
As a work which attempts to shed some light on the shadowy world of pre-Christian Celtic speculative thought, *The Gods of the Celts* is a largely successful effort on the part of Green. This is not to say that the work is completely without flaws, but, few if any of those are serious enough to detract from the overall usefulness of her work. The author essentially argues her case along currently conventional lines, and much of what she writes will not be new to the well-versed reader. Still, on occasion, a novel slant to the subject being discussed is offered.

A good example of this can be seen in Green’s discussion of the theme of exaggeration in Celtic representative art. In this instance, the author believes that the predisposition of the Celtic religion for fertility cults rarely manifested itself, “in the exaggeration of the sexual/generative parts of the human body.” Exaggeration, as it existed, could manifest itself in a number of ways such as through:

special reverence to...a particular divinity by means of ‘flattery’ or stress of its power by making the essential part of its body stand out. It may instead (or in addition) remind the worshipper...that the potency of the god is linked to a specific body part...an important function of exaggeration is the transmutation from the mundane to the sublime. A convincing parallel may be seen in the maturisation...where model tools were deliberately produced for sacral purposes. To create an image of a beast with extra-large horns was to remove it from the real world to that of the supranatural. (p. 213)

The scholarly reader will notice right away that during her discussion of early Celtic religious belief, Green appears to have at her disposal a vast knowledge of the work of previous special-
ists in the field. This feature of *The Gods of the Celts* is evident in her assessment of the sources available for the study of Celtic paganism. On this subject, it is worthwhile pointing out that Green does provide the reader with a useful synopsis of the sources indicative of Iron Age Celtic pagan thought. Much of what she says in *The Gods of the Celts* is repeated, though in less detail, in her later work, *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) pp. 96-98. Generally speaking, Miranda Green appears to have an excellent conception of the pitfalls and advantages of using such sources as the Ulster Cycles, the Mabinogion, archaeology, and Classical commentary. Also, her cautionary notes, such as: "We have to bear such constraints in mind when assessing the vernacular material" (p. 15), are indeed worth bearing in mind. For the scholarly reader, actively engaged in the study of tribal Celtic society, this synopsis of the pertinent sources alone makes Green’s book suitable, if not necessary reading.

Nevertheless, a good example of the author’s knowledge of previous work in the field can be seen in her discussion of the viability of utilizing the Ulster Cycles as a source of pre-Christian Celtic belief (pp.15-16). In this discussion, Green juxtaposes the views of K.H. Jackson and T.C. Champion, while weighing the merits of both. One minor criticism of Green’s approach is that she could be more definite in forwarding her own view of particular debates, though this is sometimes possible to ascertain by ‘reading between the lines’. This is not to say that the author never offers her personal opinion on various matters. In such instances where she does offer an opinion, as in the fore-mentioned discussion of exaggeration in Celtic iconography, the result is not only effectively undertaken, but quite convincing as well.

One aspect that is extremely annoying about the format of *The Gods of the Celts*, is its absolutely awful (not to mention bizarre) method of referencing. Rather than employing footnotes (or referencing the quoted sources within the body of the text) a list of references has been provided at the back of the book, corresponding to a page and line number. This may seem a minor point, but the scheme does tend to distract the reader. To be fair to the author, however, this hopeless referencing format probably originated with the publisher, rather than herself.
The Gods of the Celts concerns itself with such topics as the general nature and organization of Celtic religion; the cult worship of the sun and sky, water, fertility and the female deities associated with such; war, death cults and the Celtic concept of the afterlife; not to mention aspects of the nature of worship. When undertaking this task, it is very obvious that Green’s slant is an archaeological one; she is still able to juggle and juxtapose the literary and historical sources to arrive (usually successfully) at a reasonable synthesis. The general reader should beware, however. Though not overly laced with technical jargon (as most works with archaeological leanings tend to be), The Gods of the Celts can be somewhat cryptic.

One of the most interesting points of discussion in Green’s book is her finale, a look at ‘The Survival of the Celtic Tradition.’ Throughout the entire work, Green alludes to the indebtedness of Celtic sculpture and iconography to Classical types, insofar as depictions of the deities are concerned. To her credit, Green, at the last, takes issue with authorities such as N.K. Sandars (Prehistoric Art in Europe, 1968) who believed that Roman art-forms completely forced Celtic art-forms ‘underground’, especially on the Continent. Green disagrees with Sandars:

Romano-Celtic stone-carvers were working in an unfamiliar medium...It must also be realised...especially in North Britain and the West Country...that a non-Roman sculptural tradition was active and flourishing. (p.224)

Roman art, Green continues, simply acted as a new stimulus to Celtic art, rather than as a replacement.

Thus, The Gods of the Celts, by the author’s own admission, provides the reader with an explanation for the “full-fledged religious expression” of the Celtic peoples; an expression which had its “roots in European prehistory.” (p. 225) There is, I might add in conclusion, something for both scholar and general reader in this book. If the scholar makes an effort to overlook the ridiculous referencing style, and the general reader does not become overwhelmed by the complicated prose, then reading this book should prove a worthwhile endeavour.

George M. Brunsden
University of Glasgow