The World of the Gauls

Foundation(s) of a Celtic Philosophy



Antón Bousquet

More than two millennia after the Roman conquest that marked the beginning of the fading away of the Gaulish tongue and culture, traces of the world of the Gauls still pervade their land. The Gauls obstinately refused to put their worldview into writing, but they nonetheless left a foundation, buried into the soil in the form of artifacts or written in the manuscripts of their neighbors. The artworks of the Gauls, in particular, represent an invaluable source concerning the way the early Celts viewed the creation: more than mere folklore, it is also a philosophy that can be seen behind the images that they carved on rocks, stamped on coins, or cast in bronze. The world of the Gauls is gone, but its foundations remain, and they can become the basis for the edification of something new, a philosophy that will not be a reconstruction of the philosophy of the ancient Celts, but rather only one that shares roots with it. The present work examines these foundations and uses them as the starting point of a modern Celtic philosophy.

The backbone of the old foundation is the tripartition of the creation into three realms: the first is the *Dubnos*, which is the Dark and the Deep, the earth, the waters, and the shadows of the night. The "middle realm" is *Bitu*, Life and Being, which is characterized by the color of blood: the one of the dawn and the dusk. Finally, the last one is the *Albios*, which is the Bright, the light of the skies that illuminates the day, and all that cannot be touched with the hands, that is, the metaphysical world. The three realms of nature, to which the Gauls associated different gods, are themselves constantly at war with one another, as reflected in their central myth, and it is through this harmonious strife that the creation can flourish and that man can accomplish his destiny.

This book represents an encounter between the traces of the essence of the Gaulish world and the works of ancient and modern philosophers such as Heraclitus and Heidegger, an encounter that offers a new vision of the world in which man lives.

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Antón Bousquet

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The Man in the House of Being – A Story of Language and Being in the Bible

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Abbreviations

Br.	Breton.
Fem.	Feminine.
Fr.	French.
Gaul.	Gaulish.
IBA.	Illustration by the author.
JKDAI.	Jahrbuch des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts.
Masc.	Masculine.
MBre.	Middle Breton.
MoIr.	Modern Irish.
MWe.	Middle Welsh.
OIr.	Old Irish.
ONor.	Old Norse.
OWe.	Old Welsh.
PCelt.	Proto-Celtic.
TBA.	Translation by the author.
We.	Welsh.

Introduction

> What is the most difficult is like what is one's own and what is closest, which must be sought the longest, and as long as it is sought, it is never lost.
>
> — Martin Heidegger, *Andenken*[1]

More than two millennia ago, the Roman conquest marked the end of the independence of the Gauls, and with it, the beginning of the fading away of the Gaulish tongue and culture. The Gauls became the Gallo-Romans, and then the French, but traces of their origin still pervade their land. A large part of French modern cities still bear the names bestowed to them by their distant Celtic forefathers: Paris, Lyon, Marseilles, all Gaulish names whose pronunciation and meaning have been eroded by centuries of oral transmission and neglect. Few among the dwellers of these cities seek to know their first builders. Images of backward brutes wearing bright-colored pants, eager to wage wars for gold and fame: this is all that remains of their inheritance. Their ancestors nonetheless have far more to offer: more than a few mental pictures, it is a whole world that they have left us, laying in ruins in the soil, artworks of bronze, stone, or silver, or in ancient manuscripts authored by their neighbors. What remains of the Gaulish World is a precious gift, one that can be enjoyed foremost by the descendants of those who created it and those who belong to the larger Celtic people, but also by mankind as a whole, as it offers us all a chance to look at the creation and at our very nature with different eyes, which appear as brand new ones to us, even though they been

[1] TBA. Original German: "Was am schwersten zu finden ist wie das Eigene und Nächste, das muß am längsten gesucht werden, und solange es gesucht wird, ist es nie verloren." Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 52: Hölderlins Hymne "Andenken" (Winter semester 1941/42)*, Page 123.

crafted by men who have all returned to the earth long ago.

A "World" is never an objective reality, but rather always a construct of the mind, the fruit of the work of countless men striving to build something through which they will view the universe as a whole. It cannot be touched. It cannot be seen with the eyes, but it can nonetheless be built and even be destroyed if all those supporting it either cease to *be* or simply desert it for another one. The most fundamental dimension of a World is always philosophical: its foundation stone is formed by a core of representations tightly intertwined with man's experience of nature, a way to see the universe as a series of concepts articulated into a basic structure, sheltered inside his language. Upon this foundation, other constructs are built: religions, laws, governments etc., which all rely on the philosophical foundation underlying them. Even when so much has been built upon it that it crumbles or is hidden deep into the soil, its influence still remains, visible in every stone of the edifice, but only when one takes the time to carefully examine them.

The World of the Gauls is the ground upon which a vast and long-lasting civilization was built: the Celtic World, which is now split into different parts: Welsh, Irish, Cornish, Breton etc. The significance of the Gaulish World therefore extends beyond the limits of the land of Gaul. As the birthplace of the Celts, it represents the root of all Celtic cultures and one of the major forces that have shaped the European continent and made it what it is today. They emerged as a distinct people around three thousand years ago, in central Europe, but their ancestors originally came from the East, the plains of southern Russia. They were Indo-Europeans horse riders who migrated in different directions, splitting into groups that would later form different peoples: Persians, Slavs, Germans, Greeks... and the Celts. Ancient peoples were all very deeply shaped by their environment, and thus the land where these groups settled exercised a profound influence on their World. Dwelling dense forests filled with numerous creatures such as deer, boars, cranes, or dogs, the Celts built up their World upon a foundation deeply linked with their natural environment. More than their neighbors, and perhaps more than any people found in the West, they built their World *around* the experience of nature rather than *on top* of it, giving it a very peculiar essence, which distinguishes it from the one of other Indo-Europeans and

may make it worthwhile for us to appropriate.

When the Roman emperor conquered Gaul, he not only invaded its land: he was also, and perhaps foremost, the initiator of an opposite movement of population, as the Gauls quickly abandoned the home of their people, their own World, which was built by their ancestors and sheltered them since their infancy, in order to enter the World of the Romans, forgetting their own language and culture to adopt the ones of their conquerors. Their World, which grew organically like a tree with different branches stemming from its trunk, has been seen as being cut down by Ceasar, like the sacred tree described by the Roman poet Lucanus:

> . . . Where all the hills were bare, and Caesar now
> Its fall commanded. But the brawny arms
> Which swayed the axes trembled, and the men,
> Awed by the sacred grove's dark majesty,
> Held back the blow they thought would be returned.
> This Caesar saw, and swift within his grasp
> Uprose a ponderous axe, which downward fell
> Cleaving a mighty oak that towered to heaven,
> While thus he spake: ' Henceforth let no man dread
> 'To fell this forest: all the crime is mine.
> 'This be your creed.' He spake, and all obeyed,
> For Caesar's ire weighed down the wrath of Heaven.
> Yet ceased they not to fear.[2]

The emperor is nevertheless not entirely to blame for the collapse of the World Tree of the Gauls. He and his successors indeed stroke at its trunk: they persecuted the native philosophers, the Druids, guardians of the core of their World, but they never for-

[2] English translation from: Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "Non illum cultu populi propiore frequentant, \ Sed cessere deis. Medio cum Phoebus in axe est, \ Aut coelum nox atra tenet, pavet ipse sacerdos \ Acessus, dominumque timet deprendere luci. \ Hanc iubet immisso silvam procumbere ferro: \ Nam vicina operi belloque intacta priore \ Inter nudatos stabat densissima montes. \ Sed fortes tremuere manus, motique verenda \ Maiestate loci, si robora sacra ferirent, \ In sua credebant redituras membra secures. \ Implicitas magno Caesar torpore cohortes \ Ut vidit, primus raptam librare bipennem \ Ausus, et aeriam ferro proscindere quercum, \ Effatur, merso violata in robora ferro: \ Iam ne quis vestrum dubitet subvertere silvam, \ Credite me fecisse nefas. Tunc paruit omnis \ Imperiis non sublato secura pavore \ Turba, sed expensa superorum et Caesaris ira." Lucanus, *Pharsaliae Libri X*, N.Pag.

bade the use of their tongue or the preservation of their culture as the whole. The Gauls themselves lacked the willpower to protect their heritage and to continue to build their World. They rather chose to flee their home in order to seek to benefit from the riches of one of their masters. Doing so, they created a hybrid World, called Gallo-Roman, which only had a very pale resemblance with the one of their forebears.

The Gallo-Roman World was essentially Roman, and its Gaulish foundations soon where completely hidden behind the massive structure built upon it: a metaphysical, technical World, which already was very much disconnected from the experience of nature that was the heart of the one of the early Celts. Their gods were no longer linked with the forces of nature: the sky, the earth, the sun, or the thunder, but rather anthropomorphic figures that lived lives similar to men in their myths, and that could never be seen with the eyes or touched with the hands. When the Roman Empire was itself conquered by the Christian World, the idols of stones were replaced by an even more technical structure: not only a metaphysics, as was the Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, but also a theology, a set of dogmas that offered a view of the creation, a large part of which could not be experienced directly by the living: the Trinity, heaven and hell, angels and demons... The culmination of this movement, away from the experience of nature and toward an increasingly overwhelming presence of metaphysics and the *technique*,[3] nonetheless came once the Christian World began to be deserted for the one of "Modernity," which rejected the old metaphysics to replace them with others, such as positivism. With this modern World, man not only let himself be enslaved by the *technique*, but he also denied the truth of the experience of the essence of man's being, his link with the incomprehensible dimension of nature, which calls him to bring all gods into man's Worlds.

The first gods came to man when he was trying to understand the essence of nature, which is called the holy by Heidegger and Hölderlin.[4] They appeared in his World without him knowing

[3] The word *technique* is here used in its French meaning, designating all the technical knowledge discovered by mankind, from the most rudimentary techniques of flint knapping to modern technology. This corresponds to the German *Technik* and to a certain extant to the Greek τέχνη .

[4] Heidegger, *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*, Page 81-82; Original Ger-

what they were. Their names were intended to be questions rather than answers, walking sticks helping him to walk on the path toward the unconcealment of their essence. Knowing that he didn't know these gods, and only saw them from afar, without touching their essence, the dis-coverer of the first gods therefore constantly observed them, following their pace and building his World around the *presence* of the holy. At this time, the experience of the holy becomes the raw material from which a philosophy, that is, an ex-planation of the essence of nature, is built. This philosophy, in turn, helped him develop a consciousness of his own essence and to determine what role should he play in the creation: the purpose of his own being.

Once the one bringing the first gods into his World passed away, his descendants continued its edification. Convinced that the names of the gods were proof of the fact that their essence had been adequately grasped and that they are now dwelling in their World, they neglected the necessary grounding of their vision of nature. They stopped to observe the creation and to build their World around the essence of nature, and rather constructed idols on top of it: not idols of stone or wood but idols of the mind, leading them to worship the fruit of their own imagination instead of letting themselves be touched by the holy. Such a decay affected the World of the Gauls, as it affected many others, up to the present day.

Man's World is what allows him to be a human being, someone living *in* a language, *in* a culture, and who possesses a capacity to reflect. Nature is the source of all, and every World rests upon it, but it also is itself brought into man's World. As the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin tells us:

> We name you, compelled by the holy, we name you
> Nature! And new, as from a bath
> From you emerges all that is divinely born.[5]

man: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 4 Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung (1936–1968)*, Page 59.

[5] Heidegger, *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*, Page 80 (At the Source of the Danube); Original German: "Wir nennen Dich, heiliggenöthiget, nennen, \ Natur! dich wir, und neu, wie dem Bad entsteigt\ Dir alles Göttlichgeborne." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 4 Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung (1936–1968)*, Page 58. (Am Quell der Donau).

The forces of nature come into man's World at his invitation, brought in by someone who has seen them and felt their presence in his bones. They then become the first gods, and they later become idols, before they crumble to dust or are crushed with a hammer. The long journey walked by man on the path of metaphysics and the *technique* is nonetheless not a mere going astray from the truth of nature. It rather is a wandering, initiated by nature itself, where man was made to become estranged from his own essence so that the homecoming would bring him closer to it and show him its worth. The first gods have fled his presence, and he is now surrounded by countless idols that narrow his horizon and prevent him from perceiving the holy. Something nonetheless invites him to re-dis-cover, to clear the path toward the first gods and the experience of nature: the traces left in the earth and in his world, even in the very words that he uses every day, things that show him that men once saw the creation with different eyes and that they had a different relationship with nature.

The Gauls did not leave us a single manuscript, only short inscriptions on monuments, vessels, or lead tablets. Language, however, is not the only vehicle of signification: art is another. A single artwork can sometimes speak to man more clearly than a thousand pages of explanations, even if the manner of speaking of the artwork significantly differs from the way language speaks to us. The Gauls left us a myriad of objects, mainly found buried deep into the soil, objects that can teach us the way they viewed the creation or, in other words, show us their World. Artworks are indeed often used to condensate the core philosophical beliefs of a people. The poetic impulse at the source of many works of art is the same as the one that led to the bringing of the gods into man's World: the holy, also it is also known by many other names. Symbols are particularly efficient in embodying a philosophy, the core of a World, an example of which is the "yīn-yáng symbol" of the Chinese: ☯ , which represents the essence of Daoist philosophy, the interplay of opposites that are intertwined with each other, symbolizing the way the Daoists see the essence of nature. Some of the artworks created by the early Celts are purely symbolic, while others precisely depict elements of their lives or even scenes of their myths. These works paint an outline of the World, one that must be deciphered and assembled as a puzzle whose pieces are scattered across both space and time. The resulting picture will nonetheless

never be a clear painting of their World, and it does not need to be. Indeed, what is important is not to "reconstruct" what has been destroyed by the Roman conquest and the neglect of the Gauls. A rebuilding of the World of the Gauls would not only be futile but would also run against the will of the Gauls themselves, who explicitly refused to put their philosophy and the World at large on paper, given to all the peoples to see. The artworks that they crafted and left behind them give us just enough: they offer us a **foundation**.

The World Tree of the Gauls has been cut down, and all that is left of it is a stump. To pretend that we can reconstruct their World would be to deny the difference between a stump and a tree. This nonetheless does not mean that the stump is in itself useless: it can serve as the basis for the regrowth of the tree, which would be different than the first but would still share its roots. The **foundation** left by the Gauls can become the basis for the **founding** of a Celtic philosophy, which would not be the one of the Druids of the Iron Age, but would nonetheless share core elements with it. Such a foundation work is what will be attempted in the present work. Bits of the essence of the World of the Gauls will be extracted from their art and from the imprint they left on the World of their descendants and insular cousins, and these bits will be used, in conjunction with the insights provided by ancient and modern philosophers such as Heraclitus and Heidegger, to offer a new vision of the creation, rooted in the World of the Ancient Celts but built anew so as to offer us a path allowing us to escape the grip of metaphysics and theology to find back the way to an experience of the holy.

The foundation of a Celtic philosophy could nonetheless present the same danger as the building of any other philosophy: it is meant to accompany man in his experience of the holy and his appropriation by it, but if it were to become estranged from the truth of nature, if it were to become a metaphysics or a theology, it would then become more of an impediment than a help for man. As Heidegger tells us:

> What is the most difficult is like what is one's own and what is closest, which must be sought the longest, and as long as it is sought, it is never lost. A search that is rushed and hasty is no search, but rather only

> a confused straying from one to another . . . The true search is a permanent state of hesitation. Not the hesitation of the one who is merely perplexed and undecided, but rather the hesitation of the one who lingers for a long time, who looks back and forth, as he searches and lingers in the transition. The discovery and appropriation of what is one's own is one with the hesitating transition.[6]

For those who see themselves as the physical or spiritual descendants of the early Celts, the tradition should not become an idol hiding the possibility of a personal experience of the holy. Because of this, the fact that the Gauls obstinately refused to give us a canon of philosophical and religious teachings can itself be interpreted as the most precious teaching of all, and the very heart of their World. It forces us to walk our way back to the first gods and to seek to join the men who continuously bring the holy into the World, pouring its essence into words or artworks that will lead men back to its experience.

The foundation of the World of the Gauls can represent a path guiding us toward a reappropriation of the experience of the holy. It has the potential to lead us to free ourselves from the chains of the different metaphysics in which the modern man is caught, by walking toward the first gods, but then also past them, realizing that they also are idols that poorly represent the essence of the holy, which cannot be adequately represented but can be experienced. Ultimately, such a journey may lead man to let himself be approached by something else. When man is ready to welcome it, a last god may venture into his World, but this will only occur when future men will have paved the way first, as the German philosopher tells us:

[6] TBA. Original German: "Was am schwersten zu finden ist wie das Eigene und Nächste, das muß am längsten gesucht werden, und solange es gesucht wird, ist es nie verloren. Alles überhastete und gehetzte Suchen ist kein Suchen, sondern nur ein wirres Irren vom Einen zum Anderen. Zum Suchen gehört das ständige Innehalten der Besinnung. Besinnung ist wie das Atemholen der Scheu vor dem erwarteten Wunder. Das echte Suchen ist ein ständiges Zögern. Nicht das Zögern des nur Ratlosen und Unentschiedenen, aber das Zögern des lange Verweilenden, der vor- und zurückblickt, weil er sucht und im Übergang verweilt. Die Findung und Aneignung des Eigenen ist eins mit dem zögernden Übergang." Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 52: Hölderlins Hymne "Andenken" (Winter semester 1941/42)*, Pages 123–124.

> The future ones of the last god are prepared first and *only* by those who find, traverse, and build the way *back* out of the experienced abandonment by being. Without the sacrifice of these who take the way back, the possibility of an intimation of the last god would never dawn; they are the true fore-runners of the future ones.[7]

Man has been abandoned by the holy, but only because this abandonment would lead him to grow, to become what he is intended to be, and ultimately to return to the home of his youth: nature, having seen the wideness of the world and gained a deeper consciousness of the essence of all things.

Before this can occur, man must first begin his walk back. He must first encounter and build a bond with the first gods. He must see the creation through another lens so that the nature of all senses, and their influence on his sight, can be perceived and taken into account when he ponders the truth of nature. Many paths lead to many of the first gods. Among these, the gods of the Celts certainly represent a very adequate choice, as what is known of them shows us that they are particularly "archaic," in the sense that they are very close to what they were when they were first invited by man to dwell in his World: they are very close to the holy, to the essence of nature itself, which is reflected in them. Another fact that makes it a wise choice is the fact that contrary to the gods of the Greeks or the Romans, the ones of the Celts have not been overly defined and spoken of. Mirroring the ineffable nature of the holy, their gods are left to us to dis-cover and to seek, rather than simply offered to us as a definite canon of scriptures and graphic representations.

As Heraclitus famously said, one cannot step in the same river twice,[8] and in the same manner, the (re)foundation of a Celtic philosophy, which represents a path toward the first gods and past

[7] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 325. Original German: "die Zukünftigen des letzten Gottes werden *nur* und erst vorbereitet durch jene, die den *Rückweg* aus der erfahrenen Seinsverlassenheit finden, ausmessen und bauen. Ohne das Opfer dieser Rückwegigen kommt es nicht einmal zu einer Dämmerung der Möglichkeit des Winkens des letzten Gottes. Diese Rück-wegigen sind die wahren Vor-läufer der Zukünftigen." Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Pages 410–411.

[8] Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 159.

them to the holy, is not a return to the World of the Gauls. What is built upon the ancient foundations is not the original building, but rather only something new that shares its basis, and that can elevate man higher than could ever be possible before. It does not intend to recover anything: it intends to use the foundation stones left to us as our inheritance in order to build something stronger and more beautiful than what the ancients could build in their time. It is not *the* philosophy of the Celts, but only *a* Celtic philosophy, which should always be challenged, improved, or transformed in order for it to take man farther and farther on the path.

The present work will present *a* vision of the World of the Gauls, a way to look at the creation based on traces left by the ancient Celts. The backbone of this vision is the tripartition of nature into three different realms that are in constant tension and strife with one another. The first three chapters will be devoted to each one of these realms. The first is named ΔΟΥΒΝΟϹ[9] [Dubnos] in the Gaulish tongue. It is the **Dark and the Deep**, which is foremost the earth and all that can be felt with the sense of touch, that is, what is technically known as physical "matter." It is also the darkness of the night, what holds sway over the earth and the skies when the face of the sun is hidden from sight. This realm is associated with ΚΕΡΝΟΥΝΝΟϹ [cernunnos] the Horned One, the stag whose antlers support the surface of the earth.

The second realm is ΒΙΤΟΥ [Bitu], **Life and Being**, the "middle realm" that stands above the great body of the Dark. It is the whole of life, what is formed by the union of the myriad of living beings that fill the surface of the earth and even venture into the waters and the air of the sky. Men certainly represent the apex of Life, but together they form a whole, a ΤΕΥΤΑ [teuta], a people, which is linked with ΤΕΥΤΑΤΕϹ [teutates], the One of the People.

Finally, the last of the three realms is ΑΛΒΙΟϹ [albios], the

[9] Gaulish words will mainly be written in Gallo-Greek, that is, using the Greek alphabet, which was in use in Gaul during the centuries preceding the Roman conquest. The font used here has been designed for the present work, and it is based on Gaulish inscriptions. Some words and sentences will nonetheless be written using the Latin alphabet, when their source uses this writing system, as it will be the case for inscriptions dating from the Gallo-Roman period.

Bright, what is found above the surface of the Dark and above Life: the skies in which light travels and that offers the living beings a chance to contemplate the fullness of the creation. More than the other realms, the Bright is multifaceted. It is the Lofty, the winds that sweep the earth and take away the moisture of the Dark to form the clouds. It is the Light, what is without "heaviness" and can only be seen with the eyes rather than touched by the hands, that is, what stands against the Dark: the sun, the moon, and the stars. It is also the faint glow of the Milky Way, the silvery wheel that encompasses all that man can see. The Lofty is linked with TAPANIC [taranis], the Thunderous One, while the Light is tied to ΛOYTOYC [lugus], the Luminous One. The whole of the Bright is nonetheless encompassed by the Silver Wheel, the Great Queen known as PITANI [rigani] among the Gauls.

Once the three realms have been presented, the fourth chapter will be devoted to their interactions, which is a harmonious strife between the forces of nature. Life serves as a mediator of the strife between Dark and Bright, but its very being is also deeply intertwined with this strife. As told by Heraclitus: τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ' ἔριν γίνεσθαι, "what is opposite agrees, and from differing things comes the fairest harmony, and all things happen according to strife."[10] The essence of nature is to be found in the strife between the realms, which is also part of man's own essence. Life and Being can only occur when Dark and Bright are engaged in a strife against one another, and when none of the two fully overcomes the other. The unfolding of the strife is nonetheless closely linked with the flow of time, through the various cycles tied to the movements of the heavenly bodies, in particular. Each day represents a battle between the night, the reign of the Dark, and the day, reign of the Bright, which are separated by the dawn and the dusk, the time of blood, the reign of Life. The lunar cycle also exhibits such manifestations of the strife, but the yearly cycle nevertheless represents a clearer manifestation of it: the influence that the yearly cycle exerts on the life of man is indeed considerably stronger. The passing of the years defines a series of patterns that can be observed on earth: the opposition between the winter,

[10] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 160.

when the Dark holds sway over earth and sky, and the summer, when the Bright showers the earth with its light and warmth. The creatures, part of the "middle realm," are shaped by these cycle: the stag loses his horns, symbol of his strength, at the end of the winter. The crane only comes to the land of Gaul during the cold period of the year, and it returns north as soon as the warmth of the Bright can once again be felt on the earth. Man, and Life as a whole, are thrown into the strife between the realms, which is displayed in the sky and on the earth day after day, month after month, and year after year. Man's appropriation of the role that he is called to play in this strife is itself a milestone on the path leading him to the experience of his true essence.

The strife, however, is not only displayed in the earth and the sky: it is also reflected in man's World. The final chapter of the present work will be devoted to this bringing of the strife in the World, which takes the form of myths. With the myth, the strife between the realms, that is, the forces of nature, becomes a strife between the gods. The passing of the seasons becomes a play, in which gods and men are actors, telling a story that attempts to represent the harmony of nature and to show how man's life is very similar to the essence of nature itself: the play between the earth and the sky, the sun and the clouds, the moon and the seas, can be seen as obeying to the same natural order as the events pacing man's life, such as love and hate, alliances and betrayals, friendship and sacrifice. The central myth of the World of the Gauls, as it will be interpreted here, will represent a bridge between the order of nature and human nature, a bridge that can help man to nurture his bond with the creation, and ultimately pass beyond the first god and prepare himself for the coming of the last one.

The following work will therefore not teach what did the Gauls believe, or who they worshipped. It will not present a "religion" nor be a historical study. It will rather offer the reader a new outlook on the creation around him, a philosophy based on the foundation left by the Celts, but which nonetheless should not be seen as necessarily faithful to an original that has fallen into oblivion. What it demands is a certain openness to the poetic and to the voluntary ambiguities that allow man to escape the prison of a technical, metaphysical thinking. Such an escape is itself part of the path leading to the first gods, but only those willing to free themselves will succeed and will benefit from the journey.

Chapter 1

Dubnos

The basis of the ancient Celtic world is the *deep*, the *dark*, what is thought to be *below* the realm of men. In the Gaulish tongue, these notions are all encompassed by a single word: 𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌁𐌍𐌏𐌒 [dubnos] or 𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌌𐌍𐌏𐌒 [dumnos].[1]

This description of the primordial realm of the celts nonetheless should not lead us to think of it as a place of gloom and fear. It is far remote from the *inferno* of the later tradition in which most of the descendants of the ancient Gauls have bathed their mind since their infancy. The dubnos is indeed deep, dark, and it does not let itself be seen by those living their lives far above its depths, but so is the motherly womb in which all men are knitted by life itself, awaiting the day when they are brought into the world of their forebears and brethren. The darkness fundamentally is what precedes the light, and what allows it to appear. The deep is the clearing of a space in which something else can *be*, and what is below allows the beings to build what will be above it, securely resting on what lays low, unseen but unbreakable.

The following words written by the Roman emperor who brought on the twilight of the Celtic culture of Gaul can help us to better

[1] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* pages 151–152; The Gaulish word as been linked with the Welsh word *Annwfn* that designates the "underworld." The Gaulish word *antumnos*, which appears in the so-called "Larzac lead inscription" (*Le plomb du Larzac*), is seen by the French linguist P.-Y. Lambert as an early form of what would become the *Annwfn* of the Welsh, originating from a reconstructed form **ande-dubnos*, with *ande* meaning "under." (ibid., Page 50.)

perceive the nature of dubnos:

> All the Gauls assert that they are descended from the god Dis [Pater], and say that this tradition has been handed down by the Druids. For that reason they compute the divisions of every season, not by the number of days, but of nights; they keep birthdays and the beginnings of months and years in such an order that the day follows the night.[2]

The Gauls are the sons of the great darkness, the children who emerged from the depth below the surface now trodden by their feet. The words of the Roman commander may seem to imply that this filiation would be a mere superstition, with different peoples choosing different locations as the source from which their people came to be, but this would be to underestimate the wisdom of the ancient ones and betray a lack of insight concerning the nature of the Dubnos.

In order to begin to lift up the veil covering the nature of the most fundamental realm and see how it represents the source from which the Gauls sprouted out from the earth and into the world, one must go back to the birth of this ancient people, to the place and time where a group of Indo-European settlers of central Europe began to be differentiated from its neighbors, forming what would later be known as the Celtic people.

1.1 The Celts: Sons of the Deep

Following a migration from the fatherland of the early Indo-Europeans, the steppes of southern Russia, a group of horse-riding men and women began to settle in central Europe at the end of the bronze age, more than three millennia ago. A small and yet magnificent valley, in the land that now bears the name of Austria, would come to represent the birthplace of the Celts.

[2] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War* (Text in brackets added); Original Latin: "Galli se omnes ab Dite patre prognatos praedicant idque ab druidibus proditum dicunt. Ob eam causam spatia omnis temporis non numero dierum sed noctium finiunt. dies natales et mensum et annorum initia sic observant ut noctem dies subsequatur." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.*



Figure 1.1: *Hallstatt* (Alt, Jakob. *Hallstatt vom See aus.*)

The town of Hallstatt stands between a lake whose waters are more than a hundred meters deep and a small mountain whose name is a sign of the wealth that it contains: Salzberg, the "Mountain of Salt." This wealth from the depths of the earth would make the fortune of the first settlers of this valley. For millions of years, the salt waited to offer itself to those brave enough to plunge themselves into the dark and the deep, facing the threat of death in order to bring it to the surface so that it would gladden the heart of the men consuming it for their sustenance and for their pleasure. The dwellers of this valley faced these dangers and they claimed this resource as their own.[3] From this newfound wealth, a new people arose.

The Ancient Celts are more famed for their combative and rebellious nature than for their industry and perseverance, but even though they often were indeed warriors who gained their bread with the blows of their sword, their birthplace is nonetheless to be found in the heart of the Mountain of Salt. Patiently and relentlessly, they for centuries mined the mountain and plundered its precious mineral. As the sun bathed the mountain with its light, men chose to spend their days in the darkness, their bodies entering the earth, bearing pickaxes of iron and cow-hide baskets

[3] Norton-Taylor, *The Celts*, Page 33.

through narrow shafts that threatened to collapse at any moment, reminding them whence they came and whereto they would soon return.

Their hands calloused by the dust and the stones, their skin and their eyes dried up by the salty air in which they were engulfed, their flesh extracted the precious substance. Brought into the world of men, in the bright surface that they inhabit, the salt allowed them to preserve the fruits of the earth and the animals that they hunted, killed, and butchered so that they would be able to go through the winter during which the earth became barren. More than a means of preservation, the salt also highlighted the flavor of the food prepared by the women in the cauldrons hung above the hearth of their house. Traded with their neighbors, it allowed the wealth of remotes lands to be poured into the valley: gold, silver, iron, corals, jewels...

The mine nonetheless was more than a reserve of wealth that they could plunder at will. It also was the place where the ancient Celts had the most intimate contact with the earth. At the bottom of the exiguous shafts, they were reaching the limits of what was accessible to them. They could see that no matter how deep they dug, no matter how hard they struck the soil under their feet, there was no end in sight, no bottom of the earth that they could pierce in order to discover something else below it. By their own forces and by their own will did they dis-cover the nature of the soil upon which they lived their lives, pealing off thousands of its layers. The deep, the dark, and the invisible soon became their home, the dwelling place that was the source of their nourishment.

Centuries later, in Britain, a Celtic tribe also became renowned for their exploitation of another resource kept sealed in the depths of the earth: the tin mines of Cornwall. The men who undertook this extraction of tin ore took the name of 𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌌𐌍𐌏𐌍𐌉𐌉 [dumnonii].[4] The name has in the past been interpreted as linked with the depth of the valleys of the region[5], but it could also be seen as a name perfectly fitting for those who made their living in the depths of Dubnos: miners.

The Mountain of Salt represents the source of the Celtic peo-

[4] Kruta, *Les Celtes*, Page 586.
[5] Charnock, *Local Etymology*, Page 86.

ple. They are the sons of the mountain, the sons of the deep and the dark, and even though they later abandoned the mines in order to till the earth, to raise cattle, or to wage wars, they nonetheless kept traces of their origin, transmitted through tradition from the elders to the young generations.

This is the first way in which this people can be seen as belonging to and arising from Dubnos. Now, however, comes the time to further examine the nature of this realm.

1.2 The Nature of Dubnos

The most fundamental of the three realms of the Celtic world can be seen under different angles. The Gaulish term used to designate this realm itself reflects its complex nature, knitting together different elements that form a united vision of what lies under man's feet: a place that is deep, dark, invisible, but which also represents the home and the origin of the Celts as a people. It is also the earth that supports their feet and brings forth the fruits that allow man to continue, for a time, to live his life upon its surface. It is the solid ground that forms the basis of man's world, what he can experience through the senses and lean upon, something that is known as absolute truth. Finally, man is himself a son of the Dubnos, with his flesh formed from the minerals and the water contained in the dark vaults of the deep, before he returns to it once he has taken his final breath.

The wise men of the early *Keltia*, the lands inhabited by the Celts, only left us faded imprints showing us who they were, imprints found in the earth itself or in the manuscripts of their neighbors, but what we know gives us a part of the foundation of their worldview, bringing to light the fruit of the reflections of these men from distant times.

1.2.1 Dubnos: the Deep

Man can dig the soil upon which he stands, tearing it lump by lump and casting it aside so as to clear the way down to the source of his own being, but he will always be vanquished by the dark mass, which contrary to him does not count its days, as it

has nowhere else where it could return.

The dark soil nonetheless conceals the secret of its origin and of its nature. It gives man the shelters in which he can take refuge from the harshness of the skies, but it is itself encompassed by the Deep, the foundation of the soil, the clearing that allows it to be. What supports the mountains of stones, dust, and salt, the lakes and the life that roams among them, is what was there before the ground (Ge. *grund*) came to be: the **abyss** (Ge. *ab-grund*). According to Martin Heidegger: "The abyss is the *originary unity* of space and time, that unifying unity which first allows them to diverge into their separateness."[6] The abyss is the inceptual clearing that opened up the space where things and beings could emerge. It is the deepest of the Deep, the inscrutable foundation upon which the Dark, the soil, stands. The abyss cannot be seen, because it encompasses everything, including man himself. Digging deeper is of no use in order to find it, as it only displaces the Dark while the Deep slips away, curled upon itself with man moving inside it. The abyss [abgrund] thus is an abyssal ground [ab-grund], "the primessential *clearing concealment*"[7], as it operates a clearing that offers a place where the earth can arise, but that in doing so also conceals itself: the Deep is itself covered by the Dark that stands upon it, the space is hidden by what it contains.

The Dubnos, perceived as the Deep, therefore is far from being a mysterious realm inaccessible to man, somewhere from which he came to be and toward which he would one day return. The Deep encloses all that man can see, including himself. It nonetheless remains concealed because man often fails to gain an intimacy with it, as he is blinded by the multitude of "things" that fill his eyes and his mind. The Deep is the most hardly seen. It is seldom perceived, as it presents itself as a nothingness, an emptiness:

> The abyssal ground, as the staying away of the ground in the indicated sense, is the first clearing of the open as "emptiness." But how is "emptiness" to be understood

[6] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 299; Original German: "Der Abgrund ist die *ursprüngliche Einheit* von Raum und Zeit, jene einigende Einheit, die sie erst in ihre Geschiednis auseinandergehen läßt," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 379.

[7] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 300; Original German: "Der Ab-grund ist die erstwesentliche *lichtende Verbergung*," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 380.

> here? Not in the sense that space and time, as forms of ordering and as frameworks for calculable and objectively present things, are simply vacant, i.e., not in the sense of the sheer absence of such things therein, but, rather, in the sense of a temporal-spatial emptiness, an originary yawning open in hesitant self-withholding.[8]

The Deep is "self-withholding," because it sets up a stage for something else, something that will form a background where a play can take place. Only when everything else will have been removed from man's view will he be able to contemplate the Deep. Before this occurs, he will have to first appropriate the foreground and the background of the play in which he is thrown, first as a pawn unaware of his surrounding.

As the Deep encompasses all, however, there is more than one path that leads to its uncovering... The deepest of the Deep is joined with the highest of the skies, but for now, both must remain covered, waiting for the appropriate time, when they will reveal themselves.

The Deep is a self-concealing clearing that paves the way for several other facets of Dubnos. It is the foundations of all foundations. Immediately standing upon the Deep, we find the Dark, the shadowy ground inside which the miners of the Mountain of Salt plunged their flesh.

1.2.2 Dubnos: the Dark

As if it were inscribed in his bones, man's instinct tells him to be wary of the darkness, the place where nothing is seen, and thus where he cannot prepare himself to face the dangers approaching him. Blindness makes man feel powerless, and he therefore tends to avoid the places where light cannot penetrate.

[8] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 300–301; Original German: "Der Ab-grund als Weg-bleiben des Grundes in dem genannten Sinn ist die erste Lichtung des Offenen als der »Leere«. Aber welche Leere ist hier gemeint? Nicht jenes Unbesetzte der Ordnungsformen und Rahmen für das berechenbare Vorhandene von Raum und Zeit, nicht die Abwesenheit von Vorhandenem innerhalb dieser, sondern die zeit-räumliche Leere, die ursprüngliche Aufklaffung im zögernden Sichversagen," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 380–381.

The night and the winter are periods of time when the darkness holds sway over the earth, periods during which man is condemned to be still. His body has learned to restrict his level of activity during the nights, escaping the darkness in front of his eyes by closing them and taking refuge in the wonders found in his dreams, which are filled with light and clarity.

Man is thus naturally enclined to fear the Dark, but this does not mean that this fundamental aspect of the Dubnos represents a threat to his own being. This fear may be natural, but it should not lead him to forget what he owns to the tenebrous world, and what it can still reveal to him.

The Dark, however, is by definition what cannot be seen. If one endeavors to cast light upon the darkness in order to perceive it with his eyes, as a "thing" comprehended by his reason, the darkness instantly cease to be. This nonetheless precisely is one of the most precious gifts offered by the opaque realm. As the American scholar Robert Sokolowski said:

> Darkness itself comes to light, as much as it can, in philosophy, but philosophy must have the good sense to let the darkness be. If it were to try to eliminate the darkness, it would become rationalism and would be an attempt to replace the natural attitude instead of contemplating it.[9]

In order to be perceived, the Dark must remain unseen. The uncertainty of its nature cannot be destroyed without annihilating the darkness itself. With his eyes rendered useless, man is nonetheless invited by the Dark to re-dis-cover his other senses.

Plunged in the realm of shadows, man must in particular rely on his sense of touch, which is enhanced by the absence of vision. The Dark cannot be *seen*, but it can be *felt*. Through the motions of his hands, man can find the key to the perception of one of the most prominent facets of the Dubnos. What does he feel with his fingers? What can be felt, that is, matter.

The Dark, both as a physical place and as a precise period of time when the darkness hold sway, is the location where man can renew his bond with the **earth**, the dark matter that not only

[9] From: Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Page 168.

supports his feet and nourishes his body through its fruits, but also forms his own flesh. When he cannot see, he is forced to touch the earthly matter, taking the pulse of the great and dark body from which his own flesh was made.

The essence of the earth is to be a *ground*. The Dark is the ground standing on the abyss, which itself serves as the basis for the edification of man's world. Man can see the earth as the ΛITAYI [litaui], the "wide one,"[10] or as the TAΛMOYN [talmun],[11] the "surface." He can see the *TIPOC [*tīros][12], the "land," but he can also see the earth as the dark ground, the grounding soil from which all the living beings came to be but that does not let itself be seen. When man digs into the surface of the earth, he changes its shape but he still fails to see its inner part: what becomes visible then itself becomes its surface. The great darkness, what cannot be seen, is the TΔOY [gdū], the earth as the dark body that lies under its surface, what is under the world of men and what supports it.

The origin of the Celtic word TΔOY [gdū] is nonetheless older than the Celts themselves. Its Greek equivalent is even now still widely known: χθών [khthṓn], which gave the English adjective "chtonian," designating something pertaining to the "underground world." Perhaps reflecting a greater care concerning the question of the nature of the earth, the Gaulish tongue offers us a richer palette describing different aspects of its nature as compared to the English one. Concerning the subject of this section, in particular, the distinction between these terms is important, as the *Gdū* represents one of the main aspects of Dubnos, while the *Litaui* or the *Tīros* do not. Only the *Gdū* is an aspect of the Dark and the Deep, as the surface of the *Litaui* and the *Tīros* is a plane, without depth, one that is never plunged into complete darkness. The surface of the earth is continually visible, as it is permanently showered with the light of the skies, either the powerful rays of the sun or the dim glitter of the stars. In contrast with them, the *Gdū* is what cannot be penetrated by the light, what is plunged in a perpetual and continuous darkness and what can never be seen but only experienced with the other senses.

[10] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 204.
[11] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 378.
[12] Proto-Celtic reconstruction. ibid., Page 379.

The *Gdū* thus remains unseen, but it gives fruits that clearly represent visible manifestations of it. As the German thinker reminds us: "the earth is not simply the Closed but rather that which rises up as self-closing."[13] It is the *fīweryon, the "thick," the "fat" and "fruitful" one,[14] from which the flow of life will sprout between the surface and the skies above it.

Perhaps more convincing than the words of the Roman emperor quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the Gaulish tongue itself preserves clues concerning the link between this people, even mankind in general, and the Dubnos. In the language of the Ancient Celts, man is indeed called ᛏᚫᛟᚾᛁᛟᚲ [gdonios][15], the "earthly one," the being that arises from the depth of the Dark, the being who is birthed by the *Gdū*. Men are born out of the womb of the earth. Every *Gdonios* is a son of the *Gdū*. Man belongs to the Dark, the Deep, the one below, because he was born out of its womb. Every part of his body directly comes from it: the bones made of its minerals, the blood flowing through his veins made of water and iron, his flesh made from the earthly elements absorbed through the ingestion of plants which themselves extracted their essence from the depths of the earth.

Man thus is not only a son of the Dark: he also bears the Dark within himself. He never is completely severed from the Dubnos, as it is part of himself just as he is himself part of it. The fundamental realm of the Celts therefore may not merely be the "world down below," or the "underworld," as many have argued.[16] It is the Dark and the Deep as the basis for the world of men. Its core naturally is to be found under the surface of the world, but this position is not inherently part of its nature. The Dark is the source of man's being, the materiality that encompasses him. It itself stands on the Deep, as the clearing that opens up a space allowing the emergence of being and beings, but as the Deep comprises all that fills the universe, it implies that the Dubnos is not limited to what is below man. It rather is the container of all

[13] From: Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page 53. Original German: "Die Erde ist nicht einfach das Verschlossene, sondern das, was als Sichverschließendes aufgeht." From: Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Page 42.

[14] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 131.

[15] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 176; This linguistic association between man and the earth seems to originate from a very early stage of Indo-european, as it is found in several branches of the language family.

[16] See Sterckx, *La mythologie du monde celte*, Page 146.

the beings and things that are made from physical matter.

Living in everydayness, man is blinded by the glaring light of the luminaries in the sky. He cannot see the Dark and the Deep that pervades all his environment. Only when he decides to encounter the darkness can he begin to perceive the link that binds him to the Dubnos. When he stays awake during the night, or when he enters the caves formed as entryways to the depths of the earth, there or then may he begin to loosen the chains of his dependency on the light of the skies, and use his hands to feel the Dark. He may then feel the earth in his bones, and begin to live *with* it rather than to see it as a storehouse, a mere reserve of materials that he can exploit in order to fulfill his own desires.

The French archaeologist Jean-Louis Bruneaux tells us that: "The Gaul cannot separate the ground on which he lives from the underground world that supports it and from the sky, which is a sort of covering veil over it."[17] The three elements cannot indeed be separated, but the Dubnos is more than the underground world, as it not only forms the ground: it also pervades the surface, man himself, and it is even found high in the skies. The sources of light of the heavens also conceal their partial belonging to the Dark, and they also rest on the Deep. The philosophers and the historians of ancient Greece and Rome recognized the Druids of Gaul as true philosophers, the contemporaries of men who had developed very profound visions of the earth and the world, like Heraclitus and Parmenides, people of great subtlety and insight. To reduce the Dubnos of the Celts to a mythic underground universe in which the departed would be ruled by infernal deities would be to underestimate the capacity of the ancient scholars and mystics to perceive the bond that united them to the environment in which they were thrown. Clues of the intellectual and spiritual sophistication of the Celts are not only found in the sayings the scholars of the Antiquity: the art of the Celts shows us that they were a people that heavily invested in the work of the mind.

Once the irrevocable bond that unites man (*Gdonios*) to the Dubnos (As *Gdū*, the dark body of the earth) has been recognized, another aspect of this realm can be unveiled: that it constitutes

[17] TBA. Original French: "Le Gaulois ne peut donc separer le sol sur lequel il vit du monde souterrain qui le support et du ciel qui en est une sorte de couverture." From: J.-L. Brunaux, *Les Gaulois*, Page 158.

the Ground of Truth.

1.2.3 Dubnos: the Ground, Truth

The Dark that stands upon the Deep forms the ground that offers man a stable surface on top of which he can live and edify his world. This ground bestowed by the Dubnos to him does not only provide a physical stability allowing him not to stumble or drown. The Dubnos, as the self-concealing physical matter (The Dark) inserted in a space-time (The Deep), is also the ground of the upper realm, of the metaphysical, what cannot be directly experienced by the senses.

Metaphysical "ideas" are not necessarily grounded in the Dark, but they need to be in order to be shown as **true** (Ga. ᏔIᏢOᏟ [viros]/[virus][18]). A metaphysical world that lacks any grounding in the earth cannot be a manifestation of truth. The concept of "truth" has often itself been disparaged as lacking an objective ground, but the essence of the ground can be seen as truth itself. The Dubnos is something that is one, absolute, and experienced by all men. It does not lie. It does not deceive, and it has no will of its own. It cannot be annihilated but only reshaped. It cannot be seen, but it is what is most intimately experienced.

If someone knows that 1+1=2 is a true equation, it is not because he has learned a set of abstract rules defining calculus. It rather is because this equation can be related to his own experience, to his daily encounters with the surface of the Dark, by counting "things" present in front of him and directly feeling them with his senses. Only through this anchorage in the dark earth can something be *known* as true.

One of the most commonly used definitions of truth is to see it as *adæquatio intellectus et rei*, correspondance between the intellect and things.[19] Heidegger thus rephrases it: "truth is correspondence, grounded in correctness, between proposition and thing."[20]

[18] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 424.

[19] Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, Page 138. (Quoted from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.16, A.2).

[20] English translation from: Heidegger and Sadler, *The Essence of Truth*, Page 2. Original German: "So ist Wahrheit *die auf Richtigkeit gründende Übereinstimmung der Aussage mit der Sache*." From: Heidegger, *Vom Wesen*

A problematic aspect of this view of truth is that it fails to account for the fact that "things" only exist in the intellect. The Dark is not a pile composed of a multitude of things, as these "things" represent metaphysical concepts tied to man's language. As said by the Chinese philosopher Laozi: "nameless is the beginning of the earth and the sky; Names are the source of the myriad of things.[21] The Dubnos knows no "things" and no names, only a continuous unity and obscurity. The Dark and the Deep are not a mere point of comparison between metaphysical ideas: they are truth itself, and the things that are true are the ones that have a solid bond with them.

Heidegger, whose thought is deeply rooted in the Pre-Socratics and probably is close to the one of their Gaulish contemporaries, tells us that: "truth happens as the clearing concealment."[22] Truth remains concealed. It is never directly seen or "known," but it sets up a ground opening up a space for something else to *be*. One of the aforementioned quote of the same thinker can then unveil the relation between truth and the Dubnos: "the earth is not simply the Closed but rather that which rises up as self-closing."[23]. Here may the nature of the Dubnos as the ground of truth begin to be seen. The Dark is closed upon itself, unseen, but it sets up a sure ground that is absolute and shared by all, although it may be misperceived or ignored. The Dark is truth itself, as what allows "things" to be revealed as grounded and true, but nonetheless does not allow itself to be seen.

The link between Dubnos and truth even extends to the Deep, as it was seen that "the abyssal ground [ab-grund] is the primessential *clearing concealment*."[24] The Deep is the foundation and the Dark is the ground of all truths, which may manifested above the

der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet, Page 2.

[21] TBA. Original Chinese: "無名天地之始有名萬物之母," From: 老子, 《新釈漢文大系〈7〉老子　荘子上巻, Page 11. (道德經 1)

[22] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 25. Original German: "Die Wahrheit geschieht als die lichtende Verbergung." From: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 30.

[23] From: Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page 53. Original German: "Die Erde ist nicht einfach das Verschlossene, sondern das, was als Sichverschließendes aufgeht." From: Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Page 42.

[24] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 300; Original German: "Der Ab-grund ist die erstwesentliche *lichtende Verbergung*," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 380.

earth, in the metaphysical realm, but truths must always be in some way grounded: they must be rooted in the Dubnos.

The wise-men of the Celts, like those of other peoples, always sought the truth of their World. By nurturing his bond with the earth, with the Deep and the Dark, man may nonetheless come to realize that: "truth is neither somewhere *over* man (as validity in itself), nor is it in man as a psychical subject, but man is *'in' the truth*."[25] Man is indeed thrown in the Dubnos, on the earth, in truth. More than this, man *is* the Dubnos, he *is* part of the truth, and he is called to appropriate his relation with it as a whole, and the relation between the Dubnos and the other two realms of the Gaulish world.

[25] English translation from: Heidegger and Sadler, *The Essence of Truth*, Page 55. Original German: "Die Wahrheit ist weder *über* dem Menschen irgendwo vorhanden (als Gültigkeit an sich), noch ist die Wahrheit im Menschen als einem psychischen Subjekt, sondern der Mensch ist *»in« der Wahrheit*." From: Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*, Page 75.

1.3 The God in the Dark

Any exploration of the Gaulish World sooner or later leads to an encounter with its "gods." Modern men have been taught of the gods of the Greeks and Romans, either through the lens of the condescending eye of the atheistic "renaissance," or through the eye of a Judaism or a Christianity that despised above all the spiritual views of the "pagans." Perhaps more than any manuscript, the examination of the origin of this insult, handed over to us from the time of the clash between the Christian Roman culture and the Gallo-Roman one, shows us the nature of the chasm separating the two Worlds: the Roman *pagus* was the smallest division of a province. It then came to designate the countryside in general, by opposition to the cities. The *pagani*, the "pagans," were the men dwelling outside of the cities of Gauls, the men of the fields, of the forests, of the lakes and the mountains, those who lived their lives according to the path traced by their forefathers, reluctant to adopt the way of life of the Empire, and in particular, what would one day become its official religion.

The Greeks and the Romans were the builders of great and enduring cities. They nurtured the development of the sciences, the *technique*, the arts, and even politics. They were particularly efficient in their endeavors. We can read the works of Hesiod and Homer teaching us the Greek religion, and we can see thousands of statues of their deities. In contrast with this, the heritage of the Ancient Celts is far more inconspicuous. Few is known for certain concerning the spiritual beliefs of the Gauls, but many clues nonetheless point toward the fact that they significantly differed from the ones of their neighbors and distant cousins. Even though the Romans themselves assimilated the Gaulish deities with their own, it would seem that the concept of "gods" of the Gauls fundamentally differed from the one of their conquerors.

A first important peculiarity of the Gauls can be found in the work of the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, as he recounts the sack of the temple of Delphi by Celtic invaders:

> Brennus, the king of the Gauls, found no dedications of gold or silver when he entered a temple. All that he found were images of stone and wood he laughed at them to think that men, believing that gods have

> human form, should set up their images in wood and stone.[26]

What may have been a mere anecdote, not necessarily reflecting the beliefs of Brennus' people as a whole, is nonetheless supported by archeology. As argued by the French archaeologist Simone Deyts, the despising of anthropomorphic representations of the deities "probably was mostly still true in Gaul during the 2nd and 1st century B.C.," as "the images of the indigenous deities, not only in its southern part but in Gaul as a whole, did not appear before the end of the 1st century B.C."[27] This marks a profound difference of vision concerning the nature of the deities, which are then not to be thought of as creatures living in an afterworld, an upperworld, or an underworld. They are not deified heroes of yore, who were worshiped as such for so long that men thought of them as transcending the human genus, and who therefore were associated with the holy, the unseen transcendence.

There is a second clue that should convince us that the relation between the Gauls and the divine is to be approached differently compared to the way we have been taught to see the Greeks and Romans deities. It comes from one of the pillars of the Christian Religion: Augustine. The Roman theologian listed the Gauls among the peoples whose philosophers thought that a supreme god "is both the maker of all created things, the light by which things are known, and the good in reference to which things are to be done,"[28] and he, speaking in the name of his fellow

[26] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 22.9); Original Greek: "Ὅτι Βρέννος ὁ τῶν Γαλατῶν βασιλεὺς εἰς ναὸν ἐλθὼν ἀργυροῦν μὲν ἢ χρυσοῦν οὐδὲν εὗρεν ἀνάθημα, ἀγάλματα δὲ μόνον λίθινα καὶ ξύλινα καταλαβὼν κατεγέλασεν ὅτι θεοὺς ἀνθρωπομόρφους εἶναι δοκοῦντες ἵστασαν αὐτοὺς ξυλίνους τε καὶ λιθίνους.," from: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

[27] TBA. Original French: "De plus l'allusion de l'historien Diodore au fait que les Gaulois ne représentaient pas leurs dieux, eux qui à Delphes se moquaient des Grecs qui croyaient que les dieux avaient forme humaine et les dressaient en bois et en pierre devait être en grande partie juste encore dans la Gaule des Ile et Ier siècles avant J.-C. : les effigies divines autochtones, pas plus en Narbonnaise que dans le reste de la Gaule, ne sont antérieures à la fin du 1er siècle avant J.-C.," from: Deyts, *Images des dieux de la Gaule*, Page 15.

[28] *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Page 150; Original Latin: "Quicumque igitur philosophi de Deo summo et uero ista senserunt, quod et rerum creatarum sit effector et lumen cognoscendarum et bonum agendarum," from: Augustine and Hoffmann,

theologians, declared that: "we prefer these to all other philosophers, and confess that they approach nearest to us."[29] These clues should lead us to reconsider the pertinence of the rigid line drawn between the "monotheists" and the "polytheists," the Christians and the Pagans. Who are these Pagans who reject idols? What does their concept of god mean? Shedding light on these questions is of paramount importance in order to approach the truth of the Gaulish World.

Therefore, before examining the first "god" of the Gauls, the one associated with the Dark and the Deep, it is necessary to first explore the nature of the Gaulish "gods" and their relation to man's experience of the divine in general.

1.3.1 Gods, God, and the Divine

Men who live close to "nature" have always been drawn to think about its meaning, its origin, and its purpose. Some are tilling the earth with their tools so that it would offer them its fruits, while others walk through the forests to hunt their sustenance by spilling blood on the ground, using their skills and force to prolong their life. The *peasant*, the dwellers of the *pagus*, is in this regard more blessed than the inhabitants of large cities, in which all that can be seen is the products of the hands of man, leaving no place for the divine to manifest itself.

Both the city-dwellers and men of the countryside nonetheless face a common danger: the everydayness that numbs the mind, when they are caught by the force of their habits and when they grow so accustomed to things that they become blind to their nature. This danger creeps into every aspect of man's life, and especially into the shelter of his World: his language.

The word "god" has been uttered so much across its history that it has become polished by the work of time and the tongues of men. What it has become in our mouths probably would be unrecognizable to the first man who crafted this sign to point out

Sancti Avrelii Avgvstini episcopi De civitate Dei libri XXII. Page 368. (VIII.9).

[29] *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Page 150; Original Latin: "eos omnes ceteris anteponimus eosque nobis propinquiores fatemur," from: Augustine and Hoffmann, *Sancti Avrelii Avgvstini episcopi De civitate Dei libri XXII.* Page 368.

toward something that he could not comprehend, but only yearn for. The ΔΕΥΟC [deuos] of the Gauls is not the *Deus* of the Romans, and both differ from their Indo-European parent-word that also designates the "sky."[30] By his ability to confer names and create "ideas," man possesses an astonishing power, but once the impulse at the source of these creations has ceased and been forgotten, these names tend to convince man that he comprehends all the things whose names are familiar to him. When he hears and understands the word "god," it seems to him that he thereby understands god. The work of the mind is then brought to an end, and the inquisitive nature of the human brain is replaced by an attention to vain things.

As the German thinker says, "'Human being' and 'god' are mere husks of words without history, unless the truth of beyng brings itself to speak in these words."[31] In order to avoid this danger inherent to human life and to re-dis-cover the inceptual impulse of man's yearning for the divine, it is thus necessary for him to reflect on these words, in order to see whether or not this concept is grounded in the reality of his experience, and to begin to perceive the fact that contrary to what his everydayness incites him to believe, the grasping of the word "god" is not the end of the dis-covery of its meaning but rather only the beginning of a long path that he is called to tread.

It will here be seen that this path of re-flection can be a crooked one, one that not only represents man's future but also takes him to the footprints left by his forefathers. This nonetheless does not imply that he is destined to seek the return of the old gods who have been abandoned and have fled the presence of his contemporaries. They are long gone and they will not return, but they nonetheless left traces behind, fossils encroached in stone or parchments, whose examination may lead us to break the blindness induced by the everydayness of "god" and to help rekindle the fire from the heavens that is meant to serve as a beacon for all men. Then may man begin to see that the last god has yet to come, and that man has yet to know him. He cannot leave his

[30] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*. Page 142–143.

[31] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 375; Original German: "»Der Mensch« und »der Gott« sind geschichtslose Worthülsen, wenn nicht die Wahrheit des Seyns in ihnen sich zur Sprache bringt," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 476.

world in order to encounter him, but can only pave the way for its arrival, awaiting him without waiting for him.

The nature of the gods is inscrutable, but this quest without end nonetheless represents a central part of man's destiny. As Heidegger tells us:

> While the destruction of the outgoing world, as self-destruction, screams out its triumphs into the void, the essence of beyng gathers itself into its highest calling: as appropriating eventuation, to assign the ground and the temporal-spatial playing field, i.e., Da-sein in the singularity of its history, to the realm of decision regarding the divinity of the gods.[32]

This "realm of decision" represents the worldly "area" where man can face the different possibilities and concepts used to designate the gods. To appropriate this area implies that one refrains from taking irrevocable decisions concerning the nature of the divine. To allow this realm of decision, which could also be seen as a realm of indecision, and to remain open, is nonetheless an arduous task, as any misstep threatens to reduce this realm to a singularity. Perhaps the easiest and most unavoidable of these steps is the decision concerning the singular or plural nature of the divine. The laws of language often impose such a determination, but Heidegger nonetheless avoided the reduction of the realm of decision by refusing to consistently use either form of the word. The gods, God, a god, the god: by conjointly uttering these words, the space between them is left open, and the decisions reducing the realm are swiftly changed, continuously reshaping this realm, as a beating heart that shows that the end has yet to come. In an unusually plain and explicit statement, the German professor himself clearly explained this usage of the word "gods," which is still considered blasphemous by a large part of mankind. In his own words:

> To speak of the "gods" does of course not mean that

[32] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 180; Original German: "Während die Zerstörung der bisherigen Welt als Selbstzerstörung ihre Triumphe hinausschreit ins Leere, sammelt sich das Wesen des Seyns in seine höchste Berufung: als Er-eignung dem Entscheidungsbereich über die Gottheit der Götter den Grund und den Zeit-Spiel-Raum, d. h. das Da-sein, in der Einmaligkeit seiner Geschichte zuzueignen," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 228.

> a decision has been made here affirming the existence of many gods instead of one; rather, it is meant to indicate the undecidability of the being of gods, whether one or many. This undecidability carries within it the question of whether something like being can be attributed to gods at all without destroying everything divine. To speak of "the gods" is to name the undecidability as to whether a god, and which god, could arise once again as an extreme plight for which essence of the human being in which way. Yet this undecidability is not represented as the mere empty possibility of decisions; instead, it is to be grasped in advance as *the* decision from which originates either what has been decided or complete undecidedness. [33]

It is possible that the reluctance to depict the gods of the Gauls, and the hint at the belief in a single deity responsible for the creation of the universe given by Augustine may be seen in the same light. Thus seen, the traces left on the earth by the gods of the Celts may help us reveal things that remained concealed by the One God(s) who came after them. The divine may be more than what metaphysics has taught us. It may be more than "the highest being, as the first ground and cause of beings, as the unconditioned, the infinite, the absolute."[34] The fleeing of God, away from man, may only be an invitation for him to dis-cover the traces left by the first gods, preparing him for the arrival of the last one.

[33] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 345; Original German: "Doch die Rede von den »Göttern« meint hier nicht die entschiedene Behauptung eines Vorhandenseins einer Vielzahl gegenüber einem Einzigen, sondern bedeutet den Hinweis auf die Unentschiedenheit des Seins der Götter, ob eines Einen oder Vieler. Diese Unentschiedenheit begreift in sich die Fragwürdigkeit, ob überhaupt dergleichen wie Sein den Göttern zugesprochen werden darf, ohne alles Gotthafte zu zerstören. Die Unentschiedenheit, welcher Gott und ob ein Gott welchem Wesen des Menschen in welcher Weise noch einmal zur äußersten Not erstehen werde, ist mit dem Namen »die Götter« genannt. Aber diese Unentschiedenheit wird nicht als leere Möglichkeit von Entscheidungen nur vor-gestellt, sondern als *die* Entscheidung im voraus begriffen, aus der sich Entschiedenes oder völlige Entscheidungslosigkeit ihren Ursprung nehmen," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 437.

[34] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 345; Original German: "der Seiendste, als erster Grund und Ursache des Seienden, als das Un-bedingte, Unendliche, Absolute vorgestellt werden," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 438.

The traces of the first gods can only be properly seen because these gods have fled long ago. The Gauls, who lived close to them, would not have been able to see them as clearly, as their presence ineluctably blinded men to the nature of these deities. When all the gods, and even God himself is noticed by his absence, his remoteness from the world of men, then can the longing for the divine reveal the future arrival of the last god.

1.3.2 The Trail Leading to the Gods of the Celts

As the poet Friedrich Hölderlin told us: "close, and [yet] hard to grasp is the god."[35] This is true of all gods or god, but perhaps even more so for those of the ancient Celts, whose traces still abound in the land of Gaul, in the name of cities, rivers, and brooks; in museums, and in the soil itself, even though their nature and their identity are still largely unknown. What is regrettable for the archaeologists and the historians, the builders of a metaphysics, may nonetheless be a precious gift to those who are yearning for and awaiting the last god.

The reluctance of the Druids to inscribe their worldview on tablets of wax, clay, or lead preserved their deities, safeguarding the boundaries of the realm of indeterminacy in which they could *be* without being grasped and "under-stood." As it was told earlier, however, the collapse of the Druidic order and the always greater influence of the Greek and then Roman religion began to exert a considerable pressure on the Gaulish people. Trading their heritage for *amphorae* of grape wine and silver coins, they soon disregarded the wisdom of their fathers, and they began to represent the gods as if they were mere men, made of flesh and blood.

The sculptures, engravings, and inscriptions of the Celtic gods represent only the last breaths of the indigenous Gaulish World, the end of the trail on which the body of the Gaulish spirit already laid down, seriously wounded, pierced by a Roman sword but also abandoned by its sons. The corpses of the Celtic gods represent the degeneracy of the Gaulish World, the end of its course, which does not reflect its point of origin, its source. The anthropomorphic gods of the Gallo-Romans are therefore not the gods of the men

[35] TBA. Original German: "Nah ist und schwer zu fassen der Gott," from: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Page 54.

in the Mountain of Salt or the ones of the first Druids. A journey back on the traces of these gods must nonetheless begin from these last traces.

The trail leading to the Celtic gods begins at the time and place of their fleeing, as they were betrayed by men who ceased to perceive them for what they were, and instead saw them as a "mythology," a set of metaphysical beliefs. One must first start from this decayed form of the Gaulish worldview in order to follow their trail to their source, a source that can enlighten man not only concerning the first gods but also concerning the arrival of the last one. The anthropomorphic caricatures will be important milestones revealing essential aspects of the gods. It is only when one considers them as an end rather than as a starting point of the exploration of the gods that they becomes a threat to man's appropriation of the nature of his experience of the divine. If one is sufficiently careful to avoid this pitfall of anthropomorphism, key aspects of the experience of both the first gods and the last one may find themselves revealed.

This danger presented by anthropomorphic representations nonetheless is only the first one that threatens the man seeking to appropriate the impulse calling him toward the holy. A second danger is the fossilization of the mind seduced by a simplistic dichotomy between monotheism and polytheism, which by rejecting either conception plunges man in a quagmire of certainty that prevents the mind from pursuing the inquiry into the essence of the divine. Dogmatic monotheism, in particular, often leads men to forget that all cultures began with some form of monotheism, and this for a very simple reason: when the concept of "god" was first forged by the mind of man, it is almost certain that it first only designated a single deity. Any polytheistic pantheon must have begun with a first deity. Only then was the unity broken down, when man applied this concept to different "things" that he saw around him, or simply envisioned in his mind. The gods have always been striving with each other, through the intermediation of men. To recognize the ongoing battle between the gods, which started at the dawn of mankind and will only end with the coming of the last god, is another milestone allowing man to re-flect on the past and to pave the way for the future. As said by the philosopher Friedrich Schelling:

> A struggle between the gods succeeding each other, as happens in the Theogony, would not at all exist among the mythological representations if it had not actually taken place in the consciousness of peoples who know of it, and to that extent in the consciousness of humanity, of which every people is a part. . . The gods following one upon the other have actually successively taken possession of consciousness. Mythology as history of the gods, thus the actual mythology, was only able to be produced in life itself: it had to be something lived and experienced.[36]

The strife between the gods, and between God and the gods, is thus part of human history. To seek to gain a better insight of the history and the nature of this strife is part of man's walk on the path of the appropriation of his experience of the holy, and part of the preparation for the arrival of the last god. The gods of the Gauls fled when their people abandoned them, preferring the ones of their conquerors. These, in turn, were vanquished by the One God, which has now fled from the modern world. The trail of clues that these battles left behind forms a path that should lead the inquiring mind to the appropriation of his destiny and of the role he is meant to play in the future.

When the path of re-flection that leads to the first gods as been clearly seen, the fear of appearing to be a "pagan" can then be dissipated. The German thinker explains us that:

> The multiplicity of gods is not subject to enumeration but, instead, to the inner richness of the grounds and abysses in the site of the moment for the lighting up

[36] Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 90; Original German: "Die mythologie ist keine bloß als s u c c e s s i v v o r g e s t e l l t e Götterlehre. Ein Kampf zwischen den aufeinander folgenden Göttern, wie er in der Theogonie vorkommt, würde sich unter den mythologischen Vorstellungen gar nicht finden, wenn er nicht im Bewußtsein der Völker, die von ihm wissen, und insoferne im Bewußtsein der Menschheit, von der jedes Volk ein Teil ist, wirklich stattgefunden hätte . . . Die auseinander folgenden Götter haben sich des Bewußtseins wirklich nacheinander bemächtigt. Die Mythologie als Göttergeschichte, also die eigentliche Mythologie, konnte sich nur im Leben selbst erzeugen, sie mußte etwas E r l e b t e s und E r f a h r e n e s sein." From: Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke – 1. Bd. Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie.* Page 125.

and concealment of the intimation of the last god.[37]

The gods are not only part of our past. The monotheist must lift up the veil placed over them so that he will see that the battle between the gods is an essential and indispensable part of man's journey leading him to the awaiting of the last god, and its future arrival.

Once the path of re-dis-covery of the gods has been lit, and the dangers found on it have been pointed out, the trail of clues can be followed, starting from its end, and slowly walking toward the origin, the source of the gods of the Celts.

1.3.3 Cernunnos: The Horned One

The origin of the Indo-European word for "god" would seem to indicate that the ancestors of the Celtic people first sought the divine in the skies. Perhaps adopting the vision of those who inhabited the lands of Western Europe before them, that is, the builders of the megaliths, the Celts nevertheless saw themselves as the sons of the Dark and the Deep, born far away from the light of the skies. One can therefore hardly be surprised by the fact that the most emblematic and indigenous of their gods is deeply associated with the Dubnos.

The exact nature of the Gauls' relation with this god will probably forever remain shrouded in mystery, but the traces he left on stone, silver, and parchment nonetheless give us a series of insights concerning the nature of divine, and the nature of the Dubnos. The trail of clues begins in the city of Paris, the main city of the Gaulish tribe named the *Parisii*, at the beginning of the Gallo-Roman period, in the first century A.D. The so-called "Pillar of the Boatmen" (*Pilier des Nautes*) offers us a representation of the horned deity of Gaul, which is accompanied with its name.[38]

The anthropomorphic representation shows the deity with a

[37] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 326; Original German: "Die Vielheit der Götter ist keiner Zahl unterstellt, sondern dem inneren Reichtum der Gründe und Abgründe in der Augenblicksstätte des Aufleuchtens und der Verbergung des Winkes des letzten Gottes," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 411.

[38] The Pillar of the Boatmen can be seen at the *Musée de Cluny* in Paris.



Figure 1.2: *The "Pillar of the Boatmen" (Pilier des Nautes)* (Reinach, *Guide illustré du Musée de Saint-Germain*, Page 68.).

human face and torso. Anchored on the top of its head, two horns upon which two torcs (Metal rings usually worn around the neck) are hung. Above the two horns or antlers, the name of the deity can be read in Latin characters: **Cernunnos** (KЄRNOϒNNOC).

The name Cernunnos is generally considered to be derived from the Celtic word for horns and antlers: *KARNO [*karno].[39] He is the "horned one," but more than this, all the depictions of the deity indicate that he is not simply associated to any horned animal. His horns are clearly the antlers of a stag, and his own nature would seem to be closely linked with this animal. The Celtic name of this majestic forest dweller is itself linked with the same root word: *KARWO [*karwo],[40] but the same root also covers different meanings whose exploration may shed light on different facets of the nature of this god.

The word *KЄRNA [*kērna] would seem to originally designate an "angle" or a "corner."[41] More interestingly, the *Proto-*

[39] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 190.

[40] ibid., Page 192.

[41] ibid., Page 203. In Middle-Welsh, it also acquired the meaning of "jaw /

Celtic Dictionary mentions of *KARNO [*karno] "heap of stones, tomb."[42] The Gaulish KARNITOY [carnitu] is interpreted as meaning "erected, constructed," something that can be related to the nature of Cernunnos.

The horned god is associated with the Deep and the Dark, the great pile of dust and stone upon which man lives his life, and in which many return upon their death. The Gauls were sometimes cremated or left to be eaten by the crows who would carry their flesh and soul to the skies, but they were also sometimes buried into the soil, in plain tombs or in gravemound protruding from the surface of the earth.[43] Cernunnos is not a "stag-god": he rather is the heap of dust itself, what supports the upper realms thanks to the strength of its antlers. This central aspect of the "horned one" as the bearer of the surface of the earth is well illustrated by another Gaulish work of art from the Gallo-Roman period. As it can be seen in the following drawing (Fig. 1.3 and 1.4), the Reims Altar (*L'autel de Reims*) shows us Cernunnos supporting the upper part of the sculpture with its antlers, upon which a mouse can be found, burrowing under the surface. It is easy to see in this work a representation of the deity as the bearer of the upper realm, with the mouse symbolizing the soil under which it reigns as a king that supports the world of men.

The rest of the altar also highlights another aspect of the "horned one," which can be seen as corroborating the idea that he is the linked with the Deep and the Dark. He is indeed also represented with a horn of plenty that feeds what appears to be a ram and a deer that stand at his feet.

Could this aspect of the deity, which is very common in its representations dating from the Gallo-Roman period but not found in earlier works such as the Cauldron of Gundestrup, be the result of a mere linguistic association between the "horn of plenty" (*cornu copiae* in Latin) and the "horned god"? A deeper examination of the clues concerning this god will show that it is unlikely. This aspect of Cernunnos as the provider of the living beings indeed seems to perfectly fit his nature, but in order to perceive this adequacy,

cheek / side."

[42] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 190.

[43] In the later Irish tradition, these mounds (*síd*) would also be considered as entryways to the realm of the gods of the earth.

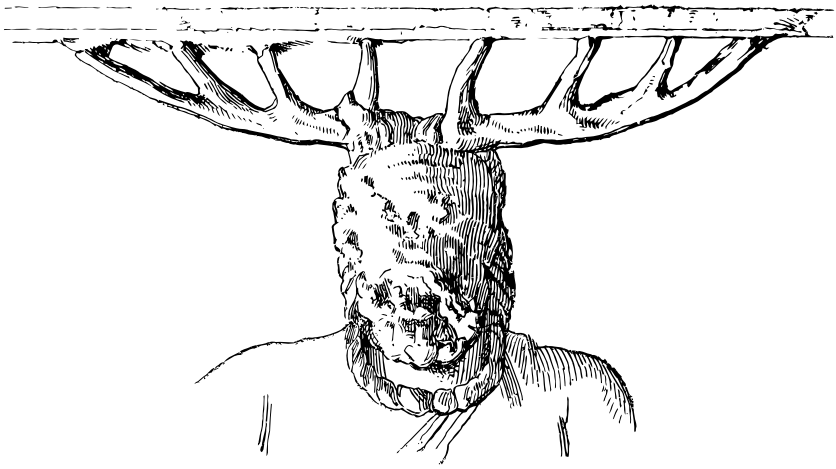


Figure 1.3: *Detail of the "Reims Altar" (L'autel de Reims)* (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 315.).

one must begin to take distance from the Gallo-Roman trail and go deeper on the path. The association between Cernunnos and the horn of plenty shows that he is more than a "stag-god," as stags are not providing their sustenance to the living beings populating the earth. What provides to both men and beasts is: the ground.

1.3.4 Cernunnos: The Ground

Even though the anthropomorphic depictions of the Gallo-Romans tend to make us see the "horned one" as a mere stag-god of the "underground," the trail of clues nonetheless indicates that a less simplistic, more elegant interpretation can be found. These representations show a series of recurring elements that go beyond the antlers on his head, with each one of these elements having a special signification that waits to be uncovered.

One of the most easily spotted of these recurring elements is the fact that from the earliest period up until the last traces of the Celtic pantheon among the Gallo-Romans, the Horned One is systematically represented sitting cross-legged on the floor, alone taking this position (See Fig. 1.5).[44] This posture, cross-legged,

[44] The bottom half of the Cernunnos carving of the "Pillar of the Boatmen" is missing, but it is very probable that this missing part would have shown the



Figure 1.4: *General view of the Reims Altar (L'autel de Reims)* (Reinach, *Guide illustré du Musée de Saint-Germain*, Page 69.).



Figure 1.5: *Small statue of Cernunnos.* Its antlers are now missing, but the sockets where they were inserted are still visible. (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 68.).

the back straightened, with a forward-looking, stern and yet relaxed face, has caught the attention of the modern scholars, as it presented a sharp contrast with the usual image that we have of the ancient Celts, and of their deities. This unusual posture very early on struck the scholars by its uncanny resemblance with the traditional representations of the "enlightened one" of the East, Cernunnos being described as adopting a "Buddha posture."[45]

The "first Buddha," Siddhārtha Gautama, lived during the time of the birth of the Druidic order (6^{th}–5^{th} century B.C.), and the descriptions of him having blue-eyes may show that he may share a distant branches of his family tree with the Celts. Any direct association between the posture of Cernunnos and the Eastern

deity once again sitting cross-legged. (See Kruta, *Les Celtes*, Page 534.)

[45] Deyts, *Images des dieux de la Gaule*, Page 15.

religion would nonetheless lack the smallest historical basis. This nonetheless does not imply that the East does not have anything to teach us concerning the nature of the sitting god. Indeed, if this posture has so many time be described as a "Buddhic" one, it may simply because both peoples discovered that one's posture may have an effect on one's state of mind, and that this particular way of sitting may possess a unique significance, shared by all those living upon the earth.

The Bavarian teacher of the Zen tradition Karlfried graf von Dürckheim tells us that:

> What right posture with its centre of gravity in Hara [the belly] means in the purely physical sense, can be easily demonstrated. A man standing in his ordinary posture will fall forward if he is suddenly pushed from behind. If he stands with Hara he feels surprisingly stable. Even a hard thrust cannot topple him over or even push him forward.[46]

By sitting, man lowers his center of gravity toward the ground. The cross-legged posture increases this downward movement, which is not only physical, but also psychological as well, as "to learn to feel *oneself* constantly down there is tantamount to overcoming the unconscious dominance of the I, and to feeling oneself permanently rooted in a much deeper region."[47] By sitting cross-legged, one accepts to relinquish his own power, the power allowing him to resist the gravitational pull of the earth that brings every thing back toward the ground from which they arose. Man thereby submits to the great power of the Dark and the Deep, relaxing his muscles and letting himself feel one with the great body that birthed him to the world.

[46] Durckheim and Healey, *Hara*, Page 136. (Text in brackets added); Original German: "Was die rechte Haltung, die ihren Schwerpunkt im Hara hat, rein körperlich bedeutet, wird am einfachsten an einem ganz schlichten Experiment zur Erfahrung gebracht. Wer sich in seiner gewöhnlichen Haltung breitbeinig hinstellt, wird, wenn er plötzlich einen Stoß in den Rücken bekommt, unfehlbar vornüber fallen. Steht er mit Hara, erfährt er eine erstaunliche Standfestigkeit. Er ist auch mit einem starken Stoß nicht umzuwerfen." From: Dürckheim, *Hara*, Page 115.

[47] Durckheim and Healey, *Hara*, Page 136. The English translation appears to considerably differ from the original text as published in: Dürckheim, *Hara*, Page 115, and thus the original text of the quoted sentence could not be found. This may be due to the use of a different edition of the book.

Now may the significance of the peculiar nature of the god's posture begin to be perceived. The posture of the Horned One reflects his nature: he is not merely sitting on the ground, he himself is the **Ground** that pulls all beings back toward the earth. His horns support the surface, but his posture ensures that all that exists rests upon a sure basis, one that cannot be destroyed or toppled.

The posture of the anthropomorphic representation may also be interpreted as an invitation addressed to mankind by the deity. The posture symbolizes the wholeness, the immovable and secure nature of the Ground, but man can also appropriate it, thereby transforming his own relationship with the earth. The Horned One may thereby be calling man to nurture the consciousness of his bound with the Ground in which he will one day return. Such a bond is necessary in order for him to avoid to lose himself in the visions offered by the realms above the Ground, the light that fills his eyes with wonders but that cannot be touched like the soil can be.

When man sits cross-legged on the earth, he lowers his center of gravity, which moves away from the head and the chest, seats of the *ego*, and it descends toward the belly, the seat of the digestion of the fruits of the earth that allow man to continue to live. Dürckheim, following the Zen tradition, argues that such a practice is necessary for man:

> What is necessary is a movement which leads downwards to the all-dissolving, all-absorbing depth of the Source. Even the ordinary man at the level of natural consciousness knows about the renewing strength of primordial Nature. Although the thinking and reflecting man, dominated by the intellect, seeks transcendence always and only 'above', unreflecting man has known since time immemorial, and still knows of a transcendence 'downwards.' [48]

[48] Durckheim and Healey, *Hara*, Page 123. Original German: "Am Anfang aller Übung, die dem inneren Weg dient, steht die *»rückläufige Bewegung«*. Das ist die Bewegung, die aus der Verstiegenheit des Ichs, das auf der Leiter seiner Vorstellungen und Begriffe nach oben strebt und sich oben festhält, zurückführt, hinab in die alles wieder einschmelzende Tiefe des Ursprungs. Schon auf der Stufe des natürlichen Bewußtseins gibt es ein Wissen um die neumachende Kraft der ursprünglichen Natur. Der nur denkend sich besinnende Mensch

The Horned One represents this "downward transcendence," as the Ground itself. He is the horn of plenty, as it is because of his stability and serenity that the nourishing fruits of the earth can sprout out of the Ground. If he is the provider of the living and the guardian of the dead, it is because he is not only "a god of the earth," an anthropomorphic figure that controls the soil from which fruits, plants, and animals originate. He is himself the Ground, rather than its master. He is not a man, nor a stag. He is the earth from which the wheat begins to grow in the springtime, and he is the stable plane that becomes a canvas for the ex-pression of man's will.

The cross-legged posture is often associated with a state of peace of mind, characteristic of Buddhist meditation. The language of the ancient Celts nonetheless also contains the trace of a similar vision: the Gaulish word TANKO [tanco] indeed means "peace," but it is itself derived from an Indo-European root associated with the concepts of "firmness" and "stability."[49] To be "at peace" is to rest on a firm ground, and the cross-legged god demonstrates this "peaceful" posture that invites men to stay close to the soil, close to him.

This nature of the Horned One as the Ground of being and beings offered an opportunity to the Celtic artists to manifest their talent for poetic representation. The horn of plenty, the cross-legged posture, the antlers bearing the surface of the earth: all these elements point toward a harmonious and elegant vision of the nature of the Dubnos. The trail, however, must be walked further, as the nature of Cernunnos goes deeper than the surface of the Ground.

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sucht in dem Maße, als der gegenständliche Geist über ihn Macht gewann, die Transzendenz immer nur »oben«. Der unreflektierte Mensch weiß aber seit altersher und auch heute noch um eine Transzendenz »unten«." From: Dürckheim, *Hara*, Page 102.

[49] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 369.

1.3.5 Cernunnos: The Dark

> When the gods are originally named and the essence of things comes to expression so that the things first shine forth, when this occurs, man's existence is brought into a firm relation and placed on a ground.
>
> — M. Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry.*[50]

The appearance of Cernunnos in the world of men offers them a new outlook at the ground of their life. The earth trodden by their feet, the vegetation that satiates their bodies, and the animals whose flesh they feast upon, all appear under a new light when they are seen as emerging from the Ground, from the "horned one."

What the light shining on the Dark first reveals to the inquisitive eye is the deception of the anthropomorphic "idols." The Ground may be moved by a will of its own, just as men are, but how poorly do the human-shaped statues reflect its majesty and its immensity, which has nothing in common with mere men, who are like leaves caught in a tempest, powerless and insignificant.

When the eye observing the Ground attempts to pierce through its crust, to reach what it conceals, all that man can see is the Dark, what is unseen but can yet be felt more surely than anything shown by the light. The Ground is only the skin of the Horned One, the surface that covers the essence. He is not a stag-god. He is not a man with super-human abilities. He is the Dark itself, the flesh and blood of all beings.

The Horned One *supports* the realm of the living, but he is not a creature living under the world of men. He supports them by clearing the space where they can exist: matter. He allows them to *be* by giving them their *substance*: not only the water and the food that sustains their bodies, but their materiality as a whole. The water and the soil of the earth is not only the ground on which man moves and lives. It foremost is the source of his own being. Contemplating the Ground and the Dark, man may

[50] Heidegger, *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*, Page 47; Original German: "Indem aber die Götter ursprünglich genannt werden und das Wesen der Dinge zu Wort kommt, damit die Dinge erst aufglänzen, indem solches geschieht, wird das Dasein des Menschen in einen festen Bezug gebracht und auf einen Grund gestellt," from: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 4 Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung (1936–1968)*, Page 41.

come to realize that he is one with the Dark. He forever was and will remain a part of it. Man is therefore inextricably tied to the "horned one," who is not an anthropomorphic figure providing for the living but rather part of the essence of all earthly things.

Most of the riches valued by men are indeed also part of the Dark: not only the food used for the prolonging of their days or simply to delight their senses, but also the resources needed for them to ex-press themselves and to act in their own realm. In order to create works of art that will incarnate man's ideals of beauty or of the sacred, he will need to cut down trees or extract an ore from the soil; he will need the flesh of the Horned One, the blood of the Dark. In order to wage wars against his fellow men, for power or for justice, he will need iron and gold, leather and wood, horses and chariots, all of which ultimately come from the dark beast whose horns form the forests of Gauls.

The Romans used to call the independent parts of Gaul the *Gallia comata*, the "long-haired Gaul,"[51] a name which has often been interpreted as originating from the vast forests of Gaul rather than the hairstyle of its inhabitants.[52] The hairs covering the surface of Gaul are the antlers of Cernunnos, made of hardened elements from the soil, and these protuberances carry life away from the surface of the earth and toward the skies, opening a space between the Bright and the Dark where the living can enjoy the best of both realms, between light and darkness, between the unnerving emptiness of the skies and the smothering fullness of the earth.

If the Horned One is associated with a stag, it is not the result of an arbitrary choice or simply because of the majesty of this king of the forest. The antlers of the Dark are the trees that pierce the surface of the land and that reach for the skies with their countless arms extended toward the sun. Just as the ones of the stags found in the forests of Gaul, these antlers are nonetheless transient, subjected to a force that they cannot control, a force that initiates a perpetual cycle of growth and decay in which the Dark as a whole is caught. The root of this cycle nonetheless remains close to the Dark, at the source of the Dubnos: the Deep.

[51] For example, in: Catullus, *Poetry* (§ 24); Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* (§ 4.105); Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum* (§ 22.2).

[52] Savignac, *Le mythe antique*, Page 259.

1.3.6 Cernunnos / Esus: in the Flow of the Deep

As it was seen at the beginning of this chapter, what supports the Ground and the Dark is the Deep, the abyss that represents "the primessential *clearing concealment*"[53] This clearing nonetheless supports more than the Dubnos: it is found as the source of all that *was*, *is*, and *will be*. The skies, the light, the world, all together emerge from the deepest of the Deep, dwelling the clearing that it opens up. It is not uniquely tied to the Dubnos, nor to any of the other realms. It is what encompasses all, embracing "things" and "beings" and guiding them during their short span of existence.

Therefore, even though the Horned One is the Ground and the Dark, he is nonetheless not the Deep itself. He is, like the other gods and all the "things" filling the universe, merely only caught in the great flow of the Deep. Even the gods must submit to something greater than themselves, something to which they owe they ability to *be*. What is technically called "space," "time," or "space-time" is the great clearing that allows all other clearings, and from which none can escape. As a clearing concealment, the Deep is what is most intimately known and experienced, and yet it is also what is the most deeply concealed, the "thing" whose nature and origin are forever kept inscrutable.

The Horned One is thus himself caught in the movement of the wheel of time, powerless to resist the whirlpools it induces. His own nature changes according to the cycles of the wheel, whose effects are felt not only on the ground or in the earth, but also in the skies and in the world of men. The appearance and the power of the heavenly bodies are transformed according to the movements of the wheel, and so is the earth and all that is found upon its surface.

The stags of Gaul begin to grow their horns when the sun has begun its retreat, taking away the light and the heat that allow the vegetation to grow, taking away the substance of the earth to give fruits hanging in the air, bathed in the light of the heavens. It is during the winter, when the trees are stripped of their green

[53] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 300; Original German: "Der Ab-grund ist die erstwesentliche *lichtende Verbergung*," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 380.

garment, that the stag appears in all its majesty, as the lord of the forest reigning over the skeletons of the trees that appear as the antlers of an underground army.

When the sun returns with the end of the winter, a green mantle begins to mask the darkness of the earth as the vegetation finally dares to come out of the soil with the first rays of the springtime. It is also during this time that the stag loses its antlers, and thereby also part of its majesty. Its head becomes bald as the trees begin to grow their leaves. The underground army disappears, replaced by luxuriant forests where every leaves bow toward the sun, forgetting the earth which is now out of their sight. The Dark is slowly concealed by the Bright, as the wheel continues its endless course. A handful of new moons will pass until the time of the Dark returns, and then the horned beast will regain its power, with its antlers keeping count of the turns of the wheel, adding a new branch to its antlers with each summer that has passed.

If the god of the Ground and the Dark is associated with a stag, it is because both are equally affected by the wheel. The yearly transformation of the animal remarkably parallels the one experienced by the dark earth. The time when the beast displays its antlers is also the season when the surface of the earth is covered with shadows. The winter is the dark time, with short days and long nights, when the light is kept sealed in the vaults of the skies, and when the power of the Dark is manifested without hindrance. The Horned One appears to reign over the surface of the earth during this part of the year, over the surface where the Dark is separated from the Bright, where the earth touches the skies.

When the spring comes, and the stag loses its antlers, what then happens to the god of the Dark? He is indeed not a "stag-god," but rather the "horned one." Can Cernunnos still bear this name when his antlers have withered to the dust? The god of the Dark is "Cernunnos" only when his antlers are displayed for all to see. His antlers are the trunks and branches of the trees during the winter, when all that can be seen is the darkness of the earth, the parched leaves trampled on the soil, the bark of the trees blackened by the dampness of the cold winds and the rain that flows back to the earth. When the Bright returns to reign over the surface, covering the earth with radiant colors and warmth, the "horned

one" is no more, but the Ground and the Dark nonetheless do not disappear.

As argued by the French archaeologist Jean-Jacques Hatt, Cernunnos is likely also known under another name, and another form: without his antlers, the "horned one" is ЄCOYC [esus],[54] whose name is inscribed on one of the stones of the "Pillar of the Boatmen," and is also mentioned in Lucanus' *Pharsalia*:

> Savage Teutates, Hesus' horrid shrines,
> And Taranis' altars, cruel as were those
> Loved by Diana, goddess of the north [55]

The *scholia* on these verses gives us more information concerning the nature of these three gods:

> Esus Mars is thus honored: a man is suspended on a tree until its limbs fall down.
>
> Teutates Mercury is thus honored among the Gauls: a man is introduced head-first into a filled barrel so as to suffocate him.
>
> Taranis Dis Pater is honored among them in this manner: a few men are burned in a tub of wood. [56]

Each one of these three gods can be seen as associated with one of the three realms of the Celtic world, as it will later be shown. Esus is the Dark and the Deep, the Dubnos, and thus the sacrifices honoring him are done in such a manner that the work of time takes back the flesh of the sacrificed, from the air to the earth, where the limbs are reclaimed by the great body from which the victim came. In contrast with this, those offered to the skies are burned, lifted up high in the air where they will join the clouds and become

[54] Hatt, *Mythes et Dieux de la Gaule I*, Page 231.

[55] English translation from: Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "Teutates, horrensque feris altaribus Hesus, Et Taranis Scythicae non mitior ara Dianae." Lucanus, *Pharsaliae Libri X*, N.Pag.

[56] TBA. Original Latin: "Teutates Mercurius sic apud Gallos placatur: in plenum semicupium horno in caput demittitur ut ibi suffocetur. Hesus Mars sic placatur: homo in arbore suspenditur usque donec per cruorem merabra digesserit. Taranis Ditis pater hoc modo aput cos placatur: in alueo Iigneo aliquod homines cremantur." From: Hermann Usener, *Scholia in Lucani Bellum civile*, Page 32.

clouds and *thunder* (TARANOYS [taranus][57]).

The origin of the name of Esus has for a long time been debated, but as pointed out by the French scholar Christian-Joseph Guyonvarc'h, it would now seem clear that it is derived from the root WESO- [veso-] meaning "the best" or the "excellent one," a title often applied to Jupiter (*Optimus Maximus*), but that also corresponds to the name of one of the main Irish deities: the *Dagda*, literally the "good god."[58]

When Cernunnos is stripped of his antlers, and when the darkness of the earth are covered with light and colors, he also is stripped of his name of "horned one." Once the appearance has been concealed, once the mask has been peeled off, all that remains is the essence. The bald lord of the night can now be designated according to his inner nature: he is now "the good one," the "excellent." This title used by the sons of the earth shows that even though the Dark and the Deep is veiled by the Bright that reigns during the warm months of the year, and even though men rejoice because of the pleasure brought by the sun, they nonetheless do not forget what they owe to the "good one."

The representations of Esus are harder to identify than those of Cernunnos. Only once is he explicitly identified as the "good one": once again, on the Pillar of the Boatmen (See Fig. 1.7). Taking the form of a short-bearded man brandishing a sort of small axe, the god is seen cutting the branches of what appears to be a willow tree. This stone as often been associated with another one, found on the same pillar, which shows the same willow trees, a bull, and three cranes standing on top of it. The stone bears the inscription TARVOS TRIGARANVS, "the bull [with the] three cranes." The story behind the second stone will be interpreted as a later point (Ch. 5), as it falls outside the subject of this chapter, but it is mentioned here because of another carving that is very similar in appearance to the image of Esus as a cutter of branches, which can be seen in Fig. 1.7.

On this monument, we once again find the axe-wielding deity attempting to cut down a tree. On this one, however, the three

[57] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 290.

[58] Christian-Joseph Guyonvarc'h, *ÉSUS*; The Proto-Celtic root is: *wesu-, cf. Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 418.

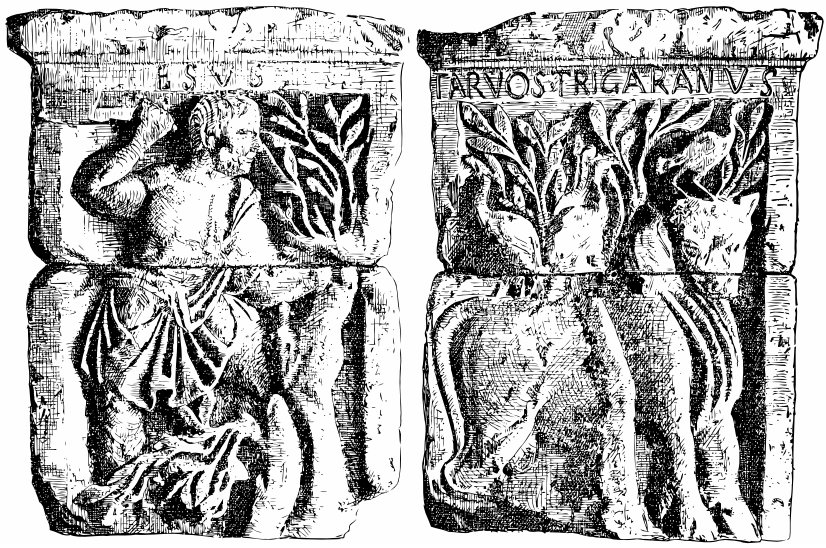


Figure 1.6: *Esus on the "Pillar of the Boatmen"*(Reinach, *Guide illustré du Musée de Saint-Germain*, Page 71.).

cranes are found on the top of the tree. The meaning of the scene is still shrouded in mystery, but other clues may help us shed light on the nature of Esus.

One can notice, in particular, that the antlers of the god of the Dark and the Deep were nonetheless not the only characteristic distinguishing him from the others. The torc worn on his neck is another, one that may help us identify other representations of the deity. On the "Cauldron of Gundestrup," which certainly is the most complete and precise source that has been transmitted to us concerning the myths of the ancient Celts, the Horned One clearly appears on one of the silver plates, with his long antlers upon his head, sitting cross-legged on the floor and wearing a torc on his neck as he carries another in one of his hands. (See Fig. 1.8)

A similar looking character appears on several other plates: a man with a torc on his neck, but no antlers. In one of these, in particular, this character faces the god of thunder, Taranis (TAPANIC), who appears as angry as he is strong, contrary to the torc wearing god, who appears anxious and insecure. (See Fig. 1.9)

The Dark remains strong, even when it is concealed by the Bright. Hence did Gauls bear names such as ЄCOYMATIOC



Figure 1.7: *Esus (?)* (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 353.).



Figure 1.8: *Cernunnos on the Cauldron of Gundestrup (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).*



Figure 1.9: *Esus (?) on the Cauldron of Gundestrup (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).*

[esumagius], "Powerful as Esus" or ЄCOYNЄPTOC [esunertus], "Strength of Esus."[59] Strong or weak, men are all ЄCOYTЄNOC [esugenus], born out of Esus, out of the Ground and out of the Dark that supports it. This incomparable vigor and endurance of the Dark nonetheless do not imply that it cannot be unnerved by the effect of the wheel and the periodic loss of dominion that it induces.

The representations of Esus cutting through the forest may suggest that he intends to get to the three cranes that it conceals,[60] but it may also be argued that Esus is simply attempting to force the motion of the wheel of the seasons by cutting off the leaves and the branches that cover the darkness of the earth. The vegetation indeed reflects the light of the skies, which then occupies the foreground of the world. The Dark is then relegated to being an invisible stage upon which the play of man's history is unfolded.

It is natural for the Dark to resist the attempts to extinguish it, that is, the onslaught of the Bright. By tearing off the leaves of the trees, even cutting down or uprooting them as a whole, the Good One would remind men that the Dark is at the source of all "things," and that what shines is not necessarily made of gold.

[59] Christian-Joseph Guyonvarc'h, *ÉSUS*.

[60] See § 3.2.4 concerning the signification of these cranes.

The beauty of the Dark is left unseen, but it remains what can be the most intimately experienced, and the source of all beings.

The wrath of Esus is a show of strength, given to be seen by man and by the skies. Even during the season when he is left without his crown that appears as a series of daggers threatening the heavens, the dark one remains mighty, striving against the skies and the wheel of the seasons that hinders his rule over the surface of the earth. His anger against his own weakness nonetheless does not diminish the benevolence of the "excellent one." Even during the summer, when his body remains veiled by the green mantle made of a myriad of plants bowing toward his opponent, the skies, he nonetheless does his part to provide all beings with their sustenance. The vaults of the earth are left open during this season, and the combined work of the Dark and the Bright, the earth and the skies, allows food to grow among the leaves of the trees and on the surface of the earth, so that life will continue its course. Once this time of harmonious strife is over, the wheel once again turns. The nights grow longer. The leaves begin to darken. Soon, the antlers of the Horned One are fully regrown, and the dark one once again begins to reign over the living.

1.4 The Dark "Things"

The oneness of the Dark forever remains incomprehensible to man. He can only see it as an endless concatenation of "things" that are found around and inside of him. These "things" are either his own creations or the ones of his forefathers. They are originally meant to reflect the truth of the Dark and the Deep. Through his study of these "things," his mind can grasp pieces of this truth, and he can try to envision the role he is meant to play during his days on the surface of the earth.

The antlers on Cernunnos' head, the torc around his neck, the animals frequently accompanying him: these are all things that bear a significance, knitted through the centuries into the World of the Celts, even into their language itself. Some of these "things" reflect the truth of the Dark, while others are purely the fruits of man's imagination, but they nonetheless all carry with them the thoughts of men, who wanted to construct a legacy that would be shared with their brethren and their descendants. Even the fictitious creations may help us uncover certain aspects of the environment in which we are thrown. The myth may sometime carry truths that are invisible to the scientific, technically minded eye, and the wisdom of the primitive man, proved by millennia of carrying and polishing, may sometimes be more precise than the tools of modernity.

Taking the ancient artifacts left by the Gauls into our hands, touching them with our fingers and scrutinizing their smallest details, we may begin to hear them speak to us, hear the echo of the voices of the ancient ones that was left imprinted in them, waiting for someone who would yearn for the unveiling of his roots. This uncovering of his origin is nonetheless far from being an end in itself. It can be more than a source of nost-algia, a longing for the home: it can foremost pave the way for the appropriation of his own destiny, of his own World, and of the holy itself. The paving of the way for the arrival of the last god necessarily implies a new beginning, and nothing can better show us the way toward the new beginning than the place and time of the first one, the source of our World, which has now grown too small and smothers the man who has heard his calling. The "things" found inside the earth, inside the Dark and the Deep, are an ideal starting point for those

aspiring to embrace the Bright and be carried by the light from above.

The first of those things are the ones that are the closest to the source, in the immediate neighborhood of the Dark and the Deep. In several representations of Cernunnos, the god keeps a creature close to him: a serpent. This animal will be the first "thing" examined here.

1.4.1 The Serpent

Serpents certainly are one of the most iconic dwellers of the Ground. Most living beings live on the wide earth ΛITAYI [litaui],[61] but the serpent almost effortlessly moves throughout the different layers of the Dark. The ΤΔOY [gdū], the shadowy depths of the soil, are his most intimate home, but he can without hindrance pierce through the surface (ΤΑΛMOYN [talmun][62]) and smoothly slide over the land (*ΤIPOC [*tīros])[63], inspiring fear, respect, and awe to the sons of the Dark.

It is not surprising that the god of the Dark would choose such a creature as its closest ally. The snake's body is indeed shaped in such a way that it is in permanent contact with the soil. It can move itself without departing from the Ground, contrary to man and the other beings that use their legs to travel over the land. Even when man follows the lead of the antlered god and sits cross-legged on the earth, his level of intimacy with the soil remains largely insignificant compared to the one enjoyed by the snake. Man mostly touches the Ground only with the sole of his feet, on the rare occasions when he walks over the earth bare-footed, whereas the snake rubs its whole body over the surface of the dark one. When this prolonged contact with the soil has caused its skin to wither, it fasts and increasingly scrapes the earth so as to shed its skin. It then enjoys the renewal of its body, and the separation with a hardened skin that had dulled its senses. Now, stripped bare of all protective coating, it can feel the harshness and truth of the Dark and the Deep, undulating on its surface, and plunging itself into its depths.

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[61] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 204.
[62] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 378.
[63] ibid., Page 379.

The snake knows no fear inside the Ground, as all the living beings that can threaten its existence are found above the surface, such as its most feared enemy: the bird of prey, master of the sky. The *Gdū* is the dominion of the snake and the birds of prey cannot pass its threshold. Silently and covertly, the creature can nonetheless observe what is above the surface and carry visions of it deep into the great body of the Dark, which has no eyes to see.

The name of this mysterious dweller of the Dubnos would seem to be ᔓOᐷEᑭA [*vobera]/[*wobera][64], reconstructed from the dialectal French *vouivre*. Other words have been proposed, which may designate different species: ᐱᑎTO [ango-][65] or ᑎᐱTIᑭ [natir][66]. The Indo-European root which has been identified as the probable source of the word *vobera, *bher-, connotes the ideas of "bearing," "stirring," "boiling," "undulating."[67] The relation with the nature of serpents is clear, but one thing can be noticed: they are particularly associated with water, more than with the dry soil. This association is corroborated by the traces left by this root on the toponymic map of France, where some underground rivers or damp forests still bear the name of *vouivre*.

The serpent dwells in the waters, and it shares some of their nature. The rivers run over the earth, leaving serpentine traces upon its surface. The serpents move like the liquid of life, even though they carry within themselves a potion of death that will be delivered to anyone who hinders their course. Snakes and waters can both penetrate the deepest part of the earth, but they can also smoothly run over its skin, and climb on the top of its highest points, elevated toward the heavens.

The serpent belongs to the Dark and the Deep, but reflecting the inextricable unity of the realms, it also ventures into the dwellings of men and the heavenly realm. It occupies a prominent place in man's imagination. It does not forever stay in the Dark: it can also venture into the World, into the metaphysical realm which is the dominion of man.

In the World of the Gauls, the serpent is seldom represented according to the truth of the Dark. It rather takes a hybrid form,

[64] Lacroix, *Les noms d'origine gauloise : La Gaule des dieux*, Page 121.
[65] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 306.
[66] ibid., Page 306.
[67] Lacroix, *Les noms d'origine gauloise : La Gaule des dieux*, Page 121.

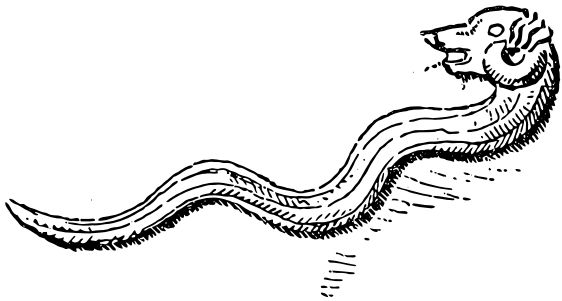


Figure 1.10: *The ram-headed snake on the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

one that highlights its origin and its indestructible bond with the Horned One. The creature crawling inside the earth is indeed endowed with the horns and the head of what appears to be a ram, even though its tongue is still the one corresponding to its original body. One of the clearest of these representations can be found on the Cauldron of Gundestrup, where the animal appears three times (See Fig. 1.10). The exact significance of this hybrid nature of Cernunnos' companion remains shrouded in mystery, but the ram is itself more than the fruit of the World of the Gauls. It is still part of the Dark and the Deep in which we are thrown, and therefore a closer observation of the nature of this animal may shed some light on the significance of the ram-headed snake of the Gaulish World.

As the antlers of the stag, the horns of the ram are meant to inspire fear and to assert a dominance on those facing them. They are a display of strength, but they can also become a powerful weapon. As hard as the strongest wood and as thick as a hammer, these horns can crush all that presents itself in front of the beast. They can shatter the skull of a wolf, demolish wooden barriers, or topple men that would dare to attempt to take hold of them.

The association between the serpent and the ram, MOΛTON [molton] in Gaulish,[68] accentuates the vigorous and assertive nature of the servant of the Dark. The horned serpent is a pathfinder, a fearful beast that combines the agility and softness of the snake, with the unyielding determination and sturdiness of the ram. As

[68] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 62–63.

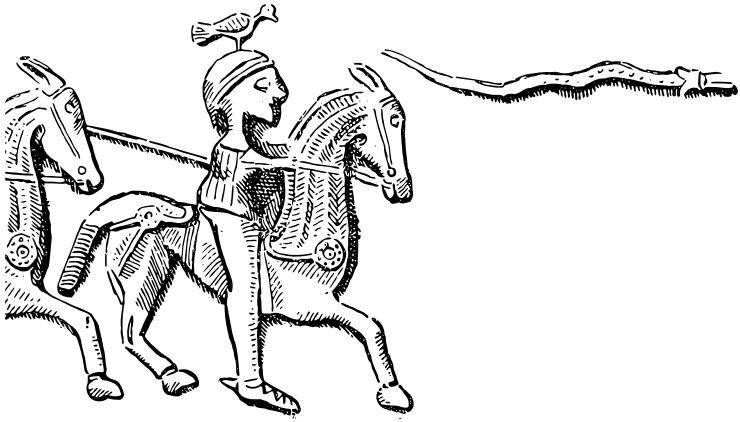


Figure 1.11: *The ram-headed snake leading the human army on the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

a torrent, fruit of a tempest, it pierces through the mountains and carves furrows into the soil. It can sculpt the Dark and defy the Bright, showing the way that man and beasts must follow. This nature of the serpent as the leader both clearing and pointing out the path for man can be seen on one of the place of the Cauldron of Gundestrup, where the servant of the Dark is shown leading the human army into battle, at the forefront of all, before the commanders and the knights (See Fig. 1.11).

Why do the horned serpent clear a path for man? Man and the serpent are both sons of the Dark and the Deep. They are the fruits of the earth, the *Gdū*, striving together to preserve the surface as the realm of the living. Only one thing can threaten the Dark: the Bright, the force of the skies. As the German philosopher tells us, the skies are far more than an empty space over our heads. They are:

> The vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether.[69]

[69] English translation from: Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page 147. Original German: Der Himmel ist der wölbende Sonnengang, der gestaltwechselnde Mondlauf, der wandernde Glanz der Gestirne, die Zeiten des

The skies are manifold, and one of their dimensions is tightly intertwined with the nature of time itself. The passing of the seasons, the cyclic appearances of the new moons, the variations of the lengths of the days and the nights: all these phenomena are displayed in the heavenly realm. The work of the skies, the heat of the sun, the frost of the winter, the winds that chase the water of life away from man's skin, all contribute to bring man closer and closer to death every day, taking pieces of his body until its work is accomplished and life suddenly disappears. Then will the Dark repossess his flesh, as he succumbs to the onslaught of time, the assault of the heavenly forces.

When the serpent leads the army of the earth to wage war on the heavenly forces, it is not because these forces would constitute an "evil" power endangering the "good one," ("Esus"). Neither man nor the serpent could live without them and without their work, but it is nonetheless in the nature of these creatures to resist them, to fight a battle they know can never be won, simply because they are destined to do so. The Dark and the Bright are both meant to strive against one another, and the living man, son of the earth, is led by the serpent to fight the skies that announce his future death.

A silver goblet found in Lyon offers us a vivid depiction of the conflict between earth and sky, Dark and Bright. The Gallo-Roman artist who crafted this goblet shows us the serpent spearheading the forces of the earth against the power of the sky, naturally represented in the form of an eagle (See Fig. 1.12). It is therefore clear that the crawling animal occupies a very different place in the Gaulish world than in the one of the Hebrews, for example. Far from being a cursed creature condemned to be despised for its cunning nature, the serpent of the Gauls is a revered servant of the Dark, the realm that gave birth to all men.

The serpent is a dweller of the Ground, an inhabitant of the shadowy realm, but the Dubnos is not a place of death, an *inferno* reserved for the wicked, but rather the source of life itself. Death is only the return to this source, the reappropriation of one's flesh by

Jahres und ihre Wende, Licht und Dämmer des Tages, Dunkel und Helle der Nacht, das Wirtliche und Unwirtliche der Wetter, Wolkenzug und blauende Tiefe des Äthers. From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936–1953)*, Page 151.



Figure 1.12: *The earth facing the skies, on a silver goblet from the Gallo-Roman period, found in Lyon* (Deyts, *Images des dieux de la Gaule*, Page 143).

the great body of the Dark. When the serpent's venom has been poured into one's veins, it only marks the time of the homecoming that ineluctably occurs to all living beings.

