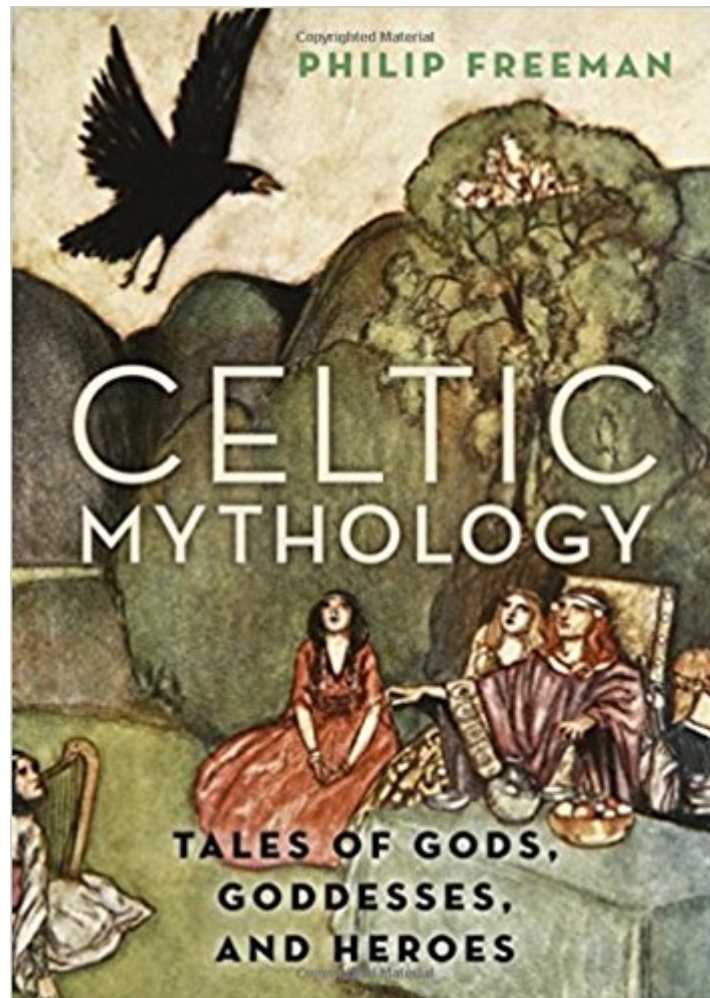




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Celtic Mythology: Tales Of Gods, Goddesses, And Heroes



Synopsis

Most people have heard of the Celts--the elusive, ancient tribal people who resided in present-day England, Ireland, Scotland and France. Paradoxically characterized as both barbaric and innocent, the Celts appeal to the modern world as a symbol of a bygone era, a world destroyed by the ambition of empire and the spread of Christianity throughout Western Europe. Despite the pervasive cultural and literary influence of the Celts, shockingly little is known of their way of life and beliefs, because very few records of their stories exist. In this book, for the first time, Philip Freeman brings together the best stories of Celtic mythology. Everyone today knows about the gods and heroes of the ancient Greeks, such as Zeus, Hera, and Hercules, but how many people have heard of the Gaulish god Lugus or the magical Welsh queen Rhiannon or the great Irish warrior Cú Chulainn? We still thrill to the story of the Trojan War, but the epic battles of the Irish Táin Bó Cuailgne are known only to a few. And yet those who have read the stories of Celtic myth and legend--among them writers like J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis--have been deeply moved and influenced by these amazing tales, for there is nothing in the world quite like them. In these stories a mysterious and invisible realm of gods and spirits exists alongside and sometimes crosses over into our own human world; fierce women warriors battle with kings and heroes, and even the rules of time and space can be suspended. Captured in vivid prose these shadowy figures--gods, goddesses, and heroes--come to life for the modern reader.

Book Information

Hardcover: 296 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (March 1, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0190460474

ISBN-13: 978-0190460471

Product Dimensions: 8.3 x 1 x 5.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #103,997 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Ancient & Medieval Literature > Medieval](#) #53 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > New Age & Spirituality > Wicca, Witchcraft & Paganism > Paganism](#) #159 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Medieval](#)

Customer Reviews

"Philip Freeman's book is a delight. This spirited retelling of the famous stories of the Celtic west serves as a brilliant introduction to the beliefs and values of the pagan and early Christian communities of Ireland and Wales. I can think of no better way to begin to explore the culture of the early Irish and Welsh." --Barry Cunliffe, author of *Britain Begins* "Philip Freeman brings to life the tales the ancient Celts told to each other, and what tales they were! Filled with passion, rage, bravery, and adventure, these stories are as exciting today as they were on the dark nights of the distant past. Heroes, heroines, gods and goddesses come to life in Philip Freeman's brilliant re-telling of these little-known but unforgettable stories." --Terry Golway, author of *The Irish in America*

Philip Freeman graduated with a BA in Classics from the University of Texas and earned the first joint Ph.D. in Classics and Celtic Studies at Harvard University. He has been a college professor for twenty years teaching classical and Celtic mythology. He is the author of eighteen books and currently holds the Orlando W. Qualley Chair in Classics at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

This professor of Classics and Celtic Studies, Harvard-trained, brings a compendium of interwoven tales, from sources translated from a wide variety of his predecessors. The contents cover the earliest deities, the Book of Invasions, the Wooing of Etain, tales from the Tain and the Ulster Cycle, and stories from the Irish otherworld. Then, a few on Finn the outlaw, before the Mabinogi are related in four stories, followed by three more Welsh stories and sagas. Finally, Christian saints Patrick, Brigid, and Brendan gain attention in this slim, but accessible collection. A quick sample of the tone. Cu Chullain asks his charioteer: "Where on earth are we?" He replies: "'I have no idea, my lord.' He continues, "But I don't think we're in Ulster anymore." (125) Not Kansas either, but the everyday register of these stories makes them meaningful for us. Too often either scholarly versions are antiquated (if in public domain) or New Age-tinged florid reckonings divorced from academic rigor and narrative control. Professor Freeman stays grounded. It's lightly annotated with introductions and endnotes, clarifying where the texts originated and variants in meaning here and there. But the learning's worn lightly, for this volume is aimed at the general reader. While Irish-published resources remain, and predecessors such as Oxford's translation by Sioned Davies of the Mabinogi and Penguin's anthology of Irish themes by Jeffrey Gantz, the updated version of Philip Freeman's colloquial versions is welcome. I'd have liked Breton, Scots, Manx, and Cornish topics to widen the Celtic scope, however.

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