



CÆSAR'S DRUIDS

AN ANCIENT PRIESTHOOD

MIRANDA
ALDHOUSE GREEN

CAESAR'S DRUIDS

CAESAR'S DRUIDS
STORY OF AN ANCIENT
PRIESTHOOD

MIRANDA ALDHOUSE-GREEN

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I dedicate this book to Betty Walker

Young man, we know your features
recreated from the bogland skull.
Your unblemished body was well-fed,
not scarred either by work or harp-strings.
Celtic sacrifice, brought by barbarous rites
to this final nurture, your last meal
the burnt bannock. Barley grains inside you
and mistletoe pollen, surviving centuries,
now witness to your druidic death.
Was it ordained for Beltain, this offering
of your perfect body to the Gods –
propitiation, in hope of a rich harvest?

(from *Lindow Man* by Gladys Mary Coles)*

* G.M. Coles 2001, 30.

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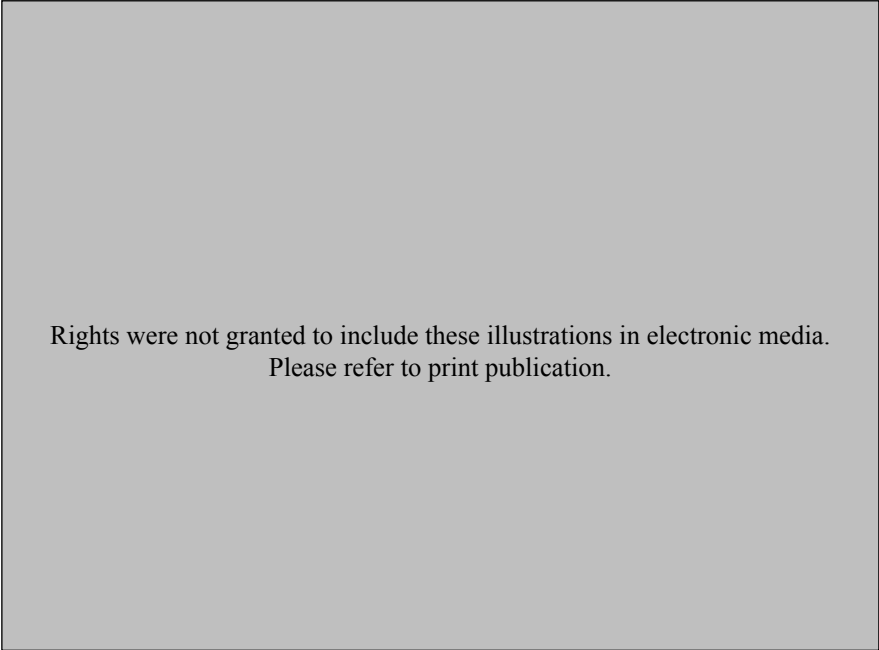
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Preface

DID THE Druids ever really exist or were they a Roman literary invention? To query the very existence of such an iconic group seems heretical but it is, nonetheless, a question that needs to be confronted. For some this hackneyed but enigmatic class of religious intellectuals, so famously (infamously) recorded by Caesar, Pliny and their peer-commentators, were the figments of fertile Classical imagination, fantasy-figures who were invented to reinforce the idea of the 'other', of the barbarian beyond the *humanitas* and civilisation of the Greek and Roman world, ripe for conquest and taming by inclusion within the Roman Empire.

I have called this book *Caesar's Druids* for a reason: Gaius Julius Caesar is our richest textual source for ancient Druids and he is also one of the most reliable. Notwithstanding recognition that, as a Roman commander and provincial governor, Caesar may well have sought at times to embellish his commentaries and to justify to Rome a conquest of the Gallic heartlands that went way beyond his senatorial remit, it is inherently unlikely that he constructed out of thin air a fictional class system for late Iron Age Gaul and Britain. Caesar's companions on campaign included members of the senatorial order who not only sent their own reports to Rome alongside their commander's but who would not have hesitated to criticise any attempts at serious digressions from the truth. In any case, there is no real reason why Caesar should have used Book 6 of his *De Bello Gallico* to veer away from factual recording in order to venture into the realms of romantic storytelling. Such writing would have added nothing to his own kudos at home but would instead have served to cast doubt on his commentaries as a whole. For me, then, little purpose is served by doubting the genuine nature of Caesar's references to the Druids. Furthermore, so many Classical writers, of such diverse periods and genres, speak of the Druids – are we to believe that they all picked up on Caesar's fantasies and built on them, even the imperial historian Tacitus, whose one weakness was his sycophancy towards his father-in-law, Agricola?

The Druids have suffered from a bad press throughout their history, from the disapproval of such ancient authors as Tacitus, Lucan and Pliny to the equally censorious attitudes taken by some to the present-day Neo-Druids'



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1 Portrait of Julius Caesar.

eneration of ancient monuments based, to a large extent, on the activities of antiquarians, beginning in the sixteenth century, seeking to construct a remote ancestral past. My focus is on the Druids encountered by Greek and Roman writers and travellers at the time when this Gallo-British priesthood flourished, their decline and possible reconfiguration under Roman occupation. My perspective is primarily that of an archaeologist, one whose interest in material culture is focused particularly on the instruments and products of ritual behaviour and the belief-systems and cosmologies that prompted it. Whilst some works, notably those of Nora Chadwick¹ and Stuart Piggott,² have concentrated respectively on the Classical texts and the antiquarian Druid resurrection, my approach seeks to combine close scrutiny and interpretation of ancient documentary sources with both archaeological theory and material evidence.

Of course, there is an immediate problem with archaeology because there exists not one vestige of archaeological evidence that can be linked unequivocally to the Druids. But in order to make any sense of the Druids as a powerful class of religious leaders we can examine contemporary material culture for, if they did exist in Caesar's day, the Druids would have operated within a context of regalia, ritual equipment, sacrifice and sacred places. Gladys Mary Coles's moving poem *Lindow Man*, with which this book begins, is undoubtedly a

piece of lyrical storytelling that expresses a direct link between the ritual death of an ancient bog-body in Cheshire and the Druids, rather than an academic treatise in which such blatant connections would be untenable. However, the poem is rich in word-painting and succeeds in presenting in a few, economically chosen phrases a world quite possibly very familiar to Caesar's Druids, people whose most important role, perhaps, was that of keepers of tradition at a time 'when unlettered men had long memories'.³

Miranda Aldhouse-Green
Cardiff University
Midsummer Day 2008

The Moon and the Mistletoe

IN SEARCH OF ANCIENT DRUIDS

We also must not omit the respect shown to this plant by the Gallic provinces. The Druids – that is what they call their magicians – hold nothing more sacred than mistletoe and a tree on which it is growing, provided it is a robur [hard-oak]. Groves of hard-oaks are chosen even for their own sake, and the magicians perform no rites without using the foliage of those trees, so that it may be supposed that it is from this custom that they get their name of Druids, from the Greek word meaning 'oak'; but further, anything growing on oak-trees they think to have been sent down from heaven, and to be a sign that the particular tree has been chosen by God himself. Mistletoe is, however, rather seldom found on a hard-oak, and when it is discovered it is gathered with great ceremony, and particularly on the sixth day of the moon (which for these tribes constitutes the beginning of the months and the years) and after every thirty years of a new generation, because it is then rising in strength and not one half of its full size. Hailing the moon in a native word that means 'healing all things', they prepare a ritual sacrifice and banquet beneath a tree and bring up two white bulls, whose horns are bound for the first time on this occasion. A priest arrayed in white vestments climbs the tree and with a golden sickle cuts down the mistletoe, which is caught in a white cloak. Then finally they kill the victims, praying to God to render his gift propitious to those on whom he has bestowed it. They believe that mistletoe given in drink will impart fertility to any animal that is barren, and that it is an antidote for all poisons. So powerful is the superstition in regard to trifling matters that frequently prevails among the races of mankind.

(Pliny)¹

Pliny's Text

A very beautiful tree-lined lane runs between the Monmouthshire villages of Tredunnoch and Llanhennock near Caerleon. About halfway along it is a small clump of gnarled and twisted trees whose bare winter boughs writhe tortuously towards the sky, like human arms reaching to a god in supplication (Fig. 2). The trees are hosts to spectacularly large and copious balls of

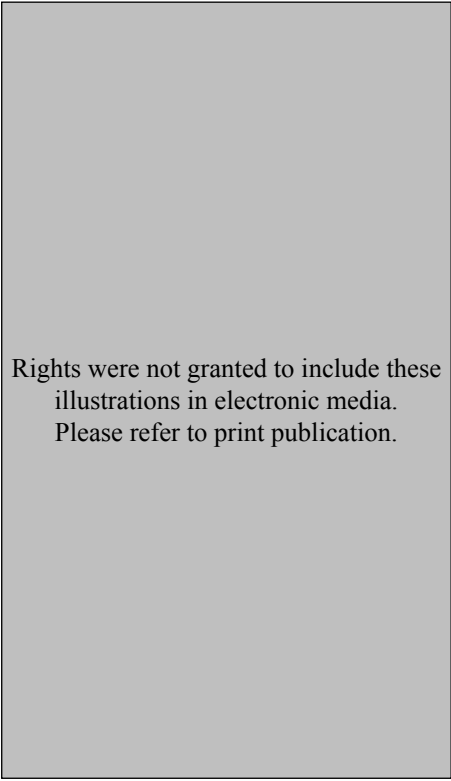
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2 Mistletoe growing on winter ash trees on a road between the villages of Llanhennock and Tredunnoch in Monmouthshire. Photo taken in December 2006.

mistletoe that look too heavy to be supported on their narrow branches. I first encountered these in midwinter and became very excited because the tree-trunks resembled those of the young oaks with which the area is densely populated. Imagine my chagrin when the coming of spring and the emergence of the new leaves revealed that the trees were not oak but ash. Nonetheless, the huge clumps of bright green mistletoe, flourishing on the bare and fragile branches like winter beacons, presented a powerful image of a vibrant life force growing out of death. The resonance of my trees with Pliny's passage was all the more potent when the bright winter moon rose behind them, picking out the intricate night-sky spaces between the branches and mistletoe leaves.

Pliny's testimony is dismissed by Nora Chadwick as a 'picturesque fantasia'.² She goes on to compare his description of the sacred oak and mistletoe ceremony as being on a par with King Alfred's burnt cakes, Cnut's battle with the waves and Robert the Bruce's encounter with his spider, as jewels of legend adorning the stark costume of historical fact. To an extent, perhaps, we should agree with Chadwick: certainly Pliny's *Natural History* shows a predilection for the collection of the curious and the bizarre³ and his personal research, gleaned – on his own admission – from over a hundred authors, was often uncritical and unverified. But we should appreciate, too, that Pliny was no mere armchair travel-writer or second-hand anthropologist. His nephew, Pliny the Younger, records his uncle's military service in the Rhineland, which

lasted more than a decade,⁴ so he could easily have picked up information about Gallic cult-practices from personal observation or from fellow soldiers, perhaps recruited from the western provinces. Yes, we may look askance at his allusion to the 'golden sickle' (the *falx aurea*), for an implement of solid gold would have been useless as a cutting tool, and it is almost certain that such an instrument was either gilded or simply bronze which, when new, would have shone as brightly as gold (Fig. 3). Indeed, the golden sickle should, perhaps, be viewed within the context of a literary theme wherein an object of gold is used as a metaphor for transformation. We can see this in action in Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid* when the eponymous hero, Aeneas, seeks the golden bough that will allow him safe passage to the Underworld, whilst he is still alive, in order to seek out his father Anchises.⁵ Interestingly, in this context Virgil makes a direct comparison between the golden bough, the possession of Proserpina, goddess of the Underworld, and the mistletoe. In the following passage the poet recounts the involvement of Venus, Aeneas' divine mother, who sends her sacred doves to guide her son in his search for the bough:



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3 Iron sickle from the late Iron Age hoard of votive objects at Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey.

Now the doves, as they fed, flitted on from spot to spot, but never so far ahead that one who followed lost sight of them. Then, when they came to the mouth of foul-breathing Avernus, swiftly they soared, went gliding through the soft air and settled, the pair of them, on a tree, the wished-for place, a tree amid whose branches there gleamed a bright haze, a different colour – gold. Just as in depth of winter the mistletoe blooms in the woods with its strange leafage, a parasite on the tree, hanging its yellow-green berries about the smooth round boles: so looked the bough of gold leaves upon that ilex dark, and in a gentle breeze the gold-foil foliage rustled.⁶

The Shadow of the Moon

Pliny's comment about the significance of the moon for the Gauls by no means stands alone. In his discussion of Gallic customs, Julius Caesar comments on the Druidic doctrine that the Gauls were descended from Dis (the name given to the Roman god of the dead) and so 'they reckon periods of time not in days but in nights' and 'in celebrating birthdays, the first of the month, and the beginning of a year, they go on the principle that night comes first and is followed by day'.⁷ Tacitus makes an equally pertinent observation in his account of Germanic custom, recording that the communities' rulers used to assemble regularly, choosing the time of the month 'when the moon is either crescent or nearing her full orb', because these times were considered particularly auspicious for 'embarking on any new enterprise'.⁸ Whilst it is easy to dismiss moon-worship as yet another trait of barbarism with which Classical writers might label their northern neighbours, there is some archaeological evidence to suggest that the moon held a special meaning for Iron Age societies in western Europe, including Britain and Gaul.

On Saturday 3 March 2007, a total lunar eclipse was clearly visible in the cloudless midnight sky over South Wales. Despite foreknowledge of its occurrence, it was a dramatic event that attracted hordes of moon-gazers and amateur photographers and it was the talk of my Penarth community for several days afterwards, with the publication of several images in the local newspaper.⁹ The pictures show the eclipsed moon, glowing with an eerie dull orange-red light through the shadow cast by the earth. The sight is weird and disturbing, even though we know exactly what is going on, and in an ancient world of portents and omens, the rare glimpse of a moon behaving in so idiosyncratic a manner must have been full of significance and foreboding. I have a friend and colleague, Ray Howell, to thank for this eyewitness description of the eclipse that he experienced at the top of Star Hill, near Llansoy in Monmouthshire:

As the eclipse begins, the moon fades. What had shortly before been the dominant centre piece of the sky now appears to be slowly, progressively

sucked dry. The disc does not disappear but rather becomes an increasingly cold dark shadow. Impossible to script, but with huge dramatic effect, immediately before totality a meteor shoots across the sky underlining the waning moon. This is a moon possessed! Then a glimmer of light appears and slowly grows. On cue, a second meteor lights up the sky. The crisis, as it may once have been perceived, is passing.¹⁰

In 1981, after a metal detectorist had found part of a coral-decorated La Tène sword, excavations were carried out on the north bank of the River Witham at Fiskerton in Lincolnshire. Rows of timber uprights, whose tops had earlier become visible as a result of ploughing, could be seen to form a causeway over swampy ground. The wooden posts, surviving in the muddy conditions, were subjected to dendrochronological (tree-ring dating) analysis, which revealed that the timbers had been renewed at relatively regular intervals at least ten times over a 150-year period from 457/6 BC onwards. The finds from the site include a number of early La Tène swords and spearheads, decorated metalwork, axes and metalworking tools, pots and human bones, including the skull of someone killed by a sword-blow. A rescue excavation in 2001 revealed, among other rich finds, a pair of log-boats, one of which had been pegged down within the causeway. The site has been interpreted as a *locus sanctus*, a focus for votive deposition and other ceremonial activities, including feasting.¹¹ A striking hypothesis, arising from the close dating of the timbers, is that their episodic renewal was associated with lunar eclipses.¹² The suggestion was made because of the regularity of time that elapsed between each new felling to provide the new timbers, which occurred every sixteen to eighteen years.¹³ Since the wood was not seasoned, there is likely to have been a close and virtually coeval relationship between the action of tree-felling and the erection of the uprights.

So in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, it seems that total lunar eclipses around the winter solstice were triggering responses from people at Fiskerton involving large-scale felling and renewal of a causeway that clearly had symbolic significance for them.¹⁴ Since such eclipses take place in the context of extremely regular and precise behaviour of heavenly bodies, if there is sufficient mathematical knowledge of the solar system it is possible to plot and predict past and future solar and lunar eclipses.¹⁵ Since the Fiskerton report was published, more work on this hypothesis has revealed that by no means all the felling episodes coincided with lunar eclipses. However, even if only some of these activities took place within a ritual context in the early British Iron Age, it is possible to propose both that the movement of the moon was significant for these communities and that professional, scientific clergy were involved in making the calculations. Such a view chimes with comments of Classical authors like Caesar, who noted that the Druids 'hold

long discussions about the heavenly bodies and their movements, about the size of the universe and the earth . . .¹⁶

'White on Blonde':¹⁷ Colour in Pliny's Text

Pliny's account of the Druidic rite is full of colour: the bright green mistletoe, the flashing gold of the sickle blade but, pervading all is white: the moon, the bulls' hides, the white robes of the Druids and the white cloak in which the mistletoe is caught. By implication, we can add to the intensity of colour symbolism the milky whiteness of mistletoe berries. Epigraphic documents such as the ancient Italic Iguvium Tables,¹⁸ which records on seven inscribed bronze tablets sacrificial procedures carried out at the various gates of the Umbrian town, indicate that the physical appearance and perfection of sacrificial animals were all crucial choices affecting the potency of the offering and, furthermore, were closely woven into the precise significance of the gift.

The persistence of white may simply represent Pliny's romantic spin-doctoring but, if it has meaning, then the symbolism of purity, light and brightness may all have fed into the meaning of the Druidic ritual. It is likely that white had symbolic meaning long before the Druids: it is apparent, for instance, that there was a preference for white materials in the British Neolithic¹⁹, something which is displayed by the use of quartz and the exploitation of chalk and limestone in the construction of monuments. There is the dramatic impact on the green landscape of Wessex created by the erection of dazzling white chalk monuments as well as deliberately selected stones, such as quartz, to decorate Neolithic and Early Bronze Age tombs.²⁰ The associations of white in the symbolic structures of traditional societies and, in particular, its very frequent oppositional relationship to black, may provide clues to understanding its meaning in British prehistory.²¹

An entirely white garment imbues its wearer with superiority and glamour. In general, it is worn by officiating priests and sacrificers when they are executing their functions. It guards them against the dangers lurking in certain forbidden places and some altars.²²

The context here is the use of colour for sacred purposes among the ritualists of the Bambara people in the Niger Valley, yet the description could equally relate to Pliny's Druids. Closer in space and time to this ancient Gallo-British religious elite, the essentially similar garments donned by Greek and Roman clergy appear to have been associated with sacral purity and 'their fitness for their functions.'²³ The Greek author Plutarch, writing in the imperial Roman period, explains that dead bodies were traditionally shrouded in white because they needed to be presented to the Otherworld as pure and bright as possible.²⁴

For the Romans, white clothing was a token of purity, and politicians donned brilliant white robes in order to emphasise their honesty.²⁵

Bulls and Mistletoe

‘... two white bulls whose horns are bound for the first time’. What does Pliny mean by this? He could refer to the youth of the animals or, perhaps to their newly tamed status. Ceremonies associated with the Roman cult of the Arval Brothers and, in particular, their annual festival in honour of their goddess Dea Dia, included the sacrifice of temple cows whose horns were first bound with gold, in a complex expiatory ritual called the *suovetaurilia*, which involved also the simultaneous sacrifice of a fully grown pig, ram and bull.²⁶ Additionally, some Roman bull-sacrifices involved the garlanding of the victims, notably in the *taurobolium*, a rite belonging to the imported Anatolian cult of the Great Mother (Cybele). In his polemic against paganism, the fourth-century Christian writer Prudentius described the ‘huge bull, with shaggy, savage brow, bound with garlands of flowers around his shoulders or entwining his horns.’²⁷ Any of these images may have been passing through Pliny’s mind when he described the Druidic ceremony but it is equally possible that the Druids had their own sacrificial rites and practices that, like those of the Romans, involved not only the choice of the best animals available and their suitability for particular offering ceremonies but also the desire to make their divine offerings as acceptable as possible by adorning and so beautifying them.

A further dimension to the Druidic bull-sacrifices is the plausible link between the physical form of their horns and the crescent moon (according to Pliny the preferred time for the mistletoe ritual was the sixth day of its waxing).²⁸ Just as was the case in Greek and Roman animal-sacrifice, these Druidic victims would have been butchered, cooked and eaten.²⁹ It is undoubtedly within such a context that the ‘banquet’ mentioned by Pliny was conducted. There is a great deal of archaeological evidence for ritual feasting in Iron Age Europe; we may cite, for instance, the residues of food and drink from Gaulish middle Iron Age shrines such as Ribemont and Gournay,³⁰ and the recently investigated site at Llanmaes in the Vale of Glamorgan, where the remains of sheet-bronze cauldrons, dating to the Bronze Age/Iron Age transition of around 700 BC, and large quantities of pig bones suggest a persistent tradition of high-status feasting.³¹

The choice of bulls by the Druids is likely to have been associated with power and strength on the one hand and with fertility on the other (Fig. 4). Bulls are the epitome of animal power and the Druids may have perceived them as projections of their own empowerment. In many traditional societies, particularly those based upon hunting, the perception of animals as prey is

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4 Late Iron Age/early Roman-period bronze bucket-mount in the form of a bull's head, from Dinorben, Denbighshire.

closely bound up with great respect for particular qualities recognised in these creatures.³² But their symbolism may have been more subtle, in so far as bulls reflect a connection between wilderness and order, the wild and the tamed and thus may have been considered as conduits between earth and spirit worlds. As uncastrated males within a context of domesticated cattle, bulls convey different and conflicting messages, for they can be wild, uncontrollable and highly dangerous, as fearsome as any wild animal. Yet bulls (and all domesticated cattle) represent the triumph of order over chaos, the taming and control of the landscape by humans. Such order/wildness polarity is acted out today in Spanish bullfights, in which the 'black, uncontrolled bull . . . is the victim of the cold, manipulative matador'.³³ In Pliny's Druidic ceremony, as in Roman rites involving the sacrifice of dangerous animals, the control of such beasts takes place within a sacred environment, a place of sacrifice or shrine which acts as a border-place between the human and supernatural spheres.³⁴

We can, perhaps, glimpse how connections between people and bulls may have worked within Gallo-British society in the Roman period through its iconography. Two strikingly similar images from early first-century AD Gaul

depict scenes involving woodcutters, willows or lime-trees, bulls and egrets: one from Paris,³⁵ the other from Trier.³⁶ The culture–nature relationship, identified above in the persona of the bull, together with other seeming opposites, is endorsed in these images in the association between the bulls and the woodcutters, in so far as it is likely that the latter are pollarding the trees, an activity that seeks to control and harness natural growth but in fact stimulates and invigorates it. If we can accept that images were sometimes produced by sculptors and their patrons to explore ideological and political issues, these carvings might have conveyed a metaphorical message of Gallic revival under Roman imperialism.³⁷ Another symbolic statement in these images is suggested by the presence of the three egrets that accompany the bulls: as waterbirds that can fly, such creatures can represent the ability to travel between worlds, but the close association of egrets with cattle (through the birds' consumption of ticks on the hides of their hosts) is also significant in terms of the juxtaposition of the bull- and bird-motifs. I wonder, too, whether there might be a yet closer link between this iconography and Pliny's bulls: egrets are dazzlingly white and their presence with the bulls might even provide the same, though referred, colour imagery as Pliny's text.

The theme of white cloaks and white bulls persists in the symbolism of the mistletoe, with its milky white berries. In his seminal work on British flora, *Flora Britannica*,³⁸ Richard Mabey discusses the presence of mistletoe on specific host-trees, commenting that it is much more common on apple and lime. I myself have seen copious clumps of the parasite on ash and oak in South Wales. If, as Pliny suggests, the Druids were particular about the host-tree for its effect on the perceived efficacy of mistletoe, this may be because the priesthood had an especial affinity with oaks. Indeed, Pliny himself discusses the possible etymology of the word 'Druid' as stemming from the Greek word for oak, 'drus'. The sacred significance of oak trees is suggested by Gallo-Roman iconography depicting not only oaks but also acorns and even oak-apples. Images from Gallic sites persistently depict forest motifs: relief carvings from Alesia in Burgundy display the image of a god with birds on his shoulder, a dog at his feet and an oak laden with acorns;³⁹ another god on a carving from Moux, also in Burgundy, carries a bag filled with oak-galls (or oak-apples),⁴⁰ and a hunter-deity, accompanied by a stag and carrying a bag of 'fruits of the forest' (pine cones, nuts and acorns), was worshipped at a mountain sanctuary at Le Donon in the Vosges.⁴¹ The representation of precise seasonality might be important, for at Moux the oak-galls are indicative of mid–late May, the time when wasp-larvae form these distinctive 'apples' on the twigs of the oak, which are highly visible to anyone looking up into its branches.⁴² It is likely that two reasons for the Druids' respect for oak trees were their size and longevity, for the English oak, at least, regularly reaches up to 40 metres in height and can live for well over five hundred years,

especially if managed by pollarding.⁴³ In ethnographies associated with the densely forested Asturias region of Spain,⁴⁴ the oak is inextricably tied up with the people's identity, particularly because of the contrast between Asturias and other areas of Iberia where the olive and the vine predominate. Here, then, the oak has become a kind of badge of Asturian communities.⁴⁵

Pliny's account of harvesting mistletoe represents one of the 'defining stories'⁴⁶ of the Druids, one of the most influential and widely recognised of Druidic legends. Like Aeneas' Golden Bough, the north-west European mistletoe, *viscum album*, epitomises the strange, the supernatural and the magical, growing as it does on apparently dead trees and without roots of its own. The configuration of its leaves and berries is singular, as the comma-shaped leaves grow in pairs flanking the berry, thus giving it a sexual shape, as though two thighs are curving around a phallus;⁴⁷ the viscous berry-juice is sometimes likened to semen; and mistletoe's dioecious properties, that is having separate male and female plants, of which the latter only bears the berries, may have been evident to ancient religious specialists. In studies of practical and symbolic properties of plants in European antiquity, attention has been drawn to some of the pharmacological uses of mistletoe, identified in the early modern period, including the treatment of insomnia, hypertension and certain forms of cancer.⁴⁸ Pliny's account makes it quite clear that the importance of mistletoe for the Druids was its curative powers, made all the more potent in conjunction with the healing properties of the waxing moon. According to Pliny, the gathered mistletoe was made into a drink for ingestion by both people and animals, for use in healing ailments and, significantly (given its sexual symbolism), as a means of curing infertility.

There is evidence to support the significance of mistletoe for Iron Age communities in Britain and Europe. The more obvious is the presence of mistletoe pollen in the gut of Lindow Man, the late Iron Age male bog-body found in 1984 at Lindow Moss in Cheshire. Despite the relatively few grains found in the body, it is likely to have been ingested deliberately rather than as a result of windblown pollen adhering to other edible substances.⁴⁹ It is debatable as to whether mistletoe in the food-residues preserved in the bog-body had been consumed for medicinal purposes or within a ritual context. But of course, as we read in Pliny's account, the two are by no means mutually exclusive and, indeed, many – if not most – healing activities in Roman Gaul and Britain took place within sanctuaries in which priests and physicians (sometimes one and the same) presided.⁵⁰ My own opinion is that, whilst it is stretching the evidence far too far to interpret Lindow Man as a 'Druidic Prince',⁵¹ it is nonetheless certain that this young man was in the prime of life and had been ritually murdered.⁵² He had consumed a final, 'sacred' meal, a kind of griddled bread containing a range of cereals and seeds (and

mistletoe) before being bludgeoned about the head, garrotted and having his throat cut.⁵³ It is possible that the mistletoe was present in the man's gut because he was a sacrificial victim: an anti-spasmodic drug might inhibit his struggles and the narcotic value of the plant could have been given to him in his final meal to dull the inevitable anguish and physical agony of his death.⁵⁴

Druids and Function

The Druids are in charge of religion. They have control over all public and private sacrifices, and give rulings on all religious questions. Large numbers of men go to them for instruction, and they are greatly honoured by the people.⁵⁵

Caesar is quite emphatic about the essential link between Druids, as they functioned in Gallic society, and religion. Yet Nora Chadwick's important study contains the astounding denial of the Druids as ancient clergy:

That they were philosophers rather than priests there can, in my mind, be no doubt. Nothing in our accounts suggests a priesthood. The word 'priest' is never applied to them. There is no central organisation such as one associates with a sacerdotal body. No clear evidence points to their connection with either temples of formal, established sanctuaries, or to liturgy or prayers conducted by them. Negative evidence indeed implies that routine sacerdotal functions were outside their sphere of influence.⁵⁶

To me it seems as though Caesar is describing the essential functions of priests, presiders over ritual behaviour and, like the monks of early Christian Britain, conduits and agents for the dissemination of knowledge and wisdom, not least about the craft of religion (Fig. 5). Caesar is clear and precise: the short passage quoted above records the Druids' authority, the gender-specificity of the Order and their function as teachers. We can find parallels to all of these attributes in the priesthoods of many religious systems, past and present, not least within traditional Christianity and Islam. The same is true of shamans within a range of traditional societies, including those of the circumpolar regions and the Plains Indians of North America. Chadwick's claim that there was no central organisation is surely refuted by Caesar's comment that 'On a fixed date each year they assemble in a consecrated place in the territory of the Carnutes; that area is supposed to be the centre of the whole country of Gaul.'⁵⁷ In Book 6 of *De Bello Gallico*, Caesar is consciously composing an ethnographical piece that is at variance with the remainder of his text, so it is not necessarily significant that he uses the term *sacerdos* (priest) only outside this section and reserves 'Druids' for his excursion into

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5 Reconstruction of a Gallo-Roman temple with officiating priests.

Gallic customs and practices. Chadwick's argument that 'liturgy and prayers' are absent from the hard evidence of archaeology does not hold water since, until the Roman introduction of writing – on any scale – there would have been no mechanism for the recording of prayers or doctrine and, in any case, Caesar stresses that the Druids were unwilling to commit their teachings to writing, partly on grounds of secrecy and partly for fear that reliance on the written word would weaken their capacity to memorise.⁵⁸

Although Chadwick is correct in her assertion that no formal temples are directly connected to the Druids, it is difficult to see how they could be archaeologically so linked, unless a temple inscription actually referred to them by name. Given the presence of widely distributed accounts of Druidism in Classical literature, of which so many references are closely related to religion and ritual, notably in sacrificial practice,⁵⁹ I cannot share Chadwick's qualms about accepting the centrality of religion to the role of the Druids in

Gaul (and Britain). That is not to say that other religious practitioners were not operating in Iron Age Europe at the same time as the Druids, who may have simply been one prominent group of priests among others. Indeed, it is quite likely that, in animal sacrifice, for instance, the practical procedures were carried out by lesser clergy, while the Druids' main task was to officiate, interpret and liaise with the gods by means of prayers and divination. While in Greek sacrificial ritual, the sacrificer also acted as both butcher and cook,⁶⁰ many other people were involved in the preparations and practice, including those with responsibility for the various instruments used.⁶¹ But Pliny's passage implies that the Druids participated in all aspects of the 'moon and mistletoe' ritual, including shinning up the oak to cut down the sacred plant, preparing the healing potion and killing the bulls. We should remember, though, that in Roman sacrificial practice, there were specialist slaughterers for despatching animals, and we might fairly question Pliny's implication that the Druids themselves performed this messy and highly skilled part of the ritual.⁶²

Literary testimony assigns the Druids a broader range of functions than simply responsibility for religious and ritual matters. Caesar and others reflect on their skills as natural scientists, thinkers, scholars of the universe, judges, politicians, doctors, teachers and 'keepers of the sacred flames' of knowledge and tradition. But despite Nora Chadwick's fervent denial of their role as priests ('Nothing in our accounts suggests a priesthood'),⁶³ none of these wider roles is out of step with an acknowledgement of their central function as religious leaders. Indeed, sacred specialists – from traditional shamans to Christian clerics – very frequently possess(ed) these broader dimensions as authority figures. Just because the Druids were philosophers, scholars, royal advisers and political leaders, that does not mean that the nexus of their power did not lie in their ability to communicate with the supernatural world.

Druids in Time and Space

When did the Druids operate within Gallo-British society? It is difficult to be exact but it is probably fair to assume their presence for some decades, or even centuries, before their first mention by Classical authors. The Druids of ancient literature were dynamic, their character changing according to chronology and to their chroniclers' perceptions. The Druids described by the Greek historian Timaeus in the fourth and third centuries BC were not the same as those whom Caesar and Cicero encountered in the mid-first century BC. Undoubtedly, by the mid-late first centuries AD, the role of the Druids, in post-conquest Gaul and Britain, had radically changed once more, and their functions and personae would have altered again between the second century

and late antiquity, when authors like Ausonius (below) were discussing their presence in western Gaul. In attempting to fix the Druids in time and space, we are totally reliant on these writers since archaeological testimony for their activities is necessarily indirect. Nora Chadwick identifies the first author to mention the Druids as probably being Timaeus.⁶⁴ His own original text does not survive but his work was quarried by later writers, such as the Syrian Greek philosopher Posidonios, whose own writing, in turn, was trawled by Strabo, Caesar and Diodorus Siculus.⁶⁵ Although we might arguably push this date back even further,⁶⁶ we cannot confidently assert their presence for long before Timaeus' time. Interestingly, a comparatively late author, Diogenes Laertius, active during the mid-third century AD, specifically cites some early sources for his discussion of the Druids: the works of Sotion the Peripatetic and of an anonymous author, both c. 200 BC.⁶⁷

A host of authors from the Greek and Roman world persistently note that the Druids were active in Gaul and Britain from the first century BC onwards. Caesar, Strabo and Diodorus all comment upon them at a time, the first century BC, when Roman eyes were increasingly focused on the conquest of western Europe, in a context in which conflict between Roman authority and the nationalism and religious conservatism of established indigenous clergy in about-to-be-annexed provinces was almost inevitable. Although Caesar is rightly often cited as having provided us with the fullest account of the Druids, it is also the case that by the time of Caesar, the Druids were already long past their peak.⁶⁸ All three writers (perhaps not surprisingly if they were all utilising a common earlier source) comment on the Druids with a certain degree of respect.⁶⁹ Julius Caesar, too, writes of them not as barbarian religious charlatans but as educated, revered and sophisticated men,⁷⁰ and he recognised in them an authority akin to his own. But the writings of Tacitus,⁷¹ Pliny⁷² and Lucan,⁷³ all active during the mid-late first century AD, show us Druids with a different face, as weird, savage *barbari* whose wicked rituals of human sacrifice gave Rome the rationale for their extermination. This switch of attitude is, of course, related to the more direct and hostile contacts between Romans and Gallo-Britons and not least, perhaps, because of the shattering experience of the Boudican Rebellion.⁷⁴ There is a significant silence, in terms of citation of Druidic activity, for the second and third centuries AD, but the Druids reappear in the work of the fourth-century Aquitanian poet Ausonius⁷⁵ and in the curious assemblage of late Roman documents known as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, which contain several oracular references to the predictions made by female Gallic Druids about the imperial succession.⁷⁶

Ausonius was born at Bordeaux at the beginning of the fourth century and died in c. AD 395. His most important work, the *Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium*, is a treatise on education. In it, the poet alludes to one Phoebicius, temple-priest of Apollo Belenus; Phoebicius was a descendant of

Armorican Druids and, moreover, was a celebrated teacher at the University of Bordeaux⁷⁷ (thus carrying on the Druidic tradition of education discussed by Caesar).⁷⁸ The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (better known as the *Augustan Histories*) is a peculiar – and not altogether reliable – collection of Lives of late Roman emperors allegedly compiled by a range of authors, including Vopiscus and Lampridius, in the fourth century AD. These texts, however unsatisfactory,⁷⁹ undoubtedly belong to the period of late antiquity and are fascinating in so far as they contain accounts of prophecies, by female Gaulish Druids, of succession to the imperial purple of such emperors as Diocletian and Severus Alexander.⁸⁰ This may represent nothing more than a literary device to express the involvement of even the far edges of the Roman Empire in the selection of emperors but, even were this to be so, it serves to demonstrate that the idea of Druidism had not entirely faded from Roman consciousness four centuries after their demotion from power. However, ‘the bell which announced the opening of the first session of the Roman university of Augustodunum sounded the death-knell of the oral druidical schools of Bibracte, and drove their teachers to the backwoods.’⁸¹

There remains one more group of Classical authors who help to place the Druids in time: those of the so-called Alexandrian Tradition,⁸² of whom many were Christian writers who, oddly enough, harked back to the Druids as examples of Noble Savages, simple but honourable religious leaders uncontaminated by the intellectual sophistication of Roman paganism, and so markedly differing in tone from the western Roman sources. The Christian Alexandrians, such as Origen (c. AD 186–255), Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–212) and Cyril (Archbishop of Alexandria, AD 412–44) expressed a nostalgic fascination for ‘barbarian wisdom.’⁸³ To the Alexandrian Greeks, the Druids were intellectuals, philosophers, thinkers who had contributed much to the understanding of the physical and spiritual world and were therefore worthy of study, even though they espoused paganism. Although they belong to a time much later than that when the Druids flourished, Clement and Diogenes Laertius (who lived in the earlier third century AD and was the author of the *Lives of the Philosophers*), for instance, quarried the works of much earlier Greeks, including Timaeus (c. 356–260 BC) and Polyhistor, who was born c. 105 BC. Another early Alexandrian writer, Timagenes, was a contemporary of Caesar, brought as a captive to Rome in 55 BC but becoming a respected teacher and historian when Augustus was emperor. He was cited as an authority on Druids by Diodorus Siculus and the late Roman writer Ammianus Marcellinus.⁸⁴ The approach taken by these early Greek authors, already extolling the virtues of the Druids, was thus not merely a back-projection to a mythical Golden Age of simplicity and philosophical purity. What is interesting about the Alexandrian School, whatever the dates of its contributors, is that the Druids were listed alongside those who practised other outlandish doctrinal systems, such as

Chaldeans and Bactrian shamans, Scythian philosophers and Indian Brahmins.⁸⁵ So the Druids are portrayed in this context as exemplars of foreignness, weirdness and as belonging to the edges of the world. Their interest, for the Alexandrians, seems to have lain in the seeming contradiction between barbarism and intellectual sophistication. Even if the Druids had largely faded from the scene by the time most of the members of the Alexandrian School were active, the *idea* of Druidism was far from defunct, and clearly still possessed currency for these later writers and their audiences.⁸⁶

If we can accept that the Druids really existed in some form, rather than being a mere fabrication of massed Classical authors, we need to consider where they operated. Were they confined to Gaul and Britain and, even there, perhaps only present in a few large cult-centres? Did their influence, instead, reach further within Europe, in the Rhineland and Danube regions, for instance, or even beyond, where the Galatae lived in Asia Minor, where Strabo describes the meeting-place of the Galatian Council at Drunemeton?⁸⁷ The name Galatae is cognate with Galli and the terms Druid and Drunemeton share the 'Dru' prefix. Pliny the Elder links *dru* with oak-trees,⁸⁸ *nemeton* is cognate with the early Irish word *nemed*, generally interpreted as 'sanctuary',⁸⁹ or 'holy',⁹⁰ although sometimes simply as associated with privilege.⁹¹ The Galatians were a Gallic splinter group who had been settled in Asia Minor since the early third century BC.⁹² Cicero mentions a king of Galatia called Deiotarus (a Gallic name) who had made the mistake of backing Pompey at the time of the civil war between this powerful statesman and the eventual victor, Julius Caesar. According to Cicero, Caesar's Aeduan friend, the Druid Diviciacus, acted as mediator between Caesar and the Galatian king.⁹³ There is indirect, circumstantial and somewhat shadowy evidence, therefore, that Druidism or a similar system *might* have operated in Asia Minor.

If Galatian Drunemeton provides an easterly boundary of Druidic location, however tenuous, what about the spatial parameters of Druidism elsewhere? We should be cautious about assuming their wide spread within northern Europe.⁹⁴ We can be confident, from such authorities as Caesar, that the heartland of the Druids was Gaul. Cicero's identification of the Aeduan Diviciacus as a Druid⁹⁵ demonstrates the presence of Druids in the Burgundian region. Caesar states that 'on a fixed date each year they assemble in a consecrated place in the territory of the Carnutes; that area is supposed to be the centre of the whole country of Gaul',⁹⁶ thereby admitting of a Druidic system that perhaps spanned Gallia from the Atlantic coast to the Rhineland and from northern Belgium to Marseille. Caesar's central place is accepted as being in the area of Chartres, ancient capital of the Carnutes, north of the centre of Gaul, between the rivers Loire and Allier. In fact the whole tenor of Caesar's description of the Druids takes as read their pan-Gallic distribution; nowhere does he say anything about areas of Gaul outside their jurisdiction. This may or may not be

significant: his generalising approach might simply be a literary device but he is very specific about the annual assembly, which thus has a ring of authenticity.

Caesar's second significant statement concerning the location of the Druids is that 'it is thought that the doctrine of the Druids was invented in Britain and was brought from there to Gaul; even today those who want to study the doctrine in detail usually go to Britain to learn there.'⁹⁷ Caesar's statement about British Druids is endorsed by other, later, writers, notably Pliny the Elder and Tacitus. Interestingly, in his dismissive and scathing reference to British 'magic', Pliny's claims are the converse of Caesar's, speaking of the way in which Druidism spread from Gaul to Britain.⁹⁸ Tacitus' testimony on British Druids relates to events just prior to the Boudican Rebellion of AD 60/61 and he refers to their presence only on the island of Anglesey, off the furthest north-west corner of Wales.⁹⁹ One thing Caesar is emphatic about is the absence of Druids from Germany – that is, among the tribes east of the Rhine. He states that 'the customs of the Germans are very different from those of the Gauls. They have no Druids to supervise religious matters and they do not show much interest in sacrifices.'¹⁰⁰ Other Classical writers tacitly support Caesar's location of Druids: Gaul and Britain.

Druids For Real or Druids Imagined?

A recent *Time Team* programme took as its theme the confrontation between the Druids and the Roman governor Suetonius Paulinus on Anglesey in AD 60 and possible archaeological evidence for these Tacitean Druids. In the course of an interview for the programme, the Druids were dismissed as a bunch of hippies wearing sacks.¹⁰¹ We have a paradoxical problem with the subject of the Druids because the word is so well known but there is so little hard evidence for them. One of the issues bedevilling serious study of an ancient Druidic system is the Druidic 'Renaissance' that developed in Britain and Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when, for instance, Megalithic monuments such as Stonehenge and Avebury were linked by antiquarians, including John Aubrey and William Stukeley, to Caesar's Druids. The Welsh stonemason Iolo Morgannwg forged an alleged unbroken chain of relationships between ancient Druids and his new Druidic movement that gave birth to the National *Eisteddfod* ('Assembly'), the *Gorsedd* with its regiment of Druids and Bards.¹⁰² None of these masters of Druid Renaissance has helped disperse the clouds surrounding the ancient texts on these religious leaders. The myth of Druidism is perpetuated today not only by the descendants of Iolo and his peers but by Neo-Pagan groups of Druids who celebrate midsummer and midwinter festivals at Stonehenge and other ancient sites.

For direct evidence of ancient Druids we are reliant on ancient texts written by Classical authors whose context was that of foreign onlookers, tourists and

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6 The skull of a man buried with a decorated headband, from a cemetery at Mill Hill, Deal; c. 100 BC.

reporters of the strange customs of barbarians on (or off) the edge of the known world of the Roman Empire. Such authors' prime purpose was not history but literature; hence the purple passages encountered in Lucan, Pliny and even Tacitus, known for his otherwise terse style. The approach of so many ancient writers, whose motives included justification of Roman colonialism or simply good storytelling, was that of sensationalising the strange, exaggerating the foreign and barbarising outsiders, particularly when those outsiders were in direct conflict with the Roman order. Records of Druidism suffer from asymmetrical reporting in so far as the writers came from a colonialist context, while the subject of their texts – the Gauls and Britons – wrote nothing of themselves to balance the picture. So the accounts we have are essentially similar to those of the Spanish Conquistadores describing the customs and practices of the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Apart from anything else, such a colonialist viewpoint works through a combination of distorting lenses: those of prejudice, ignorance and the application of a rigid, inflexible mindset to the mores of subjugated peoples, especially when the latter were non-literate.¹⁰³

In addition to the Classical writers on the Druids, with all the ‘baggage’ of distortion contained within their ancient texts, there is archaeological testimony, which comes with its own restrictions on interpretation. In an ideal world, the contribution of the Druids to Gallo-British religion would be legitimised by the existence of epigraphy directly alluding to their presence. But, of course, the vast majority of inscriptions post-date the Roman conquest, at precisely the period that the Druids were beginning to bow out of the public arena and, in any case, the common use of inscriptions marched alongside the other trappings of *romanitas*, so we would not expect to find Druids writ large (or indeed at all) in the epigraphic record. There is a large, complex and rapidly growing body of evidence for ritual regalia in Iron Age Britain (Fig. 6) and Gaul, and for the continuance of indigenous material culture relating to cult post-conquest. However, despite the close links between the Druids and religion, there can be no direct archaeological testament to Druids. All we can do is to make certain assumptions, notably that Druids contributed to the professional religious ritual and doctrine of Britain and Gaul during the later first millennium BC and early centuries of the first millennium AD. And, of course, these assumptions might be wrong!

Provided that it is used carefully, comparative ethnographical evidence can be helpful in our search for understanding of the Druids, and throughout this book reference is made to religious leaders in other cult-systems in the remote and recent past. Shamanistic communities are guided by individuals who, like the Druids, combine spiritual authority with healing, political influence, resistance to subjugation, knowledge of natural science and education.¹⁰⁴ Pliny’s discussion of Druidic knowledge about curative plants¹⁰⁵ resonates strongly with South American shamanic tradition. Siberian shamans suffered and resisted Soviet Communist oppression just as Pliny’s and Tacitus’ Druids countered Roman domination. Sami shamans of northern Scandinavia were the keepers of oral tradition, like the Druids of Caesar, Strabo and Diodorus. This book explores the complex, dynamic and sometimes dark nature of a priesthood which Caesar and his peers described with such vigour but for which the archaeological evidence is so enigmatic and elusive.

Noble Savages and Barbarous Enemies

Most of Britain is marshland because it is flooded by the continual ocean tides. The barbarians usually swim in these swamps or run along in them, submerged up to the waist. Of course they are practically naked and do not mind the mud because they are unfamiliar with the use of clothing, and they adorn their waists and necks with iron, valuing this metal as an ornament and a token of wealth in the way that other barbarians value gold. They also tattoo their bodies with various patterns and pictures of all sorts of animals. Hence the reason why they do not wear clothes, so as not to cover the pictures on their bodies.¹

HERODIAN'S STARTLING description of Britain and its inhabitants is all the more incredible given that it was written in the third century AD, probably around 250,² when the province of Britannia had been established for two hundred years.³ Little is known about Herodian; there is even doubt about his birthplace, although it is most likely to have been Asia Minor, perhaps in western Anatolia.⁴ He certainly does not seem to have known Britain very well, and the passage quoted has all the hallmarks of barbarian stereotyping that would be more understandable had it been written in the first centuries BC or AD. Herodian paints a picture of Britain as off the edge of the world, literally beyond the pale, a land where weird monsters lurked and civilisation was absent. Such a view finds resonance much nearer our own time: a nineteenth-century children's author, Favell Mortimer, set out to produce a travel guide to the world. In 1849, she began to write the first of three travelogues entitled *The Countries of Europe*, completing the third and final volume in 1857 when she was seventy-six years old, having never left her native England. The work contains, sometimes very unflattering, comments about the habits of her fellow Europeans, not least the Welsh, of whom she wrote, 'Though the Welsh are not very clean, they make their cottages look clean by white-washing them, and sometimes they white-wash the pigsties too.'⁵

Herodian's Britain is the antithesis of the Classical world: a waterlogged island, beset by wide tidal ranges unknown to the virtually tideless Mediterranean, inhabited by people who did not conform to Graeco-Roman models of

humanitas, who went about naked, covered in body-paint and whose unit of wealth was iron rather than precious metal. The context of the passage is the emperor Septimius Severus' campaigns in north Britain, conducted from his base at York and concentrated against the Caledonians and Maeatae to the north of Hadrian's Wall. So, in fact, Herodian's description of Britain does not relate to the country as a whole but rather to the far north, even further off the edge of the world than the rest of Britannia, and virtually unconquered, even though the Roman governor of Britain, Agricola, conducted campaigns against these northern tribes in the late first century AD and Antoninus Pius built the wall that bears his name across southern Scotland in the mid second century.

The background to Severus' campaigns in northern Britain was probably 'a major military breakdown in Britain in the early 180s,'⁶ when the Caledonii and Maeatae initiated hostilities against the Roman army, and problems of unrest continued to draw imperial attention for the next twenty years or so, when Severus decided to deploy large numbers of troops in an offensive designed to crush these peoples once and for all. But Severus had another agenda, that of removing his sons Caracalla and Geta (particularly the former) from the 'dissolute lifestyle of the court at Rome'⁷ and Britain was perhaps regarded as one of the remotest, most austere parts of the Empire, as far as it was possible to be from the soft, sybaritic and decadent habits of the aristocracy living in the capital.

Terra Inculta: Beyond the Ends of the Earth

Herodian's curious statement about barbarous Britons demonstrates that the myth of the wild west died hard for, when this historian from the Greek world was writing, Britain had been part of the Roman Empire for two centuries. The idea of *terra inculta*,⁸ a term used to describe ancient perceptions of bogs and waterlogged landscapes, is appropriate also for attitudes nurtured by the inhabitants of the Classical world towards the 'uncivilised' peoples surrounding them. Nowhere was this more applicable than to Roman ideas about Britain. From the time of Julius Caesar onwards, Britain was regarded as a rich prize not so much because of its potential wealth as a source of minerals but primarily because of its propaganda value.

In discussing Julius Caesar's reasons for venturing twice on campaign to Britain during his tenure of the governorship of Gaul, Barry Cunliffe comments that 'at one level he was playing to the Roman gallery by crossing the ocean and setting foot in a land of mystery.'⁹ The same, only more so, was the main purpose underlying Claudius' invasions of Britain – for Claudius, far more than Caesar, needed credibility when he became emperor, lacking, as he did, the usual credentials of military leadership and charisma enjoyed by his

predecessors Augustus and Tiberius. Claudius was by inclination a scholar, a follower of a passive occupation resulting in large part from his physical disabilities that included some paralysis and a speech impediment. Britain was thus an important flagship for Claudius (Fig. 7); its invasion and partial conquest served to legitimise his possession of imperial power and earned him the respect of the army, without which he would almost certainly not have been able to hold on to his authority.

There was a huge psychological element to the acquisition of Britannia, too. For there existed a deep-seated belief in the Graeco-Roman world that Ocean was both a deity and the boundary of the world, which it skirted in a great riverine circle.¹⁰ For the Romans, Britain represented a double challenge: it was both in Ocean and outside its limits¹¹ and so within and beyond the boundary encircling the world, and its perceived situation would reinforce its otherness, its harbouring of strange and mythical beings. Tacitus emphasises the strong

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7 Head of the emperor Claudius, found in the River Alde, Suffolk and originally from the temple of the imperial cult at Colchester, Essex; first century AD.

connection between Britain and Ocean, commenting that 'Nowhere does the sea hold wider sway; it carries to and fro in its motion a mass of currents and, in its ebb and flow, is not held by the coast but passes deep inland and winds about, pushing in among highlands and mountains, as if in its own domain.'¹² Tacitus was clearly fascinated by the relationship between sea and land in Britain, by the sheer power and range of the tides and by the incursion of the sea into inlets and estuaries. For him as, perhaps for other ancient observers of Britain, land and water were intertwined in a manner that rendered the island all the more awe-inspiring and magical, for boundaries were permeated and edges between solid and liquid matter were persistently compromised.

The issue of Britain's tides may have been significant not only in terms of the consternation they may have caused to invading forces but also for Druidic knowledge. Tidal ranges vary enormously and that variation depends largely on the gravitational pull of the moon (though the sun is involved to a lesser degree). Spring tides, with the highest ranges, occur every fortnight just after the full and new moons, while neap tides (those with the lowest range) occur at the time of the half moon. Moreover, the most dramatic spring tides take place at the time of the spring and autumn equinoxes. Although the Druids would not have known the scientific reason for the differences in the tides, those living near the coasts, or on small islands like Anglesey, would have been fully aware of a connection between the way the seas behaved and the phases of the moon, observing them as they did at first hand.¹³

Boundaries and edges are prominent symbols in many societies.¹⁴ The symbolic border between states of being is inhabited not only by shamans but also by poets, clowns and jesters, all of whom take on different personas while professionally engaged.¹⁵ For the ancient Druids, it is of particular significance that religious practitioners are frequently acknowledged as dwelling 'between,' living on the edges of their communities because of their special relationship with the spirit world. Both Caesar¹⁶ and Pliny¹⁷ speak of Druids in connection with Britain, and attitudes to Britannia were linked with ancient writers' perspectives on Druids. Both Britain itself and Druids were edgy, strange and dangerous.

To obtain some idea of how Britain and its inhabitants were perceived by imperial Rome we have only to look at the comments of its chroniclers. Caesar was the first Roman official recorded as having set foot in *terra inculta*:

I thought it would be very useful merely to have visited the island, to have seen what sort of people lived there, and to get some idea of the terrain and the harbours and landing places. The Gauls knew practically nothing about all this. In the ordinary way no one goes to Britain except traders, and even they are acquainted only with the sea coast and the areas that are opposite Gaul.¹⁸

His were the terse, dispassionate words of the army commander. However, a late Roman imperial panegyric (a festival oration) addressed to the reigning emperor describes Caesar's penetration of the unknown island in a much more emotional and significant light:

When Caesar, he the author of your name, entered Britain, the first of the Romans, he wrote that he had found another world, thinking it of so great size that it seemed not to be surrounded by Ocean, but to embrace Ocean itself.¹⁹

Many writers of the first century AD, at a time when Britain was in the process of annexation as a Roman province, describe the island much as nineteenth-century English people viewed the 'dark continent' of Africa. In flattering the emperor Claudius, Pomponius Mela commented,

Britain – what sort of place it is and what sort of inhabitants it produces – will soon be described more precisely and on the basis of greater exploration. For behold, the greatest of emperors is opening it up after it has been closed so long, the conqueror of peoples not only unconquered but unknown to boot!²⁰

Earlier, during the reign of Augustus, the conquest of Britain was regarded as unfinished business, initiated by Julius Caesar but requiring consolidation and proper annexation. Authors writing in the Augustan period stress the remoteness and weirdness of Britain and its separation from the known world by the 'monster-filled Ocean',²¹ a phrase used by the poet Horace who in another poem alludes to the desire for 'the untouched Briton' to 'descend the sacred way enchained'.²² And there is much more in the same vein. For the Romans of the first century AD, Britain was decidedly odd, other and as remote (or more so) as the moon is today, a perception that caused Pliny to speak of the land as 'the empty voids of nature'. Indeed, the myth of weirdness was so resistant to change that Herodian could still write of the Britons as a subhuman species in the middle of the third century AD.

Here be Dragons: Mythic Islands and Weird Religions

But why should I speak of these things when the craft [of Druidism] has even crossed the Ocean and reached the empty voids of Nature? Even today Britain practises magic in awe, with such grand ritual that it might seem that she gave it to the Persians.²³

Pliny's text is significant for he makes a direct connection between the otherness of Britain and of the Druids. His 'empty voids of Nature' are very close to

the perception of *terra inculta* inhabited by beings fittingly presided over by weird religious specialists. Pliny's comparison between Britain and Persia (or Parthia) is meaningful in the context of the positions of these lands beyond opposite ends of the Roman Empire, and he is not the only author to mention the two in apposition. A sycophantic poem of Horace includes a verse bracketing the two:

We believed that Jove was ruler when he thundered
in the heavens: a god amongst us will be held
Augustus when Britons and dread Parthians
Have been added to the empire.²⁴

Mention of Britain and Parthia in the same breath does not simply represent the span of empire and the strangeness of the peoples living beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. It also refers to the wildness of both lands and, most importantly, the intractability of the inhabitants and the difficulty the Romans had in subduing them.²⁵ All Pliny is doing, it seems, is hammering home the point that Britain, like Parthia, was odd and the Druidic religion practised there was equally foreign, outlandish and impenetrable.

In many traditions, islands are viewed as sacred places in part, at least, because of their inaccessibility, remoteness and the necessity of crossing aquatic barriers. Water-girt lands may be perceived as protected by encircling seas, themselves charged with supernatural powers and, in some belief-systems, islands were and are the dwelling-places of the gods. The voyages of heroes or Christian saints who embark on perilous journeys by boat and sail where fortune takes them, to magical islands, are persistent themes in Irish mythic literature.²⁶ The voyages are pilgrimages, sacred journeys and the object of the pilgrims' quest is itself sacred, a miraculous deliverance from arduous and dangerous voyages in capricious seas.

There is archaeological evidence for the sanctity of island places in the British Iron Age: Llyn Cerrig Bach, on Anglesey, is a case in point, for not only was it situated on a remote island off the north-west coast of Wales, and thus on the edge of the edge that was Britain, but recent work indicates that the site itself was precisely located on a dry island within the wetland, as if the juxtaposition of wet and dry space were significant and the site carefully selected for its idiosyncratic topography.²⁷ It is possible that it reflected the perceived interaction between wet and dry cosmologies.²⁸ There are other similarly 'mixed' (wet/dry) sites of which the most notable is Gundestrup in Jutland where, in the first century BC, a great gilded silver cauldron, carved with cultic and mythological panels, was deliberately dismantled and placed on a dry island surrounded by raised bog.²⁹ Dryness was superimposed on wetlands in order to create a proper place for sacred deposition (Fig. 8): trackways, causeways,

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8 Wrought-iron slave gang chain (one of two) from the late Iron Age votive deposit found at Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey.

bridges or jetties were frequently constructed in the Iron Age specifically as platforms for depositing metalwork in watery places.³⁰ Islands in marshes are, perhaps, the very essence of *terra inculta*, for they are inaccessible places bound by dangerous, apparently capricious bogs, as if protected by the gods. In a sense, such isolated places acted as microcosms of Britain itself during the middle and later Iron Age or, at least, were perceived as such by Roman colonisers.

The attitude of certain Roman commentators to Gallo-British cults contains a strong vein of derision. The Elder Pliny recorded one event designed to bring the whole Druidic order into disrepute, namely the affair of the 'Druid's egg', a tale guaranteed to convey the impression that these ritualists were weird and outlandish, as well as untrustworthy. In his *Natural History*³¹ Pliny recounts an episode he alleges took place when Claudius was emperor, involving a certain Gallic chieftain from the tribe of the Vocontii whose territory, so Caesar tells us,³² was in Transalpine Gaul, that is in

Provence, between the Cevennes and the Rhône, a region that became part of the Roman Empire long before Caesar's conquest of the Gaulish heartlands. This individual had been granted entry into the Equestrian Order, the second tier of Roman nobility, by Claudius in line with his policy of enfranchising Gauls and admitting them to the highest office in Rome, including membership of the Senate.³³ According to Pliny, this Vocontian, nameless alas, was executed for fraud and for practising illegal magic. Apparently, he was one of the protagonists in a lawsuit when he was found to have an amulet on his person that, according to Druidic doctrine, was bound to give its possessor victory in legal disputes, and he was therefore guilty of endeavouring to subvert the Roman legal system by magic. The talisman was known as an *anguinum*, or 'serpent's egg'.³⁴ This action by a Vocontian from the most Romanised part of southern Gaul, and the nearest geographically to Italy, is significant, suggesting that Druidism was still rife in this region in the mid-first century AD.

The punishment meted out to the Vocontian chieftain might seem to us excessive but the incident draws attention to two important issues: Roman attitudes to Druids and superstition. The reign of Claudius saw a firm crack-down on Druidism; according to Suetonius, 'Augustus had been content to prohibit any Roman citizen in Gaul from taking part in the savage and terrible Druidic cult; Pliny likewise recorded the expunging of Druidism by Tiberius Caesar.³⁵ Claudius abolished it altogether.'³⁶ All the early emperors, then, were totally hostile to the Druids, so anyone caught practising Druidic magic in Rome itself, particularly in the law courts, would be guilty of committing a heinous crime and, perhaps, even treason. The second issue, that of superstition, is more complex, for the Romans were themselves deeply superstitious, their official and cultic practices heavily interlaced with omens and portents, signs of good and ill luck. But the practice of sorcery within Roman legal proceedings might, on the one hand, have been perceived in much the same way as a jury in a modern British court deciding on a guilty or innocent verdict by reading tea leaves and, on the other, as being tantamount to Satanism. Claudius' draconian punishment may also suggest that he himself rather thought that the Vocontian's magic might work!

Edenic Nostalgia: The Alexandrian Tradition

From Caminha, Pedro Alvares Cabral's scribe during the voyage that led to the discovery of Brazil in 1500, to Sting, the rock star who in 1989 campaigned for the preservation of the Amazon jungle and Indians, the edenic discourse, with its many versions of the 'vision of Paradise', has been a constant ingredient in the construction of the complex imagery surrounding the figure of the Indian.³⁷

The passage quoted explores the notion that romance and nostalgia for a long-lost golden age and lost innocence serve to shape a Brazilian Indian past that owes more to external fantasy imposed by outsiders than to reality. In ambivalent attitudes to foreigners, particularly those of non-western origins, people from the developed world to this day nurture a dual perspective on 'exotic' societies with which they come into contact. To cite a modern example, despite the long-standing recognition of black Britishness in today's Britain, there persists a package of popular mythology that clings to the persona of those whose forbears came from the Afro-Caribbean world, among the mildest manifestations of which is the stereotype of being better at sport but intellectually inferior to their white compatriots. Similarly, those – most notably from the Classical world – who considered themselves more civilised than their neighbours, entertained perceptions of others that ranged from the wild barbarian to the Noble Savage. In the imperial Rome of Nero, the decadent behaviour of the elite within Roman society was compared unfavourably to the innocence and straightforward bravery of the communities being subjugated and sucked into the maw of the Empire. Tacitus, for instance, shows himself to be deeply disapproving of the way Roman morals had declined during the first century AD and took as his yardstick of moral rectitude the great stalwarts of the early and middle years of the Roman republic.³⁸ His apparent sympathy for the Britons under the oppressive yoke of Roman conquest³⁹ seems to imply a perceived link between the innocence of the Noble Savage represented by the Britons and the revered ancestors of Rome as opposed to the excesses, greed and lack of scruple rife in imperial Rome.

This nostalgic notion of the Noble Savage and an Age of Innocence from which the civilised world has been removed (as if expelled from the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve) is important for there is a body of ancient literature that presents Druids in just such a manner, dwelling on their intellectual powers, their sense of justice and their creation of an ordered and reverent world. These texts belonged to the 'Alexandrian Tradition' and are preserved in Greek documents 'written by scholars educated in the School of Alexandria from at least as early as the first century AD onwards.'⁴⁰ In his discussion of these sources, Stuart Piggott defines this body of texts as 'all second-hand library work, with no new empirical observations from first-hand informants or from field-work among the Celtic peoples.'⁴¹ The tenet of these 'chronicles' is comparison between the Druids and the other great philosophical doctrines of the world. The Alexandrians saw the Druids as belonging to this spectrum of powerful thinkers and therefore accorded them respect as philosophers who dwelt in a kind of paradisaical world untainted by the complexities and corruption of civilisation. The Alexandrian writers who discuss Druids span a period from the first to the fifth centuries AD and, interestingly, include a

number of Christian authors, 'early Church fathers'.⁴² These writers and their compatriots, quoting much earlier works such as that of Alexander Cornelius Polyhistor (born c. 105 BC),⁴³ allude respectfully to the contribution made to philosophy by the Gauls and their religious leaders. Clement speaks nostalgically of the ancient philosophy of the Gallic Druids, making the astounding claim that 'Pythagoras and the Greeks have acquired philosophy from the Gauls and other barbarians',⁴⁴ and listing the Druids alongside Egyptian prophets, Assyrian Chaldeans and Bactrian shamans.

Dio Chrysostom lived from the mid-first century AD to the time of Trajan in the early second. He was an eminent Greek philosopher and teacher and, following the exile imposed on him by the emperor Domitian, travelled widely until he was brought back by Domitian's successor, Nerva. Among Dio's works is a short text entitled *The Forty-Ninth Discourse: a Refusal of the Office of Archon Delivered before the Council*. In it he, like Clement, refers to Druids in relation to other important civilisations of antiquity, making the point that in the past the most powerful nations elected philosophers as advisers and mentors for their rulers:

Thus the Persians, methinks, appointed those whom they call Magi, because they were acquainted with Nature and understood how the gods should be worshipped; the Egyptians appointed the priests, who had the same knowledge as the Magi, devoting themselves to the service of the gods and knowing the how and wherefore of everything; the Indians appointed Brahmins, because they excel in self-control and righteousness and in their devotion to the divine, as a result of which they know the future better than all other men know their immediate present; the Celts appointed those whom they call Druids, these also being devoted to the prophetic art and to wisdom in general.⁴⁵

Dio Chrysostom's testimony, borrowed as some of it undoubtedly is from earlier writers on Gaul, contains interesting resonances with other societies whom he does not mention, notably the biblical prophets, such as Samuel, who was told by God to anoint Saul as King of Israel⁴⁶ and Nathan, adviser to King David⁴⁷ and anointer of King Solomon.⁴⁸ Old Testament prophets such as these had the ear of God and acted as conduits between Jahweh and earthly rulers. God spoke to the rulers of Israel using the prophets as a voice and the power thus invested in these men made them stronger and more influential than the kings themselves. If a prophet disapproved of a king's behaviour, his reign did not flourish: in the case of King David's seizure of Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, catastrophe was visited upon him, namely the death of his beloved son Absalom.⁴⁹ What is clear from Chrysostom's text, as from the description of Old Testament prophets, is that the power of those able to communicate

with the spirit world, and who could predict the future by liaising with the divine, came from their unique position in society, as God's/the gods' earthly representatives. In the Roman Empire, perceived by some as an era of lost innocence, the straightforward relationship between authority and the gods represented by a romantic and simple past enjoyed by barbarians perhaps seemed far healthier and less corrupt (even to Christians) than the intense materialism and absolute power that characterised imperial rule.

From Respect to Persecution

Imagine the scene: followers of religion X force their way into your local parish church. They attack the crucifix, century-old images carved in stone, paintings and beautiful stained-glass windows with iron bars, sledgehammers and bricks. Then they pour petrol over the wooden seating and set the ancient building alight.⁵⁰

This quotation is from Eberhard Sauer's book *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred*, which looks at late antiquity and the early medieval period. In contextualising the work, the Preface begins with this powerful image of religious persecution as experienced by its targets. Ironically enough, Sauer uses his scene to explore not the persecution of Christians, but of pagans by Christians. I would argue that the situation presented by Sauer bears strong resemblance to Tacitus' account of the destruction of the sacred groves of Mona (Anglesey) by the Romans in AD 60/1.⁵¹ Suetonius Paulinus' campaigns against the British freedom movement deliberately targeted the Druidic holy of holies because of the island's perceived identity as a hive of nationalist fervour that needed to be eradicated before Britannia could be fully subdued. We will presently return to Tacitus and his contemporaries. But first it is appropriate to examine some of the Classical chroniclers of the first century BC, for Caesar, Strabo and Diodorus, who all belonged to the 'Posidonian Tradition', are, for the most part, less censorious of the Druids than are the authors who lived and wrote during the mid-later first century AD. Diodorus speaks of 'certain philosophers and theologians who are treated with special honour, whom they [the Gauls] call Druids';⁵² Strabo, with more reverence still, said, 'The Druids, in addition to the science of nature, study also moral philosophy.'⁵³

It is likely that two factors serve to account for different perspectives on Druidism between the first centuries BC and AD: one concerns the changing relationship between Rome and the west (namely, Gaul and Britain) which, by the mid-first century AD, involved the considerable tension brought about by conquest, resistance and rebellion. Clearly this is not the sole reason for shifts in attitudes on the part of the chroniclers, for Caesar was in the very thick of

conquest when he wrote about Druids in Gaul and Britain. But, of course, Caesar may well have gleaned his information on the Druids from Gallic allies, such as the Aedui with whom, for the most part, he was on good terms (see below). The second, not unrelated, factor may be that Druidism⁵⁴ was a dynamic rather than a static phenomenon that developed and changed over time and, of course, the rate of change may have been accelerated when the Druids, as religious and political leaders, were confronted by a very real threat to the continuance of their power or even their very existence. Conversely, the treatment of the Druids by such writers as Tacitus may have been tinged with the fear, ever-present in Rome, that one day the barbarians might overrun the Empire and even its *fons et origo*, the city itself. The memory of just such an event, four hundred years earlier when, in 390 BC, the Gauls had sacked Rome, was still strong in people's minds.⁵⁵ Indeed, Tacitus specifically refers to a Druidic threat during the cataclysmic 'Year of the Four Emperors' when the Gallic chieftain Civilis led an uprising against a Rome weakened by civil strife. The Capitol was burned down, not by Gauls but by warring Roman factions. That iconic event had been seized upon by the Druids who predicted that this was an omen of doom for the Empire: 'Now, however, fate had ordained this fire as a sign of the gods' anger and of the passing of world domination to the nations north of the Alps.'⁵⁶

Caesar

Julius Caesar's respectful account of the Druids is the most detailed extant description of their position and functions within their communities;⁵⁷ he was clearly struck by the amount of power and influence the Druids wielded there. Nowhere in Caesar's text do we find pejorative attitudes to this group, despite the inevitably confrontational relationship between himself, as a conquering Roman general, and the Druids as an elite caste heavily involved in ruling the tribes whom his army encountered as allies or enemies. Caesar's testimony has a unique element: the naming of Diviciacus, who ruled the Aedui⁵⁸ and was a faithful ally of Rome during Caesar's governorship in the fifties BC, the same Divitiacus (an alternative spelling of the name) identified by Cicero as a Druid, skilled in the art of divine prognostication.⁵⁹ In the context of his war against the Germans under the leadership of their king Ariovistus, who was threatening to settle huge numbers of his people in Gallic territory and against whom many Gaulish tribal rulers were appealing for Roman help, Caesar stated, 'I trusted Diviciacus more than any other Gaul.'⁶⁰

The polity of the Aedui was under the joint leadership of two brothers, Diviciacus who, as we have seen, was pro-Caesar, and Dumnorix, who led an anti-Roman faction. Dumnorix represented trouble for Rome's plan for the

pacification and annexation of Gaul and, in the context of this book, it is worth referring to an episode recorded by Caesar, that occurred on the eve of his second visit to Britain in 54 BC. The Roman general was uneasy about leaving behind powerful anti-Roman nobles in Gaul who might use his absence to foment an uprising and, to avoid such an eventuality, he decided to take the troublemakers with him to Britain, where he could keep an eye on them and remove them from their power-bases.

To begin with, Dumnorix proceeded to use every kind of reason to support his request to be left behind in Gaul. He said that he was not used to sailing and was afraid of the sea, and also that religious considerations prevented him . . .⁶¹

This short passage is quite revealing. Not only does it indicate the wily and dangerous nature of Dumnorix and the presence of two factions within the one ruling family, but it is clear that Dumnorix, like his brother, was a religious as well as a political leader of the Aedui. Indeed, Caesar speaks only of Dumnorix's sacred duties and it is left to Cicero to tell us of Diviciacus' role as a Druid. But Caesar does not identify Dumnorix as a Druid, so we are left wondering whether, perhaps, Dumnorix occupied some other role within the religious hierarchy. In any case, Caesar's respect for the Aedui and his 'special relationship' with Diviciacus did not extend to his rebel-rouser brother and, when Dumnorix continued to resist the general's orders to accompany him to Britain, Caesar had him surrounded and killed by his soldiers.⁶²

Incidentally, the phenomenon of divided loyalties between two members of a ruling family, one nationalist, one pro-Roman, is by no means unique to Diviciacus and Dumnorix of the Aedui. There is a fine parallel in early Romano-British history among the Brigantes of north Britain who, Tacitus tells us,⁶³ were divided into similar factions in AD 68. Rome herself was in chaos leading up to the chasmic 'Year of the Four Emperors', when competing warlords nearly tore the Empire apart after the death of Nero. It was Rome's very instability at this time that apparently caused the anti-Roman faction among the Brigantes to foment open rebellion. This huge confederation of British tribes was ruled by a client-queen, Cartimandua. She was a ruler who fully supported, and was in turn supported by the Roman government, but Tacitus tells us that her consort Venutius had 'a violent character and a hatred of all things Roman.'⁶⁴ Venutius' attitude is understandable in terms of the breakdown of his relationship with his partner, for Cartimandua 'tired of Venutius, who was her consort, and gave her hand and kingdom to his armour-bearer, one Vellacatus'. Not without reason, Venutius was aggrieved at Cartimandua's treachery, particularly with someone of no higher status than

a body-servant, and came to resent not only the queen but her Roman allies whom he rightly saw as being the true power behind her leadership.

So, what can we understand from Book 6 of Caesar's *de Bello Gallico*? Was this Caesar's attitude to the Druids in general?⁶⁵ It is clear from his description of their power as recorded in his war-commentaries that he regarded this group as being perhaps the most influential members of Gallic society in the fifties BC. In introducing his account of the social order in Gaul, as he perceived it, he refers to the Druids and what he called the 'knights' as being the only people of any real status. It may be significant that he mentions the Druids before the knights.⁶⁶ Indeed, when he goes on to describe the knights,⁶⁷ he actually refers to them as 'the second class'. In recording the roles and responsibilities of the Druids, the whole tenor of his commentary is one of respect for those whom he appears to have considered not as uncivilised barbarians but as a highly organised group of religious practitioners whose high reputation within their own society was earned by their skill and wisdom.

Caesar's tone is matter-of-fact and non-judgmental: even in his account of the Druids' role in human sacrifice,⁶⁸ he is carefully neutral in his testimony; he never uses such practice as a platform for making adverse comparisons between barbarous Gallic customs and those of the civilised Roman world. His account of Gallic ritual murder is dispassionate and pragmatic, explaining its purpose as being propitiation of the gods. What is interesting about the passage in Book 6 where he discusses human sacrificial procedures – at which, he says, the Druids always officiated – is that he goes on to discuss the gods worshipped by the Gauls (and, by implication, in accordance with Druidic doctrine), as though they were Roman divinities. Thus:

The god they worship most is Mercury, and they have very many images of him. They regard him as the inventor of all the arts, the guide of all their roads and journeys, and the god who has greatest power for trading and moneymaking. After Mercury they worship Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva, having almost the same ideas about these gods as other peoples do: Apollo averts disease, Minerva teaches the first principles of industry and crafts. Jupiter has supremacy among the gods, and Mars controls warfare.⁶⁹

On the face of it, Caesar's description of the Gallic pantheon is nonsense. Even allowing for the undoubted development of syncretism between local and Roman cults throughout the Empire, there is no way that Gallic communities could have adopted Roman deities wholesale when they were only just in the process of conquest and integration into the Roman system. Religion is a notoriously conservative aspect of society, perhaps one of the last elements to be relinquished within a colonial context. It may simply be that Caesar

engaged in *interpretatio romana*,⁷⁰ a rationalisation of a foreign system that he encountered in his role as conquering general, perhaps in order to make his account comprehensible to his Roman readership. Furthermore, he may have wished to project the Druidical system as essentially similar to the Roman state religion, perhaps because he represented the Gauls as being at an approximately similar socio-developmental stage as that of 'civilised'⁷¹ Mediterranean society and thus a worthy conquest. If this is what Caesar was doing, it would have involved his identification of functional or ceremonial links between the cult of his own people and those of the Gallic heartlands in which he and his army were based. Alternatively, Caesar may simply have been concealing his ignorance of a foreign religious system.

When the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule lived among the Dogon people of Mali in West Africa, he questioned their elders about their belief-systems.⁷² Initially, Griaule was treated as a novice, and was therefore given answers to his queries deemed appropriate to his status as a beginner. Later on, when the religious leaders of the Dogon considered him worthier, he was received into the deeper mysteries of their system, rather as initiates into the Roman Catholic Church receive instruction appropriate to their perceived ability to comprehend complex levels of meaning. I suspect that, according to the Dogon model, Caesar might well have been at the novitiate stage of enquiry; there is no reason to believe that Gallic religious leaders would have expounded to him the depths of their doctrine nor, perhaps, would he have had the capacity to comprehend it were they to have done so.

In trying to understand how cultural religious interaction can work, it can be helpful to explore the nature of syncretistic belief-systems in modern societies,⁷³ whether it be the marriage between Zulu Zionism and indigenous healing cults⁷⁴ or the synthesis of Hinduism and Roman Catholicism in Tamil Nadu,⁷⁵ with a view to making broad connections between these modern religious cultural interactions and those displayed in ancient European iconography. In each instance, the fused religious practices exhibit the results of complex relationships between indigenous beliefs and those introduced by foreign powers.⁷⁶ These findings are highly applicable to the Druids and to Classical attitudes to their teaching and cult-systems. Caesar's terse list of deities worshipped in Gaul hides what was probably a highly complicated and ever-shifting relationship between Gallic and Roman religion. Caesar's army would have brought its beliefs with it and, no doubt, local people would have become familiar with the sight of altars and figurines and even with the sound of soldiers praying to their gods (Mars and Mercury in particular, the former primarily – in a military context at least – being associated with success in battle, the latter with prosperity in business; in invoking them both, soldiers thus took care to safeguard their lives and their money) (Fig. 9).

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9 Stone sculpture of Mercury from a Romano-British well at Emberton, Buckinghamshire. The schematised style is a characteristic of local work and may also reflect the affirmation of local identities and cosmologies.

But the local Gallic sacral traditions, led by the Druids, were not to be so easily dislodged, particularly so early in the relationship between Rome and the Gallic heartlands and especially in view of the essentially confrontational nature of that relationship. Indeed, both inscriptions and iconography in the western Roman provinces demonstrate that syncretism, whenever and however it occurred (and it would have developed over a long time rather than springing suddenly, fully fledged into Gallic society, as implied by Caesar's bland assumption), was the result of careful and orchestrated manipulation and appropriation. In my opinion, indigenous populations would have been highly influential in its manner of operation. On the one hand, then, Caesar is presenting to his audience back home a religious system recognisable to and comparable with his own, in an attitude, by implication, of respect. On the other hand, though, he is displaying the arrogant assurance of the empowered colonialist in misrepresenting the nature of Gallic religion, whether by virtue of ignorance or deliberate spin-doctoring.

The Literature of Imperialism: Tacitus, Lucan and Pliny

So Suetonius planned to attack the island of Mona, which though thickly populated had also given sanctuary to many refugees. The enemy lined the shore in a dense armed mass. Among them were black-robed women with dishevelled hair like Furies, brandishing torches. Close by stood Druids, raising their hands to heaven and screaming dreadful curses . . . This weird spectacle awed the Roman soldiers into some sort of paralysis. They stood still – and presented themselves as a target. But then they urged each other (and were urged by the general) not to fear a horde of fanatical women. They bore down upon their opponents, enveloping them in the flames of their own torches. Suetonius garrisoned the conquered island. The groves devoted to Mona's barbarous superstitions he demolished. For it was their religion to drench their altars in the blood of prisoners and consult their gods by means of human entrails.⁷⁷

Tacitus' text is riddled with themes of barbarism: the remote island (off the bigger island of Britannia) (Fig. 10); the fanatical, Maenad-like women who wore not the white robes of the Classical priests but Hecatean black; a group of raving Druids, very different from the dignified philosophers mentioned by the expounders of the Posidonian tradition; secluded sacred groves; weird cults and sacrificial murder. The whole episode is steeped in notions of

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disorder, lack of moderation and chaos. The Greeks had a word for this: *physis*; its antithesis was *nomos*, man-created⁷⁸ order, discipline and balance.⁷⁹

The destruction of the Druids' holy of holies on Mona (Anglesey) bears an uncomfortable resemblance to Eberhard Sauer's picture of religious hatred perpetrated by Roman Christians in the late fourth century AD. Tacitus makes it clear that the targeting of Mona by the Roman governor was, primarily, a strategic decision based on military expediency because it 'had also given sanctuary to many refugees, presumably the disaffected who had cause to fear reprisals in the aftermath of resistance. The wholesale annihilation of the sacred grove was likely to have occurred as a response to subversion, threatened or imagined, to punish, to deter and make an example to (and of) Britannia. But the decision to destroy a holy place was an extreme reaction: generally speaking, the Romans tended to respect foreign sanctuaries and Cicero reminds us that sacred groves were familiar *loci consecrati* in the Italian landscape.⁸⁰ So, although it would be stretching a point to label Mona's Druidic shrine as the victim of 'religious hatred', it seems likely that the hidden, sequestered holy place, dripping with human blood, was viewed with horror and repugnance and as a threat to *humanitas* itself.

