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Remembrance of the Ancestors in Contemporary Paganism: Lineage, Identity, and Cultural Belonging in the Irish Context

ABSTRACT: This article explores some of the ways of remembering and honouring the ancestors in contemporary Pagan religious traditions, with a focus on the Irish context. An overview is provided of how the 'ancestors' are conceptualised within Paganism, as well as where they are believed to be located in the afterlife or Otherworld. Veneration of ancestral peoples is a significant part of many Pagan rituals. Some methods of honouring the dead, and contacting the dead, through ritual practices are described. Remembering and honouring the dead, whether distant forebears or more recent relatives, is particularly important during the Pagan celebration of the festival of *Samhain*, feast of the dead, on October 31. Issues around ancestors, lineages and ethnicity are significant in many Pagan traditions, and attention is paid to these factors in terms of the Irish Pagan community's sense of cultural belonging as well as their sense of place in a physical respect in relation to the landscape, proximity of sacred sites, and other features of their geographical location.

KEYWORDS: Paganism, ancestors, remembrance, Celtic, Ireland, *Samhain*

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Ancestors and ancestry are highly significant in modern Paganism for a variety of reasons: genealogy, lineage, cultural heritage and history all have a bearing on an individual's sense of belonging and feeling of integration within a particular community, social network, nation and locality. The significance of ancestry extends to Pagans' sense of authenticity when it comes to cultural traditions and specific ritual practices. It also has a bearing on access to, and authoritative presence at, specific sacred sites, which are often the loci for ritual practices. The concept of 'the ancestors' is therefore central to Pagan discourse and ritual practices.

Since ancestors are associated with the past, the past also becomes important in how it relates to modern Pagans' perception of their own identities, socio-cultural place and legitimacy. Bonds and links with the ancestral peoples of a particular land, culture, or ethnicity can become extremely important for a Pagan individual's or group's sense of identity and 'rightful' place in a region or nation. This positioning of modern Pagan identity within particular socio-cultural contexts involves identification with particular parts of history more than others, and an emphasising of particular historical events over others. Additionally, specific historical traditions that Pagans identify with are intentionally incorporated into their worldview and ritual practices. Many Pagan customs are based on their understandings of traditional historical customs and popular beliefs as well as what can be gleaned via archaeology and other sources about pre-historical practices. This identification with particular parts of the past is a process at work, to a greater or lesser extent, in the negotiation of identity of all cultural groups. As Frykman and Löfgren state:

> Customs always tell us about the present. By seeing what has become tradition, what is considered worth preserving, we can learn something about how different groups nowadays present themselves, building up an identity of their own with the aid of references to the old days. The interesting question is not whether this tradition-building gives a true or false picture of the past, but why this particular version of a shared history is chosen (1996, 17).

Paying close attention to the reasons why ancestors are so important to contemporary Pagans can tell us much about the values and concerns of the people in this religious movement. Examination of what is regarded by Pagans as 'pagan history', as *their* history, provides much insight into the dynamics or workings of Pagan culture.

The Pagan community collectively remembers the past in particular ways, attaching new meanings to historical events and to different eras. This mechanism of historical reinterpretation is a characteristic feature of

the modern Pagan movement in a global sense.[1] Conceptualisation of, as well as remembrance of, ancestral peoples is closely tied to these ways of thinking about the past. New meanings are projected onto the distant past, which is viewed by many Pagans as a golden age, envisioned as a time when followers of nature-based religions lived in harmony with the land they lived on and in sync with seasonal cycles. In terms of historical times, Pagans identify most strongly with specific aspects of traditional culture. Again, this is a cultural process found in almost all social groups, but the significance of traditions varies from slight importance to extremely meaningful, the latter being the case for Pagan groups in their relationship to traditions of an older period. As the folklorist Alan Gailey states, 'it is clear that different social groups adhere to different corpuses of tradition in defining their identities or in ascribing their identities to themselves' (1988, 65). This process of identity-definition and identity-ascription is evident in how Pagans 'remember' and conceive of the past, how they incorporate aspects of tradition and history and make these aspects significant to their own identity. Pagan identity-formation and continual identity-maintenance heavily involves history as a cultural resource and this is especially apparent in regards to connecting themselves with ancestral peoples.

Analysis of the Pagan community's intentional symbolic placement of themselves in relation to past historical events, as well as happenings described in mythic history, allows for a better understanding of their view of their status in the modern world. This analysis of Pagan worldview and ritual practices is based on data gathered during longitudinal ethnographic research carried out with the Irish Pagan community.[2] Fieldwork was conducted over a decade-long span (2002-2012) involving participant observation in rituals and festival celebrations.[3] During this time, Pagans' views were recorded via ethnographic interviewing (40 interviews were conducted), email

[1] See further Butler (2008) for an examination of the mechanism of historical reinterpretation at work in relation to the Irish Pagan community's celebration of festivals.

[2] The research began as an MPhil research project (2001-2003) on the topic of contemporary Pagan ritual practices which was upgraded to a PhD programme in the academic year 2002-03. The PhD project encompassed many more aspects of Paganism in Ireland, providing an examination of characteristic aspects of their worldview and the ways in which this worldview is expressed through specific kinds of ritual practices (rites of passage, healing rituals and festival celebrations); additionally the analysis included their cosmology, magical beliefs, creation and use of material culture, and artistic expressions through painting, sculpture and ritual drama. I gratefully acknowledge The Irish Research Council for funding this research in the form of a Government of Ireland Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

[3] The Pagan ritual year is based on the solar cycle and the progression through the seasons while the lunar cycle features more strongly in the activities of certain individuals and groups. The Pagan annual cycle or 'Wheel of the Year' contains eight festivals or 'sabbats': *Imbolc* (February 1), Spring Equinox (March 21), *Bealtaine* (May 1), Summer Solstice (June 21), *Lughnasadh* (August 1), Autumn Equinox (September 21), *Samhain* (October 31) and Winter Solstice (December 21). These calendar dates are special for Pagans in Ireland and other countries in the northern hemisphere.

communication as well as informal discussions in person, on the telephone and in online Pagan forums. The fieldwork and interviewing was conducted in various locations, and with a variety of different groups and individuals, in the Republic of Ireland.[4]

Many cultural and environmental attributes inform the construction of contemporary Irish Pagan worldview, including history, mythology, folklore, human-made sacred sites, and natural landscape features. In order to contextualise the Pagan worldview and cosmology in regard to the corpus of Irish mythological material, folklore and mythic history, scholarly sources on early Irish literature as well as Celtic studies are referenced to give the reader a sense of the symbolic and cultural setting within which Irish Pagan worldview is formed and negotiated. The ways in which the past is conceptualised or constructed (or re-constructed, or re-imagined) by Pagans is important for their articulation of current identities, both in terms of their cultural uniqueness (as distinct from contemporary Christian cultures, for instance) and their cultural connectedness (to the 'Old Religion', to the land, to ancestors).

