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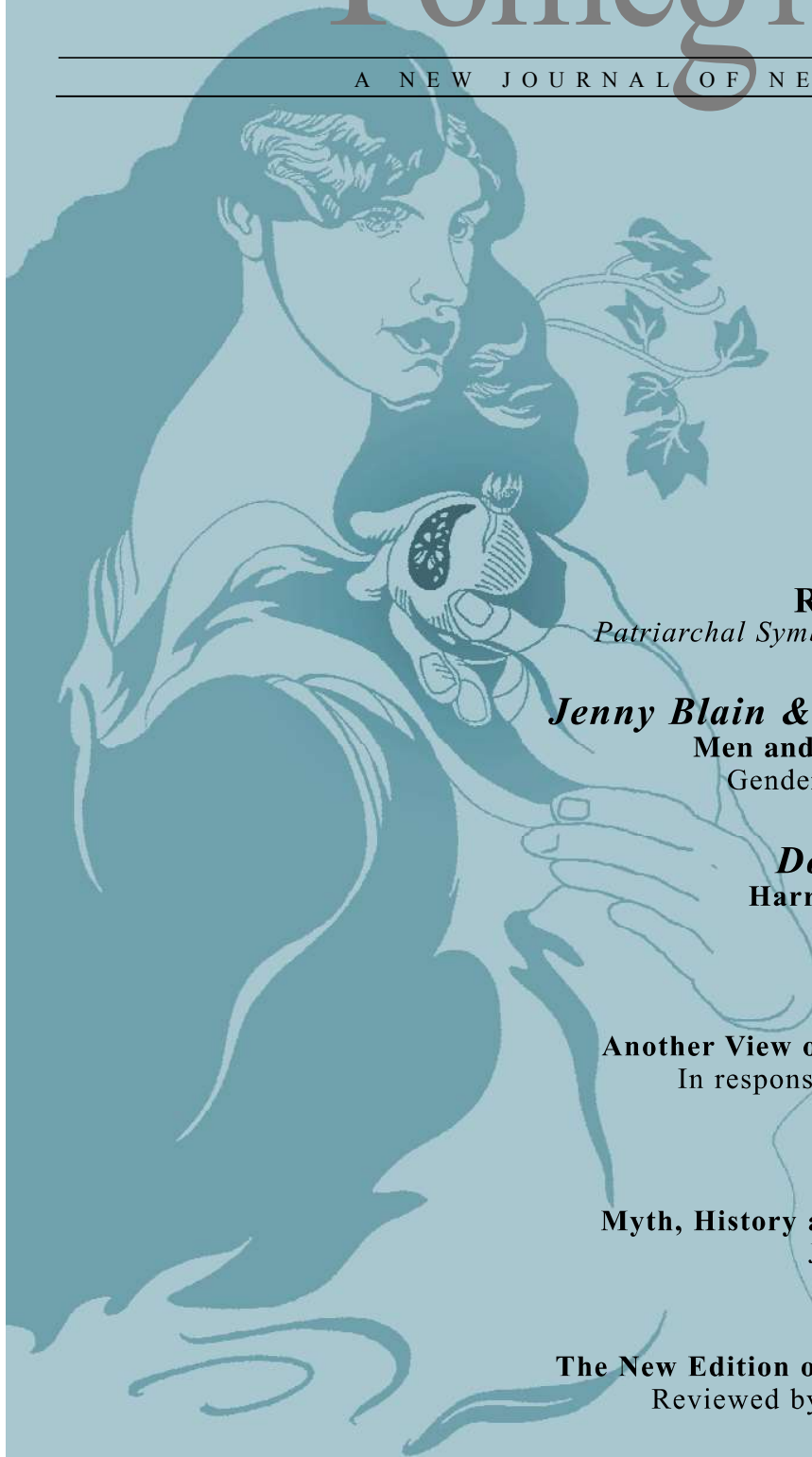
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The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



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Reviewed by Sabina Magliocco




The Pomegranate

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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 modern Paganism's many Paths. 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.

