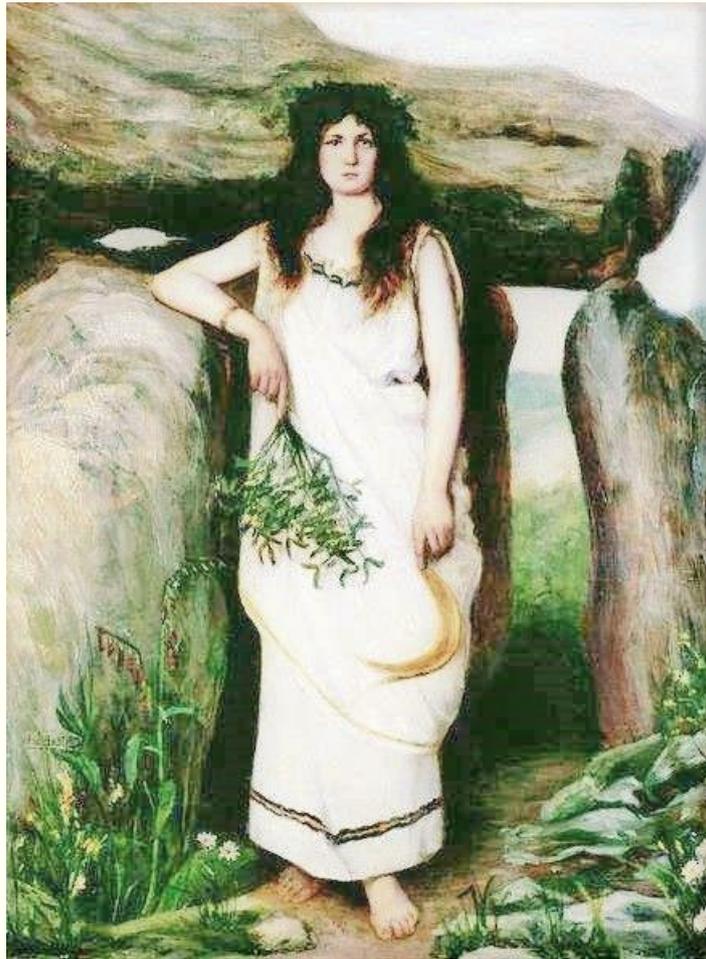


Reincarnation Beliefs in Early Ireland, Britain, and Europe



“The Druidess,” a 19th century painting by Armand Laroche.

Saturday 18th September ~ 3 to 6.15 pm (doors open 2.30)

“Once that you have assimilated all the details ... you will see that for logic, consistency, profound philosophy, divine mercy and equity, this doctrine of Reincarnation has not its equal on earth.”

The Key to Theosophy, p 154 by H. P. Blavatsky

A seminar at the United Lodge of Theosophists, London, UK

Programme

3 pm Introductory talk

3.05 First Talk **The Irish, The Gaels & Their Atlantean Connection**

Second Talk **British Celts and Druids**

3.35 Group study of the handout with Q&A

4.35 20 minute break

4.55 Third Talk **Reincarnation Beliefs of the Druids & the Norsemen**

5.10 Group study of the handout with Q&A

6.00 Closing words, concludes at 6.15 pm (or earlier)

QUOTES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

Introductory talk

Timeline of cultural influences in early Britain

These dates given by modern historians are only approximate, with the exception of the most recent ones. For the Druids, modern history only acknowledges with any definiteness an approximately 500 year period of their existence but just because they were apparently only *first written about* 2,400 years ago this does not mean that they were not in existence for a long time *prior* to that.

Druids (one of the two highest ranking social classes in **Celtic** culture) – currently thought to be approx. 400? BCE to latest, 200 CE. But this date is *unknown* as noted above, it may be many thousands BCE.

Celtic Era – approximately 600 to 55 BCE – including the Britons and Gaels who are believed to have both originally come from mainland Europe. The Gaels were then predominantly in Ireland and Scotland.

Roman (Italian) invasion and occupation of Celtic Britain – approx. 55 BCE to 410 CE.

Anglo-Saxon invasion (the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians from what is now Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands) – 5th and 6th centuries CE (i.e. 400s to 500s) – initial attempts were fought off by the Romans but after the Romans left, their invasion of Britain became possible.

Scandinavian (Norse) invasions – approx. 793 CE to 1066 CE. Scholars debate whether the term “Viking” was applied to all the Norse settlers or only those who raided. Also footnote 10 on page 6.