Old Gods and New Religious Movements: Who Are the Ancestors?

Typically, the word *ancestor* is used to refer to a person, generally one more remote than a grandparent, from whom one is descended. As such, the word is normally used to describe deceased distant relatives and thus remembrance of the ancestors equates with remembering the dead of one's own genealogical line. An individual's ancestors, taken as lineage or genealogy, is equivalent to that person's family tree, ethnic descent or bloodline, and this is an important matter within Paganism, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the path a practitioner follows and the kind of ideology the practitioner or group adheres to.[5] In some types of rituals, genealogical lines are significant, such as handfastings (Pagan weddings)

[4] In Pagan discourse, a 'solitary practitioner' refers to an individual who is not a member of a ritual group. The research included solitary practitioners as well as those who were members of groups who practice rituals together. Ritual groups of Wiccans are called 'Covens' while ritual groups of Druids are called 'Groves'.

[5] The word *path* is used within Paganism to mean the kind of Paganism a practitioner follows, similar to the meaning of the word *denomination* for faith-based religions such as Christianity. There are various paths within contemporary Paganism and this examination focuses on the paths of Druidry and Wicca. Also included among informants are those who self-identify as Pagan as a generic category (i.e. they do not align themselves to a particular path within Paganism). While Shamanism, Heathenism and various other forms of Paganism exist in Ireland, they were not included in this study. In Pagan terminology, the word path and *tradition* have equivalent meaning, but the latter is avoided in this article since the use of the word has a precise meaning in folklore study and the different connotations become even more confusing when discussing issues of cultural identity and historical continuity.

and baby blessings, as indicated in this description of a welcoming ritual for a new-born baby:

> C: When we did their baby, their first baby – and it took them some time to have that child and he was very precious. Now, we held that in the Well House and Gavin decided he was going to draw the ancestors of every single ancestor. It took forty-five minutes for him to put all the names of every ancestor. Gavin was seriously into genealogy! And then we, you know, we sort of brought the child up and did all these very traditional things. We just offered water and salt and, as it were, handed the child around and lit a special candle, which was then given to them to keep for the child.
> J: What's the offering of water and salt about?
> C: It's sustenance, it's basic stuff; you know, you're back to your basic zone zero stuff. You know, you need a roof over your head, you need food to eat, you need people to look after you. That's really what one is reminding oneself with a baby naming, that this baby is to be offered every, you know, everything it needs to thrive. It's really no more than that. And the importance of the name with a baby – there's something very earthy to the parents in that (Interview with Catherine).

For some Pagans, as shown in the interview extract above, 'ancestor' can mean relatively recently deceased relations. For others, however, ancestors can refer to human predecessors in a more general sense. It can mean all the preceding generations of a particular locality, region, nation or culture. For others still, ancestor can have an even more all-encompassing meaning and is used to refer to all of the human beings who lived on the planet before us; it means former existence of humankind it its entirety. These definitional distinctions are important to note here because, as discussed below, issues of cultural belonging, ethnicity and specific ancestral lineage are quite contentious issues for some modern Pagans.

Some Pagans feel that followers of ancient religions are their 'spiritual ancestors' since they believe that these religions are precursors to their own belief-system and religious practices. For some Pagan Witches, for instance, remembrance of 'the burning times' is important in acknowledging those who were put to death during the witch-trials. A common phrase in Pagan discourse is 'never again the Burning Times', referring to the atrocities of the witch-trials, which suggests that the people persecuted on accusations of practicing witchcraft during the 16th and 17th centuries were in fact the same kind of practitioners as modern Pagan Witches.[6]

[6] A popular song among Irish Pagans is Christy Moore's cover version of 'Burning Times' by Charlie Murphy. The chorus of this song is sometimes sung as a refrain during ritual: 'Hear them

Cultural ancestry is a significant facet of contemporary Pagan identity. Abby Day (2012) discusses how most anthropological literature concerns non Euro-American places, and how such studies reveal that the practice of conducting specific ancestor worship rituals and maintaining kin relationships have several social functions, primary of which are that 'they secure and reinforce lineage and ethnic belonging; they reproduce claims to group identity and territory' (2012: 174). In her article, Day explores how ancestor care and veneration are also common in Euro-American countries in late modernity. In the context of the Irish Pagan community in contemporary Ireland, the veneration of ancestors is practiced through specific rituals, though these rituals may also serve other functions, such as the celebration of a particular festival, healing, and/or as a means of communication with other kinds of spirits. In venerating deceased relatives, Irish Pagans reinforce lineage and ethnic belonging, but in perhaps more subtle ways than in other cultural contexts where ancestor veneration is the norm.

For Pagans in Ireland, perceived spiritual connections with ancestors help to consolidate both group identity and links to territory in regard to the local and national landscape. Sacred sites are an important factor in this process of linking to ancestral peoples and the land itself, and here the Hill of Tara in County Meath is offered as an example of a site of nexus between these different values and beliefs connected to the past, ancestors, the spirit realm, and to both individual and group identity. For some Pagans, Tara became the symbolic core of a 'Pagan Ireland' and a means of connecting, materially and emblematically, present-day Pagan identities to ancestral Irish identities.

Mythic History, Archaeology and Spiritual Lineages

Pagans consult various sources in their efforts to find out about ancestral peoples and ancient religions. These include the physical sciences, such as archaeology, and social sciences, such as historical studies and anthropological literature, whether these involve analysis of pre-historical or historical peoples (particularly studies of these peoples' ancient and pre-historic religions and historical indigenous religions, respectively), or even studies of modern Pagan communities. Pagans have a proclivity for reading academic texts about their own community, whether these are ethnographies involving them directly or sociological or psychological research papers that deal with modern Paganism. Scholars have recognised this tendency and it has been noted that, 'developing

chanting healing incantations/ Calling for the wise ones, celebrating in dance and song/ Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inanna' (x2).

