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The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



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The Pomegranate

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Maggie Carew, Stephen McManus, Fritz Muntean, Diana Tracy

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The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within the Craft. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included. In the interests of promoting lively discussion, we encourage both our writers and our readers to keep an open mind, and to be ready to explore a wide variety of outlooks.

Notes from the Underground

I am most pleased to see that so many of you have returned to read the second edition of our new journal. We have prepared for you a veritable feast of articles designed to entertain as well as to educate. Although thematic issues were never part of our original plans for this magazine, several of the writings here assembled for your pleasure might be thought of as having been inspired by Cleo, the muse of History (and one of my own distant cousins). One of these will transport you back to the world of the Ancient Celts — via the rich domain of ancient literature and modern archaeology, not the tawdry realm of cheap fiction (those of you wearing 'celtic' pentacles, kindly take note). In another we will examine the development, over the last century and a half, of today's widespread belief in a pan-European, monotheistic Great Goddess of the Neolithic. A third piece began life as a kind of obituary (an art form honoured in my kingdom), but it grew, not an unusual thing in my realm of Change, into a kind of capsule history of the early days of the Craft in North America.

In addition to these, we present another installment of our advice column as well as a review of two new, and most welcome, books on the creation of rituals and ritual space.

One thing that you will not, alas, find in this issue is a column of Letters to the Editor. Those of you, dear readers, who enjoy participating in the exchange of ideas are encouraged to take virtual pen in hand and begin this process by writing letters to us at once. My hard-working minions eagerly await your input.

We hope you find this issue as intriguing as the last, and we trust that you will also eagerly look forward to our third issue — three being an important number in my kingdom, both of magazines and of pomegranate seeds. We bid you welcome to our table: please subscribe; tell your friends; write articles; write letters ... and do have some more of this divine fruit, my dears!

Persephone (and her minions)

What We Don't Know About the Ancient Celts

by Rowan Fairgrove

When one says that one wants to study and, perhaps, reconstruct the religion of the ancient Celts, it is well to be clear about whom one speaks. 'Celtic' describes a language group which, over time, has divided into two strains — P-Celtic (Brythonic) spoken in Wales, Cornwall and Brittany and Q-Celtic (Gaelic) spoken today in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. Celtic speaking people inhabited much of Europe for millennia and their descendants live on today. One must also be clear about the possible tools for such study that are available. As so many things Celtic comes in threes, so do our sources — archaeology, classical commentaries and the vernacular traditions of the Celtic countries.

Archaeology is the study of material culture. We dig a grave and observe that the body was accompanied by food, jewelry, a sword — we can't know that one particular necklace was beloved because of lifetime associations or exactly what the haunch of pork signified to those who interred the body. So we have 'real' facts, but they are definitely open to interpretation.

Classical sources are fragmentary, and each of the classical authors who wrote about the Celts saw them from their own particular perspective. Posidonius saw them through the lens of Stoic philosophy as primitives closer to the Golden Age than the more civilized Greeks; Caesar reported on them as a conqueror who continually needed to convince his government to support the war effort. Yet these sources are the only contemporary view we have of the living Pagan Celtic culture. We don't have any contemporary religious writings from the Celts themselves because, as Caesar tells us, they had a religious prohibition against writing things down (although they eventually kept trade-related records using Greek characters).

The vernacular traditions are those hints we can get of Gaelic and Brythonic cultures, through the annals compiled by Christian monks centuries after the

fall of Celtic Paganism from the 8th to 13th centuries, and in the folklore of the Celtic language areas compiled by scholars from the 17th century to the present. The early monks recounted tales of the pre-Christian history of Ireland and Wales for several reasons — to maintain legal precedents (despite their origins in Pagan times), to craft histories of their nations (for example relating them to the Christian notion of the Flood and Noah) and to satisfy local aristocrats who fancied the idea of ancient lineages or enjoyed hearing hero tales of their ancestors. The later antiquarians, tale-collectors and Celtic revivalists generally had their own agenda as well — often they were involved in a nationalist movement in the Celtic country in question. They were certainly Christian and saw ancient Celtic religion through that lens — witness the early Druid revivals of the 17-18th century which painted Druids as monotheists who had expected the birth of Jesus and were just waiting to hear word so they could convert. (An excellent essay by Dr. Michael Raoult on the early Druidic revivals can be found in *The Druid Renaissance*.)

Obviously, none of these sources is sufficient to give us a clear vision of the religious beliefs or practices of the ancient Celts. And I fear that even in aggregate, with the addition of the comparative study of other Indo-European religions, they are insufficient for more than a fragmentary understanding of a Celtic religious worldview. This paper will generally confine itself to study of the archaeological and classical source materials.

Who were the Ancient Celts?

When I speak of the ancient Celts, I am referring to the communities of people sharing linguistic and cultural ties who inhabited most of Northern Europe between 800 BCE and 400 CE. The folk of the Urnfield culture which preceded them may also have spoken a variety of Celtic, but they had not yet created the material culture that we identify with the Iron Age Celts. At the height of their expansion (4th-3rd centuries BCE) Celtic communities spread from Ireland to the Near East.

Hallstat culture (800-250 BCE), named after a type-site at Hallstat, Austria, is the name given to the material culture of the early Iron Age Celts. Their range spanned from the Paris basin to valley of Morava in Eastern Europe and from the Alps to the north European plain. During early Hallstat (800-600 BCE) there is little evidence of great distinctions of wealth in burials. A few people are buried with wagons and horse gear, rather more are warriors (both genders) buried with their swords, most people are buried with personal ornaments and pots containing food. Cemeteries are small and associated with small settlements, perhaps one family or a group of related families.

Then between 600-450 BCE things begin to change as Mediterranean luxury goods begin to appear. Hilltop forts and a hierarchy of rich graves begins to appear. These aristocratic burials are associated with much larger residences inspired by Greek architectural styles. Archaeologists have suggested that *paramount chief* burial is accompanied by inhumation in a wooden chamber with wagon and horse trappings as before, but now there would also be a wide range of imported goods including bronze wine drinking vessels, silk, gold,

The economy was based on conspicuous consumption and potlatch-style distribution of goods. . . . warrior societies arose whose wealth came from raiding the settled traders.

amber, glass and coral. A *vassal chief* would be similar but the goods are more of local manufacture without the wide range of imports. *Sub-chiefs* are again similar but less elaborately furnished with totally local manufacture. Below this status wagon burials are not present. This type of burial and the prestige goods economic system it represents was spread from Burgundy to the middle Rhine. The economy was based on conspicuous consumption and potlatch-style distribution of goods. This is an unstable system relying on a continuing stream of imports and exports. Around this core, warrior societies arose whose wealth came from raiding the settled traders. This was an unstable equilibrium which was unbalanced by political changes in the Mediterranean and population growth among the Celtic tribes. After the collapse, the Celtic migrations began (circa 400 BCE).

La Tène culture, known for its elaborate artwork, coincides with the last 50 years or so of Hallstat. It is this culture which was carried by the migration. Warrior bands moved southwards and eastwards toward the rich pickings of the cultures they had previously traded with. Rome was attacked in 369 BCE and the thrust continued into Italy. Delphi was attacked in 279 BCE by eastward moving bands who then continued on to Asia minor. Migrations in response to population pressure continued on throughout the next few hundred years, culminating in the aborted migration attempt of the Helvetii mentioned in Caesar's commentaries.

A drastic change took place during the eight year war with Caesar's Rome as hundreds of thousands of Celts were killed, sold into slavery or maimed. And

then Caesar went home to where, for him, the real politics were and Gaul and Britain were left alone for 15 years. When later Roman emperors began to set up administration of Gaul things changed again. Most of southern and eastern Gaul was brought into the Empire fairly easily because they had already adopted a sedentary lifestyle and trade-based economic system. The borders of Empire remained in flux for some time with the pressure of the so-called Germanic tribes pressing in from the east which finally contributed to the end of Empire in the 5th century CE. There is controversy about how different the Celtic and Germanic tribes actually were and where the division may be made. Caesar arbitrarily called anyone north of the Rhine Germanic and anyone south Celtic. Archaeology makes clear that while there were two different material cultures (with different house building and burial styles) they were much more intermixed than Rome's simplistic geographical divisions would indicate. H.R. Ellis-Davidson has discussed the intersections and diversions of Celtic and Germanic culture in several books, to which I direct the interested reader.

Continental vs. Insular Celts

There are differences between the religious practices of European and British Celtic peoples. Some deities span the entire scope of the Celtic world but most are specific to a place. The south of England which was settled by Belgic peoples is more closely tied to the Continent, while northern England has more unique deities and practices. Ireland had even less contact with Europe and maintained their culture the longest. Continental Celts had felt the pressures of the Mediterranean cultures much earlier than Insular Celts. Traffic between Gaul and the eastern Mediterranean began as early as 8th century BCE. Regular trade with southern Britain begins in the 6th century BCE. However the impact of occasional maritime traders is quite different than the concentrated river trade which occurred constantly in Gaul.

Sources of Information

Classical Commentaries

A number of classical writers mentioned the Celts. The very first use of the term *Keltoi* is by the Greek Hecataeus of Miletus circa 500 BCE. Most of these Greek and Roman authors whose works have survived didn't have any first hand knowledge of the Celts. Most of the extant writing comes from the first two centuries of the common era and rely on observations of Stoic philosopher Posidonius (early 1st century BCE), whose own writings have been lost. His information was based on first hand knowledge of Celtic society in Gaul. Scraps of his writings are contained in later writings, especially Athenaeus, Diodorus Siculus (mid-1st century BCE) and Strabo (40 BCE-25 CE).

From Posidonius we learn that Celts subscribed to the Pythagorean idea of transmigration of the soul, which Julius Caesar mentions as well (though he couches it in terms of making the fighters unafraid of death). Caesar had the opportunity to see Celts at first hand, both on the continent and in Britain, but he wasn't particularly interested in religion other than to note the influence of the Druids on the nobility. Caesar describes the Druids, saying they "officiate at the worship of the gods, regulate public and private sacrifices, and give rulings on all religious questions. Large number of young men flock to them for instruction and they are held in great honor by the people. They act as judges in practically all disputes whether between tribes or between individuals." He also notes that there are many and diverse deities but does not name them except to use the name of whichever Roman deity possessed similar attributes.

It is to Pliny the Elder (1st century CE) that we owe our image of the Druids cutting mistletoe with a golden sickle. It was an afterthought on the mistletoe entry in his book on trees! The word he used was *sacerdos*, not Druid, and it was probably really the Vates who would perform such a ritual. We get this division of the Celtic 'priesthood' from Strabo's *Geographica* written at the end of the first century BCE, which states "Among all the Gallic peoples, generally speaking, there are three sets of men who are held in exceptional honour: the Bards, the Vates, and the Druids. The Bards are singers and poets; the Vates, diviners and natural philosophers; while the Druids, in addition to natural philosophy, study also moral philosophy." (His use of 'men' is generic, there are women in all three classes both in the vernacular and classical sources.) Additionally, Irish vernacular evidence does tend to support this tripartite division.

We believe that Classical sources tended to sensationalize Celtic religion. They were, after all, writing about foreigners whom they considered barbarians. It is the odd and 'uncivilized' information that is most often reported. There is very little information on the deities themselves in these sources because the writers tend to conflate Celtic deities with their own where their worship is similar. Thus, we get sensationalists like Lucan (1st century CE) reporting that there were three major Gods of the Gauls who demanded human sacrifice, Taranis (burning), Teutates (drowning) and Esus (hanging and wounding). The Romans had banned human sacrifice only a generation or two earlier and felt superior on this account.