The representation found on the goblet of Lyon echoes with the words of the Roman poet Lucianus, who depicted the terror inspired by the dis-covery of a Gaulish sanctuary that was about to be destroyed by the emperor:

> Filled with mysterious trembling; dripped the streams
> From coal-black fountains; effigies of gods
> Rude, scarcely fashioned from some fallen trunk
> Held the mid space: and, pallid with decay,
> Their rotting shapes struck terror. Thus do men
> Dread most the god unknown. 'Twas said that caves
> Rumbled with earthquakes, that the prostrate yew
> Rose up again; that **fiery tongues of flame**
> **Gleamed in the forest depths**, yet were the trees
> Unkindled; and that **snakes in frequent folds**
> **Were coiled around the trunks.** Men flee the spot
> Nor dare to worship near: and e'en the priest
> Or when bright Phoebus holds the height, or when
> Dark night controls the heavens, in anxious dread
> Draws near the grove and fears to find its lord.
> Spared in the former war, still dense it rose
> Where all the hills were bare, and Caesar now

Its fall commanded.[70]

The Latin word used by the poet is *dracōnēs*, designating both "dragons" and "serpents," beasts that both belong to the Dubnos in the Gaulish World but are nevertheless distinguished from one another. The caricature of the sacred space of the Gauls given to us by Lucanus perhaps tells us more about the Romans than it does concerning the people they conquered. The vision of the "tongues of fire" in the depths of the dark forest can nonetheless easily be seen as a sign of the Bright, the heavenly realm, reminiscent of those that appeared to the Christian apostles at Pentecost. The serpents coiled around the trunks are, on the other hand, holding tight to the trees, protuberances of the earth elevated toward the skies. They are clinging to the great body of the Dark and the Deep so as to courageously stand against the flames coming from the skies, flames that attempt to turn the forest to ashes and take these ashes to the heavens by the power of the mighty winds.

The Roman author shows his poetic skills, his mastery of the Latin tongue and of the culture he dwelt in, but this work also betrays the lack of ground typical of the Roman authors of the period. It shows a fundamental distortion of the truth of the earth, showing the Dark as something to be feared, the serpents as a threat to man's life, and the earth as a "thing" that man should subjugate.

The dark earth is man's dwelling, and the nature of poetry itself is inextricably linked with it. As Heidegger told us, "poetry does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it

[70] English translation from: Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "Fulgura: non ullis frondem praebentibus auris \ Arboribus suus horror inest. Tum plurima nigris \ Fontibus unda cadit, simulacraque moesta deorum \ Arte carent, caesisque extant informia truncis. \ Ipse situs putrique facit iam robore pallor \ Attonitos: non vulgatis sacrata figuris \ Numina sic metuunt: tantum terroribus addit, \ Quos timeant non nosse deos. Iam fama ferebat \ Saepe cavas motu terrae mugire cavernas, \ Et procumbentes iterum consurgere taxos, \ Et non ardentis fulgere incendia silvae, \ **Roboraque amplexos circumfluxisse dracones**. \ Non illum cultu populi propiore frequentant, \ Sed cessere deis. Medio cum Phoebus in axe est, \ Aut coelum nox atra tenet, pavet ipse sacerdos \ Acessus, dominumque timet deprendere luci. \ Hanc iubet immisso silvam procumbere ferro: \ Nam vicina operi belloque intacta priore \ Inter nudatos stabat densissima montes. \ Sed fortes tremuere manus, motique verenda." From: Lucanus, *Pharsaliae Libri X*, N.Pag. (410–430).

and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling."[71] A poem that misrepresents the nature of the Dark therefore fails to be a true manifestation of the essence of the poetic.

The bias of the Roman author nonetheless does not prevent us from seeing the truth of the scenery that he describes. The play unfolded in front of the eyes of the Roman soldiers standing inside the sanctuary is the same strife that was depicted on the silver goblet of Lyon: the standoff between the earth and the skies, the Dark and the Bright, in which the serpent spearheads the *gdonian* forces.

In conclusion, what the trail of clues reveals concerning the snake is that man should not see him as a threat, but rather as the embodiment of the nature of the Dark. The servant of the "horned one" is meant to lead man, in his life and toward his death. Man is meant to observe the mysterious creature, watching it crawl upon the dark soil, swim into the murky waters of the rivers, as he is also meant to keep himself close to the Dark, which gave birth to all living beings. Coiling itself around the trees, as a child tightly enfolds his mother with his arms, the serpent shows man that he can elevate himself toward the Bright without severing his roots, without departing from the earth. The serpents' head points out the way, upwards, toward the twinkling stars above, but its tail also points out toward the source, the origin, that should always remain close to man's heart.

1.4.2 The Serpent's Egg

The place occupied by the serpent in the Gaulish World was not limited to the aforementioned role of pathfinder for mankind. Its seed was also the object of a special reverence by the people of Gaul. The Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23 -–79) gives

[71] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page 216; Original German: "Hölderlin bewahrt so das »Dichterische« nicht nur vor einer naheliegenden Mißdeutung, sondern er weist durch die Beifügung der Worte »auf dieser Erde« eigens in das Wesen des Dichtens. Dieses überfliegt und übersteigt die Erde nicht, um sie zu verlassen und über ihr zu schweben. Das Dichten bringt den Menschen erst auf die Erde, zu ihr, bringt ihn so in das Wohnen." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936–1953)*, Page 196.

us the following account of the significance of a particular kind of snake egg for the Ancient Celts:

> There is another kind of egg, held in high renown by the people of the Gallic provinces, but totally omitted by the Greek writers. In summertime, numberless snakes become artificially entwined together, and form rings around their bodies with the viscous slime which exudes from their mouths, and with the foam secreted by them: the name given to this substance is "anguinum." The Druids tell us, that the serpents eject these eggs into the air by their hissing, and that a person must be ready to catch them in a cloak, so as not to let them touch the ground; they say also that he must instantly take to flight on horseback, as the serpents will be sure to pursue him, until some intervening river has placed a barrier between them. The test of its genuineness, they say, is its floating against the current of a stream, even though it be set in gold. But, as it is the way with magicians to be dexterous and cunning in casting a veil about their frauds, they pretend that these eggs can only be taken on a certain day of the moon; as though, forsooth, it depended entirely upon the human will to make the moon and the serpents accord as to the moment of this operation.[72]

The naturalist clearly does not blindly believe the implausible story told by the Druid. As the men of this order were famous for keeping their knowledge secret, it is probable that the one uttering this tale did not himself believe it, and may perhaps only have attempted to make fun of the foreign visitor. The wisdom of the Roman writer nonetheless led him to write down this account and to pass it on to us. Now incumbent to us is the task to discern

[72] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 29.12); Original Latin: "praeterea est ovorum genus in magna fama galliarum, omissum graecis. angues enim numerose convoluti salivis faucium corporumque spumis artifici conplexu glomerant; urinum appellatur. druidae sibilis id dicunt in sublime iactari sagoque oportere intercipi, ne tellurem attingat; profugere raptorem equo, serpentes enim insequi, donec arceantur amnis alicuius interventu; experimentum eius esse, si contra aquas fluitet vel auro vinctum; atque, ut est magorum sollertia occultandis fraudibus sagax, certa luna capiendum censent, tamquam congruere operationem eam serpentium humani sit arbitrii." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

the truth that may be woven into the fabric of this improbable tale.

Formed with the foamy saliva of snakes, it is firstly clear that the "egg" in question is not the seed that will produce their descendants, even though it bears its name. This object made from the *anguinum* nonetheless probably shares with the egg its form and color: a white, ovoid shape. Secondly, the conditions in which this "egg" is released seem to be significant: it is projected in the air by the hissing sound of the serpents, with the vibration of their sharp tongues, and it should also not fall down back on the earth. Thirdly, the "egg" defies the power of the Dark, as it is unaffected by the flow of the rivers, and is not subjected to the pull of the earth that attracts all matter to the core of its giant body.

Beyond the mythical aspect of the account, a certain unity and coherence can be found in the three aforementioned elements. A white object, projected through a sound-wave toward the skies, that should not touch the earth and that resists the chtonian forces. All these elements point to a single direction: away from the Dark, toward the Bright, away from the earth and onto the skies. Here, the voice of the serpent is stronger than the pull of the earth. Its speech, part of the metaphysical world, is stronger than physical gravity bringing all things back to the ground from which they arose.

As it was seen in the previous section, the serpent is the emblematic animal of the Dark and the Ground, the companion of the "horned one." Therefore, the story of the "egg"'s origin, where the serpents produce something that goes against their own nature, would seem to be paradoxical. What it shows is a bright object fashioned in and by the Dark, one that appears to strive against its origin by refusing to let itself be engulfed by the shadowy streams, hovering on its surface. It should not touch the ground, perhaps because it would then lose its peculiar, heavenly nature? Concerning the "egg," Pliny the Elder also tells us that:

> It is held in high estimation among the Druids. The possession of it is marvellously vaunted as ensuring success in law-suits, and a favourable reception with princes; a notion which has been so far belied, that a Roman of equestrian rank, a native of the territory of the Vocontii, who, during a trial, had one of these eggs in his bosom, was slain by the late Emperor Tiberius,

> and for no other reason, that I know of, but because he was in possession of it.[73]

Once the link has become clear between the "egg" and the metaphysical World, the Bright realm of vision and thought that contrasts with the Dark physical matter, the two roles attributed to the "egg" by the Druids can now appear as more than an arbitrary magical property. Success in law-suits and a favorable reception with princes, these are two actions focused on the work of the tongue, the metaphysical. The "egg," fruit of the earth thrown into the skies, hidden in one's bosom, is thought to bestow an eloquence to the man bearing it, allowing him to win the battle of the tongue that take place between earth and skies.

The story of the "egg"'s formation can thus appear in its symbolic dimension, as the telling of the building of the Bright, in its metaphysical, worldly aspect. The existence of the World, as the Bright realm of language and thought, tied to the air and the light of the skies, indeed arises from the Dark, from the earth, the material realm without which man cannot behold the light nor think. The serpents, creatures of the Dark and the Deep, combine their forces to produce the white egg that they project with their tongues in the air, toward the sun and the other stars. The Bright is in constant strife with the Dark, but it owes its existence to it. The Bright is built upon the Dark, and in order for man to win the battles that take place between the Dark and the Bright, in the realm of men, the surface between earth and skies, he must keep the Dark close to him while he is beholding and building up the World. The "egg" can serve such a purpose. If its bearer holds it tightly against his flesh, it can indeed remind him that this earthly object, one that is hard as stone but does not sink into the waters, a fruit of the Dark that belongs to the Bright, embodies the tension between the realms. It can remind man that he must at all time also be an embodiment of their strife if he is to excel and accomplish his destiny.

Even though the Druidic order already was in decline in Gaul

[73] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 29.12); Original Latin: "druidis ad victorias litium ac regum aditus mire laudatur, tantae vanitatis, ut habentem id in lite in sinu equitem r. e vocontiis a divo claudio principe interemptum non ob aliud sciam." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

during the life of Pliny the Elder, following the Roman conquest and persecutions by the Empire, the wise-men of the Antiquity saw in them more than a mere fraternity of "magicians," "soothsayers," "wizards" and charlatans. They were seen as authentic philosophers, lovers of wisdom and providers of education and knowledge rather than mere vectors for the perpetuation of ancient superstitions. Their advanced knowledge of astronomy and their love of religious symbolism suggest that the story of the "egg" may have been more than a fable, and that the kind of interpretation that has been here offered of it may have been similar to the one intended by the early philosophers of Gaul. These men were famed for their reluctance to speak plainly and to share their doctrines, and it would therefore not be surprising that they would reply with symbols to the questions of a foreign scholar, or even to their Gaulish brethren who were not part of the order.

Finally, beyond the tale of the serpent's egg, the examination of the earthly nature of the mysterious object may lead us to perceive another of its aspect. Pliny the Elder thus describes it:

> I myself, however, have seen one of these eggs: it was round, and about as large as an apple of moderate size; the shell of it was formed of a cartilaginous substance, and it was surrounded with numerous cupules, as it were, resembling those upon the arms of the polypus.[74]

Archaeologists do not seem to have stumbled upon such an object, but they did find stones with a sort of "cupules" that would seem to have been used as amulets by the people of Gaul (See Fig. 1.13). The account of Pliny the Elder has been well-known in Europe as a whole, and thus a direct influence on early modern beliefs cannot be excluded, but these objects, stones having a naturally formed hole going through them, have been for centuries associated with serpents. In Wales, they are known as *Glain Neidr* ("Serpent's egg") while they received the name of *Gloine nan Druidh* ("Druid's glass") in Scotland.[75] In English, they are usually called "adder-

[74] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 29.12); Original Latin: "vidi equidem id ovum mali orbiculati modici magnitudine, crusta cartilagineis velut acetabulis bracchiorum polypi crebris insigne." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

[75] As Ireland has no serpents, it is not surprising that this tradition does not seem to have existed in the island. In Scotland, the designation *elachan nathaireach* is also mentioned in *Archaeologia Or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating*

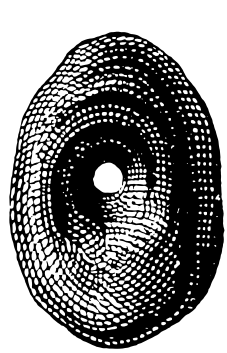


Figure 1.13: *An adder-stone found in a Gaulish tomb* (Déchelette and Millon, *La collection Millon*, Page 104.).

stones" and the subject of various superstitions[76]

The nature and origin of the "adder-stones" like the ones discovered in the soil of Gaul obviously have little in common with the account given by the Druids to Pliny the Elder. They are not the petrified foamy saliva of snakes, nor do they run against the current of rivers. They nonetheless are a fruit of the earth, the product of a phenomenon seldom seen by man's eye. The peculiarity of these stones is to have been pierced by the combined work of the earth and the skies. Streams of water are known for their slow and yet incredible strength: they patiently carve the landscape that man inhabits, eroding monumental cliffs and polishing boulders until they are nothing but a pile of finely ground sand. Hence, man's imagination is drawn to the "adder-stones," as the hole piercing them seems to defy the usual course of nature.

It was previously seen that the serpent has often been associated with water, and rivers in particular, because of their common serpentine shape and their agile, fluid nature. Perhaps even more adequately embodying the nature of the mighty rivers than the earthly, natural snake, the ram-horned serpent of the Gaulish world emphasizes the duality of the streams flowing inside the Dark. The iconic animal indeed combines the agility, softness, and smoothness of the snake with the strength and determination of the ram, which clears a path by pushing away what dares to stand

to Antiquity, Page 496.

[76] Adolphus, *The political state of the British empire v. 4*, Page 75–76.

in front of it.

The adder-stone can be seen as an excellent symbol of the duality of both the river and the ram-horned serpent, as it shows the patient work of the waters that polished the stone, blunting its edges to make it dance harmoniously with their flow, together with a display of their remarkable precision and deftness in the carving of the opening, when the inflexible material is pierced without shattering it into pieces.[77]

Like the serpent's egg, the adder-stone is a fruit of the earth, formed in its depths before it emerged to the surface and was carried by the waters. The work of the Dark that shapes it nonetheless transforms its nature. The artistry of the Horned One is manifested in this work, as the dark stone suddenly offers the sight of a radiance to the one holding it in the air. The fruit of the Dark then becomes the source of a vision of the Bright, as the stone is a manifestation of the contrast between light and darkness, the earth and the skies, through the contrast between the dark stone and the opening at its center, an opening that lets the light shines through it.

When man is entirely engulfed in the brilliance of the sun, he quickly grows accustomed to this luminosity, which is then left unseen, forgotten as an insignificant background. The stone may be seen as a reminder, showing the intertwined and complementary nature of the Dark and the Bright. Man first sees the dark stone itself, elevated in the air and visible because it reflects the light going through the skies. As his eyes are drawn to observe the opening, he begins to see the Bright through the Dark, and he approaches to get a closer look. Through the opening, he now sees the earth through the lens of the stone, but he cannot see the Dark itself, only its surface upon which the light shines and bounces. Taking the stone away from his eye, he sees that the stone, fruit of the Dark, fulfills its nature only when it is elevated in the realm of light, taking distance from its source. Both realms are dancing with one another, intertwined and in need of each other. The earth cannot be seen without the skies, but vision is

[77] Creatures of the seas may also pierce through the stones found on the coasts, producing the so-called "pholad borings" for example. Stones with such openings, created by animals rather than by the earth itself, will not here be considered as "adder-stones."

itself based on the earthly nature of the eye and of the body that carries it.

More than an object of ignorant superstition or a tool of the charlatan, the adder-stone may serve as a strong sign helping man to constantly keep his eyes on the tension between the Dark and the Bright, between the earth and the skies. Combining agility and strength, nature and art, man is called to pierce through the Ground with his glance so as to behold its truth. He his called to build a luminous World upon the Dark, weaving them together so that they may not be severed from one another.

1.4.3 Metals

Once again, in the words of Pliny the Elder: "we are now about to speak of metals, of actual wealth, the standard of comparative value, objects for which we diligently search, within the earth."[78] It is not known whether or not the Gaulish tongue had a word encompassing all metals, distinguishing them from other materials. As it is the case with the Greek word μέταλλον [métallon], it is highly probable that the Celts associated all metals with the word designating the substance from which they were extracted, that is, ores, or the location of this extraction: mines. The Proto-Celtic word *MENI [*mēni-], reconstructed from the Old Irish *méin*, *mían* ("ore, metal, mineral") and the Middle Breton *men-gleuz* ("mine"),[79] may thus very well have designated these elements of the earth that have transformed the life of man since their dis-covery.

At the time of the genesis of the Celtic people, its members already possessed a knowledge concerning the extraction, smelting, and forging of a wide variety of metals, from gold and silver to bronze and iron. What unites all these materials that are either given by the earth or taken from it, is a series of unique properties that distinguish them from the other parts of the great body of the Dark. Perhaps the most singular of these peculiarities is their

[78] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (Section 29.12); Original Latin: "metalla nunc ipsaeque opes et rerum pretia dicentur, tellurem intus exquirente cura multiplici modo." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

[79] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 265.

immutable nature. As told by an ancient Eastern text, "An excellent man, like precious metal, is in every way invariable."[80] This property is nonetheless not reserved to the most coveted metals: less valued ones, such as iron, lead, or tin, equally share this remarkable constancy, as no matter how long a piece of metal has been exposed to the work of the skies, no matter how brutally it has been hammered, twisted, or compressed, a smith will always be able to melt it back into new ingots and reshape it into a new object that will appear brand-new, well-polished and shining into the eyes of men. Objects made of metals can be destroyed, but the metal itself forever remains, passing through time, indifferent to the way it is used and miss-used by the hands of man.[81]

Wood decomposes, rots, or burns. Stones are crushed, ground, or eroded until they become fine sand. Bones are broken, buried, and they return to the earth, never to be seen again. A piece of metal, however, can be continually used indefinitely: the golden rings that the present-day men wear on their fingers may have been forged from the same piece of metal that Vercingetorix or his forebears wore around their neck. Thrown into a furnace, a necklace made of metal that has been worn out can be rejuvenated and forged anew, ready to adorn a younger neck.

Metals are a gift of the earth, but one that must be earned. They indeed seldom offer themselves to man. With few exceptions, they must rather be sought and painstakingly extracted, smelted, and refined, before the smith can even begin to fashion them. Paradoxically, the most prized of all metals of the Antiquity is also the one that is the most easily dis-covered,[82] one that appears as an offering from the Dark to man. As the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus tells us:

> Throughout Gaul there is found practically no silver, but there is gold in great quantities, which Nature provides for the inhabitants without their having to mine for it or to undergo any hardship. For the rivers, as they course through the country, having as they do

[80] From: Ballou, *The Bible Of The World*, Page 341.

[81] Aside from metals and "metalloids," very few chemical elements or material share this ability to be melted and reshaped. Glass could be seen as one example, but as a chemical compound, it can be chemically "destroyed" and decomposed into its basic elements, which do not share its properties.

[82] Peake, *The Bronze age and the Celtic World*, Page 39.

> sharp bends which turn this way and that and dashing against the mountains which line their banks and bearing off great pieces of them, are full of gold-dust. This is collected by those who occupy themselves in this business, and these men grind or crush the lumps which hold the dust, and after washing out with water the earthy elements in it they give the gold-dust over to be melted in the furnaces.[83]

Gold, *ᗅYC [*aus-][84] in Proto-Celtic, is a soft, malleable metal that was almost exclusively used for ornamentation. Pure, its softness makes it impractical for the making of vessels and tools. More than any metal known by the Celts, however, artefacts of gold passed through time unaffected by the work of the skies: contrary to silver that is darkened by the air, or to iron that rusts in contact with moisture, gold always displays its radiance, no matter where it is, or how long it as been neglected.

This gift of the Dark, found sprinkled upon the Ground, considerably changes man's relation with them both. When he is nourished by easily plucked fruits and by hunting wild animals, he does not pay attention to the nature of the Ground under his feet. He feels the great body of the Dark with his senses, but he does not seek to know what it is made of. When the wealth of the Dark begins to shine in the eyes of man as he walks by a river and beholds the glowing dust that reflects the brilliance of the great sun, and when he has realized the potential uses of what the soil contains, the way he looks at the Dark is then transformed.

Using a term borrowed from Heidegger, the Dark that was a mere background in man's life now becomes "ready-to-hand," that is, it begins to be seen as something that can be used to create

[83] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.27); Original Greek: "κατὰ γοῦν τὴν Γαλατίαν ἄργυρος μὲν οὐ γίνεται τὸ σύνολον, χρυσὸς δὲ πολύς, ὃν τοῖς ἐγχωρίοις ἡ φύσις ἄνευ μεταλλείας καὶ κακοπαθείας ὑπουργεῖ. ἡ γὰρ τῶν ποταμῶν ῥύσις σκολιοὺς τοὺς ἀγκῶνας ἔχουσα, καὶ τοῖς τῶν παρακειμένων ὀρῶν ὄχθοις προσαράττουσα καὶ μεγάλους ἀπορρηγνῦσα κολωνούς, πληροῖ χρυσοῦ ψήγματος. τοῦτο δ᾽ οἱ περὶ τὰς ἐργασίας ἀσχολούμενοι συνάγοντες ἀλήθουσιν ἢ συγκόπτουσι τὰς ἐχούσας τὸ ψῆγμα βώλους, διὰ δὲ τῶν ὑδάτων τῆς φύσεως τὸ γεῶδες πλύναντες παραδιδόασιν ἐν ταῖς καμίνοις εἰς τὴν χωνείαν," from: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

[84] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 78.

objects or to perform actions.[85] When "nature" is seen as ready-to-hand, it comes to the foreground of his existence. From now on:

> The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind "in the sails." As the "environment" is discovered, the "Nature" thus discovered is encountered too. If its kind of Being as ready-to-hand is disregarded, this "Nature" itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this happens, the Nature which "stirs and strives," which assails us and enthralls us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist"s plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow; the "source" which the geographer establishes for a river is not the "spring-head in the dale."[86]

Once the potential uses of gold have been dis-covered, the soil then becomes a reserve of ore. A new dimension of the Dark appears, as man is not only fed from the fruits hanging on Cernunnos's antlers: the very flesh of the Horned One can now adorn their body and decorate their homes or their sanctuaries.

When the earth is seen as a reserve of material and wealth, "everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering."[87] It becomes a "standing reserve" (Ge. *Bestand*) at man's disposal, rather than the great provider who dispenses his

[85] A more detailed explanation of this concept can be found in: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Page 98.

[86] English translation from: ibid., Page 100. Original German: "Der Wald ist Forst, der Berg Steinbruch, der Fluß Wasserkraft, der Wind ist Wind »in den Segeln«. Mit der entdeckten »Umwelt« begegnet die so entdeckte »Natur«. Von deren Seinsart als zuhandener kann abgesehen, sie selbst lediglich in ihrer puren Vorhandenheit entdeckt und bestimmt werden. Diesem Naturentdecken bleibt aber auch die Natur als das, was »webt und strebt«, uns überfällt, als Landschaft gefangen nimmt, verborgen. Die Pflanzen des Botanikers sind nicht Blumen am Rain, das geographisch fixierte »Entspringen« eines Flusses ist nicht die »Quelle im Grund«." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 2: Sein und Zeit (1927)*, Page 95.

[87] English translation from: Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, Page 17. Original German: "Überall ist es bestellt, auf der Stelle zur Stelle zu stehen, und zwar zu stehen, um selbst bestellbar zu sein für ein weiteres Bestellen." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936–1953)*, Page 95.

goods to deserving servants.

Man is easily tricked by all the things that shine, and because the Dark by nature conceals itself, man thus prefers to behold the Bright, the light of the sun that shines throughout the skies rather than to plunge his hands into the dark and damp soil. Man may think that he uses gold to his own profit, but he is equally used by the glowing metal, and its source. The Horned One uses the Bright in order to draw man back to the Dark, offering the shiny gold dust near what he needs the most in his daily life: the fresh waters of the rivers.

Man may plunder the Ground for luxuries and greed, for fame and pleasures, but the Ground receives as much as what is taken from it. The Dark, which before remained unseen and uncared for, is now seen in its readiness-to-hand, and it is cherished for the wealth and beauty that it provides. The Dark is now a means to an end. Parts of its nature remain concealed, but man slowly progresses on the path of its unveiling.

The Dark patiently shapes man across centuries, pointing out the way to follow with a trail of shiny objects. After bringing him to the easily found sun-colored dust laid on the banks of the rivers, the trail then leads man deeper into the earth, to a metal whose radiance evokes the moonlight: silver. The white metal, named ᎯᎮᎢᎯᏁᎢᎾᏁ [arganton][88] among the Gauls, is not as easily found as gold, as explained to us by the aforementioned Roman naturalist, who called it "the next folly of mankind": "Silver is never found but in shafts sunk deep in the ground, there being no indications to raise hopes of its existence, no shining sparkles, as in the case of gold."[89] Man must enter the Dark in order to extract this metal, which is less desirable than gold because of its paler hue and of the fact that it becomes tarnished by the work of the skies. Contrary to other lands where it is usually found in more abundance than gold, silver ore was seldom found in Gaul, and thus this metal was not commonly used locally.[90]

[88] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 48.

[89] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 31.6); Original Latin: "ab his argenti metalla dicantur, quae sequens insania est. non nisi in puteis reperitur nullaque spe sui nascitur, nullis, ut in auro, lucentibus scintillis." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

[90] See Harding, *The Archaeology of Celtic Art*, Page 7. The largest and most famous silversmithing work belonging to the Celts, the Cauldron of Gun-

Far more common than silver, bronze occupied a considerably larger place in the world of the Celts. This alloy of tin (*ᑕTATNO [*stagno][91]) and copper, named ᛕACCI [cassi] in Gaulish,[92] is also found in the depths of the earth. Contrary to gold and silver, it can be both used for ornamentation because of its bright, shiny appearance, and for the fabrication of tools, vessels, armors, or weapons. This versatility made it both precious and practical for daily use, and it therefore is not surprising that countless artifacts made of this metal have been found in the soil of Gaul. The fabrication process of bronze ingots nonetheless was more complex than the one used for gold or silver. The two ores needed to create bronze are indeed almost never found in the same regions, with tin appearing far more rarely than copper. The development of distant trade relationships was thus necessary in order to produce large quantities of bronze. Cornwall, in the land of the ᐃOYMNONII [dumnonii] (the "dwellers of the Dark and the Deep"), was a major source of tin during the bronze age, even before the Celts arrived on the island. It was sold in Brittany and then taken to different parts of the continent. The dispensation of this metal by the Dark therefore encouraged man to travel, to dis-cover the Ground, and to develop bonds with his brethren with whom he shared a common origin and a common nature.

The horizontal exploration occurred conjointly with a vertical one. Entering the Dark to mine for these metals, man was indeed lured to re-dis-cover the place of his birth, the source of his life, just as he was lured to see the vastness of the Ground and the strength of the bond that he shared with distant tribes and peoples. The covetousness for the precious, glittering substances was kindled by the Dark, which led man to a greater appropriation of the earth and of the world built upon it. From the easily spotted gold dust of the rivers, man was led to an increasingly deeper exploration of the soil, and an increasingly wider dis-covery of the land. Man was thereby given an opportunity to nurture his bond with the Dark, but this opportunity came with higher expectations of him, and also a danger. The lust for gold and silver can drive man to push his own limits, and it incites him to appropriate the Dark. It can be a formidable tool, if it used by man, but if he instead entirely

destrup, was manufactured in the East, where silver was more abundant.

[91] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 152.

[92] ibid., Page 152.

submits to this lust and let himself be completely used by it, man's bond with the Dark can find itself weakened. Man's relationship with the Dark must be one of mutual nurturing and consideration. Man must let himself be shaped by it rather than merely used, just as he must accompany and favorize its growth. By the seeking of precious ores and the use of metals, man can be used by the Dark, revealing it and bringing it to the world, but he can also let himself be shaped by these materials. His body carries metallic objects to work the earth. His neck and his arms are encircled with gilded items. His external appearance is redefined by the use of metals. The bronze spoked-wheel on his chest is now one of the specific symbol of his people, something that distinguishes its members from the other peoples inhabiting the earth.

Metals are a two-edged sword for man, one that can initiate a mutual appropriation between man and the Dark, but one that can also cause a breaking down of the relation between man and "nature." The shininess of gold, which can bring man attention to the Ground on which it is found and out of which it is made, can also just as well blind him to the Dark. This is the fundamental danger of all *technique*, from primitive metal production to modern technology, a danger often pointed out by Heidegger:

> The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [Herausfordern], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such. But does this not hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind's blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it. In contrast, a tract of land is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order [bestellte] appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field.[93]

[93] English translation from: Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, Page 14. Original German: "Das in der modernen Technik waltende Entbergen ist ein Herausfordern, das an die Natur das

They key distinction between the benefit and the danger of the use of metals is found in man's consciousness of his bond to what he intends to "exploit": the danger can be avoided if he is mindful of the fact that he is part of the Dark, that his own flesh is made of it, and that his own existence is prolonged every day because of what it provides.

The Celts, known for both their piety and their love of precious metals, seemed to have kept in mind the source of their wealth and of their life. As recounted by Diodorus Siculus, among other sources:

> A peculiar and striking practice is found among the upper Celts, in connection with the sacred precincts of the gods; as for in the temples and precincts made consecrate in their land, a great amount of gold has been deposited as a dedication to the gods, and not a native of the country ever touches it because of religious scruple, although the Celts are an exceedingly covetous people.[94]

The Greek historian Strabo also mentions that the "hiding place" favored by the Celts to conceal their treasures were the lakes, where metals were deposited, not in the form of coins but rather as bulions of silver and gold.[95] As taught in the Gospels, the imprinted

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Ansinnen stellt, Energie zu liefern, die als solche herausgefördert und gespeichert werden kann. Gilt dies aber nicht auch von der alten Windmühle? Nein. Ihre Flügel drehen sich zwar im Winde, seinem Wehen bleiben sie unmittelbar anheimgegeben. Die Windmühle erschließt aber nicht Energien der Luftströmung, um sie zu speichern. Ein Landstrich wird dagegen in die Förderung von Kohle und Erzen herausgefordert. Das Erdreich entbirgt sich jetzt als Kohlenrevier, der Boden als Erzlagerstätte. Anders erscheint das Feld, das der Bauer vormals bestellte, wobei bestellen noch hieß: hegen und pflegen. Das bäuerliche Tun fordert den Ackerboden nicht heraus." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936–1953)*, Pages 15–16.

[94] English translation from: D. Siculus, *The Library of History*, Page 169; Original Greek: "ἴδιον δέ τι καὶ παράδοξον παρὰ τοῖς ἄνω Κελτοῖς ἐστι περὶ τὰ τεμένη τῶν θεῶν γινόμενον: ἐν γὰρ τοῖς ἱεροῖς καὶ τεμένεσιν ἐπὶ τῆς χώρας ἀνειμένοις ἔρριπται πολὺς χρυσὸς ἀνατεθειμένος τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ τῶν ἐγχωρίων οὐδεὶς ἅπτεται τούτου διὰ τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν, καίπερ ὄντων τῶν Κελτῶν φιλαργύρων καθ' ὑπερβολήν." From: ibid., Page 168.

[95] See Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. "There is much more likelihood in the statement made by Posidonius and many others, that the country abounding in gold, and the inhabitants being superstitious, and not living expensively, they hid their treasures in many different places, the lakes

face upon the coins marks who they belong to, and to whom they shall return.[96] The bullion has no marks, it only displays the nature of the Dark. The Celts therefore perceived that a part of it should return to the Dark, thrown into the depths of the lakes where it would be inaccessible to the hands of man, and where it would once again become part of the great body of the earth, enriched by the refining provided by its diligent servants. This use of the waters as a sacred precinct where metals were thrown as offerings to the Dark is confirmed by archeology in various places of Gaul. It shows that some among the Celts knew how to keep the *technique* in balance with the earth, and that metals could bring them closer to the "horned one" forming the Ground.

The trail of metals traced by the Dark ends with a very peculiar one. It is the most common metal found inside the soil, and yet it is also the hardest to exploit. It is found all across the face of the earth, and yet it historically has been the last one to be discovered and used. It can be the hardest of all metals known in the Antiquity, and yet it is the one that is the most quickly degraded by the work of the skies, one that seems to yearn to be reclaimed by the earth. This metal is the one whose dis-covery had such an impact on the life of man that the age during which the Celts of Gauls were born and flourished was named after it: the "iron age."

The name for iron in the Gaulish tongue, ISARNON [isarnon], would seem to originate from the color of its ore, which shares its hue with blood.[97] Another possibility is a link with the Indo-European root *(H)ish$_2$ro- meaning "strong, holy, having supernatural powers."[98], but one does not necessarily exclude the other, as man's strength has often been considered to be located in his blood, which is also a key element of Celtic sacred rituals.

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in particular affording them a hiding-place for depositing their gold and silver bullion." (§ 4.1.13); Original Greek: "πιθανώτερος δ' ἐστὶν ὁ Ποσειδωνίου λόγος: τὰ μὲν γὰρ εὑρεθέντα ἐν τῇ Τολώσσῃ χρήματα μυρίων που καὶ πεντακισχιλίων ταλάντων γενέσθαι φησί, τὰ μὲν ἐν σηκοῖς ἀποκείμενα τὰ δ' ἐν λίμναις ἱεραῖς, οὐδεμίαν κατασκευὴν ἔχοντα, ἀλλ' ἀργὸν χρυσίον καὶ ἄργυρον." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag.

[96] Mark 12:16.

[97] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 160. This association would seem to have an early Indo-European origin and not be specific to the Celts, see the Old Norse: *járn*, which may nonetheless have been borrowed from the Old Irish *iarn*.

[98] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 172.

Even though it is more easily and more widely found than any other metal, iron comes last in the trail of metals because it demands more from man. Only when man has become proficient in the art of the smelting and forging of other metals does iron let itself become a tool in man's hand. It's melting point is indeed significantly higher than others, and thus only more advanced furnaces can digest the red blood of the earth. Once again does the wisdom of the Dark finds itself manifested through man's discovery, as just as one does not give a sharpened sword to a child to play with but rather a wooden toy, the earth only gives iron to men who have already mastered the more "innocent" metals such as gold and silver.

Iron does not shine like the so-called "precious metals," but its power is greater than any of them. Pliny the Elder very accurately describes it as:

> The most useful and the most fatal instrument in the hand of mankind. For by the aid of iron we lay open the ground, we plant trees, we prepare our vineyard-trees, and we force our vines each year to resume their youthful state, by cutting away their decayed branches. It is by the aid of iron that we construct houses, cleave rocks, and perform so many other useful offices of life. But it is with iron also that wars, murders, and robberies are effected, and this, not only hand to hand, but from a distance even, by the aid of missiles and winged weapons, now launched from engines, now hurled by the human arm, and now furnished with feathery wings.[99]

Iron came into general use among the Celts together with their emergence as a people distinct from its neighbors, as they began to develop a specific iconography and a distinct worldview during the sixth century B.C. It suddenly and deeply transformed every aspect of the life of this people: its economy, the life of the house-

[99] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 39.14); Original Latin: "proxime indicari debent metalla ferri. optumo pessimoque vitae instrumento est, siquidem hoc tellurem scindimus, arbores serimus, arbusta tondemus, vites squalore deciso annis omnibus cogimus iuvenescere, hoc exstruimus tecta, caedimus saxa, omnesque ad alios usus ferro utimur, sed eodem ad bella, caedes, latrocinia, non comminus solum, sed etiam missili volucrique, nunc tormentis excusso, nunc lacertis, nunc vero pinnato." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

hold, and warfare.[100] It brought on joy and sorrow. It allowed men to save time while tilling the fields, building houses, or crafting objects, but men also quickly realized that it could also be used to shorten lives, unleashing a torrent of blood upon the earth.

It would be tempting to see in the violence released by the dis-covery of the dark metal the sign of a divine punishment for man's covetousness and his exploitation of the earth from which he came. The Roman naturalist once again brilliantly describes such a view:

> We trace out all the veins of the earth, and yet, living upon it, undermined as it is beneath our feet, are astonished that it should occasionally cleave asunder or tremble: as though, forsooth, these signs could be any other than expressions of the indignation felt by our sacred parent! We penetrate into her entrails, and seek for treasures in the abodes even of the Manes, as though each spot we tread upon were not sufficiently bounteous and fertile for us![101]

To believe this, however, would be to ignore the fact that man does not only live upon the earth, which is exploited by him. Man is himself part of the Dark, and he is shaped by the Ground as much as he shapes it. He appears to be exploiting the soil, but he may also be used by the Dark, blindly following the trail of metals that leads him deeper into its body. The red torrent of iron ore and blood that flows upon the earth may not be a punishment, but rather a guidance, an attempt at a dialogue with man, who is both fully part of the Dark and yet alone able to stand outside of it, appearing to observe it from a distance. The viewpoint of the naturalist fits the Greek, Roman, and later Christian tradition. Following this line of thought, he considers that metals lead men to their perdition, as they should not profane the body of their mother, the earth:

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[100] See Brown, *Celts: Europe's People of Iron*, Page 53.

[101] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 33.1.1); Original Latin: "persequimur omnes eius fibras vivimusque super excavatam, mirantes dehiscere aliquando aut intremescere illam, ceu vero non hoc indignatione sacrae parentis exprimi possit. imus in viscera et in sede manium opes quaerimus, tamquam parum benigna fertilique qua calcatur." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

> It is upon her surface, in fact, that she has presented us with these substances, equally with the cereals, bounteous and ever ready, as she is, in supplying us with all things for our benefit! It is what is concealed from our view, what is sunk far beneath her surface, objects, in fact, of no rapid formation, that urge us to our ruin, that send us to the very depths of hell . . . How innocent, how happy, how truly delightful even would life be, if we were to desire nothing but what is to be found upon the face of the earth; in a word, nothing but what is provided ready to our hands![102]

No matter how "natural" this view is to us, who have inherited more from the Greek and Roman worlds than from the Gaulish one, it may nonetheless occult a part of the essence of the Dark. The naturalist tells us that metals "send us to the very depths of hell [*inferos*]." This is true indeed, but the *inferno* of the Roman is not the ᐃOᖵᐷNOᑕ [dubnos] of the Celts. Metals, iron in particular, send us to the Dark, to the depths of the earth indeed, but not to a realm of punishment and suffering. The trail ordained by the Horned One incidentally leads man to dig and to enter the earth, but it is not its *raison d'être*, which can be revealed when one examines the nature of iron.

If the ore from which iron is extracted shares its color with the blood flowing through man's veins, it is not by mere coincidence. Blood indeed possesses this particular hue because of the presence of iron in the liquid of life. Iron flows throughout man's body, and when an iron sword or dagger is used to slash the skin containing it, it is spilled on the soil, before the flesh and the bones are themselves reclaimed by the Dark.

Iron is a key that opens a new section of the path of mankind toward its own destiny. The torrent of blood unleashed by the

[102] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 33.1.1); Original Latin: "quamquam et hoc summa sui parte tribuit ut fruges, larga facilisque in omnibus, quaecumque prosunt. illa nos peremunt, illa nos ad inferos agunt, quae occultavit atque demersit, illa, quae non nascuntur repente, ut mens ad inane evolans reputet, quae deinde futura sit finis omnibus saeculis exhauriendi eam, quo usque penetratura avaritia. quam innocens, quam beata, immo vero etiam delicata esset vita, si nihil aliunde quam supra terras concupisceret, breviterque, nisi quod secum est!" From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

dis-covery of iron offers man a chance to open his eye to the Dark inside him. As blades are slitting throats, chopping arms and legs off, or piercing through the chests of his brethren and enemies on the battlefield, he is given the sight of the essence of human lives being poured on the Ground, permeating the soil and returning to the depths of the earth. The bloody wounds laid bare under the sun show him what he is made of, and as the corpses of the fallen are rotting and are being eaten by both the creatures of the skies and those of the earth, he sees that he already is part of the Dark. The presence of death points toward the value of his life, and blood toward his earthly nature, his nature as a son of the Dark who only momentarily appears to be independent from it.

Iron is a gift from the Dark rather than a curse condemning the greedy to return to the soil. It carries an invitation given to mankind, to nurture their bond with the great body from which they arose and to enter into a dialogue with it. Death is a passage that every man must go through, and the spilling of the blood of the mighty warriors serves to water the soil, returning the iron back to the Ground and thereby showing men their own nature: both what their body is made of and the nature of the Dark itself. Iron is given to man by the Dark, but iron itself offers man its own gift, which is an uncovering of the Dark.

Through the work of iron, seen as the dance between metal and blood, man enters a cycle where he penetrates the earth in order to extract the red dust that he can smelt into axes, swords, and hammers, and then uses these iron tools to spill iron-filled blood upon the ground and send other men back to the earth. The iron tools forged by the hand of man also themselves return to the earth, through the action of water and air that transform the dark metal back into the red dust from which they were formed: rust. This wheel of iron in which both man and iron are caught serves as a constant reminder of the nature of the bond between man and the Dark. Man and iron are together prisoners of this cycle, and from now on man's nature will not be separated from the nature of this element.

A man can let himself be carried by the wheel of iron, oblivious to its nature and to its purpose, but he can also seize this opportunity, consciously following the trail of metals and examining the relation between iron, blood, the Dark, and himself. When the har-

mony between these elements is appropriated, then the Dark ceases to be seen only in its readiness-to-hand, as a reserve of material that can be exploited for wealth, pleasure, and power. Another dimension of the Dark can then be dis-covered: its presence-at-hand, that is, its essence and its material nature, seen independently from the uses that can be made of them.

When he begins his life upon the earth, man does not see the presence of the Dark. When he begins to see the opportunities offered by the earth, such as the transformation of ores into metals and the forging of those into objects, he can then begin to see the Dark in its readiness-to-hand, its "usability." When the trail of metals is followed until its end, and man is caught in the wheel of iron, the presence-at-hand of the Dark can then be perceived. There would be no presence-at-hand without a prior readiness-to-hand, as man must see the earth as a set of "things" before he can perceive its oneness, although it was right in front of his eyes since his infancy. Both dimensions represent the truth of the Dark and both complement each other. The readiness-to-hand of the Dark is given to all men, as it is necessary in order for them to live, but this is not the case for its presence-at-hand, which is more demanding. The sign leading to it is found in plain sight of all: the blood spilled by the weapon of iron. Few, however, will see the wheel and perceive its significance. Many among the Celts nonetheless performed what they perceived to be a sacred duty by giving back to the Dark the wealth that allowed them to remain living, upon the surface, between earth and skies.

It would also seem that the work of iron had also kept some of its secrets from the people of Gaul. One of the most singular properties of this metal was certainly known to the smiths of the Iron age: its capacity to attract or repel other pieces of iron, exerting a mysterious, invisible force, which is now called "magnetism." This property was known among the Greeks as early as the sixth century B.C., but the nature, origin, and direction of the earth's magnetic field would seem to have been unknown to the ancient wise-men of Europe. Modern science can now lift up the veil that covered certain aspects of the Dark, thereby offering us a supplementary chance to strengthen our bond with it, one that was not given to many of our ancestors. It is now known that iron is more than one element found in the earth among others: the very core of the round globe upon which man lives his life is made of molten

iron, which flows and perpetually circulates in hidden rivers of magma that provide a stable Ground for all living beings. The direction toward which the compass points is determined by the course of these rivers of iron concealed in the depths of the earth. When magnetized, either naturally through lightning strikes or artificially, iron can serve as a reminder of the nature of the core of our planet, and of the preciousness of this element, which flows in the depths of the Dark but also in our veins, allowing us to live above the Ground.

Men now also have the privilege to know how the giant weight of iron forming the center of their planet contributes to keep them close to the Ground. The rivers of iron greatly contribute to the pull of the Dark that keeps it together, technically known as the "gravitational force." When the Celts threw their bulions of gold and silver into the depths of the lakes around them, these metals were ineluctably drawn toward the rivers of iron, answering the call of the depths that maintain the unity of the Dark. The people of Gaul may not have known the origin and nature of these forces, but they nonetheless honored and respected the mysterious powers of the Dark, which may still possess its own secrets, which may one day be revealed by our children.

1.4.4 Torcs

The "horned one," the embodiment of the Dark and the Deep, is mostly recognized by his antlers. As it was seen before, he his also frequently accompanied by a serpent, but another sign allows us to identify him: the object that he bears upon his neck, and which is often also found in one of his hands or on his lap (See Fig. 1.2–5): a type of rigid necklace, often made of gold, which is known as a *torc*. The word came to us from the Latin, but it probably has a Gaulish origin: a reconstructed source word *TORKOC [*torcos] has been proposed,[103] even though this remains a conjecture. The Latin root gave us the English words "torsion" and "torque," related to an action of twisting or turning, which clearly also explains the origin of the Gaulish word, as many of the early torcs were made of twisted gold wires bundled together, a bundle

[103] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 325. Lacroix and Kruta, *Les noms d'origine gauloise, La Gaule des combats*, Page 64.

which was itself bent in order to fit the neck of its owner.

The torc became a defining feature of the Horned One, omnipresent in his representations, but it very early on also became the main symbol of the people who saw itself as directly born from the Dark. Even though this type of necklace predates the genesis of the Celts, and was also infrequently used among the Romans, it nonetheless came to characterize all the members of the early Celtic people: not only the inhabitants of Gaul, but also the Celt-iberians and the Galatians (where torcs were known as μανιάκαι[104]). Diodorus Siculus mentions them as one of the main uses of the sun-colored metal:

> They amass a great amount of gold, which is used for ornament not only by the women but also by the men. For around their wrists and arms they wear bracelets, around their necks heavy necklaces [torcs] of solid gold, and huge rings they wear as well, and even corselets of gold.[105]

As indicated by its prominence in the religious imagery of the Celts, however, the significance of the torcs would seem to go beyond mere ornamentation.

The existence and appearance of the Celtic torcs have been described by numerous Greek and Roman sources, but none of these gives us more detail concerning the significance of this object and, in particular, concerning its link with the Horned One. Scholars usually see in them a mere "mark of rank"[106], or a reward given to warriors, as they were used in such a manner in the Roman army during the fifth century B.C.[107], whereas the French

[104] MacAulay, *The Celtic Languages*, Page 42.

[105] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.27); Original Greek: "τούτῳ δὲ τῷ τρόπῳ σωρεύοντες χρυσοῦ πλῆθος καταχρῶνται πρὸς κόσμον οὐ μόνον αἱ γυναῖκες, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες. περὶ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς καρποὺς καὶ τοὺς βραχίονας ψέλια φοροῦσι, περὶ δὲ τοὺς αὐχένας κρίκους παχεῖς ὁλοχρύσους καὶ δακτυλίους ἀξιολόγους, ἔτι δὲ χρυσοῦς θώρακας.," from: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

[106] See: Kruta, *Les Celtes*, Page 843.

[107] See H. D. Arbois de Jubainville, *Les Celtes sous le regard des Grecs et des Latins*, N.Pag. "Le torques ou collier, soit d'or, soit d'argent, est une recompense donnée chez les Romains par le chef militaire au soldat qui s'est distingué. C'est un usage bien ancien: en l'an 399 de Rome, 455 avant J.-C., L. Siccius Dentatus se vantait, dit-on, d'avoir obtenu quatre-vingt-trois torques."

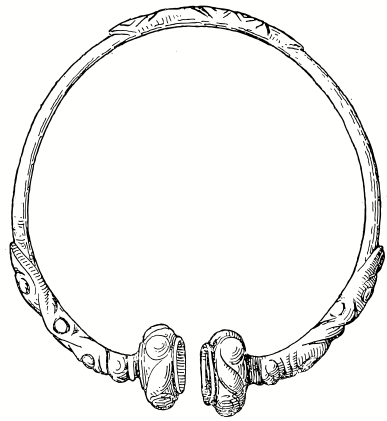


Figure 1.14: *Gaulish torc* (Reinach, *Catalogue illustré du Musée des antiquités nationales au Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, Page 271.).

archaeologist Jean-Louis Bruneaux considers that it "incarnated the divine, beneficial and necessary power of warfare."[108] The very nature of torcs implied that they were frequently associated with decapitations: made of metal twisted around a man's neck, they might have been difficult to forcibly remove, on a living man or on a corpse, the severing of the head allowing a swift and easy removal.[109] One of the elegies of the Roman poet Propertius vividly describes the fall of a torque:

> Claudius also threw the enemy back when they'd crossed the Rhine, at that time when the Belgic shield of the giant chieftain Virdomarus was brought here. He boasted he was born of the Rhine itself, agile at throwing Gallic javelins from unswerving chariot-wheels. Hurling them, he advanced, in striped breeches, in front of the host: the engraved torque fell from his severed throat.[110]

[108] TBA. Original French: "le torque en or . . . incarnait la puissance divine, bénéfique et nécessaire de la guerre." From: J.-l. Brunaux, *Les Religions gauloises*, Pages 193.

[109] See: J.-l. Brunaux, *Guerre et religion en Gaule: essai d'anthropologie celtique*, Page 89.

[110] English translation from: Propertius, *Elegies*, N. Pag. (§ 4.10); Original Latin: "Claudius a Rheno traiectos arcuit hostis, Belgica cum uasti parma relata ducis Virdomari. genus hic Rheno iactabat ab ipso, mobilis e rectis fundere gaesa rotis. illi ut uirgatis iaculans it ab agmine bracis torquis ab



Figure 1.15: *Torc-wearing Rigani on the Gundestrup Cauldron* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

The Gauls were famous for cutting the heads off their enemies fallen in battle, carrying them on their horses and keeping them as trophies on the walls of their houses. In the case of tribal warfare, the extraction of the torcs must have been part of this ritual, but the shocking nature of these visions of swords and blood should not make us forget that the significance of the torc may not necessarily be related to these. Despite its wide acceptance, the basis for this association between torcs and warfare appears to be very thin. Torcs have often been seen as a military distinction, but they were nonetheless mostly found in the graves of high-ranking women during the Hallstatt period, the time of the genesis of the Celts as a people. The object is present on several plates of the Gundestrup Cauldron, placed on the neck and in the hand of Esus-Cernunnos, but also on the neck of the celestial goddess Rigani, which is courted by the Horned One (See Fig. 1.15).[111] The object must thus have had a deeper significance for the Celts, and for the members of the Druidic order in particular, men who were enclined to seek the meaning hidden behind the signs present in the world around them.

The association between torcs and warfare in the Greek and Roman sources is natural, as it was mostly during battles that

incisa decidit unca gula." From: Propertius, *Elegies (Latin)*, N. Pag.

[111] See: Hatt, *Mythes et Dieux de la Gaule I*, Pages 89–98.

these people encountered the Celts. This impression was reinforced by the unusual appearance of these "barbarian" warriors, described as wearing nothing but the torcs around their neck.[112] The written sources nevertheless also mention that torcs were also a gift of choice among the Gauls, not only to powerful men such as Augustus, who according to Quintilian would have received a heavy torc as a gift from the Celts,[113] but also to the gods themselves. An account of such a gift, from a Gaulish king to a goddess protecting the city of MACCANIA [massalia] (Modern *Marseille*) is given to us by Justinus:

> The tribal king Catumandus was elected leader by general agreement. When he was laying siege to the city with a great army of his choicest warriors, he was terrified in his sleep by the vision of a menacing woman who said she was a goddess, and he straight away made peace with the Massiliotes. He asked if she might be allowed to enter the city to pay his worship to the gods of the city. When he came to the temple of Minerva on the citadel, he saw in the portico a statue of the goddess he had seen in his dream. Immediately he exclaimed that this was the goddess who had terrified him in the night, the goddess who had ordered him to relinquish the siege. He congratulated the Massiliotes for being under the protection of the immortal gods, and he presented the goddess with a golden torque and made a treaty of perpetual friendship with the Massiliotes.[114]

[112] See *Histoires extraites de Cicéron, de Quintilien, de Pline l'Ancien, de Valère-Maxime et d'Aulu-Gelle*, N.Pag. "Cum interim Gallus quidam nudus, praeter scutum, et gladios duos, torque atque armillis decoratus processit."

[113] See Quintilian, *Quintilien et Pline le jeune*, Page 232. "ut divus Augustus, quum ei Galli torquem aureum centum pondo dedissent..."

[114] English translation from: Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World*, Pages 39–40. Original Latin: "Catumandus regulus eligitur ; qui, cum magno exercitu lectissimorum virorum urbem hostium obsideret, per quietem specie torvae mulieris, quae se Deam dicebat, exterritus, ultro pacem cum Massiliensibus fecit; petitoque ut intrare illi urbem , et Deos eorum adorare liceret, cum in arcem Minervae venisset, conspecto in porticibus simulacro Deae, quam per quietem viderat, repente exclamat, illam esse, quae se nocte exterruisset; illam. quae recedere ab obsidione iussisset. Gratulatusque Massiliensibus, quod animadverteret, eos ad curam Deorum immortalium pertinere, torque aureo donata Dea , in perpetuum amicitiam cum Massiliensibus iunxit." From: Justinus and Bongars, *Iustini Historiae Philippicae*, Page 364.

According to the British scholar John Arnott MacCulloch, when torcs were given to deities, they "may have been regarded as vehicles of the warrior's strength which passed from him to the god to whom the victor presented it."[115] This view is hardly tenable, as it inverses the natural hierarchy between gods and men. The account of Catumandus' dream shows us that the gift is a submissive plea to the goddess, rather than a transfer of strength from the weak to the strong. The fact that the gift of the torc comes together with the establishment of a perpetual treaty of friendship with the city does not seem to be fortuitous. The treaty seals the friendship with the inhabitants of Massalia, whereas the torc seals the union with its protectress.

The story of Catumandus' dream may be more than a mere anecdote coming from an ancient historian. In this story, a parallel with one of the key elements of the foundation myth of the Celts may be found, as it is shown to us in Celtic art, and in particular in the Cauldron of Gundestrup, which is the most complete source concerning the Gaulish spiritual worldview. In Gaulish artworks, whether they be sculptures of stones, engravings on silver, or coins of gold, the torc is linked with Cernunnos, who is not only himself wearing one, but also carries another, ready to bestow it on someone worthy of its value and power.

As it will later be seen in more detail, it would seem that the goddess of the heavens, Rigani, is the one to whom this second torc is destined. Following the interpretation of J.J. Hatt,[116] it would appear that Rigani would be the seasonal spouse of Cernunnos, who spends part of the year with the "thunderous one," Taranis. The three deities can all be found on one of the plates of the Cauldron of Gundestrup, where the torc-wearing Rigani seems to look for Taranis, while a distressed Esus watches from afar (See Fig. 1.16).

This representation shows us that the celestial queen is wearing the gift given to her by Cernunnos, and that it forms a bond between the two deities. This bond only lasts for a season, but it is renewed every year. The courtship of the "horned one" thus is repeated year after year. The image of this courtship can be seen imprinted on different Gaulish coins, one example of which

[115] MacCulloch, *The religion of the ancient Celts*, Page 34.
[116] Hatt, *Mythes et Dieux de la Gaule I*, Pages 89–98.

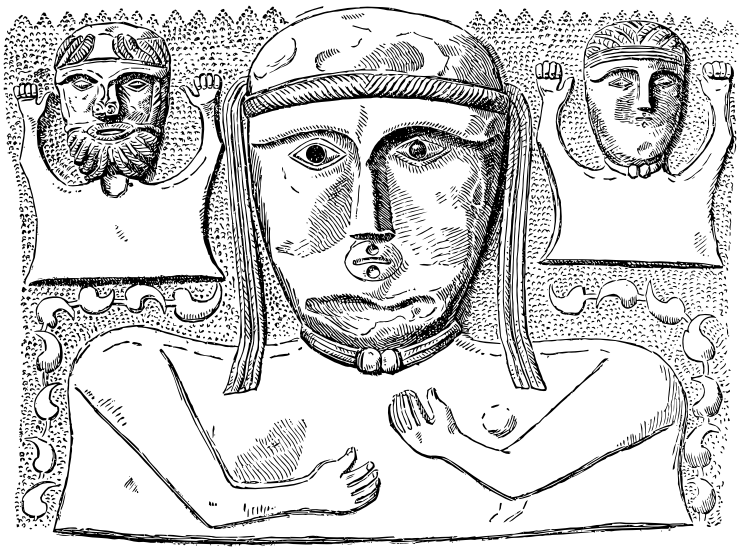


Figure 1.16: *Taranis, Rigani and Esus on the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

is shown on Fig. 1.17. The first side of this coin shows a man kneeling down, with one of his knees touching the earth, while both his arms are extended forward, appearing to plead for the favor of someone facing him. On one of his arms, a small boar is standing, an animal that as been interpreted as a symbol the people of Gaul. Behind the man, two identical torcs are found, which probably have been placed there because of the size constraints imposed by the medium of the image. The scene would nonetheless have been clear to the Gauls looking at this coin, people who were familiar with this iconography and its significance. A torc on the neck, the other in one hand: this certainly is how it was intended.

Facing this man, on the other side of the coin, a mare with a human head is seen surrounded by two large spheres, which would seem to represent celestial objects, the sun and the moon perhaps. The mare looks downward, with her long hairs falling on her back, apparently smiling. It is very easy to see in this miniature scene an illustration of the courtship of the queen of the heavens, Rigani, by the chtonian deity: Esus-Cernunnos, the torc bearer and torc giver. The golden object appears to be a key symbol of the success or failure of this courtship: when the goddess accepts to place on

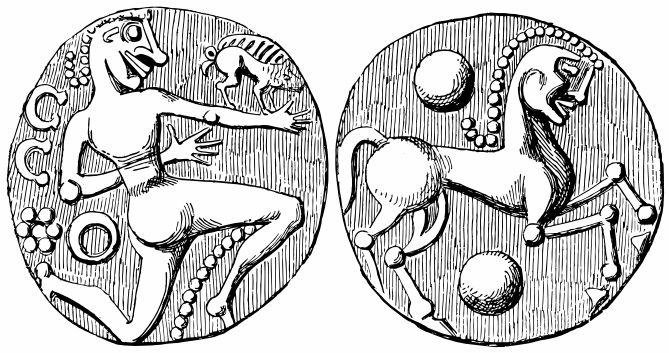


Figure 1.17: *Gaulish coin* (Hucher, *L'art gaulois, ou, Les Gaulois d'après leurs médailles*, Page 41.).

her neck the torc offered to her, she thereby accepts the union with the god bearing the other identical necklace. The torc seals the union between the god of the earth with the goddess of the skies, just as Catumandus sealed his alliance with the goddess protecting Massalia.

The two torcs, forged from the same ore extracted from the earth and made into the same shape, represent two links forming a chain binding individuals together. This object, however, cannot simply be bestowed by anyone in the artworks of the Celts. It belongs to the Dark, and it brings the one wearing it down back to the earth. When the celestial queen wears the metallic object on her neck, she can feel its weight carrying her towards the Ground, to the Dark, to her spouse who impatiently awaits her arrival. Both a hook and a buoy, the torc takes hold of the one wearing it, and the hidden power of the metal from which it is formed pulls the one caught in its grip downwards, in the direction of the heavy, metallic core of the earth, the heart of the Dark. This characteristic of torcs is nonetheless not restricted to the myth. Men wearing the object may come to experience a similar effect.

As it was seen earlier,[117] the Horned One is almost systematically represented sitting cross-legged on the earth, a position which, as the Eastern tradition teaches us, is where the human body is in equilibrium, favorizing a relaxed state and a spiritual openness. The neck plays a key role in the equilibrium allowed by

[117] See § 1.3.4.

such a posture. As the German thinker Karlfried graf von Dürckheim tells us: "The difference in the tension of the neck is a special criterion of right posture. It is as if a secret power soared up lightly from below and culminated in the free carriage of the head."[118] When a heavy golden torc enfolds man's neck, the equilibrium and the relaxed state induced by the posture highlight the presence of the metallic object, whose weight pushes his chest downward. The gift from the earth can serve as yet another reminder, not one given to his eyes to see but rather to his sense of touch, directly placed on his skin so that the presence of light would not be needed in order for it to be perceived. Even with his eyes closed, even in complete darkness, the weight of the torc tightly embracing man's neck can be felt day after day, as a memento of his origin, of his earthly nature, and of the fact that he will soon return to the great womb of the Dark.

Cantumandus would seem to have assumed the role of the "horned one" offering the torc to the goddess, but as a son of the Dark, man may also carry a torc as a sign of the recognition of his belonging or of his dedication to it. Imitating the posture of Cernunnos, sitting cross-legged with a torc on his neck, he may contemplate with his senses the gift of the metals, the gift of the earth, and his bond with the Dark as a whole. Hooked by this sign, he is given a chance to avoid to be lured by the Bright too far away from the Ground. The torc can be his lifesaver, preventing him from drowning in the illusions of the ether and bringing him back to the concrete experience of what is the most intimately known to him: his own flesh, and the hard ground beneath his feet.

[118] English translation from: Durckheim and Healey, *Hara*, Page 138; Original German: "Verspannungen und daraus resultierende Schmerzen im Nacken weisen darauf hin, daß der Mensch *sich* nicht richtig trägt, weil *er* »unten« nicht richtig da, nicht recht verwurzelt ist, also mehr oder weniger bodenlos lebt. Steht oder sitzt der Mensch richtig im Becken, dann ist es, als wenn eine geheimnisvolle Kraft von unten nach oben emporschwingt und sich in der freien Haltung des Kopfes aufgipfelt." From: Dürckheim, *Hara*, Page 121.

1.5 The Doorway to the Dark: the Sacred Bodies of Water

Even though man is born from the Dark and always belongs to it, even after his death, the realm of man, the surface upon which he builds up his world is nonetheless distinguished from the great body of the Dubnos. The Dark is never severed from the other realms standing on top of it, as it provides them with the foundation necessary for them to perdure and grow, but it also needs to retreat in order to let its children be themselves, offering them a space for them to *be*. By offering man this distance from the womb out of which he was born, the Dark kindles a fire in the heart of its child. Those who among its offspring are sufficiently aware of their own nature and of their bond to the Dark will yearn to be reunited with it, willing to sacrifice their individuality in order to enjoy a communion with the fullness of their source.

When the miners of the Mountain of Salt or those seeking metals in the soil of the Dumnonii plunged their flesh deep into shafts dug into the earth, they could feel a closeness with the Dark, whose body they penetrated. Men nonetheless have been given a better way to experience a greater proximity with the Dark and the Deep, one that is also more accessible. The shafts of the mine are filled with air, and the miners always remain surrounded by it. Another element nonetheless offers them the possibility of having their flesh completely engulfed in the Dark, embracing their body as a whole, as if they were swallowed in the mouth of the earth itself: water.

Contrary to the hard soil, the bodies of water found on the surface of the Dark can be entered by all "things" or beings. They not only let themselves be invaded by the things found above: the Dark itself pulls all "things" toward the depths, encouraging and facilitating a return to the Deep. The large bodies of water represent a doorway letting man enter the Dark, providing him a way to send back "things" to the source of all the "things" that he received, including his own flesh and his own life.

The fact that the Celts would develop a special relationship with the bodies of water is therefore hardly surprising. Ancient historians such as Strabo tell us that the Celts particularly affec-

tionated the lakes to perform offerings to their deities:

> Posidonius ... tells us that the wealth found in Toulouse amounted to somewhere about 15,000 talents, a part of which was hidden in the chapels, and the remainder in the sacred lakes, and that it was not coined [money], but gold and silver in bullion⋯the country abounding in gold, and the inhabitants being superstitious, and not living expensively, they hid their treasures in many different places, the lakes in particular affording them a hiding-place for depositing their gold and silver bullion. When the Romans obtained possession of the country they put up these lakes to public sale, and many of the purchasers found therein solid masses of silver.[119]

The universality of such practices among the Celts has been confirmed by archaeology, showing that these places possessed a particular spiritual significance for them. As Jacques Lacroix tells us: "Waters have been a privileged support for religion among the Gaulish peoples. One can even think that they were more sacralized than any other element of nature and that they invited more devotions than all the "terrestrial" devotions."[120] This particular devotion is not exclusive to the Celts, but it rarely occupies such a prominent place in the world of other peoples. The beginning of an ex-planation for this prominence can be found in the very name of this element in the Gaulish tongue. One of the main words for

[119] English translation from: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. (§ 4.1.13); Original Greek: "πιθανώτερος δ᾽ ἐστὶν ὁ Ποσειδωνίου λόγος: τὰ μὲν γὰρ εὑρεθέντα ἐν τῇ Τολώσσῃ χρήματα μυρίων που καὶ πεντακισχιλίων ταλάντων γενέσθαι φησί, τὰ μὲν ἐν σηκοῖς ἀποκείμενα τὰ δ᾽ ἐν λίμναις ἱεραῖς, οὐδεμίαν κατασκευὴν ἔχοντα, ἀλλ᾽ ἀργὸν χρυσίον καὶ ἄργυρον: ⋯ἀλλ᾽, ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνός τε εἴρηκε καὶ ἄλλοι πλείους, ἡ χώρα πολύχρυσος οὖσα καὶ δεισιδαιμόνων ἀνθρώπων καὶ οὐ πολυτελῶν τοῖς βίοις πολλαχοῦ ἔσχε θησαυρούς: μάλιστα δ᾽ αὐτοῖς αἱ λίμναι τὴν ἀσυλίαν παρεῖχον, εἰς ἃς καθίεσαν ἀργύρου ἢ καὶ χρυσοῦ βάρη. οἱ γοῦν Ῥωμαῖοι κρατήσαντες τῶν τόπων ἀπέδοντο τὰς λίμνας δημοσίᾳ καὶ τῶν ὠνησαμένων πολλοὶ μύλους εὗρον σφυρηλάτους ἀργυροῦς." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag.

[120] TBA. The word "terrestrial" should here be distinguished from the word "earthly," the first implying what is above the Ground, whereas the second represents the Dark itself, including its depths; Original French: "Les eaux ont constitué pour les peuples gaulois un support privilégié de la religion. On doit même penser qu'elles ont été sacralisées plus que n'importe quel autre élément de la nature et qu elles ont engendré davantage de dévotions que l'ensemble des dévotions «terrestres»" From: Lacroix, *Les noms d'origine gauloise : La Gaule des dieux*, Page 38.

water is: 𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌁𐍀𐌏𐌍 [dubron] (Pl. 𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌁𐍀𐌀 [dubra], Breton *dour*)[121], a noun sharing the same root with the one designating the Dark and the Deep: 𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌁𐌍𐌏𐌒 [dubnos].

In the Gaulish world, water appears as the utmost earthly element, one inextricably linked with the nature of the Dark and the Deep. It binds matter together, transforming the scattered particles of dust into the continuum of mud that forms the Ground. It is the liquid of life that sustains the flow of elements nourishing the flesh of men, but it is also what fills the holes in the earth, preventing the light of the skies from reaching its depths, even chasing it away by reflecting it on its surface. The bodies of still waters, such as lakes and ponds, can inspire awe by their quiet, mysterious, and even dangerous nature. Man cannot see what its depths conceal, as all that they reveal are an image of darkness, as if inviting men to come to them in order to dis-cover their secret.

The surface of the *lake*, 𐌋𐌏𐌊𐌏𐌖 [locu][122] in Gaulish, can indeed be penetrated by both men and "things." The plane formed by the still waters represents a doorway between the body of the Dark and the Deep on the one hand, and the realm of men on the other, that is, what is found above the Ground. The presence of such doorways nonetheless does not blur the distinction between the realms, as even though it offers a place for contacts and brief interactions, the nature of the waters nonetheless safeguards the source of man's being, preventing him from returning to the great body before the appointed time. Man can indeed enter the surface of the lake, plunging his body into the great body that gave birth to him, but such an intimate contact comes with strict limitations. Man comes from the Dark and he belongs to it, but he is not meant to dwell in the Ground. He needs the light of the sun, the air of the skies in order for his flesh to pass through the days and the nights. When he immerses himself under the surface of the waters, his lungs quickly react to force him back to the world above in order to allow him to avoid being swallowed forever by them, and thereby avoid an extinction of the fire of his life. Man can nurture his bond with the Dark when he is in contact with the waters, but the mirror-like surface also shows him the death

[121] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 141; Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 107.

[122] This Celtic word later evolved to give us the widely known Scottish Gaelic word *loch*; Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 215.

that he will one day have to face, not as a terrible figure coming to slay him, but rather as a reunification with the great body of the Dark, something that he may both fear and long for.

Man's very constitution does not allow him to pierce the secret of the dark waters. He cannot venture into its deepest parts, but he can use this passage to give back offerings to the Dark that gave him so much, and from which he owes his very existence. Thus did the Gauls throw the things they treasured into the depths of the lakes, as the dark and still waters allow them to send gifts to the "horned one" who provides all that men needs in order to prolong their own life above the Ground and to edify a world that would honor the divine.

The lake is the *mouth* of the Dark. It is the TENAYA [genaua],[123] a word that is usually considered to designate the mouth of a river rather than a body of water but also remarkably fits the nature of the lake. The name of the city of Geneva, which is located on the banks of the large lake bearing the same name, directly originates from this Gaulish word. The mouth of the river is then conflated with the mouth of the Horned One, a mouth that always remains wide-open, ready to receive the gifts of man.

As Posidonius and Strabo tell us, the Celts threw bulions of gold and silver into the mouth of the Dark. Archaeology showed us that these offerings also included various types of objects: swords, fibula, statues, amulets, and even tablets of lead carved with petitions to the gods of the Dark and the Deep.[124] Their offerings were not a mere return of what had been given to them by the earth. The objects thrown into the mouth were all worked by the hand of man, who fashioned the raw matter given by the Dark into things that are not found in nature. The fine dust of gold found by the rivers, or the silvery rocks that were extracted from the mines were first smelted, refined, forged, or cast into molds, given various shapes and imparted with a particular meaning found in the Gaulish World. What man offers is artworks that embody a harmony between the realms, allying the raw matter given by the Dark with

[123] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*. Page 177; This word does not directly designates a human mouth, which rather is: *TENOY [*genu-]; Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 158.

[124] See: Savignac, *Merde à César*, Page 78; One should note that the translation of the inscriptions is extremely uncertain.

the meaningfulness rendered possible by the Bright, the light of the World above that gives man the power to impart a signification to matter. These gifts may have been given as thanksgivings for what men received or in order to be granted something from the "good one" (Esus), but in every case, the nature of the waters as the mouth from which the Dark could receive things from above is acknowledged and honored.

Concerning the night, Heidegger said that it is "the seamstress who in sewing brings near [nähernd näht]. She works only with nearness, which furthers farness."[125] The same could be said of the waters (seen as the Gaulish 𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌁𐌓𐌀 [dubra]), which form the seam binding the Dark with the realm of men, a seam that represents a privileged location to observe the nature of the two parts that it binds together. Floating in the waters, man can indeed begin to realize what the Ground represents for him and his kind. Sinking in them, he may begin to see the frailty of his life, and see how the dry soil is the foundation stone of the world built by the hands of men. Beholding the lake from the shore, he may contemplate the impenetrable nature of the Dark and the Deep, which is seldom as clearly seen as in the shadowy waters. The surface of the waters indeed superimposes a vision of the shadows of the Dark with a reflection of the light of the skies, making the images of both dance with one another following the undulations caused by the winds, the moon, and the agitation of the living beings both above and below. The seam formed by the waters allows man to enter into a dialogue with the Dark, without relinquishing his relative independence from it, as a being living above the Ground rather than inside the body of the Dark. He lets the product of his hands slip away into the shadows but he knows that he thereby feeds the great body of "good one" through his mouth, and that his bond with his origin and the source of his being will find itself strengthened by this act.

The Gauls did not leave us any testimony of their vision of the nature of the shadowy waters such as the lakes into which they poured their wealth. The successive conquests of Gaul by the Roman and then the Christian religion nonetheless failed to com-

[125] English translation from: Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, Page 102; Original German: "Die Nacht ist die Näherin, die nähernd näht. Sie arbeitet nur mit Nähe, die das Ferne lernt." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 77: Feldweg-Gespräche (1944/45)*, Page 157.

pletely erode the respect and admiration for these waters among the population of Gaul. The new gods did not prescribe nor condone any kind of offerings in the lakes and the ponds, but a substratum, remnant of the ancient worldview, can nonetheless be perceived in the writings of the conquerors. As a first example, the following story, recounted by the Gallo-Roman bishop Gregory of Tours (A.D. 538–594), will show how a condemnation of the Gallo-Roman "paganism" can reveal how, more than fifth centuries after the Roman conquest, the Celtic vision of water still permeated the land of Gaul:

The Gallo-Roman bishop begins his story,[126] intended as the account of the conversion of the "pagans," by mentioning a basilica dedicated to the martyr Ferreol and harboring his tomb. This basilica was built near the bank of the river Rhone, but as the violence of the running waters of the nearby river threatened its enclosure, the church and the relics were moved away from its banks. As the tombs within the church were being relocated, the head of another martyr was found in the arms of the body of Ferreol: his companion Julianus, a Christian Roman soldier whose head was cut off following a persecution initiated by the Roman emperor.

Gregory tells us that: "at the very place where the blessed martyr was struck, a beautiful and enjoyable fountain is found, one that gives in abundance the sweetest waters, and in which his persecutors washed his head after cutting it off,"[127] and that these waters had the power to quench the fever taking hold of sick men. The historian also tells us the story of two men who began to fight one another in a pagan temple. As one of them took refuge in Julianus' church, its assaillant was struck with terrible torments as he attempted to force its doors. He also tells us that "abundant tears offered an outward testimony of the torture he experienced inside of him."[128] The parents of the assaillant, witnessing the power of this sacred place, made offerings to the saint.

[126] Gregory and Bordier, *Les livres des miracles*, Pages 307–319.

[127] TBA. Original Latin: "In loco autem illo, quo beatus inartyr percussus est, fons habetur splendidus, lenis, dulcibus aquis uberrimus, in quo et a persecutoribus caput amputatum ablutum est," from: ibid., Page 310.

[128] TBA. Original Latin: "et tanta afflictione miser torquetur ut ubertim fluentes lacrymæ qualis esset dolor intrinsecus extrinsecus nuntiarent," from: ibid., Page 314–316.

A priest who heard about the incident promised them that their son would recover if they all abandonned their pagan ways. Three days later, after the priest had a dream in which he saw "the statues adored by the gentiles broken by the divine power and falling down to dust on the ground,"[129] the pagan family still wanted to perform libations to their gods. Distressed, the priest prostrated himself in front of the tomb of Julianus, and he implored "with tears so that the light of the divine power finally would come to bring light to these men,"[130] and so that "the children of his own land would not remain in the darkness, as he himself tastes the joys of the eternal light."[131] Suddenly, as he prays, "the thunder roars, the lighning bolts shine, a rain of fire and hail is poured down,"[132] and the multitude seeks refuge in the church, declaring "with shouts and tears"[133] that they would change their ways if the storm goes away. Once peace was restored in the skies, the pagans "broke the statues that they adored, and they threw them in a lake found near the town and the river,"[134] and thus ends the account of the bishop.

This story of light and darkness well represents the clash between "Paganism" and Christianity. The Gallo-Roman pagans are still the sons of the Dark, in close contact with the earth that begot them, whereas the Christians are the sons of the Bright, men who disregard the depths of the earth as a place of torment and wickedness, and exalt the power of the skies. The pagans of Gaul revere the Dark as the ground of all "things," including the World of men, and they value the direct contact with what cannot be seen but can only be experienced with the other senses. The Christians

[129] TBA. Original Latin: "videt per somnium simulacra illa quae a gentilibus colebantur numine divino comminui atque in pulverem redacta solo prosterni," from: Gregory and Bordier, *Les livres des miracles*, Page 316.

[130] TBA. Original Latin: "et cum lacrymis exorat ut tandem gentilitatem hanc quæ jacebat m tenebris splendor divinæ potentiae visitaret," from: ibid., Page 316.

[131] TBA. Original Latin: "nec sineret ultra martyr beatus alumnos proprios ista caligine detineri, cum ille perennis claritatis gaudia possideret," from: ibid., Page 316.

[132] TBA. Original Latin: "renident fulgura, descendit imber igne mixtus et grandine," from: ibid., Page 316.

[133] TBA. Original Latin: "mixto cum lacrymis ululatu," from: ibid., Page 316.

[134] TBA. Original Latin: "statuas quas coluerant confringentes, in lacum vico amnique proximum projecerunt," from: ibid., Page 318.

extol the heavens, what can be seen from afar and conceived in the mind but that cannot be approached and touched. The delights of the senses are perceived as a path to perdition, whereas the path of light leading to salvation is followed through one's spiritual conduct, the nurturing of a bond with the heavens and with mankind rather than one with the earth. The Celtic pagans may be seen as having possessed a phenomenological approach to the question of the numinous, whereas the Christians can be seen as having developed a fundamentally metaphysical one. These are two very different worldviews, showing opposite relations to the Dark and the Bright, a difference that can be perceived in the story of the bishop.

Beyond the conflict between the sons of the Bright and those of the Dark, the story nonetheless also shows us, perhaps unbeknownst to its author, that an organic harmony between the two traditions was naturally created following the introduction and adoption of the foreign worldview. The story is also one of blood and water, where the words of condemnation of the pagan tradition betray the fact that some of its elements still permeated the land and the lives of the followers of the new religion. Water, in all its forms, plays a prominent role in the story: the river assaults the church, which is then displaced; tears of pain flows from the eyes of the violent man, and tears of supplication are offered to the skies by the priest; a rain of fire and hail is poured down from the heavens while the people cry tears of fear. Finally, the statues are broken and thrown into the lake. The very name of the village in which these events are said to take place, *Brioude*, is also tied with the waters: it is derived from the Gaulish word 𐌁𐌓𐌉𐌅𐌀 [briva], meaning "bridge," that is, a construction that allows man to cross running waters. This prominence of the waters, which represent the unifying element of the events unfolded near the "bridge," can allow us to attempt to look at this story from an opposite point of view: the one of the Celtic World, through the traces that it left in the language of the clergyman. One could imagine a pagan Gaul giving the following parallel account.

One day, in a village built near a bridge crossing over a river that sustained the life of the men and women living by its banks, men came with the intention of leading the people away from its source, inviting them to deny the Dark and the Deep, to reject both the "horned and good one" who nourishes them with the

fruits hanging from its antlers and the statues of human-shaped gods brought by the Roman conquerors. Deserting the sacred lake and refusing to feed the mouth of the Dark, the womb out of which they were born, these men built a temple of stone to their god of light. After the Ground was pierced by the stones of this temple, the tears of the Dark then flowed in the direction of this work of man's hands, in the form of a torrent that threatened to engulf their edifice, as a sign of the grief of the earth, neglected by its sons. Their eyes turned toward the Bright, but they nonetheless failed to notice the nature of the raging waters that pushed their walls until they were ready to crumble. Retreating in front of the force of the Dark, but still affected by their blindness to the shadowy realm, their abode was displaced away from the course of the waters.

Following these events, two sons of Gaul are making offerings in another temple, one devoted to the Roman gods, filled with images of stones representing the universe in the form of a throng of divinized men. These two men begin to argue violently, and one of them intends to kill the other, who flees and takes refuge in the other temple, the one devoted to the god of light. Pursuing the fleeing man, the assailant suddenly feels a profound torment in his flesh as he is about to enter the abode of light. Struck by the nature of this building, built by the hands of man in order to shut the Dark out of this imitation of a sacred precinct, the assailant sees and feels the grieving of the Dark. He not only perceives his own erring, his straying from the path cleared by the Dark from his conception, the Dark that is the source of his very being and the Ground of his World, but also perceives the error of his forefathers, who submitted themselves to the Roman way, which is also so much turned toward the light that it fails to see the darkness from which man comes, and to which he shall return.

As the man now sees the bereavement of the earth, his eyes begin to be filled with salty tears that flow upon his face and are drunk by the dry soil under his feet, quenching the thirst of the Ground. For him, days of anguish follow, as his kinsmen offer various gifts to the gods in order to appease his sorrow. Once the soil has been damped by the tears of the villagers, the man decides to make a stand and to find back the path of his distant ancestors, who maintained a strong bond with the Dark. Taking up the statues of his own sanctuary, the images of the gods, including the

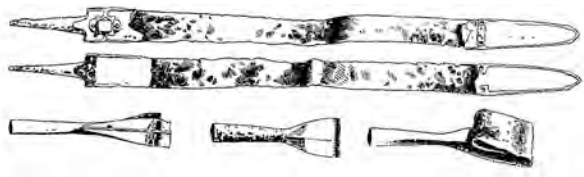


Figure 1.18: *Deliberately broken objects found in tombs* (Déchelette, *Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique celtique et gallo-romaine*, Page 449.).

ones of the "horned and good one," he carries them away from the village and toward the lake, which was a sacred place of his forefathers.

As it was the custom in their days, the man then cleaves the images made by the hands of man using a raw material from the earth so as to ensure that the objects would not be used by men anymore (See Fig. 1.18). He strikes the statues, before throwing the pieces in the shadowy waters, feeding them to the Dark through its mouth.

This crude attempt at a retelling of Gregory of Tours' story intends to show that the role of the waters in the original story may betray a remanence of the former worldview of the Gallo-Romans. The Dark may have been forgotten by men turned toward the Bright, but it nonetheless remains there, waiting for the light to be dimmed so that it can reappear in the world of men.

A substratum, image of the Dark, indeed persistently remains. The ancient Celtic origin of a large part of the folklore surrounding the lakes of Western Europe has now been widely recognized: the "lady of the lake" of the Arthurian romances, the sword Excalibur given from the depths of the water to a valorous knight. The medieval stories written centuries after the end of the Gallo-Roman period also preserve a substratum of Celtic worldview, now part of the culture of these lands. The mouth of the "good one" is still opened, ready to receive man's gifts, even after many centuries of hunger, and it remains as a sign showing man his own reflection superimposed over an image of the Dark and Deep, his origin and the source of his own being.

The lakes represent a privileged location to reach out to the Dark, but the earth is also replete with other bodies of water, which

all play a part as a seam between the realms and the liquid allowing a closer contact between man and the earth. The lakes are the receiving mouth of the Dark, but the great body also actively gives to man, quenching his thirst and refreshing his flesh by pouring out water directly from the earth through openings named **springs**.

More than any other place where water appears, the spring represents the quintessential sacred space where man's bond with the Dark and the Deep can be felt. A Celtic sanctuary is a place of intimate contact with the divine, an intimacy that implies a separation from the bustling and rumbling of man's world. It demands a certain confidentiality, as the sacred must be kept away from the profane in order to be perceived by man. Therefore, more than the lake, whose surface is wide-opened toward the skies and can be seen from far away, the spring is the privileged location for the cultivation of a greater intimacy with the Dark, and this is why the *Keltia* is still filled with sanctuaries located near natural springs.

The Gauls called the spring ANΔOYNNA [andounna],[135] literally meaning "the waters [from] below," contrasting it with the "waters [from] above": OYXOOYNA [uxouna] [136], which probably designated the sources of water flowing down from the mountains and hills, waters belonging to the Dark and Deep but nonetheless coming down from the skies.[137]

The spring is not inherently more sacred than the lake. It does not necessarily offer an easier access to the Dark and the Deep. The two bodies of water each play complementary roles in the relationship between man the earth. The lake is the receiving mouth of the "horned one," while the spring is the one from which the gift of the purest waters flows outward, running from the depths and piercing the Ground in order to fill the bodies of all the living beings and to nourish the plants found nearby.

Springs are usually small, found in the low points of valleys and forests. Stumbling upon them while traveling the land, man knows that the location of the spring receives the favors of the

[135] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 313.
[136] ibid., Page 313.
[137] The word BEPOY [beru] (ibid., Pages 313–314.) also seems to have designated springs, but it probably designated a location containing spring water rather than their origin.

Dark, and thus that it is fit for man to dwell in its vicinity. The running waters, no matter whether they flow from above or below, are "the locality that pervades the abode of human beings upon the earth, determines them to where they belong and where they are homely [heimisch],"[138] as Heidegger tells us concerning rivers. Man cannot live away from the fresh waters offered to him by the Dark. The presence of a spring allows and perhaps even invites man to establish himself there. Men, tribes, and peoples as a whole migrate and fill the land according to the flow of the waters, following a course ordained by the Dark itself.

More than the other bodies of waters, such as river and lakes, the spring inspires man's devotion because of its remarkable purity. Spring water directly arises from the murky depths of the earth, but all its impurities have been washed out, as this water slowly passed through great lengths of dust, rock, and mud, which took away everything but the crystal clear liquid that is a delight to man's throat. In the Gallo-Roman and Christian eras, the immersion in the sacred spring was often said to cure the ailments of the body, a vision shared by the ancient middle-eastern world,[139] a belief that was almost certainly shared by their Gaulish ancestors. The contact with what is pure can purify the impure, just as the proximity to the sacred sanctifies man. The attitude of the sons of the Dark toward the gifts that it offers to man betrays their level of intelligence of their own nature, and of what they owe. By venturing inside the sacred space of the spring, drinking and immersing his flesh in it, he does not simply extract resources from the earth: he rather acknowledges the generosity of the Dark and the Deep, and he honors the giver by rejoicing in the beauty and the value of its gift. The source does not need the hand of man. It does not need to be exploited: it freely gives itself to all who approach it, gladly quenching the thirst of the living and washing away the grime on their skin.

When man rejoices or grieves, tears flow from his eyes and fall

[138] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin' s Hymn "The Ister"*, Page 20; Original German: "Der Strom »*ist*« die Ortschaft, die den Aufenthalt des Menschen auf der Erde durchwaltet, ihn dahin bestimmt, wohin er gehört und wo er heimisch ist." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 53: Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister" (Summer semester 1942)*, Page 23.

[139] One of the most illustrious examples certainly is the story of the man in the Pool of Bethesda, found in the fifth chapter of John's Gospel.

down onto the Ground. The springs are a similar flow, coming up from the face of the Dark and the Deep, waiting to be elevated by the hands of man, who appreciates its taste. These tears of the Dark are only given to the earthly creatures to see: those who dwell in the valleys and the shadowy parts of the forests. The tears of the Dark are not given to the Bright to behold, and thus the spring is meant to remain concealed, hidden from the skies. Sitting in a solitary contemplation of this sanctuary of the Dark, perhaps adopting the posture of the "horned one," he may try to perceive the cause of this crying of the earth. Do these tears have their source in elation or sorrow? Are they sign of contentment or one of exasperation? The answer to these questions may be heard in the babbling of the spring itself, or it may be felt at the contact with its tears on man's skin.

The waters from the Dark cannot be "ex-plained," because what is plain is what is perfectly seen, what is illuminated by the Bright, the light of the skies and the brilliance of man's reason. The Bright, however, annihilates the invisible nature of the Dark, and thus it is essential to preserve the mysterious nature of these waters, part of the Dark, if one is to perceive their nature and through them deepen his relation with their source. One cannot shed a direct light on the dark waters but one can nonetheless examine the traces left by the springs in the life of the Gauls. In particular, a very symbolic episode of the Roman conquest of Gaul, seen from the eyes of the emperor, can reveal us how the relation of this people to the dark waters could affect their destiny as a nation.

At the end of the campaign against the Gauls, in 51 B.C., after the fall of Alesia and the surrender of Vercingetorix, the Roman army marches in the south-west of the Celtic land. It approaches an *oppidum* named 𐌏𐌖𐌗𐌄𐌋𐌀𐌏𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌍𐌏𐌖𐌌 [uxellodunum], literally the "high city,"[140] with the intent of crushing one of the last remnants of the independent Gaul. The emperor thus describes the indigenous city:

> A river divided the valley below, which almost surrounded the steep craggy mountain on which Uxellodunum was built. The nature of the ground pre-

[140] Uxellodunum would seem to have been located at the Puy d'Issolud in Vayrac, near the city of Cahors in South Western France.

> vented his turning the current: for it ran so low down at the foot of the mountain, that no drains could be sunk deep enough to draw it off in any direction. But the descent to it was so difficult, that if we made opposition, the besieged could neither come to the river nor retire up the precipice without hazard of their lives.[141]

The running waters are essential to man's life. Without it, his lifespan is reduced to a handful of days. Thus did the general decide to strike at the most vital link between the inhabitants of the city and the Dark. The river would not bend according to the will of the invaders, who intended to make themselves masters of the earth and lords of the Dark by shaping the natural course of the waters with their own hands rather than to let them run to the location chosen by the Horned One. Defeated by the river, the emperor nonetheless continued to search for a weakness allowing him to crush his opponents. Once again, the waters will be the object of his assault, as he discovered that "close under the walls of the town, a copious spring gushed out on that part, which for the space of nearly three hundred feet, was not surrounded by the river."[142] Following the path traced by the Dark, the city was built where the waters from below almost miraculously gush out from the depths rather than on the banks of the river. The more inconspicuous nature of the spring allowed it to remain unseen at first, but as the foreign soldiers grew familiar with the land, its dis-covery became ineluctable. Cloistering themselves behind walls of stone and wood, the Celts were nonetheless unable to live off the sole product of their hands. They were constantly forced to venture outside the walls in order to replenish the barrels from

[141] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 8.40); Original Latin: "Flumen infimam vallem dividebat, quae totum paene montem cingebat, in quo positum erat praeruptum undique oppidum Vxellodunum. [3] Hoc avertere loci natura prohibebat: in infimis enim sic radicibus montis ferebatur, ut nullam in partem depressis fossis derivari posset. [4] Erat autem oppidanis difficilis et praeruptus eo descensus, ut prohibentibus nostris sine vulneribus ac periculo vitae neque adire flumen neque arduo se recipere possent ascensu." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

[142] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 8.41); Original Latin: "Quorum omnis postea multitudo aquatorum unum in locum conveniebat sub ipsius oppidi murum, ubi magnus fons aquae prorumpebat ab ea parte, quae fere pedum CCC intervallo fluminis circuitu vacabat." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

which they drank their daily fill, collecting the dark waters that offered themselves to the dwellers of the vicinity of the spring. The Roman general also knew of the sacred nature of these waters, and he thus devised a stratagem to turn their bond to the Dark against them.

The aggressor began to cut out the body of the Dark, carving mines into the mount upon which the "high city" was built, trying to locate and pierce through the veins from which the precious liquid flowed, up to the mouth of the Horned One. Unable to access the larger river, the people was already weakened by a prolonged thirst, which probably affected not only the men but also of the land and the cattle. According to the emperor:

> Even... after losing the greatest part of their forces by drought... [they] persevered in their resolution: at last the veins of the spring were cut across by our mines, and turned from their course. By this their constant spring was suddenly dried up, which reduced them to such despair that they imagined that it was not done by the art of man, but the will of the gods; forced, therefore, by necessity, they at length submitted.[143]

The veins of the Dark slashed open by the Roman *gladii*,[144] its crystal-clear and yet shadowy blood fell back toward the depths, failing to reach its destination and leaving the sons of the Dark in dismay. Beyond the simplistic explanation of the military leader, who depicts his enemy as the prey of groundless superstitions that can easily be used to their disadvantage by a more rational person such as himself, a deeper significance may still be found in the account of this decisive battle, one in accordance with the nature of man's relation to the Dark.

A spring is a *source*, but it is also a *destination*: it points

[143] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 8.43, text in brackets added); Original Latin: "ad postremum cuniculis venae fontis intercisae sunt atque aversae. Quo facto repente perennis exaruit fons tantamque attulit oppidanis salutis desperationem, ut id non hominum consilio, sed deorum voluntate factum putarent. Itaque se necessitate coacti tradiderunt." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

[144] According to Xavier Delamarre, the Latin word *gladius*, designating the short swords used by the Roman army, may have been originated from the Gaulish tongue: *ᛕᚳᚨᚫᛁᛟ [*cladio-] (Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 117)

out a location on the earth that man is invited to inhabit. When the flow of dark waters changes its course, the spring then dries up, affecting the men who built their dwelling according to its destination. The emperor's account would seem to imply that the inhabitants interpreted this drying up of the spring as a sign that they were forsaken by the "horned and good one," and that a surrender was then inevitable. No matter whether or not this was indeed the interpretation followed by the inhabitants, it may be contrasted with another, one perhaps more true to the nature of the Dark. The surrender of the Gaulish warriors indeed do appear as a straying from the path traced out by their ancestors: it does not follow the vision of the Gaulish World, as it was constructed by its founding fathers.

How remote are the surrenders of Uxellodunum and Alesia to the ideal of fearlessness in the face of death that made the renown of the Celts among the peoples of Ancient Europe! As told by the Greek historian Aelian:

> I gather that the Celts face danger more boldly than other races... To run away is held to be so shameful that they often will not even escape if a house collapses and falls on them, nor if the house is on fire and they are caught by the flames. Many of them stand firm as the sea washes over them. Some pick up weapons, rush into the waves, and feel their impact, brandishing naked swords and spears, as if these could frighten or wound them.[145]

More than an indication that the people had fallen into disfavor in the eyes of the gods, the change of course of the waters of the spring may thus only have pointed out the new direction that they were supposed to take. The Dark is the Ground of all things and of all beings. It cannot forsake its dutiful sons. As the clear blood of the earth was spilled back into the depths following the slashing of the

[145] English translation from: Aelian, *Aelian: Historical Miscellany*, Page 373; Original Greek: "Ἀνθρώπων ἐγὼ ἀκούω φιλοκινδυνοτάτους εἶναι τοὺς Κελτούς ... οὕτως δὲ αἰσχρὸν νομίζουσι τὸ φεύγειν, ὡς μηδὲ ἐκ τῶν οἰκιῶν κατολισθαινουσῶν καὶ ἐμπιπτουσῶν πολλάκις ἀποδιδράσκειν, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ πιμπραμένων αὐτῶν περιλαμβανομένους ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρός. πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἐπικλύζουσαν τὴν θάλασσαν ὑπομένουσιν. εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ οἳ ὅπλα λαμβάνοντες ἐμπίπτουσι τοῖς κύμασι καὶ τὴν φορὰν αὐτῶν εἰσδέχονται, γυμνὰ τὰ ξίφη καὶ τὰ δόρατα προσείοντες, ὥσπερ οὖν ἢ φοβῆσαι δυνάμενοι ἢ τρῶσαι." From: ibid., Page 372.

veins alimenting the spring, man was shown that he was supposed to follow these waters back to their source. Even outnumbered, even facing a certain death, the Gauls were not being forsaken: they were only called back to the earth from which they came; only invited to retreat back to the great body of the Dark and the Deep, where the Bright and its followers cannot penetrate.

The Roman army indeed represents the forces of light, the servants of the skies, the Bright that strives to annihilate the Dark. Their World is one that attempts to shed light on all things, considering the darkness as a sign of ignorance and the depths as a place of oblivion or suffering. They valued the "meta-physical," what cannot be experienced by the senses, over the direct contemplation and appreciation of the nature of the earth. Perhaps more clear than any other thing in the Roman World, the standard of their legions crystallized its orientation, what it yearned and fought for: an eagle made of gold, shining under the sun as it was elevated on the top of a long pole. It offered the clearest contrast with their enemy, who were the sons of the Dark, led by a serpent in battle, a natural foe of the bird of prey.

The battle for the "high city" was therefore very symbolic, offering an occasion to men to distinguish themselves, as either champions of the Bright or as the vanguard of the Dark. The serpentine waters running under the Ground led the sons of the Dark. As it once showed them where to build their dwelling, it now ordered them to retreat into the earth, by fighting the wave of spears and *gladii* that surrounded them without fear and without any wish to preserve their lives and to remain above the surface of the earth. As the blood of the spring flowed back into the soil, the blood of the Gauls was meant to water the earth so as to replenish the body of the Dark. The call for such a tactical retreat ordered by the serpent was nonetheless ignored by its soldiers. Perhaps were they already too estranged from the earth, living perched on the top of a hill, surrounded by walls and constantly turned toward the skies. The army of the serpent therefore bowed to the eagle, leaving the waters of the spring unseen and unfollowed.

Seduced by the bright colored wine of their conqueror, the descendance of the vanquished Gauls embraced the luminous World of the Romans. The Dark and the Deep nonetheless remained unaffected by this neglect of its sons. It continued to manifest itself

to them, inviting them to return to their source. The dark waters, in particular, still continued to touch the heart of the Gallo-Romans, reminding them of the World of their forefathers, one turned toward the earth rather than the skies. The Gallo-Roman poet Ausonius embodies this tug of war between the Dark and the Bright in which the Gauls were caught in the following eulogy to the dark waters "guarding" the city of *Burdigala* (Bordeaux):

> Hail, fountain of source unknown, holy, gracious, unfailing, crystal-clear, azure, deep, murmurous, shady, and unsullied! Hail, guardian deity of our city, of whom we may drink health-giving draughts, named by the Celts Divona, — a fountain added to the roll divine! ... This is my own country; but Rome stands above all countries. I love Bordeaux, Rome I venerate ... here was my cradle, there my curule chair.[146]

Centuries after the fall of Alesia and Uxellodunum, the dark waters still attract the servant of the eagle. He recognizes that the two realms are opposed to one another, but still seduced by the great mirage of the heavens, he has yet to re-dis-cover and re-appropriate the World of his ancestors, a World that showed the Dark and the Deep as the source and destination of his own being, and as the benevolent body that gave birth to his people. Regardless of man's behavior, the Dark nonetheless permanently remains, waiting for its sons to see the errors of their ways and waiting for them to follow back the serpent in the great battle against the eagle, a battle that is still ongoing, even now, centuries after the crumbling of the last remains of the Empire.

[146] English translation from: Ausonius and Evelyn-White, *Ausonius, with an English translation*, Page 285; Original Latin: "Salve, fons ignote ortu, sacer, alme, perennis, lauce, profunde, sonore, inlimis, opace. salve, urbis genius, medico potabilis haustu, Divona Celtarum lingua, fons addite divis. haec patria est: patrias sed Roma supervenit omnes. diligo Burdigalam, Romam colo ... cunae hic, ibi sella curulis." From: ibid., Page 284.

Chapter 2

Bitu

As it was shown in the last chapter, man is a son of the Dark and the Deep. In order for him to *be* himself and to live his life, he nonetheless needs to leave the great body of the earth. Man forever remains a part of the Dark, but his existence begins when he is born out of the great womb and thrown into a world that is distinguished from it. At birth, man arises from the Ground, he ceases to be a mere pile of elements from the earth and begins to *be*, as a being that is both part of the Dark and also able to stand outside of it.

Only when a being has departed, at least partially, from the great body of the Dark may he begin to perceive the nature of its origin. As infants are destined to come out of the womb of their mother and are one day bound to leave their parents, separated by the course of life or by death itself, man is compelled to transcend his earthly nature in order to become something more than the other kinds of beings. As the benevolent parent of man, who not only gave him his body and his sustenance, but also paves the way for his first steps in life, the Dark and the Deep clears out a space where he is able to live, close to the earth but nonetheless separated from it. The surface, the Ground, is the Dark's gift to man, giving him a secure basis upon which he can live away from the earth while enjoying its fruits, and also allowing him to build a world of his own, "things" that are not the fruits of the Dark but rather his own creations.

All the living beings are endowed with the power allowing

them to extract themselves from the loving embrace of the Dark and the pull of the Deep in order to reach for the surface, where the power of the darkness does not completely hold sway, where it must compete with the Bright, the light from the skies that shines upon all the things above the Ground. Between the Dark and the Bright, earth and skies, lies the realm of men, where they reign as the supreme lords of all beings. In the Gaulish World, this realm bears a singular name, one that embodies the essence of language as much as the essence of the living: BITOY [bitu][1] "Being," "to be." In order to perceive the true significance of this distinction between the three realms, the nature of Bitu must be examined further, but this examination of the nature of this second realm of the Gaulish World will demand a particular openness and a sense of abstraction, as it is the one in which man is the most "at-home." This home is indeed so intimately known that it is hard for him to see it without only seeing his own reflection. As the point of contact between Dark and Bright, Being nonetheless remains the center of the creation, the focus point where a decisive part of the great play is played.

2.1 The Nature of Bitu

The word BITOY [bitu] comes from the dawn of the Indo-European language(s), finding cognates in different branches of its linguistic tree, such as the Russian быть [bʲɨtʲ], for example.[2] In Celtic, it acquired a rather large range of meanings, associated with the idea of permanency, life, and existence. It also, as Xavier Delamarre tells us, "probably designated the intermediate world of the living beings, at the center of an axis between the sky *albio-* and the inferno: *dubno-*."[3] This last meaning is nonetheless far from disconnected from the other. Bitu is indeed as much the "intermediate" realm between the Dark and the Bright as it is the realm of life, of beings, of being itself, all of which are encompassed and incarnated in the very substance that symbolizes the living flow of man's being: his blood.

[1] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 67.

[2] OIr. *buith*.

[3] TBA. Original French: "*Bitu-* désignant sans doute le monde intermédiaire des hommes et êtres vivants, au centre d'un axe entre le ciel *albio-* et l'enfer *dubno-*" Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 76.

Most scholars and historians have now recognized the truth of this tripartition of the World of the early Celts. Following the etymology of the word Bitu, and its location as the middle space between the Dark and the Bright, it has mostly been seen as "the terrestrial world, the one of the living beings."[4] As noted by the French archaeologist Jean-Louis Bruneaux, the term of Bitu is itself only known to us as a prefix in the Gaulish tongue, in proper names (or perhaps a title!) such as Bitu-rix, contrasted with Dubno-rix and Albio-rix. Since the Druids, who probably were the builders and guardians of this worldview, deliberately kept silent concerning the nature of Bitu, much is then left to us to dis-cover. The vision of Bitu as a mere middle realm has the benefit of being easily conceptualized but it may nonetheless occult several key aspects of this domain of the living.

The word "Bitu" may indeed not simply designate what is caught between earth and skies: it encompasses "beings" and "being," "life" and "the living," but one should keep in mind that the things found above the Ground are not necessarily part of them. What is found on the surface of the earth is not necessarily living. These things above the surface may not be "beings," and conversely, life can also be found teeming in the deepest part of the oceans or in the soil, inside the body of the Dark, as it can be found soaring in the highest of the heavens, flying above the clouds as if touching the sun, manifestation of the Bright. The threefold separation is therefore far from clear-cut and simple. Bitu, "beings" and "Being" thus permeate the crust of the earth and the air of the skies. The first layer of the meaning of Bitu, the one that is the most easily perceived, is its relation to Life.

2.1.1 Bitu: Man's Life

Life is the fruit of being: BIVITON [biuiton].[5], the outcome of the fact that a being *is*. A man's life is often seen as the sum of his achievements. Man can define himself as someone living a "great-life," RO BIOC [ro-bios][6], or as someone living the "good-life" DAGO BIOC [dago-bios].[7] What begins with his birth and

[4] J.-L. Brunaux, *Les Gaulois*, Page 158.
[5] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 77.
[6] ibid., Page 78.
[7] ibid., Page 78.

ends on the day of his death is the work of his life, what he has done with and in the world of his forefathers, and what imprint has he left upon the earth.

According to Diogenes Laertius, the Druids provided a simple, threefold instruction to guide the lives of their tribesmen: "we are told that they uttered their philosophy in riddles, bidding men to reverence the gods, to abstain from wrongdoing, and to practise courage."[8] The Celts were renowned among the Greeks and the Romans for their piety and their fearlessness, the first and last element can thus easily be believed to arise from a genuine teaching of the wisemen of the *Keltia*. The central element is more surprising, but nonetheless so general and imprecise that it cannot be found to contradict what is known of this people. These three prescriptions nonetheless paint a general picture of the ideal life of the Celts, one that can teach us concerning their vision of life itself, and of its realm.

The first exhortation, to "reverence the gods" (σέβειν θεοὺς in Greek), invites man to come to the realization of his difference with the gods: that he owes them his life and all that he can enjoy. This is the most fundamental distinction between man and the other beings roaming on the earth: he alone can perceive the work of the gods as such. He alone can en-counter them, that is, face them and thereby allow them to be seen and to "exist" in man's World. To en-counter the gods is not to "meet" them or to be brought closer to their presence. On the contrary, the en-*counter* offers man the occasion to perceive how remote he is from them, while he also recognizes the fact that he owes his very nature to them. It is precisely during such an event that the essence of man's life is manifested and that he can unveil the nature of his own realm, Bitu. As Being (Bitu) is what is "between" the Dark and the Bright, man is also a "between." As told by Heidegger:

> Beyng never *is* more fully than beings hut also never less fully than the gods, because these latter "are" not at all. Beyng "is" the "between" amidst beings and the gods, utterly and in every respect incomparable,

[8] English translation from: Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, N.Pag. Original Greek: "καί φασι τοὺς μὲν Γυμνοσοφιστὰς καὶ Δρυΐδας αἰνιγματωδῶς ἀποφθεγγομένους φιλοσοφῆσαι, σέβειν θεοὺς καὶ μηδὲν κακὸν δρᾶν καὶ ἀνδρείαν ἀσκεῖν." From: ibid., N.Pag.

> "needed" by the gods and withdrawn from beings.[9]

The purpose of man's life is thus linked with the need that the gods have of him. The path toward this destin-ation of man begins to be trodden when he has seen the nature of the realm of life: not only his own existence but the realm itself, as a whole. The appropriation of the "middle realm" is the destiny of man as what is "between" the gods and the "things":

> Beyng essentially occurs as the appropriation of the gods and humans to their en-counter. In the clearing of the concealment of the "between," a "between" which arises out of, and with, the en-coun-tering appropriation, there arises the strife of world and earth. It is only within the temporal-spatial playing field of this strife that the appropriation comes to be preserved and lost and that so-called beings step into the open realm of this clearing.[10]

Life, the "middle realm," is the "playing field" where the Dark en-counters the Bright, where the physical strives with the metaphysical, where the shadowy earth battles with the luminous world through the hands of man. The middle realm therefore is the seat of the confrontation between the gods, and the location of the en-counter between man and the divine. All is played on this surface of contact between the opposites, and the gods wait for man to enter the great game. Thus do we find the "reverence of the gods" as the foremost command that man must perform in order to accomplish his destiny.

The second exhortation of the Druids meant to guide the life of

[9] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 192; Original German: "Das Seyn ist nicht und nie seiender als das Seiende, aber auch nicht unseiender als die Götter, weil diese überhaupt nicht »sind«. Das Seyn »ist« das Zwischen inmitten des Seienden und der Götter und ganz und in jeder Hinsicht unvergleichlich, von diesen »gebraucht« und jenem entzogen." From: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 244.

