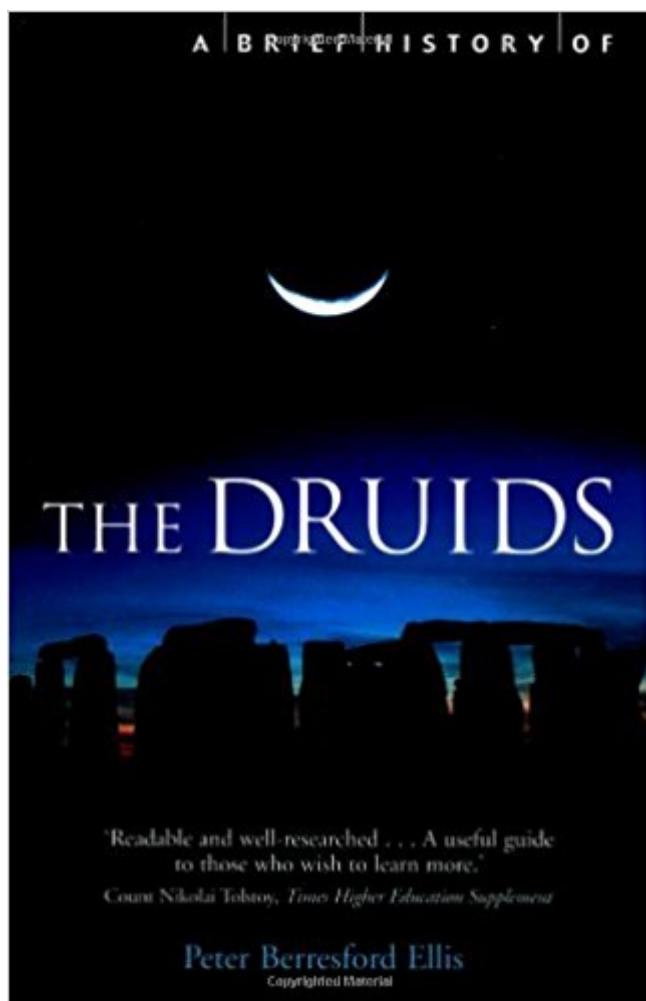


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A Brief History Of The Druids (The Brief History)



Synopsis

Shrouded in legend, the mysterious cult of the ancient Druids continues to fascinate, inspiring latter-day imitators who often are only a poorly researched and romantic reflection of Druidic lore. In this compelling and readable history, respected Celtic scholar Peter Berresford Ellis explores who the Druids really were and what role they played in the Celtic world. Ellis provides a fresh and convincing interpretation of the facts, based on both archaeological and etymological findings. "Remarkable ... offers much for the academician as well as the general reader. Fascinating reading!"Joseph A. King, author of Ireland to North America

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Customer Reviews

Readable and well-researched... a useful guide... -- Count Nikolai Tolstoy * Times Higher Education Supplement * Finally, a book that separates fact from mythology, telling us what we can and cannot know about the ancient Druids. This remarkable book by a leading historian of the Celts offers much for the academician as well as the general reader. Fascinating reading! -- Joseph A. King, author of Ireland to North America --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Peter Berresford Ellis is the author of many books, including highly regarded works on Celtic history and culture. He is a Fellow of three Royal Societies in historical and antiquarian fields and the recipient of many awards and honours for his work. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable

edition of this title.

