

Not Your Mother's Horned God: The Cernunnos Primer

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Statement of Purpose: An Introduction

While many academically-inclined pagans and polytheists are aware that the New Age bookshelf at your local bookstore chain is nothing approaching "reliable," Wiccan and Neo-Wiccan trends have managed to permeate the iconography and public perception of Cernunnos to the point where it is almost overwhelming to combat, even for experienced researchers. I have created this document as a point from which to start one's research, a tool to help identify good sources from the bad, and a general primer, a basic resource, from which to base one's religious association with Cernunnos.

This source aims to be a comfortable medium between academic and casual: academic and scholarly enough to invite genuine thought and source-checking, but also casual enough to be an approachable source to new pagans, polytheists, and seekers. It contains a glossary for words the novice may not already grasp, a bibliography, and end notes regarding Serith's work.

What Cernunnos is Not: Fertility Myths Debunked

From Wikipedia, from the "Cernunnos" article¹ cited 30 July 2015, we find:

Cernunnos is the conventional name given in Celtic studies to depictions of the "horned god" (sometimes referred to as Hern the Hunter) of Celtic polytheism. The name itself is only attested once, on the 1st-century Pillar of the Boatmen, but depictions of a horned or antlered figure, often seated cross-legged and often associated with animals and holding or wearing torcs, are known from other instances.

Nothing is known about the god from literary sources, and details about his name, his followers or his significance in Celtic religion are unknown. Speculative interpretations identify him as a god of nature or fertility.

Cernunnos is largely not referred to as "the horned god" by scholars. While linguistically, "Cernunnos" likely does in fact mean "horned," "horned one," "horned man," etc., "the Horned God" is a creation of Wiccan and Neo-Wiccan thought. This is an important distinction, particularly in that "the Horned God" takes a role in many or even most forms of Wicca as the

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cernunnos>

lone God of a bigendered duality: the Goddess, a feminine force experienced through all perceived “goddesses” in all pantheons, and likewise the God, a masculine force performing a similar role. In calling Cernunnos “the Horned God,” we associate him with this unnecessarily, while it is an unnecessary descriptor for polytheists (as his name, “Cernunnos,” performs this function already).

Nor is Cernunnos associated with “Hern,” or rather Herne, the Hunter. The foundation for this association is derived primarily from the linguistic similarity between Latin *cornu*- and English *horn*, similarly *Cernu*-, *Cerne*- and *Herne*. Linguistic cognates are not sufficient evidence for such a link, especially given that both figures are depicted wearing antlers or horns, providing an explanation for the names or titles. Additionally, Herne is primarily associated with English folklore, with his earliest attestation in Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Syncretism of English Herne, Gaulish Cernunnos, and, furthermore, Hellenic Pan, is only predominant among Wiccan schools of thought, and the origin of this idea can likely be traced to R. Lowe Thompson’s *The History of the Devil: The Horned God of the West Herne*, published 1929, which, aside from being academically flawed and wrongly recontextualized within a Judeo-Christian paradigm, also conflates “all” huntsmen figures, and is also extremely comparative, a practice which is not respected in reconstructionist and most modern academic circles.

Returning to the Wikipedia article’s synopsis, we find the quote “...depictions of a horned or antlered figure, often seated cross-legged and often associated with animals and holding or wearing torcs, are known from other instances.” This statement is misleading in that it likely refers primarily to the Gundestrup Cauldron (below), specifically an interior plate on which Cernunnos is depicted, which all too often forms the basis of entire assessments of the god’s nature.



You may note here that the relevant passage on the Wikipedia entry points entirely to traits found in this panel of the Cauldron: Cernunnos is seated cross-legged, surrounded by animals, and is both holding and wearing a torc. Various other attestations will be addressed later, but for now allow us to focus on how using this panel, and only this, is misleading.

Wiccan thought, and early scholarly thought on some counts, supposes that Cernunnos is “Lord of the Animals” because of the Gundestrup Cauldron. Surrounded by animals, holding a snake, and wearing antlers, this conclusion is an easy one to make out of context. However, not only is the Gundestrup a remarkably displaced attestation of Cernunnos (having been discovered in Denmark, far north of the majority of attestations in France), there is nothing to suggest that the entire panel is relevant to Cernunnos; in fact, the only related animals in this panel can be asserted to be the serpent (of course), the stag to the left, and the dog to the right. This is compounded by the fact that other animals may seem somewhat irrelevant to a “god of the forest” archetype (including a man riding a fish), and that that this particular pattern, the stag and dog attending Cernunnos, are also replicated, without the excess, in a strikingly similar design on a silver bowl from Lyons. Moreover, other panels also depict persons surrounded by animals yet are not *additionally* attested as “Lord(s) of the Animals” or Forests. As Ceisiwr Serith, author of the paper *Looking A Different Way*² (a scholarly article on the nature of Cernunnos as approached from a polytheism-friendly point of view), states:

