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What is philosophy?

Pentagram

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A seeking human being is continuously hovering between hope and fear, between certainty and intense doubt, between firm denial and positive endorsing. We are inclined to think that this situation keeps the consciousness sharp and alert, critical and inquisitive. We can also imagine that a seeker never begins anything because of this state of consciousness. After all, we do not know where any beginning development will end; things may turn out quite unexpectedly.

What should a human being's point of departure be, if he, on his way to gaining inner consciousness, wants to achieve certain results? Should he switch off his critical mind? Do his life's happiness and the salvation of his soul depend on hazarding to follow a teacher, an organisation or a faith, or some movement?

Is it possible for the seeking element in this human being to become an important, acquired property, which stays with the seeker during his entire path? Is it a power that turns from 'seeking' into pure 'intuition' and ensures that the human being says 'yes' or, at critical moments, knows inwardly not to continue on the chosen path?

Philosophers of all times have occupied themselves with these matters. In their quest for the truth, they go deeply into the certainties people believe they possess. They also speak about the powers that control the human being and about the small margin between his *struggle for life* and the longing of the soul. They point out the pitfalls of our (lower) consciousness, the many limitations imposed by nature, but also the liberating possibilities of the soul, because we are often seeking with our head, but find with our heart.

This is the first of two issues of the Pentagram, in which your attention is drawn to some of these thinkers or philosophical systems. Many of them found the truth. In this process, the seeking element became a property of the heart, which unfailingly separates what is true from what is false and what is genuine from what is fake.

The wisdom of the druids and bards



The ancient Celtic peoples, led and taught by the druids, possessed a culture, society and consciousness that was totally different from ours. In her book The Flaming Door, Eleanor C. Merry described in general terms the conditions on being able to approach their way of thinking:

Derreenatagart
(Derrintagart).
Rainbow above a
stone circle near
Castletownbere
on the Veara
Peninsula, Kerry
County, South-
west Ireland. The
Irish name means
'(Place of the) oak
of the priest'. ©
Pentagram.

If we neither possessed modern science, logic, our arrogant opinions or the bewilderment about death, and had no other conscience than the powerful, visible results of our deeds; if sleeping were like an awakening; if our personal memory only came to us through the repeated and solemn expression of the handwriting of the stars; if "history" were like reading in the blood of our forebears that streams through our veins; if our head felt like a model of the whole earth that we carry on

our shoulders in the rhythmic balance of our movements; if our heart were an image of the sun and our lungs the wings of the moon that protect it... yes, then the whole universe would be a powerful gesture of the spirit; then we would move around in the dreams and visions of the gods, and the earth would be our table into which we would carve, in stone and wood, our everlasting deeds."

But this is only an approximation. The visions that the bards and druids expe-



rienced during their worship are not easily accessible to us. In this time, however, in which everything is documented, we are able to clearly

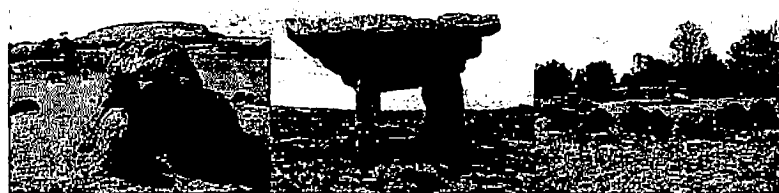
place the universal principles of the wisdom of their mysteries before us.

The wisdom of the ancient druidic mysteries partly symbolised achieving individual independence and becoming conscious of matter in the material, external field of life. This development was the central issue in the centuries before Christ, while in our time, dematerialisation and detaching from the links to the external world are emphasised.

Confronted with each other, we re-

cognise a development that makes the human being conscious of the material world in which he lives, and a development that tries to pull him out of it. The first one is considered to be the ancient, descending or incarnating development, guided by the druidic mysteries. The second one is the modern impulse to detach from this same matter again. It is one aspect of the universal principle of flowing out and returning, of exhaling what is eternal and returning to the source, which applies to all planes of life.

