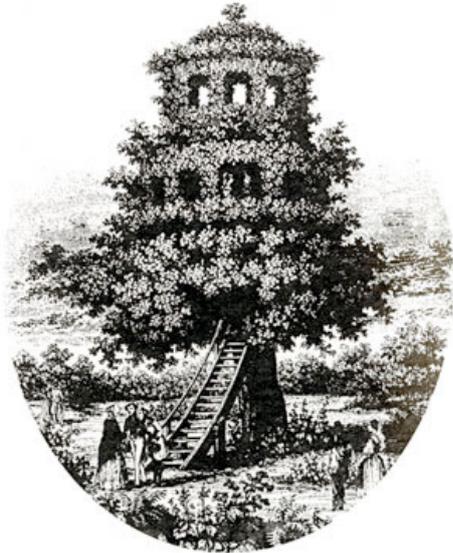


TILLEULS À DANSER®

DANCE LIME TREES, TREES FOR DANCING LOVE AND LIFE



Dance Lime Tree - Ratibor

The role of celebrations

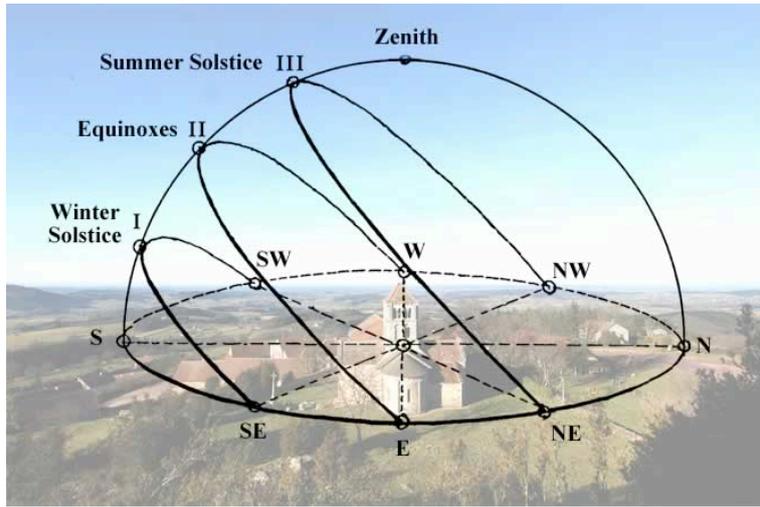
As societies develop and begin to have a structure, a need is felt to establish precise points of reference in time and in space in order to ensure a sense of community. The dance lime tree is a perfect example of one of these reference points. Its presence enables the community to gather together to mark important events. Festive times, whose origins can be cosmic, religious, political or commemorative, punctuate the calendar in a variety of ways. They ensure the transmission, from one generation to the next, of a sense of order, and can stretch back to earliest times. Their function is to maintain traditions which, in order to be perpetuated, must remain open to new developments. Celebrations bring the population together and result in a feeling of community that rises from working towards a common

goal. Unlike secular activities, these celebrations, a series of festive rites of great intensity, occur in a sacred atmosphere of suspended time. All community members experience a profound sense of unity on festive days. Worries and quarrels are forgotten in favour of reconciliation, encounters and happily concluded agreements. These festive times are a far cry from commercial celebrations sponsored by brand names and in which people merely play a passive role. The participation of each and every community member replaces entertainment that is absorbed passively.

The eight traditional celebrations, most of which exist today in somewhat different form, date from time immemorial. Many European festivals date back to earliest times, pre-dating even Indo-European influences. The celebrations of different cultures often share many common points. This is because their myths and mythologies are linked to the same sources: the sky, the sun, the stars, the earth, and the rhythm of the seasons.

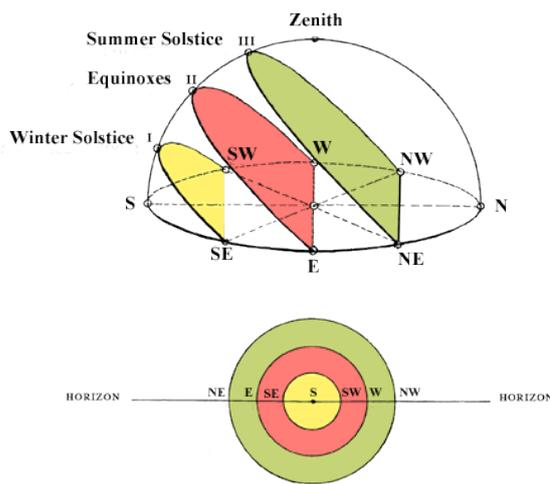
In ancient European traditions – and in particular the Nordic and Celtic traditions – the course of the sun occupies a very important position. Our ancestors were well aware of the relationship between the sun and the rhythm of the seasons. The calendar of yearly celebrations was based on these rhythms and has continued to this day, although some name and date changes occurred as Europe was Christianised.

