

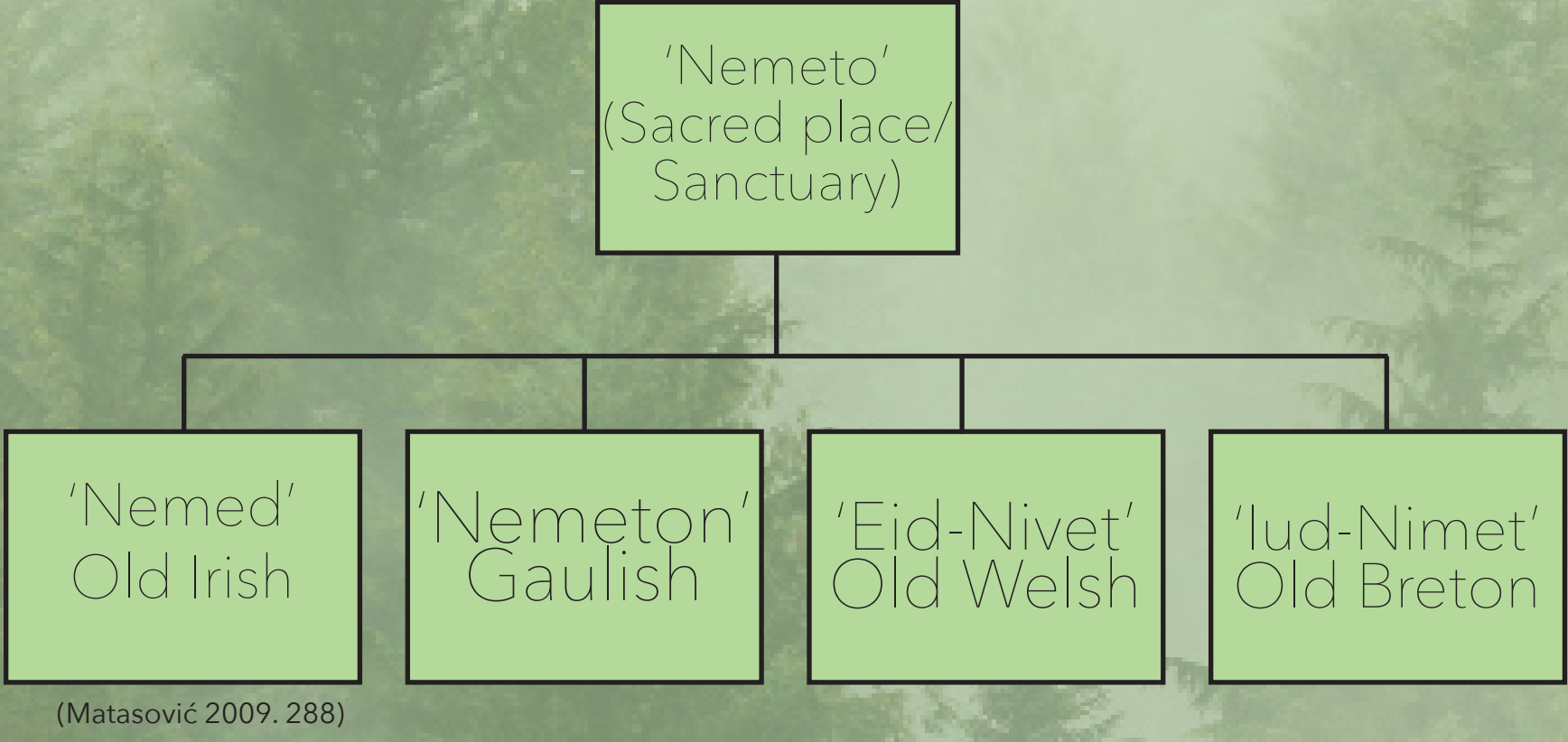
Nemetona: Goddess Of The Sacred Grove or Goddess of War?

Who is Nemetona?

