
CARANTES NEWSLETTER

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Dear Friends,

We hope this 13th newsletter reaches you well and safe, and that you are all having a pleasant summer. We are now back after the short break we took in June, and we are all looking forward to the coming months, and sharing all the readings we have in stock for you! But before delving into that, we would like to say a few words on recent events.

First of all, we would like to thank the speakers who presented at the Carantes-sponsored session at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds held at the beginning of the month. They gave three brilliant papers on topics related to subjects Carantes is interested in, and they were all three illuminating in their own ways: Eachiarn Erbnen, in collaboration with Aodhán Morris, presented a talk titled 'Fear and Loathing in Fairy Forests: Borrowings from Irish Mythology in Fringe (Quasi)Religious Groups within the Russian LARP Community'; Elisabeth Chatel presented 'From Reaction to a Status Quo: The Question of the Origins of the Breton Language and the Breton People'; and Erica Steiner closed the session with 'On the Face of It: The Problematic Modern Historiography of Tattooing in the Early Medieval British Isles'. We were very proud to be able to help these scholars get their wonderful work out there, and we encourage you to keep an eye on their future endeavors!

In other news, in the past couple of weeks we have been able to see some significant development on the international political stage. More specifically, and against all odds, the far-right came third in the recent legislative elections in France. These elections were abruptly announced by the French president Macron following the crushing win of the far-right party RN (Rassemblement National) during the European elections last month, when he dissolved the national assembly. It is only due to the historical and quite miraculous alliance of all leftist political parties in record time, putting aside their differences, that France was able to prevent the RN from seizing the reins of the country. This victory was not easy, and the campaign saw a recrudescence of racist and LGBTQIA-phobic violence throughout the country, but it should serve as a reminder that no matter the odds, we are stronger together and united. In the face of such a threat, differences matter little and with this in mind, victory is attainable. This is a cause for celebration and hope! That being said, the left's new majority in the French national assembly is only relative, and many far-right representatives have been elected still, so the fight is far from being over. Yet, this should be kept in mind as a major historical moment.

Finally, we wanted to address an incident that happened at one of the Gaeltacht programs last month, which one of our members who witnessed the incident made us aware of. We will be respecting their choice of not divulging any names or the specific details regarding locations when discussing this topic here.

One student of one of the Gaeltacht programs physically assaulted another student and collided into another after an argument over trans rights, with this student using slurs to refer to transgender people, and vocalizing various standard far-right hateful myths regarding trans people. His words and actions were extremely violent, and we condemn them in the strongest terms. After this incident, he was rightfully removed from the program.

Aside from being a concerning and upsetting event, this incident happens to be a clear example that we, as an organization, can point to when explaining what we are fighting against. It was revealed that the assailant was very active online, extensively posting white supremacist and transphobic content and 'memes' on Twitter/X, as well as material expressing a desire for Ireland to be ethnically cleansed of anyone of English descent. Taken out of context, his online presence could be considered pathetic and laughable, however, here we can see clearly how online talk can translate into physical, offline violence. While many of us understand the inherent link between online spaces and modern 'real' life, many institutions are still struggling to realize this, which may be one of the reasons why such incidents end up occurring. It should also be pointed out that law enforcement was not useful either in this instance, considering the international nature of the program and the fact they were not able to operate on a global scale. So whether it be educational institutions or state bodies, they display serious shortcomings when faced with the reality of modern fascist violence. Now, what can we do to improve this? Discussing the different policies put in place in various countries and institutions might be a good place to start, but we would love to hear your input on this, and if you have encountered such a situation before, and how it was handled (or not). We also hope that everyone who was involved in this incident is well and recovering.

Now that we covered the most recent news, on to our regularly scheduled programming.

LOGISTICS



We are back to our regular schedule for our newsletters, and you can expect them around the 15th of every month!