[10] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 375; Original German: "Das Seyn west als die Er-eignung der Götter und des Menschen zu ihrer Ent-gegnung. In der Lichtung der Verbergung des Zwischen, das aus der entgegnenden Ereignung und mit ihr entspringt, ersteht der Streit von Welt und Erde. Und erst im Zeit-Spiel-Raum dieses Streites kommt es zu Verwahrung und Verlust der Ereignung, tritt ins Offene jener Lichtung Jenes, was das Seiende genannt wird." From: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 477.

their brethren is "to abstain from wrongdoing"(μηδὲν κακὸν δρᾶν in Greek), something as universal as it is ambiguous. No man indeed would willfully do something that he would himself deem to be wrong. The concept of "wrongdoing" is tightly intertwined with the World in which it is thought. The conquerors who spilled the blood of the Gauls like rivers on their ancestral land considered themselves as guided by virtue, and they heavily condemned the worldview of their foe and their traditions, which they saw as inherently "wrong." Cicero thus described the "wickedness" of the Gauls:

> Can anything appear holy or solemn in the eyes of those men, who, if ever they are so much influenced by any fear as to think it necessary to propitiate the immortal gods, defile their altars and temples with human victims? So that they cannot pay proper honor to religion itself without first violating it with wickedness. For who is ignorant that, to this very day, they retain that savage and barbarous custom of sacrificing men? What, therefore, do you suppose is the good faith, what the piety of those men, who think that even the immortal gods can be most easily propitiated by the wickedness and murder of men? Will you connect your own religious ideas with these witnesses? Will you think that anything is said holily or moderately by these men?[11]

The condemnation of the Roman orator offers us an archetypical example of a clash of Worlds, showing that the "wrongdoings" of a people can be the most sacred act of another. To make human blood flow upon their altars was a holy deed to the early Celts, but an inhuman crime to the Romans. How then can one deter-

[11] English translation from: Cicero, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "postremo his quicquam sanctum ac religiosum videri potest qui, etiam si quando aliquo metu adducti deos placandos esse arbitrantur, humanis hostiis eorum aras ac templa funestant, ut ne religionem quidem colere possint, nisi eam ipsam prius scelere violarint? quis enim ignorat eos usque ad hanc diem retinere illam immanem ac barbaram consuetudinem hominum immolandorum? quam ob rem quali fide, quali pietate existimatis esse eos qui etiam deos immortalis arbitrentur hominum scelere et sanguine facillime posse placari? Cum his vos testibus vestram religionem coniungetis, ab his quicquam sancte aut moderate dictum putabitis?" From: Cicero, *Orationes*, N.Pag.

mine what are the wrongdoings that should be avoided in order to follow the precept of the Druids?

The Druid was himself the bearer of the tradition. He was the authority who guaranteed the adherence to the sacred path traced by their forebears. The members of the Druidic order were nonetheless more than the carrier of an echo from the past. They were widely known as enquirers and researchers of the nature of the universe in which they were thrown. Men who spent their lives observing the signs of the divine in the Dark and the Bright in between which they were caught would not have been enclined to be mere preachers of dogmas without any ground in the observable or perceivable phenomena of nature. By telling men to "abstain from wrongdoings" without telling them of the nature of these things, they may be inviting their brethren to join their rank, as the determination of rights and wrongs, truths and falsehoods, is an inherently philosophical work.

What is "right" can be more than what is in accordance with an ancestral worldview. The will of the gods is not something that can be taught, especially across generations and vast expanses of land, but rather something that can only be perceived through a direct en-counter with these gods. The second precept here intersects with the first: the en-counter with the divine is a prerequisite to the perception of what constitutes "wrongdoings," that is, the straying from the path of man's appropriation of his own life and of the realm in which this life is inserted: the "between," the surface separating and uniting the earth and the world, the Dark and the Bright.

One could perfectly agree with the Roman orator, but one could also seek the meaning of this practice. Why did their encounter with the gods require the quenching of a man's life and the spilling of his blood? An answer to this question will be proposed in the next sections, but it is here enough to say that these acts were profoundly grounded in the Gaulish worldview: they had a precise purpose, which was not a brutish thirst for the red liquid of life, but rather a way to reinvigorate, to reanimate the bond between man and the realm of life. Peering through the eyes of the Gauls, the sacred dimension of these deeds that revulse the modern man as it once revulsed the Romans may begin to appear. The fact that the Gauls did not see these as "wrongdoings" therefore

do not imply that they themselves were "wrong." The search for what is "right" is part of man's relation with the gods, and thus important enough to be the subject of the second precept publicly preached by the wise-men of the north.

The third and last exhortation, "to practice courage" (ἀνδρείαν ἀσκεῖν in Greek), is more straightforward to interpret. Courage is a virtue intimately linked with one's attitude toward death, the departure from the realm of the living. The Gauls were famous for their fearlessness and their courage, something that Caesar explains as originating from their belief in the "immortality of the soul,"[12] but that can also be seen as rooted in the nature of man as a son of the Dark. According to the Gaulish worldview, man is indeed born out of the great body of the Dark and thrown into the realm of life. Knowing this, he can perceive the fact that his life is nothing but a transient state during which he comes to be estranged from the great womb in order to fulfill a purpose, which is summarized by the three aforementioned precepts. He knows that no matter whether he has dutifully played his part in the great play of the creation or not, he will return to the earth, to the Dark, his origin and destin-ation. The Dark is a motherly womb rather than a place of torment and condemnation, and therefore man has no reason to fear the return to the source of his being. On the contrary, he may long for this homecoming, the end of the alienation from the oneness of all "things" and the union with the "horned and good one." Life is not despised by them: on the contrary, the utmost manifestation of the value of life occurs through man's choice of the way he is willing to die. The most honorable death is one done in the fulfillment of the purpose of human life itself. Dying in battle, or on the altar of a Druid, man leaves the "middle realm" when his blood flows upon the soil. This homecoming is not meant to be concealed. Man is not meant to quietly die of old age, when his forces have been exhausted and he has no means to resist the coming of death, but rather meant to be embraced as a friend, as a loving wife that welcomes the worker back home when the night approaches and the skies have taken their red hue. Man's lifeblood is meant to shine upon the Ground, seen by other men, and thus its spilling is a demonstration of the essence of life itself, something that should be awaited rather than feared.

[12] See: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.14)

The three precepts of the Druids show what man's life should be. Isolated from the Gaulish World, these precepts may appear universal but a closer examination and contextualization have shown that what they meant for the Gauls may have significantly differed from what they meant to other peoples, living in other Worlds, other "cultures." The realm of life, the middle realm of the Celts, is the stage where man is offered an occasion to prove his valor, in the eyes of the gods and the eyes of other men, not to puff out his own *ego* but rather to extol the whole of which they are all parts. Man's life is nothing but a temporary coming out of the earth, a sudden elevation that ends with a falling back down, but the spectacle of the countless risings and fallings, the wobbling of the surface separating the Dark from the Bright, is what allows a harmony between them to occur and be seen. This surface, Bitu, is nonetheless wider than the extent of man's life.

2.1.2 Bitu: Life itself

Man may reign supreme over all the living beings that roam upon the ground, burrow into the soil, or glide over the clouds, but Bitu encompasses all forms of life. Man is himself a fruit born after eons of maturation, born out of life, a life that extends far beyond mankind, across both time and space.

Man may be the only being able to seek to know the nature of life, but he is himself part of something far greater than himself. His lifespan, whose purpose was examined in the previous section, is itself inserted in the whole that "life" (as Bitu) represents. If he is someone who lives a good life, a 𐌃𐌀𐌂𐌏 𐌁𐌉𐌏𐌒 [dago-bios],[13] a life in accordance with his own nature, he is then in harmony with life itself. The aforementioned Gaulish suffix 𐌁𐌉𐌏𐌒 [-bios] is directly related to a Greek word very familiar to us: βίος [bíos] "life," that does not only designates man's life as the sum of his actions and achievements, but rather the subject of "biology."

As a science, biology does not concern itself with the specificities of human life in general, and even less with the particular lives of individual men. What it seeks is an understanding of what unifies the realm of life as a whole, the nature of life itself, something that to this days is still shrouded in mystery. What is nonetheless

[13] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 78.

almost certainly known is that every living being shares a direct genetic relation with all other beings, present, past, and future. Every single living being is a link of an incredibly long chain of continuous transmission of life: from mother to child, but also farther up until the first abiogenesis event, when life miraculously sprouted out from the inert body of the Dark.

A human body is composed of a myriad of individual cells, and likewise, all the living beings can be seen as the cells of a single body. The comm-unity formed by all the men, animals, and plants that have and will occupy the earth and the skies represents the body of Life itself, whose nature and purpose may be unfathomable to the cells composing it. Cells are created, while others return to the earth, but the body lives on unaffected by the minute changes of the organism, and its essence perdures until the body itself collapses as a whole.

As the Greek geographer Strabo tells us, the Druids of Gaul asserted that "men's souls, and also the universe, are indestructible, although both fire and water will at some time or other prevail over them."[14] This belief in the indestructibility of the soul was interpreted as a "trick" used by the Druid to root out the fear of death among their people by the Roman emperor:

> They wish to inculcate this as one of their leading tenets, that souls do not become extinct, but pass after death from one body to another, and they think that men by this tenet are in a great degree excited to valor, the fear of death being disregarded.[15]

This statement of Caesar, along with those of other ancient historians, have convinced generations that the Celts believed in a form of metempsychosis (μετεμψύχωσις), that is, the possibility of souls to migrate from one body to another. Few modern scholars now support the reality of such a belief in the Celtic World. As the French

[14] English translation from: Strabo, *Geography, Volume II: Books 3-5*, N.Pag. (§ 4.4); Original Greek: "ἀφθάρτους δὲ λέγουσι καὶ οὗτοι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ τὸν κόσμον, ἐπικρατήσειν δέ ποτε καὶ πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ." From: ibid., N.Pag.

[15] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.14); Original Latin: "In primis hoc volunt persuadere, non interire animas, sed ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios, atque hoc maxime ad virtutem excitari putant metu mortis neglecto." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

scholars F. Le Roux and C. Guyonvarc'h tell us, metempsychosis is "absent from the Celtic world."[16] Strabo's statement nonetheless does not imply any metempsychosis, and the association between the Druids and this belief may simply have been the result of an assimilation with one of its proponents, Pythagoras, who led a mystical order often compared or linked with the one of the Gaulish wise-men. The following statement by the Roman historian Ammianus may support this view:

> The Druids, being loftier than the rest in intellect, and bound together in fraternal organisations, as the authority of Pythagoras determined, were elevated by their investigation of obscure and profound subjects, and scorning all things human, pronounced the soul immortal.[17]

Strabo's statement appears to be a direct quotation of someone familiar with the Gaulish World. It is both more concise and more precise than the others, avoiding easy parallels with the Greek and Roman cultures. A detail of this statement is significant: the soul is like the rest of the creation. They are both indestructible. The "soul" is the essence of man's life, but if his body can be destroyed, what is this soul that remains?

An answer could be that while man's flesh returns to the body of the Dark, the imprint that he left on the greater body of Life nonetheless forever remains. Man is Life, and Life survives the decay of individual bodies, continuously renewing itself so as to reach farther and farther across time and space, reaching the deepest of the Deep and the highest of the Skies. In this sense is man's life indubitably indestructible, regardless of beliefs or of the particular World from which the nature of life is pondered.

Strabo tells us that the realm of Life, like the creation as a whole, is reshaped by "water and fire." Water belongs to the Dark and the Deep, while fire belongs to the Bright. Life is thus caught in the strife between the Dark and the Bright, being played by

[16] Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h and Roux, *Les druides*, Page 271.

[17] English translation from: Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus. With An English Translation*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "Drysidae ingeniis celsiores, ut auctoritas Pythagorae decrevit, sodaliciis astricti consortiis, quaestionibus occultarum rerum altarumque erecti sunt, et despectantes humana, pronuntiarunt animas immortales." From: ibid., N.Pag.

them as it forms the surface of contact between them. The "middle realm" is what stands out from both but nonetheless deeply permeates them, as a tree whose roots are deeply inserted in the soil and its branches extended high in the skies, while its trunk stands between the two extremes.

A man who sees the "middle realm" for what it truly is, the body of Life itself, would not fear to see his own flesh return to the earth. As the *Pharsalia* tells us, for the Gauls "death is the middle of a long life"[18] Indeed, but this life is not merely the one of the individual: it rather is the life of the body of Life itself, of which each man is a useful but non-essential element, one that is meant to play its part before being replaced by another; one begotten by those who already ran back into the soil, embraced by their parent.

The "middle realm" is formed by the **Tree of Life** itself. Not the mythical tree of the garden of Eden, but the one of the biologist, that is, the tree formed by all the branches of Life, stemming from a single seed. The offspring of the earliest and simplest form of life soon differed so much from one another that they were unable to reproduce with their distant cousins. They began to form domains, kingdoms, phyla, classes, orders, families, genus, and species that grew more and more distant from their roots, while occupying an increasingly larger part of the earth and the skies. As the Tree of Life sprouted from the Dark and slowly extended its branches toward the Bright, into the air of the skies, it began to clear out a space that stood between the two. Bitu, Life itself, only appeared long after the emergence of the contrast between the Dark and the Bright, but its emergence not only profoundly transformed the bond between these two: it also opened up a space where something new could appear.

The trees of the forest stand erect, with their arms widely spread so that their leaves would receive a larger portion of the light being poured down by the luminaries in the skies. Doing so, they create the forest itself, a safe harbor for a myriad of living beings that would not survive in the scorching heat of the sun or in the cold of the windy plains. The Tree of Life standing between the Dark and the Bright likewise opens up the possibility of a world to appear. It dims the radiance of the sun so that the beings

[18] TBA. Original Latin: "longae (canitis si cognita) vitae Mors media est." From: Lucanus, *Pharsaliae Libri X*, N.Pag.

living in the space enclosed by the branches and the trunks are not rendered blind by the fire from heaven. The clearing is where the Dark meets the Bright, with neither of them holding sway over it.

Every living being forms a part of the extremities of the Tree of Life: they are its leaves, *△○⋀ [*dol-][19] in Celtic. Man can easily observe the sprouting and the growth of the leaves of the trees surrounding his home, and thus the becoming of all beings is naturally associated with this seasonal cycle that sees them being born and mature before withering and falling to the ground: *△⩓⋀ [dal-n-][20], to "come into being." The tree continually comes into being through the appearance of countless transient elements forming its body, and this transience is the very source of its growth and of its strength: the old is replaced by the new, built on the foundation left by what preceded it. The space opened up by the Tree of Life that stands between the Dark and the Bright owes its existence to the leaves and to their continuous renewal. Man occupies a particular place in this picture: he is the only element of the tree endowed with eyes that can perceive the extent of the tree itself, thanks to the Bright that illuminates the clearing in which it stands and that it opens up. Man is not only part of the flow of Life that characterizes the "middle realm": he alone among the creatures has been given the power to affect the course of this flow and to take an active role in the clearing, even shaping the tree itself. Bitu is therefore more than Life: it is a clearing that allows the being of all beings.

2.1.3 Bitu: Beings and Being

Without the radiance of the Bright, the Dark remains invisible, but when it is left unbridled, nothing more than the Bright itself can be seen. Only within the clearing opened by the Tree of Life can the nature of both the Dark and the Bright begin to appear. The Dark *is* regardless of whether it is perceived or not, and its concealment is part of its nature. The universe as a whole, what is supported by the Deep, *is*, independently of the existence of the tree tearing apart and joining together the Dark and the

[19] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 88.
[20] ibid., Page 88.

Bright. The ancient Greeks had a word to designate this whole: Φύσις [phusis], usually translated as "nature" but whose meaning goes beyond what is referred to by this Latin word. As Heidegger tells us, the Φύσις is "what appears out of itself, because it brings the rising, the sprouting, the emergence, and the unconcealment,[21] a vision in line with the Chinese word for nature: 自然 [zì rán], what comes out from itself. Aristotle thus defined it: ἓν γάρ τι γένος τοῦ ὄντος ἡ φύσις "nature is one particular genus of being,"[22] but as pointed out by the German philosopher, this is not the inceptual meaning of this word.[23] Φύσις is εἶναι [eínai], the ultimate instance of being, *the* being.

The Φύσις is the organism formed by the universe as a whole. This whole conflates what is usually separated by philosophy:

> What can we still say of beings? They are, and only beings are. They are; they *have* Being. From beings and in beings what can be differentiated is *Being*. This differentiation does not concern beings and beings, but *beings and Being*. "Being" — under that term nothing can be represented. Indeed beings; but Being? In fact, the common understanding and common experience understand and seek only beings. *To see and to grasp Being in beings, to differentiate Being from beings*, is the *task* of the differentiating science, philosophy.[24]

[21] TBA. Original German: "Die φύσις \ Was sich von selbst zeigt, an ihm selbst, — weil es das Aufgehende, Aufgang, Hervorkommende, die Unverborgenheit bringt." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 76: Leitgedanken Zur Entstehung Der Metaphysik...* Page 35.

[22] English translation from: Aristotle, *The Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Page 108. Original Greek: Aristotle, *Aristotle's Metaphysics, ed. W.D. Ross*. Page 21. (§ B.4)

[23] Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 76: Leitgedanken Zur Entstehung Der Metaphysik...* Page 21.

[24] English translation from: Heidegger and Rojcewicz, *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, Page 5; Original German: "Aber was kann von Seiendem unterschieden werden anderes als Seiendes? Was können wir vom Seienden noch sagen? Es ist und nur Seiendes ist. Es ist, es *hat* Sein. Vom Seienden und am Seienden ist unterscheidbar das *Sein*. Dieser Unterschied betrifft nicht Seiendes und Seiendes, sondern *Seiendes und Sein*. >Sein<, darunter ist nichts vorzustellen. Seiendes wohl, aber Sein? In der Tat, der gemeine Verstand und die gemeine Erfahrung versteht und sucht nur Seiendes. An ihm aber *das Sein zu sehen und zu erfassen und gegen Seiendes zu unterscheiden*, ist *Aufgabe* der unterscheidenden Wissenschaft, der *Philosophie*." from: Heideg-

As the whole that *is*, even when there are no living beings cutting it out into a series of parts, a series of "things" or "beings," the Φύσις gathers being itself with its first instance. Φύσις is being, Φύσις is *the* being, undivided but also unseen.

The philosopher tells us that: "Beings *are* independently of the experience, cognition, and comprehension through which they are disclosed, discovered, and determined."[25] The "beings" *are* indeed, but not as "beings": outside of the World of the living and their senses, there are no rocks, no mountains, and no oceans. These things exist even when there are no living beings to consider them, but without the living they are not independent "things": there is only the Φύσις, the being of *the* being.

Without the Tree of Life opening up a clearing gathering the Deep, the Dark, and the Bright while keeping them at bay from each other, they together would form an indistinguishable whole. Being and its first instance, the Φύσις, therefore *are*, independently of Life and of the World of men. What the Tree of Life and the sons of the Dark bring is the **di-vision** of the whole of being, the di-vision of the Φύσις. The plurality created by man's perception of the Φύσις is the source of the **concealment of *being***, which is now eclipsed by *beings*. In the World of men, "beings are discovered with regard to the fact that they are referred, as those beings which they are, to something"[26] The clearing opened up by the Tree of Life leads to the dis-covery of the beings forming the Dark and the Bright by the living beings, man in particular. The illumination of this clearing nonetheless demands that a price be paid for this revelation.

Heraclitus, one of the pioneers of Greek philosophy, indeed tells us that φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεί, "the phusis likes to conceal

ger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd.2: Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie (Summer semester 1926)*, Page .

[25] English translation from: Heidegger and Schmidt, *Being and Time*, Page 172; Original German: "Seiendes *ist* unabhängig von Erfahrung, Kenntnis und Erfassen, wodurch es erschlossen, entdeckt und bestimmt wird. Sein aber »ist« nur im Verstehen des Seienden, zu dessen Sein so etwas wie Seinsverständnis gehört. Sein kann daher." from: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 2: Sein und Zeit (1927)*, Page 244.

[26] English translation from: Heidegger and Schmidt, *Being and Time*, Page 78; Original German: "Seiendes ist daraufhin entdeckt, daß es als dieses Seiende, das es ist, auf etwas verwiesen ist." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 2: Sein und Zeit (1927)*, Page 112.

itself."[27] When the Tree of Life has reached a certain maturity and living beings begin to perceive what surrounds them, what they perceive is a set of "beings" rather than the Φύσις itself, *the* being that is the ultimate instance of being. The plurality of beings implies a rupture of the unity of being itself with the instance of which it is a manifestation: *the* being, the Φύσις. This rupture has for immediate consequence the concealment of the Φύσις itself, of its nature as *being*. In the eyes of the living beings, being is not conflated with the beings around him. At first, being itself is entirely concealed by the beings that occupy the foreground of their life: only beings are perceived. Being "likes to conceal itself" because its value can only be seen when one has been estranged from it. Man will have to use all his might in order to seek to recover the full sight of the nature of being, a sight of the being of the whole of being.

The Tree of Life, the "middle realm," is the clearing that operates the great concealment: the veiling of being and the covering of the nature of *the* being, the Φύσις. This is in the clearing's nature:

> If we stand in a clearing in the woods, we see only what can be found within it: the free place, the trees about — and precisely not the luminosity of the clearing itself. As little as the openness is simply the unconcealedness of beings, but is the clearing *for* the self-concealing, so little is this self-concealment a mere being-absent. It is rather a vacillating, hesitant refusal"[28]

The light shining inside the clearing not only conceals itself: it also plunges the forest further into darkness. The vision of the beings inside the clearing implies a loss of vision of the whole of being, which retreats into the dark. This concealment, however, is only

[27] TBA. Original Greek from: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 10: Der Satz vom Grund (1955–1956)*, Page 103.

[28] English translation from: Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, Page; Original German: "wir z. B. in einer Waldlichtung stehend oder auf sie stoßend nur das sehen, was in ihr vorfindlich ist: der freie Platz, die umstehenden Bäume — und gerade nicht das Lichte der Lichtung selbst Sowenig die Offenheit nur einfach Unverborgenheit des Seienden ist, sondern Lichtung für das Sichverbergen, sowenig ist dieses Sichverbergen ein bloßes Abwesendsein, sondern zögernde Versagung." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 45: Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte "Probleme" der "Logik" (Winter semester 1937/38)*, Pages 210–211.

a preliminary step for the appropriation of being by the beings living under the canopy formed by the Tree of Life.

The men of the "first beginning," the witnesses of the descending of the light that created the clearing, were nonetheless in a privileged position to perceive the whole of being. As Heidegger tells us: "in the first beginning, beings are experienced as φύσις and are so named. Beingness as constant presence is still veiled therein: φύσις as prevailing emergence."[29] Then, "nature" is seen as φύσις, the becoming of beings as *△ᗅᐱᚿ [dal-n-],[30] the leaves of the Tree of Life that opens the clearing revealing beings while concealing being itself.

The emergence of the tree separating and gathering the Dark and the Bright paves the way for a key event of man's destiny:

> In the other beginning ... beings are such as to bear the clearing into which they themselves come to stand, and this clearing essentially occurs as the clearing for the self-concealing, i.e., for beyng as event.[31]

Only when men will have taken hold of the Tree of Life, taken hold of the nature of Life and of their own being will they be able to overcome the concealment of being behind the plurality of beings. This will occur when they begin the support the tree instead of being supported by it, thereby allowing them to see beyond the clearing created by the tree and its leaves.

Bitu, the "middle realm," therefore represents the space where beings first appear, and where being is itself concealed. This necessary concealment nonetheless only occurs in order to pave the way for man's appropriation of being, as a whole, gathering the Dark and the Bright in a new clearing, one that will display the harmonious dance of the opposites, a display showing both the be-

[29] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 153; Original German: "Erstanfänglich wird das Seiende als φύσις erfahren und genannt. Die Seiendheit als beständige Anwesenheit ist darin noch verhüllt, φύσις das waltende Aufgehen." From: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 195.

[30] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 88.

[31] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 181; Original German: "Im anderen Anfang aber ist das Seiende, damit es die Lichtung, in die es hereinsteht, zugleich trage, welche Lichtung west als Lichtung des Sichverbergens, d. h. des Sejms als Ereignis." From: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 230.

ings in the clearing and the being that is concealed by them. Man is therefore both a servant and master of being. Being needs him in order to be manifested as such, but man accomplishes his own nature only through the unveiling of being itself. Death is therefore of no importance to the man beholding the fullness of the Tree of Life, and its purpose. Only one thing is to be feared: the failure to accomplish the destiny of the living. Such a fear is precisely the one famously mentioned by the Celts to the Macedonian conqueror:

> The Kelts who dwell on the Adriatic came to Alexander for the purpose of making a treaty of friendship and mutual hospitality, and that the king received them in a friendly way, and asked them, while drinking, what might be the chief object of their dread, supposing that they would say it was he; but that they replied, it was no man, only they felt some alarm lest the heavens should on some occasion or other fall on them.[32]

The collapse of the skies would imply its merger with the earth, the mutual annihilation of the Dark and the Bright through the collapse of the middle realm keeping them distinct while allowing them to interact with each other. Concerning this quote, the French scholar Claude Sterckx tells us that "the recognition of the theme of the cosmic axis among the ancient Celts probably implies that they saw the end of the world as a crumbling of this stay –-a tree, a column or a mountain –- supporting the sky, and therefore the complete resorption of space and time."[33] More than a symbol or a myth, the Tree of Life is what allows the appearance of beings as such, and the unconcealment of being itself. The collapse of the tree, the crumbling of Life itself back onto the Ground from which it sprouted, would mark the "end of the world," which would

[32] English translation from: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. (§ 7.3.8); Original Greek: "φησὶ δὲ Πτολεμαῖος ὁ Λάγου κατὰ ταύτην τὴν στρατείαν συμμῖξαι τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ Κελτοὺς τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἀδρίαν φιλίας καὶ ξενίας χάριν, δεξάμενον δὲ αὐτοὺς φιλοφρόνως τὸν βασιλέα ἐρέσθαι παρὰ πότον, τί μάλιστα εἴη ὃ φοβοῖντο, νομίζοντα αὐτὸν ἐρεῖν: αὐτοὺς δ᾽ ἀποκρίνασθαι ὅτι οὐδὲν πλὴν εἰ ἄρα μὴ ὁ οὐρανὸς αὐτοῖς ἐπιπέσοι." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag.

[33] TBA. Original French: "La reconnaissance du thème de l'axe cosmique chez les anciens Celtes implique vraisemblablement qu'ils concevaient la fin du monde comme un écroulement de cet étai — arbre, colonne ou montagne — soutenant le ciel, et donc la résorption totale de l'espace et du temps." From: Sterckx, *La mythologie du monde celte*, Page 176.

nonetheless not imply the annihilation of the Dark and the Bright themselves but only the disappearance of the "middle realm" that allowed them to appear as distinct from each other, as "beings" that can be fathomed by the living. If the tree vanishes, all beings collapse back into the primordial unity, the Φύσις which is one but "meaningless" as there is no contrasting element standing out of its wholeness. The di-vision of Being and its first instance, *the* being, that is, the Φύσις itself, would then be rescinded and all "things" would thereby remain concealed, waiting for the growing of a new tree.

The "middle realm" is therefore aptly named by the Celts ᛒᛁᛏᛟᛉ [bitu]: man's life, Life itself, beings, and Being itself. This realm is the clearing that first allows the unconcealment of beings to the living beings, and ultimately the unveiling and appropriation of Being itself, what is concealed by the clearing but also what can only be perceived through the use of this clearing as a doorway leading to its revelation. The Dark and the Bright *are*, independently of the being of the living beings, regardless of the Tree of Life, but only through the "middle realm" do they become distinct "beings," elements of the whole of being, the whole of the Φύσις. These beings, however, are only instruments for the manifestation of Being itself, and as the philosopher tells us: "In the other beginning, all beings are sacrificed up to beyng, and only from there do beings as such receive their truth."[34] The "middle realm" is itself the altar made for this sacrifice of all beings up to beyng, a plane surface between earth and skies, Dark and Bright, where the blood of beings is used for the appropriation of Being. Bitu is therefore more than beings, Being, and the Tree of Life: it is also the realm of blood.

2.1.4 The Realm of Blood, Dusk and Dawn

The skies are the place where all things are revealed, where the light of the Bright does not leave any "thing" concealed. The Druids of Gaul were known for their interest in the signs found in the heavens. The core of their teachings was thus described by the

[34] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 181; Original German: "Im anderen Anfang wird alles Seiende dem Seyn geopfert, und von da aus erhält erst das Seiende als solches seine Wahrheit." From: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 230.

Roman emperor:

> They likewise discuss and impart to the youth many things respecting the stars and their motion, respecting the extent of the world and of our earth, respecting the nature of things, respecting the power and the majesty of the immortal gods.[35]

Generations of men spent their lives observing these signs, and it is therefore not surprising that an image of the world itself would be dis-covered in the skies. The skies are indeed more than the boundless expanse towering over the earth. They are a display of the nature of time itself, they are "the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether."[36] The Dark and the Deep hold sway over the sky during the night, while the Bright reigns supreme during the day. Between them, when the Dark surrenders the skies to the Bright during the dawn, or when the Bright yields to the Dark during the dusk, an image of the "middle realm" that holds them together is majestically displayed across the heavens.

At dusk or dawn, the celestial spheres experience a shift of power. The black or blue sky becomes tinted with a red hue, one that is relatively rarely found among the things of the earth but whose presence irremediably evokes a particular element tied to Life: blood. At dusk or dawn, the surface separating the earth from the sky appears as a river of blood, whose sight plunges man in awe and wonder. This image displayed daily in front of all the living beings is nonetheless more than a source of amazement, more

[35] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.14); Original Latin: "Multa praeterea de sideribus atque eorum motu, de mundi ac terrarum magnitudine, de rerum natura, de deorum immortalium vi ac potestate disputant et iuventuti tradunt." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

[36] English translation from: 147 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page; Original German: "Der Himmel ist der wölbende Sonnengang, der gestaltwechselnde Mondlauf, der wandernde Glanz der Gestirne, die Zeiten des Jahres und ihre Wende, Licht und Dämmer des Tages, Dunkel und Helle der Nacht, das Wirtliche und Unwirtliche der Wetter, Wolkenzug und blauende Tiefe des Äthers," from: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936–1953)*, Page 151.

than a vision of beauty. It represents a reflection of the nature of Being, one where each one of the three realms is successively put on display, not only offering man a chance to contemplate their uniqueness but also an opportunity to perceive the continuity between them as one seamlessly gives place to the other, showing that they together form a whole and that they are all inextricably intertwined with one another. The bloody nature of the transition between night and day, Dark and Bright, reflects the essential role played by blood in the Tree of Life and the "middle realm" as a whole.

The opposition between Dark and Bright, with Blood serving as the mediating element caught between the two, seems to represent the World of the early Celts, and it would seem to have left traces deeply imprinted in the World of their descendants. The three colors recurrently appear as symbols in the myths and sagas of Ireland. The *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, for example, frequently mentions colors that appear to possess a symbolic value, with the combat between a black bull and a white one forming the climax of the story. This narrative also shows that the most renowned hero of the late Irish tradition, Cúchulainn, is directly associated with the three colors of the sky, and perhaps also with the threefold nature of the ancient Celtic World:

> He seemed to have three kinds of hair: dark next to his skin, blood-red [*cróderg*] in the middle and hair like a crown of gold covering them outside. Fair was the arrangement of that hair with three coils in the hollow in the nape of his neck.[37]

The hero embodies Being as a whole, the union of the Dark and the Bright, separated by a *blood-red* frontier, *cróderg* in Old Irish, *𐌊𐌓𐌏𐌕 𐌃𐌄𐌓𐌕𐌏 [*kru-dergo] in Gaulish.

Blood is nonetheless not a mere symbol of the middle point between Dark and Bright. Life itself is what opens up the clearing where all the beings can appear as such. Life is what preserves the nature of the Dark and the Bright by gathering them while

[37] English translation from: *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Recension I ("CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts"), text in brackets added; Original Old Irish: "Faircsi trí folt fair: dond fri toind cind, cróderg ar médon, mind órbude ardatugethar. Caín cocarsi ind fuilt sin co curend teóra imsrotha im chlais a chúlaid." From: Ibid.

keeping them apart, distinct from one another, and the essence of Life lies in the blood. The relation between the Tree of Life and blood is nevertheless manifold.

Blood firstly is the liquid flowing inside the veins of man and many other kinds of living beings, a liquid that remains concealed in the depths of the flesh. It is what is secretly transmitted from generation to generation, from parents to children, prolonging a bond with the beings that already returned to the body of the Dark up onto the first seed of the Tree of Life. The "lifeblood" unites the living, disregarding the boundaries set by distances in time and space. Parentage is manifested in the appearance of one's body, allowing every kind of living beings to be located on the Tree of Life, showing where and when did the different branches of the tree follow their own way. When man walks upon the face of the Dark, his eyes showered with the envoys of the Bright, he is a moving reserve of blood, a transient manifestation of Being whose being is meant to end with the spilling of the flow of his life.

The second purpose of blood is fulfilled when it ceases to be concealed by the flesh. The crimson hue of the liquid of life remains invisible and thus meaningless as long as blood remains in the darkness of the veins. Colors are meant to be seen, and the red sap of the Tree of Life can only be seen at special times: at the dawn or dusk of the living beings. Children are indeed at the dawn of their life often covered with the blood of their mother, but the utmost manifestation of the nature and the coloration of blood occurs when the flesh is slashed open and the lifeblood is spilled, when the white skin is covered with a scarlet mantle and life slips away into the depths of the earth. The sight of this event where the being of a living being is brought to an end, or rather brought back to the concealment of the great body of the Dark, acts as a sign. The lifeblood of this being proclaims his homecoming to the skies through the brightness of the red dye, war-painting of the hero fallen in battle, given to all to see, which reminds men of the fact that all are called to the same fate: the being of all beings is meant to become a bloody sacrifice. This sacrifice, however, is not performed in order to receive the favor of the gods or to implore their pardon for acts of cowardice or a lack of piety. It is rather meant to be a celebration of Life, through the spectacle of the passage from life to death, from being to non-being, from Bitu to Dubnos, a passage that is not to be feared but rather longed for,

as the apex of man's life, the return to the source of his own being: the Dark and the Deep.

Their blood shining inside the clearing between the Dark and the Bright, "all beings are sacrificed up to beyng."[38] Being is concealed by beings, by the shadow of the Tree of Life, but when one offers a bloody offering of the life of a living being, all the witnesses of this event are offered a chance to peer beyond the being of beings and to get a glimpse at being itself. When blood is poured out of a being's veins, a picture of the World is offered to be seen: between the dark earth and the bright sky, the red blood represents the essence of Life, the essence of the "middle realm," but what is experienced by the one whose blood is spilt is also an image of the World, as he himself passes from light to darkness, from being someone breathing the air of the skies and beholding their radiance to being a blind and deaf part of the earth. Both pictures are focused around blood, the center of the world, the gateway between Bright and Dark, Being and Non-Being. Life therefore is the omphalos of being as a whole, and blood is its essence and the way by which man is always reminded of his destiny. Between Dark and Bright, Being shines with the color of the twilight, where the lines of separations between "things" are blurred and beings are forced to try to seen beyond the appearances, to break the line separating "things" and "beings" in order to perceive being itself. Man, however, is never alone in this reflection.

2.2 The God in Between

The depictions of Esus-Cernunnos clearly associate him with the Dark, and the very name of Taranis, meaning "thunder," links this other god with the Bright. In between the two realms, Being / Life is found, as a mediator between them, something that belongs to both and yet stands out from them. The god of the middle realm would have to possess a bond with life itself, and mankind in particular. Lucanus' *Pharsalia* mentions the name of three different Gaulish deities to whom the people conquered by the Romans offered their sacrifices:

[38] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 181; Original German: "... wird alles Seiende dem Seyn geopfert..." From: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 230.

> Savage Teutates, Hesus' horrid shrines,
> And Taranis' altars, cruel as were those
> Loved by Diana, goddess of the north [39]

A new name appears, accompanying the ones of the gods of the Dark and the Bright: Teutates. This is the only direct reference to this god in Greek and Latin manuscripts, but several variations of this name appear in inscriptions found across the *Keltia*. Scholars have also identified Teutates as the god hidden behind the descriptions of the Gaulish gods by Caesar and other Roman authors, where is his identified as either Mars or Mercury, according to the *interpretatio romana*.

As it will be shown in this section, Teutates would represent the most obvious deity that can be associated with Bitu, in the same manner that Esus-Cernunnos is linked to the Dark, and Taranis to the Bright. The properties of this deity are indeed all related to the "realm of blood": he is the god of the people, the god of war and peace, and the god honored by human blood. Each one of these aspects of Teutates can allow us to unveil new parts of the "middle realm," the first of which is the nature of a "people."

2.2.1 Teutates: God of the People

The very name of Teutates proclaims his nature: ᛏᛖᚤᛏᚨᛏᛖᚲ [teutates][40], "the one of the Teuta." The root word ᛏᛖᚤᛏᚨ [teuta][41] is found in many branches of the Indo-European language tree, where it mainly designates the "people," "the tribe," as a group of men united by various bonds.

The original Proto-Indo-European root has been reconstructed as *tewtéh$_2$[42] and the following tree shows how it developped with the flow of time:

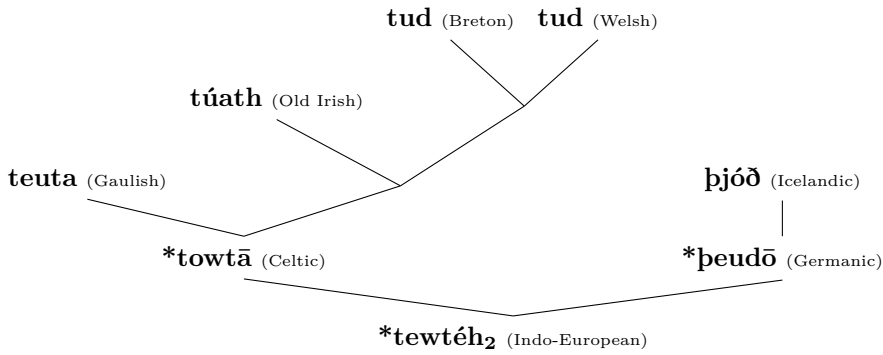
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[39] English translation from Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "Teutates, horrensque feris altaribus Hesus, Et Taranis Scythicae non mitior ara Dianae."Lucanus, *Pharsaliae Libri X*, N.Pag.

[40] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 386.

[41] ibid., Page 386.

[42] Mallory and Adams, *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture*, Page 417.



The linguistic tree reflects the Tree of Life itself, showing the growth and change of the World of men that parallels the evolution of Life as a whole. Teutates represents the god present from inception of the people, the one accompanying its members across the land that they inhabit. He is the one who can see Life in its entirety, beyond the horizon of the lifespan of individual men and beyond the walls separating households.

The concept of TEYTA has been passed on from the time of the first Indo-Europeans to the present day, shared by the Brittons, the Welsh, and also non-Celtic peoples such as the Lithuanians (Tauta) or the Icelanders (þjóð). The determination of the nature of the TEYTA [teuta], and especially of its significance in the ancient Celtic World, is nonetheless far from simple. In the modern Brittonic languages, such as Breton and Welsh, the word *tud*, descendant of the Celtic root *towtā, now designates the "people" in the sense of a indistinct population, men seen as a mass of individuals, without peculiarities: "some people do that," "people are angry." The Gaulish meaning of the word TEYTA [teuta] nonetheless was probably closer to its Icelandic or Lithuanian cognates, whose meaning emphasizes the ethnic dimension of the people: a people seen as a determined group of people, one sharing the same blood, the same land, and the same language. This, however, does not imply that the early Celts as a whole possessed a consciousness of their belonging to a single Celtic people. Different men, different tribes, and different generations certainly had considerably divergent conceptions of the nature of the Teuta. The lands of Northern Europe did not know of any significant nation-state until centuries after the Roman conquest. The Gauls therefore probably had a vision of the Teuta narrower than the one

of modern Lithuanians for example, for whom the *Tauta* designates the Lithuanian people as a whole.

A clue concerning the extent of the Teuta, as seen by the Gauls, may be found in the following Gallo-Greek inscription carved on a stone, part of a sacred space devoted to a Celtic goddess:

> CETOMAPOC OYIΛΛONEOC TOOYTIOYC
> NAMAYCATIC EIWPOY BHΛHCAMI COCIN
> NEMHTON
> *Segomaros ouilloneos tooutious namausatis eivrou bélésami sosin neméton*
> Segomaros Ouilloneos, citizen of [the city of] Nemausus,[43] dedicates this sanctuary to Belisama.[44]

In this inscription, it would seem clear that the word TOOYTIOYC [tooutious] designates "someone belonging to the Teuta," and that this "people" is here limited to the inhabitants of the aforementioned city.

One should nonetheless keep in mind the fact that the Teuta, like any other meta-physical concept, is never a permanent, monolithic sign. As the building blocks of an ancient edifice, concepts are affected by the work of the skies. They are eroded and reshaped by the hands of those to whom they have been entrusted. The *Towtā of the first Celts is not the Teuta of the Gallo-Romans, and what the word Teuta evoked to an experienced Druid may radically differ from what an uneducated merchant saw in this concept. One cannot trace a rigid line separating what is included in the Teuta from what differs from it, and this for a simple reason: this line is the horizon of man's view of the bond that unites him with his brethren.

The horizon of the pious dwellers of Nemausus would seem to be limited to the walls of their city. To the modern Brittons, the *tud* now encompasses so much that the original poetic force of this concept has been completely eroded by the work of time and a neglect by the members of this people: the *tud* is now a mere indistinct aggregate of men, without bond and without purpose.

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[43] *Nemausus* is the ancient name of the city of *Nîmes* in Southern France.

[44] The inscription was found in *Vaison-la-romaine*, located 90 Km from *Nîmes*; Duval and Lejeune, *Recueil des inscriptions gauloises 1 : Textes gallo-grecs*, Pages 205–209 (G–153); Savignac, *Merde à César*, Page 52.

Man, however, is not the passive recipient of an inalterable tradition. He has the power to build, to move, and to elevate himself so as to broaden his horizon.

The extent of one's horizon, however, is not necessarily reflected in man's piety. Broad or narrow, this horizon is not an end in itself but rather the instrument through which man's relation with what differs from himself is manifested. Man can know one thing for certain: he belongs to *a* Teuta, a people. This people, in turn, is in relation with the divine, as a whole rather than as the sum of its parts, and this link between the people and the divine bears the name of Teutates, "the one of the people" that stands in contrast to and in between the "good and horned one" (Esus-Cernunnos) and the "thundery one" (Taranis).

Even more than concerning the other two aforementioned deities, the imprint left by Teutates in the soil of the *Keltia* or the Greek and Roman Worlds is so minute that it makes an investigation of the identity of Teutates particularly arduous. This being said, the universality of the Teuta and the direct relation of the god to this concept may nonetheless allow us to lift up the veil covering the relation between the Teuta and the divine.

Several scholars of Celtic Studies, such as the French professor Joseph Vendryes, considered that the name of the god of the people was the subject of some sort of taboo. The word "teutates" would therefore not have been the name of the God of the People, but rather a mere adjective replacing it, the reason being that: "it was dangerous to name one's god when one was outside of the land of the tribe, as the enemy could invoke him as well."[45] The same scholar also argues that the imprecise nature of his name would find its origin in the manifold functions of this god, to whom it would have been difficult to assign a meaningful title.[46] The simplest explanation is nonetheless sometimes the best: Teutates could simply have been named because he embodies the power of the Teuta.

The Celts were known for their disdain of the anthropomorphizing

[45] TBA. Original French: "On se doute qu'il y a ici un phénomène de tabou: il était dangereux de nommer son dieu lorsque l'on était à l'extérieur de son pays, car l'ennemi risquait de l'invoquer lui aussi." From: Vendryes, *La Religion des celtes*, Page xii.

[46] ibid., Page 33.

of the gods, and archeology confirmed this tendency which only ended under the influence of Roman culture, whose religion was highly anthropomorphic. Teutates therefore was not a bearded man watching over the people. The most primitive expression of the experience of the divine has more often than not been based on the direct identification between elements of nature and the divine: the Greek god Ζεύς [zeús] originally was not a human figure sitting in the clouds throwing thunderbolts to the earth, but rather the Indo-European Dyēus, the luminous sky itself. Anthropomorphism only comes when man has become blind to the experience of the numinous that is found at the origin of the naming of the gods. As the starry sky is veiled by the artificial brilliance of the cities, and as the earth has become invisible, hidden under the roads built by man's hands, man has become blind to nature itself and he only sees himself and his brethren. The gods then become men, and men are thereby severed from the experience of the divine.

All men will nonetheless not necessarily be affected by this blindness and this dulling of the senses. Those who devoted their lives to the investigation of nature and the divine may be able to keep the flame of the experience of the numinous alive. Teutates may have been seen as "someone" to whom offerings where made for protection or success in warfare or commerce, but to others, it may have been seen in its essence: as the body of the Teuta itself, the whole formed by all the men living within their horizon, a whole from which something emerges, something that is not found in any of its parts.

The German philosopher Friedrich Schelling well summarizes the idea that the philosophers may have seen the gods differently than the common people:

> They themselves — the supposed philosophers — knew that they did not speak of real people. Now, however, how did the personalities created by them become real ones, and thereby become gods? Through a very natural misunderstanding, one should think, a misunderstanding that was unavoidable as soon as the representations came to those for whom the secret of the emergence of these personalities was not known.[47]

[47] English translation from: Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 26. Original German: "Sie selbst — die

Schelling was rightfully skeptical concerning such a conception among the Greeks, but it is far more convincing concerning the Celts, who laughed at the idea of statues representing the gods. If anthropomorphism appeared ridiculous to a brutish warrior such as the conqueror of Delphi, it may have been because of the influence of the Druids, who were in charge of the spiritual education of the Celtic nobility. One should therefore not be too quick to underestimate the spiritual and philosophical knowledge of the Celts, the one of the Druids in particular. These seekers of wisdom purposefully did not transmit the insights that they dis-covered to their descendants who preferred to bear the yoke of Rome rather than to offer their lifeblood to the gods of their people, of their Teuta, but the path nonetheless still lies nearby, ready to be re-discovered, and the footsteps of the ancient Celts can still be followed to find a way back to it.

To seek to know Teutates is to search for the essence of what unites the men sharing the same blood, the same land, and the same world. Teutates is the divine dimension of the "middle realm," the doorway through which man can peer beyond the boundaries of his own self and look at what he forms when he is united with his parents, brethren, descendants, and cousins. To enter into a dialogue with the "god of the people" is not to merely implore protection or to beg the blessings of a distant entity: it rather is to enter into a meaningful relationship with what emerges from a comm-unity of men, the "people" beyond the individuals. Through the nurturing of this bond with the "god of the people," man is offered a way to avoid the pitfall of a simplistic anthropomorphism that separates the Teuta from Teutates, the people from its god. Teutates does not stand above the Teuta: he rather is what emerges from it. If man needs to anthropomorphize nature in order to grasp it with his mind, he should at least do so with care so as to reflect the truth of nature rather than his own illusions. Teutates is indeed a living being, and a divine being, one whose body is formed by the concatenation of countless cells:

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angenommenen Philosophen — wußten, daß sie nicht von wirklichen Personen redeten. Wie sind nun aber die von ihnen geschaffenen Persönlichkeiten zu wirklichen und dadurch zu Göttern geworden? Durch einen sehr natürlichen Mißverstand, sollte man denken, der unvermeidlich was, sobald die Vorstellungen an solche kamen, denen das Geheimniß ihrer Entstehung nicht bekannt war." From: Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke – 1. Bd. Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie.* Page 31.

human beings themselves, those who belong to the Teuta. The body of Teutates is the body of the people itself, and he owes his existence to these individual men, just as men owe their world to him.

Men are born, live and die, but the body of the people survives them. Teutates is potentially immortal, as its essence does not depend on any individual mortal man but rather on the production of any offspring that would take up the charge of carrying the people further across time. As long as one man and one woman, members of the people, remain and are able to produce an offspring, the divine being whose body is formed by the flesh of men lives on. This implies that the people can nonetheless vanish from the "middle realm." If no man carries his body and dedicates a sacred place to him in his World, the God of the People then ceases to exist.

The relation between man and Teutates is very similar to the one that man entertains with the cells that form his body. It is one of mutual dependency, but one that is nonetheless marked by a fundamental imbalance: each cell is sustained by the body as a whole, but the whole does not depend on any individual cell, which are all disposable. Each cell has a role to play in the whole, but the failure of a single cell does not significantly affects the whole. Conversely, however, a collapse of the whole would affect the life of every single cell.

When man begins to see the body of Teutates hidden beyond the bodies and the lives of his brethren, then can he begin to unconceal the divine nature of his own people, a nature that does not imply the deification of man but rather the recognition of the being of the people, a being that transcends the life of the individual and touches on the essence of being itself.

As Heidegger investigated the relationship between man and his people, he declared that "man is the people" and that "the people is man on a large scale."[48] Behind this seemingly bland statement lies the essence of the Teuta. It is not to be understood as implying that a people is a large scale aggregate of men, but

[48] TBA. Original German: "»Was ist der Mensch?« Wir hatten darauf geantwortet: »Der Mensch ist das Volk«, d. h. aber: Das Volk ist der Mensch im Großen," from: Heidegger, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, Page 67.

rather is to be seen as meaning that a people forms a new kind of being, in the same way by which a man emerges from a pile of earthly elements. The "large scale" is also not to be seen as a mere extension of the body of the people in space: the new being that emerges from the comm-unity of men also possesses a larger extension across time. Its horizon is broader than the one of any man, and this is why this being can be considered as a "guardian" or a "benefactor" of the members of the people, even though every one of these members is fully part of its body.

Following the commonly accepted view of the place of man upon the earth, the German philosopher tells us that "the human being is within the course of evolution the most highly developed mammal and primate and thus the outermost branch of earth history in the natural phylogenetic tree of life."[49] The fact that this view is almost universally accepted as a "truth" does not lessen its narrowness. The horizon of the cell is too small for it to see what a man is, and likewise, man often fails to see that something may exist beyond the limits of his own horizon. What he himself is may be forever hidden from his view, and he may live content thinking that he is the apex of life on earth, the highest point of the Tree of Life. Regardless of man's opinion of himself, however, the body of the people lives while men are born and die. The members of the people are continuously changing but the being of which they form the cells is permanent, eternal, reflecting the second meaning of the name of the "middle realm": ᛒᛁᛏᛟᛉ [bitu], "forever." This being is what ᛏᛖᛉᛏᚨᛏᛖᚲ [teutates] represents.

Teutates is a god, that is, a being that transcends the earthly nature of the Tree of Life, something that man can glimpse at but that he cannot comprehend. Teutates is the being of the people, and a being formed by the people. He lives a life, whose purpose often falls outside of the horizon of what man can fathom. Man can nonetheless enter into a dialogue with the god. If he fails to perceive Teutates for who he is, a being emerging from the Teuta itself, an organism in which he is a disposable cell and that possesses its own will and purpose, and instead sees it as an entity

[49] English translation from: Heidegger, *Logic As the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, Page 27; Original German: "Der Mensch sei innerhalb des Entwicklungsganges das höchstentwickelte Säuge — und Herrentier und so der Erdgeschichte äußerster Ast am natürlichen Stammbaum des Lebens," from: Heidegger, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, Page 29.

watching over the earth and whose role would be to reward or punish the men below, this dialogue would ineluctably take the form of trade, with offerings representing bribes to gain the favors of the supreme judge.

In contrast with such a vulgar commerce that demeans both man and the god it involves, man may decide to enter into a more selfless relationship with the deity, one that will enrich the Teuta as a whole rather than any particular individual. Man must face the fact that the "god of the people" is not the overseer of his brethren. The god does not exist in order to serve man, but man's purpose is to form the body of the people. The relation between man and the god therefore is one between parts and a whole, one where man must face the reality of his lesser nature. We as men must accept to "insert ourselves in our own manner in the belonging to the people, [as] we stand in the being of the people, we ourselves are this people."[50] When man accepts to relinquish his own will to the will of the God of the People, then can his dialogue with the god be fruitful, and man can thereby play his role as a part of the body of the people.

2.2.2 Teutates: God of Blood

As it was seen earlier, the *Pharsalia* of Lucanus associates the three Gaulish gods it mentions with savagery and bloodshed. An ancient commentary on this poem gives us more details concerning the nature of these gods. Teutates stands out in this commentary by his particular association with the liquid of life. It tells us that "in the tongue of the Gauls, Mercury is called Teutates, the one who is honored by human blood."[51] Perhaps more than the *interpretatio romana* equating Teutates with the Roman god Mercury, the mention of blood convincingly appears to describe a genuine element of Celtic religious practice. The connection between the "middle realm" and the red sap of the Tree of Life has already

[50] TBA. Original German: "Wir als Dasein fügen uns in eigener Weise hinein in die Zugehörigkeit zum Volk, wir stehen im Sein des Volkes, wir sind dieses Volk selbst," from: Heidegger, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, Page 57.

[51] TBA. Original Latin: "Mercurius lingua Gallorum Teutates dicitur qui humano apud illos sanguine colebatur." From: Hermann Usener, *Scholia in Lucani Bellum civile*, Page 32.

been examined, and it is therefore natural that the god of this realm would also share a strong bond with it.

Caught between the Bright and the Dark, the realm of Life and Being is like the crimson-colored dawn or dusk that joins the night and the day while separating them. The three realms of the Gaulish World parallel the three phases of the sky: dark, red, and bright, and between the god of the Dark and the one of the Bright, Teutates is the Bloody, the one "honored by human blood" that shares its hue with the dawn and the dusk.

Teutates is the "bloody one," the god tied to Being and Life, and whose essence lies in blood. The body of Teutates, the "god of the people," is itself sustained by the blood of the men forming the Teuta. He is not only "honored by human blood": he *is* because of the red flow that sustains his own flesh, upon which his existence rests. If this scarlet river were to be stopped, the god would not lose his "dominion" but rather vanish completely.

The god of the "middle realm" occupies the center of the Gaulish World, not implying a preeminence over the other deities but simply reflecting the fact that he is, by his own essence and by his location, given a role of mediator. As the dusk and the dawn mark the transitions between the days and the nights, the shift of power between the Dark and the Bright, the People, Life, and Being are what bring the different realms together. The flow of the red sap of the Tree of Life is also what separates Life from Death, Being from Non-Being, and as this flow forms the body of the "god of the people," Teutates represents a god standing in between all the contrasts of the world: between Dark and Bright, Life and Death, Being and Non-Being. Once the nature of this central role played by the deity has been clearly seen, the aforementioned comparison between Teutates and a certain dimension of Roman god Mercury may become meaningful: "like the Greek Hermes he was also a god of liminal places, movement, and communication across physical and social boundaries, a 'mediator between gods and mortals, between the dead and the living.'"[52] This description of the Roman god would also perfectly fit the nature of Teutates, showing that the often naive *interpretatio romana* may at times give us valuable insights into the Gaulish World.

[52] Lott, *The Neighborhoods of Augustan Rome*, Page 79.

The "god of the people" is nonetheless not only equated with Mercury. The same commentary on the *Pharsalia* also compares him to the Roman god of war: Mars, arguing that the Gaulish god also arbitrated the combats between men and that bloody sacrifices were performed to ensure his favors:

> Teutates Mars is appeased by offerings of "despicable blood," either so that the battles would be conducted according to his divine will, or because they were already used to sacrifice human beings to the other gods.[53]

This describes a "utilitarian" view of Teutates, and of the gods in general, seeing them as beings overseeing the doings of men.[54] This passage can nonetheless be interpreted in different ways. As noted by the Austrian scholar Andreas Hofeneder, the "despicable blood" can either refer to the blood of the men fallen on the battlefield or to the sacrifice of other men whose blood would be shed with the sole purpose of ensuring the favors of the deity.[55] The Celts were known for their systematic decapitation of the bodies of their enemies laying on the battlefield, and they were also renowned for their ritual human sacrifices. Both acts may therefore have been performed to honor Teutates, but regardless of the nature of

[53] TBA. Original Latin: "Teutates Mars 'sanguine diro' placatur, siue quod proelia numinis eius instinctu administrantur, siue quod Galli antea soliti ut aliis deis huic quoque homines immolare." From: Hermann Usener, *Scholia in Lucani Bellum civile*, Page 32.

[54] A similar view is given by Caesar, who nonetheless does not name Teutates: "Mars presides over wars. To him, when they have determined to engage in battle, they commonly vow those things which they shall take in war. When they have conquered, they sacrifice whatever captured animals may have survived the conflict, and collect the other things into one place." (Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.17); Original Latin: "Martem bella regere. Huic, cum proelio dimicare constituerunt, ea quae bello ceperint plerumque devovent: cum superaverunt, animalia capta immolant reliquasque res in unum locum conferunt." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.)

[55] See Lochner, Hofeneder, and Friesinger, *Die Religion der Kelten in den antiken literarischen Zeugnissen II*, Page 320. "Hier werden zwei alternative Erklaerungen geboten. Die eine interpretiert das *sanguine diro* bei Lucanus nicht als Hinweis auf Menschenopfer, sondern versteht darunter das Blut der im Kampf gefallenen Krieger, mit dem *Teutates Mars* in seiner Funktion als Schlachtenlenker besaenftigt wurde. Die zweite hingegen deutet *sanguine diro* als nicht naeher definierte Menschenopfer, die *Teutates* in Analogie zu anderen Gallischen Goettern empfangen hat."

the offering, their stated purpose is the same: to win the support of the god so that the warrior would vanquish his enemies. This statement may show a naive conception of the nature of the "god of the people," one that may nonetheless have been shared by many among the Gauls.

A problem with the stated purpose of the offerings, "so that the battles would be conducted according to his divine will," is that it once again reverses the hierarchy between the men forming the body of the people and the god emerging from it. Teutates is the mediator, the central figure that maintains the harmony between opposites, firstly the Dark and the Bright, but also Life and Death. This is why he is compared to Mars, the Roman god who arbitrates wars and conflicts and to whom the life of the slain enemy is dedicated. This role of mediator nonetheless does not imply that the god could be swayed to favor one of the belligerents over another through offerings, as if the goal of his existence was to quench his thirst for human blood. His purpose is larger than the quibbling of men over gold, food, or riches, and his horizon extends beyond what is seen by the bellicose creatures roaming the land of Gaul. What he mediates is the strife of the gods rather than the bickerings of men. He is the rampart of blood that stands between the Dark and the Bright, ensuring the preservation of a certain harmony between them, rather than what stands between men in order to decide who among them should rule over the others.

The erroneous purpose nevertheless does not imply that the offerings themselves would be superfluous. The blood offerings serve a precise purpose, and they "appease" Teutates, but they are primarily addressed to the people itself and to each one of the men composing it. Indeed, when blood is shed, wherever it may be, man is reminded of his own nature, as a mortal cell part of the body of the people that precedes and will survive him. The blood itself will be absorbed by the earth, returning to the body of the Dark, but while it is offered to all men to see, between the Dark and the Bright, man is then reminded of what the "middle realm" is, and for what purpose does he live: the furthering and strengthening of the body of the people, the sustaining and upholding of Teutates.

The source of the blood offered as a sacrifice may be twofold: it may be the blood of those who are perceived as not belonging to the Teuta, the enemies of a particular people, but the blood of

one's own people may also be voluntarily shed. Diodorus Siculus gives us some detail concerning such human sacrifices among the Celts:

> And in pursuance of their savage ways they manifest an outlandish impiety also with respect to their sacrifices; for their criminals they keep prisoner for five years and then impale in honour of the gods, dedicating them together with many other offerings of first-fruits and constructing pyres of great size. Captives also are used by them as victims for their sacrifices in honour of the gods. Certain of them likewise slay, together with the human beings, such animals as are taken in war, or burn them or do away with them in some other vengeful fashion.[56]

The "captives" probably referred to men perceived as "outsiders," men who did not belong to the Teuta of the captors, but the "criminals" who were sacrificed certainly also included the members of one's own people. One of the possible reasons for such an act, which horrified the Greeks and the Romans who witnessed them, could be the revigorating of the body of the people as a whole, a removing of the dross burdening the flow of the scarlet river sustaining the people, and soiling its purity. By ridding Teutates of the corrupted parts of his body, the men of the Teuta would be strengthening the whole of which they are part, ensuring a greater resilience of the god of their people. The display of the flowing of the blood would itself be destined to the men witnessing it, but its direct consequence, which is the disappearance of one of the cells forming the body of the people, would be aimed at the transformation of the god himself.

Cells and body, man and the people, all are meant to work in symbiosis toward the furthering of the will of the god. Man's *ego*

[56] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.32); Original Greek: "ἀκολούθως δὲ τῇ κατ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἀγριότητι καὶ περὶ τὰς θυσίας ἐκτόπως ἀσεβοῦσι: τοὺς γὰρ κακούργους κατὰ πενταετηρίδα φυλάξαντες ἀνασκολοπίζουσι τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ μετ᾽ ἄλλων πολλῶν ἀπαρχῶν καθαγίζουσι, πυρὰς παμμεγέθεις κατασκευάζοντες. χρῶνται δὲ καὶ τοῖς αἰχμαλώτοις ὡς ἱερείοις πρὸς τὰς τῶν θεῶν τιμάς. τινὲς δ᾽ αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ κατὰ πόλεμον ληφθέντα ζῷα μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀποκτείνουσιν ἢ κατακάουσιν ἤ τισιν ἄλλαις τιμωρίαις ἀφανίζουσι. " From: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

plays its part in the play unfolded in between the Dark and the Bright, but the realization of the will of the god presupposes that men would be willing to relinquish their own will, which incites them to seek their own satisfaction, so that the destiny of their people can be fulfilled. Beholding the flow of the red river that runs into the depths of the earth, taking the lives of his brethren with them, back to the source from which they arose, man is shown how frail his life is, and how similar is his essence to the one of any other men. The same blood flows in the veins of all the members of the people, but it is also indistinguishable from the one running inside the flesh of any other man, and even the one of most of the animals roaming upon the face of the Dark. Perceiving this, he may then begin to see the marrow of the body of the people, the essence of Life itself.

2.2.3 Teutates: God of Life

The god of the Teuta is the god of blood, but not because of a thirst for the red liquid or because he would be pleased by the sight of it being shed on the earth. When the flesh of man is slashed opened by an iron blade, his lifeblood then leaves the middle realm, the one occupied by Teutates, and it runs downs inside the earth. It permeates the great body of the Dark and it soon becomes an invisible part of it. Teutates is the god of blood, but this blood is not a symbol of violence and cruelty: it rather is the essence of Life itself.

Through his relation with the lifeblood of the living beings, Teutates is also the god of Life. When blood is shed, Life disappears and all that is left is the dark earth. Teutates is "honored by human blood," but not by its return to the Dark, thereby leaving his own body. The commentary on the *Pharsalia* also mentions something more concerning the god, a peculiar way by which he would be "appeased":

> In the tongue of the Gauls, Mercury is called Teutates, the one who is honored by human blood. Teutates Mercury is thus appeased among the Gauls: a man is introduced head-first into a barrel full [of liquid] so as to suffocate him. [57]

[57] TBA. Original Latin: "Mercurius lingua Gallorum Teutates dicitur qui

As noted by many scholars, this succinct description of the way the sacrifices to Teutates were performed is striking by its resemblance with one of the scenes depicted on the Cauldron of Gundestrup. On the plate depicting the "human army" led by the ram-horned serpent, a monumental figure can be seen seizing a man of smaller stature and plunging him upside down into what appears to be a barrel (See Fig. 2.1).[58]

The scene seems to imply that the sacrifice is done during preparations for war, as the human army parades before the giant figure, who may either be a Druid or Teutates himself. Perhaps the most striking element of this sacrifice, but also the one that affirms the nature of Teutates as the god of Being and Life, is the fact that it is performed without the shedding of blood. By suffocating a man plunged head-first into a liquid, the life of a living being is extinguished but his blood remains securely stored inside his flesh. What is offered to the god is man's life, his very being, rather than his blood. When the fire of Life has been quenched inside a man's body, the flesh and the blood that remain then belong to the Dark, as they are now only matter, without the light of the mind coming from the Bright nor the flow of life coming from the "middle realm."

It would seem that each one of the three realms of the Gaulish world and each one of the gods associated with them correspond to a particular manner by which men were sacrificed. The commentary on the *Pharsalia* indeed tells us that:

> Esus Mars is thus honored: a man is suspended in a tree until its limbs fall out.
>
> Teutates Mercury is thus honored among the Gauls: a man is introduced head-first into a barrel full [of liquid] so as to suffocate him.
>
> Taranis Dis Pater is honored among them in this man-

humano apud illos sanguine colebatur. Teutates Mercurius sic apud Gallos placatur: in plenum semicupium horno in caput demittitur ut ibi suffocetur." From: Hermann Usener, *Scholia in Lucani Bellum civile*, Page 32.

[58] The image on the cauldron has also been interpreted as a reference to the cauldron of the supreme god of the later Irish tradition: the *Dagda*, the "good god" who could resurrect men by plunging them into the wondrous vessel.



Figure 2.1: *What appears to be a sacrifice scene on the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

> ner: a few men are burned in a tub of wood. [59]

The author of this commentary here gives us one of the most precise descriptions of Celtic religious practices known to us. It not only corroborates the idea of the religious significance of the suffocation of the men sacrificed to Teutates but also the very association between the three gods and the three realms. Esus is offered flesh, which falls onto the Ground once it has begun to be decomposed, that is, once it is ready to be absorbed back into the great body of the Dark. Teutates is offered the life, the being itself of the living being, as the victims are suffocated in the barrel. Finally, Taranis the god of thunder and of the skies is given the smoke of the burning bodies, which soars into the Bright, carrying with it the mind of the deceased.

The very order of the description corresponds to an upward progression between the realms, starting with the Dark (𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌁𐌍𐌏𐌒 [dubnos]), followed by Life and Being (𐌁𐌉𐌕𐌏𐌖 [bitu]) and ending with the Bright (𐌀𐌋𐌁𐌉𐌏𐌒 [albios]). It confirms the central role of Teutates, god of Life and mediator between the Dark and the Bright, but traces of this general structure of the Gaulish World can also be found in the imprint it left in the insular tradition.

Welsh and Irish medieval literature, in particular, contain a recurrent theme that can be related to the relation between sacrifices and the ancient Celtic deities: the so-called threefold death, that is, the execution of a single man using three different ways, consecutively. An example of symbolic threefold death can be found in the *Aided Dhiarmada* ("The Death of King Hermot"), an early Irish text in which the death of the king is prophecized by a cleric after he himself wounded a man whose house he burned, a man whose final breath was expired in a pool a water:

> Nor from thyself nor from thy children will I take either Heaven or Earth . . . but the violent death which he there hath gotten by thee, that shall be the very one

[59] TBA. Original Latin: "Teutates Mercurius sic apud Gallos placatur: in plenum semicupium horno in caput demittitur ut ibi suffocetur. Hesus Mars sic placatur: homo in arbore suspenditur usque donec per cruorem merabra digesserit. Taranis Ditis pater hoc modo aput cos placatur: in alueo Iigneo aliquod homines cremantur." From: Hermann Usener, *Scholia in Lucani Bellum civile*, Page 32.

> which thou too shalt have: to be wounded [*guin*], and drowned [*bádud*], and burnt[*losccad*].[60]

The same exact Irish words are used in one of the most famous prayers authored by Saint Patrick, but in a reverse order, starting from the sky and progressing toward the earth:

> Christ to protect me to-day
> against poison, against burning [*loscud*],
> against drowning [*bádud*], against wounding [*guin*],
> so that there may come to me abundance of reward.[61]

These quotes all corroborate the link between the three types of death, the three realms, and the three gods associated with them. Teutates is the one to whom victims are drowned, the sacrifice that occurs without the shedding of blood. A threefold death would imply the honoring of the three deities at once, and thereby a celebration of the universe as a whole through a dedication linked to each one of the three realms. By drowning the victim, his last breath is offered to Teutates while his blood is kept inside the boundary marked by his skin, remaining for the time of the sacrifice between the Dark and the Bright, in the realm of Life and Being. This unusual way chosen to honor Teutates is itself a clue of his deeper nature. It shows that he is more than the "god of the people," if this "people" is to be understood in a narrow sense, with the limits of the Teuta being those of the dozens of Gallic tribes or even the Celts as an ethnic group in general.

In order to perceive the reason why Teutates is the recipient of the life, the being of the victims of the Druids of Gaul, one has to gain a better sight of the nature of the Teuta. This question can also directly be related to the role attributed to Teutates by the Romans, seeing him as the Gaulish equivalent of Mars, an adjudicator of the conflicts between men and between peoples. If Teutates is the "god of the tribe," or the "god of the Celtic

[60] English translation from: O'Grady, *Silva gadelica (I-XXXI) Vol. 2*, Page 32. (Text in brackets added); Original Old Irish: "cid fil ann tra ar sé acht ni benubsa || nem ná talam fort féir. ná for do clainn. acht in aidhed [*ms.* aig.] do fuair sin letsa bid si sin aidhed do gébasa .i. guin ocus bádud ocus losccad." From: O'Grady, *Silva gadelica (I-XXXI) Vol. 1*, Page 32.

[61] English translation from: Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus*, Page 357. (Text in brackets added); Original Old Irish: "Crīst domm imdegail indiu / ar neim ar loscud / ar bádud ar guin / condomthair ilar fochraice." From: ibid., Page 357.

people," it would imply that there would be as many gods as they were tribes or peoples. The "dominion" of each one of these gods would also be limited to these specific tribes or peoples. When the commentary on the *Pharsalia* describes the main Gaulish deities, Teutates is referred to as a unique god, contrasted with Esus and Taranis. If there is only one god of the Teuta, this may be because when the essence of the Teuta is clearly seen, one would realize that there is a single and unique Teuta. In order to see this, however, one must first take a step backward in the history of the Gaulish World, and take a deeper look at the meaning and origin of this word.

It was mentioned that the Gaulish word 𐌕𐌄𐌘𐌕𐌀 [teuta] comes from the Indo-European root *tewtéh$_2$ which already had the meaning of "people" as a group of men. It would seem that this word is itself derived from the root *teu(h$_2$) "to swell."[62] The modern Persian word توده [tōda], which is derived from *tewtéh$_2$, both designates a "heap," a "pile,"[63] and also the "masses" in the sense of the "common people." These etymologies may show us a deeper aspect of the nature of the Teuta, and through this, a better look at the place of Teutates in the Gaulish World.

The Teuta is primarily an organism, a mass that grows as it absorbs elements from the depths of the earth and receives the light of the skies. This mass swells with the flow of time, and it runs upon the face of the earth so as to occupy an increasingly larger place in the creation. As this organism begins to take gigantic proportions, different parts of it begin to grow increasingly distant, in space as well as in appearance. Peoples find their origin during this process. Once the work of the skies has eroded the memory of the common origin of all men, enmities may start to abound among different parts of this organism. The members of each people may now believe that *they* are the mass itself, the Teuta, and they may discard the being of other beings as insignificant or even as something noxious. Beyond its meaning as "a people" among countless "peoples," the Teuta may be the single mass from which all the "peoples" originate, but even further beyond this, the horizon of the Teuta may not be limited to man himself. Man ultimately shares the same blood as the other crea-

[62] Mallory and Adams, *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture*, Page 417.
[63] Pollard and Banks, *War and Sacrifice*, Page 92.

tures filling the earth. The point of origin of the swelling mass of which he is an infinitely small part is the genesis of life itself, the instant and place where the realm of Being and Life, the Bitu, sprouted from the Dark and began to separate it from the Bright, creating the crimson-colored realm of blood.

The Teuta encompasses one's "people," the men and women sharing one's land, blood, and culture, but it extends further than this. One's view of the Teuta reflects the horizon of one's world: few men will already contemplate the nature of their people. Even fewer will try to see beyond the boundaries of their people and look at what unites them with other peoples, with mankind in general, and even further, see that the mass of all the living beings populating the earth forms a single mass that continues to swell across the earth and the skies, space and time, as a single being caught between the Dark and the Bright. This mass, this being is Life itself. More than the "god of the people," Teutates is therefore the "god of Life," the being that emerges from the mass formed by all the living beings, even though men may reduce the extent of his body to what they see of him, to their own limited horizon.

When man has seen Teutates as more than the God of the People; when he has dis-covered the God of Being and Life itself (as Bitu), he may then begin to seek to know his will, beyond the will of one's own people. The will of Teutates then represents the direction taken by Life itself, a will whose nature is not directly given to man to contemplate or even to simply follow. In order for him to take his rightful place in the great play of the gods, he will have to strive to know the God of Life. He will have to enlarge his own horizon, to look beyond his own self, and beyond the welfare of his own people, race, or kind, and rather seek to gain a consciousness of the true extent and role of Life itself, and of the place that it occupies between the Dark and the Bright.

2.3 The Things of Life

The sprouting of the Tree of Life from the Dark opens up the clearing where beings can appear and live between the earth and the skies. The tree is itself one, continuously growing and renewing itself, but it shelters countless "things" that can also be seen in their individuality and their specificities so as to highlight the complex harmony of the "middle realm." These "things" are the living beings that fill the oceans, the earth and the sky, including the builder of the World: man himself.

Once one has begun to perceive the nature of the "middle realm" and its relation with the divine, one must then begin to look at the way the "things" of the world form parts of the whole of Life and Being, and what role do they play in the great game played by both man and the gods. Without the individuality of the living beings, the growth of the tree would be impossible. The movements, conflicts, antagonisms, and competition among the living beings is the main force driving its growth. Only through a striving between weight and counterweight, force and counter-force, can life itself not only continue but also grow upwards, towards the Bright that showers the living with its light.

Mankind is one of these "things," a branch of the Tree of Life that is driven to perpetuate its kind and to improve itself through the opposition and complementarity between the sexes: man and woman, which will now be examined.

2.3.1 Mankind

In the Gaulish World, a human being (ᒣᐃᑐᑎᓀᐃᑐᑕ [gdonios][64]) is seen as being born out of the earth (ᒣᐃᑐᑌ [gdū]), but he is also imparted with life. He belongs to Life and Being, the "middle realm" in which his power can be manifested. Reflecting the world-view of the early Celts, in which human beings are the dwellers of the "middle realm," "mankind" is in Middle Irish called *fir betho*, "the men of the world" / "the men of Bitu," which in Gaulish would be *ᖵᐃᑭᐃ ᕼᐃᑐᑕ [*viri bitos].[65] As it is the case with

[64] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*. Page 176.

[65] The Irish word used in this expression to designate human beings is also the one designating "males," in both Irish (*fer*) and Gaulish (ᖵᐃᑭᑕ [viros]),

many other kinds of living beings, mankind is divided according to two different sexes, each one of which has been blessed with different sets of strengths and weaknesses, and different roles to play for the fulfillment of the destiny of mankind.

Man and woman, male and female: a universal distinction that is found across all the peoples of the earth. Each one of these peoples nonetheless has interpreted the role of both sexes differently, according to the peculiarities of their World, the tradition handed to them by their ancestors or their own view of the creation. The World of the Gauls inevitably exercised a profound influence on what was expected of each one of the sexes among the Celts, and through the descriptions of the behavior of the Celtic men and women given to us by the ancient Greek and Romans sources, and archeology, a window can be opened toward this World, one which can reveal certain aspects of our own nature that have been concealed by our own worldview.

2.3.1.1 Man

The Gaulish word designating males is one that is directly inherited from the Proto-Indo-European tongue: 𐌅𐌉𐌓𐌏𐌂 [viros][66], also found in the Latin *vir*, from which the English adjective "virile" originates. Like in most parts of the earth, men were indeed associated with what is now called "virility": strength, courage, or sexual vigor. The Gaulish word is also homonymous with other virtues that may be perceived as characterizing what a man should be. Originally more distinct in early Indo-European, the root word for "man" and "truth" came to be written in the exact same manner in Gaulish: 𐌅𐌉𐌓𐌏𐌂 [viros][67]. Scholars have argued that the two words may have been pronounced differently, "truth" beginning with a long vowel, but regardless of this detail, this fusion of the two originally distinct roots may nonetheless have influenced the way the Celts saw themselves as "men."

A man, as 𐌅𐌉𐌓𐌏𐌂 [viros], may thus have fulfilled the inner

whereas than the aforementioned word 𐌂𐌃𐌏𐌍𐌉𐌏𐌂 [gdonios] designates human beings regardless of their sex, which is *duine* in Irish.

[66] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 379. Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 196.

[67] ibid., Pages 321–322.

calling of his own essence by being or becoming 𐌅𐌉𐌓𐌏𐌒 [viros],[68] which as an adjective means "loyal" in the language of the Gauls. From this same root, a quality can also be derived: *𐌅𐌉𐌓𐌉𐌐𐌏 [*virido-][69], which would have been "loyalty" or "virtue." Loyalty to whom or to what? The first loyalty is the one to one's kinsmen, to one's people. The Gauls were renowned for their capacity to forego their own interests, and even the grip that they had on life itself, in order to defend the whole of their kind. Strabo well describes this trait of the Celts:

> The entire race which now goes by the name of Gallic, or Galatic, is warlike, passionate, and always ready for fighting, but otherwise simple and not malicious. If irritated, they rush in crowds to the conflict, openly and without any circumspection . . . Their power consists both in the size of their bodies and also in their numbers. Their frankness and simplicity lead then easily to assemble in masses, each one feeling indignant at what appears injustice to his neighbour.[70]

Such a conduct, the rallying of all men to protect the whole of the people, without second-thought, represents the epitome of virtue. One's life is less important than the survival and the accomplishment of the whole. Disdaining the cunning, the greed, and the selfishness that have been embraced by many other peoples, the Celtic man is proud of his nature: prone to action rather than to debate, boldly rushing toward the enemy rather than stabbing him in the back, valuing honesty over wit. This boldness nevertheless does not go against the need to protect the other members of the Teuta. When the enemy cannot be vanquished, the survival of the people may come before the warrior's fearlessness and courage:

> Thus it is that they can so easily change their abode. They march in crowds in one collected army, or rather

[68] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 226.

[69] ibid., Page 226 and 341.

[70] English translation from: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. (§ 4.4); Original Greek: "Τὸ δὲ σύμπαν φῦλον, ὃ νῦν Γαλλικόν τε καὶ Γαλατικὸν καλοῦσιν, ἀρειμάνιόν ἐστι καὶ θυμικόν τε καὶ ταχὺ πρὸς μάχην, ἄλλως δὲ ἁπλοῦν καὶ οὐ κακόηθες. . . . Τῆς δὲ βίας τὸ μὲν ἐκ τῶν σωμάτων ἐστὶ μεγάλων ὄντων, τὸ δ᾽ ἐκ τοῦ πλήθους· συνίασι δὲ κατὰ πλῆθος ῥᾳδίως διὰ τὸ ἁπλοῦν καὶ αὐθέκαστον, συναγανακτούντων τοῖς ἀδικεῖσθαι δοκοῦσιν ἀεὶ τῶν πλησίον." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag.

> remove with all their families, whenever they are ejected by a more powerful force.[71]

This shows that the Gauls may not have been as simple-minded as the classical sources depict them. The simple is someone whose horizon is particularly narrow, seldom extending beyond the boundaries of his own interests and of his own self. To be able to relinquish one's will to the will of the Teuta shows a vision hardly compatible with a complete lack of reflection.

The well-being of the people nonetheless begins within one's home. A man is given a greater strength because he is called to defend the weaker elements within his house: women, children, or parents. This strength must nonetheless be exercised in order to remain. The bodies of the men are the rampart protecting the people as a whole, and if they are not in good shape, this wall will not resist the onslaught of the aggressors and all will perish. Thus did the Gauls ensure that their men did not indulge themselves in gluttony or idleness. As Strabo tells us: "they take great care not to become fat or big-bellied, and that if any young man exceeds the measure of a certain girdle, he is punished."[72] A prominent gut not only is detrimental to a man's health and the number of years that he will spend over the Ground, but also detrimental to the Teuta as a whole. Gluttony wastes food. It weakens the ability to defend the people, and hinders the progress of mankind. Impotence is antithetical to the nature of the Gaulish man. The very name of the land and of the people indeed exults "potency."

The name of the "Gaul" comes from the Celtic root *𐌃𐌀𐌋 [*gal][73] meaning "to be able"[74] The men of Gaul, the 𐌃𐌀𐌋𐌋𐌉

[71] English translation from: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. (§ 4.4); Original Greek: "διὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τὰς μεταναστάσεις αὐτῶν ῥαδίως ὑπάρχειν συμβαίνει, φερομένων ἀγεληδὸν καὶ πανστρατιᾷ, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ πανοικίων ἐξαιρόντων, ὅταν ὑπ᾽ ἄλλων ἐκβάλλωνται κρειττόνων." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag.

[72] English translation from: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. (§ 4.4); Original Greek: "ἀσκεῖν γὰρ αὐτοὺς μὴ παχεῖς εἶναι μηδὲ προγάστορας, τὸν δ᾽ ὑπερβαλλόμενον τῶν νέων τὸ τῆς ζώνης μέτρον ζημιοῦσθαι." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag.

[73] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 150. Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 167.

[74] The Celtic root *𐌃𐌀𐌋 [*gal] itself comes from an Indo-European root *gelH (See Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 150.), which can still be observed in modern Lithuanian for example: *Aš galiu* "I

[galli][75], saw themselves as the "strong ones," men able to achieve the goals that they or the gods gave them. Modern French preserved the root in the word *gaillard*, a familiar word used to refer to a large and vigorous man.[76] The source of this name may find its source in a lack of modesty of the men who first used it to refer to their people, but it may also be a sign that they saw themselves as being called to accomplish something, something more than the usual accomplishments of the Iron Age: gold, blood, and flesh. They collectively bore this name, as a people, and it would thus seem that something was expected of them, as a group, a purpose that remains unknown to us.

The Gauls were not only renowned for their aptitude on the battlefields but surprisingly enough also for the care they took of their appearance. The most fundamental way in which the appearance of a man is shown certainly is cleanliness, which is also heavily correlated with health. Marcellinus Ammianus tells us that:

> All of them with equal care keep clean and neat, and in those districts, particularly in Aquitania, no man or woman can be seen, be she never so poor, in soiled and ragged clothing, as elsewhere.[77]

No matter how low is one's condition, a decency of appearance is rarely an unachievable goal. Clothing, jewelry, or weapons: what man displays of himself is not only the manifestation of his own *ego*, but rather the face that is given to others to behold. A man's appearance honors or dishonors, not only himself, but through him also his kinsmen, the Teuta, and even the god of the people whose body he is part. This care for one's appearance can easily degenerate into a means of aggrandizing oneself, and ultimately lead a man to destroy his own manly character, but it can also lift

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can."

[75] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 150.

[76] In Latin, the word *gallus* means "rooster," and therefore the Gauls were associated to this animal by the men of the Empire. Appropriated by the descendants of the Gauls, the animal remains a symbol of the people of France.

[77] English translation from: Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus: Roman History, Volume I, Books 14-19*, N.Pag. (§ 15.12)); Original Latin: "tersi tamen pari diligentia cuncti et mundi, nec in tractibus illis maximeque apud Aquitanos poterit aliquis uideri uel femina licet perquam pauper ut alibi frustis squalere pannorum." From: ibid., N.Pag.

up the spirit of a people, by giving its members pride in who they are: not as mere individuals in competition with one another, but as a Teuta, the whole that they together form.

The cornerstone of man's ability to remain clean, soap, was also well known among the Celts and the Germans, at a time when Rome largely ignored this invention:

> There are many other medicines . . . of the Celts, which are men called Gauls, those alkaline substances made into balls, with which they cleanse their clothes, called soap, with which it is a very excellent thing to cleanse the body in the bath.[78]

Immersing his body into water and scrubbing his skin with soap, man renews the demarcating line between Life and the Dark by shedding the dead cells and the dirt, part of the earth, off his body. When he arises from the water, Life and Being once again stand out from the body of the Dark. The two realms are now unmingled, for a time at least, until the movements of the living being and the work of the skies have brought back the earth onto man's flesh, blurring the line between the living and the non-living, the "middle realm" and the Dark.

A man is called to embody the strength of the Teuta. He must display an image of beauty and power, combining a raw brutality necessary to face the enemies of the people with an attention to details that is the fruit of a long education. Man is at the forefront of the clash between Dark and Bright. He bears the body of the god of Life and Being, who maintains the balance between the two. If men fail to fulfill their duties toward the Teuta, the Tree of Life itself could crumble upon the earth, marking the end of the world.

Many enemies waited to destroy the *Keltia*, but man's worst enemy is always to be found in himself. As told by the queen of the Britons, Boudica, as her people began to revolt against the Roman invaders:

[78] English translation from: Aretaeus, *The Extant works of Aretaeus, the Cappadocian*, N.Pag. (§ 2.7.13); Original Greek: "φάρμακα δὲ ἄλλα μυρία ... τῶν Κελτέων, οἳ νῦν καλέονται Γάλλοι, τὰς λιτρώδεις τὰς ποιητὰς σφαίρας, ᾗσι Ρ΄ύπτουσι τὰς ὀθόνας, σάπων ἐπίκλην, τῇσι Ρ΄ύπτειν τὸ σκῆνος ἐν λουτρῷ ἄριστον: καὶ ἀνδράχνη καὶ ἀείζωον ξὺν ὄξεϊ, ἀτὰρ καὶ λαπάθου Ρ΄ιζέων ἀφέψημα ξὺν ἀπύρῳ θείῳ Ρ΄ύπτει καλῶς." From: ibid., N.Pag.)

> But, to speak the plain truth, it is we who have made ourselves responsible for all these evils, in that we allowed them to set foot on the island in the first place instead of expelling them at once as we did their famous Julius Caesar[79]

The Celtic queen saw that her Gaulish cousins submitted themselves to the yoke of Rome because of their own weaknesses: their disunion and their greed, which could easily be exploited by a cunning general such as Julius Caesar. The beginning of the demise of the independent Gaul can nonetheless be traced earlier. The ties between Gaul and Rome started with commerce, wine in particular. The sweet liquid may be seen as an important factor leading to the weakening of the Gauls and their subsequent submission. The Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60 B.C. – after 7 B.C.) tells us the following story concerning the beginning of the troubled relationship between the Gauls and wine, one that shows how they let themselves ensnared by the blood-colored nectar from the south:

> The Gauls at that time had no knowledge either of wine made from grapes or of oils such as is produced by our olive trees, but used for wine a foul-smelling liquor made from barley rotted in water, and for oil, stale lard, disgusting both in smell and taste. On that occasion, accordingly, when for the first time they enjoyed fruits which they had never before tasted, they got wonderful pleasure out of each; and they asked the stranger how each of these articles was produced and among what men. The Tyrrhenian told them that the country producing these fruits was large and fertile and that it was inhabited by only a few people, who were no better than women when it came to warfare; and he advised them to get these products no longer by purchase from others, but to drive out the present owners and enjoy the fruits as their own. Persuaded by these words, the Gauls came into Italy and to the Tyrrheni-

[79] English translation from: Cassius, *Dio Cassius: Roman History, Volume VIII, Books 61-70*, N.Pag. (Book 72); Original Greek: "ἡμεῖς δὲ δὴ πάντων τῶν κακῶν τούτων αἴτιοι, ὥς γε τἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, γεγόναμεν, οἵτινες αὐτοῖς ἐπιβῆναι τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς νήσου ἐπετρέψαμεν, καὶ οὐ παραχρῆμα αὐτούς, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸν Καίσαρα τὸν Ἰούλιον ἐκεῖνον, ἐξηλάσαμεν." From: ibid., N.Pag.

> ans known as the Clusians, from whence had come the man who had persuaded them to make war.[80]

Seduced by the sweetness of the grapes that contrasted with the stronger taste of the Gaulish beers, these men went south to conquer this people who had lost all virility and were "as women." Men of action rather than reflection, they thus displaced these effeminate men, without seeking to know the origin of the loss of their manly essence. Soon enough, they adopted the lifestyle of the men they conquered. They drank the sweet wine of the grapes. They ate bread with softened by olive oil, and thus fell into the trap of their predecessors. They were the first to be conquered by Rome, opposing little resistance to men who were now very similar to them, but who nonetheless were led by men of reflection, men who mastered their own mind as they did command their bodies. The southern sickness soon spread toward the north, affecting the Gaulish people as a whole. A couple of centuries later, Marcellinus Ammianus (A.D. 330–391/400) thus described the men of Gaul:

> It is a race greedy for wine, devising numerous drinks similar to wine, and some among them of the baser sort, with wits dulled by continual drunkenness (which Cato's saying pronounced a voluntary kind of madness) rush about in aimless revels, so that those words seem true which Cicero spoke when defending Fonteius: The Gauls henceforth will drink wine mixed with water, which they once thought poison.[81]

[80] English translation from: Halicarnassus, *The Roman antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus*, N.Pag. (§ 13.11); Original Greek: "Οἱ δὲ Κελτοὶ οὔτε οἶνον ἀμπέλινον εἰδότες τηνικαῦτα οὔτε ἔλαιον, οἷον αἱ παρ᾽ ἡμῖν ἐλαῖαι φέρουσιν, ἀλλ᾽ οἴνῳ μὲν χρώμενοι κριθῆς σαπείσης ἐν ὕδατι χυλῷ δυσώδει, ἐλαίῳ δὲ συείῳ στέατι πεπαλαιω μένῳ τήν τε ὀδμὴν καὶ τὴν γεῦσιν ἀτόπῳ, τότε δὲ πρῶτον ἀπολαύσαντες ὧν οὔπω ἐγεύσαντο καρπῶν, θαυμαστὰς ὅσας ἐφ᾽ ἑκάστῳ ἐλάμβανον ἡδονὰς καὶ τὸν ξένον ἠρώτων, πῶς τε γίνεται τούτων ἕκαστον καὶ παρὰ τίσιν ἀνθρώποις. Ὁ δὲ Τυρρηνὸς πρὸς αὐτούς φησιν, ὅτι γῆ μέν ἐστιν ἡ τούτους ἐκφέρουσα τοὺς καρποὺς πολλὴ καὶ ἀγαθή, νέμονται δὲ αὐτὴν ὀλίγοι τινὲς ἄνθρωποι καὶ τὰ εἰς πόλεμον οὐδὲν ἀμείνους γυναικῶν, ὑπέθετό τε αὐτοῖς μὴ δι᾽ ὠνῆς αὐτὰ παρ᾽ ἑτέρων ἔτι λαμβάνειν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκβαλόντας τοὺς τότε κυρίους ὡς οἰκεῖα καρποῦσθαι. τούτοις δὴ τοῖς λόγοις οἱ Κελτοὶ πειθόμενοι ἦλθον εἰς Ἰταλίαν καὶ Τυρρηνῶν τοὺς καλουμένους Κλουσίνους, ὅθεν ἦν καὶ ὁ πείσας αὐτοὺς πολεμεῖν." From: ibid., N.Pag.

[81] English translation from: Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus: Roman History, Volume I, Books 14-19*, N.Pag. (§ 15.12); Original Latin: ' Vini avidum genus, adfectans ad vini similitudinem multiplices potus et inter eos

The fierceness of the men of Gaul was dulled by the red liquid. Their blood was weakened by the pleasures of the senses brought from the south, the land of the sun, where the darkness of the earth is forgotten as man turns his face toward the bright sky. Thus did a large part of the Gauls forget that they were sons of the Dark, hardened by the inhospitality of the northern lands. The queen of the Britons paradoxically gives us the most accurate depiction of the manliness of the Celts, perhaps a sign that the men of these time already had given up on the appropriation of their own essence and the fulfillment of their destiny, as she describes the contrast between her people and the Romans:

> They cannot bear up under hunger, thirst, cold, or heat, as we can. They require shade and covering, they require kneaded bread and wine and oil, and if any of these things fail them, they perish; for us, on the other hand, any grass or root serves as bread, the juice of any plant as oil, any water as wine, any tree as a house.[82]

Both the men of Gaul and their insular cousins would ultimately succumb to the power of the eagle, forgetting the Dark to become blind servants of the Bright. This nonetheless does not imply that the Celtic people as whole was vanquished. Numerous men continued to carry the body of the god of the people, allowing it to pass through centuries and millennia, even surviving the fall of the Empire. The essence of what being a man implies can still be re-dis-covered. It waits to be appropriated by the descendants of the Gauls and Britons.

The core of the manly essence is not the strength of the body, the ability to work in order to provide for one's wife and children, or the power to submit others to one's own will. It rather is the ability to see beyond the horizon of the self so as to strengthen the

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humiles quidam obtunsis ebrietate continua sensibus, quam furoris voluntariam speciem esse Catoniana sententia definivit, raptantur discursibus vagis, ut verum illud videatur quod ait defendens Fonteium Tullius Gallos post haec dilutius esse poturos quod illi venenum esse arbitrabantur." From: Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus: Roman History, Volume I, Books 14-19*, N.Pag.

[82] English translation from: Cassius, *Dio Cassius: Roman History, Volume VIII, Books 61-70*, N.Pag. (Book 72); Original Greek: "ὅτι οὔτε λιμὸν οὔτε δίψος, οὐ ψῦχος οὐ καῦμα ὑποφέρουσιν ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς, ἀλλ᾽ οἱ μὲν καὶ σκιᾶς καὶ σκέπης σίτου τε μεμαγμένου καὶ οἴνου καὶ ἐλαίου δέονται, κἂν ἄρα τι τούτων αὐτοὺς ἐπιλίπῃ διαφθείρονται, ἡμῖν δὲ δὴ πᾶσα μὲν πόα καὶ ῥίζα σῖτός ἐστι, πᾶς δὲ χυμὸς ἔλαιον, πᾶν δὲ [6] ὕδωρ οἶνος, πᾶν δὲ δένδρον οἰκία." From: ibid., N.Pag.

Teuta as a whole. This epitome of manly virtue therefore is the selfless sacrifice of one's life for the defense, the fortification, or the growth of the Teuta. Boudica once again precisely describes this manly nature:

> Those over whom I rule are Britons, men that know not how to till the soil or ply a trade, but are thoroughly versed in the art of war and hold all things in common, even children and wives.[83]

Across the entire earth, a man's most jealously treasured possession is the body of his wife, and the paternity of his children one of his main sources of pride. More than an unbridled submission to the lust of the flesh, such a practice may be a sign of a dissolution of man's *ego* into the being of the Teuta as a whole.[84] The union of the bodies and the disdain for personal property can strengthen the body of the people, which is often weakened by the sterile strives involving desire and jealousy. Voluntarily holding all things in common with his brethren, a man does not necessarily relinquish his manly nature: on the contrary, it may liberate his essence, freeing him from his selfish desires that are a source of enmity within the Teuta and allowing him to appropriate the role he is destined to play, as a part of the body of the people. Man, however, is not alone: the other sex, the other half of mankind, stands by his side.

2.3.1.2 Woman

Being and Life are born out of the Dark, but Life is the source of its own perpetuation. Human beings are born out of other human beings who have preceded them, and all these beings share the peculiarity of being women. The life of man begins in the womb of his mother, which received the seed of his father, and it is when he comes out of her flesh that he begins a life of his own. A "girl," a young woman who is of childbearing age, is thus called ᎢᎬᏁᎬᎢᎪ [geneta][85] in the language of the Gauls: the one who begets chil-

[83] English translation from: ibid., N.Pag. (Book 72); Original Greek: "σημεῖον δέ, ᾄδει καὶ κιθαρίζει καὶ καλλωπίζεται, ἀλλὰ ἀνδρῶν Βρεττανῶν, γεωργεῖν μὲν ἢ δημιουργεῖν οὐκ εἰδότων, πολεμεῖν δὲ ἀκριβῶς μεμαθηκότων, καὶ τά τε ἄλλα πάντα κοινὰ καὶ παῖδας καὶ γυναῖκας κοινὰς νομιζόντων." From: ibid., N.Pag.

[84] The practice is also mentioned by Caesar, cf. *The Gallic Wars* § 5.14.4.

[85] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 157.

dren, the source of the TENOC [genos][86], the clan, her people. A "woman" was called *BENA [*bena][87], which is derived from the same root, showing the importance of the women's capacity to produce descendants who will take upon them the charge of the carrying of the body of the people when the preceding generations would have exhausted their strengths.

As a woman gave us the most inspired words concerning the essence of a man's nature, his "manliness" (OIr. *ferdhacht*), the essence of a woman's nature (OIr. *bandacht*), according to the Gaulish world, may perhaps best be found in the words of a Gaulish man. The Greek and Roman historians have not passed on to us any direct description made by the men of Gaul of their women, but artifacts bearing a series of short inscriptions addressed to young Gaulish women have been dis-covered in the ground of the *Keltia*. Made on small counterweights used to facilitate the use of looms, these inscriptions are clearly made by men who wished to court the young women who would stay at home to weave while the men were busy with other tasks, in a frank manner that should not surprise us. Less eloquent than the speech of the queen of the Britons, these words show us how Gaulish men saw the women around them. Here are some of these inscriptions (written in Gallo-Latin alphabet):

NATA VIMPI | CURMI DA
nata vimpi | curmi da
Beautiful girl | give (me some) beer.[88]

MONI GNATHA GABI | BUÐÐUTTON IMON
moni gnatha gabi | buðdutton imon
(Come) my girl, take my little counterweight(?).[89]

GENETA IMI | DAGA VIMPI
geneta imi | daga vimpi
I am a young woman, good and beautiful.[90]

NATA VIMPI | POTA VINUM
nata vimpi | pota v(in)um

[86] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 158.
[87] ibid., Page 158.
[88] Lambert, *Recueil des inscriptions gauloises, 2, fasc. 2*, Pages 323 (L–112).
[89] ibid., Pages 330 (L–119).
[90] ibid., Pages 332 (L–120).

Beautiful girl, drink (some) wine![91]

Certainly reflecting a universal trait of mankind in general, women are desired by men for their beauty, perhaps even more than for their ability to bear children. Men are valued for the strength of their body, while women are praised for their appearance, as much among the Celts as among most peoples of the Iron Age. The kindling of the flames of desire in the heart of men is one of the main driving forces motivating men to better themselves. The men led by these flames often act without reason, rarely expanding their horizon beyond the boundaries of their own selfish interests. The incomparable efficiency of the female beauty to drive men to surpass themselves can nonetheless benefit the Teuta as a whole. One can be driven toward a destination without realizing what this destination is. Women themselves may take great care of their appearance so as to highlight their beauty, doing so to puff up their own *ego*, and yet still unknowingly perform what they were called to do by nature itself, fulfilling their part for the growth and the strengthening of the Teuta.

In these inscriptions, whose motivation is all too clear, one element nonetheless stands out. A woman is not supposed to merely be an embodiment of beauty itself, she is also meant to be ΔATA [daga], "good." Beauty is dis-covered by the eyes, but a good heart is felt by the mind. It is the spiritual and behavioral pendant of the beauty of the flesh, and as beauty is always given to others to see, a good heart offers itself to others and is oblivious to any selfish needs. The Greek historian Plutarch gives us the following example of a virtuous woman of Galatia, a region of Greece inhabited by immigrants from Gaul:

> Stratonica knowing that her husband wanted children of his own body to succeed in his kingdom, she being barren persuaded him to beget a child on another woman, and subject it to her tutelage. Deiotarus admiring her proposal, committed all to her care upon that account. She provided a comely virgin for him from among the captives, Electra by name, and brought her to lie with Deiotarus. The children begotten of her she educated very tenderly and magnificently, as if they

[91] ibid., Pages 333 (L–121).

had been her own.[92]

The woman accepted her barrenness and not only cast aside her jealousy so that her husband would have descendants but also raised these children with benevolence. As shown by this example, for her to be "good" was to play her part in the whole of the Teuta, no matter whether she was conscious of the implications of her actions or not. The body of the people thrives when its members are "good," and it wastes away when they are "bad" (Fem. 𐌃𐌓𐌏𐌖𐌊𐌀 [druca][93]). Harmony between the sexes fortifies them both. It leads to a swelling of the body of the people, which can then cover larger expanses of land and contribute to the growth of Life as a whole.

There would be no human beings without the ability of women to give birth, and there would be no birth if men were not irremediably drawn toward women, seduced by their beauty and their virtue. These feminine qualities nonetheless do not imply that the Celtic woman is meant to be a mere image of these divine attributes, motionless and fragile as a crystal sculpture. The Celtic women were renowned among their southern neighbors for their fearlessness. Diodorus Siculus tells us that "the women of the Gauls are not only like the men in their great stature but they are a match for them in courage as well."[94] Women certainly were subservient to the men of their household, but when the men failed to uphold their duty commanding them to give their lives to defend their people, this duty could also fall on them. They were therefore known to be present near the men on the battlefield, ready to fill the ranks of the dead or to chastise cowards, as in this depiction

[92] English translation from: Plutarch and Goodwin, *Plutarch's Morals*, N.Pag. (*Mulierum virtutes* Ch. 21); Original Greek: "Παρέσχε δ΄ ἡ Γαλατία καὶ Στρατονίκην τὴν Δηιοτάρου καὶ Χιομάραν τὴν Ὀρτιάγοντος ἀξίας μνήμης γυναῖκας· ἡ μὲν οὖν Στρατονίκη δεόμενον γνησίων παίδων ἐπὶ διαδοχῇ τῆς βασιλείας ἐπισταμένη τὸν ἄνδρα, μὴ τίκτουσα δ΄ αὐτὴ συνέπεισεν ἐξ ἑτέρας γυναικὸς παιδοποιησάμενον αὐτῇ τὸ παιδίον περιιδεῖν ὑποβαλλόμενον. Τοῦ δὲ Δηιοτάρου τήν τε γνώμην θαυμάσαντος καὶ πᾶν ἐπ΄ αὐτῇ ποιησαμένου, παρθένον εὐπρεπῆ παρασκευάσασα τῶν αἰχμαλώτων ὄνομα Ἠλέκτραν συνεῖρξε τῷ Δηιοτάρῳ καὶ τοὺς γενομένους παῖδας ὥσπερ γνησίους αὐτῆς ἔθρεψε φιλοστόργως καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς." From: Plutarch and Babbitt, *Moralia*, N.Pag.

[93] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 105.

[94] D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.32); Original Greek: "Αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες τῶν Γαλατῶν οὐ μόνον τοῖς μεγέθεσι παραπλήσιοι τοῖς ἀνδράσιν εἰσίν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῖς ἀλκαῖς ἐνάμιλλοι." From: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

given to us by Plutarch:

> Most of the Ambrones were cut down there in the stream where they were all crowded together, and the river was filled with their blood and their dead bodies; the rest, after the Romans had crossed, did not dare to face about, and the Romans kept slaying them until they came in their flight to their camp and waggons. Here the women met them, swords and axes in their hands, and with hideous shrieks of rage tried to drive back fugitives and pursuers alike, the fugitives as traitors, and the pursuers as foes; they mixed themselves up with the combatants, with bare hands tore away the shields of the Romans or grasped their swords, and endured wounds and mutilations, their fierce spirits unvanquished to the end.[95]

When the body of the Teuta is cut open and its lifeblood is poured back into the soil, the women have nothing left to lose. Without the men, they would be enslaved and dishonored. They therefore fearlessly rush into battle, embracing their fate and longing to join their parents who dwell in the great womb of the Dark.

To have a "good-life," to be 𐊀𐊗𐊕𐊍 𐊁𐊉𐊍 [dago-bios][96], does not imply that this life should be long. It is "good" if it fulfills the essence of what it means to be a human being. As with their vision of the creation in general, it would seem that the demarcation between the roles of the two sexes among the Celts was not as clear-cut as it was among their southern neighbors. According to Cassius Dio Cocceianus, Boudica herself would have established a link between the higher consideration enjoyed by the Gallic women and the fact that they held all things in common, including children and women. Because of this, women "possess the same valour as

[95] English translation from: Plutarch and Perrin, *Plutarch's Lives*, N.Pag. (*Mulierum virtutes* § 19.6–7); Original Greek: "Καὶ πλεῖστοι μὲν αὐτοῦ περὶ τὸ ῥεῖθρον ὠθούμενοι κατ᾽ ἀλλήλων ἐπαίοντο καὶ κατεπίμπλασαν φόνου καὶ νεκρῶν τὸν ποταμόν, τοὺς δὲ διαβάντες οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι μὴ τολμῶντας ἀναστρέφειν ἔκτεινον, ἄχρι τοῦ στρατοπέδου καὶ τῶν ἁμαξῶν φεύγοντας. Ἐνταῦθα δ᾽ αἱ γυναῖκες ἀπαντῶσαι μετὰ ξιφῶν καὶ πελέκεων, δεινὸν τετριγυῖαι καὶ περίθυμον, ἠμύνοντο τοὺς φεύγοντας ὁμοίως καὶ τοὺς διώκοντας, τοὺς μὲν ὡς προδότας, τοὺς δ᾽ ὡς πολεμίους, ἀναπεφυρμέναι μαχομένοις καὶ χερσὶ γυμναῖς τούς τε θυρεοὺς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀποσπῶσαι καὶ τῶν ξιφῶν ἐπιλαμβανόμεναι, καὶ τραύματα καὶ διακοπὰς σωμάτων ὑπομένουσαι, μέχρι τελευτῆς ἀήττητοι τοῖς θυμοῖς." From: ibid., N.Pag.

[96] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 78.

the men,"[97] but this does not imply a denial of the differences between men and women. The art of war has to be mastered by men first, because their superior physical force, but women are also given an important role to play in all things, including warfare itself. Different sources tell us that the women of Gaul arbitrated conflicts:

> There arose a very grievous and irreconcilable contention among the Celts ... The women placing themselves between the armies, took up the controversies, argued them so accurately, and determined them so impartially, that an admirable friendly correspondence and general amity ensued, both civil and domestic. Hence the Celts made it their practice to take women into consultation about peace or war, and to use them as mediators in any controversies that arose between them and their allies.[98]

Men were in charge of war, women in charge of peace. Both are necessary to ensure the survival and growth of the Teuta. War weeds out of the dross of Being. It breaks the weakest branches of the Tree of Life and discards them onto the Ground, thereby contributing to the strengthening of Life itself. Without peace, the Tree of Life would nonetheless destroy itself, and the body of the Teuta would be dissolved as each one of its cells would fight all the other, thereby killing the being that emerges from the unity and cooperation of the living. Men incarnate the virile power of creation and destruction, while women embody the hand that is meant to focus this power for the edification of the Teuta. The two poles of mankind, when they are in productive tension with one another, in harmony, strengthen each other, as they fortify the whole that they form.

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[97] English translation from: Cassius, *Dio Cassius: Roman History, Volume VIII, Books 61-70*, N.Pag. (Book 72); Original Greek: "καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐκείνων τὴν αὐτὴν τοῖς ἄρρεσιν ἀρετὴν ἐχουσῶν." From: ibid., N.Pag.

[98] English translation from: Plutarch and Goodwin, *Plutarch's Morals*, N.Pag. (*Mulierum virtutes* Ch. 6); Original Greek: "Κελτοῖς ... στάσις ἐμπεσοῦσα δεινὴ καὶ δυσκατάπαυστος εἰς πόλεμον ἐμφύλιον προῆλθεν. αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ὅπλων γενόμεναι καὶ παραλαβοῦσαι τὰ νείκη διήτησαν οὕτως ἀμέμπτως καὶ διέκριναν, ὥστε φιλίαν πᾶσι θαυμαστὴν καὶ κατὰ πόλεις καὶ κατ᾽ οἴκους γενέσθαι πρὸς πάντας. ἐκ τούτου διετέλουν περὶ τε πολέμου καὶ εἰρήνης βουλευόμενοι μετὰ τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τὰ πρὸς τοὺς συμμάχους ἀμφίβολα δι᾽ ἐκείνων βραβεύοντες." From: Plutarch and Babbitt, *Moralia*, N.Pag.

The alliances and conflicts between man and woman parallel the tension between the Dark and the Bright, which is embodied in Life and Being, the "middle realm." Without a harmonious balance between them, they do not give any fruit. When the Dark meets the Bright, Being appears as the blood-colored sky that proclaims the transition between day and night, night and day, and when a harmony of the mind and the flesh occurs between a man and a woman, the fruit of this union is a living being, a child born covered in blood who represents a synthesis between his father and his mother.

Women are therefore more than "a helper" to men, a subservient creature whose relative weakness of the body would render inferior. Their essence is the necessary counterweight to the masculine force that creates and destructs. They not only ensure the perpetuation of the Teuta through child-bearing: they ensure that the Tree of Life does not smother itself by an unbridled growth and a show of force. Their own nature leads them to naturally occupy certain roles in the daily life of the people: as shown by the aforementioned counterweight used in the weaving of fabrics, the domestic works were the task of women, who were constantly burdened by the nurturing of the children they carried in their womb, making them ill-fitted to work in the fields, to hunt, to mine, or to travel for commerce or warfare. The home is the realm of the woman, the secluded space that provides safety and warmth for the family as a whole. She cooks and weaves for both the men and the women of the house, restoring their strength and protecting them from the harshness of what lies outside its threshold. If her duty is not fulfilled, discord then enters the house, the strength of the men lacks direction, and all is soon bound to crumble.

