

Student Essay on Beltane, a Pagan Holiday

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Essay

Beltane, known as May Day in some areas, is a pagan holiday. Beltane occurs from when the moon comes out on April 31st, to when the moon rises on May 1st. It celebrates Maia and Flora, the goddesses of flowers. It signals the beginning of the 3rd quarter of the Celtic year. Beltane was said to be a time of "unabashed sexuality" and the season of love. Beltane marks the passion and vitality of summer. It was a time to plant trees and flowers, in honor of Maia and Flora. Women washed their faces in the morning dew on May 1st, and braided flowers in their hair. Washing your face with dew was said to guarantee beauty over the coming year. In villages, a May King and Queen were chosen to preside over the activities. They were usually young, between 13 and 15. There was a maypole, a tall pole with different colored ribbons coming from the top and draw out until the bottom. Children would dance around the pole in a specific order, as to weave a pattern with the ribbons. Grand feasts were very common. Engagements and marriages were very frequent. In some areas, young men would lie in fields on Beltane and pretend to sleep. If a girl wanted to marry him, she would find him and "kiss him awake"; much like the fable of Sleeping Beauty. These young men were called "the betrothed of May." Then they would go and announce their engagement in the local tavern, or wherever the party was. People would have sex in fields to help "fertilize" the soil. Older married couples would take off their rings and their meanings as part of celebrating Beltane. It is unsure where Beltane originated, for it is celebrated in such a widespread areas such as Italy, Ireland, United Kingdom, and other places in Western Europe. Beltane is important to culture in Western Europe, because it is part of both a religion, and a culture (Celtic). It is used to celebrate the beginning of summer and a warmer temperature.