

THE WHITE GODDESS in IRELAND, WALES and BRITAIN

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"When man created language with wisdom,
As if winnowing cornflower through a sieve,
Friends acknowledged the signs of friendship,
And their speech retained its touch." Rg Veda 10.71

"Whatever is happening is happening for good...."
Krsna to Arjuna in the Bhagvad Gita

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The Mare Goddess

Striking similarities have been pointed out for over seven decades between horse sacrifices in ancient India and Celtic Ireland. These similarities quickly became one of the important pieces of evidence which indicated that both the Aryans, who invaded India and began the Vedic Period (c. 1500-2,000 B.C.), and the Celts evolved from a common population which began to fission and expand during the Neolithic (Dillon 1963). This stem culture we now know to be the early Indo-Europeans, often identified as the Kurgan Culture; their apparent origin was the area now known as southwest Russia sometime prior to 4,000 B.C. Common features in ritual and linguistics survived enormous differences of time, place and environment.

As O'Flaherty (1980: ch.6) says, there are two basic questions about the horse sacrifices that demand consideration. "1) Why did the Irish ritual involve a mare and a king, while the Indian ritual involved a queen and a stallion? 2) Why was the horse killed in the ritual but rarely in the myth? ... The ritual began with symbolic copulation between the royal figure and the equine figure and ended with the slaughter of the animal and the eating of its flesh or fluid.

"The skeleton of the myth may be read as follows. A goddess in the form of a white mare or a water bird assumed human form and mated with an aging sun king. Impregnated by him through her mouth, she gave birth to hippomorphic twins, male and female, who incestuously begat the human race. The goddess or evil black alter ego injured or threatened to devour her children or the king. She then disappeared. The myth ends there, but the ritual elaborates upon the simple disappearance of the mare and the simultaneous mutilation of the king or the stallion or the son: in the ritual, the king killed the mare and ate her to restore his waning powers" (O'Flaherty 1980: 149-150).

O'Flaherty does not present this tale as the possible Indo-European prototype, that is the single myth that existed in parental Indo-European culture before it began to fission and spread. Rather, this is a "thematic rather than a historic core" (O'Flaherty 1980: 151). It contains those elements that may be identified within many variations from a variety of Indo-European cultures: Indian, Irish, Greek, Roman, Gallic, Welsh, and Russian.

I also wish to further complicate the interpretive challenge by suggesting that this myth originated after Old Europe with its religion of the Great Goddess, had been invaded and culturally overrun by various Indo-European peoples. I believe this myth to be syncretic, that is an attempt to reconcile potentially hostile and adversarial mytho-poetics who found themselves close neighbors after the Indo-European migrations. To call this a pure or characteristic Indo-European myth misses the point. After the Indo-European invasions, I believe several cultural regions saw the rise of mytho-poetics which attempted to integrate major themes from both the Thunder God mythic structure of the Indo-Europeans and the indigenous Neolithic religion of the Great Goddess. These cultural regions are those where the myth of the Indo-European mare may be found, the earliest of

which in written records is that of Vedic India c.1,500 B.C.. Furthermore, while Indo-European peoples apparently swamped much of Old Europe, some Indo-European tribes remained in contact for some time with 'islands' of the Great Goddess religion which survived their invasions as was the case in classical Crete and several localities on the European mainland. The mare is decidedly not Indo-European in metaphor although the choice of this animal to use as a mythic symbol is characteristically Indo-European. Old Europe did not domesticate the horse and it played no prominent role in their 'pure' mythic structures, although wild horses may have been occasional food animals. The Goddess is ever-present in the myth and ritual of horse sacrifice. When her epiphany is that of a water bird and not of a horse, then this is 'pure' Old European metaphor (Gimbutas, 1989). The fact that she is no longer reproductively self-contained, and therefore no longer parthenogenetic, reveals the power of the Indo-European invaders; she mates with a sun king to become pregnant. However, her power remains absolute in the ritual, for the king must eat her flesh or drink broth made from it in order to restore his powers.

"The incident at the heart of it all involves two basic processes: a sacrifice and a marriage. The sacrifice brings gods and humans together through food that is obtained by slaughter. The marriage brings men and women together through sex (here, as elsewhere, expressed through metaphors of food and eating). The emotional components of lust and fear/aggression, which we have seen to underlie so much of the mythology of the Goddess, are present in this compound ceremony, ..." (O'Flaherty 1980: op.cit.).



The Irish Ritual

"In the Irish ritual (recorded A.D. 1185 by Giraldus Cambrensis), a white mare was led before the king in the presence of his people.¹ Then, 'He, seeking to elevate himself not into a prince but a beast, not into a king but an outlaw, approaching like an animal, professes as shamelessly as irrationally that he too is a beast ... That is, he behaved like a beast (mounting her on all fours and from the rear) for copulation with the mare). The mare was then killed, cut into pieces, and boiled, and the king bathed in the broth, drinking it by lapping it up directly with his mouth, not using a cup and he also ate the mare's flesh'" (O'Flaherty 1980: 152). This is an eyewitness account by a well known scholar and historian of the times whose veracity is not questioned by scholars. It contains three essential elements of the core myth: the mating of the king with a white mare, the slaughter of the mare, and the eating of its flesh and drinking of her essential fluids as

¹ Giraldus or Gerald de Barri (?1146 - ?1220), a Welsh ecclesiastical scholar, geographer and historian is best known by his literary name of Giraldus Cambrensis. He was the son of William de Barri (Norman) and a princess of the Welsh royal family. After election to succeed his uncle as bishop of St. David's, he was rejected by Henry II (1176). He described the natural history and people of Ireland in *Topographia Hibernica* and, after a journey with Prince John (1185), did the same for Wales in *Itinerarium Cambriae*. After once more being rejected as bishop of St. David's, this time by the archbishop of Canterbury (1198), Giraldus de Barri devoted the rest of his life to study (Webster 1965: 597).

broth. Furthermore, "we encounter the Indo-European tendency to deny the divinity of the mare, a theme that will haunt these myths and rituals ..." (ibid. See also Doan (1987: 82). This is precisely what we would expect if Irish Celtic culture at this late time retained an ancient tension and internal conflict from the time when Indo-European mytho-poetics integrated with the much older tradition of the Great Goddess. The Mare Goddess was still very much present but accepted uneasily and resented. The mytho-psychological conflicts are deep, for Giraldus' report describes the behavior of the king as 'a beast'. The mare is, of course, at first glance merely a beast and this statement is an attempt by the Christian monk to reduce both the Goddess and the king, who is *the* sole conduit to the deity for his people, to '*mere beasts*'. The fact is that in the ritual, the Mare Goddess *is* killed and then consumed. This points to the final victory of the Indo-Europeans, although it is an incomplete victory because the power that flows into the king is that of the Goddess.

Why is this report, which is of a surprisingly late date and compiled by a highly prejudiced observer, accorded such weight and believed to be accurate? Scholars have long believed that Irish and Indian myths preserve the most archaic elements that can be documented from written sources about both the Great Goddess and early Indo-European myths. Why? These two cultural regions lie on the periphery of the Indo-European realm and therefore Indo-European migration, while not later than in other places, was less powerful in the sense of numbers of migratory incursions and possibly in the actual numbers of invaders as well. Therefore the Goddess survived, was renewed and absorbed some attributes from the newly arrived Indo-European myths. The most visible of her attributes is her new epiphany as a horse. There is an analogous situation in that realm of anthropology which studies hunter-gather peoples. Those cultures who preserved a 'pure' hunter-gather-fisher lifestyle into the first half of the twentieth century resided in remote regions which were not contacted by Western Culture until well into the nineteenth century: the Arctic, remote Pacific islands, African and Amazonian rainforest, and the Australian and southwest African deserts. Furthermore, the medieval Irish ritual is supported by much other fragmentary material from the other regions where sacrifice of the mare or stallion for kingly renewal was practiced. The one unique item in the Irish ritual, the eating of the mare's flesh, is not unusual. The eating of the flesh of a sacrificial animal is a common theme world-wide and perhaps in earlier times and in these other localities, the mare or stallion was eaten. Robert Graves (1955, 1:255) notes myths of the taming of winged horses in Danish and Irish sources as well as Greek. He postulates an archaic rite in which the Triple Muse (or Triple Goddess) of the Mountain forced the candidate for kingship to capture a wild horse which was later ritually eaten by the king, after his symbolic rebirth from the Mare-headed Mountain Goddess. (O'Flaherty 1980: ch.6)

On the European continent the Mare Goddess is met with in several closely related epiphanies. Demeter in Greece was horse headed. Epona was worshipped in both Gaul and the British Isles. She was depicted as a woman riding on a mare, or anthropomorphized with a human female body and a mare's head, or as the mare itself. She was associated with the male horse god, Rudiobus, and she is also associated with birds. Her name is derived from the proto-Indo-European **ekwo-s* which means horse and is the root from which the Latin *equus* and Sanskrit *asva* are derived. She is particularly concerned with pregnant mares and foals, there is a representation of her seated on a throne with her hands on the heads of two foals. Other images show her as a woman feeding apples or hay to pregnant mares. She presided over the mating of horses and the birth of both foals and human babies. "But like many another true mother goddess, her relationship with children was ambivalent; sometimes a child is depicted crouching under the raised leg of the mare ..." (O'Flaherty 1980: 154). In a second century A.D. Greek text there is a myth of a misogynist who mates with a mare and the resultant 'child' is Epona. The greatest quantity

of verified detail about the actual rites surrounding the Indo-European Mare Goddess comes from Vedic India.



Macha and Cuchulainn

"The Celtic Irish myth of Macha and Cuchulainn is a very close parallel to both the Irish ritual and the Indian ritual and accompanying myth.

"A supernatural woman named Macha agreed to marry Crunniuc on one condition: 'Our union will continue only if you do not speak of me in the assembly.' ... But one day King Conchobor heard that Macha's husband had boasted that she could run faster than the horse of Conchobor. Though she protested that she was too pregnant to race, he forced her to race against his chariot. Just as the chariot reached the end of the field, she gave birth beside it, bearing twins, a son and daughter. The name Emain Macha, the Twins of Macha, comes from this episode and remains the name of that plain ... Years later, Conchobor mounted a chariot with his sister, the woman Deichtire, who drove the chariot for her brother; they chased a flock of birds from Emain Macha until they reached Brug and took shelter in a solitary house, where they ate and drank. Later, the man of the house told them that his wife was in her birth pangs in the storeroom. Deichtire went in to her and helped her bear a son. At the same time, a mare at the door to the house gave birth to two foals. The Ulstermen took charge of the baby boy and gave him the foals as a present, and Deichtire nursed him" (Kinsella, 1970: 6-7, 21-23 in O'Flaherty 1980: 167). Although O'Flaherty considers them unimportant, the Neolithic Great Goddess makes a brief appearance here as a flock of birds.

However, in another variant of this myth, the Neolithic Goddess is more prominent. "Conchobor and some of his men chased a flock of birds from Emain Macha. Now these birds were avatars of Deichtire, the sister (or half sister or daughter) of Conchobor, and of fifty young girls with whom she had lived for three years. When Conchobor and his men chased the birds to the house at Brug, Deichtire and her companions assumed human form again, and Deichtire appeared as the mistress of the house. Conchobor, not knowing that it was Deichtire, demanded to use on his hostess the *droit du seigneur* that was his well known perogative. Deichtire begged for a postponement, for she was pregnant and that night she brought forth a boy who looked just like Conchobor, though Conchobor did not learn until the next day that the woman who had received him was his sister. The child, the future Cú Chulainn, was named Setanta; he was brought to Emain Macha to be nursed by Finnchoem, the mother of Conall" (Gricourt 1954: 75-79 in O'Flaherty 1980: 168).

"The birds are the Deichtire and her companions, swan maidens whom we will meet in Indian variants of this myth (and who are adumbrated in the Indian ritual). The importance of the birds is evident from the fact that in a later episode of the first variant, in which the birds are not identified with Deichtire and her maidens, the god Lug appears to Deichtire and tells her that it was he who had 'kidnapped her with her fifty companions in

the form of birds' - an episode that, since it has no logical place in this variant at all, must have been kept from an earlier variant in which it was truly essential" (O'Flaherty 1980:168-169). Of course, Lug is kidnapping the Goddess herself! The profound mytho-poetic conflict between Indo-European peoples and the older Neolithic Goddess culture is here encapsulated.



Celtic Goddesses: Ritual and Myth in Britain

There are virtually no contemporary observations of Goddess worship or ritual activity by Roman observers of Celtic society. Strabo, who died c.26 A.D. is believed to have utilized an ethnography written by Posidonius. He referred to 'an island beside Britain' on which sacrifices were performed akin to those in Samothrace where the sacrifices were in honor of Demeter and Kore (Persephone). The Roman geographer Pomponius, writing in the first century A.D., describes a group of nine virgin priestesses living on the island of Sena (Sein) off the Brittany coast who were believed to have magical and curative powers. They could call forth waves with their singing, change animals into whatever form they wished, cure incurable diseases and predict the future for mariners who came to them. (Doan 1987: 19-28) These are certainly attributes of the Goddess, but the question remains of possible influence from the Greek legend of Circe. Should these women be called witches, rather than priestesses who might incarnate the Goddess?

Doan (1987) divides Celtic goddesses into two categories. The first group are those connected with the earth itself and local geographic features of particular importance to a tribe such as wells, springs or forests, as well as the animals themselves. These goddesses are epiphanies of the Great Goddess according to the typology of Gimbutas (1989) and include: the three Matres or Matronae (Divine Mothers); Epona (Horse Goddess); Damona (Cow Goddess); the water goddess Sirona (Divine Star, of eastern Gaul and Brixia, the consort of Luxovius, the water god of Luxeuil); and the forest goddesses such as Dea Arduinna of the Ardennes (Boar Goddess) and Dea Artio of Berne (Bear Goddess).

Doan's second category is the war goddesses. These include: Andarta (Powerful Bear) of the Vocontii; Andrasta (the goddess invoked by Boudicca in 61 A.D. before attacking the Roman legions at Camulodonum in Britain); Nemetona (Goddess of the Sacred Grove); and the Irish war goddesses Morrigan and Macha. Goddesses of war are not a part of the mytho-poetics of the Neolithic religion of the Great Goddess in Old Europe. There is no mention of them in Gimbutas' book (1989), nor any archeological evidence to suggest their existence. Where did they come from? The answer is not hard to find if we remember that the Celts are an Indo-European people who arose in what is now Germany and Switzerland in the third quarter of the first millennium B.C., then to quickly migrate in all directions. As stated previously, I believe that they did not obliterate the Great Goddess when they encountered her, but absorbed and integrated her religion into their own Indo-European mytho-poetics. The result was a new, vigorous, hybrid mythology in which

neither was dominant and, although tensions ran high, the Goddess retained her power although not her sole dominance. The same fusion occurred in India, where the voluminous evidence for the health and survival of the Goddess includes a great deal of ethnography from the nineteenth and twentieth century: first hand observations from competent Western observers. However, unlike India, the effect upon society in Celtic realms included creating real-life opportunities for women to occupy positions of power and equality in the realms of religion, warfare and social relationships, opportunities that lasted into the early Middle Ages until crushed by various Christian churches. This movement of the Goddess into the flesh and blood of Celtic women in secular time will be discussed further below.

Doan (1987: 35) mistakenly believes the three Matres to represent original functions of the Goddess: death, war and fertility. The Great Goddess 'functions' (if we may use so crude a term) with far more than three attributes; they are best described as multiplex and polyvalent. Furthermore, there is no evidence of a War Goddess in Neolithic Old Europe. rather, the Matres are 'three' and not four, five or some other number, because the 'power of three' is of particular significance as explained by Gimbutas (1989). The Matres usually carry baskets of fruit, cornucopias, and babies because they are closely connected to the earth and fertility. Matrona gives her name to the Marne river and department in France. The Horse Goddess Epona was widely known throughout Gaul and was adopted by the Roman cavalry in that province. Her Indo-European origin needs no explanation; *wild* horses were food animals in Old Europe. In medieval Wales, she appears as Rhiannon in the epic *Mabinogion*. Sequana, after whom the river Seine was named, is a healing goddess and was worshipped by offerings of human figurines or carvings of the afflicted part of the body (Doan 1987: 37-38). In a fashion analogous to the dozens of local village goddesses documented in India, fragmentary evidence suggests a similar proliferation of Celtic deities, both male and female, whose attachment is not to the village but to particular tribes or important features of the *local* environment.

