

Drualus **(Mistletoe)**

The Sacred Plant of the Druids
By Susa Morgan Black



“The Druidess” Armand LaRoche, 19th century

Gathering the Mistletoe

On the Sixth day after the new moon
A procession of village folk.
Gathered to seek a special boon
Underneath the ancient oak.

They spied a clump of mistletoe
High in the oaken canopy
The berries gave a milky glow
Against bare limbs of the winter tree.

A white robed Druid climbed the boughs
With his golden sickle blade
A green circlet of ivy 'round his brow
His long dark hair caught up in a braid.

Extending his body along a stout limb
He could just reach the holy plant
Anxiously below they waited for him
And began their sacred chant.

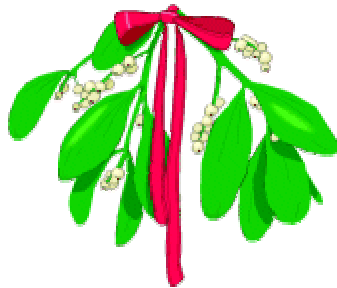
*Uil-ioc! Draoidh-lus!
Sùgh an Daraich!*

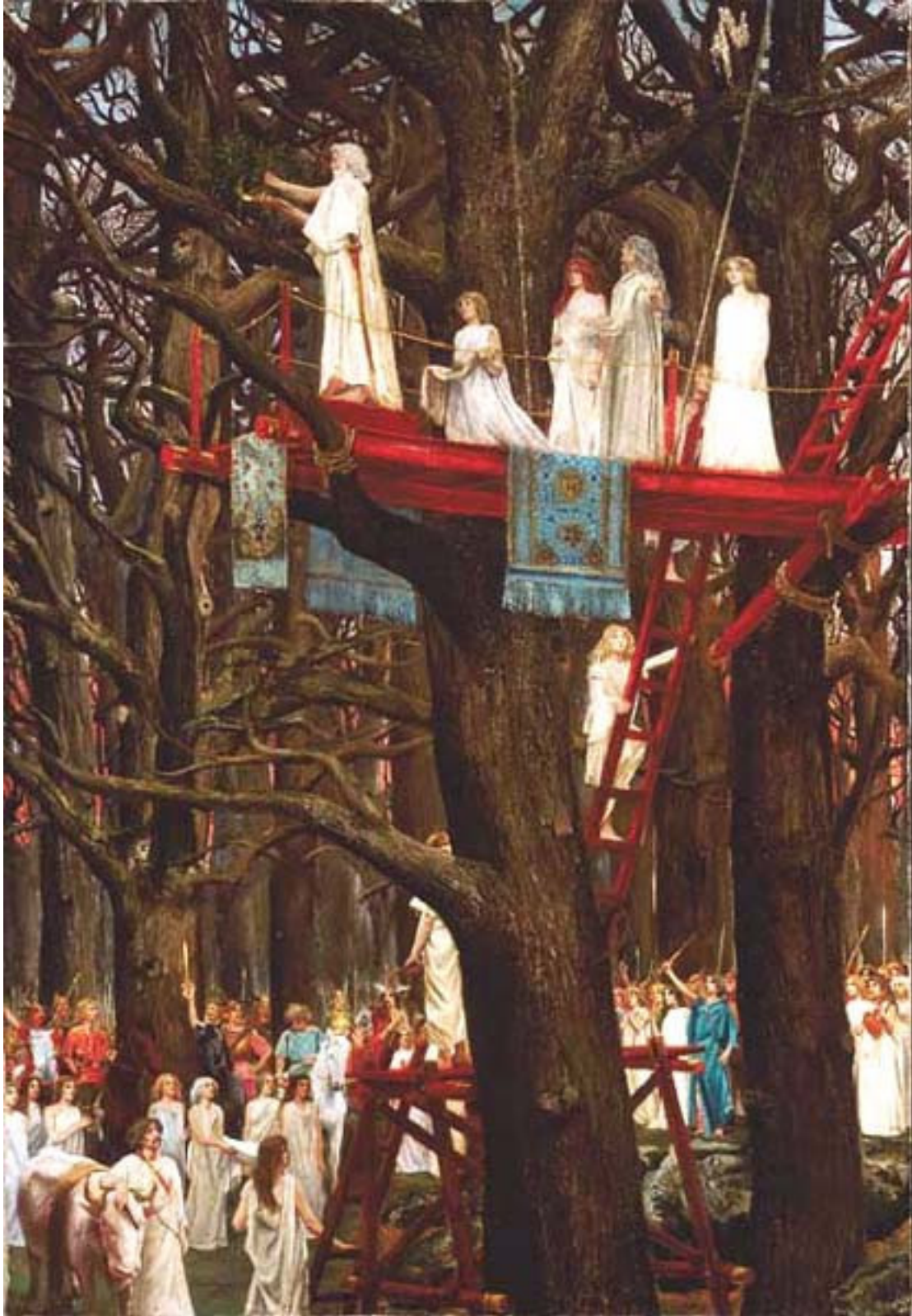
Stretched beneath the gnarled wood
A sheet of white linen was spread
For the herb to touch the ground would
Be an ominous omen of dread.

Deftly the Druid cut the stem
And the herb fell upon the sheet
A cheer rose from within the glen
And the deed was declared complete.

A white bull was sacrificed that night
And a midwinter feast was held for all
The herb was preserved for a holy rite
A gift from the venerable Druids of Gaul.

- smb, 2006





"Druids Cutting the Mistletoe", Henri Paul Motte, 1890

Mistletoe Etymology

Old English:

Misteltán, (*mistl* means “different” and *tán* means “twig” in Old English. I’ve also read the *mistl* means “dung”, referring to the fact that bird dung spreads the plant in the trees.)

