

Druidry

A lush green park scene featuring a calm pond in the foreground. The water reflects the surrounding dense foliage and trees. In the middle ground, a wooden bench sits on a grassy area, partially framed by the branches of a large tree on the right. The background is filled with more trees and greenery, creating a peaceful, natural setting.

From Ancient Lore to Modern
Practice

Who Were the Druids?

- Our information about the ancient druids comes from one of two sources:
 - Classical writers who were contemporaries of the druids and
 - Stories from Celtic cultures that were written down by medieval monks.
- Both of these sources have the problem of being potentially contaminated by the non-Celtic world view of the writers.

Who Were the Druids?

- Classical Sources:
 - Strabo and Diodorus
 - There were three types of druids: bards, ovates and druids.
 - Caesar
 - They were a religious priesthood that came from Britain and studied the sky, earth and gods.
 - They spent 20 years learning to be a druid and did not commit important information to writing.
 - They believed in the reincarnation of the soul.
 - They were the final authority on important matters.

Who Were the Druids?

— Pliny the Elder

- Druids were natural scientists, doctors of medicine and magicians.
- Mistletoe was sacred and cut in a special ceremony on the 6th night of the moon.
- Druids made powerful talismans called “druid eggs” or “serpent eggs”.

— Lucan

- Druids dwelt in deep oak groves.

Who Were the Druids?

– Alexandrian School

- Compared the druids to the Brahmins of India
- Describe the Druids as philosophers
- Described the Druids as teaching in triads:
 - Do no evil
 - Practice bravery
 - Honor the gods.

Who Were the Druids?

- Literary sources from Celtic cultures:
 - Christian monks writing the folklore and myths of mostly Ireland and Wales portray the druids as magicians, shamans, prophets and witch doctors.
 - They identified three classes of druids: bards, fili and druids.
 - Druids and early Christian saints are antagonists in many Celtic legends from the first century C.E.
 - There are a host of druids described in the myths of Ireland and Wales including Mide, Mug Ruith, and Cathbad.

So, Who WERE the Druids?

- Based on all of the available information from both Classical and Insular sources, the Druids were one of three castes within Celtic society.
- They were the intelligentsia: philosophers, judges, historians, poets, musicians, physicians, seers, astronomers and magicians.

Some Druid Misconceptions

- Druids were all old men
 - There are many famous druidesses mentioned in both Insular and Classical sources.
 - Druids were a class within Celtic society – there had to be both men and women in order to make new members of their class.
- Druids build Stonehenge
 - Stonehenge underwent several reconstructions during its prehistoric tenure, however even its last, and final, rebuild occurred prior to the Celtic invasion of the British Isles
 - There is some evidence, however, that the Celts may have used it during the Iron Age.

Some Druid Misconceptions

- Druids lived in the woods
 - Classical writers had difficulty telling the difference between Germanic and Celtic tribes. In some cases, the forest dwelling group referred to was actually a Germanic tribe.
 - Druids living in the woods may also have been the result of a substantial effort on the part of the Roman Empire to eradicate the druids living in Gaul and not a native cultural practice.
 - Druids portrayed in Irish myths live in their communities so that they can more effectively use their various skills to serve their people.

Some Druid Misconceptions

- Druids were from Atlantis, outer space, the British Isles, etc
 - Druids are the Celtic version of the intellectual class found in most cultures descended from the Indo-European language group. They are Celtic counterparts of the Indian Brahmins and the Roman Flamens.
 - Archeological and linguistic evidence indicates that the Indo-European culture began near the shores of the Caspian Sea and spread throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East over the course of several thousand years.

Some Truths about Ancient Druids

- Druids practiced human and animal sacrifice.
 - The ancient Celts almost certainly practiced animal sacrifice, as did virtually all cultures of that time period. The bones of the animals sacrificed have been found in sacred sites throughout Europe.
 - There is evidence in both literary and historical sources to indicate that the Celts practiced human sacrifice, although the victims were mostly convicted criminals or prisoners of war.

Some Truths about Ancient Druids

- Ancient druids wore white
 - It is possible that the druids of pre-Christian Europe wore white. White was the color associated with their caste.
- Druids worshipped trees
 - It would probably be more accurate to say that Druids considered certain types of trees sacred for certain types of rituals/purposes, however the tree was an important symbol in Celtic society in addition to being a source of food, shelter, etc.

What Happened to the Druids?

- By and large, the druid class most likely continued on as the intellectuals of Europe after its conversion to Christianity.
- There is evidence in various historical sources that doctors and lawyers from previously Celtic lands were highly sought after in Rome in the early part of the first few centuries C.E.
- The scholarly families of Ireland continued to teach various professions that would have been considered the purview of the druids until the time of Oliver Cromwell.

The Druid Revival

- With rise of nationalism in Europe during the sixteen and seventeen hundreds came the druid revival.
- While the druid revival in England is probably the most well know, there were also druid revivals in France and Germany.
- Some well known names in this early period are Aubrey, Stukeley, Martin, Rowlands, and Toland.