"The Irish Brigit was a triple goddess. She had two sisters with the same name, one of whom was a healer and the other a smith (!). Cormac's glossary written around 900 A.D. describes Brigit as 'a poetess', daughter of the Dagda ... a goddess whom filid [poets] used to worship. As her intercession was very great and very splendid, so they call her goddess of poets. She had two sisters of the same name, Brigit, the woman of healing and Brigit, the woman of smith-craft, daughters of the Dagda, from whose names among all the Irish a goddess used to be called Brigit. The Celtic Brigit was subsumed into the Catholic St. Brigit and remained identifiable if somewhat diminished. St. Brigit was 'born at sunrise neither within nor without a house, was bathed in milk, fed from the milk of a white, red-eared (i.e supernatural) cow" (Kenney 1929: 356-358). "Her wet cloak was supported by sun rays and the house in which she was staying appeared to be on fire. St. Brigit was called one of the two mothers of Christ and in recent times has been invoked by women on the Hebrides as the patroness of childbirth and revered as the midwife of the Virgin Mary (Ross 1967: 361-362). Giraldus Cambrensis, writing in the twelfth century, stated that Brigit and nineteen of her nuns guarded a perpetual fire surrounded by a hedge within which no male was allowed to enter. This practice calls to mind Solinus' report of the 3rd century A.D., where Minerva's (the Roman identity for Brigit) sanctuary at Bath in Britain had a perpetual fire, a circumstance that explains one of the goddess's epithets, Belisama ('Most Brilliant'): see Mac Cana (1970: 34-35). St. Brigit's monastery at Kildare, Ireland, was formerly a pagan sanctuary and the nuns mentioned by Giraldus were her priestesses. Brigit's name was originally an epithet meaning 'the Exalted One' and is cognate with the Vedic *brihati* and closely corresponds with the British Briganti, which was latinized as Brigantia. Brigantia was the tutelary goddess of the Brigantes tribe which was led by their famous queen Cartimandua in the first century A.D.. St. Brigit became the patron saint of the Leinstermen on whose behalf she would intervene in time of war. She gave her name

to three important rivers: the Brighid in Ireland, the Braint in Wales and the Brent in England" (Mac Cana 1970: 35, 95): see Doan (1987).

As in ancient and classical India, but continuing a ritual that dates to the early Neolithic and the beginnings of the Agricultural Revolution, the Goddess as Giver of Sovereignty could give birth to a ruler or infuse the king with deity powers, either through sexual intercourse or providing a supernatural drink (which contains her fluids). India is not the only region where accurate secular, political history was of little concern beside the priority to establish dynastic legitimacy through a geneology that ultimately led back to distant ancestors who were gods and goddesses. Celtic and Germanic tribes were also so inclined; indeed virtually all cultures were until c.1000 A.D. with a handful of Greek and Roman historians excepted.

Let us consider the evolution of Magnus Maximum from Duke of Britain to self proclaimed Emperor to mythological consort of the Goddess. In the fourth century A.D., the Roman Province of Britannia was besieged on all sides. In 367 A.D., a coalition of Picts, Scots and Attacotti (?Irish) overran Hadrian's Wall and invaded from the north as Saxons and the Franks attacked the coasts. Count Theodosius, with four legions, drove out the invaders in 369 A.D., but in 382 A.D. the northern frontier erupted again. These attacks were repelled by Magnus Maximus, Duke of Britain, a general who had served under Theodosius. In 383 A.D., Maximus was proclaimed emperor by his troops and led several legions across the channel, seized Paris and established an imperial court at Trier. In 387 A.D., reinforced by British troops, he moved east and in 388 took Rome. He was soon defeated by Aquileia and beheaded by Theodosius (Doan 1987:45), thus is the known life of Magnus Maximum concludes with death in war.

Magnus Maximus first entered recorded history in the ninth century *History Britonum*, then in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which was written c.1136, and also as Maxen Wledig in the medieval Welsh epic *Breuddwyd Maxen Wledig*. It is the latter 'history' that concerns us for here a legend is combined with a 'dream vision'. The tale begins with Maxen falling asleep at noon after a deer hunt along the Tiber near Rome. He dreams that he journeys to a river mouth where he finds a boat that takes him over the sea to an island (Britain). He journeys across the island until he comes to another river mouth which looks across to yet another island (Angelsey). He sees a castle near the river mouth and enters it. He finds two youths playing *gwyddbwyll* (a chess-like board game) and an old man sitting in an ivory chair decorated with two gold eagles, who is wearing the gold ornaments of kingship. There is also a maiden sitting in a gold chair, beautiful beyond words, with dress fittings, jewelry and ornaments of red gold, gems, pearls, rubies, and imperial stones. Just as Maxen and the maiden (Goddess) embrace, the sounds of horses, shields and hounds awaken him. He sends messengers to search the world for the maiden in his dream. They find the youths playing *gwyddbwyll*, the king and the maiden in the castle *Caer Seint* (site of Roman fortress Segontium, now Caernarvon) as the shore of the river Seint, where it faces Angelsey. Conquering as he goes, Maxen arrives at *Caer Seint* and learns that the king is Eudaf (i.e. Octavius), the two youths are his sons Kynan (Conan) and Afaon (Gadeon) and the maiden is his daughter, Elen Luyddog ('Helen of the Hosts'). That night Maxen sleeps with Elen (the Goddess) who asks for her wedding gift: the rule of Britain for her father along with three strongholds and three offshore islands for herself. Eventually with his in-laws help, Maxen even CONQUERS France, Burgandy and Rome (Doan 1987: 47-48). What Doan does not point out is the fascinating resurgence of the Goddess' sovereignty, for she not only legitimizes Maxen's reign by infusing him with deity power but carves out greater power for her father and brothers, and for herself as well. Considering the medieval date for this epic, these sentiments may represent only

nostalgia for the days of old when the Goddess did in fact rule on earth, or evidence for the continued presence of the Goddess in medieval Wales.

“Elen Luyddog appears to have been originally a British goddess who later became amalgamated with Helena, the mother of Constantine (c.f. Geoffrey's version in which Constantine's mother is a native British princess named Helen whereas Octavius' daughter is unnamed). The historical Helena, mother of the first Christian emperor, Constantine (who ruled from 306 to 337), was alleged to have discovered the True Cross in Jerusalem, and from the fourth century onwards was venerated as saint. Although there is no evidence that this Helena ever came to Britain, her son Constantine's connection with Britain may have led to her fusion with the native Elen Luyddog. In *Breuddwyd Maxen*, she is credited with building the Roman roads in Britain (still known in Welsh as *Sarn[au]* Helen, 'Helen's Causeway') and thus symbolizes the introduction of Roman civilization into the island. Her road-building function links her with the Breton goddess Ahes (credited with the Roman roads in Brittany), although it is possible that the epithet referred to St. Helena's pilgrimage to Jerusalem” (Bromwich 1978: 342). In addition the native British tradition that Constantine was responsible for a scheme of sweeping repairs to the British roads may have influenced the development of the legend. Maxen's marriage to Elen may also be seen as a Welsh version of the sovereignty myth in which the aspirant to the throne is united with the goddess of sovereignty, either through sexual intercourse or by drinking a certain liquor which the goddess has given to him” (Mac Cana 1955-58; Doan 1984 in Doan 1987: 48-49).

“In the *Historia Britonum* account of Vortigern's marriage to Rowenna (Renwein in *Historia Regum Britanniae*), the daughter of the Saxon king Hengist, the maiden serves the British king wine and spirits (from a golden goblet in Geoffrey's version), after which he is filled with love for her and offers her whatever she wants, even half of his kingdom” (Morris, 1980:28). “In Geoffrey's account, we see an Anglo-Saxon version of the legend combined with the Welsh one, in which Renwein brings Vortigern the golden goblet, curtsies low and says: '*Laverd king, was hail*', and orders him to drink. 'Then he took took the goblet from her hand, kissed her and drank in his turn” (Thorpe 1966: 159) see Doan (1987).

Hengist then confers with his advisors, who agree unanimously that the girl should be handed over to Vortigern in exchange for the province of Kent. “So the girl was given in marriage to Vortigern, and he slept with her, and loved her deeply” (Morris 1980: 28). According to British tradition, this eventually leads to the Anglo-Saxon invasion and conquest of Britain. As with the story of Elen and Maxen, this legend suggests a native British account of the eventual transmission of the rule of the island from the Britons to Anglo-Saxons, expressed in terms of the sovereignty myth with both elements represented: imbibing of a certain liquor and sexual intercourse.

Several Welsh dynasties claimed descent from either Maximus, Vortigern or both, which points out one important function of the sovereignty goddess or figure: giving birth to the future ruler. On the ninth-century Eliseg Pillar from Valle Crucis, in eastern Wales, we find an inscription which traces the origin of the Powys dynasty to Britu, the son of a marriage between Vortigern and Sevira, daughter of Maximus 'who killed the king of the Romans' (Gratian), with the name Sevira perhaps suggested by Severa, the name of Gratian's mother.

“Clearly here, Vortigern's (and his son's) claim to rule this territory is based on his marriage to Sevira, the representative of Maximus' dynasty. The name and precise identity of the goddess' may change, although her function remains the same. Remember that in

Geoffrey's account Maximianus inherits the kingship of Britain through his marriage to the unnamed daughter of Octavius, another variant of the same theme. Her identification with Elen Luyddog in the Welsh tale is probably a late development, since we find in the twelfth century Harleian genealogies that she is given as an ancestress of the royal family of Dyfed (South Wales) seven generations after Maximus (whose name may be an interpolation based upon his legendary fame, since he was also claimed as ancestor by two northern dynasties). The author of *Breuddwyd Maxen* may have had a definite view in mind - to unite the two famous and originally independent ancestors of the Welsh dynasties by bringing them together within an ancient mythical framework" (Bromwich 1954: 109 in Doan 1987).



The Irish Goddess of Sovereignty

The Romans never invaded Ireland and therefore strong influences from the Roman transformation of Hellenistic culture are absent. As with Celtic Britain, we see a society whose mytho-poetics represent a co-existence of the incomplete fusion of the Neolithic Great Goddess religion with the male dominated pantheon of Indo-European immigrants. These immigrants are early Celts for the periods in which first, the Halstatt and then, the La Tène peoples migrated to Ireland during the first millennium B.C.. The absence of Roman society allowed the Goddess to retain more of her integrity than in Britain making identification of her easier since we do not have to remove the cover of Roman-Hellenistic myth as was necessary in Britain. Furthermore, the Christianization of Ireland proceeded slowly; during the sixth to ninth century a significant fraction of the population did not accept the new religion. During this time period there was frequent conversion by royal families, often for reasons of perceived political and military strategic advantage, and promulgation of official decrees to that effect. The Goddess was placed under great stress and was battered and continuously challenged. Although fragmented, she survived in the rituals of folk-peasant culture into the twentieth century as documented by Gimbutas (1989). Nonetheless, folk culture is by its nature illiterate, fragmented, disjointed. In its rote repetition of ritual and superstition, folk culture relies upon subconscious archetypal memory compared with a consciously articulated theology and philosophy. It is necessary, as in Britain and Wales, to examine the histories and epics that were written in the Middle Ages when brilliant literate men still concerned themselves with the presence of the Goddess, as did seers and bards who were still being trained and sought after by kings and princes. However, these histories and epics incorporate Biblical personages and metaphor, as well as a bit of Christian theological rationale. The Celtic Irish, as did the Welsh, Britons, Indians and many other cultures conceived of their history in mythic-geneological terms as mentioned above. By the time of the Middle Ages, they attempted to organize their histories along Judaeo-Christian concepts of secular time and history. The result is an amalgam, neither pure mythic-geneology 'history' nor an accurate narrative of the politics and wars of secular time and real-life kings and queens. It was a hybrid form which is difficult to analyze as we saw in Britain, and often avoided by scholars.

"The mythic geography of the country [i.e. Ireland] is contained in the collection of stories known as the *Dindshenchas* ('Tradition of Places'), while the mythic prehistory is

found in the work known as *Lebor Gabla Erenn* ('The Book of the Conquest of Ireland'), also known as 'The Book of Invasions.' ...

"The first three invasions are known by the names of their leaders, while the last two are known by group names, thus: 1. Cessair; 2. Patholón; 3. Nemed; 4. Fir Bolg; and 5. Tuatha Dé Danann ('Tribes of the Goddess Danu'). According to this text, the first invasion was led by a woman named Cessair, the daughter of Bith ('World') son of Noah, or alternatively by Banba, one of the eponymous goddesses of Ireland. Her company consists of fifty women and three men, namely Fintan, son of Bóchra; Bith, son of Noah; and the pilot Ladra. ... Ladra becomes jealous because he is given only sixteen [women], while the others are each given seventeen. Nevertheless, he is said to have died from a surfeit of women (moral: too much sexual activity can be fatal), or from an oar shaft penetrating his buttock (which also suggests death from sexual transgression). After Ladra's death, Bith and Fintan share the remaining women, each now having twenty five. Bith goes north and is the next to die. When Bith's women return, Fintan, realizing the moral of the story, flees to the Hill of the Wave (*Tul Tuinde*). Bereft of her father and her husband, Cessair dies of a broken heart, after which the other women also die. Forty days later the Flood arrives and Fintan survives by spending a year in a cave above *Tul Tuinde*. ... Water is identified in this tale with the destructive capabilities of the feminine principle: Cessair and the others are driven by 'storm and tempest'. Until they reach Ireland, the division of the women occurs at a place called *Cumar na dtri nUisce* ('The Meeting of the Three Waters'), the confluence of the Suir, the Nore and the Barrow (still called the Three Sisters) near New Ross. Ladra's death was caused either by the women or by the oar with which he plied the waves. Fintan's flight from the reunited women resembles the inundation legends in which a person is pursued by irrupting waters and he is finally overwhelmed by the flood" (Rees and Rees 1961: 114).

This epic, even in a brief summary in modern English, has a sad and wistful quality. The Goddess is present at the outset in a position to exert her customary, timeless influence but cannot do so. Powerless and bereft at the end, she dies. The metaphor for the power of Christianity to overwhelm and extinguish the Goddess is unmistakable. I disagree with Doans interpretation that Cessair represents an archetypal goddess of destruction; it is she who is destroyed by Indo-European Christianized barbarism.

An alternative epiphany of the Goddess called Banba occupies the central role in the epic related in the eighth century *Book of Druim Snechta*. "She is identified, not with water, but with the land which emerges from the waters, 'the island of Banba of women'. She survives the Deluge on *Tul Tuinde* and lives to proclaim to the Sons of Míl - the final Gaelic invaders - that she is older than Noah. ... land, rather than water is seen as the symbol of women, whereas in the other version discussed above, land seems to represent the male force which co-exists with the watery female principle (Cessair's father is 'World' and her husband Fintan is the son of Bóchra, 'Ocean'). We see these same dualities in the case of Continental Celtic goddesses, who could represent either the life giving (as well as potentially destructive) force of the river and spring, or the fertilizing aspect of the earth" (Doan 1987: 52).

Duality is not the issue, as is extensively discussed by O'Flaherty (1980). The interpretative problem is a decidedly, difficult question for us linear, technocratic types to understand. Exactly what do polyvalent and multiplex mean in the context of mytho-poetics? To paraphrase Alice (in Wonderland), we must believe in all sorts of 'impossible' things at once if we are truly to understand. The Goddess embraces a wide spectrum of qualities and powers and holds them simultaneously. They were not dualities as we conceive of them, eternal adversaries of which only one may be chosen. Rather, they

are the diverse facts of an all embracing deity and such qualities are not in conflict with one another. 'Opposing' manifestations simply make apparent the diversity that is both potential and realized. The Goddess is sovereignty, life giving, death wielding, and fertilizing as she chooses; multiple permutations of her attributes are possible at any time. She thus may be several 'things' at once and several epiphanies may manifest themselves simultaneously, much to the consternation of those who can only see simple dualities and hard, unavoidable choices.

The invasions of the Tuatha Dé Danaan ('Tribes of Danu') are believed to represent an extensive and late invasion by Celtic peoples. Upon arriving they do battle with an indigenous people called the Fir Bolg. Depending upon the account, the Fir Bolg are roundly defeated and flee to outlying islands or after battle, join the Tuatha Dé Danaan in a compact of peace and friendship. Danaan means 'Mother of the Gods' and may be derived from the name of the Celtic mother goddess, Anu (genitive - Anann): see Doan (1980) and Carey (1981). "When the Tuatha Dé Danaan arrive in Britain and on the Continent, Eochaid, son of Erc, is king of the Fir Bolg, and Tailtiu, daughter of Magmor ('king of Spain') is his wife. In the ensuing battle, Eochaid is killed and Nuadu (king of the Tuatha Dé Danaan) lose his own arm which is cut off at the shoulder. Afterwards Dian Cécht makes a silver arm for him so that he is known as Nuadu Airgetlám ('Silver-hand'). Tailtiu marries one of the Tuatha Dé, also named Eochaid, and has the plain of Coill Chuan ('Cuan's Wood') cleared. Cian, son of Dian Cécht, gives his son Fomoiré (i.e. Fomorians) to Tailtiu for fosterage. Before her death, Tailtiu asks that she be buried in the place she had cleared. This becomes the assembly place of Tailtiu and an annual festival was held here in her memory. 'Her mourning games used to be performed each year by Lug [successor to Nuadu] and by kings after him; a fortnight before Lughnasad (August 1) and a fortnight after" (Cross and Slover 1969: 14). "Tailtiu is one of the mythical women (Carmun and Macha are the others) in whose honor annual assemblies or festivals were held after their death. Many of them are warlike in nature, and most of them associate with some form of violence or duress, but they are all connected in some way with fertility, and their assemblies usually coincide with Lughnasad, the great harvest festival of the god Lug" (Mac Cana 1969: 90 in Doan 1987).

