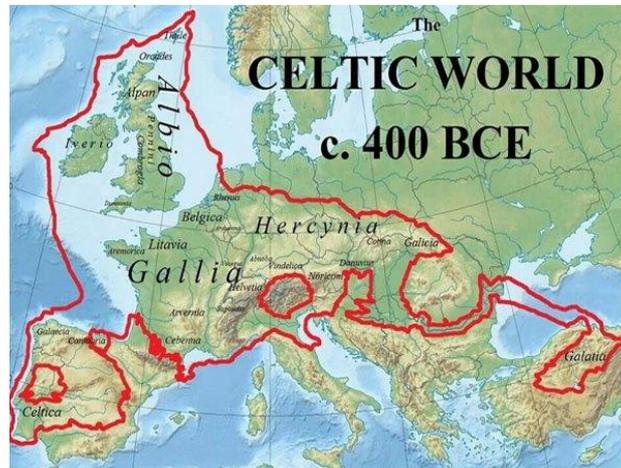




## 20. CELTIC TRADITION

With the name of Celts, we identify a group of tribes that, around 1000 BC, descended from the North and expanded into Scotland, England and Ireland and, from there, over a good part of continental Europe.



### 1. Celtic Europe before the Roman conquest

The name of these similar populations comes from the name of the priestly caste that characterized them with their doctrines. Celt, as Chaldean and Culdean was therefore the name of all the categories of priests. The Greeks derived this term from the root *kel* (κελ) signifying "mysterious", "occult". Diogenes Laertius<sup>1</sup> maintains that the highest doctrines, prior to the birth of Greek philosophy, were cultivated among the Indians (Gymnosophists, i.e. *Yogis*), the Persians (Magi), the Assyrians (Chaldeans) and the Celts (Druids<sup>2</sup>). The correct name of these peoples was certainly expressed by the root *gal*, "the powerful". The Romans and the Greeks were therefore right to call them Gauls and Galatians (γαλάται), as is also evidenced by the name of their last contemporary Spanish descendants, the Gallegos, and the name of the Celtic-Gaelic languages still living in the British Isles, the Gael peoples of Scotland, Ireland and Wales (Gaels), which the English, unable to pronounce their name correctly, have called "welsh" (the "foreigner"!).

What is most striking about Celtic peoples is that their social composition was divided into castes, clearly very similar to the traditional social structure of India. It is certain, however, that Celtic tradition was the result of the merging of two different traditional currents. The first, which was represented by the warrior, mercantile and servile castes, as well as, by the lower orders of the priestly caste, was certainly of Atlantean origin. This is evident for the violent tendency of its warriors, the bloody sacrifices of both animals and men, and for the attraction towards magic phenomena. The second current was instead represented by the Druids, the highest category of priests. There is no doubt that the Druids represented the current coming from the North, which Posidonius<sup>3</sup> declared of Hyperborean origin and that Clement of Alexandria<sup>4</sup> considered to be the source of wisdom from which Pythagoras had drawn his doctrine, perhaps thanks to the mediation of Abaris the Hyperborean.

<sup>1</sup> Greek historian (180-240 AD).

<sup>2</sup> As we can see, Diogenes Laertius already used the name of the priestly caste to define the entire Celtic people.

<sup>3</sup> Greek historian and geographer (135-51 BC).

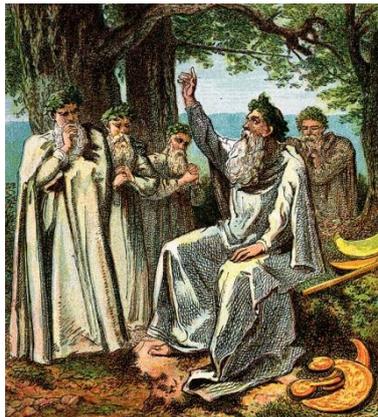
<sup>4</sup> Saint Clement of Alexandria, Greek theologian and philosopher (150-215 AD).





