

# Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism

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**Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism** (CR) is a [polytheistic](#), [animistic](#), [religious](#) and cultural movement. It is an effort to reconstruct, in a modern [Celtic](#) cultural context, an ancient Celtic religious tradition. [Pagan reconstructionists](#) have been around since the [1970s](#) but little of it had been specifically Celtic.

Many of the people who went on to establish CR were involved in Pagan groups in the seventies and eighties. Often these groups contained many Celtic elements that eventually found their way into core CR practice. This period, and these groups, are often referred to as "Proto-CR". Later, with the establishment of the Internet in the late eighties and early nineties, many of these Proto-CR, or early CR, groups and individuals came together online. This began a fruitful period of sharing of information and experiences, and led to a rapid growth of the movement.

CR does not make any claim to being a linear or direct descendant of any intact, completely [polytheistic](#), ancient Celtic tradition. The polytheistic religions of the ancient Celts were lost or subsumed by Christianity. However, CRs believe there is much to be found in the living Celtic cultures, the archaeological record, and the early manuscripts. Many folkloric practices never completely died out, and all that is needed in some areas, such as community celebrations, is a bit of dusting off and "back-engineering". Other aspects of ancient Celtic religion are more difficult to reconstruct.

CRs openly acknowledge that some aspects of their religious practice are, by necessity, modern creations. However, they state that, as much as possible, these practices are based in and inspired by early Celtic beliefs as found in early texts and the work of scholars and archaeologists, and are rooted in an understanding of, and participation in, the living Celtic cultures. Any innovations or elaborations are based upon sound historical precedents, and feedback from other scholars and experienced practitioners is sought before a new practice is accepted as part of the tradition. CRs believe it is important to lay aside elements of some ancient Celtic cultures which would be clearly inappropriate practices for a modern society. Though there is ongoing debate about the accuracy of some of the historical records which were left by outsiders, it is clear that some of those early societies may have practiced [human sacrifice](#), [slavery](#), and had strongly [patriarchal](#) elements. However, the bulk of this information can be traced to a few prominent Roman politicians and historians, such as [Julius Caesar](#) and [Pliny the Elder](#), and therefore may not be entirely reliable. CRs strive to find ethical ways of integrating their historical findings and research with their daily lives.

CR is not only about scholarly research. The founders and elders of CR believe that mystical, ecstatic practices are a necessary balance to scholarship, and that this balance is a vital component in determining whether a tradition is CR. They also believe that participation in, and respect for, the living Celtic cultures is a vital part of the tradition. Language study and preservation, and participation in other cultural activities such as Celtic music, dance and martial arts forms, are seen as a core part of the tradition.

Celtic Reconstructionists focus their efforts on a particular Celtic culture, such as the Gaelic, Welsh or Gaulish. While they believe it is helpful to *study* a wide variety of Celtic cultures as an aid to reconstruction, in religious and cultural practices these cultures are not lumped together.

Not all people who make use of Celtic reconstructionist techniques are entirely comfortable with using "Celtic Reconstructionism" or "Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism" as a name for their religion, seeing the term as describing a methodology rather than a system of belief, or seeing the term as being incorrectly descriptive. Others feel comfortable with the term CR, but have decided to name their CR sub-traditions so as to distinguish their practices from other sub-groups and flavors of CR. Some other names that people involved in CR-style religion have chosen to use include:

- Amllduwiaeth ("[Polytheism](#)" in [Welsh](#))
- Aurrad ("Member of the Tribe" in [Irish Gaelic](#))
- Celtic Restorationism
- Ildiachas ("Polytheism" in Irish Gaelic)
- Ioma-Dhiadhachd ("Polytheism" in [Scots Gaelic](#))
- Liesdoueadegezh ("Polytheism" in [Breton](#))
- Neo-Celtism
- Pàganachd ("Paganism, Heathenism" in Scots Gaelic)
- Pàgánacht ("Paganism, Heathenism" in Irish Gaelic)
- Pàgántacht (alternate Irish spelling of Pàgánacht)
- Senistrogmata ("Ancestral Customs" in reconstructed [Old Celtic](#))
- Yljeeaghys ("Polytheism" in [Manx](#))

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## First Modern Appearance of the Term and Other Historical Data [[edit](#)]

An early, key event in laying the groundwork for much Proto-CR and CR practice was the Celtic workshops, discussions and rituals at the 1985 Pagan Spirit Gathering, in [Wisconsin](#), USA. Participants at this gathering returned home and continued to develop the foundations of their CR sub-traditions, now incorporating some of the ideas they had shared in person. In later years some of them would re-meet online and once again collaborate.