Anglo-Saxon Era – approx. 410 CE to 1066 CE – The Anglo-Saxons and Vikings lived and worked alongside each other after the Viking “Norsemen” took over large parts of Britain following their initial arrival in the 8th century. They reached a peace agreement with the Anglo-Saxons who continued to

have a King of Wessex, Alfred the Great. There was one period of 29 years (1013-1042) in which a series of Viking kings ruled over the *whole* of England but not of Britain.

Norman (French) invasion and conquest of Anglo-Saxon Britain – In 1042 the Anglo-Saxons regained the monarchy from the Vikings but were ousted from their ruling position in 1066 by William the Conqueror, following the Battle of Hastings. This was the last successful invasion of mainland Britain.

After the First Talk

The Irish, The Gaels and their Atlantean Connection

With regard to their actual course of studies, the main object of all education is, in their opinion, to imbue their scholars with a firm belief in the indestructibility of the human soul, which, according to their belief, merely passes at death from one tenement to another; for by such doctrine alone, they say, which robs death of all its terrors, can the highest form of human courage be developed. Subsidiary to the teachings of this main principle, they hold various lectures and discussions on astronomy, on the extent and geographical distribution of the globe, on the different branches of natural philosophy, and on many problems connected with religion.

Exploring the World of the Druids by Miranda J. Green (based on “De Bello Gallico” by Julius Caesar)

Strabo speaks of an island near to Britannia, “where Ceres and Persephone were worshipped with the same rites as in Samothrace (lib. iv.) and this island was “Sacred Ierna,” where a perpetual fire was lit. The Druids believed in the rebirth of man, not as Lucian explains: “that the same spirit shall animate a new body, not here, but in a different world,” but in a series of re-incarnations in this same world; for as Diodorus says, they declared that the souls of men, after determinate periods, would pass into other bodies.¹ These tenets came to the Fifth Race Aryans from their predecessors of the Fourth Race, the Atlanteans. They had piously preserved the teachings, which told them how their parent Root Race, becoming with every generation more arrogant, owing to the acquisition of super-human powers, had been gradually gliding toward its end. Those records reminded them of the giant intellect of the preceding races as well as of their giant size. One finds the repetition of those records in every age of history, in almost every old fragment which has descended to us from antiquity.”

The Secret Doctrine, p. 2:760-61, 1888, by H. P. Blavatsky

Bryher writes in the foreword to *Ruan*: We know something of Celtic doctrine from early Welsh poetry and Breton folklore. It seems to have had much in common with some forms of Eastern thought. Life was considered as a time of trial: if its initiation was successfully passed, the spirit rested after death until the moment came for another return to earth. This continued until, after many lives, some attained the state of spiritual perfection that admitted them to Gwened, the “white” heaven where they became fully conscious of God. They chose, however, to return as teachers to mankind from time to time until that ultimate and future moment should come when all humanity would attain their state. *Reincarnation, The Phoenix Fire Mystery*, p 200, 1977, by Joseph Head & Sylvia Cranston

¹ There was a time when the whole world, *the totality of mankind, had one religion, and when they were of “one lip.”* “All the religions of the Earth were at first One and emanated from *one* centre,” says Faber very truly. (SD fn; emphasis added)

After the Second Talk

British Celts & Druids

Druids. A sacerdotal caste which flourished in *Britain and Gaul*. They were Initiates who admitted females into their sacred order, and initiated them into the mysteries of their religion. They never entrusted their sacred verses and scriptures to writing, but, like the Brahmans of old, committed them to memory; a feat which, according to the statement of Cæsar took twenty years to accomplish. Like the Parsis they had no images or statues of their gods. The Celtic religion considered it blasphemy to represent any god, even of a minor character, under a human figure. It would have been well if the Greek and Roman Christians had learnt this lesson from the “pagan” Druids. The three chief commandments of their religion were:—“Obedience to divine laws; concern for the welfare of mankind; suffering with fortitude all the evils of life”. *Theosophical Glossary*, 105

Like the Hindus, the Greeks and Romans (we speak of the Initiates), the Chaldees and the Egyptians, the Druids believed in the doctrine of a succession of worlds, as also in that of seven "creations" (of new continents) and transformations of the face of the earth, and in a seven-fold night and day for each earth or globe (See "Esoteric Buddhism"). Wherever the Serpent with the egg is found, there this tenet was surely present. Their Dracontia are a proof of it. This belief was so universal that, if we seek for it in the esotericism of various religions, we shall discover it in all. We shall find it among the Aryan Hindus and Mazdeans, the Greeks, the Latins, and even among the old Jews and early Christians, whose modern stock hardly comprehend now that which they read in their Scriptures. *The Secret Doctrine*, 2:757

