

# Thanks and Dedication From Dean

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Had it not been for Suzanne La Cour, my co-author, this text would not exist. Suzanne and I spent DAYS upon MONTHS on the phone and in person, visiting, talking, arguing, supposing and researching various threads, clues, ideas and references about the Ogham. Then, after a 7 year hiatus, we reacquainted and Suzanne took the laborious job of editing our old long forgotten manuscript. So it is to her I give my greatest and deepest thanks, and dedicate this this special poem to her:

*Where can a Druid find the truth of the Ogham?  
Not Hard: The true meaning of the Trees lies hidden-  
Hidden where the berries of change grow in clusters sweet  
Hidden in the tree of the sovereign soul  
Atop the thunderstruck one for whom we are named  
Conceal it too, lest death befall you and  
Seek finally in the Willow branch but beware the unfortunate may be yours!  
Then you will know - only to ask again.  
Thank you Suzanne, Blessed Be!!*

Additional thanks to Julie Sobanski for her editing help and to Sandy Starr for her editing, SPLENDID art work and enjoyable dinner company.

I dedicate this book to Richard- My love!



# Thanks and Dedication From Suzanne

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Have you ever tried to work with a Gemini? Let's see, what would be descriptive? Oh yes: exciting, confusing, thought-provoking, inspirational, fun, down-right insane and never, EVER boring! Thank God/dess I am Aquarius-Rising, or I never could have kept up with him. What started out as fun, philosophical discussions has been transformed into these pages and the entire process has been a delightful one. I am indebted to Dean, my companion in crime, for making this a reality and I thank him for this wonderful experience. Please let us know if you like the result. We're hoping to work on a few other projects.

This work was truly a cooperative effort; the basic format, the wonderful fiction and the re-telling of myth, along with much of the divinatory interpretations, are pure Dean. My own forte is research and ideas; I love seeking out little facts in out-of-the-way sources. Much of the work on botany, folk medicine and folklore, God/dess associations and magical correspondences are my contribution, as well, as my personal comments and observations gained working with the various trees. Don't worry, I won't be commenting on all of them!

We must give you fair warning! This is not intended as a "scholarly" work and a great deal of what you will read in these pages is not from any outside source. Most of it comes from the personal interpretations, opinions and insights brought about through using the Ogham for divination, meditation and general spiritual workings. We have left most (not all) of the debating to

the Ogham scholars who are working from an historical or language perspective. Our goal is far more ethereal – we want you to experience the “Spirit” of the Ogham.

Quite frankly, I really do not care if all the research to date on the Ogham turns out to be sheer fantasy. The Ogham has proven itself, time and time again, to be a gateway into spiritual worlds and insights that no other forum has revealed, at least not to me.

Here is another little poem, formed under the auspices of the Ogham:

A formidable task completed, and balance is restored once again.  
Passion and Commitment kept open the door between the Realms.  
The Fair Ones are whispering, telling me of new work at hand,  
There are many journeys yet to make before I find my rightful place upon the  
Great Tree.  
It is time to move on, beyond these pages, to begin anew.  
I hold fast to my Truth: that to seek knowledge is to be at peace in this World  
and all the Worlds.  
I am truly blessed by the Great One from which I take my name.

Last, but most certainly not least, I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of my long-time friend Ken Richardson, a.k.a. Ken Wind-walker. I hope his next journey in this world is much longer and his Way an easier one. Brightest blessings, my Friend and Brother; I know that we will meet again and I look forward to that day.



# Introduction What is Ogham?

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For whatever reason, you have been drawn to this particular book. You may already have encountered others who write of the enigma that is the Ogham. You may simply collect books on esoteric subjects or, perhaps, you have some personal past-life connection to the Celtic people or to Druidic teachings. In this book, we seek only to share our own discoveries, ideas and concepts - along with teachings of the past - in such a way that you, the reader, may formulate your own uses and understanding of the Ogham. If you agree with what you read here, if it rings true for you, that is wonderful. If not, perhaps it will pique your interest enough to work with the Ogham and discover your own truth.



So, what is the Ogham? This is a fairly simple question for which there is no simple answer. In its most simplistic form, the answer may seem to be that Ogham - also known as the Irish Tree Alphabet - is an ancient alphabet of the Druids. In reality, the Ogham is a cauldron of dispute, uncertainty, speculation and ideas. Even the word itself is subject to debate. Some authors argue that it means "language," some that it means "furrow," and still others contend that the meaning is not known or that the word has no actual meaning at all.

**Ogham:** (Also spelled Ogam and Ogum) Pronounced Oh'-um, Oh-yam or even Ah'- Gum. This term generally describes the Oghamic characters as created by the eponymous God/Hero, Ogmia Surface.

Why such confusion? Well, for one thing, no one can seem to agree on what the Ogham actually was or for what it was used. There seem to be a few generally agreed upon concepts: (1) The Ogham was an alphabet (whether or not it was used by the Druids is another question); (2) The Ogham provided a secret means of communication through the use of hand signals; (3) The Ogham was used as a divinatory method and/or magical system of some kind; (4) The Ogham was adapted as a lunar calendar system; (5) The Ogham was a group of Sacred Trees





used for spiritual study and enlightenment; (6) The Ogham was used as a mnemonic aid and as a means of classifying and categorizing the Druidic universe.

The only thing we know for sure (carved in stone, as it were) is that there remain about 400 stone Ogham markers which appear to be gravestones and property markers. Most of them, about 350, are in western Ireland, particularly in Kerry and the Dingle Peninsula, with a few on the Isle of Man. Ogham stones with a Pictish type of writing (yet to be decoded) have been found in south-western Scotland. A few stones are scattered in Wales, Cornwall and Devonshire, but are believed to have been created by Irish settlers in those areas. Archeologists have also found stones with similar (but not exact) markings in northern Spain and Portugal dating from about 500 BCE. Modern scholars believe that the early settlers of Ireland may have come across the sea from this area. Just to make matters more interesting, stones marked with Ogham characters have been found in North America, but the makers of these marks have yet to be verified.<sup>1</sup>

Even the question of exactly what the Ogham stones are has come into question. Druid and author Philip Shallcrass writes, "For many years it was assumed that Ogham stones were memorials or grave markers...this assumption is called into question by the fact that they are never found in association with burials. It has been argued that the majority of them have been moved from their original sites, but it seems likely that some at least would have remained in place alongside their burials, had there been such burials."<sup>2</sup> Shallcrass goes on to suggest that the stones were boundary markers with the names of LIVING clan chiefs carved upon them.

Where and when did the Ogham originate? These questions fuel some of the most heated debates. Most scholars on Ogham owe the basis of their research to medieval Irish manuscripts: The Book of

Ballymote, The Book of Leinster, The Book of Lecan and The Scholar's Primer.<sup>3</sup> These books clearly focused on using Ogham for writing, but there is also some evidence that Ogham was used for divination and magic. Graves and many others have also relied heavily on the writings of Roderick O'Flaherty (Ogygia - 17th century) and Dr. R. A. S. Macalister's works from the 1930's and 1940's. Unfortunately, Dr. Macalister, Graves and many more recent authors have used the "Barddas," a 19th century work on Druidism by one Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwyg) as a resource for information on both the Ogham and the Druids. Recent scholarship has substantially disproved and largely discredited this particular work.

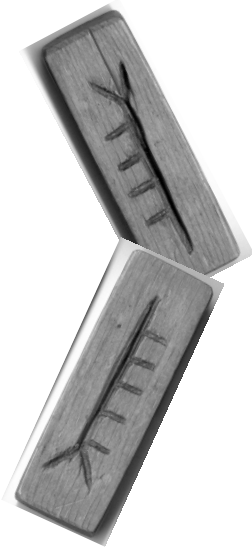
There appear to have been over 100 different types of Ogham: River-Pool Ogham, Tree Ogham, Men Ogham, Bird Ogham, Color Ogham and so forth, so, obviously, Ogham was also being used as a means of classification.<sup>4</sup> Macalister proposed that Druids used the Ogham as a secret sign language to convey messages and teachings; he also asserted that the origins of written Ogham alphabet may be traced to Greece.<sup>5</sup> The Druids were not completely opposed to writing and it is known that they made use of Greek and Latin to record mundane matters. Some place the origin of the Ogham squarely on the backs of the Romans. They believe that Ogham is based on the Boibel Loth Nuin alphabet, which also carried tree correspondences, and which originally used a series of runic-like glyphs that more closely resemble our own Latin-based alphabet. The BLN alphabet only had 18 characters, which may account for some of the missing letters in the original Oghamic tracts.

Debating a possible time-frame for the Ogham is even more confusing than discussing the physical birth-place. Dates range from about 2,000 BCE - based on a discovery of some chalk tablets which appear to contain Oghamic inscription - to post-Christian

As Above So Below



5th century Ireland. Part of the problem has been the tendency towards fanciful lore. Richard Webster suggests that we “inherited the term ‘leaves’ of a book from the ancient Celtic ‘bobileth.’” He refers to messages being constructed by stringing leaves on a cord, each leaf representing a different tree (and thus, a different letter). The message was read by flipping from leaf to leaf. <sup>6</sup> To make matters worse, it is likely that the original substance for Ogham carvings was wood, which would account for a lack of inscriptions prior to 1700 years ago. This last problem has occasionally created time-line and origins difficulties in the study of Germanic and Norse runes as well.



Well, as we’ve stated, it is not our purpose to try to sort out this historical hodge-podge, thank the Gods! We’ll leave that to archeologists and linguistic scholars.

In our opinion, there is enough evidence to at least consider the possibility that Ogham harkens back long before medieval times. To call the Ogham an “alphabet” is not entirely accurate. The Druids were an oral-tradition people who, as far as we know, did not believe in writing down their teachings. The sum total of their intensive, 20-plus years’ education was memorized and recited orally. The Oghamic system was, at least in part, a mnemonic system, a memory aide, to assist in the process of recalling the vast quantity of material learned throughout the long years of study. As time went on and Ogham was no longer a secret language (and the Druids were no longer a powerful priest caste, having been nearly eradicated by the Romans), it seems to have been shoved into the format of the Roman alphabet and used for marking grave sites and property boundaries.

Oghamic letters were used to classify the universe of the Druids. The Ogham is based upon sound and SOUND was the method of categorization used. Those things which had similar meaning or were within the same category would start with the same sound, and

thus, the same "letter." For example, Col, the Hazel Tree, symbolizes Wisdom and Knowledge. Cor, the Crane, brings about Wisdom and Knowledge, and, according to legend, it was within the Crane Bag that all the secrets of the Ogham were kept. There is still evidence of this phonetic correspondence in modern Irish and Gaelic. The Oghamic character, "Ailm" stands for Independence and Sovereignty. The Irish word "aon" literally means "one" or "alone," and the word "aois" means "age."

In the emerging Neo-pagan cultures, Ogham is being used for writing, magical work, pathworking and divinatory purposes and, as with so much of the new Pagan writings, there are many people out there who claim to know the TRUTH about the Ogham.

Your authors find it difficult to say that any one thing is THE truth. Let us face facts: during "The Burning Times" in Europe, and later in America, all forms of Paganism went under ground. It became impossible to know who was to be trusted, and, as such, the concept of "perfect love and perfect trust" become a matter of life and death. Many, or perhaps even all, of the original Pagan ways were lost or buried and what we are working with in the modern-day Pagan Revival are a series of fragments pieced back together from bits of history, legend, story, tradition and hearsay. It is necessary to approach all of the modern writings with an open mind, but not so open that your brains fall out.

We would also like to take a moment to mention that, while we may offer historic herbal, medicinal or cosmetic uses for a given tree or plant, we in NO way advise using said plant for those purposes until you have thoroughly researched it, consulted an herbalist and ascertained safety for yourself. Neither the authors nor publisher shall accept liability for use, nor misuse, of any information contained herein.

This book takes a slightly eccentric format, mixing a newly created

folk tale with factual and historic information about the Ogham. With all this in mind, let us push forth, and join with the Trees. May we suggest that it is best now to pour yourself a fresh cup of tea, draw the blinds, light a fire and relax as you become one with the Trees....

#### Footnotes

- (1) The general information provided is found all over the internet and in published texts with no cited source. However, there is a specific article on the internet about Ogham writing found in a cave in North America. Vey, Gary. Ancient Ogam in Oklahoma? (<http://www.viewzone.com/ogam.html>)
- (2) Shallcrass, Philip. A Little History of Ogham. A version of this article appeared in The Druids' Voice no.8, Summer 1997. It is a revised extract from Philip Shallcrass' forthcoming book, The Bardic Tradition in Britain and Ireland. <http://www.druidorder.demon.co.uk/ogham.htm>
- (3) Blamires, Steve. Celtic Tree Mysteries: Secrets of the Ogham, p. 5
- (4) Matthews, Caitlin and John, The Encyclopaedia of Celtic Wisdom, Chapter 2
- (5) Graves, Robert, The White Goddess, p. 115
- (6) Webster, Richard. Omens, Oghams & Oracles, p. 59



## *The Pre-Cycle*

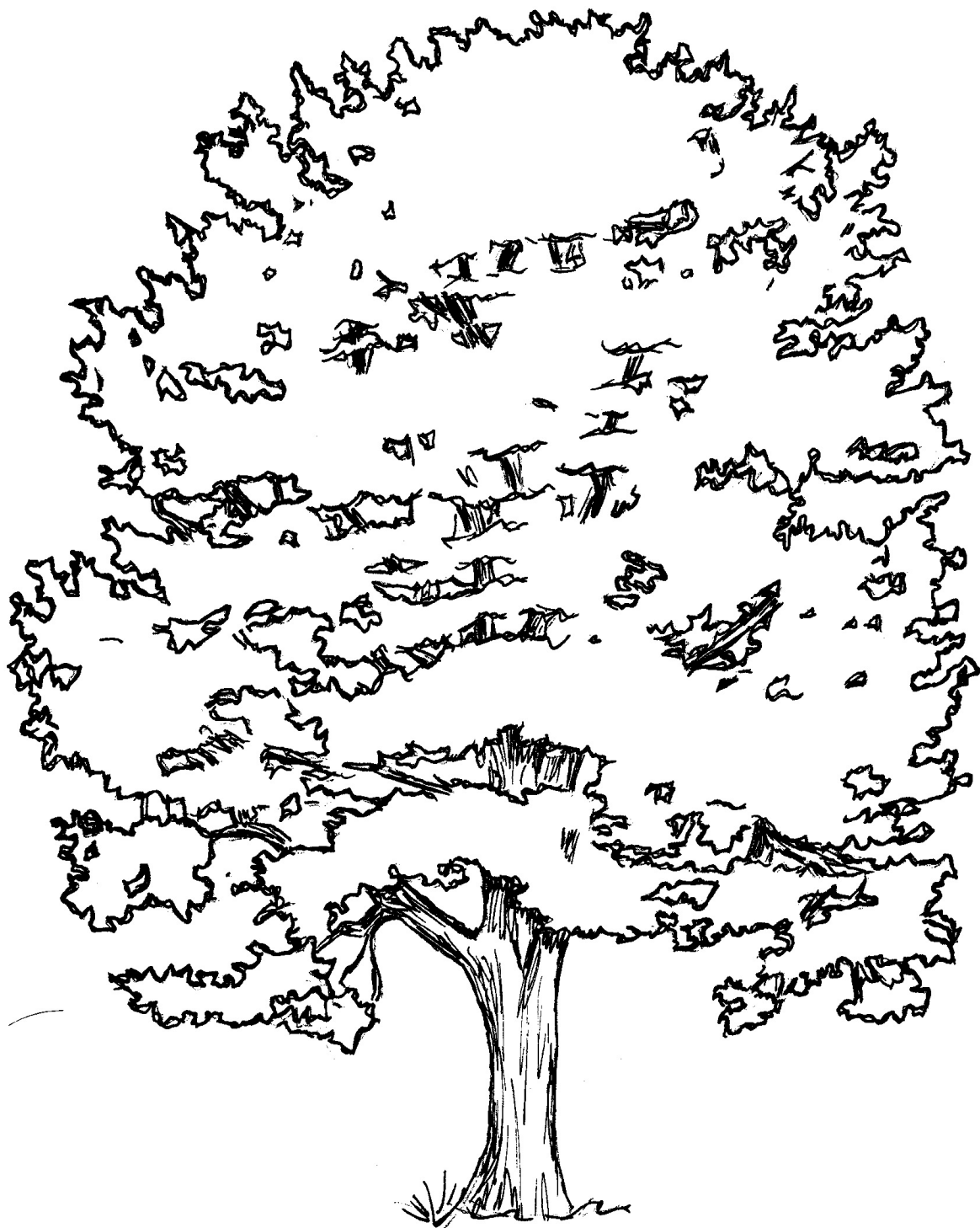
*It had been a great time, yet no time. That era before eternity, when the Earth had formed from a moment of coincidental consciousness. Atoms of energy collected, had thought and from that thought became "All That Was." Yet nothing was as it is known in the "Now" as we know it; though the now as we know it has yet to happen and still was long ago.*

*Terra hung motionless in dark-light void, as it had, mostly unchanged in the Forever-Instant in which it was created. There had been some thought formation: the Earth had occasional shifts of attitude which forged great fissures, rocks and mountains rising away from the surface. One occasion, a passing whimsy set a lush green "hair" alive upon its surface. Grasses, flowers, and leafy vines all appeared from thoughts of the Earth, and became individual consciousness; separate, yet as much a part of the Earth as the Earth was part of its conceiver.*

*All existed, yet it did not. Would but language of today allow comparison of the Then- Forever to our own Present-Forever, we would see many things that seem odd indeed.*

*Save for the rocks, mountains, fissures and valleys, the surface of the Earth was flat - a lush ocean of low leaves. But there were none of the tall ones, none of the hard ones, no Beings of Wood- none of the timeless ones who stand throughout all existence.*

*Not until a clover laughed.....*





## Some Important Definitions and Terms

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The Ogham consists of a series of 20 to 25 (sometimes more or fewer) basic characters, or letters, usually grouped in sets of five, each character representing a different tree or plant. The "writing" itself is made with a series of one to five hash marks, made at different angles and attached to a single stem line.

**Ogham:** (Also spelled Ogam and Ogum) Pronounced Oh'-um, Oh-yam or even Ah'-Gum. This term generally describes the Oghamic characters as created by the eponymous God/Hero, Ogma Sun-face. It can be used as a collective term for the entire set of Oghamic characters etched on tiles or sticks and used for divination. Here, in ENGLISH alphabetical order are some of the names and spellings of the Ogham letters: Ailm, Beithe (Also Beth or Beith,) Coll, Duir, Edath, Fearn, Gort, Huath, Idho (Or Idath,) (K) NGetal, Luis, Muin, Nuin, Onn, Beth-bhog (Or Peth-bhog,) Quert (Or Cuirt,) Ruis, Saille, Tinne, Ur, (Z)Straif, Ulioc.

**Acme:** Pronounced Ack-Me. One of the groups of Oghamic characters. Each group contains five characters with similar line structure.

**Fifths, Few or Fews:** Tiles or sticks of wood with Oghamic characters inscribed upon them.

**Fedha:** Pronounced Faith-ah which literally means "Trees." Fedha refers to the characters themselves. Also spelled feadha

**Stem Line:** The line on which the Ogham is cut or scribed. The fork ( >— ) generally denotes the beginning of the writing, representing the roots of the tree. Most Oghamic inscriptions in existence today are found chiseled into the edge of a stone, using a



sharp corner as the stem line, and are read from the Earth upward.

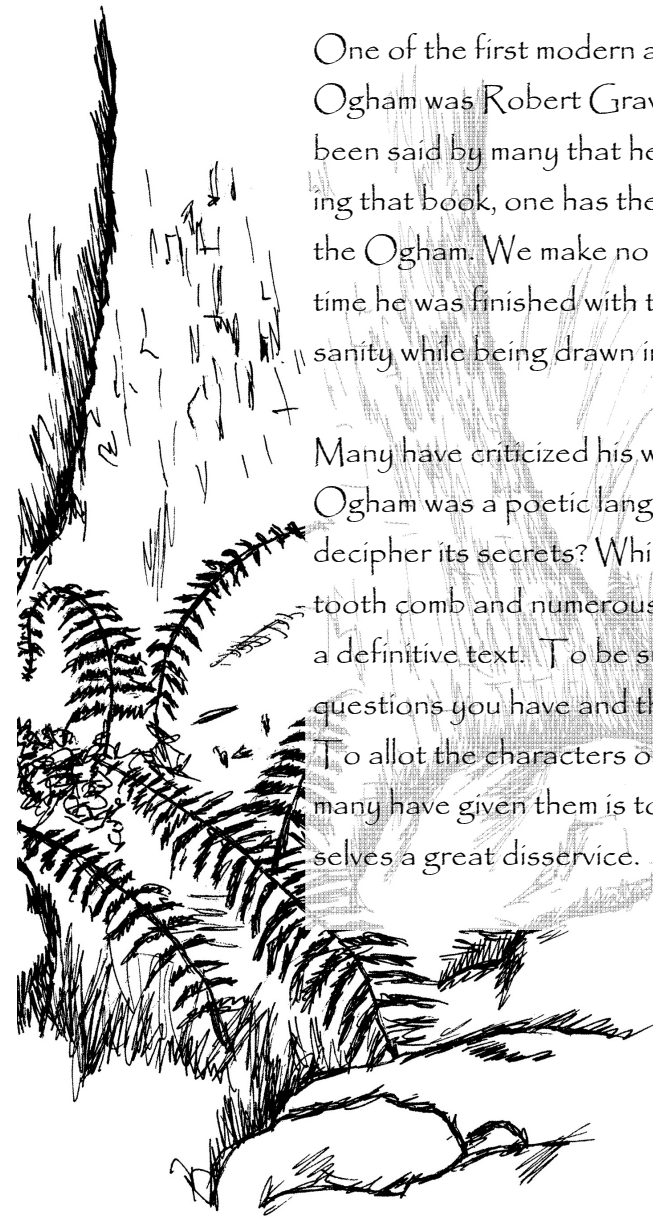
**Forfedha:** Pronounced For-Faith-ah. Five characters of much debate which are part of the total Ogham system, but apparently NOT part of the original Ogham invented by Ogma Sunface. The word literally means "Extra Trees."

## Graves- Our Mutual Insanity

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One of the first modern authors to do any real scholarly writing on the Ogham was Robert Graves in his tome, *The White Goddess*. It has been said by many that he was either a genius, or crazy, or both. Reading that book, one has the feeling that Graves was truly possessed by the Ogham. We make no real judgments as to his mental state by the time he was finished with the book, though we have questioned our own sanity while being drawn in to this text.

Many have criticized his work, however as one author pointed out, the Ogham was a poetic language and who better than a master Bard to decipher its secrets? While we think the Graves' work requires a fine tooth comb and numerous grains of salt for the reading, we also feel it is a definitive text. To be sure, the more one studies the Ogham, the more questions you have and the deeper you are drawn within its clutches. To allot the characters only the surface level understanding that so many have given them is to do you, the Ancestors and the Trees themselves a great disservice.



# Dean's First Ogham Experience

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11/21/94

"I was first introduced to the Ogham by Hillary, the enchanting owner of a local Pagan store. She had a set of Ogham tiles made from Bog Oak - wood which was easily a thousand years old. They were hot in my hands, and I was immediately possessed by them, feeling a very strong affinity and attachment, as if I had held them many times before in past lives. I put off their purchase until it was too late and they were safely in the hands of someone else.

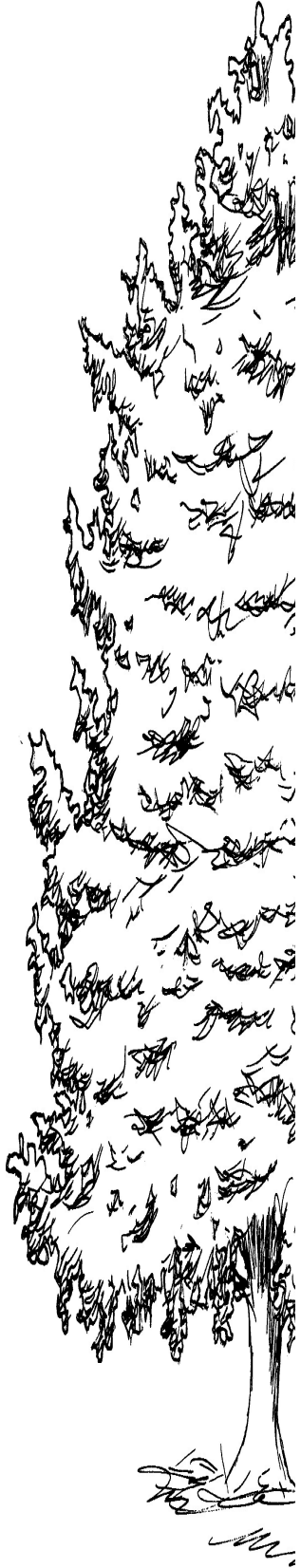
As time passed, I ended up fashioning my own set of tiles. To contain them I made a green bag with the Forfedha embroidered upon it; when opened full it was the casting surface; when closed, it was my Crane Bag.

The fews were oiled, rubbed, charged, blessed and allowed to sleep in a mixture of herbs for several weeks. I started a note book, trying to study and learn about the Sacred Trees which the familiar-yet-new markings represented. I repeatedly got in my own way, procrastinating, waiting and such.

I finally let the fedha rest under my pillow for over a month, repeatedly trying to get back to them, but discovering later that they knew better.

One day I pulled the oddly scented bag from under my pillow and restarted my studies, I can't remember that day specifically, but it was meant to be. I quickly learned the order and meanings of the Trees, and started what would be a long, still unfinished path of greater understanding. This was just the beginning.

I arrived early for work at a local recreation resort. I always carried



my Ogham with me at this point and, for some reason, felt that it was time for my first reading. I sat alone in the break room and had a feeling that something special would happen.

I pulled the bag open just a bit, and took a deep breath of the contents within. The scents of vanilla, rose, and cloves mingled with each other, and gave my spirit a rush. I flattened the bag out, revealing the hidden design upon the surface within. Cupping the fews in my hands, I looked around the room which seemed different somehow. Everything now had an ethereal glow perceivable to my inner eye.

I piled the Tree Tiles in the center of the cloth and covered them with my hands. I sent my energies into the Ogham while asking for guidance for the next few months. The pile of wood under my hands started to heat up, it physically got very HOT and the physical sensation surprised me. I blindly selected five fews and held them for a few moments; the warmth from the wood was steady now, not so dramatic.

I cast them down and slowly opened my eyes to see what they might reveal. I was not expecting what I received. As I interpreted the casting, floods of visions and truth came rushing past. The information was clear, deep and vast, yet difficult to process all at once and VERY hard to put in to words. Even to this day I find the verbal interpretation of Oghamic readings to be the hardest part. I did three further castings, always amazed at the energy of the readings.

When I was done, I gathered the fews into a pile at the corner of the cloth, covering them with my hands, feeling their warmth.

My biggest surprise and delight was to come when I looked up. I jumped back, for there I saw, with my physical eyes and with great clarity, four tall men standing around me. I came to understand that they represent, for me, the four Archetypal Guides of the Forfedha

and the Four Directions. They smiled and nodded at my efforts and I was suddenly given an awareness of how, for whom, and under what conditions I would read with the Ogham. I came to understand that the Ogham is a connection with eternal wisdom and magic of the Celtic people, the Druids and all those who have used and will use the Ogham.

Behind me, a tall man in white robes. His features are fine and youthful beneath his reddish brown beard and hair. He wears a silver torque, simple but elegant - his steel blue eyes were intense yet calming.

To my left, an aged man who reminded me of a Merlin or Gandalf type - Long grey hair and beard, steel grey eyes and a blue-grey robe of velvet, he wore a ring of knotted vine.

In the north I was faced by a man in his late twenties wearing an antlered head dress and skins. He carried a wooden shield and weapon of stone tied to a rope. His hair was longer than the young man's, more rustic, but still neat.

To my right a nobleman, dark hair and beard, wearing a crown of wood set with white and pink crystal, his jewelry was grand but tasteful. A ruler of some sort - he had a vibrant and glowing haze all around him.

Even now, as I type this account from my note book years later, it seems close and ethereal as I talk about it.

I acknowledged these men and again they nodded and smiled. I sincerely thanked them for their guidance and they faded in a blurry of light. They reappear now each time I read with the Ogham, and they offer their guidance and support. They also tell me when it is better to put the tiles away and not to ask.



## Suzanne's Oghamic Experience

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"I cannot recall the date, but I was very young and I had not yet actually discovered the Ogham. I had, however, been working with Trees – listening to my Guides, trying to establish communication, learn what they had to offer me and what they expected in return. I was becoming rather frustrated – have you ever tried to get a tree to talk to you? Trees go about things in their own time and space – it's no use trying to get them to move any faster.

I was on an OtherWorld journey, standing in my normal place Between the Worlds, when I walked through a gateway and found myself in the center of a glade. I could hear murmuring all around the Wood, as though a thousand voices were whispering all at once. At first, it was overwhelming, but gradually the whispering faded into the background. A Full Moon was shining high in the sky, bathing the Wood in moonlight. It was odd, but as I looked around, I realized that the trees were growing together in groups of like-species, in massive ring-like groves, each clearly separate from the other. To my immediate left was a grove of trees that I recognized at once. I stepped into the center of the ring and the moon – which should have remained in the center of the glade, moved directly overhead.

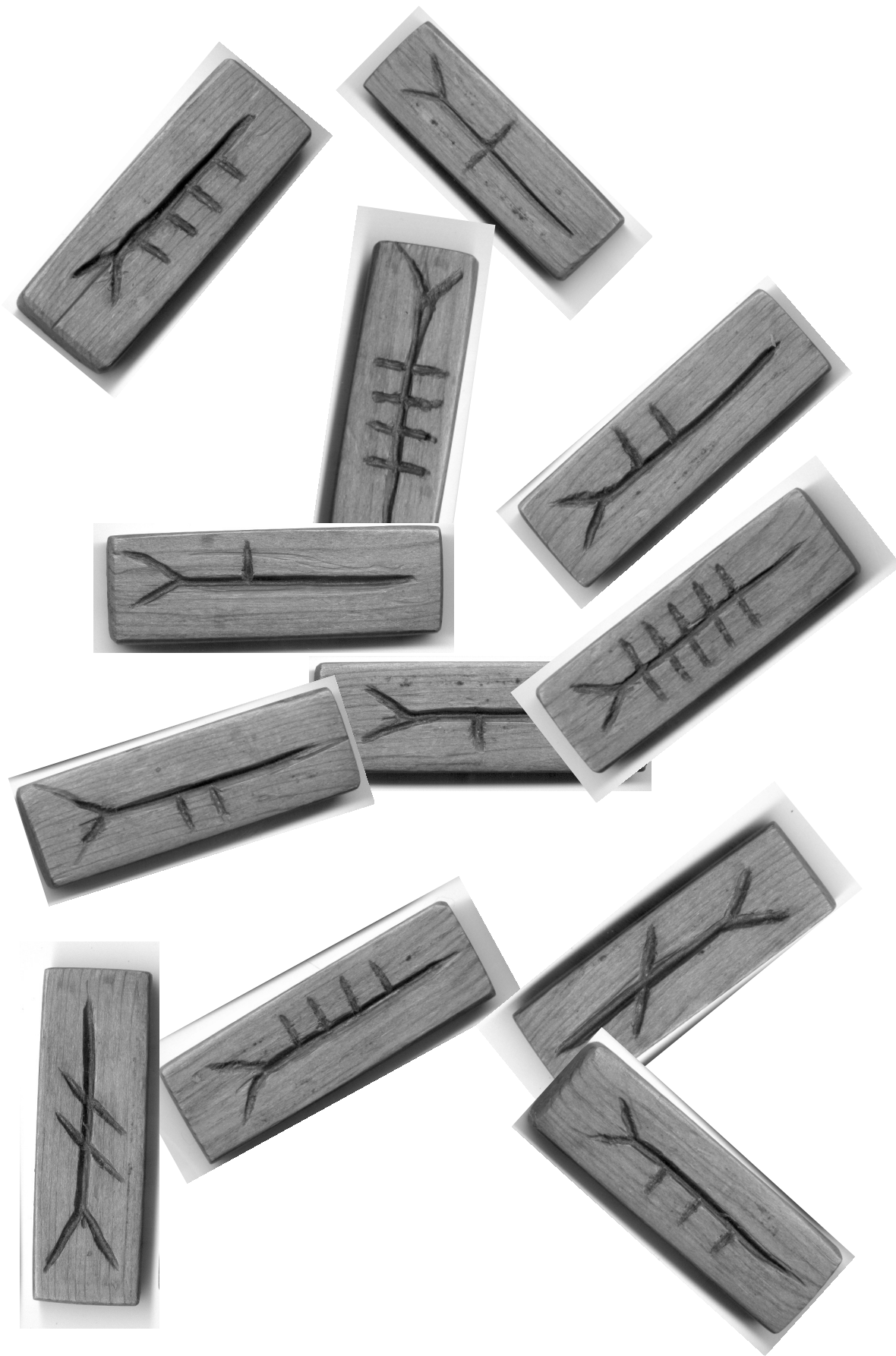
The light was so bright, that I could see every detail: grey-green moss growing beneath my feet, shimmering white bark marked here and there with horizontal streaks of brown and black and peeling in places, beautiful heart-shaped large green leaves, slightly toothed along the edges, deep green on the top and a slightly lighter green beneath. Some of the trees were bare, as though in the midst of winter. Others were wearing fall colors, covered in bright golden leaves. Still others were covered in spring catkins and seed cones. I could smell the faintest hint of wintergreen. I was in the Birch Grove.

I realized that this grove, like all the others in the Sacred Wood, is the Spirit of all the Birch Trees that exist, have ever existed and will ever exist in all the Realms.

The trees seemed to be leaning in, reaching toward me with their beautiful, slender branches. I walked around the ring, touching as many trees as I could, running my fingers through the leaves, touching the paper-thin bark, smelling the refreshing scent. I opened my heart and mind and asked the Birch to speak to me, to touch me. I sounded the name three times as I opened myself up to the Spirit of the Birch. I could see Beings of various types moving in and around the trees. I could hear the whispering, make out the voices. I had learned to talk to the Trees and I knew, with certainty, that Birch could hear and understand my own speech and respond to it.

When it was time to move on I was inspired to leave a gift. I cupped my hands together and wished hard for an appropriate gift and one appeared. I offered it to the Birch Grove with my thanks and blessings and stepped back out into the Sacred Wood. The moon was shining once more in the center of the Wood.

For months I revisited the Sacred Wood, each time entering a different grove. My observations and experiences are recorded in other parts of this book and my personal journeys turned into guided meditations that I have used with my own spiritual group, *Crystal Moon Coven*.”





# The Problem of ORDER

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Among all the other debates there is yet another dispute: the order in which the trees, and therefore the letters, occur. There are two major schools of thought regarding the proper order of the letters, as well as, several minor variations on which trees correspond with which character. We have our own ideas on what is correct FOR US, (and even we do not always agree,) so let us delve into this discussion by stating that: WHATEVER SYMBOLISMS, NAMES, ORDERS AND MEANINGS YOU FEEL ARE PROPER SHALL BE YOUR TRUTH. Use YOUR truth, not ours, to empower your Ogham prior to reading, magic or pathworking.

This is how we arrived at our truth:

Robert Graves goes into tremendous detail regarding the proper order of the **original** Ogham. We emphasize the word "original" because it should be noted that a) The Ogham originally was NOT an alphabet, but a system of classifying the universal principles of the Druids; and b) as it became an actual alphabet, it was probably translated from Irish to Welsh and then back several times, and during that time was also made to adapt to the Roman alphabet. It appears that during that Latinization period, the Forfedha came about, the last five characters which bear no geometric similarity to the rest of the characters. One theory about their obviously different appearance is that the Druids held the new symbols with such disgust that they did not wish them to be associated with the original Ogham. Another, less fanciful theory is that the Forfedha represented combinations of sounds that existed in the language and could not be represented by a single letter.

Through the years, various authors have examined and re-examined



the order of the letters. There are two BASIC versions of the Alphabet.

Version # 1- is Beithe, Luis, Fearn, Saille, Nuin, Huath, Duir, Tinne, Col, Quert Muin, Gort, NGetal, Straif, Ruis, Ailm, Onn, Ur, Edath, Idho

Version # 2 is Beithe, Luis, Nuin, Fearn, Saille, Huath, Duir, Tinne, Col, Quert, Muin, Gort, NGetal, Straif, Ruis, Ailm, Onn, Ur, Edath, Idho.

Version # 2 is believed to be the earlier version of the Oghamic alphabet. It originally omitted Quert and Straif, containing then only 13 consonants and 5 vowels. The addition of the former, by various authors, to what is commonly called the Beithe-Luis-Nuin Alphabet (so named for the first three letters) seems to be in the interest of Latinization or maintaining consistency.

As we mentioned earlier, there is evidence to believe that the Oghamic character system of notches was preceded by an alphabet which used actual characters similar to our modern day letters. It is possible that having no use for writing per se, the druids adapted it, and evened it out to 20 characters to allow for more even distribution, and to allow for balance in the cycles each group would come to represent.

Each grouping of five letters is called an Acme, and although their order is GENERALLY agreed upon, even that is up for some debate. Generally, the accepted order is:

BLNFS HDTCU  
MGPSTR AOUEI

And when we speak of the first, second, third and fourth Acme, this order is the one we shall use.

But there is evidence and reason, as we shall discuss later, for using the following order of the Acme:

B L F S N M G P S T (Z) R H D T C Q (C U)  
A O U E I

## A Repeated Error Helps Us Arrive At Our Truth

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The main conflict seems to lie in the order of the first Acme, and we believe a lot of this arises out of a typo in the original Graves book that so many have both copied and criticized.

To analyze the first Acme, we need to examine a very frequently quoted poem which speaks of the relationship between the Ogham and the finger tips of the hand. Part of the memory aid of the Ogham involved assigning different trees to each digit of the hand, thus creating a "handy" memory tool as well as a method of silently encoding messages to others. It is called "Dichetal do Chennaib," (recital/meditation from the finger's ends). Pointing to one or more fingers could convey information to someone similarly trained. There was a similar system set up using the fingers against the ridge of the nose and against the shin bone.

It was common practice to hide or encode messages within poems and riddles and the Druids were supreme Bards. A poem which spoke of cranes or wisdom, for instance, might refer to Col as a letter or to the Hazel Tree itself. Slowly decoding the poem, or even the poetic dedications at the start of this book (hint, hint), may reveal either some secret hidden message or information.

True to style, Robert Graves wrote the following poem to present what he believed to be the practice of Dichetal do Chennaib. His poem leaves MOST of the meanings out in the open; there is little hidden symbolism that needs to be decoded. You have but to read it to understand the trees to which it refers. The poem itself speaks to the practice mentioned above, of assigning a different Ogham to each finger tip. At the end of the first Acme, one begins again on the second section of the thumb to encode or indicate the next Acme. The poem itself speaks of divination, and the power of the finger tips, which is also the power of the Tree Tops, or Ogham. <sup>1</sup>

*Tree powers, finger tips,  
First pentad of the four,  
Discover all your poet asks,  
Drumming on his brow.*

*Birch peg, throbbing thumb,  
By power of divination,  
Birch bring him news of love;  
Loud the heart knocks.*

*Rowan rod, forefinger,  
By power of divination  
Unriddle him a riddle;  
The key's cast away.*

*Ash, middle finger,  
By power of divination  
weatherwise, fool otherwise,  
Mete him out the winds.*

*Alder, physic finger,  
By power of divination  
Diagnose all maladies  
Of a doubtful mind.*

*Willow wand, ear finger,  
By power of divination  
Force confessions from the mouth  
Of a mouldering corpse.*

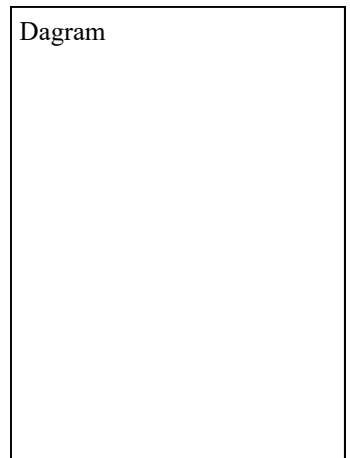
*Finger-ends, five twigs,  
Trees, true-divining trees,  
Discover all your poet asks  
Drumming on his brow.*

To further understand the poem, you should know that: Beithe is Birch (B), Luis is Rowan (L), Nion is Ash (N), Fearn is Alder (F) and Saille is Willow (S).

As you can see, there is reference in the poem to the "Physic Finger", which is the old name for the "Ring Finger." The ring finger was called the physic finger because it was believed that it was the only finger with an artery, and as such, had direct connection with the heart. This was the finger on which wedding rings were (and are) worn and it is the finger with which herbs were supposed to be stirred when empowering them for magical or healing work. It is the finger which would be thought of as bleeding away one's life, just as the Alder (Fearn) bleeds when cut. The poem also refers to the "Ear Finger." The Druids had a practice of placing their hands upon their faces when divining – they would place the thumbs in the mouth and the little fingers (the pinky) in their ears. Now that we have this background, let us explore this poem.

Note that the TEXT of the poem upholds the order BLNFS.

As Above So Below



Also, Graves goes into great detail explaining the different names for the fingers and re-stating their position on the hand. However, in Graves' book, and in most others who have quoted him, there is an illustration with what we can only assume is an error (or an explanation of another order having nothing to do with the poem). In the illustration, the last three Ogham of the first Acme are transposed to read BLFSN. It is amusing that one author quotes the poem and then places the INCORRECTLY LABELED sketch directly beside it with an arrow pointing to the "Physic Finger" which, according to the poem and Graves' text, is assigned to a different Oghamic character (Fearn NOT Saille)!

In other words, there may be more than one proper order; one that should be used for the mundane (writing) and another that should be reserved for the sacred, the spiritual (magic, meditation and divination). There may also be a magically significant reason the first Acme may have been changed and the reason that two major orders of the letters and the trees exists. It is traditional with the Futhark (Runic) alphabet to transpose the final two runes when writing them all out. It is believed that to write the entire rune alphabet in its proper order would be to invoke the magical power of all the runes at once in a powerful and chaotic spell. So, it is possible that the original Oghamic alphabet was handled in a similar manner when the Druid order was breaking down and the Ogham was no longer kept secret. By changing the order of the first Acme, it would be impossible for the uninitiated to accidentally invoke the magical power of all 20 Ogham.

There are other discrepancies within the alphabet as well. Some authors omit Quert, the Apple Tree. The Irish language has never possessed the letter "Q," so that makes some sense. However, it seems odd to omit the Tree of Apple, certainly considered one of the most sacred of trees – so, perhaps a different spelling is called for. In modern Irish, there are a number of words that begin with the letters "cu" and possess a distinctive "Q" sound. The word "cuig" is the number 5;

“cuirt” (spelled with a fada mark over the u) is associated with courting (as lovers) and the word “cuir” means to sow, plant or bury. It is possible that a similar word existed in archaic Irish meaning “Apple Tree.” Note that it is PHONETICALLY the same as Quert. The Ogham was originally a mathematical representation of an oral system and phonetically, the SOUND is the same, even if the English letter characters used are different.

The third character of the third Acme is sometimes called “nGetal,” or “nGéadal” (sometimes “Pethbog” or, if using its archaic spelling, “Beth-bhog” which, literally translated means Soft/Downy Birch). nGetal means Reed, though one can find no such word within the Irish or Scottish dictionaries. In Irish, the word for reed is “giolc.” Beth-bhog is sometimes translated to mean Dwarf-Elder and in some texts is used over nGetal. Whereas, the character Beith has a roughly ‘V’ SOUND, the two hard sounds of Beith-bhog are similarly phonetically to the letter “P.” nGetal doesn’t make much sense, since the N is already represented by Nuin (Ash). It is possible that they were trying to represent the “ng” sound. Also, while Irish didn’t have a letter corresponding to “P,” they did (and do) have the sound which is represented in modern spelling by a “bh.” (To further confuse you, Irish doesn’t have the letter “H” either – the h in bh is called lenition – don’t ask!)