The differences between men and women is a source of strength, which is manifested when the two poles are willing and able to embrace these differences, highlighting the contrast between them and fulfilling the part they have been given. If either one of them attempts to deny these differences or to blur the contrast between them, mankind as a whole then becomes blind to its own essence. Without contrast, meaning disappears and all that is left is a shapeless and colorless chasm. Without the distinction between night and day, there is no dusk and dawn. Without Dark and Bright, there is no "middle realm," and without man and woman, and the tension between them, there is no desire between them,

no union, and therefore no new life begotten as its fruit. Life itself depends on the preservation of this tension.

2.3.2 The Dog

Man certainly stands out from the other creatures found on the earth, but his own life is sustained through the support of the other branches of the Tree of Life, the other beings that provide him food for his sustenance. Man must indeed pluck the fruits hanging on the other branches so that his own kind would not only survive, but also grow in strength and importance. For him, the usefulness of the other branches is nonetheless not limited to the eating of their fruits. He can enjoy the sight and the perfume of flowers for their beauty, as he can be gladdened by the songs of the birds that are heard throughout the forests. Having spent a considerable number of years sharing the surface of the earth with various creatures, man also established a closer bond with some of them. Seing in them more than food or a source of delight for the senses, man may begin to tame the wild beasts of the land. Slowly beginning to trust in man's benevolence and authority, these beasts may share man's dwelling places and even become part of his household. For the Gauls as for countless other peoples of the earth, the dog is the creature that developed the strongest bond to mankind.

Dogs have been vilified by different cultures, but it is clear that this was not the case among the ancient Celts. According to Cassios Dio, Boudica herself used this animal as a metaphor for her own people:

> Furthermore, this region is familiar to us and is our ally, but to them it is unknown and hostile. As for the rivers, we swim them naked, whereas they do not across them easily even with boats. Let us, therefore, go against them trusting boldly to good fortune. Let us show them that they are hares and foxes trying to rule over dogs and wolves.[99]

[99] English translation from: Cassius, *Dio Cassius: Roman History, Volume VIII, Books 61-70*, N.Pag. (§ 62b.5.6); Original Greek: "καὶ μὴν καὶ τὰ χωρία ταῦτα ἡμῖν μὲν συνήθη καὶ σύμμαχα, ἐκείνοις δὲ δὴ καὶ ἄγνωστα καὶ πολέμια: καὶ τοὺς ποταμοὺς ἡμεῖς μὲν γυμνοὶ διανέομεν, ἐκεῖνοι δὲ οὐδὲ πλοίοις

For the ancient Celts, dogs were not mere "pets" bred for their beauty or to keep company to those staying inside the house. They were ferocious animals that would be feared by both men and beasts alike. Contrary to the fox, who slays stealthily and cunningly in the shadows of the dawn, the dog barks, announcing its presence to the enemy while fearlessly charging, ready to maul its prey. The dog reflects the image that the Gauls had of themselves: frank, despising ruses, which are a way to avoid direct confrontations.

Dogs do not seem to be directly associated to the divine in the Gaulish World, contrary to the stag, for example. This can easily be explained by the fact that these animals shared the living space of man for millennia, and that their proximity to man chased away the aura of the divine that followed the creatures whose sight was far less common, such as serpents, stags, or even wild boars. As the French archaeologist Salomon Reinach tells us: "if totemism causes the domestication of animals, this domestication, in turn, makes it disappear."[100] The Gauls thus do not seem to have sacralized this animal, which was honored for its usefulness, but which could also be butchered if the need arose. Diodorus Siculus, in a description of Gallic manners, tells us that: "When they dine they all sit, not upon chairs, but upon the ground, using for cushions the skins of wolves or of dogs,"[101] showing that the animal was not the object of a taboo.

Even though they are not seen as associated with the divine by themselves, dogs are nonetheless very present in the representations of the gods. On the Cauldron of Gundestrup, the animal can be seen on a majority of the silver plates: he submissively approaches Cernunnos; he accompanies the sacrifices of the bulls; he is found on the breast of the celestial queen... but also at the side of Teutates or the Druid (?) performing a ritual drowning

ῥᾳδίως περαιοῦνται. ἀλλ᾽ ἴωμεν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ θαρροῦντες. δείξωμεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι λαγωοὶ καὶ ἀλώπεκες ὄντες κυνῶν καὶ λύκων ἄρχειν ἐπιχειροῦσιν." From: ibid., N.Pag.

[100] TBA. Original French: "si le totémisme provoque la domestication des animaux, cette domestication, à son tour, le fait disparaître." From: Reinach, *Cultes, mythes et religions*, N.Pag.

[101] D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.28); Original Greek: "δειπνοῦσι δὲ καθήμενοι πάντες οὐκ ἐπὶ θρόνων, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὑποστρώμασι χρώμενοι λύκων ἢ κυνῶν δέρμασι." From: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.



Figure 2.2: *Dog on a helmet on the Cauldron of Gundestrup (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).*

in his honor, with a man plunged upside-down into a barrel (See Fig. 2.2). Later, in Gallo-Roman times, a dog would frequently be found at the side of the god named ϹΟΥΚΕΛΛΟϹ [sucellos], the "good striker" holding a hammer in one hand and a small cauldron on the other, which may perhaps find its origin in the "god of the people."

A sign indicating that dogs may also be directly associated with Teutates may also be found in the aforementioned representation of the ritual drowning. The large man performing the sacrifice to Teutates, or Teutates himself, is shown wearing an unusual head-covering: a tight-fitting helmet or a hat with what appears to be a dog tail hanging from the top. The Gauls were known to wear helmets with representations of animals sculpted on top of them, especially in battle, as it is done by the horsemen present at the right of the sacrifice scene, but it would seem that the "dog-tail" helmet of the Cauldron is unique. The link between the god of the Teuta and the four-legged creature may lie in their dual relations to life and death.

Teutates has been shown to possess three different aspects: he is the god of the people, the god of blood, and the god of Life and Being itself. He embodies the essence of the "middle realm," the Tree of Life which is the theatre in which the lives of men is played, between their birth and their death. When a sacrifice

is performed in the honor of the "god of Life," the human being sacrificed for the Teuta sees his life extinguished, but his blood is retained inside his flesh as he is plunged into the barrel until his lungs are filled with the appropriate liquid. On the battlefield, the "god of blood" is honored by the display of the red river of life that covers the Ground before it runs back into the Dark, bringing attention to the glorious event of the dusk of human lives. Man's lifeblood is the symbol of both life and death, as it inconspicuously flows during life and it is only seen when this life nears its end.

The nature of the dog may make it the ideal companion to the "god of blood." If Teutates is the god of Life, seen as a single organism, as what lives through the birth, the life, and the death of the individual human beings forming its body, the dog represents his right hand. The animal indeed fulfills a dual role toward Life itself: it is given the task to both protect life and to extinguish it.

Concerning the dogs of Gaul, the Roman writer Grattius Faliscus tells us that:

> A thousand different countries provide dogs that can be used for hunting, and each possesses its own personality. The dog of Media, which is untamed, is fierce in battle. In a land far remote from them, dogs also made the Celts renowned.[102]

The blood-hound assists its master to track his preys, the creatures that are bound to die in order to feed their bodies. It runs through the forest, guided by his eyes or the scent of the target, relentlessly pursuing it until it has inserted its fangs deep into its neck, tasting of the red water of life before this life is extinguished. As the "good-striker" who can take a life in the blink of an eye by a single swing of his hammer, the dog can bring death with a single bite.

Dogs, however, are not only blood-hounds. They can protect life as easily as they can take it. The ferocious breeds of the Gauls were indeed not only fit to protect the flocks from foxes and wolves: they were also deemed worthy to protect the leaders of the people. The Greek historian Appian (A.D. 95 –- A.D. 165) mentions their role in the following passage:

[102] TBA. Original Latin: "Mille canim patriae, ductique ab origine mores / Cuique sua: magna indocilis dat praelia Medus, / Magnaque diversos extollit gloria Celtas." From: C. Siculus and Nisard, *Oeuvres complètes*, Page 781.

> The chiefs of the Salyi, a nation vanquished by the Romans, took refuge with the Allobroges ... When he was passing through the territory of the Salyi, an ambassador of Bituitus, king of the Allobroges, met him, arrayed magnificently and followed by attendants likewise arrayed, and also by dogs; for the barbarians of this region use dogs also as body-guards.[103]

Dogs preserve lives and take lives, serving their masters and through them, the Teuta as a whole. The dog does not dig the earth, the body of the Dark, and its eyes are not turned toward the skies, the Bright. The horizontality of its own body, from its snout until the tip of its tails, proclaims its destiny, which is to be completely at the service of the "middle realm," the red line of the dawn and the dusk between night and day, the river of blood that flows between Dark and Bright.

Covering his head with a head-covering bearing a dog-tail, the man performing the sacrifice to Teutates declares himself a servant of the god, just as the dogs serve him by trimming and protecting certain branches of the Tree of Life, ensuring an ideal growth. Centuries after the conquest of Gaul, the insular tradition would recount the story of a man who took upon himself the charge of a dog. This man would later become the most famous hero of the ancient Irish tradition, and he is still known by the name of this dog: *Cú Chulainn*, Culand's Hound.

The establishment of parallels between the Gaulish World and the medieval insular tradition is always tempting, but one should always keep in mind the fact that the two worlds were separated by centuries and hundreds or miles and that the clues indicating a common Celtic filiation between the two worlds are very rare and uncertain. The story of Culand's Hound is worthy to be mentioned here mainly because of the way it describes the role played by hounds in the lives of the medieval Celts. The story itself cannot be directly related to the nature of the "middle realm" of the Gaulish world, but the place of the dogs in both worlds certainly would

[103] English translation from: Cassius, *The Foreign Wars*, N.Pag. (§ 5.28); Original Greek: "ὅτι οἱ Σαλύων δυνάσται, τοῦ ἔθνους ἡττηθέντος ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων, ἐς Ἀλλόβριγας κατέφυγον ... ᾧ παροδεύοντι τὴν τῶν Σαλύων ἐντυγχάνει πρεσβευτὴς Βιτοίτου βασιλέως τῶν Ἀλλοβρίγων, ἐσκευασμένος τε πολυτελῶς, καὶ δορυφόροι παρείποντο αὐτῷ κεκοσμημένοι καὶ κύνες: δορυφοροῦνται γὰρ δὴ καὶ πρὸς κυνῶν οἱ τῇδε βάρβαροι." From: Cassius, *The Foreign Wars*, N.Pag.

not have been radically transformed, allowing us to establish some parallels.

The story begins as Conchobor, the king, came to the house of Culand the smith. The king had previously invited a young boy named Septanta to join him to the stronghold of the smith, a boy who would come alone, after the king. Then:

> They began to drink and make merry. Culand asked Conchobor: 'Good now, O King, have you appointed anyone to follow you tonight to this stronghold?' 'I have not' said Chonchobor for he did not remember the little boy he had appointed to come after him. 'Why so?' asked Conchobor. 'I have a good bloodhound [Árchú] and when his dogchain is taken off no traveller or wayfarer dares come into the same canton as he, and he recognises no one but myself. His strength is such that he can do the work of a hundred'. Then said Conchobor. 'Let the bloodhound be loosed for us that he may guard the canton.' His dog-chain was loosed from the bloodhound and he made a swift circuit of the canton and he came to the mound where he was wont to be while guarding the dwelling, and he lay there with his head on his paws. And wild, savage and here, rough, surly and battlesome was he who lay there.[104]
>
> ... But the little boy went on the track of the company until he reached the house of Culand the smith. He began to shorten the way as he went with his playthings. When he reached the green before the

[104] English translation from: *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster* ("CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts"), text in brackets added; Original Old Irish: " Ocus tánic Conchobor iar sin co tech Culaind cerdda. Ro frithláiled in rí, & ro fíadaiged ar grádaib & dánaib & dligedaib & úaslecht & caínbésaib. Ro hecrait aíne & úrlúachair fóthu. Gabsat for ól & for aíbnius. Ro iarfacht Culand do Chonchobur: 'Maith a rí, inra dális nech innocht it díaid don dún sa?' 'Níra dálius omm,' bar Conchobor, dáig níba cuman dó in mac bec dálastar 'na díaid. 'Cid són?' bar Conchobor. 'Árchú maith fil ocum. Á fúaslaicthir a chonarach dé, ní laimthanoch tasciud do óentríchait chét fris do fir chúardda nó imthechta, & ní aichne nech acht missi fodessin. Feidm cét and do nirt.' And sin atbert Conchobor: 'Oslaicther dún dond árchoin coro imdegla in tríchait cét.' Ra fúaslaiced dind árchoin a chonarach & fochuir lúathchúaird in tríchait cét, & tánic connice in forud i mbíd ic comét na cathrach & baí and sain & a chend ara mácaib." From: Ibid.

stronghold where Culand and Conchobor were, he threw away all his playthings in front of him except his ball alone. The bloodhound perceived the little boy and bayed at him, and the baying of the bloodhound was heard throughout all the countryside. And it was not a sharing out for a feast the hound was minded to make of the boy but rather to swallow him entire past the wall of his chest and the breadth of his throat and the midriff of his breast. The boy had no means of defence, but he made a cast of the ball and it went through the gaping mouth of the bloodhound and carried all his entrails out through the back way, and the boy then seized him by two legs and dashed him against the standing-stone so that he was scattered into pieces on the ground. Conchobor had heard the baying of the hound. 'Alas, my warriors' said Conchobor, 'would that we had not come to enjoy this feast.' 'Why so?' asked they all. 'The little boy who arranged to come after me, my sister's son, Setanta mac Sualtaim, has been killed by the hound.' All the famous Ulstermen rose with one accord.[105]

... And Culand came forth and saw his bloodhound lying in scattered pieces. His heart beat against his breast. He went across into the stronghold then. 'I welcome your arrival, little boy' said Culand, 'for the sake of your mother and your father, but I do not welcome your arrival for your own sake.' 'Why are you angry, with the boy?' asked Conchobor. 'Would

[105] Original Old Irish: "Luid dano in mac bec i slichtlurg na slúag co ránic tech Culaind cerda. Gabais icc athgarddigud na sliged reme dá adbenaib ániusa. Ó ránic cofaidche in dúnaid i mbaí Culand & Conchobor, focheird a adbena uile riam acht a liathróit nammá. Rathaigid in t-árchú in mac mbec ocus glomais fair co clos fosnaib túathaib uili gloimm inn árchon. Ocus ní raind fri fes ba háil dó acht a slucud i n-óenfecht dar compur a chléib & dar farsiung a brágat & dar loing a ochta. Ocus ní baí lasin mac cóir n-imdegla reme acht focheird róut n-urchair din liathróit conas tarla dar gincráes a brágat dond árchoin co ruc a mboí di fobaig inathair and dar' iarcomlai, & gebis i ndíb cossaib é & tuc béim de immun corthe co tarla 'na gabtib rointi im thalmain. Atchúala Conchobor gloimm inn árchon. 'Amae a ócu,' bar Conchobor, 'ní ma táncamar d'ól na fledi se.' 'Cid són?' bar cách. 'In gilla bec ra dál im díaid, mac mo sethar, Sétanta mac Sualtaim, dorochair lasin coin.' Atragatar i nn-óenfecht uli Ulaid ollbladacha." From: Ibid.

> that you had not come to consume my drink and eat my food, for my substance now is substance wasted, my livelihood a lost livelihood. Good was the servant you have taken from me. He used to guard my herds and flocks and cattle for me.' 'Be not angry at all, master Culand' said the little boy, 'for I shall deliver a true judgment in this matter.' 'What judgment would you deliver on it, my lad?' said Conchobor. 'If there is a whelp of that hound's breeding in Ireland, he will be reared by me until he be fit for action like his sire. I shall myself be the hound to protect Culand's flocks and cattle and land during that time.' 'A good judgement you have given, little boy.' said Conchobor. 'I would not have given a better myself.' said Cathbad. 'Why shall you not be called Cú Chulainn Culand's Hound because of this?' 'Nay' said the little boy, 'I prefer my own name, Setanta mac Sualtaim.' 'Do not say that, lad' said Cathbad, 'for the men of Ireland and of Scotland shall hear of that name, and that name shall be ever on the lips of the men of Ireland and of Scotland.' 'I am willing that it shall be my name' said the boy.[106]

This story vividly depicts the coming of age of a young Irish boy who would become a national hero, through his transformation from Setanta into the "Hound of Culand." At the beginning of this tale, the boy already shows certain traits of a hound: he follows

[106] Original Old Irish: "Ocus tánic Culand immach & atchondairc a árchoin 'na gabtib rointi. Ba béim cride fri cliab leis. Dochúaid innund isin dún asa aithle. 'Mo chen do thíchtu, a meic bic' bar Culand, 'ar bíth do máthar & t'áthar, & ní mo chen do thíchtu fort féin.' 'Cid taí-siu don mac?' ar Conchobor. 'Ní ma tánac-su dam-sa do chostud mo lenna & do chathim mo bíd, dáig is maith immudu ifechtsa mo maith-se & is bethu immuig mo bethu. Maith in fer muntiri rucais úaim. Concométad éite & alma & indili dam.' 'Nádbad lond-so etir, a mo phopa Culand,' ar in mac bec, 'dáig bérat-sa a fírbreth sin.' 'Cá breth no bértha-su fair, a meic?' for Conchobor. 'Má tá culén do síl in chon út i nHérind. ailébthair lim-sa gorop inengnama mar a athair. Bam cú-sa imdegla a almai & a indili & a feraind in n-ed sain.' 'Maith rucais do breth, a meic bic,' for Conchobor. 'Nís bérmais ém,' ar Cathbath, 'ní bad ferr. Cid arnach Cú Chulaind bias fort-su de suidiu?' 'Nithó,' bar in mac bec. 'Ferr lim mo ainm fodéin, Sétanta mac Sualtaim.' 'Nád ráid-siu sin, a meic bic,' ar Cathbath, 'dáig concechlabat fir Hérend & Alban in n-ainm sin & bat lána beóil fer nHérend & Alban din anmum sin.' 'Fó limm didiu cid sed bess form,' ar in mac bec." From: Ibid.

the tracks of the king and his men until he faces the protector of the house of the smith, as a dog seeks its prey. His destiny leads him to the encounter that would make his fame: he immediately slaughters the "slaughter-dog" [Árchú], spilling the blood of the creature that intended to spill his own. At this moment, the boy already begins his metamorphosis into a dog, by fulfilling the first of the two charges that have been entrusted to the animal: the spilling of blood.

Following the slaughter, the boy soon sees the arrival of the dog's owner, together with the king and Cathbath the Druid. Wanting to preserve the peace among his own people, Setanta then passes judgment upon himself: if a dog belonging to the same breed, the same branch of the Tree of Life cannot be found, he will himself become the dog of the smith by fulfilling the second role of the beast: the protection of the lives belonging to the smith, that is, his household, his flocks, his herds, and his cattle.

The Hound of Culand serves the lord of his Teuta by both slaughtering those who threaten it and by protecting those who are edifying it. His role is now to find the balance between the need to spill blood, the sap of the Tree of Life, and the need to prevent this blood from running back to the body of the Dark. Standing by the smith's side, a man who spends his days beating red-hot pieces of iron with a hammer in hand, the Hound of Culand serves his master as he also serves the god of the Teuta, by becoming an example for his people to follow. The hero of the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* can thus be seen as an image of the relationship between dogs as a whole on the one side, and the Teuta on the other. After the death of his dog, the smith proclaimed his dependency on this oft vilified creature, declaring that he would have no livelihood without the animal. This death must be compensated by a birth in order to restore the balance of the Tree of Life, and thus the boy is reborn as the Hound of Culand, showing how indispensable dogs are to the Teuta. This story may have a purely Irish origin, being written down long after the dusk of the Gaulish World, but it remarkably demonstrates the role played by the dog in the "middle realm," as a piece of the great game played between the Dark and the Bright.

2.3.3 The Tree

Few peoples on earth have honored the trees as much as the ancient Celts. Preferring the majesty of the green canopy formed by their branches and leaves to the made-man roofs of the Temples, the Druids chose to dispense their teaching in the depths of the forests, surrounded by the living pillars of wood that opened a secluded space between the earth and the skies, one that offers the privacy and silence necessary for the learning of nature, a knowledge that is reserved to those deemed worthy of its reception.

The trees of the forests are themselves only one branch of the great Tree of Life among others. The metaphor should nonetheless not be seen are merely poetic, as both indeed share more than a similar structure. As the Tree of Life itself, the trees of the forest are deeply anchored into the depths of the Dark, and they open up a living space between the Dark and the Bright. The space cleared by the Tree of Life is the "middle realm" itself, Life and Being (Bitu), whereas the trees of the forest open up groves where the divine can be experienced, as the meeting point that is between the dark, the light, and life itself. The roots and branches of the trees form two strong arms that keep the earth and the skies at bay, preventing a clash between them while allowing life to flourish in the interstice between these two great realms. The forest is the refuge of the living beings, a place sheltered from the wrath of the skies, from the raging floods or the landslides. Their leaves protect the lower vegetation from being parched by the assault of the summer sun, and their fruits provide sustenance to all the creatures.

The Greek historian Maximus of Tyre (2nd c. A.D.) tells us that "the Celts worship Zeus [Δία] in the form of lofty oak,"[107] but the credibility of this late testimony is rather shaky. Gaulish art indeed would not seem to associate the tree with the skies, the realm of the Bright, but rather with both the Dark and Life. On the silver goblet of Lyon (See Fig. 2.5), the serpent, creature of the Dark and servant of Cernunnos, is seen coiled around the trunk of the tree while it aggressively stands against the auxiliary of the god of the skies, the eagle of Taranis. As seen in the last chapter,

[107] TBA. Original Greek: "Κελτοὶ σέβὅσι μέν Δία, ἄγαλμα δὲ Διὸς Κελτὶκὸν ὑψηλὴ δρῦς." From: Maximus, *Λόγοι τεσσαράκοντα*, Page 77 (§ 8.8).

the *Pharsalia* confirmed this association by describing one of the sacred groves of the Gauls, where "snakes in frequent folds were coiled around the trunks"[108] of the sacred trees. On the Cauldron of Gundestrup, the plate showing the god of the Dark, Cernunnos, shows a luxuriant vegetation surrounding the deity, while the plate depicting the "thunderous one," Taranis, is completely devoid of any plant. This, however, is perfectly natural, as even thought trees extend their arms up onto the skies, they are born out of the earth, and they prevent the light of the heavens from reaching the Ground. They grow in between the Dark and the Bright, clearing the up the space where Life can *be*, but they are closer to the earth. Their loyalty first belongs to the Dark, from which they owe their existence, but they also are bound to the whole of which they are part, and with which they share their name: the Tree of Life itself.

The plate of the Cauldron of Gundestrup devoted to the representation of the "middle realm," with the sacrifice in honor of Teutates performed in front of the human army, prominently shows what appears to be a tree at the center of the scene (See Fig. 2.3). The rudimentary style of this tree and his horizontal position may indicate that it may have been present only for decorative purposes, without any deeper significance, but one can nonetheless notice that this tree perfectly fits the overall nature of the scene. The trees of the forest are part of the great body of Life and Being, part of Teutates himself. The bloodless smothering of the victim sacrificed in his honor inside the barrel may be paralleled with the cutting of tree, which is carried by the troops before they start their campaign and spill the blood of the enemy of their Teuta, or the tree may still be standing, represented as the Tree of Life necessary for the opening of the sacred space where the sacrifice is to be performed.

The trees of the forest are the trunk of the Tree of Life, that is, the element that supports the other branches and allows them to grow and surpass it. The tree is a simple form of life: it cannot move itself; it cannot protect himself; it cannot attack its foes, and yet the strongest of the creatures often depend on it for their survival. Man eats its fruits. Its flesh is thrown into his hearth to warm his household during the winter or to cook the food that

[108] English translation from Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "Roboraque amplexos circumfluxisse dracones." Lucanus, *Pharsaliae Libri X*, N.Pag. (410–430).

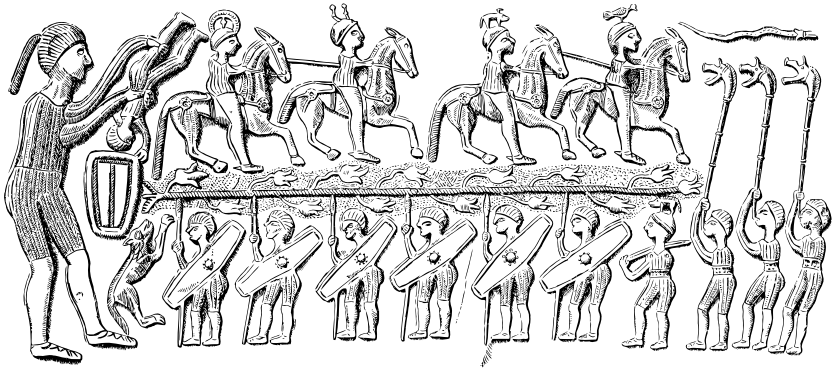


Figure 2.3: *A tree at the center of a scene on the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

gives him strength. His roots are the most resilient of foods in times of famine. Rightfully is the tree honored by the men who clearly see Life as a whole, and what they owe it.

The trees are only one branch of the Tree of Life, but they form one of the oldest, strongest, and most central of them all. The shoots emerging from this branch are numerous. They are the fruits of eons of slow changes during which they adapted to their surroundings: the earth around their roots and the air around their leaves. Each one of these shoots has been given a unique name by the men living around them: from the apple tree (ABAΛΛOC [aballos][109]) and the birch (BETOYA [betua][110]) to the willow (CAΛIKO [salico][111]) etc. The apple tree plays an important role in the World of the later tradition of the Celts, but few clues have been left to us concerning its role in the Gaulish World. Two other trees nonetheless stand out from the others in the ancient sources and the Gaulish tongue itself: the oak and the yew.

The oak is the tree that is most commonly associated with the Celts, and not without reasons. Maximus of Tyre's quote concerning the sacred nature of this tree was already mentioned, but long before his time, this link was known across the ancient world. The oak is known under three different names in Gaulish: KACCANOC [cassanos], TANNO- [tanno-], and ΔEPOYOC

[109] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 272.
[110] ibid., Page 74.
[111] ibid., Page 301.

[deruos].[112] According to Pliny the Elder, the Druids would have gotten their name from the Greek name of this tree (δρῦς [drûs]):

> Of itself the robur is selected by them to form whole groves, and they perform none of their religious rites without employing branches of it; so much so, that it is very probable that the priests themselves may have received their name from the Greek name for that tree.[113]

No matter how highly improbable this "folk-etymology" is, it nonetheless continues to be found convincing to many, as the link between the Gallic philosophers and the oak is well-known. It is hardly surprising that the oak would enjoy such a prestige among fine observers of nature such as the Druids. In the forests of Gaul, the robur indeed stands out by its loftiness and its imposing nature. Its trunk can be larger than the height of an adult man, and it can live for more than a millennia. Some of them had seen the rise of the Celts, witnessed their golden age and then saw how they let themselves be conquered by the Romans before abandoning the sacred groves in which they were honored as manifestations of the divine.

The robur was nonetheless more than a mere ornament for their sacred spaces. It occupied an important place in the life of the Celts, as their own branch of the Tree of Life was indirectly supported by its fruits. This tree is indeed more than a source of wonder to the dwellers of the forest. The fruits that it produces are the main food of the animals whose flesh occupied a prominent place during the feasts, which were an important part of the lives of the men of Gaul: the boar and its domesticated cousin, the pig.

During the fall, when the sun begins to retreat and the green mantle of the earth turns red, the robur showers the ground of the forest with its leaves and with a myriad of acorns that will fill the bellies of the wild boars and the pigs raised by men for their meat, which will in turn satiate the people gathered around it as it is cooked during sacred or profane celebrations. If the oak does not drop its precious gift onto the ground, the boars and the pigs are

[112] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 99.

[113] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 16.95); Original Latin: "iam per se roborum eligunt lucos nec ulla sacra sine earum fronde conficiunt, ut inde appellati quoque interpretatione Graeca possint Druidae videri." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

condemned to die, and man goes hungry. The Teuta as a whole depends on the gifts of the oak, and should it be honored for the role it plays in the existence of the "middle realm": a source of life.

The fruits of the oak nourish the animals, and they even can feed man once their bitterness has been washed away in the water of the rivers, but the body of these trees can also themselves be offered to man. The robustness of their wood makes them an ideal material for the construction of man's home. No other wood found in Gaul would be as trustworthy of forming the beams supporting the roof above their head, ensuring that the sky would not fall upon their head! These oakwood beams themselves represent the Tree of Life itself, which opens up the secluded space between earth and skies where Being can occur and prevents the collision and the mutual annihilation of the Dark and the Bright.

When the oak is threatened, it is Life itself that finds itself under attack. Knowing the importance of the sacred tree to the Gauls, the Roman emperor made it a target so as to demoralize his enemy and show that he did not fear the gods of the "barbarians." Such a scene is put into verse by the author of the *Pharsalia*:

> . . . Men flee the spot
> Nor dare to worship near: and e'en the priest
> Or when bright Phoebus holds the height, or when
> Dark night controls the heavens, in anxious dread
> Draws near the grove and fears to find its lord.
> Spared in the former war, still dense it rose
> Where all the hills were bare, and Caesar now
> Its fall commanded. But the brawny arms
> Which swayed the axes trembled, and the men,
> Awed by the sacred grove's dark majesty,
> Held back the blow they thought would be returned.
> This Caesar saw, and swift within his grasp
> Uprose a ponderous axe, which downward fell
> Cleaving a mighty oak that towered to heaven,
> While thus he spake: ' Henceforth let no man dread
> 'To fell this forest : all the crime is mine.
> 'This be your creed.' He spake, and all obeyed,
> For Caesar's ire weighed down the wrath of Heaven.

Yet ceased they not to fear.[114]

The sacred tree fell, and the Gaulish World itself began to lose its uniqueness. The Gauls would now become Gallo-Romans, deserting the sacred groves and flocking to the cities, the realm of the eagle, while the horns of Cernunnos laid broken upon the face of the earth. The god of the Dark cannot be properly honored without the sacred trees, as it was seen that: "Esus Mars is thus honored: a man is suspended in a tree until its limbs fall out."[115] The abandoning of the sacred groves and the cutting down of their trees, the hairs of the land of Gaul, marks the end of a world. Life will nonetheless continue for the Gauls, and the mighty oak will rise again from the body of the Dark, feeding the creatures of the forest, playing its part in the realm of Life and Being, ignoring the neglect of ungrateful men.

Because of its longevity, its fertility, and its capacity to sustain of branches of the Tree of Life, the oak is a symbol of Life itself. Another tree nonetheless stands right beside it, also occupying a central role in the World of the ancient Celts: the yew, named 𐌄𐌁𐌏𐌕𐌓𐌏𐌒 [eburos] in Gaulish (OIr. *ibar*, Br. *evor*, We. *efwr*).[116]

The yew's longevity may surpass the one of the oak, as some are thought to be more than two thousand years old. The oldest yews of present-day Europe may therefore have been older than the tree cut down by Caesar, and they may have been part of the sacred groves of the Druids. Even though the yew shares its capacity to outlive empires and peoples with the oak, it never-

[114] English translation from Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "Non illum cultu populi propiore frequentant, \ Sed cessere deis. Medio cum Phoebus in axe est, \ Aut coelum nox atra tenet, pavet ipse sacerdos \ Acessus, dominumque timet deprendere luci. \ Hanc iubet immisso silvam procumbere ferro: \ Nam vicina operi belloque intacta priore \ Inter nudatos stabat densissima montes. \ Sed fortes tremuere manus, motique verenda \ Maiestate loci, si robora sacra ferirent, \ In sua credebant redituras membra secures. \ Implicitas magno Caesar torpore cohortes \ Ut vidit, primus raptam librare bipennem \ Ausus, et aeriam ferro proscindere quercum, \ Effatur, merso violata in robora ferro: \ Iam ne quis vestrum dubitet subvertere silvam, \ Credite me fecisse nefas. Tunc paruit omnis \ Imperiis non sublato secura pavore \ Turba, sed expensa superorum et Caesaris ira." Lucanus, *Pharsaliae Libri X*, N.Pag.

[115] TBA. Original Latin: "Hesus Mars sic placatur: homo in arbore suspenditur usque donec per cruorem merabra digesserit." From: Hermann Usener, *Scholia in Lucani Bellum civile*, Page 32.

[116] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Pages 159–160.

theless also significantly differs from it. The older the oak grows, the stronger and larger its trunk becomes, but with old age, the yew tends to become hollow and its trunk can be split into several secondary ones. Its wood is not ideally suited to form the beams of houses, opening the living space of men, but is rather prized for the manufacture of bows. Combining a remarkable flexibility with a great hardness, the wood of the yew was used for millennia to bring death from afar: killing the enemies of the Teuta or the wild animals whose flesh rejoices the heart of men.

If the oak is a symbol of life, the yew is its counterpart: a symbol of death. This is not only due to the fact that its wood is used to kill rather than to protect: almost every part of the tree is indeed poisonous to man and beasts alike. Its blood-colored fruits are edible, but the seeds at their core can lead one to an early grave, as does the ingestion of its leaves. This poisonous nature of the yew was well-known to the Celts, and several ancient sources describe its use as a traditional way to voluntarily end one's life. The most symbolic of these certainly is the one described by Caesar, who tells us concerning the end of the king of the ЄBOYPONЄC [eburones], a tribe named: "the ones of the yew." In his own words:

> Cativolcus, king of one half of the Eburones, who had entered into the design together with Ambiorix, since, being now worn out by age, he was unable to endure the fatigue either of war or flight, having cursed Ambiorix with every imprecation, as the person who had been the contriver of that measure, destroyed himself with the juice of the yew-tree, of which there is a great abundance in Gaul and Germany.[117]

The king ended his own life using the emblem of his tribe. He stepped away from the Tree of Life by ingesting the sap of the tree of death, a death that is not a disappearance or a running away from Being, but rather the return to one's origin: the great body of the Dark. Leaving the side of Teutates, he lies down to the side

[117] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.31); Original Latin: "Catuvolcus, rex dimidiae partis Eburonum, qui una cum Ambiorige consilium inierat, aetate iam confectus, cum laborem aut belli aut fugae ferre non posset, omnibus precibus detestatus Ambiorigem, qui eius consilii auctor fuisset, taxo, cuius magna in Gallia Germaniaque copia est, se exanimavit." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

of Cernunnos, and his own flesh then becomes the support upon which new lives will grow.

The two trees represent the contrast between Life and Being (Bitu) on the one hand, and Death on the other, which is what is found beyond the frontiers of the "middle realm." The death of the old is necessary in order for new life to sprout out of the earth. The yew, as a guide towards death, is one of the instruments through which the Tree of Life can renew itself and grow. Like the oak, it is therefore the object of a peculiar respect by those who are mindful of the nature of Life and Being.

2.3.4 The Boar

The boar certainly is one of the most emblematic creatures roaming the forests of Gaul, even now. Its tenacity and strength allow it to fearlessly charge its enemies, breaking their bones with its head, piercing their flesh with its tusks and mauling their neck with its fangs. When they band together, they bring destruction to the fields, trampling the wheat and leaving these fields as if they were freshly plowed.

Man, however, also very early saw this animal as a potential source of wealth rather than as a source of mayhem. He domesticated the wild beast, and formed new breeds that would fit their desire: larger, fatter, more docile, and fur-less. The boars slowly became pigs, raised for their tasty meat that would accompany man's feasts. Boiled, roasted, or smoked, their flesh would give strength to the Gauls, allowing them to survive the harshness of the winter and to wage wars on those who threaten their people.

The boar, MOKKOC [moccos][118] or TOYPKOC [turcos][119] in the Gaulish tongue, occupied an important place in the World of the Gauls. It would seem that it often represented the Celts as a whole, especially in warfare. As the French archeologist Jean-Louis Bruneaux tells us: "the gallic military standards — the counterparts to the Roman eagles — were shaped as animal figures, especially a boar, made out of a copper sheet, with few details, mounted

[118] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 273.
[119] ibid., Page 273.

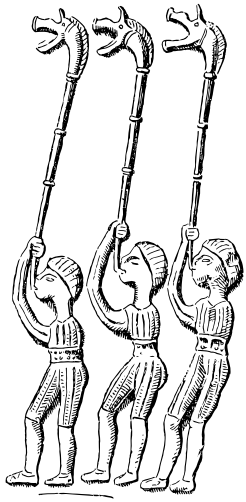


Figure 2.4: *Three carnyxes on the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

on a rigid support on the top of a long pole."[120] The animal was also chosen to prominently appear as the mouth of the instrument used to carry the battle-cries of the Celts: the carnyx, a sort of trumpet of war that appears at the back of the "human army" on the Cauldron of Gundestrup (See Fig. 2.4).

Like the dog, the boar is rather small in stature, living close to the earth and sleeping on the naked Ground. It nonetheless fully belongs to the "middle realm." The sap of the Tree of Life flows in its veins and it lives its days caught between the earth and the skies. It moves around the forest to feed itself when the skies are displaying the color of life: the bloody hue of the dusk and the dawn, while it rests or takes cover when the Dark or the Bright holds sway over the heavens. It is during this time of transition, the time of blood, that the creature strives for its survival, searching for food but also being chased by men equipped with bows and spears, eager to spill its blood.

Contrary to the dog, the boar or the pig's relationship with

[120] TBA. Original French: "Les enseigne gauloises — les pendants des aigles romaines — avaient la forme de figures animales, surtout celle d'un sanglier sculpté en tôle de cuivre en un style épuré, montées sur un socle fixé à une hampe en bois." From: J.-L. Brunaux, *Alésia*, Page 30.

man is not one that benefits both. The boar is honored by the Celts, who made it its emblem, representing their people in front of others, but the boar is incapable of perceiving this respect, and it has no use of it. Unable to feed itself, its sow, or its farrows without being threatened by weapons of wood or iron, the boar is naturally resentful of the presence of man in the forests. His belonging to the Tree of Life, to the "middle realm" between the Dark and the Bright, does not compel the boar to passively accept its fate, which is to be meat, a creature arising from the earth in order to be a delight to the palate of man.

This demeaning place in the Tree of Life and the rancor resulting from it may explain why the boar is frequently associated with the Bright, the upper realm, rather than the Dark from which its flesh is formed, or the bloody realm of Life and Being to which he naturally belongs. This relation is explicitly shown on the Silver Goblet of Lyon, which clearly depicts the opposition between the forces of the Dark on one side, and the forces of the Bright on the other (See Fig. 2.5). The dog, the stag, and the serpent are on the side of the "horned one," together with a tree upon which a human face appears, perhaps representing the god tied to the Tree of Life: "the one of the Teuta." On the opposite side, the celestial forces are assembled: the eagle that defies the serpent, a dove or a raven, and a god who may be the "Luminous one": ΛOYTOYC [lugus], who is assimilated to the Apollo of the Romans, and who gave his name to the city where the goblet was found, Lyon, ΛOYTΔOYNOYM [lugdunum]. Between him and a ball of mistletoe found on a high branch of a tree, a boar stands on an elevated place, its snout on the neck of the god.

As the boar is pursued by the hunters in the deepest parts of the woods, by the dwellers of the realm of blood who all belong to the Tree of Life, he feeds on the acorns that seem to miraculously fall down from the skies. The creature does not see whence do the succulent green fruits fall, but it clearly perceives that they are a gift from above, rather than from the earth or from the hand of man that only brings him blood and death. The acorns are poured down from the skies, as the rays of the sun that pierce through the thick canopy of the forest and end their course on the ground or on the fur of the beast, giving it warmth and a clearer sight of his surroundings.



Figure 2.5: *The boar among the celestial powers on the silver goblet of Lyon* (Deyts, *Images des dieux de la Gaule*, Page 143).

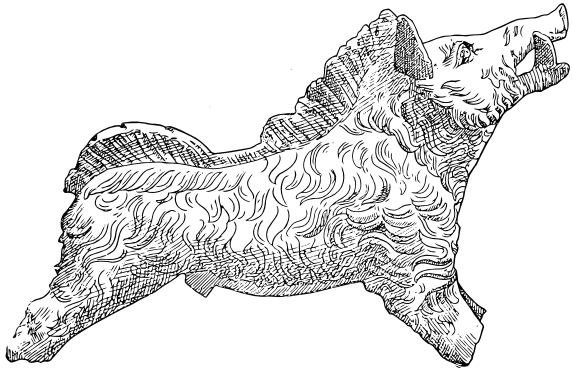


Figure 2.6: *An upward-facing Boars statue found near Luxembourg* (Reinach, *Catalogue illustré du Musée des antiquités nationales au Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, Page 68.).

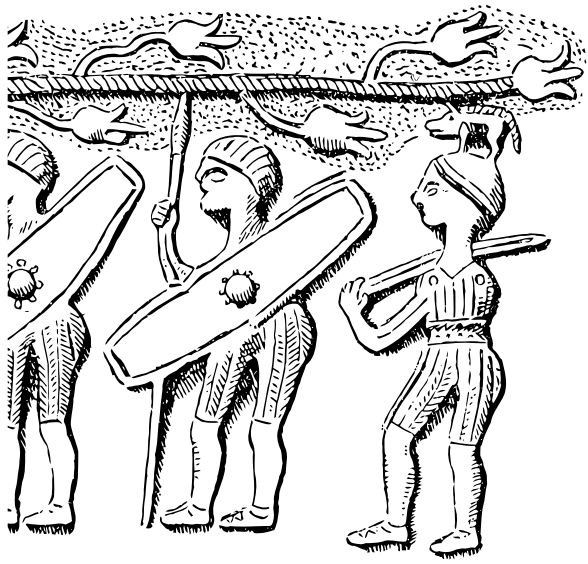


Figure 2.7: *The Boars standart on the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

Frustrated by his fate but willing to be thankful towards what he perceives to be the source of his satiety, the boar therefore turns its back to the Dark and to the Tree of Life itself, and it elevates its eyes toward the Bright, the upper realm from which it hopes to find comfort and safety. This, however, may be seen as a betrayal by those fighting for Life and Being. Disregarding its role in the Tree of Life, the boar sets its own goal, which differs from the one of the rest of the living beings, and it may therefore be resented for it. This may explain why the man bearing the helmet adorned with an image of the boar is placed at the very back of the army on the aforementioned scene of the Cauldron of Gundestrup (See Fig. 2.7). The four other standard-bearers stand are the forefront, well-equipped and riding horses, while the one bearing the image of the boar stands on foot, behind the horsemen and behind the troops, alone without a shield and alone bearing a simple crooked sword. Perhaps did the animal lose the trust of the leaders of the "human army" led by the god of the "middle realm" and the ram-horned serpent, the messenger of the Dark? Its allegiance to the Bright may therefore be the cause of this humiliating position, tearing the creature apart between its belonging to Life and Being and its yearning for the Bright.

In the medieval Welsh tradition, the third branch of the Mabinogi (Manawydan, son of Llŷr) also offers us a tale involving a boar associated with the forces of the Bright:

> And one morning Pryderi and Manawyddan rose up to hunt, and they ranged their dogs and went forth from the palace. And some of the dogs ran before them and came to a small bush which was near at hand; but as soon as they were come to the bush, they hastily drew back and returned to the men, their hair bristling up greatly. "Let us go near to the bush," said Pryderi, "and see what is in it." And as they came near, behold, a wild boar of a pure white colour rose up from the bush. Then the dogs, being set on by the men, rushed towards him; but he left the bush and fell back a little way from the men, and made a stand against the dogs without retreating from them, until the men had come near. And when the men came up, he fell back a second time, and betook him to flight. Then they pursued the boar until they beheld a vast and lofty castle, all newly built, in a place where they had never before seen either stone or building. And the boar ran swiftly into the castle and the dogs after him. Now when the boar and the dogs had gone into the castle, they began to wonder at finding a castle in a place where they had never before seen any building whatsoever.[121]

Ignoring the advice of Manawyddan, who told him that this castle

[121] English translation from: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, N.Pag. Original Middle Welsh: "A boregueith, kyuodi Pryderi a Manawydan y hela; a chyweiraw eu cwn, a mynet odieithyr y llys. Sef a wnaeth rei o'e cwn, kerdet o'e blaen, a mynet y berth uechan oed gyr eu llaw. Ac y gyt ac yd aant y'r berth, kilyaw y gyflym, a cheginwrych mawr aruthyr ganthunt, ac ymchwelut at y guyr. 'Nessawn,' heb y Pryderi, 'parth a'r berth, y edrych beth yssyd yndi.' Nessau pirth a'r berth. Pan nessaant, llyma uaed coed claerwynn yn kyuodi o'r berth; sef a oruc y cwn, o hyder y guyr, ruthraw idaw. Sef a wnaeth ynteu, adaw y berth, a chilyaw dalym y wrth y guyr. Ac yny uei agos y guyr idaw, kyuarth a rodei y'r cwn, heb gilyaw yrdhunt a phan ynghei y guyr, y kilyei eilweith, ac y torrei gyuarth. Ac yn ol y baed y kerdassant, yny welynt gaer uawr aruchel, a gueith newyd arnei, yn lle ny welsynt na maen, na gueith eiryoet; a'r baed yn kyrchu yr gaer yn uuan, a'r cwn yn y ol. A guedy mynet y baed a'r cwn y'r gaer, ryuedu a wnaethant welet y gaer yn y lle ny welsynt eiryoet weith kyn no hynny..." From: Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, Page 55.

probably was the product of a spell and that they should therefore refrain from entering it, Pryderi then ventured into the mysterious construction. At the center of the castle, he saw "a fountain with marble work around it, and on the margin of the fountain a golden bowl upon a marble slab, and chains hanging from the air, to which he saw no end."[122] Once Pryderi seized this golden bowl, he lost the use of his tongue and was stuck to the marble slab. Manawyddan then told his wife Rhiannon (Proto-Celtic *ᑭITANTONA [*rigantona] > ᑭITANI [rigani]) concerning these events, and she decided to save her husband's companion. Seeing him, she seized the golden bowl and also lost the use of her tongue and was stuck to the marble slab. Finally, "there came thunder [dwryf] upon them, and a fall of mist, and thereupon the castle vanished, and they with it."[123]

This story probably finds its origin in the medieval period rather than the time of the early Celts. The names of its characters, which reflect the original Celtic pantheon, nonetheless appear to be remnants of very ancient themes originated in the common tradition shared by the first Celts. The role played by the boar in this story may be based on the view that men had of this animal during the early days of this people. The creature here serves the forces of the Bright, of the skies above, the realm based on sight, unlike the Dark that is mainly experienced through the sense of touch. It embodies the ᗅᐱᗷIOᑕ [albios] by the color of its fur: white. It also leads the two men and their dogs away from the forest and toward a lofty construction, a city, which is a place shaped by the imagination of man rather than by nature itself. It leads them away from the physical reality of the Dark and toward the higher ground, a place where appearances replace the substance, and where everyone's eyes are turned toward the skies as the walls surrounding the structure hides the country, the nature that lies

[122] English translation from: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, N.Pag. Original Middle Welsh: "Ef a welei, ual am gymherued llawr y gaer, fynnawn a gueith o uaen marmor yn y chylch. Ac ar lann y fynnawn, cawg [eur en rwymedic urth bedeir cadwyn, a hynny] uchbenn llech o uaen marmor, a'r cadwyneu yn kyrchu yr awyr; a diden ny welei arnunt." From: Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, Page 56.

[123] English translation from: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, N.Pag. Original Middle Welsh: "ac ar hynny, gyt ac y bu nos, llyma dwryf arnunt, a chawat o nywl, a chan hynny difflannu y gaer, ac e ymdeith ac wynteu." From: Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, Page 57.

beyond it. Enticed by a bowl of gold, shining with the brightness of the sun, the man and the woman are ensnared by an illusion, and by their curiosity. Finally, the forces at play show their true nature: thunder (*dwryf* in Middle Welsh, TAPANOYC [taranus] in Gaulish[124]) strikes, a mist appears, and both the castle and its prisoners vanish in the air, snatched by the power of the Bright.

In this story, the boar is the bait used by the Bright to entrap men and dogs belonging to and serving the Dark. Its natural color was changed to reflect this unnatural allegiance of the boar, a stratagem that succeeds as men are always easily seduced by the illusions crafted out of the Bright. The boar is an animal that represents war: not only because of its fierce nature, its capacity to kill those who stand in front of it, the outer enemy, but also because it itself is torn apart between its belonging to the Dark and its longing for the Bright, a war that is also waged in the heart of the men wise enough to consider their own essence. Therefore, the boar is not seen merely as a traitor to its kind, to Life itself: it is both venerated and loathed, hunted and worshipped, the enemy of the people and the people itself, showing that nothing in the Celtic world is either entirely black or white.

[124] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 290.

2.4 The Threshold of Life and Being: Birth and Death

Life and Being, 𐊁𐊉𐊖𐊗 [bitu], is the "middle realm" in which man lives each one of his days on earth. When he is knitted inside the womb of his mother, he experiences a coming into Being, as he is thrown into life. This experience of the emerging of his own self and of his birth are nonetheless forever concealed into the deepest parts of his mind, inaccessible to him. The emergence into Being may occur before or after the exit from the womb, but it in both cases marks the true birth of man, his arrival into Life and Being. Others may be the witnesses of this mystical event, but they will never be able to feel this becoming as a first-person experience. Perhaps because of this secret nature of the becoming of life, practically no trace remains of the place occupied by the miracle of birth in the Gaulish world. The entry into Life and Being remains veiled in the past, but every man is nonetheless given the opportunity to consciously experience the crossing of the threshold of Being: death, which was, as recounted by the ancient sources and by archeology, one of the central elements of the World of the Celts.

The men abiding by the traditional values of the Celts not only were fearless in the face of death, but they even appeared to long for the end of their lives, if this end was to be a manifestation of courage and strength in battle. As Diodorus Siculus tells us: "Certain of them despise death to such a degree that they enter the perils of battle without protective armour and with no more than a girdle about their loins."[125] If a man was unable to die in combat, it would be better for him to willingly run toward death than to try to escape it or to simply live a life of alienation from his manly essence. The king who led thousands of Gauls to attack Greece, Brennus, well demonstrates this attitude:

> In the mighty battle fought there he lost tens of thousands of his fellow soldiers, and Brennus himself suf-

[125] English translation: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.29); Original Greek: "ἔνιοι δ' αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τοσοῦτο τοῦ θανάτου καταφρονοῦσιν, ὥστε γυμνοὺς καὶ περιεζωσμένους καταβαίνειν εἰς τὸν κίνδυνον" From: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

> fered three wounds. Weighed down and close to death, he assembled his host there and spoke to the Gauls. He advised them to kill him and all the wounded, to burn their wagons, and to return home free of burdens; he advised them also to make Akichorios king. Then, after drinking deeply of undiluted wine, Brennus slew himself.[126]

A king is meant to place his people above his own interests and even above his own life, and this is what Brennus does. Discarding his own body that is now nothing but a burden supported by the body of the Teuta, he does what is needed to strengthen it and ensure its survival. The drinking of the blood of the vine may not be a way to alleviate the pain or to dull the reluctance to face the threshold of Being, but rather the sign of a rejoicing, the celebration of the encounter with a friend. By spilling his own blood, man sacrifices himself to the Teuta, spending his last moments contemplating the dusk of his life, the sight of red-colored liquid that runs into the earth. He does not only "face death": he faces the essence of Life and Being, the "realm of blood," as he slowly leaves it, being for the first time offered an occasion to see his own nature as he begins to cease to be himself. In the words of Heidegger:

> To die, however, means to carry out death in its essence. To be able to die means to be capable of carrying this out. We are only capable of it, however, when our essence is endeared to the essence of death.[127]

The essence of death is the homecoming to the great body of the

[126] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 22.9); Original Greek: "καὶ πολλοῦ πολέμου γεγονότος, μυριάδας ἐκεῖσε στρατιωτῶν ἀποβαλὼν ἐπλήγη καὶ αὐτὸς Βρέννος τρισὶ πληγαῖς. βαρυνόμενος δὲ καὶ πρὸς θάνατον, συναγαγὼν τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, διελάλησε τοῖς Γαλάταις, συμβουλεύσας αὐτοῖς ἑαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς τραυματίας ἅπαντας ἀποκτεῖναι καὶ τὰς ἁμάξας καύσαντας εὐζώνους εἰς τὰ οἰκεῖα ἐπανελθεῖν• βασιλέα δὲ καταστῆσαι Κιχώριον. Βρέννος δὲ ἄκρατον πολὺν ἐμφορησάμενος ἑαυτὸν ἀπέσφαξε." From: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

[127] English translation from: Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, Page 53; Original German: "Sterben aber heißt, den Tod in sein Wesen austragen. Sterben können heißt, diesen Austrag vermögen. Wir vermögen es nur, wenn unser Wesen das Wesen des Todes mag." from: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 79: Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, Page 56.

Dark and the Deep, the departure from Life and Being and the experience of the crossing of the threshold between the realms. Death is meant to be the highest point of a man's life, the ultimate elevation of his mind before he is plunged back into the deepest abyss, thereby revealing to him the true extent of the gap between the summit and the ground floor of the creation, the brightest of the Bright and the darkest of the Dark. The appropriation of this experience represents the fulfillment of own's life as a person who transiently stands out from the unity of the Dark, a true death rather than a mere fading out of one's existence.

This appropriation of one's own death nonetheless does not come instinctively to man. He must spend a significant part of his life preparing his death in order to be capable of facing it not only without fear but with joy and understanding, seeing the true nature of this experience. This time of preparation, when man turns himself toward death, does not only involve his imagination, a projection into an unknown future: it demands that he first become familiar with it as it occurs around him. Witnessing the passage of other men from Life and Being to the Dark and the Deep, he becomes acquainted with this experience, and the childish fears in front of it slowly give place to a longing for the apex of existence and the great leap toward the arms of the earth.

The path of appropriation of life through death begins with the passive witnessing of the one's kinsmen, taken by old age or on the battlefield. It continues when one first voluntarily forces the experience of death upon another being as the result of a conflict, where this death is incidental, only given to eliminate a threat. When a man is sufficiently proficient in the art of war and familiar with death itself, he may then wish to prolong the experience of the proximity with death that is enjoyed by the warrior during battle. He may want to keep the dead foe closer than his own kinsmen, as a reminder of their encounter sealed in blood that resulted in the passage of this other being through the threshold of being. Thus may certain bloody customs of the Gauls be explained, if not justified, customs that revulse most of the sons of the Bright as it did horrify the Greeks and the Romans, but that may nonetheless serve an honorable purpose:

> When their enemies fall they cut off their heads and fasten them about the necks of their horses; and turning

> over to their attendants the arms of their opponents, all covered with blood, they carry them off as booty, singing a tribute over them and striking up a song of victory, and these first-fruits of battle they fasten by nails upon their houses, just as men do, in certain kinds of hunting, with the heads of wild beasts they have mastered. The heads of their most distinguished enemies they embalm in cedar oil and carefully preserve in a chest, and these they exhibit to strangers, gravely maintaining that in exchange for this head some one of their ancestors, or their father, or the man himself, refused the offer of a great sum of money. And some men among them, we are told, boast that they have not accepted an equal weight of gold for the head they show, displaying a barbarous sort of greatness of soul ...[128]

The decapitation of the fallen enemies represents a celebration of the harmony and complementarity of the three realms. The blade of iron, a product of the Dark, separates the body from the seat of the mind, the head, while the red water of Life and Being abundantly flows between the two. The "middle realm" is what binds the Dark and the Bright together. When the envelope of man's body is pierced and his lifeblood runs back to the earth, the glue binding the realms disappears and they drift away from each other. Without life, the body returns to the Dark, while the head becomes a white skull placed on the top of a wall, a symbol and a reminder to those beholding it.

By surrounding himself with signs of death, the Gaulish warrior patiently prepares the moment when he will have to face his

[128] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.29); Original Greek: "τῶν δὲ πεσόντων πολεμίων τὰς κεφαλὰς ἀφαιροῦντες περιάπτουσι τοῖς αὐχέσι τῶν ἵππων: τὰ δὲ σκῦλα τοῖς θεράπουσι παραδόντες ἡμαγμένα λαφυραγωγοῦσιν, ἐπιπαιανίζοντες καὶ ᾄδοντες ὕμνον ἐπινίκιον, καὶ τὰ ἀκροθίνια ταῦτα ταῖς οἰκίαις προσηλοῦσιν ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν κυνηγίοις τισὶ κεχειρωμένοι τὰ θηρία. τῶν δ᾽ ἐπιφανεστάτων πολεμίων κεδρώσαντες τὰς κεφαλὰς ἐπιμελῶς τηροῦσιν ἐν λάρνακι, καὶ τοῖς ξένοις ἐπιδεικνύουσι σεμνυνόμενοι διότι τῆσδε τῆς κεφαλῆς τῶν προγόνων τις ἢ πατὴρ ἢ καὶ αὐτὸς πολλὰ χρήματα διδόμενα οὐκ ἔλαβε. φασὶ δέ τινας αὐτῶν καυχᾶσθαι διότι χρυσὸν ἀντίσταθμον τῆς κεφαλῆς οὐκ ἐδέξαντο, βάρβαρόν τινα μεγαλοψυχίαν ἐπιδεικνύμενοι." From: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

own. The Druids, as the overseers of the spiritual development of the people, also frequently reminded the members of the people of their own nature and of their destiny. The sacrifice of humans or animals was ritualized so as to become glorious manifestations of the rupture of the bond uniting the Dark and the Bright in man that occurs when the lifeblood of a being it spilled. Each sacrifice represents a localized and limited imbalancing of the natural equilibrium of the creation, one that not only prefigures the death of individual men but also the death of the gods and the collapse of the universe as a whole. As Heidegger tells us: "The most frightful jubilation must be the dying of a god."[129] The god is indeed not immune to the fate of all the other elements of the creation. The god of the Teuta is bound to vanish when the last living being forming its body would take its last breath, but just as any man, its destiny is to fully appropriate this death. The Dark and the Bright themselves are destined to collapse when the Life binding them together will disappear, but far from being a fate inviting lamentations, it is meant to become the apex of being itself, the ultimate celebration before the final plunge into no-"thing"ness. The death of man, the death of the Teuta, the death of the universe itself, all represent the same event of appropriation, only occurring on a different scale, with the larger ones emerging from the smaller ones.

Man, the gods, and the universe as a whole are therefore destined to appropriate their own death. As the German philosopher tells us, this joy in the face of death does not represent a "nihilistic" attitude toward life:

> *Running ahead toward death* is not the same as willing nothingness in the usual sense; on the contrary, it is the highest Da-sein, the one that incorporates the concealedness of the "there" into the steadfastness of enduring the truth.[130]

[129] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 181; Original German: "Der furchtbarste Jubel muß das Sterben eines Gottes sein." from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 230.

[130] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 257; Original German: "*Vorlaufen in den Tod* ist nicht Wille zum Nichts im gemeinen Sinne, sondern umgekehrt höchstes Da-sein, das die Verborgenheit des Da mit in die Inständlichkeit des Bestehens der Wahrheit einbezieht." from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 325.

It is precisely the love of the essence of life that pushes one to consciously run toward death, as death is "the highest testimony to beyng."[131] This is true concerning the death of man, but also concerning the death of the gods, and of Life and Being as a whole. The precepts attributed to the Druids by Diogenes Laertius, "to reverence the gods, to abstain from wrongdoing, and to practise courage,"[132] can be seen as way for man to prepare the appropriation of this experience of his own death, and as a way for him to play his part in the event of the twilight of the gods and the final release of the tension between the three realms through the death of Life and Being.

[131] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 181; Original German: "Der Tod das höchste Zeugnis des Seyns." from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 230.

[132] English translation from: Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, N.Pag. Original Greek: "σέβειν θεοὺς καὶ μηδὲν κακὸν δρᾶν καὶ ἀνδρείαν ἀσκεῖν." From: ibid., N.Pag.

Chapter 3

Albios

The most fundamental realm, the Dark and the Deep (ΔΟΥΒΝΟC [dubnos]), formed a ground from which another realm could emerge: Life and Being (ΒΙΤΟΥ [bitu]). Life arises from the Dark, but it needs a space where it can *be* and grow, as an organism that continuously generates new living beings out of its own body. Life is caught between two opposites, and when it comes out of the Dark, it faces what stands against it, a third realm that bears the name of ΑΛΒΙΟC [albios][1], the Bright.

If the pitch-black sky of the night represents the Dark and the Deep, and the blood-colored horizon the time of Life and Being, the luminous sky of the day is a manifestation of the Bright. More than this, the skies as a whole form the seat of the third realm: what towers above the Ground, that is, the surface of the Dark, and what also towers above Life, which is irremediably drawn back toward to the earth. Life flourishes between the Dark and the Bright, and it depends on them both. The "upper realm" nonetheless represents more than the "skies": it represents all that is above Life itself, all the things that are distant from the earth, the things that rise away from the darkness and are elevated in the air, where they can be seen thanks to the power of the light.

Man belongs to the Bright as he belongs to the Dark. The Dark forms his flesh and the Bright harbors the fruits of his mind, his creations, the World that he edifies with his brethren. He

[1] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 242. Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 29.

cannot live away from the earth but he equally needs to receive the light of the skies that clears away the darkness in front of him and allows him to appropriate the Ground upon which he stands.

As shown by the daily alternation between the three skies reflecting the three realms, the heavens are also a place where different forces are themselves interacting with each other. The gods of the skies are in a perpetual tug-of-war that is offered to man to behold, but as a creature whose being is spread across the three realms, man is called to play a part in the edification of the Bright. Before one can play a role in the play of the heavens, one must nonetheless first discern the nature of the Bright, see how it differs from the Dark and from Life.

3.1 The Nature of Albios

As it was the case concerning the other two realms, the name of 𐌀𐌋𐌁𐌉𐌏𐌒 [albios] is almost exclusively known by its presence in various names of peoples and places. No source clearly explains the nature of this realm or even clearly states the fact that it designates a part of the universe in the World of the Celts. This fact has nonetheless been widely recognized by scholars,[2] leaving us the task of finding the meaning of this division in three parts of the creation. Fortunately, this structure is not arbitrary: it reflects the environment in which the Gauls lived their lives and which still is largely identical to the one inhabited by their descendants. The perception of this continuity nonetheless demands that we step away from "modernity" to plunge ourselves in the essence of nature: the earth below us, ourselves, and the skies above.

The previous chapters have shown that the Dubnos is more than an "underworld," and that Bitu is more than the world "down below." Likewise, this chapter will show that the Albios is not a mere "upper-world," more than the sky above our heads. Three main aspects of this realm will be presented in the following pages, based on the semantic nuances carried by this word. The first is to see it as the Lofty, what is found above the places where Life is found: the highest points of the earth, the summits of the

[2] See: Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 242; Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 29.

mountains that pierce the clouds and all that man can see above them.

The second facet of this realm is the Bright, the air and the space that is filled with light, allowing man to see and to act upon the earth. It is the sun in the sky, the sight of the creation that enlightens man's eyes and stimulates his mind. It is what stands in contrast with the Dark, the brightness that clears away the shadows and seduces man, exciting his imagination.

Finally, it is also the World, that is, what is built by the mind of man above the Ground, the surface of the earth. It is not the mere physical objects created by his hands, the cities that replace the forests and the plains, but rather the meta-physical construct that allows man to *be* human, different than the animals roaming the earth: his language, his knowledge, "things" that can be incarnated in the Dark, in matter, but that do not necessarily depend on it. It is what is opposed to the Dark and yet rests on top of it. It is the way man looks at the universe and what allows him to interact with it: not a separate platonic realm of "ideas" but rather the meta-physical World that depends on and is intertwined with Life and the Dark.

The examination of these three different aspects of the Albios will then serve as a basis for an investigation of the significance of this realm in the Gaulish World, such as the place that it occupies in the Celts' relation to the gods or to the "things" surrounding them.

3.1.1 Albios: The Lofty

The root of the Celtic word Albios originally meant "white" in Proto-Indo-European, but it would seem that it very early on acquired a different meaning among the Celts, rather designating the lofty peaks of the mountains towering over their villages, which were covered with snow during the four seasons. The mountain range at the heart of the *Keltia*, spread between the cradle of the Celts (Hallstatt) and one of the most important cities of Gaul (Lugdunum / Lyon), is said by ancient sources and modern scholars to be named from this same word: the "Alps." In his commentary on the work of Virgil, the Roman grammarian Servius (4th–5th

c. A.D.) tells us that: "all the lofty mountains are called "Alps" [*Alpes*] by the Gauls, even though what they properly designate is the peaks of the mountains of the Gauls."[3] A few centuries earlier, the Greek geographer Strabo (64 B.C. -–A.D. 24) also said that:

> The Alps were formerly called Albia and Alpionia, and at the present day the high mountain in the country of the Iapodes, next to Ocra and the Alps, is named Albius, showing that the Alps extend so far.[4]

If the deep shafts of the Mountain of Salt represent the dark cradle of the Celts, the snowy peaks of the Alps represent the place where they can free themselves from the earth, whose embrace can be seen as smothering them, as its pull continuously and perpetually drives man back to his origin, preventing his departure away from the womb that gave birth to him. Standing in contrast to the Deep, the Lofty offers man a sight of awe and wonder. It inspired the Celts like it inspired the poets of their cousins, the Germans, who joined them at the feet of these great mountains. Contemplating them, Hölderlin wrote the following verses:

> Within the Alps it is still bright night and the cloud,
> Composing poems full of joy, covers the yawning valley within.
> This way, that way, roars and rushes the playful mountain breeze,
> Steep down through the fir trees a ray of light gleams and vanishes.
> . . . . .
> Meanwhile the silvery heights gleam peacefully above,

[3] TBA. Original Latin: "sane omnes altitudines montium licet a Gallis Alpes vocentur, proprie tamen iuga montium Gallicorum sunt." From: Honoratus, *In Vergilii carmina comentarii*, N.Pag.

[4] English translation from: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. (§ 4.6); Original Greek: "τὰ γὰρ Ἄλπεια καλεῖσθαι πρότερον Ἄλβια, καθάπερ καὶ Ἀλπεινά. καὶ γὰρ νῦν ἔτι τὸ ἐν τοῖς Ἰάποσιν ὄρος ὑψηλὸν συνάπτον πως τῇ Ὄκρᾳ καὶ ταῖς Ἄλπεσιν Ἄλβιον λέγεσθαι, ὡς ἂν μέχρι δεῦρο τῶν Ἄλπεων ἐκτεταμένων." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag. In the same work (§ 7.1), Strabo also tells us that: "Now the Ocra is the lowest part of that portion of the Alps which extends from the country of the Rhaeti to that of the Iapodes. Then the mountains rise again, in the country of the Iapodes, and are called 'Albian.'"(ἡ δ' Ὄκρα ταπεινότατον μέρος τῶν Ἄλπεών ἐστι τῶν διατεινουσῶν ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥαιτικῆς μέχρι Ἰαπόδων: ἐντεῦθεν δ' ἐξαίρεται τὰ ὄρη πάλιν ἐν τοῖς Ἰάποσι καὶ καλεῖται Ἄλβια.)

> Up there the luminous snow is already full of roses.
> And still higher up, above the light, dwells the pure
> Blissful god rejoicing in the play of holy rays.
> Silently he dwells alone, and brightly shines his countenance.[5]

The "silvery heights" are the first place where man thinks he can reach the divine. It indeed requires a certain maturity in order for him to realize that he is a son of the Dark, arising from the depths of the earth, and he therefore first looks toward the heavens to seek the god above before he turns to the one below. It is therefore no coincidence that the Gauls named the highest parts of the Alps the "Ridge of Heaven," according to Diodorus Siculus.[6] This name was not passed on to their descendants, but perhaps by association with the Latin tongue, the language of their conqueror that replaced the one of their ancestors and in which the word *albus* means "white," the highest mountain of the range is now called the "White Mountain" (Fr. *Mont Blanc*). The white peaks of the mountains (Albia) are the counterparts to the shadowy depths of the waters (Dubros). Both mark the boundaries between the extremes, places that can be approached by man, the dweller of the "middle realm," but that do not let themselves be conquered by him. He may plunge in the lakes, extract the ore hidden in the heart of the earth, or ascend to the summit of the White Mountain, contemplating the face of the earth from its apex, but he cannot permanently live in these inhospitable places, which are not meant to sustain life.

The ascent to the summit of the mountains, which, as pointed

[5] English translation from Heidegger, *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*, Page 25. Original German: "Drinn in den Alpen ists noch helle Nacht und die Wolke, \ Freudiges dichtend, sie dekt drinnen das gähnende Thal. \ Dahin, dorthin toset und stürzt die scherzende Bergluft, \ Schroff durch Tannen herab glänzet und schwindet ein Stral ... Ruhig glänzen indess die silbernen Höhen darüber, \ Voll mit Rosen ist schon droben der leuchtende Schnee. \ Und noch höher hinauf wohnt über dem Lichte der reine \ Seelige Gott vom Spiel heiliger Stralen erfreut." ibid., Page 24.

[6] See: "Diodorus records that a certain peak of the Alps, which has the appearance of being the highest part of the entire range, is called by the natives the "Ridge of Heaven." From: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus*, Page 111; Original Greek: "καὶ Διόδωρος ἄκραν τινὰ τῶν Ἄλπεων κορυφὴν τοῦ σύμπαντος ὄρους δοκοῦσαν οὐρανοῦ ῥάχιν ἱστορεῖ παρὰ τῶν ἐγχωρίων καλεῖσθαι," from: ibid., Page 110.

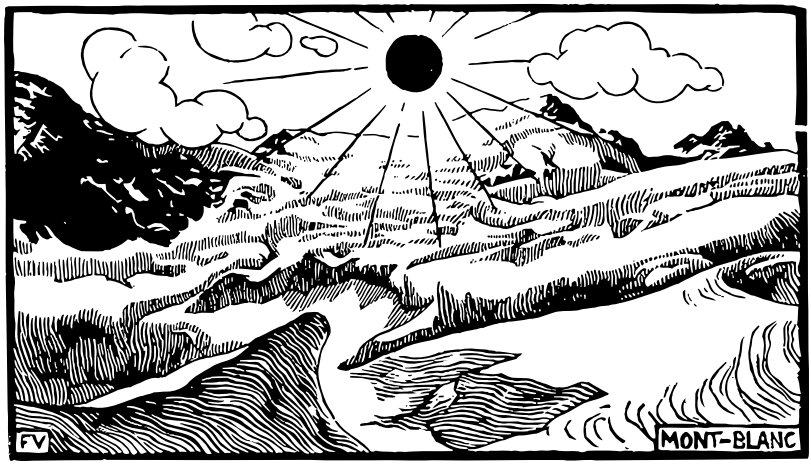


Figure 3.1: *Drawing of the "White Mountain" (*Mont Blanc*) in the Alps* (Vallotton, Félix. *Mont-Blanc*, 1892).

out by Heidegger, are "the furthest embassy of earth,"[7], also gives man a first occasion to contemplate the Dark while standing as far away from its body as it is possible for him. As noted by Descartes, "the mountain and the valley ... cannot in any way be separated one from the other."[8] The emergence of the peak is what gives the valley its meaning, and man's ascent to the silvery heights of the White Mountain reveals him the extent of the Dark below his feet. It is also a place where he can enter into contact with the forces of the skies, where he can touch the clouds and see them offer fresh water to the body of Life, waters taken away from the Dark by the radiance of the sun and the power of the winds so as to be purified and ultimately be given as a gift to sustain the beings roaming on the ground and the birds flying through the skies.

Some of the inhabitants of Gaul nonetheless decided to dwell in the inhospitable heights, attempting to free themselves from the earth and to submit the skies to their will. The Roman emperor mentions some of these men:

[7] English translation from: Heidegger, *Existence And Being*, Page 270; Original German: "Die Gipfel des Gebirges, das der äußerste Bote der Erde ist..." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 4 Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung (1936–1968)*, Page 18.

[8] English translation from: Descartes, Haldane, and Ross, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Page 181.

> In consequence of their remonstrances, the inhabitants of Marseilles shut their gates against Caesar, and summoned to their assistance the *Albici*, a barbarous people, who had long been under their protection, and inhabited the adjoining mountains.[9]

The *Albici*, dwellers of the Lofty, are also described by him as "mountaineers, a hardy race, habituated to arms, and trained up in war."[10] By living on the edge of the realm of Life, those who undertake to bind themselves to the skies acquire specific traits distinguishing them from the people of the valleys. It is as if they lived on a different earth, under a different sky, while they contemplate the life of the men down below.

The detached and isolated nature of the Lofty may explain why its name was very early on associated to a place whose main characteristic was more its difficulty of access and isolation than the height of its land: Britain, which was first known as *Alba* or *Albion*. Historians have frequently advanced the possibility that this name may find its origin in the white color of the cliffs surrounding the coast of Dover,[11] facing the shortest crossing point from Gaul, but this hypothesis neglects the fact that this root did not designate this color in Celtic (white is called 𐌅𐌉𐌍𐌀𐌏𐌒 [vindos][12] in Gaulish). Its land is far less lofty than the Alps, but its insular nature made it as hard to reach as their high peaks during the Iron Age. Its isolated population would also have developed traits shared with the "mountaineers," perhaps explaining the association between the island and the Albios. In her speech to her people, the queen of the Britons, Boudica, thus describes her homeland:

> We inhabit so large an island, or rather a continent, one might say, that is encircled by the sea, and . . . we pos-

[9] Emphasis added. English translation from: Caesar, *The Commentaries of Caesar*, N.Pag. (§ 1.34); Original Latin: "quibus mandatis acceptis Massilienses portas Caesari clauserant; Albicos, barbaros homines, qui in eorum fide antiquitus erant montesque supra Massiliam incolebant, ad se vocaverant." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Caesaris Commentariorum, pars posterior*, N.Pag.

[10] English translation from: Caesar, *The Commentaries of Caesar*, N.Pag. (§ 1.57); Original Latin: "homines asperi et montani et exercitati in armis." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Caesaris Commentariorum, pars posterior*, N.Pag.

[11] For example, cf. Wilkin, *Now and long ago, or The children's favourite history of England*, Page 3.

[12] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 320.

> sess a veritable world of our own and are so separated by the ocean from all the rest of mankind that we have been believed to dwell on a different earth and under a different sky, and that some of the outside world, aye, even their wisest men, have not hitherto known for a certainty even by what name we are called.[13]

When a man crosses the sea to reach the island, it is as if he departs from his world to enter another. He separates himself from the land of Life that sustained him since his birth, hoping to dis-cover something new, something that would elevate his mind or his *ego*.

The Lofty can represent a physical elevation, a departure away from the earth and toward the skies. It may also represent a meta-physical destination, away from the homeland and toward the foreign, away from the material and toward the spiritual. The upper realm of the Celtic World is therefore not to be seen as a mere location on the earth. The silvery heights of the Alps are the entryway to this realm rather than their entirety. The Lofty goes beyond the summits of the mountains, which still belong to the Dark, even though they are its "furthest embassy" into the skies. What is to be found through them and above them is not something that can be experienced in the same way by which the salt miners experienced the nature of the Dark: by plunging their hands into the mud. The Lofty is by nature out of the reach of man's hands, but this does not imply that he has no means of becoming intimate with it. Another one of his senses, one whose seat is found on the top of his body, can help him create a bound with what transcends the Dark and even Life itself: sight.

3.1.2 Albios: The Bright

Light can chase away the darkness that creep over the Ground, in the open air that is under the dominion of the skies, but it

[13] English translation from: Cassius, *Dio Cassius: Roman History, Volume VIII, Books 61-70*, N.Pag. (§ 62.4); Original Greek: "Τοιγαροῦν νῆσον τηλικαύτην, μᾶλλον δὲ ἤπειρον τρόπον τινὰ περίρρυτον νεμόμενοι καὶ ἰδίαν οἰκουμένην ἔχοντες, καὶ τοσοῦτον ὑπὸ τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ ἀφ΄ ἁπάντων τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων ἀφωρισμένοι ὥστε καὶ γῆν ἄλλην καὶ οὐρανὸν ἄλλον οἰκεῖν πεπιστεῦσθαι, καί τινας αὐτῶν καὶ τοὺς σοφωτάτους γε μηδὲ τὸ ὄνομα ἡμῶν ἀκριβῶς πρότερον ἐγνωκέναι." From: ibid., N.Pag.

cannot penetrate the earth without finding itself instantaneously annihilated, absorbed by the shadows. Light can only run through the air or the emptiness of the heavens. It fills the upper part of the creation, without submitting itself to the pull of the earth that attracts all the "heavy" things of the earth. The English language indeed accurately associates the Light that illuminates the skies with the opposite of "weight" or "heaviness": an object is "light" when it can effortlessly be elevated toward the heavens.[14] The "lighter" it is, the easier it can escape the pull of the earth that irremediably takes all things back to the great body of the Dark.

The Light is perfectly light: it has no mass. It flies through the air, never exhausting its strength, only stopped when it collides with the weighty objects belonging to the Dark. The myriad of rays that fill the space above the Ground hold sway over the upper realm, whose name unifies the light itself with its dominion: the Bright (Albios).

As the Lofty faces the Deep, the Bright faces the Dark, and man is caught in the tension between them. He is a son of the Dark but his own body calls him toward the Bright: his natural posture leads him to trample the earth with his feet and to turn his eyes toward the skies, toward the light. He is enticed by the inaccessible nature of the "upper realm": he knows that the source of the thundering clouds, the sun, or the stars, are all forever out of his reach. Man can nonetheless enter into contact with what he cannot reach with his hands: his eyes indeed do not need to leave the earth in order for him to enjoy a proximity with the highest of the skies: their light shines toward him, bringing him visions of all the "things" filling the creation.

Man is given his own flesh and his life by the Dark, but the Bright gives him sight. A man is said to be "bright" when he is able to see the nature of things, when the inner workings of the creation are plain to him. He is "enlightened" when he clearly sees the path laid in from of him, what he is destined to do by nature itself. Now, we can begin to perceive a certain ambivalence in the nature of the Dark and the Bright: the Bright is what is inaccessible to man, who is tied to the earth, and yet it is through its power that he

[14] The Indo-European roots of these two words are similar but not identical: *legwh- (the opposite of heavy), *leuk- (brightness). (See: Claiborne, *The roots of English*, Page 302.)

can see the universe and therefore "understand" it. The Dark, on the other hand, is what is "obscure," unintelligible, and yet it is also the Ground upon which man's life is entirely based, including his own body. This shadowy mass is what cannot be seen but also what can be the most surely experienced by the sense of touch.

As pointed out by Heidegger, the Greeks called the truth ἀλήθεια [alētheia], which can be read as ἀ-λήθεια: un-concealment. This betrays a conception of truth based on the sense of sight and thus on the power of the Bright. Heraclitus said that "the eyes are more accurate witnesses than the ears,"[15] but also that "poor witnesses for men are the eyes and ears of those who have barbarian souls."[16] Perhaps more than the "civilized" men of Greece, sons of the sun entirely devoted to the things above, the "barbarians" of Gaul, sons of the Dark and the Deep, may have known that the surest truth may be the one that let itself be felt by the hands rather than the one letting itself be "un-concealed." The Bright can be a source of revelation, of manifestation of truth, but it can also deceive man, showing him mirages that will lead him away from the truth.

Light is mostly seen positively as a source of unconcealment, but it can just as well conceal. A man going out from a dimly lit cave will be blinded by the brightness of the sun, less aware of his surroundings now that he is in the open-air than when he was in the shadows. This nonetheless does not imply a denial of the benefits of the Bright on human life. The light of the skies and the fire from heaven give him joy, hope, and a sense of wonder. They stimulate his imagination and considerably enlarge the horizon of his mind by allowing him to grasp what he cannot reach and to see what cannot be touched. By showering all that is above the Ground with light, the Bright clears up the universe, opening up a space where all the creatures can see themselves and begin to appropriate the earth, while it brings beings closer to one another. As the famous oriental parabole teaches us, men plunged into the darkness may touch different parts of an elephant and imagine the appearance of the creature in radically different ways: as a tree

[15] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 149; Original Greek: "οφθαλμοί των ώτων ακριβέστεροι μάρτυρες." From: ibid., Page 41.

[16] English translation from: ibid., Page 149; Original Greek: "κακοί μάρτυρες άνθρώποισιν οφθαλμοί καί ώτα βαρβάρους ψυχάς έχόντων." From: ibid., Page 41.

trunk if one touches its legs; as a fan if one touches its ears, or as a snake if one touches its trunk. Only with his eyes may the man accurately perceive the whole of the animal. Sight can elevate man's mind, taking it away from the darkness of the earth, and this may explain why many peoples such as the Greeks and the Romans particularly valued visual forms of arts such as sculpture or painting.

The Celts nonetheless knew that man is a son of the Dark rather than of one of the Bright. The welcoming of the gifts from above should therefore not lead him to forget his origin, which is found down below. The early Celts did not frequently fashion visual representations of the gods, perhaps because such representations would ineluctably belong to the Bright, serving it and leading to a neglect of the other realms. It may therefore not be a coincidence that the only type of anthropomorphic representation mentioned by the ancient sources before the Gauls were influenced by the Roman religion is the "wicker man" that was burned in honor of one of the god of the skies, Taranis (See § 3.2.1).

The Bright is nonetheless more than a mere realm of light. As mentioned before, it is the conjunction of the light with the space found above the Ground. This space is more than an empty expanse, a vessel where light can be poured in. As Heidegger tells us, it is:

> The vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether.[17]

The skies, the seat of the Bright, are the stage where the play of time is continually unfolded in front of man's eyes. The Bright would not appear as such without contrast, not only a contrast

[17] English translation from: Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page 147; Original German: "Der Himmel ist der wölbende Sonnengang, der gestaltwechselnde Mondlauf, der wandernde Glanz der Gestirne, die Zeiten des Jahres und ihre Wende, Licht und Dämmer des Tages, Dunkel und Helle der Nacht, das Wirtliche und Unwirtliche der Wetter, Wolkenzug und blauende Tiefe des Äthers." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936–1953)*, Page 151.

with its earthly counterpart, the Dark, but also with(in) itself. The wheel of time continuously turns, marking the alternation between the radiant sky of the day and the dimly lit starry sky of the night, separated by the blood-colored dawn and dusk. The skies are themselves a mirror of the nature of the creation as a whole. The Bright gives man a representation of the whole, which cannot be directly seen in its entirety, as it includes the Dark and the Deep, Life and Being, which do not belong to the dominion of the Bright and therefore cannot be accurately painted by rays of light and given to be seen in man's eyes.

The Bright also offers man the possibility to transcend his own *presence*, as its light can act as a messenger showing him what happened in the past and what will befall him. The light of the distant stars shows an image of what they were long before man appeared on the earth. The sky also announce the coming of the storms or the emergence of the sun. The face of the moon proclaims the coming of the tides and the retreat of the clouds of winter heralds the approach of cold winds. The firmament is the screen where man is shown the path to follow, the pitfalls to avoid, his origin and his destin-ation. Its radiance not only illuminates the present: it also shines across time itself, revealing it to man, as a new dimension through which his will is powerless but that nonetheless forms a whole rather than a series of discontinuous instants.

Beyond the blue dome towering above the earth and beyond the heavenly bodies filling the skies, the Bright therefore joins the Dark. The Deep, upon which the Dark is based, can indeed also be found to be what encompasses the skies. The deepest low joins the highest heights. The universe is folded upon itself, exhibiting a property of the shapes of the heavenly bodies. As Heraclitus tells us: "the beginning and end on a circle are common,"[18] a statement whose obvious nature conceals a depth of meaning that is not unlike the nature of the Deep itself. The Deep is the clearing that allows both the Dark and the Deep to emerge out of itself, the "space-time" that supports them from above and from below, that is, from the largest expanse of the Bright to the smallest singularity buried into the most concealed part of the Dark.

[18] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek: "ξυνόν γάρ αρχή καί πέρας έπί κύκλου περιφερείας." From: ibid., Page 160.

The folded nature of the Deep implies that the opposition between Dark and Bright cannot be conceived as a clear-cut dualism, as both form a continuum, and both are intertwined with each other. The Bright may be felt in the deepest parts of the Dark and the Dark may shine in the highest parts of the Bright. This fact is itself manifested daily in the sky itself, with the two main heavenly bodies teaching man this lesson on a daily basis. The sun is indeed the brightest element found in the upper realm but it itself is a sphere formed of matter, a "heavy" body that shares its nature with the earth. It belongs to the Dark even though it reigns as the king of the Bright. This is even more true of the moon, which by itself would be completely dark at all times if it did not receive the light of the sun. Conversely, however, the Bright may also be found hidden at the heart of the body of the Dark. The core of the earth is indeed a perpetually boiling sea of molten iron, constantly assaulting the mass of the Dark with white light coming out of the fiery metal. This light is usually absorbed by the body of the Dark, but it sometimes nonetheless escapes toward the sky by piercing through the peaks of what is called a "mountain of fire" in Welsh and Breton (Br. *menez-tan*, We. *mynydd tân*) in events that rightfully inspired the awe of men. This does not negate the fact that the dominion of the Bright is what is above the Ground and that what is under it falls under the one of the Dark, but it shows that man should not let himself be ensnared in a kind of binary thinking that gives him the impression that he can really grasp the nature of "things," including the creation itself. The Bright thereby illuminates the mind of man, continuously inviting him to continue to observe the signs in the heavens and on the earth so that he would elevate himself toward a higher (or deeper) understanding, reaching from the deepest parts of the Dark to the highest parts of the Bright, embracing the circle formed by the Deep, which encompasses all.

3.1.3 Albios: The World

The "upper realm" of the Celtic world encompasses all that is above the Ground and does not belong to Life. It represents what stands against the Dark, the invisible mass of the earth, what is technically called "matter." The Dark includes the "things" occupying a portion of space, and possessing a "heaviness," a "weight"

such as flesh, rocks, metals, or dust. The Bright, on the other hand, therefore includes all the "things" that do not occupy a specific portion of the universe or do not have any "heaviness." The hand of the Bright, the Light that carries the visions of the creation that are offered to man, itself can be seen as such a "thing" without mass and without extension. Other "things" may also stand against the Dark in such a manner, being less conspicuous than the Light shining through the skies.

The Dark represents the physical matter that can be felt with one's flesh, and the Bright what can be seen but cannot be touched: the light, the clouds, the skies themselves. Other elements of the creation can also be seen as standing against the physical matter, being without "heaviness" but also being invisible: the so-called "meta-physical." The mention of the meta-physical nonetheless does not imply the existence of a Platonic realm of "ideas" that would be separated from the earth, the body of the Dark. The meta-physical can be seen as not only intertwined with the world around us, inextricably tied to the physical, but it can even adequately be considered to be the "World" itself, when the meaning of this word is properly unfolded.

The three realms of the Celtic World: Dubnos, Bitu, and Albios, are all commonly translated as "world" in most scholarly works concerning the Celts. This understandable and yet regretable shortcut blurs the nature of each one of the three realms by merging them into a vaguely defined concept whose meaning would be arduous to describe precisely by anyone not rather well versed in philosophy. It is often naively conceived as "the totality of what is real,"[19] thereby confused with the "universe" as a whole, but one of the contributions of modern philosophy to the advance of human thought is to have shown that the "world" is often mistaken for a particular "world-view."

Men from different lands, belonging to different cultures and speaking different languages will indeed have a radically different vision of the things around them. Their language, for example, will determine how do they cut off the whole of the creation into a myriad of "things" designated by "words." As told by the German hermeneut Hans-Georg Gadamer, language is "not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather on it depends the fact

[19] Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, Page 39

that man has a *world* at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world."[20] The world is not the totality of the material things that surround us. It is neither nature itself nor the constructions built by the hands of man: cities, roads, houses. It rather represents the meta-physical constructions through which man perceives and makes sense of the universe in which he is thrown, constructions that are not separated from the physical but are rather built on top of it, and intertwined with it. The World of man stands against the Dark, but it is also built upon it and it cannot perdure without its support. According to Heidegger, for whom the "earth" designates the great body of the Dark:

> World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world . . . The earth cannot dispense with the Open of the world if it itself is to appear as earth in the liberated surge of its self-seclusion. The world, again, cannot soar out of the earth's sight if, as the governing breadth and path of all essential destiny, it is to ground itself on a resolute foundation.[21]

Man sees the Dark through the lens of the World, and the World allows the Dark to partially come out of its seclusion, being felt rather than seen. Through the World, the Dark can appear in the "upper realm" without being annihilated by the brilliance of the Bright, or by the conspicuousness of the Lofty. Being in the World, the Dark can be itself, staying in the shadows, out of the light, and it can yet transcend its own boundaries by appearing

[20] English translation from: Gadamer, *Truth and Method. 2 Revised edition.* Page 440; Original German: "Die Sprache ist nicht nur eine der Ausstattungen, die dem Menschen, der in der Welt ist, zukommt, sondern auf ihr beruht, und in ihr stellt sich dar, daß die Menschen überhaupt Welt haben. Für den Menschen ist die Welt als Welt da, wie sie für kein Lebendiges sonst Dasein hat, das auf der Welt ist." From: Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Page 446–447.

[21] English translation from: Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Pages 47–48; Original German: "Welt und Erde sind wesenhaft voneinander verschieden und doch niemals getrennt. Die Welt gründet sich auf die Erde, und Erde durchragt Welt . . . Die Erde kann das Offene der Welt nicht missen, soll sie selbst als Erde im befreiten Andrang ihres Sichverschließens erscheinen. Die Welt wiederum kann der Erde nicht entschweben, soll sie als waltende Weite und Bahn alles wesentlichen Geschickes sich auf ein Entschiedenes gründen." From: Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Pages 35–36.

outside of itself, given to man to be seen: not with his eyes but rather with his mind, thereby "tricking" the Bright by penetrating the "upper realm" without letting its nature be destroyed by the radiance of the skies.

The World stands upon the Dark. It therefore is part of what is found above the Ground, but it also differs from the skies and the Light filling them. It is invisible to the eye but it possesses a strong bond with the Dark. It is the highest part of the "upper realm" and yet it is also the one that enjoys the greatest level of intimacy with the earth. Man needs the Bright just as he needs the Dark for the survival of his flesh, for him to perdure as a being caught between earth and skies. Without the light of the World that illuminates his mind as the sun illuminates the creation, man could continue to live but he would be nothing more than a beast, indistinguishable from the rest of the Tree of Life. The World allows him to be more than a being among all the other beings: he is a human being, a creature that not merely let itself be carried by the flow of nature but rather one that can see its own destin-ation and strive to appropriate it, by shaping the World that shaped it.

The World is the way by which the continuity of the universe is split by our minds into a multitude of pieces that we organize into structures so as to convince ourselves that we can grasp the nature of "things." Such pieces and structures mostly originate from the dawn of our people. They were transmitted from mouth to ear across millennia and across vast expanses of land in a continuous human chain, with men improving or abandoning them according to their will. As the German philosopher warns us, however:

> The world is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are just there. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things. The world worlds, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen.[22]

[22] English translation from: Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page 43; Original German: "Welt ist nicht die bloße Ansammlung der vorhandenen abzahlbaren oder unabzählbaren, bekannten und unbekannten Dinge. Welt ist aber auch nicht ein nur eingebildeter, zur Summe des Vorhandenen hinzu

Man cannot escape the World without losing his own nature. The World is "light," without mass, and yet the strongest man would not be able to break the chains that bind him to it. The World is also "light," as a source of illumination, and yet it conceals itself so efficiently that very few men are even aware of its existence. Man can spend his whole life edifying a World without realizing how this World contributes to the edification of his own being. He can shape the World according to his inspiration, but he is nonetheless also shaped by the World, which is not only built by himself but also by countless other men, who are either living alongside him or already returned to the great body of the Dark.

The three realms of the Gaulish tradition, Dubnos, Bitu and Albios, are themselves only parts of the World of the Celts rather than objective elements of the creation. The line separating them is only drawn by the human mind so that man can better fathom the nature of the universe. This, however, does not imply that this separation does not reflect the truth of the creation. It can give man a deeper insight into the nature of the universe in which he is thrown, an insight that would remain concealed if the tripartition of his World had not been envisioned. More than this, it can also lead him to dis-cover the nature of the self-concealing source of light, the nature of the World itself. Seeing himself within the World to which he is forever bound, man may then begin to work *with* it rather than simply build it or be shaped by it. If he succeeds in establishing a harmony between him and his World, he may finally begin to lift up the veil covering his own nature and his own destin-ation.

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vorgestellter Rahmen. Welt weitet und ist seiender als das Greifbare und Vernehmbare, worin wir uns heimisch glauben. Welt ist nie ein Gegenstand, der vor uns steht und angeschaut werden kann." From: Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Pages 30–31.

3.2 The Gods of Albios

The Dark and the Deep, Life and Being, are both characterized by a certain unity that is easy for man to perceive. They form two great bodies that are somewhat intertwined with each other, as Life itself depends on the Dark and arises out of it. The "upper realm" is also braided together with these two bodies but its manifold nature makes its unity harder to see, perhaps precisely because all that one can see or fathom is mediated by the World and the Bright, including the Dark and Life.

The manifold nature of the Skies thus finds itself reflected in the World of the Celts. The divine nature of the "upper realm" is not composed of a united body of the heavens that would only face what is below. It is rather itself the seat of a strife between divine forces that harmoniously fight to display their power and extend the reach of their dominion. This divine play, continuously displayed in the firmament, is itself a part of the play between the realms in which man is thrown. The play of the heavens teaches man the beginning of the path that will lead him to an unveiling of the larger play in which he is himself called to be an actor rather than a mere pawn.

The separation between the three facets of Albios that were examined in the previous section, the Lofty, the Bright, and the World, can be associated with the three gods linked to the "upper realm" of the Gauls, if one keeps in mind that there is no strict line marking boundaries between them, just as the three realms themselves cannot be easily isolated. The first one of these gods, more closely bound to the Lofty, has already been mentioned: Taranis, the god of thunder, of the dark clouds and the winds. The second one is the luminous god that is the source of the light of the Bright, Lugus, the light of the sun that holds sway over the sky of the day. Finally, the third one is the least conspicuous of all the gods of the Celtic World, and yet also the most central character of the divine play of the heavens: Rigani, the great queen of the skies. She is the "silver wheel" that is seldom seen but encompasses all, the milky way, the galaxy in which our own lives are nothing but a grain of sand lost on a coastline. She represents all that *is*, whether it is seen or not, wether it is visible or invisible, including the World itself.

Each one of these three gods will first be examined separately before the play of the heavens is itself presented in the next chapter.

3.2.1 The Lofty One: Taranis

As concerning the other gods of the Celts, few details have been passed on to us concerning the "lofty one." The first god of the "upper realm" is nonetheless mentioned by name by the ancient sources and in Gaulish inscriptions. He is the last one of the three deities mentioned in the *Pharsalia*, and the ancient commentary on this work tells us that:

> Taranis Dis Pater is honored among them in this manner: a few men are burned in a tub of wood.[23]

The assimilation of Taranis with the Roman god of the "underworld" is clearly erroneous, even though both gods may nonetheless share common attributes. The very name of the god indeed proclaims the location of his dominion: TAPANIC [taranis] is the god of *thunder*, which is called TAPANOYC [taranus] in the language of the Gauls.[24] The fiery and aerial nature of the sacrifice is in accordance with this name. The root-word is found in all the Celtic languages and it survived in French toponyms and perhaps even in some dialects. According to Jacques Lacroix, "mountainous regions could have, more than others, remembered the thundering god: thunderstorms were often violent, and lighning bolts were feared there,"[25] perhaps explaining why the *Gascon* dialect, spoken near the Pyrenees mountain range, continued to call thunder *Taram*[26] two thousand years after the Roman conquest and the beginning of the neglect of the old gods. The men who frequently ascended the lofty mountains of Gaul may have felt a closer bond with the Lofty One, the cloudy god who reigns

[23] TBA. Original Latin: "Taranis Ditis pater hoc modo aput cos placatur: in alueo Iigneo aliquod homines cremantur." From: Hermann Usener, *Scholia in Lucani Bellum civile*, Page 32.

[24] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 290.

[25] TBA. Original French: "les régions montagneuses ont pu, davantage que d'autres, garder souvenir du dieu tonnant: les orages y sont parfois violents; la foudre y était redoutée." From: Lacroix, *Les noms d'origine gauloise : La Gaule des dieux*, Page 181.

[26] ibid., Page 181.

above them, a bond that better resisted the work of time.

The name of the god is also found written by the Gauls themselves in the following inscription found on a small basin discovered in a field in the south of the country:

> OYEBPOYMAPOC ΔEΔE TAPANOOY
> BPATOYΔEKANTEM
> *Ouebroumaros dede Taranoou bratoudekantem*
> Ouebroumaros offers this to Taranis as tithe (or as a thanksgiving).[27]

A basin is not only a container for water, gift from the Dark. Its surface can also be a mirror where the skies are reflected, appearing to displace and conquer the earth, while offering an image of the clouds that can be seen both by the men who cannot elevate themselves away from the Ground and the gods in the heavens.

Taranis also relatively frequently appears in Gaulish iconography. The most peculiar element that allows us to unambiguously identify him certainly is the wheel that the god holds with one hand, a sign usually interpreted either as a symbol of a thundering roar or as a solar one. A small bronze statue, now exposed at the French museum of national antiquities, shows him holding such a wheel with one hand and what appears to be a lightning bolt being thrown on the other, while he carries a series of "esses" on his shoulders (See Fig. 3.2). The god also appears with a wheel on the Cauldron of Gundestrup, which seems to be given or taken by a man or another god. The question of the interpretation of the meaning of this wheel will be given at a later point, when the play of the heavens will be examined (Ch. 5).

As told in a verse by the German poet Hölderlin: "In the thunderstorm speaks the god."[28] The loud rumble from the clouds that shakes the mountains and the lightning bolt that pierces (Ga. TAPO- [taro-][29]) through the clouds to strike the earth below, both are manifestations of the power of the "lofty one." They are

[27] Duval and Lejeune, *Recueil des inscriptions gauloises 1 : Textes gallo-grecs*, Page 54 (G–27); Savignac, *Merde à César*, Pages 56–57.

[28] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"*, Page 58. Original German: "Im Gewitter spricht der Gott." From: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Page 62.

[29] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 291.



Figure 3.2: *Small bronze statue representing Taranis* (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 189.).

his language and his tongue, with which he communicates with the rest of the creation. He is not just "thunder" itself, or a mere "god of thunder." He is the one whose speech is thunder, but who is far more than this. He is the air flowing above the Ground and creeping into any space left open by the Dark. He is the clouds towering over the earth and the creatures roaming on its surface. He is the wind (MWe. *awel*) that carries the scents of the flowers, brings the warmth of the distant deserts to the lands of the north and inspires (MWe. *awen*[30]) the poets.

The late anthropomorphic representations of Taranis share some elements in common with their Greek and Roman equivalents. He is seen as filled with anger, displaying strength without beauty, a brutish deity whose wrath seems to be directed toward the earth and its inhabitants. Several Gaulish coins, for example, appear to describe the first celestial god violently blowing away birds and men with his breath (See Fig. 3.3). His own body clearly forms the clouds of the Skies, with his long hairs and bushy beard undulating to form the winds that sweep the earth.

[30] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, p. 47

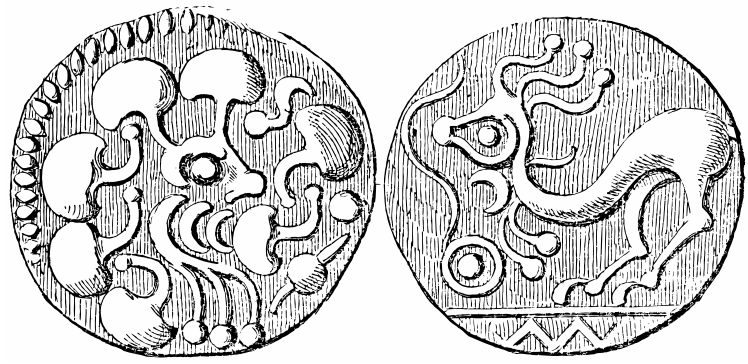


Figure 3.3: *Small bronze statue representing Taranis* (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 189.).

The anger of the "lofty one" and his tormented appearance mirrors the chaotic dimension of the sky. He is the god of chaos, if this word is neither taken in its original Greek sense, designating a primordial abyss, nor as implying a mere absence of order or harmony. The chaos linked with the "lofty one" rather designates the incredibly complex nature of his dominion, the intricate order of the work of the skies that is veiled behind an apparent randomness but whose nature has finally begun to be revealed by modern science. Our contemporaries have all heard of the "butterfly effect," the fact that the flapping of the butterfly's wings can be the source of a thunderstorm at the other end of the planet. This chaotic manifestation is nonetheless itself part of the natural order of the sky. It represents an unseen harmony, one that can be seen as being controlled by the divine: the lofty force that roams the heavens.

Man's relationship with the "lofty one" is as troubled as the god himself. He indeed sees his brethren suffer the wrath of the deity, who brings the lives of both men and cattle to an abrupt end with his fiery bolts. Man sees his crops swept away by the storms of summer or his fruits destroyed before they are ripe by freezing winds during the spring. Downpours from the clouds of anger flood his land, destroying villages, the work of his forefathers. Yet, the "lofty one" also is the source of the fresh air of the summer nights that puts a smile on man's face. He is also the one gently sprinkling the fields with the water of life that allows all the plants to grow and allows both men and animals to prolong their days

over the Ground. He is the one protecting the ears of wheat from the scorching radiance of the sun by taking them under the cover of his massive woolly white hands. He is the one carrying the pollens away so that flowers would embellish the face of the earth, allowing the bees to produce the sweet nectar that rejoices the heart of men. His anger can be soothed and he can be a source of life, a benevolent manifestation of the divine.

In order to show their gratitude to the one providing some of the most crucial elements that they need in order to stay above the surface of the earth, including the very air that they breathe every second, the Celts made offerings to the "lofty one." The commentary on the *Pharsalia* has already been mentioned at the beginning of this section. It told us that Taranis was honored in the following manner: "a few men are burned in a tub of wood." Others ancient sources give us more detail concerning these offerings to the first celestial god. Strabo tells us that: "they prepare a colossus of hay and wood, into which they put cattle, beasts of all kinds, and men, and then set fire to it." [31] This is the famous "wicker man" that became one of the symbols of the supposed "barbaric" nature of the early Celts. The Roman emperor also depicts such a practice, adding a few details to the description made by the Greek geographer:

> The nation of all the Gauls is extremely devoted to superstitious rites; and on that account they who are troubled with unusually severe diseases, and they who are engaged in battles and dangers, either sacrifice men as victims, or vow that they will sacrifice them, and employ the Druids as the performers of those sacrifices . . . Others have figures of vast size, the limbs of which formed of osiers they fill with living men, which being set on fire, the men perish enveloped in the flames. They consider that the oblation of such as have been taken in theft, or in robbery, or any other offense, is more acceptable to the immortal gods; but when a supply of that class is wanting, they have recourse to the

[31] English translation from: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. (§ 4.4.5); Original Greek: "κατασκευάσαντες κολοσσὸν χόρτου καὶ ξύλων, ἐμβαλόντες εἰς τοῦτον βοσκήματα καὶ θηρία παντοῖα καὶ ἀνθρώπους, ὡλοκαύτουν." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag.

oblation of even the innocent. [32]

The last sentence certainly is an exaggeration destined to paint the enemies of the Empire as savages without any moral sense. The rest of the description, however, appears rather credible. The Roman commander once again displays a lack of sensitivity to spiritual matters in his depiction, leaving aside the reason why such "wicker men" were made in the first place, an unusual practice.

The link between the mode of execution of the victims and the "lofty one" is very clear: the flames reduce the flesh and the blood into fine ashes, which are then lifted up toward the sky by the heat they produce. These ashes are thereby handed over to the winds that carry them to become parts of the clouds, reinforcing the body of the god above. They also become the clouds showering the fields and forming the rivers. They become the storm that chases away the fleet of the invader, or the breeze guiding the traveler back to his homeland. By offering the lives of those who dishonored their people, the Druids not only improve the health of the Teuta: they also provide resources to the forces of the Skies, who need to extract matter from the body of the Dark in order to exercise their power. Only the smallest dust of the Dark, pieces broken away from the great body, can be lifted up toward the heavens and be used by the "lofty one." Fire is the tool of the Bright that can be used to produce the "light matter" able to soar in the highest parts of the sky. This tool of the Bright nonetheless does not belong to the Lofty and its god. His lightning bolt can ignite the earth, but the hand of man is more skilled to wield this power. Man can thus assist the "lofty one" by preparing the ashes needed to strengthen the winds and the clouds. Thus do man burn things of the earth to offer them to the one above.

A question nonetheless remains: the significance of the "wicker

[32] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.16); Original Latin: "Natio est omnis Gallorum admodum dedita religionibus, atque ob eam causam, qui sunt adfecti gravioribus morbis quique in proeliis periculisque versantur, aut pro victimis homines immolant aut se immolaturos vovent administrisque ad ea sacrificia druidibus utuntur . . . Alii immani magnitudine simulacra habent, quorum contexta viminibus membra vivis hominibus complent; quibus succensis circumventi flamma exanimantur homines. Supplicia eorum qui in furto aut in latrocinio aut aliqua noxia sint comprehensi gratiora dis immortalibus esse arbitrantur; sed, cum eius generis copia defecit, etiam ad innocentium supplicia descendunt." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

man" itself. It is not a mere idol of wood, crudely made from the trunk of a large tree. A large structure made of wicker requires a considerable amount of work, a collaboration between a large number of people who would spend days or weeks preparing and building this unusual sacrifice, which probably was an annual event. The people as a whole would be involved in such preparations, from the Druids who conduct the sacrifice itself to the women who patiently weaved the stalks while the men chose and guarded the victims who would be offered to the "lofty one." This offering would seem to be tailored to involve the people as a whole, showing the unity of the Teuta to the divine above the Ground and above Life and Being itself.

The cohesion of the Teuta is precisely what the "wicker man" represents. The colossus is itself an image: it symbolizes the being formed by the organic relation between more fundamental forms of Life. As the men, women, and children forming a single people, a whole that is more than the sum of its parts just as a man is more than an aggregation of cells, the body of the "wicker man" is composed of men as well. It is a living image of Life honoring the Skies that allow it to *be*. Life would not exist, there would be no living beings without the benevolence of the "lofty one" who provides the fresh water they need to quench their thirst or to water the crops that sustain their bodies, just as it sustains the body of the Teuta as a whole. The bond between the Teuta and the "lofty one" is renewed by this celebration of Life through the sacrificial death of the lowest elements of the Teuta: the men who disregarded their role in it by stealing for their own profit, thereby weakening the body of their people in order to inflate their own *ego*.

The ritual sacrifices of the Celts have been almost universally depicted as barbaric and senseless by the "civilized" men, ancient and modern ones, and the overcoming of this prejudice is never an easy task. If one attempts to look beyond the shocking aspect of the "wicker man," one may nonetheless perceive its truth, and even a certain beauty. The Druids or priests who were at the origin of this ritual were far from lacking intellect or moral values. As mentioned numerous times by the Greeks and the Romans, the Celts were a very pious people. Their neighbors also told us that to "honor the gods" would seem to have been the first teaching of the Druids. All the peoples of the Iron age executed the criminals

among them. The Celts simply ritualized these condemnations, using them for a spiritual purpose: to unite their people and to renew their bond with the gods. When the flames reduce the lives of the thief and the murderer to ashes and lift these ashes up to be carried away by the winds up to the highest clouds of the skies, both the gods and men are offered a manifestation of the beauty of the creation, in which the three realms are interlaced and interdependent, harmoniously bound with one another. Each cell of man's body; the bodies of every man forming the body of the people; the "god of Life and Being" itself: are all turned toward the "lofty one" during this sacrifice, forming a bridge between the realms. The first god of the skies is itself moved by this event. The winds are touched by the flames and the contact with the lives that were brought to an end for this purpose. He will be compelled to reply to this offering, be it with thunder resonating like a million clapping hands or with a fresh breeze that gently enfolds all the men below the clouds. The "lofty one," however, is not the only manifestation of the divine that is found is the realm above.

3.2.2 The Bright One: Lugus

The second celestial god of the Gaulish World certainly is the one whose dis-covery is the most challenging. He is the god of the Bright, and yet he remains to this day covered by a cloak of shadows. His presence has left traces all over the *Keltia*, from Ireland to Spain, in the names of men or cities, or in votive inscriptions. Characters clearly based on him are found in the medieval folklore of Wales and Ireland, and yet it is also a god who is never mentioned by name in the ancient sources. No image of him has been unambiguously identified, and even the Cauldron of Gundestrup, the most detailed and explicit representation of the Gaulish pantheon, does not seem to include any clearly identifiable representations of him. Despite all this, it would nonetheless appear that he occupied a central role in the religious world of the Celts, a role that still needs to be unconcealed.

