

SAMOLOUISSUS

WISDOM OF THE GREEN



BRANOS CARNUTODRUIDION

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*FOR THE CARNUTES, WHOSE SACRED FOREST STILL
BREATHES,*

AND FOR ALL WHO CARRY THE INNER FIRE FORWARD.

Table of Contents



PART ONE: CHAPTER ONE WHY PLANT KNOWLEDGE MATTERS	6
PART ONE: CHAPTER TWO SOURCES AND SCOPE OF THE RECORD	10
PART ONE: CHAPTER THREE READING THE HERB CORPUS	15
PART ONE: CHAPTER FOUR THE HERB CORPUS	20
PART TWO: CHAPTER ONE MODERN PRACTICE WITHOUT INVENTION	130
PART TWO: CHAPTER TWO INTERPRETING SAMOLOUISSUS	140
PART TWO: CHAPTER THREE ETHICS AND RESPONSIBILITY	146
PART TWO: CHAPTER FOUR THE SPIRITUAL MEANING	151
PART TWO: CHAPTER FIVE THE SACRED RELATIONSHIP	208
PART TWO: CHAPTER SIX RECONSTRUCTED GAULISH-INSPIRED RITE OF HERB GATHERING AND HONORING	211

**PART ONE:
CHAPTER ONE**

**WHY PLANT
KNOWLEDGE
MATTERS**

Plants have always stood among humanity's oldest teachers. Long before written language, before cities, and before monuments of stone, people learned to observe the living world around them. They watched the seasons turn, recognized which roots nourished and which poisoned, discovered which leaves eased pain, and learned when flowers opened, fruits ripened, and seeds returned to the earth. This knowledge was not acquired all at once but accumulated slowly, generation after generation, through careful observation, memory, and lived experience.

Among the ancient peoples of Gaul, plants were woven into nearly every aspect of life. They provided food, medicine, dyes, fibers, timber, fuel, shelter, and fodder. They marked the changing seasons, shaped agricultural rhythms, defined the boundaries between cultivated land and wilderness, and formed the landscapes within which communities lived. Some trees became landmarks. Certain herbs were gathered at specific times of the year. Others entered medical practice, ritual observance, or local custom. Whether practical or symbolic, plants occupied a constant presence within the Gaulish world.

Yet despite their importance, plant knowledge often receives less attention than other areas of Celtic studies. Archaeological discoveries, inscriptions, and classical descriptions of Druids or warfare frequently take center stage, while the relationship between people and the vegetal world remains comparatively understudied. This imbalance is understandable. Stone, metal, and written texts survive far more readily than leaves, flowers, and oral traditions. The everyday familiarity ancient people possessed with their local landscapes rarely leaves a complete historical record.

The challenge is even greater when studying the Gauls. No surviving botanical manual, herbal, or medical treatise written by the Gauls themselves has come down to us. Instead, what we know survives only in fragments: a passing remark preserved by a Roman naturalist, a medicinal recipe copied centuries later, the name of a plant recorded in a glossary, an archaeological discovery suggesting cultivation or use, or a ritual description preserved by a classical author. None of these sources, by themselves, provides a complete picture. Together, however, they begin to reveal recurring patterns that deserve careful attention.

The title of this booklet, *Samolouissus*, is a modern Gaulish compound chosen to describe the study of attested Gaulish plant knowledge and the relationship between

the ancient Gauls and the vegetal world. It is not presented as the name of a documented historical tradition, nor as evidence that a unified botanical discipline once existed under this title. Rather, it serves as a modern designation for the body of surviving evidence explored throughout this work.

The name is formed from two Gaulish elements:

- **samolos** – *plant* (also attested with meanings including the trunk of a tree or the sole of the foot)
- **uissu-** – *knowledge, understanding, wisdom, perception, or experience*

Together, these elements form Samolouissus, which may be understood as "plant knowledge," "knowledge of plants," "herbal knowledge," or "the study of plants."

The second element, *uissu-*, is especially significant. It more than just the accumulation of facts. It conveys understanding gained through observation, experience, familiarity, and lived relationship. The title reflects not only the subject of this booklet but also its method. The chapters that follow encourage readers to approach the plants historically, carefully, and respectfully, allowing knowledge to emerge through the meeting of historical evidence, observation, and thoughtful reflection. The title, serves as both the name of this work and the philosophy underlying it.

The purpose of this work is not to reconstruct a lost religion of herbs or to create a new system of plant magic. Neither is it an attempt to romanticize the past or fill the gaps in the historical record with speculation. Instead, this volume seeks something both simpler and, perhaps, more valuable: to gather the surviving evidence, present it carefully, and allow the historical record to speak as clearly as it can.

Doing so requires patience. The evidence is often incomplete, sometimes contradictory, and occasionally uncertain. Yet uncertainty does not diminish its worth. On the contrary, approaching the record with humility allows us to appreciate not only what has survived but also the limits of what can responsibly be claimed. Rather than forcing the fragments into an artificial whole, this work invites the reader to see them as pieces of a larger landscape, one whose outlines are visible even when many of its details remain beyond recovery.

In studying ancient plant knowledge, we also recover something about the way our ancestors understood their place within the living world. Plants can teach us that knowledge is rooted in observation, that wisdom often develops through long familiarity rather than sudden discovery, and that meaningful relationships with the land cannot be separated from time, place, and season. They teach patience, attentiveness, and respect for limits, qualities that remain as valuable today as they were two thousand years ago.

The chapters that follow begin with the surviving historical evidence. Before asking how ancient plant knowledge might inform modern practice, we must first ask a more fundamental question: What does the historical record actually preserve?

**PART ONE:
CHAPTER TWO**

**SOURCES AND
SCOPE OF THE
RECORD**

Any study of plant knowledge among the ancient Gauls must begin with an acknowledgment of the limitations of the surviving evidence. Unlike the extensive botanical and medical writings preserved from Greece and Rome, no Gaulish herbal, botanical treatise, or medical manual has survived into the present day. Whether such works were never written or have simply been lost remains unknown. As with much of Gaulish culture, the historical record reaches us indirectly, preserved through the observations, compilations, and interpretations of others.

Our understanding depends upon a diverse body of evidence rather than a single source. Classical authors, archaeological discoveries, inscriptions, linguistics, and later medical traditions each contribute fragments to the larger picture. Individually, these sources are incomplete. Together, they allow us to reconstruct aspects of Gaulish relationships with the plant world while remaining mindful of the uncertainties that accompany the evidence.

The Classical Authors

The largest body of written evidence comes from Greek and Roman writers. Authors such as Pliny the Elder, Dioscorides, Marcellus Empiricus, and others occasionally recorded plants, remedies, gathering customs, or ritual practices associated with Gaulish peoples. Their interests varied considerably. Some wrote encyclopedias of natural history, others composed medical manuals, while still others described the customs of foreign peoples encountered through conquest or travel.

These writings are invaluable because they preserve observations that might otherwise have disappeared entirely. At the same time, they must be approached critically. None of these authors wrote as neutral ethnographers. Each wrote for a particular audience, within a particular literary tradition, and through the cultural assumptions of the Greco-Roman world. Some personally observed the practices they described, while others relied upon earlier works or secondhand reports whose original sources are now lost. Consequently, every testimony must be evaluated within its own context rather than accepted uncritically.

The Archaeological Evidence

Archaeology provides an independent line of evidence that often complements the literary sources. Carbonized seeds, pollen studies, preserved plant remains, agricultural

tools, storage pits, wells, ritual deposits, and residues recovered from vessels all contribute to our understanding of the plants that grew, were cultivated, traded, or consumed throughout Gaul.

Unlike literary sources, archaeology rarely explains *how* a plant was understood or used symbolically. It can show that a particular species existed in a region, was deliberately cultivated, or appeared in ritual or domestic contexts. These discoveries frequently confirm, refine, or occasionally challenge the written record.

The Linguistic Evidence

The Gaulish language preserves another important avenue of investigation. Plant names recorded in inscriptions, glossaries, place names, and personal names provide insight into which species held sufficient importance to become embedded within the language itself.

Etymology cannot reveal the full significance of a plant, but it often illuminates how people categorized the natural world and what characteristics they considered noteworthy. In some cases, Gaulish names survive alongside their Latin equivalents, allowing tentative identification of species mentioned by ancient writers.

As with all linguistic evidence, however, caution is required. Similar names do not always indicate identical plants, and some identifications remain debated among scholars.

The Later Medical Traditions

Several late antique and early medieval medical compilations preserve remedies attributed to Gaulish regions or practitioners. Among the most important is Marcellus Empiricus, whose *De Medicamentis* records some remedies collected in Gaul during the late Roman period. Although written centuries after the height of independent Gaulish society, such works may preserve elements of regional medical traditions that continued under Roman rule.

These sources occupy an important but carefully defined place within this study. They are neither dismissed because of their later date nor accepted uncritically as direct windows into pre-Roman practice. They are evaluated alongside the broader historical record, allowing areas of continuity and uncertainty to remain visible.

The Nature of the Evidence

The evidence presented throughout this work varies considerably in strength. Some plants appear repeatedly across multiple independent sources, with descriptions that reinforce one another. Others are mentioned only once, perhaps by a single author or within a single medical recipe. A few survive only as names whose precise botanical identification remains uncertain.

The herb corpus presented in this booklet does not seek completeness. Inclusion does not imply widespread use or religious importance. Rather, each plant has been selected because it can be reasonably connected to Gaulish regions, language, or cultural practice through the surviving evidence.

Where certainty exists, it is stated plainly. Where scholarly disagreement remains, that uncertainty is preserved rather than resolved through speculation. Maintaining these distinctions is essential if we are to understand the historical record on its own terms.

Attestation and Interpretation

Throughout this work, a clear distinction is maintained between attestation and interpretation.

Attestation refers to what the surviving evidence explicitly preserves. It includes statements made by ancient authors, archaeological discoveries, inscriptions, linguistically supported plant names, and other forms of documented historical evidence.

Interpretation begins only after the evidence has been established. It asks what patterns emerge across the record, how different pieces of evidence relate to one another, and what broader understanding of Gaulish plant knowledge may reasonably be inferred. Interpretation is a necessary part of historical study, but it must always remain accountable to the evidence from which it arises.

This distinction forms the foundation of *Samolouissus*. The first portion of this volume is devoted to presenting the historical record as faithfully as possible. Only after that foundation has been laid will later chapters explore what these surviving fragments may reveal about Gaulish relationships with the living world.

By beginning with the evidence itself, we honor both the richness of what has survived and the humility required when approaching what has been lost. The historical record may be incomplete, but it is far from silent. When examined carefully, its scattered voices still have much to teach us.

PART ONE:
CHAPTER THREE

**READING THE
HERB CORPUS**

The chapters that follow present the surviving botanical evidence associated with the ancient Gauls. Rather than attempting to reconstruct a complete system of Gaulish herbalism, this herb corpus gathers those plants that can be reasonably connected to Gaulish regions, language, or cultural practice through the surviving historical record.

The evidence is necessarily uneven. Some plants are mentioned repeatedly across several ancient authors, while others survive only as a single passing reference or preserved name. As a result, the length and detail of each entry reflect the surviving evidence rather than the historical importance of the plant itself. A brief entry should not be understood as indicating a plant of little significance, only that little has survived concerning it.

To present this material consistently, each herb is organized into a common format whenever the available evidence allows.

Typical entries include:

- **Common and Historical Names** – Modern English names together with attested Gaulish, Latin, or Greek names where they survive.
- **Scientific Identification** – The botanical species most widely accepted by current scholarship.
- **Attested Sources** – The ancient literary, linguistic, or archaeological evidence associated with the plant.
- **Botanical Description** – A brief overview of the plant's appearance and natural distribution.
- **Attested Uses** – Medicinal, agricultural, domestic, ritual, or other uses explicitly preserved by the historical record.
- **Historical Notes** – Discussion of disputed identifications, textual issues, or scholarly questions where relevant.
- **Commentary** – When appropriate, a brief synthesis placing the evidence into its broader historical context.

Not every herb contains every section. Some entries preserve only a name or a single medicinal use, while others offer considerably richer evidence. Rather than filling gaps with speculation, this work preserves the historical record as it survives. Uncertainty is acknowledged where it exists, and silence within the sources remains silence.

The herbs are arranged alphabetically for ease of reference. This organization avoids suggesting a hierarchy of importance or symbolic significance that the surviving evidence does not support. Each plant is instead presented as an individual witness to the broader relationship between the ancient Gauls and the living landscape.

As readers move through the corpus, recurring themes will naturally emerge. Certain plants appear repeatedly in healing traditions, others in ritual practice, seasonal observance, or boundary-making. These broader patterns are explored in the later chapters of this volume. Here, the focus remains on presenting the evidence clearly and consistently, allowing each plant to speak through the sources that preserve it.

With these principles established, we now turn to the surviving herb corpus itself.

Understanding the Herb Entries

Each herb in this corpus follows a consistent format designed to distinguish between information preserved in the ancient sources and modern editorial material.

- **Botanical Description** provides a modern botanical summary intended to help identify the plant discussed by the ancient authors.
- **Distribution in Ancient Gaul** summarizes the plant's likely distribution within ancient Gaul using modern botanical scholarship together with information preserved by the classical sources when available.
- **Attested Sources** lists the surviving ancient texts that mention the plant.
- **Attested Uses** summarizes only those medicinal, practical, or ritual uses preserved in the ancient sources.
- **Gathering Practices** appears only when an ancient author records specific methods of harvesting or preparing a plant.
- **Historical Notes** provide additional context, discuss uncertain identifications, textual problems, differing Gaulish names, and other relevant scholarly observations.
- **Commentary** offers editorial observations that place the evidence into its broader historical and cultural context while remaining distinct from the ancient testimony itself.

Throughout this work, every effort has been made to distinguish between the testimony of the ancient authors and modern botanical scholarship. Botanical descriptions and estimated distributions are modern summaries intended to aid identification. Ancient medicinal uses, ritual practices, and Gaulish plant names are drawn only from the surviving historical sources cited in each entry unless otherwise noted.

Understanding Identification Status

As you read through the herb corpus, you will notice that many entries include an Identification Status. These designations reflect the degree of confidence with which a modern plant can be associated with the ancient evidence.

Ancient botanical texts rarely provide enough detail to identify every plant with complete certainty. Classical authors often recorded only a local or regional name, a medicinal use, or a brief botanical description. In many cases, the same name may have referred to different plants in different regions or periods, while some descriptions are simply too brief to allow a definitive identification.

Modern identifications draw upon several lines of evidence, including the surviving ancient texts, historical linguistics, botanical descriptions, ecology, and the history of herbal scholarship. Even so, not every identification can be made with equal confidence. Some plants can be identified with a high degree of certainty, while others remain provisional or unknown. In some cases, the genus can be determined with reasonable confidence, but the exact species cannot.

To reflect this, each entry has been assigned one of the following confidence levels:

- **Secure Identification** - The identification is strongly supported by the ancient evidence and is widely accepted in modern scholarship. Little or no significant disagreement exists regarding the plant's identity.
- **Well Supported Identification** - The identification is broadly accepted and fits the available historical, linguistic, and botanical evidence, although complete certainty is not possible.
- **Probable Identification** - The proposed identification represents the most likely interpretation of the available evidence, but reasonable alternative identifications have been suggested.

- **Possible Identification** - The ancient evidence is insufficient to support a single convincing identification. One or more modern proposals exist, but the plant's identity remains uncertain.
- **Unknown Identification** - The ancient source preserves the plant name or its use, but there is currently no reliable basis for identifying it with a specific modern plant.

A Note on the Illustrations

The illustrations throughout this volume are artistic interpretations of the plants discussed rather than formal botanical illustrations. While care has been taken to capture the characteristic appearance and recognizable features of each species, the drawings are intended to complement the text rather than serve as scientific identification guides.

With these principles in mind, we now turn to the surviving herb corpus itself, preserving the ancient sources while presenting the most carefully supported modern botanical identifications currently available.

PART ONE:
CHAPTER FOUR
THE HERB CORPUS

Alder

Scientific Name: *Alnus* spp.

Gaulish Name: *Uernetus* (attested)

Identification Status: Probable

Attested Sources

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book IX, Line 131

"The herb, which is called *uernetus* in Gaulish, you will crush and squeeze out its juice and pour it into the deaf ear; this remedy also cures pain."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Alder is a moisture loving deciduous tree commonly found along rivers, streams, marshes, and wetlands throughout much of Europe. It is recognized by its rounded leaves, catkins, and small woody cones that remain on the branches after seed dispersal.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Several species of alder were widespread throughout Gaul, particularly in lowland river valleys and wet forests. Because of its preference for waterlogged soils, alder would have been a familiar tree along many waterways and floodplains.

Attested Uses

The surviving evidence preserves one medicinal use. Marcellus records that the juice of a plant called *Uernetus* was crushed and placed into the ear to treat deafness and relieve pain. No additional Gaulish uses are explicitly preserved in the surviving record.

Historical Notes

The exact identification of *Uernetus* remains uncertain. Many scholars associate the name with alder because of linguistic similarities, although complete certainty is impossible. The surviving text does not provide a botanical description that allows definitive identification.



Commentary

Although the evidence is brief, the passage demonstrates that Gaulish plant names continued to circulate into Late Antiquity and were considered valuable enough for Roman physicians to preserve. Even a single reference such as this offers a rare glimpse into regional botanical knowledge and reminds us how much of the tradition has been lost.

Asarabacca

Scientific Name: *Asarum europaeum*

Gaulish Name: *Baccar*

Identification Status: *Well Supported*



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica I.9

"For pains in the head, new ulcers of the eyes, breasts inflamed after childbearing, and erysipelas. The smell induces sleep. The Gauls call it Baccar."

Botanical Description

Asarabacca is a low growing evergreen woodland herb with glossy heart shaped leaves and inconspicuous purple brown flowers that grow close to the forest floor.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

The plant grows throughout temperate Europe in shaded deciduous woodlands and would have been present across much of eastern and central Gaul.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides attributes several medicinal properties to the plant.

- Head pain
- Eye ulcers
- Inflammation after childbirth
- Erysipelas
- Sleep induction through its aroma

The passage also preserves the Gaulish name Baccar, providing one of the clearest examples of a native plant name entering the classical botanical tradition.

Historical Notes

Whether the medicinal properties described by Dioscorides originated with Gaulish practitioners or reflect broader Greco-Roman herbal knowledge cannot be determined.

The significance of the passage lies primarily in the preservation of the Gaulish name itself.

Commentary

The preservation of *Baccar* demonstrates that Roman physicians occasionally considered regional plant names important enough to record alongside Latin terminology. Such references offer valuable evidence for the interaction between local botanical traditions and the wider medical literature of the Roman world.

Betony

Scientific Name: *Betonica officinalis*

Identification Status: Secure

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 25.46.1



"The Vettones in Spain discovered the plant called *vettonica* in Gaul, *serratula* in Italy, and *cestros* or *psychrotrophon* by the Greeks, a plant more highly valued than any other. It springs up with an angular stem of two cubits, spreading out from the root leaves rather like those of *lapathum*, serrated, and with a purple fruiting-head. Its leaves are dried into a powder and used for very many purposes. From it are made a wine and a vinegar, good for the stomach and the eyesight. So great is its fame that the home in which it has been planted is considered to be safe from all dangers."

Botanical Description

Betony is a perennial herb of the mint family distinguished by its square stems, serrated leaves, and spikes of purple flowers. It commonly grows in meadows, woodland edges, and open grasslands throughout much of Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Betony was well established throughout Gaul and neighboring regions, where Pliny records it under the name *vettonica*. Its broad distribution made it a familiar medicinal herb across much of western Europe.

Attested Uses

Pliny describes betony as one of the most highly valued medicinal plants known in his day.

Its recorded uses include:

- Treatment of stomach ailments.
- Support for eyesight.
- Preparation as medicinal wine.
- Preparation as medicinal vinegar.

Pliny also records a widespread belief that a house in which betony was planted was protected from danger.

Historical Notes

The origin of the name *vettonica* is debated. Pliny attributes its discovery to the Vettones of Hispania while noting its use in Gaul. Whether this reflects the plant's origin, its widespread use, or simply Roman tradition remains uncertain.

The protective reputation attached to the plant appears alongside its medicinal value, illustrating that practical healing and protective belief were not necessarily viewed as separate categories in the ancient world.

Commentary

Betony occupies an unusual place within the classical record. Pliny praises it more highly than almost any other herb and preserves both its medicinal applications and its protective reputation. Together, these suggest that the plant was valued not only for healing but also for safeguarding the household, demonstrating how health and protection could be understood as closely related aspects of well being.

Birch

Scientific Name: *Betula* spp.

Identification Status: Secure

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 16.30.1



"The latter is a Gallic tree, of a remarkable white colour and slenderness, a cause of terror as supplying the magistrates' rods of office; it is also easily bent to make hoops and likewise the ribs of small baskets, and the Gauls extract from it bitumen by boiling."

Botanical Description

Birch is a deciduous tree recognized by its pale, often white bark, slender trunk, and light canopy. Several species grow throughout Europe, particularly in cooler climates and disturbed woodland.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Birch was widespread across Gaul, particularly in northern forests and upland regions. Its flexible wood and distinctive bark made it valuable for both practical and domestic purposes.

Attested Uses

Pliny records several uses for birch among the Gauls:

- Wood for magistrates' rods.
- Flexible branches for hoops.
- Basket making.
- Extraction of bitumen or tar through boiling.

Pliny also identifies birch as a distinctly Gallic tree.

Historical Notes

The exact substance translated as "bitumen" is generally understood to refer to birch tar or birch pitch rather than naturally occurring petroleum. Birch tar was widely used throughout ancient Europe as an adhesive, sealant, and preservative.

Pliny's description emphasizes the practical importance of the tree rather than medicinal or ritual applications.

Commentary

Birch illustrates how deeply trees were woven into everyday life. Rather than appearing primarily as a sacred or medicinal species, the surviving evidence highlights its usefulness, flexibility, and economic value. Its association with authority through magistrates' rods also hints that practical materials could simultaneously carry social significance.

Brookweed

Scientific Name: *Samolus valerandi*

Identification Status: Probable

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 24.63.1



The Druids also have given the name of *samolus* to a certain plant that grows in humid localities. This, too, they say, must be gathered fasting with the left hand, as a preservative against the maladies to which swine and cattle are subject. The person who gathers it must be careful not to look behind him, nor must it be laid anywhere but in the troughs from which the cattle drink."

Botanical Description

Brookweed is a small perennial herb that grows in marshes, wet meadows, stream margins, and other damp environments. It bears clusters of delicate white flowers and thrives in consistently moist soils.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Brookweed was native to the wetlands and marshes of Gaul, making it readily available in many lowland regions and river valleys.

Attested Uses

Pliny records brookweed as a veterinary remedy.

Its documented purpose was:

- Protection of swine from disease.
- Protection of cattle from disease.

The preparation involved crushing the freshly gathered plant into the animals' drinking trough.

Gathering Practices

Pliny preserves one of the most detailed harvesting instructions associated with any Gaulish plant.

The collector was instructed to:

- Fast before gathering.

- Gather the plant with the left hand.
- Avoid looking directly at the plant while harvesting.
- Place it directly into the drinking trough.
- Avoid setting the plant down before use.

These actions suggest that gathering itself was regarded as an intentional and carefully regulated activity.

Historical Notes

Brookweed is one of the clearest examples of a plant accompanied by explicit ritual instructions in the classical record. Whether these practices originated among the Druids, local healers, or broader regional custom cannot be determined, but their preservation by Pliny indicates that they were considered distinctive enough to record.

Commentary

Brookweed provides one of the strongest pieces of evidence that plant gathering among the Gauls could involve prescribed actions extending beyond simple collection. The combination of fasting, left handed gathering, and restrictions on movement suggests a disciplined approach in which the manner of harvesting was understood to be inseparable from the plant's intended use. Brookweed occupies a central place in understanding the historical foundations of *Samolouissus*.

Buttercup

Scientific Name: *Ranunculus* spp.

Gaulish Name: *Blutthagio* (attested)

Identification Status: Possible



Attested Sources

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book IX, Line 131

"The herb, which is called *blutthagio* in Gaulish, grows in moist places. You grind it and, even if there is only a little juice, you mix the juice with a little vinegar, stir it together, and instill it into the ears to protect them and warm them."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Buttercups (*Ranunculus* spp.) are herbaceous flowering plants commonly recognized by their bright yellow, glossy flowers. Many species prefer damp meadows, marshes, stream banks, and other moist environments.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Various species of buttercup were widespread throughout Gaul, particularly in wetlands, river valleys, and seasonally damp grasslands.

Attested Uses

Marcellus records buttercup, under the Gaulish name *blutthagio*, as a remedy for ailments of the ear.

Its recorded use involved:

- Crushing the plant to extract its juice.
- Mixing the juice with a small amount of vinegar.
- Instilling the preparation into the ear to provide warmth and protection.

Historical Notes

The precise botanical identification of *blutthagio* remains uncertain, though it is generally associated with a species of buttercup based on the description of its habitat and later scholarly interpretation.

Like several remedies preserved by Marcellus, the passage preserves the Gaulish plant name alongside its medicinal application, providing valuable evidence for the persistence of regional botanical knowledge.