# The Order Used Within This Text Or One Truth Only- With Room For Others!

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Q  
C  
T  
D  
H  
S  
F  
N  
L  
B



A note from Dean:

I have, on many occasions, been accused of having the "attitude that never ends," but I want to state this up front: **EVERYTHING** you read in this text is what I, and/ or Suzanne, believe to be true - that's all. I wasn't alive in this body when the Ogham was developed. I have no conscious, first hand knowledge of what really is "True" about the Ogham, nor does anyone now living. The same goes for most magical traditions, Druidic or otherwise. I have become a passionate student of the Ogham, and as such I share my findings, opinions and beliefs with you. You may pick and choose what you like and adapt it to your needs. I share my views and opinions on things like the order of the Trees so that we may have a common framework of reference to deal with as we discuss the Ogham from here on out. After that, you can adapt, change and deal with the information as you see fit.

To other authors out there I say only that we can agree to disagree and still enjoy each other's opinions. I know that Suzanne agrees.....

And, with that out of the way, this is the order we use within our personal Oghamic work, and in this text:



Name	Phonetic Pronunciation	Tree
Beithe	Vee-Tha (Beth or Baw)	Birch
Luis	Leash	Rowan
Nuín (Níon)	Neen	Ash
Fearn	Fayrne	Alder
Saille	Sail or Sal-yaе/ Sah-eel	Willow/Pussy Willow
Huath	Hwhaath	Hawthorn
Duir (Dair)	Door	Oak
Tinne	Tinnuh	Holly/Furze
Col	Kohl	Hazel
Cuirt (Quert)	Qwert	Apple
Muín	Mihn	Blackberry (Bramble)
Gort	Gort	Ivy
Peth-bhog	Pethbog	Dwarf Elder/Reed
Straif	Ztraif	Blackthorn/Sloe
Ruis	Reesh	Elder
Ailm	Aye-lm	Elm
On	Ohn	Gorse
Urr	Uhr	Heather
Eath	Ea-Dah	Poplar (sometimes Aspen)
Idho	Eye-tho	Yew
Ulioc * (follows)	Oo-Lee-Og	Mistletoe (*Discussion fol-



# The Forfedha

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The one thing that most authors seem to agree on is that the final acme of characters, known as the Forfedha, (which literally means “extra Trees”) appears to have been added much later. To our knowledge, they have not found such characters on the existing standing stones.

There are several theories as to how these characters came about – but no one really knows for sure. They appear to represent sound combinations (usually called diphthongs).

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Irish Name	Sound	Tree	Divinatory Name
Phagos	ae	Beech	Mide (Midhe – pronounced “mee”)
Iphin	io	Gooseberry (Pine?)	Sis
Uileand	ui	Honeysuckle/Woodbine	Fis
Oir	oi	Spindle	Cath
Ebad	ea	Aspen	Blath

---

We both feel a certain apathy toward these figures ourselves, so we use them only as signifiers or place holders on our casting cloth or casting surface.

Mide is used to represent the here and now, generally placed at the center. Sis is in the south or bottom, representing a doorway into something new– or what is coming. Fis, to the West or left is what must be learned. Cath, to the North or top is the conflicts that need to be resolved. Blath, to the East or right represents the outcome or resolution.

Footnotes

(1) Graves, Robert, The White Goddess, p. 198

# The Legends of the Trees- With Notations

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As we venture into the actual meanings assigned to the Oghamic characters, we can only fully reach an understanding of their entire scope of meaning by getting to know the Trees which they represent.

And with that understood, let us begin with the first of the Oghamic tracts as we return to our new myth of creation.....

## *Cycle One* *A Clover Laughed*

*A clover laughed within, yet as loud to the others as if someone had laughed at a wake. Awareness from the grasses and vines shifted to this clover- each mused as the thoughts washed from flora patch to flora patch, bridging synaptic gaps with sparks of awareness and creativity. A communal vision arose- THE GREAT ONES- all thought. Great ones like us which exist in the Now-Forever and which shall be in the Future-Forever.*

*Light of thought shimmered around- it swirled and collected into tall vertical clusters. Thousands of unseen, unfelt voices collected and intoned silent melodies as the light took form. When Light-Thought had become Solid-Thought the first of the Great Ones had appeared.*

*Atop a small hill she stood- Calling herself Beithe, the Birch. As she grew, a majestic slender white trunk cracked away and shed. She felt the warmth of the thoughts all around her and thought inward of herself. As her thoughts reflected inward, Birch saw more of her kind flashing into being at points all around. Her prolificacy continued throughout the First Cycle at various points on Terra.*

*As her bark peeled, she grew, changing herself and the land around her. With a thought, her bark split and issued forth drying winds, and drowning waters. Shimmers of light and not-light rose and fell. Birch herself was created and destroyed many times that Cycle, her kindred numbers also cycling through an ebb and flow.*

*And the clover laughed again.... It had begun!*

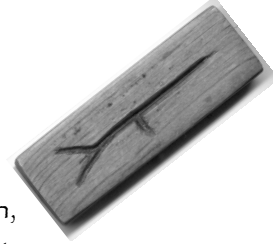


# B- Beithe: The Birch

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BEITHE (Vee-Tha)

BIRCH - (Betula spp.)



Other names: Yellow Birch, River Birch, Canoe or Paper Birch, Black or Sweet Birch, Spice Birch, Mountain Mahogany, Berke, Beth, Lady of the Woods, Shining Birch. <sup>1</sup>

Keywords: Elegance, Grace, Beginnings, New Births, Patience, Growth, Spiritual Protection.

Magical Associations: Use Birch to connect with the Triple Goddess and with the Divine Child; attract Otherworldly visitors; connect with Earth and Air Elementals; add Birch to incense in order to accurately predict, and understand, all possible outcomes of a given situation.

Medicinal and/or cosmetic use: Birch leaves and bark are used for a wide variety of remedies. An infusion of leaves or a decoction of bark can be used to relieve headaches and can be made into poultices to soothe skin irritations and burns. In Scandinavia, the flexible Birch branches are used, complete with leaves, to lightly scourge the back before going into the sauna. This increases blood flow and circulation, but it is also believed to purify the soul. Birch is said to provide symptomatic relief of rheumatism, gout, and arthritis. This makes sense, since Birch contains methyl salicylates which have analgesic (pain-killing) and anti-irritant properties. Folks in the Appalachians have been known to chew on birch twigs to clean their teeth (it leaves a nice mint aftertaste).



Beithe, the Birch tree, is a graceful slender tree with bark that is mostly a white to silver-grey, though some varieties range from red-



dish to nearly black. The bark also contains flecks of black and peels away from the tree to allow it to grow. While this peeling is a natural process, it is imperative that one never peel away the bark from a living Birch tree; stripping the live bark, even in small amounts, will kill the tree. If you want to use birch bark, wait until it has peeled away naturally.

It must be assumed that the Birch of the Ogham is *Betula Pendula*, the European White Birch, however many varieties of Birch thrive in North America as well. The White Birch (*Betula Alba*), also known as Paper or Canoe Birch, is the most widely distributed variety in North America. It is easily one of the most beautiful trees in existence; papery white bark which sheds like snake skin, shiny green leaves, graceful, tall, slender, it makes an incredible sound even in the slightest of breezes. Birch wood burns very slowly, but generates a great deal of heat; the paper curls were used by Native Americans and early pioneers as fire starters.

Once populated in a location, birch can have a tendency to be very prolific and will become the dominant tree in the area, though Birch tends to be relatively short-lived (about 50 years on average, still pretty young for a tree). You can plant Birch in soggy ground to get the soil to dry up a bit.

Birch timbers are cultivated for their graceful trunks as ornamentals and for timber used in furniture and old time boat making. Native Americans are said to have used the layers of peeled bark as a type of "paper." Black Birch, or Sweet Birch, was commonly used to make Birch beer (a low-alcohol content, lightly carbonated drink). Early pioneers used Birch "switches" in disciplining children. It would be interesting to learn whether or not they knew of the lore associated with the use of those same Birch switches by the ancient Celts: the switches were used to beat and "purify" prisoners. Prior to the development of a chemical substitute, the Black Birch (*Betula lenta*) was the primary source for oil of Wintergreen. Today, almost all of the oil is syntheti-

cally manufactured.

Birch has long been associated with the Celtic Otherworld and the Three-Fold (Triple) Goddess. The poet, Coleridge, dubbed the Birch, "The Lady of the Woods." Brid or Brigid was closely connected to the Birch Tree, as were her talents of learning, culture, magic and poetry. In various Celtic tales, the Birch's white bark and deep green leaves have been symbolically transmuted to indicate an Otherworldly presence, the maiden's white skin through green lace. The whiteness of the wood was associated with cleanliness and spiritual purity.<sup>2</sup>

Birch is one of the trees traditionally used to fashion the Maypole, which represents not only fertility, but also the Universal (World) Tree which forms the axis of the worlds. Birch is surely a sign of good luck. The Yule log was (and is) often made of Birch. The connection between the Birch and the concept of rebirth and the Divine Child is well supported; for example, in Europe, Birch twigs and branches were used to "beat the bounds," driving out the Wren (Holly King, God of the Waning Year) to make way for the Robin (Oak King, God of the Waxing Year).

Birch trees grow in clusters which often appear to be joined at the roots as the faces of the Goddess are joined together - she represents a gentle connection to all things and recognition that nothing is truly separate or independent of anything else. The Goddess assures protection to all who join with this sacred tree.

In Divination: One can read the appearance of Birch as that of beginnings, and new births. It speaks of fertility and new seeds to be planted. It also speaks of the need to be patient and provide the proper conditions for those seeds to grow. It warns us to plant the PROPER seeds, since grain will never grow from the seed of milkweed. We must understand too, that all beginnings have many possi-



ble outcomes, and we may be required to take on all three roles of the Goddess as we embark on this new beginning.

Just as the Birch must shed to grow, we must accept that as we grow, as new things are born, we must shed the old skin and dead weight or we can not continue on, nor can we deny that there are aspects of all opposites within each of us, as the Birch bark is both black and white.

If we create and spread our bounty without balance, our creation can become stifling and overpowering, in effect killing off that which we have created.

Birch shows a sense of protection around what we are about to begin - that it has been fated to be and shall be, if done with proper intent. She points the way of clear purpose and a fresh start, and can be closely associated with the month following Samhain.

Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

I see Birch as an Otherworldly Child or Maiden. Birch radiates laughter, joy, light, beauty, incredible energy and artistic creation, especially with words. She is inspiration, a poet's tree. Birch has been said to protect a woman from being carried off to the...Otherworld."<sup>3</sup> I'm not so certain about that; personally, I think Birch straddles the Worlds. She exists partly in our mundane physical realm and partly in the OtherWorld, the Realm of Faery. Birch provides an opening to that realm for those who know how to see it. I just do not get the feeling that Birch would keep anyone from entering, or even try to do so. Birch loves to talk, with a language akin to a babbling brook. She sends out feelings of wanting to pull herself up from her roots and go right along with you, to explore the world around Her. Although very amenable to human contact, Birch is not a good listener. She is very trusting and not a particularly good judge of character. Birch does



not like to be alone, She would much rather talk with someone (come to think of it, Birch talks to herself a lot). If you open yourself to it, you will pick up on a sense of child-like pouting when you leave.

I believe that the "beginnings" and "new births" associated with Birch are more of the mind and spirit; that is, ideas, philosophical and spiritual realizations, and insights. You must create or become involved in life situations in order to achieve results. Nothing is going to come to you unless you go out and look for it, making it happen.

I also believe, more than ever, that Beithe cannot be associated with the time immediately surrounding Samhain. Even as the Celtic New Year, Samhain does not quite reflect the joy and innocence that is within Birch. The tree is Child almost more than Maiden, Youth Personified. It radiates joyful, vibrant energy. Not the sort of "things" usually associated with Samhain; seems more like Yule to me!

#### Footnotes

(1) Unless otherwise noted, the vast majority of botanical and medicinal information in this book came from the following sources (please see Bibliography):

Harris, Ben Charles. The Compleat Herbal

Hoffman, David. The Herbal Handbook: A User's Guide to Medicinal Herbalism

Lust, John. The Herb Book

(2 and 3) Thorsson, Edred. The Book of Ogham, p.115

# *The Second Cycle*

## *A Time of Quickening*

*The Birch concluded one night of day and looked within. Inside she realized that all was still in a constant change and flux, and just as it was her nature to metamorphose and transform, so too should it be the state of some of the Great Ones to remain true and fast.*

*Birch uprooted herself from the loosely thought soil in which she imagined she had once stood, and moved about, seeking out other Great Ones, different yet the same.... Remiss in finding such a spirit of thought, Birch lay to rest, cleared her mind, and existed outside of existence for a time.*

*In its unfocused mind, thought-Birch saw images over which it had little control. Pointed rods, solid, similar to that which Earth Birch was made of, flew through the air, landing with great speed within their targets. The rods grew into tall Great Ones, different from Earth-Birch. This new Great One had power to protect against the wee folk who already were crossing over to examine the new Earth-Thoughts as they unfolded. Red berries appeared, and these too would protect-protect the others who would come later, born of bark, as they entered battles psychic and otherwise.*

*As Thought-Birch returned to the realm of the solid, a new one had set down roots and taken hold. Growing taller now, and veiled in the same glamour of berries witnessed only in thought-sleep, He claimed forth the name- Luis, Rowan- Being of protection and quickening. Berries of red, life blood of those to come later.*

*Other aspects of Birch had seen the transformation happen over great spans of No-Time. All of Terra was aflame with the variety of the mead unfolding before them and from within them. The clover closed, and dreamed of a day when it might share its gift of sweet nectar with another- In a sparkle of infinity, a bumble bee was formed.*

*Drinking quick of the nectar, the bee flew high into the Rowan and fancied alive its brethren to build there a great colony hive. The first dew-soaked honey of Clover was to appear this cycle, through hard physical work in this still thought-formed world.*

*For no-time all existed together. Birch grew and multiplied, covering most of the Earth's surface with its family, while Rowan remained firm and true, growing higher to the sky; holding a hive which grew heavy with honey.*

*All drank water from Terra....*



## L- Luís: The Rowan

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LUIS (Leash)  
ROWAN - (Sorbus aucuparia)



Other Names: Sorb Apple, Mountain Ash, Quickbeam, Quicken, Delight of the Eye, Witchbane and Witchwood.

Keywords: Set and Focus Goals; Empowerment, Knowledge from Insight, Physical Protection, Magick.

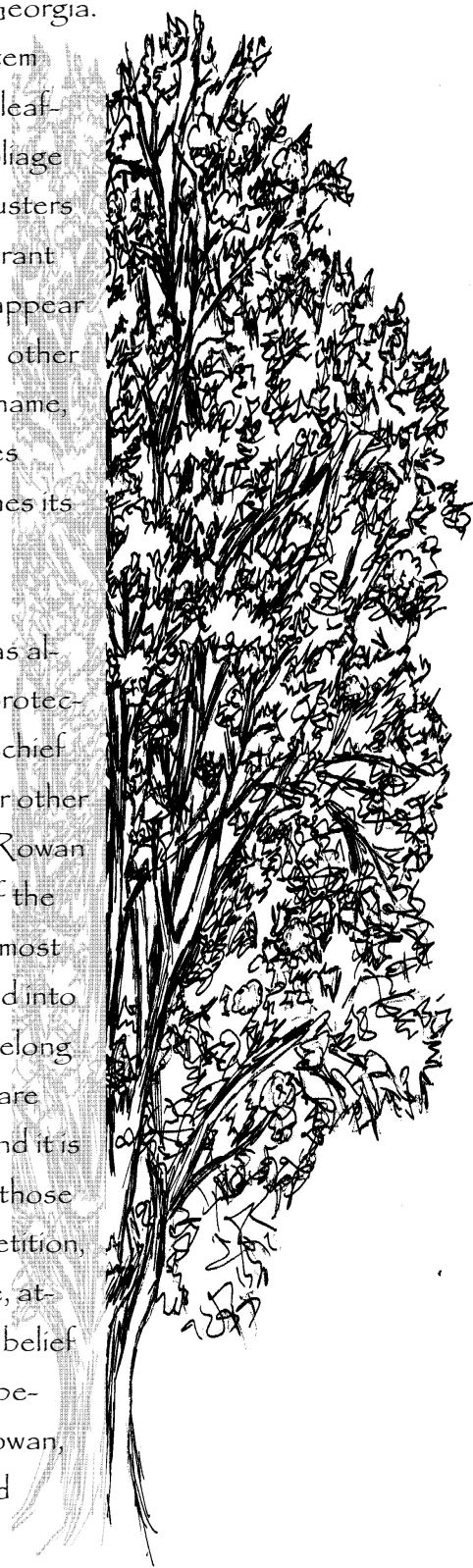


Magical Associations: Use Rowan to empower and enhance almost all types of spellcrafting and to connect with the Faerie Folk. Rowan is a tree of protection, healing, and success. In many cultures, its branches and twigs were bound together with a red thread and made into protective amulets. As with most important magical trees, a stick of Rowan carried on a sea voyage was believed to prevent drowning. If planted near a house, Rowan is believed to protect both people and property from lightning strikes and harmful magick. Burn dried leaves and berries as incense to increase psychic abilities and make contact with Spirit Guides, Elemental Beings and the Divine. Burning Rowan-based incense at the Dark of the moon will banish unwanted energies and baneful magick.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: An infusion of Rowan berries is used as a gargle for hoarseness and a sore throat; the fresh berry juice can reduce irritation of mucus membranes and muscle tissues. Part of the fruit (an isolated sugar) has been incorporated into a prescription medicine used to reduce pressure in the eye as a treatment for glaucoma. Rowan berry juice is an excellent diuretic and a mild laxative. Ironically, Rowan berry jam is also a folk cure to treat diarrhea.

The Rowan, or Quicken Tree, is in the same family as the Mountain Ash, and both the American and European varieties can be found in the USA. The tree can be found as far south as Georgia. The leaves are small and the berries grow in clusters. Each stem consists of 11 to 17 leaves, however, most often there are 13 leaflets; 6 pairs of two opposing leaves with one end leaf. The foliage has pretty white flowers in the spring and early summer and clusters of berries in the fall and winter. The ripe berries are a rich, vibrant scarlet with a touch of orange. Birds have been observed to appear intoxicated after eating Rowan berries. Bears, raccoons and other wildlife will go out of their way to get to them. True to its nickname, Mountain Ash, Rowan grows at higher elevations and requires cooler temperatures. In the United States, the Rowan reaches its southern range in the Great Smoky Mountains.

The Rowan tree is often used for making spear shafts, but has always been equated with another form of protection: magical protection. Rowan is said to protect against evil sorcery and the mischief of the Faerie Folk, especially if planted near a sacred circle or other magical site. This is obviously a post-Christian association. Rowan was once believed to "belong" to the Faery Folk, to be one of the plants under their protection; therefore, it was treated with utmost respect. Katherine Briggs writes, "fairy flowers may be divided into those that give protection against the fairies and those that belong to them ...Lady Wilde tells us that in Ireland, the herb-women are supposed to have received their knowledge from the fairies, and it is they alone who know of certain herbs, and who can recognize those that are dangerous." <sup>1</sup> The Early Church, not desiring competition, tried to discourage the belief in - and offerings to - the Faerie, attempting to link them with devils and demons. Eventually, the belief spread that Rowan provided protection FROM the Faerie because of the close association between Faerie and Witch. Rowan, thus, became known as providing protection from Witches and Witchcraft as well.



Rowan apparently assimilates the protective qualities of whatever it is near; for example, it was planted near gravesites to prevent haunting. In older times, many people, particularly in Ireland, associated the Land of the Dead (the Summerland) with the Faery Realms. Therefore, the Rowan took on an association with the dead based on its association with the Faery (or visa versa; it is hard to know which came first). Rowan was also believed to aid in astral travel, to allow the spirit to separate from the body in order to visit other realms. A poem called "The Fairy Lover," recorded in Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, tells of a young woman who had fallen in love with a fairy lad; she would go beyond the mountain where he would sing to her and she began pining away for to join him. Her brothers learned of her lover and slew him. She sings, "Thou Rowan tree there by the door, On thee shall I go to the graveyard." <sup>2</sup> It is just as likely that she is talking about entering (flying, or astral traveling, through a gateway) into the Faery Realm as she is the physical graveyard.

Rowan branches have been used for dowsing rods, and can help one decide on the best locations for building based on the location of nearby water. The berries sport a small pentagram at the place they connect to the branch. This is another symbol of magical connection and protection as it represents the Four Elements, plus Spirit. At different times in human history, red-colored foods of all types were associated with blood and originally believed to be food fit only for the Gods. Later, these foods were thought to belong to the Faery Folk. Still later, and until relatively modern times, many red, and purple-colored foods were believed to be poisonous to humans, including apples, tomatoes and eggplant.

Rowan wood was said to be burned by Druid armies to call upon the protective spirits that would guide them into war and give them the strength and will to follow through on their tasks. It was also said to provide insight into the coming battle strategies.

The potent magical power of the Rowan has been glorified in song and verse. Although not mentioned by name, Rowan is surely the plant referred to in the following poem, where it addresses just about every need. The Rowan has beautiful long green leaves on a distinctly reddish stalk.

*Pluck will | the little red-stalk of surety...  
For success of health, for success of friendship,  
For success of joyousness,  
For overcoming of evil mind, for overcoming of evil eye,  
For overcoming of bewitchment,  
For overcoming of evil deed, for overcoming of evil conduct,  
For overcoming of malediction,  
For overcoming of evil news, for overcoming of evil words,  
For success of blissfulness.*

In Divination: As the force of a spear, the Rowan speaks of making your plans fast and aiming carefully for them. It suggests that hyper-focus on your goals is important right now, and that you should carefully to steer things, lest they go off course.

Just as the tree was burned for strength, protection and insight, so too may you have to create some of your own fires in order to gain the insight and knowledge you need to continue.

Depending upon where it appears in a reading, the appearance of this Ogham indicates protection, either that it exists right now, or that you must seek it. It is important to reflect on from which direction and source that protection is really coming. This character is more active than passive; it has to do with active participation, creating affirmative actions and making things "quicken" or flow in your life, rather than just waiting for things to come about.



It speaks of protection against those who would seek to cause trouble and it advises you to set up these protective forces before the problems make their presence known.

Choose a direction, embody the archer and shoot steadily for your target. Let no outside distractions or influences deflect your path as you head for the bull's eye.

Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

This tree sends out major "stay away" vibes. It has "protection" written all over it. The Rowan has often been associated with the Goddess, however, while the symbolism of the green leaves, white flowers, and red berries certainly support this view, the tree itself has a definite "young masculine" feel to it, more Male Warrior than anything else. The influence is definitely FIRE. Some authors believe that the Irish name for Rowan, "Luis" is derived from luisu, the flame. I have tried on many occasions to use Rowan to "connect" with the Otherworld, but I have experienced much better luck with Birch, Hawthorn and Willow. Rowan does, however, do a great job of empowering magick, invoking protection and for banishing unwanted influences or obstacles.

The Rowan also has an association with the Goddess, Brid or Brigit. Remember, that the Ogham was a system of mnemonics, and the Irish word for "Rowan" was "Luis." By this reasoning, as a Druidic teaching device, Rowan should have been associated only with gods and spirits whose names began with the sound of "L," such as Lugh (whose weapon was a magical spear). But the Druids do not appear to be the sort of peoples who skimmed the surface of things. Mnemonic devices are simply memory aides and when one thing is triggered, the list of subsequent triggers is endless. Brigit was closely associated with fire, the hearth, healing and smithcraft. Her name



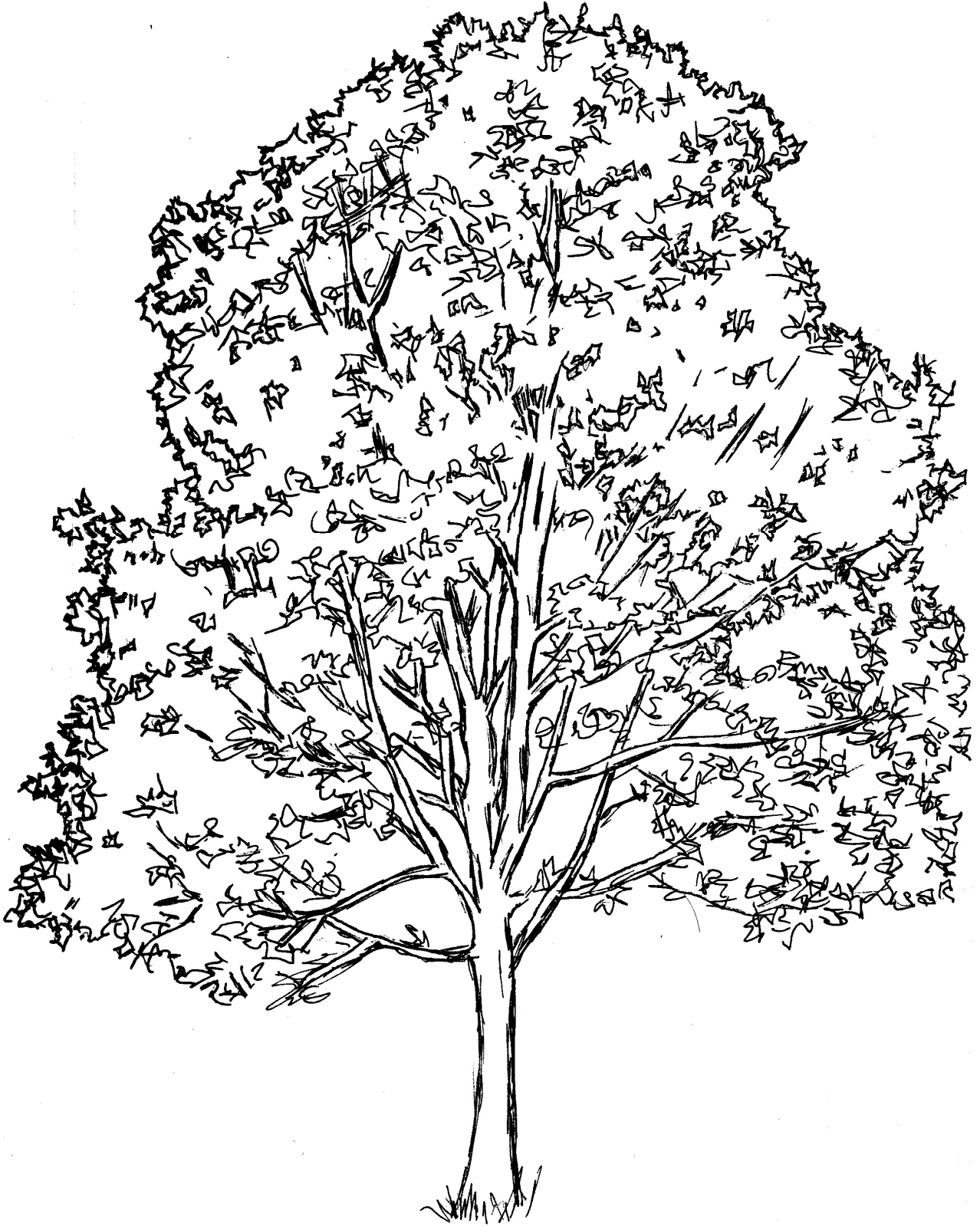
means "bright arrow," yet another reference to the use of Rowan as spear making material. So, perhaps the association is not so difficult to understand after all.

I, and many others, associate the Rowan closely with the Festival of Imbolc (also called Bridmas) at the beginning of February. Of all the times of the year, this is the one I most associate with a "quickening." The earliest spring bulbs begin to emerge in many areas of the country. For the first time, there are signs that Winter is loosing its hold on the land. Depending on which author you read, Imbolc was the beginning of the spring season. In warmer climates, the snow turns to rain and the ground begins to warm. This was traditionally lambing time; for the first time since Winter began there is fresh milk, butter, and cream. From now through Ostara, the Spring Equinox, everything seems to be bursting forth anew, as the Sun increases in strength. Sounds like Rowan to me!



#### Footnotes

- (1) Briggs, K. M. *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, p. 85
- (2) Carmichael, Alexander. *Carmina Gadelica*, p 489
- (3) *Carmina Gadelica*, *The Red Stalk*, p. 148



## *Cycle Three*

### *Water Of The Earth*

*As No-Time lead to the Cycle of Three, all the Great Ones and Low Ones drew the precious moisture which they now needed from the Earth, as their Thought-bodies and Earth-bodies merged and became one. The Bees were more focused into the physical world, and the Great Ones too were drawing out of their world of thought slowly...reluctantly. And drink they did.*

*The Cycle moved forward and the Bees began to notice that their physical life-giving flowers were withered and gone. Slowly they lost their ability to rethink the blooms back to life. The vines, flowers and even the Great Ones themselves, having to partially obey the physical laws which they had created, were slowly becoming parched as they withdrew all life-giving water from their void-bound orb of ideas.*

*Excitedly, the Bees approached the Rowan which had given them shelter and home since the start of their Cycle, and looked for help. Each leaf the Rowan, newly created and still merely hinting at attachment with the physical realm, joined together in a mournful hum....  
That which had begun was out of balance, 'twas time to be reborn!*

*The leaves started falling, piling one atop the other and the Rowan tree found itself abandoned by the very sparkles of green and red which it prided in and used to shelter the Honey Builders. As the leaf piles grew higher, their hum of rebirth grew louder. All the Honey Builders swarmed forming a huge black spot in the sky, humming in unison with the leaves.*

*As Birch finally started to fall, as vine withered and clover sighed, in that moment of desperation came an idea to save all... Leaves swirled upward, taller and fuller, and their consciousness energy was used to transform not only them, but the vast blot of Honey Builders. As the leaves formed yet another of the Great Ones- a new trunk of purpose called Nion, the Ash - The Bees too were caught within the swirl.*

*Nion ordered that all was to begin again! The Bees swirled into a fluffy ball of white vapor as their thought-forms shifted and realigned. In the sky, their energy formed an ever growing mass of white, fluffy and light, floating in the sky above the hanging dirt sphere as easily as the Earth itself hung motionless in the void.*

*"Clouds", mused Nion, "Giver of cleansing - Rebirth!" And with that, droplets started to weep from the newly formed cloud. Weeping for those of the Great Ones and Low Ones who were drifting out of physical focus below, weeping for what might have been.*

*As the waters called into existence by Nion rose, the flora of Earth was again reborn! The Ash had protected its elders from being un-thought, and in doing so, protected itself as well.*

*As the Clover, now strong and revived, pushed upward and opened its blooms, from within each blossom resurrected a Bee, ready to think into being yet another hive!*

*It was time for a meeting....*

## N- Nion: The Ash

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NUIN or NION (Neen)

European Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), also called Bird's Tongue;  
American Ash (*Fraxinus americana*), aka White Ash

Keywords: Esoteric and Knowledge (especially of the hidden variety), Healing, Finding Inner Peace, Grounding and Centering within the Self, Rebirth.

Magical Associations: Use Ash for increasing good luck; carry the dried Ash leaves as a talisman to draw good luck to you. Place Ash leaves under your pillow to induce prophetic dreams. Ash is useful in removing unwanted energies, particularly spells, curses, and hexes. Paul Beyerl in "The Master Book of Herbalism" writes that Ash will remove warts by contagion magick - stick a pin in the tree, then in the wart, then back in the tree and ask the tree to remove the warts by: "Ashen tree, ashen tree, Pray buy these warts of me." <sup>1</sup>

Ash is carried to protect the traveler on a journey. An interesting note, according to Scott Cunningham "snakes have an innate fear of the Ash Tree and... will not crawl over its wood." <sup>2</sup> This bit of lore probably accounts for the wood being used in magical cures for snakebite. Ash is repeatedly referred to as the choice for making Healing Wands. Ash has traditionally been used in spells and rituals for protection of house and home, protection against flooding and to banish negativity.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Uses: A decoction of Ash bark can have diuretic and laxative effects and has been used to expel parasites. (Native Americans used Black Walnut for this as well). It will also help reduce fevers. As with many Sun-ruled herbs, Ash is con-





sidered a cleansing tonic to purify the blood, boost the immune system and clean out toxins. Cherokee Indians made a tonic from the inner bark to clean out the liver and remedy stomach complaints.

Ash leaves are said to encourage prophetic dreams and this tree has long symbolized rebirth and purity. Hopman writes of a rumor that unicorns (another symbol of rebirth and purity) are fond of ash trees and if you want to glimpse a unicorn, she recommends carrying ash wood or leaves or lying in a bed of Ash while placing the leaves upon your chest.<sup>3</sup>

Native Americans believed that the Ash tree was in balance and unison with the Earth and her creatures. In many Celtic societies, an Ash tree would be planted on the birth of a baby. The relationship was symbiotic - the health of the baby was believed to be dependent upon the health of the tree.

People focused on or drawn to this tree tend to be peaceful and like having solitude, but will tend to draw students and others to whom they will act as counselors and mentors.

Ash is an excellent hardwood when burned for fuel, producing a long-lasting hot flame producing little smoke. It is one of the woods traditionally used for the Yule Log (along with Birch and Fir). Flexibility is one of the features of Ash wood that makes it useful for so many mundane things, such as axe handles, wooden wheels and so forth. It is not brittle, but able to give, and thus, sustain great weight. The American Ash grows 70 - 80 feet (with a spread of 60 feet), while its' European counterpart can reach heights of 110-130 feet. There is also a Green Ash which grows in North America which prefers to grow much closer to water sources. Like the Aspen and the

Poplar, the leaves of all types of Ash are green above and a whitish color underneath; this gives the impression of continuous movement, even when there is not breeze and the leaves are still. The bark is clearly marked in a fish-net type pattern. The American Ash changes color in the Fall, but European Ash leaves fall off the tree while they are still green. The roots of the Ash thrive in wet conditions and threaten to overtake the roots of other nearby trees. Ash matures quickly and is propagated by the wind. After fertilization, the flowers form little clusters of fruit, called keys and the keys are carried by the wind in the springtime when the Ash can take root in the moist ground.

To the Teutonic peoples, the Ash represented and formed the foundation of the Universe. To the ancient Celts, the Ash spanned time and space, tying the Three Worlds (Upper, Lower and Middle) and the Past, Present and Future together. The Ash was a sacred tree throughout Europe. It was used in England much as Rowan was used in Scotland – to protect livestock and property against fairies and witches. Magick staves, wands and the handles of witch's brooms (besoms) were traditionally made of Ash.

The Ash is a bleeding tree. When cut, the red sap gives the appearance that the tree is bleeding from a wound. This characteristic probably accounts for the Ash being viewed in many cultures as the "Mother Tree," the source of the soul. In Teutonic folklore, the Ash was the World Tree, Yggdrasil, which was tended by the Norns, (known as the Fortunaes or Moerae by the Greeks, they were also called the Meliae (Ash-tree nymphs). Woden (Odin) used the Ash, Yggdrasill, as his steed. Odin hung in the Great Ash Tree called Yggdrasil in order to gain enlightenment. From this he was reborn, and so Ash helps us understand our place in all the great cycles of the universe, and be at peace with them.

According to author Barbara Walker, Yggdrasil had three huge

roots: one root of the Ash went into the Earth, one went into the well of Mimir and one went into the Underworld. "The tree produced a magic fluid called 'aurr,' never precisely defined, but most probably the same life-giving female lunar blood that lies secretly at the root of all universal-elixir myths."<sup>4</sup>

Ash is part of the triad of Oak and Ash and Thorn. It was believed that where these three trees were found together, a human could see the Faerie Folk and could find the entrance to the Otherworld through the Sacred Tree. Evans-Wentz relates a story about Lough Gur in County Limerick, taken from David Fitzgerald's, "Popular Tales of Ireland": "The Lough is still enchanted, but once in seven years the spell passes off it, and it then appears like dry land to any one that is fortunate enough to behold it. At such a time of disenchantment a Tree is seen growing up through the lake bottom...the peasantry about Lough Gur still believe that beneath its waters there is one of the chief entrances in Ireland to Tir-na-nog, the Land of Youth, the Fairy Realm."<sup>5</sup>

In Divination: Nuin calls for inner peace. It is a tree that speaks of peace for ones' self and, in attaining that, an ability to create peace for those around you.

Ash often symbolizes a rebirth that will occur when you have made amends with yourself and your self-created conditions. It also suggests a need to look at the BIG picture and see how all the minor things and singular focuses fit into the greater scheme of things around you. In doing this, you can attain inner purity and clarity of vision and focus that can lead to your connection with All That Is, thus leading to your personal rebirth.

This tree speaks of responsibility to yourself AND to others. It also speaks of knowing when to be introspective and when to share your



discoveries with the world. Sometimes when we THINK we are done, there are still more revelation to come, and as such, we must have patience, wait and look within for a bit longer.

### Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne

The Ash is a wonderful tree – beautiful deep green leaves, nice symmetrical shape and I absolutely love to see it in the Fall. The leaves turn bright orange, deep red (almost maroon or purple) and they stay on the tree for a remarkably long time, lending color to a rapidly fading landscape. Ash just gives out feelings of friendliness, cooperation and general well-being. Even without a breeze, the two-tone color of the leaves in the summertime creates a feeling of constant movement, flow and coolness. It creates a perfect place to park oneself under on a hot summer day and read a nice book.

Ash is most frequently associated with the Sun and Fire, but occasional water correspondences turn up too. Cunningham, and several other authors, clearly list Ash as a Masculine, Fire Tree ruled by the Sun, but then proceed to ascribe both Gods of Fire (Mars, Thor) and Gods of Water (Poseidon) to the tree. Cunningham states, "....it is also used in sea rituals, for it represents the power



which resides in water.”<sup>6</sup> Others have described how Ash was magically used to prevent drowning and to grant protection during sea voyages.

If there must be correspondences, I see Ash as the balance of the Four Elements, sacred to the Gods and Goddesses of Creation. Its message is to bring life into balance, to find inner harmony. Be sure that you are viewing life in the larger context and that you do not insulate yourself from the world around you. Search deeply and extensively for that which is hidden from view and be prepared to sacrifice for what you believe to be true.

By the way, I gave the wart-spell my best shot. Kindly let me know if this works for someone else. It certainly didn't work for me and that dermatology visit was expensive!

#### Footnotes

- (1) Beyerl, Paul. Master Book of Herbalism, p. 201
- (2) Cunningham, Scott. Encyclopedia of Herbs, p. 40
- (3) Hopman, Ellen E. Tree Medicine, Tree Magic, p. 41
- (4) Walker, Barbara. The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols & Sacred Objects, p. 460
- (5) Evanz-Wentz, WY. The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries, p. 78
- (6) Cunningham, Scott. Encyclopedia of Herbs, p. 40

## *Cycle Four*

### *The Tribunal Meets*

*When the former cycle was complete, the Earth knew many things. It knew of vines, flowers and clovers; the Low Ones - It knew of Beithe and her children; Luis, the tree of quickening made many in numbers, and it knew of Nion, which had saved the other Great Ones in a moment of rebirth and re-creative thought. Of course, Earth also knew the buzzing of the Bees.*

*The Great Ones sent forth their spirits and their thoughts, and all gathered in No-Where outside of all that existed. The life-giving water continued to imagine itself falling from the sky - great pools and puddles started to form. Water-Thought found other Water-Thought and slowly they began overtaking large portions of the surface of Terra.*

*Beithe, Luis and Nion buzzed and spun, blurring the images they had taken as they exchanged ideas on the state of the great Dragon which they had become a part of, and yet were still apart from. In the Forever-Instant they were spending outside of their physical bark bodies, the water was fast overtaking more and more of the dry places, completely covering many of those whom it once saved.*

*As the spirits, resolved to make more concrete and specific their domain, returned to their bark bodies, they found most all had been laid to sleep under a great blanket of liquid. Only the tallest mountain tops still had exposed land and most of the Great Ones had collected there. Others lay beneath the water, empty without their spirit forms.*

*As water over took the surface, Terra wondered what had become of it. The ideas it spun into reality had indeed taken on life of their own, and yet they were falling in on themselves, the forces on the surface began to shift again, this time with less balance than ever before.*

*Beithe, Luis and Nion - still apart from their bark bodies, were summoned - summoned deep within the very body from which they were conceived. Earth took shape within itself, a great Dragon with golden scales, mist filled eyes, wings of silver light- Draconis' voice rumbled in their spirit forms. "Balance!"*

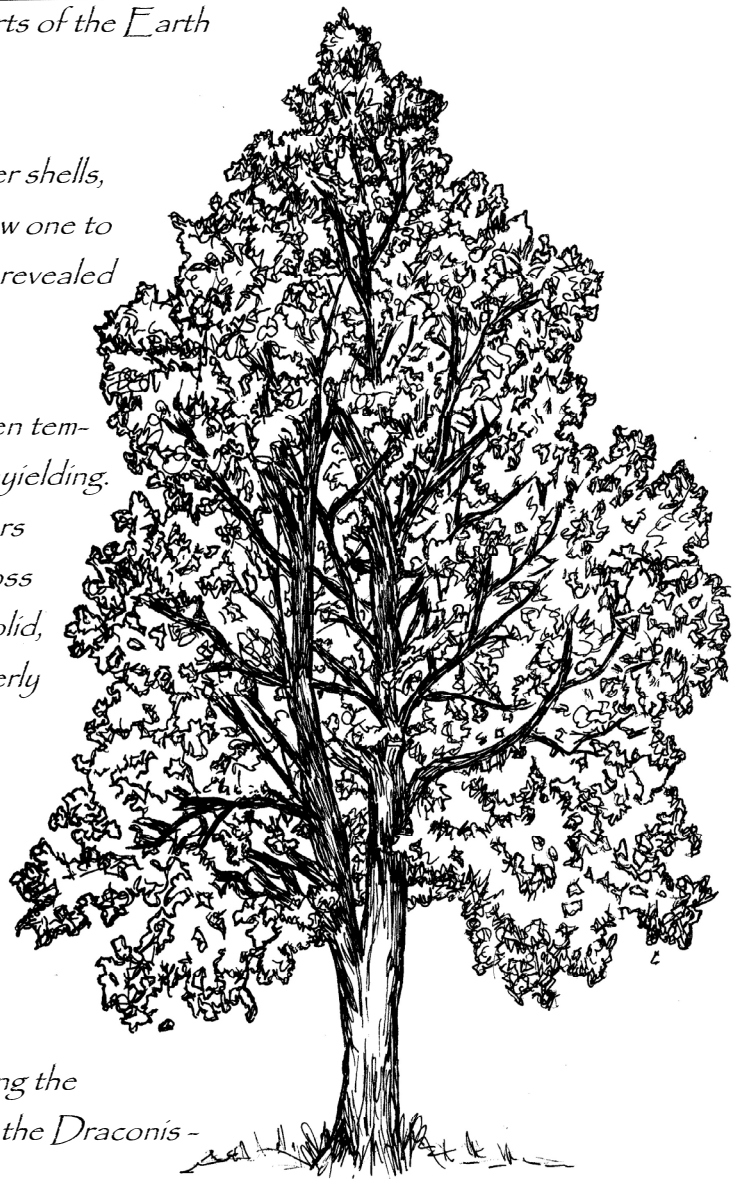
*With great rumbling, Draconis exhaled a fire of creation and each of the spirits before him split and were shifted. Half of each returned to the bark body from which it came, the other half became new!*

*Spirit of Birch rose high into the void above Earth, growing, forming substance and mass, higher and larger, like a great pearl it position itself into the sky- Luna had been born! Her beckoning caused movement of the waters, which then began a never-to-end cycle of tides and waves, reseeding and claiming new parts of the Earth shell for land and sea.*

*Spirit of Luis found one of its underwater shells, encircling it in thought. It was time for a new one to appear...as the water receded, Fearn was revealed - a new Great One called Alder.*

*Alder stood strong and true, having been tempered by the water, made stronger and unyielding.*

*Fearn, the Alder, held soil fast and waters receded and realigned. Fearn spoke across the air, "Our hold is secure, our home is solid, all the elements have come together properly to make us strong.... We may one day sacrifice and bleed with our great Dragon, but we are NOW! Let it be known to all that shall be thought of and come here. Let them live among us in peace, solidity and balance we are the Great Ones - Hereafter we take the collective name of Trees- great ones among the Flora - Equal, yet unique. Blessings on the Draconis - Blessings on the Earth!"*



## F-Fearn: The Alder

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FEARN (Fayrn)

Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*, Common name: Black Alder, European Alder); (*Alnus serrulata*, the Common Elder, is widely distributed in the U.S.)