Nemetona is represented by modern scholars as either a Celtic or Romano -Celtic goddess of sacred sites and as a goddess of war (Green 1992, 160). However, her true function as a goddess is not truly known and is a point of controversy. Evidence can be found in both ancient inscriptions and Irish mythology for her being linked to war and battle however the relevance and accuracy of this evidence is not always considered useful (Beck 2009, 251). Modern scholars can use a variety of evidence to try and divine the meaning Nemetona had to the indigenous Celts, including the etymology of her name, analysis of inscriptions and who she is represented alongside as well as her later incarnation in Irish Mythology as Nemhain.

Etymology of Nemetona

The etymological roots of Nemetona's name indicates that she is at the least associated with sacred sites, particularly groves (Green 1996, 474). The root word 'nemeto' is defined as meaning 'sacred place' or 'sanctuary'. It can be found in Old Irish, Old Welsh and Old Breton where variants mean the same thing (Matasović 2009, 288). The Gaulish word 'nemeton', from which Nemetona is believed to get her name, by modern scholars (Green 1996. 474; Kilpatrick 2013)., means 'sacred grove'; Nemetona herself is thus referred to as "goddess of the sacred grove" (Green 1996. 474). It is likely that the goddess was named after the sacred sites she represented. It is unclear if the Gallic root word came before the other languages or if this was the influence of Nemetona's popularity in the British Isles and which became adapted into native languages



There are some questioned Etymological links to the middle Welsh word 'Nyfed' which means strength. (Matasović 2009. 288) Could this be a link to her being linked to the War Goddess Nemhain in Irish myth. There are also links to the word 'nemos' meaning heaven or sky (Matasović 2009. 288) – unusual for Nemetona as she is normally viewed as a chthonic Goddess (Green 1992) 'Nanto' meaning stream or valley (Matasović 2009. 283)– which is closer to the theme of nature associated with Nemetona, however it's more distant etymologically.



(Osnabrügge, 2018 AE 2007, 1044.)

There is very little ancient etymological evidence of Nemetona being a war Goddess, aside from a recent discovery at Eisenberg where a tablet refers to her as "Victoria Nemetona" (Osnabrügge, 2018 HD065905). Victoria being used here as either an epithet or the Roman goddess of victory. This is the only plaque found that gives Nemetona this name and may well be an example of creolization, where a traditional Celtic goddess becomes intertwined with traditional Roman goddess, creating a new deity. (Webster 2001. 209)

Inscriptions



Epigraphik-Datenbank, 2018, EDCS-11000125, Altrip Ripa

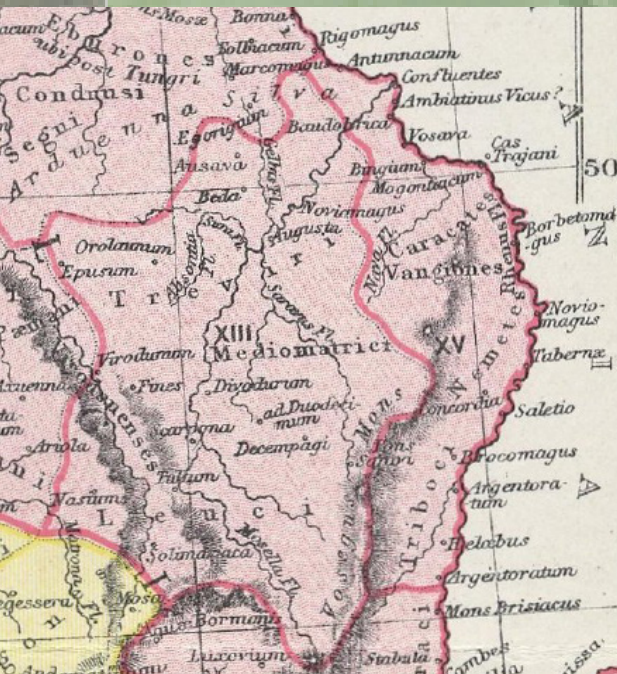
evidence for Nemetona having "martial roots" (Green 1992, 160) however evidence of this stance is based mainly on her weak etymological links to Irish mythology.

