

**THE  
WHITE GODDESS  
OF  
TRUTH**

*Demi H. Quins*

*First of all, I would like to thank my beloved husband Hendrik. We missed each other a lot because of the amount of research I did. Hendrik has supported me in every conceivable way and thereby ensured that I could complete this mission, which of course is very nice and sweet.*

*Also very special thanks to my very dear English friend Art who translated and corrected my originally Dutch book into this English version.*

*Art has worked so hard and I am very grateful to him for that.*

*Lots of thanks also to all my friends for all their encouragement during my research and I want to especially thank my French friends who shared information on some of the topics discussed in this book.*

*Also a word of thanks to all writers who in the past, and very distant past, shared information about goddess Nehalennia, whether or not hidden in a grimoire. Their records have proved invaluable and references to them can be found in the endnotes of this book. Thanks to contemporary techniques, I could read several of their works and was able to consult more sources than were available at the time they wrote books. It enabled me to make all kinds of connections.*

*Many thanks also to the environment in which I live now. It is a place where mountains protect, ancient stones breathe mystique and the footsteps that Druids left behind still reveal secrets.*

*This book is a tribute to all who remained faithful to the ideas of Nehalennia's religion, some of them had to pay for it with their lives.*

*This also applies to those who in previous centuries tried to find Nehalennia again and were burnt at the stake.*

*I dedicate this book to those who wanted to be heard.*

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## Prologue

Jitske, an acquaintance of mine, told me that women who do not have children and who are also part of a family branch that dies because there are also no sisters to continue a line, do have an important task. She explained to me that a woman's eggs are already present in an embryo and that every mother carries the eggs of her future daughter and possible granddaughters. The genetic information is no longer passed on as soon as the relevant family branch ends. This is not the case for men, because, whether they have children or not, they always have seeds that are produced reasonably freshly. So it is actually quite strange that genealogists usually sift through the male ancestors and assign less weight to the female pedigree lines.

Sometimes the termination of a family branch is a choice, as in my case. As a child I didn't like to play with dolls and I realized from an early age that I didn't want to become a mother. I thought being an animal mother was okay, but the path of human mothers didn't appeal to me. I had some doubts about this when I was in my early twenties, but decided not to respond to the temporary rattling of my ovaries.

Sometimes there is no such choice, as in the case of Jitske. She would have liked it to become a mother, but accepted it when that didn't work out and embraced a future where she would not bear children. This also shows the difference between *childlessness* and being *consciously childfree*, something that I have explained to people many times during my life. The similarity between Jitske and me is that we are both the last in such a family branch and that the further growth of the twig of the family tree stops with us.

I thought it was an interesting thought to delve a little further and came up with, among other things, an article that had been published in the Dutch *Koorddanser Magazine* in 2010, entitled *Ode to the last of the women's line*.<sup>1</sup> It describes how women who are the last of their family branch, are inundated with possibilities, wishes and motives and that these types of women in particular have many talents. I recognized myself in the description, because during my life I have always been very active in exploring and discovering possibilities. I sometimes get tired of myself because of that. My life would be a lot more quiet, simpler and above all more relaxed if I did not always see learning moments or opportunities in everything that comes on my way.

The article also highlighted that women who are the last of such a family line have a responsibility to get things done. They do not continue a physical line on Earth, but they can leave something else behind. That resonated with my whole being and because of that I knew what I had to do.

I was going to write a book about Nehalennia, because this goddess keeps coming my way, so strongly that I already knew for a long time that I had to do something with it. Many times there were subtle signals, such as an image that I saw somewhere, an article that happened to draw my eyes or a website that unexpectedly turned out to contain a reference to this goddess.

Nehalennia is a forgotten goddess. Many have heard nothing or little about her and she is not mentioned in detail in school books. What had kept me from writing about her was that I felt that everything there was to say about her was already described and explored by others. And apparently not much was known about her. The idea that I could add something to the rare publications did not seem very likely to me. Anyone who wants to write more about a goddess who hardly plays a role in human existence, cannot escape research and those other authors would probably have done that well. And besides that... who would be interested in a Nehalennia book? Who would want to read it? Such a book could then only be published for a niche market and would entail an awful lot of work. I did not mind the latter, because doing research is a hobby of mine and I do not write from the point of view of achieving financial gain.

But would it be a meaningful activity to take a closer look at this goddess?

Would I please anyone with that?

I grew up in the Netherlands and emigrated to France with my husband Hendrik. We have settled on a mountain in the Pyrenees. Yet this goddess kept coming my way in France, again with images, references and symbols that I just happened to see. The nagging feeling that I should pay attention to her persisted and

stirred up an energy in me. I made discoveries in France about which, to my knowledge, no one has written extensively about. What soon became clear to me after our emigration is that Nehalennia was not an unknown goddess in the Pyrenees and that hardly any connections were made between her worship in the French mountains and the way she was worshipped in the Dutch province of Zeeland.

When that realization really dawned on me, I decided that it was really time for me to subject this goddess to a very thorough investigation and to respond to the right to exist that she claimed not only in my life, but also through earthly discoveries. I decided to study especially the old sources in which she was mentioned. This book is a result of this and is emphatically different from other books because I also used my paranormal antennas during this investigation in places where I strongly felt Nehalennia's presence. This brought me further with regard to my research. However, you will not notice much of this while reading, although I do mention it here and there. During attunements to the goddess I opened myself to clues and premonitions, but also to casual remarks from passers-by and people with whom I talked more extensively. I took advantage of my evolved third eye to absorb symbolism and the results were overwhelming. Whenever I received impressions, I began to dig into the literature to see if there were any connections between my findings and what had been written about this ancient religion. I have therefore tried to substantiate everything with evidence from the literature.

Thanks to this quest I was able to clarify previously unshared, relatively unknown or not combined information about the goddess. It was as if I stepped into a time machine and travelled to bygone centuries. I have chosen to let you as a reader travel with me in my non-linear sequence of discoveries.

Nehalennia has been oppressed by Christianity, among other things, when church fathers made choices that had bloody consequences for those of other faiths. Followers of the pagan ancient cult have in the past often had to pay for their devotion to the goddess with a gruesome death. Over time, a tendency has continued towards erasing the existence of the goddess.

Yet lines remained...

Texts have escaped the eye of opponents of Nehalennia and there have been non-baptised peoples who had a lot to say about her. In some places this goddess is still known and throughout history there have also been groups that did let the power of Nehalennia return in seclusion and began to worship her again.

When I started writing, I did not imagine that my discoveries would lead to a book of this format and that it would be ready in the time of a global crisis when there is a great craving for information about the power of light. The information I studied about the human past suddenly became surprisingly topical. The time is clearly ripe for the pagan voices to speak, which reads, among other things, that Nehalennia is the victim of an unparalleled conspiracy.

The goddess still exists, her luminosity has never been lost and we can still make good contact with her.

*Especially now!*

This book is written for anyone who really wants to understand her fascinating religion.

***Demi H. Quins***

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Altar for Nehalennia.<sup>2</sup>

# 1. Thunder at Walcheren

On the evening of January 4, 1647, it was quite rough on the beach of Walcheren, a peninsula in the west of the Dutch province of Zeeland. It was raining, storming and lightning flashed in the dark sky, while fierce waves rolled over the sand and crashed against the dunes. The sand hills had a difficult time and the storms knocked entire pieces out of the coastal protection. Thunder as fierce as this was rare, and this storm had already started in late December and had raged incessantly.

I can imagine how scary that must have been for the Zeelanders. Along the coast, thunderstorms are much more violent than in inland urban areas at a greater distance from the water. In Zeeland, wind can slide over the waves and whiz like an untouchable force.

I have lived in Zeeland for quite some time. As a native of Brabant, a province in the South of the Netherlands, the move to the coastal area of Zeeland almost felt like an emigration. It is a beautiful, natural province, but when I lived there I soon noticed that as soon as the weather is bad, everything looks grey and ominous. In Zeeland, nature regularly confronts you with its strong primal force, and the nice, summery holiday feeling that you can experience in that province will, because of that, quickly disappear during the winter time. If I stood on the dike near the Scheldt during a storm, I could only feel a fraction of what had happened that particular evening in 1647 in Zeeland. It is logical that they wanted to take a look at the damage the following day. That was on January 5, 1647, according to the *New Chronyk of Zeeland* which was published in 1696.<sup>3</sup>

A group of residents of the coastal town of Domburg climbed over the dike and were confronted with a surprise. Stone slabs were visible everywhere in the sand. They were altarpieces with Latin inscriptions, from which, among other things, the name Neptune could be discerned. And yes, Neptune was a well-known mythological god of the sea and salty waves, there was not a person in Zeeland who had never heard of him. However, most of the stones had the unknown name Nehalennia carved on them.<sup>4</sup> It must have been surprising to read that name, because who the hell was she? The only thing that this name showed was that she must have been some goddess who was paid homage to in ancient times.

Half a century after this discovery, the Zeeland soil revealed new finds. In 1705 and 1706 hundreds of oblong stones were found in the mud, said to be floor stones that belonged to an old wooden temple dedicated to this Nehalennia. Digging in mud and mire, the ground turned out to hide even more; such as remnants of old habitation, a sculpture of a woman's head, broken carved works of art and gold medals.

Cemeteries were discovered to the east and west of Domburg in 1687, 1749 and 1817. That must have been quite a strange experience, because these remains showed that they were graves of people of more than normal height and strength.<sup>5</sup> Some of these remains wore copper necklaces with tokens around their necks. Most of the chests contained coins, and in one of the chests was a crooked saber with a handle of silver wire. And that strange name Nehalennia kept coming up. What kind of goddess was Nehalennia? And how remarkable it was that remnants that recorded her existence were only found in Zeeland!

In this religious part of the Netherlands it was soon concluded that the name Nehalennia was the Holy Mother of God and that ancient priests had chosen a different name for her. *The Courantier of Bruges* had already hastily reported in 1647 that the Nehalennia finds on the Domburg beach were simply references to Mary and that earlier ministers had changed the name to Nehalennia.<sup>6</sup>

It did lead to all kinds of speculation, and many believed that Nehalennia, and a number of other deities, were gods worshipped by the Romans. Some evidence of this was stone slabs found in Kapelle and Domburg, which referred to Jupiter, Neptune and Hercules.

On October 10, 1848, the church, in which several of these reliefs were kept, was struck by lightning. A fire then raged that destroyed much of this Zeeland heritage.<sup>7</sup> A bombing raid in Middelburg in 1940, during the Second World War, also made some of these old finds disappear. Perhaps all of that worked out well, as this *false pagan goddess* fell into obscurity and could only be remembered as a rounded piece of history from the distant past. Those who had previously believed in this goddess must have been some kind of idolatrous

pagans who venerated this Nehalennia in small chapels. If only everyone thought this was a local affair, it would not require much attention, nor would it be necessary to answer difficult religious questions in churches about this ancestral heritage.

Nehalennia would have almost become a legend, were it not for the fact that again in 1970, when fisherman K.J. Bout was sailing on the Eastern Scheldt, discovered new clues. When he pulled his fishing nets on board his catch turned out to contain all kinds of strange stones, the very same slabs of sand-lime stone that had made their way to the surface of the mainland centuries ago. That was of course big news and all Dutch newspapers covered the story at the time.

All kinds of altar fragments with carvings decorated with relief were fished up. There were not just a few, for in that year, and subsequent years, some 240 of such votive stones and statues alone were taken from the water. Such finds were placed in freshwater baths and thus stripped of the salt that had attached to them. Some of the altars were pristine and preserved, because they were embedded in clay, other finds turned out to be weathered, but what dominated still was always the name Nehalennia, which referred to a mysterious goddess.

Research clarified that not only in Domburg, but also at the village of Colijnsplaat there had been a *Nehalennia temple* in which this lady was honoured.<sup>8</sup> Dr. P. Stuart, curator at the Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, was in a daze over these fantastic discoveries. It was as if Atlantis had been discovered in the Eastern Scheldt!

It is strange that the place where the high concentration of sacred stones from ancient times were dredged out was not preserved very carefully. In 1986, the *Zeeland Underwater Treasures Preservation Foundation* attempted to declare that this archaeological site was of such interest that it should be a prohibited area. At that time there were still temple remains on the bottom and it was challenging for treasure hunters to dredge up the precious historical artefacts there. These kinds of antiquities were easily tradable as had already happened several times. For example, a rare temple stone was dredged up in 1985 by a professional fisherman and sold to the *Zeeuws Museum*, a museum of Zeeland.<sup>9</sup>

Where fisherman Bout from Tholen had received only a meager finder's fee, diving daredevils filled their pockets unashamedly. Precious heritage found its way onto the antique market and ended up in the hands of the Belgians, among others. Fisherman Bout became wiser himself. In 1985, when he recovered a pristine 100-kilogram Nehalennia altar, he wanted to sell it to a museum. *"It is a beautiful stone. If museums don't pay enough for it, we'll just keep it ourselves,"* his wife told a reporter.<sup>10</sup>

In 2008 Flemish divers conducted research on the bottom in that specific area. Even then fragments of buildings were uncovered. The sawn roof tile shapes that were found used to cover hipped roofs, such as on the cover of colonnades of Gallo-Roman type temples.<sup>11</sup>

Finds have always been made in this Zeeland area, so the goddess always made herself heard. Church fathers of the past would have liked to see her disappear, but she persisted in claiming a place in Dutch history. Nehalennia turned out to fit in well with the Zeeland motto *Luctor et Emergo*, because *I struggle and emerge*, seems to suit her perfectly.

## 2. A Goddess with a Pelerin

All the finds show that Nehalennia is usually depicted with a long, white robe and a cap. Statues found in Domburg have also been described in which the goddess is veiled from head to toe.<sup>12</sup> On reliefs dedicated to her on which her hairstyle is shown, can be seen that her long hair is rolled up at the sides and back of her head and that she has a hairstyle with a center parting in the middle.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes she sits on a throne and is accompanied by baskets full of apples or other tree fruits on her lap or by her side, other times she is standing and has placed one foot on the prow of a ship. It is not uncommon for her to be in the company of a dog, which at first sight appears to be a greyhound.<sup>14</sup> All stone altars have

different finishes, one decorated with vines, the other with flower pots or tree branches. Also relief stones have been found without an image, only showing an inscription accompanied by her name.

Anyone who wants to interpret the nature and the field of activity of an unknown goddess of course first looks at all the symbols. This has been done frequently during history. It was soon concluded that Nehalennia could be linked to maritime activities, because many of the attributes depicted on the altar stones have something to do with this. The ship's rudder and stern of a boat are examples of this. It is therefore regularly assumed that she must have been a real sea goddess. That also connected with the Zeeland wetland area where so many fishermen were active at the time.

Because experts found it strange to see maritime objects depicted in combination with trees and plants, it was concluded that those who believed in her have begun to enforce her blessing in a general sense over time and that therefore, long ago, a shift had taken place in her worship. From asking for protection at sea, she would have slowly become a goddess who could also be invoked for general prosperity.<sup>15</sup>

The name of this goddess also reveals a lot and to that there has been given much thought. *Elle* or *Helle* means in Zeeland a shallow,<sup>16</sup> *Ee-hallen*, stream or water temple and *Ne-hallen*, new temple.<sup>17</sup> In several sources, Nehalennia is described as a *sea swimmer* and *sea dweller*, which in combination with the maritime symbols made her considered to be a water goddess.<sup>18</sup>

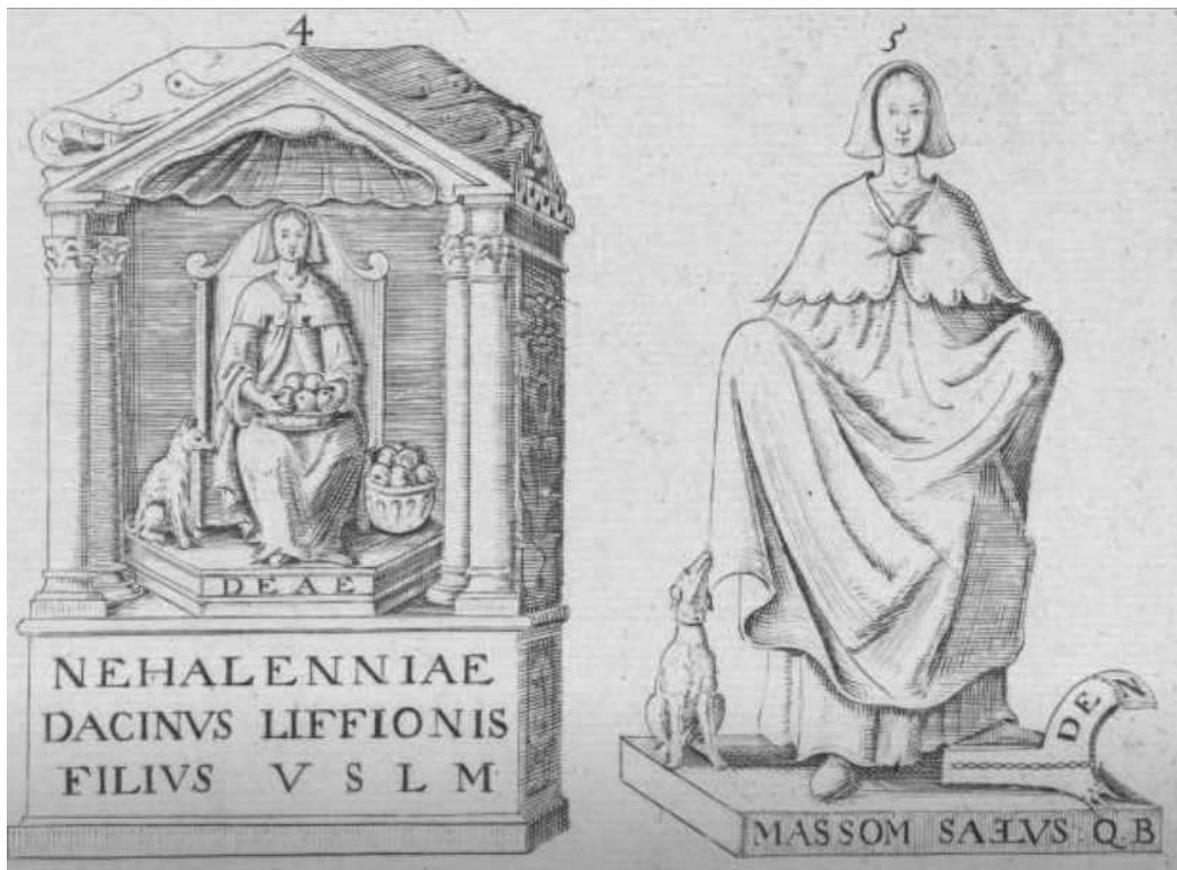
Over the centuries, however, many more ideas have emerged from which the goddess's name could have sprung. The Latin *nerē*, for example, refers to elliptically rotating movements in a general sense, such as a spinning wheel makes, but also the moon does. And because *Neu-hell* in Germanic means *New Moon*, several researchers thought it was logical that Nehalennia would be the same as the moon.<sup>19</sup> It was thought her name would be Greek, or rather a Latinized word of Greek origin, and perhaps it was Celtic. After all, *Len* is a Celtic word that means pond. Gauls honoured the moon, and so did the Druids, by observing at the edge of ponds and interpreting the light that the moon projected on the water as predictive clues. Her name could therefore be derived from the Celtic word *Helanus*, which means lamp, light and splendour and was also used to indicate the moon.<sup>20</sup>

That Nehalennia, pronounced as *nieuwe heilige* in German dialect, did mean *New Saint*,<sup>21</sup> and would therefore be a reference to a fortune teller or holy woman, is an example of a statement that seemed very far-fetched to many. And what also did not sound so likely was that the goddess could have been the namesake of the Netherlands or Zeeland. Indeed, there were researchers who assumed that she might have originally carried the name *Nehalent* or *Zehalent* and that this name would have later changed to Nehalennia.<sup>22</sup>

Author Mattheus Gargon wondered in 1715 if Nehalennia was not just an ancient Celtic word derived from *Nephalon*, softened first to *Nehalon* and *Nehalen*, to eventually become *Nehalennia*. *Nephalon* not only signifies apples, but is also a term from which great harvests are derived, which were called *halen* (fetch) and *inhalen* (bring in) in Dutch at the time.<sup>23</sup> He gave a complete list of all kinds of possibilities that he considered likely. For example, the Hebrew word *Allon*, which means oak tree, could be linked to sacred oaks that could have been attributed to this goddess. Or her name would come from the Greek word *Neales*, which means fresh fish. Or it could be a derivative of the French words *nefle* or *néflier*, meaning medlar, a fruit that is a descendant of the apple and pear. And he considered that words like *Nephele* or *Nephale*, referred to clouds and to *Nephaleos*, which was at the time a nickname for the sun. According to him, Nehalennia could also be seen as the goddess of salvation, in the form of *Hal* or *Hailennie*. In his long speech he also came to the insight that the name could have been misread, because the Romans pronounced the H as a V. After all, they did the same with the Waal, the most water-rich arm of the Rhine in the Netherlands, which they called *Vahalis* or *Vahal*.

Shouldn't we read the name Nehalennia as Vehalennia? He wondered if that was the case, that she could be the same as Belennia, which was named after the sun that was called by the Nordic peoples Belenus, and who was the same as Bel, Bal, or Baal. From that perspective, Nehalennia would be the *new bell*, the *new light*.

There have also been experts who thought that the goddess was originally British and that she could have been transferred from Britain to the coast of Zeeland. However, her name could not be Anglo-Saxon according to others, because that empire had not been created until the fifth century and she was already known in Zeeland at that time. Because she is often referred to as Dea Nehalennia, and *Dea* was a term often given to a witch in the Middle Ages, there were also voices that said she had simply been a medieval witch. But that theory did not work either, because she was also honoured well before that period. Moreover, a Dea is not just any holy woman, she is a goddess!