Notes from the Underground

It is with great pleasure that we welcome back Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis, whose work first appeared in our Fall 98 issue. In this instance, they are the co-authors of an article on the fascinating subject of seidhrwork and gender. Those of us who are (still!) running into people who believe that only women can be Witches will be interested in the parallels between this all-too-common misunderstanding and the challenges faced by Heathen men who engaged in the oracular practice of seidhr.

In the earliest days of Neopaganism, nearly all of us believed that the basic elements of our religion were descended from either Classical Paganism or Neolithic tribal practices, and that these had survived in Europe alongside the official state religion for a millennium or so, only to be ruthlessly and (almost) completely wiped out by the terrors of the Inquisition. Subsequent, however, to the publication of Brian Levack's *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* in 1987, and Aidan Kelly's *Crafting the Art of Magic* in 1991, these beliefs have generally fallen out of favour, at least among the majority of educated Neopagans.

Two senior Pagan scholars, Donald Frew and Max Dashu, have continued to resist this trend, and we are happy to be able to present articles by both of them, written especially for *The Pomegranate* at our request. Frew, well known for his critiques of Kelly (and more recently of Ronald Hutton and Jacqueline Simpson; see the most recent issue of

Ethnologies), writes about a hitherto unsuspected vector for the transmission of religious ideas and sacred texts from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Europe by way of the Islamic center of scholarship at Harran. Dashu writes in response to Jenny Gibbon's article in our Summer 98 issue, questioning the new models of the Witch Hunt which are being proposed by social historians such as Robin Briggs, Norman Cohn, and Brian Levack. Those who wish to learn more about the work of Ms Dashu and her Suppressed History Archives should refer to the bio sketch on p 43.

We have followed these articles with an essay on the difference(s) between myth and history by John Michael Greer, co-author of the now-famous (or infamous) 'Red God' article that appeared recently in *Gnosis* magazine.

The new edition of Leland's *Aradia* is reviewed here by Sabina Magliocco. Further reviews or letters about this landmark publishing event are actively encouraged.

We mentioned in the introduction to our previous issue that no one had yet commented on our new layout and typeface. We've received several responses since that time—one of which appears in our letters column—and as a result we have returned to a denser typeface, while maintaining our two-column layout. We have also reversed the previous trend toward longer and longer call outs, restricting ourselves to short quotes surrounded by more 'air'. We hope you continue to enjoy our evolving appearance, and we welcome your comments and suggestions.

Persephone's hard-working minions.

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

CARMELLA HUGGINS WRITES:

Dear Pomegranate Readers,

I was greatly impressed by Professor Salomonsen's recent article [*Pom* 8, Spring '99] on the difficulties facing those conducting research in 'Modern Magical Communities'. The efforts she went to, as well as the thoughtful insights she arrived at, are a credit not only to her own wit and character, but also to the way the scholarly process is supposed to work, IMHO, and often does.

Although Salomonsen's article mainly addresses the methodological problems she encountered, my attention was drawn to the issue she raises in her introductory remarks: the essentially masculine nature of the ritual symbolism in use, not only by Reclaiming, but throughout much of the modern Pagan community. Her closing comments on the subject were welcome and informative, and if there's anything more she has to say on this subject—something that may have found its way into her thesis, for example—I, for one, would be most interested to see it.

For several years now, I have heard and read others, both inside and outside of the magical community, express similar opinions: not only is Neopagan Witchcraft in

general, and feminist Witchcraft in particular, carrying what Salomonsen refers to as "the heavy patriarchal burden of romantic gender essentialism", for the most part we are also largely "only replacing one patriarchal tradition (Judeo-Christian religion) with another (Western occultism)". But if this is true, how can it be, as Salomonsen's respondent asks, that feminist Witchcraft continues to provide so much enrichment and empowerment to so many?

The answer to this question may lie in a more careful consideration of what greater access to 'enrichment and empowerment' actually implies. Here's a quote on the subject from Suki Colgrave, the British Jungian writer:

Instead of urging a new and wider definition of thinking and feeling to include both the masculine and feminine principles, [American feminists] have largely restricted their demands to securing equal rights to develop the masculine thinking and feeling sides of their nature ... By doing this, women may win a more respected place in society, but the strength of the consciousness which exalts masculine thinking over feminine thinking, and all thinking over feeling will remain intact (*The Spirit of the Valley: The Masculine & Feminine in Human Consciousness*, J Tarcher, 1979, p. 91).