Classical writers also tell us something of the Celts' appearance. Diodorus says Gauls are tall and fair with loud voices and piercing eyes. He says the women are nearly as big and strong as their husbands and as fierce. Tacitus identifies the Caledonii of Scotland as having reddish hair and large loose limbs whilst

the Silurians of Wales were swarthy with dark curly hair. Dio Cassius describes Boudica as large and frightening with bright red hair. Strabo tells us that both genders liked to wear lots of jewelry and this is certainly borne out by the

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archaeological record which shows heavy torcs, broaches, rings, necklets and bracelets. A lovely quote from Virgil sums up thusly the idealized classical view of a Celt, "Golden is their hair, and golden their garb. They are resplendent in their striped cloaks, and their milk-white necks are circled with gold."

Inscriptions

Inscriptions on altars and votive objects provide us with almost 400 names of Celtic deities. Unfortunately many of these names appear only once and have no elaborating evidence to allow us to understand the nature of the deity named. Other names have descriptive epithets added to the names. Still others are paired with Roman deities whose known character allows us to guess more accurately about their Celtic counterparts. Some of these classical Roman deities also receive Celtic epithets. Classical gods often also receive Celtic consorts. When possible we compare inscriptions from more than one area and infer the characteristics of the deities, supplemented by contemporary comments.

Cosmology

The Celts do not seem to have had a hierarchy of divinity in the sense of a coherent pantheon dwelling in some remote place. The human world and the Otherworld formed a unity in which the human and divine interact. Each location has numinous powers which are acknowledged by the people as we can see by their naming of mountains, rivers and other natural features many of which have associated deities.

When the Celts invaded Greece in 278 BCE, Brennus entered the precinct of Delphi, saw no gold and silver dedications and only stone and wooden statues

and he laughed at the Greeks for setting up deities in human shape. Caesar mentions that the Germans worship forces of nature only.

... in archaeology, wooden buildings pose a problem of interpretation ... all that remains in the record is the positioning of post holes!

Domestic Cult

The most basic sanctuary in a traditional culture is the home and hearth. Often non-family members are not allowed to approach the hearth. Archaeological evidence of elaborately decorated hearths and fire-related tools indicates that the domestic cult of the Celts was centered here. Each family would have had its rites, sacrifices to the house deity (perhaps as elaborate as the *penates*, *lar* and *genius* of the Romans), protections for the house and family, etcetera. Many fire tools echo the sacrifice, being in the form of horses or rams, garlanded and thus ready to nourish the Gods and the people.

The next level of ritual around the hearth would be the banquet. There are elaborate eating utensils present in the archaeological record and Posidonius (quoted by Athenaeus) gives a good account of a Celtic feast:

The Celts sit on hay and have their meals served up on wooden tables raised slightly above the earth. Their food consists of a small number of loaves of bread together with a large amount of meat, either boiled or roasted on charcoal or on spits. This food is eaten cleanly but like lions, raising up whole limbs in both hands and biting off the meat ... When a large number dine together they sit around in a circle with the most influential man in the centre, like the leader of the chorus, whether he surpasses the others in warlike skill, or lineage, or wealth. Beside him sits the host and next on either side the others in order of distinction. ... The Celts sometimes engage in single combat at dinner. For they gather in arms and engage in mock battles, and fight hand-to-hand, but sometimes wounds are inflicted, and the irritation caused by this may even lead to killing unless the bystanders restrain them. And in former times, when the hindquarters were served up the bravest hero took the thigh piece, and if another man claimed it they stood up and fought in single combat to death.

Another component of the feast is the Gift. The Celts practiced the redistribution of wealth at their feasts, creating an elaborate debt structure which binds the society together. Recipients of gifts may repay the giver in kind or in loyalty and service. In an extreme form, life itself may repay the gift. This system of clientage is documented both in myth and in the ancient laws of Ireland and Wales which have come down to us through Medieval redactors.

Other interesting evidence of the importance of feasting to the Celts are burial goods which indicate the belief in the Otherworld feast, many of which are also known from Irish and Welsh mythology, such as Manannan's Feast of Wisdom and Age, the feast of Bran's head with his companions, or Giobniu's Feast where the participants neither aged nor died. Otherworld feasts generally feature an ever filled cauldron so that food never runs out, or animals who rise up ready to be slain again the next day. Grave goods include flagons of wine, drinking vessels, animals and hearth implements,

Public Cult

How much of a public cult existed depends on which period of Celtic history is being discussed. In earliest times, sacral power was part of the sovereignty. The Queen and/or King would have done divination, carried out sacrifice, identified sacred springs or other natural features and other religious duties for the Clan, including becoming the ultimate sacrifice in times of trouble, according to mythological sources. Continental Celts were just beginning to develop cities in the last few centuries BCE. This led to a secular administration in the form of judges. Some cities were built around sanctuaries or religious schools, others were centers of commerce or military strongholds. Archaeology is only beginning to give us insights into the type of civic ritual present in the cities.

The common form of sanctuary in early times (500-250 BCE) is an enclosure delimited by a ditch and sometimes a palisade, interior pits and posts delimited sacred space and received sacrifices. As time went by interior buildings and more elaborate ambulatories were constructed (in archaeology, wooden buildings pose a problem of interpretation — all that remains in the record is the positioning of post holes!). At the time of conquest many sanctuaries were dismantled and hidden by their worshippers. These areas seem to have kept their sacred character, however, as Romano-Celtic temples are often built on the same sites. Since the form of temples in both cultures was similar except for materials used, conflation was not difficult. Most Romano-Celtic temples had a central sanctuary surrounded by an ambulatory within a precinct surrounded by walls and ditches. There are variations which include auxiliary buildings or a divided sanctuary, but the general pattern is clear. These structures don't lend themselves to congregational-style worship. There is a

small shrine where the statues of deities or sacred symbols are housed and the ambulatory gallery, perhaps with openings through which the worshippers could see into the sanctuary, but any large gatherings were probably held outside in the enclosure around the temple precinct.

Sanctuary enclosures were rectangular or sometimes circular. The great variation in materials deposited at such sites suggests that each was dedicated to a specific deity with particular requirements. There is some evidence that the posts, lintels, gates and other features of the palisade were highly decorated: carved, painted, hung with offerings. The entrance was a very important feature. In early ditch enclosures the entrance is a break in the ditch. Palisades brought in the custom of gates, monumental porticos, etcetera. At Gournay (France), a pit is dug at the entrance with a foot bridge to cross to enter the sacred space. The entrance was hung with human skulls. Two large heaps of cow skulls and weapons were deposited on either side in the ditch. These may be the result of the dismantling of successive displays at the entrance. Deposition in the ditch elsewhere is more even.

In the interior the center point of the sanctuary is indicated by a post, a pit or a building. Presumably the center is closest to the Otherworld being farthest from the outer world beyond the ditch. A system of posts with directional and astronomical significance were aligned around this center. Another interior feature are pits, the shape and size of which vary from site to site. At one site in Czechoslovakia the central pit was 11m x 8m and 2m deep! A more common pattern is 10 pits grouped in threes and a central pit. Sacrifices may have occurred at the central pit with the others being sealed so that sacrificial animals placed within could decompose. The animal bones are then thrown into the perimeter ditch. It is not uncommon in the ancient world to have seen pits as entrances to the Underworld (Greek *bothroi* and Roman *mundi* for example). Elsewhere in the Celtic world deep shafts are dug with ritual depositions, so the Celts may have shared this interpretation.

In addition to dedicated sanctuaries, the entrance to a city seems to have been a particularly important ritual area as well. In many British hillforts, ritual pits have been found at the entrance and along the principal roadway with horses, humans, and more rarely dogs, are buried there. It is unclear whether the human burials represent sacrifice or merely deposition near town.

One classical source, Strabo, gives a little insight into town gates. He says the Celtiberians worshiped an unnamed God of the full moon. "They perform their devotions in company with all their families in front of the gates of their townships and hold dances lasting throughout the night." Classical writers

mentioned (probably using a single, now lost source) the practice of choosing a scapegoat who was supported richly at the expense of the community for a year before being ritually killed to remove all ill luck from the people. Because the

Before the influence of Mediterranean cultures, the Celts do not seem to have anthropomorphised their deities.

original source is lost, it is hard to say where this was observed. One writer places it at Marseilles.

Military Cult

Shrines were set up along borders where preparatory rituals could be done before a conflict and rites of thanksgiving and victory could be celebrated. Often sacrifices (or post-Roman, altars) were promised beforehand and these would be carried out at such a shrine. There are many altars dedicated to various deities with inscriptions such as "so-and-so gladly and willingly fulfills his vow". Unfortunately, they only rarely indicate what it was the deity provided in exchange. Military offerings were also deposited in water, see below.

Celtic Deities

Animal Divinities

Before the influence of Mediterranean cultures, the Celts do not seem to have anthropomorphised their deities. There are statues of boars, horses, bulls, bears, birds, etcetera, long before there are human featured ones. What we cannot know is how the people thought about these figures. Were the animals seen as symbolic of natural forces? Were there attributes of the animals which were revered as being associated with divinity? Some deities later given human form are inextricably linked with specific animals — eg, Epona and horses, Cernunnos and stags, Artio and bears, Arduinna and boars.

An interesting sidelight on animals as sacrifice — at Gournay-sur-Ardeche there is an enormous deposition of animal bones. The horses and cattle are both elderly specimens and do not show signs of butchering. Pigs and sheep at the site are young and were eaten. Were horses and cattle revered and brought here

for ritual and burial? And at South Cadbury in England there are horse skulls all carefully buried right side up.

Goddesses, Gods, Divine Couples

Cernunnos

The name Cernunnos, meaning 'horned' or 'peaked' one, appears only once in an inscription in France. However, the name is generally applied by archaeologists to all male antlered deities found in Celtic iconography. A Horned God is the only pre-Roman anthropomorphic deity, having appeared in a rock carving in the 4th century BCE in Northern Italy. He is there accompanied by a ram-horned snake and bears two torcs, which remain common features of the 'Cernunnos' iconography in both Gaul and Britain. Bull or goat horned heads are also found in La Tène metalwork He is also

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associated with a variety of animals both wild and domestic, especially stags, and with fertility symbols such as cornucopias and bowls of grain or money. He (or his male companions) are often ithyphallic as well. There are also several representations of Horned Goddess(es), including one representation in Gaul where she appears as consort to a Horned God. The frequent depiction of Cernunnos in a cross-legged pose has been cited by some as a "Buddha-like" posture tied to Indo-European roots and by others to indicate his ties to the common folk who (according to Classical sources) sat on the ground.

Jupiter Taranis

The Roman Jupiter, while often Optimus Magnus (Best and Greatest), also has Celtic surnames, often territorial. Jupiter Optimus Magnus Beissirissa (associated with the Bigerriones in southern Gaul), Jupiter Ladicus (as the spirit of Mount Ladicus) and Jupiter Parthinus (associated with the Partheni in Yugoslavia/Bulgaria). An interesting aspect of the Celtic Jupiter is that he is

often mounted, unlike his Roman counterpart. Jupiter is also paired with Taranis, one of the primary Celtic deities of Gaul. Caesar said that Taranis "held the empire of the skies" when likening him to Jupiter. Taranis was a thunder god who relished human sacrifice (according to Lucan), a later commentator describes Jupiter Taranis as Master of War. Seven altars to Taranis have survived from far flung locations indicating that his cult was widespread. Dr. Miranda Green believes that prior to conquest Taranis may have simply been an elemental force.