According to sources that were not recorded until the beginning of the Christian era, but are considered reliable by most experts, the Druids experienced the cosmic Christ in a clairvoyant and vi-



Top, left page: Celtic gods were often represented in groups of three, triads, just as their teachings were also passed on in triads. Because of the bread and the linen in their lap, this relief of the mother goddess in three figures symbolises the abundance of life. © Ulster Museum.

Above, right and left: Dolmen and stone circle in the megalithic complex of Carrowmore, Sligo County, Ireland.

Above, centre: Poul-nabrone Dolmen at The Burren, Clare County, Western Ireland. This is a so-called *portal tomb*, and the best-known dolmen of Ireland. According to the ancient Irish legend *The running away of Diarmuid and Grainne* ('Grain goddess'), this dolmen was their sleeping-place during their flight from the mythical hero Finn Mac Cool. © Pentagram.

sionary way. They referred to him as 'the Lord of the Elements.' All who have studied the history of the Celts and their spiritual teachers agree about one point: the Roman sources of our knowledge of the Celts were often prejudiced, because it was the history of the victors. Victors are always right – until authentic sources surface that qualify their story. They usually tell an entirely different story, certainly concerning the Celts.

One of these sources is *Bardass*, a manuscript that was once recorded from the mouth of Welsh bards. Like all ancient sources of wisdom, this was only passed on orally for centuries. Not until the first centuries AD, there were bards who, together with monks, put these traditions in writing. The copies we nowadays possess are adaptations of those first written versions. In some places, the content was Christianised, but this does not detract from the 'primordial wisdom' that we can sense in it.

Bardass relates the story of Menw or Manu as 'the Son of the three cries'. He had a vision of the creative word, in which he heard the name of God: 'When God spoke His name, the light and the life originated with the word, because before there was no life except for God himself. His name was spoken, and by speaking it, the light and the power of life were created as well as the human being and every other living thing. And Menw beheld the emanation, the form and appearance of the light in the three pillars and its musical expression in the rays of the light, because

hearing and seeing were one, united in one form and sound. And united with these three was the power which was God the Father. And because each of them was united into one, Menw understood that any voice, any hearing and life and being, any vision and seeing was one with God, even the tiniest creature is none other than God.'

Two things strike us in this text: the unity that flows out into a number of qualities. This is encountered in many traditions of wisdom: it is also called the emanation, the flowing out of all beings, all forms and phenomena from *one* source. In the Welsh tradition, perception and hearing appeared simultaneously, followed by their use in letters and symbols; then came the understanding of sound and speech, and the music of song and poetry. In brief, it was an ever-continuing differentiation without loss of unity. No break occurs anywhere in creation, 'even the tiniest creature is none other than God.'

The second central issue is the image of the three pillars. Upon hearing the primordial sound, Menw heard three tones and he saw three letters. He also beheld the symbols that belonged to it: 'The symbol O was given to the first pillar, the symbol I to the second or middle pillar, and the symbol W belongs to the third pillar. This forms the word OIW.³ This means: through this word, God reveals his creation: life, power, eternity, universality. It was at the same time the manifesta-