The Druid Revival

- The druid revival in England gave rise to the Ancient Druid Order (ADO), the Ancient Order of Druids (AOD) and the Ancient Masonic Order of Druids (AMOD).
- These organization were fraternal orders similar to the Freemasons and the Rosicrucians.
- The members were mostly Christians, although many had strong leanings towards Deism.

The Druid Revival

- The druid revival also reached across the Atlantic to the town of Newberg, New York, where a group calling itself the “Society of Druids” formed in the late seventeen hundreds and then disbanded in the early eighteen hundreds.
- The Ancient Masonic Order of Druids (AMOD) gave rise to the Ancient Masonic Order of Druids in America (AMODA), which later changed its name to the Ancient Order of Druid in America (AODA).

Modern Druids

- The ADO gave rise to the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD) lead by Phillip Carr-Gomm.
- In the United Kingdom there is also the British Druid Order (BDO), the Glastonbury Order of Druids (GOD), the Druid Clan of Dana (DCD), the Loyal Authurian Warband (LAW) and the Insular Order of Druids (IOD).
- Some of these organizations are Neopagan and others are a mix of Pagans, Christians and other religious or spiritual paths.

Modern Druids

- The Ancient Order of Druid in America (AODA) stills exists today and is lead by John Michael Greer.
- The Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA) was founded in 1963, is currently led by Michael Scharding and gave rise to the New Reformed Druids of North America (NRDNA), Ar nDraiocht Fein (ADF), the Henge of Keltria (via ADF) and the Order of the White Oak (via Keltria).
- The Sisterhood of Avalon (SOA) is a female only druid group in the US.

Modern Druidry

- While the term druid comes from the Celtic branch of the Indo-European language family, not all “druids” worship within a Celtic pantheon.
- Most modern Neopagan druid groups place a high value on scholarship and while not all are reconstructionists, many try to ground their work in linguistic, archeological and mythical evidence.
- Many modern druid groups practice, at least in part, an earth-based spirituality even though there is no evidence to support that the ancient druids did.

ADF Druidry

- Ar nDraiocht Fein is a public, non-profit pagan church with roughly 1200 members world wide.
- ADF has orthopraxy not orthodoxy.
- ADF encompasses all hearth cultures derived from the Indo-European language group including the Celtic, Germanic, Norse, Hellenic, Roman, Slavic, Baltic, Vedic and Indo-Iranian pantheons.

ADF Druidry

- The purposes of ritual within ADF
 - To build community
 - To honor and serve the Kindred (Ancestors, Nature Spirits and Gods and Goddesses)
 - To honor the earth
 - To align ourselves with the worlds around us
- Ghosti
 - There are reciprocal obligations between all things
 - Ritual maintains those obligations between the folk and the Kindred

ADF Druidry

- The Core Order of Ritual (COoR)
 - Honoring the Earth Mother
 - Creation of Sacred Center
 - Well – Fire – Tree
 - Gate between the world
 - Inviting the Three Kindred
 - Inviting the Deity of the Occasion
 - Prayer of Sacrifice
 - Omen
 - Return Flow

ADF Druidry

- The Core Order of Ritual (COoR) – Optional
 - Honoring the Sky Father
 - Appeasing the Outdwellers
 - Inviting a God/dess of Inspiration
 - Piacular Offerings
- In ADF rituals, we do not cast circles, call to the quarters or invoke deities from more than one pantheon.

ADF Druidry

- The Ritual Calendar:
 - ADF celebrates each of the 8 Neopagan holidays in the Wheel of the Year.
 - There is some flexibility in the timing of the rituals to accommodate hearth cultures that did not celebrate either the Quarters of the Cross-Quarters.
 - Some groves also celebrate holidays special to that grove or hold monthly rituals to build community and/or do magical work.

ADF Druidry

- ADF Structure and Organization
 - ADF has many different sub-groups
 - Groves and Protogroves – Local congregations of ADF
 - Kins – Groups of people who all worship in the same hearth culture and share research, ideas and rituals.
 - Guilds – Groups of people who either practice or want to learn a craft that is related to the work of ancient IE people or ADF as an organization. Most guilds have study programs
 - SIGs – Groups of people with a common interest that work together on that area of interest.
 - Orders – Religious sub-groups that focus on the worship/veneration of a specific God/Goddess/Spirit.

ADF Druidry

- ADF Study Programs
 - Dedicant Path
 - Guild Study Programs
 - Generalist Study Program
 - Initiates Program
 - Clergy Training Program
- With the exception of the Dedicant Program, the Generalist Study Program and the Initiates Program all study programs have three levels.

Questions?



Where to Go for More Info

- A Brief History of the Druids by Peter Berresford Ellis – ISBN 978-0-78670-987-8
- What Do Druids Believe? by Phillip Carr-Gomm – ISBN 978-1-86207-864-2
- Bonewits's Essential Guide to Druidism by Issac Bonewits – ISBN 0-8065-2710-2
- The Solitary Druid by Rev. Robert Ellison – ISBN 0-8065-2675-0 (out of print but still available used)

Sources

- Ellis, Peter Berresford. A Brief History of the Druids. Philadelphia: Running Press Book Publishers, 2002.
- Bonewits, Isaac. Bonewits's Essential Guide to Druidism. New York: Citadel Press, 2006.
- www.adf.org