Connected with theories of Cernunnos as a hunting god are the descriptions of him as Lord of the Animals. As I have already stated, this view is based largely on the Gundestrup cauldron, on which he is surrounded by animals. However, the majority of the animals are insignificant from an iconographic point of view. [...]

Except for the stag and dog, then, the surrounding animals appear to be more decoration than iconography, a case of a silversmith filling space.

Finally, the phrase “speculative interpretations identify him as a god of nature or fertility” is the same kind of meaningless garbled text as “it is said by some that...” The article itself cites Miranda Green who, among the Celtic reconstructionism community, is known for misunderstanding of symbolism and misconstruing evidence; for example, she is known to be fond of the idea of solar gods, which is not founded.

While the Wikipedia article’s inaccuracy is troubling, though not unexpected, it is also prudent to address the misinformation within the Neopagan, Wiccan, and Pagan “casual” community. It is worthwhile to note the almost complete lack of fact-checking or sourcing within the pagan community; in fact, some groups actively disdain fact-checking under the premise that magic is mutually exclusive with science and academia (which is a topic for another time). Given these tendencies, and also the Neopagan desire for “usable” qualities, traits which one can imminently relate to or refer to in Wiccan-style spellwork, one obviously expects more

² <http://www.ceisiwrserith.com/therest/Cernunnos/cernunnospaper.htm>, cited 30 July 2015

misinformation. Thus, from the Pagan/Wiccan About.com, the article on Cernunnos by Patti Wigington³:

Cernunnos is a horned god found in Celtic mythology. He is connected with male animals, particularly the stag in rut, and this has led him to be associated with fertility and vegetation. Depictions of Cernunnos are found in many parts of the British Isles and western Europe. He is often portrayed with a beard and wild, shaggy hair -- he is, after all, the lord of the forest. [...]

He is a god of vegetation and trees in his aspect as the Green Man, and a god of lust and fertility when connected with Pan, the Greek satyr. [...]

Because of his horns (and the occasional depiction of a large, erect phallus) Cernunnos has often been misinterpreted by fundamentalists as a symbol of Satan. Certainly, at times, the Christian church has pointed to the Pagan following of Cernunnos as "devil worship." This is in part due to nineteenth century paintings of Satan which included large, ram-like horns much like those of Cernunnos.

No evidence supports Cernunnos' association with maleness or virility as an association, let alone an exclusive affinity to male animals or maleness. While we've already discussed the misconception that Cernunnos is affiliated with animals in a general capacity, the misconception here lies in the idea that he is associated with fertility, which no reliable sources or attestations support. Additionally, while this article associates Cernunnos with vegetation, there is even less evidence to support this particular claim, and it seems to come entirely from Neopagan sensibilities.

Incidentally, it may here be prudent to mention that the "many parts of the British Isles and western Europe" here referenced is, in fact, Gaul and regions touched by the Gaulish diaspora--in effect, Gaulish and Brythonic areas. Only two attestations are found beyond continental Europe. In short, Cernunnos is a *Gaulish* god. This is an important distinction to make in order to avoid Pan-Celticism and similar pitfalls.

There is no evidence supporting the idea that Cernunnos is associated with "the Green Man," whose significance at best can be assumed to be symbolic. There is also no evidence conflating Cernunnos with the Hellenic deity Pan. This paragraph is particularly misleading in that it lists these as "aspects" of Cernunnos, which is not only historically unsupported but also implies an affiliation with Wiccan deism (returning to the gendered, soft-polytheistic duality, where every god is an expression of the one God).

Finally, the last paragraph is misleading in a multitude of ways. Firstly, and most pertinent to Cernunnos in particular, *there are no historical depictions of Cernunnos with an erect phallus*. Modern iconography, by way of Wiccan influence, frequently incorporates this motif, but this has never been seen in archaeology. This is only ever seen in modern art, namely in art that conflates Cernunnos with Pan and/or satyrs. Furthermore, the Catholic Church--as one assumes this article intends, as we must remember that "the Christian church" is a

³ <http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/godsandgoddesses/p/Cernunnos.htm>, cited 30 July 2015

nonentity--has never declared war, intellectually or otherwise, on the relevant paganisms, and certainly not within the nineteenth century.

