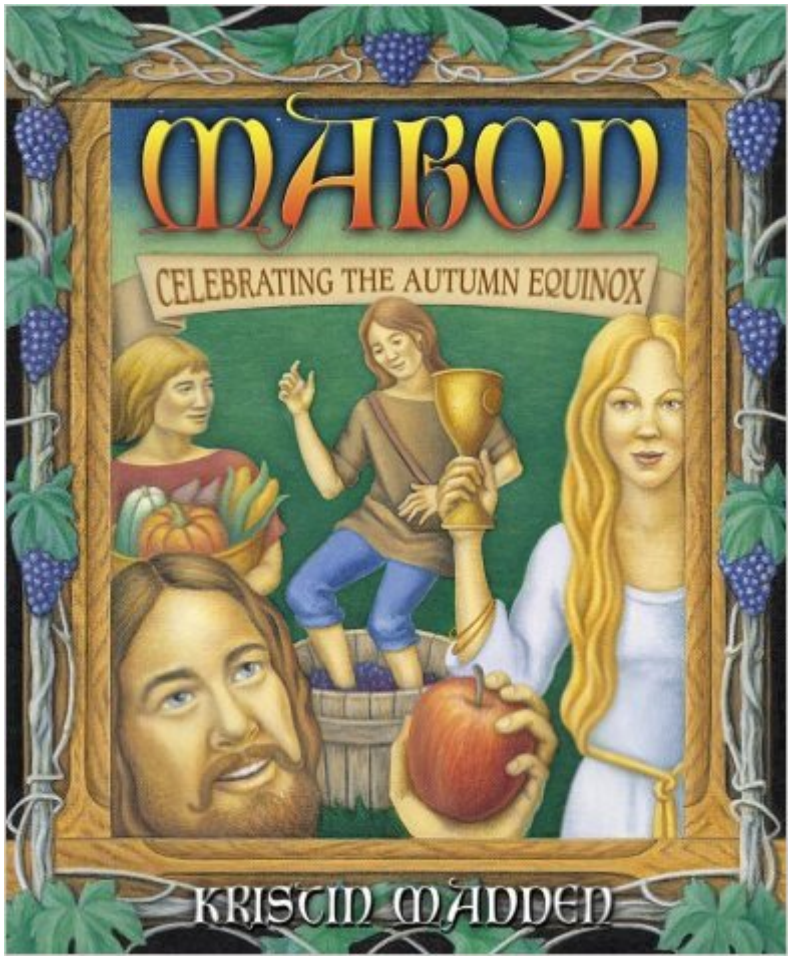
Mabon: Celebrating The Autumn Equinox



Synopsis

The Pagan Thanksgiving for the harvest It's the season of changing colors; crisp air filled with the scent of wood smoke; and festivals offering wine, hot cider, and apple pie. At this time of equal day and night, we give thanks for the harvest that will sustain us through the dark winter months. This book explores the history, legends, and traditions of the season that is honored from the Far East to the Celtic Lands, and from Scandinavia to South America. Create your own Mabon tradition with the help of the book's many recipes, magical workings, equinox rituals, and crafts for all ages. Â Part of Llewellyn's successful series on each of the eight Pagan sabbats, or holidays Â The author is well-known throughout the Pagan community Â For anyone who celebrates the turning of the seasons and the ancient holy days Â Relevant to any culturally-based path

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Customer Reviews

Kristin Madden is an author and mother, as well as an environmental chemist and wildlife rehabilitator. She is the Director of Ardantane's School of Shamanic Studies. A Druid and tutor in the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids, Kristin is also a member of the Druid College of Healing and is on the Board of Silver Moon Health Services. She has been a freelance writer and editor since 1995. Her work has appeared in Whole Life Times, PARABOLA, and many other publications. Kristin is the author of five books including Mabon: Celebrating the Autumn Equinox and The Book of Shamanic Healing. Kristin was raised in a shamanic home and has had ongoing experience with Eastern and Western mystic paths since 1972. Over more than a decade, she has offered a variety

of shamanic and general metaphysical workshops across the United States. Kristin is active in both pagan parenting and pagan homeschooling communities locally and globally. She also served on a Master's Degree thesis committee for a program on the use of visual imagery and parapsychology in therapy with ADD/ADHD children.