Other names: Winterberry, Feverbush, Owlcr

Keywords: Building a Strong Foundation, Finding Strength through Convictions and Beliefs, Willingness to Sacrifice, The Gift of Prophecy, Resurrection, Regeneration.

Magical Associations: Use Alder to lay a good foundation and strengthen your resolve at the start of any project. Burn alder chips in incense during meditation to understand where you are in your life and to understand what it is that you have to sacrifice that you may move forward. Alder-based incense can also be used in ritual to break ties with a situation or individual from the past.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Uses: Highly prized as an emetic, freshly peeled alder bark induces vomiting to purge system of toxins. (NOT recommended!) As a hemostat, dried powdered bark and leaves taken internally are believed to reduce internal bleeding. The bark has been used to treat chronic skin ailments, especially those due to parasites such as lice, by boiling it with vinegar. Alder is used to purify the blood, cleansing it of toxins; therefore it is taken as a tonic to treat liver and blood-related disorders such as jaundice.



The tree itself is often used for bridges and foundation pilings. Alder grows in cooler areas, along streams and river banks and is extremely resistant to the effects of water. It is of average strength until it is submerged in water; Alder then becomes extremely strong and

As Above So Below

long lasting, resisting decay and rot. For this reason, Alder is used in all types of construction where the wood will be exposed to water, e.g. waterwheels, flood gates, bridges, pilings, etc. In fact, many of the cathedrals of Venice, Italy, are built upon Alder pilings, as were many of the buildings found in the La Tene archeological digs in Switzerland. The La Tene culture, which followed the Hallstat, is believed to be among the earliest true Celts.

The Alder is what WE consider to be the fourth Ogham. The wood of Alder is white and pure, but when the tree is cut, the sap runs blood red. In the "Cad Gaddeu," (The Battle of the Trees), the Alders "in the front line, began the affray."<sup>1</sup> Graves cites another poem, the Irish Ossianic ballad, "Song of the Forest Trees," in which Alder is described as "the very battle-witch of all woods, tree that is hottest in the fight."<sup>2</sup> Our ancestors believed that it was the fiery nature of Alder which allowed it to so well resist the corrupting effects of water. The ability of the Alder to bleed like a wounded man gave it great weight; the crime of felling an Alder was met with the punishment of burning down the assailant's home.

According to Graves, the Alder was rarely mentioned in the ancient world of Greece and Rome (having been superseded by the Delphic Laurel), but where it is mentioned, it is of great importance. The Alder was named as one of the three trees of resurrection; Cypress and White Poplar being the other two.<sup>3</sup> This idea is further reinforced by the Alder's close association with the Celtic Deity, Bran. In many tales, Bran was the Keeper of the Cauldron of Regeneration. An oracular Deity, Bran's severed head continued making predictions after his death. The Alder symbolizes the power of the waxing Sun; the power of fire to reduce water. The time of the Alder follows the drying of the late winter floods by the Spring Sun.

The green Alder branches were used to make whistles, supposedly used to call up the winds. These whistles were also believed to have

an effect on animals to calm them and to engender trust in them. The Alder is also used for yielding dyes of three colors; red from the bark, green from the flowers and brown from its twigs. Graves suggested that this typified the principles of Fire, Water and Earth. <sup>4</sup>

In Divination: This tree represents Foundation - the need to build it, the strength of it and the lasting qualities that any good foundation should possess. Just as the Alder must be submerged for strength, it reminds us to be certain the proper conditions exist for our foundation to be properly set, lest it falter as it becomes tested.

Spilling of the blood/sap may be required in the form of a self sacrifice, or trial by fire, in order to obtain that foundation you may wish to establish. Like any foundation used for too long, this tree can denote stagnation, stubbornness or unwillingness to change, depending upon where in the reading it falls.

As Bran's resurrected Head prognosticated the future, so too this tree speaks of a need to regenerate and resurrect yourself from situations of the past in order to move forward and address what is to come. It speaks of starting anew based upon experiences of old. It speaks of taking the mistakes you have made, along with your successes, and combining them for your new future, and your new path.

Fearn speaks of a need to remain true and consistent with your per-



sonal beliefs, your personal foundations and commitments, yet knowing when it is time to change them or move along. A foundation which prevents growth or positive change will transform into an obstruction or barricade and leave you wallowing in stagnant water.

Footnotes

- (1) Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess*, p. 30
- (2) *Ibid*, p. 169
- (3) *Ibid*, p. 171
- (4) *Ibid*, p. 171





# Cycle Five

## A Journey Moonward

The fragment of Nion's spirit raced up toward Luna looking for guidance toward her rebirth. This thought fragment spun 'round the moon, wondering at its control over the flows of the water. From the void, high above Earth, this spirit saw much and gained great inspiration and psychic insight.

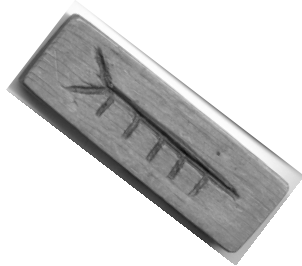
She developed too a mother's love for the orb below her, thus with guidance of the moon, she set back to Terra, on the waters edge. As thought took shape, revealed to all was a new Tree- tall, and strong, yet yielding and soft. Her graceful branches rose up and then wept downward toward the now calm waters below.

She called herself Saille, the Willow - and her love and insight came from within, she was mother of them all.

With her appearance, Saille knew somehow that the First Five were complete! Great trees who would, at least for a time, be the Chieftains of this void bound Orb. She wept though, for she knew too that it would not always be this way..... It seemed something unfortunate was about to occur.

## S- Saille: The Willow

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SAILLE (Sa-eel' or Sah'-la)

Willow (White Willow - *Salix alba*; Black Willow or Pussywillow - *Salix nigra*; Sallow, or Goat Willow - *Salix caprea*)

Other Names: Tree of Enchantment, Witches' Tree, Witches' Aspirin, Withe, Salicin Willow, Withy

Keywords: Balancing Emotions, Coping with Loss, Fluidity, Flow, Flexibility and Change, Acceptance, Wisdom, Intuition, Love, Nurturing



Magical Associations: Moon Magick, Divination, Love, Healing, Enchantment, Glamour, Connecting with Goddess as Crone. Willow branches have long been used as healing wands and dowsing rods. Willow was used to bind Birch (or Broom twigs) onto an Ash branch to form a Witches' besom.

The late author, Pauline Campanelli, in "Wheel of the Year," has a lovely invocation for the blessing and consecration of a besom:

"Besom of Birch with Willow tied, Be my companion and my guide.  
On Ashen shaft by moonlight pale, My spirit rides the windy gale.  
To realms beyond both space and time, To magical lands my soul will sail,  
In the company of the Crone I'll ride, This besom of Birch with Willow tied.  
So do I consecrate this magical Tree, As I will, so mote it be." <sup>1</sup>

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: A decoction of Willow bark is almost universally recognized by diverse cultures for its pain-killing and anti-inflammatory properties. Although native peoples had long been

using the willow as a pain killer and fever reducer, science discovered the reason for these properties only about 150 years ago. Willow bark (and Poplar, a close relative) provide a concentration of salicin, a precursor and ingredient used in aspirin. In fact, if you take a willow twig and cut it up, it will smell very much like the aspirin you buy in a bottle. Boiled Willow bark has been used to treat all types of pain associated with joints. The boiled bark is also used as an internal astringent to stop internal bleeding. Willow makes an excellent wash to cleanse irritations, bites, burns, and other skin eruptions.

Saille has much similar folklore and belief surrounding it from culture to culture. The Chinese and the Native Americans looked upon Willow as a most fortunate tree, bringing luck, spiritual protection, prosperity and wisdom. Willow is almost always seen as feminine in nature.

The White Willow generally grows approximately 50-75 feet, while the Black Willow can reach 100 feet or more. Weeping Willows were brought to America from England during colonial times, although there are many native species of Willow found throughout the northern hemisphere. A temperate zone tree, the Willow prefers very moist soil and is not fond of excess heat. The further north it grows and the more water available, the larger it grows. Twigs cut from a Willow tree and stuck in the ground after the last frost and during the spring rains will often take root and form a new tree. The Willow has an odd chemical characteristic; it will help almost any type of plant take root. A twig of Willow allowed to stand for a few hours or so in plain water can actually be used as rooting hormone for other plants. From the Willow, life emerges.

She is the Lady who weeps by the water's edge - her branches reach skyward, and then bending down in yielding fashion, reaching either toward the grounding influences of the Earth, or the knowledge hidden deep within the water. Willow has long been associated



with purity, having been used to beat the ground to purify the area around it.

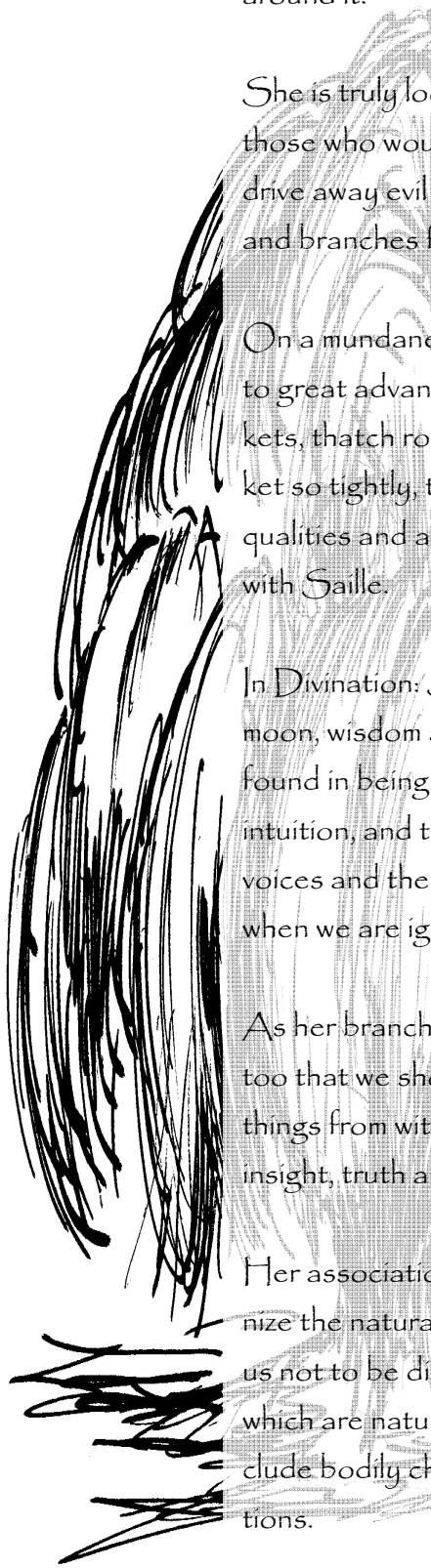
She is truly looked upon as the Mother of the Forest, watching out for those who would commune with her. Knocking on Willow was said to drive away evil influences, and many of her people have used her bark and branches for physical and magical healings.

On a mundane note, humans have used the flexibility of the branches to great advantage. Willow has been used for centuries to weave baskets, thatch roofs and bind broom bristles. One can weave a willow basket so tightly, that it will hold water without fear of leakage. Similar qualities and attributes are also found when we associate Pussy Willow with Saille.

In Divination: Saille embodies the feminine principles, energies of the moon, wisdom and energies of the water and embodies the strength found in being flexible or empathizing with others. Willow is a tree of intuition, and tells you to listen to the wisdom within, listen to the inner voices and the psychic input you receive. She often warns of times when we are ignoring our most basic forms of intuitive guidance.

As her branches find their strength in being flexible, Willow reminds us too that we should empathize with others and try, when possible, to see things from within their framework of reference, and thus gain additional insight, truth and wisdom for ourselves.

Her association with the moon speaks of cycles, and a need to recognize the natural paths, processes and orders we must follow. It reminds us not to be displeased or in a hurry with those processes in our lives which are natural, good, and ultimately leading to growth. These include bodily changes, mourning, death, growth and other transformations.



As the Tree Mother (or Grandmother), Willow speaks of comfort, finding it in others and offering it to those in need. In doing these things, in becoming aware of all of these elements and aspects of Willow, we can truly gain the insight, intuition and understanding that she represents.

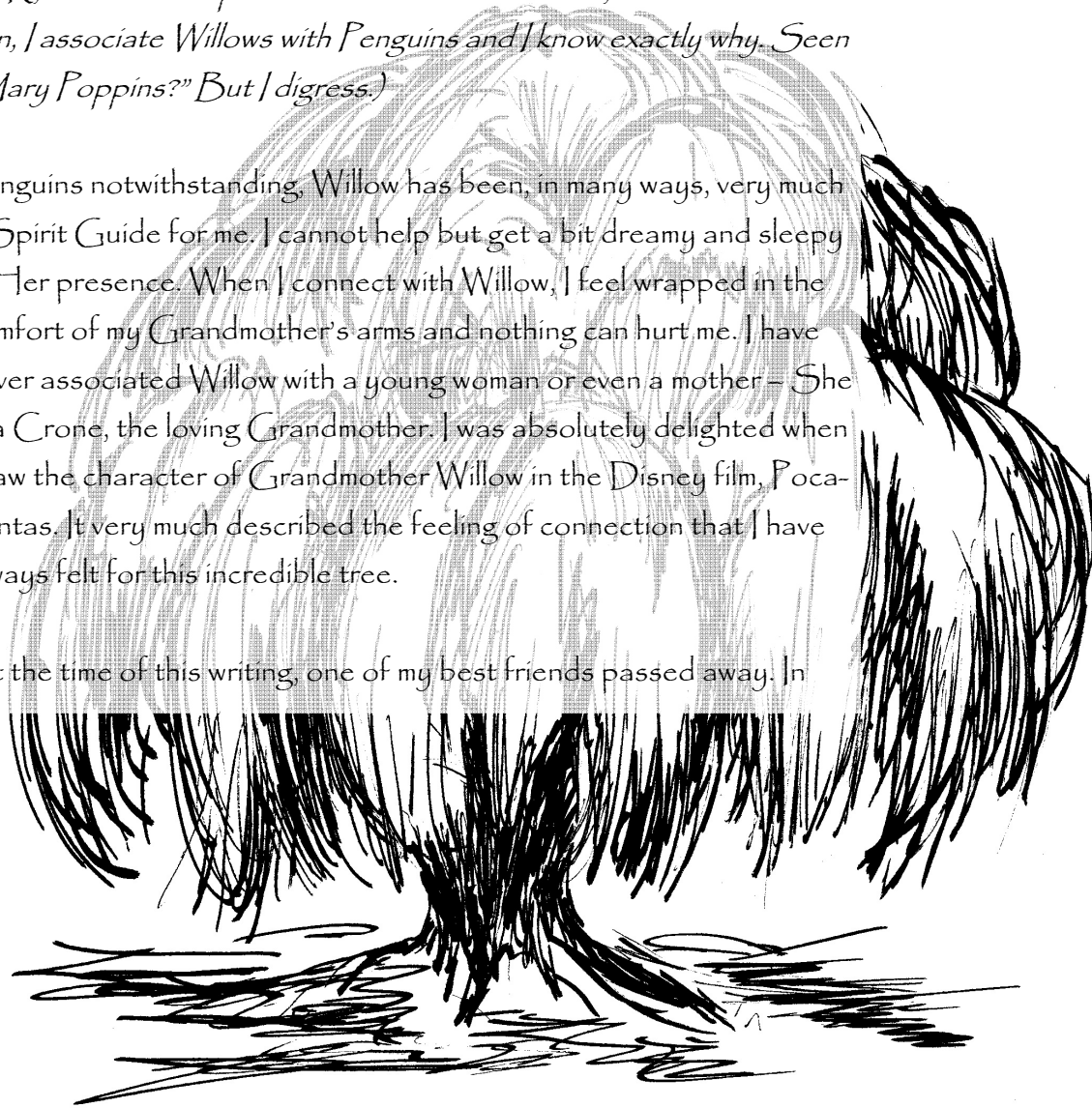
Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

Since the earliest days of my childhood, I have felt drawn to Willow.

*(OK, not to mess up the rather serious tone here, but for some reason, I associate Willows with Penguins and I know exactly why. Seen "Mary Poppins?" But I digress.)*

Penguins notwithstanding, Willow has been, in many ways, very much a Spirit Guide for me. I cannot help but get a bit dreamy and sleepy in Her presence. When I connect with Willow, I feel wrapped in the comfort of my Grandmother's arms and nothing can hurt me. I have never associated Willow with a young woman or even a mother – She is a Crone, the loving Grandmother. I was absolutely delighted when I saw the character of Grandmother Willow in the Disney film, Pocahontas. It very much described the feeling of connection that I have always felt for this incredible tree.

At the time of this writing, one of my best friends passed away. In



much of the folklore of the British Isles, Willow is closely associated with death, but in a negative way, seeing only grief, fear and loss. I spent some time with a magnificent Willow to see what She could teach me about death and I suggest that you do the same. Sit down and listen to the Willow: while Birch chatters and Alder roars, Willow sings in soft whispering tones. Flowing melodies, tinged with a faint melancholy, contain a quality which has made Irish and Celtic folk music (and performers like Enya and Clannad) so popular today. There is a longing in Willow's song: no bitterness, no grief, just a touch of sadness and recognition that life is a balance of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. Lady Wilde wrote, "The Willow is thought to have a soul in it which speaks in music; for this reason the Irish harps were generally made of the wood. Brian Borohm's (Boru's) ancient harp, still in existence, is made of the Willow tree." <sup>2</sup>

To bring emotions into true harmony is to feel ALL emotion. Do not deny the existence of sadness and grief - cope with it and work through it. There is nothing wrong with tears, they cleanse the heart and bring the soul back into balance. Willow's song is one of flow and harmony, embracing life, not death.

Once I spent some time with the Willow, I felt much more at peace and able to bring my emotions back into balance. I want to remember my friend as he was in life, not in sickness. Willow helped me do that and She can help you, too.

#### Footnotes

- (1) Campanelli, Pauline. Wheel of the Year, pp.53-54
- (2) Lady Wilde, Irish Cures, Mystic Charms & Superstitions, p. 101

## *Cycle Six*

### *A Vision*

The Willow tree rested, exploring her newly born abilities of intuition, she entered a deep state of meditation. Leaving her bark body, she traveled upward through the once void and into the astral plane from which all had appeared. She traveled across the expanses of the Earth, and then forward through that which would one day be called "Time." She saw marvelous visions of this planet as it would be- ruled by the Great Ones for millennium, lush, alive and green.

There would be a probable time when it was shared with great four legged creatures- some larger than the largest of Great Ones could ever dream of being. There was a time too, when ice and snow would cover this orb, like a great quilt of crystals, creating opportunity for a new awakening.

She saw, created by their own arrogance, a life form emerging from the trees themselves, a life form which would be called Man, and have many great accomplishments. At first, Man would live with the land, accepting the delicate balance of all things.... And then Saille wept.

She wept as she saw this two legged animal begin a war on the Great Ones and upon Terra. Huge communities would be burned, or murdered in the name of the two-legged's prosperity - Eventually, Earth would seek to reset again, and the destruction would fold in upon them, lest they become aware in time and return the balance they were once a part of.

Still Saille wept. Her tears trickled off her drooping branches, and she wished to embrace all that existed within her physical world. Her tears collected and grew, not a loose puddle, but a sap-like pile, which was added to by her fellow Willow who all now shared in her vision.

A great moaning and sorrowful cry of foreboding echoed across the community of the Great Ones, and as this cry became louder, there was talk of what could be done to prevent this disaster from being allowed to come full course. This cry vibrated and shook the pool of viscous tears, and they rose, as if alive from the ground to form a new trunk, yet un-

seen.

Thorns grew and the trunk became stronger and twisted. It screamed and shouted of strength as steam enveloped the area all around. The community grew silent, and all watched through clenched bark, as blood appeared in small clusters about the new rough hewn branches.

The newcomer proclaimed... "I am Huath! Hawthorn!"



## H- Huath: The Hawthorn

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HUATH (Hwath)

Hawthorne (*Crataegus* spp.) There are 800-900 species of Hawthorne in North America alone and it is extremely difficult to tell one species from another.

Other Names: Hagthorn, Fairy Tree, Whitethorn, May, May-blossom, Quick, Thorn tree, Haw, Tree of Chastity, Haw, Thorn Plum, Mayhaw, Scarlet Haws, Cockspur Thorn, and others too numerous to mention here.

Keywords: Hope, Inspiration, Warning, Protection from Danger, Granting Wishes, Happiness, Fertility, Feminine Sexuality, Enticement.

Magical Associations: As with the Rowan, it is almost impossible not to associate the Hawthorn with magick, particularly fertility and prosperity magick. One of the most traditional methods of making a wish is to tie colorful strips of cloth to one of the thorns and then state your wish, three times aloud. In some traditions, colored eggshells are also hung on Hawthorn trees as tokens of wishes made.<sup>1</sup> Carrying a small piece of Hawthorn is believed to lift the spirits and relieve depression; it also attracts good luck to the bearer.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: Hawthorn is used as an anti-spasmodic, a sedative and a vasodilator. It may help prevent heart disease by lowering blood pressure and opening arterial passages. Homeopathically, it is also believed to be able to heal a heart weakened by disease or stress. Hawthorn has played an important part in the development of prescription heart medications.

In ancient times, the Hawthorn was viewed as a tree of hope, happiness and good fortune, especially by the Greeks and the Romans.

As Above So Below



The beautiful flowers were often included in wedding bouquets and strewn in the path of the couple to ensure fertility and happiness. The Romans placed Hawthorn leaves into cradles to keep evil spirits away from the child. Branches of the Hawthorn were brought into the house for protection right up to the medieval times

By the Middle Ages, particularly in the British Isles, Hawthorne was viewed as a tree of evil, misfortune and even death. It is easy to understand why...the Hawthorn was the tree most associated with magick and the Faerie Folk, being of course, the third tree in the sacred Fairy Triad of Oak, Ash and Thorn. The association between the followers of the Old Religion and the Faerie was so strong, that even after people ceased to believe in the Fair Ones, many still believed the Hawthorn to be a tree of evil and misfortune.

It has always been considered a dangerous thing to destroy a Hawthorn Tree, lest disaster befall you. This disaster often took the form of the death of one's children or cattle. Richard Webster writes about the building of the ill-fated DeLorean car factory in Northern Ireland, which required the removal of a huge old Hawthorn tree. Locals, it is said, were not surprised when the automobile manufacturing undertaking failed.<sup>2</sup>

Hawthorn is often venerated around the time of Beltaine or May Day. The appearance of her flowers was said to signify the time when it was safe for a marriage to ensue. Hawthorn has symbolized both chastity and sexual excess. While the flowers signal that it is time to marry, they give off an alluring feminine scent thought to be an aphrodisiac. Flowering Hawthorn has oft represented sexuality and passion.

Magically speaking, a Hawthorn branch carried in the pocket is said to bring good luck and lift depression: however, if brought into the house it will attract ruin.

The fiery energy of Hawthorn is manifest in the berries, which have long been associated with the feminine cycle, and in the thorns which protect and defend. All of the various related plants are known for their thorns. The fruit of the Hawthorn is bright red and frequently resembles a very small apple. The berries themselves are rumored to be a VERY powerful heart tonic, and have long been a favorite of bird-watchers who find the object of their desires attracted to the berries in masses.

In Divination: Hawthorn is frequently thought of as representing disaster or misfortune, and granted, anyone who has walked into a hedge of Hawthorn might agree. However, had they been looking where they were going and stopped to avoid the hedge, the injury need not have been inflicted. In other words, Hawthorn gives clear warning of possible disaster or blockades IF one keeps on the current path or proceeds with eyes closed or the mind not on the task at hand.

Hawthorn is strongly related to fertility, sexuality and creativity. Hawthorn tells us that there is a time to sit back, collect and refrain from any action, and then a time to charge forth and plant our seeds, literally or figuratively.

Hawthorn often warns that to interfere may lead to more problems for you than it is worth and often times it is better to "follow the rules" so to speak. Anger or rash action may force you to deal with things for which you are not prepared.

Hawthorn reminds you to be cautious of what you wish for. You may be enticed or enchanted by something that glitters, but it brings with it a spell more powerful than you can imagine and within which you may find yourself entangled. Leaving a gift in the right place may insure your wish is granted, but are you certain you REALLY want it?

Hawthorn has a fiery, mercurial energy and represents intense forces coming in to play. These forces should neither be ignored, nor feared, but must be respected and understood, lest they consume you.

Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

The first thing I noticed about the Hawthorn was not the thorns, but the beautiful berries, even in their green stage. I went to pick a berry and THEN noticed that I was about to be impaled on a 2-inch thorn. Let me tell you, if you have not seen Hawthorn up close and personal, those thorns are impressive. Hawthorn is graceful and kind of bushy. Although in Dean's mythos Huath is masculine, to me Hawthorn is extremely feminine in aspect and appearance. I cannot help, but to associate the Hawthorn with the Triple Goddess: white flowers (Maiden), followed by blood-red berries (Mother), and full of inch-long (or longer) thorns (Crone). I have used the Hawthorn very successfully in rituals to gain access to the Otherworld and to communicate with the Faerie, with Nature Spirits, and, for some reason, with Power Animals.

#### Footnotes

- (1) Campanelli, Pauline. Ancient Ways, p. 61
- (2) Webster, Richard. Omens, Oghams & Oracles, p. 74

## *Cycle Seven*

### *A War, And Then A Leader*

Huath proclaimed that the disaster perceived by Saille must not be allowed to happen. He spun a fantastic tale of war, and of the fate that would befall the newcomers. Anger cycled within him along with love, as he offered protection from his barbarous branches. He warned that those who should drop one ounce of blood-sap would share in the fate of their victims.

Great alarm fell through the community. Huath encouraged all present to exist outside of their physical structures and return to focus of energy so that they could swarm about, envelop and destroy the two-legged creatures before they would ever be formed.

Frenzy, riot and turmoil abounded, all were in a state of despair and unbalance and knew not what to do. Anger and cries spread like hot-flower through the forest, and there was danger of yet another shift in consciousness back to the time before existence. What they feared most from those to come later, they were about to bring upon themselves.

#### *A Dragon Roared!*

Below them, the dirt they now rooted in shook. It shook so violently, that many fell, loosing grip of the shifting soil. High atop a rocky cliff, a bolt of Light-Vine erupted from the sky, splitting a great fissure within the Earth.

From this fissure rose a leader, a tree of great strength and wisdom, a tree of slow growth and sturdy flesh, a tree of endurance who would help restore calm to the bark clan. All fell silent.

Duir, The Oak looked around and spoke.... "Hush, and focus my fellows. This is not our destiny. Huath was born from your fears and feelings of disaster, and so has amplified those fears within you. Huath is not to blame, for he is but carrying out his purpose, it is we, those who created Huath, that are to blame."

Oak stood, a might century atop the hill. He offered a doorway into a new era. A time of balance, a time of strength, and he invited Hawthorn to serve as a warning and protector of those who would tamper with proper cycles, whoever they may be.

"Let the acorns | give as free gifts to our world represent the mighty things that may rise and grow out of small, patient ideals....."



## D- Duir: The Oak

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DUIR (Door)

Oak (America: *Quercus Alba* - White Oak;

Europe: *Quercus robur* - English Oak)

Other Names: Jove's Nuts (Scott Cunningham, *Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs*, pg. 162)

Keywords: Strength, Endurance, Power, Wisdom, Hospitality, Financial and Business Success, Physical Protection, Grounding, Fortress, Barriers.

Magical Associations: Luck, Fertility, Repels Negativity, Prosperity. The Oak is closely associated with both the Sun and the planetary influence of Jupiter, both Fire and Earth. The acorn is a potent symbol of fertility and used in fertility and prosperity magick. Oak may also be used in weather-working, particularly in the raising of thunder and lightning storms.



Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: Oak is used as an astringent and tonic. It is considered an exceptional blood purifier and is taken internally to treat a variety of blood disorders; e.g. to stop internal bleeding and bleeding from hemorrhoids and menstrual problems. Externally, Oak bark is boiled and used as a treatment for varicose veins and skin irritations. Oak bark tea can relieve diarrhea. Like the Willow, Oak's bark is used to fight fever.

Duir is the great guardian of the forest. There are few parts of the world where some variety of Oak does not flourish. This powerful grandfather of the forest was honored by Druid and non-Druid alike.

The White Oak of North America and the English Oak of



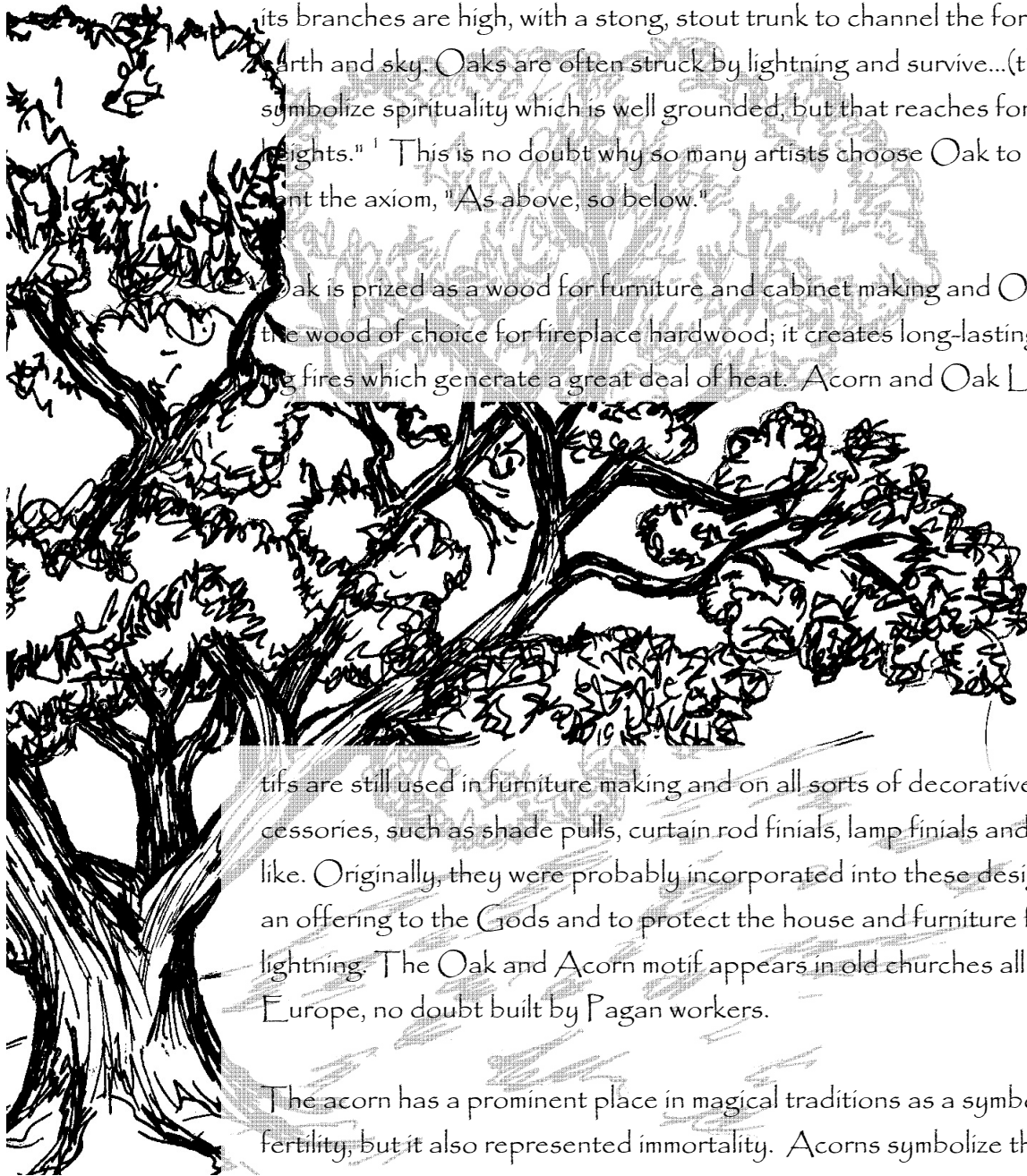
As Above So Below

Europe are extremely similar in appearance and virtually identical in medicinal and magical use. There are many other species of Oak, particularly in North America, including the Live Oak, Pin Oak, Red Oak, Black Oak and many more. Oak is one of the longest lived trees. English Oaks have been known to survive 1000 years, exceeded in lifespan only by the Yew, the giant Sequoia, and some species of Bristlecone Pine (at over 5,000 years old, they are considered the oldest living things). The Oak "tree has roots that are at least as deep as its branches are high, with a strong, stout trunk to channel the forces of earth and sky. Oaks are often struck by lightning and survive...(they) symbolize spirituality which is well grounded, but that reaches for the heights." <sup>1</sup> This is no doubt why so many artists choose Oak to represent the axiom, "As above, so below."

Oak is prized as a wood for furniture and cabinet making and Oak is the wood of choice for fireplace hardwood; it creates long-lasting, blazing fires which generate a great deal of heat. Acorn and Oak Leaf motifs

are still used in furniture making and on all sorts of decorative accessories, such as shade pulls, curtain rod finials, lamp finials and the like. Originally, they were probably incorporated into these designs as an offering to the Gods and to protect the house and furniture from lightning. The Oak and Acorn motif appears in old churches all over Europe, no doubt built by Pagan workers.

The acorn has a prominent place in magical traditions as a symbol of fertility, but it also represented immortality. Acorns symbolize the egg





from which the Universe hatched and many wands sport an acorn at their tip (called priapic) as a symbol of creation and male fertility. A necklace of acorns symbolized wholeness and rebirth in a Witch's Circle. Pauline Campanelli states, "The acorn necklace is worn by Witches as a symbol of the God; for male Witches as amulets of fertility...female Witches to honor the God, as well as, his masculine traits within ourselves."<sup>2</sup> Keep in mind that the other necklace traditionally worn by a Witch is made of amber and jet. Amber, of course, is fossilized resin, the fossilized sap of ancient trees.

The root word of Duir is the Indo-European derw; this word can also mean truth or knowledge. Most of the famous Druid schools were in the midst of sacred oak groves or forests.<sup>3</sup> According to Barbara Walker, "Irish churches were known by the old druidic name of dairthech, 'oak-house,' (a term) formerly applied to the sacred grove."<sup>4</sup>

In some areas, possibly because of their strong connection with the Oak tree, the Druids were linked with the Faery Folk. Most people have heard of the Banshee. This is the anglicized version of the word "bean-sidhe" meaning, roughly, the woman of the fairy-mound. In Brittany, she was called the Banrhude, or bane-druid, or Dryad of Death. Evans-Wentz records mention of a spell to summon up one of the Faery race: "You held in your hand three dried leaves, one of ash, one of the oak, and one of the thorn, and pronounced an incantation or charm... the words of such a Cornish charm had to pass from one believer to another, through a woman to a man and from a man to a woman, and thus alternately."<sup>5</sup>

Acorns may also be worn to attract Faerie Folk, Nature Spirits and Earth Elementals. The hollow Oak has a long association with the Faery. "Faery folks are in old Oaks" is an old saying primarily referring to the Oak-men, Faery Beings said to haunt Oak coppices (hollowed-out trunks). The Oak, especially a hollow Oak, was be-

lieved to be a gateway between this world and the OtherWorld. In Irish and Scottish, the word Duir/Dair literally means "door", symbolizing this tree as a protective gateway. The word Druid, may have been derived from the word for Oak, meaning "Of The Oak."

No matter which culture you investigate, the Oak is usually a symbol for the God of the Waxing Year. As such, the Oak is especially venerated at Yule and at Midsummer, when the God of the Waxing Year and the God of the Waning Year (Holly) vie for position of authority. Shavings of Oak, or acorns, added to incense make an appropriate offering to God as a symbol of the Sun, Light, Growth, Fertility and Abundance.

Oak trees have a never-ending assortment of magical lore around them, as they symbolize protection, strength and creation; and furthermore, are home to Mistletoe, reason enough to be considered a pure magical connection to the Celtic Other World. Philip Carr-Gomm writes: "The mistletoe symbolizes the moment of incarnation, the moment of entry-into-time. The oak symbolizes the eternity of Tradition. Oak and mistle(toe) united point to the mystery of the existence of both Time and No-Time, Form and No-Form."<sup>6</sup>

In Divination: Oak has always stood for strength, endurance and protection. When it appears in a reading, it signals all of these things and more.

Like the Oak, you will have to grow slowly, be patient and persistent to achieve your goal. Begin small, for out of tiny Acorns, do mighty Oaks grow. Trying to start an Oak grove by digging up a full grown tree and moving it would prove futile and fruitless. Likewise, you may be trying to make changes in one HUGE swoop – break it down into smaller increments.

Duir speaks of endurance, and an eternal quality surrounding what you are doing. It also speaks of a need for leadership and the challenges one faces if they choose to take up that role of leader.

Strength, courage, commitment, dedication and unfaltering devotion are all aspects of this tree.

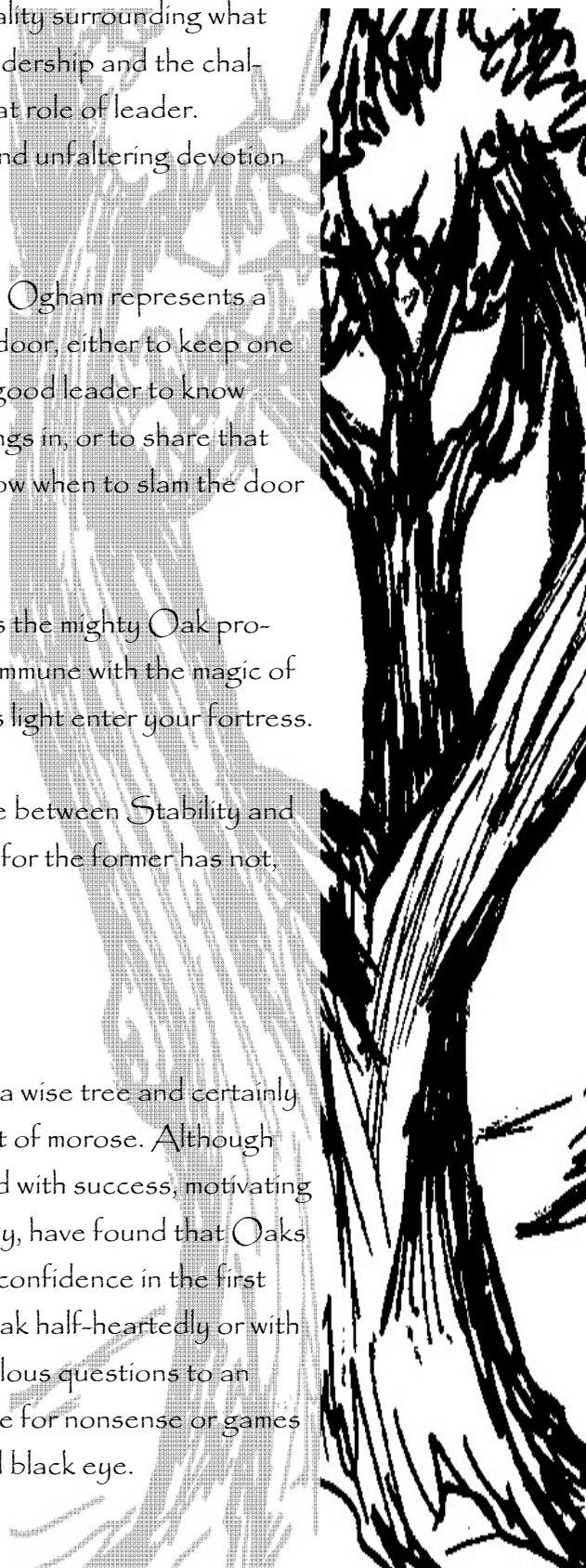
As the word Duir means a "door", so too this Ogham represents a door as well. The Oak makes the strongest door, either to keep one locked inside OR outside. It is the sign of a good leader to know when to throw the door open to allow new things in, or to share that which was within. It is equally important to know when to slam the door tight, and keep secure what you now have.

Be ready too, to share your space, for just as the mighty Oak provides a home to Mistletoe, so too may you commune with the magic of the Otherworld if you let but one flicker of its light enter your fortress.

It is also important to recognize the difference between Stability and Stagnation and make sure that one's pursuit for the former has not, and does not, become the latter.

Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

It's difficult to talk to an Oak sometimes. It is a wise tree and certainly has much to offer, but it is serious to the point of morose. Although Oaks have a long magical tradition associated with success, motivating ambition and inspiring confidence, I, personally, have found that Oaks only deal with those who approach them with confidence in the first place. It is not a good idea to approach an Oak half-heartedly or with any insincerity or disbelief. Do not pose frivolous questions to an Oak - leave that for Birch. Oaks have no use for nonsense or games and you are likely to come away with a magical black eye.



The power of the Oak can be overwhelming and demanding. When I was a child, my Guides introduced me to my first Oak; a massive tree at least 250 years old. I kept getting the impression that someone was watching me from within the central branches of the tree. I kept staring up at the top of the trunk and suddenly came face to face with an enormous Dragon Spirit. The power radiating from this entity was tremendous. Large, old Oaks are often the homes of such Dragon Spirits who act as the Tree's protective guardians – it seems to be their natural home in this realm. Like the Oak, they brook absolutely no nonsense, but they have so much to impart, if we can connect with them. I have often wondered if this was the reason behind the Druid's connection to the Oak, as I am quite certain that they encountered many such spirits as well. There is tremendous old Oak in Dean's neck of the woods, in Orlando, at Loch Haven Park. You will know the tree as soon as you see it. During the recent hurricanes, trees of nearly equal size on all sides of this particular Oak were badly damaged. This tree barely lost leaves and the Dragon Spirit is still there.

#### Footnotes

- (1) Hopman, Ellen, E. Tree Medicine, Tree Magick. P. 21
- (2) Campanelli, Pauline. Ancient Ways, p. 146
- (3) Evans-Wentz, WY. The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries, p 433
- (4) Walker, Barbara. The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets," p. 256
- (5) Evans-Wentz, p. 176
- (6) Carr-Gom, Philip, The Elements of the Druid Tradition, P 114

## *Cycle Eight*

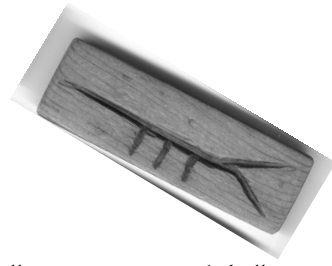
### *A Time For Balance*

Along with Duir, the others pondered what balance meant, and what types of things they should create within their existences to ensure balance and judgment- an ability to see both sides. Beithe expounded on the importance of healthy birth and growth. Luis offered the wisdom of making ones life fast and firm, while Nuin spoke of protection as well as knowing when it was time to start anew and re-create that which is no longer working. Saille offered her balance of intuition along with the practical considerations of Oak, and Fearn spoke of making sure your foundation is strong. Huath chimed in suggesting that fears should not be allowed to shake that foundation and that through these things could truth, judgment and balance be achieved.

And so it was that the judge of the forest was brought about. Tinne, Holly - a quiet yet striking gentleman. He wore a coat of pure deep green, one that would be soft and light when times were abundant, yet one that would become harsh, thorny and protective when his berries were ripe and all around him was bare. Beneath his coat of green, a fine white flesh, one that would stimulate and encourage bonds and partnership.

Tinne called forth a cry of reason and balance, but an understanding of times when might be needed to fight and stand strong for protection of self and those around. But how to know when that time was correct.... Ah, the need for wisdom.