Alternative names:

Golden Bough
Holy Wood
Birdlime

Celtic translations:

There are three words or phrases for “Mistletoe” in Scottish Gaelic which gives an indication of the high esteem the plant was held amongst the ancient Scots:

Uil-ioc - All heal or make whole
Draoidh-lus – Druid’s herb
Sùgh an Daraich - Juice, sap or dearest of the Oak

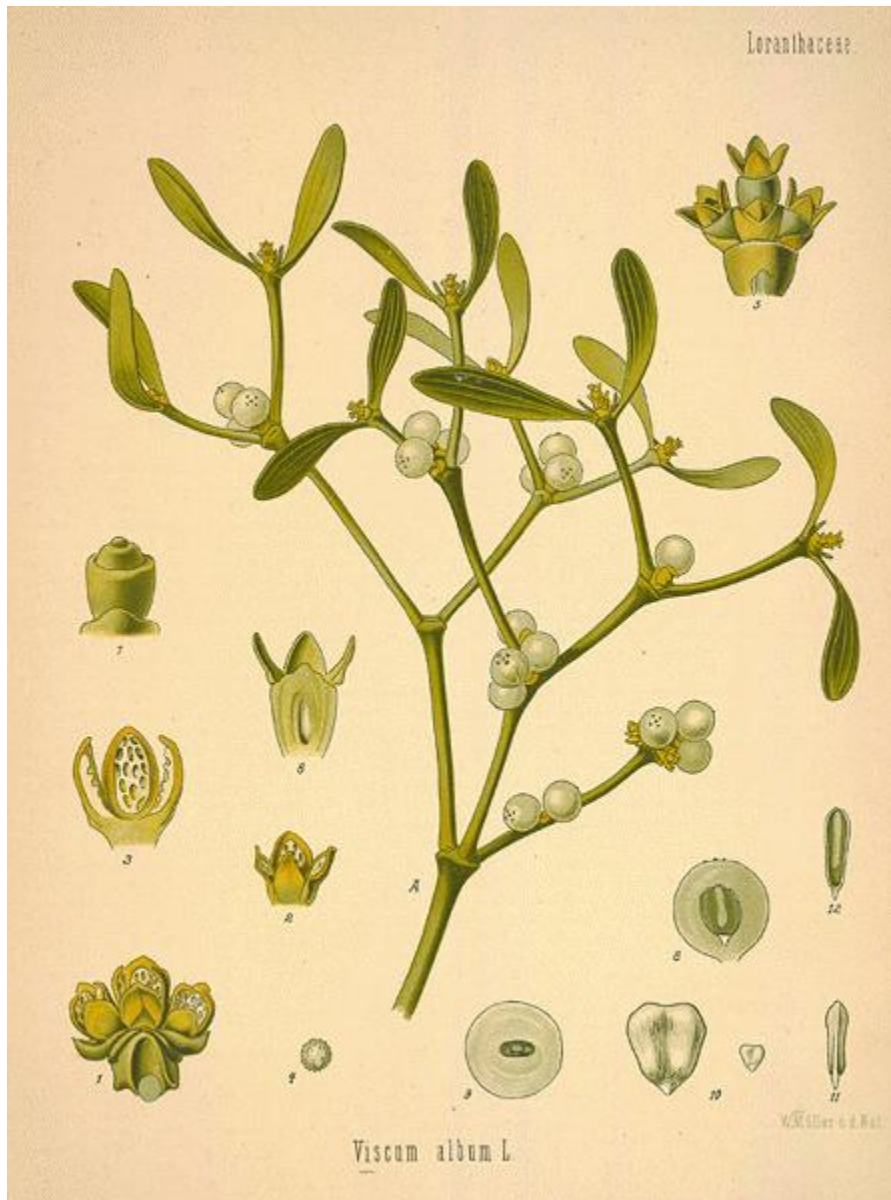
In Irish, it is *Druailus*, which is “herb of the Druids”.

In Welsh, it is *uchelwydd*. *Uchel* translates as “high”. The New Welsh Dictionary by Christopher Davies says of mistletoe: “*Uchelwydd. Planhigyn yn tyfu ar goed eraill ac iddo aeron gwyn.*” (Translation by Sam from the OBOD Message Board: “Mistletoe. A plant which grows on other trees and with it berries white.”)

In Brittany, it is called *Herbe de la Croix*, after an old legend that the cross was made from this wood, after which God punished it by changing it into a parasite. (Grieve, Vol. II, pg. 547)

Latin translation:

Viscum Album. Ovid wrote, “*Ad viscum Druidae cantare solebant.*” (The Druids are wont to sing to the mistletoe). (Hopman, pg. 100)



(Grieve, Vol. II, pgs. 547-8)



Description

Species: *Viscum Album*

Family: *Loranthaceae*

Distribution: Mistletoe is a parasitic plant, spread by bird droppings. There are roughly 1,200 species world wide.

Environment: Mistletoe lives high in the canopy of both softwoods and hardwood trees. Varieties of Mistletoe are found in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and America.

Propagation: “When one of the familiar sticky berries of the Mistletoe comes into contact with the bark of a tree - generally through the agency of birds - after a few days it sends forth a thread-like root, flattened at the extremity like the proboscis of a fly. This finally pierces the bark and roots itself firmly in the growing wood, from which it has the power of selecting and appropriating to its own use, such juices as are fitted for its sustenance: the wood of Mistletoe has been found to contain twice as much potash, and five times as much phosphoric acid as the wood of the foster tree. Mistletoe is a true parasite, for at no period does it derive nourishment from the soil, or from decayed bark, like some of the fungi do - all its nourishment is obtained from its *host*. The root becomes woody and thick”. (Grieve, Vol. II, pgs. 547-8)

Leaf and Stem: Mistletoe’s stem is smooth and a brownish yellow or golden color. (Hence it’s name, Golden bough). I’ve also read that it turns golden after being cut. The branch forks freely into branchlets in every direction, forming a globular mass which can reach up to three feet in diameter. The leaves are “tongue shaped”, broadening at the end. They can be from one to three inches long, arranged in pairs with short stalks. They are usually a yellow-green in color, and somewhat thick and leathery.