Sulis Minerva

Sulis Minerva is the primary deity of the temple complex at Bath, England. Sul or Sulis is thought to have been the primary deity of the area in pre-Roman times. When the Romans exploited the therapeutic potential of the thermal spring, Sulis became equated with Minerva Medica. Through the many inscriptions in the form of curses and altar dedications to Sulis we can get some idea of how her worshippers thought of her. She had the power to grant healing, of course, but also to witness oaths, catch thieves, find lost objects and generally right wrongs. Some examples include, "I have given to Minerva the Goddess Sulis the thief who has stolen my hooded cloak whether slave or free, whether man or woman. He is not to redeem this gift unless with his blood." and "May he who carried off Vilbia from me become as liquid as water. May she who obscenely devoured her become dumb whether Velvinna, Exsuepus Vbrianus, Severinus Augustalis, Comitianus, Catusminianus, Germanilla or Jovina." and "Docimedis has lost two gloves. He asks that the person who has stolen them should lose his mind and his eyes in the temple where she appoints."

Another way to try to figure out how she was thought of is to study the cognates of her name. *Suil* in Old Irish is 'eye' or 'gap'. *Heol* is 'sun'. Other possible interpretations are 'gap', 'orifice', or 'the center of the whirlpool'. There also exists a trio of Goddesses called the Suleviae, of the beneficent and protecting mother or matron type. Inscriptions to the Suleviae are found at Cirencester, Colchester and in several locations in Gaul. Suleviae may be "the triple Sulis" as we have the triple Brigid and many other three-fold Celtic deity forms. One of the inscriptions at Bath, on a statue base says "To the Suleviae, Sulinus, a sculptor, son of Brucetus, gladly and deservedly made this offering" so we know they, as well as the singular Sulis Minerva, were known at this site also.

Mars, Lenus Mars

We moderns have this idea of Mars as exclusively a brutal war god. To the Celts he was more often a peaceful protector, a healer or a tribal god. This is

much in keeping with the original Italian Mars who was a guardian of fields and boundaries and sometimes a storm god. It was only his late-classical/Imperial conflation with the Greek Ares that gave him the combative, warrior-for-gain aspects. Mars was venerated as Mars Albiorix by the Albici in southern Gaul who considered him a protective mountain spirit. Albiorix means 'king of the world'. Mars Camulos was widespread, found in both Britain and on the Continent.

Lenus Mars is a great healer god who presided over a large temple complex at Trier and a sanctuary at Pommern. He also was known in Britain. He uses his warrior strength as a protector against illness and death. His epithet Iovantucarus shows his special role as a protector of the young. Lenus Mars also has a Celtic consort, the mother Goddess, Ancamna. (She is also paired with Mars Smertius by the Treveri.)

Mars Loucetius ('bright' or 'shining') gives us another insight into Mars. Loucetius in the Roman world is usually an epithet of Jupiter. Mars Loucetius is paired at Bath with Nematona (Goddess of the Grove) and on the continent with the war Goddess Bellona.

Mars Mullo (Latin for mule) was very popular in northern Gaul. He was associated with a shrine at Allonnes where pilgrims came to have their eyes cured. Many votive sculptures of the ailing part have been found there.

Rosmerta and Mercury

Rosmerta is a very widespread Celtic Goddess, her name means Great Provider. Her male equivalent would be Smertius. After conquest she is often paired with the Roman Mercury. She has similar attributes and Mercury was probably subsumed into her cult when introduced. She is also conflated with Fortuna, but they also appear together or with Maia (Mercury's mother). Rosmerta is shown associated with a cornucopia, purse, patera, caduceus, scepter, wheel, rudder, globe and, in Britain, a wooden barrel or bucket. The high status of her cult is indicated by the rank of some of her worshippers and the fact that her name is linked epigraphically with the Emperor. Presumably she was invoked for good fortune in commerce, in life and in death (the caduceus is a symbol of guidance through the Otherworld). Mercury is usually represented very classically, he carries his caduceus, wears his winged cap, holds or wears a purse. He is accompanied by a cock, goat and/or turtle.

Epona

Depictions of mounted women or charioteers are found on Iron Age coins and may also represent horse-related Goddesses, in addition, representation of

women and horses as linked continues in the vernacular traditions in the stories of Rhiannon and Macha. Epona, whose name is derived from the Celtic word for horse, is the Goddess of horses and horse breeding. As mares were often used as working animals on farms, some writers have speculated that Epona has aspects of fertility of the land and the domestic cult. Her worship became very

... the original Italian Mars was a guardian of fields and boundaries and sometimes a storm god. It was only his late-classical/Imperial conflation with the Greek Ares that gave him the combative, warrior-for-gain aspects.

widespread — there are over 300 representations and inscriptions found bearing her name. She was adopted by cavalry soldiers throughout the Roman world, perhaps because she was a deity who offered protection both for the soldier and the horse! She was the only Celtic deity whose festival was celebrated in Rome itself, on December 18.

Representations of Epona always have a horse present. She is most often shown sitting sideways on a mare, sometimes a suckling mare. Sometimes Epona is standing or sitting beside or between horses. She holds symbols of plenty like cornucopiae, patera full of grain and fruit. She sometimes is feeding her equine companions. She often appears with the Mother Goddesses in inscription and iconographically. There are even several finds where she herself is tripled and an inscription is dedicated to "the Eponas".

Statues of Epona have been found associated with healing springs. It is hard to know what significance this has. Many Celtic deities have a healing aspect. Perhaps she was invoked for healing of horses. Her image appears on tombstones and in graves. One statue where she has a man behind her on her horse has been interpreted as taking the soul on horseback to the Otherworld. She is shown holding a key or a mappa (a napkin used to begin races) which may link her to the beginnings and endings.

Seasonal Festivals

The seasonal festival dates that we associate with the Celts come from a variety of sources. Classical writers speak of periodic assemblies where Druids performed rites and judged inter-tribal disputes but dates are not given. An Imperial temple at Lugdunum (Lyon) was dedicated on August 1, probably in recognition of a feast of Lugh (and the Emperor Augustus' birthday — such a coincidence would probably be played up). However, we lack direct evidence to substantiate this assumption although given the fact that the city is named after Lugh and Lugh's feast is similarly dated in later Irish tradition we can speculate with some certainty. This lack of direct evidence hampers us with other dates as well — important events in mythology happen on Beltaine, Samhain, etc, but no coherent scheme is set down. The earliest calendar that we have, the Coligny Calendar, mentions Samhain which appears as Samonios.

The Coligny Calendar, which dates from between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE, is both a lunar and solar instrument, providing reconciliation between the two years. A year was divided into 12 months of alternating 29 and 30 days. Every 2-1/2 years a 13th month was added. According to Diodorus every five years a great sacrifice was held. The Coligny Calendar provides information on auspicious and inauspicious days and we can see that they reckoned by nights. It is the oldest inscription we have in a Celtic language (the letters themselves being in the Roman alphabet.)

Votive Offerings

Votive offerings often provide us insight into the powers of a site, and into the motives of the worshippers. It is assumed that artisans and workshops associated with larger temples and shrines made souvenirs and mass-produced offerings available. We know from some chance anaerobic depositions that wooden objects were used. Because these do not survive well, we mainly find the offerings of the higher classes. In areas where pottery or pipe clay was common, we presumably have more offerings from all classes represented.

The most common offerings are coins. In addition to regular coins in circulation there are tiny coins whose small character makes it unlikely that they were used for anything other than offerings. For example at the site of the temple at Bath over 16,000 Roman coins have been found dating from the mid-first century CE.. and continuing until the late fourth century, shortly before Rome abandoned Britain. A handful of pre-Roman coins of the local tribe the Dobunni suggest that coins featured in worship at the spring before the Roman invasion. Many of the coins found were clipped to mark them as property of the

Goddess and therefore no longer legal tender. Some of the coins are quite rare, others were coins of the eastern empire with no value in the west but perhaps representing pilgrimage to the shrine from distant parts. A substantial number of mid-fourth century coins depicted a phoenix rising from the ashes, possibly alluding to the hidden fire that heats the spring water. On the continent wheel models are often present in coin deposits.

The next most numerous offering is personal jewelry (bracelets, broaches, rings, earrings, hair and dress pins, etcetera) In some cases these appear to have been "killed" before deposition. We can speculate that items so closely associated with a person would be useful in sympathetic magic. Unfortunately, we have no certain way of knowing what the ancients were thinking when they threw their jewelry or coins into the sacred springs. Is our custom of throwing coins into wells a survival of these practices?

Another type of offering, especially at healing centers, are anatomical models of, presumably, the afflicted area which needed the deity's attention. For example at the shrine of Sequana, Goddess of the River Seine, come models of eyes, breasts, heads, limbs and internal organs. Some of the models showed particular ailments: eye disease and respiratory problems seem to have been the main afflictions among her pilgrims.

Sacred springs and rivers also received many martial offerings, primarily swords, scabbards, helmets and spears. Some such artifacts appear to have been made especially for sacrifice as they are of precious metals and elaborately decorated rather than made of workable materials for a warlike function. The Celtic practice of throwing things in springs was so common and resulted in such rich deposits that such sites were auctioned off by the Romans after conquest. One sacred site of the Volcae Tectosages is reported to have yielded 100,000 lb. of silver and 100,000 lb. of gold!

Sacrifice

Human Sacrifice and Head Hunting

Evidence of human sacrifice comes from various Classical literary sources. Dio Cassius mentions a sacrifice to Andraste by Boudica on behalf of the Iceni. Lucan attributes sacrifices on behalf of three Gaulish Gods, Taranis, Esus and Teutates. Archaeology doesn't confirm such sacrifices, with the possible exception of the man found in the Lindow Moss. There are also a couple of sites where a burial can be interpreted as sacrifice or as punitive criminal burial.

The severed head seems to have had significance for the Celts. Veneration of the head is found in all Celtic areas and over the entire temporal spread. The head is seen in art, as a religious symbol and as a battle trophy. There is ample archaeological evidence for the human skull being given special treatment. Niches in shrines such as the Celto-Ligurian lintel is merely one manifestation. Human skulls have been found deposited in lakes and wells.

*People wishing to practice some form of
“Celtic” religion pull threads from the
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around some other system.*

Vernacular sources such as the story of Cu Chulainn in Ireland present vivid descriptions of head taking as do the accounts of classical authors. Diodorus Siculus (quoting Posidonius?) says: “They cut off the heads of enemies slain in battle and attach them to the necks of their horses. The blood-stained spoils they hand over to their attendants and carry off as booty, while striking up a paeon and singing a song of victory, and they nail up these first fruits upon their houses just as do those who lay low wild animals in certain kinds of hunting. They embalm the heads of their most distinguished enemies in cedar-oil and preserve them carefully in a chest, and display them with pride to strangers, saying that for this head one of their ancestors, or his father, or the man himself, refused the offer of a large sum of money. They say that some of them boast that they refused the weight of the head in gold.” It is interesting to speculate why such a sum would be offered. Perhaps the kin of the slain would pay a ransom to have the head returned for proper ceremony? Livy, writing in the 3d century CE, reports that the Boii who captured Consul-Elect Lucius Postumius in Northern Italy “stripped his body, cut off the head, and carried their spoils in triumph to the most hallowed of their temples. There they cleaned out the head, as is their custom, and gilded the skull, which thereafter served them as a holy vessel to pour libations from and as a drinking cup for the priest and the temple attendants.” The head is also very common as a motif in art. Statues of heads and disembodied heads in coins, reliefs and jewelry are quite common.

Animal Sacrifice

There are a variety of animals, both wild and domestic, whose remains may

represent sacrifice. Some are burned or buried whole while others are butchered and, presumably, consumed. Archaeological evidence in either case is somewhat problematic, although the location of deposition in a temple area may suggest the sacrificial interpretation. However, a butchered animal may not have been killed with a sacred purpose and a non-butchered animal may simply have died of old age and been buried rather than dying as a result of sacrifice.

Among sacrificial animals we find horses, cattle, lambs, pigs, and dogs, also stags, hares, birds and wild pigs as well as other wild animals. Young animals often show signs of butchering, older cattle and horses mostly do not. Pig, either wild or domestic (its hard to tell!), is a favorite in both burial and temple deposition. Pliny mentions bull sacrifice by the Druids.