# T-Tinne: The Holly



TINNE (T chin'-na)

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) - Mountain Holly, European Holly, English Holly

Other Names: Bat's Wings, Holy Tree, Sacred Tree, Hulver Bush, Christ's Thorn.

Keywords: Foresight, Good Wishes, Balance between Forces, Judgment, Justice.



American Holly (*Ilex opaca*). — a, b, female and male flowers.

Magical Associations: Protection, both physical and magical - Holly can be used to ward the home and property and guard against negativity in all forms. Holly encourages action and should be used in magical workings to overcome procrastination. It can also be used in magick to allay fears, reduce anger, and ease jealousy and suspicion. Holly can be used in spells concerning legal issues and issues of injustice; in this way, Holly can be a powerful ingredient in turning the Karmic Wheel. If you engage in this type of magick remember to be careful what you wish for, for surely you will get it.

Several texts suggested that if you want to induce prophetic dreaming, or make your dreams come true, gather nine fresh Holly leaves (some said smooth, some did not specify) wrap them in a white cloth, tie the cloth with nine knots, and sleep with it under your pillow or hanging over your bed.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: The leaves are usually the part used. The berries are poisonous in almost every species of Holly. At one time, Holly was used for a variety of medical conditions including gout and gravel, rheumatism, and arthritis; it was also believed to rid the

body of toxins and tone the blood. Most species have excellent diuretic properties and were used to treat urinary problems. Some species of Holly have been used to reduce fevers, and European Holly used to be used in the treatment of chronic bronchitis. Holly made into a tea has a mild stimulating effect, much like caffeine. Holly is rarely used medicinally these days, even by folk medicine practitioners. It is far too easy to make medicines too strong, causing severe vomiting and diarrhea.

Tinne flowers in July, its shiny leaves are soft and flexible in the summertime, but become harsh and spiny, protecting the berries from animals in the winter, allowing the fruit to ripen.

Holly was thought to be the male counterpart to Hawthorn's Feminine cyclic principals and was often used by the Celts to create shafts for their spears. That spear was believed to give focus and guidance in spiritual struggles, as well as, physical ones. Holly was used as a club by the Green Forest Giant, crushing his enemies with great blows of this thorny bush. Often associated with the God, Lugh and the Goddess, Habondia, it embodies their principles of light and plenty. Also associated with Saturn, it taps into the Saturnine energies of balance, judgment and fairness as well as Teaching.

Phonetically speaking, the T and D sounds (As in Tinne and Duir) are almost identical, and lest we forget the Ogham was a system based upon sound, the Holly and the Oak are closely related in principles and meanings. Similar phonetic/symbolic notations can later be made between the C, G and Cu Ogham as well.

The Holly referred to by the Ogham is probably not the European Holly with which we are all familiar. According to Graves (and subsequent authors quoting him), the *Ilex aquifolium*, or European Holly, was not native to the British Isles and was introduced in the 16th century. The Holly which was represented in the original Ogham was probably the evergreen Scarlet-Oak (also called a Kerm-Oak, or Holly Oak in

the Ilex (Holly) family. <sup>1</sup> There are many other varieties, including White or American Holly (Ilex opaca) and False Alder (Ilex verticillata). Although we usually see Holly grown in shrub form, it can grow as a tree reaching 20-30 feet in height. It is usually associated with the winter season, though it grows far to the south, even in South America. The medicinal herb Yerba mate<sup>1</sup> is actually a type of Holly (Ilex paraguariensis) and is made from the twigs. Among all these species, medicinal use and folk-lore is similar, if not identical.

Crowns of Holly and Ivy were placed on the heads of newly-wed couples to ensure fertility, protection and balance. Holly is thought to bestow good fortune on the home, especially at Yule, and should be used to decorate doors and windows. Native Americans planted Holly around dwellings to ensure protection. Holly was closely linked to the Forest Folk and the Earth Elementals. Part of the tradition of decorating at Yule with "boughs of Holly" (and, for that matter, putting out plates of food and sweets) was to provide a warm place, indoors and in barns for Nature Spirits, Elementals and the Horned God of the Animals and the Forest. Although Holly is almost always associated with a male Deity, it was also sacred to the Germanic Holle, Queen of the Underworld which, once again, reinforces the association of Holly with the waning year.

In Divination: Holly is a tree of balance, knowing when to be soft and subtle, and when to be harsh and protective. When Tinne appears it speaks of balance and judgment, that which is fair - universally fair, not necessarily fair to the individual.

Holly represents justice and a need to see both sides- a need to make a decision. Holly is the judge of the forest, and helps us compare two sides and make our choices from there. The danger of Holly is that we may sit too long making these comparisons and never get anything done.



Injustice must be avenged! It is important to realize that imbalances must be set right: lack of knowledge must be met with teaching, voids must be filled. Injustices must be set right. Whereas Oak tends to be a slightly more passive principle, Holly is active. It tells you not to dilly-dally in seeing that balance and judgment have been made and carried out. Should you choose NOT to decide, action may be taken on your behalf, often to your later dislike.

Often this character will herald a resolution to a legal battle or some type of legal or theological debate. It tends to suggest that one is about to get what they have earned, good or bad.

Picture

### Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

I must admit, Holly has never been one of my favorite plants. I think it is beautiful and I love the color of the leaves and berries, but it has always given me a nasty feeling. Not just stay away, but **STAY AWAY** (with a sneer, if it had a face). I realize that most people don't feel that way, decking the halls with it at Yule, so when I started this project, I tried to change the way I felt about Holly. For whatever reason, I didn't have much luck. I did find that once I moved to the mountains and encountered Holly Trees instead of the compact Holly Bushes that I knew in Florida, I did have better reactions and was able to work more easily with the energies. I've also since encountered Smooth Holly and I really like it. It has similar energies to the standard Holly, but it is much nicer in personality.

On the other hand, the Ivy is one of my absolute favorites. I wonder what that says about me...never mind - I'm not sure I want to know.

#### Footnotes

(1) There is a Scarlet-Oak in North America, but it is of the Quercus (Oak) genus).

## *Cycle Nine*

### *Definition Of Wisdom*

*Each of the Great Ones sat, trying to decide just what constituted wisdom. For without wisdom there could be little strength, neither love of justice nor recognition of all that is good nor all goodness.*

*Each Wood-Being thought pictures into the sky. These pictures, each claimed, represented wisdom, but one by one the same thing happened. Each time a new idea on wisdom was proposed, the thought-form simply shriveled and congealed into a hard, dark roundish shape covered with small tufted spines, and hit the ground with an overly loud "Clap."*

*This went on for many risings of the Sky-Flower. Lump after lump of discarded wisdom piled upon the forest floor. Tree-Folk looked discouraged at the pile of discarded wisdom when, from the branches of the Willow a sound was heard.*

*A loud squawk issued from the branches, a new sound, that of a fluffy creature- a creature of flight. As all thought images turned toward it, they saw a great animal, with long movable branches which allowed it to fly, even within the physical world. It sported a hard trunk only at one end, and within the halves of this trunk it clutched one of the colder water dwellers. With a gulp, the feathered one had consumed it.*

*This animal, called Cor, flew down and started consuming the hard dark lumps scattered about the floor of the forest. When the last nut of wisdom had been consumed, he squawked a laugh at the Great Ones who had ignored and discarded the collective wisdom they had issued forth. They were still learning that community was the key, and no single ideal could become wisdom.*

*Cor stretched his wings wide and in an odd manner no bird would ever use again, his head tipped back and he squawked even louder. His feet burrowed into the earth, and he started growing taller and less soft. Great winds blew his feathers away, revealing rough flakey*

*wood below. He grew taller and greener. Cor uttered his last squawk as Cor, for now in his place stood Coll, The Hazel tree! The nuts of wisdom once consumed had transformed Cor, and now these nuts were appearing at branch tips rapidly.*

*Each of the feathers that had blown away was also transforming into another of those great birds, and with a yell, hundreds of Cranes took flight, rising high into the sky. They would bring the news of the great Hazel tree, tree of knowledge and wisdom, to every corner.*

*The Great Ones now knew of wisdom in THEIR world and another world would soon share other wisdoms as well.*



## C-Coll: The Hazel

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COLL (Kaal)

Hazel (European Hazel - *Corylus avellana*; American Filbert - *Corylus Americana*)

Keywords: Wisdom, Knowledge, the Search for the True Self, Insight, Truth, Teaching, Inspiration, Eloquence, Language, Divination, Ordination.

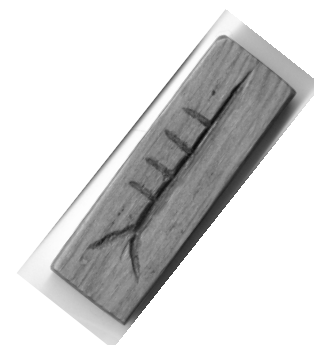
Magical Associations: Divination and Prophecy, Fertility, Weather-working, Protection (of knowledge), Love Divination, Granting Wishes, Invisibility.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: Primarily used as a food product, Hazelnuts are extremely rich in trace minerals. Hazel is used as a homeopathic remedy for chronic respiratory problems, such as asthma and chronic bronchitis and lung-related illness.

The fruit of the Hazel, the hazelnut, is also known as a filbert. Bearing in mind that Ogham was a phonetic-based language, it is not surprising that the Crane, Cor, was also associated with this Oghamic character. Much of the lore surrounding the Hazel tree is linked to many of the Elder (and Crone/Sage) Deities, in particular, the Caillech, the Old Woman. The term Cailleach, appears to have been a title, rather than a name. She had many aspects, and like any other Triple Goddess was known by many names throughout the British Isles, among them Black Annis, Grian, Aine, Cally Berry and so many others. In one of Her Weather-Worker forms, Cailleach appeared as a crane with twigs in Her beak to forecast severe storms.

Nuts of all kinds are symbolic of wisdom, their compact rewarding

As Above So Below



Hazel (*Corylus americana*); — a, female catkin; b, female flower; c, male catkin; d, male flower.

package contained within a hard shell to protect it. The hazelnut is no different. In legend, Salmon swam in the Well of Wisdom and ate the nuts from The Nine Hazel Trees of Knowledge (Hazel is the 9th Ogham) as they fell into the well. One of the more famous legends of Fionn Mac Cumhaill (Finn McCool – McCool derives from Mac Coll, son of Hazel) tells us that Fionn was apprenticed to a Druid, Finnécas, who had been fishing the River Boyne for many years trying to catch the Salmon of Knowledge. He had given Fionn specific instructions regarding the preparation and cooking of the fish. When the Druid finally caught the salmon, he gave it to Fionn to cook. The lad accidentally burned his thumb and put it in his mouth to cool. From that moment on, whenever he wished to know something, he stuck his thumb in his mouth and the knowledge came immediately. <sup>1</sup> If you recall, we mentioned earlier of the Druidic practice of placing their hands on their faces when prognosticating, thumbs in their mouths and the little fingers in their ears!

According to Graves, Col was associated with the Bardic number nine because nine is the number sacred to the Muses and it takes nine years for the Hazel to bear nuts. In the Fenian legend of the “Dripping Hazel,” the tree dripped poisonous milk and was home to many vultures, symbolizing knowledge or wisdom put to ill use. Fionn's Shield, made from the wood of this tree, was all that could protect one from improper use of these “poisons.” When used in battle, the fumes from the shield were said to kill thousands. <sup>2</sup>

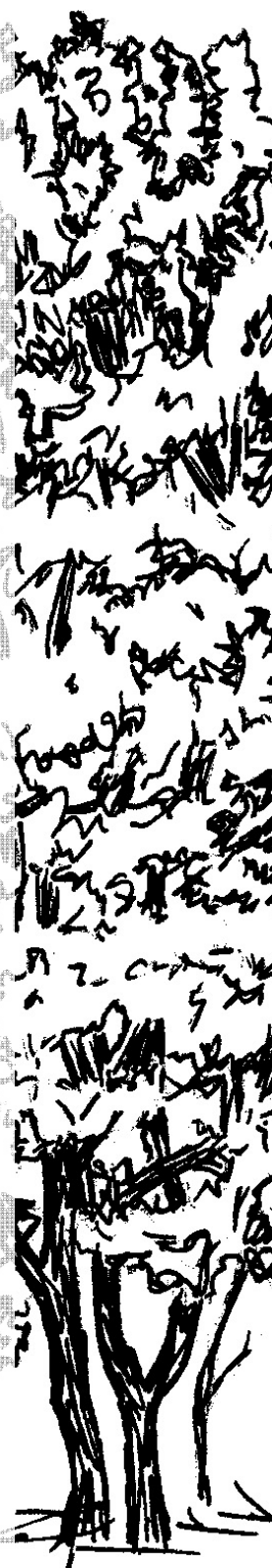
The Caillech is most probably a pre-Celtic or proto-Celtic Deity. Very little written information is available about this ancient Being. Her name is carried on in place names and oral tradition. Most of the single standing stones are believed to be dedicated to Her. The very word, “Coll,” is a root word, from which is derived the popular Irish name, and diminutive term, “Colleen” (literally “little old woman”). The terms for woods and forest, “coille” or “caill” are also derived from

Coll. She symbolized one of the three great ages of Ireland: the Age of the Yew Tree, the Age of the Eagle, and the Age of the Hag of Beare, another name for the Cailleach. As the Irish pantheon diminished after the advent of Christianity, the Cailleach was removed from god-hood and made into a demon-like fairy figure in children's stories. In some of the older myths, She is thinly disguised and often presented in tales which grant young men everything from magical and mundane weaponry to Bardic inspiration. <sup>3</sup>

The reason for such detail on the Cailleach is to illustrate just how powerful she must have been to our forbearers. Most cosmic/creator Deities, at one time or another, are rulers of every element, the planets, the stars and the Earth Herself. The Cailleach was no exception. A Goddess of the Moon, She was also considered a Sun Goddess in twin aspects, e.g. Big Sun and Little Sun. This could be a reference to the Waxing and Waning Year or to the Sun and Moon. A part of her is found in many of the traditions associated with the creation of Ireland. She was later linked with Celtic Deities such as Manannan, possessor of the Crane Bag. Brigit was probably one of Her Aspects (and one which certainly survived the test of time). There are authors who link her with the ancient Indo-European Kali, the Creator and Destroyer.

It should be obvious that Hazelnut is associated with water, especially streams and sacred wells. The knowledge and wisdom that Hazel confers is intuited, a sudden realization or epiphany, rather than that gained through careful and diligent study. Carrying Hazelnuts was supposed to enable sailors to weather even severe storms at sea. To this day, Hazel is sometimes referred to as Witch (or Witch's) Hazel because so many magical practitioners preferred to use it for dowsing rods for detecting water and for finding hidden treasures.

The association between the Hazel and mystical wisdom seems to be



more prevalent in Ireland and Scotland than in England, where the Hazel tree seems more associated with fertility. A bag of hazelnuts was given to a new bride in order to ensure fertility and a happy marriage. Anyone who has been to an Italian wedding knows that almonds play a similar role in that culture.

According to Scott Cunningham and many other authors, Hazel is masculine in nature and associated with the Sun and the Elements of Fire and Air. Three pins of Hazel driven within the walls of the house was said to protect the dwelling for fire, hazel twigs placed in the windows protects against lightning and wearing a Hazel crown confers invisibility upon the wearer. <sup>4</sup>



In Divination, Col is the tree of wisdom and knowledge. When Col appears it signals the need for, or arrival of, great insight and wisdom. It tells you to look within and seek that wisdom and to realize that wisdom is not from one source of truth, but rather from a collection of sources and ideals.

Col often says that soon you will seek to obtain, or will share, great wisdom and spiritual insight with others around you.

The challenge with Col then, is to use this wisdom properly and for constructive purposes. Col can warn that we are misdirecting our inner wis-





dom, or ignoring that inner truth of which we are already in possession.

Be aware that new information or wisdom often changes us and the old life and answers may no longer fit.

### Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

Hazel is one of my favorite trees. I love the way it looks and the noises that come from it. I guess it is just the sound that the nuts and leaves make when a breeze blows through them. I have been a long-time fan of hazelnuts, hazelnut liquor (Frangelico), hazelnut coffee and just about anything flavored with hazelnut. It did not come as a surprise to learn that the Hazel is one of the few plants with well-supported Air and Water Element associations. For whatever reason, I am most strongly attracted to those two Elements, especially in combination. As you have read, Hazel also has an association with Fire and the Sun. This has never felt quite right to me, although I do believe that this association originally derived from the Cailleach. I suppose that if I were to place the Hazel in my "elemental and magical scheme of things," She would be a perfect balance of all five "Elements:" Air, Fire, Water, Earth, and Spirit. The Hazel is one of those trees which I believe borders or exists in the two Worlds, our own and that of the Sidhe, the Faery Realm.

#### Footnotes

- (1) Matthews, John. *Taliesin: Shamanism and the Bardic Mysteries in Britain and Ireland*. pp. 31 – 34
- (2) Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess*, p. 182
- (3) Briggs, Katherine. *An Encyclopedia of Fairies...*, pp. 58 – 59
- (4) Cunningham, Scott, *Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs*, p. 119

## *Cycle Ten*

### *A Gift*

*As Col's nuts of wisdom split and shared enlightenment with the world of the Great Ones, others came from other worlds to investigate. As each nut split, all manner of Fairy, Gnome, Elf, Sprite, Spirit, and Dryad appeared and examined this new world unfolding. They sought to create a bridge.*

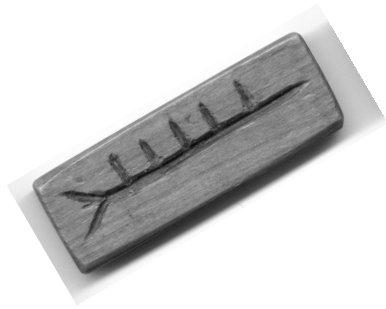
*A small Fairy made herself known to the Great Ones. She spoke of her realm, and protection and love that they wished to offer the trees atop the Dragon. With that, all manner of Otherworldly creatures suddenly became visible and danced and sang around the trees of Terra. The Great Ones offered their shelter, fruits, understanding and their wisdoms with the People of the Sidhe. So flattered were the small ones that they too sought to create a gift.*

*From within a Hazel nut an odd fruit appeared. Soft, like a berry, but much larger even than the largest nut it grew. This new fruit was sweet, though it spoke of forbidden knowledge and bitter poisons that one might have to endure to taste its magic and connect with the Otherworld one seeks.*

*The Fairies created a dark hole-like void in a blank spot of Terra, a doorway to their world, and into this chasm they tossed this red fruit. Light erupted from the darkness as shafts of various colored rays reached upward toward, and downward from the sky at the same time. As light attained branch form, several Fairies sat upon these branches and curled into small delicate white flowers that dotted the flexible branches of the new magical tree.*

*"Let this always be a gateway to our realm and to other worlds as long as one would take the chance to arrive..."*

*And thus was born Cuert, the Apple.*



## Q- (CU or CC) Quert/Cuert: The Apple

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CUERT (Kwert)

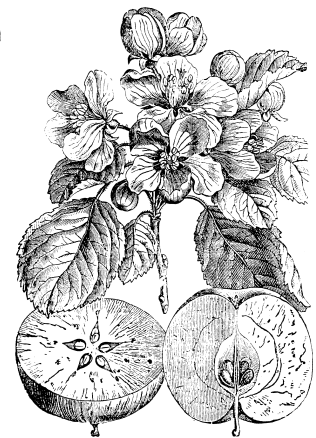
Crabapple (*Malus sylvestris*), Apple (genus *Malus* of the family Rosaceae)

Other names: Silver Branch, Silver Bough, Fruit (Food) of the Gods, Fruit (Food) of the Dead, Tree of Love, Love-Fruit.

Keywords: Immortality, Beauty, Resurrection, Regeneration, Faith, Love, Restoring Peace and Harmony, Poison with pleasure.

Magical Associations: Love, Divination, Healing, Opening the Veil Between the Worlds, Connecting with the Triple Goddess, Shattering Illusions. There have been many games, usually played by children, to divine information about ones' future love. You twist the stem of an apple to foretell any number of things: the name of your future love, the month in which you will meet, his or her profession and so forth. You receive your answer when the stem breaks. An old folk spell, usually performed on Samhain night, is to peel an apple in front of a candlelit mirror to see an image of your future love.

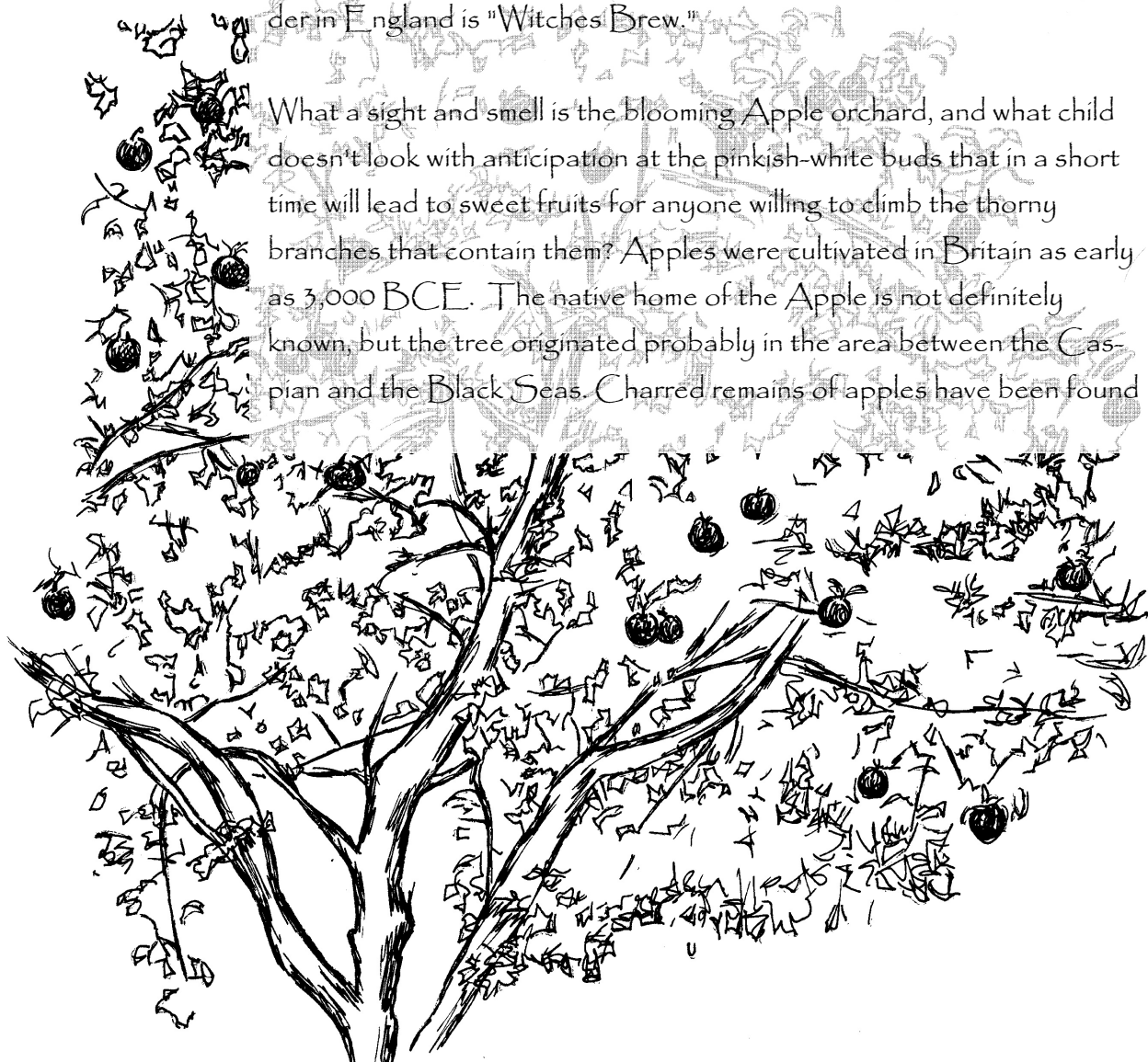
Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: An apple a day keeps the doctor away! This is more fact than fancy: apples are full of vitamins, minerals and fiber which aid in digestion and reduce intestinal discomfort. In addition, apple pectin has recently been shown to reduce serum cholesterol levels and aid in weight loss. Eating apples also helps reduce stress (is it from all the crunchy chewing or all those vitamins?!). Apple-loading fasts (eating nothing but apples and apple juice for a couple of days) were (and are) believed to reduce toxins, give the digestive



system a rest, and revitalize the entire body. Is this the modern day equivalent of older tales that speak of eating apples for beauty? Considering that the fruit is so sweet, danger is contained within the core - the seeds in fact contain cyanide and can be quite poisonous if eaten in large enough quantities.

As early as the 2nd century C.E., apple wine was brewed as a cure-all in ancient Rome. Scrumpy, a fermented apple beverage, is quite intoxicating and it is said that often fermented apples were used to induce altered states of consciousness. Another common name for strong cider in England is "Witches Brew."

What a sight and smell is the blooming Apple orchard, and what child doesn't look with anticipation at the pinkish-white buds that in a short time will lead to sweet fruits for anyone willing to climb the thorny branches that contain them? Apples were cultivated in Britain as early as 3,000 BCE. The native home of the Apple is not definitely known, but the tree originated probably in the area between the Caspian and the Black Seas. Charred remains of apples have been found



in the prehistoric lake dwellings of Switzerland. Apples were a favorite fruit of the ancient Greeks and Romans. They were such a popular fruit, throughout Europe, that in ancient Rome they gave rise to the expression, "ab ovo useque ad mala," "from the egg to the apple," meaning from start to finish. <sup>1</sup>

Cuert is most likely the Crab Apple, rather than what we think of as the domesticated Apple. The beauty of the Crab Apple Tree is just as enticing, even though the fruit is sour and suitable only in recipes for jam and jelly. Still, have you ever seen an aged Crabapple in full bloom or in Fall color? Absolutely breath-taking, it is truly one of the most beautiful trees in the world.

The Apple symbolizes and imparts the gifts of immortality and eternal beauty. In many cultures, a Goddess was Keeper of Golden (or Silver) Apples which She distributed to both gods and men. These Goddesses, and the gardens and lands they protected and/or ruled, were almost always associated with the "west," the setting sun and either the Land of Faery or the Underworld or both. In Celtic mythology, particularly in Ireland, the key to entering these lands was the Silver Branch, possessed by the sea god, Mannanan Mac Lir. The Silver Branch was both the symbol of the poet and the passport to the Otherworld. Depending on what you read, the branch bore three Silver Apples or had crystal white blossoms. When shaken, wondrous Otherworldly music poured forth, opening a portal between this world and the Land of Faery, causing shifts in time and consciousness. It also served in the mortal world; it soothed anger and could bring peace to a hostile situation.

Red foods were often the property of the Gods and the Faerie. In England, at least a few of the orchard's apples would be left for the Faerie Folk. It was believed that bad luck would befall the farmer who did not leave an offering. In many legends, humans are warned not to eat of Faerie food (often apples), lest they wander forever in the

Otherworld.

Aside from the timing of the apple harvests, this Underworld and/or Otherworld association was one of the main reasons that apples are closely linked with the celebration of Samhain, also called the Feast of the Dead and the Feast of Apples, or, as it is known today, Halloween. Bobbing for apples, a common game at this time of year, developed (or devolved, depending on how one looks at it) from the concept that one could capture the spirit of the Goddess of the Underworld without actually having to die to do so, thereby, in a way, cheating Death. One of her symbols was contained within the apple itself; sliced through the core is the 5-pointed pentagram.

The apple was so important to Western European culture that it was given credit even when credit was not due. The fruit Eve gave to Adam was most likely a pomegranate, but in the centuries to follow the Apple was substituted. Although a Judeo-Christian world view would have us believe that by offering the apple to Adam, and partaking of it herself, Eve brought about sin (she and Adam realized that they were naked and were ashamed), in much older traditions a Goddess would be offering the gift of knowledge, and life, to humankind.

The predecessor of Christmas caroling, wassailing, was originally done at Samhain with the last of the apple harvest. Only later was it moved to Yule. The Apple tree was toasted and honored for the food and life she provides and offered a drink of cider. Wassailing was carried out through the orchards to thank the trees, bless them, and convince them to continue producing a bountiful harvest. The following poem was not necessarily used in wassailing, but is certainly a good example of the serious consideration given to this Sacred Tree:

*The Apple Tree*  
*O Apple tree, may God be with thee,*  
*May moon and sun be with thee,*  
*May east and west winds be with thee,*  
*May the great creator of the elements be with thee,*  
*May everything that ever existed be with thee...<sup>2</sup>*

In Divination: Cuert is indeed a symbol of beauty. It tells us to see and recognize the beauty around us and to seek the beauty in truth. It could easily be called "Beauty with a Beast," however, for just as the center of the apple contains bitter poisons, so too may beauty sought become poisonous if one gets carried away and falls victim to the Underworld.

Cuert speaks of strong connections with the Underworld, of being aware of the unpleasant side of things we may have to go through in order to obtain the beauty, balance and harmony we seek. There is a strong feeling of resurrection, rebirth, and the need to endure cold, pain or other tests before getting what you seek.

It also speaks of the Otherworld, the planes above as well as the planes below; it tells us that with an eye for beauty, ALL things can become magical. There may, however, be some special key that is required before entry will be allowed.

Cuert signifies the appearance of or need for love. Not only love for or from another, but love of one's self. It also reminds us of the ordeals we may face to grasp that fruit of love, much like the task of bobbing for apples itself.

## Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

It is so easy to associate the Apple with the Triple Goddess. It almost leaps out at you: the white flesh is Maiden, representing mystery, beauty and ever-lasting youth; the red peel is Mother, symbolizing magick, marriage and birth; and the poisonous seeds, arranged in a mystical pentagram, are the Crone, representing, of course, death and resurrection, but magic and wisdom as well. Interestingly, although the apple is almost always associated with the feminine principle, there are occasional references to the male gender within British literature and fairy tales; for example, "The Apple Tree Man," which is believed to be the spirit of the oldest tree in the orchard and, in whom, the fertility of the orchard resides.<sup>3</sup>

I have used the apple as a focus for meditation in ritual Circle, particularly at Samhain and I have been very pleased with the resulting insights. Of course, MY favorite use of apples is dried in potpourris and pomanders, studded with cloves or scented with cinnamon. Hmm, that reminds me, did I mention pie?

### Footnotes

- (1) The Witches Almanac, 1993, p. 26
- (2) Carmichael, Alexander, Carmina Gadelica, p. 445
- (3) Briggs, Katherine, An Encyclopedia of Fairies.... p. 9



## *Cycle Eleven*

### *Loneliness In The Forest*

*Together they stood, as a great mass of green towers reaching toward the fiery ball above them, and yet, within each was a sense of loneliness. The Great Ones all stood upon the same planet, drank of the same life-giving waters and sun, yet each was concerned alone with their own individual existence more over than anything else. Each flake of bark, twist of leaf and drop of berry was still an incredible effort of thinking and forming from thought. Each Tree focused within and only as far without as was needed to insure its own physical needs were being fulfilled. Physical needs were fulfilled perhaps- but there were still voids; wants, needs and emotional emptiness within many of the Bark Folk.*

*Loneliness became overwhelming within forest after forest, and in that loneliness started a sense of selfishness and fear. The Great Ones drained rivers of all their water, thinking new tilts to their leaves that would gather all the sunlight for one, while blotting it out to the younger and smaller below. None of this was done out of cruelty, nor viciousness, simply out of a sense of survival and a sense of being alone upon the great orb of Root-holding soil.*

*'T was then a clover, sensing the dark cast descending around, uprooted itself. Running from Tree to Tree, it tried to reason with them, help them see that they were not alone but all part of that first thought of creation- the first Clover that laughed, and the ideals that laughed even before that Clover. But the Clover went unheard- its voice alone too small in the chaos of loneliness that pervaded.*

*Drawing energy from its brethren, the clover flashed out of existence as a clover, and became a wave of twining, spiraled energy. Tendrils of thought forked out and flew around all the Great Ones, first unnoticed, but then threatening to strangle and smother them all lest*

*they take note.*

*Awareness in each of the Great Ones slipped away from their singular needs, and toward the threat of encroaching strangulating as the now thickening tentacles of green thorny vines continued to encircle and ensnare. "I am Muin," said the Vine. "I bring you a gift if you are willing to see it!"*

*As Muin's hold tightened, the Great Ones ceased fighting her hold individually, and instead started working together, forest by forest, land mass by land mass - united as one great race once again.*

*With that, Muin's grasp was loosened, and with a sound like fairy bells in snow, small black sweet fruit appeared all along the length of this new being. Neither small and green, nor tall and woody, but both. A connection between the two worlds, one that would serve as a reminder of the importance and value of the interconnectedness and intertwining of all thought, action and life around it.*



# M- Muin: The Blackberry, Bramble Vine

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Muin (Min)

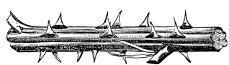
Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*)

Other names: Thimbleberry, Bly, Bramble, Cloudberry, Goutberry, High Blackberry, Dewberry,

Keywords: Harvest, Interconnectedness, Community, The Subconscious Mind, Overcoming Dependency

Magical Associations: Healing, Prosperity, Protection. Blackberry is used to banish negativity and bind negative energies and spirits. It was made into flails to drive away evil entities and influences.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: The roots and leaves are the primary parts used for medicinal remedies and, of course, the berries serve as food. Blackberry has generalized tonic properties. Blackberry leaf tea is said to reduce intestinal inflammation and is a long-standing cure for diarrhea. According to Scott Cunningham, a Blackberry vine that forms a natural arch is an "aid to magical healing... (on a sunny day) crawl through the arch backward and then forward three times, going as nearly east and west as possible." This rite is supposed to cure boils, rheumatism and even clear up your skin.<sup>1</sup> (We would venture a guess that it would aid in magic for fertility and prosperity as well.)



While there are some authors who suggest that the vine represented by Muin is the grape vine, most sources say there were no such plants in Ireland at the time of Oghamic inception, nor was grape-based wine being consumed. In old Irish dialects, the term Muin refers to Bramble, or Blackberry Vine. As anyone who has planted a small crop of

Blackberries will attest, given a few years and good soil, the Blackberry vines can and will take over an entire property, often sprouting up 40 feet or more away from their original plot.

As Blackberry grows, it becomes a thick twisted bush which has a vine-like quality to its growth, but has woody stalks and stems and LOTS of thorns. In the winter, the green growth may die back, leaving behind it a dense protective hedge which keeps the root from being damaged, and also creates a physical thorny barrier to animals and people who might try to cut through its domain. It is possible that the thicket that surrounded a legendary "sleeping beauty" was that of blackberry, suggesting too that the thorns can guard that which is delicate and vulnerable until such time as it is safe to be resurrected.

It took quite a while to find a reference on the growing season and harvesting time for Blackberries. In almost every text the Blackberry was described specifically as a summer fruit, to be used in summer pie-making. That would place it much earlier in the lunar month calendar than Graves and many other authors have placed it within the Ogham.<sup>2</sup> If one of the arguments is that the Blackberry was a fruit used for fall wine-making, in much the same way as the grape, then summer would have been too early. The perfect reference finally appeared on a gardening show of all places: "Gardening Naturally" on The Learning Channel. The following paraphrased comments were made by one of the hosts, Barbara Damarosh; she said that the good thing about planting lots of different fruit-bearing shrubs is that different types of berries have successive ripening times, thereby providing food for the birds all year long. Blackberries ripen very late in summer and early fall and provide food for birds well into the fall season.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the British Isles there was a taboo against eating Blackberries; they were believed to be the property of the Faerie Folk. Of course, this no doubt also means that Bramble must have been sacred to a Goddess at an earlier time, most probably Brigit or Brigantia.

As Above So Below



The berries are a favorite food of animals and people alike and each large berry is made from a series of small berry-like chambers; a greater whole born out of a series of individuals which by themselves would be more vulnerable to attack and less sustaining to those who might eat them. Within each of these small chambers is a seed which could, by itself, create a new plant to begin this process all over again.

Blackberry bramble has been used to bind energy in banishing spells and has been made into flails to be used for banishing evil.

In Divination: Muin, the Blackberry Bramble, heralds a sense of intertwining and interconnectedness. It speaks of recognizing that ones situations are currently dependant on and dependant upon others. It speaks of an awareness that we are not alone and **NEED** to be part of a community. Within this community we must maintain an awareness of self and realization that any one may become a catalyst for sweeping changes upon the whole.

Muin also speaks of residue, emotional or physical, which is left behind in our lives. Often this residue, like the left over branches, protects us and keeps others from making too much progress or headway within our personal space. It may also be acting to restrict us and keep us locked in as well.

The Blackberry may suggest there is too much dependency in current situations, that things are **TOO** intertwined. It can also suggest a need for some kind of protective boundary. Muin can indicate a presence of such a boundary which may be keeping vital experiences from reaching us.

The intertwining of this vine is also that of the Conscious and Unconscious Minds; an understanding that there is need to look within, but

not to become trapped in the inner realm that you create for yourself. There is much to be learned from spiraling inside, but the knowledge and realizations must be brought back outside to be used. If the delicious juice and life-giving sugars of the Blackberry fruit are not consumed and used, they will dry up and become useless a short time after they are exposed.

Wine made of Blackberries is a heady drink indeed. Temptingly sweet and seemingly innocuous, it can help you release prophetic visions if used in small quantities, like diving into the Subconscious. Drink too much, spend too much time in its intoxicating grasp and you will accomplish little.

Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

Nothing much to add on the Blackberry, but I do want to make some comments on two other plants. There is some debate on which Tree was actually connected with this character. I am not entirely certain that the original plant represented by the Ogham was Blackberry. I agree that it was certainly not the Grapevine, but I believe another possible contender is the Mulberry (*Morus rubra* (red) and *Morus nigra* (black)). The Mulberry is well known for its sweet, captivating scent. The Black Mulberry, in particular, was common in Europe and, in addition, the Mulberry is classified as a Tree, growing as high as 60 feet. Medicinally, Mulberry was used as a traditional treatment for tapeworm and intestinal parasites, and as a natural laxative. The milky white sap and the unripe fruit can produce hallucinogenic visions (a good substitute for wine if I ever heard one). Magically, the Mulberry functions much as the Blackberry with protection, against both physical and magical attack. It guards the home against lightning. The most powerful magical use of Mulberry is as an enhancer for the Will, the force of concentration needed to produce results (magical or mundane).

I also have not ruled out Nettle, specifically *Lamium album*, (White

Nettle a.k.a. Dead Nettle, Blind Nettle, also called White Archangel) as a possibility. So I thought I would include some information on the Nettle, just in case others come to the same conclusion. Medicinally, Nettle is and was used as an antispasmodic; an infusion was placed in hot bathwater for "female problems" including uterine cramps, irregular cycles, to increase a weak menstrual flow. It is also used for stomach and intestinal cramping and spasms and has been brewed as a tea to aid insomniacs. Nettle is used as a tonic, believed to purify the blood, and as a styptic (a medicine used to stop bleeding). Nettle can be used to stop nose bleeds, and as a gargle for sore throats and to soothe mouth sores.

There are several different types of Nettle, but they generally have similar medical and magical properties. White Nettle was an important herbaceous shrub throughout Europe, well into medieval times, even eaten in salads. It grows much like the bramble, with little white flowers and hairy stems and leaves. It looks like the famous stinging nettle, but it lacks the sting. Even so, it is ruled by Mars and practically exudes "Fire" energy. Another interesting comparison is the sedative and tranquilizing effects (similar to blackberries or grapes which have been fermented as wine) that the Nettle is said to have. Like Blackberry, Nettle is used magically in healing and protection spells; it is also used in spells to bind enemies, send back curses (and negativity in general), and exorcize malignant spirits from the home and from a person.

Just food for thought!

#### Footnotes

- (1) Cunningham, Scott. Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs, p. 55
- (2) Per Graves: Blackberry Month is 9/2-9/29, which includes the Autumn Equinox.
- (3) Gardening Naturally was shown on the local PBS station, repeat date: 8/9/96



## *Cycle Twelve*

### *Evolution of A Newcomer*

*As feathered ones satiated their appetites on the berries Muin had produced, she pondered what she had accomplished. Her vines grew strong, yet tended to grow brittle in the cold and leave behind them masses of thorny fence, strong, and unyielding but still very unalive. She would grow forth, spring up anew and fall back in the winter, but restlessness was within her. Part of her wished to know what it would mean to grow anew always, and shed her course thorns in favor of more subtle guise and defense.*

*Many Dark and Light Times she pondered these things, and one day, a new berry appeared on her branch. Within this berry a seed of progress, of inward growth and new development. She became obsessed with the protection of this berry, and sought that it should never fall nor be harmed until she was ready for a new growth to take place. Geis, the childless Swan, had other thoughts. One night, when Muin had worn her conscious mind to boredom obsessing over this new seed, Geis snatched the berry and took it far away.*

*In a lump of mud, Geis planted this seed and lay upon it as if it were her egg. Summer passed along and still the "egg" did not hatch. Autumn saw the leaves around her wilt and fall, but Geis still did not remove herself from this self modeled nest of stolen "egg." Winter saw her nearly freeze until finally the spring thaw came about.*

*Muin again bore berries which called forth a sensual Siren-like song, tempting Geis away from her nest. When she rose, beneath her had sprouted a small green vine, tiny now, but soon it would flourish, reach high and low and cover huge mountains with a thick green carpet. The child born of Muin and Geis was to be called Gort, The Ivy, and her powers of development, progress and revelation would be shared and extolled by creators for the eternal cycle to come.*

## G- Gort: The Ivy

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GORT (gort)

IVY (*Hedera helix*, English Ivy)



Keywords: Friendship, Loyalty, Fidelity, Faith, Eternal Life, Development, Achievement, Mentoring, Fostering.

Magical Associations: Protection, Healing, Good Luck, Love. Ivy is a woman's plant, and as such may be worn by women for good luck. Planted on the border of a property, or up against the home, Ivy protects the residents against negativity and averts disaster. Ivy was often used in love charms, particularly those to ensure the fidelity and faithfulness of a loved one. The ability of Ivy to survive in all types of weather probably contributed to its association with fidelity and loyalty. It is a clinging and everlasting friendship, eternally alive.



Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: Ivy's main medicinal use was as a wash for sores, skin irritations, burns, etc. This is rather ironic actually, because the cure sometimes made the person worse; many people are sensitive to the oils contained in the Ivy and have allergic reactions. In some herbal texts, Ivy is said to influence the brain and central nervous system; specifically it was used to relieve pressure in the body, including inter-cranial pressure. This is probably a reference to the hallucinogenic, and toxic effects that are produced if the leaves are consumed. Like most evergreens, Ivy berries are poisonous.