Imagery

Animals and Liminality

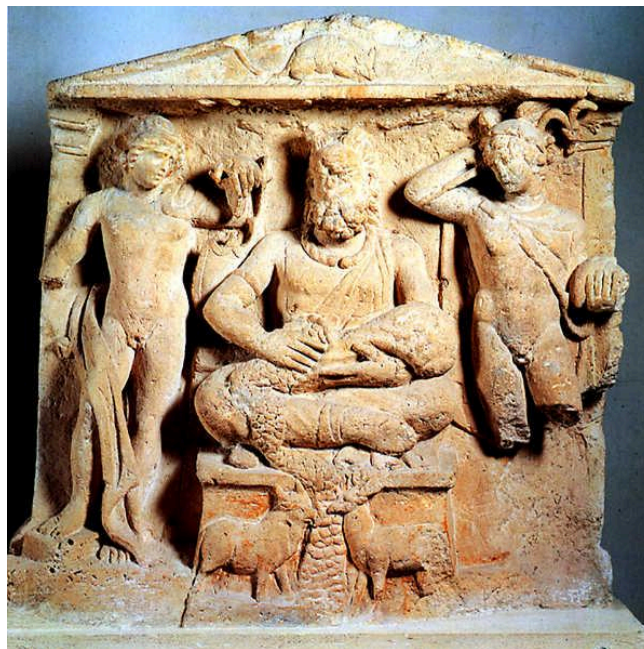
We may as well begin our discussion of Cernunnos' imagery with animals, as this is not only the most widely attested (for better or for worse), but also indicative to his identity in that it refers to his antlers, one of his most clear icons.

Continuing from our discussion of the Gundestrup Cauldron and the Lyons cup in the section "What Cernunnos is Not," above, in relation to his association with the animals the stag, dog, and snake, we must take into account the significance of these animals.

The stag is seen in both Cernunnos' personal iconography and in his surrounding iconography. Cernunnos' antlers allude to two separate ideas of his identity, which are not mutually exclusive. These are, firstly, his potential pastoral role, which we will discuss shortly, and secondly, the concept of being *liminal*: that is, "between," here between human and animal.

This concept is given more depth if one considers the context in which the stag, outside of Cernunnos' person, is found. On the Gundestrup, the stag opposes the dog; this is founded in the fact that Cernunnos', the stag's, and the dog's eyes are all at the same level, horizontally aligned. This alludes to a balance between them.

A similar balance is found on Cernunnos' depiction on the Reims stela, below:



Here, the opposition is found in the stag and bull sitting at Cernunnos' feet (and also in the additional symmetrical details of the piece). Cattle, here the bull, are a symbol of domesticated wealth (and the association here alludes to Cernunnos' potential pastoral qualities); likewise, the stag, an animal which is hunted, is also a symbol of wealth, though from the wild.

Similarly, the opposing symbols of stag and dog from the Gundestrup and Lyons cup seem to suggest the duality of hunter and hunted; furthermore, both are associated with the Otherworld, in that the dog is a common Celtic symbol for death and dying, while the stag, and the hunting of the stag, is also related to death and thus the passing through to the Otherworld.

Thus, all of these animal depictions seem to suggest, not that Cernunnos is a ruler of or associated with animals, but rather that *Cernunnos is associated with liminality*. This is perfectly represented in the Reims stela above: as attested by MacCana⁴, to his right is Apollo and to his left Mercury, naturally opposing figures in their own right (Apollo, being a god of society and culture, versus Mercury, messenger and guide to the souls of the dead, as in the syncretic tales of Hermes leading souls to Hades). In effect, Apollo and the bull appear on his right side, Mercury and the stag on his left. He is, in this incidence, literally the *sitter-between*, resting on the threshold between both the cultivated lands and the wilds, as well as the wealth of this world and of the next.

Returning to the Gundestrup's stag and dog, this is repeatedly supported; here, the dog takes the role of civilized, domestic, versus the stag's wild, and the dog takes the role of hunter where the stag is hunted.

Additionally, the snake, including the antlered or ram-horned snake with which Cernunnos is associated, has been noted as a chthonic symbol, as well as a guardian of treasure (which will be important shortly). Celtic iconography regarding snakes is complex, at times indicating fertility and healing (as seen in Sirona's iconography, on a different note), yet at other times indicating death, the Otherworld, and/or rebirth.