We will be holding a **public meeting** in August, the discussion focusing on the articles linked in the present newsletter. This time, we are sharing a poll so we can assess which time and date would suit the most people. Please following this link to fill up your preferences: <https://doodle.com/meeting/organize/id/eV04LzOb>



Also, you can join our **discord server**! This link will be active for the next 7 days: <https://discord.gg/ma9AQeTS>

MONTHLY READINGS

This month, and in preparation to our Lughnasadh public meeting, we are inviting you to read two articles on the subject of neo-paganism. This topic was discussed quite a few times recently on our discord server, and so we thought it would be a great time for us to delve into it together! Neo-Paganism and related movements like Witchcraft are popular introductions to Celtic material for many people outside the academic sphere, and for many of us in academia too, however well we may have deconstructed these first steps later on.

The first article is: MAGLIOCCO, SABINA. "‘The Heart Is the Only Nation’: Neo-Paganism, Ethnic Identity, and the Construction of Authenticity." In *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, 205–38. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhfrj.10>.

Firstly, it's worth noting that both articles focus on specific communities in the United States. Thus, it would be useful to trace some of the differences we might notice in European contexts. We find both articles relevant nonetheless because America has, for better or worse, the merit of distilling worldwide trends in such a way that they appear there at their strongest.

Magliocco's study examines the cultural sources of various Neo-Pagan practises, rituals and beliefs. She traces how her informants connect their spiritual life with questions of ethnicity and identity relative to other populations that surround them. In particular she is interested in the self-perception of Neo-Pagan practitioners and its intersection with other processes of identity construction in a hybrid, complex world. One of the practises she highlights is the importance of cultural borrowing, with Neo-Pagans frequently constructing personal practises based on elements taken from various cultures. This has been cause for controversy in the past, particularly in the case of borrowings from Native American cultures, which easily fall into what Phil Deloria has called "Playing Indian."

Magliocco's article outlines some useful nuances in our understanding of culture that are worth dwelling on. For instance, what are relativist arguments about culture, and what are universalist arguments? How does a capitalist context affect culture and the way we see it? How did the Celtic label become associated with Neo-Paganism and Wicca?

And how does this connect to notions of indigeneity? How do we, in Celtic Studies, interact with the indigeneity as a concept? Is it applicable? Or can it highlight the complexities of identities that root themselves in Celtic material, and point us perhaps to one of the radicalizing slopes we are trying to understand?

We think it's worth evaluating how Magliocco's argument for empathy and imagination fares in the face of radicalizing essentialism, and relative to understandings of power. Her hesitation with theories of cultural property comes from the asymmetrical way they are applied to various groups, depending on their position of power. What is racist coming from dominant groups is reasonable coming from oppressed groups, and for Magliocco, this makes widespread understandings of cultural appropriation unworkable. But is this true? Or can we find other ways to connect power and culture that can help us to understand the place of Celtic Studies relative to identity and oppression?

The second article we wish to discuss is: Furth, Brett H. "Ethnic Neo-Pagan Altars and Ancestors in Texas: An Ethnoreligious Strategy to Reconfigure European Ancestry and Whiteness." *Western Folklore* 76, no. 3 (2017): 313–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44790956>.

This article struck a chord with several of us, as it discusses examples of specifically American neo-pagans, and how their religious practices is linked to a need to re-valorise their ethnic identities in an increasingly globalised world. The author presents the testimony of different informants regarding their own practices, and what led them to such beliefs. The article goes over different neo-pagan denominations, as well as concepts such as 'blood memory'. It highlights the informants' relationship with their ancestry, as well as their place in the racial discussions in America.

While discussing this article, we were led to reflect on some of our own experiences reconciling with our own identities, especially for those of us who grew up in white spaces and on colonised land. How would such an experience influence one's beliefs? Is it enough to explain the need the informants in the article seem to have for a differentiated identity? What tools do we have to understand and reflect on such a phenomenon?

The article also includes mention of which deities and places are favored by the informants, which led us to notice the prevalence of some names over others, such as Bríd/Brigit for instance. Why such tendencies and popularity? Can you note any strange additions, or figures that you would expect but are missing here?

That is all for us now at the CARANTES steering committee. Please feel free to contact us if you have any reactions, thoughts or concerns, or if you would rather not get any more emails. We'd love to hear from you on the discord server or by email.

Until next time, keep well and safe,
And thank you for doing this work with us,
Your friends at



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