Mars Loucetius was a highly influential god in the Romano Celtic world, even gaining his own temple, at Winternheimer Berg, where a monumental fountain was erected in his honour. His name translates to "Light", "Shining one" or "Brilliant one" (Sjoestedt 1994. 17). Paired with Nemetona in this context it would have been unlikely that he was a war god. More likely he was the creolized version of a indigenous Celtic God, most likely Lug, due to the similarities in the etymological meanings. (Sjoestedt 1994. 17). Nemetona is linked also to Mars Rigonemetis, as their names have a similar root meaning (Green 1996. 144). However the connection appears to end here as the only surviving evidence of Rigonemetis is on a Roman cult inscription found in Nettleham, where he invoked alone (RIB 3 3180).

Romano-Celtic inscriptions often featured a male Roman god alongside a Female Celtic goddess. Such pairings were common in the Romano-Celtic world and the female could sometimes be invoked alone. (Green 1996, 474). One inscription survives that honours Nemetona alone. This comes from Winternheimer Berg, found in 1884 (CIL 13, 07253.). The Inscription itself is was dedicated by Aulus Didius Gallus Fabricius Veiento, a governor of Britain and Moesia during the Rules of Claudius and Nero and even a Praetor until exiled. (Luckhaupt 2015) This plaque shows the importance of a Celtic deity being honoured by a non-indigenous, elite, Roman official as it "emphasizes the super-regional importance and reputation of the cult" (Luckhaupt 2015). With Votive offerings of lances and weapons being found. (Luckhaupt 2015). here there may be evidence for her being used to represent a deity involving war, but this would be an educated guess at best.



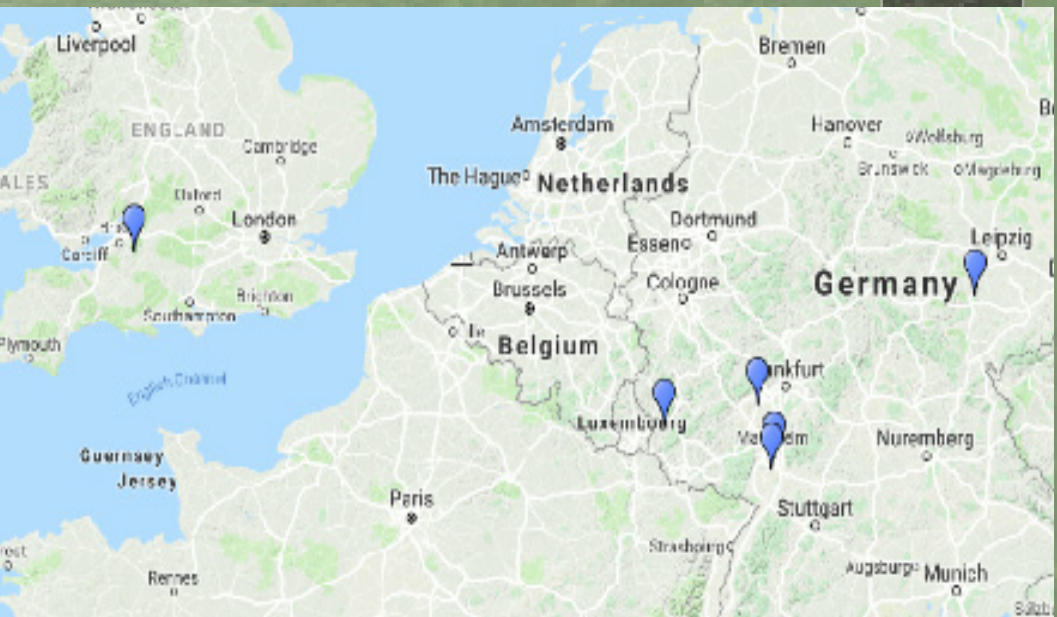
GDKE, Landesmuseum Mainz, Ursula Rudischer CIL 13, 07253.