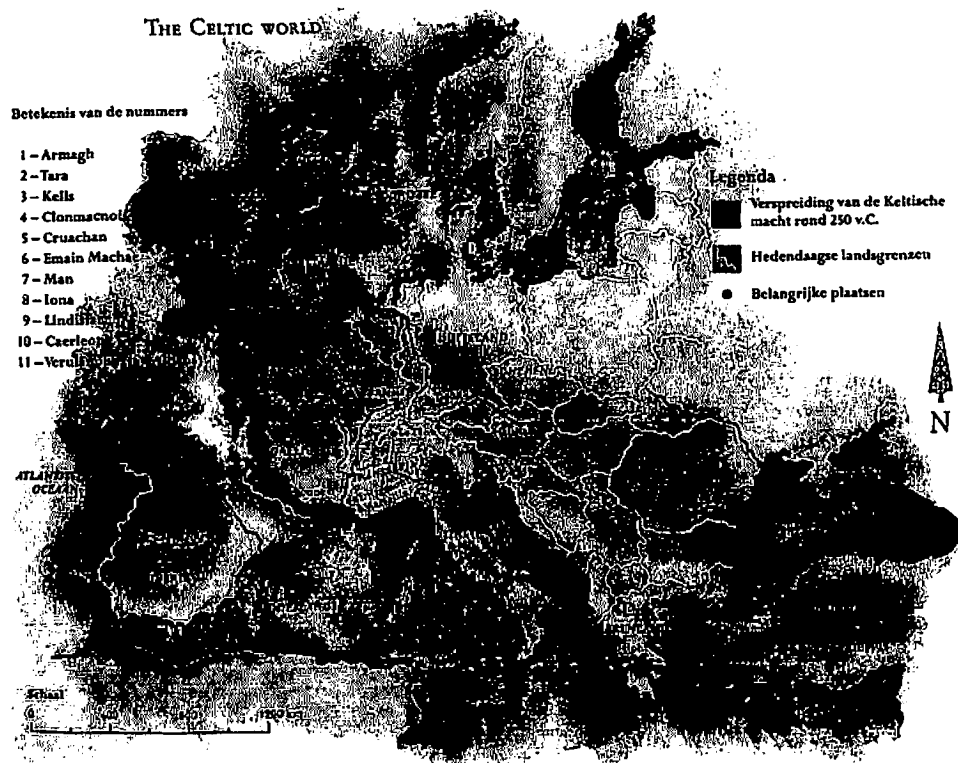
THE CELTIC WORLD

Betekenis van de nummers

- 1 - Armagh
- 2 - Tara
- 3 - Kells
- 4 - Clonmacnoise
- 5 - Cruachan
- 6 - Emain Macha
- 7 - Man
- 8 - Iona
- 9 - Lindisfarne
- 10 - Caerleon
- 11 - Verulamium

Legenda

- Verspreiding van de Keltische macht rond 250 v.C.
- ▨ Hedendaagse landsgrenzen
- Belangrijke plaatsen





tion of his love, because at that moment the whole universe was visited like a flash of lightning. It was a simultaneous sounding and pulsing with the spoken name of God, in one conception of love."

In this splendid primordial image, the pillars stand, which also appears as symbols in other traditions. Just think, for example, of the pillars of power and wisdom from the Jewish tradition, the

two pillars of the entrance of the Temple. In the Celtic tradition, the two pillars were called 'Art' and 'Knowledge'. They contained the entire wisdom of the ancient world. The wisdom was also carved on two pillars by Hermes, the great sage of antiquity. In the Celtic pillar, the pillars had a middle pillar of love. Yet, the whole structure is supported by the two pillars of Art and Knowledge, and

light, art and knowledge, power and wisdom etcetera, love arises in the middle and ignites everything in great harmony unto a great fusion of light. This can also be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition: Christ, as the manifestation of this power of love, does not come to abolish the (Jewish) law, but to fulfil it, as he explains. Wisdom and power are united in love.

"The realisation of the inherent truth in this ancient story is the heart and the essence of any study of Celtic mythology – or rather of all secrets of life. There is a triad everywhere. The human being, as the third one, can associate in any relationship to the other two."

The human task is to combine the arts, science and religion within himself. When he realises this unity, it will radiate in society and in culture. That it concerns more than just the reconciliation between the two extremes of the arts and science, is shown by another source from Celtic mythology. This refers to the story of 'Annwn's Take,' (also called 'The Depth'). This story is attributed to the bard Taliesin, whose name means 'radiant brow', symbolising an enlightened person. The poem deals with a journey in a ship through seven enclosed spaces, circles, or sanctuaries (called 'Caers' in the text). The ship's crew consists of twelve people, with the thirteenth one in the middle: Arthur. This isn't just the image of the legendary Round Table, but also and above all a representation of the zodiac with the sun in its centre. In the poem, the seven planetary spheres are 'visited' by the twelve signs of the zodiac.