The first appearance in print of the term "Celtic Reconstructionist", used to describe a specific religious movement and not just a style of Celtic studies, was by Kym Lambert ní Dhoireann in the Spring, 1992 issue of [Harvest Magazine](#) (Southboro, [Massachusetts](#), [USA](#)). Ní Dhoireann credits Kathryn Price NicDhàna with originating the term "Celtic Reconstructionist"; however, NicDhàna credits her early use of the term to a simple extrapolation of [Margot Adler](#)'s use of the term "[Pagan Reconstructionists](#)" in the original, 1979 edition of [Drawing Down the Moon](#). Though Adler devotes space to a handful of Reconstructionist traditions, none of those mentioned are specifically Celtic. In chapter eleven, while describing his Neo-Druidic group, NRDNA, [Isaac Bonewits](#) used the phrase "Eclectic Reconstructionist." However, by the time CR became a recognized tradition, this pairing of terms had become oxymoronic, as "Reconstructionism" in the Pagan/polytheist sense had now been defined specifically to exclude "Eclecticism".

NicDhàna and Ní Dhoireann have stated that they coined the term "Celtic Reconstructionist / Celtic Reconstructionism (CR)" specifically to distinguish their practices and beliefs from those of eclectic traditions like [Wicca](#) and the [Neo-Druidry](#) of the time. Erynn Rowan Laurie also began using the name "Celtic Reconstructionist" some time in the early '90s, though "NeoCeltic" was her initial term of choice. With Ní Dhoireann's popularization of Celtic Reconstructionism in the Pagan press, and then the use of the term by these three individuals on the internet, "Celtic Reconstructionism" began to be adopted as

the name for this developing spiritual tradition.

Initially only a few dozen people were involved on the Proto-CR and CR listserves. These included the [PODS:CELTIC Echo](#) on [PODnet](#) (a [FidoNet](#) technology based network), the Celtic and Occult forums on networks like [GEnie](#) and [CompuServe](#), and later Nemeton-L in 1994 (founded and initially moderated by Laurie). But over the [1990s](#) many hundreds of individuals and groups gradually joined the discussions online and in print, and the movement became more of an umbrella group, with a number of recognized sub-traditions.

## Number of Adherents

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No one is sure how many people identify as Celtic Reconstructionists. As of May, 2006, the two most popular CR online communities, [imbas-public](#) and [cr\\_r](#), have 671 and 365 members, respectively. There is overlap between the two groups, and it is likely not everyone on these lists identifies as CR, or would be considered CR by the elders of the movement. However, there are also a number of smaller, online CR communities and message boards, often with up to 100 or 200 members. There are also many general [Neopagan](#) communities, or general Reconstructionist ones, that include people who identify as CR, but who have no contact with the larger CR groups. There are also people who belong to CR groups but who are not active on the Internet. Until some sort of appropriate census is designed and undertaken, it is likely there will be no definite figure.

## Celtic Reconstructionism and [Neo-Druidry](#)

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Though there has certainly been quite a bit of cross-pollenization between Neo-Druidism and Celtic Reconstructionist groups, and there is a large crossover of membership between the two movements, the two have somewhat distinct methodologies and goals in their approach to Celtic religious forms. CR practitioners tend to look to the whole cultural matrix in which the religious ideas were formed, while Neo-Druids tend to prefer to focus on the specifically [druidic](#) functions. Some Neo-Druidic groups claim to be non-religious in nature, which is not the case with most CR groups. There are some CR philosophies which downplay the role of the druidic office specifically in preference to a more general view of Indo-European priesthood (making the argument that the Druids may simply have been a very successful school of priestcraft, and possibly not even completely pan-Celtic), or to the successors of druids such as the [filí](#) and seanachies.

This is not to say that there is no connection between Neo-Druid groups and CR. Some Neo-Druid groups (notably, [Ár nDraíocht Féin](#) (ADF), the [Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids](#) (OBOD), and [Keltria](#)) have similar methodologies of reconstruction, or have taken up CR methodologies recently. The ADF, in particular, have long used CR-type techniques, but many CRs criticize them for their pan-Indo-European focus, resulting in such oddities as "[Vedic](#) Druids" and "[Roman](#) Druids".

Other differences between CR groups and Neo-Druid groups can include such elements as differing ideas on [hierarchical](#) structures and acceptance of [Enlightenment](#)-era druidic revivals. Some philosophical differences exist as well, especially in terms of what "Druid" means. Some Neo-Druidic groups call anyone with an interest in Celtic Spirituality a "druid", and refer to the practice of Celtic spirituality as "Druidry", while CR groups tend to look at the older definition, seeing it as an office that requires decades of training and experience and is only attained by a small number of practitioners.

Despite these differences, there are generally good relations between Neo-Druid and CR groups, with, as noted previously, a great deal of sharing of ideas and even memberships.

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## External links

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- [The CR FAQ - An Introduction to Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism](#): Written by a collective of

long-term members of the CR community and representatives of diverse CR sub-traditions, including some of the founders of the tradition, the FAQ is only the second document to present a consensus view that speaks for more than one group's vision.

- [Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism](#): The much-briefer consensus tradition statement from 2003.
- [CAORANN](#): Celts Against Oppression, Racism and Neo-Nazism.
- [cr\\_r](#): The LiveJournal CR community.
- [Dùn Sgàthan](#): Scottish/Gaelic Reconstructionist Group.
- [IMBAS](#): Articles and YahooGroup.
- [Multicultural Polytheistic Hearth](#): Discussion board for Reconstructionists, with a large CR presence.
- [Pàganachd / Pàgánacht](#): Articles and LiveJournal community.

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