

DOOM, DRUIDS AND THE DESTRUCTION OF MONA:
ROMAN REVENGE OR DIVINE DISSAPPROVAL?

CONDENACIÓN, DRUIDAS Y LA DESTRUCCIÓN DE MONA:
¿VENGANZA ROMANA O DESAPROBACIÓN DIVINA?

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RESUMEN

Los romanos no aprobaban los druidas, en particular en el primer siglo de nuestra era, cuando parecen haber presentado el mayor problema como focos del nacionalismo galo-bretón. El escritor romano Tácito describía un hecho que tuvo lugar durante el cataclísmico “Año de los cuatro emperadores”, cuando Roma estaba sumida en el caos y, como resultado, surgieron rebeliones provinciales, incluyendo una revuelta en las tierras del Rin, liderada por Julio Civilis. Fue una época en la que la vulnerabilidad de la capital imperial sirvió para avivar las llamas de la superstición que siempre ardieron por debajo de la cubierta de racionalidad. De hecho, el hecho descrito por Tácito fue un fuego accidental más que un incendio, pero el asalto percibido sobre el principal icono de la romanitas, el Capitolio, simbolizó un ataque sobre la misma Roma y el Imperio. Según Tácito, druidas disidentes que operaban en la Galia y Britania difundieron el mensaje de que este desastre era un presagio que anunciaba un sísmico cambio de poder para las tierras septentrionales.

ABSTRACT

The Romans did not approve of the Druids, particularly in the first century AD, when they seem to have been at their most troublesome as foci for Gallo-British nationalism. Tacitus was describing an event that took place during the cataclysmic ‘Year of the Four Emperors’, when Rome was in chaos and, as a result, provincial rebellions flared, including a revolt in the Rhineland led by Julius Civilis. It was a time when the vulnerability of the imperial capital served to fan the flames of superstition that always smouldered beneath the canopy of rationality. In fact, the event Tacitus described was an accidental fire rather than arson, but the perceived assault on the principal icon of *romanitas*, the Capitol, symbolised an attack on Rome itself and the empire. If Tacitus is to be believed, dissident Druids, operating in Gaul and Britain, spread the word that this disaster was an omen, signifying a seismic shift of power to the northern lands.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Condenación; presagio; druidas; Tácito; Mona

KEYWORDS

Doom; omen; Druids; Tacitus; Mona

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“But it was above all the burning of the Capitol that had driven men to the belief that the Empire’s days were numbered. They reflected that Rome had been captured by the Gauls in the past, but as the house of Jupiter remained inviolate, the Empire had survived. Now, however, Fate had ordained this fire as a sign of the gods’ anger, and of the passing of world domination to the nations north of the Alps. Such at any rate was the message proclaimed by the idle superstition of druidism”¹.

The Romans did not approve of the Druids, particularly in the first century AD, when they seem to have been at their most troublesome as foci for Gallo-British nationalism. The Roman writer Tacitus, a member of the imperial court (but one who detested its decadence) was describing an event that took place during the cataclysmic ‘Year of the Four Emperors’ in AD 68/9 when, following Nero’s death, four warlords competed in bloody conflict for the purple. Rome was in chaos and, as a result, provincial rebellions flared, including a revolt in the Rhineland led by the infamous Julius Civilis². It was a time when the vulnerability of the imperial capital served to fan the flames of superstition that always smouldered beneath the canopy of rationality. In fact, the event Tacitus described was an accidental fire rather than arson, but the perceived assault on the principal icon of *romanitas*, the Capitol, the great temple to the three principal state deities Jupiter, Juno and Minerva symbolised an attack on Rome itself and the empire. If Tacitus is to be believed, dissident Druids, operating in Gaul and Britain, spread the word that this disaster was an omen, signifying a seismic shift of power to the northern lands.

1. OMENS OF DOOM.

Prediction of the future through the interpretation of dreams and strange events was a persistent thread running through religion and politics in the Graeco-Roman world³. The College of Augurs was one of the most august religious guilds in Rome. In origin, Augurs foretold impending events through reading the flight-patterns of birds, but their remit was much larger than that⁴. Cicero described Augurs as ‘interpreters and intermediaries’ of the gods and hints that their responsibilities and powers lay beyond

1 Tac., *Hist.* 4.54; trans Wellesley 1964, 242.

2 Tac., *Hist.* 4.61.

3 WILDFANG, R. L.: «The Propaganda of Omens; Six Dreams involving Augustus», in LORSCH, R., WILDFANG, R.L. and ISAGER, J. (eds.): *Divination and portents in the Roman World*, Odense, 2000, 43-56.

4 BEARD, M., NORTH, J. and PRICE, S.: *Religions of Rome. Vol 2. A Sourcebook*. Cambridge, 1998, 22.

mere interpretation but involved manipulation of spirit-forces as well⁵. Cicero also informs us that a Gaulish Druid, Diviciacus, whom he met in Rome in 60 BC, was skilled in divination⁶.

Early Roman Britain was no stranger to portents and the explanation of strange happenings as messages from the spirit-world about future events at times of extreme stress and crisis. They were rife, for example, at the time of the Boudican Rebellion of AD 60. Two Roman authors who reported the events leading up to and during the Revolt were Tacitus, writing at the end of the first century AD, some fifty years afterwards, and Dio Cassius, whose texts were much later, in the early third century. Both speak of prophetic occurrences that seemed to point to impending disaster for the Roman towns of Camulodunum (Colchester) and Londinium, two of the three cities (the other being Verulamium: Saint Albans) that bore the brunt of Boudica's fury following the seizure of the tribal assets of her husband's kingdom, that of the East Anglian polity of the Iceni, on his death.

“At this juncture, for no visible reason, the statue of Victory at Camulodunum fell down – with its back turned as though it were fleeing the enemy. Delirious women chanted of destruction at hand. They cried that in the local senate-house outlandish yells had been heard; at the mouth of the Thames a phantom settlement had been seen in ruins. A blood-red colour in the sea, too, and shapes like human corpses left by the ebb tide, were interpreted hopefully by the Britons – and with terror by the settlers”⁷.

In order to put Tacitus' words into context, it is important to appreciate that reports of 'prodigies' were familiar in his writings⁸. Irony is a particular Tacitean device⁹ and so the portents he records may be no more than a wry interpretation of the panic engendered by the Boudican rebellion, seasoned with religious scepticism. Dio may have been using the same original source-material, though he appears to have been speaking of London for he, too, tells of the ocean turning blood-red. He adds that Roman settlers in London also heard a clamour of disturbing voices speaking in foreign tongues and raucous laughter in the empty council chamber, lamentations in the theatre and drowned houses¹⁰. Some of these 'portents' can be explained away: the setting sun enflaming the Thames estuary, the reflection of riverside dwellings in smooth water, and even the sounds of the wind howling in empty buildings could be hyped up by a nervous populace only too aware of Boudica's vengeful army at its gates. Hindsight, too, lends drama to the situation: both writers were fully cognisant of the blood-bath wreaked by Boudi-

⁵ Cic., *Phil.* 13.12. FEENEY, D.: *Literature and Religion at Rome. Cultures, Contexts and Beliefs*. Cambridge, 1998, 82.

⁶ Cic., *De Divinatione* 1.90.

⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 14.32.

⁸ MORGAN, G.: «Omens in Tacitus' *Histories I-III*», in LORSCH, R., WILDFANG, R.L. and ISAGER, J. (eds.): *Divination and portents in the Roman World*, Odense, 2000, 25-42, cit. 29.

⁹ MELLOR, R.: *Tacitus*, London, 1993, 129-130.

¹⁰ D.C., 62.1.

ca on the three defenceless Roman cities, so it was all too easy to imagine that such a catastrophic series of events must have been heralded by magical portents and divine omens.

2. ASSAULT UPON A SACRED ISLE.

“So Suetonius planned to attack the island of Mona, which although thickly populated had also given sanctuary to many refugees. Flat-bottomed boats were built to contend with the shifting shallows, and these took the infantry across. Then came the cavalry; some utilized fords, but, in deeper water the men swam beside their horses. The enemy lined the shore in a dense armed mass. Among them were black-robed women with dishevelled hair like Furies, brandishing torches. Close by stood Druids, raising their hands to heaven and screaming dreadful curses... Suetonius garrisoned the conquered island. The groves devoted to Mona’s barbarous superstitions he demolished. For it was their religion to drench their altars in the blood of prisoners and consult their gods by means of human entrails”¹¹.

Loci consecrati in Iron Age Europe as also, indeed, in the Classical world, were frequently situated according to features in the landscape, such as mountains, rivers, springs and groves, or other natural phenomena. So, for instance, Roman wayside shrines were built at points of lightning strikes. In the Classical world, as elsewhere, caves and mountains were (and in some places still are) especial foci of sanctity¹². In north-west Europe, particularly, islands were frequently perceived as sacred: they are liminal places, surrounded by water (and by seashores, which are themselves redolent with edginess) often difficult of access and sometimes perilous to visit. According to Tacitus, the island of Mona (Anglesey) was a *sanctum sanctorum* for the British Druids. It is easy to see why both Britons and Romans might have regarded Anglesey as sacred: it is perched at the extreme north-west edge of what is now Wales, itself at the utter north western edge of the Roman Empire; the Menai Straits, that separate it from the mainland, could be treacherous to ships¹³. Tacitus comments that the Romans had to construct special flat-bottomed boats in order to cope with capricious currents), and it had a remoteness that served to encourage its persona as strange and otherworldly.

It is likely that the Roman army was chary of landing on Mona. The Romans were as superstitious as any other people in antiquity, and they would have been aware of stories circulating in Britannia about the Druids, holy islands and the dark, forbidding sacred groves that grew there (with dark hints of unspeakably barbaric rites taking place there), as well as their concerns about a safe landing. The early imperial poet Lucan’s description of the Druidic sacred grove near Massilia exemplifies the Roman attitude to such awesome places, not at all surprising since groves of trees were important spiritual places for Italians as well as the inhabitants of Britain and Gaul. According to Cicero¹⁴, temples were the correct places to worship the gods in towns and cities but groves were the *loci consecrati* in the Italian countryside.

11 Tac., *Ann.* 14.30; trans. Grant 1956, 317. The presence of savage women, with dishevelled hair, was the very counterpoint to Roman ideas of order, gender and the fitness of things.

12 BRADLEY, R.: *An Archaeology of Natural Places*. London, 2000, 3-32.

13 Tac., *Ann.* 14.30.

14 Cic., *De Leg.* 2.8.

3. GROVES, GODS AND CURSES.

Lucan's Massilian grove is described by the poet in graphic detail as being steeped in chill supernatural presence: black water welled out of springs; trees shook their leaves in spite of there being no wind, and were spattered with the blood of human sacrificial victims; scattered about were hideous human images made of bleached and rotting wood; even the priest of the grove was frightened to venture into that holy place, particularly during certain times of the day and night when the spirits were thought to stalk their holy place. But the sacred grove stood in the way of Caesar's army, on its way south to meet Pompey's forces, and he gave orders that it should be felled.

“Yet the loneliness and solemnity of the grove awed his toughest soldiers; They shrank from their task, convinced that if they struck at the sacred trees The axes would rebound, turn in the air, and chop off their legs. Caesar, realizing what was passing through their minds, snatched an axe and swung it fiercely at the nearest oak: ‘I will take the entire blame for the sacrilege’, he shouted. ‘None of you need fear any ill consequences’”¹⁵.

Readers of Lucan's epic poem would have had the benefit of hindsight, in so far as Caesar's blatant defiance of the local grove-spirits might have been perceived as a direct contributor to the Roman general's downfall four years later, when he was assassinated in Rome by Republican senators. Just as Caesar had his come-uppance' after the sacrilege of felling the sacred trees of the Massilian grove so, in a sense, did Suetonius Paulinus for, no sooner had he destroyed Mona's Druidic holy of holies, than Boudica led the Iceni and Trinovantes in revolt against the Roman government¹⁶. The Boudican Rebellion nearly caused Britannia to be lost to the Roman Empire and, more personally, led directly to Paulinus' demotion from the governorship of the province and his recall to Rome in disgrace¹⁷.

But what is interesting, too, is that Lucan's description of blood-soaked altars in the Massilian grove is virtually identical to Tacitus' account of the gore-spattered offering-places on Mona. Thus Lucan¹⁸:

“The barbaric gods worshipped here had their altars heaped with hideous offerings, and every tree was sprinkled with human blood”

¹⁵ Lucan, *Phars.* 3. 417-455; trans. Graves 1956, 79. The context for the presence of Julius Caesar's army in Massilia was his leading of his army southwards from the heartland of Gaul to confront Pompey's forces, ultimately to meet in battle at Marsaburgh in Thessaly in 48 BC, with victory for Caesar.

¹⁶ ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.: *Boudica Britannia*, London, 2006.

¹⁷ His savage reprisals after the Revolt were reported to the Emperor Nero by the new finance minister, Julius Classicianus, and Suetonius was relieved of his governorship. Tacitus puts a gloss on these events, reporting merely that the general was superseded for not terminating the war': Tacitus *Annals* 14.39; trans. Grant 1956, 322. But his replacement by a series of governors with administrative rather than primarily military strengths allows us to infer that Nero had realised that Britannia had to be won over by conciliation if she was not to be lost.

¹⁸ Lucan, *Phars.* 3. 372-416; trans Graves 1956, 78.

And Tacitus¹⁹:

“For it was their religion to drench their altars in the blood of prisoners”.

Could Tacitus have lifted this passage wholesale from Lucan? The latter was a near-contemporary of the emperor Nero, and Tacitus would potentially have had access to his work. Both allusions to blood-dripping trees in dark, sinister groves present the familiar trope of barbarising spin so beloved of Classical writers on their ‘uncivilised’ northern neighbours. What is more, there is a story-telling mechanism in the two passages that is not dissimilar to the *geissa* that pepper early Irish mythology. In these *geissa*, a prohibition is put upon someone, and the listeners know that, sooner or later, the *geis* will be broken, leading to its object’s inevitable downfall²⁰. In the same way, the ancient Roman reader would have been fully aware that the destruction of Druidic groves – whether in Provence or Anglesey – would incur the wrath of local deities, the anger that is clearly iterated in the curses screamed at Aulus’ soldiers by Mona’s defending Druids.

