

Druidism in the Roman Empire: A Constructed Mystery Cult

This paper will analyze the methodology used by Roman authors of the Imperial Period to diminish Druidic legitimacy by comparing it to new religious movements or Persian *magoi*. Druidism has been discussed within the context of the Romanization debate at length, but the investigation of Druidic representation in its relationship with “mystery cult” literature has been limited. Pejorative accounts of foreign populations have consistently influenced shared cultural mindsets and the depiction of Druids can be contextualized in this manner. This paper will argue that when describing Druidism, Roman authors of the Imperial Period utilize formulaic linguistic and conceptual structures that reference past and concurrent accounts of “mystery cults”. A further claim can be made that this was done in order to promote political and cultural hegemony within the larger context of Romanization by diminishing Druidic legitimacy.

Utilizing Caesar, Cicero, Tacitus, Pliny the Elder, and other Roman authors of the early and late Imperial Periods, a framework for Roman perspectives on Druidism can be extrapolated. While Cicero and Pliny the Elder explicitly compare Druids to Persian *magoi* with pejorative intent, other comparisons are made between Druidism and new religious movements in more complex ways. As the comparison between mystery cult narratives and Druidic depictions has not been made as of yet, this paper will rely heavily on a comparative literary analysis of primary Roman Imperial descriptions of Gallic Druids. However, scholarship on imperial interactions in Gaul (Webster 1999) (Ross 1979) (DeWitt 1938) (Tamblyn 1909) will also contribute insightful perspectives to contextualize Druidism outside of the primary literature within larger historical events. Once a framework for Roman authors’ methodology has been established, it can be fitted

with cultural *bricolage* theory (Terrenato 1998). If accepted, this argument could provide further insight into Romanization through a religio-cultural lens.

Works Cited

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