

# Cernunnos

In [Gallo-Roman religion](#), **Cernunnos** was a deity depicted with antlers, seated cross-legged, and is associated with [stags](#), [horned serpents](#), [dogs](#), [bulls](#), and [rats](#). He is usually holding or wearing a [torc](#) and has been seen holding a bag of coins (or grain) and a cornucopia.<sup>[1]</sup> Believed to have originally been a Celtic deity, over 50 examples have been found from this time believed to be associated with him, concentrating in the north-eastern region of what was called [Gaul](#) by the ancient Romans. Cernunnos is also associated with the Wiccan [Horned God](#) in the modern religious tradition of [Wicca](#).



The Cernunnos-type [antlered](#) figure or [horned god](#), on the [Gundestrup Cauldron](#), on display, at the [National Museum of Denmark](#) in [Copenhagen](#)

## ^ Name and etymology



In [Gaulish](#), the name Cernunnos is rooted in the word *karnon* which means "horn" or "antler". Karnon is cognate with Latin *cornu* and Germanic *\*hurnaz*, ultimately from [Proto-Indo-European](#) *\*k̑r̥n̥o-*.<sup>[2]</sup> The etymon *karn-* "horn" appears in both [Gaulish](#) and [Galatian](#) branches of [Continental Celtic](#). [Hesychius of Alexandria](#) glosses the Galatian word *karnon* (κάρνον) as "Gallic trumpet", that is, the Celtic military horn listed as the [carnyx](#) (κάρνυξ) by [Eustathius of Thessalonica](#), who notes the instrument's animal-shaped bell.<sup>[3]</sup> The root also appears in the names of [Celtic polities](#), most prominent among them the [Carnutes](#), meaning something like "the Horned Ones,"<sup>[4]</sup> and in several [personal names](#) found in inscriptions.<sup>[5]</sup>

The [Proto-Celtic](#) form of the theonym is reconstructed as either *\*Cerno-on-os* or *\*Carno-on-os*. The [augmentative](#) *-on-* is characteristic of theonyms, as in [Maponos](#), [Epona](#), [Matronae](#), and [Sirona](#).<sup>[6]</sup> Maier (2010) states that the etymology of *Cernunnos* is unclear, but seems to be rooted in the Celtic word for "horn" or "antler" (as in *Carnonos*).<sup>[7]</sup>

"Cernunnos" is believed by some Celticists to be an obscure epithet of a better attested Gaulish deity; perhaps the God described in the [interpretatio Romana](#) as [Mercury](#) or [Dis Pater](#),<sup>[8]</sup> which are considered to share Cernunnos's [psychopomp](#) or [chthonic](#) associations. The name has only appeared once with an image, when it was inscribed on the *Nautae Parisiaci* (the sailors of the [Parisii](#), who were a tribe of [Gauls](#)).<sup>[9]</sup> Otherwise, variations of the name Cernunnos has also been found in a Celtic inscription written in [Greek characters](#) at [Montagnac, Hérault](#) (as καρνωνου, *karnonou*, in the [dative case](#)).<sup>[10]</sup> A [Gallo-Latin adjective](#) *carnuātus*, "horned", is also found.<sup>[11]</sup>

## ^ Epigraphic evidence



Due to the lack of surviving Gaulish literature regarding mythologies about Cernunnos, stories with various possible epithets he might have had, or information regarding religious practices and followers, his overall significance in Gaulish religious traditions is unknown. Interpretations of his role within Gaulish culture vary from seeing him as a god of animals, nature and fertility to a god of travel, commerce and bi-directionality.<sup>[12]</sup> The only evidence that has survived are inscriptions found on various artifacts.

The *Nautae Parisiaci* monument was probably constructed by Gaulish sailors in 14 CE.<sup>[13]</sup> It was discovered in 1710 within the foundations of the [cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris](#), site of ancient [Lutetia](#), the [civitas capital](#) of the [Celtic Parisii](#). It is now displayed in the [Musée National du Moyen Age](#) in [Paris](#).<sup>[14]</sup> The distinctive stone pillar is an important monument of [Gallo-Roman religion](#). Its [low reliefs](#) depict and label by name several [Roman deities](#) such as [Jupiter](#), [Vulcan](#), and [Castor](#) and [Pollux](#), along with Gallic deities such as [Esus](#), [Smertrios](#), and [Tarvos Trigaranus](#). The name *Cernunnos* can be read clearly on 18th century drawings of the inscriptions, but the initial letter has been obscured since, so that today only a reading "[\_]ernunnos" can be verified.<sup>[15]</sup>