We ought to look more closely at the Mona Druids’ curses, for such castigations were perceived as powerful tools of magic in Greek and Roman antiquity. Tacitus²¹ describes the inscribed *defixiones* (curse tablets) placed beneath the floor of Germanicus’s bedroom in Antioch by agents of the emperor Tiberius who, jealous of the general’s popularity, sought to destroy him. Archaeological evidence for *defixiones* abounds in the western Roman provinces, particularly in Britain and Gaul²². They were generally aimed at named individuals but some, like the Larzac curse from southern France, named multiple victims. It is tempting to see Mona’s Druids engaging in the vocal form of this kind of cursing, perhaps all the more powerful because of its immediacy. In the myths of the early historical Irish period, Druids had the power physically to wound the objects of their satirical abuse: their words could sandblast the faces of their victims as effectively as a shower of stones²³.

8. THE TRIUMPH OF ROMANITAS

Despite the best Druidic attempts at cursing Aulus’s army into oblivion, the legions and auxiliaries sent to smash Mona’s sacred stronghold were successful. According to Tacitus, the island was triply defended: by armed men, by oath-muttering Druids and by black-garbed women, their hair on end, brandishing torches. Tacitus likens the women to the *Erinyes*, the Classical Furies, who were punitive spirits and avengers of wrongs, especially murder²⁴, and it is likely that the soldiers would have made that connection. But there is another aspect to the female presence on Anglesey. Whilst Tacitus

19 Tac., *Ann.* 14. 30; trans. Grant 1956, 317.

20 MEES, B.: *Celtic Curses*, Cambridge, 2009, 144-149.

21 Tac., *Ann.* 2.68.

22 MEES, B.: *Celtic Curses...*

23 GREEN, M.: *The World of the Druids*, London, 1997, 124.

24 ARRIS, N.: *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, London, 1962, 215.

makes a clear distinction between the women and the Druids themselves, the former were clearly religious ‘officials’ and were probably prophetesses. There is an abundance of literary and archaeological evidence to suggest that female seers were active in the spiritual affairs of Gaul and Britain during the late Iron Age and Roman periods. The best-documented is the broadly contemporary Batavian seeress named *Ualeda*, who was operational at the time of the Year of the Four Emperors in AD 68/69²⁵. Gallo-British inscribed *defixiones* (curse-tablets) provide more testimony to the presence of prophetesses in the western Roman provinces: an example from Larzac in southern France specifically mentions one called *Severa Tertionicia*²⁶.

But Mona’s entire arsenal of warrior-defenders, Druids and “Furies” could not stand up to the relentless push of the disciplined Roman legionary and auxiliary forces which had been the instrument of conquest over so much of the known world. After hesitating at the sight and sound of all the spiritual and psychological warfare that assailed them, “they urged each other (and were urged by the general) not to fear a horde of fanatical women”²⁷. What followed amounted to wholesale destruction both by burning and deliberate demolition:

“Uward pressed their standards and they bore down their opponents, enveloping them in the flames of their own torches. Suetonius garrisoned the conquered island. The groves devoted to Mona’s barbarous superstitions he demolished...”²⁸.

5. FIRE, DESTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION.

Readers of this paper will make the connection between the opening quotation from Tacitus’s *Histories* and the one above, from his *Annals*. Both, of course, allude to the destructive power of fire. In the ancient world, fire was probably the most significant danger-factor: accidental fire or deliberate arson would have had devastating effects, particularly in closely-packed wooden buildings and in forests. Spontaneous fires, for instance from lightning strikes, were perceived as the results of divine intervention. As a weapon in warfare, fire was extremely effective in its capacity for wholesale destruction of communities, crops and livestock; once it took hold, it could be very difficult to halt or extinguish. It is also telling that, in both incidents recorded by Tacitus – the burning down of the Capitol and the firing of the sacred grove on Anglesey – the author connects these fires with the Druids. It is as though, seen through Roman eyes, this ‘barbarian’ priesthood was synonymous with chaos and destruction, ever-present threats to the ordered and controlled world within the borders of the Roman Empire. But in the case of Anglesey, the fires were set by Paulinus’s soldiers who, in a twist of irony, used the very torches of the holy island’s defenders to destroy it, turning their own weapons against them. It was deemed necessary utterly to obliterate the Druids’ *sanctum sanctorum* lest it could have been kept as a kind of martyrs’ shrine. Perhaps, too, the efficacy

²⁵ Tac., *Hist.* 4.65.

²⁶ MEES, B.: *Celtic Curses...*, 50–69.

²⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 14.30; trans. Grant 1956, 317.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

of the grove's destruction was perceived to be associated with the turning of the Druids' own fire against their sacred trees.

Fire had additional symbolism: it was central to both Greek and Roman sacrificial procedures²⁹. It was (and is) an agent of transformation, whether used in the reduction of wood to ash, cooking food, firing clay pots or producing metals. Paulinus was, perhaps even unwittingly, turning the Druidic stronghold on Anglesey into a gigantic holocaust, a sacrificial bonfire that could be seen for miles around. An important facet to the use of fire in Classical antiquity and beyond was its role in purification³⁰. In early Irish mythology, the Druidic May Day festival of Beltane involved the building of twin bonfires between which herds of cattle were led, in a purifying ceremony, before they were led to their summer pastures. This ritual is recorded by the ninth-century AD Irish author Cormac³¹. Fire was closely linked to lustration in Classical sacrificial ceremonies, too³². By engulfing Mona's sanctuary in flames, Paulinus and his Roman soldiers not only destroyed it but also effectively purged it of all the 'poison' of Druidism.

❧. MONA: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE.

In 1941-1943³³, a military airfield was constructed at RAF Valley in north-west Anglesey, not far from the coast that faced the smaller isle, known as ❧oly Island. During peat-clearance for the airfield in an area of coastal wetland, engineers discovered a range of iron and bronze artefacts, and informed Cyril Fox, then Director of the National Museum of Wales, who came up to investigate the site. The modern lake formed by the engineering work was given the name Llyn Cerrig Bach ('Lake of the small stones'), and it was here whence the finds came³⁴. The site revealed a rich assemblage of Iron Age tools, weapons and horse-gear dating to between the fourth century BC and the second century AD³⁵. The presence of this material resulted from episodes of deliberate or ❧structured' deposition, almost certainly of a ritual nature. The state of the metal objects suggests that they went into the water in groups over a long period of time, rather than being curated on land and then all put into the aquatic environment as a single explosive ceremonial event. The inference (and it can be nothing more than that) is that these objects were placed in a watery context as gifts to the spirit world, at a location deemed as an edgy, liminal place, a conduit to the realms of supernatural beings.

The "votive" metalwork, if such it be, is essentially an assemblage of high-status pieces: swords, decorated shields and ornamental horse-gear, including chariot-fittings and iron tires for their wheels. As well as military equipment, two massive gang-chains

29 D❧ RAND, ❧.-L.: ❧Greek Animals: Towards a Typology of Edible Bodies❧, in DETIENNE, M. and ❧ ERNANT, ❧.-L. (eds.): *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks*, Chicago, 1989, 87-119.