Paganisms draw on academic scholarship, and researchers contribute directly and indirectly to understandings within the communities they study' (Blain, Ezzy and Harvey 2004, 2).

Pagan groups draw from particular cultural resources in the process of identity-creation, and conscious ritual-creation and sometimes their way of sourcing the source, so to speak, is to look up academic texts. For example, those archaeological or historical sources consulted by practitioners in Reconstructionist paths might be noted in an academic study of that particular Pagan community, and in turn those listed sources influence other Pagan practitioners to directly consult those same sources.[7] This process is not an indication of a capricious or vacillating attitude toward historical fact on the part of Pagan groups, but rather the opposite; Pagans attempt to locate the factual information on ancient religions so they can create a framework on which to base their re-created rituals. There is awareness within Paganism that it is not possible to recreate ancient religions as such, since too much information is lacking, but a characteristic feature of the contemporary Pagan movement is this endeavour to incorporate 'correct' information. This process is more complex than Pagans attempting to re-create ancient religions *per se*, and Graham Harvey expands on this point:

> While 'reconstruction' may be watchwords of particular Pagans, they are rarely if ever taken to be as straightforward as an outsider might judge. That is, an observer may be tempted to belittle the very idea that an ancient religion can be fully revived centuries, if not millennia, after it was last practiced. However, those who make claims about their engagement with the 'old religion' of their ancestors, or that of the ancestors who lived in a location, may intend something far more complex than observers may impute. They are usually fully aware of the disjunctions between the past and the present, and they are often explicit that museum and literary resources are less than adequate as sources of knowledge about religious ideas, performance, and material culture (2007, 279).

The seeking out of information about ancient religion, and the incorporation of it into worldview and practice, is part of the desire to engage with the ancestors. This interest in ancient peoples and their religions is a central feature of modern Pagan culture: 'neo-pagans, by definition, attempt to recover and re-create ancient pagan religions and adapt them to the modern world' (Lewis 1999, 196). Even though Pagans consult archaeological studies about past societies as well as megalithic monuments and burial places, they tend to incorporate only the

[7] Reconstructionist Pagans attempt to recreate ancient religious rituals as part of their spiritual practices. Subsets include Celtic Reconstructionist and Norse Reconstructionist paths.

information that supports their own views or practices, which the archaeologist Peter J. Fowler comments on as a cultural process: 'we shape elements of our present in the light of those parts of the past we select for imitation and emulation' (1992, 5). Thus, Pagan perspectives on ancestral peoples draw from much accurate scholarly information, but this information is integrated with other interpretations, which are not based on fact. Some interpretations have to do with emotions and the concept of spiritual lineages. One example of this spiritual reading of the past is the way in which some practitioners claim to feel the presence of ancestors during particular kinds of rituals, or at particular places, most often at sacred sites.

Locating the Ancestors: Summerland, Otherworlds and Afterlives

There is a diversity of beliefs among modern Pagans in relation to the nature of the spirit world and the afterlife where the ancestors are thought to reside. Pagans elucidate their beliefs in other realms of existence, and human relationships with these realms, in a very individualistic way, which varies from one person to the next. Often, Pagan narratives are multi-layered and can allude to many different systems of belief, including ideas about death and the afterlife, or the spirit world, which are found in differing religious traditions. A characteristic feature of Pagan worldview is the acceptance of different conceptions and understandings of the spirit realm (or Otherworld) and of the afterlife.[8]

Many Pagans express a belief in the 'next world' after death, but the kind of afterlife described varies widely. Some Pagans believe in reincarnation and Michael York compares this concept as found in the context of Paganism with that found in the New Age movement:

> Belief in reincarnation is one that is prevalent in both movements. The idea behind rebirth, however, tends to diverge between the groups. In New Age, reincarnation is part of the spiritual development of the individual psyche leading toward its ultimate apotheosis and/or re-mergence with the godhead from which it came. Reincarnation is intimately interconnected with the very *raison d'être* of life and the divine plan of the Ultimate. Reincarnation for the neo-pagan, by contrast, appears to put less stress on the notion of karma – the working out of past debts and mistakes. Instead, it is more simply part of the great eternal round of nature: birth-death-rebirth (1995, 148).

[8] Some Pagans are atheists who do not claim any belief in the existence of a spiritual realm, deities or other supernatural beings, or of an afterlife.

Some Pagans do not believe in an afterlife and think the dead body becomes part of the earth, which is conceptualised as part of the cycle of life, death and regeneration of ecological life. Some Pagans, particularly Wiccans, refer to the 'Summerland', 'the realm in which the souls of the departed reside, rest, and integrate lessons from their earthly life while awaiting reincarnation' (Lewis 1999, 279). James R. Lewis notes the possibility that 'Neopagans adopted the term from nineteenth-century Celtic studies, where it was used to translate a Gaelic term for an otherworld where the souls of the departed rested after death' (1999, 279).

The notion of a spirit realm underlies Pagan discourse and ritual and, as mentioned above, has many different individualised conceptualisations. For Irish Pagans, ideas about the spirit realm are interlinked with ideas about the otherworld found in Irish mythology and folklore, though there are also marked differences in Irish Pagan's envisioning of the otherworld due to other influences on their cosmology.

In Irish mythology, the afterlife and otherworld are sometimes conflated as one and the same location, although it is not explicitly described.[9] There are some references to specific names for otherworldly realms in Irish mythology, but it is not clear whether these are distinct realms or part of one Otherworld, or whether these realms are also afterlife abodes for spirits of the dead. One of the names for the Otherworld in Irish mythology and folklore is *Tír na nÓg* meaning 'land of the young', which is said to be a bright paradise where there is no sickness or old age. This otherworldly paradise is not located in the heavens but underneath the ocean, or alluded to as an underworld that is accessed via subterranean entranceways.

The pre-Christian idea about the Otherworld of the *síde* that has been preserved in mythology presents it as a realm that is coterminous with the earth.[10] In the Irish Mythological Cycle, the name *síde* is used for the underground residences of the beings said to have inhabited Ireland in mythical pre-history, as well as being the name for the beings themselves (Maier 2000, 248). The *síde* are often equated with the mythical people, the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, who are said to have fled on the arrival of invading Celtic tribes and hid in their subterranean abodes. These places of hiding included the mountains and hills of the natural landscape as well as the

[9] It is important to point out that the Early Irish literary manuscript sources, in which the mythology of the pre-Christian peoples of Ireland was compiled, were mediated through Christian authors. There are no extant first-hand accounts from the pre-Christian inhabitants of Ireland. The ambiguity as regards the location and inhabitants of the Otherworld in Irish mythology might be due to this process of compilation at the hands of Christian scribes. There is a likelihood that Christian concepts were added into the descriptions of the Otherworld and other indigenous concepts were omitted or obscured during the compilation. This could have been an intentional obscuring of indigenous beliefs or it may have been the outcome of the mythological material being interpreted according to the Christian cosmology, and hence understanding, of the compilers of the material.

