

The Order of the White Moon Goddess Gallery Presents

# MODRON

A Level II Final Project for The Sacred Three Goddess School  
by Adept Jenai May

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## HER STORY

Modron is a Celtic Mother Goddess from whom we may receive gentle healing, spiritual and bodily nourishment, fierce protection, and guidance. She is a goddess whose origins and identity are veiled in mystery, for she left but a few breadcrumbs as insightful clues. Nonetheless, people today continue to entrust their prayers and wishes to Modron's care.

To those familiar with Celtic mythology, Madron is best known as the mother of Mabon in "*Culhwch ac Olwen*," a Welsh tale from the Mabinogi (circa 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century). Linguistically, Modron translates from old Celtic to mean "mother" and Mabon means "son." Together Modron and Mabon represent the Universal Mother Goddess and Divine Son.

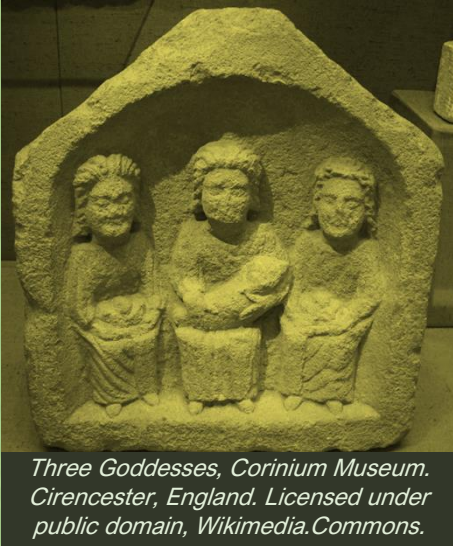
There is more to Modron than being a mother. In the Welsh Triads (circa 14<sup>th</sup> century), Modron was listed with her twin children; a son named Owain (possibly a pseudonym for Mabon<sup>ii</sup>) and a daughter named Morfudd. The Triads also name her husband as Urien Rheged (a knight of King Arthur) and her father as Afallach (Avalon), king of the Otherworld.<sup>iii</sup> This tells us Modron was also connected to the Otherworld and the dead. This lineage is significant



Mother Goddess with Apples, Corinium Museum, Cirencester, England.

because it leads us to see how Modron may have been an early form of Morgan Le Fay (of the Arthurian tales), for Morgan was also married to Urien, mother to Owain, and belonged to Avalon.

Another Welsh story connects Modron to both the Fae and Avalon. It tells of Urien Rheged and Modron at Rhyd y Gyfarthfa, the “Ford of Barking Dogs.” Urien was drawn to the ford by the sound of barking hounds yet, when he arrived, saw none and the barking had stopped. There was only a beautiful woman bathing in the River Alyn (similar scenes are common in tales of the Fae). Urien grabbed her and “had his will of her.”<sup>iv</sup> The woman then introduced herself as Modron, the daughter of the King of Annwfn (Avalon), and explained that she had to stay at the ford until she gave birth to a son by a Christian man. She instructed Urien to return in a year to receive his son. When he returned, he met two children instead of one: a son named Owain, and a daughter named Morvydd.



Three Goddesses, Corinium Museum, Cirencester, England. Licensed under public domain, Wikimedia Commons.

Stepping further back in time, to the Roman occupation of Britain (43 to 410 AD), we discover Modron as *Matrona*, or the *Matres* (“Mothers”), a triple goddess popularly worshipped at healing springs and wells.<sup>v</sup> Unlike the Wiccan “maiden, mother, and crone” archetype, these triple goddesses were all mothers; fertility goddesses of both agriculture and humans/animals. Sculptures of the *Matres* most often depict three mothers, carrying objects such as bread, flowers, grain, a cornucopia, apples, and babies. In addition to these held items, there might also be children, diapers, and even snakes present in the scenes. People prayed to Her for Healing (physical and emotional), Abundance, Fertility, Family Protection, and matters of Midwifery.

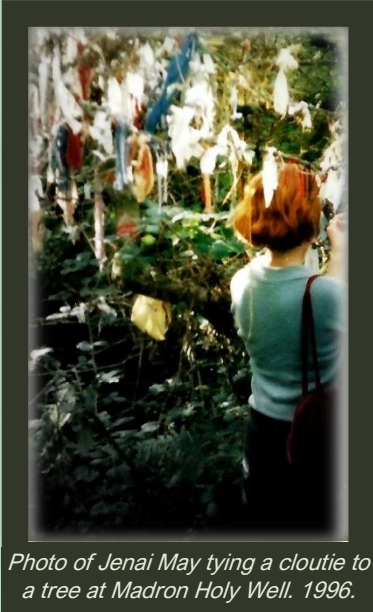
According to Dr. Noémie Beck, the *Matres* were most likely imported to Britain by Roman soldiers, yet there are also inscriptions showing Mother Goddesses with Celtic names.<sup>vi</sup> Given their inherent similarities, it’s possible the Roman occupiers assimilated the Celtic Mother Goddess with the *Matres*. Nevertheless, the *Matres* were widely revered across Britain, with main worship centers were in Cirencester (near Gloucester, which is mentioned in the *Mabinogi*), Cornwall, and along Hadrian’s Wall.

