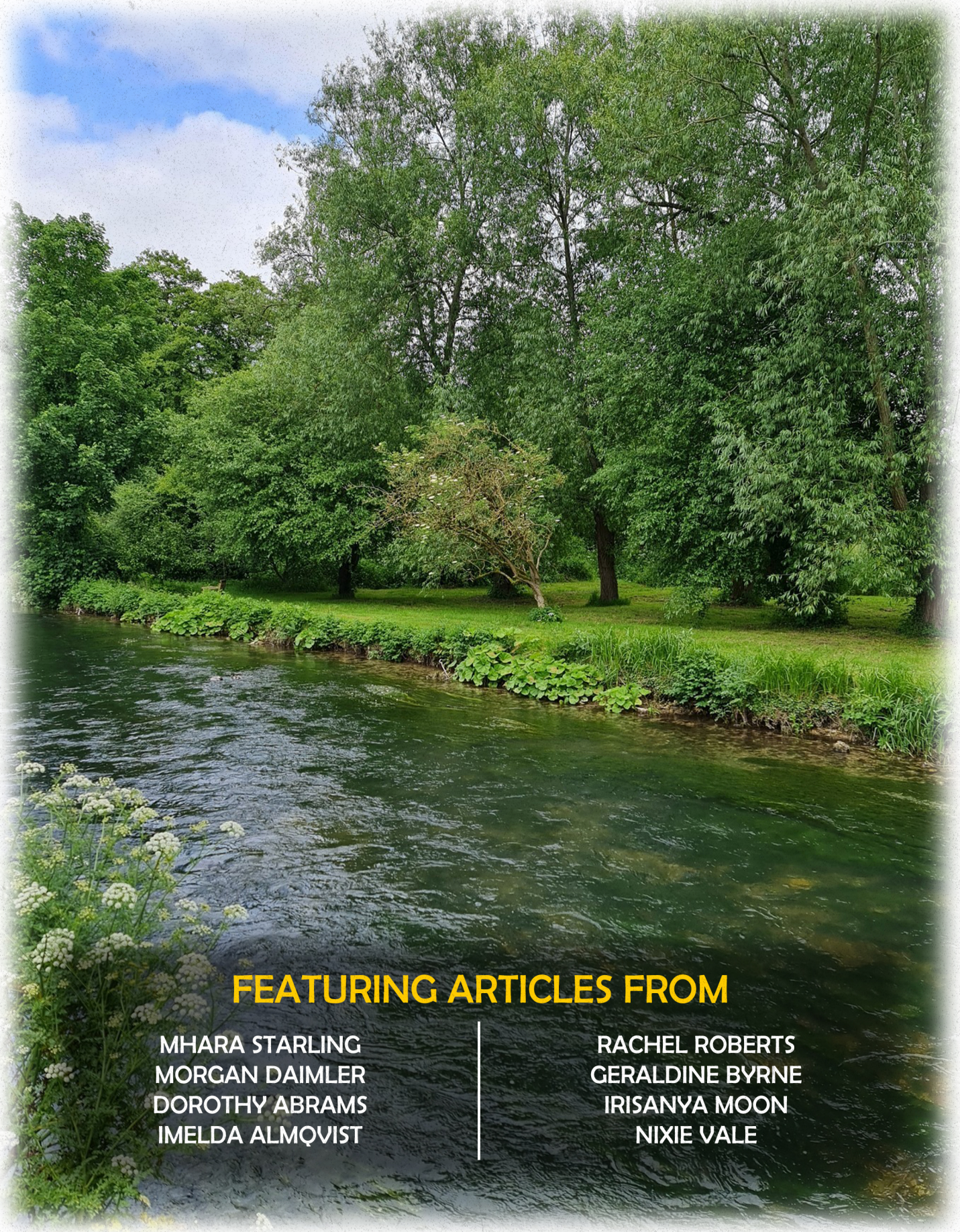


MOONSCAPE

VOL. VII



FEATURING ARTICLES FROM

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About MoonScape

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Editorial

BY TREVOR GREENFIELD

Welcome to MoonScape volume VII! Whether your solstice is marking longer days or longer nights, why not step back, take some time out and consider the changing seasons and the gifts they bring to us all. Warmer days, cooler evenings, verdant greenery, fall colors... blessings all. Then, when you've concluded your meditation, I strongly recommend you dive straight into this latest edition and enjoy its erudite observations and sublime writing.

Our latest offering is packed with goodies... such as Mhara Starling on the Deities of Wales, Morgan Daimler exploring the Wild Hunt, Thea Prothero adding a touch of Heathenry and Imelda Almqvist talking Runes... there's something for everyone! And I could go on – OK I will! Rachel Walker is connecting us to Roman Deities, Irisanya Moon is discussing Hecate and Geraldine Byrne introduces Draiocht Ceoil, the magic of music... and there's still more to enjoy! Happy reading...

Wherever in the world you are this solstice, the Moon Books Team send you our very best wishes for the rest of the year.



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Finding the Deities of Wales

BY MHARA STARLING

Growing up in a rural part of North Wales, I was always captivated by the way in which the land seemed to sing with stories of old, with tales of enchantment and wonder, and how myth and lore shaped our relationship with place.

Upon the cliffs overlooking the sea at the edge of my village sat the remnants of a Bronze Age Cairn, a reminder of how this place I called home has been a hub of human activity for thousands upon thousands of years. According to the *Mabinogi*, some of Wales' oldest traditional stories, it was in this village that Branwen, a princess and sister to the King of ancient Britain was married to the Irish King. Just down the road and along the coast sat a great and dramatic burial chamber called *Barclodiad y Gawres*, which translates to mean "The Giantess' Apronful". Stories say this site was created when a Giantess dropped several large stones from her apron.

Stories shaped the landscape. My childhood playground seemed to be a repository of ancient wisdom, storied pasts, and songs of the ancestors.

And yet, when I began taking my first tentative steps onto a path that was inherently spiritual, magical, or devotional in nature, for a reason that I will never truly understand, I turned to cultures I was far removed from. I turned to the mythologies of ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. I felt, for some reason, that in order to be a Witch or a Pagan I needed to build a relationship with popular Deities from these places that I, in reality, had little to no actual connection to. I cringe rather at that in retrospect. However, to cut my younger self some slack, it was exactly what books on modern Witchcraft, Paganism, and Polytheism seemed to focus predominantly on at that time.

It was as though I was trained to believe that true magic could only exist in distant,

far-flung cultures and landscapes. I began to forget the magic of the land upon which I walked daily. I noticed this seemed to be a common mindset in my local Pagan communities as well. Local open rituals and magical events often called to great Goddesses from the Greek, Roman, or Egyptian pantheons, very rarely did I hear people discuss their relationship with Celtic Deities, despite us living in a Celtic nation.

For the longest time I felt a disconnect from the concept of Deity altogether. That is, until I found a community of local Polytheists and Pagans who worked with Deities that were rooted in this landscape, in my own culture. Finding this community flung me onto a journey of rediscovery and reconnection. Suddenly, I began to feel the song and power of my own landscape once again, and I quickly realised that I did not need to call to Deities who originate from cultures far across the seas, because there were spirits and entities right here, rooted to the land beneath my feet, who spoke my language, and who have witnessed the evolution of our culture over generations. And most of all, they were altogether familiar.

I had grown up reading the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, our traditional stories. They told the tales of beings such as Brân the Blessed, a Giant who ruled over the island of Britain long ago, and who's severed head is buried under the white hill in London as a talisman of protection. Arawn, the Lord of the Otherworld who once swapped lives with a mortal man for an entire year. Arianrhod, a powerful woman who lived on a mysterious island surrounded by a raging river, and who could alter people's fate with her words. Blodeuwedd, a woman made of flowers who was made for the sole purpose of pleasing one man, but she rebelled and like the wildflowers she was made of, could not be tamed, and for that was transformed

into an owl who stalks the night for eternity.

These characters were very familiar. I grew up with them, spent my childhood playing games with friends where we pretended to be them, and took part in art projects or theatrical performances inspired by their stories. And now, as I explored my own spiritual and magical beliefs, here they were again, as guiding hands and allied forces to us as modern day polytheists and magical practitioners. Building a relationship with them as a Witch and Polytheist was not about discovering them but rekindling a flame which had first been lit in my childhood.