Altar stones for the goddess Nehalennia, Jan de Mel, 1725.<sup>24</sup>

Well, what do you conclude about a goddess of which you only know the name and some symbols?

In an 1812 report made for the Dutch *Class of Confederates*, that was intended to inform the government, it emerged that while Nehalennia's naming statements differed widely, they could be roughly divided into two groups. Group one were the experts who saw her as a moon goddess, group two consisted of those who considered her a local river goddess.<sup>25</sup>

These kinds of ideas did change a bit over time as more researchers started to get involved in the issue. The first two syllables, *Ne* and *Hal*, were sometimes spelled *neihal* or *neehal* and that could have something to do with different old dialects. The big question was therefore what *neeh* or *neih* could mean. Researcher Kern, who wrote a lot about Nehalennia in the nineteenth century, thought that this had to do with the Old High German word *neihen*, which can be translated into sacrifice. *Neihen* would then have been a verb that referred to sacrifice, offer or bestow.<sup>26</sup> So a goddess with such a name probably had a lot to give and distribute to the people. Kern was convinced that the name Nehalennia could best be translated in today's

language into: *Our Dear Lady*.

A theory which received much attention, is that the name Nehalennia would be derived from the Indo-European word *Nei-Leiden*. In 1971 J.E. Bogaers and M. Gyseling wrote about this and they thought that her name could be read as that of a goddess who, with one hand on the rudder, piloted ships safely across the sea like a leader or helmsman.<sup>27</sup> Thus, she would have been a patroness for merchants who braved the North Sea by boat.

In 2004 a new option was put forward which stated the name Nehalennia would be derived from the word *ni-salen-ya*; she who came from the salt water.<sup>28</sup>

Well, the existence of the goddess was forgotten, but she was at least embraced again like an old house goddess of Zeeland. Around 1827 it was assumed that she was not worshipped anywhere else than in this southern coastal part of the Netherlands. All coins found in the vicinity of her temple complexes immediately explained why Zeeland sailors liked it so much to wear golden earrings, sometimes with coins attached to them.<sup>29</sup> Of course, that all came from the time of Nehalennia, when superstition was not unknown to any skipper. This custom still exists and when I still lived in Zeeland, I could often tell from the golden earrings that some men wore that they were fishermen.

The Zeeland traditional costume was suddenly also explained, because the goddess wears a pelerine on several images. Because such a short tippet is typical of some of the old attire of Zeeland women, the goddess seemed to have been honoured in that way.

All knowledge about her existence had been forgotten, but the goddess still conquered a place in the hearts of many Zeelanders. From a strange, unknown idol, she became a kind of protective mother from Zeeland. The term *Mother Goddess* was appropriate, according to some authors.

### 3. Mother Goddess Nehalennia

The term *Mother Goddess* is used many times inappropriately nowadays, especially in New Age groups. Suddenly every goddess, who has a bond with other women on the basis of her gender, seems to be considered a heavenly mother. Nehalennia in particular has been assigned such a role from a feminist point of view, as a representative of the social position of women in bygone times. Mother goddesses, however, are goddesses that can mainly be linked to creation, fertility and the life cycle. But does Nehalennia belong to that category?

In 1846 a book appeared on the market that was written by J. de Wal from Leiden who had extensively researched the theme of mother goddesses. It was a scientific study that took many years, intended for scholars, which had consulted not only special, but also rare texts.<sup>30</sup>

De Wal mentioned exactly what mother goddesses are and began with descriptions about the thread of life weaving Fates, who, according to the ancient Greeks, constantly ensured that the essence of them did not get lost. They could affect both the good and the bad that befell people and act as guides.

Traces of Fates can also be found in Norse mythology, where each of these goddesses represented a phase of life and thus symbolized the past, the present or the future. These types of goddesses were considered to be mothers and in many cultures they were always depicted as a group of three. They took care of those who were born, provided guidance throughout the course of life, and eventually cut the thread of life when lives came to an end. They could be called upon, but they also had the power to come forward themselves when certain people needed their protection.

Many powers were attributed to such goddess trios, for they were also the protectors of special places, such as fields or forests. Because their productivity was far-reaching and they possessed fertility-inducing powers, they were often depicted with fruit. Mother goddesses have been given shrines of their own in many cultures in the form of temples with a porch and a depository on a fenced-in piece of land surrounded by trees.

Nehalennia was indeed also accompanied by fruit and finds showed that she also had temples. But De Wal concluded that she could not be strictly defined as a mother goddess, because she was almost always depicted alone. In his work he indicated that this was a bit surprising in the case of Nehalennia, but he emphasized that there were no mother goddesses worshipped in relation to her religion.

In 1845 there was a report about a relief depicting three women sitting side by side on a bench or throne, all dressed the same. The relief on the altar was badly damaged, but it was then determined that the central figure was Nehalennia, because the remains also showed a dog sitting next to her.<sup>31</sup> The two ladies by her side were considered her companions, who were alike in character. After that, a stone surfaced at the Zeeland village Colijnsplaat which once again established a link with these mother goddesses, also called *Matronae* or *Matres*.<sup>32</sup> On that stone could be seen three ladies and the name Nehalennia was listed on the inscription.

Nehalennia was also sometimes depicted together with two other gods, namely Hercules and Neptune. Hercules is said to be the fertilizing force in creation, Neptune, a symbol for water. One thought that came to mind when I studied De Wal's work is that Nehalennia acted not so much as a goddess of fates of humans, but in the triad she formed on some found stones, had been more of a goddess of the earth itself. Through my further research, I believe we can just let go of the idea of Nehalennia as a goddess belonging to a trio of Fates. She was clearly an isolated goddess who had helpers, with whom she was occasionally depicted together. Fates represent a principle of equality, characterised in the fact that each Fate is equally important and forms one whole with the other two goddesses. Nehalennia, however, was highly regarded. She was more important than her helpers, who, while part of her cult, were not equal to her. That is also what the votive stones on which three ladies are depicted show, because the lady in the middle that looks like Nehalennia was being the only one carrying a dog.

J.A. MacCulloch, who shared a lot of information about the Celts at the beginning of the last century, reported that helping triads were found all over the ancient Celtic religion.<sup>33</sup> Originally these goddesses cultivated the earth and were often associated with rivers. Later they became mainly domestic goddesses and guardians of bushes. They were worshipped and believed to be the descendants of a primitive earth mother. Images depicting such goddesses alone with a child are, according to MacCulloch, sometimes regarded as statues of the Virgin Mary and, once they turned black, as Black Madonna's, so-called *Vierges Noires*. In popular superstition, they have been remembered as three good ladies, as *Dames Blanches* with whom travellers met in forests, or as three fairies who could appear at the birth of a child. Under the influence of Christianity they became hated witches in some places.

## 4. Clogged Gratitude Stones

Much has been speculated about Nehalennia over the centuries. Some clarity about how she was adored has been provided by the relief stones that were found. Many of them bear the name of the person who had offered gratitude to the goddess, regularly accompanied by a profession. Usually there are also the letters V.S.L.M. part of the inscriptions, which indicates the abbreviation *Votum Solvit Libens Merito*.<sup>34</sup> This term has also been found on various altars that are not related to Nehalennia and it refers to a dedication to a particular deity. It can be seen as a *thank you* in response to a wish fulfilled.

In almost all Dutch books from the old days the idea arises that Nehalennia was worshipped in the Scheldt area and that people dropped thankstones in the water as soon as a wish was fulfilled. Those stones would then have been thrown overboard by fishermen or traders who sailed their boats along the old Zeeland. That throwing such thankstones into the sea was a common form of worship is no more than an assumption. The idea cannot be substantiated with any further evidence, but was adopted indiscriminately by virtually everyone who wrote about Nehalennia. The only evidence to this effect was that there were large concentrations of these thank-offerings at certain places in the Scheldt.

The question that especially arises is in what era the goddess was known in Zeeland. It is clear that she was

worshipped at least during a period when Christianity had not yet broken through or was temporarily darkened. Belief in her must already date from before the reign of Constantine the Great (272-337) and that is in line with the estimate that her sanctuary would have stood in Domburg around the year 200.<sup>35</sup> That temple was designed as a square building measuring about four by four meters<sup>36</sup> and it was swallowed up by the sea towards the end of the third century.<sup>37</sup>

A Frenchman named Debray, who was the director of bridges and roads of Lille around 1877 investigated earlier studies on the peatlands of the Flemish coast. He spoke about the blue clay in which many Roman artefacts had been found. Most of them were in the impure peat zone, known as *fake grass*. He also mentioned the pieces that had ended up stuck in the peat due to the currents and invasion of the sea. That earthly layer mainly contained debris from the Gallo-Roman era, which according to him dated from the period in which the temple of Nehalennia was built.<sup>38</sup>

It therefore makes sense that the goddess dates back to a time before pagans converted to Christianity. A coin found in 1817 near a number of votive stones had the text: *Christiana Religio* and on the other side was the name *Hludovicus II. R. I.*, who reigned between 855 and 875. Given the location of that coin, her name could have been still known at that time, but she was probably no longer so openly revered. She was thought to have been revered right up to the time when missionaries passed through cities to rid the people of Pagan beliefs.

Missionaries deployed for that purpose introduced people to a new God and endeavored to make them abandon their own beliefs. Such clergymen were not solitary proclaimers of the faith who shared their beliefs on personal grounds and lived by their own means, but were high officials of the state who received all kinds of benefits. They did not have to pay taxes or tolls for the use of roads and means of transport. They were allowed to ask for shelter and food for their horses from private individuals.<sup>39</sup> If it was necessary, they could also ask for protection, so that thieves and rebels were kept at a distance.

Those who were converted by these kinds of Christians did not have to meet many specific requirements. Some knowledge of the most important truths, the Christian God and being able to recite some texts, was sufficient. In this way a battle was fought with anyone who was superstitious and engaged in idolatry, although it was quite a hassle. Nature worship, belief in water spirits, dwarfs, ghosts and white ladies, as well as several other rituals, could not be suppressed so easily. At that time people had conversations with talking ravens and listened to cuckoos because they could indicate with their cry whether there was a chance to find a lover. Great importance was also attached to sayings of diviners and sorcerers. Signs of nature were taken seriously and interpreted.

Saint Willibrord came to Zeeland around the year 725 to preach Christianity.<sup>40</sup> This Irish native was probably the one who managed to talk Nehalennia out of the hearts of the inhabitants of the Zeeland territory. Saint Eligius is said to have been his predecessor. According to the ancient chronicles, he was appointed to teach the barbarians of the coastal area a lesson by destroying their idolatrous temples and statues.<sup>41</sup> In the chronicles it is stated that Willibrord found a temple of the old heresy in Zeeland, which clarifies that Eligius had not succeeded in his mission. It also indicates that Nehalennia was well known on the Zeeland territory at the beginning of the era, and probably long before then, until at least the eighth century.

The old temples were destroyed during the times when people were converted to Christianity and the main pagan places of worship have since been turned into Christian buildings. The assumption that votive stones were poured into the water by seafarers to honour the goddess does not necessarily hold true in view of this history. Because what do you do if you are a missionary who wants to get rid of a lot of relief stones in favour of an idol? Right! You aim it in the Scheldt if you want to get rid of it quickly. With that nearby water-rich spot in this southern part of the Netherlands, that may have been an obvious dumping ground. However, the few who previously suggested that thought were simply ignored in mainstream literature.<sup>42</sup> In a book from 1717 it is stated that not far from Domburg there had been another temple that was also dedicated to Nehalennia.

This temple would not have been swallowed up by water, but destroyed by those who converted people in Zeeland. These Christians are said to have thrown the statues contained therein into the water.<sup>43</sup>

Another possibility that explains why high concentrations of votive stones have been found in the Scheldt is that worshippers of Nehalennia may have hidden various altars themselves, because their faith was forbidden. What would you do with statues and altars of an important goddess that no one is allowed to see anymore because of a ban? If people did hide them en masse, that could also explain why such special altars were later excavated in the dunes and elsewhere in the ground. In that case, they were hidden by those who were no longer allowed to openly cherish their ideas and who perhaps quietly moved their altars to remote places. In this way, they could still honour their precious and beloved goddess secretly above the ground in which her altars were buried.

## 5. A Piece of Zeeland History

The old Dutch coastal area, where Nehalennia was so known, used to look different from the Zeeland of today. Present-day Zeeland contains a part of Flanders that was not there before and part of the original Zeeland area now belongs to the province South Holland. To better understand the Nehalennia cult on the former territory, we must first of all place the goddess in an old Zeeland context.

If we jump to the period of the beginning of the era, a time in which her worship was lively, it becomes clear that different tribes lived on the old Zeeland soil. It is said that the area was inhabited by Nervii, Morin and Menapii.<sup>44</sup> These people had in common that they were all Celts. But well, that does not say much, because there has never existed a Celtic Empire, so the only real similarity was that these residents all spoke the same language. It is also not entirely clear where exactly these Celts came from, although it is thought that these Germanized Celts probably migrated to this region from ancient Germany. It is known that the Celts worshipped nature and knew several gods. Those who idolized Nehalennia, and who mixed with the West Germanic tribe of the Batavians, were probably Nervians, a source reports.<sup>45</sup> It remains primarily in speculation as we deal with who lived at that time on the dangerous Zeeland soil. It is likely that they were people from all kinds of groups who had fled from the rulers who occupied all major areas.<sup>46</sup> It was these refugees who knew goddess Nehalennia and who tried to keep her cult alive by leaving the busier areas.

About 52 years before the era, the Romans owned half of the present-day Netherlands. The lower part of the Netherlands did not belong to an area called Gallia Belgica, a Roman province, until the second half of the first century. At the time, the Romans took over a large part of today's European territory.

The French author Maurice Magre reveals in a book about ancient history how violent Roman rulers were in France. First there were the atheistic Romans, who believed only in the gratification of desires, and then came Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) who acquired the title of abbot of supreme priest by bribing emperors. Romans loaned their wives to each other and were willing to kill friends like assassins when there were conflicting interests. What also recurs more often is how the Romans laughed at people with disabilities, who they made to act like monsters during meals. The Romans stuffed themselves so much with food that they took emetics because their food intake was greater than human absorption capacity could handle. At the time, the Romans also decided who got what. The higher someone was in rank, the better they were fed. Maurice Magre described the Romans as *voracious pot bellies* who were by no means world civilizers.<sup>47</sup> He also mentioned the horrendous methods of murder carried out by them, such as starving old or sick slaves. These atrocities, which were then allowed to be watched by large families, were considered a treat and an outing. As a result, Magre sketched a picture of what must have happened also on Dutch soil at that time, although these kinds of atrocities are mainly hidden in the Dutch history books.<sup>48</sup>

Julius Caesar was vain, loved women, and was famous for his pale skin colour. He was bald and struggled with that. His merchants cut off the long hair of Gauls to make false braids for Roman ladies. Caesar craved luxury while urging others to austerity. Magre considered him a missionary of evil, who killed human spirits and gave

them roads, statues, and baths in return. And as the Gauls fell, Caesar was glorified as mankind's greatest civilizer. Ironically, Caesar was murdered by one of the few he really loved, a kid he considered a son.

In those early centuries, the Romans were especially busy persecuting early Christians. The stories about what they all got up to are not pretty either. Early Christians were crucified, thrown to the lions, or burned alive.

The influence of the Romans became bigger and bigger in the world and also in the Zeeland Scheldt area, which became a real Roman trading place in the second and third century.<sup>49</sup>

Sea levels began to rise in the south of the Netherlands in the third century. The sea is treacherous because it gives and takes, that was something the people who lived there at that time knew all too well. Seacoasts in parts of the world have moved. In some areas, former beaches are now laying on higher soil, while developed coastal areas are buried beneath the waves. In the Netherlands in particular, such phenomena of immersion have occurred, which may be another reason why so many votive stones have been found in the water. It is believed that during the Roman period the north of the Netherlands consisted mainly of swamps and forests that were often sought out by the sea. At that time it would have been safer in the south of the Netherlands. The construction of the temple to Nehalennia indicates that the Walcheren-area was not only inhabited at the time, but also considered safe.<sup>50</sup> While one of the temples of Nehalennia may have been destroyed by later Christian missionaries, and several temples existed, the possibility also remains that the most talked about temple may have been swallowed up by the waves. If the latter is the case, that explains why various sources report that the area was no longer habitable at that time. Yet people still lived in that coastal area during those years.

In the year 392 there was a change in the religious ideas of the Romans and the Roman Empire became officially Christian. That is a bizarre, but very defining piece of history. From a banned religion, Christianity instantly turned into the only permitted religion, and people were converted during so called *Christianisations*.

Domburg is said to have been an important trade center in relation to the Anglo-Saxons around the year 500 and during that period, among others, Saxons, Frisians, Germans and Suebi lived there.<sup>51</sup>

In the sixth century, few people lived in old Zeeland and the residents who still saw a future there, did not have an easy time. At that time there were no pumping stations and the daily high tide gave them wet feet rather easily or when it stormed heavily, rained continuously or at spring tide. Sometimes whole areas of land were flooded and farmers could only leave their farms by boat. A major threat to daily life was therefore the water. Farmers created places of refuge where they could get themselves and their livestock to safety when the water rose. By creating mountains and standing on the peaks, they were sometimes able to avoid drowning during those times.<sup>52</sup> Usually there was a ditch around those mountains, probably because the soil had been shoveled out of it to make the mountain, while the draining channel was retained. Everyone wanted to live near a safe place and so small hamlets often were formed around the best mountains. Churches were later built on such hills.

It became extremely dangerous in Zeeland in the ninth century, after the Christianisation of the eighth century. Vikings then moved to the area, according to a report dating back to the end of the ninth century.<sup>53</sup> At that time the population was forced to build forts along the coastal area to protect themselves. These were round castles with doors that could be closed easily and where residents could flee. The old *Ringwalfort* of the village of Souburg was an example of this.

Not only looters, but also water remained an enemy. And by the end of the ninth century, the water took on extra power. At that time more and more islands arose as river arms widened and separated pieces of land. Sometimes complete parts of Zeeland could be wiped off the map in one night.<sup>54</sup>

In the part of Zeeland that borders Belgium you can view the old territory of Saeftinghe, which recalls times past. It is a sunken part of Zeeland and it covers 3200 hectares. It is therefore one of the largest salt marsh areas in the Netherlands.<sup>55</sup> As a tidal area, this *Drowned Land* is subject to ebb and flow. It is sometimes hiked

in groups accompanied by guides, but no one lives there. Neither is this possible because it is dangerous there and anyone who does not know the way can easily drown when water rises. In the visitor center, a legend is told about the vain, haughty and wealthy people who used to live there. These residents made a big mistake when their fishermen caught a mermaid with their nets. Her merman shouted from the Scheldt that they should release his wife, but the fishermen refused to do so. As a result, the people were cursed and their entire area was swallowed up by waves. Ever since, forms in the white fog have occasionally been seen there, said to be drowned Saeftinghers, whose souls are still wandering on the open plains. I sometimes heard people in Zeeland whispering about those spirits. Saeftinghe was once inhabited and in the Middle Ages it would have been glorious, with its own castle. Sources are not unambiguous about when the village exactly was overrun by the Scheldt.

At the end of the ninth century, both estuaries of the Scheldt had become wide and there was a Roman naval station in Domburg that was used to make the crossing to Britain. Finds of shards from the tenth century are numerous, showing that Zeeland was completely inhabited at the time.

Little has been written about the state of Zeeland before the year 1000. The history is mainly described from geology and on the basis of archaeological finds. It is known that many monasteries were built there between 1000 and 1400.<sup>56</sup>

In the Middle Ages there was a lot of religious disorder in Zeeland and all kinds of groups started to fight the teachings of the Church. Stories are known describing how people in those days were chased to church with sticks and forced to attend masses. It was a scary period for Christianity and priests were showered with ridicule. Church circles feared that if this continued, Christian doctrine would have completely disappeared in about ten years. In ecclesiastical records it is stated about Zeeland that when the cross of the redeemer was planted on the spot where people had kneeled for Wodan, and where Mary had taken over from Nehalennia, it remained quiet there in the coastal region until about the twelfth century. Then suddenly a Cathar named Tanchelm attracted attention, who started preaching on the Zeeland soil and gained a lot of support there.<sup>57</sup> He belongs to a Cathar history that was very neglected in the history books.

Tanchelm requested his followers not to listen to the Church preachers because of all the untruths they were telling. According to him, the clergy behaved immorally, churches were brothels, and it was impossible for sacraments to be administered by those who were not pure and therefore committed sacrilege.

Eventually, Tanchelm left Zeeland and went to Rome. In 1112 or 1114 he travelled back via the Rhine, where he came into contact with other heretics in Cologne. By the Church he was seen as an Antichrist and destroyer. The Inquisition was on his heels and he was captured in Cologne. A letter has been found in which, on behalf of the church of a Dutch city named Utrecht, the Archbishop of Cologne was thanked for taking this blasphemous man into custody. That letter also explicitly requested not to let go of him.<sup>58</sup> Dressed as a monk, Tanchelm managed to escape and he hid himself in Zeeland. Then he travelled to Bruges, where believers were also enraptured by his presence and they even kept his bath water as a relic. Several Zeelanders moved to Antwerp, where he preached a lot and had a whole flock of followers.