The path of the bards and druids pur-

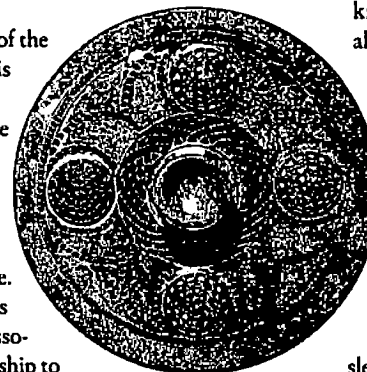
portedly had three stages: from the fixed constellations through the planetary spheres to the world of the elements. A true bard could say, just like Taliesin, the 'Radiant One', that he was thrice-born: 'Three times I was born. I know how to contemplate. It is sad that people do not seek all knowledge of the world that is

gathered in my bosom. For I know all that ever was and all that will be.' Every night, while asleep, a druid – someone who had accomplished a threefold initiation – consciously travelled through the three spheres (elements, planets and stars) and before awakening, in reverse order. To him, sleeping was, therefore, an awakening and death did not

frighten him.

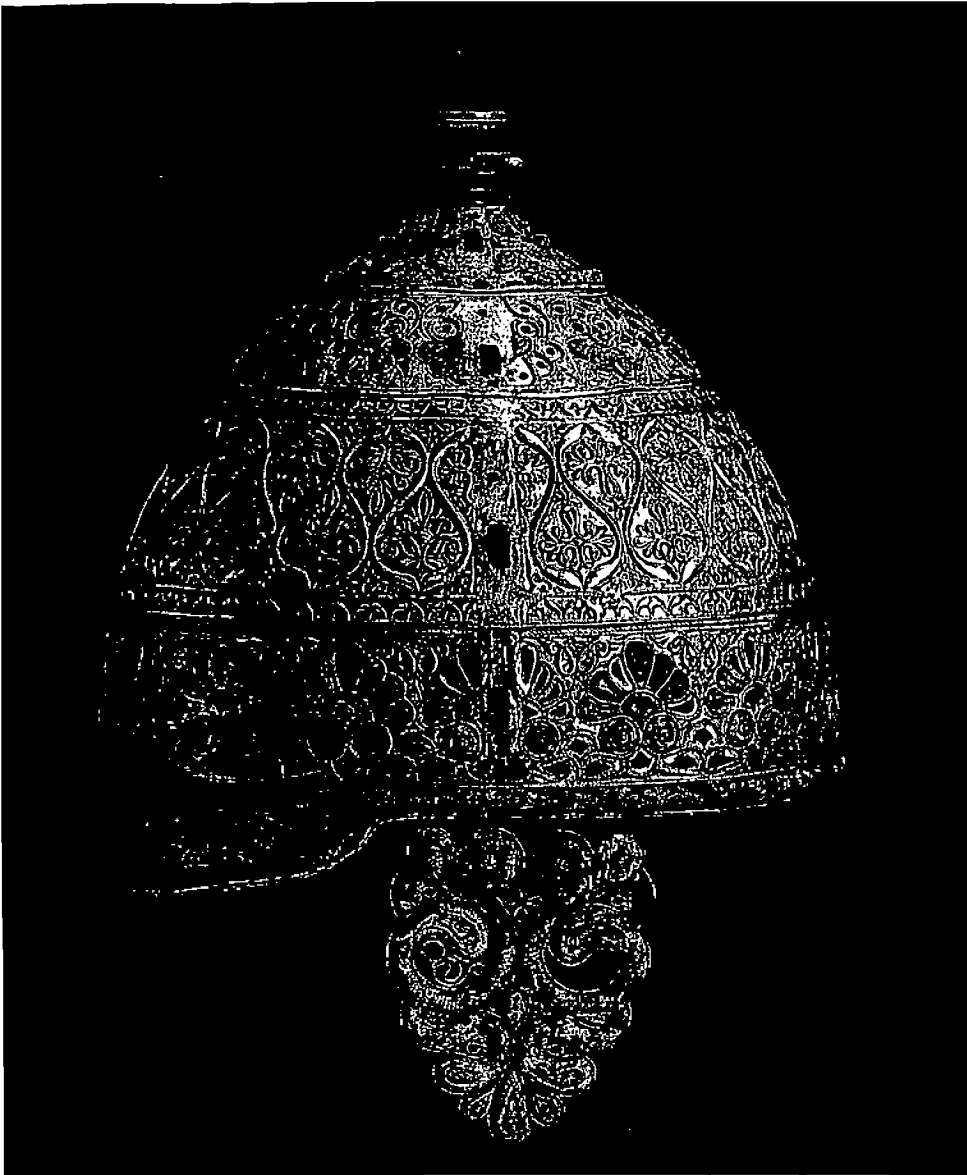
The druid or bard who was initiated in the mysteries and had become a seer, felt himself to be a miniature model of the universe. From great heights, he looked down at the great 'cosmic instrument' in its twelvefold and sevenfold order. From this also emerged, for the druids in particular, the knowledge of all the realms lying below it. Thus he became acquainted with the secrets of, for example, earthly magnetism, but also with the reflection of influences emanating from the constellations and planets in the human body and in the planetary world. On this basis, he developed a form of medicine. The bard heard the melodies and the harmonies of the higher worlds. But it was not his lower personality that had this heavenly music at his disposal, but his self. The name of this self, which was united with divinity, was IAU, also called 'the Younger'.