Summation

Much work has been accomplished toward studying the Celtic world. It is unlikely that more classical sources will be uncovered, but archaeology gives us a tool for discovery which we are only beginning to use. A grounding in the physical remains will allow us to interpret the later literature more accurately and provide a more complete picture of our ancestors' worship. But I hope it is plain from my discussion, that our ancestors did not leave us a whole cloth in which to wrap ourselves.

In the absence of such a tapestry, it is necessary to be aware that speculation is rife — and amongst the NewAge/Occult community is sometimes based in little more than wishful thinking. If one is interested in reconstructing and practicing Celtic religion it is well to be aware of the sources and of the philosophy in the researches of any teacher or group you may join or any book you may read. People wishing to practice some form of ‘Celtic’ religion pull threads from the tattered cloth of our knowledge and wrap them around some other system. Some, such as the Neo-Pagan Druids of Ar n’Draiocht Fein, study the Celtic religious data and then combine their researches with information on the religious traditions of other Indo-European cultures. Other practitioners pull threads and wrap them around some other system, thus creating syncretic traditions such as the various forms of ‘Celtic Wicca’, ‘Celtic Magic’ and such. Unfortunately, some (perhaps most) of these have nothing particularly Celtic about them except the use of Celtic deity names within a system very different from any conceived by the ancient Celts.

I believe that the greatest source of magic and religious inspiration exists within each person. Practicing based on the dictates of one's own experience with one's land, Otherworld spirits and divinities is certainly valid religious practice.

If, however, we wish to claim that what we do comes to us from the religion of the ancient Goidelic or Brythonic peoples, I believe that we must do our best to research and understand their worldviews and practices.

Particularly when teaching, passing on the research along with the practice helps the student to better understand and evaluate whether a tradition fits with her/his aims and worldview. I believe we owe it to our students to tell them our inspirations and our experience and to credit any source materials — spells adapted from vernacular prayers or ancient inscriptions, practices gleaned from archaeological study or borrowed from a magical traditions of other cultures. There are few things more embarrassing than sharing some bit of ‘ancient’ lore and finding out that the person you told it to wrote it a decade or so before.

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The Neolithic Great Goddess: A Study in Modern Tradition

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Modern belief in the veneration of a single Great Goddess in the European Neolithic is often accompanied by the notion that those cultures of 'Old Europe' were woman-centred in society as well as religion. What is the long history which precedes these contemporary notions? What is the complex history of their political development. A chain runs from Classical times to Marija Gimbutas and our own day.

Sources amongst the Classical pantheon

An important shift in the way in which goddesses were treated in European letters took place towards the end of the 18th century. Until then, as in the classical ancient world, they had been regarded mainly as patronesses, or allegorical figures, of civilization. Eric Smith's *Dictionary of Classical reference in English poetry* (1984) provides a quick guide to their relative popularity in English literature between 1350 and 1800. Most favoured was Venus, mentioned in 66 works, followed by Diana in 42, Minerva in 32, and Juno in 26, with the other ancient female deities trailing far behind. What they represent between them is love, maidenly chastity, wisdom and majesty. Only Diana is shown in any connection with the natural world; in these cases (which are rare), she is represented mainly as goddess of hunting, the chief recreation of the nobility.

It is more significant to our present purposes that the ancient Greeks had spoken of the earth as being female in gender and the sky as male (in direct contrast, for example, to the ancient Egyptians); this language became embedded in western science which derived from Greek roots. It was reinforced by the mind-set of the patriarchal societies which occupied medieval and early modern Europe, in which intellectuals in general, and those who dealt with the sciences in particular, were overwhelmingly male. Carolyn Merchant has led a number of writers in emphasizing the development of a scholarly language which

identified the author and reader as male adventurers occupied in exploring and exploiting a female natural world (Merchant 1980).

The Romantic impact

This was the pattern which prevailed, with remarkable consistency, until the decades around 1800, when it was altered permanently by that complex of cultural changes known conventionally and loosely as the Romantic Movement. One aspect to it was the exalting of the natural and the irrational, those qualities which had conventionally been feared or disparaged and characterized as feminine. Cultural historians have devoted many works to tracing the course of this revolution in taste, which for the first time gave emphasis to the beauty and sublimity of wild nature and of the night. None had yet made a study of its impact upon western images of the divine feminine.

That impact is clear enough in English letters, and Smith's *Dictionary* once more provides an easy means of tracing it in the realm of poetry. Between 1800 and 1940 Venus (or Aphrodite) retains her numerical supremacy in appearances, with Diana (or Artemis) still coming second. Juno, however, almost vanishes, and so does Minerva after 1830. The third place is now taken by Proserpine, as goddess of the changing seasons, and fourth by Ceres or Demeter, lady of the harvest. A reading of the texts listed discloses a much more striking alteration. Venus now appears not merely as patroness of love but in relation to natural surroundings. Diana, no longer primarily a symbol of chastity or hunting, stands for the moon, the greenwood and wild animals. Furthermore, when a goddess is made the major figure in a poem, instead of the subject of a comparison or reference, the supremacy of Venus is overturned. In these cases, by the 1810s the divine feminine is personified either as the moon (apostrophized with particular religiosity by Keats) or the spirit of the green earth (for whom Shelley makes an equivalent, especially in 'Song of Proserpine'). In the latter capacity she often sheds any classical label altogether, becoming simply 'Mother Earth' or 'Mother Nature'.

These new emphases remain absolutely constant through the remainder of 19th-century English literature. They are reproduced in the parallel world of opera libretti, where we see them in the most famous opera of the century to treat of Druids, Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* (1831). Here the librettist, Felice Romani, broke with the tradition of Druids as sun-worshippers to make the heroine, standing in a sacred wood, pray to a moon goddess. It only remained for Swinburne to take the final stage of development in 1867 when he apostrophized the goddess of nature under the German name of Hertha. This poem knocked God out of the structure altogether, by making her the single mighty deity who created and maintains the universe. It would be interesting

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and easy to show how the same themes remain stable long into 20th-century English letters, and to provide parallel examples from the Continent.

Also relevant from the 19th century is a different sort of cultural phenomenon, a debate among European intellectuals over the nature of prehistoric religion. Crudely speaking, this was divided between those who suggested that primitive religious belief was a superstitious compound of ignorance and fear, and those who viewed it as an embodiment of sublime truths, which had degenerated and been forgotten among most modern tribal people. The first 'ignoble' theory was especially popular among thinkers of the French and Scottish Enlightenment, the second 'noble' view among the German Romantics. The Germans assumed the tone of these eternal truths consisted of monotheism, and usually linked it to an instinctual understanding of the processes of nature and of human life.

The notion of a single great goddess

So it makes good sense that in 1849 a German scholar, Eduard Gerhard, advanced the novel suggestion that behind the various goddesses of classical Greece stood a single great goddess, venerated before history. As the century wore on, other classicists began to adopt this idea, drawing support for it from the assumption that the cultures of Anatolia and Mesopotamia were older than, and in some measure ancestral to, those of Greece. Those cultures did contain some figures of pre-eminent goddesses, identified with motherhood or the earth. This tendency of thought was given an additional impetus at the end of the century when excavation began to turn up figurines, many apparently feminine, on prehistoric sites in the southeast of Europe and the Levant. It was possible to interpret these as representation of the original single goddess, and this is what sometimes occurs (Ucko 1968:409-12, and sources listed there). It is worth stressing that most classicists and Near Eastern archaeologists did not adopt the concept, but equally significant to recognize that among those who did were some major figures. In the British context the most important was probably Sir Arthur Evans, who made something of a personal conversion to it. In his writings of the 1890s he did not connect the statuettes found in his excavations on Crete to any specific deity, but in 1901 he identified them firmly with the

Babylonian Mother Goddess. By 1921, and the publication of his celebrated volumes on Knossos, he was convinced that all must be images of a prehistoric Great Goddess, at once Virgin and Mother (Evans 1895:124-31; 1901:185; 1921:ii, 45-52). This compound was achieved by blending together those historic goddesses who represented separately these two apparently exclusive characteristics. For those used to a Christian culture, of course, there was no difficulty in doing so; behind the emerging figure of the prehistoric deity now stood not only Mother Nature but the Virgin Mary.

By the mid 19th century this image was already starting to combine with another, which had emerged from a debate between lawyers over the origins of society and of the human family. One of the contesting theories in this exchange, articulated first in 1862 by the Swiss J.J. Bachofen, was that the earliest human societies had been woman-centred, altering to a patriarchal form before the beginning of history; what was true in the human sphere had apparently to be true in the divine one. The notion of a primitive matriarchy was first fully expressed by J.F. MacLellan's *Primitive marriage* (1875), and from 1903 Jane Ellen Harrison combined it with that of the Great Goddess to produce a full-blown vision of how prehistoric southeastern Europe should have been. A major figure among British classicists, she was the pivot of a well-known group of Cambridge scholars. Her work, both celebrated and controversial, posited the previous existence of a peaceful and intensely creative woman-centred civilization, in which humans, living in harmony with nature and their own emotions, worshiped a single female deity. The deity was regarded as representing the earth, and as having three aspects, of which the first two were Maiden and Mother; she did not name the third. In Harrison's vision male deities existed only as sons and consorts of the Great Goddess. This happy state of affairs, she proposed, had been destroyed before the opening of history by patriarchal invaders from the north, bringing dominant male deities and war-like ways. She believed that European humanity had never recovered from this disaster (Harrison 1903: esp 257-322; 1912).

Significant in Jane Harrison's interpretation was its being both feminist and conservative; a life-long Tory and an opponent of female suffrage, she preferred women to devote themselves to education and to fostering culture in the broadest sense, leaving politics and government to men. Following her work, the idea of a matristic early Europe which had venerated such a deity was developed in books by amateur scholars such as Robert Briffault's *The mothers* (1927) and Robert Graves' *The white goddess* (1946). In the same years, acceptance of the concept of the single prehistoric goddess continued to grow among experts in the prehistory of Greece, the Balkans, and the Near East; in 1929 the British archaeologist G.D. Hornblower gave it a backward projection

by linking it to the figurines, again often feminine, found on a scatter of European sites from the early period of the Upper Paleolithic. After this these statuettes were regularly cited as evidence that a Great Goddess, Mother Goddess, or Earth Mother had been venerated all through the Stone Ages (Ecko 1969:409-12).

The Goddess and British prehistory

She remained, however, very much a concern of specialists in the Balkan and Mediterranean regions. Those concerned with the emerging field of western European prehistory, and especially of the British Neolithic, reserved judgment; the evidence was not comparable, and no parallels had been found to the figurines abundant in the southeast. The western Neolithic tradition included the very widespread megalithic monuments. Some French tombs contained the carved figure of a female being, which gave some grounds for arguing in favour of a goddess cult; but the decisive evidence for one was lacking, and archaeologists did not feel able to pronounce upon the matter without it. Between 1920 and 1940 Gordon Childe, Grahame Clark and O.G.S. Crawford all published surveys of prehistoric Britain which scrupulously avoided pronouncing upon the nature of its religions. Childe and Crawford suggested that the megalithic tombs had been monuments of a single faith, and Childe even characterized it as spread by missionaries from the Near East (another comfortable fit with Christian tradition); both declined to identify the being or beings upon which it had been focused (Childe 1940:46-118).