Tanchelm was also called Tanchelyn, Tancheli, Tanchielinus, Tanquelinus, Tandemus, Tanderius, Tanchelinus, Tancellinus and Tanchelij, among others. The fact that he was known by so many names in various areas already indicates that he was a great person. His teachings therefore appear to be spread in Bohemia, Elzas, Thuringia and all kinds of surrounding regions.<sup>59</sup> He is clearly an example of a Cathar who decided to move to Zeeland and he was also the one who started a great heretic movement in the Low Countries as a result of that.<sup>60</sup> He spoke mainly to fishing families living in the remote areas and preached regularly in coastal villages. Those were the places where he found a lot of support. His teachings would have resembled Sophism, a Greek philosophical movement that was created in the 5th century BC.<sup>61</sup>

Those who went to fight his followers in Cologne discovered that he had spread a blunted form of the teachings of the ancient Manicheans, a religion that originated in the third century on the border of the

Roman Empire and Persia.<sup>62</sup> Manicheans regarded reed as a sacred symbol and therefore liked to lie on reed mats.<sup>63</sup> Why that was the case is not clear to many, but you will understand it as you read on in this book, because reed also had an important place within the cult of Nehalennia. The Manicheans were also viewed as Cathars in their days, and one aspect that Tanchelm taught of this teaching had to do with two eternal principles: good and evil. According to this Cathar, evil on earth was mainly to be found within Christianity. Tanchelm's followers were ostracized and regarded as criminals, yet his teaching was widespread and highly represented.

Rarely research has been done on this Cathar. Even most Dutch and Belgians have never heard of Tanchelm. We have been indoctrinated with the idea that Catharism was mainly a thing of Southern France and those who want to read about Tanchelm mainly get to read faulty and partisan reports from his ecclesiastical opponents.

When Tanchelm sailed on a boat on the Scheldt, he was beaten to death by a priest. That would have happened in 1115 or 1124. Sources are also unclear about his background. He was probably a native of the southern Dutch province Brabant, a Frisian or a Belgian from Antwerp. A researcher from the Belgian Academy of Archaeology, wrote in 1868 that he thought Antwerp had been Tanchelm's headquarters, based on texts his father-in-law had collected from researchers.<sup>64</sup> Due to the heresy of Tanchelm, the Church was busy sending their best preachers to those locations.<sup>65</sup>

Dutch territory continued to be plagued by water. In 1170 the water destroyed the connection with the northern part named Friesland, and a century later the *Flevo lake* became a gorge. There were severe floods and many people drowned or lost all their belongings. In 1421 the inland sea of the Biesbosch was born, still a wetland nature reserve in the provinces of North Brabant and South Holland.

Devastation and various catastrophes took place in 1570, 1665, 1717 and 1774. It all led to water-filled gorges and faults that had major effects on the Netherlands. According to French researchers, this had something to do with the then changing North Sea, because where it initially rippled quietly and had insignificant tides, it became much more ferocious at that time, resulting in all kinds of local problems.<sup>66</sup>

The mainland of Zeeland was regularly subject to changes. An example of this is the town of Reimerswaal, which was first mentioned in 1258 and received city rights in 1374. Reimerswaal became a flourishing trading town and was the most important city in Zeeland, next to Vlissingen and Middelburg. The salt trade in particular flourished there. In 1564 it was no more than an island in the Eastern Scheldt.<sup>67</sup> In the seventeenth century there were still some dilapidated houses and in the eighteenth century the island and the remaining ruins disappeared into the waves.

The province of Zeeland is characterised by flat land, panoramic views and water. Still, some of the refuge mountains created by the inhabitants in the sixth century were preserved for many years. These were small earth heights, elevations on the land of Zeeland that could not even be called a hill because they were so low, according to a magazine for hikers in 1934.<sup>68</sup> Most of those mounds were no higher than ten meters, whereby the commonly used name was still the Dutch word *berg*, which means mountain. Author Van Wallenberg wrote: "*I still remember very well from my youth, how behind the parental home there was a mountain of refuge, which we never called anything other than simply: the mountain. And we have more proof that the word mountain is the common name in the names of homesteads, in the vicinity of which such a traffic island is located or used to be: Fruitberg, Ossenberg, Den Berg, Konijnenberg, Berglust, Luycksberg, Hazenberg; there may still be some, but these are names of hooves that come to mind for a moment.*"

At a high, beautiful mountain in the hamlet of Zanddijk, near the village Veere, a house had a peculiar gate. On it was written: *La Maison de haute montagne*. The word *montagne* is an old French word for *montagne*, which means mountain. The house was older, because registers showed that it was before that already registered in 1626 as *Thuijs genaamt Houte Montagne*,<sup>69</sup> which can be translated into: *The house that is called the high mountain*.

The building was also known as *the house with the high mountain*. Why the house in Veere referred to the mountains in the French language is a mystery. Captain Jan Coopvaer had been the owner of that house. In 1594 one of the noble *Lords of Zeelandt* wrote about him; that this captain also supervised ships that came from Holland and on which English soldiers were seated. Soldiers who were not welcome in Zeeland at that time.

When the dyke near the house was bombed during World War II in 1944, a creek formed on the site that washed away the monumental farm.<sup>70</sup> I wonder if Jan Coopvaer and the former owners of the house in Zanddijk knew anything about Nehalennia. In this region, mention is made of a piece of land called *Neeltje Jans*. That area, partly under water and partly dry, has been a point of discussion throughout history. In 1708 litigation was still underway, because its owner was unknown and two parties were claiming ownership.<sup>71</sup> According to historians, Neeltje Jans was a Zeeland nickname for Nehalennia.

For more than twenty centuries, people there fought against nature and partly because of this it remains a bit of a separate part of the Netherlands. For generations, Zeelanders have been confronted with dike breaks and floods, often resulting in the loss of loved ones. The tragic flood of 1953 is still engraved in the minds of many. Strangely enough, over the centuries, water has not only been a curse, but has also remained loved. Life in Zeeland was not always that easy and many see Nehalennia in that context. She was a helper, a goddess who, in those first centuries of the era, kept the scarce number of people on that piece of earth going. A goddess who gave these coastal residents hope and sometimes fulfilled their wishes, but who was wiped out by Christianity. Yet history also shows how the people on Zeeland soil have tossed about questions in terms of what they should believe. After all, it was not only an area where Nehalennia was venerated, but also a place where many people in the Middle Ages listened to Cathar ideas.

## 6. The Zeeland Girl from the Scheldt

Nehalennia votive stones usually show a shell in the ceiling niche; a scallop shell with ridges. This conch symbol has often been associated with the environment in which she was worshipped. The Scheldt could then be seen as a conch shell and the flat shell flap as the coastal land. On this basis it has often been thought that Nehalennia was a local goddess of the Scheldt.

We also see names similar to those of the Scheldt in other places. In English areas we come across the words *Sceld* and *Sheld*, which can also be read as shields and therefore have similarities with German compound words such as we see in the village name Schiltbach. The word Scheldt also resembles the English *sceald*, which signifies a sandbank or shallow.<sup>72</sup> *Sceld* and *sceald* have the same origin, because they are derived from the word for bowl, whereby at most the question can be asked whether it concerns a concave or a convex bowl.<sup>73</sup> A *sceldmere* means a lake where water sometimes collects and other times it does not, but with *sceld rivers* it is different, because they are not hindered very much over their natural course. And then there is also the *Schaalsee*, near the Elbe, which can be regarded as a big natural bowl that is filled with water. Out of this lake flows a little river that bears the name Schilde. The word Scheldt can probably best be translated as *scale*. Scallops have a flat bottom shell and a convex top shell. The mollusk that lives in a scallop shell is a hermaphrodite and can expel water with the shell with clattering movements. Nehalennia is associated with these types of shells because it symbolizes the power she has on water. Nehalennia was sometimes considered to live in the water, which can then be seen as a land basin that carries the water in the shape of a bowl, but she also moves on the water, because on the water you can sail with a boat, which is also a bit bowl shaped. The conch is an important symbol of this goddess, and if you press a conch to your ear, you hear the comforting tones of her sea.

In writings, Nehalennia is referred to as a *Zeeland Girl*, a stream goddess, an idol and even a devil, who belonged to heavenly scum that was put on a pedestal by pagans who did not know any better. This goddess is seriously wronged with this. It also contrasts sharply with the enormous amount of votive stones found

near Walcheren. Those stones indicate that those who ordered them to be made must have been smart people. They could read and write, something that not everyone could do at the time. And even if they couldn't write, it turns out that they had enough resources to have such a stone made by someone who would do it well. It must have been mainly the upper class who were able to have votive stones made that were provided with appropriate texts, whether or not embellished with artistic reliefs. It has also become clear that almost all engravings are made in the name of men. This may indicate that women played a minor role in that old Zeeland territory, but it is also possible that women worshipped the goddess in a different way. I consider the latter the most likely, because the men there had obviously no shame in worshipping a goddess instead of a male counterpart and that must be significant for the zeitgeist.

That the goddess was much more than some water-being to her followers, we can see from the conch roof on various votive stones and altars. The goddess carries the shell above her head, so that the symbol can not only be linked to water and land, but also indicates a celestial scale, in the form of the ribbed top shell and another earthly, flat half. This says a lot about the background of Nehalennia, because such images of heaven and earth can also be seen in other old religions and they are sometimes also decorated with fruit or eggshells. Gods depicted with these symbols can be considered creators. Brahma, the god, who according to the Hindus created the material universe, is an example of this. He spent a year in an egg and then made the heaven and earth from the two pieces of shell.<sup>74</sup> The shell of Nehalennia therefore clarifies that she had dominion over both the sky and the land and that is in line with assumptions in which she was not only seen as a water goddess, but also as an interpreter of the moon.

The shell is still a beloved symbol of pilgrims, especially those who go on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella, which has been very popular since the Middle Ages. Saint James the Greater is the Holy Patron of Spain and is said to have been an Apostle of Jesus. When this James was murdered, his remains were thrown into the sea. The story goes that his body later washed up on the beach and that he then had a scallop shell stuck to his hat.<sup>75</sup> According to legend, a star marked the location where the remains of the saint needed to be laid to rest and therefore the name of the place of pilgrimage derived from the words *Campus Stellae*, the field of the star. A Saint-Jacques scallop shell is often taken from Santiago de Compostella as a trophy. It originally served as a begging bowl or plate during pilgrimages, was also used to decorate cloaks and hats and was a protective symbol for pilgrims that saved them from robbers. Today's pilgrims still attach this symbol to their backpacks. In many texts it can be read that the popularity of the Saint-Jacques scallop is a result of the worship of this James. That is not entirely correct, however, because although people today do often link the shell to this saint, we can see from Nehalennia's altars that the shell was also very popular within her much older cult.

When I visited the local museum of Bélesta, in the Pyrénées-Orientales, I also discovered that the shell was a symbol that people in bygone times often liked to carry with them. In the hamlet of Bélesta a cave was discovered by accident in 1983 and the museum is entirely devoted to the finds made there. There were 32 people buried in the cave who had been honoured with earthenware gifts. These people are said to have lived in the Neolithic period, some four thousand years ago. Borings and finds showed that it was not only a cemetery, but that people had also lived in this cave. What I found striking was that scallops were also found in which two holes had been made, which shows that they had served as pendants. It is interesting that these shells were already seen as jewels at that time that were worn for pleasure or religious purposes.

Shells were also related to death, as shells have also been found in Gallic graves and Merovingian burial sites.<sup>76</sup> The shell is a pagan symbol of resurrection and future life that has been preserved within Christianity. That is the reason why not only old gods, but also church saints are regularly depicted with them. Those who pay close attention will see the scallop shell in many places, both within pagan and ecclesiastical settings. Often locations of deified mortals are decorated with shells to show that physical existence can be overcome. Several Gallo-Roman artefacts have niches decorated with shells, as is the case on some votive stones and

most of the altars of Nehalennia. This is partly because molluscs were creatures of good morals, I read in a French book.<sup>77</sup> They therefore play mystical or symbolic roles in the writings of ancient philosophers. Sometimes it was the gods who had crawled out of the shell themselves or who could brave the waves with shell boats.



*The main altar of Saint-Pierre church in Saint-Paul-de-Fenouillet clearly shows how important the scallop shell is for Saint Peter, among others. There is also a stucco scene at the baptismal font where it can be seen that John the Baptist is baptising Jesus with a scallop shell.*

Because of their striking analogy, *coquilles* were also associated with the female sex organ and therefore seen as symbols of the creative power of nature. An old folk custom in December that was practised on the Dutch Wadden Islands is a reminder of this, because on these islands people wrapped themselves in straw, heather, feathers and shells during the festivities. By imitating a spirit of vegetation, it was hoped to ensure a rich harvest.<sup>78</sup>

The shell played a role in all kinds of cultures. The Roman poet Horace (65-8 BC) saw shells as moon jewels and sang all kinds of songs about the moon and molluscs, in which he mentioned, among other things, the oysters of the Egyptian Abydos. The conch was used by Hindus as a trumpet and became an instrument to invoke the gods.<sup>79</sup> The Brahmins, who held an ancient priesthood and could speak to kings on behalf of gods, had a ritual in which they used a conch as an inductor to invoke the god of the moon and sacred rivers. This moon god could send a spirit called a *Narayana*. With the help of the messages of such a spirit, they were able to fulfil their roles as mediators between heaven and earth.

Shells thus show that life does not end after death and that they are the divine symbol of creation that can be used to create openings in dimensions through which gods can be contacted. Harvested in the sea, these moon jewels represent feminine and nautical imagery that goddess Nehalennia was also knowledgeable about. Every pearl in old Zealand could have been seen as a gift from the moon and shells were probably also used to appeal to Nehalennia. You can read more about the way in which shells come into contact with the goddess in **Chapter 126**.

James Churchward, who wrote a book in 1933 on the secret symbols of the lost continent of Mu, described scallops as symbols of closed gates.<sup>80</sup> They would indicate gates that could be opened to those who wished to reach heaven. It is a thought that we also see in various pagan religions. If we look closely at the altars of Nehalennia, we see that she was also a gatekeeper. The shell is also like a sarcophagus and the fact that this shell can be found behind or above the head of Nehalennia therefore also tells us something about the scale of her immortality.<sup>81</sup> The shell is the symbol of a magical principle that sees everything between up and down

as a fine-meshed network that connects itself as two facets. Nehalennia is therefore a goddess of this connection.

With regard to the goddess, shells can also be viewed as hearts of the sea, because with some imagination they are heart-shaped. Moreover, shells consist of lime, a material that has also been used to manufacture votive stones. If you look from a Zeeland point of view, you will soon conclude that the shell represents the Scheldt and that its rich symbolism also sits with Nehalennia very well.

## 7. A Soulless Replica

About six years ago I visited Colijnsplaat in Zeeland. A temple replica was opened there along the banks of the Scheldt in 2005 to commemorate Nehalennia. As she is seen as a faded house goddess of Zeeland, who is responsible for a relatively unknown piece of Zeeland history, it was decided to have this special building built near her original sanctuary from the Gallo-Roman era. Experts believed that this region was called Ganuenta at the time, based on an inscription on a votive stone. They claimed that Ganuenta had been a Roman trading town covering part of Zeeland, South Holland and Brabant. However, this is incorrect, I will return to this subject in **Chapter 43**.

Calculations show that Nehalennia's original temple was swallowed up by the raging waters around AD 270, although that may not be the correct choice of words. The theory was that the temple fell into the sea due to the erosion of the shore, but this appears to have been refuted by a find in the year 2000.<sup>82</sup> In that year a piece of pavement was discovered in the Scheldt that had belonged to Nehalennia's temple. That remnant clarified that the temple was likely simply pushed into the water. In 1647 all kinds of remnants of the sunken building were found, which Zeelanders call a *heydens capelleken*; a pagan chapel.

The second chapel is said to have been located somewhere near Domburg. It was assumed that the dune area of Domburg at that time extended much further than is the case today and that the remains of this second temple would lie in the sea about 200 to 300 meters away offshore. During the Second World War, a fisherman from Veere found a votive stone dedicated to Nehalennia at a depth of 24 meters at the so-called *Well of Domburg*, and it was considered plausible that this find confirmed the hypothesis about the second temple location.<sup>83</sup>

A grey statue of the goddess can be seen in the Zeeland temple replica of Colijnsplaat. It is a pity that they did not choose limestone, because in the past the goddess was mainly honoured with lime sandstone. As is usually the case, she is depicted with a foot resting on the prow of a ship, a little dog by her side and carrying fresh apples on her lap.

I expected it to be a powerful, spiritual location, but unfortunately that turned out not to be the case. The building does not reveal much of the old Zeeland heritage and is mainly used for weddings and events. I therefore consider it a soulless reminder of a once thriving cult.

The building also appeared not to be open at regular times. For me it is an example of a historical memento that will be forgotten in the not too distant future. This old religion, which has flourished in this area, deserves much more attention in my opinion. I think it is sad that this location has not become a place where people can learn a lot about the goddess and where films about her history are shown or where votive stones can be viewed. To see the most beautiful examples of the preserved votive stones, you must travel to the *National Museum of Antiquities* in Leiden, a two-hour drive from Zeeland.

At the temple replica, the goddess is no more than what people used to know about her and that is the case throughout the Netherlands. Most Dutch who have heard anything about her, all remember her as the old water goddess or idolatry of a pagan local cult in Zeeland, who, according to books, had many followers among superstitious sailors. Those who know about the votive stones often have an image in their head of rough men, with golden earrings, that were considered worshippers of this goddess. And many of these people think those sailors or fishermen thanked the goddess with stone slabs for fulfilled vows and threw

these offerings of thanks into the water. Because these men used the moon during their navigation, this goddess was identified with that celestial body and later that pagan idea would have also been embraced ashore, so the duties of this goddess would have been somewhat moved to the land. Well... As you progress in reading my further research, you will understand my sarcastic undertone.

What annoys me about historical records of Nehalennia is that she is seen by many as a Roman goddess and that this has even been mentioned as a fact in newspapers dating back to the end of the last century.

In 2017, a party was celebrated in Zeeland in Colijnsplaat, where young primary school students were dressed as Roman soldiers. *"A little later, the students were initiated into the world of Nehalennia"*, an article from the *Provincial Zeeland Newspaper* states.<sup>84</sup> It was part of an educational program related to a *Nehalennia week*. You will be able to read in this book that Nehalennia was not Roman at all and then it will also become clear how cruel it is to teach children about a goddess while dressed in an outfit of those who deliberately destroyed the ancient Nehalennia cult and her believers. I consider all of this a horrible example of the falsification of history.



*The statue of Nehalennia that can be seen in the temple replica along the harbour of Colijnsplaat.*

In Dutch literature, people have mainly lingered in endless chatter about the name of the goddess and get bogged down in virtually nothing-based speculation about the way in which she was praised. There are researchers who have focused on sorting out the names of the seafaring traders who paid tribute to her, and sometimes new finds made themselves known, which only raises extra question marks. There is really not much more to say about the goddess based on what has been described about her in Dutch texts in the past. Because of course we can find out and discuss her symbolism, as many did and I will do in-between, but continuing that until we weep, does not bring us any further to information about who this goddess was and what kind of worshippers this religion had. As far as I am concerned, it would have remained at that, had it not been for the fact that I thought I had caught a glimpse of her in the French town of Bugarach. That was also the start of my research.

## 8. *Flabbergasted by a Force*

Hendrik and I emigrated to the south of France at the end of 2017. We did not land here without a reason, because our interest in the footsteps left by Cathars and Templars in this mystical area is great. We did choose to settle in the slightly rougher part of the Pyrenees, because of the beautiful nature and we like the mentality of the French in this area. The mountain culture suits us like a warm coat.

This whole area consists of geographical peculiarities and is infused with exciting legends and mysteries. Our place of residence is situated in a special and magical earthly area to say the least. Unlike the Netherlands, France is very careful with old heritage and I love to wallow in those spheres of the past and soak up the history of bygone times.

When I had just arrived in France, I wanted to visit a church nearby in Bugarach, a somewhat isolated village in the Pyrenees in the shadow of the 1230 meter high mountain with the same name as the village. After apocalyptic predictions, the hamlet came to the fore in 2012. It was then claimed that the planet would be destroyed on December 21 and that only the lives of those present in Bugarach would be spared. At that point, flying saucers would land or a heavenly force would split open the mountain. The event attracted a lot of attention in the press worldwide, with the result that people wearing aluminium hats stormed the village. The mayor did not know what to do and even got the army involved to make sure everything went smoothly. Despite all the predictions, no extraterrestrial or divine interventions took place. Yet the mountain continues to appeal to many and it is quite busy there, especially during the summer. People still camp in vans at the foot of the mountain and many ceremonies are performed there, mostly of a pagan nature. That was already the case before 2012 and in ancient times. It is a place where many oddities occur, which have something to do with ghosts and extraterrestrial visitors, but where also uncommon energies can be felt and sometimes indefinable sounds can be heard.

Visiting the village church of Bugarach, which was built in 1194, had been on my wish list for a while, but every time Hendrik and I went there it was closed, due to renovation, the winter time or the absence of the key keeper. When finally the doors were open, shortly after our emigration, I put my first foot over the threshold there...

A pentagram that hangs above the entrance and the way the outside light slips in, gives the church a mystical appearance. This is reinforced because reliefs of the Holy Grail are depicted on various walls and various windows show saints that are depicted without facial features. There is an abundance of feminine statues on display, all of which are holy ladies that can be associated with stories of apparitions.

A stained glass window has been installed in a niche of the church, the image of which can be interpreted in many ways. It shows a much-discussed boat in a landscape that, printed on a card, would not look out of place in a tarot deck and resembles the card of *The Wheel of Fortune*. It is speculated that this window is a reminder of Jules Verne, who loved to go on holiday in this village and wrote the well-known book *A Journey To The Center of the Earth*, taking inspiration from the stories about the mysterious mountain.

In his book *Clovis Dardentor*, a captain Bugarach with a sailboat played a role. Other researchers assume that the window is much older and refers to Noah's Ark or to King Solomon's treasure transported by sea. While I was walking through the church, something strange happened. I had a feeling of sliding back in time and Nehalennia popped into my mind. It completely overwhelmed me. I thought of those who adored her and believed wholeheartedly in her existence. My thoughts also drifted to the Romans, who had so exasperated the pagans, and I also thought about the Christian beliefs they later began to spread. Ancient gods and goddesses were swept away over the centuries as if they had never existed. Many pagan religions have disappeared from the earth in devious ways, not only by forced abolition, but also because the old belief systems were covered with new symbols, new icons and a cross. The feminine power within religion also faded, but I was surprised to find that it was still tangible and vibrant in this church. It was clearly the feminine energy that touched me so much in this interior. The church contains various pagan symbols, something that I had not expected at all, given the austere exterior of the church.