Flowers: The flowers open in May. They are small, arranged in threes, and cluster in short spikes in the forks of the branches. There are both male and female flowers that occur on the differently sexed plants. They do not have a corolla, but a yellowish calyx.

Fruit: A very small, waxy, glistening, smooth, globular white berry ripens in December. Some plants produce red berries.

Sustenance: Mistletoe draws sustenance from the host tree by producing a sucking organ called the *hausotia*, which penetrates the bark and absorbs the tree’s own supply of water and minerals. A healthy tree can withstand the parasite, but as the tree ages and weakens, the mistletoe’s invasion hastens the demise of the tree. The mistletoe can also produce its own carbohydrates through photosynthesis. (Keator, pg 56)

Form: It grows in an illogical and uncontrolled manner, closely mimicking the growth of cancer in biological bodies.

Astrology: Sacred to the Sun and Jupiter. (Hopman, pg. 104) I’d add the moon as well, because of the milky, luminescent berries.

Folkore and Legends

British Isles: Mistletoe’s reputation is described in it’s Gaelic name, *Uil-ioc*, which means “all heal”. Herbalists have used it to treat epilepsy, sores, ulcers and poisoning. In folklore, it is said to also protect against lightning, fires, disease and misfortune. Mistletoe was placed in the crib of infants to guard against the child being stolen by fairies and replaced by a changeling. To this day, we kiss under the mistletoe which

refers to its ancient status as a fertility charm. Originally, a berry was removed for each kiss! (Pracownik/Baggott, pgs. 116-119)

Italy: A beautiful fairy appeared to a knight with an image of the crescent moon and the Holy Grail at her feet. She held a mistletoe in her hands and told him that the plant kept her eternally young and beautiful. (Hopman, pg. 103)

Scandinavia: Baldur was the Shining God, the pride of the Gods. His mother, Frigga, asked all the beings on earth for their word that they would not harm her perfect son. However, jealous Loki hid the tiny mistletoe from her, (or in some tales, the plant touching neither earth nor sky, it was missed) and she did not gain this plant's promise. Loki later planted the mistletoe, in the shape of a dart, in the hands of the blind god, Hodur, and challenged him to throw the herb at the immortal Baldur. Innocently, Hoder complied, and threw the plant which I'm sure was guided by Loki's nefarious hand, and to everyone's dismay, it pierced Baldur, instantly killing him. The whole world was plunged into mourning. The white berries of the mistletoe represent Frigga's tears. Interesting to note that among the Celts mistletoe is a plant of light and healing, but in this Scandinavian version, it is a plant of death and despair.

In another version of the story, Frigga manages to bring Baldur back to life again (perhaps with a homeopathic mistletoe antidote) and a new epoch commences. She is so grateful for his renewed life, that the plant comes to represent everlasting life, and it is a symbol of love to kiss beneath the mistletoe.

Greece: According to Virgil, Aeneas could go down to Tartarus only when he carried a sprig of mistletoe in his hand as protection. (Hopman, pg. 104)

Eastern Europe: Mistletoe protects the bearer from werewolves.

Native American: Many of the California Oaks host the parasitic plant Mistletoe, just as their counterparts in Europe do. Local Indian tribes believed that the life spirit of the Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*), a mountain Oak, retreated to the mistletoe during harsh times.¹ Druids in Europe held the same belief, which may be the basis of the Western European custom of bringing the Mistletoe into the home during the harsh winter season, bringing the spirit of the Oak within. This ancient tradition still thrives in California.

Mistletoe in Literature

Mistletoe is very much in evidence in Victorian times. From Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*:

"From the centre of the ceiling of this kitchen, old Wardle had just suspended with his own hands a huge branch of mistletoe, and this same branch of mistletoe instantaneously gave rise to a scene of general and most delightful struggling and

¹ Oaks of California, Page 12

confusion; in the midst of which, Mr. Pickwick, with a gallantry that would have done honour to a descendant of Lady Tollinglower herself, took the old lady by the hand, led her beneath the mystic branch, and saluted her in all courtesy and decorum."

Quotes from *Christmas Eve* by 19th Century writer, Washington Irving:


"Here were kept up the old games of hoodman blind, shoe the wild mare, hot cockles, steal the white loaf, bob apple, and snap dragon; the Yule-clog and Christmas candle were regularly burnt, and the mistletoe with its white berries hung up, to the imminent peril of all the pretty housemaids."

"The mistletoe is still hung up in farm-houses and kitchens at Christmas, and the young men have the privilege of kissing the girls under it, plucking each time a berry from the bush. When the berries are all plucked the privilege ceases."

Ogham

Not all ogham sets include the mistletoe. In my research, I have found a few that do.

In *The Celtic Tree Oracle* by Liz and Colin Murray, mistletoe and heather both are

represented by "UR", and the letter "U", whose glyph is . They write, "Uchelwydd, Mistletoe, traditionally known as All Heal is the invisible fertility symbol on solid foundations, revealing their inner meaning. The mistletoe literally grows on solid foundations, and was venerated by the Druids particularly on the Oak, a rare occurrence. When found, the plant was ritually gathered with golden sickles by the phases of the moon at Midwinter, and it was believed to contain the fertile essence of its mighty host, the Oak."