The Torc, Cernunnos, and Wealth

Continuing our discussion of the Reims stela, Cernunnos' associations with wealth are another extremely important detail often missed. The Reims stela is particularly interesting in this light because it is easy to find this association: In Cernunnos' lap he holds a bag of what appears to be coins (or alternately grain), a clear emblem of riches and material wealth.

This association is supported by the aforementioned antlered serpent's associations with wealth and fertility (material wealth). As guardian of treasure, the serpent could be an important symbol alluding to Cernunnos' power over material and chthonic wealth. This is further supported in the bull and stag opposition, as the bull, in particular, is an emblem of domestication and thus pastoral wealth.

Another *extremely* predominant symbol of wealth with which Cernunnos is associated is the torc. The torc is associated frequently with depictions of Gaulish deities and kings or warriors, suggesting that it is a symbol for divinity and sovereignty (or, at the very least, power).

⁴ *Celtic Mythology* by Proinsias MacCana, 1969, p. 67

This sovereignty symbol, while associated with Gaulish deities, is incredibly strongly associated with Cernunnos in that its inclusion in his depiction is nearly universal in earlier depictions, including the Gundestrup (where he wears one around his neck and holds the other in one hand). In his depiction at the Paris Altar, for example, he actually wears two on his head, one hanging from each horn:



In addition, the torc represents wealth (which may be associated in turn with sovereignty and power, as one might expect). Serith supposes that the torc in its capacity as symbol for wealth was later replaced by actual representations of wealth, i.e. the bag of coins at Reims.

He goes on to assert that the torc and the snake are, in fact, another example of paired opposites. As seen in the Gundestrup depiction, Cernunnos carries a torc in his right hand and a snake in his left. This particular arrangement is significant in that the Celts regarded the right hand (associated with the south, as east, the direction of the rising sun, was considered to be the “frontmost,” facing direction) as fortuitous and the left (north) as negative. Regarding this, Serith says:

In Indo-European symbology and language, the left is associated with the dark side of existence and the right with the bright. In English this is reflected in the words "sinister" and "dexterous." If, therefore, the torc is representative of wealth, with that which is positive, and the serpent with death, that which is negative, those are the appropriate sides for them to be. Cernunnos is therefore seen, in this symbolism, to sit or stand between paired opposites.

Aside from Serith’s interpretation, with the snake as a symbol of chthonic wealth, “hidden treasures,” we might suppose that the snake *also* represents wealth, albeit in a different sense or source. In fact, this may even (tentatively) represent the division between material wealth, the torc, and Otherworldly wealth, the snake.

From this iconography, we can gather that Cernunnos was a god of wealth and sovereignty, and additionally we may be able to infer that Cernunnos was primarily a chthonic god in nature, between wealth coming from the earth, the Otherworldly associations, and the association with the snake as a symbol.

Chthonic Associations

It is worth a brief mention on its own of Cernunnos' various chthonic associations. Aside from being associated with the Otherworld (which is, in its way, chthonic, especially in relation to the spirits of the dead), Cernunnos is also associated with the chthonic snake.

Furthermore, scholars such as Phyllis Fray Bober identify Cernunnos with Roman Pluto, as in Bober's (excellent, intriguing) *Cernunnos: Origin and Transformation of a Celtic Divinity*⁵. Pluto is the epitome of a chthonic god, perhaps *the* chthonic god, and furthermore identified with wealth and material riches from the earth (coming from his chthonic associations), as well as the dead and afterlife.

Liminality and Dualities, or "Paired Opposites"

As we have seen, Cernunnos' iconography is buried in dualities. This is not because he is a god of dualities, but rather because he is a god of what is *between* two things, the sitter-between.

Thus far, we have seen the following dualities:

- **stag and dog:** civilization, domestication (dog) versus the wild (stag), as well as hunter (dog) versus hunted (stag)
- **stag and bull:** domesticated wealth (stag) versus wild wealth (stag), as well as civilization (bull) versus the wild (stag), in addition to the material world (bull) versus the Otherworld (stag)
- **torc and snake:** representing both positivity, life (torc) and death, the Otherworld (snake), as well as divine, or ouranic, wealth (torc) and chthonic wealth (snake).
- **Mercury and Apollo:** chthonic (Mercury) versus ouranic (Apollo), life (Apollo) versus death (Mercury), civilization, cities (Apollo) versus the spaces between, roads, travel, doors (Mercury)

From these dualities, we can in fact infer a set of related, more abstract dualities:

- **wild versus civilized** (which provides additional support to the idea of Cernunnos as pastoral god)
- **this world versus the Otherworld**
- **material versus spiritual**
- **ouranic versus chthonic**
- **life versus death**

⁵ <http://www.jstor.org/stable/501179> Bober's *Cernunnos* on JSTOR.