The victimisation of sacred groves is a recurrent theme in Classical chronicles of encounters between Rome and Gaul. Writing thirty years or so before Tacitus, the epic poet Lucan describes Caesar's destruction of another sacred grove, one belonging to the Massiliotes that stood in the way of the siegeworks that the general was throwing up around Marseille, whose inhabitants supported Pompey's bid for supreme power at Rome rather than Caesar's. Lucan's vivid description of the southern Gallic grove bears close comparison with Tacitus' account of Mona, including the 'altars heaped with human blood' theme. The poet implies that Caesar's soldiers, many of whom were Gauls, were chary of felling the holy trees but Caesar broke the spell by seizing an axe from a soldier and striking the first blow. 'Every Gaul present shuddered at the sight, but the defenders of Marseille were delighted: they could not believe that such an insult to the gods would remain unpunished.'⁸¹ While Lucan does not specifically mention the Druids in this episode, in an earlier passage he makes direct reference to their association with sacred groves and to their role as rebels when he says, 'The Druids, too, took advantage of the armistice to resume the rites of their wicked religion. (These men live deep in the forests, and claim – perhaps idly, perhaps not – that they alone understand the secrets of divinity and astrology.)'⁸² The latter passage forms part of his horrified account of human sacrifice perpetrated by the Gauls in propitiation of their 'merciless gods', Teutates, Esus and Taranis. For Lucan, the Gauls and their rites were too barbaric to be acceptable to *romanitas*. His text displays far more emotion and distaste than Tacitus' prose, and for him the 'wicked religion' of the Druids was not to be tolerated. Unlike Tacitus, for whom

expediency dictated the fate of Mona's forest shrine, Lucan confronts the Druids and their religion head-on and it is the barbarism of Druidism and all it stands for that justifies Roman hostility and, ultimately, gives Caesar free rein to obliterate the eerie groves that both engender and protect its weird cults.

Pliny the Elder is the only author who discusses the etymology of the term 'Druid', associating it directly with the Greek word for 'oak' – *δρῦξ*. Nora Chadwick suggests that it might even have been a nickname, deriving from a link with woodland, meaning something like 'backwoodsmen',⁸³ a somewhat pejorative term that neatly encapsulates colonisers' common attitudes towards their perceived inferiors. If Chadwick is right, Pliny and his fellows were using a term equally applicable to Herodian's Britons: country bumpkins, lurking in dark clumps of trees and engaged in weird and bizarre practices. Pliny, of course, is most famous for his lengthy discourse in his *Natural History* on Druids, oaks, mistletoe and golden sickles⁸⁴ (see Chapter 1), an account relatively free from colonially loaded language although, even here, some of his prejudices creep in. For instance, he uses the term *magus*, translated by Rackham as 'magician',⁸⁵ but the word can also mean 'learned man'.⁸⁶ The real sting in the tale is the comment at the end of the mistletoe passage, when Pliny concludes 'So powerful is the superstition in regard to trifling matters that frequently prevails among the races of mankind'.⁸⁷ Pliny returns to the twin themes of magic and superstition later in the *Natural History*,⁸⁸ in discussing the relationship between the Druids and Britain, commenting on the practice of magic in 'the empty voids of nature', a wonderfully dismissive label for Britannia. In the same passage, Pliny speaks of the Druids as quacks and witch doctors, rightly outlawed by the emperor Claudius. The scorn with which Pliny speaks of Druidic superstition is ironic given that he belonged to a country that took superstition to extraordinary lengths: where else but in ancient Rome would one encounter a ritual in which the head of the family spat black beans over his shoulder to avert the evil influences of ancestral ghosts?⁸⁹ So were the Druids wise and sophisticated or savage and superstitious? Can we get beyond the Classical literature and edge any closer to the reality of religious leadership in Gaul and Britain?

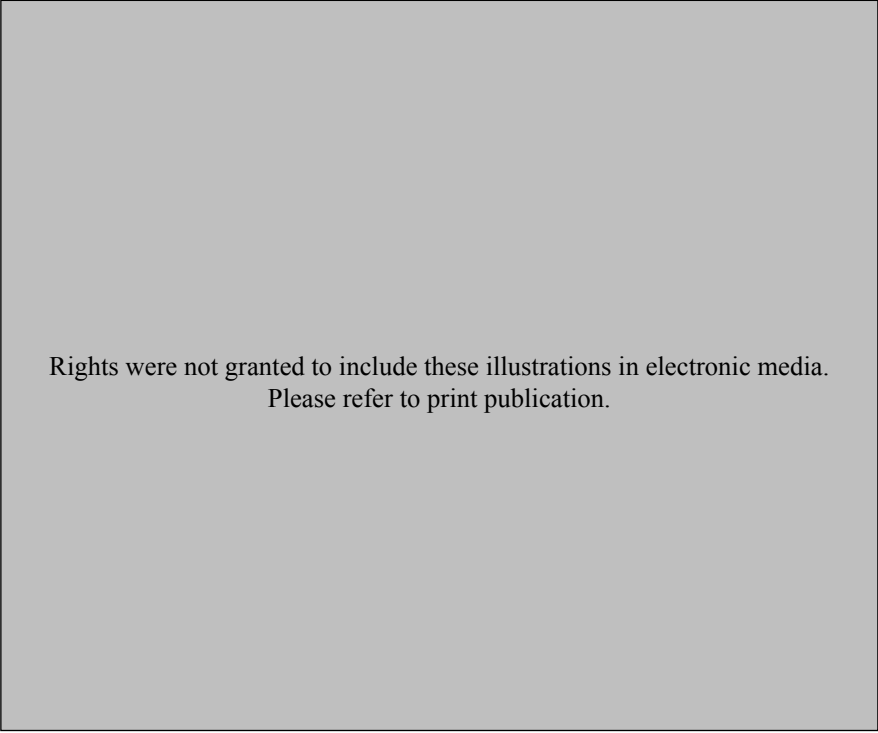
Priests and Power

Posidonius, again, when telling of the wealth of Louernius, father of Bituis who was dethroned by the Romans, says that in an attempt to win popular favour he rode in a chariot over the plains distributing gold and silver to the tens of thousands of Celts who followed him; moreover, he made a square enclosure one and a half miles each way, within which he filled vats with expensive liquor and prepared so great a quantity of food that for many days all who wished could enter and enjoy the feast prepared, being served without a break by the attendants. And when at length he fixed a day for the ending of the feast, a Celtic poet who arrived too late met Louernius and composed a song magnifying his greatness and lamenting his own late arrival. Louernius was very pleased and asked for a bag of gold and threw it to the poet who ran beside his chariot. The poet picked it up and sang another song saying that the very tracks made by his chariot on the earth gave gold and largesse to mankind.¹

ATHENAEUS, A Greek who lived in Egypt and at Athens, was writing around AD 200. The passage describing Louernius and his ostentatious largesse belongs to his treatise *The Learned at Dinner*, whose main theme was feasting.² Strabo also makes reference to Louernius and his son,³ adding the information that they belonged to the ruling class of the Arverni, a people living in the Auvergne of Central Gaul, and placing them in the second century BC.

Athenaeus' colourful testimony provides many insights into the way polities (or non-urbanised states) worked in the second–first century BC: ruler-ship and religion, feasting and the construction of huge enclosures for assembly and ritual practices for all of which we can find evidence in Gaul and Britain during the time of the Druids. Athenaeus' comment on 'expensive liquor' almost certainly refers to imported Italian wine rather than to the less exotic and much cheaper ale brewed locally and quaffed by the masses,⁴ and archaeological evidence for Mediterranean wine-drinking – not least the quantities of the large wine-vessels known as amphorae on excavated sites in Burgundy and the Auvergne – supports his testimony. Both he and Strabo

also make the important statement that, among the Arverni at least, some kind of dynastic system was in place by the second century BC. Indeed, such succession from father to son can also be traced in the same polity in the mid-first century BC, when the great Arvernian chieftain, Vercingetorix, son of Celtillus, came to the fore as a leader of the Gallic rebellion against Caesar.⁵ Druidism flourished within a milieu of centralised and hierarchical societies in which power could be acquired, held and expressed within fairly large centres of population. Hidden in Athenaeus' description of Louernius' extravaganza is a significant statement, namely that the chieftain 'fixed a day for the ending of the feast', for it suggests that the banquet was connected to a formal celebration, perhaps a religious festival (Fig. 11). Furthermore, the fixing of precise calendrical times resonates with Caesar's comment about the Druids – that every year, on a fixed date, they attended an assembly in a sacred place within the territory of the Carnutes (around Chartres).⁶ Finally, the tradition of large-scale feasting itself had close associations with ritual behaviour.⁷



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Settlement and Society in Late Iron Age Gaul and Britain

On the day appointed for the trial, Orgetorix assembled his entire household (about 10,000 people) at the scene and brought all his dependants and debtors there too, of whom there were a vast number. Through them he was able to escape having to stand trial. This provoked the people; they tried to gain their right by armed force, and the magistrates were collecting large numbers of men from the countryside when Orgetorix died. One cannot help suspecting, as the Helvetii believe, that he took his own life.⁸

The story of Orgetorix is recorded in Book I of Caesar's *de Bello Gallico*. He was an influential nobleman of the Helvetii, a people occupying territory in what is now Switzerland. This large group of loosely affiliated communities was ruled by magistrates, as was Rome itself, but Orgetorix conspired with others of high rank to become sole king. Whilst we might fairly question Caesar's text on the ten thousand composing Orgetorix's entourage, even if his household contained half or less than is reported in the Roman general's account, that is still a staggeringly large retinue of kin and provides us with a glimpse of substantive populations in mid-first-century BC Gaul. Caesar's account of Orgetorix's rise and fall raises two important issues: the nature of rulership in late Iron Age Gaul and Britain and what one might expect in the way of archaeological evidence for events involving large gatherings.

Kings and Magistrates

The first move was made by Vercingetorix, a young Arvernian with very great power in his tribe. His father, Celtillus, had once been the most powerful man in the whole of Gaul and had been killed by his fellow tribesmen because he wanted to become king.⁹

Caesar's description of power-relations in Gaul during the period of his governorship of the region, in the mid-first century BC, is telling, not simply for the information it provides on Gallic politics but also because, in a sense, what the Roman general was doing was reflecting on his own situation in Rome, and his desire for absolute rulership. With a bitter irony, he – like Celtillus – was destined to be cut down by his enemies. Since the expulsion of the last of the Etruscan kings from Rome in 509 BC and their replacement by an infant republic presided over by two annually elected magistrates (the consuls),¹⁰ the Roman people had been on their guard against monarchy in any form. But rulership in late Iron Age Gaul oscillated between kingship and elected magistracies.¹¹ Kings could be hereditary: this was, perhaps, especially customary among the Arverni, since we know of Louernius and Bituis in the second century BC, as well as Celtillus

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12 Coin of Vercingetorix, unprovenanced.

and Vercingetorix in the first (Fig. 12). But certainly Celtillus' bid for kingship seems to have met a fatally hostile reception and it may be that Vercingetorix's aspirations were acceptable to the Gauls only in the context of the crisis of imminent loss of independence to Caesar and Rome.

Other Gallic polities certainly went down the route of elected leadership. According to Caesar,¹² the Gaulish state of the Aedui, whose territory lay in Burgundy, had a system of annually elected magistrates, given the title *vergobret*, officials who enjoyed absolute power over their people, including that of life and death. At some point during the fifties BC, this Burgundian polity changed its custom from having one supreme magistrate to having two, with equal power,¹³ very much on the Roman consular model, although the presence of a second magistrate clearly created huge tensions and schisms within the Aedui.¹⁴ This polity also had a *senatus*, again in common with Rome. A similar situation obtained among the Treveri of the Moselle Valley. Caesar records that this polity, too, endured a struggle for supreme power by two noblemen: one of them decided that the best course for him was to throw in his lot with Caesar's army, while the other prepared to fight.¹⁵

The situation in south-east Britain during the first centuries BC and early AD appears somewhat different, in so far as coinage and literature provide unique evidence for the presence of dynasties among polities such as the Trinovantes, the Catuvellauni and the Atrebates,¹⁶ perhaps set up by Julius Caesar on his visits to Britain in 55 and 54 BC. Interestingly, the inscribed coinage indicates

that some of these dynastic rulers called themselves 'king', apparently with the blessing of Rome, and it is likely that they enjoyed a close relationship with Rome as 'client-kings' of 'buffer-states' long before the conquest date of AD 43 when Claudius invaded Britain. Their presence was probably encouraged by Rome both as a means of 'softening up' Britain for eventual annexation and of protecting the western boundary of the Empire in Gaul.¹⁷ One of these British kings, Togidubnus (Cogidubnus),¹⁸ called himself 'Great King of the Britons' on an inscription dedicating a Roman temple to Neptune and Minerva at Chichester, in about AD 58. Togidubnus may have been educated in Rome, where he encountered other *obsides* (sons of barbarian noblemen) from eastern provinces, where titles like this were traditionally adopted.¹⁹

Statedom

A state consists of a large population with complex social structures, urban centres, rule by kings or elected magistrates, a 'class-based hierarchy' of power, a 'centralised bureaucracy' supported by laws and taxation, a priestly class and the construction of formal temples.²⁰ Moreover, the use and minting of coinage indicates the existence of 'central authorities with power to act on behalf of the state.'²¹ Gaul and parts of Britain in the late Iron Age appear to fulfil most, if not all the criteria for statehood.²²

Centralisation was not confined to social structures within individual polities. Caesar makes constant reference to the annual Gallic Council of chieftains, an assembly that he, the Roman commander, had the power to convene.²³ Indeed, in speaking of the intransigence of the Treveri in 54 BC, Caesar makes a close link between attendance at the council and loyalty to him. He comments that the Treveri did not send representatives to the meeting, had not accepted his authority and were 'said to be making overtures to the Germans across the Rhine'.²⁴ What we cannot tell from Caesar's account is whether the 'Gallic council' was his initiative, a device to maintain cohesive, pan-Gallic fealty to Rome, or if he was tapping into a pre-existing system of inter-polity connections. This council was evidently not the same convention as the annual Druidic assembly recorded by Caesar as taking place 'on a fixed date each year'.²⁵ So how exactly did the Druids fit into the political and governance system obtaining in Caesar's Gaul (and Britain)? How much authority did they enjoy, and how did their religious responsibilities intertwine with the broader canvas of power and influence during this period?

Priests, Politics and Power

And it is not only in the needs of peace but in war also that they carefully obey these men [the Druids] and their song-loving poets, and this is true not

only of their friends but also of their enemies. For oftentimes as armies approach each other in line of battle with their swords drawn and their spears raised for the charge these men come forth between them and stop the conflict, as though they had spell-bound some kind of wild animals. Thus even among the most savage barbarians anger yields to wisdom and Ares does homage to the Muses.²⁶

If we can believe Diodorus' testimony, the Druids' ability to stop battles is evidence of their immense power. The 'meddling' of clergy in state business, whether in war- or peace-time politics is a familiar theme in both ancient and modern societies. Their position is often the opposite to the party line, and acts as a counterpoint to mainstream politics. The role of prophets in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible displays tensions between rulers and their prophetic advisers. These seers, voicing the word of God, spoke from the margins; they often lived physically on the edges of society and uttered uncomfortable truths.²⁷ Such prophets were not always 'rational' because they were tuned in to a sacred dimension frequently at odds with the material world in which they lived. Although the Druids clearly enjoyed high status within Gallic society, there is a sense in which they also fit into this mould of challenge and tension, and their intervention during battles is, perhaps, one of the best examples of such contrapuntal behaviour.

War and Peace: Druids as Arbitrators and Adjudicators

Diodorus Siculus gives the impression that the Druids regularly intervened in putting an end to battles before they had begun. If this were so, it means that they must have travelled with the Gallic military, like army chaplains in modern western warfare. Their role as peacemakers is borne out by Strabo who, although using the same earlier source – Posidonius – as Diodorus, refers to this aspect of Druidical activity as something that *used* to happen in the past, either before Posidonius' report in the earlier first century BC, or before Strabo was writing this part of his *Geography*, rather than as a custom current when the records of such practice were being compiled.²⁸ Strabo and Diodorus were writing at broadly the same time, so the discrepancy between the two authors may be nothing other than differing interpretations of Posidonius' original testimony. But in presenting this account of physical peacemaking as current, Diodorus might have been guilty of creating an 'antiquarian ethnographic present',²⁹ in other words speaking of past events and habits as though they were still happening. What is significant is the indication that the Druids, at some point in their history, enjoyed enormous influence in military matters. It is as though high-ranking Christian clerics today had the power to stop the armed forces in their tracks in campaigns against foreign adversaries.

Caesar also emphasises the role of the Druids in civil adjudication,³⁰ though he does not link this responsibility directly with warfare. Indeed, he goes out of his way to stress that the Druids were exempt both from military service and taxation,³¹ and the manner in which he juxtaposes the two suggests that taxation itself was closely linked to the funding of military campaigns. In terms of arbitration, Caesar has this to say:

In almost all disputes, between communities or between individuals, the Druids act as judges. If a crime is committed, if there is a murder, or if there a dispute about an inheritance or a boundary, they are the ones who give a verdict and decide on the punishment or compensation appropriate in each case. Any individual or community not abiding by their verdict is banned from the sacrifices, and this is regarded among the Gauls as the most severe punishment. Those who are banned in this way are reckoned as sacrilegious criminals. Everyone shuns them: no one will go near or speak to them for fear of being contaminated in some way by contact with them. If they make petitions there is no justice for them, and they are excluded from any position of importance.³²

Caesar's statement provides the crucial connection between the Druids and secular authority in mid-first-century BC Gaul. Not only does his report demonstrate their influence in affairs that more properly belonged to rulers (whether kings, chiefs or magistrates) but – and this is more significant – that the punishment meted out to the disobedient was a religious one. What Caesar is saying, in effect, is that Gallic personhood, citizenship and identity were all inextricably tied up with participation in and presence at religious events and that exclusion from ritual activity was tantamount to exile.³³ Furthermore, individuals or groups that defied the Druids were so charged with negative force that they were considered contagious: the transgressors were mad, bad and dangerous to know!

All men acting as judge, that they would have struck with *defixio*, that Severa Tertioncna may annul the *defixio* of this man: that he may not have the power of sorcery by writing of sorcery, of sorcery by word . . .³⁴

This is part of the text of the inscribed lead plaque from Larzac in southern Gaul. Most of the inscription concerns the nefarious activities of two rival groups of female sorcerers, but this one piece refers specifically to the magical influence of men acting in judgement over their peers. This Gallic inscription dates to around the second century BC and it may not be too fanciful to interpret the dramatis personae here mentioned as Druids, Druidesses or at least people belonging to the same genre of religious practitioners, even though

their penchant for casting spells and counter-spells might place them in the lower ranks of unofficial Gallic 'clergy'. *Defixiones* (lead or pewter tablets inscribed with curses)³⁵ are well attested in Roman Gaul and especially in Romano-British sanctuaries, and they acted as statements of revengeful intent by the maligned against wrongdoers. Here, the text has interest in its allusion to 'men acting as judge', for it is to this element in the spectrum of Druidic authority to which I now turn.

In contrast to Caesar, Strabo splits the learned class of Gauls into three: the Bards, *Vates* (prophets) and Druids.³⁶ Diodorus differs only slightly from Strabo, making a distinction between Bards and Druids and mentioning another class of 'seers',³⁷ cognate with Strabo's *Vates*. Both the latter speak of the Bards as lyric praise poets and the *Vates*/seers as skilled in divination. Strabo speaks of the Druids as 'the most just of men,' going on to say that this reputation gave them the responsibility to act as judges in disputes, whether public or private, presumably because of their wisdom and their close link with the gods. Caesar, using the same early text of Posidonius, makes a similar comment about the Druids' authority in making judgements, adding that they acted not only in settling disputes but as criminal justices as well in cases of serious crime.³⁸

Selection and Succession: Merit and Holiness

There is one Druid who is above all the rest, with supreme authority over them. When he dies, he is succeeded by whichever of the others is most distinguished. If there are several of equal distinction, the Druids decide by vote, though sometimes they even fight to decide who will be their leader.³⁹

According to Caesar, then, one Archdruid presided over all the rest and he was chosen for this highest of religious offices through merit, being judged as sufficiently distinguished presumably on the grounds of learning and wisdom. In a sense, such selection from among peers is analogous to the way the Pope is elected, and we can imagine the meetings, held behind closed doors, perhaps for days, until the 'white smoke' appeared and the identity of the new chief Druid emerged. But what strikes a discordant note in such an otherwise dignified affair is the notion of unseemly brawls for supremacy between distinguished, white-bearded old gentlemen. This is difficult to credit and is especially ironic given the Druids' role in calming aggression and intervening in conflicts. It is tempting to interpret such testimony either as Caesar's levity or as credulousness on his part, believing everything that he might have been told even if, perhaps, reported to him tongue in cheek.⁴⁰

Some four centuries later, in the fourth century AD, the Aquitanian academic Ausonius painted a rather different picture of Druidic succession.

Ausonius refers specifically to a dynasty of north Gallic Druids living in later Roman Gaul:

If report does not lie, you [Patera] were sprung from the stock of the Druids of Bayeux, and traced your hallowed line from the temple of Belenus; and hence the names borne by your family: you are called Patera; so the mystic votaries call the servants of Apollo. Your father and your brother were named after Phoebus, and your own son after Delphi [Delphidius]. In that age there was none who had such knowledge as you, such swift and rolling eloquence.⁴¹

While Ausonius was reporting second-hand, as it were, and was writing about individuals alive more than two centuries later than Caesar's Druids, his presentation of Druidic families is nonetheless significant, and it may be that, in the context of becoming Roman, the Druid order changed from a meritocracy to a family concern. Ausonius' testimony is also important both in the respect he accords to the Druids, their continued existence as a learned class in Roman Gaul and in his statement that Phoebicius, son of Patera, was the 'keeper of Belenus's temple.'⁴² Apollo Belenus ('Apollo the Bright One') was an important Gallo-Roman healer-god in Gaul, with a particular reputation for curing eye-disease.⁴³

Druidic Authority: Teachers and Curators of the Sacred Word

They teach many things to the noblest of the race in sequestered and remote places during twenty years, whether in a cave or in secluded groves.⁴⁴

In c. 12 BC, Augustus opened a series of schools for young Gallic noblemen, of which one prominent example was in the territory of the Burgundian Aedui at Augustodunum (Autun), almost certainly the one mentioned by Tacitus in the context of the Gallic rebellion against Rome led by Florus and Sacrovir in AD 21.⁴⁵ Such a move struck at the very heart of the Druids' power-base – their ability to educate the young and thus maintain their influence over religion and politics. Caesar speaks of the way high-ranking Gallic youths used to flock to the Druid schools for instruction by teachers who had themselves undergone rigorous training for twenty years. Furthermore, he recounts how serious students travelled to Britain to study with the most distinguished Druidic teachers.⁴⁶ Incidentally, the allusion by both Mela (in the above quotation) and Caesar to 'twenty years' is probably a literary device for expressing 'a long time' rather than their reference to a precise time span.

Druidic teaching was conducted through the spoken rather than written word. Caesar makes it clear that learning by heart was considered a proper

way of communicating esoteric knowledge because of the need to train memory and because the nature of the doctrines was so secret.⁴⁷ Word power was effective: in the passage from the *Commemoratio* quoted in the previous section, Ausonius mentions his admiration for the eloquence exhibited by the Druidic rhetoricians of Bordeaux. In religious contexts, the spoken word could assume especial power: the experience of hearing repeated prayers (and curses) is quite different from reading them silently, and we can imagine that the Druids with the most sonorous, resonant voices could command all the more awe and respect. In his study of shamanism, Piers Vitebsky draws attention to the power of words that transcends meaning but relates perhaps more to their musicality.⁴⁸ Chants and mantras may have a hypnotic, trance-inducing effect, and the blast of curse-words gains its force from the explosive nature of their delivery. In the early medieval Ulster Cycle epic, the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, Queen Medb of the Irish province of Connacht sends her Druids and bards against Fer Diad, foster-brother of her great enemy the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn; they literally bombard him with satire such that the words raise blisters all over his face.⁴⁹

Caesar's comment about responsibility for the traditions of their people acknowledged the Druids as keepers of the sacred flame of ancestral tradition, giving them enormous influence within their communities. A sense of identity goes hand in hand with tradition and a knowledge of the past, and it was the Druids who held the key to information that gave people a time-depth perspective. The elders of Baktaman communities in New Guinea might be 'old men with poor memories'⁵⁰ but they, nonetheless, are the only people who are considered to hold sacred knowledge. The Druids would have been especially influential because of their esoteric knowledge, a knowledge that perhaps knitted together a complex and diverse set of ritual traditions.

Holy orders: Sacral Kings and Sacred Officers

There were a great many of them in my camp. Diviciacus was among them, and so was Liscus, who held the highest office of state, called Vergobret by the Aedui. (This annually elected magistrate has power of life and death over his countrymen.)⁵¹

We are first introduced to Diviciacus (Fig. 13) and his brother Dumnorix at the very beginning of Caesar's *Commentaries*, in the context of troublemaking among the Aeduan ruling class by the Helvetian Orgetorix, who was aspiring to become king in the face of strenuous opposition from the people and their elected magistrates.⁵² Caesar explains how Orgetorix encouraged Dumnorix to attempt the same thing, namely to wrest supreme power from Diviciacus who 'at that time held the chief magistracy in the tribe and enjoyed the widest

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13 Diviciacus at Rome.

support of his people'.⁵³ Dumnorix was a troublemaker, a fanatical freedom-fighter and a persistent thorn in Caesar's side. One of Caesar's reasons for not wanting to leave this man behind when he went to Britain was that, apparently, Dumnorix was busily spreading rumours among the Aeduans that the Roman general had offered to make him king, a claim that caused considerable unease and resentment among his people.

It is telling that one of the reasons Dumnorix (Fig. 14) gave for not accompanying Caesar to Gaul was 'that religious considerations prevented him' (see Chapter 2).⁵⁴ Was he saying that he, too, was a Druid or was he, perhaps, claiming a form of 'sacral kingship' in which, as a quasi-divine individual, he was too valuable to be expendable, especially as he claimed to be 'afraid of the sea'?⁵⁵ Sacral kingship is a particular feature of early medieval Irish mythology in which rulers enjoyed supernatural status but were 'hemmed in by awesome religious taboos and onerous social obligations,' because they were perceived as the personification of their people and on their own well-being depended that of their subjects.⁵⁶

Before leaving the subject of sacral rulership, we should look at Strabo's account of Galatian society in Asia Minor, although his comments relate to a

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14 Inscribed coin of Dumnorix/Dubnorix minted by the Aedui.

much earlier period than that of Caesar's Druids. The Galatians were a people of Gaulish origin who established themselves in part of what is now Turkey in the early third century BC.⁵⁷ Strabo's comments are worth quoting because they contain allusions to several important issues concerning sacral kingship and the ritual nature of political gatherings:

The Council of the tetrarchs consisted of three hundred men, who assembled at Drynemeton, as it was called. Now the Council passed judgement upon murder cases but the tetrarchs and the judges upon all others. Such, then was the organisation of Galatia long ago, but in my time the power has passed to three rulers, then to two, and then to one, Deiotarus, and then to Amyntas, who succeeded him.⁵⁸

If we accept Strabo's account, Galatia appears to have evolved from oligarchy (rule by a group) to monarchy. More importantly, the Gaulish names given both to the Galatian assembly location and to the first-named single ruler have sacred connotations, supporting the connection between politics and religion that runs as a consistent thread through this chapter. Drynemeton or Drunemeton means 'Oak Sanctuary', a term that resonates both with the sacred groves allegedly beloved of the Druids and with archaeological evidence for timber sanctuaries and places of assembly, such as Fison Way,

Thetford.⁵⁹ Deiotarus' name is interesting for it means 'Divine Bull', a name that clearly denotes sacral rulership, and has associations with feasting, bull-sacrifice and even shape-shifting, a phenomenon linked particularly with shamanistic societies.⁶⁰

A Plethora of Priests?

In 1978 an inscribed ceramic jar was found deliberately deposited in a ditch bounding a religious precinct at Argentomagus (Argenton-sur-Creuse), in the territory of the powerful polity of the Bituriges.⁶¹ The inscription reads 'given by a *vergobret*', suggesting that the pot, and presumably its contents (coins, grain, liquor or another substance), were a votive offering in some ritual context (Fig. 15). So what exactly was a *vergobret*? The evidence from Caesar indicates that an individual given this title combined civic and religious duties. In his reference to the Aeduan *vergobret* Liscus, Caesar describes Liscus' duties and his problems with the rogue nobleman Dumnorix.⁶² Liscus complained to Caesar that Dumnorix's seditious activities against the official Aeduan government involved the accumulation of influence both from inside and outside his own polity, including the arrangement of a marriage between his mother and a powerful citizen of the Bituriges, the very territory that produced the *vergobret* inscription. The situation is made more coherent (and complex) in Book 7 of *de Bello Gallico*, where Caesar elaborates on the governmental structure of the Aedui, describing how 'Aeduan law forbids those who hold the chief magistracy to leave their country'. This might explain why Dumnorix demurred over his trip to Britain; he perhaps considered himself a *vergobret*, even though he clearly had not gone through the proper election procedures.

The evidence from Caesar and from the Argentomagus dedication suggests that the *vergobret*'s combined sacred and secular political responsibilities (and

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15 Pot bearing a cursive inscription that reads *Vergobretos readdas*, from the Gallo-Roman town of Argentomagus, France.

privileges) brought them into close contact with the Druids if, indeed, they were not Druids themselves.

What of the other named Gallic official, the *gutuat*er?

He [Caesar] visited the Carnutes, among whom the revolt had first begun . . . He found that they were particularly alarmed because they were very much aware of what they had done. Caesar wanted to free this tribe from its fear as soon as possible, and so he demanded that Gutuatrus, who had been an instigator of the revolt and chiefly responsible for the massacre at Cenabum,⁶³ should be handed over for punishment.⁶⁴

This passage is from Book 8 of the *Commentaries* on the Gallic wars, the final section of *de Bello Gallico* completed by Hirtius after Caesar's assassination in 44 BC. The historical context is the mopping-up operation in which Caesar was engaged in 51 BC. Following the iconic siege of Alesia and the surrender of Vercingetorix, pockets of resistance still existed in the heartlands of Gaul, not least among the powerful Bellovaci in the north and the Carnutes further south, the polity where Caesar places the annual assembly of the Druids.⁶⁵ According to Hirtius, Gutuatrus appears to have been a proper name but he may well have confused a name with a title, for Gallo-Roman inscriptions indicate a *gutuat*er to have been some kind of magistrate, perhaps with sacred duties, like the Aeduan *vergobret*.⁶⁶ Gutuatrus (or the *gutuat*er) was handed over to the Romans, flogged to death and his corpse decapitated.

The term *gutuat*er is highly significant, for it is a Gallic word meaning 'father of voice' or 'father of inspiration',⁶⁷ descriptions that connect strongly with the evident responsibilities of the Druids as wordsmiths, diviners and negotiators with the supernatural world. Like the *vergobret*, *gutuat*ri are attested epigraphically on Gallo-Roman inscriptions, some of which associate them directly with religion. A stone – now lost – from Maçon (Saône-et-Loire) mentions a *gutuat*er of Mars and priest of the local god Moltinus; two from Autun (Augustodunum), further north in Burgundy, refer to another who was involved in dedications to the emperor Augustus and a native Gallic deity, Anvallis (Fig. 16).⁶⁸ All the aforementioned *gutuat*ri had Gallic names.⁶⁹ Norbaneius Thallus inscribed his title GVTVATER on the base of the small marble altar he dedicated.⁷⁰ The epigraphic evidence for these 'fathers of inspiration' belongs to the first and second centuries AD,⁷¹ and presents a picture of Gallic religious officials who had in some ways become part of the Roman system of cult and authority. Yet they retained an indigenous 'flavour', with their Gaulish titles and their allegiance to local gods. What we cannot know is how early the office of *gutuat*er may have been in existence, for our sources are all late and, apart from the testimony of Hirtius,⁷² are dated firmly in the post-conquest period. But inscriptions are clustered in the region

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16 Altar from Autun (Augustodunum), capital of the Aedui, dedicated by a *gutuater* called Norbaneius Thallus to the local god Anvallus.

of Burgundy where there were powerful polities like the Aedui largely loyal to Caesar and where we have specific evidence for the presence of at least one Druid, Diviciacus.⁷³

The Temple-priests of the Boii

In 216 BC, a southern Gallic people named the Boii, who lived in North Italy, gained a great victory in battle over the Romans during the latter's war against Hannibal. The Boii, like other Gallic states, had taken the side of the Carthaginians and had been engaged in bitter conflict with the Romans, who were led by their general Lucius Postumius. The Augustan historian Livy is our main literary source for the period and one episode he records concerns the behaviour of Boian religious officials, whom he calls *antistites*, in the aftermath of their victory:

There Postumius fell fighting with all his might to avoid capture. Spoils taken from his body and the severed head of the general were carried in triumph by the Boians to the temple which is most revered in their land. Then after cleaning the head they adorned the skull with gold according to their custom. And it served them as a sacred vessel from which to pour libations at festivals and at the same time as a drinking cup for the priests and the keepers of the temple.⁷⁴

Livy's original Latin refers to *sacerdotes* (priests) and *antistites* (keepers of the temple). Both terms were in general use but the etymology of the latter implies their accordance with particular authority and prestige. The keepers of a temple would have been completely in charge of the building and its precinct; they would have been responsible for orchestrating events, celebrations and sacrificial procedures. The reference to the placement of war-booty in the shrine resonates strongly with the archaeological evidence for such practices at the 'war-sanctuaries' of middle Iron Age Gaul (see Chapter 7).

Feasting and Drinking: Sanctuaries and Communities

In the late second millennium BC, groups of men from communities in eastern Crete, known collectively as the Eteocretans, were travelling to remote upland regions for drinking sessions: the fragments of fine-ware drinking cups and animal bones are the sure signs of feasting.⁷⁵ The exclusively masculine identity of these bands is attested by the ancient Greek *Symposia*, the aristocratic men-only drinking-clubs that had their origins 'in the hall-feasts of the warrior chieftains but they were now developed into occasions of dignity and ceremony'⁷⁶ and were sometimes part of the initiation of youths into manhood. In Greece, then, feasting and drinking were associated above all with nobility, hedged with ritual, exclusivity and systems of male bonding.


Recent archaeological work on late Iron Age Gaul has vastly increased understanding of the nature of society, the presence and role of public sanctuaries and the persistent focus on commensality (eating and drinking together), sometimes associated with warfare.⁷⁷ But high rank may now have been preferentially displayed by feasting rather than by the bearing of arms, and recent work on sites in Picardy and its environs indicates a strong connection between feasting and ritual.⁷⁸ In later Iron Age Gaul, the new emphasis on enclosure of sites – whether settlements, graves or shrines – may have been linked to statements of identity and belonging. The activities of digging ditches and building enclosures require cooperation and group effort.⁷⁹ The sanctuaries themselves were generally simple rectangular structures but, significantly, their entrances were aligned on the midsummer or midwinter

solstices,⁸⁰ and it may be that these events triggered their construction. The evidence for coin-minting at sanctuaries suggests their role as gathering places in which business was conducted and power brokered.⁸¹ Money was (and is) a mechanism of exchange involving trust and, as such, its production needed to be controlled and overseen by both rulers and religious officials, perhaps to the accompaniment of banquets that served to cement relationships, seal bonds and ratify business deals.⁸²

At Fesques (Seine Maritime), ritual and collective feasting were entwined, for this sanctuary within a large ditched enclosure was the setting for specific rituals, including either human sacrifice or trophy-display of the defeated dead: there are abundant signs of serious feasting and drinking, apparently involving large numbers of people. The idiosyncrasy of Fesques lies in the presence of pits following the line of the enclosure ditch, each of which contained pairs of human feet belonging to individuals who had been placed upright within them or, perhaps, had been suspended upside down over them, all facing towards the interior of the sanctuary.⁸³ Why only the feet should have survived here is a mystery but maybe they were left at the shrine to represent the sacrificial act while the rest of the corpses were disposed of elsewhere. The site at Fesques was huge, with an enclosed area of 10 hectares, and was presumably designed to accommodate large numbers of people, some of whom may have travelled long distances periodically, perhaps at times of seasonal festivals or annual assemblies, in order to conduct business, reinforce socio-political networks and, importantly, to participate in religious ceremonies that served to endorse, legitimise and literally sanctify the proceedings. The establishment of sanctuaries like Fesques, and cognate cult-sites such as Acy-Romance (Ardennes), played a crucial role in the melding together of disparate communities that morphed into larger-scale polities: the religious centres acted as foci for regular gatherings⁸⁴ in the manner, maybe, of the Druidic assemblies or Gallic councils mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Acy-Romance has much in common with the broadly contemporary site of Fesques in so far as it also contained a large ceremonial ditched enclosure associated with shrines and pits, each of the latter containing a human body. At Acy, these comprised the mummified, seated corpses of young men – most probably sacrificial victims – whose bodies had been dried out in crates (Fig. 17). The focus of Acy was a large central D-shaped enclosure associated with cemeteries and a settlement. The enclosure was the convergence-point of several roads, as if marking a highly significant place; what is more, the entire complex at Acy was situated according to ancestral religious concerns, for the precinct appears to have been laid out in veneration and commemoration of a Bronze Age barrow.

The site at Acy has a unique dimension relating to its burials: there are two discrete groups – rich cremation-graves and inhumations (including the



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17 Skeleton of a man buried in a seated position at Acy-Romance, Ardennes, France in the second century BC.

mummified bodies) without grave-goods, the absence of which suggests that they enjoyed lower status than those whose remains were cremated. The seated bodies have been interpreted as sacrificed prisoners-of-war or foreign hostages. There was one other unburnt individual, the extended skeleton of a young man the position of whose hands indicates that he had been bound or manacled, and whose skull had sustained a heavy blow from a curiously shaped blade. All this is singular enough but is not the end of the story, for among the grave-goods accompanying one rich cremation-burial was an axe whose blade was an exact fit with the fatal wound in the young man's head, and it is difficult to avoid the speculation that here was the person who dealt the sacrificial blow. Bearing in mind the literary evidence (above) for the Druids' responsibilities for judging criminals and settling disputes, might this have been a judicial killing? Two other cremation-graves also contained

material that led to the interpretation of the remains as those of priests,⁸⁵ and maybe all three presided over the ceremonies at Acy, including the large-scale feasting, for which the bones of domestic animals, particularly young ewes, are ample testimony.

Although the evidence from these Gaulish sanctuaries suggests a high degree of communal and ritualised eating and drinking, we need to be cautious in always interpreting size of congregation from feasting-debris. Plutarch's *Life of Mark Anthony* contains an account of the banquets held by Cleopatra in Alexandria, as witnessed by a doctor called Philotas, who was amazed at the huge quantity of food and drink being prepared in the palace kitchens for just twelve people.⁸⁶ The extravagance of the Arvernian Louernius (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) and the abundance of animal bones and drinking paraphernalia from sites like Fesques and Acy should not blind us to the possibility that commensality might have been the preserve of the few and that, if display played a part in ritualised feasting behaviour, much more food and drink might have been presented than was ever consumed.

The Power of Clergy

Just as the Anglican Communion is seeking to express its own understanding of human rights so the Church of England is under threat of compromising its spiritual identity by dint of interference from secular courts.⁸⁷

This passage, from a recent edited volume on religious freedom and human rights, encapsulates current debates in the western world over the extent to which religion and spirituality and secular notions of civil liberties and human rights should or should not undergo mutual modification. Are there implicit contradictions, within modern western tradition, in attempts to safeguard both the integrity of religious belief (and its observance) and of basic human rights and values? Whilst I suspect that no such worries would have disturbed the sleep of either Roman priests or Druids, in antiquity there is a sense in which politics and religion had to be reconciled. Of course, in many societies, past and present, the modern western tendency towards division between religion and the secular world is totally at odds with the perception of close meshing between the spiritual and material aspects of the human experience. The evidence from archaeology and (where present) ancient texts suggests that in the world of the Druids in Gaul and Britain, in the last few centuries BC, religious ritual was an irresistible driving force that influenced all facets of power. But in studying the evidence for states, chiefdoms and religious leadership, we have to admit that beneath the top layer of high-status individuals such as Diviciacus and Dumnorix there existed a pyramid of religious officialdom comprising layers of ever more locally focused clergy whose

'footprint', in terms of surviving tangible evidence, is light or non-existent. Perhaps the bottom of the pyramid is represented by the sorceresses recorded on the Larzac inscription.

In Rome, civic religion – that is, religion based on cities or city-states (*civitates*) – was organised by elite groups, such as the Roman state priesthood, for their own authoritative purposes. We can imagine that the Druids of late Iron Age Gaul and Britain, too, operated within a fledgling state system in which they were able to wield a combination of religious and material power through which other, more local cults were perhaps pushed to the edge. It is likely that, like Rome, Gallo-British late Iron Age urban centres would have constructed a civic religion that was embedded in the socio-political fabric of each polity and which overrode all other cults and rituals (although these would still have enjoyed a local role). The accruing of traditions over time would result in the build-up of 'symbolic capital',⁸⁸ a reverence for the state and its secular and religious leaders that was rooted in the past and the ancestors. It was the Druids' responsibility to orchestrate and maintain this relationship between power and cult. It is not without irony that the Roman occupation of western Europe was instrumental in dislodging the Druids from this prime position at the top of the pyramid so that they, in their turn, were marginalised by the new, intensely civic system on which Roman government was based.

Blood, Thunder and Precious Gifts

THE DRUIDS AND SACRIFICE

The Druids are in charge of religion. They have control over public and private sacrifices, and give rulings on all religious questions. Large numbers of young men go to them for instruction, and they are greatly honoured by the people . . . Any individual or community not abiding by their verdict is banned from the sacrifices, and this is regarded among the Gauls as the most severe punishment.¹

IN ANCIENT Gallo-British society, in common with much of the ancient world, a harmonious relationship with the supernatural world depended upon the propitiation of its inhabitants by means of prayers and gifts. In the passage quoted above, Caesar is emphatic in assigning such responsibilities to the Druids rather than to any other priesthood or class within the Gallic society of the mid-first century BC with which he was familiar. Clearly, it would be nonsensical to assume that every single sacrificial procedure, whose signature we can identify in material culture in Iron Age Britain and Gaul, involved the Druids. However, certain forms of ritual gift-giving seem to have been so elaborate or to have involved such valuable offerings as to be convincingly associated with a powerful, authoritative body of ritualists commensurate with Caesar's Druids (Fig. 18).

Sacrificing Wealth

In November 2000, Ken Wallace, a member of a Leicestershire amateur field-walking group, discovered late Iron Age and early Roman pottery, a large assemblage of animal bones and two hundred coins, minted in the early decades of the first century AD, on a hilltop near Market Harborough.² Wallace reported the find and English Heritage agreed to provide funds for an archaeological evaluation of the site by ULAS (University of Leicester Archaeological Services), which immediately discovered six hoards of coins. As more and more ancient money came to light (more than five thousand gold and silver coins), ULAS became concerned about the probability of illicit metal-detecting activity at the site. At the same time, the discovery was considered of sufficient importance to attract funding from the British

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18 Reconstruction of the sacred lake-site of La Tène, on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Here, in the late nineteenth century, a drop in the water level revealed a timber causeway and a large assemblage of metalwork that had been cast into the water in sacrificial acts. Human remains suggest that ritual murder took place here too.

Museum, ULAS and the BBC³ for the next three years. The site proved to be a large hilltop enclosure belonging to the local late Iron Age polity of the Corieltavi (the people occupying this area of the East Midlands). With the Celtic coins, minted by the local community, were some early Imperial Roman issues and – strangest of all – an iron, silver-decorated Roman parade helmet that was evidently placed there as part of the same ritual actions as the coin-depositions.

The enclosure was deliberately sited on the brow of the hill, commanding wide views of the Welland Valley to the south, and the coins and other votive objects were concentrated to the north-west of the main entrance-way. Silver ingots and other silver objects were also found, and a small dog, its feet tucked under its body, had been placed on its side within a pit dug in the centre of the entrance-way. The evidence suggests that between *c.* 50 BC and the forties AD,⁴ people were visiting this *locus sanctus*, feasting on pork and leaving valuable offerings, mainly bags of coins, but also other things, such as the dog and the helmet. The suggestion is that this was an important meeting-place for the Corieltavi at a significant period – on the cusp of free Britishness and incorporation into the Roman Empire – when one might expect tensions and increased ceremonial activity. The collective gorging on meat, together

with the votive deposition of huge numbers of coins and other precious objects, suggests ritual activity that involved gift-giving, ritual feasting and sacrifice. There is no specific Druid 'footprint' here but the combination of Iron Age and Roman coins and – especially – the presence of the Roman ceremonial helmet might lead to the conclusion that here we have an example of appropriation of *romanitas* for British religious purposes. In this context, the imagery on the helmet is significant for it includes a depiction of Victory crowning a horseman attired as a Roman soldier, perhaps the emperor himself. If this can be interpreted as an act of appropriation and maybe even resistance to the new order, it is easy to imagine its orchestration by professional clergy.

Spoils of War

When they have decided to fight a battle, it is to Mars that they usually dedicate the spoils they hope to win; and if they are successful, they sacrifice the captured animals and collect all the rest of the spoils in one place. Among many of the tribes it is possible to see piles of these objects on consecrated ground. It is most unusual for anyone to dare to go against the religious law and hide his booty at home, or remove any of the objects that have been placed on such piles. The punishment laid down for that crime is death by the most horrible torture.⁵

Caesar's observation of Gallic war ritual is persistently reflected in the archaeological record, perhaps most vividly in the 'war-sanctuaries' of middle Iron Age Gaul, such as at Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise), Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Somme) and Mirebeau (Côte d'Or),⁶ where thousands of broken weapons, some used in battle, others ritually destroyed, were heaped up on holy ground along with objects associated with feasting, sacrificed animals and – sometimes – prisoners-of-war. The mass deposition of weapons likewise occur in Britain, for instance at the late Iron Age sanctuary of Hayling Island (Hampshire), where large quantities of deliberately damaged weapons were placed in the courtyard of a circular shrine, within the *temenos* (the sacred precinct surrounding the temple buildings that separated sacred from profane ground).⁷

Noisy Offerings: Roaring to the Gods

Their [the Gauls'] trumpets again are of a peculiar barbaric kind; they blow into them and produce a harsh sound which suits the tumult of war.⁸

The Romans . . . were dismayed by the splendid array of the Celtic host and the ear-splitting din which they created. There were countless horns and trumpets being blown simultaneously in their ranks, and as the whole army

was also shouting its war-cries, there arose such a babel of sound that it seemed to come not only from the trumpets and the soldiers but from the whole surrounding countryside at once.⁹

At about the time that Julius Caesar was making Gaul his own, in the fifties BC, a group of individuals dug a pit within a sanctuary at Arènes near Tintignac in the Corrèze region of central France.¹⁰ They then crammed five hundred objects into this pit, including swords in their scabbards, spears, helmets, images of animals interpreted as 'battle ensigns' and – most singular of all – five war-trumpets (*carnyces*: singular *carnyx*), each as tall as a warrior and each terminating in a bell depicting a beast's head, four in the form of tusked boars, with open mouths and impressive rows of teeth¹¹ and one shaped as the head of a serpent. Boar-headed war-trumpets are rare finds and the Tintignac hoard is exceptional in its inclusion of five in a group. (In Britain, a wonderful example of the boar's-head bell of one trumpet is recorded as a ritual offering in a marsh at Deskford in the Scottish Grampians, associated with a fortified Iron Age settlement (Fig. 19). The boar's head was made of different copper alloys, designed to provide colour variations, and was fitted with a movable wooden tongue that would have vibrated like a tuning fork when blown.)¹² These war-trumpets are repeatedly depicted in iconography on Iron Age coins and monumental sculpture featuring Gallic battles.¹³ The most significant *carnyx* imagery appears on the Gundestrup Cauldron in a scene of sacrifice or sacred transformation in which horsemen,

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19 Bronze mouthpiece from a *carnyx*, in the form of a boar's head, found at Deskford, Grampian, Scotland; first century AD.

infantry and *carnyx* players march in procession, their boar-head trumpets blaring.¹⁴ The prominence of these martial noise-makers on such a sacred vessel adds to the picture, provided by ritual deposition, that the *carnyx* could be perceived as a highly valuable offering, not least, perhaps, because its porcine mouthpiece imitated the significance of the pig (wild or domestic) as a prestigious feast-food and as a regular meat offering in high-status graves and ceremonial sites.¹⁵ In this regard, it is interesting that the Tintignac hoard contained a cauldron made of bronze and iron.¹⁶

*Galloping into Death: The Ghost Cavalry of Gondole*¹⁷

Although Gaul is not a rich country, funerals there are splendid and costly. Everything the dead man is thought to have been fond of is put on the pyre, including even animals. Not long ago slaves and dependants known to have been their masters' favourites were burned with them at the end of the funeral.¹⁸

In 2002, INRAP (the *Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives*) was instrumental in uncovering an unusual cemetery at a late Iron Age *oppidum* (fortified centre) at Gondole in the Auvergne. At about the time of Caesar's conquest of Gaul,¹⁹ the community occupying this hillfort dug a large pit and carefully placed in it the bodies of eight horsemen along with their horses. The men were placed together in two rows of four, on their right sides and most had their left arms extended, their left hands reaching out to, and often lying on the shoulder of the body in front. The horses were similarly positioned, in two rows and lying on their right sides with their forelimbs placed on or near the next-door body.²⁰ Thus, men and beasts were treated in a virtually identical manner, as if to reflect their mutual connectedness. There were no grave-goods with the bodies and the skeletons bear no signs of trauma to indicate how these horsemen and their mounts met their deaths. Although in the above passage Caesar specifically refers to the custom of cremation, the excavators of Gondole make reference to his account of burial of high-ranking Gauls, with their animals and even their servants or retainers, in a form of 'attendant sacrifice' frequently recorded as having occurred in the ancient world.²¹ The cemetery discovered at Gondole in 2002 was not the only such burial ground in the vicinity for, a year later, in 2003, a second group of horses was uncovered near the *oppidum*.²²

In his account of burial customs in Scythia, a huge region north of the Black Sea, the fifth-century BC historian Herodotus described elaborate funerary rites associated with the death of Scythian kings, ceremonies that involved the slaughter of warriors and their horses to accompany their masters to the next world. Herodotus records two such events, one taking place at the king's death, the other at the end of the year. At the funeral itself, a huge square grave

was dug for the king's body, which was entombed accompanied by members of the royal household, including his favourite concubine and the servants closest to him, all strangled and buried in the grave with the horses.²³ Herodotus describes the second funerary event as follows:

At the end of the year another ceremony takes place: they take fifty of the best of the king's remaining servants, strangle and gut them, stuff the bodies with chaff and sew them up again . . . Fifty of the finest horses are then subjected to the same treatment . . . When the horses and riders are all in place around the tomb, they are left there, and the mourners go away.²⁴

Clearly, though, we cannot make direct comparisons between the death rituals of the Gallic Arverni in the mid-first century BC and the Scythians of Central Asia four hundred years earlier. Herodotus' record alludes to the placement of gold vessels and 'a selection of his other treasures' in the Scythian king's tomb, whilst the 'ghost cavalry' at Gondole had nothing.²⁵

An alternative explanation for the presence of the cavalry unit at the Arvernian stronghold is that these were not attendant sacrifices but prisoners-of-war or, more likely, the special burials of noble dead who had fought well and deserved particularly reverential treatment after a brave death and who were so well regarded that the expensive assets of highly trained war-horses were disposed of with them. Such an explanation does, however, fly in the face of the uninjured skeletons and, of course, the absence of the grave-furniture one might expect to accompany the revered dead. It may be that their positioning was significant: just as certain Celtiberian *oppida*, like those of Ávila in north-central Spain and Lesenho in Portugal,²⁶ were 'protected' by granite statues of armed warriors, so Gondole might have been similarly guarded by the spirit-army buried outside its gates. Whatever the precise nature of the Arvernian horseman burials, the placing of horses with the dead suggests a highly ceremonial act indicative of deliberate sacrificial killing. The alternative view is that all the mounted soldiers and their beasts were killed in one massacre: possible but unlikely, given the absence of battle-scars on the dead. So, in the Gallic heartland of the Arverni, the tribe that produced Caesar's greatest enemy, Vercingetorix, a highly significant event (or maybe more than one), generated a ritual response that involved special disposal of horsemen and, arguably, the sacrifice of either men and horses or, if the men had died in battle, at least of the animals which were their battle-companions (Fig. 20).

Two aspects of the Gondole discoveries might link this cemetery with the Druids. Caesar is likely to have known this area of central Gaul better than almost any other, given the great conflict at the Arvernian capital, the *oppidum* of Gergovia, near Clermont-Ferrand, and it is therefore not impossible that, when he was composing the ethnographic section of his war commentaries, in

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20 Bronze sceptre terminal in the form of a double horse, rider and trophy severed heads, from the Celtiberian *oppidum* of Numancia.

Book 6, he described events and customs he knew about from a prolonged sojourn in Arvernian territory.²⁷ So, when he spoke of the Druidic involvement in all manner of sacrificial rites,²⁸ he might well have been drawing upon his experience of tribes like the Arverni. It is perhaps significant, too, that Vercingetorix clearly relied heavily on his cavalry, which was regularly sent on ahead of his main force.²⁹ The Gallic chieftain found his cavalry particularly useful in hampering the supply chain of Caesar's army, by intercepting foragers and laying waste the grain crop.³⁰ Caesar readily admitted that 'the Gauls were superior in cavalry'³¹ and described the way that Vercingetorix accorded his cavalry special honour, consulting them about the conduct of the campaign against the Romans.³² Plutarch's *Life of Caesar* contains a dramatic account of the final surrender of the Arvernian leader, after the successful siege of Alesia by Caesar's army had put an end to the fight for Gallic freedom, describing how Vercingetorix, 'after riding round him in a circle, leaped down from his horse, stripped off his armour, and sat at Caesar's feet'.³³ All of this indicates the high status of Gallic cavalry, and provides a context for the spirit-horsemen of Gondole.

If we return to Caesar's account of Gallic ritual practices, one significant element concerning ritual murder might be relevant to the Gondole finds:

‘The Gauls believe that the power of the immortal gods can be appeased only if one human life is exchanged for another, and they have sacrifices of this kind regularly established by the community.’³⁴ He goes on to explain that the most favoured candidates for such treatment were those caught in some nefarious act. If we apply this model of interpretation to Gondole, could it be that this mounted unit consisted not of noble war-dead but rather of a group of Gallic warriors who had transgressed, had perhaps shown cowardice or were even deserters, whose shame caused their deaths and those of their mounts? After all, no one would wish to ride into battle a beast that had borne a coward. A second, related issue, concerns the Druids’ doctrine on reincarnation, as relayed by Caesar, who commented on their projection of a belief in the transmigration of souls from dead bodies to live ones. Caesar, perhaps somewhat cynically, remarked that this was a useful way of encouraging bravery ‘because it removes the fear of death’³⁵ in battle. If the Gondole horsemen were branded cowards, the Druids would have had a particular interest in their ritualised punishment.

A final thought is a consideration of whether the singular position of the bodies, in relation to each other, is significant. The deceased were arranged so that they remained in physical contact with one another even in death. This could refer to an emotional bond made in life, maybe representing their comradeship in arms, or perhaps those burying them were making statements about a relationship superimposed on the dead by the living, perhaps to reinforce the collectiveness of the sacrifice, if that is what it was. There is another, more grisly possibility, that these men were bound together by fetters whose organic nature prevented their preservation. The Gallic ritual centre at Acy-Romance (Ardennes) provides possible parallels for such ‘shameful’ deaths: here, in the early second century BC, certain young men were given special inhumation burials, without grave-goods at a site where cremation was the usual funerary rite. More bizarre than the treatment of the Gondole bodies was the persistent habit of placing the deceased at Acy in tightly flexed and hunched seated positions with their heads resting between their feet, probably bound in that position, within wooden boxes (Fig. 17), before lowering them into a deep pit where the bodies mummified in that doubled-up attitude for up to six months before being brought back to the surface and interred around a public sanctuary.³⁶ The poverty of these graves is in sharp contrast to the rich cremation graves from the site, some of which at least may have been those of the people engaged in sacrificial rites, perhaps even Druids.

A Bad Press? Classical Writers and Druidic Human Sacrifice

The Romans have put an end to these customs and also to their sacrificial and divinatory practices opposed to our customs. They used to stab a human

being whom they had devoted to death, in the back with a dagger, and foretell the future from his convulsions. They offered their sacrifices not without a Druid. There are also other accounts of their human sacrifices; for they used to shoot men down with arrows, and impale them in the temples, or making a large statue of straw and wood, throw into it cattle and all sorts of wild animals and human beings, and thus make a burnt offering.³⁷

The Greek author Strabo hailed from Amaseia, a town of Pontus in Galatia, on the River Scylax south of the Black Sea. Strabo's own intellectual standpoint is interesting, for he was a convert to the Stoic philosophy, and – in common with many followers of this doctrine – was contemptuous of traditional religion, which was frequently regarded by Stoics as mere superstition.³⁸ Although the author travelled in Asia Minor and Egypt, studied in Rome and probably visited Greece, he never went to Gaul or Britain. So, for information on these regions, included in his *Geography*, Strabo relied on the lost works of the earlier Greek writer Posidonius,³⁹ a fellow Stoic, and, indeed, he specifically refers to the Syrian writer's *Histories*⁴⁰ as a source.

Strabo's passage on Druidic human sacrifice is complex for it refers to practices that took place in the past, perhaps during Posidonius' time and, by his 'used to', he infers that by the time he was writing such ritual events no longer occurred. Why did Classical writers dwell on the theme of human sacrifice among 'barbarian' peoples? Was it to emphasise differences between the civilised and uncivilised worlds? Strabo's comments, however anachronistic, are valuable for the short passage quoted above contains a dense package of information, particularly if we can make connections between his account and material culture. His first words demonstrate a 'holier than thou' tension between Gallic Druids and the Roman government. Secondly, he links a particular form of ritual murder, involving bloodletting, to divination, something that both Greeks and Romans practised using animal sacrificial victims. Thirdly, Strabo firmly and directly associates the practice of human sacrifice with the Druids. Fourthly, he speaks of very special forms of killing: shooting, impaling and burning in 'wicker men', this last a method to which both Caesar and a ninth-century commentator on Lucan's *Pharsalia* also refer.⁴¹ Last but not least, Strabo's allusion to the seemingly indiscriminate bundling into the wicker man of humans together with wild and farm animals suggests that, according to him at any rate, there was no perceived distinction in terms of value or propriety between humans and other animate beings.

Naming and Shaming: Lucan's Three 'Brothers in Blood'

... and those Gauls who propitiate with human sacrifices the merciless gods Teutas [Teutates], Esus and Taranis – at whose altars the visitant shudders

because they are as awe-inspiring as those of Scythian Diana . . . The Druids, too, took advantage of the armistice to resume the barbarous rites of their wicked religion.⁴²

Lucan, from whose epic poem the *Pharsalia* this passage is taken, was born in the city of Cordoba in southern Spain and committed suicide by opening his arteries on 30 April AD 65, having incurred the displeasure of the emperor Nero at the age of just twenty-five. His folly in openly opposing the emperor was so extreme as to necessitate the consonant suicides of his father and his two uncles, one of whom was the famous scholar Seneca, in addition to his own. Lucan died without finishing his great work, a poetic account of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, which culminated in the eponymous Battle of Pharsalus in Thessaly in 48 BC. Like Posidonius and Strabo, Lucan was trained in Stoic philosophy. He became a *quaestor* (financial official) under Nero and was also appointed to the highly prestigious College of Augurs⁴³ before falling out of favour after he incurred imperial displeasure by being a more popular poet than Nero.⁴⁴ In his 'Introduction' to the 1956 translation of the *Pharsalia*, Robert Graves is somewhat dismissive of the poet, calling him 'the father of yellow journalism', accusing him of a 'love of sensational detail' and 'unprincipled reportage';⁴⁵ in present-day language, then, Graves sees Lucan as a spin-doctor or a tabloid journalist.

If Lucan is as inferior a chronicler as Robert Graves suggests, how should we treat the passage above? Tempting though it may be to ignore it as colourful drama, and as anti-Druid propaganda, the names have a ring of authenticity for all three appear in the archaeological record in the form of inscriptions. 'Taranis' name refers to his role as a thunder deity⁴⁶ and he is linked epigraphically to the Roman sky-god, Jupiter. Although the name occurs infrequently, altars dedicated to him are widely distributed, occurring in Britain at the Roman legionary fortress of Chester, Gaul, in the Rhineland and at Scardona in Dalmatia (Croatia).⁴⁷ Teutates, whose name refers to 'tribe' or 'people',⁴⁸ occurs more commonly, though he seems to have enjoyed his greatest popularity in Britain.⁴⁹ One inscription mentioning his name appears on a sherd of pottery from Kelvedon (Essex), of a ware identical to another fragment depicting the Trinovantian horseman with a curved implement resembling a Roman instrument of divination called a *lituus* (see Chapter 8); it might even have come from the same vessel.⁵⁰ The name 'Esus' ('Lord') occurs only once in Gaul and never in Britain. One of the stones on the early Gallo-Roman pillar, erected in Paris by a guild of Seine boatmen, the *Nautes Parisiacae*, was dedicated to Esus (Fig. 21).⁵¹

The presence of epigraphic evidence for all three of Lucan's *dei horribiles* is significant for it demonstrates that Lucan's account was based on the reality of their worship by Gallo-British communities. Lucan himself did not travel to

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21 Part of a stone monument, set up in Paris in honour of Jupiter in AD 26 by a guild of Seine boatmen, depicting a woodcutter and inscribed 'Esus'.

Gallia or Britannia; indeed, his short life precludes his having had much time to do so, and the poet may have obtained his material on Gaul from the lost books of Livy's great historical work on Rome, the *Ab Urbe Condita*, written in the time of the emperor Augustus. Little is known of Livy's life; there is no surviving evidence that he travelled far, if at all, outside Italy and he himself also used other sources for his work.⁵² The dispassionate mention of Taranis, Teutates and Esus on inscriptions gives no hint of the savagery darkly referred to by Lucan. However, the ninth-century AD Bern scholiast of the *Pharsalia* fills in some detail about these gods that may once have been in Lucan's original text. According to the medieval commentator, Taranis was reputed to have accepted offerings of people burnt to death in wooden troughs, whilst his fellow deities are described thus: 'Teutates inspires terror with sacrificial blood, whose altar bristles with weapons . . . He was venerated with human blood . . . Esus is appeased thus: a man is suspended in a tree until his limbs fall apart in a bloody sacrifice . . .'⁵³ The Swiss commentator appears to contradict himself in so far as he adds that Teutates' human sacrificial victims were

drowned in vats. There is a suspicious symmetry about the alleged manner of these ritual deaths, whether in Lucan's original text or as embroidered by his glossator, for air, water, blood and fire are all represented. But, as we shall see shortly, the archaeological evidence suggests that all these methods of sacrificial killing were employed in the last centuries BC and the first centuries AD in north-west Europe. It is even possible that some, like Lindow Man (see pp. 71-2; Fig. 22), were killed according to the reality and symbolism of three modes of dispatch: bloodletting, drowning and hanging.


The Archaeology of Human Sacrifice

Lucan's account of the three gruesome gods of Gaul implies, though it does not state directly, that the Druids were involved in their appeasement by human sacrifice. If Caesar, Strabo and their fellow writers were right that this priesthood was involved in all manner of sacrificial procedure, then it is conceivable that, in Gaul and Britain at least, the remains of people who appear to have met untimely and ritualised ends during the later Iron Age and even later were also associated with the Druids, if only in attendance and in a supervisory capacity.

There is sporadic but persistent archaeological evidence for human sacrifice in Iron Age and Roman Europe.⁵⁴ It is especially useful to look at such practice both in terms of its resonance with Druidic practice and in the context of recent discoveries and theories. In particular, we should imagine what lay behind different modes of sacrificial killing: strangulation, for instance, is a significant mode of dispatch since it literally stops the breath in mid-flow thus, perhaps, symbolically keeping the body in a liminal, half-alive/half-dead state.⁵⁵ The same might be true of deposition in a bog, the context for many candidates for Iron Age European human sacrifice, for immersion in a watery grave inhibits bacterial activity and therefore halts the natural processes of decay. This means that the body is prevented from undergoing the 'normal' rites of passage with the decomposition of soft tissue and the consonant conversion to skeletal matter (or to bone fragments and ashes if cremated). Ironically, then, the preservation of the material body by bog-deposition prevents the symbolic progression of the self to the Otherworld, by suspending the body in the material, human world. It is possible that modes of killing and the disposal of victims, involving a hiatus in their dissolution, were charged with meaning and that the 'freeze-framing' of bodies between life and death represented particularly by abnormal preservation and, perhaps also strangulation, was of especial significance for bodies whose demise was for sacrificial purposes. This might be all the more important if such victims were aversion sacrifices or scapegoats, where the need to neutralise maleficent forces could result in special post-mortem treatment

that ensured the avoidance of contamination either of the living community or of the realm of the ancestors.

The Lindow body (Lindow II), belonging to a man in his early twenties, was placed in a marsh at Lindow Moss in Cheshire probably during the first century AD (Fig. 22).⁵⁶ He had sustained severe blows to the head, he had been garrotted, his throat had been cut and his body showed signs of additional injuries. His hair and beard were neatly trimmed with shears, and his hands showed no signs of manual labour, both facts that suggest he was someone of consequence. Immediately after he died, he was placed in the peat-bog naked, except for an armband of fox fur. Shortly before he was killed, he ate a final, rather unpalatable meal of bread baked on a griddle, containing a range of seeds and cereal grains, heavily laced with chaff, sometimes interpreted as



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22 Lindow Man. The body of a young man sacrificed and placed in a peat-bog at Lindow Moss, Cheshire in the first century AD.

'famine food'.⁵⁷ It may be that the choice of bread content reflected actual food shortage at the time he was murdered, or that it was a symbolic meal, designed to project notions of low status. But an alternative explanation is that the meal was intended to represent a varied landscape, for the different ingredients grow in diverse environments. If the threat of famine were genuine, the crisis would be sufficiently grave to admit, perhaps, of a scapegoat sacrifice, the selection of one individual, a voluntary or unwilling victim, to die in order to appease malign spirits and avert disaster.⁵⁸ But why was Lindow Man subjected to such carefully orchestrated and controlled violence? Was each assault designed to keep the unfortunate man hovering on the brink between life and death as long as possible so as to 'vex' his soul and prevent its becoming freed from his body?⁵⁹ There is, inevitably, a more prosaic meaning for these prolonged killings, namely that, as a maximum deterrent, someone guilty of a serious crime was subjected to as long-drawn-out, painful and frightening a death as possible, as was the case in Roman punitive practice.⁶⁰

The questions of why Lindow Man was so brutally murdered or who he was will never be resolved with certainty. It has been argued⁶¹ that the nooses round many of the necks of Iron Age European bog-bodies might have represented attempts to rescue those who had strayed into the treacherous swamps, but even if this were so, it doesn't explain the persistent and savage nature of their injuries, for Lindow Man is just one of dozens of ancient bog victims who seem to have been systematically abused before meeting a particularly violent and many-faceted end.⁶² One theory about this man's death is that he may have been sacrificed to avert the disaster of the Roman general Suetonius Paulinus' advance into North Wales in order to destroy the holy Druidic sanctuary on the island of Anglesey in AD 60.⁶³ This event took place just prior to the Boudican Rebellion that nearly cost Rome the entire province of Britannia. Lindow Moss is in a region through which the Roman army may well have passed on its way to the *insula sancta*, and I am of the view that the Druids were very possibly involved in orchestrating the rebellion itself. One thing is certain: the death(s) of Lindow Man was the result of careful, subtly controlled treatment meted out by people who had a thorough knowledge of medicine, human anatomy and what the body could or could not tolerate before succumbing; if the Druids were skilled in healing, as Pliny, averred,⁶⁴ they were probably also good at manipulating and prolonging death.

Iron Age and Roman period bog-bodies have been found in most areas of north-west Europe with extensive raised peat-bogs: Ireland, Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and North Germany. However, in a book about Druids it is pertinent to confine discussion to Britain and Gaul, where we know from Classical writers that the Druids were active and, by inference, also to Ireland where early medieval texts are rich in references to the Druids, allowing us to infer (particularly in the absence of a significant Roman presence) that similar

priesthoods might have operated within local Iron Age contexts. The presence of Irish objects in the later Iron Age hoard of ritually deposited material at Llyn Cerrig Bach⁶⁵ supports the notion of shared ritual practices between Ireland and Wales.

Two Gentlemen of Ireland

In the spring of 2003, two men who had clearly met untimely and violent ends, were discovered in the course of peat-management activities in central Ireland. Oldcroghan Man, found in County Offaly, when a drain was being dug in the peat along a parish boundary, was a giant of a man, about 6 feet 4 inches (1.91 metres) tall, powerfully built and with enormous hands, who died in around 300 BC. His injuries, both ante- and post-mortem, were many but what killed him was a stab-wound that penetrated his left lung, a defence cut to one arm demonstrating that he had tried to parry the fatal blow. Immediately after his death, Oldcroghan's body was subjected to horrific mutilation: he was decapitated, chopped in half and his upper arms pierced and threaded through with twisted hazel ropes (withies). His nipples had been sliced, nearly severing them, the absence of signs of healing an indicator that this occurred just before or just after death. Analysis of the man's fingernails showed that he sustained his great body with a meat-rich diet but the well-preserved stomach contents revealed that his final meal had consisted of cereal grains and buttermilk, which was at variance with his normal carnivorous diet, suggesting a 'special' last meal.

It is not difficult to see parallels between this Irish body and Lindow Man: the multiple, unnecessarily (in practical terms) violent injuries and the 'last supper'. Other similarities include the inference of high status: like Lindow Man, Oldcroghan Man had manicured fingernails and he, too, went to his grave wearing nothing but an armband, this time of plaited leather decorated with metal mounts with La Tène designs.⁶⁶ But Oldcroghan's 'torture' and mutilation were far in excess of Lindow Man's traumas. As we have seen, in discussing the possible circumstances of Lindow Man's death and deposition and, in particular, the choice of place within the landscape, it was suggested that the sacrifice (if that is what it was) may have been linked to a particular event, namely the threatened annihilation of the Druids' sacred island of Anglesey by Roman troops in AD 60. Oldcroghan Man's death and deposition may, too, be associated with place or event: it has been argued that the bog in which this man was found may be significant for its proximity to Croghan Hill which, during the early medieval period, was the place of inauguration for the kings of Uí Fáilge.⁶⁷

The other bog-body, that of a slightly built man, was found in February 2003 by peat-extraction workers at Ballivor, County Meath. Originally, the body had lain in a deep bog at Clonycavan (on the Meath/Westmeath border),

but it was dragged to its findspot by a mechanical digger used in harvesting peat. Like Lindow Man, he had sustained repeated blows to the head, perhaps with an axe, and he appears to have been disembowelled. He was about 5 feet 9 inches (1.76 metres) tall and, like Lindow and Oldcroghan, was naked when he was put into the marsh. He was roughly the same age as them – no more than twenty-five. He was distinguished by his hairstyle, unique in terms of other discoveries, for his hair, long at the front and sides and much shorter at the back, had been piled high on his head by means of a gel made from a mixture of pine resin and animal fat that might have been imported from France or Spain.⁶⁸ The man may have kept his hair up for long periods for his head was infested with lice, suggesting that he rarely washed or combed his hair. Despite this apparent neglect of personal hygiene, the hairstyle and the gel used reflect an individual of high rank. The events leading to this man's death may have occurred at a similar time to those in which Oldcroghan died, in about 300 BC. He, like the owners of the Lindow and Oldcroghan bodies, had suffered violent abuse and mutilation.

Details of the deaths meted out to the Cheshire bog-man and the two Irish bodies, together with another Iron Age bog-body found at Gallagher in County Galway in 1821,⁶⁹ resonate strongly with evidence from Classical writers about the way Gaulish human sacrifices were conducted by the Druids (or cognate clergy). Strabo refers to a practice among the Cimbri whereby prisoners-of-war were sacrificed to the gods and their entrails cut out and examined in a divinatory ritual.⁷⁰ Diodorus Siculus discussed the Gallic Druidic practice of stabbing sacrificial victims, whose death-throes and flow of blood would be interpreted to predict the future.⁷¹ The stab wounds and abdominal injuries to the Oldcroghan and Clonycavan victims present similar pictures. Moreover, there is evidence from Weerdinge in the Netherlands that one of a pair of Iron Age bog-bodies found there was disembowelled.⁷²

Decapitation, too, is chronicled as a ritualised act of war among the Gauls.⁷³ In his *Germania*,⁷⁴ Tacitus' description of various punishments employed by northern tribes refers to the weighting down of cowards and the 'disreputable of body'⁷⁵ in marshes and is highly reminiscent of the treatment suffered by the Irishmen from Oldcroghan and Gallagher, the first of whom was tethered by hazel withies threaded through his arms, the second pinned down by hurdles. In the same passage, the Roman writer comments on hanging as a punishment for desertion.

Tacitus' words draw attention to the need for caution in attributing violent and untimely deaths to human sacrificial rites. However, what is very significant in this regard is another remark in the *Germania*,⁷⁶ namely that 'capital punishment, imprisonment and even flogging are allowed to none but the priests, and are not inflicted merely as punishments or on the leaders' orders, but in obedience to the god whom they believe to preside over battle.'⁷⁷ If we

can believe Tacitus, it follows that sacrificial behaviour was complex and could sometimes be closely interwoven with punishment. This, of course, connects strongly with Caesar's comment that criminals were favoured choices for ritual murder among the Gauls.⁷⁸ What is more, the Roman general's account of the 'most terrible torture' inflicted on those who interfered with the sacred deposits of war-spoils to the gods⁷⁹ chimes with the horrific injuries sustained by the Oldcroghan victim, even though he died perhaps three hundred years before Caesar's conquest of Gaul – and in Ireland. We can only speculate as to the circumstances surrounding the precise choice of location of the bog victims: might they have been deposited at special places in the landscape, perhaps on territorial boundaries that had been disputed, and therefore required settlement of ownership by judicial authorities?⁸⁰ If so, given Caesar's comments about the Druids' adjudicatory role, it might be that such people were associated with places of assembly, where treaties, legal matters and other official business was carried out within sacred ceremonial contexts. Archaeological and literary evidence suggests that territorial boundaries were sometimes foci for religious activity.⁸¹

A Tale of Two Heads: Human Sacrifice and Cannibalism in Roman Britain?

It is beyond calculation how great is the debt owed to the Romans, who swept away the monstrous rites, in which to kill a man was the highest religious duty and for him to be eaten was a passport to health.⁸²

The Gauls were at one time so savage that they believed a man to be highly pleasing as a sacrifice to the gods.⁸³

If we believe Classical authors, such as the Elder Pliny, we should expect to find evidence for human sacrifice in Roman Britain (or Gaul). Earlier in the same passage as that quoted above, Pliny records that such rites were conducted in Rome as late as 97 BC, when the custom was banned.⁸⁴ It is interesting that he refers specifically to the enactment of ritual cannibalism by the Druids⁸⁵ for, although his statement was likely to have been no more than sensational journalism, Strabo also mentions it, in an Irish context, saying of the island, 'I have nothing to tell except that its inhabitants are more savage than the Britons since they are man-eaters as well as herb-eaters.'⁸⁶ Like Pliny, Strabo was making much of the edginess of Britain and Ireland, presenting them as literally outlandish, outside the boundaries of *humanitas* and civilised behaviour. Yet there is material evidence that human flesh was occasionally exploited, if not slaughtered, for consumption. The find of human arm-bones, split longitudinally to extract the marrow, from a swallet-hole at Alveston near Bristol, dating to c. 30 BC, suggests such a practice, as do the butchered human bones from an early Iron Age site in the grounds of Eton College.⁸⁷

A Romano-British site that, at first, seemed to confirm the notion of ritual cannibalism is Folly Lane, St Albans where, in the Roman town of Verulamium, the skull of a youth was found in a pit associated with a temple (Fig. 23). Verulamium was a 'show-piece' Roman town established early in the post-conquest period on the site of an important Iron Age *oppidum* of the powerful Catuvellauni, one of the three Roman cities targeted as especial objects of hatred by Boudica's rebels. Folly Lane lies on the north bank of the River Ver, high up above Verulamium's city centre and seems to have been a site of particular symbolism and sanctity from before the Roman conquest. In about AD 50, a Briton of the highest status was buried with great ceremony, involving a lying-in-state, gift-giving on a massive scale, an elaborate cremation ceremony and the sacrifice of three women as attendants to accompany the nobleman into the next world.⁸⁸

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23 Bronze knife decorated with curvilinear La Tène designs, from the vicinity of Verulamium, Hertfordshire; probably first century AD.

Archaeological evidence points to the persistence of Folly Lane as a *locus sanctus* and a symbolic focus for the Roman town throughout Verulamium's Roman history. In 'the memory of kings',⁸⁹ people in the city centre could gaze up to the elevated situation of Folly Lane and see there a temple precinct that commemorated the ancient chieftain. During excavations outside the main Roman temple from 1991 to 1993, the archaeologist Rosalind Niblett discovered a series of pits, in one of which was the skull of a boy accompanied by the remains of a puppy and a whetstone. The skull revealed that the youth had not died from disease or an accident but as a result of sustained violence and subsequent ritual action: he was bludgeoned to death with a blunt instrument and then beheaded. The head was then subjected to a bizarre treatment, being systematically de-fleshed⁹⁰ before being jammed onto a pole where it was displayed for a brief period before its burial in the pit.⁹¹ Even more oddly, other pits in the vicinity contained a series of face-pots, some of which were symbolically de-fleshed as well, with flakes shaven off the cheeks as if to obliterate the features. Whether the skull belonged to a criminal or a sacrificial victim (or both), there is no doubt that the youth suffered a special death and post-mortem treatment, and the mimicry of the head's de-fleshing on the face-pots indicates how important the ritual event of flesh-stripping must have been.⁹²

De-fleshing might have a number of symbolic purposes: if rubbing out the features was the desired result, the act could have been connected to degradation and obliteration of identity. But it could also have been done in order to accelerate the natural processes of decay and thus to control the transition of the youth's persona from death to another state. It might even, like the bog-killings, have been carried out in order to interfere with the rhythm of decomposition and thus prevent the soul's departure and reincorporation as an ancestor. Whatever the precise story behind the Folly Lane boy's bizarre and violent death and the subsequent treatment of his head, there are some uncanny and disturbing similarities between his end and that of another young male, from the other end of Roman Britain, although there is no sign of this other person's subjection to cannibalistic rituals.

Since 2000, the Brighton-based TV film company, Electric Sky, has involved me in the making of several documentaries for the series *Tales of the Living Dead*. Apart from the Folly Lane skull, another programme had themes of special relevance to the evidence for the retention of human sacrifice or, at least ritual killing, well into the Roman period.⁹³ This film, made in July 2007, took as its subject the decapitated head of a young man found in a noisome Roman rubbish ditch outside the Severan fort of Vindolanda (Chesterholm),⁹⁴ just south of Hadrian's Wall (Fig. 24). The site is famous for its unique and invaluable collection of letters written on thin slivers of wood before the construction of Hadrian's Wall in the AD 120s and preserved by the freak

circumstance of the anaerobic conditions in which they lay in the ground until their discovery two thousand years after they were written.⁹⁵ The man had been in his twenties when he sustained severe, frenzied blows to the head, including a deep sword cut that fractured his skull, and another blunt-instrument trauma, probably from the pommel or flat blade of the same weapon.⁹⁶ It is even possible that he was scalped, or his head deliberately de-fleshed just after it was sliced off his body. The excellent state of his teeth suggests that he had access to a comparatively refined diet, implying that he enjoyed reasonably high status within his community. The injuries to his head were followed by beheading, not by a clean sword cut, such as one might expect if the blow had been delivered by an experienced soldier, but rather by a series of seemingly inexpert chopping cuts, as if the perpetrator either did not care how he did it or was an inexperienced executioner (perhaps, then, not himself a soldier). Finally, the state of the skull revealed that the severed head had been displayed on a pole above the ditch, on the fort-ramparts, before its decomposed remains tumbled or were thrown into the ditch like a piece of rubbish.

Oxygen and strontium isotopic analyses of the teeth⁹⁷ of the Vindolanda decapitation victim revealed the interesting information that this individual was a local man who spent his early years and died at, or, at most, a few miles away from, Vindolanda, although he might have served in the Roman army away

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24 The skull of a young man found in the ditch of the Roman fort at Vindolanda just south of Hadrian's Wall; earlier third century AD.

from home for some of his short adult life.⁹⁸ This man met a violent end, culminating in the shame of beheading, display of the bleeding, brain-exposed and decomposing head on a pole and the ultimate humiliation of being treated as refuse. According to Imperial Roman law, beheading was a punishment reserved for really serious crimes, including murder and sedition, and was a standard extreme punishment within military jurisdiction. Decapitation (*capitis amputatio*) was certainly a mode of execution within the Roman army in the Severan period,⁹⁹ the time when the Vindolanda individual was beheaded. However, the situation is more complicated for, within a Gallo-British context, cutting off heads and displaying them as sacromilitary trophies was customary during the later Iron Age.¹⁰⁰

Given our knowledge that the beheaded Vindolanda individual was a Briton and, what is more, a local man, could it be that his death had overtones of a sacrificial killing, even if it had been primarily punitive? The savage blows rained upon his head, the repeated chopping to sever head from cervical vertebrae and the consequent display and discard suggest a ritualised act. If the man was killed by Roman soldiers at the behest of their commanding officer, the concentration on the head and the utter humiliation of its owner might have been a significant Roman act designed to have maximum impact on the local populace: such a custom resonated with cult practices already familiar to them for centuries. Given the historical context of this killing, there is a final twist to the episode because it may have happened at a very specific time. In AD 211 the emperor Septimius Severus died at York, leaving the Empire jointly to his two sons, Caracalla and Geta. Caracalla was the stronger and more ambitious brother, although Geta was the more popular choice for many army units. Caracalla murdered Geta in Rome and thereafter embarked upon a systematic campaign of *damnatio memoriae*, wherein Geta's supporters throughout the Empire were annihilated and his very memory erased through the defacing of his inscriptions and portraits.¹⁰¹ Even though Caracalla had returned to Rome in 211, it is highly likely that his legates would have continued the British campaigns against Scotland begun by Severus. Within the context of such a purge, is it possible that the beheaded man at Vindolanda had backed the wrong side during the struggle for the emperorship and paid the ultimate price. If so, the treatment of the head, stuck on a pole for all to see, acted as deterrent and sacrifice.¹⁰²

We can only speculate as to whether or not the Druids were involved in any of the ritualised killings described here. What stands out in all these instances of ritual murder is the control. Someone, or a group of people, wanted to manipulate the deaths of certain individuals in order to have power over their last moments, their dispatch and the subsequent treatment of their bodies. It is far from certain that the Druids were involved in any of these events but they were all clearly orchestrated by those who knew exactly what they were

doing and who had knowledge of human anatomy. It seems also that they had access to detailed knowledge of how much the human body could tolerate before it succumbed, so as to prolong the liminal time between life and death and, arguably, to have power over the souls of the victims. Given the testimony of chroniclers such as Julius Caesar, the Druids must at least be likely candidates for such activities.

