

Ogham of My Land

Virtues and Gifts of the Trees of my territory

"Druid is its Territory"

My land is Tuscany, more precisely the area of Montalbano in Lower Valdarno, near Vinci (Florence); it's a mountain ridge of about 25 km and covers about 180 kmq of land in the heart of the basin of the river Arno. I have always been very attached to my native land, and through Druidry, I had the opportunity to deepen and strengthen my relationship with it. This part of the landscape is easy to look at, with its rolling green hills, terraced and cultivated with olives and other fruit trees; but also with strong and long-lived plants, full of life and energy. Exploring it, I discovered stories and energies that have been created over the years; a series of teachings related to typical trees of this region. In this short work I will present nine trees I grew up with, and with which I have a strong relationship; trees and place that have spoken to me every time I open to the Song of the Earth and the wisdom of the Dragon, with a curious mind.



It is said that *the root of the self is where we gather our inner strength*, and trees can help us to sink our roots in Mother Earth to receive spiritual nourishment and Nwyfre to keep our bodies healthy. *The roots of something is its Source*, our source are our Ancestors, Ancestors of blood and also in spirit. To honor the life of the trees, and all of creation, means honoring our roots, and in doing so, opening up the flow of the infinite blessings that come from the otherworld... sending forth within us, a deep feeling of gratitude for the beauty of which we are the Keepers.

*Walk in the Woods and learn its Essence
with lowly heart go...walking it..know its breath..
with a curious mind experience...immerse yourself in its scents!
Walk in its silence and follow the Song of the Earth
heal your wounds and rearrange your thoughts
honor the flow of time listening to its voice...
in the reflection of the stars... cathedrals of trees above you..*

Olive, the Inner Energy

-*Olea europaea*-

Planetary energy: the Sun.

Position around the wheel: North

Arthurian archetype: the Mabon

Keyword: Energy, Strength, Regeneration

I live in the land that is the heart of the extra virgin olive oil production, and the Montalbano hills abound with these magnificent evergreen trees placed in wide terraces. They can reach a height of 20 meters and their trunks are very peculiar: often convoluted, from which



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protrude many suckers, with beautiful grain and incredible hardness. *It's a tree that evokes in me the feeling of "my home", I keep in my eyes the beauty of my hills.* Walking around I saw olive trees grow in places of extreme conditions, old trees that despite signs of decay, always show an elegant bearing, proud and radiant, continuing to flourish until the last moment. *This tree is truly gifted with a secret energy.* Meditating near these trees has always given me great strength, a force that works on the will. In particular energises me when I feel tired and worn in my life energies. It is precisely from its flowers that Dr. *Edward Bach* created a remedy *Olive*, which when taken regularly, helps to restore our energy levels. A symbol of strength and continuous rebirth, I

associate this tree with the energy of the Sun at the time of Alban Arthan, when it seems to lose strength and light, it is reborn as the young *Mabon*, regenerating and returning slowly to shine on us.

Linden, the Balm of the Heart

-*Tilia cordata*-

Planetary energy: the Moon.

Position around the wheel: North-East

Arthurian archetype: the Lady of the Lake

Keyword: Opening, Sweetness, Understanding

Linden with its scent is for me the symbol of love, the force that goes with grace, gentleness and motherhood. In the spring, I love to spend time in the gardens of my city, to sit on the benches and breathe deeply the scent which causes the soul to relax by opening it to listening. It seems that everything in this tree is linked to the heart: the shape of its leaves, its herbal properties and the fragrance of its flowers. *Its presence is the reassuring embrace of the Mother, its scent, a balm for the heart.*