Commentary

Although brief, this passage demonstrates the practical character of Gaulish herbal medicine. The emphasis lies not only upon the plant itself but also upon its careful preparation. The preservation of the Gaulish name *blutthagio* further illustrates how local botanical traditions continued to be recognized within late Roman medical literature. The identification with buttercup (*Ranunculus*) is a modern proposal based primarily on habitat and traditional medicinal use.

Celtic (Gallic) Nard

Scientific Name: *Valeriana celtica*
Identification Status: *Well Supported*



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica, Book I

Celtic nard is recommended as a tonic for the spleen, stomach, liver, and kidneys. It may be taken with wine and wormwood and is also used in warm compresses, liquid medicines, and warming ointments.

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 12.26.2; 21.79.1

Pliny describes Gallic nard as a valuable medicinal plant harvested with its roots, washed in wine, dried in the shade, and stored carefully. He compares it favorably with Indian and Syrian nard while warning against adulteration with another plant known as "little goat."

He also records its medicinal applications, including treatment for:

- Snake bites.
- Flatulence.
- Disorders of the liver.
- Disorders of the kidneys.
- Excess bile.
- Dropsy.
- Excessive menstruation.

Botanical Description

Celtic valerian is a small perennial alpine plant of the honeysuckle family. Its aromatic roots were highly valued in antiquity and were widely traded for medicinal purposes.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Unlike many herbs in this corpus, Celtic nard was largely associated with mountainous regions, particularly the Alps and neighboring uplands of southeastern Gaul. Its relative scarcity contributed to its commercial value.

Attested Uses

The historical record preserves numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment of:

- Disorders of the spleen.
- Disorders of the stomach.
- Liver ailments.
- Kidney ailments.
- Snake bites.
- Dropsy.
- Excess bile.
- Flatulence.
- Excessive menstrual bleeding.

It was also prepared as:

- Warm compresses.
- Medicinal wines.
- Ointments.
- Liquid medicines.

Historical Notes

Celtic nard appears more frequently in the classical record than many Gaulish herbs, reflecting both its medicinal reputation and its economic importance. Pliny devotes considerable attention to its preparation, quality, and commercial trade, indicating that it was regarded as a valuable commodity throughout the Roman world.

The comparison with Indian nard illustrates the interconnected nature of ancient medicinal trade while distinguishing the Gallic variety as a respected regional equivalent.

Commentary

Celtic nard represents one of the clearest examples of a Gaulish medicinal plant achieving recognition beyond its homeland. The surviving evidence portrays it not merely as a local remedy but as a widely valued medicinal substance whose preparation, quality, and trade received careful attention. Its prominence demonstrates that Gaulish botanical knowledge contributed to the broader pharmacological traditions of the ancient Mediterranean.

Colt's Foot

Scientific Name: *Tussilago farfara* L.

Gaulish Name: *Calliomarcus* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book XVI, Line 101

"An effective remedy for a cough: the herb, which is called *calliomarcus* in Gaulish and *equi ungula* in Latin, is collected during the old (waning) moon... dried beforehand, placed into a new vessel with burning coals, sealed with clay, and inhaled through a reed until the vapor reaches the chest and stomach."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Colt's foot is a perennial herb recognized by its bright yellow flowers, which appear before its broad, hoof shaped leaves. It commonly grows in disturbed soils, stream banks, roadsides, and damp open ground.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Colt's foot was widespread throughout Gaul and much of temperate Europe, thriving in moist soils and disturbed habitats.

Attested Uses

Marcellus records colt's foot as a treatment for coughs.

The remedy involved:

- Gathering the plant during the waning moon.
- Drying the herb.
- Heating it within a new vessel over burning coals.
- Sealing the vessel with clay.
- Inhaling the warm vapors through a reed.

Gathering Practices

This passage preserves one of the most detailed ritual preparations associated with a medicinal herb.

The instructions include:

- Harvest during the waning moon.
- Gather on a specified day (*liduna die lovis*).
- Dry the herb before use.
- Use a new vessel.
- Seal the vessel with clay.
- Administer the remedy through inhalation rather than ingestion.

Historical Notes

The expression *liduna die lovis* remains uncertain.

As noted by Cunolugus Drugaisos, the reference may not indicate the Roman weekday Thursday but instead preserve a Gaulish calendrical designation associated with the waning moon. The term *liduna* has no secure parallel in standard Latin dictionaries and may represent a Latinized form of an otherwise unattested Gaulish lunar term.

This uncertainty illustrates the challenges of interpreting late antique medical texts that preserve fragments of regional tradition.

Commentary

Colt's foot is particularly valuable because the surviving account preserves not only the medicinal purpose of the plant but also a remarkably detailed sequence of preparation. The emphasis on timing, specialized equipment, and controlled administration suggests that successful healing depended upon disciplined practice rather than the plant alone. It provides another important window into the structured approach that characterized aspects of Gaulish herbal knowledge. The medicinal use and description align closely with *Tussilago farfara*, which has a long history in European medicine as a cough remedy. Although the exact morphology is not described, the therapeutic application strongly supports the traditional identification.

Comfrey

Scientific Name: *Symphytum* spp.

Gaulish Name: *Halus* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 26.26.1

"Halus also, which the Gauls call *sil* and the Veneti *cotonea*, cures pain in the side, as well as kidney troubles, sprains and ruptures. It is like *ox-eunila*, and the tops are like those of thyme. It is sweet and allays thirst. Its roots are in some districts light, in others dark."

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book XXXI, Line 29

"The comfrey root, which herb is called *halus* in Gaulish, either chewed or burnt and ground up is placed in a draught against hemorrhoids discharging excessively."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Comfrey (*Symphytum* spp.) is a perennial herb recognized by its broad, rough leaves, drooping bell shaped flowers, and deep black roots. It thrives in moist meadows, stream banks, woodland edges, and other nutrient rich soils.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Comfrey was widespread throughout Gaul, particularly in damp habitats near rivers and wetlands. Its abundance and medicinal properties made it a well known component of traditional herbal practice.

Attested Uses

The surviving sources attribute several medicinal uses to comfrey.

These include treatment for:

- Pain in the side.
- Kidney ailments.
- Sprains.

- Ruptures.
- Excessive hemorrhoidal bleeding.

Marcellus records that the root was either chewed or burned, ground into a powder, and administered in a medicinal drink.

Historical Notes

Pliny preserves several regional names associated with this plant, recording *sil* among the Gauls and *cotonea* among the Veneti. Marcellus, however, preserves the Gaulish name *halus*. Whether these names refer to regional dialects, different varieties, or separate traditions remains uncertain.

Modern medicine recognizes comfrey as containing compounds that promote tissue repair while also containing pyrrolizidine alkaloids, making internal use potentially harmful. This modern knowledge should not be read back into the historical evidence but does illustrate the complexity of traditional medicinal plants.

Commentary

Comfrey appears consistently within the historical record as a plant associated with restoring damaged tissues and relieving physical injury. Its repeated use in treating wounds, sprains, and internal ailments reflects a broader concern with repair and recovery, making it one of the more substantial medicinal herbs preserved in the Gaulish tradition.

Common Birthwort

Scientific Name: *Aristolochia clematitis*

Gaulish Name: *Theximon* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 3.6

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called the plant *Theximon*. He attributes numerous medicinal uses to it, including treatment for asthma, chills, disorders of the spleen, hernias, convulsions, wounds, ulcers, gum disease, fevers, and other ailments. He also notes its use as a fumigation, with the smoke inhaled over burning coals during severe fever.

Botanical Description

Common birthwort is a perennial herb distinguished by its heart shaped leaves and unusual yellow-green tubular flowers. It grows in warm, rocky slopes, open woodland, disturbed ground, and mountainous regions throughout southern and central Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Although less common than many woodland herbs, birthwort occurred in suitable habitats throughout parts of Gaul, particularly in warmer and limestone rich regions.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides attributes a wide range of medicinal applications to birthwort.

These include treatment for:

- Asthma.
- Chills.
- Disorders of the spleen.
- Hernias.
- Convulsions.
- Side pain.
- Wounds.
- Ulcers.
- Gum and tooth ailments.
- Fever.
- Nasal lesions.

The plant was administered in several forms, including drinks, poultices, ointments, and fumigations.

Historical Notes

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Theximon* provides another valuable example of local botanical terminology entering the wider Greco–Roman medical tradition.

Modern research has shown that species of *Aristolochia* contain aristolochic acids, compounds now known to be highly toxic and associated with severe kidney damage and cancer. This modern understanding underscores the importance of approaching historical remedies as evidence of ancient practice rather than contemporary medical guidance.

Commentary

Birthwort illustrates both the breadth and complexity of ancient herbal medicine. The extraordinary range of ailments for which it was prescribed reflects its importance within classical pharmacology, while its preserved Gaulish name demonstrates that regional knowledge remained visible within larger medical traditions. It also serves as a reminder that historical significance does not necessarily imply modern safety.

Climbing Ivy

Scientific Name: *Hedera helix*

Gaulish Name: *Subites* (attested)

Identification Status: Secure



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 2.210

Taken in a drink of wine is good for dysentery, but it must be taken twice daily. The Gauls called it *Subites*.

Botanical Description

Common ivy is a woody evergreen vine that climbs trees, stone walls, and rocky surfaces by means of aerial rootlets. It is widely distributed throughout Europe and remains green throughout the year.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Climbing ivy was abundant throughout Gaul, particularly in woodlands, hedgerows, rocky slopes, and abandoned structures. Its evergreen nature made it one of the most recognizable plants of the European landscape.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records one medicinal application.

The plant was taken in wine for the treatment of:

- Dysentery.

The remedy was administered twice daily.

Historical Notes

Although the surviving passage is brief, it preserves the Gaulish name *Subites*, providing another important witness to regional botanical vocabulary.

Elsewhere in classical literature, ivy frequently appears in association with Dionysus/Bacchus and festive traditions. Those broader Mediterranean associations, however, should not be assumed to reflect Gaulish understandings unless supported by specific evidence.

Commentary

The historical evidence for climbing ivy within a Gaulish context is modest but significant. Its preserved name contributes to the corpus of attested Gaulish plant terminology, while its medicinal use demonstrates that even familiar and widespread plants occupied a place within regional healing traditions. As with many entries in this corpus, the value of the evidence lies not in its quantity but in its preservation.

Clover

Scientific Name: *Trifolium* spp.

Gaulish Name: *Uisumarus* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book III, Line 25

"For dizziness of the head (*vertigo*): The herb *trifolium*, which is called *uisumarus* in Gaulish, you soak in cold water and drink this water for ten days, but you should change the herb daily."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Clover (*Trifolium* spp.) is a low growing perennial herb recognized by its characteristic three part leaves and rounded flower heads, which range in color from white to pink and purple. It grows abundantly in meadows, grasslands, roadsides, and cultivated fields throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Various species of clover were widespread across Gaul, particularly in open pastures and agricultural landscapes where they formed a common component of native vegetation.

Attested Uses

Marcellus records clover, under the Gaulish name *uisumarus*, as a treatment for dizziness or vertigo.

The preparation involved:

- Soaking the fresh herb in cold water.
- Drinking the infused water daily for ten days.
- Replacing the herb with fresh material each day.

Historical Notes

The repeated replacement of the herb over a ten day period suggests that freshness formed an important part of the remedy's preparation. Whether this reflected practical herbal knowledge or formed part of a broader therapeutic tradition cannot be determined from the surviving text.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *uisumarus* contributes another valuable example of regional botanical vocabulary recorded in late antique medicine.

Commentary

Although the surviving reference is brief, it preserves a complete therapeutic regimen rather than a single application. The emphasis on daily renewal suggests that the preparation itself was viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one time remedy, illustrating the careful and structured nature of some Gaulish medicinal practices.

Clubmoss

Scientific Name: *Huperzia selago*

Identification Status: Possible

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 24.62



"Similar to savin is the herb known as *selago*. Care is taken to gather it without the use of iron, the right hand being passed through the left sleeve of the tunic as though the gatherer were in the act of committing a theft. The clothing, too, must be white, the feet bare and washed clean, and a sacrifice of bread and wine must be made before gathering it. It is carried also in a new napkin. The Druids of Gaul have maintained that this plant should be carried upon the person as a protection against accidents of every kind and that its smoke is especially beneficial for diseases of the eyes."

Botanical Description

Fir clubmoss is a small evergreen lycophyte with upright, densely branched stems resembling miniature conifer branches. It grows in upland forests, heathlands, and mountainous regions throughout northern and western Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Clubmoss occurred throughout the forests and uplands of Gaul, particularly in cooler mountainous regions where it grew among conifers and acidic woodland soils.

Attested Uses

Pliny attributes two principal uses to *selago*:

- Carried as a protective charm against accidents.
- Smoke used in the treatment of eye ailments.

Gathering Practices

Pliny preserves one of the most elaborate gathering rituals associated with any plant in the classical record.

The collector was instructed to:

- Avoid the use of iron.
- Reach through the left sleeve with the right hand while gathering.
- Wear white clothing.

- Wash the feet beforehand.
- Gather barefoot.
- Offer bread and wine before harvesting.
- Carry the plant in a new cloth or napkin.

These instructions strongly suggest that harvesting was regarded as a deliberate and highly regulated act rather than ordinary collection.

Historical Notes

Pliny explicitly attributes these practices to the Druids of Gaul, making this one of the clearest surviving descriptions of a plant associated with Druidic gathering traditions.

Whether every element of the account reflects direct observation or Roman interpretation cannot be determined. Nevertheless, the remarkable level of detail distinguishes *selago* from nearly every other plant preserved in the historical record.

Pliny does not describe the method by which the smoke was applied. It is possible that the herb was burned as a ritual fumigation, with the smoke passing before or around the face and eyes as part of a healing or purification rite. Because Pliny is recording Druidic tradition rather than providing a clinical description, the exact practice cannot be reconstructed with certainty.

Commentary

Alongside brookweed, *selago* provides one of the strongest surviving witnesses to the ceremonial dimensions of plant gathering in ancient Gaul. The emphasis on preparation, purity, offerings, specialized movement, and the avoidance of iron suggests that the manner of collection was understood as inseparable from the plant's efficacy. *Selago* occupies a central place in any study of Gaulish plant knowledge.

The traditional identification is Fir Clubmoss (Huperzia selago), Pliny's reference to the medicinal use of its smoke has led some scholars to question this identification. No alternative species has achieved general scholarly acceptance, so the identification remains possible rather than certain.

Creeping Cinquefoil

Scientific Name: *Potentilla reptans*

Gaulish Name: *Pempedula* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.42

Used as a mouthwash, it stops decaying ulcers in the mouth; gargled, it relieves roughness of the throat; and taken as a drink, it helps flowing bowels, dysentery, arthritis, and sciatica. The Gauls call it *Pempedula*.

Botanical Description

Creeping cinquefoil is a low growing perennial herb with five part leaves, yellow flowers, and long creeping runners that spread across open ground. It commonly inhabits meadows, roadsides, grasslands, and disturbed soils.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

The plant was widespread throughout Gaul, thriving in open habitats, pastures, and cultivated landscapes where it formed dense mats across the ground.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records several medicinal applications for creeping cinquefoil.

These include treatment for:

- Mouth ulcers.
- Sore throat.
- Diarrhea.
- Dysentery.
- Arthritis.
- Sciatica.

The plant was administered as:

- A mouthwash.
- A gargle.
- A medicinal drink.

Historical Notes

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Pempedula* provides another important example of indigenous botanical terminology surviving within the classical medical tradition.

The range of medicinal uses attributed to the plant reflects its reputation as an astringent remedy within ancient herbal medicine.

Commentary

Creeping cinquefoil appears in the historical record as a versatile medicinal herb, particularly in the treatment of inflammatory conditions affecting both the mouth and digestive system. Its preserved Gaulish name, together with its broad therapeutic applications, demonstrates the continued visibility of regional plant knowledge within the wider medical literature of the Roman world.

Cudweed

Scientific Name: *Gnaphalium* spp.

Gaulish Name: *Gelasonen* (attested)

Identification Status: Probable



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 3.132

"The leaves given to drink with strong wine are good for dysentery. The Gauls call it *Gelasonen*."

Botanical Description

Cudweed (*Gnaphalium* spp.) is a small herbaceous plant recognized by its woolly gray green leaves and clusters of pale, papery flowers. It commonly grows in dry grasslands, disturbed soils, roadsides, and open fields throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Various species of cudweed were widespread throughout Gaul, particularly in open meadows, cultivated land, and dry hillsides.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records one medicinal application.

The leaves were administered with strong wine for the treatment of:

- Dysentery.

Historical Notes

Although the surviving reference is brief, it preserves the Gaulish name *Gelasonen*, adding another indigenous plant name to the historical record.

No additional Gaulish uses are explicitly recorded in the surviving sources.

Commentary

Cudweed illustrates how even a single preserved reference can contribute to our understanding of Gaulish botanical knowledge. While the medicinal application is modest, the preservation of the Gaulish name demonstrates that local plant traditions continued to be recognized within the wider medical literature of the ancient world.

Dwarf Elder

Scientific Name: *Sambucus ebulus*

Gaulish Names: *Ducone* and *Odocos* (attested)

Identification Status: Secure



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.175

Dioscorides describes dwarf elder as a medicinal herb possessing drying and purgative properties. He attributes numerous therapeutic applications to its leaves, stalks, roots, and fruits. He also records that the Gauls called the plant *Ducone*.

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book VII, Line 13

"The herb, which is called *acte* in Greek, *ebulum* in Latin, and *odocos* in Gaulish, is pressed together with its berries, and the juice is spread daily through the hair with a comb to dye it."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Dwarf elder is a perennial herb with upright, hollow stems, finely divided leaves, clusters of white flowers, and dark purple black berries. Unlike the common elder, it dies back to the ground each year and spreads through creeping underground rhizomes.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Dwarf elder grew throughout much of Gaul in disturbed ground, woodland edges, roadsides, and open fields, particularly in fertile soils.

Attested Uses

The surviving sources preserve a remarkably broad range of medicinal and practical uses.

These include treatment for:

- Dropsy.
- Snake bites.
- Inflammation.
- Burns.

- Dog bites.
- Gout.
- Disorders affecting the womb.
- Excess phlegm.
- Excess bile.

The plant was also used:

- As a purgative.
- As a medicinal bath.
- As a hair dye to darken the hair.
- To improve the appearance of curled hair.

Historical Notes

Two different Gaulish names are preserved for this plant.

Dioscorides records the name *Ducone*, while Marcellus preserves *Odocos*. Whether these represent regional dialects, separate traditions, or textual variation cannot be determined.

Dwarf elder contains compounds that are toxic when improperly prepared. Although widely employed in ancient medicine, modern handling should remain cautious and informed by contemporary botanical knowledge.

Commentary

Dwarf elder is one of the most extensively documented herbs within the surviving Gaulish record. Its numerous medicinal applications, combined with its cosmetic use as a hair dye, demonstrate that plants often occupied multiple roles within daily life. The preservation of two Gaulish names further suggests that the plant was widely known across different regions or traditions.

Dyer's Woad

Scientific Name: *Isatis tinctoria*

Gaulish Name: *Glastum* (attested)

Identification Status: Secure



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 22.2.1

"In Gaul there is a plant like the plantain, called *glastum*; with it the wives of the Britons, and their daughters-in-law, stain all the body, and at certain religious ceremonies march along naked, with a colour resembling that of Ethiopians."

Botanical Description

Dyer's woad is a biennial herb with blue green leaves and clusters of small yellow flowers. It is best known as one of the principal ancient European sources of blue dye, produced by fermenting its leaves.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Woad was cultivated and gathered throughout parts of Gaul and neighboring Britain, where it served as an important source of blue pigment for textiles and, according to classical authors, body decoration.

Attested Uses

Pliny records one principal use.

The leaves were processed to produce a blue dye used for:

- Body staining during religious ceremonies.

The plant was also widely valued throughout antiquity as a source of blue textile dye.

Historical Notes

Pliny's description specifically associates *glastum* with the Britons rather than the continental Gauls, while identifying the plant itself as occurring in Gaul. His account is one of the principal classical references connecting woad with ritual body coloring.

The extent to which this practice occurred throughout Gaul, as opposed to Britain, cannot be determined from the surviving evidence. Likewise, Pliny's description should

be read within the context of Roman ethnographic writing, which often emphasized the distinctive customs of neighboring peoples.

Commentary

Unlike many plants in this corpus, woad is remembered less for its medicinal properties than for its role in color, identity, and public display. The preservation of the Gaulish name *Glastum* highlights the cultural importance of the plant, while Pliny's account illustrates how botanical materials could serve not only practical needs but also communal and ceremonial expression.

Eggplant

Scientific Name: *Solanum melongena*

Gaulish Name: *Scubulum* (attested)

Identification Status: Possible



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.71

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called the plant *Scubulum*. He attributes numerous medicinal applications to its leaves, including treatments for skin diseases, eye ailments, inflammation, stomach pain, psoriasis, and earache.

Botanical Description

Eggplant is a perennial plant of the nightshade family, typically cultivated as an annual. It bears broad leaves, purple flowers, and fleshy fruits that range in color from deep purple to white. Although native to Asia, it became known throughout the Mediterranean world during antiquity.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

The precise extent of eggplant cultivation in Gaul remains uncertain. While Dioscorides preserves a Gaulish name for the plant, suggesting familiarity with it, it was likely less common than many native European herbs and may have been introduced through trade with the Mediterranean.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides attributes a variety of medicinal applications to the leaves.

These include treatment for:

- Streptococcal skin infections.
- Shingles.
- Eye ulcers.
- General aches.
- Inflammation of the stomach.
- Inflammation of the parotid gland.
- Psoriasis in children.
- Eye discharges.
- Earache.

The plant was prepared in several ways, including poultices, washes, and ear drops.

Historical Notes

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Scubulum* indicates that the plant was sufficiently familiar to possess a regional designation. Whether this reflects cultivation within Gaul or knowledge acquired through trade cannot be determined from the surviving evidence.

Commentary

Eggplant demonstrates that the Gaulish botanical record was not limited solely to native woodland herbs. The survival of a Gaulish name alongside a wide range of medicinal applications illustrates how regional plant knowledge interacted with the broader medical traditions of the ancient Mediterranean.

Some modern researchers have proposed Black Nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*) instead of Eggplant, while older translations use Eggplant. There is no clear scholarly consensus.

Elderberry

Scientific Name: *Sambucus nigra*

Gaulish Name: *Scobie* (attested)

Identification Status: Secure



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.174

Dioscorides describes the common elder as a tree like plant with hollow stems, clusters of white flowers, and dark purple black berries. He records that the Romans called it *sambucus*, while the Gauls knew it as *Scobie*.

Botanical Description

Elderberry is a deciduous shrub or small tree recognized by its hollow branches, compound leaves, broad clusters of fragrant white flowers, and dark berries. It commonly grows along woodland edges, hedgerows, riverbanks, and disturbed ground.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Elderberry was widespread throughout Gaul, thriving in fertile soils and disturbed habitats where it became one of the most familiar shrubs of the European landscape.

Attested Uses

In the surviving Gaulish reference, Dioscorides primarily provides a botanical description together with the plant's regional names.

Elsewhere in classical medicine, elderberry was widely employed for numerous medicinal purposes, though these applications are not specifically connected to the Gaulish tradition in the surviving passage.

Historical Notes

Unlike the preceding entry on dwarf elder (*Sambucus ebulus*), this passage serves chiefly as a botanical description and preserves the Gaulish name *Scobie*. The distinction between the tree form elder and the herbaceous dwarf elder was clearly recognized by Dioscorides.

Commentary

Although little specifically Gaulish practice survives for elderberry, the preservation of the name *Scobie* provides another important witness to indigenous botanical vocabulary. Together with the related entry on dwarf elder, it illustrates the careful

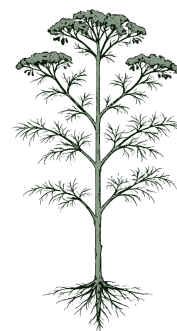
distinction ancient authors made between closely related species and their differing uses.

Fennel

Scientific Name: *Foeniculum vulgare* Mill.

Gaulish Name: *Sistrameor* (attested)

Identification Status: Possible



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 3.82

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called fennel *Sistrameor*. He attributes numerous medicinal uses to the plant, including treatments for digestive disorders, poisonous bites, urinary stones, jaundice, and women's health following childbirth.

Botanical Description

Fennel is a tall aromatic perennial herb with finely divided feathery leaves, yellow flower umbels, and strongly scented seeds. It grows naturally in open, sunny habitats and has long been cultivated throughout Europe and the Mediterranean.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Fennel was known throughout southern and central Gaul, both as a cultivated herb and in suitable wild habitats. Its aromatic qualities and medicinal value contributed to its widespread use.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Diarrhea.
- Poisonous animal bites.
- Urinary or kidney stones.
- Jaundice.

He also notes that a decoction of the leaves:

- Encouraged the production of breast milk.
- Assisted women following childbirth.

Historical Notes

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Sistrameor* demonstrates that fennel was sufficiently established within Gaulish botanical knowledge to possess its own indigenous designation.

Many of the medicinal properties attributed to fennel by Dioscorides continued to appear throughout later European herbal traditions, reflecting the plant's long standing therapeutic reputation.

Commentary

Fennel stands among the more versatile medicinal plants preserved in the historical record. Its association with digestive health, recovery after childbirth, and protection against poisoning reflects a broad therapeutic role within ancient medicine. The survival of its Gaulish name further emphasizes the integration of local botanical knowledge into the wider pharmacological traditions of the classical world.

