



Druids

CLASSICAL REFERENCES, CONNECTIONS
AND NEW AGE MOVEMENTS

Introduction

- ♦ Druids as a profession in the early ages,
- ♦ Hierarchy,
- ♦ Position within the society,
- ♦ Duality of perceptions,
- ♦ Mentions in classical sources,
- ♦ Druids in other cultures,
- ♦ Druids and the Neo-Pagan movement.



Druids as a profession

Druids are something that people regardless of their knowledge about culture and history seem to associate them with the Celts (this could also be due to the influence television and pop culture has).

Druids were predominantly leaders of the communities in regards to the religious aspects of life, as well as the judges and advisors to the tribe leaders.

The name possibly comes from the Greek Dru, meaning Oak, a tree that is widely associated with wisdom, supernatural and Druids.

Hierarchy

Druids were an organised group led by an Arch Druid.



Classical sources never mention specific duration the Arch Druid held their office for, but it can be safely assumed, based on what Caesar said, that the office was held for life.



New leader was chosen based on merit, or vote, sometimes, according to Caesar, in a fight.

Position within society

- Druids were held in a high regard.
- Were exempt from war,
- Caesar in The Gallic War says that 'The druids do not go to war, nor pay tribute together with the rest; they have an exemption from military service and a dispensation in all matters.'
- Due to the above he further reasons that 'many embrace this profession', which indicates that it was quite popular, but does not give us the idea of how many druids there were, as he states later on 'some remain in the course of training twenty years.', which may equally mean that it was not easy to become a Druid or that not many had the necessary predisposition to fulfil such a role.

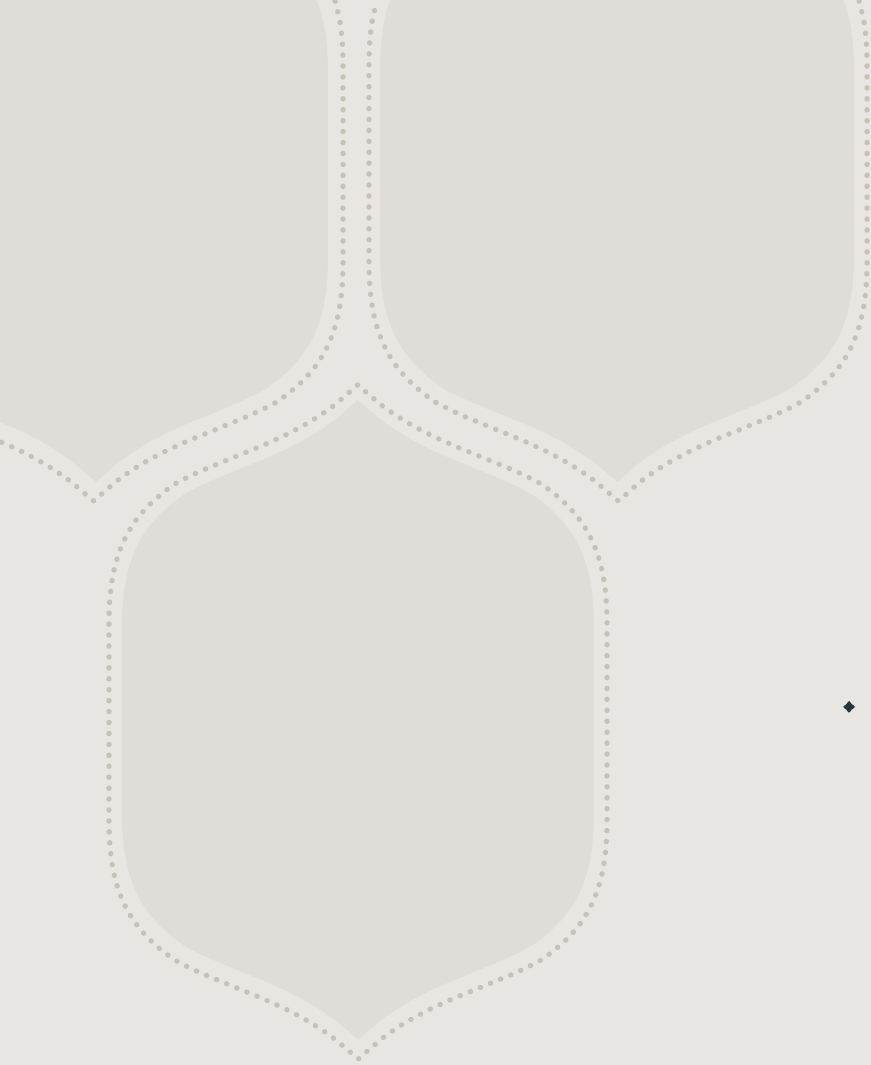
Duality of perceptions

- Druids are presented as wise man, whose judgement was supreme in all matters (Caesar and especially Strabo in *Geography*),
- Philosophers who close the gap between the spirituality and the mundane,
- At the same time, whilst being wise and served justice, organised human sacrifices,
- Fearsome when protecting their lands (Tacitus, *The Annals*) - 'All around, the druids, lifting up their hands to heaven, and pouring forth dreadful imprecations, scared our soldiers by the unfamiliar sight, so that, as if their limbs were paralysed, they stood motionless, and exposed to wounds. '.

