

**THE  
CELTIC  
ENCYCLOPEDIA**



**VOLUME V**



T H E  
C E L T I C  
E N C Y C L O P E D I A

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VOLUME V

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The Celtic Encyclopedia

is dedicated to

Rosemary who made all things possible



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## Chapter 25

### CALENDARS

The Celtic solar year was called the circle of Baal (Bealaine/Bliadhain) and was divided into halves. The first half (waxing half) of the year began at dusk on winter solstice. Already the longest night and the shortest day have passed. The second half (waning half) of the year began at dusk of summer solstice. Already the shortest night and the longest day have passed. The solar year was then quartered by the equinoxes (days of balance) when night and day are of equal length. These four important solar events were represented by four spokes of the solar calendar. The time between the solar events was again subdivided by four calendar events which were represented by the other four spokes of the solar wheel.

The Celtic day was also divided into two halves. The first half (dark half) of the day began at dusk and the second half (light half) of the day began at dawn with high noon as its point of balance.

A Celtic lunar/solar calendar was found in France at Coligny near Bourg-en-Bresse. The site was in the border zone of the Sequani and the Ambarri tribes who both settled the area around BC 6th century. The calendar was found with artifacts including a bronze statue believed to have been part of a temple where the calendar plaque was mounted for public use. The time that the calendar was in use is thought to have been between BC 3rd - AD 1st century. The script and numbers on the calendar are Roman and the language is Brythonic Celt. Alban Wall, Stonehenge and the Calendar of Coligny, asserts that it contains no Roman or Greek elements and, like Stonehenge, is based on a 19-year moon/sun cycle.

Pliny (AD 1st c), Stonehenge and the Coligny calendar all present evidence that the Celts began their month on the 6th day of the moon, which is the waxing half or 1st quarter, the day of balance.

The Coligny calendar had 16 columns showing 62 lunar months plus two additional intercalary months, giving it a 19-year cycle. The month was divided into a bright half of 15 days with the 3-day full moon at the center. The dark half had 14-15 days with the new moon at its center. The British and Portuguese, among others, still use the fortnight/15 days as a measurement of moon-time. The first half of the moon-month had maximum light and the second half had maximum darkness. The second half of the moon

calendar was called Atenoux or Athnugud (renewal).

Some of the days and months of the Colingy calenday were marked good (Mat) or bad (Anm). The Celts believed even into recent time that people born in the night could see ghosts and phantoms which could not be seen by people born during the daylight hours.

The Celtic tree calendar as presented by Robert Graves, The White Goddess, divided the year into 13 months. The tree year began in December just after the solstice with the month of Beth, represented by the self-propagating birch tree that was used to drive out the spirit of the old year.

The oldest zodiac was the lunar zodiac with 28 houses or stations in which the moon could be seen. As the moon goddess lost in importance to her son it was overshadowed by the solar zodiac. The Saros cycle of the lunar calendar synchronizes with the sun every 18.03 solar years. Stonehenge has a lunar aspect and there is an interesting lunar calendar called Sagres ("sacred") in southern Portugal at Cabo de São Vincente. North America, especially in the province of Alberta, has many lunar calendars called medicine wheels.

The solar zodiac calendar begins at the vernal equinox which is the day of balance in the waxing half of the sun year and the beginning of the bright half of the solar year. The sun and moon both move west to east in relationship to the movement of the stars.

The solar zodiac calendar is regulated by the constellation in a band which is 8° on either side of the elliptic path followed by the earth and its moon as the planet orbits the sun. The band is divided into 12 equal sections called signs or houses and starts with the sun's position at the vernal equinox. The modern-day zodiac was standardized by Hipparchus in BC 2nd century with Aries at the vernal equinox. Before this time the starting constellation was Taurus. The ancients did not use the zodiac to predict the complicated future events for individuals; such a concept is relatively modern.

It has been suggested that the Celts used a 13-month calendar. The constellation Libra, which is the house before Scorpio, was not used before BC 300 but the constellation Ophiuchus (Serpent Holder) was in use and fell between the houses of Scorpio and Sagittarius. The naming of the constellations had more to do with the mythology they told than with the physical appearance of the star configurations.

In late September, the sunset and moonrise coincide for several days in the northern hemisphere and this is the time of the full moon called Harvest Moon. The winter moon rises earliest and sets latest while the sun rises latest and sets earliest.

Stonehenge is probably best known as a solar calendar but it was also an excellent lunar calendar. The two calendars are in synchronicity every 19 years and the

bluestone horseshoe was used to keep track of the cycle. The end of the 19-year cycle would see the conjunction of full moon and winter solstice sunset. The moon would rise over the heelstone as the sun set through the arch of the Great Trilithon.

The Greeks called the people who built and interpreted the calendars at Stonehenge Hyperborean (people of the north). They reported that these people used wheat straw in their rites to the sun god who visited them every 19 years on the great year. He visited them from the time of the vernal equinox and played his harp until the Pleiades rose (in Taurus) before leaving again.

The Celts have used constructions such as Stonehenge, Aubrey Circle, mountain ridges such as Edderton in Scotland, the calendar of Coligny and medicine wheels in America and Iberia to track the stars, sun, moon and other planets so as to divine the calendar events of the future.

### Months of the Coligny Calendar

| first half         | second half        |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Giamonios - (Dec)  | Samonios - (Jun)   |
| Simivisonn - (Jan) | Dumannios - (Jul)  |
| Equos - (Feb)      | Rivros - (Aug)     |
| Elembivios - (Mar) | Anagantios - (Sep) |
| Edrinios - (Apr)   | Ogronios - (Oct)   |
| Cantlos - (May)    | Cutios - (Nov)     |

### The Five Vowels (Stations) of The Moon Goddess

|           |                   |         |              |         |
|-----------|-------------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| A (Ailm)  | - New Moon        | - black | - BIRTH      | (hinge) |
| O (Onn)   | - Waxing Crescent |         |              |         |
| U (Ura)   | - Waxing Half     | - red   | - INITIATION |         |
| E (Eadha) | - Waxing Gibbous  |         |              |         |
| I (Idho)  | - Full Moon       | - white | - EMOTION    | (hinge) |
| E (Eadha) | - Waning Gibbous  |         |              |         |
| U (Ura)   | - Waning Half     | - red   | - REST       |         |
| O (Onn)   | - Waning Crescent |         |              |         |
| A (Ailm)  | - New Moon        | - black | - DEATH      | (hinge) |

**The Robert Graves 13-Month Tree Calendar**

B - Beth --- Dec 24 - 20 Jan  
 L - Luis --- Jan 21 - 17 Feb --- (Imbolic - Feb 03-04)  
 N - Nion --- Feb 18 - 17 Mar  
 F - Fearn --- Mar 18 - 14 Apr --- (equinox - Mar 20-21)  
 S - Saille --- Apr 15 - 12 May --- (Beltainn - May 04-05)  
 H - Uath --- May 13 - 09 Jun  
 D - Duir --- Jun 10 - 07 Jul --- (solstice - Jun 21-22)  
 T - Tinne --- Jul 08 - 04 Aug  
 C - Coll --- Aug 05 - 01 Sep --- (Lughnasadh - Aug 07-08)  
 M - Muir --- Sep 02 - 29 Sep --- (equinox - Sep 22-23)  
 G - Gort --- Sep 30 - 27 Oct  
 P - Peith --- Oct 28 - 24 Nov --- (Samhain - Nov 06-07)  
 R - Ruis --- Nov 25 - 22 Dec --- (solstice - Dec 21-22)  
 23 Dec --- (and a day)