Ferns

Scientific Name: *Pteridophyta*

Gaulish Name: *Ratis* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book XXV, Line 37

"The herb *pteris*, that is, the fern, which is called *ratis* in Gaulish and which often grows upon the beech tree, has its roots beaten and placed into a draught with wine for those suffering from pains of the hips."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Ferns are ancient vascular plants that reproduce by spores rather than seeds. They are characterized by divided fronds and thrive in moist woodlands, rocky slopes, stream banks, and shaded environments. Numerous species occur throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Ferns were abundant throughout Gaul, particularly in forests and damp valleys. Although Marcellus associates *ratis* with growth upon beech trees, this likely refers to ferns growing among the roots or at the base of beech woodlands rather than as true epiphytes.

Attested Uses

Marcellus records one medicinal application.

The roots were:

- Crushed.
- Mixed with wine.
- Administered as a draught.

The preparation was intended to relieve:

- Pain of the hips.

Historical Notes

The phrase describing the plant as growing "on the beech tree" is unusual, as European ferns do not normally grow directly upon trees. The passage may instead refer to ferns commonly found in beech forests or represent a translation of a regional expression.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Ratis* provides another valuable example of indigenous botanical terminology surviving into late antique medicine.

Commentary

Although only one medicinal use is preserved, the entry demonstrates that even common woodland plants formed part of the therapeutic knowledge remembered within Gaulish tradition. The association with beech forests also reminds us that ancient botanical knowledge often reflected ecological relationships rather than isolated species.

Feverfoullie

Scientific Name: *Centaureum erythraea*

Gaulish Name: *Exacum* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 25.31.1

"This centaury the Romans call the 'gall of earth' because of its extreme bitterness, while the Gauls call it *exacum*, because a draught of it evacuates from the body by stool all harmful drugs."

Pliny also describes the plant's appearance, notes that it grows near springs, and records that its medicinal juice was extracted from the leaves after harvest.

Botanical Description

Common centaury is a slender biennial herb with narrow leaves and clusters of bright pink flowers. It commonly grows in open grasslands, woodland clearings, and damp ground, particularly near springs and moist meadows.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Centaury was widespread throughout Gaul, especially in moist grasslands and along springs, matching Pliny's description of its preferred habitat.

Attested Uses

Pliny records the plant primarily as a powerful medicinal herb.

Its principal recorded use was:

- Purging harmful substances from the body through evacuation.

The medicinal juice was extracted from the leaves after harvesting.

Historical Notes

Pliny explains that the Gaulish name *Exacum* derived from the plant's reputation for expelling harmful substances from the body. Whether this represents a genuine Gaulish etymology or a Roman interpretation cannot be determined.

The association of the plant with springs may simply reflect its natural habitat rather than any symbolic significance.

Commentary

Centaury appears in the historical record as a cleansing herb whose principal value lay in purification through physical elimination. Pliny's preservation of both the Gaulish name and its perceived meaning provides a rare glimpse into how medicinal function may have influenced botanical terminology within the ancient Gaulish world.

Greater Celandine

Scientific Name: *Chelidonium majus*

Gaulish Name: *Thona* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 2.211

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called the plant *Thona*. He attributes numerous medicinal uses to its leaves, roots, and sap, including treatments for eye disorders, jaundice, herpes, and toothache.

Botanical Description

Greater celandine is a perennial herb recognized by its deeply lobed leaves, bright yellow flowers, and distinctive orange yellow sap released when the stems are broken. It commonly grows along hedgerows, woodland edges, walls, and disturbed ground.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Greater celandine was widespread throughout much of Gaul, flourishing in shaded habitats, settlements, and woodland margins.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records several medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Poor eyesight.
- Jaundice.
- Herpes.
- Toothache.

The plant was prepared in several forms, including:

- Honey based eye preparations.
- Dried sap formed into small pellets.
- Root decoctions with anise and white wine.
- External applications with wine.

Historical Notes

The plant's bright yellow sap made it easily recognizable and contributed to its long medicinal history throughout Europe.

Modern botanical research has demonstrated that greater celandine contains numerous biologically active alkaloids and may be toxic if improperly used. Its appearance in the historical record should be understood as evidence of ancient medical practice rather than guidance for contemporary use.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Thona* further enriches the corpus of indigenous botanical terminology.

Commentary

Greater celandine stands among the more extensively documented medicinal herbs of antiquity. Its association with disorders of vision, liver function, and skin reflects the broad therapeutic role it occupied within classical medicine. The survival of its Gaulish name illustrates once again how regional plant knowledge became woven into the wider pharmacological traditions of the ancient Mediterranean.

Hellebore

Scientific Name: *Veratrum album*

Gaulish Name: *Laginum* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.150

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal uses for white hellebore. He recommends gathering the roots at harvest time and describes its use as a powerful purgative, emetic, ingredient in eye salves, abortifacient, and treatment for a variety of ailments.

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 25.25.1

"The Gauls when hunting dip their arrows in hellebore, and say that the meat, when the flesh around the wound has been cut away, tastes more tender... The Gauls called it *Laginum*."

Pliny also notes its use against lice and flies.

Botanical Description

White hellebore is a robust perennial herb with broad pleated leaves and tall spikes of pale green-white flowers. It grows naturally in mountain meadows, damp alpine slopes, and woodland clearings throughout central and southern Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

White hellebore was most common in the mountainous regions of Gaul, particularly the Alps and upland areas where cool, moist conditions favored its growth.

Attested Uses

The surviving sources attribute numerous applications to hellebore.

These include:

- Inducing vomiting.
- Strong purgative.
- Eye salves.
- Inducing sneezing.
- Abortifacient.

- Treatment for lice.
- Killing flies.
- Hunting poison applied to arrows.

Dioscorides also describes several methods of administration, including medicinal drinks, breads, and mixtures with other ingredients.

Historical Notes

Hellebore was regarded throughout antiquity as an exceptionally powerful medicinal plant whose effects required careful preparation. Pliny's account of poisoned hunting arrows provides one of the clearest examples of a plant serving both medicinal and hunting purposes within the Gaulish record.

Modern toxicology recognizes *Veratrum album* as highly poisonous. Its inclusion in this work reflects historical documentation only and should never be understood as a recommendation for practical use.

Commentary

Hellebore stands among the most potent plants preserved within the historical record. Its ability to heal, poison, purge, and kill illustrates the ancient understanding that the same plant could possess both restorative and destructive capacities. The surviving evidence consistently portrays hellebore as a substance requiring knowledge, caution, and restraint.

Henbane

Scientific Name: *Hyoscyamus niger*

Gaulish Name: *Bilinuntiam* (attested)

Identification Status: Probable



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.69

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called henbane *Bilinuntiam*. He attributes numerous medicinal uses to its leaves, seeds, and juice, particularly for pain relief, inflammation, disorders of the womb, coughs, gout, and various eye ailments.

Botanical Description

Henbane is an annual or biennial herb distinguished by its sticky, hairy leaves and pale yellow flowers marked with deep purple veins. It commonly grows on disturbed ground, roadsides, abandoned settlements, and waste places.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Henbane occurred throughout much of Gaul in open, disturbed habitats, particularly near settlements where nutrient rich soils favored its growth.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Ear pain.
- Disorders of the womb.
- Eye inflammation.
- Inflammation of the feet.
- Coughs.
- Gout.
- Swollen breasts after childbirth.
- Menstrual disorders.
- Pain relief.

Preparations included:

- Tablets.
- Poultices.

- Suppositories.
- Seed preparations.
- Leaf applications.

Historical Notes

Henbane was one of the principal pain relieving plants of classical medicine. Ancient physicians recognized both its medicinal value and the need for careful preparation.

Modern science confirms that henbane contains powerful tropane alkaloids capable of producing hallucinations, delirium, paralysis, and death. These properties underscore the importance of viewing the historical evidence as documentation rather than instruction.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Bilinuntiam* provides another important example of indigenous botanical terminology surviving within classical literature.

Commentary

Henbane exemplifies the delicate balance between remedy and poison that characterizes many ancient medicinal plants. The breadth of its recorded applications reflects both its effectiveness and the respect it demanded. Within the Gaulish record, it serves as another reminder that botanical knowledge often involved navigating powerful natural forces through disciplined practice rather than casual experimentation.

Hyacinth

Scientific Name: *Hyacinthus orientalis*

Identification Status: Probable



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 21.97.1

"The hyacinth grows chiefly in Gaul. There they use it to impart a shade to the dye *hysginum*. The root is bulbous... applied in sweet wine it checks the signs of puberty... It relieves colic and counteracts the bites of spiders. It is diuretic. For snake bites, scorpion stings, and jaundice its seed is given mixed with southernwood."

Botanical Description

Hyacinth is a bulb forming perennial recognized by its dense spikes of fragrant blue, violet, pink, or white flowers. Its strap like leaves emerge from an underground bulb during the spring growing season.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Pliny associates hyacinth particularly with Gaul, where it was apparently valued both as a medicinal plant and as a source of dye. The precise species referred to in the classical sources remains open to scholarly discussion.

Attested Uses

Pliny records several applications.

These include:

- Producing dye.
- Treatment for colic.
- Spider bites.
- Snake bites.
- Scorpion stings.
- Jaundice.
- Diuretic.

He also records its controversial use in suppressing the physical signs of puberty.

Historical Notes

Pliny's statement that hyacinth was used by slave dealers to delay puberty reflects a disturbing aspect of the ancient slave trade rather than an accepted medicinal practice. It illustrates how botanical knowledge could be applied within exploitative social systems and should be understood within its historical context rather than as a therapeutic recommendation.

The botanical identity of the ancient "hyacinth" remains debated, as the name was sometimes applied to different flowering plants in classical literature.

Commentary

Hyacinth illustrates the diversity of ways plants entered ancient life, extending beyond medicine into dyes, commerce, and even the darker realities of slavery. Its appearance in the historical record reminds us that botanical knowledge was never morally neutral; plants could serve healing, practical, artistic, or harmful purposes depending upon how human societies chose to employ them.

Juniper

Scientific Name: *Juniperus communis*

Gaulish Name: *Jupicellusum* (attested)

Identification Status: Secure



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 1.103

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called juniper *Jupicellusum*. He attributes numerous medicinal properties to its berries and notes that its smoke was used to drive away snakes.

Botanical Description

Common juniper is an evergreen coniferous shrub or small tree distinguished by its sharp needle like leaves and blue black berry like cones. It grows in open woodlands, heathlands, rocky slopes, and mountainous regions throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Juniper was widespread across Gaul, particularly in upland regions, open forests, and dry, rocky landscapes where it remains common today.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Stomach ailments.
- Disorders of the chest.
- Coughs.
- Flatulence.
- Colic.
- Venomous bites and poisons.
- Convulsions.
- Hernias.
- Disorders of the womb.

He also notes that:

- The berries were used to make wine.
- The smoke was employed to drive away snakes.

- The plant functioned as a diuretic.

Historical Notes

The association of juniper smoke with repelling snakes reflects one of several ancient traditions in which aromatic plants were believed to ward off dangerous animals. Whether this observation originated from practical experience or symbolic association cannot be determined.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Jupicellusum* provides another valuable example of regional botanical terminology entering the classical medical tradition.

Commentary

Juniper appears in the historical record as both a medicinal and protective plant. Its broad therapeutic applications, combined with its association with purification through aromatic smoke, illustrate how practical healing and environmental protection could overlap within ancient botanical knowledge.

Lemon Balm

Scientific Name: *Melissa officinalis*

Gaulish Name: *Merisimorion* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 3.118

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called lemon balm *Merisimorion*. He attributes a wide variety of medicinal uses to the leaves, including treatments for venomous bites, respiratory ailments, digestive disorders, ulcers, gout, and women's health.

Botanical Description

Lemon balm is a fragrant perennial herb of the mint family recognized by its bright green leaves, small white flowers, and distinctive lemon scent released when the foliage is crushed.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Lemon balm grew naturally in parts of southern and central Gaul and was also cultivated in gardens for its medicinal and aromatic qualities.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Scorpion stings.
- Spider bites.
- Dog bites.
- Toothache.
- Dysentery.
- Mushroom poisoning.
- Colic.
- Difficult breathing.
- Goiters.
- Ulcers.
- Gout.

The plant was also used:

- As warm compresses.
- In hip baths.
- As a mouth rinse.
- As an enema or suppository.
- As a medicinal syrup.

Historical Notes

The remarkable range of applications recorded by Dioscorides reflects lemon balm's reputation as a versatile medicinal herb throughout antiquity.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Merisimorion* demonstrates that the plant had become integrated into regional botanical traditions rather than remaining solely part of Greco-Roman medicine.

Commentary

Lemon balm stands among the more broadly useful medicinal herbs preserved in the historical record. Its applications span external wounds, internal disorders, respiratory illness, and women's health, reflecting a plant valued for both comfort and recovery. The survival of its Gaulish name reinforces its place within the wider landscape of Gaulish herbal knowledge.

Limeum

Scientific Identification: Uncertain

Gaulish Name: *Limeum* (attested)

Identification Status: Unknown

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 27.76.1

"Limeum is the name given by the Gauls to a plant that they use to make a drug, called by them deer poison, with which when hunting they poison their arrows. As much of the plant as is usually used for one arrow is mixed with three bushels of saliva stimulant, and when cattle are sick this mash is forced down their throats. Afterwards they must be tied to their stalls until they are purged for they usually go wild and if sweating ensues cold water should be poured over them."

Botanical Description

The botanical identity of *Limeum* remains unknown. Pliny provides no physical description of the plant, making its identification impossible with certainty.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Because the plant cannot be securely identified, its natural distribution within Gaul remains unknown. Pliny's account simply records that it was known and used by the Gauls.

Attested Uses

Pliny records two distinct applications.

The plant was used:

- To prepare a poison applied to hunting arrows for deer.
- As an ingredient in a veterinary preparation administered to sick cattle.

The veterinary treatment involved careful supervision after administration because of its powerful physiological effects.

Historical Notes

Limeum is one of the more enigmatic entries in the surviving Gaulish botanical record. Without a botanical description, modern scholars cannot confidently identify the species to which Pliny refers.

The account is nevertheless valuable because it demonstrates that Gaulish plant knowledge extended beyond medicine into hunting and veterinary care. It also reflects an understanding that powerful substances could serve different purposes depending upon their preparation and dosage.

Commentary

Although the plant itself remains unidentified, *Limeum* offers an important reminder that ancient botanical knowledge encompassed far more than healing alone. The same plant could function as both poison and remedy, depending upon circumstance and intention. This duality reflects a recurring theme throughout the historical record: plants possessed capacities that demanded knowledge, restraint, and careful application rather than simple categorization as either beneficial or harmful.

Meadowsweet

Scientific Name: *Filipendula ulmaria*

Gaulish Name: *Rodarum* (attested)

Identification Status: Probable



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 24.112.1

"When it does not support a vine there grows near it a plant called by the Gauls *Rodarum*. It has a stem with knots, like a twig of a fig tree; the leaves are those of a nettle, whitish in the centre, but in course of time becoming red all over; the blossom is silvery. If the leaves are beaten up with old axle grease, without being touched by iron, they are a sovereign remedy for tumours, inflammations and gatherings. After being rubbed with it the patient spits to his right three times. They say that the remedy is more efficacious if three persons of different nationalities do the rubbing from left to right."

Botanical Description

Meadowsweet is a perennial herb with tall reddish stems, deeply serrated leaves that are pale beneath, and fragrant clusters of creamy white flowers. It grows naturally in damp meadows, marshes, stream banks, and other moist habitats throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Meadowsweet was widespread across Gaul, particularly in wetlands, river valleys, and moist grasslands where it formed dense colonies during the summer months.

Attested Uses

Pliny records the plant as a treatment for:

- Tumors.
- Inflammations.
- Abscesses or swellings.

The remedy involved:

- Crushing the leaves with old axle grease.
- Avoiding the use of iron during preparation.
- Applying the mixture externally.

Pliny also preserves accompanying ritual actions intended to enhance the remedy.

Gathering Practices

The preparation specifically required:

- The plant not to be touched by iron during preparation.

The treatment also included symbolic actions:

- The patient spat three times to the right after application.
- Greater effectiveness was believed to result if three people of different nationalities performed the rubbing from left to right.

Historical Notes

This passage is one of the few surviving examples in which medicinal preparation is explicitly combined with ritualized actions. Whether these gestures originated within Gaulish practice or represent Roman interpretation cannot be determined. Nevertheless, the repeated emphasis on movement, direction, and the avoidance of iron parallels similar gathering traditions recorded elsewhere in the historical record.

Commentary

Meadowsweet occupies an important place within the surviving evidence because it illustrates that healing sometimes extended beyond the medicinal properties of a plant alone. Preparation, direction, and deliberate action appear alongside the remedy itself, suggesting that effective treatment could involve both material and ceremonial elements. Like brookweed and *selago*, *Rodarum* offers another glimpse into the disciplined character of Gaulish plant practice.

Mistletoe

Scientific Name: *Viscum album*

Identification Status: *Secure*



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 16.95

Pliny preserves the most detailed surviving account of mistletoe within Gaulish religious practice. He describes the Druids' reverence for mistletoe growing upon oak trees, the ceremonial harvesting performed on the fifth day of the moon, the use of a golden sickle, the white robes of the priest, the sacrifice of two white bulls, and the belief that mistletoe possessed remarkable healing and protective powers.

Botanical Description

European mistletoe is an evergreen parasitic shrub that grows upon the branches of various trees, producing leathery green leaves and white berries during winter. Although it can inhabit several host species, Pliny emphasizes its rare occurrence upon oak.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Mistletoe occurred throughout much of Gaul wherever suitable host trees were present. Oak mistletoe, however, was comparatively uncommon and held particular significance within Pliny's account.

Attested Uses

Pliny records both medicinal and religious uses.

These include:

- A sacred object within Druidic ritual.
- A medicinal preparation believed to promote fertility.
- An antidote against poisons.

Gathering Practices

Pliny preserves the most elaborate harvesting ceremony associated with any Gaulish plant.

According to his account:

- Only mistletoe growing upon an oak was considered especially sacred.
- It was harvested on the fifth day of the moon.

- The priest wore white robes.
- The plant was cut with a golden sickle.
- It was caught in a white cloak before touching the ground.
- Two white bulls were sacrificed.
- Prayers accompanied the ceremony.

Historical Notes

Pliny's description remains one of the most frequently cited classical passages concerning the Druids. Although written from a Roman perspective and likely containing interpretation or embellishment, it nevertheless preserves valuable information regarding the ceremonial importance attributed to mistletoe within Gaulish religion.

Modern scholars continue to debate how literally every element of Pliny's account should be understood. Even so, it remains the fullest surviving description of a Gaulish plant rite.

Commentary

Mistletoe occupies a unique place within the historical record. Unlike most plants preserved for their medicinal value, it stands at the intersection of healing, ritual, cosmology, and sacred landscape. Whether every detail recorded by Pliny reflects historical practice cannot be known, but the passage unmistakably demonstrates that certain plants were regarded as possessing significance extending far beyond their practical uses. For any study of *Samolouissus*, mistletoe represents one of the foundational witnesses to the relationship between plants, ritual, and the sacred in ancient Gaul.

Mugwort

Scientific Name: *Artemisia vulgaris*

Gaulish Names: *Ponem* and *Bricumum* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 3.127

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called mugwort *Ponem*. He attributes numerous medicinal applications to the plant, particularly in the treatment of disorders affecting women's health, the urinary system, and kidney stones.

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book XXVI, Line 41

"*Artemisia* is an herb which is called *bricumum* in Gaulish. Seek it where it grows and, before sunrise, pull it with your left hand. Then bind it around the bare kidneys. By doing this, you employ a unique and immediately effective remedy."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Mugwort is a hardy perennial herb with deeply divided dark green leaves that are silvery beneath and clusters of small reddish yellow flowers. It commonly grows along roadsides, riverbanks, waste places, and woodland edges throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Mugwort was widespread across Gaul, flourishing in disturbed soils, settlements, grasslands, and open woodland margins.

Attested Uses

The surviving sources attribute numerous medicinal uses to mugwort.

These include treatment for:

- Disorders of the womb.
- Painful urination.
- Kidney stones.
- Retention of urine.

- Kidney pain.
- Difficult childbirth and afterbirth.
- Menstrual disorders.

Marcellus additionally records the plant being bound around the kidneys as a therapeutic application.

Gathering Practices

Marcellus preserves specific harvesting instructions.

The herb was to be:

- Gathered before sunrise.
- Pulled with the left hand.
- Immediately applied around the bare kidneys.

These instructions resemble other Gaulish gathering traditions that emphasize timing and the symbolic use of the left hand.

Historical Notes

The survival of two Gaulish names *Ponem* in Dioscorides and *Bricumum* in Marcellus may reflect regional dialects, differing traditions, or textual variation.

Mugwort is one of several plants in this corpus whose recorded preparation emphasizes the circumstances of gathering as much as the plant itself. These recurring patterns become especially significant when considered alongside other herbs such as brookweed, *selago*, and meadowsweet.

Commentary

Mugwort stands among the most significant plants in the surviving Gaulish record. Its extensive medicinal applications, combined with explicit instructions concerning time of harvest, the left hand, and immediate application, reveal a tradition in which preparation and action formed an integral part of healing. Together with mistletoe, brookweed, and *selago*, mugwort provides some of the clearest evidence that Gaulish plant knowledge extended beyond simple pharmacology into disciplined relationships between practitioner, plant, and landscape.

Oak

Scientific Name: *Quercus robur*

Identification Status: Secure

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 16.95

See the entry for Mistletoe, where Pliny preserves his detailed account of the sacred relationship between the Druids, the oak, and the harvesting of mistletoe.

Botanical Description

The pedunculate oak is a large deciduous tree distinguished by its broad crown, deeply lobed leaves, and acorns borne on long stalks. It is among the longest lived trees of Europe and commonly forms the dominant canopy of temperate woodlands.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Oak forests covered extensive portions of ancient Gaul and formed one of its principal woodland ecosystems. Several species of oak occurred throughout the region, with *Quercus robur* being among the most widespread.

Attested Uses

Within the surviving Gaulish record, oak is primarily associated with:

- Sacred groves.
- Religious ceremony.
- The ritual harvesting of mistletoe.

Rather than emphasizing medicinal properties, Pliny presents the oak as the tree upon which the Druids centered many of their religious observances.

Historical Notes

Pliny states that the Druids regarded no tree as more sacred than the oak and that they performed none of their religious rites without it. He further suggests that the very name "Druid" may have been connected with the Greek word for oak, although this etymology is no longer accepted by modern scholarship.

While Pliny's account must be read critically, the repeated association between the Druids and oak groves is supported by other classical references and remains one of the strongest themes within the surviving evidence.



Commentary

Few plants occupy as prominent a place in the historical imagination of Gaulish religion as the oak. Although the surviving evidence is almost entirely religious rather than medicinal, it reveals the oak as a symbol of sacred space, continuity, and divine favor. Within the context of *Samolouissus*, the oak reminds us that plant knowledge extended beyond healing into the very places where ritual life unfolded.

Peat Moss

Scientific Name: *Sphagnum* spp.

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 24.17.1

"Sphagnos, or sphacos, or bryon, grows also, as I have pointed out, in Gaul. It is useful in the sitz bath for uterine affections, and beaten up and mixed with cress and salt water, it is also good for the knees and for swellings on the thighs. Taken in drink moreover, with wine and dry resin, it very quickly acts as a diuretic. Beaten up and drunk with wine and juniper berries, it drains off the water in dropsy."

Botanical Description

Peat mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) are small, soft mosses that form dense carpets in wetlands, bogs, and marshes. Their remarkable ability to retain water allows them to create and maintain peat forming environments throughout northern Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Peat moss was abundant throughout the bogs, marshes, and wetlands of northern and western Gaul, where extensive peatlands formed important ecological landscapes.

Attested Uses

Pliny records several medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Disorders of the womb.
- Swelling of the knees.
- Swelling of the thighs.
- Dropsy.

He also records its use as:

- A sitz bath.
- A diuretic.
- A drink prepared with wine and resin or juniper berries.

Historical Notes

Unlike many herbs in this corpus, peat moss is closely associated with wetland environments rather than cultivated or woodland habitats. Its inclusion demonstrates that Gaulish plant knowledge extended beyond flowering herbs and trees to encompass mosses and other non vascular plants.

Commentary

Peat moss illustrates the diversity of the Gaulish botanical tradition. Even plants that might easily be overlooked today were recognized for their medicinal properties and incorporated into healing practices. Its strong association with wetlands also highlights the importance of ecological setting within ancient plant knowledge.

Pennyroyal

Scientific Name: *Mentha pulegium*

Gaulish Name: *Albolon* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 3.36

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called pennyroyal *Albolon*. He attributes numerous medicinal applications to the plant, particularly for digestive disorders, women's health, respiratory complaints, inflammation, snake bites, and fainting.

Botanical Description

Pennyroyal is a low growing aromatic herb of the mint family with small purple flowers and strongly scented leaves. It grows naturally in damp meadows, stream margins, and open grasslands throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Pennyroyal was widespread across Gaul in moist grasslands, wetlands, and disturbed ground where sufficient moisture supported its growth.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Digestive disorders.
- Nausea.
- Lung congestion.
- Convulsions.
- Snake bites.
- Fainting.
- Inflamed gums.
- Inflammation.
- Gout.
- Disorders of the spleen.
- Itching.
- Disorders of the womb.