Classical Sources

- ♦ Classical sources can not be fully trusted when trying to piece together the picture of a Druid in Early Ages, as all of that, at that point, were created from the outsiders' perspective and oftentimes those who were hostile to Druids.
- ♦ No records made by Druids regarding their positions or culture, Caesar mentions that 'Nor do they regard it lawful to commit these to writing, though in almost all other matters, in their public and private transactions, they use Greek script.', as what Druids taught was relied orally, taking into account notions associated with all of the Esoteric and Occult traditions we can safely assume that this was due to their Oath of Secrecy.





Classical Sources continued...

- The classical authors who wrote about the Druids include, but are not limited to Caesar (including human sacrifice, position in the society, religion, hierarchy, dispensation, origin and connection with the God of Underworld), Tacitus (including Druidic defence), Strabo (sacrifice, position within society, connection to Bards and [O]Vates), Diodorus. Strabo and Caesar describe Druids at length.

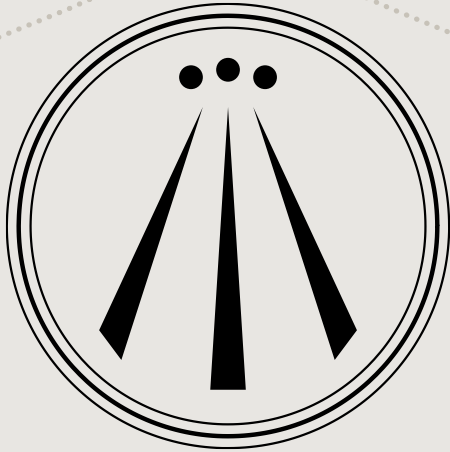
Druids in other cultures

- ♦ There is no mention that Druids were strictly connected with Celtic Culture – that is with the 'Continental Celts',
- ♦ Caesar mentions connection to Britain and designates it as the source of culture and training place, which differs slightly to the standard practice of a Master and Apprentice prevalent in most cultures in regards to any craft and quite common these days when it comes to Esoteric religions.
- ♦ Professor Aldhouse-Green in *The Magician's House* describes signs of druidic practice in the Roman Empire, indicating that the practice reached further than just the Celtic Tribes, it may also suggest that the above suggestion of the tradition being passed from Master to Apprentice is quite adequate.

Druids in other cultures continued...

- ♦ Caesar mentions that the Druids originate from the God of Underworld – Dis Pater, which if to be taken into account together with evidence of migration of the Celtic Tribes through Europe, we can assume that there is an existing connection between the Druids and Wolochs (or Wolchws) or Slavic tradition, as both of these fulfilled a role of a Mage, or Shaman within their respective cultures, and both are strongly associated with the God of Underworld, in case of Wolochs it would be the slavis Wales, incidentally the name He shares with one of the areas where Celtic-speaking people settled down in.

Druids and the Neo-Pagan movement



- Druids rose in popularity during the 20th century, with many Druidic Orders being organised (including OBOD in the UK),
- Druids are often connected with the New Age religions such as Wicca,
- In all of the cases of New Age association a Druid is connected with the Spiritual World, whether through the practice of Magic (or Magick as some religions prefer to distinguish their acts from the stage magicians) or a philosophy of being one with Nature.
- Druids are intricately connected with Nature, regardless of the form they take. This may come from the association with the Oak Tree.

The Awen – a symbol widely associated with Neo-Druidic movement, symbolises Three Rays of Druidry – The Ray of Nature, Knowledge and Devotion. Each one representing a different aspect of druidry.

Druids and the Neo- Pagan movement continued...

- ♦ The OBOD describes the practice of Druidry these days as 'a spiritual way and practice that speaks to three of our greatest yearnings: to be fully creative in our lives, to commune deeply with the world of Nature, and to gain access to a source of profound wisdom. '
- ♦ Penny Billington in her book *The Path of Druidry* states that 'Being a Druid is not a static position to achieve, but a mindset, a way of looking at and relating to life from a wider perspective than most people do and with different emphasis.' This further refers to a popular saying among pagans these days – That if you ask 10 pagans about something (usually Magic) you will get 15 different answers. The same principle applies to the practice of Druidry these days.
- ♦ Pete Jennings in *Pagan Paths* states that 'Druids are unusual among Pagans in that they are equally concerned with the Sun, Earth and Moon.', whilst this may not be an entirely appropriate statement, it does carry the spirit of Neo-Druidry as that which promotes being in tune with the Nature as it is.

Conclusions

The position of a Druid was very versatile, but held in high regards,

Multiple sources agree on Druids being philosophical leaders as well as the bridges between the divine and mundane,

Majority of the sources connect the Druids with human sacrifices,

The function of the Druid these days is different to what it was before, yet the core (according to the practitioners) remains the same – connection with the Otherworld and safeguarding of Nature.

Reading list

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