**ZODIAC SUN CALENDAR**

Aries - Mar 21 - 20 Apr - bear / ram  
 (equinox - Mar 20-21)  
 Taurus - Apr 21 - 21 May - bull / elk  
 (Beltainn - May 04-05)  
 Gemini - May 22 - 21 Jun - Mighty Twins / Orion Giant  
 (solstice - Jun 21-22)  
 Cancer - Jun 22 - 23 Jul - ship / crab  
 (solstice - Jun 21-22)  
 Leo - Jul 24 - 23 Aug - lion / lynx  
 (Lughnasadh - Aug 07-08)  
 Virgo - Aug 24 - 23 Sep - virgin / earth goddess  
 (equinox - Sep 22-23)  
 Libra - Sep 24 - 23 Oct - balance / bird  
 (equinox - Sep 22-23)  
 Scorpio - Oct 24 - 22 Nov - scorpion / snake  
 (Samhain - Nov 06-07)  
 Sagittarius - Nov 23 - 21 Dec - archer on horseback  
 (solstice - Dec 21-22)  
 Capricorn - Dec 22 - 20 Jan - goat horn / sea goat  
 (solstice - Dec 21-22)  
 Aquarius - Jan 21 - 19 Feb - water bearer / phoenix  
 (Imbolic - Feb 03-04)  
 Pisces - Feb 20 - 20 Mar - twin fish  
 (equinox - Mar 20-21)

**SUN CALENDAR - The Harmony of Baal**

NAME Winter Solstice  
 ALTERNATIVE An-fheill-shlinnein (great shoulder-borne feast-day)  
 TYPE sun event  
 PURPOSE death of the old / birth of the new  
 DATE Giamonios (Dec) 21-22 / (2-day festival)  
 DEITY Artio / Caer Iborneith / Dianos / Belenos  
 SYMBOL D / oak club / bull  
 RITES bonfire / cider / veneration of nature  
 REMARKS Winter solstice is the shortest day of year and follows the longest night. The solstice was a 2-day event for the Celts at which they mourned the death of the old sun god and celebrated the birth of the new sun god.

The 2 days of minimum light were helped by lighting black (old sun) and gold (new sun) candles. A moon goddess such as Caer Iborneith (yew) presided over this event.

The first day of this event was concerned with the death of the sun god of the waning half of the year. He was associated with the holly tree and the lynx. The day began on the eve of winter solstice and continued until the sun's life was extinguished at the end of solstice. The color of that day was black.

A needfire of elder, the death tree, was lit on the eve of winter solstice and sacrifices were made throughout the day as the solemn event took place. Only simple meals such as round oatcakes were eaten, washed down with a little water.

The eve of the 1st day of the waxing half of the year was more hopeful, with the preparation of a feast and veneration to the Great Mother (moon). Trees were ornamented and homes were decked out with scarlet berries from plants such as mistletoe, yew, ivy and holly and boughs of silver fir in honor of Artio, the deity who helps with births. The mistletoe was important because it contained the soul of the oak tree until spring.

As an act of sympathetic magic to help ensure that the son of The Great Mother would be born strong and friendly, a great birch or apple needfire was lit. The Celts spent this night chanting and dancing their way into a frenzy waiting for the new born sun to show himself. A portion of the Yule log was saved to start the needfire of the following year.

When the new sun was born, the feast followed and the Celts ate and drank cider (or golden ale) in excess, then gave presents as charms to ensure abundance during the following year. The sun god of the waxing half of the year was associated with the bull and the oak tree.

The Coligny Calendar indicates that the Celts divided

the solar year into two halves, with the solstices as the hinges. The first half started at winter solstice in the month of Giamonios (December).

In the solar zodiac this was the month of the goat and in the tree calendar the festival started at the end of the month of Ruis (elder), tree of death, and ended with B (birch), the tree of new beginnings. The apple tree was known as the tree of eternal life.

The god Dianos (Bright Phase) was of paramount important, being the god of new beginnings. As a god with two heads looking in opposite directions he was associated with death and rebirth, doors, brightness and oak.

NAME Imbolic  
 ALTERNATIVE Imbolic {Imbolg} (Swelling Belly) / Oimelc / Oimelg  
 TYPE calendar event  
 PURPOSE to nourish the newborn sun god  
 DATE Equos (February) 3-4 / (8-day festival)  
 SITE Tara  
 DEITY Brighid / Tea  
 SYMBOL right-facing swastika-shaped fire wheels  
 RITES bonfire / mead / chanting / song / instrument  
 REMARKS In Ireland the festival of Imbolic was in honor of the fire deity Brighid (the bride) who was the wetnurse to the sun god. This was the time when the cows began to lactate, the time of the Water Bearer in the zodiac calendar and the tree month Luis (Rowan) tree of substance food of the gods. A needfire of rowan wood was lit, and firewheels in the shape of right-facing swastikas were constructed from rush and set ablaze. The Imbolic festival also marked the beginning of spring season (Earrach).

Sacrifices were offered, food and mead was in abundance and with the help of music and chants the Celts danced themselves into a frenzy, inviting the fire goddess to inhabit someone's body and walk among them.

The Celts prayed that she would nourish the newborn sun deity and that he would grow strong and friendly. Tea, a Celtic fertility goddess, was the patron of the feast (Feis Tara) that was held in honor of Brighid. There was a prescribed order of presentation of the food served, with Bride cakes and dishes with rowan berries having special importance. After the feast followed games of skill, music and stories by bards, entertainment by poets, horse races, foot races, and meetings between families, clans and friends.

Mead was the drink of all the calendar events dealing with the sun god and any breach of the divine peace was instantly punishable by death.

NAME Spring Equinox  
 ALTERNATIVE Co-thad-thrath (co-joining timeperiod) / vernal  
 equinox (equal night/day) / The Dragon's Head  
 TYPE sun event / moon festival / earth festival  
 PURPOSE sun god overthrew darkness / The Great Mother /  
 awakening of the earth goddesses  
 DATE Elembivios (March) 20-21 / (3-day festival)  
 DEITY On-niona  
 SYMBOL disk divided into light half and dark half  
 RITES bonfire / mulberry wine / chanting / song /  
 instruments

REMARKS At the spring equinox, the young son god  
 overwhelmed darkness and a 3-day festival was held to  
 honour his mother, to purify the land, to celebration the  
 emergences of the earth goddesses from their winter sleep  
 and to begin a new cycle of events. Furze fires were lit  
 on hilltops in honor of fertility goddesses such as On-  
 niona.

During this event night and day were in balance, it  
 was the beginning of the bright half of the year and the  
 first day of the zodiac calendar with the end of Pisces and  
 the beginning of Aries. The day was also in the month of  
 Alder (hottest-burning) in the tree calendar.

The Great Mother (Triple Goddess) visited her admirers  
 first as the hag, dressed in black and representing  
 physical death. It was a day of sacrifice, first by the  
 druids, then by everyone.

During the second day The Great Mother appeared as, a  
 youth wearing white, signifying intellectual birth. On  
 this day (spring equinox) everyone visited the mother cave  
 (unicursal maze) representing the womb of the earth goddess  
 and asked for the return of the male oak spirit from its  
 winter abode in the female mistletoe.