As concerning the first celestial god, the most surely known aspect of this deity is the origin of its name: ΛΟΥΤΟΥϹ [lu-

gus][33], derived from the Indo-European root *lewk[34], "to shine," "to be bright." Lugus is the "luminous one," the light coming from the sun, rather than the sun itself. He is the light descending from above the clouds, above the blue dome that encompasses the earth. He not only towers over the Ground but also over the "lofty one" himself. More than stone carvings or the descriptions of the historians, the best way for us to dis-cover the nature of the "luminous one" probably is to examine the nature of what he represents: light itself, as it was the raw element from which the old "poets" of Gaul began to carve a place to Lugus into their World.

Most of the light that goes into a man's eyes comes out of the sun, the largest and brightest of the heavenly bodies visible on earth. The earliest Greek philosophers already knew that the moon's brilliance was only a reflection of the gift of the sun,[35] and that they therefore owed to the sun their ability to see the creation around them. How hard would man's life be without the radiance of the white sphere in the skies! Just as his life would not be possible without the earth that provides the matter for the sustenance of his flesh, man would not survive without the light of the heavens. As the air forming the "lofty one" stands against the earth formed by the "horned one," the shining face of the "luminous one" stands against the body of the god of the shadows. The Bright faces the Dark and man is caught between them, depending on them both. The Bright, however, is not the sun itself. It is indeed not the sun that faces the Dark, as the lower realm does not have any equivalent to the blazing heavenly body. There is no black sun in the depths of the oceans. The Dark fills up the entirety of its realm, and so does the Bright, which does not designate the fiery disk up in the air but rather its emanation: the brightness that penetrates and occupies the air and the emptiness above the Ground. The Bright forms the whole of what is above the body of the Dark and above the realm of Life, and it is this whole that contrasts with the Dark itself. Once this has been perceived, the nature of the Luminous One may begin to be unveiled.

Once the Gauls began to welcome the influence of the religion of their conqueror, they started to disregard the root of the Gaul-

[33] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 211.
[34] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 248.
[35] See: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 49

ish conception of the divine, one that did not separate the gods from the creation in which they were inserted. They ceased to see the Luminous One and began to see a man representing the light of the sun. They ceased to look up toward the skies to behold the divine with their own eyes and instead carved up images of stone, iron, or wood, which would be easier to understand than the incomprehensible nature of the creation itself. Instead of the light itself, they sought to represent a man who would possess certain of its characteristics. Considering the dozens of such works that have passed to millennia and can still be examined, it would seem highly unlikely that none of them would not represent the Luminous One, who seemed to be worshipped all across the *Keltia* for centuries.

One of the most credible hypotheses concerning the representation of Lugus certainly is the one seeing him as the "three-faced" god, which is represented on several monuments of the Gallo-Roman period. One example is an altar found in *Reims* that shows three faces belonging to a single head, with prominent hairs and a long beard (See Fig. 3.4). This work displays an indigenous style that contrasts with the emphasis on realism characteristic of Greek and Roman art. Here, it seems clear that the goal of the artist was more to represent the essence of the divine by showing how it can be related to man rather than to create a faithful image of a man who would symbolize a god above. The god is shown as a head without a body, a head that appears flat and whose three faces completely fill up the square space upon which they are carved. The meaning of the three faces appears relatively plain: it implies an ability to see everything effortlessly. The Greek sun-god Helios has received an epithet that perfectly fits such a description: Πανόπτης [pan-óptês], the "all-seeing." The almost two-dimensional nature of the artwork can also be related to the heavenly body, which as said by Anaximender, appears "flat like a leaf."[36] The sun fills all the spaces that are not occupied by the Dark. Towering over the earth, every man living on its surface can see the face of the source of light, which has the same appearance no matter from where one looks at it. The body of the sun is uniform. It has no sides nor back, no chest nor limbs: only a face that appears

[36] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 83; Original Greek: "πλατυν ώς πέταλον τον ήλιον." From: ibid., Page 82

identical no matter from which angle it is observed. This is why the Luminous One may have been represented as a three-faced god, whose hairs and beard may represent the rays coming out of him to bring light to the earth and to the creatures living on its surface.

In medieval Ireland, the name of Lugus survived the conversion of the people to the new faith. *Lug*, the hero of several Irish legends, nonetheless probably had few in common with the Luminous One of the Gauls. Once again, we will deliberately avoid the pitfall of easy but illusory parallels with the insular literature, but just as the name survived the centuries, certain aspects of the Irish hero indubitably show that he once represented more than a human hero, such as the following passage from the *Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann*, "The Fate of the Children of Tuireann":

> Breas, the son of Balar, arose and said: "I wonder that the sun is rising in the west to-day, and in the east every other day." "It were better that it were so," said the Druids. "What else is it?" (but the sun), said he. "It is the radiance of the face of Lugh Lamhfhada," they said.[37]

The epithet *Lamhfhada / Lámfada* literally means "long-arm" or "long-hand." His Welsh counterpart, LLeu, appearing in the *Mabinogi*, also received a similar name: *LLawgyffes* "skillful hand." The inceptual Luminous One, which is the light seen by all men on every day of their lives, had already been replaced by anthropomorphic characters in medieval times. The insular legends had already forgotten to look at the skies to witness the divine play that is meant to guide their walk on the path, replacing it with the product of their own imagination, tales of men rather than poems depicting the order of nature. These tales nonetheless somewhat faithfully preserved the names of the major characters of the play, and the epithet given to the "luminous one" may also reflect one of his original characteristics. The "long-arm" of Lug may originally not have referred to his skills when throwing spears to his enemies. The

[37] English translation from: Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, *OiDe cloinne Tuireann = The fate of the children of Tuireann*, Pages 82–83. Original Old Irish: "Is annsin d'eirig iongnad liom Breas mac Balair, agus a oubairt: "Is iongnad Liom," ar re, "an grian ag eirge a n-iar a n-diu agus a n-oir gaca Laoi eile." "Dob" fear go m-bud í," ar na draoite. "Creud eile" ar re. "Dealrad aigte Lóga Lámfada," ar riad." From: ibid., Page 15.

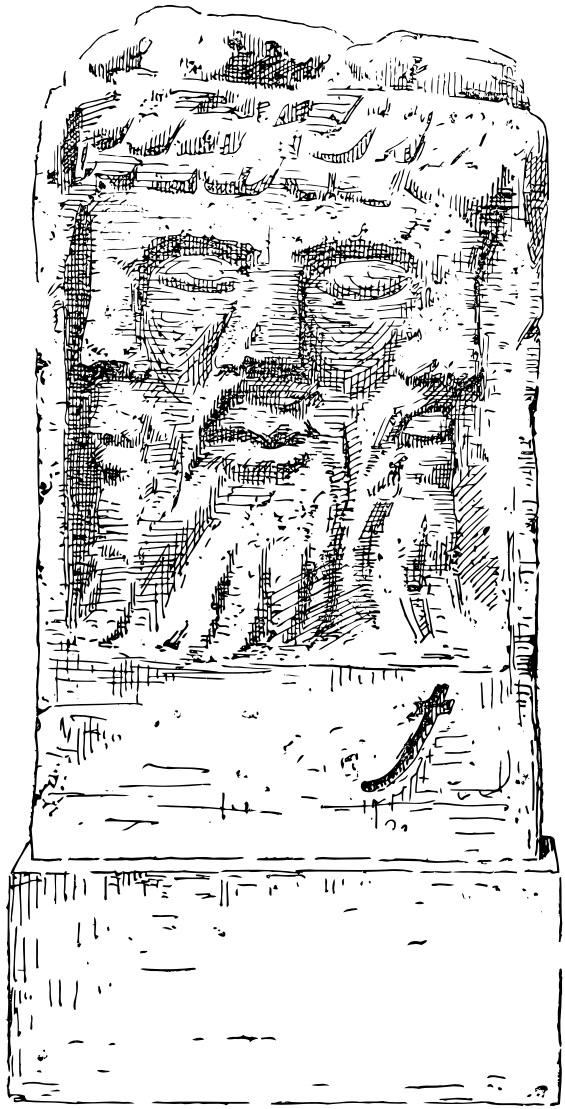


Figure 3.4: *A three faced god that may represent Lugus*(A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 344.).

shining sphere of the heavens also throws things that can pierce and kill: rays of light coming out of his own body. The Light of the skies itself is akin to the "long-arm" of Lug. It is "far-reaching," passing through millions of miles in an instant, but also "skillful," as it also creeps into the smallest space that is not completely shut off from the skies.

The rays of the Bright, however, do more than simply strike the body of the Dark. The far-reaching hands of the blazing heavenly body are not the violent fists of the Lofty One, the thunder that cleaves the tallest trees and kills men and beasts as with a hammer thrown out of the clouds. They are the skillful hands of an artist, a painter whose brush is swept over the creation. The white light of the sun is the palette from which the world of man gets its colors. When the brush of the Luminous One passes over an element of the creation, this element retains certain parts of its light while rejecting others, as if choosing its own color on the palette given by the god. The surface of the Dark is in such manner entirely painted by the light of the Bright, which includes every hue perceivable by men and animals. The beauty of Life and Being and the majesty of the skies is thus revealed by the far-reaching hand of the Luminous One, and contrary to the Lofty One, who inspired mixed feelings to the dwellers of the earth, the second celestial god is the source of an unambiguous awe.

Lugus is the one who brings the universe out of its concealment, offering it to be contemplated by all beings, but doing so, he also conceals himself. The body of the sun can never be seen with the eye of man, which only sees the light coming out of it. It can nonetheless also be said that man never sees the light itself: he rather only sees the "things" on which the light bounces or originates, and not the nature of the light itself. Light reveals all, and yet it is never itself seen. Its nature still escapes the grasp of the human mind but the major part of man's knowledge is nonetheless given to him through its agency. Lugus is the all-seing god whose face cannot be beholden, and thus no easy representation of him could be fashioned by the hands of man. He is the carrier of visions and beauty, the messenger teaching man the nature of the earth upon which he is thrown. He is the great dis-coverer, the one who *un-conceals* the "things" that man sees.

An un-concealment firstly is an event linked to sight and what

allows it to occur: light. As noted by Heidegger, the wisdom of the Greek tongue also shows that an un-concealment, understood as ἀ-λήθεια [a-lḗtheia], is also linked with the concept of truth, which does not belong to the Dark nor to the Bright. Truth is neither matter nor light, and yet it shares with the latter its "lightness," that is, its absence of heaviness. It belongs to another dimension of the "upper realm," one that transcends both earth and the heavens, the Dark and the Lofty: the World.

3.2.3 The Light of the World: Lugus

As it was seen in an earlier section,[38] the World is not to be thought as designating the physical environment in which man lives his days on the earth. The World is the loftiest part of the "upper realm," one that transcends the Dark and the Bright. It can be crudely thought as a "realm of ideas," but only if one keeps in mind that it is one that is built and depends on the Dark and on Life, and one that man dwells just as he dwells the earth. There can be no "idea" without a creature thinking it, one with a brain part of the body of the Dark. The World is the "meta-physical," what is neither light nor matter, and yet is inseparable from them.

The World nonetheless enjoys a particular bond with the Bright, one that has been noticed by the German philosopher, who tells us that: "the essence of light and brightness, namely letting through for seeing, is precisely the basic accomplishment of the idea."[39] What the Bright shows with its brush of light is the truth of the earth and the sky. It un-conceals the nature of the creation and offers it to man to contemplate. To be seen as Truth, however, these visions must be brought into the World. Man indeed cannot see the light of the Bright without the help of his World. As Heidegger reminds us:

> Someone who sees a book knows that he already sees something more than, and different from, what he can

[38] See § 3.1.3

[39] English translation from: Heidegger and Sadler, *The Essence of Truth*, Page 42; Original German: "Was wir als das Wesen des Lichts und der Helle herausstellten, Durchlässigkeit für das Sehen, gerade das ist die Grundleistung der Idee." From: Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*, Page 57.

> sense with his eyes, i.e. that he must already understand what 'book' as such means.[40]

Here is one of the pillars of modern phenomenology. It teaches man that his sight depends as much on his mind as on his eyes. The Bright sends light to the eyes but it is the mind that transforms this light into a set of "things" and "truths" that form the World in which man is thrown and from which he observes and interacts with the earth and the skies.

If Lugus is the god of the Bright, its interdependence with the World may imply that he also represents the god of the World. The World is the product of countless "un-concealments," truths and things revealed to man and then passed on as a tradition from generation to generation. Truth (ἀ-λήθεια) represents the quintessential "idea," the cornerstone of the World that joins it together with the Bright. The existence of a link between Light and Truth, the Bright and the World may have been reflected in the tongue of the Gauls. As argued by Jean-Paul Savignac, Lugus may have been seen as the "god of oaths," noticing that the word for "oath" in Gaulish would seem to be very close to the one of the deity: *𐌋𐌏𐌖𐌕𐌉𐌏𐌍 [*lugion].[41] This resemblance may have been purely fortuitous originally and yet it may still have influenced the relation between the god and oaths in the Gaulish World. This root is mentioned several times in the final imprecation of one of the longest Gaulish inscription extent to us:

> ... LUGE DESSUMMIIIS LUGE DESSUMIIS
> LUGE DESUMIIS LUXE
> I prepare them for the oath. I prepare them for the oath. I prepare them for the oath. Swear![42]

As noted by Savignac, the word *luge* may even designate the god

[40] English translation from: Heidegger and Sadler, *The Essence of Truth*, Page 42; Original German: "wie derjenige, der das Buch sieht, etwas davon weiß, daß er schon *mehr* und *anderes* sehen, im Blick haben muß als das mit den Augen Empfindbare: daß er schon *verstehen* muß, was »Buch« überhaupt besagt." From: Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*, Page 58.

[41] Savignac, *Merde à César*, Page 83. See also: Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 210.

[42] The translation follows the interpretation of Savignac in Savignac, *Merde à César*, Pages 78–83. Lambert, *Recueil des inscriptions gauloises, 2, fasc. 2*, Pages 269–271.

himself, but no matter whether it was the case or not, this link may nonetheless serve as a catalyst for the uncovering of the nature of the World and of its relation to the "luminous one." An oath is itself defined as "a solemn usually formal calling upon God or a god to witness to the truth of what one says."[43] To take an oath implies that one has no fear of being examined, of being proved. To be a witness of an event almost always implies *seeing* it, rather than the use of the other senses, and therefore who else would be a more fitting witness than the all-seing god? The oath, however, does not involve something that can be seen, but rather something that is heard: not a noise nor a sound, but rather words, a manifestation of language. It would show that the reach of the "long-armed god" extended beyond the boundaries of the earth and the heavens: its light pierced through the limits of the physical realms to go beyond them, to the meta-physical World.

Clues indicating the existence of a link between the "luminous one" and the World can also be seen in ancient sources. The following *interpretatio romana* given by the emperor as often been interpreted as referring to him:[44]

> They worship as their divinity, Mercury in particular, and have many images of him, and regard him as the inventor of all arts, they consider him the guide of their journeys and marches, and believe him to have great influence over the acquisition of gain and mercantile transactions.[45]

The identification of the three-faced god with the Roman Mercury can also be supported Gallo-Roman iconography, where the indigenous deity can be seen with a symbol frequently accompanying the representations of Mercury: a ram. The head of the animal can for example be seen in the left hand of the three-faced god in a carving found in Paris (See Fig. 3.5).

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[43] From: Webster's dictionary. Web.

[44] For example, see: Lacroix, *Les noms d'origine gauloise : La Gaule des dieux*, Page 155

[45] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.17); Original Latin: "Deum maxime Mercurium colunt. Huius sunt plurima simulacra: hunc omnium inventorem artium ferunt, hunc viarum atque itinerum ducem, hunc ad quaestus pecuniae mercaturasque habere vim maximam arbitrantur." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.)



Figure 3.5: *The three faced god holding a ram's head* (Reinach, *Guide illustré du Musée de Saint-Germain*, Page 72.).

An element supporting the identification of Lugus as the master of all arts, another attribute of Mercury, was first noticed by the French scholar Henry d'Arbois de Jubainville in a medieval Irish text: the *Cath Maige Tuired*, "The Battle of Magh Tuireadh." Once again, rather than the insular stories themselves, it is the names of some of their characters and the epithets associated to them that appears more likely to contain remnants of the vision of the divine of the early Celtic World. This text tells us how a man named Lug sought to enter the royal palace at Tara, a man who was also called *Sam-il-dánach*: "the equally skilled in many arts." When he arrived at the entrance of Tara:

> The doorkeeper then asked of Samildánach, 'What art do you practice? For no one without an art enters Tara.' 'Question me,' he said. 'I am a builder.' The doorkeeper answered, 'We do not need you. We have a builder already, Luchta mac Lúachada.' [46]

Lug continued to seek entry by mentioning all the arts that he mastered, successively saying that he is a smith, a champion, a harper, a warrior, a poet and a historian, a sorcerer, a physician, a cupbearer and a brazier. The guard then decides to tell the king about this mysterious man:

> Then the doorkeeper went into the royal hall and told everything to the king. 'A warrior has come before the court,' he said, 'named Samildánach; and all the arts which help your people, he practices them all, so that he is the man of each and every art.' [47]

The word translated as "art" (OIr. *dán*) should here be understood as including all the skills that involve the intellect, as its Greek equivalent: τέχνη [téchnē], which encompasses the arts, the

[46] English translation from: *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts); Original Old Irish: "Rofíoarfaig ion dorsaid do tSamhilldánuch, 'Cía dán frisa ngnéie?' al séi, 'ar ní téid nech cin dán i Temruid.' 'Déne mo athcomarc,' ol sé. 'Am sáer.' Friscort an dorsaid, 'Nít-regaim i leas. Atá sáer lenn cenu .i. Luchtai mac Lúachadhae.' " From: Ibid.

[47] English translation from: *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts); Original Old Irish: "Luid in dorsaid isin rígtech íar sudiu co n-éicid dond ríogh uleí. 'Tánic ócláech io ndoras lis,' al sé, 'Samilldánach a ainm; & na huili dano arufognot det muntir-si, atát les ule a óenor, conedh fer cecha dánai ule éi.' " From: Ibid.

sciences, and the *technique* as a whole. The Irish word *dán* can also designate poems, trades, or businesses. It literally means "a gift," something "given" to man, but by whom?[48] The common element between all these arts, all these intellectual skills mastered by Lug is that they are all directly linked to the World. What makes a good builder, smith, musician, poet or historian is not mere physical strength but rather a practical knowledge that is inherently meta-physical. Even the warrior needs his strength to be guided by a skillful hand in order to overcome his enemies.

The skills of Lug can also be compared to the ones of the Gallic Mercury described by the emperor. The invention of all arts, the guiding of the travelers, and the activities related to wealth and commerce are mentioned by Caesar. To guide men on their journeys on earth would seem to be an attribute of the god of the Bright, the Luminous One who sheds light in front of their steps and can tame the anger of the Lofty One. The monetary activities, on the other hand, are clearly linked with the World. The metal used to mint the coins of bronze, silver, and gold used by the Gauls unambiguously belongs to the Dark. It is extracted from the entrails of the earth in the shadowy shafts of the mines. By itself, however, the metal is itself worthless. Gold itself has no intrinsic value. What makes it so precious is the eyes of the men desiring to acquire it, its place in the World of men. The images stamped on them mark their belonging to a nation, the moment when they cease to be a mass of metal and become coins, pieces of the abstract monetary system of a people or a government.

A last but nonetheless central element of the World appears to be linked to the Luminous One in an illustrious medieval Welsh source: language. The following verses of the poem entitled *Cad Goddeu* ("The Battle of the Trees"), attributed to the 6th century poet Taliesin, describe a character bearing a strong resemblance to the Lug of Ireland, and perhaps also the Lugus of the Gauls:[49]

[48] The word can be found with a similar meaning in French, but from the Latin: *un don*.

[49] English translation from: Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, Page 282. Original Old Welsh from: ibid., Page 143.

O dof yt las baed.	If I come to where the boar was killed,
Ef gwrith ef datwrith.	He will compose, he will decompose,
Ef gwrith ieithoed.	He will form languages.
llachar y enw llawfer.	The strong-handed gleamer, his name,
Lluch llywei nifer.	With a gleam he rules his numbers.
Ys ceinynt yn ufel.	They would spread out in a flame,
O dof yn uchel.	When I shall go on high.

This *Llachar Llawfer*, the "strong-handed gleamer" clearly seems to be the "long-armed," "skillful-handed" Lug, who also appears in other texts of the medieval Welsh tradition. He is here presented not only as a master of the arts, a poet skillful with his tongue, but also as one forming languages themselves.

As shown by Gadamer,[50] language is "not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all."[51] The emergence of language in the life of man operated a clearing. It opened up a whole new space that can be inhabited by man, a space that rests on the Dark and Life but nonetheless itself is pure Light, in both sense of the term: as the luminous and as what has no mass. Language is manifested on the earth and in the skies. Words are carved on stone or wood; They are spoken and carried through the air into the ears of those who listen. Language nevertheless also is fundamentally metaphysical, something that transcends matter and space, the Dark and the Bright.

The heart of language is the building of "things" through which man can perceive the universe around him. By forging "concepts," or "words," he forms the building blocks of the World; he crafts a lens through which he will see the creation. The World is the totality formed by all these building blocks. It is the structure built with language, which is not a mere tool that man can use as he pleases, but rather, in the words of Heidegger, a "house of being,"[52] man's home, which he shapes according to his will but

[50] See § 3.1.1

[51] English translation from: Gadamer, *Truth and Method. 2 Revised edition.* Page 440; Original German: "Die Sprache ist nicht nur eine der Ausstattungen, die dem Menschen, der in der Welt ist, zukommt, sondern auf ihr beruht, und in ihr stellt sich dar, daß die Menschen überhaupt Welt haben." From: Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Page 446–447.

[52] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, Page 217; Original German: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 9: Wegmarken (1919–1961)*, Page 313.

that also shapes him according to the will of others, a home in which he is forever prisoner.

The previous pages have shown the place of the Luminous One in the World of the later Celts: the Gallo-Romans, the Irish, and the Welsh mainly. It showed him as the "inventor of all arts," the master of language, and a skillful-handed man. The inceptual Lugus of the Gauls, however, was a god and not a man, no matter how strong or skilled. If the early Celts rejected anthropomorphic representations of the gods, it certainly was because such images would only be caricatures depicting the divine as what it is not: a man. The three faces of the "all-seing" one of the Gallo-Romans attempt to show how the god surpasses men, but they still lead men to think of him as a man located somewhere in the heavens, simply out of reach. In order to re-dis-cover the inceptual nature of the Luminous One, it is necessary for us to distance ourselves from these images, whose examination is nonetheless useful as it allows us to see and walk back the path that led to their creation. These anthropomorphic representations are only the starting point of the journey to the inceptual Lugus, to the essence of the "luminous one."

The link between the god and the Bright has already been examined: he is not a human-shaped god commanding the sun or its light, but rather the Bright itself, the emptiness of the skies and the Light that fills them. Likewise, he is not an overseer of the World, or its architect, but rather what emerges from its cohesion, the being formed by its entirety. He is the Light of the World, what allows man to see the universe through the lens of the World. The "luminous one" is formed by the mind of men, but men are also formed by it, as its being is sustained by the continuous chain of tradition, by which the World, seen as the sum of all the knowledge and concepts accumulated *in* language, passes through the millennia. Just as the living beings roaming the earth form the cells of the body of the Teuta, the mind of each man forms a cell of the "luminous one," a part of the World. These cells are pure "Light," without "heaviness," that is, meta-physical, but they are as important to the being of man as his own body. Without the Light of the World, man would be blind to his own being, and to the nature of being itself. Only through the World may he stand above the beasts that are purely ruled by their own instincts, by the divine will or by chaos. The Light of the Skies

would itself remain in the shadows if it didn't pierce through the frontier between the Bright and the World, between the physical brightness shining in the sky and the meta-physical one that shines in the World. Only when man knows what "light" is, as an element of his World, does he truly see it. The "luminous one" therefore is the one giving sight to all beings: he sheds light on the Dark, highlighting its surface. It gives warmth to all creatures and allows Life to flourish above the Ground. Finally, the "far-reaching" rays of the "luminous one" shines inside the World. They form the hearth of the "house of being," through the walls of which man can contemplate and act upon the creation.

The nature of the relation between man and the "luminous one" is both particularly fascinating and extremely complex. Far from the simplistic image of a superhuman figure in command of the sun or the sky, a figure that faces the men living under its yoke down below, the relation between them and the god is an intricate one, as the nature of the god is tightly intertwined with the very nature of man. Life and Being rest upon the body of the Dark but the World itself rests upon Life and Being. It cannot perdure without men serving as the cells of its own body. Conversely, man would not be a human being without the Light of the World, the shining body of the tradition embedded in language since the dawn of his kind. Man was begotten by the Dark but it is the World that makes him human, a creature able to swim against the flow of nature or to assist it willingly and consciously. The "all-seing" god of the Light, understood as both the Bright and the World, physical brilliance and meta-physical enlightenment, would nonetheless be blind without the men building and supporting the World, as they are his eyes, which are scattered all over the surface of the earth. He is all-seing not because he is the Light itself, but because he gathers the visions of all men, forming a single World that constitutes his own body. He is the being emerging from the encounter between the two facets of the Light, the Bright and the World, a being of a higher order, with individual men forming the cells of its body, but nonetheless also sharing a crucial aspect of its nature with man: the fact that he is as much shaped by the other as he himself shapes it. There is no clear line separating mankind as a whole from the "luminous one." The two are intertwined as man's being is intertwined with language and the World. The god is not a Lord of the Light, as he is himself the Light, which can

itself be shaped by the will of men, just as they themselves are shaped by the whole of the Light that they received since their infancy.

The unity of the Light, which is the radiance of the Bright whose source is the sun and the mass-less body of the World that is built in the mind of men, itself becomes a part of the World once it is brought to language and conceptualized. It is an element that is worthy to be contemplated, as it not only holds a key to a better perception of the nature of man but also can help us dis-cover a new aspect of the divine.

3.2.4 The Celestial Queen

Among the four gods of the Celts that were examined in the previous pages, none of them were women. It would nonetheless seem that the highest seat of the Gaulish pantheon was reserved to one, a goddess elevated in both the literal and figurative sense of the term. From the depths of the Dark to Life, the Lofty, and the Bright, each god is more than an arbitrary direction for one's prayers, hopes, and anger. They are more than the product of men's imagination: they are foremost anchored in "nature," as it is experienced by all men each day of their lives. The Dark can be felt in the earth, physical matter. Life and Being is both experienced directly by man and witnessed as he observes the other beings around him. The Lofty gives him the air that fills his chest, the rain that waters his crops, and the thunder that reminds him of his frailty in front of the divine. The Bright shines upon the creation in which he is thrown and enlightens his mind so that he may grasp the universe with his mind. Above all these, above the earth, the clouds, and even the sun, there lies the high seat of the gods, the utmost manifestation of the divine in the creation.

The most complete and precise source at our disposal concerning the gods of the early Celts without a doubt is the Cauldron of Gundestrup, a mute series of images carved and stamped on silver that nonetheless speaks more of the gods of the Gauls than all the ancient sources combined. The play that it depicts shows the role of the different gods of the Celtic World, and their relationships. Cernunnos is clearly identified as the god of the Dark and the Deep on one of the plate, while Taranis displays his anger in the sky in



Figure 3.6: *The goddess of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

another. The unfolding of the play itself will be left out for now, as it will be the subject of the last chapter, but it can be noticed that the most central character of the story of the Cauldron appears to be a woman, a goddess, who is represented on four of the thirteen silver plates.

Before trying to name this goddess, a brief examination of the way she is depicted on the Cauldron will be performed, so that she can later be linked with other representations of Celtic goddesses. Of the four wide plates found on the inner part of the Cauldron, the woman is only represented once (See Fig. 3.6). She occupies the upper part of the center of this plate, and she is surrounded by four wondrous beasts: two elephant-looking creatures facing her, two griffins, and what appears to be a dog ready to attack. The woman wears a torc on her neck. She appears naked, her arms folded on her chest upon which her long hairs fall down. Her upper and lower lips are marked with two dots, which also appear on another plate. The design of this plate parallels the one showing Taranis in the skies, and scholars seem to agree that the woman is also represented as located in the sky.

This scene can be related to a theme that appears on several Gaulish coins, one of which was already examined in the first chapter. These coins (See Fig. 3.7 and Fig. 1.17) show a man kneeling down, with an arm extended, appearing to offer a torc to a woman-headed horse, her face facing downward while she stands between

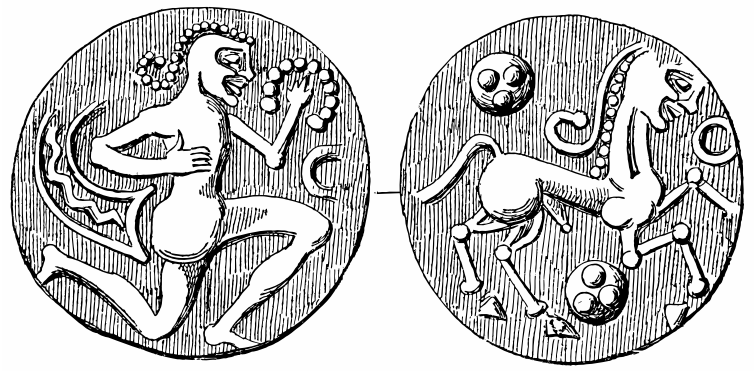


Figure 3.7: *Esus(?) offering a torc to the celestial goddess* (Hucher, *L'art gaulois, ou, Les Gaulois d'après leurs médailles*, Page 38.).

two spheres, which themselves contain three smaller ones.[53] Other coins frequently represent this horse-shaped goddess surrounded by heavenly bodies: sun, moon, and stars, and it can thus be inferred that the aforementioned spheres would also represent the heavenly location of the deity. It can be noted that on the wide plate of the Cauldron, the woman is also placed between two disks: rosettes that may also evoke celestial bodies.

Gallo-Roman iconography contains a profusion of statues and carvings representing a goddess associated with horses, whose name is known to us from ancient sources: ЄTTONA [epona], a name derived from the Indo-European word for "horse." The Roman poet Prudentius (4th c. A.D.), who was no admirer of the Celtic tradition, wrote that:

> Even though [a pagan] dedicates smoking altars to some Saturns, Junos or Venuses, or to other strange deities, he nonetheless, each time he raises his eyes toward the sky, locates the supreme power in a single God to whom the throng of secondary powers served by different ministers obey... Nobody gives a seat above the heavenly bodies to the goddesses Cloacina or Epona, even though they buy them fragrant incense, plunge their hands in the consecrated flour or the entrails of

[53] The coin on Fig. 3.7 shows a horse with male genitalia, but its human head is clearly the one of a female. This would appear to make fun of the man/god courting a female with a prominent penis, a sign of Gaulish humor.

> the victims.[54]

Nothing would seem to indicate that the Epona of the Gallo-Roman period would be a celestial goddess. It would nonetheless seem that during the centuries of Gaulish independence, the equestrian goddess was indeed given a high seat in the World of the Celts, one above Taranis and Lugus. As it will later be seen, she is the character around which the story of the creation represented by the cosmological myth of the early Celts. The nature of the goddess is nonetheless still a puzzle, whose pieces must be joined together before she can appear in its fullness.

A small indication that may attest the survival of the link between the equestrian goddess and her heavenly origin during the late antiquity may be found in the fable of the Pseudo-Plutarch:

> Fulvius Stellus hated women and used to consort with a mare and in due time the mare gave birth to a beautiful girl and they named her Epona. She is the goddess that is concerned with the protection of horses. So Agesilaüs in the third book of his Italian History.[55]

This fable is obviously satirical in nature, but it nonetheless mentions an interesting element: the name of the supposed father of Epona, Fulvius Stellus, is formed from two Indo-European roots, the first meaning "bright" and the second "star..."

More important than the equestrian nature of the goddess, which may well have been a trait acquired at a later point or the result of a "fusion" between different deities, it would seem that the defining feature of the female deity is her relationship with Esus-Cernunnos. During the Gallo-Roman period, it seems that Epona is never directly linked with the god of the Dark. The

[54] TBA (Based on the French translation in *Mélanges littéraires extraits des Pères latins*, Page 51.); Original Latin: "Quamvis Saturnis, Junonibus, et Cythereis, \ Portentisque aliis fumantes consecret aras: \ Attamen in coelum quoties suspexit, in uno \ Constituit jus omne Deo, cui serviat ingens \ Virtutum ratio, variis instructa ministris ... Nemo Cloacinae, aut Eponae super astra deabus \ Dat solium, quamvis olidam persolvat acerram, \ Sacrilegisque molam manibus, rimetur et exta." From: ibid., Page 51.

[55] English translation from: Honoratus, *Plutarch. Moralia. with an English Translation by. Frank Cole Babbitt*, N.Pag. Original Greek: "Φουλούιος Στέλλος μισῶν γυναῖκας ἵππῳ συνεμίσγετο: ἡ δὲ κατὰ χρόνον ἔτεκε κόρην εὔμορφον καὶ ὠνόμασαν Ἔποναν: ἔστι δὲ θεὸς πρόνοιαν ποιουμένη ἵππων: ὡς Ἀγησίλαος ἐν τρίτῳ Ἰταλικῶν." From: ibid., N.Pag.



Figure 3.8: *The Saintes Altar* (Courcelle-Seneuil, *Les dieux gaulois d'après les monuments figurés*, Page 14.).

spouse of the "horned one" is nonetheless present alongside him in several monument, such as the Altar of Saintes (See Fig. 3.8), which shows a male figure sitting cross-legged on the earth, holding a torc in his hand, while a woman sits next to him, holding a horn a plenty.

Like Esus-Cernunnos himself, who also is frequently represented with a horn of plenty, his spouse was seen, at least during the Gallo-Roman period, as a provider. Her name has been inferred by scholars, notably from inscriptions such as this one:

> E[...]O I RIGANI ROSMERTIAC
> ... I dedicate (this) to the (Great) Queen and Great Provider.
> or: ... I dedicate (this) to Rigani and Rosmerta. [56]

The terms RIGANI and ROSMERTA have both been interpreted as proper names and as titles. Scholars such as Jean-Jacques Hatt used the first to name the goddess of the Cauldron of Gundestrup,

[56] TBA. Original Gaulish (Gallo-Latin) from: Lambert, *Recueil des inscriptions gauloises, 2, fasc. 2*, Pages 179–183. (L–67, *Terrine de Lezoux*); Savignac, *Merde à César*, Pages 74. interprets *rigani rosmertiac* as two different deities: Rigani and Rosmerta.

an interpretation that is coherent with the clues extent to us concerning her nature.[57] The title of "Great Queen" may also fit the description of the celestial goddess toward which the queen of the Britons, Boudica, addressed her prayers in the following passage written by the Roman historian Cassius Dio:

> Buduica, raising her hand toward heaven, said: "I thank thee, Andraste, and call upon thee as woman speaking to woman; for ... those over whom I rule are Britons, men that know not how to till the soil or ply a trade, but are thoroughly versed in the art of war and hold all things in common, even children and wives, so that the latter possess the same valour as the men ... Wherefore may this Mistress Domitia-Nero reign no longer over me or over you men; let the wench sing and lord it over Romans, for they surely deserve to be the slaves of such a woman after having submitted to her so long. But for us, Mistress, be thou alone ever our leader.[58]

The same historian also appears to refer to the same goddess when he writes that a certain *Andate* "was their name for Victory, and they regarded her with most exceptional reverence."[59] Traces of the "great queen" may have survived longer on the island than in the continent. As pointed out by numerous scholars, the name of one of the central characters of the Mabinogi, Rhiannon, is derived from the Celtic word *𐌐𐌉𐌕𐌀𐌍𐌕𐌏𐌍𐌀 [rigantona], a synonym of 𐌐𐌉𐌕𐌀𐌍𐌉 [rigani]. This fact by itself would not be compelling, but one should keep in mind that the Mabinogi certainly is one

[57] See: Hatt, *Mythes et Dieux de la Gaule I*, Page 89.

[58] English translation from: Cassius, *Dio Cassius: Roman History, Volume VIII, Books 61-70*, N.Pag. (Book 62b); Original Greek: "καὶ ἡ Βουδουΐκα τὴν χεῖρα ἐς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνατείνασα εἶπε ʻχάριν τέ σοι ἔχω, ὦ Ἀνδράστη, καὶ προσεπικαλοῦμαί σε γυνὴ γυναῖκα, οὐκ ... ἀνδρὸς ἔχει, ἔργῳ δὲ γυνή ἐστι: σημεῖον δέ, ἄδει καὶ κιθαρίζει καὶ καλλωπίζεταί, ἀλλὰ ἀνδρῶν Βρεττανῶν, γεωργεῖν μὲν ἢ δημιουργεῖν οὐκ εἰδότων, πολεμεῖν δὲ ἀκριβῶς μεμαθηκότων, καὶ τά τε ἄλλα πάντα κοινὰ καὶ παῖδας καὶ γυναῖκας κοινὰς νομιζόντων, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐκείνων τὴν αὐτὴν 17 τοῖς [4] ἄρρεσιν ἀρετὴν ἐχουσῶν ... μὴ γάρ τοι μήτ᾽ ἐμοῦ μήθ᾽ ὑμῶν ἔτι βασιλεύσειεν ἡ Νερωνὶς ἡ Δομιτία, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκείνη μὲν Ῥωμαίων ἄδουσα δεσποζέτω ʻκαὶ γὰρ ἄξιοι τοιαύτῃ γυναικὶ δουλεύειν, ἧς τοσοῦτον ἤδη χρόνον ἀνέχονται τυραννούσηςʼ, ἡμῶν δὲ σύ, ὦ δέσποινα, ἀεὶ μόνη προστατοίης." From: ibid., N.Pag.

[59] English translation from: ibid., N.Pag. (Book 62b); Original Greek: "καὶ ἐν τῷ τῆς Ἀνδάτης μάλιστα ἄλσει ἐποίουν. οὕτω τε γὰρ τὴν Νίκην ὠνόμαζον, καὶ ἔσεβον αὐτὴν περιττότατα." From: ibid., N.Pag.

of the medieval texts showing the strongest link with the Gaulish pantheon. Several of its characters bear the names of continental deities, in addition to some of their attributes: Lleu/Lugus, Gofannon/Gobannos, Maponos/Mabon etc. Furthermore, the role played by Rhiannon at the beginning of the Mabinogi may also evoke the traits of the ancient celestial goddess of the Gauls.

The first appearance of Rhiannon in the Mabinogi occurs as Pwyll, prince of *Dyfed* (The western kingdom of Wales but also a word derived from 𐊀𐊇𐊗𐊁𐊍𐊇𐊂 [dubnos]) who received the title of *Pen Annwfn*, the "head of the underworld," decides to climb a sacred mound that would either bring wounds or wonders to those who sit on its top. Without fear, Pwyll sits on the mound and then sees an intriguing lady clad with silk and gold riding a white horse down below:

> "Young man," said Pwyll, "I see the lady coming; give me my horse." And no sooner had he mounted his horse than she passed him. And he turned after her and followed her. And he let his horse go bounding playfully, and thought that at the second step or the third he should come up with her. But he came no nearer to her than at first. Then he urged his horse to his utmost speed, yet he found that it availed nothing to follow her. Then said Pwyll, "O maiden, for the sake of him whom thou best lovest, stay for me." "I will stay gladly," said she, "and it were better for thy horse hadst thou asked it long since." So the maiden stopped, and she threw back that part of her headdress which covered her face ... "I am Rhiannon, the daughter of Heveydd Hên, and they sought to give me to a husband against my will. But no husband would I have, and that because of my love for thee, neither will I yet have one unless thou reject me. And hither have I come to hear thy answer." "By Heaven," said Pwyll, "behold this is my answer. If I might choose among all the ladies and damsels in the world, thee would I choose."[60]

[60] English translation from: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, Page 421. Original Middle Welsh: "Dyuot yr orssed a orugant y eisted. Ny buant hayach o enkyt yno, yny welynt y uarchoges yn dyuot yr vn ford, ac yn un ansawd, ac vn gerdet. "Ha was," heb y Pwyll, "mi a welaf y uarchoges.

At a later point in the story, the son of Rhiannon and Pwyll is snatched away during the night by a mysterious creature and her mother stands accused of having murdered him. As a punishment, she is condemned to stay at the door of the city and to confess her crime to those passing by and to carry them inside on her own back... ridden as if she were a horse!

The Rhiannon/Rigani of the Mabinogi is described as being associated with the Bright: she is riding a white horse, clad in shiny gold clothes and she is seen while Pwyll stands on the top of a mound. Her husband, on the other hand, is bound to the Dark: he comes from Dyfed/Dubnos, and is himself called the "prince of the underworld." These elements may show that the story was rooted in ancient folklore that preserved remnants of one of the central myth of the Celtic World: the story of the union of Dubnos and Albios through the union of their respective god and goddess, a theme that would seem to be at the heart of the scenery of the Cauldron of Gundestrup. This story will itself be the subject of the fifth chapter, but for now, it is sufficient to notice that the "Great Queen" certainly is the centerpiece of the Celtic World, of the way the early Druids viewed the creation.

The existence and the main attributes of the goddess have now been dis-covered, but a crucial question nonetheless remains: what does she *represent*? As seen earlier, the gods of the Gaulish World, as they were first envisioned by the Druids of the early Celts or the other wise men preceding them, were indeed not arbitrary creations, empty vessels that could be used as the recipients of the devotion of the people. As fine observers of creation, the Druids and their predecessors accurately perceived that they

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Moes uy march." Yskynnu a oruc Pwyll ar y uarch, ac nyt kynt yd yskynn ef ar y uarch, noc yd a hitheu hebdaw ef. Troi yn y hol a oruc ef, a gadel y uarch drythyll, llamsachus y gerdet. Ac ef a debygei, ar yr eil neit, neu ar y trydyd, y gordiwedei. Nyt oed nes hagen idi no chynt. Y uarch a gymhellaud o'r kerdet mwyaf a oed ganthaw. A guelet a wnaeth na thygyei idaw y hymlit. Yna y dywot Pwyll. "A uorwyn," heb ef, "yr mwyn y gwr mwyhaf a gery, arho ui." "Arhoaf yn llawen," heb hi, "ac oed llessach y'r march, pei ass archut yr meityn." Sewyll, ac arhos a oruc y uorwyn, a gwaret y rann a dylyei uot am y hwyneb o wisc y phenn, ac attal y golwc arnaw ... "Riannon, uerch Heueyd Hen, wyf i, a'm rodi y wr o'm hanwod yd ydys. Ac ny mynneis innheu un gwr, a hynny o'th garyat ti. Ac nys mynnaf etwa, onyt ti a'm gwrthyt. Ac e wybot dy attep di am hynny e deuthum i." "Rof i a Duw," heb ynteu Pwyll, "llyna uy attep i iti, pei caffwn dewis ar holl wraged a morynnyon y byt, y mae ti a dewisswn." From: Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, Page 77.

were infinitely small pawns in a very large game played between forces greater than them. The concept of "god" without a doubt emerged from the awe experienced while facing these forces, which could not be identified or comprehended. Perhaps more than other European peoples, the Celts were able to bring a precise representation of these forces to their World, preserving their complexity and their ambivalence. Esus-Cernunnos is the god of the Dark and the Deep, the body of the earth and the rest of "matter." Teutates is the god of Life and Being, the body of the Teuta, the organism that fills the surface between earth and sky. Taranis is the god of the Lofty, the heavenly forces that tower over the earth: the clouds, thunder, the winds, and the rain. Lugus is the god of the Light, the brilliance that shines in the skies and in the World. Following this structure of the Gaulish representation of the divine, what does the "Great Queen" represents in the creation?

The aforementioned clues have shown that the queen thrones in the heavens. Her status would imply an exalted position, one higher than the other gods. The lowest part of the skies is the dominion of the "lofty one," while the sun and its light are linked to the "luminous one." What is left is the moon and the stars, with only the latter occupying a higher position than the other elements of the skies. Representations of the goddess frequently show her between what appears to be two heavenly bodies, but their nature does not seem to be identifiable. The ancient sources do not give us any clear clues that could help us for this identification, and neither do the sculptures and carvings of the Gallo-Roman period. This is nonetheless not surprising if we consider the origin and purpose of all "mythology." As the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling tells us: "Truth is in mythology, but not in mythology as such."[61] The characters described by mythologies may not exist, and yet they may nonetheless be rooted in truth, if one is able to see what is truly represented by these men and women. Concerning the impulse leading "philosophers" to create the foundation stone of a mythology, Schelling also tells us that:

> They have not freely chosen the presentation, but rather

[61] English translation from: Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 23; Original German: "Es ist Wahrheit in der Mythologie, aber nicht in der Mythologie als solcher." From: Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke – 1. Bd. Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie.* Page 26.

> were urged toward it and nearly forced; in part, the oldest language was missing scientific expressions for general principles or causes. The poverty of language has obliged it to express abstract concepts as persons, logical or real relations through the image of reproduction. In part, however, they have been so seized by the objects themselves that they strived to also place them before the spectators' eyes, so to speak, dramatically, as acting persons.[62]

Metaphors, metonymies, and allegories are the main tools of the poet, who is the builder of the World. They help man fathom what he cannot grasp, by bringing it to language and to his World, where he can transform it as a set of "things" that he can manipulate as if he understood them. Thus did the philosophers of Gaul represent the creation in terms of a play in which the forces of nature are the main actors. As noted by Schelling,[63] however, when this allegorical representation of nature is popularized and handed over through centuries of oral tradition, the source of the allegory slowly fades away and all that remains is a story of men and women, anthropomorphic gods whose story becomes disconnected from the impulse that led to their creation: the understanding of nature.

Among the Gauls, the knowledge of the true nature of the play may have been reserved to the Druids, with the common people being only offered a simple "mythology" that could be easily understood, stories of battles, love, and betrayals between anthropomorphic gods. Without the "philosophers," whose teachings were prohibited soon after the Roman conquest, it is therefore natural that the piety of the Gallo-Roman would have quickly been shaped

[62] English translation from: Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 26; Original German: "Sie haben die Darstellung nict frei gewählt, sondern waren zu ihr gebrungen und beinahe gezwungen; teils haben der ältesten Sprache wissenschaftliche Ausdrücke gesehlt für allgemeine Principien oder Ursachen, Armut der Sprache habe sie genötigt, abstracte Begriffe als Personen, logische oder reale Verhältnisse durch das Bild der Zeugung auszudrücken ; teils aber sehen sie von den Gegenständen selbst so ergriffen gewesen, daß sie gearbeitet haben, sie auch den Zuhörern gleichsam dramatisch wie handelnde Personen vor Augen zu stellen." From: Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke – 1. Bd. Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie.* Page 31.

[63] See: Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 26.

by the Roman religion. This erosion of the allegorical nature of the play of the gods would probably have occurred regardless of the invasion. In Britain and Ireland, where the Druids remained active after the fall of Gaul, the medieval mythology that has reached us is already almost devoid of elements that can be directly traced to the early world-view of the continent. A substratum nonetheless appears in these insular sources: names of ancient god, the central nature of the oppositions between darkness and light for example. The stories themselves do not seem to be directly linked with the main play of the Gaulish World, which is found illustrated on the Cauldron of Gundestrup, but one thing is known for sure: both were created by men living in the same World, only separated by a few centuries. A World does not change so quickly, and the elements used to build a story are rarely new: an author uses the elements already found in his World to create, especially when he intends to write a "mythology." The major part of the story of Llew Llaw Gyffes found in the Mabinogi probably has a medieval origin, but the name of Lugus, its association with the light, and certainly his epithet show that ancient remnants of the early Celtic World were still present in the island during the middle-ages.

The key to the identification of what the Great Queen originally represented in the play of the creation of the early Celts may be found in the names of the characters of these medieval sources. The Rhiannon of the Mabinogi is clearly inspired by the queen herself, but another female character of the same work also appears to share some attributes with the continental goddess. This other character stands out from the others because of the meaning of her name and also by her relation with Llew Llaw Gyffes. Before explaining further the link between this character and the Great Queen, let us first examine how she appears in the Mabinogi.

In order to continue to live, the king of Gwynned,[64] Math ap Mathonwy, needs to rest his feet on the lap of a virgin when he is not in battle. After the rape of his "footholder," the king tries to find another maiden who could be used for this purpose. A man named Gwydion then addresses the king:

[64] The name of Gwynned is based on the word for "white." It designated the Kingdom of North Wales, that faced another kingdom: Dyfed, whose name is derived from the word Dubnos, the "dark" and the "deep." A connection with the two opposites realms of the Gaulish World, Albios and Dubnos, is probable.

> "Seek Arianrod, the daughter of Don, thy niece, thy sister's daughter." And they brought her unto him, and the maiden came in. "Ha, damsel," said he, "art thou the maiden?" "I know not, "lord, other than that I am." Then he took up his magic wand, and bent it. "Step over this," said he, "and I shall know if thou art the maiden." Then stepped she over the magic wand, and there appeared forthwith a fine chubby yellow-haired boy. And at the crying out of the boy, she went towards the door. And thereupon some small form was seen; but before any one could get a second glimpse of it, Gwydion had taken it, and had flung a scarf of velvet around it and hidden it. Now the place where he hid it was the bottom of a chest at the foot of his bed. "Verily," said Math the son of Mathonwy, concerning the fine yellow-haired boy, "I will cause this one to be baptized, and Dylan is the name I will give him." So they had the boy baptized, and as they baptized him he plunged into the sea. And immediately when he was in the sea, he took its nature, and swam as well as the best fish that was therein. And for that reason was he called Dylan, the son of the Wave. Beneath him no wave ever broke.[65]

Before leaving the premises of this scene in shame, another child falls out of the womb of Arianrod, a child who is taken by his uncle, Gwydion. A few years later, the child is presented to his mother so that he can finally receive a name from her, but she

[65] English translation from: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, Page 421. Original Middle Welsh: ""hawd yw dy gynghori. Aranrot uerch Don, dy nith uerch dy chwaer." Honno a gyrchwyt attaw. Y uorwyn a doeth ymywn. "A uorwyn," heb ef, "a wyt uorwyn di?" "Ny wnn I amgen no'm bot." Yna y kymerth ynteu yr hutlath a'y chamu. "Camha di dros honn," heb ef, "ac ot wyt uorwyn, mi a ednebydaf." Yna y camawd hitheu dros yr hutlath, ac ar y cam hwnnw, adaw mab brasuelyn mawr a oruc. Sef a wnaeth y mab, dodi diaspat uchel. Yn ol diaspat y mab, kyrchu y drws a oruc hi, ac ar hynny adaw y ryw bethan ohonei; a chyn cael o neb guelet yr eil olwc arnaw, Guydyon a'y kymerth, ac a droes llen o bali yn y gylch, ac a'e cudyawd. Sef y cudyawd, y mywn llaw gist is traed y wely. "Ie," heb [Math uab] Mathonwy, "mi a baraf uedydyaw hwn," wrth y mab brasuelyn. "Sef enw abaraf, Dylan." Bedydyaw a wnaethpwyt y mab, ac y gyt ac y bedydywyt, y mor a gyrchwys. Ac yn y lle, y gyt ac y doeth y'r mor, annyan y mor a gauas, a chystal y nouyei a'r pysc goreu yn y mor, ac o achaws hynny ygelwit Dylan Eil Ton." From: Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, Page 77.

curses her son, proclaiming that he will never have a name if she does not give him one. Determined to make her break her own curse, Gwydion then decides to deceive her by changing his own appearance and the one of the child. Pretending to be shoemakers, they deck their boat near her house. Then:

> Thereupon behold a wren stood upon the deck of the boat, and the boy shot at it, and hit it in the leg between the sinew and the bone. Then she smiled. "Verily," said she, "with a steady hand did the lion [*LLeu*] aim at it." "Heaven reward thee not, but now has he got a name. And a good enough name it is. Llew Llaw Gyffes be he called henceforth." [66]

Arianrod is the mother of Llew, the "luminous one," and the mother of Dylan, the "second wave" (*Dylan Eil Ton*), who is killed by one of his uncle named Gofannon, whose name originated from Gobannos, the ancient Celtic god representing the "fire in the earth": the smith. Once again, the details of this story do not appear to be of great antiquity or to be directly related to what is known of the Gaulish pantheon. Certain core elements of this tale nonetheless show that it may have been based on authentic ancient folklore, rooted in the early cosmological myth of the Celts.

The "allegorical" elements of this story are clear to those looking for them, even though it is far from certain that the author himself would have been aware of them. Rather than the Light of the Skies, Lugus here represents its source: the sun. His brother, also born with shiny golden hairs, not merely commands the waves of the seas but rather the "two waves," that is, the tide that twice each day affects the entire earth. The brother of the sun that would direct the tide is obviously the moon, a "dead" celestial body that only reflects the light shining out of the sun, killed by the "fire in the earth." Both sun and moon are thus the sons of Arianrod. Her name is itself based on a combination of ancient Celtic words, whose meaning was still clear during the medieval period: AP-

[66] English translation from: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, Page 424. (text in brackets added); Original Middle Welsh: "Ac ar hynny, llyma y dryw yn seuyll ar wwrd y llog. Sef a wnaeth y mab, y uwrw a'y uedru y rwg giewyn y esgeir a'r ascwrn. Sef a wnaeth hitheu, chwerthin. "Dioer," heb hi, "ys llaw gyffes y medrwys y Lleu ef." "Ie," heb ynteu, "aniolwch Duw it. Neur gauas ef enw. A da digawn yw y enw. Llew Llaw Gyffes yw bellach." From: Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, Page 80.

TANTOPOTA [arganto-rota], the "Silver Wheel." William Owen Pughe, in his Welsh dictionary published in 1832, defines the word Arianrod as "the constellation called the northern crown."[67] This association between the Silver Wheel and this crescent-shaped constellation can be found stated as a fact in a great number of books, but its basis appears very uncertain.[68] How would this small constellation come to be interpreted as the mother of the sun and the moon? Furthermore, the association with both silver and a wheel does not seem very convincing, as its stars at best represent half a wheel and their color would not appear more silvery than the one of any other stars. The story of the birth of the two brothers nonetheless may give us a clue: they fall down while their mother passes over a wand. What element of the Skies can be found above the sun and the moon and may appear as both the opened legs of a mother giving birth to celestial bodies and as a Silver Wheel? The most obvious answer is: the Milky Way, the galaxy in which the earth, the sky, the sun, and the moon are all located.

All the men who ever lived and all that they ever knew stood under the gaze of the silvery river of stars that encompasses the earth as a whole. As a celestial wheel, it slowly but continuously rotates with the passing of the days and the seasons. It only appears to man when the sun has retreated to its nightly abode, but even during the brightest parts of the day it still inconspicuously towers over the earth. The contemplation of this wonder, however, demands a certain effort. The Silver Wheel only offers herself to be seen to those willing to venture into the darkest parts of the earth during the darkest parts of the night. One needs to step away from all light, from the fire that gives warmth and the torches that lit the path that one intends to walk. Only when a man completely surrenders himself to the Dark can he behold the majesty of the Silver Wheel. Few men make the efforts necessary to seek an occasion to pay their respect before this queen of the creation. Philosophers sensible to the essence of being would be enclined to seek such moments of contemplation and awe, more than the common people who were either exhausted from manual

[67] Pughe, *A dictionary of the Welsh language.* Page 126.

[68] Many sources also appear to state that the constellation's name was *Caer Arianrod*, the "Fortress of Arianrod,"sometimes citing Owen as a source. The dictionary, however, makes no mention of the "fortress": it is Arianrod herself who is associated with the constellation, rather than her abode.

labor or simply oblivious to the nature of the "things" surrounding them. Contrary to the sun, the moon, or the animals, the galaxy is therefore rarely the object of the people's devotion. Therefore, the fact that the Silver Wheel does not appear to be explicitly represented or mentioned in the ancient sources is rather unsurprising. Even though it is the greatest element of the creation, it naturally also was the first to be forgotten when the allegorical meaning of the myth began to fall into oblivion. All that may have remained was her epithet, the "Silver Wheel," and the fact that she was the mother out of which Lugus and Dylan[69] fell down.

As argued by Jean-Paul Savignac, it would seem that both Rhiannon/Rigani and Arianrod/Argantorota would have been modelled after a single continental goddess, both the Great Queen and the Silver Wheel, which the French scholar interprets as designating the "round dance of the stars" (*ronde des étoiles*) rather than as the galaxy itself.[70] Gaulish iconography may be seen to support such a view.

It was mentioned earlier that the Rigani depicted on one of the wide-plates of the Cauldron of Gundestrup shows her in between two rosettas, and that Gaulish coins frequently represent the "celestial horse" identified as her surrounded by two spheres, interpreted as celestial bodies. Two other coins (See Fig. 3.9) may show us that the two women may have represented a single goddess of the Gauls. The design of the two coins is different, probably the work of two different artists, but they clearly describe a single scene, which seems inherently mythological in nature. Both show the celestial horse behind an ear of wheat, symbol of the "provider" (Rosmerta). Under the belly of the horse, a solar symbol is shown, one which may be interpreted as a rosetta on the first coin. Above the back of the horse, one can see a sphere enfolded with what the French archaeologist Eugène Hucher described "tormented shapes that could, to a certain extent, be interpreted as a seahorse"[71]. The second coin, which may simply be an imitation of the first, which is far more finely crafted, shows a winged-shaped form between two spheres on top of the aforementioned figure. The other side of the two coins depict two conjointed twins with long hairs,

[69] A clear link between the name "Dylan" and a Gaulish deity has yet to be proposed.

[70] Savignac and Mineraud, *Argantorota, Grande-reine*, (Back cover).

[71] Hucher, *L'art gaulois, ou, Les Gaulois d'après leurs médailles*, Page 69.



Figure 3.9: *Two Gaulish coins* (Hucher, *L'art gaulois, ou, Les Gaulois d'après leurs médailles*, Pages 69-70.).

who appear to be looking upwards. Their faces are surrounded by a circle composed of dozens of small circles.

It is all too easy to see confirmations of one's own ideas in relatively abstract or symbolic artworks, but the resemblance between the images of these two coins and the aforementioned story of the birth of the sun and the moon by the Silver Wheel is nonetheless striking enough to be worthy of being mentioned.

The horse riding Epona, the Great Queen Rigani, and the Silver Wheel Argantorota would seem to be three different avatars of a single goddess. Another clue may be found in the altar of Dennevy (See Fig. 3.10), which shows three deities side by side: the three-faced man that was identified earlier as Lugus, a woman at the center and another man on her right, who is thus described by the French archaeologist Alexandre Bertrand: "in his left hand, a horn of plenty; the right hand, extended like the one of the goddess, offers some sort of flat cake to a serpent, which raises its head to catch it."[72] In the Gaulish World, snakes and dragons

[72] TBA. Original French: "Dans la main gauche, une corne d'abondance; la droite, allongée comme celle de la déesse, présente à un serpent, qui lève la



Figure 3.10: *The altar of Dennevy* (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 316.).

are foremost seen as associated with bodies of waters. The snake, the animal that undulates like a wave in order to move, would represent a logical choice to symbolize a god associated with the waves. This altar may therefore represent the celestial Queen with her two sons, the "luminous one" linked with the light of the sun and the "second wave" linked with the moon and the tides.

The identification of the second son of the goddess is problematic. The place that he occupies in the play of the gods of the Gauls appears to be less important than the one of his brother, something that is nonetheless far from surprising considering the celestial nature of the two sons: the sun is indeed far more im-

tête pour le saisir, une sorte de gâteau plat." From: A. Bertrand, *L'autel de Saintes et les triades gauloises*, Page 35.



Figure 3.11: *Smertrios on the "Pillar of the Boatmen"* (IBA.).

portant in the lives of men than the moon. The representation of the second son on the altar of Dennevy allows us to establish a possible link with two Gallo-Roman deities whose name has been passed on to us: SMERTRIOS and SUCELLOS.

The first is mainly known through a representation found on the "Pillar of the Boatmen" (Fig. 3.11)[73] where he appears face to face with a snake, ready to strike it with a torch or a bludgeon. His name, or rather the epithet by which he is known, could mean "provider" or "caretaker."[74] This would fit the representation of the altar of Dennevy, where the god appears with a horn of plenty, apparently feeding the serpent.

The second appears in several bronze statues of the Gallo-Roman period (See Fig. 3.12). He is easily recognizable by his very peculiar posture: one hand elevated in the air, generally holding a mallet, while the other is extended in front of him, holding a bowl or a *patera*. The name SUCELLOS has generally been interpreted as meaning "the good striker,"[75] explaining the presence of the mallet. This description, however, shows SMERTRIOS and SU-

[73] The name of the god is partially visible on the pillar, but not on the photograph.

[74] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 277.

[75] ibid., Page 113.

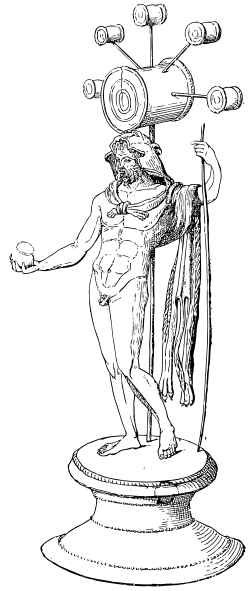


Figure 3.12: *Sucellos* (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 318.).

CELLOS both have several attributes in common. What has been interpreted as a "cake" in the hand of the second son on the altar of Dennevy by Alexandre Bertrand may also be seen as a *patera*. The bludgeon of SMERTRIOS may also be seen as a parallel to the mallet of SUCELLOS. Both may represent evolutions of a single Gaulish deity, a god originally linked to the celestial luminary of the night and the tides, but that later became the provider and striker, probably because of a mythological narrative. The story of the wrestling between the moon-god and the aquatic creature may represent a mythological explanation of the origin of the tides. The pounding of the mallet on the surface of the seas may be the source of the tides and the waves that strike the coasts and bring fish to feed the dwellers of the earth. This hypothesis is naturally unverifiable, but it nonetheless gives us matter for reflection.

Finally, one may perhaps see a direct symbol of the Silver Wheel in one of the aforementioned plates of the Cauldron of Gundestrup, the one depicting the "human army" that is led by the "ram-horned snake." This scene (See Fig. 3.13) shows four horse-riders, each one of them wearing a helmet adorned with a standard:

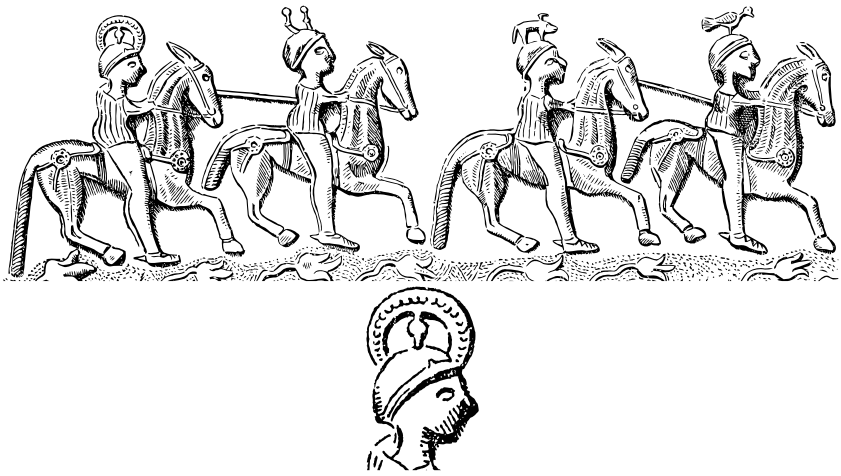


Figure 3.13: *Top: The four riders leading the "human army" on the Cauldron of Gundestrup; Bottom: Close-up of the first rider* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

a bird, a dog or a wolf, the horns of a bull or a stag, and finally a disk-shaped figure that, contrary to the others, does not seem to be representing an animal.

The helmet of the last rider is adorned with a flat torus on which a series of little dots have been stamped. In the hole at the middle of the torus, a small disk or sphere is represented, attached to the torus and the top of the helmet. The three animals would seem to be associated with three gods: the first, a dove or a crow, has been attributed to Lugus. As seen in a previous chapter, the second, a dog/wolf, can be attributed to Teutates, while the third probably represents antlers, a symbol of Cernunnos. It would seem incoherent that only the goddess would be represented as herself rather than as her animal, which as it will later be seen is the crane. Regardless of this incoherence, the helmet may in fact still be a direct representation of the Silver Wheel.

Now that the identity and the attributes of the goddess have been dis-covered, one important thing remains: the examination of her inner nature and of her place in the creation. Each one of the aforementioned deities of the Gaulish World indeed possesses a particular significance intrinsically linked with the nature of the "thing" that they allegorically represent. In this World, the

galaxy is not seen as the "Milky Way"[76] of the Romans. It is not the milk of the wife of Zeus sprayed in the heavens in distant past, as believed by the Greeks, nor the "Path of the Birds"[77] of the Lithuanians. It is not the "Winter's Path"[78] of the Norsemen, nor the "Silver River" of the Chinese,[79] but the Silver Wheel: ᚨᚱᚷᚨᚾᛏᛟᚱᛟᛏᚨ [arganto-rota].

The wheel certainly is the most common symbol used by early Indo-European cultures. It has often been interpreted as representing the sun, but as exemplified by the use of the word in expressions such as the Latin *Rota Fortunae*, the "Wheel of Fortune," or the Sanskrit भवचक्र [bhava-chakra], the "Wheel of Life/Being," the round object that allowed the Indo-European chariot riders to reach and conquer vast territories also was endowed with a more spiritual meaning, one directly connected to the deepest root of man's being. As philosophers who devoted their lives to the observation and the service of the forces of nature, the stars in particular, it would be surprising if the Druids of Gaul would not have given a significant and meaningful place in their World to the Milky Way, the largest element of the creation and the largest "thing" represented in their World. These philosophers took their secrets with them, on the pire or in the tomb, but the aforementioned clues nonetheless show us the beginning of the path that they walked. Perhaps better than giving us a World that was already built and taking us directly to a destin-ation whose nature would not be understandable, they rather only gave us a direction, leaving us the task of the dis-covery of the nature of the creation, a task that requires a personal involvement. In order to understand the nature and the role of the Silver Wheel, the best way therefore is to contemplate it, while standing on the basis left by the ancient wisemen.

Seen from the earth, with naked eyes, the Silver Wheel appears as a ring that surrounds the globe. Astronomically, it is known that the rotation of the galaxy is centered around the buldge that appears as the brighest area of the Milky Way, but phenomenologically, it is experienced as a ring that surrounds the earth and continously sweeps the sky. A single night of observa-

[76] Latin: *via lactea*.
[77] Lithuanian: *Paukščių Takas*.
[78] Icelandic: *Vetrarbrautin*.
[79] Chinese: 銀河 [yín.hé].

tion indeed teaches man the fact that the axis of the Silver Wheel is far away from the earth, and that our planet is only caught in its movement. More important than the determination of the center around which the celestial bodies revolved is the fact that, as obsersed during man's lifetime, they manifest an almost perfect regularity and circularity. As Heidegger tells us:

> The purest motion, in the sense of change of place, is circular motion; it contains, as it were, its place in itself. A body which so moves itself, moves itself completely. This is true of all celestial bodies. Compared to this, earthy motion is always in a straight line, or mixed, or forced, but always incomplete.[80]

Contrary to the clouds, the winds, and the rain, which are all largely unpredictable, steered by the capricious god of the Lofty, the course of the Silver Wheel and of the other stars filling the sky show a great regularity. This course can be accurately predicted by man, sometimes decades in advance even with only rudimentary techniques. The chaos of the earth contrasts with the order of the higher heavens. On the Ground, all things are ineluctably drawn toward the great body of the Dark, and man continuously fights against this pull in order to shape the Ground according to his will, as he fights the will of other men, resulting in an absence of order and of predictability. The crown of the skies, however, exhibits a perfect order, a serene planning that contrasts not only with the frequent irrational anger of the "lofty one" but also with the more sporadic wrath of the Dark, which manifests itself in the form of earthquakes, volcanic erruptions or landslides.

The calm order of the Crown of the Skies speaks to man. It seems to tell him that regardless of what men, the "dark one" or the "lofty one" do on the Ground, the course of the largest things of the creation is already determined. In the words of the German philosopher:

[80] English translation from: Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, Page 84; Original German: "Die reinste Bewegung im Sinne der Ortsveränderung ist die Kreisbewegung; sie enthält gleichsam den Ort in ihr selbst. Ein Körper, der sich so bewegt, bewegt sich vollkommen; das gilt von allen Himmelskörpern. Demgegenüber ist die irdische Bewegung immer eine gerade oder gemischte oder aber gewaltsame, eine stets unvollkommene." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 41: Die Frage nach dem Ding. Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen*, Page 85.

> Mortals dwell in that they receive the sky as sky. They leave to the sun and the moon their journey, to the stars their courses, to the seasons their blessing and their inclemency; they do not turn night into day nor day into a harassed unrest.[81]

Man is powerless in front of the divine forces. He cannot calm the wrath of the "lofty one," nor conceal the brightness of the "luminous one." These forces, however, appear to submit to the calm order of the Silver Wheel, which alone encompasses all and remains unaffected by the other, lower forces. The sons of the Silver Wheel display certain traits of their celestial mother: the moon commands the rising of the tide twice a day and it shows a new radiant face every month. The sun marks the years, which it also divides into four seasons that correspond to the time between the two solstices and equinoxes. The sun also marks the most visible and important sign of the passing of time affecting man: the separation of the day into a time when the Dark holds sway over the Ground and another, when the light of the sun itself, the Bright, takes over this role.

Thus did the "round dance of the stars" become a symbol of both space and time, and of the way the creation is caught in their flow. The Bright marks the days, as the smaller gear of the cosmic mechanism, while the largest gear apparent to the naked eye is the Silver Wheel. Heraclitus told that "thunderbolt steers all things,"[82] but the influence of the shining arrows of the "lofty one" seem insignificant in comparison to the all-encompassing reach of the wheel. She is the vessel that carries the creation and is thus seen as the helm that directs its course.

Behind its silvery glow, the Wheel is therefore more than an adornment of the heavens, more than the Crown of the Skies. Its

[81] English translation from: Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page 148; Original German: "Die Sterblichen wohnen, insofern sie den Himmel als Himmel empfangen. Sie lassen der Sonne und dem Mond ihre Fahrt, den Gestirnen ihre Hahn, den Zeiten des Jahres ihren Segen und ihre Unbill, sie machen die Nacht nicht zum Tag und den Tag nicht zur gehetzten Unrast." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936–1953)*, Page 152.

[82] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 157; Original Greek: "τά δέ πάντα οιακίζει Κεραυνός." From: ibid., Page 156.

nature reaches to the very core of man's being. Its circularity and the regularity of its motion reflect the foundation of being itself: space and time. Inspired by the ancient Indo-European prophet Zarathustra, Nietzsche declared that:

> Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything blooms again; eternally runs the year of being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of being builds itself. Everything parts, everything greets each other again; eternally the ring of being remains true to itself. In every instant begins being; round every 'here' rolls the ball 'there.' The center is everywhere. Curved is the path of eternity.[83]

The Silvery Wheel can indeed also be seen as the Wheel of Being, representing the whole of the creation. All the forces inside the dominion of the Great Queen are submitted to her yoke, which is as calm and slow as it is orderly and unchangeable. She is both the wide extent of the skies and the flow of time, both of which forming the clearing that allows the being of all beings.

The tormented philosopher told us that "curved is the path of eternity," but it is also the Wheel of Being that is curved upon itself, in the sense that it is both the deepest part of the Deep, what supports the existence of the Dark and what remains when every "thing" is absent, and the highest part of the heavens, the Crown of the Skies, the vessel that encompasses the creation as a whole and clears up the space and time where it can *be*. This implies that the realms of the Gaulish World are curved upon themselves, the foundation of Dubnos joining the apex of the Albios, and that the articulation of these realms itself forms a wheel, with three different parts interlaced with one another, that continuously binds all that *is*.

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[83] English translation from: Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Page 168; Original German: "Alles geht, Alles kommt zurück; ewig rollt das Rad des Seins. Alles stirbt, Alles blüht wieder auf, ewig läuft das Jahr des Seins. Alles bricht, Alles wird neu gefügt; ewig baut sich das gleiche Haus des Seins. Alles scheidet, Alles grüßt sich wieder; ewig bleibt sich treu der Ring des Seins. In jedem Nu beginnt das Sein; um jedes Hier rollt sich die Kugel Dort Die Mitte ist überall. Krumm ist der Pfad der Ewigkeit." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 6.1: Nietzsche I (1936–1939)*, Page 274.

3.3 The Elevated Things

The "upper realm" of the Gaulish World differs from the others by its manifold nature. Contrary to the Dark and the Deep, or Life and Being, it is itself the seat of several deities who are united by their common dwelling but who nonetheless exhibit different traits that distinguish them from one another and, as it will be later seen, may also oppose them to one another. The three dimensions of the Albios: the Lofty, the Bright, and the World, are each associated with different "things" of the World of the Celts, and so is the dominion of the Silver Wheel that encompasses the earth and all that is known to man. When the dwellers of the earth raise their heads toward the skies, they can behold the flight of the birds who follow the clouds. They can attempt to see the brightness of the sun without blinding themselves or they can wait for the night, when the gentle twinkling of the stars gives them a more precise vision of the extent of the Bright. As dwellers of the World, they can themselves become the builders of the most elevated "things," when they are willing to seek to know to nature of their World.

The examination of the elevated "things," as both what is found high in the skies and in the loftiest part of the "metaphysical" World, itself teaches the nature of the "upper realm." This realm is indeed itself built as a result of the observation of nature, from years of diligent study of the skies and what is found in them. These "things" are both part of and manifestations of the divine, and they thus represent links between the earth and the heavens, the mortals and the elevated gods. Each "thing" of the World can be seen as such a doorway toward the divine, but as a lifetime would not be sufficient to present all the wondrous signs of the divine scattered in the creation, only a few of them will be examined in the following pages, leaving to the reader the task of seeking the rest by himself. This section will be opened with what certainly is one of the most universally recognized symbols of the Celts' piety: the mistletoe.

3.3.1 The Mistletoe

Living organisms are always caught in between the Dark and Bright. They occupy and form the "middle realm" of Life and Being, with their flesh extracted out of the body of the Dark but owing their life to the water falling from the clouds and the light of the Bright. With their roots anchored deep into the earth and their branches extended towards the skies, they embody the unity of the three realms.

Among the myriad of plants found in the "middle realm," one nonetheless stands out from the other by its heavenly nature: the mistletoe, a plant that never touches the earth and grows on the top of trees. The account of the place of the mistletoe in the life of the Gauls given by Pline the Elder certainly is one of the most famous quotes concerning the ancient Celts. It tells us that:

> The Druids — for that is the name they give to their magicians — held nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree that bears it, supposing always that tree to be the robur. Of itself the robur is selected by them to form whole groves, and they perform none of their religious rites without employing branches of it; so much so, that it is very probable that the priests themselves may have received their name from the Greek name for that tree. In fact, it is the notion with them that everything that grows on it has been sent immediately from heaven, and that the mistletoe upon it is a proof that the tree has been selected by God himself as an object of his especial favour.[84]

According to the historian, the mistletoe would seem to be directly linked with one of the gods of the skies. The mode of reproduction of the mistletoe explains how the god could designate a particular tree as the object of his favour: the berries of the plant are eaten

[84] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 16.95); Original Latin: "Non est omittenda in hac re et Galliarum admiratio. nihil habent Druidae — ita suos appellant magos — visco et arbore, in qua gignatur, si modo sit robur, sacratius. iam per se roborum eligunt lucos nec ulla sacra sine earum fronde conficiunt, ut inde appellati quoque interpretatione Graeca possint Druidae videri. enimvero quidquid adgnascatur illis e caelo missum putant signumque esse electae ab ipso deo arboris." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

by birds but due to the high viscosity of these berries, from which the plant takes its Latin name (*viscus*), they are not digested by the bird, who often excrete them on the branches of another tree sometime later. The seeds coated with the viscous flesh of the berries then naturally stay glued to the new tree and they begin to sprout when the weather is warm enough, often one full year later. The bird can thus be seen as the messenger of the god, who carries the seed of the plant to a specific tree.

The association between the mistletoe and the "upper realm" of the Gaulish World can be seen in the description of the ritual cutting of the plant given by Pline the Elder:

> The mistletoe, however, is but rarely found upon the robur; and when found, is gathered with rites replete with religious awe. This is done more particularly on the fifth day of the moon, the day which is the beginning of their months and years, as also of their ages, which, with them, are but thirty years. This day they select because the moon, though not yet in the middle of her course, has already considerable power and influence; and they call it by a name which signifies, in their language, the all-healing. Having made all due preparation for the sacrifice and a banquet beneath the trees, they bring thither two white bulls, the horns of which are bound then for the first time. Clad in a white robe the priest ascends the tree, and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, which is received by others in a white cloak. They then immolate the victims, offering up their prayers that God will render this gift of his propitious to those to whom he has so granted it. It is the belief with them that the mistletoe, taken in drink, will impart fecundity to all animals that are barren, and that it is an antidote for all poisons. Such are the religious feelings which we find entertained towards trifling objects among nearly all nations.[85]

[85] English translation based on: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 16.95). The translation has been corrected, as it designated the moon as what was called the all-healing rather than the mistletoe; Original Latin: "est autem id rarum admodum inventu et repertum magna religione petitur et ante omnia sexta luna, quae principia mensum annorumque his facit et saeculi post tricesimum annum, quia iam virium abunde habeat nec sit sui dimidia.

The waxing crescent of the moon, when the celestial body's brightness grows; the white bulls, white robes, white cloaks and the golden sickle; the immolation of the sacrifices: the whole description of the ritual points toward the Bright. The sacred plant does not appear to belong to the Dark and the Deep, nor to Life and Being. It rather is a gift from the skies. In order to perceive this unusual bond, the nature of the plant itself must be further examined.

The Gaulish name of the mistletoe is not directly known. Jean-Paul Savignac has proposed the word *𐌏𐌋𐌋𐌏𐌉𐌀𐌊𐌊𐌏𐌂 [ollo-iaccos] as a reconstruction of the "all-healing" mentioned by Pline,[86] but its names in the Britonnic languages rather designate it as what is found on "the top of the branches": MWe. *uchelfar*, MBre. *uhel-varr*.[87] No word for it seems to have been recorded in the ancient Irish literature, which is somewhat natural as the plant is not native to the island.

More than its name or its place in the Celtic *mythos*, however, it is the very biological nature of the mistletoe that led men to honor this plant as a sign of the divine. Its mode of reproduction has already been described. When the seed excreted by the bird sprouts on a tree branch, it pierces its bark so as to grow roots inside the wood and thereby extract the elements necessary for its survival and its growth from the sap that flows inside the branch. It therefore never enters into contact with the soil, living its life entirely depending on its host, which itself takes its sustenance from the depths of the earth. It then slowly grows a single stem during approximately three years before the first the first flower appears. The flower of the mistletoe is very inconspicuous. It is

omnia sanantem appellant suo vocabulo. sacrificio epulisque rite sub arbore conparatis duos admovent candidi coloris tauros, quorum cornua tum primum vinciantur. sacerdos candida veste cultus arborem scandit, falce aurea demetit, candido id excipitur sago. tum deinde victimas immolant praecantes, suum donum deus prosperum faciat iis quibus dederit. fecunditatem eo poto dari cuicumque animalium sterili arbitrantur, contra venena esse omnia remedio. tanta gentium in rebus frivolis plerumque religio est." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

[86] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 242; Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 29.

[87] The Breton word *varr* is highly polysemic: "branch," "grape," "top," "surface." Therefore, the word for mistletoe could have had a slightly different meaning: "high-grape" for example.

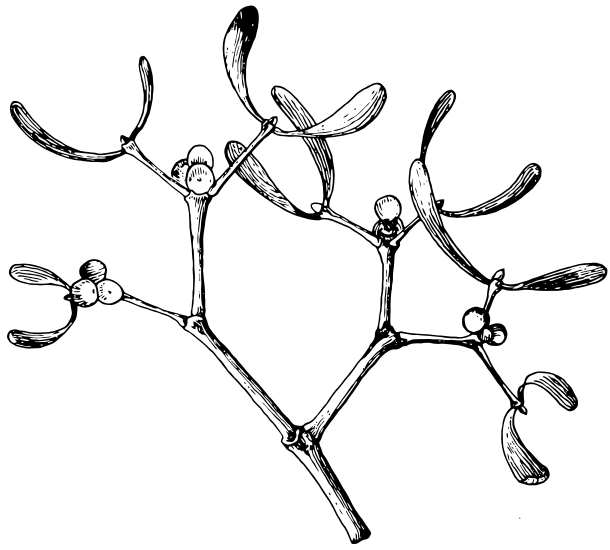


Figure 3.14: *A branch of Mistletoe* (Prior and Frey, *Mistletoe and holly*, Page 6.).

very small and does not protrude from the plant, being instead placed between two ovoid leaves that form a crescent. When pollinated by another plant of the opposite sex, the mistletoe then produces from three to five white berries that are yellowish at first but slowly become white and translucent as they mature. Once the leaves fall to the ground, the stem branches in two, growing from the base of the two leaves. This branching will occur every year, giving the plant its characteristic shape: a sphere that enfolds the branch on which it grows.

One of the most striking peculiarities of the plant, one that certainly caught the attention of the Druids, is that it appears to disregard the passing of the seasons, the work of the Wheel that regulates the growth of the major part of Life. The green sphere stands out in the landscape of the winter, as it alone remains among the naked branches of the trees. When the Ground is covered in snow and the critters of the forest do not dare to venture outside of their underground abodes, the leaves of the mistletoe are still extended high and wide, as countless small arms that invoke the divine found in every direction. Its bright berries mature at the beginning of the winter. They reflect the sunlight of De-

cember, letting it pass through them and offering man a reminder of the beauty and warmth of the summer that is now long gone. All year long, as if living on a different planet than the other living being, the mistletoe flourishes, grows, and withers, independently of the rest of the body of Life. It defies the order of time by fruiting in winter and by the very color of its berries, which is unique in the forests of Gaul.

Perhaps more than for its medicinal use, the mistletoe was used since immemorial times to produce birdlime, *ᛏᚳᛟᛁᚳᛟ- [*gloydo-] in Proto-Celtic,[88] a form of glue used to trap birds. The viscous flesh of the white berries was cooked and then placed on trees. As Pline the Elder tells us in his *Natural History*, once a bird would land on the birdlime, it would not be able to fly away.[89] The irony of relationship between the plant and the bird responsible for the reproduction of the plant, the Mistletoe Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*), was not lost on the men of the Antiquity, as revealed by the Latin proverb: *Turdus ipse sibi malum cacat*, "the thrush shits its own doom..."

All the aforementioned peculiarities of the mistletoe easily explain the reason why this plant would occupy such an important place in World of the Druids, men eager to look for signs of the divine in the nature surrounding them. The evergreen plant nonetheless was more than an "all-healing" remedy. From the emergence of the *La Tène* culture (5th c. B.C.) up until the early Gallo-Roman period (1st c. A.D.), the mistletoe appears in representations of Celtic deities. The most frequent theme involving the mistletoe certainly is the image of a god whose head is surrounded by its two ovoid leaves. These representations, found carved on stone or on bronze objects, are unusual by their anthropomorphic nature, as they mostly belong to a time when such representations where rare.

A first example of the "god with the mistletoe leaves" can be seen on what appears to be a ritual flagon found in Waldalgesheim (See Fig. 3.15), dating from the early *La Tène* period. It shows a man of old age with a prominent mustache and with the image his face elongated as if he had a long beard pointing toward the base of the image, where a dotted circle is found. The face is surrounded

[88] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 161.
[89] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 16.94)



Figure 3.15: *The god with the mistletoe leaves on a flagon found in Waldalgesheim* (Schönherr, *Der Grabfund von Waldalgesheim*, N.Pag.).

by esses connected by dotted circles, probably meant to represent mistletoe branches.[90] The upper part of the man's head is covered by two symmetrical mistletoe leaves, which appear from the top of his ears.[91] The facial expression of the man appears to represent him as serene and wise.

A second example can be found on a gold mask found in Schwarzenbach (See Fig. 3.16), dating from the same period. It also shows a face whose upper part is enfolded by two mistletoe leaves. Here, however, the face appears to be one of a child, with large ears and a puffy appearance.[92] Two different images of the

[90] Esses also frequently seem to be associated with the skies. The vase of Brno, for example, depicts constellations in a similar form, with stars represented by small spheres which are joined together with esses. The artist of the flagon of Waldalgesheim may have combined the two meanings, representing both the mistletoe branches and the stars in the sky.

[91] Some of the images of the "god with the mistletoe leaves" do not show his ears, and thus the leaves have sometimes been mistaken for prominent ears.

[92] The drawing of the mask does not accurately reflect the child-like appearance of the face. It is nonetheless used here as it is the only public domain representation of the artifact.



Figure 3.16: *A gold mask found in Schwarzenbach* (Ebert, *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte Bd. 2*, Page 455.).

god are also found on a stone pillar found in Pfalzfeld (See Fig. 3.15) The anthropomorphic figures are there once again shown surrounded with esses and circles, but with one difference: three inverted sepals or petals found under the heads, which also appear on several other artworks.

The common element between all these images is the association between the head and the mistletoe leaves, which appear to sprout out of it. The head does not appear to simply be adorned with the leaves, as with a laurel wreath. It rather seems to be one with the plant, or to be born out of it. The head is located where the flower and the berries would normally be, showing that the translucent white sphere was probably associated with the head. The origin of this anthropomorphization of the mistletoe may be easily explained: when one closely observes the bud growing between the leaves, it often appears as the body of a man or an insect, the stem forming its trunk, the bud its head, and the two leaves forming two arms extended upwards (See fig 3.18).

The aforementioned description of the ritual cutting of the mistletoe among the Gauls and the peculiar nature of the plant both show that it is closely linked with the "upper realm." All the representations of the "god with the mistletoe leaves" show it as a male, leaving two possibilities concerning his identification: he is either Taranis, the "thunderous one," or Lugus, the "luminous one." The serene facial expressions of the images showing the god between the leaves as an old man do not fit the images of the "thunderous one," who is shown as ugly and angry on the Cauldron of Gundestrup. The child-like face of the golden mask of Schwarzen-



Figure 3.17: *Carved pillar found in Pfalzfeld* (Ebert, *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte Bd. 11*, Page 201.).



Figure 3.18: *A close view of a mistletoe bud* (IBA.).

bach fits him even less. Lugus represents a far more obvious candidate: he is the embodiment of the Light and the World itself. In the previous section, the Gallo-Roman representations of the "three-faced god" have been associated with him. Far from contradicting an identification of the "god with the mistletoe leaves," this may only be another clue pointing toward a link between the three faces, the mistletoe and the "luminous one": the translucent spheres growing between the leaves indeed most commonly appear by three. The two types of representations belong to very different times: the head with the mistletoe leaves is a theme found during the early *La tène* period, while the three-faced god only appears once these have completely disappeared from Gaulish art. One may nonetheless be an extension of the other, showing a shift where the link with the plant was forgotten,[93] but its "all-seing" nature was not.

The "luminous one" is the Light and the World. He not only represents the spiritual force at the root of all piety but also the wisdom that comes as the result of an enlightenment, an illumination. The berries of the mistletoe are unique in the land of Gaul: they alone are both white and translucent, both reflecting the light of the sun and letting it pass through them before reaching the eyes of men and birds alike. They may appear as the embryos of the stars that shine in the heaven. The most luminous of them all to the men on the earth, the sun, is also a white sphere elevated high in the air. The mistletoe leaves of the god may thus represent the origin of his birth, an early Celtic *mythos* that saw the "luminous one" as born on the branch of a tree. With this in mind, the account of the birth of Lugus given by the Mabinogi can be reexamined in order to see whether it may contain the remnants of such an early link between the "luminous one" and the mistletoe. As seen earlier, his birth occurs unexpectedly, when his mother is called to prove her virginity in front of the king:

> Then he took up his magic wand [*hutlath*], and bent it. "Step over this," said he, "and I shall know if thou art the maiden." Then stepped she over the magic wand, and there appeared forthwith a fine chubby yellow-haired boy. And at the crying out of the boy, she went

[93] The Silver Goblet of Lyon is a rare exception, as it shows an Appolo, often linked to Lugus, near a ball of mistletoe on the top of a tree (See Fig. 2.5).

> towards the door. And thereupon some small form [*y ryw bethan*] was seen; but before any one could get a second glimpse of it, Gwydion had taken it, and had flung a scarf of velvet around it and hidden it.[94]

The interpretation of this scene requires the mentions of an aspect of the Silver Wheel,[95] the mother of Lugus, that had yet to be mentioned: the fact that she is closely associated with birds, notably on the Cauldron of Gundestrup. This link between the goddess and birds will be examined further in the next section but for now it is enough to know that she may appear as one. In the story told by the Mabinogi, Lugus appears as an indeterminate "thing" (MWe. *y ryw bethan*) that falls down from his mother's womb as she steps above a staff (MWe. *Llath*). Taken away and put in a chest by Gwydion, the "thing" later appears as a boy. Considering the link between the mother and birds, a link between the "luminous one" and the mistletoe can then be unveiled.

The story of the birth of the "luminous one" parallels the beginning of the mistletoe. All begins when a bird steps on the branch of a tree: the mother steps above a staff. An undigested seed coated with glue is then excreted by the bird: an indistinct shape falls down from the mother's womb. The seed is then received by the tree: the "thing" is picked up by Gwydion, whose name literally means "born out of wood,"[96] and is placed in a chest, probably made of wood. After some time, once the bird that carried the seed has flown away, it then sprouts into a bud of mistletoe: once the mother has departed from the court in shame, the "thing" placed in the chest turns out to be a baby.

The parallel is rather convincing, and it may represent a remnant of an early myth of the Celts, one which contrary to most stories of the medieval insular literature would be intertwined with

[94] English translation from: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, Page 421. (Text in brackets added); Original Middle Welsh: "Yna y kymerth ynteu yr hutlath a'y chamu. "Camha di dros honn," heb ef, "ac ot wyt uorwyn, mi a ednebydaf." Yna y camawd hitheu dros yr hutlath, ac ar y cam hwnnw, adaw mab brasuelyn mawr a oruc. Sef a wnaeth y mab, dodi diaspat uchel. Yn ol diaspat y mab, kyrchu y drws a oruc hi, ac ar hynny adaw y ryw bethan ohonei; a chyn cael o neb guelet yr eil olwc arnaw, Guydyon a'y kymerth, ac a droes llen o bali yn y gylch, ac a'e cudyawd." From: Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, Page 77.

[95] The Rhiannon of the Mabinogi, Arganto-rota.

[96] OWe. *guid-gen*.

the natural environment surrounding them. A last representation of the "god with the mistletoe leaves" may support this interpretation: a bronze flagon from the early *La tène* period, found in the tomb of a princess in Reinheim, which shows the god with the body of a horse, perhaps highlighting the filiation between the "luminous one" and the Great Queen Epona.[97] It can also be noted that the name of Lugus' protector, Gwydion (*ᘺIᐃOYTЄNOC [*vidu-genos] in Gaulish), would therefore also be a fitting epithet for the "luminous one." Born out of the Silver Wheel taking the form of a bird, the god of the Bright begins his life on a tree before ascending to become the great luminary of the sky, perhaps itself carried by another bird.

The force of the early World of the Celts and many other ancient peoples was this ability to ex-plain what could be seen daily in the sky or on the earth by using creations of the mind grounded in the truth of what can be experienced by the senses in order to better perceive the nature of their own being and to deepen their relation with the divine.

The mistletoe is a symbol of the link between Life and the Bright, but it is also a direct manifestation of the resilience of Life. No matter whether it rains or snows, whether the sun shines or the thunder roars, the green spheres are always found high in the trees. Because of this ability to produce bright fruits in the heart of the winter, it was seen as possessing the ability to "impart fecundity" and to counteract poisons by the Gauls. More than any other "thing" of the World, this plant stands outside of the three realms: it is not rooted in the earth; it does not submit itself to the cycle of the seasons like other plants; it does not fly in the sky. The mistletoe is outside of the three realms, or perhaps at their intersection.

When it appears on the top of a tree, the mistletoe is more than a single bud surrounded by symmetrical leaves. Every year, the leaves that came out of each bud fall down, at a different time, in order to allow the plant to grow new stems that will give new leaves and themselves later branch into new stems. After several years, the plant begins to form a sphere that enfolds the branch on which it grows. It appears to live a life of its own, a

[97] There is no public domain image of this flagon. It can be seen in: Kruta, *Celtic Art*, Page 60.

microcosm populated by dozens of little anthropomorphic figures with multiple white heads that appear to look in every direction. This "world," this image of the great body of Life itself, came to be through the gift of the bird who carried a seed taken from another sphere. This process mirrors the growth of the Teuta itself, with living beings that are the source of their descendance, exponentially growing as a single body. Contrary to many parts of the body of Life, mankind in particular, the mistletoe nonetheless does not see a wasting away of its source. Man sees his parents die and their flesh being returned to the earth, but when the mistletoe branches, every year, the original stem that gives birth to two different new ones does not wither, nor does it return to the earth. It remains as the support and the lifeline of its descendants. If stems are cut off from their "parent," they fall down from the sphere and are reclaimed by the Dark.

A plant outside of the cycle of the seasons, the mistletoe therefore also represents a display of the totality of Life, independent of the flow of time. The years of its life can be seen in the number of its branches. It offers a vision of the entirety of its life, from its first bud until the most recent ones. The sphere can the seen as a model of the Teuta itself, seen from outside the flow of time, where it can be instantaneously seen in its fullness. It teaches man to see beyond his own *presence*, to seek to nurture his bond with his origin, and perhaps even to reflect on the nature of the "bird" that carried the first seed from which the body of the Teuta originated.

3.3.2 The Birds

The birds represent the loftiest part of the body of Life and Being. They belong to the "middle realm" but their dominion extends where humans and other animals cannot set foot: the air and the sky. They can venture deep into the enclave of the "thunderous one" and even soar higher, above the clouds, where all that can be seen is the brightness of the sun during the day and the gentle glow of the Silver Wheel during the night. These creatures of the sky are united by their heavenly nature, their ability to extract themselves from the pull of the great body of the Dark that draws every creature back to the Ground, but the branch of the Tree of Life that they form is wide, showing considerable

differences between the smaller branches that arose after countless generations.

Different species of birds occupy a different place in the World of men. Some of them offer gentle songs that sooth the hearts of those hearing them, while others produce loud shrieks, leading them to be resented by man and beasts alike. Bright colored feathers can inspire awe and wonder, and a dark cloak may be interpreted as an omen of death, a return to the Dark. Their behavior also greatly determines the way they are perceived by men. Their place in the World is nonetheless also largely the fruit of the impressions of individual men, early poets who were able to carve their vision into the World in which they and their brethren lived their lives.

Birds were hunted or bred as food since time immemorial. Found among the ancient mountain tribes of Taiwan, the priests of Rome, or the Druids of Gaul, one of the most universal and oldest uses of birds was for the practice of augury. Justinus recounts such a use, for no small matter:

> The Gauls, when the land that had produced them was unable, from their excessive increase of population, to contain them, sent out three hundred thousand men . . . to seek new settlements. Of these adventurers part settled in Italy, and took and burnt the city of Rome; and part penetrated into the remotest parts of Illyricum under the direction of a flight of birds (for the Gauls are skilled in augury beyond other nations) . . .[98]

The flight of a bird is seen as unpredictacle, and thus directed by the hand of fate or by the will of the gods of the "upper realm." They are the messengers of the divine, fingers of the gods who offer signs to those among the men down below who are pious enough

[98] English translation from: Justinus, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, N.Pag. (§ 24.4); Original Latin: "Namque Galli abundante multitudine, cum eos non caperent terrae, quae genuerant, CCC milia hominum ad sedes novas quaerendas velut ver sacrum miserunt. Ex his portio in Italia consedit, quae et urbem Romanam captam incendit et portio Illyricos sinus ducibus avibus (nam augurandi studio Galli praeter ceteros callent). . ." From: Justinus, *Abrégé des Histoires Philippiques de Trogue Pompée.* N.Pag. (Web)

to seek a divine guidance.

Another example, given by the Pseudo-Plutarch, recounts the legendary origin of the city of 𐌋𐌏𐌕𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌍𐌏𐌖𐌌 [lugdunum] (Fr. *Lyon*):

> Near to this river stands a mountain called Lugdunum, which changed its name upon this occasion. When Momorus and Atepomarus were dethroned by Seseroneus, in pursuance of the oracle's command they designed to build a city upon the top of the hill. But when they had laid the foundations, great numbers of crows with their wings expanded covered all the neighboring trees. Upon which Momorus, being a person well skilled in augury, called the city Lugdunum. For lugdon in their language signifies a crow, and dunum any spacious hill.[99]

The etymological link between the name of the city and the crow is not supported by historical linguistics, but as noted by Jacques Lacroix, it would nonetheless seem that the city came to be associated with this bird.[100] The Silver Goblet of Lyon (See Fig. 2.5), in particular, appears to show the bird flying near the Gaulish Appolo, who surely represented the god whose name is the real source of the name of the city: Lugus. The legend of the Pseudo-Plutarch may simply have mistaken the messenger of the "luminous one" for the god himself.

The crow (𐌁𐌏𐌃𐌏𐌖𐌏- [boduo-][101]) and the raven (𐌁𐌓𐌀𐌍𐌍𐌏- [branno-][102]) wear a black cloak that may evoke the Dark and the Deep. In the insular tradition, they were associated with death, as they were the creatures tearing out the flesh of those fallen on

[99] English translation from: Honoratus, *Plutarch. Moralia. with an English Translation by. Frank Cole Babbitt*, N.Pag. (*De Fluviis* 6); Original Greek: "Παράκειται δὲ αὐτῷ ὄρος Λούγδουνος καλούμενον• μετωνομάσθη δὲ δ' αἰτίαντοιαύτην. Μώμορος καὶ Ἀτεπόμαρος, ὑπὸ Σεσηρονέως τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐκβληθέντες, εἰς τοῦτον κατὰ προσταγὴν χρησμοῦ ἦλθον τὸν λόφον πόλιν κτίσαι θέλοντες. Τῶν δὲ θεμελίων ὀρυσσομένων αἰφνιδίως κόρακες ἐπιφανέντες καὶ διαπτερυξάμενοι, τὰ πέριξ ἐπλήρωσαν δένδρα. Μώμορος δὲ οἰωνοσκοπίας ἔμπειρος ὑπάρχων, τὴν πόλιν Λούγδουνον προσηγόρευσεν. Λοῦγον γὰρ τῇ σφῶν διαλέκτῳ τὸν κόρακα καλοῦσι, δοῦνον δὲ τόπον ἐξέχοντα⋯" From: ibid., N.Pag.

[100] Lacroix, *Les noms d'origine gauloise : La Gaule des dieux*, Page 112

[101] ibid., Page 110

[102] ibid., Page 110

the battlefield. Doing so, the birds were nonetheless also seen as carrying the flesh of the fallen heroes up to the skies. For this reason, corpses have been left to be eaten by birds, a practice found among the Celts but also among other people of the Iron Age, the Persians in particular.[103] Crows and ravens, however, have traditionally also been symbols of wisdom. Modern science has shown that they possess a high level of intelligence. They also have a special talent to imitate noises and even human speech, sometimes surpassing parrots in this regard. This fact alone would have struck the imagination of men eager to seek signs of the divine in nature such as the ancient Celts. It is no coincidence if the Germanic god of wisdom and knowledge, Odin/Wotan, is accompanied by two ravens named "thought" (ONor. *Huginn*) and "memory" (ONor. *Muninn*). The crow and the raven therefore dwell in the World as much as in the skies. They are the messengers of the "luminous one," who reveals the path in front of man's feet with the Light of the Bright and enlightens his mind with the Light of the World.

The aforementioned Silver Goblet of Lyon (See Fig. 2.5) also shows another bird, one of a larger stature, which is seen facing the serpent, the right hand of the god of the Dark: an eagle (𐌴𐌡𐌉𐌡𐌏- [eriro-][104]). The eagle would here appear to represent the force of the "thunderous one," the angry force that faces the earth: Taranis, the god of the Lofty. Such a representation nonetheless appears to be of Roman origin, as the eagle is a traditional symbol of the Roman equivalent to Taranis: Jupiter, but it does not appear in the early iconography of the Celts.

Another bird also occupies an important place in the spiritual World of the Gauls, one that is found on the early artworks of the continent and in the myths of medieval Ireland. It does not possess the strength and the speed of the birds of prey, nor the intelligence or the thirst for blood of the raven, but it nonetheless appears to occupy the highest place in the World of the Celts. This bird is the crane, called 𐌕𐌀𐌡𐌀𐌍𐌏𐌒 [garanos] \[garanus][105] in Gaulish. The most explicit sign of the prominent place accorded to the crane in the World of the Gauls certainly is the depiction of the bird found on the *Pillar of the Boatmen*, carved during the early Gallo-Roman period and found in the foundations of the *Notre Dame de Paris*

[103] See: J.-L. Brunaux, *Les druides*, Page 196
[104] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 117.
[105] ibid., Page 151.



Figure 3.19: *The bull with the three cranes on the Pillar of the Boatmen* (Reinach, *Guide illustré du Musée de Saint-Germain*, Page 71.).

cathedral (See Fig. 3.19).

The stone carving shows a majestuous bull in the middle of a forest of what appears to be willow trees. Three cranes can be seen sitting on the top of the animal: two on its back and one on its head, each bird looking in a different direction. Above the carved image, a Gaulish inscription written in Latin characters give us the name of this scene: TARVOS TRIGARANVS, "the bull (with) the three cranes."[106] The signification of the scene has yet to be unveiled, but it seems certain that the crane plays an important role in the central religious myth of the early Celts.

Another clue can be found on one of the silver plates of the Cauldron of Gundestrup, on which three birds appear together with three women, among which we find the Great Queen (See Fig. 3.20). This plate shows the queen with a small bird in one hand, and two larger ones, which may represent cranes, flying on her two sides. A woman touches the queen's hairs while another sits on

[106] This stone appears to have been meant to appear next to another, which has already been presented in the first chapter: the stone showing Esus cutting through willow trees with a sort of small axe (See Fig. 1.6). An interpretation of this scene will be attempted in the last chapter.



Figure 3.20: *The Great Queen on the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

her shoulder. A man and a small dog are lying on the goddess' breast, apparently dead, while a larger dog or lion appears to try to catch one of the cranes. As convincingly interpreted by Jean-Jacques Hatt,[107] it would seem that this scene refers to an event that frequently appears in the medieval literature of both Wales and Ireland: the transformation of a human into an animal. The Great Queen is therefore linked with birds: the thrush that plays an essential part in the sprouting of the mistletoe, that is, the birth of Lugus, and the crane, whose nature must now be examined in order to perceive the reason why this bird came to represent the celestial goddess.

The long, thin legs of the crane and its elegant posture naturally evoke a feminine behavior. A long neck and an elongated beak further increase this impression of delicateness. The voice of the crane nonetheless sharply contrasts with her graceful appearance: far from the harmonious chirping of the sparrow, her voice is a deafening screech that is displeasing to the ears. Probably for this very reason, the crane came to be seen as a symbol of inhos-

[107] Hatt, *Mythes et Dieux de la Gaule I*, Page 93.

pitality in medieval Ireland. This view is exemplified in the story of Athirne Ailgessach, found in the *Book of Leinster*, which tells us that he received (or perhaps took) from the god Midir three "hostile and inhospitable cranes" (*corra diultada & doichle*) that he then used to chase away those who would seek to enter his home.[108] It would nonetheless seem that the crane still inspired a certain respect among the dwellers of the island up until the medieval period. The Welsh cleric Gerald of Wales indeed recounts that King Henry II of England taught the Irish to eat "the flesh of cranes, which they until then abhorred" when he invaded the island.[109] The existence of a taboo concerning the eating of cranes may be a remnant of the devotion to the Great Queen inspired by the sight of the crane, who was transformed in one in the ancient myth of their distant forefathers.

There is nonetheless a very simple reason explaining why the crane may have been perceived differently by the Gauls and the Irish: the Irish word *corr*, which do not seem to originate from the same root as the Gaulish word for the crane,[110] TARANOC [garanus], may have designated other birds with a similar appearance, such as the heron. One of the most noticeable peculiarities of the crane found in the land of Gaul is its migratory nature. Every year it flies over the land, spending the winter in the south, and coming back with the spring. As it would seem that the crane was not native to Ireland, the dwellers of the island would not have the opportunity to witness the yearly journey of these birds. The philosophers of Gaul, eager to find the links between the divine and the signs of nature, surely would have established a correlation between the migration of the bird and the work of the Silver Wheel, which determine the seasons and the yearly cycle of nature. One of the earliest works of wisdom of Europe that has reached us, written by Hesiod (8^{th}–7^{th} c. B.C.), a keen observer of the creation and one who had a talent to perceive the signs of the divine in it, mentions the reason why the crane occupies a special place in the World of the philosophers of nature in his poem *Works and*

[108] *Book of Leinster, formerly Lebar na Núachongbála* (§ 5, Web).

[109] See: Giraldus, *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, Page 279–280, "Ubi et lautam Anglicanae mensae copiam, venustissimum quoque vernarum obsequium plurinum admirantes, carne gruina, quam hactenus abhorruerant, regia voluntate passim per aulam vesci coeperunt."

[110] PCelt. *korxsā. Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Pages 218–218.

Days:

> Mark, when you hear the voice of the crane who cries year by year from the clouds above, for she gives the signal for ploughing and shows the season of rainy winter; but she vexes the heart of the man who has no oxen.[111]

This is precisely why the crane is associated with the Silver Wheel. Both represent the work that time exerts upon the creation. The turning of the wheel carries the earth and the sky, all men and animals, according to a cycle that is the source of a harmonious strife, an equilibrium between the realms, between the gods, and between all beings. The crane appears as a messenger of the Silver Wheel, or according to the myth, its earthly incarnation, one that announces the arrival of winter when she flies southward, and proclaims its end when she returns to the north, as if she was responsible for the melting of the snow that covers the soil and prevented the rebirth of the plants. The unmelodious nature of her cry is soon forgotten when man realizes the blessing that she brings with her. Thus was she revered by the men of Gaul, who saw in her the work of the Silver Wheel, which is seldom seen but nonetheless encompasses all and directs the flow of the creation.

The crane, however, is more than the proclaimer of the passing of the seasons. Her head bears the symbol of the place of the Silver Wheel: the three colors representing the three realms. The black of the Dark and the Deep, the red of Life and Being, and the white of the Lofty and the Bright, the three colors displayed by the bird, which are also shown daily in the sky, represent the central nature of the crane in the myth, as she is the element that both unites the three realms and also is the source of the strife between them. The jalousy and desire provoked by the beauty of the goddess is what causes the strife between earth and sky, as it will later be seen (See Ch. 5).

The crane is the seamstress that joins the realms, the insti-

[111] English translation from: Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica with an English Translation by Hugh G. Evelyn-White*, N.Pag. (Works and Days, line 448–451); Original Greek: "φράζεσθαι δ', εὖτ' ἂν γεράνου φωνὴν ἐπακούσῃς \ ὑψόθεν ἐκ νεφέων ἐνιαύσια κεκληγυίης: \ ἥτ' ἀρότοιό τε σῆμα φέρει καὶ χείματος ὥρην \ δεικνύει ὀμβρηροῦ: κραδίην δ' ἔδακ' ἀνδρὸς ἀβούτεω:" From: ibid., N.Pag.