This is probably the best treatment the Druids have received from any book I have read, though it suffers from Ellis' typical tendency to focus on tiny details, be sceptical of Classical sources, and repeat the same points constantly. It was Ellis' book 'The Celtic Empire' that first sparked my interest in the Ancient Celtic (particularly Gaulish) world several years ago, and this book is written and outlined similarly. The subject of the book is of course the 'priestly caste' of the pre-Christian Celtic world, who have been long known for several centuries as mistletoe-worshipping, human-sacrificing barbarian philosophers with huge beards. As I imagined he would, Ellis fiercely challenges the stereotypes, often at the expense of the writings and observations of various Classical and British scholars. He uses the culture and religion of Ancient India to show their common Indo-European roots with the Celts and reveal their common religious heritage, and how many of the features of Druidism were actually to be found across ancient Europe, even in the Classical World. I do not agree with how Ellis handled the subject of human sacrifice in the Celtic world. He paints it to be a rare occurrence yet he gives us an account of the barbaric slaughter of Greek prisoners by a Galatian warband, and several other similar incidents. He then goes into Gaelic myth, which only records one case of human sacrifice (to Crom Cruach, which was incidentally overthrown by the Druids), and lastly concludes with the matter of human sacrifice in the Romano-Greek world. In my opinion, giving a dozen scattered examples of Roman and Greek sacrifices does not even need to be in a book on Celtic religion; it is straying away from the whole thrust of the chapter. Overall, I found the author's treatment of this subject to be less than adequate, or fair to the Classical World. Overall, however, I was deeply impressed with the content and scope of this book. The author does not dig deep into a bunch of kinky new-age mystic stuff, but simply presents that which is known about the Druids in a readable manner. He touches on a variety of interesting topics, including the true meaning of the name 'Druid', the role of Christianity and female Druids in Druidism, and, most interesting to me as a student of the Roman-era Celtic world, the role of the Druids in the 1st-4th Century Roman Empire. Were the Druids wiped out by the righteously indignant Roman legionaries, as tradition tells us, or did they simply come to occupy different social roles? The author's answer to this question is provocative and informative. The Book's chapters are: Introduction (Identifying the Druids); the Celtic World; Origins of the Druids; Druids through Foreign Eyes; Druids through Celtic Eyes; Female Druids; Religion of the Druids; Rituals of the Druids; Wisdom of the Druids (further divided into 10 sections); and Reviving the Druids. It also contains a comprehensive bibliography and index.

The Author meticulously examined and counter-examined all documentation and multiple opinions on such documentations, so much so that in the beginning of the book, I was wondering if any conclusions would ever be drawn. Finally, he made some conclusions which surprised me, since I really was new to this material, and it all made good sense actually. The analysis covered a large land mass (Indo-European territories), but I did not find that confusing at all. I found the writing style and conclusions clear and easy to follow. This book really enlightened me about Celtic Society, the role of Druids in it, and also explained what happened to the Druids. I now feel that I have a greater understanding of this subject, as if I have a grasp of the "Big Picture." Anyone with an interest in this time period (or who are curious about Celtic Society and Druids) should read this book.

I recently completed a movie script that takes place in pre-Christian Europe. This book was an absolutely essential tool in my research. Berresford Ellis is a thorough and careful scholar, but he writes clearly, and engagingly. Occasionally, he takes on other scholars and he does repeat that the Romans' authority on Celtic matters is highly biased. Given that almost all academic research on pre-Medieval matters relies heavily on Roman sources, Ellis's insistence on their fallibility is important. He carefully traces several fallen chestnuts of "knowledge" to their sources. Likewise, he uncovers many good ancient accounts of ancient (mostly Greek) encounters with Druidism that differ radically from the received (mostly Roman) knowledge. The book was an eye-opener on that score. I have not found a more reliable source of information on Druidic matters than this one.

The author is very precise, we can see he did research deep into Europe's ancient history. He really gives an accurate idea of the Celtic People and of how they spread into Europe and Asia?! I do not agree here, they did spread, not to Asia, they are Natural from Asia and spread to Europe. When they arrived in Europe, they already had their gods, similar to the Hindu ones, even the druids sat cross-legged like the Orientals. So, if it was like historians say, they spread to Asia, "learned" their religion and myths, and then came back to Europe with brand new ideas??? I think not, they came from Asia and spread, not the other way. Anyway, the book is excellent, I've learned quite a lot of the Celtic ways, the author is precise and non-fictional.

Informative book, More like a very brief overview but a good read for someone trying to determine interest.

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