"If you examine a Mistletoe berry you will find four black, semicircular marks around the central dot. These represent the mystic cities of the Sidhe, or world of Faerie: Falias, the North; Finias, the South; Gorius, the East; and Murias, the West. The central dot is the etheric fifth, thus encompassing the circles of existence. (ed. note: the central dot could represent Tara, the center of old Ireland.)"

"Mistletoe and Heather combine in this card to guide you into closer contact with the world of spirit and the resulting healing your pathway can lead to. After all, Mistletoe is not called "all heal" for no reason. Its derivations are to be found in several modern medicines, and a preparation is used in some forms of alternative medicines today as a treatment for cancer." They link Mistletoe with the Owl, and the colors purple and gold. (Murray, pgs. 58-59)

In *Ogham, the Celtic Oracle*, they include mistletoe by itself and give it a blank stave or stone instead of a glyph. They write that mistletoe represents the extra day in the Celtic tree calendar (Dec. 23rd, the "day" in the traditional year and a day), and the blank stone is the most powerful yet fearful stone one can pull in a reading. "Mistletoe reflects who

you really are and your life path potential from birth to death. It reveals your core energy and can make fears arise that you thought were long buried. However, by facing and overcoming those fears, anything and everything becomes possible for you. You have the power to walk in your dreams; to bring dreamtime into this reality.” Their keywords for mistletoe are “truth and the unknown”.

The authors write that the Druids regarded mistletoe as the most sacred of trees because it grew between earth and sky, touching neither. Its symbolism included the unknown, the life force, divine semen (ed. note: the white berries resembled drops of semen, and those plants with red berries resembled women’s menstrual blood), and immortality. The most prized mistletoe was found growing in the Druid’s holy Oak tree. (ed. note: I have read elsewhere that mistletoe growing in apple trees was also especially valued for healing.) They describe the gathering of the mistletoe, “Druids would cut it with a golden sickle around midwinter and catch it in a white linen cloth because for it to touch the ground was thought to rob it of its magic. During the time of cutting, the Celts ceased all warfare, making the winter solstice a season of peace and good will long before the arrival of Christianity.” (Pracownik/Baggott, pgs. 116-119)

Ellen Evert Hopman, who wrote the inestimable *A Druid’s Herbal*, also writes that Mistletoe is “too sacred to have a written ogham name.” She ascribes the letter “Y” to mistletoe. (Hopman, pg. 12)

Druid’s Herb

It has been written in many sources that the Druid’s had three most holy plants, although they don’t agree on which three plants they were. Most sources always mention these two – Mistletoe and Vervain. Other plants mentioned as the third holy herb are betony, club moss, fern, foxglove, heather, hops, meadowsweet, mugwort, mint, Saint Johnswort, verbena, wormwood, and more.

Other sources don’t include mistletoe as a plant, but describe it as the Druid’s most holy tree next to Oak. In truth, it falls between the cracks of definition – a plant, a tree, a parasite, touching neither earth nor sky, which adds to its mysterious and otherworldly ambience.

Ellen Evert Hopman provides a wealth of information in her *Druid’s Herbal*.

Hopman says, “According to Pliny, the Druid priest or priestess would wear white robes to gather the herb, which was cut down on the sixth day of the moon or at Midsummer. A golden knife was used to gather the plant, and tremendous care was taken that it not touch the ground.” (Hopman, pg. 101) In other references I’ve read that mistletoe was gathered at midwinter, when the berries are ripe. I have come to believe that mistletoe represents both solstices and can be gathered at either time. Mistletoe seems to combine the energy of the sun and moon. It is gathered during the two solstices, but at a certain phase of the moon. I have also read references to the star-like quality of the berries, bringing in a stellar affiliation. Truly a universal plant!

Hopman tells us that Mistletoe grows from northern Europe to northwest Africa, and east to Asia and Japan. I would add that it grows in Northern America as well. I obtain my Yule mistletoe from the oak trees growing in Sonoma County, California. Mistletoe is classified as a parasite which grows on different types of trees, both hard and soft woods. Mostly commonly on apple – where it is held to be sacred since both are considered healing. It also grows on Elm, Spruce, Pine, Poplar, and Oak, “where it is held most potent and sacred”, being the holiest of Druidic trees. (Hopman, pg. 101) Grieve also mentions Hawthorn, Ash, Lime, Larch, and Cedar. I imagine that Mistletoe picks up the central energy of any tree that it grows on, and intensifies it.

Mistletoe blends its own healing energy with the tree it is growing on, so if you gathered mistletoe from a poplar, it would combine the energies of mistletoe and poplar (a seer’s tree). Remember - It is a bad omen to let the plant fall to the earth while gathering.

There is another oddity about this incredible plant. Hopman writes, “the berries ripen in midwinter and have a further peculiarity in that the ripe berries, open flowers, green berries, and immature leaves can all be found on the same plant” at the same time. Mistletoe does not follow a sequence like all other plants. In this way, it simulates the timelessness of the Faerie realms, where time is irrelevant. “It also seems to ignore heliotropism and geotropism – it will grow upside down, sideways, or in any direction it chooses.” So space is irrelevant as well. Truly a plant of deep mystery! Most plants germinate in the dark, but mistletoe requires light. The flowers bud in May, but don’t usually open until February, and the process from fruit to flower can take nearly two years. (Hopman, pg. 101)

Mara Freeman writes that at the Druid’s Winter Solstice ceremony, “the proceedings began with an invocation to the moon as one who ‘healed all things’. Since the Druids regarded mistletoe as a universal healer, perhaps they believed its pearly white berries contained the essence of the moon.” (Freeman, pg. 364)