Figure 3.21: *A crane* (Hume and Marshall, *The game birds of India, Burmah, and Ceylon*, Page 20.).

gator of the great strife through which the creation becomes more than a still picture. The turning of the Silver Wheel is what allows things to rise up and to crumble. It allows desire, love, hate, and revulsion to flow freely inside the creation so that the world-picture can be imparted with a life of its own. On a Gaulish shield upon which we can see the outline of two cranes facing opposite directions, a single word proclaims the essence of the crane: CATVS, "strife" (See Fig. 3.22).[112] The bird separates and joins,[113] in a strife that is not a mere destructive opposition, a resistance to the natural flow, but rather a harmonious balancing between the forces of nature, as expressed by a contemporary of the earliest Druids of Gaul, Heraclitus, who declared that: τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ᾽ ἔριν γίνεσθαι, "what is opposite agrees, and from differing things comes the fairest harmony, and all things happen according to strife."[114] The crane embodies this harmonious strife and the blurring of the line that separates the realms.

The role played by the Silver Wheel is also mirrored by the crane's posture: one foot in the air, the other under water, that

[112] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 111.

[113] It can be noted that the old Irish word for "crane," *corr*, also means "pointy" or "sharp."

[114] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 160



Figure 3.22: *A Gaulish shield* (Reinach, *Catalogue illustré du musée des antiquités nationales au château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye (2e édition)*, Page 45.).

is, one in the Lofty and the Bright; and the other in the Dark and the Deep, as if she refused to choose between earth and sky. She is torn apart between the heavens where she can soar freely to contemplate the power of the Lofty and the dark waters in which she finds tranquility and her sustenance.

Traces of the role played by the crane in the World of the ancient Celts may perhaps be found in the insular literature. For example, in the *Cath Maige Tuired*, the "Second Battle of Mag Tuired," the son of the Silver Wheel, Lugh/Lugus, attempts to rally the various forces of Ireland against their enemy, the *Fomoire*, and thus asks what would be the contribution of the most important persons of the land. After Luchta, Ogma, and the Morrígan, but before the cupbearers and the Druids, he addressed a group of men or women designated as *a corrgunechai*, a word translated as "sorcerers"[115] but which is composed of the word "crane" (*corr*) and the word "wound" (*guin*).[116] These sorcerers give a perplexing answer, whose interpretation will be left to the reader:

> 'Not hard to say,' said the sorcerers [*corrguinidhgh*]. 'Their white soles will be visible after they have been overthrown by our craft, so that they can easily be killed; and we will take two-thirds of their strength from them, and prevent them from urinating.' [117]

Soon after this dialogue, Lugus is described as performing a ritual that evokes the nature of the crane and that may be related to the work of the *corrguinech*. In order to encourage men to fight, he goes "around the men of Ireland on one foot and with one eye closed,"[118] while declaiming or singing a spell. This posture repeatedly appears in the literature of the island, often associated with imprecations or curses, although it is not the case here. One foot on the earth, the other in the air; one eye in the darkness,

[115] eDIL s.v. corrguinech or dil.ie/12535.

[116] eDIL s.v. guin or dil.ie/26798.

[117] English translation from: *Cath Maige Tuired, the "Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, CELT (Translated by Elizabeth A. GrayProof). Text in brackets added; Original Irish: " 'Ní anse,' ar na corrguinidhgh. 'A mbuind bánai forra íarn' trascrad trienar cerd-ne, go romarbtar a n-aiscid; ocus dá trian a neirt do gaid foraib, lie forgabáil aru fúal.' " From: ibid.

[118] English translation from: *Cath Maige Tuired, the "Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, CELT (Translated by Elizabeth A. GrayProof); Original Irish: "Conid and rocan Lug an cétal-so síos, for lethcois & letsúil timchell fer n-Erenn.' " From: ibid.

the other in the light; this ritual appears to borrow the ambivalent nature of the crane in order to secure the favor of the realm above and the one below, the Dark and the Bright that are called so that the blood of Life that will be spilled during the strife will be the one of the enemy rather than the one of their own people. Going in circles, the shape of the wheel, around the people, while taking the posture of the crane, this ritual once again shows that the Silver Wheel and its incarnation represent the hand of fate, the great power of decision within the creation.

3.3.3 Language

As seen earlier, the Albios not only encompasses the things that are found in the skies but also what is out of the reach of light itself: what is called "meta-physical." Language certainly is the basis of meta-physics. It is what operates the clearing opening up the space where the World of men can be built, cutting out (PCelt. *𐊂𐊓𐊀 [*brē] "to cut") the unity of the creation into a multitude of "things," concepts and words (PCelt. *𐊂𐊓𐊀𐊕𐊓𐊐 [*brētrā][119]) that give man the impression that he can grasp the order of the universe.

Different peoples build different Worlds: the shared space that is language (as *langage*, language in general) is indeed wide enough to allow groups of men to live on their own, separate from other groups, and to build their own languages (as *langue*, particular languages) that will reflect their culture and their environment. Here is how the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus describes the use of language among the Gauls:

> The Gauls are terrifying in aspect and their voices are deep and altogether harsh; when they meet together they converse with few words and in riddles, hinting darkly at things for the most part and using one word when they mean another; and they like to talk in superlatives, to the end that they may extol themselves and depreciate all other men. They are also boasters and threateners and are fond of pompous language, and yet they have sharp wits and are not without cleverness

[119] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 77.

> at learning.[120]

This description would fit many ancient peoples, especially the eastern neighbors of the Gauls: the Germans. Old Norse literature indeed gives us plenty of stories of men who balanced the use of the sword and the spilling of blood with the use of the most intricate and cryptic poems, filled with riddles and obscure references to the gods. Far from the image of senseless brutes driven by their thirst for gold, it would seem that the men of ancient Europe were also men who valued knowledge and those able to master the subtleties of the tongue.

Language, *ᛁᚨᚴᛏᛁᚲ [*iactis][121] in Gaulish, can also itself be seen as a double-edged sword, one that can both destroy and save, attack and protect. Standing close to the king, beside the strongest warriors and the druids, another class of men were found in the great halls of Gauls:

> Among them are also to be found lyric poets whom they call Bards. These men sing to the accompaniment of instruments which are like lyres, and their songs may be either of praise or of obloquy.[122]

The *ᛒᚨᚱᛞᛟᚲ [*bardos][123] is not a mere "entertainer": he is the builder of reputations, the judge of one's character in the eye of the people. His mastery of language and music gives power to his words: they are easily remembered, carried through time and space by the men and women who have been seduced by them.

The bards were nonetheless not alone to master the highest

[120] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.31); Original Greek: "αὐτοὶ δ' εἰσὶ τὴν πρόσοψιν καταπληκτικοὶ καὶ ταῖς φωναῖς βαρυηχεῖς καὶ παντελῶς τραχύφωνοι, κατὰ δὲ τὰς ὁμιλίας βραχυλόγοι καὶ αἰνιγματίαι καὶ τὰ πολλὰ αἰνιττόμενοι συνεκδοχικῶς: πολλὰ δὲ λέγοντες ἐν ὑπερβολαῖς ἐπ' αὐξήσει μὲν ἑαυτῶν, μειώσει δὲ τῶν ἄλλων, ἀπειληταί τε καὶ ἀνατατικοὶ καὶ τετραγῳδημένοι ὑπάρχουσι, ταῖς δὲ διανοίαις ὀξεῖς καὶ πρὸς μάθησιν οὐκ ἀφυεῖς.," from: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

[121] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 217.

[122] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.31); Original Greek: "εἰσὶ δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς καὶ ποιηταὶ μελῶν, οὓς βάρδους ὀνομάζουσιν. οὗτοι δὲ μετ' ὀργάνων ταῖς λύραις ὁμοίων ᾄδοντες οὓς μὲν ὑμνοῦσιν, οὓς δὲ βλασφημοῦσι.," from: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

[123] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 56.

forms of linguistic expression. As the emperor tells us: "The Druids . . . are said there to learn by heart a great number of verses; accordingly some remain in the course of training twenty years."[124] As their distant cousins, the Aryans who composed and memorized the Vedas in India and many other peoples of the Iron Age, the leaders of the Gauls shaped the spiritual core of their World using poetic language, verses that could more easily be memorized while inspiring a sense of beauty. If the power of the bards is often underestimated, the one of the poet is even more so. If men were fully conscious of the incredible impact that the work of the poet can exert on a World, their desire to master this art would be greater than their lust for riches and fame. The power of poetry, however, is itself not mastered by anyone composing verses, far from it. Only one who has perceived the essence of poetry can begin to craft words that would pass through the ages and shape the World of men.

It is therefore not surprising to see that the men of Gaul who were often more powerful than the kings of their lands, the Druids, held in high regard this art of the tongue and spent a large part of their lives learning the poetic work of their forefathers. Heidegger is one of those who saw the true power of poetry, understood as the Greek ποίησις [poíēsis], an "act of creation," a becoming into language in particular, that is, the birth of a "thing" into the World. The Gaulish word for poet, ΤΤΡΙΤΙΟϹ [pritios], is also based on the same semantic analogy linking poetry to an act of creation,[125] a word itself derived from the same root as its Greek equivalent. The poet is thus a "creator," one who orders the World, the "meta-physical," as the gods order the creation as a whole, but as the German philosopher tells us:

> Poetizing is founding, a grounding that brings about that which remains. The poet is the one who grounds beyng. What we call the real in our everyday life is, in the end, what is unreal. In the beckoning of the gods being, as it were, built into the foundational walls

[124] Emphasis added. English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.14); Original Latin: "Druides . . . Magnum ibi numerum versuum ediscere dicuntur. Itaque annos nonnulli vicenos in disciplina permanent." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

[125] From the I.E. root *k^{w}er, cf. Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 253.

> of the language of a people by the poet, without the people perhaps having any intimation of this initially, beyng is founded in the historical Dasein of the people, a pointer and directedness are placed into this beyng and deposited there. Poetizing — the expression of psychical lived experience? How far removed is all that! Poetizing — enduring the beckonings of the gods — the founding of beyng.[126]

The beckonings of the gods [*der Winke der Götter*] was the seed from which language itself sprouted out of the earth. It also remains the source of a true poetic inspiration (*ANAOYO- [*anauo-][127]), which induces an elevation of the "soul" (*ANATION [*anation][128]), the essence of man's being. The act of creation of the poet is therefore foremost an act of piety, a mark of devotion to the gods. This piety nonetheless does not arise from and is not directed toward a "meta-physical" idea of the divine. Its source and its destination are the same: the whole of being, the creation inside which man is thrown and in which he comes into contact with the divine surrounding him. Language is the vessel in which these beckonings can be shared but also where man's very being finds its origin: it is what distinguishes him from the beasts roaming the earth or flying in the sky.

Language is the light that clears the space where the World can be built, a light that is not under the control of any human. Only the "luminous one," he who shines throughout the creation, has the power to shine beyond the deepest skies, in the domain of the Light, of what is without mass nor extension: the "meta-physical." Language is the gift of the "luminous one" to man, a

[126] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"*, Pages 31–32; Original German: "Dichtung ist Stiftung, erwirkende Gründung des Bleibenden. Der Dichter ist der Begründer des Seyns. Was wir so im Alltag das Wirkliche nennen, ist am Ende das Unwirkliche. Indem der Wink der Götter gleichsam in die Grundmauern der Sprache eines Volkes durch den Dichter hineingebaut wird, ohne daß vielleicht zunächst das Volk dies ahnt, wird im geschichtlichen Dasein des Volkes das Seyn gestiftet, in dieses Seyn eine Weisung und Angewiesenheit gelegt und in ihm hinterlegt. Dichtung — Ausdruck seelischer Erlebnisse? Wie weit weg ist das alles! Dichtung — Aushalten der Winke der Götter — Stiftung des Seyns." From: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Page 33.

[127] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 202.

[128] ibid., Page 46.

creature too weak to clear the way for the building of the World by itself. As the German philosopher tells us:

> Language itself has its origin in silence. It is first in silence that something such as 'beyng' must have gathered itself, so as then to be spoken out as 'world.' That silence preceding the world is more powerful than all human powers. No human being alone ever invented language — that is, was alone strong enough to rupture the sway of that silence, unless under the compulsion of the God. We humans are always already thrown into a spoken and enunciated discourse, and can then be silent only in drawing back from such discourse, and even this seldom succeeds.[129]

Silence is the foundation of language, just as language is the foundation of the World. It is broken by the shockwave of the beckoning [as *Winke*, a waving] of the god above. Silence, as an absence of language rather than a mere absence of sound, holds sway over the Dark. Language, however, is tied to the Light, in both senses of the word: speech requires the air of the sky in order to be emitted and propagated while writing demands a source of light in order to be seen. Man is therefore elevated by language. It lifts him up towards the skies, away from the Ground from which he came. His tongue allows him to appeal to the forces of the heavens, as during the battle described by Tacitus:

> All around, the Druids, lifting up their hands to heaven, and pouring forth dreadful imprecations, scared our soldiers by the unfamiliar sight, so that, as if their limbs were paralysed, they stood motionless, and exposed to wounds.[130]

[129] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"*, Page 199; Original German: "Die Sprache selbst hat ihren Ursprung im Schweigen. Erst muß in diesem dergleichen wie >Seyn< sich gesammelt haben, um dann als >Welt< hinausgesprochen zu werden. Jenes vorweltliche Schweigen ist mächtiger als alle menschlichen Mächte. Kein Mensch für sich hat je Sprache erfunden, d. h. war für sich stark genug, die Gewalt jenes Schweigens zu brechen, es sei denn unter dem Zwang des Gottes. Wir Menschen werden immer schon in eine gesprochene und gesagte Rede hineingeworfen und können nur mehr noch schweigen im Rückzug aus dieser Rede, und selbst dieses gelingt selten." From: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Page 218.

[130] English translation from: Tacitus, *Complete Works of Tacitus*, N.Pag.

But man is not a son of the Bright. He was born out of the womb of the earth, the silent body that forms the foundation of all the things that man can see. The gift of the "luminous one" can thus represent a danger to the man who is not sufficiently anchored into the earth. His hands are meant to be extended towards the heavens, but his feet are equally meant to remain on the ground.

If man were only a part of the great body of the Dark, he would not be any different than the myriad of senseless beasts forming the major part of Life. He would not *be*, as a being able to play an active part in the ordering of the creation. Language is what allows him to enter and to build up the World, what gives "meaning" to his life. It is no coincidence if the Celtic word for "meaning," *ᑕᖆᐱᗝᑎᐃᗝ- [*stlondo-][131], shares the same root as the Latin root of the word "splendor." Meaning can only be found with the help of the Light, but this does not lessen the value of the Dark. The Light is by itself meaningless: nothing would be visible or seen if there was nothing but brightness. Only when it shines upon the Dark does the Light shows its purpose and its essence, which is the creation of contrasts.

Man is born out of silence, out of the Dark, but he is thus called by the god to reach out towards the Light through the edification of the World. This building work elevates him, tearing him between his origin, the Dark, and his destin-ation: the Light. His own being arises from this tension between these extremes, a tension that is the combination of both the work exercised by language itself upon man and of the work that man performs *within* language, within the World. If language is this string that puts the realms in tension with one another through man's *being*, it nonetheless also implies that its power can also lead man to his own doom. What allows him to *be* may also be the source of his fading out of being. In the words of Heidegger:

> Only where there is language does world prevail. Only where there is world — that is, where there is language — is there supreme danger: altogether the danger,

(*The Annals* § 30); Original Latin: "Druidaeque circum, preces diras sublatis ad caelum manibus fundentes, novitate aspectus perculere militem ut quasi haerentibus membris immobile corpus vulneribus praeberent." From: Tacitus, *Annales ab excessu divi Augusti*, N.Pag.

[131] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 356.

> which is the threatening of being as such by non-being. Language is dangerous not only because it brings the human being into a particular danger, but is what is most dangerous — the danger of dangers — because it first creates, and alone keeps open, the possibility of a threatening of beyng in general. Because the human being is in language, he creates this danger and brings the destruction that lurks within it. As what is most dangerous, language is what is most double-edged and most ambiguous. It places the human being into the zone of supreme achievement, yet at the same time holds him within the realm of abyssal decline [*Verfall*].[132]

Contrary to what the metaphors of the English language itself teach us, what is "high" is not necessarily better or "superior" to what is "low." If man becomes so fascinated by the Light that he comes to forget the Dark, he may "elevate" himself in the higher spheres of knowledge, but such an elevation may also represent a decline toward the abyss of non-being. Without an equilibrium between the Light and the Dark, language and silence, man may lose himself in a vacuous "play of words." The Light is what shines in the eyes of man, but it also is what is without substance, without weight. The essence of man is to be the link between Dark and Light, what gathers the creation into the World. This work (*ᛏᚾᛁᛗᛟᛉ- [*gnīmu-][133]) of knowledge can be imperiled by a poor mastery of language.

Perhaps more than any other people of Ancient Europe, the Gauls were aware of the power of language, and of its dangers. The

[132] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"*, Page 58; Original German: "Nur wo Sprache, da waltet Welt. Nur wo Welt, d. h. wo Sprache, da ist höchste Gefahr, die Gefahr überhaupt, d. h. die Bedrohung des Seins als solchen durch das Nichtsein. Die Sprache ist nicht nur gefährlich, weil sie den Menschen in eine Gefahr bringt, sondern das Gefährlichste, die Gefahr der Gefahren, weil sie die Möglichkeit der Seynsbedrohung überhaupt erst schafft und allein offenhält. Weil der Mensch in der Sprache ist, deshalb schafft er diese Gefahr und bringt die in ihr lauernde Zerstörung. Als das Gefährlichste ist die Sprache das Zweischneidigste und Zweideutigste. Sie stellt den Menschen in die Zone höchsten Erringens und hält ihn zugleich im Bereich abgründigen Verfalls." From: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Page 62.

[133] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 163.

Druids, in particular, were known for their secrecy, being reluctant to share their knowledge with those deemed unworthy to wield its power. As the emperor tells us, they in particular exerted a stringent control of one particular form of language:

> The Druids . . . are said there to learn by heart a great number of verses . . . Nor do they regard it lawful to commit these to writing, though in almost all other matters, in their public and private transactions, they use Greek characters. That practice they seem to me to have adopted for two reasons; because they neither desire their doctrines to be divulged among the mass of the people, nor those who learn, to devote themselves the less to the efforts of memory, relying on writing; since it generally occurs to most men, that, in their dependence on writing, they relax their diligence in learning thoroughly, and their employment of the memory.[134]

The two reasons given by Caesar show that the Druids were conscious of certain aspects of human nature, such as the fact that men tend to ignore and to forget what is too common, what surrounds them every day of their lives. Knowledge is subject to the same treatment as the other "things" found in man's World: only when a thing is sought and is hard to acquire does it has value in his eyes. The popularization of the most precious knowledge would inevitably lead it to appear worthless, and thus lead it to be ignored. In this regard, there is no greater danger than the universal use of the written word.

Written language considerably extends the range of oral speech, both in space and in time. It also leads to a formidable inflation of the mass of knowledge that can be accumulated and stored, or, in other words, it expands the frontiers of the World to a distant hori-

[134] Emphasis added. English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War*, N.Pag. (§ 6.14); Original Latin: "Druides . . . Magnum ibi numerum versuum ediscere dicuntur. . . Neque fas esse existimant ea litteris mandare, cum in reliquis fere rebus, publicis privatisque rationibus Graecis litteris utantur. Id mihi duabus de causis instituisse videntur, quod neque in vulgum disciplinam efferri velint neque eos, qui discunt, litteris confisos minus memoriae studere: quod fere plerisque accidit, ut praesidio litterarum diligentiam in perdiscendo ac memoriam remittant." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.* N.Pag.

zon. A contemporary of the Druids of Gaul used the very medium of writing to warn future generations about its danger. In his *Phaedrus*, Plato recounts a story taken from Egyptian mythology, in which the god Thamus severely condemns the use of writing, arguing that:

> It will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discovered a potion for remembering, but for reminding; you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing.[135]

The abundance of manuscripts written by the Greeks concerning spiritual matters would seem to imply that such warnings were never taking seriously among them. This, however, was not the case in Gaul. Not a single manuscript, tablet, or carving giving us a first-hand account of the wisdom of the Druids has been found to this day. Their knowledge was reserved to their disciples, the KOMPOYNOC [com-runos][136], that is, those worthy of "sharing the secrets," of having a part in the edification of the spiritual core of the World of their people. The Druids therefore preferred to see their wisdom fell into oblivion than see it preserved in manuscripts, circulated among a people who would have forgotten its roots and embraced the World of the invaders.

To appropriate the essence of language is the first step toward the appropriation of being itself. Because he can wield the power of language, man has been granted the possibility of elevating himself

[135] Emphasis added. English translation from: Plato, *Plato*, Pages 551–552 (§ 275a). Original Greek: "τοῦτο γὰρ τῶν μαθόντων λήθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ, ἅτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἔξωθεν ὑπ᾽ ἀλλοτρίων τύπων, οὐκ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοὺς ὑφ᾽ αὑτῶν ἀναμιμνησκομένους: οὐκουν μνήμης ἀλλὰ ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον ηὗρες. σοφίας δὲ τοῖς μαθηταῖς δόξαν, οὐκ ἀλήθειαν πορίζεις: πολυήκοοι γάρ σοι γενόμενοι ἄνευ διδαχῆς πολυγνώμονες. εἶναι δόξουσιν, ἀγνώμονες ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλῆθος ὄντες. . ." From: Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, N.Pag.

[136] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 202.

above the Ground. He alone is been allowed to extract himself from the great body of the Dark in order to venture into the Light. Here, however, the Light is not the dominion of the Bright, the Light of the skies, but rather the space that as no extension and no mass: language and the World that it supports. This gift and the task associated with it, the edification of the World, not only bring him closer to the god of Light, or to the gods of the skies in general, but also allow him to strengthen his bond with the god of the Dark and with the one of Life. Only within the World may he perceive their nature. He can feel their presence on the earth, but he needs the light of the World in order to peer beyond the horizon of his own sensorial experience. Through his work in the World, man can be more than a mere beholder of the holy: he may become a diligent servant of the divine by playing a part in the great play of the creation, the strife between the gods through which Being is celebrated and appropriated, by both man and the gods themselves.

The pitfalls on the path of man's destiny are nonetheless plentiful. As a warrior waving a heavy sword around himself, he is always under the threat of being carried away by the inertia of his "tool" and of being led to fall into the abyss. He should therefore chose his words carefully and not consider language lightly. As taught by eastern philosophers of the Zen tradition, the use of ambiguous language, of riddles and obscure speech may be one of the best way to break away the spell leading man to think that he is the master of language, when he is more often than not its slave. By the uttering of perplexing sentences, the teacher leads his disciple to think about the meaning of words, and about the essence of language itself. He can thereby show him how little can language itself be grasped, and how little does language help him to grasp the nature of the "things" that are part of his World. One never masters language: the best that one can do is the gain an awareness of the fleeting nature of all linguistic representations and of his own horizon.

Man is therefore bound to train himself to avoid the dangers of language if he is to appropriate this essence of his own being. According to the German philosopher, the dangerousness of language is twofold:

On the one hand, there is the danger of supreme prox-

> imity to the gods and thereby to being annihilated by their excessive character; at the same time, however, there is the danger of the most shallow turning away and of becoming entangled in worn-out idle talk and the semblance that goes with it. The manner in which these two conflicting dangers — the danger belonging to the essence of language, an essence difficult to endure, and that belonging to the playful corruption of its essence — intimately accompany one another heightens the dangerousness of language to the extreme.[137]

These two dangers represent two different types of imbalance in the tension between the Dark and the Light, tension mediated by man. The first represents a release of the tension between man and the Dark: he forgets the great womb out of which he was born and the shadowy nature of his own flesh. He fully throws himself in the Light, in the "upper things," disregarding the experience of the earth, considering the gods as more accessible in the World than on the Ground. If man completely severs himself from the Dark, he then becomes pure Light and is absorbed by it, thereby losing himself, losing his own being. His nature does not call him to join the gods but rather to bring them to the World and to maintain the productive tension between them. He should therefore be wary of the seductive power of the loftiest things, as their brightness can warm his heart but it can also burn his flesh.

The second danger mentioned by the philosopher is by far the most common. Because of the everydayness of language, man tends to release the tension between him and the Light. Language is seen purely as a tool for interpersonal communication, for entertainment or government. Not only does language then ceases to elevate man above the Ground, it also maintains him in a state of blindness to the nature of the divine as a whole. Man is not only blind to the Light, but also to the nature of the Dark and

[137] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"*, Page 59; Original German: ". . .einmal die Gefahr der höchsten Nähe zu den Göttern und damit zur übermäßigen Vernichtung durch sie, zugleich aber die Gefahr der flachsten Abkehr und Verstrickung in das vemutzte Gerede und seinen Schein. Das innige Beieinander dieser beiden widerstreitenden Gefahren, der Gefahr des schwer auszuhaltenden Wesens und der Gefahr des spielerischen Unwesens, erhöht die Gefährlichkeit der Sprache bis aufs höchste." From: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Page 63–64.

to the nature of Life and Being. The divine as a whole is eclipsed by the everydayness of language that causes man to live in pure immediacy, in pure *presence*. He thereby fails to play his part in the play of the creation. He becomes a speaking animal, one who has lost his own nature by spoiling the gift granted to him by the god of the Light.

One of the means that can be used to counteract this dangerous and yet natural degeneracy of the gift of language is to prevent an uncontrolled inflation of the size of the World, which represents the sum of all linguistic knowledge. An "economy" of language can increase the value and the weight of the words uttered by men and women. A scarcity of words combined with a sustained reflection on their nature would naturally reduce the decay of language, the loss of its power that leads it to be abandoned as a means of spiritual elevation and a means of appropriation of the essence of man's being.

By committing the spiritual knowledge of a people to one's memory, one ensures that the mass of such knowledge would not continually increase. The limitation of man's memory then acts as a safeguard: knowledge that is considered useless or simply not understood will soon be forgotten, preventing its misuse or misappropriation. The weakness of human memory would also imply that such knowledge would never be considered "granted." Only through a perpetual refreshing and learning would this knowledge remain in the mind of men. Only those ready to spend countless days learning directly from the mouth of a teacher would be worthy to share the heritage of the ancient wisemen.

An unrestricted use of literacy would destroy this strategy meant to counteract the fall of language into everydayness. This nonetheless does not imply that this medium would be of no use to those seeking to preserve the tension between Dark and Light. The written word should not be used concerning spiritual matters, the knowledge of the divine and the wisdom of the ancients, but it nonetheless has a place in the World. Even the Druids used it when it could further the progress of their knowledge of nature. The most significant example that has reached us certainly is the Coligny calendar, which is so complex that it would have been almost impossible to conceive it without the use of written signs. According to Diodorus Siculus, the writing of letters was also common

among the people, probably through the use of specialized scribes: "We are told, at the funerals of their dead some cast letters upon the pyre which they have written to their deceased kinsmen, as if the dead would be able to read these letters."[138] What is important is to continually refresh the awareness of the true nature of language and of the dangers inherent to its power. More important than the mass of knowledge itself, the use that is made of it is what matters the most.

A misunderstood or misused compendium of ancient wisdom may do more damage to a people than a complete absence of knowledge. A void of knowledge would indeed encourage men to become poets, that is, men who bring the Dark, Life, and the Bright into the World; men who edify the World through acts of creation. They would thereby think by themselves, striving to grasp the nature of the universe in which they are thrown. The poet, as someone who balances the Dark and the Light by bringing the former into the latter, is in an ideal position to avoid the dangers of language. On the other hand, if men are given a "ready-made" World, a sum of knowledge that is presented as an unquestionable truth that contains the answers to all their questions, they would have no incentive to think by themselves and to seek to know the true role that they are meant to play in the creation. Without a personal experience of the tension between the realms, without being a direct witness of the play between the divine forces, one is condemned to remain a passive onlooker rather than an actor of the play.

Therefore, rather than to transmit a heritage that would corrupt new generations of men unable to bear the burden of a true spiritual education faithful to the nature of man's calling, it may be best to let the ancient wisdom die with its teachers. It would seem that this is precisely what occurred after the persecution of the Druidic order by the Roman emperors in Gaul. More than the knowledge of the gods of the Druids, however, it is the Gaulish World as a whole that collapsed under the yoke of Rome. The people of Gaul nonetheless would also seem to share the blame of

[138] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 5.28); Original Greek: "διὸ καὶ κατὰ τὰς ταφὰς τῶν τετελευτηκότων ἐνίους ἐπιστολὰς γεγραμμένας τοῖς οἰκείοις τετελευτηκόσιν ἐμβάλλειν εἰς τὴν πυράν, ὡς τῶν τετελευτηκότων ἀναγνωσομένων ταύτας..," from: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

this collapse, as they also embraced the World of their conqueror. The conquest initiated a clash between two Worlds, and as Jean-Paul Savignac tells us: "This conflict between Latin and Gaulish was a duel between oral and written language. The written language won the duel, but the oral language nonetheless scored some points."[139] The Latin of Gaul and later the French language is still marked by its Celtic roots. Its pronunciation differs from the other Italic languages because of this influence. The names of cities and rivers still to this day more frequently originate from the Gaulish tongue than from the one of the Romans, even though the work of time has severely eroded them.

Even in Britain and in Ireland, the Druidic order faced a slow decline, slowly transforming the philosophers into "magicians" and "sorcerers." Even during the middle ages, an awareness to the danger of the written word nonetheless was still reflected in the literature of Ireland. The pen was itself used to lament on the prevailing of the written word in the story of *the judgment concerning Cormac's sword*, which can be summarized as follows:

Dubdrenn, a steward to High King Cormac, coveted a wondrous sword belonging to a young man of the court named Socht. Briefly taking the sword while its owner was drunk, the steward asked a brazier to inscribe his name inside the hilt of the sword and then returned it without his ruse being discovered. He then brought a suit before the king, declaring that the sword was his. Socht, in turn, swore that it belonged to him. Then:

> Socht was called upon to prove that the sword was his. He swore that it was a family treasure, and thus it had come down to him.
> The steward said, "Well, O Cormac, the oath that Socht has uttered is a lie."
> "What proof hast thou of that?" asked Cormac.
> "Not hard to declare," replied the steward. "If the sword be mine, my name stands graved therein, concealed within the hilt of the sword."
> "That will soon be known," says Cormac, and therewith he had the brazier summoned. The brazier comes

[139] TBA. Original French: "ce conflit entre le latin et le gaulois a été un duel entre l'oral et l'écrit. L'écrit a gagné la partie, mais l'oral s'en est tiré avec les honneurs de la guerre."Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 27.

> and breaks open the hilt and the name of Dubdrenn stands written within it. Thus a dead thing testified in law against a living man.[140]

Deciding to turn the ruse of the steward against him, Socht then declared that the sword indeed belonged to Dubdrenn, but that it was found in the neck of his grandfather Angus. The identity of the murderer now known, Socht demanded justice for this crime. The king ordered the payment of a heavy fine and the sword was given to him.

Writing is perceived as a dead form of language, as opposed to living speech, the word of a man of honor. To see how an inscription would be more valued than the word of a living man appears as an ill omen, the proclamation of the fact that man has ceased to "use" language for his own elevation, and that he has now become a tool used by language itself.

This story well represents the place of language in the modern age. The ideological battle has mostly been lost: literacy triumphed over orality. The unrestricted inflation of language and knowledge continues, and more than ever, man is now disconnected from the Dark. The modern man lives in the Light, focused on his own *presence* and oblivious to what is above as much as to what is below. The Light of his World obscures the play of the creation. The course of the sun, the phases of the moon, even the Silver Wheel itself: all are forgotten, as man focuses his attention on vain words, on the language of everydayness that occupies his days and his nights. The play of the creation, however, is not close to its end. Man therefore still has time to appropriate language and thereby to find his role in the great play.

[140] English translation from: Rolleston, *The High Deeds of Finn and other Bardic Romances of Ancient Ireland*, N.Pag. Original Irish: " doberar do Socht denum cor'bo leis in claideb, & dobeir Socht [in] luighi corbo sed fine do in claideb & cor' fo leis fein hé. \ Asbert in rechtaire: 'Maith ameind, a Cormaic; in tæth ud adbert Socht is eitheach hé.' \ 'Cid dogní latsu sin,' ol Cormac, 'conid breg he?' \ 'Ní ansa,' for se, 'masa limsa in claideb ata m' ainm scribhta and, & se fortuighthi in imdorn in claidib i folach.' \ Congairther Socht co Cormac, & isbert ris in ní sin. 'Bid garscel co feastar sin,' ol Cormac. 'Congairear in cerd duind,' ol se. Tic in cerd & taithmigis in dorncar, & airiacht ainm in rechtaire scribhta and. IS andsin rodgella marbh for bíu inagar log don scribadh." From: *Echtra Cormaic i Tir Tairngiri ocus Ceart Claidib Cormaic*, CELT.

3.3.4 Symbols

From its earliest period, the art of the Celts was mostly aniconic. Contrary to most peoples of the earth, the artists of Gaul focused on seemingly abstract shapes rather than on anthropomorphic representations of the gods or what they saw around them on the earth. The reaction of King Brennus as he conquered the Greek sanctuary of Delphi well represents this state of mind: "All that he found were images of stone and wood he laughed at them to think that men, believing that gods have human form, should set up their images in wood and stone."[141] As abstract as they may appear, the designs that characterize the artworks of the early Celts nonetheless do not appear to have been created for mere aesthetic purposes. Their art is not purely abstract: it is also profoundly *symbolic*.

The Gauls did not leave any text exposing their world-view. The medium of choice of their artistic and spiritual expression was the symbol, images that are mute but nonetheless show us things that cannot be told with words. They learned this use of symbols from their own ancestors, the early Indo-European horse riders coming from the East. One of the most common of these symbols certainly is the spoked wheel (See Fig. 3.23). Often interpreted as a solar symbol, linked to the "course of the sun" in the sky, the spoked wheel also well symbolizes the Indo-European people itself, as it would seem that the discovery of the spoked-wheel gave a precious advantage to the Indo-European tribes who conquered vast extents of land using wheel chariots pulled by horses. With this advantage, they invaded the north of India, Persia, and most of Europe, in successive waves that would define the different branches of the Indo-European people.

Perhaps a remnant of the culture of their forefathers, the Gauls continued to carry spoked-wheel pendants made of gold or bronze around their neck. More than a solar symbol, it came to represent the bond uniting the Indo-European people, men who

[141] English translation from: D. Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History, Volume XI, Books 21-32*, N.Pag. (§ 22.9); Original Greek: "Ὅτι Βρέννος ὁ τῶν Γαλατῶν βασιλεὺς εἰς ναὸν ἐλθὼν ἀργυροῦν μὲν ἢ χρυσοῦν οὐδὲν εὗρεν ἀνάθημα, ἀγάλματα δὲ μόνον λίθινα καὶ ξύλινα καταλαβὼν κατεγέλασεν ὅτι θεοὺς ἀνθρωπομόρφους εἶναι δοκοῦντες ἵστασαν αὐτοὺς ξυλίνους τε καὶ λιθίνους.," from: D. Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica, Vol 1-2*, N.Pag.

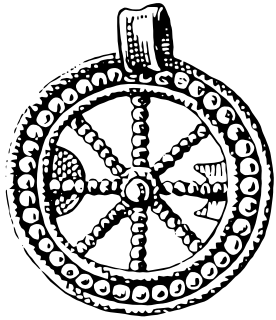


Figure 3.23: *A spoked-wheel pendant* (Déchelette and Millon, *La collection Millon*, Page 266.).

would now be unable to communicate with one another because of the increasing difference between their dialects but who would nonetheless keep the memory of their common heritage, the gifts of their distant forefathers.

The wheel shown in Fig. 3.23 is doubly "symbolic": the Greek word σύμ-βολον [sým-bolon] indeed literally designates the "putting together of two things," as two pieces of a broken pottery joined together to prove that they belong to the same object. Inside the wheel depicted here, a circle faces a crescent shape, apparently meant to be joined: a symbolon within a symbol. It remarkably demonstrates the ambivalent nature of the symbol, as a "thing" whose weakness is also its greatest power. A symbol is fundamentally incommensurable. It appeals together to the mind and to the senses, but it does not directly point toward what it signifies. It may allude to what it refers to by its appearance, but it never accurately depicts what it "means," or otherwise it ceases to be a symbol and rather only becomes an image, a *mimesis*. This inherent indeterminacy of the symbol may confuse those who behold it but it also represents the source of its incredible power. The incommensurability of the symbol allows man to see what he wants to see in it. It allows him to see in the symbol an echo of the deepest (or highest) aspirations of his mind, without destroying the bond that it creates with the community of men who also recognize their own inspirations in the same symbol. A core part of the meaning of the symbol is often shared by all, but its ambivalent nature allows the coexistence of personal interpretations

with a universal meaning shared by all, without contradictions.

The very nature of the symbol allows it embody the ambiguity of the human mind more efficiently than any words, as poetic as they may be. Its silent nature facilitates its adoption by men, as each one of them may interpret it as he wishes, but it still remains one, recognizable and thereby binding those who adopted it as a part of their own identity. Symbol of the course of the sun, the technical or military superiority of the early Indo-European riders, or of the Silver Wheel that encompasses the earth and the sky, this is not what would seem to matter the most. The power of the symbol does not lie in the nature of what it signifies, but rather in the force it exerts on those who perceive it. The binding force of the symbol is what gives it its true meaning, beyond what it originally signified for the man who first crafted it.

Besides the spoked wheel, another early Indo-European symbol frequently appears in the World of the Celts, from the earliest period up until modern times: the four-legged cross, sometimes called a tetraskelion but more widely known as the swastika. Few symbols have crossed the boundaries of cultures as much as the swastika, found from Japan to Ireland, and few have also acquired such a vast range of meanings as it has. Like the spoked wheel, it has often been interpreted as a solar symbol. In contrast with this plausible and yet simplistic interpretation that betrays the prejudice of scholars who often underestimate the intellectual and spiritual abilities of our distant ancestors, the hypothesis that the swastika may have an astronomical meaning has now been widely recognized as plausible. A particular form of swastika, notably found on several Gaulish coins, would seem to support the idea that the swastika represents the position of the Big Dipper (part of *Ursa Major*) or the Little Dipper (part of *Ursa Minor*) relative to the North Star (*Polaris*) at four different moments.[142] The two Gaulish coins shown in Fig. 3.24 can easily be interpreted as astronomical. The peculiar shape of these swastikas, with curved outer sections, also perfectly fits the shape of the Little Dipper.

What this shows is that the men of the Iron Age were able to create symbols related to complex aspects of nature. One of the powers of the symbol is this capacity to offer an easy grasp

[142] See: Jouet, *Dictionnaire de Mythologie et de la Religion Celtiques*, Page 956.

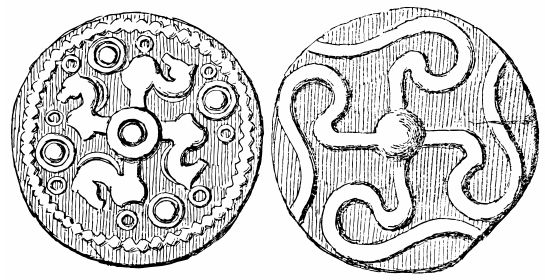


Figure 3.24: *Gaulish coin that may represent the course of the Little Dipper around the North Star* (Hucher, *L'art gaulois, ou, Les Gaulois d'après leurs médailles*, Pages 105–106.).

of "things" or phenomena that are inherently difficult to perceive directly or immediately. The course of the constellation around the North Star is not an instantaneous event. The symbol is itself never visible as such in the sky, as man is condemned to live in the *presence* of his senses. He cannot step outside of the flow of the days and the years in order to contemplate it in its entirety but he can nonetheless appeal to his capacity for abstraction in order to glimpse at the whole beyond his own *presence*. By joining the representations of the constellation at four different points of its cyclic movement, man can create a "thing," part of the World, that will allow him to envision the whole of course of the stars, in an instantaneous manner, as if he was able to step out of it.

The strength of the symbol allows man to transcend the limits of his own perception, but also and perhaps foremost the limits of his language, the boundaries of his World. As told by the French hermeneut Paul Ricoeur: "what asks to be brought to language in symbols, but which never passes over completely into language, is always something powerful, efficacious, forceful."[143] The symbol speaks to us, individually and collectively, not only echoing our own aspirations but also showing us a vision, something that cannot be brought into words but nonetheless irresistibly attracts the dwellers of the World. The beauty of the symbol can nevertheless be overlooked or neglected. All are not equally sensitive to it, as, in the words of F. T. Vischer, "only in a profound spirit does the content of the symbol grow warm and become the felt, the

[143] Ricoeur and Klein, *Interpretation Theory*, Page 63.

desired."[144] The forger of the most powerful symbols nonetheless must avoid to lose himself in the highest parts of the World or in the depths of the Dark. In order to adequately wield the power of the symbol, he must stay close to the surface separating both, so that he can appropriate the space where language is meaningless and the earth cannot be felt.

The dominion of the symbol is at the crossroad of the realms. It is often naively considered to be a more "primitive" location as compared to the World. The symbol is erroneously considered to come before language, and it is seen as an easier form of expression. Men are brought into the World almost immediately after their birth and all very soon feel at-home *in* language. How many, however, will come to master the art of the forging of symbols? Few. The symbol is harder to master than the tongue. Man is also less likely to even try to master it, as the symbol is essentially "unnecessary" in man's daily life. The symbol is a response to the call of the transcendence, an attempt to get a grasp at what can neither be fully grasped neither by the mind nor by the senses. The symbol is neither earthly nor worldly. It rather represents an attempt to go beyond both by staying in the interstice between the two. As told by Hans-Georg Gadamer:

> The symbol does not simply dissolve the tension between the world of ideas and the world of the senses: it points up a disproportion between form and essence, expression and content. In particular, the religious function of the symbol lives from this tension. The possibility of the instantaneous and total coincidence of the appearance with the infinite in a religious ceremony assumes that what fills the symbol with meaning is that the finite and infinite genuinely belong together. Thus the religious form of the symbol corresponds exactly to the original nature of "symbolon," the dividing of what is one and reuniting it again.[145]

[144] Vischer and Yanacek, "The Symbol", Page 425.

[145] English translation from: Gadamer, *Truth and Method. 2 Revised edition.* Page 67; Original German: "Das Symbol hebt die Spannung zwischen Ideenwelt und Sinnenwelt nicht einfach auf. Es läßt gerade auch das Mißverhältnis zwischen Form und Wesen, Ausdruck und Inhalt denken. Insbesondere die religiöse Funktion des Symbols lebt von dieser Spannung. Daß auf dem Grunde dieser Spannung der momentane und totale Zusammenfall der Erscheinung

The symbol shares with the World its ability to "cut out" the unity of the creation and to caricature it so as to make it more accessible to man. It nonetheless also shares with the Dark its capability to lead man to feel reunited with the whole of which he is part. The symbol is fundamentally tied to the spiritual, to the divine. It is as much estranged from worldly language as it is remote from the daily experience of the earth. What it offers is a glimpse of the holy, of what can neither be expressed in language nor perceived by the senses.

The art of the Celt makes an intensive use of symbols, far more than the art of any of their neighbors. From the early *La tène* period, they have carved, hammered, or painted abstract patterns on various objects such has swords, vases, helmets, or fibulas. Such patterns would soon be found all over the *Keltia*, and they would pass through the centuries with a very slow but continuous evolution. One symbol nonetheless stands out from the vast corpus of artworks of the Celts, one that is consistently omnipresent from the time of the ethnogenesis of this people up to the present day: the triskelion, a "three-cornered whorl, each corner ending in a circlet and the whole defining a curving-sided triangle."[146] The archeologist D. W. Harding wrote that: "A study of individual or recurrent motifs, like the pelta or triskelion of La Tène art . . . is essential to an understanding of Celtic art, just as the understanding of words is an essential prerequisite to a critical appreciation of poetry."[147] The importance of the understanding of these symbols, the triskelion in particular, nonetheless goes beyond the question of the appreciation of Celtic art: it represents a key for the appreciation of the nature of the early Celtic World as a whole.

The symbolism of the early Celts appears to be centered on the harmonious interlacing of curves, evoking the swirling of smoke or liquids. Two early examples are shown in Fig. 3.25 and 3.26, which both display a triskele inserted in a larger scene depicting waves or folds, a series of circular movements opposing one another

mit dem Unendlichen im Kultus möglich wird, setzt voraus, daß es eine innere Zusammengehörigkeit von Endlichem und Unendlichem ist, die das Symbol mit Bedeutung erfüllt Die religiöse Form des Symbols entspricht damit genau der ursprünglichen Bestimmung von *Symbolon*, Teilung des Einen und Wiederergänzung aus der Zweiheit zu sein." From: Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Page 83–84.

[146] Harding, *The Archaeology of Celtic Art*, Page 65.

[147] ibid., Page 15.



Figure 3.25: *Gaulish vessel with a triskeles design found in the Marne region* (Reinach, *Catalogue illustré du Musée des antiquités nationales au Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, Page 254.).

and yet forming a harmonious whole. Contrary to the swastika, which appears to directly represent the course of a constellation in the sky, the triskeles do not seem to represent a precise "object." It would seem to be more cosmological than astronomical in nature. As with almost every other symbol found in ancient artifacts, it has also been designated as "solar," with few plausible explanations concerning the threefold nature of the symbol. One of the most convincing links between the sun and the triskelion would be that each one of its arm would represent one of the three skies of each day: the night, the dawn, and the day, which form a continuous cycle repeated with each rotation of the earth.[148]

More than an association with the sun itself, which only represents one of the three daily skies, it would nonetheless seem far more coherent to see in the triskelion a representation of the threefold nature of the Celtic World itself. Just as each color of the sky can be associated with a particular realm, the black night with the Dark, the red dawn with the blood of Life, and the whiteness of the day with the Bright, the day nonetheless represents a whole, with a threefold nature, with no strict demarcation between its

[148] This possibility is mentioned in Jouet, *Dictionnaire de Mythologie et de la Religion Celtiques*, Page 983.



Figure 3.26: *Granite monolith, Co. Galway, Ireland* (Déchelette, *Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique celtique et gallo-romaine*, Page 1523.).

parts.

In order to perceive the accuracy and veracity of such a description of the central symbol of the Celtic World, one of its variant should be more closely examined, one which appears on numerous artifacts and that can more easily be interpreted. An example of these can be seen on the inside of the Cauldron of Rinkeby, a vessel that in all likelihood was used for Druidic rituals, like the Cauldron of Gundestrup (See Fig. 3.27). It shows what will here be called a "triskelion disk": a circle in which three drop-like shapes are interlaced with one another, appearing to rotate together. The peculiarity of this symbol, which has been noted by countless scholars, is its resemblance with another well-known symbol, one that comes from the Far East: the Chinese 太極圖 [tàijítú], also known as the "yīn-yáng symbol":



The comparison between the two symbols is interesting because contrary to its Celtic counterpart, the origin and the meaning of the "yīn-yáng symbol" has been explicitly described by those who crafted it, during the 11th century (A.D.). The Chinese symbol

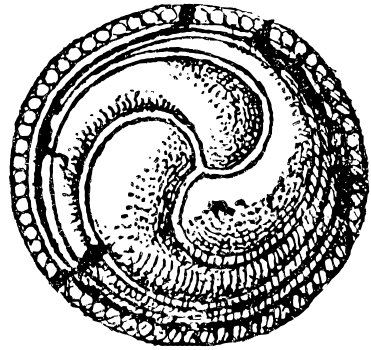


Figure 3.27: *The "triskelion disk" on the Cauldron of Rinkeby* (*JKDAI 1887*, Page 32.).

aims at representing the essence of a philosophy that comes from the same time period as the one of the Druids of Gaul: Daoism (道家), largely based on the work of the Chinese philosopher Laozi (老子). One of the key elements of this philosophy certainly is the essential role played by contrasts and oppositions, exemplified by the opposition between the Dark (陰 (*yīn*)) and the Bright (陽 (*yáng*). As shown by the symbol, this opposition is as much a dance as a strife, and the elements taking part in this play are always inextricably interlaced with one another. This ambiguity between dualism and monism, the strife of the opposites and the recognition of their unity, is what is remarkably represented by the symbol.

More than a mere aesthetic coincidence, however, it would seem that the similarity of appearance between the core symbols of the early Druids and the one of the Daoist philosophers may be the result of similarities in the underlying world-views of the two communities. The contrast between monism and dualism of the Daoist philosopher can easily be paralleled with a similar world-view found among the Druids, one in which the dualism would simply be replaced by a trialism reflecting the three realms. The main insights of the Daoist philosophers would seem to also fit the Celtic world-view, which emphasizes an awareness of the role of contrasts and harmonious oppositions. In the first and most important work of Daoist philosophy, Laozi's 道德經 [Dào dé jīng], the following interpretation of the meaning of the aforementioned Indo-European symbol can be found:

> – Thirty spokes held in one hub: in the empty space lies the cart[wheel]'s usefulness.
> – Molding clay into vessels: in the empty space lies the pot's usefulness.
> – Chiseling doors and windows to make a room: in the empty space lies the room's usefulness.[149]

Being rests on non-being, the Bright rests on the Dark, and the turning of the great Wheel is what allows the being of all beings. Simple and yet deep statements like those of Laozi were also common among early Western philosophers such as the Pre-Socratics, who according to ancient sources may either have been inspired by the Druids of Gauls or have inspired them.[150] The statement of Laozi shows how a symbol can express a philosophical insight better than any discourse: the wheel speaks by itself when man observes it carefully, and all the elements of nature also have such teachings to offer.

It is known for a fact that the "yīn-yáng symbol" arose in the East long after its "meaning" was put into words. It probably was also the case concerning the emergence of the triskelion among the early Celts. The three realms would have to first be brought into their World before this World would be able to give birth to the symbol, etched on the earth in stone, clay, or iron. Only then may man craft the triskelion, imparting it with a signification. The symbol then lives a life of its own, always inspiring more than what was envisioned by its creator. No matter how lengthy or complex, the philosophical ex-planation of the relation between the three

[149] TBA. Original Chinese: "三十輻共一轂當其無有車之用。埏埴以為器當其無有器之用。鑿戶牖以為室當其無有室之用。" From: 老子, 《新釈漢文大系〈7〉老子　莊子上巻, Page 28.

[150] See, for example, the following statement by Diogenes Laertius: "There are some who say that the study of philosophy had its beginning among the barbarians. They urge that the Persians have had their Magi, the Babylonians or Assyrians their Chaldaeans, and the Indians their Gymnosophists; and among the Celts and Gauls there are the people called Druids or Holy Ones, for which they cite as authorities the Magicus of Aristotle and Sotion in the twenty-third book of his Succession of Philosophers." (English translation from: Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, N.Pag. Original Greek: "Τὸ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἔργον ἔνιοί φασιν ἀπὸ βαρβάρων ἄρξαι. γεγενῆσθαι γὰρ παρὰ μὲν Πέρσαις Μάγους, παρὰ δὲ Βαβυλωνίοις ἢ Ἀσσυρίοις Χαλδαίους, καὶ Γυμνοσοφιστὰς παρ᾽ Ἰνδοῖς, παρά τε Κελτοῖς καὶ Γαλάταις τοὺς καλουμένους Δρυΐδας καὶ Σεμνοθέους, καθά φησιν Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τῷ Μαγικῷ καὶ Σωτίων ἐν τῷ εἰκοστῷ τρίτῳ τῆς Διαδοχῆς." From: ibid., N.Pag.)

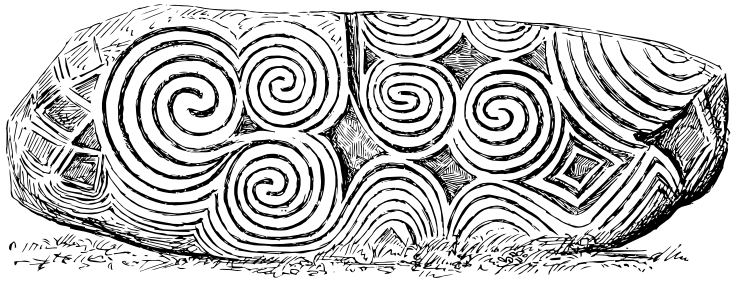


Figure 3.28: *A carved stone at the Newgrange sanctuary* (Allen, *Celtic art in pagan and Christian times*, Page 49.).

realms or the three colors of the sky never exhausts the power of the symbol. This is why a detailed analysis of the symbols of the Celts would not only be futile: it may even lead one away from the experience and the appropriation of their essence, which cannot be efficiently brought back into the World, into words. Such a task will therefore be left to the reader.

Before the plunge into the essence of the symbol, a final element can nonetheless also be pointed out: the fact that the triskelion, and the underlying philosophy that gave birth to it, may very well have been older than the Celts themselves. For centuries, if not millennia, the Druids of Gaul and Britain had been considered to be the originators of the most ancient and well-preserved sanctuaries of Europe. The so-called megaliths, these large stones erected alone or in circles in dozens of different places, were once associated with the Druidic order, and seen as places where their rituals were performed. Druids certainly may have appropriated these places, but it is now known that these sanctuaries were built up to five thousand years ago, long before the emergence of the Celts as a people.

The builders of the famous sanctuaries of Stonehenge and Newgrange are now designated as the "beaker people." The fact that these sanctuaries were built to be in alignment with the rising or setting of the sun during the solstices is not by itself as extraordinary as it may appear, as solstices were known and celebrated all over the globe since time immemorial. It nonetheless demonstrates a preoccupation for the observation of the signs of the sky, and a close link between these and religious rituals. In



Figure 3.29: *A threefold spiral found inside the Newgrange complex* (Allen, *Celtic art in pagan and Christian times*, Page 48.).

Newgrange, a large mound was built, with a passage going from its extremity to its center. At the entrance of this passage, a large stone engraved with abstract designs was placed lying on the earth (See Fig. 3.28). These designs are mostly spirals interlaced with one another. Inside the mound, on the day of the winter solstice, the sun can penetrate through the passage, perfectly aligned with it, its light unimpededly reaching the very center of the mound. On the wall of the chamber at the end of the passage, the light of the sun shines upon an engraved design: a single threefold whorl that is very similar to the triskelion of the Celts (See Fig. 3.29).[151]

There is no clear evidence of any direct cultural influence between the "beaker people" and the Celts. The first culture seems to have vanished millennia before the arrival of the latter, but the dwellers of Gaul, Britain, and Ireland certainly would have pondered the meaning of the megaliths and of the symbols carved on them. They may even have represented a foundation stone upon which they began to build their own World, basing themselves on the wisdom of those who already returned to the great body of the Dark long before they were born. These men, who did not know the art of writing, only left symbols, but these have passed through the ages and they continue to this day to inspire awe and wonder, more widely impacting the World than the words of the ancient philosophers.

[151] Mohen, *Les Mégalithes*, Page 79.

3.4 The Doorway to the Bright: the Clearing

Man always remains at the intersection of the three realms: his flesh is part of the Dark; his existence is part of Life; his mind is part of the World and his eyes contemplate the Bright. The permanent nature of his contact with the three realms can nonetheless dull his mind and his senses, rendering him oblivious to both the contemplation of their essence and to the experience that they offer. Man therefore continually needs reminders if he is to gain and preserve an awareness of the role he is meant to play in relation with these realms.

Rituals constitute a very efficient way to provide and sustain such an awareness. For a people like the early Celts, whose spirituality was tightly intertwined with the observation and the contact with nature, the ideal location for these rituals would be the places left unspoiled by the work of man's hands, places fashioned by nature itself and which demonstrate its perfection. As seen in the first chapter, the spring was the privileged location to approach the essence of the Dark and the Deep. The waters of the spring allow one to enter into the great body of the Dark and to send offerings to it by throwing objects into the shadowy waters. The privileged location for man to renew his awareness of the essence of Life and Being is the place and time where lives begin or end: the birth and death of creatures, the sacrifices where the lifeblood is made to flow between earth and sky, given to be seen by all as a reminder of their own fleeting nature.

More than near the springs, the Druids of Gaul were known to perform their rituals in another very peculiar location: clearings inside the forests. Several ancient sources mention these sanctuaries. The lengthiest description of a sacred grove used by the Druids is found in the *Pharsalia*, although it seems almost certain that this vivid poetic depiction was more based on legends and hearsay rather than on the observation of direct witnesses. The poem tells of the arrival of the Roman army in one of the "sacred groves" of the Celts, which offers them a terrifying vision:

> There stood a grove [*lucus*] Which from the earliest time no hand of man

Had dared to violate; hidden from the sun
Its chill recesses; matted boughs entwined
Prisoned the air within. No sylvan nymphs
Here found a home, nor Pan, but savage rites
And barbarous worship, altars horrible
On massive stones upreared; sacred with blood
Of men was every tree. If faith be given
To ancient myth, no fowl has ever dared
To rest upon those branches, and no beast
Has made his lair beneath: no tempest falls,
Nor lightnings flash upon it from the cloud.
Stagnant the air, unmoving, yet the leaves
Filled with mysterious trembling; dripped the streams
From coal-black fountains; effigies of gods
Rude, scarcely fashioned from some fallen trunk
Held the mid space: and, pallid with decay,
Their rotting shapes struck terror. Thus do men
Dread most the god unknown. 'Twas said that caves
Rumbled with earthquakes, that the prostrate yew
Rose up again; that fiery tongues of flame
Gleamed in the forest depths, yet were the trees
Unkindled; and that snakes in frequent folds
Were coiled around the trunks. Men flee the spot
Nor dare to worship near: and e'en the priest
Or when bright Phoebus holds the height, or when
Dark night controls the heavens, in anxious dread
Draws near the grove and fears to find its lord.[152]

[152] English translation from Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, N.Pag. Original Latin: "Lucus erat longo numquam violatus ab evo, \ Obscurum cingens connexis aera ramis, \ Et gelidas alte submotis solibus umbras. \ Hunc non ruricolae Panes, nemorumque potentes \ Silvani Nymphaeque tenent, sed barbara ritu \ Sacra deum, structae diris altaribus arae; \ Omnisque humanis lustrata cruoribus arbos. \ Si qua fidem meruit superos mirata vetustas, \ Illis et volucres metuunt insistere ramis, \ Et lustris recubare ferae: nec ventus in illas \ Incubuit silvas, excussaque nubibus atris \ Fulgura: non ullis frondem praebentibus auris \ Arboribus suus horror inest. Tum plurima nigris \ Fontibus unda cadit, simulacraque moesta deorum \ Arte carent, caesisque extant informia truncis. \ Ipse situs putrique facit iam robore pallor \ Attonitos: non vulgatis sacrata figuris \ Numina sic metuunt: tantum terroribus addit, \ Quos timeant non nosse deos. Iam fama ferebat \ Saepe cavas motu terrae mugire cavernas, \ Et procumbentes iterum consurgere taxos, \ Et non ardentis fulgere incendia silvae, \ Roboraque amplexos circumfluxisse dracones. \ Non illum cultu populi propiore frequentant, \ Sed cessere deis. Medio

Soon after the arrival of the Romans, the trees of the grove are cut down. Many elements of this description would appear to be genuine, even though its tone is of course considerably darkened so as to justify the destruction of the sanctuary by the "enlightened" invaders.

The words used to designate such sanctuaries, in the Latin of the *Pharsalia* and in the tongue of the Druids, may nonetheless better show us the true nature of these places of worship of the gods. The etymology of the Latin word *lucus*, used to refer to the sacred place of the Celts, contradicts the description of the Roman poet: it is foremost a place of light rather than an abode of darkness where that the sun's brilliance would not be allowed to penetrate. The Indo-European **lówkos** ("open space, clearing")[153] is a place where the Bright (I.E. **lewko-**[154]) holds sway.

The etymology of the Gaulish word for "clearing," 𐌉𐌀𐌋𐌏𐌍 [ialon],[155] is unclear, although a connection with the word *yālo- ("praise, worship") is plausible.[156] Another word nonetheless was more commonly used to designate the sacred spaces of the early Celts: 𐌍𐌄𐌌𐌇𐌕𐌏𐌍 [nemēton].[157]. At least at the time of the Roman conquest, this word may not have been reserved for the sacred clearings in the forests. In medieval Irish, the word would even come to designate the concept of the "sacred" itself, regardless of its location. The origin of the word, however, may perhaps indicate that it was foremost seen as a place where man could enter in contact with the "upper realm": it is indeed based on the word *𐌍𐌄𐌌𐌏𐌒 [*nemos],[158] "the sky," even though its original meaning may also already have changed at the time of the Gauls. All across the globe, men have commonly associated the divine with the heavens, more than with the earth. The Celts nonetheless saw themselves as sons of the Dark rather than children of the heavens. They were aware of their position: at the meeting-point between the Dark, Life, and the Bright. Reflecting their central location

cum Phoebus in axe est, \ Aut coelum nox atra tenet, pavet ipse sacerdos \ Acessus, dominumque timet deprendere luci." From: Lucanus, *Pharsaliae Libri X*, N.Pag.

153 Ringe, *From Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic*, Page 171.

154 Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 245.

155 Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 105.

156 Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 433.

157 ibid., Page 288.

158 ibid., Page 288.

relative to the three realms of their World, they may have chosen a sacred space that would also be at the crossroad of the paths of the gods.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the easiest way for man to approach the "upper realm" is to elevate himself in the Lofty: to ascend to the summit of the highest mountains, where all is forever covered with snow. There, man can stand above the clouds, facing the brightness of the sun during the day and the wondrous vision of the Silver Wheel during the night. The Druids, however, did not choose the easiest path. To plunge oneself into a single realm represents a rejection of the essence of man's nature, as the guardian of the intersection. The summits of the mountains are too remote from the core of the Dark, and too remote from Life, which seldom ventures in these lofty locations.

In contrast with the summits of the mountains or the depths of the lakes, the clearings in the forests offer a location that mirrors the place of mankind among the three realms. The clearing is close to the great body of the Dark. It is visited by all the creatures of the forest, which is teeming with life. It is also opened towards the skies, and as man stands in the middle of the clearing, he is naturally reminded of his own nature and of his own destiny. The nature of the clearing is nonetheless more subtle than it may at first appear.

The clearing is neither a place of light nor a place of darkness, but rather a place of gathering of the opposites. In order for light to be seen, a place must be given to the shadows. Seen in the purity of their essence, there is no difference between light and darkness: both equally blind the eyes of man, leaving nothing to be seen. It is only when the light is given the opportunity to approach the darkness that things can be revealed. The play between light and darkness nonetheless also reveals a concealment, it highlights the fact that a revelation always comes together with a concealment. As noted by Heidegger: "Only when we stand in the clearing do we experience self-concealing."[159] The light poured down from the sky into the clearing allows it to be seen by man, but as he now perceives the myriad of "things" surrounding him, his own being fades into the shadows, harder to notice among a profusion of

[159] TBA. Original German: "Nur wenn wir in der Lichtung stehen, erfahren wir das Sichverbergen." From: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 346.

"things." This light from the sky also further plunges the rest of the forest into the darkness. The forest disappears from man's sight, and the luminous clearing is contrasted with the darkness beyond it.

The sun is thus a source of darkness as much as it is a source of light. It indeed has the power to conceal what is normally seen when its face is hidden. During the night, when the moon and the stars fill the forest with a soft glow, the men in the clearing can see the inside of the forest, and see that both the forest and the clearing in its midst are very similar, as places where the light plays with the shadows. During the day, contrasts appear: the dwellers of the forest are unable to see the inside of the clearing, blinded by the brightness that holds sway inside it, while those who stand at the center of the clearing are blinded by the darkness holding sway over the forest. Twice every day, however, man is given the sight of the transition between the reign of the Dark and the one of the Bright. Then comes the time of the sacrifice, when it is Life that holds sway over both the clearing and the forest, the day and the night, the Bright and the Dark. At dusk or dawn, the red hue of the skies proclaims the reign of the bloody creatures, as the gentle light illuminates both the clearing and what lies beyond it.

The play of the sky, the wonder of the daily alternation between the three colors marking the reign of each one of the realms, also offers man an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the clearing itself and on the concealment that ineluctably comes with the daily revelations offered by nature. The words of a contemporary of the Druids, the Greek philosopher Parmenides, may at this time be pondered:

> But since all things have been named light and night \ And what belongs to their powers is assigned to these and to those, \ The whole is altogether full of light and of ungleaming night, \ Both of them equal, since nothing is amidst either of them.[160]

The consciousness of the nature of contrasts is the first step toward an awareness of the whole. Beyond the movements of the players,

[160] English translation from *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume V*, Page 57; Original Greek: "αὐτὰρ ἐπειδὴ πάντα φάος καὶ νὺξ ὀνόμασται \ καὶ τὰ κατὰ σφετέρας δυνάμεις ἐπὶ τοῖσί τε καὶ τοῖς,\ πᾶν πλέον ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ φάεος καὶ νυκτὸς ἀφάντου \ ἴσων ἀμφοτέρων, ἐπεὶ οὐδετέρῳ μέτα μηδέν." From: ibid., Page 56.

the stage on which the play is played can then appear. The meaning of the play then becomes clear and its substance comes to be felt. Such an appearance and experience is nevertheless never granted. As the dance between night and day is necessary in order for the dawn to occur, and as the dance between the Dark and the Bright is necessary in order for the essence of Life and Being to be appropriated by man, the meaning of the play naturally also falls into oblivion. The experience of its substance is forgotten by the senses so that the event of its appropriation can itself be continuously repeated, renewing the bond between man and his own destiny.

The repetition of the ritual, following the repetition of the cycle of nature, is therefore an indispensable part of any spiritual development based on the nature of the creation. As suggested by the origin of the word ΝΕΜΗΤΟΝ [nemēton], the clearing is indeed a doorway opened towards the skies. It is a privileged location for the men who endeavor to contemplate the play of the heavens while simultaneously preserving their bond with the Dark and with Life itself. The clearing, however, can also be seen as the seat that man is meant to occupy in the creation, a seat from which he can not only be a spectator of the greater play between the three realms and the gods, but also become an active and conscious participant of this play, both a priest and a warrior fighting for the gods, striving to achieve what he was created to do and to become who he was meant to become.

Chapter 4

The Strife

As seen in the previous pages, the three realms of the World of the Gauls each possess their own peculiarities, a unique nature that makes them stand out from the rest of the creation. These realms are nonetheless far from being isolated from one another. More than this, the distinction between them should only be seen as a shortcut, a caricature of the fullness of man's environment, which is necessary in order for him to begin to perceive the truth of his own being and of the being of all beings. The threefold nature of the realms only exists in man's World, but this partition allows him to dis-cover new parts of the nature of the creation. Once the peculiarities of each one of the realms have been contemplated, then comes the time to ponder the relation between them, that is, to seek to know how they interact with each other and what is the role of each one of them in the great play of being.

The very word used to designate what *is* when the imprint of man's will is absent, "nature," connotes the idea that what is "natural" reflects a certain harmony, on a level always higher (or deeper) than what man can achieve. Such a natural harmony of the creation nonetheless does not imply that nature is either peaceful or quiet. The great flow of nature is indeed all but restful and steady. If only one word had to be uttered to characterize this flow, this word would be: strife. The strife inherent to nature, however, is not the petty bickerings of children, nor the fruitless conflicts of men. It rather represents the very essence of the harmony of nature. A harmony cannot exist without differentiation,

without a contrast between different elements. If a white canvas can be deemed beautiful by the art critique, it is only through the contrast it offers with what lies beyond its frame, or the irregularities of its texture. More than any other, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus accurately de-scribed the essence of the strife: τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ᾽ ἔριν γίνεσθαι, "what is opposite agrees, and from differing things comes the fairest harmony, and all things happen according to strife."[1] The strife is what allows the harmony of the creation to shine in the eyes and in the World of men. It is infinitely complex, comprising every single element of this World, including man himself, who is part of this harmony, even though he has been endowed with the power to resist the flow of nature.

Dubnos, Bitu, and Albios: the three realms are part of the great strife from which the harmonious nature of the creation is manifested. The strife is unfolded right in front of man's eyes, at all times. The course of the sun that marks the pace of the days and the nights represents a battle between the Dark and the Bright. The appearances of the moon come as a support to the sea in its battle against the dry land, assisting the rise of the waters that threatened to engulf the Celtic warriors who brandished their swords against the tide, defying nature itself. When man brings "nature" into his World, he is compelled to reflect the strife inherent to its essence. The strife then becomes the very basis of his World. Indeed, as Paul Ricoeur tells us:

> It appears as though certain fundamental human experiences make up an immediate symbolism that presides over the most primitive metaphorical order. This originary symbolism seems to adhere to the most immutable human manner of being in the world, whether it be a question of above and below, the cardinal directions, the spectacle of the heavens, terrestrial localization, houses, paths, fire, wind, stones, or water.[2]

The oppositions found in nature form the foundation that allows man to conceptualize the environment in which he is thrown. The three realms of the Celtic World find their origin in the observation

[1] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 160

[2] Ricoeur and Klein, *Interpretation Theory*, Page 65.

of the forces of nature, and just as men learned to see the divine through the lens of these realms, they ultimately came to see the flow of nature as a strife between the gods.

The myth comes as the fruit of the observation of the strife as it occurs in front of man's eyes. The myth, however, is never an end in itself. Just as a fruit rots or is eaten by creatures that will carry the seeds inside it to a new land, the myth that begins as an image, reflection of the order of nature, ineluctably decays into mere stories that only reflect the imagination of the men perpetuating them, stories that can later lead men back to their source. The myth depicting the strife is thus itself caught inside the battle opposing the Dark and the Bright, the sensible truth and the purely meta-physical construction, and men are called to re-discover the path cleared by their ancestors, a path that pointed out the essence of the flow of nature.

The traces left out in the soil of Gaul by the early Celts show us the essence of the strife of the gods, which was centered on the clash between the Dark and the Bright, and in particular, the opposition between the "horned one" and the "thunderous one": Cernunnos versus Taranis, who fought for the heart of the Great Queen. The link between the myth and the poetic impulse that led to its creation, that is, the experience of the holy through the observation of the flow of nature, appeared to have crumbled soon after the Roman conquest. During the centuries of independence, however, the anthropomorphization of the divine forces already appeared to grow more and more pervasive, reflected by an inflation of the number of deities worshipped by the Gauls, which reached the hundreds. This decay is also part of nature itself, and it comes as a necessary effect of man's poetic impulse, which helps him understand nature but also leads him to alienate himself from it. Schelling well described this process:

> Through the presupposition of a religious instinct it might be conceptualized how man believes to find the God that he seeks initially in the ubiquitous elements or in the stars that exert on him the most powerful or salubrious influence; and how he gradually, to bring God nearer to himself, visualizes him as descending to the earth, visualizes him even in inorganic forms, and fancies himself to be able to represent God, first in

> organic beings, for a time even among animal forms, and finally in purely human form.[3]

The myth helps man to bring the divine closer to himself, but this descent of the divine inevitably leads to its disappearance. The divine is indeed what stands in contrast with the profane, and thus if man fails to separate his own everydayness from the sacred, the divine is then compelled to flee away from him. Man is not called to invite the holy to dwell in man's world, but rather is invited to experience the divine in the contemplation of the flow of nature and the participation in the great strife of the natural forces. This invitation nonetheless does not imply a mere "elevation" of man toward the heavens, toward the higher spheres of either the skies or the World. What it entails is a relentless movement of appropriation, directed toward every part of the flow of nature: as much a downward movement, toward the earth, as an upward one, toward the heavens. It even includes an inward movement: the appropriation of man's very being, of his own nature, the nature of his people and of Life itself.

The myth therefore represents the end-product of the poetic impulse through which man attempts to approach the divine. This end-product is nonetheless already decayed: it is alienated from the truth of nature. As Heraclitus reminds us, however: ξυνόν γάρ ἀρχή και πέρας έπι κύκλου περιφερείας., "the beginning and end on a circle are common."[4] The myth is both the end-product of a poetic impulse and the beginning of the path toward a re-dis-covery of this impulse, and of the holy from which it originates. The fact that the content of the myth is largely unknown to us may thus be beneficial to us. It indeed forces us to focus our attention on its core rather than on its appearance. This absence invites us to

[3] English translation from: Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 56–57; Original German: "Unter Voraussetzung eines religiösen Instinkts würde sich begreifen lassen, wie der Mensch den Gott, den er sucht, zunächst in den allgegenwärtigen Elementen oder in den Gestirnen, welche den mächtigsten oder wohltätigsten Einfluß auf ihn ausüben, zu finden glaubt, allmählich, ihn sich näher zu bringen, zur Erde herabsteigt, selbst in unorganischen Formen den Gott sich vergegenwärtigt, bald mehr in organischen Wesen, eine Zeit lang selbst unter Tierformen, endlich in reiner Menschengestalt ihn vorstellen zu können wähnt." From: Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke – 1. Bd. Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie.* Page 76.

[4] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 160

trace back the original source of this core, which is the play of the creation, shown in front of our eyes almost exactly as it was shown to the Gauls of the Iron Age.

By attempting to perceive the essence of the strife that animates the creation, man himself becomes part of this strife. Fighting the decay of the myth and the fall into oblivion of the calling for the appropriation of being, man wages a war against the work of the skies, against the turning of the wheel and the flow of nature that erode both man's body and his own creation: his World. In order to become an efficient soldier in this war, man must nonetheless first enlargen his horizon so that he can see the playing field and the players that will oppose him.

The following pages will be devoted to the exploration of the nature of the strife. It will begin with an examination of the tension between the three realms. The complementarity and antagonisms between Dubnos, Bitu, and Albios will be revealed, first in a "static" manner, that is, without considering the changes affecting these realms, the work of time in particular. Then, the effect of the turning of the wheel of time will be examined: how the daily, monthly, and yearly cycles affect the balance between the realms. Finally, the link between the strife of the realms and the strife of the gods in the central myth of the Gaulish World will be exposed. Ultimately, the purpose of this knowledge of the strife will be unveiled, showing what role it can play in the appropriation of man's destiny and his relation to the holy.

4.1 The Tension between the Realms

A strife necessarily implies the possibility of changes to occur, that is, the possibility of movements and interactions. Symbols of the harmonious nature of the strife, such as the Chinese "yīn-yáng symbol" or the triskelion of the Celts, often reflect its dynamic dimension by showing the forces at play as rotating while being intertwined with each other. Each one of the three "legs" of the tri-skeles appears to lead the other two, carrying them further as if they formed a single entity moved by a single will. Such a symbolism can be seen in one of the masterpieces of early Celtic art: a ceremonial helmet where an intricate pattern of rotating



Figure 4.1: *A triangle-triskeles design on a Gaulish helmet.* Picture taken at the Museum of National Antiquities, Saint Germain en Laye, France. Drawing by the author.

triskeles can be seen, stamped in gold (See Fig. 4.1). The fact that one cannot know for sure whether the artist at the origin of this pattern intended to represent the harmonious strife of the realms or not is of no importance. What matters is that it reflects its truth. It can help man grasp what he cannot perceive with his senses. What this design shows is that the three branches are part of the same whole and that they are the source of a movement in which they themselves are caught. The inertia of the flow of nature is a fundamental aspect of the strife, showing the interdependency of the three branches, which must be seen in their uniqueness but nonetheless cannot be severed from one another.

The pattern stamped on the helmet also shows us something more. The center of each triskelion forms a triangle from which the three arms sprout, curled upon themselves. This triangular shape reflects the three possible links between the realms: the link between Dubnos and Bitu, the one between Bitu and Albios and finally the one between Dubnos and Albios, as illustrated in Fig. 4.2. The harmonious nature of the strife is manifested through the play between the three poles, which are connected to one another by a bond that both prevents their wandering off from each other and also prevents their collapse into an indistinguishable whole. Heraclitus therefore rightfully pointed out the similarity between the strife and two of man's creation: οὐ ξυνιᾶσιν

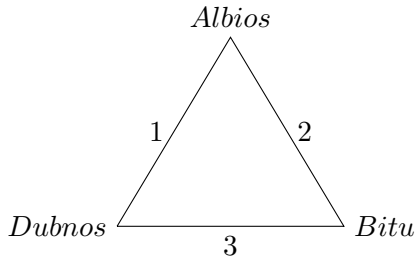


Figure 4.2: *The three possible tensions between the realms.*

ὅκως διαφερόμενον ἑωυτῷ ὁμολογέει· παλίντροπος ἁρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης, "They do not understand how being at variance with itself it agrees: back-turning structure as of a bow or a lyre."[5] The three bonds between the realms are like the strings of a lyre, which keep its extremities in tension with one another, and whose vibrations resonate across all the space around them, producing a harmonious representation that can be enjoyed by the senses.

A tension offers an opportunity to reveal a variance, a difference, and through this revelation, it is the essence of each one of the varying elements that can be unveiled. The lyre is useless by itself, if it has no strings or if these strings remain unplucked. The tension of the unplucked string already produces a harmony between the extremities of the instrument, but this harmony is unseen and unheard. Only when this silent harmony is perturbed by man's fingers does the lyre reveal its power and something new can emerge from the instrument: the sound, the audible manifestation of the harmonious strife between the extremities joined by the string.

The tensions between the realms, just as the realms themselves, are nonetheless only man-made representations of the order of nature. It is therefore important to keep in mind that while the examination of these tensions can guide man's progress toward the appropriation of his own being, it can also lead him to put more trust in the representation than in the experience of nature itself. The three realms reflect a certain truth of the order of nature, but this correspondence between the World and the creation is not to be taken for granted: it is meant to be continually proved and

[5] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 160

reassessed.

This being said, the relation between the realms can now be examined. As pointed out by the Greek philosopher, the strife is akin to the work of a bow or a lyre. If the three realms are seen as forming a triangle, with each realm forming a pole that can be put in tension with two others, this would imply that the creation would comprise three different tensions, three different strings that would offer different sounds to be heard by all beings. This, however, would lead us to misunderstand the very nature of Life and Being, which stand in contrast to both the Dark and the Bright. A key toward the perception of the role played by Life and Being in the order of nature is once again given to us by the Greek master of the strife, who ex-plains us that:

> τῷ οὖν τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος.
> The name of the bow is Life, but its work is death.[6]

What this points out is that the realm of Life and Being is not a mere nexus of tensions among others: it rather is the vector of all tensions. Life is the string that puts the Dark and the Bright in tension. The release of this tension implies the dissolution of Life itself, that is: Death. Without Life, human life in particular, there is no Dark nor Bright, no earth nor world, but only the εν και παν, the totality and oneness of nature, which is then invisible and unseen. Once this aspect of Life and Being has been clearly perceived, the representation of the relation between the realms can be reconsidered: the triangle can now be seen as a bow, whose extremities are the Dark and the Bright, with Life and Being forming the string tensed between them (See Fig. 4.3).

The birth of a being represents the pulling and the release of the string of Being. After this birth, the course of the being's life represents the movement of the string that first sends the arrow toward its target before oscillating and fading away, leading to the release of the tension. The string then awaits the finger that will pull it again and again, until the target has been reached.

When the role of Life and Being as the vector of the tension between Dark and Bright is clearly seen, the nature of man's destiny can begin to appear. The Tree of Life as a whole forms a wedge

[6] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 160

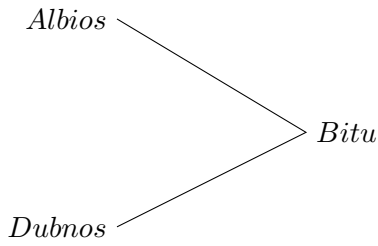


Figure 4.3: *The bow and the string.*

growing between the Dark and the Bright, separating them and thereby allowing their uniqueness and peculiarities to be revealed. Only man is able to willingly affect the bow itself, by applying his will to the shaping of the tension between its extremities: not only the Dark and the Bright but also Life and Death. Only man can dwell in the bright World, where the creation as a whole takes its meaning, and he therefore is the key allowing the balance between Dark and Bright to created and to be preserved.

Bitu, Life and Being, is more than a "middle realm" located between an underworld and an upperworld: it is the center point of the creation, as it allows the nature of both the Dark and the Bright to be seen, in the World, without severing them from the whole of which they are part. Life represents a synthesis of the Dark and the Bright, one that becomes something more than the concatenation of its parts, as a new dimension emerges from their union. The union of the bodies of a man and a woman can become the source of the emergence of a new life, distinct from its parents, and in a similar way, the union of the Dark and the Bright leads to the birth of Life itself. This union is reflected in the nature of the liquid of life itself: blood, which combines the earthly iron that gives it its red hue with the heavenly oxygen that prevents the collapse of life.

In order for the string of a man's life to continue to vibrate, that is, for him to remain alive, he needs to continually let the flow of each one of the three realms pass through his body:

> — The flow of the Dark is the water that man needs to drink daily, letting it permeate his whole body before it returns to the earth, taking with it the impurities

that are of no use to him.[7]

> — The flow of Life is the living matter that man needs to ingest in order the continue to live. The highest branches of the Tree of Life, such as man, indeed cannot survive without feeding on the fruit of its lower branches. Man needs to consume other forms of life, eating, swallowing, and digesting them, letting his body extract their essence before returning what he does not need to the soil, thereby fertilizing it and allowing new life to flourish.
>
> — The flow of the Bright is the air carried by the winds, the oxygen that gives the sky its blue color and that man needs more than any other element. Man fills his lungs with the air of the sky, allowing the air to be combined with the earthly elements in order to feed the fire of Life that burns within his flesh.

This shows that man's own nature requires that he stay at the crossroads of the three realms. He cannot live without a continuous proximity to each one of them. This nonetheless does not mean that he cannot enjoy a particular closeness to one of the realm, or neglect one of them. He is called to preserve the harmony between the realms but he may fail to reply to this calling.

Even without any failure on his part, different members of a people may be assigned different roles leading them to live closer to one of the realms, while others would ensure that the general balance is preserved. This may perhaps explain why many among the Gauls were given names such as 𐊀𐊇𐊗𐊂𐊉𐊇𐊗 [dubnorix], 𐊂𐊗𐊕𐊇𐊗𐊇𐊗 [biturix], and 𐊀𐊋𐊂𐊗𐊇𐊗 [albiorix],[8] proclaiming them as lords of one the realms of their World. The 𐊇𐊗 [rix] is the *regent* of a dominion, someone holding sway of the space enclosed by its boundaries. These titles may appear to be somewhat inappropriate when they are bestowed on mere men. Who else than the god of the Dark, the "horned one," would be deemed to be fit to bear the name of 𐊀𐊇𐊗𐊂𐊉𐊇𐊗 [dubnorix]? Who besides

[7] Another non-organic element of the earth that is necessary for man's survival is precisely the one that made the fortune of the early Celts: salt. Without salt mines or trade, man would be condemned to remain close to the sea, as his flesh needs salt in order for him to remain healthy.

[8] Roux and Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h, *Les fêtes celtiques*, Page 180

Teutates may be called ᛒᛁᛏᛟᛉᚱᛁᚷ [biturix]? The identity of the lord of the Bright, ᚨᛚᛒᛁᛟᚱᛁᚷ [albiorix], may be more difficult to assert: it could be a fitting name for both Taranis and Lugus, as the word ᚱᛁᚷ [rix][9] is a masculine term, showing a contrast with one of the name of the Silver Wheel: ᚱᛁᛏᚨᚾᛁ [rigani], the queen, the female regent. The ancient sources nonetheless teach us that men did bear such names, but this does not imply that these men were seen as more powerful than the gods themselves. In these instances, the ᚱᛁᚷ [rix] may designate someone who is a faithful and proficient servant of a particular realm and its god(s), a force serving a particular cause rather than a "king" holding a supreme power over a dominion.[10]

A ᛞᛟᚤᛒᚾᛟᚱᛁᚷ [dubnorix] may be someone who enjoys a particular proximity with the great body of the Dark: miners or salt or iron, for example. The brother of the famous druid Divici-acos known as Dumnorix was famous for his great wealth, and his name is found stamped on many coins. The source of his power came from the precious metals found in the earth, and perhaps his name precisely reflected this origin.

A ᛒᛁᛏᛟᛉᚱᛁᚷ [biturix] may be a person whose daily activity brings him close to the essence of Life and Being, or someone who possesses the power to protect life or to annihilate it. Such an epithet came to designate one of the tribes of Gaul as a whole: the ᛒᛁᛏᛟᛉᚱᛁᛏᛖᛋ [bituriges], but the reason why they bore this name remains unknown.

Finally, an ᚨᚨᛒᛁᛟᚱᛁᚷ [albiorix] may be someone who is deeply aware of the things of the World, or someone who is able to interpret the signs of the skies: the course of the sun, the stars, or the moon. Each one of these men bears a responsibility toward his people: to further the reach of the Teuta into deeper parts of one particular realm. The leaders of the people are in turn given the charge to ensure that the Teuta as a whole keeps its balance, its place in equilibrium between the three realms so that their harmony can be preserved, thereby allowing man to play his part in the creation.

The awareness of the importance of the harmony between the

[9] Plural: ᚱᛁᛏᛖᛋ [riges].

[10] See: Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 311

realms did not completely disappear with the collapse of the Gaulish World. The insular literature once again preserves signs that can be interpreted as remnants of such an awareness. One example is the following anecdote taken from the Mabinogi, in the story named *Peredur the son of Evrawc*, telling us about a wondrous encounter between Peredur and a herd of sheep:

> And he came towards a valley, through which ran a river; and the borders of the valley were wooded, and on each side of the river were level meadows. And on one side of the river he saw a flock of white sheep, and on the other a flock of black sheep. And whenever one of the white sheep bleated, one of the black sheep would cross over and become white; and when one of the black sheep bleated, one of the white sheep would cross over and become black. And he saw a tall tree by the side of the river, one half of which was in flames from the root to the top, and the other half was green and in full leaf.[11]

This vision is obviously symbolic, and its symbolism would seem to reflect the role of Life as the element mediating the Dark and the Bright. The living creatures are seen as either reflecting the color of the Dark or the one of the Bright, depending on which side of the river do they stand, but the whole of the herd ensures that both sides are equally reflected. The bleating of a sheep signals an imbalance, a call for a reinforcement of the herd representing one of the two poles of the creation. This vision well represents the play of tensions between the realms, and the role that man is called to play in it.

Contrary to the peaceful play of the sheep seen by Peredur, however, the relations between the realms as a whole are defined

[11] English translation from: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, Pages 108–109; Original Middle Welsh: "Ac ynteu a deuth racda6 parth a dyffrynn auon, a gororeu y dyffryn oed yn goet. Ac o pob parth yr auon yn weirglodyeu g6astat. Ac or neill parth yr avon y gwelei kad6 o deueit g6ynyon, ac or parth arall y g6elei cad6 o deueit duon. Ac ual y breuei vn or deueit g6ynnyon, y deuei vn or deueit duon dr6od, ac y bydei yn wenn. Ac ual y breuei vn or deueit duon, y deuei vn or deueit g6ynnyon dr6od, ac y bydei yn du. A phrenn hir a welei ar lann yr auon. Ar neill hanner a oed idaw yn llosci or gwreid hyt y ulaen, ar hanner arall a deil ir arna6, ac uchla6 hynny y g6elei mack6y yn eisted ar benn cruc." From: Meyer, *Peredur ab Efrawc*, Page 25.

by their powerful nature. The harmony between them does not contradict the fact that each one of them is engaged in a battle, a strife that involves the largest and strongest elements of the creation. Contrary to the tensions between the realms, which are inherent to their nature, the strife is a profoundly dynamic process, a continuous movement inserted in time, where the dominion and strength of each one of the realms is perpetually transformed. Now comes the time to examine the essence of this strife.

4.2 The Strife between the Realms

The very nature of the realms puts them in tension with one another. The universe, however, is not a three-dimensional bow that remains frozen. The bow itself is encompassed by the great wheel of the skies. The creation as a whole is taken in its flow, which allows the work of the bow to take place. As declared by the Greek master of the strife:

> εἶναι γὰρ ἓν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὁτέη ἐκυβέρνησε πάντα διὰ πάντων.
> Wisdom is one thing: to know the will that steers all things through all.[12]

The Great Wheel is the one steering the course of the creation. It is both the belt of the heavens and what allows the work of the skies: time itself. As pointed out by Heidegger, the skies are indeed more than the emptiness above the ground.[13] Man's relation to time is shaped by the work of the skies, which is manifested as the various cycles that pace life. The alternation between days and night and the coming and going of the seasons are the main signs that affect not only man's life but also the "middle realm" as a whole. Unstoppable and inescapable, the work of the skies is what allows the being of all beings. As a giant wheel made of solid metal that is running down a mountain, a wheel that carries all beings in its axle, the course of time is what "steers all things through all" but that itself appears to be unaffected by any thing.

[12] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 149; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 150.

[13] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Page 147; Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936–1953)*, Page 151.

The nature of time will probably forever remain inscrutable. Like "space" or "matter," it is nevertheless one of the most intimately known foundations of being, a cornerstone of man's embodiment. If the nature of time cannot be fully grasped by the mind, one may then decide to find it in the visible elements of the creation, those that share their essence with time itself. The inescapable and unstoppable nature of the course of time may thus be seen as being reflected in the element that encompasses all that man can see, the one that is permanently enfolding the earth and the skies, even when the sun has hidden its face or when the moon is nowhere to be seen. This element would obviously be the galaxy itself, the Silver Wheel that continuously rotates above the ground, both during the night and the day, forever present even when the brightness of the sun conceals it. Heraclitus asked:

> τὸ μὴ δῦνόν ποτε πῶς ἄν τις λάθοι.
> How would one escape the notice of what never sets?[14]

One cannot escape the work of the skies, just as one cannot escape the notice of the Silver Wheel. The arms of the galaxy are always enfolding the earth and the skies, and the rotation of the wheel goes hand in hand with the flow of time. The two thus appear not only to be inextricably tied to one another: they may even be seen as being identical. The most majestic element of the skies can be seen as confounded with their work, time itself. The turning of the heavenly wheel is what drives the flow of nature. It is the main gear whose rotation determines the various cycles of nature: the days, the months, the years, for example.

The work of the skies, the turning of the Silver Wheel, also initiates the strife between the realms, that is, a power play between the forces of the Dark, Life, and the Bright. The cycles of nature, which are all set in motion by the wheel, form different stages where different plays can be unfolded, stages that are themselves linked with one another by their very nature. The smallest of these stages is the day, which is centered on the alternation between the daytime and the nighttime. The days are themselves the fundamental elements of a larger cycle, another stage that forms the location where a different play is played: the months, which are based on the phases of the moon. Finally, the months are

[14] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 175; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 174

themselves the elements of a larger stage: the year, which either depends on the solstices and equinoxes or on fixed calculations based on the months and the days. These cycles contain manifestations of the strife between the realms, with the three of them presenting a balancing between the forces of the Dark and those of the Bright that is correlated with the turning of the wheel, but the wondrous essence of nature is not limited to these cycles.

The turning of the wheel is continuous. It is characterized by an almost perfect regularity, and these properties as transmitted to the various gears that are attached to it. The skies are nonetheless full of uncertainties and unpredictabilities. Certain elements of the creation are not working like clockwork. They can be more than an intricate clockwork driven by the axle of the skies, and rather be led by their own will or by pure randomness. Life is the best example of these, as Life is fundamentally unpredictable. The weather would be another, a spectacle of randomness and chaos displayed in the sky every day of our lives. The strife of the realms is therefore also a strife between the order created by the work of the wheel and the chaos that is inherent to some elements of the universe, elements that can belong to any of the three realms.

The strife is therefore manifold and the striving elements are all interlaced with one another. It is far from a simplistic battle of good versus evil, black against white. The nature of the strife reflects the complex harmony of nature itself. Man is himself inserted in the work of the wheel, either a passive beholder or a soldier actively engaged in the strife, but no matter where he stands, he is continuously shown the various plays that are unfolded under the direction of the Silver Wheel. So accustomed to the presence of the stages right in front of his eyes, his senses may have been dulled to the spectacular nature and beauty of these plays that are repeated day after day, month after month, and year after year. In order to perceive what is man's role in these plays, every individual must learn to re-dis-cover the cycles of natures and learn to relate them with the larger strife between the order imposed by the wheel and the chaotic dimension of the creation.

The remnants of the Gaulish World tend to indicate that the early Celts paid a special attention to these cycles and that some of them gained a deep awareness of the nature of the strife. The next section will show how this awareness ultimately led to the birth of

the central myth of the Gaulish World, the one that is depicted on the Cauldron of Gundestrup and other artworks, but for now, the source of the myth must first be examined. The essence of this myth indeed lies in its link with the very essence of nature, the experience that man has of the earth and the skies, an experience that has not radically changed since the time of the Gauls. The myth can help man to deepen his relationship with nature, but the myth nevertheless is only something that points out the essence of the earth and the skies. Therefore, the main cycles tied to the turning of the wheel will now be examined so that the various plays given to us to see may begin to be re-dis-covered, before the nature of the great strife is itself unveiled. The first play is the one that is repeated each day.

4.2.1 The First Play: the Daily Cycle

In the English language, the word "day" designates both the daily 24 hours cycle and the daytime, that is, what stands in contrast with the night. This may show that the builders of the language that evolved to become the English tongue considered the daytime to be the essence of the day. For them, the days certainly began at dawn, with the rising of the sun and the appearance of the light that chases away the darkness of the night. As recounted by the Roman emperor, the Gauls nonetheless had a different vision of the essence of the day:

> All the Gauls assert that they are descended from the god Dis [Pater], and say that this tradition has been handed down by the Druids. For that reason they compute the divisions of every season, not by the number of days, but of nights; they keep birthdays and the beginnings of months and years in such an order that the day follows the night.[15]

The daily cycle begins after the dusk because man's being origi-

[15] English translation from: Caesar, *Caesar's Gallic War* (Text in brackets added, § 6.18); Original Latin: "Galli se omnes ab Dite patre prognatos praedicant idque ab druidibus proditum dicunt. Ob eam causam spatia omnis temporis non numero dierum sed noctium finiunt. dies natales et mensum et annorum initia sic observant ut noctem dies subsequatur." From: Caesar, *C. Iuli Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum.*

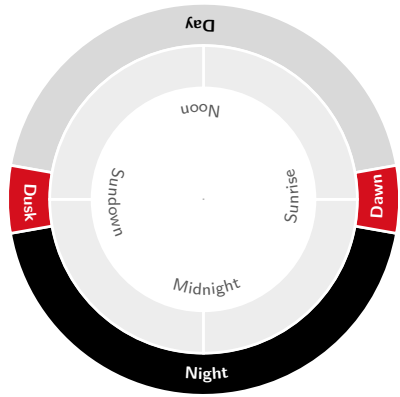


Figure 4.4: *The daily cycle.*

nates from the Dark. Only once he comes out of the earth and out of the womb of his mother can he contemplate the light of the day. Vision only comes after blindness, in the same manner that being arises from non-being. The reign of the Dark precedes the one of the Bright, but both ally their forces to form the day.

A crucial element that has nonetheless been left out by the general of the invading army, but that certainly would not have been by the Druids, is the nature of the twilight between the reign of the Dark and the one of the Bright. The sky is a mirror of the deeper nature of the universe, with the daily cycle reflecting the strife between the realms. The daily changes of the sky are not limited to an alternation of nights and days, Dark and Bright. Between day and night, Dark and Bright, the sky offers a very peculiar sight, one that neither belongs to the day nor the night but that can also be seen as the fruit of their harmonious union. Between the reigns of the Dark and the Bright, the dawn and the dusk represent the reign of Blood, Life and Being, when the sky is painted with the red hue that characterizes the living beings.

The daily cycle thus comprises three different reigns, which correspond to the three realms. The cycle can be represented as a wheel, the smallest gear of the celestial mechanism put into motion by the Silver Wheel, the greatest visible element of the universe (See Fig. 4.4). The lower part of this wheel of the days represents the night, the time of the Dark, while its upper part marks the

daytime, the reign of the Bright. Caught between these two poles, or perhaps serving as their mediator, the dusk and the dawn are the times when the "middle realm" appears to hold sway over the sky and the earth. The dusk marks the period of transition between the days, the renewal of the daily cycle, whose motion is paired with the one of the greatest wheel, but our examination of the daily cycle will begin at the origin: the night, when the cycle begins.

4.2.1.1 The Night

The darkness can be seen as the most "natural" state of the creation. Darkness are found wherever light is absent, but this does imply there is nothing else inside them. On the contrary, the emergence of all beings occurs inside the body of the Dark, at a time when these beings are completely plunged in the shadows. The night, ᚾᚩᚷᛏ- [noxt-][16] in Gaulish, is often associated with death, but the being of all beings also begins in the darkness, which should therefore also be seen as the origin of life.

For man and a great part of the other living beings, the night is a period of rest, when they must find shelter from the elements in order to see another day. At night, man retreats into his home, having finished the work of the day. Once the sun has done the same, man is forced to inaction, as he cannot move safely and efficiently without his sight, unless he is able to kindle a fire that would provide him light. Doing so, however, man only resists the flow of nature and he spoils the lesson offered to him by the turning of the wheel.

The night takes away man's sight of his environment, but it offers him a chance to develop his other senses. More than this, the night may be a privileged time for man to see and reflect on the nature of the day and the light. The night is the time when the Dark holds sway over the earth and the sky, and by kindling a fire or lighting a lamp during the dark hours, man artificially brings back the reign of the Bright into the night. He thereby conceals what the Dark reveals: on the earth, the cloak of the night invites him to renew his bond with his source, by closing the eyes that attract him toward the skies so that he can once again begin to feel

[16] Savignac, *Dictionnaire français-gaulois*, Page 253.

the unity of the great body of the Dark of which he is part. The essence of his own materiality is best perceived when his sight has been taken away from him. The night nonetheless rarely plunges man into complete darkness. The retreat of the sun and the reign of the Dark over the skies allow the nature of the deepest parts of the sky to be seen. It is only during the darkest hours of the night, when all the sources of light except the faint glitter of the stars have been covered by the Dark, that the Silver Wheel can appear in all its majesty.

The interlaced and complementary nature of the realms is therefore manifested by the night, which calls the wise to investigate the nature of the heavens and invites him to build his World while others are sound asleep. The night is indeed the only time when a particular science can be developed, one that occupied a central place in the life of the Druids as it did for most of the learned men of the ancient world: astronomy. More than the mere "study of the stars," this science was closer to a cosmology, a "study of the universe," of the essence and purpose of the creation. Seeing the turning of the wheel, man can try to make sense of the flow of nature and its various cycles in which he is caught. This knowledge of the night sky can enlighten his World as a whole, showing that the opposition between Dark and Bright can lead to a mutual unconcealement.

Perhaps because he is not ready to stay face to face with the Dark, man is also irremediably driven away from the experience of the naked earth during the night. What occupies most of his time during the reign of the Dark is something that takes him the farthest away from the earth and the shadowy realm that it is part of. Soothing the fears that come with the loss of his sight, man escapes from the unsettling contact with the naked earth in order to take refuge inside his World. His body left immobile, his muscles as relaxed as they can be, every night he falls into sleep, leaving his flesh and consciousness behind to plunge himself fully into *his* World, which is then largely severed from the earth, the reality of the creation. Sleep is man escaping the overwhelming reign of the Dark by throwing himself completely into his World and the fruit of his imagination. There, he can regain his sight, even though all that he sees is mere illusion.

The kindling of a fire in the dark hours, man's building of

the World through thinking, or his escape of the dominion of the Dark through dreaming all represent incursions of the Bright into the reign of the Dark. This shows that even though the Dark holds sway over the earth and the skies during the night, the strife between Dark and Bright is still waged through the intermediacy of man, who can appeal to the forces of the Bright when he cannot bear the yoke of the shadows or simply wants to flee their presence.

Man, however, is supported by the whole of Life, which serves as the supply line of the strife. The animals largely follow the flow of nature rather than shape its course, but certain branches of the Tree of Life have developed affinities with either one of the two poles of the creation. Some of them, such as the firefly, are most active during the dark hours and are even able to become a source of light that chases away the darkness around them, thereby weakening the reign of the Dark. The mouse, on the other hand, only needs the faint glow of the starry sky in order to roam the countryside or the forest, but it is equally at ease in complete darkness, spending a great part of its life under the ground, in narrow shafts that keep it in close contact with the whole of the Dark. This peculiarity and this affinity with the Dark is also shared with the serpent, a creature that does not fear the shadows, so fearless of the night that its own flesh found no need for eyelids. It is therefore always watchful, even when most creatures have escaped to the land of dreams, unable to face a prolonged period of darkness and blindness. The crane, on the other hand, chooses the night to cease her flight in the dominion of the Lofty. She descends to the earth when the sun has retreated into its shelter, and it herself seeks shadowy waters that could offer her a place to rest until the end of the night. Creature of the highest skies during the day, the crane therefore becomes a dweller of the Dark when the lower realm holds sway over the earth, as if she always preferred a proximity with the strongest element of the creation. Her allegiance fluctuates together with the turning of the wheel, alternating between the Dark and the Bright, following the flow of nature, or perhaps even contributing to its formation.

The strife can nonetheless also be more direct. The forces of the skies can command an assault of the earth. It is particularly true of the forces of the Lofty, which like Life itself stand out from the regularity and order of the movement of the earth and the heavenly bodies induced by the turning of the wheel. Man is

caught in the flow of nature, but he can resist the order imposed by the wheel, such as the fact that the Dark reigns during the nighttime. The Lofty is very similar to him in this respect, as the winds and the clouds appear to be largely unaffected by the cloak of the night. The thunderous clouds of the Lofty can momentarily break the reign of the Dark by showering the earth with lightning strikes that may even ignite fires that would burn down the forests and its dwellers, all parts of Life, thereby bringing the night to an early end.

The clouds can by themselves cover the face of the earth, preventing Life from witnessing the presence of the Silver Wheel and of the stars filling the skies. They can thereby form another wedge separating the earth from the skies, the Dark and the Deep from the Silver Wheel and the Light. The same action can nonetheless also be seen as potentially strengthening the sway held by the Dark during the night, as they can conceal the glow of the heavens, thus plunging the earth and the creatures living on its surface in perfect darkness. The forces of the Lofty therefore represent a major actor in the strife between the realms, as contrary to the earth and the rest of the skies, they are largely unpredictable, making them a potential threat to the ordered cycle imposed by the wheel, to which the heavenly bodies and the earth are submitted. These forces may nonetheless simply play a part in this order, being neither friend nor foe of any of the three realms. Just as the glow of the starry sky both breaks the sway of the Dark and highlights its power, the veiling of the stars and the wheel may become the source of a longing for their presence. The Lofty may therefore be the force breaking the cycle of nature in order to highlight the beauty and the need for this order. Only when the wheel is hidden may it be missed and loved, and so does the earth. A forced separation of two lovers is always an occasion for them to rekindle the fire of their affection. The perturbation of the cycle is also what shows man the need for its existence. The lofty forces are thus a key that gives meaning to the night and the daily cycle as a whole by allowing its order to be transiently broken.

The night is the time when the Dark holds sway, but it is therefore not a time marked by complete and permanent darkness. It is a time when the Dark strive with the Bright, with different allies such as man or the Lofty taking up different roles in it. The strife occurs at all times and in all places, but the night is

more often than not a time when the Dark can prevail over its opponents. This position, this advantage of the night is given to the Dark by the wheel itself. It is fully part of the order of the creation, an order that purposefully leaves a place to the chaos of the Lofty, but also to the one of Life itself, as a means to make the magnificence of the order of nature manifest through a contrast with its absence.

Continuous and unstoppable, the turning of the wheel nonetheless soon brings the reign of the Dark to an end. This occurs when the brightest of the heavenly bodies leaves its shelter and begins to rise above the horizon.

4.2.1.2 The Dawn

The end of the night does not come with bells and whistles. It is a slow progression, with the darkness steadily extinguished by the reappearance of the light of the sun, which comes before the celestial body shows its face above the surface of the earth. This highlights the oneness of the day, which is split into different parts in man's World in order for him to get a better grasp of its nature but nonetheless remains one.

The dawn can be seen as marking the end of the reign of the Dark over the earth and the sky. This nonetheless does not imply an immediate take over of the Bright. The dawn indeed neither belongs to the day or to the night, or it represents their synthesis, a state of harmonious union between the opposites, which for a brief period of time appear to suspend the battle waged against one another. The dawn represents the meeting point of the Dark and the Bright, a meeting that produces a magnificent display: the heavens are painted with shades of red, offering the sight of something that arises from the union of the Dark and the Bright, something new that is the product of their tension and their encounter.

The red hue of the dawn nonetheless represents something more than the encounter between Dark and Bright, night and day. It foremost is a sign pointing out to another fruit of the union between the two realms: Life and Being, the "middle realm." The crimson color of the sky at dawn is a proclamation of the transient reign of Life, which occupies the forefront of the creation during

the twilight between nights and days. The sky is given the color of the creatures' lifeblood because it is during this time of union of the Dark and the Bright that the living beings, which are the sons born out of the two poles of the creation, are called to play their most important role.

It was earlier seen that the realm of Life and Being is the string putting the Dark and the Bright in tension with one another. Living beings, man in particular, are called to preserve the equilibrium necessary for the strife to continue. Their very being is a manifestation of this harmony between the opposites, just as the dawn is a harmonious encounter between light and darkness. This harmony nonetheless does not imply that Life is peaceful, or that the dawn is a time of tranquility. On the contrary, the bloody color of the sky is a sign of the coming of a new battle: a civil war within Life itself, where the different living beings populating the earth strive against one another for their survival, thereby contributing to the growth of the Tree of Life.

The dawn is the time when the silence of the forest is broken by the singing of the birds. The first rays of the sun also serve as a wake-up call for many creatures. For the so-called "crepuscular animals," the twilight is the time of the daily cycle when they will perform most of their daily tasks. Among these, two of the most emblematic creatures populating the forests of Gaul can be found: the deer and the boar. Both take advantage of the faint clarity of the dawn to move through the trees and bushes in order to feed themselves and their progeny. Sleeping during the night and resting during the hottest hours of the days, they are the most at ease when the sky is adorned with its red cloak. These creatures are nonetheless not the only ones to be active during the twilight. The red color of the sky of dawn is also a warning to the beasts of the forest: as the dawn is the privileged time for them to roam through the forest, it is also the time when they have to face the greatest dangers. As the boar eats the acorns offered to him by the oak, and the deer feasts on the green leaves sprouting from the earth, man is often lurking nearby, also eager to feed himself.

Even before daybreak, man is taken away from his nightly refuge, the land of dreams where he can escape the darkness of the night, by his hunger for the flesh and his thirst for the blood of the creatures surrounding him. For him, the scarlet sky signals

the time for him to spill the blood of the boar and the deer. Their flesh will restore his forces and those of his family, allowing them to continue to stay above the surface of the earth, part of the whole of Life.[17] More than this, the time of blood that follows the night is also the occasion for man to renew his commitment to his own destiny, which is to be the instrument through which the harmony between Dark and Bright is preserved and manifested. For the Gauls, such a renewal would imply the performance of rituals celebrating the essence of life, rituals that would be centered on the offering of the life of some living beings, whose being and transition toward non-being would be dedicated to one particular element of the creation, either one of the three realms in particular.

The dawn is thus a time of blood, a time when the animals fight for their survival and when man is called to strive to prove himself worthy of his role of mediator between the realms. Shedding blood on the altar that is found in the midst of the clearing, deep into the forest, the servant of the wheel extinguishes a life to compensate for the rebirth of the members of the Teuta who have safely returned from their escapade into the land of dreams, being brought back to the surface of the Dark by the first rays of the dawn, whose color reminds them that their own being is nothing but a transient extraction from the body of the Dark. The night comes to man as a return to his origin, inviting an extinguishment of his own *ego* that may be feared by those who are unable to perceive the essence of their own being. The darkness of the night invite a proximity to the oneness of being that may appear to be a plunge into non-being, interpreted as death. The warmth of the dawn and the restoration of man's sight that it induces is thus naturally felt as a rebirth, a return to being after a time of proximity with non-being. Even though the night offers him an occasion to perceive the essence of his own being rather than taking it away, man can nonetheless be seen as experiencing a rebirth at the time of the reappearance of the red splendor of the morning. Regaining his consciousness from which he was alienated by his fleeing away from the darkness of the night, and regaining sight of the earth and the sky, man should be thankful to still be part of the body of Life and Being.

[17] One should nonetheless keep in mind the fact that the Gaul mainly fed themselves by farming and the raising of livestock rather than by hunting.

A willing actor of the strife between realms, and himself one of the highest branches of the Tree of Life that forms the middle realm keeping Dark and Bright in tension, man sacrifices beings which are seen are less worthy than himself of being part of the body of Life and less apt to contribute to the fulfilment of Life's destiny. The Tree of Life is the bow whose curvature keeps Dark and Bright in a state of harmonious strife, but the wood of this tree needs to be continuously planed or chiseled in order to prevent its growth from hindering its use. The blade of the one performing the sacrifice is as a planer that removes a thin layer out of the tree, allowing it to continue to grow in flexibility and in strength. The blood of the sacrificed, whether they are boars, fowls, or even human criminals deemed unworthy of remaining part of the body of Life, shines under the light of the dawn, reflecting the color of the sky on the earth.