## 2. *Tuatha Dé Danann* landing in Northern Europe

According to Irish tradition, the Northern druidic current was called *Tuatha Dé Danann*, the "Tribe of the divine knowers of the arts"<sup>5</sup>. The most important of the traditional texts of Ireland, "The Battle of Maige Tuired" (*Cath Maige Tuired*)<sup>6</sup>, describes the tribe: "*The Tuatha Dé Danann lived in the islands in the North of the world studying druidism, knowledge, art and magic. They surpassed everyone in these arts. The Battle of Maige Tuired came after the landing of the Tuatha Dé Danann on the shores of Ireland. There, they were faced by the ranks of the inhabitants of the islands, the Fomoires, described by all the chronicles as warrior-demons. Their leader was a one-eyed giant who was killed when a stone was casted to his eye*<sup>7</sup>. At this point we would like to remind the reader of our previous article *The gold age – the Hyperboreans*, published in this same site: *in the neighboring lands near Hyperborea, lived the Arimaspi, barbarians dedicated to metallurgy, who had only one eye and were enemies of the Hyperboreans*. Now, the Cyclopean aspect also puts *Fomoires* in evident relation with Atlantis. Thus, the Battle of *Maige Tuired* represents the victory of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* over previous Celtic populations of Atlantean origin and sanctions the priestly supremacy of the Hyperborean Druids over the entire Celtic society.



## 3. Doctrinal discussion among Druids

<sup>5</sup> The common philological interpretation that pretends to translate "the tribe of the goddess Dana" is incorrect as there is no reference to any deity the entire Celtic mythology known by this name.

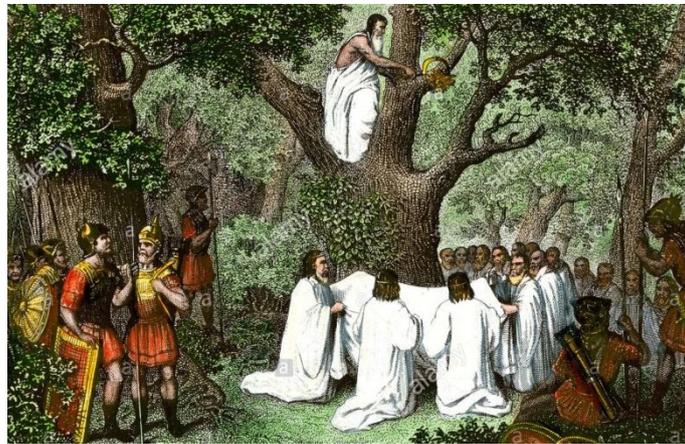
<sup>6</sup> F. Le Roux & C.J. Guyonvarc'h, *I Druidi*, Genova, Eciq, 1990, p.392.

<sup>7</sup> This episode is reminiscent of that of the blinding of cyclops Polyphemus by the hand of Odysseus, as narrated in the *Odyssey*. Furthermore, Polyphemus was the son of Poseidon, the most important god of Atlantis.



The diversity of the Druidic caste from the rest of society is so significant that pushed Prof. Myles Dillon of the Trinity College of Dublin<sup>8</sup> to support the idea, based on ritual studies, traditions attributed to the Druids and on the comparison between Gaelic and Sanskrit terms, that the Druids were in fact *brāhmaṇas* from India!

From Ireland the Druids expanded into the rest of the British Isles and into Armorica, the current French peninsula of Normandy. The Druids did not arrive in the rest of Celtic Europe. However, the minor priestly orders of the Celts faithfully represented them everywhere they went. Such was the prestige of the Druids that they were considered Deities in human form. The name of this priestly caste comes from the composition of two words, curiously identical to two Sanskrit roots: *dhru*, which means stable, and *vid*, to know. Hence, Druid means he who is "stable in knowledge". These two terms were symbolized by the oak, symbol of stability, and by the mistletoe<sup>9</sup>, symbol of knowledge; the latter grows on the branches of oaks, but it is not produced by them, as knowledge is not produced by stability. "*The Druids considered nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the oak on which it grows.*"<sup>10</sup>



#### 4. Druids ritually gathering the mistletoe under the control of Roman soldiers

The Druids were divided into two subclasses: the first whose members lived in the depths of the forests devoting themselves to metaphysical research, welcoming disciples who would live with them to provide service (Sskr. *seva*). Little is known about their teaching, as this exercise was carried out strictly from mouth to ear. All ancient authors who speak of the Druids attest to the secrecy of their teachings. We only know that the doctrine concerned the immortality of the soul, its transmigration in other worlds and in multiple births, the way to escape this fate through knowledge and the periodic destruction of the manifested world through water or fire. This was enough for the Romans to recognize a similarity with the Pythagorean doctrine. The disciple of a Druid "*must memorize a great number of verses*"<sup>11</sup>. The teachings in verses, strictly oral, were a condensation of the doctrinal knowledge that was transmitted. However, the disciple was able to understand them only after having listened to their explanatory comments and the exegesis of the teacher.