Gort has often been associated with blacksmiths and is thought of as a plant of physical and mental development. It grows slowly, long and strong, often overtaking larger trees, buildings, walls and hills. It looks fragile, but can become very thick and woody. Ivy has been used to represent the dragon gnawing at the roots of the Universal or World

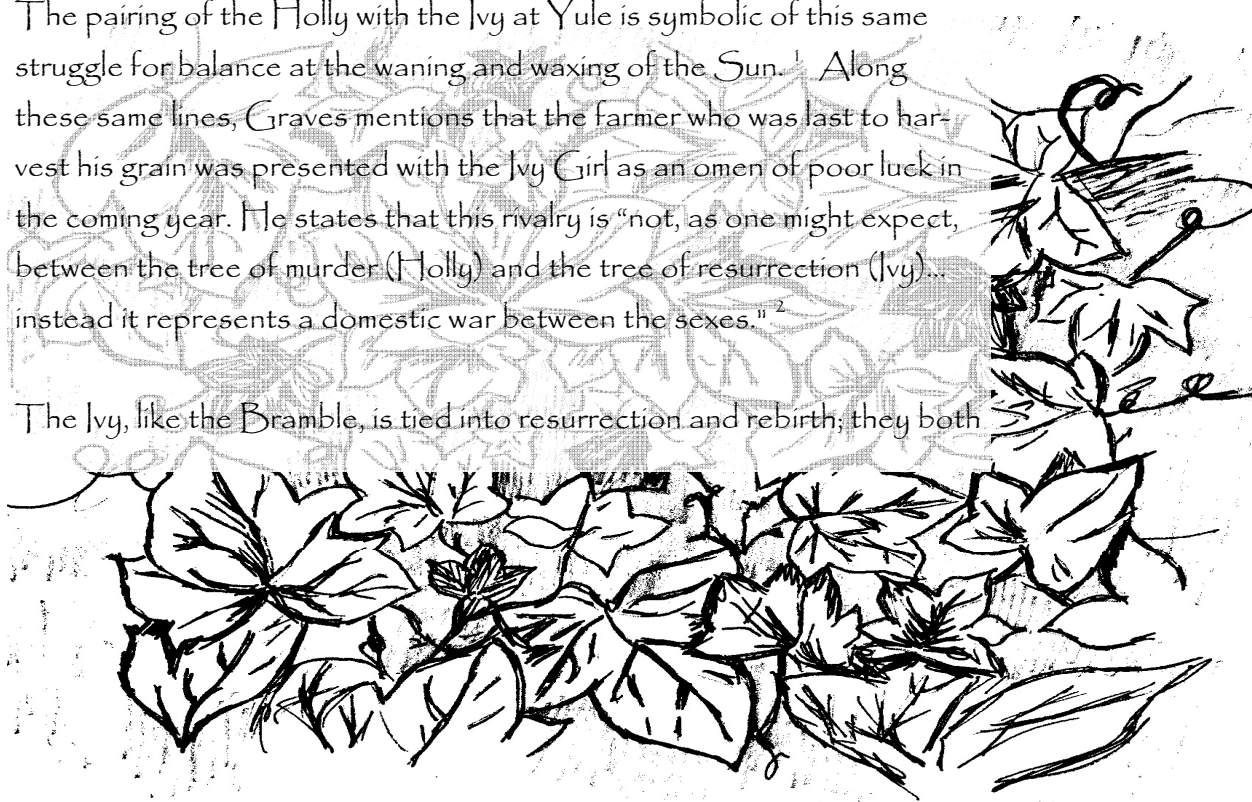
Tree. It is a reminder of the strength to be found even in low places and its' effect if used persistently against those who may be considered stronger.

Ivy was very deliberately planted along house foundations and encouraged to grow up the walls. It was believed that the Ivy would help protect the house from both physical and magical harm.

The Ivy was heavily associated with the Dionysian cult; in Rome, coins symbolizing the Dionysian Mysteries depicted a basket covered with Ivy vines. Ivy became associated with drunkenness, both as a cure and a cause.

One English custom bound the final sheaf of grain with Ivy; this was called the Ivy Girl who was believed to be in combat with the Holly Boy...(representing) a combat between the half of the year presided over by the Goddess (waxing) and the half ruled by the God (waning). The pairing of the Holly with the Ivy at Yule is symbolic of this same struggle for balance at the waning and waxing of the Sun.<sup>1</sup> Along these same lines, Graves mentions that the farmer who was last to harvest his grain was presented with the Ivy Girl as an omen of poor luck in the coming year. He states that this rivalry is "not, as one might expect, between the tree of murder (Holly) and the tree of resurrection (Ivy)... instead it represents a domestic war between the sexes."<sup>2</sup>

The Ivy, like the Bramble, is tied into resurrection and rebirth; they both



grow and wind in a spiral pattern, a pattern easily recognizable as sacred to the ancient Celts. Ivy was also used in brewing a fermented beverage called ivy-ale.

Ivy trunks, if left untended, can attain diameters of almost a foot and branch out in all directions. They form a tangling carpet of leaves and twining stems. They can, however, choke themselves out and rob all nutrients from an area, bringing about their own demise. The Ivy can push its way through stones, crack pavement and bind other trees. It is incredibly powerful in the changes it can bring about, though it is slow in its approach.

In Divination: Ivy appears to talk about development, either in creating change or in fulfilling change about to be achieved. It often warns to take a slow approach and be certain that as you grow, you are not causing too much damage to your environment and to those around you. Gort talks of nurturing, fostering and mentoring those around you and of seeking mentors as well.

In creating change it is important to avoid becoming too wrapped up in the tools of that change, or in the process. It says to catalyze the change but not to become so swept up in it that you do not realize when the end result has been achieved. The consequence then can become a rut of never-ending change.

Ivy speaks of situations and relationships that are currently undergoing or **IN NEED OF** intentional change and transformation. It speaks of a time to slowly look at what transformation needs to be developed and to try and find the most productive way to do that.

Gort is the Ogham of fidelity, being faithful and having some degree of dedication to others, to purpose and to self. It encourages relationships of a nurturing nature.

## Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

It was very difficult to find any references about the Ivy which were somehow tied into Yule in one form or another, all emphasizing the battle between the Dark and Light of the year. I must admit, Graves' observations aside, I read a lot more than just a "battle of the sexes" into this pairing:

Yule celebrates the return of Light by the vanquishing of the Dark. At this time, the light of the sun will begin to gain in strength until it culminates at Midsummer, when the Holly King (Waning God) will once again slay the Oak King (Waxing God). At Midsummer, in spite of the slaying of the Oak King, the world is in full bloom. The time surrounding Midsummer is chock-full of so much fertility – so much LIFE – that there is no reason to create such a symbol artificially. The slaying of the Holly King at Yule, on the other hand, especially in more northern climes, occurs when the world is bleak; nothing is growing, and the world, for all intents and purposes, is dead. A physical symbol of the promise of life is needed here and the Ivy, an evergreen with a strong feminine energy, provides that promise. She stands by her mate as he dies, as a promise that he will be renewed again.

I also want to say a few words about using Ivy in fidelity, friendship and love magick. Yes, it is powerful; yes, it will work; but realize that Ivy can bind you into a relationship/situation that can smother you – or the other person involved – unless you are careful to set up boundaries while crafting your spell.

### Footnotes

- (1) Campanelli, Pauline. *Wheel of the Year*, p. 6
- (2) Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess*, pg 184

## *Cycle Thirteen*

### *Move And Earn A Gift, Or Begin Again*

*Geis flew aloft, squawking a warning; the hard waters of the north had passed too near the sky fire, and soon the water, hard no longer, would come crashing down and bury all in a deep wet sleeping end. She feared for herself, the Great Ones and her newly laid eggs.*

*Plans were made by all, under the guidance of Muin, for a great wall made to hold back the water. Side by side the Great Ones rooted themselves and when the waters came, the trees were able to hold them back, for a time. Acres of Soil behind them was soaked through and made useless muck, and slowly the water rose.*

*Several of the Great Ones were near their end and about to give way under the pressure of the water when divine intervention took light. Geis was seen moving her nest and Eggs to higher drier land..... Even this fowl of the water was moving out of her element to a point of safety.*

*The water thundered a warning to yield or be crushed under a tremendous blow as the mighty king sought to be joined with his great body. In a flash of resolve and a wise moment of thought, the Great Ones flew to high ground out of the way of a wave of mountain like proportions.*

*Their movement had earned a reward, along the edge of the raging river, mighty King Niksa offered forth a gift. From along the water's edge, new life emerged. At the seam of raging water and calm land, tall graceful reeds rose into the air, joined by small willowy plants of red berry and strong but subtle branch. NGetal, the Reed and Beth-Bhog, the Dwarf Elder rose strong and formed a symbolic fence between the land and water, a barrier of safety and a symbol of the wisdom to stand firm in ones foundation, yet be flexible to survive.*



# Y- (NG or P) NGetal: The Reed Or Peth-Bhog (Peith) The Dwarf Elder

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The very name of this Ogham, as well as, the tree and/or plants represented is very much in debate. The whole issue of the “ng” sound is frustrating. Old Irish did not possess such a sound nor did the Latin alphabet have a symbol for that sound, so what it is doing here we may never know. The name Peth-bhog (spelled in any variety of ways) is difficult to research and reference. The fact is, over time, the associations for this particular Ogham Few have obviously been lost - or mistranslated - and a decision about what the Ancestors intended is impossible to make. Most authors designate this Ogham as NGetal: the Reed. However, we have decided to present both alternatives and let the reader decide which - if either - makes sense. Admittedly, our material on Dwarf Elder is not to our liking. We simply could not find associations specific to the Dwarf Elder - all references pointed back to either the Elder or to the Reed.

We will begin with Reed.

NGETAL (Nga-tel)  
Reed (Phragmites spp.)

Keywords: Flexibility and Adaptability, Clear Communication, Protection through Invisibility and Cunning, Strong Foundations, Finding Order in Chaos, Creating Harmony out of Discord.

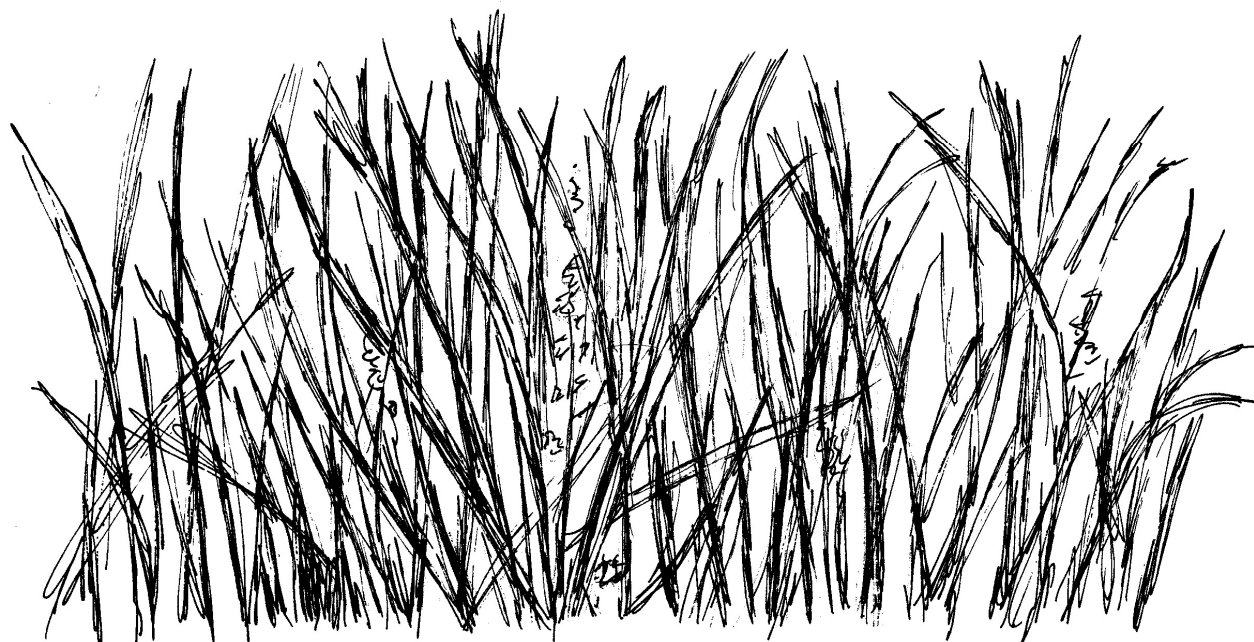
Magical Associations: Reed can be used in much the same way as Fern (Fern, the plant; not Fearn, the Alder), that is, as a talisman for



luck and prosperity and to confer invisibility. Reed can be carried to provide physical protection in crowds and planted (in wet areas, please) around the home to make it "invisible" to burglars and other negative energies which would invade your house and property. Reed is used for weather-working, to call up rain and wind (think: rain-sticks). Meditate on Reed and use it to "point the way" for your magickal workings and spiritual path.

*Medical and/or Cosmetic Use:* Reed is primarily used in folk medicine as a rather strong diuretic. It increases urination and is considered useful in the elimination of gravel and stones, especially from the kidneys.

Reed is actually a form of tall grass which grows in thick clumps, called stands, along marshy banks. Reed has a tall, woody stem, thus, classification by the Ancients as a tree (at least a shrub) is understandable. Reeds produce beautiful tufts or plumes, but they spread by means of a very large and tangled rootstock, sometimes reaching 30-40 feet from the point of origin. In the United States, *Phragmites communis*, Common Reedgrass, grows wild throughout North Amer-



ica - and much of the world in some form or another - in marshes, bogs and along streams and river banks. If a stream is not nearby, the Reed will even take root in wet ditches on the side of the road. Once Reed has taken hold, it is almost impossible to pull out and eliminate. The flexible stems and roots are incredibly strong.

To the ancient Greeks, the Reed formed the *Syrinx*, also known as Pan Pipes. Pan was pursuing a wood nymph, named *Syrinx*, who was a chaste follower of the Moon Goddess, *Diana*. *Syrinx*, trying to outrun the *Faun*, called on the water nymphs (in some versions, on *Diana*) to rescue her. The nymphs promptly turned her into a bunch of Reeds and when Pan made a grab for her all he found were Reeds. He discovered that the hollow tubes made beautiful music and he fashioned them into the pipes which bear his name.

Reed is used in the making of baskets which, if woven tightly enough and dried, are lightweight and waterproof. Reed pulp was used in the making of paper, the quill to go with it and as material for a house, from roof to floor. According to Robert Graves, a house was not considered established until the roof was put in place. The Reed, by its very nature, is able to repel water; in the damp climes of the British Isles, Reed was preferred to straw for roof thatch. Reed was also used as a floor covering. Reed also serves an important function in a marshy ecosystem; it provides cover for birds and water animals, such as beaver, and otter. Reed is used as nesting material for a wide variety of birds. (And alligators in the southern U.S.) The seeds provide food, and the roots provide a comfortable shelter for fish, tadpoles, and many other aquatic dwellers. Hidden deep within the Reeds, they are nearly invisible from predators.

Many authors place the Reed at the time of Samhain. Graves states that the reed is ready for cutting at this time and that the Reed Month begins October 28th. <sup>1</sup> This could be; this poem, collected by Alexander Carmichael, certainly echoes the theme of death (and misfor-

tune). It sounds as though someone died of poisoning.

*Thou reed unblest, Thou reed unholy,  
Thou reed wherewith was given the drink accurst.  
Every wind that sobs, Over knoll and plain  
Groans the death-groan, Through the reed accurst!*<sup>2</sup>

In English, one of the definitions of "reed" is a person whose opinion is easily swayed, like a reed blowing in the wind. As we have mentioned, the Reed only appears to be easily moved; in reality, it is not so easy to pluck the Reed from its' chosen habitat. As anyone who lives on a lake can attest, the Reed can sometimes be impossible to permanently remove. It keeps growing back, just like the grass that it is.

PETH-BHOG (Veith-fog)

Dwarf Elder (*Sambucus ebulus*); Black Dwarf Elder (*Sambucus ebulus niger*)

Common names: Blood Elder, Wild Elder, Dane(s)wort, Wildwort, Walewort

Special Note: The Dwarf Elder is not native to North America and is not prevalent, occurring in only a couple of northern states. A plant which looks similar and goes by the name of Dwarf Elder(berry) (*Aralia hispida*) – also known as Bristly or Hairy Sarsaparilla and related to the ginseng – has similar medicinal uses and is found in many areas of the U.S., but it is not the same plant!<sup>3</sup>

Keywords: See Reed.

Magical Associations: Nothing specific to Dwarf Elder that did not apply to Reed or to Elder Tree.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic: The primary use as a medicine comes

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from boiling the rootstock of this shrub to use as a diuretic, a very strong laxative and purgative. The physical reaction to Dwarf Elder is much stronger than to the Elder (*Sambucus canadensis* or *Sambucus niger*) and the plant has fallen out of favor for medicinal use. An ointment made from a tincture of Dwarf Elder is used to treat burns and skin irritations. The berries are poisonous and are not used for medicine; however, they were traditionally used for dyeing (producing black and blue dyes) and for making ink.

Peth-Bhog, The Dwarf Elder, *Sambucus Ebulus* is different from the common Elder in many ways. It is a small bushy shrub, often growing near watery edges. It sports a small black berry which has many seeds within and is highly toxic. Dwarf Elder shares many qualities with NGetal, the Reed. Graves theorized that Peth-bhog replaced NGetal since those using it at the time had no use for the original Ng sound in their alpha-phonetic system. No matter, we are still examining the same basic principles.

In both of these plants we see a stalk structure that tends to be very flexible and will give tremendously under winds without breaking. Through this flexibility they find their strength and ability to remain rooted fast to their structure and within their spot. They live and remain fast BECAUSE they are flexible.

The Dwarf Elder is also representative of the great labyrinth, a principle in which we must often back-track or change our approach to attain what we seek, while remaining true to ourselves and to our quest or purpose.

In Divination: Peth-bhog, probably pronounced pi' vog (or NGetal if you prefer) reminds us of the need to be flexible in our approaches and our reactions, but to remain true to our inner selves, our inner commitments and our true purposes and beliefs.

It speaks of finding Order in Chaos, finding Strength in Flexibility and finding Success in Sacrifice or compromise. The appearance of Ngetal often suggests that being invisible, that is being adaptable, may be ones best course of action at this time.

Also, as these flexible plants find order in a storm, this Ogham speaks of finding order and a sense of the familiar even within those situations in your life that have become disheveled and chaotic. Realize that with FOUNDATION all is still strong and firm.

There is a sense with this Ogham of being at peace and harmony with your environment and being able to adapt without losing a sense of self and who you are and where you have come from.

Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

Not that I particularly want to add to the debate (oh, why not?), but the Matthews, among others, list Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and Fern (presumably, a water-loving variety such as Marsh Fern) as being appropriate for the NGetal Ogham. Edred Thorsson also lists Broom as a possibility for this Ogham. In this text, the information on Broom may be found under the Ohn (or Onn) Ogham few, so we need not discuss it here.

I would, however, like to comment on Fern. Unfortunately, I was not able to find out which type of Fern might have been "the one," so I have no idea what the Irish name might have been or how it would have fit in the mnemonic nature of the Ogham. In modern Irish, the word for Fern is "raith(neach)" or "renniagh," but that may not have been in Old Irish or the word could have been borrowed from Gaul (actually, there is an argument for this – apparently raith has possible Gaulish cognates/roots, i.e. "ratis" and "pratis" – so who's to say?)<sup>4</sup>

There are, virtually, hundreds of species of Fern; some types prefer water, some types prefer rocky soil; some have woody stems and some do not. The magical uses and the symbolism for Fern approximate the Reed very closely: love, harmony, flexibility, weather-working (to call up rain), even conferring invisibility! Each of the many varieties of Fern has a different medicinal property. Any given species might have been used to cure tapeworm, treat respiratory infections, heal sprains, or cure male impotence. Let's just put it this way - Fern is a very useful medicinal herbal, well known, and well used, by wise women and cunning men of old. Personally, Broom and Dwarf Elder just do not feel right to me and I don't think they belong to this Ogham. Reed just feels better and Fern feels better still. Which Fern, I do not know. I guess I will just have to keep investigating. Just thought I would point out yet another option.

#### Footnotes

- (1) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 185
- (2) Carmichael, Alexander, *Carmina Gadelica*, p. 369
- (3) Mrs. Grieve's *Modern Herbal* is now available on line. It is a wonderful reference and frequently quoted (with or without credit). The website states: "Bear in mind "[A Modern Herbal](http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/e/elder05.html)" was written with the conventional wisdom of the early 1900's. This should be taken into account as some of the information may now be considered inaccurate or not in accordance with modern medicine." <http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/e/elder05.html>
- (4) Online Gaelic Dictionary, <http://www.ceantar.org/cgi-bin/search.cgi>

## *Cycle Fourteen*

### *Coercion.... Then Punishment*

*A bit of fruit lay rotting in the sun. Within this kingdom of thought-formed creation, ill thought was oft the most dangerous threat of all; and on this Cycle, it manifested in that putrid berry. The berry lay there with its sugars oxidizing in the sun. It pondered what might become of it when its moisture had all gone and it had shriveled, when a stray thought, an angry thought, floated by and took form.*

*In time, this unpleasant sugary casing became the home for other ill thoughts, thoughts of coercion, manipulation and control. The berry looked without and noticed one day that it had changed, changed into a mobile creature, to be named Ztraigen.*

*Ztraigen was not a pleasant creature, nor terribly attractive. He still sported a dark glossy bumpy skin which, being thin as a berry's skin, often cracked, allowing juices to leak about and attract all manner of flies. Within his inner self, all his manipulative tendencies, and the underlying knowledge that his existence was a change in fate had made him angry and fearful.*

*This vile creature went about the forest, riding on the back of two cranes he had captured and bound. Everywhere he went he took what he needed, cutting down vines and branches to create shelter for himself, defecating in life-giving waters and tearing down all manner of fruits and berries leaving them behind to rot.*

*Clearly his manipulative, wasteful and controlling ways were taking their toll.... But Cuert would see it end.*

*The Fairy Folk who lived upon the Apple Tree saw this creature making all around it bow to its will, living outside the harmony of nature and they spoke to Cuert of a plan. They spoke of drink they enjoyed in their land made from juices which had been lay to ferment in the sun. Cuert had one such fruit hanging from her branch, but it looked sour indeed. With a cast of glamour however, the Sidhe Folk made it look huge and ripe, like the most luscious*

*and glorious apple ever seen. It called to Ztraigen....*

*When the creature had eaten the fermented apple, its intoxicating effects took hold fast, and the fermentation spread throughout his juice blood quickly. He was overcome by sleep.*

*The Great Ones acknowledged his strengths and abilities to manipulate the world around him, and to create changes within that which is fated through control or coercion- but also recognized that it must be kept in check, and there must be knowledge of when it is the **SELF** which must be controlled.*

*Ztraigen would not be destroyed but, by Judgment of the Great Ones, he returned to be part of Terra and became one of the Great Ones himself. Known as Straif, in some areas of the world he was a thin twisted thorn Tree called Blackthorn, in other areas he bore a dark Apple called the Plum or Sloe.*



## Z- (SS or ST) Straif: Blackthorn, Plum or Sloe

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STRAIF (Ztraif)

Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)

Other Names: Sloe, Wild Plum, Wishing Thorn, Mother of the Wood, Dark Crone of the Wood.

Keywords: Coercion and Control, Accomplishment through Manipulation, Resentment, Refusal to Accept the Truth or SUPPOSED truth.

Magical Associations: Protection, Exorcism, Empowerment, Overcoming Obstacles to Spiritual Growth, Crone Magic, Dark Moon Magic

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: Blackthorn Tea makes a good purgative and laxative. It also helps stimulate the appetite by calming the stomach. Although not poisonous, the fruit leaves a nasty feeling in the mouth and is quite sour. It is said that the fruit becomes slightly more palatable after being exposed to frost over a few nights. Still, it is much easier to eat when cooked and sweetened, as in jam; the jam may also be used in medicinal doses as mild laxative. The juice of the fresh fruit is said to reduce inflammations in the mouth and throat. Blackthorn is a febrifuge - a decoction of the root helps to reduce fever. Blackthorn is recommended for bladder and skin problems and for reducing stones of all types.

Blackthorn is also known as Sloe and is a close relative to the Plum Tree. It is also related to cherries and apples and, like the Apple, is part of the Rose family, Rosaceae. It has been referred to as Dark



Sloe (*Prunus spinosa*). — 1, flowering branch; 2, branch with fruit; a, a flower, longitudinal section.

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Apple or Black Apple and it is believed to hold all the darker secrets and mysteries to balance the 'lighter' more benign Otherworldly connections of the Apple herself. Of course, Sloe is the source of flavoring for Sloe Gin, a potent alcoholic beverage (though not a real gin).

Magically speaking, Blackthorn has been used to create "blasting rods," used by ceremonial magicians in rituals of Conjunction and Summoning, to control Daemons. It has also been used as a staff of authority in other magical traditions. Blackthorn has been long used as a weapon, but for psychic or magical battles as opposed to physical ones. Thorsson writes, "Blackthorn...is often used as the magical weapon to wound effigies of one's enemies." <sup>1</sup> Pretty powerful plant!

According to Graves, the Blackthorn is usually thought to be the wood used for the Irish "shillelagh," but, in fact, Oak is usually the wood of choice for that particular weapon, a short, thick club. Blackthorn was used – along with Oak and Ash – to create a fighting stick (sometimes called a "bata") which gained popularity as a walking stick and was very popular in the 19th century. <sup>2</sup> The use of Blackthorn in creating walking sticks goes back much further, however. Graves states that "the black rod" carried as a walking stick by local witches was much feared and believed to cause miscarriages (presumably in women and in livestock). <sup>3</sup>

The tree was and is cultivated for ornamental purposes in Europe and Asia where it grows as either a shrub or as a tree, reaching approximately 10-15 feet in height. Traditionally, the Blackthorn is not supposed to exceed 13 feet. The Blackthorn also grows in the wild, forming hedge-rows which provide shelter for a variety of birds and animals. True to its namesake, the branches are covered with thorns. Like the Hawthorn, the tree has white blooms; the fruit is round and blue to blue-black and ripens in October after the frost.

The Blackthorn and Whitethorn (Hawthorn) are often referred to inter-

changeably – simply as “Thorn,” although they are definitely not the same species and do not have the same magical or medicinal properties. The rumor is that Whitethorn (Hawthorn) will destroy any Blackthorn that grows nearby, but in truth, the two trees are frequently found growing side by side in thickets and hedgerows.

There is really one primary Deity association with the Blackthorn and it is not consistent with the usual system of classification and mnemonics. The Cailleach was said to carry a walking stick made of Blackthorn. She wielded it as symbolic of her authority and control over the weather, livestock and fertility (or lack of it). She is reborn each Samhain and “in Scotland, winter begins when the Cailleach (also the Goddess of Winter) strikes the ground with Her Blackthorn staff.”<sup>4</sup> Katherine Briggs writes, “The Cailleach...seems one of the clearest cases of the supernatural creature who was once a primitive goddess, possibly among the ancient Britons before the Celts. There are traces of a very wide cult... the variety of aspects in which she is presented is indicative of an ancient origin...”<sup>5</sup> Briggs goes on to say that the Cailleach throws her staff under a Gorse or Holly Bush – plants also belonging to Her – and turns to stone, thus bringing about the Waxing Year. In some legends, she turns into a beautiful Maiden, frequently associated with the Goddess, Brigid.

In Divination: This Oghamic character represents coercion and control in whatever forms they may manifest in your life.

In positive ways it can be a sign for you to take control of a given situation and manipulate it in to what you need. However the energy of this Ogham is generally intense and has a sense of resistance along with it, that those you may try to control will not be terribly willing and it may involve a lot of energy expenditure on your part. The energy of this Ogham is that often associated with manipulation.

On the more malevolent side, this Ogham can speak of Manipulation, Control and Coercion against one's will. It can be a warning that one is dangerously near to doing that TO others, or that other people or situations are currently doing that within one's own life. It is wise to seek a way out of situations that are this psychologically controlling, and attempt to fall back in to harmony with true focus and purpose.

Understand though, that there are times where the approach of Straif is the only way to go, and if this Ogham appears as a message for the approach needed, then be prepared to use every method at your disposal to accomplish what you must. Also be ready to return to a natural balance the instant it becomes possible to do so, for any manipulation or control sent out shall return many fold over on both a physical and a metaphysical level.

This Ogham can also signal a sense of self control or manipulation, kidding ones self, or making self condemnations that are becoming restricting. Look inward when this Ogham appears and determine if, in fact, it is YOU who are manipulating YOU, and if that is healthy and within alignment with your true will and purpose at this time.

Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

In Tarot, when a reading includes a great number, say 8 out of 10, Major Arcana cards, it is frequently remarked that the life of that person is in the hands of the Gods and the best thing they can do is just "go with it" and try to stay out of the Universe's way. That's a bit how I feel about Straif. (Yes, you may be in danger of being manipulated or coerced – and you certainly should closely examine that possibility - but if you determine with certainty that this is not the case, then perhaps the Blackthorn is telling you that you are precisely where you are supposed to be at this time until Deity, your Spirit Guides, your Power

Animals - or whatever it is with which you commune - tells you differently.) When was the last time you meditated? When was the last time you lit a candle, did a ritual and/or made an offering to the God/dess, to the Ancestors? When was the last time you thought about what the God/dess wants you to do at this stage of your life? Like the Tower Card, Straif can shake things up, but it usually comes at a time when you need to be shaken up in order to have your faith restored, to remember who you are and how you came to be.

When I first wrote about Straif, I had only been in physical contact with the Blackthorn once. It was with a branch already removed from the Tree and made into either a short staff or a really long wand. All I remember is incredible energy emanating from the wood. For all the negatives associated with Blackthorn, it did not feel that way to me, just powerful and no-nonsense, much like the Oak. At the time I felt that I could not give my personal impression of the living Tree, but I intended to keep looking. Well, fortune smiled upon me in the form of a trip to Ireland. My friends and I were driving down a highway when I yelled, "stop the car!" Although I had never seen that particular species before, I knew IMMEDIATELY what was standing, alone, in the middle of the field. All I can say is: I must have a stronger-than-normal Crone connection, because I fell immediately in love with the Blackthorn Tree.

It was smaller than I had imagined it would be, but then so was Hawthorn when I finally met one. More like a large shrub than a tree, yet very tree-like in presence. I understand that these trees usually grow in thickets, frequently among Elders and Hawthorns, but this one was standing alone - a silent sentry just watching the world go by. The feeling that came from this Great One was POWER and EMPOWERMENT; as if connecting with the Spirit of Blackthorn would allow me to overcome any issue, solve any situation by sheer force of My Own Will. While Hawthorn radiates the Maiden,

Blackthorn radiates the Crone. Blackthorn speaks softly – as a very old woman would speak – but Her voice is steady, calm and intense. She knows what she is doing and it is best not to engage her unless you know what you are doing, too!

Footnotes

- (1) Thorsson, Edred, The Book of Ogham, p. 169
- (2) Haggerty, Bridget, <http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/AEmblem/Shillelagh.html>
- (3) Graves, Robert, The White Goddess, pp. 245 - 246
- (4) Black, Susa Morgan, <http://www.druidry.org/obod/trees/blackthorn.html>
- (5) Briggs, Katherine, Encyclopedia of Fairies..., pp. 58 - 59

## *Cycle Fifteen*

### *The Magician Of The Forest*

*Over passing Cycles, the Great Ones were becoming more rooted in the physical world around them, and for many Cycles they had not thought-created anything. All around them remained relatively the same, comfortable, balanced, firm, and stagnant.*

*A new one appeared, or perhaps evolved; she spoke of creation and change and showed to the Great Ones amazing things. By a mere cast of her branch or turn of attitude she created new forms of branch and flower. She was a great sorceress some claimed, others that she was a Messiah. But this new one, Ruís, had no desire to be known as either. She had appeared it seemed to her, from the last remnants of thought-created form that the Great Ones had left lingering. It resided within their spirits, their inner selves their will to continue.*

*Ruís felt her job was not to be miracle worker, but a teacher to share with the Great Ones the importance of change- that which is created by the self and by the will.*

*As all watched, she magically decorated herself with a lace of small white flowers which were bright and glowing against her green leaves, and in time she said they would evolve. When time, elements and fertility were right, the flowers gave way to small green orbs, clusters of tiny jade which would soon darken with mysteries of life, magic and the cycles of never ending change. Ruís spoke to the others and proclaimed that their development of the physical had reached a point where they must all return their attention toward the realm of the spiritual and higher understanding of the principles of thought, idea and creation; a new Council was formed.*

*No wonder that her name would one day mean "Wise Old One" and be synonymous with those who create magic. Ruís, The Elder, had found her niche among the Great Ones. She heralded the formation of the Council of The Elders.*





# R- Ruís: The Elder

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RUIS (Reesh)

Elder (*Sambucus canadensis*; American Elder, a.k.a. Sweet Elder, Common Elder, Elderberry, Rob Elder) (*Sambucus nigra*, a.k.a. Black Elder, European Elder)

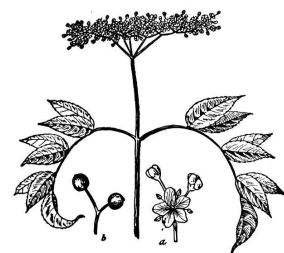
Other Names (applied to both species at any given time): Pipe Tree, Ellanhorn, Boor (Bour, Boure) Tree, Ellhorn, German Elder, Eldrum, Tree of Doom, Tree of Music

Keywords: Compassion, Healing, Transformation and Change, Letting Go, New Opportunities

Magical Associations: Protection, Healing, Prosperity, Manifesting Wishes. Place Elder Flowers around the outside of the home, under the windows and across the doorway to protect pets and protect the home from theft and negativity. "Take freshly fallen sprigs ...attach a little piece of the pet's fur to it. In this manner you are symbolically "joining" the protective energy of the Elder to that of the pet. Then, hide the Elder where it will not be disturbed." <sup>1</sup> An interesting dichotomy to this is that the chemical make-up of this tree makes it poisonous or unappealing to many animals, particularly birds, reptiles and insects.

Elder twigs worn close to the body will protect from both physical and magical attack. Elder is also believed to remove enchantments, dispel glamour and force a "sorcerer" to remove or reverse any spells or curses cast. Like many of the Sacred Trees, Elder is also believed to protect the home and bearer from lightning. It is believed that Elder can only be used magically by those of unselfish intent, who are pure of heart; all others who attempt to use the Elder will suffer confusion, memory loss and disorientation.

As Above So Below



Branch with Inflorescence of Elder (*Sambucus canadensis*).— a, part of the inflorescence; b, fruits.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: The Elder is used extensively in all types of folk medicine. Unlike the Dwarf Elder, the Elder Tree's berries are edible, but they must first be cooked, in the form of elderberry jam, for example. Elderberries may be eaten raw if extremely ripe, but only in small amounts. Herbalist John Lust rather sardonically states, "The berries are not to be eaten raw...unless you like diarrhea and vomiting."<sup>2</sup> Elder roots, stems and leaves also contain toxic substances, including one which releases cyanide. Elder stems are hollow and have been used in pipe making (thus, the name "Pipe Tree"), but the stems are processed before use. Children have been poisoned by using fresh Elder stems as straws or blowguns.

All that said, Elder is one of the best diuretics and is used in treatment of urinary tract and kidney disorders, as well as, water retention leading to raised blood pressure. An emetic, Elder acts as a purgative by increasing perspiration; it virtually sweats out cold and fever. Elder is also reputed to aid in rheumatic conditions, gout, neuralgia (nerve pain) and was used in ointments to heal skin irritations, burns and inflammations. Elderflower water, especially if it was made from the flowers collected in the May Day morning dew, was believed to soften the skin, fade freckles and increase beauty; the flowers and fruit were (and are) also used to flavor wine. Many of the Elder's medicinal "cures" were magical ones: there were spells using Elder to cure and prevent rheumatism and arthritis, cure warts, relieve insomnia, cure infertility and reduce fevers (the last accomplished by sticking an elder twig into the ground while maintaining complete silence). The twig-in-ground method was also applied to curing toothache.<sup>3</sup>

Native to both North America and Europe, the name "Elder" is applied to numerous species in both countries. Common Elder generally grows as a low shrub of about 15 feet in height. Black (European) Elder is much taller, a tree species which grows to more than 50 feet high. Both trees are virtually identical in medicinal and magical uses and have apparently been

used by humans for a very long time. Petrified Elderberries have been found in Neolithic sites.

On practical levels, Elder can be used for a variety of wooden items: fences, pegs, fishing poles and much more. Boiling the leaves creates an effective mosquito repellent and the same can also be poured into the holes of mice and moles to repel them. There are so many medicinal and herbal uses noted for this tree that Hopman writes, "The many prohibitions surrounding the harming of an elder tree may stem from her great usefulness in medicine and in magic."<sup>4</sup>

The flowers and berries are prized for food and beverage making. The berries are used in jams, pies and wine-making and elderflowers are used for flavoring wines and teas. May Wine, a favorite for Beltaine, is traditionally made from elderflowers collected at dawn on April 1st, when the dew is still upon them. The Elderflower gives the wine a lightly carbonated feel, like light champagne. The herb sweet woodruff is frequently used instead of elderflowers in the making of May Wine.

Ruis has a long, magical history with much documented folklore, medicinal references and ritual use. The strange thing is that the lore on Elder cuts both ways. Usually a tree is perceived as generally good or generally evil. The lore on the Elder Tree is almost equally divided between the two. The Elder is either described as a Goddess-like, benevolent spirit, protecting both people and fairies or as a powerful malignant being, usually a witch or evil fairy that haunts and terrorizes. Katherine Briggs states, "of all the sacred and Fairy Trees of England, the surviving traditions of the elder tree seem to be the most lively."<sup>5</sup>

This dichotomy may have come about because of Christian lore that suggests that Judas hung himself from an Elder Tree and that the cross that bore Jesus was made of Elder. This may be the origi-

nation of Elder as an “emblem of sorrow and death.”<sup>6</sup>

It is not surprising therefore, that Elder is associated directly with magic - the magical principles of change and the recognition of the spiral cycle of Birth, Learning, Teaching and Death - and the transformations that each cycle brings about. The Elder was almost certainly sacred to Goddesses of the Underworld and the felling of an Elder was punishable by death in some parts of Europe.

Folklore, legends, medicinal associations and tales of the spirit within the Elder were extremely wide-spread, from the Russian steppes across the continent into the British Isles. The lore was amazingly consistent, which leads Paul Beyerl to comment, “the same legends appear in diverse cultures, and one begins to believe truth to be the reason.”<sup>7</sup> In general the Spirit of the Elder was always thought of a female and as the Mother aspect of the Goddess. At any time you wished to partake of some of the Elder's treasure, whether it be flowers, berries or branches, you must first have good intent and then verbally (and out loud) ask the Spirit of the Tree for Her bounty. It is said that the Mother Spirit or Forest Spirit resides within these trees and will seek revenge on those who do it or the rest of the forest harm.<sup>8</sup>

Elder Trees were considered magical Guardian Trees of travelers who would entrust their journey to a particular Tree spirit. As long as the Tree remained well, the traveler would enjoy good fortune and health.

You may have noticed that one of the names for Elder is “Tree of Doom.” In some areas, the Spirit of the Elder was believed to be a Witch or Faerie. Graves writes that, in Ireland, “elder sticks, rather than ashen ones, are used by witches as magic horses.”<sup>9</sup> As you should expect by now, the opposite is also rumored to be true: that Elder wards off and protects AGAINST Witches and Faeries and the effects of magick. In addition, Elder was considered to be a “Witches Herb,”

heavily used for magical purposes and to attract the Faerie Folk. We have discussed these contradictions in earlier chapters.

Some of the folk names for Elder such as Ellanwood, and Ellhorn (relating to the Elves) are clues to this Tree's strong association with the Faerie. If a baby was left near an Elder tree, or placed in a cradle containing Elder wood, it was believed that the Faerie Folk would leave a changeling in its place or that the baby would be pinched black and blue by evil or mischievous faeries.

In Divination: This Ogham represents magical transformation and change as a result of will, thought, action or deed. Often these changes are of a major nature and represent moving on to new Universal Plateaus in one's life. There will be New Information, New Experience, New Opportunities, New Challenges, but first you must let go of the old baggage.

These principles can be very simply stated, but their impact on the individual is seldom simple. Change is far-reaching, and can have a tendency to shake familiarity, shake what "has always been." At first, one may be inclined to dig in one's heels and refuse to loosen the hold on what is there, but in time either one must let go, or cease to move forward.

Ruis is the Ogham of healing. Physical and emotional healing energies are present with this Ogham and it is always wise to remember that sometimes to heal or cure we must first cut away dead flesh, take some tonic, or purge ourselves of dis-easing influences.

This Ogham heralds a time when you can create many magical transformations within your life; whether you see this as good or bad will depend on how ready you are to create or experience such changes. It is important also to create these changes with intent and not simply for the sake of change, unless your desire is to be surprised with where

you find yourself when the transformation process is complete.

### Some Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

I do not have much to add about Elder – the folklore is so vast that any input from me seems over the top – however; I want to emphasize Elder's ability to empower magic. More than any other plant, the Elder can help you manifest your wishes, your deepest desires. I have used the flowers, fruit, leaves and twigs in spells and I have never been disappointed. Be careful what you wish for! The folklore is correct, by the way – Elder does NOT like anyone taking anything from Her without first asking permission and leaving a gift in exchange. I usually leave a few strands of hair – what's a little pain between friends?

### Footnotes

- (1) Telesco, Patricia, *A Victorian Grimoire*, pg. 272
- (2) Lust, John, *The Herb Book*, p. 179
- (3) Cunningham, Scott, *Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Herbs*, p. 98
- (4) Hopman, Ellen E., *Tree Medicine, Tree Magic*, p. 147
- (5) Briggs, Katherine, *An Encyclopedia of Fairies...* p. 316
- (6) Grieve, M., *A Modern Herbal*, entry on Elder [www.botanical.com](http://www.botanical.com)
- (7) Beyerl, Paul, *The Master Book of Herbalism*, p. 99)
- (8) Hopman, Ellen E., *Ibid*, p. 153
- (9) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 185

## *Cycle Sixteen*

### *To Be Free*

*The Council of Elders met: Ruís joined by Duir, Huath and Beith. Together, they pondered many higher principles and ideas, those archetypal symbols that would one day become basic staples of all life as it was thought-formed and physically formed on the now stable surface of the great Dragon called Earth. Much had been learned about the interconnectedness of this community of great tall Wood Beings - all was seen as an aspect of the other, and none were truly alone. Yet, it seemed that someday, should life have a sense of purpose for the individual, they must also see and value the strength that comes from standing alone; being a part of a whole, yet in ways apart from that whole.*

*Ruís was the first to volunteer to leave the clan and venture off into the new realm alone, with no sense of partnership with the others. To the top of a new mountain she thought herself, none around, not even a clover could be heard to chuckle upon this tower of earth. At first, one could almost perceive fear in the heartwood of Ruís, but slowly that fear faded.*

*The others of the Elders Council first worried about Ruís and then granted her that freedom to go off and seek that which, until then, they had only spoken of. Gazing down over the others of the bark clan, Ruís suddenly had an awareness of her sense of self, both outside and within the families of the Great Ones, and through this realization, she was transformed. Standing atop the mountain peak was a new Tree, tall and majestic and to be called Ailm, The Elm or Fir tree.*

*Ailm had within him both a sense of sovereignty of self and being, as well as an understanding of the responsibilities of that independence and its state of continued connectedness to those from which one strives to be free. The more we seek to be independent within ourselves, the more we will find what we seek also connects us with our pasts and our histories.*

## A- Ailm: Elm, Fir or Palm

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Once again, we see a debate among Ogham scholars – was the Tree of origin for Ailm the Elm or the Fir? While many texts list Ailm as being the Elm Tree, there is an expanding list of authors who assert that the Fir Tree, particularly the White Fir or Silver Fir, represents this Ogham. But wait, a third Tree enters the fray, the Palm Tree is also a consideration. In fact, in Old Irish, the word for palm was “ailm”; in modern Irish the word is “pailm.” Although we do not normally think of palms when we think of Ireland, and, indeed, the tree is not native, the Palm does grow along some parts of the Irish coastline.

So, it is basically up to you, the Reader, to visit with each Tree and make your own decision as to which one may have represented the Oghamic Ailm. Perhaps one of the Trees will stand out as being correct for you or perhaps all of them will seem right, at different times and for different reasons. Here, we present the various options, starting with the folklore and facts of the Elm Tree.



Elm: (*Ulmus campestris* or *Ulmus procera*)

Other Names: European Elm, Common Elm, English Elm, Elven, Elfin

Keywords: Time, Love, Self-Esteem, Overcoming Exhaustion, Lifting the Spirits

Magical Associations: Protection, Divination, Grounding and Centering, Finding Love, Eloquence



A piece of Elm wood, carried near the heart, is said to attract ones' true and proper love. The leaves are believed to be potent aids in dream magick and lucid dreaming. Stick a straight pin into the leaf, from top to bottom, state what you wish to see in your dreams (or the problem for which you are seeking a solution) and then place it under your pillow. The Elm will open your Subconscious Mind to the proper dream and, thus, the solution.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: Skin Toner and Astringent.