On the third day of the festival, the Triple Goddess  
 appeared as a maiden in the prime of her life and dressed  
 in scarlet: the color of the spirit, fire and sexual  
 energy. The young goddess attended a day of feasting,  
 drinking (mulberry wine), chariot races, games of skill and  
 story-telling.

All three days of the event were enhanced by dance,  
 song, music and decoration by any new growth of leaves or  
 flowers. The Great Mother was the perpetual virgin, mother  
 of all Celtic deities, mankind and all living things. She  
 was associated with the moon, fertility and continual  
 motion.

NAME Beltainn  
 ALTERNATIVE Bealltain / Beltain (Brilliant Fires) / Beltane  
 / Beltene / Belteine / Beltine / Cet-Saman /  
 Cetshamain  
 TYPE calendar event  
 PURPOSE fertility festival / settle disputes  
 DATE Cantlos (May) 4-5 / (8-day festival)

SITE Uisnech, Ireland / Chartres, France  
DEITY Belenos / earth goddesses  
SYMBOL sun discs / 8-spoked sunwheels  
RITES bonfires / mead / beltane cakes / incense /  
chanting / music / dance  
REMARKS Beltainn {Beltuinn} marked the beginning of the  
summer season (Samhradh). Beltainn had two fires and was a  
2-day event with 3 days of festival on either side. Bel  
(god) teine (fire) was a fertility festival in which  
Belenos the male sun god and the female earth goddess  
fertilized nature (life force) and encouraged healthy  
livestock, game and foliage. Belenos was associated with  
the bull and the oak tree. This was the month of the bull  
in the zodiac calendar and the month of Saille (Willow) in  
the tree calendar. Willow was also a tree of great  
importance to the moon goddess. Hawthorn crowns were made  
for the god and goddess.

On the eve of Beltainn all fires were extinguished and  
all wheels ceased to turn. At the crack of dawn, the  
needfire was lit using two large very dry trunks of oak.  
The oak was rubbed together by 81 males working in shifts  
of 9 men each. The Beltainn fires were special fires  
called Coelcerth (Gaelic), now known as bonfires meaning  
"good fires".

Two large circles were drawn on the ground and the  
sods were cut out and placed around the edges. The fuel  
for the fires was gathered by 9 teams of 9 men each who had  
to be free of metal. In the center of each circle they  
erected an oak log (phallus). Logs of the 8 remaining  
chieftain trees were then arranged like the spokes of the  
wheels of the sun god's chariot radiating around the two  
oak axles. A tent of the wood was constructed at the hub  
with the spokes radiating from it.

The phallus was usually the tallest tree to be found  
in the area. It was limbed, barked and made smooth. Ropes  
were tied to the top and wound around the trunk. People in  
costumes of birds then held onto the ends of the ropes,  
jumped into the air and flew around the pole as the ropes  
unwound. Residues of this ritual are still visible in  
Maypole festivities.

Circular Beltainn cakes (Tcharnicanare) made from  
eggs, milk and oatmeal were quartered and put into a  
container of calf skin. All the members of the tribe then  
filed by and retrieved a quarter of the wheel-cake. The  
person who picked the cake with the charcoal-blackened mark  
on it was called the cailleach bealtine (Beltain Carline)  
and became the sacrifice.

The sacrifice was slain and cut into quarters with two  
sections placed on each hub. The hubs were then lit from  
the needfire and the festival was on. The members of the  
tribe circled the fires in a sunwise direction 3 times.  
Next, two young bulls were ritually killed. The cattle  
were driven 3 times between the fires of Beltainn with a  
rowan stick in order to purify them and to stimulate



fertility.

The festival was associated with spring flowers and new boughs of leaves from the hawthorn which was sacred to the moon goddess. People wore bright colors to enhance the cycle and to help it on. This was a precarious time of year because winter stores were still the main source of food, as most new growth would not yet be ready to eat. Circular cheeses were rolled down the hills in a sunwise direction and the feast that followed was of mead, boar, game, sweet milk, milk curdled over the fire and, most importantly, fresh beef.

During the feast, incense was burned and music was provided by the bards. The festival included ritual ecstatic dancing around the phallic stone, ceremonial acts of bowing and kissing, and leaping over the Beltaine fires. There were different types of races, entertainment by bards and poets, friends and family were together and a festive atmosphere prevailed.

Beltainn Sunwheels (Maltese crosses) made of ash were set ablaze and thrown or rolled into the fires. That night the red and white dragons, representing the sun and the moon, performed sacred rites throughout the night. The druids beat skin drums and blew horns, and male and female warriors beat their swords against their shields until the dragons finally pass out from drinking too much mead. On the following morning the sun was greeted with "Good morning and show your eye".

Special cups were carved into stone to catch dew, which was collected each morning of the festival before dawn and used for purification rituals. Ivy was also used for collecting dew. Women made ropes of cow-tail hair and dragged them through the grass to collect dew to beautify their faces, then hung them by their cows to ensure a greater quantity of milk. Branches of the rowan tree were also placed over doorways and barns.

The Partholean, Nemedian, Danann and Goidel all landed in Ireland on Beltainn. The Celts of Ireland held their Great Assembly on Beltainn at Uisnech, the navel of Ireland. The Gauls also held their Great Assembly on Beltainn at Chartres which was in the territory of the Carnuti tribe. This was a time when disputes were settled and the druid's word was law.

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| NAME        | Summer Solstice  |
| ALTERNATIVE | Grian Stad (sun stop)  |
| TYPE        | sun event  |
| PURPOSE     | death of the old / birth of the new  |
| DATE        | Samonios (June) 21-22 / (2-day festival)   |
| DEITY       | Artio / Balor / Belenos / Lugh   |
| SYMBOL      | T / holly club / lynx  |
| RITES       | bonfire / mead / blood / battle of the Titans  |
| REMARKS     | Summer solstice is the day of maximum light and the beginning of the waning half of the year. This was the |

day that the sun god, associated with the oak tree and the bull, was defeated by his son who was associated with the lynx and the holly tree. The solar event coincides with the departure of the Mighty Twins (Gemini) and the arrival of the ship (Cancer) in the zodiac calendar and is in the month of Duir (Oak) in the tree calendar. The two great battles of Magh Tuireadh in Ireland were fought on summer solstice between chieftains who represented the bull and Lynx gods.

The oak god was made drunk on heather mead then led to the sacred site with 12 standing stones and an altar stone. The sun god was tied in the 5-fold position with willow thongs to an oak tree that had been trimmed into a T. As the sun set the sacrifice was then beaten until he passed out, then blinded, flayed, castrated and impaled with a mistletoe stake. He was then cut into joints on the altar stone where his blood was caught in a basin and used to sprinkle the people of the tribe so they would be vigorous and fertile.

The flesh of the oak god was then roasted over twin oak fires that were either lit from a needfire or from a lightning strike, which was even more sacred. When the meat was cooked, the 12 males who were left out of the 13 chosen as initiates for the god chewed his flesh as they danced and chanted in a frenzy around the two fires in a figure of eight.

The head and genitals of the sacrifice were saved and the head was cured with smoke or oil and used by the druids as an oracle as they did with the head of Bran.

Death was considered a precursor to fertility, and the festival which followed honored female fertility deities such as Artio (Artemis), a moon goddess who was associated with bears, bees and the production of honey. The Manx wore a sprig of Mugwort (*Artemisia Vulgaris*) on their person during this day. The celebration which had begun with the sacred fires and sacrifices was followed by feasting, drinking, dancing and music. During this festival, the youth performed ritual displays to impress the opposite sex. This is the longest day of the year and the heat of sun grows in intensity.