The archaeological evidence points to the strong probability that human sacrifice was still being perpetrated in a Britain that was fully incorporated into the Roman Empire, where such practices were illegal. If the Druids went underground, as a shadowy but powerfully subversive group, in post-conquest Britain and Gaul, it is quite possible that they continued to practise the 'old religion'. Despite the official ban on ritual killing, Britain remained on the edge of the Roman world. Local cults may have died hard, and the spiritual response at times of need or crisis may well have been to hark back to tried and tested ancestral rites that had served the devotees of the ancient gods well in the past. In the case of the Vindolanda decapitation victim, these old rituals may even have been reinvented and appropriated by officers of Caracalla's army to convey a powerful anti-resistance message to the local community.

Druids, Oracles and Shamans

*Zeus the all-seeing grants to Athene's prayer that the wooden wall only shall not fall, but help you and your children.*¹

THIS CHAPTER will explore the visionary element in ancient Druidism and how it might connect with the system of ecstatic relationship with the supernatural world widely known as shamanism. In most, if not all, traditional shamanistic communities, the agency enabling communication between earth and spirit worlds is the attainment of the state of trance – the capacity, of certain ritualists, to access out-of-body experiences in order that the spirit might engage with other, higher supernatural forces for the purposes of healing or protecting the community. The mystical experiences undergone by several divine functionaries in the Classical world – notably the Pythia of Delphi and the Cumaean Sibyl – seem closely related to ‘modern’ shamanism in as much as their being possessed by their god Apollo brought them into the orbit of spirit forces who entered them and spoke through them.

But how might shamanism have relevance to an ancient priesthood about whose actual mechanics of ritual function we know so little? Until recently it was possible to go and study the traditional shamans of the Sami in Lapland, the Siberian Khanty, Evenk or Chuckchi, the Indian Sora, the South American drug-enabled groups of shamans and the San Bushmen of southern Africa. There is a wealth of anthropological material available for the study of ‘modern’ shamans,² and it is difficult to match this in applying a model to the Druids, a group of individuals for which the evidence is scanty and indirect, with most of our knowledge of them heavily laced with the colonial slant of Classical writers whose relationships with the worlds of the Druids in Britain and Gaul were predominantly those of superior conqueror to subjugated nation. Under these circumstances, the conquering power will seek to suppress what might be considered dangerous political messages about resistance, freedom and independence. Furthermore, the conquered people will seek to drive their ritual system underground, keep it secret and divulge only enough of the most simplistic information to their oppressors, preferring

instead to keep most doctrine secret, especially if potentially contentious. The way the Druids and other religious leaders worked in Roman Gaul and Britain was by stealth, waiting until political rebellion was in the wind and then leaping forward to fan the flames of sedition and provide a support-mechanism with which it could act. This is what seems to have occurred with the Rebellion of Civilis, the action of Dumnorix against Caesar and, most dramatically of all, during the Boudican revolt.

The World of the Shamans: The 'Old Believers'³

The social roles of the shaman in shamanic societies are numerous and diverse: he is a healer and a priest, a fortune-teller and a psychopomp leading the souls of the deceased to the abode of the dead, an epic-singer and a politician.⁴

This is one definition of Siberian shamanism and the immediate resonance with descriptions of ancient Druidic functions is very striking. Classical authors make repeated reference to all these facets of Gallo-British Druidism: Caesar stresses their involvement in politics and leadership and mentions their role in expounding doctrine about life after death; Lucan echoes the involvement of the Druids in preaching about reincarnation;⁵ Pliny the Elder comments in detail on their activities as sacred healers;⁶ and there are multifarious references in the ancient literature to the central Druidic function – that of divination or prediction of the future via communication with the spirits.⁷

Perhaps the most interesting correlation between shamans and Druids concerns the crucial role of each in the curation of tradition. Shamans in circumpolar regions have a particular role here and one of the shaman's main responsibilities is to pass on his or her esoteric knowledge to initiates.⁸ In describing the functions of the Druids, Caesar comments on the very similar role of Druids whose novices spent so much of their time learning sacred lore and committing it to memory rather than writing it down.⁹ He says that they could write (using Greek letters), but that they chose not to do so in religious matters. But could Druids write? Perhaps those who, like Diviciacus, had visited Rome picked up the skill there, but there is little evidence for literacy on any scale in Iron Age Gaul. It could be that, even if the Druids could write, it was felt that the written word was no match for the transmission of sacred lore by word of mouth: the spoken word is all the more powerful because of its immediacy, the capacity for improvisation and, of course, because of the sound of the teacher's voice.

Flying the Cosmos

According to Greenlandic pre-Christian religion, the *Angakok*¹⁰ (shaman) had the power to visit the 'Inua' of the sky (the Man in the Moon) but was reluctant to do so because the Inua was the god of punishment. So it was that only very good shamans would travel there, and only if there were dire necessity to ask for help on behalf of their community. The Greenland shaman would prepare for his cosmic journey while in his darkened house. There, his hands would be bound behind his back whilst his drum began beating, apparently of its own accord but, in fact, struck by a helping spirit or *toornat*.¹¹ The Greenlandic shaman could not only travel through the air to visit the moon but also travel through water to the 'Mother of the Sea'. He would negotiate with the sea-goddess on behalf of humans for, if earth-dwellers displeased her, she hid the animals so that the hunters and their families went hungry.¹² There is much about the pre-Christian Greenlandic perception of the supernatural world that accords with shamanism in many northern cultures: the physical ordeals of the shaman; his or her role in helping people by liaising with the spirits, aided by sensitive 'antennae'¹³ to tune into the 'vibes' of the spirit world; the symbolic drum and, perhaps above all, the ability of the shaman to make the spiritual journey between the different layers of the cosmos in order to communicate with the supernatural powers and to recover the lost souls of humans stolen by evil spirits through injury or disease.

Soul-flight, such as that of the Greenland *Angakok*, is the most common means for shamans to undertake cosmic journeys. Clearly, this form of activity is going to be virtually impossible to track archaeologically and, even if relevant to ancient Druids, it is not the kind of information that they would have communicated to the foreign powers that recorded their presence. But it is tempting to interpret in shamanistic terms one of the most evocative images from later prehistoric Europe, a Bronze Age rock-carving from Kallsängen in southern Sweden. The petroglyph depicts a group of winged men, carved very deeply into the rock-face: they have bird-beaks as well as wings; some have erect phalluses and one is two-headed.¹⁴

Bird-men (seen as half-human, half-bird) occur repeatedly in the imagery of societies with a shamanistic tradition, notably among some native Canadian communities – including the Kwakiutl people of the Vancouver region¹⁵ and the Ojibwa of Ontario¹⁶ – and in Siberia.¹⁷ The shamans of the Central Mexican Huichol people achieved soul-flight by means of mind-altering plants, such as the peyote cactus, and their shamanic out-of-body experiences were recorded in yarn paintings: one of these depicts a horned shaman with the wings of an eagle or vulture rising to the upper cosmos to converse with the spirits.¹⁸ In early medieval Irish prose mythological texts, several Druidic 'bird-men' are recorded

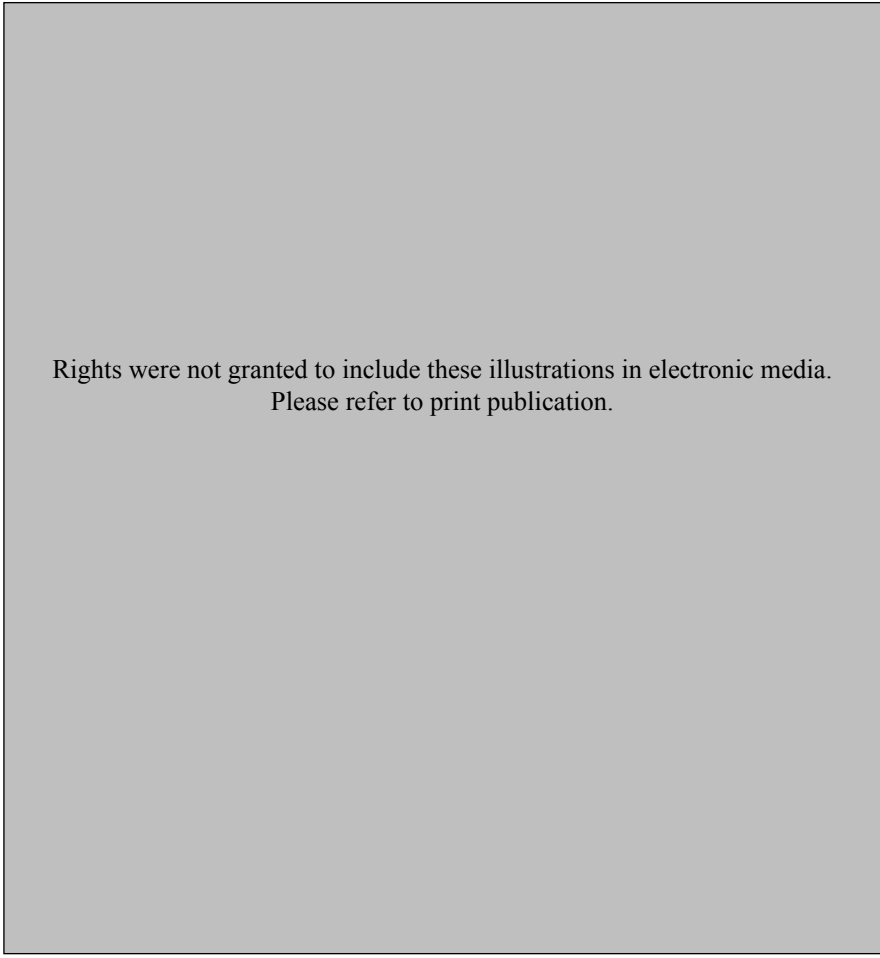
as possessing powers of 'prohibition' (forbidding spells, or *gessa*) over high-ranking individuals: thus, in the story known as the *Siege of Druim Damgair* the blind Druid Mog Ruith wears the hide of a bull, feathers on his head and chants spells as he flies on his journey to liaise with the spirits, having imposed a series of *gessa* on King Cormac of Ulster;¹⁹ similarly, the broadly contemporary tale of *Da Derga's Hostel* features a bird-man called Nemglan, a prophet whose *gessa* bound King Conaire Mor not to slay birds.²⁰

Winged figures are not uncommon in the religious iconography of the Classical world. Two important examples are Nike/Victory and Hermes/Mercury. It is arguable that, on the one hand, these divinities owed their genesis to a shamanistic worldview, a cosmological framework that admitted of flights of the soul to other worlds and, on the other, to Gallo-British appropriation of Classical cult-imagery to express indigenous attitudes to the supernatural. A prominent goddess in the Graeco-Roman pantheon was the personification of victory, Nike (for the Greeks) and Victoria (for the Romans). Typically, she is depicted on coins, figurines and monuments as a winged woman. She appears thus on two late Iron Age coins from south-east Britain which is not in itself surprising, given that in the decades between Caesar's visits and Claudius's invasion of Britain certain friendly British kings chose to make statements about their fealty to Rome through the images on the coins they minted.²¹ But a radical reinterpretation the Victory figure on these two coins²² presents the view that, on the basis both of the artistic treatment of the winged figure on the obverse of the coin, and the presence on the reverse of a very British-looking warrior complete with *carnyx* (war-trumpet), suggests that they might represent a native divine being or, even, a female shaman, cloaked in the guise of the Roman goddess.

Shamanism and soul-flight may be connected with Gallo-British attitudes to the Graeco-Roman god Mercury (Fig. 9), who was traditionally represented in Classical art as a young, semi-naked man wearing wings on his hat or ankles. Caesar makes an interesting comment about Gaulish religion: 'The god they worship most is Mercury, and they have a great many images of him. They regard him as the inventor of all the arts, the guide of all their roads and journeys . . .'²³ Caesar may have been right, for in both monumental sculpture and small figurines, Mercury is the most commonly represented deity in Roman Gaul and Britain.²⁴ Mercury's wings are usually explained as the means of the god's transport as herald of the gods but, if we unpick this interpretation, it makes the best sense if Mercury is some kind of arbiter or go-between, a role that may have its origins in the identification of the Hermes/Mercury being within the context of an ancient Mediterranean version of shamanism. Such an argument is supported by other aspects of the Hermes/Mercury cult of Greece and Rome, not least the role of the god as a psychopomp or leader of souls to the realms of the dead,²⁵ a function specifically ascribed to northern shamans.

There is, in addition, a strong link between Mercury and healing in Gallo-Roman and Romano-British cult-traditions.²⁶

One of the most telling objects from Roman Britain is a small copper-alloy figure of the deity from Southbroom in Wiltshire, found in a pot with several other religious figurines (Fig. 25). Instead of the usual emblem of a purse, signifying Mercury's role as a god responsible for trade and business, on this image he holds what looks like a rattle, an instrument commonly employed in shamanic ritual to conjure up spirits, drive them away or induce trance.²⁷ So if we peel away some of the layers of symbolism attached to the Roman cult of Mercury, it is possible, perhaps, to catch glimpses of



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25 Romano-British bronze figurine of Mercury with 'shamanic' rattle from Southbroom, Wiltshire.

a shamanistic origin for the cult. In particular, his possession of wings to enable him to flit around the cosmos between the gods is especially evocative of the soul-flight of the shaman, mediator between humans and the spirits. Given this indigenous 'take' on Mercury in Gallo-British contexts, could this god have been connected to a shamanistic aspect of Druidism? At any rate, it seems as though – here at least – Caesar's testimony on Gallic religion marries with the archaeological evidence for Mercury's popularity in the province.

Changing Shape and Swapping Gender

A common thread running through a great many 'modern' shamanistic traditions was that of the shape-shifter, shamans as transformative beings. Indeed, in some communities they are known as 'two-spirits,' a term deriving from their in-between location between the worlds of people and the supernatural powers.²⁸ Shamans may exhibit and act out their double nature as multiple or 'between beings' by presenting themselves in the opposite gender or by having a full or quasi-animal form. Although it is impossible to make direct links between such practice and the behaviour of the Druids in ancient Gaul and Britain, it is worth considering the interpretation of the numerous instances of gender-crossing and shape-changing between animal and human exhibited in Iron Age, Gallo-Roman and Romano-British iconography (Fig. 26).²⁹

In terms of 'skin-turning' and trans-species transformation, the most persistently represented beings are in the form of humans with antlers or bull-horns. They occur in pre-Roman Iron Age contexts on coinage³⁰ and repeatedly on north Italian rock-art in Camonica Valley.³¹ But the most famous image of this type is on the well-documented gilded silver cult-cauldron ritually deposited on a small dry island within a peat-bog at Gundestrup in Jutland. Probably manufactured in the first century BC, the rich iconography of this piece includes a scene in which an antlered human sits cross-legged in the 'yogic' position, surrounded by beasts,³² in much the same way as traditional shamans are depicted with their animal spirit-helpers (Fig. 27).³³ Occasionally, iconography on coins and figurines shows us powerful beings that exhibit a combination of trans-species and trans-gender imagery.³⁴ Is it possible that some of these images represent not deities but religious officials – Druids or shamans – who adopted split identities in order to intercede with the gods on behalf of their communities?

Visions and Ecstasy in the Classical World: Delphi and Cumae

In the early fifth century BC the Pythia, the Oracle of Apollo's shrine at Delphi, predicted that the Athenians would win the war against Persia. The

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26 Gold coin of the Ambiani depicting 'shape-shifting' between human and animal form.

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27 Antlered human figure depicted on an inner plate of the silver cauldron from the votive deposit in a bog at Gundestrup, Jutland, Denmark; probably first century BC.

priestess's message to her suppliants was often deliberately obscure and uttered in ambiguous riddles. The Oracle's reference to the 'wooden wall' was veiled advice to the Athenians to build a fleet that would enable them to defeat the enemy by sea at the Battle of Salamis, even though the Persians would first lay waste their lands.

'High priestess of Delphi was high on oracle gases'. Such was the header for an article in *The Times* in October 2006.³⁵ The piece goes on to present new

research by a geologist and a geophysicist who, in making a scientific examination of the Oracle's cave in the sanctuary to Apollo (the Greek god of prophecy) at Delphi, suggested that the presiding priestess, the mouthpiece of the prophetic god, experienced hallucinations resulting from anoxia. From c. 1100 BC to the early first millennium AD, the Delphic Oracle was consulted by those desirous of knowing the future; they made the journey to her cave from all over the Greek world to hear divine predictions of their fate uttered by the High Priestess of Apollo when possessed by the god. The Oracle spoke in a spirit-possessed gibberish that required translation by her attendant priests. The Delphic prophetess was one of many Greek 'visionary-practitioners', identified by the ancient Greek writer Artemidorus as *oneirokritai* (literally 'interpreters of dreams'), experiencing the will of the gods while in an out-of-body state and making vaticinatory (future-telling) proclamations.³⁶ Herodotus' account of the Athenians' consultation of the Oracle (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) is interesting, for initially the envoys dispatched to Apollo's shrine received a disturbingly negative pronouncement on their future defeat at the hands of the Persians, and it was only on their return with the olive branches of suppliants that they heard the more encouraging response about their liberation through fighting at sea at the Battle of Salamis.³⁷

Although the influence of the Delphic Oracle declined from the late fourth century BC onwards in terms of its performance on the political stage, the Greek writer Plutarch, who lived a long life between c. AD 45 and 120, was proud to include in his *curriculum vitae* a lengthy spell as a priest at Apollo's shrine.³⁸ Plutarch, coming from an old Theban family, was able to boast an esteemed lineage and he lived most of his life in his home town of Chaeronea in Boeotia, not far from Delphi. Despite this apparent attachment to his home, Plutarch travelled widely in Greece, Rome and Egypt and divided his time between the pursuit of scholarship (particularly philosophy) and public office. It was in this civic role that he held his priesthood at Delphi. Given this first-hand experience of oracular shrines it is no surprise that his writings, the most famous of which were his *Lives* of the Greeks and Romans, were shot through with references to portents and divination, especially the predictive utterings of the Pythia.

It is clear from the persistent references to the Delphic Oracle in Classical literature that the Pythia played an important role in the divination rites endemic to Mediterranean antiquity, just as did the Druids in Gaul. The incident before Salamis is just one of a series of significant episodes in which 'history' was altered by the prophecies of Apollo as relayed through his priestess.

The article about the Delphic Oracle in *The Times* concludes by speculating on the genuineness of the Pythia's utterances, suggesting that her trance-experience might have been nothing but a sham and that 'the priestesses were

highly alert and well-informed about Greek affairs thanks to a network of agents.³⁹ It is easy to appreciate how exploitation of a legend could have worked in antiquity, and it would have been crucial to the continued sponsorship of the Delphic Oracle and Apollo's shrine there that the Pythia's words rang true, despite her habit of talking in riddles and veiled speech. Such 'fraud' may not have been entirely cynical but was rather based, perhaps, on the need for ancient communities to be able to rely on the help of the supernatural, whether or not humans manipulated such powers. The oracular sanctuary was in an inaccessible, awe-inspiring place, a significant location where earth and Underworld mingled in the caves and fissures of the mountains, where spirits would be deemed to cross between worlds to communicate with humans. The notion of caves as 'edgy' places, at the interface of the realms of people and of the divine, is a persistent one.

In many ways analogous to Delphi was the shrine of Apollo at Cumae, near Naples, an ancient Greek foundation that may date back to as early as the ninth century BC.⁴⁰ Cumae was the underground home of the Sybil, the prophetess who played such an important part in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, the account of Aeneas' journey to the Underworld in search of his father Anchises. The *Aeneid* is Virgil's epic poem in praise of Rome and Augustus, the tale of the founding of Rome traced back to the flight of the Trojan hero Aeneas after the sack of Troy by the Greeks (as narrated in Homer's *Iliad*). Like the Pythia, the Cumaean Sybil uttered her prophecies when driven out of her mind by the presence of the god. Classical writers tell us that, as at Delphi, the numinous point of contact between earthworld and the realm of the supernatural was a cave, 'a vast cavern . . . the awful Sybil's own secluded place.'⁴¹ Virgil describes the first encounter between the priestess and Aeneas, which is shot through with awe and eerie terror, not least because the Sybil is presented as the unwilling and coerced mouthpiece of the god:

Meanwhile the prophetess, who had not yet submitted to Apollo, ran furious riot in the cave, as if in hope of casting the God's power from her brain. Yet all the more did he torment her frantic countenance, overmastering her wild thoughts, and crushed her and shaped her to his will. So at last, of their own accord, the hundred tremendous orifices in the shrine swung open, and they carried through the air the answer which the prophetess gave . . . I see war and all the horrors of war. I see Tiber streaming and foaming with blood . . .⁴²

Virgil proceeds to speak of the way the cavern's echoing chamber made the Sybil's voice a roar and how – like the Delphic Oracle – her words comprised 'truth wrapped in obscurity'. The apparent similarity between the two shrines is not surprising; Cumae (Greek Cyme) was founded by Greek colonists from the Euboean mother-city, also called Cyme,⁴³ and Apollo presided over both

sanctuaries. But it is interesting that both Plutarch and Virgil emphasise the issue of possession, the ecstatic, visionary experience of the priestess when touched by the god. The gender of the god's mouthpiece is also significant: religion was one of the few areas of public life in which Greek women, freed from the constraints of the *oikos* (the household) were able to participate. But even though there were plenty of Greek goddesses, in the sphere of practical religious experience the rites at both Delphi and Cumae reflected the asymmetry of gender-relations that was so embedded in Greek (and Roman) life. The Cumaean Sybil was empowered in her relationship with the mortal Aeneas, but in terms of her possession by Apollo she was utterly powerless.

While the achievement of transformation by the Delphic Pythia has been suggested as resulting, at least in part, from the particular geology of the site, Virgil's description of Cumae suggests something quite similar:

There is a cleft in the flank of the Euboean Rock forming a vast cavern. A hundred mouthways and a hundred broad tunnels lead into it, and through them the Sibyl's answer comes forth in a hundred rushing streams of sound.⁴⁴

The nearby gateway to the Underworld, through which Aeneas must pass with the Sybil as his guide, is described as 'a deep rugged cave, stupendous and yawning wide, protected by a lake of black water and the glooming forest', the lake giving off such a poisonous miasma that no birds could fly directly over it without being overcome by the toxic fumes. Like Delphi, the region in which Cumae is situated is an earthquake zone and Virgil appears to describe a fissured landscape, with vents, caves and underground springs, all contributing to the notion of connection between the worlds of humans and the gods. Like the Pythia, the Sybil, too, may have been 'high' on the natural gases seeping from deep under ground.

The Delphic Oracle and the Cumaean Sybil may seem a world away from Druids, but oracular powers were persistently ascribed to this Gallic priesthood and, we shall see, hallucinogens, caves and ecstasy all played a role in their link with the spirits.

From Cumaean Sibyl to Batavian Veleda

But Aeneas the True made his way to the fastness where Apollo rules enthroned on high, and to the vast cavern beyond, which is the awful Sibyl's own secluded place; here the prophetic Delian God breathes into her the spirit's visionary might, revealing things to come.⁴⁵

The Augustan poet Virgil's *Aeneid* is a legendary narrative in which the worlds of humans and the supernatural are closely meshed and the gods play a

central role in the direction taken by the story. The central hero, Aeneas, is in constant contact with the divine and, in particular, with his own goddess-mother, Venus. The whole of Book 6 is steeped in the supernatural and a large part of it is taken up with Aeneas' journey to and sojourn in the Otherworld. Aeneas is presented by Virgil as an ambiguous being, half-immortal, half-human, caught in a divine destiny and helped or harmed by various spirit forces on his mission to found Rome from the ashes of Troy. When the hero consults the Cumaean Sibyl (Oracle) about his proposed descent to Hades, she gives him stark warning that, whilst penetration of the Underworld from earth is not difficult, the way back to the upper air is impossible without either the help of the gods or the exalted heroic status of the traveller.⁴⁶ It is clear from the poet's treatment of Aeneas that he fulfils both criteria and, moreover, the High Priestess of Apollo appoints herself his guide. Both Aeneas and the Sibyl are 'two-spirits',⁴⁷ beings who straddle and link earthworld, the supernatural dimension and the space between.

The seclusion of the Cumaean Sibyl is key to her identity and behaviour. Virgil describes her residence in a cave, a dark place, not only a boundary between worlds, penetrating deep underground into the Underworld, but also a hidden, separate place to which access was strictly controlled, guarded by double doors.⁴⁸ Such distancing of the possessed one from other people is crucial to her power and her ability to listen, uninterrupted, to the message of the god. There is a sense in which the Sibyl was a marionette, manipulated by Apollo and kept apart from human society until and unless he willed otherwise. One dimension to such separation may well have been sensory deprivation: it is easy to imagine the psychic state of someone dwelling alone in the darkness, a prey to strange, magnified and echoing sounds, like water dripping from the cave roof, or rushing in fast-flowing underground streams. Such people would have been highly susceptible to peculiar neurological experiences, hallucinations and weird audiological phenomena, whether real or induced by altered states of consciousness.

The role of seclusion is central to Tacitus' account of the Germanic prophetess Veleda in the mid-first century AD. In AD 68, the emperor Nero, last of the Julio-Claudian line, died and the Roman world was turned on its head by a leadership contest. Nero's death had left a dangerous lacuna, allowing four military leaders to challenge for the succession in AD 69. Of the four would-be rulers, Otho, Galba and Vitellius each enjoyed a very brief spell as emperor but then a new imperial dynasty was eventually established by the victor – the Flavian emperor Vespasian – who emerged triumphant from the struggle. In the context of the chaos that unfolded during the 'Year of the Four Emperors', some indigenous peoples of Gaul and the Rhineland, chafing under the subservience of provincial status, rose up in rebellion against their colonial oppressors. Their leader was Julius Civilis, a nobleman of the Batavii

(one of the Germanic tribes who occupied a region on the Rhine delta that is now part of the Netherlands).⁴⁹

Civilis had fought alongside the Romans in the German campaigns under Vitellius, the commander of the Rhineland army and, whilst ostensibly a staunch supporter of the imperial government, had already come under suspicion of sedition during the reign of Nero, some time before he led the Gallo-German revolt in 69. Tacitus⁵⁰ describes how, even though Civilis was of royal descent, he had been arrested and taken in chains to Nero, despite his probable status as a 'Friendly King', one of the series of client-rulers employed by Rome to save manpower by controlling buffer-zones between areas of full provincial status and the Rome-free world.⁵¹ The fact that Civilis had a Roman *nomen*, Julius, implies that he was under the protection of Rome and quite possibly a Roman citizen and, if so, his summary arrest and treatment as an ignoble criminal was inappropriate to his rank and would have caused a quite justifiable sense of grievance.

The entry of the seer Veleda onto the stage is heralded by Tacitus' account of the ritualised behaviour adopted by Civilis after his first successful campaign against the Romans, in which he swore an oath to dye his hair and beard red and to cut it only after he had destroyed the enemy army.⁵² This in itself is interesting in so far as we can assume that the dye he used was ochre, an ingredient used widely in prehistoric ceremonial activity associated particularly with Gravettian burials of the Upper Palaeolithic: in a multiple burial at Dolni Věstonice in the Czech Republic, dated to c. 26,000 years ago, red ochre was used extensively in the decoration of bodies, especially the head and genitals.⁵³ Closer to home, the earliest known ceremonial burial from Britain, Paviland Cave on the Gower Peninsula, is called the 'Red Lady of Paviland' because of the ochre sprinkled on the body of a young man buried with a series of ivory rods, perhaps used in divinatory or other shamanistic rites.⁵⁴ Clearly it is nonsense to make meaningful connections between an Upper Palaeolithic burial and a Batavian who lived in the mid-first century AD, but the digression can be excused simply on the grounds of identifying red ochre as a special substance that may have represented blood, danger and other symbolic themes appropriate to the specific contexts of its use.

According to Tacitus, Civilis' action in using his body as a representation of his attitude to the Romans was alleged to have been accompanied by something quite outrageous, namely the handing over of Roman prisoners to his young son to use as targets for archery practice! It is against this backdrop of 'barbarism' that Tacitus introduces Veleda, a prophetess held in high esteem by her community for her divinatory powers. Her reputation had recently received a boost for she had correctly prophesied her people's defeat of the Roman army. Veleda was a single woman and, although Tacitus does not tell us so, it is likely that she was a virgin, like many holy women in early medieval

contexts.⁵⁵ It was to this revered holy woman that Civilis sent the captured legionary commander Munius Lupercus as a present. Lupercus had been spearheading the campaign against the Batavian rebel and had been in command of two legions plus a large contingent of auxiliaries.⁵⁶ The value of this gift was commensurate with the esteem in which Veleda was held, for the Germans regarded her not only as a highly significant force in religious and political matters but almost as a goddess.⁵⁷ The extent of the prophetess's political influence is further expressed in the dilemma faced by the citizens of the Roman *colonia* of Cologne who were wavering between their support for the rebels and their allegiance to Rome. Tacitus tells us that the people of the city drew up proposals to satisfy the leaders of the revolt and agreed to lay them before Civilis and Veleda for arbitration.⁵⁸ Later still in the campaign, just before Civilis was finally defeated, Veleda was presented with a gift even more valuable than the legionary commander Lupercus: a Roman flagship, captured during fighting on the Rhine, was towed up the River Lippe as a present to the priestess.⁵⁹

What is telling about all this is the ambiguity with which Tacitus describes the Germans' attitude to Veleda. On the one hand, she – like the Druids – was accorded enormous respect, amounting almost to worship (with the gifts of the legionary legate and the captured warship interpretable as sacrificial offerings to a divine power). Her skills in telling the future and in adjudication display her close connection with the Druids of Caesar's Gaul. But conversely, Tacitus speaks of her, in terms reminiscent of the Oracles of Delphi and Cumae, as a sequestered woman (Fig. 28), secluded from the world of humans and only communicating with the outside world through the medium of one of her kinsmen:

But any personal approach to Veleda or speech with her was forbidden. This refusal to permit the envoys to see her was intended to enhance the aura of veneration that surrounded the prophetess. She remained immured in a high tower, one of her relatives being deputed to transmit questions and answers as if he were mediating between a god and his worshippers.⁶⁰

Veleda is thus presented as a being on the edge of society, a marginal person, and – perhaps – dangerous because she had the ear of the gods. In this respect, she is very close to her prophet sisters at Delphi and Cumae and she, too, spoke in tongues that had to be interpreted for human ears. Veleda's tower may be compared to the underground caves of the Classical seers. Her virginal state is also significant: in the context of holy women in medieval England, virginity and sequestration went together, the sexually intact female acting as a metaphor for a fortress, the secret, innermost part of the castle perceived as akin to the private female body guarded by men.⁶¹ In this way, then, Veleda

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28 The Batavian prophetess Veleda sequestered in her tower.

could be seen as a disempowered victim, bounded by her gender, like so many women in ancient societies, the tool of her male relatives, unable to function in the real world and with no option but to maintain her celibate state, for therein lay her power and the ability of her mind to act as a conduit for the messages from the supernatural world. Furthermore, it would have been crucial that this woman and her special gifts should not fall into the hands of rivals or enemies for then her power might be manipulated and turned against her own people.

According to Tacitus, it was Veleda's gender that made her especially receptive to the words of the gods.⁶² This makes sense, for women, like religious practitioners or shamans, occupied marginal places in society. Indeed, the author comments that the Germans believed that women in general possessed 'an element of holiness and prophecy,' and that their advice was never lightly dismissed.⁶³ Their very femininity gave them a paradox of power, danger and vulnerability. Their 'open,' accessible bodies allowed entry by the spirits, as if

in sexual congress, whether such intrusion were accepted voluntarily or were unwelcome. Indeed, if we refer back to the *Aeneid*, we witness just such a sexual analogy in the possession of the Cumaean prophetess ridden by Apollo like a horse by its rider or a mare by a stallion.⁶⁴ So was Veleda a Druid? I suspect that she was in all but name, although she belonged to a Germanic group and despite Caesar's specific denial of Druids among the Germans.⁶⁵

Divination: Predicting the Will of the Gods

The king cried aloud to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spake and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.⁶⁶

This passage from the Old Testament Book of Daniel relates to the time when the Israelites were in thrall to Babylon under its king Belshazzar. The immediate context is the great royal feast at which the 'fingers of a man's hand' wrote a fearful message of doom on the wall.⁶⁷ The passage is of interest to us because of the description of the esteem in which the king held his seers, his wise men, who were reputed to be able to tell the future and the will of the gods. It was this ability for divination that gave ancient prophets their authority. Interpreting what the supernatural powers wanted or were going to do could occur in a number of ways: from the observation and understanding of portents,⁶⁸ prodigies⁶⁹ and from dreams.⁷⁰ The Book of Daniel presents a picture of divine prophecy in a millenarian context, that of the end of King Belshazzar's reign because he had been weighed in the balance by Jahweh, the God of Israel, and found wanting. It is in just such an 'end-of-the-world' context, later in this chapter, that we will find the predictions of the Druids in their foretelling of Rome's fall.

Diviciacus

Both Julius Caesar and Cicero comment on Diviciacus, a Gallic nobleman and chief of the Burgundian Aedui, who clearly made a deep impression on them: on Caesar because he was a staunch ally and on Cicero because of his skill at divination (Fig. 13). Cicero's admiration for the Aeduan was the more surprising in view of the urbanity of this writer and rhetorician, whom one would suppose to have been scornful of barbarians. Cicero's comments are interesting:

The system of divination is not even neglected among barbaric peoples, since in fact there are Druids in Gaul; I myself knew one of them, Divitiacus

of the Aedui, your guest and eulogist, who declared that he was acquainted with the system of nature which the Greeks call natural philosophy and he used to predict the future by both augury and inference.⁷¹

Cicero's *de Divinatione* ('About Divination') was written as a dialogue between the author and his brother Quintus, hence the phrase 'your guest'. The meeting between the Roman and the Gaul took place in 60 BC when the latter travelled to Rome in search of support from the Roman Senate against the expansionist policies of the German Ariovistus; he and his people had threatened Aeduan territory since defeating the tribe nearly ten years earlier.⁷²

The passage shows Cicero's recognition that the Druids practised a form of divination with at least some elements familiar to the Romans. Certainly, augury (the prediction of the future by the study of the flight formation of birds and the interpretation of other natural phenomena) was common practice among Roman clergy, there being a specific office of Augur whose main duty it was to observe these portents. Elsewhere,⁷³ Cicero speaks of the Augurs as 'interpreters and intermediaries' of the gods, in this instance Jupiter, and the language he uses indicates that these religious officials had responsibilities not only to understand and communicate the wishes of deities but also to manipulate them.⁷⁴ The other skill claimed by the Aeduan Druid was that of 'inference'. It is difficult to interpret this term but it may refer to dream-visitations by the spirits or to the inspired guesswork often employed by ancient priests in their attempts to appear omniscient. It is perhaps significant that Cicero does not admit Diviciacus' skill directly, saying only that the Druid 'declared' his knowledge of the system.

Cicero's main interest in Diviciacus is in his religious powers; Caesar tells us much more about Diviciacus the man and, in so doing, inadvertently provides more information about the religious set-up in Gaul, although he himself never refers to his Aeduan ally as a Druid. Caesar introduces Diviciacus in Book 1 of his *de Bello Gallico* as a tribal leader who, in 58 BC, was chief magistrate⁷⁵ and 'an earnest supporter of the Roman people, extremely loyal to me personally, remarkably trustworthy, and a fair and moderate man.'⁷⁶ This was at the time that eastern Gaul was being threatened by the expansionist German ruler Ariovistus and it is clear both from Cicero's account of the Aeduan's visit to Rome and from Caesar's narrative that Diviciacus was an accomplished negotiator, chosen to represent the Aedui in their pleas to Caesar for help against mass German immigration to Gallic territory.⁷⁷ Indeed, he acted as arbitrator not only for his own people but also on behalf of the Bellovaci.⁷⁸ Diviciacus, then, fulfilled one of the major roles for Druids identified by Caesar in *de Bello Gallico* Book 6, namely that of judge in disputes between communities.⁷⁹ So, while Caesar never calls him a Druid directly, his indirect testimony accords with Cicero's identification of Diviciacus as one of their number.

Prophecy and Dissent: Tacitus and 'Millennial' Druids

But it was above all the burning of the Capitol that had driven men to the belief that the Empire's days were numbered. They reflected that Rome had been captured by the Gauls in the past, but as the house of Jupiter remained inviolate, the Empire had survived. Now, however, Fate had ordained this fire as a sign of the gods' anger, and of the passing of world dominion to the nations north of the Alps. Such at any rate was the message proclaimed by the idle superstition of druidism.⁸⁰

So Tacitus wrote in the cataclysmic 'Year of the Four Emperors', AD 69, when Roman warlords were at each other's throats to gain the throne and the Gallic provinces were in rebellion. The Druids are portrayed here as eschatological visionaries, perhaps responsible for driving forward a revitalisation movement as a way of resisting Roman colonialism.⁸¹ Such references to Druidic prediction in Classical literature should arguably be taken more seriously than is usually the case and the Druids should perhaps be recognised as a powerful protest movement during the Roman Empire. Prophecy is heady stuff and within the context of the Greek and Roman world, in which Tacitus was writing, the 'idle superstition of druidism' may have, in reality, been a cause of anxiety to Rome.

The apocalyptic message associated by Tacitus with the burning of the Capitol needs to be understood in context. The Capitoline Hill, temple home of the Capitoline Triad, Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, the three most prominent of Rome's state gods, was the spiritual centre of Rome, and its destruction by fire by soldiers backing Vitellius and his claim to the emperorship, was regarded as a catastrophe. In Tacitus' words, 'This was the most lamentable and appalling disaster in the whole history of the Roman commonwealth.'⁸² The historian goes on to comment on the intense significance of this act of vandalism, remarking that the destruction of the Capitol was symbolic of the fact that Rome had turned on itself in civil war. In order to understand this viewpoint, we need first to read Tacitus as a staunch republican who disliked the tyranny of imperial Rome and whose scorn for the internecine strife caused by the four pretenders' bid for the purple was very obvious in much of his writing.⁸³ Secondly, it is necessary to appreciate the importance of the Capitoline Triad, and of Jupiter in particular, for they and he represented not just the religious persona of Rome and the Empire but Rome's very identity. The great temple overlooked the city and its occupants looked after it. Jupiter Optimus Maximus (Jupiter Best and Greatest) was Rome's champion.⁸⁴

Whenever the Romans were in crisis, they looked to Jupiter Capitolinus to protect them from disaster. As early as 390/387 BC, when the Gauls sacked Rome, a Roman named Camillus is said to have persuaded its inhabitants not to abandon the city, arguing that the Feast of Jupiter could not be celebrated

anywhere but at the Capitol.⁸⁵ This emphasis on the location of the sky-god's most holy sanctuary was presumably at least in part because of its situation on a holy mountain, what has been called 'the meeting-point of heaven and earth.'⁸⁶ The cult of Jupiter was complex and multi-layered, but it is clear that it was not so much a religion as a political phenomenon, signifying the essence of Rome itself. This is why the army reaffirmed their loyalty by establishing new altars to Jupiter every January wherever they were on the imperial frontiers.⁸⁷ No wonder that the linking of the destruction of such an icon of Rome as the Capitol with the Druids was a cause for grave concern. If the Gallic priesthood was genuinely instrumental in trading on the catastrophe to predict the end of the Roman Empire, it displayed considerable astuteness in its ability to tune in to the ever-present fears lurking in the Roman psyche.

Divine Lotteries: From Scythia to Stanway

Philosophers . . . and men learned in religious affairs are unusually honoured among the [Gauls] and are called by them Druids. They further make use of seers, thinking them worthy of high praise. These latter by their augural observances and by the sacrifice of sacrificial animals can foretell the future and they hold all the people subject to them.⁸⁸

Classical authors comment on the prediction of the future as a central area of Druidic responsibility. The act of foretelling events by tapping into a spiritual force field, known as divination, is also an essential element in the 'package' of traditional shamanistic behaviour.⁸⁹ Among the Sami of Lapland and Siberia, the principal instrument of divination was the highly decorated shaman's drum which, when played, vibrated so as to move a pointer towards a particular image or motif and thus inform the shaman of the spirits' will.⁹⁰ A wonderful picture of Sami divination, published in a book called *Laponia* by Johannes Schefferus in 1673, is that of a Norwegian shaman, or *noaidi* and his trance-state. It contains two images: the one on the left depicting the shaman beating his drum while its vibration causes the 'divination ring' to move across the drum's surface that is decorated with symbolic motifs; the one on the right shows the shaman lying on the ground in a trance-state, his drum lying over his body, while his released spirit wanders to other realms.⁹¹

Recent studies of Siberian shamans reveal the varied nature of implements that could be employed to help in the diviner's craft, including the bones of humans or animals.⁹² The use of the latter in traditional shamanistic divinational performance should alert the archaeologist in dealing with bone-assemblages, for these remains of the dead were, perhaps, not simply discarded or formally buried in funerary ceremonies but may sometimes have been used by ritualists in their searching for doorways into the Otherworld.

For auspices and the casting of lots they have the highest possible regard. Their procedure in casting lots is uniform. They break off a branch of a fruit-tree and slice it into strips; they distinguish these by certain runes and throw them, as random chance will have it, onto a white cloth. Then the priest of the State if the consultation is a public one, the father of the family if it is private, after a prayer to the gods and an intent gaze heavenward, picks up three, one at a time, and reads their meaning from the runes scored on them. If the lots forbid an enterprise, there can be no further consultations that day [Fig. 29].
(Tacitus)⁹³

There are many soothsayers in Scythia, and their method is to work willow rods. They bring great bundles of them, which they put down on the ground; then they untie them, lay out each rod separately, and pronounce their prophecy. While they are speaking it, they collect the rods into a bundle again as before. This is the native mode of divination in Scythia; but the class of effeminate persons called 'Enarees' use a different method, which they say was taught them by Aphrodite: these people take a piece of the inner bark of the lime-tree and cut it into three pieces, which they keep twisting and untwisting round their fingers as they prophesy.

(Herodotus⁹⁴)

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Herodotus and Tacitus were literally worlds apart, both in time and space, the one a Greek from Asia Minor writing in the fifth century BC about communities dwelling in what is now southern Russia, the other a Roman senator born in southern Gaul in about AD 55, writing about peoples in Germania (east of the Rhine) at the end of the first century AD. In the passages quoted above, both authors were describing the 'other', the weird and strange customs of people beyond the Greek or Roman worlds.

The Scythians, a pastoral people, traded with the Greek colonies on the northern Black Sea coast and so were familiar to the Greeks; the German tribes, living next door to the Gallic provinces and having waged fierce wars against the Roman army during the first century AD, were also, to a degree, known quantities. Both Herodotus and Tacitus were interested in foreign customs, particularly those involving ritual and religion. Indeed, there is a curious element of similarity between their two accounts of divinatory practice by casting lots: both used bundles of rods made from specific types of tree, of which both were probably cultivated or modified by humans (willows and limes are favourite trees for pollarding among pastoral societies). In both ceremonies it is recorded that religious officials were present: a priest for the Germans and soothsayers for the Scythians. If we believe these details, they suggest that the wood-species selected for prognosticatory equipment were significant. Trees and, particularly, tree-species played an important role in Gallo-British cult-practices⁹⁵ and – while in no way implying cognitive association over huge geographical areas – a persistently recurring linkage between wood and ritual behaviour can be identified in traditional religious systems, from the Caribbean to Madagascar and beyond.

The purposeful choice of particular metals or woods for divinatory equipment, implied by the passages from Herodotus and Tacitus, may occasionally be identified in the archaeological evidence of late Iron Age Britain, notably in the 'Doctor's Grave' at Stanway on the outskirts of Roman Colchester, a high-status male cremation-burial dated to about AD 50.⁹⁶ The grave is special for various reasons but, in the present context, it is particularly significant for the presence of eight rods, each flattened at either end, four made of iron and four of copper-alloy. Their practical function is unclear but it is possible that they could have been used in 'bundles', cast onto a surface and the pattern of resulting deposition read by ritualists in divination, just as described by Classical writers.

The Stanway grave (Fig. 30) has other indicators that the dead person might have been a 'holy man' or shaman: these include the presence of a metal bowl whose spout contained the remains of artemisia, a hallucinogen that might have been used to induce trance. Bearing in mind that a central role of many traditional shamans is that of healer, it is notable that the Stanway grave-goods also included a medical toolkit. At first glance, these instruments

were of standard Roman make but close scrutiny revealed that all but one were manufactured to a British design modified from Italian prototypes, as if it were important that the Stanway healer imprinted his own stamp on his personal medical equipment. It is even possible that, as a holy man, his healing tools had to be personalised for his own use. There is one further component to the Stanway grave that, again, might suggest that the deceased was a 'two-spirit' shaman, and that is the board game, presented as if two players were interrupted in mid-game. Could it be that the two sets of gaming counters represent the two aspects of the shaman's being, the earthly and the otherworldly dimension?

Ancient Druids and 'Modern' Siberian Shamans: A Story of Resistance Movements

For the principate of Tiberius Caesar did away with their Druids and that class of seers and doctors.

(Pliny)⁹⁷

Augustus had been content to prohibit any Roman citizen in Gaul from taking part in the savage and terrible Druidic cult; Claudius abolished it altogether.

(Suetonius)⁹⁸

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In the winter of 2003 I travelled up the coast of Norway on one of the Hurtigruten vessels that ply the route from Bergen to Tromsø and up to the North Cape providing a lifeline to the coastal towns and villages, for some of which the ships are virtually the only means of contact with the outside world, particularly in the winter months. These vessels also take tourists throughout the year and, although the February days were short, it was a magical experience, watching a weird black-and-white snowscape slide past as we floated by on an ink-black sea. The public saloons and walkways in the ship were decorated with a remarkable series of pictures painted by Sami artists. When, during a tour of the boat, I asked about the paintings, a disturbing but little-known aspect of Norway's recent history was revealed, namely its treatment of the Sami population of the far north, an area that is still sometimes called Lapland.⁹⁹ Until 1967, the Norwegian government had a Norwegianisation policy whereby Sami children were removed from their homes and homelands, forced to renounce their indigenous roots and their language, be adopted into Norwegian families and be educated as Norwegians. This strategy, strongly reminiscent of the way Aboriginal Australian children used to be 'de-Aboriginised', was designed to wipe out the minority cultures existing inside 'progressive' countries with strongly colonialist attitudes, which had little time for communities with alternative cultures and lifestyles living alongside their mainstream societies.

From at least the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Sami religious system and language were particular targets because both were and are always seen and used as foci for nationalism and self-determination. One of Norway's first missionaries, Thomas von Westen, made it his goal to eradicate both the Sami language and shamanism.¹⁰⁰ In about 1700, the Danish-Norwegian missionary initiative included the rounding up and confiscation of as many shaman's drums as could be found. The collection was dispatched to Copenhagen where, tragically, it was later destroyed in a fire.¹⁰¹ Somehow, such an event is an apt and terrible symbol of the quenching of the Sami shamanic spirit.

The first Russians encountered indigenous Siberian populations in the later sixteenth century when the two peoples clashed over the fur trade. In ensuing conflicts, the Siberian tribespeople usually came off best, and were given the epithet 'Hairy Killers' by their adversaries.¹⁰² In Soviet Russia, Siberian shamans were the subject of concentrated and often savage persecution, particularly under Stalin in the 1930s and 1940s,¹⁰³ for they were regarded as political leaders capable of fomenting resistance to the Communist regime. Many shamans were sent into exile (and into concentration camps known as 'gulags') in order to wipe out their influence on their people. As a consequence of these actions, most of the Khanty shamans lost their lives.¹⁰⁴ In his magical book, *Reindeer People*,¹⁰⁵ Piers Vitebsky discusses this persecution of Siberian

shamans and the destruction of the shamanistic system that included staging 'shallow re-enactments of shamanic trances' that mocked the spiritual world of the professional ritualist and his intimate relationship with such beasts as the reindeer.¹⁰⁶

Shamanic communities in Soviet territories were perceived as followers of a primitive religion worthy of historical documentation but also as a subject for scorn and ridicule: this attitude is illustrated by a Russian anti-shaman poster depicting a wild holy man dressed in pelts and brandishing a great drum before three kneeling worshippers who abase themselves beneath it.¹⁰⁷ However, the relationship between Russian Communism and Siberian shamanism was a complex and dynamic one because, alongside the picture of persecution, there was also a sense in which the Soviets, learning from the huge errors made by colonial powers in Africa, the United States and Australia, invoked a central (though all too often massaged or ignored) tenet of Communism, namely equality between all people, and thereby preserved to a degree – and sometimes even encouraged – the local mores of ethnic minorities. One of the reasons why Siberian groups have not gone the way of other colonised peoples is the inhospitable climate and terrain, which discouraged large-scale settlement by 'more developed' peoples from the south.¹⁰⁸

Is there a sense in which it is valid to make broad comparisons between some aspects of hostility to 'modern' shamans on the part of state-colonial regimes such as Soviet Russia and parts of European Scandinavia and attitudes to Gallo-British Druids held by the Roman imperial government? To a degree, I think the two situations are analogous because, in each case, the indigenous religious leaders were perceived as necessary targets for repression simply because of their power-bases, whether real or imagined. Traditional shamans combined the ability to heal with the spiritual knowledge needed to 'read' the spirit world and predict the future. Druids occupied a similar niche within their societies and, moreover, were regarded as the best educated with the highest intellect of any in their communities. Both shamans and Druids were seen as focal beings for resistance and subversion and were therefore singled out for destruction. In her seminal book, *The Druids*,¹⁰⁹ first published in 1966, Nora Chadwick challenged the view that the Druids were purposefully annihilated by Rome; she sums up the situation, as she saw it, in this way:

... the druids perished by slow strangulation, the inevitable result of the superimposition of a higher culture on a lower. The effective implementation of the Roman administrative system inevitably stifled the old-world traditional culture of Celtic Gaul.

I suspect that were Chadwick to be writing her book today, and particularly had she glanced across at cognate spiritual leaders in the traditional world, she

would have modified her opinion. Indeed, we see elsewhere in this book that, just as shamanic influence in Siberia and northern Scandinavia far outlasted the colonial repressions of Communist Russia and European Christianity, the Druids also survived, albeit in a muted manner, and enjoyed new careers as subverters of the western Roman Empire in the mid-later first century AD.¹¹⁰

A reference to a Sami shamanic survival speaks volumes about the power of local religions and their practitioners over long periods of time. It concerns Mount Skierfe, one of the most sacred places for the ancient Sami of northern Sweden. There is a cave beneath the mountain where, long ago, devotees made sacrifices and brought gifts to propitiate the local spirits. The cave was looted many years ago but, according to a comment made by a local man, Wille Läntha, in 1979, 'those who took a share of the finds later suffered all kinds of accidents and death'¹¹¹ long after the cave's active use as a holy of holies had ended. So, just as bringing gifts had appeased the spirits in the past, did those who robbed them recently invoke their curses? Did the Druids similarly retain their reputation for spiritual influence long after their power-bases had disappeared?

The Time Lords: Calendars, Festivals and Sacred Knowledge

*The Celtiberians and their neighbours on the north offer sacrifice to a nameless god at the seasons of the full moon, by night, in front of the doors of their houses, and whole households dance in chorus and keep it up all night.*¹

STRABO CONJURES up a colourful picture of noisy night-festivals, carousing in the streets, entire families turning out to sing and out-sing their neighbours, in honour of the full moon, in activities tantamount to ‘lunatic’ behaviour. In fact, there is little literary evidence for indigenous cult-practices in Iron Age and Roman Celtiberia,² and we have to be cautious in our acceptance of the Greek geographer’s testimony. After all, it is part of a scathing dismissal of Iberian people who, he tells us, have a ‘slovenly character’ and live ‘on a low moral plane’. He even includes a discussion of an unlikely characteristic – surely designed as further vilification – namely their alleged practice of bathing in and cleaning their teeth with vintage urine.³ So, set against such a backdrop, Strabo’s tale of moon-dancing might simply be another alienatory tactic to emphasise the barbarian nature of Iberian communities. However, the moon figures prominently in both literary and archaeological evidence, as a time-marker and a focus for sacred ceremonies. Strabo’s comments, like those of so many Classical authors, contain a mixture of fact, embroidered truths and fantasy.

Controlling Time

Time is not simple: it can, at least, be divided into measured time and time as experienced. ‘Measured time can be seen as a series of moments occurring in sequence and which can be counted . . . By contrast, the time of human experience is not purely successive and defies measurement. Past, present and future meet in complex forms, such that the present is only given meaning through retaining elements of the past and anticipating the future.’⁴ Acting in partial counterpoint to this distinction is the notion of time as both linear and cyclical.⁵ So the shape of time can be both a straight road, running from past through present to a future whose perspective vanishes into the unseeable

distance, and/or a circle whose perception depends on a rhythm of constant repetition and patterning. Cyclical time is easier to measure because it relies on the natural world; the phases of the moon, the seasons, the position of the sun in the sky are not affected by human behaviour, although the meaning of such natural, rhythmical phenomena varies according to their interpreters. Linear time is complex because it exists largely in cognitive arenas of recognition and, whilst given values – associated, for instance, with birth, ageing and death – are constants, the way they are manipulated, played out and acknowledged are, to an extent, context-specific.

But time can be perceived as far more complicated than either linear or cyclical measurement: Aristotle and Augustine, respectively, conceived of time as the 'time of the world' and the 'time of the soul'.⁶ For Aristotle, time was sequence (the 'time of the world'); for Saint Augustine, champion of the 'time of the soul', material time was secondary to a human-centred perspective of existence in a soul-centred pool of being in which an inner pulse of time relied more on the directional development of the persona than on external temporalities. We cannot know to what extent people living in communities, whose religious affairs were controlled by ancient Druids, appreciated the complexities and rhythms of different kinds of time. However, the perception of time as a multi-layered phenomenon may well have contributed to the enhanced prestige of the Druids as the only individuals capable of interpreting and managing both inner and outer time, as externally measured and mentally experienced. To use the term 'time lords' to describe the Druids is to acknowledge literary and archaeological evidence for the existence of esoteric knowledge based, in part, upon the ability to compute calendrical time.

In many past and present societies, time is perceived as something that needs to be controlled rather than a phenomenon that controls human behaviour. Often in these situations, because time is acknowledged as a force beyond human mastery, its management is seen as the preserve of those with religious authority, who have the right and power to engage in active dialogue with the supernatural world. Simbo communities in the Solomon Islands are each ruled by a *bangara*, or 'Big Man', who is recognised as possessing the power to control time, for he is the keeper of the calendar, and his reputation as such rests upon his ability to make accurate predictions of seasonal change. Such a skill is vital to the economic well-being of his community for seasonality is intimately bound up with the growth and production of particular forms of nut that are harvested as a commodity not for home consumption but as trade-goods.⁷ The authority of the *bangara* is intimately associated with his connectedness to the sacred and his access to esoteric and arcane knowledge.

Some West African living traditional societies are beset by constant worries and concerns associated with the apparent unpredictability of crop and livestock welfare and the persistent problem of maleficent spirit forces⁸ that seek

to wreak havoc in people's seasonal farming activity by means of flood, drought or disease, so disrupting the agricultural year. In the Central African state of Gabon, time is intimately bound up with the perception of the universe as organised, both chronologically and spatially, 'in such a way that the other world is both the past and the future, and the movement of human life matches that of the sun.'⁹ In West African cosmologies, too, a preoccupation with sacred time is very evident: 'In Edo art, a circled cross represents simultaneously the four cardinal directions, the four days of the week, and the unfolding of the day – morning, afternoon, evening and night – at the time of creation.'¹⁰ In these societies, time, divination and ideas concerning the worlds of humans and the spirits are represented in art by religious specialists, who both create and interpret the motifs involved in relationships with the supernatural world: underpinning much of this art is a preoccupation with celestial bodies as indicators of passing time.

Divination, the power to predict the will of the gods, is closely interwoven with the control of time, for it was the reputation of the ancient Druids as 'keepers of time, past, present and future'¹¹ that permitted them to enjoy the authority to forbid wars, adjudicate in disputes, act in judgement in cases of serious crime and banish malefactors. Their trained memories gave them power as curators of their people's traditions, their origins and their very identity and, for societies without recourse to written records, the Druids provided that link of past to present. Divination gave access to the future: the Aeduan Druid Diviciacus came to the Roman orator Cicero's attention because of his great skill in divining the future.¹² Successful prediction of the spirits' behaviour, and thus that of natural phenomena – the seasons and the weather – allowed the Druids to guide their people so that they made the most of the good times and avoided the worst of the bad.

The possible identity of the Stanway 'Doctor' as a Druid is based largely upon the discovery of objects placed in his grave that proclaimed his status as both skilled empirical healer and probably also diviner (Fig. 30).¹³ He died in about AD 50 and his remains were interred outside Roman Colchester. The surgical instruments accompanying him in the tomb indicate that in life he would have been equipped to perform both minor and major surgical procedures; the set of copper-alloy and iron rods may well have been used to cast lots, as described by Tacitus in his treatise on the Germans;¹⁴ the spouted strainer bowl contained artemisia, a medicinal herb that also acts as a psychotropic agent perhaps used in the attainment of shamanistic trance-states; a jet bead found in the grave might have contributed to the aura of spiritual power, for jet (probably from the region of Whitby in Yorkshire) was perceived to possess magical and talismanic qualities, probably because of its electrostatic properties.¹⁵ In many traditions, healing was and is closely connected to spiritual force, ill-health being perceived as a direct result of inimical spirit-action.¹⁶ As we saw in Chapter 5, the other

important set of objects in the Stanway 'Doctor's Grave' was the board game set out as if two people were in the midst of play. This may have acted as a referent for a 'two-spirit' person, an individual who straddled both the spirit and material worlds, someone like a shaman or Druid, but it may also represent time frozen and controlled.

Whilst the Stanway cremation-grave perhaps allows us a glimpse of the paraphernalia of a Druid who controlled the spirits by predicting their will, and thus the future, the Atlantic Iron Age in Scotland has produced evidence that might point to the special burial of an oracular figure. Investigation of human remains in the domestic contexts of this region has drawn attention to a striking find associated with a roundhouse in the far north of Scotland, at Crosskirk in Caithness, that was occupied between the fourth century BC and AD 80.¹⁷ In the centre of the building was a lidded stone cist 'which had been raised above the floor to accommodate the head and torso of a corpse seated in an upright position.' Such a grave is remarkably unusual in itself, but is reminiscent of the mummified seated burials placed around a shrine at Acy-Romance.¹⁸ Stranger still is the condition of the body, for it belonged to an elderly man who had enjoyed a robust physique in prime adulthood but in later life was 'so riddled with osteoarthritis that he appears to have become seriously disabled, while the condition of his teeth indicates that he was barely able to eat during the last years of his life.'¹⁹ This means that in effect this individual was 'curated' – cared for long after his viability as an independent member of the community was over. Moreover, when he died, his body was carefully placed to face towards the 'image' of the Old Man of Hoy, a natural sea-stack resembling a tall human figure, situated out to sea, off the equally impressive towering cliffs of the Orkney Island of Hoy. The body of the old man may well have been in place throughout the period of occupation of the building, deliberately positioned so as to maintain communication with the living even after death and possibly, therefore, fulfilling a role as an ancestral oracle, watching over his people.²⁰ His orientation towards the man-shaped stack off Hoy could even signify a perceived relationship between this elder and the sea-stack image itself. Both the Crosskirk man and the Old Man of Hoy were perhaps seen as enduring icons that looked after the people associated with them. We cannot tell for certain what role the Crosskirk man played in life but his care when he became infirm and the singular manner of his burial strongly suggest that he was a holy man, who retained protective power over his people after his death.

Night People: Walking on the Dark Side

They say also that the moon, as viewed from this island, appears to be but a little distance from the earth and to have on it prominences, like those of the earth, which are visible to the eye. The account is also given that the god

visits the island every nineteen years, the period in which the return of the stars to the same place in the heavens is accomplished.²¹

This passage from Diodorus Siculus is attributed to an original much earlier source, a lost text written by Hecataeus of Abdera in *c.* 330 BC.²² It is part of an account of the Hyberboreans (the ‘people beyond the North Wind’), a probably mythical people who allegedly lived in the far north and who worshipped Apollo within a ‘magnificent sacred precinct of Apollo’,²³ a circular temple that has been variously identified with the megalithic monument of Stonehenge or its Scottish ‘equivalent’ stone circle at Callanish.²⁴ Whether or not the Hyberboreans were a fictitious people (and whether or not their land can be identified with any part of Britain), the allusion to nineteen years is significant, for it coincides with the interval, known as the ‘Metonic Cycle’ that indeed measures the precise number of years that elapses before ‘the moon returns to the same phase on any given day in the year’.²⁵

Pliny’s Druidic ceremony which opens this book – involving mistletoe, ‘golden’ sickles, oaks and sacred bulls – was enacted on the sixth day of the moon. Pliny explains that such events were planned for this precise phase of the moon because it was waxing but yet to achieve its full strength, and that the moon was especially important to the Gauls and their Druids because their months, years and ‘ages’ (of thirty years) were calculated using lunar systems of measurement.²⁶ Pliny seems to have been well informed for, as is explored later on, there exists material culture that points strongly to a moon-centred cosmology (Fig. 31) associated particularly with the ‘synodic period’, that is the time between new moons (the calendar month).

The Gauls claim that they are all descended from Dis Pater: they say this is the tradition handed down to them by the Druids. For this reason they reckon periods of time not in days but in nights: in celebrating birthdays, the

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31 Iron Age gold coin from Drayton, Hampshire, depicting a horse with crescent moon above.

first of the month, and the beginning of the year, they go on the principle that night comes first and is followed by day.²⁷

Caesar is implying a calendrical reliance on the moon and, perhaps, the position of the stars, for he also alludes to the Druids' expertise in star-gazing.²⁸ In his *Works and Days*, the eight-century BC Greek farmer-poet Hesiod, who came from Boeotia, north of Attica, wrote of the way to read the night sky in planning the various major activities of the farming year:

When the Pleiads, Atlas' daughters, start to rise
 Begin your harvest; plough when they go down.
 For forty days and nights they hide themselves,
 And as the year rolls round, appear again
 When you begin to sharpen sickle-blades.²⁹

Whilst undoubtedly some stars like Betelgeuse were visible in the daytime,³⁰ star-gazers, whether Druids or farmers, would have relied heavily on nocturnal observation. Even though the moon is sometimes clearly demarcated in broad daylight, its shape and detail are far less sharply defined than at night. If calendrical calculations were closely connected to the lunar month, Caesar's remarks about the Gauls as 'night-people' make a good deal of sense. However, it is possible that the darkness of night itself may have been symbolically important to later prehistoric European communities. Tacitus describes a fascinating piece of night-behaviour among a Germanic people called the Harii, who lived in south-eastern Germany:

As for the Harii, they are superior in strength to the other peoples I have just mentioned, and they pander to their savage instincts by choice of trickery and time. They black their shields and dye their bodies black and choose pitch dark nights for their battles. The terrifying shadow of such a fiendish army inspires a mortal panic, for no enemy can stand so strange and devilish a sight. Defeat in battle always begins with the eyes.³¹

Whilst Tacitus' account of the Harii is not directly linked to calendrical or lunar concerns, the emphasis on night is important for it implies both deliberate intent to choose moonless nights for battle and to exploit their opponents' fears at having to face a 'phantom' army.

Moon-dancers and Fire-walkers

In 1988, I had the good fortune to attend a Prehistoric Society study-tour of southern Scandinavia, to see the Bronze Age rock-art clustered around both

the Swedish and Norwegian sides of the Oslo Fjord. Whilst the entire week of rock-gazing was an enchantment, perhaps the most powerful experience was the midnight moon-walk, for it is on a moonlit night that the shallow-relief carvings are most visible. As we walked, while elks rustled in the wooded darkness beside the road, the full moon bathed the gently sloping surface of a huge rock, picking out the images carved thereon with astonishing clarity. When we had visited the same rock during the daytime, it was quite hard to make out the iconography that covered its surface with intricate and complex motifs, for the light flattened and bleached the carvings, like over-exposed photographs, and some of the images were virtually invisible. It is as if the rock-artists designed their work to be seen principally – or sometimes only – by moonlight.

Carved by a Bronze Age artist on a remote rock-face at Järrestad in southern Sweden³² is a tall, willowy human figure who appears to be dancing: his arms are outstretched, the hands with palms upwards and thumbs extended; his legs are bent, he balances on tiptoe and the entire image seems shot through with sinuous movement, as if swaying to an inaudible beat (Fig. 32). The figure's gender is not physically evident but the sword, complete with its scabbard, jutting from the hip, and the dagger hanging from the waist, might suggest masculinity. The curiously small, bird-shaped head calls into question the figure's identity as fully human and it may – like many of its fellow images – depict a half-human, half-animal hybrid. Clustered around this pirouetting figure are numerous other motifs including people, human feet and ships but the dancer is the largest image there and he clearly dominates the scene, as its focal point. He alone of the human figures bears weapons and only he seems to have been endowed with any kind of individuality. The rock-face chosen for the carved dancer was a special place: it faced a series of burial mounds and it was in the vicinity of a spring-fed pool. But most interesting of all is the evidence for burning on the rock just where the flames would be caught in the reflection of the water and where, at night, they would imbue the figure of the 'dancer' with ghostly flickering light that would have caused it to 'move' as a swaying, shimmering image in the fire-lit (and sometimes moonlit) darkness. The wind in the flames and clouds passing over the moon's face would have given the image a dynamic quality so that it appeared and disappeared, as if it were emerging from the rock-face or sinking back beneath its surface. Perhaps the Järrestad dancer was a shaman, constantly moving between the material and supernatural worlds, the rock the membrane separating the two, and dancing in the moon- or fire-light as though in a trance-induced dream.³³

Calendars and Computations

The order of the calendar throughout the Latin year, its causes and the starry signs that set beneath the earth and rise again, of these I'll sing.³⁴

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32 The Järrestad Dancer, a Bronze Age rock-carving from southern Sweden.

The Augustan poet Ovid (most famous for his book the *Ars Amatoria* that was banned in Rome for its indecency) compiled his *Fasti* (literally 'good [divinely lawful] days') in the earliest years of the first millennium AD. Indeed, he complained that its production was disrupted by his exile, by imperial decree, to Tomis on the Black Sea in AD 8. The *Fasti* is a poem on the Roman calendar and, although it has only partially survived, over five thousand lines of it have been preserved.³⁵ Its importance here lies in part in its persistent reference to stellar calendrical calculation and in its inextricable intertwining of calendars with cult and the gods. The *Fasti* were the proper days and the opposite of the *Nefasti*, days on which it was inauspicious to undertake anything of importance because of religious prohibition. Early on in Ovid's

poem, he makes reference to what he called the 'felices animae' ('happy souls'), the wise people who founded the stellar calendar on which the *Fasti* is based. Ovid speaks of the 'felices animae' as belonging to a kind of golden age of purity, with 'sublime hearts', unsullied by sexual lust or drink and uncorrupted by the desire for wealth or earthly power.³⁶ There is a strong resemblance between Ovid's veneration for these early ascetics and the picture painted of the Druids as Noble Savages by some Classical writers, notably those who espoused the Alexandrian Tradition.³⁷

Ovid's *Fasti* is unique in its detailed evidence for Roman rituals, ceremonies and festivals all enacted at their rightful time, plotted by various means including cosmological study. But it is only one element in a large body of evidence for the close connection between calendars and the sacred in European antiquity. In the Old Icelandic calendar the seasons were ushered in by means of blood-sacrifice: notably in mid-October, in the hope of a good new year, and in mid-April, to mark the approach of good weather for fighting battles and to secure victory.³⁸ The publication of Ovid's *Fasti* itself was the product of a great change that had occurred in Rome in 304 BC for, before that date, knowledge of the calendar was secret, jealously guarded as the preserve of the priesthood and those in high office, and not made public until the Roman people demanded it and the calendar was thereafter displayed in the city for all (those who could read) to consult.³⁹ The most likely reason for such secrecy is that knowledge is power and only certain high-ranking and educated individuals had the right to its access.

A famous ancient Italian calendar from Antium is the *Fasti Antiaties Miores*, which survives as a sheet of plaster with letters painted on it in red and black, dating to between 84 and 46 BC.⁴⁰ The Italo-Roman calendar operated on similar principles to the Athenian calendar, the main purpose of which was to ensure that festivals were celebrated at the correct time. This was done by calculations designed to keep track of the days of the month to maintain step with the lunar cycle.⁴¹ The prime function of the Athenian calendar was to impose a regular system for the celebration of official religious festivals, in other words, to ensure that the right rituals were enacted at the most effective time, when the gods were most likely to listen.⁴² The organisation of this calendar was pivoted on the phases of the moon, the most sacred day being the first day of the month, 'Noumenia' (New Moon Day), and all the most important festivals were clustered in the first fortnight of the month, when the moon was waxing,⁴³ a custom similar to that recorded in Pliny's famous Druidical mistletoe ceremony.⁴⁴

The Roman and Athenian calendars situate evidence for the Gaulish calendars within a cognate system. Ovid's *Fasti* and the Antium inscription demonstrate the religious nature of calendrical computation and the cosmological foundations of festival calendars. The Athenian system is of especial

significance in so far as the emphasis on the lunar cycle and, in particular, on the waxing half of the lunar month, invites direct comparison with what we know of religious calendars in Gaul. The Classical evidence serves also to contextualise the Gallic material as associated with religious practitioners, almost certainly the Druids.

In 1897 in a field north of Coligny (Ain) some fragments of a statue depicting a young man (interpreted as a god) were discovered buried alongside several large pieces of broken sheet bronze bearing an inscription, in Roman letters but in the Gaulish language (Fig. 33). The deposit had clearly been deliberately interred for the traces of vegetable fibres found around the fragments of statue and inscription were almost certainly the remnants of a bag or other container.⁴⁵ The place where the deposit was made was probably woodland at the time, perhaps even a sacred grove. The bronze inscription proved to be part of a complex five-year lunar calendar and is by far the most complete example known from Gaul.⁴⁶ There were probably many others in ancient Gaul, for those that survive belonged to different polities. They may once have been displayed in sanctuaries, as temple-furniture, before they were deliberately concealed, probably either for safe-keeping or in ceremonial acts

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33 The Gallo-Roman ritual calendar from Coligny (Ain), France.

of closure but, in any case, the idea seems to have been to hide sacred texts that were first purposely destroyed, perhaps to neutralise or conceal their power or to render them useless to any profane persons who came across the pieces in order to avoid sacred knowledge falling into impious or unfriendly hands.

The Coligny calendar probably dates to the second or third century AD. If that is the case, then its presence, written in the Gaulish language, suggests the retention of a degree of Gallic religious independence, and this is reinforced by its divergence from the Julian calendar, the format used by Rome from the time of Caesar. The calendar may have been one of many, perhaps somewhat divergent, Gallic calendars in use at any one time, that were likely to have been based on esoteric knowledge passed down through oral tradition long before the Roman period, when it was first compiled in a set, written form.⁴⁷ The Coligny inscription covered a period of five lunar years of twelve months, each month having either twenty-nine or thirty days. But, in order to realign the lunar with the solar course, two intercalary thirty-day months were inserted every two and a half years.⁴⁸

Apart from the division of each year into months, the Coligny calendar refers to half-yearly festivals celebrated to mark the end of winter and the end of summer respectively. 'Samon' marked the boundary between the end of one year and the beginning of the next and was at the beginning of November;⁴⁹ 'Giamon' heralded the end of winter. Additionally, the calendar mentions 'Loudin' and 'Laget', the first describing the winter half of the year when the sun could be plotted as daily rising a little higher in the sky, the second the summer half when the sun sank lower in the sky each day.⁵⁰ Each month was divided into two fortnights, representing the waxing and waning moon, each two-week period separated from its opposite by the word 'Atenoux', meaning 'returning night'. The abbreviations MAT and ANMAT appear to relate to these moon-measured fortnights, the lucky half of each month corresponding to the daily augmenting of the moon's disc to full strength. So the Coligny calendar resonates both with the calendar in use by Athenians in the fifth century BC and with Pliny's statements⁵¹ concerning the Druidic lunar festival involving mistletoe-cutting and bull-sacrifice, on the sixth day of the waxing moon.

The detailed calendrical information recorded on the Coligny sheet indicates that learned classes in Roman (and, by implication, in pre-Roman) Gaul possessed a thorough knowledge of the movement of heavenly bodies in the nocturnal sky, a knowledge based on continual observation of nights, fortnights, months and six-monthly periods. Such practical astronomical acumen was most likely in the hands of the Druids, for Pliny's testimony ties in with that of Caesar⁵² in attributing celestial knowledge to these religious practitioners. The Coligny calendar itself was a practical computational tool: it had

holes for the insertion of mobile pegs by each listed day, to enable precise calculations to be worked out.

So what was the purpose of such calculations? Classical texts provide some clues, as in the case of the annual Druidic assembly near Chartres, recorded by Caesar as occurring on a specific date.⁵³ It is likely that, as in the case of the Athenian, Roman and Old Icelandic calendars, it was considered important, even crucial, that sacrifices and other public (and arcane) ritual acts were enacted at the right or most auspicious time because only then would the ceremonies be acceptable to the gods and therefore efficacious for the ritualist and his community. It seems likely that the significance of precise calendrical calculations lies in their influence on the farming year and the consonant social cycle.⁵⁴ What is particularly interesting about the Coligny artefact is its date for, despite its use of Gaulish rather than Latin, it was written well within the Roman period. In fact, it is a testament to the relationship between *romanitas* and *gallitas* in matters of cult. The use of Latin script was necessary within the tradition of indigenous pre-Roman non-literacy, but the employment of Gaulish words roots the inscription in native ritual and, indeed, the very power of the document probably depended on its retention of a sacred language. Prior to the introduction of Roman habitual recording by written texts, the circulation of these holy words relied on memory and their potency perhaps depended on their wholly oral transmission.⁵⁵

Many middle Iron Age short iron swords with hilts in the form of male human figures have upper blades decorated with celestial motifs that appear to have features in common with the computations of the Coligny calendar, notably the waxing and waning moon.⁵⁶ The astral decoration on this group of weapons conforms to a persistent pattern (Fig. 34): it consists of triple motifs, engraved or stamped onto the iron of the blade and then inlaid with gold; the three symbols comprise a crescent and disc set either side of a vertical median line and to the viewer facing the sword, the disc is on the right, the crescent on the left (so, of course, for the person holding the sword, these positions would be reversed). This obviously suggests the new and full moon separated by a line corresponding to the division between the waxing and waning lunar fortnights that, on the Coligny calendar, is represented by the word *ATENOUX*. Of course, it is also possible to propose an alternative explanation for the symbols, namely, that instead of new and full moons, what the crescent and disc represent are the moon and the sun, with the median line reflecting the division between night and day. It is even possible that the motifs were intended to read flexibly, so that both lunar months and light and dark could be symbolised at one and the same time or on different occasions. The rarity with which the human image was depicted in Iron Age Europe suggests that the anthropomorphic figures forming the sword-hilts might themselves have been representative of special beings or, at least, of particular

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34 Iron Age swords with lunate symbols.

authority, of a power that perhaps endowed the sword's possessor with the kind of esoteric, cosmological knowledge appropriate to rulers of the material world or, even more so, to Druids or similar individuals who could read the stars and thus predict and interpret the movements of heavenly bodies and, via this skill, hear the words of the gods.

Iron Age swords are not the only objects to have differential astral symbols marking out phases of time. To the early Iron Age (c. 600 BC) belongs a thin sheet-gold bowl from Zürich-Altstetten, decorated all over in repoussé stippling.⁵⁷ Left mirror-smooth, unstippled blank areas are the outlines of various motifs, including animals identified as hare and stags, together with alternating discs and crescents running as a frieze above them, just below the vessel's rim.⁵⁸ Not only do the astral motifs depict changing phases (between new and full moons or between the night moon and noon-day sun) but the animals themselves were apparently chosen to reinforce the symbolism of change. The hare is a nocturnal feeder, particularly visible on the bright, moonlit nights of antiquity when little else illuminated the darkness. It has intensely seasonal behaviour, with spring-time boxing matches between rival males and between females wishing to repulse unwelcome advances from lustful suitors, 'lunatic' running, jumping and pirouetting and gathering in large groups. 'There is no doubt that hares really do go mad in March' and particularly under a full moon.⁵⁹ A few years ago, the journalist Robin Page

observed an episode of this sensational spring behaviour: 'The other day I was watching this madness under a full moon. It was incredible. Fifteen hares running, boxing and generally behaving badly, as if they had been released too early from an animal mental institution.'⁶⁰ The seasonality associated with red deer is also very obvious, in the rhythm of shedding and growing of antlers but, additionally, like hares, they have a nocturnal dimension in that they forage for food by night as well as by day.⁶¹

Roman-period motifs that similarly exhibit moons in different phases or suns and moons together include an idiosyncratic form of decorated Gallo-Roman funerary monument that occurs in particular clusters in the territory of the *Mediomatrici* in Alsace. The tombstones have been dubbed 'stèles-maisons' because of their gabled, house-like form⁶² and some of them are decorated with circle- and crescent-motifs.⁶³ Other iconography shows episodes of time: a small Gallo-Roman altar from the *Comminges* region of the French Pyrenees depicts a yew frond and a row of three different forms of concentric circle that may be three sequential stages of development of the 'aril' (the red 'yew-berry'), namely the 'nut', 'apple' and 'acorn' (Fig. 35).⁶⁴ If this interpretation is correct, it places the *Comminges* altar alongside other Iron Age and Roman-period imagery that illustrate phases of time and, perhaps, seasonality.

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35 Stone altar from the *Comminges* region of the French Pyrenees depicting a yew frond and three 'arils' (berries) in different stages of development.

Aside to the Coligny calendar and its fellow calendrical artefacts are other cosmological referents associated with the behaviour of heavenly bodies. There may well be a connection between the circularity of British Iron Age roundhouses and the movement of the sun across the sky during the day and the summer half of the year, these structures acting as microcosmic universes. By far the majority of these roundhouses possess easterly or south-easterly entrances, perhaps aligned on the general and equinoctial sunrise and/or the midwinter solstice, and their circular form allowed for the daylight to move around the internal space in replication of the sun's traverse of the daytime sky. It seems plausible that the northerly private, sleeping, inactive half of the house was opposed to the lighter southerly, public, eating, active-living half.⁶⁵ Indeed, the distribution of artefacts within these spaces and the divergent methods of building seem to support this: at Thornwell Farm, near Chepstow in south-east Wales, a substantial Iron Age roundhouse exhibited considerably more permanent, massive construction of its easterly wall than that bounding its western arc, which was of far more ephemeral build, and inside the scatter of pottery and other domestic debris was concentrated to the east, around the entrance.⁶⁶

So how did ancient people and their religious leaders conduct themselves in accordance with these seasonal rhythms, all of which would have been hedged about with ceremonies and rituals designed to protect crops and livestock and to acknowledge cosmological forces?

A Time to Live and a Time to Die: Seasons and Ceremonies

Stand still, O Sun in Gibeon;
stand, O Moon, in the Vale of Aijalon.

So the sun stood still and the moon halted until a nation had taken vengeance on its enemies, as indeed is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stayed in mid heaven and made no haste to set for almost a whole day. Never before or since has there been such a day as this day on which the Lord listened to the voice of a man . . .⁶⁷

Joshua's defeat of the Amorites was enabled by God's holding still the sun and moon. Just before the battle, Joshua had spoken with Jahweh⁶⁸ and had asked him to make a sign to pledge the delivery of his people. In response, Jahweh stopped the sun and moon in their tracks and showed both Joshua and the Israelites that, with him on their side, they would prevail over their enemies, however unlikely this might seem. Time was used as a device to display the authority of God to his people and their adversaries.

A medieval Irish mythological story, related in the *Leabhar Gabhála* (the Book of Invasions), tells of an illicit love-affair between two divine beings, the

Daghda or 'Good God', the chief of the Irish pagan pantheon, and Boann (linked eponymously with the river Boyne). As a result of their illicit union, Boann becomes pregnant and, in order to conceal her infidelity, the two guilty deities cast a spell upon the sun so that it stands still in the sky for nine months, until their son Oenghus is born, so that the child is conceived and born on the same day.⁶⁹ So, by the power of divine will, it was believed possible to warp time, halt the sun in its tracks and telescope two events – conception and birth. As in the Old Testament encounter between God and Joshua, time stands still in response to a higher authority; the diurnal and monthly cycles are arrested. So Oenghus is named 'the young man', a Peter Pan-like figure with eternal youth. An alternative way of looking at objects like the moon-decorated middle Iron Age swords and the sepulchral iconography of Gallo-Roman Alsace is as presentations not of sequen time but as halted time, as a display of synchronous crescent and full moons or even as night and day frozen together, as if the highest sacral authorities, like the Druids, actually possessed the power to manipulate time.