One The Origins of Thanksgiving In addition to being the Autumnal Equinox, this is the harvest season and we celebrate this time of year with feasts of thanksgiving. While the American Thanksgiving has been set in November, the Canadians celebrate their holiday in October. It is from ancient European festivals, during which farming communities would share meat, bread, and beer for three days after the harvest was brought in, that these modern celebrations developed. It is also interesting to note that on the island of Kosrae in the Federated States of Micronesia, the fourth Thursday in November has been set aside for a Thanksgiving celebration. Canada In Canada, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday of October. A date of November 9 was originally set by Parliament in 1879. Over the years, several dates were used including the third Monday in October, which was shared with Armistice Day after the First World War. These holidays were separated, and Thanksgiving was changed to the current October date in 1957. The Canadian Thanksgiving stems from slightly different origins than the American holiday. When people were beginning to leave Europe for North America, harvest celebrations were still common throughout Europe, and the people brought these traditions with them. Early Canadian farming families filled a goat's horn cornucopia in thanks for the fertility and abundance of the land. An English explorer named Martin Frobisher held a formal celebration in 1578 in Newfoundland, giving thanks for his survival over the long journey to the "New World." Frobisher Bay was named after him, and he was later knighted in his homeland. Other settlers in the area continued this tradition of thanksgiving celebration. In the 1600s, the French explorer Samuel de Champlain is said to have had wonderful relations with his native neighbors. The French settlers, along with Champlain, formed the "Order of Good Cheer" and held huge feasts of thanksgiving, sharing the bounty with the native peoples in their area. During the American Revolution, the Loyalists, who remained loyal to English rule, moved north to Canada. They brought the American tradition of Thanksgiving with them. As they moved throughout Canada, so did these celebrations. United States All Americans study the Pilgrims at Thanksgiving time in school. We trace our hands and color in the fingers to make turkeys. We make fake Pilgrim hats out of construction paper, and we learn about the Mayflower and Plymouth Rock. By the time we reach adulthood, few of us remember what that whole thing was really all about anyway. Accepted History The Pilgrims, or Puritans, were a sect of Christians

known as Separatists or Brownists in England. The term "Pilgrims" was not associated with them until the late 1700s. They were an interesting people, following the teachingsof a man named Robert Browne. Their belief was that the only true churches were formed by groups of like-minded people coming together by choice. When this happened, Separatists put together an organizing compact and elected their clergy. They believed they were the chosen people of God. These Pilgrims wanted to be left alone, and were willing to leave other religions alone as well. They were seen as a radical sect in England and were persecuted for it. In search of tolerance and peace, they left England first for Holland. In 1605, many of these Pilgrims left Holland with almost 40 people. They boarded the Speedwell ship and met up with the Mayflower in England. In all, about 120 adventurous people set sail for the "New World." Unfortunately, their adventures consisted mainly of leaks in the Speedwell, and they had to return to England twice. Finally, they left the Speedwell behind and set forth from Plymouth, an English port, in September 1605 with 102 people, including men, women, and children. This was far from an easy passage, and two people died. However, one child was born at sea and another was born before his parents set foot on land, so 102 disembarked in present-day Massachusetts. The London Company had granted these people lands near the Hudson River, but winds blew them off course, and they took it as a sign from God that this was where they were to settle. Before establishing a settlement, the Mayflower Compact was drawn up and signed by forty-one men. The compact was a plan for government in their new home. The big rush to get this signed was because not all the settlers were Pilgrims, or Separatists. The Separatists feared trouble from the others because they were not on the land granted to them. A suitable area was found on the site of a former native village. They moved the ship and all their belongings into Plymouth Harbor and established the Plymouth Colony. In the following spring, the Mayflower itself returned to England. The hardships of this new land took its toll. Fifty-two people died that first winter, leaving very few to plant crops in the spring. Squanto and Samoset, two natives who had been captives on English ships, took pity on the Pilgrims and taught them how to survive in this land. They showed the settlers to catch and use fish as fertilizer. They taught them what types of crops to plant with this fertilizer. They showed them how and what to hunt. They also introduced the Pilgrims to the great Wawmegin, chief of the Wampanoag people. This chief was called Massasoit by the settlers and remained friendly to these newcomers in his lands throughout his life. That first harvest was such a blessing that the governor of the colony invited the Wampanoag people to share in a three-day festival of thanksgiving. This first Thanksgiving took place between September 21 and November 9, 1621. This is referred to as Harvest Home, and is also described later in the "Traditions Around the World" chapter (see page 23). After 1621,