The Coligny Calendar shows that summer solstice was considered the beginning of the second half or waning half of the year and was in the month of Samonios (June).

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| NAME        | Lughnasadh   |
| ALTERNATIVE | Bron Tro Gain (Trogain's Sorrow) / Lughnasa / Lughnasad {loo-nas'-ad} (Lugh's Wedding) |
| TYPE        | calendar event   |
| PURPOSE     | thanking the Great Mother / trial marriages  |
| DATE        | Rivros (August) 7-8 / (15-day festival)  |
| SITE        | Emain Macha / Croagh Patrick / Wexford   |
| DEITY       | Carman / Lugh / Tailtiu  |
| SYMBOL      | T / holly / lynx / 4-spoked wheel  |

RITES bonfire / mead / first sacrifices / sacred foods  
/ ritual combat

REMARKS In Ireland, Lughnasadh was a 3-day festival in honor of the sun god associated with the lynx and the holly club. The festival began with a torch procession to the highest site in the area such as Croagh Patrick, where the main bonfire in Ireland was held.

The calendar event of Lughnasadh occurs while the sun is in the house of Leo (lynx) of the zodiac calendar. The month of Tinne (Holly), the bisexual tree, has just ended and Coll (hazel) perfection is just beginning in the tree calendar. The festival also marks the beginning of autumn (Foghmhar).

A larger than usual needfire was lit and the night was passed in fasting and keeping a quiet vigil for the first rays of the sun god. As soon as the sun god appeared, "First Sacrifices" were made, to show appreciation for the blessings that the sun god and the earth goddesses had bestowed on the people.

The festival of the highland cattle herders was an old festival called Bron Tro Gain and came to Ireland with the Nemedians or the Firbolg. Bulls were sacrificed and this was the time when the cattle were taken to their winter pastures where they were fattened for winter slaughter. Some cattle were slaughtered in August so that their meat could be dried and the skins cured in the hot sun.

At Emain Macha in Ulster, Lughnasadh also served as a wake for the goddess Tailtiu. A re-enactment of the events that led to her death was held and the races and other games were her funeral games. At Wexford in the province of Leinster, the festival was associated with the goddess Carman.

Lughnasadh was also a commemoration of Lugh himself as a harvest festival as well as a cattle and horse fair, with chariot races, mock swordplay, women's races, entertainment by musicians and poets, and meetings between friends, family and clans. The feast itself began by eating curd cheese circles and butter made from the cows' milk of that morning. Special bread was also made from grain that was cut, dried, winnowed, ground and baked on a rowan fire that day.

During the festival of Lughnasadh, deeds of violence, levying debts, abductions and the divorcing of a husband or a wife were all prohibited on penalty of death. Trial marriages of 11 days were consummated on this day.

NAME Autumn Equinox  
ALTERNATIVE Co-thad-thrath (co-joining time period) / fall equinox (equal day/night) / The Dragon's Tail  
TYPE sun event  
PURPOSE prepare the sun for resurrection  
DATE Anagantios (September) 22-23 / (3-day festival)  
SYMBOL disk divided into dark half and light half

**rites** bonfire / triangle cakes  
**REMARKS** The autumn equinox is another day of balance between dark and bright, when the nights and days were of equal length. Bonfires were lit on the morning to lend strength to the sun god who is losing to the powers of darkness. In the zodiac calendar this was the end of the virgin earth goddess (Virgo) and the beginning of the house of balance (Libra). It is the month of Muir (Blackberry) in the tree calendar a plant of resurrection.

Furrowed triangle cakes were eaten in honor of the mother goddess who would guide the spirit of the oak tree to the mistletoe where it would abide for the winter. This was the beginning of the dark half of the year, a time when preparations for winter began.

**NAME** Samhain  
**ALTERNATIVE** Feis na Samhin (Feast of Samhain) / Samain {shah-vin} (Night of the Dead) / Sainn / Saman / Samhainn / Samuin / Savain / Saven / Savin /  
**TYPE** calendar event  
**PURPOSE** remembrance of the dead  
**DATE** Cutios (November) 6-7 / (7-day festival)  
**SITE** Hill of Ward  
**DEITY** Tlachtga  
**SYMBOL** 8-spoked wheel  
**rites** bonfire / mead / sacred food / donated firewood / sacred dances / rites of protection  
**REMARKS** The festival of Samhain noted the triumph of dark over bright and the beginning of the winter season (Geimhreadh). It was the time of the long winter nights when the deities of the underworld had the responsibility of maintaining order.

The eve of Samhain began by breaking the day's fast with a feast of goose, chitterlings (boar intestines) and bread baked from acorn. All fires were extinguished and no wheels were allowed to turn until the next eve. During Samhain the door between this world and The Otherworld opened upon each other, permitting spirits from either side to roam freely. The hearth was prepared for relatives who had passed on as a show of respect for the dead and to keep them happy.

During Samhain night, it was possible for those brave enough to raid The Otherworld for treasures, but the time between first cockcrow and daybreak was better spent asleep in the safety of one's home. Most warriors spent the night in their forts eating, drinking and boasting of their past brave deeds in an attempt to keep the souls of dead warriors at bay.

The following eve the great needfire was lit on the Hill of Ward in Ireland in honor of Tlachtga, a goddess of knowledge. The needfire was lit by a druid on a specially prepared site. A circular trench was dug using the cut-out turf to make an inner shelf. The wood was rowan and was

donated by the chieftains of Ireland. The Samhain fire was lit by using a specially-built wheel with 8 spokes and an axle of sacred wood. The axle was placed on the starter wood and a long rope was wound once around the axle and pulled so that the wheel spun in a sunwise direction. The friction from the wooden axle against the starter wood created enough heat to start the Samhain fire (Tlachtgha).

The head chieftains of Ireland then brought fire from the sacred needfire at Tlachtgha to their provinces and all the hearth fires were relit with a torch from the chieftain fires. The Rites of Protection were performed to any corners in the home, thresholds, chimneys, windows and any other openings.

When the druids lit the needfire at Tlachtgha which was 12 miles from Tara, a white bull was sacrificed, marking the end of the grazing season. Selected people swung burning brooms and fire-balls around their heads during special sun dances. Filidhs divined using hazelnuts and apples in association with fire and water.

The feast was held at Tara afterwards. The night was spent feasting with games, entertainment, and sword dances performed by 8 warriors. As at all calendar events, both instrumental and vocal music was important. Poets and bards remembered the brave deeds of the warriors now living in The Otherworld and sung their praises and beat their drums. Mead was the drink of most calendar festivals, and any breach of the Divine Peace was instantly punishable by death.

Through the art of dancing, singing and use of intoxicants, the Celts could achieve ecstatic states which would allow the gods to walk among their admirers.

After the festival, cattle were slaughtered and salted away for winter which was very rough in some Celtic areas. This was also the time for wars and combats. The dark half of the year was the time of the warriors and each made sure his or her weapons were ready. The druids prepared their Aspen rods which they used to measure corpses.

The festival was in the month of Scorpio (serpent) of the solar zodiac or the old month of Ophiuchus (serpent holder). It was also the month of Peith (Guelder Rose) or Ngetal (reed) of the tree calendar.