30 G❧ ❧ DSBL❧ M, ❧.: *Fire and Civilization*, London, 1994, 132-133.

31 GREEN, M.❧.: *The World of the Druids...*, 35; LE R❧❧ X, F. and G❧ Y❧ N❧ ARC❧, C.: *Les fêtes celtiques*, Rennes, 1995, 103.

32 ❧ ART❧ G, F.: ❧Self-cooking Beef and the Drinks of Ares❧, in DETIENNE, M. and ❧ ERNANT, ❧.-L. (eds.): *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks*, Chicago, 1989, 170-182, cit. 174.

33 STEELE, ❧.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach. Treasure from the Iron Age*, Llangefni, 2012, 7-9.

34 MACD❧ NALD, ❧.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach. A Study of the Copper Alloy Artefacts from the Insular La Tène Assemblage*, Cardiff, 2007, 2-3, Figure 1.

35 MACD❧ NALD, ❧.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach...*, 161; STEELE, ❧.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach...*, 8-9.

were recovered, each with multiple neck-rings for several people. They were designed to control slaves or prisoners-of-war³⁶ and to enable them to be moved through the landscape easily and securely. Interestingly, a recent C14 dating programme on the faunal remains that survived (the story is that Cyril Fox threw most of the animal bones away) indicates that at least some beasts found their way (as sacrificial offerings and/or feasting debris) into Llyn Cerrig Bach as early as the seventh century BC³⁷, suggesting a horizon of ritual activity that predated the placing of the metalwork assemblages into the water. The faunal remains came from domestic species, including goat, ox and dog, and this pattern of selection accords with ritual practices elsewhere in Iron Age Britain and the near Continent³⁸.

But human sacrifice may also have taken place at Llyn Cerrig Bach. Although never published in Cyril Fox's original report³⁹, a letter to him from an engineer working on the airfield survives in the National Museum archive that suggests the recovery of human bones from the site. No trace of these survives and it is, of course, possible that Mr Jones, who wrote the letter to Fox in July 1943, mistook animal for human remains. But, if he was right, two interesting possibilities arise from Jones's identification. Firstly, it might be that Fox deliberately suppressed the evidence for political reasons: given the discovery of the bones right in the middle of the Second World War, could it be that Fox had no wish to present a British past where such barbarous practices as human sacrifice had taken place? Secondly, if the depositional practices at Llyn Cerrig did include the offering of human flesh, then it is possible that the 'slave-chains' recovered from the site were those used to convey sacrificial victims. If so, the chains might have been perceived as charged with spirit-force and/or have been too polluted to be allowed continued circulation in the human world, despite the considerable scrap-metal value represented by such ironwork.

Unfortunately, there is no means of proving the presence of human remains at Llyn Cerrig, still less to assign them a date. Notwithstanding this, it is interesting that the archaeological evidence for ritual activity at the site does not chime entirely with Tacitus's testimony. For the recent dating programme involving the decorated copper-alloy objects reveals no abrupt cessation of offering practices in the mid-first century AD, which is what one might expect if Llyn Cerrig were to have been the site of Mona's Druidic shrine. Instead, in common with other sites on the north and west periphery of the Roman Empire (elsewhere in Wales, in parts of England and in Scotland), Llyn Cerrig appears to have been visited by devotees at least until the late second century AD. So we need to ask two questions: can we, with any confidence, place Tacitus's Dr-

36 ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.J.: «Ritual bondage, violence, slavery and sacrifice in later European prehistory», in BARBER, E. and EARSON, M. and TREHARNE, I.N. (eds.): *Warfare, Violence and Slavery in Prehistory. Proceedings of a Prehistoric Society conference at the University of Sheffield*, BAR International Series 1374, Oxford, 2005, 155-163; *Eadem*: «Semiotics of Subjugation: The Ritualisation of War-prisoners in Later European Antiquity», in TREHARNE, I., TREHARNE, I. and ANGLADE, J. (eds.): *Warfare and Society. Archaeological and Anthropological Perspectives*, Aarhus, 2006, 281-304.

37 MACDONALD, J.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach...*, 168.

38 ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.: *Dying for the Gods. Human Sacrifice in Iron Age and Roman Europe*, Stroud, 2001, 41-50; MENIEL, J.: *Les sacrifices d'Animaux chez les Gaulois*, Paris, 1992.

39 FOX, C.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach*, Cardiff, 1946; STEELE, P.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach...*, 12.

idic shrine on Mona at the archaeological site of Llyn Cerrig Bach. And if so, can we account for the continued offering practices after the site was destroyed by Paulinus in AD 60?

The answer to the first of these two questions is no. Tacitus gives us no details concerning the location of the Druids' *sanctum sanctorum* on Anglesey; the only hint is that it appears to have been close to the shore facing the Menai Straits, not all that far from Llyn Cerrig (and even if the original grove was not exactly in the same location as the depositional site, the latter could still have been associated with the rites enacted in the sanctuary). So the circumstantial evidence is quite robust but that is all. As for the second question, there is a great deal of archaeological testimony to the continued reverence for sacred sites long after their apparent abandonment or destruction. A sense of spirit presence in a particular location in the landscape could not be obliterated by the wiping out of either holy personnel or buildings. It is unlikely that, following the supposed annihilation of Mona's shrine, Paulinus would have left a military presence to police the site and prevent the return of devotees or surviving clergy. We need to think of Mona and its sacred site(s) as a place of pilgrimage, visited by local people and visitors from some distance and a location that continued to attract notice and veneration long after Paulinus' holocaust. A related issue, to be dealt with presently, is the survival of the Druids themselves following their active persecution in both Gaul and Britain during the first century AD.

To explore the continued pull of places with religious or ritual resonances, it is useful to take a glance at a British site with remarkable powers of spiritual endurance, albeit perhaps not continuous. To do this, we need to turn our back on Anglesey for the moment, and focus on a site on the opposite side of the British Isles: Thetford in East Anglia, the home of Boudica and the Iceni. At the time of the Boudican Rebellion, AD 60, when Paulinus was busy attacking Anglesey's Druids, the Iceni had an impressive ceremonial enclosure at Fison Way, Thetford, that was extensively refurbished during the 50s AD, presumably as a response to Paulinus's aggressive imperialist policy. The structure comprised an enormous rectangular space bounded by a bank and ditch inside which was a series of nine timber palisades, using immense oak-uprights. The visitor's gaze would immediately be drawn to the massive timber gateway guarding an east-facing entrance⁴⁰. The interior of this great enclosure was quite bare, but it would have made a dramatic impact on the surrounding landscape. It was probably used as a ceremonial place of assembly, even a kind of 'war-office' for leaders to meet and discuss military tactics. It is even possible that the massive timber posts might have been erected in simulation of a natural sacred grove. In any case, it is likely that the Icenians would have consulted their gods here.

