

Brigid's Mythological Background

Brigid (or Brighid, Brigit, Brig, Brid, Bride, etc.) appears in Irish mythology as the daughter of the Dagda and wife of Bres. (Brighid is from Gaelic word *brigh*, meaning “power, vigor, virtue.” Her name means variously “The Exalted One,” “Power,” “Fiery Arrow of Power,” sometimes translated as the title “Brigid of the Flaming Arrow.”)

She was a part of the Tuatha Dé Danann, an Irish supernatural race. Brigid is venerated in the Celtic cultures of Ireland, Scotland (where is is known as Bride), Wales, Britain, France, and Spain. As a triple goddess, she is known as Brigid of Poetry, Healing, and Smith-craft. This triple goddess aspect of Brigid is often portrayed as “Maiden-Mother-Crone.” She was worshipped in her threefold aspect of Maiden-Mother-Crone, taking on these different aspects as the wheel of the year turned from Spring to Summer and, finally, Winter.

Brigid is associated with wisdom, poetry, healing, creative inspiration, fertility, love, fire, childbirth, protection (as patron of warfare or Briga, thus the association with the Anglo goddess of warfare, Brigantia), domesticated animals (thus her association with the festival of Imbolc or Oimealc; Gaelic *Oimeaic*, which literally means “in milk” or “in the belly,” referring to the lactation of the ewes at this time of year). She is also strongly associated with holy wells (an aspect which was taken over when Brigid was christianized as St. Brigid). *Cormac's Glossary*, written in the 9th century by Christian monks, says that Brigid was “the goddess whom poets adored” and “woman of wisdom” or sage, who is also famous for her “protecting care.” It also says that Brigit has two sisters: Brigit the physician or “woman of healing,” and Brigit the “smith.” (This is why she has been identified as a triple

deity.) In ancient times, smiths were not only recognized for their craft, but their work was also connected with magic. Thus, Brigid's association with ritual magic.

As a goddess of smith-craft, Brigit's is also strongly associated with fire. In her earliest incarnation, as Breo-Saighit, she was called the "Flame of Ireland," and "Fiery Arrow." She was a Goddess of the forge as well, reflecting on her fire aspect. Legend says that when She was born, a tower of flame reaching from the top of her head to the heavens. Her birth, which took place at sunrise, is interpreted by some sources to indicate that Brigid was at some point in Celtic mythology a dawn goddess. (Her name comes from Proto-Celtic *Brigantī* and means "the high one" or "the exalted one." It is cognate with the name of the ancient British goddess Brigantia, with whom Brigid is thought to have some relation. It is also cognate with the Old High German personal name *Burgunt*, and the Sanskrit word *Bṛhatī*," meaning "high," an epithet of the Hindu dawn goddess Ushas. The ultimate source is Proto-Indo-European *b^hṛǵ^héntih*, a feminine form of *b^hérǵ^honts*, "high," derived from the root *b^herǵ^h* - "to rise"). Xavier Delamarre, citing E. Campanile, suggests that Brigid could be a continuation of the Indo-European dawn goddess.) Therefore, some sources see her as primarily a goddess of fire and flames, a goddess of hearth and home, and a goddess of passion and love.

Brigid is also said to represent the supreme Mother Goddess of pre-patriarch times. One of her symbols is the heart, an ancient symbol of feminine power. Brigid is also said to reigned over fire, over art, and over beauty. (*Cormac's Glossary* explains that from these associations, all goddesses in Ireland are called Brigit; suggesting that it "may have been more of a title than a personal name.")