## Chapter 26

### TOTEMS

NAME Bear  
EPITHET The Brown Animal  
SYMBOL OF power / resurrection  
STAR GROUP Aries (bear) / Ursa Major (big bear) / Ursa  
Minor (little bear) / Arcturus (bear)  
ASSOCIATED honey / mead  
SEE ALSO Art / Arthur / Artio / Math  
REMARKS The bear was a mean adversary against a hunter  
armed only with a spear or bow, but its fur had many uses  
and its meat contained a great amount of fat to mix with  
fruit and berries and acorn meal to help ward off vitamin  
deficiencies in winter.

The bear was a great fan of honey, from which the  
Celts made their sacred drink of mead. Bears also have a  
taste for salmon, another sacred food. The moon goddess  
Artio was associated with the bear and numerous Celtic  
characters were named after the animal including Art,  
Arthur and Math.

Because the bear hibernates in winter it has a  
supernatural element dealing with resurrection. Many stone  
sculptures of the animal have been found in Spain, Portugal  
and Ireland. The constellation Aries was known to the  
Celts as the bear, and today there are the constellations  
Ursa Major (big bear) and Ursa Minor (little bear). The  
old North Star was called Arcturus which also means bear.

NAME Bee  
EPITHET The builder  
ALTERNATIVE Beach (Irish) / Gwenynen (Welsh)  
SYMBOL OF resurrection / reincarnation / fertility  
ASSOCIATED mead  
SEE ALSO Artio / Creide / Uroica  
REMARKS The honey bee is a stinging insect with 4 wings  
and 6 legs. Their society is divided into 3 casts; the  
queen (fertile female), drones (fertile males) and the  
workers (sterile females). Because they have a highly  
developed parental instinct, they store masses of honey for  
their undeveloped offspring in larval state who then  
reincarnated into a bee.

An important event in the life of the bee colony is  
the nuptial flight of the queen followed by the drones. She  
flies straight up where she mates with the strongest drone,

the weaker are then eliminated by the workers. This social style was imitated by the Amazons, and Celtic women also chose the best males to mate with.

Another important event of the bee is the swarm. This happens when the hive becomes too crowded. A queen followed by up to 30,000 bees will leave the old hive behind and fly in a swarm until they find a new place to settle. The Celts used the swarm idea when their territory became overcrowded.

Fermented honey, beeswax or honeycomb and water made mead, the oldest form of fermented liquor. Because the bees hibernated in winter they were a symbol of resurrection. They were also beneficial in the fertilization of flowers. The goddesses Artio and Uroica and the druid Creide were all associated with bees.

Beeswax was also important in the making of candles and essential in the casting method called the lost wax process which was used in making bronze weapons and tools or ornaments of bronze, silver or gold.

NAME Boar  
 EPITHET The Wild, Savage Beast  
 ALTERNATIVE Torc (Irish) / sow (fully grown female)  
 SYMBOL OF war / ferocity / fertility  
 ASSOCIATED moon goddess / warriors  
 SEE ALSO Aine na gClair / Amhairghin / Arduinna / Baco / Cerridwen / Danu / Mac Cecht / Manannan / Moccus / Pryderi  
 REMARKS The wild boar is a fast powerfully-built animal with razor-sharp tusks and an ability to eat almost anything. They are easily aggravated and are known for their fierce fast zig-zag attacks. They are one of the cloven-hoofed animals with a short-legged heavy body covered with a tough bristly hide and a long mobile snout. The wild boar lived in a unit called a sounder which is like an extended family or clan.

The boar was revered by the Celts, and was considered the royal beast of the Danann. They provided a sacred food, and Manannan had magical boars that could be eaten one day and were ready to eat again the next. Hunting the boar was a sacred act accomplished with a spear. In Bronze Age Ireland, the sacrifice of the boar was a sovereign right of Danu. Boar hides were also used for armor and shields.

Boars were associated with the Otherworld and fed on the sacred acorn of the oak tree, as well as on beech nuts. Because their fur came in the colors red, white and black they were also associated with the moon goddess. The boars were prolific breeders and a symbol of fertility. The deities Arduinna, Moccus and Baco were all associated with boars in Gaul. In a Welsh tale, Pryderi chased a white boar with red ears into a fortress that disappeared. He was also killed over magical pigs which were given to his



father. As a magical animal, the boar was known for its healing powers. Under Brehon law, the domesticated sow had three equal divisions: one part for her body, one part for her anticipated value and one part for her litter.

Warriors were associated with these animals and the words Torc and Triath both mean "chieftain" (hero) and "boar". A boar fire also meant a chieftain fire, and Mac Cecht lit one on a Samhain. Druids were sometimes called swine.

Many Celtic stories make reference to warriors being turned into boars, and one on Ben Bulben was described as being a gray-cropped white boar with no tail or ears. Twrch Trwyth was a ferocious boar and leader of a sounder that caused destruction throughout Ireland. When the Goidel conquered Ireland, Amhairghin recited a poem which contained a line stating that he was the wild boar of valor.

Attesting to their popularity are the great number of artifacts depicting the boar found throughout the Celtic world. They appear as decorations on coins, swords, shields, helmets, and as sculptures in stone, wood and bronze. There are three Irish words for pig: muc, orc and torc. Northwestern Spain and northern Portugal have numerous full-size stone sculptures, and Pictish pictographs in Scotland often have the image of the boar.

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| NAME        | Bull  |
| EPITHET     | To Swell  |
| ALTERNATIVE | Tarbh (Irish) / Tarw (Welsh)  |
| SYMBOL OF   | virility / ferocity / waxing  |
| STAR GROUP  | Taurus (bull)   |
| ASSOCIATED  | sun god   |
| SEE ALSO    | Belenos / Esus  |
| REMARKS     | The Celtic zodiac at one time began in Taurus which initiated the waxing half of the year. Belenos was the sun god of that part of the year. The war god Esus was also associated with the bull. Druids sacrificed white bulls to the sun god and performed the bull feast as an important divining tool. |

The vicious war of the Cualnge Cattle Raid was over a majestic bull and the war ended with a battle between two supernatural bulls. The ox, on the other hand, was a castrated bull and was a docile animal of great strength (dumb ox) used to haul wagons, skids of logs or rocks. The steer was a young castrated male and was raised as a beef animal.

The bull was a symbol of male fertility and strength and was a familiar motif in the art of the Celts. Stone sculptures have been found in northwestern Spain and northern Portugal, and their images have been found on cauldrons, coins, sword scabbards, and Pictish stone pictographs. Stone votive offerings depicting bulls were reclaimed from the harbor of Burghead in Scotland.

NAME           Cat  
 EPITHET       The Stalker  
 ALTERNATIVE   Catt (Gaelic) / Tom (M)  
 SYMBOL OF     stealth / waning powers / hunter  
 STAR GROUP    Leo (lion) / Lynx  
 ASSOCIATED    moon goddess / sun god  
 SEE ALSO       Lugh / Cat  
 REMARKS       The cat is probably best known for its ability to climb and leap great heights and for its incredible sense of balance. All cats except the cheetah have the ability to retract their claws completely. They also have very keen night vision and the female is an especially notable solitary hunter. A blind cat had special supernatural association.

The cat in Celtic mythology was often associated with the Otherworld and was an animal sacred to the moon goddess. Red, white and black cats were of special interest. The ancient Silures tribe of Wales venerated the the wildcat and in a cave at Clough in Connacht there was a chair of silver with a slender black cat relaxing on it. The Pictish founder of Caithness in Scotland was named Cat, and the Clanna Stewart of Scotland had the cat as its totem. The cat totem ruled the waning half of the Celtic year.