The Goddess of Sovereignty is here as Tailtiu, although much diminished and surrounded by battling male Indo-European Celtic deities. Nonetheless, she has an important role to play and becomes incorporated into the ritualistic warfare of the Indo-European Celts where she performs roles that are both nurturing and warlike. Thus does the Goddess survive but as she is greatly changed. A striking equality of the sexes was a hallmark of Celtic society, as we shall see, and followed from the model inherent in their myths. This feature of their everyday society is one of the stronger pieces of evidence that pagan Celtic society represented a hybrid culture in the manner defined above and not a 'pure' Indo-European society. The transformed Goddess, who has taken on many of the qualities of a male Indo-European war god, is present in a powerful and spectacular epiphany at the Cath Maige Tuired ('The Battle of Moytura') which follows the battle described above on the same site and results in the defeat of the Fomoiré.

"After the First Battle of Moytura, because he has lost one of his arms, Nuadu is blemished and must relinquish the kingship. Mainly at the instigation of their wives, the Tuatha Dé then elected as the new king Eochaid Bres (Eochaid the Handsome), whose mother Ériu was of that tribe but whose father Elatha was of the Fomoiré. Bres is the result of an illicit union and his rule ends by being catastrophic (Gray 1982: 27-29). Bres does not cement an alliance between the Fomoiré and the Tuatha Dé, but chooses to dominate and humiliate them. He is removed from kingship. Nuadu, with his arm restored by Dian

Cécht's son Miach, briefly ascends the throne, then gives way to Lug who has Tuatha Dé paternity. The stage is set for war.

"While the Tuatha Dé are preparing for battle, the war goddess, the Morrígan ('Great Queen' or 'Queen of Demons') comes to Lug and prophesies the destruction which will take place. She also meets the Dagda at Glen Edin in the north, appearing as a woman washing at the river Unshin. (One of her characteristic forms is that of the woman washing shrouds or the heads and limbs of those destined to die at the fjord before battle.) Although she is standing astride the river, they copulate and she prophesies the destruction of Indech, the king of the Fomoiré, saying that she will 'save him from the blood of heart and the kidneys of his valor-testicles). Later, she gave two handfuls of her blood to the hosts that were waiting at the For of the Unshin" (Gray 1982: 45). In another episode, the Dagda encounters Indech's daughter and has 'intercourse with her, after which she offers magical assistance against the Fomoiré. ... The Morrígan and Badb ('Scald-crow'), the second of the three war goddesses, proclaim the victory and the return of prosperity, but also prophesy the end of the world and the return of chaos" (Doan 1987: 55).

[It is worth noting that when a deity is described using the prefix 'The' before a 'name', the complete appellation signifies not only a 'name' but a 'species' of being, a 'category' of the divine.] The Morrígan, although having absorbed attributes of an Indo-European war god, is still a striking example of the Goddess of Sovereignty whose power can only be accessed through sexual intercourse. In spite of her participation in this Indo-European war, she is no longer supreme and is clearly angry, so she prophesies the end of the world and a return to chaos.

The third and last act of the epic history of Ireland concerns the defeat of the Tuatha Dé Danaan by the Sons of Míl (Milesians), whose descendants are the Gaels. Their father's name Míl Espaine is the Latin *miles Hispaniae*, meaning Spanish soldier in Gaelic. *Hibernia*, which is the Latin form of the Greek term for Ireland (*Ierne*), is derived from *Iberia* ('Spain'). Did the Gaels originally come from Spain, an idea that is usually dismissed as medieval fantasy? Perhaps they did, as Celtic peoples settled the Iberian peninsula in the last centuries of the first millennium B.C.. They could have migrated northward hugging the eastern Atlantic coasts of the Iberian peninsula and Gaul in small boats then to cross the Channel to continue along the west coast of Wales and Britain. *Ierne* survives as *Ériu* or *Éire*. In any case, the invasion of the Milesians will once again demonstrate that the Goddess lives and must be propitiated.

"According to *Lebor Gebla*, the Sons of Míl landed in the southwest of Ireland on May 1 (*Beltaine*) and, upon setting foot on Irish ground, their poet and judge [i.e. druid], Amairgen, recited a poem in which he claimed to subsume all being within himself. After defeating the Tuatha Dé, they set out for Tara." [Archeological evidence dates the beginning of Tara as a royal residence to 300 B.C., a practice that continued for six centuries. Before that, it must have been a sacred locality most likely dedicated to the Earth Goddess.] "Enroute they encountered the three eponymous goddesses of Ireland, Ériu, Banba and Fódla, each of whom extracted a promise from Amairgen that her name should be used as a name for the island. Ériu, whose name Amairgen promised would be the principal one, foretold that Ireland would belong to the Sons of Míl for all time, but that neither their chief, Donn, nor his offspring would have any benefit of the island. Shortly afterwards, he was drowned off the southwest coast of the island, an area known ever since as *Tech Duinn* ('Donn's House'), identified as the Irish Otherworld, with Donn as the Lord of the Dead" (Doan 1987: 57).

Has the Great Goddess, besieged on all sides by the invaders, chosen to put the Goddess of Death into an Indo-European male deity if only to henceforth bear one less burden? Getting mean and lean is an old and effective strategy when life gets very tough.

"At Tara, the Sons of Míl, found the three kings of the Tuatha Dé, Mac Cuill, Mac Cécht and Mac Gréine, husbands of the three goddesses, and ordered them to surrender the land. The kings claimed a respite for three days and then referred the case to Amaigen, who judged that the Sons of Míl should leave the island and journey out past the ninth wave (which constituted a magical boundary for the Celts). When they sought to land again, the Tuatha Dé created a druidic wind which carried them out to sea. The second time Amaigen invoked the land, immediately the wind abated and brought them to land. The Sons of Míl came ashore and inflicted a final defeat on the Tuatha Dé at Tailtiu, the site of the annual festival instituted by Lug. ... He (Amaigen) symbolizes the beginnings of their settlement by proclaiming himself the embodiment of creation, and he ensures their successful landing by appeasing the goddess of the land. In his invocation of Ireland, as in the triad of eponymous goddesses married to the kings of Tara, we find a statement of one of the dominant themes of Irish tradition: the personification of the land as a goddess married to the rightful king" (Mac Cana 1970: 64 in Doan 1987).



The Irish Celtic Goddess of Death

The Great Goddess as Death Wielder is present in the literature of the early Middle Ages in Ireland and Wales, although in a diminished form, for the conflict with Christianity had been lost. The Otherworld in these tales has the beneficent quality of immortality and paradise and is controlled by women who are often depicted as fairies.

"In the eighth-century Irish tale, *Echtrae Conli* ('The Adventure of Conle'), ... a fairy woman comes to the hero, who is sitting on the hill of Uisnech, the ritual center of Ireland, and states: 'I come from the Land of the Living, a place in which there is neither death nor sin nor transgression. We enjoy lasting feasts without preparing them and pleasant company without strife. We live in great peace. From that we are named the People of Peace {*áess síde*, alternatively People of the Otherworld}' see Dillon (1948: 102) and Ó Cathasaigh (1977-78: 138).

"She reveals that she loves Conle, the son of Conn Cétchthach ('of the Hundred Battles'), high king of Ireland in the second century A.D. according to the Annals. She says that she wishes to bring him to Mag Mell ('The Plain of Delight'), where Bóadach is immortal king, a king without 'weeping or sorrow in his land since he took sovereignty.' The woman is heard by all but seen only by Conle. Conn invokes the aid of his druid, Corn, to protect his son from the woman's magic. He chants against the woman and she departs but, before leaving, she throws an apple to Conle which is his only food for a month (the magical food of the Otherworld, like the pomegranate in the myth of Persephone).

"Conle yearns for the woman until, at the end of the month, she returns and summons him once more to the Otherworld. Conn hears her and calls for the druid, but the woman says: 'Conn of the Hundred Battles, do not love druidry, for in a short while there will come a righteous man with many companies, numerous and wonderful, to give judgement on the wide shore (St. Patrick?). Soon shall his judgement reach you. He will scatter the spells of druids, with their evil learning, in the sight of the devil, the dark and magic alone' (Mac Cana 1976: 97).

"Conle is torn between love for his people and desire for the woman, and she repeats her invitation: There is another country where also you could go. I see the sun sets. Though it is far away, we shall reach it before the night. It is the country which delights the mind of anyone who goes there. There are no people there save only women and girls' (Dillon 1948: 104).

"Immediately, Conle springs away from his people into her crystal boat, rows with her across the sea, and they are never seen again" (Doan 1987 58-59).

"We find a similar account of the Otherworld as Land of Women in the seventh or eighth century mythological tale, *Echtrae Emain maic Febail* ('the Adventure of Bran son of Febal'), also known as *Immram Brain* ('The Voyage of Bran'). The story seems to represent a pre-Christian Irish view of the Otherworld which the clerical author has attempted to mesh with the Christian idea of Paradise (Mac Cana 1976). In this tale a woman appears in Bran's house and recites a twenty-eight quatrain poem in which she describes a land where lovely colors shine on every side; joy is constant; sorrow and sickness do not exist and music sounds always in the air. In three quatrains, the woman prophesies the birth of Christ, and in the final verse she urges Bran to shake off his lethargy and come to the Land of Women. [I find it interesting that Christianity has won and then the Goddess departs, wishing to take her favorites with her.]

"The next day, Bran departs with twenty seven companions and, after two days and nights, they see Manannán mac Lir coming towards them in a chariot upon the water. He also recites a twenty eight quatrain poem describing the Otherworld in terms very similar to the woman's. He tells Bran that what seems the sea to him is to Manannán the many flowered Plain of Delight. ... Then, as in the first poem, there is a sudden interpolation of Christian material. Adam's sin is recalled and the coming of Christ foretold. Manannán also prophesizes the conception and birth of his son, the hero Mongn, which parallels the Incarnation of Christ. In the final quatrain, Brain is told to row to Emne (Emain Ablach), the Land of Women. " ... (They) row until they come to the Land of Women. The leader of the Women calls to Bran, but he is afraid to land. She throws a ball of thread at his face, and he puts up his hand. The ball sticks to it, and the woman draws him in by the thread. They enter into a great hall in which they find twenty seven beds, one for each couple. They remain there feasting for what seems to them one year, although it is actually many years.

"At the end of this period of time, one of the men feels homesick and Bran is persuaded to go home. The woman warns them not to set foot on land ... They arrive at Srub Brain in Ireland and find people assembled there who ask who they are. Bran replies: 'I am Bran son of Febal.' One of the gathered men responds: 'We know him not, though 'The Voyage of Bran' is one of our ancient stories.' The homesick man leaps from the boat and as soon as he touches the land is turned to ashes, ... Bran tells them the account of his wanderings and writes them down in Ogam (an early Irish alphabet), and then bids farewell, after which his adventures are not known" (Dillon 1948: 104-107)).

"Much of the early Irish literature deals with the conflict between Christianity and the native druidic establishment. By the seventh century, the conquest of institutional paganism had long since been assured, but many of the oppositions and tensions created by the establishment of Christianity remained unresolved. In *Echtrae Conli*, the conflict is primarily between the rival ideologies presented by the druid on the one hand and the fairy woman on the other. Ironically, the Celtic Otherworld is seen to presage the Christian heaven; the druid is made to obstruct the supernatural visitor and thus oppose the blessed region in which she dwells, while she prophesies the coming of St. Patrick (or possible Christ) who will destroy the druids 'devilish science and spells' (Mac Cana 1970: 96).

"*Immrám Brain* lacks this specific polemic. Instead the author is able to present a more extended view of the Otherworld in its various aspects. Gradually, the notion of Mag Mell is harmonized with the Biblical terra *repromissionis* ('Land of Promise', Tír Tairngiri in Irish), first through the general Christian bias of the whole composition, and more importantly through the pairing of Christ, who was both God and man, with Mongán, who belonged to both this world and the Otherworld. In other words, the author creates an equation between pre-Christian and Christian by drawing an analogy between the birth of the semi-divine native hero and the birth of Christ" (Mac Cana 1976: 94, 98).

"One might ask why the Irish Otherworld is so strongly associated with women. ... To begin with, a vast area of Irish mythology, and particularly that part of it most intimately connected with the land of Ireland, its physical features, and its fertility, is dominated by the great figure of the goddess in whose dispensation lay such basic issues as peace and war, prosperity and sovereignty. It is hardly surprising then that she should sometimes be thought of as dominating the Otherworld realm to the virtual exclusion of the gods. ... The woman who invited Bran and Conle to the Land of Women can hardly be dissociated from those goddesses, such as Áine (who had her seat at Cnoc Áine in Co. Limerick), Aoibheall (of Craig Liath in Clare), and Clíodna (of Carraig Clíodna in Cork), whose fairy dwellings constituted familiar landmarks in the Irish countryside and whose traditions flourished until recently among local populations. Nor can they be dissociated from the corresponding goddesses of British tradition, Rhiannon, for example, in medieval Welsh literature and Morgain la Fée in Arthurian romance" (Mac Cana 1976: 111).

"Medb's, lover in *The Tain* is the hero Fergus mac Roich ('Manly vigor' or 'Choice of Men,' son of 'Great Stallion'), whose virility is such that when his supernatural wife, Flidais, is not present, he needs seven ordinary women to satisfy him" (Ross 1967: 215). "Medb conducts an affair with Fergus so flagrantly that her husband Ailill's normal composure is severely strained. Throughout the tale, she offers her own 'friendly thighs' (or else her daughter Findabair, an extension of herself) to those whose aid she seeks. Usually such offers are made under the influence of strong drink, which has also been traced to the sovereignty myth and the symbolic drink given to the the chosen candidate" (Bowen 1975: 29). Such promiscuous behavior, however, should not be seen as a reflection of 'gross moral turpitude' in early Irish society, but rather the result of Medb's mythic origins (cf. Doan 1967: 64-65).

I disagree with Doan's interpretation that Medb here is not a goddess, but a literary reflection only. Furthermore, he sees this image to be that of "a fickle and reckless queen, whose actions results in the deaths of countless men" (Doan 1967: 65). He is not alone in this opinion and supports it with a quote from O'Rahilly (1967) that expresses a similar sentiment. Yet he senses the metaphors and interpretation I prefer when concluding "... we see the theme of woman as the cause of chaos and destruction..." (Doan 1967: 66).

I see Medb, not simply as a fickle, destructive, nymphomaniac but as something more profound and terrifying. Medb is the Goddess of Death, who can promote the return of chaos, not to revel in destruction and death, but so as to 'clear the deck', scour the cosmic 'field' in order that a new birthing of society may take place. Such a cataclysm heralds the end of a cosmic cycle and the beginning of a new 'world' in the ancient cosmological sense. The Goddess of Death is not merely a life-taking epiphany of the Great Goddess, for that role would view death as a finality. Such a concept is foreign to the mytho-poetics of the Goddess. In death is the renewal of life, and this cosmic metaphor is not subject to amendments or exceptions. One need only look at the meaning attached to the coming of winter and then ecological renewal in the spring. The Goddess of Death, of whom Medb is a Celtic epiphany, by exercising her awesome power also changes the fundamental ground of mytho-poetics in such a manner as to precipitate a new birthing of a transformed society. The historical problem that faced Medb is that she became progressively more powerless as Christianity became ever more entrenched in a rigid institutionalized bureaucracy. One could view her actions, particularly in the *The Tain*, as that of a very angry Goddess of Death, who will attempt to hurt the chauvanistic society which is overwhelming her realm, if her larger purposes are thwarted. It seems as if her second tier of motives might be phrased thus: 'if the world cannot be prepared for a rebirthing that has integrity and tradition intact, then let it bleed awhile'.



The Irish Goddess and Celtic Sovereignty: Love and Power

"In early Irish literature the territorial goddess, or goddess of sovereignty, is frequently depicted as an old hag who is transformed into a beautiful young woman when she either kisses or has sexual intercourse with the rightful heir to the throne. We find this for example, in the legends of both Niall Noígíallach ('of the Nine Hostages'), ancestor of the Uí Néill of Ulster, whose reign according to the Annals was from 379 to 405 A.D., and Lugaid Laígde, ancestor of the pre-Gaelic Érainn of Munster.

"According to the former legend, Niall is hunting with his brothers when they stop to cook and eat a meal, after which the eldest brother goes in search of water. He comes to a well guarded by a monstrous black hag who will grant him the use of the well if he will give her a kiss. He refuses and returns empty handed. Each of the three middle brothers goes in turn and has the same experience, except for Fiachra, who gives the hag a brief kiss. When Niall, the youngest, goes, he offers not only to kiss her, but to lie with her. He then throws himself upon her and kisses her, and she is transformed into a beautiful maiden. When he asks her who she is, she replies; 'I am the Sovereignty of Ireland' (*missi banfhlaith hrenn*), ... She tells Niall to refuse to give water to his brothers until they grant him seniority over them and agree that he might raise his weapon a hand's breadth over theirs, after which his descendants will hold the kingship ..." (Doan 1987: 62).

