

## NOTES ON THE FESTIVAL OF LUGHNASSADH – 1<sup>ST</sup> - 14<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST

Also called *Lammas* (from the Anglo-Saxon “Loaf-feast”)

And *Brón Trógain*, the “sorrows of autumn” or the “sorrows of Trógain”.

And *First Fruits*, in honour of the first harvest of the year.

Although ceremonies are usually carried out either at the start of August, or in some places the 7<sup>th</sup>, Lughnassadh in its entirety is traditionally a two-week long festival!

The festival is in honour of the God Lugh who was known as the *samildánach* – the Master of All Arts, and his foster mother, the Goddess Tailtu (from Old Celtic *Talantiu* "The Great One of the Earth"). Lugh means “Shining One” or “Lightening”... a phenomenon that is probably most common at this time of the year. Lugh is associated with both the sun and, to a degree, the golden corn.

Lughnassadh (pron loonassah) means the “funeral games of Lugh”. But it is not *his* funeral that is observed at this time; rather it is the funeral of Tailtu. She is honoured as the deity who, in Gaelic myth, single handedly laboured to clear away wilderness and virgin forest, making fields for the first time, so that crops could be grown. She did this for the good of Her people – and died as a result of Her efforts. Perhaps it is for this reason that Lughnassadh is also called *Brón Trógain* (the sorrows of Autumn) in Irish myth.

*Trógain*, however, carries a double meaning, as it was also the name of a much earlier Gaelic God - the actual *son* of Tailtu ... the true Corn-King... whose function seems to have been overshadowed and displaced by Lugh, who probably was imported from the Continental Celts, where he was primarily known as Lugos.

To facilitate the work of Tailtu, Lugh had to battle with the *Fomhoire* - the Gods of Chaos/wilderness. Together, they tamed the wilderness of the land and furthered humanity’s learning - one of the major functions of the Gods of consciousness, the *Tuatha De Dannan* - so that man could grow and harvest crops.

Lugh, however, has mixed parentage. His father, *Cian*, is Dannan, his mother, *Eithne*, is Fomhoire.

Lugh’s fame is so great in Gaelic myth that it would be impossible to do him justice in these notes. So we will only look here at some of his attributes that are relevant to the meaning of Lughnassadh within the Ceile De tradition.

Although at one point in legend - for forty years - he does actually take on the role of High King, Lugh is depicted primarily as the initiator, guide, and helper to High Kings. His Divine helper in this work is the Goddess Sovereignty (the Land), who has many names in Gaelic Myth. Tailtu is one of them, Madbh another. She offers the cup of sovereignty to the High King, who begins his reign with a marriage ceremony between himself and the Land. .

Classical observers of the Celts often compared this Divine pair to Mercury, the otherworldly protector of earthly kings and Rosmerta, who was the divine keeper of the drink of sovereignty.

Like Mercury, Lugh is also known for his fleet-footed agility in travelling between the worlds. Perhaps as a result of his mixed parentage (half dark and half light) He belongs fully to neither world and partakes of the qualities of both. It is significant to say that, as we see in the Gaelic legend “The wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn”, Lugh is also an inner plane initiator into a higher plane of consciousness.

As *samildánach*, Lugh’s mastery of all arts suggests he transcends the many divine functions. He therefore represents the summit of all human achievement. It could also be said that He represents the sum of the Gods’ achievements... another of his titles is “The High One”.

Although Lugh can rightly be identified with the Brythonic God *Llew*, we can also begin to see *some* similarities emerging between Lugh and another British Deity – Myrddin, later to become Merlin in Arthurian legend. Mixed parentage... counsellor to Kings... possessor of knowledge of all the worlds... mover between worlds... Initiator...

In the Ceile De tradition, Lugh represents the part of us that, when we are able to dialogue with it, helps us to grow... to learn. In some ways, we could call him the God of higher (esoteric) knowledge. He is that part within us that sees all things with razor sharp perception. He is the *Way toward Ultimate Truth*... “*Firinn*” in Gaelic. His bird, the eagle (*fir-eun* – the “true Bird”), soars to the sun... He is the *Inner Witness*, who precedes and serves the Higher Self (High King). Like the corn that grows, warmed by the all-seeing light of the sun, he is the “first fruit” of our spiritual harvest.

#### THE CORN BECOMES THE BREAD OF LIFE

On our inner journey, many of us mistake our Inner Witness for our Higher Self. They are not identical. In the Christ myth, the Witness is John the Baptist; the Higher Self is the Christ. As with Lugh, John represents a certain level of spirituality (the law) that must be moved beyond if we seek spiritual maturity. As he himself says, “*He must increase, as I must decrease*”. That process began as we passed through the period of mid-summer solstice / St John’s Eve... The outer sun began his slow waning, so that, as the shadows grow longer, we begin to feel the need to search through our own shadows for our inner en-lightenment.

The prophet John saw clearly his role to “prepare the way for the Lord” (the High King/Higher Self). He accepted his role fully and passionately. His function is that of true discernment and highest will in a human being. He prepares the way for the Master and knows when his work is done. In the mythic world there are no coincidences – John/Lugh both celebrate the fullness of their functions at midsummer. (Mid summer solstice – June 21<sup>st</sup>. St John’s eve – June 24<sup>th</sup>) Significantly, John (like John Barleycorn) “loses his head” in Lughnassadh month – on August 29<sup>th</sup>.

There comes a time when the *samildánach in us* must make use of all that it knows. We must grind down and digest all we have learned ... all we have gained with our keen inner eye and take soul-nourishment from it. We must yield to the great

purpose of John, Merlin and Lugh – the advent of the “One to Come” – the Higher Self.

Again, there are no coincidences in Myth... Lughnassadh’s honouring of the Mother and Her self-giving in the creation of all of Her children, culminating in Her Ultimate Child – the Christ – is also significantly echoed in yet another August feast – that of the Assumption of Mary on August 15<sup>th</sup>.

A picture of the interrelationship between these various divinities begins to emerge :-

- Mother Earth...our bodies... Tailtu... carries in Her brown womb a fruit that She nurtures all our lives, the seed of our Highest Self.
- At *our* harvest time, that part of us that is mortal (identified with the transient) like the Corn-King, Trógain, lets drop its seed and dies. But nothing is ever wasted. A part of the Corn king gives himself to feed our bodies...Another part returns to the Mother to be born again.
- Through the many cycles of our lives, our Otherworldly “Lugh-skills” develop in us, more and more with each successive crop... It offers us a new knowledge – so that we can use our seed in a new way - to alchemically transmute it into the Bread of Life.
- With the guidance of Lugh, we die a “higher death”. We seek out, find and dare to reveal our *Higher Selves* to ourselves and others. In imitation of the Christ... at that other great Lughnassadh event - the Transfiguration.

At the start of Lughnassadh, as the corn prepares itself to be cut in the coming weeks of harvest time :-

- ☀ The first ceremonial “head” is cut..
- ☀ We return one part, in gratitude, to Tailtu.
- ☀ We grind down our grain.
- ☀ We throw our chaff to the wind of the Great Mystery.
- ☀ We enter into communion with the Bread of Life.

*Fàilte dbuit A Mbatbair-thalmbuinn,  
Tha thu lan de na gràsan;  
Tha an soillse a-staigh  
Is beannaichte, do riochd  
agus beannaichte toradh do bhrù,  
Christ mo Chridhe...*

Hail, Mother Earth,  
Full of grace,  
The Light fills Thee.  
Blessed is Thy form  
And blessed is the fruit of thy womb –  
My heart’s Christ.