

Nine Witches of Brittany: The First Avalon



by Stewart Farquharson

Ile de Sein, Brittany

Just south of Cornwall, across the water known as the English Channel, lies the land of Brittany. A place with a great dark forest called Broceliande in the Arthurian legends, and rocky coasts, and bleak moors haunted by goblins, and standing stones, and beautiful golden-haired mermaids who carried men off to be their lovers.

Sein is in the red box. The holy island is just a few feet above sea level. It is covered in grass and bare rocks, guarded by dangerous reefs, and home to dolphins and grey seals. One can only reach it with much care, even today. When the Romans were invading France, then called Gaul, it was even more difficult.



Writing in 43 AD, Pomponius of Mela, a geographer from southern Spain wrote about 9 virgins living on the Isle of Sein (off the Finistère coast of western Brittany): *“The island of Sena in the britanic sea faces the Osismiciens (celts of Armorica) and is renowned for its oracle whose priestesses, devoted to a perennial virginity, are the 9 gallicénes. Their singular powers can lift the winds, their songs can raise the seas, they can shape-shift into animals particularly the swan who is linked to the soul ‘Anatia’, they can cure the most terminal illnesses and predict the future only to those who dare come and seek their wisdom.”*

Mayorca, another spanish writer of that era alluded to the elemental magic practiced by these priestesses: *“They choose a virgin amongst themselves, for they all are. She is then sent naked into the sacred forest to gather, using only the little finger of the left hand, Hyosciamus niger (Henbane), the flower of the god Beli*

(Bel). She then has to immerse it into a fast flowing river and walk away backwards as if to imitate the retrograde sun.“



The wind is so harsh that only small trees and shrubs manage to grow on the island, but there are fields and herbs and wildflowers. And the mainland is near.

These women could have been trained as druids, for a teaching sanctuary existed by the mouth of the Loire. As such it would be unthinkable for a man to harm them. They would be poets and judges, seers and doctors, and teachers of their kind. Being a virgin in those days meant not chastity, but freedom from maintaining a household. A celtic wife has been found buried with her ring of iron keys as any decent chatelaine would be, for wives kept control of food supplies and clothing, and gave orders to their servants. This path the priestesses would not follow.

Daily Life for a Celtic Woman

Appearance: the Bretons tend to have darker hair than Celts of Ireland and Scotland, but very fair skin. They would be wearing long tunics over long skirts, under warm cloaks with hoods. Their

shoes would be of fine leather, and workers would have aprons and perhaps small cloth bonnets to keep their hair out of things.



Iron Age homes were huts woven of thatch, with central fireplaces and tripods and cauldrons for cooking. Beds would be woven boxes of willow stems, filled with soft straw. Tools would hang from the ceiling, along with drying herbs.



Milking the cow daily and making cheese would be important, and keeping bees for honey, growing garden herbs, collecting medical herbs from the fields and the forests of the mainland, trading for fish and venison, spinning wool and weaving clothes... all these would keep a priestess busy.

Faery Traditions of Brittany

A peasant house had better be kept neat if you wanted to keep the little household fairies, or lutins, from playing pranks. You could leave milk or honey for them at night.

Outdoors were more dangerous beings. The Teurst were like the British pooks, shapechangers who enjoyed following you home in the guise of a huge black dog, or a white horse. Or the bundle of twigs on your back might grow heavier and heavier until the sly teurst jumped off with a shout.

Morgans had golden hair usually and fishy tails and swam in the shallow bays of the ocean. They could entice a fisherman to jump overboard, and that man would not be seen again.

Standing stones were rumoured to guard gold treasures, but you had to be wary of the korrigans, small but savage goblins. They would attack and pinch you.

Finally the skeleton lady, the Ankou, might pursue you in her magic boat or coach, on a dark night, and yes you would die if she caught you.

There were darker things. Men might be cursed to become werewolves... they changed shape by a river, for water and the moon was part of the spell. Women might be half-serpents... beautiful but very dangerous, perhaps drinking your energy fatally.

The Forest of Broceliande – On to Avalon

As the centuries passed and the Celts adopted Roman ways, the old gods welcomed the new. Rosmerta the goddess of fruit, flowers and abundance married Mercury the sly merchant's god. Lugh of the bright spear fought alongside Hercules of the club and lion skin. Dana of the rivers welcomed Minerva of the home crafts and wisdom. Epona of the horses might ride alongside Mithras of the Roman soldiers.

Probably for the isle of Sein the Mother Goddess and the Sea Father were the important deities. Also the swan as a totem animal.

Constantine adopted Christ, and the gods retreated to the woods and fields and mounds. The legions left and Britons crossed the English channel in a rush, to settle Brittany. Saxons fought and brave men and women defied them. Legends from Britain now mingled with those of the Bretons. Sein was said to be all that was left of the sunken land of Ys, which is also claimed by Wales.

Meanwhile on the mainland the dark forest of Broceliande was the home of story adventures. There was a magic lake of youth and the fairies. There was a mysterious stone hill of a dreadful giant. There was the haunting island of St. Michel. All would figure in legends of King Arthur. There was even the Grail. The bishop of Dol was said to have received the grail from the Holy Land. Then it had been stolen by raiders. Adventurers would try to get it back. And on the isle of Sein it was rumoured Merlin had been born, of a priestess and a mysterious wanderer.

From here the stories would shift to Glastonbury, to knights and castles and chivalry, and to the once and future king. Arthur was born in Britain...

Some Magics of the Sea Witches

Seer Stones:

Aqua Aura – This is clear rock crystal with a lovely blue tinge. It comes from a vapor of gold that bonds with the stone. It gives the authority and decisiveness of gold with the wish-bringing of quartz. Also clairvoyant.

Kyanite – This is a blue and white-grey stone which sings of the sea and dolphins and a lovely magic. It helps one connect with all the deep spiritual resources of the waters.

Charoite – This is a new purple-white stone from Russia and has a lovely gentle transforming effect. It gives angel contact, too. Sort of an amethyst-milky quartz magic.

Seraphinite – This is a veined green stone with dark and white lines, and reminds me of moss or trees. It feels like moldavite in your hand with much power and “unearthly” presence. Very good for protection and reaching out.





To attune to this, just say you are accepting the Isle of Sein Empowerment from your teacher. To attune a student use any method you like, but holding a sea shell would be nice...

This system is for psychological and spiritual growth. Please see your own physician for any health problems.

Best wishes,
Stewart