Thanksgiving was occasionally celebrated, rarely on the same date. In the mid-1700s, Congress determined these dates, and they usually took place in December. President George Washington set a November date, beginning in 1789. However, this was not an official annual holiday until President Abraham Lincoln set its celebration as the last Thursday in November. The date was again changed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and finally placed on its modern date of the fourth Thursday in November by Congress in 1941. Another Story From the Native American perspective, the early days of the Pilgrim settlers were not as harmonious and peaceful as we have been taught to believe. The rigid beliefs and intolerance that made the Puritans such outcasts among the English carried over to New England. While there was a fifty-year peace between native peoples and settlers, this was largely due to a great chief, and it changed quickly once the chief's son grew old enough to understand politics. The land the Pilgrims settled was already occupied by the Wampanoag people. These were an agricultural people who used hunting and fishing to supplement what they grew. Theirs was a society in which hospitality was an important part of daily life. This hospitality was extended to the Pilgrims, in spite of the fact that the Wampanoags had suffered many losses in recent years due to disease epidemics introduced by European settlers. After the English arrived, disease continued to decimate the Wampanoag people. The Wampanoag leaders were called sachems and sagamores. They held responsibilities under the Great Sachem. These leaders were called kings (or queens) by the English, but they were much more integral, down-to-earth members of the community than European royalty was. Much of the early relationship between the Wampanoag people and early settlers was relatively friendly. This contributed to the generous way later settlers were treated. Not all interactions were so friendly and captains of slave ships were known to supplement their "take" with native peoples. Squanto, the Patuxet man who assisted the Pilgrims, had been taken as a slave years earlier. He had gained his freedom from monks in Spain, and returned to his homeland as an interpreter for the British. When he reached present-day Massachusetts, he found that everyone in his village of Patuxet had been killed by epidemics. The Pilgrims initially stumbled into the deserted village of Nauset, one of the Wampanoag villages that had been devastated by disease. Almost everyone was gone. Those Nausets who remained left behind baskets of corn for the deceased. Unaware of the purpose for this food, the settlers almost took it home before the remaining Nauset warriors chased them off. Eventually they occupied the site of Squanto's old home, the abandoned village of Patuxet. The Wampanoags knew they were there, but kept their distance throughout a winter that killed off half the settler population. The following spring, the dying Pilgrims were greeted by a Pemaquid sachem named Samoset. Samoset spoke some English from previous encounters with explorers and other