This is also universal. We find a similar name in the *Stanzas of Dzyan* (that were



Left: Gaul fighter on an armour belt from Slovenia; 4th century BC.

Above: We know many examples of richly-worked shields, like this bronze, open-work shield from the Chariot tomb at Cuperly, Marne, France.

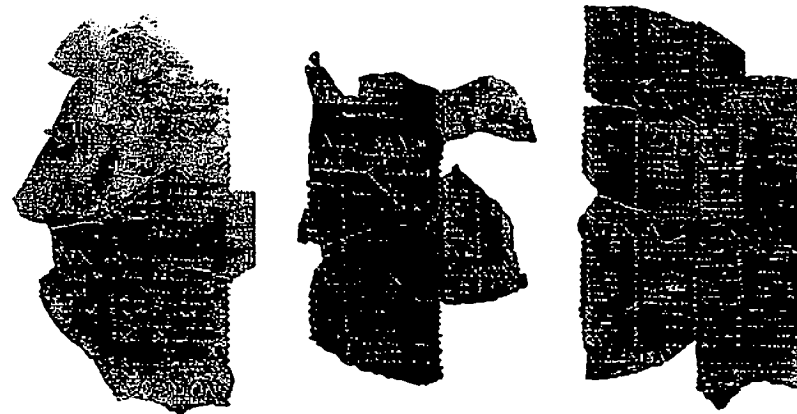


Parade helmet of bronze and iron, gold and coral from Agris (Charente), approx. 400 BC. Musée de la Société Archéologique et Historique de la Charente, Angoulême, France.

later translated for the West by H P Blavatsky): 'Behold, oh Lanoo, the radiant child of the two, the unparalleled refugent glory, bright space, son of dark space, which emerges from the depths of the great dark waters! It is Oeaoohoo the younger. He shines forth as the son. He is the blazing divine dragon of wisdom.'

In our time, the perspective has turned

around. We have now reached the nadir of materialism and crystallisation, and the way back or upward leads via the four elements or building stones (interpreted allegorically) through the planetary spheres to the world of the fixed stars, to the zodiac. If this path of initiation is walked, the ancient glory of the microcosmic human being is restored.



Fragments of a Celtic calendar from Coligny (Ain), 2nd century BC. The Celts had a five-year cycle of 62 months, in a complex system based on the rhythms of the sun and the moon, and show a refined understanding of the stars and their movements.