Map of the Nemetes, Samuel Butler, 1907

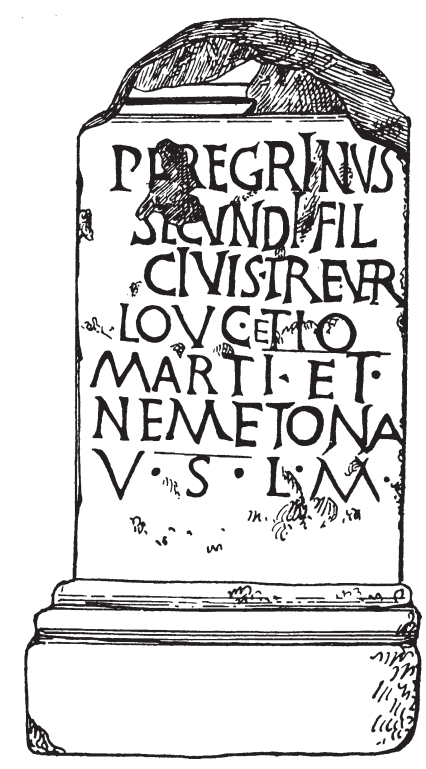
One Inscription does occur in Bath, as a dedication to Loucetios and Nemetona, but still this is created by a citizen of the Treveri.

Map of Nemetona Inscription sites



Evidence as a war goddess in Irish Mythology.

Modern scholars (Sjoestedt 1994, 18; Squire 1912, 275) have frequently noted Nemetona's links to war and battle. Sjoestedt describes how Nemetona is "definitely a war goddess", not a tutelary goddess (Sjoestedt 1994, 18). The main argument



RIB 140, inscription at Bath

for this is the belief that Nemetona and Mars Loucetius are direct parallels to the Irish the gods Nemhain goddess of frenzy and Net God of war., Although there is initial similarities in the etymology of Nemetona and Nemhain, stemming from the same root word, their names do not share a similar meaning. The reason so many modern sources are willing to believe Nemetona evolves into Nemhain is because the inscription at Bath creates a geographical link between the two goddesses (MacCulloch 1992, 41). However, the inscription itself has a Germanic origin, not British. There is also no inscriptions of Nemetona found on mainland Ireland, which would be expected if her myth had survived there. The Link to Net is also weak as he is no real comparison to Ares or Mars as he is merely titled the god of war, and shares not etymological link with Loucetius (Sjoestedt 1994, 32).



Temple of Sulis Minerva Bath

The idea of Nemetona as a war goddess is based on weak etymology; no archaeology, and old ideas. Squire, who describes Nemetona as a war goddess (Squire 1912, 275) has ideas that are now 100 years old. More recent scholars do not address the discrepancies in older works and fail to find new ways of explaining Nemetona's function in a Romano-Celtic society. Stewart even compares Nemed, the Leader of the third invasion in the book of Invasions, to the root word Nemeton (Stewart 1990, 128). This could be an explanation as to why there are etymological similarities, due to creolization of language and the indigenous adaptation of another culture into their own. However saying this is a direct survival of Nemetona would be incorrect as there is no evidence of her surviving in this area.

Goddess of the Grove or Goddess of war?

It is hard to know for certain what role exactly Nemetona had to her followers. It is common for scholars to refer to her as Celtic (Green 1992, 160), but looking at archaeological evidence, it becomes clear that Nemetona, as we know her does not exist until after the Roman invasion. It is more likely then that Nemetona is a creolized version of a Celtic goddess, who became mixed with Roman ideas and given a Celtic name related to her purpose. Nemetona was more likely a tutelary goddess protecting not only groves and holy sites, but settlements as-well. This may be why versions of her name appear all across the Roman empire like Augustonemeton and Nemausus. Her associations with war come much later in Irish myth and are highly flawed

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- Rebecca Calder 2018