The calendar of celebrations revolves around the Eight Nature Festivals, which have existed throughout Europe for many hundreds of years. The calendar is based on the sun's position at various moments of the year, and on corresponding seasonal activities.



This link between the sun's course, the seasons, and the community made our ancestors feel that they were part of a long chain of living things including the earth, humankind and the heavens, which formed a coherent whole. The dance lime tree, with its three-tiered structure, forms a link between the earth and the heavens, and serves as a symbol for the order of things.

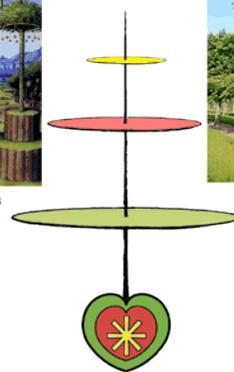
The three tiers of the dance lime tree represent the three circles described by the course of the sun at three important times of year: the winter solstice (the shortest day of the year), the spring and autumn equinoxes (when day and night are of equal length) and the summer solstice (the longest day of the year).



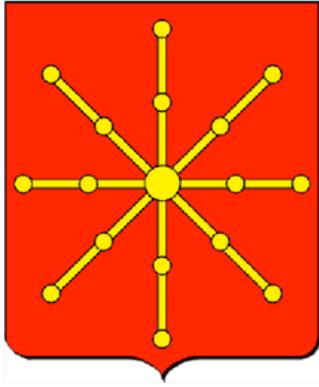
Anne de Bretagne's book of Hours



Van de Berg nursery (Holland)



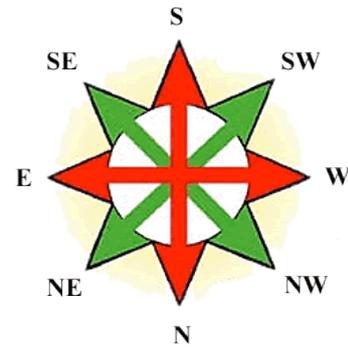
At the summer solstice, the sun rises in the northwest, reaches its zenith in the south, and sets in the northeast. At the equinoxes, it rises in the east, reaches its zenith in the south, and sets in the west. At the winter solstice, it rises in the southeast, reaches its zenith in the south, and sets in the southwest. An **X** can be traced between the northeast and the southwest, the southeast and the northwest. This x-shaped cross is known as the Cross of Taranis, or St Andrew's Cross. If another cross (+) is superimposed along the perpendicular east/west and north/south axes, a circle dividing the year into eight equal parts is obtained. (please see sketch). This eight-point star is a common element in heraldry, and also appears frequently in ancient stone sculptures.



The eight-point star on a coat of arms. □



The eight-point star on a Norwegian costume from the Hordaland region (see <http://www.norskflid.no>) □



The eight-point star and the eight points of the compass. □

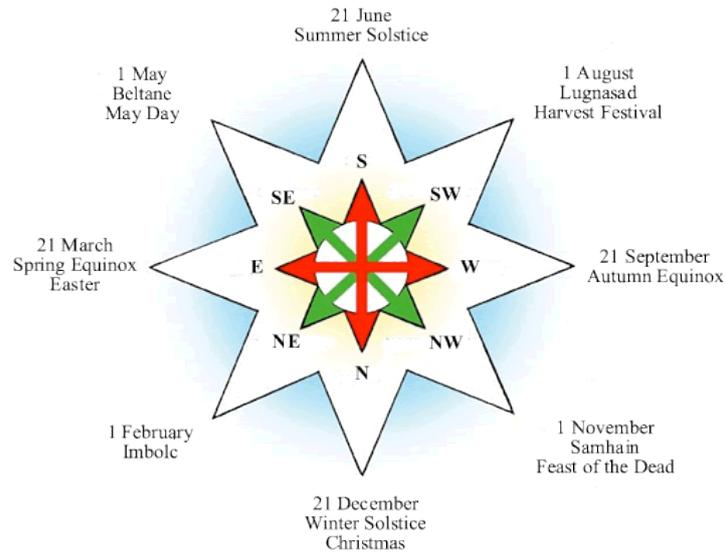
These divisions determined the times of the eight yearly nature festivals of Europe, which were celebrated from time immemorial in both monotheistic and polytheistic traditions.