*On the left you can see the stained glass window in Bugarach church. The church is centrally located in the shadow of the Pic de Bugarach, a large mountain. On the right an image on which Nehalennia is depicted with an négo. This votive stone was found in Domburg.<sup>85</sup>*

Perhaps I immediately made a link with Nehalennia because of the dominant light blue colours that were applied to the walls. I had read in the past that an altar of Nehalennia had surfaced in Domburg that still contained traces of blue paint. Yet it was mainly the stained glass window that attracted me. While exploring the rest of the church, I kept walking back to the niche to stare at it.

The window shows a *négo*, a simple boat that can be used to sail on ponds and has the same shape as the boat with which Nehalennia is often depicted on reliefs.

In an 1874 book by Holtzmann on German mythology, which I had read in the past, it was clarified why Nehalennia was sometimes depicted not as a goddess, but as a small boat.<sup>86</sup> Such a boat would be the symbol of a vessel on which deceased souls could travel. Holtzmann regarded Nehalennia as a goddess of the underworld, because a dog and fruit often accompanied goddesses of death.

The syllable *hal* in her name is said to refer to *hell*, not in the context of punitive purgatory, but to a haze that pagans regard as the intermediate station where souls temporarily end up after their death. I had remembered that because it expanded her function as a moon goddess or water goddess and it popped back into my head at that moment. My mind also drifted to the local stories about lakes under the mountain of Bugarach, and I realized that they could be silent references to that hell world or underworld that the little boat on the stained glass window could have had also something to do with.

And suddenly it dawned on me that in the church of Bugarach, among all those female saints, space had also been created for Nehalennia, so that she could continue to be disguised and unobtrusively worshipped. To me, this window felt like an ode to her.

It was unreal that these assumptions cranked my thoughts while standing in front of that particular window with the boat in the church. I kept thinking of all kinds of historical information that I had read about in the past and about things that were the subjects of conversations that I'd had with people in the past. In my mind I started to combine all kinds of information. It was as if I had walked into an arcanum of the tarot and the window depicted a gate hidden behind a drawn card. In that other world I entered, a force seemed to want to say something to me. My feet were suddenly planted very firmly on the floor, so firm that it felt like the gravity of the earth was pulling on the soles of my shoes. It spun in my head and it even made me slightly shaky and dizzy. For several moments I heard a buzzing noise in my ears, which made it seem as if something wanted to catch my attention. What was this? And why did I suddenly see all those links with Nehalennia? My heart could absorb it all, but my rationality told me it was crazy.

The window and I were connected to each other like a magnet and gazing at the coloured glass I saw more references to the goddess. On the votive stones found, Nehalennia wears a brooch in the shape of a wheel on her pelerine and I saw such a wheel depicted on this window. Nehalennia's brooch, as well as that wheel, could be a reference to Taranis, a wheel god who could make it thunder, had a lot of knowledge and was also labelled a magician. He was no stranger in this area, because finds of wheels, which in ancient times were set alight with fire and rolled down the mountains during festivities, show that Taranis was revered in this French region. So the first impression of the picture on the window was an *négo* with a wheel on the mast, but I looked with different eyes and saw the boat of Nehalennia, which was accompanied by an attribute of Taranis. His wheel turned and because of that the *négo* moved on the water.

W. Winwood Reade published the book *Mysteries of the Druids* in 1861 and mentioned both Taranis and Nehalennia in the intro. According to him, Nehalennia was a name that had to do with all kinds of goddesses who were equivalents of each other and watched over an oak tree in which Taranis would dwell.

He added this text:

*"By the bright circle of the golden sun,  
By the bright courses of the errant moon,  
By the dread potency of every star,  
In the mysterious Zodiac's burning girth,*

*By each and all of these supernal signs,  
We do adjure thee, with this trusty blade  
To guard yon central oak, whose holy stem,  
Involves the spirit of high Taranis:  
Be this thy charge."*

In the church of Bugarach, the sun and the moon can light up the oak pews through the stained glass windows, but also through two wheel-shaped windows. The ceiling of the church is dotted with stars and candlesticks attached to the walls cast shadows of swords on the church walls. Under the base of a statue by Jeanne d'Arc, the symbolism of the tarot card of *Ace of Swords* can be seen.

Has Bugarach been a place of oak guards?

The village is located in an old Gaulish location. The Celtic word *Bugha* refers to a blue or green plant that has eyes. That seems to be a reference to apples of the eye with which the sun and moon have sometimes been compared, but it can also simply indicate an apple tree. When you look at the underside of an apple, you also see with some imagination an eyeball and iris with a pupil. Given the etymology of *Bugha* and *Buarach*, I became convinced that *Bugarach* is a contraction of these words and that the village church was built on a very old Gallic site that served as a pagan oracle site. The *Forêt de Chêne*, a large oak forest, located on the southeastern edge of the mountain massif, must have played an important role in this, just like the mountain itself and the village land. That immediately explained to me why so many are attracted to the area and feel such a powerful energy there. The link I thought I saw at that time with Nehalennia and Bugarach could be dismissed as a complete figment of my imagination and as an assumption without any foundation. Yet it was as if that special window reflected on me a power of Nehalennia that allowed all kinds of thoughts to bubble up in me.

In our French area, something is going on with some church windows. Since our emigration I have spoken with a few French people who told me that in many old churches in this region the stained glass windows are positioned in such a way that they can pass on messages with a certain incidence of light to those who are open to them or know on which special dates they can sit in certain churches to witness this. That some church windows can actually do that, becomes clear in Rennes-le-Château, a village close to Bugarach.

Every year on January 17, a wonderful phenomenon occurs in that little church. On that day, known as *Pommes Bleues*, the building is always packed. Around noon, circular projections appear on the wall through the stained-glass windows that look like apples.

For a long time, this building was owned by the village priest François Bérenger Saunière (1852-1917). The story goes that this priest found secret parchments in his church. Although there are some doubts as to the authenticity of these documents, he seems to have grown immensely rich since that find. The parchments have been revealed and one of them is known as *The Great Parchment*. It is a text full of codes. Henry Lincoln, a researcher who published books and made documentaries about this area, got his hands on the decryption thanks to the French writer Gérard de Sède.

The decoded text reads:

***BERGERE PAS DE TENTATION QUE POUSSIN TENIERS GARDENT LE CLEF PAX DCLXXI PAR LE CROIX ET  
CE CHEVAL DE DIEU J'ACHEVE CE DAEMON DE GARDIEN A MIDI POMMES BLEUES.***

This can be translated into: *Shepherdess no temptation, Poussin, Teniers hold the key. Peace 681. By the cross and this horse of God, I complete (or destroy) this Demon Guardian at midday blue Apples.*

The meaning of these words is much discussed by researchers. In the *Revue Celtique*, published in 1879, I read that the Celtic word *Buarach* means rising cow, as meant in early morning, the moment when the sun rises. Its counterpart is the time when the sun is covered up to go to sleep. The moon then takes over and watches over the apples. The Celts called this nature event *Avalo Kûch*, which literally means *apple guardian*.

Because of the way in which I felt a connection with Nehalennia in Bugarach, the etymological explanation of the moon as guardian of the apples and the deciphered code of *The Great Parchment*, which also mentions a guardian of apples, I again made a link with Nehalennia. Could she be the guardian of those mysterious apples? After all, the goddess always carries apples with her on images.

The light projections that can be seen on January 17 during *Pommes Bleues* in Rennes-le-Château, are said to be the work of a great geometrist who at that moment seals his relationship with his partner with light. I therefore suspected that every year in Bugarach something happens with the wheel-shaped windows in the church there, referring to Taranis. Since *Pommes Bleues* in Rennes-le-Château takes place at noon, it will probably happen in Bugarach at an undiscovered time around midnight, when the moon is full.

Nehalennia became in my mind a connecting factor between Bugarach and the Rennes-le-Château mysteries and I discovered that no one had made this link before. I briefly doubted if I was right, but also realized that no wisdom can arise without insight or intuition and that the experience in the church of Bugarach was so overwhelming that it must have happened for a reason. But was it possible at all that I picked up a trace of the goddess outside Zeeland? Wasn't that a bit far-fetched after all? I was determined to investigate that.

I can imagine that what I have written in this chapter may sound a bit fuzzy to some readers, but it was a moment when I felt that something was making itself known, wanted to share knowledge, and turned my attention to symbols that I would understand and between which I could make connections. I decided to include this experience in this book, because all of this turned out not to have happened for nothing and this whole experience later fell into place during my research. To me it felt like an incentive to act on my intention to write this book, and also something strange had happened prior to this, which I will write about in **Chapter 125**.

## 9. Finds Outside Zeeland

In many Dutch texts it can be read that authors are convinced that the goddess was mainly worshipped at the then Scheldt estuary. They therefore refer to the many finds that have been made in Zeeland. Also in old Dutch texts it is clarified that Nehalennia must have been very popular, but that she probably only appealed to local pagans in that area. The zeitgeist played a role in this. If Nehalennia was loved by pagan ancestors, who were actively worshipping an idol in the south of the Netherlands, then there was no need to waste many words on it. History could then remain as it was and everyone could continue to believe in a history of civilizing Romans and in the God that Christian missionaries had introduced to people. It ensured that Nehalennia could easily stay outside the general historical books. Both the scientific world and the Church Fathers have long, year after year, pondered the findings related to Nehalennia and subsequently turned the goddess into a story that mainly resembles a legend.<sup>87</sup>

The point is, however, that discoveries have not only been made in Zeeland.

Between the 15th and 17th century the *Ruin of the Brittenburg*, also known as *Huis ten Britten*, was sometimes visible in the sea due to storms on the beach between Katwijk aan Zee and Noordwijk, Dutch places that are part of the province South-Holland, a coastal area between The Hague and Amsterdam.

In those years, various reliefs dedicated to Nehalennia were found on those beaches, which is not often mentioned in texts.<sup>88</sup> The Brittenburg is said to have been a Roman citadel with a lighthouse, and history reveals that this building has disappeared into the sea. In 1982, fragments of a Roman settlement were found during the excavation of the current discharge sluices.<sup>89</sup> Finds referring to the Romans had already been made there in 1520, including coins; the most recent with the date 270.

The Brittenburg is considered a *cold case* in history. The riddle has still not been solved. The building was striking in its shape as it was square, and therefore did not resemble other Roman fortresses. Since the temple of Nehalennia on Walcheren is also known to be square, I do not consider it unlikely that this place also housed a temple in favour of the goddess. You will read later in this book that Nehalennia is especially honoured on islands with shrines and lighthouses. The website of the municipality of Katwijk aan Zee states that the finds that were discovered during excavations often date from before Christ.<sup>90</sup>

In Oosthuizen, belonging to the province North-Holland, a curious bronze statue was found in a ditch in October 1911, which was concluded to represent Nehalennia.<sup>91</sup> In Vechten, near Utrecht, an altar was found

that was donated to the goddess by skippers from Tongeren, a place in Belgium.<sup>92</sup>

While doing research, I found it striking how stubbornly old Dutch press publications adhered to the Zeeland exclusive right to Nehalennia and how discoveries made outside Zeeland were dismissed with simple sentences.

Examples abound...

In October 1872, for example, the contents of the North-Holland Castle Ilpenstein in Ilpendam were publicly sold, which turned out to consist, among other things, a vow stone dedicated to Nehalennia. The relief showed two columns with a shell-shaped roof in the niche. Nehalennia sat on a throne with a basket of fruit on her lap. To her left was another basket of the same kind and to her right a dog was visible. It was already written about Ilpenstein Castle in 1845 that on the forecourt there was a grey bluestone of the pagan goddess Nehalennia.<sup>93</sup> According to tradition, this memorial stone was found around 1622, during the draining of the Purmer. That does not sound implausible, because the Purmer used to be an inland sea and was only later reclaimed land and a *polder*, which is an area surrounded by one or more flood defences by which the water level can be artificially controlled. The author, who mentioned this find, which had been preserved for more than two centuries, wrote that there was no reason whatsoever to think that the stone would actually have been found there. After all, such finds were only made in Zeeland.

However, the old *Purmer Memorial Book* mentions that anyone who approached the front avenue of the castle saw that special Nehalennia stone and that the stone was found in the Purmer and brought to the castle at the request of a man named Volkert Overlander.<sup>94</sup> Archaeologists who believed that Nehalennia was venerated exclusively in Zeeland, had done everything to say that this could not be true, because then difficult questions would have to be answered about those who also honoured her. Then one would have had to admit that the goddess might have been much grander than they thought.

In Brussels, Belgium, it turned out that statues of Nehalennia were also owned, but when it was written about, the Dutch press immediately reported that there were not so many findings in Belgium compared with Zeeland.<sup>95</sup> The tone to me sounds a bit childish.

Another haughty example can be read in a magazine from 1847. In response to finds made abroad, it was written: *"At last there is a mention of two memorial stones found outside our homeland, one of which was certainly dedicated to Nehalennia, the other probably. There was another mention of a mosaic found in France, on which, completely incorrectly, it is thought to be seen a Nehalennia."*<sup>96</sup> According to the French, the woman depicted on the mosaic they found, is indeed Nehalennia and I will come back to that in detail in

## **Chapter 12.**

Not only in Zeeland but throughout the Netherlands many artefacts have been found that refer to Nehalennia, but she was clearly known as a goddess in other countries as well.

Relief plates made their way to the surface in the Vosges and have been excavated in Pesch, Germany. Two stones have also been excavated at Deutz, near Cologne, which were dedicated to Nehalennia.<sup>97</sup> Excavations in the center of Cologne<sup>98</sup> also revealed a small statue of the goddess and in 1863 during a renovation of a house in Cologne, a relief stone with an image of the goddess was discovered in a wall.<sup>99</sup> And so it goes on, because in November 1819, in the south-west of Echternach, in the direction of Luxembourg and the vicinity of Trier, all kinds of details from the Roman era were found, including two white marble statues of goddess Nehalennia with a dog on her lap.<sup>100</sup> Similar stone statues had been found in Rhenen and Nijmegen, many kilometers away from Zeeland.<sup>101</sup> In 1854 it was reported that at the foot of the mountain of Plumont in Jura, near the Swiss border, a bronze statuette had been found which, upon investigation, was considered to depict Nehalennia.<sup>102</sup>

For this reason, in some sources, Nehalennia is called a goddess of German origin, who is also known as Néhalen. In that capacity she is said to be the goddess of the ancient Germans and mistletoe-worshipping Druids.<sup>103</sup>

However, quite a lot has been written about Nehalennia, especially in French literature, which clearly shows that we are dealing with a real goddess and that the belief in her extended much further than many people suspect, it looked like some people on purpose ignored this kind of information. Nehalennia was clearly rooted much more deeply in European history than was thought or some so called skilled researchers *wanted* to think.

A life-size statue of a seated woman was offered to a French museum, holding a cornucopia in her right hand and with a fruit basket resting on her knees. This statue of Nehalennia had a few special features. For example, in the center was a serpent that twisted partly around the goddess's neck, while leaning with its head on a ram. The statue was found in Sommerécourt, which is on the border of the departments of Haute-Marne and Vosges. It was owned by Mr Gérardin, the former mayor of Neufchâteau. The French departmental museum, which took possession of this find, drew up a list in 1850 with all the antiquities that were part of their inventory.<sup>104</sup> It turned out that quite a lot had been found in that region. The museum also had two small bas-reliefs, which were found in the ruins of the Fremifontaine forest, which is located in the department of Vosges. One relief showed Nehalennia sitting on an ox with a horn of plenty in her right hand and the other depicting the goddess sitting on a horse. In the same department, a relief was also found in the town of Grand in 1848, showing Nehalennia sitting on the back of a mule with a horn of plenty in hand. In the nearby town of Esclès, a sandstone statue of a seated woman was found carrying a basket of fruit on her knees, which was also believed to be a depiction of Nehalenna.

The archaeological site of the French Grand, in the region of Vosges and Grand Est, has been an important site for the Nehalennia cult because much has been found there that reminds one of the goddess. It was concluded that the statues with inscriptions discovered there, bearing the name Nehalennia, among other things, belonged to temples in the past.<sup>105</sup> During a French congress of scientists in 1850 it was also mentioned that statues of Nehalennia were found in the ruins at Grand.<sup>106</sup>

In an 1816 book on art treasures of the French monarchy, which discusses art treasures collected over fourteen centuries, it appears that that collection contained a relief rescued from the ruins of the *Église Saint-Marcel* in Paris and also concerned a representation of Nehalennia.<sup>107</sup>

In this book I will share a lot more information about this old religion in present-day French territory, because all these findings gave me something to hold on to for further research in the country I emigrated to.

A cautious first conclusion is that it was not so convenient to consider Nehalennia as a goddess who was known only or mainly in Zeeland. This is even proven by the inscriptions of the votive stones found in Zeeland. A simple example of this is a thank-stone dredged up on August 21, 1970, which was given to the goddess in AD 223 by a man named Aelian.<sup>108</sup> This donor was an Italian-born teacher of eloquence who also spoke the Greek language very well. He lived in Rome and wrote many books. It is not logical for such a literate man to worship a local pagan idol along the coast of the Netherlands.

So yes... Nehalennia was honoured in the Dutch area we now call Zeeland.

And no... Nehalennia was not only known in the south of the Netherlands, she was a much greater goddess than many assume.

The French did not deny the finds in other countries. In a French book from 1866 it is neatly listed that images of Nehalennia have been found on the Dutch Island of Walcheren, in France, Germany and Italy.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, it was not so strange that I thought I recognized the symbolism of Nehalennia in the window of the church in Bugarach. The fact that I was overcome there by a force that spurred me on to further research, did not seem to have come out of nothing because of these discoveries.

Unfortunately, the notion that Nehalennia was a real Zeeland goddess has been so stubbornly adhered to in the Netherlands that precious research time has been lost through endless debate with a particularly powerful tunnel vision full of bias. My toes curled as I read various accounts from the old days. At the time you needed to stand very strong in your shoes if you wanted to dare to make an assumption about the

goddess or her origin!

I discovered that I was not the only one who was annoyed by that. In 1873 P.H. Witkamp sneered at historians who continued to hold on to the idea that Nehalennia was a local goddess from Walcheren, while discoveries had also been made at all kinds of other locations. He listed that along the Rhine, near Rhenen and Nijmegen, and also in Germany, Belgium and France findings that referred to the goddess were made. Yet his publication was also ignored.<sup>110</sup> If forces had been bundled and discoveries had been explored from a lesser feeling of ego, we would probably have been able to learn much more about this goddess before.

At the end of August 1984 a fossil of a split hoof was found in the clay in Walcheren. It turned out to be a print of a calf that had walked on a meadow along the sea somewhere in the early Middle Ages. In a text about this in the *Algemeen Dagblad*, a Dutch newspaper, Nehalennia was quoted, who according to the journalist had protected the old sailors. He wrote: *“To my knowledge no remnants have been found of the medieval town of Walcheren. The remains of the temple dedicated to Nehalennia have also been lost. In 1647 statues and altarpieces were fished from the sea and stored in the church of Domburg. They were lost in a fire in the middle of the last century. What remains of a thriving piece of early medieval culture is just a cow's foot print. In a year or so, the sea will have swallowed that up too.”*<sup>111</sup>

Such texts made me belligerent and gave me an extra boost to not allow the legacy that was left by the goddess on the earth to be lost. In this book I will clarify that unreliable researchers and lazy journalists have clearly not done their homework properly.

## 10. Nehalennia the Rhine Goddess

Nowadays, the current theory prevails that Nehalennia was especially revered along the Rhine and was therefore also known on today's German soil. Of course, this idea automatically explains the finds made in Germany. In the first centuries of that millennium, all kinds of tribes lived in the Netherlands, including the Kaninefats, Frisians and especially the Batavians were present in Zeeland. They were all considered Germanics. And before that, other tribes lived there, about which little is known, some of which I mentioned in **Chapter 5**.

In the past century, it was often said in history books for children that the Germanics became good friends with the Roman occupiers and learned everything from them, such as how to build better houses, how to make good butter and what kind of edibles could be planted in the fields.<sup>112</sup> However, the real history is less rosy. The Germanics were oppressed by the Romans and used as slaves. In AD 69 the Batavians revolted, something that the Frisians had already done before. However, the Romans got the upper hand again.

Nevertheless, the Rhine proves to be a good starting point for researching the goddess, since she was certainly venerated there, probably in the beginning not only by the Germanic tribes, but also by the Romans. The Rhine is a 1233 kilometer long river and therefore one of the largest rivers in Europe. The French writer and poet Victor Hugo (1802-1885) was lyrical about this waterway. According to him, the Rhine combined everything, because it was as fast as the Rhône, as wide as the Loire, as encapsulated as the Meuse, as winding as the Seine, as green as the Somme, as historic as the Tier, as royal as the Danube, as mysterious as the Nile, as glittering as a river in America and as covered with fables and ghosts as an Asian river.<sup>113</sup>

It is certain that those who previously settled along this earthly lifeline knew Nehalennia well, because where this river surrenders to the sea gods, all kinds of altar stones were found. Several researchers hypothesized that Nehalennia was a Germanic goddess who, through Germanics living along the Rhine, had become known in Zeeland. While in the Netherlands the idea prevails that Nehalennia is primarily a Zeeland goddess, many Germans are convinced that she originated in their territory.