The fate of the Thetford structure is telling in terms of interpreting its function, for it was singled out for systematic demolition by the Roman army after the Boudican Revolt had been crushed. Each timber post was carefully dismantled, as if to create the illusion that it had never existed. That a contingent of Suetonius's army was re-

40 GREGORY, T.: *Excavations in Thetford*, volume 2, Norkolk, 1991; ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.: 'Gallo-British Deities and their Shrines', in THORNTON, M. (ed.): *A Companion to Roman Britain*, Oxford, 2004, 193-219, cit. 199, fig. 11.4; ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.J.: *Boudica Britannia...*, 161-162.

sponsible is indicated by the presence there of discarded bits of military gear. Was this 'unmaking' of an iconic site designed to erase not only the site's actuality but also its capacity to contain memory? If so, then the evidence from later Roman Britain argues for the failure of the Romans' attempt at *damnatio memoriae*. For more than three hundred years later, a hoard of rich and sacred gold and silver treasure was found to have been deliberately deposited adjacent to the early Icenian monument⁴¹. The cache was placed there in about AD 390: the largest element of material was a unique series of thirty-three silver spoons, almost certainly used for measuring out ritual libations⁴², many of which were inscribed with dedications to the gods. The name of an obscure Italian woodland deity Faunus appears on several of them and, either twinned with his name or alone, local British divinities, such as Medugenus ('mead-begotten one') are mentioned. Is it too far-fetched to suggest that the once great Icenian centre lived on in the ancestral memory of local people, a memory that found tangible expression, three centuries later, in a hoard of sacred loot?

The re-ignition of a site's veneration after a long period of time, exemplified by Thetford, raises questions that are also relevant to Llyn Cerrig Bach. There is no evidence, at the East Anglian site, that people continued to come and pay homage at Fison Way throughout the Roman period. So it is impossible to argue for an active persistence of sacrality here. Instead, what seems to have occurred is a renewed manifestation of spiritual significance at the time of another threat, perhaps perceived as just as momentous as the early Icenians' refusal to accept *romanitas* in the first century AD. The nature of this late Roman stress can only be surmised. Might it have been the increasing strength of Christianity in later fourth century Britain that prompted the deposition of the Thetford treasure, as a paean of defiant paganism?

So how is Thetford relevant to Llyn Cerrig? The dating of certain pieces of metalwork to some time after the mid-first century AD sack of Mona's Druidic shrine does not in itself negate a possible association between the archaeological site and Tacitus's sacred stronghold. The issue raised is rather that of persistent pilgrimage. Were Tacitus's Mona 'refugees' (see above) in fact pilgrims? It is quite likely that local people (and even those from further afield) continued to venerate the sacred presence, despite the obliteration of the grove. Indeed, the ash left by the burnt forest would have made the land very fertile, and soon after the fire, new growth would have started to appear, and saplings quickly arise from the ashes, as if to represent a rebirth of the Druids' authority. Perhaps we should think in terms of the continuance of quiet resistance to the attempted annihilation of the local religious leadership. To achieve a greater understanding of this kind of scenario, it is useful to consider a site in Gaul where something similar may have taken place.

41 NS, C. and TETER, T.: *The Thetford Treasure*, London, 1983; ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.: 'Gallo-British Deities...', 199-200, fig. 11.4.

42 AINTEYER, S.: 'Silver hoards from Britain in their late Roman context', *L'Antiquité Tardive* 5, 1997, 93-110.

8. THE 'MAGICIAN'S HOUSE' AT CHARTRES.

Until the early twenty-first century AD, there was virtually no concrete and specific archaeological evidence for the Druids, still less their retention into the provincial Roman period. All our 'knowledge' of this religious group came from classical texts and surmise from the material culture of ritual activities. But in preparing the foundations for a new car-park in the centre of Chartres in 2005, the builders came upon the remains of a Roman house that had burnt down in the second century AD. Rubble from the destroyed building had protected its cellar, which was found to be an underground shrine, presided over by a Roman citizen of Chartres called Gaius Ierius Sedatus. Ritual regalia from the crypt included a set of inscribed *turibula* or incense-burners, the most complete of which carries epigraphic references to Druids on four panels. In the inscribed vessel, Sedatus describes himself as the guardian of the *numina omnipotentia* (all-powerful spirits), and proceeds to name them. All are obscure and otherwise unknown names except for 'Dru' and, if that word does stand for Druid(s), then in this context, they are included in the list of *numina*⁴³.

Sedatus' shrine appears to have been involved in an eclectic rag-bag of ritual that melded western European cult-practice, including Druidic traditions, with so-called 'magical' rituals that belong more comfortably in Greece and Egypt. But the significance of the Chartres discovery, in the context of this paper, is the apparent survival, in some form, of Druidism in second-century Roman Gaul. Two other points concerning this find are striking. One is that Chartres was the Gallic town identified by Julius Caesar⁴⁴ as the location of the annual Druidic Assembly, held there, in the territory of the Carnutes, a polity perceived as occupying the nominal centre of Gaul, on a fixed day every year. The second concerns the identity and status of Sedatus. The inscribed *turibulum* informs us that he had three names (a *praenomen* Gaius, a *nomen* Ierius, and a *cognomen* Sedatus), the presence of the last is an indicator, in this period at least, that Sedatus was a Roman citizen, for only those who enjoyed the status of a *civis romanus* possessed a *cognomen*. If Sedatus was a Roman citizen, then he was part of the Gallo-Roman establishment, and perhaps enjoyed high office in *Autricum* (Roman Chartres). So what was this pillar of the community doing summoning up forbidden Druids in a secret subterranean shrine? And how did the Druids come to change their identity from priests to spirits (members of Sedatus's *numina omnipotentia*)? What I think may have been happening is that Sedatus was dabbling in clandestine ritual that, though harmless, could have been frowned-upon in Roman administrative circles. By re-inventing the Druids and adding them to the palimpsest of local spirits, Sedatus may deliberately have sanitised them in order not to attract suspicion of sedition at a time when the real Druids had been officially been abolished by first-century emperors such as Tiberius and Claudius but whose title, 'Druids', remained foci of unease⁴⁵.

43 GARDNER, R., O'LEARY, D. and VAN ANDRINGA, W.: 'A prayer for blessings on three ritual objects discovered at Chartres, *Autricum* (France/Eure et Loir)', in GARDNER, R. and MARCO SIMON, F. (eds.): *Magical Practice in the Latin West. Papers from the International Conference held at the University of Zaragoza 2005*, Leiden, 2010, 487-518.

44 Caes., *Bell. Gall.* 6. 13.

45 See this paper's opening quotation from Tacitus, *Hist.*, 4.54.

8. LANDSCAPES OF MEMORY: THE PILGRIM

The discovery at Chartres helps make sense of the kind of thing that was occurring in Roman Britain, for instance at Thetford and, perhaps at Llyn Cerrig Bach. Sedatus was perhaps inventing or constructing a new Druidism rather than recreating or dusting-off the old. But what was important at Chartres was that the word Druid retained resonance and meaning even after the old Iron Age societies and their religious orders had become obsolete. The persistence of pilgrimage to Llyn Cerrig Bach long after Suetonius's attack on Mona is telling, in terms of retention of religious memory, and this holds true even if Tacitus's sacred Druidic grove and Llyn Cerrig Bach were not one and the same.