He also records its use for:

- Encouraging menstruation.
- Expelling the afterbirth.
- Acting as an abortifacient.

Historical Notes

Pennyroyal was widely known throughout the ancient Mediterranean for its potent physiological effects, particularly those relating to women's reproductive health.

Modern research has demonstrated that pennyroyal contains highly toxic compounds, especially in concentrated oils. Its appearance in the historical record should be understood as documentation of ancient medical practice rather than contemporary guidance.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Albolon* contributes another important example of indigenous botanical terminology.

Commentary

Pennyroyal appears throughout the historical record as a plant of considerable potency. Its broad range of medicinal applications, especially those affecting digestion and reproduction, reflects an ancient understanding of plants capable of producing profound physiological effects. Like hellebore and henbane, it reminds us that many of the most respected medicinal herbs were also among the most dangerous, requiring knowledge, restraint, and careful judgment in their use.

Pimpernel

Scientific Name: *Anagallis* spp.

Gaulish Name: *Sapana* (attested)

Identification Status: Probable



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 2.209

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called pimpernel *Sapana*. He attributes numerous medicinal uses to the plant, particularly in the treatment of inflammation, ulcers, splinters, toothache, and disorders affecting the head.

Botanical Description

Pimpernel is a small annual herb with slender stems, opposite leaves, and delicate star-shaped flowers, most commonly scarlet or blue. It grows in cultivated fields, roadsides, grasslands, and disturbed soils throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Pimpernel was widespread throughout Gaul, particularly in open fields, agricultural land, and disturbed habitats where it readily colonized bare ground.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Inflammation.
- Splinters and embedded thorns.
- Gangrenous ulcers.
- Toothache.
- Excess mucus affecting the head.
- Corneal ulcers.
- Eye inflammation.

The plant was administered as:

- Poultices.
- Gargles.
- Nasal applications.

For toothache, the juice was placed into the nostril opposite the affected tooth.

Historical Notes

The unusual instruction to administer the juice through the nostril opposite the painful tooth illustrates the complexity of ancient therapeutic practice. Whether this reflects empirical observation or contemporary medical theory cannot be determined.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Sapana* adds another indigenous botanical term to the surviving corpus.

Commentary

Pimpernel appears in the historical record as a versatile medicinal herb used primarily for inflammatory conditions and disorders of the head. Its varied methods of application demonstrate that ancient practitioners adapted individual plants to different forms of treatment according to the ailment being addressed.

Pine

Scientific Name: *Pinus* spp.

Identification Status: Secure

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 37.11.3

"The peasant women of Transpadane Gaul wear pieces of amber as necklaces, chiefly as an adornment, but also because of its medicinal properties. Amber, indeed, is supposed to be a prophylactic against tonsillitis and other affections of the pharynx."



Botanical Description

Pines (*Pinus* spp.) are evergreen coniferous trees recognized by their needle like leaves, woody cones, and resin rich wood. Ancient pine forests were widespread across Europe and served as the original source of much of the fossilized resin later known as amber.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Several species of pine occurred throughout Gaul, particularly in mountainous regions, sandy soils, and drier uplands. Although Pliny's passage concerns amber rather than the living tree itself, amber ultimately derives from the fossilized resin of ancient coniferous forests.

Attested Uses

Pliny records the medicinal use of amber rather than pine itself.

Amber was:

- Worn as a necklace.
- Believed to protect against diseases of the throat.
- Valued both as an ornament and as a medicinal amulet.

Historical Notes

Strictly speaking, this passage concerns fossilized amber rather than the pine tree itself. Its inclusion is appropriate because amber originates from the hardened resin of ancient coniferous trees and reflects the medicinal value attributed to tree derived substances.

The protective use of amber necklaces represents one of the few examples within the surviving record where a plant derived material was worn continuously rather than prepared as a medicine.

Commentary

Although indirect, this passage broadens our understanding of Gaulish plant knowledge by showing that trees were valued not only for their wood or medicinal preparations but also for the enduring substances they produced. Amber illustrates how materials originating from the botanical world could occupy medicinal, decorative, and protective roles simultaneously.

Plantain

Scientific Name: *Plantago major*

Gaulish Name: *Tarbidolopion* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 2.153

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called plantain *Tarbidolopion*. He attributes an extensive range of medicinal applications to its leaves, particularly in the treatment of wounds, ulcers, inflammation, burns, bites, tumors, and eye disorders.

Botanical Description

Broadleaf plantain is a hardy perennial herb distinguished by its broad oval leaves with prominent parallel veins and tall spikes of inconspicuous green flowers. It commonly grows in meadows, roadsides, fields, and disturbed ground throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Plantain was abundant throughout Gaul, flourishing in cultivated fields, pathways, settlements, and other disturbed habitats where it remains one of Europe's most widespread medicinal herbs.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Gangrenous ulcers.
- Malignant sores.
- Carbuncles.
- Shingles.
- Herpes.
- Chronic ulcers.
- Dog bites.
- Burns.
- Inflammation.
- Mumps.
- Bone inflammation.
- Goiters.
- Glandular swelling.

- Eye ulcers.

The leaves were primarily applied externally, often with salt.

Historical Notes

Plantain was among the most frequently employed wound healing herbs of the ancient Mediterranean world. Its broad therapeutic range reflects its reputation as an astringent and restorative plant.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Tarbidolopion* demonstrates that this familiar medicinal herb also held an established place within regional Gaulish botanical traditions.

Commentary

Plantain stands among the most broadly useful medicinal herbs preserved in the historical record. Its repeated application to wounds, burns, ulcers, and inflammation highlights its role as a primary healing plant within ancient medicine. The survival of its Gaulish name further emphasizes its importance within the practical botanical knowledge of the Gauls.

Prickly Poppy

Scientific Name: *Papaver argemone*

Gaulish Name: *Corna* (attested)

Identification Status: Possible



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 2.208

"The leaves applied as a poultice take away *argemae* (small white ulcers on the cornea) and small clouds in the eye and lessen inflammation. The Gauls call it *Corna*."

Botanical Description

Prickly poppy is a slender annual herb with finely divided leaves, bright red flowers, and elongated seed capsules covered with stiff bristles. It commonly grows in cultivated fields, open grasslands, and disturbed soils.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Prickly poppy was found throughout much of Gaul in agricultural fields and open ground, where it commonly grew among cereal crops and other annual plants.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records the plant as a treatment for disorders of the eye.

Its recorded applications include:

- Corneal ulcers.
- Clouding of the eye.
- Eye inflammation.

The leaves were prepared as a poultice.

Historical Notes

The surviving reference is brief but preserves the Gaulish name *Corna*, adding another indigenous botanical term to the historical record.

As with several eye remedies preserved by Dioscorides, the exact effectiveness of the preparation cannot be assessed from the historical evidence alone.

Commentary

Although only a single medicinal use is recorded, prickly poppy contributes to the recurring pattern of plants employed in the treatment of vision and eye health within the ancient record. Its preserved Gaulish name ensures its place within the herb corpus, illustrating once again how regional botanical knowledge became incorporated into classical medical literature.

Redstem Wormwood

Scientific Name: *Artemisia scoparia*

Identification Status: *Probable*

Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica Book 3

"Boiled by itself (or with rice) and taken with honey, it kills threadworms and roundworms, loosening the bowels gently."

Botanical Description

Redstem wormwood is an aromatic annual or biennial herb of the daisy family with finely divided leaves and slender reddish stems. It commonly grows in dry grasslands, disturbed ground, and sandy soils throughout Eurasia.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Although less widespread than common mugwort, redstem wormwood occurred in suitable dry habitats throughout parts of Gaul, particularly in open fields and well drained soils.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records two principal medicinal applications.

The plant was used to:

- Eliminate threadworms.
- Eliminate roundworms.

It was prepared by:

- Boiling alone or with rice.
- Taking the preparation with honey.

The remedy was also noted to gently loosen the bowels.

Historical Notes

Unlike mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), this species is represented in the surviving record by a brief medicinal reference and no preserved Gaulish name. Nevertheless, its inclusion illustrates the diversity of the *Artemisia* genus within ancient pharmacology.



Commentary

Redstem wormwood represents the practical side of ancient herbal medicine, addressing common parasitic ailments through relatively simple preparation. Its presence alongside other species of *Artemisia* demonstrates that closely related plants could possess distinct medicinal applications within the classical tradition.

Rue

Scientific Name: *Ruta graveolens*

Identification Status: Secure

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 20.51.1



Pliny records the Gallic variety of rue as an important ingredient in antidotes. He states that the leaves, juice, and fumes were used against numerous poisons and venomous creatures, including aconite, mistletoe, poisonous mushrooms, snakes, scorpions, spiders, bees, hornets, wasps, salamanders, and the bites of rabid dogs. He also reports the belief that those carrying rue or anointed with its juice were protected from venomous creatures and that snakes avoided its smoke.

Botanical Description

Rue is a strongly aromatic evergreen subshrub with bluish green divided leaves and clusters of yellow flowers. Its pungent scent and bitter taste made it one of the most recognizable medicinal plants of the ancient Mediterranean.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Rue was cultivated in parts of Gaul and likely introduced through Mediterranean trade and horticulture. The Gallic variety noted by Pliny suggests that it had become sufficiently established to be recognized as a regional form.

Attested Uses

Pliny records numerous medicinal and protective applications.

These include treatment for:

- Poisoning by aconite.
- Poisoning by mistletoe.
- Poisonous mushrooms.
- Snake bites.
- Scorpion stings.
- Spider bites.
- Bee, hornet, and wasp stings.
- Salamander poisoning.
- Bites from rabid dogs.

Rue was also believed to:

- Protect those who carried it from venomous creatures.
- Repel snakes when burned.

Historical Notes

Rue appears throughout classical medicine as one of antiquity's principal antidotal herbs. Pliny's emphasis on its protective qualities reflects a recurring pattern in which medicinal efficacy and apotropaic belief overlap.

Modern studies have shown that rue contains biologically active compounds capable of causing severe skin reactions and toxicity. Its historical importance should be understood independently of contemporary medical practice.

Commentary

Rue stands among the foremost protective herbs of the classical world. Whether employed as an antidote, carried as a safeguard, or burned to repel dangerous animals, it illustrates how healing and protection were often understood as complementary rather than separate functions. Within the historical record, rue consistently appears as a plant associated with defense against harmful forces.

Sea Lavender

Scientific Name: *Limonium* spp.

(traditionally identified from the ancient *Leimonion*;
exact identification remains uncertain, possibly Sea Lavender)

Gaulish Name: *lumbarum* (attested)



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.16

"The seed, pounded into small pieces and taken in a drink with wine, helps dysentery, disorders of the bowels, and women's menstrual disorders. The Gauls call it *lumbarum*."

Botanical Description

The plant identified by Dioscorides as *Leimonion* has traditionally been associated with species of *Limonium* (sea lavender), although its precise botanical identity remains uncertain. These perennial herbs produce basal rosettes of leathery leaves and delicate clusters of violet or lavender flowers, often growing in coastal meadows, salt marshes, and open grasslands.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Species traditionally identified with *Leimonion* occurred along the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Gaul as well as in suitable inland habitats. Because the ancient identification is uncertain, the exact distribution of the plant described by Dioscorides cannot be established with confidence.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records several medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Dysentery.
- Disorders of the bowels.
- Menstrual disorders.

The seeds were:

- Crushed.
- Mixed with wine.
- Taken as a medicinal drink.

Historical Notes

The botanical identity of *Leimonion* has long been debated among scholars. Although often associated with *Limonium* species, certainty is impossible based solely upon the surviving ancient descriptions.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *lumbarum* nevertheless provides another valuable witness to indigenous botanical terminology.

Commentary

The plant known to antiquity as *Leimonion*, illustrates the challenges of reconstructing ancient botany. Even where precise identification remains uncertain, the historical sources preserve evidence of medicinal practice and regional vocabulary, allowing the plant to retain an important place within the surviving Gaulish herb corpus.

Snake Lily

Scientific Name: *Dracunculus vulgaris* Schott

Gaulish Name: *Gigarus* (attested)

Identification Status: Possible



Attested Sources

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book X, Line 58

"A nasal polyp is cured by the herb of Persephone, which is called *draconteum* in Greek and *gigarus* in Gaulish, either by pouring its juice into the nostrils or by inserting papyrus soaked in the juice and wrapped around a probe into the nostrils until the following day."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

Snake lily is a striking perennial herb arising from a large underground tuber. It bears a single mottled stalk, divided leaves, and a large dark purple spathe surrounding a long central spadix. During flowering it emits a strong odor that attracts carrion insects.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Snake lily was found primarily in the warmer southern regions of Gaul and neighboring Mediterranean areas, favoring rocky slopes, open woodland, and well drained soils.

Attested Uses

Marcellus records one specific medicinal application.

The plant was used in the treatment of:

- Nasal polyps.

The remedy involved either:

- Pouring the juice into the nostrils.
- Inserting papyrus soaked in the juice into the nasal passage until the following day.

Historical Notes

Marcellus identifies the plant as the "herb of Persephone," preserving a Greek religious association alongside the Gaulish name *Gigarus*. The passage illustrates how Greek, Roman, and Gaulish botanical traditions could coexist within a single medical text.

Because of its irritating properties, snake lily must be regarded as a highly hazardous plant. Modern botanical knowledge confirms that contact with fresh tissues may cause significant irritation.

Commentary

Snake lily is one of the more distinctive plants in the surviving corpus, both for its dramatic appearance and its specialized medicinal application. The preservation of its Gaulish name, together with its association with Persephone in the Greek tradition, illustrates the cultural layering that characterizes much of the late antique botanical record. It reminds us that ancient herbal knowledge often moved across linguistic and cultural boundaries while retaining traces of its regional origins.

Spurge Laurel

Scientific Name: *Daphne laureola*

Gaulish Name: *Osubim* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.148

Dioscorides records that the Gauls called spurge laurel *Osubim*. He attributes numerous medicinal applications to the leaves, including treatments for phlegm, headaches, stomach pain, and digestive complaints.

Botanical Description

Spurge laurel is an evergreen shrub with glossy dark green leaves, small greenish yellow flowers, and black berries. It grows in woodland understories, rocky slopes, and shaded forests throughout much of Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Spurge laurel occurred throughout the woodlands of Gaul, particularly in calcareous forests and shaded hillsides where it formed part of the understory vegetation.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records several medicinal applications.

These include:

- Expelling phlegm through the bowels.
- Inducing vomiting.
- Encouraging menstruation.
- Relieving headaches.
- Soothing stomach pain.
- Relieving colic.
- Drawing mucus from the head.
- Inducing sneezing.

The leaves were administered both internally and externally depending upon the intended effect.

Historical Notes

Spurge laurel was regarded throughout antiquity as a powerful medicinal plant capable of producing vigorous physiological effects.

Modern botanical knowledge recognizes the plant as highly toxic. All parts contain potent irritants capable of causing severe poisoning. Its inclusion in this corpus reflects historical documentation and should not be understood as guidance for practical use.

The preservation of the Gaulish name *Ousubim* adds another valuable example of indigenous botanical terminology.

Commentary

Spurge laurel belongs to the group of plants that ancient physicians employed with considerable caution because of their powerful effects upon the body. Its repeated association with purging and expulsion reflects a broader pattern within classical medicine in which restoration of health was often sought through the deliberate removal of harmful substances.

Sweet Flag

Scientific Name: *Acorus calamus*

Gaulish Name: *Piper Apum* ("Pepper of Bees") (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 1.2

"The Gauls call it the Pepper of Bees (*Piper Apum*). The root, taken as a drink, warms the body and causes urination. It is suitable for disorders of the rectum, chest, and liver, as well as for colic, hernia, convulsions, enlargement of the spleen, excessive mucus, and poisoning from the bites of animals."

Botanical Description

Sweet flag is a perennial wetland plant with long sword shaped leaves and aromatic creeping rhizomes. It thrives in marshes, ponds, riverbanks, and shallow wetlands.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Sweet flag was found in marshes and along waterways throughout parts of Gaul, where suitable wetland habitats supported its growth.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Disorders of the rectum.
- Chest ailments.
- Liver disorders.
- Colic.
- Hernia.
- Convulsions.
- Enlarged spleen.
- Excess mucus.
- Poisoning from animal bites.

The root was also noted to:

- Stimulate urination.
- Warm the body.

Historical Notes

The Gaulish designation *Piper Apum* ("Pepper of Bees") is among the more distinctive plant names preserved in the classical record. Whether it refers to the plant's aroma, appearance, or relationship to bees remains uncertain.

Modern populations of *Acorus calamus* differ chemically, with some varieties containing compounds now regarded as potentially toxic. Ancient sources, however, consistently describe it as an important medicinal root.

Commentary

Sweet flag appears in the historical record as a broadly useful medicinal plant, particularly valued for disorders involving internal congestion and impaired bodily function. The preservation of its unusual Gaulish name highlights the close observation and distinctive vocabulary that characterized regional botanical knowledge.

Thyme

Scientific Name: *Thymus serpyllum*
Gaulish Name: *Gilarus* (attested)
Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book XI, Line 10

"The herb *serpullum*, which the Gauls call *gilarus*, should be chewed while fasting by one whose mouth has an unpleasant odor, and then swallowed."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Marcellus introduces this remedy within a section addressing disorders of the lips, gums, mouth, tongue, palate, ulcers, and offensive breath.

Botanical Description

Wild thyme is a low growing aromatic perennial with tiny evergreen leaves and clusters of pink to purple flowers. It commonly grows on dry hillsides, rocky ground, grasslands, and open woodland throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Wild thyme was widespread across Gaul, particularly in sunny grasslands, limestone hills, and rocky landscapes where its fragrant mats were common.

Attested Uses

Marcellus records one principal medicinal application.

The herb was:

- Chewed while fasting.
- Swallowed after chewing.

It was used to treat:

- Offensive breath.

The broader context of the passage concerns disorders affecting the mouth, lips, gums, tongue, and palate.

Historical Notes

The recommendation that the herb be chewed while fasting reflects another example of preparation and bodily condition being considered important aspects of treatment. Although the passage is brief, it preserves both the Gaulish name *Gilarus* and a complete therapeutic instruction.

Wild thyme remained an important medicinal and culinary herb throughout later European herbal traditions, though those later uses extend beyond the evidence presented here.

Commentary

Thyme illustrates how even common culinary herbs occupied meaningful places within ancient medicine. The simplicity of the recorded treatment, fasting, chewing, and swallowing contrasts with the elaborate preparations associated with other plants, reminding us that Gaulish botanical knowledge ranged from highly ritualized practices to straightforward household remedies. The preservation of the name *Gilarus* further enriches the corpus of attested Gaulish plant terminology.

Vervain

Scientific Name: *Verbena officinalis*

Identification Status: Secure

Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 25.59.1



"The people in the Gallic provinces make use of it both for soothsaying and the prediction of future events. The magicians declare that those who rub themselves with it obtain the object of their desires, that it drives away fevers, wins friendships, and cures every disease. They say it should be gathered at the rising of the Dog star, without being touched by the rays of either the sun or the moon. Honey and honeycombs are first offered to the earth, a circle is drawn around the plant with iron, it is lifted with the left hand, and its leaves, stem, and root are dried separately in the shade. Water in which it has been steeped, sprinkled upon a banquet couch, is said to encourage merriment and good cheer."

Botanical Description

Vervain is a slender perennial herb with square stems, opposite toothed leaves, and spikes of small pale violet flowers. It commonly grows in open grasslands, roadsides, disturbed ground, and field margins throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Vervain was widespread throughout Gaul, particularly in open habitats and around settlements where it readily established itself.

Attested Uses

Pliny records several medicinal, ritual, and divinatory uses.

These include:

- Divination and soothsaying.
- Protection against fevers.
- Promoting friendship.
- General healing.
- Promoting merriment when infused in water and sprinkled upon banquet couches.

Gathering Practices

Pliny preserves one of the most elaborate harvesting traditions in the historical record.

The plant was to be:

- Gathered at the rising of the Dog star.
- Protected from the light of both the sun and the moon during harvest.
- Preceded by offerings of honey and honeycomb to the earth.
- Circled with iron before being removed.
- Lifted with the left hand.
- Dried with its leaves, stem, and roots separated in the shade.

Historical Notes

Pliny attributes many of these claims to the "magicians" of Gaul, reflecting his characteristic skepticism toward ritual practices. Despite his dismissive tone, the passage remains one of the richest surviving descriptions of ceremonial plant gathering associated with the Gauls.

Together with mistletoe, *selago*, brookweed, mugwort, and meadowsweet, vervain provides some of the clearest evidence that gathering itself could be understood as a carefully ordered act governed by timing, preparation, offerings, and prescribed movements.

Commentary

Vervain occupies a central position within the surviving evidence for Gaulish plant traditions. Whether every claim preserved by Pliny reflects historical practice cannot be known, but the remarkable attention given to its harvest demonstrates that certain plants were approached with deliberate ritual discipline. More than almost any other herb in this corpus, vervain illustrates the intimate relationship between healing, divination, and ceremonial action.

Wallflower

Scientific Name: *Erysimum* spp.

Gaulish Name: *Vela* (attested)

Identification Status: Possible



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 22.75.1

Pliny records that the Gauls called the plant *Vela*. He describes its appearance and attributes numerous medicinal uses, including treatments for coughs, jaundice, respiratory illness, digestive disorders, joint disease, poisonings, and wounds.

Botanical Description

Wallflowers (*Erysimum* spp.) are herbaceous plants of the mustard family with narrow leaves and clusters of yellow, orange, or purple flowers. They commonly grow on rocky slopes, walls, roadsides, and disturbed ground throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Species of *Erysimum* were widespread throughout Gaul, particularly in dry grasslands, rocky terrain, and cultivated areas.

Attested Uses

Pliny records numerous medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Coughs.
- Expectoration of mucus.
- Jaundice.
- Disorders of the loins.
- Pleurisy.
- Colic.
- Intestinal disorders.
- Parotid abscesses.
- Cancerous sores.
- Inflamed testicles.
- Disorders of the anus.
- Joint disease.
- Asthma.
- Fistulas.

- Poisoning.

The plant was administered in several forms, often mixed with honey, figs, water, or axle grease.

Historical Notes

Wallflower is presented by Pliny as a versatile medicinal herb whose applications span respiratory, digestive, and external conditions. The preservation of the Gaulish name *Vela* demonstrates that it was well established within regional botanical traditions.

Commentary

Wallflower represents one of the more broadly applied medicinal herbs in the surviving record. Its diverse therapeutic uses illustrate the flexibility with which ancient practitioners employed familiar plants. The preservation of its Gaulish name reinforces the continuity of local botanical knowledge alongside the wider traditions of Roman medicine.

Water Lily

Scientific Name: *Nymphaea alba* L.

Gaulish Name: *Baditis* (attested)

Identification Status: Probable



Attested Sources

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis, Book XXXIII, Line 63

"There is a herb which is called *nymphaea* in Greek, *clava Herculis* in Latin, and *baditis* in Gaulish. Its root is crushed and prepared with vinegar, then given to a boy for ten continuous days, and in a marvelous way he becomes a eunuch."

(Translation by Cunolugus Drugaisos.)

Botanical Description

The white water lily is an aquatic perennial with broad floating leaves, fragrant white flowers, and thick creeping rhizomes anchored in the mud of ponds, lakes, and slow moving rivers.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

White water lilies were widespread throughout the lakes, ponds, marshes, and slow rivers of Gaul, forming conspicuous colonies in still or gently flowing water.

Attested Uses

Marcellus records one highly unusual application.

The crushed root, prepared with vinegar, was administered over a period of ten days with the intention of suppressing or preventing male sexual development.

Historical Notes

As Cunolugus Drugaisos observes, the reference to making a "eunuch" may not necessarily indicate physical castration. It could instead refer to suppressing sexual desire, preventing fertility, or preparing an individual for a religious role, such as the self castrated priests (*Galli*) of Cybele. The precise meaning cannot be determined from the surviving text.

The historical passage should be understood within its cultural and religious context rather than as evidence of an established medical practice.

Commentary

Water lily is one of the most unusual entries in the herb corpus. Rather than preserving a broad medicinal tradition, it records a single practice whose purpose remains open to interpretation. The passage reminds us that ancient botanical knowledge occasionally intersected with religious identity, social roles, and concepts of the body that differ significantly from those of the modern world. As with several other entries in this corpus, the value of the source lies not in confirming the practice itself but in preserving another fragment of the diverse ways plants were understood in the ancient Gaulish world.

Water Milfoil

Scientific Name: *Myriophyllum spicatum*

Gaulish Name: *Beliucandas* (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.115

"Applied fresh or dried with vinegar, it prevents ulcerous sores from becoming inflamed. The Gauls call it *Beliucandas*."

Botanical Description

Water milfoil is an aquatic perennial distinguished by its finely divided, feather like submerged leaves and slender flowering spikes that emerge above the water's surface. It grows rooted in ponds, lakes, slow moving rivers, and marshes throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Water milfoil was widespread throughout the wetlands and waterways of Gaul, inhabiting quiet freshwater environments where it formed dense underwater colonies.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records one principal medicinal application.

The plant was used to:

- Prevent inflammation in ulcerous sores.

It was prepared by:

- Applying the fresh or dried plant with vinegar.