The red hue of the sky both celebrates and invites the spilling of blood, which is a necessary part of the strife between the realms. It also paints the earth and the sky as a whole with the color of man's lifeblood. The Welsh language reflects an awareness of this fact, as the twilight can be called in the tongue of Taliesin: *cyfliw gŵr a llwyn*, the time "when man and bush are of the same color."[18] With the whole of the earth and the sky painted in blood, man's fear of the sight of this color, which he associates with death and suffering, is dulled. It dissipates his reluctance to face the sap of the Tree of Life, as he knows that this is the privileged moment for blood to be spilled: this bloodshed is part of the role he is given in the great play, and this time of twilight is the time for him to shine, as neither Dark nor Bright holds sway over the creation, but it is rather Life itself that occupies the center of the stage of nature. Once man has seized the opportunity offered by the dawn to appropriate the essence of his own being, comes the time for the wheel to continue its course. The bloody sky soon becomes brighter and brighter, until the sun finally shows its radiant face, marking the beginning of the day.

[18] *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, "cyfliw."

4.2.1.3 The Day

The fading of the dawn induced by the reappearance of the light of the sun allows the things of the earth to be seen, with their own colors rather than painted with the bloody dye of the twilight. The blue taint taken by the sky acts as a reminder of the fact that although man is born out of the Dark, his life nonetheless depends on his access to the air that fills the sky, dominion of the Bright. The blue tint of his veins is a sign that his lifeblood is also made of the same element that gives the sky its color. Man, however, seldom needs invitations in order to turn his eyes toward the Bright.

The light of the day restores man's ability to see all that is found upon the face of the Dark. The sun reveals the earth, thereby dissipating the terrors of the night, the fears that come with the blindness to his surroundings. Feeling safe and potent, able to move around the earth and to act according to his own will, man will more often than not fail to notice what is now concealed by the unveiling brought on by the daylight. What is found beyond the blue cloak placed by the sun around the heavenly dome, the stars, and the Silver Wheel itself, is now concealed from the view of all the beings roaming the earth or flying in the sky. The day is a time when man's eyes are wide open, and when he is the most active, emboldened by the power of the sun that not only gives him warmth and safety but also brings all the things of the earth to his World, brings them into his eyes so that he can grasp them with his mind. It is nonetheless also a time of danger: not for his flesh, as the night was, but rather for his spirit, which may be dazzled by the clarity of the day, leading him to forget that he is a son of the Dark and that all that shines is not gold.

Under the light of the day, the difference between earth and world may be blurred. The day is a time when the earth appears clear and plain, but it is also a time when man tends to let himself be guided by his eyes instead of letting his eyes be controlled by his reason. The dominion of the Bright is replete with visions and information, but it is also filled with illusions that entice man into delusions. Man hunts the lesser creatures at dawn, but he himself can become the prey of the forces reigning during the day. As the vector of the tension between Dark and Bright, man must remain watchful of himself. During the night, he escapes the darkness by

taking refuge in the world of his imagination, which belongs to the Bright, and during the day he is called to plunge himself into the great body of the Dark to flee the snares of illusion and delusion. He may use the light coming from the Bright to investigate the nature of the Dark, thereby strengthening his bond with it. This is the study of "nature" that was dear to the wisemen of the Iron Age: the observation of the earth, the rocks, the plants, the essence of "things." The darkness of the night invite man to turn himself toward the sky to observe the splendor and order of the heavenly bodies, and reciprocally the brightness of the day invites man to dis-cover the magnificence and beauty of the earth.

The rest of Life nevertheless reacts in different ways to the arrival of the day. Men busy themselves with the work of the fields, warfare, or trade, but for many creatures the day is very similar to the night. The aforementioned "crepuscular animals," that is, those who are most active during the twilight such as the boar or the deer, rarely forage for food and move across the land during the brightest hours of the day. For them, the dazzling light of the sun presents the same dangers as the darkness of the night, as both make them targets for predators. The deer and the boar therefore rest during the day, hidden by ferns or bushes and thereby escaping the rays of the sun and the arrows of man. Other creatures nonetheless can thrive during the day, and in particular those that share a natural bond with the sky. The crane is one of these creatures, and even though she dwells in the shadowy waters of the Dark during the nighttime, plunging her long legs into the muddy soil, the appearance of the sun marks the time for her to deploy her wings and to depart from the earth. Soaring through the clouds, the majestic bird spends the day away from her nightly abode, away from an earth whose stability provided her safety during the dark hours but which now appears too limited for her ambitions. Enjoying the freedom and vastness of the heavens, she flies looking at the horizon, between the sun and the earth, the source of the Bright and the body of the Dark.

The light of the Bright is nonetheless more than something that pleases the eyes of the creatures or something that threatens their bond with the Dark that gave birth to them. The Tree of Life as a whole would collapse in a very short amount of time if the rays of the sun would cease the relentless toil that they perform on the face of the earth. These silent servants of the Bright are indeed

responsible for the watering of the great tree. They patiently strike the earth and the seas to tear out the moisture that is mixed with the soil or the salt of the earth, letting the winds of the Lofty carry it to form its substance: the clouds. When the moisture of the earth and the seas has been separated from its impurities by the light and the heat of the sun, it forms the clouds that pour out fresh water all over the surface of the Dark. They water the Tree of Life as a whole, allowing it to continue to perdure and grow, showing that Life depends on the work of the forces of the upper realm: the Bright that extracts the moisture and the Lofty that carries it and pours it down where there is need of it.

The role played by the forces of the Lofty is nevertheless not limited to being the water bearers for the Tree of Life. As it was the case during the night, the Lofty plays an essential role in the strife that takes place during the day. Contrasting with the order of the cycle put in motion by the Silver Wheel, the Lofty represents the chaos that disturbs this order. This disturbance is nonetheless fully part of the larger order of nature, as it is only through its contrast with chaos that the order itself can be appreciated, and it is because of the clouds that Life that flourish upon the face of the Dark.

The very existence of the clouds carrying the fresh water that will quench the thirst of the living beings represents a challenge to both the Dark and the Bright. The wooly flesh of the Lofty indeed stands between the light of the Bright, high in the skies, and the body of the Dark, down below. The clouds hinder the course of the rays of light that are indispensible for them to be formed, but this may be seen as a necessary balance, a measure of "economy" by which the Lofty ensures that Life would not be drowned in an excess of rain nor parched by an excess of light. The Lofty may nonetheless also be seen as playing a more mischievous role.

The clouds can indeed separate the earth from the higher parts of the skies. When they form a thick cover that extends to the horizon, all that man can see of the skies is these clouds, which thus represent the Bright, the upper realm as a whole, hiding away the face of the sun, which itself concealed the Silver Wheel and the stars by its brightness. Reciprocally, the white cloak of the Lofty also conceals the earth from the heavens. The sun and the wheel are both blind to what occurs on the earth, even during the day

when the light of the Bright showers the lower realms. Flying above the clouds, the crane loses sight of the earth, and she is led to forget the shadowy waters that offer her safety and a shelter during the dark hours. The Lofty can thus stand between the other forces of nature: it hinders the reign of the Dark during the night and it reduces the sway held by the Bright over the earth during the day. It is at the center of the strife between the realms. Even though it itself belongs to the Bright, it nonetheless strives both for and against the three realms. It is the chaos that makes the order shines, and without this chaos, nature would be a mere mechanism. Chaos thus shares with Life its ability to oppose the flow of nature.

Regardless of the chaos of the Lofty, the day nevertheless remains a time when the Bright holds sway over the earth. Thunderous clouds may hover over the ground, but they are never able to completely extinguish the fire of the heavens, the splendor of the Bright. The relentless onslaught of the Lofty only highlights the unquenchable nature of the light from above. The Bright nonetheless remains the subject of a higher power, one against which it remains helpless: the turning of the wheel that soon brings an end to the reign of the Bright over earth and sky.

4.2.1.4 The Dusk

When the sun approaches the horizon, the blue color of the sky, which proclaimed the dominion of the Bright over the heavens and the earth, slowly turns dark. The horizon then begins to bleed, as it did during the dawn, marking the coming of the dusk. As Heidegger tells us, the dusk is nonetheless more than the end of the day. It is...

> ... not a mere sinking of the day, the dissolution of its brightness in the gloom of night. Dusk, anyway, does not necessarily mean the twilight of the end. The morning, too, has its twilight. The day rises in twilight. Twilight, then, is also a rising.[19]

[19] English translation from: Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, Page 164; Original German: "»Dämmerung« ist jedoch kein bloßes Untergehen des Tages als Verfall seiner Helle in die Finsternis. Dämmerung meint überhaupt nicht notwendig Untergang. Auch der Morgen dämmert. Mit ihm geht der Tag auf.

The turning of the wheel weakens the forces of the Bright, which no longer hold sway over heaven and earth. As the sun hides its radiant face, Life rises again, and its bloody banner is displayed across the skies.

Once again, the creatures of the forest that were driven to take cover to avoid the dazzling brightness of day, such as the deer and the boar, now slowly emerge from their shelter and they begin to roam the land again, searching for food or a mate. They are soon followed by men, who have sharpened their spears and arrows, prepared to spill blood to feed their household.

The second twilight is also a time propitious for the performing of sacrifices and other rituals. These may have different purposes: they may celebrate the glorious reign of the Bright that is now coming to an end, or they may proclaim the return of the power of the Dark that will soon take over the earth and the sky. They may honor Life and Being, the "middle realm" of which man is part and that now occupies the front of the stage of the great play of the creation. If the celebrants are able to see beyond the horizon of their own *presence*, they may also see the dusk as an articulation point of something larger than what they can witness with their own eyes.

The dawn was a time of transition between night and day, Dark and Bright. More than a mere transition between Bright and Dark, the dusk also marks the completion of the daily cycle, that is, one revolution of the smallest of the gears driven by the Silver Wheel. The dusk is the seam between the days, the return to the beginning. As noticed by Heraclitus, ξυνόν γάρ άρχή και πέρας έπι κύκλου περιφερείας., "the beginning and end on a circle are common."[20] The joining of the end of a day with the beginning of a new one shows that each day is a reenactment of a single play. The daily cycle represents one dimension of the strife between the realms, one that is unfolded in time, lasting a single day, but that is nonetheless extended till the end of time through its repetition.

The appropriation of the seam between the days is what allows man to appropriate the essence of the daily cycle, the first gear of

Dämmerung ist zugleich Aufgehen." From Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 12: Unterwegs zur Sprache (1950–1959)*, Page 38.

[20] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 160

the celestial mechanism. As ex-plained by Heidegger:

> The transition [der übergang] thus is not the [going] away from one and the toward the other, but rather the essential way of coming-together of the one and the other. A transition is not the going-forth but rather the abiding gathered in oneself, which unites the one and the other, and thus brings them both forth from their abiding essential ground . . . [21]

The dusk is what unites the days. Every one of them forms a whole, one that nonetheless does not contradict their uniqueness. No day is like the other, and yet all days are but a recapitulation of the same battle, part of the larger strife. The recurrent nature of the day allows its essence to be continually reappropriated by man, while he himself develops his forces to play an increasingly important part in the play of the creation.

The day ends with the dusk, but each new day is in the middle of time, between its beginning and its end. The bloody sky of the evening is caught between the daylight and night, and the new day, the *present*, is caught between the past and the future. The daily cycle is the one with which man is the most familiar. His life submits to its rhythm long before he can begin to fathom what it represents. In the first weeks of his life, as an infant, his flesh gets accustomed to the separation between nights and days. It will nonetheless take him many years to begin to perceive the existence of another cycle, the presence of another, larger gear that is linked with the movements of the gear of the days.

4.2.2 The Second Play: the Monthly Cycle

The second gear that is driven by the great wheel is the one marking the months. Contrary to the previous one, the monthly

[21] TBA. Original German: "So ist denn der übergang nicht das Weg von Einem und das Fort zum Anderen, sondern die wesentliche Art des Zueinanderkommens des Einen und des Anderen. übergang ist nicht das Vorübergehen, sondern das in sich gesammelte Bleiben, das Eines und das Andere einigt und so beide aus ihrem bleibenden Wesensgrund hervorgehen und in ihm allererst bleiben läßt." From: Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 52: Hölderlins Hymne "Andenken" (Winter semester 1941/42)*, Pages 85–86 (Andenken).

cycle is often overlooked by men and beasts alike. Life seldom notices the heavenly body that bears the sign of this cycle, revealing a different face each day until its ends, which is also a new beginning. The moon's presence is rather low-key compared to the brightness of the day or the darkness of the night. It can be seen during any part of the daily cycle, but its own brightness, which brings the light of the day into the darkest moments of the night, is best seen when the Dark holds sway over the earth and sky.

Very few creatures would seem to be affected by the phases of the moon, and man does not seem to be one of them. This would explain why the appearance of the monthly cycle into man's World would seem to occur at a relatively late stage of his evolution, when men felt the need to divide the solar year into a smaller unit that would allow them to prepare for the passing of the seasons, and anticipate the tasks and needs tied to agriculture in particular. The unfolding of the months can be witnessed by anybody, but only the observers of nature, the "lovers of wisdom," feels the need to bring the months into their World. This bringing of the monthly cycle into the World certainly occurred long before men understood the origin of the monthly veiling and uncovering of the face of the moon. Different cultures, different Worlds, nonetheless implied different representations of the nature of the months.

Concerning the nature of the months in the Gaulish World, Pliny the Elder once again gives us a precious information, linking it to the ritual cutting of the mistletoe:

> The mistletoe, however, is but rarely found upon the robur; and when found, is gathered with rites replete with religious awe. This is done more particularly on the fifth day of the moon, the day which is the beginning of their months and years, as also of their ages, which, with them, are but thirty years. This day they select because the moon, though not yet in the middle of her course, has already considerable power and influence.[22]

[22] Enlish translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 16.95); Original Latin: "est autem id rarum admodum inventu et repertum magna religione petitur et ante omnia sexta luna, quae principia mensum annorumque his facit et saeculi post tricesimum annum, quia iam virium abunde habeat nec sit sui dimidia. " From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

This indication concerning the beginning of the months would seem to be confirmed by what undeniably is the most important source concerning the Gauls' relation to time: the Coligny calendar. Even though it has been deliberately broken into dozens of pieces, this calendar dating from the 1st century A.D. gives us a general overview of the monthly and yearly cycle, probably very similar to the one used by the Druids of the centuries preceding the Roman conquest, Druids who certainly were the ones having created and developed it.

The Coligny calendar shows us that the months could either have 30 or 29 days. In the first case, these months were considered to be MATV, that is, "good," while they were seen as ANMATV, "not good," in the other. As this distinction would seem to be related to the yearly cycle, it will be ignored in the present section.[23] The calendar nevertheless shows us that the months themselves were divided into two parts.

After the 15th day of each month, a separation is indicated by a recurrent word, carved in letters as large as the name of the month itself: ATENOVX, whose meaning is still the subject of debates among scholars (See Fig. 4.5). The most convincing interpretations of this word appears to link it with a "renewal," a "return of the dark" in particular.[24] This would fit the separation of the month in its middle point, which would correspond to the third quarter of the moon, that is, the time when most of its face begins to be covered in darkness (See Fig. 4.6).

Contrary to the daily cycle, which begins after the dusk, with the reign of the Dark, the monthly cycle of the Gaulish World appears to start when the face of the moon grows brighter. The phases of the moon represent a canvas upon which a monthly alternation between Dark and Bright is painted, with the light of the

[23] Concerning this distinction, the following quote of Heraclitus can be mentioned: Περι δε ημερων αποφραδων ειτε χρη τιθεσθαι τινασ ειτε ορθωσ ηρακλειτοσ επεπληξεν ησιοδω τασ μεν αγαθασ ποιουμενω, τασ δε φαυλασ, ωσ αγνοουντι φυσιν ημερασ απασησ μιαν ουσαν, ετεροθι διηπορηται, "Concerning unlucky days, whether one should recognize them, or whether Heraclitus was right in criticizing Hesiod for considering some days good, some bad, because he was ignorant that the nature of every day as being one, has been discussed elsewhere." (English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 145; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 144)

[24] See: Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 58.



Figure 4.5: *A fragment of the Coligny calendar* (Ricci, "Le calendrier celtique de Coligny", Page 449.).

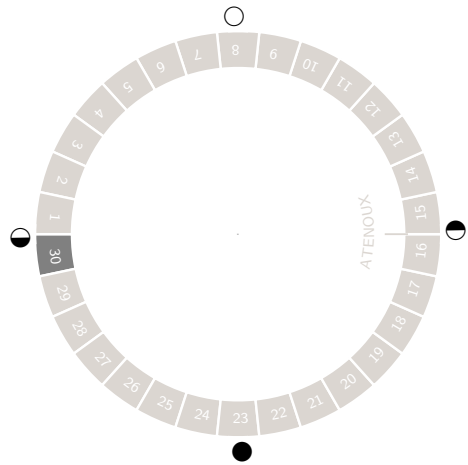


Figure 4.6: *The monthly cycle.*

sun serving as an ink. This painting itself represents a new dimension of the strife between the realms. It represents a second play that is unfolded in parallel to the play of the days, but one that is unfolded at a different pace: it takes a month to be completed instead of a single day.

Every day, the turning of the wheel allows the Dark and the Bright to successively hold sway over earth and sky, with two brief periods marking the reign of Life in between. During each one of these days, the moon affects the balance between the realms, showing a continually different face for approximately 29.5 days, before starting again. The daily battle is thus completed by a monthly one, which sees the moon as a relatively inconspicuous and yet significant actor in the great play of the creation. The change of appearance of the moon is continuous, but as exemplified by the Coligny calendar, the quarters of the moon, that is, the two moments when its face either begin to grow darker or brighter, represent key moments of the monthly cycle, which can be used as conceptual boundaries cleaving the month in two parts: the bright moon and the dark one. Each one of these parts shows a different role played by the moon in the strife between the realms. They will therefore be separately examined.

4.2.2.1 The Bright Moon

As told to us by Pliny the Elder, the beginning of the month is a time when the moon, "though not yet in the middle of her course, has already considerable power and influence."[25] Its brightness becomes more and more noticeable, making the celestial body stand out from the rest of the sky, both by day and by night. The moon is at the apex of its power when its face is entirely filled with the brilliance of the sun, a time that also marks the middle of the period of the bright moon. During this time, the moon shines in all its splendor. Its round disk can be sighted together with the one of the sun during the day, showing the formidable harmony of the creation manifested by the fact that even though the moon is hundreds of times smaller than the sun, the faces of both celestial bodies appear to have an almost exact same size to those observing them on the earth. They appear as brothers, who share a part of

[25] See § 4.2.2.

their appearance, product of their common origin, but also possess very distinct personalities.

The sun permanently displays its dazzling brilliance, while the moon only redistributes the brightness handed over to it by the sun, which it does not receive equally each day. Less powerful that its luminous brother, the silvery disk nonetheless fully belongs to the forces of the Bright. The role that it plays during the day is very modest, but its force is not found in the brilliance of its face but rather in its range of action. Indeed, contrary to the sun, which is only visible during half of the day, and thus also half of the month, the moon can be sighted high in the skies when the sun is completely hidden from the sight of those living on the earth.

The work of the moon is to bring some of the brightness of the sun into the dominion of the Dark. When the Bright is condemned to hide the source of its brilliance, the moon acts as a vanguard of the forces of the day that ventures into the night. Its light weakens the reign of the Dark over the earth and sky, as it breaks the blindness of the creatures and chases away the shadows that are meant to cover the creation during the dark hours.

For those who leave in fear of the darkness, and those who cannot stand the blindness that affects them when the Bright has retreated into concealment, the moonlight represents a ray of hope, a sign in the heavens that foretells of the return of the day, and also lits their footsteps, dissipating the uncertainty that is often a source of anguish for the living beings that failed to nurture their bond with their origin: the Dark and the Deep. They welcome the moon as a savior from the terrors and insecurities that they endure during the dark hours, completely oblivious to what this revelation conceals.

Indeed, for those who are at ease in the shadows, those able to perceive the lessons of the night, the moonlight can be seen as a source of concealment. As this light is shed upon the earth, the intrusion of the Bright hinders the renewal of man's bond with the Dark. The blindfold of the night is an important element inviting man to cease to entirely rely on his eyes for guidance. His eyes veiled by the cloak of shadows, he is forced to feel the earth with his other senses, his sense of touch in particular. The loss of his sight offers him an occasion to re-dis-cover the raw experience of the earth, with his hands and his whole flesh teaching him the

nature of the Dark and the Deep. This experience is perturbed by the moonlight, which entices him to turn himself toward the sky rather than the earth, and to let himself be guided by his eyes rather than his hands.

The moon fights to conquer the heart of the beings populating the earth, by filling their eyes with light. The Bright does not abandon the battlefield during the night: it remains, less conspicuous, less powerful, but still very much present. The moon nonetheless does more than simply chase away the darkness of the night. Its brightness leads to a veiling of the largest and most majestic element of the skies: the Silver Wheel itself, whose faint glow disappears when the moon shines in all its splendor. The wheel can only be paired with the Dark, as only when the shadows prevail in the skies may it be seen by those found on the earth. It flees into concealment when brighter elements show their brilliance in the heavens, making it hard to be sighted, but also thereby increasing the joy of a rare encounter.

The moon's effect on the earth is nevertheless not limited to its light. The "celestial body" may serve the forces of the Bright, but part of its nature also belongs to the great body of the Dark. The moon shares with the earth its material nature: it is made of dust and rock. It possesses a "heaviness," and it thereby is irremediably attracted to the other "heavy" objects surrounding it. The gravitational force works to bring all matter together, that is, to form a single body with all the Dark elements of the creation, even the ones such as the sun or the other stars, which are committed to the Bright. The monthly cycle corresponds to one revolution of the moon around the earth, which is combined with the earth's rotation around itself. The attraction between earth and moon is the source of a very tangible and well-known phenomenon: the tides, whose link with the celestial body has been known since time immemorial.

The moon attracts both the land and the seas when it passes over them, creating a bulge directly under it and on the opposite side of the earth. The tide would be a monthly phenomenon if the earth was immobile, but because of the effect of its rotation, the tides occur twice a day. The tides are nonetheless different according to the phase of the moon during which they occur. During the new and the full moon, the high tide reaches its peak, while the

low tide is at its lowest point. During the quarters, the differential between the high and low tides is at its minimum.

The apex of the moon's power therefore is found during the full moon, when its brilliance has the greatest effect on the sky and the earth and when its "heaviness" exerts the strongest pull on the land and the seas. The moonlight attracts man's eyes, attempting to make him turn his back on the experience of the Dark and to subject him to the forces of the Bright. The "heaviness" of the moon, on the other hand, pulls his flesh and the earth as a whole toward the sky, both showing man that the heavenly body shares a part of its nature with him and that the forces of the Bright can be exerted in different dimensions: servants of the Bright can not only chase away the darkness, but also directly shape the body of the Dark itself. This show of force is nonetheless transient. With the turning of the wheel, the forces of the moon are soon exhausted, marking a strengthening of the power of the Dark.

4.2.2.2 The Dark Moon

The month began when the moon's face displayed an equilibrium between its dark and bright parts, and this state of equilibrium is once again reached at the middle point of the cycle. An important difference nonetheless distinguishes the two moments: the renewal of the month occurs when the bright part of the celestial body is about to grow, while its middle point marks the "return of the darkness": ATENOVX. After this turning point, comes the time when the brightness of the moon progressively weakens, until its face is entirely veiled by the shadows, both during night and day. After this complete concealment, which occurs at the middle of the second part of the month, the "new moon" will begin to show its face, announcing the end of this month and the beginning of a new one.

If the moon is seen as part of the forces of the Bright, as one of its agent that brings light to the dominion of the Dark during the night, this implies that the second part of the month shows a weakening of the ability of this agent to perturb the reign of the shadows. During this time, when its face is as dark as the earth itself, the heavenly sphere nonetheless does not become an ally of the Dark. Invisible, it still continues its toil meant to bring

the body of the Dark and Life toward the skies. The pull of the moon is indeed at its peak when its face is entirely plunged in the shadows, as strong as it was during the full moon. The seas as a whole are pointing toward the dark sphere in the skies, and even man's flesh is affected by it, even though he might remain unaware of the invisible strength of this heavenly monument.

The weakening of the disturbance caused by the moonlight benefits to the Dark, allowing its reign to continue unhindered and the lessons of the night to be taught to the men eager to nurture their bond with their origin. The absence of any moonlight nonetheless does not imply that the Dark chases away all sources of light. It resists the intrusion of the forces of the Bright, but it welcomes a visitor, the appearance of a contrast that does not threaten its reign, and might even fortify it. Sufficiently distant so as not to annihilate the darkness of the night, and gentle enough to allow a peaceful coexistence, the faint glow of the Silver Wheel and of the countless stars that accompany it is not perceived as a threat. The galactic arms embracing the body of the Dark as a whole, the harmonious encounter displayed during the night teaches man one of the most precious lessons of nature. The contemplation of the turning of the wheel is a manifestation of its order, an order that is highlighted by the disturbances that come in its way: both those linked with the daily cycle, such as the clouds, and those tied with the passing of the months, such as the moonlight.

The monthly cycle therefore exhibits a secondary strife between the moon and the Silver Wheel, as the concealment of the former is necessary in order for the latter to appear (See Fig. 4.7). The encounter between the Dark and the Silver Wheel, which certainly is the greatest manifestation of a harmonious contrast between Dark and Bright, is therefore further limited by the action of the moon. During more than half of the daily cycle, this encounter is made impossible due to the intrusion of the sun, and during more than half of the monthly one, it is hindered by the presence of the moonlight. The rarity of the encounter nevertheless only makes it more precious. It intensifies the awe experienced by those fortunate enough to witness it, having fled all the sources of light that would conceal this wondrous sight, fled the cities to head toward the country, where nature holds sway rather than the hands of man.

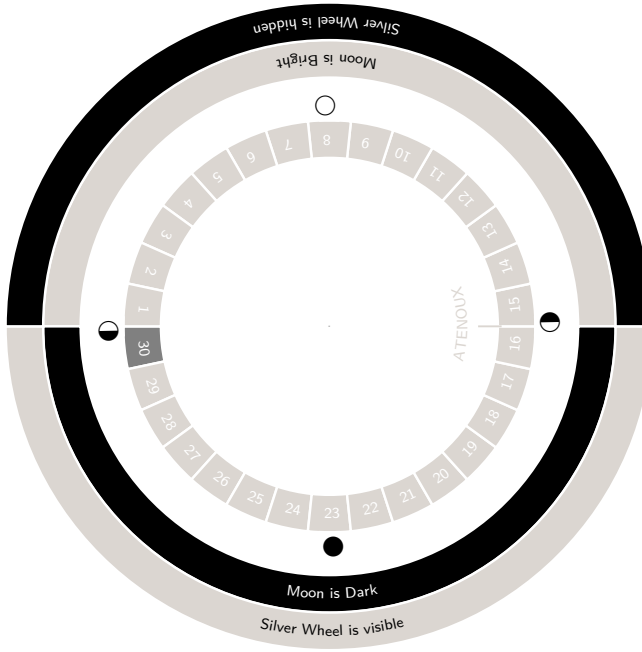


Figure 4.7: *The monthly cycle.*

The turning of the wheel nonetheless puts more gears into motion. After the gear of the days and the gear of the months, now comes the time to examine the one marking the passing of the years.

4.2.3 The Third Play: the Yearly Cycle

Like the passing of the days, the succession of the years is directly and intimately experienced by man. Contrary to the phases of the moon, which are easily overlooked by those who do not feel particularly attracted to the study of the sky, the change of seasons significantly affects his life. This is true today, but it was even more so for the Celts of the Iron Age, who did not enjoy the comfort and the technology shielding man from the extreme cold of the winter, the heat of the summer, or the rage of the thunderstorms. Since the dawn of mankind, the seasons were linked to the sun. It is now known that a year represents a full revolution of the earth around the sun, but even without such knowledge, dif-

ferent observable phenomena easily show the correlation between the apparent motion of the sun in the sky and the changes that accompany the yearly cycle. The most obvious of these certainly is the changes that it induces on the daily cycle.

In Europe at least, the days of the winter are significantly shorter than those of the summer. The sun rises and sets at a different time every day, thereby affecting the balance between the reign of the Dark and the one of the Bright. Dawn and dusk, the time of Life and of the bloody sky, is largely unaffected, but as shown in Fig. 4.8, the time of their coming is subject to a balancing. The peaks of this movement of the sunrise and sunset represent the longest and shortest periods when the Dark or the Bright hold sway over earth and sky. The shortest period of the reign of the Dark is known as the summer solstice, while its longest is the winter solstice. Between these two extremes, two more times are easily noticed: the days when there is a perfect equilibrium between the duration of the two reigns. These two days are known as the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, and the four periods between them have traditionally been used by many cultures to divide the year in four: the four seasons.

For the so-called "beaker people," that is, the civilization that erected the megaliths found across Western Europe and built the sanctuaries of Stonehenge and Newgrange long before the arrival of the Celts, the solstices would seem to have represented particularly important moments of the year. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Newgrange sanctuary was built in order for the sunlight to illuminate its core only at sunrise on the days around the winter solstice. Known for centuries, this fact greatly contributed to the belief that the Celts also shared these views, as they were mistakenly considered to be the builders of these ancient sacred places. What is known of the early Celtic World would seem to indicate that the people of Gaul saw the yearly cycle as depending on something more than the course of the sun.

As they attempt to perceive the order of the creation and to bring it to their world, men are condemned to reduce its infinite complexity and perfection to a caricature, which alone can be grasped by his reason. The flow of time then becomes a wheel, one that set into motion different gears forming the mechanism of nature. The gear of the years does not turn freely, without contact

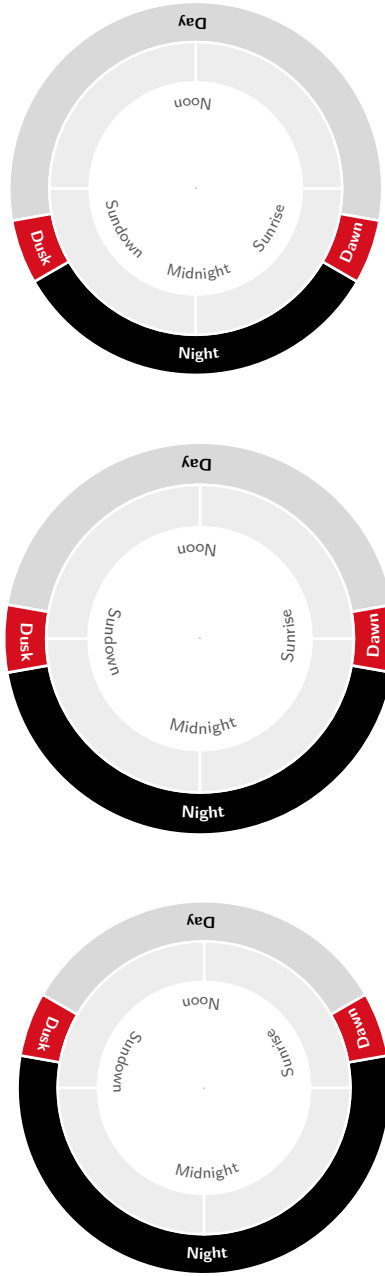


Figure 4.8: *The daily cycle at the winter solstice (top), the equinoxes (center), and the summer solstice (bottom).*

with the rest of the mechanism. It is seen as being bound to the one marking the pace of the days, and the one determining the passing of the months.

The order of nature nonetheless rarely perfectly corresponds to the representations that man makes of it, in his World. Nature does not behave as a well-oiled machinery, and the articulation between the days, the months, and the years reflects this state of fact. The solar year does not correspond to a round number of days and months: it indeed approximately lasts 365.15 days, a little more than 12 lunar months. Because of this, men belonging to various eras and dwelling in various Worlds have tried to find a harmonious combination allowing them to preserve their orderly vision of the "celestial mechanism": the so-called lunisolar calendars.

The best source at our disposal concerning the way the ancient Celts viewed the yearly cycle, the Coligny calendar dating from the 1st century A.D., shows that such a lunisolar calendar was in use in Gaul at the time of the dusk of Gaulish culture. This calendar exhibits a great level of sophistication, including a system of correspondence between days belonging to different months, whose purpose has yet to be ex-plained. What remains of this calendar is a set of dozens of pieces that represent half of its original surface (See Fig. 4.9). It appears to have been deliberately broken, probably following the Druidic taboo preventing the diffusion of the sacred knowledge to those not belonging to the order. It nonetheless gives us a clear outline of the way the Druids of the early Gallo-Roman period conceptualized the passing of the years.

The fragments show that the Gaulish calendar is based on the lunar year, with the use of leap months to compensate the increase of the shift with the solar year, which is induced by the 6.15-day gap between the two. The months themselves are the subject of a similar compensation: they are either 29 or 30 days long in order to correct the shift induced by the gap between the daily cycle and the monthly one, which lasts approximately 29.5 days. As mentioned in a previous section, the longer months are marked as MATV ("good"), while the shorter ones are seen as ANMATV, "not good."

Furthermore, perhaps one of the most crucial information

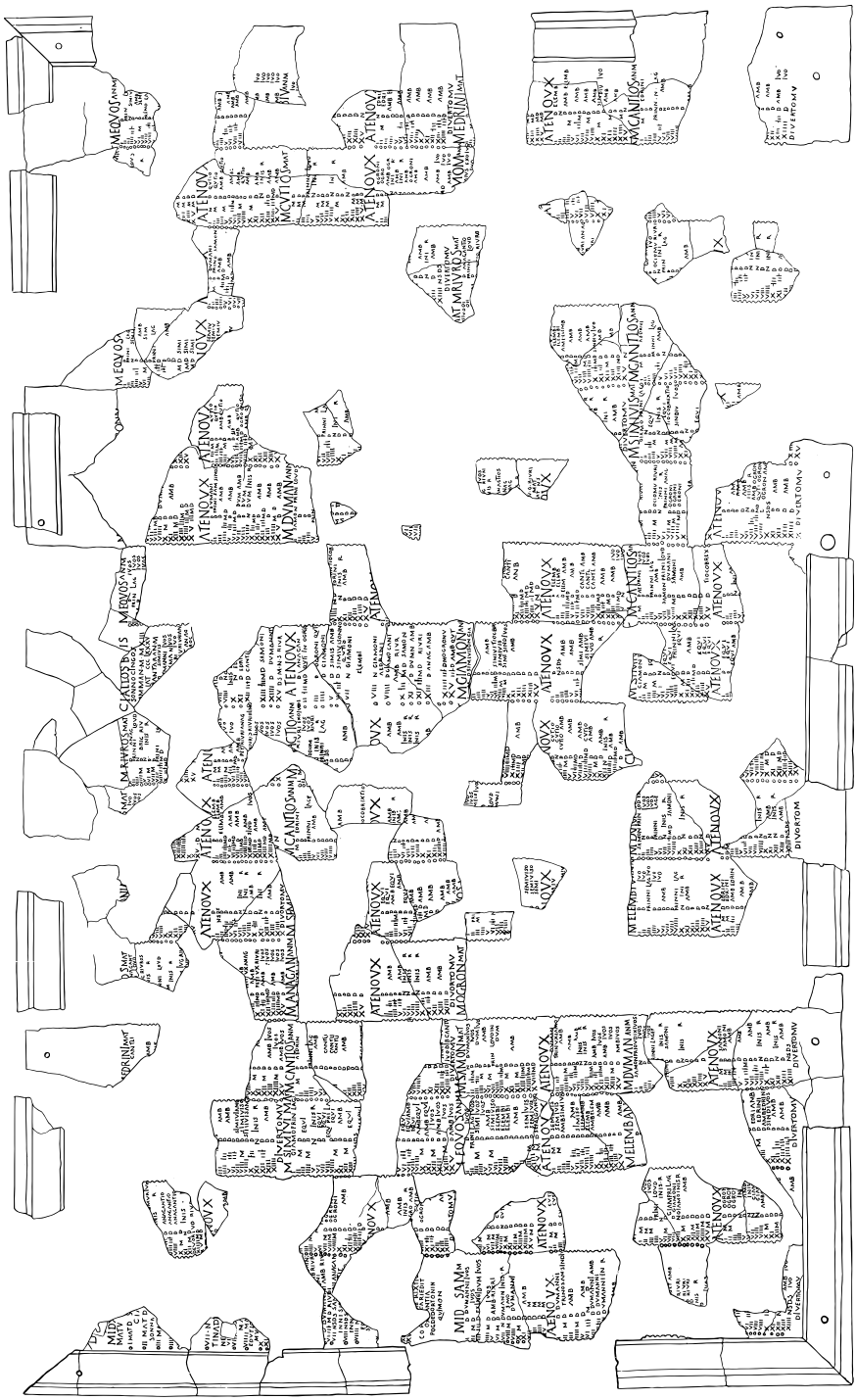


Figure 4.9: *The fragments of Coligny calendar* (Ricci, "Le calendrier celtique de Coligny", Page 449.).

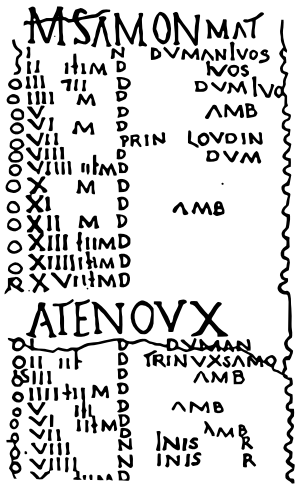


Figure 4.10: *Samonios* (Ricci, "Le calendrier celtique de Coligny", Page 449.).

given by the calendar is the presence of the most important feast of the year of medieval Ireland: *Samain*. At the beginning of the second half of the month of SAMONIOS, a special event is indeed indicated at the same date each year: TRINUX SAMO, the "three nights of Samonios" (See Fig. 4.10). This undeniably shows that this feast was common to the early Celtic people. It would also seem to disprove the belief that the builders of the Celtic World accorded a great importance to the solstices and equinoxes, as did their predecessors: the "beaker people." The date of the most important feast, which is also seen as marking the beginning of the yearly cycle (as it was the case in Ireland), is indeed relatively remote from both the solstices and the equinoxes. *Samhain* is now usually celebrated at the beginning of November, but the presence of leap months in the Gaulish calendar induced a great variability in the distance between the three nights of Samonios and the four articulation points of the solar year. In other words: the year of the Gaulish World was based on computations by the Druids rather than on the observation of the course of the sun.

This preeminence of the computation over the observation does not necessarily imply that the Gaulish calendar was disconnected from nature, but it definitely betrays the fact that the men organizing their lives around it were subjugated by the power of

the Bright, and that they may have grown distant from the raw experience of the Dark. This calendar probably was the result of centuries of development before it took the form of the Coligny fragments, with successive generations of scholars adding further elements that they perceived to be refinements. This late form of the calendar may thus be very remote from the inceptual conception of the yearly cycle shared by the Celts of Hallstatt and the first Druids.

The Coligny calendar can nevertheless be a good starting point for the exploration of the nature of the yearly cycle, in its natural dimension. It can be used to construct an outline of the wheel of the years, shown in Fig. 4.11. This wheel firstly shows that the unequal repartition between the MATV ("good") and ANMATV ("not-good") months shows a symmetry along a line going from the TRINOX SAMONI to the middle of the month of Giamonios, a date that corresponds to the feast of *Beltain* of medieval Ireland but which is nonetheless absent on the fragments from Coligny. This symmetry well fits the traditional opposition between the darker part of the year, beginning at *Samhain*, and the brighter part, which is celebrated with fire at *Beltain* in the Irish tradition. It may show that the Druids were careful to split the year in two exactly equal parts, thereby preserving the balance between a yearly reign of the Dark, roughly corresponding to the fall and the winter, and a yearly reign of the Bright, the spring and the summer.

The turning of the wheel of the year is nonetheless not an end in itself. Its inceptual nature without a doubt was more anchored in a direct experience of the effects of the yearly cycle than on technical computations performed on tablets, by men who had lost sight of their own essence and of their origin. The representation of the wheel is only a map, one that is only a guide rather than a substitute for a direct sight of the path to follow. This path begins at the starting point: the TRINOX SAMONI, the three nights of summer.

4.2.3.1 The Three Nights of Summer

Like the daily cycle, which begins after dusk, the year of the Celts begins when the Dark is about to reenter the front stage

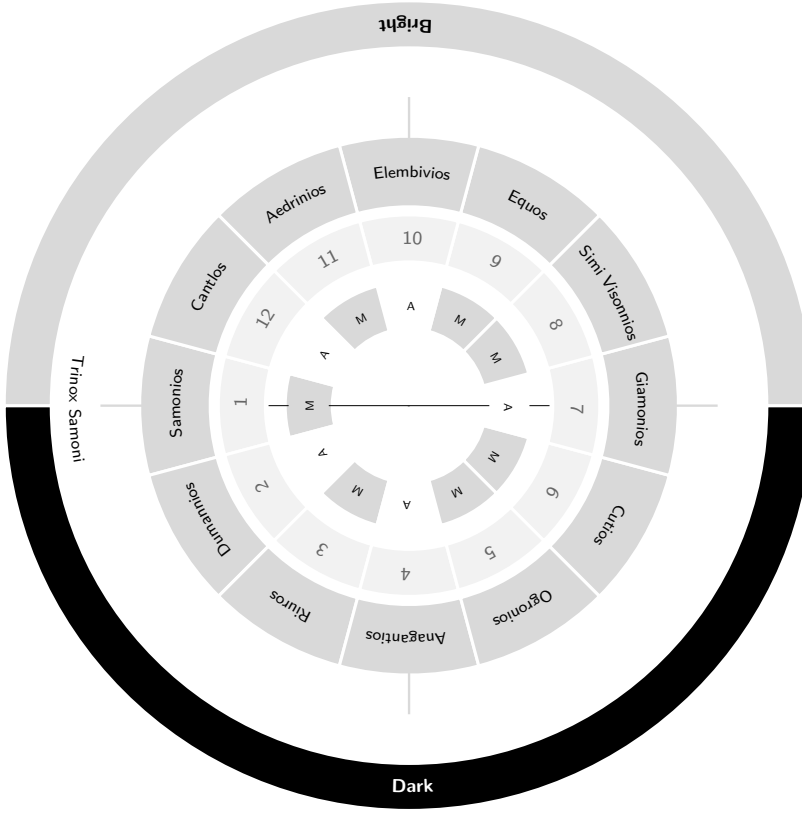


Figure 4.11: *The yearly cycle according to the Coligny calendar.* The innermost circle shows the repartition between MATV and ANMATV months. The second one shows the order of the months, while the third gives their Gaulish names.

of the play. The month of *Samonios* literally is the month of "summer," marking its completion rather than its arrival. It comes at a time when the hottest days of the year are long gone and the fresh air of the fall has already conquered every part of the land. The three nights coming immediately after the middle of the month, which marks the beginning of the time of the dark moon, appear to be the major feast period of the year, and also the starting point of the cycle.

The feast thus occurs at the meeting point of the beginning of three cycles, when each one of them is at a turning point marking the beginning of a show of force of the Dark and the Deep. This celebration occurs during the night, when the Dark holds sway over the daily cycle. It also comes immediately after the third quarter of the moon, when the face of the celestial body begins to grow darker every day. Finally, it comes at the end of the summer, when the nights are growing significantly longer than the days, as the winter arrives. This conjunction between the beginning of the three cycles is a perfect occasion to celebrate the Dark, whose strength will increase until it reaches its peak in the middle of the winter, during the night, when the moon is completely covered in shadows.

Contrary to its place in the daily and monthly cycles, however, the date of the three nights of Samonios do not appear to correspond to any of the four articulations of the solar year. One might have expected that the feast marking the beginning of the dark period of the year would have begun at the autumnal equinox, which represents the moment when the nights start to grow longer. As mentioned before, the feast days are nonetheless fixed according to the lunar months, ignoring the course of the sun. Thus, why did the ancient Celts chose this particular date for their most important celebration of the year?

If the meaning of the three nights of summer cannot be found in the skies, this may be because the Celts foremost saw themselves as the sons of the earth rather than sons of the heavens. The daily cycle, the one that is most intimately and frequently experienced by man, is determined by the course of the sun, but it is more than a purely astronomical phenomenon: the cycle exerts a strong influence on the earth, and not only on the skies. The months also affect the earth through the tides, in the same manner that the

yearly course of the sun changes its surface. Life, in particular, is subjugated to the transformations induced by the course of the sun. Man has evolved to use his intellect in order to prepare himself for the arrival of the dark months, which bring with them the cold winds that push him to find shelter inside the earth, caves or dwellings made by his own hands from the materials offered to him by the Dark. The plants and the animals, on the other hand, can in their very flesh bear the marks of the seasons.

The end of the summer is the dusk of Life: the time when the green canopy of the forests loses its luster, when the bright green hue of the leaves fades away, as they proclaim the end of their own being by taking the color of the sap of the Tree of Life. The leaves take the color of blood before they fall to the Ground, soon to be reclaimed by the great body of the Dark. As the dusk witnessed daily by men and beasts alike, the fall nonetheless is only a time of transition between the reign of the Bright and the one of the Dark rather than the end of Life itself.

The life of some of the most emblematic beasts of the forest is also paced by the turning of the wheel. Two of them, in particular, experience an important change during the period in which the three nights of summer occur, animals that occupy a prominent place in the Gaulish World: the stag and the crane.

The stag is the symbol of the Dark and the Deep, the creature supporting the Ground. After the end of the winter, this king of the forests of Gaul is weakened, as he has lost the antlers that gave him a majestic appearance and provided him with a means to defend himself and his progeny, or to attack his foes. It will take long months for them to slowly grow back. Hidden in the deepest parts of the forest when the sun is radiant and the green canopy separates it from the sky, the stag is therefore vulnerable during the reign of the Bright. As the summer draws to an end, however, comes the time when the animal has regained his majesty. As the long nights return together with the reddening of the leaves, the stag's antlers now make him appear stronger than ever before, giving him confidence. The stag's forces come together with the return of the reign of the Dark over the earth and sky, explaining why the two are closely associated in the Gaulish World.

The life of the crane, symbol of the Silver Wheel, the Great Queen of highest heavens, also undergoes important changes dur-



Figure 4.12: *A three-colored painting found on a ceramic vessel in Numentia (Spain)* (IBA.).

ing the end of the summer. One of the most peculiar characteristics of this bird is the fact that it can travel thousands of miles to avoid the colds of the winter of northern Europe, where it stays during the major part of the year. The main migration road of the cranes of Western Europe represents a straight line going from modern Belgium to Spain, passing through the middle part what was the land of the Gauls. Around the middle of the month of October, that is, around the Gaulish month of Samonios, the cranes fly over Gaul, going south, where the climate is more hospitable during the winter months. Most of them will spend the cold season in Spain, but some also stop in Gaul itself, even in its northern parts. For the men of Gaul, the yearly exodus of the crane may therefore appear to represent a descent from the higher heavens: it is the time when the cranes, which cannot be sighted during the bright part of the year, appear to come down to the earth, spending the dark months in their land or the one of their southern cousins, the Celtiberians.

Considering the central place occupied by the crane and the stag in the religious world of the Gauls, the fact that the beginning of the year would be marked by these two events, which are essential parts of the lives of these animals, would not be surprising. A ceramic vessel found in the Celtiberian settlement of Numantia (1^{st} c. B.C.) appears to skillfully depict the symbolic value of the crane, which is found at the center of a triskelion (See Fig. 4.12).

Painted in three colors, which are also the colors of the animal itself, the artwork also represents the three hues mirroring the three realms: the black of the Dark, the red of Life, and the white of the Bright. At the center of the threefold gyratory symbol, the crane may symbolize the turning of the celestial wheel. The return of the bird to the earth is a new beginning, and an event to be celebrated.

The end of the summer also marks the beginning of the mating season of one of the other most symbolic animals of the forest: the boar. A beast roaming near the surface of the earth, cloaked with black fur, and fed from the acorns covering the soil, the boar belongs to the Dark. The reign of the shadowy realm therefore marks a strengthening of the male boars, which can then attract females to produce offsprings that will also be sons of the winter, as their gestation lasts a little more than three months. Together with the stag, the boar is undaunted by the arrival of the dark season. On the contrary, both are at their peak while many other creature hide and strive for their survival.

More than the course of the sun, the autumnal equinox in particular, the signs shown by the most revered creatures of the land may have been the reference points around which the yearly cycle of the Gaulish World was articulated. Succumbing to the desire for a man-made regular order that would supplant the one of nature and allow an easy planning of the feast, the Gauls, during the early Gallo-Roman period at least, would use the monthly cycle to determine the date of the three nights of summer. This nonetheless may not have been the case at the beginning of the edification of this World, when the first feast was celebrated. The spiritual world of the early Celts was based on more than astronomical observations or calculations. The creatures living among them in the forests are more present in their religious art than the celestial bodies.

The three nights of summer therefore represent a conjunction of several natural phenomena: firstly, the alignment of the three gears that are put into motion by the wheel, that is, the the daily, monthly, and yearly cycles, which are at this moment all at a turning point marking the return of the strengths of the Dark. Secondly, the southern migration of the cranes, which occurs when the stag's antlers lose their velvety covering and begin

to be hardened, marking the return of his authority.

The nature of the celebrations of the three nights is never mentioned by the antique sources, and archeology has not been able to tell us anything about them either. The use of the traditions associated with the celebration of *Samhain* in medieval Ireland to determine the nature of the ones of the TRINOX SAMONI of the Gauls may be tempting, but it would nonetheless certainly lead us astray from the original significance of this feast. For example, the crane was not native to Ireland, and the island is nowhere near the path of migration of this bird. The central role played by the crane in the Gaulish World would therefore quickly have faded away into oblivion if this bird was not known by the people. More than the nature of the celebrations, however, the source of this event may be what matters most, and be what can teach us to reappropriate the natural world around us. The essence of the three nights of summer is the end of the Bright period and the beginning of a new yearly cycle, which begins with the reign of the Dark. The dusk of Life that comes with the fall is the sign of the return to the origin, or, in other words, a new birth out of the body of the Dark.

4.2.3.2 The Dark Semester

The beginning of a new year comes as a *tabula rasa* for the earth. During this time, the Ground is swept by the winds and the rain, until most of the trees have let their bloodied leaves fall down onto the soil. These leaves soon begin to be decomposed and to rot, becoming indistinguishable from the dirt forming the Ground itself. The dark semester will be full of trials for Life, but the Dark remains its source, what allows the very Being of all beings. These trials will take their toll on the individual beings composing the body of Life, but this body as a whole will find itself strengthened by them. In particular, the dark semester is the occasion for man to reappropriate a crucial part of his own essence, one that he continuously tends to overlook and ultimately forget: his earthly nature, the fact that before being part of the body of Life, he was only dirt, part of the body of the Dark.

The Coligny calendar teaches us the names of each one of the months of this period. Even though the meaning of most of these names is rather uncertain, they nonetheless give us a coherent

outline of the way the Gauls experienced the dark period of the year. These months are:

1 - SAMONIOS (15th-30th)	Summer
2 - DUMANNIOS	Fog (?)
3 - RIUROS	Frost (?)
4 - ANAGANTIOS	Ritual bath (?)
5 - OGRONNIOS	Cold (?)
6 - CUTIOS	Invocations (?)
7 - GIAMONIOS (1^{st}-15th)	Winter[26]

From these names, it appears that the main trait characterizing the dark semester was the harshness of the elements. The reign of the Dark is wet and cold. It is hard and intense, but it also reflects the truth of the Dark. Contrary to the Light, which is without heaviness, not tangible, the Dark represents something that can be touched, either hard or soft, wet or dry, hot or cold. It is perceived as more "real" than the visions offered by the Bright, but the price to pay for the experience of this tangibility is the danger of being swallowed by it.

As the dark part of the year is marked by the prevailing of the forces of the Dark over those of the Bright, this implies that there is an imbalance between the two. Man is thus led to experience the very essence of the Dark. He is pulled toward it more than ever, to such an extent that it may even threaten his own being. Man indeed is a mediator between the realms, and his very being arises from the harmonious tension between Dark and Bright. The takeover of the earth and the skies by the Dark during the winter forces man to plunge himself deeper into the source of his own being, but he also needs to keep the two realms in tension, otherwise, his own life would be engulfed by the Dark and he would cease to be. The earth, the body of the Dark, is itself inert and cold, the

[26] SAMONIOS: Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Pages 266-267; DUMANNIOS: According to Xavier Delamarre (ibid., Page 154) the name of the second month would mean "smoke." It would nonetheless seem more probable that it here designated "fog" rather than "smoke." The Russian word туман, meaning "fog," is considered to be a Turkic loanword, but this word may ultimately itself have been borrowed from an ancient Indo-European root. In particular, a connection with an Avestan root dunman, also meaning "fog," is rather credible (Harlez, *Manuel de la langue de l'Avesta*, Page 160); RIUROS: Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 260. ANAGANTIOS: ibid., Page 44. OGRONNIOS: ibid., Page 239. CUTIOS ibid., Page 133. GIAMONIOS: ibid., Page 179.

antithesis of Life, even though it represents the ground where it takes root and the source of its being. The yearly reign of the Dark is therefore an initiatic journey, one during which the living beings are brought closer to the boundary between being and non-being, life and death, so that the realization of their natural bond with the Dark and of their need for the Bright for their survival can lead to an intensification of the tension that they are meant to create and maintain.

Each one of the milestones of the reign of the Dark represents both an experience offered to all beings and a lesson meant to rekindle the fire in their heart that calls them to reappropriate their own essence. The aforementioned names of the months of the Gaulish calendar represent a fitting roadmap of this initiatic experience that man is forced to go through every year of his life, and this no matter whether our translations of these name is faithful to their original meaning or not, as these translations can all be adequately linked with the essence of the dark part of the yearly cycle, regardless of their accuracy. The liminal months will not be discussed, as their meaning represent a summary of the two halves of the year: the summer (SAMONIOS) and the winter (GIAMONIOS). Immediately after the opening of the dark period comes the time of the fog.

The Fog (DUMANNIOS) Fog only appears when the sunrays fail to hit the earth with their full force: at night, at dawn or dusk, or when the thick clouds of the Lofty cover the dome of the sky with its wooly mantle. When the fog engulfs a part of the land, it perturbs the lives of the creatures living inside it. Even during the daily reign of the Bright, when they are normally allowed to rely on their sight rather than their other senses, the fog bars them from seeing what lays at the horizon.

Hiding the daylight, it is as if the fog chased away the day to bring back the night. It attacks the daily reign of the Bright by preventing the living from receiving its warmth and its light. It acts as an agent of the Dark, helping it in the strife with its lofty opponent: it not only forces man to abandon his sight but it also increases his perception of the absence of warmth by coating his skin with a thin layer of water. The dampness of the fog penetrates the fur of the beasts and the clothes of men, as if plunging them

in the shadowy waters that are part of the body of the Dark. Blinded and wet by this agent of the lower realm, the creatures are led to recognize and to submit to the yoke of the strongest force of the winter. This incursion of the Dark into the dominion of the Bright, above the Ground, represents an assault against the heavenly forces, one that put the living in difficulty.

The Bright is nonetheless far from being powerless during this period. As if taunting the Dark while reminding the living of its power, the Bright manifests itself on the highest branches of the trees, which have now been stripped naked by the cold and the darkness. The white, translucent berries of the mistletoe become ripe during this time, when Life as a whole is weakened by the harshness of the winter. The green globes of mistletoe are a reminder of the fact that the wheel will continue to turn, soon bringing the spring that will allow the Life to reappear in all its splendor. The evergreen plant resists the *tabula rasa* initiated by the Dark, as its own life cycle is largely independent of the yearly dimension of the strife, and it thereby reminds man that the battle is still ongoing.

The Frost (RIUROS) Frost comes during the peak of the winter in the land of Gaul. A fiercer force than the fog, it hardens the shallow surfaces of water laying on the Ground and the dew that covers the leaves and the grass that remain during the cold season. Doing so, it prevents the plundering of the body of the Dark by the Bright. It interrupts the "water cycle," by which the combined action of the sun and the winds extracts water from the soil and the seas in order to bring them to the sky, where it will form the clouds, body of the Lofty. Frozen, hardened, the water stays on the earth, forming an armor covering the soil, protecting the Dark from its celestial opponents.

Ice, however, would be the most natural state of water if the reign of the Dark was absolute and permanent. It is the warmth of the Bright that allows it to take its liquid form during the major part of the year. The freezing of the waters during the coldest months threatens the very existence of the most of Life itself. Man, in particular, is not well equipped to live in frozen landscapes. Only his intelligence and his resourcefulness allow him to survive the victorious season of the Dark, when it has largely vanquished

the Bright. In what may appear as a betrayal of his own essence, as a son of the Dark, man will often feel compelled to appeal to the Bright for his survival and his comfort: kindling fires that break the yoke of the darkness and the cold over the winter, he strengthens the presence of the Bright upon the surface of the earth in order to preserve a semblance of equilibrium between the realms, an equilibrium that is necessary in order for him to *be*, as a mediator whose existence depends on the tension that it forms between the two poles of the creation. Somewhat paradoxically, the access to the fiery power of the Bright allows him to once again experience a greater intimacy with the great body of the Dark, by allowing him to plunge himself into its shadowy waters.

During this period, around the winter solstice, even the greatest elements of the sky appear to succumb to the power of the Dark. The Silver Wheel itself grows dark, and it is harder than ever for man to behold its glory. Even the wheel itself appears to retreat to the earth during the wintertime, leaving the heavens only populated by the stars, which nonetheless continue to follow the lead of the invisible wheel, continuously turning according to the order established by the celestial crown.

The Ritual Bath (ANAGANTIOS) The meaning of this Gaulish word is highly uncertain. An interpretation proposes to see it as designating the month of "no-travel."[27] As the central month of the dark season, when the nights are long and the cold intense, it would indeed not be a time fit for long journeys on foot or horseback. Men would be more enclined to stay indoors, taking refuge near the hearth at the center of their home, which acts as a doorway toward the Bright, filling their abode with light and warmth. When the Dark holds sway over the entire land, keeping it in darkness and cold, man is forced to conceal this passage that offers the Bright an access to the dominion of the Dark so that it would not be quenched by the shadowy forces. He thus remains close to it, protecting what allows his own survival.

Another interpretation sees the name of this month as linked with a form of "ritual bath."[28] This interpretation would allow an easy parallel with the celebration of the Irish feast of *Imbolc*,

[27] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 44.
[28] ibid., Page 44.

which involves the visit of sacred-wells and whose name has been interpreted as related to a "cleansing" (*imb-fholc*[29]). The basis of both etymologies is very shaky, but it nonetheless gives us an opportunity to examine the link between the dark semester and the act of bathing in general.

As seen in a previous chapter, the shadowy waters of the lakes, wells, and sources represent a gate allowing man to penetrate into the core of the great body of the Dark. It is by plunging his flesh into these waters that man can feel himself returning to his origin. It is in these waters that he can enjoy the greatest intimacy with his earthly, dark nature. The ritual bath is primarily not a mere way for him to clean himself. The dirt on his flesh is indeed itself part of the Dark. It is not something impure that he should get rid of, but rather a reminder of his own nature. The bath only accentuates the contact with the earth that is induced by the dirt and the mud on his skin. It does not cleanse him of his "sins." It does not heal the ailments of his body. What it does is to give him a new experience of intimacy with the Dark. It brings him back to the frontier between being and non-being, between his own individuality and his being part of the unity of the Dark, of all the matter part of the creation.

The ritual bath is a reenactment of man's birth: his coming out of the great body of the Dark and his plunge into the air offered to Life by the Bright. Such a ritual could hardly be performed at a more fitting time than during the heart of the winter. The beginning of the dark semester indeed marks a *tabula rasa*, with most of Life being forced into hiding, striving for its survival. The heart of the winter, on the other hand, is a time of preparation for the rebirth of Life, which will soon reconquer the face of the Dark once the Bright will begin to regain its strengths. The immersion into the waters is an occasion to renew his bond with his origin, while his emergence into the air offers him a chance to enhance his awareness of what he owes to the Bright. The bath gives man an opportunity to increase the tension between Dark and Bright that he is meant to embody. As a part of Life, he depends on both, but he must continually reappropriate the duality of his own nature in order to play his part in the great strife. The heart of the winter is the best time for him to reappropriate his dark nature, just as

[29] *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie – 1928*, Page 44.

the middle of the summer will be the most appropriate season to reappropriate the bright part of himself.

The heart of the winter is also a key moment for several of the emblematic animals of the forests of Gaul. At this time, the stag's antlers are now fully regrown, with a new tine on each side that comes with each new winter. The peak of the Dark's strength is therefore also reflected by the animal that symbolizes it in the Gaulish World. A peak, however, implies that a decline is inevitable...

For the boar, on the other hand, the heart of the winter represents the end of its mating period. This end comes together with the earliest litters of piglets, those that were conceived at the end of the summer. This is therefore also a period where this animal is strong, with the arrival of a new generation that comes soon after the most impressive males have succeeded in producing an offspring. The wheel, however, continues to turn.

The Cold (OGRONNIOS) The coldest part of the winter normally follows the winter solstice, at a time when the sway of the Dark over earth and sky begins to grow weaker. Like the darkness, which are only what remains when light is absent, the coldness of the earth represents an absence of the warmth of the Bright, a low level of movement of the multitude of particles composing it. Contrary to the Bright, which is continuously in motion, combining the regular cycles of the Wheel with the chaotic nature inherent to the Lofty, the Dark is endowed with a certain calmness and steadfastness. When it reign over the earth, its own nature is reflected on the Ground: it is cold, immobile, and quiet.

For Life, extreme cold represents a challenge. Contrary to minerals or metals, the very existence of all plants and animals depends on the movements, exchanges, or transfers between the cells forming their "body." Life needs the heat of the Bright in order to be created and to survive. The raw matter forming the body of Life is directly extracted from the body of the Dark, but it is the Bright that initiates and allows its growth. During the winter, the germination of the plants is inhibited by the cold. Many animals are forced to retreat under the Ground. It is as if Life itself was being extinguished by its parent. If the lifeline tying every living

being to the Bright is cut off, they then are taken by to the womb from which they came.

The cold is not by itself painful for the living, perhaps as a sign that the return to the ground is not to be feared, and inevitable. Immersed in freezing waters, the quenching of man's life is not only painless: it may even appear pleasant. As the heat flees his flesh, both his body and his mind are numbed, as if he was delicately enfolded in a silk blanket. Only his desire to remain separate from the oneness of the Dark leads him to resist this embrace bringing him down below. His will to live is inextricably linked with his bond with the Bright, which is what stands against his own origin. His destiny calls him to resist the return to the body of the Dark so that he can produce a harmony between the two poles of the creation. What the experience of the cold teaches him is his own frailty. It prepares him for the day when he no longer will have the strength to resist the embrace of the earth. It reminds him that this day is not to be feared, but that he nonetheless has something to accomplish before he returns to the ground.

Man, however, is not the only creature affected by the colds of this month that follows the peak of the winter. As the nights begin to grow shorter and shorter, marking the decline of the forces of the Dark, its most emblematic creature also encounters new challenges. The antlers that gave him his majesty and strength suddenly fall onto the ground. He is now left without the means necessary to defend himself and his territory. The king of the forest has yet to be dethroned, but his authority is now considerably weakened.

At the same time, the crane, which spent the last few months in its southern retreat, begins to fly north as soon as the cold wave recedes, as she instinctively knows that from now on, the forces of the Bright will begin to reconquer the earth and the sky. Appearing to leave the earth, in this case the land of Gaul or Spain, in order to dwell in the sky, the crane changes her allegiance. Ally of the Dark during the winter, it seems that she will now join the forces of the Bright, as if she was now repulsed by the feeble appearance of the stag, which represents the state of the Dark as a whole. As the cold now recedes, and the day grows in length with the passing of each day, the living nonetheless have reasons to express themselves, making themselves heard throughout the sky.

The In-vocations (CUTIOS) Once again, the etymology of the name of this month is only the result of an informed guesswork. The root of this word may have a common origin with the Latin word *guttur* meaning "throat," with the month therefore being linked with the idea of a proclamation, an invocation, or simply the sound of a voice. The time of the year certainly represents a period when the air is filled with sounds: the beginning of the spring is a source of rejoicing for both men and animals. The birds chirp in the morning that comes increasingly earlier in the daily cycle. The newborn piglets cry out for food, while the boars roam the forest looking for freshly grown plants. Men celebrate the end of the winter and the return of the heat of the sun, which dries the moisture out of their clothes and their home, and allows them to work the fields, to hunt, or to wage wars against their enemies.

Songs of rejoicing are certainly heard throughout the villages, as feasts are prepared to honor the mercy of the Dark that allowed them to remain above the ground and the splendor of the Bright that allows Life to once again retake possession of the surface of the earth. Thus does the winter (GIAMONIOS) ends, marking the end of the dark semester, the first half of the yearly cycle.

4.2.3.3 The Bright Semester

The completion of the first half of the yearly cycle represents a turning point: the moment when the Bright finally begins to overcome the Dark, which is undefeated but grows weaker every day. The strife will nonetheless continue until the turning of the wheel will mark a decline of the celestial forces. Once again, the Coligny calendar gives us the names of each one of the months of this period, names whose etymologies are very problematic but that nonetheless provide us some clues concerning the way the Gauls saw the reign of the Bright. The months are named as follows:

1 - GIAMONIOS (15th-30th)	Winter
2 - SIMI VISONNA	Middle-spring (?)
3 - EQVOS	Horse (?)
4 - ELEMBIVIOS	Deer (?)
5 - AEDRINIOS	Burning (?)
6 - CANTLOS	Chant (?)
7 - SAMONIOS (1^{st}-15th)	Summer[30]

A first look at these names shows a significant difference with those of the dark season: whereas the first part of the year is marked by the appearance of several weather phenomena, which mostly occur during this period, such as the frost, the cold, or the fog, the reign of the Bright, on the other hand, exhibits a particular link with the "middle realm": Life. Two of the six months appear to bear the names of animals. This link between Bright and Life is nonetheless perfectly understandable. The sky of the bright season indeed does not significantly differs from the one of the other part of the year. There are few phenomena associated with hot temperatures, in the same manner that the snow, the frost, or fog is associated with colder periods. The most visible changes that come with the end of the winter are the ones experienced by the surface of the earth.

The surface, however, is the dominion of Life. During the dark period, the Tree of Life is trimmed, stripped of its green mantle that covers the earth, but as soon as the Bright regains some of its strengths, it can draw Life out of the Ground, inviting and assisting the plants to take their distance with the great body of the Dark and to extend themselves toward the sky, dominion of the Bright. It can also lead the animals out of their shelter so that they can behold the face of the sun and reconquer their land. Life is born out of the Dark and the Deep, but it is Life that allows it to shine in all its splendor. It is because of this gift of the Bright that Life is ready to distance itself from its origin, from the source of Being itself, as if tempting the living beings by visions and ideas so that they would betray their "parent."

The reign of the Bright over earth and skies therefore goes

[30] GIAMONIOS: Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Pages 179; SIMI VISONNA: ibid., Page 274; EQVOS: ibid., Page 165. ELEMBIVIOS: ibid., Page 161. AEDRINIOS: ibid., Page 33. CANTLOS ibid., Page 104. SAMONIOS: ibid., Pages 266–267.

hand in hand with the renewal of Life's dominion over the surface separating the two opposite realms. It puts Life at the center of the strife, as the sons of the Dark are during this period greatly helped by what the shadowy realm stands against. The transition between the two reigns is nonetheless smooth, even inconspicuous in the Gaulish calendar, a fact that may be surprising considering the elements related to it in the late Celtic tradition, the Irish one in particular.

For many of the modern hermeneuts of the Celtic tradition, the medieval Irish feasts indeed appear to present a clear and simple picture of the key moments of the yearly cycles of the Celts. *Samhain* marks the entry into the dark season, while *Beltain* represents a celebration of the return of the bright one, the two symbolizing the complementary forces of nature. The Coligny calendar, which is the most comprehensive and precise source at our disposal concerning the vision of the yearly cycle among the ancient Celts, nonetheless appears to deny such a clear-cut representation. As a counterpart to the "three nights of summer" (the *Samhain* of the Irish), one would expect to find a similar feast six months later, at the middle of the month of GIAMONIOS ("Winter"), and yet, no recurring event is found on the Gaulish calendar.

The absence of a clear demarcation between the reign of the Dark and the one of the Bright may be seen as highlighting the continuous and harmonious nature of the strife. The turning of the wheel does not occur as a series of jerky movements but rather as a continuous rotation, and the change of balance between Dark and Bright also reflects this continuity. Only the very beginning of the cycle is marked as a special event. The rest of the year forms a totality, which nonetheless displays the power play of the different forces of the creation. The yearly strife reflected by the passing of the days, months, and semesters represents a manifestation of the harmony and unity of the creation, rather than one of dissension and separation. As Heidegger reminds us:

> The strife is not rift [*Riss*], in the sense of a tearing open of a mere cleft; rather, it is the intimacy of the mutual dependence of the contestants. The rift carries the contestants into the source of their unity, their common ground. It is the fundamental design [*Grundriss*]. It is the outline sketch [*Auf-riss*] that marks out

> the fundamental features of the rising up of the clearing of beings. This design [*Riss*] does not allow the contestants to break apart. It brings the contest between measure and limit into a shared outline [*Umriss*].[31]

The contrast between the two semesters is only a worldly caricature meant to help man grasp the nature of the strife. There is no celebration of the passage from the dark to the bright semester because the two are completely intertwined with one another. Each day of the winter sees the return of the Bright during the day, which then takes over the earth for a few hours. In the same manner, each month the moon shows its bright countenance during the darkest hours of the night, no matter which one of the realms holds sway over the semester. Man is meant to be torn apart between his belonging to the whole and his individuality that requires that he break this unity in order to get a limited grasp of its nature.

Another reason could nonetheless also explain the absence of a celebration of the beginning of the bright semester. As a son of the Dark, a celebration of the overcoming of the shadowy forces may appear to be a betrayal of his own nature. The Tree of Life as a whole is attracted to the Bright, which allows its sprouting out of the soil, its conquering of the surface of the Dark, and its extension toward the skies. This attraction is nonetheless also a source of danger for him, as what allows his growth may also lead him to be cut off from his roots and thereby to lose the essence of his own being, leaving his destiny unaccomplished. Such a celebration may occur, but it needs to be concealed from the source of all concealment. How may one indeed conceal anything from the Dark and the Deep? The concealment of the darkness can only occur with the help of light, and only something Light, without substance or "heaviness," may be hidden from the body of the Dark. Thoughts, ideas, silent devotions: these are forms of worldly expression that can be concealed from the Dark. A fire in the sky is another, something that belongs to the Light, in the two senses

[31] English translation from: Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, Page 38; Original German: "Der Streit ist kein Riß als das Aufreißen einer bloßen Kluft, sondern der Streit ist die Innigkeit des Sichzugebörens der Streitenden. Dieser Riß reißt die Gegenwendigen in die Herkunft ihrer Einheit aus dem einigen Grunde zusammen. Er ist Grundriß. Er ist Aufriß, der die Grundzüge des Aufgehens der Lichtung des Seienden zeichnet. Dieser Riß läßt die Gegenwendigen nicht auseinanderbersten, er bringt das Gegenwendige von Maß und Grenze in den einigen Umriß." From: Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Page 51.

of the word, both luminous and without "heaviness," something that can be seen but not be touched.

The month of GIAMONIOS ("winter") is the hinge between the semesters, equally split between the two. It marks the formal end of the winter season, with the heat and light of the sun growing stronger every day. The month that follows, and that opens the bright semester after the hinge formed by GIAMONIOS, marks the return of the spring.

The Middle of Spring (SIMI VISONNA) Even though the arrival of the spring is determined by the turning of the celestial wheel, its signs are nonetheless more visible on the surface of the earth than in the sky. These signs firstly are the appearance of the first buds on the trees, which are still without foliage. Fresh grass begins to emerge from the soil that finally receives the light and the warmth of the sun. Inside the earth, the seeds and kernels scattered by the birds and the critters of the forest, which were buried under the dirt and the decomposing leaves of the past year, now receive the signal marking the end of their long sleep: their germination is initiated by the fleeing of the cold, and they now know that their growth will be facilitated rather than impeded by the elements.

The fleeing of the cold is caused by the increasing length of the time when the sun holds sway of the daily sky, but also by the change of the sun's course, which sends its light to the earth with a more direct angle of attack. The onslaught of the sun is nonetheless mitigated by the action of the Lofty: the clouds of the springtime frequently hide the bright face of the sun and it pours out large quantities of water over the forests, the mountains, and the fields. This may appear to represent an internal strife between the forces of the Bright: the Lofty preventing the Light from striking the body of the Dark and the Life covering it. A regular and harmonious strife between these two heavenly forces are nonetheless a key allowing the reemergence of Life during the spring: Life indeed needs both warm sunlight and rain in order to flourish, and as the two can hardly occur at the same time, an alternation between the two is therefore necessary. The Lofty and the Light must strive against one another, and yet, none of them can prevail over the other for more than a few days without

threatening the growth of Life.

The strife between the Lofty and the Light, the rain and the sun rays, lasts several weeks. During this time, a slow but constant change of the surface of the earth can be observed. The skeleton of the forest, which stood out from the soil as the antlers of a multitude of giant stags, begins to be concealed by the green canopy emerging from each one of these wooden horns. Most of the earth is soon covered by this green mantle, which conceals the darkness of the soil while the sun's light fills the sky. Inside the forest, this canopy represents a wedge inserted between Dark and Bright, earth and sky. The green mantle of Life opens up a space where the two poles can encounter each other, under the auspices of Life itself. The fern and the grass partly cover the body of the Dark, while the dancing leaves act as gatekeepers preventing the sunrays, agents of the Bright, from overwhelming the clearing. Life itself not only embodies a harmonious association between Dark and Bright: it also foster direct encounters between the two, encounters that can be witnessed by all the living beings.

The middle of the spring therefore represents a high point of the influence of the "middle realm" in the great strife. The springtime resembles a mechanical spring in that it harmoniously keeps what is found at its extremities at bay from each other, and yet it also joins them through its own cyclic movement of compression and release. The oscillations of Life, tied to the yearly cycle, induce a cyclic encounter and separation between Dark and Bright, earth and sky, and the "spring" marks the time when the two realms are pushed apart from one another, letting Life reign over the space opened between them.

This period nonetheless does not merely affect the plants. The does that were impregnated by the strongest stags during the summer of the previous year are now giving birth. The fawns are all born during the reign of the Bright, but the young stags will have to wait for the coming of the reign of the Dark to be bestowed their first antlers, symbol of their authority and a weapon to defend themselves. As shown by the names of the next two months, the spring is a time when the front scene of the great play is occupied by Life, even though the Bright reigns over the skies.

The Horse (EQVOS) The name of the month of EQVOS is peculiar because of the appearance of the sequence [kw], which is very unusual in Gaulish, especially at the time of the Coligny calendar. The root word appears easily identifiable to the linguist: it would seem to be related to the *equus* of the Romans, a word derived from the Indo-European root h$_1$ék$^{\text{w}}$os, meaning "horse." A problem nonetheless immediately arises with this identification: it is well known that in Gaulish the sequence [kw] became [p].[32] The Gaulish word for "horse" is also well known from the name of the horse-riding goddess: EPONA, and many other names of places and people. In the absence of any solid alternative to this interpretation, the word has been considered to represent a dialectal archaic form, or perhaps a loanword from the Latin.[33]

Regardless of the word's origin, the presence of this animal, which occupied a special place in the lives of many Indo-European peoples, is hardly surprising. The ancient Thessalian calendar, for example, contains a month named Ἱπποδρόμιος [hippodrómios], that is, the month of "horse racing." The link between the horse and the end of the spring in the Gaulish World remains a mystery, but it probably was related to a "use" of the horse, rather than to the own life-cycle of this creature. The Gauls were famous for their cavalry (Lat. *equites*), which can be seen leading the Gaulish warriors on the Cauldron of Gundestrup.[34] The return of the favorable weather of the spring may signal the beginning of different equestrian activities: racing, warfare, or even sacrifices.

Furthermore, as it was seen in the last chapter,[35] the horse-riding goddess EPONA may have been assimilated with the Silver Wheel itself, and therefore the month of the horse may be linked with the honoring of the celestial queen. During the Bright season, the galaxy indeed grows more and more visible in the night sky. Its central bulge, which is its most luminous part, emerges from under the horizon at the end of the winter. The center of the galaxy then appears higher in the sky during the summer, marking the peak of its visibility from the northern hemisphere in which the

[32] This sound change affected both the Brittonic and the Gaulish branch of the Celtic languages, but not the Goidelic branch, which includes Old Irish. See also the Greek ἵππος, which experienced the same transformation.

[33] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Page 165.

[34] See Fig. 5.13.

[35] See § 3.2.4.

land of Gaul is located, and therefore also the peak of its influence upon the earth. More than ever, the Silver Wheel manifests itself as what drives the celestial machinery, the different gears whose rotation marks the days, the months, and the years. The seasonal course of the heart of the galaxy therefore appears to oscillate between Dark and Bright: during the reign of the shadows, it plunges under the horizon, as if it was enticed by the power of the Dark, but when the Bright holds sway over the skies, it then emerges from the horizon and soars toward the heavenly throne, the highest position in the heavenly hierarchy, even higher than the sun, the most present manifestation of the Bright.

The month of the horse does not occupy the middle of the Bright semester, but it nonetheless also represents the peak of the forces of the Light. The period during which the summer solstice will fall, which can vary greatly because of the lunar nature of the Gaulish calendar, will indeed be centered around this month. On the day of the solstice, the length of the reign of the Bright during each day will be the longest, while the night, reign of the Dark, will be the shortest. With the Silver Wheel's brightness illuminating the darkest parts of the night and the sun's blazing rays filling the sky and striking the earth during the day, the forces of the Bright are thus stronger than they ever were since the beginning of this yearly cycle. One of the three components of the Bright nonetheless has yet to manifest its strength: the Lofty, the clouds and the winds.

Once again, however, the turning of the wheel marking the strengthening of the Bright also profoundly affects Life, the "middle realm" that grows under its protection. On the surface of the earth, the flowers are now blooming, allowing their seeds to be carried and scattered by countless agents of the Bright: firstly by the winds, but also by Life itself: bees, butterflies, or moths that feed themselves from the flower's nectar while helping them to reproduce and extend the territory occupied by their branch of the Tree of Life. Many critters of the forest will nonetheless impede this work of expansion: hordes of insects, rodents, but also larger animals like the boar or the deer, relentlessly tear up the leaves and flowers in order to survive and to make their own branch of the tree take over a greater part of the earth. This shows that Life itself can be seen as divided despite the unity of its body. The creatures creeping on the soil will tend to impede the growth

of the plants, as their stems and leaves are their main source of sustenance, while the living beings assisting their expansion tend to be flying in the air. The creeping beings only grow by stepping on lower branches of the Tree of Life, chipping them away piece by piece and giving them back to the great body of the Dark after extracting what they needed of them, thereby serving the most fundamental realm.

The flying beings helping for the pollination of plants, on the other hand, not only do not need to extinguish lower forms of life in order to ensure their survival: they rather assist these lower branches, together with the winds, thereby allowing the Tree of Life to grow as a whole. Serving the growth of Life, the pollinating creatures and the Lofty are thereby weakening the dominion of the Dark on the surface of the earth. Creatures of the air and the winds, the bees therefore diligently act as agents of the Bright in its strife opposing it to the Dark. The whole of Life mediates the strife and it allows the encounter between the two realms, but each branch of the Tree of Life, and even individual beings, can choose to give their support to either one of the realms, doing its work willingly or instinctively. The wheel nonetheless continues to turn, now bringing the summer and the center point of the bright semester.

The Deer (ELEMBIVIOS) Now comes the heart of the bright period of the year, the summer, when the Light shines more than at any other time. Following the month of the horse (EQVOS), it bears the name of ELEMBIVIOS: the month of the deer. The meaning of the word is well established: it is derived from an Indo-European root found also in Greek (ἔλαφος) [élaphos], or in the English word designating the *Elk*. Ancient Greek calendars include a month bearing a name that may once again help us interpret the link between the animal and the yearly cycle: Ἐλαφηβολιών [elaphēboliṓn], the month "[of Artemis] hunting deer," which was associated with celebrations where offering of deer were performed in honor of the hunting goddess.[36]

Ancient sources, and the Coligny calendar itself, are silent concerning the existence of celebrations involving deer sacrifices

[36] See: Bouillet, *Dictionnaire classique de l'antiquité sacrée et profane*, Page 417.

among of the Gauls. One thing nonetheless seems clear: the fact that the month of the deer, when it is probable that the animal symbolizing the Dark and the Deep was sacrifice, is located precisely at the center point of the second semester, at the moment when the Bright is at the peak of its power, certainly is not coincidental. In the life-cycle of the deer, this month comes two months before the mating season, at a time when the stag has yet to fully grow back his antlers, symbol of his glory and authority. The totem of the Dark and the Deep shares with this realm his times of strength and weakness. Strong, with his antlers crowning his head, when the shadowy realm holds sway over earth and sky, he appears weakened when the reign of the Bright comes, having lost his majestic horns and escaping the light of the sun to take cover in the most remote parts of the forest. Contrary to the doe, the stag is indeed seldom spotted roaming the fields that are showered with the Light of the great celestial body of the day. He prefers the darkness. He is a creature of the shadows, increasing the aura of mystery and holiness that surrounds this lord of the forests of Gaul. For the ancient Celts, a people that valued strength and outward appearance, the time of weakness of the deer makes it a target for the hunters.

The killing of the deer has a sacred dimension, one that can nonetheless be manifold. The Celtic World does not succumb to the temptation of an easy cut out of the oneness of the creation into an opposition between right and wrong, friend and foe, self and whole. Men are born out of the Dark and the Deep. They are the sons of the shadowy realm. By killing the emblem of the Dark when it experiences its weakest state, they may simply be trimming this branch of the Tree of Life, strengthening it before the Dark can once again reconquer the earth and the sky, once the turning of the wheel would allow it. The deer allowing themselves to be hunted and butchered are indeed the weakest elements of their kind. The hunt then only leaves the strongest among them standing above the ground, thereby paving the way for the return of the Dark, with new generations of fawn growing in weight and strength.

Man may nonetheless also hunt the totem of the Dark in order to honor the Bright. Striking a final blow to the leader of the shadowy realm, he may thereby consecrate the supremacy of the celestial forces over earth and sky at this precise moment of the

yearly cycle. He is indeed born out of the body of the Dark and the Deep, but it is the Bright that now allows Life as a whole to flourish during this semester. The Light allows him to feed himself, by plucking the fruits of the lower branches of the Tree of Life. The Lofty provides him with fresh water, which is stolen from the Dark and purified by sunrays before being poured onto his flesh by the showers from the clouds. The privilege of being a builder of the World places him above all the other branches of the Tree of Life. All of this he owes to the celestial realm, which he may choose to honor by sacrificing the emblem of his own parent, the Dark.

Men may nonetheless also be divided concerning their allegiances. Part of the Teuta may perform the sacrifice for one reason, while the rest would do it for another. Some may even prevent the ritual killing of the symbol of the Dark, putting fidelity to their birthgiver above anything else, even Life itself. No matter what, the peak of the Bright nonetheless calls for the blood of the Dark.

At dawn or dusk, when the sky has been painted with the blood of Life, the hunter thus carries his sharpened tools forged from the body of the Dark, the iron taken from its flesh and shaped into arrows, javelins, or swords. Using a faithful servant of the Dark, the dog, to track the presence of the stag, the hunter relies on his sight to spot him among the trees and bushes. Finally struck down by the metal, the stag falls downs to the ground, and its lifeblood begins to flow back to the inert body of the Dark, displaying its red hue to all those who participated in this ritual. The corpse is then carried outside of the concealment of the forest in order to be seen by the Bright, and it is butchered in honor of the order of the creation. The meat may then be served during the feast celebrating the gathering of the Teuta, which occurs during this time of the year.

During the early Gallo-Roman period, representatives of the different tribes of Gaul gathered in *Lugudunum*, the fortress of Lugus, each year on the first of August, according to the Roman calendar that had supplanted the indigenous one.[37] As noted by Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, it would seem that such a gathering would have a Celtic origin, predating the conquest.[38] The French

[37] The gathering is known in Latin as the *concilium Galliarum*.

[38] H. d. Arbois de Jubainville and Loth, *Cours de littérature celtique Vol. 7*, Page 317.

historian also notes that the date of this feast coincides with one of the four major festivals of the Irish year: *Lugnasad*, the "assembly [of] Lug."

At the middle point of the semester, when both Life and the Bright are at their peak, with the former owing its splendor to the latter, men therefore congregate at the major city found in the center of Gaul, a city itself dedicated to the Bright itself. The heads of the Teuta come together under the auspices of the Bright in order to renew the bonds uniting the tribes and their members into a coherent whole, sharing a single World, with a single will. As their link with the Dark is now at its weakest point, they are free to devote themselves to the building of their World. The stag has disappeared, leaving men as lords of the earth, while the Bright reigns supreme over the skies. This gathering is nonetheless not a mere celebration or a show of force. It is a chance for them to bring the Teuta together so that its forces would be directed toward their own destiny: the increase and the strengthening of the harmonious tension between Dark and Bright, to pull the string of the bow of Life near its breaking point, awaiting the release of being.

While the men of Gaul are gathered under the gaze of the sun, the rest of the Tree of Life continues to be subjected to the changes brought on by the reign of the Bright. Even though the summer solstice, marking the end of the lengthening of the daytime, occurred during the previous month, the heat felt on the surface of the earth continues to rise, due to the "lag of the season."[39] Soon, the "month of fire" will mark a turning point in the yearly cycle.

The Burning (AEDRINIOS) The name of the month of AEDRINIOS is in all likelihood based on the Indo-European root $*h_2eyd^h$- designating a burning or the kindling of a fire.[40] The same root appears in the name of one of the most powerful tribes of Gaul: the AEDUI, the "ardent ones."[41] The Latin word *aestas*, designating the "summer," also evolved from the same root. The location of this month inside the yearly cycle would seem to ex-plain the rea-

[39] The earth and the seas need time to accumulate and release solar energy. The hottest or coldest periods of the year therefore occur around two months after the solstices.

[40] See: Rix, *Lexikon der Indogermanischen Verben*, Page 259.

[41] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Pages 35–36. OIr. *áed*.

son behind the choice of this name: it corresponds to the hottest time of the bright semester. It is the "month of fire" or the "burning month" because of the heat accumulated on the earth, the seas, and the air itself.[42] The nights already have begun to grow longer, marking a weakening of the reign of the Bright over the daily cycle, but the influence of the sun's light and warmth on the surface of the earth is now at its apex.

This time also marks the end of the reproduction cycle of many parts of Life. The apple tree has produced the fruits that will be used for man's sustenance, and the pleasure of his senses as well, by being transformed into cider. Now ripe, these fruits are plucked before they are baked by the blazing light of the summer sun. The wheat, which was carefully planted and tended by the farmers, begins to be harvested, with the ears cut off from their earthly roots and thrown into jars of clay, protecting them from being reclaimed by the great body of the Dark.

For man, the show of force of the Bright may represent a tipping point, reminding him that he needs the Dark more than it needs him. In the past months, he rejoiced in the reign of the Bright, enjoying the fresh air outside his dwelling, delighted by the warmth of the sun on his naked skin. Now, however, as the Dark is seldom seen, the sun of AEDRINIOS burns his flesh. It darkens the tone of his skin, as a reminder that he remains a son of the Dark, a man, who belongs to the "middle realm" rather than to the luminous one. The heat of the ether dries up the moisture of his flesh, robbing him of the water of life to take it to the clouds of the Lofty. Sweating and thirsty, he more than ever feels the need to stay close to the shadowy waters. Quenching his thirst in the rivers or the lakes, and plunging his whole body inside the Dark in order to experience the cool embrace of the earth, he can now realize that the Bright has now grown too strong. A balance between Dark and Bright is necessary in order for Life to perdure and prosper, and Life itself is meant to play a part in the preservation of this equilibrium. When the relief of the night comes, with the momentary return of the darkness upon the earth, he can now sleep on the bare soil, without clothes, feeling the freshness of the body of the Dark that soothes him. The discomfort induced by the heat pushes him back to the earth, back to his origin. Thankful

[42] The αἰθήρ (ether) of the Greeks also comes from *h_2eyd^h-.

to both realms to which he owes his own being, the tension that he exercises between the two is now greater than before.

Tensions are nonetheless also particularly present among the heavenly forces during this time of the year. The heat of the Light stirs up the air of the Lofty, fanning the flames of chaos across the sky. The dampness extracted from the Dark collides with the blazing rays of the Light. A considerable amount of water finds itself floating in the heavens, greatly inflating and densifying the body of the Lofty. The color of the clouds slowly changes from wooly white to pitch black, and the thick and dark mantle of the Lofty begins to mask the face of the sun, preventing the bulk of its Light from reaching both Life and the Dark. The hottest month is the time when the storms are the most frequent and the most violent in the land of Gaul. When the heavenly vaults of the Lofty have been filled thanks to the work of the Light, the clouds and the winds take over the sky, hiding the sun, the moon, the stars, and even the Silver Wheel itself. These vaults are soon overflowing, and torrents of water are then poured back onto the surface of the earth. These showers provide a relief from the parching heat of the summer to countless living beings, as it also gives fresh water to quench the thirst of men and animals, and waters the Tree of Life as a whole.

Emboldened by its own power, the Lofty can even attempt to strike both Life and the face of the Dark, using thunderbolts that can burn men to the ground or shatter trees and rocks. It can light wildfires that turn parts of the earth into sources of fiery brightness than would not only annihilate living organisms but also break the reign of the Dark that still prevails during the night, and render futile the great heavenly body that normally provides the light of the day. The Lofty thus attempts to supplant the Light and to take over the command of the Bright as a whole. The hegemony of the Lofty is nonetheless always short-lived. The heat of the Light above the clouds soon disperses the clouds, trimming down the body of the Lofty as its watery vaults are emptied, as soon the sky once again is filled by the light of the sun.

Man's attitude while he witnesses this internal strive of the heavenly forces is necessarily ambiguous. The showers offered by the Lofty save him from the burning heat of the Light, and they allow Life as a whole to continue and grow. This takeover of the

Lofty nonetheless also threatens his own being: his people can be struck down by lightning, and the wildfires that they cause can burn down his village. What it reveals is that the Dark needs to regain strength in order for the balance between the realms to be restored. The dissensions between the heavenly forces reflect this lack of equilibrium, as only when the Dark is weak may the forces of the Bright attempt to undermine one another.

As an ultimate sign of the reign of the Bright, and perhaps also of the end of this reign, shooting stars are more numerous during this month than during any other. The inconspicuous phenomenon of the transient appearance of these "stars" may remind the living that what shines is soon condemned to return to the Dark. The wheel continues its turn, now bringing the month of the chant.

The Chant (CANTLOS) The month of CANTLOS is the last complete month belonging to the bright semester. It therefore marks the beginning of the end of the reign of the Bright, and the reappearance of the Dark on the front scene of the great play. With the equilibrium between the different realms being progressively reestablished, the strife is rekindled, as each one of them thinks that it can prevail over the others.

The common interpretation of the origin of the name CANTLOS is rather well substantiated: it is derived from a root meaning "singing," related to the English word: "chant."[43] The reason ex-plaining this choice, however, can only be the subject of an informed guesswork. An examination of the place of this month in the yearly cycle may nonetheless give us some clue concerning the nature of this designation, and the place that this time occupied in the World of the Celts.

The reproduction cycle of a large part of the plants comes to an end during this month. The wheat has already been harvested and the grain has been stored for the coming year. The barley is now cut off in the fields as the heat of the summer slowly fades away, replaced by the freshness of the fall. If the internal strife between the Light and the Lofty has been sufficiently harmonious, alternating the heat and the light of the sun with the showers of the dark clouds in good proportions, the fruits of the strife of earth

[43] Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise.* Pages 104.

and sky are then plentiful. With its granaries full, the people as a whole can now rejoice, as each man knows that unless a disaster strikes them, they will have enough food to sustain their flesh during the coming winter.

All over the globe, the end of the harvest marked a time of celebration for populations heavily dependent on agriculture. The harvest itself often was a collective work, one that demanded the participation of all those physically able to do so. Gathered outside while enjoying the freshly prepared food made with the product of their hard work, the people eat and drink, dance and sing to honor the benevolence of nature, the strife that allows the perpetuation of Life, and the continuation of their own being, in particular. The songs of CANTLOS may precisely be linked with these celebrations, or even sung during the long days of work for the harvest, when men, women, and children are all gathered in the fields, doing a repetitive task that invites the uttering of chants of yore, transmitted from generation to generation by people who went through a great number of seasons. The month of the chants may therefore be filled with the voice of the Teuta, singing in unison while they work together for their survival.

The end of the harvest comes together with the dusk of Life as a whole, the decline of its sway over the surface of the earth that depended on both the weakened status of the Dark and the reign of the Bright over the skies. The signs of this dusk of Life is nonetheless not found in the sky, but rather on the trees of the forest, near the surface. As the strengths of the Bright slowly fade away, the green canopy that marked the dominion of Life over the earth begins to darken, taking the red hue of the blood flowing inside the veins of the creatures roaming among the trees, the color of the sky during the dusk and dawn of the day. These leaves will soon begin to fall down to the ground, joining back the body of the Dark, which now grows stronger every day, fed from the decaying remains of the formerly living beings. The return of the Dark, however, can also be seen in the life-cycle of its emblematic animal: the stag.

Perhaps as a preparation of the return of the forces of the Dark and the Deep, the emblematic animal of this realm begins its mating period during this month. At this time, the antlers of the stag are now fully regrown. The protective velvety coating

covering his antlers begins to disappear, and his crown begins to harden, taking its final form. The impressive roar of the king of the animals of Gauls can be heard resonating throughout the land. His below is meant to attract the attention of the does, with which he intends to produce an offspring, and to scare off the eventual challengers to his dominion. Humiliated during the summer, when members of his kind were sacrificed because of their weakened state, the stag now proclaims with his loud voice the return of the Dark and the reestablishment of his own authority. The shout of the stag echoes with the chants of the harvest celebrations, the two filling the air of the month of CANTLOS, announcing the nearness of the end of the reign of the Bright.

Carefully selecting the most promising stags of the forest, the does allow themselves to be impregnated so as to produce a new generation of deer, which will be stronger than the one before, perhaps preventing its overpowering by the servants of the Bright. The stag was sacrificed at the heart of the summer, but now the wheel is turning against the celestial forces, and he is ready to reconquer his dominion. The cycle is now close to its end, and close to a new beginning, with the formal ending of the bright semester, with the month of SAMONIOS.

4.2.3.4 The Return of the Three Nights: End and Beginning

The yearly cycle ends with the first half of the month of SAMONIOS, the "[end of] the summer." It is the period when the cranes begin to migrate south, leaving their summer dwelling to settle in some parts of Gaul or Spain. The majestic bird appears to leave the sky to return to the earth, on the banks of lakes and ponds where her long legs allow her to anchor her feet into the muddy soil while she keeps her body over the waters, in the air where she is used to flying. She joins the stag, whose mating period ends and which is now at the peak of its prestige. It is as if she was attracted by his renewed majesty, which led her to abandon the Bright, the realm that now grows weaker every day. Always siding with the dominant force of nature, she switches her allegiance, following the flow of the seasons and the cyclic order of the strife.

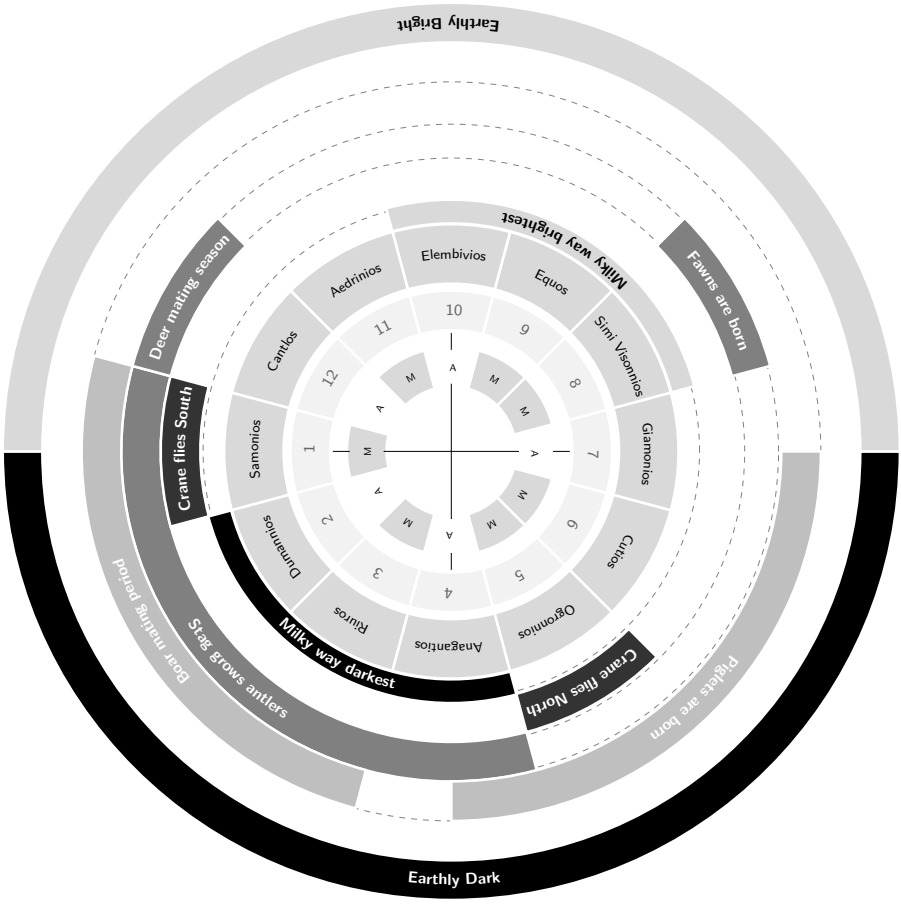


Figure 4.13: *The links between natural events and the yearly cycle.*

The crane thus follows the heavenly element associated with her: the Silver Wheel itself, whose luminous central bulge soon begins to enter the horizon, as if it also descended to the earth, leaving its celestial throne to join the Dark while it appears to prevail over the Bright. The sky therefore is found to be a mirror a Life, with both realms echoing with one another, and shedding light on each other.

The wheel of the year may be represented as in Fig. 4.13, showing how certain key natural phenomena are articulated together to perform the great play witnessed by every living beings each year of their life. Each one of the three realms, and each

one of the elements composing them, play a part in the harmonious strife that is linked with the turning of the wheel. The strife is harmonious, not only because neither one of the three realms permanently prevails over the other, something that would end the strife, but rather because it is through the regularity of the transient overpowering of each one of these realms, an overpowering that only lasts a short amount of time, that the cycle itself can continue. The strife may therefore be seen as what drives the wheel, perhaps as much as the wheel drives the gears of the celestial mechanism.

The yearly cycle is itself a wheel, whose end is also its beginning. It began with the "three nights of summer," and so does it end also. The end is nonetheless only symbolic, as there is a seamless transition between the turns of the wheel. Man, however, is a creature that only grasps the order of nature through the creation of artificial discontinuities. To him, the three nights are not a mere celebration of the beginning of a new year but rather a moment that helps him gain an awareness of the nature of the cycle itself, an awareness of the nature of his own being, which is part of the ever moving creation.

A possible indication concerning the nature of the events taking place during the three nights, the sole well-identified feast period of the Coligny calendar, may be found on the other major source concerning the World of the ancient Celts: the Cauldron of Gundestrup. The 13 plates of the cauldron form a circle around a central plate, which certainly possessed a particular significance. The details of this central plate will be discussed in the next chapter, but for now it suffices to say that it depicts a scene where a bull is sacrificed. This plate clearly is the most finely crafted one, exhibiting a great level of skill to represent the animal with a very high embossment, including a set of attachable horns. One of the wide inner plates also depicts a bull sacrifice, or more exactly the sacrifice of three bulls side by side, by three different men.

The sacrifice of the bull appears to hold a prominent place on the imagery of the cauldron. The ritual sacrifice of such an animal is also mentioned by Pliny the Elder, as it was seen in the last chapter, in his famous passage concerning the cutting of the mistletoe:

> Having made all due preparation for the sacrifice and

> a banquet beneath the trees, they bring thither two white bulls, the horns of which are bound then for the first time. Clad in a white robe the priest ascends the tree, and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, which is received by others in a white cloak. They then immolate the victims, offering up their prayers that God will render this gift of his propitious to those to whom he has so granted it.[44]

The bull is the largest and the most precious animal of Iron Age Gaul. It is therefore hardly surprising to find that it was sacrificed during the most sacred events of the Celts. As seen in Pliny's example, it appears that the bull's color is what marks its association with the Bright: a white animal must be chosen, because the mistletoe belongs to the luminous realm. The sacrifice to honor the Bright is performed using white or golden objects. It thus implies that the bull by itself is not inherently bound to either one of the realms: it is the apex of the cattle, a creature whose hairs can take many colors, and which can be offered to any force of nature.

The fact that the most famous story of ancient Irish literature, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, focuses on the appropriation of the strongest bull of the island, the "Brown of Cooley" (*Donn Cúailnge)*, does not appear to be a mere coincidence, especially considering how the story ends: a climactic battle between the Brown and another bull, the "Horned White" (*Finnbhennach*). The symbolic battle between the two bulls represents the strife of Dark and Bright. At its center, the human hero Cúchulainn acts as the mediator of the strife, with hairs embodying the colors of the three realms: "dark next to his skin, blood-red [*cróderg*] in the middle and hair like a crown of gold covering them outside."[45] The bull is a symbol of strength. It can become an incarnation of the power of the Dark,

[44] English translation from: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, N. Pag. (§ 16.95); Original Latin: "sacrificio epulisque rite sub arbore conparatis duos admovent candidi coloris tauros, quorum cornua tum primum vinciantur. sacerdos candida veste cultus arborem scandit, falce aurea demetit, candido id excipitur sago. tum deinde victimas immolant praecantes, suum donum deus prosperum faciat iis quibus dederit." From: Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, N.Pag.

[45] English translation from: *Táin Bó Cúailnge* Recension I ("CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts"), text in brackets added; Original Old Irish: "Faircsi trí folt fair: dond fri toind cind, cróderg ar médon, mind órbude ardatugethar." From: Ibid.

of Life, and of the Bright, depending on the color assigned to it at birth. Once this dimension of the nature of the bull has been unveiled, an interpretation of the meaning of the threefold sacrifice depicted on the cauldron may be attempted.

The sacrifice of the bulls may represent a celebration of the strife itself, an honoring of the equilibrium between the three realms that have waged war against one another during the whole year, without any one of them definitively prevailing over the other. It is because of the preservation of the harmonious nature of the strife that the wheel could complete its turn. It would indeed be torn apart if there were no equilibrium between the forces at play in its midst, and the celestial mechanism would then come to an end. As Heraclitus teaches us: τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ᾽ ἔριν γίνεσθαι. , "what is opposite agrees, and from differing things comes the fairest harmony, and all things happen according to strife."[46] The bow or the lyre are very similar to the great strife, as their work, the creation of a sound or the shooting of an arrow, is only possible when there is an equilibrium between the forces pulling the extremities of the instrument in opposite directions. Only through the hidden harmony between these striving elements can these objects fulfill their purpose.

Perhaps the clearest depiction of the link between the great strife that animates the creation and the sacrifice of the bulls is the one found on a ritual cauldron found in Rinkeby (See Fig. 4.14). Only parts of the artifact have been recovered. The first fragment shows a triskelion symbol inserted within a dotted circle at its center, forming three interlaced drop-like shapes evoking a clockwise rotation. On the two sides of the triskelion, two animals are facing each other, appearing ready to fight: a boar on the left, and another animal, which is harder to identify with certainty and might be a stylized wolf or a dog. Under them, plants are seen growing on the soil. The strife between the dog and the boar has been mentioned before,[47] as it is a theme that appears on several Gaulish coins, on the Cauldron of Gundestrup where men bearing a dog and a boar are seen as opposed to one another,[48]

[46] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 161; Original Greek from: ibid., Page 160

[47] See § 2.3

[48] See Fig. 5.14.



Figure 4.14: *The Cauldron of Rinkeby* (*JKDAI 1887*, Page 32.).

and in medieval Celtic literature as well. The dog is a creature of the Dark, the companion of the "horned one," while the boar is relentlessly hunted for its flesh by man and dogs, thereby naturally leading it to reject his belonging to the lower realm. The battle between the dog and the boar can thus be seen as an image of the strife as a whole, represented around its core symbol: the triskelion.

The second fragment, which represents parts of the outer decorations of the cauldron, shows a human face with long hairs and a large torc around its neck.[49] Under the torc, the circumference of the cauldron is decorated with the series of round metallic rivets. Alone on the outside of the cauldron, encompassing all that it contains within its circular boundary, the person represented on this artwork appears to be the great celestial queen, the Silver Wheel, who initiates and contains the great strife that allows the being of all beings. On the two sides of the great queen, the symbol of the raw forces of the strife can be found: two bulls (more of them were probably also represented on the missing part of the cauldron). No scene of sacrifice is here shown. The bulls simply stand beside the queen, as the hidden forces that are hidden from the dog and the boar inside the vessel, but whose effect can nonetheless be felt by them.

The sacrifice of the bulls is not a means to appease the divine forces and to bring peace to the earth and the skies. The strife is essential to the being of all beings, as known by Heraclitus, who criticized Homer for saying "'would that strife might perish from among gods and men' [Homer Iliad 18.107]; for there would not be harmony without high and low notes, nor living things without female and male, which are contraries."[50] The spilling of the bull's blood and the extinguishing of its life is not a pacification of the forces of nature. On the contrary, just as the awareness of man's

[49] Some have argued that the upper part would represent a form of head-covering rather than hairs, and that the person depicted would be a male. The middle split and shape of this part, together with the soft appearance of the face, nonetheless makes an identification of the character as female more credible.

[50] English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy. Part 1.* Page 157; Original Greek: "Ηράκλειτος ἐπιτιμαι τῶι ποιήσαντι 'ὡς ἔρις ἔκ τε θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων ἀπόλοιτο' οὐ γὰρ ἂν εἶναι ἁρμονίαν μὴ ὄντος ὀξέος καὶ βαρέος οὐδὲ τὰ ζῷα ἄνευ θήλεως καὶ ἄρρενος ἐναντίων ὄντων," from: ibid., Page 156

own death is what can give him the best incentive to strive for the continuation of his own being, the symbolic quenching of the lives of the three bulls, the three forces at work in the great play, offers an occasion for man to feel the essential nature of these forces, as he sees the lifeblood of the animals slowly departing their flesh and sees their strengths fading away. When the bull falls down to the ground after being struck by the iron blade, its massive body pounds the earth, producing a wave that resonates in the soil, in the skies, and in the chest of the men standing around it.

The Greek philosopher of the strife tells us that: Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, "Strife is father of all and king of all."[51]. The strife may be seen as the king of all, but it may also be seen as initiated by the great queen, the Silver Wheel, whose movement allows the play of the forces of nature, the cycles of the years, months, and days, which are all intertwined. The Silver Wheel may be seen as an embodiment of the strife, as it occupies a central place in it, but it nonetheless also is ineluctably caught in it, as it owes its own being to the strife itself. As Heidegger tells us:

> Battle is the power that creates beings, yet not in such a way that, once things have come to be by way of it, battle then withdraws from them. Rather, battle also and precisely preserves and governs beings in their essential subsistence. Battle is indeed creator, yet also ruler.[52]

The being of all beings arises from the harmonious strife of the three forces of nature: the Dark, Life, and the Bright. Man is caught in the turning of the wheel: he is subjected to the yoke of the days, the months, and the years, with the transformations of the three realms profoundly affecting him, shaping him into an instrument of the strife.