Associated with the Moon, the linden tree with its aroma resembles the affection and tenderness of the maternal instinct, the female and generous side of nature. Despite its prominence, it can reach 30-40 meters in height, its rounded leaves form of heart, giving this tree a strong aura of grace and elegance. Its sweet scent induces relaxation; it stimulates dreams, opens friendship and love, infusing



the soul with compassion and understanding towards ourselves and others. The atmosphere of hospitality that is perceived is similar to that of oak, but in a different way: if the oak reminds us of a protective hospitality, the Linden is made of sweet reception. For this reason the Germanic peoples viewed this tree as sacred to Freya, the Goddess of love and protection. Based on the Arthurian studies, it is natural to make an association with the Lady of the Lake and to the love of which she is the dispenser, opening our hearts to the initiation of sleep within enchanted island of Avalon, thus uniting in us strength and compassion. Meditating in its presence helped me in times of mistrust and despondency, when expectations came crashing into reality. At times when I felt let down, it held me, helping me to understand the needs of others in relation to mine, combining aspects of myself and suspending judgment and shame. Its scent in the long time, has the effect of numbing the senses and strongly stimulate the flow of Awen. For this reason it was considered an oracle tree in the past, and still is it; ready to open up the road that leads to the island of the apple trees, the way to Avalon.

The European Aspen, the Voice of the Wind

-Populus alba-

Planetary energy: Mercury

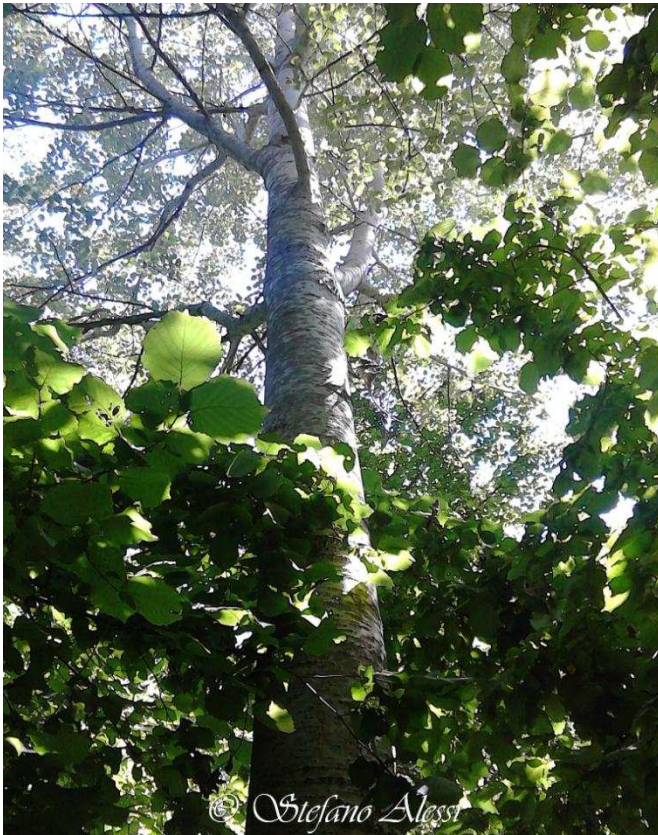
Position around the wheel: East

Arthurian archetype: Merlin

Keyword: Flexibility, lightness, clarity

When I feel the need to listen to the wind and clear my head of thoughts, I go to visit one of the many Poplars populating the countryside and the woods around my home. On days when the wind blows hard, its leaves come to life, beginning their chant. Its structure is

made to accommodate the wind, and welcome him back to his form proudly. The gift of its characteristics is that of great flexibility. Immersing myself in a meditative state in its company, is a simple and very rewarding experience for the senses. The continuous wind rustling has the power to free the mind, dusting the thoughts and promoting absolute



presence in the here and now. The sunlight shining through a group of Poplars while the wind blows, creates a magical atmosphere in which sound and light transport us to a world of reflections and the murmurs of a thousand shades... it brings a smile, infusing me with joy and cheerfulness. *I always perceived poplar as an eloquent and carefree tree.* Associated by the Latins with Hercules when he travelled to the Underworld, this tree brings us the gift of lucidity of mind, to meet the challenges of a clear and light perspective. The ability to "switch off" the head from unnecessary thoughts, allows our mind to work without too many distractions, so that suddenly from the depths of ourselves rises the answer or the emotion needed to deal with a specific situation. It is as if

Merlin, riding the wind, whispers to our spirit's intuition that we seek to walk in balance and listen to our inner knowing. When the noise of the world is still... he comes to life, singing his wisdom.