The *Matres* undoubtedly enjoyed a cult following throughout the English West Country (Cirencester and Cornwall), North England (along Hadrian’s Wall), and in Gaul. Yet, no recorded *myths* or *stories* of the *Matres* survive from the Romano-British period; we’re left with only sculptures and inscriptions on altars. Nonetheless, these surviving artifacts present a rich and flourishing tradition of Mother Goddess worship that was thriving in the early half of the first millennia AD (and likely longer).

Caitlin Matthews insists Modron isn’t actually a name, but rather a title that encompasses *all* mother goddesses.<sup>vii</sup> I partially disagree. I believe that, in the Welsh Triads and *Mabinogi*, Modron was recorded as a specific name, unique to her character. On the other hand, if we look to the older “*Matres*” or “*Matrona*,” we see names could have also been titles. According to John Koch, the names of homelands were attached for more specific identification. For instance, the *Matres* were referred to as “*Matres Gallae*” in Gaul.<sup>viii</sup> In this example, their name also functions as a title.

Which is important because, in this context, we realize it doesn’t matter whether the *Matres* were imported. Modron would have been universally recognized as the Mother Goddess, no matter her names or titles, and her worship would have been far more widespread than the *Mabinogi* character’s reach. Embracing the shared connection between Modron and the *Matres* is crucial to comprehending the reverence and relevance of this mysterious Celtic Triple Goddess.

## PRAYING TO MODRON:



*Photo of Jenai May tying a cloutie to a tree at Madron Holy Well. 1996.*

Modron was a river/water goddess, so her shrines were often built near healing springs and wells in Britain. Madron Holy Well, in Cornwall (now named after St. Madron though originally dedicated to the goddess Modron). Near and around the well, there are several trees draped in rags, called “clouties.” Clouties are a form of prayer and magic with various methods of use. The simplest approach is to tie a scrap to the tree while quietly saying a prayer, most often for healing. Ideally the scrap will be of natural fibers so they can degrade – as the rags degrade and fall off the tree, so does the ailment from the afflicted person.<sup>ix</sup> A more elaborate approach is to wet the rag in the well, set it on the afflicted part of the body, then tie the rag to the tree with your prayer.

In 1996, I visited the Madron Holy Well, but I didn’t have any rags with me to tie on the cloutie trees. I knew that, so long as the cloutie was made of natural biodegradable fiber, it would degrade and carry the magical

prayer to the healing well and Modron. So, I plucked a single strand of my hair from my head and used it as a cloutie instead of a rag.

As simple as the experience was, it felt profound. I closed my eyes, and, in that moment, a vision of a symbol etched itself in light behind my eyelids. It was a crescent moon resting on its back, cradling a crown. (When I was younger, I often saw symbols in this way, usually associated with sacred places or important people and concepts. I still see these symbols now and then, just not as often.) Since that visit, I’ve often reminisced about the cloutie tree and wondered about the part of myself I left behind there.



*Symbol for Modron as revealed in a vision to the author, Jenai May*



*The first cloutie on Jenai's tree.*

Working with Modron inspired me to bring the cloutie tradition closer to my home in Oregon. Behind my house, a few feet from our back fence, runs a small creek. A crabapple tree perches against our fence, essentially on the creek bank. So, I turned this wee crabapple into our own cloutie tree and dedicated it to Modron with a ritual (pg. 5). Being new, our cloutie tree has only a few cotton scraps carrying my family’s healing prayers and wishes. Someday, I hope to see it well-draped with clouties fluttering in the breeze.

Does the cloutie tradition appeal to you? If so, you needn’t live near a spring or holy well to create your own cloutie tree for prayers. If you have access to a bowl, water, and any tree or shrub, you can use it for clouties. You can even dedicate a special cloutie twig (willingly donated from a tree) and keep it inside your home. Water isn’t necessary to use clouties, though it’s helpful if you choose to dedicate it to a water goddess such as Modron. Consider keeping a bowl of water nearby your cloutie tree, shrub, or twig.