The very mythic landscape of Welsh Deities is a complex one indeed, with many arguing we should not be seeing these characters as “Deities” but instead as literary characters from a corpus of early medieval Welsh literature. Indeed, in the manuscripts which preserve the stories of these engaging and powerful characters, they are never referred to as Gods. There is no archaeological evidence they were ever worshipped by pre-Christian peoples either. And so, why do we see them as Deities? Is there even such a thing as a Pantheon of Welsh Gods? These are complicated and difficult questions to answer without falling down a variety of complex rabbit holes.

Whilst yes, we can say with clarity that there is little to no evidence of the characters from Welsh literature and lore which proves they were ever worshipped as Deities in the ancient world, it is however far more complicated than that. Some characters have names which are cognate with pre-Christian Celtic Deities. Take, for example, the character of Mabon ap Modron, a child that was stolen away from his mother and kept as prisoner for thousands of years, only to finally be released by King Arthur’s men. Mabon’s name derives from a Deity known as Maponos, who was venerated in Northern Britain and parts of Europe. His mother’s name, Modron, is cognate with the Goddess Matrona. In both the Welsh and the earlier cognate names, Mabon and Modron, or Maponos and Matrona mean “Divine son” and “Divine mother”. Mabon and Modron

are essentially Welsh reflexes of earlier Deities, and they are not the only ones. Our stories carry echoes of ancient beliefs.

Beyond this, we must also consider something rather profound: Are Deities only valid if they carry a sense of antiquity? Whilst we cannot prove that Rhiannon or Gwydion were ever worshipped in the pre-Christian past, I can point you to several altars, temples, covens, and magical traditions which have revered them over the last century at least. By now the Welsh Deities are Deities revered across the world. I could argue this process of apotheosis has been occurring for the last thousand years at least. These characters carry the very spirit of Wales, a country that has long been suppressed and overlooked. They sing of our sovereignty and right to exist, and we, as Welsh people, have upheld them as cultural icons and emblems for a very long time.

To those who say, “you cannot and should not venerate these characters as Deities” I simply reply, “that ship has sailed”. The Welsh Gods may not fit everyone’s criteria of being verifiably ancient, but what they certainly are, without argument, is real. Many hear their call today and are moved by them. They seem to reach through the mists of time and tug at our hearts. Their stories are meaningful to people today.

My latest book, *Pantheon: The Welsh* explores the Deities of Wales in more detail. It is not a book that explores a topic locked or restricted by time and antiquity, but instead an insight into a living, breathing, ever-evolving polytheistic practice. One inspired and informed by the past but firmly rooted in the here and now.

Therefore, if you would like to explore the topics mentioned in this article in more depth, then pick up a copy, and allow me to take you on a quest to discover the Deities of Wales.

Mhara Starling is the author of *Pantheon: The Welsh* and *Pagan Portals – Y Mabinogi*

The Many Faces of the Wild Hunt

BY MORGAN DAIMLER

When the subject of the Wild Hunt comes up many people envision a single cohesive group, riders who travel the sky looking for prey. And that view is true, but also not. The Wild Hunt is a surprisingly complex subject which has distinct and sometimes very different appearances across Europe and into the United States. While there is a throughline that holds each version within the wider grouping, the various appearances can also be contradictory to each other and how much of a threat – or blessing – they represent to the humans they encounter varies wildly.

At its simplest the Wild Hunt is a group of hunters who travel the sky, flying not with wings but with magic, and who hunt the earth beneath them. Beyond that however each separate grouping is different, sometimes in key ways. The Wild Hunt may be led by a deity, often a god although also sometimes a goddess, or by a famous dead human, or by the Devil. In some cases, the Hunt has no humanized figures in it at all, including only a group of hounds, but most include riders, horses, and hounds. The humanoid leader of the Wild Hunt might ride alone or might lead a group of hunters, often comprised of the restless dead or those who have died in battle. In contrast though some versions of the Hunt are less martial; Perchta leads a group of children who died unbaptized in some tales and the US Ghost Riders in the Sky are cowboys who died in a stampede and are seeking their missing cattle for all eternity.

The most well-known of the Wild Hunts is undoubtedly the Germanic version led by Odin, but even here we find the boundaries between versions blur and diverge. The

idea that Odin – alternately named Woden, Wotan, or Wouden – leads the Wild Hunt is found from Germany to Sweden with the broad strokes the same. However, when we look beyond those broad strokes we find some important differences between the Wild Hunts across these areas. In Sweden for example the Wild Hunt is thought to be particularly active around the solstices, while in Germany it can be more active around the Harvest. The Anglo-Saxon version, drawn from Norse influences, was seen by an entire village around Lent, in the spring. Odin is the most famous leader in Sweden and surrounding areas but in Germany we also find stories of Frau Gauden [Mrs Odin], Perchta, and Holda leading as well.

In various English versions of the Wild Hunt we find stories of humans who were cursed to lead the Hunt, usually through their obsessive love of hunting in life, occasionally combined with their blasphemous actions either challenging the Devil or challenging the Christian God. In one story, for example, a priest ignores his Sunday duties to hunt and is cursed by God. A twelfth century tale gives us a Wild Hunt led by a human king named Herla, who attended an Otherworldly wedding only to find when he left that centuries had passed and anyone who dismounted the horses they were travelling on would immediately crumble to dust as the centuries they had missed caught up with them. Before they had left the Otherworldly king who had hosted them had gifted king Herla with a small dog which rode on his lap, and had warned him not to dismount until the dog jumped down first; this has never happened and Herla and his men are wandering the world still, unable

to stop. Wales and England are also the main areas we find stories of the Wild Hunt including only hounds with their leader either absent or unnecessary; in these stories even hearing the hounds is a bad omen.

The Welsh Wild Hunt is sometimes conflated with Arawn and his Otherworldly hounds, the Cwn Annwn. The Hunt in this form may appear led by Arawn or not, and hearing the Cwn Annwn howling means death will come to that person. Sometimes Gwyn ap Nydd is named as the leader of the Welsh Wild Hunt as well, leading the Plant Annwfn [Children of Annwfn] who are sometimes called fairies in English. In Ireland we also find a version of the Wild Hunt which consists of fairies, called the Slua Sidhe [fairy host]. These are entirely malicious beings who travel through the air seeking humans to torment or take with them. Stories advise caution if out at night, especially alone, and offer various means to defend against these beings if they are encountered.

While the Irish Slua Sidhe are fairies the Scottish Sluagh Sith are said to be the restless human dead, condemned to travel the air until judgement day. The two terms in Irish and Gaidhlig sound the same and have similar meanings when translated but are understood differently in folk belief. The Sluagh Sith, while human souls, are just as malicious in nature as their Irish fairy counterparts, although the Irish Slua will harass anyone they run across while the Sluagh in many stories target humans who have committed crimes or are weighed down by guilt, seemingly targeting those with a similar nature to their own. To be taken by either version rarely ends well for the human involved and there are many methods recorded to rescue a stolen human from them.

In most stories the appearance of the Wild Hunt is either dangerous in itself or acts as an omen of dangers to come. The Lenten sighting of the Wild Hunt in England which was witnessed by an entire community (mentioned above) presaged a time of civil unrest in the area, for example and in some Welsh tales the sound of the hounds

baying foretold death to those who heard it. The appearances of the Ghost Riders in the Sky in the US were said to warn the viewer to amend their lifestyle or risk being condemned to join them after death. In other places however the Wild Hunt could be a blessing, with some German folklore saying that the Hunt passed over fields during the harvest to bless the crops. It was also possible, if risky, to engage with the Germanic Wild Hunt and win blessings or gold. There are stories of people encountering Perchta travelling in a wagon with a broken axle; if the person offered her help to fix her wagon, he would be rewarded with the wood shavings that resulted from fashioning a new axle which if taken home would transform into gold by morning. Similarly, those who encountered Odin's Hunt and dealt cleverly with him would be rewarded for their efforts. But to fail to deal well with them opened a person up to great danger; one man who spoke rudely to the Wild Hunt had the severed leg of his own child flung at him in response. Most stories advise seeking shelter if you are out at night and hear the sounds of horses and hunting hounds on the wind.