The agrarian year was based on the cycle of the seasons, which corresponded to the life cycles of plants, animals and humans in an eternal round of birth, life, death and re-birth. The cycle symbolises existence, stretching from birth to re-birth. The sun is “born anew” at the winter solstice: the days lengthen at the time of the French *Chandeleur* celebration (1 February); grow longer from the spring equinox to the summer solstice, the period of fertility from the time of planting to harvest in early August; and shorten until the time of the winter solstice, when the cycle begins again. Dance lime trees®, which provide a link between the heavens, mankind and the earth, can help people of today to rediscover these eternal cycles and to find their place in the universe.

The four points of the X-shaped cross, known as the Taranis or Saint Andrew’s Cross, correspond to the four agricultural festivals, Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasad and Samhain. The four points of the +-shaped cross, which correspond to the perpendicular axes of the cardinal points, determine the four astronomical festivals (or festivals of light), celebrated at the solstices and the equinoxes. These divisions of time and space make up the eight traditional European festivals, which are based on a sacred cosmic vision. The eight points of the intersecting crosses determine the times of year the Eight Nature Festivals will be held. These festivals have taken place since time immemorial in both monotheistic and polytheistic cultures.

Each season was traditionally inaugurated by one of the eight festivals, which can be defined as rites of passage or of entry that primed people for the work to be done in the new season. Every spring, for example, people would contemplate the greening of nature and be filled with a similar sensation of renewal. Springtime represents a return to life for humankind. Just as the agrarian year corresponds to the cycle of the seasons, the rhythm of the seasons corresponds to the life cycles of plants, animals and humankind, all of whom have a time to be born, to live and to die in order to be born again. These rhythms give rise to the many rites of passage that have been carefully described by ethnologists.

The year is divided into two equal halves, from the May Day/Beltane festival on the first of May, to the festival of remembering the dead/Samhain on the first of November. The celebration of the first of May corresponds to the end of the winter period of forest work, and in France people would sing “Nous n’irons plus au bois”, or “We will no longer go to the forest” at this time.



The Eight Nature Festivals are presented in their simplest, most basic form here. Studying many populations, countries and regions leads to an understanding of the incredible diversity and creativity connected with these festivals, and which is too complex to be presented here. Our hope is that everyone who reads these lines and becomes interested in dance lime trees® and the eight ‘mother’ festivals will go on to do his or her own research, make discoveries, and invent personal traditions and customs in order to bring new life to communities both large and small.

The poetic space of the dance lime tree® can be associated with any of these festivals, as well as with the other events that punctuate the social life of a community, including engagement ceremonies, civil weddings, and civil baptisms. Valentine’s Day, 14 February, is a perfect occasion to celebrate “the tree of love and life”. It should not be forgotten that Valentine’s Day commemorates the Nordic god Vali, an archer who is the ancestor of the cupids of today.

The Eight Nature Festivals

1. [Winter solstice, the Jul \(or Yule\) festival, of renewed light](#)
2. [Imbolc, the festival that takes place on 1 February](#)
3. [Spring equinox, Easter](#)
4. [May Day, Beltane](#)
5. [Summer solstice](#)
6. [Lughnasad, the festival that celebrates the grain harvest as well as the different trades, arts and crafts](#)
7. [Autumn equinox, as well as the grape harvest and the fruit harvest](#)
8. [Samhain, the festival that celebrates the remembrance of the dead and the saints \(All Hallow’s Eve, Halloween, All Saint’s Day\).](#)

1. December 21st

Winter Solstice, also known as Jul (Yule), “Neu Helle”, “Nouvelle Clarté”, “Le Grand Tournant” and Noël

This festival was moved to 25 December and transformed into a day of celebrating the birth of Christ during the Christianisation of Europe.

The word Jul, or Yule, means “wheel”, or the wheel of time. People throughout the world held celebrations at the winter solstice to encourage hope and courage at the dark time of year when the ground is frozen and all life suspended. The unvanquished Sun (sol invictus) is fêted. On the morning of the longest night of the year, our ancestors saw the rising sun as a symbol of rebirth and of the lengthening days. The new year began at this time, following the ‘death’ or end of the old year, bringing with it a feeling of permanence and renewal.

Families decorated (and continue to decorate) the house with the traditional colours of the season: red for the sun and green for nature. The Christmas tree was a tree of light, and in the chimney a log decorated with colourful symbols burned for at least twelve hours. The longest night of the year was eclipsed by all these signs of the return of light.

This solstice festival heralded the renaissance of nature, which had remained suspended or frozen for forty days. At the time of the Imbolc festival (“La Chandeleur” in French, Groundhog Day in North America), held on February 1st, nature began to show the first signs of spring.