settlers. He stayed the night and left for his home in Maine the following morning. Samoset soon returned to the village with Squanto, who devoted himself to teaching the Pilgrims how to survive for years. Squanto only left when he became ill, returning to his people to heal. It was Squanto that introduced the Pilgrims to the Great Sachem, Woosamaquin, which means "Yellow Feather." He was called Massasoit by the English. The Wampanoags were once the most powerful and numerous people in the area. But they had lost more than half of their people in three devastating epidemics. The Naragansett people emerged as the most powerful force during the years leading up to the Mayflower's arrival. It is believed that Woosamaquin felt that it was a good political move to assist the settlers and sign treaties with them. In the spring of 1621, Woosamaquin signed a treaty permitting the Pilgrims to occupy 12,000 acres of the future Plymouth Plantation area. Coming from two very different worlds, these people understood this in two very different ways. The Wampanoags perceived it as a sharing of land that could not be truly owned by any one person. The English settlers saw it in the way that most modern people do: they owned this land. It was theirs and theirs alone. Therefore they could do with it as they wished, and could prevent others from occupying it. When the grateful Pilgrims invited Woosamaquin to their first harvest festival (the first Thanksgiving), the problems stemming from this difference of perception were mere seeds of the strife that would emerge and tear apart their peaceful relations. Woosamaquin and ninety of his warriors brought five deer to the three-day feast. The security of this harvest was relatively short-lived. That winter brought another ship from England, and an additional forty people to feed. Once again, the settlers were aided by their native neighbors when Aspinet, sachem of the Nauset, brought them food. These Pilgrims were not all Puritans, and things changed after 1630 when a large number of Puritans moved into this area from the south, displacing most of the other Christian peoples. The Puritans were intolerant of other Christians and native peoples alike. They preferred to take rather than ask, or offer trades for land and items. Between 1640 and 1675, large numbers emigrated from England, where Puritans were enduring even greater oppression than before. Also by this time, the settlers had developed enough trade and commerce so they no longer needed the help of the native peoples. In fact, the trade and expansion of the English settlers altered the balance of power among native confederacies more than once. Native populations continued to decline, mainly as the result of epidemics, but also due to wars. Conversion to a Puritan version of Christianity further destroyed native cultures and traditions. The Great Sachem Massasoit/Woosamaquin had the names of his sons changed to English names before his death in 1661. While his older son, renamed Alexander, became the Great Sachem after his father, it is the younger son, renamed Philip, who made history. Alexander was a strong and independent sachem,

which did not go over well with the Puritan government at Plymouth. He died soon after eating a meal during talks with this government. Many native peoples believe he was poisoned, and have rather convincing evidence to support this possibility. The Puritans said that he died of a fever.1 Philip took over as Great Sachem, and was called King Philip by the English. His goal was to prevent further expansion by the settlers into native lands. To accomplish this, he enlisted the help of other native nations. The situation got became increasingly worse until, in 1675, what would be known as "King Philip's War" broke out. The settlers made good use of native converts as spies and scouts, turning the native peoples against each other and gaining an otherwise impossible advantage. They also repeatedly refused to acknowledge the neutrality of certain native peoples, adding to the army on Philip's side. It also added to the number of people he was responsible to shelter and feed. This was not an easy task, and intensified the difficulties native peoples were already experiencing. It all blew up for Philip's people in August 1675. Philip's wife and son were captured and reportedly sold as slaves, although they did return to their native peoples years later. Then Alexander's wife was drowned in an attempt to escape a village raid. Her head was displayed at a settler's village. Betrayed by an informer, Philip was captured and killed later that month. His head was displayed at Plymouth for many years. Peace treaties were not signed until 1678, before which most of Philip's accomplices were hunted down and their cornfields burned. Many of the tribes that fought in this war, particularly the Wampanoags, were nearly exterminated by the time treaties were signed. These are two very different versions of the First Thanksgiving, and the events surrounding it. I offer both here to give a more balanced view of this time, in the hopes that you will do your own exploring into our collective history. You can well imagine that most native peoples do not celebrate Thanksgiving as we do, and many come to it with sadness and anger. This is something we might keep in mind as we give thanks for our blessings and investigate our own Shadow sides. Â To Autumn by John Keats Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness! Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun; Conspiring with him how to load and bless With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run; To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees, And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core; To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells With a sweet kernel; to set budding more, And still more, later flowers for the bees, Until they think warm days will never cease, For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells. Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store? Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find Thee sitting careless on a granary floor, Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind; Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep, Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook Spares the next swath and all its twinÃ¨d flowers; And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep Steady thy laden head across a brook; Or by a cider-press, with

patient look, Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours. Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they? Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,Â¿ While barrÃ¨d clouds bloom the soft-dying day, And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue; Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn Among the river sallows, borne aloft Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies; And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn; Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft; And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.2 1. "Records from the Plymouth Council at this time make note of an expense for poison ’to rid ourselves of a pest.’" www.tolatsga.org/wampa.html. Many Wampanoags believe the "pest" was Alexander. 2. Quiller-Couch, Arthur Thomas, Sir. The Oxford Book of English Verse. Bartleby.com, 1999.