Each version of the Wild Hunt reflects and incorporates beliefs unique to the area it is found in, shown by the range of possible leaders of the Hunt. This means that those who seek to study the Wild Hunt will find many stories across cultures, each of which is different in important ways. One may either choose to look only at a particular version and do a deep dive into that group's stories or one can cast a wider net and look cross culturally at the different groups to see what they have in common and what changes from one to the other. Modern pagans have chosen to incorporate these beings into their practices, including crafting rituals which call on or include them, but it is important to choose which version of the Wild Hunt you are calling carefully and to interact with them respectfully.

Morgan Daimler is the author of *Pagan Portals – The Wild Hunt* and many other titles.

KEN'S SUMMER BIRTHDAY

Sour bitter lemon beaded meringue pie
That makes me pucker and squint.
A birthday pie for Ken,
So sour none would share--
But me, on summer solstice plus 4 or 5.
I learned love, sharing with my father.

Stinging cold spring fed lake
not yet warmed by summer sun.
First swim Solstice plus 4 or 5;
He ran down the dock and dived
while we inched in from pebbly shore
shrieking delight as the cold crept up
our child sized bodies.

Mom sat on the dock paddling her feet.
His head popped up out beyond,
"Get me an ice pick!" he yelled.
We all laughed at dad's joke
Every year on solstice plus 4 or 5.

Numbed, we sunned up warm,
Left for the soft serve ice cream stand
To freeze our insides next.
"The biggest ya got," he'd call.
How much custard could pile on the cone?
His birthday Solstice plus 4 or 5.
We made sure Solstice was what he wanted.
He went home for coffee, warmed his insides
To match his sunny skin,
along with sour lemon pie.
Good parents, Mom and Dad. Good memories
Each Summer Solstice plus 4 or 5.

DOROTHY ABRAMS

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Portals, Patterns and Pathways

BY IMELDA ALMQVIST

Every liminal space between runes is a mystery school, and its curriculum is mythology. I call this Palaeolithic bone broth for the soul.

By the time you read this article, my handbook for rune magicians will have been published! This is the book my Seiðr and Rune Magician students have been waiting for (for many years) but I still anticipate fielding the following questions:

- Do we really need another book about the runes? (Aren't there enough rune books on the shelves in book stores?)
- Is there really anything new to say about a writing system that is nearly two millennia old?
- And why does the word Palaeolithic appear in the quote above as the runes are from a later period?

These are fair questions and I will try to answer them in this article.

I have a Forest School in Sweden where I teach Seiðr courses and courses for Rune Magicians. Much of the material shared in this book is based on years of keeping personal rune journals but it is also informed by observing my students work with the runes.

I see the runes not only as letters, though they were the writing system of the Viking Era, and used well before that by Germanic tribes. I primarily see them as glyphs with powerful indwelling spirits. One chapter in my book explores whether every rune might represent a deity (or, at least, is closely connected to a deity or "god force", as I have found close correspondences for all runes of the Elder Futhark).

I do not believe that anyone will ever have "the final word" on the runes because of those timeless indwelling spirits. They shapeshift and meet us wherever we are in the world, or in history. They constantly reveal new dimensions of meaning, as both culture and technology evolve. There are absolutely runes connected to AI, for instance, (but I will make

that the topic of another article!)

The runes still hold mysteries. We cannot say that "we know everything about them" and the same goes for the larger body of material I teach: Seiðr and Old Norse Traditions. There are gaps and inconsistencies in the source material we have been left (myths, poems and sagas). Some people find that frustrating, but I generally see it more positively: the fact that we don't know "everything" leaves space for our own discoveries and conclusions (both individually and in group settings), because it is not a closed or hermetically sealed system being passed down to us. It is a system that continues to evolve as we evolve.

Individual rune magicians all work in their own unique way, based on their personal relationship with the runes and the guidance that they receive. The dimensions of culture and land are very important too in this work. Someone who lives in (say) East Anglia is likely to work in a different way from someone like me, a Forest Witch and artist in Sweden. Someone based in the USA or Canada will have a different cocktail of influences again. Land is important because it physically sustains our life. It is important to live in harmony with all beings around us and that involves deep listening to all voices (including the non-human ones), communication and making offerings.

As someone who was born and raised in a coastal city in the Netherlands (see my previous book: North Sea Water in my Veins, about the pre-Christian spirituality of the Low Countries!) I am viscerally aware of the link between sea water, blood and ink.

I always emphasize in classes that the Vikings used the runes of the Younger Futhark. The Elder Futhark was used in the period before that. I see people who want to be very "authentic" and adopt a Viking-like

style or appearance. They often sport tattoos incorporating the runes of the Elder Futhark. Technically speaking that is an anachronism (an error of chronology, where something is placed in the wrong period or time-frame). A more blatant anachronism would be a movie where Vikings use mobile phones to communicate. Everyone would immediately spot that error and laugh! Therefore I suggest that people do their research (or consult a specialist) before they have runes permanently tattooed on their body.

What do I mean by “Palaeolithic bone broth for the soul”? Well, no writing system appears out of nowhere. The early scientists (working in the cradle of civilisation) were all astronomers too. My book takes a deep dive into cultural astronomy and how early writing systems were linked to star constellations and special gateways in the zodiac.

Confession time: the original book was way too long and I took out a chapter about the Stone Age, where I tried to establish a tentative connection between common shapes in rock art (petroglyphs) and the runes of the Elder Futhark. I will publish this material as an article, either on my Substack or perhaps in a magazine. Either way, history teachers (and authors) chop up history into distinct periods and “chapters”. In everyday life there is no such clarity. People who live through transitional periods are not always aware of it, because for them their everyday reality is “normal” (and major transitions often lasted centuries). The Old Norse people had no internet, though the Vikings travelled vast distances and sent home news about foreign lands and deaths in battle. There were well-established trade routes in the Viking Age. Wealthy people had access to silk, spices, glass (exotic beads) and wine from warmer climes.

The runes (of the Elder Futhark) were already in use for centuries before the Viking Age started. This is sometimes called the proto-Norse period. The Norse gods had forerunners or predecessors. For example, we have information about a pre-Christian Germanic goddess called Nerthus, who is closely associated with the sea god Njörðr. Historians of religion have suggested that Nerthus eventually splits into two goddesses: Frigg (Odin’s wife) and Freyja. In Norse

mythology as we know it today, Njörðr is the father of twins: Freyja and her brother Freyr.

I believe (but cannot prove) that the runes made a similar long journey through history and Deep Time. That we see forerunners of them in some petroglyphs and that the night sky (the first storybook – or movie – of our Deep ancestors) played a role in this.

Let me finish this article by introducing the key insights which led to me developing the material presented in this book.

#1 Years ago I wrote in my Rune Journal that “Every liminal space between runes is a mystery school, and its curriculum is mythology!” This insight proved to be incredibly fertile ground for mapping the liminal spaces between the runes.

#2 The letter- (or glyph) sequence of many early (ancient) alphabets (such as Phoenician, Archaic Hebrew and Egyptian Hieroglyphs) appears to be connected to the night sky and star patterns. Does such a correspondence also exist for the runes? (There is a chapter about Old Norse Astronomy, guided by astronomical numbers and references to celestial events described in the Poetic Edda).

#3 Before the Enlightenment, Astronomy and Astrology constituted one unified field of study. What happens if I arrange the Runes of the Elder Futhark in a Circle and then look at that circle the way that an astrologer reads a natal (birth) chart?

My conclusion is that the runes map a mythical or imaginal realm where cosmic blueprints share their stories and wisdom through archetypal figures, deities, personifications, alchemical images and symbols. I found countless correspondences and wisdom teachings (or portals, patterns and pathways, which gave me the title of this book!)

I hope that you will dive in, and if you do, please (pretty please!) leave a review on Amazon, two words will do and I will be so grateful!