Myrtle, the Beauty of the Earth

-Myrtus communis-

Planetary energy: Venus

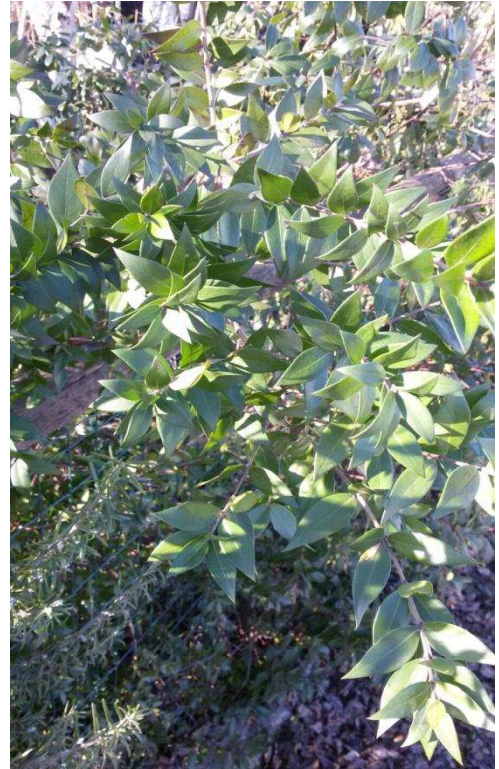
Position around the wheel: South East

Arthurian archetype: *Gwenhwyfar* –Guinevere-

Keyword: Purity, Love, Beauty

Myrtle is one of the typical evergreen mediterranean shrubs. Between May and July it becomes covered with fragrant white flowers that later in autumn become black berries, very popular in Italian cuisine. In ancient civilizations it has consistently been associated with both sensual and spiritual love, fertility and death, or the cycle of the regeneration of vital forces. For the Greeks it was sacred to the goddess Venus and symbol of the joy of life, of love for knowledge and the beauty of man and earth. Its fresh herbaceous aroma, with

shadow and light tones, has helped me to open up to the silent and profound beauty of the whole existence. *From this shrub I received a great lesson on the importance of loving myself, opening me up to the compassion and kindness within us;* a cornerstone of my Druidry training, a journey that sees the reflection of the self in nature & nature in the self. An uninterrupted flow of nourishment that can happen only if we are able to open ourselves to love in the broadest sense that we can try. Burning myrtle changes the air vibrations, purifying the energy and instilling a deep sense of peace with its fresh and balsamic aroma. Its virtues evoke in me the harmonious vibrations of the Guardian of Peace and Harmony on Earth: *Gwenhwyfar*, Guinevere. She is the beautiful face of sovereignty, the bride Maiden, whose integrity sustains the honor of Arthur's court, and whose beauty reflects the face of the fertility of the land. This is the myrtle for me..



Holm Oak, the Inner Fire

-*Quercus ilex*-

Planetary energy: Inner Sun

Position around the wheel: South

Arthurian archetype: the Grail Hermit

Keyword: Presence, Support, Inner Light



sensitivity to it and its seasonal changes. *I experienced on my skin its silent embrace full of*

I am fortunate enough to live near one of the oldest Holm in Tuscany, the Holm of Faltignano, a small hamlet situated in the heart of Montalbano, that is about 7 km from the town of Vinci, the birthplace of the famous Leonardo. Set on a grassy terrace, which offers magnificent views of Vinci and on the lower Valdarno plain, the Holm stands in all its majesty. It is the oldest tree of the whole territory, approaching him, I am wrapped in a silence of reverence and contemplation. It has a circumference of 5.20 meters, a height of 19 meters and an age of well over 200 years old, dating from the eighteenth century. In the many visits made to this ancient patron of my territory, I was able to develop a

strength. I had the privilege of being in this silence, experiencing the blessing of his presence in total solitude. It is easy to feel the mighty stability that characterizes the Holm's energy; but above all I feel the love that surrounds him: the gift of all those who have labored for its health and its growth in all its years of existence. I was enriched by the trees company and support when I was in search of my journey and the road in front of my feet was lost, when I was filled with a sense of loss and feeling cut adrift. Holm Oak expresses a deep inner strength, like the light that shines within us; a light that lives in the heart of the earth, the midnight sun, our inner sun, the light of the Grail. Its presence has helped me regain the Light and to keep it fed with love for my land. As the Hermit of the Grail which gives refreshment and regeneration to the Knights immersed in their spiritual Quest, so does the Holm in his silent presence along our quest: *showing us where to find the source of our light to be able to feed every day.*