Some of these dualities are exceptionally important in that they allude to Cernunnos' role as death god or psychopomp, which will be discussed shortly. All are important in that they show how Cernunnos deals with the spaces between.

As an aside, the dualities may be reflected in the Cernunnos-endemic "horned serpent." While the ram horns are a sign of domestic and civilized wealth, the serpent is a chthonic creature of the earth, associated with the wild. Like Cernunnos himself, the horned serpent is of two worlds, sitting between two concepts, neither fully of one nor the other. Notably, the serpent Cernunnos holds in the example Serith gives (the Cauldron) for his torc/serpent duality does *not* have horns or antlers, marking it not as a horned-serpent type, the sitter-between as Cernunnos is himself, but as a simple chthonic serpent type, associating it with only one of the two sides.

Additional, exceptionally important (and interesting!) analyses on these dualities are addressed in Serith's essay⁶. I've gone ahead and reformatted them in the end notes of this paper, because I personally find the format he's provided to be difficult to understand.

Who Cernunnos Is: On Liminality

So we've covered who Cernunnos *isn't*. Now, having taken note of his iconography and true depictions, we can make an accurate body of assertions regarding Cernunnos' nature and his role as a Gaulish god.

Among other things, we find that...

Cernunnos is a god of death and a potential psychopomp figure.

Associated heavily with the spiritual realms, the concept of passing between worlds, and the idea of life flowing into death, we can easily assume that Cernunnos holds some dominion over death. The Romans may have, in fact, known him as Dis Pater, the "Father God" (the Romans loved their *interpretatio Romana* and applied it to everyone and everything), who is known to be the god considered by the Gauls to be their "common ancestor" (as attested by Caesar)⁷.

Given the death and liminal association, this is an almost natural progression. Regardless of Cernunnos' identity as Dis Pater is true, Cernunnos can nevertheless be identified with *the ancestors and the spirits of the dead*.

Between these associations and his identity as liminal, one might presume he is a psychopomp figure. While this is true, another, perhaps more clear potential psychopomp deity can be found in Epona (again, a subject for another paper entirely). His wealth associations link him more firmly to the afterlife and the dead than the actual leadership of souls.

He is the distributor and controller of wealth and material goods.

Shown with coins, grain, torcs, emblems of wealth, and all varieties of symbols for domestic and civil success. Iconography also alludes to a potential **pastoral** role to be played

⁶ <http://www.ceisiwrserith.com/therest/Cernunnos/cernunnospaper.htm> Seriously, go read it when you get a chance.

⁷ <http://classics.mit.edu/Caesar/gallic.html> Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, "The Gallic Wars."

here (which makes sense in that pastoral figures go between the wilds, where herds graze and migrate, and the civilized areas, towns and cities, to trade and gain wealth).

Again, Bober's identification with Pluto also alludes to this.

He is chthonic in nature.

Between the dead, the associations with Otherworldly and chthonic symbols, the derivation of worldly wealth from the earth, etc., this is self-evident.

It is also notable at this point, however, one additional piece of evidence which points to his *literal* placement below ground, in the earth, a literal chthonic association: in the Reims stela, at the top of the temple structure, a mouse or rat is depicted. Commonly being depicted close to the ground, this seems to indicate that Cernunnos, below the rodent, is in turn below ground. This evidence lends additional credence to the association between material wealth and the physical earth.

And finally, ***first and foremost, Cernunnos is a liminal god.***

Going between all spaces, Cernunnos' home truly seems to sit between all things, including the many realms of reality identified by the Celtic Gauls, both divine and mundane in nature. In traditional or even occult terms, he is a crossroads god, associated with the in-between places where separate things momentarily intermingle.

It is his role, in short, to reconcile opposing forces, to act as an intermediary between worlds; for those who are situated in one world or the other, unable to cross, as is usual for most beings, things, and even divinities, he is the mediator of spirits and forces.

He is occasionally the god of particular, reconcilable opposites, in being "a little of both": healing and killing, natural and manmade.

What is liminality, exactly?

Liminality is experienced in our daily lives in a number of ways. Dawn and dusk, for example, are liminal times, neither day nor night. Doors and thresholds are liminal places: neither indoor nor outdoors. Shapeshifters and things which change shape are liminal, as are things which are part human, part animal (revisiting Cernunnos' antlers). Incidentally, a mule, neither horse nor donkey, is *also* liminal.