2. February 1st, Imbolc, or “La Chandeleur” or Groundhog Day

The first festival is Imbolc (the return of light). It celebrates the fecundity of nature and is dedicated to the goddess Brigantia, Brigit, Brigitte or Bridget. Nature begins to come back to life at this time of year, which is characterised by the birth of lambs and of the renewed production of ewe’s milk. It is a festival of the return of light after the dark of winter, and of the purification with water of people, houses, fields, and animals. This extremely important agrarian ritual was undertaken in order to encourage fertility and fecundity. It is the day when crepes, pancakes or grain cakes are made. These are tossed as high as possible into the air in imitation of the sun’s course. Christianisation transformed this festival into a celebration of the Virgin Mary’s purification rites, 40 days after the birth of Christ. It is plain, however, that it is an immutable festival of the sun.

3. March 21st, Spring Equinox, Ostara, Pâques, Easter.

Day and night are of equal length at the equinox. The weather becomes warmer, buds and flowers appear on plants, hibernating animals awaken, and migratory birds return. The goddess of spring, Eostre, or Ostara, also returns, her young girl’s or lover’s face beaming. This goddess of youth, love, and the greening earth brings with her the light of the first dawn of the year to occur due east.

When Christianisation took place, the name Pâques, from the Greek “Paskha”, meaning passage, was given to this festival. A mysterious treasure hunt has taken place on Easter morning since time immemorial: people of all ages rush outside to search for sweets in the garden: confectionary eggs, chickens, bells and rabbits, the latter symbolising the mating season. Wells and springs were decorated and people would go in early morning to bring pure water from these places.

4. May 1st, May Day, Beltane

Our ancestors called this period, when nature is full of vigour and fertility, the month of joy. On the night of 30 April, young people would go singing from house to house. The sun of May and rose petal baths made young girls in search of a husband even more beautiful. Villages would elect and crown a May Queen, who was admired in a niche decorated with hawthorn flowers. A “green man” covered with moss and leaves was taken about, accompanied by singing, and a handsome boy and pretty girl were dubbed the “May fiancés”. It was customary to drive livestock between two fires in order to purify and bless them before they were taken to pasture.

The May Tree

Ribbons, symbolising the links between destiny and life, were woven around a May Tree by twelve couples. May baskets containing flowers and sweets were secretly left on the doorsteps of friends and family members, and young men left small trees beneath the windows of their sweethearts.

Beltane, or May Day, was considered the bridge leading from spring to summer.

5. June 21st, Summer Solstice

The longest day and the shortest night of the year occur at the summer solstice. The sun is at its zenith and nature is luxuriant. Medicinal herbs were traditionally harvested the day before the solstice, on 20 June. Flower crowns and bouquets were abundantly made. This solar festival was (and still is) often accompanied by great pyramidal fires lit on hilltops. These fires took different forms in different regions, and were sometimes wheels of fire that were rolled down hills. These community festivities included music, dancing, singing, games and story telling and continued all night until sunrise.

6. August 1st, Lughnasad, festival of the grain harvest and of the trades, arts and crafts.

The sun is in all its glory at the time of Lughnasad. It is worshipped through a festival of the sacred grain and of its golden harvest, which produces magnificent sheaves of wheat and oats. Nature’s abundance is also fêted in connection with the summer fruit harvest. This is also the time when the trades, the arts and crafts, commerce, and fairs are celebrated. Entertainment includes acrobatic games, eloquence and poetry contests. The entire community gathers together at this time. Community togetherness is a particular emphasis of the Lughnasad festivities.

7. September 21st, autumn equinox.

Like at the time of the spring equinox, the day and night are of equal lengths. The autumn equinox is associated with the west, the direction in which the sun sets. The west, where the sun goes down and daylight ends, is also associated with the end of life. This festival inaugurates a time when people finish projects and prepare for winter.

Fruits and nuts are gathered at the end of nature’s productive cycle. This is a time of balance, when garden produce and the results of the fruit harvest are enjoyed. The grape harvest is also celebrated. All these festivities mark the end of nature’s productive cycle.

8. November 1st : Samhain, the festival that celebrates the remembrance of the dead and the saints (All Hallow's Eve, Halloween, All Saint's Day).

This festival commemorates the beginning of the dark season, a time of rest when nature is asleep. It is the time of change from the season of light to the season of darkness. Everyday activities change. Farming work draws to a close and the herds are brought in from the fields; work begins anew in the forests. Lamps are relit and fires rekindled; people gather around the fire to tell stories in the long evenings. The candle and the apple symbolise this festival. Samhain is a time of passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead. A small altar made up of objects that belonged to and images of one's ancestors is placed on the oldest piece of furniture in the house.

This festival provides a point of entry to the other world. It is associated with a great many customs having to do with the remembrance of the dead and with predictions.

Pierre ALBUISSON

Translation : Marcia HADJIMARKOS



Dance Lime Tree in PEESTEN (Germany)