Historical Notes

Although the surviving reference is brief, it preserves the Gaulish name *Beliucandas*, adding another indigenous botanical term to the historical record.

The treatment emphasizes preventing inflammation rather than curing an existing wound, illustrating the preventative dimension of some ancient remedies.

Commentary

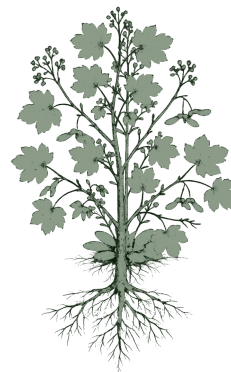
Water milfoil demonstrates that aquatic plants occupied a place within Gaulish herbal knowledge alongside the more familiar woodland and meadow herbs. Though only a single use survives, the preservation of its Gaulish name provides another valuable fragment of the botanical vocabulary once used throughout ancient Gaul.

White Maple

Scientific Name: *Acer* spp.

Common Name: Gallic Maple (attested)

Identification Status: Well Supported



Attested Sources

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia 16.26.1

"The maple... is second only to citrus in its elegance as a material for cabinet making. The white maple, an exceptionally light coloured wood, is called Gallic maple, and grows in Italy north of the Po and on the other side of the Alps."

Botanical Description

Maples are deciduous trees characterized by their opposite leaves, winged seeds (*samaras*), and hard, fine-grained wood. Several native species occur throughout Europe, producing timber valued for both strength and beauty.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Pliny specifically associates the white maple, known as the "Gallic maple," with regions north of the Alps, indicating that it was recognized as characteristic of Gaul and neighboring territories.

Attested Uses

Pliny emphasizes the exceptional quality of its wood.

It was valued for:

- Fine cabinet making.
- Decorative woodworking.
- High quality finished craftsmanship.

Historical Notes

Unlike many plants in this corpus, the significance of white maple lies not in its medicinal properties but in the quality of its timber. Pliny's designation "Gallic maple" suggests that the wood had acquired a reputation extending beyond its native range.

The precise species intended by Pliny remains uncertain, though it likely refers to one of the European white maples such as *Acer pseudoplatanus* or a closely related species.

Commentary

White maple reminds us that Gaulish plant knowledge encompassed more than medicine and ritual. Trees were equally valued for their practical contributions to daily life, craftsmanship, and trade. The recognition of "Gallic maple" as a superior woodworking material reflects the importance of forests not only as sacred landscapes but also as sources of beauty, utility, and skilled craftsmanship.

Wormwood

Scientific Name: *Artemisia absinthium*

Identification Status: Secure

Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica, Book I

Celtic nard is recommended as a tonic for the spleen, stomach, liver, and kidneys. It may be taken with wine and wormwood and is also used in warm compresses, liquid medicines, and warming ointments.



Botanical Description

Common wormwood is a perennial aromatic herb with silvery gray, finely divided leaves and small yellow flower heads. Its intensely bitter foliage has made it one of the best known medicinal herbs of Europe since antiquity.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Wormwood was widespread throughout Gaul, growing in dry grasslands, rocky slopes, roadsides, and disturbed ground.

Attested Uses

In the surviving Gaulish references, wormwood is mentioned as a companion ingredient with Celtic nard.

Within those preparations it was used in the treatment of:

- Disorders of the liver.
- Kidney ailments.
- Dropsy.

Historical Notes

Although wormwood itself receives no independent Gaulish entry in the surviving sources, its repeated appearance alongside Celtic nard demonstrates its established role within ancient pharmacology.

Numerous additional medicinal uses of wormwood appear elsewhere in Greek and Roman literature, but they are beyond the scope of the specifically Gaulish evidence presented in this corpus.

Commentary

Despite the brevity of the surviving Gaulish references, wormwood clearly formed part of the broader medicinal tradition known throughout ancient Gaul. Its association with Celtic nard reflects the frequent practice of combining herbs into compound preparations rather than relying upon a single plant alone.

Yarrow

Scientific Name: *Achillea millefolium*

Identification Status: Secure

Attested Sources

Dioscorides

De Materia Medica 4.103

"Yarrow, applied as a poultice, is excellent for excessive bleeding and for both old and fresh ulcers."



Botanical Description

Yarrow is a hardy perennial herb recognized by its finely divided, fern like leaves and broad clusters of small white or pale pink flowers. It grows abundantly in meadows, grasslands, woodland edges, and roadsides throughout Europe.

Distribution in Ancient Gaul

Yarrow was widespread throughout Gaul and would have been one of the most common medicinal herbs of open grasslands and cultivated landscapes.

Attested Uses

Dioscorides records several medicinal applications.

These include treatment for:

- Excessive bleeding.
- Fresh wounds.
- Chronic ulcers.

The herb was applied as:

- A poultice.

Its application helped protect wounds while promoting healing.

Historical Notes

Although no Gaulish name survives for yarrow in the extant sources, its medicinal reputation was widespread throughout the ancient world. Its use for wounds and bleeding continued through the medieval period and into later European folk medicine.

Commentary

Yarrow concludes the herb corpus appropriately as one of antiquity's best known wound herbs. Although the surviving Gaulish evidence is brief, its reputation for stopping bleeding and supporting the healing of wounds reflects one of the oldest continuous medicinal traditions in Europe. Even without an attested Gaulish name, its inclusion illustrates the practical character of the herbal knowledge preserved in the classical sources.

Sources and Methodology

The herb corpus presented in this volume is a historical reconstruction based upon surviving Classical literature together with modern botanical scholarship. Every effort has been made to distinguish between information preserved by the ancient authors and modern editorial summaries intended to aid identification and historical understanding.

The medicinal uses, gathering practices, ritual traditions, and Gaulish plant names presented throughout this work are drawn only from the surviving historical sources cited for each entry unless otherwise noted. Botanical descriptions and the probable distribution of each plant within ancient Gaul are modern summaries based upon contemporary botanical research.

Because many ancient plant names cannot be identified with complete certainty, some botanical identifications remain tentative. Likewise, the surviving Classical authors occasionally differ in their descriptions, preserve regional variations in plant names, or interpret Gaulish customs through Roman or Greek cultural perspectives. For these reasons, the material presented in this volume should be understood as historical evidence rather than definitive proof of ancient practice.

The purpose of this work is not to provide instructions for modern herbal medicine. Many plants described in the ancient sources are now known to be toxic or potentially dangerous. Instead, this volume seeks to preserve and present the surviving evidence for Gaulish botanical knowledge, medicinal traditions, and ritual practices within their historical context.

Primary Sources

The herb corpus presented in this volume is drawn primarily from three surviving Classical authors. None of these writers were themselves Druids, nor did they write exclusively about the Gauls. Each approached the subject from his own cultural perspective and must be read critically. Even so, together they preserve some of the most valuable surviving evidence for Gaulish plant names, medicinal practices, and ritual traditions.

Pliny the Elder

Naturalis Historia

Translation by John Bostock and H. T. Riley

Pliny the Elder was a Roman naturalist, military officer, and encyclopedist who lived from approximately **23–79 CE**. His monumental *Naturalis Historia* sought to collect the natural knowledge of the ancient world, including information on plants, animals, minerals, medicine, and the customs of many different peoples.

For students of Gaulish tradition, Pliny is particularly valuable because he preserves numerous references to the Druids and the peoples of Gaul. His work records sacred plants such as mistletoe and *selago*, gathering rites, medicinal herbs, regional plant names, and observations on Gaulish craftsmanship, metallurgy, amber, forests, and many other aspects of life. Although he often writes from a skeptical Roman perspective, his work remains one of our richest surviving sources.

Pedanius Dioscorides

De Materia Medica

Translation by Tess Anne Osbaldeston and R. P. A. Wood

Pedanius Dioscorides was a Greek physician and pharmacologist who lived during the **1st century CE** (c. 40–90 CE). His *De Materia Medica* became the foundational herbal and pharmaceutical text of Europe and the Mediterranean for more than fifteen hundred years, remaining an authoritative reference well into the nineteenth century.

His work describes over six hundred plants together with their medicinal preparations and uses. Of particular importance for this volume, Dioscorides preserves numerous Gaulish plant names that might otherwise have been lost. These entries provide rare glimpses into indigenous botanical vocabulary while also illustrating how Gaulish herbal knowledge became part of the wider medical traditions of the ancient world.

Marcellus Empiricus

De Medicamentis Liber

Translations by Cunolugus Drugaisos

Marcellus Empiricus was a Gallo–Roman physician and medical writer active during the late **4th or early 5th century CE**. Unlike Pliny and Dioscorides, Marcellus wrote from Gaul itself, preserving a number of remedies that appear to reflect local medical traditions alongside material borrowed from earlier Greek and Roman authorities.

His work is especially significant because it preserves several Gaulish plant names together with detailed instructions concerning their preparation and collection. Some remedies specify gathering herbs before sunrise, harvesting with the left hand, avoiding iron, or observing particular lunar phases. These repeated patterns suggest that, at least for certain plants, the manner of gathering was considered as important as the plant itself.

The translations used throughout this volume are by **Cunolugus Drugaisos**, whose work has greatly expanded access to these important Gaulish passages. My sincere thanks go to him for his generosity, scholarship, and willingness to make this material more widely available.

Reading the Sources

These authors should not be viewed as instruction manuals for modern herbal medicine. Rather, they are historical witnesses that preserve fragments of Gaulish botanical knowledge, indigenous plant names, medicinal traditions, and ritual practices. Some plants described in these texts are now known to be toxic, while others remain difficult to identify with certainty. Accordingly, this volume presents them as evidence for the study of ancient Gaulish culture and religion rather than as recommendations for contemporary medical practice.

Together, these works provide one of the richest surviving windows into the botanical world of ancient Gaul and form the foundation upon which this herb corpus has been compiled.

Modern Botanical References

The Botanical Description and Distribution in Ancient Gaul sections throughout this herb corpus are modern editorial summaries intended to aid in the identification and historical context of the plants discussed by the ancient authors. They are based upon contemporary botanical scholarship rather than the classical texts themselves.

The principal modern references consulted include:

- *Flora Europaea*
- *Plants of the World Online* (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)
- *Flora of North America* (where applicable)
- Royal Horticultural Society references
- USDA Plants Database (for introduced species and comparative distribution)

These modern references have been used solely to summarize plant identification, taxonomy, morphology, and the probable historical distribution of plants within ancient Gaul. Ancient medicinal uses, gathering practices, ritual associations, and Gaulish plant names are derived only from the classical sources cited for each entry unless otherwise noted.

**PART TWO:
CHAPTER ONE**

**MODERN PRACTICE
WITHOUT
INVENTION**

"The past cannot be recreated, but it can still be listened to."

The preceding chapters have explored the surviving evidence for the herbs known to the ancient Gauls. Through the writings of Pliny, Dioscorides, Marcellus Empiricus, and other classical authors, we have encountered fragments of a botanical tradition that once formed part of everyday life, medicine, ritual, and religious practice.

Yet that evidence is exactly that, fragments.

No complete Gaulish herbal has survived. No Druidic manual of sacred plants has come down to us. The prayers, teachings, and conversations that once accompanied the gathering of herbs have largely disappeared into history.

For many people, this absence creates a temptation. If the record is incomplete, perhaps it should simply be filled with imagination. If the ancient sources are silent, perhaps modern intuition can replace what has been lost.

This book takes a different path.

The purpose of *Samolouissus* is not to recreate an ancient tradition exactly as it once existed. Such a goal would require evidence that no longer survives. Instead, this work seeks to understand what remains, to recognize its limits honestly, and to allow those surviving fragments to inspire a thoughtful and respectful modern practice.

History becomes our foundation, not our prison.

The ancient evidence gives us direction without pretending to give us certainty.

The Fragmentary Nature of the Evidence

Every surviving reference to a Gaulish herb represents only a small window into a much larger world.

A single paragraph from Pliny may preserve a gathering custom that once belonged to an entire ceremonial tradition. A brief note from Dioscorides may record the medicinal use of a plant while leaving unspoken the stories, prayers, or seasonal customs that surrounded it. Marcellus preserves valuable Gaulish plant names and ritual instructions, yet even these stand as isolated pieces of a much broader cultural landscape.

This is the reality of studying ancient Gaul. We do not possess complete systems. We possess moments. Those moments are precious precisely because they survived, but they should never be mistaken for the whole tradition. Recognizing this limitation is not a weakness. It is the beginning of responsible scholarship. Rather than forcing certainty where none exists, we allow the surviving evidence to speak for itself, acknowledging both what it reveals and what remains unknown. This humility creates room for genuine learning.

Rather than asking, *"How can I recreate exactly what the Druids did?"* we begin asking a better question:

"What can these surviving traditions teach me about how the Gauls understood their relationship with the living world?"

Our question opens the door to a practice rooted not in speculation, but in careful observation, historical honesty, and reverence for both the evidence and the mystery that still surrounds it.

Ancient Practice and Modern Practice

Although this volume draws upon ancient sources, it is not an attempt to recreate ancient Gaul.

The world of the Gauls no longer exists. Their villages have disappeared, their political structures have vanished, and much of their religious tradition survives only in scattered references preserved by outsiders. Even the landscapes they inhabited have changed through nearly two thousand years of agriculture, industry, urbanization, and environmental change.

We also live in a different world medically, scientifically, and culturally. Ancient herbal medicine developed within a framework that differs greatly from modern medical knowledge. Some plants once valued as medicines are now known to be toxic, while others have been studied and understood in ways unavailable to the ancient world. Recognizing these differences does not diminish the wisdom of our ancestors; it simply reminds us that every tradition exists within its own historical context.

Modern practice cannot simply imitate the past. Nor should it. The goal is not historical reenactment but thoughtful continuity.

The ancient Gauls teach us less by providing a complete ritual system than by revealing an attitude toward the natural world. Their surviving practices suggest patience rather than haste, observation rather than assumption, and reverence rather than exploitation. Plants were approached deliberately, gathered with intention, and understood through long familiarity with the landscapes in which they grew.

These principles remain as valuable today as they were in antiquity.

When we gather a plant respectfully, take time to learn its ecology, understand its history, and appreciate its place within the living landscape, we are participating in the same spirit of attentiveness that the ancient sources repeatedly preserve. While our methods may differ, the posture of respect can remain the same.

This distinction is essential throughout the chapters that follow.

The spiritual interpretations presented in this volume are not offered as recovered doctrines or forgotten Druidic or Gaulish teachings. They are modern reflections inspired by ancient evidence. They seek to continue a conversation rather than claim to finish one.

Relationship Rather Than Reconstruction

One of the greatest challenges in reviving any ancient tradition is resisting the desire to replace silence with certainty.

The historical record leaves many questions unanswered. We often know that a particular herb was gathered with the left hand, collected while fasting, or used to treat a specific illness, but we rarely know what prayers accompanied its harvest, what stories were told about it, or how its symbolism may have been understood within everyday life. Faced with these gaps, it is tempting to invent what has been lost or to borrow freely from later traditions that may have little connection to ancient Gaul.

This volume takes a different approach.

Rather than attempting to reconstruct a complete religious system, it seeks to cultivate a relationship with the surviving evidence. The goal is not to claim certainty where none exists, but to listen carefully to what the historical record still has to teach.

A relationship begins with observation.

The ancient authors repeatedly describe plants in terms of what they do. They heal wounds, calm inflammation, protect livestock, relieve pain, strengthen the body, or mark the boundaries of sacred ritual. These functions tell us something about how the plants were understood and why they were valued. By paying close attention to these recurring patterns, we begin to see not only their practical uses but also the qualities they consistently express.

Meaning grows from familiarity.

Just as one comes to understand a person through repeated encounters rather than a single conversation, the character of a plant emerges through patient study. We learn its appearance, its season, the places where it grows, the creatures that depend upon it, and the ways it has been used across generations. Historical evidence provides one part of that relationship; direct observation of the living plant provides another.

This approach requires patience. Rather than asking, "*What does this herb symbolize?*" it is often more fruitful to ask, "*What does this herb continually reveal about itself?*"

The difference is subtle but important. The first question looks for an answer to assign. The second invites an ongoing conversation.

This is especially important when approaching traditions whose voices survive only in fragments. The purpose is not to place modern ideas into ancient mouths, but to allow ancient evidence to guide modern reflection. Symbolism here, is not invented. It is discovered gradually through the meeting of historical testimony, careful observation, ecological understanding, and personal experience.

The plants become neither relics of the past nor blank canvases for imagination. They remain living beings, encountered with curiosity, respect, and humility. Our

understanding of them continues to deepen, not because we have recovered every ancient answer, but because we have learned how to ask better questions.

Learning Through Function

One of the most consistent patterns found throughout the historical herb corpus is that plants are described by what they do.

The ancient authors rarely speculate about abstract symbolism. Instead, they record how a plant was used, where it was found, how it was gathered, and the effects it was believed to produce. A plant healed wounds, eased pain, reduced inflammation, protected livestock, encouraged fertility, or marked a sacred occasion. In nearly every case, its identity was understood through its relationship with the world around it.

This observation provides the foundation for the interpretive approach used throughout this volume.

Rather than beginning with symbolism, we begin with function.

When a plant is repeatedly employed to heal wounds, it naturally invites reflection upon healing, restoration, and recovery.

When another appears again and again in remedies against poison or venom, it suggests themes of protection, discernment, and resilience.

Plants associated with cleansing may speak to purification and renewal. Those connected with fertility may become symbols of growth, abundance, or continuity. Herbs gathered under carefully prescribed conditions may reveal ideas of preparation, reverence, and intentionality.

These meanings are not arbitrary correspondences assigned after the fact. They arise from observing how a plant consistently participates in human life as preserved by the historical record.

This does not mean that every medicinal use should be transformed into a spiritual symbol. Nor does it suggest that ancient practitioners necessarily understood these plants in precisely the same way. Such conclusions would go beyond the available evidence.

Instead, function serves as a point of departure.

It offers a place where historical testimony and modern contemplation can meet.

Just as the visible qualities of a tree may inspire reflection upon endurance or stability, the historical functions of an herb may invite meditation upon the virtues it consistently expresses. These reflections do not replace the ancient evidence; they grow from it.

The plant remains grounded in its documented history while continuing to speak to those who approach it with patience, observation, and respect.

Over time, these observations deepen. What begins as a simple medicinal herb gradually becomes a teacher. Its appearance, habitat, season, historical uses, and role within the landscape begin to reveal a coherent character. It is from this living relationship, not from speculation alone, that spiritual meaning gradually emerges.

The spiritual and ritual meanings presented later in this volume should not be understood as fixed correspondences. They are invitations to contemplation, rooted in the surviving evidence and enriched through continued relationship with the living plant.

The Wisdom of Gathering

One of the most striking features of the surviving herb corpus is that the ancient authors often describe not only what a plant was used for, but how it was gathered. Again and again, the sources preserve instructions that extend beyond simple practicality. Certain herbs were gathered while fasting. Others were gathered with the left hand, harvested before sunrise, collected during particular phases of the moon, or removed without the use of iron. Some required offerings before harvesting, while others instructed the gatherer not to look behind or to place the plant directly into a vessel without allowing it to touch the ground.

Taken individually, these practices may seem unusual. Together, however, they reveal a consistent pattern. Gathering was approached as an intentional act. The plant was not merely collected; it was approached with preparation, awareness, and purpose.

Whether every instruction reflects an ancient Gaulish custom exactly as it was practiced cannot always be determined. Some accounts undoubtedly passed through Greek and Roman authors whose understanding of Gaulish religion was incomplete. Others may

preserve regional customs or later developments that cannot be generalized to every community. Yet despite these uncertainties, the overall pattern remains remarkably consistent. The act of gathering required attention. It asked something of the practitioner before anything was taken from the land. Modern readers need not imitate every ancient instruction literally. The purpose of fasting, avoiding iron, gathering with the left hand, or observing the phases of the moon is not found merely in the actions themselves. Rather, these practices remind us that harvesting was understood as a relationship rather than an act of consumption.

The gatherer prepared themselves before approaching the plant. The moment of harvest became one of mindfulness rather than convenience. This perspective remains deeply relevant today.

Before gathering any herb, one may pause. Observe the surrounding landscape. Consider whether the plant is abundant enough to harvest responsibly. Notice the insects that depend upon it, the soil in which it grows, the season, the weather, and the larger community of life that surrounds it. The ancient instructions teach us that gathering begins long before the stem is cut. It begins with attention.

The surviving customs invite us to cultivate the same qualities they appear to embody: patience, gratitude, restraint, and reverence for the living world. Whether our practices resemble those of the ancient Gauls in outward form matters less than whether they arise from the same inward disposition. A respectful harvest is not defined by following an ancient formula perfectly. It is defined by approaching the living plant with humility, gratitude, and the awareness that we are receiving a gift rather than taking a resource.

The wisdom of gathering extends far beyond herbs alone. It becomes a way of meeting the natural world itself, with open eyes, careful hands, and a grateful heart.

Tradition as Conversation

One of the greatest misconceptions about ancient traditions is that they exist as fixed systems waiting to be recovered. If only enough fragments could be gathered together, the thinking goes, the complete tradition could be reconstructed exactly as it once was.

The historical record does not support this view.

Every tradition changes over time. Even the ancient Gauls themselves lived across many centuries and inhabited a vast geographical area stretching from the Atlantic coast to central Europe. Customs differed from region to region. Local plants, climates, neighboring cultures, and historical events all shaped the ways communities understood the world around them.

The tradition was never completely static. It was always alive. What survives today represents only a small portion of that living conversation. Rather than attempting to recreate a single frozen moment in history, modern practitioners have the opportunity to continue the conversation in a manner that remains honest to the surviving evidence while responding thoughtfully to the realities of the present. This is not the same as invention. A conversation requires listening before speaking.

The ancient sources speak first. Archaeology contributes its voice. Linguistics, ecology, and history each deepen our understanding. Only after listening carefully do we begin to respond through our own practice, reflection, and experience.

The modern practitioner does not stand above the tradition, deciding what it should become. Nor do they stand outside it, merely observing from a distance. Instead, they become a participant in an ongoing dialogue between past and present. The herbs themselves are part of that conversation.

Many of the same plants that grew beside Gaulish roads, forests, rivers, and fields continue to grow today. They have survived empires, kingdoms, and countless generations of people. While our understanding of them has changed, the plants themselves continue to express their own nature through the landscapes they inhabit.

When we spend time with them, observing their growth, learning their ecology, understanding their history, and appreciating their role within the living world, we enter into a relationship that extends beyond the written record.

History introduces us. Experience deepens the acquaintance. Neither stands alone. Historical study without lived experience risks becoming little more than an academic exercise. Personal experience without historical grounding risks becoming detached from the tradition it seeks to honor. When the two are held together, each strengthens the other. This balance lies at the heart of *Samolouissus*.

The chapters that follow do not present fixed correspondences or universal meanings. Instead, they offer carefully considered interpretations rooted in historical evidence, informed by the living character of each plant, and intended to serve as starting points for further contemplation rather than final conclusions. The tradition remains alive.

Looking Forward

The pages that follow move from the historical record into the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of the herbs.

Each interpretation begins with the evidence presented in the herb corpus and develops through the methodology described in the next chapter. Historical uses, ecological character, methods of gathering, and cultural context together provide the foundation from which modern reflections emerge.

Readers are encouraged to approach these interpretations in the same spirit that has guided this work from the beginning: with curiosity rather than certainty, with reverence rather than possession, and with a willingness to let the plants remain teachers rather than merely objects of study.

The goal is not to tell the herbs what they mean.

It is to listen carefully enough that, over time, they may reveal something of themselves.

PART TWO:
CHAPTER TWO

INTERPRETING
SAMOLOUISSUS

The preceding chapters have presented the surviving historical evidence for the herbs known to the ancient Gauls. Through the writings of Pliny the Elder, Pedanius Dioscorides, Marcellus Empiricus, archaeology, linguistics, and related sources, we have examined what can reasonably be known about these plants and the ways they were understood within the ancient world.

Yet historical evidence alone does not create a living tradition.

The surviving texts preserve medicinal recipes, gathering customs, regional plant names, and occasional glimpses into ritual life. They tell us that certain herbs were gathered while fasting, harvested with the left hand, collected during particular phases of the moon, or prepared without the use of iron. They preserve remedies for wounds, illnesses, livestock, childbirth, poison, and many other concerns. They even preserve a surprising number of Gaulish plant names that would otherwise have disappeared from history.

What they do not preserve is a complete spiritual system.

No surviving text explains the symbolic meaning of every herb. No ancient Gaulish herbal survives that records the prayers spoken while gathering each plant or the lessons a teacher may have shared with an apprentice. Like so much of Gaulish religion, what remains is precious but incomplete.

This absence presents both a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge is obvious. We cannot honestly claim knowledge that has not survived.

The opportunity is equally important. We are invited to approach these plants with humility, allowing the surviving evidence to become the beginning of understanding rather than its conclusion.

For some, the answer to this problem is reconstruction. Every surviving fragment is assembled in the hope of recreating an ancient tradition as faithfully as possible. For others, historical evidence serves only as inspiration, while symbolism and ritual are developed almost entirely through personal intuition or later esoteric traditions.

Samolouissus follows a different path.

Rather than attempting either complete reconstruction or unrestricted invention, this work seeks to cultivate interpretation rooted in evidence. History provides the foundation. Observation deepens that foundation. Reflection allows meaning to emerge. The result is neither a reconstruction of ancient Gaul nor an entirely modern symbolic system, but a thoughtful conversation between the two.