Pine, the Spiritual Warrior

-Pynus sylvestris-

Planetary energy: Mars

Position around the wheel: South - west

Arthurian archetype: *Gwalchmai* -Gawain-

Keyword: Energize, Protect, Continuity

A walk in the Pine forests has always helped me to connect with my male life cycles, harmonizing them to my life experiences. Pine, large, slender evergreen tree that reaches toward the sky, is for me the Spiritual Warrior, the male principle untamed and vigorous, whose energy comes from profound union with the Mother Earth. In Mediterranean cultures it was considered the lord of vegetation and the tree beloved by the God Pan and Dionysus; as an Evergreen, it was perceived to be laden with vital energy, vigor, joy and sexuality harmonized at a high level of spirit. Its characteristically strong scent - balsamic and slightly spicy- opens the breath and gives that extra push needed in cases of debility, and mental and physical exhaustion, instilling positivity and optimism. *Its essence brings healing and hope to the soul, making us proud and combative, renewed and evolved.* It is extremely beneficial when we feel guilt for not being true to our word and our path. His presence in

my garden has always given me a strong feeling of security, companionship and determination. Every time I leave the home or return, I offer him the gift my thoughts and my thanks, putting my hand on his scaly bark. Its warrior essence, reminds me of the Knight *Gwalchmai*, Gawain, the defender of Arthur's kingdom, and beloved by the Goddess. He is the most courteous of the Knights of the court and the most involved in the defense of the Earth and of the Kingdom. Thus is the pine, courteous knight of great courage.



The Generous Chestnut

-*Castanea ativa*-

Planetary energy: Jupiter

Position around the wheel: West

Arthurian archetype: *Arthur*

Keyword: Generosity, wisdom, safekeeping



Precious ally for survival since ancient times, the Chestnut is considered one of *the fathers of the woods of Tuscany*, as it grows to become a giant, and can live up to a thousand years, always showing a great life force because although very old, continues to tick suckers for renewed growth. Its woods are beautiful and rich, with typical flora and fauna of the old and mature forest, enveloped by the scent of the rich life and fertility of the land. *Walking amongst chestnuts is like stepping into a rich knowledge of books, where we feed the part of us curious and eager to learn and know.* When I was a child and went to pick chestnuts with my parents, I was enchanted by its trunk; it is characterized by anthropomorphic forms and vertical lines with a spiraling shape. It often takes on special

forms, creating gaps and niches, as if inviting us to join him, to directly experience his rooted and stabilizing wisdom.

Hugging him I always feel a strong current of energy moving through me from the tree, the telluric forces within it acting as a catalyst, dispensing his wisdom as Guardian of the woods.

*Beloved Fathers of my land
Masters of Wisdom speak ...here I stand!
To you this song of life..
To you my song...born of my desire.
May this feeling flood over the whole earth
Your voice calls every soul to return..
From my Heart to your Heart
To you this my chant...*

Observing a chestnut tree from afar in the sunset of an autumn day, one has the impression that it shines a pure and warm light that warms the heart. It is a strong tree, impressive and generous that many times has welcomed me into his embrace when the vicissitudes of life tended to overwhelm my common sense and my will, giving me every time ideas for inner rebirth, a new vision full of hope and energy. For the role of Guardian of the Forest and his aura of wisdom, he has always evoked in me the image of Arthur, the primordial guardian of Britain who takes care of his people and his land, in the service of the Goddess, the Sovereignty.