Doan implies that prophesy by the druidess might be the model for the Goddess of Sovereignty's pronouncements about legitimate kingship particularly in view of the political leverage that such events empowered. If the Goddess is *real*, then he has the fundamental

premise backwards. In any case, there is a good historical record of a Gaulish druidess foretelling the fate of his descendants to the Roman Emperor Aurelian. One way for an observer in our times to assess the strength of the Great Goddess' power in a society of the distant past is to scrutinize the evidence for the roles that women occupied and, in particular, look for participation in power positions such as tribal leader, warrior or influential prophet.

"In the second legend, it is foretold to King Dáire that a son of his named Lugaid will attain the kingship of Ireland, for which reason he gives the name to all five of his sons. ... a druid tells Daire that his heir will be the one to succeed in catching a fawn with a golden fleece ... The fawn appears and, while they pursue it, mist separates the five brothers from the other hunters. Lugaid Laígde catches the animal. Then a great snow begins to fall and one of the brothers sets off in search of shelter. He find a house with a great fire, good food, ale and a horrible sorceress. The latter offers him a bed for the night if he will sleep with her. He refuses and she tells him that he has deprived himself of Sovereignty. The other brothers then come to the same house in turn, but the sorceress asks nothing of them, until Lugaid Laígde comes. When he follows her into bed, she becomes radiant like the rising sun in the month of May and fragrant like a beautiful garden. As he makes love to her, she says to him: 'Happy is your journey, for I am Sovereignty, and you shall attain the sovereignty over all of Ireland'" (Doan 1987: 63).

"In Irish legend, as we have seen, the selection of the king took the form of a sacred marriage with the goddess who represented both the abstract sovereignty and the physical substance of his kingdom. In pre-Christian times, the inauguration ceremony, actually called the *banfheis rígi* ('wedding-feast or marriage of kingship') presumably included a physical enactment of the union of king and goddess, as in Sumerian tradition. [And in Vedic India as well.] ... There is evidence that Diarmait mac Cerball, king of Tara in the sixth century celebrated the *Feis Temrach* ("Feast of [literally sleeping with] Tara") in defiance of ecclesiastical pressure and that his clerical opponents sought his downfall. In a later poem attributed to Diarmait, he states: 'I was the lawful spouse of the beautiful daughter of Erimon. Clerics have expropriated me from possession of Fótia of the uplands. Young unlawful kings will wash their shoes in her house ... '" (Mac Cana 1982: 521).

"In addition to undergoing a ritual act symbolizing his union with the goddess, which may have involved the use of the phallic Lia Fáil ('Stone of Destiny'), the king of Tara (or 'high king of Ireland') may have also taken a mortal wife on this occasion to ensure his claim to the kingship. This is suggested by a passage in *Tochmarc Étaíne* ('The Wooing of Étaín') in which the men of Ireland refuse to hold the Feast of Tara for Eochaid Airem until he takes a wife, for which reason, he institutes a search that leads to his marriage with Étaín, in actuality a goddess reincarnated in human form. The message of this is clear; Eochaid's claim to the kingship may not be validated until his union with the goddess of sovereignty, in this case Étaín" (Doan 1987: 63-64).

"Another literary reflex of the goddess of sovereignty is Medb Lethderg ('Red-side' or 'Half-red'), daughter of Conán of Cuala, who was married to the nine kings of Tara in succession, including Feidlimid, father of Conn Cétchathach. Conn's son Art and Art's son Cormac. According to the *Book of Leinster*, compiled in the twelfth century, 'Great indeed was the strength and power of that Medb over the men of Ireland, for it was she would not allow a king in Tara without his having herself as wife" (Mille, 1927:137-138, cited in Bowen, 1975:19).

"The name Medb itself is connected with the liquor associated with sovereignty, seen earlier in the legends of Niall Noígíallach and Conn Cétchathach. Etymologized as 'She who intoxicates,': the name is ultimately derived from the same Indo-European root as English 'mead'. Medb's identification as the goddess who conveys sovereignty through the sacred drink can be seen from a medieval poem in which, referring to someone aspiring to the kingship of Ireland, the beer of Cuala comes to him, 'obviously with Medb Lethderg, daughter of Conn of Cuala, in mind' (Ó Máille, 1927: 145, cited in Rees and Rees, 1961: 75; Dumézil 1973: 93).

"Likewise, Medb of Connacht, the central female character in the Irish epic, *The Tain* ('*Tin Bó Cuailnge*', 'Cattle Raid of Cooley'), appears to be a literary reflex of the goddess of sovereignty. A daughter of the king of Tara, she is said to have been married to Conchobar, king of Ulster, but 'through pride of mind' she forsook him against his will, which is then given as the 'first cause of the stirring up' of the 'Cattle Raid of Cooley'" (Mille 1927: 131, cited in Ní Bhrolcháin, 1982: 526). "Thereafter she married successively Tinde son of Connra Cas, Eochaid Dála and Ailill mac Mata, each of whom became king of Connacht through his marriage with her. As she herself admits to her husband Ailill in *The Tain*, she was sought by other suitors as well, for she 'never had one man without another waiting in his shadow' ... She demanded a husband suitable for the kingship, as she also tells Ailill: 'for I demanded a stange bridge-gift such as no woman before me had asked of a man of the men of Ireland, to wit, a husband without meanness, without jealousy, without fear'" (O'Rahilly, 1967:138).

"While Cú Chulainn is defending the province of Ulster single-handedly, she comes to him in the form of a beautiful young woman, saying that she is the daughter of Buan ('the Eternal One'). When she offers to help him, he replies that it wasn't for a woman's backside that he took on this ordeal. She then tells him that instead she will hinder him in the up-coming battle coming to him in the form of an eel, a she-wolf [very shamanic!] and a hornless red heifer" (Kinsella 1970: 132-133): see Doan (1987: 67).

Spurning the Goddess of Sovereignty was extremely dangerous and the principle has shamanic overtones. If power doors are opened, and the opportunity not pursued, understood, absorbed and utilized in altruistic and creative ways, personal disaster and madness usually follow. Doan is very shortsighted here. This is not simply a bedroom farce in which the hero rejects the advances of a warrior goddess who plays seductress. The evolution of the Goddess of Sovereignty into a warrior and Goddess of War will be dealt with below.



On the Reciprocity of Divine Relationships

The reciprocal relationship which exists between the gods and humans is poorly understood in the West, although thoroughly assimilated in Buddhism. We in the West are still obsessed with religious iconography and the imagery of mytho-poetics as *only* symbol and metaphor. Icons and images, be they static constructions or active ritual, are certainly

metaphoric and that is an objectively valid level of experience and interpretation. It is not, however, the bottom line except to those who restrict themselves to intellectual and scholastic boxes. Do not misunderstand me here; those 'boxes' contain invaluable toolkits for understanding. Taking it apart and putting it back together again are extremely valuable processes and the knowledge gained is important and fundamental. I obviously thoroughly indulge myself in that process. A serious problem exists, however, with an exclusive restriction to that process and 'scientific' linear, deductive logic.

For example, there is currently a 'New Age' cottage industry that devotes itself to pointing out the limitations of the view of reality developed by Western science. The limitations are real and it is important to realize the arrogance of the delusion of comprehensiveness that the scientific revolution and twentieth century reductionism subjected us to. However, let us not 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. A detailed, factual, analytical knowledge base is fundamental for considering both the nature of reality in general, and the meaning of religious experience and mytho-poetics in particular. However, depending upon one's intuitive convictions, philosophical beliefs and life experiences, the matter may not end there. *If the gods and goddesses are real, they are not metaphors, they carry metaphors with them.* Isolated metaphors are constructions of the human mind working at an advanced poetic and philosophical level; they are not objectively real things. Meaning is forever restricted to a particular cultural context at a specific time in history. White was the color of death in the mytho-poetics of the Great Goddess in Neolithic times and historically used as the color of mourning in many Eastern cultures. It is the symbol of virginal purity and the goodness inherent in the hero in Christianity. Numerous examples of such cultural relativity may be given.

*If the gods and goddesses are objectively real, then a reciprocal relationship between us and them is a bit less difficult to imagine. You cannot have a reciprocal relationship with a metaphor, as it is an abstract construction to be contemplated and understood - a primary device of religious philosophy, if you will. If the deities are but another form of being, as defined in Buddhism, then interaction and reciprocity assume real pragmatic meaning. Indeed, Buddhism defines the gods, for all their awesome powers, as inferior to us, for one extraordinary reason. Only human beings can progress spiritually, achieve enlightenment, conquer *samsara*, (the endless cycle of rebirth), and enter *nirvana*. The Great Goddess' mytho-poetics do not comment upon such a contrast between gods and humans, for there is no written evidence for a philosophy of the transmigration of souls underscored by *karma* and the eternal quest for spiritual enlightenment that leads to the total transformation and union with the Void or Great Bliss. (Re-incarnation can be read into what little we can decipher about druidic beliefs.)*

There is however, a striking correspondence in the basic belief that deities are as objectively real as humans (putting aside *maya*, the fundamental illusory nature of corporeal reality). Buddhism, whose theology is the product of brilliant minds working first of all in advanced intellectual spheres, ultimately sees the deities as products of our minds. Reflecting a vast panorama of emotional and psychic states, once generated they are objectively real with vast influence and an intense demand for interaction and reciprocity. It is for that reason that human beings are considered divine, for we contain, and may, if very spiritually advanced, deliberately generate the multiplex Deity.

The mytho-poetics of the Neolithic Great Goddess, while no doubt developed by exceptional minds, proceeds from a different departure point. Only in its very last stages, was any of the philosophy written down even in diluted forms. It is the product of cultures that lacked writing and whose religious leaders did not concern themselves with the

conscious development of an intellectual, philosophical theology. The Goddess is known to be objectively real, but not because of the revelations of advanced spiritual practice in the sense that we have come to know that in tantra for example. This was no doubt the path for the exceptional few.

The Goddess' objective reality is established because of her relationship with sovereignty, which is a fascinating combination of power and nurturing, that flowed in both directions, not only from Goddess to sovereign, but from sovereign to Goddess. The Goddess revealed herself as real through a relationship that was based in real world concerns that were pragmatic and affected the entire society. Through this relationship, the Goddess is revealed to be dependent upon humanity for strength, and indeed, her very existence. She is not a frozen, perfected icon totally self contained and unaffected by anything from the 'world', only able to grant power and gifts at whim if supplicated properly such as is Yahweh of the Old Testament. Her very existence depends upon reciprocal, interaction with the human sphere. Her relationship with the king is essential for her to manifest her power on earth and he becomes her essential sacred vehicle. If that last point is at all in doubt, reflect for a moment upon the influence of Christianity upon the Goddess as narrated here; in the absence of her divine consort, she disappears but does not die. The White or Great Goddess is objectively real with a finality that is very different from Buddhism, with its ultimate recourse to *maya*. She does survive all attacks, and while invisible in the worst of times, she can always be found by those whose minds and perceptions are attuned to the discovery and the relationship.

"When cultural traditions are interrupted, it should be no surprise that certain things can no longer be seen. Naturally, apples are easier to see than, let us say, incubi. But difficulty of perception should not be an argument against its reality. Just because it is easier to travel from Bielefeld to Erlangen than Timbuktu will not cause anyone to argue for that reason, Timbuktu is 'less real'. ... We can expect 'mythic perceptions' to be situated on a 'different plane'. Typically, such perceptions are rejected out of hand by many scientists precisely because they are on a 'plane' which these people do not want to enter, because it would be inimical to their 'cognitive interest.'" (Duerr 1985: 347-349).

When Cú Chulainn is fighting against Lóch at the ford, the Morrígan comes from the *síd*-mounds in the form of a white, hornless, red-eared heifer (symbolizing an Otherworld cow), with fifty heifers around her, each pair linked together by a chain of white bronze. Cú Chulainn casts at her and shatters one of her eyes. She then comes in the form of a black, slippery eel which coils itself around Cú Chulainn's legs. While he is disentangling himself, his enemy Lóch wounds him in the breast. Cú Chulainn strikes the eel, crushing its ribs. Finally, a russet-colored she-wolf attacks him and he again casts at her, shattering her eye. Lóch once again wounds him while he is warding her off, and Cú Chulainn kills him with his special weapon, the *gae bolga*. (O'Rahilly 1967: 194; Ross 1967: 220).

"Later on the Morrígan comes to Cú Chulainn in the form of an ugly old hag milking a cow with three teats. 'The reason she came thus was to be succoured by Cú Chulainn, for no one whom Cú Chulainn had wounded had ever recovered until he himself aided in his cure'" (O'Rahilly 1967: 197); see Doan (1987: 67-68).

The human sovereign has powers the Goddess needs. In this situation, her own powers do not suffice; she cannot heal herself alone. Yet the sovereign's powers are due to his relationship with the Goddess of Sovereignty. We see the need for reciprocity, because sovereign and goddess are each incomplete without the other, and thus reciprocity and complementarity are demanded of their relationship, or else great powers are lost. In

this case, if the interactive reciprocity does not occur, it is not only two beings who suffer. The prosperity of the realm depends upon the king's relationship with 'heaven', i.e. the Goddess. This is a universal theme whose explication may be found in the ancient Near East, Celtic realms, ancient China and Japan. This universality is not an argument for cultural transfusion of this mytho-poetic from a primary location to other regions. It is evidence for the objective universality of this truth which was discovered independently in several different places and times. We can take the discomfort of Cú Chulainn upon realizing whom he has healed, as indicative of the tension and unresolvable conflicts embedded in a hybrid society which fused Great Goddess mytho-poetics with those of the skygod-oriented Indo-Europeans.

"Cú chulainn asks her for milk and, each time he receives the milk from one of her teats, he blesses her. First one eye, then the other, and finally her leg is healed. She then taunts him, saying 'You said you would never heal me,' to which he replies, 'If I had known it was you, I wouldn't have done it'" (Kinsella 1970:137).

"In some versions of the tale, after being cured, the Morrígan alights in the form of a crow on a bramble bush. Later, becoming enraged at the fewness of his own supporters, Cú Chulainn raises a battle shout, which is answered by demons, and Nemain or Badb ('Crow') brings confusion on the armies. Nemain and Badb are sometimes represented as the consorts of Néit, the god of war, ... The Morrígan also appears in *Aided Con culainn* ('The Death of Cú Chulainn'). On the last morning of his life, when Cú Chulainn approaches his horse, Liath Macha, he discovers that the Morrígan has broken his chariot during the previous night. 'She did not want Cú Chulainn to go the battle because she knew he would not return to Emain Macha'" (Tymoczko 1981:42). [There is a very moving sense of anguish and poignancy here as the Goddess contemplates a loss that is both affects both a personal relationship and her power on earth as well.] "When Cú Chulainn goes into his final battle, the Morrígan still does not desert him for, as he comes near the enemy, a bird is seen flying over the chief in his chariot" (Henessey 1870:50; Tymoczko 1981: 52). After he receives his death wound, he ties himself to a pillar. The raven perches beside him for a while, and one of his slayers comments, 'That pillar did not usually hold birds' (Tymoczko 1981: 61), after which the Morrígan disappears from the scene. The Badb also appears in a late version of this tale, as the washer at the fjord. Cú Chulainn and his druid Cathbad, come to a fjord and see a woman lamenting, washing and wringing blood-stained spoils on the edge of the fjord. Cathbad states that she is Badb, the daughter of Calitín, washing Cú Chulainn's armor, a sure sign of his death" (Van Hamel 1933:96, cited in Lysaght 1979: 10): see Doan (1987: 67-68).



The Celtic Goddess of Sovereignty as Warrior

The Goddess of Sovereignty must, unavoidably, be a warrior, for was there ever a kingdom that was never threatened from without or within by those wishing to acquire power and wealth? A Goddess of Sovereignty who could not also be a Goddess of War

would be powerless and impotent in the face of such crises and the integrity of the realm would be easily compromised. Some historians view the Goddess of War as a degenerate manifestation of the Great Goddess forced upon her as the war-like Indo-Europeans forced her to assume a role that was originally not necessary. Such a view depends upon the bucolic fantasy of an eternally peaceful, pacifist Neolithic.