To the druid or bard, the journey to *Annwn's Take* led into the depths. Before he finally descended into 'Gwair's jail', his body, everything had to be 'in good order', that is, in accordance with the cosmic laws. The just person, we can find in the text that reads like the report of an initiation, 'bears the heavy, blue chain'. He is subjected to the inevitable impurities and the heaviness of physical life (the blood). He also enters the world, referred to as *Vediwid*. He has to be well prepared for his descent. It is the experience of stepping outside himself for the first time in order 'to become acquainted with the world,' of uniting with the world by experiencing its spiritual reality and not the illusion of its physical nature. Otherwise, the 'brightly burning sword' will be lifted against him, and he will not be able to cross the threshold of spiritual consciousness.

Charged with the 'take', the treasure of experience, Taliesin finally returns to the higher worlds, but with another name: Elphin, the 'Son of Man'. In him lives Taliesin, the immortal spirit, the microcosm. Elphin may be temporarily separated from Taliesin, but that is only appearances. He is ensnared and imprisoned in his earthly destiny. Taliesin releases him from it, and Elphin remem-

bers his heavenly destiny again. He turns to the inner spiritual being again. Finally, Taliesin sings before Elphin's wife, his soul. He enters the hall where he will sing, and all twenty-four bards are silenced by the genius that radiates through his recitation. In the number twenty-four, we recognise a universal symbol again. In the Christian and gnostic tradition, they are called the 'Twenty-four Elders'. They represent the two times twelve signs of the zodiac: the first time during the descent – the old lights – and the second time during the ascent, the 'the way of the stars' – the



A Gaul god carries a wild boar on his chest and has an extra eye on the side of his trunk. The wild boar was the symbol of the fighter/king, the eye refers to knowledge of the two worlds. © RMN/Man.

new lights on the inner firmament.

And then the pre-Christian aspect miraculously merges with the Christian aspect in his song:

*'John the Prophet
I was called by Merddin (Merlin),
ultimately every king
will call me Taliesin.*

*I was with my Lord
in the highest spheres,
when Lucifer
fell into the depths of hell.*

*I carried the banner for Alexander;
I know the names of the stars
from north to south.*

*I was on the cross of the horse
of Elijah and Enoch.*

*I hung on the tall cross
of the merciful son of God.*

*I was in Canaan
when Absalom fell;
I was in the hall of Don
before Gwydion was born
(Mercury or Hermes).*

*I was in heaven
with Mary Magdalene.*

*I received my inspiration
from the Cauldron of Ceridwen.'*

Every human being is a son of man, Elphin. In every human being, Taliesin is waiting to liberate him. Then Elphin arises from the earthly personality and becomes the son of God again, who he always was but who was forgotten. He regains his initiation name: Taliesin. Elphin-Taliesin represents the whole of humanity. It is splendidly expressed in the lines of the poem 'Royal Cadeir':

*'At the end of our efforts
the tongues will become extinct.
The fiery soul
will travel through the clouds
with the children of the Seraphim.
Your people will ascend
towards Elphin's redemption.'*

REFERENCES:

- 1 Translated from the Dutch text of: Eleanor C. Merry: *The Flaming Door. The Mission of the Celtic Folk-Soul*. New Knowledge Books, East Grinstead, UK, 1936. Reprinted in 1962, 1983 and 1984 (Harper Collins, London).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 The W is equal to the U and is pronounced as U in Welsh, so OIU.
- 4 Translated from the Dutch text of: Eleanor C. Merry: *The Flaming Door. The Mission of the Celtic Folk-Soul*. New Knowledge Books, East Grinstead, UK, 1936. Reprinted in 1962, 1983 and 1984 (Harper Collins, London).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 H P Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*. Stanza III, verse 7. Theosophical University Press Online Edition.