If the purpose of the exercise is to appropriate more political power, more access to material rewards, and more personal safety for women, then there can be little question that the most effective way of achieving these ends is through the aggressive use of masculine energy.

Even if the rhetoric surrounding these activities is couched in terms of what Salomonsen refers to as "the consciousness of human rights and its gospel of social constructionism", it doesn't require much in the way of psychological insight—or knowl-

edge of 20th century history—to know how hard it is to actively resist something as powerful as the patriarchy without becoming part of it in the process. This is particularly true if what pass for feminist aspirations are little more than a wish to extend the many, obvious benefits of patriarchal society to wider circles of women.

This process of appropriating patriarchal consciousness—and magic—for women, rather than working to undermine it on a cultural basis as it effects both women and men, may be effectively guaranteeing the victory of patriarchalism.

Carmella Huggins
Toronto, Ontario

SÍÂN REID WRITES:

I received the Beltaine issue in the mail today. Your editorial noted that no one had commented on your format change. Well, let me be the first then. I don't like it.

I understand that because of cost and space limitations, you needed to pick a smaller, more compact font than the one you

were previously using; I just don't like the one you've picked. I find it too rounded, slightly script-like, and more difficult to read. Two small, serif, compact fonts I think would make better text are Garamond and Palatino.

I also think that your call outs are too long and narrow. In general terms, I was taught that a call out should be four lines deep, max. Some of them look as though you've made a hole in the top of the page, and just sort of poured the text in. Could you make them wider, and fit the text around them, with, say, a one point line above and below to separate them from the text?

Just thoughts ... I know it is a big job to do this stuff, even when it is on a computer, and I probably shouldn't be so critical, but I think your other issues looked a whole lot better than this last one ...

Síân Reid
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario



Pomegranate

Announces the establishment of an awards program intended to encourage Neopagan Scholarship.

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Men and 'Women's Magic': Contested Narratives of Gender, Seidhr, and 'Ergi'

by Jenny Blain,
Dalhousie University
and Robert Wallis,
University of Southampton

INTRODUCTION

'Seidhr' is a particular form of practice, broadly 'shamanistic' in nature, within Nature-religions based on Northern European traditions. This article is the work of an anthropologist and an archaeologist, who are discovering seidhr in different ways and from different locations, talking with seidhworkers and engaging with various forms of participation and observation. Here we examine some accounts of seidhworkers, from present and past: today's interviews, and the sagas written around 800 years ago that purport to describe activities of 1000 years ago. The intent is to display some of the interweaving of narratives within the accounts of the present, and hint at how the discursive construction of 'seidhr' as gendered practice provides, for at least some of those who undertake it, a means of resistance to dominant gender paradigms.

SEIDHR AS WOMEN'S MAGIC

seidhr appears in accounts from the past, in the Norse Sagas and Eddic poems, most often as a female activity, 'women's magic', involving trance-journeying to

gain knowledge of the future, or influence perception, thought or action. Male seidhworkers (seidhmenn) were spoken of as 'ergi', a term of insult relating to behaviour seen as 'unmanly'. Over the time of writing of the Sagas (approximately the 12-14th centuries CE) seidhr and other forms of magical practice seem to have been increasingly devalued and proscribed by church and state authorities, re-emerging within the late 20th century search for spiritual and cultural 'roots' and awakening of 'alternative' spiritualities.