Imelda Almqvist, Forest House and Forest School, Sweden

Adding a Touch of Heathenry to your Practice

BY THEA PROTHERO

In the introduction to my book, *Heathenry for the Solitary Practitioner*, I share that the Norse god Odin started showing up in my dreams and meditations:

"[One] the day I visited Grimes Graves in Norfolk... a Neolithic flint mine, which was re-named during the Anglo-Saxon period after their god Grim (which means masked or hidden one), another name for Woden (Odin). I had recently made a new set of Runes from sacred stone and decided to bring them with me that day. I cast them on the ground near one of the infilled mineshafts and concentrated. It was not the ground that I had cast onto, but a shadowy hand. "Not now" was all I heard. That night I dreamt of the grey figure in the mine shaft at Grimes Graves, his face was covered by a large hat, and he carried a staff of wood that seemed to climb into the clouds. He led me to a vast, cavernous wooden cave made of tree roots, which twisted and enclosed everything around it. On one of these vast roots, carved in rudimentary Runes, was my name, and the roots seemed to all point towards the figure. I knew who He was..."

At the time, I wasn't especially interested in Heathenry, half-believing the hype that it was a very masculine faith, although some aspects of the Norse tradition have always resonated with me, namely Runes and Seidr.

I have since found out that, in fact, many pagans for all pathways feel a sudden, quiet pull towards the Norse gods, the Runes, or Yggdrasil (the world tree).

Since childhood, I, along with many other people, have loved being entertained by the wonderfully evocative, often funny, and always captivating Norse Myths. Yet taking that first step, as I have illustrated above, can seem intimidating and scary. Unhelpfully, the internet often perpetuates Heathenry as a rigid and lore-heavy faith, policed by academic gatekeepers with complex reconstructionist ideals. Sometimes it can feel as though you need a degree in Old Norse to even consider lighting a candle to Thor or call yourself a Heathen!

I should perhaps mention here that I am an academic studying this very subject, but hasten to add that one thing I have learned through my studies is that historical texts (such as the sagas and Eddas), although wonderfully informative and highly valuable as a source, should merely be a framework, created by the people who lived a thousand years ago. The heart of modern Heathenry cannot and should not be sought in a dusty archive. Instead, it can be found in the woods and forests, and in places where people meet up today. As a living, breathing faith, it resides on altars, in blots and gatherings, and with those who feel the pull of Heathenry.

You do not need to throw away your Brigid's cross to also honour Freya or change any of your rituals or daily practices; you simply need to be willing to build the relationship and be open-hearted. If you are waiting until you are word-perfect on the *Voluspa* before speaking to the gods, then you are missing the point! The Gods, Vaettir, and ancestors value sincerity, consistency, and hospitality;

values often found in other pagan practices, and it's likely you're already familiar with them. Your individual, unique experiences, and relationship with deities (often called UPGs – unverified personal gnosis) are equally as valid as any of the words written during the Viking age.

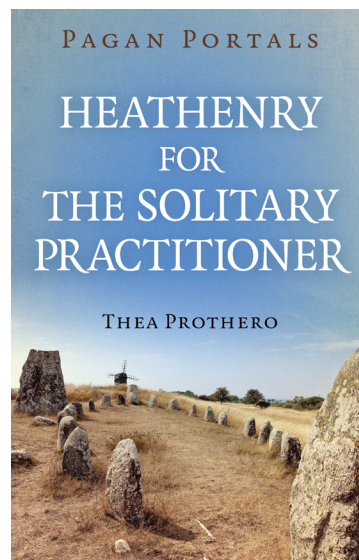
In the Heathen worldview, the gods are not distant, untouchable rulers demanding complete oblation; don't get me wrong, they are powerful and deserve your respect, but I have found they appreciate a warm welcome and frith (hospitality) above all else. So, if Thor shows up in your life and you are drawn to honouring him, put a representation of Him on your altar. One thing I have found is that the Norse gods are not precious about sharing altar space, or any other space you want to invite them to. I distinctly remember Odin showing up at a circle honouring the Cailleach, which I was attending with a group of women from a goddess temple in Ireland.

Some ways to start building a relationship with them include treating them as you would an honoured houseguest. Offerings can be as simple as setting an extra plate for dinner, a glass of water, mead, or juice, or placing flowers from your garden by their statue. Speak to them plainly, in English (or whatever language is your first), and always from the heart. By offering a portion of what you have, you are entering into the gifting cycle, or reciprocity; the concept of establishing mutual respect and friendship through sharing, which is one of the core concepts in the Heathen worldview.

If you are familiar with the Runes, or you practice a form of divination within your own spirituality, then you will find they are far more than simply a way of telling fortunes. Runes are highly intuitive and often function as portals into the Norse worlds, offering a nuanced connection to the gods/spirits/ancestors.

The most common set, which you can find everywhere, is the Elder Futhark; most sets come with a rudimentary chart of meanings, making them readily accessible to everyone. Instead of jumping straight in with complex and time-consuming layouts, instead integrate them gently into your daily practice by concentrating on a simple question (for example, what will befall you during the day) and drawing a single Rune. But don't just read the meaning from your chart, look for signs of its energy during the day. As an example, drawing Fehu (ᚼ) could indicate financial transactions, whereas Isa's (ᚲ) energy may represent moments of stillness and pause. By simply drawing a Rune a day, you are learning to see the world through a Heathen lens.

Integrating Heathen aspects into your existing practice is not about starting again on a different path or even rewriting your belief system; it's about expanding your spiritual family and deepening your connections to the divine. By focusing on practical devotion, lived experience and everyday hospitality, you will already be well on your way to inviting the Norse tradition, or Heathenry, into your life.



Thea Prothero is the author of *Heathenry for the Solitary Practitioner*

Roman Deities for Summer Connection

BY RACHEL S ROBERTS

A modern summer defined by its community gatherings and BBQs, family holidays, escapes to the seaside and cooling time in and with rehydrating waters is not that dissimilar to the ancient Roman approach to the season. Their recognition of the role of the sun, the necessity of water and the value of family time is reflected in the feast days and increased worship of particular deities during summer.

Here are four Roman deities that you may want to connect to in the coming months, just as the Romans did. These deities are particularly connected to the summer season and have their feast days during this time, offering an opportunity for sacred pause and ritual.

Sol

Sol is the Roman God of the sun who also governed sunlight. He was primary god of the Gens Aurelii (tribe) of Ancient Rome, a prominent and influential Sabine family. He was increasingly popular from the 1st century BCE onwards and was known also as Sol Indiges (native sun). There was a festival of Sol Indiges on August 9th the date of the dedication of his temple on Quirinal Hill, in Rome and also a festival to Sol and Luna on 28th August.

How can he support and inspire you?

- Sol can support you in connecting to your inner sun, that is, your sense of presence, power and purpose and help you to discern or utilise your energy around these themes.
- He teaches about balance and potentiality. The sun can nurture and also burn and can be an ally in moderating extremes and navigating hot, intense feelings such as anger, passion and irritation that can consume it excess but also can provide nurturing warmth or motivation if tended with compassion and moderation.
- He represents our forward-facing Self, that

which the world sees and can guide you in finding ways to confidently and authentically share and express Self.

How to connect:

- Sunrise and sunset gazing is the best time to witness and meditate with the sun (especially to avoid over exposure in the summer) and a chance to receive Sol's energy and to give thanks! Choose these times to connect with your inner sun: sunrise (for increasing and amplifying) and setting sun (for moderating and calming).
- Work with, or create Solar oils, essences or teas. Creating infusions with solar light and water (charging the water with Sol's rays through exposure). Calendula and dandelions are great, accessible flowers for infusing in Solar water for confidence and vitality.

Luna

Luna is the Roman Goddess of the Moon, who also governed moonlight. She was part of what was known as the agricultural triad of Flora (blossoming), Luna (cycles and rhythms) and Ceres (growth). All three were part of an agricultural temple complex on Aventine Hill Rome, and she also had her own temple on Palatine Hill, the sacred heart of ancient Rome. She had festivals days on 31st March, 24th August and a shared festival with Sol on 28th August.

How can she support and inspire you?

- She can support you by shedding light on that which has been hidden or lost in illusion or mis-representation. Truth can sometimes be like the moon, hidden behind clouds of judgement and falsity but she will gently reveal the light in any situation.
- Luna is also a joyful goddess that will guide you in finding reasons to smile. She is an ally for those that wish to restore child-like wonder and delight in their everyday life. With her, find the white rose in a dark thicket of thorns.

How to connect:

- Experience her cooling energy during the summer months. If you are feeling overheated, then try a visualisation or meditation where you envision Luna's cool white light pouring over you from the head down, like a refreshing fountain of light.
- Summer is great time for moon-bathing or moon sleeping (maybe the only time you can do this without freeing your toes off!). Sleep, meditate, dance, walk, sing, make love, create art out in the rays of the moonlight.