<sup>8</sup> M. Dillon, *Early Irish Society*, Dublin, The Three Candles, 1954.

<sup>9</sup> A parasitic plant that grows on trees. It produces little white fruits with the pulp consisting of a viscous liquid. The mistletoe is also mentioned by Virgil (*Aeneid*, VI, vv. 136-141 and 201-209). Before descending into Hades, Aeneas picked a branch of mistletoe from an oak tree, which bestows the power to enter the underworld and get out of it and "rise again" driving away the demons and conferring immortality. J. Brosse, *Mitologia degli alberi*, Milano, Rizzoli 1994 pag.88.

<sup>10</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XVI. 249-251; Pliny was a celebrated Roman naturalist and historian.

<sup>11</sup> Julius Cesar, *De bello gallico*, VI 14; between 58 and 51 AD. Cesar conquered and subjugated the whole of Gaul (today's France).





The second Druid subclass was composed of priests who lived near the villages. They devoted themselves to solemn public rituals.

However, they did not make animal sacrifices, they dressed in white and were strictly vegetarian. Some of them lived at the court of a King (*Rix*) and performed a function similar to that of *purohita*.



## 5. The Bard and the King (*Rix*)

Below the Druids there was another priestly subclass that dated back to the period preceding the arrival of the "Nordic" current. These were called Files, seers (Sskr. *r̥ṣi*). They were composers of sapiential poems, astrologers and judges. Generally, they lived at the courts of princes or the most important noble knights. They performed divinatory rituals and bloody sacrifices, taught cosmological sciences and imparted enchantments (*mantras*) to their disciples. They were highly skilled at the improvisation of hymns, a mastery that survived from father to son until the seventeenth century AD, when it disappeared together with its masters due to the persecution of Cromwell.



## 6. A File

The lower priestly level was represented by the Bards. They dedicated themselves to the composition of war poems that went to sing at the sound of their lyres from castle to castle and from village to village. Although they were not able to compose sapiential poems, they spread the works of the Files with their songs. They performed the function of genealogists of the important families of their region,



learning by heart and transmitting the genealogical tree of the ancestors of the Knights. They had an important role in the preparation of the battles, both for the extreme attempt of reconciliation between the two contenders, and for casting curses against the opponent army. For this reason, the Bards were very familiar with the Knights. These were the main subdivisions of the Celtic priesthood, although many texts further subdivided Druids, Files, and Bards into numerous and complex sub-hierarchies by their function.



## 7. Celtic Knights

The Knights constituted the second caste in importance. The most courageous and authoritative among them was recognized as King<sup>12</sup>. The others were Land-lords and formed the army, which also included their women. They continuously practiced the use of weapons and, following certain teachings of the Bards, they were able to enter into a state of furious alteration during battle, which the Romans called in Latin *furor gallicus*. Stripping their clothes off and brandishing their weapons, they faced the enemy in a terrible and crazed state of trance. At first the Romans were frightened by these acts of insane audacity and the high stature and physical prowess of the Celtic Knights. However, soon the Romans understood that these uncoordinated attacks that mimicked the aggressiveness of the bear were easily repelled by discipline and military art.



## 8. Celtic Knight represented as a bear

<sup>12</sup> In Gaul, however, at the time of Caesar's conquest, most of the Celtic kingdoms were governed by oligarchies of Knights.



As the bear represented the Knights, the boar was the animal that represented the caste of the Druids<sup>13</sup>. Two Hyperborean symbols are found in Celtic tradition: the boar alludes to the island *Vārāhī*, the Arctic land from which the Druids (*Tuatha Dé Danann*) were said to come, whereas the bear alludes to *Ursa Major*, the constellation of the Northern pole.



### 9. Boar, the symbol of the priestly Celtic caste

Finally, the Celtic society was composed of the cast of free men, artisans, traders and the caste of servants and peasants.

*Gaṇapati*

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<sup>13</sup> We will find this connection later when we talk about Celtic tradition during the Middle Ages in Europe. In the medieval saga, in fact, King Arthur (*arktos*, bear) was a disciple of his *purohita* of the court, the Druid Merlin, known as "the Boar of Brocéliande".