To my mind, it is totally legitimate to make connections between Llyn Cerrig and the holy of holies that was the focus of Suetonius's attack. The longevity of ritual activity at Llyn Cerrig, as measured by the persistent structured deposition of meaningful objects, is consistent with its identification as a place of sacred pilgrimage, with all the connotations of long, difficult journeys, hardship and sacrifice that is implied by such a term. The concept of pilgrimage, usually associated with medieval and later Christian practices in the western world⁴⁶, can be traced, at least implicitly, deep into antiquity. The present author argues for the interpretation of certain healing shrines in Roman Gaul and Britain as centres of pilgrimage. At *Fontes Sequanae* near Dijon, where Sequana, goddess of the spring-source of the Seine, was venerated, images of young devotees display what might well be interpretable as 'pilgrim-badges' on their chests and backs⁴⁷. It is interesting, too, that these youthful worshippers are depicted carrying animals in their arms⁴⁸. Were these sacrificial offerings, like those represented by the faunal remains at Llyn Cerrig Bach⁴⁹ one of the points Gray makes about pilgrimage is that the sacred journey is itself both an offering and a mobile sacred place, and the clothes, badges and other personal accoutrements all contribute to the sacrality of the pilgrim and the landscape through which he/she passes⁴⁹. *Fontes Sequanae* is a rich site, with considerable evidence for ritual and worship, including abundant imagery and epigraphic dedications. Llyn Cerrig is far more mute but, nonetheless, it is possible to imagine the circumstances of deposition and to flesh out the stark end-products of the rituals and ceremonies that must have accompanied the placement of precious items in that remote Anglesey lake on the very northwest edge of the known world.

9. RITUAL AND CEREMONY ON ANCIENT MONA.

Although it is possible only to make tentative assumptions concerning the manner in which cultic acts were played out at Llyn Cerrig Bach and/or Tacitus's holy of holies, certain nuggets of evidence can be used to build a platform of surmise. To take Llyn Cerrig first, certain objects speak of spectacle, communal involvement and social activ-

46 GRAY, M.: 'Pilgrimage: a comparative perspective', in ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.: *Pilgrims in Stone. Stone images from the Gallo-Roman sanctuary of Fontes Sequanae*, BAR International Series 754, Oxford, 1999, 101-110.

47 ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.: *Pilgrims in Stone ...*, 12, fig. 5.

48 *Ibidem*, figs. 5, 6, 7 and 9)

49 GRAY, M.: 'Pilgrimage: a comparative perspective...

ity. The iron gang-chains themselves hint at theatre, for they and their captives would create a dramatic spectacle that would have been both seen and heard as it passed on its way to the shrine. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault⁵⁰ describes the symbolism of the prisoner chain-gang in the nineteenth-century French penal system, from the hammering of the forged neck-rings into position to the clanking journey through the countryside, a sight that would engender a weird festival atmosphere in the villages through which it passed. We can imagine, then, that a similar sense of theatre might have been present among the witnesses of the chain-gangs that ended up at Llyn Cerrig, together with their prisoners. If genuine human remains were found here, it is possible that they were those of just such captives: they could have been slaves, criminals, prisoners-of-war or even scapegoats, persons chosen to bear and take away ill-luck and pollution from their communities and purify them by dying.

Clergy leave a very faint and ambiguous footprint in prehistoric archaeology. There is little to point directly to the presence of priests, let alone Druids, at Llyn Cerrig Bach. However, one group of artefacts from the pool may have been bindings wound around wooden sceptres: several coiled ribbons in sheet bronze survive from the site, and one retains a fragment of the ash stave that it had encircled⁵¹. Of course, even if all the bronze ribbons did once belong to staffs, they may have been wands of authority rather than religious regalia. But sceptres do turn up on Romano-British temple-sites, notably on the Surrey shrines at Farley Heath⁵² and Wanborough, where no less than sixteen were recovered during excavation⁵³. The presence of multiple sceptres or rods of authority at sacred sites, such as Wanborough and Llyn Cerrig suggests that several 'priests' or religious officials may have simultaneously presided over ritual procedures.

The nature of the finds at the Llyn Cerrig 'sanctuary' provides some clues to some of the events that may have taken place there. In several Iron Age temples, particularly in the 'war-sanctuaries' of northern and central Gaul (Gournay [Seine], Ribemont [Somme], Acy-Romance [Ardenne] and Mirebeau [Côte d'Or]), for instance⁵⁴, the deposition of military equipment marched alongside evidence for elaborate and extravagant feasting, in the form of butchered faunal remains, together with eating and drinking equipment. Similar patterns of activity can be traced at the shrine on Mona. The swords, shields, horse-trappings and chariot-fittings were accompanied by two large sheet-bronze cauldrons, arguably used to prepare large-scale meals or to hold liquor. Can we imagine scenes whereby warriors offered up the accoutrements of battle to the spirits residing in the lake and pilgrims indulged in ritual commensality, whilst sitting round fires, and all presided over by clergy?

50 Foucault, M.: *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*, Tr. by Alan Sheridan, New York, 1977, 257-261.

51 SALES, J.: *Guide Catalogue of the Early Iron Age Collections (in the National Museum of Wales)*, Cardiff, 1976, 58, fig. 14, 1-2; STEELE, P.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach...*, 48.

52 SALES, J.: *Farley Heath Temple*, *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 93, 2007, 1-147.

53 COOPER, M.G. and BIRD, J.: *The Roman Temple at Wanborough, excavation 1985-1986*, *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 82, 1994, 1-168, cit. 106-111, figs. 26, 27; ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.J.: *Caesar's Druids. Archaeology of an Ancient Priesthood*, London/Newhaven, 2010, 156, fig. 48.

54 BRÉHAÛ, X., L.: *Les Gaulois. Sanctuaires et rites*, Paris, 1986; *idem: Les religions gauloises. Rituels celtiques de la Gaule indépendante*, Paris, 1996.

Whatever was happening at Llyn Cerrig in the last centuries BC and the first hundred years or so AD, the topography of the site was key to its ritual use, because of its aquatic nature, its remoteness and its island location. Tacitus tells us little about the Druidic site on Mona, except that it was near the coast and comprised a sacred grove; excepting his allusion to the sea in the Menai Straits, he says nothing about water. However, in the context of describing a Germanic cult, that of the agricultural goddess Nerthus, the same writer comments in great detail on the sacrifice of slaves in a sacred lake after her annual ceremony⁵⁵, and he also refers to Nerthus's sanctuary as consisting of a sacred grove on an island in the sea. Interestingly, the Roman writer alludes to the shunning of anything made of iron during the Germanic goddess's festival, when all ferrous objects had to be locked away. A great many items in the assemblage of deposited objects at Llyn Cerrig were made of iron, including swords, currency-bars, chariot-tires, the two gang-chains, blacksmiths' tongs and a sickle. Could it be that some of the depositional events here were themselves associated with prohibitions, wherein dangerous artifacts needed to be neutralised by sacrificial means? Nerthus' ceremony is not the only event recorded by Classical writers about their barbarian neighbours to the north. In his *Natural History*, Pliny alludes to rituals where iron was viewed as a perilously charged substance and where special measures needed to be taken in order to harness its potential for harm. Pliny describes two healing rituals associated with the need to avoid iron objects: one associated with the curing of eye-disease, where the *selago* plant had to be gathered 'without iron', the other in the context of healing stomach-complaints using tamarisk that needed to be harvested without the use of iron implements⁵⁶.