No such caution, of course, restrained non-academic writers. By 1910 Rudyard Kipling had already absorbed enough of the arguments of thinkers such as Bachofen, MacLellan and Harrison to portray a prehistoric England run by priestesses in his book of children's stories, *Rewards and fairies*. From the present perspective, the most revealing of these authors was H.J. Massingham, best known for his intensely romantic descriptions of the English countryside, evoking its deep roots in the past. What drove Massingham was an unusually bitter detestation of modern, industrialized, urbanized civilization — an 'utter darkness and savagery' (Massingham 1944:49). In opposition, he evoked the spirit of traditional Christianity; viewing it as a purified version of ancient paganism, he said that as rooted in primeval communion with Nature which had to be renewed if humanity was to be saved. In this profoundly reactionary vision, the favoured period was the Middle Ages, when society was ordered, contented and infused by spiritual values; the contemporary institution which Massingham most admired was the Roman Catholic Church, purely because it resisted so many features of modernity. When he wrote a book about the Cotswolds, in 1932 he took his information about their long barrows straight from the famous survey by O.G.S. Crawford — with this difference; whereas

It looks as if the Grimes Grave 'Goddess' was a fraud; like the Piltdown skull, it had success because it represented precisely what some were hoping to find at that moment.

Crawford had avoided characterizing the deity of the megalithic culture, Massingham repeatedly declared, with perfect confidence, that she had been Mother Earth. For scholars who wanted to think like Massingham, the barrier was apparently removed at last in 1939, when A.L. Armstrong claimed to have found the unequivocal proof of the worship of an Earth Goddess in the British Neolithic. At the bottom of one flint mine at Grimes Graves, he allegedly uncovered a female figurine, seated upon a crude altar and with a vessel (apparently for offerings) placed before her. From that moment onwards, the statuette appeared in works upon the New Stone Age in general and Grimes Graves in particular, interpreted as a deity. The Ministry of Works, as custodians of the site, placed a picture of it upon the cover of its official guide-book and reconstructed its 'shrine' for visitors to see.

From its reported discovery, rumours circulated within the archaeological community to the effect that it was a fake, planted either by or upon Armstrong. Such was the discretion of that community that not until 1986 did one of its members, Stuart Piggott, raise the matter in print (Piggott 1986:190). An investigation into the matter was carried out by Gillian Varndell, as part of a general reappraisal of the Grimes Graves material, and in 1991 she reported the following points: the excavation was never published; Armstrong's site notebook stopped abruptly on the day of the vital discovery, without recording it properly; on the day of the find, most unusually, he had directed all other experienced excavators to leave the site; the figurine and vessel look suspiciously freshly-carved; and somebody on Armstrong's team was an expert carver, because similar objects, including an Egyptian sphinx, made from the same chalk rock were among his possessions from the dig (Varndell 1991:103-06).

As no method exists for dating chalk objects, Varndell added, the authenticity of these cannot be objectively tested; but not surprisingly, she concluded that the circumstantial evidence made their status extremely dubious. This doubt is increased by the fact that since 1939 not a single other figurine has been found in an unequivocally sacred context from the British Neolithic. It looks as if the

Specialists in the history and theory of religion now took the former existence of [a Great Goddess] as proven fact, and incorporated it into their own works. Works on the history of art absorbed the same idea and it governed the initial interpretation of fresh excavations in the Near East, such as those of James Mellaart at Catal Hüyük.

Grimes Grave 'Goddess' was a fraud; like the Piltdown skull, it had success because it represented precisely what some were hoping to find at that moment. Its effects could be seen in the 1940s, upon a wife-and-husband team very prominent among them, Jacquetta and Christopher Hawkes. In 1945 and 1940 respectively, they published textbooks in which they suggested that the megalith builders of western Europe had been converted to the religion of the Great Goddess of fertility, by missionaries moving through the Mediterranean from the old centre of her cult in the Balkans and Levant. This religion was replaced in turn, so both argued, by new cults introduced by the Beaker People, conquering westward from central Europe (C. Hawkes 1940:84-9, 153, 180, 198; J. Hawkes 1945:16-18).

Jacquetta Hawkes and a goddess religion

By the early 1950s they had parted in every sense. Christopher Hawkes did not return to the topic, concentrating instead upon later pre-history; Jacquetta developed it with passionate enthusiasm, having become a professional writer of novels, plays and poetry as well as popular works of archaeology and history. The latter earned her an enormous readership, even while she continued to command affection and respect among archaeologists of her generation. She was awarded the OBE and an honorary doctorate, and became one of the two British members of UNESCO (along with the scientist Sir Julian Huxley). By 1951 she had developed a view of the Neolithic which she was to elaborate far into the 1960s — essentially the view of Jane Harrison and Harold Massingham, with an explicit acknowledgment of the poetic vision of Robert Graves. Her New Stone Agers were also women-centred, peaceful, creative, and living in harmony with Nature, worshiped as a single goddess. This happy religion united the figurine-makers of the southeast and the megalith-builders of the west, with a chain of cult centres such as the temples of Malta. Like her

predecessors, Hawkes declared that it had been destroyed by war-like patriarchal invaders worshipping sky gods: she gave a further apparent precision to this process by identifying these conquerors with the Indo-Europeans, regarding the Beaker People as their western manifestation (Hawkes 1951:158-61; 1954a:20-21, 198, 243-44; 1954b; 1962:57-87; 1963:204-344; 1968a).

Her politics were likewise of a piece with those of Harrison and (more particularly) Massingham. Her favourite period was the 18th century, the last time in her opinion at which civilization and nature were harmoniously intertwined in England; to understand how provocative this concept would be to a socialist in the 1960s it would be remembered that the century concerned was also the time of the Atlantic slave trade, rotten boroughs, the Bloody Code of capital offenses and the golden age of aristocratic oligarchy. With the industrial revolution, as Hawkes saw it (1951:143, 198, 200-01), England grew 'hard, dirty and hideous', and the 'Great Goddess was seen in her aspect as Cinderella, with soot in her hair and dust on her skirt'. Modern science was 'a Frankenstein's monster', leaving the present world 'in helpless expectation of a searing death', and the computer 'a parasite of the Appalonian mind' (Hawkes 1968b:260; 1962:240-41). Her hatred of technology was honed to an intense suspicion of socialism. It is not surprising to find her going out of her way to condemn communism, but there is a startling moment when she describes the American nuclear weapons research station at Los Alamos as the exemplar of 'what socialism would achieve if it had its head' (Hawkes 1954: chapter 8; 1955:277). Salvation, for her as for Massingham, lay in a renewed sense of kinship and unity with Earth, the Great Goddess (Hawkes 1954b:245-49). All these emotional impulses were legitimized, for her general readership, by her authority as an archaeologist. Small wonder that she was so popular, for she provided the prehistoric counterpart to the sentimental conservatism represented in the same period by the histories written by Sir Arthur Bryant and guides to English counties produced by Arthur Mee.

The Universal goddess

Within the British scholarly community, Jacquetta Hawkes was only the most passionate and overtly ideological representative of a broader trend. Whether or not there ever was an Age of the Goddess in Neolithic Europe, there certainly was one among European intellectuals between 1951 and 1963. During the mid 1950s three giants of British archaeology, Gordon Childe, O.G.S. Crawford and Glyn Daniel, declared their belief in the veneration of a single female deity by Neolithic cultures from the Atlantic littoral to the Near East (Childe 1954:64-65, 268; 1958:21, 46, 58, 124-39) Childe was the most tentative, Crawford the most enthusiastic, having been converted to the notion in 1953 and later

devoting a large and euphoric book to it. Both projected the image into later ages; Childe asserted that it lay behind the medieval Christian veneration of female saints, while Crawford found traces of his goddess in a range of folk customs, such as corn dollies. Specialists in the history and theory of religion now took the former existence of such a figure as proven fact, and incorporated it into their own works. Works on the history of art absorbed the same idea and it governed the initial interpretation of fresh excavations in the Near East, such as those of James Mellaart at Catal Hüyük (Mellaart; 1967).

The most remarkable illustration of a wider impact on intellectual culture came in the field of psychology. Freud seems to have said nothing directly about the matter, although his work did emphasize the universal importance of mother figures. Jung, in view of his famous theory of archetypes, was surprisingly offhand when dealing with that of the Mother Goddess. Declaring that the essential archetype was that of the mother, he saw the goddess as merely one derivation from it — not of immediate concern to psychiatrists because the image of her was rarely encountered in the modern world; indeed, he seemed to imply that he only considered her at all because historians of religion had made such a fuss about her (Jung 1959:75-102, *passim*). It was left to his devoted disciple Erich Neumann to argue in 1963 that the evidence for the universal goddess indicated that the archetype of the Great Mother had been a constant 'inward image at work in the human psyche'. Neumann developed this argument into an elaborate theory of human spiritual development, in which the goddess stood for 'the archetypal unity and multiplicity of the feminine nature' and even now 'determines the psychic history of modern man and of modern woman' (Neumann 1963: esp. 1-2, 336). The process now set up was circular; Neumann had based much of his argument upon the data assembled by archaeologists who had developed the notion of the Great Goddess; and his work inspired Jacquetta Hawkes to declare that depth psychology had proved that such an image was natural to human beings — the last evidence she needed to establish its existence in prehistory (Hawkes 1968b:260).

The goddess questioned

So it was that belief achieved the sort of apogee which comes before a fall. In 1962 a young scholar, Peter Ucko, published an essay questioning the interpretation of the Near Eastern figurines as images of a single female deity, and so rocked the foundations of the whole structure of theory (Ucko 1962). His arguments inspired a leading figure in the profession, Stuart Piggott, who more than a decade before had apparently been the only one to view the Neolithic as patriarchal with the same instinctual leap of faith which had carried others towards a matrilineal interpretation (Piggott 1949:82-95). Even Piggott had briefly been carried away by the rush to accept that it venerated a goddess

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(1954: 46); after Ucko's work he felt able to attack the whole idea (Piggott 1965:114-15). Ucko himself pressed forward his critique at the end of the decade (Ucko 1968); he was joined by another rising scholar, Andrew Fleming, who uncoupled the chain of reasoning which had supported the notion of the Goddess at the other end, by challenging the idea that the western European megaliths could definitely be associated with such a cult (Fleming 1969). Neumann's extrapolation of the image into Jungian psychology was subsequently attacked in its own right, by feminist thinkers who pointed out, convincingly, that it actually provided a pseudo-history to justify male domination (Reuther 1975: 154-57). The effect upon professional prehistorians was to make most return, quietly and without controversy, to that careful agnosticism as to the nature of ancient religion which most had preserved until the 1940s.

The goddess and feminist thinking

The change of view took longer, of course, to filter through to other disciplines which had absorbed the former orthodoxy; it has still not reached many members of the general public. A significant example of this insouciance was the work of Michael Dames, who in the late 1970s wrote a pair of popular books (Dames 1976; 1977) which interpreted the Avebury ritual landscape in terms of the cult of the Great Goddess, relying heavily upon the ideas of Hawkes, Briffault, Graves and other writers in that tradition, and blissfully unaware of any re-interpretations which had been made since. He had so little grasp of archaeology that he made errors which would have appalled somebody such as Jacquetta Hawkes, assuming (for example) that long barrows were in use at the same period as henges and failing to notice that to Hawkes the divide between woman-centred and male-centred cultures had actually separated these classes of monument. By claiming the most spectacular structures of British

She carefully remodeled the image of [the Great Goddess] to conform with evolving feminist opinion, reducing the association with motherhood, fertility and sexuality to emphasize her far more as a mighty creatrix, presiding over all life and death.

prehistory for a single 'age of the Goddess', however, he gave immense pleasure to the increasing number of people who were now actively seeking a feminist alternative to Christian or Hebrew monotheism.