Liminal ideas are also frequent in prophecies, for whatever reason. "No man of woman born" stems from this idea (which likely stems in turn from the Hindu tale of Mahishasura and Durga), as well as similar conditions like "neither indoors nor outdoors," "neither man nor woman," "neither man nor god," "neither naked nor clothed." The relative degrees where these ideas meet (thresholds; bigender, etc. persons; demigods; wearing something not clothes; etc.) are the places where they meet and intermingle, i.e., liminal.

Other liminal spaces include borders and boundaries, for example those between countries; shores, especially the areas open to air at low tide but submerged at high tide; in cars

or similar vehicles, which isn't indoors but isn't quite outdoors either; etc. Truthfully, wherever two opposing things intermingle is a liminal space.

Patronage

This section is provided as a point of reference, not as a complete body of work or conceptual understanding of Cernunnos.

Frequently, I receive questions like, "so, Cernunnos is the god of x...?" or "is Cernunnos in charge of z?" While I feel that Gaulish (and other Celtic) deities are not so easily compartmentalized into clear-cut, defined roles, perhaps reflecting the very humanizing practice of hero-worship and deification prevalent in Celtic Europe, this isn't the point of view that many pagans are used to, having been "weaned" on Wiccan "deity associations" and/or the far more popular Hellenic associations where everything has a role (a god of love, a god of sex, a god of war, and so forth).

This said, consider the following section to be a body of information to bridge the gap, some context for beginning practitioners. This is a working list and is neither comprehensive nor perfect.

Cernunnos is "the god of..."

- Spirit work
- Crossroads, paths
- Blocking and unblocking paths, doorways, options
- Death, dying, the ancestors
- Change
- Wealth and riches
- Business, the marketplace

Cernunnos is the patron (occupational advisor figure, guide) of...

- Spirit workers, astral travellers
- Priests, clergy, religious figures
- Diviners, anyone attempting to see beyond the mundane using mundane tools
- Messengers, travelers
- Park rangers, environmental activists, those associated with both civilization and the wild
- Funerary directors and workers, and others associated with death and the dead
- Homeless persons
- People in times of great change, during a move, between jobs, etc.
- Those making major life choices, or at a point in their life where such a choice could be made
 - High school and college graduates
 - Fiance(e)s, those recently engaged

- Bankers, traders, merchants
 - Indie producers, merchants, and artists
 - Start-up businesses
- Immigrants, those with complex heritage

Cernunnos is associated with the following locations:

- The threshold or doorway
- Crossroads
- Marketplaces
- Places of high traffic
- City limits
- Country borders, boundaries
- Woods
- Highways
- Rest stops, convenience stores on highways, etc.
- Graveyards, mausoleums

Spiritual things Cernunnos is associated with include:

- Dreams (neither waking nor sleeping, conscious nor unconscious)
- Spirit work
- Ancestor veneration
- Dirt (as chthonic)
- Bones
- Divination of most varieties, including necromancy
- Funerary practices and associated necromancy

Mundane things Cernunnos is associated with include:

- Fences, gates
- Roads, esp. back roads, highways
- Bridges
- Sleep (neither dead nor waking)
- Mirrors (neither real nor fake)
- Coins, gold
- Grain, wheat, oats, etc.; bread
- Chthonic foods (potatoes and root vegetables, certain alcohols, etc.)
- Metals and gems, i.e., the riches of the earth; earthen rocks and metals
- Snakes
- Deer
- Cattle
- Bones, earthly remains (neither animate nor inanimate)

- Wednesday (as Latin *diis Mercurii*, day of Mercury?)
- Saturday (in its Saturnian aspect?)

Potential epithets:

- Keeper of riches
- God under the earth
- Antlered serpent, Horned serpent
- Clearer of paths
- Sitter-at-the-crossroads
- Sitter-between
- Liminal one
- God undying
- King in Sleep (I use this personally, unsure if anyone else cares for it)⁸

You may want to petition Cernunnos if:

- you need an obstacle unblocked
- you must make a significant choice and are unsure of what to choose
- you are feeling spiritually blocked, or your religious work seems stagnant
- you are considering pursuing clergy studies or some other religious commitment or oath
- you are beginning a move or occupational shift, or are in a similar transitory period, and require guidance
- you wish to establish a spiritual relationship, working or otherwise, with your ancestors/the dead

How Do I Know If A Source Is Good?: What to Look For

It's probably a good source if...