The old Germanics formed a mixture with all their peoples and tribes, whom all spoke the Germanic language. It is therefore a fairly accurate and safe statement to state that Nehalennia belonged to the religious ideas of these inhabitants. After all, they had settled in the Netherlands, among other places, and lived mainly in

Western and Northern Europe.

Nehalennia is also often referred to as a Celtic goddess or indigenous goddess, but above all as a goddess whose origin can be traced to the Germanics. You will therefore find her name not only in Dutch texts, but also in German writings. That is where most of the quests begin and end, although the artefacts referring to Nehalennia that have been found in Germany at least clarify that the area where this goddess is worshipped was much larger than just Zeeland.

While going through old articles I also came across statements that Nehalennia would be a true Roman goddess. The Dutch Baron Van Lynden tot Blitterswijk, belonging to the nobility, was completely convinced of this in 1796.<sup>114</sup> The idea behind this was that the Romans had brought civilization to people and then also introduced them to their gods and goddesses.

When Nehalennia is discussed in German books, she is usually mentioned in the same breath with other goddesses, all of whom are said to have been offered prayers to in a similar way. The German goddesses she has been linked to acted usually as a kind of supernatural godmothers teaching people a variety of activities, such as spinning, weaving, sowing, and harvesting.

I read texts by Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), a literary scientist who is best known for the folk tales he wrote together with his brother Wilhelm. Goddesses are seen from the German fairytale perspective mainly as ladies who are connected to the earth and are therefore opposite to gods or who work together with masculine heavenly principles.<sup>115</sup> As a result, I notice that I have difficulty taking the German texts too seriously, because they are clearly written from Roman, indoctrinated principles. With regard to Nehalennia, explanations are mainly sought in fairy tales. For example, Nehalennia is considered a successor or goddess who can be compared to the Egyptian Isis, who would have been nicknamed Holda by the Romans in an assimilated form. These versions of the quests for the origin of Nehalennia then lead to fairy tales about *Hulda*, *Holle*, *Hulle* and *Frau Holl* in which the goddess would live on or had been preserved.

Most people know the fairy tale of Lady Holle, in which a spinning girl chases a bobbin that falls down a well and ends up in a wonderful world. In that fairy tale there is a slight reference to an apple country because an apple tree is an element of it. In the story, the girl takes care of an old woman who she encounters in the underworld, but at a certain point the girl gets homesick and is then allowed to return to the upper world. Another girl, who later also wants to discover the well, is not so helpful towards the old woman and is doused in the underworld with pitch. The moral of the fairytale is a karmic principle that clarifies that you get what is due when you enter that underground Apple Land. Those who do good will be rewarded, those who are not sincere will be punished.

Lady Holle, the old woman in the fairy tale, is a symbol of a supernatural, feminine being from popular belief. She is the mist in the mountains, loves springs and lakes, practises divination and is therefore often identified with Nehalennia. In Norse and Danish folktales, she has become *Hulla*, *Huldra* or *Huldre* and has a tail that she carefully tries to hide.

The once well-known Nehalennia thus acquired devilish traits in the Scandinavian countries and because of Jacob Grimm more the stature of a fairy tale. Grimm, however, does let dancing ghosts and gnome stories trickle down, but he writes between the lines that Nehalennia, as an ancient goddess, can hardly be regarded as just a simple river goddess.<sup>116</sup> He's right about that, because she was much more so with his fairy tales we don't get very far.

I am not looking for stories, but for the real religion and teachings that Nehalennia has propagated. I am looking for the roots of the faith held by her worshippers and the teachings that spread among the ancient tribes who lived along the Rhine. The votive stones and all the statues indicate that the followers of Nehalennia did not believe in just a kind of folk talk. After all, they were smart people, who at least had money or merchandise, which made them wealthy enough to have votive stones made in worship of this goddess. In addition, we can also read from the inscriptions that they also had the wish and the will to give

honour to Nehalennia. Records show that they were mainly traders, seafarers who could afford big boats and who ran businesses or at least engaged in barter. It is inconceivable that these people worshipped a goddess who can be identified with Lady Holle.

We are especially indoctrinated with regular thoughts of primitive tree worshippers when we think of pagans who lived in ancient times. Church-based sources portray those people as somewhat stupid and dumb and consider it a good deed that these wanderers were Christianised and civilized. The idea of simple souls can't be correct, because it does not fit the picture of the people who made or had votive stones manufactured.

The fact that Nehalennia was compared to Lady Holle shows clearly how a goddess of prestige was given a different, somewhat macabre identity under the influence of Christianity.

Times in which Christian missionaries were very active must have been difficult in the current German territory, because it appears that many artefacts that were dedicated to Nehalennia have been produced on that very soil. Large Rhineland workshops where votive stones or altars with texts and reliefs were made, were located in Cologne, Xanten and Bingen, among others.<sup>117</sup>



*A book illustration from: Das Buch von der Frau Holle, 1903.<sup>118</sup>*

There are two sides to Grimm's stories. It is possible that he wanted to tell us something about this ancient goddess in his lifetime and used stories to do so at a moment when Catholicism was rampant. Fairytales may then have been a safe way to preserve old ideas. More authors did that, because in various old stories a depth can be found that at certain times could not be discussed, as in the medieval epic about Reinaert de Vos, who in English speaking countries is known as Reynaert the Fox. In it, commentaries on worldly corruption and hypocrisy are concealed in expressions of talking animals. Clergy are mocked in that story and the greed of

the nobility is denounced. That which was not allowed to say openly could sometimes be incorporated into a story. Perhaps Grimm also wanted to tell us something and tried to preserve that as history in fairytale form? With regard to Grimm, the reverse is also possible, for by turning an important goddess into a fairytale creature, he may have consciously contributed to the denunciation of the old Nehalennia doctrine. After all, nobody wants to believe in fairytales from a religious point of view.

I searched further in Germany and came across Johann Wilhelm Wolf (1817-1855), who had grown up in a strict Catholic environment and later wrote a book about German theology. His book didn't help me either. He related Nehalennia to the goddess Nirdu, who the Romans had come to know through the Germanics and who was worshipped through the symbol of a ship called Isis.<sup>119</sup> There is a dot to connect to this goddess, but under a different name. I will come back to that later in this book. Still, Wolf did hold on to the opinion that Nehalennia would be a typical goddess of Zeeland.

Grimm also played a somewhat curious role in this connection, because all the names he used were of gods and goddesses and Nirdu's was included in them. German, Scandinavian and Latin denominations got mixed up, revealing a path and footprints followed by various researchers.<sup>120</sup> Because that track has been checked so many times, I decided to set my own course. Theories about the ancient Germanics as founders of the religion around Nehalennia did not get me any further. The Germans were the ones who exchanged their ancient religion for a solar service, whereas the Celtic peoples continued to prefer the water and moon service.<sup>121</sup> From this alone it can be concluded that the Celts continued to worship Nehalennia while the Germanics made her disappear to the background.

It was Jacob Burckhart (1818-1897), a prominent art historian, who reported that Nehalennia was not only a water goddess of the Netherlands, but also of France.<sup>122</sup> At least his research went a bit further than vague fairytale descriptions and Catholic indoctrinated thoughts of fellow countrymen. In France I wanted to continue my search, but I was busy because we had only just emigrated.

## 11. A Message from the Goddess?

During our emigration process I did not have the time to delve deeper into the background of Nehalennia. We had just settled into our French home, but renovation and construction work demanded attention. We really liked the fact that we had moved to France, but the future needed to be further created and shaped, which meant that I ran out of time. Every day I helped with odd jobs until late in the evening. Anyone who is just emigrated, is also confronted with a lot of regulation that requires attention and in France this also entails a lot of time-consuming paperwork. All kinds of forms had to be filled in, we had to make sure our car got a French license plate, needed to apply for building permits and had to learn and discover exactly how the French tax authorities worked. Every day was filled with activities and although I often thought about my Nehalennia quest, I didn't have the energy to do research and continue writing.

And then suddenly something strange happened...

On the night of May 18, 2018 it was pitch dark outside. We then had lived in France for almost six months. I was in my office answering some e-mails that needed attention.

Hendrik decided to take our old dog for a walk just before going to sleep and I heard him calling our dog and rattling the dog leash. They walked out together and he closed the front door. Within minutes the front door flew open and I heard Hendrik calling from our hallway: *"Demi, there is something strange outside. Hurry up!"* I ran outside and looked at the forests and mountains that surround our house.

*"Not there, Demi,"* said Hendrik, while pointing to the sky. *"Over there!"*

I looked up and instinctively dived behind a bush because what I saw shocked me. In the air sat a low-hanging, snow-white mist, in the shape of a complete angel. It was so mega-big that at first I found it incredibly overwhelming. The sky was dark, but clear. Because we live on a side of a mountain, we can see far and nowhere were there clouds visible. It was clearly an angel. Bone white. This being seemed to communicate

with us through subtle arm movements. Every part of me froze because this was so overwhelming. I simply could not comprehend what I was seeing. Arms, legs, a robe, wings, a head and something carried in one hand, a kind of stick or lance.

I dashed inside, grabbed my camera from the table and ran back outside, where I took a seat next to Hendrik on the steps that lead to a raised part of our garden. I tried to take pictures of this phenomenon but my camera froze. I swapped the battery for a fully charged one, but I still couldn't take a picture. My camera turned on, but as soon as I pointed the lens at the sky, the device switched off and none of its buttons worked.

*"Leave that camera alone. Take a good look! This is not normal,"* said Hendrik. *"We may never see anything like this again."*

We gazed at the sky for fifteen minutes. Then the wings became butterfly-like, the sharply defined nebula changed into a dove shape and everything was gone in one fell swoop. Disconcerted we went inside and we spent a long time in bed that night talking and speculating about what exactly we had seen.

I decided that this was one of those events that I would rather share only in my own small circle of friends. Anyone who has not seen what we saw would surely conclude that with a rich imagination we had perceived a shape in a cloud. I know that many other people have these kinds of experiences, but we now live in a world where it is no longer possible to talk about it so openly. Still, the experience continued to occupy me.

Hendrik and I do not believe that this was just any nebula, it was too different for that and was too clearly a humanoid shape. We decided to consider the experience as a special moment we had shared together and we let it rest.

About two months after this event, however, the story was continued. We were invited by a French friend to watch a performance by the band in which he plays drums. It had been a hot day and the band played in a small hall for a modest audience. It was fun and when the musicians took a break after an hour, we walked outside. I wanted to smoke a cigarette, Hendrik walked with me to cool off. At dusk we got to talk to an Englishman who lives here in the area and who had been invited by the band's singer to attend the performance.

Fate decided that the Englishman, who travelled through the Pyrenees in his camper van, a quarter of a century ago, should stay here. His camper broke down and came to a standstill. During the repairs he was offered a job and met the love of his life. He never left the Languedoc region again.

A nice conversation started covering many subjects that are more often a topic of conversation here. Every stone exudes spirituality and there are so many special places that attract people and scream for further investigation. The feeling of *needing to live* here is recognizable for many immigrants that have landed in this area. I had recently spoken about this with an Australian couple who had sold their entire belongings for a new life on a French mountain.

The conversation turned in a direction whereby we talked about the spirits of Druids seen here from time to time. I had also seen them in the *Forêt des Fanges*, a large forest in the mountains. In addition, I had already spoken several times to paranormally sensitive people who also had observed Druids in the most diverse places in the Pyrenees.

*"I've seen a White Lady here,"* replied the Englishman.

We got goosebumps when he took out his cell phone and showed us a photo of the angel shape he had observed in late November 2006 in Perpignan in the evening, when he was sitting on a terrace with his wife and two daughters. We had seen the same phenomena that he had witnessed. I told him I tried to take pictures too but my camera kept freezing.

*"My camera also froze,"* he responded, *"I then tried it with my flip-flop phone, you know, an old fashioned one. It worked!"*

We agreed that we would talk about it extensively again later, and an appointment followed.

The Englishman then came to our house with his wife and we had an open conversation, in which he said that seeing the angel shape had opened all kinds of doors for him. Suddenly he saw more than before. He also saw things that other people did not see and that had already given him all kinds of insights. Working for *National Geographic* as a driver for a while, he had guided several documentary makers to special places in this region. During the off times in recording, he had noticed that he spontaneously saw the deeper meaning of old paintings or of statues that stood in those locations. Ever since this angel's appearance, all sorts of things came down his path related to a book he was writing.

That was recognizable to me, because although I was preparing a book about Nehalennia, I experienced the same and received clues from unexpected quarters. This Englishman himself was an example of this, because how coincidental was it that we had started talking to him during that night of the performance and that he, his wife, children had seen such a similar appearance in the sky as us?

I thought about it a lot later. Getting paranormal impressions was familiar for me, because I have had those experiences since I was young, but the strange thing was that I suddenly got completely different impressions, which were uncommon to me. Suddenly I knew certain things. My dreams also changed. So it seemed as if that angels appearance had activated something in me too. I kept feeling something, a guiding force. For me that was a somewhat strange sensation, partly because I was not raised in a religious way. While I have experienced bizarre coincidences at times, I have never considered them to be an intervention of a deity. The angel apparition made me feel more strongly that what we had seen could have something to do with my research. I couldn't define the experience and all I felt was that this angel was conveying a distinctly feminine energy, and so did Hendrik.

Was there a need to interpret this as a sign of goddess Nehalennia? Did this have anything to do with this old religion? It raised questions, because can a goddess even just be wiped away if a group thinks she should disappear or because another god is considered more important? If such a goddess really exists, that does not seem possible to me. It made me realize that people in the old days were incentivized to forget about their religion and that they may have been told that their goddess was nothing more than a fairytale figure, but that if the goddess really existed, she couldn't have just disappeared because of that. Did this goddess still exist? It seemed as if my experience in the church of Bugarach had triggered something in me, which was then activated by the angelic apparition. I even started to wonder if those profound experiences had anything to do with a past life. Sitting in the garden and looking at our house, I also wondered if this might be an unconscious reason why I had felt the urge to emigrate to France. And I knew one thing for sure and that is that I absolutely wanted to live in this area? Some people are real Francophiles, but I am not. If this area had been in Germany or Sweden, I would have moved there. It is this place in particular that appealed to me, but also to Hendrik. If that was linked to Nehalennia, it also explained why we had moved from Brabant to Zeeland earlier, where Nehalennia also had a clear presence, but above all had been forgotten. I will never forget the power of the angelic apparition, nor my first visit to the church of Bugarach. But I did start to wonder what this goddess was capable of.

Was she looking for contact?

Was this an incentive?

And where else should I look for traces of this forgotten religion?

## 12. The Mosaic in Nîmes

I decided to resume my research as soon as possible. I felt two things started to mingle. I had to research information, especially in old books, but there was also knowledge given to me in a less common way, perhaps because I am the last in the women's line as a consciously child-free woman. Of course spirituality has an important place in my life and I like to fathom why certain things happen and what their deeper meaning is, but with my findings in Bugarach and the angel apparition as a guideline I did not get very far. A

part of that is suggestive and interpreted on the basis of my assumptions. Besides that, I had planned to write a book full of ancient facts that could be supported by evidence or literature. There are already enough spiritual books and I wanted to disregard what was passed on to me by less common means.

The experiences encouraged me to dive into the French archives. I simply felt that the goddess was well known in France, and if so, that there must be traces left. It felt like a duty to investigate and prove this.

A first important point of reference was the mosaic mentioned earlier in the Occitaine city of Nîmes, located in the department of Gard. That would have carried an image that has been interpreted by the French as a representation of Nehalennia, while many Dutch researchers at the time said it had nothing to do with this goddess. Nîmes is a large, busy city about 250 kilometers from my French hometown. If people there previously knew about the existence of the goddess it would certainly be a good starting point for further investigation.

Was that mosaic a reference to Nehalennia or not? The French thought so, the Dutch claimed not. Who was right?

It forces us to go back a little more than three centuries in time...

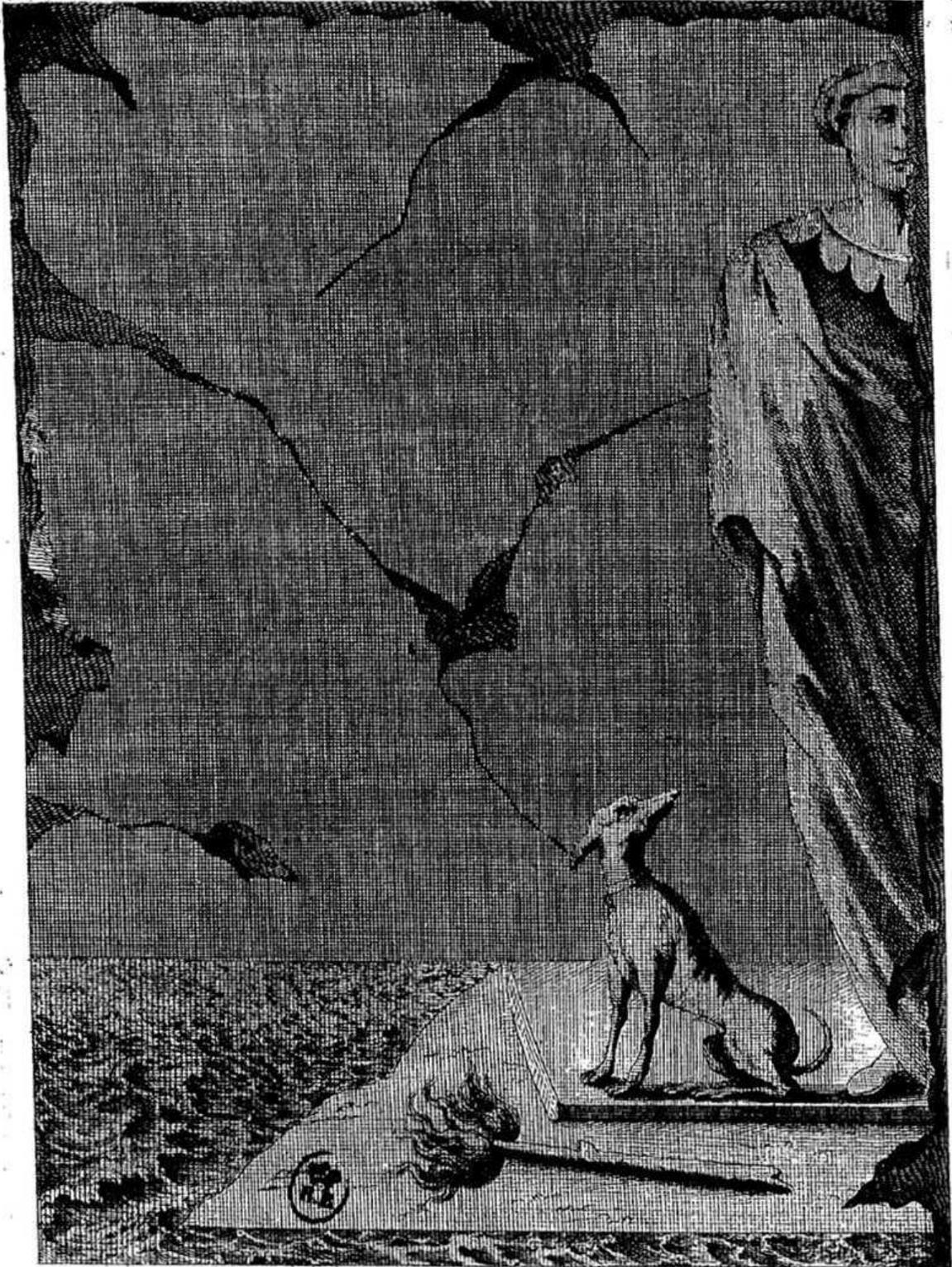
Anyone who bought an older house in Nîmes at that time often stumbled on antiquities. Some of these finds were decayed mosaics, which were made of marble or stone of various colours. Usually they were square or rectangular and very difficult to remove. Just as in other parts of Europe antique tiles have been removed that people now want to buy and pay a lot of money for, people who lived at that time in Nîmes also decided that they wanted to modernize their homes. Anyone who bought a house with a damaged or decayed mosaic simply dug it out or cut it away. Of course, a lot of heritage has been destroyed as a result of that.

Mosaics from different periods have been found in Nîmes. Many of those stone works of art have been found in places where beautiful houses had stood. Sometimes such coloured stones had been part of a bath. In ancient times, people mainly visited bathhouses in centrally located places with facilities that were intended for everyone. A private bath with a mosaic was thus a very desirable luxury.

François Graverol also found such a mosaic in the country house he had bought in Nîmes. Graverol was not just anyone. He was a lawyer in the parliament of Toulouse and scientific director of the Academy in Nîmes. He is also described in texts as an accomplished historian and experienced antique dealer. He had studied Greek and is still praised in France for the historical texts he wrote.<sup>123</sup> Graverol thought that the mosaic he found was so remarkable that he sent a letter to Jean Ciampini in Rome on February 4, 1686.<sup>124</sup> Ciampini was an Italian attached to the Council. He was mainly occupied with writing dissertations about monastic buildings and other structures full of antiquities.<sup>125</sup>

The mosaic Graverol had discovered consisted of white, black and red and showed a woman in a white dress standing on the shore of the rough sea. A greyhound sat by her feet and a flaming torch was depicted at the base. According to French historians, the rendering clarified that not only the Zeelanders, but also the inhabitants of Nîmes gave thanks to Nehalennia when they had escaped from a shipwreck or survived a violent storm at sea. In Nîmes this was apparently done by means of such a work of art, it was assumed.

Because the mosaic was badly damaged, later French researchers looked at the ancient texts of writers from days gone by who had published a few things about that mosaic. It was probably manufactured by a native of Nîmes who had survived the waves of the rough seas after a storm or shipwreck.<sup>126</sup> The lady standing along the coast in a typical Nehalennia posture and clothing, with a dog, undoubtedly depicted by the French the goddess that was so long ignored.<sup>127</sup> It was simply considered plausible that the person who had made the mosaic, or had it made, had thanked Nehalennia in this way for saving his life. Although this piece of art was not marked with the name Nehalennia, as was often the case on votive stones in Zeeland, it was easy to see that this woman could represent a depiction of the goddess. She had the same hairstyle which was clearly parted in the middle and she had her hair rolled up. That was a hairstyle with which Nehalennia was often depicted.