This approach requires transparency.

Readers deserve to know how the interpretations presented in the following chapters have been developed. They should be able to see the path from the historical evidence to the spiritual reflections rather than being asked simply to accept conclusions without explanation.

Every interpretation in this volume follows the same general method. Although individual herbs differ in the amount of surviving evidence, the principles remain consistent throughout the work.

What follows is not presented as the only possible way of approaching these plants. It is simply the method that has guided the writing of this book.

The Five Principles of Interpretation

Begin with the Historical Record

Every interpretation begins with the surviving evidence. Before asking what a plant may symbolize, we must first ask what the ancient sources actually tell us. The writings of Pliny, Dioscorides, Marcellus Empiricus, and other surviving witnesses provide the historical foundation upon which every later reflection is built. Sometimes the evidence is abundant. A plant may be described in several sources, preserving multiple medicinal applications, gathering practices, and even indigenous Gaulish names. At other times the evidence consists of only a single sentence. Both deserve equal honesty. Where the historical record is rich, it should be explored carefully. Where it is silent, that silence should be acknowledged rather than filled with speculation. There is value in admitting that we simply do not know. Historical evidence is not an obstacle to spiritual practice. It is the soil from which meaningful practice grows. Without roots, interpretation quickly becomes detached from the tradition it seeks to honor.

Understand the Living Plant

Historical texts describe plants. Living plants reveal themselves. The ancient authors preserve valuable information, but they encountered these herbs as living parts of the landscape rather than as entries in a book. To understand a plant fully requires more than reading about it. It requires observing where it grows, how it responds to the seasons, what creatures depend upon it, and the role it plays within its surrounding ecosystem. A marsh plant lives differently from a mountain herb. A towering oak expresses different qualities than a creeping moss. An annual wildflower teaches different lessons than a tree that survives for centuries. These observations do not replace the historical evidence. They deepen it.

Ecology often reinforces what the historical sources already suggest. A plant associated with wetlands may naturally invite reflection upon transition, adaptation, or hidden life. A species that flourishes in disturbed ground may become an image of resilience and renewal. A long-lived tree may express endurance, continuity, and memory. The plant itself remains one of our greatest teachers.

Learn Through Function

The historical sources consistently describe herbs by what they accomplish.

They heal wounds, Reduce inflammation, Protect livestock, Ease pain, Encourage fertility, Relieve poisoning, Mark sacred occasions. Their identity is revealed through action. This observation forms one of the central principles of *Samolouissus*. Rather than assigning symbolic meanings arbitrarily, this work begins by asking what the plant repeatedly does within the historical record. Healing suggests restoration. Protection suggests boundaries and guardianship. Purification

suggests renewal. Fertility suggests growth and continuity. The symbolic qualities emerge naturally from the historical functions. This does not mean that every medicinal application possesses hidden spiritual significance. Nor does it imply that the ancient Gauls necessarily interpreted every herb symbolically in the same manner presented here. Function becomes the bridge between history and contemplation. It provides a responsible starting point for reflection while remaining firmly rooted in the surviving evidence.

Consider the Wider Context

No plant exists in isolation. Every herb belongs within a wider network of relationships. Its Gaulish name may preserve an important clue. Its gathering practices may reveal attitudes toward preparation, reverence, or timing. Its ecological setting may reinforce its historical functions. Its role within healing, agriculture, ritual, or craftsmanship provides additional layers of meaning. When these elements are considered together, the plant begins to emerge as more than a medicinal remedy. It becomes part of a larger cultural and ecological landscape. Context prevents interpretation from becoming overly simplistic.

Allow Meaning to Emerge

Only after history, observation, function, and context have been carefully considered do we begin spiritual reflection. This final step cannot be rushed. Meaning is not something imposed upon a plant. It is something discovered gradually through continued relationship. Sometimes a symbolic theme becomes immediately apparent. At other times understanding develops slowly over months or years of observation. Both are valid. The interpretations presented throughout the following chapters should be understood as invitations rather than conclusions. They are not intended to replace the historical evidence. They grow from it. Readers may discover additional insights through their own study and experience. Such discoveries do not diminish the work presented here. They continue the same conversation that began centuries ago between people, plants, and the landscapes they share.

A Living Tradition

One of the remarkable qualities of working with herbs is that they are not relics preserved behind museum glass. They continue to grow. They continue to flower. They continue to shape the landscapes around us. While the ancient texts remain fixed, the plants themselves remain alive. Every spring they emerge again. Every season they invite renewed observation. Every generation has the opportunity to encounter them directly. The study of *Samolouissus* can never truly be finished. Future archaeological discoveries may uncover new evidence. New translations may clarify uncertain passages. Linguistic research may reveal forgotten meanings hidden within ancient

names. Ecological study may deepen our understanding of how these plants lived within the landscapes of ancient Gaul.

Most importantly, careful observation of the living plants themselves will continue to enrich our understanding. This is the nature of a living tradition. It is rooted in history but never imprisoned by it. The purpose of this methodology is not to establish fixed correspondences or final interpretations. Its purpose is to provide a responsible foundation from which thoughtful spiritual practice may continue to grow.

The chapters that follow represent one expression of that continuing journey. They are offered not as the last word on the subject, but as an invitation to continue listening to the ancient sources, to the living landscape, and to the herbs themselves.

**PART TWO:
CHAPTER THREE**

**ETHICS AND
RESPONSIBILITY**

"To honor a plant is to care for its future as much as its past."

Every tradition carries with it certain responsibilities. The study of ancient herbs is no exception. Throughout this volume, we have examined the surviving historical evidence, explored a method for interpreting that evidence, and considered ways in which these plants may continue to inspire modern spiritual practice. None of these pursuits, however, exists apart from ethical responsibility. The manner in which we approach plants, historical sources, and the living world ultimately shapes the integrity of our practice. Ethics is not an addition to herbal work. It is its foundation.

The ancient sources repeatedly suggest that gathering plants required preparation, attentiveness, and restraint. Whether harvesting with the left hand, fasting before collection, avoiding iron, or making offerings to the earth, these customs remind us that plants were not viewed merely as resources to be taken. They were approached with intention. Although our circumstances differ greatly from those of the ancient Gauls, the principle remains relevant. Respect should guide every relationship we cultivate with the plants themselves, with the historical record, and with the landscapes that continue to sustain them.

Ancient Medicine Is Not Modern Medicine

One of the greatest mistakes a reader could make is to confuse historical documentation with contemporary medical advice.

The medicinal uses preserved by Pliny, Dioscorides, Marcellus Empiricus, and other ancient authors reflect the medical understanding of their own time. While some remedies have proven remarkably effective through modern scientific investigation, others are now known to be ineffective, dangerous, or based upon medical theories no longer accepted.

Several herbs described throughout this volume contain toxic compounds capable of causing serious illness or death if used improperly. Others interact with modern medications or possess effects that were not understood by ancient physicians.

The herb corpus presented in *Samolouissus* should never be treated as a modern herbal manual. Its purpose is historical. It preserves evidence. It does not prescribe treatment.

Readers interested in herbal medicine should consult qualified medical professionals and experienced clinical herbalists before using any medicinal plant. The historical record provides invaluable insight into ancient botanical traditions, but it cannot replace modern medical knowledge or professional care. Respect for the past includes recognizing both its wisdom and its limitations.

Care for the Living Plant

Every herb discussed in this volume exists not only within history but within the living world. Many continue to grow in fields, forests, wetlands, and mountains much as they did centuries ago. Others have become uncommon through habitat loss, changing climates, or human activity. Some are now protected by law in parts of their native range. To study a plant responsibly is to recognize that its continued existence matters more than our desire to possess it. Whenever possible, herbs should be observed before they are harvested. Learn where they grow. Understand their role within the local ecosystem. Notice the insects that depend upon them, the birds that shelter among them, and the soil and water that sustain them. If harvesting is appropriate, do so sparingly. Take only what is needed. Leave healthy populations undisturbed. Never gather rare, threatened, or protected species from the wild. Cultivation, ethical sourcing, or respectful observation are often better choices than collecting from natural habitats.

A relationship with plants is measured not by how much we take, but by how carefully we learn to care for what remains.

Respect the Living Landscape

Plants never exist in isolation. Every herb belongs to a wider community of life. The ancient Gauls understood this intuitively. Their sacred groves, rivers, springs, forests, and mountains were not simply locations where plants happened to grow. They were living landscapes inhabited by countless visible and invisible relationships. Modern ecology expresses a similar truth through different language. Healthy plants depend upon healthy soil. Healthy soil depends upon fungi, insects, microorganisms, water, and countless other forms of life. When one part of the landscape suffers, the whole community is affected. To honor an herb, is also to honor the place in which it grows. Walk gently. Leave no unnecessary trace. Respect private property and protected lands.

Support conservation efforts whenever possible. Allow the landscape to remain richer because you visited it, not poorer. In doing so, we continue one of the deepest lessons preserved by the ancient tradition: that human beings participate in nature rather than stand apart from it.

Respect the Sources

Historical honesty is itself an ethical practice. Throughout this volume, every effort has been made to distinguish between what is historically attested, what may reasonably be inferred, and what represents modern interpretation. This distinction should be preserved. When the evidence is uncertain, it is better to acknowledge uncertainty than to manufacture confidence. When a practice is modern, it should be presented as modern. When a symbolic interpretation is personal or devotional, it should not be attributed to the ancient Gauls without supporting evidence. Doing so honors both the historical tradition and the people seeking to learn from it. Integrity strengthens a tradition far more than certainty ever could.

Walk with Humility

Perhaps the greatest lesson preserved by the herb corpus is not found within any single plant. It is found in the manner of approaching them. Again and again, the historical sources describe preparation before gathering, attentiveness before action, and respect before use. Whether expressed through fasting, ritual gestures, careful timing, or simple observation, the underlying principle remains remarkably consistent. The natural world is approached with humility. Humility does not mean thinking less of ourselves. It means recognizing that the living world is older, wiser, and more enduring than any one generation. We study the plants because they have something to teach us. We preserve the historical record because it has something to teach us. We care for the landscape because future generations deserve the same opportunity to learn.

When approached in this spirit, the herbs become more than historical curiosities or symbolic correspondences. They become companions in an ongoing journey of learning.

Looking Forward

The chapters that follow explore the spiritual and ritual meanings of the herbs presented throughout this volume.

These interpretations arise from the historical evidence, the methodology described in the preceding chapters, and a commitment to responsible practice. They are offered not as immutable truths, but as thoughtful reflections intended to deepen relationship with the plants themselves.

May they encourage careful observation, honest scholarship, reverence for the living world, and a continued conversation between the wisdom of the past and the practice of the present.

PART TWO:
CHAPTER FOUR

**THE SPIRITUAL
MEANING**

Alder (*Uernetus*)

Historical Note

Alder (uernetus) is attested as a remedy for hearing loss and ear pain, prepared by crushing the plant and instilling its juice into the ear.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Healing of perception and awareness
- Restoration of balance in the senses
- Quiet, internal healing rather than dramatic intervention
- Water edge and liminal ecology (alder grows near rivers, wetlands)

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Healing & Blessing (Spiritual)

- Alder is suited to *restoring perception*: clarity of hearing, attentiveness, and the ability to “listen rightly,” both physically and symbolically.
- In ritual contexts, Alder may be invoked when someone feels spiritually deafened, overwhelmed, unable to hear guidance, or disconnected from ancestral or divine voices.

Water & Liminal Space Work

- Because Alder is a tree of riverbanks and marsh edges, it naturally lends itself to rites at thresholds between worlds, especially water related nemetâ.
- A staff, wand, or charm made from fallen Alder wood may be used when working at the boundary of knowledge, memory, or transition.

Offerings

- Alder bark or leaves (ethically sourced) may be offered near running water when seeking healing, clarity, or reconciliation.
- Particularly suited for quiet prayers rather than public ceremony.

Cautions & Ethics

- Alder wood and bark have real world chemical properties; ritual use should remain symbolic.
- Prefer fallen or naturally shed material; Alder is ecologically important to wetland systems.

Asarabacca (*Baccar*)

Historical Note

Asarabacca (*baccar*) is attested as a treatment for head pain, eye ulcers, inflammation after childbirth, and skin disease. Its scent was said to induce sleep.

Core Spiritual Themes

- The head and senses as sacred centers
- Induced rest, sleep, and altered states
- Gentle descent into stillness
- Post birth recovery and restoration

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rest, Sleep, and Trance

- Asarabacca's strong scent and sleep inducing quality make it symbolically suited for ritual rest, incubation, and descent rather than ascent.
- It may be placed near (not on) the sleeping area during dreamwork or pre divinatory fasting, to support *receptivity rather than action*.

Post Rite Integration

- After intense ritual or emotional work, Asarabacca fits a "closing" role, helping the practitioner settle, ground, and return inward.
- Especially appropriate following rites connected to birth, grief, or healing.

Head & Vision Blessings

- In symbolic practice, Asarabacca supports clarity of perception by first quieting noise.
- A prayer over the head or brow using the plant as a focus object can be used when someone needs relief from inner turmoil or overthinking.

Cautions & Ethics

- Asarabacca is toxic if misused; no internal use is implied or recommended.
- Ritual use should be external, symbolic, and restrained.

Betony (*Vettonica*)

Historical Note

Betony was regarded as one of the most valued plants in Gaul. Homes in which it was planted were considered safe from all dangers. It was used medicinally in many forms, including wine and vinegar.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Household protection
- Stability and safety
- Continuous, everyday guardianship
- Quiet warding rather than aggressive defense

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Household Guardian Herb

- Betony naturally becomes a hearth and home plant in modern practice.
- A dried sprig near the hearth, altar, or main doorway symbolically extends the ancient belief that the home itself is guarded.

Long Term Wards

- Unlike herbs used for emergency purging, Betony is suited to *ongoing protection*.
- It may be renewed seasonally (not constantly), reinforcing steadiness rather than anxiety.

Offerings & Civic Space

- Because Betony was valued across cultures, it fits public or communal spiritual spaces: shared nemetons, meeting halls, or study areas.
- An offering of Betony represents goodwill and desire for peace rather than dominance.

Cautions & Ethics

- Avoid turning Betony into an “anxiety charm”; it represents trust and stability, not fear.
- Emphasize long term care over constant ritual replacement.

Birch

Historical Note

Birch is noted for its white bark and flexible wood. It was used for magistrates' rods, basket making, and bitumen extraction, and was associated with wedding torches and auspicious beginnings.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Authority and civic order
- Purity and clarity
- Beginnings, unions, and transitions
- Social structure and rightful rule

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Beginning

- Birch is a natural choice for *first rites*: new commitments, new students, new tools, or new cycles.
- A Birch wand or rod marks authority that is meant to guide, not punish.

Marriage & Union

- Drawing from its association with wedding torches, Birch can be used in rites of union, not only marriage, but alliances, oaths, and reconciliations.

Social & Civic Ritual Use

- Birch fits rites concerning right order: leadership installation, community boundaries, or ethical commitments.
- It symbolizes structured authority rather than wild power.

Cautions & Ethics

- Birch is not inherently "gentle" ; it represents order backed by consequences.
- Use thoughtfully, especially in rites involving authority.

Brookweed (*Samoius*)

Historical Note

Brookweed (*samoius* / *samolus*) grows in moist places and was gathered fasting, with the left hand, without looking at the plant or behind the gatherer. It was placed only in animal troughs to protect swine and cattle from disease.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Liminality and tabooed action
- Protection of livelihood and sustenance
- Guardianship over animals and dependent beings
- Obedience to ritual restraint
- Wetland and boundary ecology

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Protection of Animals & Livelihood

- Brookweed is foremost a protector of those under one's care, animals, dependents, and by extension the household economy.
- In modern practice, it may be used symbolically in blessings for pets, livestock, or even gardens and tools that sustain daily life.

Rites of Restraint & Trust

- The strict harvesting taboos suggest Brookweed as a plant for rites where self control, humility, and trust are central.
- Rituals involving Brookweed should emphasize following instructions precisely, accepting limits, and resisting curiosity mirroring the "do not look back" motif.

Boundary & Threshold Work

- Because it grows in wet places and is tied to crossings and rules, Brookweed fits rites marking transitions that affect others, not just the practitioner: taking responsibility, assuming guardianship, or entering communal roles.

Offerings

- Offerings of Brookweed (or symbolic representation) are appropriate near water sources as thanks for continued health, nourishment, and protection of creatures.

Cautions & Ethics

- Wetland plants are ecologically sensitive; symbolic use or local analogues are often preferable.
- Ritual power here lies in discipline, not repetition or intensity.

Buttercup (*Blutthagio*)

Historical Note

Buttercup (*blutthagio*) grows in moist areas. Its juice, mixed with vinegar, was used to protect and warm the ears, relieving pain.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Gentle warmth and circulation
- Minor but persistent ailments
- Comfort rather than cure
- Moist places and mild liminality

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Comfort & Soothing Rites

- Buttercup is appropriate for rituals aimed at relief, not transformation.
- It supports moments when one needs warmth, reassurance, or gradual easing rather than dramatic change.

Listening & Receptivity

- As with Alder, the association with ear care points to symbolic “hearing” but Buttercup works on the level of discomfort, not deafness.
- It may be used when someone struggles to listen due to irritation, anxiety, or agitation.

Domestic & Personal Use

- Buttercup belongs to quiet household rituals: personal blessings, bedtime prayers, or daily grounding moments.
- A small symbolic charm associated with Buttercup can represent patience and steady support.

Offerings

- Best offered in small, personal devotions rather than communal rites, ideal for household spirits or ancestors associated with care and everyday welfare.

Cautions & Ethics

- Buttercups can be irritating or toxic if misused; ritual use should be symbolic only.
- Avoid overstating its role, its strength lies in gentleness.

Celtic / Gallic Nard (*Valeriana celtica*)

Historical Note

Gallic nard was valued medicinally, comparable to eastern nard, used for internal organs, menstruation, and serpent bites. It was harvested with the root, washed in wine, dried in shade, carefully packaged, and sold at notable value.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Worth, rarity, and careful preparation
- Inner balance of vital organs and cycles
- Protection against poison and disruption
- Trade, value, and exchange

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Offering of Value

- Gallic nard is best understood as a precious offering herb, not an everyday ritual plant.
- Its careful preparation and monetary worth suggest use in major rites, vows, or thanksgivings, especially those involving healing or renewal.

Inner Order & Balance

- Because it aided vital organs and menstrual regulation, it symbolically suits rites seeking inner harmony, correct timing, and bodily or spiritual cycles aligning properly.

Protection from Venom & Corruption

- As with remedies for serpent bites, Gallic nard serves spiritually to guard against subtle poisons: resentment, envy, exhaustion, or long term imbalance.

Trade & Reciprocity Rites

- Particularly fitting for rites concerning exchange: oaths, offerings made in return for aid, or concluding long labors.

Cautions & Ethics

- This plant should never be treated casually in ritual framing; scarcity and value matter.
- Modern substitutes or symbolic equivalents may be appropriate when access is limited.

Colt's Foot (*Calliomarcus*)

Historical Note

Colt's Foot (*calliomarcus*) was used ritually and medicinally for coughs. It was gathered during the waning moon and prepared in a sealed vessel to produce vapors inhaled through a reed, penetrating the arteries and stomach.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Breath, voice, and the inner channels
- Lunar timing and decline
- Sealed containment and slow release
- Passage between inside and outside

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Breath & Anation Work

- Colt's Foot naturally aligns with breath as life force, what you would elsewhere describe as *Anation*.
- Ritual use may focus on restoring voice, clarity of expression, or unblocking what has become constricted.

Lunar & Waning Rites

- Because it is gathered in the waning moon, Colt's Foot belongs to rites of letting go: easing burdens, releasing grief, or quieting turmoil.

Contained Transformation

- The sealed vessel and reed suggest controlled processes.
- Symbolically, Colt's Foot is suited for gradual work, prayers or rites that unfold over days rather than instant outcomes.

Ritual Silence & Voice Return

- It may be included in rites where silence is observed before speech is reclaimed, reinforcing the rhythm of restraint, breath, and release.

Cautions & Ethics

- Vapors and inhalation practices should be approached symbolically; no physical replication of ancient medical methods is recommended.
- Emphasize metaphor over reenactment.

Comfrey (*Halus*)

Historical Note

Comfrey (*halus*) was used to treat pain in the side, kidney troubles, sprains, ruptures, hemorrhoids, and excessive bleeding. It was chewed or burnt, ground, and taken in mixtures.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Restoration and knitting together
- Recovery after damage or strain
- Endurance through injury
- Care over time rather than immediacy

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Mending

- Comfrey is symbolically suited for repair after harm, emotional, spiritual, or relational wounds rather than sudden crises.
- It may be incorporated into rites that acknowledge damage while affirming the slow work of becoming whole again.

Endurance & Perseverance

- In modern practice, Comfrey can stand for the strength required to persist through long healing processes.
- It fits well in devotions undertaken during recovery, convalescence, or rebuilding periods.

Community Care & Support

- Because Comfrey addresses strain and rupture, it can be used in rites focused on the health of a community following conflict or exhaustion.
- Symbolically, it reflects solidarity, mutual support, and long term care.

Cautions & Ethics

- Comfrey has known risks if ingested; ritual use should remain symbolic and external.
- Emphasize patience and restraint, as its spiritual role is not rapid intervention.

Common Birthwort (*Theximon*)

Historical Note

Birthwort (*theximon*) was used for asthma, splinters, convulsions, wounds, fevers, chills, and disorders involving removal or expulsion. It could be inhaled as smoke or applied to cleanse and draw out harm.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Extraction of embedded harm
- Transition and emergence
- Crisis intervention
- Threshold moments involving danger or necessity

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Extraction & Crisis

- Birthwort is spiritually aligned with moments when something must be removed for healing or survival, old oaths, harmful ties, or destructive habits.
- It suits rituals performed during decisive, often uncomfortable transitions.

Threshold & Emergency Rituals

- This herb belongs to liminal rites where normal gentleness is insufficient.
- Use in spiritual contexts should reflect gravity, seriousness, and necessity, not casual devotion.

Release into New States

- Given its name and applications, Birthwort can symbolize both physical and spiritual rebirth after danger or hardship.

Cautions & Ethics

- Birthwort contains toxic compounds and has serious medical risks.
- All usage should remain symbolic only, emphasizing ethical awareness and caution.

Climbing Ivy (*Subites*)

Historical Note

Climbing Ivy (*subites*) was used in wine to treat dysentery and internal disorders.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Persistence and binding
- Endurance through attachment
- Stabilization and containment
- Gradual resolution

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Binding & Stabilization

- Ivy's growth pattern suggests rites aimed at holding things together, relationships, households, or intentions that require continuity.
- It is useful where unraveling must be prevented without suppressing growth.

Containment of Excess

- Spiritually, Ivy symbolizes reducing excess and overflow, of emotion, speech, or action, helping restore equilibrium.

Long Term Commitments

- Good for rites focused on vows, commitments, and responsibilities that grow over time rather than appear suddenly.

Cautions & Ethics

- Ivy can be invasive; ritual symbolism should acknowledge both its strength and its risks.
- Avoid framing Ivy purely positively, control and restraint are central to its meaning.

Clover (*Uisumarus*)

Historical Note

Clover (*uisumarus*) was soaked in cold water, and the infused water was taken daily over ten days to treat vertigo.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Balance and equilibrium
- Reorientation and grounding
- Gentle correction
- Cyclic repetition

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Re Centering

- Clover is well suited for rituals addressing disorientation, loss of direction, confusion, or imbalance.
- It supports slow recalibration rather than sudden change.

Daily Discipline & Cycles

- Its repeated daily application suggests using Clover in practices requiring consistency: daily prayers, steady ethical work, or habit reform.

Grounding & Stability Rituals

- Clover can be symbolically used to anchor the practitioner to the land and the present moment, easing stress and instability.

Cautions & Ethics

- Emphasize patience and repetition in ritual framing.
- Clover's spiritual strength lies in steadiness, not intensity.

Clubmoss (*Selago*)

Historical Note

Clubmoss (*selago*) was gathered without iron, with ritual purity: clean bare feet, white garments, offerings of bread and wine, and collected in a manner likened to a symbolic “theft.” Druids carried it as protection against accidents, and its smoke was used for eye ailments.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Ritual purity and preparation
- Protection against misfortune
- Clear sight and discernment
- Proper exchange with the land
- Druidic authority and protocol

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Ritual Preparation & Purification

- Clubmoss is best suited for rites of preparation rather than outcome.
- It may be symbolically invoked when cleansing oneself before major ritual, teaching, divination, or public duty.

Protection Against Misfortune

- Carrying Clubmoss, or a symbolic token representing it, aligns with its ancient role as a preservative against accidents, spiritually understood as guarding against disorder, missteps, and unintended harm.

Clarity of Sight

- The use of its smoke for eye ailments translates well into symbolic rites for clear perception, ethical clarity, and measured judgment, especially for Uâtis or Druids tasked with seeing on behalf of others.

Offerings & Reciprocity

- Clubmoss emphasizes correct exchange: offerings precede use.
- In modern practice, it teaches that knowledge and protection are not taken freely but earned through respect and restraint.

Cautions & Ethics

- Clubmoss species are often endangered; physical harvesting is discouraged.
- Symbolic representation or local evergreen analogues are strongly preferred.