- Gaul or the Gaulish diaspora (and its distinctions from the rest of Celtic Europe) is mentioned
- La Tène (the defining archaeological period of the Gauls) is addressed or mentioned
- Sources are given in the form of professional citations (in “works cited” or “bibliography” format), or in footnotes
- The text (etc.) is published by an archaeological journal, text, or series
- Authors or editors include archaeologists, anthropologists, or similar experts or authorities in a relevant field
- The text cites or otherwise references archaeological evidence (cups, walls, decorations, altars, and so forth)

⁸ <http://thebloodybones.tumblr.com/post/74143984848/77-adorations-of-cernunnos> Most of the more complex epithets I would personally supply would likely come from here.

- There is no association or affiliation with pagan or neopagan communities or opinions
- The text was obtained from a reasonably respectable source, such as a known publisher or JSTOR
- It's already in the sources listed below, or references one or more of them, or is likewise referenced

Drop it like it's hot if...

- Masculine fertility or any of the other common pitfalls discussed above are mentioned
- Pan-Celticism is adhered to; i.e., "Cernunnos is a Celtic god," "the Celts liked/did/wanted x y z"
- Anything in the text seems to imply that the Gauls had written documentation of their practices, that we have received any such information verbatim, or that the Celts (of any stripe) have a living tradition which has continued unedited to this day

You might have some problems with...

- French and German sources; Gaul, being partially located in modern-day France, and particularly Cernunnos, with most of his attestations being listed there, has a predominant body of work in, well, French, i.e. in Deo Mercurio⁹, the effectively superior website on Gallo-Roman polytheism. A good deal is also in German. Additionally, the scholarly articles posted on the Facebook Gaulish polytheism community¹⁰ tend toward being German, for whatever reason. If you truly wish to pursue extended, scholarly studies into Gaulish polytheism, you may eventually wish to learn French (or German).
- Relatively spotty approach to usable polytheistic information. There is no cure for this one--that's just our lot in life, honestly.

Resources and Further Reading

Bibliography and Website Documentation

Referring directly to Cernunnos:

- Primarily referenced within this text:
 - [Bober, Phyllis Fray: "Cernunnos: Origin and Transformation of a Celtic Divinity"](#)
 - [Serith, Ceisiwr \(also under the name Fickett-Wilbar, David\): "Cernunnos: Looking Another Way"](#)
- Also referenced and/or informative:

⁹ <http://www.deomercurio.be/en/> The majority of the body of work is in the French (/fr/) section of the website, though the English section is incredibly useful as well.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Gaulish-Polytheistic-Reconstructionism/161315550632894> An exceptionally useful resource, when used as a "study group."

- ["KAPNONOY: to CARNONOS." Deo Mercurio on Cernunnos](#)
- [MacCulloch, J. A.: "The Religion of the Ancient Celts"](#)
 - [Refer specifically to Chapter III](#)

Referring to Gaulish polytheism as an applicable/supplemental practice:

- Brunaux, Jean-Louis: *The Celtic Gauls: Gods, Rites, and Sanctuaries*
- Freeman, Philip: *War, Women, and Druids*

Additional interesting supplements:

- [À la recherche des fêtes celto-romaines \(French but good. if you can read it\)](#)
- [Google Map of attestations of Gaulish gods \(subject to change by nature\)](#)
 - [List of attestations of Cernunnos in particular](#)

End Notes: Serith's Analyses of Depictions

As a reminder, the original content can be found at and attributed to [Serith's paper located on his website](#). It is provided here, with minor edits, for clarity of use and ease of access.

Analysis of the Imagery of the Gundestrup Cauldron

Torc: Culture Wealth Positive	Mediator between Positive and Negative	Snake: Nature Hoarder of Wealth Negative
Mediator between Culture and Nature	Cernunnos	Mediator between Nature and Culture
Stag: Nature Wealth Hunted	Mediator between Positive and Negative	Dog: Culture Death

Analysis of the Reims stela

Apollo: Healing Bright Human form	Mediator between Life and Death	Mercury Psychopomp Dark Human form
Mediator between Human and Animal	Cernunnos	Mediator between Human and Animal
Bull: Tame	Mediator between Tame and Wild	Stag: Wild

Animal		Animal
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Analysis of La-Celle-Mont-Saint-Jean

Billhook: Tame Plant Nurturing	Mediator between Three Pairs of Opposites	Bow: Wild Animal Death-dealing
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Analysis of Mercury, Cernunnos, and Cognates (Tables 4 + 5)