Neptune

Neptune is a Roman god of water, who specifically governed the morning dew and springs (the places where water comes up from the earth). He was one of three gods (Mars, Apollo and Neptune) that were exclusively honoured with sacrifice of a bull. Neptune was honoured in this way for his important role of bringing moisture to the land. He had temples dedicated to him in the Circus Flaminius and the Campus Martius and was honoured on December 1st and during his festival Neptunalia on July 23rd.

How can he support and inspire you?

- He is connected to the fertility and health of the earth and on a human physical level is also connected to our lymphatic system and keeping it healthy and in flow (antidote to dryness). Work with him to heal and refresh a dehydrated body, heart and soul.
- In working with cleansing, clearing and healing your roots, which may include working with ancestral water bodies and bringing the waters of the earth through your systems to clear any woundings or blockages around identity and belonging.

How to connect:

- Collecting morning dew (from grass or flowers) and using it in ancestral or personal work. For example, you may want to use it as a face or hand wash in the morning or walk barefoot in the morning dew.
- Affirm your sense of belonging, home and identity by connecting to your local water sources (springs, rivers, lakes etc.). Neptune encourages us to get our feet in the water to reconnect, cleanse and empower those roots.

Vesta

Vesta is the Roman goddess of the hearth fire

and the eternal fire of Rome. She was also considered the burning fire at the centre of the earth and of the universe. She was a goddess that played a vital and daily role in the domestic lives of the roman people and in the running of the state. Vesta's presence was believed to ensure the prosperity of family and empire. Her temple, the home of the Vestal Virgins was in the Forum Romanum at the foot of Palatine Hill, Rome and her primary festival was Vestalia on the 9th June, though the month of June and the particular days surrounding June 9th were also considered sacred to her (7th to 15th June).

How can she support and inspire you?

- Vesta is a great helper if your inner flame is running low or over-burdened and your energy, drive, or self-belief needs some support and re-ignition. She will help you find hope and ways to restore the temple fire of your mind, body and soul.
- She is a goddess that loves to be present in your home life and will support you in tending to relationships and the things, ways and spaces that bring peace, joy, harmony and warmth to your home (both literal and metaphorical).

How to connect:

- Create time and space for you and your family to connect in a way that is nourishing and enjoyable for all. Summer is perfect for this! Light a candle that calls in and presences Vesta whenever you have a garden party, BBQ, family meal or community gathering. Invite her to be a part of your celebrations and to maintain harmony throughout.
- Upgrade your candle gazing meditation to (safely) bonfire gazing! Let your gaze soften, deepen and lengthen your breath and reach out to Vesta in her flames and open to her wisdom being shared with you.
- You may also want to give a prayer, offering or invocation to Vesta's fire (can be as simple as offering one marshmallow before you toast and eat the rest!).

I hope that these deities offer you a pathway or opportunity for creating deeper connection to Self, the earth and life and may your further exploration of them bring you much joy and fulfilment this summer.

Rachel S Roberts is the author of *Pantheon: The Romans*

The Magic of Music

BY GERALDINE BYRNE

I was three years old, sitting on the counter of my parents' music shop in Dublin, listening to a man with a banjo singing a folk song, when I realized that music could change your soul. That man was Luke Kelly, of the famous Irish folk band, The Dubliners. The banjo was a Hofner that had just arrived from Germany.

My dad nodded when the song ended, when the last note faded.

"That's grand," he said.

It was more than 'grand' to me. It was as if someone had turned on the light and poured colour into the world. Over the course of my life, from helping out in the shop as a child to running it for decades as an adult, I was privileged to hear many great musicians. Traditional and folk, Classical and Jazz. Famous or simply one of the thousands of talents that populate every townland in Ireland, they all ended up in our shop.

I learned to play Cello and classical guitar. In all honesty I was very little use as a player but I was a genius at listening. Music to me is a story, a cinematic reel in my head, a narrative unfurling as if reading a novel. It also became a bridge, a conduit between what I could see, what I could sense and what I could manifest. I was lucky to grow up in a culture that accepted the importance of music, that enshrined it at the heart of life. Words and music, sound and magic, were interwoven in our stories and history.

That day listening to one of the greatest voices in our history set me on a journey to find the music. I found I wasn't the only one who could see the energy behind it. I listened. I took in stories of my family, of music, of folk magic and as I started my career as a poet, the search widened.

Where did the power of words end and that of music begin?

The answer lay in an Irish phrase, *Draíocht*

Ceoil, or "music magic." When the old folk talked of local poets, they often spoke of them singing their poems. Music supported the words and words amplified the power of the notes and the line between being a poet whose words lay on paper and a musician whose words hung in the air were meaningless. Sound has power, and words can be music.

Draíocht Ceoil and the whole attitude of the Irish towards sound and music has its roots in our ancient past, in the power and influence accorded to the poet and musicians of early Ireland. Even the advent of Christianity couldn't interrupt this. But when Cromwell's army brought disastrous upheavals, the systems that had upheld our culture were broken.

At this point, the magic passed into the hands, and mouths, of the people. New musical forms emerged to preserve music, and new traditions evolved at the same time, to preserve the knowledge held by the poets. What to say if you met one of the *Sí* on a dark road at night, for example. How to charm, heal, or hex, how to sing a wish into reality, or ensure protection for field or home.