*P. Moreau sculp.*

*A drawing of the mosaic found in Nîmes.<sup>128</sup>*

Incidentally, more such mosaics of different sizes were discovered in Nîmes, always in black, red and white. Nor did it stop with this one reference to Nehalennia, because on June 14, 1750, a pavement of cube-shaped marble stones that were perfectly connected to each other was discovered near the fountain of Nîmes. The whole consisted of nine compartments. The middle compartment showed a man dressed in green with a carriage pulled by horses. Another compartment showed a bust of a veiled woman whose throat was covered with a flame, and two other compartments showed a head covered with a light drape of leaves and flowers.<sup>129</sup> Did the image of that veiled woman had anything to do with Nehalennia?

In the Netherlands the mosaic found in Graverol's mansion was discussed, and there was a lot of debate about the torch depicted on it. Okay, the greyhound, the woman in the white dress and the sea were symbols of Nehalennia, but the Dutch had the opinion that a symbol of a torch simply did not match the goddess and said that the find in Nîmes had to be seen as a representation of another lady.

What is special about this position is that Nehalennia is also sometimes depicted in the Netherlands with a dog and a torch. However, when a researcher thought he saw similarities in such an image with the goddess of hunting, Diana, it was abruptly dismissed,<sup>130</sup> while now that torch appeared in an image possibly of the goddess in France, this subject was suddenly used to argue that it could therefore not be a representation of Nehalennia. There was clearly a double standard!

On the contrary, French scholars considered that torch an appropriate symbol, for it expressed, according to them, that Nehalennia, in her capacity as a moon, showed herself only at night, as soon as daylight disappeared.<sup>131</sup> As a result, the French continued to regard the mosaic as an item related to Nehalennia, while the Dutch bellowed that they were doing so wrongly.

At the time of the find, the French thought it was a bit strange that the torch was made from a branch and that is of course quite weird. However, I had to chuckle when I discovered a drawing of the mosaic. That much-discussed torch is not a fire torch at all, but a bulrush, which in terms of symbolism can be directly related to Nehalennia. In the next chapter I will clarify why I make that relationship.

### 13. The Bulrush

Nehalennia was known in France and there clearly connected with the marriage between man and woman. Several legends have been recorded about this. In central France there were a number of ancient customs related to the goddess. In the early centuries of Christianity, every bride had to kneel by a statue of Saint Anna or her daughter Mary, make three signs of the cross and walk a short distance. The Gauls, however, did not believe in the Christian Virgin and Saint Anna, because Nehalennia predominated them. After a consummated marriage, a Gallic bride was immediately led to a statue of Nehalennia.<sup>132</sup> Such a veiled statue of the goddess in her white dress, accompanied by a dog and a fruit basket, stood in a *grove*. The old word *grove* refers to trees with a striking thickening in the trunk in which an opening has formed. Such an opening must have been regarded in ancient times as a sacred natural hollow.

In the presence of the statue, the bride was then given a bulrush that was wrapped with hemp. The bulrush may not mean anything to you, but you have probably seen it. It is a shoreline plant consisting of a stem with a brown cigar-shaped end. By wrapping such a bulrush with long hemp leaves, a Nehalennia wand was created. And this item is exactly what we see in the mosaic of Nîmes! The supposed torch is not a torch at all, but clearly a branch. The fact that it is a flaming object is purely based on an interpretation that could not be drawn on the basis of, for example, yellow or orange tones, because the mosaic consisted only of the colours red, white and black. Moreover, it also doesn't make sense that it is a burning torch lying there on the ground, as is the case in the picture. The fire would behave differently, because flames would not all point flat to the ground in a longitudinal direction.

It is not surprising that a bulrush is confused with a fire torch. The flower spikes of this plant are torch-shaped. If you look closely at the bulrush, you will see a yellow spike on the cigar-shaped top that carries the male

pollen. The female part of the plant protects her seeds well in the brown cob, so that they do not get wet when it rains. It is a plant that mainly grows along rivers and purifies water. Anyone who soaks such a woolly cigar in oil or another combustible substance when the seed is ripe can use the plant as a torch. Dutch nicknames of the fruit spikes of the plant are therefore *cane cigar* or *torch* and the dried spikes were even used to be smoked by boys like a cigar, which seemed to stink terrible.<sup>133</sup>

The plant unites male and female power, water and fire, protects the female part well, can give light in darkness and unites purity. As a result, the bulrush was once thought to be an ideal plant for marriage. The fact that the plant was wrapped in hemp fits completely with that symbolism, because hemp is especially flexible and strong. So anyone who asked the goddess for a marriage blessing with such a wand of bulrush and hemp, asked her to preserve these forces of flexibility and cooperative partnership within the marriage and hoped to receive her light in dark times.

In addition, people in the past did not regard the bulrush as an ornamental plant that looks nice in vases and flower arrangements. It was also not at all pleasant to place the stems with their cigar shapes in the house. Such a cob can burst open with the result that thousands of silver threads fall on the floor that are difficult to remove. When such a thick brown cob breaks open outside in the fall or winter, the thousands of seeds travel on white, fuzzy hairs across the earth in the wind. That travelling aspect has probably also been associated with the goddess, for Nehalennia was also considered a goddess of travellers.

The bulrush was especially liked for practical reasons. Very earlier, but also in wartime, pillows and beds were filled with the fluff from the plant, because it is very similar to kapok. The down was then pulled out of the cobs with forked sticks.<sup>134</sup> The fiber yield was very high, as much as 33%. The coots built nests with it, and the leaves and stems were also collected by humans to serve as inexpensive cover material for farmhouse roofs and barns.<sup>135</sup> Due to the composition of starch and sugar, parts of the plant used to be processed into animal feed.<sup>136</sup> The remains also functioned well as bedding in stables. And the bulrush was medicinal, for it was beneficial for those who suffered from chilblains.<sup>137</sup> I came across all kinds of things when I dug into information about the use of bulrushes. They made baskets for playing games with it, prepared salads from the young roots and used the pollen or dried ground roots as flour in baking for bread and cakes. Looking at old names given to the plant, it appears that it has also been used to wash jugs, brush spouts and polish lamps. For women, the bulrush was therefore a symbol of domestic virtues and therefore also well suited to marriage, because Nehalennia was said to protect interiors and households, with a veil of modesty and a dog as an image of loyalty.

In any case, the bulrush was clearly a plant that suited Nehalennia. With a bulrush you could survive in all kinds of ways and the plant was also useful for all kinds of practical purposes that were important in and around the house at the time. In France, the bulrush was therefore linked to Nehalennia, especially when it was wrapped with hemp leaves. Not only from folklore it became clear to me that the goddess played a role in the wedding ceremony, but also in a French dictionary dating from 1866 it is described that Nehalennia was the goddess of the partners.<sup>138</sup>

We no longer know the symbolic powers of the bulrush, for practical household matters because we now mainly use plastic objects and we have also forgotten the combination of the bulrush with Nehalennia or with building our own nest. What we have probably kept from the Nehalennia cult is getting married in a white dress. During marriage, many women still dress in white and are veiled just like Nehalennia.

With all this in mind, let's return for a moment to the mosaic in Nîmes. The interpretation that the mosaic was made at the request of a seafarer rescued from death is from my opinion not correct. It is much more likely that it was a wedding present that a man had made or ordered for his wife. It is quite possible that that man was aware of a ritual with the bulrush at that time. Spinning a bulrush after the wedding was a ritual that has been performed in France for a long time. It was certainly used until the 16th century, even by very chic ladies.

Various French books describe all kinds of things about ancient wedding rituals. The same elements always return. One is that a veiled statue of Nehalennia was placed in a small forest.<sup>139</sup> The dog that was depicted with the goddess probably symbolized marriage fidelity at the time and the fruit the hope of an abundance of happiness. And always was mentioned that bulrush that was given to the bride so that she could wrap it around with hemp, a ritual by which heaven would bless her and the companions she was going to take care of.



I found the link mentioned in some sources between Nehalennia, Saint Anna and her daughter Mary, quite interesting because they indicate a sequence of worship. The Gauls worshipped Nehalennia who existed first, and since Christianisation her role has been taken over by Anna and her daughter who, according to the Bible story, was the mother of Jesus.

When we were invited by an acquaintance of ours, who had a vocal recital in an old church in Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes, accompanied by a harpist, I studied the symbols I saw in the old church during the performance. *L'église de la Nativité de Notre-Dame*, literally translated: *The Church of the Nativity of Our Lady*, is entirely dedicated to Saint Anna and her daughter Mary. I was curious if Nehalennia still had a place there. And yes, I thought I saw her and it was like she was waving to me. "Hello, yeah, here I am. I'm still a bit disguised and inconspicuous, just like in Bugarach."

A relief panel depicts a waving bride, leaning on an anchor. In addition to this relief, decorations are made, consisting of golden branches with brown coloured heads on top. I consider those decorations as subtle references to the bulrush.

## 14. The Nehalennia Tree in Altrier

Nehalennia has been purposefully wiped out after the rise of Christianity. She has not only been talked out of people's minds, but also torn from their hearts. Proof of this can be found in the Luxembourg town of Altrier. There, in a forest, close to a road, is an ancient oak that was written about in 1899.<sup>140</sup> The tree is still there and carries a statue of Mary in the opening of the grove. In the past, these were the places where Gauls performed their wedding rituals, among other things, as you have read in the previous chapter. For a long time in the Netherlands, these types of trees were known by the name *Old Tree*, which referred to trees with a hollow in which pagan ancestors placed sacrifices or statues.<sup>141</sup>

The statue of the Virgin Mary has clearly replaced the statue of Nehalennia in Altrier. All around this oak are statues of goddesses found during excavations. Most of these artworks were broken and buried together, showing that someone had knowingly destroyed them. A preserved statue shows goddess Nehalennia, depicted in white terracotta, seated and wearing a pleated dress. She has a belt and has a band around her head and a dog sitting on her knee. The fact that this statue was not broken, while statues of other goddesses had been cut to pieces, indicates how important Nehalennia must have been. The destroyer clearly had no trouble smashing the other statues to pieces, but wanted to spare Nehalennia. So something in him believed in her strength, which made him decide to keep her whole and to bury her near the tree where she was venerated. Those who knew about this could possibly still secretly pay tribute to the goddess.

The oak is still there and so is the statue of the Virgin Mary. Every year a Mary-procession takes place that leads to the oak. It is galling that Christians have reshaped ancient rituals like this and started practicing their own religion at powerful pagan worship sites. It is also unfair that Nehalennia had to disappear to make way for Mary. After all, this was not a process of natural change because it was imposed.

Stone coffins, urns, coins and rings have been found in the vicinity of this site, as was also the case in other places of worship of the goddess. In 1820 three Nehalennia statuettes were excavated in Altrier.<sup>142</sup> Later, no fewer than around five hundred small statues were found in the soil in this place in Luxembourg, all representing Nehalennia.<sup>143</sup> Despite this, the tunnel vision of some researchers led to the conclusion that no traces of a Nehalennia religion had been discovered here and it was assumed that Altrier had been a location of a factory where these types of figurines were made. This bias is a result of not putting the goddess in context and not having enough empathy to understand the religion that had developed itself around this goddess. She was in fact also connected to the sea by all these researchers and therefore they did not consider Altrier a suitable place for Nehalennia. The researchers simply did not realize that her reach was much larger. They also searched diligently for a temple that they could not find. It was forgotten that such temples were often either destroyed by Christians or made of wood, so that they would have decayed over time. In addition, many pagans viewed the forests as their cathedrals, so the lack of temple remains do not necessarily prove that the goddess was not worshipped there at all. Most researchers did not see the connection with the special oak, which used to be so important to Nehalennia worshippers.

Altrier has certainly been a place where statues of the goddess were made, but it is a bit stupid to think that people at that location did not have much to do with the goddess. That is just as illogical as saying that in Lourdes plaster statues of a holy virgin are sold, while no one in the area would believe in her.

Nowadays religious statues are also made in countries where hourly wages are lower and it is possible to order such statues through Chinese discounters, for example. In the past it was unthinkable to create images of a goddess that no one believed in. That would soon have become work that nobody wanted to do. After all, carvers were deeply religious people who performed a sacred task.

Other finds in the border area between Germany and Luxembourg indicate that images of Nehalennia were made more often in that region. For example, the ancient Romans had a camp in Dalheim, Germany, which was located about ten kilometers from Luxembourg on a vast plateau called *Castra Dalheimiana*. It was a place where several sources were found and the camp was located on the Roman road that ran from Metz to

Trier. Historians first talked about this place in 1636 and several excavations were organized there in 1851 and 1855.<sup>144</sup> contained?

Mosaic paving was found in Dalheim and also a vaulted burial vault containing an ash-filled urn. This cellar was located in an underground space that led from the church in Dalheim to the interior of the Roman camp at that time. This underground gallery had partly collapsed, but a relief of Nehalennia was found and donated to the museum. A small, reddish stone was also found that was probably part of an earring or pin. One side of that stone showed an upright figure and the other side depicted seven faces. The top facet showed a double trident and the six lateral facets had the inscription *M-EMI-NI-E-TA-MO*. They are words from the African Yoruba language that mean: *I am you*.

In 1850, ovens were also discovered here, in which pottery was baked. Camp Dalheim had a ceramic interior that was quite important and finds show that mainly coarse pottery was made. One of the ovens was still partly filled with vases of matt, reddish clay and coarse paste. Tools were also found, intended to create grooves and embellishments in reliefs. A variety of crafted objects were discovered near the ovens, including a stone depicting a goddess sitting in an armchair, which French researchers concluded was Nehalennia. A small statue of Nehalennia was also discovered, probably intended to be worn around the neck as a pendant. This jewel was covered with a glossy blue varnish.<sup>145</sup>

Where I described earlier in **Chapter 13** how in France Nehalennia, Anna and Maria coexisted, and that each person could choose on the basis of their own religion from which image a blessing was requested after a consummated marriage, the tree in Altrier is a good example of how that ultimately went further. There, Nehalennia was destroyed, obliterated and replaced by Mary.

In the distant past, at the present *Mary Tree*, brides turned with a bulrush in front of a statue of Nehalennia to ask the goddess to bless their marriage in awe. But Nehalennia was of course much more than a goddess of marriages, as we know from the finds in Zeeland.

Given the enormous amount of finds referring to Nehalennia in both Altrier, and in the surrounding area, I can only conclude that the goddess was also worshipped expansively in this area.

## 15. The Miracle Statue of Lissewege

The fact that Bruges and Nehalennia have a connection with each other is subtly demonstrated in a poem written by Julius Sabbe, who was born in 1846 in Ghent, Belgium. In that poem, entitled *A Bruges woman*, he wrote: *It is said that that black robe that you wear was already the hood of the Nehalennia*. And later in the poem he called that hood the eternal man who makes her cheeks bloom like apple blossom.<sup>146</sup> These are metaphors that symbolize the moon and dark night.

Nehalennia also had a place in the Templar village Lissewege, which is located below Bruges. In the *Lischput*, which was the name an old creek or pond located there, according to the stories, a statue of the goddess was found by fishermen from the Belgium village Heijst. These fishermen took it to their own village, but it turned out to have disappeared the next day. When they returned to the *Lischput*, it was again on the bank among the reeds. Then they took it a second and a third time, but each time the same thing happened. The fishermen then concluded that a place of worship should be built for Nehalennia on that site.<sup>147</sup>

In Belgium, the bulrush bears the name *dulpijp*, because it was like a pipe that could be smoked for fun. Would many of those plants also have grown around that original creek of Lissewege, Belgium? The *Lischput* was created by natural phenomenon and used to be a remnant of a fracture in the landscape into which water had entered.<sup>148</sup> During my research it gradually became clear to me that Nehalennia was known precisely at these kinds of earthly breaking points and in that sense the *Lischput* and Lissewege have a connection with the worship of Nehalennia in France. The goddess was not only known in France as the *Helennia de l'eau* and because of that associated with water, and as the goddess of marriage, but she was also known as the goddess of the gorges. Her existence was linked to the French word *gouffre*, which means

chasm or abyss. She was therefore sometimes called the *Neha of the gorges* in France.<sup>149</sup> The fact that the miracle statue of Lissewege was found in such a *gorge* and that people started worshipping Nehalennia there, indicates that an association between Nehalennia and this kind of special earthly fracture was also established in Belgium.

Nehalennia's place of worship in Lissewege is said to have consisted of a chapel that soon became too small. The number of pilgrims who flocked to the site was so great that the building soon had to expand to accommodate more people. It is unclear exactly where that shrine was built. It is sometimes mentioned as the famous nearby abbey of *Ter Doest*, although the building more suitable for this seems to be the current *Templar Church* of Lissewege, which is extremely large in size. A manhole cover in this church commemorates the discovery of the miracle statue, although there are also sources that state that the pit was only created later as a reminder of the legend.<sup>150</sup>

The Templar Church does have a number of special features. A striking example is a very old statue of the head of a cat, the so-called *Baphomet head*. Exciting treasure stories are told about the floorplan, which depicts a labyrinth. Ceiling ornaments show symbolism of both the Knights Templar and the Cathars. One such symbol is a dove that is depicted in the same way as the Cathar dove in the South of France. A man who worked in this church told me that different people also read all kinds of secret codes by the way in which the various white statues are arranged in the ridge of the building.

The Templar Church has now mainly become a stopping place for pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostella and still has a miracle statue, but it is not the original. The present image is a representation of Mary, where the original image was Nehalennia, who was venerated in this region.<sup>151</sup> After the teachings of Christ were introduced to people, they would have claimed that the original statue was not Nehalennia, but Mary, perhaps in order to secretly worship Nehalennia. It is also quite possible that the original statue of Nehalennia was a representation of the goddess with a child in her arms and that it therefore resembled The Madonna and child. Nehalennia was traditionally also depicted with a child. This is evident in, among other things, a publication of the diocese of the French Dijon from 1897, in which it is described that on the banks of the Dijenne, a small river, an image had been found showing Nehalennia with a child crawling out of an urn and holding a pointed fruit basket.<sup>152</sup> I will call such a hive, also called a *cornucopia*, the horn of plenty later in this book. It is a real Nehalennia symbol.

There is another link between Nehalennia and Lissewege in Belgium, which I discovered much later during my research, but I would like to mention this briefly in this chapter. Nehalennia was called *Liesse* in a small area of France and worshipped as such in the town of Liesse-Notre-Dame, some 250 kilometers from Lissewege. It concerns a village in the North of France, where the Knights Templar were also active. She was depicted there as the *Virgin of Liesse* and identified with a Black Madonna of the Knights Templar. Black Madonna's wore coats resembling a lampshade and were traditionally covered with precious veils. A French newspaper reported that the real statue of the Black Virgin of Liesse was burned in 1793 and then changed for a statue with a Virgin and Child.<sup>153</sup> It indicates that the later equivalent of Nehalennia, which was called Liesse by certain groups of Templars, was not only the namesake of Liesse-Notre-Dame, but also of Lissewege, formerly known as Liessewege. *Wege* is an old word that can be translated into the word *path*. Liessewege therefore means: *the path of Liesse*.

A few years ago I visited the originally medieval *Light Festival* in Lissewege, which has been reinstated and is celebrated throughout the village. On two consecutive special evenings, that take place annually every August, all streets and village houses are stripped of artificial light. It feels very intimate to walk among the crowds, enjoying the candlelight that burns everywhere and to stroll by stalls selling goodies. During this party, many symbols of light can be seen in the dark, consisting of geometric shapes such as pyramids, towers and wheels that radiate a profound symbolism. There are also arches for visitors to walk under. Flowers of light burn on grassy plains, while artists display objects of light they have created and dancers treat the

visitors with fire rituals.

The highlight of the festival is the moment when the church tower of the great Templar Church is symbolically set on fire. Nowhere is it clear why this is done. It has been said that burning church towers were part of a tradition that says that such high towers used to be used as lighthouses, so that they could function as a navigational point for navigators.<sup>154</sup> Still, the question is whether they have been used for that at all. In any case the church of Lissewege did not serve as such.

Could it then have another reason why a symbolic fire was started in the tower during the Festival of Light in Lissewege? The party is an ode to the moon, because at that moment this celestial body can throw its radiant projection fully on the village, without being disturbed by any artificial light. Many houses in this village are white and they almost glow in the dark.

During the party, a bride adorned with lights invariably wanders through the village streets in a long white dress. She is called the *Bride of Light* and that again seems not only to confirm that Nehalennia played an important role in the lives of brides, but also shows that she was revered in this region in the past. The original root of this white bride is most likely a reference to Nehalennia.

With regard to the religion surrounding the goddess, an explanation for the burning church could be that the building at that time was just as much a navigation tool as Nehalennia and the moon, although that is not propagated as such in Lissewege. It seems that the *Bride of Light* represents a goddess who is drawn to the town by the light beacon of the church tower, which is popularly called the *White Polder Village* or *Templar Village*.

Perhaps this festival of light was originally a symbolic, raised middle finger that conveyed that people had no interest in all the Christian rituals and that they still remembered Nehalennia in this village? After all, this place was once a location where, according to stories, an important status was attributed to Nehalennia and a village where the goddess had asked for a place of worship by means of a miracle statue.

## 16. The Mont-Hélanus

If the goddess previously played a major role in human lives, then more must be known about how she was worshipped, because she was clearly not only a goddess of marriage and of light in the dark. However, I could find very little about that in Dutch texts that was not speculative. During my initial search I hoped to learn a bit more about it and that led me after some research to a special mountain in France.