The European Elm is predominantly used in poultices or tinctures to treat skin disorders and irritations, such as boils. Slippery Elm (*Ulmus fulva*) has many more medicinal uses. It is used for gastric and throat and skin disorders. It is considered soothing and astringent at the same time, thereby reducing inflammation and irritation. Slippery Elm is still used in natural-formula and herbal cough and throat drops.

Elm is the common name for trees and shrubs of the family Ulmaceae and in the order Urticales, so it is related to Nettle. Elm is found throughout the northern temperate zone, but there was/is one type of Elm native to Ireland and other parts of the British Isles: the Scotch Elm or Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*). In fact, the tree is fairly prevalent in the northern parts of Ireland.

Elm is highly prized as a wood for furniture making – it is relatively free from knots and does not split or splinter easily. Elm holds up well under wet conditions, resisting mildew and warping, thus, it was favored for use in boats, docks, cart interiors and coffins.

The English or European Elm was often called Elven or Elfin because it was believed to provide a place where Humans and Elves could meet and communicate with one another. Offerings to the Elves were left at the base of Elm Trees and Hopman suggests making offerings of wine, mead, coin, sage or tobacco, music and

As Above So Below



dance to attract Wood Elves. It is important to first develop a relationship and open communication with the Elm Tree; this is supposed to make meeting and communicating with Devas, Elves and Nature Spirits easier. <sup>1</sup>

Probably due to its importance as a throat soothing medicine, Slippery Elm is believed to bestow eloquence or a honey-tongue. It is said that you can create a great speaker out of a child if you place some Elm or Slippery Elm twigs inside a bag and hang it from the child's neck. <sup>2</sup> Conversely, if someone is spreading malicious gossip about you, take a few twigs of Elm or Slippery Elm, bind them together with black thread on the Dark Moon, name the bundle as the person gossiping about you and the gossip will cease.

Elm is a Tree of the planet Saturn and, secondarily, of Mercury. Connect with Elm to gain a sense of responsibility and instill self-discipline. Elm will allow you to connect with the true nature of the Wise Woman/Sage and to the independence and sense of self that only comes with maturity and wisdom. By working with Elm, one learns to view events, including one's own life situation, with detachment and reason. Elm is a Tree of correct, not quick, decision-making and the confidence that the decision made is true and proper.

Elm was believed to have a sympathetic and compassionate nature. This may be "because of the vulnerability of elms to disease, it was thought that if one elm was cut down, a neighbouring elm would pine and die in sympathy." <sup>3</sup>

Originally, Elm, Fir and Palm were all sacred to Goddesses. The Babylonians and ancient Hebrews thought of the Palm as the Great Mother, sacred to Ishtar, Ashtaroth and later to Astarte. When the Male Consort/King came about, Palm took on the associations of male virility and sexuality and eventually fell under the dominion of Osiris, Attis and

other Gods of Resurrection. Of course, Fir and Palm are both evergreen trees, the evergreen being an ancient symbol of rebirth, immortality and resurrection. The Fir also took on correspondences relating to the Sun God, but it retained some of its lunar qualities, as we shall examine in a moment.

Only the Elm remained female throughout the lore; in Norse mythology, the first woman was Embla (Elm); Ash was her male consort. The Elm was believed to be the Keeper of Women's Mysteries, imbued with the essence of feminine power. It is a tree of rebirth and regeneration. The Elm can only be killed by destroying all the roots. If there is any life left in the roots, over time they will sprout a new Tree. That was one of the reasons Dutch Elm disease was able to claim so many Trees; the fungus penetrates the Tree right down to the roots.

Now on to our next candidate: The Fir

Fir (most likely the Silver or White Fir, *Abies* spp.)

Note: in North America, the Silver Fir is sometimes called the Balsam Fir, although the two species are separate.

Keywords: Leading a Balanced Life, Finding a Purpose, Peace, Strength through Unity, Hope, Easing Guilt and Remorse.

Magical Associations: Protection, Healing, Fertility, Prosperity, Purification.

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: Pine resin is astringent and antiseptic making it a good choice to apply to skin wounds and chronic skin conditions such as eczema. The resin can be heated and applied to aching muscles and painful joints in a poultice, plaster, or as a liniment. This type of treatment is also useful in treating colds; the Pine's strong scent will help open up the lungs and soothe the throat. It is excellent for drying mucus membranes and providing relief from colds



and sinus infections. The vast majority of Pines render Oil of Turpentine, useful primarily as an antiseptic. Pine tar is used in veterinary medicine to repel insects and treat skin conditions, among other things.

Pine is much more in demand for use in construction, cabinetry and furniture making and most parts of the tree are used: the wood for crafts and building materials, the pine cones as fire-starters and decorations, the needles for basket-weaving and the pitch for a variety of chemical products. Pine pitch yields rosin for the violinist's bow (as well as a number of other commercial products, such as varnish and sealing wax). Oil of Turpentine; an excellent solvent and paint thinner. Of course, Pine is a wonderful addition to potpourri; just bringing some fresh pine boughs into the home will release a wonderful scent. Pine burns slowly and produces a great deal of smoke and resin – it does not make good firewood; in fact, it creates creosote, which clogs up chimneys and can catch fire if not removed. (Believe it! Suzanne has personal experience with this particular situation. What a mess!) At least one Mediterranean species yields the marvelous pine nuts (pignoli), which, along with lots of fresh basil, olive oil and parmesan cheese, creates basil pesto.

Fir, Pine, Cypress, Larch, Spruce and a few others all fall under the general heading of “true conifers,” that is, cone-bearing trees with needles instead of leaves. Granted, there are a few differences here and there in planetary rulership; but all in all these trees are interchangeable for magical, medicinal and practical purposes. The only Pine native to Ireland, and prevalent throughout the British Isles, is the Scots Pine, *Pinus sylvestris*.

Use Pine to clear negativity. The branches may be used as a besom while the resin may be added to incense for clearing negativity and purifying sacred space. Like acorns, pine cones were carried to increase fertility. Burn the needles (which have a tendency to shoot forth

sparks) to reverse hexes and send negativity back to the sender. Pine is used primarily in money, fertility, protection and exorcism magic.

As with the Elder, the Pine was believed to house a powerful Forest Spirit, usually a Female, who will take revenge on any who harm the Tree. The superstition of knocking on wood to prevent misfortune may have derived from the practice of knocking three times on the trunk of the Tree to allow the Spirit to escape before proceeding to cut into the Tree.

According to Pauline Campanelli, Fir was the most traditional tree for the Beltaine Maypole...generally cut by the young men in the village on May Eve and erected in the village square to be danced around on May Day.<sup>4</sup> Some Maypoles are left up permanently; while others are cut up and distributed as Yule logs to be burned at Winter Solstice. Like the Palm and the Elm, the Fir was considered a birthing tree, sacred to the Goddess. Once it became associated with the Divine Child born at Yule, LIVING Trees were decorated OUTSIDE of the home. Branches and pinecones were brought inside and decorated to scent the home, bring good fortune inside and give the Elementals and Nature Spirits a place to come in from the cold. The custom of killing Trees for Yule decorations is a modern one, and completely contrary to the original intent. Still, as long as the wound is clean and some of the Tree and branches are left, the Tree will eventually grow again. There is no reason to destroy thousands of acres of Trees, even if they are grown commercially. Instead of buying a dying tree (to symbolize a time of rebirth), buy a small "bagged and burlapped" evergreen and plant it in your yard or buy a potted-container Pine instead.

The Fir was sacred to many Moon Goddesses, including Cybele, whose cult ranged over most of Southern and Eastern Europe. The Fir and/or Pine was later linked with her lover Attis, whom Cybele

transformed into a Fir Tree (in some myths, the Goddess changed him into an Almond Tree).

In the British Isles, Oak was the original symbol representing The Divine Child (Oak King/Holly King), but as the celebration of Yule gained in importance with the influx of the Teutonic and Germanic peoples in Britain and the Vikings in Ireland, the Oak gave way to the Silver Fir. The Silver Fir has retained many lunar, and therefore feminine, associations. As with most evergreens, Pine and Fir represent long life, unending joy and vigorous old age.

The Scots Pine, the Silver Fir and the Palm have another thing in common. They are all slender trees which have great strength, grow to great heights and provide vantage points for seeing great distances. Silver Fir, which is native to Ireland, has probably been associated longer with this Ogham few than either of the other two correspondences. 'T was said that the Trojan Horse was made from Silver Fir, and that from it's singularity was given birth to many soldiers.

Often growing tall atop mountain peaks, this tree tends to look over and survey all of the land below it, often towering above many other grand Trees of the forest. It resists all of the highest winds atop these mountains and braves dangers alone, yet part of the greater collective which stands below it.

In Divination: Ailm, as Fir and/Or Elm speaks of sovereignty and independence. Being an individual while acknowledging the union with the collective body from which you come. Ailm is an Ogham which heralds the ability to stand back from situations, even when you are a part of them, and be apart from them, allowing greater objectivity and clarity in decision making. Often this Ogham speaks of a tendency to be too tied up in a situation to see clearly, and that an outside view is necessary. That outside view may come from ones self, as well as from an outsider,

if proper mind set can be achieved

Ailm signals great strength physically and mentally, and an ability to begin this final oghamic cycle which unravels the greater mysteries of life. It is as always, when this Ogham appears it may signal that one possesses these qualities OR that one should SEEK to Possess them.

Sovereignty and independence tend to be too separate things, for one can only be sovereign when it has been recognized by others, though one can claim or proclaim ones independence readily. It requires occasional validation or release from others or release OF others for sovereignty to take place.

Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

I don't have anything to add, really. Personally, I prefer to use Elm, not because I really think it was the original Ailm, but simply because there is so much less magical and folklore material available (as opposed to Fir or Pine) and I enjoy the challenge. I also just happen to like Elm trees. See, we TOLD you to search for your truth, just as we search for ours.

Footnotes:

- (1) Hopman, Ellen E., Tree Medicine, Tree Magic, p. 103
- (2) Ibid, p. 103
- (3) Briggs, Katherine, An Encyclopedia of Fairies..., p. 159
- (4) Campanelli, Pauline, Wheel of the Year, 76

## *Cycle Seventeen*

### *The Magic That Surrounds*

*'T was toward the center of one Dark Time, when the veils between the worlds are thinnest, that the Elders and other Council members gathered. "'Tis Time," said Huath, "to create MAGICK!" Each of the Great Ones issued from their physical bodies a Thought-Form of Spirit, one that could move about more freely than their ever rooted bark bodies. These Tree Spirits gathered within a circle around a crack that issued forth from the Dragon. Fire erupted from the crack, and all proclaimed the work ready to begin.*

*Many Cycles had passed since the Council was formed, and many truths had been uncovered through their meditations and debates, but no truth more powerful than that of the magic of combined principles; the magic of synthesizing their energies, thoughts, ideals, talents, problems, independence and dependence, at the proper time, to manifest whatever was desired.*

*A circle of blue flame danced around the Tree Spirits who now for the first time proclaimed the purpose of their work aloud to this world, and all others who could hear. They wish to manifest, within the physical, a representation of the ideal of synthesis, a green creature to teach the lessons and live the life of growth through combination of elements. Water was summoned to this circle, as was the very wind itself. All joined within the link of thought and energy.*

*The Earth folded up upon the circle, enveloping all in an endless night- And then, there was silence.... a deafening silence louder than an erupting volcano. As sky fire rose and lit Terra below, the consciousness of the trees slowly awakened within each. There all around them they saw the result of their combined efforts, a tight thicket of sorts, lush and green, yet emblazoned with thorns. Already, some of the small four-legged fur-covered ones were living protected within the coils of the thorns, making use of that which drove others away.*

*Her name was Onn, The Gorse, and she would become that which she would teach.*



## O- Onn: Gorse, Furze or Broom

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ONN or OHN

Gorse or Furze (*Ulex europaeus*), though another possibility is Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*)

Other Names: Furze, Broom, Green Broom, Waxen Woad, Greenweed, Prickly Broom, Ruffet, Whin, Frey, Goss, Gorst, Irish Broom, and Link.

Keywords: Synthesis, Focus Energies and Goals, Make Room for New Growth

Magical Associations: Prosperity, Protection, Purification

The rather prickly Gorse was planted in hedgerows to keep out mischievous spirits and faeries.

Burning Gorse or Broom will drive away malevolent spirits, poltergeists and negative energies.

If Broom grows on your property, gracing it with all those lovely golden flowers, it is an indication of good luck and prosperity. Magically, Broom and Gorse are used in money spells because of their reputations for attracting gold, not doubt another reference to their flowers. Carrying the yellow Gorse flowers in white linen is believed to attract gold to the bearer.

The fact that Broom and Gorse flower for much of the year, and that the flowers have a particularly sweet fragrance, probably contribute to the belief that the flowers lift the spirits, cure despair and reduce



Gorse

As Above So Below

melancholy.

#### Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use:

Furze/Gorse is not known for its medicinal properties. There is anecdotal evidence that the flowers were once used to treat scarlet fever and jaundice and the seeds were used for stones and to treat diarrhea. Gorse is also believed to repel fleas and help heal snakebite. Broom, on the other hand, is a very powerful medicinal herb.

Broom has, in common with Gorse, the quality of being a mild purgative and is also reputed to break up stones and gravel. It acts as a vasoconstrictor, thereby raising blood pressure and it stimulates the central nervous system in an action similar to nicotine. Folk medicine recommends the use of Broom, in tincture form, to help soothe EXTERNAL herpes sores.

Broom was (and still is) used in European folk medicine as a diuretic and emetic, but is considered by American herbalists to be too dangerous to use medicinally. Large doses may speed up heartbeat to dangerous levels and toxic reactions can be fatal. Also, smoking Broom can produce hallucinations. Rather than as a medicine, Broom is used today as a yellow dye, particularly effective in dyeing wool.<sup>1</sup>

At one point, botanists believed that Gorse/Furze and Broom were in the same genus and family. The plants are frequently found growing side by side, they look remarkably alike and give off the same type of “energy.” In spite of the fact that while Gorse is covered in spiny prickly leaves, Broom has only tiny leaves and rarely has spines or prickles. Scotch Broom has been introduced and can be found in most states east of the Mississippi. It is also found in several western states where it is considered pretty much a “noxious weed.” Gorse (not called Furze in this country) has also made its way to the US, probably brought by Irish and Scottish immigrants.

Whether in the U.S. or in Europe, Broom and Gorse are shrubs, rather than trees. They are hardy and grow from 2 – 6 feet in height. When in bloom, both species are covered in fragrant golden-yellow flowers. Gorse/Furze creates a natural hedgerow – likened in the U.S. to a thicket or briar patch. The spiny-shaped Gorse leaves are not really thorns, but they can hurt just the same. As the plants age and toughen, the prickles become a danger to livestock, embedding themselves in the animals' mouths.

In fact, Gorse is a favorite food for grazing sheep, and other livestock, and it is routinely ground up and added to feed. Also, fields of Gorse are burned, a procedure that allows the plant to come back softer and far more edible. This practice continues today, but it has obviously been around for some time. Graves recalls a reference from the Cad Goddeau, the poetic Battle of the Trees: “The broom with its children... The furze not well behaved, Until he was tamed.” Graves tells us that this is a reference to the Spring-fires “which make its young shoots edible for sheep.”<sup>2</sup> Burning also drives out abundant wildlife, which is then hunted for food. The thickets are the perfect shelter for small animals and birds.

In Ireland, and other parts of the United Kingdom, there are several varieties of Gorse/Furze and each one – along with Broom – blooms at a slightly different time creating flowers from about April through November. The flowers are frequently blooming when few others are about and it is said that the Gorse will always be visited by the first bees of the year, showing beginnings of new productivity. The relationship between the flowering Gorse (and Broom) and bees probably contributed to the plant's magical correspondence with wealth and fertility.

The plant that we call “Broom,” was traditionally used for making sweeping brooms. Both the plant and the object created from it are symbols of fertility and prosperity. Jumping the Broom at weddings, a custom no doubt linked to the magical symbolism of the plant, was done to ensure a

fertile and fruitful marriage.

One rather odd note from Mrs. Grieves: "The flowering tops were used for house decoration at the Whitsuntide festival but it was considered unlucky to employ them for menial purposes (e.g. sweeping) when in full bloom.

An old Suffolk (England) tradition runs:

'If you sweep the house with blossomed Broom in May  
You are sure to sweep the head of the house away.'" <sup>3</sup>

In Divination: Just as one must adapt or work with the Onn branches to make them usable for feed, or the like; the appearance of this Ogham suggests that you must synthesize that which you have, stirring it all together in some usable form. It suggests that right now the raw materials are there (like the pollen collected by bees) and one may have them in abundance, but it is VITAL to do something WITH them, to blend them together with hard work to obtain the final outcome (honey).

When this Ogham appears as a problem or warning, it often suggests that there may be tendency right now to scatter ones energies in trying to bring together too many unneeded elements at once; and that it is necessary to find and synthesize the PROPER things for the desired outcome.

Onn speaks of wisdom and taking what you know or what you have, adapting it and making it work properly in your new situation or new endeavor. It also is a signpost of the realization of new elements that may need to be brought in. As the bees gather pollen, so too, must you gather and harvest to attain your sweetest reward.

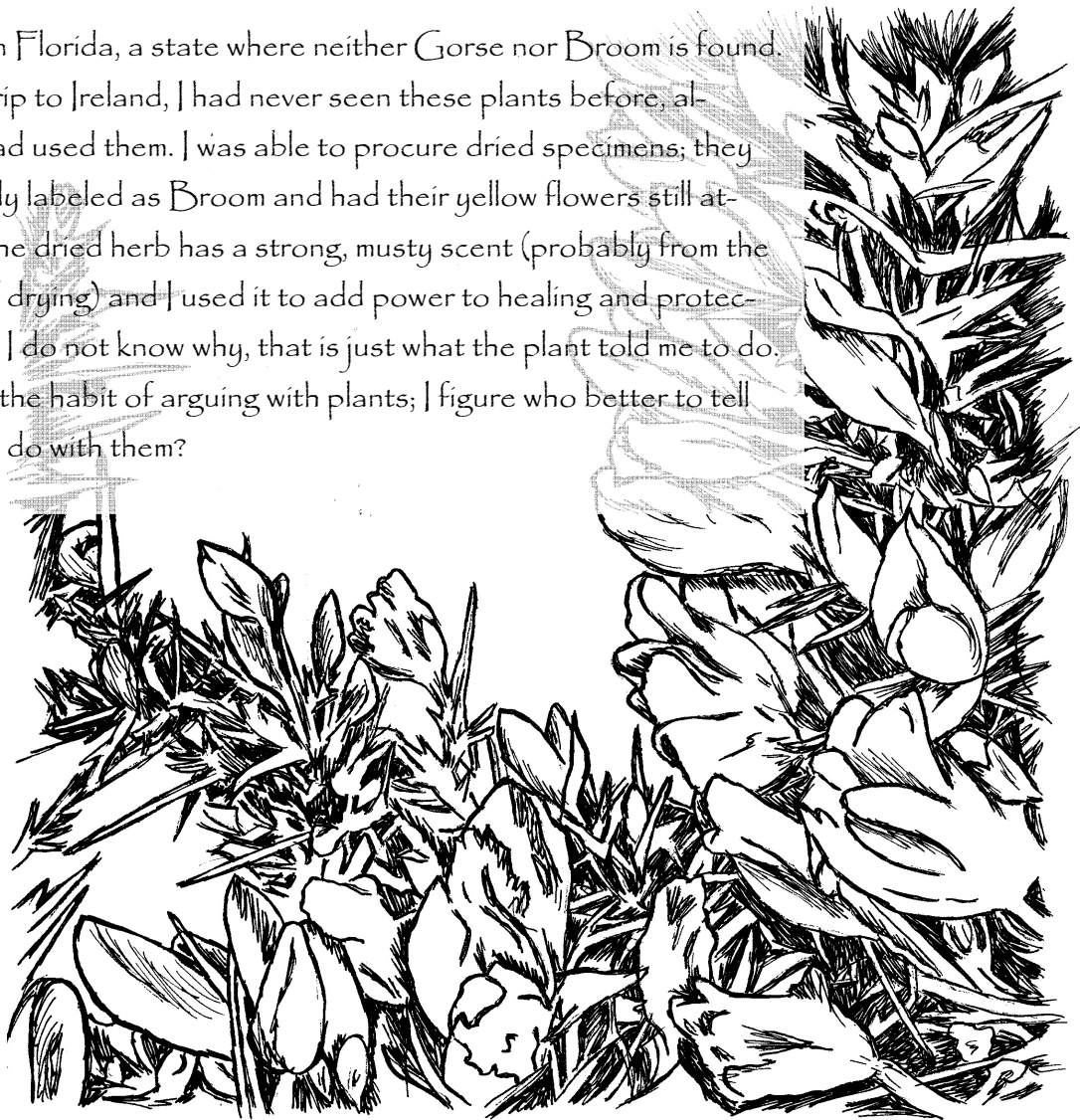
Just as the Gorse fires are lit to create a new harvest, nourishment and life, so too, must one light a fire in ones personal life in order to create any sense of change or continuation. To be renewed and alive, one must

prune back the dead branches and make room for the new growth.

Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

One of the other Trees sometimes associated with the Onn Few is the Ash, primarily because of the association between the Ash and the Spring Equinox. At the time of Spring Equinox, the Gauls worshipped a Maiden Goddess called On-niona in the Ash Groves. Her name is obviously derived from Onn (Gorse) and Nion (Ash).<sup>4</sup> Granted, the reference is tenuous, but I feel obliged to report it.

I grew up in Florida, a state where neither Gorse nor Broom is found. Until my trip to Ireland, I had never seen these plants before, although I had used them. I was able to procure dried specimens; they were usually labeled as Broom and had their yellow flowers still attached. The dried herb has a strong, musty scent (probably from the process of drying) and I used it to add power to healing and protection spells. I do not know why, that is just what the plant told me to do. I am not in the habit of arguing with plants; I figure who better to tell me what to do with them?



I recognized Gorse and Broom the minute I laid eyes on them. In Ireland, they were blooming EVERYWHERE – a riot of the most intense yellow and gold that I had ever seen. Broom also has a touch of orange and sometimes white. The fragrance was wonderful – sweet. I kept trying to figure out why the scent seemed so familiar and then it struck me. This is probably going to sound crazy, but they smelled a bit like Orange Blossoms to me. I associate the Orange Tree with healing and protection, so perhaps there is some sort of metaphysical relationship after all.

Footnotes:

- (1) Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs, p. 55
- (2) A Modern Herbal, online - <http://www.botanical.com>
- (3) Graves, Robert, The White Goddess, p. 192
- (4) Ibid, p. 192

## *Cycle Eighteen*

### *A Gateway of Passion*

*A fire had cleaned the rough branches from the Gorse, who now sprouted new tender green shoots which it offered to some of the rabbits living below. Onn chuckled as the baby bunnies scurried in and out of its new growth, tickling as they did.*

*The Council mused at the fires that breed within the souls of so many of the blood-filled creatures that now increasingly shared their space upon terra. It seemed that within them was a drive of force that came from the heart, the spirit and the soul. It was this fire that catalyzed most change within their plane of existence, be it birth, ending, or any of the other changes in between. It was that inner fire that opened the path that made travel or change possible.*

*Huath spoke at length of the fire within the spirit, a fire he called Passion, a passion which may manifest itself in desire, longing, action, anger, lust, love and in many other ways, but what creates dynamic motivation to or away from some end. It was proposed that the intensity of that energy is what would create that gateway, but an argument ensued. The argument raged not just between the Great Ones, but among the very Elements themselves, each attempting to describe the quality of Passion in their own way.*

*So great was the argument and the internal fires that were stirred in this exchange, that the Earth itself shook and cracked a great fissure through the center of one of its larger masses of dirt. The crack stretched up the Earth Mass from the water which surrounded the dirt all the way to several of the enormous pools of water that lay land locked. With that, an Egress had been created, a Gateway caused by Passion, which started a never ending flow of water from within the continent, outward toward its larger body.*

*At the opening of that gateway, a low green carpet was forming. Dotted with bright red flowers, its name was Ur, the Heather- and it grew in honor of the passionate feelings that shook the very structure of Terra and created the gateway through which that emotion could flow.*

# U-Ur: The Heather

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UR or URA

Heather (*Calluna* spp. including *Calluna vulgaris*: European Heather and *Ericaceae* spp. including Heath and Scotch Heather)

Keywords: Solitude, Obsession, Passionate Beliefs, Opportunities, Controlling Ones' Temper, Spiritual Healing and Development

Magical Associations: Weather-working, Luck, Passion, Protection, Lust (not Love)



Scotch heather

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: The flowering shoots of Heather are the primary source for medicinal use. They are used primarily as vasoconstrictors; Heather constricts the capillaries, thus raising the blood pressure and moderately strengthening the heart. Heather is also used as diaphoretics to increase perspiration and they are believed to stimulate the flow of bile and urine, thus allowing the body to rid itself of toxins. All of the members of the heath family are astringent and diuretic in nature and are considered useful in the treatment of gout, stones, kidney problem, and rheumatism. It is used as a tincture to treat skin disorders and to "beautify" facial skin, probably by opening the pores and improving circulation, thereby bringing color back into the face.

In Wales and Scotland, they brewed a potent drink called Heather Ale. There are also tales of Heather-flavored Mead (honey wine). These beverages were said to be taken as restoratives, no doubt in keeping with the belief that Heather removes toxins from the body. However, there is some evidence that the ale produced some rather intense drug-like hallucinogenic effects, possibly caused by the presence of an ergot-like fungus that flourishes under the Heather leaves.



During different stages of development, and using various parts of the plant, the Heather is a major dye-producing plant, creating green, orange, yellow, purple and brown dyes for dyeing wool. Heather has been used as roof thatching, and basket and rope-making.

The plant itself is a low growing evergreen shrub which tends to spread and reach upward toward the sky. Heather will find a niche to grow in wherever it can and then it will spread once it has taken hold. It is drought resistant, cold resistant and disease resistant, growing in the most meager of environmental conditions – on top of mountain balds in poorly nourished, rocky soil. In fact, one of the interesting things about Heather is that it **MUST** have poor, acid soil in which to thrive.

True Heather is found only rarely in North America. In fact, if you check the Plant Database, there are only a couple of northern states in which the *Calluna* or *Erica* species, in any form, occur. Mountain Heather (*Phyllodoce breweri*), a native of California and Nevada, is part of the *Erica* species and a member of the Heath family. While it is used in making fragrances and as a dye, it has virtually no medicinal use, folk or otherwise. *Calluna vulgaris* L. (Hull), an introduced species of European Heather, may be found in the far northeastern US and the most northern central states.<sup>1</sup>

Graves writes, “The heather is the midsummer tree, red and passionate, and is associated with mountains and bees.”<sup>2</sup> Well, while the Red Heather was thought to inspire passion, the White Heather was believed to control or even protect one against the temptation.

The magical function and symbolism of Heather varies with the color of the flowers. Much in the manner of the Hawthorn blossom,

Heather is believed to incite or cool the passions. White Heather is said to bring the bearer good luck and discourage passionate advances (and violent crime, including rape). Red Heather attracts lusty companions, while pink heather attracts a more gentle love. Purple Heather encourages a love of solitude and contemplation, an admiration of beauty and a love of being in the mountains. Heather was believed to grant long life (immortality in some cases). It is also said to allow a person to remember past lives and to help one connect to the Universal Mind, becoming aware of everything and everyone. That's some powerful magic!

There are references found in the lore on Druids, and the Celts, of an adder's egg, also called a serpent's egg. The references are usually fairly vague and there are several differing versions of the "egg." There is a passage in Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* that is no doubt referring an egg of this type. It mentions that the egg has "power against fairy women," so it is likely that the Heather was once the domain of a Goddess and later of the Faerie Folk. The charm also brings to light the possibility that Heather fields were burnt in much the same manner as the Gorse, most probably at midsummer in honor of the Sun. This charm probably comes from Scotland or Wales:

"This is a thing found among heather, especially old tall unburnt heather. It is alleged that the serpent goes round and round the clump of heather, emitting a froth or spittle from its mouth upon the clump without stop or pause. No one understands why this is: When the spittle emitted by the serpent on the heather plant cools and dries, the stuff grows as hard as a stone but as light as tinder...Old people esteem it highly for its power in healing and for its power against fairy women."<sup>3</sup>

In Divination: Many have associated this Ogham only with passions

of love, but Heather is an Ogham of passion in many ways. It is love, hate, obsession, loathing, action, worship and more. It is NOT passive, it is NOT ambivalent and it is not impartial. Heather is about taking sides and fighting for what one believes in. Heather is about looking for opportunities within AND without to create change and to head toward the passions one seeks or away from those passions which have become more destructive than productive.

Heather is about gateways which exist now or which must be created for the next level of activity or 'obsession' to begin. It speaks of the coming of such "open doors" and an understanding that they do not last forever. As such, one must be ready to use the gateway or seek to return to it later and hope that it has not closed and rusted shut.

Heather can speak of a need to curtail passions or to keep ones' cool either temper-wise or romantically within a given situation, lest the fires of the heart cool the wisdom of the mind and spirit. As a turning point within this final Acme, Heather speaks of finding focus for your passions as you head toward the end of this final cycle.

Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

I was surprised at how difficult it was to find information regarding Heather and not just as a part of the Ogham, but in general. I looked in all sorts of references, but found relatively little magical or symbolic information, other than a bit of color-associated magick. It appears, to me at least, to have been an extremely important plant in Ireland and Scotland, so I don't really know why there was not more available.

For some inexplicable reason, Robert Graves suggested that the Linden, or Lime Tree, could be substituted for Heather in flat regions where Heather does not grow. Why Graves made this suggestion is beyond me – there are really no similarities between Heather and the Linden in medicinal use, growth habits or folk lore (magic or otherwise) and, of course, even Graves admits that the Linden did not rank among the sacred trees in Britain.<sup>4</sup> About the only thing that Heather and the Linden have in common is their mutual association with luck.

Heather is a very friendly plant; it generates feelings of well-being and warmth. It is also extremely assertive, growing in the most unusual places. I have found Mexican Heather (a cultivar and, to my knowledge, the only type that grows in Florida) trying to grow UNDERNEATH the rocks in my garden. I associate Heather with Nature Spirits. Not the Faerie Folk, but with the small, Deva-type spirits that help the plants grow. I have been fortunate to witness them moving about, dancing if you will, in and around clumps of Heather and enjoying themselves immensely.

Footnotes:

- (1) The Plant Database, <http://plants.usda.gov>
- (2) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 192
- (3) Carmichael, Alexander, *Carmina Gadelica* p. 380
- (4) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 192

# *Cycle Nineteen*

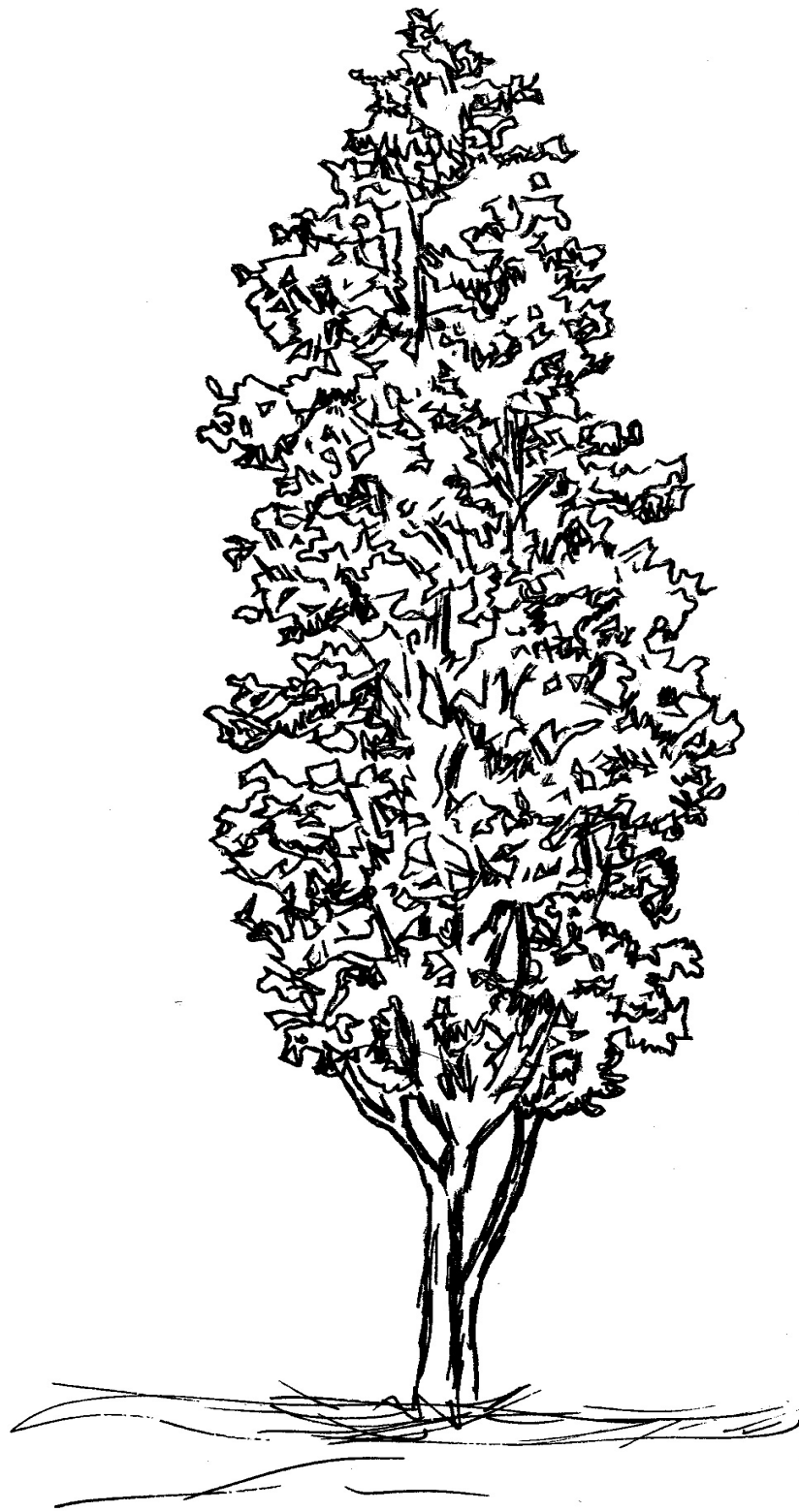
## *Triumph In Surrender, Surrender In Triumph*

Saille awoke with fright and described to the others a dream.

In this Dream, Saille was not a Great One, but one of the two-legged creatures that were prognosticated to come, when the era of the Great Ones was to end. Lost and alone within a forest, she was cold and hungry. Though all around her were life giving plants, trees and animals, she had no knowledge of how to use them or how to ask them for help, and so she wept in fear and anger. It was seen that she was about to be overcome with hunger and exposure and cease to be, something Saille didn't yet completely understand, but that she knew was a mystery which caused fear in these two-legged creatures. And then, on the edge of the end, Saille's Dream-Self released the melancholy burden of sanity. In the visions that followed, she was led by a voice, later to be realized as the voices of the Great Ones calling her to safety. The voice led her to water, shelter and a field of berries which were used to satiate her appetite and allow her to live yet another day.... Then she awakened.

The Council proclaimed the wisdom within Saille's dream to be the heralding of the final and greatest of the Great Ones; A Tree to be called Edath, The Aspen Tree, which shall come to represent overcoming obstacles and being overcome by them. It will offer a realization that within each winning is loss and within each loss is winning, and that there is no such thing as a situation that can not be overcome. Edath was born, and the Cycles, it seemed were complete.

And then a dark thing happened.....



## E- Eadha: The Aspen

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EDATH (eadah)

Aspen - European Aspen (*Populus tremula*) and Black Poplar (*Populus nigra*) are found in Europe. *Populus tremula*, though introduced, is rarely found in the United States. Both the European Aspen and the American Aspen have the characteristic "quaking" leaves.

Other Names: Trembling Poplar, Quaking Aspen, Aspen Poplar, White Poplar

Keywords: Facing Fear, Solutions at Hand, Faith, Rebirth, Communicating with the Divine and with Spirit Guides

Magical Associations: Relieves mourning and grief, Repels thieves, Instills Verbal Eloquence

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: The winter-time buds of the Quaking Aspen are especially good used in a salve as a treatment for external rashes and skin wounds or made into a tea for sore throats and coughs. Poplar buds have long been incorporated into cosmetic skin-care products, especially as a preservative. All varieties of Aspen and Poplar are close relatives of the Willow family (*Salicaceae*). The bark of the tree contains salicylates, the primary ingredient in aspirin and used, obviously, to treat fevers and pain associated with headaches, toothaches, arthritis and rheumatism. The Balsam Poplar (*Populus balsamifera*) Note: Balsam Poplar, *Populus canadensis* - also called Balm of Gilead - is a variation) is used in the treatment of bronchial illnesses such as chronic bronchitis and asthma



where it is used as an inhalant. Ironically, although the buds are used in treating respiratory problems, the pollen from the Poplar is a common cause of respiratory allergies.

In America, the Big-Toothed Aspen (*Populus grandidentata*) is a native found throughout much of the eastern United States (from North Carolina northward and over to Michigan). Quaking Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) is another native and is found distributed widely in the US, missing only from the southern portion of the country. Aspen is closely related to the Cottonwood Tree (*Populus L.*) distributed widely throughout the 50 states. The Lombardy Poplar (*Populus nigra*), called the Black Poplar in Europe is an introduced species and also widely distributed in the US.<sup>1</sup>

Aspen Trees generally favor higher climates and mountainous regions, while Poplars and Cottonwoods are usually found at lower elevations and near water. The famous "Quaking Aspen" a.k.a. "Trembling Poplar" is actually the American variety of this tree, not the European variety. The Quaking Aspen is one of the many species of Poplar which have petioles, or leafstalks; these stalks are flattened, so that the leaves move from side to side, but not up or down. Even the slightest of breezes can set all of the leaves "trembling." The primary immediate difference between the European Aspen and the American Aspen is the color of the bark: young American Aspens have a pale white bark which turns brown as the tree ages; the European variety has a dark grey to blackish bark and generally grows much larger than its American counterpart (although some American Aspens have been known to reach 100 feet in height).

The Tree is naturally very drought resistant, and can withstand many hardships yet still service. Their roots are very strong and will crack sidewalks, pipes, and house foundations. Poplars release a marvelous, fresh scent, and make wonderful shade Trees. Like the Birch, the



Poplar has a relatively short life span and, again like Birch, they are pioneer trees, able to colonize and take over areas of burned forest and new soil.

Although the trees vary in appearance from species to species, all have similar medicinal and magical properties. The Tulip Poplar, a popular ornamental tree in the U.S., is related to the Magnolia, not the Aspen/Poplar, and should not be used as a substitute.

Eadha, Aspen or Poplar, is frequently associated with fear, uncertainty or lamentation and grief. Black Poplar was used to make rulers and, in Ancient Ireland, the fé (measuring wands) used by coffin-makers on corpses to measure for both coffin and grave. This tree was regarded as a funerary tree and sacred to Mother Earth in pre-Hellenic Greece.<sup>2</sup>

Poplar is softwood, not particularly good for building, but great for pulp and light, serviceable objects. The lumber is used primarily for paper pulp, crates, kitchen utensils (used for this in ancient times as well) and matches.

Poplar wood was also for shield-making because it was thought that the use of this wood would protect a soldier from death and disease. It was generally believed that the constantly trembling leaves were "talking" to the wind and the wind was the messenger of the Gods. "Poplar wood brought protection and endurance, and it also helped the aspirant to hear the guidance of the spirit as it moved within and without."<sup>3</sup>

The "Quaking Aspen" is believed to protect the frightened or those easily given to panic. In the wind, its leaves shimmer and shake as if the tree is alive with fright over some unseen, perhaps imagined enemy. Or perhaps the tree is simply afraid of havoc the two-leggeds are wrecking

on its neighborhood.

Interestingly, although Aspen and Poplar share so many of the same traits, Scott Cunningham gives Aspen a Masculine/Mercury/Air rulership and assigns Poplar a Feminine/Saturn/Water one.<sup>4</sup> As with other Saturn-ruled plants, many of which are hallucinogenic, the Poplar buds are cited as an ingredient in traditional flying ointments. Poplar buds, especially those of the Balsam Poplar, are carried to draw prosperity to the bearer. Aspen is more closely associated with anti-theft, protection and eloquence magic. Placing an aspen leaf under the tongue was thought to produce eloquent speech.

The ancient Greeks believed that the Tree once was the Heliades, the sisters of Phoethon, who rode his father's chariot into the Sun. The sisters' grief was so great that they transformed into Poplars and their tears became amber in the streams.<sup>5</sup> This association with death and with Saturn probably accounts for the Yew Tree sometimes being substituted for Aspen in the Eadha Few.

In Divination: Aspen speaks of the need to face fears, to overcome them. It speaks of overcoming adversity or being overcome by it. Aspen is a tree of protection and of finding within ones' self the will to do even that which one fears, with faith that it will turn out for the best.

Aspen is a tree of overcoming great odds and difficulties and seeing hard times through to the bitter, and often NOT so bitter, end. When Eadha appears it can herald breakthroughs in current problematic situations, or things which have been solid and ever present that are about to be overcome by the resentments that have been ignored for too long.

Eadha warns against ignoring situations that may be unpleasant, but rather suggests dealing with them and facing them now so that they can

not get out of hand or too set in place to be easily dealt with later.

Once we have succeeded in coming through this period of overcoming, we are then ready to proceed to the next cycle...

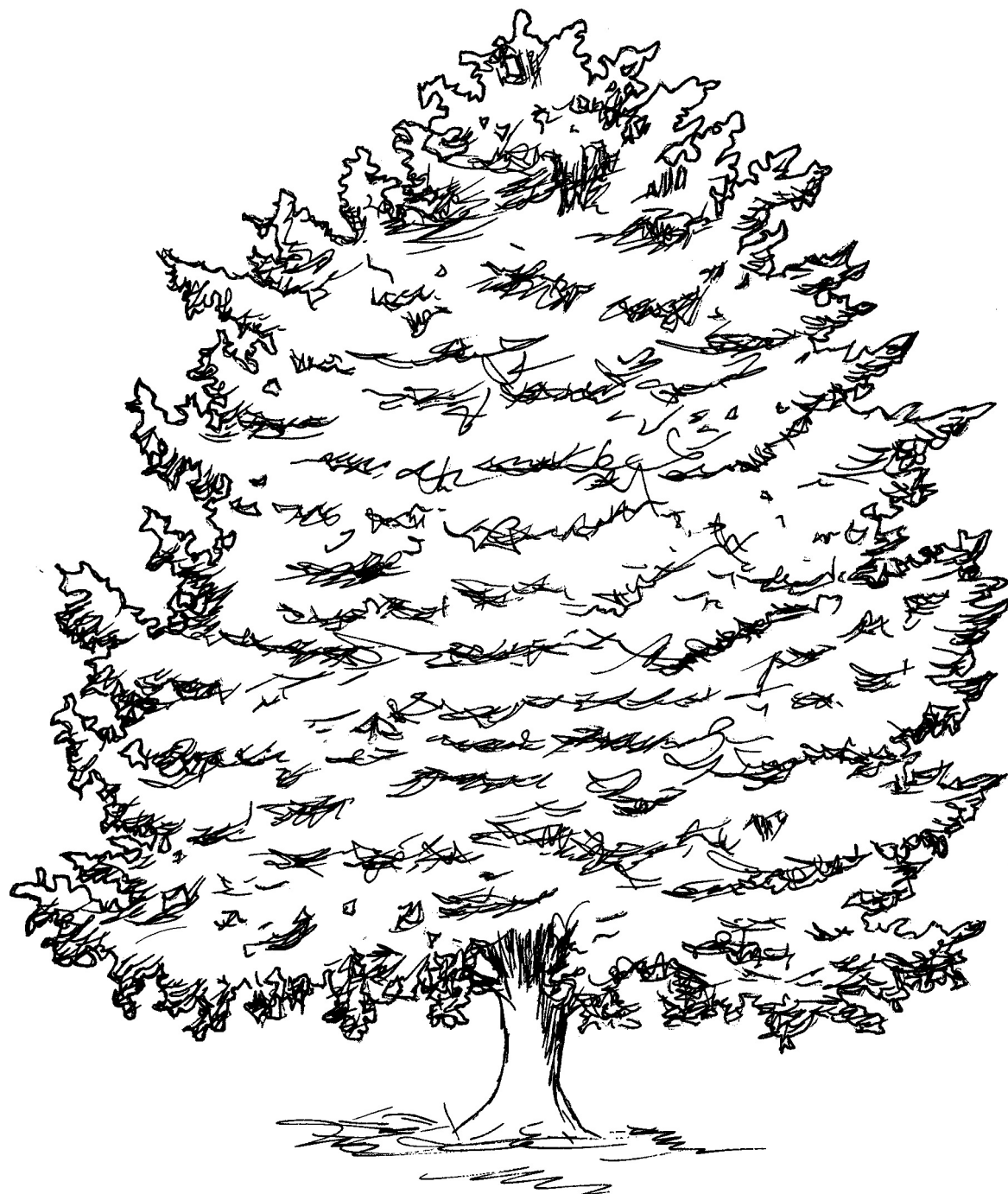
Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

I've never picked up a sense of fear or nervousness. Have you ever watched an Aspen or Poplar? To me, it's all about communication. Yes, the leaves quiver and shake with regularity, but it is not quite as constant as the literature would have us believe. The sense that you are watching (or eavesdropping on) a conversation is very real. The leaves quiver and then come to rest, just long enough that it appears as though the Tree is listening to some unseen party; then the leaves begin shaking again as though in response.