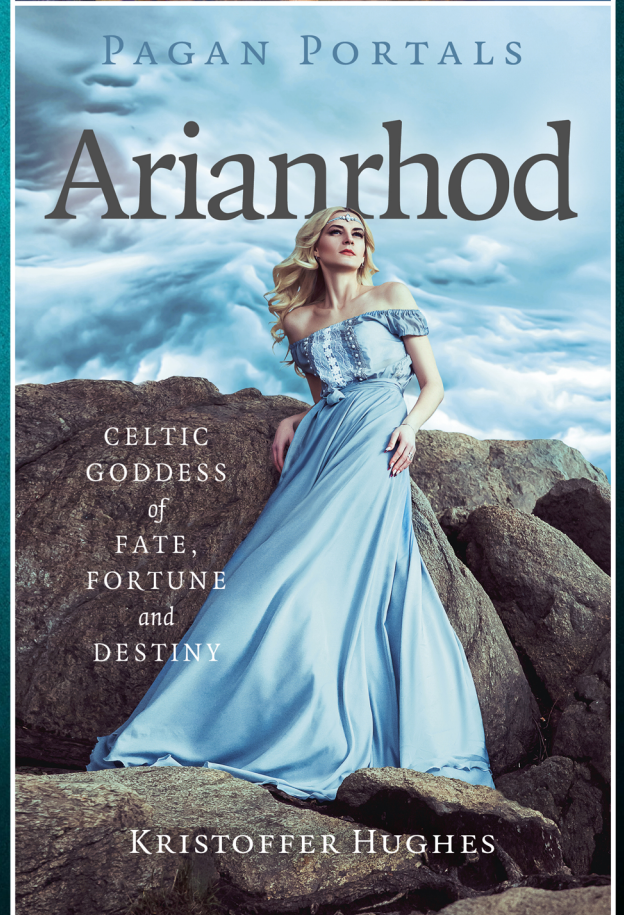
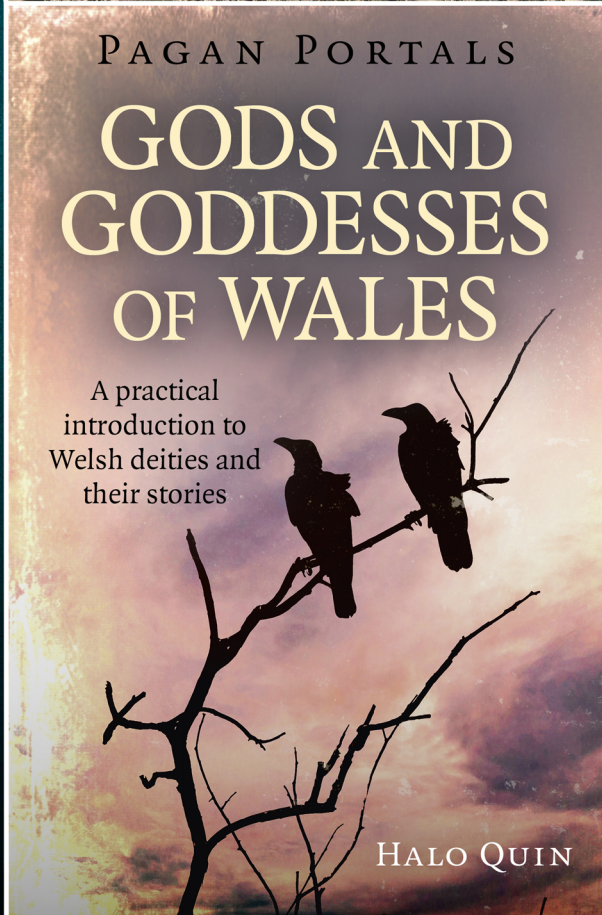
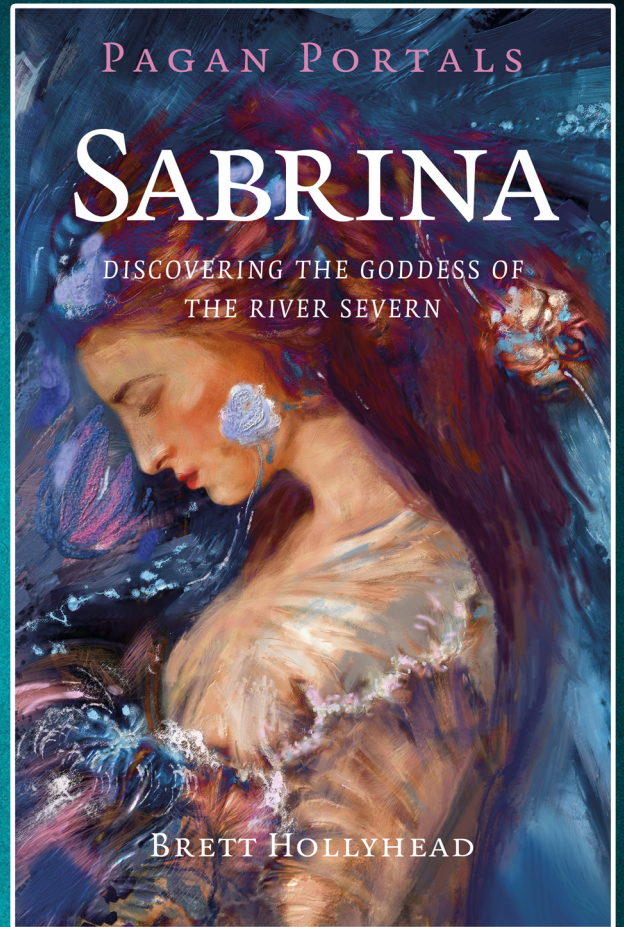
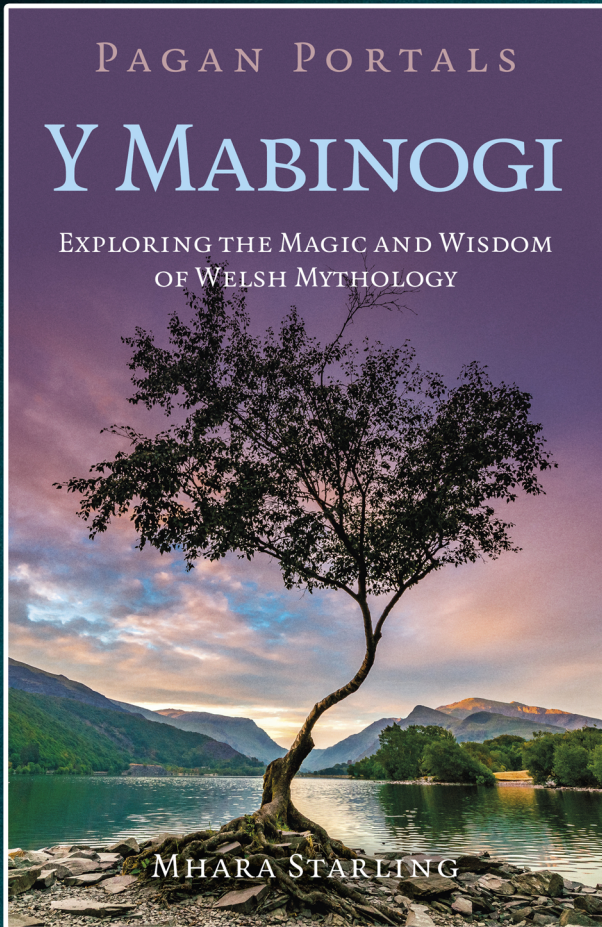
Belief in the magical and transformative use of sound became a folk magic practice, one rooted in daily life and the inherent Irish belief in the presence of the Otherworld. Dismissed by outsiders as "superstitions," we lived in harmony with the unseen with a sharp awareness of entities like the *Sí*, *Púca*, ghosts and more. Little charms, mischiefs, wards and spells were a part of daily life, hand in hand with even the most devout observances of church and priest. Keening our dead or singing good luck into a crop – we knew how to use the sound energy around us.

The folk magic tradition of *Draíocht Ceoil* was born and endures still, an instinctive understanding of the power of sound.

Geraldine Byrne is the author of *Draíocht Ceoil*

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Hecate of the Land, Sky & Sea Immersing Yourself in Her Magick

BY IRISANYA MOON

*In fact, she has much more because Zeus honors her,
and her domain extends over land and sky and sea,
and she can greatly aid a man--if this is her wish.
In trials her seat is at the side of illustrious kinds,
and in assemblies the man she favors gains distinction.
And when men arm themselves for man-destroying battle,
the goddess always stands beside those she prefers
and gladly grants them victory and glory.
Again, she is a noble goddess when men compete
for athletic prizes, because she stands by them
and helps,
and whoever, by force or strength, wins a fair prize,
carries it away with ease and joy and brings his parents glory.
To horsemen, too, when she wishes, she is a noble helper
and to those working out on the stormy and gray sea
who pray to Hecate and to the rumbling Earthshaker.*

Theogony, Hesiod, 423 ff, translated by Apostolos N. Athanassakis

Zeus saw something in Hecate, something that was inherent, something that draws forward respect in all who meet her. He honored her with three realms, three ways to move between humans and gods and creatures. The king of Olympians didn't give her power, but rather she retained the power she held as a Titan. Even after the Titans lost their positions to the Olympians, Hecate remained.

With these three realms, Hecate is often described as a triple goddess, and this is true, but often conflated with age or life stage. Rather, the triplicate goddess can be seen as multifaceted, she of many ways and powers. She is the one who looks in all directions,

across all roads that lead away from what is known to what is needed.

Hecate of the Land

Dark and mysterious, Hecate becomes the shadow in the night, the one who travels liminal spaces, often with howling hounds. Because of her wisdom, she is often called on by others to witness and to inform their rites with the dead. One might call on Hecate to bring them closer to their ancestors and to aid in their communications.

If you have need of Hecate in these workings, travel to a place in nature, possibly to a crossroads and find unsettled earth. At this place, dig a hole and leave offerings to the dead. Cover the hole and ask Hecate to guide you. You may need to return to this place a few times before you get her support. Praise her with words and gifts. Read poetry and stories to her. Tell her about your dead and why you want to meet them again. Ask her to travel in swiftness and to return with what you need.

Close your eyes and find her torches in the dark. Close your eyes and find her footsteps. Close your eyes and feel a breeze pass you. Hear the whisper you offer and the answer Hecate brings. Notice when the spirits are louder or when the land is quieter. Bring your heart to the ritual. Thank her for all that she might offer to you during this night and the moon cycle to follow.

Hecate of the Sky

As the moon and the stars travel from one horizon to another, Hecate travels too. She finds herself in the unseen, in the shadow. She isn't hidden, but rather patient. Turn to the sky in the dark to find where patience can be a gift when you just want answers or action. Drop into the way the sky doesn't change itself, but rather our perspective allows us to see what was always there. Turn your eyes to a place of vastness, of possibility, and of unknowing.

The sky is wide enough to hold all of your questions and many more of your confessions. Meet Hecate in the night to tell her what you haven't told anyone. Meet her with the queries that embarrass you, and leave shame on the ground. Life is not meant to be done well or one way. Your life is one that offers you many crossroads of potential. Each will lead you to where you want to go, though some paths are longer when you wait to follow them.