In the least populated French department of Lozère, located in north-east Occitania, lies Mont-Hélanus, a mountain that holds a large lake, named *Lac de Saint-Andéol*.

Every year, many people came to this mountain to throw linen and cloth for men's clothing in the mountain water. Three days were then celebrated and on the fourth day the same natural phenomenon always occurred which was characterised by enormous showers of rain and hailstones. This change of weather was accompanied by thunder and lightning, from which the visitors could barely escape.<sup>155</sup>

It is said in French texts that the people who came to this place, especially for this event, belonged to a special ancient cult of followers who paid homage to water and fountains.<sup>156</sup> The natural phenomenon of hailstones and rain on the closing day of the festivities is said to have diminished when a Christian Bishop of Mende built a chapel there, which he dedicated to Saint-Hilaire. The Church therefore did everything in its power to suppress this water ritual, among other things, by creating its own place of miracles, but based on Christian ideas. Praying to the rosary or bathing there would be enough to experience wonders.

Yet up until the 19th century there were people who came to this place to pay homage to the water and the moon.<sup>157</sup> This originally pagan ritual clearly turned out to be difficult to stop. A Frenchman named Dr. Prudières attended this lake festival for several years in a row after 1860.<sup>158</sup> He described how thousands of believers turned out to plunge into the water and threw things into it, from bandages that covered wounds to conjunctival protective cloth worn on their eyes against the painful influence of light. Bottles were filled with

water, because it was said that it was on those days that the water received extra healing power and thus became beneficial to use as eye drops. All kinds of things were offered into the lake, so cheese, bread, cakes and coins sank to the bottom of it. The pilgrims prayed together, took a bath, and washed themselves in the mountain water while reciting secret incantations. They circled the lake in processions. Afterwards, people ate and danced on the grass.

With a smile on my face I studied the sources in which this special celebration was discussed. Talking about life in the mountains, eating all kinds of goodies people brought along and then playing music at the end, I recognize from the meetings in our French living environment. Hendrik and I are regularly invited by French friends to participate in pleasant evenings in deserted mountain areas. That always has something magical and appeals to the human sense of togetherness that most French people like to embrace. We always like those days very much and they may be a relic of old times that is still in the blood of the French.

The rituals and festivities at Mont-Hélanus were unstoppable and it became clear that they had also been performed there for a long time as in 1953 remains of a Gallo-Roman temple were located there.<sup>159</sup> So traditionally, it had been a sacred place for a long time. A burial mound has also been discovered, a so-called *tumulus*.

We can at least read from the rituals of these believers something about the way in which followers of Nehalennia also shaped events, but I also had the suspicion that this *Hélanus-mountain* and the religion around Nehalennia had something to do with each other. That this assumption is correct, was confirmed the French author Jacques Martin (1684-1751). According to him, the moon was worshipped on the mountain of Hélanus in a similar way as was the case at the French Island of Sein.<sup>160</sup> I will come back to that island later, because it was certainly a location where Nehalennia was honoured.

It is therefore noticeable that Nehalennia was especially extensively worshipped in remote places. Anyone who wanted to feel the goddess, travelled consciously to special, isolated locations to gather there with other believers. The fact that people sought healing at Mont-Hélanus and wanted answers to questions must have actually succeeded, otherwise this ritual would not have lasted for centuries. People knew that there was something to be found near this mountain that made the journey worthwhile.

That there was a French cult that donated offerings at lakes and fountains I found very interesting in relation to my research. In the book *Histoire générale de Languedoc*, published around 1840, it is stated that at that time such water worship was still common in the Pyrenees, where gold and silver coins were thrown into rivers and mountain streams and where cursing or complaining in the vicinity of lakes was avoided.<sup>161</sup> As an example, he cited the *Massif de Tabe* in the Ariège, which is located in the French Pyrenees in the town of Foix. That is a place where there are two lakes, where it was said that if you threw anything in it, there would erupt such rage that you would be consumed by lightning and fire. A small chapel was located in that area which made me frown again when I read about it. Whoever lit a fire in it could have remarkable encounters if the night was spent there. This is also reminiscent of the burning church tower of Lissewege and says something about the idea that the goddess in the darkness could be invoked with fire.

It is not inconceivable that that chapel in Foix was also a Nehalennia place. According to Gregory of Tours, a historian of the Languedoc, the location in Foix was exactly comparable to that of Mont-Hélanus.<sup>162</sup> Since Hélanus was the same kind of place as the Island of Sein, these are clear references that these were places of worship of the goddess. What's special in this context is that the mountain in Foix bears the nickname *Massif de la Frau*; the mountain of the woman.

*But who is that woman?*

Does this actually points to Nehalennia? Mountains and lakes were of great spiritual importance to pagan cults as far back as early antiquity, but is there any more evidence in these French mountains leading to a revered goddess in a white dress?

## 17. The Notre Dame de Laval

Ever since we lived in France, we sometimes took a break in the church grounds of the *Église Notre-Dame de Laval* in Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes, which is located in the same village as the church I mentioned in **Chapter 13**, where a wall panel with a woman wearing a flowing outfit can be seen, with a subtle reference to the bulrush next to it.

The *Notre-Dame de Laval* is located in the outskirts of the village and is an old church, which has been rebuilt several times. In the grounds there are beautiful walking paths between trees and shrubs, where a wonderful serene energy can be felt. I always like to go there.

During the *Journées Européennes du Patrimoine*, the church was open for a weekend and we received a personal tour of the building from a guide. The church is clearly related to the Knights Templar and contains various symbolisms thereof, including an oracle head found on the site, about which much can be read in ancient texts. Such a sculpture of a head was not only used by the Knights Templar as a speaking head that could transmit or reveal information, but also had a ceremonial function in their initiation rituals. That is the reason why such an oracle head has often been found at Templar churches, as is also the case with the church in Lissewege and in *Our dear Lady Church* in Bruges.

After climbing the narrow staircase in the church tower, we ended up on an octagonal platform that has a direct view of the special mountain of Bugarach. An octagon is a reference to the Holy Grail in coded Templar script. The elderly man who gave us the tour told us that the church had been rebuilt and renewed, but confirmed to me that it was originally an old Templar church.

The church has a beautifully designed altar, with small plaster statues and reliefs, which together depict an unusual scene. When the Bible was compiled, a number of scriptures were omitted, some deliberately and some unknowingly. These texts are called *Apocrypha* and are mostly written by the early Christians. Thus, such texts are only *non-sacred* because the compilers and designers of the Bible thought they did not belong in the New Testament. Reasons for this were diverse. Sometimes the writings were so similar to other texts that they added nothing. As an author, I know that writing also means 'scrapping' and you have to 'kill some darlings' to convey a story. From an ecclesiastical point of view, there have also been texts that people preferred to keep secret or of which it was decided to only make them known to a limited group. This has partly to do with the spirit of the times. The status of men was higher among the Romans than that of women. This was reinforced when the Romans started spreading and shaping Christianity. That is why, for example, the role of Mary Magdalene was shifted to the background. Meanwhile, extensive books have been published about the relationship she had with Jesus and that she really was his most beloved apostle. She is said to have travelled to the Languedoc region and preached on the southern French soil.

Another example of a document kept from the Bible is the *Gospel of James*, the oldest surviving version of which dates from the fourth century. The text consists of twenty-five short chapters and is about Joachim and Anna, a well-to-do devout couple. The pair bears one shame and that is that they are unable to have children. Joachim decides to make a sacrifice in a temple, but it is refused. Anna goes to her garden and there complains about her childlessness. Then suddenly an angel appears and tells Anna that she is pregnant. Joachim, returning home, met his pregnant wife at the gate in Jerusalem. The child born later is named Mary and taken to a temple at the age of three, where she is cared for by angels. Eventually, an old man named Joseph becomes Mary's husband. And then after a while a baby descends from a cloud that is in a cave. It is a son who was not conceived through sexual intercourse.

If you take the text literally, you will see that not only was Jesus born of an immaculate conception, but that his mother, Mary, was also a child who had emerged from the immaculate conception of her mother Anna. This apocryphal text is depicted in a comic book style with colourful reliefs and plaster dolls on the wall behind the altar of the *Notre-Dame de Laval*. In that sense it is a beautiful historical memento of an unknown story, but at the same time also a somewhat different looking church monument.



*Presumably, a representation of Nehalennia in Notre-Dame-de Laval in Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes.*

It is my interest in the Knights Templar and my deepening understanding of their underlying religious lines of thought that makes me often quickly recognize symbols of this knighthood. Because Nehalennia and Liesse had been discussed in that context, I was extra alert to symbolism that could be a reference to this goddess. Nehalennia undoubtedly played a role among the Knights Templar in their religious experience and during philosophical reflections. It is something that will be discussed more often in this book. Earlier I had seen a clear reference to Nehalennia at an old *oratory* next to this church, which consists of a dome-shaped building. A relief present in it had immediately caught my attention and at that moment again overwhelmed me with that feeling...

It was an indescribable tingling that reminded me of what I had experienced earlier in the church of Bugarach. Now that we had access to a personal guide, I asked him if he could tell us more about the relief. He replied that he did not know who was depicted on the relief and noted that he thought it was a Templar. However, it was already clear to me straight away that the person shown represents a lady who has several similarities to Nehalennia. The woman is standing on a boat with a shield in her hands and is dressed in a cloak. Her depiction, with a cloth on her head, is also very similar to the way in which Nehalennia is shown on some votive stones. As is always the case, the boat is clearly an *négo*. Nehalennia and her cult were unique, but Nehalennia has sometimes been subtly and unobtrusively preserved and I found this lady on the boat a clear example of this.

It occurred to me again that there might be a connection between Nehalennia, Anna and Mary, because I had also encountered the three when I looked closer at the rituals of the bulrush. If Mary was Anna's daughter, could it be that Anna was Nehalennia's daughter? And that Nehalennia could be the grandmother of the biblical Mary? It was a thought that I quickly put aside. If there were such a clear connection, the goddess as such would have been preserved, because Mary's mother Anna is also still worshipped in various churches. Anna, and especially Mary, have simply supplanted Nehalennia after the Christian conversion.

I regularly thought about the relief stone of the woman with the boat from the *Notre Dame de Laval* and thought it was quite a discovery. How coincidental is it that disguised references to Nehalennia have been preserved in two churches in Caudiès? I knew I had unearthed another trail.

Where I previously thought that my search for Nehalennia would mainly be a quest in the ancient literature, it seemed that all kinds of places that are located not far from us, especially as the crow flies, referred directly to the goddess. That again placed the white apparition we had witnessed in a Nehalennia light, because what if that strange experience did really have something to do with Nehalennia? Could it then be that such manifestations occur more easily here, because this goddess has long been loved in this environment? Is that also a reason why rituals such as at Mont-Hélanus were so difficult to suppress? Has her presence in Occitane territory continued to be felt and seen?

I decided to attune my whole being to Nehalennia and to search on every trip for symbolism that could be related to the goddess. And I also decided to dig into old books about this environment to see if they could clarify more about her existence. I wanted to subject every finding to close scrutiny.

The mosaic in Nîmes has been erroneously dismissed as not referring to Nehalennia, the torch depicted on it has been misinterpreted and not seen as a bulrush. And that this bulrush, especially in France, was deeply linked to the Nehalennia cult, while that was no longer known in the Netherlands at all, proves that errors in thinking and errors of interpretation have been made regularly. How many other times has that happened?

A lot of questions and thoughts were also buzzing through my mind. Did the stained glass window in Bugarach really depict Nehalennia's boat? Nehalennia is clearly honoured in France with mosaics, and stained glass windows can also be considered glass mosaics. Did those *blue apples*, referred to in the parchments of Rennes-le-Château, and those apples projected during *Pommes Bleues* actually have anything to do with the mystical religion surrounding Nehalennia?

Whenever we drove around in our region, I noticed that there are quite a few place names with *D'Aval* in the name. And suddenly it dawned on me...

Why did the church in Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes bear the name *Notre-Dame-de-Laval*? The village church is mystical and an old name of this place is *Lavail Notre Dame*, which means: *The veil of Our Lady or the veil that covers Our Lady*.<sup>163</sup> Could *Notre-Dame de Laval* be a reference to a *Lady of Aval*? To *Our Lady of Avalon*? Is the name in this way a subtle reference to a goddess who knows the way to Apple Country Avalon?

An interesting detail is that the Celts in Cornwall used the word *Aval* to signify an apple.<sup>164</sup> Was this veiled lady of Avalon perhaps of the same in origin as Nehalennia of the Apple Country and the *guardian of apples*?

## 18. Apple Land Avalon

Before I go any further, let's take a moment to reflect on that mysterious Apple Country called Avalon. According to Christians, somewhere high in heaven lies a wonderful, divine place that believers can enter after death. The Gauls did not believe in such a heavenly paradise. They were convinced that there was another dimension, which could be entered through caves, hills or mountains.<sup>165</sup> It appears from the old epics that anyone who wanted to enter that underworld needed a passport in the form of a silver branch of the sacred apple tree. That could be a branch with blossoms or fruit, or a single apple without a branch. Such apple tree talismans turned out to be the key to unlocking secrets from that other world.<sup>166</sup> Similar stories have also been told about Avalon, the promised land in which there is no age, decline or gloom, and where apples make soothing music. That place is often referred to as an island. In Breton it is called *d'Inys Afalon*, the Island of apples.<sup>167</sup>

The word *apple*, in Dutch *appel*, can be found in all kinds of place names, such as in the Dutch Apeldoorn, which used to be called Appeldoorn, and in the German Appeldoorn near Cleves, which later became known as Appeldren. In Germany we also see place names such as Affoltern, Apfaltern, Affaltach, Affalirangen, Affalter and Affolterbach.<sup>168</sup> In France there are several place names that bear Avalon in the name, or a derivative thereof. The most obvious example of this is Avallon, a French village in the Yonne department. The Romans called it Aballo or Aballone, a Greek word for apple.<sup>169</sup>

The fact that the apple was an important fruit or symbol in the past can also be seen in all kinds of names of gods, such as that of the Greek predictive god Apollo and that of Albello, the latter was the apple tree god who was widely worshipped in South West France.

The first Christians are also said to have taken inspiration from pagan stories about apples in relation to other worlds and therefore adopted an apple as a symbol. That the apple also began to symbolize a key to a different state of being can be seen in the story of Adam and Eve who were expelled from Paradise. All of this was the result of a bite Eve took from an apple, destroying the apple's key function and breaking access to glory.

If we look at the Apple Country of the old religions, an image of dark waters related to rebirth also emerges, as I read in a book from 1931 about the symbolism of the Celts and Germanics.<sup>170</sup> It would be *ap* or *ab*, an encompassing cubit or all, derived from the Germanic word *apfel* or *apple*, called *Aval* in Breton and *Aball* in Irish.

Irish literature shows that the Apple Country is a metaphor for a story about reincarnation, in which golden apples and silver twigs represent the spiritual inspiration and inner divine power that people possess. Anyone who tastes the deeper meaning of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge will become aware of that. This is also reflected in the word silver, which originated heraldically from the Germanic word *weiss*, which comes from erasing and thus comes to know and is related to wisdom. That it is important to become aware seems to be a message from the Apple Country.

Avalon is nowadays mainly seen as a mythical land that is linked to legends about King Arthur. It is said that he ended up on the Island of Avalon and that a female Druid named Morgane, who resided there, healed his wounds. Morgane, was knowledgeable in medical science, and thus had all of the qualities that were attributed to Druid priestesses.<sup>171</sup>

The Druids, in particular, seem to have loved special islands because they felt that at those places a special energy had power. They wanted to live in the silence in places of seclusion where a lot of water could be found and thus they created their own Apple countries. They found islands particularly suitable places to live and there were many islands inhabited by these nature worshippers.

The historian and philosopher Plutarch (46-120) wrote about such a Druid island on the Irish coast, where people could speak with *geniuses*. I will explain the term geniuses a little further because it does not only refer to smart people, but also to special kinds of entities that were considered to be like guardian angels. In

the past many people believed that every place, and also every human and every natural object possessed a genius and that they also offered protection, not only on the specific places they inhabited, but for example also when marriages were conducted. Geniuses lived in volcanoes, houses, trees, on mountains, in short, everywhere. We will come across these types of entities often in this book. They were known not only within the Nehalennia religion, but also within many ancient cultures, and people used to have a lot of faith in them. Even the Romans believed in these spirits and propitiated them.

On the island Plutarch spoke about, lived not only many geniuses, but there were also trees with silver branches and golden apples. When these apples knocked together, due to the wind, they produced a sound that could cure ailments. Often these kinds of stories are considered legends, but they probably have a deeper meaning and have esoteric teachings hidden in them. There have been several such places that served as oracles. The Greek oracle of Dodona was an example of this, as it was a place where all the sounds and indications of the surrounding nature were interpreted as a sign. Priests and priestesses who lived there listened to the sounds of the rustling branches and also derived messages from gods from the sounds of metal objects that the wind set in motion and knocked together. From all these noises that were caused by nature itself, secrets could be discerned; foretold by the wind. In nature, the ancient religions found the answers they were looking for, so that they also had an ear for birdsong and sounds of the water. Those who acted as priests or priestesses in such places had the knowledge to translate these messages for people.

The Druids knew a lot about Avalon, but left us little information in this area.

Plutarch wrote that the Druid Apple Country could only be reached in a glass boat, at a place where a miraculous tower would arise. In this he seems to be hiding a clue, because the question is whether the Apple Country he is talking about is located in the world that is visible to us at all. He mainly seems to indicate a dimension that can be made visible through glass.

Is it possible that we can also see a glimpse of the Apple Land through a glass mosaic? In Rennes-le-Château, this always appears to happen on January 17, when three blue apples can be clearly seen there projected on the church wall. Those who have studied this mysterious place and visited the museum, which is located in the villa that the village priest Saunière used to live in, have also entered the conservatory of this priest. This conservatory, consisting of stained glass windows, offers a view of a tower that Saunière had built and dedicated to Mary Magdalene. The conservatory served as the private chapel of this mysterious priest and, given Plutarch's explanation, it is not inconceivable that he also used this glass space as an oracle to glimpse and receive information from the Apple Land using glimmers of light. After all, the light slips beautifully in there, so that all kinds of colours and shapes are projected into the space.

It seems that in times past, people have tried to reveal, by means of the stories recorded about Avalon, that there is another dimension, which perhaps can be entered by gazing through coloured glass, whereby a glass mosaic can then be used as an oracle. It may also suggest why a special stained glass window was placed in the church in Bugarach.

Does all this also say something about Nehalennia, who as a lady knows her way to the Apple Country with her veil? I got into a conversation with a French neighbour about this subject and she told me that apples, in their language, sometimes signify a departure from mainstream consciousness. When someone faints, it is called in France *tomber dans les pommes*, which can be literally translated in: *falling into the apples*. Anyone who is briefly unconscious due to any circumstances, enters another consciousness that the French refer to as apples. *Être dans la lune*, is another French expression that can be seen in the same kind of context. This saying can be translated as: *being in the moon*. When the French say this, they mean that an individual's behaviour is disconnected from reality, so the person is not completely in the here and now with his or her mind and thoughts. The moon and the apples both clearly refer to a different state of being and that seems to be a consciousness in which Nehalennia can also be found, or which at least clarifies that the goddess in particular can also be found in other types of consciousness.

## 19. Knights Templar, Pentagrams and Consciousness

Just outside the old Zeeland village of Oostkapelle is a castle with the name *Westhove* that still makes many foreheads frown, partly because nobody knows exactly when it was built. There are some guesses that the castle may have been built around the year 800, but it is also possible that another building stood there before, as is sometimes the case with old such structures.

Westhove was haunted and people were very afraid of the White Ladies that would appear there. One of those ghosts was a feminine white figure. Reverend Hoog, a fighter against superstition who died in 1802, informed people that these apparitions were all wood thieves and had unmasked one.<sup>172</sup>

A similar story about such an exposure circulated towards the end of the 18th century. Then, a lot of wood suddenly disappeared from the castle.<sup>173</sup> A hunter, who wanted to shoot at the figure near the woodpile, discovered that a tailor from Domburg had disguised himself as a *Dame Blanche*, although this did not invalidate the existence of the white ghost women.

Stories of white female apparitions in this area have been circulating for many centuries. They would mainly be seen at the *Wulpedreve*, the entrance to *Westhove Castle*. A ghost is said to live in the castle itself, this was previously stated in the year 800. It was a ghost of a woman who had died in *Westhove*. Every year on the night of 14 and 15 June she stood crying on the tower.<sup>174</sup>

There are links between *Westhove Castle* and the Templars. Wolfert van Borselen, who decided to become a Templar in 1118 donated all his possessions, including this castle, to the Knights Templar Order.<sup>175</sup> This makes it clear that the castle fell into the hands of the Knights Templar, confirming the suspicion that Templars also lived in that castle.

Various coins and objects dating from before Christ have been found in the castle grounds. In 1749 an old cemetery was also discovered behind the castle where urns, rings, buckles, needles and keys were found. There were also ancient monuments that were thought to refer to the Goths, an East Germanic people who invaded the Netherlands in 432.<sup>176</sup>

There are also connections between Nehalennia and this castle. To begin with, the Domburg temple dedicated to the goddess was located in the vicinity of this location.<sup>177</sup> It is also mentioned that there were a few Nehalennia altars in this castle, which had made a curious journey to Paris with many other antiquities after the French era.<sup>178</sup> Pencil drawings were also kept in the castle, made from the votive stones found on the coast that referred to Nehalennia.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, there was a Roman bridge in the outer courtyard of the castle, where a Nehalennia stone was walled in. In 1845 it was reported that this stone had been severely damaged and that the entire right side of it was lost.<sup>180</sup> It was unknown how the stone got there. In that same year it was thought that the stone had been found on the Domburg beach.<sup>181</sup> However, that is purely an assumption and I wonder if that is true. I started to notice that the Templars more often settled in the vicinity of former Nehalennia locations. For instance they settled at the site where the miracle statue was found in Lissewege, the foundations of the *Église Notre-Dame de Laval* in Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes had been in their hands and you will read more about similar Nehalennia-locations where they also left their footprints. It is striking that it is precisely in these kinds of places that stories of apparitions of a white lady can often be found.