One of these was Marija Gimbutas, the only major figure in professional archaeology to ignore — or rather to reverse — the shift of opinion characterized above. As she was the foremost western expert in the prehistory of eastern Europe, a status largely achieved through her superlative command of the languages of that region, her pronouncements commanded attention. Three aspects of her work are relevant in this context. In strict archaeological terms it was amazingly conservative. Her view of prehistoric Europe remained based firmly upon the theory of invasions first elaborated by Gordon Childe, while her notion of a continent-wide veneration of a single prehistoric goddess was an elaboration of the orthodoxy of the mid-century. In an important sense, her ideas developed in a straight line from the 1950s onward, ignoring all criticisms and counter-models made after that time. She may have been encouraged in this by the necessarily close co-operation which she made with scholars from what were until recently the Warsaw Pact states, upon whose monographs she depended for much of her data. Their attitude to the prehistoric past was likewise bound by relatively inflexible ideological models, which included a belief in primitive matriarchy based upon the admiration which Friedrich Engels had conceived for the theories of Bachofen.

If her work was conservative in a technical sense, its political import was not. Since the opening of the 20th century, as indicated, the prehistoric Goddess has been most often associated with a reactionary literature and a rhetoric of hatred for modernity. Marija Gimbutas, retaining the rhetoric, gave it a radical feminist tone. This aspect of her thought emerged slowly. Her first contribution to the field of prehistoric religion came in 1974, over 20 years into her professional career, when she published *The gods and goddesses of old Europe*, an interpretation of the data from southeastern Europe which built implicitly on the

work of Jacquetta Hawkes and explicitly upon that of Erich Neumann. In harmony with the prevailing reaction against the concept that a single goddess had been honoured there, she classified female deities in the plural. In 1982 she republished this text; reversing its title to give goddesses precedence over gods, but it was only in the books brought out at the very end of her life, in 1989 and 1991, that she began to speak, in the old fashion, of one Great Goddess venerated throughout Neolithic and Chalcolithic Europe, of whom all apparently differing female representations were merely aspects.

She carefully remodeled the image of this being to conform with evolving feminist opinion, reducing the association with motherhood, fertility and sexuality to emphasize her far more as a mighty creatrix, presiding over all life and death. Whereas in 1974 she had acknowledged her debt to Neumann, in 1989 she distanced herself from him by criticizing the limitations of his concepts (Gimbutas 1974:238-39; 1989:316). She sharpened the sense of moral outrage with which the destruction of the matrilineal cultures had already been invested by previous writers, portraying the whole period from that time until the present as a patriarchal dark age. Her Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures were allowed no vices, the succeeding ages no virtues (Gimbutas 1989:316-21; 1991:vii-xi, 4). Above all, she claimed for the presentation of these ideas the shock of a brand-new revelation, challenging existing orthodoxies and assumptions. She allowed Joseph Campbell, a psychologist famous for popular books on mythology, to declare in a foreword that she had deciphered the Neolithic as Champollion had decoded the hieroglyphs of Egypt (Gimbutas 1989:xiii-xxi; 1991:vii-xi).

The third great characteristic of her later work was that, like Jacquetta Hawkes, she ceased to direct books at fellow scholars and aimed them instead at an inexpert general public, with impassioned and moving eloquence. She was correspondingly indifferent to professional criticism; her behaviour after 1985 was that of a convert to a faith, preaching it in order to save a threatened world while there was still time, and only too ready to emphasize the distance at which she stood from most other archaeologists (Noble 1989:5-7). A language of revelation coloured the interviews which she gave to feminist periodicals; in one of these she recalled how, on commencing her famous excavations at Achilleion, she picked up a figurine 'of the Goddess' which had been washed to the ground's surface by rain, and thought this 'surely a blessing on her work and her destiny' (Noble 1989:6). The same atmosphere informed her two last, largest and most popular books.

When the latter dealt with southeastern Europe, she was able to draw upon her own immense expertise in the prehistory of that region. It was necessary for her

polemical purpose, however, to argue as Jacquetta Hawkes had done, that the whole of Europe had once been the realm of the Goddess; in extending her claim to the west of it, she relied upon a patchy and selective reasoning, in which a writer such as Michael Dames was accorded equal status with that of professional prehistorians, and some of his mistakes were repeated. Her notions of how a matrilineal society should have been cause her to attribute the Linkardstown cist culture of Ireland, dated to the 4th millennium, to the 'patriarchal' Indo-Europeans, while the great Wessex henges — almost a thousand years younger — were assigned to the woman-centred 'Old Europe' alleged to have preceded them (Gimbutas 1991:206-19, 341). Such errors were almost inevitable, given the fact that she was working against the clock of a debilitating and ultimately mortal illness. She died hailed by her followers as the avatar of a rediscovered religion; it is suggested here instead that the rediscovery — or discovery — of that religion was a long time in the making, and that it proceeds from the very essence of modernity.

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Margaret St. Clair, Forgotten Foremother of Pagan Science Fiction

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The importance of science fiction and fantasy writing in the Pagan community is undeniable. Most often told is the story of how Robert Heinlein's 1961 novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* (SISL) helped spawn the Church of All Worlds. As CAW co-founder Oberon (Tim) Zell recently wrote, "SISL introduced me and a few friends to the ideas of Immanent Divinity ('Thou Art God'), Pantheism ('all that groks is God'), Sacraments (water sharing), Priestesses, social nakedness, intimate extended families as a basis for community; and, of course, open, loving relationships without jealousy; and joyous expression of sexuality as divine union." From that introduction, Zell, Lance Christie, and others created the Church of All Worlds, and as Zell acknowledges, "organized SF fandom ... had an enormous influence on the CAW and the newly emerging Pagan movement, providing a template for our organization that continues to this day."¹ For instance, organized Pagan festivals, which began in the mid-1970s and blossomed in the 1980s, often carried the syllable 'con,' from 'convention,' in their names (Gnosticon, Esotericon), a practice begun by the organizers of SF fan conventions. (More recently, as festivals moved from urban hotels to outdoor campgrounds, more are described as 'festivals' or 'fests'.)

We might even speculate that SF was more important in North America than in the British Wiccan revival, because North American Pagans could not tell themselves a story about re-connecting with the religious tradition of their land's former inhabitants. Instead, they had to forge their own and they drew often as not on visions of alternative futures for inspirations. Fantasy works turn up frequently on coven reading lists. A writer in the Colorado-based magazine *Mountain Oracle* suggests that aspirants to a Wiccan first-degree initiation should read Katherine Kurtz's *Lammas Night* (based on the ritual work said to have been carried out in 1940 to halt the planned German invasion of England),² Ursula LeGuin's *Earthsea Trilogy* and other works of fantasy, together with the expected works of Margot Adler, Scott Cunningham and other

contemporary writers on magic. Additional works (Charles De Lint, Castaneda) are prescribed for the second degree.³

With the exception of the Church of All Worlds, the preceding paragraphs largely describe the decade of the 1970s and subsequently. But Neopagan Witchcraft and the world of science fiction intersected at least as early as 1963, the year of publication of Margaret St. Clair's novel *Sign of the Labrys*. Unfortunately, St. Clair, who lived from 1911 to 1995, would be caught between her writer's craft and the secrecy of the Craft. Accused by her Craft

mentors of having 'given away too much,' she would back away from overtly Wiccan themes while still expressing her underlying spiritual and ecological philosophies. In her later years, her writing output declined, and few contemporary Wiccans are aware of her work.

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When *Sign of the Labrys*⁴ came out in 1963, 'SF' definitely stood for science fiction then, although of course it was speculative too. This was the age of 'space opera' starship troopers and slim-finned rockets pulling G's as they strained

to leave planetary gravity. Technocrats ruled, while "Beyond the perdurite windows, magnified in the crystalline clarity of the asteroid's synthetic atmosphere, loomed a row of the immense squat turret forts that guarded the Astrophon base — their mighty twenty-four-inch rifles, coupled to the Veronar autosight, covered with their theoretical range everything within Jupiter's orbit." Women, when they appeared, were "Elora Renee ... the lovely dark-eyed Martian girl" or "his wife, Myra [who] fluffed up her red hair in a distracted fashion."

That is not Margaret St. Clair's writing; the first two quotations came from Jack Williamson's story 'Hindsight' and the third from 'When the Bough Breaks,' by Lewis Padgett. Both stories appeared in John W. Campbell Jr.'s 1952 anthology of works previously published in *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine, one of the classic SF 'pulp.'⁵ It was a masculine world of drawing boards and atomic pistols, and the only witches were female, perhaps interplanetary sorceresses like James H. Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres*⁶ or priestesses of exotic religions far off in time or space. But even those fictional characters had some

imaginal power: How many of Schmitz's readers wondered if they too could mentally sense some equivalent of the klatha power?

Still, as Ramfis S. Firethorn noted in a recent issue of *Green Egg* devoted to the theme of 'science fiction and Paganism,' the 'Golden Age' of science fiction—the late 1930s and early 1940s—generally ignored Witchcraft as a theme.⁷

Sign of the Labrys is sprinkled with signatures of the Gardnerian Craft: people saying 'Blessed be' to each other, use of ligature and drugs to gain 'the sight,' ... ritual nudity, ritual garters, and Sewell's initiation by a man in a stag mask with a scourge ...

Robert Graves, who announced in *The White Goddess* that the double-headed ax was a sign of goddess worship. But who was she? In 'Thoughts from my Seventies,' her introduction to a collection of her earlier stories, *The Best of Margaret St. Clair*, published in 1985 by Academy Chicago, she wrote, "The road from ... Kansas to science fiction writing in California is a tortuous one and one that I don't want to try to retrace. John Clute, who did a critical study of my work in Science Fiction Writers, characterized me as 'elusive,' and it may be so."

She had moved with her family to California when she was 17. Presumably that was in 1928, just a year before the economic crash that marked her generation's lives. She attended the University of California at Berkeley, and went on to get a master's degree in Greek. She met her husband, Eric St. Clair, at Berkeley also. In that same introduction, she talks about the craft of science-fiction writing. She liked the freedom that the genre gave her as a writer, but she seemed perplexed by fandom. "I am often puzzled by the intensity of feeling people bring to [science fiction]. Is it a sacred cause? Have science fiction writers become the seers, the prophets, the moral teachers of our age? Can they

"There was plenty written about high sorcery and high magic in ancient kingdoms. Magic swords abounded, and towers in which fearful wizards conjured terrible demons, but people who practiced simple magic in a religious context were peculiarly absent. Then two literary events occurred ... [Margaret Murray's works] and the publication of Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*."⁸ Margaret St. Clair's use of the word 'labrys' in her title suggests that she had been reading

give us guidance on levels unknown to the writers of detective or gothic fiction? I don't find the qualifications for these elevated roles among my colleagues or in myself." In her opinion, SF's "predictive and prophetic value, in which public respect for science fiction seems to be rooted, have not proved very great." Instead, she offered, "the historic task of science fiction is to develop a global consciousness. ... It may be that science fiction writers, without ever being conscious of it, have been moved as a group to blow on the spark of a new awareness in human beings: that we live on a sacred planet." If she was right, then Jack Williamson's story 'Hindsight' unconsciously fit the mission, for despite its space-opera trappings, its plot turned on the desperate attempt by the citizens of Earth to break loose from the rule of the Astrarch, a space pirate who became dictator of our solar system. (That the Earth people all seemed to be Americans was another matter; *Astounding Science Fiction* was an American magazine.)

In 'Idris' Pig,' the first story in *The Best of Margaret St. Clair*, the sacred planet was Mars—an inhabitable Mars, like that of Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*. The title itself gives a clue: 'Idris Seabright' was one of St. Clair's pen names, and if she got 'labrys' from Graves' *White Goddess*, she cannot have missed his references to Idris, one of the Three Happy Astronomers of Britain, according to the Welsh triads, and to Cader Idris, a Welsh mountain with a stone 'chair' at its summit, "where," Graves wrote, "according to local the legend, whoever spends the night is found in the morning either dead, mad, or a poet."⁹ George, the male protagonist, traveling on an interplanetary spaceliner between Earth and Mars, 'planet of perfumes,' accepts a mysterious commission to deliver an odoriferous miniature pig to someone who will recognize his password at the spaceport. There are various mix-ups, some violent, and eventually he becomes allied with Blixia, a "good-looking [Martian] girl" with dark red hair. Just when two drooling bad guys have George and Blixia cornered, she plays her trump card:

"'Ando djar,' Blixia said. She raised one hand and swept the red curls back from her forehead.