Islands, groves and watery places were all liminal or marginal places, where the material and spirit worlds clashed, like tectonic plates, and thus were at the same time dangerous to people and yet also so spiritually charged as to allow convergence and connectivity between the realms of mortals and immortals⁵⁷. Islands were contradictory places because water encroached and butted up against land all around them. Classical writers make constant reference to the occurrence of weird cultic events on islands set within Gallo-British waters: thus, Pomponius Mela, writing in the first century AD, describes the presence of nine virgin priestesses who inhabited one of the Scilly Isles, off the south-west coast of Cornwall⁵⁸, and broadly in the same period, Strabo refers to an island in the river Loire allowed only to female priests, who practised an annual auto-sacrifice of one of their number, on the occasion of the re-roofing of their temple⁵⁹. Both these authors speak of sacred islands associated with holy women, so maybe Tacitus makes Mona all the more sacred because of the black-robed Fury-like women he describes. It is almost as though odd-island-women in Classical attitudes to their 'barbarian' neighbours.

⁵⁵ Tac., *Germ.* 40.

⁵⁶ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 24. 62

⁵⁷ ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.: 'Ritual sites and sanctuaries', in STEELE, J.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach. Treasure from the Iron Age*, Llangefni, 2012, 42-43.

⁵⁸ Pomp. Mela, *Chorographia* 3.47-8.

⁵⁹ Str., *Geog.* 4.4.6

☒. GODS ON THEIR SIDE☒

Some years ago, when I was writing my book on Boudica⁶⁰, I was asked by a television researcher whether I could explain the Icenian war-leader's attitude to her defeat by the Romans in AD 60. I pondered on this question for a while, and then I replied that, maybe, she felt that her own gods had failed her and had been defeated by those of the conquering Romans. Could the same argument apply to Suetonius ☒aulinus and his army's successful attack on the Druids' sacred grove on Mona☒ Was the battle for the holy island perceived to have been fought not only on the ground but also in the realms of the spirits☒ Can we see, in what happened on Anglesey, a microcosm of the Roman occupation of Britain as a whole☒ These are pertinent questions: for both the Britons and the Romans, the gods were everywhere, and involved with everything, so it would not have been possible to dissociate the victories and defeats of people from the divine. In the case of Mona, the protagonists were a Roman general and his forces, on the one hand, and a group of holy men (and women), on the other. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that in the Iron Age Anglesey had a reasonably large static population (indeed Tacitus says as much), and there is archaeological evidence that ☒Anglesey was densely farmed and settled during the Iron Age'.⁶¹

So what is known about late Iron Age gods in Britannia☒⁶² A mixture of Classical literary testimony and archaeological findings suggests a cosmological grounding in the natural world; that of the sun, water, mountains, forests and rivers. There is a danger of back-pro☒ection from the Roman ☒known' to the prehistoric ☒unknown' and that is unacceptable. For Roman Britain, we are faced with a veritable explosion of explicit references to the divine world, from iconography and epigraphy. There is little of the former and virtually none of the latter in the late Iron Age. Classical writers, such as Dio Cassius (writing some one hundred and fifty years after the events of AD 60), provide tantalising clues to what may have been a rich pantheon. ☒ e makes graphic reference to a warrior goddess, Andraste, worshipped by Boudica with savage and bloody rites in the new-minted Roman city of London⁶³. In calling for divine help to save Mona, the Druids would surely have appealed to the most powerful deities at their disposal. And what was more likely than their invocation of battle-gods in order to help them in their attempt to repel Roman military forces☒ In such a context, the overwhelmingly martial character of the depositional material at Llyn Cerrig Bach should not be forgotten.

60 ALD☒ ☒ SE-GREEN, M.☒: *Boudica Britannia...*

61 SMIT☒ , G.: ☒Anglesey in the Iron Age☒, in STEELE, ☒.: *Llyn Cerrig Bach. Treasure from the Iron Age*, Llangefni, 2012, 26-27, cit. 26.

62 Although the events being discussed here technically date to within the Roman period, there had been little time for the establishment of a Romano-British pantheon, and the old gods and religious structures (including the Druids) were still highly relevant to British cosmologies and rituals in the mid first century AD.

63 D.C., *Roman History* 62.7 «...they hung up naked the noblest and most beautiful women, cut off their breasts and sewed them into their mouths so that they seemed to be eating them. Then they impaled them on sharp stakes which ran the length of their bodies. All this they did to the accompaniment of sacrifices, feasting and orgies in their various sacred places, but especially in the grove of Andraste. This is the name they gave to ☒ictory, and they regarded her with particular reverence☒.

According to Tacitus, the sanctuary on Mona was the Druidic *sanctum sanctorum*. Given its status, surely the Roman threat to its continued existence might be expected to galvanize the local spirits to become especially active against the Roman enemy. After the failure of both gods and Druids to protect the holy island, what did such a setback do to British perceptions of the power of their deities and their priests? To what extent was it acknowledged that the new foreign gods were in the ascendant? We cannot hope to answer these questions directly: all that is possible is to examine the evidence, particularly from material culture, for what happened to British religion after AD 60.

The evidence from the Roman city of Chartres (*Autricum*), examined earlier in this paper, indicates that the name of the Druids lived on in the consciousness of the Gauls well into provincial Gallo-Roman times. There is also a scatter of Classical literary allusion to the Druids that carries their memory or their continued existence right through into the fourth century AD. The curious group of late Roman texts collectively known as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (or the Augustan histories) contain several references to Druidic prophecies concerning the ascendance of various Roman emperors to the purple⁶⁴. These include Severus Alexander, Aurelian and Diocletian. These texts are of doubtful authenticity, in terms of accurate reporting of imperial events but, like the Chartres *turibula*, their very mention of Gallic Druids (actually Druidesses) indicates that their notoriety lived on until the third century AD and, what is more, they were associated with accession to the imperial throne, thus putting them at the very heart of Roman politics. Even later than the *SHA*, the western Gaulish rhetorician and poet Ausonius,⁶⁵ who hailed from Bordeaux and who wrote a eulogy for the teachers at its university, makes detailed allusion to a Druidic family dynasty, with inherited priestly powers that included rhetoric. Some four centuries earlier, Julius Caesar commented on Druidic word-power and their emphasis on the importance of memory and oral tradition.⁶⁶ All of this literary evidence, however much or little reliance that can be placed on it, suggests at least that the demise of the shrine on Anglesey did not signal the obliteration of the Druids either in fact or in memory. But none of the late texts refer to Britain, so it is impossible to be ascertain to what extent the Druids survived in some form here. But if a once-hated priesthood could still operate, albeit hugely changed, within the imperial Roman provincial system in Gaul, how much more likely is it that it survived in the far north west, that much further away from the seat of *romanitas*?

The successful Roman attack on the sacred Druidic stronghold on Anglesey suggests that, on this occasion at any rate, the gods were firmly on the side of the Romans. Nonetheless, scrutiny of the archaeological record for religion in Roman Britain paints a picture that is far from overwhelmingly Roman. It is undoubtedly the case that the religious cults and cosmologies of the conquerors were imported on a large scale with

64 ALDHOUSE-GREEN, M.: *Caesar's Druids...*, 220-222; CHADWICK, N.: *The Druids*, Cardiff, 1997 (2nd edition: first published in 1966), 81-82. Nora Chadwick suggests that the *SHA* was an amalgam of texts, some of which originated in earlier periods.