Calendrical devices of whatever kind were clearly important for priests in divining the will of the gods, predicting future events (and, by so doing, constantly reaffirming their own authority) but it is likely that they were also crucial tools in managing the farming year and timing the festivals and gatherings that served as social, economic and spi[ritual] events. Clearly these were all ultimately associated with the means of survival and prosperity that depended upon the skill and knowledge of both farmers and their religious advisers. Arable and pastoral exploitation of the land each had their own seasonal cycles and some agricultural tasks would have necessitated communal activities to enable success. In crop-growth, reaping and haymaking may well have been carried out collectively, particularly if the weather was chancy and all speed was required to take advantage of a rare dry spell.⁷⁰ For livestock-management, the need for gatherings of people may have been even more crucial for it is unlikely that each person or community would have been able to support herds and flocks of sufficient size for a successful breeding programme. The sharing of such resources would work only if a regular, seasonally driven system of pastoral gatherings took place, where stock was exchanged, females impregnated and births overseen.⁷¹ Groups would have made seasonal journeys between upland and lowland areas to take advantage of summer pastures and winter grazing. Such important events and, especially, perhaps, the shifting of settlements – together with their household gods, we can imagine – would at least have had the sanction of the spirit world via religious specialists such as the Druids, who would know when was the most efficacious time for these moves by means of astronomical observation and the employment of calendrical tools such as the Coligny calendar.

Seasonal patterning of behaviour and, in particular, the gatherings of otherwise scattered communities at nodal points in the year, are common socio-economic devices, and analogies to the activities of Iron Age Britons and Gauls can be identified within traditional societies all over the world. One example will suffice, that of the San Bushmen of southern Africa, where 'a seasonal pattern of aggregation and dispersal' is observed. In the dry winter season, communities split up because there is insufficient water to sustain large bands; they come together in larger groups during the wet summers, when there is water aplenty, and this is the time when congregational rituals, including healing ceremonies, take place that serve to strengthen kinship ties, reaffirm identities and undertake acts of communion with the spirits whose efficacy lasts through the 'dispersal period' when the groups disaggregate.⁷²

In the sixth century AD Gregory, Bishop of Tours, wrote a treatise entitled *The Glory of the Confessors*⁷³ in which he described a third-century agricultural festival in which a Burgundian fertility goddess, Berecynthia, was carried through the countryside surrounding Autun on a wagon 'for the preservation of their fields and vineyards.'⁷⁴ We are reminded irresistibly of the Germanic goddess Nerthus described by Tacitus as trundling around her fields in a cart (that normally resided in a sacred island grove) for a festival that lasted a few days, while all iron objects were locked away and there was general merrymaking and rejoicing among her people until the somewhat more sombre finale, in which the slaves allocated the task of washing the sacred wagon were drowned in the purification lake because they had looked upon the divine.⁷⁵ Tacitus does not say at what time of the year the Nerthus ceremony took place but it would undoubtedly have been important that it was enacted at precisely the right time. The involvement of clergy is noted by Tacitus, who says that the priest alone could touch the goddess's sacred cloth and he attended her in her cult-wagon on her journey around the countryside until safely back in her holy of holies.

In the mythological literature of early historical Ireland are contained detailed references to four important seasonal festivals: Samhain (beginning of November), Imbolc (beginning of February), Beltane (beginning of May) and Lughnasadh (beginning of August).⁷⁶ Although the evidence for these four calendrical events is almost exclusively Irish, there is some indication that they may similarly have been celebrated in Gaul and Britain. For example, the 'Samon' inscribed on the Coligny calendar is almost certainly to be identified with Samhain; a common link-name for the Gaulish Apollo was Belenus, the 'bel' root-word meaning brightness, while Beltane was the spring/summer bonfire festival. Lughnasadh, too, shares root-words with place-names such as Lugdunum (Lyon) and Luguvalium (Carlisle), both perhaps associated with the Irish god Lugh after whom the harvest-festival of Lughnasadh was named.

The Druids were closely involved in these Insular festivals, as portrayed by the medieval monastic scribes who compiled the Irish prose tales: the twelfth-century prose text known as the *Dinnshenchas* contains the story of a Druid called Mide who antagonised fellow Druids by lighting a Beltane (summer-eve) fire at Meath that spread all over Ireland, thus encroaching on local Druidic authority. In response to their hostility, Mide cut out all the dissenting Druids' tongues and tossed them into his midsummer bonfire. By so doing, he effectively destroyed them, for their power lay in their eloquence and the dissemination of their knowledge through the spoken word. Beltane was celebrated particularly at an annual assembly that took place at Uisnech in Westmeath, deemed to be the very centre of Ireland.⁷⁷

The great end-of-year festival Samhain was traditionally celebrated with huge politico-religious assemblies at the royal site of Tara, at which pastoral rituals, fairs, markets and other communal activities took place. Samhain was an odd time, a period of no being, when the normal laws governing the material world were temporarily suspended at the boundary between two years, time stood still and the spirit world mingled with that of humans, sometimes with devastating effect. Samhain was critical, too, for the Irish farming year, for that was the occasion when livestock were rounded up and decisions were made about slaughtering or keeping animals over the lean winter months.⁷⁸

Dying for a Reason: Dying for a Season?

Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eyelids,
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country nearby
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach . . .⁷⁹

This is from *The Tollund Man*, Seamus Heaney's poem about the winter death of the bog-man. Several victims of ritual murder followed by placement in peat-bogs had been killed during the autumn or winter. One of the bodies from Lindow Moss (Cheshire) contained large numbers of hazelnuts,⁸⁰ while the absence of fruit, fresh herbs and berries in the Grauballe Man's gut implies that he consumed his final meal in wintertime (see Chapter 8).⁸¹ The enactment of high-profile sacrificial rituals in the lean times, when food might be scarce and the cold and darkness pervasive, makes a great deal of psychological sense: then rural communities would naturally feel at their most

vulnerable, and in greatest need for support from the gods and for relief from hard everyday life by the conducting of ceremonies and festivals. It might even be that the 'pause' between life and death, the prolonging of the point of death by sacrificers,⁸² may have been intimately connected with perceived pauses in time, at the boundaries between seasons, the end or beginning of a new year or even at equinoxes and solstices or at the zenith of the full moon. In this way, ritualists such as the Druids may have been curators of time, able to make given moments hesitate before moving on.

Knowledge of time was one of the central focuses of Druidic power. Their mastery of the heavenly bodies as they moved around the sky, of the seasons and the rhythms of the natural world, were part of their store of esoteric erudition that made them so indispensable to the prosperity, or very survival, of their people. They were the keepers of the sacred calendars, interpreters of the mysterious universe and lords of time.

Holy Ground

SANCTUARIES AND SACRED LANDSCAPES

He [Posidonius] also says that there is a small island in the ocean, not far from the land, lying off the mouth of the Loire; and the women of the Samnites inhabit it; they are possessed by Dionysus and propitiate the god with initiations and other sacred rites; and no man may land on the island, but the women themselves sail out from it and have intercourse with men and then return. It is their custom once a year to remove the roof from their temple and to roof it again the same day before sunset, each woman carrying part of the burden; but the woman whose load falls from her is torn to pieces by the others, and they carry the pieces around the temple crying out 'euoi' and do not cease until their madness passes away; and it always happens that someone pushes against the woman who is destined to suffer this fate.¹

CAN WE believe any part of Strabo's bizarre account, or was it pure invention? Whether or not he is describing a genuine ritual re-roofing ceremony it is clear that in his account of the weird, ecstatic behaviour of these holy women the author was profoundly influenced by the Maenads, the demented female followers of the Dionysiac cult.

Sacred space is important for it is the arena where the world of the spirits touches that of humans. Holy ground belongs to the gods and it was here that ancient priests were able to access the supernatural world. So where did the Druids and fellow priests play out their liturgies and ritual actions? We have two points of reference: accounts of shrines in the Classical texts, and the archaeological record for places in which professionally orchestrated ritual activities or events, such as sacrifice and votive offerings, persistently took place.

Strabo's description of the Loire island sanctuary is highly significant because it constitutes one of the very few ancient literary references to a built temple (as opposed to a natural sacred place such as a grove) within the heartland of Iron Age Gaul. Indeed, the author's account of a roofed Gallic building is virtually unique.² Strabo's (or Posidonius's) account provides a wealth of detailed information, much of which resonates with themes discussed elsewhere in this book: the island location, exclusivity (based primarily on gender

at Strabo's site), spiritual possession (presumably induced by hallucinogens, alcohol or other trance-agents), construction and decommissioning rituals, the significance of time, human sacrifice, dismemberment and divination (prediction of the sacrificial choice).

The notion of limited access is important: Strabo's women had put themselves in self-appointed exile from the world, immured on an island that was permeable in one direction only, in so far as they could rejoin mainland society as they wished and then return, but no one else could make this journey and visit the holy island. It was as if these priestesses dwelt in the Otherworld. We do not know precisely who these 'Samnitae' were, whether they belonged to a specific tribal group or to an exclusive religious order on whom the name was bestowed. A people called the Samnites occupied lands in central Italy and were an offshoot of the Sabines, whose women were the object of an infamous legendary episode in the earliest period of Roman history, when a dearth of women in the fledgling city-state of Rome led to the carrying off of young female Sabines – the 'Rape of the Sabine Women'.³ It can only be wildly speculative to establish links between these Maenad-like women, who tore their sister-priestesses to pieces in their annual architectural reaffirmation of their faith, and the wise male Druidic elders, full of *dignitas* and *gravitas*, whom we encounter in the writings of Caesar and his peers. Even if these holy women and their extreme behaviour really existed, they are a world away from the Druids and deserve our attention only in as much as they may reflect the presence of many different kinds of clergy in late Iron Age Gaul.

Enchanted Woods: The Sanctity and Secrecy of Groves

No one shall have gods to himself, either new gods or alien gods, unless recognised by the State. Privately they shall worship those gods whose worship they have duly received from their ancestors. In cities they shall have shrines; they shall have groves in the country and homes for the *Lares*.⁴

Cicero was writing some time between 52 and 46 BC. The context is a discussion of the religious laws of his ideal state. Of course, the author drew heavily on his own experience of Roman state religion but it is also clear that the work contains much original thinking. The comments on Gallo-British holy places in the texts of Tacitus, Lucan and Pliny appear to present sacred groves as stock themes of barbarism so Cicero's endorsement of these natural spiritual foci as right and proper is all the more interesting. Cicero was one of the most sophisticated and urbane men of late Republican Rome, and, if sacred groves were acceptable to him, we can be sure that they were not regarded as necessarily associated with 'backwoodsmen'. What many commentators from the

Greek and Roman worlds appear, then, to have done, is to have used the theme of sacred groves as a prism for expressions of barbarism and turned them into weird, outlandish centres for primitive cults by seasoning them liberally with the spice of human sacrifice.

The restricted access to holy ground noted in Strabo's account of the Samnitae is a feature of sacred groves mentioned in a range of Classical texts that deal with religious customs in Germany, Gaul and Britain towards the end of the Iron Age.⁵ Indeed, these groves provide the least equivocal evidence for sacral arenas from which Druids might have operated. Lucan's description of the grove near Massilia desecrated and destroyed by Caesar's soldiers in 48 BC includes the statement that 'nobody dared enter this grove except the priest',⁶ implying that the wooded place was so charged with spirit-force as to be dangerous to humans unprotected by their status as religious authorities. In the same passage Lucan hints at the horror of the grove, its altars strewn with 'hideous offerings' and its trees spattered with human blood.

Tacitus comments repeatedly on the seclusion and exclusivity of sacred groves among the Germanic peoples. For instance, he says that 'their holy places are the woods and groves, and they call by the name of god that hidden presence which is seen only by the eye of reverence'.⁷ Furthermore, in speaking of these sacred places⁸ he goes on to describe how certain pure white horses, renowned for their divinatory powers, were kept in these forest sanctuaries. These beasts were kept pure and unsullied and never used for labour but were harnessed to a sacred chariot and driven by a priest or king who noted every neigh or snort and interpreted these sounds as holy proclamations of the future. All this is recounted by Tacitus who betrays no surprise at such bizarre behaviour (although it bears some resemblance to the weird antics of the emperor Caligula, who reigned before Claudius and, in one of his madder moments, announced his plan to make his horse Incitatus a consul).⁹

Tacitus and Dio Cassius record that Britain, too, had its fair share of sacred groves. These ranged from the 'groves devoted to Mona's barbarous superstitions', with their altars dripping with human gore,¹⁰ to the grove of a named British deity, Andraste (or Andate), worshipped by Boudica in London following her sack of the city in AD 60/61 and prior to her final confrontation with Suetonius Paulinus' forces in pitched battle.¹¹ According to Dio, the sacrificial rites conducted in honour of this war-goddess were associated with atrocities committed against the women of Roman London, acts that were probably deliberately designed as direct 'eye-for-an-eye' retaliation for the rape of Boudica's daughters:

... they hung up naked the noblest and most beautiful women, cut off their breasts and sewed them into their mouths so that they seemed to be eating them. Then they impaled them on sharp stakes which ran the length of their

bodies. All this they did to the accompaniment of sacrifices, feasting and orgies in their various sacred places, but especially in the grove of Andate. This is the name they gave to Victory, and they regarded her with particular reverence.¹²

Despite the 'feasting and orgies' taking place in Andraste's *locus sanctus*, it is highly likely that this grove, like others, was controlled with access restricted to the cognoscenti. Groves are places that are dark, impenetrable and naturally secret, but the horrific sounds of carnage emanating from such spaces undoubtedly sent a frisson of terror through the surrounding landscape, all the more frightening because it was invisible. The persistent link between sacred groves and human sacrifice made by Classical chroniclers on Gaul and Britain is associated not only with secrecy but with the groves as belonging to the spirit world rather than that of humans, thus permitting of acts such as ritual murder that, perhaps, could only be condoned outside human spaces. The idea of sacred groves as divine places is borne out by Lucan's description of the Massilian grove,¹³ where norms were flouted and strange things happened. According to Lucan, this was a place deserted by birds and wild animals, where trees defied nature by not stirring in storms but moved instead for no apparent reason, or spontaneously burst into flames that did not consume them. Here the ground shook with earthquakes that did not affect the surrounding land, trees uprooted and replanted themselves and the ground muttered and groaned to itself as though possessed. Lucan's grove, then, was apart, separated from earth-world and, just as an embassy in a foreign land belongs not to that land but to the place providing that embassy, the grove belonged to 'other', spirit, beings.

That spiritual energy attaches to sacred groves is a belief found in many societies. The Muslim saints' tombs and burial grounds in the Maghreb region of Morocco are situated within sacred groves, special places, preserved in an otherwise intensively cultivated landscape, that sustain a particular range of plant and animal species not found elsewhere in the region.¹⁴ The preservation of these sites as holy places reinforces their sanctity, producing ultimately a rich and diverse ecology. Their ancient status as places of veneration is mirrored in a modern context, not least because of their contribution to nature conservation! Within such holy burial grounds, the animals and plants of the groves have acquired a protected status reflecting their crucial role in the assertion and reassertion of their communities' identity. These groves possess a dual role in expressing the worlds of the intellect and the imagination. Like the Maghreb burial sites, the ancient Gallo-British groves would have been left uncultivated, as hallowed ground, and thus would have been home to a range of species absent elsewhere in the local countryside. The Maghreb grove-sites are, in a sense, analogous to those Gallo-British sacred groves mentioned by Tacitus, Lucan and Dio: separated from the world around them, they are different and special because of their status as holy, 'out-of this-world' places.

A further parallel is to be found among village Hindu communities in Kerala, South India, where the grove (*kaavu*) has an identity and function that contrast with the ordered space of the built sanctuary, although both are holy. Groves, as wild, uncultivated spaces, are associated with instability, risk, chaos and rampant fertility, uncontrolled by humans because here the spirits have free rein. A powerful spirit force emanates from these natural tree-clustered spaces. *Kaavus* are edgy places, often situated on the boundaries of settlements, providing an anarchic counterpoint to the order of the built temple, which is in the centre of inhabited space. In Kerala, the inner/outer divide is also associated with status and caste, for the *kaavu* is linked with the *Pulayas*, the lowest caste of society whose members live on the edges of the settlements. Incidentally, if a constructed temple falls into disuse (perhaps because the focus of the settlement has shifted), it reverts to *kaavu* which, despite its own instability, therefore appears to be the default status, so the built sanctuary is potentially temporary, always in danger of returning to its original wild *kaavu* state.¹⁵ Keralan *kaavus*, like the sacred groves of Lucan, Tacitus, Dio and Pliny, are power-houses, generating sacred energy that is the cause both of their veneration and their peril.

Building Sacred Groves

'Builders change the world'.¹⁶ By the building of specialised ritual structures people alter their cosmological environment. Constructed shrines represent a significant difference in attitude to and perception of the sacred from those associated with worship in (and of) natural places. The enclosure of holy ground might be read as an act of separation, an acknowledgement of polarities between 'inside and outside'¹⁷ and a recognition that the built sanctuary itself might influence the manner of ritual enactment and the manifestation of the divine presence. So, while both sacred groves and constructed shrines involve the enclosure of cult-places, the built environment involves a manipulation and, to a degree, a constructive control of sanctity.

The main characteristic of a grove is its serried ranks of tall trees. Certain Iron Age and early Roman-date sites in Britain suggest that natural sacred groves might have been emulated by the construction of copies built from felled timber uprights, as if the idea of the form was deemed sufficiently important to make artificial copies of genuine natural wooded spaces. A potential candidate for such a site is at Fison Way, Thetford (in north-west Norfolk), an undoubted *locus sanctissimus* whose sacrality was maintained over more than three centuries, albeit with recognisable changes in behaviour over time (Fig. 36). Fison Way, situated in a relatively remote region, was a special Icenian site in the later Iron Age and early Roman period.¹⁸ Long after its demise, in the 60s AD, it was chosen for the deliberate deposition of the

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36 Plan of Fison Way, Thetford.

Thetford Treasure, one of the richest and finest hoards of precious metalwork from fourth-century Britain,¹⁹ buried deliberately close to the early enclosure. The siting of this treasure – perhaps late Roman temple offerings, including a range of silver spoons dedicated to local and Italian deities – suggests that Thetford was a ‘persistent’ place, a continually or episodically venerated space that retained its odour of sanctity for over three hundred years.

One of the reasons for the maintenance and revitalisation of Fison Way as a sacred place in the late fourth century may have been its iconic status as a symbol of British Icenian resistance against *romanitas* in the mid-first century AD. But key to this site as a *locus sanctissimus* is its possible function as a Druidic centre at the time of the Boudican Rebellion. The ritual enclosure at Fison Way was initially constructed in the late Iron Age but it saw a phase of massive refurbishment and embellishment in the AD, shortly after the Icenian uprising against the Roman governor Ostorius Scapula in AD 47,²⁰ and it is

difficult not to see a direct link between the two events. This new phase involved the enclosure of 32,000 square metres, the demarcation of an enormous rectangular space, by a bank-and-ditch, with another smaller one inside it. In the context of discussion about sacred groves, the interest lies in the treatment of the space between the two earthworks, for it was 'sown' with a series of nine parallel palisades made of huge timber uprights flanking an east-facing entrance guarded by a massive wooden gateway. It is not impossible that these serrated ranks of posts were erected to form a kind of artificial sacred grove.

The structure at Thetford was built on Gallows Hill, carefully chosen as the highest point in the surrounding landscape, and the huge enclosure, bristling with upright timbers, must have been an impressive sight on the skyline for miles around. Fison Way may well have been a sanctified place built primarily as an Icenian assembly,²¹ where the elders, rulers and religious leaders of the confederation met and – maybe – hatched the plan to rebel against Rome in AD 60. Despite its monumental construction, the site is unlikely to have functioned as a military stronghold, for whoever used Fison Way in the early post-conquest years, and for whatever purpose, left behind the residue of their presence not in military equipment but in the nearly fifty brooches, dropped from the cloaks or robes of those who gathered there. In such a context, it may not only have fulfilled its function as a meeting-place but its very construction, involving the entire community in an act of solidarity, may have been equally important. The process of monumental building in earlier prehistory is believed to have been associated with just such statements of community and belonging. It is thought, for instance, that the great, enigmatic Neolithic monument at Silbury Hill in Wiltshire, part of the complex ceremonial landscape that included Avebury, the Sanctuary and Stonehenge, may have been charged with symbolic significance at least in part because of what it represented in terms of time, effort and the control of local resources,²² an investment of which its creators and their communities would be constantly reminded whenever they looked at the great white hill of chalk gleaming in the green landscape.

If the Fison Way site represents a ceremonial monument with a sacropolitical purpose, it may have had a function similar to the pan-Druidic assembly recorded by Caesar.²³ But it is what happened to the site immediately after the Boudican Rebellion that is particularly significant, for its fate strongly suggests that it had stood as a symbolic statement of Icenian self-identity and resistant ideology. The structure was systematically destroyed, not by fire but by being purposefully dismantled, timber by timber, and its ditches filled in. It was as though the power and self-determination of the builders was being deliberately nullified and erased from landscape and memory. Fison Way's destroyers were the Roman military: they left behind their hardware, perhaps deliberately, to signify conquest and control of a ceremonial centre that had been constructed by the Iceni, the initiators and main

perpetrators of the Boudican Revolt, a chasmic episode in the history of the Roman Empire that nearly cost Nero the entire province of Britannia.²⁴

The idea that the architectural form of Fison Way, Thetford might have been designed to imitate a natural sacred grove is rendered more plausible by the identification of similar sites in Iron Age and Roman contexts in Britain and Europe. A series of hollows scooped out of the chalk and filled with loam during the first century AD formed the second phase of the Romano-British temple precinct at Lowbury Hill, Oxfordshire. This might represent tree-root cavities, and their spacing and regularity could be construed as the result of deliberate close-planting of trees in order to mimic a sacred grove. The religious nature of the site is borne out by the erection of a built shrine in the second phase of use, and here the body of a woman, her face deliberately 'erased' by the removal of her facial bones, was deposited, perhaps as a sacrificial victim or maybe as a special burial after her natural death.²⁵ Other artificial groves may be suggested at sites with ranks of timber uprights, especially in instances where some were structurally unnecessary. So the celebrated late Iron Age site at Navan Fort in County Armagh, identified as the place where Emain Macha, capital of the ancient kingdom of Ulster, was established in the early historical period, might have possessed such an artificial 'forest' in the huge 'Forty Metre' building, erected on the summit of a small drumlin, which contained more than two hundred great oak posts. At the centre of this monument was an enormous oak timber, 55 centimetres in diameter and more than 12 metres high, which had been felled in 95–4 BC. It was clearly a sacred place: near the bottom of the hill, in a small lake called Loughnashade, was a set of four beautifully crafted and decorated bronze trumpets which had been deposited, perhaps following a ceremonial event.²⁶

Sanctuaries and Head-curation in the Lower Rhône Valley

The Boii stripped his body, cut off the head and carried their spoils in triumph to the most hallowed of their temples.²⁷

No Classical writer makes a direct link between the Druids and headhunting. Nonetheless, the severing and ritual use of enemy heads among the Gauls is a persistent theme in many ancient sources.²⁸ If we can accept Caesar's remark that the Druids 'have control over public and private sacrifices and give rulings on all religious questions', it is likely that – if we can believe Livy and Strabo – the Druids were either actively or tacitly involved in rites associated with the deposition of human heads in sacred places. Strabo's testimony is significant for, although he does not specifically connect head-taking to temples, he does refer to their placement at house-entrances, as if to emphasise both their public display and their role in protecting inhabited space and its occupants.

At the Greek colony of Marseille in southern Gaul (founded *c.* 600 BC), local communities adopted the Greek custom of building substantial stone sanctuaries, such as those at Entremont and Roquepertuse, even though the material culture of the rituals enacted therein was not Greek but Gallic.²⁹ Both the iconography and human remains found at these temples indicate a persistent focus on human heads, their collection, curation and deposition (Fig. 37). All this has long been known but recent work shows the longevity of such activities and the identification of dynamics of cult-life that developed over three or more centuries.³⁰

On the basis of the 'simple' fashioning of the heads, the so-called 'head-pillar' from Entremont has been identified as one of the first images in the sequence, perhaps carved as early as *c.* 500 BC. The stone began its life upright, displaying a 'tree of skulls', with incised lines for the eyes and noses and, usually, with mouths absent, perhaps representing trophy heads. Here, the blankness of facial expressions leads us to believe that it was not the intention to represent individuals but rather to depict heads in quantity.³¹ The early carvings probably relate to a period of sporadic inter-tribal skirmishing,

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37 Statue of a warrior holding a severed human head, from Entremont; fourth–third century BC.

before these petty fiefdoms coalesced under the powerful hegemonic leadership of the Saluvii, the group who eventually emerged as the controlling force in the region. But later in its biography, the stone had another purpose, for it was re-used as a lintel in the second century BC, perhaps because the carved heads carried ancestral power that endowed the entrance of which the stone became part with properties of guardianship and control of access; the trophy heads incised thereon thus attained a new, protective symbolism in which the enemy (represented by their severed heads) were used by their vanquishers to protect their temples from malign influences.

The archetypal simplicity with which the skulls on the Entremont pillar were rendered contrasts sharply with the group of large warrior-statues from the site identified as belonging later in the sequence, to the third century BC,³² each of which is depicted holding a cluster of severed human heads. The difference between sculptures lies in the level of detail: the head-pillar bears schematic, anonymous-looking heads, while those held by the warrior have individual hairstyles, facial expressions and headgear, as if to endow each with a unique identity. The heads of the warriors, too, are individualised, as if to image specific warlords. This development, from anonymity to individual identity, is possibly a reflection of the changing society of the region and indicative of the stamp of authority of the newly empowered Saluvian confederation, each severed head perhaps representing a defeated tribe or its leader.

Probably to the same period of Saluvian supremacy, represented in the iconography of the warriors with clusters of heads at Entremont, belong the stones carved with niches containing real severed heads that were found at several of the shrines where the head-iconography occurs. The most notable site is the cliff-top sanctuary at Roquepertuse whose stone portico is striking in its punctuation by such skull-niches. Some of the heads had demonstrably sustained serious, if not lethal, injuries, and their presence is explained in terms of 'real violence'.³³ The sites that reveal evidence for the collection of genuine heads occur in 'precisely the area in which Posidonius travelled in the early first century BC, and to which his heavily quoted account of Celtic head-hunting relates'.³⁴ Strabo's acknowledged recycling of Posidonius in his account of Gallic headhunting means that Posidonius' own observations have come down to us, all the more valuable because they were gained from his first-hand witnessing of ritual behaviour in southern Gaul.

The Roquepertuse portico, with its grisly burden of heads, probably placed in the niches when still fleshed, where they rotted *in situ* (the decomposition and resultant stench perhaps themselves charged with symbolism), has a function similar to the re-used skull-pillar from Entremont. In each case, the heads (depictions or the real thing) possessed 'edgy' functions that were protective but also, perhaps, significant in reflecting the head as a boundary-object in its own right; for decapitation and head-taking may well have been deliberate acts

designed to prevent the proper rite of passage of the dead, to disrupt the flow of the soul from the living body to the afterlife. In this way, the head represented the dwelling-place of the human soul and its severance from the body cut the link and, perhaps, left the soul in limbo. The head as a boundary symbol is reinforced at Roquepertuse by the Janus-head (a double head, each face looking in the opposite direction) that topped one of the lintels of the sanctuary.³⁵

The evidence from shrines such as Entremont and Roquepertuse suggests that the beheading of enemies, the collection of their heads, their curation – perhaps for decades or even centuries – and their deposition in sacred places were the result of complex, orchestrated rites that recurred over time and symbolised an inextricable melding of violence and ritual behaviour within the context of warfare and contested power-bases. The treatment of the crania within the portico-niches at Roquepertuse tells us something else about the reason for their presence, for the evidence is that they became part of the very fabric of the temple building. Analysis of the monumental stonework and of the surface of the embedded skulls indicates that the masonry was decorated with painted designs that encompassed not only the stonework but also the crania themselves,³⁶ as if to demonstrate that, in a sense, the heads had become fused with the very fabric of the sanctuary. We cannot know whether the Druids or their counterparts presided over these singular southern Gallic shrines but it is worth drawing attention to Caesar's comment about the Druids' role as keepers of memory and tradition.³⁷ One of the features of these Lower Rhône Valley sanctuaries was the persistent curation of images and human remains over time, behaviour that fits well with Druidic guardianship of ancestral tradition.

The 'War-sanctuaries' of Middle Iron Age Gaul

When they have decided to fight a battle, it is to Mars that they usually dedicate the spoils they hope to win; and if they are successful, they sacrifice the captured animals and collect all the rest of the spoils in one place. Among many of the tribes it is possible to see piles of these objects on consecrated ground. It is most unusual for anyone to dare to go against the religious law and hide his booty at home, or remove any of the objects that have been placed on such piles. The punishment laid down for that crime is death by the most terrible torture.³⁸

The theme of trophy-taking and subsequent dedication to the gods identified at the Saluvian temples around Massalia takes a different but related path in the Gallic heartlands further north. If Caesar is to be believed, at the time he was writing his *Commentaries* it was customary for combatants within warring communities to collect the arms and armour of enemies slain in battle and to offer them up to the gods of war in thanksgiving for victory. Caesar himself

very probably witnessed the heaping up of damaged and battle-scarred weapons and shields, perhaps in open sanctuaries. He also comments that such acts of dedication were accompanied by the sacrifice of livestock, the erstwhile possessions of the defeated. Such beasts would presumably have included war-horses and fighting dogs, animals that actually took part in battle, but also baggage animals (mules and oxen) and, perhaps, sheep and goats that were brought with marching armies as meat on the hoof. Furthermore, domestic animals would have been rounded up in the course of raiding expeditions and some of these, too, may have been sacrificial victims, though it is hard to believe that none of the booty thus won was ever brought home and enjoyed. Several sanctuaries in northern Gaul bear witness to ritual events that closely resemble those described in Caesar's account, notable among which are those at Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise) and Ribemont-Sur-Ancre (Somme).³⁹ Curiously, there seems to be no sign of one form of booty one might expect to find: women. They must have been part of the spoils of combat but they do not appear to have been dedicated to the Gallic gods of war.

The temple of Gournay-sur-Aronde (Fig. 38) was in the tribal territory of the Bellovaci; it was situated in a significant location on the boundaries between this polity and that of three others.⁴⁰ The shrine was within an Iron Age fortified place (an *oppidum*) and near to a stream which, at the site of the sanctuary, formed an enormous pool. The sacred place began life as an enclosure, built during the fourth century BC and, by the next century, it had become a constructed temple that continued in use until its – apparently – voluntary and systematic clearance and closure just before Caesar's Gallic War in the 50s BC. Whilst the next three centuries were seemingly without cult-use, in the fourth century AD, a small rural temple was erected in the exact centre of the original enclosure,⁴¹ indicating the reversion and remembered sanctity of the site.

Despite the large geographical distance between the shrines of the Lower Rhône Valley and the northern Gallic sanctuary of Gournay, there are some shared features, particularly with respect to boundaries, the taking of trophies, including human heads, and curation of material over time. Furthermore, much of the evidence from the latter site contains resonances of Caesar's description of Gallic war-shrines, notably the votive deposition of weaponry alongside the sacrifice of animals. Where the Druids, or people with similar functions, become 'visible' is in the evidence for careful management and control of events within the site; there is no hint at piecemeal, ad hoc religious rites but rather a heavily orchestrated set of co-ordinated rituals that included rhythmically spaced animal sacrifice, conducted at regular intervals over time. Two locales within the sanctuary at Gournay appear to have been particular foci for activity: the ditch surrounding the enclosure, and a large oval pit in the centre of the compound. The enclosure ditch was the main repository for a whole range of special deposits that included military equipment, some

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38 Reconstruction of the middle Iron Age 'war-sanctuary' at Gournay-sur-Aronde, Picardy, France.

damaged in battle (Fig. 39), some deliberately 'injured', human remains and the remains of animals discretely placed in particular sections of the ditch. The weapons were 'curated' by being deposited first in pits and then in the enclosure ditch. The animal remains belong to two different methods of deposition: the disposal of complete carcasses of oxen and horses, and the remnants of feasting, comprising the butchered meat of young sheep and pigs. The horses were probably battle animals but the cattle were treated in a very specific manner. Faunal remains indicate that elderly oxen were killed according to a precise formula of dispatch, over a period of many years: each animal was killed at the age of about thirteen or fourteen by a practised blow to the back of the neck, and its muzzle slashed with a sword; it was then placed in the central pit for up to six months, until the flesh had rotted away. Then the heads were removed and deposited in the ditch on either side of the entrance to the shrine (Fig. 40).⁴² It is likely, too, that human heads adorned the portico fronting the sacred enclosure: a reconstruction of the shrine as it may have looked in the third century BC shows a lintel supported on three uprights, each of which contained niches with human skulls (see Fig. 38), very similar to those from Roquepertuse.⁴³

The sanctuary of Gournay and cognate shrines like Ribemont,⁴⁴ Mirebeau⁴⁵ and Acy-Romance⁴⁶ all attest to the presence of professional clergy who were

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39 Ritually bent iron sword from Gournay-sur-Aronde.

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40 Skulls of sacrificed oxen, from Gournay-sur-Aronde.

responsible for some precise and complicated ritual behaviour that involved the sacrifice of animals (and also probably human war-captives), the special deposition of battle-trophies and the care and management of the votive material over a long time span. We cannot know whether the Druids were involved but at Acy-Romance (Ardennes) high-ranking cremation graves of people buried with objects interpretable as liturgical equipment, including ceremonial weapons, suggest that priests were interred in the vicinity of the shrines they tended. The long time-frame of formulaic activity at sites like Gournay is indicative of the upholding of persistent and precious traditions and rituals. The significance of time may even be realised in the choice of the sacrifice of elderly oxen, for these animals had worked for their living during their long lives and it may well be that their lives invested them with special value in death.

Two British Shrines: Great Chesterford and Haddenham

Both shrines are located in East Anglia: Great Chesterford in Essex and Haddenham in Cambridgeshire; the first was built in what became a substantial Roman town, the second in a rural fenland environment. Each shows signs of complex ceremonial activity both before and following the Roman conquest.⁴⁷

Great Chesterford

The temple at Great Chesterford was first excavated in the 1840s and re-examined in the late 1970s.⁴⁸ It was situated on a hill a mile east of the town, and the well-documented Romano-British sanctuary was preceded by an Iron Age shrine. The placing of both the town and its temple may be significant in so far as, like Gournay, it was on a tribal boundary, between the territory of the Catuvellauni and the Trinovantes⁴⁹ and therefore, perhaps, situated in a strategic position for inter-tribal negotiations concerning matters such as territorial boundaries and for shared festivals and assemblies. The shrine occupied what may have been perceived as a nodal point very close to a stream and to an Iron Age cemetery. The first – late Iron Age – shrine was constructed in the early first century AD and consisted of a relatively ephemeral rectangular wooden structure, perhaps with only three sides. The building was associated with a series of irregularly shaped pits, interpreted as possible tree-holes, in which case there could once have been a sacred grove. On top of this pre-Roman shrine was a Roman-period religious building, of well-known 'Romano-Celtic' type, with two concentric squares comprising an inner *cella* and outer ambulatory (Fig. 41). The site continued in use, with various modifications, until the mid-third century AD when the temple went out of use only to be renovated in the fourth century.⁵⁰

Apart from the possibility of a sacred grove, whether natural or deliberately planted, at the pre-Roman shrine, the ritual activity in the holy precinct, or *temenos*, in the Roman period is of interest because it reveals repetitive and organised behaviour associated with the votive deposition of inanimate material, including ironwork and special animal deposits in pits, dominated by a concentration of newly hatched chicks and, more especially, immature sheep, the latter with their left sides removed. Signs of butchery on the bones suggest that feasting on meat formed a significant part of the ceremonial activity on the site. In a structure outside the precinct but associated with it was a deposit of skulls, all with their mandibles missing, five belonging to cows, one to a horse, and all positioned upside down. The repetitious and managed nature of the animal deposits is reflected in the persistence of tradition wherein animals were deposited in annual ceremonies (Fig. 42), for as long as a hundred years, which was perhaps associated with festivals designed to encourage fecundity

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41 Plan of the temple at Great Chesterford, Essex in the late first and early second centuries AD, with sacrificial pits for animal offerings in the south-west corner of the precinct.

in livestock, hence the over-representation of young chickens and lambs. People were clearly gathering at the *locus sanctus* on a regular basis and their worship and accompanying sacrifices must have been controlled and led by a priesthood. Small finds from the sanctuary include a number of objects, including gold and silver 'leaves' made, perhaps on site, for pilgrims to buy and offer to the presiding deity. There were pens for sheep, indicating that devotees could select and purchase an animal for sacrifice without having to go to the trouble of bringing the creature with them from home.

The religious activity at Great Chesterford was by no means confined to the temple. Indeed, other buildings in the town have also been identified as sanctuaries. The town is noteworthy, too, for the presence of one of the very few Jupiter-columns recorded from Britain⁵¹ and for a series of special deposits outside official temple sites. In this way, the town bears similarities to several urban sites such as Dorchester (Dorset)⁵² and Silchester,⁵³ where human foetuses and infant-burials, dogs, coins, ironwork, cosmetic sets and complete pots have been found, suggestive of foundation-deposits. Also at Silchester, some early Roman buildings were deliberately aligned on the summer solstitial sunrise. This acknowledgement of seasonal events ties in with Caesar's comment about Druidical knowledge of the heavens⁵⁴ and with archaeological evidence for their calendrical expertise.⁵⁵

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42 Part of the bone assemblage from sacrificial pits in the Great Chesterford temple precinct.

Whilst it is not impossible that unofficial and ad hoc rituals were taking place at sites like Great Chesterford and Silchester, the precision with which many of the ceremonies appear to have been enacted suggests the presence of clergy. At Great Chesterford, in particular, the attention paid to the siting of the main temple near to Iron Age burial grounds and to water, and its late Iron Age beginnings (particularly the possible presence of a sacred grove associated with the earliest built shrine), indicates a recognition of ancestral presence, together with some very specific religious depositional activity that reflects considered, repeated behaviour centred on seasonal ceremonies. The ability to predict the most auspicious time for the celebration of such festivals would, most plausibly, have been the responsibility of a priesthood that, in the pre-Roman period at least, could well have been Druid.

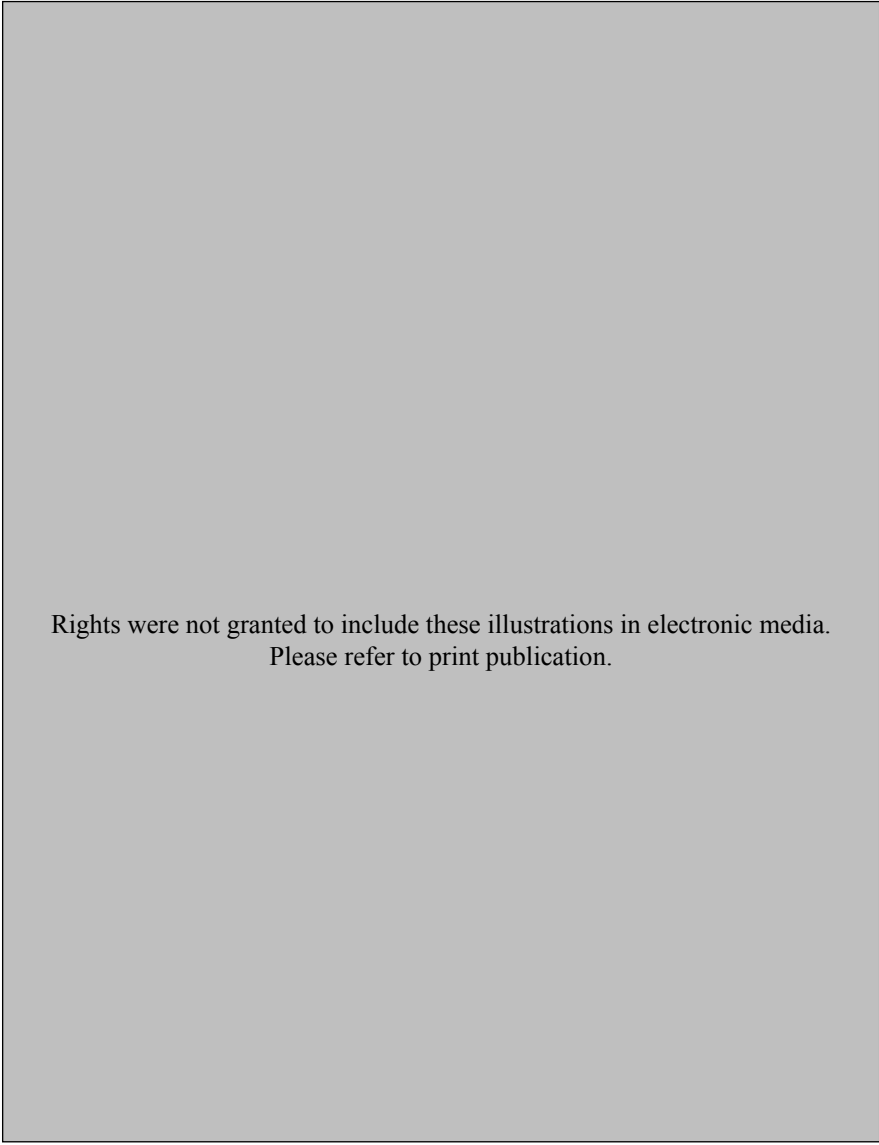
Haddenham: A Landscape of Memory

The Snow's Farm ritual complex at Haddenham, a prime example of a persistent holy place for a Bronze Age barrow,⁵⁶ itself the focus of long-lasting burial ritual that endured throughout the Bronze Age, 'may have become a focal point of lingering mythical association' during the first millennium BC.⁵⁷ In part, the cause of such continued sanctity might simply have been the prominence of the barrow mound in an otherwise flat landscape but it is equally possible that an

ancestral or other spiritual presence was perceived to lurk in the place, keeping it charged with supernatural energy that required propitiation. In the middle to late Iron Age, a sub-square enclosure⁵⁸ was constructed next to the (later) Romano-British shrine and the Bronze Age burial mound. The enclosure does not immediately identify itself as ritual in nature. However, its position, contiguous with the barrow and the temple, might be significant; it has neither hearth nor internal posts (although that could be as true for a shed or barn); and there is evidence that some pottery was deliberately broken. The excavators themselves comment that the site might have been 'special' but, if so, the 'ritual was very much rooted in the mundane'.⁵⁹

No such doubt surrounds the religious character of the Romano-British structure built on the flank of the Bronze Age barrow.⁶⁰ It consisted of a quasi-octagonal building set within a large square (Fig. 43). There may have been a sense in which the builders were playing with form, in so far as the presence of the circular burial mound beneath the Romano-British shrine means that they were erecting a circle within a square *on* a circle. This first Roman-phase temple, constructed in the second century AD, evinced no signs of elaborate liturgical trappings and, according to the excavators, the ritual focus at this period seems to have been 'upon the character of depositional practices and, particularly, *the act of sacrifice*', related to a concern with 'the expression of time, transformation and the translation of ritual'.⁶¹ To put it more plainly the archaeological evidence suggests that, in this initial phase of the temple's life, people were expressing their beliefs by means of animal sacrifice and votive deposition rather than by the flummery of formal regalia or the exhibition of priestly presence. People visiting the sanctuary at this time demonstrated their need to connect with the supernatural by sacrificing animals or animal body parts. In the centre of the shrine someone had placed a complete sheep's carcass with a coin behind one hind leg; a nearby pit contained the mandibles of cattle; other deposits, very oddly, were of sheep's jaws of which two had coins set between them; yet others consisted of 'heads and hooves', reflecting the offering of fleeces or skins.

Despite the dearth of formal religious material, much can be seen from the pattern and content of repeated animal-offering at Haddenham. In terms of location, the deposits were at their densest concentration along the eastern edge of the shrine-floor, but in addition a cluster of sheep skeletons, each accompanied by a complete pot, was placed outside the temple building, in the north-west corner of the compound, indicating that at least some ritual activity took place in the open air. For me, the most interesting aspect of the sacral activity in this earliest Romano-British shrine is the presence of the coins placed in the mouths of the sheep, for this would appear to relate to a specific funerary rite associated with Classical beliefs in the afterlife of humans. In Roman religious tradition 'Charon's obol' was traditionally placed between the



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43 Plan of the sacred site of Haddenham, Cambridgeshire.

lips of the newly dead as payment for the divine ferry-man, Charon, who sailed them across the River Styx to the Otherworld.⁶² What the worshippers at Haddenham seem to have been doing is presenting the sacrifice of sheep as though they were people – a kind of surrogacy or substitution.⁶³

In the third century AD, the Romano-British shrine was systematically dismantled, probably because of flooding, and then refurbished in the early fourth century, when a sub-square shrine, constructed with timber posts, was built on the very crown of the original Bronze Age barrow and set within a cluster of massive wooden uprights (it is tempting to see this structure as yet another substitute for a sacred grove). The new shrine itself may have been an ephemeral building associated with specific and cyclical festivals.

The finds from the Snow's Farm sanctuary complex accord with those from a range of other Romano-British shrines and certain objects indicate clearly that clergy were operating here. These include part of a copper-alloy sceptre or baton of authority similar to those recorded at, for instance, Wanborough (Surrey) and Muntham Court (Sussex)⁶⁴ and a curious, but significant rod, nearly 36 centimetres long, marked with groups of regularly spaced incised grooves along its shaft. The purpose of this second object is uncertain, but it bears a certain resemblance to a long-shafted ceremonial rattle or *sistrum* from a wetland site near Peterborough,⁶⁵ and it is possible that the marks represent some means of calendrical computation by priests engaged in divinatory ritual. The profile of the faunal assemblage is similar to that at Great Chesterford in so far as at both sites sacrifice and feasting on young sheep appear to have played predominant roles. In interpreting the rituals taking place at the Roman-period shrine the excavators take the view that it was the 'moments of sacrifice' that were the driving force. They see the phase-dependent differential use of animal bodies here as reflecting changing ritual practices and beliefs: in the first phase entire sheep were deposited, with no signs of butchering or consumption but, in later phases, the fleeces were offered to the gods and the flesh eaten in communal feasting ceremonies.

Haddenham raises some crucial issues about how ritual was organised. Were shrines like this managed by resident clergy who looked after one particular shrine, or were there the equivalent of team-ministries, where one priest or a small group was responsible for maintaining 'services' in a 'parish' of religious sites? The vast majority of ritual activities took place in the open air, and repetition, rhythm and cyclicity, and the persistence of place over many centuries, were all important aspects of the way the site acted, as somewhere that people could interact with the gods. Sometimes, the ad hoc nature of ceremonies suggests that clergy were not always present and that the community itself took charge of ritual practices. The shrine and the religious behaviour of its clergy and worshippers in the Roman period had little to do with *romanitas*, yet there were priests there who clearly enjoyed authority. The longevity of the

holy place⁶⁶ indicates that past and sacred memory were powerful influences on the perception of holy ground in this fenland community. It is not difficult, therefore, to envisage a 'Druid footprint' that may have determined the original construction of a sacred place before the Roman conquest that maintained at least a modicum of independence from Roman governance throughout the period of Roman occupation. The Romano-British shrine may well have come into being as a result of 'building from memory',⁶⁷ whereby the mythologies of the past and ancestral power fed into a sense of accumulated spiritual energy that was tapped over and over again for millennia, perhaps gaining added potency at each episode of its reaffirmation.

Pilgrimage and Memory: From Llyn Cerrig Bach to Bath

Many holy places were long-lived, with evidence for episodes of use, closure and reinvestment, sometimes with significant pauses in between phases of active life. Memories were long and the spiritual power of place was often maintained over hundreds of years, even when the archaeological evidence points to significant hiatuses within the biography of a *locus sanctus*. Many sacred sites had long, albeit punctuated, lives during which ideas, cult-practices and offerings may have been recycled, curated, revitalised and rethought in ways that served to perpetuate and reinvigorate the sacred. Llyn Cerrig Bach on Anglesey may similarly have been visited and revisited by pilgrims over long periods.⁶⁸ People may have first visited the site as holy ground in the middle Iron Age, when their devotion manifested itself in animal (and perhaps also human) sacrifices; the cult may then have evolved, in the later Iron Age, according to a changed set of religious values, when living beings were replaced as votive offerings by the prestige material goods of the time: military equipment (Fig. 44), ironwork, horse-gear and the trappings of slave-ownership in the form of two massive iron slave-chains.

The point is that Llyn Cerrig was a physically remote island sacred place that, nonetheless, was persistently visited by pilgrims who may have come from quite long distances, and those who followed in the footsteps of their forbears are likely to have been fully aware of what had gone on before, partly because of folk-memory but also because the past may have been visible to them in the form of skeletal material or even, given the aquatic environment, as bodies with preserved soft tissue. The idea of pilgrimage, generally recognised as being an essentially medieval invention, at any rate in western tradition, is probably very ancient. What marks the focus of pilgrimage is the reputation of a sacred site as special, empowered, charged with spiritual energy and capable of changing lives.⁶⁹ A crucial aspect of pilgrimage, whether ancient or modern, is perception that a sacred site is recognised as successful, as having a special connection with the supernatural world.

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When Romano-Britons planned the road between Bath and Mildenhall in Wiltshire, they carefully sited it so that it avoided but ran in sufficiently close proximity to Silbury Hill to be clearly visible to travellers.⁷⁰ Many of these would have been pilgrims journeying to the great healing thermal spring sanctuary of the native British goddess Sulis, who was given the name of a similar Roman deity, Minerva. As a pilgrim-route, this road would itself have had some kind of status as a mobile sacred space,⁷¹ and so Silbury Hill, recognised as an ancient monument in the Roman period, might have played an important role in contributing to the sanctity of the route westwards to Bath because of the mythology that had undoubtedly grown up around the great mound. The reputation of a sacred site as an attraction for pilgrims is based largely upon memory and upon the relaying of information by visitors who have been there to those yet to make the journey.

These major ancient holy places may all have had their stories to tell, reputations to circulate and legends to transmit. They were used by their local communities as essential conduits to the divine world and by pilgrims for whom a long, difficult journey acted as a gateway to enlightenment and healing. Behind them all were the religious authorities. The responsibility for conveying information and for the upholding of tradition was almost certainly in the hands of a priesthood, for whom the constant revivification of holy ground was crucial in the maintenance of their own power and authority.

44 Late Iron Age decorative bronze shield-boss from Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey.

The Druids' Toolkit

REGALIA AND RITUAL EQUIPMENT

Magic certainly found a home in the two Gallic provinces, and that down to living memory. For the principate of Tiberius Caesar did away with their Druids and this tribe of seers and medicine men.¹

The selago plant is gathered without iron with the right hand, thrust through the tunic through the left armhole, as though the gatherer were thieving. He should be clad in white, and have bare feet washed clean; before gathering he should make a sacrificial offering of bread and wine. The plant is carried in a new napkin. The Druids of Gaul have recorded that it should be kept on the person to ward off all fatalities, and that the smoke of it is good for all diseases of the eyes.²

Healing Minds

Healing must have been fundamental to the ancient Druids for, on the one hand, religious leaders in other societies are often expected to heal bodies and minds – using a combination of medicine and spiritual powers – and, on the other, we have specific testimony to their curative activities from Pliny who repeatedly connects the Druids with the healing arts, albeit in a somewhat sneering, ‘barbarist’ manner.

Early in the twentieth century, Henry Wellcome assembled an extraordinary collection of curative equipment from all over the world that allows us a glimpse into possible meanings behind incomprehensible groups of material.³ Among the exhibits in Wellcome’s medical museum is a bundle of bits of human bone wrapped in a cloth bag from Upper Ogowe in Gabon,⁴ a funerary reliquary containing bone parts of the deceased used to bless hunting expeditions, protect the ancestors from maleficent spirits and bring good health to the living. This kind of assemblage would not necessarily be identified as of especial significance in an archaeological context but Wellcome’s collection reminds us that seemingly obscure material culture may be highly meaningful within particular contexts. Thus, for instance, the Stanway rods may be compared to ‘medicine bundles’ used by traditional healers in traditional North American curative rituals.

Shamans were healers.⁵ Many shamanistic societies believe that physical (and mental) sickness arises from the theft of a person's soul by evil spirits.⁶ It is the shaman's responsibility to gain access to the spirit world – through trance and the resultant out-of-body experience, when he or she can visit the Otherworld, hunt down the maleficent force, retrieve the lost soul and return it to its owner, thereby restoring health. Apart from the enactment of 'soul-flight' to the realms of the supernatural to rescue stolen souls, the shaman used divinatory techniques to liaise with the spirits for curative purposes. Thus healing and divination are closely associated in ritual practice.⁷ Ethnographic evidence helps us to provide a framework for understanding how the Druids may have acted in similar capacities to modern traditionalist advocates and healers.

A Healing Ceremony Conducted by an American Plains Holy Woman

Indigenous American communities dwelling in the northern Plains share the tradition of the Sun Dance, a ritual that involves a combination of fasting and dancing. 'Suffering is a vital part of a successful Sun Dance. If a few of the dancers are fortunate, they may collapse and experience a vision.'⁸ Self-mutilation may be added to the physical hardship of abstinence from food and water for up to four days, together with the rigours of endurance involved in dancing during the heat of day and the cold of night. The purpose of the dance is to offer self-sacrifice to the spirits in return for healing or a safe birth. In Plains Indians communities rituals such as this are conducted by spiritual leaders, often women, who act as conduits between their people and the supernatural world. When these ritualists undergo 'soul-journeys' on behalf of the sick, the strain of going between worlds puts them at great risk of physical or mental impairment.⁹ The Sun Dance is supported by various lesser ritual activities, such as purification in sweat lodges, gift-exchange, singing and flesh offerings. Symbolic and practical equipment used in Plains Indians healing rituals include pipes for the smoking of tobacco or herbs, drums, 'sweet grass', eagle feathers and images of wild animals,¹⁰ all of which act as agents to enable contact with spirit forces and the engagement of their support.

Ceremony and ritual behaviour start when the healer is first approached. The setting may be anything from the home of the holy person on the reservation to the parking lot of the Family Thrift Store in Rapid City. Quietly, with ancient and detailed ritual, a commission is made between the patient (or family member) and the healer. This is generally done with a cigarette or prayer pipe. Tobacco and sincerity are the key ingredients. The holy person listens and considers whether she wishes to perform the ceremony. After careful consideration, and after smoking the tobacco, the healer agrees to a

prescribed time and place to create a sacred place, or cosmos, where spirits can be contacted. The healer may also decline.¹¹

The ritual progresses from sweat-induced purification for the holy woman (and often the family of the sick person) to the cleansing of all her equipment with the smoke from the purification fire.

The equipment she uses is chosen according to her dreams, but typical items might be her pipe bowl, stem, tamper, rawhide rattle, and eagle-bone whistle, a small hand drum, and a fan made up of one or more eagle feathers. A small bundle of sage (itself a hallucinogen) may be passed round the room, each person taking a single stalk and placing it behind his right ear. All metal jewellery is also removed, so that the spirits may find everyone approachable.¹²

Why Look at Plains Indians Holy Women in a Book about Druids?

It would clearly be a grossly essentialist approach to make direct links between 'modern' healing rituals among Plains Indian communities and those of ancient Gaul and Britain. However, this native American culture does serve as a useful context in which to situate the minimal evidence from Classical writers and material culture for the Druidic and other coeval healing ceremonies of the late first millennium BC and early Roman period. The rich body of evidence from traditional societies whose ritual customs are either still practised or were enacted within living memory provides a glimpse into a complex world of curative ceremonies which cannot even be imagined with only Pliny's few and colonially biased words on the subject and a mute assemblage of possibly relevant artefacts. Pliny's *Natural History* is a collection of curiosities from around the known world. His comments about Gaulish ritual practices – whether they concern mistletoe growing on oak trees, rites of harvesting selago or are simply allusions to medicine men dwelling on the edges of the universe – should be read, to a degree at any rate, as anecdotal embroidery. Even if we can accept some of his testimony as fact rather than fiction, he tells us little about the way in which sacred leaders used their healing powers. The archaeological data, too, are enigmatic, for ritual equipment cannot firmly be ascribed to curative practices and the presence of medical toolkits attests to the activities of physicians not necessarily associated with ritual or the Druids.

Body-Art and Healing

All the Britons dye their bodies with woad, which produces a blue colour and gives them a wild appearance in battle.¹³

Cosmetic grinders are a type of artefact used only in late Iron Age and early Roman Britain.¹⁴ These are paired objects, each comprising a small bowl and grinder, used to pound pigment into powder and, whilst they have been interpreted as primarily for the application of make-up, they may, instead, have been used in the preparation of plant materials for use in tattooing, in which case the pounded powder would have been mixed with a binding agent such as egg-albumen or even semen.¹⁵ Of the several Classical literary references to painted Britons,¹⁶ only the Greek author Herodian, writing in the third century AD of the Caledonians who opposed the emperor Septimius Severus' forces in Scotland, uses a specific word that refers to tattooing as opposed to body-painting.¹⁷ Were ancient British tattoos used to symbolise identity or ethnicity (Fig. 45)?¹⁸ They might have been expressions of resistance to colonialism, a way of preserving British identity as not being Roman.¹⁹ We find similar resistance in modern western situations, for instance in North America where groups of people considering themselves to be marginalised within society adopt tattooing as 'political bill-boards of dissent'.²⁰ Such reassertion of self-identity as part of a general response to foreign domination may well have been closely associated with the Druids but, in the present context of healing rituals, it is particularly pertinent that woad possesses antiseptic properties, and was perhaps employed by warriors to keep their wounds clean, accelerate healing and avoid blood-poisoning and gangrene.²¹ The 'ice man', who died in the Austro-Italian Alps on the cusp of the Neolithic

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45 Iron Age gold coin, with tattooed face, minted by the Parisi.

and Early Bronze periods, was found to have clusters of tattoo marks on arthritic areas of his well-preserved frozen body,²² perhaps the results of attempts to treat his pain.²³

How may we link tattooing with Druidic healing practices in ancient Gallo-British societies? Druidism was a nationalist movement in which symbolic and actual healing might well have been associated with authority. There are two strands to this argument: firstly, Druids may have been involved in tattooing the warrior-elite before they went into battle, partly in order to enhance the latter's ability to intimidate the enemy and partly to protect their bodies (actually and symbolically); secondly, they may, themselves, have been tattooed as a means of communication with and empowerment by the spirit world. Some Plains Indian shamans, or 'medicine men' tattoo their bodies: in her study *Red Man's Religion*, Ruth Underhill refers to Osage holy men whose chests were tattooed with 'the esoteric symbols that told their history',²⁴ thus becoming living encyclopaedias of knowledge about the mythology and traditions of their people. Two bog-bodies from Lindow Moss in Cheshire, one of which contained the residues of mistletoe in the gut, had artificially pigmented skin.²⁵ Since Pliny alludes to the curative properties of the plant in connection with Druidic cult-practices in Gaul, could Lindow Man's mistletoe and body-art refer to healing arts?²⁶

Healing Equipment

Stanway was a remarkable funerary site for a select group of high-status Britons who died in the late Iron Age and early Roman periods. Among the dead was a doctor or surgeon whose remains were interred with his surgical instruments. Other objects in the grave that may have had a medical function consist of a strainer bowl, which had been used to make a tea-like infusion with artemisia, and a set of rods. Most of the surgical instruments lay on top of a wooden gaming board on which gaming pieces had been laid out as if at an early stage in a game.²⁷

The Stanway grave is dated to *c.* AD 50–60; it belonged to a group of seven burials classified as 'secondary' tombs associated with four 'primary' ones,²⁸ so identified because of the presence in them of wooden chambers containing ritually broken material mixed in with a token amount of human cremated bone (they were otherwise empty of human remains, as if the chambers were cenotaphs rather than true graves). Three of the so-called secondary tombs contained grave-goods that appear to suggest the identity or profession of the dead: one was a warrior; another a scribe; and the third was the physician. The surgical implements from the last grave indicate a cultural blend of local Iron Age and new Roman traditions: the instruments were made according to a

general Roman template but some indicate the inclusion of forms foreign to the Italian physician's toolkit: these include the use of iron rather than bronze, and the presence of one-piece scalpels. The surgical toolkit strongly resembles sets from Central Europe and most, if not all, of the Stanway medical kit appears to have been of Gallo-British rather than Roman manufacture.²⁹ All the implements (and indeed all the grave-goods in the tomb) were complete except for one, the surgical saw, which had been specially treated: it was deliberately broken into five pieces, placed close together in the centre of the gaming board. Could it be that this one instrument had failed its owner, become polluted and had had to be ritually smashed in order to neutralise its power?³⁰

Can we make valid connections between the Stanway 'Doctor' and Druids or with religious authority? Certain pieces in the grave, like the spouted bowl filled with artemisia, suggest that the dead person was no ordinary physician, for he could have used this drug to make a healing herbal infusion that was good for treating worm-infestations, fever and menstrual cramps.³¹ The traditional Gaelic healer Mary Beith describes the curative properties of wormwood (*Artemisia absinthum*) as a particularly effective vermifuge, commenting that the best time for its harvesting was September, 'when the fruit would be ripe and the stem and leaves nearly dry. It was kept by hanging it from the ceiling in a muslin bag, and when needed an infusion was made of about two ounces of dried herb to one pint of boiling water.'³² She also identifies mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) as an appetite enhancer and as being efficacious against fatigue.³³ We explored the use of this herb as a hallucinogen in Chapter 5, in the context of shamanism and, if it were employed in this way at Stanway, it lends credence to the link between the role of the healer and holy man, who might have used it to induce trance and prophetic power.³⁴ Stanway is by no means the only late Iron Age/early Roman site in Britain to produce remains of plant hallucinogens: we may cite, for instance, the substantial quantity of henbane from Farmoor and opium mixed with spelt wheat at Wallingford (both in Oxfordshire).³⁵

The two sets of rods in the Stanway grave remain to be explained (see Fig. 30). These are without close parallel but possess features that may help to interpret their function. Firstly, they fall into two metallurgical groups: four are iron, four bronze; secondly, they are of two different sizes: two large and two small iron rods and the same for the bronze set. All share the same basic shape, each having a long shank flattened and widened at either end. Could it be that both the differential metals and varied sizes perhaps served to 'gender' the rods (the hard iron/large = male and the softer bronze/small = female)?³⁶ But that does not account for the fact that both iron and bronze rods occur in each size, suggesting that sexual dimorphism and softness of material are not securely linked. Unless the rods were used for some obscure medical

purpose, their likeliest function is for use in the divinatory casting of lots, perhaps in order to recover sick souls from maleficent spirits.³⁷

In view of Tacitus' allusion to the picking up of three rods for study by the Germanic religious official,³⁸ it is interesting that three of the Stanway rods were separated from the rest and deposited on the gaming board,³⁹ which the Stanway 'Doctor' might, indeed, have used in life as a means of predicting the future course of an illness. If the eight rods were not used for divinatory purposes, they may, even so, have been important sacred equipment, perhaps associated with healing.

Spread on a museum table, the contents of a medicine bundle do seem insignificant. The first visitors who named them saw only a few shrivelled skins, some bunches of herbs, perhaps a feather, a claw or an arrow-point. Yet, when the bundle was opened on special occasions, every motion of the officiant's hand in untying, unrolling, or lifting was accompanied with song and the recitation of the promises given in primeval days.⁴⁰

In the context of curative rites, the differential sizes and metals of the Stanway rods may, like the contents of the Plains Indians medicine bundles (described in the quotation), have been charged with power and meaning. Given comments by both Pliny⁴¹ and Tacitus⁴² concerning the need to avoid iron in certain sacred ceremonies, it may be that both iron and bronze were considered appropriate (or inappropriate) for the efficacy of particular healing rituals, so requiring the presence of rods in both metals. The Stanway 'Doctor's Grave' was clearly the tomb of someone who enjoyed high status in his community at a time when south-east Britain was beginning to face new challenges posed by *romanitas*. Much of the material in his tomb had Roman connections but some of the grave-goods indicate a Britishness that might have been deliberately presented in the funeral rites of the deceased. Given the meld of sacred and healing artefacts placed with him when his cremated remains were interred here, it is possible that the dead man was a holy man and healer. He may even have been a Druid, though that can be no more than speculation.⁴³

Badges of Authority: Regalia of Wisdom

Sometime during the third century BC, a religious leader living in the great *oppidum* at Manching, on the Bavarian Danube, commissioned a very distinctive object for use on ceremonial occasions and in ritual activities. It has been called a 'votive tree', and it consists of sheet-bronze leaves and imitation wooden fruit and berries mounted on a wooden staff, the whole thing approximately 70 centimetres long and covered in gold foil (Fig. 46).⁴⁴

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46 'Sacred branch', made of wood and gilded bronze, from Manching, Bavaria; c. 300 BC.

The object is unique but the technique has been likened to Hellenistic workmanship on funerary wreaths.⁴⁵ 'When found, the tree was situated on a large thin wooden plate covered in gold and richly decorated.'⁴⁶ This cult-object is all the more significant because the form of the leaves suggests their identification of the plant as a member of the convolvulus family, some species of which produce seeds with intoxicating, hallucinogenic properties.⁴⁷ For a processional object, 70 centimetres is a respectable height and its flashing gilded surface and the subtle metallic movements of its leaves in the wind would have been an arresting sight during religious ceremonies. Given Julius Caesar's denial of Druidism in Germany, we should be circumspect about assigning such an object to the Gallic priesthood but, given the presence of isolated votive metal leaves from Gaulish Iron Age sites such as those found in a sanctuary at Saint-Maur (Oise)⁴⁸ and the settlement at Villeneuve-Saint-Germain (Aisne),⁴⁹ it is possible that the Druids, too, used such objects to provide a religious spectacle and to endow their carriers with mystic authority.

Crowns of Glory

Between 1984 and 1989, the Dover Archaeological Group, under the direction of Keith Parfitt, conducted rescue excavations in advance of housing development at Mill Hill, Deal in east Kent. Among the features uncovered, ranging from the Neolithic to the Anglo-Saxon periods, was a series of Iron Age burials, forty-two inhumations, five cremations and a horse burial.⁵⁰ The contents of one grave in particular excite interest for they hint at the presence of a professional ritualist. This is the 'warrior's grave', so called because a sword and shield had been placed with the body of a slim, mature man (described by the excavator as 'of slightly feminine build'),⁵¹ about thirty to thirty-five years old who probably died in the early second century BC.⁵² Despite the martial accoutrements, the dead man may have had responsibilities other than warfare, for upon his head was a bronze crown or diadem, richly decorated with La Tène designs (see Fig. 6).⁵³ The presence of the headdress suggests that its wearer possessed some kind of ceremonial role within his society and the way his weapons were deposited in the grave also indicates special treatment: the iron sword, encased in its decorative bronze scabbard, had been placed face-down, so that its ornamental side was hidden; what is more, the man's shield had been deliberately broken before being placed in the tomb. The inference is that both items of military equipment were 'decommissioned' – either, perhaps, to reflect the end of the warrior's career, to neutralise the power of the weapons or, maybe, to represent the symbolic rather than functional nature of their presence in the grave. This last is possible if the man's principal occupation was religious leadership, for the military equipment might have been placed with him for his journey to the Otherworld for symbolic reasons, as a mark of respect and in acknowledgement of his power.

The headdress itself consisted of a decorated band that fitted directly round the head and originally a plain and narrow cross-band fitted over the top of the cranium.⁵⁴ Comparable crowns of later Iron Age and Roman date include a find made in 1844 at Leckhampton (Gloucestershire), now sadly lost, the only other known example of a skeleton found wearing such headgear.⁵⁵ The dating of this burial is uncertain: it might be Iron Age but it has also been claimed as belonging to the Anglo-Saxon period. A diadem from the Romano-British site at Hockwold-cum-Wilton in Norfolk is the closest parallel to the Deal headdress in terms of its form and style (Fig. 47). The East Anglian site is of especial interest, firstly because the crown was one of six ceremonial headdresses from the same field and, secondly, because there was a Romano-Celtic temple at Hockwold and the crowns may have been placed in a kind of sacred storehouse of ritual objects in about AD 200.⁵⁶ (Some of these diadems had adjustable headbands, as if used by more than one priest.) The hoard of religious bronzes from Felmingham Hall (also Norfolk), deposited in the

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47 Bronze diadem from the Romano-British temple at Hockwold-cum-Wilton, Norfolk.

mid-third century AD, contained the remains of at least two crowns.⁵⁷ This hoard also contained a bronze model wheel, likely to have been associated with a Gallo-British celestial cult.⁵⁸ The connection between wheel-motifs and ceremonial headdresses is repeated on other British sites.⁵⁹ The most significant came from the excavation of the Romano-British temple at Wanborough in Surrey, which produced no less than five headdresses, dated to the mid-second century AD, consisting of chains crossing over the head, designed for attachment to leather or cloth caps, three of them topped by knobbed finials in the form of freestanding wheels (Fig. 48).⁶⁰ The ceremonial crown adorning the head of the dead 'warrior' at Deal belongs to the second century BC. The survival of the same basic form well into the Roman period, as exemplified at Hockwold, suggests some measure of continuance of ritual praxis in Britain that involved using similar regalia. The chain headdresses seem to have been confined to post-conquest contexts but a coin from the Midlands, depicting a human head wearing a wheel-decorated headdress,⁶¹ was probably minted in c. AD 10–20 so, again, there is evidence of transference of religious material culture from late Iron Age to Romano-British cult-use.

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48 Reconstruction of a priest wearing one of the wheel-decorated headdresses from the Romano-British temple at Wanborough, Surrey.

Such elaborate headdresses perhaps strike a chord with the iconography of the great silver-gilt cauldron from Gundestrup in Jutland, which was probably made in *c.* 100 BC.⁶² On one of its inner plates is depicted a scene of a 'Celtic' army, in which the horsemen, riding in procession, all wear headgear adorned with complex motifs.⁶³ All the headdresses consist of small leather caps: surmounting one is a bird; on another is a boar (also worn by one of the foot soldiers in the lower register of the plate); the third sprouts a pair of antlers

and the last a plume arching over the head. Although the caps are usually described as military helmets, they look far more like soft caps; moreover, each cap has a defined rim which could in fact represent a metal headband. To my mind, then, the headdresses worn by the horsemen on the Gundestrup Cauldron are highly reminiscent of the ritual crowns found in British Iron Age and Romano-British contexts such as Deal and Wanborough. Although two of the four Gundestrup horsemen are armed with swords, their ritual headgear can be explained if they were taking part in a religious ceremony, and the presence of a huge, godlike figure engaged in drowning or rescuing a man from a vat serves to indicate the ceremonial, or even sacrificial, context of this martial procession.⁶⁴

So what do all these crowns mean? Can their wearers be identified with the Druids in any way? Clearly those who possessed such exotic and non-functional headgear were special people, and it is likely that the purpose of their headdresses was to single them out as men or women who were particularly revered by their community, figures of power and authority – just the kind of individuals described as Druids by Caesar.

Aaron's Rod: Staffs of Authority

The unequivocally sacred contexts in which several of the Romano-British headdresses occur – whether in constructed temples or in votive hoards – are strongly suggestive of their possession by professional, perhaps sometimes resident, clergy. Adjustable crowns were designed for wear by several people in turn, so it is quite possible that liturgical regalia sometimes remained the property of the temple rather than of individuals. The same pattern of archaeological context pertains to a group of objects that we may loosely call sceptres and sceptre-bindings: they, too, are found mainly in shrines or ritually deposited assemblages. For the most part, such regalia consist of plain sheet-bronze strips, sometimes found curled into a spiral form showing that they were originally wrapped around a wooden shaft⁶⁵ or of cylindrical ferrules, like those from the temples at Muntham Court (Sussex)⁶⁶ and Wanborough.⁶⁷ Interestingly, the evidence for multiple headdresses at the latter site is mirrored in the quantity of sceptres deposited here.

Some liturgical equipment was designed to make a jangling or rattling noise.⁶⁸ A Romano-British sceptre from the mud of the River Nene near Milton Ferry, Peterborough,⁶⁹ consisted of a long shaft with a flattened oval end-piece, perforated for the attachment of bells or rings that rang or jangled when shaken. The shaft is decorated with a series of oblique and horizontal incised lines. These markings resemble those on other rods,⁷⁰ and it is possible that the scratches represent some kind of divinatory device. Objects interpreted as sceptres but with excrescences perhaps designed to rattle against

other surfaces, have been discovered at a Romano-British site at Frensham in Surrey.⁷¹ The pan-shaped rattle from the hoard of religious Romano-British regalia at Felmingham Hall probably had a similar function (Fig. 49).⁷² By analogy with traditional shamanistic practices, such noisy objects may have been designed to attract beneficent spirits, to ward off inimical ones or, if used for rhythmic effects, to aid the attainment of trance-states.⁷³

The same function of making sacred sounds might be ascribed to musical instruments like ceremonial trumpets found in ritual watery contexts.⁷⁴ Recent experiments carried out on Silbury Hill in Wiltshire⁷⁵ demonstrate that the sound made by instruments like these carried for at least half a mile, thereby serving to draw in communities some distance from the site of performance who would, thus, be able to participate in the ritual events or festivals enacted in ceremonial centres. Apart from sound, the visual effect of such trumpets would have been striking: the set of four huge curved late Iron Age horns found in the sacred lake at Loughnashade in County Armagh⁷⁶ would have towered above their players, the sun catching their bright bronze and picking out the La Tène designs on their mouthpieces.

The most interesting ceremonial staves are those with forms or ornamentation that make some kind of statement concerning the beliefs or cult-practices

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49 Bronze ceremonial 'rattle' from the hoard of Romano-British religious objects found at Felmingham Hall, Norfolk.

followed by those who used and carried them. The staves (or bindings) themselves are usually plain but one, from the Farley Heath shrine,⁷⁷ is different in so far as it bears an array of 'matchstick man'-motifs incised on the surface of the sheet metal (that once clad a wooden rod of office) so complex that it surely represents a mythic story or documents a ritual event. The iconography includes depictions of artefacts, such as smiths' tongs, animals, birds and at least two human figures, one with a solar symbol built into his body and the other carrying a long-shafted axe or hammer.⁷⁸ Both anthropomorphic images find close parallels in images of Gallic divinities: the so-called 'wheel-god' and the hammer-god *Sucellus*.⁷⁹ We can be confident that these images make sacred statements and thus infer that the piece belonged to a religious official, perhaps for use during cult ceremonies. The tong-bearing image may alternatively be interpreted as a dowsing figure, for the shrine at Farley Heath was built around a holy spring.⁸⁰

The depiction of what may be a solar image on the Farley Heath binding resonates with two striking examples of sceptres from Willingham Fen (Cambridgeshire) and Wavendon Gate (Buckinghamshire). The former, probably part of a sceptre-terminal, comprises a cast-bronze ferrule approximately 12 centimetres high to which is attached a group of images including an eagle, a wheel, a triple-horned bull and a young, beardless and naked man whose left foot stamps on the head of a monster with a small human face (Fig. 50).⁸¹ Most of the motifs are consistent with representations of myths associated with Romano-British solar cults, and the wielder of such a symbolically charged mace must have held considerable authority.⁸²

The second piece of regalia is very different but retains the solar wheel-motif: this is a piece of oak, approximately 33 centimetres high, carved into a tenon surmounted by a large wheel; the tenon is stepped and pierced with a nail-hole, as if for attachment to a sceptre or stand. It came from early Roman levels in a waterlogged pit at Wavendon Gate in Milton Keynes.⁸³ Significant for its interpretation as a cult-object relating to celestial worship is a series of four miniature bronze wheels from the same site.⁸⁴ Whilst there is nothing conclusive to link the ritual items from Farley Heath, Wavendon or Willingham with the Druids, the persistent celestial symbolism on all three brings to mind Caesar's comment on the Druids' interest in the universe and the heavenly bodies in the firmament: 'They hold long discussions about the heavenly bodies and their movements . . .'⁸⁵

Instruments of Ritual

Letting Blood and Telling Spoons

Sometime around the end of the first century BC, a man was ritually killed and placed in a grave cut into the peat in a Danish marsh (Fig. 51). He was buried

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50 Romano-British bronze sceptre-terminal depicting cosmological motifs, including a triple-horned bull's head, wheel, eagle and naked human figure with his foot on the head of a monster with a human face, from Willingham Fen, Cambridgeshire.

in the Nebelmoose peat-bog and is generally known as the Grauballe Man, after the home village from which his finders came. What is remarkable about this individual is the manner of his death: his head received a savage blow that stunned him, then his throat was slit from ear to ear, nearly severing the neck, and the oesophagus was also cut. Perhaps his last conscious act was to swallow a thin gruel that contained the spores of ergot, a highly toxic fungus that grows on fermenting grain, particularly on barley. In the present context, it is the instrument that was used to cut his throat that is of interest, for it serves to introduce discussion on the nature of sacrificial implements. The fatal wound was inflicted using a razor-sharp blade, leaving a deep cut with smooth edges but with a pronounced notch in the centre of the bottom lip of the wound.⁸⁶ In looking at the implements used for such a ritual killing, we need to consider not only the sharp-edged cutting tool but also the object used to club him into unconsciousness. Similar methods were used to

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51 The Grauballe Man, an Iron Age bog-body, with its throat cut, found at Nebel Mose, Jutland; 400–200 BC.

slaughter Lindow Man: his skull also showed signs of trauma and his throat, too, was slashed, although he had also been garrotted for good measure.⁸⁷

So, in the case of each of the British and Danish bog victims, the men were rendered senseless before death. This itself is significant for it means that they could not 'consent' to their dedication to the gods. In ancient Greek tradition involving animal-sacrifice, the victim had symbolically to accept its fate, and this was achieved by sprinkling the animal with water so that it would shake its head or by giving it a bowl of water so that it lowered its head to drink. In both rituals, the movement of the creature's head – contrived as it was – would be read as consent.⁸⁸ This is broadly similar to certain other traditions, notably in Islamic religion, where any animal slaughtered for meat is subjected to ritualised treatment: its head is turned to face Mecca and it has to be fully conscious and aware of its impending death, so as to dedicate the killing to Allah.⁸⁹

The material remains of sacrificial equipment are bound to be ambiguous simply because instruments suitable for clubbing and cutting are likely to have been equally effective in ritual and secular use. However, it is perfectly possible that some of the objects identified as sceptres or sceptre-terminals could have been used to stun sacrificial victims – whether human or animal (the Willingham Fen sceptre-head, for instance was quite heavy and could have been so used), just as in the Old Testament Aaron's rod acted as a staff of authority and a weapon.⁹⁰ Significantly, the interim report on the early Romano-British shrine at Muntham Court, Findon in Sussex⁹¹ records the discovery of ritual objects including not only the sceptre-ferrule already mentioned but also two ceremonial knives (one bronze, one iron), together with the skulls of three oxen carefully buried in the floor and a small plaque

depicting a slain wild boar. The assemblage of finds here, then, appears to reflect priestly activity involving sacrificial ritual associated with animals, a sceptre that may have doubled as a club and two special knives.

Sacrificial knives frequently appear as deliberate votive deposits at late Iron Age Gallic sites: knives were carefully placed beneath the heads of slain pigs in late Iron Age tombs, for instance at Lamadeleine, Luxembourg, in one of the cemeteries of the great Titelberg *oppidum*,⁹² and in the tomb of a warrior at Saint-Georges-lès-Baillargeaux (Vienne) (Fig. 52).⁹³ In 1910, the tomb of a woman buried in the third/second century BC at La Chaussée-sur-Marne (Marne)⁹⁴ was found to contain a small shallow bronze bowl, perhaps for holding sacrificial blood or oil, and a spoon, originally one of a pair (see Fig. 71). The two spoons (one of which has been lost) had been placed over the right arm with the bowl inverted over them. Pairs of bronze spoons, used in religious rituals, are recorded in a number of British contexts, including the priest/warrior's burial at Deal, discussed above in the context of his possession of a decorated diadem, and the discovery of a set in a peat-bog at Crosby Ravensworth in Cumbria.⁹⁵ These paired spoons are never identical: one is usually plain, perforated by a drilled hole while the other is divided into quadrants by two lines by a central intersection. A pair recovered as a chance find at Castell Nadolig in Cardiganshire, West Wales has handles copiously decorated with late La Tène designs, although the intersecting lines have been scratched

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52 Set of 'sacrificial' knives from a late Iron Age tomb at Saint-Georges-lès-Baillargeaux, Vienne, France.