"'D-d-dai?' the shorter addict said.

"'Andor,' Blixia replied. George, peering at her obliquely, saw that on her forehead shone, in pale blue fire, the intertwined symbols of the full and crescent moon."¹⁰

The bad guys beg the priestess's pardon and retreat, leaving George and Blixia to complete their mission. The moon symbols sound just like those often displayed on a Witch Queen's crown or on an athame, yet 'Idris' Pig' was first published in 1949 in the magazine *Startling Stories*. That was only a year after *The White Goddess*.

Sign of the Labrys begins, “There is a fungus that grows on the walls that they eat. It is a violet color, a dark reddish violet, and tastes fresh and sweet. People go into the clefts to pick it.” By the second paragraph, the reader is into a familiar scenario of Cold War-era science fiction: a post-catastrophe world where huge underground shelters were constructed and “never actually occupied, and there had been no need for peace to be made for them to be abandoned entirely. People live in them now because they are quiet, even luxurious.”

Sam Sewell, the narrator, lives in “the tier called E3” under an unnamed city in the former United States. Due to global ‘yeast plagues,’ Earth’s population has plummeted, government and commerce dissolved, and the survivors merely drift through their days, finding what they need in the massive stockpiles of emergency supplies, their chief meaningful, organized labor being the collecting and mass burial of victims of the continuing, although abated, plagues. By page 2, Sewell has been contacted by an agent of the FBY (Federal Bureau of Yeast?): “As far as we can be said to have a government nowadays, it is the FBY; I don’t know why we dread it so. Perhaps it is the background of ‘science,’ which, to a man of my generation, is automatically dreadful.” The FBY is hunting a woman named “Despoina, or Spina, or just D . . . We suspect that she may be a sower [of infectious yeasts].” Despoina, the agent informs him on his next visit, is a witch.¹¹ Sewell’s reaction is predictable: he thinks first of old hags, broomsticks, and so forth, whereas Despoina is described as a “girl . . . slender and small-boned, with a remarkably fair skin [and] very heavy red-gold hair.”¹²

If readers have guessed that Despoina is the priestess, that Sewell will become her partner, and that the FBY will play the role of the Inquisition, they have the bare bones of the plot. And if they detect a parallel between Sam Sewell and Jan Bonder and between Despoina and “pliant and graceful” Morven the witch (with “pure ivory flesh” and “red-gold hair”¹³), they might wonder if Margaret St. Clair had picked up a little-known novel of 1949 called *High Magic’s Aid*, by a writer using the pen name ‘Scire.’ Most definitely she had read the same writer’s next book, *Witchcraft Today*, published in 1954 under his own name, Gerald Gardner.¹⁴ *Sign of the Labrys* is sprinkled with signatures of the Gardnerian Craft: people saying ‘Blessed be’ to each other, use of ligature and drugs to gain ‘the sight,’ recovered memories of the Burning Times and an ancient Sabbat rite (‘Horse, Horse and haddock!’), ritual nudity, ritual garters, and Sewell’s initiation by a man in a stag mask with a scourge (a detail which would cause St. Clair some small problems later).¹⁵

Sign of the Labrys carried a publication date of August 1963, which is significant, because according to mainstream Wiccan history, the Gardnerian tradition arrived in North America in the persons of Raymond and Rosemary Buckland slightly later. The date has led some Witches to speculate on a pre-Buckland strain of Gardnerian-influenced Wicca in North America. According to Buckland himself, however, St. Clair had read *Witchcraft Today* and

Another visitor to that same house was Ed Fitch, a younger American who found the Craft through the St. Clairs.

combined its influence with her own preexisting desire for a Pagan renaissance but was not yet formally initiated. Both St. Clairs were interested in magic and were, in effect, Neopagans before the term was in common use. Margaret’s background in Classics contributed largely to that fact; she would have read such scholars on Greek mythology as Jane Hamilton, who contributed a lot to the mythos of

‘ancient matriarchies.’ The St. Clairs had been in touch with Gerald Gardner circa 1962, and, Buckland said, “Gerald put them on to me.”¹⁶ Margaret St. Clair sent him a copy of her new book, *Sign of the Labrys*: “Perhaps a little late in the day, she asked me if I would critique it for Craft details. I thought they were very good at the time except for the fact that she had a man initiating a man.”¹⁷ The error in ritual did not prevent a friendship from developing. “They were absolutely wonderful people, very warm and loving,” Buckland recalled. After correspondence and visits, the Bucklands flew from New York to California and initiated the St. Clairs, who used the Craft names Froniga and Weyland, on 15 April 1966. Eric’s Craft name reflected his interest in smithcraft and jewelry-making; he made the silver witch queen’s crown that Rosemary Buckland wears in photographs in Raymond’s book *Witchcraft from the Inside*.¹⁸

The St. Clairs’ house “was a great place to visit,” Buckland recalled. “It was high up in the hills [above Berkeley] with a fantastic view—an all-wood house; the walls were plain, bare wood. They had floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and the most incredible collection of the first editions of all the Oz books by Frank Baum. Margaret was very much into herbs and had an herb garden.” Another visitor to that same house was Ed Fitch, a younger American who found the Craft through the St. Clairs. He confirmed that their interest in magic predated their Gardnerian initiation.¹⁹ “When I first walked into their house down at the end of Skyline Drive in Richmond (California) in 1964, the hardwood floor had a triple circle with a pentagram inscribed in it. Me being the innocent, I figured, ‘Oh, how very interesting,’ And I saw the ceremonial sword on the wall, but I

did not connect two and two to make four. The key thing about the circles on the floor is that that's not the way the Gardnerians would have done it. That is pre-Gardnerian, although it's conceivably out of *High Magic's Aid*. What they had there predated their association with the Bucklands."

Like the majority of 1960s Wiccans, Fitch made his initial connection through books. He had already read Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*; then, "I was living in Baltimore at the time with my parents after I got out of the Air Force the first

Unfortunately for her potential readers, the 'slap on the wrist' she apparently received for spilling secrets — as 'secrets' were perceived in the 1960s — seems to have soured her on creating any more obviously Wiccan characters.

time. When I started getting restless, I would go out to the airport and watch the planes go in and out. I browsed through their really good book section and came across *Sign of the Labrys*. I flipped through it, put it back on the shelf, took a couple steps, stopped, and said, "Wait a second! Moon phases ... priestess ... this fits with what Gardner said and what Robert Graves said." I read it carefully and said, "Aha, this is the Craft." I read it and re-read it. Once I began writing to Margaret in care of the publisher, I began a steady exchange of letters, and

they invited me to come out and visit them. Late that year I did exactly that." When Fitch rejoined the Air Force and was stationed in Massachusetts, "they sent a report on me to the Bucklands and said that I was good material for the Gardnerian Craft. I got a letter from Rosemary, and as soon as I got settled in at the air base, I contacted the Bucklands, went down [to Long Island] to pay them a visit and we were friends instantly. That was how Margaret and Eric got me connected in with the Craft." In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Fitch continued to visit the St. Clairs. "We would settle down and talk and talk and talk — they were willing to go all night, but I would start collapsing at about 3 a.m." Neither he nor Buckland remember them ever leading a coven. Childless by choice, bookish, both writers, the St. Clairs preferred their long-distance friendships to taking a hands-on role in the growing 1970s Pagan renaissance. By then the St. Clairs were in their sixties, and as Fitch recalls, there was a certain generation gap between them and the new psychedelic Pagans. Not that they were prudes, he continued. They were well-traveled, stayed at nudist colonies, and "while they approved of a lot of the liberal attitudes, they disapproved of most of the people that were putting things forth and thought

that they were pretty gauche. Also, they were 'hardshell Gardnerians,' I guess you'd say. About the time that they were initiated, we were all convinced that the Gardnerian Book of Shadows was cast in granite and that it had been that way with every word unchanged for centuries. We don't believe that anymore, but at that time, they did, and so they had a strong suspicion of anybody that would call himself or herself a Witch." Nevertheless, Fitch said, "If anyone deserved the term 'elders,' they did."

The St. Clairs had also disconnected themselves somewhat from the Bay Area, moving to a new home on the Pacific coast near Point Arena. They had read Dion Fortune's novels *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*, and recreated their atmosphere in a house where every window had an ocean view. Eric St. Clair died in 1987. Ed Fitch last saw Margaret in early 1994, a little more than a year before her death. "She was so very frail that afterwards [some other friends] and myself felt that she might not survive the trauma of when her old cat died. Her cat seemed to be the one friend that she still had left. More people should have visited her."

Perhaps Margaret St. Clair felt she had given away too much in *Sign of the Labrys*, for her subsequent novels were not so overtly Wiccan, even though a feminist Pagan outlook continued to inform them. Despite wearing the camouflage of the male-oriented 'Golden Age of Science Fiction,' she had always tended to deflate the heroic ego in her stories. Her 'successful' male characters, like Sam Sewell, were skeptical and humble; when more heroic, grasping types defeated them, the long-term prognosis for humanity was going to be bad. Her 1949 story 'Hathor's Pets' undercut the traditional 'Golden Age' female characterizations: helpless, inferior, or evil. Although the narrator's sister "was never very logical" and hardly "violated the cult of feminine delicacy," she is a product of her times: "the government-sponsored cult of feminine modesty, chastity, and brainlessness in the late 1980s had put an end to [feminine intelligence and independence]. Nowadays a woman was a cross between a dripping sponge and a vegetable." Perhaps St. Clair was prophetic enough to foresee the rise of the Religious Right and Focus on the Family.

In *The Dancers of Noyo* she entered the sub-genre of Northern California After The Big Collapse, similar territory to that explored by Ursula LeGuin in her *Always Coming Home* or Ernest Callenbach in *Ecotopia*. Maybe she had witnessed some members of the Psychedelic Generation engaging in what we called at the time psychedelic fascism: 'Be hip, or else.' *Dancers'* world is divided into coastal tribes: back-to-the-land hippies who have aged and become the Mandarins, "all the old activists ... the most self-righteous generation since Queen Nefertiti." They enforce vision quests and the production of

hallucinations upon the younger generation. "I've never been able to understand, though, why the Mandarins prize visual illusions so much," the young narrator says. "... the trouble was that the people my own age, though they hated the whole mystic bit, confined their action against it to bitching."²⁰ *Dancers* is less Wiccan than *Labrys* but none the less magical. Its magic, however, is more shamanistic and bioregional than Gardnerian; after earthquakes and plagues, the children of the wannabe Indians are in fact beginning truly to inhabit the land. "It seemed to me that the legends were coming back," says the narrator, another Sam. "The coast was reappearing itself with figures from its ancient past ... The old ways were coming back."²¹ As in *Sign of the Labrys*, this Sam and his female companion must uncover and destroy an evil conspiracy.

St. Clair published two novels between *Labrys* and *Dancers*. These were *Message from the Eocene* (1964) and *The Dolphins of Altair* (1967), about humans conspiring with intelligent dolphins to save the environment. I have been unable to locate either one, but as the Eocene era marked the rise of mammals, I suspect that the former as well as the latter showed her ecological concerns. Science fiction's impact on Neopaganism and Wicca may well have lasted because its characters sometimes offered role models of a sort to a community overloaded with 'beginners' and short on 'elders.' In addition, as I suggested earlier, science fiction might possibly have been a more potent 'growth agent' on Neopaganism in North America than in Britain, for instance.