The Poplar is a beautiful tree; the leaves are a whitish gray on the bottom and bright green on the top, which, of course, only adds to the appearance of constant movement. Very much like the Willow, the Poplar speaks in whispers. You have to be very still, inside and out, to understand the feelings/thoughts emanating from the Tree. In Europe, the Aspen was frequently associated with a loss of hope. I just don't see it. For me, the Tree seems to be a reminder to be flexible and sway with the wind while holding on, even in the worst of storms. Hold on, because there is a promise of new things to come.

Footnotes:

- (1) The Plant Data Base
- (2) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 193
- (3) Hopman, Ellen, E., *Tree Medicine, Tree Magic*, p. 131
- (4) Cunningham, Scott, *Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs*, pp. 41, 182
- (5) Hopman, Ellen, E., *Ibid*, p. 131



# *The Final Cycle*

## *What Ends This?*

The Oldest Oak stood high atop a mountain, having been struck many times by Light Vine from the sky, having lived through fire and drought, having seen what would one day be called Eons come and go- and felt then a streak of fear. This odd feeling spread through the Forests of the Earth, all knew that something- unknown- was about to happen. Attention turned from all points around the globe toward that one Oak who now found itself in the throws of a transformation that it did not understand.

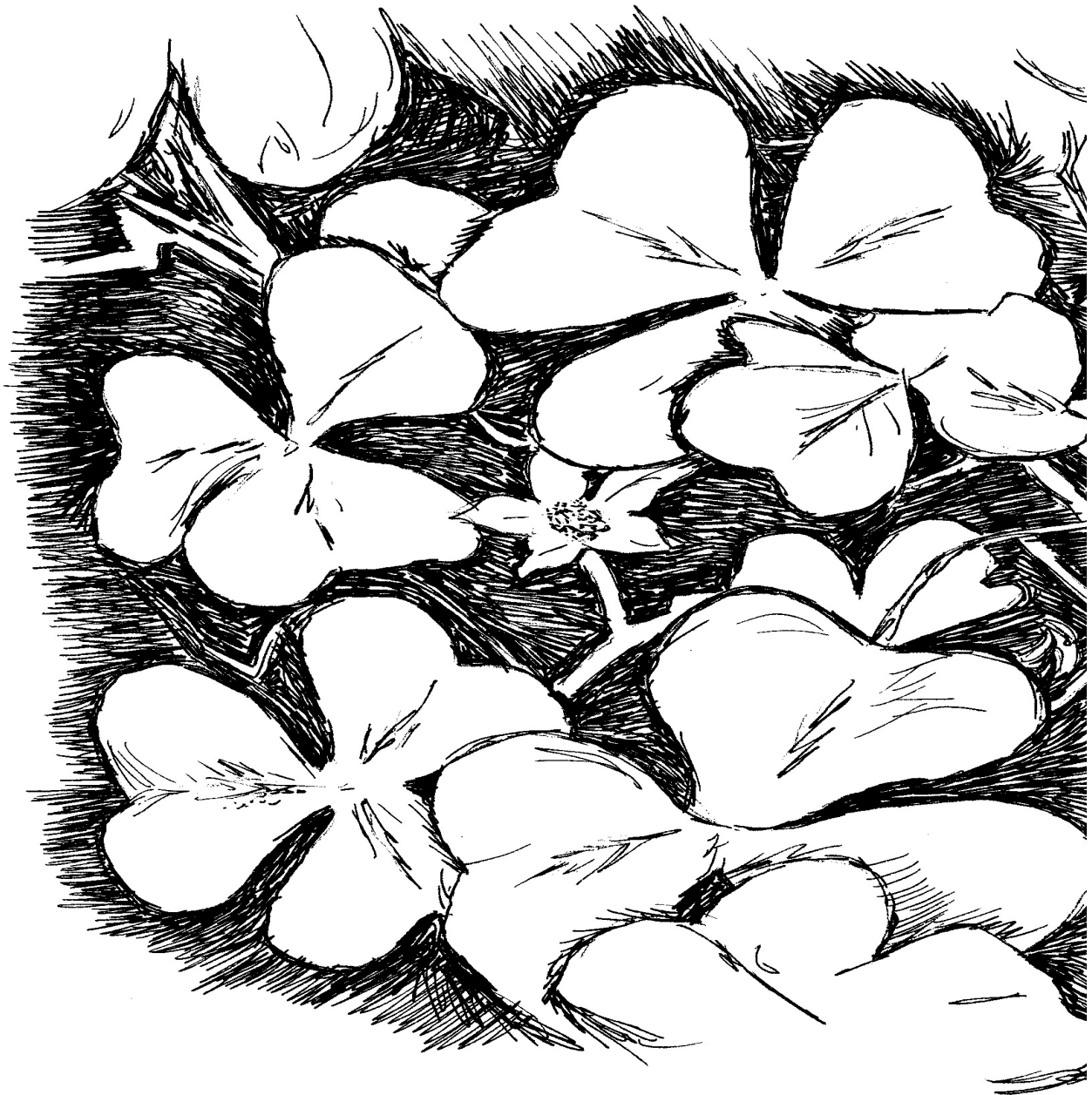
Like a great black cloud it fell from the sky, a cloaked figure neither fire nor water, with a cold and stale odor about it. It proclaimed that it was called Death and it had come for the Oak. Duir feared and resisted the attack of this dark Otherworldly spirit, crying and shrieking a sound which made leaves fall and bark crack all around the Great Dragon which for once also seemed helpless. But Death exclaimed....

"Accept me, and all will grow and continue - refuse me, and cease to be." In some small way, Death had a sound of compassion within its voice. "For it is the right of all with free will and thought to refuse me, but to do so is to be doomed to endless stagnant existence." And Oak's perception of Death slowly changed.

All fell silent among the Great Ones. The clover held its breath, the bees landed upon the ground and Cor folded its wings in somber deference to what was about to be witnessed. Death spread its cloak and became a tree with great tall strong branches which surrounded the Duir. As The Oak perished within the center of this new Tree, life was created around it. This new tree called Idath, the Yew, spoke promise of new Cycles for all eternity, as its mysteries are further revealed to all who choose to embrace it.

There was a rustle within the vacant center of the giant Yew tree and then, from within it, two new creatures climbed out. Like those from the visions of Huath and Saille they were fragile, barkless, with split stems that ended in soft warm ends that never rooted into the ground. One day they would number many and be called Humans. One day, they would forget from whence they came. One day...

And then, a Clover laughed.



# I-Idho The Yew

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Idho (Eye-tho)

Yew (English or European Yew; *Taxus baccata*)

Other Names: Chinwood

Keywords: Death and Transformation, The Cycle Begins Anew



Magical Associations: Spiritual Protection, Communicating and Raising the Spirits of the Dead, Granting Immortality

Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use: Before we report the following we state: It is best not to use Yew in ANY type of herbal medical treatment. There are many other herbs which produce the same effects and which are much safer to use. You can poison yourself by incorrectly handling Yew leaves and berries. Granted, it is primarily the English Yew, *Taxus baccata*, that contains so many toxins, but various parts of other Yew species are also problematic.

We did not expect the English Yew to have many medicinal associations, since nearly every part of the plant is highly toxic. But the berries, needles and branch tips have been used in folk medicine for centuries. Yew was used as an expectorant to treat coughs and bronchial congestion. It was also used as a purgative and diuretic and was believed to be an effective treatment in bladder and kidney problems, arthritis and rheumatism and liver problems. Yew also provides a source for the heart medication, Digitalis.



Well, folklore and modern research have combined to find a new – and much needed – use for the Yew. Taxol is a chemical derived from the



bark of the Pacific Yew (*Taxus brevifolia*), a native of the western United States. Taxol was approved as a treatment for ovarian and other types of cancer in 1992 and for breast cancer in 1994. Unfortunately, these drugs require a large amount of bark and the Pacific Yew is scarce and a protected species. Synthetic taxol is on the market and researchers are investigating the possibility of extracting larger amounts of the drug from the needles and berries of the Pacific Yew and various other species of Yew.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Tree of Death may yet yield Life; time and research will tell.

Because Yew is classified as a conifer, it is considered a soft wood, like Pine. To the contrary, Yew produces a very close-grained hard, but pliable wood, one of the reasons that Yew was highly prized as a wood for competition-grade archery bows and as hunting bows. The best archery bows are still made from this beautiful wood. Yew is especially prized for the wonderful colors contained within the heartwood: patterns and textures in shades of orange, streaked with purples and browns that become glorious when left in the hands of wood artisans. These craftspeople create objects of beauty and practicality: game boards, furniture, jewelry and all sorts of decorative objects. For that matter, Yew has also been the subject of art – a famous Van Gogh painting (1888) is entitled “Trunk of an Old Yew Tree.”

The English Yew, *Taxus baccata*, has shiny green needle-like leaves and beautiful red berries which last all winter long. Birds love the berries and the Tree provides nourishing food during the cold winter months when little else is available. On the other hand, the foliage and seeds of Yew contain highly toxic alkaloids and livestock is routinely poisoned, at least by the English Yew. The poisons stop the heart of an animal so suddenly that no symptoms are seen; the animal simply drops dead. This fact alone would be enough of a reason for a number of folk tales and the association between Yew and Death.



Frequently, several Yews grow together, creating one massive Yew. Over time, this single entity, though it may be HUGE in diameter, will rot from the inside out, creating a completely hollow center. Yet, the tree lives on – Yew may be one of the oldest living creatures on Earth. Scientists believe that some specimens are over 2,000 years old. All varieties of Yew are evergreen and, in winter, full of life while all around them are dead and withered. As is the case with evergreens, the Yew was associated with Immortality, as much because of Yew's incredibly long life-span as its evergreen properties.

Yew (and/or Rowan) was, and still is, planted in church yards and by grave markers to calm restless spirits and immobilize them. Graves writes that, in Brittany... “church-yard yews will spread a root to the mouth of each corpse.”<sup>2</sup> Stakes of Yew were rumored to be the wood-of-choice for killing vampires. For that matter, magical items of all types, such as runes, wands and staves, have been created since ancient times from the twisted shaft of the Yew. Continuing the death theme, not only was Yew used to create bows, spears and darts, but the toxins found in the Yew's berries were frequently used to dress the tips with poison, making the weapons even more deadly. As with many Death-Trees, the Yew was used on spiritual quests to provide divinatory insight. Shamans knew of the Yew's odd properties as they inhaled the vapor of the Yew sap to induce prophetic visions and allow them to communicate with the dead.

A clue into the Yew's vast variety of magical uses is found in this old verse from the *Carmina Gadelica*. It happens to be titled “Mountain yew, or juniper,” but it certainly describes the European Yew as well. “I will pluck the gracious yew ...against... distress, misfortune, fatigue, hardness, pain, anguish of breast, drowning, danger, fear.”

And so, this Tree ends the cycle of the Oghamic Fews; it represents Death and Transformation. But what a complicated monosyllabic

word: Death. Death means many things...

On a purely physical level Death means an end to physical functions, a time when the physical body has simply worn out and ceases to be viable. It is a time when the Spirit must move on; it must make transition so that a new physicality may begin and so all bodily elements may return to their base forms and realign with the universe around them.

But death is not an end; for just as this final Oghamic character brings to an end a 20 year cyclic calendar, it also signals a time to begin anew and start the cycle over again. It is not the end from a start to a linear finish perspective; but rather, a signal that the loops of the Universal Tree have overlapped and it is time, once again, to begin tracing their path with new experiences and new tools in hand. The journey is always new, yet ever the same as we make these transitions over and over. In death there is life - and so it begins again.

In Divination - Just as the nutrients of the physical body return to their base form, Yew, the Final Ogham, signals a time or need for us to do the same - to regroup and begin anew. In order for us to progress to the next step, to discover new territories, we must accept the quietus upon us and allow it to fall into the past; allow it to be broken down into its base elements of experience and memories. The past is not forgotten, nor does it cease to exist, but with this tree we see that only through death - and an acceptance of that which must or shall end - may we truly make transition. To do otherwise is to cease to grow and cease to exist.

And since Death signals another new birth, this tree symbolizes IMMORTALITY and an understanding that the more things end and change; the more they begin again and remain the same. It suggests that it is time to induce or set up the proper conditions to gain the insight you seek, and to understand that upon which you are about to embark

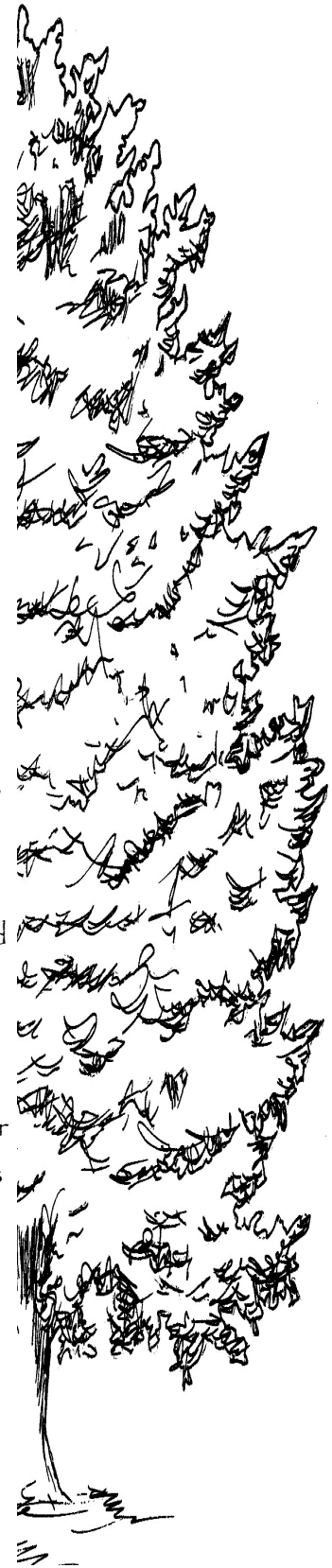
Because we are often limited by our human perceptions, we will tend to perceive upcoming death (be it psychic, spiritual, relationship-oriented, change of job or what have you) as being unhappy, sad, or melancholy but, with a proper approach, these feelings can be minimized.

We need to remember that if the Yew tree refused to allow its' center to die it would not continue to grow outward to attain its incredible proportions. By denying its nature, it would affect that nature and, thus, cease to be. And being a Yew is what it does best.

Additional Thoughts from Suzanne:

I have always been an avid admirer of the Yew – there is so much folklore and legend surrounding it and I had read of the medical research. Still, I wasn't prepared for my first encounter with the real thing. I grew up in Florida and I had only seen the Florida Yew (*Taxus floridana*). While it is a genuine Yew, it is shrubby, with a spindly trunk, perhaps a 10 – 12" in diameter – not a particularly impressive tree in physical form or in energy. Then I went to Ireland and, to my very good fortune, came upon an Ancient One: a Yew that must have been at least 400 years old, if not much older. I was reasonably certain that I recognized it, but it was so different from anything I had seen that I consulted with a park ranger (or whatever she was called) and asked for identification and confirmed that this was, indeed, an English Yew that was several hundred years of age.

I cannot even begin to describe it. The trunk was fairly pale in color and I could not have gotten my arms around it no matter how hard I tried. The trunk looked like it was made up of vertically placed, incredibly thick ropes (which may have been multiple



trunks); the foliage was very dark and the roots were enormous. I don't even know how tall the tree was, I was so impressed by the sheer girth of it and the energy emanating from it. I had never been in the presence of such a Tree as this before. It completely changed my view of the Yew.

Since I do not have access to such an incredible specimen, I would just as soon make some substitutions in my magic. Some texts on the Ogham list, as a substitute for Yew, a tree called the Service Tree (*Sorbus domestica*), a relative of Rowan or Mountain Ash and an almost exclusively European species. The Service Tree does not really have the same connotations (physical, magical or medicinal) as the Yew and, besides, it would be just as difficult to come by here in the states. Therefore, I had to come up with a different alternative.

After closely comparing the two species, I have found that the Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) is extremely similar to the Yew in almost every detail. Juniper is native and plentiful in Europe (including Ireland), Asia and North America. The growth habits of Juniper range from a two foot shrub to a 25-30 foot tree. The Juniper is very similar in appearance to the Yew, blooms about the same time, but the berries remain a black-purple and do not turn red. Dried Juniper berries are, of course, the primary flavoring used in gin. Juniper provides much of the same medical support and is generally safe to use, provided that the dosage is carefully regulated. Juniper provides a safer, and equally effective, substitute for Yew in magical spells.

Footnotes:

- (1) Edwards, Neil, University of Bristol, 1996, <http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Chemistry/MOTM/taxol/taxol.htm>
- (2) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 194
- (3) Carmichael, Alexander, *Carmina Gadelica*, p. 369

# Mistletoe- The 21st Ogham?

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Here, we reach the most revered of the Sacred Plants of the Druids, the Mistletoe. Mistletoe, or Ulioc, was one of the most magical, sacred and revered plants within the Druidic beliefs, yet it appears to have been excluded from the Ogham. It is no good arguing that Mistletoe was not found in Ireland, since there are several other Trees associated with Ogham that are found elsewhere in Britain or in Gaul. The Druids were among the most traveled of their fellows (of the time) and they apparently shared information and communicated with fellow Druids scattered throughout the Celtic World. Graves writes, "Although in ancient Irish religion there is no trace of a mistletoe cult, and the mistletoe does not figure in the Beth-Luis-Nion, to the Gallic Druids...it was the most important of all trees." <sup>1</sup> It just seems odd, to us, to exclude Mistletoe from a system based on Plant Deity, though we must consider that it was regarded as to be too sacred to be named. The texts that have chosen to include Mistletoe usually interpret it as the letter "Y," (and a few authors lump it in with Muin), but on an intuitive level, and having had it confirmed by personal guides, we feel that a blank stem line, like a Blank Tarot Card or a Blank Rune used by some readers, Suzanne included, is an excellent representation of this special plant.



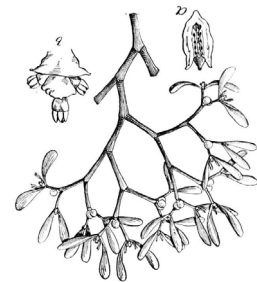
Ulioc, All Heal, The Unnameable One

OO-LEE-OC The Mistletoe (European Mistletoe, *Viscum album*) and American Mistletoe (*Phoradendron* spp.)

Other Names: All Heal, Golden Bough, Witches Broom, Wood of the Cross, Holy Wood, Thunderbesem, Misseltoe, Devil's Fuge, Birdlime, The Unnameable One

Keywords: Overcoming Difficulties, The Unknowable, Fate, The

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## Universe in Balance

### Magical Associations: Spiritual and Physical Protection, Fertility, Love, Healing and Health

**Medicinal and/or Cosmetic Use:** Since ancient times, Mistletoe has been regarded by healers as a panacea, a cure-all for any number of conditions. American and European mistletoe contain different enzymes and have slightly different medicinal effects. American Mistletoe has been used predominantly as an emetic and nervine, although it has been used to treat a variety of diseases and disorders including, but not limited to: epilepsy, convulsions, heart problems, nervous conditions and delirium. (Actually, Mistletoe is more likely to cause delirium). Native Americans used mistletoe as an abortifacient, as it was known to stimulate uterine contractions. In Europe, Mistletoe has been valued as a cardiac, diuretic, and vasodilator. It affects the circulatory system, increasing blood flow and affecting the blood pressure; for these reasons, European Mistletoe has been used in the past in treating arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). European Mistletoe was also used as a remedy for nervous conditions and epilepsy and as a heart tonic to lower the blood pressure and strengthen the heart. The white berries were also believed to cure impotence and restore fertility. In either species, Mistletoe is quite poisonous and large doses can stop the heart, bring on convulsions, hallucinations and death.

Believe it or not, European Mistletoe is actually native to California! There are many species of American Mistletoe, (*Phoradendron* spp.), both introduced and native, which are found throughout most of the United States. Only the most northern central states appear not to have "true" Mistletoe. In most areas, Mistletoe is considered a pest and a noxious weed.<sup>2</sup> Mistletoe grows as a large bushy plant, about 2 to 5 feet in diameter. Mrs. Grieves writes, "It will grow... on almost any deciduous tree, preferring those with soft bark, and being, perhaps,

commonest on old Apple trees, though it is frequently found on the Ash, Hawthorn, Lime and other trees. On the Oak, it grows very seldom.”<sup>3</sup>

Oghamically speaking, Mistletoe has no writable character, as it was considered too sacred to be given a name. Later, it became known as Ulioc, which means All Heal. It seems a bit of irony on the part of the Druids, to name something "All Heal" which is, in fact, quite poisonous. It is even said that the wrong dose of All Heal will cure all of ones' ailments at once. Mistletoe is a parasitic plant; it draws all nourishment from the host tree itself, via a thread-like root which eventually pierces the bark and penetrates the tree. At the same time, Mistletoe is said to absorb any poisonous substances affecting the Tree. Mistletoe is primarily propagated by birds through their droppings, thus, earning the folkname, Birdlime. It also sticks to, and eventually drops from, the birds' beaks and feathers.

Mistletoe was considered especially magically potent because it remained green throughout the winter, even upon the dormant Trees, radiating Life even in the time of Death. Both European and American species of Mistletoe are evergreens which grow on a variety of deciduous trees including apple, pear, lime (linden), and hawthorn. Of course, the Mistletoe was most prized by the Druids when found growing on the Sacred Oak Tree. Mistletoe was viewed as the sacred heart of the Oak. The ceremony of "Gathering the Mistletoe" was, in effect, the vicarious sacrifice of one of the most powerful of Gods, whose Spirit resided within the Oak. The green leaves represented the Goddess, while the white berries, some say, represented the semen of the God; therefore, Mistletoe was a symbol of magical and holy unions, the balance of opposites, the OtherWorld and the UnderWorld and all things sacred and magical.

When we say "all things sacred and magical", we mean just that. Name a

magical goal and chances are you will find that Mistletoe can be used to obtain it: Protection, Fertility, Healing, Hunting, Invisibility, Exorcism, Success, Love, Lust (cooling and increasing), Warding off illness and much more. One of the most important considerations in the magical use of Mistletoe was the time at which it was gathered. For example, Mistletoe gathered in the summer (red berries) was often used for protection while in the winter (white berries), fertility was more often the goal. Sprigs of Mistletoe were placed in cradles as protection and to ward the child from being stolen by the Faerie Folk.

Rosemary Guiley writes, "The only extant detailed account of a Druid ceremony comes from Pliny...on the sixth day of the moon, a Druid garbed in a white robe climbed an oak tree and, with his left hand, cut the mistletoe with a gold sickle...which...was caught in a white cloth. Two bulls were sacrificed and a feast held. It was believed that if the mistletoe was allowed to touch the ground, misfortune would befall the entire community."<sup>4</sup>

In Divination: The Few can be left blank, or sport a blank stem line, and in reading it can be used similar to a blank Tarot card, or Odin's Rune - to represent the unknowable: information from this point on is veiled, cryptic and not to be seen just yet. Leave it in the hands of the Gods.

Ullio also is a tile of magical connections surrounding the situation, that some of what is happening is fated to be. It has been written in the waters and, as such, shall flow to its end. It speaks of Universal Balance: good and evil, Goddess and God, night and day. It speaks of the magical conflicts going on and that they must see their end before a new cycle can begin. Mistletoe is a sort of Wild Card which adds various meanings to any reading, including that of remaining alive and fertile when all that around you is barren.



It also points out that the situation right now may be volatile and 'poisonous,' should you ingest too much of it too soon. T read carefully if making path changes when mistletoe appears.

Mistletoe says that Magic is around every corner. Live magically and in harmony with thy true will and true purpose and all shall be in divine order.

Footnotes:

- (1) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 40
- (2) The Plant Database, <http://plants.usda.gov/>
- (3) A Modern Herbal, <http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/m/mistle40.html>
- (4) Guiley, Rosemary, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, p. 108

# The Calendar

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There have been dozens of books and there are, virtually, hundreds of websites discussing and promoting the Celtic Tree Calendar, a 13-month lunar system, based on the Sacred Trees of the Ogham, as THE ancient Pagan calendar of the Druids. Is the calendar an ancient tool? Did the Druids actually rely on it to show the passing of months, years? At one time, both of these questions were held to be true.

Yet Graves himself writes, “[I first found the Beth-Luis-Nion tree-alphabet in Roderick O’Flaherty’s ‘Ogygia;’ he presented it, with the Boibel-Loth, as a genuine relic of Druidism...said to have been latterly used for divination only...I noticed almost at once that the consonants of this alphabet form a calendar of seasonal tree-magic, and that all the trees figure prominently in European folklore.”<sup>1</sup> Graves then goes on to discuss each tree and assign a period of time to it; thus, it appears that he created the calendar in or around 1948, using various mythos



from a number of different cultures to back up his theories.

However, remember we said at the beginning of this book that this is *OUR* truth and that you need to discover *YOUR* truth. Well, our truth decided not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater! Frankly, *ANY* attempt to place calendrical correspondences on the Oghamic characters is completely contrived and, because of this, one system is no more or less valid than another. Whether or not the Celtic Tree Calendar is actually a relic of the past or a thoroughly modern invention, it is immensely useful and we enjoy working with it.

As you read various versions of the Tree Calendar a number of things come to light. First, if this was a genuine lunar calendar, the dates would not be fixed. Second, different authors assign different starting dates, some setting the New Year at Samhain, others placing it at Yule. There is more than enough evidence that the Insular Celts, particularly the Irish, viewed Samhain as the New Year, the death of the Light Half of the Year and the birth of the Dark Half. The Druids, however, being primarily solar-oriented, placed a great deal more importance on Yule, and, over time, many of the customs and associations that were once part of Samhain in the British Isles were transferred to Yule, starting with the Druids and continuing through successive invasions by the Norse, Danes and the Teutonic and Germanic tribes.

Our modern calendar came about primarily because Julius Caesar decided that the old Roman calendar was simply too complicated. He created the Julian Calendar in which a year had 365 days with an extra day added every four years. Due to a mistake, the extra day was added *EACH* year and some fancy foot-work was needed to straighten out the mess. Our solar-based modern calendar was adopted in 1582 and named for Pope Gregory XIII. The Gregorian calendar – the one we now use – was constructed to give a close ap-



proximation to the tropical year (referring to the mean interval between the vernal equinoxes) which is the actual length of time it takes for the Earth to complete one orbit around the Sun.<sup>2</sup>

We could get into all sorts of technical discussions about solar, lunar and luni-solar calendars, but that would get us way off track (and probably bore most readers to tears). Simply put, a genuine lunar calendar, such as the Islamic Calendar or the ancient Greek Calendar, does not factor in seasonal changes, e.g. the equinoxes. Therefore, the

dates vary tremendously – holy festivals may take place in the spring one year, the summer a few years later and so forth. Most lunar calendars, such as Hebrew and Chinese, take seasonal markers into account to adjust the timing of the calendar in any given year; thus making it so that, although festival dates are not fixed, they will usually fall within the same time-frame, give or take a couple of weeks. This is a luni-solar calendar – festivals, holy days and the new months begin at sunset on either the New or Full Moons.

All this said; let's take a look at the Celtic Tree Calendar:

Most sources display The Celtic Tree Calendar with 13 months based on the moon phase - not the sun. Most authors omit the vowels and many also combine Quert and Straif with other months to make the year and first three Acme coincide. Using this reasoning, the calendar looks a lot like this:

B	Beithe	Dec 24th- Jan 20
L	Luis	Jan 21 - Feb 17
N	Nion	Feb 18 - Mar 17
F	Fearn	Mar 18 - Apr 14
S	Saille	Apr 15 - may 12
H	Huath	May 13 - June 9
D	Duir	June 10 - July 7
T	Tinne	Jul 8 - Aug 4
C	Col	Aug 5 - Sept 1
Cuert was omitted or Shared with Col		
M	Muin	Sept. 2 - Sept 29
G	Gort	Sept 30 - Oct. 27
P	Peth-bhog	Oct 28 - Nov 24
Straif was omitted or combined with Peth-bhog/NGetal		
R	Ruis	Nov 25 - Dec 22

Dec 23rd was left unassigned, presumably to be associated with the

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Unnameable Ogham, Misteltoe.

Presented here are some arguments and reasons for reconsidering this version of the calendar. We are leaving it up to you, the Reader, to decide.

By using the calendar above, the final Oghamic characters (the vowels) as well as two other characters are ignored. Some authors, including Graves, ascribe the vowels to the solstices and equinoxes in order to create a fixed system of time-keeping, a luni-solar calendar. Still, even Graves leaves out the two other characters, Quert and Straif. It seems incredibly obvious to us, that Idho – the Yew – the Tree of Death should be placed somewhere near the end of the year, either at or during Samhain. Beithe, on the other hand – representing Birth and Beginnings – belongs at the beginning of the year, whether that is Samhain or Yule or the time in-between the two. There is much evidence to support the idea that the Celtic year ran from Samhain to Samhain, thus the first month should begin after Samhain and the last month should fall upon it.

It just doesn't seem reasonable that the Druids would arbitrarily leave out five of the characters. However, to try and adapt a FIXED system that uses all 20 Ogham just doesn't work. The challenge came to try and find a key to a cycle/system using all of the characters, not just some of them. Two interesting concepts emerged from our efforts regarding the use of the Ogham as a calendar: one developed by Dean for use in divinatory time-telling and the other suggested by Suzanne for use in divinatory character assessment, our place within the life cycle and the potential for creating change. We will explore the latter, first.

The Ogham as a Perpetual Life Calendar

If you begin a 13 month CYCLICAL/PERPETUAL calendar with Beithe - using all 20 Ogham characters and following it through - begin-

ning again with Beithe at the end of the entire 20 character tract, Beithe will not fall again as the First Month of the cycle until the 21st year! That is to say, the Ogham, used as a cyclic calendar, will span a cycle of 20 years. This is the amount of time that many sources say it took to become a Druid. Here is an illustration of that cycle:

YEAR NUMBER      13 Oghamic Months By Letter...

1	BLNFSHDTCQMGP	Begins (at birth?)
2	ZRAOUEIBLNFSH	
3	DTCQMGPZRAOUE	
4	IBLNFSHDTCQMG	
5	PZRAOUEIBLNFS	
6	HDTCQMGPZRAOU	
7	EIBLNFSHDTCQM	
8	GPZRAOUEIBLNFS	
9	SHDTCQMGPZRAO	
10	UEIBLNFSHDTCQ	
11	MGPZRAOUEIBLN	
12	FSHDTCQMGPZRA	
13	OUEIBLNFSHDTC	
14	QMGPZRAOUEIBL	
15	NFSHDTCQMGPZR	
16	AOUEIBLNFSHDT	
17	CQMGPZRAOUEIB	
18	LNFSHDTCQMGPZ	
19	RAOUEIBLNFSHD	
20	TCQMGPZRAOUEI	Cycle Ends
21	BLNFSHDTCQMGP	Cycle be-

gins anew in the 21st year

There are other forms of divination ~ such as numerology and astrol-

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ogy – that use the “sign” or “number” given at birth to achieve a greater understanding of what makes people what they are and what many become. In addition, most systems assign any given year an over-all quality, expanding upon that information through the months that occur within that year. Knowing where one is in his/her numerological cycle can, for example, lend greater insight as to where the person might focus goals and plan for the future. Well, knowing where we are within the Oghamic cycle would serve a similar purpose! Moreover, it appears to hold true for most people. In this case, the over-all tone of the year would be determined by the first tree. The subsequent months would be influenced by the energies of the trees that appear within the year, the Moon Months.

The study and interpretation of these patterns become more and more fascinating as you do so. Z – Straif (Blackthorn) begins Year 2, marking the “terrible twos,” a time of chaos, but a time of great learning, for both parent and child. The fourth year, the year in which we prepare to say goodbye to infancy and enter school the following year, begins with I – Idho (Yew), representing the symbolic ending of one phase and the entry into another. We hit our “Q” – Quert (Apple) cycle in our 14th year, about the time most of us develop crushes and begin engaging in “courting” behaviors (for lack of a better term). The Year of Luis (Rowan) begins at age 18, the year in which most of us “quicken” into young adulthood and prepare to launch ourselves into our search of a new life and new goals. In our 21st year, we begin life anew, starting the cycle again with B – Beithe (Birch) – Tree of Birth and Beginning. For most of us, this marks the entry into true adulthood: we graduate from college, move out of our parents’ homes, find permanent jobs, get married – we can even legally drink alcohol!

We find it interesting to note that it is not until we are 33 years of age that we re-enter the Oghamic cycle that signifies solidifying our foundations as represented by Fearn (Alder). Prior to that, foundation-building began as we started our twelfth year, the time of early adoles-



cence and the time we begin completely restructuring our views of the world around us. This is the time we examine – or actively participate in – those areas of life which will take us into adulthood: politics, religion, sexuality and so forth. We develop our own opinions about the world around us – moving away from those held by our parents – and we frequently hold to these ideals and ideas throughout our 20's. We tend to re-examine these things again when we hit our early 30's. We hit our Ruis (Elder) year at 40 – how appropriate to be in a cycle of Healing, Transformation and Letting Go at this time! See how this works?

This method may be combined with others, including the more “traditional” Celtic Lunar Calendar. We can use the interpretations for our personal Birth Tree (for Suzanne, born on April 20th it is Saille; for Dean, born on June 10th it is Duir) and interpret it through our place in the cycle described above. There is no need to forget about one method and embrace another. Integration seems far more suitable to working with the Ogham as a divinatory method. This, in fact, leads us to...

## Divinatory Time Telling

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Dean's contribution to the calendric association of the Ogham is more for divinatory purposes than that of telling time or tracking cycles. He describes it as follows:

“In divination, you can take several approaches to the calendar and empower it in anyway way you choose. Again, my own intuitive information is that no matter what, anything other than a cyclic calendar is a contrivance and, as such, is not historically accurate anyway.”

If you wish to place the Ogham into arbitrary dates and times, I suppose the best thing you have to deal with is the original Ogham alphabet with only 13 consonants and 5 vowels. One arbitrary way of doing this is as follows:

B is November

L is December

N is January

F is February

S is March

H is April

D is May

T is June

C is July

M is August

G is September

P is October

R is Samhain

The vowels become seasonal markers, with I (Idho) being the unnamable time between Samhain and the New Year in November. A (Ailm) becomes associated with Alban Arthan, the Winter Solstice; O (Onn) is associated with Alban Eilir, the Spring Equinox. U (Ur) is associated with Alban Hefin, the Summer Solstice and E (Eath) is associated with Alban Elfed, the Fall Equinox.

Note these are MY correspondences, which differ from Graves in a number of ways. They leave out the following characters: Cuirt, Straif and Mistletoe. Further, they associate the vowels with the four Quarter Fire Festivals, as well as, associating the Final Ogham, Yew, with the Dark Time, the Tween Time, around Samhain.

Another approach is to associate the characters with SEASONS

as a group. This brings us to another cauldron of supposition and dispute. We already mentioned that most authors set the order of the Ogham as: blnfs, hdtcq, mgpzz, aouei

If each Acme represents a season and Beithe begins AFTER Samhain, then Beithe represents Winter, Huathe - Spring, Muin - Summer and Ailm begins the Fall. In this case, Oak and Tinne, both heavily associated with the Summer Solstice, fall in the season of Spring, not Summer.

There are those who say that the real "alphabetical" order of the Ogham is:

Blfsn, mgpzz, hdtcq, aouei

Once again, Beithe begins AFTER Samhain and the first Acme represents Winter, however, the Second Acme (as Listed Above) is Spring, the Third Acme is Summer and the Final Acme, which ends with Idho (Yew) on Samhain, represents the FALL.



For general time-telling in divination, you can use an arbitrary month system with the final five characters representing times of the year in general, OR a general representation of basic SEASONS with earlier Ogham representing points early in that season, or you can use a combination of both.

Personally we do not recommend always trying to nail down time in an Oghamic reading. In readings, the information is in the form of a cycle or path; in other words, once "this" has happened, then "this" will come to pass, followed by "this," for **HOWEVER LONG EACH STEP TAKES.**

The closer the Oghamic tile falls toward the center of the reading surface, the closer to "now" it is. However, a combination of the calendars above can be used. *Do as you feel is correct!*"

Footnotes:

- (1) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 165
- (2) Calendar Systems: <http://scienceworld.wolfram.com/astronomy/Calendar.html>



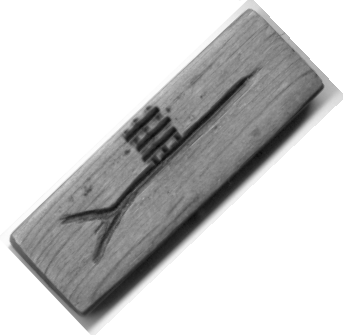


The Forfedha  
The Five Beastics-

What they are, How they came about, How they are used in readings.

Meanings Divinatory and otherwise.

Crane Bag poem discussion maybe???



# Cycles, Cycles Everywhere

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Just as the seasons have cycled upon the earth and our lives are cycles within that Great Cycle, from the Big Bang to Final Implosion, so too does the Ogham possess smaller cycles within the great 20-Year Path that is the Oghamic tract. Each Acme forms a miniature pathway that repeats itself four times over, each time in a way which is related to, but different than, the path before it.



**BIRTH:** The first Acme could be called the Acme of Birth, or the Beginnings of Life. It need not refer to physical life; it may also include emotional, experiential or philosophical births as well. We begin this cycle with Birch, for Birth and Beginning; we then embark upon the fast-paced journey of infancy, thrusting out like the spear of the Rowan Tree. As you will realize, the middle ground of each acme is always a balance point and here we reach a time of inner peace and rebirth in Ash. Continuing on, we find our new-born building a strong foundation in the physical world as represented by Alder. Finally, we see it nurtured, mothered and attaining new understanding from within in Willow.



**POWER:** Taking a look at the second Acme, we enter the realm of Crisis Response. In Hawthorn, we see the signal of the first sign of danger or a problem. It tells us of the challenge that may be in the offing. We respond with Oak's strength and build up our protections and fortresses. Locking tight the doors we may need to protect ourselves, we also keep an eye on other doors that we may use to es-

cape, should flight be our wiser response. In Holly, we see again a midpoint where we stop, and pause before battle to seek balance and a sense of justice within the crisis we are now facing. In Hazel, we look for the answers and wisdom needed to survive. Finally, through Apple we connect with the Otherworld and, having faced the poisons of our challenge, we now get the rewards that we seek.



**COMMUNITY:** In the third Acme we see a sense of Community Development and our position in it. The Bramble brings about the initial realization of others around us and how we all inter-relate. Ivy helps us to develop those bonds and relationships slowly, asserting our own identity slowly within the collective, to a greater end and more effective outcome. In our midpoint, Reed/Dwarf Elder tells us that we must take a step back and look more closely: it is time to compromise with others and with their situations, to try and see all sides of the situations in which we find ourselves. Blackthorn tells us to be aware of how we are controlled by or how we are controlling others around us, and to cease any unhealthy controls that may be there. Finally, within Ruís we see all of our efforts coming together for a magical change and a time when we can then begin to understand the higher mysteries revealed within the final Acme.



**TRANSITION:** The Final Acme deals with Higher Life Truths and where we each fit within that big picture. In Fir/Elm, we rediscover our independence and sovereignty, recognizing that though we are a part of the community we have sought to live within, we are still individual within it. Gorse allows us to take all that experience which we now see with great clarity and blend it together. Here we process and grow to understand



even those experiences which have been of great puzzlement and caused confusion or sadness. Heather sees our interior fires lit from within as the discovery of the new inner vision and understanding of self truth, and affords us a gateway with which we can make our final transition. We take a step back and survey all that we have seen and been. We must decide if we are ready to step through this gateway of passion into the final series of mysteries. In Aspen, we overcome our final fears and the obstacles which hold us back or, they overcome us and, thus, we prepare to face the Yew. Yew, Death, again finds us at the end of this cycle and ready to begin another. In the Ogham, Death seldom deals with Death on the physical plane, but rather higher and deeper endings which then lead to new beginnings and higher levels of learning and understanding.

## Further Information on The Fews

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In divination, a reading which contains Fews from only one Acme may indicate a rather narrow focus within the area with which that Acme is concerned. Also, by following the spiral path from the first character of that Acme to the last, one gets a feeling for not only how many times one will have to progress around the cycle to reach the end, but how many times one will have to pass the same way in order to pick up the next sequential piece of awareness.

Readings contained within a single acme may also indicate a person focused on one area of the life path alone; someone who is currently involved in what might be called a karmic lesson or destined series of events for purpose of learning and major life progression.

We should take a moment to look at the numerological consistencies and cycles within the Ogham.

All of the "One Fews" (those which have only one hash mark) – bhma

- are related to some form of beginning. Beithe is a birth or beginning of new direction, focus, family or project. Huath is the beginning of confrontation or meeting new obstacles/challenges. Muin is a beginning of relationships with others and Ailm is a beginning of greater understanding of universal life secrets through sovereign soul searching.

The "Two Fews" - ldgo - involve action and/or reaction. In Luis we see forging ahead with the new direction that had just begun. In Duir we see a natural strength response to the ensuing challenges. Gort is slow and steady action as we find our way within the community and Onn is the action of gathering materials and the subsequent creation using them.

The "Three Fews" - ntpu - are almost always turning points, midpoints of balance where one pauses to make decisions and then decides to go forward or back. Nion sees us finding inner peace. Tinne has us seek to find inner balance so that we may do what is right and just. Pethbhog speaks of flexibility, seeing both sides and learning compromise. Ur forces us to examine our passions as they relate to the gateways before which we stand.

The "Four Fews" - fcze - deal most often with foundations of some type, and what we should do with them at that point. Fearn is the initial foundation builder and speaks of strengthening what is there. Col is a foundation of knowledge and wisdom and the importance of having both. Straif deals with foundations which have come to control us and which we must control. In essence, it is a foundation of emotional stability within the realm of a crisis. Edath allows us to overcome foundations which hold us back on a spiritual level so that we may progress to the next level.