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53 Pair of 'divining' spoons from Castell Nadolig, Cardiganshire; first century AD.

on with less than perfect precision: both spoons of this pair have neatly punched holes in different parts of each bowl (Fig. 53).⁹⁶

Spoons such as these clearly possessed some kind of cult function and they may well have been used in divinatory rituals,⁹⁷ the idea being that the spoons were cupped together and a fine powder or coloured viscous liquid (perhaps of crushed woad or ochre) was blown into the space; the prediction would be made according to the quadrant of the marked spoon on which the deposit landed. Reference to the cardinal points was a key factor in the laying out of Roman towns: 'division of the real world into quarters defined by lines joining the cardinal points had a long ancestry in the Near East, and also became the basis for classical systems of divination'.⁹⁸ Extrapolating from this it is not difficult to appreciate how the surface of these marked spoons might represent either the real or other world and perhaps, symbolised the universe, and even to suggest that the holes might represent heavenly bodies in the firmament. Such a view seems less fanciful if we refer to another pair of spoons, from Ffynnogion, Llanarmon Dyffryn in Denbighshire (North Wales), whose handles are in the form of rayed 'solar' circles.⁹⁹ Whether or not these spoons were instruments of divination, they appear to have been part of ritualists' toolkits in the later Iron Age; it is tempting to see the graves containing such peculiar objects as those of religious specialists, maybe of Druids themselves; similarly, the placement of such precious objects in

marshes belongs to a long-standing tradition of deliberate deposition in later prehistoric Britain.¹⁰⁰

The south-eastern British tribe of the Trinovantes, whose heartland lay in present-day Essex, is historically well known because of its involvement in the (in)famous Boudican Rebellion of AD 60.¹⁰¹ At about the time of Caesar's reconnaissance visits to Britain in 55/54 BC, a Trinovantian knight was given an elaborate funeral with full military honours at Kelvedon (Essex). It is possible that this man, or someone like him, was depicted on a black-ware pot, also from Kelvedon, for the surviving sherd displays the image of a warrior-horseman, his hair stiffened with lime,¹⁰² carrying a diamond-shaped shield in his left hand while in his right he bears a curious staff that terminates in a crook (rather like a bishop's crozier).¹⁰³ While this strange object might be interpreted as a bent spear, it could instead represent a ritual staff used in augury, like the similarly curved 'hockey-stick' (*lituus*) of Roman divinatory ritual. This motif¹⁰⁴ has been identified as present on the imagery of Verica¹⁰⁵ at the late Iron Age temple of Hayling Island (Hampshire) and on other late Iron Age coin-issues such as those minted by Cunobelin, king of the Catuvellauni, which show a range of apparently sacrificial scenes, including one depicting a bearded man, seated and holding a *lituus* and a cauldron.¹⁰⁶

The long curved staffs found in Romano-British iconography have been identified as sticks for use in ball games akin to hurling:¹⁰⁷ a Nene Valley (castorware) pottery mould from Kettering (Northamptonshire) bears the image of a veiled or long-haired male figure brandishing the stick in his right hand while holding a group of circular objects in the crook of his left arm, one of which has escaped and bounces under the stick.¹⁰⁸ While in the process of writing this chapter, I was excited to hear of another castorware vessel, a sherd of which is currently being studied for publication. Depicted as a stamped impression occurring twice on the same fragment, are three human figures, of whom one wears a diadem, the middle one carries what looks like a two-pronged staff and the third holds a curved rod that looks very like a *lituus*.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps this scene allows us to reinterpret the Kettering imagery as depicting religious rather than recreational activity. Another possible example of such an implement is, significantly, from the sanctuary of Hockwold-cum-Wilton – an image of a man with an erect phallus, holding a long curved staff and which closely resembles the object held by the Kelvedon horseman, as well as three round objects.¹¹⁰ The figure is on a sheet-bronze plaque that forms part of one of the ceremonial headdresses from the site. Such a context suggests a ritual function: either the scenes depict some kind of ceremonial game or these curved staffs are examples of the *lituus*, perhaps being used in conjunction with spherical objects associated with divination. We should remember that, in origin, Roman *ludi* (games) were closely linked with religious ceremonies,¹¹¹ and so there is no necessary tension between the interpretation of these curved

sticks as games paraphernalia or ritual equipment, even if the Romano-British images do not represent the *lituus* of the professional Augur.

Of course, the *lituus* is a Roman religious device, used in Roman ceremonies associated with taking auspices. The principal function of the Augurs was to interpret the flights of birds and other observations of animals in order to consult the divine will. We should recall Cicero's comment that the Gallic Druid and political leader Diviciacus was skilled in augury,¹¹² although this was an essentially Roman priestly function. Augurs were not, however, involved with sacrificial activity¹¹³ so, if the coins have been correctly read as depicting the act of sacrifice, involving one of these Augurs' staffs, then it is probable that the coin-maker or his adviser incorrectly interpreted the role of Roman Augurs. This is interesting in the light of possible religious tensions between indigenous British and Roman priests at the interface of Iron Age/Roman Britain, in the time between Caesar and Claudius when Britain was becoming increasingly sensitised to Roman mores.¹¹⁴ Could it be that the presence of a *lituus* on the Cunobelin issue is an example of appropriation, of the deliberate adoption of a Roman symbol to reflect non-Roman ideas? The image of the cauldron on the coin may reflect 'Britishness' as a counter-balance to the *romanitas* embodied in the *lituus*, and it is to these symbols of power and ceremony that we now turn.

The Sacred Cauldron: Food, Blood, Wine and Collective Consumption

Hailing the moon in a native word that means 'healing all things, they [the Druids] prepare a ritual sacrifice and banquet beneath a tree and bring up two white bulls . . .'¹¹⁵

Louernius, father of Bituis . . . made a square enclosure one and a half miles each way, within which he filled vats with expensive liquor and prepared so great a quantity of food that for many days all who wished could enter and enjoy the feast prepared.¹¹⁶

Recent research has explored the relationships between individual homesteads and village settlements in Neolithic Greece and, in particular, the sharing of food resources.¹¹⁷ An important theme is 'commensal politics', the role of food-consumption in maintaining and reaffirming social relationships.¹¹⁸ Commensality is important not simply because of the social interaction involved in sharing food but also because it provides opportunities for gatherings, whether for formal discussions, ceremonies or informal leisure talk and storytelling.

There is a great deal of evidence for symbolic feasting in Iron Age Europe,¹¹⁹ sometimes on a massive scale. Testimony comes from graves: from Hallstatt Iron Age princely tombs of the sixth century BC, such as the Hochdorf

chieftain's grave (with its nine drinking-horns, dinner service for nine guests and an immense Greek cauldron that had once contained mead)¹²⁰ and the equally lavish and broadly contemporary tomb of the 'princess' of Vix, whose grave furniture included a Graeco-Etruscan wine-mixing vessel so large that several people could stand in it with ease,¹²¹ to some of the very late Iron Age graves at, for instance, Welwyn (Hertfordshire)¹²² in south-east England, and Clemency¹²³ and Goeblingen-Nospelt in Luxembourg,¹²⁴ with their large assemblages of amphorae, olive-oil jars and vessels for fish-sauce.

The symbols of collective consumption were not confined to funerary contexts. Investigations of Gallic sanctuaries belonging to the middle and later Iron Age have revealed abundant signs of feasting, involving the consumption of vast quantities of meat and wine, at sites such as Acy-Romance (Ardennes) and Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Somme).¹²⁵ At Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise), the selection of animals for use in sacred banquets was rigidly prescribed: young lambs were sacrificed in springtime and shoulder-joints were preferentially eaten.¹²⁶ At the sanctuary on Hayling Island (Hampshire), built around the time of Caesar's visits to Britain, feasting took place outside the modest circular shrine and the remains of sacrificed and consumed animals were deposited in the courtyard. At this sanctuary, again, there was evidently a preference for lamb or mutton and, significantly, there appears to have been an embargo on the consumption of beef,¹²⁷ a prohibition at variance with domestic contexts in the region. In view of the highly ritualised control of sacrificial butchery practices,¹²⁸ it is likely that professional clergy were at the heart of feasting ceremonies.

But what do we know about ritual feasting in the time of the Druids? Apart from the residue of meat-eating, in the form of bone-assemblages, the most prominent artefacts are the vessels for the containment or preparation of drink and food.¹²⁹ The votive watery deposit at Llyn Fawr (Glamorgan, South Wales), initiated perhaps as early as the eighth century BC, is significant in part because of the clear evidence for its situation at the Bronze Age/Iron Age transition, when craftspeople familiar with working copper-alloy, using sheet metal and casting technology were experimenting with the new medium of iron. But Llyn Fawr is perhaps most important in socio-religious terms for the hoard's inclusion (and probably containment within) two large beaten-bronze cauldrons that were already as much as a hundred years old when deposited in the remote lake¹³⁰ as part of a sacro-ceremonial act to which people may have journeyed on pilgrimages from some distance away. Llyn Fawr has recently sprung into sharp focus thanks to the discoveries not far away at Llanmaes in the Vale of Glamorgan, where staff from the National Museum Wales have uncovered a site of similar date which includes roundhouses, enormous quantities of animal bones, of which 80 per cent were those of pigs and – most exciting of all – fragments of at least four bronze cauldrons, five large bowls and a ladle.¹³¹ So here is spectacular evidence of large-scale

feasting. Cauldrons may not have been suitable vessels for cooking because their thin metal walls might easily buckle or split in intense direct heat,¹³² so they were more probably used for serving stews prepared in pottery vessels or for liquor.

The symbolic role of cauldrons is highlighted by their presence as watery deposits, often in pairs, in Iron Age Britain and Ireland, including contexts much later than Llyn Fawr, as at Llyn Cerrig Bach on Anglesey and Blackburn Mill in southern Scotland, all of which might date to the Roman conquest of these regions in the late first or early second century AD. One of these Scottish cauldrons, from Carlingwark Loch, contained a hoard of ironwork.¹³³ Their ritual function is endorsed, too, by the discovery of the Salisbury hoard, a remarkable cache including objects dating to between the third and first millennium BC and collected for sacred deposition in about 200 BC. At least forty-six miniature bronze cauldrons were found, dating to the time the hoard was deposited and contemporary with an equally staggering array of twenty-four superbly made model shields.¹³⁴ The cauldron of cauldrons is, of course, the great gilded silver cult-vessel from Gundestrup in Jutland¹³⁵ with its scenes of mythology and ritual events. Its importance in feasting is highlighted by the detachable horns on the great bull depicted on the cauldron's base-plate that perhaps stuck up through the blood, liquor or stew contained within the vessel, as if to represent cooking meat.¹³⁶

The significance of large vessels is played out in their depiction on Iron Age coins, many issues bearing images of cauldrons or amphorae as well as high-status motifs of horses and boars.¹³⁷ Drinking equipment almost certainly had a symbolic function and, in addition to their persistent presence in Iron Age graves,¹³⁸ amphorae have been found in huge quantities on late pre-Roman Gallic *oppida*. One such cache is that from Corent in the Auvergne, where the numbers of vessels were far in excess of what would be appropriate for purely social wine consumption, suggesting that something out of the ordinary was happening to the wine brought in these jars.¹³⁹ Amphorae were persistent motifs on Arvernian gold coinage (Corent was an Arvernian site);¹⁴⁰ their depiction directly underneath the human face on the obverse of these coins demonstrates their key symbolism. It may be that wine was used among some Gallo-Britons as an aid to trance-experience.

The symbolism not only of wine but of the vessels in which it was transported is indicated by the treatment of some of the amphorae from Gallic sites, including Corent and Lyon, for they sustained sword cuts, as if from attack in battle, and they were sometimes even 'beheaded', as if their shape and colour were seen as analogous to those of human bodies¹⁴¹ and their wine as blood. So could they therefore have been perceived as surrogates for human sacrifice,¹⁴² which, so Classical writers report, was the remit of the Druids? If the vessels for storing and transporting wine were treated like people, and

subjected to 'human' sacrificial procedures, such behaviour suggests that the idea of human sacrifice was deep in the psyche, even if by Caesar's time it was comparatively rare. It is quite possible that the evidence for feasting was sometimes enacted in the context of this 'ultimate' sacrifice.

In his account of the Druids and other Gallic priests, Caesar gives us only the barest outline of their appearance and their ritual duties. Study of archaeological evidence for sacred regalia allows us a glimpse of how holy men presented themselves and how they operated within their communities. They had badges of office, staffs of authority and religious power and they wore headdresses that increased their height, marked them out as special and inspired awe. They had equipment for divining the future and noisy objects to conjure up beneficent spirits and repel those that were harmful and could cause disease or blight crops and livestock. They presided over sacrificial rites and could have been involved in the great feasts for which there is such eloquent evidence in the form of cauldrons and drinking equipment. The sinister 'murder' of wine-amphorae in Gaul hints at a lingering religious mindset that admitted human sacrifice as a legitimate act for the propitiation of the gods.

Druids and Doctrine

EARTH, SPIRIT AND UNDERWORLD

The Druids hold that the soul of a dead man does not descend to the silent, sunless world of Hades but becomes reincarnate elsewhere; if they are right, death is merely a point of change in perpetual existence¹

IN HIS poem the *Pharsalia*, Lucan refers to the Druidic belief in the rebirth of the soul after death. By contrast, Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid* paints a ghastly picture of Hades, the Classical Underworld, full of monsters, demons and lamenting, unshriven souls. One of the most terrible images in the poem is that of Charon, the unkempt and aged ferryman, who rows the dead who have been given the proper funeral rites across the River Styx. On his journey through Hades to visit his dead father, Anchises, Aeneas meets the ghosts of countless people, young and old, whose pale ghosts cluster by the shore, begging Charon to ferry them across the water to Elysium.² The *Aeneid* refers to an Underworld to which, so said the Sibylline prophetess, it is easy to descend but very hard to leave.³ The poet's account of Aeneas' journey through this Underworld contains one very significant point in terms of the interpretation of archaeological evidence from the north-western European Iron Age, for he describes three distinct states of after-death being: the unclean dead whose unburied, polluted state prevents them from crossing the River Styx; a kind of limbo, where certain souls must await permission to progress to the ultimate goal of the Elysian Fields; and paradise itself.

In searching the Classical texts for a 'core' of Druidic doctrine, it is their tenet of reincarnation that stands out. Caesar⁴ and Diodorus Siculus⁵ say much the same thing as Lucan, which is not surprising if we accept their quarrying of a common earlier source, that of Posidonius.⁶ However, each text provides slight but significant variations in the description of the Druids' teaching on rebirth. Caesar introduces a pragmatic, even cynical, element:

The Druids attach particular importance to the belief that the soul does not perish but passes after death from one body to another; they think that this

belief is the most effective way to encourage bravery because it removes the fear of death.⁷

If we read Caesar's comments correctly, what he is saying here is that the idea of perpetual reincarnation – meaning that death, as such, did not exist – was employed by the Druids in order to exhort warriors to extra courage in action because their minds, spirits or souls would survive mortal injuries received in battle. This passage is more than simply a reiteration of a doctrine of rebirth, for it implies, perhaps, that Gallo-British warriors were sometimes subject to fear and cowardice and that the Druids' presence was therefore needed on the battlefield, even though, according to Caesar, they themselves were exempt from military service.⁸ If this were so, then it might account for the presence of anomalous late Iron Age graves (such as the one found at Deal) where men were interred with priestly regalia and weapons. Although speculation, it is possible that such individuals were accorded especial honour if they had successfully turned the tide of battle by their intervention and exhortation.

Diodorus Siculus' account of Gallic belief in reincarnation contains much more detail than the other two texts:

The belief of Pythagoras is strong in them [the Gauls], that the souls of men are immortal, and that after a definite number of years they live a second life when the soul passes into another body. This is the reason given why some people at the burial of the dead cast upon the pyre letters written to their dead relatives, thinking that the dead will be able to read them.⁹

We have to remember that Diodorus almost certainly derived his information from Posidonius, and it may be that, in describing Gallic religious customs, this earlier Greek author was writing within the framework of his own Stoic philosophical beliefs. At any rate, we should question the assumption of widespread literacy among the Gauls of the first century BC; at best, letter-writing would have been confined to the educated noble classes.¹⁰

Diodorus' first comment is on the link between this Gallic doctrine of rebirth and that of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, the *fons et origo* of such beliefs. Secondly, he provides specific information concerning the precise working of the cycle of death and rebirth. Thirdly, he discusses the way in which notions of life after death were interpreted by the Gauls themselves. Fourthly, the writer talks about letter-writing in Gallic society, of particular interest in the light of Caesar's statement.¹¹

Pythagoras' Theory: Rebirth and Reincarnation

The Greek philosopher Pythagoras lived in the sixth century BC. Little is known about him except that he emigrated from his birthplace on Samos to

Croton in southern Italy in about 532 BC.¹² But we have far more knowledge of his followers, the Pythagoreans. Better known to us as the mathematician who gave the world his theorem, chief among Pythagoras' philosophical teachings was the concept of reincarnation or, more precisely, the transmigration of souls. The emperor Nero's tutor, the Stoic philosopher Seneca, discusses the doctrine of Pythagoras in his *Letters from a Stoic*, referring specifically to his practice of vegetarianism:¹³

Pythagoras maintained that all creatures were inter-related and that there was a system of exchange of souls involving transmigration from one bodily form to another. If we are to believe Pythagoras, no soul ever undergoes death, or even a suspension of its existence except perhaps for the actual moment of transfusion into another body. This is not the moment for inquiring by what stages or at what point a soul completes its wanderings through a succession of other habitations and reverts to human form. It is enough for our present purposes that he has instilled into people a dread of committing the crime of parricide, in view of the possibility that they might, all unknowing, come across the soul of an ancestor and with knife or teeth do it some dreadful outrage, assuming that the spirit of a relative might be lodging in the flesh concerned.¹⁴

Seneca's text has relevance to Druidism. Firstly, it is clear from his writings that a keen interest in Pythagoras and his teachings existed among the intellectuals of the Imperial Roman period, of whom Diodorus and Seneca were only two of many.¹⁵ This may account for Diodorus' identification of Druidic doctrines of rebirth with the transmigration of souls expounded by Pythagoras and his followers. Secondly, Seneca makes two points that resonate strongly with archaeological evidence from Iron Age European contexts. Pythagoras' vegetarian canon accords with the 'shamanistic' respect shown to animals, which were sacrificed within a strictly prescribed framework of ritual; treatment of whose remains, together with the frequency of animal-imagery in symbolic art, demonstrates a reverent attitude to both wild and domestic beasts.¹⁶ The second point relates to human sacrificial procedures, particularly the apparent emphasis on the suspension of normal rites of passage presented by some of the bog-bodies, including those of Lindow Man and the Irish marsh victims. If the Druids held to a doctrine similar to that of Pythagoras, namely that of cyclical death and rebirth, a deliberate intervention to break the cycle could make sense in terms either of human sacrifice or of extreme punishment designed to deny transmigration to the soul of the dead.

Pythagoras' thought 'has affinities with Indian doctrine, and he evidently had contact with India. Some have thought that his name was a garbled

version of Pitta-guru (“father-teacher”).¹⁷ Whether or not such an association is likely in the sixth century BC, there is little doubt that the concept of reincarnation has been fundamental to Hindu religion since its development in the third millennium BC.¹⁸ ‘Rebirth (*punar-janma*) is regarded as fact by Hindus, and efforts to bring the endless cycle of births and deaths to an end are at the core of all Hindu religious practices. The prospect of having to die, time and again, all kinds of deaths, of having to endure existences not only as lowly humans, but as animals and plants, is so frightening that everything must be done to avoid it.’ Hindus believe that only wisdom and enlightenment can break the cycle and allow the achievement of *moksa* (release).¹⁹ But, if that is too difficult, it is at least possible to influence the status of one’s next life by working towards the attainment of good karma, just as one’s present karma is the result of actions and behaviour followed in previous incarnations.²⁰

Whether or not Hindu traditions and perceptions influenced Pythagoras, how possible was it for the Druids themselves to have had access to his philosophy or to any other Greek system of thinking? Pythagoras lived in the sixth century BC. By 600 BC, there were Greeks in southern Gaul, when the Phocaeans established a colony at Massilia (Marseilles), giving rise to a Gallo-Greek culture here and at neighbouring towns like Glanum, where the Greek alphabet and system of writing were adopted and Hellenic modes of stone building and sculpture introduced.²¹ Glanum, the tribal capital of the Glanici,²² is a case in point because here the archaeological evidence indicates a ready synthesis between Greek, Roman and native southern Gaulish culture²³ and, in such a context, the influence of Pythagorean thinking may well have percolated through to indigenous clergy and, thence, to the heartlands of Gaul. A good example of Gallo-Greek religious interaction may be found in a dedication from Orgon (Bouches-du-Rhône), probably from a sanctuary of the Saluvii.²⁴ The inscription, using Greek characters, was set up by a Gaul named Vebroumarus to the Gallic sky-god, Tanarus,²⁵ the ‘Taraniis’ of Lucan’s poem (see Chapter 4), whom the author mentions almost in the same breath as his allusion to the Druids.²⁶

The long-standing and intense connections between Greece and southern Gaul from the sixth century BC indicate the presence of a viable conduit for cultural interaction that may have given rise to a Pythagorean element in the Druids’ teaching. But whatever links, if any, may have existed between this Gallic priesthood and Greek philosophical thinking, the nature of the Gauls’ apparent belief in reincarnation needs consideration. The testimony of Caesar, Lucan and Diodorus is ambiguous. Rebirth can mean genuine transmigration of souls, in which the spirit of a person inhabits different sequential bodies, in the way that Hindus, Buddhists and other reincarnatory faiths perceive life after death.²⁷ But rebirth may also mean the experience of a new, tangible life in an Otherworld, set in a parallel dimension to earthworld, like

the *Annwfn* (Underworld/Otherworld) described in the group of medieval Welsh prose texts known as the *Mabinogion*. This Welsh afterlife was perceived, like that of early Irish mythology, as a paradisaical world where one's body remained young and fit for ever and the reborn dead could enjoy a life of happy luxury and leisure, feasting, making love and hunting while time stood still and existence was perpetual.²⁸ Such a tangible after-death existence is certainly implied by Diodorus' text which contains contradictions: whilst the author refers to Pythagorean perceptions wherein souls move from body to body, he speaks of the Gauls' belief that letters thrown onto funeral pyres could be read by the dead, as if these messages could be resurrected in the next world and recognised by their deceased recipients.

Haunted Selves: Roman Beliefs about the Afterlife

Roman mortuary customs and beliefs about life after death were heavily influenced by the Etruscans and were therefore underpinned by a strong and vivid perception of life – of a sort – after death, whether the Otherworld consisted of a gloomy hall filled with unhappy ghosts or a happy, sparkling paradise where those beyond the grave enjoyed all the good things of earthly life but without any of the miseries of material existence. There were those, like the Epicurean philosopher Lucretius, who repudiated any idea of sentient life after death and of divine intervention in human affairs. In his *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius is vehement in his doctrine that the human soul, like the body, was mortal and dispersed, like its corporal, material house, when a person died. In preaching such a canon, the writer tried to persuade people against superstition, telling them that death should not be feared because there was no existence after dying.²⁹ But for the most part Roman society admitted of an existence after death, and some firmly believed in a conduct-driven afterlife in which – rather like the Hindu concept of karma (and, indeed, Christian notions of Judgement Day) – how one behaved in one's earthly life determined how pleasant one's new post-death existence would be.³⁰

Tacitus, while clearly undecided about what happened to the dead, espoused the notion of rewarding a good life. At the end of the *Agricola*, his eponymous eulogy to his father-in-law, he speaks thus to the shade of *Agricola*:

If there is any mansion for the spirits of the just, if, as the wise aver, great souls do not perish with the body, quiet, O Father, be your rest. May you call us, your household, from feeble regrets and unmanly mourning to contemplate your virtues, in presence of which sorrow and lamentation become a sin! May we honour you in better ways – by our admiration, by our undying praise, even, if our powers permit, by following your example!³¹

Although this passage is laced with an almost sickening sycophancy, Tacitus raises an important point, namely the role of the dead as venerated ancestors who, perhaps, continued to watch over and protect their living descendants. There was a strong Roman perception that ancestors could be forces for good but also for ill if neglected, not accorded proper rites or were without kin to do them honour. Hence, the festival of the *Lemuria*, a public ceremony of the unquiet and wandering dead that took place on 9, 11 and 13 May.³² The Augustan poet Ovid records the somewhat bizarre rite in which the *pater familias* (the male head of the family) rose at midnight and, having washed his hands, with fingers clenched around his thumbs, walked through the house on bare feet spitting black beans from his mouth, with his head averted, chanting the phrase 'with these beans I redeem me and mine', while the restless ancestral spirits crept up behind and gathered the beans out of his sight. When he had repeated these words nine times, he washed once more, clanged bronze vessels together to frighten the ghosts and then said nine times, 'Ghosts of my fathers, be gone.'³³

Funerary Practices and the Material Culture of 'Rebirth'

First they laid resinous wood, and upon it sections of oak trees to build the pyre up high; the sides of the pyre were wattled with sombre-foliaged boughs; in front they planted funereal Cypresses, and his shining arms adorned its top. Some lit fires beneath the cauldrons, and boiled water; they washed and anointed the corpse of their friend, so cold in death. All were lamenting. When they had wept him, they laid on the bier his body, covering it with purple drapes and the dead man's own clothing. The bearers lifted the bier onto the pyre, a melancholy office, and in the traditional manner averting their eyes, applied the lighted torches. The pile of offerings burned – the incense, the meat, the libations of oil. Now when the ashes had fallen in and the flames died down, they quenched the remains, the thirsty embers, with wine; and collecting the bones, Corynaeus put them away in a casket of bronze. He then moved round his comrades three times, bearing pure water; aspersing them with drops he shook from a branch of fruitful olive, he purified them, and spoke the farewell words. Aeneas the true now raised over his friend a massive tomb, laying on it the man's own arms, his oar and his trumpet . . .³⁴

In the description of the funeral of Aeneas' comrade-in-arms, Misenus, Virgil constructs a vibrant tableau not simply of the mortuary rites involved in the burial but of the less tangible elements of dealing with the dead, including prayers and purification ceremonies that may leave no trace in the archaeological record. Excavation may reveal the cremated or inhumed remains of people, grave-goods either left in the tomb or consumed on the funeral pyre,

and evidence of mourning behaviour, such as feasting, breaking the possessions of the deceased and the construction of lasting monuments in their memory. Virgil reveals detail about the building of Misenus' pyre, the choice of timber, the tools used for felling and dressing the wood, the treatment of the body, the need for the bereaved to avert their eyes for fear of pollution, the way in which the pyre was quenched when it had done its work, and the rituals associated with the gathering of the cremated remains.

The context of this arresting passage in the *Aeneid* is the death of one of Aeneas' companions, who had fought beside him in the Trojan War and who had been a close friend of Hector. Misenus was famed as a trumpet-player and, according to the story, it was this talent that proved his downfall, for he boasted of his prowess, challenged the gods to a musical contest and was thrown overboard from the ship by a jealous sea-god who hurled the presumptuous mortal against the rocks to perish in the surf. This is just one of numerous examples in Virgil's poem of the way in which the poet mixes up the worlds of gods and humans, making them interact constantly and presenting a relationship between the material and the spirit domains wherein people were the playthings of deities and might be either favourites or ill-favoured by particular divinities. In the present context, it is not so much Misenus' unfortunate end or even his funeral rites that are especially significant; rather it is the reference to the initial encounter between Aeneas and the Sibyl,³⁵ when Aeneas is negotiating with her for admittance to the Underworld. She is in the midst of giving him instructions as to what he must do in order to be able to cross the threshold between the worlds of the living and the dead, the first of which is to seek out and acquire the golden bough, his passport to the Stygian realms he desires to visit, when she breaks off in order to inform him of an occurrence that threatens to thwart his plans. The problem, so the Sibyl tells Aeneas, is that, unbeknownst to him, Misenus has died and his lack of proper burial means that Aeneas and all his companions are polluted. The Sibyl urges him to put this right, to bury his friend with the appropriate funeral rites and to sacrifice black sheep, presumably to Hecate, goddess of the Underworld, to whom such animals were traditionally offered as gifts of appeasement.

The unburied dead as a pollutant has several elements of meaning: firstly, to leave a corpse to rot in the open air is clearly a practical problem in terms of smell and hygiene. Secondly, from a symbolic perspective, Aeneas' proposed visit to the Underworld is hedged about with prohibitions and ritual safeguards, for it is dangerous for a living person to travel among the dead, in part, at least, because it upsets the natural order of things, makes the divisions between life and death potentially unstable, and – most important of all – risks offending the supernatural powers presiding over the worlds of both the living and the dead. Finally, unless Misenus is given a proper burial, his soul is denied the rite of passage for transition to the 'bodiless regions' and will

forever be condemned to cry piteously and vainly for access to Charon's boat and conveyance by the divine ferryman across the River Styx to Elysium.

Virgil's account of the circumstances surrounding Misenus' death and his funeral rites has a direct bearing on attitudes to death, after-death and after-life that influenced the ways in which reincarnation and transmigration of souls may have been perceived by the Romans and by people dwelling on the periphery of the Roman world. In Gaul and Britain, during the later first millennium BC, there is archaeological and literary evidence for a considerable variation – both regional and chronological – in mortuary rites, but all of them have a bearing on perceptions of how the living viewed their dead and the need to enact the right rituals so that the ancestral spirits would be treated correctly but not allowed to contaminate those still inhabiting the material world (Figs 54 and 55). For the disposal of the most important dead, at least, religious officials were almost certainly present to guide the proceedings and ensure the proper rites took place.

Transforming the Dead: Fire and Water

These men [the Druids], as well as other authorities, have pronounced that men's souls and the universe are indestructible, although at times fire or water may (temporarily) prevail.³⁶

Strabo's comment concerning Druidic teaching on the permanence of the human soul is enigmatic: on the one hand, it seems a very general statement that lumps the soul with the universe; on the other, the inclusion of fire and water as temporary agents for threatening this permanence might be read in apocalyptic terms, when natural disasters appear to wipe out the world, or it could apply to particular funerary customs associated with cremation or deposition in water. Destruction by fire was often interpreted by the Romans as an evil omen: hence Tacitus' statement concerning the Druidic prediction of the downfall of Rome when fire swept through the Capitoline Hill in AD 69, a catastrophe widely believed to be the result of the gods' displeasure at the chaos wrought by the schisms ripping through the fabric of Roman society in the 'Year of the Four Emperors'.³⁷ But if Strabo was, instead, referring to Gallic burial customs, he could be saying that people's souls remained immortal, however their bodies were interred, and that therefore the destruction of mortal remains did not matter. If that is the case, he could be interpreted as being in direct contradiction to Diodorus, Caesar and Lucan, for whom the Druids' doctrine on reincarnation (literally, the habitation by souls of new bodies) was paramount.

According to archaeological evidence, the consumption of bodies by fire could be a complex and attenuated process in the later Iron Age in Gaul and

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54 Middle Iron Age carriage-burial of a high-status woman, from Wetwang, East Yorkshire.

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55 Decorated bronze casket, possibly once containing herbs, liquor or holy oil, from the Wetwang woman's burial. The casket was welded shut, as if to trap whatever was inside and keep it there.

Britain, sometimes involving several stages. What is more, as the processes and ceremonies surrounding some rich cremation-burials become better understood,³⁸ so the complexity of grave-goods deposition is being recognised as multi-faceted: some material was selected for destruction on the funeral pyre while other objects were carefully retained or placed for the first time in the grave after the fire had been quenched or had died down. The complexities of pyre ceremonies in Gaul and Britain resonate strongly with Misenus' burial rites.

In Rome and Italy, cremation had been the more popular funerary rite during the Republican years, falling out of favour and gradually being replaced by inhumation during the second and third centuries AD.³⁹ Cremation was still practised in Rome during the mid-first century AD: in describing the funeral rites of Nero's wife, the empress Poppaea, Tacitus records that 'her body was not cremated in the Roman fashion, but was stuffed with spices and embalmed in the manner of foreign potentates.'⁴⁰ This probably says more about Nero's gigantic ego than anything else (he may have wished to present the imperial family as if they were Egyptian pharaohs), but it is interesting that

embalming, preserving the body for the afterlife, could be practised at the highest level in imperial Rome. This method of dealing with the dead is clearly displayed in a tomb near the Via Cassia on the edge of the city, which contained the mummified corpse of a young girl who had died at the age of about seven in the mid-second century AD. She had been embalmed and placed lovingly in her grave with her jewellery and playthings.⁴¹

It may be that the choice of cremation or inhumation in the Roman world was led by fashion (much as it is today in the western world) or personal taste but the very widespread shift from burning bodies to leaving them in the ground in the second century AD might lead us to suppose that such a radical change reflected some new philosophy about life after death and the need to preserve bodies intact so that they could enjoy a tangible afterlife sound in wind and limb. But the change may also be the result of altering perceptions of just where the afterlife took place: ash and smoke from cremations rise to the sky while inhumed bodies decompose, their matter sinking into the earth and – maybe – this reflected a belief that the Underworld was just that, a place underneath the abode of living beings. Richard Bradley explores instances of the latter notion among the Sami of northern Scandinavia and Russia, for whom the dead walked upside down in the footsteps of the living.⁴²

Caesar makes it clear that cremation was the favoured rite for the Gallic noble classes (and by implication for the Druids themselves) when he was in Gaul as military commander in the 50s BC. He specifically says:

Although Gaul is not a rich country, funerals there are splendid and costly. Everything the dead man is thought to have been fond of is put on the pyre, including even animals. Not long ago slaves and dependants known to have been their masters' favourites were burned with them at the end of the funeral.⁴³

In about AD 55, not much more than a decade after the Claudian invasion, the funeral of a British nobleman of the Catuvellauni was conducted at Folly Lane, Verulamium, a high place of sanctity above the centre of the Iron Age *oppidum*. The first century BC in south-eastern England saw a change in indigenous burial practices⁴⁴ whereby cremated human remains were given formal interment, with careful harvesting of calcined bones from the debris of funeral pyres and their placement in pottery vessels. Before c. 50 BC, the disposal of human corpses left faint archaeological footprints, the inference being that the remains of the majority of dead people were either excarnated (left exposed for wild beasts and birds to scavenge), buried in water or the burnt fragments of cremations scattered, leaving no permanent traces in the ground.

The funeral of the Folly Lane chieftain was conducted with considerable ceremony. A huge enclosure, extending over nearly 2 hectares, was constructed

around a central and very deeply⁴⁵ sunk shaft in which excavators found the scattered remnants of feasting equipment, including tableware imported from Gaul and amphorae that had contained Italian wine. It is likely that such debris represents the first act in the mortuary drama when, soon after the man died, he was placed in the shaft, where he lay in state for some time before the funeral banquet. Then the body was raised from the pit and cremated on a huge pyre nearby, together with a quantity of 'showy' silver goods, richly decorated horse-gear, an ivory-ornamented chair and a chain-mail tunic. After the fire had died down, mourners collected a small group of burnt memorabilia from the pyre, along with some token cremated bone, and buried it all in a shallow pit in the vicinity of the pyre. The original 'viewing' shaft was then destroyed and the burial pit covered by a carefully constructed mound of turves. The pyre-site was marked with a timber upright and at the same time that these funerary rites were being conducted, and as an integral part of the proceedings, three women were sacrificed and placed in the enclosure ditch at its entrance,⁴⁶ as if to ward off evil spirits and protect the soul of the dead man.

The various stages in the funerary ceremony surrounding the death and disposal of the Folly Lane chieftain's mortal remains, including his lying-in-state, cremation and final interment, indicate that, on occasions, burial was not simple but was protracted, as if to reflect the gradual desertion of the body by the spirit. Such an idea may be borne out by the somewhat obscure remark by Diodorus Siculus,⁴⁷ namely that the souls of men were considered by the Gauls – followers of Pythagorean tradition on reincarnation – to be immortal and that 'after a definite numbers of years they live a second life when the soul passes into another body'. Is it possible that the interruption in the final interment of the Folly Lane nobleman's cremated remains symbolised the hiatus between the departure of the soul from one body and its occupation of another? If so, then we are immediately reminded of Druidic doctrines of reincarnation.

The Folly Lane 'chieftain' was no ordinary member of the British elite living in Verulamium just after the Roman conquest. He was friendly to Rome, perhaps a client-king, and he may even have served as a Roman cavalryman.⁴⁸ His links with Rome are exemplified not only by the Mediterranean wine served at the funeral banquet but also by the ivory-mounted chair burnt on his pyre, for it was a 'curule chair', the kind of seat used by Roman magistrates and of a type represented on some of the coins of the Catuvellaunian king Cunobelinus, who might have died as late as the 40s AD.⁴⁹ We can only imagine the pomp and ceremony surrounding the funeral of this high-ranking Briton. His possible rulership over a huge territory may be reflected in the selection of turf used to cover the funerary shaft and final burial place, for it was carefully chosen from a range of habitats, perhaps in recognition of the wide and varied landscape whose people owed allegiance to him.

But despite his Roman trappings, his was an essentially British burial, whose complex and long drawn-out ritual was clearly orchestrated by professional clergy. What is more, the inclusion of human sacrifices, of women whose inhumed remains showed signs that they all suffered from disabilities affecting their mobility,⁵⁰ indicates that indigenous traditions were being maintained: given the ritual murders and the high profile of this burial it is more than likely that the Druids were involved. We can only imagine the intensity of the experience undergone by those who witnessed the spectacular events surrounding this man's death and cremation. Not least of the spectacles was the pyre itself that, when fully alight, would have been visible (and smelt) for miles. But the cremation of the Folly Lane chieftain was no transient experience. The layout of the Roman town indicates that not only was the *locus sanctus* north of the River Ver respected for centuries after the nobleman's death but that the main city buildings were aligned on the site, as if to commemorate the burial site for ever, in acknowledgement of the continuing significance of his ancestral presence in what has been described as 'the memory of kings'.⁵¹

We can get some idea about funeral pyres from Roman coins struck to mark the consecration of dead emperors, such as Antoninus Pius and Septimius Severus,⁵² which depict huge, tiered edifices that literally became towering infernos once the fire had taken hold. (We have to be careful, though, because emperors were special and their incredibly elaborate funeral rites are unlikely to have been mirrored by those of ordinary mortals, particularly in the provinces.) The Greek historian Herodian, who wrote in the third century AD, describes the pyre set up to commemorate the death of Septimus Severus in Rome, even though he actually died and was buried at York. Herodian records how the emperor's sons Caracalla and Geta brought their father's inurned ashes back to the capital and commissioned a life-size wax statue of the dead emperor which lay supine on an ivory couch, left on show in the entrance hall of the imperial palace for seven days. 'Every day the doctors came, approached the couch, inspected the image and announced that the patient was growing progressively worse.'⁵³ Herodian goes on to describe the magnificence of the pyre erected to cremate the 'body': it was made of logs piled five storeys high, filled with faggots and elaborately decorated with precious hangings, ivory statues and paintings. The interior was perfumed with spices and scented oils, and cavalry and charioteers filed past it before it was ignited by the new emperor. Although this elaborate mock burial was that of an emperor in the imperial city, it is possible that equally elaborate ceremonies were enacted at Folly Lane. It is even possible that some of the silver found melted down on the Catuvellaunian pyre site represented not grave-goods but pyre decorations. If the Folly Lane chieftain's pyre was anything like as large as that built to honour Severus, its burning would have been a conflagration that would not, in visible terms, have appeared so very

different from the giant wicker men described by Caesar and Strabo as being used in Druidic rituals for the immolation of sacrificial victims.

If fire was regularly employed as a means of disposing of the dead in later Iron Age Britain and Gaul, perhaps giving rise to Strabo's comment about the fate of humans after death (above), then credence may also be sought for his comment concerning water as another temporary interruption in the immortality of the soul. Apart from the remains of those who clearly met untimely and special deaths and whose bodies were placed in marshes, there is evidence that, on occasions, dead people were disposed of in watery contexts (Fig. 56). Very often, the only surviving components of Iron Age human remains in water (with the exception of the bog-bodies) are skulls. This may be because heads were given special treatment or, equally likely, the less robust skeletal parts of the body became scattered in running water. Although Cyril Fox categorically denied finding human bone in his investigation of Llyn Cerrig Bach during the Second World War, the archive recently re-studied,⁵⁴ suggests that human remains were present at the site and, perhaps, were deposited as one episode in the complex rituals there that included the placing of precious metalwork and animal bone during different periods of the Iron Age in Wales until the Roman conquest.

In 1981, archaeologists conducted excavations on a causeway, represented by a double row of timber uprights, running along the north bank of the river Witham at Fiskerton in Lincolnshire. The river has long been famous for the

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56 Head of a young girl, sacrificed in a peat-bog at Windeby, Schleswig-Holstein in the first century AD.

presence there of ornate military equipment, decorated with La Tène designs, ritually deposited in the water.⁵⁵ The site has already been discussed, in Chapter 1, in the context of its possible lunar symbolism, for the renewal of the timber posts, about every twenty-two years coincides to a degree with past lunar eclipses. Fiskerton is a waterlogged site and investigation revealed a range of ritually deposited artefacts dating mainly to the third century BC, including weapons, ornaments and wooden boats. Also recovered from the 1981 excavations were fragments of human bone, chief of which was part of a cranium, the parietal bone bearing the marks of a sword-slash that, because it never healed,⁵⁶ is likely to have been the cause of the owner's death or to have been inflicted post mortem. The skull belonged to a young adult.⁵⁷

Other rivers were the repository of human skulls in the Iron Age and Roman periods in western Europe. We may cite the late Iron Age head found in the River Saône, near Châlons-sur-Saône, which also bore signs that its owner had sustained repeated blows from a sword, together with a hole indicating that it had been fastened with a nail to a post or building.⁵⁸ It is important to emphasise that, as is the case with all these riverine deposits of human heads, it is impossible to tell whether they went into the water alone or whether the rest of the body was tossed in (or reverently deposited) as well. Like the bog-bodies, it is possible that the watery deposition of human heads (or heads with their bodies), especially those who had died violently, perhaps as a result of punitive or sacrificial action, was a special funerary rite designed either to help or inhibit the passage of the soul to the next world.

Life, Death and Druids

The mystery of dying and the fate of people and their souls after death were issues of major concern for the Druids and the communities they served. Their knowledge of the Otherworld gave them insight into how the dead, particularly the noble dead, should be treated, in order to placate their spirits and send them safely into the world beyond the grave.

The Power of Speech: Druids and Bards

In conversation they [the Gauls] use few words and speak in riddles, for the most part hinting at things and leaving a great deal to be understood. They frequently exaggerate with the aim of extolling themselves and diminishing the status of others. They are boasters and threateners and given to bombastic self-dramatization, and yet they are quick of mind and with good natural ability for learning. They have also lyric poets whom they call Bards. They sing to the accompaniment of instruments resembling lyres, sometimes a eulogy and sometimes a satire.⁵⁹

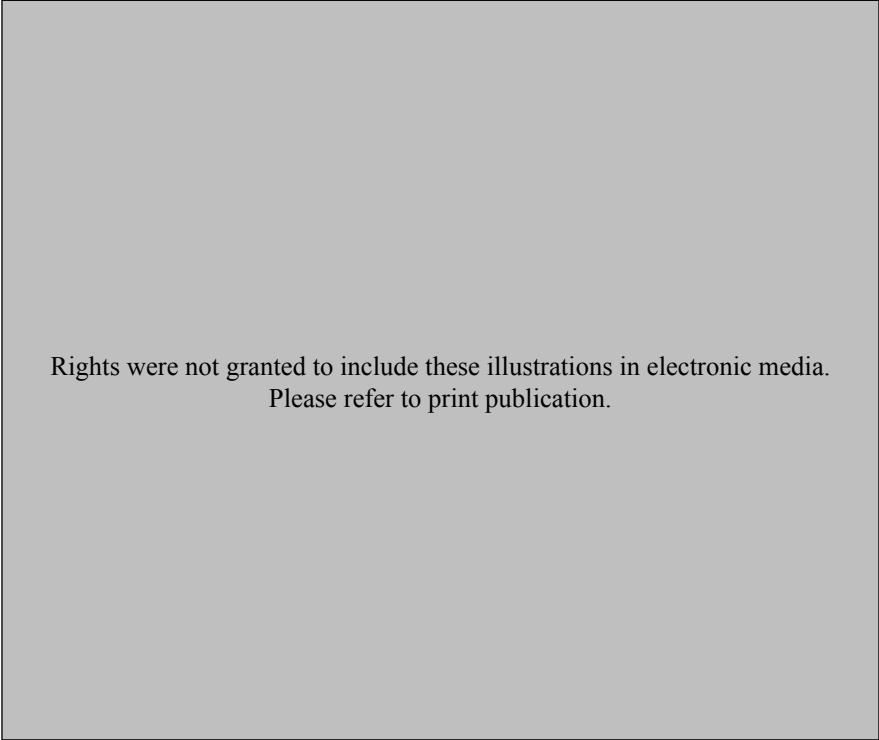
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57 Part of a sheet-bronze trumpet from Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey.

Diodorus' comment contains important allusions to speech and music (Fig. 57) with particular reference to the Bards, who possessed many of the same functions as the Druids, including that of divination. Whilst Diodorus and Strabo⁶⁰ split the functions of holy men, Caesar only speaks of two high-status groups in Gaulish society, the Druids and the Knights so, for him, at least, it was the Druids above all whose use of words, in prose, poetry or song, had the power to link earth and spirit worlds. Incidentally, Diodorus' comment about the use of lyres by the Bards calls to mind the wonderful set of antler tuning-pegs for a seven-stringed lyre deposited in the second century BC in an underground shrine at High Pasture Cave on the Island of Skye.⁶¹

In considering burial rituals and perceptions of life after death, the words spoken or sung at funerals would have played a key role in sending the soul to its proper place. Chanting, keening, speaking repetitive verse and strumming lyres would all have added atmosphere to the sombre occasion of death, and we can imagine how the Druids – or their subordinates – would have been regarded as essential presences in death rituals, helping to free the spirit of the dead from its body, purifying and transforming it so that it could enter its new realm, and comforting mourners with assurances of reincarnation and continuance of the soul. One way in which this could be done was by reaffirming a community's traditions and we can, perhaps, understand this better with reference to the role of Bards in a much earlier society, that of ancient Greece.

The excavation of the Mycenaean 'Palace of Nestor' at Pylos in the Greek Peloponnese uncovered a wall painting that had decorated a great assembly hall and depicted a bard sitting on a rock and playing a lyre. Homer's *Odyssey* makes repeated reference to bards and it is particularly striking that their performances embraced praise poetry, entertainment, music and the sacred.⁶² In Homer's Greece, as in other heroic societies, the bards played a key role in knitting together the fabric of society, by telling stories of home and abroad, repeating well-known tales and, most importantly, reminding their audience of



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58 Late Romano-British stone head from Caerwent, South Wales. The open mouth may reflect an intention to express the power of the spoken word.

their ancestry and their rootedness in the spiritual world (Fig. 58). One of the most vivid portrayals of a sacred bard in the *Odyssey* is the description of the blind Demodocus, bard at the court of the Phaeacian king Alcinous, who sang songs of the heroic past, of prophecy and the gods so poignantly as to reduce Odysseus to tears.⁶³ Ancient prophets, those with 'second sight', were often physically blind, the better to see into the world of the supernatural. The Homeric representation of the bard as the voice of the gods foreshadows the way the Druids were described in the Classical texts on late Iron Age Gaul. Indeed it is likely that accounts of Druidic behaviour and spiritual power by educated people like Diodorus and Caesar were heavily influenced by ancient Greek bardic tradition. The Druids, though, were more than keepers of oral tradition; they were philosophers, teachers and expounders of religious doctrine, conduits for communication with the spirit world and controllers of sacred knowledge. As such, they held the key to life, death and rebirth.

Images and Tombs

DRUIDS FACE TO FACE?

I also urge you to make sure that the tonsure, about which you also asked me to write, is worn in accordance with Christian ecclesiastical practice . . . We who desire to be saved by Christ's Passion like Peter wear this sign of the Passion on the crown of the head, which is the highest part of the body.¹

SO, ACCORDING to the Venerable Bede, wrote Ceolfrid, abbot of the monastery at Jarrow in Northumberland in *c.* AD 710 to the Pictish king Nechtan, who had requested guidance on particular religious practices, including the proper observance of Easter and the correct tonsure (a circular shaven area on the top of the head surrounded by hair)² to be worn by Catholic Christian clerics. A tension existed in the British Church at this time for alongside the official dogmas of Roman Christianity were indigenous practices, on the northern and western fringes of the Roman Empire, that included a different kind of 'Celtic' clerical tonsure, said to follow the practice of Simon Magus, which consisted of a swathe of shaven hair, stretching from ear to ear. In the present context, the interest of Bede's testimony about such matters lies in his allusion to the manipulation of the human body for sacral purposes. He explains that adoption of the circular tonsure by Catholic English monks was to acknowledge, commemorate and replicate the crown of thorns worn by Christ at his Passion. Recent study³ suggests a possible link between the religious tonsure spoken of by Bede and others⁴ and the singular hairstyles identified on Iron Age iconographic human representations from central Europe that appear to show parts of the head deliberately shaved.

The Man from Bohemia

The nobles shave the cheeks but let the moustache grow freely so that it covers the mouth. And so when they are eating the moustache becomes entangled in the food, and when they are drinking the drink passes, as it were, through a sort of strainer.⁵

Diodorus presents a somewhat unappetising and contemptuous image of feasting, alcohol-swilling men, with wine-stained, food-encrusted facial hair. But he does tell us something about the attention paid to male personal appearance and, in particular, that of the head and face in later Iron Age Gaul, also borne out by the presence of 'toilet-instruments' in the archaeological record.⁶ 'Hair is a symbol freighted with cultural meaning. Variously deployed as a marker of social status, racial alterity, physical maturity, age, sexual potency and, most strikingly, gender, hair communicates a society's values.'⁷

Visitors to the Iron Age galleries in the Národní Muzeum in Prague will observe a nearly life-size ragstone sculpture of a male human head⁸ reposing at the bottom of a large display case amidst a welter of pottery and metalwork. It is to be regretted that such an important piece of middle Iron Age material culture has apparently been dumped in a case where it is easy to miss for it is a unique piece of sculpture, one that allows those who see it to come literally face to face with a portrait of an Iron Age man (Fig. 59). The head, discovered in 1943, comes from a monumental statue, never found, probably set up in a

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59 Early Iron Age stone male head from Mšecké Žehrovice, Bohemia, Czech Republic.

public place, perhaps in a settlement or a shrine. It had a distinct biography, for some time after its production and display the head was severed, broken into several pieces and buried, incomplete, in a pit with pottery suggesting its deposition in the third–second century BC, in the vicinity of a rectilinear enclosure (known as a *Viereckshanze*) at Mšecké Žehrovice, 50 kilometres from Prague. While we seem to be straying far to the east of the Gallo-British focus of the present study, this part of central Europe was occupied by a tribe called the Boii, almost certainly related to the Boii who inhabited a region of Cisalpine Gaul in the Po Valley.⁹

Until relatively recently, *Viereckshanzen* were considered to be ritual places, equivalent to pre-Roman sanctuaries in Britain and Gaul. But the absence of any finds of a ritual or votive nature has cast doubt on this interpretation.¹⁰ The enclosure at Mšecké Žehrovice has been the subject of a recent excavation during which the pit containing the stone head from outside the earthwork was found to be associated with a large wooden structure identified, from analogous buildings in the region, as ‘an enclosed elite site’.¹¹ The whole issue of ‘enclosure’ in the Iron Age is fascinating: the very act of enclosing sites may relate to perceptions of separateness and ‘placedness’ and the collective engagement with the communal task of digging ditches. The construction of enclosures, which necessitates the bringing together of people, could act as a metaphor for relationships between individuals and settlements.¹² If we apply such a model to *Viereckshanzen* like Mšecké Žehrovice, it is possible to think in terms of a meaningful connection between the enclosure and the broken image buried outside it.

Monumental stone statuary in the La Tène period does not necessarily represent deities but rather may depict real individuals, but, whether they are interpreted as gods or people, the problem of their paucity throughout Iron Age Europe remains. The main reasons for arguing against their identification as divinities rest partly on Diodorus Siculus¹³ account of the Gallic chief Brennus’ scornful incredulity on seeing the statues of the gods at Delphi in 279 BC because for him and his people the gods could not be bound by specific images. Furthermore, there is a lack of association between La Tène-period statuary and sanctuaries. However, there is a link between monumental stone iconography and sanctuaries in the Lower Rhône Valley (see Chapter 7). We ought also to bear in mind that a whole raft of wooden monumental images may once have been present but perhaps not preserved. Despite some misgivings, I take the view that some at least of the few large stone images present in the archaeological record are probably of real people and I concur with the view that one of these may well be the person whose head was put in a pit in Bohemia.

The specific features of the head that might define the status, and even the social role of the person whose head was represented here, are clearly key to

understanding its function. But first we should think a little more both about its archaeological context and its fragmentation.¹⁴ The head (and its erstwhile body) clearly had a biography, composed of episodes that began with the hewing of the stone for its carving and modelling, the setting up of the statue, its breakage, removal of the body to be disposed of elsewhere and the singular treatment of the head. This last involved not only its burial in a pit but, first, it was deliberately smashed into several pieces, of which at least one was not placed in the pit but kept back unburied, and never found. The treatment of the body and, especially, the head appears to reflect an iconographical version of the treatment of some human remains in middle Iron Age contexts, for instance in the northern Gaulish 'war-sanctuary' at Ribemont-sur-Ancre,¹⁵ where headless bodies were deposited, and the Saluvian shrines of southern Gaul where heads were retained for display but not the rest of the body.¹⁶ The issue of deliberate damage¹⁷ is crucial to understanding why the image was so treated, for the breakage of the head and the abstraction of at least one piece constitute purposeful and controlled 'post-mortem' manipulation of the body that may be associated with veneration and respect or, conversely, with contempt and humiliation. But breaking up an image has further connotations, those of 'enchainment'. This term is used to describe the circulation of the various pieces of a broken object in wider contexts, perhaps within kinship or war-band groups or between communities, in order that the fragmented object serves to preserve notions of connectedness, even though it may be physically scattered. But we may, alternatively, be witnessing a form of iconoclasm in which the person imaged was subjected to a form of *damnatio memoriae*, erased from memory because of enmity or misconduct. Additionally, if the image were associated with a dead individual, the removal and fragmentation of the head might have served to deny rites of passage between the worlds of humans and the ancestors and to prevent reincorporation in another form of being.

So did the Bohemian head represent a person or a god? Given the scarcity of stone iconography in the Iron Age, it is sensible to assume that any human thus depicted was special in some way. The careful treatment of the hair and facial features and, especially, the presence of a large buffer-torc around the neck adds weight to this idea. There is another feature – a small but deeply drilled hole centrally placed, where the mouth should be, beneath the nose and between the two wings of the moustache.¹⁸ The perforation is clearly deliberate and might have served either as a libation-hole, for the 'ingestion' by the image of wine or oil as offerings or, perhaps more likely, as an oracular device so that the head could appear to be speaking if someone 'hid' behind it and uttered prognostications.¹⁹ But it is the peculiar hairstyle of the Bohemian head upon which is based a compelling, though contentious argument for its identification as that of a Druid.²⁰ The hair runs as a narrow band, *en brosse*,

along the forehead from ear to ear, leaving a completely bald cranium whose roughened surface appears to indicate a shaven scalp. The head is clearly treated so as to be visible from behind as well as from the front and sides and so the plain scalp is not simply a device to save time and effort but rather a deliberate depiction of hairlessness. Male-pattern baldness does not fit the way the hair is indicated on this carving so it seems as though the head is either shown as partially shaved or wearing some kind of smooth, skull-hugging leather cap. In either case, the evidence could point to the representation of a religious specialist.²¹ So, then, it is feasible tentatively to identify the 'owner' of the Bohemian head/statue as some kind of special, probably clerical, person. Given Caesar's ascription to the Druids²² of a wide swathe of responsibilities, that covered both religious and socio-political roles, it matters less whether the pit in which the head was buried was associated with a sacred enclosure than that the structure signifies the presence of an elite.

There is a range of possible parallels to the Bohemian male head in mid-late Iron Age Gallic iconography where the human head appears to be similarly treated.²³ Highly relevant is the tiny copper-alloy image of a man, seated cross-legged and wearing a cuirass, that forms part of the handle on a flagon from the fifth-century BC 'princely' tomb of Glauberg (Hessen) in Germany (Fig. 60). The head of this figure is depicted wearing a hairstyle very similar to that of the monumental carving from Mšecké Žehrovice in so far as there is a narrow band of elaborately curled hair around the front and sides of the face, leaving the cranium bare.²⁴ The Glauberg figure perhaps provides the closest parallel to the Bohemian head in early-middle Iron Age Europe, and the evidence from both sites is valuable in charting the emergence of a pattern of differential head-shaving.

But, and this relates to the passage from Bede with which this chapter began, is it valid to suggest that this pattern of hair-modification is some kind of Druidic tonsure?²⁵ I am not entirely convinced. Most importantly, there is the problem of chronology:²⁶ Bede and his contemporaries were writing nearly a thousand years later than the date the Bohemian head was placed in the pit and a genuine link between the Christian Celtic tonsure and a possible representation of a prehistoric pagan Druid is unlikely. However, the value of the argument that the Bohemian statue shows a tonsure lies in the manner in which attention is rightly drawn to the issue of hair-management as a possible mark of office or religious authority. Banding or partial head-shaving might indeed be indicative of exclusivity and of adherence to a particular group within society. The importance of hair is clearly indicated by the iconography of the Danish silver-gilt Gundestrup Cauldron,²⁷ whose cult-significance is beyond doubt, both because of the nature of the imagery and because of the vessel's careful dismantlement and placement on a dry island within a Jutland peat-bog. The outer plates depict a range of male and female heads whose hair

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60 Decorative bronze flagon-fitment in the form of a figurine of a warrior; from the fifth-century BC burial at Glauberg, near Nürnberg, Germany.

is elaborately and individually coiffed (Fig. 61), the men's beards likewise. On several of the heads the hair appears to be confined to a band in the front²⁸ but, in this case, it is almost certain that caps are being worn, perhaps to signify priestly status.

Holy Signatures: Marks of Priesthood?

The man whose remains were interred in the tomb at Glauberg in the fifth century BC is almost certainly represented by the monumental stone carving of a bearded 'warrior' from the site (Fig. 62).²⁹ Although he wears a cuirass and shield, he has no sword, spear or dagger and his hands are wrapped protectively round his body, as if to display a message of guardianship against or exclusion from external agents. His status as a 'big man' is suggested by the massive legs, out of all proportion to the rest of the body. The treatment of the

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61 Head of a woman wearing a headband, on an outer plate of the silver cauldron from Gundestrup, Jutland, Denmark.

hands and legs is a feature present on other contemporary imagery such as the stone statue of a man from a tomb at Hirschlanden (Germany).³⁰ The huge legs may reflect physical prowess but they may also stand as metaphors for power in general, or even for mastery over large territories, for those over-developed calf muscles suggest the ability to march over huge swathes of landscape and thus evoke control and authority.³¹ The three pendants hanging from the necklet worn by the stone image from Glauberg may well represent metal arrowheads,³² thus linking the carving to the practice of elite hunting.

In the second century AD, the Greek author Arrian wrote the *Cynegetica*, a treatise on hunting in which he describes its practice among the Gauls not only as an elite sport³³ but also as having a close link with religion, remarking that the Gauls (he calls them 'Celts') never engaged in hunting without first seeking the blessing of the gods.³⁴ Hunting was perceived as theft from the natural world and its divine guardians so specific sacrificial rituals were carried out in propitiation of a Gallic hunter-goddess to whom the first fruits of the hunt and other gifts were offered every year when the deity's birthday was celebrated.³⁵ So could the Glauberg warrior represent a hunter or the priest of a hunting-deity such as Arrian describes?

The need to enact rituals of purification and expiation is a persistent theme in many hunting societies, past and present, and such appeasement ceremonies were often associated with goddesses: the hunting-deities of Ossetia in the Caucasus³⁶ and Yamanokami, a divine mistress of animals in Japanese religious tradition,³⁷ are just two examples of perceptions in which the worship of a goddess of the natural world, particularly in mountain regions, is closely

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62 Monumental stone statue of a warrior wearing a 'leaf-crown', from Glauberg, Germany.

interwoven with hunting propitiation rituals. If the Glauberg figure is wearing arrowheads as neck ornaments, it is possible that they acted as a marker either of his prowess as a hunter or as a hunting-ritualist.

The most striking feature of the Glauberg statue is the 'crown' in the form of two immense comma-shaped lobes curving round and meeting at the top of the head. These 'leaf-crowns' are endemic to early Iron Age art and are found not only on monumental sculpture such as the image from Glauberg,³⁸ but also on small items of broadly contemporary decorated La Tène metalwork.³⁹ The persistence of this motif over time and space suggests that its symbolism was deeply embedded in the ritual consciousness of those who produced and used the images on which it is found. Although it is generally regarded as being particularly associated with monumental and portable depictions of human faces in early Iron Age central Europe,⁴⁰ it occurs also on third-century BC

sculpture from the sanctuary at Roquepertuse⁴¹ and the copper-alloy-bound wooden bucket from a tomb at Aylesford (Kent) dating to the first century BC.⁴² It is likely that the motif represents mistletoe leaves.⁴³ If this is right, then it is tempting to link these images with Druidic iconography.

But what of other possible marks of priestly identity on Iron Age human images? A recurring motif, carved on their foreheads, is a three-petalled 'lotus-flower' design. The monumental statue from Glauberg is one of several whose leaf-crowned heads are marked in this way⁴⁴ and – to my eyes at least – the motif gives the faces an air of frowning authority (though, of course, that may not have been the original intention). The design is likely to have been based on the lotus flower and, if so, may be associated with regeneration and rebirth.⁴⁵ There is also a connection between the tri-lobed lotus-flower-motif and some of the Iron Age Gallo-Germanic images of humans seated in the cross-legged 'yogic' or 'lotus' position,⁴⁶ such as the little copper-alloy flagon fitting from Glauberg (discussed earlier in this chapter in connection with hair-symbolism and tonsuring) and the monumental stone warrior-images from Saluvian sanctuaries such as Entremont and Roquepertuse in the Lower Rhône Valley (see Fig. 37).⁴⁷

It may well be that the little seated figure on the Glauberg flagon represents the same hero as the monumental stone statue but in a meditative position that possibly reflects either his role as a religious practitioner or his after-death state as an ancestral spirit. The association of this small image with wine-drinking might be significant in terms of attainment of out-of-body trance experience and receptiveness to communication with the supernatural world. Indeed, a recurrent association between leaf-crowned images and liquor is present: for instance, the faces on the Aylesford bucket,⁴⁸ with their elaborately curled-over leaf-crowns are likewise associated with a vessel for the containment of alcoholic drink. The Aylesford faces have more significance, in terms of the distinctive hairstyles noted (above) on certain images, for they, too, display a horizontal band above the eyebrows that could be interpreted either as a narrow fringe of hair on a tonsured head or as part of the leaf-crowned headdress.

The lotus-motif on the forehead may have had special and long-standing symbolism, for it recurs in a Romano-British cult-context at Bath. The so-called male Gorgon head on the pediment of the great temple to Sulis Minerva, built on the site of powerful thermal springs, bears a triplistic lotus-motif on the forehead virtually identical to those carved five hundred years earlier at Glauberg and other German sites. If there is a genuine link over such a long time, then how could that have come about? The temple at Bath was constructed in the latter half of the first century AD and, significantly, perhaps, many of the masons involved in its construction and embellishment were of Gaulish origin.⁴⁹ Some could easily have come from the

Rhineland, the homeland of the earlier images, of which at least a proportion would probably have still been standing, visible in the landscape. It is perfectly feasible to argue a deliberate transference of motifs by these craftsmen who may not have been aware of the precise meaning of the lotus-design but would have recognised the stamp of authority on such striking images. Acknowledging the past may have been a crucial way of expressing religious identity.⁵⁰

Bath is, and was, an iconic Romano-British holy site that, despite its Classical demeanour, was primarily dedicated to a British goddess, Sulis who, in all probability, had a presence long before the great temple was built in her honour. The lotus-symbol on the head of the 'Gorgon' represents just part of a package of motifs that acted as a counterpoint to *romanitas*, not necessarily in a context of resistance but rather as an alternative symbolic structure that found a voice in a multi-cultural religious milieu. The gender-twist of transference from female Medusa to male cult-head formed part of such a manipulation of motifs for, at Bath, the masculine severed head stood as a multi-layered symbol of authority based on the significance of the human head itself, the power of male divinity and the representation of solar and aquatic energy⁵¹ that gave Sulis her magnetism and reputation.

Priests on Celtiberian Pots

Celtiberia consisted of a group of peoples in north-east Spain during the Iron Age and Roman periods. Their urban centres, notably at Numancia and Tiermes, have produced a rich assemblage of polychrome decorated pottery that dates to the first phase of Roman annexation of the region, and these ceramics were used as a medium for the display of complex religious and mythological motifs. One group of iconography comprises images of people who may well have been local priests, for they are depicted in the act of making sacrifices. Some have the faces of birds of prey, suggesting their capacity to shape-shift between bird and human form, like shamans. They are characterised by their highly decorative clothing and, especially, by their tall conical hats (Fig. 63).⁵² Could it be that such headgear was the Iberian equivalent of the high 'leaf-crowns' of central and north-west Europe? Could these special people have been Hispania's version of Druids?

Torcs, Music and Religious Power

Soon afterwards, when Ariovistus was their leader, the Insubrian Gauls vowed to dedicate to their war-god a torc made from the spoils of our soldiers. Jupiter intercepted this dedication; for Flaminius set up in honour of Jupiter a golden trophy made from their torcs.⁵³

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63 Early post-Roman-conquest polychrome potsherd depicting a Celtiberian priest in a tall conical hat, from Numancia, Spain.

Lucius Annaeus Florus, a friend of the emperor Hadrian, was born in the late first century AD in North Africa. His *Epitome of Roman History* is a panegyric on Rome and its people. Florus is just one of several Roman authors who talk about the dedication of Gallic torcs to Roman gods or emperors. His historical context is the military campaigns against the tribes of Cisalpine Gaul⁵⁴ during the late third century BC, led by the Roman consul Marcellus. Livy also discusses the dedication of an Insubrian torc to Jupiter after a battle in which the Italian Gallic Boii were defeated.⁵⁵ Quintilian, born in about AD 30, refers to an enormous solid gold torc, weighing a hundred pounds, given to Augustus by suppliants from Gaul.⁵⁶ The persistent reference to torcs as votive booty may be a stock method of describing high-status barbarism, for literary and archaeological evidence leaves no room for doubt that these neck-ornaments were endemic to parts of central and northern Europe, including Britain, during the middle-later Iron Ages.⁵⁷ Of the many Classical literary reports of torcs worn by high-ranking Gauls and Britons,⁵⁸ the references by Florus and Livy are of particular note because they link torcs with religious dedications.

In new studies of 'Celtic Art' in the British Isles, two distinct horizons of art have been identified: the earlier between c. 200 and 20 BC, the later from c. AD 40 to the second century (and thus going on well into the period of Roman occupation).⁵⁹ It is possible to demonstrate that torcs were considerably over-represented in deliberately deposited caches in relation to their

presence outside hoards. This unbalanced distribution of torcs is in direct contrast to other material, such as horse-gear, that reflects a much more even contextual pattern. Furthermore, in the earlier-phase hoards a narrow range of 'object-connections' involving torcs has been established, making it possible to identify a limited number of persistent associations: torcs were routinely deposited in hoards with ingots, horse-gear and coins. These object networks seem to be associated with power and authority, both in terms of the connected objects themselves and in the reflection of the amount of control exercised in the selection of material to be hoarded. If there is a religious aspect to this kind of deposition, then in the earlier phase there may have been a greater degree of exclusivity in terms of those who held sacred power. This earlier phase is exactly the period in which, according to the Classical texts, the Druids were at the apex of their authority. In the later hoards, the range of object-connections is much greater, perhaps signifying a shift in power relationships and – maybe – a more egalitarian attitude to structured deposition that, in the Roman period at least, may have resulted from Druidic disempowerment.

The representation of human figures wearing or holding torcs, like the Bohemian stone head, is a recurrent theme in Iron Age and Roman-period iconography in central and western Europe.⁶⁰ Sometimes this ring-jewellery is the only piece of detail on otherwise 'blank' images. Whilst torcs are by no means a purely religious signifier, particular iconographic representations of persons wearing neck-rings may very well have been those of ritualists. One problem is that some torc-wearers might have been gods rather than priests. For example, the stone image of a three-headed figure from Condat (Dordogne),⁶¹ whose central head wears a twisted torc around the neck, is almost certainly a divine image. But the identification of one small group of Gallic torc-wearing figures as ritualists is based on another feature of their iconography, namely their possession of musical instruments.

The flute-player from Pauvrelay à Paulmy (Indre-et-Loire)⁶² is a late Iron Age limestone figure of a nude (probably) male with a large buffer-torc demarcating the head from the torso: the figure has no neck. It has a large round, hairless head and staring circular eyes; the torso is featureless but for the two large hands, positioned as if playing a vertical flute-like instrument and with fingernails flattened as if pressing down on the holes, and the barely discernible outline of the flute itself. The hands are coarsely fashioned but their size and prominence, clearly intentional, draw the viewer towards them. Iconography of Iron Age Gallic musicians is rare enough but what makes the figure from Pauvrelay so special is the treatment of the right hand, which has six fingers. There are various possible reasons for this presentation of deviance,⁶³ one of which is the portrayal of a real individual with this abnormality (one that might, indeed, have contributed to his skill with the flute). It

is possible that 'special' people, those with a physical or mental condition that set them apart from the community, were sometimes chosen as persons touched by the gods and therefore sensitised to the spirit world. Certainly, a pattern can be discerned in the frequently aberrant physical state of individuals who met untimely and, arguably, sacrificial deaths in the European Iron Age. One body, in particular, displays exactly the same deformity as the Pauvrelay musician: the bog-body from Lindow Moss, known as Lindow III, had a vestigial right thumb.⁶⁴

The second image of a musician comes from Paule in Brittany and is one of a set of four stone figures from the high status later Iron Age site at Saint-Symphorien (Fig. 64).⁶⁵ All four have over-large heads and plain torsos and all wear distinctive headbands. Their features are schematic, giving them an air of remoteness. One of these images draws our attention for it, like the Pauvrelay carving, depicts a musician, a lyre-player, wearing a buffer-torc beneath the chin: he holds a small stringed instrument in his left hand, while the fingers of the right hand pluck the strings.

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64 Late Iron Age stone statuette of a lyre-player, from Paule, France.

An amazing Iron Age site, High Pasture Cave, on the Island of Skye, has revealed evidence for the special, ritual treatment of a musical instrument very similar to the one depicted at Paule. A group of artefacts was found in a stream-fed cave-system in which structured and ritual deposition of domestic material, including worn-out goods, took place between the fifth and first centuries BC. One part of the cave, called 'Bone Passage' by its excavators, revealed a large quantity of crafted bone and antler objects that included a set of seven pointed antler items that have been interpreted as tuning-pegs for a lyre-like seven-stringed instrument, similar to the one played by the Paule statue. These objects were carefully placed between two paving stones and, like much of the material in the cave, were positioned in the 'liminal' entrance space. The deposition-site contained a range of other material, including the skeletons of animals, especially pigs (the carcasses were butchered according to a ritual formula that necessitated splitting the skulls and the bodies laterally into left and right halves), pottery and stone implements. In the second phase, 400–300 BC, a stone stairway down to the cave was built. This stairway has been described as 'steps into the underworld'.⁶⁶ The sacred character of the site is suggested, too, by the final phase, in about 100 BC, when the cave was deliberately sealed. In that sealing-layer, the body of a young woman was deliberately interred, together with a newborn baby and a foetus. Forensic evidence indicates that the woman was local and that she is likely to have been the mother of both infants and, if so, then one must have been 'curated' for a time before the three bodies sealed the cave.⁶⁷ The Skye site has important links with other regions of Atlantic Scotland, particularly Orkney, where similar stairways to sacred underground 'shrines' have been recorded and where young adults were carefully interred as guardians to the sealing of the holy space and where, similarly, there was an emphasis on craft-production during the life of the sites at Mine Howe on Main Island and the Knowe O' Skea on Westray.⁶⁸

The principal symbolic theme of the High Pasture cave-site was transformation: of living to dead and dead to living, light to dark, dark to light, raw material to crafted product and its burial and reincorporation into the natural world, all enabled by the transitional agent of flowing water. If transformation was the key to the site's significance, the presence of part of a musical instrument makes sense in terms of the function of music as an agent for trance-experience. The tuning-pegs at High Pasture Cave perhaps belonged to a ritualist whose responsibility it was to set the mood, engage the spirits and enable the minds of worshippers to become receptive to the supernatural presence. The sound of the plucked strings would have resonated around the cave, magnified and distorted by the echoing acoustic qualities of the enclosed space, so that the very walls of the cave would appear to be speaking back at the people from the Underworld.⁶⁹ Similarly, the musicians depicted

at Paule and Pauvrelay could also have been images of priests with similar functions.

Music might have had alternative sacred connotations, too: in Classical tradition, one of the purposes of playing music at religious ceremonies was to drown out inauspicious sounds such as the cries of sacrificed animals or any profane noises that might disturb the liaison between ritualists, worshippers and the deities being propitiated. In commenting upon the practice of child-sacrifice in Carthage, the Greek author Plutarch, writing in the late first–earlier second century AD, refers to the bands of musicians whose job it was to make sufficient noise to muffle the screams of the victims,⁷⁰ because such sounds would be perceived as ill-omened and would render the sacrifice null and void.

Sound, and music in particular, was a key part of sacred lore in ancient societies, not just in terms of creating atmosphere and stimulating channels of communication with the supernatural dimension. For a study of ancient Druids, music in the context of ritual might have a special importance, based on its ability to control. In exploring acoustics in Neolithic monuments, sacred sounds are seen as combining with rhythm to create an atmosphere of spirituality and magic. Songs and dances, repetitive chants and drum-beats contributed to the theatre of ritual and the strangeness of the world beyond.⁷¹

Music was a powerful tool with which professional ritualists could control worshippers and manipulate access from the world of humans to that of the spirits. It demonstrates the multi-sensual nature of ritual and the importance of the unseen, particularly in dark sacred spaces, such as caves, groves and – perhaps also – built shrines whose light-levels may have been carefully supervised so as to engender the right environment for both vision and sound. The images of musicians, such as those from Paule and Pauvrelay, together with the survival of ancient musical instruments themselves (whether in the form of tuning-pegs for 'lyres' or the trumpets from Llyn Cerrig and Loughnashade)⁷² enable a glimpse into the complexity of ritual behaviour at the time when, according to Caesar and other contemporary writers, Druids were in control of religion in north-west Europe.

But what of the possible significance of the torcs worn by the Gallic musicians whose images are the subject of the present discussion? In Iron Age and Gallo-Roman imagery, torcs are worn by a very distinctive group of figures, namely those of antlered beings, discussed elsewhere in this book⁷³ in the context of shamanism. The best-known depiction is on the Danish Gundestrup Cauldron where, on one of the inner plates, a human figure wearing antlers and accompanied by a stag and ram-horned serpent sits in a cross-legged, yogic attitude and is presented wearing one torc and carrying a second, as if to reinforce the energy and meaning with which the torc-motif is imbued. The combination of antlers and paired torcs recurs, for instance, on the *Nautes Parisiacae* monument set up in about AD 26 in Paris by a guild of

Seine boatmen,⁷⁴ and on a rock-carved panel from the Iron Age horizon at Val Camonica in north Italy.⁷⁵ At Gundestrup, the torc is a persistent motif for not only is it associated with the antlered figure but it adorns the necks of many of the human busts on the outer plates, particularly those of females.⁷⁶ As stressed above, torcs are likely to have had several layers of meaning in Gallo-British iconographic repertoires. But in the context of transformational imagery such as is encompassed by shape-shifting, 'shamanic' figures and musicians, its form may contribute to perceptions allied to transition between worlds, namely cyclicity, reciprocity and connectedness.⁷⁷ As ring-symbols, torcs may have conveyed messages associated with the perpetual exchange of energy between human, ritualist and spirit and the wholeness of the relationship between the tiers of the cosmos.

Priestly Graves: From Brough to Tartigny

The Analogy of the Povrovka Tombs

It is not easy to identify the tombs of ritualists unless they contain objects that appear to be specifically cultic in nature. To set the scene, it is useful to take a sideways glance at an Iron Age tradition that, although far away from our western European arena, can tell us much about the equipment and regalia of deceased clergy. The analogy chosen here is the *kurgans* (burial mounds) of the Eurasian Steppes, the preservation of whose contents is due to the permafrost conditions in which the dead were interred. Five *kurgan* cemeteries were excavated at Pokrovka in the southern Ural steppes of central Russia,⁷⁸ dating between the sixth and second centuries BC. For our purposes, it is the tombs of females that excite the most interest, for the excavators identified a particular group of 'priestess' burials belonging to the fifth–fourth century BC:

Cemetery 2 yielded a priestess of the highest status excavated at this site. Her mortuary offerings included a stone-carved altar, a very fine bronze mirror with incised decorations composed of interlocking rosettes in the centre and surrounded by registers of geometric design, three fossilized sea-shells, three gold plaques in the form of a Tien Shan snow leopard, and a small censer of fired clay BC.⁷⁹

Some graves in the same cemetery appear to have been those of warrior-priestesses:

The burial of one young female warrior contained 40 bronze arrowheads in a quiver and an iron dagger. Two amulets symbolised her prowess: one was

a large boar's tusk drilled for suspension which may have been worn round the waist on a special cord; another was a single bronze arrowhead in a leather bag to be worn around the neck [the necklace made of arrowheads adorning the neck of the Glauberg warrior-statue (above) comes to mind]. She also had two seashells and a natural stone in the shape of a seashell.⁸⁰

The objects in this grave associated with ritual practice are particularly noteworthy: the seashells, for instance, carry particular significance, perhaps, because Pokrovka is hundreds of miles from the sea⁸¹ and, thus, such material must have possessed connotations of distance, 'outside' and consonant exotic value.

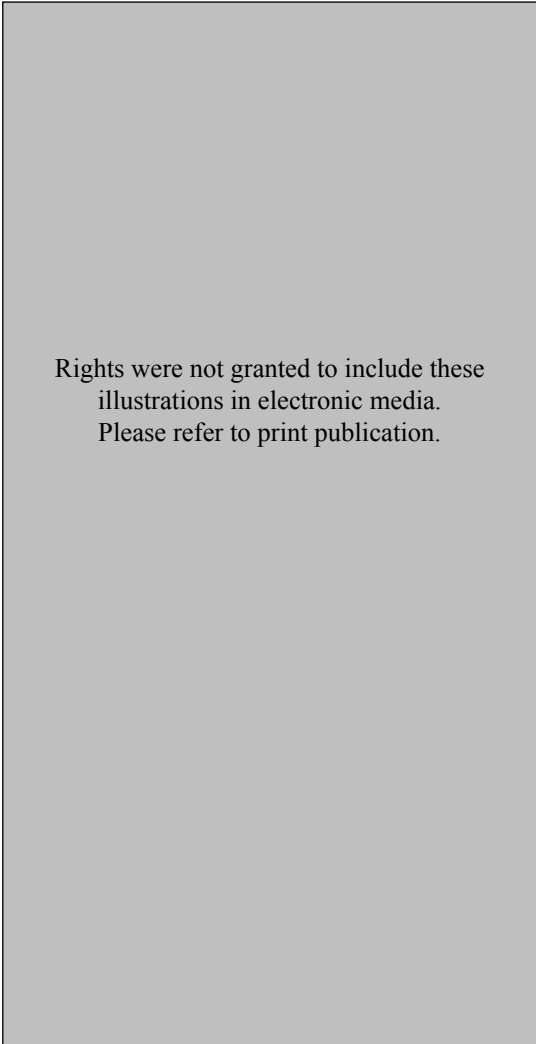
The Iron Age burials from the Russian steppes had special meaning for the communities to which they belonged: the mode of burial, the grave-goods and the evidence for social organisation provided by the contents of the *kurgans* were all related to the culture and mores of the *kurgan*-dwellers. It is, of course, inappropriate to see genuine connections between this Eurasian tradition and that of the western Druids. However, like the ancient Pokrovka communities and cognate groups elsewhere in the region, professional ritualists such as the Gaulish and British Druids were sometimes interred in ways that marked them out as special, including the furnishing of their graves with unusual and exotic material. As is the case with the 'warrior-priestesses' from the Caucasus, we may apply to western Europe the model of multi-functional individuals, who combined religious with other duties or, alternatively, that of sacro-political power, demonstrated by the presence of weapons. It is curious, though, that some Gallo-British ritualists were buried with the panoply of war, for Caesar makes specific reference to the Druids as non-combatants who were excused from both taxation and military service.⁸²

'Warrior-priests'

The grave of the late Iron Age man from Deal (Fig. 65), with his sword, brooch and decorative headband,⁸³ is distinctive because the presence of the headband suggests that its wearer was a man who enjoyed religious authority (see Fig. 6), and the position of a brooch by the legs implies that he was interred in a cloak rather than the clothes of a fighting man, but the accompanying sword and shield provide counter-indications of a military role. While the long garment could be explained in terms of a sepulchral shroud, the headband, which sat tight on the head and was not part of a helmet, appears to identify the Deal man as a special person.

The second significant factor about this burial is its position relative to the other graves in the cemetery, for it is right on the edge, set apart from the rest,⁸⁴ and this could also reflect the tomb of someone who, in life, occupied a

special, marginal position in his community – a liminal individual such as a shaman, prophet or ritualist.⁶⁵ In this context, it is more than likely that the weapons and armour in the Deal man's grave were placed there as a mark of respect and high status, perhaps because for late Iron Age southern British communities the highest mature masculine rank was seen in terms of the ability and permission to bear arms. Weapons had meaning over and above their use in battle. 'The special way in which weapons were often treated – as



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65 The grave of a 'warrior-priest', with sword and decorated headband, from Mill Hill, Deal, Kent; c. 100 BC.

grave-goods and as deposits – show that they played roles in human consciousness beyond their functional use as military implements.⁸⁶ In northern and western mythologies, weapons had a magical role and their legendary creation by supernatural powers indicates their particular symbolism. In the light of the tentative interpretation of the Deal burial as that of a ritualist, another find from the site, not far from the cemetery, might also point to the presence of religious practitioners; this is the Romano-British chalk figurine found deep underground in a pit-shrine,⁸⁷ an image that may represent a priest penetrating the dark recesses of the Underworld to commune with the supernatural powers dwelling therein.