Cypress, Lord of Silence

-Cupressus sempervirens-

Planetary energy: Saturn

Position around the wheel: North- West

Arthurian archetype: Blaise

Keyword: Fix, Focus, Releasing

Cypress is an evergreen conifer of pyramidal shape that can grow up to 50m in height. Traditionally, it finds a place among the trees of the cemeteries and holy places, but in Tuscany is commonly used to adorn the hills or the avenues leading to villas and farms for its elegant appearance, ascetic and saturnine; thus evoking structure and permanence. This tree has a dual symbolism in apparent contrast: on one side is the guardian of life and immortality, known for its longevity, its elongated shape, its sturdy, strong wood and its evergreen foliage, sacred to Zeus, Apollo and Venus. The other side is sacred to Pluto, the God of the Underworld, for its dark green color and the aura of austerity, silence and meditation that it emanates. This made it a decorative plant in cemeteries, giving the appointment of *Guardian of the Dead*, the *Guardian of the Dark Realm* and *Guardian of the*

Threshold. It was considered valuable to heal the diseases of the soul, and doctors prescribed rest in its shade and contact with its aromatic essence to dispel the anxieties and the darkness within us, bringing the light. My areas are full of his presence and from my journey of exploration, I was lucky enough to discover a special place that I have baptized with the name *Cypresses Grove*. The pungent and aromatic flavor, discreet and pervasive that you can breathe in



his presence, always gives me clarity, concentration and relaxation. Sitting in his presence opens our hearts to connect with the deeper forces and the highest within us. In meditation I perceived the cypress as a strict teacher, *a flame that rises to the sky, a night fire, a flame that shines in the dark nights of the soul, a flame from the dark green Light that connects us with roots in the heart of earth and the stars of heaven, highest of our Ancestors*. Here I met Blaise, who as shadowy figure in the events of the Arthurian cycle, offers access to the depth of human consciousness and opens the way to some of the deepest secrets of the soul. The connection to the planet Saturn is clear as they both have the characteristic of coagulating, purify and transforming our thoughts through silence and interior recollection.

Hazel, Young and Wise

-Corylus avellana-

Planetary energy: Mercury

Position around the wheel: the Center

Arthurian archetype: Gwion Bach/Taliesin

Keyword: Wisdom, Communication, Dreaming.

I grew up with a great hazel tree in front of my grandmother's house, located near the well. When she moved to Tuscany, she brought with her a tree cutting from the old house, to plant it in the new. And so while my grandmother told me stories, I ate hazelnuts and played in its branches. I also remember when my grandfather hide hazelnuts around the home, daring me to find them in the most hidden places. *Hazel is the tree that, more than any other, reminds me of my carefree childhood and dreams. His spirit leads me to the source of my ability to dream and to keep in touch with my inner child. That part of us that is pure, joyful and open to the world of fantasy and to the realm of fairy.* Contact with other worlds is more evident pausing under its branches, moving away from the bustle of everyday life, materialism and logic

that can be of detriment to the world of fantasy and dreams. *Three hazelnuts under the pillow*



to get an answer. There are ancient stories about the hazel, and it is no coincidence that in Druidry it is associated with the Bardic Inspiration that Druids learn to cultivate and to make flourish in our every action. *The soul of the hazel is the soul of a dreamer*, one who has the courage to believe and live their dreams and to be able to manifest these in his life; as does the flower that embraces the pollen until the right time for its fertilization.

The Hazel speaks to our Gwion Bach, our innocent side, who knows how to wait in silence for the right moment to be able to taste the three drops of the Awen, and manifest Taliesin, the spirit of inspiration to our souls singing about the wonders of all creation.

Proceeding to the conclusion of this work, I placed each of these trees along the wheel of the year, creating a **Mandala of the Spirits of the Trees** with a dense link of associations with the Druid Festivals, and with the energies that lead us in our journey through the seasons.