The druids, an introduction

In the various Celtic communities, the druids played a decisive part. There is a world of difference between the romantic fantasy images and the documented reports that were written by historians and chroniclers from classical antiquity. Fiction tells about a majestic, grey-haired old man with a wavy beard and hair, who is surrounded by an otherworldly light in the oak woods, collecting mistletoe; who utters prophecies and brings sacrifices, including human ones, on the stone altars called dolmen. Reality was quite different: possibly more sober but just as fascinating.



The word druid is not related to the word oak. For centuries, this was assumed groundlessly. This is because Pliny the Elder spoke in his *Naturalis Historia* XVI, 24 about the bards' devotion to mistletoe and where it grows. 'They perform no sacred rites without oak leaves; so that the very name of Druids may be regarded as a Greek appellation.' Thus it was concluded that the word derived from the Greek word drus (oak), and this conclusion is still supported by some people to this day. But it is quite different. In Nordic mythology, there is a connection between 'tree' and 'knowledge'. Pliny speaks about trees and not about oaks. It may be assumed that druid means 'man of the trees' or 'knowledgeable one', derived from the Indo-European word 'wid' which means wisdom.

Bards worked in communities that have been classified as Celtic. This

We can trace the Celts in England and Wales (Cymru) as Cymmerians, in Ireland as Gaels, in Scotland as Gaels and Picts and in France (Gaul) as Gauls. According to tradition, these people colonized 'a virginal land' in ancient times. Druidism was organised around 1800 BC under the leadership of Hu Gadarn (Stonehenge). He was a contemporary of Abraham and the patriarch of his people. The Celts did not commit anything to writing, not even religious matters, nor did they ever build altars in which metal or nails were used. They formed the biblical 'stone kingdom'. We may perceive an impression of their wanderings by following the pyramid-shaped stone heaps – the cairns – from the Middle East to Britain: from their original land beyond the river Euphrates (about 3000 years BC) to their new dwelling places on the island and in Gaul around the beginning of our era.

According to tradition, the first stone heap was erected by Jacob as a token or a contract between Laban and himself. 'So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his kinsmen: "Gather stones," and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap. Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha; but Jacob called it Galeed. Laban said: "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore it got the name Galeed.' (Gen.31:45-48)

Erecting a 'stone heap of the witness' became a religious tradition of the Hebrews and the Celts. It testified to their unshakeable belief in the covenant between them and the one invisible God.

Page 11: Sandstone Etruscan stele from Bologna. The bottom image shows the struggle between an Etruscan knight and a Gaul warrior.

Right: Martin Linnartz. Mistletoe in an oak. Pencil drawing, 1981.

group of peoples lived in areas stretching from Hungary to the British Isles, from the plain of the Po to the Rhine estuary and from far in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor to North Africa, Spain and France.

In *De Bello Gallico VI, 13/14*, Caesar says of them: '... the druids preserve the religion, perform sacrifices and explain the teachings. Many young men are educated by them, and they are revered as their judgment is decisive in almost any conflict. They administer justice and make laws, they solve disputes concerning inheritances or borders, and they determine penalties or rewards. If an individual or a tribe does not obey, they exclude those involved from practicing religious duties. Obviously, this is the ultimate penalty for the Gauls... They do not usually partake in wars and do not have to bear weapons...'

The term druid covered much, as there were the most diverging talents and powers in which a druid was specialised. They were judges, priests, poets, literary artists and so on. The ancient Greek and Latin authors called them sometimes 'philosophes' and at other times 'magician', 'prophet', 'king' and 'poet'. Diodorus of Sicily concludes that no sacrificial ritual is performed without the presence of a druid



'specialised in philosophy'. The authors of antiquity always spoke admiringly about the druids and never considered them primitive wizards. Diviciacus says in his *De divinatione, I, 40* 'He (the druid) claimed to know the laws of nature, which the Greeks have called physiology, and he possessed the power to predict the future by observing and explaining the signs.'