To the late Iron Age or – more likely the early Roman period – in northern Britain belongs a second ‘warrior-priest’ burial, from Brough-on-Humber, discovered in October 1936 during the laying of a pipeline.⁸⁸ Two bodies were interred in this grave, beneath a layer of thin limestone slabs, but all of the three accompanying ceremonial items had been placed with one of them, a mature or elderly man, about 5 foot 9 inches tall, with a large head. The regalia consisted of an iron-bound wooden bucket and two sceptres, both comprising iron shanks and copper-alloy terminals, each of which was in the form of a bearded human head wearing a crested helmet (Fig. 66). Metal-hooped stave buckets seem to have been placed in late Iron Age graves as symbols of power and authority⁸⁹ and, of course, they are closely associated with feasting and the consumption of locally made alcoholic drinks, such as ale and mead (which could be linked to the inducement of shamanic trance as well as socio-political conviviality).

The religious symbolism of buckets is suggested by their reappearance as motifs on sacred iconography in Roman Britain, particularly in the Cotswolds region.⁹⁰ The two sceptre-heads endorse the interpretation of the Brough-on-Humber grave as the repository for the body of at least one ritualist, for the sceptres alone would have endowed their owner(s) with authority and, like the military regalia placed in the Deal tomb, the helmeted heads on these ‘wands of office’ denote empowerment. But it is telling that, despite the imagery on the sceptre-heads, no weapons or other martial equipment were found in the tomb, and their absence renders the religious nature of that authority all the more possible. Why two bodies were interred in a single grave is unclear, although double burials are by no means unknown in other Iron Age contexts. In some instances at least paired burials might be interpreted as those of master or mistress and retainer/servant.⁹¹ In the case of the Brough-on-Humber tomb, could it be that one body was that of an acolyte or novice, who accompanied his teacher/guru to the afterlife? What is clear from the position of the grave-goods in relation to the two bodies is that care was taken to ensure that the badges of office were correctly placed by the body of the one who, in life, had enjoyed the higher socio-religious status.

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66 Bronze sceptre-tip in the form of a helmeted male head, from a late Iron Age burial at Brough-on-Humber, East Yorkshire.

In the later third century BC, a group of six 'aristocratic' cremation-graves was constructed at Tartigny (Oise) in the territory of the Bellovaci, situated between the rivers Somme and Seine. Each tomb consisted of a large mortuary chamber within a much larger surrounding quadrangular ditch, and the grave-goods have led some scholars⁹² to identify the cemetery as the burial place of priest-physicians, for the cremated remains are accompanied by iron-bound wooden buckets (similar to the one from Brough and to those found in high-ranking late Iron Age cremation graves in south-east England), bronze bowls and spoons and surgical equipment (Fig. 67). One grave produced a medical kit including a combined pincers and scalpel, and a knife that could equally have been used in surgery or as a sacrificial implement. Cognate burials have been discovered in other northern Gaulish sites, notably at Acy-Romance (Ardennes),⁹³ where some very odd inhumations of young men, without grave-goods, mummified in a seated position, were placed

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67 Ritual equipment, including surgical tools and an iron-bound wooden bucket, from a late Iron Age tomb at Tartigny, Oise, France.

around a large building, three of them aligned on the rising sun. Other burials at Acy were those of high-status individuals, cremated with rich tomb-furniture including sacrificial equipment.

Bog-bodies: Could Some Have Been Priests?

The vast majority of Iron Age and Roman-period bog-bodies do not occur in the 'Druidic heartlands' of Gaul and Britain but are found in northern European contexts, particularly in Denmark, northern Germany and the Netherlands. Exceptions include the British Lindow bodies from Cheshire and the group from Ireland.⁹⁴ Although several of these well-preserved human remains appear to have been those of people who had not been heavily involved in manual labour – and so might be assumed to be of relatively high status, it is also true that a number display signs of malnutrition, sometimes resulting in arrested bodily development that manifests itself forensically in the bones and teeth. Is there any evidence for identifying any of the bog-bodies with professional clergy? The short answer is 'no', but one or two features permit a more lingering scrutiny before dismissing such a possibility

out of hand. I want to look at just two bodies: the Grauballe Man and the Windeby Girl.⁹⁵

The 'Windeby Girl' (see Fig. 56) comes from Schleswig-Holstein in the far north of Germany. She died in the first century AD and was interred in a remote marsh, naked but for a woollen hairband apparently acting as a blind-fold, and flowers had been placed around her. She was young, only twelve or thirteen years old, and her hair had been cropped or shaved close to her head. A birch branch was laid on her body, as if to represent a staff or wand of authority. There was no sign of violence and she was probably drowned. I, and others before me, have interpreted the position of the hairband as significant in terms of the possible identity of this young person as a shaman.⁹⁶ But recent analysis calls much of this interpretation into question. First, the placing of the hairband has been queried, and it is possible that, when the body was found, the band was over the nose rather than the eyes and only took on its new position during the original conservation process. Second, 'new investigations suggest that the corpse is that of a boy'.⁹⁷ Neither of these discoveries overturns the notion that this youthful individual was some kind of priest/ess. Like many north European bog-bodies, adolescence seems to have been a factor in selection.⁹⁸ The hairband covering the nose, if that is correct, might have acted in a way similar to the one used to strangle the girl from Yde in the Netherlands,⁹⁹ as a means of suffocation or of trapping breath within the body (although for that to work practically, the mouth must also have been gagged). The body was buried in the bog with a birch staff that had been (?deliberately) broken, perhaps to symbolise the ending of the person's authority or to neutralise power.¹⁰⁰ The very ambiguity in the gender of the Windeby individual may be significant for, if the body was that of an androgynous female or the converse, that in itself might have been perceived as an empowering characteristic, for 'gender-bending' is a persistent motif in shamanistic traditions.¹⁰¹

Characteristic of many Iron Age and Roman-period bog-bodies are signs of physical abnormality, particularly associated with malnutrition. The Windeby girl/boy had clear horizontal striations (Harris Lines) on the leg-bones, indicating periods of arrested development during childhood. Such evidence corresponds to the 'last meals' found in the preserved gut of several such corpses, that seems to be 'famine food'. The Danish Grauballe Man's teeth exhibited similar signs of 'developmental disturbance' in early childhood, whether from a severe illness or, more likely, from malnutrition.¹⁰² Grauballe Man is important to studies of sacrifice or priesthood because he has recently been the subject of thorough and rigorous scientific investigation involving a whole battery of forensic tests on bones, hair, teeth and soft tissue, allowing the most up-to-date analysis of his life and death. Like the Tollund Man, Grauballe has been identified as a possible ritualist or shaman because

of the presence of ergot, an alkaloid contaminant in fermenting barley or rye, in his gut. Ergot causes weird behaviour, including hallucinations, burning sensations, convulsions and coma, and victims of ergot poisoning might well have been perceived as possessed by spirits. However, all may not be as it seems.

The Grauballe Man was discovered in 1952 during peat-cutting (see Fig. 51).¹⁰³ He was naked and the cause of death, a deep, gaping wound to his throat that ran from ear to ear, was immediately apparent.¹⁰⁴ The most recent radiocarbon dating indicates that he lived and died between 400 and 200 BC.¹⁰⁵ The ergot in his gut, seemingly so significant, is now thought not to have been present in sufficiently large quantities to be explained other than by accidental ingestion of a naturally occurring substance.¹⁰⁶ In other words, the ergot was nothing out of the ordinary and may not even have affected the man's health or behaviour. So far so bad: our identification of this individual as a special person, a ritualist, seems to be blown out of the water. His last meal appears to have been unpalatable, though reasonably nutritious but it has been described as 'prison fare'.¹⁰⁷ This, in itself, begs questions, for examination of the hands indicates that Grauballe Man did not regularly engage in manual labour, suggesting that he was by no means on the bottom social rung of his community.¹⁰⁸ The treatment of the man's hair tells the same story as his hands for it was properly cut with scissors or shears,¹⁰⁹ items not normally possessed by a poor person or slave. The man was about thirty years old when he was killed; he was just below average height for the time. Apart from his early period of arrested growth, he was in reasonably good health and no physical abnormalities were identified.¹¹⁰

The manner of Grauballe Man's death is significant: the deep cut to the throat was controlled, deliberate and professional, involving a large sharp instrument such as a sword or long knife, and the killer forced back the man's head, probably by grabbing and pulling back the hair, to inflict the wound.¹¹¹ But, like many bog victims, the man had been subject to some ante-mortem injuries, including trauma to the lower jaw, resulting in tooth-loss and breakage¹¹² and a broken lower left leg.¹¹³ The absence of greens and fruits in his 'muesli' diet indicates that he died in winter and was placed in the 'engulfing deep'¹¹⁴ of the bog, presumably as a sacred act. Such people were very possibly 'incorporated into the ritual universe of the bog'.¹¹⁵ The winter killing and burial may be significant in terms of their occurrence at the darkest, coldest time of the year, when the landscape appeared dead and there was fear that the sun and warmth might never return.

In trying to piece together the man's last hours we can use the new forensic evidence to reconstruct the scene: he may have been subject to some systematic abuse in the months leading up to his death; he was given a last meal in which over sixty plant-species were represented (itself, perhaps a significant

symbolic act in which the whole landscape was reflected); then he was led or carried to the marsh and someone kicked him on the right leg, causing him to sink to his knees, and his head was jerked right back, exposing the throat to the terrible injury that severed his carotid artery and jugular vein, the spouting blood adding to the spectacle and inducing unconsciousness and death within minutes. Significantly, too, it is probable that his killers or the other participants in the ritual event had to break the ice on the bog-surface before he could be placed there. His body may well then have been held down by blocks of peat or branches, so that 'he was secured in his limbo – between water and land'.¹¹⁶

If Grauballe Man was a priest, he was also a victim, albeit, perhaps, a willing one. Whoever he was in life, he had a special death. If the idea was simply to kill him as a punitive act, he could have been strangled or simply bludgeoned to death. But this was a controlled death, the instrument carefully selected. While we can be fairly certain that Grauballe Man would not have identified himself as a Druid *per se*, it is plausible to see him as a man of consequence whose death, at least, was charged with symbolism. Shaman, priest, sorcerer or simply victim of sacrificial killing, his murder and subsequent deposition serve to enmesh this individual deeply within the cult and cosmology of his community. In looking down at this man, the centrepiece of the new Moesgaard Museum display in northern Jutland, might we have the inestimable privilege of looking directly into the face of an ancient ritualist?

Gender Matters

DRUIDS, DRUIDESSES AND GENDER-CROSSERS

The Germans believe that there resides in women an element of holiness and prophecy, and so they do not scorn to ask their advice or lightly disregard their replies. In the reign of the deified Vespasian we saw Veleda long honoured by the Germans as a divinity, whilst even earlier they showed a similar reverence to Aurinia and others, a reverence untouched by flattery or any pretence of turning women into goddesses.¹

CAN WE identify gendered ritual behaviour among the Druids and their fellows? Analysis of iconography on southern African San (Bushman) art shows a strong link between gender and symbolism. In particular, the significance of ‘bored stones’, used as weights for digging sticks,² appears to be connected with fertility rites, for these pierced pebbles symbolised the vagina and the ‘reamer’, the pointed tool used to make the perforation, the phallus.³ One might extend the sexual symbolism further, in so far as the digging stick itself, boring into the soil to enable planting, might be perceived as a penis penetrating the female earth. There is no doubt that San rock-art contains a wealth of social and religious imagery and that ‘hidden in the common gaze’⁴ was a huge range of coded messages associated with the complex cosmology of the people who created and used this ‘public’ art.

So what has the gendered art of the San to do with an ancient religious order operating on the other side of the world? The answer is, of course, nothing directly, but we can perhaps learn from the treatment of gender in San art and apply the idea of gendered artefacts to the archaeology of later prehistoric Europe, particularly in relation to its possible relevance to the identification of female religious functionaries. (Incidentally, a comparison between the San rock art and that of Iron Age Val Camonica in north Italy reveals a striking difference, in as much as whilst the southern African iconographic repertoire contains a great deal of female imagery, much of the Camonican representational art is overwhelmingly male.)⁵ If we are to find female Druids, it is on archaeology that we have chiefly to rely, for many of the Classical writers who mention Druids are silent on the matter of Druidesses,

although persistent references to Gallic female priests are contained within the texts.

The Problem of Women Priests: From the General Synod to Caesar

In 1993, the General Synod of the Church of England passed a measure that made provision for the ordination of women as priests. The first female priests were ordained in 1994.⁶ The whole question of whether or not women could be ordained had been a maelstrom of controversy for decades, and there were those who predicted that the ending of male exclusivity would signal the mortal fragmentation of the Church. The current debate, equally heated,⁷ is on the issue of female bishops. On 11 July 2005, the General Synod voted in favour of the admittance of women to the episcopate. The matter is still in ferment, with passionate advocates for and against the election of women as bishops. Traditionalists point to the absence of women in the Early Church as a template for how Christianity should be conducted in the present; radical thinkers are of the opinion that religion has to change with society and that modern Christian faith must not be put in a two-thousand-year-old strait-jacket or else it will wither and die.⁸

Julius Caesar, our most detailed and informative source on ancient Druids, makes no mention whatsoever of female clergy. But Caesar was of his time and his society, belonging to a strictly patriarchal system in which women had limited rights and, in theory at least, were subject to a male head of the household. The *pater familias* had technical powers of life and death over women, although – in practice – such authority was curbed by various other kinship systems, such as the ‘family council’. Furthermore, the legal powers of the *pater familias* were, by this period, by no means matched by social practice, which was much more liberal. In the late Roman Republic, at the time of Caesar, the position of women had improved considerably relative to earlier periods, but their legal independence was still constrained by the perceived need for there always to be a man in charge of them. So, as a matter of course, male guardians (*tutores*) were appointed to take responsibility for widows and fatherless women, particularly with regard to financial concerns.⁹ This, then, was the society which Caesar knew and that, arguably, he projected onto Gaul in the mid-first century BC. The picture he paints of Gaulish society’s attitude to women closely resembles the ancient Roman *pater familias* system:

Husbands have power of life and death over their wives as well as over their children. When the head of a distinguished family dies, his relatives meet and if there have been any suspicious circumstances connected with his death, they examine his wives under torture, as we examine slaves; if they are found guilty, they are burnt to death, suffering the most dreadful torment.¹⁰

Classical Attitudes to Women and Ritual

For the women, the Thesmophoria represents the one opportunity to leave family and home, not only all day, but all night; they assemble in the sanctuary, rigorously excluding all men.¹¹

The Thesmophoria was a Greek religious festival, exclusively for women, celebrated in honour of the earth-goddess, Demeter. One key role of the festival was a demonstration of female independence from the *oikos* (home and family) and from male control, and of women's responsibility for fertility of people, livestock and crops.¹² Two rich female inhumation graves, found at Eleusis and dating to c. 800 BC, have been tentatively identified as those of priestesses of Demeter¹³ largely because of the sumptuous gold ornaments adorning the bodies and, particularly, the faience figurine of Isis/Demeter placed with one of the corpses.

The exclusivity of female involvement with the cult of Demeter is explicable in terms of the fertility connection. But in ancient Greek society, women also played central roles in other aspects of cult and religious festivals: in Athens, female priests were involved in a number of 'major public cults, including that of the patron deity of the city, Athene Polias, and they played leading roles in the great religious processions.'¹⁴ Women were also central players in funerary ritual; this last may, in part at least, be due to the practicalities associated with the treatment of the newly dead for, on the day a person died, the body was ceremonially cleansed and laid out at home, usually by close female kin, and it was the women of the family also who gathered round the bier and led the mourning.¹⁵ Interestingly, funerary laments were castigated in Classical Greece, as being immoderate, unseemly and extravagant, all traits associated with female behaviour, and mourning women were reprimanded for disreputable and disorderly conduct.¹⁶

Roman religion had its own women-only cults, chief of which was the annual festival of the *Bona Dea* (Good Goddess), traditionally celebrated in the house of one of the consuls and presided over by the consul's wife, who supervised the sacrificial procedures.¹⁷ In the late Republic, the cult gained notoriety because of a scandal concerning the demagogue Publius Clodius, then a beardless youth infatuated with Caesar's wife Pompeia. Publius infiltrated the secret rituals disguised as a female cult-musician when Pompeia, as wife of the consul, was officiating at the annual sacrifices.¹⁸ Clodius was caught and Caesar not only prosecuted him for sacrilege (for no man or male creature was even allowed to be in the house during the ceremony) but he divorced Pompeia, because 'I considered that my wife ought not to be even suspected [of adultery].'¹⁹

Female Ritualists: The Testimony of Strabo, Mela and Tacitus

Writers report a custom of the Cimbri to this effect: Their wives, who would accompany them on their expeditions, were attended by priestesses who were seers; these were grey-haired, clad in white, with flaxen cloaks fastened on with clasps, girt with girdles of bronze, and bare-footed; now sword in hand these priestesses would meet with the prisoners of war throughout the camp, and having first crowned them with wreaths would lead them to a brazen vessel of about twenty amphorae; and they had a raised platform which the priestess would mount, and then, bending over the kettle, would cut the throat of each prisoner after he had been lifted up; and from the blood that poured forth into the vessel some of the priestesses would draw a prophecy, while still others would split open the body and from an inspection of the entrails would utter a prophecy of victory for their own people; and during the battles they would beat on the hides that were stretched over the wicker bodies of the wagons and in this way produce an unearthly noise.²⁰

The Greek geographer Strabo's observations in this passage relate to the north European Cimbri, a powerful people whose territory lay in what is now the far north of Germany and southern Denmark. Contained within this short piece are a number of stock themes, not least of which is the singular appearance of the religious officials. Not only were they women but they were elderly and went barefoot, and their sacrificial implement was a weapon of war. Like the priests of Roman antiquity, these women wore fine white garments, presumably signifying their state of purity and high rank, and gleaming metal belts; they may have avoided footwear because of respect for holy ground and the perceived need for direct connection with the earth. The treatment of the victims before their deaths was also significant, in so far as they were crowned with wreaths, as if to demonstrate high status, their suitability as a divine gift, just as, in Classical ritual, sacrificial animals were decorated with ribbons or garlands of flowers or their horns gilded to give them the best possible appearance as gifts for the gods.²¹ The custom of wreathing the prisoners has a curious twist in that, according to Roman practice, it was the victor that was so crowned. Were Strabo's grisly witch-like women real or a figment of his imagination, a literary picture of barbarian ritual practice beyond the known world?

Strabo's Cimbrians are not the only females enacting human sacrifice chronicled in his *Geography*. Chapter 7 of this book begins with a passage describing the annual temple ceremony enacted by priestesses on a women-only island off the mouth of the Loire. According to the author, these women marked out one of their number for sacrificial killing as part of the re-roofing rituals, thereby sanctifying the process.²² These island priestesses carried out

ritual murder in a state of intoxication, possessed by the god in whose honour the ceremony was conducted. In this latter passage, Strabo introduces another stock theme, that of islands, liminal places, belonging to the edges between human and supernatural worlds, where strange events occurred. What the writer is recording – whether fact or fiction – is a kind of auto-sacrifice, wherein clergy themselves were ritually murdered, presumably as the ultimate statement of high value because of the pure and sacred state of the victim. Auto-sacrifice is well documented in other societies, ancient and modern.²³ The Old Testament of the Bible makes reference to a kind of auto-sacrifice among the priests of Baal, whom the Israelite king Ahab adopted as his god after his marriage to Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon. The prophet Elijah castigated Ahab for his desertion of Jahweh and challenged the priests of Baal to a contest of fire, to see whether Jahweh or Baal was the true God of Israel. As Elijah mocked the priests of Baal for their inability to call up their god to light their sacrificial fire, allusion was made to their custom of self-laceration in honour of their god.²⁴ On the other side of the world and several millennia later, Spanish colonial chroniclers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries record apparently similar practices among the priests of the Mexican Zapotec people, who practised self-bloodletting as well as the ritual killing of others.²⁵

The connection between holy women and islands, recorded by Strabo, is a persistent theme in chronicles of Gaul and Britain by Classical writers, including Pomponius Mela and Tacitus. Little is known of Mela's life. He was from Tingentera on the southern Spanish coast near Gibraltar, born of an Italic family, and wrote his *De Chorographia* ('a brief survey of the world in three books')²⁶ in the mid-first century AD, probably in Rome. His discussion of Gaul does include references to the Druids, most notable of which are his comments concerning their teaching about reincarnation to noblemen in secluded places, such as caves or groves,²⁷ but his reference to island priestesses does not identify them as Druidesses. The island concerned was called Sena, and he places it in a group called the Cassiterides, or 'tin-islands', almost certainly the Scillies.

On the Celtic coast are a number of islands that, because they are all rich in lead, people call by one name, the Cassiterides. In the Britannic Sea, opposite the coast of the Ossismi, the isle of Sena belongs to a Gallic divinity and is famous for its oracle, whose priestesses, sanctified by their perpetual virginity, are reportedly nine in number. They call the priestesses Gallizenae and think that because they have been endowed with unique powers, they stir up the seas and the winds by their magic charms, that they turn into whatever animals they want, that they cure what is incurable among other peoples, that they know and predict the future, but that it is not revealed except to sea-voyagers and then only to those travelling to consult them.²⁸

Like Strabo's Loire-island priestesses, Mela's holy women operated in a sacred world without men but, unlike those described by the Greek writer, who took their sexual pleasures while on trips to the mainland, the sacred women of Sena were virgins. Unlike the Roman Vestals, who took a vow of chastity only for thirty years, the Sena virgins were celibate for life. Female virginity was associated with empowerment that was related both to purity and, perhaps, to undissipated sexuality. In medieval thought, concepts of virginity emphasise both the complexity of maidenhood and its importance as 'the image and practice of perfection, the highest form of life, an imitation of the angels.'²⁹ In a sense, Vesta's holy women strove for the same kind of goal, total dedication to the goddess who, more than any other female deity, except for Roma herself, was the essence and heart of the Roman state. The Vestals occupied a unique position in Roman society, for their virginity placed them outside normal gender paradigms, endowing them with privileges generally reserved for men, such as the ability to conduct their own business affairs rather than having to answer to a guardian or paterfamilias.³⁰ The sacred maidens of Sena were described by Mela as allegedly possessed of powers closely resembling those of shamans,³¹ notably the ability to shape-shift between human and animal. Their number – nine – may also be significant, for in Roman Gaul and Britain deities were often perceived and depicted in triplicate.³²

Tacitus, too, connects islands with female religious functionaries in his famous description of Suetonius Paulinus' attack on Anglesey in AD 60.³³ The author explains the context of the assault on Mona, its use as a sanctuary for refugees, presumably British freedom-fighters for whom Roman domination of Britannia was unacceptable. Paulinus clearly expected serious resistance, for he commissioned specially built boats with flat bottoms and shallow draughts so that the army could get close to the shore, and the general deployed cavalry as well as infantry units. The densely populated island was defended by a solid wall of enemy warriors. 'Among them were black-robed women with dishevelled hair like Furies, brandishing torches. Close by stood Druids, raising their hands to heaven and screaming dreadful curses.'³⁴ In this passage, Tacitus makes a clear distinction between the Druids and their female companions: the latter were not Druidesses but were nonetheless religious women, whose black clothing and rumpled hair suggest, on the one hand, an attitude of mourning and, on the other, a connection with the Underworld. The Classical Furies (the Greek *Eumenides*),³⁵ like the Valkyries of Norse mythology,³⁶ and the Badbh or Morrigna of early Irish legend,³⁷ were battle-goddesses, who fed on death and often provoked war. The Furies had a special role, though, that of vengeance, and it is surely this aspect of the Anglesey women that is referred to by Tacitus. (Incidentally, the Greek name for the Furies, *Eumenides*, refers to good or gracious goddesses, and seems to have been a euphemistic term, perhaps designed to avoid the magical horror

of uttering their real name: Erinyes – ‘Angry Ones’).³⁸ But, at the same time, the dishevelled hair was a typical sign of female mourning and the women seem to be predicting the downfall of their island sanctuary and, perhaps, the loss of British independence. The black garments worn by the wild women of Anglesey may have been a deliberate contrast to the robes of the Druids who, according to Pliny,³⁹ were clad in white.⁴⁰

Interestingly, it is not the beleaguered women of Anglesey who scream but the Druids themselves; their commentator allows the women no voice but gives them, instead, the visual impact of torch-bearers, combining the illumination of the scene⁴¹ with gestures that threatened the Roman army with fire as a physical weapon and with the psychological impact made by the ghostly flickering light of the flames. As Tacitus graphically puts it, ‘defeat in battle always begins with the eyes.’⁴² (Melanie Giles has commented that psychological warfare may have been an integral part of British later Iron Age battle-tactics, citing the use both of particular motifs, such as fantastic animals, and colour (red coral or enamel) in the decoration of weapons and shields to represent shed blood).⁴³ The screamed curses of the Druids, the armed Britons and the unnerving sight of terrible women pushing firebrands in their faces combined to unman the attacking Romans: ‘This weird spectacle awed the Roman soldiers into a sort of paralysis. They stood still – and presented themselves as a target. But then they urged each other (and were urged by the general) not to fear a horde of fanatical women.’⁴⁴ It is as though the Druids were of less account and regarded as a lesser threat than the Fury-like women and, perhaps, it was the unlikely presence of women in such a context that contributed the most to the psychological warfare with which the Roman army was faced.

Boudica and Veleda

Having made her speech, she then engaged in a type of divination by releasing a hare from the fold of her tunic, and since it ran on what was for them the lucky side, the whole mass of people shouted for joy and Boudouica raised her hand to heaven and said: ‘I thank you, Andraste, and I call upon you woman to woman . . . as one who rules over Britons who have no knowledge of tilling the earth or working with their hands, but are experts in the art of war and hold all things in common, even their wives and children. Through this the women too possess the same valour as the men . . .’⁴⁵

Boudica and Veleda were, broadly speaking, contemporaries, both coming to prominence in the 60s AD and remarkable for the treatment they receive (unusual for women) at the hands of their Classical biographers. Boudica is presented, by both Tacitus and Dio Cassius, as wholly independent, of equal

rank with any man; the Batavian prophetess Veleda is a rather more ambiguous figure⁴⁶ for, although she was held in high regard, she led a sequestered life, guarded by her male relatives as zealously as any Roman maiden (Fig. 68).

There is no inkling in the texts that Boudica was a Druid. Yet, if we can believe Dio's testimony (and that is questionable), it is significant that she acted as a prophetess in the grove of Andraste, goddess of Victory. Roman leaders certainly conducted sacrifices: this is clear from iconography on monuments such as the Ara Pacis where, for example, the Trojan Aeneas – the founder of Rome – is depicted in the act of sacrificing a bull.⁴⁷ But presiding over a sacrificial event is not the same as divination, which is what Boudica was doing. It may be that implied in Dio's text is the idea of 'sacral kingship', a common

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68 Nineteenth-century statue of Veleda in the Luxembourg Gardens, Paris, by Etienne-Hippolyte Maindron.

theme in early Irish historical mythic literature, wherein the sovereign king or queen is also perceived as a god or goddess.⁴⁸ This is borne out, to a degree, by Boudica's reported speech in which she addresses Andraste in the familiar tone of an equal. What is clear from the text is that, on this occasion at least, Boudica was acting as a priestess. As a comparison, we should remember the anti-Roman Aeduan, Dumnorix, brother of the Druid Diviciacus who, when required to accompany Caesar to Britain in 54 BC, argued that he could not travel because 'religious considerations prevented him'. This excuse could mean anything from the need for Dumnorix to be present for ritual duties to a prohibition against his encounter with dead bodies, as was the case for many Roman priests, including the *Flamen Dialis* (priest of Jupiter) who also, interestingly, was forbidden to sleep away from his bed for more than three consecutive nights.⁴⁹

Digressions aside, we should examine Boudica's act of prophecy in more detail, not least the animal involved in the ceremony. The divination procedure occurred just before her forces committed atrocities against the captured noble Roman women of London, who were strung up naked, their breasts cut off and stuffed in their mouths, in a parody of self-cannibalism, and impaled on sharp stakes in imitation of the fate meted out by the Roman soldiers who had raped Boudica's daughters when Icenian assets were seized by the finance minister, Decianus Catus, on the death of their father, the Icenian client-king Prasutagus.⁵⁰ It was common practice in the Classical world to consult the gods, to ascertain their approval (or not) before battle.⁵¹ But using hares in oracular rituals was a more specialised practice. Two aspects of Dio's testimony concerning Boudica's hare draw the attention: the direction it ran in when released and the choice of the animal itself.⁵² A hare may behave in an unpredictable manner, swerving, doubling back and running in a zig-zag path, and the interpretation of its movements may have been associated not simply with whether it ran to the left or right but, perhaps, with whether it made for a particular feature in the landscape: a special tree, hill, rocky outcrop or stream. Directionality was an important element in divining the will of the Gallic gods: Livy alludes to an event during the early fourth century BC when a certain Ambigatus was ruler of the powerful tribe of the Bituriges whose territory lay in west-central Gaul, near Bourges; Ambigatus had to deal with the over-population of his lands, and so he sent his two nephews Bellovesus and Segovesus out into the world 'to find such new homes as the gods by signs from heaven might point the way'.⁵³

The choice of the hare as an instrument of divination is important, particularly in the light of a comment about Britain made by Caesar: 'They think it wrong to eat hares, chickens or geese, keeping these creatures only for pleasure and amusement'.⁵⁴ We certainly cannot take Caesar's comment at face value, for chickens at least were eaten in late Iron Age Britain, as attested

to by the presence of butchered chicken-bones in domestic refuse at sites such as Danebury (Hampshire), where they were mixed in with food debris from the consumption of larger domestic animals.⁵⁵ Hare were certainly hunted in Iron Age Gaul and Germany and, although most wild animals are severely under-represented in faunal assemblages on Continental archaeological sites, this creature was relatively popular as food.⁵⁶ The Greek writer Arrian, who composed a treatise on hunting, the *Cynegetica*, in the second century AD, describes the use of dogs by Gallic noblemen in hunting hares, to flush them from cover and drive them into nets or snares.⁵⁷ But the behaviour of hares may have marked them out as special: their speed, their habit of foraging at night and, particularly, the observation of their spring mating rituals⁵⁸ all drew attention to these animals and, perhaps, caused them to be perceived as touched by the gods. The boxing matches indulged in by rival males (and also by females fending off unwanted suitors) may have given rise to notions of combative valour, and their erotic behaviour connected them with spring fertility rituals. Furthermore, hares have large, bulging and staring eyes, and it is possible that this feature, coupled with their 'possessed' behaviour, gave them the reputation of shamanic creatures.

Boudica was a mature, widow who had borne two children. She was an indomitable war-leader but with religious authority too. Veleda, of the Batavians, was very different. She was a prophetess but she was an unmarried woman, a virgin, and her contribution to warfare lay entirely in her ability to foretell the outcome of battle. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of Veleda's secluded, sequestered position, closely guarded by her male kin, with that of the Cumaean Sybil who was in thrall to the god Apollo. But it is useful to revisit Veleda here, in the context of literary evidence for women with sacred powers. Unlike Boudica, who appears to have enjoyed an independent status, even though she derived her rank from her marriage to Prasutagus,⁵⁹ Veleda's situation was different. Whilst she was held in huge, almost godlike esteem for her prophetic powers, Tacitus' narrative presents an image of a woman kept virtual prisoner in a high tower and shielded from direct contact with supplicants.⁶⁰ Several features of Veleda's life, as a female virgin religious specialist, are key to her character, not least the ambiguity of her empowerment – in her skill in accurate prophecy – which contrasts sharply with her physical constraints. The extent of her influence is manifest in her ability to use her divinatory powers for political and military ends, for it is she who took the role of arbitrator between the Roman citizens of Cologne and Civilis' freedom-fighters, acting as the voice of the gods. Her virginity, like that of the holy women of Sena, was clearly an essential part of her power for it not only represented her total allegiance both to her kinsmen and to the gods but it also reflected her marginal position, neither man nor 'full' woman, a person on the edge, and thus endowed with special but dangerous powers that had to

be managed and correctly channelled so that they were neither dissipated nor misused. Veleda's seclusion may have been considered necessary because of the inherent instability of her virgin state. By analogy with the anxieties about female virginity obtaining in the medieval period, concerns that manifested themselves in the ordeals to some women were subjected to test the truth of their virgin state,⁶¹ it was in the interests of Veleda's relatives to ensure that she stayed celibate, for the loss of her maidenhood would mean the loss of her (and their) power.

In the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris stands a marble statue of Veleda (see Fig. 68). It was carved in the late 1830s by Etienne-Hippolyte Maindron, a pupil of the sculptor David of Angers, and is typical of the romantic and nationalistic sculpture of nineteenth-century France,⁶² which included statues of many noble heroes and heroines of the Gallic past, the most famous being the great image of Vercingetorix at Alesia. The statue depicts a contemplative young woman, clad in a short tunic and closely resembling the Roman virgin deity Diana. But Tacitus' portrayal of Veleda has little in common with descriptions of the free and independent hunter-goddess, other than virginity. The nineteenth-century Parisian Veleda stands on public view, her chin resting on her hand, leaning nonchalantly against a tree-trunk, testament to the proud, freedom-loving people of both ancient Gaul and modern France.

Predicting the Purple: Druidesses in the Augustan Histories

On a certain occasion, Aurelian consulted the Druid priestesses in Gaul and enquired of them whether the imperial power would remain with his descendants, but they replied . . . that none would have a name more illustrious in the commonwealth than the descendants of Augustus.⁶³

A curious collection of late Roman documents, known as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (the *Augustan Histories*), contains a hotch-potch of texts allegedly by writers such as Vopiscus of Syracuse and Lampridius, and severe doubts have been raised as to their authenticity as reliable historical literature:⁶⁴ indeed, the *Scriptores* have been described as 'generally damned and generally used'.⁶⁵ However, their interest for this study lies in their references to Gallic Druidesses as imperial prophetesses. The emperor Aurelian reigned from AD 270–5 and during the period of his rule he gained several notable victories against Queen Zenobia of Palmyra and the independent Gallic emperor Tetricus. Despite his reputation as a military man, Aurelian had a deeply spiritual side and was heavily involved with solar theology and with the attempt to establish of a pagan monotheism.⁶⁶ Vopiscus' reference to the oracular utterances of Druidesses to Roman emperors is one of several recorded within the *Scriptores*. The particular anecdote relating to Aurelian is

explained by the passage immediately following the account of the emperor's encounter with Druidesses, namely a eulogy on the early fourth-century emperor Constantius, who traced his lineage back to the Claudian family.

One of Vopiscus' anecdotes, apparently from a story related to him by his grandfather, relates to the elevation of Diocletian to imperial power in AD 284. Diocletian was born in Illyria,⁶⁷ was of humble parentage,⁶⁸ and began his career in the ranks of the Roman army. The story goes that, while stationed in Gaul, Diocletian had been drinking in a local tavern when he encountered a Druidess who chided him for being niggardly with payment for his wine. Diocletian retorted with the flippant reply that he would show greater generosity when he assumed the purple. The priestesses chastised him for his levity but prophesied that this uncouth soldier would, indeed, become emperor once he had killed 'the boar'.⁶⁹ This obscure reference was a riddle or play on words, for *Aper* (Latin for boar) was the name of the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard.

Another of the 'Augustan' historians, Aelius Lampridius, put his name to an account of an encounter between an earlier emperor, Severus Alexander, and a female Druidic seer. This time she did not predict his assumption of the imperial throne but acted (rather like Julius Caesar's soothsayer on the steps of the Senate before his assassination) as a harbinger of doom, warning him of catastrophe to come: 'Furthermore, as he went to war, a Druid prophethess cried out in the Gallic tongue "Go, but do not hope for victory, and put no trust in your soldiers"'⁷⁰ The Druidess had made an accurate prophecy: he was a weak military commander and during campaigns against the Germanic Alemanni he hesitated before engaging in a major offensive. This provoked a mutiny in the ranks, led by a Thracian called Maximinus. Severus was murdered in the spring of AD 235,⁷¹ after a relatively long reign of thirteen years.

The notion of encounters between aspirants to or holders of imperial power and female members of a – by then at least – obscure and disempowered Gallic priesthood is somewhat bizarre. These stories need to be seen as stock themes, probably entirely fictitious, but nonetheless revealing. However, these late Roman texts are not the first to connect imperial predictions to barbarian prophethesses: when Galba, one of the four contenders for rulership of the Empire after Nero in AD 69, was governor of Hispania Tarraconensis he was cheered by the prophecies of a high-born girl from the town of Clunia that 'the lord and master of the world would some day arise in Spain'.⁷²

The so-called Druidic predictions of the *Augustan Histories* belong to a period of ferment within the Empire in the third century AD, between the end of the Severan dynasty and the accession of Diocletian. Significantly, this time has been referred to as 'A Disintegrating Order',⁷³ and it is at unstable periods such as these that portents, omens and prophecies assume particular

prominence. In establishing themselves as world leaders, one mechanism that certain emperors, or their biographers, might well have adopted is the legitimisation of imperial accession by the recording of predictions from weird and outlandish religious practitioners from the outer edges of the world, and the image of the bizarre and the otherworldly is enhanced all the more by the notion of female seers, and Druidic ones at that.

Despite their loss of power and influence in the first century AD, Druids would have been buried deep in the folk-memory of the Romans and it is significant that the fourth-century Aquitanian poet Ausonius alludes to a dynasty of Druids. In his poem commemorating the Professors of Bordeaux,⁷⁴ he refers to a certain 'old man' called Phoebicius, temple priest of the sanctuary dedicated to Apollo Belenus at Bordeaux, who was the grandfather of Ausonius' friend and teacher, Delphidius. Phoebicius was apparently descended from a famous Druidic family from Brittany. Both Phoebicius and Delphidius were teachers of rhetoric, a calling that would have found approval among Caesar's Druids, with their rejection of written documents and their reliance on memory and the spoken word.

Walking on the Dark Side

Send away the spell of these women against their names listed below: it is a spell of sorcery bewitching the sorcerers. On, Adsagsona, look again at Severa Tertioncna, their sorcerer of word and their sorcerer of writing, that she may release this one that they would have struck with *defixio*. With a bad spell against their names, it will carry out the bewitchment of the group below . . .⁷⁵

Taken from a lead plaque dating to the late pre-Roman Iron Age, written on both sides in cursive Gallic script, this inscription from Larzac in southern Gaul speaks of two rival guilds of *mnas brictas*, 'women endowed with magic', who had cast spells and counter-spells upon each other to engender and neutralise harmful magic (Fig. 69). The sheet had been deliberately snapped in half and was found placed over the grave of a woman, presumably one of the sorceresses. This rare pre-Roman Gallic text allows us a glimpse into a dark and sinister world of witchcraft, a superstitious subtext that lurked beneath the surface of society. Apart from the provision of evidence for the presence of such groups in Gaul, the Larzac inscription permits us to witness a weird form of entrepreneurial religious activity in which cells of wise women were vying for pre-eminence. The Larzac plaque refers specifically to *defixiones*, curses for which there is abundant archaeological evidence in Roman Gaul and Britain and which were traditionally written on lead sheets, presumably by professional clergy.⁷⁶

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69 Inscribed lead curse-tablet, with mention of sorceresses, from a late Iron Age context at Larzac, southern France.

Strettweg and Chamalières

There is nothing particularly noteworthy about these people in detail, but they are distinguished by a common worship of Nerthus, or Mother Earth. They believe that she interests herself in human affairs and rides through their peoples. In an island of Ocean stands a sacred grove, and in the grove stands a car draped with a cloth which none but the priest may touch. The priest can feel the presence of the goddess in this holy of holies, and attends her, in deepest reverence, as her car is drawn by kine . . .⁷⁷

These were rites associated with an agricultural goddess worshipped by a number of Germanic communities and involving a sacred wagon that was driven around her territory at the time of her festival, the ceremonies being completed by the washing of the cart and its cloth by slaves who were then drowned in the holy lake. Once again, a Classical historian makes a connection between a sacred island, a grove-sanctuary and holy women. We are not told whether Nerthus' administering clergy were themselves female or whether the luckless slaves who were ritually murdered were women.

The account of Nerthus helps put in context the statuette of a woman from Strettweg in Austria. In 1851, a remarkable find was made in a rich early Iron Age tomb beneath a barrow at Strettweg in Styria.⁷⁸ Dating to *c.* 600 BC, the grave was furnished with 'masculine' accoutrements including weapons and horse-gear, but the most striking element in the funerary furniture was a four-wheeled bronze platform, 35 centimetres long, on which stood a cluster of in-the-round bronze figures, including male foot soldiers and riders on horseback and, at either end of the platform, two female attendants holding the huge antlers of a stag standing between them (Fig. 70). The human and animal figures on this 'cult-wagon' are dominated by a central female figure towering above them; she is 26 centimetres tall, more than twice the height of any other of the images. Bent at the elbows, her arms are held aloft, the palms of her hands supporting a shallow plate on which once reposed a large bronze cauldron. The woman, naked apart from a wide belt or girdle, is emphatically gendered, with a pronounced vulva and small but well-demarcated breasts and she wears large hooped earrings. The composition of the images grouped round her suggests a ritual hunt, with stag-sacrifices, and the large female

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70 Bronze cult-wagon with scenes of stag-sacrifice and warfare and central 'priestess'; from a seventh-century BC male grave at Strettweg, Austria.

figure in their midst is perhaps best interpreted as a priestess holding up a vessel full of sacrificial blood.

The Strettweg statuette may be seen as a representation of a 'big woman',⁷⁹ someone who enjoyed political and religious seniority, rather like the woman buried at Vix in Burgundy at around the same time⁸⁰ who was entombed lying on a four-wheeled bier accompanied by rich grave-goods. These included exotic material, perhaps to represent her suzerainty over a wide range of environments and territories, and an enormous *krater* (wine-mixing vessel) that probably came from southern Italy. Significantly, on the lid of the vessel stands the small figurine of a draped priestess-like woman, perhaps perceived as a depiction of the deceased herself.⁸¹ The sixth century BC is, perhaps, too early for Druids 'proper', but the presence of women who combined political with sacral power is hinted at in some of the iconographical and sepulchral evidence. The ladies from Strettweg and Vix have in common their association with liquor – whether blood or wine – and there seems to be a strong correlation, certainly, between power and alcohol in Iron Age Europe, as witnessed by the presence of drinking paraphernalia in both early and late Iron Age contexts.⁸²

The wooden statuette of a woman from Chamalières (Puy-de-Dôme) in the Auvergne of south-central France belongs to the early Roman period in Gaul, being produced in the earlier first century AD. It came from a ritual site with a short span of active life, probably less than a hundred years. The shrine, focused on sacred springs, is renowned for its lack of discernible structures and for the thousands of wooden 'ex-votos' and statuettes placed in or near the holy water in acts of devotion by pilgrims who hoped that, by so doing and by bathing in or imbibing the sacred spring water, their physical (and perhaps also spiritual) maladies would be cured.⁸³

The site of Chamalières was first discovered in the 1840s, followed up by serious study in the 1870s, but the principal investigation took place in the late 1960s and 1970s,⁸⁴ revealing the presence of closely packed layers of wooden anatomical votives, carved from oak or beech, including complete bodies, torsos with innards exposed, limbs and other organs, all preserved in the waterlogged conditions. Most of the complete figures were sculpted in 'rudimentary' fashion, with comparatively little anatomical detail or clothing, although it is possible to identify the *sagum*, the local heavy woollen cloak or hooded *caracalla* that is worn, on some images.⁸⁵ This costume, from study of other cognate sites in Gaul, is best interpreted as depictive of the standard outdoor heavy-weather clothing for adult Gallic men.⁸⁶ The majority of the complete images appear to represent pilgrims,⁸⁷ sometimes bearing gifts to the presiding spring-deity, whose name is unknown. However, an inscribed lead tablet from the sanctuary mentions the well-known Gaulish god Maponus,⁸⁸ who was equated with Apollo in the western Roman provinces,⁸⁹

particularly in northern Britain, but also at a thermal healing sanctuary at Bourbonne-les-Bains, giving rise to the likelihood that the divinity worshipped here at Chamalières might also have been Maponus.

The absence of discernible architectural features and of stone sculptures at Chamalières, together with its short and early flourishing, all contribute to an understanding of the shrine as distinctly local, without the high-value Roman patronage enjoyed by other cognate shrines such as *Fontes Sequanae* in Burgundy.⁹⁰ One of the wooden statuettes from the Auvergnian healing sanctuary is that of a woman, dressed in a long robe falling in folds from her shoulders and fastened by what looks like a brooch high up on the central fold of the garment. She has thick hair, parted in the centre, but the top and back of her head are covered by a heavy veil, and round her neck she wears a slim torc with heavy terminals. Uniquely, in comparison with all the other images from Chamalières, this figure has been carved with attention to detail, and the veil and torc are not repeated on other statuary from the site. Like the much earlier figure from Strettweg, this woman's face betrays her mature years. She might be a pilgrim, like the other people represented here, but her veil and torc mark her out as special, and it is more likely that she is either a goddess or a priestess; the veil suggests the latter, for in Roman religion, at least, it was the custom of sacrificing clergy to veil the head as a sign of respect for the gods.⁹¹

Burying the Priestesses? La-Chaussée-sur-Marne and Wetwang

In the district there lived a woman called Thorbjörg, a seeress who was called the 'Little Prophetess' . . . It was Thorbjörg's custom to spend the winter visiting, one after another, farms to which she had been invited, mostly by people curious to learn of their own future or what was in store for the coming year . . .

When she arrived one evening, along with the man who had been sent to fetch her, she was wearing a black mantle with a strap, which was adorned with precious stones right down to the hem . . . She bore a staff with a knob at the top, adorned with brass set with stones on top. About her waist she had a linked charm belt with a large purse. In it she kept the charms which she needed for her predictions . . . She had a spoon of brass and a knife with an ivory shaft, its two halves clasped with bronze bands, and the point of which had broken off.⁹²

The tale of Thorbjörg comes from the *Saga of Eirik the Red*, one of the great medieval Icelandic mythic prose stories. It provides an insight into the elaborate material culture sometimes associated with the persona of a pagan European priestess and the description of the Icelandic seer makes it clear that the detail of her clothing and her accoutrements was deemed of crucial

symbolic importance. Several points about Thorbjörg strike a chord with the trappings of Gallo-British religious practitioners: she wore black, like the ladies of Anglesey; she bore a staff; she carried a bag of objects that were charged with power and meaning; she had a spoon and a knife, the latter evoking the custom of ritual breakage so persistent a feature of European Iron Age depositional practice.

The La Chaussée Seer

The bag and spoon excite especial interest in view of the tomb of a woman who died in the third century BC at La Chaussée-sur-Marne (Marne), for she was buried with a bag containing a bowl and a pair of spoons, the latter almost certainly used in divinatory rituals (Fig. 71).⁹³ The bag carried by holy men and women is a persistent theme in shamanistic traditions: attention has been drawn to a range of medieval and early modern contexts in which bags of herbs, potions and charms were carried by wise women as tools of their trade.⁹⁴ These bags were essentially similar to the 'medicine bundles' possessed by Plains Indians, whose contents were treated with as much reverence as medieval Christian saints' relics.⁹⁵ Of course, it can only be supposition that the

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71 Bronze bowl and spoon (the latter originally one of a pair), found placed in a bag in the tomb of a woman buried in the third century BC at La Chaussée-sur-Marne, France.

woman interred at La Chaussée was a professional ritualist but her spoons, bowl and bag are suggestive of such an interpretation. On analogy with seers' bags from medieval and early modern northern Europe and the medicine bundles of the Plains Indians, it is likely not only that the individual items contained within the bag but the combination of objects and the receptacles themselves were perceived to hold sacred power, both in themselves and in conjunction with each other.

The 'Red Lady' of Wetwang

The term 'Red Lady' in an archaeological context rightly belongs to the famous 'Red Lady of Paviland', an Upper Palaeolithic ceremonial burial of a young man, whose partial skeleton (thought, when discovered by Dean Buckland in 1823, to be the body of a woman) had been covered in red ochre, in a remote and inaccessible cave high up on what is now the coast of Gower in south-west Wales.⁹⁶ But I have borrowed the term to describe the burial of a female with a cart or chariot in the middle/late Iron Age at Wetwang in East Yorkshire.⁹⁷ This woman was about thirty-five when she died: joints of pork were laid on her torso and on her shins lay a mirror. The 'cabin', pole and yoke of the vehicle had been positioned over her body. The burial was uniquely rich in the sheer amount of red coral in the grave, and the focus on this colour may have been deliberately designed to reflect something special about the woman's physical appearance, for she had suffered from a facial disfigurement, a large bright red growth near her nose that distorted her features, and whose presence is attested to by the bone changes to her face. Far from being shunned by her community, this woman had clearly enjoyed considerable power and when she died she was buried with pomp and ceremony. Indeed, the red tumour on her face appears to have been 'celebrated' by the careful selection of red coral for the decoration of her grave-goods, particularly the horse-gear associated with the vehicle. While we cannot know whether the Wetwang cart-burial was that of a priestess or shaman, her treatment at her funeral demonstrates that she was regarded with respect, even veneration, and her mirror may hint at her identification as a seer.⁹⁸

Crossing Gender in Ritual Practice

In the territory of the Naharvali one is shown a grove, hallowed from ancient times. The presiding priest dresses like a woman; the gods, translated into Latin, are Castor and Pollux. That expresses the character of the gods, but their name is Alci. There are no images, there is no trace of foreign cult, but they are certainly worshipped as young men and as brothers.⁹⁹

In certain societies, inversion rituals are enacted by mourners in order to avert threats of pollution or the inimical interference of ghosts during funerals.¹⁰⁰ These may take the form of role-reversal (such as swapping status or gender) or the turning of clothes inside out. Similarly, Tacitus' comment about a particular transvestite Germanic priesthood gains credence within the context of tension and fear in dealing with gods in holy places. At the Bronze Age cemetery of Mokrin, in the Banat area of Slovenia,¹⁰¹ there is evidence for the special status that biologically ambiguous or ambivalent persons may have enjoyed in past societies: at Mokrin, one burial, that of a robust man, contained sumptuous *female* jewellery, in a cemetery otherwise characterised by the poverty of grave-goods. Chapter 5 touches briefly on gender-crossing in ancient European iconography and the possibility that the iconography of such beings was associated with the shape-shifting of shamans. The multiple gender-systems present in the shamanistic traditions of many native North American peoples¹⁰² enable an understanding of the important role that can be played by perceptions of fluid and several genders in symbolic traditions wherein biological sex was and is frequently overridden by social structures.

In the fourth century AD, the body of a young man was buried on the Bainsse cemetery-site at Roman Catterick, with rich grave-furniture and personal ornaments. He was 'dripping' with jet jewellery and, although the burial was that of a man, he was adorned as though he were female. The excavators have tentatively identified this individual as a eunuch priest (or *gallus*) of the Anatolian goddess Cybele, whose priests castrated themselves and wore female clothes.¹⁰³ But, if he were a religious official, he need not have been associated with the cult of Cybele, nor need he have been a *castratus*. He might, instead, have been an official of a local cult that demanded transvestism as part of his role as a liaison person between human and spirit worlds, rather like the Germanic priest mentioned by Tacitus. The selection of black jewellery to adorn his person may, as discussed above (in the context of the black-clad 'Furies' of Anglesey), have been a symbol of femininity. The choice of jet to adorn him might well be because of the peculiar electrostatic properties of this substance.

So were there female Druids in Gaul and Britain? If so, why did Caesar not mention them? And why do they suddenly crop up in the later Roman literature as prophetesses of imperial succession? Some, at least, of the observations about women priests by ancient writers must be seen as no more than flights of fancy or contributions to a mythology of barbarism. But I suspect that religious officials in western Europe did include females, wise women who had the gift of looking into the future, very like male Druids: the archaeological evidence suggests as much (Fig. 72), and the literature, too, contains detailed and plausible references to religious women. There is no need to deny the existence of Valeda or Aurinia.

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72 Image of a woman having her hair plaited by a servant, on an outer plate of the silver cauldron from Gundestrup, Jutland, Denmark.

Druids Underground

REBELLION, RESISTANCE AND REVITALISATION IN THE WESTERN ROMAN PROVINCES

THE PETER Gabriel song ‘San Jacinto’¹ explores the bitter ironies arising from the theft of land from indigenous Americans by white colonialists. The song focuses on the perspective of the local shamans, or ‘medicine men’, in their sweat-lodge, invoking the spirits, and Gabriel constructs a pair of parallel universes that converge in the inevitable destruction of one by the other. In the first ‘universe’, the local shaman assembles his liturgical equipment, his buffalo cloak, his shaman’s bundle and his body-paint; the second universe, that of the incomers, is referred to as ‘cut-up’ land, seized from its rightful inhabitants and used to create luxurious American homes, each with its swimming-pool, whose children play at ‘Red Indians’ while, nearby, are the places for relaxation and socialising, built for the white foreigners but, in a nostalgic sop to the past, named after native American heroes: Geronimo’s Disco and Sitting Bull Steakhouse. The song conveys a potent message about old and new orders, the clash of cultures, and the way in which indigenous spiritual values can be heedlessly undermined by incomers with different worldviews.

What was the nature of the relationship between the spirituality of indigenous Gallo-Britons and *romanitas*? In particular, how might the Druids have been instrumental in resistance movements or acts of religious challenge? Their role as agents of subversion did not necessarily mean overt political or military opposition but rather involved subtler means of countering and taking ownership of the new religious movements that came to Gaul and Britain with the Roman army, Roman government and inclusion of these territories within the global world represented by the Roman Empire. Such counterpoint could be achieved in a number of ways: by psychological means, as exemplified by the passage in Tacitus’ *Histories* (below) or by the manipulation of material culture, particularly in the fields of ritual behaviour and religious art.

The cults and rituals of Gaul and Britain (whether genuine or invented by Greek and Roman authors) may have been employed by the Classical world in order to define and express the foreign, ‘other’ identities of those communities living beyond its borders.² The attitudes displayed by Greek and Roman authors (see Chapter 2) were essentially those of interested voyeurs, colonial commentators for whom indigenous cults and rituals were, at best, only very

partially understood and, at worst, wilfully misrepresented. The *interpretationes romana* exhibited by writers such as Caesar and Tacitus are typical of top-down narratives for which the gold standard was the Classical way and everything else was weird and barbarous. That being so, Classical texts will only inadvertently provide insights into subversion of or counter-thrusts against religious *romanitas*, and it is to archaeological evidence that we must turn in our search for alternative movements after the inclusion of Gaul and Britain as provinces of the Roman Empire.

Apocalypse Now? Foretelling the End of Empire

But it was above all the burning of the Capitol that had driven men to the belief that the empire's days were numbered. They reflected that Rome had been captured by the Gauls in the past, but as the house of Jupiter remained inviolate, the empire had survived. Now, however, fate had ordained this fire as a sign of the gods' anger and of the passing of world dominion to the nations north of the Alps. Such at any rate was the message proclaimed by the idle superstition of Druidism.³

Prophets make their voices particularly penetrative during episodes of political crisis or tension for it is then – when people's identity is under threat – that they are most likely to be heeded. A situation peculiar to newly colonised communities is one of 'accelerated change', in which disorientation, loss of personhood and instability under a new, foreign regime all act together to create an arena in which rebellion can take root.⁴ The fomentation of sedition by indigenous soothsayers may prove fruitful, for their audience is vulnerable and eager to latch onto any doctrine that may ease their plight and give them hope. The context of the burning of the Capitol was the 'Year of the Four Emperors' (AD 68/9), when Rome itself was in the throes of a political chaos engendered by the death of Nero and the subsequent power-vacuum wherein Roman generals in charge of troops all over the Empire competed for the imperial purple. There is no reason to doubt Tacitus' veracity in narrating such an apocalyptic Druidic portent; neither is there cause to question the very real terror created in Rome by the burning of the iconic heart of the city, the home of the Capitoline Triad, the state gods Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, the divine family on whom Rome's spiritual power was based. In voicing such an omen, the Druids were 'pressing all the right buttons' and they knew well how to play on people's atavistic fears.⁵

Iconic Heroes: Rebels and Druids

The Druids' alleged prediction of Rome's collapse as a global power took place within the context of a serious Gallic revolt led by a Batavian of royal descent,

Julius Civilis. Tacitus tells us that Civilis was originally a friend of Rome (and his first, Roman, name suggests as much) but because of unjustified ill-treatment by the Romans he became disaffected and seized upon the episode of Roman weakness to foment rebellion. Although Civilis was not a Druid, his close adviser, Veleda, was a priestess and prophetess, and she had predicted victory for Civilis and his Gallo-German supporters, and the annihilation of the Roman legions in the Rhineland. Tacitus informs us that, after Civilis' initial victory, he had sworn an oath to dye his hair and beard red and let them grow until the Roman army was destroyed. Now that Veleda's prophecy had come to pass, the oath was fulfilled and Civilis cut his hair and shaved his face.⁶ The combination of the Druids' apocalyptic prognosis of the Empire's fate following the burning of the Capitol and the proclamations of Veleda suggests that the Druids or their peers were active in the later first century AD, particularly at trouble-spots. The same may be true of Boudica with her own prognosticatory powers and the possible link between the Boudican Rebellion and the threat to the Druidic holy of holies on Anglesey.⁷ There may have been an important connection between Civilis' decision to wear his hair unshorn and oath-taking, for uncut hair might have symbolised unbroken pledges.⁸ Moreover, the reddening of the freedom-fighter's hair, presumably by ochre, may have been associated with blood-feud, vengeance and the 'rivers of blood' he would deliver to his enemies.

Nearly fifty years before the Rebellion of Civilis, there was a Gallic revolt led by Julius Florus, a ruler of the Treveri in the Moselle Valley, and Julius Sacrovir, a leader of the Burgundian Aedui. The uprising occurred in the reign of Tiberius, in AD 21, and, like the later agitator Civilis, both Florus and Sacrovir were Gallic aristocrats who had adopted the Roman ruling name of Julius. These two were Roman citizens, with all the rights and privileges conferred upon the fortunate holders of such status, but they cited the crippling burden of Roman taxation⁹ visited upon their people (the exact same reason for rebellion given by Tacitus for the role of the British Trinovantes in the Boudican Rebellion).¹⁰ Like Civilis' revolt, the earlier rebellion of Florus and Sacrovir rocked the Empire to its foundations. Tacitus commented that the insurgence was by no means confined to the Treveri and the Aedui but involved all sixty-four Gallic polities together with some of the German peoples, and even the Spanish provinces were debating as to whether to join in.¹¹ Why is this rebellion significant in a discussion of revitalised Druidism in the Roman period? It is simply that one of the leaders, Julius Sacrovir, bore a rather significant surname, for Sacrovir means 'holy man', and it is tempting to see this man adopting such a title because of his religious authority and his waging of a holy war, or *jihad*. Sacrovir may well have had a Druidic role, even though he is not identified as a Druid by Tacitus. If the Roman commentator is to be believed, the potential uprising of the whole of Gaul, Germany

and even Spain was seen as an apocalyptic threat to rival the burning of the Capitol.

Resistance in Action

Hidden Transcripts and Masked Ideologies

The playing-out of resistance strategies in post-colonial situations, such as in Roman Gaul and Britain, is evident in the seventeenth-century Spanish colonialism of central New Mexico.¹² The material culture of the Salinas Pueblo region demonstrates how art and iconography can represent religious responses of subjugated peoples to the imposition of foreign domination. The village-communities of this area were ruled by Spanish missionaries, who sought strenuously to eradicate the cults and rituals of the indigenous population and to replace them with Christian doctrine. The tradition was for female potters to decorate their clay vessels with religious symbols and iconographic motifs but, under Christian colonial rule, the tradition bifurcated according to two different modes of *habitus*: one comprised the villages under the direct gaze of a resident missionary presence; the other consisted of communities living in villages without direct and constant missionary supervision. So, now, two ceramic decorative traditions emerged: glaze-ware vessels, produced by women who lived in the missionary-supervised communities, were ornamented with apparently bland geometric motifs, deliberately simplified to mask their meaning from foreign eyes; by contrast, the potters in the freer villages used their craft as a way of producing white-ware vessels whose iconography was a medium for expressing, reaffirming and teaching the old religion. Ironically, then, public and private contexts were inverted: the potters living in villages under the public scrutiny of the missionaries 'went underground', hiding their messages behind inscrutable and impenetrable masks of simplified decoration, whilst those craftswomen able to work without foreign inspection were free to express non-Christian cult-ideas through the medium of quite explicitly religious pottery-motifs.

Iconographies of Resistance in Britain and Gaul

South-west Wales was a 'marginal' region of Roman Britain; study of settlement patterns before and during the Roman conquest reveals that, for many communities, Roman culture had little or virtually no impact. The problem with the majority of sites is lack of chronological precision because of the relative poverty of the archaeological record. The evidence for Romano-British occupation of this region comes mainly from defended settlements, known as ring-forts or *raths*, some at least of which are likely to have had Iron Age

origins.¹³ One such site was Coygan Camp, a fortified farmstead whose discontinuous occupation between the later Iron Age and Roman periods is suggested by an absence of pottery dating to the first century AD.¹⁴ Given the paucity of pottery in parts of later prehistoric Wales, though, this alone is not necessarily a convincing argument for a hiatus in occupation here. The relative richness in material culture at Roman Coygan, represented, for instance, by an unusually high proportion of decorated samian ware for the region, has led to the site's interpretation as a 'high-status farm'.¹⁵ Coygan occupied a spectacular physical position high up on a steep coastal promontory, beginning its life as a substantial Iron Age hillfort,¹⁶ although whether defence or display was the prime factor governing its choice of location is open to debate.

A single artefact discovered near Coygan Camp might be significant in the context of appropriation or resistance. In the early nineteenth century, a Roman bronze *trulleus* (a saucepan) was found in Coygan Cave, close by (Fig. 73).¹⁷ First recorded in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1842, the findspot was described as a natural cavern in a pass called Kyn Gadel. According to the early accounts, the pan formed part of a hoard containing a strainer and sixty coins of the late third-century emperor Carausius, but all except the *trulleus*

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73 Roman *trulleus* (saucepan) decorated with a triskele on the base; found with coins of Carausius at Coygan Camp, Carmarthenshire.

has been lost. This object is relevant to the present discussion in that on its base is an applied triskele-motif;¹⁸ the triskele (or three-armed 'whirligig') was a persistent symbol in later Iron Age La Tène art, with particular clusters in Welsh decorated metalwork.¹⁹

The presence of such a local design on a specifically Roman piece of (?)military equipment might itself raise eyebrows but it is even more curious in such a late Roman context. However, the other objects from the hoard might help us understand it, in particular the coins. Carausius was in power between AD 287 and 296, but he was not just an emperor, he was a usurper who seized Britannia from the regular emperor Maximian. Carausius²⁰ belonged to the Menapii (in modern Belgium), whose region was 'on the edge of the empire in a province which was threatened with, and periodically subjected to, barbarian attack and natural calamity'.²¹ So Carausius was a frontiersman, well used to military and political turmoil. He made his name by serving as a marine commander under Maximian, his job being to clear the English Channel of German pirates who were making raids on Gallic coastal settlements. But Carausius was caught embezzling booty rather than delivering it to the imperial treasury, so the emperor ordered his execution, whereupon the condemned man set himself up as a breakaway emperor of Britain. Is it possible that the *trulleus* belonged to a British Carausian supporter who, by putting a triskele on his cooking-gear, marked himself out as a servant of an independent, specifically 'British' regime. The deposition of the *trulleus*, strainer and coins in a secret cave location may have been effected by people living in the nearby Coygan Camp or by a soldier, simply for the safe-keeping of someone's personal fortune in turbulent times. But it could have been a sacred act, in which case, clergy might have been involved. In any case, the presence of the triskele in an otherwise entirely Roman hoard provides a jarring note explicable, perhaps, in terms of the expression of a new Britishness and one that in Wales, on the far western edge of Empire, might also possess connotations of indigenous revitalisation.

Romano-British religious iconography in the Cotswolds, centred on Corinium (Cirencester), the *civitas*-capital of the Dobunni, may similarly contain resistance imagery. Of particular relevance, in consideration of resistance and appropriation within a colonial context, is a group of stone sculptures produced within a framework of schematic and even possibly surrealist models of expression. Such imagery has all too often been dismissed by Romanists, that were (and are still) steeped in Classical traditions of life-copying figural art, as incompetent work by inept 'barbarian' stonemasons attempting unsuccessfully to ape their Graeco-Italian betters. But such attitudes, born of the perception that Classical iconography was a gold standard against which all other figural sculpture must be measured,²² are unacceptable against a backdrop of ever-developing awareness that religious visual expres-

sion may have alternative goals and purposes from aesthetic, mimetic principles.²³ Indeed, schematic techniques and the avoidance of realism are the conscious choice of many modern artists seeking different ways of seeing and of expressing what they see. Abstract art has recently been used in the production of memorial sculpture that commemorates such cataclysmic episodes in modern human history as the Holocaust, Vietnam and Nine-Eleven.²⁴

Despite attempts²⁵ to present the Roman occupation of southern England as 'liberation' rather than conquest, the imposition of foreign, colonial power on indigenous populations is never easy to accept by the subjugated. Certainly, aristocratic client-kings like Togodubnus (Cogidubnus, mentioned by Tacitus as a staunch pro-Roman British ally in territories south of the Thames), welcomed *romanitas* and its opportunities for personal advancement.²⁶ People like him, probably educated in Rome, would have seen where their best interests lay and have striven to become as Roman as possible. But others, like the freedom-fighters Caratacus and Boudica, sought war to retain independent power, and religious leaders – like the Druids – who were royal advisers and enjoyed the highest authority were, for the most part, fiercely antagonistic towards a new order under which they stood to lose most, if not all, of their own power-base.

But in the same way as religious officials, artists – whether poets, craftspeople or musicians – would have taken particular stances in society and such people are always influenced by the culture(s) in which they work and worked.²⁷ Both groups – priests and artists – may be reactionaries or embrace new thinking, may act in affirmation or opposition to canons and dogmas to which they are subjected, and often work to subvert or protest against the status quo. Given the sometimes contrapuntal response to Classical realism observable in Romano-British sculpture, it is possible that such alternative modes of expression were influenced, or even triggered, by religious manipulation of a political situation. In other words, the Druids may have acted in concert with sculptors to produce images that represented tacit resistance to *romanitas*. Iconography is an important tool that can change minds and worldviews; particularly in societies that are largely non-literate, visual imagery can be hugely influential in the presentation of ideas, counter-thrusts, challenges and stimuli to thinking.²⁸ There have been persuasive arguments for a Druidic perspective in the choice of images on Iron Age gold and silver coinage in late Iron Age Britain.²⁹ I would argue that, similarly, they may well have had a hand in guiding and manipulating Romano-British iconography, particularly that of an overtly religious character, but perhaps used also in the projection of socio-political statements concerning identity and independence.

One issue is key to understanding the employment of iconography in a western Roman provincial context as a means of identifying post-conquest

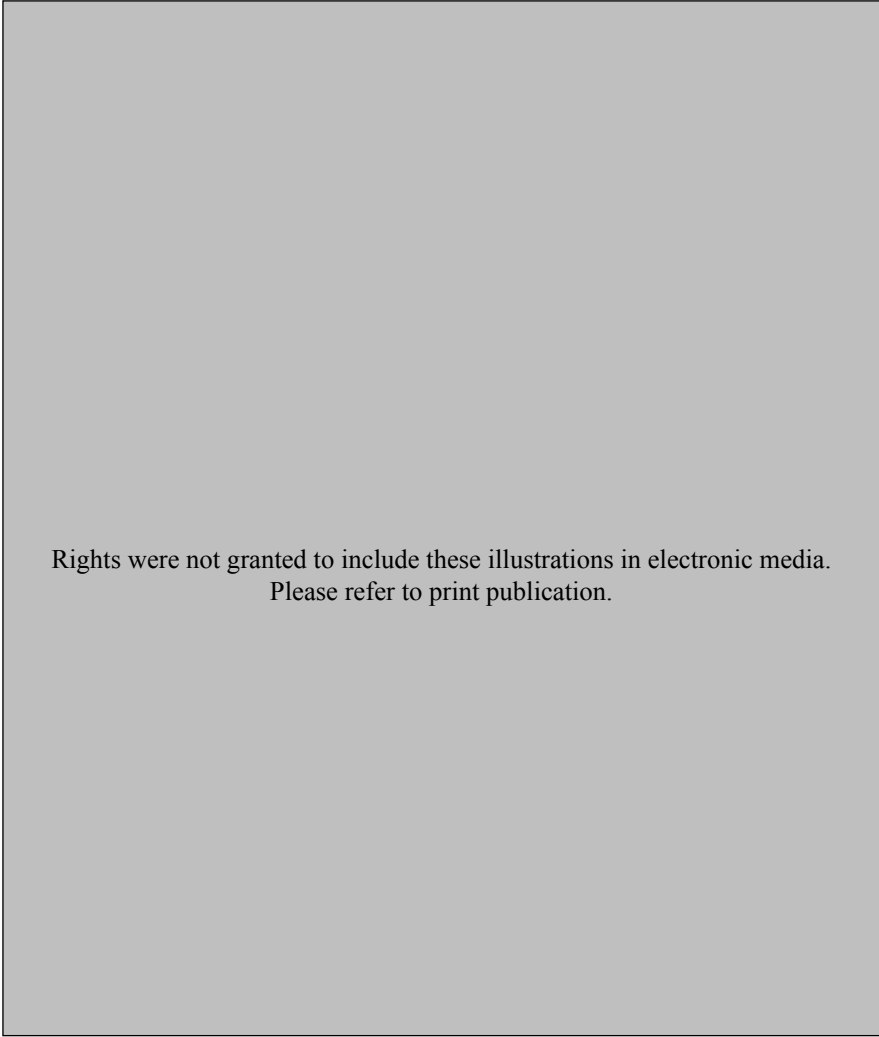
Druidic activity: the nature and flavour of 'syncretism', a word too often glibly used to explain the apparently hybrid 'Romano-Celtic' development of religious expression and belief. Syncretism, the coming together of two religious systems (usually, though not exclusively) as a result of colonial interaction,³⁰ is inevitably asymmetrical, and is particularly evident where one, almost always the system belonging to the colonial power, has a greater level of organisation and formality. Syncretism, then, is usually powered in a top-down manner; it is rarely a marriage between equals. So the expression of syncretised beliefs and cosmologies is likely to be skewed towards the 'dominant' partner.

But syncretism is a far from simple, unilinear process: it may involve subjugation, negotiation, counter-balances and shifting equivalences as the weaker partner seeks to re-establish and reaffirm self-determination and, perhaps, the stronger, colonial power relaxes after the initial impetus of intervention and becomes interwoven with indigenous tradition. We must also reflect that acting in counterpoint to the asymmetry of power is the numerically superior population on the receiving end of the colonial package. So syncretism is inherently unstable, constantly open to change and renegotiation. Moreover, the attitude of local aristocracies to a new order may be to embrace it and this, initially, serves to push along – and appropriate – a novel, exotic cult-system in order that indigenous individuals of high rank may safeguard and increase their own influence within an alternative hierarchy of power-relations.

A further factor acting on the way new religious movements operated within provincial Roman society, such as Britannia, is a need to challenge the frequently accepted idea of smooth, untroubled elision between intrusive Roman cults and those of the colonised population. This idea, that cults encountered by colonial powers in occupied provinces were blandly accepted and absorbed, is now seen as overly simplistic, and it is probably more accurate to acknowledge a perception on the part of the Romans that their own pantheon and ritual systems were superior and more 'right' than those of their conquered territories outside Italy. Indeed, the whole idea of religious tolerance (that is frequently propounded as a feature of polytheistic theogonies) is an essentially modern concept likely to have been unrecognisable to ancient societies.³¹

Application of such an approach to Roman Britain results in the recognition that certain indigenous cults would have been perceived as more acceptable than others and that these others – perhaps Druidism in particular – may have been regarded with hostility, contempt or even ridicule. If this were so, it is feasible that indigenous responses to *romanitas* and its religious attitudes included the production of a body of veiled iconography that sought, perhaps, to hide resistance and assertion of identity behind a mask of schematism and

abstraction.³² This, therefore, might be a legitimate way of viewing and interpreting such apparently simplified images as the plaque from Cirencester (Gloucestershire) depicting three hooded figures represented as featureless triangular shapes,³³ or the equally schematic triple image (Fig. 74), depicting three (probable) women from Roman Bath³⁴ whom I have tentatively identified as British forms of the presiding spring-goddess, Sulis Minerva.³⁵ Could it be that Druids or their successors, keepers of an indigenous sacred flame, acted in concert with Romano-British sculptors to maintain an alternative tradition whose eschewal of the Classical gold standard of iconographical



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74 Romano-British schist plaque depicting three women, in highly schematised form, from Bath (possibly originally from the temple of Sulis Minerva).

representation operated in a milieu of resistance, tacit subversion and statement of independence?

Parallels to the resistance motifs observable in Romano-British religious imagery may be found in the post-conquest iconography of the Spanish provinces. Here, it is the rich and complex polychrome ceramic motifs that have provided evidence for a vigorous tradition of indigenous religious art. Local aristocracies robbed of their ability to 'live according to traditional values,'³⁶ transferred such values by morphing them into motifs in ceramic decoration that served to keep lost identities alive within a neutralised symbolic context in which memories were retained by those 'in the know'. One example of how such traditions were manipulated in the Iberian ceramic polychrome series is that of the 'beautiful death'. This refers to the noble death of the warrior in battle who, alone, was accorded the honour of excarnation – exposure of his body so that his flesh could be consumed by vultures, creatures of the sky-gods, and so absorbed into heaven. A persistent motif in the post-conquest ceramic tradition of Numancia³⁷ is a schematic image of a fallen soldier, sword still in hand, whose body is depicted as two triangles, the apexes of each coming together to form his waist; perched on his lower body is a stylised bird of prey pecking at his vitals while suspended above the mortuary scene is what appears to be an enormous sun (Fig. 75).³⁸

Classical literary references have enabled relatively confident interpretations of this Celtiberian ceramic imagery: Aelian refers to an Iberian polity known as the Vaccaei who practised the 'beautiful death' of valorous warriors,³⁹ and Silius Italicus similarly mentions this practice among 'the Celts who have added to their name that of the Hiberi'.⁴⁰ To my mind, a significant element in the representation of these Iberian warrior-deaths is the triangular abstraction of the warrior himself because the schematic rendering of the human body may have served both to veil and to enhance the imagery, to depict a kind of apotheosis in which the living warrior was transformed to divine hero. Like the Cotswolds iconography just discussed, the abstract style perhaps also rendered the images less risky or provocative within a Hispano-Roman context, thus enabling the free circulation of this pottery among specific interest groups in much the same way as happened among the seventeenth-century New Mexican Pueblo communities under missionary control.

Old Wine in New Wineskins:⁴¹ The Transformation of a Goddess

Though Lateranus slays, in Numa's fashion,
lambs and russet steers,
he swears before Jove's high altar
by none than his revered

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75 Early post-Roman-conquest polychrome potsherd depicting 'the beautiful death' (the excarnation of a fallen warrior whose body is devoured by vultures); from Numancia, Spain.

Goddess of horses, and images daubed
On the stinking stalls.⁴²

I noticed a little shrine of the Mare-headed Mother, the Goddess Epona, standing in a niche of the post that supported the main beam of the stable.⁴³

These passages, from Juvenal's *Satires* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* are rare Classical literary references to a Gallo-Roman horse-goddess Epona. Juvenal was born in Latium in Italy in about AD 60; Apuleius was a wealthy, high-ranking man of North African⁴⁴ origin, born in AD 123. Juvenal was a right-wing xenophobe and abhorred the infiltration into Rome of what he saw as weird and barbaric cults, whether from the western or eastern provinces: indeed, he spoke with contempt of the way that the Syrian river 'Orontes flowed into the Tiber'.⁴⁵ He also seems to have had little time for women, homosexuals or social climbers. Apuleius, who became a priest of Aesculapius (Graeco-Roman god of healing) at Carthage, wrote his humorous moral allegory against a backdrop of growing support for Christianity in the Empire, a religion whose doctrine of social equality he loathed. Given the standpoints of these two ancient writers, their very different attitudes to the Gallic goddess

Epona should not surprise us. Juvenal sneered at what he saw as a low-class foreign horse-cult, whereas Apuleius was accepting and gentle in his description of her stable-shrine, perhaps because his story is wound around transformations between humans and animals and, in particular, between Lucius, the main protagonist of his tale, and a donkey.

Epona was a Gallic goddess who does not appear, from archaeological evidence, to have been venerated until Gaul had become a Roman province. However, the reference to her worship by Classical writers, together with the wide distribution of her cult-images and epigraphic monuments,⁴⁶ is testament to her popularity. Central to the iconography of this deity is her equine companion. The cult of Epona (Fig. 76) is important to an investigation of indigenous Gallo-British religion and linkages between pre-Roman and post-conquest traditions, for whilst she appears to have sprung, fully fledged, into Gallo-Roman cosmology without discernible forbears, close scrutiny of certain late Iron Age coin-issues reveals a possible antecedent – the imagery of a warrior-horsewoman on coins from eastern Armorica.⁴⁷ The aggressive, armed and gesticulating female figure on these coins might have been transmuted in

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76 Stone statuette of the Gallo-Roman horse-goddess Epona from Alesia, Burgundy, France.

Roman Gaul to become a peaceful goddess of prosperity, healing and the Otherworld⁴⁸ whilst retaining links with her past by means of her horse and in the acquisition of an epigraphically recorded horse-name Epona. It is likely that the Druids (or their equivalents) would have been key players in the choice of iconographic representations on Iron Age coinage⁴⁹ and, in my view, their descendants would have been equally involved in the careful selection of Roman-period religious imagery that would serve to curate tradition, albeit re-packaged. If this were so, their presentation of Epona was eminently successful, for she was worshipped all over the western Empire, was mentioned in a range of Classical texts and even had an official festival in the Roman calendar of religious ceremonies, on 18 December,⁵⁰ a rare privilege for a non-Roman deity.

The genesis and development of Epona are likely also to be valid as a working model applicable to other provincial divinities whose Iron Age progenitors have left no archaeological footprint. Some of them would have existed, in some form, in the cosmologies of pre-Roman clergy and worshippers; others may have been wrought new in the context of annexation, perhaps as an active response to a new world of *romanitas* whose cults were expressed more tangibly, through images and inscriptions, and thus would attain dominance. So, alongside Epona, we might list the *Matres* (Mothers), *Genii Cucullati* (Hooded Spirits), the sky-god of the Jupiter-Giant columns and countless others whose imagery springs into focus with Roman occupation of the Rhineland, Gaul and Britain.⁵¹ The cross-community nature of many religious images, including Epona and the *Matres*, suggests the presence of some form of centralised doctrine as well as the undoubted dissemination of cults through the army, merchants and other travellers. If, as we believe, the Druids faded from the overt political scene during the first century AD, their survival may have depended upon a shift in their focus of power towards public forms of religious expression that embraced and appropriated modes of presence – mass-production of iconography and the epigraphic habit – in order to remain players in the game. That is not to deny that *romanitas* and its agents also had a role to play in the development and adoption of local religious beliefs.

The Double-naming of Deities in Roman Britain

Hand-in-hand with the new or transformed iconography went the ‘epigraphic habit’, wherein the names and dedicatory messages to the spirits were set down as a permanent written record. Such action served not only to record but also to codify and thus create a new relationship between humans and the inhabitants of the supernatural world. Just as the late Iron Age inscribed coinage was charged with particular meaning associated with empowerment and authority, so inscribed expressions of allegiance to particular deities were influential in changing worlds, minds and cosmologies. The naming of gods and the sharing

of identification put the divine in the public arena and, perhaps, broke the stranglehold of secrecy and esoteric knowledge upon which the *auctoritas* of the Druids was based. In the kaleidoscopic array of divine names surviving on inscriptions, one form may be singled out for its expression of synthesis, syncretism and interaction between colonial power and its colonised subjects, that of 'double-naming', the bestowal of Roman and Gallo-British names on divinities. What did this dual-naming habit mean for religion and for power-relations between the two cultural groups involved?⁵² This kind of dual-identity, together with the religious epigraphic habit in general, is likely to have been a wholly post-colonial phenomenon and does not represent a pre-Roman Iron Age pantheon. Furthermore, recognition must be given to the essentially asymmetrical nature of *interpretatio romana* so often presented as demonstrating equality between Romans and provincials.⁵³

The divinity venerated at the important healing-spa-temple at Bath, the eponymously named *Aquae Sulis* (the Waters of Sulis) is an apt example of a double-named deity. Sulis Minerva⁵⁴ was the presiding goddess of the sanctuary and, unlike most double-named divinities in Roman Gaul and Britain – Mars Cocidius, Mars Lenus, Mercury Arvernus, Silvanus Callirius to name a few of many⁵⁵ – on the numerous epigraphic dedications to this British goddess, the local name, Sulis, comes first in all but one. The apparent ascendancy of the British element in her name power may be due to one or a combination of factors, not least of which may have been a deliberate gesture to *britannitas* in the years immediately following the catastrophe of the Boudican Rebellion in AD 60. For it was in these decades that Bath developed its monumental, Classically styled temple and baths on the site of a major series of hot springs beside the River Avon, certainly with Roman financial sponsorship and input from Gallo-Roman architects and stonemasons.