In the West we find magic of as high an antiquity as in the East. The Druids of Great Britain practised it in the silent crypts of their deep caves; and Pliny devotes many a chapter to the "wisdom"² of the leaders of the Celts. The Semothees, — the Druids of the Gauls, expounded the physical as well as the spiritual sciences. They taught the secrets of the universe, the harmonious progress of the heavenly bodies, the formation of the earth, and above all — the immortality of the soul.³

Isis Unveiled, 1:56, 1877, by H. P. Blavatsky

We would naturally expect, in view of the geographical position of the country, to find Ireland colonized at an early day by the overflowing population of Atlantis. And in fact, the Irish annals tell us that their Ireland was settled prior to the flood... “We have seen their annals laying claim to an immigration from the direction of Atlantis prior to the deluge... Many analogies have been found to exist between the beliefs and customs of the Druids and the other religions which were drawn from Atlantis... It would appear probable that the religion of the Druids passed from Ireland to England and France. The metempsychosis or transmigration of souls was one of the articles of their belief long before the time of Pythagoras; it had probably been drawn from the storehouse of Atlantis.” (from Ignatius Donnelly, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*.) *Reincarnation, The Phoenix Fire Mystery*, p 201

² Pliny: "Hist. Nat.," xxx. I: Ib., xvi., 14; xxv., 9, etc. (Isis fn)

³ Pomponius ascribes to them the knowledge of the highest sciences. (Isis fn)

After the Third Talk (see also slides)

Reincarnation Beliefs of the Druids and the Norsemen

Druids of Europe

The Hierophants of *Egypt and of Babylon*⁴ styled themselves “Sons of the Serpent-God” and “Sons of the Dragon”. “I am a Serpent, I am a Druid”, said the Druid of the *Celto-Britannic regions*, for the Serpent and the Dragon were both types of Wisdom, Immortality and Rebirth. As the serpent casts its old skin only to reappear in a new one, so does the immortal Ego cast off one personality but to assume another [ie via reincarnation]. *The Theosophical Glossary*, “Drakōn” p. 104, *emphasis added*

Into their [Druidic] sacred groves — natural academies built by the hand of the Invisible Architect — the initiates assembled at the still hour of midnight to learn about what man once was and what he will be.⁵ They needed no artificial illumination, nor life-drawing gas, to light up their temples, for the chaste goddess of night beamed her most silvery rays on their oak-crowned heads; and their white-robed sacred bards knew how to converse with the solitary queen of the starry vault.⁶

On the dead soil of the long by-gone past stand their sacred oaks, now dried up and stripped of their spiritual meaning by the venomous breath of materialism. But for the student of occult learning, their vegetation is still as verdant and luxuriant, and as full of deep and sacred truths, as at that hour when the arch-druid performed his magical cures, and waving the branch of mistletoe, severed with his golden sickle the green bough from its mother oak-tree. *Magic is as old as man*. It is as impossible to name the time when it sprang into existence as to indicate on what day the first man himself was born. Whenever a writer has started with the idea of connecting its first foundation in a country with some historical character, further research has proved his views groundless. Odin, the Scandinavian priest and monarch, was thought by many to have originated the practice of magic some seventy years B.C. But it was easily demonstrated that the mysterious rites of the priestesses called *Voilers*, *Valas*, were greatly anterior to his age.⁷ Some modern authors were bent on proving that Zoroaster was the founder of magic, because he was the founder of the Magian religion. Ammianus Marcellinus, Arnobius, Pliny, and other ancient historians demonstrated conclusively that he was but a reformer of Magic as practiced by the Chaldeans and Egyptians.⁸

The greatest teachers of divinity agree that nearly all ancient books were written symbolically and in a language intelligible only to the initiated. The biographical sketch of Apollonius of Tyana affords an example. As every Kabbalist knows, it embraces the whole of the Hermetic philosophy, being a counterpart in many respects of the traditions left us of King Solomon. It reads like a fairy story, but, as in the case of the latter, sometimes facts and historical events are presented to the world under the colors of a fiction. The journey to India represents allegorically the trials of a neophyte. His long discourses with the Brahmans, their sage advice, and the dialogues with the Corinthian Menippus would, if interpreted, give the esoteric catechism. His visit to the empire of the wise men, and interview with their king Hiarchas, the oracle of Amphiarus, explain symbolically many of the secret dogmas of Hermes. They would disclose, if understood, some of the most important secrets of nature. [eg immortality] *Isis Unveiled*, 1:18-19

⁴ When early Western spirituality is studied in Theosophy, the influence of ancient Egypt is never far away.