65 In his *Commemoratio Professorum Burgidalsensium* 10.11; Aldhouse-Green 2010, 222 and 294, fn. 74.

66 Caes., *Bell. Gall.* 6. 14.

the governor's administrative system, with the army and with entrepreneurs. But the evidence from iconography and from epigraphy indicates that something new was created in Roman Britain (and elsewhere in provincial Europe). Romano-British religion was syncretistic, containing a blend of cults from the Classical world and those from Britain and Gaul. So the Gallo-British mother-goddesses, the *Matres* rubbed shoulders with Juno and Venus, and Jupiter's worship changed to include a strong indigenous solar element. None of the most successful sanctuaries in Roman Britain was that of Sulis Minerva at Bath (*Aquae Sulis*). Here an imposing Classical temple was built on the site of hot springs that had been venerated, perhaps, for millennia before the arrival of the Romans; the cult statue of the goddess depicts an image of Minerva that would not have been out of place in Rome itself. Yet the majority of the many inscriptions from the temple, including the impressive assemblage of lead and pewter *defixiones* (curse-tablets) from the sacred spring, bear invocations to a dual persona: Minerva for the Romans, Sulis for the Britons, and many altars and curses simply mention the name of Sulis.⁶⁷ The survival (or creation) of British religious cults is demonstrated not only by the finds from late Roman sites such as Thetford, described earlier in this essay, but in such important sanctuaries as Lydney, a Classically-styled temple erected within view of the River Severn and its imposing tidal Bore, and dedicated to a very British god, Nodens.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION.

The theme of this volume is disaster in antiquity, and human reaction to it: natural catastrophe as experienced, such as the Vesuvian eruption that engulfed Pompeii and Herculaneum in AD 79 and witnessed at first hand by Pliny the Younger, and disaster whether natural or human-induced as perceived and interpreted by contemporaries, archaeologists and historians. Trickiest of all, perhaps, is the attempt to consider disasters in terms of divine intervention, whether engendered by the Biblical Jahveh in revenge against the Egyptians for holding the Israelites captive or as discussed in the present paper because the gods of the conquering Romans, so it seemed, were more powerful than those invoked by the British Druids. The defeat of the Druids and their supporters in their holy of holies must have shaken them and their followers to their foundations, particularly as it was virtually synchronous with that other defeat, that of Boudica's freedom-fighting forces in the south-east. In terms of both military and divine ascendancy, the fortunes of the Britons would appear to have been at rock-bottom in AD 60.

If we were only to possess the testimony of Greek and Roman commentators, such as Tacitus and Dio Cassius, we would be forgiven for assuming that Britannia and her gods were finished after AD 60. But archaeological evidence provides assurance that this was not so. Yes, of course things changed as a result of the Roman annexation of

67 GREEN, M.: *Celtic Goddesses...*, 93-99; COULIFFE, B.: *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath. Vol.2 The Finds from the Sacred Spring*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph no. 16, Oxford, 1998.

68 WHEELER, R.E.M. and WHEELER, T.: *Report on the Excavation of the Prehistoric, Roman and Post-Roman Site in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire*, Oxford, 1932.

Britain as a province. But the old ways continued, to a degree (as testified, for example, by continued depositional practices at Llyn Cerrig Bach) and alongside the adoption of gods from the Roman pantheon, a vigorous syncretism between Roman and indigenous deities created a new Romano-British religious system. Not only that but new British divinities, like the late Roman-period deity Nodens at Lydney, are represented in the archaeological record. Perhaps the best recent evidence for new local religious movements within the province is the gold and silver cult treasure, found at a Romano-British shrine near Baldock in North Hertfordshire in 2003 and 2009, an assemblage that included feather-shaped votive plaques inscribed with the name of the goddess Senuna and a real rarity—a silver statuette of the goddess herself, on a base also inscribed with a dedication to her. Like Sulis at Bath, Senuna's iconography indicates linkage with the Roman goddess Minerva but, at her sanctuary at Baldock, it is only the British goddess's name that featured on her dedications⁶⁹. Senuna's treasure is so significant for the religious history of Roman Britain that it was included in the recent fifty most significant objects featured in the recent television series *Britain's Secret Treasures*⁷⁰.

And what of the Druids? The destruction of their stronghold on Mona marches alongside literary testimony to the Roman intention to stamp them out altogether. Pliny the Elder records imperial edicts against the Druids in the first century AD.⁷¹ But the evidence from Chartres is testament either to Druidic survival into second-century Gaul or, more likely, to its reinvention. The late author Ausonius spoke of Druidic families in the fourth century AD. The demolition of the Druidic grove on Anglesey was a mortal blow to free Druidism, just as Boudica's defeat in pitched battle sounded the death-knell for British independence. But neither Druidism nor Britishness were choked entirely to death by the events of AD 60.

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⁶⁹ MATTINGLY, D.: *An Imperial Possession. Britain in the Roman Empire*, London, 2006, 484.

⁷⁰ ITN 1 July 16–22, 2012.

⁷¹ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 30.4. For the principate of Tiberius Caesar did away with their Druids and that class of seers and doctors. Although it appears that Pliny is alluding to Tiberius, it is more likely that it was the next emperor Tiberius Claudius Caesar who was responsible for this edict.

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Fig. 1: The wild coast of Anglesey. The rocks resemble Paulinus's flat-bottomed boats used in the invasion of Mona. © author



Fig. 2: A modern 'sacred grove'. Ash trees with mistletoe growing on them in winter. According to Ólíní the mistletoe was sacred to the Druids. Llanhennock, near Monmouth, South Wales. © author.



Fig. 3: An ancient yew-tree in the churchyard of Saint Lawrence's Church, Didmarton, Gloucestershire. © author.



Fig. 4: Nineteenth-century statue of the ancient Batavian prophetess Velleda, in the Luxembourg Gardens, Paris. © Paul Jenkins



Fig. 5: The site of Llyn Cerrig Bach. © author.



Fig. 6: Reconstruction of Boudica's chariot, at the Castle Museum, Colchester. In the background is a scene of the film about Boudica, starring Alex Kingston.

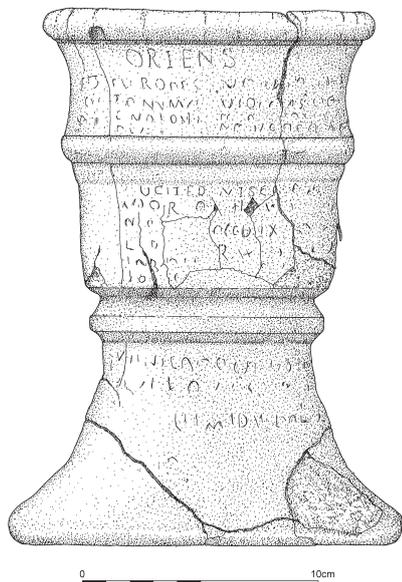


Fig. 7: The Chartres thuribulum. © Ian Dennis.



Fig. 8: Statuette of a child-pilgrim from Fontes Sequanae, near Dijon, wearing the insignia of a pilgrim. © author



Fig. 9: Life-size bronze head of the emperor Claudius, found in the river Alde in Suffolk, but almost certainly originally from Colchester, Essex. Claudius was one of the emperors bitterly opposed to the Druids. [Paul Jenkins](#).