I would also suggest that St. Clair's work set a course that would be followed later by North American Wicca. It began with combing through ceremonial magic, succeeded by some wholesale borrowings from Gardnerian Wicca, and now, I suspect, is moving towards a more place-oriented practice and an attempt to discover a new spiritual relationship with the land that at the same time does not merely copy or 'steal' the practices of native tribes. Unfortunately for her potential readers, the 'slap on the wrist' she apparently received for spilling secrets—as 'secrets' were perceived in the 1960s—seems to have soured her on creating any more obviously Wiccan characters. Years would pass before any other author did so. Nevertheless, Margaret St. Clair was able to communicate her broader concerns. At this writing, at least one publisher has expressed interest in reprinting her Pagan-themed work, so possibly her influence will spread a little further.

An earlier version of this essay appeared in Songs of the Dayshift Foreman (Box 1607, Aldergrove, BC V4W 2V1, Canada), an articulate Pagan newsletter highly recommended by the editors of The Pom.

References:

1. Oberon Zell, 'Science Fiction, Double Feature,' *Green Egg* 118 (March-April 1997): 3. Cf. Chap 6, 'A Religion from the Future—the Church of All Worlds' in Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), as well as Robert S Ellwood, *The Sixties: Spiritual Awakening* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994): 183-85.
2. As I argues in my 1985 paper, 'Secrecy and Historicity in the Book of Shadows,' the story of 1940 magical workings to thwart the threatened German invasion is foundational to the British Craft. It established Wicca's patriotic credentials and, esoterically, drew a set of parallels in which Britain = Native Paganism and Nazi Germany = Christianity.
3. Kierian Rhys, 'A Matter of Degree,' *The Mountain Oracle* 1:3 (Summer 1997): 82-83.
4. Margaret St. Clair, *Sign of the Labrys* (New York: Bantam Books, 1963).
5. John W Campbell, ed. *The Astounding Science Fiction Anthology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952).
6. James H Schmitz, *The Witches of Karres* (New York: Ace Books, 1966). A portion of this novel was published in Campbell's 1952 anthology, noted above.
7. Those years were the 'Golden Age' as defined by literary critics. The other 'Golden Age of Science Fiction,' I am told on good authority, is whenever the reader was 13 years old.
8. Ramfis S Firethorn, 'Speculative Theurgy,' *Green Egg* 118 (March-April 1997): 8.
9. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1966 [1948]) 91.
10. *The Best of Margaret St. Clair* 36.
11. St. Clair, *Labrys*, 13.
12. St. Clair, *Labrys*, 8.
13. Gerald Gardner, *High Magic's Aid* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1975 [1949]) 204.
14. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider & Co, 1954).
15. St. Clair, *Labrys*, 53-54.
16. Raymond Buckland, personal interview, 5 June 1997.
17. Gardnerian initiations were supposed to be of men by women and vice versa. Hearing of this mistake in the text, a contemporary Gardnerian priestess said, "If I were arguing for St. Clair back then, I would have argued that I had turned it around deliberately."
18. Raymond Buckland, *Witchcraft from the Inside* (St Paul: Llewellyn, 1971).
19. Ed Fitch (pseudonym), personal interview, 6 June 1997.
20. St. Clair, *Dancers*, 8-9.
21. St. Clair, *Dancers*, 163.

BOOK REVIEWS: Two New Books on Pagan Ritual

The Spell of Making
Blacksun

Chicago: Eschaton Productions. 1995

Castings: The Creation of Sacred Space
Ivo Dominguez, Jr. (Panpipe)

Georgetown: SapFire Productions, 1996

Reviewed by Diana Tracy

Back in the dark ages when many of us started Wicca, we were starved for knowledge, and, being of the intellectual bent, headed to our nearest libraries and bookstores looking for revealing tomes. What we found were abstruse esoterica only indirectly related to our doings, or decidedly spare recipe books of 'spells' and a few rituals. There were few sources that provided satisfactory 'whole cloth' rituals, nor were there books that explored the implications and obligations of doing magic.

When Neopaganism began to flower on the late 70s and early 80s, a new generation of books proliferated. Unfortunately, even the best of them tended to be 'how' books, with only minimum attention paid to the 'why' and 'wherefore' departments.

Currently there is another surge of new titles at the local bookstores, and no few of them are on the art of creating ritual. To my joy and amazement, even the weakest of them seem to cover at least some aspects of ethical, spiritual and theoretical issues. Do you suppose this means that we are actually *thinking* about what we're doing, rather than just doing it? What a refreshing concept!

The following two books are, in my mind, a couple of the best available. Both deal thoroughly with the issues raised by doing magic. One goes deeply into the mechanics of actually creating a ritual from start to finish, and the other focuses

mainly on the creation of sacred space. I had originally thought that I would be judging these books on an 'either/or' basis, but I find that I'm glad to have both of them on my bookshelf.

The Spell of Making by Blacksun could be thought of as a detailed operator's manual for the creation of ritual, full of detail, and complete with a tutorial. Breezy and accessible, this book reads like having a series of fireside conversations with this 20 year veteran of Wicca. Blacksun, is a long time high priest of a large west coast organization (he lives in Seattle), and he has researched and lectured on this subject, as well as refined his ritual making technique in both large and small venues. His first published work on the subject, *The Beginning Elements of Ritual Construction*, has been sold and distributed by Circle for better than ten years; and his series of articles in the old *Georgian Newsletter* concerning ritual-making precede even that. Much of Northwest Wiccan ritual shows the touch of his most competent hand.

Ritual is certainly not unique to just Pagans, and Blacksun's formula could be applied to any religion at all. But his experience as a coven's High Priest for 17 years is used throughout to illustrate the principles and techniques he describes in his book. This makes it not just a dry work of theory for study, but a comfortable read that will give you insight and understanding as well as knowledge. Parts are inspiring, others are humorous, but all are educational and enjoyable.

Though *The Spell of Making* is written as if it were a fireside conversation, beware: this is compact information. Few could read it from front to back without having to put it down several times and mull over the information. Even one chapter a day will keep you thinking long into the night. It is a whole new approach to looking at religious ritual that you won't find in any text book or college course. Even if you only plan to attend rituals, this book will give you insight that will be invaluable in making your participation more magical and spiritually significant than before. And if you plan to create or produce rituals, and you want to insure that you know what you are doing and why it should be done, this information will give you the best chance of making those rituals truly wondrous.

The book is written in three parts. The first part of the book details what religious ritual is and how it works. Blacksun makes a passionate case against casual preparation and production of rituals. He gives specific definitions to various words and spiritual concepts that are frequently used inexactly in the neopagan community. With his explanation of the conscious and unconscious



mind, he explains why and how symbols are used within ritual and how to make our magic real.

The second part of *The Spell of Making* gives a step-by-step 'blueprint' of a ritual. Each step (focus, vision, handling energy, cleanup) has a chapter of its own, and much effort is put into explaining not only the 'hows' but the 'whys and wherefores' as well. Along the way, Blacksun explains what each step is supposed to accomplish and offers familiar examples of how that can be done. As the reader is led from one step to the next, Blacksun shows how each is connected and dependent on the others before it. However, he notes that these

If you are a third degree Wiccan ... The Spell of Making is for you. If you are a Neopagan new to magical work ... then you'll be wanting to read Castings: the Creation of Sacred Space.

steps are merely framework; that to build truly great ritual is an art which uses this framework to make something beautiful and spiritually meaningful. As with other arts, time and practice are the necessary ingredients for creating good ritual.

The last section of the book may be the most valuable to those with no mentors who are faced with the task of writing ritual. Blacksun has provided two complete rituals in the Appendices, complete with line numbers. These are rituals that are currently being performed, and have been refined over time. In chapter 14, he goes over one of the rituals line by line, dissecting and explaining what he was writing and why he did it that way. All of the principles and formulas described in the previous chapters of the book are employed, and the reader is given a real, practical look at how they are used in this particular ritual.

In the following chapter, the reader is then led through the process of building a ritual from scratch. Some parts are produced only to be discarded later, as will happen in real creative process. Blacksun discusses his thinking as the ritual-building progresses. The process of development is written for all to see, and the result is a well made ritual that works exactly as intended. Appendix B contains the completed ritual, as actually performed.

This book is not aimed at neophytes. It assumes at least some knowledge of theory and practice, and some experience at least participating in rituals. Although couched in primarily Wiccan terms, it is certainly applicable to the broader Neopagan community, as well as anyone needing to understand the principles of ritual writing.

Castings: The Creation of Sacred Space by Ivo Dominguez Jr. (Panpipe) is an invitation to and an exploration of sacred space. Dominguez is an active member of the Neopagan community on the east coast, and has participated in a variety of esoteric disciplines. This is reflected in his book; although applicable to Wicca, it focuses on a much broader spectrum of traditions, including Quaballah, ceremonial magic, astrology, and the more traditional eastern and western religions.

Castings, like *The Spell of Making*, is divided into sections. The first contains a series of lessons and simple illustrative exercises, the second deals with magical symbolism, and the third is a variety of casting techniques. If you go through this book as intended, following the exercises and castings in order, you will have a very solid foundation for working magic.

The introduction almost put me off. Although filled with good information, especially for the neophyte, I found the language a bit thick and 'over-scholarly'. However, this was less apparent in the rest of the book.

The first three chapters deal with the self. Inner work that everybody who makes magic should do is laid out in a sensible progression. Issues like inner vision, state of mind before, during and after magical work, and the most important of all, awareness of self are explored using the basic senses as a pathway to understanding. From chapter three, Inner Preparations: "Of all the variables to consider, the quality of any casting is determined, to the largest part, by the internal state of the person or persons involved in the creation of the space."

Further chapters covering the use of energy, grounding and centering, and immanence and transcendence complete this first section. The information is dense and detailed. More complex exercises build on the previous workings. Definitions are clear, and pros and cons of different actions ("What happens if I don't ground?") are discussed.

Next, Dominguez undertakes a discussion of magical symbolism. He shows a wide variety of symbol languages from a variety of traditions, and does a



remarkably good job of showing how they work together as a magical fabric covering all esoteric traditions. He makes it clear that castings can be as simple or complex as you wish, depending on the amount of work you wish to do.

The final section is a series of casting exercises, some designed for solo work, and some for groups. These show Dominguez' ease with moving amongst the many traditions that he's studied. Each working is laid out in detail, including what to expect from a magical standpoint, and what to notice when reviewing the work. Although I must say that I'm not entirely tuned in to all of his modalities, each work does present a different way of manipulating magical energies. A run through all of them would give a practitioner a good solid feel for how the energy is moving during a ritual.

A short chapter is given to working with large groups, including a ritual that worked successfully for their group. A final word about importance of intent during magical work wraps up this excellent book.

Both books are well laid out, and progress from simple to complex information, bringing the reader along with exercises and examples. They both accomplish what they set out to do with aplomb. Neither is a cover to cover read. One should expect to read, work, and then digest the information presented before moving on. My only major criticism of them is their lack of quality bibliographies. Neither of these books would benefit greatly from footnoting, but both should, in my opinion, be providing extensive reading lists. That said, I shall be recommending both of these books to my students.

If you are a third degree Wiccan who has only participated in rituals and has suddenly been required to provide effective ritual for your group, *The Spell of Making* is for you. If you are a Neopagan new to magical work, or if you are a Wiccan from one of those 'boy scout badge' type of groups, and you want to *really* understand what magic is all about, then you'll be wanting to read *Castings: the Creation of Sacred Space*.

The Spell of Making

Blacksun

Chicago: Eschaton Productions. 1995.

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Castings: The Creation of Sacred Space

Ivo Dominguez, Jr. (Panpipe)

Georgetown: SapFire Productions, 1996.

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