Druid Solstice Rituals

Pliny described in his Natural History, “The Druids, for so call they their Magi, have nothing more sacred than the mistletoe, and the tree on which it grows, provided it be the oak. They select a particular grove of oaks and perform no sacred rites without oak leaves, so that from this custom they may seem to have been called Druids (Oakites), according to the Greek interpretation of that word. They reckon whatever grows on these trees is sent down from Heaven and a proof that the tree itself is chosen by Deity. But the mistletoe is very rarely found and when found is sought after with the greatest religious ardour, and principally ins the sixth moon, which is the beginning of their months and years, and when the tree is thirty years old it is then not half grown only but has attained its full vigour. They call it All Heal (Ull-ice) by a word in their own language and having proper sacrifices and feasts under the trees with great solemnity bring up two white bulls, whose horns are first bound. The priest, clothed in a white surplice, ascends the tree and cuts it off with a golden knife, and it is received in a white sheet.

Then they sacrifice the victims (bulls) and pray that God would render his own gifts prosperous to those on whom he has bestowed it. They reckon the mistletoe administered as a potion can impart fecundity to any barren animal and that it is a remedy against all kinds of poison.” (Carr-Gomm, pg. 112-3)

Philip Carr-Gomm, the Chosen Chief of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids writes, “To understand the reason for the Druid’s reverence for mistletoe we need to realize that they considered the union of the mistle with the oak deeply symbolic, as they likewise considered the cutting of it with a golden sickle, and its falling to the ground. The mistletoe is symbolically related to the male sperm due to the colour and consistency of the mistleberry juice. Being airbourne, a mistletoe has not touched the ground, it symbolizes, therefore, seed-in-potency, in potential, awaiting the moment of conception. When the mistletoe was cut at the time of the Winter Solstice and brought down from the tree, the Druid was enacting the process of incarnation, of fertilization, of conception. The airbourne seed symbolizes the divine spark of individuality, of God. It has not yet incarnated on earth, it has had no contact with earth, it is still on the World-tree, at the top, close to Heaven. The Druid cuts it down with the golden sickle - with sun and moon, male and female power, united. Conjunction, union having occurred, the spark is drawn down into the body, into life on earth, as it is brought down from the tree. And of course it is no coincidence that this occurred at the time of the Solstice, when the sun is reincarnated or in the Christian tradition, when the son is incarnated.

“The mistletoe symbolizes the moment of incarnation, the moment of entry into time. The oak symbolizes the eternity of Tradition. Oak and mistle united point to the mystery of the existence of both Time and No-Time, Form, and No-Form.” (Carr-Gomm, pg. 113-14) Carr-Gomm mentions that the Pagan custom continues of giving out sprigs of mistletoe at Yule, even in Christian churches. At York Cathedral, a branch of mistletoe remains at the high altar throughout the twelve days of Christmas.

Modern Druids still hold the Mistletoe in the greatest of reverence. Emma Restall Orr (Chief of the Druid Network), writes in *Ritual, A Guide to Life Love and Inspiration*, “The Rite of the Mistletoe is performed, the bough held high by the priest in the south. The priestess in the north walks to the centre, where the blessings are made over the unlit fire. The gathering is asked, “What would you have of this union? What do you wish conceived? The Awen is called, each soul reaching for the power of inspiration, its flow moving through us. The bough is grounded.” (Orr, pgs. 133-134)

In our own ritual of Doire Bhrighid Grove (OBOD tradition), each member is given a sprig of mistletoe at Winter Solstice. We ask for what we need healed in the following year, and keep the sprig on our Druid’s altar, or perhaps wear a piece as a talisman of healing. The next year, we may choose to burn our talisman in the Yule fire as a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Mistletoe Medicine

Mistletoe's growth resembles the growth of cancer cells in a body. For that reason, scientists have studied its medicinal properties and found that fermented mistletoe taken from oak trees stimulated killer cells in experiments with rats with liver cancer. Unfermented mistletoe showed an effect in inhibiting human leukemia. Extract of Mistletoe shows anti-tumorous abilities in several types of cancerous tumor, including lungs, colon and breast cancers. (Hopman, pg. 102)

Properties found in Mistletoe include: phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, sulphur, proteins, polysaccharides and tumor inhibiting bacteria. It is used to treat many conditions: nervous conditions (convulsions, delirium, hysteria, neuralgia, urinary disorders, heart conditions, epilepsy). It is used as a heart, hormone, and pancreatic tonic, and is a treatment for typhoid fever. It is recommended for stroke, hardening of the arteries, blood pressure regulation (for high or low), menstrual regulator, and useful for symptoms during menopause (hot flashes, anxiety, etc.) It has also been used for fertility in barren women. (Hopman, pg. 102-3)

Another formula I have read is mixing red Holly berries, black Ivy berries, and white Mistletoe berries on the Winter Solstice, and letting the mixture rest until the Summer Solstice (some sources say Autumn Equinox, which is nine months later). The berries can be a mixture of fresh and dried, gathered in the appropriate seasons. It can be used as the basis of a cordial or ointment which can rejuvenate even the most sluggish system. I think this would be a powerful mixture to wake up our Druidic or Faerie insight!

Three holy berries

Three Holy berries,
Red, black and white,
Beloved by the Faeries,
They mark a sacred site.

Ivy's berry black as night,
Holly's red as blood,
Mistletoe, a moonlit white,
They haunt the hallowed wood.

Holly crowns the forest king,
The reddened berries bright.
The boundary of the forest rings
With the strength of holly's might.

Ivy crowns the woodland queen,
A lovely Faerie Sprite.
Dressed in black and forest green,
She brings us all delight.

Gathered in a Druid Rite,
With a Mage's blade of gold
Cut from oak in the moonlight
Mistletoe can make us whole.