We know from Tacitus⁵⁶ that the harshness of the governor Suetonius Paulinus was widely regarded as having been largely responsible for the Boudican fiasco and steps were taken in the aftermath to appoint governors who would consolidate and engage in reconciliation rather than confrontation. Religion is also a good mechanism with which to heal wounds and effect harmony and it would have been both natural and sensible to call on British religious experts for advice in handling a delicate and sensitive situation. So, although the temple precinct at Bath bore all the outward trappings of Roman investment and patronage, elements of *britannitas* were either permitted or actively encouraged, not only in the naming of the goddess (who may or may not have existed in some tangible form before the Roman occupation of the region) but also in the iconography from the site. Often cited as a bold testament to synergies between Roman and British sculptural (and cosmological) traditions is the human head decorating the temple-pediment. It is certainly an arresting image but not always appreciated by those who have not visited

the Roman Baths Museum is the realisation that it is not such a dominating feature as it seems when taken out of context. In fact, the head carving is surprisingly small and high up and so may not represent the trumpet-blast of cultural cross-fertilisation generally ascribed to it. Perhaps this image, with its blend of gender-crossing Medusa, river-god and sun-deity, was the result of compromise, of negotiation between religious authorities with Roman and British perspectives that fully acknowledged the independent statement made by the Bath 'Gorgon' whilst, at the same time, taking care not to alienate colonial attitudes.

Druids Revisited?

On display in the Castle Museum, Colchester is a Roman helmet, one of several belonging to Roman soldiers killed in action during the sack of Colchester by British freedom-fighters during the Boudican Rebellion of AD 60. After the event, someone systematically collected these helmets and 'ceremonially' deposited them in a pit specially dug to receive them. The gathering and burial of these mementos is interpreted⁵⁷ as an act of respect by fellow soldiers but an alternative reading is possible, namely that it was Britons rather than Romans who deposited these helmets, not as a reverential token burial of brothers-in-arms but rather in a practice akin to the taking and deposition of trophy heads.

Such a notion finds support elsewhere in Roman Britain. It is particularly the case with the reading of archaeological material from the pits at the Roman fort at Newstead, just south of the River Tweed in southern Scotland, which rests on the convincing premises that 'there is no valid reason why the interpretation of Roman period behaviour should proceed under different rules from that of Europe's prehistory'.⁵⁸ Moreover, the military and civilian populations of Newstead consisted largely of ethnic Britons, Gauls and Germans 'only lightly Romanized'.⁵⁹ Newstead has long been recognised as a fort where 'odd' deposits have been found and, in the light of the Colchester helmets, it is of interest that two groups of such deposits in the Newstead pits consist of military parade helmets with face-masks (strongly resonating with the Colchester cache) and human skulls. I suspect that a range of Roman-period depositional practices might similarly be understood in the light of continuation or revisitation of pre-Roman ritual behaviour. Whilst it is unwise to be dogmatic about agency, if this kind of thing was occurring on a persistent basis within Roman Britain, some individuals or groups were likely to have been 'carrying the torch', as it were, and it is feasible to identify Druids or their inheritors as the linchpins of tradition, whether or not such 'curated practices' were carried out in the context of resistance, appropriation or syncretism.

Deposits of human and animal remains in Romano-British villas⁶⁰ provide further possible identification of British revitalisation movements in action. As at military Newstead, Romano-British villas provide evidence for the continuation (or re-establishment) of 'Britishness', especially in the deposits specifically associated with agricultural buildings of the third and fourth centuries AD. Whilst this kind of votive evidence is known at temple sites throughout (and before) the Roman conquest, the late date of the analogous villa material is of particular note, endorsing the notion of reinvention or readoption of earlier rites. Most striking of the depositional phenomena is the preponderance of infant-burials that occur – sometimes alone, sometimes in conjunction with the bodies or body parts of domestic animals – as foundation burials. At Barton Court Farm (Oxfordshire), special deposits include the skeletons of three newborn babies with the skulls of a sheep and a pair of dogs.⁶¹ The association between infants and animals noted here is even closer at the Star Roman Villa in Somerset, where the bones of a baby were found actually mingled with those of a sheep.⁶²

Human and animal deposits are not confined to the living quarters of villas but persistently occur in the parts of the farm complexes reserved for agricultural processing: hearths and so-called 'corn-driers' at, for instance, Winterton in Lincolnshire, Catsgore in Somerset and Barton Court Farm.⁶³ Many of these 'corn-driers' were probably malting sites for the processing of grain to make beer.⁶⁴ The resurgence of special depositional practices in late Roman agricultural contexts may be explicable in terms of increasing connections between the different functional spaces of villas and the development of business areas for mass-production of farm products, such as beer. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the making of beer might have 'required' the association of infant-deposits because of a perceived association between successful brewing and the statement of fertile power perhaps seen as residing within the bodies of infants (whether neonates who died naturally or the victims of infanticide) and animals.

These new ritual practices discernible in Romano-British villas during the later third and fourth centuries may well be expressions of revitalisation movements, the conscious harvesting and reintroduction of old myths and ways of linking up with the spirit world that, perhaps, had been lost sight of under *romanitas*. 'Of course, the past is not actually revived – it is the society's perception of the past which is revitalized,'⁶⁵ just as deliberate 'reinvention' of ancient rites occurs in more recently colonised societies, such as those of Plains Indians. A good example of the latter is observable among the native American communities of Peterborough, Ontario where, in May 1954, a huge rock-carving site, discovered during a mining investigation, revealed evidence for the cosmological belief-systems of the Algonquin hunting communities of the southern Canadian Shield. The petroglyphs have been dated to between

AD 900 and 1400, in the latter part of the 'Woodland period'.⁶⁶ The iconography appears to relate to an Algonquin worldview in which centrality of place was accorded the concept of *manitou*, a world of 'guardian spirits, the vision quest, shamanism, and cosmology'.⁶⁷ The idea of spirit-quests was still active among the Ojibwa Algonquins as late as the early 1960s.

The Algonquin site's relevance to understanding revitalisation movements is due to the tension that has recently arisen between present-day Ojibwans – who see themselves as direct descendants of the petroglyph-carvers, and thus the rightful keepers of a rock-art site still considered sacred – and archaeologists anxious to preserve the site from damage. For living Ojibwans, the site is charged with spirit-force and they demand access to the rock-surface in order to commune with the supernatural world and conduct rituals that sometimes involve lighting fires on the carvings. Such action is, of course, a matter of concern for archaeologists (who are, for the most part, of white colonial descent). The irony is that mid-twentieth-century Ojibwans had no knowledge of the glyphs before their discovery by white mining engineers, and the clearance and survey of the site were carried out by white archaeologists and anthropologists. Yet, quite legitimately, native Ojibwans now claim it as their own sacred shrine. The solution to the problem lies in the increasing number of Ojibwan archaeologists who are able to act both as the site's curators and be sensitive to its significance to the local population.⁶⁸ I wonder whether the Algonquin situation might be profitably applied, simply as a framework for understanding, to the revitalisation processes apparently being acted out in late Roman Britain.

New Gods: From Lydney to Thetford

Two late Romano-British sites bear witness to the resurgence and reaffirmation of British paganism at a time when Christianity was developing and spreading, at least officially, in the western Empire.⁶⁹ In about AD 150, the Greek writer Artemidorus wrote a treatise called the *Oneirocriticon*, (the *Interpretation of Dreams*), in which he identifies two types of dream, of which one, the *oneiros*, was important in the process of divination.⁷⁰ The late Roman shrine at Lydney Park (Gloucestershire) had a resident 'Interpreter of Dreams', one Victorinus, who was responsible for supervising the production of a mosaic, laid in the *cella* (holy of holies) of the sanctuary on behalf of the man in charge of the presiding priest, Titus Flavius Senilis.⁷¹ Beneath the inscription giving this information, which forms the frieze at the top of the mosaic, dolphins and other marine creatures cavort in waves that are probably meant to reflect the waters of the Severn Estuary and the magnificent Severn Bore visible from the temple. Both Victorinus and his master bore British surnames and the work of each of them was dedicated to the veneration of a very British god, Nodens.

Lydney's presiding deity was a healer-god and his 'animal-helpers' were dogs, whose images – of all shapes, breeds and sizes – were represented on figurines and sculptures given to the god by grateful pilgrims. A curious feature is the human face on one of these canine images (Fig. 77).⁷² Could we be witnessing an example of 'shamanistic' transformation in action, the dog representing a kind of spirit-helper who acted as go-between in relationships between Nodens and his human devotees? Here at Lydney was a large Classically styled temple, accompanied by a suite of baths and a dormitory (for sick pilgrims to sleep and receive curative visions of the god), apparently with no images of the god in human form: only his dogs are given a visual voice. I like to imagine Victorinus and Senilis as successors to the Druids of the first centuries BC and AD, rather like Delphidius and Phoebicianus in Gaul, recorded by Ausonius in the fourth century.⁷³ After all, they presided over a very British cult.

On the other side of Britannia, Fison Way, Thetford in Norfolk was a focus of Icenian nationalism during the Boudican Rebellion. Before the uprising, a huge timber structure was built, probably as a sacro-political gathering place and, at the time of the Boudican war, the Roman army systematically dismantled the site, not in an act of angry destruction by fire but by removing each timber and filling in all the ditches. This way, perhaps, it was hoped that the symbolically charged place would be forgotten rather than perceived as a memorial to resistance.

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77 Bronze figurine of a dog with a human face, from the late Roman shrine of Nodona at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire.

If the aim of the destruction was annihilation of memory, then it may not have worked, for after an interval of more than three hundred years, the sanctity of the site was reaffirmed by the deposition, in almost exactly the same location as the great ‘hall’, of a hoard of precious metal objects, including jewellery – finger-rings (some with with gems much older than their settings) necklaces, bracelets and an ornate gold belt-buckle – and a set of thirty-three silver spoons.⁷⁴ It is likely that the spoons belonged to some kind of *collegium* or religious guild, and they may well have been used in ritual acts involving measurements of wine, oil or holy water.⁷⁵ But that is not all, for many of the spoons are inscribed with the names of deities, of which the most prominent is Faunus, an obscure Italian woodland-god; more curious still is the doubling of his name with a range of local divinities with unequivocally British names, of whom the most interesting is Medugenus, ‘the mead-begotten one’ (Fig. 78). This name, its imagery redolent of intoxication and – perhaps – mind-bending, altered states of consciousness and trance, brings us back to notions of shamanism, visions and spiritual connections.

The evidence for a link between Druids and the late Roman cache of silver- and gold-work from Thetford has to be purely speculative but a group of people had clearly made themselves responsible for keeping alive the symbolically charged meaning of a very specific site that had once been the nexus of Icenian resistance against Rome. Within a late Roman context of religious pagan resurgence, seen already at Lydney and evident in many parts of south-western England, it is not absurd to imagine that old traditions, old memories and old feelings of Britishness were being revisited and revitalised at Thetford, as at Lydney and at many of the rural villa-sites discussed earlier. To my mind,

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78 Silver spoon from the late Roman precious metal hoard found at Thetford, Norfolk. The spoon bears the name of a British deity Medugenus (‘mead-begotten’).

there is no reason why the religious component of the Thetford hoard could not have been curated by British clerics whose ancestors were Caesar's Druids. In a way, the situation at Thetford aptly reflects the pulse of Druidic revival and the survival or reinvention of British cosmologies.

So, whilst the literary evidence falls largely silent for the Druids after the Roman conquest of their lands, there is persistent archaeological evidence for the survival and vigorous resurgence of local beliefs and ritual practices. Religious iconography underwent a transformation under Roman domination but this was expressed not as a replica of the Roman pantheon but as a new religious movement which used aspects of Roman artistic motifs to explore and present ideas that, despite being new, belonged firmly within the cosmologies of Gaul and Britain. For me, the Druids – or their successors – were key to the way that local religions and cult-practices changed and renewed themselves throughout the Roman period. Ausonius mentioned the presence of Druids in late Roman Bordeaux. It is as likely that similar groups of indigenous priests remained active in other parts of Gaul and in Britain. They may or may not have been known as Druids at that stage but they continued to have a crucial role in driving religious observance and, perhaps, using religion to express attitudes of self-determination and resistance to *romanitas*.

Epilogue: Druid Afterlife

Fair-faced Cathbad, hear me – prince, pure, precious crown, grown huge in druid spells.¹

WHAT OF the Druids beyond the ancient world? How did they come to be reborn and reinvented over the centuries so that, today, there are groups calling themselves Druids in all parts of the globe? Present-day western Druidry takes its place among other ‘new’ pagan religious movements such as Wicca and Odinism. It is possible to track a constant, chameleon-like, transformation of the Druid phenomenon during the historical period not only in its form but also in its geographical arena for, after the end of Roman Gaul and Britain people called Druids emerged in the pagan mythic stories of early historical Ireland. The origins of these stories are complicated because the people who first wrote them down were Christian monks educated in the Classics and, undoubtedly, influenced by Classical traditions.

After some centuries of silence, Druids were reinvented by antiquarians, first during the Renaissance but persisting throughout the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Men such as John Aubrey and William Stukeley made spurious but, at the time, persuasive connections between the great megalithic monuments dominating the landscape of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Britain and the Druids, thus providing their country with a long and colourful history. Alongside the English and Scottish antiquarian tradition (and those of France and Germany) there grew up in Wales a similar desire to link past with present, a movement led by a Glamorganshire stonemason, Iolo Morgannwg, a man who forged ‘ancient’ texts to enable him to set up the Welsh *Eisteddfodau*, populated with Druids and Bards, with an allegedly unbroken pedigree stretching back to Caesar’s time. One legacy of this antiquarian imagination combined with the ‘Green Lobby’ from the later twentieth century onwards to feed into the Neo-Pagan alternative religious traditions so actively practised today of which, perhaps, the most visible signature is the solstitial ceremony at Stonehenge.

Irish Mist

Before turning to the early Irish mythic texts, it is necessary to consider the contested issue of whether the Romans ever seriously colonised Ireland. If so, their presence might have provided a conduit for the spread of ideas of Druidism – if, of course, the Druids were not already present in Ireland at the same time as their existence in Britain. There is no firm evidence for Iron Age Irish Druids but if, as I have argued in this book, Iron Age art was an agent for the transmission and exchange of symbolic and cosmological ideas, its presence as a vigorous force in Ireland is one way in which a shared worldview might have embraced Druidism. These exchanges of ideas certainly point to significant links between Irish and Welsh Iron Age art, indicating the circulation of themes and ideas on both sides of the Irish Sea.²

Archaeological evidence suggests that Roman material culture reached Ireland, and there is even the occasional Roman burial.³ There was probably a mixture of localised settlement, perhaps by the traders who plied across the Irish Sea bringing Roman goods to Ireland, and visits by tourists from the western Empire, who left traces of their presence at such prehistoric monuments as Newgrange (Country Meath). Discoveries have been made of precious metal hoards of coins and other objects from the late Roman period, probably loot plundered by raiding parties from Ireland to Britain. Could low-level Roman military incursions have occasionally taken place?⁴ Tacitus tells us that the Roman governor Agricola took notice of Ireland in the late first century AD during campaigns in Scotland,⁵ commenting on the general's view that it would be perfectly feasible for a Roman legion to conquer the land. Tacitus also mentions visits from Britain to Ireland by merchants and, interestingly, that Agricola 'had given welcome to an Irish prince, who had been driven from home by a rebellion'. So, the governor had received an Irish 'guest', much as Caesar and the early emperors had welcomed British princes such as Mandubracius, Adminius and Verica. According to Tacitus, Agricola had pondered conquest partly because Ireland was easily reached from Gaul and because Britain might stay quieter without the presence of free peoples just to its west. So were there Druids in Ireland at the time that Rome occupied Britain? Druids only appear on the Irish scene in the early medieval texts that, although steeped in paganism, came from the pens of Irish Christian monks and can be seen to contain Christian ethics and morals lurking behind the tales of love, religion and war.

Most of the Irish prose tales that feature Druids were compiled as written narratives in around the twelfth century AD but may, in origin, have existed as the stock-in-trade of professional storytellers for some centuries beforehand. These Druids are almost unrecognisable, evincing virtually no connection with Caesar's Gallo-British religious practitioners, except for their high status,

political influence and knack for divination. In Ireland, the Druids belong to a world of fantasy, where they are empowered to do strong magic and turn worlds upside down in a context in which the inhabitants of the spirit world stalk that of the living and constantly meddle in human affairs (much like the deities of Norse and Classical myths). These early Irish stories are obviously the product of monastic propaganda, whose purpose was to reinforce Christianity by holding paganism up to ridicule. The Irish pantheon of deities and the Irish Druids were largely, if not wholly, the figments of clerical imagination, designed to hammer home the point that the only sane alternative to a chaotic paganism were the order and sobriety of Christianity.

The Christian redactors (scribes of the oral tales) were familiar with some Classical literature. Studying the texts of the Graeco-Roman world, the writings of Virgil, Caesar and others, would have formed a substantial part of the Christian monastic repertoire of learning and it was in these works that monks found the inspiration to construct a war-torn pagan Ireland with which it was necessary for Christianity to do battle. We should not be surprised, therefore, if descriptions of Irish Druids, such as the Ulster ritualist Cathbad, had an apparently coherent resonance with Caesar's Gallic religious acquaintances, like Diviciacus, and Tacitus' Germanic Veleda. But Cathbad is first and foremost a magician, a miracle-worker and a fortune-teller. The scene of one of Cathbad's revelations is a feast at the house of King Conchobar's court storyteller, Fedlimid, whose pregnant wife is serving them. Suddenly, the unborn child shrieks from its mother's womb, terrifying everyone present; her husband demands to know what is going on but she, as puzzled as the rest, looks to Cathbad to explain the mystery, which he does:

A woman with twisted yellow tresses,
green-irised eyes of great beauty
and cheeks flushed like the foxglove
howled in the hollow of your womb.
I say that whiter than the snow
Is the white treasure of her teeth;
Parthian-red, her lip's lustre.
Ulster's chariot-warriors
Will deal many a blow for her . . .
Deirdriu shall be her name. She will bring evil.⁶

Cathbad correctly predicted the havoc Deirdriu's beauty would wreak upon the Ulstermen, provoking bitter jealousies between the king and her other suitors and triggering appalling civil strife in Ulster. We do not have to dig deep to discern here the Christian canon of morality, moderation, peace and, above all, the sense of propriety that kept nubile young women in their place.

Cathbad is – at least in large measure – an instrument of the interleaving of Classical tradition with Christian homily by Christian authors. Like other iconic images of these early ‘historical’ tales, such as chariot-driving heroes and sacred cauldrons in which dead mortals could be reborn, the Irish Druids cannot be linked in any meaningful way with the ritual and religious practices of pre-Christian Britain and Gaul. But there is a further important ingredient in the Insular stories, namely the imagination of professional storytellers who, Christian or not, provided the seasoning that facilitated the wide circulation, repetition and mutation of the tales to a wide, and largely illiterate, audience.

Closely tied into the Irish myths of the Druids are legends that speak of sacred sites, gathering places for annual festivals and assemblies, where new Irish kings were inaugurated and sacrificial rites enacted. These were special, liminal places, entrances to the Otherworld, where the gods dwelt. Interestingly, many of these sites were, in fact, locations where prehistoric monuments had been erected, many centuries before they became woven into early medieval mythic Irish narratives, and where little archaeological evidence exists of structures contemporary with the stories told about them. Perhaps the most resonant of these Insular sites is Tara in County Meath, identified in the early medieval literature as the most important royal site of all Ireland.

In about AD 800, the Irish ‘scholar monk’ Oenghus⁷ wrote with triumphant Christian passion of the downfall of the great centres of pagan ritual, contrasting them with the flourishing monasteries that had replaced them. He says this of Tara:

No more lives strong Tara,
her lordships are blighted;
with full choirs of preachers
Armagh is still mighty⁸

Archaeological investigation of Tara has revealed a palimpsest of monuments, the earliest dating to Neolithic times, the latest (and most numerous) probably to the later Iron Age. The structures include burial mounds, standing stones and ring-forts (*raths*) and, at the time the prose tales were compiled, these would have been highly visible in the landscape, as many remain so today. Iron Age builders clearly respected, even venerated the earlier mounds, perhaps perceiving them as belonging to the ancestors, and the archaeological evidence suggests that in antiquity Tara was always regarded as a place of ceremonial significance.⁹ As a Christian zealot, Oenghus would have regarded it as his duty (and his pleasure) to target such supremely significant pagan sites as Tara, for paganism was still lurking on the periphery when he was writing

his martyrology and the name of this great site, and others – such as Cruachain and Emain Macha – which he mentions in the same breath would still have contained strong and evocative memories for his audience.

One of the persistent themes of Irish medieval mythic literature is sacral kingship, something akin to the historical English divine right of kings but even closer to the spiritual world in so far as Irish kings were described in the texts as mortal yet married to the divine personification of Ireland.¹⁰ This being so, the selection of a new ruler was a highly sacred act, and one that required the choice to be ‘sealed’ by a series of prescribed rituals. Tara was closely bound up with royal inauguration ceremonies and it was incumbent upon each newly chosen king to attend the *Feis Temhtra* (the Feast of Tara). Before final selection candidates had to undergo a range of ritual tests, the results of which were interpreted by the Druids who – in keeping with their traditional role as diviners – thus acted as oracles predicting the will of the gods. The would-be king had first to don a special royal cloak that would be too large for him if he were not the right choice. Next, he would mount a chariot and attempt to drive it between two stones that parted just enough to admit the vehicle unscathed if the driver were the rightful king-elect. Lastly, the king-elect would have to reach out his hand and touch the Stone of Fál: only if the stone uttered a shriek would he be deemed by the Druids to be acceptable as the next king.¹¹

Overtly Christian texts, such as the seventh-century *Lives* of Saint Patrick, present a stark clash of two faiths – Druidism and Christianity – and, when pitted against each other, Christianity always triumphs. Muirchu’s *Life of Saint Patrick* contains scathing references to Druids as shaven-headed barbarians, chanting impious phrases.¹² Similarly, the coeval *Life of Saint Berach* alludes to the Druids as ‘full of treachery and malice’, impotent against the soldiers of Christ.¹³ But perhaps the most ironic twist in the early Christian texts is the ‘Christianisation’ of the Druids. In the *Vita Brigitae*, written in the seventh century by Cogitosus, the young Saint Brigit has a Druid patron who cares for her and she grows up in his household.¹⁴ A story about the Ulster king Conchobar, called the *Aided Conchobar*, relates a pronouncement by his royal Druid who informs the king that Christ’s crucifixion had caused a great earthquake, whereupon the king – already grievously wounded by a brain-ball¹⁵ – suffers a fatal stroke, overcome by the challenge to the pagan order. The monastic manipulation of paganism for its own ends reached its apogee in this ultimate Christian appropriation of the Irish Druids.

On 3 March 2008, *The Times* featured an article focused on Tara as a symbol of irreconcilable tensions between the Irish economy (the ‘Celtic Tiger’) and the Irish spirit (the ‘Celtic Harp’), as envisioned by the Irish Nobel laureate Séamus Heaney. For a motorway is planned that will smash its way through the very heart of ancient Tara which, he says, ‘means something

equivalent to what Delphi means to the Greeks.¹⁶ For Heaney and many people living in Ireland, Tara remains a sacred place, the desecration of which would be an unprecedented national tragedy. Tara is listed as among the hundred most vulnerable world-heritage sites: 'This entire site is the equivalent of Stonehenge, Westminster Abbey for its royal associations and Canterbury for its Christian associations all rolled into one.'¹⁷

Drawn by Dragons: Druids in the Antiquarian Imagination

The English poets have some odd things to say of the Druids. Drayton's are drawn through the air by dragons; Milton calls on Parliament to follow the examples of the Druids; Pope's Druids may be taken for Scythian heroes; Marvell and Wordsworth picture themselves as Druids . . . and Blake calls Adam a Druid.¹⁸

A.L. Owen's *The Famous Druids* ushers in a shift in our focus of evidence for a Druidic 'afterlife': from early medieval Ireland to Renaissance and later Britain. English poets of the early modern period present the Druids as belonging to a heroic golden age, in much the same way that they were imagined by the writers of the ancient Alexandrian school. For these poets, as for antiquarians, a renewed interest in the Classical world allowed the Druids to capture the romantic and the whimsy of a mythologised English past. We should remember, though, that the Druids were also 'resurrected' in France and Germany during a parallel resurgence of interest in the ancient world and a similar search for the roots of present identity. So the French writer Jean le Fèvre's *Fleurs et Antiquitez des Gaules, où il et traité des anciens Philosophes Gaulois appelez Druides*¹⁹ was published in 1532 and, in 1650, the German Esaias Pufendorf produced his *Dissertatio de Druidibus*.²⁰

One of the most significant needle-hooks upon which hung the tradition of the ancient Druids for English intellectuals in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries was Stonehenge. Indeed, as recently as 1 April 2008, one of the theories put forward in *The Times* for understanding the function of Stonehenge was that it was a 'druid temple'.²¹ For modern scholars, there can be no possible connection between the megalithic monument of Stonehenge and its fellow structures and the Druids. Stone circles belong to the Neolithic and Earlier Bronze Age periods, and the multi-phase monument of Stonehenge itself was in use between c. 3000 and 1000 BC,²² whilst the Druids, of course, existed nearly a millennium later than the 'end' of Stonehenge's primary life.

The blame for attaching the Druids to Stonehenge initially can be firmly apportioned to the antiquarian John Aubrey (1626–97). We have to recognise that, in the absence of the long prehistoric perspective only made possible by scientific methods of dating that developed in the mid-twentieth century,

Aubrey, like his contemporaries, had no means of separating demonstrably pre-Roman phases one from another. Since, according to writers like Caesar, the Druids existed before the Roman annexation of Britain and because Stonehenge clearly also pre-dated the Roman conquest, it made sense to see this great stone monument as a Druidic temple. In the 1670s, Aubrey finished his book on British megaliths, originally entitled *Templa Druidum*.²³ Although Aubrey showed restraint in his claims for the Druids' connection with megalithic monuments, fully acknowledging their speculative nature, he also showed signs of incipient Druidomania in identifying a Roman strigil (a Roman bronze implement used for scraping off oil and dirt in baths) from the fort of Reculver in Kent as the very golden sickle mentioned by Pliny as used by the Druids to cut off mistletoe from sacred oaks!²⁴

Stukeley and Stonehenge

At noon I hied to gloomy shades
 Religious woods and midnight glades . . .
 And hark! The ringing harp I hear
 And lo! Her druid sons appear
 Why roll on me your glaring eyes?
 Why fix on me for sacrifice?²⁵

If John Aubrey played a principal role in sowing the seeds of spurious Druid–Stonehenge connections then one of his successors, William Stukeley, inherited his mantle and carried it much further in so far as he came to identify himself with the Druids. Born ten years before Aubrey's death, Stukeley followed both medical and clerical careers, becoming a Lincolnshire physician and, in 1729, the vicar of Stamford. In 1723, Stukeley commenced his *History of the Temples of the Ancient Celts* but ten years later he changed the title to *The History of the Religion and Temples of the Druids*. Stukeley was concerned to reconcile Druidism with Christianity and sought to make connections between the patriarchs of the Old Testament and the similarly venerable ancient Gallo-British priesthood. In linking the Druids to Christianity, he used as his linchpin the sanctity of the number three, arguing that the Holy Trinity shared its symbolism with the triadic nature of ancient Druid cosmology. In the frontispiece of his book *Stonehenge, A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids*, published in 1740, Stukeley specifically identified himself as a Druid, calling himself Chyndonax, after the name on an alleged 'Druidic inscription' found near Dijon and published in 1623. Perhaps the most voluble testament to the culmination of his obsession was his signature on a volume of his sermons dedicated to the Princess Dowager Augusta in 1763: 'Chyndonax of Mount Haemus (Hampstead), Druid'.²⁶

A Flurry of Druids and a New Ancient Order

During the eighteenth century, groups of Druids were being founded all over Britain, the formation of their cells fuelled by such luminaries as Aubrey, Stukeley and their contemporaries. The British Circle of the Universal Bond²⁷ claimed its genesis as the direct result of a weird ceremony that took place on Primrose Hill in London to celebrate the autumn equinox in 1717, when the Londonderry-born John Toland was elected and inaugurated as Chief Druid of a large disparate group of Bards and Druids hailing from Ireland, Britain and Brittany. The background to this event was Toland's dismay at the growing ritualisation of the Anglican Church and a consonant meeting he convened at the Apple Tree Tavern in Covent Garden earlier in the same year. Although a Christian, Toland harked back to the simplicity of a Druidic Golden Age which he hoped to re-establish in a resurgence of Druidic values and doctrines.

In 1781, a secret society was formed in London by Henry Hurle, called the Ancient Order of Druids. Initially, the meeting-place for this new group was a public house called the King's Arms, in the heart of the West End.²⁸ Organised on lines similar to freemasonry, membership was reserved for men and it was above all a convivial society of cultured, urbane gentlemen although by the early nineteenth century some lodges were admitting other classes. Hurle identified Stukeley as a principal inspiration for the Order, which began with a modest membership. By the mid 1790s lodges had been established all over the world, with more than three thousand members. The respectability of the Ancient Order of Druids is demonstrated by the distinction of certain members: in 1908 the young Winston Churchill was admitted to the Albion Lodge of the AOD at Blenheim near Oxford. A photograph of Churchill's induction shows him centre-stage, looking suitably solemn, surrounded by civic dignitaries, clanking with mayoral chains, alongside venerable white-robed, white-bearded Druids who would have been quite at home in Pliny's sacred, mistletoe-strewn oak-grove.²⁹

Inventing a Past: Druidomania in the Far West

Hail, all hail to the Mistletoe,
 Hail, hail, all hail, to the Mistletoe, hail . . .
 The enlighten'd Crowd with grateful raptures glow,
 And crown his head with sacred Mistletoe,
 With Mistletoe, the leaves of Oak they bind,
 And hail him Druid, Friend of Human kind,
 And Hail him Druid, Friend of Human kind.³⁰

In 1723, the vicar of Llanidan (Anglesey), the Reverend Henry Rowlands, published *Mona Antiqua Restaurata*, a history of the island, in which he refers

to Tacitus' account of the Romans' attack on the Druidic island of Mona (Anglesey). Like Stukeley, Rowlands concocted an unholy soup of tradition in which the Druids were descended from the Old Testament Noah and whose altars were megalithic tombs. Indeed, Rowlands considered himself – as an Anglesey clergyman – to have 'inherited the Archdruids' seat'.³¹ For Rowlands, then, the brief comment in Tacitus' *Annals*³² provided a perfect opportunity to indulge in the 'Druidomania'³³ that was to afflict so many of his fellow countrymen later in the eighteenth century.

The *Gentleman's Magazine* for October 1792 featured a gathering of London Welsh bards who, following John Toland's example, met to celebrate the Autumn Equinox on Primrose Hill. The Bardic tradition, without false Druidic flummery, had flourished in Wales since the twelfth century. Medieval Welsh bards enjoyed high status because of their skill with words and the rigour of poetic convention that operated according to a strict code of structure and metre. The medieval bards fulfilled another role as well: 'It is surely no accident that the dynamic upsurge of Welsh poetry in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was closely associated with the attempts of the Welsh princes to stem the Anglo-Norman tide.'³⁴ It was, perhaps, this notion of self-determination and independence in the face of colonial oppression that appealed to an eighteenth-century stonemason who was to construct a new cultural and intellectual identity for Wales on the spurious foundations of a remote and Druidical past.

Iolo the Mythmaker

On reaching Trevigneth, we examined some relics of Druidism, called Cromlechs . . . our imaginations were led back to the period when the horrid rites of Druids, of whom at a very early period this island was a stronghold, were celebrated on this spot. Here the Druid priests once offered their dreadful sacrifices, and performed their idolatrous worship . . .³⁵

In the 1770s a Glamorgan-born stonemason, Edward Williams, got together with fellow London-Welshmen concerned at the fading away of the Welsh language and the bardic tradition whose genesis had been stimulated by Anglo-Norman invasions five hundred years previously. Williams had been elected Bard and, according to convention, had adopted a Bardic name to reflect the land of his birth, 'Iolo Morgannwg' (Iolo of Glamorgan). So far so good. But Iolo's enthusiasm for the preservation of his country's heritage was fuelled not only by his own Bardic status but was also affected by the Druidomania coursing through the ranks of broadly English antiquaries such as Stukeley. In seeking to emphasise Wales's cultural credentials, Iolo launched a two-pronged campaign: firstly to establish an unbroken genealogical link

between current Glamorganshire Bards and the ancient Druids; secondly to 'recreate' the ceremonies associated with the Druidic/Bardic tradition. To pursue these two aims, Iolo became both forger and inventor and his inspired creation of a Welsh identity was 'fuelled by copious supplies of laudanum and a heady mixture of fact, fiction and extravagant fantasies'.³⁶ But to understand Iolo we need to step back and view his activities in his eighteenth-century context and to look forward in time to English attitudes in the following century. 'As the Welsh themselves began to discover, invent and re-invent literary, historical and musical treasures, they derived comfort from the knowledge that their identity was based on a history considerably older than that of England.'³⁷

Away from Wales, among the 'London Welsh', the zeal for establishing a long-standing Welsh pedigree was of particular concern and, in 1751, these 'exiles' founded the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, claiming the original ancient Britons as their ancestors, to promote Welsh culture and, most importantly of all, to revive the Welsh language. It is a tragic irony that a century later, the English government's hostility to the Welsh language culminated in the Education Act of 1870, which inhibited its use in Welsh elementary schools. Geraint Jenkins comments that 'Welsh was increasingly equated with ignorance and backwardness'.³⁸ Against this backdrop of English superciliousness, it is little wonder that people like Iolo and his successors strove to put Wales on the map as a nation, with an irrefutable and long-lived national heritage of which the flagships were the Welsh language and the Bardic tradition.

Iolo has been dubbed 'the most gifted, complex and intriguing figure in the annals of Welsh culture'.³⁹ An expert forger, he counterfeited documents that allowed him to present his own poems as those of a fourteenth-century poet, forgery that was not 'rumbled' until 1926, after academic scrutiny by Griffith John Williams.⁴⁰ It was Iolo who organised the historic gathering on Primrose Hill in 1792, there initiating the *Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain* (The Assembly of the Bards of the Isle of Britain), a 'druidic court, a theatrical event steeped in quasi-masonic rituals . . . designed to give one of the forgotten peoples of Europe a new and enhanced sense of their own identity and worth'.⁴¹ Part of his Welsh Druidic Revival, and arguably his most influential legacy, was Iolo's promotion of the *Eisteddfodau*⁴² as pivotal regular, high-profile events, a project he launched with a three-day ceremony held in the garden of the Ivy Bush Hotel in Carmarthen. Here he unrolled the new face of the *Eisteddfod* with the creation of rituals – such as the Invocation to Peace, the Druids and the Hirlas Horn – that survive in the Welsh National *Eisteddfodau* today. Iolo's creation was a brilliant piece of theatre for it provided an arena for Welsh identity, language and culture to be spotlighted in defiance of the denigration of the land and its people by the English.

The idea of the *Gorsedd* was not confined to Wales: another ‘beleaguered’ people, on the western edge of Britain, the Cornish, adopted both it and the Druidic tradition. A 1933 painting, *Cornish Gorsedd at Roche Rock* by Herbert Truman, depicts two nineteenth-century luminaries of the Cornish Druidic tradition, Henry Jenner and Robert Morton Nance, with a gathering of blue-robed, mainly bearded, gentlemen, with banners, harps and swords, very clearly following the Welsh tradition started by Iolo Morgannwg but displaying Cornish independence from Wales in their distinctive blue garments.⁴³ Jenner and Nance were at the forefront of Cornish linguistic studies and in 1938 the latter brought out a Cornish–English dictionary.⁴⁴ In 1836, Brittany, too, was searching for its ancient roots. In 1794 Jacques Cambry travelled extensively to try and gather traces of old Breton songs and literature, and lamented the demise of Breton poetry,⁴⁵ blaming its loss on ‘the priests who wished to annihilate all traces of the sublime religion of the druids, to the ignorance of the nobles, and to the stupidity of the ordinary people who had been reduced to slavery.’⁴⁶ All of the old Breton ceremonies, including solstitial bonfires, had been forbidden in Brittany since the sixth century AD. The Bretons, too, had (and have) their own *Gorsedd*, organised along similar lines to those in Wales and Cornwall. In August 1967, one such Breton *Gorsedd* met at the ancient abbey of Paimpont;⁴⁷ the gathering was the *Gorsedd Drouized* (the Druidic Assembly), and it thronged with chosen from all over Brittany, some in blue, others in white, proclaiming and celebrating their Breton identity and culture in a way that clearly and overtly displayed their connections with Iolo and the revived Welsh Druid movement. It is diverting to speculate to what extent, when he began the revival of the Welsh *Gorsedd*, Iolo had in mind Caesar’s great annual Druidic Assembly in the heart of Gaul.

It was in the lands of these ‘border peoples’ that the Druid revival was most vigorous, perhaps because of an enduring sense of living on the edges of larger, imperial worlds led by England and France, from which they felt (and were, to an extent) excluded. In this way, then, the Druids – albeit totally re-invented – continued to fulfil a role in providing focus and identity to these marginalised groups. The link between Druids and the preservation of local languages in places like Wales and Brittany contributed to an alternative way of determining themselves, a way of resisting the giant hand of colonialism.

Enduring Icons: Solstices and Summer Magic

Our task is not to recreate a Druidry that existed thousands of years ago, but instead to respond to the source and interpret it for today. If we can do this, the gap between ancient Druids and modern ones disappears.⁴⁸

My quest for the Druids ends with a brief glance at today’s Druidic traditions, the so-called ‘“World Wide Web” of Druidry.’⁴⁹ Pockets of Neo-Druids exist

all over the world, from Ireland with its Irish Pagan Movement established during the celebration of the old Irish festival of Samhain in the autumn of 1993, to the gay and lesbian Druid cell, called the Golden Gate group, in San Francisco, and from Brittany to Australia.

The Welsh Druids and the Gorsedd y Beirdd

Modern Welsh Druids are not part of any religious Druidry; their identity as Druids is entirely cultural. Welsh identity is strongly connected with the Welsh language, a tongue that, up until comparatively recently, was deliberately suppressed or, at any rate, discouraged by the Anglocentric slant of the British Government.⁵⁰ An iconic moment in Welsh resistance to this attitude was the foundation of *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* (the Welsh Language Society), its aim to 'secure official status for Welsh in the public sphere in Wales.'⁵¹ The Welsh National *Eisteddfod*, a cultural fair held every August in a different venue each year but alternating between North and South Wales,⁵² celebrates the best in Welsh arts and culture, its connecting tissue the Welsh language. Pivotal to the ceremonies is the *Gorsedd y Beirdd*, the Assembly of Bards, and it is only by decree of this body, a year and a day in advance, that the *Eisteddfod* can be held. The members of the *Gorsedd* are those recognised as the most prominent and influential contributors to Welsh language, culture and literature, particularly poetry, and they are called Druids.⁵³

Each *Eisteddfod* opens with the procession of Druids to the stage set up in the pavilion, their ranks indicated by the different hues of their robes: blue, green and white. Their leader, the Archdruid, takes centre-stage and addresses the participants: the *Eisteddfod* has begun. The newly elected Druids walk at the back of the procession, robed but bare-headed, until they reach the *Ceidwad y Cledd* (the Keeper of the Sword), where they each touch the naked sword-blade in turn before being taken to the 'flat stone' where they are officially welcomed into the Order of Druids by the Archdruid. The new Druids then progress to the *Meistres y Gwisgoedd* (the Mistress of the Robes) who places headdresses on their heads.⁵⁴ Now the three main events of the festival can take place: the Crowning of the Bard (Fig. 79), the award of the Prose medal and the Chaining of the Bard.⁵⁵

So why would the cream of contributors to Welsh culture call themselves Druids? If we cast our minds back to Caesar's description of his Gallic Druids we can find his view of a high-ranking, intellectually superior caste who, perhaps alone in their society, are at ease with the written word. And there the connection ends. Iolo Morgannwg and his peers constructed a Welsh Druidic pedigree stretching far back into the past, a past that began with the Anglesey Druids, on the edge of the world, fighting for British freedom and defending their most sacred island grove. Modern Welsh Druids are perfectly aware of

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79 The 2008 Welsh National *Eisteddfod* Bardic Crown, sponsored by Cardiff University, to mark its 125th Anniversary. The crown was made by the Anglesey artist Karen Williams and depicts aspects of the university's architecture.

their 'invented' ancestry but, in a sense, the *Eisteddfod* and the *Gorsedd y Beirdd* contain within them a kernel of independence and self-identity in the face of creeping anglicisation that would, in all likelihood, have been thoroughly approved of by those beleaguered original Welsh Druids fighting for survival against an earlier colonial power that threatened – both militaristically and culturally – to engulf and extinguish *britannitas*.

Solstice and Sanctuary: New Druids and Old Stonehenge

Now people try to tell us we're
no longer free to roam
The holy living landscape that
once we called our home.
They waste our time and money trying
to keep us from the bones
That our blessed Mother gave us
to erect as standing stones.⁵⁶

Of the many theories circulating up until recently about the original purpose of Stonehenge, the two most prominent have been the monument's

identification as a temple and as an astronomical observatory. But in May 2008, *The Times* printed an article outlining the latest archaeological research undertaken by the Stonehenge Riverside Project and led by Mike Parker Pearson of Sheffield University. The project has involved the radiocarbon dating of a series of cremation-burials from the site that demonstrate the site's use as a burial ground from just after its original build, c. 3000 BC until a considerable time after the largest stone circle was erected about five hundred years later. The researchers emphasise that this was no ordinary cemetery but was reserved for the remains of the elite dead, perhaps members of a royal family.⁵⁷ Parker Pearson sees Stonehenge as an ancient 'domain of the dead'.⁵⁸

Stonehenge and observation of the summer solstice have long been the focus for Neo-Druid groups, not least for the Church of the Universal Bond. In June 1923, the British Circle of the CUB sent a letter to Sir John Baird, the First Commissioner of HM Office of Works,⁵⁹ complaining that 'the people of my faith' were no longer permitted access to the stones, even though 'our Order has never failed in the past to hold its annual meetings within the enclosure of Stonehenge, a place raised in the name of All Father by our forbears . . .'.⁶⁰ Since then Druid groups have battled, with varying degrees of success, to gain access to the monument, particularly to venerate the sun at midsummer dawn. Up until the mid-1990s, access was severely restricted but, in June 1995, a small group was allowed to celebrate Midsummer Day with rituals and ceremonies upon payment of an access fee to English Heritage, the guardian body for the stones. This limited dispensation for Druid groups for special purposes continued until 2000 when, ironically, a new ruling, giving access to everyone, gave Druid groups fewer opportunities to worship privately and reverently.⁶¹ Despite the long-standing tensions between archaeologists and religious groups, including Druids, concerning access to Stonehenge (and companion monuments, such as Avebury), the anthropologist Barbara Bender undertook a research project in the 1990s that sought to work with the contesting interest groups to give all 'consumers' of Stonehenge an equal voice. Bender's work represents an increasing trend of enlightenment that recognises the validity of the claims to the monument made by diverse communities, whether these claims be academic or spiritual.⁶²

Archaeologists have, for decades, correctly protested with fervour the artificiality of connections between ancient and modern Druids and between the true age of Stonehenge and present-day summer ceremonies at this monument and its larger sister at Avebury. But it is the archaeological community, represented by the Stonehenge Project, under the directorship of English Heritage, that will allow both Neo-Druids and the public greater and more meaningful access to the majestic stone circle that stands in the middle of Salisbury Plain. For the plan now is to 'liberate the monument from its small, triangular plot and re-unite it with its proper setting. Journeying across the

open landscape will encompass several histories, rather than a single monumental moment.⁶³ In order to fulfil this aim, the present visitor centre will be relocated further away and the road passing near to the stones will be hidden in a bored tunnel. Visitors will be able to approach the circle on foot, by bicycle or by a special land train. By these means, English Heritage intends to restore spiritual meaning to the monument and to enhance the visitor's experience by allowing appreciation of the entire ancient ritual landscape, only one element of which is Stonehenge. 'Being bold at the Stones'⁶⁴ will thus enable the archaeologist and the Druid to engage with the henge at all levels.

Druids Uncovered: Fact, Fiction, Faith and Fantasy

I am a Wiccan and my wife is a Druid. I work, pay my bills and taxes, do not commit crimes or try to force my beliefs on anyone, and would appreciate it if the press stopped writing about us in a way that would be unacceptable for other religious groups.⁶⁵

Modern followers of 'new religious movements' such as Wicca, Druidry and Odinism are often – in my view unacceptably – ridiculed as espousing wacky cults that are a blend of cobbled history and 1960s' hippy culture. Surely, the only 'crime' of which modern Druids are guilty is that of using an ancient name to identify themselves. Most modern Druids⁶⁶ are highly intelligent thinkers who are fully aware of who they are and who they are not. They do not deserve or merit scathing dismissal for their genuine belief-systems. A prime example of such prejudice about the contemporary use of Stonehenge was printed in *The Times* on 20 June 2008. The author, Damian Whitworth, protests, 'Isn't it time to reclaim the summer solstice, and our iconic monument, from the druids and hippies?'⁶⁷

This book is about ancient Druids, the Druids described in such detail, and with considerable respect, by Julius Caesar in the mid-first century BC. But, of course, the aim here has been to look not just at the Classical literature on the Druids for its information about the Druids themselves (and, revealingly, about its own stereotypic and biased attitude to 'barbarian' peoples outside the Mediterranean world), but also to relate these writings to the material culture of ritual and religion, to use the concept of the Druids as a hook upon which to hang an exploration of an ancient cosmology and ritual system. Thus, if we seek to understand ancient priesthoods, as presented in literature contemporary to them, it is essential to examine cognate material culture, even though nothing in the archaeological record points unequivocally to a Druidic presence in ancient Gaul and Britain. To proclaim that archaeological evidence is irrelevant⁶⁸ is unhelpful, if not downright nonsense, as is the dismissal of

ancient Druids as a figment of the Classical literary imagination, to be set alongside snake-haired Gorgons and chimaeras. Such views contain attitudes of prejudice that echo the condescension towards modern Druidry.

The recent lively and dynamic debate about 'Celticity' – whether or not it is valid, or useful, to label Iron Age Britons and Europeans as Celts – is largely outside the remit of this book.⁶⁹ But where the Celtic debate does impinge upon 'Caesar's' Druids is in the arguments of those who wish not only to deny past Celts but also, in so doing, to see ancient Druids as creations of fictive writing.⁷⁰ To deny Gallo-British Druids, as presented by Caesar and his contemporaries, as propagandist colonial fantasy is tantamount to admitting that all Classical literature written about peoples outside the Graeco-Roman world is fiction. The implications of such perceptions are staggering and, surely, refutable, for followers of such a model would have to subscribe to a curious philosophy of ancient history, in which its treatment as having any legitimacy at all is dependent upon its avoidance of any subject beyond Greek or Italian soil. Clearly, some ancient writers were guilty of embroidery, or even invention, but to dismiss all texts that deal with Gaul and Britain surely takes criticism to an absurd conclusion. Caesar, for example, would have been unable to fabricate his records on Gaul and Britain because accompanying him on his campaigns were fellow aristocrats, like Cicero's brother Quintus, who also wrote reports to Rome and who would have confirmed or denied the commander's reporting.⁷¹ To airbrush away ancient Druids as fabrication has, as its corollary, acknowledgement of a kind of hysterical mass-contagion afflicting all authors of ancient texts that mention Druids.⁷²

In early June 2008, I accompanied a television company to Anglesey and the north-west of England to make a film called *The Last of the Druids*. The locations for the film-shoots included Llyn Cerrig Bach, the site of the great late Iron Age votive deposit of metalwork, and South Stack on Holy Island, off the west coast of Anglesey. Both sites resonate sharply with the quest for ancient Druids. Holy Island is a magically beautiful and remote place, the site of an Iron Age community set high on a mountain overlooking the sea. The rocks on the shore have an uncanny resemblance to the flat-bottomed boats described by Tacitus as built by Paulinus' army for negotiating the treacherous waters of the Menai Straits, and I was very conscious of being on the edge of the edge of the world, on an island off an island off the most north-westerly limit of the Roman Empire, a fitting place for the last stand of the untamed Druids.

Llyn Cerrig Bach is situated on Ministry of Defence property, with restricted access because of its proximity to RAF Valley. Filming there was a weird experience, for the peace of the water (Fig. 80), with its abundant wildlife, was in sharp contrast to the clamour of the high-powered jet aircraft that continually took off and howled up over our heads into the stratosphere

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Please refer to print publication.

80 Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey, June 2008.

and the helicopter that hovered irritatingly above us, its rotor clearly audible to the unfortunate sound-engineer in the film crew. In pondering this curious blend of rural lakeland idyll and military activity, it occurred to me that the site presents a magnetic connectivity between past and present. In the first century AD, when Britain was gradually becoming a Roman province, Anglesey symbolised British defence against a foreign invading force. In 2008, RAF Valley is a military airfield whose purpose is also the defence of Britain. The bent iron swords deposited at Llyn Cerrig, perhaps first used in the protection of a Druidic holy of holies, were the equivalent of the jet fighters screaming overhead on exercises. Perhaps the Druids would have approved.

Notes

Preface

1. Chadwick 1997.
2. Piggott 1968.
3. From Lord Marchmain's dying speech in which he recalled his youth and the varied history of his country seat of Brideshead, in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1982 edition), 364.

Chapter 1: The Moon and the Mistletoe: In Search of Ancient Druids

1. 16.95; trans. Rackham 1945, 549–51.
2. Chadwick 1997, 34–5.
3. Witness, for instance, Pliny's account of the way in which the Druids of Gaul gathered selago, a plant reputed to be good for healing diseased eyes: 'It is gathered without iron with the right hand, thrust through the tunic through the left armhole, as though the gatherer were thieving . . .': *Natural History* 24.62; trans. Jones 1956.
4. Pliny *Epistolae* 3.5; trans. Radice 1963, 87–8.
5. The Sibyl advises Aeneas thus:

If your heart is set on this fantastic project,
Here's what you must do first. Concealed in a tree's thick shade
There is a golden bough – gold the leaves and the tough stem –
Held sacred to Proserpine: the whole wood hides this bough
And a dell walls it round as it were in a vault of shadow.
Yet none is allowed to enter the land which earth conceals
Save and until he has plucked that gold-foil bough from the tree.
Fair Proserpine ordains that it should be brought to her
As tribute. When a bough is torn away, another
Grows in its place with leaves of the same metal.

[Virgil *Aeneid* 6, lines 135–44; trans. C. Day Lewis, in Chisholm and Ferguson eds 1981, 229.]

6. *Aeneid* 6, lines 199–209 (Chisholm and Ferguson 1981, 230).
7. Caesar *De Bello Gallico* 6.18; trans. Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 123.
8. Tacitus *Germania* 11; trans. Mattingly 1948, 110.
9. *Penarth Times* 8 March 2007, 1, 3, 15.
10. Howell 2007 and personal communication.
11. Field and Parker Pearson 2003, xi.
12. Chamberlain 2003, 136.
13. The exactitude is due to the precision of dendrochronological dating, to within a year.
14. Chamberlain 2003, 136.
15. Chamberlain 2003, 137.
16. *De Bello Gallico* 6.15 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 123).
17. 'White on Blond' is borrowed from the title of Tim Darvill's paper (2002, 73–91).
18. Devoto 1940; Poultney 1959; Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 42.
19. Darvill 2002, 73.
20. Lynch 1998, 62–7.

21. Darvill 2002, 73, after Berlin and Kay 1969.
22. Zahan 1972, 61.
23. Rowe 1972, 44.
24. Plutarch *Quaestiones Romanae* 26; after Rowe 1972, 44.
25. Croom 2000, 27.
26. Beard, North and Price 1998, 151.
27. Prudentius *Crowns of Martyrdom* 10.1001–50; after Beard et al. 1999, 161.
28. This, in itself, is interesting. Most British and western European historical pagan lunar rituals involve the veneration of the full moon: see, for instance, Hutton 1999, 310 and *passim*.
29. Beard et al. 1998, 36; Detienne and Vernant 1989.
30. Brunaux 1986.
31. Lodwick and Gwilt 2004.
32. Brian Morris (2000, 37) cites just this attitude to hunted and domesticated animals in traditional Malawian communities; they perceive animals as essentially similar to humans and, as such, worthy of emulation by hunters and farmers.
33. Emel 1998, 110, citing Richard Wright's *Pagan Spain*, 142–3.
34. In her treatise on animals in urban contexts, Jennifer Wolch explores this tension between order and nature, arguing that animals impact upon people living in cities in an unnatural, sanitised and safe manner that denies genuine relationships between humans and beasts (1998, 119–38).
35. On the *Nautes Parisiaca* pillar, dedicated to Jupiter by a guild of boatmen in AD 26: Espérandieu 1911, nos 3133, 3134; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 226–7, fig. 8.4.
36. Espérandieu 1915, no. 4929; Schindler 1977, 32, abb. 91; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 226–7.
37. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 226–9.
38. Mabey 1996, 243.
39. Le Gall 1963, 161; Espérandieu 1938, no. 7684.
40. Green 1989, 105, fig. 45; Deys 1976, no. 160.
41. Espérandieu 1938, no. 7800; Hatt 1964, plates 150, 151.
42. The garden of a house I inhabited in 2005 and 2006 at Llanhennock in Monmouthshire has an enormous oak, more than three hundred years old, on which the oak-apples are highly visible from quite some distance beneath the branch on which they form in late spring. Oak-apple Day was an English May festival, so named in the nineteenth century but commemorating a much older festival dating from medieval times: Hayman 2003, 81.
43. Mabey 1996, 72–7.
44. Fernandez 1998, 87–93.
45. For an interesting recent discussion of the significance of trees and forested landscapes, see Evans, Pollard and Knight 1999, where the significance of Neolithic deposits associated with tree-throws is examined, together with reference to anthropological examples of ambiguous attitudes to trees and the 'bush', for instance among the Dogon of Mali, and the Zafimaniry of Madagascar.
46. The berries also grow in the fork between two mistletoe branches, again resembling sexual organs; Keble Martin 1965, plate 75.
47. Ronald Hutton has charted the English folk custom of kissing under the mistletoe, tracing it back to the eighteenth century but commenting that this practice belonged in origin to a much wider kissing ritual not only associated with mistletoe but other bushes or clumps of foliage as well: Hutton 1996, 36–8.
48. Nyberg 1993. It also had a reputation as an anti-spasmodic and nervine remedy: Scaife 1986, 131.
49. Scaife 1986, 131–3; Scaife 1995, 84.
50. Aldhouse-Green 1999.
51. Ross and Robins 1989.
52. He was in his mid-twenties, well nourished and unused to hard manual labour: Stead, Bourke and Brothwell 1986.
53. Aldhouse-Green 2001a, 89.
54. It is worth recording that in the Amazon rainforest, a plant that is of the mistletoe family (though not the European *viscum alba*) is regularly used in the production of a hallucinogenic drink called Ayahuasca, used by shamans to free the mind and allow it to wander in the realms of the spirits: Schultes, Hofmann and Ratsch 1992, 124.

55. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
56. Chadwick 1997, xviii.
57. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
58. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
59. Green 1997a, 39–47; Chadwick 1997, 11–50.
60. Detienne 1989, 11.
61. Burkert 1985, 254.
62. I am indebted to Prof. W.H. Manning for drawing my attention to the specialist nature of ritual killing in the Roman world.
63. Chadwick 1997, xviii.
64. Chadwick 1997, xxix.
65. Tierney 1959–60.
66. As I suggested in Green 1997a, 14.
67. Chadwick 1997, 65.
68. Chadwick 1997, 75, in which she cites de Witt 1938.
69. In his *Library of History* (5.31.1–5), for instance, Diodorus Siculus refers to the Druids as learned Gallic philosophers, greatly honoured by their people. Strabo's *Geography* likewise refers to the Druids as specialists in moral and natural philosophy and 'considered the most righteous of men': *Geography* 4.4.4; after Green 1997a, 40.
70. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13–14.
71. For example Tacitus *Annals* 14.30–31.
72. *Natural History* 30.4.
73. Lucan *Pharsalia* 1.422–30.
74. Aldhouse-Green 2006a.
75. King 1990, 106; Hammond et al. 1978, 154.
76. Green 1997a, 90, 97.
77. Chadwick 1997, 82.
78. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
79. Rankin 1996, 292.
80. Green 1995, 139; 1997a, 97; Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 136.
81. Chadwick 1997, xix.
82. Piggott 1968, 102–3.
83. Chadwick 1997, 1.
84. Chadwick 1997, xxix–xxx.
85. Chadwick 1997, 59–67.
86. It should be noted that, of course, most, if not all, the late Christian authors on Druids were using information derived from earlier sources. But even so, it remains significant that Druids still attracted their attention for it means that the theme of Druidism maintained a resonance long after their existence under Caesar and his contemporaries.
87. *Geography* 12.5.1.
88. *Natural History* 16.95.
89. Chadwick 1997, 13.
90. Rees and Rees 1961, 110. For discussion of Gallo-British deities with *nemeton*-names, see Aldhouse-Green and Raybould 1999.
91. Champion 1995, 91.
92. Rankin 1996, 188–9; 1995, 21; *Natural History* 34.38; Polybius *Histories* 3.3.
93. Cicero *De Divinatione* 1.90; Rankin 1995, 31.
94. Francisco Simón (2006, 153) has argued convincingly against the assumption of a pan-European Druid network.
95. *De Divinatione* 1.90.
96. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
97. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
98. *Natural History* 30.4.
99. *Annals* 14.30.
100. *De Bello Gallico* 6.21.
101. By Tony Robinson: Kenneth Brassil personal communication.
102. For those interested in the Druid Renaissance, see Green 1997a, 139–58; Piggott 1968, 131–81; Owen 1962, *passim*. See also the Epilogue to this book.
103. Marcus and Flannery 1994; Green 1998a; Webster 2001; Spielmann et al. 2006.

104. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005; Aldhouse-Green 2001a; 2001c; 2007b.
 105. *Natural History* 24.41.62.

Chapter 2: Noble Savages and Barbarous Enemies

1. Herodian *History* 3.14.6–7; trans. Whittaker 1969, 359.
2. Whittaker 1969, xiv.
3. It is interesting to note that in the earlier second century AD officers of Gallic troops stationed at Vindolands, just south of Hadrian's Wall, referred to the Britons as *Brittunculi* ('wretched little Brits') in one of the letters preserved at the fort: Bowman 1994, 97; Birley 2006, 22–3.
4. In what is now western Turkey. For discussion of Herodian's country of origin see Whittaker 1969, xxiv–xxviii.
5. Miloudi 2007, 13; Favell Mortimer's book was recently re-published as *The Clumsiest People in Europe or Mrs Mortimer's Bad-tempered Guide to the World*: Pruzan 2007.
6. Mattingly 2006, 122.
7. Mattingly 2006, 123.
8. A term borrowed from Müller 2002, 36: 'Bogs and swamps appeared as eerie, threatening regions just like the hostile wasteland far from the cultivated farm land, an impenetrable thicket out of which one could not find a way, remote clearings, ponds, lakes and dangerous whirlpools in rivers or karstic hilly regions, where one could get lost or fall. There was a widespread belief that these regions were spooky, that they held the entrance to the underworld of the damned or the "undead" . . .'
9. Cunliffe 2001, 369.
10. The Classical perception of Britain, its identity as an island and its isolation are succinctly presented by Richard Bradley: 2007, 1–10.
11. Braund 1996, 12.
12. Tacitus *Agricola* 10; trans. Mattingly 1948, 61.
13. I am grateful to Stephen Aldhouse-Green for drawing my attention to the connections between the tides and the moon. For observations on the Bristol Channel tides (which have virtually the highest ranges in the world) I acknowledge the on-board notes provided by the Waverley Excursions Steamship Company (2008).
14. Dichotomies and connections between inside and outside may convey powerful messages associated with belonging and exclusion, the living and the dead and the material and supernatural worlds: Davidson 1993, 7–12.
15. Davidson 1993a, 9.
16. Caesar *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
17. Pliny *Natural History* 30.4.
18. *De Bello Gallico* 4. 20 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 81).
19. *Panegyricus Latinus* 8.11.2; after Braund 1996, 22.
20. Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 3.6.49; after Braund 1996, 102.
21. Horace *Odes* 4.14.45–8.
22. Horace *Epodes* 7.7–8.
23. *Natural History* 30.4 (Jones 1963, 287).
24. Horace *Odes* 3.5.1–4.
25. Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 12.
26. Wood 1993, 54–64.
27. Undertaken by Drs Philip Macdonald and Tim Young as part of the reappraisal and re-investigation of the late Iron Age sacred site and its ritually deposited material: Macdonald 2007, 174.
28. Bond 2007.
29. Kaul 1991; Olmsted 1979.
30. Macdonald 2007, 175; Chadwick 1997, 73–4.
31. *Natural History* 29.12; Zwicker 1934, 57.
32. *De Bello Gallico* 1.10: 'I reached the territory of the Vocontii in the Transalpine province on the seventh day after leaving Ocelum, the last town in northern Italy' (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 21).
33. *Annals* 11.23–25; see also Chisholm and Ferguson 1981, 542–3 for translation of a bronze tablet found at Lyon in 1598 which records Claudius' rationale for his inclusive attitude towards Gaul.
34. *Anguina* were allegedly made from the congealed, hardened spittle of angry snakes. Pliny apparently had been shown one of these and describes the *anguinum* thus: 'It was round, and about as large as a smallish apple; the shell was cartilaginous and pocked like the arms

- of a polypus': *Natural History* 29.12; trans. Stuart Piggott 1968, 125. Piggott suggests an alternative explanation for *anguina*, namely that they could be 'the ball of agglomerated empty egg-cases of a Whelk (*Buccinum*), which has a parchment-like texture and a nodulated surface, for since *Buccinum* is a genus confined to Atlantic and northern waters, its egg-cases, common enough objects on a North Gaulish or British beach, might be quite unfamiliar to a Mediterranean naturalist and so capable of being endowed for him with magic powers': Piggott 1968, 125–6.
35. *Natural History* 30.4.
 36. Suetonius *Claudius* 25; trans. Graves 1962, 177.
 37. Ramos 1994, 75.
 38. Mellor 1993, 47–67.
 39. Exemplified by his *oratio obliqua* (reported speech) put into the mouth of the British rebel queen Boudica: *Annals* 14.34, where he describes her outrageous treatment by the Romans in the events leading up to the Boudican Revolt in AD 60/1. See also Aldhouse-Green 2006a.
 40. Chadwick 1997, 58.
 41. Piggott 1968, 102.
 42. Notably the Greek theologians and teachers Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–216) and his successor, Origen (c. AD 186–255) and the much later Cyril, archbishop of Alexandria between AD 412 and 444: Piggott 1968, 102.
 43. Chadwick 1997, xxii–xxvii.
 44. Clement *Stromata* i. 15.71; after Chadwick 1997, 61.
 45. Dio Chrysostom *The Forty Ninth Discourse*; trans. Crosby 1946, 301.
 46. 1 Samuel 9:15–16.
 47. 2 Samuel 12:1–2.
 48. 1 Kings 1:32.
 49. 2 Samuel 18:9–17.
 50. Sauer 2003, 8.
 51. Tacitus *Annals* 14.30.
 52. *Library of History* 5.31.2; trans. Tierney 1959–60, 251.
 53. *Geography* 4.4.4; Tierney 1959–60, 269.
 54. Chadwick 1997, 6.
 55. Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 5.38–5.50. During a wave of migrations from Gaul into Italy in the early fourth century BC, a Gallic army under the leadership of Brennus reached the very gates of Rome and threatened the citadel (the Capitol) itself, laying siege to the Romans trapped in the city. In what appears to have been a somewhat shameful conclusion, Rome's freedom was regained by paying for it: 'Quintus Sulpicius conferred with the Gallic chieftain Brennus and together they agreed upon the price, one thousand pounds' weight of gold – the price of a nation soon to rule the world': trans. de Sélincourt 1960, 379.
 56. Tacitus *Histories* 4.54; trans. Wellesley 1964, 242.
 57. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13–18.
 58. A Burgundian polity (tribe) whose territory lay between the rivers Saône and Allier.
 59. Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h 1995a, 3. Caesar mentions Diviciacus, ruler of the Burgundian Aedui, many times in his *De Bello Gallico* (e.g. 1.3.16–20), for he was a staunch ally of Rome. It is not he that identified this man as a Druid but Cicero who, in his *De Divinatione* 1.90, wrote 'Nor is the practice of divination disregarded among uncivilized tribes, if indeed there are Druids in Gaul – and there are, for I knew one of them myself, Divitiacus, the Aeduan . . .' (Falconer 1922; quoted in Green 1997a, 44). The alternative spellings Diviciacus and Divitiacus are typical of Gaulish personal names.
 60. *De Bello Gallico* 1.41 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 35).
 61. *De Bello Gallico* 5.6 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 90).
 62. *De Bello Gallico* 5.7.
 63. Tacitus *Histories* 3.45.
 64. Tacitus *Histories* 3.45 (Wellesley 1964, 172).
 65. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13–15.
 66. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
 67. *De Bello Gallico* 6.15.
 68. *De Bello Gallico* 6.16.
 69. *De Bello Gallico* 6.17 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 123).
 70. *Interpretatio romana* is a term used by Tacitus in his *Germania* (43) to describe the religious beliefs of a northern polity called the Naharvali: 'the gods, translated into Latin, are Castor and

- Pollux. That expresses the character of the gods, but their [Germanic] name is Alci. There are no images, there is no trace of foreign [i.e. Roman] cult, but they are certainly worshipped as young men and as brothers' (trans. Mattingly 1948, 136).
71. 'Civilised' is here used in its original sense, i.e. associated with living in a city-state environment.
 72. Paden 1992, 103.
 73. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 215–20.
 74. Kiernan 1994, 69–84.
 75. Mosse 1994, 85–107.
 76. Shaw and Stewart 1994, 6; Meyer 1994, 45.
 77. *Annals* 14.30; trans. Grant 1956, 317.
 78. I use 'man' here deliberately, rather than 'human', since for Greeks such as Euripides men represented order, women and animals chaos and disorder.
 79. For the use of *nomos* and *physis* in Greek drama, see, for instance Euripides *The Bacchae*, trans. Vellacott 1973, 191–244. For a discussion of the ancient Greek concepts of *nomos* and *physis*, see Ferguson 1989b, 42–5. For the use of these polaric concepts in Gallo-Roman iconography, see Aldhouse-Green 2007b.
 80. Cicero *De Legibus* 2.8.
 81. *Pharsalia* 3.372–455; trans. Graves 1956, 78–9.
 82. *Pharsalia* 1.422–65 (Graves 1956, 38).
 83. Chadwick 1997, 13.
 84. *Natural History* 16.95.
 85. Rackham 1945, 549.
 86. Smith 1955, 418.
 87. *Natural History* 16.95 (Rackham 1945, 551).
 88. *Natural History* 30.4.
 89. In the May festival of the *Lemuria*: Adkins and Adkins 1996, 131–2.

Chapter 3: Priests and Power

1. Athenaeus *Δειπνοσοφισταί* (*The Learned at Dinner*) 4.37, p. 152D–F; trans. Tierney 1959–60, 248.
2. In which the author uses the framework of the Greek *Symposion* to discuss various topics, particularly those associated with communal eating and drinking, hence the allusion to Louernius' vast banquet. The *Symposion* was the name given to 'drinking-clubs' confined to men and to citizens, at which social interaction was combined with serious discourse.
3. *Geography* 4.2.3. He gives them slightly different names 'Luerius' and 'Bituitus': Tierney 1959–60, 264. Strabo almost certainly derived his material from the earlier author and traveller Posidonius.
4. Athenaeus (4.36, p. 151 E–152D; Tierney 1959–60, 247) comments that 'the drink of the wealthy classes is wine imported from Italy or from the territory of Marseilles . . . The lower classes drink wheaten beer'.
5. 'The first move was made by Vercingetorix, a young Arvernian with very great power in his tribe. His father, Celtillus, had once been the most powerful man in the whole of Gaul and had been killed by his fellow tribesmen because he wanted to become king': *De Bello Gallico* 7.4 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 136); Collis 2007, 526.
6. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13. See Chapter 6 for discussion of sacred calendars.
7. Haselgrove 2007, 501; Lupton 1996. In her study of food-symbolism among the Hua of New Guinea, Anna Meigs (1995, 19–20) discusses attitudes to the perception that certain comestibles have a high symbolic value, particularly luxury food, that which was not essential for life and nutrition.
8. *De Bello Gallico* 1.4.
9. *De Bello Gallico* 7.4 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 136).
10. Le Glay et al. 2001, 40.
11. Collis 2007, 526: 'We can reject the idea that kingship represents an earlier form of Gallic society, as was assumed by many twentieth-century historians. Caesar's *Commentaries* imply that the first-century BC Gallic states, like their Greek and Italian counterparts, veered between monarchy and oligarchy . . .'
12. *De Bello Gallico* 1.16
13. *De Bello Gallico* 7.32.

14. According to Caesar (*De Bello Gallico* 7.32), the *clientes* (official supporters/dependants) of each set up rival gangs that threatened the land with civil war.
15. *De Bello Gallico* 5.3.
16. Creighton 2000; 2006. The Catuvellauni and Trinovantes occupied territory in south-east England north of the Thames, while the Atrebates belonged south of the river, in Hampshire and its environs.
17. For discussion of the British dynasties and the role of client-kings in Britain, see Creighton 2000; 2006; Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 2–22, 67–92.
18. Scholars are divided as to the correct rendering of this chieftain's name: copies of the relevant ancient texts vary, and it is unfortunate that the first two letters of his name are missing on the inscription from Chichester.
19. Henig 1998, 9.
20. As defined by Renfrew and Bahn: 1996, 167.
21. Collis 1995, 75.
22. Collis 2007, 524.
23. *De Bello Gallico* 6.3: 'At the beginning of spring I summoned the Gallic council as usual' (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 116). Caesar appears to have invoked this council at times of crisis, as well as 'as usual'. In Book 6.44, he describes his campaigns against the northern Gallo-German Eburones, led by their chieftain Ambiorix, and the Roman commander used the arena of the Gallic council in order to gain intelligence about a conspiracy of the Senones and the Carnutes of central Gaul that was erupting at the same time as the war against Ambiorix's people.
24. *De Bello Gallico* 5.2 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 89).
25. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
26. Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.31; trans. Tierney 1959–60, 251–2.
27. Elijah, Samuel and Nathan are good examples of Old Testament prophets who acted as advisers to mediate between God and Israelite kings, such as Saul, David and Solomon and attempted to curb royal malpractice: Porter 1989; 1 Kings 18; 1 Samuel 9–28; 2 Samuel 11–12; John 1:19–28; Peter Cox, sermon at All Saints Church, Penarth 9 December 2007.
28. *Geography* 4.4.4: 'Indeed in former times they arbitrated in war and brought to a standstill the opponents when about to draw up in line of battle' (Tierney 1959–60, 269).
29. James Whitley personal communication (HISAR Archaeology Research Seminar 7 February 2008).
30. Note the comparison with New Testament Judaism, where religious leaders, such as the Pharisees, were heavily involved in adjudication: Luke (12:13–21) records Jesus' refusal to act as judge in a dispute over property.
31. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121, 123).
32. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
33. In terms of the reach of their religious authority, it is worth referring here to Strabo's testimony (*Geography* 4.1.13) in relation to the deposition of precious objects in sacred lakes among the Volcae Tectosages in south-west Gaul around Toulouse, namely that no Gaul would have dared to profane the treasure, presumably for fear of the gods but, more likely, for fear of reprisals by religious functionaries, who may have been Druids.
34. Part of the reverse of the Larzac inscription: Meid 1992, 40–46.
35. See Chapter 11.
36. *Geography* 4.4.5.
37. *Library of History* 5.31.
38. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
39. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
40. Prof. Bill Manning has suggested to me that it is not necessary to assume that the Druids themselves engaged in physical combat for supremacy but that clashes may have taken place between their supporters. This is particularly likely if individuals like Diviciacus combined the roles of political and sacred leadership.
41. Ausonius *Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium* 1.4; trans. Evelyn White 1919, 103, 105.
42. *Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium* 1.10 (Evelyn White 1919, 115). The *Commemoratio* was a eulogistic treatise about Ausonius' fellow teachers of rhetoric at the University of Bordeaux.
43. Thevenot 1968, 100–102.
44. Pomponins Mela *De Chorographia* 3.19; after Chadwick 1997, 45.
45. *Annals* 3.43: 'Sacrovir with an armed force occupied the capital, Augustodunum, and seized the youthful Gallic noblemen who were being educated there' (Grant 1956, 136). For the foundation of Augustodunum, see Pinette and Rebourg 1986, 10–12.
46. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13–14.

47. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
48. Vitebsky 1995, 78.
49. Kinsella 1970, 168. For Irish Druidic satire, see also Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h 1995a, 11.
50. Robb 2007.
51. *De Bello Gallico* 1.16 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 23–4).
52. *De Bello Gallico* 1.2–3.
53. *De Bello Gallico* 1.3 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 18).
54. *De Bello Gallico* 5.6 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 90).
55. Ibid.
56. Raftery 1994, 80.
57. Koch 2007, 28–9. Relevant Classical sources include Pliny *Natural History* 34.38 and Dio Cassius *Roman History* 22.97.
58. *Geography* 12.5, 1 (Jones 1928, 469).
59. See Chapter 7.
60. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 172–5.
61. Bibracte 2000, no. 7.
62. *De Bello Gallico* 1.16.
63. What is now Orléans.
64. *De Bello Gallico* 8.38 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 194).
65. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
66. Christian Goudineau (2003) is of the opinion that the *gutuater* was a purely political office, whilst Yann Le Bohec (2005) is more inclined to the view that the *gutuatri* were associated with Gallic clergy, quite possibly with the Druids.
67. Chadwick 1997, 38–9, with references.
68. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* XIII, nos 2585 (Maçon), 11225, 11226 (Autun).
69. Kendrick 1927, 135–6: Narboneius Thallus and Gaius Secundus Vitalis Appa at Autun; Gaius Sulpicius Gallus at Maçon. The fourth inscription, from Le Puy (Haute-Loire), was set up by a very Roman Gaul who described himself as Prefect of the Colonia and also oversaw iron mining in the district: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* XIII, no. 1577.
70. Coulon 2000, 52 (with plate).
71. Chadwick 1997, 38–9; Kendrick 1927, 135–6.
72. *De Bello Gallico* 8.
73. Diviciacus visited Rome in 60 BC where he met the great orator Cicero, who described the Aeduan chieftain as a Druid skilled in divination: *De Divinatione* 1.90.
74. Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 23.24.11–12; trans. Moore 1951, 83.
75. Whitley 2008.
76. Freeman 1996, 184.
77. Chapter 7 examines shrines and sanctuaries in detail and, in particular, the construction of the 'war-sanctuaries' of northern Gaul, such as Ribemont and Gournay-sur-Aronde where feasting habitually took place.
78. Haselgrove 2007, 499, 501.
79. Haselgrove 2007, 496; Davies 2007.
80. Haselgrove 2007, 501.
81. Delestrée 1996.
82. Aldhouse-Green 2006c.
83. Haselgrove 2007, 500; Fichtl 2004.
84. Fichtl 2004; Wells 2006.
85. Haselgrove 2007, 498, 501–2, fig. 6; Lambot 1998; 2000; Lambot and Meniel 2000.
86. Plutarch *Life of Mark Anthony* 28; trans. Scott-Kilvert 1965, 295.
87. Hill 2002, 13.
88. Woolf 2008.

Chapter 4: Blood, Thunder and Precious Gifts: The Druids and Sacrifice

1. Caesar *De Bello Gallico* 6.13 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
2. Priest, Hill and Leins 2006, 35–9.
3. The BBC became involved because of their wish to include the Leicestershire site in their *Hidden Treasure* series of TV programmes.
4. Dated by radiocarbon. See Chapter 8 for discussion of pig-deposition at Llanmaes in the Vale of Glamorgan.

5. *De Bello Gallico* 6.17 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 123).
6. Brunaux 1988, 13–23; du Leslay 2000.
7. King and Soffe 1991; 1999.
8. Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.30.3 (Tierney 1959–60, 251).
9. Polybius *Histories* 2.29; trans. Scott-Kilvert 1979, 140.
10. Hammond 2005; Maniquet 2005, 29–31.
11. Maniquet 2005, fig. 10.
12. Green 1996d, 94, fig. 64.
13. See Hunter 2001 for a comprehensive discussion of the *cornyx*.
14. Kaul 1991, 23: experimental archaeology undertaken by the National Museums of Scotland has involved the reconstruction of the Deskford *cornyx* and the production of a recording where several of the instruments are played together, producing a horrifying sound. It was also discovered that the trumpet was capable of creating a range of noises, from a deep roar to a pig-like squeak: Hunter personal communication.
15. Parker Pearson 1996; 1999. See, for instance, earlier discussion of the Market Harborough site and Chapter 7 for Llanmaes feasting remains of pork.
16. Maniquet 2005, 30–31, fig. 9.
17. I have borrowed the term ‘ghost cavalry’ from Nathan Schlanger’s article: Schlanger 2006, 25, caption to fig. 1.
18. *De Bello Gallico* 6.19 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 124).
19. Excavators date the cemetery to between 70 and 20 BC: Schlanger 2006, 25, caption to fig. 1.
20. Schlanger 2006, fig. 1.
21. Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 143–5, 163–5.
22. Schlanger 2006, 25, fig. 2.
23. Herodotus *Histories* 4.72–3.
24. Herodotus *Histories* 4.73; trans. de Sélincourt 1965, 264–5.
25. Although the excavators at Gondole might have discovered only the burials of the noble person’s retinue, not the principal grave itself.
26. Tranoy 1988, 219–28; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 40–41, fig. 2.6. Most of these granite images belong to the later Iron Age but some bear Latin inscriptions mentioning people’s names, and perhaps, then, acted as tombstones.
27. Recorded in *De Bello Gallico* 7.
28. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
29. For example *De Bello Gallico* 7.12: ‘At this point, the cavalry, which was riding in advance of Vercingetorix’s marching column, appeared in the distance’ (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 139).
30. As described in *De Bello Gallico* 7.64.
31. *De Bello Gallico* 7.65 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 161).
32. *De Bello Gallico* 7.66.
33. Plutarch *Life of Caesar*, trans. Warner 1958, 241.
34. *De Bello Gallico* 6.16.
35. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
36. Lambot 1998; 2000; Brunaux 2000a.
37. Strabo *Geography* 4.4.5 (Tierney 1959–60, 269).
38. A useful discussion of Stoicism can be found in Chisholm and Ferguson 1981, 312.
39. Like his broad contemporaries Diodorus Siculus and Caesar. Posidonius was a Syrian born at Apamea on the Orontes in about 135 BC.
40. For example *Geography* 4.1.7.
41. *De Bello Gallico* 6.16; the early medieval glossator of Lucan’s text came from Bern in Switzerland, and his elaboration on the *Pharsalia* as it has come down to us suggests that he had access to an original, fuller version. In the Bern commentary, there is a reference to the Gallic celestial god Taranis, whose name, along with those of two others, Esus and Teutates, is mentioned by Lucan. It is the medieval Swiss glossator who specifically connects Taranis with human sacrifice in the form of consumption by fire in a gigantic wicker contraption: *Taranis Ditis pater hoc modo apud eos placatur: in alveo ligneo aliquod hominens cremantur*: Zwicker 1934, 50. Roughly translated, the text means ‘they propitiate Taranis Dis Pater by cremating several men in a wooden vessel’ (author’s translation). It is noteworthy that the Lucan commentary refers to an *alveus*, a vessel, casket or container, not an anthropomorphic image, while Caesar and Strabo do describe a man-shaped contrivance.
42. Lucan *Pharsalia* 1, lines 441–51 (Graves 1956, 38); Zwicker 1934, 47–8.
43. A priesthood whose main function was divination through the interpretation of bird-flight.

