

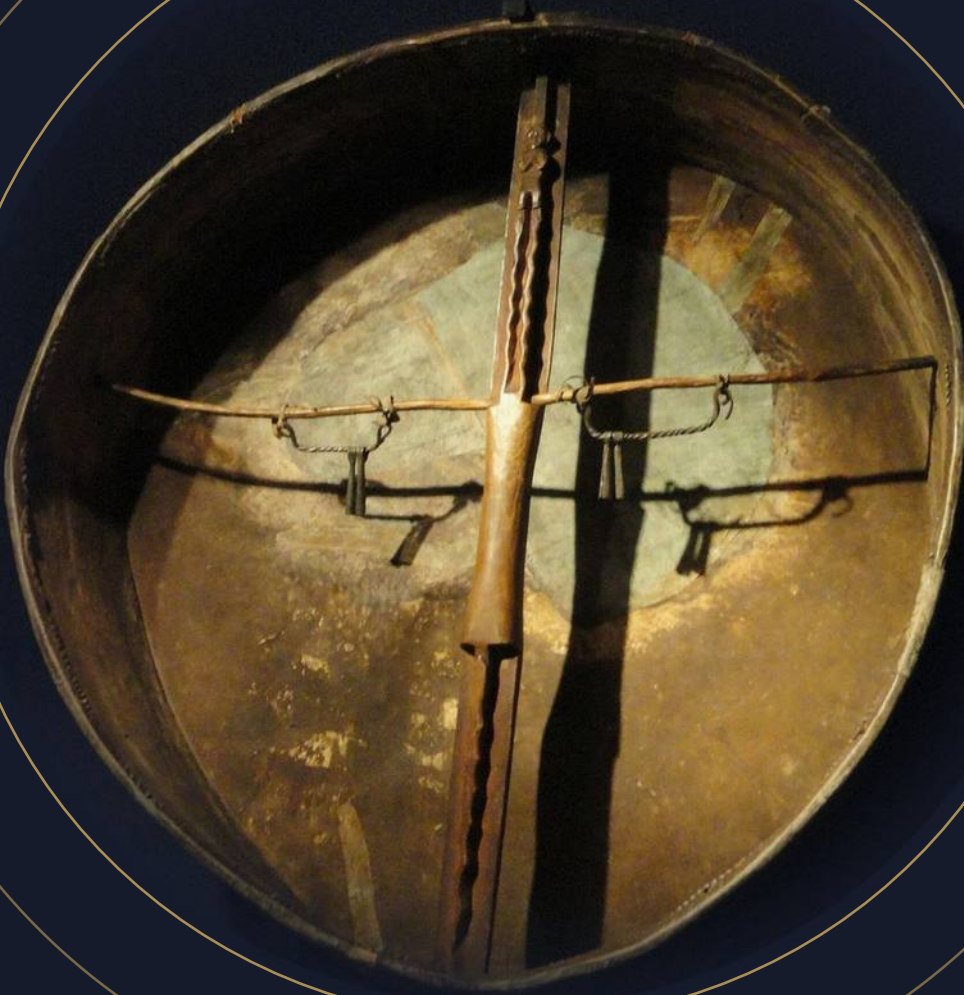
CLARITY GUIDES

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CELTIC SHAMANISM · HISTORY · RESEARCH

SHAMANIC DRUMMING

*A history of the drum and the journey,
with a special focus on Celtic shamanism*



Published by Clarity Guides · Cover: shaman's drum from Tuva (dated 1889), Museum of Cultures, Helsinki. Photo: Daderot, CCo

Preview – full guide coming soon – goclarity.uk

ABOUT THIS GUIDE



For thousands of people in Scotland and beyond, a drum circle is a calm, sociable way to spend a Sunday afternoon. Behind that steady beat sits a long, complicated and sometimes painful history.

This edition puts Celtic shamanism first. Chapters 1 and 2 look honestly at what we really know about the druids, poets and seers of Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Brittany, the Otherworld, the bodhrán and the Celtic year, and how Celtic-inspired drumming is practised respectfully in Fife today, with a gentle drum journey to try.

The rest of the guide traces the wider history: where the word *shaman* comes from, how drums were made and understood in Siberia, Mongolia and Tuva, among the Sámi of northern Europe and in North America and the Arctic, how many of those drums were taken, burned or banned, and how some are now coming home. It then follows the drum into the modern West, from academic theories to the “core shamanism” workshops that most local circles grow out of, and looks honestly at what scientific studies have and have not found.

We have tried to be accurate and respectful. Every date and quotation comes from a published source listed at the back. Where historians disagree, or where the evidence is thin, we say so.

A note on words. “Shaman” is one people’s word that outsiders later applied to many very different traditions. Where we know a community’s own term (for example the Sámi *noaidi* or the Inuit *angakkuq*) we use it. Where historians use “shaman” as a general term, so do we, without suggesting all these traditions are the same.

Not medical advice. This guide is for general interest and education. Nothing in it is a treatment or cure for any condition. Please read the health & safety page before joining a circle.

CONTENTS

IN THIS GUIDE



01	Celtic shamanism: what we really know	4
02	Drums, seers & sacred places: Scotland & the Gaelic world	11
	Try it: a Celtic drum journey	19
03	A word from Siberia: where ‘shaman’ comes from	21
04	Deep time: what the evidence can and can’t tell us	23
	Map: the drum’s homelands	25
05	Siberia: the drum as a horse	27
06	Tuva & Mongolia: silence and revival	31
07	Sápmi: the noaidi and the painted drum	33
08	Taken, burned, returned: the Sámi drums	36
09	North America & the Arctic	38
	Timeline	40
10	The drum comes West: scholars and ‘core shamanism’	43
11	What does the science say?	45
12	Drumming with respect	47
13	Drumming the turning year: Samhain & the Wheel of the Year	49
	Find a circle near you: Fife, Perth, Dundee & Edinburgh	56
	Your health & safety	58
	Glossary · Sources & further reading · Image credits	60



CELTIC ROOTS

CELTIC SHAMANISM: WHAT WE REALLY KNOW

Ask at a Scottish drum circle where its practice comes from and you may hear “the old Celtic ways”. The real story is more interesting: a handful of ancient clues, a rich body of medieval story, and a creative modern revival.

“Celtic” is first of all a family of languages. The Welsh scholar Edward Lhuyd grouped Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish and Breton together as “Celtic” in his *Archaeologia Britannica* of 1707, and the label was later stretched to the Iron Age peoples of Europe who spoke related languages. Those peoples never called themselves by one name, and no ancient “Celtic bible” survives. Julius Caesar even tells us the druids refused to write their teachings down.

So everything we know comes second-hand, from four kinds of evidence. Each is valuable, and each has its blind spots.

♦ FOUR KINDS OF EVIDENCE

CLASSICAL WRITERS C. 100 BCE–120 CE

Greek and Roman authors such as Caesar, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Pliny the Elder and Tacitus. They were outsiders, often enemies at war, and some copied a lost account by the Greek writer Posidonius.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Offerings in rivers and bogs, shrines, carved stones, the Gundestrup cauldron, Pictish symbol stones and ogham inscriptions. Objects show that ritual happened, but rarely what people believed about it.

MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Irish sagas, glossaries and law texts, and Welsh poems and tales, written down by Christian scribes from about the 7th century, mostly in manuscripts of the 11th century or later. They blend old memory with later invention.