Another more serious matter is that the revival of Goddess in our times is frequently ignorant of, and impatient with, historical traditions. We live in times where a supreme importance is attached to the 'reinvention' of religion and traditions for our times, as if former times have nothing to contribute except for the broad outlines of old fashioned symbolism that we now market with trendy chic. If the Goddess is real, and I am proceeding on that belief, then reinventing her is a preposterous idea, to say the least. She was, and always will be, *there*. Our task is to discover the timeless and to learn from it. This means a deep and serious exploration of history, not for simple curiosity and quaintness, but for the metaphysical truths ancient times contained. After truly contemplating that vast accumulation of knowledge and insight, then and only then, may we cautiously experiment with the modification of tradition. Impulsive and unthinking 'reinvention' is a game for children and the results will only have meaning to the immature who are forever infatuated with their own egos and the obsessive need to personalize anything and everything. Our cultural obsessiveness, with ritual 'reinvention', only reflects our ignorance and immaturity. It is as if forcing a simplistic, contemporary image on archetypal styles and forms would somehow reveal the most profound of meanings. Furthermore, current feminism, which so easily mixes social theory with a 'politically correct' theology, has produced its own cartoon version of the Goddess.

"The classical description of the Celtic woman warrior comes from the *Roman History* of the fourth century Byzantine writer, Ammianus Marcellinus, which makes it somewhat suspect, although he did derive much of his material from Timagenes, a contemporary of Emperor Augustus. In an oft-quoted passage he states: 'Nearly all the Gauls are of lofty stature, fair and of ruddy complexion; terrible from the sternness of their eyes, very quarrelsome, and of great pride and insolence. A whole troop of foreigners would not be able to withstand a single Gaul if he called his wife to his assistance, who is usually very strong, with blue eyes; especially when, swelling her neck, gnashing her enormous teeth, and brandishing her sallow arms of enormous size, she begins to strike blows mingled with kicks, as of they were so many missiles sent from the strong of a catapult' (*Roman History XV, 12*).

"There (Britain) the existence of powerful queens of the Iceni and Brigantes, namely Boudicca and Cartimandua, testifies to a tradition of British women rulers which may have differed from the situation prevailing in Gaul. [In *The Gallic War*, Caesar describes Gaulish Celtic women as either begging their husbands not to abandon them or offering themselves to the Roman army when their own men were not present.] Cartimandua, wife of the Brigantian chieftain Venutius, appears to have held power in her own right. Tacitus (c. 55-117 A.D.), in *The Histories* (III, 45), refers to her as *pollens nobilitate* ('powerful by reason of noble birth'), implying that she had inherited the right to rule her tribe, perhaps confirmed through her marriage to Venutius, undoubtedly the ruler of another Brigantian tribal group" (Charles-Edwards 1974: 45). Her power is further demonstrated by her action of turning the rebel leader Caratacus over to the Romans in chains in 51 A.D., which probably created a rift in the Brigantian federations.

"Six years later, Cartimandua separated from Venutius for unknown reasons and attempted to entice his male relatives over to her side. But, as Tacitus states in *The Annals*

of Imperial Rome, with considerable Roman anti-feminism, 'her enemies, infuriated and goaded by fears of humiliating feminine rule (*stimulante ignominia, ne feminae imperio subderentur*), invaded her kingdom with a powerful force of picked warriors' (*Roman History XII*, 40). This led the Romans to send their first auxiliaries and finally a legion to reinstate her. As a result, Cartimandua's authority was confirmed and there appears to have been a reconciliation between her and Venutius. The Romans were rewarded for their support four or five years later, during Boudicca's revolt, when the situation was not complicated by a Brigantian attack on the rear of Paulinus' hard pressed armies. Undoubtedly, Cartimandua was as happy with her Roman client-state position as her fellow client ruler, Cogidummus, in Sussex" (Richmond 1954:50).

"In 59 A.D. Prasutagus, king of the Iceni, (modern day East Anglia), died but left a will naming the Emperor Nero co-heir with his two daughters, thereby hoping to preserve his kingdom and household from attack. Prasutagus' widow, Boudicca, apparently resisted, and was flogged by the Romans while her two daughters were raped. According to Dio Cassius (c. 150-235 A.D.) who, aside from Tacitus, provides the only full account of the rebellion, Boudicca was 'a British woman of the royal family possessed of greater intelligence than often belongs to women' (*Roman History, LXII*, 2). In 61, A.D., while the Roman governor, Gaius Suetonius Paulinus, was intent on the destruction of the druidic stronghold on Anglesey, Boudicca launched her revolt. Dio Cassius describes her as she appeared before her troops: 'She was huge of frame, terrifying of aspect, and with a harsh voice. A great mass of bright red hair fell to her knees; she wore a great twisted golden torc, and a tunic of many colors, over which was a thick mantle, fastened by a brooch. Now she grasped a spear, to strike fear into all her watched her' (*ibid*; Chadwick 1972: 50).

"In Boudicca's speech, which Dio Cassius probably invented as a standard rhetorical piece, although it undoubtedly reflects the contemporary Roman view of her, she berates the Iceni for having allowed themselves to be enslaved by the Romans. After she finishes speaking, she releases a hare as a form of divination which runs to the auspicious side. She then invokes the war goddess Andrasta (whose name probably means the 'The Invincible One' -- ironically Boudicca's name also seems to mean 'Victory'), and clearly identifies herself with the goddess, saying: 'I thank thee Andraste, and call upon thee as woman speaking to woman ... those over whom I rule are Britons, men that know not how to till the soil or ply a trade, but are thoroughly versed in the art of war and hold all things in common, even children and wives, so that the latter possess the same valour as men' (*Roman History LXII*, 6).

"Dio Cassius has Boudicca condemn the Romans for their effeminacy, although this may reflect Dio Cassius' own view of Nero's court. She beseeches Andrasta for 'victory, preservation of life and liberty' from men who bathe in warm water, eat artificial dainties, drink in mixed wine, anoint themselves with myrrh, sleep on soft couches with boys for bedfellows -- boys past their prime at that, -- and are slaves to a lyre player and a poor one too' (*ibid*).

Her attack on Nero continues ... 'Wherefore may this Mistress Domitia-Nero reign no longer over me or over you men; let the wench sing and lord it over Romans, for they surely deserve to be the slaves of such a woman after having submitted to her so long. But for us, Mistress (Andrasta), be thou alone ever our leader' (*ibid*).

"The Iceni were then joined by the Trinovantes of Essex who particularly hated the Roman ex-soldiers who had formed a settlement (*colonia*) at Camulodunum (Colchester), the former Trinovantian capital. ... After two days of of siege, the town fell and the

inhabitants were butchered. Suetonius Paulinus hastened from Wales but, when neither his own legions nor the Second Legion summoned from the southwest arrived, he had to abandon both Londinium (London) and Verulamium (St. Albans) to Boudicca's fury.

"... (A)rcheological excavations have corroborated the wholesale destruction of the settlements. ... He (Dio Cassius) focuses on Boudicca's gruesome appropriation of the war goddess she had invoked in the groves sacred to her. ... (*Roman History, LXII 7*). This implies that the war goddess would be particularly satisfied by the sacrifice of female victims, in the same way we know from other accounts that male deities were appropriated by the sacrifice of male captives" (Doan 1987: 29).

Boudicca ordered an unspeakable mutilation of the women who had become Roman sympathizers and collaborators; I refer you to Doan (1987) for an exact description which I have chosen not to reproduce. The extraordinary circumstance which demands thoughtful comment is that this is the only instance in ancient history that I am aware of where a *female* leader, who is also acting as her own general, and is *also* an epiphany of the Goddess of War, deliberately chose to torture and execute *female* prisoners of war. Obviously, this historical record needs to be reconciled with my remarks above concerning a nurturing war goddess; there is certainly not a trace of that aspect in this situation. Nurturing behavior can be destroyed by vicious abuse and, in certain situations, may be inappropriate if the opponent is unusually savage and cruel. Furthermore, unspeakable cruelty to the enemy has at times, as with the U.S. use of atomic weapons against the Japanese at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the fire bombing by the Allies of Dresden Germany during WWII, been adopted as a deliberate, military strategy to bring a brutal war to an immediate close. As an epiphany of the Goddess of War, Boudicca adopted an extreme strategem which we have seen on occasion throughout history; it was tragic for her and her people that it failed.

"The ferocity of Boudicca's revolt suggests considerable hostility to the Roman occupation of Britain. Prior to this, the Iceni, Trinovantes and most of the other tribes had seemed to accept Roman rule. Undoubtedly, the barbarous treatment they received following the death of Prasutagus had done much to aggravate the situation. Following the sack of the three towns, Suetonius Paulinus quickly gathered together nearly 10,000 armed men and, as in the battles fought in Gaul during the previous century, the Romans utterly routed the less disciplined Celtic tribesmen. The British were so confident of victory that they brought their wives with them, stationing them in carts on the edge of the battlefield. According to both Tacitus and Dio Cassius, Boudicca rode in a chariot before her army ...

"The Romans attacked in ordered fashion. The British fled with difficulty since the ring of wagons blocked the outlets. ... Tacitus claims that Boudicca poisoned herself, whereas Dio Cassius claims that she fell sick and died ..." (Doan 1987: 27-30).

"In his *Chronicles of Scotland*, Hector Boece attests that the women of Celtic Scotland were as combative as those of Ireland: 'The women were of little less vassalage and strength than were the men; for maidens and wives of all ranks, if they were not with child, went to battle as well as the men. (my translation, based on Bellenden's cited in Henderson 1982: 20).

"However, a similar tradition is found concerning the Germanic Lombard ('longbearded') people of northern Italy, for their eighth century chronicler states that their name derives from a time when their women went into battle with their hair tied under their chins to delude the enemy (Wemple 1987: 134), which suggests that woman warriors may have existed in other than Celtic Dark Age societies.

"In twelfth century Wales we find Gwenllian, daughter of Gruffydd ap Cynan, the wife of Gruffydd ap Rhys, and mother of the future Lord Rhys, taking part in battle. In 1136, she led her own army against the Normans at Cydweli (Kidwelly) in Dyfed (southwest Wales). She saw one son killed and another taken prisoner before she herself fell on Maes Gwenllian ('Gwenllian's Field'), still named after her (J.Morris 1984: 185; Williams, 1964(II): 28).

"In Ireland, women appear to have participated in warfare on a regular basis much longer than they did in Britain. ... (W)e find references in the Irish law tracts to liability for military service by daughters who inherit land from their mothers when there are no male heirs (Dillon 1936: 139-140). This obligation was supposedly abolished by Adomnán in the seventh century. ...

"Warlike women continued to flourish in medieval Ireland despite Adomnán's Law. During the Bruce wars of the early fourteenth century, Dearbhfhorgaill, daughter of Magnus O'Connor, 'with all the gallowglasses and men of Clan Murtagh that she could obtain, marched against the churches of Drumcliff and plundered many of its clergy,' ... [Neatly done. The Goddess of Sovereignty as warrior attacks the Christian church, which had nearly dealt her a death blow.]

"Her (Agnes Campbell, Lady Cantire) daughter, Fionnghuala (Iníon Dubh) MacDonnell, married to Hugh O'Donnell of Donegal, and the mother of Red Hugh O'Donnell, likewise played an important political and military role during this period. In 1588, she avenged the death of her cousin, Alexander, son of Sorley Boy MacDonnell, by having her Scottish troops kill Hugh, son of Dean O'Gallagher, implicated in her cousin's death. In 1590, she led an attack on her husband's son by his first wife, Donnell O'Donnell, who had attempted to set aside his father and usurp his half-brother, Red Hugh's, place. This led to the deaths of Donnell and some two hundred of his followers, shot by Iníon Dubh's bowmen (O'Donovan 1851(III)). In 1592, she was instrumental in persuading her husband to abdicate in Red Hugh's favor. As the historian Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh states concerning the gathering of O'Donnell's followers to elect Red Hugh: 'It was an advantage that she came to the gathering, for she was the head of advice and counsel of the Cenél Conaill (the O'Donnells), and though she was calm and very deliberate and much praised for her womanly qualities, she had the heart of a hero and the mind of a soldier, inasmuch as she exhorted in every way each one that she was acquainted with, and her husband especially to avenge his injuries and wrongs on each according to his deserts. She had many troops from Scotland, and some of the Irish at her disposal and under her control, and in her own hire and pay constantly, and especially during the time that her son (Red Hugh) was in prison and confined by the English" (*The Life of Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill*, I: 39 in Doan 1987: 32-34).

"The war goddess in her maternal aspect underlies the two powerful women under whom Cú Chulainn had trained in martial arts in Britain, and from whom he learned the secrets of his craft. They are called Scáthach ('The Shadowy One') and Buanann ('The Lasting One', cf the patronymic Buan given the Morrígan in *The Tain*). According to *Tochmarc Emire* ('The Wooing of Emer'), which deals with Cú Chulainn's quest to obtain Emer, daughter of Forgall Monach, as a bride, the hero is sent to Alba (Scotland or Britain) to complete his education. He first comes to Domnall the Warlike whose daughter Dornoll ('Bigfist') falls in love with him but, when he rejects her, vows revenge on him. then he and his two companions set out for Scáthach's land alone, performing various feats en route.

"When he arrives at Scáthach's fortress, he is greeted by Uathach ('Specter'), Scáthach's daughter, who becomes his mistress. On his third day there, Uathach advises him to go where Scáthach is training her two sons, to make his hero's salmon-leap up to the yew tree where she is resting, and to place his sword between her breasts, making her promise three things; thoroughness in his training, marriage to her daughter without bride price, and tidings for the future, since she was also a prophetess (fith). Cú Chulainn does what Uathach has told him and afterwards lives with Uathach while Scáthach teaches him 'brave deeds and the craft of arms' (Van Hamel 1933: 52; Kinsella 1970: 30-31).

"During this period Scáthach is at war with another territory whose chief is the woman warrior, Aife. To keep him out of battle, Scáthach gives him a sleeping draught and ties him up, but after an hour he was up fighting against three of Aife's warriors. He then overcomes Aife by means of a trick and holding a sword over her, demands three desires: 1) that she gives hostages to Scáthach and never oppose her again, 2) that she spend the night with him, and 3) that she bear him a son. She agrees and they sleep together that night. Cú Chulainn leaves her a gold thumb-ring, telling her that she should send the boy to Ireland when his finger has grown to fit the ring. She is to give him the name Connla, and Connla is to reveal his name to no man, give way to no man and refuse no man combat. Of course, this eventually leads to the tragic encounter between father and son found in the tale, *Aided Oenfhir Aife* ('The Death of Aife's One Son'), in which Connla is killed by his father, as Sohrab is by Rostum in Persian tradition or Hadubrand by Hildebrand in Germanic legend. Apparently, this is an ancient Indo-European mytho-heroic theme, seen here in its Irish form" (Mac Cana 1970: 105-106): see Doan (1987: 69-70).

Doan (1987) remarks how the role of female warrior and martial arts teacher is presented in a matter-of-fact context as no more unusual than that of the male hero. Such would be the case if an ancient pre-Indo-European tradition of the Goddess of Sovereignty as warrior was still intact in Ireland and, as discussed above, that role originated as an unavoidable obligation thrust upon the Goddess of Sovereignty.

"After leaving Aife, Cú Chulainn comes upon a one eyed hag who begs him to get out of her way. He lets her have the path, except where he clung by his toes. She strikes at his big toe, trying to knock him off the path down the cliff. But he sees her in time, makes his salmon-leap upward, and strikes her head off. She is Éis Énchenn ('Bird-headed'), the mother of the last three warriors Cú Chulainn had killed. Here we again see the destructive aspect of the mother goddess [out to avenge her sons], analogous to Kali in the Hindu tradition" (Doan 1987: 70).

As the Goddess can generate multiple epiphanies, which then may act autonomously, do we see here a deliberate sacrifice by the Goddess of Sovereignty of one her epiphanies in order to subject the king she has empowered to one last test of his capacity, a conclusion to the fine tuning of his strength?

"The link between the maternal and warlike functions of these goddesses is also seen in the tale of the Macha. According to *Noinden Ulad*, ('The Debility of the Ulstermen'), a woman appeared one day to a wealthy Ulster farmer, a widower named Crunnchu, and began keeping house for him. That night she made a ritual right-hand turn to ensure good fortune and entered his bed. His wealth increased as a result of their union and eventually she became pregnant by him. Crunnchu decide to go to the great assembly of Ulstermen, but his wife warned him not to speak of her there. However, when he saw the king's horses racing, he boasted that his wife could outrun them. The king then forced them to bring her to the assembly and, even though she was pregnant, made her run against the royal

horses. Before the race, she revealed that her name was Macha, daughter of Sainrith mac Imbaith ('Strange son of Ocean'), that a long lasting evil would come from this on the whole of Ulster, and that her name and her offspring's would be given to that place. She finished before the horses but then cried out in pain and gave birth to twins (Irish *emain*), from which came the name for the capital of Ulster, Emain Macha ('The Twins of Macha'). As she gave birth, she screamed that all who heard the scream would suffer from the same pangs for five days and four nights in their times of greatest difficulty. From that time onwards, the affliction seized the Ulstermen who were there that day and their descendants for nine generations (Kinsella 1970: 6-8; Cross and Slover 1969: 208-210). Only three classes of people were exempt from the curse: the young boys of Ulster, the women, and Cú Chulainn (because of the fact that he is both a son and avatar of the god Lug and a son of the mortal Sualtam). For this reason, he was enlisted into protecting the province of Ulster single-handedly during the Cattle Raid of Cooley. Macha's equine attributes also suggest a link with the horse goddess Epona and the British Rhiannon.