[10] *Sí* is the spelling in the modern Irish language, and variant spellings include *síth*, *síd*, and *sidh*.

burial mounds associated with pre-Celtic peoples. Parallels can be drawn between the mythological tradition and oral tradition or folklore of the fairies.[11] In folklore, places associated with the fairies include 'fairy hills', caves, 'fairy forts' (ringforts) and 'fairy trees' (particularly Whitethorn), woodlands and particular rocks.[12]

In Irish mythology, and in other Celtic mythologies, the realm of the dead and the realm of supernatural beings are sometimes described in a way that makes them seem to be the same location. Deities and spiritual beings such as the *síde* inhabit the same place. There are traditional beliefs that deceased humans can join the fairy realm and be 'in the fairies', though it isn't clear whether they remain a human spirit or become some other kind of entity after death. Similarly, in the folklore of the Celtic regions, beliefs about fairies and the dead are intermingled but the exact nature of the realm in which they dwell is ambiguous:

> At first sight the commonly received idea of fairyland seems as far as possible from the shadowy and bloodless realms of the dead, and yet, in studying fairy-lore and ghost-lore alike we are haunted and teased by resemblances between them. This is not to say that the fairies and the dead are identical, or that the fairies derive entirely from notions about the dead, only that there are many interconnections between them (Briggs 1970, 81).

Although there are many associations between fairies and dead humans in Irish folklore, there does not seem to be the same interrelation in Pagan discourse. It appears that Pagans view ancestor spirits and the fairies as distinct kinds of beings, although they do make reference to the ancestors being in the Otherworld. The relationship between Pagan beliefs and the traditional Irish beliefs connected to the Otherworld and its proximity in the natural landscape is significant when examining Pagan connections to sacred sites and their belief that these places – sacred hills, burial mounds, and caves – are loci where one can connect with ancestral peoples and otherworldly energy.

[11] The word *síde* (pl.) is translated into English as 'fairies' (or sometimes 'elves') but the meaning is not directly translatable. The word *fairy* is an anglicised version of the Old French '*faerie*', via *fae* (*fay*) 'a fairy', from Latin *fata* 'the Fates', pl. of *fatum* 'fate'. The spelling *faerie* was popularised by Spenser in the 16th century as a pseudo-archaic or poetic term for fairyland. The word *faerie* has connotations of enchantment and whimsicality and came into common usage in the English language in the 13th century. The Irish word *síde* has different associations.

[12] Ringforts are circular shaped settlements consisting of a round wall of earth or stone, often with a ditch outside (Harbison 1997: 22). Some of these structures date to the first millennium of the Christian era or later, while others date to the Iron Age or earlier, perhaps even as far back as the Late Bronze Age (Harbison 1997: 24).

Honouring the Ancestors through Ritual

The most common way that Pagans remember and venerate the ancestors is through ritual. The loci for these rituals include sacred hills and megalithic monuments. The hills located in the ancient fifth province of Ireland, *Mide*, are sacred sites for Pagans. The province of *Mide* was significant in the ancient symbolic division of the country: 'The idealised picture was probably one of a simple fivefold mandala-type division: north, south, east, west and centre: Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connacht, in modern terminology, with a central kingdom. The central kingdom existed in early historic times and was called *Mide*, which means "middle"' (de Paor 1985, 123). Proinsias Mac Cana has explored in depth 'the idea of a country as being divided into five parts, one of them centred between the other four' (2011, 251) and how sites of sacred significance and pilgrimage are often located in the sacred centre:

> The image of the sacred centre, Caesar's *locus consecratus*, is well attested – place of pilgrimage and *omphalos* seem to merge as places of assembly – together with the fivefold division of kingdom or nation comprising the centre and the four territories (or mountains) that surround it in the direction of the cardinal points (Mac Cana 2011, 110).

Pagans adhere to this cosmology of the sacred hills being within the sacred centre of the country, and they regard these hills, more than other places, as ones that are conducive to connecting with the ancestors. The sites that were once considered part of *Mide* are the Hill of Tara, the hill of *Uisneach* and *Tlachtga* (hill of Ward). Pagans visit these hills on the festivals and honouring the ancestors is most often a part of the rituals conducted. Certain hills are associated with particular festivals, *Tlachtga* being associated with the festival of *Samhain* on October 31 and *Uisneach* with the festival of *Bealtaine* on May 1. Tara is associated with the ancient *Samhain* but Pagans visit it most often on the Summer Solstice.

Visiting these sites for ritual purposes is important for modern Pagan identity in that it places their religious ritual practices in the context of ancient myth, pilgrimage traditions as well as situating them physically in the symbolic religious centre of ancient Ireland. Folklorist Henry Glassie describes the process of utilising older traditions in the creation of new ones: 'Tradition is the creation of the future out of the past. A continuous process situated in the nothingness of the present, linking the vanished with the unknown, tradition is stopped, parcelled, and codified

by thinkers who fix upon this aspect or that, in accord with their needs or preoccupations' (2003, 176). There is a need for contemporary Pagans, from their perspective, to associate themselves with the sacred aspects of ancient Irish culture. Their choice of sacred sites, festivals to celebrate, and certain ritual actions are all part of this striving for connection with ancestral culture.

Rituals connected to the ancestors also take place at megalithic monuments, particularly stone circles.[13] Such sites are used for handfastings, initiations, and festival celebrations, all of which may include invocation of, or other reference to, ancestors.[14]

Although it is not known whether people in the distant past used megalithic monuments as sacred sites, or whether the builders of such sites built them for religious observance, Pagans make connections between these sites and the religion of the ancestors. Antiquarian literature and art of the 18th and 19th centuries had a big impact on romanticising these megalithic sites and connecting them with a spirituality thought to exist in the ancient world. This Romantic literature and artistic style influences Pagan perceptions of what Europe was like prior to Christian influence. These sources also influence Pagans' choice of ritual sites, as they regard these monuments as physical representations of the ancient religion that have survived into contemporary times. For some, having ritual access to these sites is very important because, in their mindset, it is a way of entering the same sacred space as the ancestors.

