

SAINT **B**IRREN AND **O**LD **M**EG

And Saint Birinus passed then into the country of the Dubunni, and carried the word of the Lord throughout that land. From Corinium he went forth into the countryside, and his followers with him, and many were baptized at every place where he stopped.

Anon he came to a hilly place where the people were sore afraid of a foul witch, whose name was Margenna. She walked the land by night devouring livestock and humans alike, and where she passed the crops were blighted. The saint's followers entreated him to return to Corinium and preach further to its people, but he determined to defeat this evil through the power of the Lord.

After a day spent in fasting and prayer, Saint Birinus went forth to the cave where the witch was said to dwell, and called out in a loud voice, commanding her to submit to the Lord and repent her evil ways through the grace of Christ Jesus; but she came out of her cave in a rage and sought to belabor him with her great cudgel. Winter followed in her footsteps, and the land was blasted with frost and ice.

Secure in the protection of the Lord, Birinus stretched forth his own staff and struck her once upon her shoulder. Thereupon she was turned to stone, and her cudgel struck into the ground beside her, remaining upright. Birinus blessed the cudgel in the name of the Lord, and commanded it to do no more harm but to act according to the nature ordained in it by God, and immediately leaves sprang from the wood, the witch's cudgel becoming thereby a string and healthy thorn tree, to remind all who saw it of the crown under which Christ suffered at his crucifixion.

As you read, you remember that Corinium is known today as Cirencester, and the name Margenna suggests both the legendary Morgan le Fay of Arthurian myth and the Irish war-goddess known as the Morrigan.

Handout 1B