"Ford says concerning the these two Irish tales: 'We glimpse once again the remnants of a myth operating at both the hippomorphic and anthropomorphic levels. Macha, daughter of the Sea, appears as one who insures prosperity. Compelled to behave like a horse, she runs against the king's horses and delivers twins while in that equine role. Elsewhere, twins horses are born of Macha ... under circumstances that also yield the birth of the hero. At least one of these horses is of the sea, but both become associates of the hero' (Ford 1977: 8).

"As Ford points out, in Celtic tradition the Lord of the Otherworld is pre-eminently the sea god (Irish Manannán, Welsh Manawydan). 'When he mates with the Great Queen, he partakes of her characteristic shape, which is equine' (Ford 1981-2: 125). [See also] the Greek myth of Poseidon's intercourse with Demeter, he a stallion and she a mare, from which union both a daughter and a horse named Arion were born" (O' Flaherty (1980: 190-191): see Doan (1987): 80-91).



The Power of Three and Two

"Two other Machas occur in Irish tradition: the wife of Nemed, the leader of the third invasion recounted in *Lebor Gabála* dominated him as Medb does Ailill. When the five sons of another claimant continued to oppose her, she sought them out in their hunting ground enticing them one by one to sleep with her, and then bound them each in turn. According to this account she forced them to build the royal fort of Emain Macha (Mac Cana 1970: 90). The three Macha's provide cogent evidence for Georges Dumzil's theory of the tripartite division of Indo-European society. The first Macha is a prophetess, the second a warrior and the third the telluric goddess who brings increase and fruitfulness, thus corresponding to the magico-religious, military and fertility functions of the society. Perhaps, all three stem from a single transfunctional Celtic goddess" (Doan 1987: 71).

Doan is a bit confused here. The third subdivision of Indo-European society does not contain the religious, which is restricted to the 'first estate'. The 'second estate' subsumes sovereignty and kingship. The 'third estate' is that of economics both in the direct sense of food production and the secondary aspects that arise in village and town, crafts, trade, commerce, etc. The contemporary West is still a good Indo-European society in terms of its basic organization. Three of the most important manifestations of the Great Goddess as we have discussed in detail, are neatly plugged into the Indo-European system of organizing mytho-poetics and society. In the hybrid mytho-poetics of Celtic society, the White Goddess survived quite well for over a millenium and eased her accomodation to the Indo-European elements with which she had to co-exist by exercising her major powers via a trifurcation. Gimbutas (1989) has established the fundamental nature of two and three part symbolism in the Neolithic cult of the Goddess. The basic powers of three and two are woven into the mytho-poetics of the Celtic Goddess.

"Together with Badb and the Morrígan (or Anu/Anaan), Macha is often given as the name of one of the daughters of Ernmas, the *bantuathaig* ('witches'; cf. Hennessey 1870: 37; Carey 1983). This indicates a prevalent belief that there were three war goddesses, with the number again suggesting the triplication often associated with Indo-European traditions. ... From the inscription, {C}athu-bodva ('Battle Crow') in Gaul, as well as the inscription to Lamiis Tribus ('to the three Lamias') from an altar in the Romano-Celtic temple in Benwell in Northumberland, it appears that the war goddess(es) were worshipped both on the Continent and in Britain, as well as in Ireland. Although a Latin term is used in the latter inscription, the concept is Celtic, and it is noteworthy that Cormac glosses Macha, the war goddess, as *lamia* in his glossary (Ross 1967:223). In Irish tradition, the goddesses sometimes appear collectively as Badba (the crows which haunt the battlefield) or as Morrígna (the plural of Morrígan).

"According to Lebor Gabla, Ernmas has six daughters: the three war goddesses, Ériu, Fótla and Banba. Although this may be a late rationalization of an early mythic theme, it suggests the presence of a dualism seen in the sovereignty myth discussed earlier, the goddess as hag and bridge. In addition, in some texts we find the god Néit with two wives, the war goddess Nemain, and Fea, who seems to be tutelary figures (Carey, 1983). Likewise the Dagda mates with two goddesses, the river goddess Bóand and the war goddess Morrígan. Similarly, Fergus mac Roich is associated with two goddesses, the woodland deity Flidais, who travels in a chariot drawn by a deer, and the warlike Medb, who one poet refers to as the 'queen wolf', the sight of which deprives men of their strength and who, like Macha, outruns horses on the track" (Sjoestedt 1982: 50) see Doan (1987: 72).



The Celtic Goddess as Druidess

Gimbutas (1989) believes the Goddess as Weaver of Fate to be a primary epiphany. In Celtic realms, however, archeological evidence for this aspect of her domain is very sparse. "During the Hallstatt period, we find the earliest depictions of Celtic women, for example on the group of pots from Sopron-Vrheľ, Hungary ... dating from the seventh century B.C. which show women weaving on vertical looms ..." (Doan 1987: 1). Nonetheless, the historical record of Roman times and the medieval epics confirm the presence of the Goddess as Weaver of Fate in an important and significant manifestation, that of the druidess and prophetess.

"The Roman geographer Pomponius Mela writing in the first century A.D. describes a community of nine virgins living on the island of Sena (Sein) off the coast of Brittany to whom he attributed magical and prophetic powers, such as arousing the waves of the sea by their singing, changing animals into whatever they wished, curing incurable sicknesses and predicting the future for the benefit of the mariners who came to consult them. We do not know if these women were actual druidesses, or whether this account was influenced by the Greek legend of Circe. However, they do bear a striking resemblance to the nine witches of Gloucester in the medieval Welsh tale of Peredur and the thrice nine women who welcome the voyagers in the Irish *Immram Brain* ('The Voyage of Bran'), as pointed out by Proinsias Mac Cana (1976: 112). We also find witches or sorceresses in the medieval Welsh tales of Culhwch and Owen and Gwion Bach and Taliesin (Ford 1977: 119-181), perhaps distant echoes of the earlier Celtic tradition.

"In Tacitus' *Germania*, written before 98 A.D. and dealing with the various Germanic and Celtic tribes beyond the Rhine, we read that the 'Germans believe that an element of holiness and a gift of prophecy reside in women, so that they do not hesitate to ask their advice or lightly disregard their replies. Among these Women Tacitus mentions Veleda, a prophetess of the Bructeri, one of the probably Celtic speaking tribes beyond the Rhine that took part in the Revolt of Civilis (68-69 A.D.). Tacitus implies that Veleda, whose name may be derived from the Celtic word for 'seeress', encouraged the Bructeri to revolt (*Germania* VIII; Mattingly and Handford 1970: 108).

"In the *Annals of Imperial Rome*, Tacitus describes the Roman attack on the druidic stronghold on the island of Mona (Anglesey) in northwest Wales in 61 A.D., in which he notes the presence of 'black-robed women with dishevelled hair ... brandishing torches' along with the druids 'raising their hands to heaven and screaming dreadful curses'. He continues: 'The weird spectacle awed the Roman soldiers into a sort of paralysis. They stood still -- and presented themselves as a target. But then they urged each other (and were urged by the general (Suetonius Paulinus) not to fear a horde of fanatical women. Onward pressed their standards and they bore down their opponents, enveloping them in the flames of their own torches (*Annals of Imperial Rome* XIV, 28; Grant 1956: 327).

"Despite Roman opposition to the druidic religion in Gaul as in Britain, the name druid, if not the actual institution, continued in use as late as the fourth century A.D. when the poet Ausonius traced the ancestry of the professors of rhetoric in Bordeaux to the druids of Armorica (Chadwick 1972: 46). In *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, also dating from the fourth century, we find references to female druids, actually prophets like Veleda.

According to this collection, one of these women speaking in Gaulish predicted to the Emperor Alexander Severus his imminent death (in 235 A.D.). The Emperor Aurelian supposedly consulted Gaulish druidesses on the future of his offspring (between 270 and 275). Like Macbeth on a later occasion, he was told that none would have a name more illustrious than the descendants of Claudius. Diocletian himself was supposed to have told the story of a Gaulish prophetess/innkeeper in Tongres (eastern Belgium) who chided him for being too stingy while he was still in a minor post (before 284). He replied in jest, 'I shall be generous enough when I become emperor,' to which she replied, 'Do not jest, Diocletian, for you will become emperor' (Magie III, 1968:439).

"In early Irish literature we find this tradition of the *babdruí* ('druidess'), as well as the *banfhile* or *banfháith* ('poetess, prophetess') who, like the *file*, was both poet and prophet at the same time. [See also Dillon 1963.] In addition, we find references to the *bancháinte* ('female satirist'), which indicates that well into the Christian period women in Irish society were considered to have certain powers, which could be used for good or for ill. In fact, St. Patrick's Lorica ('Breast-plate') invokes the powers of God and His Universe against, among other things, 'the enchantments of women (*brichtu ban*) and smiths and druids' (Henry 1984:146).

"Two recently discovered Gaulish inscriptions greatly expand our knowledge of Gaulish sorceress'. The first was discovered at Chamalires, near Clermont-Ferrand, on a leaden tablet found among thousands of wooden tablets at the ritual thermal site of Source des Roches. The charm, placed in the spring by a group of men, seeks the intercession of Maponos ('Divine Youth'), the Celtic god of healing waters sometimes equated with Graeco-Roman Apollo, specifically asking that their request be expedited 'through the incantation of women', (*brixtia anderon*), a Gaulish expression closely corresponding to the Old Irish *brichtu ban*, found in St. Patrick's Lorica (Henry 1984: 145). The second inscription found on a lead tablet from Larzac, also contains a Gaulish expression parallel to *brichtu ban*, and appears to represent 'a statement from an indigenous sisterhood of enchantresses' (Hamp 1986). A translation and interpretation of the tablet has been recently published" (Lejeune et al., 1985): see Doan (1987: 19-21). The conclusion is unavoidable that Celtic and Germanic druidess' and prophetess' are manifestations of the White Goddess as Weaver of Fate and, no doubt, in exceptional instances were epiphanies as well.

"[In *The Tain*] Medb reviews her troops from her chariot before setting off on the cattle raid. It is at this point that Medb encounters the *banfháith* ('prophetess') Feidelm, also riding in a chariot. According to the description of Feidelm found in the *Book of Leinster* version of *The Tain*: 'The girl was weaving a fringe, holding a weaver's beam of white bronze in her right hand with seven strips of red gold on its point (i.e. weaving threads in a magical manner, to enable her to prophesy the coming battles). She wore a spotted, green-speckled cloak, with a round, heavy-handed brooch in the cloak above her breast. She had a crimson, rich-blooded countenance, a bright laughing eye, thin, red lips. She had shining pearly teeth; you would have thought they were showers of fair pearls which were displayed in her head. Like new *partaing* (Parthian leather) were her lips. The sweet sound of her voice and speech were melodious as the strings of harps plucked by the hands of masters. As white as snow falling in one night was the lustre of her skin and body (shining) through her garments. She had a long and very white feet with pink, even, round and sharp nails. She had long fair yellow, golden hair; three tresses of her hair round her head, another tress (falling behind) which touched the calves of her legs (O'Rahilly 1967: 143).

"When Medb questions her who she is, she responds: I am Feidelm the prophetess from Síd Chruachna (the *síd* in Connacht). Each time that Medb questions her as to how she sees their army, Feidelm replies, 'I see red on them. I see crimson.' Since Medb remains incredulous, Feidelm recites a poem in which she prophesies the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn's destruction of the army ..." (Doan 1967: 66)

If the Great Goddess retained much of her strength and vitality in medieval Ireland, it seems only natural that the druidess and prophetess should be prominent for they are her epiphany as the Weaver of Fate.



Christianity and the Death of the Goddess in Ireland

"In the eighth or ninth century, a Christian monk, using the verbal ambiguity of the Irish word *caillech* (either 'hag' or 'nun'), invented a fiction in which the goddess takes the veil (*caille*) in the latter years of her life. In the poem which he composed, the 'Nun' of Beare contrasts her present state of poverty and physical decay with her former state, when she was young, beautiful and the companion of kings.

I, the old woman of Beare
Once a shining shift would wear
Now and since my beauty's fall
I have scarce a shift at all ...

For my hands as you may see
Are but bony wasted things,
Hands that once would grasp the hand
Clasp the royal neck of kings ...

I who had my day with kings
And drank deep of mead and wine
Drink wheywater with old hags
Sitting in their rags and pine ...

Happy island of the main
To you the tide will come again
But to me it comes no more
Over the blank, deserted shore. (tr. O'Connor 34-38).

"We see in this poem the ancient goddess lamenting the change which has taken place, with the substitution of Christianity for the old pagan way of life. Some of the pre-Christian elements remain, for example, her identification with the land. This is reminiscent of the Celtic mother goddess Anu, also identified with the province of Munster and particularly associated with fertility and prosperity, whose breasts were thought to form

the pair of hills in Co. Kerry called 'Dá Chích nann' ('Te Paps of Anu'), still called 'The Paps' in English (Doan 1980). In one verse, the Hag of Beare states that she envies nothing old except the Plain of Femen (near Cashel, Co. Tipperary) which (unlike herself) still keeps its yellow barr (crop or hair), evoking the original equation of the land and the goddess. In another verse, she complains of the royal standing stone of Femen, associated with the inauguration of kings, and Ronn's fortress in Bregon (near Cashell), that their 'cheeks' are not weathered, only her alone, again revealing her former identity as the territorial goddess whose marriage with the king legitimized his rule (cf. Byrne 1973: 166-168).

"The negative image of the goddess of Ireland as a harlot who offers her thighs to any claimant to the kingship, be he Irish or English, survives in Irish poetry well into the modern period. For example, in the late seventeenth century, Dibhí Bruadair reproaches Ireland as an aged woman who has shown herself unfaithful to the memory of her kings by consorting with the 'hairy Saxon droves'. The poem begins:

O maid of the thick, wavy tresses,
Who gave thyself to lust and deceit,
Guide-star thou art of the harlots.
Who flit, though many thy years.
(tr. Breatnach 1953:324)

"Eoghan Ruadh Ó Suilleabháin uses the same theme in an *aisling* (vision) poem from the late eighteenth century, although here we again see Ireland as a beautiful young maiden, expressing once again the ambivalence with which the ancient Celtic goddess was viewed:

Alas! Alas! an honest harlot was she indeed!
For a spell Art had her and Niall and Naois,
For a spell she supped at the strong O'Briens' feast --
And soft was her body till 'twas worn by lease!
(tr/ Breatnach 1953: 323 in Doan 1987: 73, 75)



The White Goddess as Sovereignty in Medieval Wales: The First Branch of the Mabinogi

"Much of our knowledge of British mythologies comes from the collection of Welsh tales known as the four branches of the Mabinogi, probably compiled during the late eleventh or early twelfth century. According to Mac Cana (1970), the redactor and the storytellers upon whose work he drew had not inherited a coherent body of myths, but rather 'the scattered residue of a fragmented and half-forgotten tradition', which they wove into a succession of international story motifs to produce the final narratives often revealing their composite character by numerous obscurities and inconsistencies (Mac Cana 1970:

75). Nevertheless, despite the fact that by this period the knowledge and understanding of native mythology was patchy and unsystematic, as in Ireland at a much later date, certain basic concepts seem to have survived the collapse of the social system which had generated them, with the myth of the goddess of sovereignty and of the sacred marriage, the *hieros gamos*, being one of the most permanent and productive (Mac Cana 1977: 116).

"In the first branch of the *Mabinogi*, Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, we find the theme of sovereignty centered on the figure of Rhiannon. ... Rhiannon's name has been etymologized as 'Divine Queen', and as such she may be identified with the goddess of sovereignty so important in Celtic tradition, the goddess who must be won by aspirant to the kingship. In her manifestation of supernatural power, her independent strong-mindedness in choosing a husband, and her superior wisdom, she appears like other manifestations of the goddess, such as the Irish Medb (McKenna 1980: 46).

"In the first half of the tale, Pwyll exchanges places (and physical appearance) for one year with Arawn, the king of Annwfin, the Welsh Otherworld. While there he lives chastely with Arawn's wife (who is unnamed in the tale) and defeats one of Arawn's Otherworld enemies. Although it is not stated explicitly in the text, it is implied that the strong and productive alliance between Pwyll and Arawn ... is the result of Pwyll's proof of fidelity as well as martial skill. Upon his return to Dyfed (southwestern Wales), when Pwyll is told of the excellent governance which the country has received during the previous year, he agrees to maintain this in the future.

"In the second part of the tale, though, we learn that Pwyll still has much to learn regarding the virtues of a sovereign. When an unknown horsewoman rides by Gorsedd Arberth, the *síd*-like mound upon which he is sitting, he waits until the third day before setting out after her himself. Unable to overtake her, he finally asks her to wait for him, which she does, stating 'I will wait gladly ... and it had been better for the horse if you had asked it long ago' (Ford 1977: 44). Rhiannon informs Pwyll that she has chosen him as her spouse, and she tells him to come to the wedding-feast which she will arrange at her father's court a year from that night.