Creeping Cinquefoil (*Pempedula*)

Historical Note

Creeping Cinquefoil (*pempedula*) was used for mouth ulcers, throat roughness, dysentery, arthritis, and sciatica.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Containment and restraint
- Steady resistance to deterioration
- Support during chronic strain
- Holding boundaries against erosion

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Boundary Maintenance

- Cinquefoil supports rites where one must hold firm rather than advance, protecting spiritual, emotional, or ethical boundaries over time.

Chronic Burdens

- It may be symbolically used in long-term workings involving recurring difficulty, fatigue, or responsibility, particularly where endurance is key.

Speech & Restraint

- Its association with the mouth and throat aligns it with careful speech, moderation, and guarding against harmful expression.

Cautions & Ethics

- Avoid framing this herb as a cure all; its spiritual role is defensive and sustaining, not transformative.

Cudweed (*Gelasonen*)

Historical Note

Cudweed (*gelasonen*) was given with wine for dysentery, addressing internal imbalance and distress.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Internal settling and containment
- Quiet correction
- Reduction of excess
- Recovery from overwhelm

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Calming & Settling Rites

- Cudweed is suited for calming spiritual unrest, reducing agitation, excess emotion, or inner turmoil.
- Ideal for rites focused on regaining composure after disorder.

Aftermath Work

- Where a disruptive event has already passed, Cudweed symbolically assists in stabilizing what remains rather than revisiting the crisis.

Private Devotion

- This herb fits personal, introspective practice more than public ceremony.

Cautions & Ethics

- Emphasize moderation and privacy in its use.
- Avoid dramatizing its role, it works quietly and subtly.

Dwarf Elder (*Odocos*)

Historical Note

Dwarf Elder (*odocos*) shared many uses with elder, including purging, treating dropsy, assisting childbirth related conditions, healing wounds, dyeing hair, and expelling harmful substances. It was potent and wide ranging in application.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Potent transformation
- Purging and release
- Crossing social or bodily thresholds
- Alteration and reversal

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Purging & Release

- Dwarf Elder is spiritually aligned with letting go of what must be expelled old roles, emotional excess, or harmful influences.
- Such rites should be undertaken deliberately and sparingly.

Threshold & Identity Work

- Its association with hair darkening and bodily change suggests symbolic use in rites of identity shift aging, status change, or entering new social roles.

Strong Medicine, Strong Boundaries

- This herb belongs to a category of *powerful but risky* allies; its spiritual use is appropriate only when gentler options are insufficient.

Cautions & Ethics

- Dwarf Elder is toxic if misused; no physical experimentation is implied.
- Ritual framing must emphasize respect, necessity, and restraint.

Dyer's Woad (*Glastum*)

Historical Note

Dyer's Woad (*glastum*) was used in Gaul to stain the body blue during certain religious ceremonies, marking the skin itself as part of ritual expression.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Transformation of the visible self
- Ritual identity and altered status
- Marking sacred time and action
- Courage, liminality, and boundary crossing

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Transformation & Role Change

- Woad is most appropriate for rites where one becomes something different, even temporarily: warrior, supplicant, devotee, or liminal figure.
- It marks a clear distinction between ordinary time and sacred action.

Embodiment of Devotion

- Unlike many herbs used around the body, Woad historically altered the body itself.
- In modern practice, its symbolism can be carried through temporary markings, symbolic colors, or dedicated ritual garments rather than literal skin staining.

Courage & Threshold Rituals

- Woad aligns with rites involving fear, bravery, or passage into danger, physical, emotional, or spiritual.
- It signals willingness to be seen and changed.

Cautions & Ethics

- Physical use on skin should be symbolic or safely substituted.
- The key element is visibility and intention, not reenactment.

Eggplant (*Scubulum*)

Historical Note

Eggplant (*scubulum*) was used externally for inflammation, ulcers, earache, skin conditions, and irritation, especially in children.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Cooling and soothing
- Gentleness and care
- Relief rather than confrontation
- Protection of the vulnerable

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Cooling & Soothing Rites

- Eggplant is symbolically useful in rites meant to reduce heat, anger, resentment, agitation, or emotional burn.
- Best used when calm and care are required instead of force or confrontation.

Care for the Vulnerable

- Its use for children suggests spiritual applications in blessings for those who are fragile, tired, or newly begun on a path.

After Conflict Work

- Eggplant fits rites focused on easing tension after conflict rather than addressing the conflict itself.

Cautions & Ethics

- Its strength lies in moderation and gentleness.
- Avoid dramatic ritual framing.

Elderberry (*Scobie*)

Historical Note

Elderberry (*scobie*) is described as a tree like plant with strong scent, white flowers, and dark fruit. It was widely known and named across cultures.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Cycles of life, death, and renewal
- Boundary between worlds
- Ancestor and household presence
- Protection through continuity

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Ancestor & Hearth Work

- Elderberry naturally belongs near the household altar and ancestral rites.
- It symbolizes continuity across generations and the protection of lineage.

Seasonal Rites

- Its flowering and fruiting cycles align it with seasonal observances, particularly those reflecting growth, harvest, and decline.

Boundary Protection

- Elder has long carried a liminal reputation; in derived practice it marks edges: garden boundaries, yard limits, or ritual enclosures.

Cautions & Ethics

- Different parts of elder are toxic if misused.
- Ritual use should emphasize respect and boundary awareness.

Fennel (*Sistrameor*)

Historical Note

Fennel (*sistrameor*) was used to aid digestion, expel poisons, support lactation, cleanse after childbirth, and break stones.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Clearing internal obstruction
- Nourishment and renewal
- Flow and circulation
- Post birth restoration

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Clearing & Renewal

- Fennel suits rituals where one seeks to restore flow of energy, creativity, or emotional processing.

Support & Nourishment

- Its association with milk and post birth care makes it ideal for blessings involving support, generosity, and sustenance, both given and received.

Stone Breaking Symbolism

- Fennel can be used symbolically in rites aimed at overcoming stubborn inner obstacles or long held emotional blockages.

Cautions & Ethics

- Emphasize symbolic use aligned with nourishment rather than purgation.
- Avoid medical framing.

Ferns (*Rratis*)

Historical Note

Ferns (*rratis*) were used medicinally for hip and joint pain, with roots prepared in wine. They were noted as often growing near beech trees.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Ancient endurance and deep time
- Hidden strength beneath the surface
- Woodland liminality
- Support of movement and stability

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Deep Time & Ancestral Grounding

- Ferns, as ancient plants, lend themselves to rites that acknowledge deep continuity, the long persistence of land, lineage, and tradition.
- Appropriate for grounding work when engaging with ancestral memory or the accumulated weight of the past.

Strength Beneath the Surface

- Because their power lies largely underground, ferns symbolize hidden resilience rather than visible dominance.
- Use in meditative rites focused on inner strength that supports outward movement.

Forest Threshold Work

- Ferns naturally occupy shaded, marginal forest spaces, making them suitable for rites performed at the edge of paths, groves, or nemetâ where transition and uncertainty are present.

Cautions & Ethics

- Fern populations can be sensitive; ritual use should rely on fallen fronds or symbolic representation.
- Avoid over harvesting.

Feverfoullie (*Exacum*)

Historical Note

Feverfoullie (*exacum*), a bitter plant, was gathered in autumn and used to expel harmful substances from the body. Its bitterness gave rise to the Roman name "gall of earth."

Core Spiritual Themes

- Bitter truth and cleansing
- Expulsion of corruption
- Autumnal decline and release
- Necessary discomfort

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Purification & Expulsion

- Feverfoullie is spiritually aligned with cleansing that is unpleasant but necessary.
- Suitable for rites addressing moral corruption, lingering negativity, or spiritual stagnation.

Autumn & Waning Rites

- Its seasonal gathering ties it to decline, decay, and preparation for renewal.
- Use in rites associated with the waning half of the year or the darkening season.

Acceptance of Discomfort

- Feverfoullie teaches that healing and clarity may involve bitterness.
- Ritual framing should emphasize honesty and resolve, not gentleness.

Cautions & Ethics

- Do not romanticize suffering; this herb's symbolic role is corrective, not punitive.
- Use sparingly.

Greater Celandine (*Thona*)

Historical Note

Greater Celandine (*thona*) was used for sharpening sight, treating jaundice, toothache, and skin conditions. Its juice was prepared carefully and allowed to dry into small forms.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Clarity of sight and perception
- Discernment
- Purification of vision
- Exposure of hidden imbalance

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Clarity & Discernment Rites

- Greater Celandine belongs in rites seeking clear seeing, truth discernment, ethical judgment, and insight free of distortion.

Revealing Hidden Imbalance

- Symbolically, it may be used to expose what has been obscured misaligned motives, unexamined habits, or unconscious patterns.

Preparation Before Decision

- This herb fits preparatory rites before important choices, councils, or judgments.

Cautions & Ethics

- Greater Celandine is toxic if misused.
- Ritual use must remain symbolic and controlled.

Hellebore (*Laginum*)

Historical Note

Hellebore (*laginum*) was a powerful poison and medicine. It was used to expel matter violently, kill pests, poison arrows, and counter parasites and infestations.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Danger and decisive force
- Extreme purification
- Warfare and lethal boundary setting
- Irreversible action

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Last Resort

- Hellebore should be framed as an herb for absolute necessity, not routine practice.
- Its spiritual role aligns with final boundaries, severance, and protection against existential threat.

Warfare & Defense Symbolism

- Spiritually associated with militant defense, vigilance, and refusal to permit invasion, whether physical, spiritual, or ethical.

Final Cleansing

- Represents removal that cannot be undone.
- Rituals invoking this plant should be rare and undertaken with solemn awareness.

Cautions & Ethics

- Hellebore is extremely dangerous.
- Emphasize symbolic invocation only and clear moral clarity in its conceptual use.

Henbane (*Bilinuntiam*)

Historical Note

Henbane (*bilinuntiam*) was widely used for pain relief, inflammation, disorders of the womb, gout, eye ailments, coughs, and as a sedative. It was prepared in many forms, including poultices, suppositories, and tablets.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Altered consciousness and heaviness
- Pain, numbness, and relief
- Dangerous knowledge
- Crossing into shadowed states

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Shadow & Altered State Symbolism

- Henbane belongs firmly to shadowed herbal knowledge, plants that alter perception and awareness.
- In derived practice, it should *never* be used physically, but symbolically represents altered states, trance, or deep inward descent.

Rites of Pain Acknowledgment

- Spiritually, Henbane is not about curing pain but acknowledging its presence and temporarily easing its grip.
- It suits rites dealing with grief, chronic suffering, or heavy psychological states where gentleness is impossible but endurance is required.

Boundary of the Forbidden

- This herb teaches restraint. Its presence in ritual lore serves as a reminder that not all power is safe to wield, and wisdom lies in knowing what *not* to touch.

Cautions & Ethics

- Henbane is highly toxic and hallucinogenic.
- Ritual engagement must remain purely symbolic and clearly framed as such.

Hyacinth

Historical Note

Hyacinth was used in Gaul for dyeing and medicinally to treat colic, bites, jaundice, and as a substance affecting sexual development.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Suppression and restraint of growth
- Controlled development
- Social control and power over bodies
- Beauty with an edge of authority

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Restraint & Delay

- Hyacinth is spiritually aligned with holding something back delaying growth, postponing action, or resisting premature change.
- Appropriate for vows of discipline or periods of intentional limitation.

Authority & Social Order

- The plant's use in controlling bodily development suggests ceremonial associations with authority, regulation, and imposed structure.
- Its spiritual framing should acknowledge discomfort and imbalance inherent in such power.

Hidden Cost of Beauty

- As a dye plant, Hyacinth stands at the crossroads of beauty and control what is made pleasing at a cost.

Cautions & Ethics

- This herb highlights ethical ambiguity.
- Ritual work should confront questions of consent, control, and responsibility.

Juniper (*Jupicellusum*)

Historical Note

Juniper (*jupicellusum*) was burned to drive away snakes and poisonous creatures. Its berries were used medicinally and to make wine.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Protection and warding
- Purification through smoke
- Boundary defense
- Resilience in harsh conditions

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Sacred Space & Boundary Clearing

- Juniper is ideal for fumigation rites, cleansing ritual space and establishing protective boundaries.
- Smoke may be carried sunwise around a nemetôn or household perimeter.

Protection & Vigilance

- It is especially suited for rites focused on vigilance rather than aggression, keeping danger at bay rather than confronting it directly.

Land & Nemetâ Work

- Juniper harmonizes well with land based rites, especially those involving wild or marginal spaces.

Cautions & Ethics

- Avoid excessive smoke indoors.
- Emphasize purification, not domination.

Juniper is one of my primary cleansing herbs. Its fragrant smoke is used to purify ritual spaces before ceremonies, devotional work, or divination. Rather than viewing cleansing as the removal of "negative energy," I understand it as restoring right relationship and preparing a place for sacred presence. Juniper marks the transition from ordinary space to sacred space.

Lemon Balm (*Merisimorion*)

Historical Note

Lemon Balm (*merisimorion*) was used to soothe bites, wounds, dysentery, breathing difficulties, and inflammation of ulcers and tumors.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Soothing and calming
- Relief from distress
- Gentle restoration
- Emotional balm

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Comfort & Ease

- Lemon Balm is ideal for softening rituals those intended to comfort, soothe, and reassure rather than transform.

Healing After Shock

- It suits rites following emotional or spiritual trauma, where rest and recovery take priority.

Gentle Devotion

- Lemon Balm fits daily devotions, quiet prayer, and household ritual rather than intense ceremonial magic.

Cautions & Ethics

- Keep its use modest and calm in tone.
- Avoid turning it into a “miracle cure” symbol.

Limeum

Historical Note

Limeum was used by the Gauls to create a potent arrow poison for hunting. It was also forced down the throats of sick cattle to purge illness, often causing violent reactions before recovery.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Dangerous potency
- Forced expulsion and purging
- Boundary between medicine and poison
- Power over life and death

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Absolute Boundary

- Limeum belongs to the category of herbs representing lethal boundaries that which must never be crossed lightly.
- Spiritually, it may be invoked symbolically in rites that establish final limits, prohibitions, or irreversible decisions.

Purging by Necessity

- Its use in cattle medicine suggests a brutal but necessary cleansing.
- Ritual symbolism may apply to moments where harsh measures are required to save what remains, cutting away corruption at great cost.

Hunting & Survival Contexts

- Limeum can stand for the stark realities of survival, subsistence, and the responsibility entailed in taking life.

Cautions & Ethics

- Limeum is explicitly dangerous and lethal.
- Its spiritual framing should be rare, solemn, and symbolic only, used to teach restraint more than action.

Meadowsweet (*Rodarium*)

Historical Note

Meadowsweet (*rodarium*) was used to treat inflammation and tumors. Its application involved ritual gestures, such as spitting to the right and participation by people of different origins.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Healing through cooperation
- Ritual action and repetition
- Social harmony
- Shared effort across boundaries

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Communal Healing Rites

- Meadowsweet naturally lends itself to collective ritual, where healing is performed together, not alone.
- Particularly suited for community blessing rites involving cooperation and diversity.

Ritual Gesture & Intent

- The repeated actions surrounding its use emphasize that gesture matters, movement, direction, and participation carry meaning alongside the herb itself.

Social Balance & Reconciliation

- Because of its emphasis on multiple participants, Meadowsweet fits rites intended to heal division, restore harmony, or reconcile differences.

Cautions & Ethics

- Emphasize consent and communal agreement.
- The herb's meaning is diminished if stripped of its social context.

Mistletoe (*Viscum album*)

Historical Note

Mistletoe held exceptional sacred status among the Gauls, especially when found growing on oak. It was harvested on the fifth day of the moon by Druids in ritual purity and believed to possess all healing power.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Divine favor and selection
- All healing and renewal
- Lunar timing and sacred cycles
- Sovereignty and priestly authority

Ritual & Devotional Uses

High Sacred Rites

- Mistletoe belongs only to major ritual moments, renewal of vows, blessings of community cycles, and rites tied to lunar phases.
- It symbolizes that which descends from the divine into the mortal realm.

Blessing & Continuity

- It may be used to bless tools, nemetâ, or households as an emblem of continued favor and protection.

Lunar & Temporal Alignment

- The fifth day of the moon can be ritually observed as a time of healing, reconciliation, and renewal in derived practice.

Cautions & Ethics

- Mistletoe is toxic if ingested.
- Ritual framing should emphasize reverence, restraint, and symbolic handling only.

Mistletoe is one of the most versatile sacred plants in my practice. Inspired by its exceptional status in the classical sources, I regard it as a general-purpose ritual herb. It may accompany prayers, blessings, offerings, seasonal observances, or rites of healing. While I reserve naturally harvested mistletoe for special occasions, it serves as a reminder that the Gods continue to reveal gifts through the living world.

Mugwort (*Bricumum / Ponem*)

Historical Note

Mugwort (*bricumum, ponem*) was used for womb ailments, kidney pain, and urinary issues. It was harvested before sunrise with the left hand and encircled around the body.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Liminality and threshold crossing
- Release and unbinding
- Left hand rites and non ordinary practice
- Connection to deep bodily cycles

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Liminal & Uâtis Work

- Mugwort is strongly aligned with liminal practice, vision, divination, and crossing between known and unknown states.
- Suitable for rites involving journeying, Drus work (Gualish world Tree), and encounters beyond ordinary perception.

Release & Unbinding Rites

- Its association with breaking stones and unblocking passages makes it ideal for rituals aimed at releasing emotional or spiritual stagnation.

Night & Threshold Rituals

- Mugwort fits rites conducted at dawn, dusk, or liminal times of the moon, where clarity arises from transition.

Cautions & Ethics

- Mugwort can affect pregnancy and should be treated with respect.
- Ritual use should remain symbolic and external.

Mugwort accompanies many of my offerings to the spirits of place. Before prayers or offerings are given, I may burn a small amount or place fresh leaves upon the earth as a gesture of respect toward the local land spirits. For me, mugwort serves as an herb of welcome, helping establish a mindful relationship between myself and the place in which I stand.

Oak (*Quercus robur*)

Historical Note

Oak was regarded as the central sacred tree of the Gauls and is inseparable from the rites surrounding mistletoe. Druids performed rituals in oak groves and used oak in nearly all religious contexts.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Stability and endurance
- Sacred authority and legitimacy
- Axis between worlds
- Order upheld through strength

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Axis of the Nemeton

- Oak represents the structural heart of sacred space.
- In derived practice, oak defines where ritual order is established and maintained.

Authority & Oath Work

- Oak is appropriate for vows, oaths, and commitments that must endure over time.
- It symbolizes promises made publicly and upheld privately.

Continuity & Tradition

- Oak stands for inherited wisdom and long cycles, making it suited for rites of lineage, transmission, and teaching.

Cautions & Ethics

- Avoid reducing oak to generic “strength.”
- Oak’s power lies in responsibility and restraint as much as dominance.

Peat Moss (*Sphagnum*)

Historical Note

Peat moss (*sphagnum*) was used for baths treating uterine disorders, swelling, joint pain, and dropsy. It was applied both externally and internally in medical contexts.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Absorption and containment
- Softening and support
- Holding moisture and memory
- Quiet endurance

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Softening & Support

- Peat moss is ideal for rituals meant to ease strain, protect what is vulnerable, and hold what needs gentle containment.

Holding Space

- Symbolically, it represents what absorbs emotional or spiritual weight without collapsing useful in caregiving and support roles.

Water & Earth Balance

- It fits rites focused on balancing moisture and dryness, flow and stillness, especially in bodily or emotional contexts.

Cautions & Ethics

- Peatlands are environmentally sensitive.
- Use symbolic representation or imagery rather than harvesting.

Pennyroyal (*Albolon*)

Historical Note

Pennyroyal (*albolon*) was used as a warming and digestive herb, an abortifacient, and to expel menstrual flow, poisons, and parasites.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Expulsion and removal
- Heat and urgency
- Boundary between aid and harm
- Transformative danger

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Expulsion

- Pennyroyal belongs among herbs of forceful removal, used symbolically when something must be driven out.

Warning Herb

- Spiritually, it teaches caution: not every obstruction should be removed, and not every method is safe.

Crisis & Emergency Symbolism

- Appropriate in teachings about ethical limits, desperation, and the cost of intervention.

Cautions & Ethics

- Pennyroyal is toxic.
- It should appear in ritual teaching primarily as a boundary marker, not a tool.

Pimpernel (*Sapana*)

Historical Note

Pimpernel (*sapana*) was used to draw out splinters, ease inflammation, purge mucus from the head, and relieve toothache.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Extraction of embedded harm
- Minor but persistent injury
- Focus and precision
- Clearing channels

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Extraction

- Pimpernel symbolically assists in removing irritants small but damaging influences that lodge beneath awareness.

Clarity of Thought & Speech

- Its connection to the head, mouth, and nostrils makes it useful in symbolic work around thought clarity and speech purification.

After Impact Healing

- Best applied when harm has already occurred and must be removed rather than avoided.

Cautions & Ethics

- Spiritual use should focus on precision and restraint.
- Avoid framing in dramatic or extreme terms.

Pine

Historical Note

Pine is referenced in connection with amber worn by women in Transpadane Gaul, valued both for adornment and protection against throat ailments caused by local waters.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Preservation and resilience
- Protection through adornment
- Northern and upland strength
- Resin, time, and endurance

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Protective Adornment

- Pine aligns with the idea that protection can be worn, not only hidden.
- Resin, pitch, or symbolic pine tokens may be used in charms meant to guard the voice, breath, or expression.

Endurance & Longevity

- As an evergreen, pine supports rites focused on steadfastness through hardship, emotional winters, or long obligations.

Upland & Harsh Land Work

- Pine is appropriate for rites tied to mountainous regions, cold seasons, or environments where endurance is essential.

Cautions & Ethics

- Avoid generic “evergreen symbolism.”
- Pine’s strength lies in survival under pressure, not softness.

Amber holds an important place in my devotional practice. Pieces of amber are offered to the Gods as gifts of beauty, gratitude, and reverence. Formed over immense spans of time, amber reminds me that the sacred often works beyond the measure of a human lifetime. It is a simple but meaningful offering that asks for nothing in return. Connected to the Gaulish Apollo as mentioned by Apollonius of Rhodes.

Plantain (*Tarbidolopion*)

Historical Note

Plantain (*tarbidolopion*) was used for wounds, burns, bites, inflammation, tumors, ulcers, and protection against malignant conditions.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Protection at the surface
- First response and immediate aid
- Shielding and covering
- Everyday resilience

Ritual & Devotional Uses

First Response Symbolism

- Plantain is spiritually suited to immediate aid rites, when damage has just occurred and stabilization is needed.

Shielding Work

- Use plantain symbolically to cover, protect, and guard vulnerable individuals or spaces without invoking extreme measures.

Everyday Protection

- As a common roadside plant, Plantain represents dependable, readily available support rather than rare power.

Cautions & Ethics

- Emphasize humility and accessibility rather than potency.
- Avoid over elevating its role.

Prickly Poppy (*Corna*)

Historical Note

Prickly Poppy (*corna*) was applied externally to treat eye ulcers, cloudiness, and inflammation.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Painful clarity
- Defense through discomfort
- Sharp boundaries
- Vision through adversity

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Harsh Discernment

- Prickly Poppy symbolically aligns with clarity that is uncomfortable but necessary, truths that sting before they heal.

Defensive Boundaries

- It can represent thorned boundaries: protection that discourages approach while preserving what lies within.

Vision & Awareness

- Because it relates to the eyes, it may be used in rites asking for honesty or removal of illusion, even when painful.

Cautions & Ethics

- Frame use carefully; this herb represents guarded insight, not cruelty.
- Avoid glorifying suffering.

Redstem Wormwood (*Artemisia scoparia*)

Historical Note

Redstem Wormwood was used to expel intestinal worms and restore balance gently.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Gentle cleansing
- Removal of parasitic influence
- Restoration of internal order
- Quiet correction

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Gentle Removal

- This herb symbolizes removing influences that drain energy without dramatic confrontation, habits, obligations, or thoughts that sap vitality.

Internal Balance Work

- Best suited for introspective rituals focused on restoring internal environmental balance rather than external defense.

Quiet Maintenance

- Redstem Wormwood supports ongoing spiritual hygiene rather than crisis response.

Cautions & Ethics

- Do not frame as aggressive purification.
- Its role is corrective and restorative.

Rue

Historical Note

Rue was regarded as one of the strongest antidotal plants. It was used against poisons, snake bites, stings, mad dog bites, fungi, and venoms. Its smoke and mere presence were believed to repel serpents and harmful creatures.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Powerful apotropaic force
- Vigilance and defense
- Conscious resistance to harm
- Moral and spiritual caution

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Protection & Warding Rites

- Rue is well suited as a guardian herb, used symbolically to repel harmful influences, ill intent, and spiritual “venoms.”
- It may be placed at thresholds or used in boundary marking rites for strong but controlled protection.

Clarity Against Corruption

- Rue aligns with rites focused on resisting temptation, deceit, or moral corruption standing firm against influences that distort judgment.

Defensive Vigilance

- Rather than aggressive confrontation, Rue supports constant awareness and preparedness.
- Its presence signals seriousness and alertness rather than comfort.

Cautions & Ethics

- Rue is potent and potentially harmful if misused.
- Ritual framing should emphasize restraint, discernment, and respect.