Let Hecate remind you that you are always under the curve of a sky that has followed you since birth. Let her bring you to the places that will hold you in all of your phases. Drop to the ground if you must. Rest on your back to see where she finds herself too, that daughter of the Titaness, Asteria, goddess of the stars. You can be born into the galaxies of her arms.

Hecate of the Sea

The waters of the body are the waters of the world. And Hecate is there. She travels these liminal spaces between land, traveling beyond the rocks and possibly birthing terrifying sea creatures. There is an agreement with water; that you need to trust the liminal of floating. Your body is made for it. Your body is designed to hold itself up, and Hecate can hold you too. She can watch as you decide if you can trust yourself enough to stay on the surface. And she can meet you in the moments where it could be easier to drop below the surface to understand depth.

To meet Hecate of the Sea, travel to the waters of the unknown. Meet the mysteries of a local pond or lake or ocean. As the edges of the water touch your edges, ask yourself and ask Hecate what you are ready to understand. Notice how you move toward or away from the water. Where are you moving toward or away from what you cannot escape? If water is a part of you and the ocean could hold water that was once a rainstorm that soaked you, what can you know of your part in this world? No matter how difficult things become, Hecate can help you see that you have always been a part of the waters that reshape rock. You can call on her to help you remember the great power of yourself and your buoyancy in the liminal.

When you call on Hecate, ask her for what you really need. She wants to know, she wants to support you. Even in the times

when she knows better, she is the one who always supports me as I find my way to what is best for me. I see her as the kind mentor who nods their head, even as I make another careless mistake. I can return to her with what I have learned, and she nods again.

May your magick travel across the land, sky, and sea, across the questions and queries, and toward the places and people that need healing.

I offer you this invocation to help you call her.

*Hecate, Keeper of Keys!
Hecate, Guardian of Crossroads!
Hecate, Traveler between Worlds!*

*Grant me your wisdom and knowing,
Bless me with your patience and discernment,
Surround me with your magick and cunning.*

*You who walk with the ghosts,
You who take the hand of Persephone,
You who followed Demeter in her grief and anger,
You who wake the dead,
You who protect the living,
You who light all the ways of understanding,
You who holds the moon and the darkness,*

*Hear my prayers,
Hear my praise,
Hear my humble heart.*

*Hecate, Hecate, Hecate
Goddess of Magick and Witchcraft,
Watch over me,
Whisper to me,
Awaken me to what lies between shadows,
Bring me to my truest self,
Stay with me in my journeys,
Meet me before the sliver of the crescent moon
arrives,
Hold the torch when darkness falls,*

*Hecate of Might and Power,
Hecate of Truth and Justice,
Hecate of Death and Devotion,
Praise to your many names!*

Hail Hecate! Hail Hecate! Hail Hecate!

Irisanya Moon is the author of *Hecate: Goddess of Magick & Witchcraft* and other titles.

Witchitorium

BY NIXIE VALE

Witchitorium is a compendium of terms that you might encounter while being a practicing witch, or someone interested in spirituality, magic and witchcraft. This is the book I wish I had when I first had interest in the craft, and I truly hope this will help every witch that opens the book.

I first started walking my path in 1999/2000 and the internet didn't exist as we know it now. I didn't have answers to the questions I had. Another problem I had finding information and answers was living in a very rural area, and our library didn't have the books I was searching for. The first witchy book I ever read was Scott Cunningham's *Wicca: a Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, and while I didn't feel a strong connection to it, but it became a foundation, something I can build off of. I am blessed to have some amazing young people and children in my life with an interest in the craft, and while they all have information at their fingertips but, unless you are very conscious and discerning about what you are reading, it can be easy to take in incorrect information, or misinformation.

Someone asked me a few years ago, if they can suck on Malachite to help with their toothache because they saw it on social media. I told them they shouldn't be putting any crystals in their mouth, especially crystals like Malachite. And I've been asked what different types of water can be used for. It was questions like these that led me to write the book, because I want to give inexperienced practitioners a decent foundation about the language of witchcraft, while also giving experienced witches something to reference. At its core, the language of magic is so important to the craft because words have power, and when you understand the language, you are able to weave spells, connect to spirit and live an authentically magical life. They call it spelling for a reason.

Building the Book

Whenever I work on a project, I write down what my goal is going to be. With *Witchitorium*, my goal was to write a comprehensive directory (or as comprehensive as I could). I began with writing a list of things I thought should form part of the book, and once this was done I consulted my books and then the internet for terms which would work well. Once I had done that, the real work began, alphabetisation. I wrote all the words on slips of paper so I could move them around before cementing everything into place. When I started writing on the computer, I had to pace myself because of my disability, so I told myself that I would work for four hours a day on the book and once I got going it didn't take too long to put everything in order, and inputting explanations.

NOTE one of the most valuable things I learned from writing the book was to keep track of your sources and where you found the information. Writing the resource bibliography took nearly as long as the book to write.

What Would I Do Differently?

I think if I could do it again, I would explore more obscure terms, and try to find something to add to the X chapter. I felt so bad that I couldn't put anything there and I feel like I should have dug deeper so it wasn't left as a blank space.

What Did I learn?

As I was going through the writing process, I learned things about myself, my craft and who I am a disabled witch. I learned that while I knew things about a very wide range of topics, there is always room for me to grow and to develop myself and my craft.

Nixie Vale is the author of *Witchitorium*

DARE NOT

Don't you dare to tell me
what I need to become.

Don't you dare to tell me
to shut down this Magic-Waving Factory
(the name by which I call my life).

Don't you dare to tell me
to pull the break
on my dashing through dreams,
wild dancing in the storms,
and my whispered conversations with the Old Ones
each time we meet between the worlds.

Don't dare to tell me
that I should forget about
pursuing the wonders
in the world where I belong,
just because that world isn't yours as well;
(it isn't, because you don't want
to claim your place in it,
so don't blame me for your choice).

At liminal times
I sneak out and walk barefooted:
sometimes through silky grass caressing my feet,
sometimes through rich, warm mud
that has gathered both the kisses of the sun
and the tenderness of summer rain;
that mud is nurturing balm for my feet as it is for my heart.

Sometimes I burst forth into the light,
the golden-red light of the liminal times,
inebriating for the senses and much sweeter
than any mead that human lips have ever sipped.

Don't dare to tell me
to forget it all because it's madness;
I chose the madness of my world
over the sanity of a million other
safer, tamer, quieter worlds,
and pay the price for the bliss-laden moments
filling up my days.

So, don't you dare to tell me...

DANIELA SIMINA

Midsummer Nightmare

BY DOROTHY ABRAMS

I woke before the sun on the longest day. I dreamed a prophecy.

"That girl has my locket." I complained. Dias gave it to her at Yule and she wears it around her neck, being told not to remove it. She rarely follows instructions, which he must know by now. The locket is gold, hung on a chain as fine as cobwebs. It was one I wove with spider magic. Now she weaves a sheath of fine alpaca threads around the chain because it chaffes, silly bitch.

"I am apt to get quite cross is she doesn't stop. I'd complain to Dias but he will only tell me not to be jealous. Human traits are unbecoming, I know, but Dias provokes me. He provokes her too." I mumbled to myself. No one else will listen.

My name is Cobweb, and only I spin filaments around talisman. I do that with ethereal songs and fluid dances that pour me from floor to roof. I gather myself together and stream into the treetops and return to my bed when I am tired of fairy magic.

What's that? I hear his voice in my mind's ear. It resonates rich and warm and pulses with his heart. He wheedles as a child, saying the locket was his to give. It was. But I know he gave it to her as an irritant. She wanted a ring. She wants a husband. He gave her the locket I gave him. I want it back since he cannot be trusted.

Last Moon I appealed to Queen Ambrosia, She Who Looks Like a Cat. I sing her to sleep at night and tweak her awake when she least expects it. Tis our game, Ambrosia and me the Singer.

I accompany myself on the strands of a web I made to play on. Then Moth or Dragonfly joins me as we sing the Queen off to sleep again. Tis a dangerous game we play; in her half waking state we might be mice or butterflies. Or winged bats. Her response is quick. With the locket I could wink across the worlds under the glowing stars. Without that in hand, well I must jump to save my wings. So far so good.