Hippolytus says in his work *Philosophumena, I, 25* that the druids have made a thorough study of the teachings of Pythagoras, and Clemens of Alexandria states in his *Stromata I, XV, 71* that Pythagoras was not only a pupil of the Brahmins, but that he had also studied with the druids. The Brahmins and the druids may be compared as their 'professions' of teaching and studying, poetry and legislature were similar. The starting point of Celtic law was identical to that of ancient India.

Myles Dillon, a former professor of Celtic at the university of Dublin, gives a whole series of remarkable similarities between the cultures of the Aryan Indians and the Irish druids.

In ancient Greece, one was amazed that the druids possessed a significant philosophical system and that these barbarians (any non-Greek or non-Roman people) knew a philosophical and religious tradition of such a high intellectual and spiritual level. Caesar said about the Celts: 'The druids teach that the souls do not disappear but proceed from one body to another.' Next to the king stood the druid. Together they ruled the land. In a Celtic community, the state, the temporal, stood in the service of the wisdom of the druids, the eternal. With the Romans and later with the Roman-Christian church, the eternal stood in the service of the temporal.

In addition to the Roman chronicles, much is known about the druids in ancient Britain, Ireland and Wales through traditions and documents from early Christianity. The origin of Christianity in England and the events of the first centuries were quite different from what the church wanted us to believe. The earliest information about Britain can only be obtained from Roman writers like Julius Caesar, Dio Cassius, Tacitus, Suetonius and later Roman authors. However, the available records show that Britain possessed a highly developed civilisation and culture at the time and could certainly not be described as 'barbaric'. 'Civilised and courteous to strangers' was how Diodorus Siculus (died 14 BC) characterised Britain's inhabitants. 'They are honest and have integrity; they are far removed from the tricks of certain people among us, they are

MISTLETOE

The knowledge of the druids, flowers and plants and their medicinal uses of herbs and plants is indeed impressive and based on a profound knowledge of the human being. These knowledgeable men, who supported the mistletoe for many reasons, didn't have to make any magical notion in addition. To bring an immortal medicinal plant, the mistletoe was to them the symbol of higher life. Mistletoe is a plant that never touches the earth because it draws its life force from ancient trees, often oaks, in vast forests that were sacred to the druids.

The mistletoe is not a parasite in the usual sense of the word. It draws its water from the oak, without penetrating its actual vascular system, growing in the interstices of the bark.

For its age and immortality, its wondrous healing powers, the mistletoe, considered to be different from the world, the world of the living, away from the cycle of Gwynn, the mistletoe is not subject to the changing of the seasons. It berries ripen in the coldest period. It avoids anything that is connected to the earthly cycle. It knows no upper or lower side and its shape is spherical. The format in the seeds of the mistletoe is cylindrical, its dimensions roughly twice as long as those of any other plant. It is a closed circle, it is eternally and mainly a circle. A special relationship with the Celtic druids considered the mistletoe to be a concrete proof of the divine help offered to the human being, who necessarily ventures up the circle of experience.

The tiny plants grew in the endless forests that covered thousands of acres of land full of iron ore places to which the turmoil of mineral extraction and the wars hardly penetrated. Down there there was boundless silence, borne by the rustling of the wind and where the violence of rising and fading civilisations passed by unnoticed. Field thrushes ate the berries of the mistletoe and dropped the seeds on other trees via their fast digestion. Or they brushed their bills, to which the seeds got stuck, on branches so that the mistletoe could spread from tree to tree.

Do we now really still know how to make the most effective healing ointment out of this plant? Was it also used as a remedy against the holy disease, epilepsy? The druids could not know that mistletoe contains polypeptides, vitamin C and biogenic aminocholine. But they did know that the mistletoe lowers the blood pressure and combats the growth of tumours because it is able to retain light and (vital) warmth. Thus it becomes understandable why those initiated men (and women) with the immense insight, surpassing earthly space and time, and with the profound knowledge of the cosmos considered this plant to be a gift, a universal remedy, a remedy stemming directly from the endless plains or, as it is also called, the land of the living.