As mentioned above, some Pagans believe that the followers of nature-based religions of previous epochs are spiritual ancestors. Some practitioners visit megalithic sites and sacred hills with the aim of sensing and attuning to spiritual energies that they believe permeate these sites. This idea of the presence of spiritual energies at the sites is related to the idea that the sites had a religious function in the past and that the energy 'raised' during these ancient rituals still lingers as a kind of magical residue. As David Lowenthal observes, 'monuments and memorials locate the remembered or imagined past in the present landscape. Their function

[13] Megalithic stone circles are commonly selected as ritual sites because these sites are viewed as sacred due to their association with pre-Christian religion but also because of their circular shape. They are viewed as already marked out 'magical circles', as a circle is cast by visualising it or marking it on the ground at the beginning of most Pagan rituals as a way of creating a sacred space. Some Pagans believe that stone circles hold or contain magical energy 'raised' during a ritual (magical energy is defined by some as emanating from the otherworld or spirit realm while others believe in 'earth energy' that comes up from the earth itself via the participants in the ritual, who act as conductors, and is then released on the earthly plane).

[14] In Paganism, there are initiations into groups and also into orders, which are often to mark the commencement of 'magical training'. Other initiations are an induction into the Pagan religion, normally into a specific tradition i.e. one becomes a Witch, Wiccan or Druid on initiation. The initiation ritual can mark the personal intent to begin a specific spiritual journey and can be a 'self initiation' or 'dedication'.

is not to preserve the past but to recall and celebrate it' (1979, 121). For Pagans, megalithic monuments are places where the ancestors can be remembered and a particular idealised version of the past can be celebrated.

There is a certain kind of picture of the ancestral past presented in Pagan discourse. The ancestors are portrayed as people with a close spiritual connection to the natural world and to the land, as performing specific kinds of religious practices, and as communing with deities and other spiritual entities at sacred sites. An analysis of this picture reveals what modern Pagans are most yearning for and that seem to be lacking in the modern way of life: a close connection with the natural environment, a nature-based spiritual connection, and the ability to connect with divinity in an experiential way at certain locations. The Celticist Donald Meek comments on the tendency in modern society to put together a 'motley collection of snapshots and images of the past, which are assembled to meet the needs of the collector' (2000, 24). It cannot be stated with certainty what the ancestral peoples were like, or what their religious practices consisted of, but the Pagan imagining of them resembles the current practices and values of Pagan practitioners. In this respect, 'the ancestors' are a created ideal culture, the epitome of what a nature-religion should be like, in the modern Pagan view.

High Kingship and Druidical Fires: Preserving the Memory of the Ancients

The version of the way of life of the ancestors and the 'pagan' past presented by modern Pagans depends for its authenticity on the preservation of certain sites and their associated cultural traditions and ideas. A prime example of this is the Hill of Tara, which is one of the main sacred sites for Irish Pagans and a significant royal and religious site in ancient times, associated with the historical and mythological reigning kings of Ireland (Slavin 2002, 69). The *Ard Rí* or High King of ancient Ireland is said to have ruled from this site.[15] The *feis Temro* or 'Feast of Tara' was held there, which was a ritual to mark the inauguration of a new king (Maier 2000, 263). As well as being connected with the ruling seat of kings in ancient times, Tara is also linked to druidic ritual and to the 'sacred fire of the Druids' (Smyth 1996, 166-7). In Irish mythology, this site is the setting for stories about heroes and gods. Tara is a 'hollow hill', associated with the Otherworld of the *síde*.

Plans for the M3 motorway through the Tara-Skryne Valley were announced in 2003. The construction of this four-lane toll road is a very emotive issue for Irish Pagans, as well as Pagans internationally, due to its

[15] In ancient Ireland, there were regional ruling kings or chieftains and a High King whose rule was higher-ranking than theirs.

status as a sacred site and links with ancestral peoples, their social system, royalty and religion. During the planning stage for the motorway's route, many Pagans voiced their outrage on the Internet.[16] Some attended meetings and some planned protests.[17] Others carried out magical rituals to protect the site from harm and I was invited to take part in one such protective ritual, which took place on the first weekend of October 2003. This was a gathering of Druids at the hill and a number of rituals took place on different mounds over the course of the weekend. One of these rituals held atop *Rath Gráinne*, one of the mounds of Tara, was an earth-healing or 'green magical working' to shield the site from any damage the road building might cause.[18] The ritual involved twenty-five people. We began by holding hands and forming a circle around four people in the centre. The four in the middle called the quarters and called on the spirits and energies of the four directions. Then, we all hummed, changing the pitch a few times, and chanted in order to raise energy. This was followed by a spiral dance, where, still holding hands, we whirled in towards the centre, making a spiral shape; then we whirled back from the centre and recommenced a full circle shape once again. A woman remained in the centre of the circle and played the tune 'King of the Fairies' on her tin whistle. The energy raised from the humming, chanting, dancing, and music was then channelled: each person concentrated on visualising the energy as a glowing wall and concurrently focused on sending this energy out of the circle so that it enveloped the entire site of Tara. The intention was for this 'energy barrier' to surround and protect the site.

Once road building commenced, these rituals to protect Tara continued, both at the site and by 'distance healing' for the site. Demonstrations were held on the Hill of Tara itself and, when the building commenced, the demonstrations at the site turned into direct action where protestors attempted to prevent any diggers or other equipment from

[16] Online discussions took place in members-only forums which I had joined, such as one connected to the Hibernian Order of Druids called 'Family of Rowan' (the E-group has since disbanded). Later, there were various Facebook pages and groups (both public and closed types) devoted to the Save Tara campaign and many of these had Pagans as members and Pagans relaying information from the site to the internet and others sharing this information across the different online networks. Although these groups and pages were not Pagan-run, they did have a Pagan membership (that was obvious to me as I knew the people from my field research).

[17] For example, there was a Pagan presence at meetings of the Tara Skryne Project consultation with locals, stakeholders, and the Friends of Tara group, one of which was held on 3 September 2009. This was an introductory meeting to sound out what issues needed to be addressed in the process of constructing a plan for the area around the Hill of Tara itself. At least one person present at this initial meeting who self-identifies as Pagan became involved in protests and direct action at the site when construction work commenced.