Additional evidence is given by one inscription on a metal plaque from [Steinsel-Rélent](#) in [Luxembourg](#), in the territory of the Celtic [Treveri](#). This inscription<sup>[16]</sup> read *Deo Ceruninco*, "to the God Cerunincos", assumed to be the same deity. The Gaulish inscription from Montagnac<sup>[17]</sup> reads αλλετ[ει]νος καρνονου αλ[ι]σο[ντ]εας (*Alletinos [dedicated this] to Carnonos of Alisontea*), with the last word possibly a place name based on *Alisia*, "[service-tree](#)" or "rock" (compare [Alesia](#), Gaulish *Alisiia*).<sup>[18]</sup>

## ^ Iconography





Cernunnos on the [Pillar of the Boatmen](#), from the [Musée national du](#)

[Moyen Âge](#) (Museum of the Middle Ages), in [Paris, France](#).

On the [Pillar of the Boatmen](#), we find an image depicted with stag's antlers, both having [torcs](#) hanging from them with the inscription of *[C]ernunnos* with it. The lower part of the relief is lost, but the dimensions suggest that the god was sitting cross-legged, providing a direct parallel to the antlered figure on the [Gundestrup cauldron](#).<sup>[19]</sup>

Iconography associated with Cernunnos is often portrayed with a [stag](#) and the [ram-horned serpent](#). Less frequently, there are [bulls](#) (at [Rheims](#)), [dogs](#) and [rats](#).<sup>[20]</sup> Because of the image of him on the Gundestrup Cauldron, some scholars describe Cernunnos as the [Lord of the Animals](#) or the Lord of Wild Things, and Miranda Green describes him as a "peaceful god of nature and fruitfulness"<sup>[21]</sup> who seems to be seated in a manner that suggests traditional shamans who were often depicted surrounded by animals.<sup>[22]</sup> Other academics such as Ceisiwr Serith describes Cernunnos as a god of bi-directionality and mediator between opposites, seeing the animal symbolism in the artwork reflecting this idea.<sup>[23]</sup>

The *Pilier des nautes* links him with sailors and with commerce, suggesting that he was also associated with material wealth as does the coin pouch from the Cernunnos of Rheims (Marne, Champagne, France)—in antiquity, Durocortorum, the *civitas* capital of the [Remi](#) tribe—and the stag vomiting coins from Niedercorn-Turbelslach (Luxembourg) in the lands of the [Treveri](#). The god may have symbolized the fecundity of the [stag-inhabited forest](#).

Other examples of Cernunnos imagery include a [petroglyph](#) in [Val Camonica](#) in [Cisalpine Gaul](#).<sup>[9][24]</sup> The antlered human figure has been dated as early as the 7th century BCE or as late as the 4th.<sup>[24]</sup> Two goddesses with antlers appear at [Besançon](#) and [Clermont-Ferrand](#), France. An antlered god appears on a relief in [Cirencester](#), Britain dated to Roman times and appears depicted on a coin from [Petersfield](#), Hampshire.<sup>[9]</sup> An antlered child appears on a relief from [Vendeuvres](#), flanked by serpents

and holding a purse and a torc.<sup>[25]</sup> The best known image appears on the [Gundestrup cauldron](#) found on [Jutland](#), dating to the 1st century BCE, thought to depict Celtic subject matter though usually regarded as of Thracian workmanship.

Among the [Celtiberians](#), horned or antlered figures of the Cernunnos type include a "Janus-like" god from [Candelario](#) ([Salamanca](#)) with two faces and two small horns; a horned god from the hills of [Ríotinto](#) ([Huelva](#)); and a possible representation of the deity Vestius Aloniecus near his altars in [Lourizán](#) ([Pontevedra](#)). The horns are taken to represent "aggressive power, genetic vigor and fecundity."<sup>[26]</sup>