"At the wedding feast Pwyll is tricked into giving Rhiannon to another suitor, Gwawl son of Clud, failing to moderate lordly generosity (prized as a virtue in Celtic rulers) with prudence. When Gwawl says that he has request to make of Pwyll, the latter answers that he will give him whatever he asks of him. Gwawl responds that he desires the woman with whom Pwyll plans to sleep that night (Rhiannon) and the wedding-feast (cf. the Irish 'marriage of kingship'). Pwyll falls silent and Rhiannon says 'Never has a man been more feeble-witted than you have been' (Ford 1977: 46).

"Rhiannon, fortunately, has a plan. She tells Gwawl to return at the same time the next year when 'a feast shall be made ready in this court for you ... to sleep with me'. Pwyll arrives at this feast in rags carrying a bag which he asks Gwawl to fill. This bag cannot be filled 'until a noble endowed with land, territory and wealth rises up and tramples the food in the bag, saying enough has been put in here,' possibly a reference to the bag, symbol of fertility and prosperity, often carried by Epona in Gaulish depictions of the horse-goddess (Ford 1977: 26). When Gwawl steps into the bag, Pwyll twists it so that it goes over his head, closes and ties it, and then sounds his horn, calling in his war-band. They then play 'Badger-in-the-Bag,' a rather cruel sport in which they strike the bag with their feet or with sticks until Gwawl asks for mercy. Pwyll asks for the counsel of Rhiannon and her father, and they suggest releasing him on the condition that he provide sureties for a pledge not to seek compensation or vengeance for the trick played on him.

"Pwyll and Rhiannon's wedding feast continues where it had left off the previous year and, after they ate and revelled, 'Pwyll and Rhiannon went to the chamber and spent the night in pleasure and contentment' (Ford 1977: 49). As Mac Cana (1955: 85-86) points out, in the Irish myth of kingship the two main elements are the feast or libation which the goddess offers to her kingly spouse and their sexual union. Here again, we see the sexual union of the king and the sovereign figure as the culmination of the wedding feast, ...

"The third part of the tale deals first with the lack, and later the loss, of fertility in Pwyll's kingdom. According to Mac Cana's reading of the sovereignty myth, the goddess not only marries the rightful king but also becomes 'the mother of such a king and the ancestress of a royal line' (Mac Cana 1955: 88, cited in McKenna 1980:47). Rhiannon's inability to produce an heir until the third year of their marriage is seen as an impediment to Pwyll's achievement of full sovereignty. [A striking example of the weakened Goddess, whose strength and fertility has been sapped by several centuries of contact with Christianity.] **In Celtic thought, the fertility of the land was dependent on the 'truth' of the prince and magically related to his own potency. 'Hence the fertility of the royal marriage is not only a dynastic necessity but also a measure of the rightfulness of the reign'** [emphasis mine] (McKenna 1980: 52).

"The men of Dyfed grow restless at seeing Pwyll without an heir and, as in the Irish *Wooing of Étaín*, threaten him with a loss of sovereignty unless he rectifies the situation. Here of course the problem lies with his lack of an heir, not his lack of wife as in the Irish tale. Of course, the end result-barrenness - is the same in both instances. Pwyll refuses to divorce his wife, saying they have not been together long enough to act according to the advice of his men after a year has passed.

"Before the year is up, Rhiannon gives birth to a son who is mysteriously abducted at birth, while his mother and her handmaidens are sleeping. ... this may reflect an early Celtic myth of the abduction of Maponos ('Divine Youth'), son of Matrona ('Divine Mother'), which also survives in the eleventh century tale, *Culhwch and Olwen*. Afraid that they will be blamed for his disappearance, Rhiannon's handmaidens kill the newborn pups of a staghound bitch in their room with them and smear her face and hands with blood. Rhiannon is accused of murdering her son, and her punishment (which reveals her equine nature as an avatar of the horse goddess) is to sit beside the mounting block outside the gate of Arberth and to offer to carry visitors on her back to the court.

"Meanwhile, Rhiannon's son is found by one of Pwyll's vassals. Teyrnnon Twrf Liant (whose name is derived from Tigernonos 'Divine Lord,' a fitting counterpart to Rigantona 'Divine Queen,' and whose epithet may mean 'Tempestuous Sea,' suggesting that he may be a form of the sea god, Manawydan son of Llyr). Every year, on the evening before May 1, one of Teyrnnon's mares would produce a foal which would disappear before morning. Teyrnnon decides to keep watch to find out what is causing this. As night falls, the mare gives birth to a foal, which stands immediately. When Teyrnnon goes to inspect the foal, a giant claw enters through the window and seizes the foal. Teyrnnon draws his sword and cuts off the arm from the elbow. He hears a loud roar and wail, pursues the sound and finds a small boy wrapped up in a mantle. He and his wife raise the child, who is named Gwri Golden-Hair.

"The child has a strong affinity for horses and also grows at a tremendous rate so that 'before the end of the fourth year, he was bargaining with the stable-boys to let him lead the horses to water' (Ford 1977: 53). The foal which was born on the same night he

was found is given to the boy by his foster-mother (who in this instance may represent a double for his own mother, Rhiannon). In fact, Ford has suggested that Teyrnon's wife is unnamed because she is a 'shadow of the child's real mother' (Ford 1981-82: 121).

"Later, seeing the resemblance between the child and Pwyll, Teyrnon takes Gwri to his father's court. Rhiannon, sitting beside the mounting block, offers to carry each of them to the court, but Teyrnon refuses. Inside Teyrnon recounts the discovery of the child, and the assembly accepts him as Pwyll's son. Rhiannon says that, if it is so, she is delivered of her anxiety (*pryder*), for which reason Pendaran Dyfed ('Chief-Thunder of Dyfed,' possibly another form of Manawydan) decides that the child should be named Pryderi. The tale ends with the death of Pwyll, Fryderi's inheritance of the seven cantrefws (literally '100 hamlets') of Dyfed, to which he adds seven more cantrefws, and finally his marriage to Cigfa, descended from 'Casnar Wledig of the nobility of this island' (Ford 1977: 56), with Pryderi's own marriage perhaps a recapitulation of the sovereignty theme.

"Ford finds two parallels to the third part of *Pwyll* in Irish mythology, the first being the tale of Macha recounted earlier in which 'at the king's assembly, a woman races against his horses and, while thus behaving like a horse, gives birth' (Ford 1977: 7). The second is the tale dealing with the conception and birth of Cú Chulainn (Compert Con Culainn)": see Doan (1987: 76-79).

"According to this reading, Pryderi is at once the son of the mortal Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed (known as 'Lord of the Otherworld'), the son of Teyrnon Twrf Liant ('Lord of the Tempestuous Sea'), who is the mare goddess's consort, and the son of Manawydan son of Llyr ('Sea'), who appears as his step-father in the third branch of the Mabinogi, 'Manawydan son of Llyr' -- thus denoting a triple paternity. Pryderi is then either the son of three separate gods, or more likely the son and avatar of three aspects of a single god, who is lord of the Otherworld, god of the sea and god of storms (cf. the name of Pryderi's foster-father, Pendaran, ('Chief-Thunder'). In addition, he is the son of Rhiannon, Queen of Dyfed (and goddess of sovereignty), whose equine nature is further revealed in the third branch.

"Ford goes further than most other scholars in suggesting that the structural analysis reveals that 'the myths reflected in these tales were very much alive and that the storyteller was very much aware' of their meaning even as late as the eleventh century (Ford 1977: 13). According to him: The first branch appears to confront the problem of the failure of the horse-goddess to guarantee fertility and generate a hero (at the anthropomorphic level) and a foal (at the hippomorphic level). For that failure, she is punished by being deprived of her divinity and reduced to the function of beast of burden ... The story is successfully resolved ... in that the hero and foal are restored and so is Rhiannon in her proper role as consort of the king and guarantor of fertility (Ford 1977: 13 in Doan 1987).



The Second Branch of the Mabinogi: The Goddess of Sovereignty is Weakened

"The second branch of the *Mabinogi* is entitled 'Branwen daughter of Llyr', ... The heroine of the tale, Branwen ('White' or 'Sacred Raven'), ... is introduced as 'one of the three chief ancestresses in this island, and the fairest maid in the world' (Ford 1977: 60). The main characters in the tale are Branwen; her full brothers Bendigeidfran ('Bran the Blessed') and Manawydan; her half brothers Nisien and Efnisien (sons of her mother, Penarddun daughter - or sister - of several Welsh dynasties); and her husband, the Irish king Matholwch. The tale is set in northwestern Wales and Ireland, with the action moving from one side of the Irish sea (sometimes called the 'Celtic Pond') to the other. Thematically, the tale has much in common with early Irish tradition, and it may have been composed orally during the period of Irish settlement along the west coast of Wales, which probably began as early as the third century A.D.. Ogam inscriptions suggest that the immigrants continued to speak Irish as late as the sixth or seventh century" (Chadwick 1976: 32). "Moreover, the southeastern Welsh kingdom of Brecon (Brycheiniog), which traced its ruling dynasty to the marriage between a native princess and an Irish prince (parents of the eponymic founder of the kingdom, Brychan), lasted until the tenth century" (Chadwick 1972: 79).

"Within the mythical time-frame of the tale, we see Bendigeidfran (literally 'Blessed' or 'Sacred Raven', a name almost identical in meaning to his sister's, and undoubtedly a Celtic deity similar to Lug/Logos) as 'crowned king of this island ... invested with the crown of London'. The medieval Welsh looked back nostalgically at a time when Britain existed at least in their imagination as a single political entity. ...

"At the beginning of the tale, Bendigeidfran and his brother are sitting on the rock of Harlech, one of his courts, when they see thirteen ships coming from southern Ireland. They learn that Matholwch, king of Ireland, has come to seek Branwen as a wife in order to unite the Island of the Might (Britain) with Ireland. They hold an assembly and agree to the marriage, setting a date when Matholwch will come to 'sleep with her in Aberffraw', the chief court of Gwynedd (northeastern Wales) on the isle of Anglesey.

"On the morning after the wedding ceremony, Efnisien the troublesome brother, learning that his sister has been given in marriage without his permission, disfigures the horses belonging to Matholwch. Clearly, he had no legal right to be consulted on the matter, and he is merely trying to create political discord (Patterson 1981-82: 100). His name, derived from the Welsh *efnys* ('hostile enemy'), suggests that he is a troublemaker, a type found elsewhere in medieval literature, ... [Efnisien is more than a malcontent. The horses are an avatar of the horse goddess and his ability to disfigure them without resistance prefigures the impotency of the Goddess in this myth.]

"When Matholwch learns that his horses have been mutilated, he leaves for his ships. Messengers intercept him and he reveals the reason for his displeasure. Bendigeidfran offers to replace the horses, and to pay him an honor-price (*sardead*, is also the word for insult) in gold and silver. The Irish king accepts and returns to the court. That night he is not so cheerful as previously, and Bendigeidfran thinks this is because he has not received enough compensation. Therefore, Bendigeidfran gives him a cauldron with a magical property: any dead man cast into the cauldron will emerge alive but mute. On the next night Bendigeidfran tells him the story of how he obtained the cauldron.

"Bendigeidfran says that a monstrous couple had brought the cauldron with them from Ireland. Matholwch adds that he had encountered them in Ireland, an enormous man bearing the cauldron on his back and a woman twice his size walking behind him. The

woman was to bear a fully armed warrior at the end of three months. He kept them for some time until their maintenance became too burdensome, after which they were burned out of an iron house and came to Britain with the cauldron.

The predominance of the goddess here appears to reflect a pre-Indo-European tradition when society was dominated by the Great Goddess and therefore the origin of this tale cannot be later than the early first millennium B.C. when the first Celts began to trickle into the British Isles. The appearance of the White Goddess in all her strength after nearly two millennia of Indo-European Celtic influence is extraordinary.

"Branwen continues with the return of Matholwch and his bride to Ireland. At first she is warmly greeted and, after a year has passed, she conceives and bears a son, who is named Gwern. However, during the second year, the Irish began to grumble about the humiliation Matholwch had suffered over the horses" (Doan 1987:86).

I wonder if the humiliation of the Irish in Bendigeidfran's kingdom - through the vehicle of his brother Efnisien - might illustrate the perceived, superior vitality of the Goddess in this Welsh kingdom, because the animal mutilated is the one, above all, of most importance to Indo-Europeans along with cattle. The horse goddess, after all, only arose when the Neolithic Great Goddess confronted Indo-Europeans. Matholwch is finally forced by his foster brothers and men to drive Branwen from his chamber, to make her cook for the court, and to subject her to a daily blow on the ears each day by a butcher (presumably using Branwen as a substitute for her brother Efnisien). Efnisien's mutilation of the horses had included cutting their ears down to the head, as well as their lips to their teeth, their tails to the rump, and their eyelids to the bone, which may also explain why the butcher carries out the punishment.

"The Irish realize that this punishment is harsh, so they place a prohibition on travel to Wales and order that any Welshmen who come to the island be imprisoned. Branwen manages to train a starling, teaching it speech and explaining the appearance of her brother to it. She sends it to him with a letter, describing the dishonor which has befallen her. When he learns of the insult to her, he gathers a force and crosses the Irish sea (walking before the ships since he is a giant). When the Irish and the Welsh are on the verge of making a settlement. Efnisien again destroys the peace, this time by throwing his nephew Gwern, into the fire.

"It has been suggested that Efnisien's actions reflect a pre-Celtic matrilineal system of inheritance. If inheritance were reckoned through the mother's line, then Efnisien would have had a reason for trying to prevent Branwen's marriage and killing her child. As Bendigeidfran's mother's son, he would under matrilineal succession, have been the king's nearest heir, if the king's sister had no offspring. However, according to medieval Welsh law, the child of a woman who had been given by her male guardian to a foreign prince would inherit the full complement of patrimonial rights, including succession to kingship. This right of matrilineal inheritance coexisted with normal patrilineal rule of descent (Patterson 1981-1982: 100).

"After Efnisien throws Gwern into the fire, the Irish and the Welsh begin fighting. Bendigeidfran protects Branwen by holding her between his shield and his shoulder" (Doan 1987: 82, 85-87).

Perhaps that says it all; this pale shadow of the goddess must be shielded in battle. The resulting battle goes badly for the Welsh and only seven survive. There are adventures that include the origin of Bran's Head that do not concern us here. The Welsh the return

home. "However, when they land in Aber Alaw, she looks at Ireland and Britain and says, 'Dear Son of God ... alas that I was born! Two good islands have been destroyed because of me' (Ford 1977: 70). She then dies of a broken heart and they dig a four sided grave for her. They continue on towards Harlech ...

"Unlike Rhiannon in *Pwyll*, we see Branwen as a passive woman. She has no say in the matter of her betrothal and marriage, accepts her punishment, and dies frustrated over her inability to control destiny. Rhiannon, on the other hand, accepts her punishment only after conferring with her counselors, and chooses her own mate (Ford 1977: 27). The destruction of the horses symbolically foreshadows the loss of sovereignty and fertility brought about by Branwen's removal from the royal chamber and the death of her son. Unlike *Bwyll*, which ends with a restoration of order and fertility, *Branwen* lacks a restoration: Branwen dies and two kingdoms are almost entirely destroyed. The Otherworld interlude is only temporary; the survivors must return to face the problems of this world.

"The birds of Rhiannon suggest the delights of the Otherworld, since we find in Culhwch and Olwen a reference to them as 'the ones that rouse the dead and make the living sleep' (Ford 1977: 139). The goddess Epona is sometimes shown accompanied by a bird or birds, and the Irish Otherworld goddess Clíodna dwells in an island with magical birds which sing 'wonderful music which would have put sick and wounded men to sleep' (Ross 1967: 268). The references to Rhiannon and her birds, as well as to Pryderi and Manawydan, serve to link this tale with both the first branch of the Mabinogi and the third branch, *Manawydan son of Llyr*" (Doan 1987: 87-88).

I will not delve into the third branch. Rhiannon and Cigfa are here but are only pale reflections of the goddess with little power and extreme passivity. In the fourth branch of the *Mabinogi*, *Math son of Mathonwy*, Aranrhod is a distorted manifestation of the goddess who can only be described as stupid, vengeful and whining, with a good dose of self pity thrown in for good measure.

"Whereas we see Rhiannon as an active positive force in the first branch, and Branwen, Rhiannon and Cigfa as primarily passive and resigned to their fates in the second and third branches, in the fourth branch we see a much more complex treatment of women. Goewin is the unwilling rape victim in the first part of the tale; Aranrhod the woman whose shame is made public and who then avenges herself by refusing to give a name, arms or wife to her son' and Blodeudd the woman driven by adulterous love to seek the death of her husband. ... Likewise, the debilitating love which Gilfaethwy feels for Goewin seems closer to the courtly love of the medieval troubadours ... Certainly during the four branches we see a progression from a mythic view of women, with goddesses such as Rhiannon determining the course of action with impunity, to an all too realistic view of human inter-relationships with rape, adultery and murder accepted as part of life, yet accompanied by just punishment" (Doan 1987: 94-95).