The lynx, which was a common cat in Europe during the time of the Celts, had a heavy body, tufted ears, heavy side whiskers and green-gold eyes. They were night hunters and preferred to spend their days resting in a cool cave or other lair. The totem of the Danann hero Lugh was a lynx.

In Celtic mythology there was an island called Lyonesse off the coast of Cornwall which sank beneath the sea. Lynx is also the name of a constellation between the Great Bear and Cancer.

NAME           Cow  
 ALTERNATIVE   Bo (Gaelic) / Buwch (Welsh)  
 SYMBOL OF     fertility / wealth  
 ASSOCIATED    earth goddess  
 SEE ALSO       Boann / Bress / Brighid / Caibre / Cian / Cu Chulainn / Damona / Ethne / Morrighan /  
 REMARKS       All domestic cattle were originally bred from the Ur-cow (Aurochs). They were huge reddish-colored animals that roamed the forest of Europe in the wild state. The last one died in a Polish zoo in AD 1627.

Cattle were important animals in the mythology of the Celtic people; the cow was a symbol of the earth goddess and the bull was associated with the sun god. Cattle with white hair and red ears were a definite sign of the Otherworld. Gray was also an Otherworld color for cows and both Cian and the Fianna had supernatural cows whose names referred to gray.

The fire goddess Brighid was weaned on the milk of a white cow with red ears, Boann was referred to as Boann of the White Cows and the handmaiden Ethne survived entirely on milk from a magic cow. The Morrighan appeared to Cu Chulainn as a red cow with 3 teats.

When Cairbre Caithcheann (Cathead), a person of a service clan, took the position as high chieftain of Ireland by force, the goddess of Ireland showed her displeasure by making the udders of all the cows in Ireland go dry.

Cattle were used as an exchange value, cows' milk was the favorite non-alcoholic drink of the Celts and cheese was a major food staple. Cow hides were used to cover their coracle and for the making of clothing.

The bride price for a noble maiden was 21 cows. The noble cow was displayed on Pictish stones in Scotland. The Danann Bress tried to trade the secret of cows with continuous milk for his freedom. Celtic society was inseparable from cattle herding.

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| NAME       | Crane   |
| EPITHET    | The Talkative / The Chattering  |
| SYMBOL OF  | curative powers / patience / augury / shapechanging   |
| STAR GROUP | Grus (crane)  |
| ASSOCIATED | moon goddess / willow trees / water / maze dance  |
| SEE ALSO   | Esus / Manannan / Midhir  |
| REMARKS    | The crane is a primitive but beautiful bird which stands on long stilted legs. It has a powerful neck, large wings and a long bill. Although it is not a water bird, it spends much of its life with its feet in the water catching fish. |

The Numidian and Balearic Cranes have black and white feathers with red skin showing through: colors sacred to the moon goddess. Cranes arranged their catch in a format that resembles the spokes of a wheel. They place the tails of the fish on top of each other with the heads pointing out in a fan. When they fly back to the nest they clamp the tails in their beaks and the weight of the fish is evenly distributed. Wheels were symbols of the cyclic movement of the sun, moon and zodiac. The constellation Grus was named for the crane.

The Celts sacrificed wild cranes to the moon goddess. The god Esus was associated with cranes, and Manannan and the Fianna both carried their treasure in a crane bag. Mythology also mentions a number of stories where women were changed into cranes.

The Celts performed a sacred dance called the Crane Dance (Spiral Castle). The dance (9 steps then a leap) was performed in a unilateral spiral maze through which the dead were carried on their way to the Otherworld. The maze dance was called Troy Town in England, Caer-Droia in Wales and New Grange in Ireland was referred to as the Spiral

Castle.

The crane had a dark side and it was forbidden to eat its flesh. Midhir had 3 cranes who scared unwanted people from his fortress by screaming out: "Pass By! Keep Away! Do Not Enter!". A Celtic helmet has been found with crane decorations on its ear flaps.

NAME Deer  
 EPITHET The breathing, Living Creature  
 ALTERNATIVE doe (F) / buck or stag (M) / Os (Gaelic)  
 SYMBOL OF graceful / fleet / timid  
 ASSOCIATED shape-changing / rebirth  
 SEE ALSO Flidais / Gilfaethwy / Sadb  
 REMARKS The deer is an even-toed hoofed mammal and, except for the reindeer, only the males have antlers which they drop every spring. The reindeer are also the only ones of the species to have been domesticated. The deer is adaptable to nearly all types of terrain except deserts. It is a very graceful animal and is noted for its visible breath in the form of steam.

To the Celts, the deer was an animal of the hunt and venison was one of their main sources of food. The hide was very useful and the soft doeskin was particularly valued.

In Celtic mythology the deer was the animal most often used to associate females with the wild. Many women were changed into deer by wizards and sorcerers. Sadb gave birth to a human boy, then was changed into a deer and raised him. The nature goddess Flidhas drew her chariot with deer. As punishment for raping his cousin, Gilfaethwy was turned into a doe so he could bear a fawn sired by his brother who had been turned into a stag.

NAME Dog  
 SYMBOL OF death / health / protection  
 STAR GROUP Canis Major (large dog) / Canis Minor (small dog) / Canes Venatici (hounds) / Sirius (dog star) / Procyon (lesser dog star)  
 ASSOCIATED sun god / moon goddess / hunter-gods / healing / underworld / eyesight  
 SEE ALSO Annwn / Belenos / Celtchair / Cerridwen / Cu Chulainn / Cunobel / CuRoi / Mac Da Tho / Taranis / Tuireann  
 REMARKS The wolf was the first European animal to be domesticated by the Paleolithic hunter around BC 10,000. Through the millenia, the dog began to develop as a species with different shaped heads and round eyes.

Dogs were admired for their keen senses of sight, smell and hearing. Their primary functions became those of guard and hunter's helper. Through the ages, the hound became important in the hunting of deer.

Most dogs have 5 claws on the front feet and four on

the back, associating them with both the moon and the sun deities. The hound was associated with the Underworld and Arawn used a pack of hounds to hunt the souls of the dead.

Dog saliva has long been thought to contain curative powers. Dogs were sacrificed to sun gods at curative sites such as pits, wells and for the foundations of buildings. Blind dogs had a supernatural association and many goddesses were associated with lapdogs.

Numerous warriors were associated with dogs. Cu Chulainn was named for a smith's wolf-hound and given the job of guarding the cattle of Ulster. Celtchair died when splattered by the blood of the dog Doelchu, and poisoned dog blood was used to cover the blades of weapons. The hound Ailbe who belonged to Mac Da Tho was the excuse for the battle between warriors of Connacht and Ulster.

Many stories revolve around people being changed into dogs. Tuireann was changed into a bitch and gave birth to her sons in the form of hounds. Cerridwen changed herself into a hound to catch a hare. There were also the hounds of Belenos and the hero Cunobel was called the hound of Belenos. The hounds of Taranis stole the sacrifices left to other gods. Several constellations and stars have been named in association with the dog.