Divine representations of the Cernunnos type are exceptions to the often-expressed view that the Celts only began to picture their gods in human form after the [Roman conquest of Gaul](#).<sup>[27]</sup> The Celtic "horned god", while well attested in iconography, cannot be identified in description of Celtic religion in [Roman ethnography](#) and does not appear to have been given any *interpretatio romana*, perhaps due to being too distinctive to be translatable into the Roman pantheon.<sup>[28]</sup> While Cernunnos was never assimilated, scholars have sometimes compared him functionally to Greek and Roman divine figures such as [Mercury](#),<sup>[29]</sup> [Actaeon](#), specialized forms of [Jupiter](#), and [Dis Pater](#), the latter of whom [Julius Caesar](#) said was considered the ancestor of the Gauls.<sup>[30]</sup>

## ^ Possible reflexes in Insular Celtic



There have been attempts to find the *cern* root in the name of [Conall Cernach](#), the foster brother of the Irish hero [Cuchulainn](#)<sup>[31]</sup> in the [Ulster Cycle](#). In this line of interpretation, *Cernach* is taken as an epithet with a wide semantic field—"angular; victorious; prominent," though there is little evidence that the figures of Conall and Cernunnos are related.<sup>[32]</sup>

A brief passage involving Conall in an eighth-century story entitled *Táin Bó Fraích* ("The Cattle Raid on Fraech") has been taken as evidence that Conall bore attributes of a "master of beasts."<sup>[8]</sup> In this passage Conall Cernach is portrayed as a hero and mighty warrior who assists the protagonist Fraech in rescuing his wife and son, and reclaiming his cattle. The fort that Conall must penetrate is guarded by a mighty serpent. The supposed anti-climax of this tale is when the fearsome serpent, instead of attacking Conall, darts to Conall's waist and girdles him as a belt. Rather than killing the serpent, Conall allows it to live, and then proceeds to attack and rob the fort of its great treasures the serpent previously protected.

The figure of Conall Cernach is not associated with animals or forestry elsewhere; and the epithet "Cernach" has historically been explained as a description of Conall's impenetrable "horn-like" skin which protected him from injury.

## ^ Possible connection to Saint Ciarán



God of [Etang-sur-Aroux](#), a possible depiction of Cernunnos. He wears a [torc](#) at the neck and on the chest. Two [snakes](#) with ram heads encircle him at the waist. Two cavities at the top of his head are probably designed to receive [deer](#) antlers. Two small human faces at the back of his head indicate that he is [tricephalic](#). [Musée d'Archéologie Nationale](#) (National Archaeological Museum), in [France](#).



Rock carving of an antlered figure in the [National park of Naquane, Italy](#).<sup>[33]</sup>



Some see the qualities of Cernunnos subsumed into the *life* of [Saint Ciarán of Saighir](#), one of the [Twelve Apostles of Ireland](#). When he was building his first tiny cell, as his [hagiography](#) goes, his first disciple and monk was a boar that had been rendered gentle by God. This was followed by a fox, a badger, a wolf and a stag.<sup>[34]</sup>

## ^ Neopaganism and Wicca



Within [Neopaganism](#), specifically the [Wiccan](#) tradition, The [Horned God](#) is a deity that is believed to be the consort of the [Great Goddess](#) and syncretizes various horned or antlered gods from various cultures. The name Cernunnos became associated with the Wiccan Horned God through the adoption of the writings of Margaret Murray, an Egyptologist and folklorist of the early 20th century. Murray, through her [Witch-cult hypothesis](#), believed that the various horned deities found in Europe were expressions of a "proto-horned god" and in 1931 published her theory in "The God of the Witches". Her work was considered highly controversial at the time, but was adopted by Gerald Gardner in his development of the religious movement of Wicca.<sup>[35]</sup>

Within the Wiccan tradition, The Horned God reflects the seasons of the year in an annual cycle of life, death and rebirth and his imagery is a blend of the Gaulish god Cernunnos, the Greek god [Pan](#), The [Green Man](#) motif, and various other horned spirit imagery.<sup>[36][37]</sup>

## ^ References in modern culture



- The American television series "[Hercules: The Legendary Journeys](#)" features Kernunnos as a major villain during its fifth season. He is manipulating the demigoddess, Morrigan, by holding her daughter captive.
- The French-Belgian TV thriller [Zone Blanche](#) features Cernunnos, who protects the forest from humans, hoards treasure, and revives dead characters to life.
- The German/Austrian TV thriller with supernatural streaks [Der Pass](#) features Cernunnos.
- The psychedelic downtempo group Dub Trees (fronted by [Youth](#) [Martin Glover]) produced an album in 2016 entitled *The Cerronnos Dub Rituals EP*<sup>[38]</sup> wherein Celtic Galician and Summerian pipes are used.
- The Argentinian folk metal band Cernunnos was named as a tribute of this god and one of the songs of its first album *Leaves of Blood* is also named "Cernunnos".
- The comic series [Sláine](#) features an incarnation of the Horned God Carnun (based on the Gaulish deity Cernunnos).