A sacred elixir of the three,
Berries dark and berries bright,
A brew of magic possibility,
Granting mystical insight.

Warning: The berries are extremely poisonous. Parts used are the twig and leaf only. The usual concoction is two teaspoons of powdered leaf and stem per cup of water, several times a day. Large doses have been known to induce convulsions in children, so be especially careful. Best to work with a knowledgeable herbalist rather than experiment with it yourself.

Homeopathy:

A much safer way to use mistletoe is homeopathy, which renders the product to a very small part through a process of distillation. In homeopathic remedies, the parts of the plant are gathered with a leaf of the plant (i.e., you don't touch it directly), and carefully placed in a glass or crystal bowl, covering the surface and left in the sun (or in some cases, moon) for several hours. The plant material is carefully removed, and the water becomes the matrix of further remedies. It is carefully bottled and left in a cool dark place, then siphoned off into remedy bottles, where a few drops are added to pure spring water.

Homeopathic remedies for mistletoe include epilepsy, petit mal seizures, heart conditions, asthma, gout, rheumatism, rheumatic deafness, chorea, metrorrhagia, ovarian problems (on left side). Mistletoe is especially oriented to complaints on the left side of the body" (Hopman, pg 103) (The left side of the body is controlled by the right side of the brain, which is the more holistic, metaphysical part of the brain.)

Metaphysically, I would use a homeopathic remedy to intensify any other homeopathic tree remedy. For instance, if you wanted to go into a deep trance journey exploring the spiritual realm of oak, I would create a homeopathic "remedy" of two parts oak, one part mistletoe. (For Celtic magic, we usually work in parts of three or nine unless otherwise indicated.)

If you wanted to concoct the *Three Holy Berry* cordial above, I would harvest nine berries from each plant, bottle them with spring water and leave overnight during a full moon. Then I would strain the water into a "matrix bottle", and use three to nine drops for each "remedy bottle". This way you have distilled the essence of the berries, and rendered the toxins inactive. You can also use the chant above during the process.

Ogham Healing

If I am using *Ogham Slánaich* (Ogham healing), I will borrow the ogham glyph from **Ur**



to draw over the area I am working on. To me, the three lines represent the three sacred Druid herbs and the center line – the oak or apple tree the healing mistletoe grows on. It could also represent the three rays of Awen, for the inspiration of poetry, music, and art are a part of healing. Using the power of Mistletoe (All Heal) channels all the healing energy of the Druids, which can be applied to any form of healing that you do.

In some ogham systems Ur refers to heather, which is another healing herb. I've read that mistletoe seldom occurs in Scotland, and the Druids there substituted heather. However, the word for heather is *fraoch* in Scots Gaelic, whereas the words for mistletoe are *Uil-ioc* in Scots Gaelic and *Uchelwydd* in Welsh, leading me to believe that phonetically, **Ur** is more connected to the mistletoe than heather. If Oak and Mistletoe are rare in Scotland now, it is because there had been much deforestation. Perhaps they were more prevalent during Druidic times.

Mistletoe Magic

Because the tree is an “in between” plant – not an herb or a tree, growing between earth and sky, and its growth and season follows no rules, it is a plant of deep magic. It is a powerful gateway or talisman to the other world. It is most famous for its all healing properties, but is associated with Faerie magic as well. It could well be considered a “key” to the mysteries of the other world, which is why it was so revered by the Druids.

Amulets and talismans made of mistletoe speed healing and offer protection. Hunters wear it to aid in hunting, and women wear it to conceive. Hofman writes, “Hang it in the bedroom to bring beautiful dreams and to unlock, through the dreams, the secrets of immortality.” (Hopman, pg. 104) “One of the most sacred Druid herbs, this plant helps the aspirant to perceive the Other World.” (Hopman, pg. 72) She also writes that there is an old tradition of adding a few berries to the wedding cup for fertility, but cautions that the berries are poisonous and must not be swallowed. I'd recommend adding them to the cup, *after* having drunk from the brew, then offering the remains as a libation to the Goddess.

“Mistletoe is an excellent all purpose magical herb. Its wood is a good choice for wands and ritual implements.” (Hopman, pg. 104)

Grow Your Own Mistletoe:

Madame Grieve gives instructions on how we can grow our own mistletoe: “By rubbing the berries on the smooth bark of the underside of the branches of trees till they adhere, or inserting them in clefts made for the purpose, it is possible to grow Mistletoe quite successfully, if desired.” (Grieve, Vol. II, pg. 547)

Caution: I'd advise growing it on a healthy young tree as it can hasten the demise of an elder, immune compromised, environmentally challenged, or weakened tree. In this age of *Sudden Oak Death*, I'm not sure we should introduce more Mistletoe into the oak forests who are struggling to survive as it is. Since apple trees are abundant fruit trees, and it is another magical tree associated with the mistletoe, I'd recommend an apple tree host rather than an oak.

Mistletoe Wand



At Yule, 2006, I bought a bough of mistletoe from a flower shop. The proprietor stated that it was cut from an oak tree on a farm in Sonoma County, Northern California (where oaks are very common). I hung it to dry among the rafters in our house until Midsummer, 2007, then I stripped it down and saved all the parts. The berries and leaves I ground to powder; the twigs and detritus I bottled. Then I cut a thick piece off for a wand, and sanded the rough spots. I use this as my "All healing" wand in my Druid healing rites.

I separated the central junction from which all the stems shoot from the main stem. This I keep in a leather bag with an oak tree stamped on it, as a healing talisman. I'm wearing it as I write this article.