<i>Tree</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Festival</i>	<i>Planetary energy</i>	<i>Arthurian archetype</i>	<i>Quality</i>
<i>Olive</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Alban Arthan</i>	<i>Sun</i>	<i>Mabon</i>	<i>Strength</i>
<i>Linden</i>	<i>North-East</i>	<i>Imbolc</i>	<i>Moon</i>	<i>The Lady of the Lake</i>	<i>Compassion</i>
<i>Aspen</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>Alban Eiler</i>	<i>Mercury</i>	<i>Merlin</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>
<i>Myrtle</i>	<i>South-East</i>	<i>Beltane</i>	<i>Venus</i>	<i>Guinevere</i>	<i>Love</i>
<i>Holm Oak</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>Alban Hefin</i>	<i>Inner Sun</i>	<i>The Hermit</i>	<i>The Graal</i>
<i>Pine</i>	<i>South-West</i>	<i>Lughnasadh</i>	<i>Mars</i>	<i>Gawain</i>	<i>Action</i>
<i>Chestnut</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>Alban Elfed</i>	<i>Jupiter</i>	<i>Arthur</i>	<i>Generosity</i>
<i>Cypress</i>	<i>North-West</i>	<i>Samhain</i>	<i>Saturn</i>	<i>Blaise</i>	<i>Silence</i>
<i>Hazel</i>	<i>Centre</i>	-	<i>Earth</i>	<i>Gwion/Taliesin</i>	<i>Inspiration</i>

The trees placed in cardinal points (*Olive, Poplar, Chestnut and Holm Oak*) are those who bring quality and attitudes to be developed to travel in our lives in balance and in our uniqueness. While the trees in places not in cardinal points (*Linden, Myrtle, Pine and Cypress*) distribute the energy through values and feelings that they carry and which find expression in their odorous molecules.

Taking the wheel in clockwise direction, we see how the **Strength** expressed by the *Olive* is distilled in our hearts through the sweet fragrance of *Linden*, reminding us of how the strength must necessarily be measured by the kindness and **Compassion** of the soul.

The European *Aspen* **Flexibility** is fully experienced in the universal principle of **Love** that the aroma of the *Myrtle* expands within us. The gift of the Holy **Grail Light** that the mighty *Holm* offers reminds us that it exists inside us, spiritualized by the protective hand of the *Pine*, thus showing us the Spiritual Warrior **Action**. And finally the **Generosity** of the *Chestnut* is included in the **Silence** and the essentiality of *Cypress*. The *Hazel*, at the center of the mandala, is the place where all these experiences converge to feed our inner Innocent Child and awaken the **Inspiration** that gives us Taliesin.

Moving from tree to its opposite, we find the union of opposites which combine together, to make a complete human being, expressing fully our potential. Then we see that the **Outward Strength** expressed by the *Olive* is nourished and sustained in union with the **Inner strength** generated by *Holm*, both sides of which the true soul strength is composed. In making the mind **Flexible** and open to the light song of *Poplar*, we become gentle beings and **Generous**, as are the *Chestnut* trees with their woods and their creatures. When our hearts are opened to the *Linden* **Compassion** we discover ourselves as the *Pine* Warriors that they **Act** in the awareness of their feelings. Finally when we accept the **Love** that the *Myrtle* teaches us, we also open ourselves to its polar opposite, hidden under the cloak of death and detachment in **Silence** of the *Cypresses* Grove.

Each of these trees can provide many other gifts, *walking a mandala it is to be open to a series of infinite teachings*. When we sit under a tree, our soul opens like a flower, and we are fertilized by its vibrations that awaken in us memories, wisdom and vision. *The Spirits of the Trees are alive and many of them are eager to share*. As Druids we cross many times the Wheel of the Year, with every lap we open ourselves to new levels of depth, each time discovering new treasures and teachings for our journey. So it is with this mandala, as with any other teaching put in the form of a wheel. *Without beginning... without end... a circle within a circle.. and an even circle... Our journey continues!*

Many of these teachings were born from direct experience with the trees of my territory, but also distinct from and sharing with many Druids with Passion, Honesty and Integrity sharing this journey with me. In particular, many thanks to Mirella Giuliani and Paolo Veneziani, for the support, the depth and weight of their presence in my life.

*Thanks to all members of the **Hazels Grove**, whose magic nourishes the life of the Woods ...*

Thanks to all who have the courage to believe in the magic of life..

Thanks to all those who walk and dream with me..

Thanks to the Spirits of the Trees who have sung, sing and continue to sing to my heart ...

In Peace, in Beauty, in the Song of My Land...

*Stefano Aeothin Alessi /| *