- Cernunnos is also featured in the third-person [MOBA](#), [SMITE](#), classified as a Hunter.
- The band [Heilung](#)'s 2019 album "Futha" displays art representing Cernunnos in several places, including a female version of the Gundestrup Cauldron Cernunnos on the art for the song "Norupo", called Cernunina, as "Futha" represents a feminine counterpart to the band's 2015 album "Ofnir".<sup>[39]</sup>
- The [Etrian Odyssey](#) video game series features Cernunnos as a boss character. He appears in [Etrian Odyssey](#), its remake, [Etrian Odyssey Untold: The Millennium Girl](#), and [Etrian Odyssey Nexus](#).
- The antagonist in the video game *Perennial* is an antlered forest monster, based on Cernunnos, who is turning park visitors into trees.
- In the [Dawn](#) comic series by J. Michael Linsner, Cernunnos is the last of the Elder Gods and is the god of death and change. He is married to Aurora (aka Dawn), of the younger gods who is the goddess of birth and rebirth. Together Aurora and Cernunnos complete the cycle of birth, change, death and rebirth.
- In the manga, "[The Ancient Magus' Bride](#)" by [Kore Yamazaki](#), the horned god is shown walking through the forest during the [Yule](#) season. He is depicted as a cervitaur, having the head and torso of a human male and the body of a deer. He also wears a mask resembling a deer of his face. He carries around a goddess called 'Dark Lady' on his back. They are also shown in the [anime adaptation](#).
- In [Fate/Grand Order](#), the sixth Lostbelt, based on Britain, shows Cernunnos with a Berserker Saint Graph. The Faries who inhabit the Lostbelt poisoned Cernunnos and used his body to create Britain. Thousands of years later, a soulless Cernunnos is fought and defeated by the main characters.

## ^ See also



- [Abbots Bromley Horn Dance](#)
- [Celtic polytheism](#)
- [Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism](#)
- [Green Man](#)
- [Herne the Hunter](#)
- [Horned God](#)

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## ^ Notes



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3. Delamarre; Greek text and English translation of the passage from Eustathius' [Homeric commentaries](#) given by Edward Wigan, "Account of a Collection of Roman Gold Coins," *Numismatic Chronicle* 5 (1865), p. 11 [online](https://books.google.com/books?id=0VwUAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA11&dq=carnyx+Eustathius&hl=en&ei=yEPDTMPmA4SfnAf__a3UCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=carnyx%20Eustathius&f=false). ([https://books.google.com/books?id=0VwUAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA11&dq=carnyx+Eustathius&hl=en&ei=yEPDTMPmA4SfnAf\\_\\_a3UCQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=carnyx%20Eustathius&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=0VwUAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA11&dq=carnyx+Eustathius&hl=en&ei=yEPDTMPmA4SfnAf__a3UCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=carnyx%20Eustathius&f=false)) ↗
4. Also *Carni* and *Carnonacae*.
5. Such as *Carnarus*, *Carnatus*, *Carneolus*, *Carnius* and *Carnicus*; Altay Coşkun with Jürgen Zeidler, "'Cover Names' and Nomenclature in Late Roman Gaul: The Evidence of the Bordelaise Poet Ausonius" (2003), p. 33.
6. Delamarre, citing M. Lejeune, *Lepontica* (Paris 1971), p. 325.
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13. Based on the inscription (CIL XIII. 03026), on the accession of the emperor Tiberius.
14. A. Kingsley Porter, "A Sculpture at Tandragee," *Burlington Magazine* 65 (1934), p. 227, pointing out the relative maturation of the antlers.
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16. AE 1987, 0772 = AE 1989, 00542.
17. RIG 1, number G-224.
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## ^ External links



- "Is the Gundestrup Cauldron an Authentic Celtic Artifact?" (<http://www.shadowdrake.com/celtic/gundestrup.html>)<sup>[c]</sup>: A possibly ancient depiction of the Horned God