## THAT WHICH IS SACRED TO MODRON:

- **Symbols:** Springs & Holy Wells, Spring Flowers, Grains, Apples, Nuts & Acorns, and The Number 3
- **Colors:** Yellow, Orange, Grass Green, Watery Blue
- **Crystals:** Peridot, Citrine, Amber, Blue Fluorite, White Calcite
- **Animals:** Hounds, Ravens, Snakes, and Pigs
- **Elements:** Earth & Water
- **Scents & Teas:** Apples, Chamomile, Rosemary, Juniper, Lavender, Blackcurrant, Mint



## CLOUTIE PRAYER TO MODRON

BY JENAI MAY

*Modron,  
Mother of Three,  
I beseech thee.  
Queen of healing waters  
Queen of nourishing fruits,  
Queen of the Avalon realm,  
Please bestow your healing relief  
upon my [affliction].  
For this I ask gratefully.  
So Be It and Blessed May I Be.*

## BE HEALED WITH MODRON, A RITUAL

**Historical Note:** *According to Paul Broadhurst, in May, mothers would dip their naked children in Madron's Well three times while the parent faced West. Then they walked the children nine times around the well before placing them on "St. Madron's Bed" – a small grassy hill. If a child fell asleep, it was a good omen. All of this was to be done in perfect silence.<sup>x</sup>*

### Suggested Ingredients & Supplies:

- Bowl of Fresh Water (bonus points if using Springwater or Well Water).
- Candles – White, Green, and/or Blue, any combination of the three. Only white is fine too.
- Incense (optional) – Something woody such as Sandalwood.
- Fresh seasonal flowers such as Honeysuckle, Azalea, Gardenia, or Poppies
- Apple cut to reveal its star, set on a plate or napkin (you will eat the apple).
- Honeysuckle water (optional, for the bath).
- Scrap of fabric (skinny and long enough to wrap around a small tree branch).
- If you are working healing for someone else, have a photo, drawing, poppet, or even just a piece of paper with their name on it to represent them.

Near bedtime, prepare your ingredients and altar with candles (don't light yet), crystals, flowers, the apple, bowl of water, etc. You want everything completely ready, so you can hop out of the bath/shower (next) and get right to the ritual.

Enjoy a relaxing bath or shower. If you take a bath, splash a little honeysuckle water in the water. While bathing/showering, perform a self-blessing. Visualize the water washing away unhealthy energy and toxins. Infuse healing, loving intent in every movement, even when drying your body.

Go to your altar and light the candles and incense, then cast your circle and call elements, directions, and Modron. Use your own, familiar method for this step.

Sit comfortably, either on the floor or in a chair, and take up the scrap of fabric (a "cloutie"). Face West and dip the cloutie into the bowl of water and then place it on the afflicted part of your body. Speak to Modron and ask for her healing assistance. You may use the *Prayer to Modron*, found on the previous page. If you choose to maintain traditional silence, then consider saying the prayer silently in your head. Do this three times total: Dip the cloutie in the water, place it on the afflicted body part, and say the prayer.

Pass the cloutie around the bowl of water nine times with care; you may use your hand or walk it around. At this point, consider dancing, swaying, and/or chanting to raise energy. When you're ready, release the energy and see it spreading healing, not only to yourself, but also to the world.

Close the circle and say your thanks to Modron; use your preferred method. Then eat the apple.

Tie the cloutie to a tree branch, bush, or even around your wand. You may also choose to place it in a blessing bowl or something similar. It's also fine to place it back in the bowl of water. Please do whatever comes most natural to you.

Lastly, retire to bed and enjoy a restfully healing night's sleep.

## NOTES & REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> Main photo on front page - Mother Goddesses (Deae Matres) Sculpture, C. 100-200 AD. Corinium Museum, Cirencester, England. Licensed under public domain, Wikimedia.

<sup>ii</sup> Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain* (University of Wales Press, 2014), 451.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid., 459.

<sup>v</sup> Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, *Ancient Goddesses* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 194.

<sup>vi</sup> Noémie Beck, "Goddesses in Celtic Religion; The Matres and Matronae," February 11, 2017, <https://brewminate.com/goddesses-in-celtic-religion-the-matres-and-matronae/>.

<sup>vii</sup> Caitlin Matthews, *Mabon and the Guardians of Celtic Britain; Hero Myths in the Mabinogion* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2002), 179-180.

<sup>viii</sup> John T. Koch, *The Celts; History, Live, and Culture* (California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 581.

<sup>ix</sup> Paul Broadhurst, *Secret Shrines; In Search of the Old Holy Wells of Cornwall* (Cornwall: Pendragon Press, 1991), 180-182.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid., 183.

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