[18] At this stage, it was not known by the Pagan community that the construction of the M3 would involve direct damage to the mounds; the intent of this ritual was to safeguard the site from 'spiritual damage'. Some also expressed concern that the lights and noise of traffic on the motorway would change the atmosphere of the site, making it less conducive to magical workings.

being brought onto the site. The campaign at Tara eventually became an actual community of activists, many living in camps on the hill for the duration. While not all involved in the direct action campaign were Pagans, there was a prominent Pagan presence. This commitment to protecting the site was influenced to some extent by the idea of Tara as a symbol of the ancestors and a physical, established connection to ancestral kings, their royal ceremonies and the people's religious observance.

Pagan protestors expressed the idea that they were 'doing it for the ancestors'. One Druid, on visiting the protesters on-site, describes how she immediately got involved:

> I could not walk away and joined them on a daily basis using our bodies to blockade trucks and diggers from entering sites in the Tara Skryne Valley. We prevented any work from taking place for an entire six weeks, April to June 07, with marginal success either side of this period as our numbers were so low and because many of us were arrested during the Operation Bedrock swoop by *Gardaí* [Irish police force] (Email Communication with Caoimhe, 16/02/12).

An impetus for the Pagan protests at Tara was the fact that the site is an enduring reminder of ancestral culture. This site especially is embedded in the cultural landscape of Ireland, as well as its sacred geography. The view of Tara's symbolic significance differs according to the social group in question; for a large sector of Ireland's contemporary population, places like Tara have a historical worth, but for them they are simply heritage sites with no sacred associations. For Pagans, on the other hand, the importance of the sites is related to a whole complex of meanings that include ancestors, mythic history, ancient religion, folklore and identity. Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis also make this point in their discussion of the use of pre-historic sites by contemporary religious practitioners: 'They are interested in "heritage", not only intellectually but as part of the spiritual or imaginal landscapes within which they author identities. They develop specific relationships with particular sites, to which they return time and again' (2004, 238). The subsequent construction of the M3, and the damage to the sacred sites in the Tara-Skryne Valley, disrupted Pagan use of their sacred site and caused much dismay and upset in the community. Damage to the site was also perceived as a threat to contemporary Pagans coming from those in power, as government bodies had planned the road, as well as a threat from the sector of mainstream Irish society that wanted the road to take the route through the Valley. This perceived threat to Pagan culture was connected to the lack of concern among the general population about damage to a highly significant site for Pagans. This feeling in the Pagan community was

worsened by certain media coverage of the protests, which specifically undermined their cultural connections with the past and ancestral people.

The stereotype of 'tree-hugging hippies' was employed by the media ostensibly in an endeavour to belittle the prominent Pagan involvement in the 'Save Tara-Skryne Valley' campaign. In a *Sunday Times* article (Fay 2005b, 3), there is a photo of two well known Pagan activists with the caption, 'Heart-warming twaddle won't wash in court' and a description of how 'the Save Tara campaign's most impassioned objections to the routing of the M3 through the Tara/Skryne Valley appear to be based on what amounts to bad poetry – the florid expression of mystical abstractions about Celtic heritage and national identity'.[19] Here, the Pagan community's appeal to save the site due to it being a sacred ancestral site is picked up on, but made into a mockery. Another article titled 'Hippies get their time warped', attempts to trivialize the Pagan activity at Tara by suggesting their claim to the site is inauthentic:

> Claims by self-styled modern Druids that these rituals are part of an unbroken Celtic tradition stretching back to Ireland's ancient past were accepted at face value. In reality, the Coming of Lugh legend is a comparatively recent invention, an amalgamation of several myths. The so-called re-enactment is highly dubious as there are no documented accounts of how the central fable was celebrated in Celtic times. The pillar around which the rituals take place is probably not the sacred stone (*Lia Fáil*) it is reputed to be. Its location and Christian carvings suggest that it's a gravestone for casualties of the 1798 rebellion. But silence about such details isn't surprising. Without the purported historical legitimacy, 21st-century Druids might look as if they are playing silly dress-up games (Fay 2005b, 3).

While the limestone pillar-stone is called the *Lia Fáil*, Celticists, archaeologists and Pagans alike acknowledge that it is unlikely to be the mythical stone described in medieval texts. However, the significance for Pagans is that the site itself is associated with this mythic history. The tabloid accounts of the campaign reveal how strongly modern Pagans identify with the past and how they link the site to ancestral culture. These are important claims because they give Pagans a sense of legitimacy, especially in the face of journalistic attacks where they are perceived as followers of an inauthentic religion. This media coverage served to spur on Pagan assertions of ancestral connections and authentic spiritual claims to the site. Blain and Wallis discuss Stonehenge as a site at the source of

[19] Quotes from newspaper articles are included here as the wording of these caused much consternation and reaction from the Pagan community. There were of course other newspaper accounts but in general these tended not to focus on Pagans in the Save Tara campaign.

tensions between Pagans and the authorities and in their discussion of how Pagan groups engage with archaeological discourse, make the point that:

> What is interesting about these perspectives is not just that some Pagans (if not claiming a continuity of tradition over the millennia) draw on these perceived folkloric traditions; but rather, the way in which these perspectives on the past – conceptions of what constitutes folklore – are mobilised in active attempts to influence and in some instances negotiate site management (2003, 314).

Tara similarly is a site of contested 'sacredness' and a similar process can be seen where Pagans draw on cultural traditions, mythology and folklore connected to the site as a way to back up claims of sacred status and appropriate treatment of the site. Another concern raised by Pagans, and others, about the appropriate treatment of the Tara/Skyrne Valley sites was the way that remains were, and are currently, being dealt with. There were many references to ancestors and the desecration of graves during the ongoing construction on online forums.[20] The ideological and symbolic connections with distant ancestors became increasingly significant in the case of Tara's vulnerability in the face of the encroaching motorway, as did the material connections to ancestors, such as skeletal remains.