NAME            Dolphin  
 STAR GROUP    Delphinus (dolphin)  
 ASSOCIATED    sea goddess / underwater worlds  
 SEE ALSO      Nehalennia  
 REMARKS       Dolphins are salt water mammals who live in herds. They are recognizable by their distinctly-shaped snouts, bulbous foreheads and large visible eyes. The dolphin's skin is black on the back with white belly and grayish-yellow striped flanks.  
                 The constellation Delphinus is named after the dolphin. The sea goddess Nehalennia was associated with the dolphin and the inner plate of the Gundestrup cauldron with Cernunnos depicts a dolphin. The dolphin was also an image used by the Picts on their stone pictographs.

NAME            Dragon  
 EPITHET        The Sharp-Sighted One  
 ALTERNATIVE   Dragun (Irish) / Driag (Welsh)  
 SYMBOL OF     sun / moon  
 STAR GROUP    Draco (dragon)  
 ASSOCIATED    champion warriors  
 SEE ALSO        Caer / Credhylad / Fedelm / Fingin / Lludd / Medbh / Prydain / Uther  
 REMARKS        The etymology of dragon makes so many references to sight (to see, make distinct, bright, clear, discern, look at etc.) that it strongly suggests a person who has attained a level of perception and understanding far beyond the norm. This would indicate people within the druidic

category or someone who has had special training such as a champion warrior.

The red dragon was the guardian of the intellect (sun cycle) and the white dragon was the guardian of the emotions (moon cycle). Because they danced to different beats they would have a yearly conflict, but only settled their differences every 19 years.

When the Britons conquered England, Prydain put an end to the Dragon Tyranny (state of continuous warfare). Lludd had a problem with two dragons that fought every year, then changed into wild boars as they tired. The filidh Fedelm prophesied for Medbh that her troops would be colored crimson and held at bay by a dragon in his youth. Uther's epithet Pendragon meant "dragon head", a reference to the spring equinox. The dragon's tail is a reference to the autumn equinox. Dragon head and tail are terms used to denote the ascending and descending nodes of the moon and planets.

Fingin the druid was described as having the sharp sight of the dragon. The fertility goddess Credhylad was fought over by two dragons every year. The filidh Caer lived on the lake of the dragon while she was in the form of a swan for half the year. The star constellation Draco was named for the dragon and one of its stars, Alpha Draconis (Thulban), was once the pole star.

NAME Duck  
 EPITHET The Diving Bird  
 ALTERNATIVE drake (M)  
 SYMBOL OF fertility / death / reincarnatiion  
 ASSOCIATED sun  
 REMARKS The duck is a broad-beaked, web-footed, short-legged water bird. They are easily domesticated and were symbols of fertility.

There is a small Celtic sculpture of a duck carrying a human head on its back. A votive sun chariot with 3 wheels (4 spokes each) carries a god with a bird head and has 3 ducks positioned in a way which implies that it is being hauled or led by them. Another small ritual wagon carrying a funeral urn has 2 ducks at each end, with the pairs pointing in opposite directions. A cauldron has tiny sculptures of ducks affixed to the rim, suggesting reincarnation, and a belt was found with ducks and sun symbols alternating. Most Celtic associations with ducks seem to imply a connection with death and the Otherworld.

NAME Eagle  
 ALTERNATIVE Iolar (Gaelic) / Eryr (Welsh)  
 SYMBOL OF reincarnation  
 STAR GROUP Aquila (eagle)  
 ASSOCIATED sun god / sky god  
 SEE ALSO Culhwch / Gwrhyr / Llew / Mabon

REMARKS Eagles are the largest members of the hawk family. They have strong hooked beaks with sharp cutting edges. They are birds of prey and totally carnivorous, eating animals from hares to young fawns, as well as fish. They tend to make their nests in remote and inaccessible places.

Celtic images of eagles have shown up on the crests of helmets, on coins and as tiny figures on a cauldron flesh hook. One cauldron has mounts in the shape of bulls with eagles perched on their head. In Scotland, the Picts used the eagle on many of their pictographs.

The mythology of the Celts has associated the eagle with shapechanging and the zodiac. In the Welsh story of Culhwch, Gwrhyr the interpreter questions the eagle as to the whereabouts of Mabon. In an Irish story, Llew changes into an eagle in an attempt to escape his predicament.

NAME Fox  
 ALTERNATIVE Vixen (F)  
 SYMBOL OF cunning / intelligence  
 STAR GROUP Vulpecula (little fox)  
 ASSOCIATED moon goddess  
 REMARKS Foxes are small, slim animals with elliptical pupils and bushy tails. Their fur colors include red, silver and black, associating them with the moon goddess.

Foxes are nocturnal hunters, feeding on small animals, birds, fruit and insects. In winter they often steal the burrows of badgers and rabbits but in the summer they sleep out in the open. In April the mature vixen gives birth to 4 or 5 young, forming a family called a skulk.

The body of a sacrificed druid found in a bog in England was wearing an armband of fox fur which Dr. Ross suggests may have been his totem animal. The constellation Vulpecula means little fox.

NAME Goat  
 EPITHET The Leaper  
 ALTERNATIVE Geit (F) / billy (M) / kid (young) / Gabhar (Gaelic) / Gafr (Welsh)  
 SYMBOL OF fertility / virility / sure-footedness  
 STAR GROUP Capricorn (goat horn)  
 SEE ALSO Cernunnos  
 REMARKS The goat is a cloven-hoofed grazing animal with long hair and rectangular pupils. Both sexes are bearded, have hollow horns on the tops of their heads and are known for their head-butting. The billygoat has a strong odor. The meat of the male kid and the milk and cheese of the females were a source of food for the Celts.

The Aryan root "ghaid" means to leap or spring, reflecting a typical behavior of the animal. The goat horn was the symbol for the constellation Capricorn in the zodiac. In mythology, Cernunnos was shown with the legs of

a goat. Goat hair was important for weaving, and goat hides made the best skins for shaman drums.

NAME           Goose  
 ALTERNATIVE   gander (M) / gosling (young) / geese [pl]  
 SYMBOL OF     fertility / combat / augury / Otherworld  
 ASSOCIATED    sun god / moon goddess / warriors / guards /  
                   Samhain  
 SEE ALSO      Dianos / Cu Chulainn / Lugaid / Ocelos  
 REMARKS       The goose is a heavy water bird, larger than a  
                   duck and smaller than a swan. The bird has a long snake-  
                   like neck, hisses when irritated and will give a vicious  
                   bite when threatened. The wild birds breed in the north.  
                   Geese were domesticated very early and their feather and  
                   down were collected for their warmth. Because of its  
                   territorial nature and aggressive behavior, the gander  
                   makes an excellent guard.

In Celtic mythology, the birds are sacred to the moon goddess and are also associated with the sun gods such as Ocelos. A votive offering from Roquepertuse shows geese pulling a sun chariot. A sculpture of a goose sat on the central column of the entrance of the sanctuary at Roquepertuse and another sat between the heads of the god Dianos on the sculpture from the same site.

The goose was also thought to guard against disease, and although it was normally taboo to eat, it was a special food at Samhain. As Cu Chulainn offered to serve goose to his friend Lugaid, it must have been at the time of Samhain. Pictographs of the goose are found in the Scottish Highlands on the Pictish stones.

NAME           Hare  
 EPITHET       The Gray Animal  
 SYMBOL OF     fertility / combat / augury / swiftness  
 STAR GROUP    Lepus (hare)  
 ASSOCIATED    moon goddess (Great Mother)  
 SEE ALSO      Boudicca / Cocidos / Froech / Gwion  
 REMARKS       The hare is a very fast large rodent with long  
                   ears, divided upper lip, short tail, large feet and  
                   powerful hind quarters. The fur is usually gray but some  
                   have a reddish-brown color. Hares live in the open and can  
                   remain perfectly still even when its pursuer is almost on  
                   top of it. During the March mating season, hares become  
                   frenzied or eccentric and the males battle each other.