I use the Gaelic to invoke the powers of the mistletoe:

*Uil-ioc! Draoidh-lus!
Sùgh an Daraich!*

Which I pronounce: Yool-ok. Droo-lish. Shoo an Dareech. (I can't guarantee that's the correct pronunciation. If you are a Gaelic speaker, please email me at susab@ravensrock.net and correct my pronunciation!!)

Mistletoe Incense

Part of the powdered berries and leaves are included in a Druid incense, which consists of nine parts:

Druid Forest Incense: Mistletoe berries/leaves, Vervain flower/leaves, Meadowsweet flower/leaves, Mugwort, Oak Bark/ground acorn, Willow Bark, Birch Bark, Hazel bark/ground nut, and Apple blossom/ground seeds. This incense will help create an atmosphere for a trance journey into the sacred Druid forest, where you can learn from the spirits of the trees. You can modify this incense to include any of the sacred trees you want, as long as you include mistletoe and oak, and the components equal nine parts. If you are practicing an *Avalonian* tradition, you must include apple as well. The different tree parts you use will change the focus of your journey. For instance, if you use Yew, you will most likely journey to the land of the ancestors; Apple – to Avalon and its nine priestesses; hazel – the sacred salmon in Segais' Pool of Knowledge; Hawthorn – to a Faerie mound, Blackthorn – a visit to the frighteninge Cailleach, etc. Two trees often form a magical gateway on vision journeys, and to travel between two Oaks is an especially powerful and safe route for Druids.

Druid Sacred Incense: A simple three-part incense would be Mistletoe, Vervain and Oak bark or ground acorn. This has many uses – trance journeying, inspiration, healing, communication with ancient Druids, purification, etc. This can also be worn in a bag as a talisman of protection.

Mistletoe Jewelry



The only example I have found of mistletoe in jewelry is an exquisite set of mistletoe in pendant and earrings, made of silver and seed pearls by brilliant nature artist Michael Michaud.

Michael Michaud's website: <http://sattvagallery.com/jewelry.html>

Mistletoe Meditation

The Door of the Druids

It is the sixth day after the first new moon following the Midwinter Solstice. A sacred time, when the Druids of old would climb into the majestic oak trees to gather their most sacred plant – the mistletoe.

You have been looking forward to this night for many years. Fascinated with Druids

since childhood, you have attended every available class, workshop, and festival on the subject, read every book, and even joined a marvelous order that offered a correspondence course. Tonight was the night of Druidic self initiation, and you have chosen a difficult task, to obtain a cluster of mistletoe from an ancient oak tree, deep inside the woodland estate, performing the act as close to the ceremony of old as possible. (After much thought you have decided to leave out the sacrifice of the twin white bulls.)

You don a ceremonial white tunic with Celtic knotwork embroidery to represent the ancient white robes of the Druids. You grab your knapsack and take off from your cottage, leaving the village in which you live behind and making for the surrounding forest. Snow crisscrosses the ground, and you crunch through the drifts, allowing your intuition to guide you to the rare Scottish oak tree you had already discovered in the deep Caledonian wood. A raven flutters before you with a wild caw of warning. You spy the great shape of the wintry oaks, silhouetted against the snow. As you draw closer, you can see the mistleberries glistening above you in the dim moonlight.

You throw up a stout knotted rope over a lower branch of the massive tree. You manage to shimmy up the rope, bracing your feet against the knots and pulling yourself up knot by knot until you reach the first bough. You climb into the center of the tree, then pull yourself up bough by bough until you are within reach of the lowest cluster of the “holy wood”, its berries shining bright as stars amongst the dark green leaves.

From within your backpack you produce a small sickle shaped knife, which has been gold plated, and a large white linen scarf. You tie the four corners of the scarf around the mistletoe, tying it off below the stem connecting it to the wood of the oak. Then, with the sharp sickle, you begin to saw at the stem, uttering the sacred chant honoring the holy plant in the ancient tongue of the Gauls:

*Uil-ioc! Draoidh-lus!
Sùgh an Daraich!*

With a final saw, the stem snaps free, and you quickly grasp the linen bag before it falls to the ground below. Carefully, you place the linen bag inside your knapsack and begin your careful descent to the ground.

As you lower yourself, knot by knot, you hear something – the deep metallic chiming of a bell. You look around for the source, but see nothing but a forest of winter bare trees and evergreens. The chime sounds again, and the oak shudders with the sound. With a jump, you land on the ground and crouch on all fours staring warily around you. And again, the bell sounds its deep call. Finally you look behind you, and realize the sound is coming from the oak itself!

Looking closely at the oak, you note something you hadn't seen before. A portal shaped outline of light glowing in the deeply grooved bark at the base of the trunk, with an oddly shaped hole in the middle. A door in the oak? Then you remember that the word *Door* is

linked to the old Gaelic word for oak – *Duir*. Tentatively, you approach the door and put your hands on the rough bark and push. It is solid, and does not budge. You put your ear up to the trunk, and you can hear noises, as if there was an assembly on the other side of the door. You look inside the bright spot in the middle of the door – something like a keyhole, and your eye is dazzled by the light. You withdraw, frustrated. What you need is a key. A key that will open the oaken door.

Sùgh an Daraich!

Then you remember the translation: “The sap of the oak”, “the darling of the oak”- Mistletoe. You reach inside your knapsack, and untie a corner of the white linen bag. Your hand finds a loose twig of mistletoe and you pull it out. The white berries gleam against the dark green leaves perched on a crooked golden brown stem. Taking your “key” to the doorway, you insert the stem in the oddly shaped hole, and it suddenly swallows the sprig whole, and with another chime of the bell, the light outline around the portal widens and the door opens.