Many other sectors of society in Ireland, and globally, expressed emotions ranging from disagreement to outright despair at the construction of the motorway, often highlighting the cultural significance of the Hill of Tara and the complex of sites in the Skryne Valley. The general public and academics acknowledged this cultural importance during the construction work and in hindsight: 'It would appear that the principle of "cost benefit return" for those who invested in this toll motorway has been given priority over preservation of the most important cultural landscape in Ireland' (Bhreathnach, Fenwick and Newman 2004, 6). The historical significance was also highlighted: 'Public and academic interest is not surprising given the iconic status of Tara as a prehistoric and historic landscape and its key role in modem Irish history and our sense of identity' (Cooney 2004, 8). For Pagans, however, this is not just a cultural landscape, or a complex of sites significant to Irish history and heritage, but a *sacred landscape*; ideas about the ancestors and their culture,

[20] One example is the Facebook 'Tara Skryne Preservation Group', which in the description of the group includes the statement: 'Just one of our group's many aims and objectives includes the recovery of the remains and artefacts unearthed during excavations of the M3 Motorway from the National Museum of Ireland. This call has received the backing of the World Archaeological Congress. We wish for the respectful re-internment of these ancestral remains…' (https://www.facebook.com/groups/147134658692156/. Accessed 15/03/2015).

and the presence of ancestral remains, is of paramount importance to the site's sacred status.

Remembering the Ancestors at Samhain: Feast of the Dead

Remembering and honouring the dead, whether distant ancestors or close relatives, is particularly important during the Pagan celebration of the festival of *Samhain* on October 31.[21] *Samhain* is the name for the Celtic feast of the dead, which preceded the festival of Halloween. The folklorist Leila Dudley Edwards has pointed out that even by using the term '*Samhain*' rather than 'Halloween' to refer to their festival, neo-pagans are making a conscious reference to links that the festival has with older practices that pre-date the Christian All Hallows (2000, 225).

In Irish mythology, *Samhain* is the time when the mounds or *síde* on the landscape open up, allowing the inhabitants of the Otherworld to interact with living human beings. In Irish folklore, it is the time when the symbolic barrier between the human world and the Otherworld becomes thin and it is believed to be the time when deceased relatives could return to the place where they had once lived (Danaher 1972, 207).

In Paganism, *Samhain* is a time to remember and venerate dead loved ones as well as distant ancestors. Many Pagans create altars with photographs or mementos of their deceased relatives and friends, along with items representing the magical elements of earth, air, fire and water and usually some items indicative of the season, such as fruit or nuts. One of the biggest gatherings annually at *Samhain* takes place at *Tlachtga*, a site associated with the pre-Christian *Samhain* festival celebrations. During the ritual celebration of this festival, the participants often invite the spirits of the dead into the sacred circle and it is believed to be a time conducive to making direct contact with the dead. An example of this is a *Samhain* ritual I took part in on October 31, 2002: I joined a Pagan group in North Cork, at their ritual centre outside Mallow. We gathered around a large bonfire in their field, where we took off our shoes and socks so that our feet could be in direct contact with the earth. Everyone stepped into the sacred space that had been marked out on the ground around the fire. We stood in a circle holding hands and called the quarters by walking around deosil, or sunwise, and calling on the spirits of each quarter. Each person then called on a dead relative (mine was my maternal grandmother) to join us in the circle. A chalice filled with mead along with loaves of homemade bread were passed around the circle and shared. This was done with the intent of welcoming those present and creating a bond within the sacred space.

[21] For an analysis of other aspects of the Pagan celebration of this festival, see Butler (2009).

Some of the mead was also poured on the ground as a libation for the ancestors and other spirits.

Another common ritual practice at *Samhain* is to write messages to deceased relatives and other loved ones on pieces of paper, which are then burned in the ritual fire inside the sacred circle. It is believed that the messages can pass between the world of the living and the dead more easily at *Samhain*, since the 'veil' or barrier separating the two is more porous.

In conversations about celebrating the festival of *Samhain*, Irish Pagans described leaving offerings for the fairies and doing rituals to venerate their ancestors as unrelated activities; the belief underlying both actions is that the barrier between worlds is down so that various spirits are abroad, rather than fairies being equivalent with the dead. As mentioned above, the ancestor spirits and fairy beings are generally conceptualised as distinct entities in Paganism.

The festival of *Samhain* is a highly significant one in terms of honouring the ancestors and re-affirming links between modern Paganism and ancient religion and culture. Historical aspects of the traditional festival celebration are retained, such as lighting bonfires, acknowledging the dead and leaving offerings for the fairies. Much emphasis is placed on this being a Pagan religious festival and a special time for them to remember the ancestors.

Ancestral Peoples, Homeland and Other Contentious Issues

Pagan identities become a controversial issue when it comes to remembrance of the ancestors when the definition of 'ancestor' is geographically and perhaps also ethnically specific. The issue becomes complicated by other ideas related to homeland, such as that of being 'native', language, and other ideas that pertain to cultural belonging. These matters of ethnicity, nationality and language are discussed, and often disputed, within specific Pagan groups, between different Pagan groups, and between the Pagan community and outsiders. Connections between contemporary Paganism and ancestral peoples are to the fore in these kinds of discourses.

As discussed previously, ancestor-spirits are believed to reside in the Otherworld or spirit realm, which in the case of Irish Pagan belief is generally regarded as a place of propinquity that can be accessed through the natural landscape. Conceptions of, and beliefs about, local spirits and deities and how to appropriately venerate them can become emotive in regards to perceived 'foreignness' or foreign traditions being imposed on a locale or cultural setting. Since Pagans tend to merge disparate cultural elements from a variety of different sources into their practices, some

elements of their practices might be regarded as alien to a particular cultural setting. This is especially the case when it comes to interacting with the spirit world.

The idea of 'spirits of place' is prominent in Pagan discourse and there are various understandings of the 'correct' way to interact with these local spirits. There is debate among Pagans about whether deities are geographically specific, that is, whether certain gods and goddesses are to be found in specific physical landscapes or at certain sacred sites. A controversial issue is whether practitioners who follow a particular path of Paganism can 'impose' a pantheon on a place where it did not originate. For example, Germanic and Nordic deities are thought (by some Pagans) not to belong in Irish rituals. Some believe that the old gods have an independent existence on the spiritual realm and have endured through time, so that a follower can communicate with them today by way of specific ritual actions; some of these ritual actions are culturally specific. There are those who believe that worshipping, especially invoking, deities without regard to cultural context amounts to cultural appropriation and does a disservice to both the original culture and the deities themselves. Indeed, some believe that this practice of invoking a deity that is foreign to the land where it is called upon might even unleash powerful energies that would cause havoc because they are not native to the place.