"Daughter you have been careless of your heart with that Locket. And ours. You are reckless to give her your portal. Be sure it is woven shut." Ambrosia swept out of the boudoir with her careful attendants.

My was heart was wrung with pity for myself. *What can be done?* The locket had a mirror in it. She could be watched by those who knew it. *This breach is not my fault!*

Then whose? I sat listening to the fountain fall in melodious dribbles, making a tune in my head, spinning words of my tale when I heard him singing it. *"My love is sad and I must go."* I whirled to my feet.

Dias!

His smile was warm and eyes sparkling. I let him fold me in his arms and rock me back and forth. Almost I let go my guard until I was reminded, *Tis Dias*. I jumped back. He held my hand and kissed the palm with a slight lick, a small nip. False innocence to pretend he did not.

"Why mourn the loss of what you handed off?" He whispered in my ear. His breath, hot and sweet.

"I gave a gift!"

He dared laugh at me. "Oh little one, is not a gift a gift? And cannot the one blessed with it share, or must we hide it in hand and selfishly not reveal our passion?"

"It held my love!"

"And I added mine. What could be better?"

"That you return it with our loves blended," I demanded with all the command I held.

"That would make a child of it. Did you want a child of me? I did not think that true."

"No! No child. I want you!" I was giving away too much. Again.

"But you may not have me in a locket."

"So you gave yourself to her! Locket and all." He raised one lazy shoulder and leered. I did not dare confront him more.

"Cobweb, Cobweb. Come let me take you on my lap. You'll not regret it." I slapped his hand away. I could smell her on the air that wafted by him.

"As you wish, for now. I am free fae and will come when I will. As will you." He faded slowly enough for me to see him join her on the terrace in that unfriendly world. I huffed and puffed, trying to make sense of him. I made fists and waved them over my head shouting in frustration. "I will pummel him."

When I opened my hands in the air the locket fell to the ground. I looked at it, wary as if it were a snake. Its imprint was in my palm. It smelled like her. I smelled like her. Goddess I smelled like her!

His laugh rang out between the worlds as she looked desperately around for the locket. She stood up and shook out her dress. Something else fell out of its folds. The Ring! She wanted the ring at Yule and he gave her my locket!! Fury ran through my bones and power curled in

my blood. What game is this? The Witch is ill equipped to match me, as much as I am poorly matched against the Mage.

"Dias! Do you offer marriage?" She asked half afraid of rejoicing. As well she might be.

"It means I love you. Of course we will marry. You've always known I love you."

She shook her head in time with mine. She did not know and I did not believe. Love cannot go to her. It cannot. She slid into his arms and he closed his eyes, breaking my vision. I took the Locket and threw it halfway across the sky. They would wed.

His son would be born on a Tuesday. He would name him Martes. I knew that from somewhere. Martes Dias. *Is that Market Day? Mars of the Gods? Who is Dias and why am I obsessed?* I felt sick.

The Queen rose and tapped me soundly on my head.

"Stop dreaming, Carless Cobwebb. You failed to wake me. What will my price be? I've already sent off the man." My heart clenched. *This was her work!*

"I thought he was fae?" I turned to her downcast. Contrite.

"Silly Cobweb. Now sing merry songs for me of summertime. She settled on her garden throne wound round with roses and thorns and pulled me on to her lap with a tentative pinch that sizzled in my blood. Dragonfly and Moth took up the song mocking me.

"*Her love is glad and so he left.*" The Queen laughed. The thorns scratched my arm and blood rose out of the wounds. She bent over my arm and casually sucked to stop the blood, ran her tongue around her lips.

"Mmmm. You taste wonderful my silly Cobweb."

Dorothy Abrams

Seal Magic

BY MELANIE GODFREY

The seal and I have danced together in a metaphorical sense for many years, ever since I found and fell in love with a three-day-old, abandoned seal pup during the winter storms of 2017 in Cornwall. Since that day, they have inspired more peace, gentleness, sensitivity, and compassion within me. Seals enchant, and their curious natures appeal to my soul.

I found out that many years ago seal clans inhabited parts of the British Isles – the Conneely family of Connemara, and the MacCodrum's of North Uist. The MacCodrum families lived on the ancient landscape of North Uist and were the clan of the seals. Their ancestry dates back to Norway, and they were originally called Clann Odain, translated to Mac Odrum, and relating to the Norse god Odin. The last MacCodrum was buried on North Uist in the late 18th century. On Conneely land it was forbidden to hurt or kill any seals, and other clans would change their names to Conneely to grant themselves protection. These clans believed they were related to seals.

Our Gaelic ancestors trusted that seals were descended from folk who had lost their lives at sea, and individuals who took their own lives were thought to become a seal, transforming in certain cases into a selchie. Seals are, therefore, our ancestors.

Although there is little written evidence about how these clans revered

seals, if we look closely enough, we can see our Gaelic ancestors seemed to have an animistic relationship with the world around them and communicated with nature at a subtle level. They saw pinnipeds not only as clan totems but as symbolic, sacred, and special. If you feel a connection with the spirit of the seal, let them guide you.

There are stories from the olden days in Scotland about people who were born with webbed hands and feet and were said to be outstanding swimmers. These folk with hereditary selchie paws were from parents where one was human, the other a selchie. Selchie bloodlines still exist today, and one day you may meet an individual on a remote Hebridean island and have a feeling you have met with someone special, Otherworldly, and with magic in their blood.

The ocean is a doorway to the Otherworld where legends of the selchie were birthed. Selchie spirits metaphorically teach about the mystery of transformation and shapeshifting, as in the tale of the selchie maiden where a seal comes ashore, sheds her silky skin, and falls in love with a human. This man is so in love with her that he does not want to risk losing her, so he hides her silky pelt, and she can never return to her true home – the ocean. Over time, the maiden becomes withdrawn, melancholy, and longs to return home to the sea. One of her children happens

to find her silky pelt, which had been hidden under the floorboards in her bedroom. She takes her skin, bids a heart-wrenching farewell to her children, and returns to the aquamarine waters forever more. This is a lesson that one can never trap a selchie spirit, for they will always find their way to freedom.

Selchie magic is the gentle embodiment of coming home to oneself, a reminder that we will always find the freedom we seek, no matter what. And it is a reminder to honour ourselves, and to have boundaries towards anyone who may wish to take away our personal power. For me, the symbology of the seal is returning to myself over and over again, of reclaiming my metaphorical seal skin of freedom, and a reminder that the thick blubber of the seal skin is spiritual protection. They are powerful medicine.

Seals inspire our imagination, their symbolism represents intuition, emotional depth, and joy as they meander through azure seas as confident, courageous, and highly intelligent beings. Seals travel great distances in short spaces of time, and as if they have inbuilt maps under the ocean, they return to the exact same spot they started. Their magic is enchantment! They are connections to our ancestors and messengers of the spirit world.

Seals have zero control over their environments. They rest in one place – land or sea – for short periods of time, as they belong to neither. Seal magic is therefore liminal magic and symbolically teaches us about transitioning through a threshold

with grace – be that through moving house, changing jobs, or the death of a loved one, all of which can often feel unsettling places to dwell. Pinnipeds teach us about tenderly letting go, of having faith in unsettled times, of trusting the in-between space, just as they do.

Little is written about how the Gaels interacted with and revered seals as hallowed beings, so we can only use our imagination and journey back to the past. The seal clans lived close to the ocean and were said to be peaceful communities, as peaceful as the seals themselves, with both living in harmony on the seashore. Pinnipeds have stood the test of time, having evolved over millions of years through skilfully understanding their environment and the oceanic tides.

As one of the oldest semi-aquatic mammals on earth who progressed from a carnivorous ancestor, a walking seal called Puijila – who existed 24 million years ago in the Arctic Circle – later evolved flippers and fins to become the sea dwellers they are today. Powerful in the waters, yet vulnerable on land, they continue to thrive and survive throughout the centuries.

Seals captivate and enchant our hearts with their soulful eyes and sensitive souls. We are forever inspired by the sea-people. We may never know all there is to know about seals, their intrinsic magic, and embodied wisdom, but what we can be sure is that their magic and legends continue to be a source of fascination for always.

Melanie Godfrey is the author of *The Magic of the Seal*

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