The hares were considered a sacred animal and were taboo to eat among the Celts. They were a symbol of fertility and were associated with the Great Mother, as well as with the war/nature god Cocidos. Boudicca used a hare to augur the outcome of her upcoming battles. Gwion turned himself into a hare to avoid detection, and Froech captured 7 hares on his way to Raith Cruachain. The constellation Lepus was named for the hare.



NAME Heron  
 ALTERNATIVE Egret (white heron)  
 ASSOCIATED sun god / bull / willow / water  
 SEE ALSO Esus  
 REMARKS The heron is a large wading bird with a long neck, long straight beak, long legs and a long tail. The bird's back feathers are usually black and white. They prefer to nest in tree-tops.  
 The wild egret eats the parasites from the back of cattle. Esus, a god of death and war, was shown in association with 3 egrets or cranes.

NAME Horse  
 EPITHET The Runner  
 ALTERNATIVE Mare (F) / steed or stallion (M) / Echo (Irish) / March (Welsh)  
 SYMBOL OF fertility / virility  
 STAR GROUP Pegasus (winged horse) / Equuleus (colt)  
 ASSOCIATED moon goddess / sun god  
 SEE ALSO Abarta / Arawn / Atepomaros / Epona / Etain / Ferghus / Figol / Lugh / Mabon / Macha / Manannan / Medbh / Morrighan / Niamh / Oisin / Pwyll / Red Riders / Rhiannon / Rudiobos  
 REMARKS The horse is a single-hoofed animal, a powerful runner and relatively easy to domesticate. Through the ages, the horse was used to ride and to pull wagons or chariots. Mankind has a long record of symbolized and real mating with horses, mares representing the moon goddess and studs representing the sun god. Etain, Rhiannon, Medbh and Macha all represented the mare goddess, and Epona was the Divine Mare, protector of the species.

In Ireland, the high chieftain was ritually mated with a horse and the success of the tribe depended on the success of that relationship. Many men had epithets such as Eochaidh, meaning stud, having mated with the mares (women) who had the epithet of sovereignty. Ferghus mac Roig had such a large penis that he was called The Great Horse.

A horse or horses also hauled the chariot of the sun god across the sky. The sun god Atepomaros had horses sacrificed to him and the war god Rudiobos had a sculpture of a man-horse dedicated to him. The sun god Lugh claimed to be the first person to use a horse in Ireland but at the same time the filidh Figol told Lugh he would bind the urine of the Fomorii warriors and their horses with his magic.

Red horses were associated with death and the Otherworld, such as those ridden by the Red Riders of the Sidhe. The war goddess Morrighan rode a chariot that was pulled by a red horse with one leg.

Gray horses were also associated with the Otherworld.

A filidh named Abarta had a supernatural horse that carried 16 warriors across water, and Arawn from the Land of the Dead also rode a gray horse. Herne the Hunter rode a black horned horse, probably indicating that it wore a head shield with horns, similar to some which have been found.

Niamh rode a white steed that carried her and Oisín across water. Rhiannon rode a supernatural white mare when she was trying to attract the attention of Pwyll, and Mabon rode a horse called White Brown-mane during the chase of the great boar. Manannan also had two white horses that drew his chariot across the crested waves.

Horses were prized by warriors as animals of combat, and some were trained to fight in order to help their masters. Horses were high on the lists of gifts that noble gave each other, and were often decorated in gold, bronze and precious stones. Horse remains have been found in chariot burials and their images were engraved on vessels, coins and the earth itself, such as at Uffington.

Many warriors were born at the same time as their horses and they became bonded with them. The great female horse warriors, the Amazons, sacrificed horses to a deity. The Picts left pictographs of horses in Scotland and the ancients named star groups Pegasus (winged horse) and Equuleus (colt).

NAME           Moose  
 ALTERNATIVE   elk  
 SYMBOL OF     strength / power  
 STAR GROUP    Taurus (bull)  
 SEE ALSO       Garbh  
 REMARKS       The moose is the largest member of the deer family and can weigh over 1000 lbs (500 kg). Moose have broad antlers and their tough hide was used for leather. They feed on the young shoots and leaves of willow and birch as well as on moss and lichens. They keep to the more secluded parts of the forest and in the summer prefer the swampy areas.

The Celts hunted moose for their meat but during the rutting season the males were extremely dangerous. The Welsh giant Garbh used moose to haul her chariot.

NAME           Otter  
 EPITHET       The Water Animal  
 ALTERNATIVE   water dog  
 SYMBOL OF     playfulness  
 SEE ALSO       Cu Chulainn / Froech  
 REMARKS       The otter, an aquatic mammal, has thick dark brown fur, webbed feet and a long somewhat flattened tail. It is a carnivorous water animal and lives in burrows in river banks and salt water lagoons. Otters like to eat fresh and salt water fish and shellfish, and often lay on their backs while they eat, holding their food in their

paws. They particularly enjoy salmon.

Froech caught 7 water dogs on his way to woo Finnabair. It was prophesized that Cu Chulainn would see a dog lap up his blood just before he died. The prophecy was fulfilled by an otter (water dog).

NAME Owl  
 EPITHET The howler  
 ALTERNATIVE Owlet (young) / Blodeuwedd (Welsh)  
 SYMBOL OF intelligence / stealth  
 ASSOCIATED moon goddess / night time  
 SEE ALSO Blodeuwedd / Gwrhyr / Mabon  
 REMARKS The owl family are nocturnal birds of prey with large heads and big eyes. They are known for their silent flight, sharp night vision and quick dives and hard hits as they grasp their prey in strong talons.  
 Blodeuwedd (flower-face/owl) was turned into an owl as punishment for her treachery against her husband so that she would never enjoy the sun again. Gwrhyr the interpreter questioned the Owl of Cwm Cawlwyd on the whereabouts of Mabon. Images of owls have appeared on coins, jewelry, cauldrons and other Celtic artifacts.

NAME Raven  
 EPITHET The Croaker / Messenger of the Gods  
 ALTERNATIVE Bran (Welsh) / Fiach (Irish)  
 SYMBOL OF prophecy / messengers  
 STAR GROUP Corvus (raven)  
 ASSOCIATED magic / shape-changing / battle / death / curing eye disease  
 SEE ALSO Badbh / Bran / Culhwch / Gwrhyr / Lugh / Mabon / Macha / Morrighan  
 REMARKS The raven is the largest bird of the crow family. The omnivorous bird has a large, strong black bill, glossy purple-black feathers, black legs and piercing black eyes with steel-gray lids.  
 Ravens pair for life and tend to use the same nest every year, building it in remote rocky regions. The mating rituals of the raven involve dramatic aerial displays with power dives that cause their feathers to beat like drums.  
 The ravens are the largest of the songbirds and will mimic numerous animal sounds, including human speech. They are very talkative birds and carry on conversations with each other even when they are long distances apart. It is these qualities that have earned the bird the epithet of Messenger of the Gods.

As scavengers, the ravens were associated with battle scenes and became linked to the goddesses of war such as Macha, Morrighan and Badbh Catha, associating them with the Raven's Croak (to foresee evil). Lugh and Bran were two war leaders who had ravens in attendance. The bird was