Among Irish Pagans, this view was encountered that only the gods of one's own land should be invoked in ritual and in this context, this means the deities of Celtic myth, though for some the definition is narrowed down to deities and spirits with specific connections to Irish landscape features, as well as rivers and the Irish sea. A Druidic group called the Owl Grove follows a pan-Celtic pantheon, invoking Irish, Welsh and Breton deities and does not identify with deities from the mythologies of other cultures.[22] A Wiccan Coven member explains why the tradition followed by her group can be regarded as 'Celtic Wicca' since they venerate deities across the Celtic pantheon:

> The Celtic part is more that we take account of the energies of this land here, which are quite specific; they're quite different from what you get on the Continent or say, in the States, and also some of the traditions in both worship and belief. We also only worship the Celtic deities. We wouldn't worship Egyptian deities or Norse deities … We worship all of them [Celtic deities] and not just the Irish ones. Also, say, Welsh deities. For example, our Coven goddess is Arianrhod who's a Welsh deity of rebirth. But my personal patron deities are Brigit and Herne the hunter (Interview with Sarah).[23]

[22] See further Butler (2005) for an in-depth discussion of this group's beliefs and practices.
[23] Names have been changed to protect the identities of informants.

The Celtic affiliation is important in terms of spiritual practices and this is interlinked with the local landscape.

Other Pagans are eclectic in venerating deities from many different pantheons, forming pan-European or even pan-global pantheons for their own spiritual purposes. Those who believe that deities are archetypes without an individual consciousness feel it is acceptable to invoke energies of gods or goddesses regardless of cultural contexts or historical or geographical influences. Among these practitioners, it is regarded as appropriate to merge energies and there is a universal system of archetypes applied cross-culturally. For example, the Mórrígan of Celtic mythology would be equated with Kali of Hindu mythology, as both are 'creator-destroyer' goddesses. For some Pagans, all goddesses are manifestations of the singular Goddess force while all gods are representations of the God energy. There are differing opinions across the Irish Pagan community, as well as across the international Pagan networks, on whether or not it is appropriate to invoke a deity or connect with a spiritual being that is not connected to one's ancestral culture.

For Irish Pagans, ancestors are most often believed to be the Celts. Study of these peoples and where the different tribes originated is an entire discipline in itself, but Pagan comprehensions of the Celtic past are strongly influenced by popular conceptions of the 'Celtic' that emerged from the Celtic Revival of the 18th and 19th centuries. Scholars have remarked upon the departure of modern Celtic-based spiritual movements from simply romanticising the Celtic past to donning a Celtic identity themselves: 'an aspect of the present [Celtic] revival that sets it apart from its predecessors is the extent to which Celtophiles are appropriating Celtic identities and, as part of this appropriation, engaging in religious practices perceived to be Celtic' (Lewis 2009, 480). It is this assumption of Celtic identity by modern Pagans that is most controversial, both within the Pagan community and among their detractors who feel this is not a 'genuine' religion.

The Celts are viewed 'as repositories of a spirituality that has elsewhere been lost' (Bowman 1993, 154-5). In the Irish context, the Romantic works of the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival involved a re-imagining of the vernacular Irish culture. The agrarian lifestyle of Irish people was the focus of much of their works, and their portrayals drew from quixotic notions like W. B. Yeats' 'Celtic Twilight'. Irish Pagan culture is influenced by this material both in the portrayal of the Celtic and of the pre-modern Irish. The source material about Irish ancestral culture that Irish Pagans try to connect with has already been filtered through a romantic mindset.[24]

[24] For further discussion of the influence of Romanticism on Irish Pagan worldview, see Butler (2013).

Pagans in Ireland often claim this Celtic ancestry or heritage, whether or not they have a genetic link to a Celtic land and regardless of whether their place of birth was a Celtic region. These people are what Marion Bowman might describe as 'Cardiac Celts', who feel in their hearts that they are Celts. In this view 'spiritual nationality is a matter of elective affinity' (2000, 246). The notion of homeland is provocative to those who take a more nationalistic stance and for whom ethnicity, land and language are all of central importance to identity and claims of cultural belonging. Some Pagan groups, as well as non-Pagan groups, attach very different meanings to Celtic ancestry and heritage. There are those who feel that only people born in, and claiming descent from, people in a Celtic region can make a claim to Celtic identity. For others, language is an integral part of Celtic (or Irish) identity. The issue of language use in Paganism is complicated in the Irish context in regard to the ancestors; some feel that Irish should be spoken in ritual when communicating with the ancestors, and others believe it would be Old Irish since the ancestors existed before the modern Irish language.[25]

Within some Pagan paths, the issue of cultural heritage and authenticity becomes part of an exclusionary ideology where some groups claim to be following the 'true religion'. Concurrent with Pagan groups that place emphasis on 'blood and soil' and 'true religion', there are fascist groups who are hijacking Pagan symbols and identities for a neo-Nazi agenda: 'Paganism is being pressed to the cause of spiritual Aryanism in Europe' (Gallagher 2009, 585). In some parts of Europe, certain Pagan groups see ethnicity, directly traceable lineage, and language as being of central importance. In Ireland, generally speaking, Paganism is more influenced by Romantic Nationalism and ideas about spiritual ancestry. In all of these Pagan worldviews, the ancestors and ancestry are of vital importance, but for different reasons.

Concluding Remarks

Pagans view the past in a selective way, emphasising an ancestral culture that they believe forms the basis for their own beliefs and practices. The image of the ancestors, their way of life and values, and their beliefs and practices, is one constructed from various sources: academic literature, archaeological data, popular literature, artworks, folklore, mythology and imagination. The distant past is regarded by Pagans to be more meaningful, and to hold more authority, than the recent past. Claims about the ancient religions and cultures make Pagans feel more secure in

[25] A similar argument is made for speaking Old Irish to communicate with deities of the Irish pantheon.

their current identities, which is part of the process of identity-maintenance: 'all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator' (Hobsbawm 1983, 12). This reinterpreted picture of ancient times is often held up to justify modern Pagan practices and access to sacred sites. Most importantly, the idea of spiritual ancestors gives legitimacy to modern Pagans as it serves to integrate and contextualise their practices within the cultural fabric and socio-geographical milieu. Factual information is compiled about the pre-historic past and combined with historical detail and amalgamated with new meanings and values to create a corpus of knowledge. This knowledge about the ancestors, both the factual and the imagined, provides a sense of cultural belonging as well as an impetus for particular kinds of practices.

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