Looking inside the door of the oak you see a vast hall. But glancing around the tree, your mind boggles, for it is no bigger than any other oak. Between the threshold of the tree and the forest, space itself seems to have warped, and you are looking in on another world. Gingerly, you step through and move forward. Glancing back for reassurance, you note that the door is still open, and you can still see the familiar forest outside.

It is a hall unlike any you have ever seen before. The walls are a dark aged oak, and a wooden staircase spirals upward around the walls and disappears into the darkness above. The stairs continues spiraling downwards as well, it’s railing taking its shape from the knotted root of the oak, and a burnished oaken floor is a circle suspended between the vast upper chamber and the mysterious underground. You note glowing lights from niches in the walls, giving the interior a sparkling, star-like quality.

Finally, you pull your eyes away from the strange twisting stairs, and look towards the center. There resides a large, thick, glistening oaken table on stout legs. Simple wooden stools are pulled under the table. The table is full of light, at first looking like brilliant lanterns placed around the table. You realize that is the light which nearly blinded your eye as you looked in the keyhole. You creep closer and note that the table is inlaid with strange and marvelous designs – Celtic knots, mystical creatures, bizarre flowers, sun, moon, and star-like designs, and more. But looking at the brilliant lanterns, you realize that they are not lanterns at all – but shaped glass. As you gaze at the largest one of these brilliant orbs, your eyes adjust to the light and finally you are able to discern its true shape – it is a finely crafted skull, made from quartz crystal. In astonishment, you observe that there is a circle of twelve crystal skulls on the table.

Again you hear the bell, its deep tones seeming to come from both above and below, reverberating against the walls, as if the tree itself were the bell.

And then you hear the sound of voices, talking in low tones. Male and female voices, coming from all around, yet you could see no human beings, or even forest spirits.

“*Cò tha seo?*” You hear a voice whisper, and another answers, “*Chan aithne dhomh.*” Then there is silence once again.

“Who’s there?” you ask timorously. “I can’t see you!”

“We are all around you.” Comes a voice nearby. Looking down at the table, you find yourself staring into the crystalline orbs of the largest of the quartz skulls, and realize that the sound is coming from the stone.

“You can talk!” You exclaim in astonishment.

“Of course we can talk. It is all we do.” The voice responds evenly. Though no part of the stone jaws move, the sound is unmistakably coming from within its recesses. A buzzing of voices commences, and you realize the voices are coming from all the stones. Looking up at the walls, you realize the shining lights are yet more crystal skulls, their lights gleaming far above your head like stars until they disappear into the darkness above.

“But, who are you? Where am I? What is happening?” You blurt out in avid curiosity.

You hear the merry sound of laughter swelling around you, and with it, your apprehension lightens. These creatures cannot hurt you, they are stationary, whereas you have two legs, that can still carry you through the open door back to your own world. You look back and note with relief that the door is, in fact, still open. But you are still too curious to retreat.

“You have found the key to *Talla Drùidhean*, the Hall of the Druids.” The nearest skull tells you. “The key, of course, is *Draoidh-lus*, the Druid’s herb – mistletoe.”

Another glistening skull adds, “This is our mid-winter assembly.”

“Assembly of who?” You insist.

“We’ve already told you.” A citrine colored skull exclaims rather peevishly. “*Drùidhean*. We are the spirits of the Druids of Old. As Celts, we have always venerated skulls. What better form for our spirits to reside in?”

Stunned, you look around you at the skulls, the lights disappearing above you, the glow coming from the stairs leading underground. “You’re all trapped here?”

Again, the laughter. “Trapped, no.” patiently the largest skull explained, “The old tale that Nimüe trapped me inside a tree isn’t exactly true.”

“You’re Merlin?” You whisper, flabbergasted.

The crystal flashes in the affirmative, “I am called *Meirneal* in this part of the world.”

A delicate rose quartz skull next to him answered, “The truth is, we retired here. By the way, I’m Nimüe, but the Druids once called me Nemetona. And you?”

You hesitate in confusion, your head spinning, then remembering your manners you stammer your name.

“And all these others?” You indicate the glistening orbs in the niches above you.

“All the Druids of Albion,” Meirneal tells you, “have come to rest here. Every region has it’s own assembly.”

“But you have come to be initiated, haven’t you.” Nemetona states. “There is a seat for you at our table tonight.”

You note that one of the stools has been drawn out, and there is an empty place at the table. You look down at the ornately carved wood and notice your own totem inlaid in the wood. The highly polished surface reflects your image back to you, and for an instant, you see can see through the skin, not to bone, but to a crystal matrix within.

The ceremony is short, but profound, witnessed by the sparkling orbs of colored light – the skulls of Druids past. Before the end, you have been given a new name, known only to yourself and the crystal skulls.

“What gift have you brought us?” Meirneal asks.

You hesitate, then remember to look inside your knapsack, and draw out the white linen bag. You unfasten the ends and pull out the bough mistletoe, laying it carefully on the outspread linen cloth.

“You couldn’t have chosen a more appropriate gift.” Nemetona’s pink surface gleams at you in approval.

“You can always come back to us when in need. We are your guides in this life, and your companions in the next.” Merneal advises you, “*Where Mistletoe meets oak, there you will find a portal.*”

“But for now, you must go back to your own world. We have left you a gift at the door.” The light in the skulls have begun to dim and you realize that you must withdraw. You bid your farewells and make your way back to the oaken portal, which has remained open. Outside, the stars still sparkle in the night sky, the six day old moon is still high overhead. It seems that no time had passed at all.

You step outside and look back at the tree. No light outlines the portal, it is once again a winter bare oak tree. But hanging from a low bough is a small bag. A gift for you. Even in the dim light, you can see what they bestowed upon you as you emptied the contents of the green silk bag into your palm – a sprig of mistletoe, an acorn, and a tiny delicate clear quartz crystal skull.

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