44. Graves 1956, 7–9.
45. Graves 1956, 13. A somewhat ironic point of view given Graves's own scandal-mongering in his two splendid historical novels, *I Claudius* and *Claudius the God* (1941a and b).
46. The modern Welsh word for thunder is 'taran'.
47. The name Taranis, or a version of it, appears on a total of seven extant inscriptions: Green 1982.
48. The Old Irish word 'tuath' has the same root.
49. Jufer and Luginbühl 2001, 66.
50. Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 29–30; Aldhouse-Green and Raybould 1999, 93, 120, 132.
51. Saragoza 2003, 10; Espérandieu 1911, no. 3134; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 226, fig. 8.4.
52. Green 1982, 40, and citations therein.
53. Zwicker 1934, 85, trans. Marilyne Raybould; Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 68, 85.
54. I have explored this evidence in depth (Aldhouse-Green 2001c) and it would serve no purpose to go over the same ground in any detail in the present volume.
55. Tim Taylor's enthralling study (2002, 144–69) is essential reading for anyone interested in the meaning behind ways of killing for ritual purposes.
56. Although the radiocarbon dates are ambiguous: Turner 1999, 228–9.
57. Holden 1995.
58. For discussion of the scapegoat, see Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 144–5; Girard 1977, 80. Scapegoat sacrifice is a widely distributed phenomenon in the ancient world: Hughes 1991, 139–65; Garland 1995, 23; van Straten 1995, 40–47; Herodotus *Histories* 2.45.
59. Taylor 2002, 158.
60. Bauman 1996, 19.
61. Notably by Stephen Briggs: 1995, 168–82.
62. Aldhouse-Green 2001c, especially 113–25; Bergen et al. 2002; Van der Sanden 1996.
63. Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 155–60.
64. *Natural History* 16.95.
65. Raftery 1994, 179.
66. This information is taken from notes on a National Museum of Ireland Exhibition on bog-bodies, kindly provided by Eamonn Kelly: Kelly 2006 and personal communication 3 August 2007, and by Isabella Mulhall: Mulhall and Briggs 2007, and personal communication 3 December 2007. Oldcroghan Man's radiocarbon dates indicate a range between 362 and 175 BC.
67. Kelly personal communication 3 August 2007; 2006.
68. Kelly personal communication 3 August 2007; 2006.
69. Raftery 1994, 188. There is some doubt as to the date of this body, which could belong to the earlier Bronze Age. It was not conserved when found and is now in a deplorably shrunken state.
70. *Geography* 7.2.3.
71. *Library of History* 5.31.3–4.
72. Van der Sanden 1996, 179, fig. 245.
73. Strabo *Geography* 4.4–5; Diodorus *Library of History* 5.29.4–5; Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 10.26.11, 23, 24.
74. *Germania* 12.
75. A translation suggested by Prof. Mike Parker Pearson (pers. comm.).
76. *Germania* 7.
77. *Germania* 7 (Mattingly 1948, 106).
78. *De Bello Gallico* 6.16.
79. *De Bello Gallico* 6.17 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 123).
80. Eamonn Kelly has suggested that the Irish ones, together with ritually deposited Iron Age metalwork, might have been placed at the boundaries of territory (Kelly 2006).
81. For instance, the Iron Age 'war-sanctuary at Gournay was placed at the junction of three polities: the Ambiani, the Viromandes and the Bellovaci' (Brunaux 1986, 3).
82. Pliny *Natural History* 30.4 (Jones 1963, 287).
83. Pomponius Mela *De Chorographia* 3; after Chadwick 1997, 29, footnote 3.
84. *Natural History* 30.3.
85. *Natural History* 30.4.
86. *Geography* 4.5.4 (Jones 1923, 259).
87. Alveston: Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 59; Eton: Charter 2000, 19.
88. Niblett 1999, 19–20, 310–12; 2001, 29–52; Creighton 2006, 125.
89. A term used by John Creighton (2006, 123–56).
90. The head was studied under a Scanning Electron Microscope at English Heritage's laboratory at Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth in December 2003; the de-fleshing marks, made by

- a narrow-bladed knife, some ninety in all, were clearly visible. The osteological research on the ante-mortem injuries was undertaken by Simon Mays of English Heritage.
91. In December 2003, the Folly Lane skull was the subject of a forensic documentary for National Geographic's *Tales of the Living Dead*, second series, made by Electric Sky, for which I was the lead investigator.
 92. Rosalind Niblett personal communication.
 93. I am grateful to Sally Jenkinson, David Lee and the rest of the Electric Sky team for allowing me to publish this material.
 94. The multi-phase military site of Vindolanda consists of nine forts, dating to different Roman periods. This ditch belonged to the period when Septimius Severus and his sons Caracalla and Geta came to north Britain, in the late second/early third century AD. At this time the fort was used as a military base for Severan and Caracallan campaigns against the Scottish *Maetae* and *Caledonii*: Mattingly 2006, 124.
 95. Bowman 1994; Birley 2002; 2006.
 96. The osteological work on the skull was undertaken by Dr Trudi Buck.
 97. By Carolyn Chenery at the NERC Geosciences Laboratory at Keyworth, Nottingham in July 2007.
 98. Oxygen isotope analysis studies the composition of rainwater absorbed in human teeth during childhood; strontium provides a geological 'footprint'. The results showed that the enamel in the tooth, which is robust and resistant to external contamination after it has formed, gave the same signature, that of the man's early years, as the porous dentine, the latter of which is absorbent to the immediate soil that is in contact with the dead and buried head.
 99. Bauman 1996, 151.
 100. For references see note 75; Armit 2006, and Chapter 7 of this book.
 101. Andrew Birley personal communication, 10 July 2007.
 102. Prof. Bill Manning thinks this explanation is unlikely and that the treatment of the Vindolanda man was simply the result of punitive decapitation, pointing to the iconographic evidence from Trajan's Column with its images of beheaded prisoners-of-war.

Chapter 5: Druids, Oracles and Shamans

1. Herodotus *Histories* 7.141 (de Sélincourt 1965, 461).
2. To such scholars as Piers Vitebsky (1995) and David Lewis-Williams (2001; 2002).
3. A term used in the biographical note on the front inner cover at the beginning of Pentikäinen 1998.
4. Pentikäinen 1998, 11.
5. For example, in *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.14; *Pharsalia* 1, 441 ff.
6. *Natural History* 16.95; 24.62.
7. For example Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.31.2–3; Cicero *De Divinatione* 1.90; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae: Aurelianus* 43.4.5.
8. Pentikäinen 1998, 11.
9. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
10. Jensen 2004.
11. Kristanssen 2004; Jensen 2004.
12. Vebaek and Høegh 1999, 1.
13. Gilberg n.d., 3.
14. Coles and Coles 1988, 47.
15. Sheridan 2000, 110–11.
16. Vastokas 1990, 44, fig. 16.
17. Eliade 1968, 136–7; Halifax 1982.
18. Vitebsky 1995, 49, bottom right.
19. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 195; Smyth 1995, 23–44.
20. Sjöblom 1996.
21. Creighton 2000, 80–125.
22. By Justin Claxton (2001).
23. *De Bello Gallico* 6.17 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 123).
24. Green 1976, 31; Thevenot 1968, 72–96.
25. Henig 1995, 153; 1984, 199; Ferguson 1970, 177.
26. The spring-shrine of Nérès-les-Bains (Allier) in south-central Gaul is one of many thermal temples dedicated to the god: Thevenot 1968, 87–8. In Britain, the curative sanctuary at Walsingham in Norfolk contained several images of Mercury: Bagnall Smith 1999, 21–56.

27. Vitebsky 1995, 82.
28. Jacobs et al. 1997.
29. Aldhouse-Green 2001a; 2001b; Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 143–78.
30. Aldhouse-Green 2001b, fig. 7.8.
31. Aldhouse-Green 2001b, figs 7.2 and 7.4.
32. Kaul et al. 1991, fig. 221; Aldhouse-Green 2001b, fig. 7.3.
33. Vitebsky 1995, 66–7; Devlet 2001.
34. A late Iron Age Armorican coin issue (unprovenanced) depicts a mare with a huge upstanding mane, seven teats and a foal crouched beneath her; she has a human face and wings: Duval 1987, 38–9, 4B; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 163, fig. 6.8. A series of Gallo-Roman figurines (also without specific findspots) represents a seated female figure but with the antlers of a male red deer: Boucher 1976, nos 317–18; Aldhouse-Green 2001b, fig. 7.10.
35. Carr 2006, 5.
36. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 145; Hansen 2000.
37. Herodotus *Histories* 7.141.
38. Talbert 1988, xiii.
39. Carr 2006, 5.
40. Vincenzo 1979, 4.
41. *Aeneid* 6; trans. Knight 1963, 147.
42. *Aeneid* 6 (Knight 1963, 149–50).
43. Bury and Meiggs 1978, 74.
44. *Aeneid* 6 (Knight 1963, 148).
45. *Aeneid* 6 (Knight 1963, 147).
46. *Aeneid* 6 (Knight 1963, 123).
47. Jacobs et al. 1997; Roscoe 1998.
48. Knight 1963, 148.
49. *De Bello Gallico* 4.10 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 75 and map).
50. Tacitus *Histories* 4.13.
51. Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 67–92.
52. Tacitus *Histories* 4.61.
53. Aldhouse-Green, S. 2000, 236.
54. Aldhouse-Green, S. 2000, xxxiii, 227, 233–5; Young 2006, 205.
55. Gilchrist 1999, 140–42; Green 1995, 190–94; Henken 1991, 1–8.
56. Tacitus *Histories* 4.18.
57. Tacitus *Histories* 4.61.
58. Tacitus *Histories* 4.65.
59. Tacitus *Histories* 5.22.
60. Tacitus *Histories* 4.65 (Wellesley 1964, 250).
61. Gilchrist 1999, 140; Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 118.
62. *Germania* 8.
63. *Germania* 8 (Mattingly 1948, 107).
64. *Aeneid* 6 (Chisholm and Ferguson 1981, 227).
65. *De Bello Gallico* 6.21.
66. Daniel 5:7.
67. To the effect, ‘Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting: your kingdom will be shortlived.’
68. Morgan 2000, 25–42.
69. Rasmussen 2000, 9–24.
70. Hansen 2000, 57–66; Wildfang 2000, 43–56.
71. *De Divinatione* 1.90; trans. Chadwick 1997, 104.
72. Caesar *De Bello Gallico* 1.31.
73. *Philosophica* 13.12.
74. Feeney 1998, 82.
75. *De Bello Gallico* 1.3.
76. *De Bello Gallico* 1.9 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 25).
77. *De Bello Gallico* 1.30–33.
78. *De Bello Gallico* 2.14–15.
79. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
80. Tacitus *Histories* 4.54 (Wellesley 1964, 242).

81. Webster 1999, 1–20.
82. Tacitus *Histories* 72 (Wellesley 1964, 190).
83. O’Gorman 2000; Mellor 1993, especially 86–112, 137; Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 48.
84. Ogilvie 1979, 16.
85. Ogilvie 1979, 16; Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 5.52–4.
86. Ferguson 1970, 33.
87. Henig 2004, 225.
88. Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.31.2–3; trans. Oldfather 1939.
89. Vitebsky 1995, 25; Hutton 2001, 54–8.
90. Vitebsky 1995, 80.
91. Pareli 2000, 47.
92. Hutton 1993, 20–1; 2001, 81–3.
93. *Germania* 10 (Mattingly 1948, 108–9).
94. Herodotus *Histories* 4, 63–9 (de Sélincourt 1964, 263).
95. Aldhouse-Green 2000.
96. Crummy 1993; 1995; 1997; 2002a and 2002b; Crummy et al. 2007.
97. *Natural History* 30.
98. *Claudius* 25 (Graves 1962, 177).
99. It is remarkable how silent Norwegian historical and political literature is on this subject: for example, Kihlberg 1997; Helander 2007.
100. Cornwallis, Bender and Swaney 2002, 43.
101. Pareli 2000, 47.
102. Hutton 1993, 7.
103. Pentikäinen 1998, 8.
104. Pentikäinen 1998, 99; Hutton 2001, 25.
105. Vitebsky 2005, 231–2.
106. See Vitebsky 2005, plate between pp. 304 and 305, a photograph of a dramatic performance in a village hall, with a child-dancer dressed up as a reindeer calf watched by boys wearing ‘mock-traditional costume’.
107. Vitebsky 1995, 137.
108. Hutton 1993, 8.
109. Chadwick 1997, xix.
110. Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 144–71. See also Chapter 12.
111. Kihlberg 1997, 24, caption to lower plate.

Chapter 6: The Time Lords: Calendars, Festivals and Sacred Knowledge

1. Strabo *Geography* 3.4.16 (Jones 1923, 109).
2. The Celtiberians occupied territory towards the north-east of Spain. This is where Strabo places Celtiberia (*Geography* 3.4.12) and where evidence for Celtiberian languages has been identified: Koch 2007, 22–3.
3. *Geography* 3.4.16 (Jones 1923, 107, 109).
4. Gosden 1994, 2.
5. Lippincott et al. 1999, 17.
6. As explicated by Julian Thomas (1996, 32–3).
7. Burman 1981; Gell 1992, 306–13.
8. Turner 1974, 26.
9. MacGaffey 2000, 17–18.
10. MacGaffey 2000, 18.
11. Green 1998c, 190.
12. *De Divinatione* 1.90.
13. Crummy et al. 2007, 201–3; 2008, 30–1.
14. ‘For auspices and the casting of lots, the Germans have the highest possible regard. Their procedure in casting lots is uniform. They break off the branch of a fruit-tree and slice it into strips; they distinguish these by certain runes and throw them, as random chance will have it, on to a white cloth’: *Germania* 10 (Mattingly 1948, 108).
15. Crummy et al. 2008, 31; Sheridan 2003; Sheridan and Davis 1998.
16. For instance, among Siberian Evén communities: Alekseev 1997. The same is true for ancient Mediterranean societies, including Rome, where diseases were regularly attributed to curses and spells: Graf 1997, 164–6.

17. Armit 2007, 118. The chronology derives from a series of radiocarbon dates from charcoal taken from the burnt roof of the roundhouse and from the bones of the seated elder.
18. See Chapter 3.
19. Armit 2007, 118, after Fairhurst 1984, 87–8.
20. Armit 2007, 118, 120.
21. Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 2.47 (Oldfather 1935, 41).
22. Ruggles 1999, 88.
23. Trans. Oldfather 1939, 39. For ancient references to the Hyperboreans, see Piggott 1968, 94–6.
24. The latter is the more likely, since the megalithic stone circle at Callanish was built on the Isle of Lewis, in the Western Isles of Scotland: Burl 1976, 148–55; Mohen 1990, 136.
25. Ruggles 1999, 88–9; Lippincott et al. 1999, 49.
26. *Natural History* 16.95.
27. Caesar *De Bello Gallico* 6.18 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 123).
28. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
29. Hesiod *Works and Days* lines 381–3; trans. Wender 1973, 71. Hesiod is recommending that the harvest commence in early May, at the ‘heliacal’ (early) rising of this cluster of seven stars, and that ploughing should take place in early November, when they sink in the night sky: Wender 1973, 155 (notes 8 and 9).
30. Aldhouse-Green and Davies 2004, 16–17.
31. *Germania* 43 (Mattingly 1948, 136). For information concerning the location of the Harii, see Mattingly 1948, 166.
32. Coles 1999.
33. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 91–2.
34. Herbert-Brown 2002, 102, after Frazer 1931.
35. Herbert-Brown 2002, v.
36. Herbert-Brown 2002, 101–3.
37. See Chapter 2.
38. Lyle 1990, 75–85.
39. Salzman 1990, 6.
40. Scullard 1981, 46–9, fig. on p. 49.
41. Pritchett 1963, 345.
42. Mikalson 1975, ix.
43. Mikalson 1975, 13–14, 24.
44. *Natural History* 16.95.
45. Zavaroni 2007.
46. Other fragments of apparently similar chronometers or time-charts have been recorded from Lac d’Antre and from Villards d’Héria (Jura): Duval and Pinault 1986, 262–75.
47. Ruggles 1999, 159.
48. Zavaroni 2007; Duval and Pinault 1986, 262–75; Olmsted 1992.
49. On analogy with its philologically cognate Irish counterpart, Samhain.
50. Fitzpatrick 1996, 386–7; 1997, 74–5.
51. *Natural History* 16.93–5.
52. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
53. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
54. Fitzpatrick 1997, 74–9.
55. Caesar tells us (*De Bello Gallico* 6.14) that the Druids frowned upon written records for transmitting ritual knowledge but that they were familiar with Greek characters and used writing for ‘public and private accounts’: trans. Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121.
56. Examples cited by Fitzpatrick include those from Lysice in the Czech Republic and Mainz in the German Rhineland: Fitzpatrick 1996, figs 19 and 16 respectively. He also references the occurrence of similar astral symbols on long middle Iron Age swords: Drack 1954–5.
57. Repoussé-work is the result of a technique in which sheet metal is punched from the inside to form decoration that stands proud of the outer skin. The vessel would have been placed in a bed of an elastic material such as pitch while the goldsmith hammered out the stippled ornament from the inner surface.
58. Green 1998c, fig. 16.2; Nagy 1992.
59. Page 2005; Mason 2005.
60. Page 2005.
61. Clutton-Brock 2002, 336–7.
62. Linckenheld 1927.

63. A stone from the Forêt de Walscheid is carved with a gable shape near the top, beneath which is a large crescent, its horns pointing upwards, flanked by two smaller discs; another, from the same region, bears a similarly oriented crescent right at the apex of the triangular stone. In the centre of the 'house' is a large disc and at the bottom are three small concentric circles above a carved hemisphere that framed a semicircular opening, as though representing the front door of the 'dwelling' of the dead (Green 1998c, figs 16.8 and 16.7 respectively).
64. Hageneder 2007, 150, fig. 30.7.
65. Fitzpatrick 1997b, 78 and fig. on that page; Oswald 1991; 1997; Parker Pearson 1996.
66. Hughes 1996.
67. Joshua 10:12–14.
68. The Hebrew name for the God of the Old Testament.
69. Mac Cana 1983, 32; Green 1993, 15.
70. The author has witnessed (and indeed participated in) just this kind of collective effort in haymaking in southern Finland in the late 1960s, at the Eklunds' farm at Sibbo Kyrkobi, near Helsinki.
71. Fitzpatrick 1997b, 75.
72. Mitchell 1997, 342–3.
73. Gregory *Glory of the Confessors*; trans. Van Damm 1988. For discussion of Gregory's works, see De Nie 1987.
74. *Glory of the Confessors* 76.
75. *Germania* 40.
76. Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h 1995a.
77. Ó hÓgáin 1999, 97 with references. Note the resemblance between the annual gathering at Uisnech and the Druidic meeting near Chartres recorded by Caesar (*De Bello Gallico* 6.13).
78. Green 1992b, 185–6; Macalister 1931; Mac Cana 1983, 127–8.
79. From Séamus Heaney's *The Tollund Man*: Heaney 1998, 64.
80. Holden 1995.
81. Harild et al. 2007, 176.
82. Taylor 2002, 158.

Chapter 7: Holy Ground: Sanctuaries and Sacred Landscapes

1. Strabo *Geography* 4.4.6 (Tierney 1959–60, 269–70).
2. Even though the Greek word *ἱερόν* (*hieron*), which should technically refer to a covered structure, is used of other Gallic religious sites (see Webster 1995, 446–7 table 24.1, for list of different terms used for Gallic shrines by Classical chroniclers).
3. Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.9. The story goes that Romulus, one of the founders of Rome (with his twin brother Remus), sent out envoys to neighbouring Italian states to negotiate for inter-marriage rights but that all the communities despised the inhabitants of the new Rome as upstarts and unworthy as kin and so refused Romulus' overtures. Romulus responded not by military engagement but by cunning. He began elaborate preparations for a festival in honour of Neptune in his role as patron of horses, called the *Consualia*, and lured a number of curious communities to the city, including the Sabines, who came *en famille* with their wives and children. 'This was the Romans' opportunity: at a given signal all the able-bodied men burst through the crowd and seized the young women. Most of the girls were the prize of whoever got hold of them first, but a few conspicuously handsome ones had been previously marked down for leading senators, and these were brought to their houses by special gangs' (trans. de Sélincourt 1960, 28).
4. Cicero *De Legibus* 2.8; trans. Keyes 1928, 393.
5. The persistent reference to groves in ancient place-names is significant. Two words for grove – *lucus* and *nemeton* – are especially relevant. Most famous of the *nemeton* names is 'Drunemeton' (meaning an 'oak-grove') mentioned by Strabo as the sacred meeting-place of the Galatian tribal council, near Ankara in modern Turkey: *Geography* 12.5.11. (The Galatians were an offshoot of Gauls dwelling in Asia Minor.) For place-names, see, for instance, Ptolemy's *Geography* 2.6.23; Rivet and Smith 1979, 103, 254, 385–7; Koch 2007.
6. *Pharsalia* 3.417–23 (Graves 1956, 79).
7. *Germania* 9 (Mattingly 1948, 108).
8. *Germania* 10.
9. Suetonius *Gaius Caligula* 35; trans. Graves 1962, 157.
10. Tacitus *Annals* 14.30 (Grant 1956, 317).

11. Dio Cassius *Roman History* 62.6–7.
12. *Roman History* 62.7; trans. Ireland 1996, 67.
13. *Pharsalia* 3, lines 399–453.
14. Deil 2007.
15. Aldhouse-Green 2001d; Uchiyamada 1998.
16. A comment made by Michael Hansell in his book *Built by Animals* (2007, 26).
17. Harding et al. 2006, ix.
18. Gregory 1992.
19. Johns and Potter 1983.
20. *Annals* 12.31.
21. Sealey 1997, 12.
22. Ochota and Oliver 2007.
23. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
24. Sealey 1997, 42; Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 162–3.
25. Keys 1992; Esmonde Cleary 1993; Michael Fulford personal communication. Another similar ‘grove’ may be identified at the Iron Age site at Bliesbruck (Mosel) which comprised more than a hundred pits containing votive deposits and, more importantly, several had been planted with trees or tree-trunks possibly, once again in replication of a natural clump of trees (Von Petrikovits 1987, 248).
26. Robertson 1992; Lynn 1992; 1994.
27. *Ab Urbe Condita* 23.24 (de Sélincourt 1965, 198).
28. *Geography* 4.4.5.
29. Benoit 1969.
30. Armit 2006; Arcelin 2004; Arcelin and Congès 2004; Arcelin and Rapin 2003.
31. Armit 2006, 9, fig. 2 (left).
32. Armit 2006, 9–10, fig. 2 (right).
33. Armit 2006, 8.
34. Armit 2006, 8.
35. Benoit 1969, plate XXXIV, 1.
36. Coignard and Coignard 1991; Delamare and Guineau 1991.
37. Caesar *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
38. *De Bello Gallico* 6.17 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 123).
39. Brunaux 1988, 13–16; Brunaux 2000b; Du Leslay 2000.
40. The Ambiani, Viromandui and Suessiones.
41. Brunaux 1988, 13–14.
42. Brunaux 1988, 9, 15. It was the discovery of tiny foot bones in the central pit that enabled the excavators to interpret this as a decomposition chamber, even though the pit had been systematically emptied and cleared as part of the ritual on the site.
43. Brunaux 2000b, 27 (top picture).
44. Du Leslay 2000; Brunaux 1988, 16–21.
45. Brunaux 1988, 21–3.
46. Lambot 1998; 2000.
47. These two sites have been selected from a large range of potentially relevant sanctuaries because both have been the subject of recent and extensive investigation.
48. Lewis 1966, 2, 19; Collins 1978; Goodburn 1979, 309–10, fig. 9; Rodwell 1980, 222–3.
49. Medlicott 2004; 2008.
50. Medlicott 2005; 2008.
51. Jupiter-columns were distributed throughout eastern Gaul and the Rhineland during the Roman period. They are complex monuments comprising circular or octagonal bases carved with images of deities, tall tree-like columns surmounted by Corinthian capitals and, on the summit, in-the-round sculptures of Jupiter (or native equivalent) on horseback (not a Roman tradition of Jupiter-imagery), brandishing a thunderbolt and riding down ‘giants’ with human faces and torsos and legs replaced by snake-tails: Bauchhens and Nölke 1981.
52. Studies at Greyhound Yard, Dorchester revealed evidence for complex rituals apparently associated with the foundation of the Roman town, including deposits of animals and clusters of pots sunk in deep shafts: Woodward and Woodward 2004.
53. Fulford 2007.
54. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
55. See Chapter 6.
56. The evidence for persistent ritual activity, lasting more than a millennium, from the fenland site at Haddenham comes as a result of a seven-year research programme of excavation.

57. Evans and Hodder 2006, 18.
58. Haddenham IV.
59. Evans and Hodder 2006, 77–95.
60. Haddenham III: Evans and Hodder 2006, 327–417.
61. Evans and Hodder 2006, 327.
62. Stevens 1991.
63. For surrogate human sacrifice, see Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 47–9.
64. O’Connell and Bird 1994, 107–21; Burstow and Holleyman 1957, 101–2 and see chapter 9.
65. Green 1975.
66. Sacred activity is traceable back at least as far as the Bronze Age burial mound but, perhaps, even before, given the siting of the barrow upon Neolithic Grooved Ware occupation: Evans and Hodder 2006, xx.
67. A phrase borrowed from a paper by Vicky Cummings on the influences of past and memory in the construction and use of Neolithic chambered tombs: Cummings 2003.
68. Macdonald 2007.
69. Finucane 1977, 10.
70. Grinsell 1953, 178.
71. Gray 1999.

Chapter 8: The Druids’ Toolkit: Regalia and Ritual Equipment

1. Pliny [the Elder] *Natural History* 30.4; trans. Jones 1963, 287.
2. Pliny *Natural History* 24.62 (Jones 1956, 75).
3. Wellcome’s story of his travels, collections and his medical museum, opened in 1913, is told in a British Museum exhibition catalogue (Arnold and Olsen 2003).
4. Arnold and Olsen 2003, 301.
5. Vitebsky 1995, 10; Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 11.
6. Vitebsky 1995, 10; Alekseev 1997, 153–64; Underhill 1965, 90–1.
7. Carr 2002; Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 112.
8. St Pierre and Long Soldier 1995, 18.
9. St Pierre and Long Soldier 1995, 23–4.
10. St Pierre and Long Soldier 1995, 19.
11. St Pierre and Long Soldier 1995, 158.
12. St Pierre and Long Soldier 1995, 161.
13. *De Bello Gallico* 5.14 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 94).
14. Carr 2001, 120; 2005, 273–92.
15. Whilst Carr seems to use the terms woad and indigo interchangeably, they are not the same plant. It is worth mentioning, also, that the dye in woad comes from the leaves and takes a fair amount of knowledge and preparation time to produce: Wilkes 1999, 20–1.
16. E.g. Martial *Epigrams* 11, 52, who refers to ‘sky-blue Britons’. For further references, see Pyatt et al. 1995, 70–1. Tacitus discusses the martial habits of the Harii, a Germanic tribe who ‘black their shields and dye their bodies black and choose pitch dark nights for their battles’: *Germania* 43 (Mattingly 1948, 136).
17. ‘They mark their bodies with various figures of all kinds of animals and wear no clothes for fear of concealing these figures’: Herodian *Histories* 3.14.7: after Pyatt et al. 1995, 71.
18. Carr 2001, 121.
19. Although tattoos decorated the bodies of high-status people in ancient Egypt (Fletcher 2005; Tassie 2003) and those of the Scythian elite, as evidenced in frozen bodies from Iron Age Pazyryk Siberian graves from c. 500 BC (Rolle 1992; Rudenko 1970; Vitebsky 2005, 11, 30), in the Greek and Roman world, tattooing seems to have been used not as body-art but as a mark of servitude or punishment: Connor 2004, 77; Gustafson 2000. As possible confirmation of an association between tattooing and low status, we may cite the stone iconography of two slaves or prisoners-of-war from Roman Mainz; close scrutiny of these figures, locked together by neck-chains, suggests that their naked bodies may have been tattooed: Thompson 2003, 10, fig. 3. If this is so, the argument that Britons tattooed themselves as a sign of resistance to *romanitas* is of particular note.
20. Atkinson 2003, 59. Tattoos, like other body-art, have the property of movement: judicious flexing of muscles on a tattooed body can allow a picture to move, convolute and become alive: see Laurie Lee’s description of his uncle Ray’s tattoos in *Cider with Rosie*, the account of his childhood in Slad, Gloucestershire: ‘His body was tattooed in every quarter – ships in full sail, flags of all nations, reptiles, and round-eyed maidens. By cunning flexing of his muscles he

- could sail these ships, wave the flags in the wind, and coil snakes round the quivering girls' (Lee 2002, 174).
21. The therapeutic use of body-paint and tattoos in ancient Egypt is discussed by Joann Fletcher (2005).
 22. Spindler 1995, 167–73; Fletcher 2005, 11.
 23. Simone Scheers has argued for the identification of patterns depicted on human faces adorning Iron Age coins in Eastern Gaul as tattoos and these, too, may have been apotropaic or healing marks. The representation on Iron Age coins of animals, such as boars, just beneath the ears on human faces on gold issues of the Aulerici Ebuovices (Fitzpatrick 1997a, 9) may be evidence for tattooing or body-painting, although the depiction of ferocious creatures, such as wild boar, is more likely to have been a mark of battle-prowess or identity than of healing.
 24. Underhill 1965, 31.
 25. Pyatt et al. 1995, 62–73; Turner 1999, 229.
 26. 'They [the Druids] believe that mistletoe given in drink will impart fertility to any animal that is barren, and that it is an antidote for all poisons': *Natural History* 16.95 (Rackham 1945, 551).
 27. Crummy 2002b, 47.
 28. Crummy 2002b, 48; Crummy et al. 2007; 2008.
 29. Crummy 2002b, 51; Künzl 1991.
 30. Stephen Aldhouse-Green has suggested to me that a more utilitarian reason for the breakage of the saw was its size: if the toolkit was transported to the grave in a bag, the saw may have been too big and was perhaps therefore broken for convenience.
 31. Crummy 2002b, 53, 65; Grieve 1980, 858–9.
 32. Beith 1995, 251.
 33. Beith 1995, 229.
 34. Carr 2002, 65; Cunningham 1985. For more discussion of artemisia as a narcotic, see Schultes et al. 2001, 98. For discussion of hallucinogens or mind-altering substances in European prehistory, see Sherratt 1991.
 35. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 124; Creighton 2000, 52. For wider discussion of archaeological evidence for hallucinogenic material, see Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 122–31. For information on henbane, see Rudgley 1999, 126–32; 1993, 94–5.
 36. Crummy 2002b, 55.
 37. Metal rods were used in Egyptian contexts for tattooing (Tassie 2003), but the flat ends of the Stanway rods make this interpretation unlikely for the doctor's grave-goods.
 38. *Germania* 10.
 39. Crummy 2002b, 55.
 40. Underhill 1965, 110–11.
 41. *Natural History* 30.4.
 42. *Germania* 40. In this passage, the author describes a fertility ceremony associated with an earth-goddess named Nerthus. He explains that during her festival everything made of iron had to be locked away and he implies that this is because iron symbolised weaponry and warfare and the goddess would only be bountiful in a context of peace.
 43. Attention should be drawn to the strong linkages between healing and the sacred in the Graeco-Roman world, including Gaul and Britain. For a broader discussion of this phenomenon, see Aldhouse-Green 1999; 2006b. For a possible link with Druids, see Crummy et al. 2008; for the refutation of such connection, see Hutton 2008.
 44. Perrin 2000, 22; Maier 1991a, 530.
 45. Perrin 2000, 22, caption to plate.
 46. Maier 1991a, 531.
 47. Dr Paddy Coker (University of Greenwich) personal communication.
 48. Maier 1991b, 240–49; Brunaux and Lambot 1991, 178–80.
 49. Debord 1982, 213, 245; Aldhouse-Green 2000, 11.
 50. Parfitt 1995, 13.
 51. Parfitt 1995, 155.
 52. Parfitt 1995, 155.
 53. Stead 1995, 19–20, 72–86; Fitzpatrick 2000a, 48.
 54. As illustrated in Stead 1995, 73, fig. 25.
 55. Stead 1995, 75.
 56. Stead 1995, 75. Other East Anglian ceremonial headdresses include those from a cache found at Cavenham Heath (Suffolk), of which one was of chain type, like those from Wanborough: Green 1976, 213, plate XXIVf; Layard 1925. Other chain headdresses of Roman date have been found

- in a religious hoard at Stony Stratford (Buckinghamshire): Green 1976, 179; British Museum 1964, 62.
57. Gilbert 1978; British Museum 1964, 60.
 58. Green 1984 323 (cat. no. AB5, plate 62); 1991, 106, fig. 85, 131–2.
 59. The late Iron Age hoard of votive material from Hounslow, near London, contained fragments of a headband, together with a wheel-model and three boar-figurines; the obverse of a late Iron Age silver coin, probably from the British Midlands, depicts an antlered human head wearing a headdress surmounted by a wheel: Stead 1995, 80–1; Green 1984, 323 (cat. no. AB6, plate 63); British Museum 1925, 147–8; Boon 1982; Green 1991, 100, fig. 79.
 60. O'Connell and Bird 1994, 93–4, 96, plates 11–19; figs 23, 25; see Williams 2007 for discussion of the 1999 excavation season at Wanborough.
 61. Boon 1982.
 62. Kaul 1991.
 63. Kaul 1991, 23.
 64. For close discussion of the iconography on this and other Gundestrup plates, see Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 154–5, fig. 6.4.
 65. As in the late Iron Age ritual deposition at Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey: Savory 1976, 84, fig. 14, nos 1, 2, and at the Romano-Celtic shrine of Farley Heath (Surrey): Green 1976, 219; Goodchild 1938; 1947; British Museum 1964, 64, fig. 81, 8.
 66. Burstow and Holleyman 1957, 101–2; Green 1976, 220, plate XXVf.
 67. O'Connell and Bird 1994, 106–11, figs 26 and 27; plates 20–3. It is worth drawing attention to the multiple sceptres at Wanborough; as many as sixteen were recovered from the temple.
 68. The religious complex at Brigstock (Northamptonshire) has produced a series of so-called pole-tips, iron or bronze sceptre-terminals pierced as if to allow for the insertion of rings or bells, for use as *sistra* (sacred rattles): Greenfield 1963, 228 ff.; Green 1976, 181 and plates 25a and b.
 69. Green 1975.
 70. Notably from the sacred Romano-British site at Haddenham in Cambridgeshire, another watery context, like Milton Ferry: Evans and Hodder 2006, 358–9, fig. 7.29.
 71. David Bird and David Graham (Surrey Archaeological Society) personal communication.
 72. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 126, fig. 54; Gilbert 1978.
 73. Vitebsky 1995, 78–9; Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 153. Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 13.171d, speaks of the use of music to drown the cries of the victims of Punic child-sacrifice.
 74. Such as Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey (Green 1996c, 30–1; Macdonald 1996, 32–3); and Loughnashade, County Antrim in Northern Ireland, where four were found in a small lake, allegedly with human skulls, directly beneath the ceremonial site of Navan Fort (Emain Macha), built and burnt down as a sacrificial act in the early first century BC (Raftery 1994, 184; Lynn 1992, 33–57).
 75. Ochota and Oliver 2007.
 76. Raftery 1994, 184.
 77. Poulton 2007.
 78. The motifs are clearly visible in Green 1991, 98, fig. 78.
 79. Green 1989, 74–130.
 80. Aldhouse-Green 2008a.
 81. Alföldi 1949; Green 1984, 350, cat. no. C6; Green 1991, 93, fig. 76.
 82. Green 1984, 225–6.
 83. Green 1996a, 155–8.
 84. Green 1996b, 113–16.
 85. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
 86. Van der Sanden 1996, 110, 158.
 87. Stead et al. 1986; Turner 1996, 34–5; 1999, 227–33; Parker Pearson 1999, 68; Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 87.
 88. Detienne 1989, 9.
 89. I am grateful to Stephen Aldhouse-Green for his personal observations of this practice in the Sudan in the late 1960s.
 90. Exodus 7: 8–10.
 91. Burstow and Holleyman 1957, 101–2.
 92. Meniel 2001, 118, 124.
 93. Meniel 2001, 118, 125–6; Lejars and Perrin 2000, 39.
 94. Lejars and Perrin 2000, 40; Stead 1995, 107.
 95. Fitzpatrick 2000a, 49.

96. Stead 1995, 105–6, figs 46 and 47; Savory 1976, 26, 106, fig. 36, no. 4; Brassil 1996, 26–7.
97. Fitzpatrick 1997a, 20.
98. Woodward and Woodward 2004, 68–9.
99. Savory 1976, 61, no. 25.
100. Bradley 1990.
101. Sealey 1997, 15–21; Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 28–30; 173–7.
102. As recorded by Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 5.28, in his descriptions of Gallic warriors fighting against Rome, who apparently wore their hair in this way to make themselves look taller and more intimidating.
103. Colchester Castle Museum 1997, 7; Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 29–30, and plate 4. I am grateful to Paul Sealey, Assistant Curator at Colchester Castle Museum, for information on the Kelvedon warrior burial in advance of publication.
104. Creighton 2000, 192–3.
105. Verica was a British ruler belonging to the ‘southern dynasty’ of south-east Britain in the years leading up to the Claudian invasion of the island. Dio Cassius tells us that Berikos (almost certainly Verica) claimed help from the emperor Claudius against his expansionist northern neighbours, the Catuvellauni, and the request for Roman intervention is frequently cited as one of the excuses for the Claudian conquest of Britannia: Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 41; Creighton 2006, 27; Manley 2002, 47; Mattingly 2006, 8; Dio Cassius *Roman History* 60.19.1.
106. Creighton 2000, 205, fig. 7.8 (third from left).
107. Ross 1986, 79.
108. Ross 1986, 79, fig. 36.2.
109. Stephen Upex personal communication (11 July 2007). The sherd was rediscovered while working through the pottery collection of the late Brian Hartley.
110. Ross 1986, 79, fig. 36.1.
111. Beard, et al. 1998, 40.
112. *De Divinatione* 1.90.
113. Beard et al. 1998, 22.
114. Creighton 2000, 204.
115. *Natural History* 16.95.250 (Rackham 1945, 551).
116. Athenaeus 4.37 p. 152D–f; after Tierney 1959–60, 248.
117. Halstead 2006.
118. Halstead 2006 19–26.
119. For a useful anthropological discussion of symbolic aspects of eating in the context of New Guinea religion, see Meigs 1995, 17–29.
120. Megaw and Megaw 1989, 41; Olivier 2003, 2–3; Biel 1991, 110–13.
121. Rolley 2003, plates 4–6.
122. Cunliffe 1991, 139; Stead 1967. For a thorough and up-to-date review of late Iron Age feasting funerary practice in south-east Britain, see Brookes 2004, 214–20.
123. Fitzpatrick 2000b, 18–20; Metzler et al. 1991.
124. Haffner 1974; Wells 1995, 237; Metzler 1991, 520–1.
125. Meniel 2001, 123, 125.
126. Meniel 2001, 77–86; Brunaux 1988, 117.
127. King and Soffe 1991; King and Soffe 1999.
128. Brunaux 1996, 24–5.
129. In this context it is worth drawing attention to Late Bronze Age ‘flesh-forks’, clearly intended for public and ceremonial feasting use, from Dunaverney (County Antrim) and Little Thetford (Cambridgeshire), part of an elaborate paraphernalia of commensality evidently in place before the Iron Age: Bowman and Needham 2007.
130. Lynch, Aldhouse-Green and Davies 2000, 183–4.
131. Lodwick and Gwilt 2004, 77–81; 2005, 91–2; Pitts 2005, 6. Mike Parker Pearson has argued convincingly for the link between the consumption of pigs in the British Iron Age with status, power and even sacred kingship: Parker Pearson 1996; 1999.
132. Brookes 2003, 214–20.
133. Manning 1972; Green 1998b.
134. Stead 1998, 115–18.
135. Kaul 1991
136. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 121.
137. Gruel 1989, 94–9.
138. Arnold 1999.

139. Collis personal communication; Guichard personal communication.
140. Fischer 2006, 40–49.
141. Amphorae can look quite human. See, for example, Alcock 2001, plate 10.
142. Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 139–40.

Chapter 9: Druids and Doctrine: Earth, Spirit and Underworld

1. *Pharsalia* 1, 441–5 (Graves 1956, 38).
2. *Aeneid* 6 (Chisholm and Ferguson 1981, 225–46).
3. *Aeneid* 6.
4. *De Bello Gallico* 14.
5. *Library of History* 5.28.
6. Tierney 1959–60.
7. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 121).
8. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
9. *Library of History* 5.28.
10. I am indebted to Prof. W.H. Manning for these observations concerning the interpretation of Diodorus on letter-writing among the Gauls.
11. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
12. Ferguson 1980, 92.
13. Ferguson 1975, 32–3.
14. Seneca *Epistolae Morales* CVIII; trans. Campbell 1969, 205–6.
15. Others include the Greek philosopher Iamblichus, who lived in the mid–late second century AD, and wrote *On the Pythagorean Way of Life*: Ferguson 1980, 93. See also mention of Pythagoreans on a second-century AD inscribed tablet from Smyrna in Asia Minor which, in the context of reference to mystery cults, alludes to their abstention from eating beans: Ferguson 1980, 166.
16. Green 1992a, especially chapters 3, 5, 6 and 8.
17. Ferguson 1975, 32.
18. Klostermaier 1998, 16–17.
19. Klostermaier 1998, 92.
20. Klostermaier 1998, 40–1. In Buddhist ideas of rebirth release from the endless cycle of reincarnation may be achieved through *nirvana*, a similar form of enlightenment to the related Hindu faith. *Nirvana* is ‘the elimination of desire, of the thirst for life, of all that holds us to the things which apparently are. It is thus an entry into absolute nothingness . . . a state which is neither being nor non-being. It is a state of oblivion, spiritual freedom, true health, immersion in cosmic consciousness’: Ferguson 1978, 170.
21. As witnessed by the plethora of Greek-language inscriptions from the Lower Rhône Valley: Salviat 1979.
22. The Glanici belonged to a confederation of peoples called the Saluvii: Jacob and Salviat 1992, 3.
23. King 1990, 68.
24. Clébert 1966, 238.
25. Espérandieu 1924, 38, no. 40; Green 1984, 359, no. D3.
26. *Pharsalia* 1, 445 (Graves 1956, 38).
27. The Nigerian Yoruba believe in direct migration of souls within families: hence, when a baby is born soon after a grandparent’s death and of the same gender, he or she is given a name meaning ‘Father has returned’ (*Babatunde*) or ‘Mother has returned’ (*Yetunde*): Ferguson 1978, 101, 167.
28. Such a world is described in the First Branch of the *Mabinogion*, where the hero Pwyll encounters Arawn, lord of *Annwfn* and agrees to change places with him for a year. Pwyll’s sojourn in *Annwfn* is described as a sumptuous way of ‘life’, although Pwyll’s heroic chastity prevents him from making love to Arawn’s wife in her husband’s stead: trans. Jones and Jones 1976, 5.
29. Hardwick 1981, 48–53; Lucretius *De Rerum Natura*, especially Book 3: 380–42, 862–911, 1042–end: Chisholm and Ferguson 1981, 364–7; trans. Latham 1960, 96–129.
30. Toynbee 1971, 36.
31. *Agricola* 46 (Mattingly 1948, 98).
32. Scullard 1981, 118–19; the *Lemuria* took place on non-successive ‘odd’ days because even numbers were considered bad luck in this context.
33. Ovid *Fasti* 5, 421–9. Ovid was born in 43 BC at Sulmo, to the east of Rome. He was banished from Rome by Augustus, for reasons unknown, and died in exile at Tomis on the Black Sea in AD 17: Emlyn-Jones 1982, 51–2.
34. *Aeneid* 6, lines 214–33 (Chisholm and Ferguson 1981, 230–1).

35. The Oracle of Cumae (see Chapter 5). The story of the encounter between the prophetess and the hero, Aeneas is told in *Aeneid* 6, lines 150–5.
36. Strabo *Geography* 4.4.4 (Tierney 1959–60, 269).
37. Tacitus *Histories* 4.54.
38. As a result of work by Andrew Fitzpatrick at Westhampnett (1997) and Alison Brookes's PhD dissertation (2004).
39. Toynbee 1971, 33–4.
40. *Annals* 16.6 (Grant 1956, 372). Tacitus also records that Poppaea was killed, while pregnant, kicked by Nero in a vicious rage.
41. Toynbee 1971, 41.
42. Bradley 2000, 5–13.
43. *De Bello Gallico* 6.19 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 124).
44. Niblett 2001, 31.
45. Approximately 3 metres deep.
46. Niblett 1999, 19–20; 2001, 46; Creighton 2006, 125–6.
47. *Library of History* 5.28, 6 (Tierney 1959–60, 250).
48. Creighton 2006, 125.
49. Creighton 2000, 181–3.
50. Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 165. Iron Age human sacrificial victims, including bog victims, very frequently suffered from physical disabilities: Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 157–60.
51. Creighton 2006, 123.
52. Toynbee 1971, 61 and plates 15 and 16.
53. Toynbee 1971, 59–60; Herodian *History* 4.2.2–4.
54. Macdonald 2007, 173. Macdonald draws attention (2007, 177) to the presence of human bone in other watery contexts, such as the small artificial pool at Emain Macha in County Armagh. The information about the presence of human remains at Llyn Cerrig is recorded in a letter to Cyril Fox of the National Museum of Wales from J.A. Jones, resident engineer at RAF Valley, dated 8 July 1943 (in the NMW archives).
55. Including the Witham shield-facing, with its stylised animal-head ornament and the shadowy outline-image of an attenuated boar: Megaw and Megaw 1989, 198.
56. Field and Parker Pearson 2003, 11.
57. In discussing the Fiskerton skull, Andrew Chamberlain draws attention to an analogous find in the Netherlands, where a late Iron Age skull with a similar sword-cut has been found deposited in the River Meuse: Chamberlain 2003, 125–6; Schegget 1999, 228, fig. 8A.
58. Similarly injured heads have also been recovered from the Thames and the Walbrook in London, though their date is uncertain and they could either be of Iron Age or Roman date, the latter being the more likely. There is evidence that these latter heads were exposed until the flesh disappeared before being cast into the water: Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 104; Bonnamour 2000, no. 74; Bradley 1990, 180–1; Marsh and West 1981; Maloney 1990; West 1996, 190–1; Isserlin 1997, 91–100.
59. *Library of History* 5.31 (Tierney 1959–60, 251).
60. 'Among all the tribes, generally speaking, there are three classes of men held in special honour: the Bards, the *Vates* and the Druids. The Bards are singers and poets; the *Vates* interpreters of sacrifice and natural philosophers; while the Druids, in addition to the science of nature, study also moral philosophy': *Geography* 4.4.4 (Tierney 1959–60, 269).
61. Birch 2007, and personal communication.
62. Hawkes 1980, 9.
63. Homer *Odyssey* 8, lines 68–144.

Chapter 10: Images and Tombs: Druids Face to Face?

1. Bede *A History of the English Church and People* 5.21; trans. Sherley-Price 1955, 318–19.
2. See Mills 2004 for discussion of clerical tonsure in medieval Europe.
3. See a thought-provoking paper in *Antiquity*, by Natalie Venclová (2002).
4. Notably by Gildas in the sixth century AD: *De Excidio et conquestu Britanniae* Book 52, 6. 'Britons have their hair treated in the way introduced by Simon Magus, whose tonsure went from ear to ear just as it was cut by the *magi*, who had only their front covered by it'; after Venclová 2002, 468.
5. *Library of History* 5.28 (Tierney 1959–60, 249–50).

6. Carr 2001; Hill 1997. The late Iron Age is not the first period of prehistory with archaeological evidence for the presentation of the male body: for instance, Paul Treherne (1995) discusses the material culture of male grooming in Bronze Age Europe.
7. Mills 2004, 109–10.
8. Megaw and Megaw 1989, col. plate XVII; Venclová 2002, fig. 2; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 20, fig. 1.6.
9. Koch 2007 maps 17.4, 17.6.
10. Venclová 2002, 459.
11. Venclová 2002, 460.
12. Davis 2007.
13. *Library of History* 22.9.
14. Megaw and Megaw 1998.
15. Du Leslay 2000.
16. Armit 2006 (and see chapter 7).
17. Chapman, J. 2000; Croxford 2003; Aldhouse-Green 2004b.
18. This is clearly visible in Aldhouse-Green 2004c, 307, fig. 4.
19. See Chapter 5 for an account of oracles and portents.
20. Venclová 2002.
21. Alexandra Croom illustrates the head of a priest wearing a tight-fitting cap, with a fringe of hair visible in front, taken from the great Augustan altar, the *Ara Pacis* set up in Rome in c. 13 BC: Croom 2000, 68, fig. 25.1. The *Ara Pacis* was set up by Augustus to celebrate the emperor's return from a successful expedition to Gaul and Spain in 13 BC but was not dedicated until 9 BC: Chisholm and Ferguson 1981, 200.
22. *De Bello Gallico* 6.13.
23. Venclová 2002, figs 4–6.
24. Frey 1996/97, 31, abb. 10; Lontcho 2000, 7, fig. 1.
25. Venclová 2002, 466–9.
26. Venclová 2002, 469.
27. Kaul 1991.
28. Venclová 2002, 465; Aldhouse-Green 2004c, figs 11, 12.
29. Frey 1996/97, abb. 20; Aldhouse-Green 2004c, fig. 1.9.
30. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 68, fig. 3.7.
31. I have suggested elsewhere (Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 31) that the massive calves on the statues from Glauberg and Hirschlanden resemble the exaggerated leg muscles on some Bronze Age Scandinavian rock-carvings of 'big men': Coles 1994, figs 16a, 78; Coles 2000, plate 68.
32. Arnold 2007.
33. Arrian *Cynegetica* 23.
34. *Cynegetica* 24.
35. *Cynegetica* 24; Brunaux 1988, 87–97.
36. Chaudhri 1996.
37. Blacker 1996.
38. There is an almost identical, though fragmentary, stone head from Heidelberg: Megaw and Megaw 1989, 74, fig. 82; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, fig. 2.2.
39. Such as the head depicted on a copper-alloy mount ornamenting a flagon from the Dürrnberg in Austria: Megaw and Megaw 1989, 74, fig. 81. They resemble the large ears of an animal but are more likely to represent some form of headdress, for on some pieces human ears are clearly shown as well as the comma-shaped lobes. The flagon-mount from the Dürrnberg (note 38) is one example; another is the tiny sheet-hold appliqué face from Schwarzenbach in Germany: Megaw and Megaw 1989, 70, fig. 74.
40. Megaw and Megaw 1989, 69–75.
41. Lontcho 2000, 7.
42. Rapin 2000, 20.
43. Perrin 2000; Brunaux 2000c, 5, 9 and figs.
44. The fragmentary stone head from Heidelberg and the four heads relief-carved on the pillar-stone from Pfalzfeld (both from German sites, like Glauberg), all bear this sign. Heidelberg: Megaw and Megaw 1989, 74, fig. 82; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 31, fig. 2.2. Pfalzfeld: Megaw and Megaw 1989, 75, fig. 83; Brunaux 2000c, 5. Glauberg: Frey 1996/7, 31, abb. 10; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, fig. 1.9.
45. I have discussed this elsewhere but, briefly, the lotus had such a cyclical meaning in antiquity because the plant, one of the water-lily family, has flowers that rise from and sink into the water in response to daylight or night-time and because the bud is a tiny replica of the fully grown flower: Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 223; Lehner and Lehner 1960, 35.

46. Lontcho 2000, 6. The positioning of one upright lotus lobe above two horizontal ones resembles a human figure in the 'lotus' attitude, seated cross-legged on the ground or on a bench. Lontcho has also identified possible lotus-motifs on the back of the monumental Glauberg figure's cuirass and as a chevron-design on the forehead.
47. Lontcho 2000, 6; Armit 2006.
48. Rapin 2000, 20.
49. Blagg 1979, 101–7.
50. See Green 1999 for a discussion of retro-symbolism in the material culture of western Europe. For analogies in present-day Australian Aboriginal communities, see Flood 1997; David et al. 1998, 290–304.
51. Cunliffe 1986, 1–14; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 222–3, fig. 8.3.
52. Simón 2007, 109.
53. Florus *Epitome of Roman History*; trans. Forster 1929, 91–3.
54. Cisalpine Gaul, or *Gallia Cisalpina* ('Gaul this side of the Alps') was the area of southern Gaul in the modern north of Italy, around Como and the Po Valley
55. *Ab Urbe Condita* 33.36.13.
56. Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 6.3.79.
57. I discuss torcs in detail in Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 40–7, with references.
58. For example Polybius *Histories* 2.29; Strabo *Geography* 4.4.5; Dio Cassius *Roman History* 62.2.1–4.
59. The current (2008–9) AHRC-funded research project, 'Technologies of Enchantment', is designed as a systematic study of the chronology, context and social meaning of 'Celtic Art' in the British Isles: Garrow 2007.
60. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 40–7, figs 2.6–2.9.
61. Deyts 1992, 134.
62. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 181, fig. 7.1; Deyts 1992, 18; Lemaistre 1999, 83, no. 38; Coulon 1990, 69–71.
63. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 180–1.
64. Turner 1996, 34; 1999, 229. The silent film, *The Unknown*, made in 1927, is the tale of Alonzo the Armless Wonder, who used his feet to perform a knife-throwing act in the circus. His arms were actually intact but he disguised himself as an amputee because he had strangled someone and, to evade detection, pretended to be armless, *because his hand had two thumbs*. The tale has an extra bizarre twist in that the hero, Alonzo, falls in love with someone who cannot bear to be touched by a man, so he decides that his arms should, after all, be amputated, only to find that his fickle girlfriend has spurned him for another man (with arms!): *Time Out* London 2007.
65. Menez in Deyts 1999, 25.
66. By the project-leader, Steven Birch, to whom I am indebted for unpublished information. He has interpreted the site as a special, holy place, where the flowing stream-water and the underground nature of the site gave it particular symbolic meaning to the community.
67. Birch 2007.
68. Harrison 2005.
69. For a discussion on acoustics and transformation in the British Neolithic, see Watson 2001.
70. *De Superstitione* 13.171d.
71. 'Sound, in combination with rhythm, frequently provides a means by which ritual discourse can be structured. Vocalisation, song and dance can all be repetitive means of specialised communication that discourages dissent. The use and control of sound not only separates an audience from performers or participants, but also promotes the endurance of ritual procedures by minimising the opportunity for aural interruption. At the same time, sound is invisible, and its behaviour is not readily explained without the hindsight of modern scientific procedures. These elements combine to create the special and magical qualities of sound': Watson 2001, 180.
72. See Chapter 7.
73. Chapter 5.
74. Espérandieu 1911, no. 3133.
75. Aldhouse-Green 2001b, fig. 7.2 (top left).
76. Aldhouse-Green 2004c, fig. 11.
77. Aldhouse-Green 2007b.
78. In the 1990s: Davis-Kimball 2001.
79. Davis-Kimball 2001, 247.
80. Davis-Kimball 2001, 247, figs 2 and 3, on p. 248.
81. Davis-Kimball 2001, fig. 1 (map), showing Pokrovka in relation to its nearest sea, the Caspian.

82. *De Bello Gallico* 6.14.
83. As discussed in Chapter 8 of this book: Parfitt 1995, 13, 155.
84. As pointed out by Duncan Garrow: Garrow 2007.
85. Throughout our recent book on ancient shamanism, we stress the persistent thread of liminality or edginess surrounding the persona of the professional ritualist: Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005.
86. Wells 2007, 470.
87. Parfitt and Green 1987, 295–8.
88. Corder and Richmond 1938; Green 1978, 47.
89. Arnold 1999; 2001.
90. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 224. The very recently discovered hoard of vessels, including wine buckets and cauldrons, from a late Roman-period site at Drapers Gardens in the Upper Walbrook Valley, London is of note because some of the forms are very similar to late Iron Age types and because they were carefully deposited at the bottom of a well, perhaps for safe-keeping or as offerings to the gods: Hawkins et al. 2008, 14–17.
91. Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 165.
92. Lejars and Perrin 2000, 37.
93. Lambot 1998; 2000.
94. See Chapter 4.
95. This selection is based partly on their intrinsic interest but more especially on the fact that both have been and are the subject of recent and ongoing forensic and contextual research projects leading to new interpretations of their lives and deaths.
96. Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 119; Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 115 (both with references), and see Chapters 5 and 6.
97. Asingh 2007c, 305.
98. The Kayhausen boy, also from Schleswig, is a good example: van der Sanden 1996, 93, 1411, plate 117; Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 158–9, fig. 59.
99. Van der Sanden 1996, 138; Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 122.
100. In a British middle Iron Age context, the inhumation of a woman, bound hand and foot, from Great Houghton, Northamptonshire may have relevance, for she wore around her neck a lead torc, snapped in the middle and back to front (that is, with the opening at the back of her neck). She has been interpreted as a possible sorceress, partly because of her mortuary treatment and partly on account of the lead torc: lead is a base metal, traditionally used in European antiquity for curses and maleficent spells: Chapman, A. 2000; Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 137.
101. Aldhouse-Green 2001a and see Chapter 5.
102. Ahrenholt-Bindslev et al. 2007, 150, 152.
103. Asingh and Lynnerup 2007, 9; Asingh 2007a, 15.
104. Asingh 2007a, 28.
105. Heinemeier and Asingh 2007, 199.
106. Harild et al. 2007, 161, 176.
107. Harild et al. 2007, 174.
108. Asingh 2007a, 26.
109. Asingh 2007d, 321.
110. Lynnerup et al. 2007, 226, 233.
111. Gregersen et al. 2007, 241–2, 247.
112. Ahrenholt-Bindslev et al. 2007, 146.
113. Gregersen et al. 2007, 241–2.
114. Asingh 2007b, 276.
115. Asingh 2007b, 287.
116. Asingh 2007d, 322.

Chapter 11: Gender Matters: Druids, Druidesses and Gender-crossers

1. Tacitus *Germania* 8 (Mattingly 1948, 107–8).
2. Ouzman 1997a, 72.
3. Ouzman 1997a, 89.
4. Ouzman 1997b, taken from the title of his paper.
5. Bevan 2005; 2006, 79–126. But see Bevan's argument for the – sometimes – 'masked' representation of women in some of the Camonian iconography: 2006, 77–8.
6. opsi.gov.uk/uk-church-measures/1993/Ukcm_19930002_en_1.html

7. channel4.com/culture/microsites/C/can_you_believe_it/debates/bishops.html; thinkinganglicans.org.uk/archives/001253.html; Gledhill 2008a; 2008b; 2008c.
8. In April 2008, *The Times* ran a front-page feature on new proposals to establish 'gender havens' in the UK, in which new dioceses would be created that did not have to embrace the principle of women bishops: Gledhill 2008a. The issue is particularly contentious in Wales: Williamson 2008.
9. Le Glay et al. 2001, 138–42.
10. *De Bello Gallico* 6.19 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 124).
11. Burkert 1985, 242.
12. Burkert 1985, 245.
13. Ferguson 1989a, 124.
14. Joint Association of Classical Teachers (JACT) 1984, 165, section 4.30.
15. Ferguson 1989a, 127.
16. Holst-Warhaft 1995, 98–9, with references.
17. Plutarch *Life of Cicero*; trans. Warner 1958, 292.
18. Liebeschütz 1979, 31 (with references to Cicero's denunciation of Clodius' sacrilege); *Life of Cicero* (Warner 1958, 301).
19. Plutarch *Life of Caesar*; trans. Warner 1958, 225.
20. Strabo *Geography* 7.2.3 (Jones 1924, 169, 171).
21. Beard et al. 1998, 148–56.
22. *Geography* 4.4.6.
23. In October 1993, Seema Kamdar reported an instance of auto-sacrifice by starvation, conducted by a Jain, in the *Times of India*: Kamdar 1993.
24. 1 Kings 18:28.
25. Marcus and Flannery 1994, 55–74.
26. Chadwick 1997, xxvii.
27. *De Chorographia* 3.2; after Chadwick 1997, 29–30.
28. *Chorographia* 3.47–8; trans. Romer 1998, 115.
29. Salih et al. 2003, 3.
30. Plutarch *Life of Numa* 9–10; Ferguson 1980, 57–8. But with these rights came a grave responsibility for if, during their thirty-year service to Vesta's sacred flame, they lost their virginity, their punishment was starvation by burial alive. Both Plutarch and the Younger Pliny (*Letters* XI.6–11) mention such retribution, which was carried out publicly by priests, who led a procession in which the fallen Vestal was borne through the Roman Forum to the burial cell, sunk within a specially made mound.
31. See Chapter 5.
32. Green 1989, 169–205. The theme of nine holy virgins appears in a very different context from that of Mela's account of Sena in the mid-first century AD. Contained in a medieval Welsh mythic poem of thirteenth-century date called *Preiddu Annwfn* (the Spoils of Annwn [the Welsh Otherworld]) is a description of nine virgin priestesses who tended a cauldron of regeneration that produced food that could resurrect the dead. The cauldron was capricious and could only be persuaded to boil when fanned by the breath of the nine holy women and, even then, it would not cook food for anyone branded a coward. *Preiddu Annwfn* is preserved in the *Book of Taliesin* (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 2: Haycock 1983, 52–78).
33. *Annals* 14.30.
34. *Annals* 14.30 (Grant 1956, 317).
35. Guthrie 1954, 191. But see Harrison 1980, 253–6 for discussion of the origin of the *Eumenides* as kindly spirits.
36. Page 1990, 61–2; Davidson 1993b, 33, 61.
37. Green 1995, 41–2.
38. Harrison 1980, 213, 253–6.
39. *Natural History* 16.95. In her study of colour in the British Iron Age, citing colour/gender relationships in the funerary traditions of certain societies such as the Merina people of Madagascar, Marlies Hoecherl (2008 personal communication) discusses the idea of the association between colour and gender, and I am indebted to her for this idea about the contrasting garments of the Anglesey 'Furies' and the Druids.
40. For many Plains Indians people, 'North is usually black, the colour of evil': Underhill 1965, 110.
41. I have speculated (Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 153) as to whether the confrontation may have taken place during the murky gloom of dawn. It is even conceivable that Paulinus attacked at night, although Paul Sealey (personal communication) argues that the shoals and currents in the waters of the Menai Straits are so treacherous that a night attack would be suicidal. In his

- Germania*, Tacitus does refer specifically to night-combat among the Germanic tribe of the Harii: 'They black their shields and dye their bodies black and choose pitch dark nights for their battles. The terrifying shadow of such a fiendish army inspires a mortal panic, for no enemy can stand so strange and devilish a sight': *Germania* 43 (Mattingly 1948, 136).
42. *Germania* 43 (Mattingly 1948, 136).
 43. Giles 2000.
 44. *Annals* 14.30 (Grant 1956, 317).
 45. Dio Cassius *Epitome of Roman History* 62.6 (Ireland 1996, 66).
 46. See Chapter 5.
 47. Beard et al. 1998, vol. 2, 85.
 48. Aldhouse-Green 2001e.
 49. Beard et al. 1998, vol. 2, 196.
 50. *Annals* 14.30.
 51. Voisin 2006.
 52. Voisin 2006, 480.
 53. *Ab Urbe Condita* 5.34 (de Sélincourt 1960, 363).
 54. *De Bello Gallico* 5.12 (Wiseman and Wiseman 1980, 93).
 55. Grant 1989, 135; Alcock 2001, 45. For the significance of chickens as shamanistic creatures in traditional Nepalese healing religion, see Hardman 2000.
 56. Meniel 1987, 89–100; 1989, 87–97. Meniel refers to hare remains at such sites as Compiègne and at Tartigny, where a grave produced the remains of a horse, a dog and a hare, as though to reflect the tomb of a hunter: Green 1992a, 51.
 57. *Cynegetica* 23.
 58. Mason 2005; Page 2005. In his review of Mason's *The Hare*, Page describes the 'mad' behaviour of mating hares: 'They are running in the fields in circles at high speed, jumping and turning in mid-air and appearing to box. Sometimes there can just be two of them; at other times there can be a dozen or more. It is one of the most glorious sights of the British countryside because there is no doubt that brown hares really do go mad in March.'
 59. Aldhouse-Green 2006a, 178.
 60. Tacitus *Histories* 4.65.
 61. See Cartwright 2003 for discussion of virginity-tests in medieval Welsh prose. It is interesting to observe the role of male virginity and celibacy in medieval Britain, not only in the clergy but occasionally also in projections of royal sanctity: Joanna Huntington has explored the construction of Edward the Confessor as virgin: Huntington 2003.
 62. Goudineau 2000.
 63. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae Aurelianus* 44.4–5; trans. Magie 1932, 283.
 64. Rankin 1996, 292.
 65. Chadwick 1997, 81, quoting Rand 1939, 598, 783. The accepted view of these texts is that they were all written by a single individual in the late fourth century AD. Their only real value is in demonstrating that Druids (and Druidesses) were still part of people's 'mindsets' in the late Roman Empire: Manning personal communication 2008.
 66. Le Glay et al. 2001, 402–3.
 67. In what was part of Yugoslavia, now Croatia.
 68. Le Glay et al. 2001, 405.
 69. Vopiscus *Numerianus* 14.2 (Magie 1932, 439).
 70. Aelius Lampridius *Severus Alexander* 60.6; trans. Magie 1924, 301.
 71. Le Glay et al. 2001, 364.
 72. Suetonius *Life of Galba* 9.2; trans. Graves 1962, 225. Apparently, the prophecies of this Clunian girl matched those of another female prophet who, two centuries earlier, had spoken while in a trance-state.
 73. In the *History of Rome*, by Marcel Le Glay, Jean-Louis Voisin and Yann Le Bohec 2001, 391.
 74. *Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium* 10.11. 'Nor must I leave unmentioned the old man Phoebicius, who, though the keeper of Belenus' temple, got no profit thereby. Yet he, sprung as rumour goes, from the stock of the Druids of Armorica, obtained a chair at Bordeaux by his son's help: long may his line endure' (Evelyn White 1919, 115). In 4.5–14 Ausonius' eulogy on the rhetorician Patera, he says, 'If report does not lie, you [Patera] were sprung from the stock of the Druids of Bayeux, and traced your hallowed line from the temple of Belenus; and hence the names borne by your family: you are called Patera; so the mystic votaries call the servants of Apollo. Your father and your brother were named after Phoebus, and your own son after Delphi [Delphidius]' (Evelyn White 1919, 105). 'In that age there was none who had such knowledge as

- you, such swift and rolling eloquence.' See also the following poem on Delphidius himself (1.5): Evelyn White 1919, 103–5.
75. Nick Griffiths personal communication; Meid 1992, 40–44; Green 1995, 153.
 76. For example at Bath: Tomlin 1988, and Uley: Tomlin 1993.
 77. *Germania* 40 (Mattingly 1948, 133–4).
 78. Bonenfant and Guillaume 1998, 59–65.
 79. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 72. See also Arnold 1995 for discussion of gender and power-relations in Iron Age Europe.
 80. Rolley 2003, vol. 2, planches 4, 5.
 81. Although the figure, like the *krater* itself, is of Greek make and so cannot have been an actual portrait of the dead woman: Manning personal communication 2008.
 82. Arnold 1999.
 83. Romeuf 1986; Romeuf and Dumontet 2000; Aldhouse-Green 1999, 97–99; Pelletier 1984, plate 1, opposite p. 48.
 84. Romeuf and Dumontet 2000, 20–35.
 85. E.g. Romeuf and Dumontet 2000, 97, no. 49.
 86. Wild 1999, 65–6.
 87. Romeuf and Dumontet 2000, 65, nos 57 and 225.
 88. Romeuf and Dumontet 2000, 40, fig. 20.
 89. Green 1978, 59; Green 1992b, 140; de Vries 1963, 84–6; Lambert 1979, 141–69.
 90. Aldhouse-Green 1999; Deys 1983; 1994.
 91. As displayed in the depiction of Aeneas on the *Ara Pacis* in Rome: Beard et al. 1998, vol. 1, 85, 4.3c.
 92. *Eirik the Red's Saga* 4; trans. Kunz 2001, 658.
 93. See Chapter 8 for discussion of how these pairs of spoons may have been used to predict the future.
 94. Knüsel 2000, 174.
 95. Underhill 1965, 110–11.
 96. Swainston and Brookes 2000, 21.
 97. Hill 2001, 2–3.
 98. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 127; Fulford and Creighton 1998, although mirrors are present in many Iron Age burials, so that alone is not sufficient evidence to identify the Wetwang woman as a seer.
 99. *Germania* 43 (Mattingly 1948, 136).
 100. Marlies Hoecherl examines these issues in the context of bodily decay in her work on the symbolism of colour in British Iron Age funerary ritual: Hoecherl 2008, 13; and personal communication.
 101. Rega 1997; Parker Pearson 1999, 109–10.
 102. Hollimon 2001.
 103. Wilson 2002, part I, 176; part II 2, 41–2. For analogies note, for example, the Hetaira of Hindu systems: eunuchs who dress and behave as women: Jones 2008.

Chapter 12: Druids Underground: Rebellion, Resistance and Revitalisation in the Western Roman Provinces

1. musicsonglyrics.com/p/gabriellyrics/petergabrielsanjacinto
2. Simón 2006.
3. Tacitus *Histories* 4.54; trans. Wellesley 1964, 242.
4. Webster 1999, 14.
5. Like Enoch Powell in his 'Rivers of Blood' speech on British immigration, made on 20 April 1968.
6. Tacitus *Histories* 4.61 (Wellesley 1964, 247).
7. See Chapter 11.
8. Aldhouse-Green 2004c, 299.
9. *Annals* 3.39–40.
10. *Annals* 14.31; *Agricola* 15.
11. *Annals* 3.43.
12. Spielmann et al. 2006.
13. Williams 1990–91, 114.
14. Arnold and Davies 2000, 74.
15. Arnold and Davies 2000, 74, 112.
16. Arnold and Davies 2000, 159.

17. Coygan Cave was an important Mousterian site, occupied by people 64,000–38,000 years ago; it was also a hyaena den from about 40,000 years ago: S. Aldhouse-Green et al. 1995, figs 2, 10 (for location of the site).
18. Arnold and Davies 2000, 119 and fig. 10.1F; Wainwright 1967, 5, 85–8; Adam Gwilt personal communication 25 April 2008.
19. As at Trawsfynydd and Moel Hiraddug: Green 1996d, 63, 124; and at Llyn Cerrig Bach on Anglesey: Macdonald 2007, 119–27.
20. Mattingly 2006, 230–3; Casey 1994.
21. Casey 1994, 48.
22. For this colonialist perspective, see, for example, Johns 2003.
23. Aldhouse-Green 2003, 39–48.
24. Young 2006, 8–9.
25. By such scholars as Martin Henig: 1998.
26. *Agricola* 14.
27. Cooper 2002.
28. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 8.
29. Creighton 1995.
30. For a study of syncretism in action, see Stewart and Shaw eds 1994, in particular Shaw and Stewart 1994, 1–26.
31. Beard et al. 1998, 212.
32. Aldhouse-Green 2007a.
33. Henig 1993, no. 96; Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 199, fig. 7.11.
34. Cunliffe and Fulford 1982, no. 26, plate 7.
35. Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 214, fig. 7.20.
36. Simón 2007, 103.
37. An important fortified Iron Age *oppidum* and, later, Roman town.
38. Simón 2007, 107, fig. 9.5.
39. Aelian *De Natura Animalium* 10.22.
40. In other words, the Celtiberians: Silius Italicus *Punica* 3, 342–8; trans. Duff 1949, 139. See Aldhouse-Green 2001c, 46 and colour plate 3.
41. ‘No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on to an old coat; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and leaves a bigger hole. No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and then wine and skins are both lost. Fresh skins for new wine!’: Mark 2:21–2.
42. Juvenal *Satires* 8, lines 154–6; trans. Creekmore 1963, 142.
43. Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 5.27; trans. Graves 1950, 92.
44. From present-day Morocco.
45. *Satires* 3, line 62.
46. Green 1989, 17, map 4; after Linduff 1979.
47. Ancient Armorica is present-day Brittany and part of Normandy.
48. Aldhouse-Green 2006c.
49. See Creighton 1995. I am also indebted to Dr Daphne Briggs for allowing me pre-publication sight of her important paper on Icenian coinage: Briggs 2008, which not only discusses the agency of its iconography but draws attention to her new thinking on the etymology of the coin-epigraphy, which makes a clear philological connection between priests and rulership in names such as Esuprastus and Prastutagus.
50. Duval 1976, 50.
51. For an in-depth discussion of such images, see Green 1989.
52. Webster 1995b; Zoll 1994.
53. Tacitus (*Germania* 43) coins the phrase *interpretatio romana* to explain the interaction between Roman and Suebian deities. Literally, the phrase means the Roman ‘take’ on local gods and goddesses. Zoll draws attention to the irony of double-named gods in their use by scholars to argue the case both for Romanisation and resistance.
54. Cunliffe and Davenport 1985; Cunliffe 1988.
55. For more detail and references, see Green 1992b; Duval 1976.
56. *Agricola* 16; *Annals* 14.38–9.
57. On the museum’s accompanying display board.
58. Clarke 2000.
59. Clarke 2000, 24.
60. Scott 1991.

61. Scott 1991, 117; Miles 1986, 4.
62. Scott 1991, 117; Barton 1964, 87–90. The connectedness and lack of differentiation between human and animal resonate with work currently being undertaken in Neolithic Continental LBK (Linear-Band-Keramik) assemblages, where ‘bodies, far from being self-evident entities in themselves, are situated within a continuous flow of substances, which need careful management both for the shaping and aggregation of bodies as well as during their eventual dissolution’: Hofmann 2007.
63. Scott 1991, 117; Stead 1976, 48.
64. Jones 1981, 115.
65. Scott 1991, 119.
66. Vastokas and Vastokas 1973, 9, 27. The great panel, carved on a slab of crystalline limestone, was mapped and recorded between 1954 and 1967, and steps were taken to protect the site from interference.
67. Vastokas and Vastokas 1973, 31.
68. I visited the Peterborough rock-art site in October 2004, as the guest of one of its original investigators, Dr Joan Vastokas of the University of Trent, Peterborough, Ontario, who not only showed me the glyphs but explained the present-day tensions in responsibility for its care and use. I am grateful to her for her invitation to visit the University of Trent as Distinguished Guest Lecturer and for her insights into Algonquin cosmologies.
69. After AD 312 the emperor Constantine, a new adherent of Christianity, promulgated the new monotheism throughout his realm. Martin Henig (1984, 214–15) suggests that the strong links between Roman Britain and Constantine would have served to promote the new religion, although ‘there can at first have been relatively few Christians’ there, and when Julian the Apostate took the imperial purple in the 360s, and set out to reverse the trend towards this faith and promote pagan cults, ‘he would have found them still in a flourishing state throughout the North West provinces’.
70. Hansen 2000.
71. Wheeler and Wheeler 1932, plate XIX, A; Henig 1995, 120.
72. Green 1997b, fig. 7.
73. *Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium* 1.4, 1.11.
74. Johns and Potter 1983; de la Bédoyère 2006, 259.
75. Painter 1997. The hoard also contained strainers for wine or other alcoholic drink.

Epilogue

1. From *The Táin Bó Cuailnge*: trans. Kinsella 1970, 9.
2. Philip Macdonald’s analysis of the Llyn Cerrig Bach assemblage makes such connections abundantly clear: Macdonald 2007, 105–7. See also Cunliffe 2001, map on p. 328 for suggested routes for transmission of La Tène art.
3. For a discussion of evidence for the Romans in Ireland, see Di Martino 2003.
4. Raftery 1994, 206–19.
5. *Agricola* 24.
6. *The Táin* (Kinsella 1970, 9–10).
7. Raftery 1994, 64.
8. Schneiders 1995, 160.
9. Raftery 1994, 65–70.
10. Aldhouse-Green 2001e.
11. Mac Cana 1958–9; 1983, 114–19; Macalister 1931.
12. Green 1997a, 136.
13. Green 1997a, 134.
14. Bray 1987; Mac Cana 1983, 32–4.
15. Green 1997a, 134–5; Lehmann 1989. A brain-ball was a weapon comprised of the brain of a decapitated enemy mixed with lime so that it became rock-hard.
16. Heaney quoted in Sharrock 2008, 23.
17. As quoted by Jonathan Foyle, chief UK executive of the World Monuments Fund in Sharrock 2008, 23.
18. Owen 1962, 27.
19. Translated as ‘The Flowers and Antiquities of the Gauls, wherein the ancient Gaulish Philosophers called Druids are discussed’: Piggott 1968, 133.
20. ‘A thesis about the Druids’: Piggott 1968, 134, 142.
21. De Bruxelles 2008, 21.

22. Chippindale 1994.
23. Aubrey later changed the book's name to *Monumenta Britannica* (though he retained 'Temple Druidum' as the opening section title).
24. Green 1997a, 140–1; Piggott 1968, 142–4; Piggott 1989; Smiles 1994.
25. From William Wordsworth's 'Vale of Esthwaite' (c. 1805).
26. Green 1997a, 143; Piggott 1985.
27. A Druidic Order that survived until 1963 when it was replaced by the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids: Green 1997a, 147.
28. The tavern still exists in Poland Street, near Oxford Street, and on the wall is a plaque recording the 'revival' of the Ancient Order of Druids in 1781.
29. Green 1997a, 170; Piggott 1968, plate 32. For discussion of the Ancient Order of Druids, see Green 1997a, 147; Carr-Gomm 1991.
30. From a Druidical poem 'Y Derwydd' ('The Druid') from a collection of verses by the harper Edward Jones entitled *The Bardic Museum of Primitive British Literature* (1802): Green 1997a, 152; Piggott 1968, 169–71.
31. Owen 1962, 73. See also Piggott 1968, 148–9; Green 1997a, 147.
32. *Annals* 14.30.
33. A term used by Geraint Jenkins in his *A Concise History of Wales* (2007), 20.
34. Jenkins 2007, 83.
35. Burrow 2007, 131, quoting Thomas Jackson's (1856) reminiscences on the Island of Anglesey in which he – like his peers – misrepresented megalithic tombs, built in the Neolithic period, as the altars of the Druids. In actuality, these tombs belonged to people buried thousands of years before the Iron Age Druids were active in Wales, the rest of Britain, and western Europe.
36. Jenkins 2007, 3.
37. Jenkins 2007, 3.
38. Jenkins 2007, 216.
39. Jenkins 2007, 217.
40. Stephens 2008b; Löffler 2008.
41. Jenkins 2007, 217.
42. An *Eisteddfod* is literally an 'Assembly'.
43. Green 1997a, 155. From the Royal Institution of Cornwall, Truro.
44. Payton 1999, 395.
45. Cambry 1836, 84.
46. Williams 1992, 280.
47. Le Scouëzec 1986, 187–203.
48. Philip Carr-Gomm, *Touchstone* 1996; after Green 1997a, 179.
49. Green 1997a, 169.
50. For in-depth discussion of this topic, see Jenkins 2007, 227–300.
51. Jenkins 2007, 265, caption to figure 46, showing a Welsh protestor being arrested, none too gently, by three policemen.
52. In 2008 the National *Eisteddfod*'s venue was Pontcanna Fields in central Cardiff.
53. One recently elected member is my friend and colleague Sioned Davies, Professor of Welsh at Cardiff University, who has made a towering contribution to Welsh literature in her new translation of the great medieval compendium of Welsh prose tales known as the *Mabinogion*: Davies 2007.
54. Sioned Davies personal communication, 3 July 2008. See also Holt 2008 for comment on the admission of the actor Matthew Rhys to membership of the *Gorsedd* in 2008.
55. The Crowning of the Bard honours the poet judged best in the production of poetry in free metre; the Prose medal goes to the winner of the Prose Competition; the Chairing of the Bard celebrates the award for the best poem in strict metres. See Green 1997a, 156–7, after information from the Welsh National Eisteddfod Office. In 2008, as part of the celebration of its 125th Anniversary, Cardiff university sponsored the Bardic Crown and, on 9 July, delivered it to the National Eisteddfod Committee in an official handover ceremony held in Cardiff, which the author was privileged to attend. The crown, made by the Anglesey artist Karen Williams, has the traditional maroon of the university as its central cap and the decorative theme for the headband, made of silver and copper wire, is a combination of elements of the university's architecture and its crest. In 2008, the crown was awarded for the best Bard to produce a group of poems on the theme 'The Street of Pleasure'.
56. From a poem 'The Druid and the Land' by Philip Shallcrass (1994); quoted in Green 1997a, 172.
57. Hoyle 2008, 5.

58. Quoted in Hoyle 2008, 5. See also Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998.
59. The broad equivalent of today's English Heritage.
60. Green 1997a, 174.
61. Hutton 2005, 15.
62. Bender 1998; Merriman 2002, 556, 560.
63. Brown 2008, 26.
64. Brown 2008, 26–7.
65. Extract from a letter from Steve Diamond written in response to a comment in *Metro* (18 February 2008) on the article on the Stanway 'Doctor's Burial' that appeared in *British Archaeology* (March/April 2008) in which modern Druids were referred to as 'bearded, white-clad crackpots that gather at Stonehenge', and reprinted in the May/June 2008 issue of *British Archaeology*, 7. My thanks are due to Mike Pitts, editor of *British Archaeology* for information concerning this letter.
66. Like Philip Carr-Gomm and Philip Shallcrass: Carr-Gomm 1996, 1–16; Shallcrass 1996.
67. Whitworth 2008, T2, 3.
68. As I heard in a recent lecture: Hutton 2008.
69. For sane and sensible discussion of this debate, see, for instance, Sims-Williams 1998; Collis 2003; James 1999. See also Aldhouse-Green 2008b. The Celtic debate also embraces the issue of modern Celticity, and the extent to which identification of present-day peoples on the western edges of Europe as Celts has contaminated the terms Celt and Celtic as a means of describing Iron Age communities. A comment made recently, in the context of an article on the Celtic Media Festival in Galway, expresses the view of one Welsh 'Celt': 'What have the Celts got in common? . . . All that seems to hold us together is a commitment to preserving minority languages and an increasingly sophisticated and deep-rooted obsession with our common neighbours, the English': Ellis 2008.
70. Hutton 2008.
71. Dr Louis Rawlings personal communication 9 July 2008.
72. The denial that the Druids ever existed has uncomfortable connotations of later historical invention. I cite here, as an example, the far more destructive 'Revisionism' movement, propounded by, among others, the British academic David Irving that has sought to deny the Holocaust, a manipulation and deliberate distortion of memory that both rationalises and mythologises uncomfortable truths: Hirsch 1995, 26–34; Lipstadt 1993; Pierre 1992; Irving 2000. What is, of course, open to debate is the extent to which Classical writers such as Caesar understood or misinterpreted the information they were given by local people. Prof. Manning has drawn attention not only to this issue but also to the brevity of the texts: personal communication, 2008.

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