⁵ Cæsar, iii., 14. [Isis fn]

⁶ Pliny, xxx. [Isis fn]

⁷ Munter, on the most ancient religion of the North before the time of Odin. *Memoires de la Société* etc.... [Isis fn]

⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, xxvi., 6. [Isis fn]

The mystery veiling the origin and the religion of the Druids, is as great as that of their supposed fanes is to the modern Symbologist, but not to the initiated Occultists. **Their priests were the descendants of the last Atlanteans, and what is known of them is sufficient to allow the inference that they were eastern priests akin to the Chaldeans and Indians, though little more.** It may be inferred that they symbolized their deity as the Hindus do their Vishnu, as the Egyptians did their *Mystery God*, and as the builders of the Ohio Great Serpent mound worshipped theirs — namely under the form of the "mighty Serpent," the emblem of the eternal deity TIME (the Hindu Kala). Pliny called them the "Magi of the Gauls and Britons." But they were more than that. The author of "*Indian Antiquities*" finds much affinity between the Druids and the Brahmins of India. Dr. Borlase points to a close analogy between them and the Magi of Persia;⁹ others will see an identity between them and the Orphic priesthood of Thrace: simply because they were connected, in their esoteric teachings, with the universal Wisdom Religion, and thus presented affinities with the exoteric worship of all.

Like the Hindus, the Greeks and Romans (we speak of the Initiates), the Chaldees and the Egyptians, the Druids believed in the doctrine of a succession of worlds, as also in that of seven "creations" (of new continents) and transformations of the face of the earth, and in a seven-fold night and day for each earth or globe (*See "Esoteric Buddhism"*). Wherever the Serpent with the egg is found, there this tenet was surely present. Their *Dracontia* are a proof of it. This belief was so universal that, if we seek for it in the esotericism of various religions, we shall discover it in all. We shall find it among the Aryan Hindus and Mazdeans, the Greeks, the Latins, and even among the old Jews and early Christians, whose modern stocks hardly comprehend now that which they read in their Scriptures.

The Secret Doctrine, 2:756 (for standing stones in Carnac, Brittany etc on see also *S.D.* 1:341 & 2:379-380)

The Norsemen¹⁰ in Europe

In *Viking Civilization*, Axel Olrik states: "A special form of family relationship was that in which one newly deceased was reborn [reincarnated] in his descendants, and the latter were accordingly given the name of the deceased... 'We shall come again' said the old people in Saetersdal [Norway], when death called them from the ancestral home." [...]

The transition from pagan to Christian belief is well illustrated in [this recorded] story from the Flateyjarbok.¹¹ Prior to the birth, around A.D. 995, of King Olaf the Holy to Queen Asta of Norway, a man named Hrani had an unusual dream in which an early Norse king, Olaf Geirstaoaalfr, appeared and begged him to break into the howe or burial mound of this old monarch and remove his gold ring, sword, and belt. These treasures, Hrani was instructed, were to be taken to Queen Asta and the belt placed around her to ease the child—bearing that had long been delayed. According to the dream the child was to be called Olaf and given the ring and sword. All these directions were carried out, and it was natural for the people to believe that the old king had come back. *Phoenix Fire Mystery*, p 199

[Olaf the Holy went on to become king but after converting to Christianity he denied his soul had ever "been in two bodies." H. R. Ellis, who tells this story, comments: "Here the belief in rebirth seems to be clearly expressed, all the more convincingly because of the Christian king's determined denial of it later on."]

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⁹ "But the Magi of Persia were never Persians — not even Chaldeans. They came from a far-off land, the Orientalists being of opinion that the said land was Media. This may be so, but from what part of Media? To this we receive no answer." SD fn.

¹⁰ "The term "Viking" has come to be applied to all Scandinavians of the period, but... the term *vikingr* applied only to someone who went *í viking*, that is plundering... most Viking-age Scandinavians were not Vikings at all, but peaceful farmers and craftsmen who stayed quietly at home all their lives." *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings*. John Haywood, p. 8). The Norse colonies of the Vikings (called Varangians in the Baltic) produced the Norse-Gaels, the Normans, Rus' people, Faroese and Icelanders. It was the Rus' who gave their name to Russia and Belarus. [Wiki. 'Viking Age'](#)

¹¹ Flateyjarbók is an important medieval Icelandic manuscript.