The Knights Templar originated from the Cistercians, a religious order of monks. After the crusaders conquered Jerusalem in 1099, Bernhard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), an abbot of the Cistercian monastic order, received approval from the Pope to establish this knighthood.<sup>182</sup> Thus an order arose, wherein these knights took a special vow. They vowed to punish robbers and to place their lives at the service of the King of Kings. They fought for the Cross, and believed that neither death nor life could separate them from God's love. Whoever became a Templar relinquished possessions and was allowed to own nothing else but weapons, a horse, and the equipment that was necessary for a knight. Hugh of Payns (1070-1136) became the first grand master of the order. Members of the order dressed themselves in white cloaks with a cross and went to serve

without accepting any earthly reward, accompanied by a squire. In particular, they guarded sacred sites such as Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Mount of Olives, Jordan, Calvary, and the Holy Sepulcher. The order's headquarters was the Solomon Temple in Jerusalem.

Many crusades took place until 1291 but when the task of the knights came to an end, the order continued. The order appeared to be bulging with money and was therefore supreme. The Knights Templar owned war loot, had received endowments from many quarters, inhabited castles, owned lands, established hospitals, and fulfilled a role that shows that they became true bankers. They had created *something out of nothing*.

On Friday, October 13, 1307, King Philip the Fair (1268-1314) decided to end their power. Templar Knights were arrested and the Order members were accused of heresy by this French king, who was especially eager to fill his treasury with their belongings. Trials were conducted endlessly against these knights, especially in France. The French Inquisition tortured the knights, threw them into dungeons or burnt them at the stake. In other countries these knights were treated less harshly and not necessarily sentenced to death. Sometimes they were completely acquitted, although in some countries their possessions were confiscated.

The Knights Templar were said to be practising magic, witchcraft and sodomy, and it was said they kissed each other's bottoms during rituals.<sup>183</sup> This was a strange turnaround, for in their heyday they had been, besides the Pope, the supreme power of Christianity.

Jacques de Molay (1240-1314), the last Grand Master of the order, was taken to the scaffold on March 11, 1313, and then proclaimed that both the king and the Pope should appear before God's throne. Just before he died, he correctly predicted the times of their deaths.<sup>184</sup>

The order was abolished at the beginning of the 14th century, but an underground core remained. At the time a number of knights managed to escape the atrocities and a large number settled in Scotland. The Scottish could not only use their manpower very well, but also noticed that the ideas of the Knights Templar turned out to be in line with Celtic traditions. In that country at that time grail mysticism prevailed.<sup>185</sup> Several Knights Templar had also left for Portugal and had joined military knighthoods there. A number of societies that still exist can be traced back to this temple order.

Quite recently, on October 25, 2007, the Vatican published the book *Processus contra Templarios*, in which the Roman Church no longer declared the Templars heretical. After hundreds of years, these knights received their restoration of honour.

In 1877 Theodore Merzdorf, the curator of the *Oldenburg Library*, revealed a series of old archives.<sup>186</sup> These were Latin texts and copies of documents relating to the official rules of the Knights Templar. Frederic Münter, a Danish scientist discovered that information in the Vatican between 1780 and 1790.<sup>187</sup> In a passage entitled *Article 30* it is stated that when a brother is dying, he will be buried with his red belt and it is also stated: "*On his tombstone the oldest mark of salvation will be engraved: the Pentalpha.*" This is the reason why pentagrams are engraved on several Templar tombs. The fact that the Templars saw the pentalpha, which consists of five A's and thus forms a pentagram, as a symbol of salvation I found to be a special discovery, because it draws a clear link between the Templars and the goddess.

After all, Nehalennia is also a saviour and on the votive stones she carries the pentagram in disguise in the form of apples. After all, anyone who cuts an apple crosswise sees a star or pentagram in the core. Nehalennia therefore also had the opportunity to give people that old symbol of salvation through her apples. It seems, therefore, that the Knights Templar revealed this hidden Nehalennia key at the *Église Notre-Dame de Laval* in Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes, having her there openly bear their mark of greatest salvation. After all, the lady who is depicted standing on her négo on that relief carries a shield with a pentagram. Besides this relief hangs another relief on which only a pentagram is depicted.

That Nehalennia was considered a saviour, is evident from various votive stones. A good example of this is a Dutch altar stone dating from the first half of the second century and is known as the *27th altar*.<sup>188</sup> This stone is rectangular, 12 inches high and 6 inches wide. Laurel branches are depicted on the sides and a fruit-

adorned border can be seen at the top, arranged like a plinth. There is a text in eight engraved lines that can be translated into: *To Nehalennia Ingenuinius Januarius erected this altar out of thanks for the salvation of his son.*

The name Januarius was a popular name at the time, which appears more often on inscriptions found in the Dutch place Nijmegen and the German city's of Cologne and Mainz. From the Latin words *Ex Precepto* on the stone, it appears that the recipient made the stone *on order*. It is not known from whom he received that assignment. Possibly it was the goddess herself who made this known through an apparition or dream, or through a clergyman who spoke on her behalf. Janus's son may have been ill or had undertaken a dangerous endeavor and had been saved thanks to the goddess. This event had already taken place, otherwise there would have been a request in the form of the text *Pro Salute*, which has also been found on similar votive stones. In any case, the inscription of this stone shows that the goddess was able to protect and that she was thanked for that with a beautiful stone.

The Knights Templar not only knew about the ideas of the old Germanic tribes, but also had all kinds of ancient knowledge of early Christianity, which had been expelled by the Romans before the new Christianity had arrived. It therefore appears that they kept the pentagram as a symbol, but no longer showed it in disguise via apples, as the pagans did.

Canadian mystic Manly P. Hall (1901-1990) revealed that the Knights Templar were persecuted and murdered for having this kind of ancient, preserved knowledge.<sup>189</sup> According to Hall, they also knew that Jesus was not crucified at the age of 33. Jesus is said to have been in his early thirties when he was baptised and eventually died of old age. It was also known to the Knights Templar that Jesus had a relationship with Mary Magdalene and that she had been initiated into an ancient teaching. According to Hall, there is no question that Jesus was initiated into Greco-Pagan or Asiatic mysteries. The Church had spread all kinds of lies about this pair and said, among other things, that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. She was not a sinner, but an *apostola apostolorum*, the apostle of the apostles. She was his most beloved follower and that was because her eyes were open whereas his other close followers appeared to be groping in the dark.<sup>190</sup>

The Catholics had blurred the role of women in texts, but the Knights Templar gave all kinds of important women from history a stage again. As a result, they brought female power back into the world, of which the apocryphal representation in the church in Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes is also an example.

Joseph and Mary, the parents of Jesus, are believed to have belonged to the Essenes, an early Syrian sect. The Essenes held ancient religious knowledge, an important part of which was a doctrine related to the immortality of the soul. After initiations in three degrees at a mystery school, which only a few passed, an initiated Essene could receive its knowledge. Some of them were celibate, some were married. According to them, Jesus would not have been a result of immaculate conception, but was born spotless, in the sense of *unblemished*. Later he would have been initiated into the depths of the Mysteries.<sup>191</sup>

The Essenes believed in God, the immortality of the soul, and in a future state of being that followed according to the way lives were conducted. They regarded their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. They lived like one big family and avoided contact with people who did not follow the same teachings. Their lives consisted of performing tasks and studying knowledge that was kept secret from others. They performed a daily rite of immersion in cold water, then put on white linen dresses and ate a sober, vegan meal consisting of bread and vegetables.<sup>192</sup> Not only the self-chosen poverty and diet, but even their style of clothing was used as a basis in shaping the Order of the Templars.

The Pythagorean Essenes are known to believe that contact with money would contaminate their hands. They detested the idea that the gifts of God could be bought. They were mediators who let themselves be helped by spirits and who followed the path of their divine soul.<sup>193</sup> In that regard, the Knights Templar also had some similarities with them, as these knights also renounced possessions. Another similarity is the fascination with the pentagram, which the Pythagoreans saw as a geometric figure with a deeper underlying meaning. For

them it also interpreted the magic number five and the essence of the universe. They considered it a secret symbol with special proportions<sup>194</sup> and as an emblem of health.<sup>195</sup> The book *The Magus or Celestial Intelligencer*, published in 1801, confirms this meaning. It talks about a pentagram that appears as a symbol thanks to revelations. It could not be received in any way other than unveiled by a deity.<sup>196</sup>

That in particular seems to tie in well with what Nehalennia wanted to teach the people. The goddess wanted to be as easily accessible as the moon and was a point of light in the dark. She hid the star of redemption in apples, as if it was the key to a hidden land.

In order to further understand the meaning of the star of Nehalennia, we can also draw on preserved knowledge of the ancient Germanic view of stars in relation to births. The pentagram was considered by them to represent a human being on a stage of deification.<sup>197</sup> Every birth was seen as a passed initiation. The initiate had learned to enter five areas and to transform these principles into a one-pointed sphere of reincarnation of sowing, harvesting and growing. Every born soul could therefore subsequently develop, because he or she carried the seed that lead to higher growth.<sup>198</sup> The apple can be seen as the seed and the physical life that makes us grow like a tree. The star-shaped core located in the apple can be compared with the soul and with the actual essence of all acquired experiences.

Within the Pagan view, one attached particular importance to the perfection of the star, which was the symbol of the spark of light from which a person could develop and, on the basis of the life path followed, could start to shine at the end of their life. The brightness of this star would then reveal what the soul had made of life and what had been learned during the earthly period.

That is why the pentagram was the greatest sign of salvation among the Knights Templar and the star was also regarded in ancient pagan circles as a key that could be used to open the door of the afterlife. Any star that was complete and shone beautifully enough was allowed to travel further to another place. Nowadays we could compare such a star with a DVD which, if not written with the correct information, does not allow access to the start-up of a subsequent computer programme.

The Knights Templar's knowledge of this information caused a discrepancy with regard to the Biblical story and was therefore at odds with what the Church preached.

Ecclesiastical doctrine requires every baptised believer to submit and follow Biblical precepts to progress. In the pagan doctrine the responsibility for the doings and omissions lay with the person himself and after the end of life nothing could be changed anymore on the level of what was learned and on mistakes made. The only thing pagans could do during their lifetime to rectify anything was to do good deeds where they had previously gone wrong. Knowing to add as much light to the star as possible was the purpose of life.

From the Church's viewpoint, correcting wrongdoing was much easier and repentance could be earned in the form of an *indulgence*. This was possible, for example, by praying or by undergoing a pilgrimage, but it was also possible to buy it. In this way sins could be bought off and forgiven. Sums earned from selling indulgences were initially used for noble causes, such as for helping the poor, but the system subsequently became a source of injustice and abuse, because many hands liked to dip into containers holding such proceeds.

The Templars had clearly discovered that something was wrong with the thinking of Christianity. Mainstream Christianity, shaped and enforced by the Romans, was clearly different in nature from the ancient teachings spread by Jesus, who had been murdered by those same Romans! The Templars discovered that there were more similarities than differences between the much older Christian doctrine and the ideas of the ancient pagans.

In the days when the Templars were openly active, ecclesiastical doctrine was frequently under discussion. That was also the period in which the Cathar Tanchelm mentioned by me found listeners in Zeeland and other places. After everything I have read about this part of the Middle Ages in the course of my life, the image arose in me that people were mainly looking for evidence then. At that time, pilgrimages were often made, which led to contacts with believers from other cultures and regions. Conversations that would have arisen

had been enriching and forced people to think more. There was also a clear search for more and many hoped that truth and invisible powers would unfold to them visually. It is not inconceivable that this actually happened in some places, where, for example, group requests were made to heaven. The people were clearly looking for the other worlds and dimensions, communicating with the divine and wanted to see for themselves some of the magic. The Church had made all kinds of rules about what to do and what to believe, and that started to offend people. However, anyone who showed this too openly signed his own death warrant during that period.

Star symbolism had taken on a completely different meaning within Christianity. The second chapter of the apostle Matthew discusses the *Star of Bethlehem*. It was a star from the East that magicians had seen rising and that ushered in the coming of the Christ child. The text also states that the child was subsequently honoured with earthly treasures, such as gold. All of this was a contradiction of the old teachings and the Knights Templar knew that. They knew the original teachings about the star were different and that this information had nothing to do with earthly matters. They understood also that the soul star was given during birth, but was not visible at that moment, and needed to be completed during life. The final glow of it could be seen after death and not at birth. They knew the star depicted a development of the soul that became especially important in the afterlife. People didn't arrive on earth as a star, but could learn how to eventually become a beautiful star.

That is exactly what Nehalennia shows with her apples and I am convinced that the Templars became interested in this ancient goddess and tried to preserve and protect as much of her antique heritage as possible, as they also did at *Westhove Castle*.

The Temple Church in London features a crescent moon that acts like a boat bearing the Virgin Mary, with the ship's mast depicted in the shape of a cross.<sup>199</sup> The similarity between Nehalennia on her boat and the ecclesiastical Mary has therefore not escaped their notice. Nehalennia has at least been a point of attention of the Knights Templar, not only because of her star symbolism, but also because she envisioned a teaching of the ancient way of thinking, in which she could push aside a veil to give a glimpse of the other world that the Templars also wanted to investigate and serve.

Incidentally, in mythological texts, not only the apple, but also the pear is referred to as a provider of access to that miraculous place and within the Nehalennia cult the apple and pear have therefore depicted a similar symbolism.

Pears and apples indicate where information can be found and symbolize the '*so above, so below*' principle that will be cited more often in this book. Despite their different appearance, apples and pears appear to be similar fruits, but there is a big difference. If you place an apple and a pear in a water bowl, you will see that the apple floats and the pear sinks. That's because the apple contains more air and therefore the pear is heavier. It does indicate that the star that conceals both fruits can be seen in the context of the ancient teaching explained in this chapter. As we are below we will be above and as we are above we are below. The apple shows our outer and light side, the pear our darkness and depths. If both powers strive to beautify our star, there will be salvation. In addition, it indicates that working to illuminate the star that what we can become in the afterlife can be done anywhere. We can work on our inner surface on the surface, but we can also find it when we fathom our depths.

On many Nehalennia altars, both apples and pears occupy an important position and show not only her sign of salvation, but also places where the goddess can be found. She can therefore be found on land, in crops, among the stars in the sky, but also floating on the sea, in the depths and even in other dimensions. The latter is clearly visible on an altar reproduced in a French magazine. Nehalennia is depicted on the front of that altar in the typical way, but on the back next to a curtain two apples and two pears can be seen.<sup>200</sup> The pentagrams of these fruits are clearly keys to the entrance that she covers with her veil. The more light the evolving, personal soul star receives, the more the goddess can show. The same publication also depicts other altars of

the goddess, with apples and pears occupying striking positions on fruit baskets and on the sides. Some of the altars depict three apples and three pears at the top.

## 20. *The Terrible Périllos*

In a curious little town in the Pyrénées-Orientales, I caught another glimpse of Nehalennia. The village of Périllos can be found in postcode area 66600, of which the three sixes alone already appeal to the imagination.

Périllos is a truly abandoned hamlet, which the French in our region designate as a place of disaster, because those who inhabited this place often suffered terribly. Whenever the calm there seemed to have returned and lives were back on track, something terrible happened there. In ancient times, Périllos was a village occupied by rulers during wars, but the place was also seriously affected by infant mortality and the plague. Other epidemics, famines, droughts and typhoid deaths from a contaminated source... nothing was spared the diehards who continued to live there.

The climate there also has extremes, because in the winter you freeze and during the summer you experience an almost unbearable, desert-like heat. It also used to be the case in times gone by and that is why never more than probably a hundred people lived there.

After the Second World War, hardly anyone wanted to live in that hamlet anymore and when in 1963 an airplane with eleven passengers exploded and thick fog coloured the area a solid grey, most of the last residents thought that was the straw that broke the camel's back, and they too packed their suitcases. In French forums about paranormal phenomena, there is also a lot of speculation about this flying incident, because several researchers believe that this was a covered-up UFO crash.

Since 1971, the year after the very last resident left, Périllos had the official status of "abandoned village". *La cité fantôme*, headlined the French newspaper *La Dépêche* in 2014, in which the question was sadly asked who was the last person who had closed the door behind him in that haunted place to turn his back on his past and memories of ancestors. And even uninhabited, the site continued to claim lives, as two men died during military training in 2009.

Meanwhile, mainly during the weekends, a handful of people reside on the mountain between the ruins of the old village where no electricity and no running water can be found. They have become a symbol of hope and are new building diehards, who also conduct research. At that altitude they have a view of the even more extensive green part, a no-man's land consisting of mountains, hills and stone remnants of former houses.

Not far from the sparsely inhabited village center, former vineyards are overgrown and nature has regained the upper hand. Bees live there untouched by pesticides and butterflies flutter in abundance above the tall grasses. In this place the earth can still be itself and grow and flourish without human interference. This area was once called *Salveterra; The Saving Land*. When I walked around this area I wondered how that could have changed, because it is now known as a place where you better not spend too much time.

I am starting to associate places like this more and more with Nehalennia, because the goddess seems to love nature and remote places. And yes, in Périllos an abundance of animals live in freedom and you can still smell the scent of wild thyme and rosemary.

The fact remains, however, that Périllos in Catalan means *dangerous* and especially considering all the events that have happened in the hamlet, that seems appropriate. The mountain ranges and high limestone ridges, that abound there, are definitely not safe even now and quite dangerous when it snows or when the wind blows hard. In the neighbourhood it is also said that the place name is a derivative of the word *perellos*, which means pear. Links with a family that used to live there can therefore not be ruled out, because this isolated area was in the hands of the Lords of Périllos, who had a coat of arms with three pears on it. Both this family and their former estate are associated with the Knights Templar. The family had ties to such knighthoods, which are also referred to as the Order of Malta. Of course, all of this is significant to the interest this family

was focused on. Templar treasures are said to be hidden on their former site.

*Le Castel dal Segnou in Périllos*, of which the ruins are still visible, belonged to Jean I, the king of Aragón. In 1391 this king decided to house the Catalan viscount Raymond de Périllos in that castle.<sup>201</sup> In 1397, Raymond made a pilgrimage from Périllos to Lough Derg, Ireland. I will come back to that in the next chapter, because there is a link to Irish stories that may have to do with Nehalennia, but I would first like to discuss the special, former residence of this viscount.

The hamlet has, besides a few other interesting archaeological sites, two particular hotspots and a special small church. One of those hotspots is a high plateau that appeals to the imagination because it looks a lot like a landing site. This leads to exciting stories in the region, because it is rumoured that time travellers from the future have made contact with people on that plateau.

The second interesting hotspot is a small cave, *La Grotte du Trou de la Caune*. In the region, the story goes that a hermit lived there who considered the cave as an entrance to the underworld. Research is being done in *La Caune* and various spiritual groups led by guides also visit this place regularly. People have special experiences there, which vary from strange apparitions to voices heard on film recordings made in the cave which were not heard when the films were made. Paranormally sensitive people and mediums also often receive messages and visions there. In this sense, the cave has the energy of the place of an oracle.

*La Caune*, which is not very easy to find, contains large stalagmites and an opening through which the sun and moon can project a beautiful glare on the walls. Around 2007, researchers André Douzet and Filip Coppens, who unfortunately past away at too young an age, reported that strange statuettes were discovered around this cave in Périllos. Statuettes resembling depictions of ancient Sumerian gods, often associated with alien visitors due to their reptilian appearance and elongated ears. The find appeared to be a reference to an indigenous European civilization dating from 7000 to 3500 BC. André Douzet showed me pictures of these figurines, which are currently held in his private museum.<sup>202</sup> He told me that he had no idea what culture they come from, who left them there and what gods these ancient statues represent.

A larger statue of a woman has also been found in *La Caune*, which may have been hidden in this cave during the French Revolution. There is much speculation about who this lady represents. Many people think that it is Saint Barbara of Nicomedia, but that cannot be correct, because this image wears a crown with stars and Barbara was never depicted that way. The statue has also been described as a Black Madonna. Although it resembles one, I do not find this lady immediately recognizable as such and moreover she is not carrying a child with her. It depicts a dark-haired woman in a white dress. Her star crown in particular is a typical item.

The patron saint of the village church is Archangel Michael and it is interesting that a woman with a tiara of stars is spoken of in relation to this Archangel in the Bible. The pair is discussed in detail in *Revelation 12*. It contains a story about a woman appearing in heaven. She shines like a sun, has the moon under her feet and wears a hairband with twelve stars on her head. She screams in pain as she gives birth to a baby boy. A dragon with seven heads and ten horns tries to eat the child, but fails. The child disappears into the throne room of God and the mysterious woman flees to the desert. At that moment a war starts in heaven and then Michael suddenly appears to fight the dragon with his angelic army. The great dragon eventually falls to earth and chases the woman. However, he does not catch her because God has given her eagle wings and she lives for a while in a secluded place, a shelter that God has made for her.

The adjacent larger town of Rivesaltes celebrates the legend of Babau every year, which is based on a story about the disappearance of six children during a moonless but starry night. A bloodthirsty monster with sharp teeth had taken them. The beast is said to have crawled out of the Agly, a river whose name is derived from the words *aquilla* and *aqua*; eagle and water. The legend describes how the same thing happened over the following days. The beast made terrifying noises, and eyewitnesses claimed this creature was between 6 and 7.5 meters long. It was a dragon with round eyes, large claws and sharp teeth. The municipality, which had by now armed itself, wanted to kill the animal. They didn't succeed, although they had injured the monster.