

## Transcript for *A Look at Druidry*

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Slide 1: Title

Slide 2: What is Druidry?

Druidry is a nature based religion which draws upon the practices, beliefs, and traditions of Ancient Celtic Druids. Modern Druidry is considered to be a part of Neo Paganism, along with other nontraditional religious practices, such as Wicca, Heathenism, and aspects of New Age culture<sup>1</sup>.

Slide 3: Beliefs

Both Ancient and Modern Druidry believe in the worship and honoring of nature. Many ceremonies occur in outdoor settings rather than in a dedicated temple or church structure. They practice polytheism, worshiping multiple deities or spirits, and the honoring of the male and the female<sup>2</sup>. Some aspects of belief vary with the teachings of an order or the individual's own views.

Slide 4: Beliefs (continued)

Ancient Druids were worshippers of Mercury, but also paid homage to other Greco-Roman gods<sup>3</sup>. Modern Druids tend to focus more on the revival of Celtic gods or aspects of nature, such as the moon or tree spirits.

There is a belief in the concept of Rebirth, that the soul moves immediately to a new body in order to continue living. This belief has become more associated with Reincarnation over time; the soul still continues to live on, but the life may no longer be a continuation, rather a new start.

Slide 5: Origins

The Ancient Druids were primarily in Celtic Britain and France or Gaul. They refused to commit their practices to writing, which means there are no firsthand accounts of Ancient Druidry or its history, so it is unclear where they originated from or how long the religion existed. There are secondhand accounts though from outsiders, such as Gaius Julius Caesar and Pliny the Elder<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, these accounts are often biased or embellished making it difficult to determine how many of the practices discussed were accurate. Modern Druidry was created using these texts, and a renewed interest in Celtic history.

Slide 6: Ancient Druids – Quote by Julius Caesar

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<sup>1</sup> Lesiv

<sup>2</sup> Cooper/Cox

<sup>3</sup> Rankin

<sup>4</sup> Aldhouse-Green

### Slide 7: Ancient Druid Sources

The best source of information scholars have for the Ancient Druids comes from Caesar's accounts of the Gallic War, but even that is minimal compared to the importance the Ancient Druids had. Other sources come from different scholars and conquerors, who like Caesar, saw the Druids as strange, but powerful. Some information can be gathered by looking at archeological finds, but without context and primary sources, it is difficult to tell what is actually useful. This does not prevent conjecture about what purpose finds may have had in Ancient Druidry.

### Slide 8: Ancient Druids

Ancient Druids were more than healers and priests; they held many positions in Celtic society. Druids were teachers and philosophers; they helped to maintain oral traditions and cultural history. They were judges, upholding the laws and ensuring punishments were carried out. Sacrifices would not be done without their presence. They communicated with spirits, and controlled who had access to sacred knowledge. They were an integral part of society and were treated as such with exemptions to military service and taxation<sup>5</sup>.

### Slide 9: Modern Druidry Foundations

Modern Druidry got its first start during the late 1600s when John Aubrey and friends decided to claim they were reviving Druid society and ceremonies; although short lived, it marks the beginning of Druidry regaining interest among the people. It also marks the linking of Stonehenge to Druid ceremonies. A more serious, and long lasting society was the Ancient Order of the Druids; fraternal in nature, this society still exists today. The founders created this order in the late 1700s and it marks the shift from interest in the Ancient Druids to Druidry as a practicable religion<sup>6</sup>.

A renewed interest in Welsh culture also contributed to the rise of Modern Druidry; one of the greatest contributors to this was John Rhys, whose works helped bring the Celtic myths and religious views into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These works, combined with the rise of Neo Paganism, renewed interest in the Classical texts, and desire for something outside the conventional, would help to inspire the creation of later Druidry orders, such as the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids and the Ár nDraíocht Féin (A Druid Fellowship)<sup>7</sup>.

### Slide 10: Modern Druids

Modern Druidry combines a mix of the practices and beliefs mentioned in Classical texts with those scavenged from other Neo Pagan religions like Wicca. While they follow many of the same beliefs, Modern Druids tend to be more spiritual than their Ancient counterparts; with a greater focus on the religious aspects of Druidry than the many social roles that Ancient Druids

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<sup>5</sup> Aldhouse-Green/Caesar

<sup>6</sup> Cox

<sup>7</sup> Cooper

played. Modern Druidry is also not limited to a single culture or geographic location, but much like their predecessors, many practitioners tend to promote the mysterious aspect of Druidry. It is not necessary that practitioners belong to an order and solo practice is more likely to happen with how widespread Modern Druidry has become. There is still a focus on nature veneration and polytheistic worship, but not all of the ancient practices are needed in this modern age.

#### Slide 11: Practices and Rituals

While many practices and rituals continue into the modern era, some have been discontinued, while others have been created. Ceremonies continue to be held out in nature, but Stonehenge now plays a part in certain holiday/spiritual celebrations, such as Yuletide. While there are texts citing the monument's usage in religious ceremonies, it was not until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century that scholars first began to link Stonehenge with British Druids being the architects of the great monolith. To this day, Druids and Stonehenge are linked, despite there being no real evidence to back up the association<sup>8</sup>.

Human sacrifice is no longer practiced since the Druids are no longer part of a warrior culture. Originally the sacrifices were intended to maintain balance; the gods must have something equal to what is being asked for, in this case, a life for a life<sup>9</sup>. Likewise, the practice of tattooing with woad is no longer common since the invention of modern medical practices. Woad, in addition to dyeing the skin blue, also holds antiseptic properties and could have been used by Ancient Druids to help stave off infections<sup>10</sup>.

#### Slide 12: Spread of Druidry

The spread of Ancient Druidry was limited. It was a religion practiced by the Celts of Britain and France, but kept shrouded in mystery to prevent outsiders from learning more. A lack of written material made teaching later generations problematic after Roman Conquerors pushed for the eradication of the Druids and their religion.

Modern Druidry is more open in many ways. It can be practiced by anyone who wishes to learn and learning can be done online. While it is not a mainstream religion, it is not being actively suppressed.

#### Slide 13: Conclusion

In conclusion, Modern Druidry has many things in common with its older counterpart, but much of the teachings and practices are based on secondhand accounts and theories by later scholars. It is a relatively young religion that focuses on nature based and polytheistic worship, and has a far greater reach than Ancient Druidry did.

This concludes this presentation.

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<sup>8</sup> Cusack

<sup>9</sup> Caesar

<sup>10</sup> Aldhouse-Green