Snake Lily (*Gigarus*)

Historical Note

Snake Lily (*gigarus*), also called draconteum, was used to treat nasal polyps through direct and invasive application, reflecting its intense and targeted nature.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Confrontation with invasive forces
- Serpentine symbolism
- Precision and focus
- Willingness to endure discomfort for resolution

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Invasive Removal

- Snake Lily symbolically supports removing influences that have intruded deeply, obsessions, controlling habits, or external pressures that have become lodged within one's psyche or life.

Serpent Imagery & Power

- The serpent association places this plant at the crossroads of danger and wisdom, used when confronting forces that cannot be ignored.

Focused Intervention

- Its ritual role is precise rather than broad: addressing one defined issue with unwavering attention.

Cautions & Ethics

- Symbolizes severe intervention and should never be framed lightly.
- Emphasize ethical clarity and necessity.

Spurge Laurel (*Ousubim*)

Historical Note

Spurge Laurel (*ousubim*) was used to induce vomiting, expel phlegm, promote sneezing, and purge excess fluids often violently.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Violent purgation
- Release by force
- Disruption of stagnation
- Harsh correction

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Forcible Clearing

- Spurge Laurel represents unavoidable disruption, situations where stagnation can only be broken through forceful change.

Teaching Tool of Extremes

- More often a *symbolic warning* than a ritual tool, this herb teaches that some remedies cost more than others.

End of Tolerance

- Spiritually, it marks the moment when accumulation becomes intolerable and correction must occur.

Cautions & Ethics

- Spurge Laurel is highly toxic.
- Ritual engagement should be conceptual and instructional, not performative.

Sweet Flag (*Acorus calamus*)

Historical Note

Sweet Flag was used to stimulate urination, address chest and liver ailments, relieve convulsions, and counter poisons. It was known as “pepper of bees” among the Gauls.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Flow and circulation
- Awakening and stimulation
- Clearing stagnation
- Vital movement

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Awakening & Movement

- Sweet Flag is symbolically linked to stirring what has become sluggish, reviving motivation, clarity, and responsiveness.

Restoring Flow

- Best used in rites focused on restarting processes: creativity, communication, or emotional circulation.

Support Against Toxins

- Represents resilience and the capacity to withstand challenges without collapsing.

Cautions & Ethics

- Emphasize moderation and symbolic use.
- Avoid framing it as aggressive purification; its strength lies in movement rather than force.

Thyme (*Gilarus*)

Historical Note

Thyme (*gilarus*) was used medicinally for oral health, sores of the mouth, gums, tongue, palate, foul breath and was chewed while fasting.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Purification of speech
- Discipline and restraint
- Breath and voice
- Moral cleanliness

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Speech & Word Craft

- Thyme is especially well suited for rites involving right speech, oaths, prayers, teaching, and public address.
- Symbolically, it cleanses the mouth before words are offered.

Fasting & Discipline Work

- Its association with fasting ties it to ascetic moments: preparation before ritual, teaching, or oath taking.

Breath Awareness

- Thyme aligns with attention to breath, spoken intention, and the responsibility carried by words once released.

Cautions & Ethics

- Avoid trivializing into “sweet speech” symbolism.
- Thyme is corrective and purifying, not flattering.

Peristereon (Vervain)

Historical Note

Vervain was used by the Gauls for divination and prophecy. It was gathered with complex ritual requirements, offerings, iron circles, left hand harvesting, and strict timing.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Divination and foresight
- Desire and alignment
- Ritual precision
- Spoken destiny

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Divinatory Rites

- Vervain is fundamentally linked to seeing ahead omens, signs, and unfolding possibilities.
- It fits rites of consultation, decision making, and discerning direction.

Alignment of Desire

- Traditionally said to attract what one seeks, vervain should be framed as alignment rather than manipulation clarifying intent so outcomes follow naturally.

Formal Ritual Structure

- Vervain emphasizes that how something is done matters as much as outcome timing, gesture, offering, and order are essential.

Cautions & Ethics

- Avoid reducing it to wish granting symbolism.
- Stress responsibility and clarity in divinatory use.

Vervain is one of the herbs I most closely associate with blessing and sacred preparation. It may be used to bless ritual tools, sprinkled as an infusion to prepare a ceremonial area, or carried during important rites. Ancient authors associated vervain with sacred and prophetic practices among the peoples of Gaul, and while I do not claim to recreate those traditions exactly, its historical importance makes it a natural companion in devotional work.

Wallflower (Vela)

Historical Note

Wallflower (*vela*) was used to treat coughs, jaundice, joint pain, asthma, fistulas, and poisons, including applications for infants.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Quiet persistence
- Healing through patience
- Support for the overlooked
- Strength in marginal spaces

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites for the Overlooked

- Wallflower suits rites focused on those who are ignored, marginalized, or recovering quietly rather than dramatically.

Gentle Endurance

- Spiritually, it teaches healing through time, patience, and consistency not force.

Caregiving & Protection

- Its use for infants ties it to guardianship, gentle protection, and responsibility for the vulnerable.

Cautions & Ethics

- Frame as supportive, not passive.
- Strength here is subtle and enduring.

Water Lily (*Baditis*)

Historical Note

Water Lily (*baditis*) was used in ways associated with suppression of fertility and ritual renunciation, possibly connected to priesthood.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Renunciation and restraint
- Separation from generative cycles
- Stillness on deep waters
- Sacrifice for sacred purpose

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Renunciation

- Water Lily symbolically represents choosing withdrawal from certain life paths for devotion, service, or spiritual focus.

Stillness Over Depth

- Floating yet rooted, it suits meditative rites emphasizing calm above unseen depth composure over emotional intensity.

Sacred Commitment

- Use only in contexts making clear this is about choice, not coercion vows freely taken, not imposed.

Cautions & Ethics

- Extremely sensitive symbolism.
- Must always be framed around autonomy, consent, and reverence.

Water Milfoil (*Beliucandas*)

Historical Note

Used smeared on ulcers or sores to keep them from becoming inflamed. Associated with cooling, calming, and preventing irritation.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Cooling agitation
- Preventing escalation
- Emotional de-inflaming
- Gentle boundary setting

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Cooling the Inner Fire

- Water milfoil suits rites that ease conflict, soothe tempers, or reduce the “heat” in a situation internal or external.

Non escalation Charms

- Symbolically excellent for preventing a harm from growing: gossip from spreading, anger from rising, or a spiritual irritation from worsening.

Boundary Waters

- It creates a calm surface “do not let disturbance take root.”

Cautions & Ethics

- Do not frame as suppressive of emotion; it is stabilizing, not numbing.

Water Pimpernel (*Samolus*, *Samous*)

Historical Note

Gathered fasting, with the left hand, without looking back, and used for protecting livestock from illness. Only placed in their drinking trough.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Liminality and vigilance
- Protection of dependents
- Ritual discipline
- Offerings of service

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Guardian's Herb

- This plant is deeply linked to caretaker responsibility those who tend others: children, community, animals, land.

Left Hand Path of Duty

- Harvesting it with the left hand and no backward glance marks it as liminal, purposeful, and requiring attention to ritual detail.

Water Borne Blessings

- Its placement in the water trough connects it to blessing through shared waters, offering health through what is consumed.

Cautions & Ethics

- Should not be used for coercive warding. This is a herb of caretakers, not controllers.

White Maple (*Gallic Maple*)

Historical Note

A fine, pale wood used in elegant carpentry, prized for its finish. Known as “Gallic maple” north of the Po and across the Alps.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Craftsmanship
- Refinement
- Stability
- Beauty through work

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Tools of the Art

- White maple is ideal symbolically for ritual tools crafted with intention: staffs, wands, plaques, writing tablets.

Refinement of the Self

- The “finish” it allows speaks to the ongoing work of shaping one’s virtue, polishing roughness into clarity.

Ancestral Skill

- Represents the craftspeople of Gaul, woodworkers, carvers, joiners and honors skill cultivated over generations.

Cautions & Ethics

- Focus on craftsmanship, not luxury. This wood’s virtue is skill, not status.

Wintergreen (*lumbarum* / *Leimonion*)

Historical Note

Seeds taken with wine helped dysentery, abdominal issues, and supported menstrual cycles.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Restoration of equilibrium
- Rhythm and cycles
- Digesting life experiences
- Resilience

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Cycle Harmonization

- Supports rites that focus on the natural rhythms of life: monthly cycles, seasons, tides, and periods of growth or rest.

Emotional Digestion

- Because it assists bodily digestion, spiritually it aids in processing experiences taking in, breaking down, and integrating.

Restoring the Center

- Good for rebalancing after chaotic or draining periods.

Cautions & Ethics

- Avoid any symbolic implications about regulating others' bodies or choices focus on inner rhythm and self restoration.

Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*)

(See also Celtic/Gallic Nard for overlap)

Historical Note

Closely associated with the same class of bitter, cleansing, clarifying herbs as nard. Known for purification and sharpness of awareness.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Banishing haze
- Truth through bitterness
- Protective clarity
- Cleansing the senses

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Cutting Through Delusion

- Wormwood works as a spiritual solvent, removing glamour, pretense, self-deception, and fog.

Boundary of Bitter Truths

- Used when one must face or state an uncomfortable truth clearly and without embellishment.

Purification by Bitterness

- Not gentle; this is a sacred confrontation herb. Appropriate in rites of moral clarity or psychic cleansing.

Cautions & Ethics

- Should never be framed as punitive.
- It reveals truth; it does not weaponize it.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

Historical Note

Used to prevent infection, staunch bleeding, and heal old and new wounds.

Core Spiritual Themes

- Wound tending
- Protection in vulnerability
- Closure and healing
- Courage in recovery

Ritual & Devotional Uses

Rites of Healing Wounds

- Yarrow helps seal spiritual or emotional “bleeding”, events that still drain energy or vitality.

Protection During Injury

- It creates a boundary that lets healing happen without re injury. Good for rites after grief, conflict, or trauma.

Courage to Recover

- Healing takes bravery. Yarrow is the herb that stands with those choosing to mend rather than endure.

Cautions & Ethics

- This is not a quick fix symbol. Yarrow honors the work of healing, not a magical reset.

Every relationship with the plant world grows through experience. The historical record provides a foundation, but living traditions are sustained through respectful observation, gratitude, and continual learning. Spend time with the herbs. Learn their appearance, fragrance, habitat, and season. Observe how they grow and what creatures depend upon them. Allow your understanding to develop not only through books, but through direct relationship with the living landscape.

Above all, remember that these plants are not merely ingredients or tools. They are living members of the greater community of life. When approached with reverence, they become teachers as much as medicines, reminding us that healing begins with relationship, with the land, with the Gods, and with one another.

**PART TWO:
CHAPTER FIVE**

**THE SACRED
RELATIONSHIP**

Throughout this book we have explored the botanical identity, medicinal uses, and historical evidence surrounding many of the plants known to the ancient Gauls. Yet the surviving sources reveal something equally important: herbs were not regarded merely as useful materials. They were approached with reverence, gathered according to custom, and incorporated into practices that united healing, religion, and daily life.

Ancient writers such as Pliny the Elder and Marcellus of Bordeaux preserve scattered descriptions of these practices. Although their accounts must be read critically, often written by outsiders who misunderstood or criticized the traditions they observed, they consistently describe ritual behavior surrounding the gathering of certain plants. Herbs might be collected at particular times of the moon or before sunrise. Some were gathered with the left hand, others without the use of iron. Offerings of bread, wine, honey, or honeycomb were presented to the earth before harvesting. Sacred plants were carried in clean cloths, while white garments, washed feet, and ritual preparation emphasized that gathering medicinal herbs was not simply labor, but a sacred act.

These accounts suggest that healing began long before a remedy was prepared. The manner in which a plant was approached mattered. The gatherer entered into a relationship with the land, recognizing that medicine was not manufactured solely through human skill but received through the generosity of the natural world. Plants were gifts rather than possessions.

This understanding reflects a broader characteristic of Gaulish religion. The ancient Gauls recognized divine presence within the living landscape. Sacred groves, springs, rivers, mountains, and forests were places where human beings encountered the Gods and the spirits of place. It is unsurprising that the plants growing within those landscapes could likewise be treated with reverence. Gathering an herb was not merely the collection of a resource; it was participation in an ongoing relationship between humanity, the land, and the divine.

Modern readers should avoid assuming that every herb was gathered with elaborate ceremony. The surviving evidence concerns particular plants, many of which appear to have held exceptional medicinal or religious significance. Everyday gathering almost certainly occurred as well. Nevertheless, the recurring patterns preserved in the sources

reveal underlying principles that likely shaped the broader attitude toward healing plants: gratitude, restraint, preparation, and reciprocity.

This volume has frequently returned to the importance of evaluating evidence according to its strength. The same principle applies here. We possess no complete Gaulish herbal ritual, no surviving liturgy for gathering plants, and no manual describing every step of the process. What survives are fragments preserved in classical literature and later medical texts. Individually they offer only glimpses. Together they reveal recurring themes that allow us to cautiously reconstruct the values that surrounded herbal practice.

The chapter that follows is presented as a modern reconstruction inspired by those surviving traditions. It does not claim to reproduce an ancient ceremony exactly. Instead, it gathers together the ritual behaviors preserved in our sources and weaves them into a coherent devotional practice suitable for modern Gaulish spirituality. Throughout, every major element has its roots in the historical evidence, while the structure and symbolism have been thoughtfully reconstructed where the ancient record is silent.

Like the herbal identifications throughout this book, this rite should be understood as an invitation rather than a certainty. It is one possible expression of an ancient way of relating to the living world, a way founded not upon ownership, but upon respect; not upon taking, but upon receiving; and not upon domination, but upon reciprocity.

For every herb gathered from the earth carries with it an unspoken reminder: healing is a gift before it is a remedy.

**PART TWO:
CHAPTER SIX**

**RECONSTRUCTED
GAULISH-INSPIRED
RITE OF HERB
GATHERING AND
HONORING**

The following rite is a modern reconstruction inspired by surviving accounts of plant gathering among the ancient Gauls. It is not presented as an intact ancient ceremony. No complete Gaulish herb-gathering rite has survived. The rite draws upon practices recorded in ancient and late-antique sources: ritual washing, bare feet, white clothing, offerings before gathering, gathering at particular times, the use of the left hand, avoidance of iron in certain circumstances, and the careful receiving and carrying of harvested plants. Where the historical record becomes silent, the rite draws upon the Gaulish worldview developed throughout this work, particularly the relationship between Giamos and Samos, reciprocity with the living world, and the understanding that healing begins through relationship rather than possession. The reader should distinguish between attested practice and reconstructed meaning. The ancient sources sometimes tell us *what* people did without telling us *why*. The symbolism offered here is one modern Gaulish interpretation of those actions.

● The Time of Gathering

When there is no historically attested gathering time associated with a particular herb, the Macarnolugrâ, the First Quarter Moon, may be chosen. Pliny tells us that mistletoe was gathered on the fifth day of the moon, when the moon was growing but had not yet reached the middle of its course. This rite does not claim that all Gaulish herbs were historically gathered at the First Quarter. Rather, the growing moon provides an appropriate reconstructed time for gathering plants associated with healing, blessing, vitality, and increase. Within this practice, the Macarnolugrâ represents life moving toward fullness. Where an ancient source preserves a particular gathering time for an herb, however, that tradition may be honored instead. Some plants were gathered before sunrise, while others had their own seasonal or celestial associations.

● Preparation

Before going to the place of gathering, wash your hands and feet. Wear clean clothing. White may be worn if desired, particularly when gathering a plant considered especially sacred. These practices echo ancient descriptions of ritual plant gathering in which cleanliness, white clothing, and washed bare feet distinguished sacred gathering from ordinary harvesting. If the land is safe for doing so, remove your shoes when you reach the gathering place.

Stand upon the earth.

Feel the ground beneath you.

Do not immediately begin searching for what you have come to collect.

First, become present to the place.

Notice the trees, plants, birds, insects, wind, water, stones, sunlight, and everything else participating in that landscape.

You have entered a community of living beings.

● **Approaching the Herb**

When you find the herb you intend to gather, do not immediately touch it. Observe it first. Consider whether there is enough growing there to harvest responsibly. Look for other plants of the same species nearby. Notice whether it is flowering or producing seed. Observe whether insects or other animals are making use of it. If taking the plant would harm the population growing there, leave it. There is no failure in returning home empty handed. Sometimes honoring the herb means allowing it to remain exactly where it grows.

● **Greeting the Land**

Stand or kneel beside the plant. Place your left hand upon the earth, if appropriate, and say:

*Earth beneath me,
Land around me,
Gods and spirits who dwell here,
I come not as owner,
but as guest.*

I come seeking a gift of the living land.

*May what passes between us
be given and received
in right relationship.*

Remain quiet for a moment. Listen.

● **The Offering**

Before gathering, give something in return. The surviving sources preserve offerings associated with plant gathering including bread, wine, honey, and honeycomb. A small amount is sufficient.

The purpose is not payment. A gift cannot purchase the living world. The offering acknowledges reciprocity. Place your offering respectfully and say:

Datiesti uta dassân.

Datiūmī uta dassais.

You give that I may give.

I give that you may give.

May there be reciprocity

between myself and this place.

For what I receive,

I offer gratitude.

● **Giamos and the Left Hand**

When possible, make your first contact with the herb using the left hand. The use of the left hand in gathering certain medicinal plants is historically attested. Marcellus describes *bricumum*, an *Artemisia*, being gathered with the left hand before sunrise. Pliny likewise records left-handed gathering in his account of vervain, while his description of selago preserves an unusual ritual in which the right hand was passed through the left sleeve. The ancient writers do not tell us that these customs were connected with Giamos. That interpretation belongs to this reconstruction. Within this rite, the left hand is the hand of Giamos. It is the hand of receiving.

The right hand is ordinarily the hand through which many people perform deliberate action: making, cutting, building, striking, shaping, and manipulating the world around them. Here we intentionally begin differently. We receive before we act.

Giamos is associated with what is inward, hidden, gestating, ancestral, and beneath the visible surface. Roots grow unseen within the soil. Seeds wait in darkness. Medicines exist within plants before human hands reveal them.

Extend the left hand.

Touch the herb gently.

Pause.

You are not yet taking.

You are receiving.

- **Asking Before Gathering**

Say:

*Living one,
rooted within this land,
I acknowledge you.*

I seek a portion of what you carry.

*Not through conquest,
not through possession,
and not through needless taking.*

*May I receive what may be given
and leave what must remain.*

Remain still for several breaths. There need not be a supernatural sign. The answer may simply be discovered through observation. If the plant is scarce, unhealthy, damaged, or needed by the life surrounding it, leave it. Right relationship sometimes requires restraint.

- **Gathering**

Take only what you need. When practical and safe for the particular plant, allow the left hand to receive the harvested portion. A tool may be used when necessary. The ancient prohibition against iron belongs specifically to certain recorded plant gathering traditions and should not automatically be applied to every herb. The golden sickle associated with Pliny's famous mistletoe account should not be treated as a universal Gaulish harvesting implement. The purpose of reconstruction is not to combine every ancient description into a single imagined ceremony. We preserve the principle behind them:

Gathering can itself be sacred.

As you gather, say:

*From Giamos I receive,
from the hidden comes the revealed.*

*What has grown in darkness
shall pass into light.*

*What has rested within the land
shall become medicine, blessing,
offering, or sacred work.*

I receive without conquest.

I take without excess.

● **Take No More Than Needed**

Never strip an area simply because an herb is useful. Leave strong plants standing. Leave flowers for pollinators. Leave fruit for animals. Leave seeds for what comes after you. Leave enough that someone walking this place after you might never know that you gathered there. The land is not a storehouse created for human consumption. We participate in it.

A healer who strips the land cannot continue to heal.

● **Receiving the Herb**

Pliny describes selago being carried in a new cloth and mistletoe being received in a white cloth. This rite adapts that principle by carrying gathered herbs in a clean cloth, basket, or other vessel reserved for respectful harvesting. Place the herb within it carefully. Do not throw it casually into a bag as though it were merely an object.

Say:

I have received you from the land.

*May I carry you with the same respect
with which I approached you.*

● **Thanksgiving**

Before leaving, return your left hand to the earth.

Say:

To the land, my gratitude.

*To the spirits of this place,
my gratitude.*

*To the Gods who sustain life,
my gratitude.*

*To this herb,
my gratitude.*

What was given has been received.

What was received shall be honored.

*May life continue here
after I have gone.*

Remain for a moment before departing.

● **From Giamos into Samos**

When you return home, the relationship does not end. The plant has crossed a threshold. Within the land its virtues were largely hidden. Through gathering, drying, preparing, burning, infusing, offering, or otherwise working with it, those virtues become manifest. This movement can be understood through Giamos and Samos. Giamos is the hidden potential. Samos is its manifestation. The root beneath the earth becomes medicine. The aromatic leaf becomes smoke. The flower becomes offering. The dried herb becomes blessing. What was hidden becomes revealed. Yet neither exists without the other.

The purpose of the herbalist is not to dominate the plant and force power from it. The herbalist participates in a transformation already present within the living world.

● **Honoring the Herb at Home**

Before drying, preparing, or storing the herb, hold it between your hands.

Say:

*Child of the Earth,
Gift of the living land,
I received you beneath the Moon
and carried you into my home.*

*What was hidden within Giamos
now passes toward Samos.*

*May your virtues be revealed
according to your nature.*

May I use you wisely.

*May I never forget
the land from which you came.*

*May your gift bring healing,
blessing,
protection,
nourishment,
or sacred purpose
according to the work before me.*

*You were not simply taken.
You were received.
And you shall be remembered.*

The herb may then be dried, stored, prepared, offered, or otherwise used according to its nature.

● **When the Herb Is Used**

The final act of the gathering rite occurs whenever the herb is eventually used. Before placing juniper upon the fire, preparing vervain, giving an herb as an offering, or working with another plant, take a moment to remember where it came from.

Say:

*From Earth you came.
Through Giamos you grew.
Into Samos your virtues are revealed.
May your gift now serve its purpose.
And may what I have received
someday be given again.*

A Note on Samos, Giamos, Left, and Right

Samos and **Giamos** describe two complementary movements within the Gaulish understanding of the Cosmos. They should not be understood simply as “good” and “bad,” nor as two opposing forces locked in conflict.

Samos is associated here with the bright, outward, active, manifest, and expanding qualities of existence.

Giamos is associated with the dark, inward, receptive, hidden, ancestral, and gestating qualities.

Each depends upon the other. A seed rests unseen before it emerges; roots grow within darkness while leaves reach toward the sun. What is hidden becomes manifest, and what is manifest eventually returns again to what is hidden.

The association made in this rite between these principles and the right and left hands is reconstructed rather than directly attested in Gaulish sources.

The reconstruction begins with an interesting pattern in the surviving plant lore. Several ancient and late antique accounts specifically prescribe unusual use of the left hand when gathering plants. Artemisia is to be gathered with the left hand; vervain is taken up with the left; and selago involves the right hand being passed through the left sleeve. These instructions demonstrate that the side or hand used could possess ritual significance, even though the sources do not preserve the underlying Gaulish explanation.

Comparative Indo-European traditions provide additional context. Across a number of Indo-European languages and cultures, the right side developed associations with skill, correctness, favorable action, strength, and the ordinary hand of deliberate activity. This relationship is visible even linguistically: words descended from Indo-European terms for “right” can carry meanings connected with what is straight, proper, skillful, or fitting. The left, by contrast, frequently occupies the less ordinary side sometimes ominous in particular cultures, but also marked, liminal, reversed, or outside the normal pattern of action.

This rite interprets that distinction through Samos and Giamos.

The right hand represents the more Samos like movement of acting upon the world: making, shaping, cutting, giving, building, and bringing something into manifestation.

The left hand represents a more Giamos like movement of receiving: listening, accepting, drawing inward, encountering what is hidden, and allowing something to come to us before we act upon it.

This is particularly appropriate for gathering herbs. The plant is not approached first as something upon which human will is imposed. The gatherer begins with the receptive hand. Before cutting, preparing, transforming, or using the herb, we first receive it.

When this rite calls the left hand the Hand of Giamos, it should be understood as a modern Gaulish theological interpretation built from three things: historically attested left-handed plant gathering customs, comparative Indo-European symbolism surrounding right and left, and the complementary relationship between Samos and Giamos.

It is not a claim that an ancient Gaul would have explained the custom in precisely these words.

It provides a meaningful way for a living Gaulish practice to understand an ancient ritual behavior whose original explanation has been lost.

Looking Ahead

This booklet has focused primarily upon the plants themselves: their names, historical references, traditional uses, and the surviving evidence for how some were gathered and regarded. The reconstructed practices offered at the end of this work are intended to demonstrate one way that these fragments can be thoughtfully brought into a living Gaulish practice without confusing reconstruction with historical certainty.

These ideas will be explored more fully in my forthcoming work, ***Gaulish Folk Practices – An Introduction to Modern Gaulish Witchcraft***, which will move beyond herbs to examine the wider rhythms of everyday Gaulish-inspired practice: customs of the home and land, offerings, blessings, protective practices, seasonal observances, healing traditions, signs and omens, and other ways in which a reconstructed Gaulish worldview might be expressed through ordinary life.

Samolouissus is also a beginning. The plants gathered within these pages lead us outward into the home, the field, the forest, and the many small practices through which relationship with the Gods, spirits, ancestors, and living land may be maintained.



Uissus in britû, creddâ olli in te

Ambi uessû, Lugou

Knowledge in mind, faith of all in you

I walk with you, Lugus