I submit that what we see through the four branches of the Mabinogi is a progression from the manifestation of a 'complete' goddess whose integrity and structure is still largely intact (thus providing literature with a mythic view) to the presentation of victimized royalty in which occasional reflexes of the goddess are only briefly visible. We witness the death of the goddess due to Christianity and from the corpse arises fully human women, who in spite of their aristocracy, possess no particular character of distinction. But then the chauvanism of the Christian Church is well documented, as is its subordination of women. In the light of such theology and politics, what else could result from the dominance of a powerful, chauvinistic Christian Church.



Saint Brigit

St. Brigit (also 'Bridget' or 'Bride') was born c.450 and died c.523-525 A.D.. Her mother was a slave woman named Brocca and her father was an Irish chieftain of Leinster named Dubhthach who was descended from Felimidh, the famous lawgiver king of the second century A.D.. Brocca was exiled from the king's mansion by the threats of his wife and sold to a druid in whose household Brigit was born. Nonetheless, Dubhthach had retained ownership of Brocca's child and when grown up, Brigit returned to her father's house. She had been baptized long before and was beautiful, very bright, charismatic and generous. She aroused the jealousy of her father's wife, as her mother before her had done, and further aggravated her father's patience by her generosity with his possessions: presumably giving them away to the poor. Dubhthach, who was prone to selling women who displeased him, decided to sell Brigit to the king of North Leinster, but for reasons unknown that transaction never took place.

Brigit next emerges as committed to a religious life having taken the veil of a nun at the hands of a bishop named Mucaille along with seven virgin companions in 467. St. Mel of Meath² is believed to have conferred the authority of an abbess upon her and about 470 she founded a double monastery at Cill-Dara (Kildare). She was the abbess of the convent there, the first in Ireland and was instrumental in choosing the first abbot. This monastery was situated beside an ancient oak tree which stood until the tenth century and contained a sacred fire tended by Brigit and her seven companions. Decorative art, metal work and the art of manuscript illumination were cultivated at Kildare and *The Book of Kildare* was considered one of the finest Irish manuscripts until its disappearance in the 17th century. Before her death, the city of Kildare had grown up adjacent to the double monastery (Delaney 1980: 120; Hyde (1910: 156-160).

There is little else known with certainty about St. Brigit's life. She is mentioned only once in St. Patrick's official biography, which is a bit strange considering that they were contemporaries - he died in 492. In his biography, the story is told of a dream she had of farm and wild animals which St. Patrick interpreted as being symbolical of the history of the Irish Church. There are several 'Lives' of St. Brigit, some of which are quite ancient.³ The earliest is 53 stanzas of four lines each ascribed to St. Broccan or Brogan Cloen (early seventh century) which may be found in the *Book of Hymns*, of which an 11th century copy still exists. Cogitosus, a Kildare monk, wrote a life of St. Brigit prior to the Danish invasions in the seventh century. There are four others, three of which appear to be of

² St. Mel (d. c. 488) was a the son of St. Patrick's sister Darerca. He accompanied St. Patrick to Ireland and became a bishop (Delaney 1980: 403).

³ Interesting that St. Broccan is not to be found in Delaney (1980).

ninth century date or earlier. Both the *Leabhar Breac* and the *Book of Lismore* also contained 'Lives' of St. Brigit (Hyde 1910: 162-164). Brigit has not lacked in hagiography.

Of more concern to us is what evidence can be found that points to Brigit as a manifestation of the pagan Irish goddess, Brigit described above. Several attributes of the pre-Christian Brigit carried over into St. Brigit. For example, the pagan Brigit was the goddess of poets, the Christian Brigit was a patroness of men of learning. More to the point is this long forgotten extract of folk and mythic memory to be found in Hyde (1910: 161, footnote 1). "'Brigit,' writes Whitley Stokes '(cp. Skr. *bhargas*) was born at sunrise neither within or without a house, was bathed in milk, her breath revives the dead, a house in which she is staying flames up to heaven, cow-dung blazes before her, oil is poured on her head; she is fed from the milk of a white red-eared cow; a fiery pillar rises over her head; sun rays support her wet cloak; she remains a virgin; and she was one of the two mothers of Christ the Anointed. She has, according to Giraldus Cambrensis, a perpetual ashes fire watched by twenty nuns, of whom herself was one, blown by fans or bellows only, and surrounded by a hedge within which no male could enter' (*Top. Hib.*, chaps. 34, 35 and 36), from all of which Stokes declares that one may without much rashness pick out certain of her life incidents as having 'originally belonged to the myth or ritual of some goddess of fire.'⁴ We see the Goddess of Death and Regeneration in action when "her breath revives the dead." Hyde (1910: 162) goes on to further identify her attributes as those of helping the poor, expelling hardship and protecting against pestilence. Brigit is also the prophetess who foresaw Christ, the Queen of the South and Mary of the Gael, the latter indicating the extreme affection in which she was held by the Irish. Certainly the Goddess of Life Giving may be here seen acting in a protectress role. Brigit's crosses were used into early 20th century to protect the harvest and farm animals.

Several scholars have speculated that the site of Brigit's monastery was a former pagan sanctuary. The Curragh at Kildare was an area of lush green meadows and a sacred place from which Merlin was said to have transported the site of Stonehenge to the Salisbury Plain in England (Condren 1989 66-67). While this tale is pure myth - the historical Merlin lived in the sixth or seventh century A.D. and most of the great stones and structures at Stonehenge were built during the third millennium B.C. - it does highlight the sanctity of the Kildare region. The sacred oak tree of Brigit, about which no weapon could be placed, recalls the association between oak trees and druids. Recall that Brigit's foster father was a druid and while he did not object to her baptism, it is tempting to speculate that she received some druidic training.

There are several stories in her lives which relate her failure to obtain a Roman 'Ordo', the official prayer book that ensured orthodox Christian worship, and thus point to the unorthodoxy of the liturgy she introduced. One tale tells of a blind youth who brings back to Kildare an *Ordo Placentinus* from either the Isle of Wright or Placentia in northern Italy. The Isle of Wright was an important supply center for the Roman army in Britain and Placentia in Italy was a strategic locality for the military conquest of Britain.

All of this suggests suggests distinct Roman influence on Brigit's practice and one of the earliest forms of Christian foundation in Rome was the college of vestal virgins. Recall the vestal virgins who served many pagan temples throughout Hellenistic times. They

⁴ Whitley Stokes was a well published Celtic scholar in the Victorian era. I have been unable to identify the exact reference quoted by Hyde (1910). Stokes published a number of articles in the *Revue Celtique* in the 1890's and his *magnum opus* was *Theseaurus Palaeohibernicus* co-authored with J. Strachan and published in 1902-03.

were dedicated to the cause of the state and among their sacred duties was the tending of a sacred fire which symbolized the unity of the Roman empire. Should the fire ever go out they would be scourged heavily by the chief priest who must relight the fire. Their reward was great legal and social privileges not accorded to other women. They could give evidence in court and were attended by an officer of the Roman army. Although virginal, they were given the rights and privileges of mothers. The symbolism of their virginity is complex but it likely indicated that they were not at the command of any mortal man but only that of the state collective: such a meaning would make understandable their symbolic authority. A serious political crisis would throw into question their virginity. Should any vestal virgin actually be proven to have indulged in sexual activity, she would be buried alive and her lover - if caught - whipped to death. Such punishments were fitting in the Roman mind because their virginity was one aspect of the mythic glue which gave the Roman political state unity, integrity and strength.⁵ A vestal virgin spent ten years in training, ten years fulfilling her function and ten years teaching apprentices. Unlike Christian nuns, after these thirty years they were free to marry. Their duties may have also included preserving sacred traditions, the laws of the state and healing remedies.

There are hints in the legends that surround Tara, the royal seat of the High Kings of Ireland, that there was a pagan college of vestal virgins there. Brigit's practice at Kildare, with her virgin nun companions tending a sacred fire, appears to carry on this tradition and to have successfully incorporated it into a Church practice that was not branded heresy and continued into the twelfth century, if we can rely on the report of Giraldus Cambrensis as mentioned above and others as well,. The 'sacredness' of the fire is emphasized by legends of what accrued to those men who violated it and the powers that it bequeathed. One young man who entered the enclosure, wherein was the fire, went lame and lost his mind. Another went mad and drank so much water he burst and died. Yet both bears and men gained strength and protection against evil by leaping over the sacred fire (Condren 1989: 68-72). St. Brendan is said to have acquired the ability to subdue sea monsters on his fabulous voyage by simply uttering the name of Brigit (Condon 1989: 75).

Another element of Brigit's tradition concerns the distribution of cakes. The vestal virgins of Rome made cakes from the first ears of last year's corn harvest and distributed them on the feast of Lupercalia, which corresponded to the Celtic Imbolc now celebrated at Candlemas at the beginning of February. Another tale from Brigit's 'Lives' relates how two men brought a vessel to her to be blessed. They accidentally let it fall but it did not break nor did a drop of water spill from it. St. Patrick heard about this 'miracle' and ordered the water from the vessel to be divided among the main churches in Ireland and the remainder sprinkled on the field to ensure their fertility. Here we see the Goddess of Sovereignty symbolically unifying the kingdom, as she did when prohibiting weapons from contacting her sacred oak, and the Goddess of Fertility renewing the land to ensure a prosperous harvest (Condren 1989: 73). This incident also makes one wonder about St. Patrick's druidic sympathies! Another tale relates how Brigit as the Goddess of Fertility cured the frigidity of a young man's wife.

As Goddess of Sovereignty she wielded considerable political and bureaucratic power as related in her reprimands of the displays of wealth indulged in by the male bishop in her double monastery and her regular audiences with bishops and clerics. She was also famous as a peacemaker. Brigit's own blood has sacred healing power and reveals her as a

⁵ As did the sacred horse ceremony which anointed the king and gave him credibility to rule.

goddess of healing. Falling out of her chariot, her blood from a bad head wound healed two dumb women who happened to be lying nearby on the road (Condren 1989: 75-77).

If the Irish Goddess were to survive the arrival of Catholicism, then at the very least she must go underground to be honored in folk ceremony and ritual when that could be hidden from the Church. A more powerful position would be attained if she could manifest within a powerful female figure that belonged to the Church itself. St. Brigit's Night is February 1 and celebrates the division of the 'winter half' of the year into winter and spring (Rees and Rees 1961: 92). Inevitably, Brigit as the Goddess metamorphosed first into Virgin Mother and then into the virgin Christian St. Brigit, a process that can be partially documented in the historical record. Legend attributes to St. Patrick the insistence that Brigit always be accompanied by a priest, thereby ensuring that Holy Orders would never be conferred on her and thereby greatly restricting her 'official' religious power.

Cogitosus, a scholar of the seventh century who wrote a 'Life' of Brigit, was a member of the *romani* party in Ireland who were trying to eradicate the last vestiges of the old religion in Ireland and bring its practice into conformity with that of Rome. Living a century after Brigit, he tried to eliminate any references to her as a fire goddess. In 888, Irish virgins for the first time cut their hair: remember that hair in the old religion was a potent sign of a woman's power. St. Patrick became the patron saint of the Church of Armagh in north Ireland which was allied with the powerful Uí Néill dynasty. Brigit became the patron saint of Kildare in the south which was allied with the Leinster kings. By becoming identified with one side in this ninth century political power struggle, the Virgin Saint becomes a partisan Virgin Warrior, a concept alien to the Great Goddess as Giver of Sovereignty to a unified kingdom ruled by *one* semi-divine consort-king.

Perhaps the final indignity and a 'real-world' end to Brigit as Goddess occurred in 1132. A Leinster king, Dermot Mac Murrough, fought a ferocious battle in which many died and part of the Kildare monastery was destroyed. The Abbess of Kildare was deliberately raped because Mac Murrough wanted to impose a kinswoman as abbess. The last historical mention of an Abbess of Kildare, and presumably the last incarnation of Brigit as the Abbess of Kildare, is in 1172 when Sadhbh, the daughter of Gluniarainn Mac Murrough, died. The monastery lost its independence and was placed under the protection of the Norman bishop Lawrence O'Toole who happened to be the brother-in-law of the king of Leinster, Dermot Mac Murrough. In 1220, the papal legate, Henry of London, ordered the sacred fire to be extinguished but the local people rebelled at this and the bishop of Kildare ordered that it be relit. Reverence for Brigit was now rapidly descending into the outback of folk custom and superstition. The monastery fell into insignificance and was disbanded during the suppression of the monasteries in 1540-41 (Condren 1989: 95-112).

Parenthetically, I wish to mention briefly that there is no specifically Celtic history of the Great Goddess and Mary. The Virgin Mary's evolution from the mother of Christ into saint is not specifically Celtic history, nor is it a tale of the transformation of the Egyptian goddess Isis as is commonly supposed. Mary subsumes much of Cybele, an orgiastic mother goddess of Asia Minor whose worship was imported into Rome during the Punic Wars. But absorption is not succession within a lineage for Mary above all, is a *virgin* mother, and that sets her apart from not only Cybele but all the Great Goddesses of pre-Christian times. I refer the reader to Carroll (1986) but beware of the extreme extension of modern psychoanalytic theories into a time frame and mind set where they have no relevance.



The Death of the Goddess in Gaul and the Origin of Witches

"According to Roman authors, Diana was the most venerated of all the deities of Galatia, and presumably the most stubborn opponent of the new religion. Understandably, she was singled out for particularly keen attacks by the Christians. We may therefore wish to treat with some caution a story which appears in the life of St. Taurinus, who in the fifth century was bishop of what is now Evreux. According to this tale, Diana withdrew from her followers of her own accord because, since the arrival of the Christians, she was held in 'fiery chains'. In contrast to the Spartan willow branches, these chains could never be loosened again.

"The power of this goddess was greatly feared and considered very real. This is evidenced not only by the testimony of St. Taurinus, who heard her voice himself, but even more clearly by a marble torso of Diana, which in earlier times stood next to the monastery church of St. Matthew near Trier. It carried a medieval inscription that was still being renewed in the seventeenth century, and which read:

If you want to know who I am,
I used to be a false goddess.
When St. Eucharius came to Trier,
He broke me and took away my honour.
I was honoured as a god,
Now I stand here for the world to mock.

"It seems, however, that sometimes Diana did manage to break her chains. This is indicated by a famous text from the collection of legal documents of Reginus, an abbot of Prüm. At the beginning of the eleventh century, it was included by the then bishop of Worms, in his *Decretum*, and it was translated into German in a Swiss manuscript from the year 1393: 'Also we should not forget nor overlook that there are quite a number of deluded women who were converted by the Devil, and who on his orders commit mockery, and are subject to fantasies and illusions of the senses. They believe and say that they, together with a large number of women, go riding and travelling with a pagan goddess, who is called Dyana, or with Herodiade, on the backs of some forest animals, during the quiet of the night, passing over many regions or countries. And that they obey her orders, as of a powerful lady. And that the same goddess calls them to her service during certain nights.

"During the early Middle Ages and even at its height, no one apparently disputed that there were such women travelling through the wilderness by night. What was denied was that Diana, the mistress of such beings, was a true goddess, and that not only demons, but also humans took part in such travels.

"St. Germanus of Auxerre saw such beings with his own eyes. At first glance, he thought they were real. But when he found that those people whom he knew and thought he had recognized were actually sleeping peacefully at home, he was forced to conclude

that the apparitions he had seen must of necessity have been demons who had assumed only the shape of those sleeping women.

“Had the Christians of those early times accepted as fact that from time to time their women went flying away with the pagan goddess, it would have meant admitting that the ‘false goddess’, whom they had deprived of power, was still capable of exerting considerable influence in the world. As it was, Diana was not exactly robbed of her existence, but what existence she was allowed was a pitifully meagre one. Once a deity, she was now driven from her shrines and banished to a spectral realm, accessible only to a few wretched women who could participate in its rites merely in fantasy or illusion. Occasionally, she was still needed, but only to affirm one’s own normality. That did not mean that she had to be accorded all that much reality.

The old pagan culture paled in dead space, and the new paganism of those who were destined to break the willow branches around their hearts during the later Middle Ages was still far away. As we shall see later on, those rebels to come were not admonished as pagans. They were persecuted as heretics of the Christian faith. These were no longer adherents of the faith of a bygone age, something that had managed to survive for centuries into the time of the Renaissance in the memory of a few women travelling by night. The ‘new sect’ of witches did not come from out there, from remote villages or forests. It arose from the inside, or as Levi-Strauss might want to say, from the outside of the inside. Precisely because of the guardians of the social order – its night side, as it were - it was considered to be real, even though the reality of someone else. **Snow White’s stepmother could only bear to see her second face when it was not her own, but that of the mirror”** (Duerr 1985: 14-15).



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