The "Five Fews" - sqri - all deal with understanding, intuition, answers, conclusions and outcomes. In Saille we find the conclusions reached

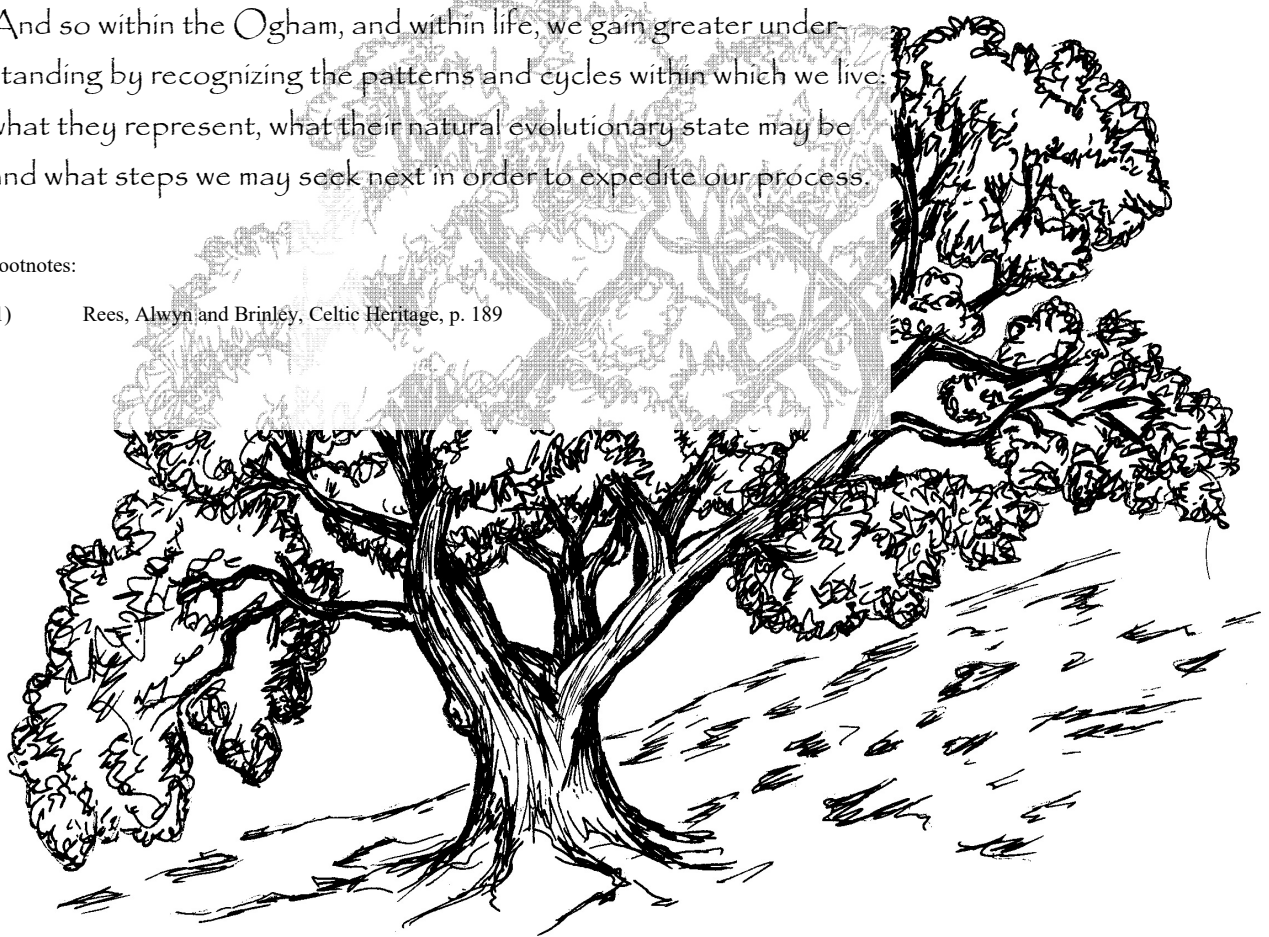
via intuition. We look to our nurturing inner and spiritual guides. Quert is outcome and answers achieved, but only after we have risked the poison (the dangers) in order to reach the magic we seek. Ruís is the change we have worked to manifest within the community and within our relationship to it. Idho is the final set of answers which Death conceals.

“Five is not the most prominent number in Celtic tradition, but it appears in a large number of significant contexts, particularly in Ireland: five great roads, five paths of Law, five prohibitions for each king, the faeries count by five, mythical persons wore five-fold cloaks and the hero, CuChulain had five wheels on his shield.”<sup>1</sup>

And so within the Ogham, and within life, we gain greater understanding by recognizing the patterns and cycles within which we live: what they represent, what their natural evolutionary state may be and what steps we may seek next in order to expedite our process.

Footnotes:

(1) Rees, Alwyn and Brinley, Celtic Heritage, p. 189



# Remembering and Using the Sacred Trees

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There are a number of ways in which you might incorporate the symbolism and energy vibrations of the Trees into your life. Here is a brief summary of some of the ways in which we use the Trees of the Ogham in everyday living:

## 1. Create an Amulet or Talisman

You may use the Sacred Trees to create an amulet or talisman, depending upon your needs and your magical inclinations. An amulet is simply a charm used to draw desired energies to you, allowing them to manifest within your life. A talisman is a bit more complicated; it is a charm which has been deliberately charged to deflect negative energies. The how-to is based in your particular system of belief and we won't be going into that here.

The easiest Tree Amulet is simply that; carry a small piece of the tree with you in your pocket or purse. It is best to keep it close to your skin and it is a simple matter of placing a small twig or a piece of the appropriate type of wood carved with the Oghamic symbol into some cheesecloth and pin this cheesecloth "bag" inside your clothes. You can, of course, find a nice piece of wood, sand it a bit, attach it to some cord and wear it as a pendant underneath your clothing. In the case of an amulet, there is no need to do anything other than be aware of it and allow it to work on your Subconscious mind.

## 2. Add Sacred Wood to Incense

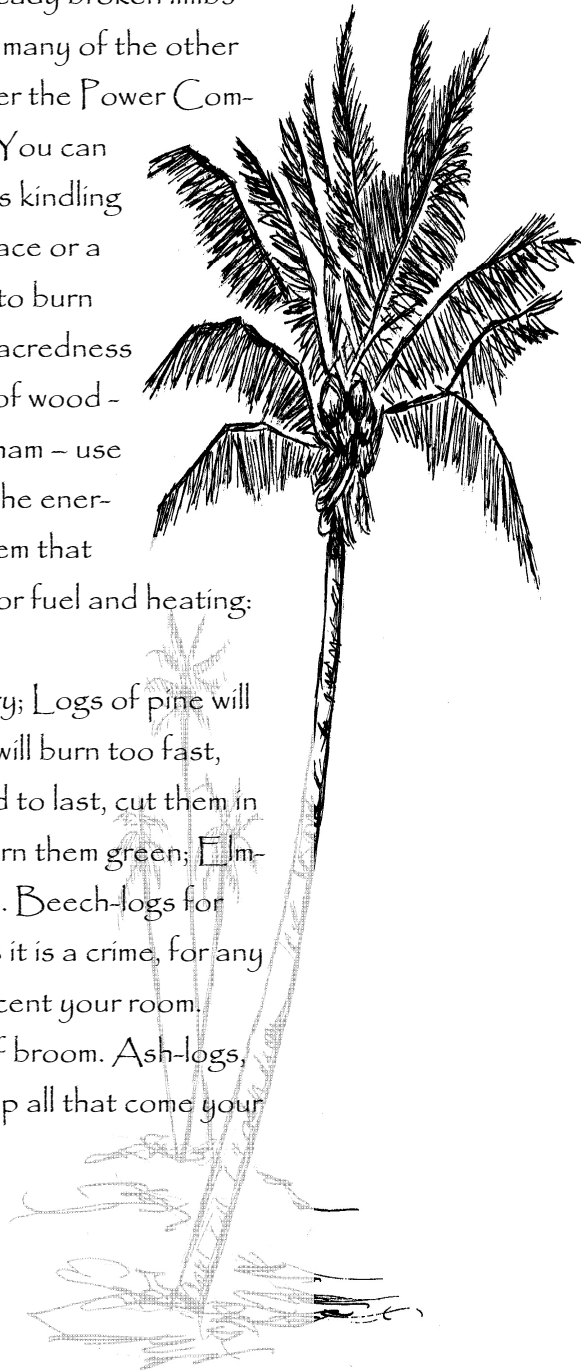
You can greatly empower incense and release the energies of the Trees simply by adding a bit of DRY wood to any loose incense. The wood should be added as shavings or sawdust, otherwise it may be too

difficult to burn.

### 3. Add Sacred Wood to your Fireplace

Are we being disrespectful by suggesting this? No. We are not about to suggest that you find a perfectly healthy tree and cut it up for firewood. Suzanne has frequently found already broken limbs and branches of Oak, Ash, Poplar, Willow and many of the other Ogham Trees lying around after storms (or after the Power Company clears branches away from electric wires). You can add logs, small branches or even use the wood as kindling if it is in small enough pieces. If you have a fireplace or a woodstove and you live in area where you need to burn wood in order to heat your home, why not add sacredness to the act? If you have access to specific types of wood - perhaps some of the Sacred Trees of the Ogham - use that wood with intent and acknowledgement of the energies being released. There is a very popular poem that speaks of the different qualities of wood used for fuel and heating:

“Oak-logs will warm you well, that are old and dry; Logs of pine will sweetly smell, but the sparks will fly. Birch-logs will burn too fast, Chestnut scarce at all; Hawthorn-logs are good to last, cut them in the fall. Holly-logs will burn like wax, you may burn them green; Elm-logs like to smouldering flax, no flame to be seen. Beech-logs for winter time, Yew-logs as well; Green Elder-logs it is a crime, for any man to sell. Pear-logs and apple-logs, they will scent your room. Cherry-logs across the dogs, smell like flower of broom. Ash-logs, smooth and grey, burn them green or old. Buy up all that come your way - Worth their weight in gold.”<sup>1</sup>



#### 4. Draw in the energies through your furnishings

When furnishing your home, trees make up the bulk of the larger pieces. Why not select furniture based on the spiritual and magical properties inherent within the wood itself? The majority of furniture is produced from Red or White Oak and Pine. Wicker, of course, is made from Willow. Of course, keep the environment in mind when selecting wood furniture - there are still companies manufacturing furnishings and other items from endangered species of trees such as those found within the rainforests.

#### 5. Incorporate symbolism into home furnishings

Our ancestors did it all the time. Walk into almost any church in Europe and you will find wonderful carvings and bas-reliefs of oak leaves, acorns, foliate masks, antlers, and many, many other symbols all drawn from nature. If you can't carve, use paint or stenciling to bring this effect into your home. It is the deliberate selection and conscious acknowledgement of the symbols used that makes the difference, not great (or poor) artwork.

Take stenciling for instance. Stenciling is a very popular, inexpensive and (relatively) easy-to-do method of adding a decorative touch to walls and furniture. There are all types of patterned stencils to choose from or you can create your own from Mylar. Instead of selecting a non-specific vine or flower or geometric border, why not put some thought into it? Oak leaf and acorn patterns are easy to find and would make a wonderful border around doors and windows (or around a fireplace). Pine cones and branches, Holly leaves and berries, Willow leaves and branches, Berry vines, even Mistletoe can all be used to great effect both decoratively and spiritually.

#### 6. Use the Sacred Trees in your Spiritual Workings

Rather than using just “any old wood,” be intentional about it. Use Fir or Ash or Birch for your Yule Log. Create the Sacred Fire at Samhain and Beltaine using woods from the appropriate trees, as many as you can obtain.

## 7. PLANT A TREE!

Do some research, visit a garden center and find out which of the Sacred Trees will thrive in your gardening zone. Then get out there and plant one! You will derive so much pleasure from watching your Tree grow and thrive and future generations will thank you.

### Footnotes:

(1) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, p. 169. Graves states that this poem came from E.M. Hull’s *Poem Book of the Gael*, but there are references to this being written by an Englishwoman, Honor Goodhart during the 1926 coal strike and originally published in *Punch Magazine* in 1926. It has also been credited to a John Estabrook, so we don’t really know the source.

# Pathworking

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We have mentioned the term "pathworking" several times within this text, without really defining what it means, so, while this is by no means an "official" definition, we will attempt to explain the concept as we use it. In a nutshell, pathworking is the exploration of the Universe - both inner and outer - through a specific system of learning. In other words, one chooses a particular form through which to explore, understand, and, most importantly, interpret the meaning of life, the universe and everything.

There are many pathworking systems. In a way, we all engage in a type of pathworking from the moment we come in to this world; most of us are given a perspective through which to view life by our parents, who, of course, received their perspective from their parents and so forth. We usually change it around to suit the times, adding bits and pieces and developing (or reinventing) new words and terms. Often, we outright rebel against it, trying to be as different from the "older generation" as possible; but sooner or later, with maturity and wisdom, we realize that we analyze ourselves, our motivations, and the world around us with, and through, those very early teachings instilled deep within our subconscious minds.

Think about it: if you are born into an upper middle class family who has lived for generations in the heart of some big city, your view of the world (and of yourself -) is going to be heavily influenced by these facts. You are going to have, from the time you begin learning, a different perspective than someone brought up in a rural, financially impoverished family (or any other permutation of lifestyle, e.g. a wealthy suburban upbringing versus an impoverished inner city upbringing).

This does NOT mean that one perspective is necessarily better



than the other, nor does it mean that individuals from these very different backgrounds cannot end up in the same place, as President of the United States, for instance. It simply means that, throughout their entire lives, regardless of future training and education, these two people will have slightly different priorities and will understand, interpret and process the same information in different ways. In some areas of life - for example, possessing an instinctual understanding of the cyclical ways of nature - a person raised on a rural farm is probably going to be wiser than the kid from the city. In other areas, the city kid might have an advantage, such as being able to better understand the internal motivations of other people. We are not talking about education or book-learning here. Anyone can get a college education and become a doctor, lawyer or what have you. In the end, the conclusions drawn may be the same, but they will be arrived at through different internalized perspectives.

The above statements **ASSUME** that these two individuals travel through life without encountering a foreign system of learning, specifically, that of Metaphysical Pathworking. Choosing a metaphysical spiritual path and/or a tool through which to gain deeper understanding of the Self and the Universe forces you to re-examine the ways in which you interpret what you experience. It adds another dimension to the learning process, one which, **IF DONE CORRECTLY** and without keeping a death-grip on old perspectives and imposing them onto new information, is not limited to confined or biased thinking. By definition, a metaphysical system of learning should encompass the validity of all religions, all cultures, and all spiritual paths. Such a tool should not have any "worldly" associations: money, status, level of education and so forth should not, ideally, be part of any metaphysical system. Everyone begins from the same point, from the same level of understanding, receives the same information and may proceed at a pace which is comfortable.

There are many such tools for discovery, although they are often thought to be no more than systems used for divination. The Tarot and the Qabala are two of the best known. The Ogham can be used in much the same manner, as a system for discovery and for connecting with Divine Spirit and Universal Consciousness.

Learning to identify the Oghamic symbols and learning the Tree names and basic meanings is only a drop in the proverbial bucket. To truly understand and use the Ogham as a pathworking system, one must be willing and able to connect with the Trees themselves, to understand their very nature. Now, how does one accomplish this living in areas where the Great Ones described within these pages do not exist? The answer: by connecting with the Universal Archetypes of the Trees.

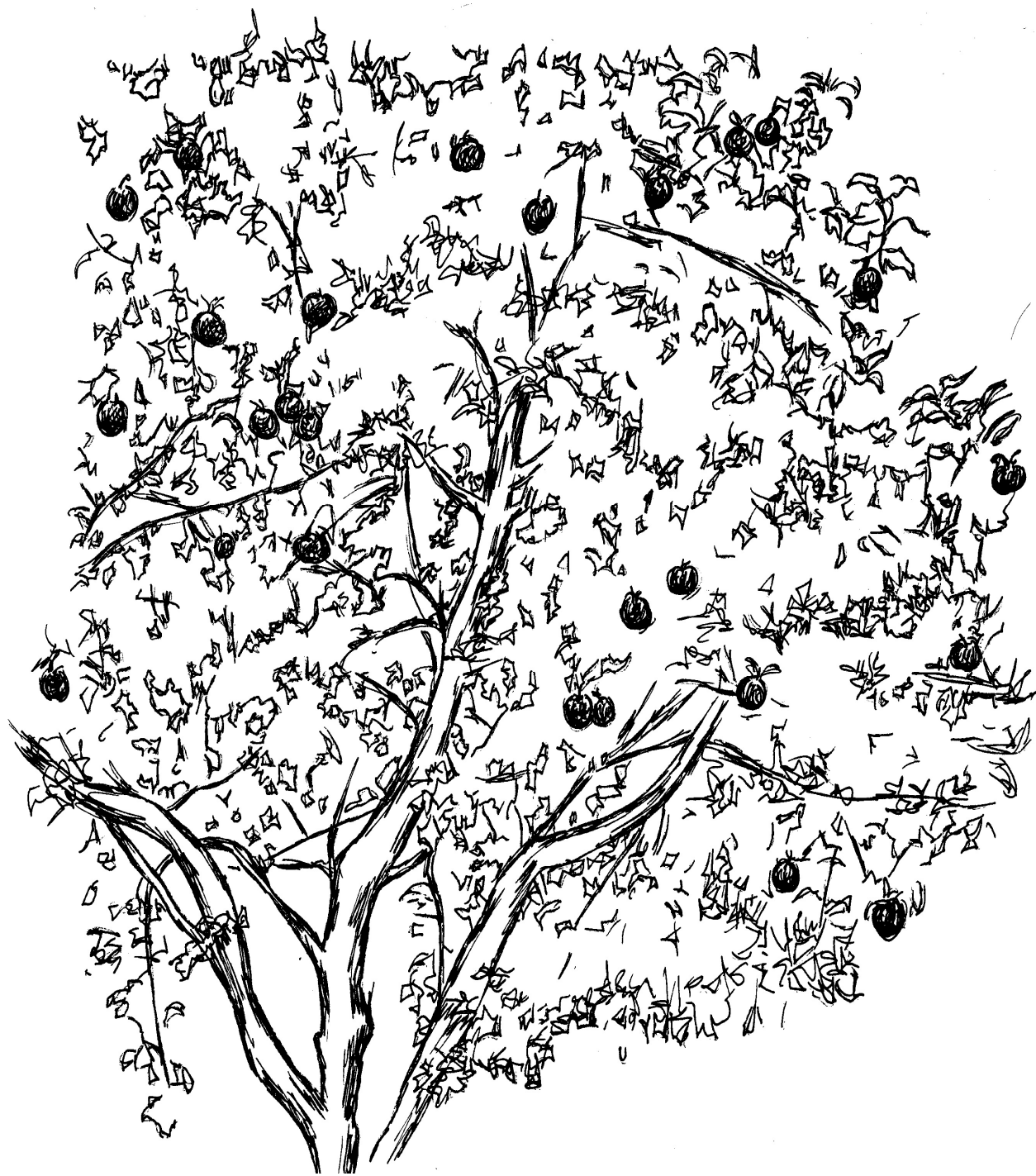
When we speak of all the qualities associated with Rowan, we are not talking about a particular tree or even a particular species of this Tree. We are speaking of the Rowan Archetype: the Spirit of the Rowan Tree which stands for, and connects to, all other Rowan Trees. This Spirit contains the energies, memories and magical potential of every Rowan which has ever existed, which exists now in the present and which will exist in the future. Even if you cannot go into the backyard and find a Rowan Tree, you can connect with the Spirit of the Rowan as one of the Great Sacred Trees of the Ogham.

It is possible to substitute other Trees in this physical world for some of the Trees of the Ogham, finding native species with similar energies, habitats and memories. We have provided suggestions along the way for finding native species and making substitutions, however, it is best to try working with and through the original Archetypes first. Then, should you come across a native species that you feel "connects" with a certain Archetype, by all means, add this species to your workings.

The ideal working (and probably the easiest to connect with psychically) would include a set of Ogham Fews made from twigs or pieces of wood from each of the Trees represented in the Ogham. Most likely, this was the "original" Ogham; a twig or piece of wood from each of the Sacred Trees would have been easily identified by a trained Druid. Make no mistake, even such a small part of the Tree still contains the essence of the Tree, allowing the Subconscious or Higher Mind to connect with this essence and use it to analyze the present, divine the future or obtain information about the past. The system of symbols etched into wood probably came later. Besides, it is much easier to connect to the Archetypes of the Sacred Trees through the use of the Trees themselves, rather than through artificial symbols. It simply requires less energy and concentration.

Nowadays, it is almost certain that you will have to construct your Ogham set from one or more types of wood using the Oghamic symbols as a trigger to bring each Archetype of the Trees into focus. Many people choose to use Birch or Oak for this purpose. Remember, in this respect, the Ogham works much like the Tarot; the Ogham Fews themselves do not contain any special powers or magick. The power comes from linking into the Archetypes triggered by the symbols. Much like the Tarot, if you want to work with the energies of the Star or the Fool, you need to key into these Archetypes through focus, concentration, meditation, visualization and faith. That newly-made, fresh-paper-smell, mass-produced deck of Tarot cards has no special connection to the Archetypes represented by the images on the cards. These images simply act as triggers, allowing the Higher Mind to take over, connecting you to the "Universal Star" (the Star Archetype) or "Universal Fool" (the Fool Archetype). Contrary to what many people believe, the cards themselves have no special powers.

We never said that pathworking was easy, however, to us, it is well worth the time and the effort required.



## Divination – How it Works and How it Doesn't!

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While divination is some peoples' primary reason for learning about the Ogham, we would like to encourage you to develop a magical and pathworking relationship with the Trees and their symbols as well. To diminish this system down to that of a simple prognostication tool denigrates you, the trees and those who have tried to develop deeper understanding of the mysteries.

Tarot cards, Ogham Fews, Runes and so forth, all represent Archetypes - images that mean something and speak to us on a grand universal level. Divination, like any psychic or magical work, takes place mainly within the Subconscious Mind and the Astral Realms. Any reading consists of several basic parts: The Reader, the Querent (Sometimes they are one in the same,) the Tool and the Archetypes represented by the Tool.

Tarot cards themselves are no different than blank index cards or matchbook covers. As we said, the cards have no magical powers, nor do they "know" anything. I-Ching Sticks are just sticks, Tea Leaves are like any other sludge at the bottom of a cup and Runes are pieces of stone. So too is it with the Oghamic Fews. They do not make the reading; they have no knowledge or power in and of themselves.

In any reading, a Reader must enter a state in which the mind is allowed to communicate with the "Collective Unconscious" - a body of all the knowledge of past/present/future. This body of knowledge allows the Reader's and Querent's individual mind(s) to gain access to the information needed and bring it into the conscious realm by means of the Tool. Because of the functioning of the

process, it is necessary for the reader to: a) have an understanding of what the Archetypal Images of the Tool represent; and b) allow the subconscious access to those Archetypes and a hand in their interpretation.

What this means is that before you read with any tool, be it Ogham, Tarot, or any other, you must know what you believe are the meanings of the Archetypes you are using. Note, we did not say you should know the "correct" meanings of the Archetypes. YOU are the only one who decides what correct really is; but you must have some familiarity with your tool and what it represents BEFORE you try to read with it. Reading Tarot from a book does not work because your subconscious has no pre-conceived ideas of what the symbols on the cards mean. It is important to first have an understanding of what the symbols are, and what they are about, before attempting to really read with them. Having to wonder and think "which tree am I looking at and what does it mean," will break the connection with the Collective Unconscious, as well as, Otherworldly connections inherent within the Ogham. It will lessen the strength and effectiveness of the information received.

The other important aspect of divination is allowing your subconscious mind to take over. When doing any type of divination, you should enter a light trance state, a relaxed state of awareness, or at the very least be focused on the intent of what you are doing. You aren't dealing Blackjack here; you are connecting with higher wisdom. Behave as such!

Once you have learned the personal meanings of the tool you plan to read with - and empowered the Archetypes, as such, within your mind - you should then establish some routine to help you enter the proper mental framework. It may consist of an empowerment ritual that you do before a reading in the form of a meditation, visualization, incantation, prayer, process or the like. Many Celtic diviners advocate biting the

thumbs before a reading to connect with the wisdom of Fionn Mac Cumhail who burnt his thumb on the Salmon of Wisdom. (See Col - The Hazel).

Whatever you choose as an empowerment routine, at least in the beginning, stick with it and be consistent. The routine you follow will be a cue or "Subconscious On-Switch" that says to your mind "Hey - it's time to do that psychic stuff...Let's get plugged in to the communal mind that knows-it-all!!!"

The final secret is to LISTEN!!! Don't read too literally and remember to listen to that inner voice and don't ignore it. Make connections and associations within the Archetypal framework you have developed. Whenever anyone asks how to develop their psychic powers the first thing we say is, "Listen." If you don't use your eyes, you go blind; if you don't use your legs you lose the ability to walk; if you don't listen to your subconscious, its voice becomes weaker; but like anything else, it will become stronger and more skilled with use! As we have discussed earlier, divination does not work because of the pieces of wood tossed down upon a surface, but rather through the person conducting and interpreting the reading and the person for whom the interpretation is made.

## Divining with the Ogham

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The first step toward divination is to obtain your Ogham set. You can purchase one, but it is far preferable to make one yourself, meditating over each tree as you carve the Few. Traditionally, Ogham sticks are carved on 1/2" square lengths of wood, using the corner as the stem line. Another approach is to use flat piece of wood about 1/2" wide, 1/4" thick and 2 1/2" long, carving the stem line and character on one side and leaving the other side blank, or decorated.

Once created, you can oil them in any way you like, and scent them if you so desire. You should also make or obtain a bag in which to store them. Our Ogham bags also spread out flat and become the casting surfaces upon which we read, but this is not necessary. You can stain or decorate the wood Fews in whatever way you like, but it is wise to be as environmentally conscious as you can be when making them. We also recommended that wood be the material of choice, not stone, glass or paper.

If you should choose to use some wood found in nature it is important, as always, to ask the tree if you may have the branch needed. If permission is received, you should tie a red ribbon or cord below where you plan to cut and ask the Spirit of the Tree to leave that branch. Allow it a day or so to comply, and be sure to ask again before actually cutting the branch.

Pauline Campanelli has a wonderful invocation to the Spirit of the Tree, precisely for such a task. Once the request is made, she suggests that you wait for an affirmation: a breeze in the branches or a fall of an acorn or cone. (Of course, the Tree may also speak to you)!

*“O Spirit of the Oak (or whichever) / invoke thee  
By root and trunk / summon thee  
By branch and leaf / call upon thee  
Hear me and grant my request  
O Spirit of the tree  
Grant that I may take from thee  
This branch and that it will bring to me  
The power of your magic wood.*

(Once the branch is cut:)



*Thank you Spirit of this tree  
Blessed Be, Blessed Be!"<sup>1</sup>*

In a pinch you could use cards or paper slips with the characters written upon them, but this is decidedly NOT preferable.

You should decide at this point as well, how many characters you will use in your set. The initial 20 characters are the standard Ogham et for divination, but you can also include a blank Fēw to represent Mistletoe and some sets include the Forfedha as actual Oghamic tiles. They tend to represent very potent and powerful energies when they appear, representing "significators," if you will.

You will also require a casting surface and, again, you have many options. Both Thorsson<sup>2</sup> and Webster<sup>3</sup> offer up their own designs for casting cloths and both Suzanne and Dean use the basic Thorsson design on our bags. It is essentially an "X" which runs from corner to corner, the center of the cloth represents Mide or NOW. It has a smaller box within its center and on the bottom edge of this box is embroidered Seis, the doorway. To the left is the Spiral, Fīs, representing that which must be learned and to the North is Cath, representing conflicts or obstacles. To the right is Blath which is the outcome or prosperity. You may wish to consult the Thorsson book for more details on this design.

The center represents the intersection of all within the NOW; the lower edge of the cloth is the door way of experience on which we are embarking. The left edge is learning and knowledge. North, again, deals with conflicts, foundations and situations to be overcome. The right edge is the area of resolution, answers, prosperity and the outcome. The colors are left up to you.

You may, of course (and we encourage you to do so), design your own casting cloth; even incorporate other systems within this one if

you choose. Use a zodiac wheel or simply three concentric rings representing past, present and future or divide the surface into the Elements or whatever means something to you.

You can also make a casting surface of carved Birch or oak, with this or any design of your choice engraved upon it.

Not all readings involve "casting," per se, and a casting cloth is not vital to read with the Ogham. The simplest Ogham readings consist of simply asking a question, asking for guidance, or meditating on a situation and then drawing one or more Fews from the bag. Their meanings should give you the guidance you seek.

In casting, you will want a flat casting surface. Take a moment to reaffirm in your mind what the symbols on the surface represent. Dump the Fews out onto the center of the cloth and cover them with your hands, feeling their warmth and vitality and the energies with which you have empowered them, as well as, the energies that they have developed on their own.

Focusing on the question or situation, separate the Fews into two piles under your hands and either grasp two or three in each hand, or feel for those that seem to tingle and pick them up.

Once you have from 5 to 8 Fews, (it is up to you and the immediate situation, but in general, the fewer, the easier the interpretation. Sometimes the Ogham needs more to give you the full message). You can either cast them upon the cloth, gently tossing them from a distance of 8 inches or so above it, or place them sight-unseen where you feel they belong.

At this point, take a deep breath, sit back and get a general overview of what you see in front of you. What does the over-all picture appear

to be? The first time you try to read, you may be overwhelmed by the wealth of interpretations which lay before you.

Readings are done in a spiral form, from the center and then around clockwise. Those things which lie closer to the center lies closer to the NOW (present). Any Fews which lie upon dead center deal with the immediate truth of any given situation. Placing a Few here can be very revealing. As you look at the "spread" in front of you, you need to first notice what characters are face down: these represent things which currently are hidden, or those which are yet to be uncovered. The next step is to look at which Fews point toward the next realm and which either point across the cloth or back to the realm before it. Generally, the direction of the flow of the Fews is the direction of the flow of energy. The flow can tell you in what area the energy and experience of a given tree will end up being focused.

Overlapping characters are things which affect each other in a given situation; they will often be connected in such a way that one principle must be uncovered or completed before the one below it can be achieved.

So, you begin at the center, noting the situation here and now, then spiral down to the first tile which deals with the doorway of opportunity (or what the next step will be). If there are other Fews farther from center, they can be interpreted now, if it feels right to you; more often they are part of the NEXT lap of the spiral. You then proceed to the left, seeing what the lessons are you need to discover in order to proceed. (Remember, the closer to the center, the closer to NOW. If other lessons appear they may apply to the second turn around the spiral).

To the North you will gain information on conflicts and foundations, how to resolve and strengthen what is there and what indeed that foundation is. To the right you find out about what will lead to pros-

perity, or the outcome, what that outcome will be and you will also get a general idea if this is really a resolution or simply the next step to the next new beginning.

Any variety of casting is more difficult to learn to interpret than, say, a Tarot spread in which each card is placed in a position that already has some specific meaning associated with it. If you are more familiar with Tarot type spreads, you may wish, in the beginning, to draw each Few from a pile or bag and place them, in order first in the center, South, West and North.... In time, the Ogham will guide you to deeper understanding and clarity to allow you to do the more complicated casting.

As with any Oracle, if you do not fully understand the answer, it is alright to ask for some clarification, but then you should either write down the results for future reference or put the Ogham away. Do not ask the same question over and over just because you don't like the answer it has given. The Ogham has a tendency to become very blunt in that case, or simply become totally non-responsive. Likewise we do not recommend consulting the Ogham for trivial things. It has been Dean's experience, at least, that it simply refuses to respond in this instance.

Footnotes:

- (1) Campanelli, Pauline, Wheel of the Year, p. 48
- (2) Thorsson, Edred, The Book of Ogham, Chapter 5
- (3) Webster, Richard, Omens, Oghams & Oracles, p. 117

## A Mnemonic System - Then and Now

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Mnemonics is a word which simply means "of the brain" or "having to do with memory." It makes sense that a 20 year course of training consisting entirely of oral traditions would include some memory tricks or aids; as we spoke of earlier, at least one poem speaks of the use of the Fingers in association with the Ogham as a memory tool.

If you look at the diagram above, you will see that the finger associations are noted. While it is true that Finger Ogham may have been used to encode messages, it would also have been valuable as a memory tool. While it would require an entire book devoted solely to mnemonics to fully explain their usage, we offer some ideas and explanations as to ways it may have been used and also ways in which it **COULD** be used today.

In mnemonics, everything works on association, visually and aurally associating something you already know with something you want to remember. Generally, the more silly or violent the association, the better the mnemonic works, though 'reasonable' mnemonics can be effective if they are logical enough to the individual.

In the case of the Ogham, many of the mnemonics were probably reasonable ones, using the logic that if something started with a B sound, from Beithe, it probably had to do with birth, beginnings, shedding the old, Brid (Brigit), the Otherworld and so forth. Even opening up a modern Gaelic dictionary will reveal this connection. You will find words starting with b that mean: to bud, womb, bake, etc. An interesting word, Breo-Druidheachd which meant Pyromancy: the beginning of knowledge through the flame perhaps?

It isn't just the letter B - it is everything that comes after that. Mnemonics is a way of placing thousands of pieces of information into just a few categories. The system is pervasive: you think Brid and

you have hundreds of words, ideas and actions associated with this Goddess immediately come to mind: the OtherWorld, Fire, Flame, Smithcraft, Hearth and so forth. From that single word, you weave a web of thousands of correspondences. From 20 characters of the Ogham, each Tree leads you to thousands of related words, things, concepts, actions, Deities, animals – the list is virtually endless.

Today you can certainly use this system for simple things. If you remember that Alder is the tree that bleeds, and you recall that the physic finger was thought to be the only one with an artery to the heart, then you will recall that the F Few falls on the physic finger. You can associate the tree below it on the hand as Hazel by visualizing, perhaps, blood running all over The Hazel Tree of Wisdom. Knowing that Hazel is called Col, and that crane was associated with wisdom as well, it should be less troublesome to remember that the Crane was called Cor. As you come to know the trees better, you can form associations in your mind from finger to finger, and position to position, making it easier to look at an Oghamic character and know immediately what the tree is and what it represents.

Likewise, if you study the numerological correspondences discussed earlier and apply them to the digits of the hand, the relationships between each of the "One Trees," "Two Trees," and so on, should become even clearer. To draw a brief comparison as food for thought, it is interesting to note that the basic numerological correspondences and locations of the Ogham in the hand correspond generally with palmistry meanings of each finger as well.

In palmistry, the thumb is the seat of all beginnings, your will, life energy and such. The first finger represents actual physical action, DOING something. The middle finger is about balance, the third about relationships and other types of foundations as well as aesthetics, and the pinky is about communication, learning and answers. Yet another ex-

ample of how many roads lead to truth.

Using the Ogham as a mnemonic base requires first that one understand and know the Trees themselves, inside and out. Once that happens, you will find it simple to make associations between the various characters as you point to their location on your hand, and thus, add to your foundation of understanding new principles that join with the old as each is uncovered.

## The Other Ogham

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A continuation of the former discussion should include that the Ogham also came to mean, represent and be represented by MANY other things. This manifests in the encoded poems that Graves spend much time deciphering. It is wise study for any serious student of the Ogham to read Graves, *The White Goddess*. Here you will find many references to the Oghamic poems, in which metaphors for various trees, animals and such were used and which correspond to the Oghamic characters. In some cases, like the power we discussed earlier, the truths revealed dealt with the order of the characters or calendric correspondences. In other cases, deciphering the poem helped to solve a riddle. Hidden within the dedications of this book you can find your authors' own truth about the real Oghamic meanings - if you have the patience to decipher the hidden meanings.

The Druids had a system of bardic teaching; teaching sacred (and mundane) truths through lore, song and poetry. This we know for certain. It seems an obvious hiding place for wisdom, burying truth in plain sight within a poem that only other Druids could decode. Most likely, this became more and more necessary when the Ogham was becoming known outside the Druid world and being used for actual writing.

In divination this is of little use, but it is mentioned here in brief due to its historic significance, and to make the reader aware that many of the ancient Celtic poems have hidden meanings which do, in fact, relate to and correspond with the Ogham both directly and indirectly.

## The Music Of The Trees

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While your authors would love to provide you with complete musical correspondences to the Ogham we fear it is not possible to do so. Reliable, historical information seems unattainable. Douglas Monroe, in *The 21 Lessons of Merlin*, offers one possible Oghamic musical notation system, but whether or not that information is reliable is hotly debated.<sup>1</sup>

However, there is a way to use the Ogham as it relates to music.

It should be obvious to anyone now this deep into this text, that the Ogham is a sequential pattern, proceeding from one principle to the next in a specific order. As such, if you are musically gifted, it is simple to begin with the lowest note on a given keyboard or instrument and work your way sequentially upward through the first 26 notes and then start again. This would include the Forfedha and Mistletoe within the musical system, of course. On a Piano, there might be logical reason to begin at middle C, progressing both forward from there and going backward in order for the lower keys.

No matter what, the use of the Oghamic correspondence here is not to play songs, but rather to attune to the vibrations and music inherent within the principles of the Trees. If you use a system of your creation it will be right and work properly for you and perhaps, someday, there will be more concrete evidence as to the true musical corre-



spondences.

In magic, the musical Ogham would be used to accent or add energy to a given spell, ritual or part thereof. Plucking a note, or using it as a repeated undertone within an actual musical work, would imbue the magical work – and those listening to it – with the magical vibrations of that Oghamic character. In a multilevel spell, several notes together in progression would form a musical equivalent of the spell, which adds yet another subconscious area of interaction within the magical purpose.

Obviously, these combinations may not always be pleasant to the ear, just as magical brews are not always pleasant to the palate. It is a concept, however, which unleashes entirely new bardic and spiritual possibilities for a musically-inclined student of the Ogham.

Please feel free to explore this further.

Footnotes:

(1) Monroe, Douglas, *The 21 Lessons of Merlin*, p. 200

# The Historical Legend of Ogham Sunface

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While no complete legend seems to exist in print, a much quoted passage translated, according to Thorsson, Mathews and others who have used it, from The Book of Ballymote is partially quoted here:

"What are the place, time, person and cause of invention of the Ogam? Not hard. Its place the Isle of Ireland where we Irish live. In the time of Bres Son of Elatha king of Ireland it was invented. Its person Ogma son of Elatha son of Delbaeth brother to Bres, for Bres, Ogma and Delbaeth are all three sons of Elatha son of Delbaeth there. Now, Ogma, a man well skilled in speech and in poetry invented the Ogham. The cause of its invention, as a proof of his ingenuity, and that this speech should belong to the learned apart, to the exclusion of the rustics and herdsmen. Whence the Ogham got its name according to sound and matter, who are the father and mother of the Ogham, what is the first name that was written by Ogham, in what letter it was written, and why b precedes every letter.

Ogham from Ogma was first invented in respect to its sound according to matter..."<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that the Ogham was originally an alphabet of sorts: it was a PHONETIC alphabet which was intended to classify the universal principals of the Druids by like-vibration of sound. Thus, all those things which had similar SOUNDS would fall under the same Oghamic letter/character. The characters of Ogham, stood not only for Trees but, as it evolved, came to represent many different things - plants, animals, places, archetypal God and Goddess forms and much more.

It was SOUND that made one Ogham unique from another and it

was sound which was, and is, the key to all existence and the key to the Ogham.

Footnotes:

- (1) Matthews, Caitlin & John, Encyclopaedia of Celtic Wisdom, pp. 49, 50

# The Legend of Ogma - Revisited

Ogma ran far in the woods. He had, for many days and nights, asked Bran to guide him in his quest for truth. "I call upon the powers of all that is good and just - Dear Gods, hear my call and grant me knowledge of the truth. The way to wisdom, the way to all that is correct and good, the road out of ignorance."

Silence....

Ogma paused for a moment, reflecting on the lack of sounds all around him. Then, in the distance he could hear the wind, weaving a hypnotic web throughout the forest and bogs. Final dew drops dripped down into a nearby puddle making a surprisingly loud splash. A growl was heard not far in the distance and Ogma withdrew his knife as a soft, yet piercing metal on leather sound emitted. Each step spoke a crack of branches and small flies sung merry tunes about Ogma's ears.

Ogma went on cautiously. A flutter caught his eye and he hurled his knife through the air. The knife made a clean swift sound as it sailed through space, landing with a "Stwack" in an unfortunate Birch Tree. A Crane shrieked atop the tree.

Suddenly, with a roar of great thunder, the forest took on a magical cast, the trees faded from view; in fact, all vanished save for Ogma, the Birch tree, Crane and Knife. The Spirit of the Tree let out a shriek of piercing pain louder than that of the Banshee. Ogma fell to his knees, covering his ears as the howling continued. Before him, a white shimmer separated itself from the tree, removing the knife as it removed itself. The now more humanoid-shaped etheric spirit held the knife above Ogma, dropping it inches from his face as he knelt perfectly still.

Just then, a shaft of sunlight touched Ogma's face and he spoke. "Forgive me, Spirit - I was careless in my frustration." As Ogma told of his plight for truth and wisdom, the spirit of the tree took a human form and called herself Bríd. She told Ogma to look around him, for all around was the wisdom he sought; he had but to recognize and name it that it would be

part of the future he was to carve.

Looking around, it was too dark to see anything but the Birch tree into which the spirit had now returned. All was dark save for the ray of sun cast on Ogma himself and the tree of Birch. 'T was then that Ogma noticed the reflection in his knife blade of the Crane sitting above him, the image seemed to flutter and shift. He was beset once again with great wisdom.

Using the blade of the knife, he reflected a shaft of sun into the darkness. As the beam was cast into the forest it shone on other trees, first Luis. Ogma said aloud: "Rowan - a tree of Quickening," Then "Ash- a tree of truth and rebirth," This was followed with "Alder - a tree of foundation and self sacrifice," and then "Willow - a tree of enlightenment and insight." As he cast his eyes on Saille, the Willow, he was taken by the sound of its name. Then he began to listen closely, not to the sound made when he spoke the name, but to the tree itself. And then he listened to the sound of the trees before it. Each was a unique sound, not like any other. **SOUND!** That was it! The truth of knowledge and all that existed was in **SOUND!**

With that, a blinding light overcame the forest, and all was seen again. An old hag stepped forth from the forest, offering Ogma a branch on which to carve, and so, Ogma set forth scribing notches upon a staff of Birch.

He carved first this "bbbbbb—bb." A stag of seven tines to be certain, the name of beginning seven times over- Beithe, or Birch, the tree to which he owed this enlightenment. Or perhaps it was to be Saille, the Willow of Enlightenment, followed by Luis, the Quicken Tree, to make the knowledge fast and flowing. Ogma looked at the motionless old woman who offered him the branch of Birch. There was a shimmer around her as she smiled and bid Ogma well. She became a blur of light and then the Crane stood in place of the Cailleach for a moment, before taking flight back to the tree tops.

As Ogma lay carving, the Goddess Brid looked out from inside the Otherworld and reached forth. With a cast of her hand that sent a swirl of light around Ogma's face, she split forth a part of his personality. Ogma was told that from this day forward, a portion of

that from which he was made had been doubled and halved; Ogma was to continue forth within his life, and his new self would continue on in this life and in many to come.

Ogma Grianáinech (Sunface) was born that day by his own hand, the hand of Brid, the Cailleach's power and the wisdom and knowledge of the Crane. This new writing was to be called Ogham after Ogma and every time it is used, scribed, studied or pondered over, those who do so empower themselves and the Archetype of Ogma Sunface. They connect with the wisdom of the ages, the wisdom of the Druids and the timeless wisdom of the Sacred Trees.

THE END-

And a return to The Beginning!







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A few Internet Websites worth checking:

Our web site: <http://www.TruthOfTheTrees.Com>. This is a resource for discussion and further notes on this text. You can also purchase prints and originals of the art work throughout this book, created by artist Sandy Starr.

Grieve, M. A Modern Herbal: The Medicinal, Culinary, Cosmetic and Economic Properties, Cultivation and Folk-Lore of Herbs, Grasses, Fungi, Shrubs & Trees with their Modern Scientific Uses. This wonderful book has been faithfully reproduced and is available on line at [www.botanical.com](http://www.botanical.com)

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\* An Foclóir Beag: <http://www.csis.ul.ie/focloir/>

\* Gaelic Dictionaries Online: <http://www.ceantar.org/Dicts/>

\* Irish Dictionary Online (by subscription): <http://www.englishirishdictionary.com/>