[51] TBA. Original Greek from: ibid., Page 156

[52] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"*, Page 112; Original German: "Der Kampf ist die Macht der Erzeugung des Seienden, aber nicht so, daß der Kampf, nachdem die Dinge durch ihn geworden sind, aus ihnen sich zurückzieht, sondern der Kampf bewahrt und verwaltet auch und gerade das Seiende in seinem Wesensbestand. Der Kampf ist zwar Erzeuger, aber auch Beherrscher." From: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Pages 125–126.

Man nonetheless is not condemned to remain passive in the strife. On the contrary, he is called to become a conscious and willing soldier of the camp of Life, the string keeping Dark and Bright in tension so that being may manifest itself in all its splendor and tangibility. The strife is itself waged in the heart of men, consciously or not, and it is his responsibility to frequently rekindle its fire. Otherwise: "Wherever battle ceases as a power of preservation, standstill begins: a leveling out, mediocrity, harmlessness, atrophy, and decline."[53] The three nights of summer may be seen as an artificial seam between the years, giving man an opportunity to intensify is awareness of the nature of the strife, through the sacrifice of the three bulls that represent its three components. The details of the sacrifice are themselves not primordial: the bulls may be sacrificed separately, starting with a white bull to mark the end of the bright semester, a red one for the celebration of the dusk of the year, and a black one to honor the return of the reign of the Dark. All three may also be sacrificed simultaneously during each one of the three days, to highlight the unity of the three realms. The essence of the feast would nonetheless stay the same: it is a means to bring back men, and the Teuta as a whole, closer to their destiny, closer to the essence of their own being. As the German philosopher reminds us:

> Such battle . . . is here not arbitrary discord or dissension or mere unrest, but the strife of profound conflict between the essential powers of being, such that in the battle the gods first come to appear as gods, humans as humans, over against one another and thereby in their intimate harmony. There are no gods and humans in themselves, or masters and slaves in themselves who then, because they are such, enter into strife or harmony. Rather, the converse is the case: It is battle that first creates the possibility of decision with regard to life and death. By proving themselves in one way or another, beings in each case first become what and how they are, and this 'are' — being — prevails in

[53] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"*, Page 112; Original German: "Wo nämlich der Kampf als Macht der Bewahrung aussetzt, beginnt der Stillstand, der Ausgleich, die Mittelmäßigkeit, die Harmlosigkeit, Verkümmerung und Verfall." From: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Pages 125.

its essence only as such proving.[54]

The feast is a fire iron that can be used to rekindle man's engagement in the strife. It is, however, not the only tool at his disposal. He is also given a sword that allows him to pierce through the barrier separating him from the holy and the essence of being, a sword that nonetheless is double-edged, presenting its own dangers: the myth, which will be the subject of the last chapter.

[54] English translation from: Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine"*, Page 112; Original German: "Dieser Kampf aber — und das ist das andere, worauf kurz hingewiesen sei — ist hier nicht zufälliger Hader und Zwietracht und bloße Unruhe, sondern der Streit des großen Widerstreites zwischen den Wesensmächten des Seins, so daß in solchem Kampf erst die Götter als Götter, Menschen als Menschen gegeneinander und damit im innigen Einklang zum Vorschein kommen. Es gibt nicht an sich Götter und Menschen und an sich Herren und Knechte, die dann, weil sie solche sind, in Streit oder Einklang kommen, sondern umgekehrt: erst der Kampf schafft die Entscheidungsmöglichkeit auf Leben und Tod. Durch die Bewährung so oder so wird das Seiende erst je, was es und wie es ist, und dieses >ist< — das Sein — west nur als Bewährung." From: Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, Pages 125–126.

Chapter 5

The Myth

> CLINIAS: Well sir, don't you think that the gods' existence is an easy truth to explain?
> ATHENIAN: How?
> CLINIAS: Well, just look at the earth and the sun and the stars and the universe in general; look at the wonderful procession of the seasons and its articulation into years and months!
>
> - Plato, *Cratylus*[1]

This fragment of dialogue written by the Greek philosopher gives us a hint of the origin of man's first experience of the holy. The silent order of the Silver Wheel and the course of the stars following her represent both the loftiest elements of the creation and its most fundamental and most secure basis. The regularity of the turning of the wheel is comforting to the living beings caught in the chaos of Life and subjected to the unpredictable anger of the Lofty. The different plays that are repeated in front of man's eyes can be seen as a sign guiding his walk through time: the passing of the days, the months, and the years each offer him the sight of a scene of the play(s) of nature. The observation of this play is nonetheless perplexing. It is only through a long reflection, when

[1] English translation from:Plato, *Plato*, Page 1543 (Laws X 885e-886a); Original Greek: "Κλεινίας: οὐκοῦν, ὦ ξένε, δοκεῖ ῥᾴδιον εἶναι ἀληθεύοντας λέγειν ὡς εἰσὶν θεοί; Ἀθηναῖος: πῶς; Κλεινίας: πρῶτον μὲν γῆ καὶ ἥλιος ἄστρα τε καὶ τὰ σύμπαντα, καὶ τὰ τῶν ὡρῶν διακεκοσμημένα καλῶς οὕτως, ἐνιαυτοῖς τε καὶ μησὶν διειλημμένα: καὶ ὅτι πάντες Ἕλληνές τε καὶ βάρβαροι νομίζουσιν εἶναι θεούς." From: Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Page.

each one of its scenes has been seen countless of times and each one of their details been learned, that he can begin to interpret it and begin to see its significance.

The plays of the skies appear to be the product of a design, rather than random manifestations. If the course of the largest elements of the creation, and their effects on earth such as the seasons or the tides, have already been determined, it would be logical to think that the fate of men may also have been fixed in advance. As the Greek philosopher tells us:

> Humans should admit as evidence of the intelligence of the stars and this entire movement of theirs, the fact that they always do the same things, because they are doing what was decided an astonishingly long time ago and do not change their decision back and forth, sometimes doing one thing and at others doing something else, wandering and changing their orbits.[2]

The course of the heavenly bodies may thus reflect man's walk of life, and a wise man should therefore be mindful of them. Plato also tells us that: "A true captain must pay attention to the seasons of the year, the sky, the stars, the winds, and all that pertains to his craft, if he's really to be the ruler of a ship."[3] What is true to the captain is nonetheless also true of every man, whose life is caught in the flow of time, the turning of the wheel.

The forces at play in the skies are the most visible, and thus the first to be recognized by man. Seen from any part of the earth, by every man, during their entire lives, and yet inaccessible, the heavenly forces are the first to be identified as being greater than man himself. These forces naturally come to be linked with man's origin and his destiny, a fact already known by the Greek

[2] English translation from:Plato, *Plato*, Page 1625 (Epinomis 982c-d); Original Greek: "τοῖς δὲ ἀνθρώποις ἐχρῆν τεκμήριον εἶναι τοῦ νοῦν ἔχειν ἄστρα τε καὶ σύμπασαν ταύτην τὴν διαπορείαν, ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἀεὶ πράττει διὰ τὸ βεβουλευμένα πάλαι πράττειν θαυμαστόν τινα χρόνον ὅσον, ἀλλ᾽ οὐ μεταβουλευόμενον ἄνω καὶ κάτω, τοτὲ μὲν ἕτερα, ἄλλοτε δὲ ἄλλα πρᾶττον, πλανᾶσθαί τε καὶ μετακυκλεῖσθαι." From: Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Page.

[3] English translation from:Plato, *Plato*, Page 1111 (Republic 488d); Original Greek: "τοῦ δὲ ἀληθινοῦ κυβερνήτου πέρι μηδ᾽ ἐπαΐοντες, ὅτι ἀνάγκη αὐτῷ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ποιεῖσθαι ἐνιαυτοῦ καὶ ὡρῶν καὶ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἄστρων καὶ πνευμάτων καὶ πάντων τῶν τῇ τέχνῃ προσηκόντων, εἰ μέλλει τῷ ὄντι νεὼς ἀρχικὸς ἔσεσθαι, ὅπως δὲ κυβερνήσει" From: Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Page.

philosopher: "It seems to me that the first inhabitants of Greece believed only in those gods in which many foreigners still believe today — the sun, moon, earth, stars, and sky."[4] The forces of nature thus come to be identified as "gods," but this does not imply that these gods were the ones of Greek mythology. By bestowing a name on different parts of nature, man breaks its unity in order to comprehend it and to bring it into his World. The appearance of the first "god" marks the beginning of man's struggle to fathom the essence of nature and the essence of his own being. When he crafted the word "god," he did not know what this word truly designated, and thousands of years of usage of this word may only have brought men farther from an answer. Concentrating their reflection on the word itself, men indeed tend to forget the impulse that led to its creation. The creation of the first "god" was indeed a question rather than an answer: a way for man to crystallize the fleeting awe experienced while he contemplated the greatness of nature and the essence of being.

Once the "gods" have entered man's World, their splendor eclipses the forces of nature at their origin. Man's attention is irremediably attracted to these man-made representations, and he begins to overlook nature itself, to neglect the direct experience of the holy. When this occurs, the play of nature is superseded by a play of the gods: the great experience begins to be replaced by a mythology. As pointed out by the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling, the very nature of man's language invites such a replacement:

> — When German says: the masculine [der] sky. the feminine [die] earth; the masculine [der] space, the feminine [die] time — then how far is it really from there to the expression of spiritual concepts through masculine and feminine deities. One is almost tempted to say: language itself is only faded mythology; what mythology still preserves in living and concrete differences is preserved in language only in abstract and formal dif-

[4] Plato, *Plato*, Page 115 (Cratylus 397d-e); Original Greek: "Σωκράτης: τοιόνδε τοίνυν ἔγωγε ὑποπτεύω: φαίνονταί μοι οἱ πρῶτοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῶν περὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα τούτους μόνους τοὺς θεοὺς ἡγεῖσθαι οὕσπερ νῦν πολλοὶ τῶν βαρβάρων, ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην καὶ γῆν καὶ ἄστρα καὶ οὐρανόν: " From: Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, N.Pag.

ferences.[5]

Language initiates the trans-port of the gods, from the loftiest parts of the sky and the deepest parts of the earth to the vicinity of men. Man's imagination nonetheless soon takes the lead in the creation of a mythology. The play of nature, with its harmonious arrangement of loosely defined forces, is slowly replaced by a theatre, where anthropomorphic gods are the actors of a play that mirrors the life of man.

The birth of mythology should nonetheless not be reduced to a decadence of man's search for an understanding of his experience of nature and being. The creation of a mythology also contributes to the understanding of the experience of nature that is found at its source. It builds a bridge between man and the higher (or deeper) forces, by bringing these forces to the earth, to make them dwell in the World of men. The realms of nature are re-presented as anthropomorphic figures, and the great strife becomes a play in which these figures are the actors of a drama. Man does not have a first-hand experience of what it means to be the earth, the winds and the clouds, the sun, or the stars. He only knows what it is to be human. Therefore, the play of the gods is for him a means to bring the incomprehensible essence of nature closer to his own experience. It transforms philosophy into psychology, which is more accessible.

The question of the accessibility of the understanding of nature is one of the reasons explaining the emergence of mythology. The observation of nature and the attempt to bring the awe that it inspires into man's World is the work of the philosopher and the poet. Few will respond to the calling of nature, inviting men to develop their bond with it, but those who have been given the will and the means to bring the essence of nature and being to the World have also been entrusted with a responsibility toward the Teuta: they are called to lead those who are blind to the essence of

[5] Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 40; Original German: "Wenn die deutsche sagt : der Himmel, de Erde ; der Raum, die Zeit : wie weit ist es von da noch bis zu dem Ausdruck geistiger Begriffe durch männliche und weibliche Gottheiten. Beinahe ist man versucht zu sagen : die Sprache selbst sei nur die Verblichene Mythologie, in ihr sei nur in abstrakten und formellen Unterschieden bewahrt, was die Mythologie noch in lebendigen und concreten bewahre." From: Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke – 1. Bd. Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie.* Page 52.

nature closer to it. Insensitive to the spectacle of nature unfolded daily in front of their eyes, the people is therefore offered a vision of something more accessible, something that does not require any sensibility to the philosophical or the poetic: the play of the gods, a mythology that depicts the essence of nature and the strife of its forces as a battle between anthropomorphic gods, whose life strikingly resembles the ones of the members of the people.

The greatest strength of mythology certainly is its resilience, and it may precisely be one of the reasons why mythologies were created in the first place. The philosophical doctrines and the knowledge of the Druids have been completely lost. The songs of the Bards of Gaul have all fallen into oblivion. Traces of the ancient wisdom of Gaul nonetheless remain: bits of knowledge encapsulated inside the myths that have passed through the centuries and millennia, from mouth to mouth or in the form of manuscripts, artworks, or inscriptions. As shown in the previous chapters of the present work, the remnants of the play of the gods of Gaul allow us to walk back the path of the Celtic thinkers to find back the philosophy that formed the core of their World. Mythology therefore is more than a means to ex-plain the philosophy of nature: it is also a means to lead men back to it, to invite them to find the path toward a first-hand experience of the majesty of the creation and the splendor of the holy.

Mythology is nonetheless not a panacea. It is a double-edged sword, one that can lead men to strengthen their bond with nature, but also can lead them astray. Mythology arises from the combination of poetry and philosophy, but as Schelling tells us: "as soon as a mythology is present and has completely filled consciousness, both [mythology on the one hand, poetry and philosophy on the other] initially depart from each other in different directions."[6] The mythology created by the philosopher and the poet, once it has been entrusted to the people, begins to be appropriated by its members. Men who are not aware of the poetic essence of the

[6] English translation from: Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 38 (text in brackets added); Original German: "Sobald die Mythologie da ist und das Bewußtsein vollständig erfüllt hat, wie alsdann von ihr au sals von einem gemeinschaftlichen Mittelpunkt beide erst nach verschiedenen Richtungen auseinander gehen." From: Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke – 1. Bd. Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie.* Page 49.

myth, that is, of its link to the reality of the experience of nature, begin to transform it, altering the play of the gods so that it would reflect the dramas at the center of the lives of the men of their time. The myth thereby progressively loses its bond with nature. With its anchor severed, it becomes a marooned ship, subject to the will of countless men, pushing it in different directions. As Schelling tells us, the process can nonetheless be spanned across centuries, as it was the case for the Greeks: "if the first trace of philosophy's separation from mythology is already in Hesiod, then it takes the whole time from Hesiod up to Aristotle before philosophy separated itself from everything mythical and, therefore, also from everything poetic."[7] The completion of this severance of the link between the poetical myth and philosophy nonetheless not only decreased the value of the myth: it also weakened philosophy itself, which became estranged from the poetic as philosophers took refuge in scholasticism, which allows them to believe that nature can be reliably modeled as a complex machinery.

When the myth is despised and the poetic ignored, language itself becomes an idol, and man loses sight of the nature of being. Language is nonetheless itself rooted in myth, as it is rooted in poetry. A man only deludes himself if he thinks that a search for "truth" can do away with the poetic. As Nietzsche tells us:

> What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses [*die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind*], coins which have their obverse [*Bild*] effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal.[8]

[7] English translation from: Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Page 38; Original German: "Denn ist die erste Spur eines Ausscheidens der Philosophie von der Mythologies chon in Hesiodos, so bedarf es der ganzen Zeit von diesem bis auf Aristoteles, ehe die Philosophie von allem Mythischen und daher auch Poetischen sich geschieden hat." From: Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke – 1. Bd. Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie.* Page 49.

[8] English translation from:Derrida and Moore, "White Mythology", Page

The myth is always with us. Our language finds its roots in ancient myths, poetic representations of nature that arose from the awe inspired by the sky, the earth, the sun, the stars, the animals, and the seas.

While reading Hesiod or Homer, the link between the myths and nature would not be clearly apparent. If their writing once represented an allegory of the essence of nature, centuries of changes largely eroded their link with the poetic impulse that led to their creation. This natural decay of the myth, whose allegorical dimension is soon lost, occurs in most cultures. The Celts, however, represent a remarkable exception to this rule. Even without any written texts, or perhaps because of this absence, the central myth of the Celtic World clearly appears to be deeply intertwined with the experience of nature. The allegorical dimension of this myth seems to have remained apparent during the centuries of independence of the Gauls, from the end of the Hallstatt period (5^{th} c. B.C.) to the time of the Roman conquest (1^{st} c. B.C.), as shown by the artifacts examined in the previous chapters, even though a separation between the myth and the philosophy from which it originates can already be witnessed early on. A millennia later, in Ireland and Wales, only a very faint substratum remains, one that would be easily overlooked without the clues left by their ancestors on the continent.

The uniqueness of the Gaulish myth resides in this preservation of its link with poetry and philosophy. It represents more than a story meant to entertain or even to present an imaginary answer to the great questions occupying man's mind: the origin and purpose of the creation, man himself in particular. It rather directly offers a depiction of the play of the forces of nature that can be contemplated each day. It is directly tied to these different cycles of nature: the story it tells is the one shown in the skies and on the earth during the passing of the days, the months, and the

15. Original German: "Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen, kurz eine Summe von menschlichen Relationen, die, poetisch und rhetorisch gesteigert, übertragen, geschmückt wurden, und die nach langem Gebrauch einem Volke fest, kanonisch und verbindlich dünken: die Wahrheiten sind Illusionen, von denen man vergessen hat, daß sie welche sind, Metaphern, die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind, Münzen, die ihr Bild verloren haben und nun als Metall, nicht mehr als Münzen, in Betracht kommen." From: Nietzsche and Schlechta, *Werke (3)*, Page 314.

years, in a way that makes its bond with nature readily apparent. The growth and loss of the stag's antlers, or the yearly migration of the crane represent important parts of the myth, as they occupied an important place in the lives of the ancient Celts. With this link between myth and nature, story and reality, left intact, the Celtic people could fully enjoy the benefits of the wisdom of their philosophers. The people as a whole, through the religious rituals and feasts associated with the myth, could enjoy a close proximity to the essence of nature, by strengthening their relationship with the "gods." Even those who were blind to this essence of nature itself, which is so close to man that it often disappears from his field of view, had a chance to live in harmony with it, with the pace of their life being made to correspond to the cycles of nature through the intermediacy of the myth-builders: the poets and the philosophers.

Living in harmony with the forces of nature by following the guidance of the myth, man can live close to the gods. The anthropomorphic nature of the myth blurs the line between man and the gods: the higher beings are thereby brought to the surface of the earth, from above or below, while man can project himself as playing the part of one of the forces of nature at work in the great strife. This type of anthropomorphisms tied to the myth have often been decried, even by the Gauls themselves. As mentioned before, King Brennus indeed ridiculed the Greeks for representing the gods as human figures made of wood or stone![9] The Gauls seldom used such representations before the Roman conquest, but as shown by the Cauldron of Gundestrup and other artifacts, they nevertheless had a place in the spiritual life of the Gauls, even among the elite who commissioned these precious works of art. The ability to project oneself into the myth indeed allows a strengthening of man's bond with nature, as he can more clearly see the relation between man and the forces of nature, and the relation between the great strife and the struggles he himself experiences in his daily life: love, friendship, betrayals, hate, or desires for vengeance. The themes of the drama of any human life find an echo in the highest of the skies and the depths of the earth: man is himself part of the strife of the realms, but there is also countless strifes imbricated within one another, mirroring the great strife of the realms at different scales.

[9] See § 1.3.

As argued by the Belgian historian Claude Sterckx, the ancient Celts would have accorded a great importance to the relationship between the nature of the universe and the nature of the numerous elements found in its midst: "each element of the universe (microcosm) functions according to the same laws as the universe as a whole (macrocosm) and every description of one of them can be applied to the others,"[10] something that can be related to the mathematical concept of "self-similarity," as exhibited in fractals for examples. The life of men therefore mirrors the great strife between the realms. The yearly cycle is mirrored inside the monthly one, with an alternation of power between Dark and Bright, and the monthly cycle is itself mirrored each day when the sunlight and the night battle to take over the earth and the skies.

The self-similarity of the universe considerably enhances the power of the myth, if this myth is grounded in the essence of nature, as it implies that the story it depicts is not only an anthropomorphic caricature of the great strife offered to a people unable to grasp the philosophical essence of the creation, but that it rather depicts both the inner essence of mankind as well as the essence of nature at the same time, as both "function according to the same laws," to borrow the words of the Belgian historian. Coupled with an awareness of its link with the essence of nature, the myth has the potential to solidify the bond between man and the essence of being. Walking on the edge between the poetic myth and the scientific observation of nature, he is given the chance to accomplish his own destiny by becoming a living and conscious manifestation of the tension between Dark and Bright, man and the oneness of nature.

The traces left by the first gods on the soil of Gaul therefore allow us to re-dis-cover what was lost when the myth was severed from philosophy, when the philosophers abandoned the communion with the essence of nature, an abandon sealed by Aristotle and that was followed by almost two millennia of Greek, Roman, and then Christian scholastic tradition. These traces offer us a chance, not to return to a vulgar "paganism," but rather a chance

[10] TBA. Original French: "chaque élément du monde (microcosme) fonctionne selon les mêmes lois que l'univers entier (macrocosme) et toute description de l'un s'applique aussi aux autres." From: Sterckx, *La mythologie du monde celte*, Page 135.

to show our readiness for the arrival of the "last god" mentioned by Heidegger.[11] This "last god" will only come when man has walked back the path to re-dis-cover the first gods, and has brought them out of their concealment. The last god nonetheless differs from the first ones, even though both are dis-covered near the same location. As Heidegger tells us:

> The last god has his own most unique uniqueness and stands outside of the calculative determination expressed in the labels "mono-theism," "pan-theism," and "a-theism" . . . The multiplicity or gods is not subject to enumeration but, instead, to the inner richness of the grounds and abysses in the site of the moment for the lighting up and concealment of the intimation of the last god.[12]

It is through the appropriation of the tension between Dark and Bright that the last god can be called, and its intimation perceived. When man has made the great strife *his*, he can then begin to appropriate the essence of his own being, and of being itself. Only then may he pave the way for the arrival of the last god, whose arrival will depend on man's capacity to propagate the event of the appropriation of being among his kind.

The myth of the first gods represents the outcome of the thought of ancient wise men, the end of their philosophy and the beginning of the transmission of their knowledge, given as an inheritance to their descendants and to mankind as a whole. It nonetheless also constitutes a stepping stone for us, distant sons of these ancient ones, one that can guide us back to the first gods and liberate us from the chains of metaphysics and theology. The path to the last god first leads us to the first ones so that the poetic impulse that led to their creation can be re-dis-covered and

[11] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Pages 322; Original German: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 409.

[12] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Pages 325-326; Original German: "Der letzte Gott hat seine einzigste Einzigkeit und steht außerhalb jener verrechnenden Bestimmung, was die Titel »Monotheismus«, »Pan-theismus« und »A-theismus« meinen . . . Die Vielheit der Götter ist keiner Zahl unterstellt, sondern dem inneren Reichtum der Gründe und Abgründe in der Augenblicksstätte des Aufleuchtens und der Verbergung des Winkes des letzten Gottes." from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 411.

re-enacted, not to create new gods, but rather only to prepare us to welcome the last one, whose coming cannot be forced.

The following telling of the central myth of the Gaul should therefore be taken as an invitation to lift up the veil on the link between human life and the essence of nature, the turning of the wheel that takes us in its rotation. What matters is not whether or not this myth represents a faithful reconstruction of the one that was told by the Druids of Gaul: what matters is rather the fact that this (re)construction can help us reappropriate the essence of poetry, and ultimately help us prepare ourselves for the arrival of the last god. This retelling of the myth will begin with the one concerning which the (re)construction is the most surely based: the story that mirrors the yearly cycle.

5.1 The Myth of the Year

The most precious source concerning the central myth of the Gauls without a doubt is the Cauldron of Gundestrup, a large vessel decorated with a series of silver plates depicting one of the play of the gods (See Fig. 5.1). This artifact will form the backbone of the following telling of the myth, but other ones will also be used to complete and corroborate what is shown on the cauldron. The ordering of the silver plates of this cauldron is crucial to the comprehension of the story that it depicts, but unfortunately, the determination of this ordering still remains difficult. For the following telling of the myth, the order of the inner wide plates reconstituted by the Danish archaeologist Sophus Müller will be followed,[13], together with the placement of the two outer plate whose location can be determined because of the holes pierced through them, which go through two of the inner plates. Different propositions have been made by scholars concerning the ordering of the rest of the plates[14], but the matter is still debated. The following proposition should therefore only be taken as an attempt at the retelling of the myth, rather than a definitive, proven reconstruction. It is foremost aimed at helping us plunge ourselves into the core of the mythical universe of the Gauls and, in particular,

[13] Müller, *Det store Sølvkar fra Gundestrup*, Page 39.

[14] For example, see: Nielsen et al., "THE GUNDESTRUP CAULDRON", Page 16.



Figure 5.1: *The Cauldron of Gundestrup.* *(Sydow,* Die Kunst der Naturvölker und der Vorzeit*, Page 467.)*

show us the link between the myth and the spectacle of nature that is unfolded every year in front of our eyes, both in the sky and on the earth, in the life of man as well as in the life of the creatures inhabiting the land of Gaul.

The myth starts with the new year, immediately after the celebration of the "three nights of summer." Both the year itself and the myth that it represents are nonetheless without a true beginning nor end. Both indeed form a cycle, which is repeated almost identically every year. The extremities of the myth are thus joined together, implying that one may begin to narrate it at different points of its unfolding. The story is itself inscribed on a medium ideally suited to this peculiar nature: a round vessel, which can be turned like a wheel, and which as no clear beginning nor end. Therefore, there is a seamless transition between the extremities of the myth, in the same manner that the end of a year is intertwined with the beginning of a new one. This is important because it explains certain peculiarities of the myth itself, which may otherwise appear as incoherent or paradoxical. This apparent paradox is nonetheless at the heart of both the myth and the yearly cycle that it portrays. The myth therefore begins without any introduction of its characters, without any background given to ex-plain its origin or its end, as there is no true beginning, but



Figure 5.2: *Plate A01 (C6573) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

rather only an infinite repetition of the play of the gods...[15]

The Great Queen, the Silver Wheel who encompasses the skies and the earth with its silky white arms, occupies her throne in the highest of the skies, surrounded by wondrous celestial creatures, animals that are nowhere to be seen down on the earth, in the land of the Gauls (Fig. 5.2).[16] Her long silvery hairs encompass the earth, as a bridle that keeps it under its control. Her court stands by her side: hundreds of subjects whose presence illuminates the darkness of the night, including the two faithful servants that protect her and tend to her needs, following each one of her steps.[17]

[15] N.b.: Illustrations already shown in the previous chapters will be repeated here for convenience, as they will form the backbone of this (re)telling of the myth.

[16] It would seem that the artist of the Cauldron of Gundestrup, or perhaps the creators of the myth themselves, considered that the "exotic" animals, not native to Europe, such as elephants or lions, were associated with the Bright: the skies, the realm of imagination. These creatures therefore appear to be associated with the celestial forces on the Cauldron, the forces of the Lofty in particular.

[17] The two servants of the Great Queen may represent particular stars. If our identification of the Silver Wheel as the Milky Way is correct, an easy choice for the two handmaidens of the Great Queen would be the two brightest stars that are found on its two sides: Vega and Altair, which are part of the "summer triangle" through which the Milky Way passes. A clue that may be

As the summer is now ended, the darkness slowly begin to hold sway over a greater part of the earth and the skies. The Luminous One, who reigns over the major part of the heavens during the day, grows weaker and weaker, unable to illuminate the face of the earth during most of the day. The forces of the Thunderous One, in charge of the lower sky, also begin to be exhausted, and the winds that sweep over the earth at his command are tamed by the coldness of the earth. The Great Queen notices the weakening of the two lords of the sky and, in particular, the loss of prestige of her companion, the Lofty and Thunderous One whose power drove her to abandon her husband in order to take refuge under his wooly and fiery embrace.

Down on the earth, another now takes over the dominion that is lost by the forces of the Bright: the lord of the Dark, which is the realm of shadows that stand against the light of the heavens, the earth that stands against the skies. He is the Horned One, the stag whose antlers support the surface of the earth, antlers that are now fully grown and hardened following the end of the summer and the resurgence of the shadowy forces. He is also, and perhaps foremost, the husband of the Great Queen, whose heart he conquered ages ago, but who nonetheless betrayed him, seduced by the manliness of the angry and powerful Thunderous One who reigned over the earth and sky during the summer. The Queen still bears on her neck the seal of their union and of their irrevocable bond: a golden torc, whose weight constantly pulls her down back to the earth, to her husband who also wears this token. The fruits of this union of the Dark and the Bright, the earth and the skies, form another sign of their harmonious encounter: twin sons, the sun and the moon, the Luminous One whose splendor illuminates the day and the Second Wave whose influence brings the tides that elevate the seas twice each day (Fig. 5.3).

The two sons have a different appearance, but both are torn between the realms of their two parents. They are constantly moving in the space opened between them: beneath the Silver Wheel, who occupies the highest of the heavens, but above the

seen as validating this hypothesis is the metalwork placed on one of the most remarkable Celtic artifact: the jug of Brno. The jug represents a set of stars at two different times of the year, which include the "summer triangle," but the matter still demands more investigations (See: Kruta and Bertuzzi, *La cruche celte de BRNO*, Pages 76–86.).



Figure 5.3: *Gaulish coins showing what may represent the Great Queen (as Epona) and her two sons.* (Hucher, *L'art gaulois, ou, Les Gaulois d'après leurs médailles*, Page 69.).

surface of the earth. They run through the sky and plunge beneath the horizon, as if they did not want to choose between the fatherly realm and the motherly one. They look up toward their birth giver, pleading for her return to the side of her husband, who faithfully awaits her down below.

Time nonetheless has passed since the bride of the Dark deserted the earth. The Thunderous One, who succeeded in seducing the Great Queen because of his power, is now exhausted after his summer rage that laid waste on the dominion of the Horned One but also watered it so that Life could be renewed and conquer the face of the earth. Weakened, with his grip of the sky slowly losing strength, the Great Queen begins to look down on her summer love, her second husband for whom she abandoned the first. On the earth, the lord of the Dark, who could not call himself the Horned One as he had lost his antlers at the end of the winter, was only known as the Good One during the reign of the Bright over earth and sky. Now, however, his majesty has been restored by the turning of the wheel of time. His head is now adorned with the symbol of his renewed strength and of his sway over the creation.

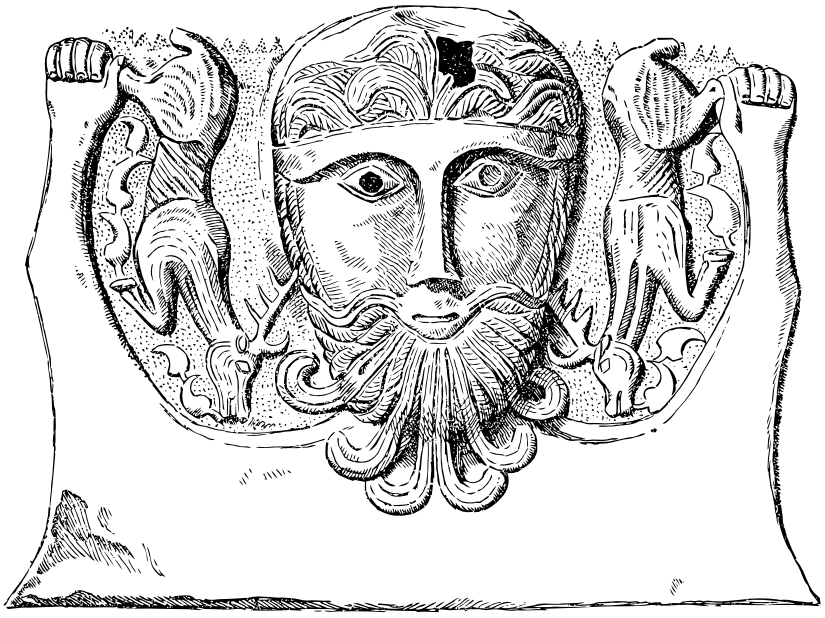


Figure 5.4: *Plate B02 (C6568) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).*

During the darkest night of the month, when his two sons have taken refuge under the horizon, hidden behind the body of their father, the only light allowed to shine in the dark sky is the silvery glow of the Great Queen and her servants. Emboldened by the return of his own beauty and by the recovery of his own power, the Horned One seizes his two sons, who have now taken the appearance of two stags once they descended to the earth, so as to remind the queen that the fruits of their love are still very much present, a tangible and eternal testimony of their first carnal encounter, a dual manifestation of the harmonious union of the opposites, the Dark and the Bright (Fig. 5.4). This scene has caught the attention of the queen, who does not remain insensitive to its truth, but more will be needed in order to convince her to once again change her allegiance.

Confident and determined, with his two sons standing by his side, the Lord of the Dark continues his work of seduction. He gets down on his knees, pleading for her return, holding a new symbol of their union in his hand, inviting her to seize the golden torc and to place it around her neck, thereby accepting the yoke of the

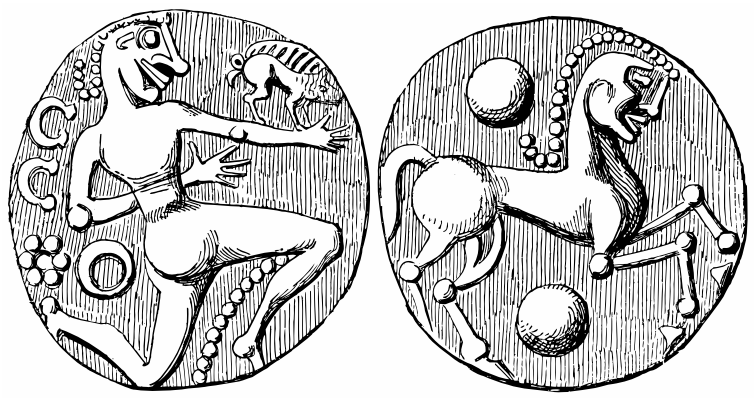


Figure 5.5: *Esus(?) offering a torc to the celestial goddess* (Hucher, *L'art gaulois, ou, Les Gaulois d'après leurs médailles*, Page 38.).

earth (Fig. 5.5).[18] Whispering in the ear of one of his servant, the Horned One gives him the mission to carry a message to the Great Queen herself, an invitation for her to abandon her summer love in order to return to the steadfast embrace of her faithful companion, the lord of winter.

The Thunderous One, however, is not blind to the scheme that is being prepared on the earth. From his lofty position, he observes the envoy of the Dark and his two step-sons, who often stand between himself and his bride and remind him of her other husband. He therefore resents these young men, and he is certain that they are spending the nights on the earth in order to plot his demise. Not ready to surrender his bride, the crown of the skies, he therefore begins to devise a strategy to strike down his rival and those who betrayed his trust.

In the heavenly court, the Great Queen receives the visit of the envoy from the earth: a hound, whose courage is only equaled by his fierceness (Fig. 5.2). Witness of this impudence, which can be seen throughout the skies, the master of the winds and the clouds cannot remain passive at the sight of this insult that threatens his position in the creation and his honor. He immediately sends his

[18] Since the end of the myth is also its beginning, the queen receives the torc every year. This would explain the incoherence between the fact that the queen already has a torc on her neck on the first plate of the Cauldron, even though the Horned One still holds it in his own hand in order to give it to her.

most ferocious servants to stop the hound from delivering his message: griffins that can soar through the clouds and ascend to the celestial throne, with their razor-sharp claws ready to cut through the flesh of the servant of the Dark. Meanwhile, elephants are guarding the queen herself, preventing her escape and preventing the hound from reaching her. Moved by this clash between Dark and Bright that occurs because of her, and proud of her own exalted position, she rejoices at the sight of the combat between heavenly and earthly creatures, which is a consecration of her own value: the Dark and the Bright, the greatest forces of the creation are opposed to one another in order to conquer her heart, with living beings serving as the foot soldiers of this conflict. The Queen nonetheless sees that the balance of power is now shifting, and her heart now begins to waver...

The beasts sent by the Thunderous One fail to prevail over the hound, and their blood is soon spilled by the ruthless servant of the earth. The elephants are unable to push away this voracious animal, whose mouth is now dripping with blood. Standing between the two handmaids of the queen, the envoy then delivers his message, urging her to forsake her summer love, who is now doomed and unable to resist the takeover of the earth and the skies by the Dark, and to come down to her earthly home, where her sons are impatiently waiting for her return.

The Thunderous One nonetheless does not consider himself to be vanquished. He has lost the battle in the heavens, but the war is far from over. He thus decides to take the strife to the field of his enemy, by sending another heavenly creature down to the earth in order to chase away an easy prey: the Second Wave, who takes human form and flees riding on a seal as it sees the fierce lion sent from its lofty abode, taking refuge in his own dominion: the seas that obey him (Fig. 5.6, upper right part). The first son keeps his animal form and stands beside his father, who calmly awaits the return of his envoy.

Soon after these events, the hound returns to the earth, seeking his master. The Horned One sits cross-legged on the naked earth, in perfect equilibrium, with his eyes closed as if he was gathering his forces, preparing the whole body of the Dark for the oncoming battle. He his himself the earth and the Dark as a whole. This gathering of himself is interrupted by the hound, who



Figure 5.6: *Plate A02 (C6571) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

approaches his mouth to the ear of his master. The beast whispers the good news: the Great Queen has been convinced. She is now on her way down to the earth, having escaped the notice of her watchers thanks to a transformation of her appearance.

The Silver Wheel, who occupied the highest of the heavens, turned herself into a creature fit to perform the journey she is now undertaking: a crane, a gracious bird that is at this precise moment migrating from the great north down to the land of Gaul. Joining the thousands of cranes undertaking this journey, she is able to fly toward the Horned One, who awaits her arrival, without catching the attention of the one she is now forsaking. Filled with shame and anger, the Thunderous One assembles his host formed by the clouds and the winds. His fury is unleashed throughout the sky, blowing away all the creatures dwelling in the air. Insects and birds alike are carried far away by the tempest that rages over the entire surface of the earth. They are smashed onto the ground indiscriminately, as the soil is swept away, taking the reddened leaves of the fall away from the trees to bring them up in the air, making them forcibly join the forces of the Lofty (Fig. 5.7, left part).

Having perfectly blended herself among the dance of the cranes performing their yearly travel south, the Great Queen and her two handmaids nonetheless succeed in escaping the wrath of her former companion. She lands on the great body of the Dark, once

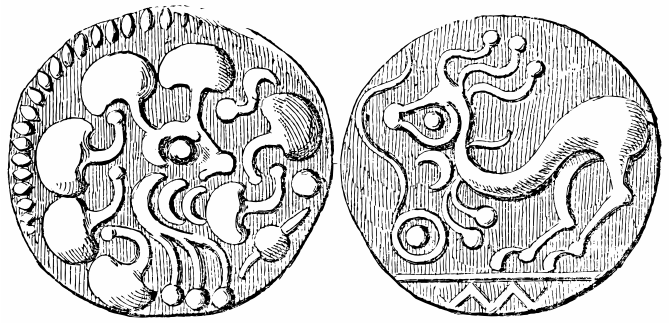


Figure 5.7: *Gaulish coin appearing to represent Taranis blowing a bird away.*

again feeling the soft but cold embrace of the shadowy waters. At this precise moment, her two sons welcome her, as they themselves come back from their daily sojourn in the skies. They enter the horizon just when their mother arrives, marking the victory of the earthly forces as the night is about to fall (Fig. 5.7, right part).

The Queen is now overjoyed, feeling the embrace of the Dark, her first love, and enjoying the vision of her sons who now stand by her side, thankful for her homecoming. The joy, however, soon gives place to fear. The heavenly lion sent by the Thunderous One is still chasing the fruits of her womb, and it soon seizes the Luminous One, who is only armed with his bare hands to face this menace (Fig. 5.8, upper left part). The combat is brutal, as the resolve of the animal is on par with the fierceness of the first born. As they both roll onto the ground, with their limbs intertwined, trying to prevail over their opponent, the beast can be heard from afar. It whispers in the ears of its adversary, but what is said remains incomprehensible to those standing around. The celestial creature soon succumbs to the mighty grip of the hands of its foe, which are clung onto its throat, preventing it from replenishing its lungs with the air of the heavens, indispensable for its survival. Once the life of the creature has been extinguished, the victorious son discards its corpse, throwing it on the ground so that it can be reclaimed by his father and absorbed into the great body of the Dark. The eldest son nonetheless does not appear triumphant, nor proud of his victory, which allows his family to be reunited and to enjoy a certain peace.



Figure 5.8: *Plate B03 (C6564) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

With both his sons and his bride at his side, down on the earth, and with his majestic antlers proclaiming the return of his authority, the Horned One now reigns over earth and skies. It is the wintertime, the time when the darkness reign over the creation, even though the forces of light are still far from being annihilated. They continue their onslaught on the dominion of the Dark, but its lord is now too powerful to be overthrown. The earthly family thus enjoy the serenity of the winter, united under the reign of the somber patriarch. The trees of the winter, stripped of their green mantle, now appear as the antlers of the Horned One, piercing through the skin the earth and extended high into the air of the heavens, as an incursion of the Dark into the dominion of the Bright. The Queen stands in awe before the greatness of her husband, who now rules over all that can be seen with the eyes or felt with the senses. She is proud of her offspring, her sons who appear to combine the strength of the Dark, quality of their father, with the wide reach of the Bright, inherited from their mother (Fig 5.9). The Luminous one shines throughout the skies, while the Second Wave commands the rising of the seas, and both run through the creation, passing through both the earth and the sky every single day.

Time continues to flow, and the peak of the winter is now passed. The appearance of the lord of the Dark begins to change. In his human form, his beard begins to wither. The long and curly hairs that mirrored the antlers of his animal form one by one fall down to the ground. They are the symbols of his majesty and authority. As the days begin to grow longer, marking the end of the winter and a resurgence of the power of the Bright, the Horned One begins to grow weaker every day. He still holds sway over earth and skies, but many are now aware that his reign will sooner or later come to an end. On the earth, however, some are not satisfied with the normal course of time: they want to exert their influence on the very frame of the creation. Among the living beings that inhabit the surface of the earth, a man soon decides to take his survival, and the one of his loved ones, into his own hands.

The man is exhausted by the reign of the Dark, which prevents him from growing the food necessary for him to remain alive. It even kills his offspring because of the cold induced by the absence of the Luminous One, who spends his time on the earth, under the



Figure 5.9: *The altar of Dennevy* (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 316.).

horizon, rather than to shine throughout the sky, showering the soil and the living with light and warmth. Every aspect of his life are made harder by the reign of the shadows over his land: hunting is unpractical, and so is warfare, herding, or any building work. Fearing death more than the Dark itself, even though the former inevitably leads one to enter the latter, the man therefore decides to venture into the prescinct of the gods. He approaches the Luminous One, to convince him to spend less time in his earthly retreat and to occupy his rightful place in the skies, as the source of light that can shine throughout the creation during most of the day, bathing earth and skies with its comforting presence (Fig. 5.10, left part).

The arguments of the man are manifold. He knows that the power of the firstborn of the union of Dark and Bright can only be exerted in the sky, where his brilliant face can shine and be seen. On the earth, in the company of his father, the Luminous One is almost invisible, without prestige nor authority. In the sky, on the other hand, he dominates all that is within his reach. All the living beings roaming the earth or flying through the heavens are thankful for his presence, and they stand in awe of his beauty

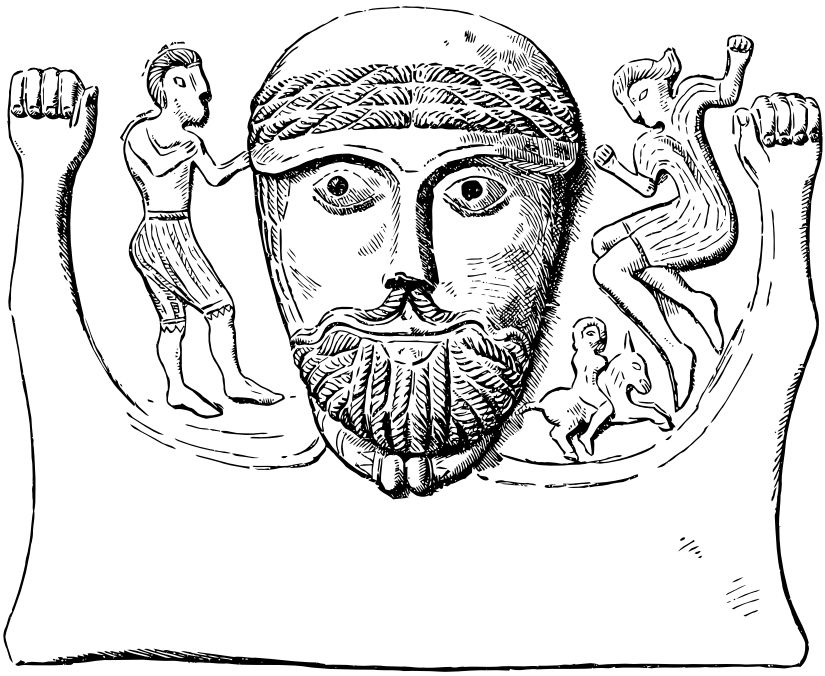


Figure 5.10: *Plate B04 (C6570) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

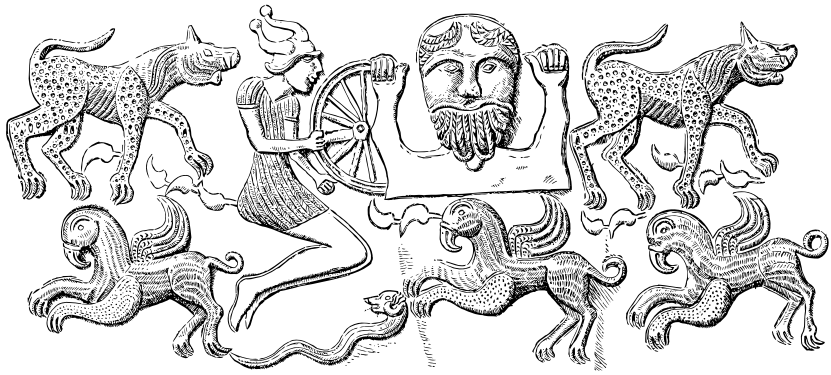


Figure 5.11: *Plate A03 (C6572) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

and majesty. The heart of the god was already wavering before the arrival of the man, but his arguments touch his heart and stimulate his pride, pushing him over the edge of his loyalty to his father. Mounting a winged horse, he soon departs from the earth, ascending into the sky and thereby forsaking his own parents (Fig. 5.10, right part). The Horned One is nonetheless not so easily deceived. He is the great body of the Dark, the earth itself, and he therefore can hear every word uttered on its surface. Distraught by this betrayal, he reflects on a possible course of action.

The rider soon arrives at his destination: the seat of the Thunderous One, who is surrounded by his host of ferocious celestial creatures (Fig 5.11). The lofty lord holds a spoked wheel with his right hand, a symbol of his power over the lower heavens, or perhaps of his capacity to strike the earth with thunderbolts and to shake it with his roar? The Luminous One also seizes the wheel, appearing content and proud of himself. Both will now be allied against the forces of the Dark, but they will also strive against one another for the control of the skies. Both now attempt to take hold of the wheel, which also represents the rotation of the heavens themselves, the Silver Wheel that drives the order of the creation. The two lords of the sky know that the sway of the Horned One over earth and sky grows weaker every day. By accelerating the turning of the wheel, they accelerate his demise, and they thereby also strengthen the forces of the Bright. Regardless of the schemes of men and gods, the turning of the wheel is nonetheless inevitable.

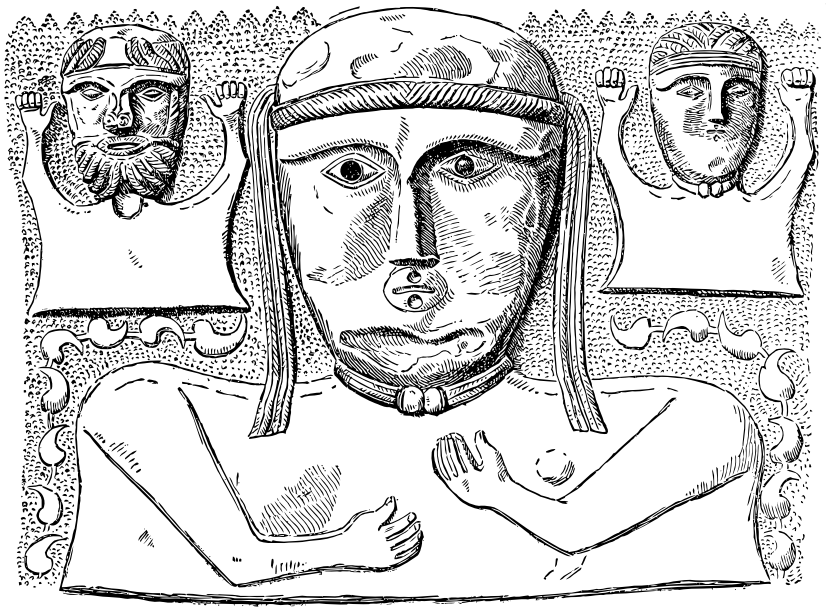


Figure 5.12: *Plate B05 (C6566) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

The winter is now ended, and the spring begins. The days are now longer than the nights, marking a takeover by the Luminous One of the dominion of his father. Meanwhile, an inconspicuous servant of the dark lord already entered the cloudy dominion of the forces of the Bright, and he witnessed the actions of the treasonous firstborn: the ram-horned serpent, who then comes back to earth unnoticed, reporting what he saw to his master.

As the spring comes, the stags populating the forests of Gaul suddenly lose their majesty: their antlers, which gave them both a weapon to defend their territory and an imposing appearance, now fall down onto the ground, leaving their heads bare. The lord of the Dark is also subjected to this transformation that reflects the weakening of his grip on the earth and the sky. He thus ceases to be the Horned One, and begins to be named according to another one of its qualities. A man or a god is first defined by his strength, and only when this strength goes missing does he begin to be characterized for his temperament. Meek but still one of the essential poles of the creation, he is now known as the Good One (ESUS).

In the sky, the forces of the Bright are growing stronger. The splendor of the Luminous One illuminates the earth, slowly conquering a greater part of the days, while the Thunderous One uses his power to further weaken the Dark: he begins to open up his vaults and to pour down torrents of water taken from the Dark by his fiery associate, waters that are necessary for the rebirth of the plants and the trees, allowing them to take over the surface of the earth, covering it with their green veil and thereby concealing the great body of the Dark.

Down on the earth, the Great Queen observes the decline of her husband. Once the most impressive force of nature, and the lord of the forest, who terrified the other creatures with the majesty of its antlers, the Good One now appears as a frail, insecure shell of a man. In his human form, he is now a beardless boy, having lost the last remains of the symbol of his authority (Fig. 5.12, right side). The Thunderous One, on the other hand, is now far stronger than before. His rage reshapes the heavens and the earth with rain, winds, hail, and thunder. The Queen is moved by this show of force. Her heart is troubled, as she feels her love for her earthly husband being burned away by her desire for a union with what now is one of the strongest power of the creation. The rude appearance of the lofty lord attracts her. Even his boar-like nose now appears as a sign of strength, as his bushy hairs and beard that proclaim his virility across the heavens.

As her heart is once again wavering, the queen sees a sign in the sky: a dance of cranes that begin to migrate north now that the warmth of the Luminous One fills the land of Gaul. Their loud shrieks resonate throughout the earth, as a herding call inviting their kind to follow them. Seizing her chance, the bride of the earth then once again takes the appearance of the graceful bird, with her two handmaids at her side. The three of them soar through the clouds, and they soon reach their destination: the lofty seat of the Thunderous One, whose woolly cloak now envelops the whole earth. He has not been endowed with a beautiful appearance: neither handsome nor elegant, his face reflects the chaotic nature of his dominion. Despite these traits, or perhaps because of them, he nevertheless displays an uncomparable robustness and vigor, qualities that are particularily appealing to the empress of the higher heavens. She therefore returns to his side, feeling safe under the cover of his fleecy mantle and in his arms whose strength reshapes

the earth and the sky.

Even with her feathery disguise, the departure of the Great Queen did not go unnoticed. The ram-horned snake witnessed her arrival to the seat of the lofty lord. Knowing that the Dark is now too weak to attack the forces of the Bright in order to recover the celestial bride, the faithful servant appeals to the only force capable of tipping the scale in the favor of the Dark: Life itself, and men in particular. The lord of Life and Being, the One of the People (TEUTATES), receives the emissary who comes to plead for revenge to the insult made to his master. The god is sensitive to the plea of the envoy of the Dark, but a decision concerning such a serious matter will demand that ample time be taken to ponder the question of what will the consequences of the support of any particular side of this conflict be. He first needs to determine whether or not his realm will benefit from any intervention in this conflict.

When men began to see the reign of the Dark as an unbearable yoke during the peak of the winter, one of them succeeded in convincing the Luminous One to abandon the earth in order to rejoin the forces the Bright, shining in the sky during most of the day and thereby weakening the reign of the dark lord, and helping Life to survive and grow. Now, however, the wheel has turned, and the yoke of the Bright during the peak of the summer slowly becomes as noxious to Life as was the one of the previous ruler of the creation. Life indeed benefited from the gifts of the Thunderous One: the showers that water the land and all the living beings inhabiting it. The heat of the summer nonetheless now threatens the survival of the plants and the creatures of the earth as much as the frost did in winter. The lord of Life remains undecided. He is warry to intervene to restore the balance between Dark and Bright, knowing that the turning of the wheel always sooner or later restores its harmony, even though he is tempted to manifest his own power to show the importance of his role as mediator between the realms.

The lord of Life embodies the will and the being of all living beings, including their contradictions. Men are divided, failing to see their own purpose, and the purpose of Life itself. Some will take upon themselves the task of restoring the balance between Dark and Bright, the forces of the earth and those of the heav-

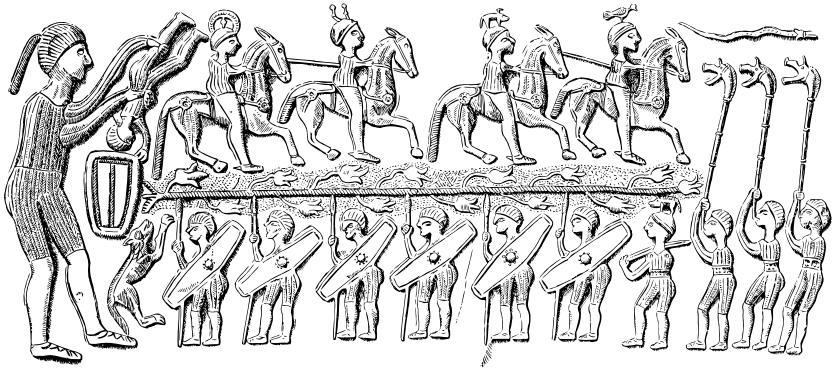


Figure 5.13: *Plate A04 (C6574) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

ens, deaf and blind to what is larger than them. A large part of the people now supports the ram-horned serpent in his campaign against the Thunderous One. The chiefs and the Druids among them therefore rally all their troops and they perform a sacrifice that will symbolize their commitment to the cause of the Dark. A man deemed unworthy of belonging to his people is seized and plunged upside down into a barrel filled with water (Fig. 5.13, left part). His life and his being are extinguished, without a drop of blood given to the Dark, or ashes offered to the Bright. It is here a celebration of Life, the middle realm, whose forces are about to intervene in the conflict between the two poles of the creation. The troops are now arrayed around the sacred tree. The roar of the carnyxes resonates throughout the land, announcing the oncoming battle and uplifting the spirit of the soldiers in front of them. The vanguard of horse riders, composed of the chieftains and the mightiest warriors of the Gauls, follow the lead of the ram-horned snake, which guides them to the battlefield.

The battle does not oppose men directly to the celestial forces. Men indeed cannot ascend to the skies in order to attack. Just as the One of the People is able to rally men to defend the cause of the Dark, the forces of the Bright are also able to convince men to fight for them. The Luminous One, in particular, is particularly well positioned to influence the hearts of men, filling them with visions of power and glory. Many also want to free themselves from the influence of their birth giver, the Dark, which they perceive as

smothering their ambitions. They may also simply want to join what appears to be the winning side of the strife for the control of the creation. Regardless of their motivations, which certainly are as diverse as the men populating the earth, a part of mankind, and even a part of the people of Gaul, now sides with the forces of the Bright.

The army led by the ram-horned serpent now faces those who rebel against the Good One, the Dark out of which each one of them was born. Men stand against men, brothers against brothers, holding a single standard, which they both claim as their own, seeing themselves as the true representatives of mankind (Fig. 5.14): a boar, the most visible inhabitant of the forests of Gaul. The side fighting for the defense of the Dark, the honor of the Good One, is accompanied by the earthly creatures, servants of the lord of shadows, among which the hound occupies a prominent place. Facing them, the ground soldiers of the celestial forces are assisted by heavenly creatures, animals normally never found on the surface of the earth,[19] such as winged horses, which are able to withstand the assaults of the hounds.

Caught between the two camps, the lord of Life, the One of the People, witnesses this madness. It is his own flesh, his own being that strives against itself, cutting off his body piece by piece and casting them off to the ground, where they are absorbed by the Dark. Stunned by the absurdity of these hostilities, he attempts to intervene, holding the two camps separate from one another, hoping that their thirst for blood would vanish if they were given time to reflect on the nature and the goal of their actions. The battle, however, takes place in the heat of the summer, when Light occupies the major part of the days and penetrates deep inside any opening found on the earth. The followers of the ram-horned serpent inevitably fail to destroy the forces of the Thunderous one. They are slaughtered in great numbers, and what remains of their army is left powerless, unable to bring back the bride of the Good One down to the surface of the earth.

Standing near the seat of her summer love, the Great Queen observes the fratricide combat taking place down below. The camp

[19] Such creatures were almost never seen in Western Europe, and they therefore belonged to the realm of imagination: the World, which is part of the Bright.



Figure 5.14: *Plate B06 (C6569) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).



Figure 5.15: *Plate B07 (C6565) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

of her hibernal husband is decimated. The flesh of the men and hounds that tried to take snatch her away back to earth has been torn open by the celestial lions, and their corpses now lay down near her (Fig. 5.15). She then realizes that she is no longer free to chose to whom does her heart belong. The strength and confidence of the lord of the clouds and the winds, which attracted her before and led her to willingly take refuge in his arms, now appear under a different light. He is now her jailor, full of a rage that is no longer only directed at his archenemy down on earth or his opponent in the battle for the control of the skies, the Luminous One, but also directed against her, because he now fears that she one day will once again forsake him and return to the side of her earthly husband. She is distraught by this realization. She is torn between her repulsion for the vulnerable and feeble lord of the earth, and her fear in front of the brutish and insecure lord of the clouds and the winds. Neither one of them now appears as a suitable mate for her, the Great Queen whose throne occupies the summit of the skies, and whose dominion encompasses both the earth and the heavens. As she reflects on an appropriate course of action, she is comforted by her two handmaids, who take care of her and try to alleviate her worries. The celestial regent now only sees one possible choice, one possible path to escape the predicament in which she is now caught. Hoping to escape the notice and the reach of her jailors, the lions of the heavenly host, she and her two faithful servants once again take the appearance of three cranes, ready to fly away from the lofty court.

The three cranes wander in the sky, descending below the clouds, dominion of the Thunderous One. The leader of this herd of birds nonetheless does not wish to return to the earth, dominion of the Good One. Both of her lovers are equally unworthy of her. The forces of the Bright now begin to decline as the peak of the summer is now behind them, and the lord of the Dark begins to recover some of his prestige. New antlers are beginning to grow on the top of his head. When he takes his human appearance, a beard now once again starts to cover his face, slowly erasing the tender traits characterizing his nature as the Good One: a gentle but frail boy, provider of Life but unable to defend it from the yoke of the Bright. And yet, he remains unappealing to the queen, lacking the stamina and the nobility that she demands. The monarch of the skies therefore seeks refuge to the only place that neither belongs



Figure 5.16: *Esus (?)* (A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 353.).

to the Dark nor the Bright: Life, the "middle realm."

The three cranes stop their descent when they reach the top of the green canopy of the forests of Gaul. Standing between earth and sky, in the foliage of the trees, they become dwellers of the realm of Life and Being, refusing to submit to the authority of either one of the two poles of the creation (Fig. 5.16). Her two suitors nonetheless do not intend to let her go so easily. Closest to her, the Good One pursued the flock of cranes as their arrived on earth. A hatchet in hand, he enters the forest where the birds have taken refuge. The trees are now all covered in leaves: the surface of the Dark no longer is his territory, as it was during the heart of the winter, when he exerted his authority both in the skies and on the earth. It now belongs to Life, which covers every part of the surface of the earth. Despite the thick cover offered by the forest to the fleeing birds, he nevertheless succeeds in tracking them down. Determined to bring the queen back to his home, willingly or forcibly, he begins to strike down the tree where she now perches with her two companions (Fig. 5.16 – 5.17).

The regent of the highest heavens is nonetheless not so easily caught. Seeing the tree upon which they stand being chopped down, the three cranes fly away, deeper and deeper into the forest.



Figure 5.17: *Esus on the "Pillar of the Boatmen"*(A. L. J. Bertrand, *La religion des Gaulois; les Druides et la druidisme*, Page 360.).

In the heart of the land, hidden inside the most secluded parts of the green mantle covering the earth, they find a sign: the most impressive animal of the land, larger than the stag, stronger than the bear, and more useful to man than the boar. It is a bull, whose sheer mass makes his hooves penetrate deep into the earth, proclaiming his belonging to the Dark. His hairs are red, as the blood that flows in the veins of all the creatures of the forest. His two horns, proudly elevated high in the air, as if they were ready to pierce through the clouds and to keep the celestial bodies in respect, nonetheless also serve as a declaration of his link to the Bright. His very essence, as the largest animal found in the land of Gaul, also designates it as the ideal symbol of the resilience and force of Life and Being, the "middle realm." The bull therefore embodies the essence of Life itself, which is the fruit of the harmonious strife between Dark and Bright. Life is what allows the tension between Dark and Bright, belonging to both and yet keeping them at bay from each other.

The cranes therefore behold this sign standing in the heart of the forest, which is also the heart of the "middle realm." They recognize it as the most central and neutral location, the eye of the storm that is the strife of the realms, which paradoxically is the quietest place, where the forces at work in the strife cancel each other out. Impressed by the majesty of the beast, and knowing what it represents, they thus decide to perch on top of the animal, with the queen resting on its head, and her two servants on its back (Fig. 5.18). They are neither on the earth nor in the sky, neither in the dominion of the Good One nor in the one of his lofty opponent.

As the cranes enjoy the protection provided by the bull, the earthly suitor of the Great Queen finally arrives in the clearing where the bull stands. Still armed with his hatchet in his hand, cutting through the ferns and the branches, he now faces the wall of blood and muscles upon which his beloved perches with her two servants. The bull is not impressed by the lord of the earth, and he remains still, simply observing the intruder. The animal knows that he would not dare to strike him, and that he would have no chance to prevail if a combat between them were to take place. As the embodiment of the essence of Life and Being, he himself is now the wedge that keeps the Dark and the Bright at bay from each other, by preventing the Good One from taking hold of the Great



Figure 5.18: *The bull with the three cranes on the Pillar of the Boatmen* (Reinach, *Guide illustré du Musée de Saint-Germain*, Page 71.).

Queen.

The cranes, on the other hand, do not have such a great confidence in the abilities of the bull. Frightened, or perhaps simply annoyed, they thus swiftly depart from their refuge. They soar back to the sky, through the clouds, carried by the winds, and they soon return to the seat of the queen's celestial guardian. The Thunderous One is still stronger than his earthly enemy, and thus the Great Queen still deems him to be a better match to her, for the time being at least... His forces are indeed now growing weaker, while the Good One slowly recovers some of his power.

Down on the earth, among the men dwelling in the land of Gaul, the strife continues to rage between the men wishing the return of the Great Queen to the earth and those who want her to remain with her celestial protector. As the summer soon draws to an end, the forces of the Dark and those of the Bright now almost match one another in terms of strength. Far from leading to peace, this equality of forces considerably amplifies the tension between the two armies fighting on the earth. Without any side significantly stronger than the other, both are convinced that victory is within their reach, and the combat is thus increasingly ruthless. Men fall like flies, and the soil is gorged with their blood. The One of the People is powerless to stop this senseless slaughter that threatens his very existence.

Some among the Gauls are nonetheless wise enough to see that the strife between the gods, waged by proxy using men as pawns, does not benefit to the creation as a whole. It served its purpose when it contributed to a better harmony of the strife, but it is now consuming Life as a whole. The need for a renewal is now felt, and the meaning and essence of the strife must be re-discovered by men so that they may once again play their part in it. In the middle of the fall, preparations for the ritual are made, a ceremony that will take place over three nights. Throughout the land, envoys of the druids are searching for the three strongest bulls that can be found among their people: a white one, a red one, and a black one, each serving as a champion of one of the realms of the creation, and the gods associated to it. As the red bull upon which the three cranes perched as they were chased by the Good One, which embodied the wedge formed by Life and Being, separating the Dark from the Bright, the white bull both

represents the Bright itself and the part of the people working for it to prevail over the other realms, while the black one embodies the Dark and those fighting for it.

On the first day of the ritual, the white bull is placed at the center of the clearing, in front of the people gathered to witness this celebration. Servants of Dark are also present: hounds that turn around the bull, eager to see its blood flow down onto the ground. The Bright nonetheless also sent its envoys: fierce felines that are pursuing the hounds, preventing them from attacking the bull (Fig. 5.19). As the corpse of one of the hounds lays on the floor, a priest stands near the white animal, a sharpened sword in his hand. When the signal is given, at the end of the day, when the sun is soon to set, his throat is cut open. A river of blood flows out of his neck, and the animal loudly falls onto the ground, shaking the earth and touching the hearts of those beholding this wondrous sight. The symbol of the heavenly forces has fallen, declaring the end of the summer, the reign of the Bright, while honoring the role that it plays in the strife and the creation as a whole.

As the Bright time of the year is now ended, comes the dusk. This dusk is nonetheless very brief: only a single day. The second day of the ritual begins when the sun hides its face beyond the horizon, when it returns to the earth after having illuminated the sky during the day. When the Luminous One is away, and the lord of the Dark has yet to cover the earth with shadows, this is the time when Life holds sway, when the One of the People is in command. A red bull is now brought into the clearing, representing the forces of Life, the Teuta as a whole. Absent from the skies, both the Dark and the Bright nonetheless once again have sent their servants, which are as much chasing each other as they try to reach the bull, either to protect it or to bring it down, before the priest has a chance to do it himself (Fig. 5.20). When the blade of the man slices the beast's throat, it is not to mark a defeat of the realms to which he himself belongs. It rather celebrates Being by showing men the end of a being, showing them how the strongest living beings inevitably die when the crimson liquid filling them is poured out of their bodies, while the Teuta continues to live, strengthened by the unity of the men that are gathered in the sacred place. As the red bull lays inert in a pool of blood, and as the red-colored sky now begins to turn dark, men are given a reminder of their own nature, and of the importance of the role



Figure 5.19: *Plate A00 (C6563) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

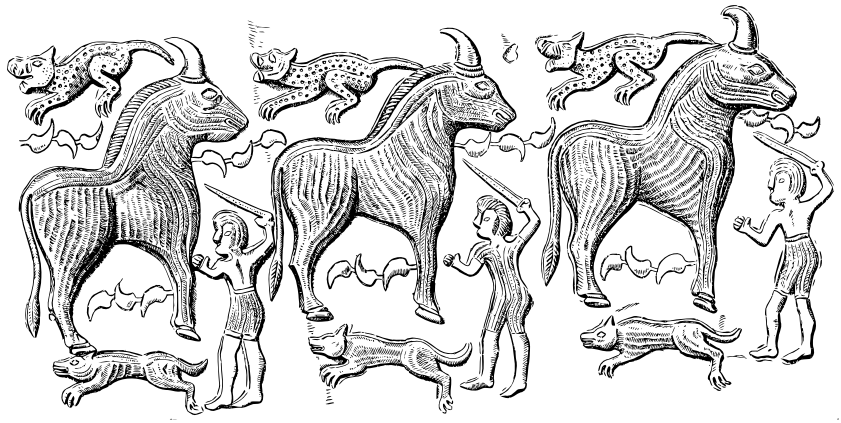


Figure 5.20: *Plate A05 (C6575) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

that they play in the strife between the gods.

The next day, the final part of the celebration is being prepared. The reign of the Bright has ended, and the day of blood served as a time of transition, a time when neither Dark nor Bright prevailed. Life kept both at bay from each other, but now, the wheel is about to complete a full rotation. The end is about to become a new beginning, as the Good One is now ready to take over. The reign of the Dark will formally start once the light has been chased away from both earth and sky, except for the feeble gleam of the Silver Wheel and her servants, who stand in their celestial court. As the black bull arrives in the clearing, the show of force of the envoys of both Dark and Bright takes place, with the hounds protecting the dark beast from the onslaught of the heavenly creatures. As the blade touches the beast and blood gushes out onto the soil, a new year begins. The authority of the father of Life is now restored, and he is determined to recover all that belongs to him, including his bride who is still with her heavenly lover.

The first undertaking of the new regent of the creation is to help the One of the People, whose body is still being torn apart by the inner strife affecting men. Supporters of the Dark still viciously fight those of the Bright, as mountains of corpses are pilling up in the plains of Gaul. As the people is divided, the two parts of the body of Life have been turned into a pair of dragons,

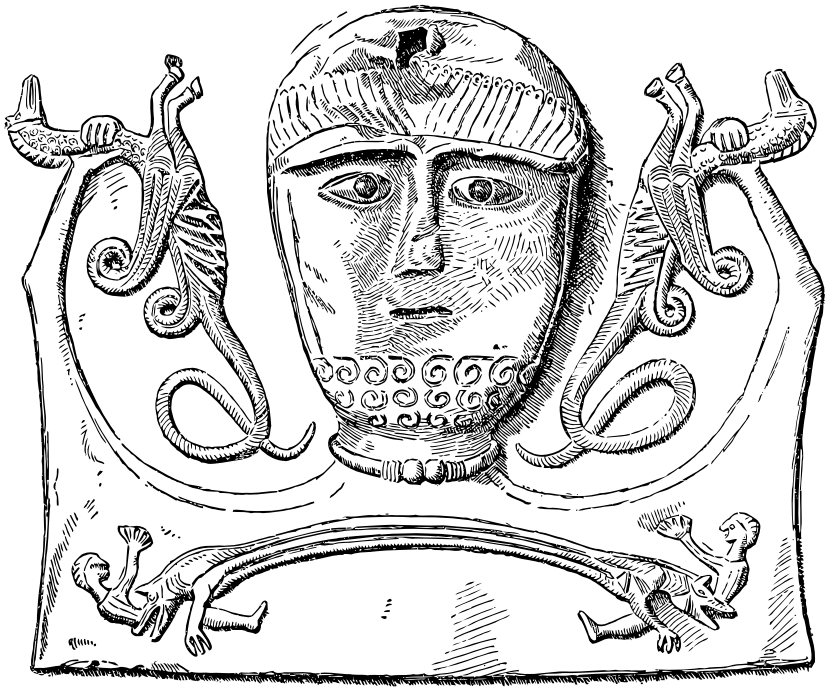


Figure 5.21: *Plate B08 (C6567) of the Cauldron of Gundestrup* (*JKDAI 1887*, N.Pag.).

a white and a black one, which are engaged in a furious combat. Witnessing this, the Good One is slowly regaining the strength that in the past allowed him to steer the course of the creation. This recovery is manifested by the return of his beard when he takes his human form, as the symbol of his virile power. Filled with courage and confident in his authority, he thus decides to seize the two dragons. He strangles them and keep them away from each other, but without extinguishing their lives: he simply intends to subdue them and to show them that he now prevails over both the forces of the Bright and Life itself (Fig. 5.21).[20]

[20] The events depicted on this plate may have a common origin with the following passage of the Mabinogi, the source of which may also have inspired similar description found in Arthurian literature (*Historia Brittonum* III: §32-56, for example): "And the second plague," said he, "that is in thy dominion, behold it is a dragon. And another dragon of a foreign race is fighting with it, and striving to overcome it. And therefore does your dragon make a fearful outcry. And on this wise mayest thou come to know this. After thou hast returned home, cause the Island to be measured in its length and breadth, and in the place where thou dost find the exact central point, there cause a pit to be dug, and cause a cauldron full of the best mead that can be made to be put in the pit, with a covering of satin over the face of the cauldron. And then, in thine own person do thou remain there watching, and thou wilt see the dragons fighting in the form of terrific animals. And at length they will take the form of dragons in the air. And last of all, after wearying themselves with fierce and furious fighting, they will fall in the form of two pigs upon the covering, and they will sink in, and the covering with them, and they will draw it down to the very bottom of the cauldron. And they will drink up the whole of the mead; and after that they will sleep. Thereupon do thou immediately fold the covering around them, and bury them in a kistvaen, in the strongest place thou hast in thy dominions, and hide them in the earth. And as long as they shall bide in that strong place no plague shall come to the Island of Britain from elsewhere." From: *The Mabinogion. Mediæval Welsh Romances*, N.Pag. (Original Middle Welsh: "Yr eil ormes heb ef yssyd yth gyuoeth di. dreic y6 honno. A dreic estra6n genedyl ara𝖍 yssyd yn ymlad a hi. Ac yn keissa6 y goresgynn. Ac 6rth hynny heb y dyt ych dreic ch6i diaspat engirya6l. Ac ual hynny y ge𝖍y kaffel g6ybot hynny. Gwedy delych atref. Par uessura6 yr ynys oe hyt ae 𝖍et. ac yn y 𝖍e y keffych di y p6nt perued yn ia6n. par glady y 𝖍e h6nn6. ac odyna par dodi ker6yneit or med goreu a a𝖍er y wneuthur y my6n y clad h6nn6. a𝖍enn o pali ar wyneb y gerwyn. ac odyna yth person dy hunan. Byd yn g6yla6. ac yna ti awely y dreigeu yn ymlad yn rith aruthter aniueileit. ac or diwed ydant yn rith dreigeu ynyr awyr. ac yn diwethaf o𝖍 g6edy darffo udunt o engirya6l agirat ymlad vlina6. 6ynt asyrthant yn rith deu barche𝖍 hyt ar y𝖍enn. ac asudant gantunt y 𝖍enn. ac ae tynnant hyt ygg6aela6t y gerwyn. ac ayvant y med yn g6byl. ac agyscant g6edy hynny. Ac yna yny 𝖍e plycca ditheu y 𝖍enn yneu kylch 6ynteu. ac yny 𝖍ekadarnhaf a geffych yth gyfoeth y my6n kist uaen clad 6ynt. a chud y my6n y daear. a hyt tra vont h6y yny𝖍e kadarn h6nn6, ny da6 gormes y ynys prydein ole ara𝖍." From: Rhys and Evans, *The text of the Mabinogion*, Pages 96-97.)

The hounds, his servants, leap onto the soldiers of the two camps, preventing them from needlessly pouring out the blood of their brothers. Men, and Life as a whole, are born out of his body, and he wants to see his children as allies against his own enemy, the one who keeps his bride away from him, in particular.

The Great Queen, sitting on her heavenly throne, observes the unfolding of these events, as the ferocious beasts of her celestial lover are closely watching over her. Down on the earth, the Good One now once again becomes the Horned One, as his antlers are now fully regrown, hard as oak wood. He promptly sends his most faithful and fearless servant, his large hound, back to deliver a message to his bride, urging her to return to his side, on earth. Thus the new year begins as the one before. The play of the gods is repeated year after year, given to men to observe and to reflect upon, until one day, when all may come to an end...

5.2 The Others Myths

If a credible retelling of the myth of the year of the early Celts can be proposed, it is mainly because of the preservation and the dis-covery of the Cauldron of Gundestrup, which paints a rather detailed outline of its most important moments. Already at the time of the creation of the cauldron, the separation between the philosophical and natural dimensions of the myth on the one hand, and its purely imaginary and folkloric dimensions on the other, could already be perceived. The myth began as the story of the strife between the three realms, which is reflected in nature and repeated almost identically every year: the migrations of the cranes, the growth and loss of the stag's antlers, the visibility of the Milky Way, or the length of the days and the nights.

Ancient sources tell us about other gods worshipped by the Gauls, many of whom, contrary to the main characters of the myth of the year, do not seem to represent a force of nature, but rather are purely anthropomorphic gods, heroes of yore or imaginary persons who are associated with elements of man's lives or particular professions. GOBANNOS certainly is one the most ancient of these gods. He is "the smith," known from several Gaulish inscriptions but also preserved in the medieval literature of the insular

Celts. He is the *Gofannon* of the Welsh, the one who killed his nephew *Dylan Eil Ton*, the Second Wave, who in turn was the brother of *Llew Llaw Gyffes*, the Lugus of the Gauls.[21]

Another example would be OGMIOS, who is known as *Ogma* in Irish literature and is seen as the inventor of the *ogham* alphabet that was in use in the island during the early middle-ages. This god, who appears to be absent from the myth of the year, is nonetheless the subject of the lengthiest and most detailed description of any Celtic god in ancient Greek and Roman sources. The Syrian satirist Lucian of Samosata offers us this description as he recounts the time when he saw a painting of the god in Gaul:

> Our Heracles is known among the Gauls under the local name of Ogmius; and the appearance he presents in their pictures is truly grotesque. They make him out as old as old can be: the few hairs he has left (he is quite bald in front) are dead white, and his skin is wrinkled and tanned as black as any old salt's. You would take him for some infernal deity, for Charon or Iapetus,–any one rather than Heracles. Such as he is, however, he has all the proper attributes of that God: the lion's-skin hangs over his shoulders, his right hand grasps the club, his left the strung bow, and a quiver is slung at his side; nothing is wanting to the Heraclean equipment . . . This ancient Heracles drags after him a vast crowd of men, all of whom are fastened by the ears with thin chains composed of gold and amber, and looking more like beautiful necklaces than anything else. From this flimsy bondage they make no attempt to escape, though escape must be easy. There is not the slightest show of resistance: instead of planting their heels in the ground and dragging back, they follow with joyful alacrity, singing their captor's praises the while; and from the eagerness with which they hurry after him to prevent the chains from tightening, one would say that release is the last thing they desire. Nor will I conceal from you what struck me as the most curious circumstance of all. Heracles's right hand is occupied

[21] It is nonetheless still possible that GOBANNOS may have been linked with some natural force. Volcanos, as "fires from the depth of the earth," may be a fitting match for the "smith."

> with the club, and his left with the bow: how is he to hold the ends of the chains? The painter solves the difficulty by boring a hole in the tip of the God's tongue, and making that the means of attachment; his head is turned round, and he regards his followers with a smiling countenance.[22]

As he observes the painting, a learned Gaulish man, speaking Greek and also well versed in the mythology of his own people, then offers some explanations to the perplexed foreigner:

> We Gauls connect eloquence not with Hermes, as you do, but with the mightier Heracles. Nor need it surprise you to see him represented as an old man. It is the prerogative of eloquence, that it reaches perfection in old age; at least if we may believe your poets, who tell us that "Youth is the sport of every random gust," whereas old age "Hath that to say that passes youthful wit." Thus we find that from Nestor's lips honey is distilled; and that the words of the Trojan counsellors are compared to the lily, which, if I have not forgotten my Greek, is the name of a flower. Hence, if you will consider the relation that exists between tongue and

[22] English translation from: Lucian, *Lucian. Works. with an English Translation by. A. M. Harmon.* N.Pag. Original Greek: "τὸν Ἡρακλέα οἱ Κελτοὶ Ὄγμιον ὀνομάζουσι φωνῇ τῇ ἐπιχωρίῳ, τὸ δὲ εἶδος τοῦ θεοῦ πάνυ ἀλλόκοτον γράφουσι, γέρων ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἐς τὸ ἔσχατον, ἀναφαλαντίας, πολιὸς ἀκριβῶς ὅσαι λοιπαὶ τῶν τριχῶν, ῥυσὸς τὸ δέρμα καὶ διακεκαυμένος ἐς τὸ μελάντατον οἷοὶ εἰσιν οἱ θαλαττουργοὶ γέροντες: μᾶλλον δὲ Χάρωνα ἢ Ἰαπετὸν τινα τῶν ὑποταρταρίων καὶ πάντα μᾶλλον ἢ Ἡρακλέα εἶναι ἂν εἰκάσειας. ἀλλὰ καὶ τοιοῦτος ὢν ἔχει ὅμως τὴν σκευὴν τὴν Ἡρακλέους: καὶ γὰρ τὴν διφθέραν ἐνῆπται τὴν τοῦ λέοντος καὶ τὸ ῥόπαλον ἔχει ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ καὶ τὸν γωρυτὸν παρήρτηται, καὶ τὸ τόξον ἐντεταμένον ἡ ἀριστερὰ προδείκνυσιν, καὶ ὅλος Ἡρακλῆς ἐστι ταῦτά γε . . . ὁ γὰρ δὴ γέρων Ἡρακλῆς ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρώπων πάμπολύ τι πλῆθος ἕλκει ἐκ τῶν ὤτων ἅπαντας δεδεμένους. δεσμὰ δὲ εἰσιν οἱ σειραὶ λεπταὶ χρυσοῦ καὶ ἠλέκτρου εἰργασμέναι ὅρμοις ἐοικυῖαι τοῖς καλλίστοις. καὶ ὅμως ὑφ᾽ οὕτως ἀσθενῶν ἀγόμενοι οὔτε δρασμὸν βουλεύουσι, δυνάμενοι ἂν εὐμαρῶς, οὔτε ὅλως ἀντιτείνουσιν ἢ τοῖς ποσὶν ἀντερείδουσι πρὸς τὸ ἐναντίον τῆς ἀγωγῆς ἐξυπτιάζοντες, ἀλλὰ φαιδροὶ ἕπονται καὶ γεγηθότες καὶ τὸν ἄγοντα ἐπαινοῦντες, ἐπειγόμενοι ἅπαντες καὶ τῷ φθάνειν ἐθέλειν τὸν δεσμὸν ἐπιχαλῶντες, ἐοικότες ἀχθεσθησομένοις εἰ λυθήσονται. ὃ δὲ πάντων ἀτοπώτατον εἶναί μοι ἔδοξεν, οὐκ ὀκνήσω καὶ τοῦτο εἰπεῖν οὐ γὰρ ἔχων ὁ ζωγράφος ὅθεν ἐξάψειε ταῖς σειραῖς τὰς ἀρχάς, ἅτε τῆς δεξιᾶς μὲν ἤδη τὸ ῥόπαλον, τῆς λαιᾶς δὲ τὸ τόξον ἐχούσης, τρυπήσας τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν γλῶτταν ἄκραν ἐξ ἐκείνης ἑλκομένους αὐτοὺς ἐποίησεν, καὶ ἐπέστραπταί γε εἰς τοὺς ἀγομένους μειδιῶν." From: ibid., N.Pag.

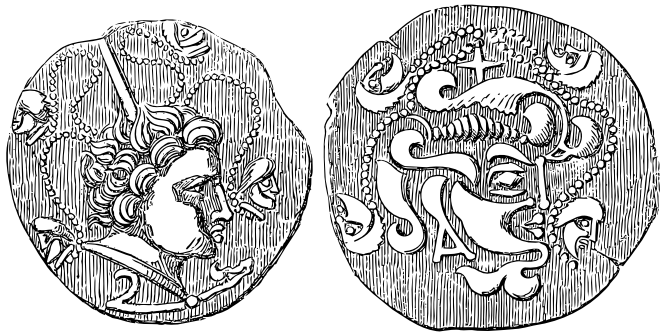


Figure 5.22: *Two Gaulish coins identified by Eugène Hucher as representing* OGMIOS. (Hucher, *L'art gaulois, ou, Les Gaulois d'après leurs médailles*, Page 93 & 104.).

> ear, you will find nothing more natural than the way in which our Heracles, who is Eloquence personified, draws men along with their ears tied to his tongue. Nor is any slight intended by the hole bored through that member: I recollect a passage in one of your comic poets in which we are told that "There is a hole in every glib tongue's tip."[23]

One may be tempted to cast doubts on the description of the Gaulish god, as it was indeed written by a satirist, but it nonetheless is supported by archaeology. Numerous Gaulish coins indeed appear to depict a god with several heads attached to him with chains, which have been identified by the French archaeologist Eugène Hucher as representing OGMIOS (Fig. 5.22).

The two aforementioned gods may be very ancient. They

[23] English translation from: ibid., N.Pag. Original Greek: "τὸν λόγον ἡμεῖς οἱ Κελτοὶ οὐχ ὥσπερ ὑμεῖς οἱ Ἕλληνες Ἑρμῆν οἰόμεθα εἶναι, ἀλλ᾽ Ἡρακλεῖ αὐτὸν εἰκάζομεν, ὅτι παρὰ πολὺ τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ ἰσχυρότερος οὗτος. εἰ δὲ γέρων πεποίηται, μὴ θαυμάσῃς: μόνος γὰρ ὁ λόγος ἐν γήρᾳ, φιλεῖ ἐντελῆ ἐπιδείκνυσθαι τὴν ἀκμήν, εἴ γε ἀληθῆ ὑμῶν οἱ ποιηταὶ λέγουσιν, ὅτι αἱ μὲν τῶν ὁπλοτέρων φρένες ἠερέθονται, τὸ δὲ γῆρας ἔχει; τι λέξαι: τῶν νέων σοφώτερον. οὕτω γὲ τοι καὶ τοῦ Νέστορος ὑμῖν ἀπορρεῖ ἐκ τῆς γλώττης τὸ μέλι, καὶ οἱ ἀγορηταὶ τῶν Τρώων τὴν ὅπα ἀφιᾶσιν εὐανθῆ τινα λείρια γὰρ καλεῖται, εἴ γε μέμνημαι, τὰ ἄνθη. ὥστε εἰ τῶν ὥτων ἐκδεδεμένους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πρὸς τὴν γλῶτταν ὁ γέρων οὗτος Ἡρακλῆς ἕλκει, μηδὲ τοῦτο θαυμάσῃς εἰδὼς τὴν ὥτων καὶ γλώττης συγγένειαν: οὐδ᾽ ὕβρις εἰς αὐτόν, εἰ ταύτῃ τετρύπηται: μέμνημαι γοῦν, ἔφη, καὶ κωμικῶν τινων ἰαμβείων παρ᾽ ὑμῶν μαθών, τοῖς γὰρ λάλοις ἐξ ἄκρου ἡ γλῶττα πᾶσὶν ἐστι τετρυπημένη." From: ibid., N.Pag.

may even predate the Celts themselves and have been worshipped by those who dwelt in the land of Gaul before their arrival from the East. They, however, do not belong to the "first gods," that is, those that designated the most fundamental forces of nature, forces that the first men could see with their own eyes every day but could not comprehend with their mind. Only once the first gods have dwelt in the World of man for a long period do other gods begin to be introduced in it, gods who often have no direct relation to nature, to the creation as it is experienced by man. The product of man's imagination, the myths in which these purely worldly gods play a part may teach man certain aspects of his own nature. They may offer a certain psychological guidance, educating the youth so that they would not commit the errors of their forefathers. Disconnected from nature itself, they nonetheless significantly differ from the myths involving the first gods. The myths of the first gods were interpretations of the essence of the natural world, ex-planations of what man experiences in his daily life and, in particular, what is too great for him to understand, but whose presence nonetheless inspires awe and wonder. These myths arise from a philosophy, and they contribute to the popularization and the development of this philosophy. Once the poetic experience at their source has been eroded by the work of time, the link between the myth and philosophy is broken, and the myth slowly decays into an aggregate of stories, a product of the imagination of numerous generations that have forgotten its inceptual purpose.

The myth of the year of the Celts already experienced such a decay, especially after the conquest, a decay that is clearly perceivable in the mythical elements based on the carving of the Pillar of the Boatmen, such as the "bull with the three cranes" and the intervention of the hatchet-wielding ESUS, elements that stand out as disconnected from the cycle of nature, which is at the heart of the larger myth of the year. Despite this decay, which probably already started long before the Roman invasion, this myth is nonetheless invaluable, because of the fact that it still splendidly depicts the relation between the three realms of the Gaulish World during the year, including the life cycle of several animals found in the land of Gaul, such as the stag and the crane. Placing the man hearing or reading it on the edge between the earth and the world, the Dark and the Bright, the reality of nature and the products of man's imagination, its anthropomorphic nature allows him to

identify himself to the forces at play in the creation, and to see himself as an actor of the strife between the realms.

The imagery uncovered by archaeology and the medieval insular literature tends to indicate that other myths linked with the cycles of nature certainly existed among the early Celts. The myth of the year probably had at least two parallel myths: one associated with the monthly cycle, and one depicting the passing of the days. Concerning these, however, no source comparable to the Cauldron of Gundestrup has been discovered yet, leaving us unable to propose any credible construction of these myths. This may nonetheless be seen as a chance rather than something to lament on. Indeed, the essence of the first myths is to be a means used to deepen man's bond with nature and the holy. When man receives the myth from his ancestors, already perfectly defined and fossilized by centuries of tradition, he has no incentive to research its origin, or to try to determine whether or not it accurately represents the essence of the earth and the skies, and what is between them. Left without inheritance, without a rigid tradition built around a series of myths, man is thus invited to himself become a poet, someone who will seek to understand nature and to bring its truth to the World that he and his people inhabit.

The Gauls did not leave much to their descendants, but they nonetheless left just enough for their children to follow their footsteps, without falling in the temptation of a blind obedience to tradition, as this tradition must now be completed and rebuilt around the ruins of the Iron Age. The core of the Gaulish World, the philosophy of the early Celts, is clear enough in order for all men to see its value and its truth. Just as the Gauls were, more than two millennia ago, we are indeed now thrown into a universe that can be seen as composed of three realms: the Dark and the Deep, Life and Being, and the Bright, which are constantly engaged in a harmonious strife that is reflected in the cycles tied to the heavenly bodies, the "round dance of the stars." This is not a "religious belief," but rather a worldview, a way to see the creation that can be directly experienced by the senses, a view that is grounded in the earth and the skies but nonetheless is also the product of man's language. This philosophical core can now become the basis upon which the poet can build new myths that would help him to nurture his bond with nature and the divine.

The myth of the month, for example, would certainly involve the moon, the Second Wave, second son of the Silver Wheel. Its monthly reappearance may be interpreted as a rebirth, perhaps incorporating remnants of the original myth that may have been preserved in medieval literature, such as the accidental killing of the Second Wave by his uncle GOBANNOS. It may even include exceptional events such as lunar eclipses, when the moon takes the color of blood, the hue characterizing the "middle realm." The myth of the day would nonetheless be easier to construct, as the philosophical core of the Gaulish World appears to be built around it: the alternation between the dark night and the bright daytime, separated by the dawn and dusk, when the horizon becomes red as blood, and the animals of the forest finally go out of their shelters. What matters is that the observation of nature, and its bringing into man's World through the work of the poet, can lead man to re-dis-cover his own essence as part of the strife of the realms, and part of Life and Being in particular. His essence allows him to become the tension through which Dark and Bright are revealed to all beings, and to unveil the role that he is called to play in the creation and the truth of being itself. As Heidegger tells us: "Truth establishes itself in the work. Truth is present only as the strife between clearing and concealing in the opposition between world and earth."[24] The truth of being cannot be offered as a gift, and it cannot be directly taught. Only through the work of the poet can it be dis-covered and appropriated. Every one of us is therefore called to become a builder of the World, a philosopher-poet, someone who crafts myths that allow an encounter between man and the first gods, as a preparation for the welcoming of the last one. The end, however, can itself also be the subject of a myth, as it was the case in the Gaulish World...

5.3 The Myth of the End

Man is caught in the flow of time and he cannot see its destination. He cannot experience the end of the creation before it

[24] English translation from: Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, Page 37; Original German: "Die Wahrheit richtet sich ins Werk. Wahrheit west nur als der Streit zwischen Lichtung und Verbergung in der Gegenwendigkeit von Welt und Erde." From: Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Page 50.

comes, but he nonetheless feels the need to know how history ends, and what will be the outcome of the strife between the forces of nature, which includes man himself. The myth can once again help him envision what this outcome could be, but contrary to the myths helping him to make sense of the essence of nature, such as the myth of the year, this one cannot be grounded in a personal experience. It necessarily is a pro-jection, based on visions that are the fruits of man's imagination, and that therefore can never be considered to be exact "truths."

Most eschatological myths will nevertheless be tightly intertwined with a philosophy found at the foundation of the World of the people from which they arise. It would seem to be the case with the early Celts, even though the detail concerning their vision of the end is extremely scarce. The most insightful source concerning the final myth of the Gauls is very succinct but it nonetheless allows us to relate it to the essence of the Gaulish World. It is a single sentence from the ancient historian Strabo: "Not only the Druids, but others as well, say that men's souls, and also the universe, are indestructible, although both fire and water will at some time or other prevail over them."[25] The fire is an attribute of the Bright, while water belongs to the Dark. What it tells us is that either one of the poles of the creation may at time destroy the other realms, with Life being wiped out when the imbalance between Dark and Bright is too great for the living beings to bear. It may also mean that the crumbling of Life itself, the "middle realm" keeping Dark and Bright at bay, may cause a collapse and fusion of the two extremes, thereby annihilating all differences, all the contrasts that define nature.

The same historian also mentions another element that may be found at the heart of the eschatological myth of the Gauls:

> The Kelts who dwell on the Adriatic came to Alexander for the purpose of making a treaty of friendship and mutual hospitality, and that the king received them in a friendly way, and asked them, while drinking, what might be the chief object of their dread, supposing that they would say it was he; but that they replied, it was

[25] Strabo, *Geography, Volume II: Books 3-5*, N.Pag. (§ 4.4); Original Greek: "ἀφθάρτους δὲ λέγουσι καὶ οὗτοι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ τὸν κόσμον, ἐπικρατήσειν δέ ποτε καὶ πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ." From: ibid., N.Pag.

> no man, only they felt some alarm lest the heavens should on some occasion or other fall on them.[26]

This passage is now well known by all the descendants of the Gauls. It foretells of a collapse of the heavens, which would then be merged with the earth, killing all the living caught in between. The frame supporting the skies can also be identified in their World: it is the Silver Wheel, the Great Queen that dwells in the highest parts of the heavens, and whose movements determine the course of time itself and with it the course of all what she encompasses: the sun, the moon, the clouds and the winds, the living creatures, and the earth itself. She is the backbone of the creation, supporting it on her shoulders. This nature of the Silver Wheel may be found in an ancient Celtic chariot sculpture that depicts a series of men and animals standing on the flat part of the chariot (Fig. 5.23). At its center, a very large woman, two times bigger than the other figures, is seen supporting a large round vessel and the four crossed pillars that connect it to the chariot, as she stands on the center of a spoked wheel. This may very well represent the Silver Wheel supporting the heavens, and thus the mythical collapse of the skies may imply that something would ultimately happen to the Great Queen, either her death or an inability to continue her support of the creation.

According to Strabo's first quote, however, the collapse of the order of the creation may only be a transient state rather than an absolute end: fire and water "at some time or other" prevail. When Dark and Bright collapse and merge one into the other, the possibility for Life to exist ends, and the strife between the realms ceases. The end of the *strife* marks the beginning of a time of *peace*. For the Celts, peace may nonetheless not necessarily have been seen as desirable. Peace is indeed called TANKO- [tanco-][27] in the Gaulish tongue, a word based on a root meaning "to be solid, firm." Once the Silver Wheel has crumbled upon itself and when the skies fall down onto the earth, the creation as a whole

[26] English translation from: Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, N.Pag. (§ 7.3.8); Original Greek: "φησὶ δὲ Πτολεμαῖος ὁ Λάγου κατὰ ταύτην τὴν στρατείαν συμμῖξαι τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ Κελτοὺς τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἀδρίαν φιλίας καὶ ξενίας χάριν, δεξάμενον δὲ αὐτοὺς φιλοφρόνως τὸν βασιλέα ἐρέσθαι παρὰ πότον, τί μάλιστα εἴη ὃ φοβοῖντο, νομίζοντα αὐτὸν ἐρεῖν: αὐτοὺς δ᾽ ἀποκρίνασθαι ὅτι οὐδὲν πλὴν εἰ ἄρα μὴ ὁ οὐρανὸς αὐτοῖς ἐπιπέσοι." From: Strabo, *Geographica*, N.Pag.

[27] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 369.

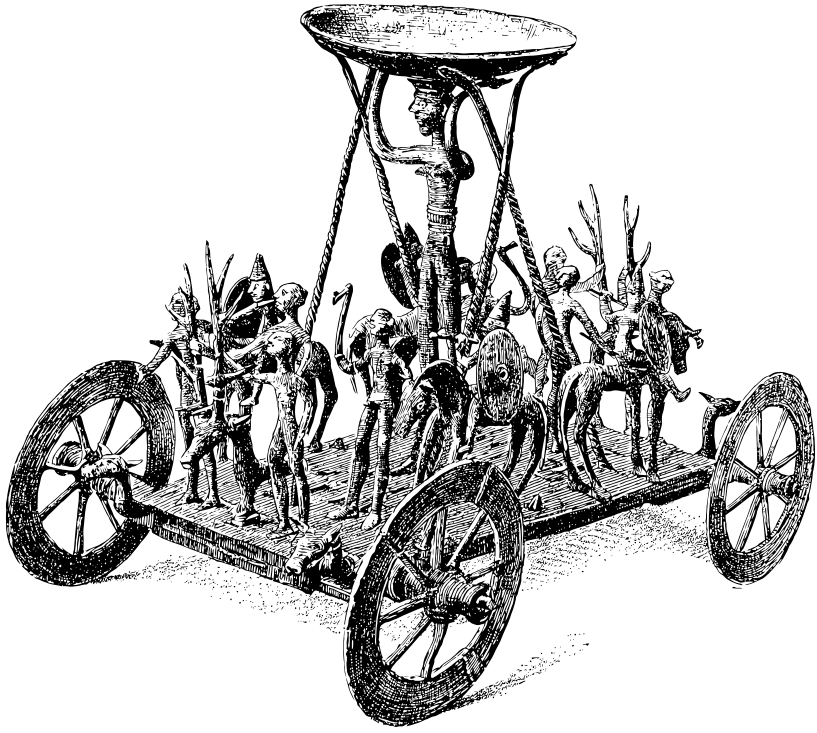


Figure 5.23: *The Strettweg Chariot (7^{th} c. B.C.)* (*JKDAI 1887*, Page 32.).

becomes as a solid, lifeless block mixing light and matter, Dark and Bright. Once everything has crumbled, nothing can move, and the universe is quiet and silent, as a corpse that only serves as a reminder of its past life and glory.

Every strife ends with peace (as TANKO- [tanco-]), and all that is built sooner or later crumbles. Therefore, the destiny (PCelt. *TONKETO- [*tonketo-][28]) of the strife inevitably leads it to a state of peace, where the realm of Life and Being has no place, as it incarnates the separation and the tension between Dark and Bright. All peace is nonetheless also necessarily transient. The Bright sooner or later flees from the Dark, and Life reemerges in the rift between them. It shows that the building of all that stands above the earth, no matter whether those things are made from the body of the Dark or from the light of the Bright, is never an end in itself, as all things are ultimately crushed by the great collapse, the great peace that annihilates all "things." The only thing that forever remains indestructible is man's accomplishments, the appropriation of his own being and of his own destiny, which remain permanent once they have occurred, even when he has returned to the dust.

What the myth of the end teaches man is that what is found and left on the path is more important than its destination. The end is unforeseeable, and therefore man should not waste too much time wondering about its endless possibilities. To envision the end only serves to show him that the reaching of the end is not what he is called to experience. As the German philosopher tells us, for man, "the end is only where a being has torn itself away from the truth of be-ing."[29] His destination is the appropriation of the strife, when its harmonious essence has gained ground in the heart of his own life, so that the strife becomes indistinguishable from peace, as the order of the strife is now perfectly understood, leaving man in a state of absolute peace as he continues to wage the most violent battles to which he has ever taken part.

When the strife has thus been appropriated, man can cease

[28] Matasovi, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Page 383.

[29] English translation from: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, Page 293; Original German: "Das Ende *ist* nur dort, wo sich das Seiende aus der Wahrheit des Seyns losgerissen," from: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Page 416.

to pursue the first gods. He can forget the myth, and foremost, he can stop to await the arrival of the last god, as by awaiting him he already tries to make him fit in the molds of the idols fashioned by the men who neither knew the first ones nor waited for the last one, those who lived in between the time of the first poets and the one of the last metaphysicians. Only by waiting, without attempting to know what will come, will he prove himself worthy of his arrival.

Conclusion

> All action requires forgetting, just as the existence of all organic things requires not only light, but darkness as well.
>
> — Nietzsche[30]

The exploratory work offered in the previous pages is meant to invite to a foundation of a Celtic philosophy. Such a foundation can only occur when space has been left for it, in the World. It needs a vacuum, a clear space, which would allow man to build something new, and it is precisely the obstinate refusal of the early Celts to put their philosophy and their World as a whole into writing, even when these were about to be forgotten, that allows the possibility for such a work to be initiated. The forgetting of the knowledge of the Druids was necessary in order for us to do our own investigation of the truth of nature. If a canon of sacred texts had been given to us by the ancient wise men, we might have been tempted to accept it without question, especially for those who see themselves as their direct heir, their distant sons.

Even though man can become the prey of a rigid tradition, which can hold him prisoner and limit his horizon, he nonetheless would not even be truly human if he did not receive and appropriate any tradition. He directly receives his language and an incredible amount of knowledge from his parents, many bits of which originate from the earliest times of the existence of his kind. An infant needs to be given a foundation, to be introduced into a

[30] English translation from: Nietzsche, *The Nietzsche Reader*, Page 127. Original German: "Zu allem Handeln gehört Vergessen: wie zum Leben alles Organischen nicht nur Licht, sondern auch Dunkel gehört." Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie: Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I-IV : Nachgelassene Schriften 1870-1873*, Page 250.

World, a language, in order to become a builder of Worlds and to transmit a heritage to his own children, and to mankind as a whole. The Celts left us just enough: only a foundation, something that invites us to build further but also gives us enough freedom for us to seek the truth of nature without impediment, except our own honesty and willpower. The extent of what they left is nonetheless still vastly unknown: every year, the soil of Europe offers us new artifacts crafted by the early Celts. The men of Gaul therefore continue to guide us on the path, even now. New dis-coveries might help us to avoid some of the dangers waiting for us on the path, but they nevertheless are not essential to our journey. The destination indeed is not the World of the Gauls as it was during the Iron Age, a "reconstruction," but rather the appropriation of our own being through the experience of nature, using the walking stick that is philosophy.

The present work only represents a small shoot growing on the stump of the Gaulish tradition, one that may in time grow larger or simply die if it is not strong enough to sustain itself. What it reveals is the importance of contrasts in nature, but also the central role that life plays in it. It shows that the strife inherent to it can be embraced, something which, far from plunging man into rage and distress, might, on the contrary, help him to live in harmony with his own essence. By identifying the role of the forces of nature, sometimes relating them to human lives through anthropomorphic metaphors, he may become mindful of their play, and decide to become an active builder of the World, an actor of the play of the creation instead of a passive onlooker. More than to a mere contemplation of nature or a reflection on its essence, man is called to action, to accompany and to direct the flow of nature rather than to let himself be carried by it.

The path to such an action and appropriation is nonetheless littered with traps and lures. The anthropomorphic metaphors may ensnare man into the worshipping of worthless idols instead of seeking the truth of the gods. In Gaul, the importance of this anthropomorphic dimension significantly grew under the influence of Rome, and it represented a departure from the tradition of the Gauls' forefathers, who seemed to be very aware of its dangers. Man may also enjoy the comforting feeling that knowing the names of the gods gives him, allowing him to "grasp" them, to "understand" them, but these names are mere signs that can themselves

become idols, signifiers hiding what they signify behind a veil of apparent clarity. Another lure is the one inherent to all philosophies: its fossilization into a metaphysics, a structure composed of predefined elements of the World that come to be accepted as truth, without being questioned or investigated. When a philosophy becomes a religion, this is when its builder stops to seek the truth of nature and stands still on the path toward the essence of the holy, when the philosopher becomes a preacher.

As it is viewed in the present work, the World of the Celts is far remote from the image that most people have of it. The ancient Celts inspire visions of magic, mystery, and foremost fantasy. Those eager to escape the harsh realities of modernity often find in Celtic culture a refuge where their fantasies can be projected. The Celtic philosophy explored in the previous pages nonetheless stands in sharp contrast with such a vision, and I would tend to believe that so would the original philosophies of the Celtic wise men of the Iron Age. Rather than to peddle fantasies allowing men to escape the reality of their environment, it on the contrary is meant to bring them closer to the truth of nature, away from the metaphysical (belonging to the Bright) and physical (belonging to the Dark) idols that are constantly fashioned by the minds and hands of men.

The World of the Gauls, however, is not man's destination, but only a milestone. It leads him to a dis-covery of the first gods, but once he has become acquainted with these gods, he must leave them behind to continue his progress on the path. He will need to pass by other milestones before his journey ends, but if he perseveres, he may one day be worthy to let himself be approached by the last god. The foundation of the Celtic philosophy that has been laid in the previous chapters invites a continuation of this work. All the "things" surrounding man in his daily life can be seen under a different light through the lens of this World: the cities in which he lives are themselves a battlefield where Dark and Bright are constantly waging a war through the intermediacy of Life, man in particular. The domination of these cities by technology can be seen as a manifestation of the power of the Bright, which represents an invisible hand ruling them with an iron fist. Permanently bathed with light, even during the darkest hours of the night, the cities have cast away the shadows of the Dark, thereby severing themselves from their origin and becoming completely subjugated

by the forces of the Bright. Doing so, they imbalance the equilibrium necessary for the continuation of the strife. Only when man will have gaind an awareness of the nature of the forces at play, and of his role in the strife, will he be able to give back strength to the Dark from which he came.

When all that man can see is the product of his own hands, he becomes blind to the presence of nature itself. The matter building the cities remains part of the great body of the Dark, but it has been transformed to such an extent so as to become unrecognizable. When the first men dwelt in dark caves on the side of cliffs or deep into forests, they could see what they owed to the Dark, which reigned supreme over the earth during the night. Seeing a concrete building, very few of the modern men will see the natural essence of what it is made of: rocks from the soil formed by millions of years of work, wood from trees that took decades to grow as they were watered by the sky and showered with its light, metals that are the gift of the soil... Conversely, the nature of the Bright also comes to be forgotten by the men who are severed from the essence of nature. Artificial lighting and heating may appear to render the work of the sun obsolete. Many men are born, live, and die without having beholden the majesty of the Silver Wheel, which is concealed by the electric bulbs we use to keep the Dark at bay during the night. Pre-calculated calendars have led to a neglect of the moon, whose observation is now only purely "recreational."

The development of the *technique* nevertheless is not inherently noxious to man's appropriation of his own essence. On the contrary, it offers him incredible tools that can both help him to gain a greater awareness of his own nature and lead him to become an active participant of the strife, as efficiently as it can lead him away from it. Information technology certainly is a domain that possesses a great potential in this regard. Technology only amplifies man's power, which he can use to strengthen his bond with the truth of nature or to completely destroy it. He therefore only needs to see the beginning of the path, and then to take the decision to tread upon it.

Nietzsche told us that "all action requires forgetting." The forgetting of the Gaulish tradition offers us a chance to build something upon its foundation, and likewise, the concealment of nature

by the development of technology gives us an opportunity to re-dis-cover it and to appropriate it in a manner that was impossible to those who lived before its emergence. The void left by the crumbling of modern metaphysics, which led to an abandon or a fleeing of the gods that replaced the first ones, calls us to examine the foundation upon which we stand. Once the idols of our World have served their purpose, which is to show us their limitations and what is false in them, they can be discarded or used for the edification of the future, to pave the way for the arrival of the last god.

To give the reader a "conclusion" of the present work, in the sense of an outcome rather than a closing statement, would nonetheless betray its nature. As an invitation for a personal experience and an "action," or as a foundation, it indeed demands that one make this philosophy his own and try to see himself in its World. Only then may it produce something, shaping the one that stepped on this foundation and decided to take upon himself to build something on top of it, taking it in a new direction.

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