Mercury	Hermes	Pan	Pushan	Cernunnos
Wealth: Possessing, bestowing	Wealth: Distribution	Wealth: Sheep	Wealth: Herds, "bring prosperity"	Wealth: Possessing, bestowing
Psychopomp	Psychopomp		Psychopomp	Psychopomp: Between Apollo and Mercury
Mediator between up and down	Mediator between up and down		Mediator between up and down	Mediator between up and down (torc and snake)
Messenger of gods	Messenger of gods		Messenger of sun	
Identified with Hermes	Identified with Mercury, father of Pan	Son of Hermes; "Pan" cognate with "Pushan"	"Pushan" cognate with "Pan"	Accompanied by and identified with Mercury
	Roads and travellers		"Master of the way," protector of travellers	Sailors on Seine
Merchants	Merchants		Merchants	Merchants
	Doors		Offered to on threshold	Sit on threshold at Reims
	Announcer of sacrifice		Announcer of sacrifice	
Goat	Goat	Goat	Goat	Goat
	Leads bride to groom		Leads bride to groom	
	Borders		Borders	Liminal zone of forest
Herds		Pastures	Pastures	Herds of cattle and deer
		Physical deformity: Part goat	Physical deformity: Toothless	Physical deformity: Part deer, antlers
	Worshiped in caves	Lives in and is worshipped in caves		Underground at Reims

Snakes	Snakes			Snakes
Goes and returns	Goes and returns		Goes and returns; ships	Looks both ways (Three heads)
Grain			Grain (gruel)	Grain (alt. coins)

Glossary

- **Celtic:** Referring to a vast array of interrelating cultures, one of which is Gaul. Gaul is Celtic, but all of Celtic Europe is not Gaul.
- **Chthonic:** Referring to “that which is under the earth, below,” associated with the underworld, with further traditional associations with both death and riches; complements that which is ouranic.
- **Conflation:** I use this word in this paper largely to refer to the practice of applying something inappropriately to another thing in the sense of research and often in the context of soft polytheism; i.e., “it’s inappropriate to conflate Cernunnos and Pan.”
- **Gaul:** A region of continental Europe populated by a variety of tribes (including the Helvetii, the Nemetes, etc.), in what is modern day France, Switzerland, Germany, and various other parts of continental Europe.
- **Gaulish:** Referring to Gaul or the Gaulish diaspora. The Gaulish diaspora is an expression of cultural exchange; for example, Brythonic areas sometimes attest western Gaulish gods, while Germanic areas sometimes attest eastern Gaulish gods, and so forth.
- **Gaulish Polytheism:** The belief in the many deities and spirits of Gaul, here referring not to the historical practice, but to the practices of Gaulish polytheists today.
- **Hard Polytheism:** The belief that each god is its own being, a separate spirit from all other gods; compare “soft polytheism.”
- **La Tène:** The archaeological era by which Gaul is most notably marked. Archaeological evidence from La Tène is the primary evidence for this paper and other Gaulish polytheistic approaches to practice.
- **Liminal:** Discussed above (approx. page 10), “liminality” is the quality of being not quite one thing or another. “Liminal” is this noun in adjectival form.
- **Pan-Celticism:** The unreliable and largely inappropriate practice of conflating one Celtic culture or region’s practice to all Celtic regions. For example: “The Gaels had a lot of cultural emphasis on cattle raids, therefore the Gauls also had such an emphasis,” or “sea deities are prominent in Gaelic belief (centered on an island), so they must also be prominent in Gaulish belief (which is largely inland).” This has obviously problematic implications.
- **Reconstructionism:** A particular approach to polytheism which attempts to recreate, or “reconstruct,” what the ancient people who venerated those same deities (here, ancient Gaul). Sometimes shortened to “recon” for brevity.
- **Soft Polytheism:** The belief that all gods are merely facets of one or a few focal, central gods; that they are homogenous in nature and their respective identities are different

“faces.” This is a belief predominantly held in neopagan and Wiccan-influenced communities. I do not hold to this belief and this paper was written with this in mind.

- **[Torc:](#)** A usually-golden band, often spiral in make, which is a symbol of sovereignty and wealth, and can be worn around the neck or arm. The link leads to images.
- **Ouranic:** Referring to “that which is heavenly, above,” associated with the divine (in a Hellenic sense, this would be Olympian), and further traditionally associated with heavenly power, sovereignty, sometimes the material world.