One of the best known of the Icelandic sagas, Eiríks saga Rauða, holds an account of the seeress fiorbjörg who comes to a Greenland farm to prophesy. From this account, much of the formal ritual of today's oracular seidhr practice has been derived (Blain, 1999). Her divination, or prophesy, was aided by 'powers' or 'spirits' (nátúrur, from Latin *natura*), and she entered a trance stage, assisted by the singing of a special song. This divinatory practice was not the only 'magical' component of what a seidhworker might do, but it was the one which most obviously resembled the trance-journeying of shamanistic practice elsewhere. Other components might include shapeshifting, and drawing on the spirit world to help or harm others. It is not clear precisely which activities were covered by the term 'seidhr', and it is likely that the meaning of the term changed over time. In this paper we use 'seidhr' as a convenient name for shamanistic activities, in the knowledge that other terms may have been used. Old Norse was not lacking in such terms: *fjölunnigr* 'much-knowing', *hamramr* 'shapestrong', *völva* a woman who could see the future, and so forth. It is pos-

sible that seidhr at one time referred specifically to the seeking of the assistance of spirits, in trance. Our usage in the paper parallels current usage within the communities that are attempting to re-construct seidhr-practices today.

Definitions of shamanic practice vary. Eliade's (1964) outline of the 'shamanic complex' is still widely used, including several major components—primarily the ecstasy gained by means of ascent to the sky, or descent to underworlds, in trance. Often shamanism is described as a potentially-universal phenomenon, a 'shamanic complex' experienced by individuals, to be elaborated or explained in terms of individual spirituality or psychology. Oosten, however, comments (1984: 377) that:

Many authors have described the shamanistic complex as a religious phenomenon ... mainly interested in the origin and the essence of the shamanistic complex and they were less concerned with its social dimensions. For the anthropologist of religion, however, these social dimensions are of crucial importance in order to understand the cultural significance of shamanism.

Examining the history of shamanism and its study shows that 'shamanism' is an extremely problematic term. It is derived from the Tungus word 'sama:n' (Pentikäinen 1998). In the eighteenth century various Mandchu-Tungus language speaking 'tribes' in central Siberia who named their ecstatic practitioners 'sama:n', were encountered by German explorers (Flaherty 1992). The roles of these individuals varied, however, even among this handful of peoples: 'shamans' were not all the same (Hoppál, pers com). While Westerners used terms from their own languages to describe these 'sama:n', such as 'wizard'

in English, by the end of the 18th century, 'Schaman' and the verb 'schamanen' had become the generic terms (Flaherty 1992).

In this way, 'shaman-ism' was born, originally a culture-specific term, extracted, essentialised and universalised into the Westernism we know today (Wallis, in prep.). Therefore, 'shamanism' is whatever the definer wants it to be; no wonder academics find discrete definition elusive and scholars such as Eliade have been criticised for their definitions. Shamanism can still be a useful term though, but definition confines interpretation, where another approach might be more appropriate. Dowson's "Elements of Shamanism" (in press) embrace diversity to avoid the metanarratives definition embodies. Techniques of trance are embedded in specific social relations: shamans enter a trance in order to engage with a spirit world, and this role is socio-politically supported by the community. By focusing on the socio-politics of shamanism, as well as 'techniques' or activities in the spirit world, we can discern cross-cultural difference as well as similarity. The ways that shamans' roles are sanctioned by their communities show how different shamanisms are across the world. The study of shamanism in this way is not monolithic (searching for the same thing everywhere, across space and time) because it emphasises difference. Neither is it vague: the shaman assumes very specific social/spiritual activities.

seidhr, we think, was a shamanistic practice, involving aspects of shamanism as described above; but not necessarily 'shamanic' because the communities of the time did not have 'shamanic religion'. The reconstruction of seidhr today may be

said to be also shamanistic, but not shamanic, for the same reasons. We treat seidr as shamanistic practice embedded within culture, and within discourses (past and present) of gender and ‘appropriate’ behaviour. This is an explicitly sociohistoric approach in which shamanistic prac-

the literature is full of the concept of magic-workers, what these might do, who they should be, and how others should treat them. seidr may not be central to the community, but its practice is still community practice, based in cultural possibilities for women and men. Today seidr is

hwoman or völvu seems one that was generally acknowledged. Jochens says that:

... these narratives ... give credence to a historic reality of prophetesses among pagan Germanic-Nordic tribes. Equally important, the literary proliferation of the sibyls in the thirteenth century suggests that they were part of the contemporary perception of pagan times. (Jochens 1996: 116)

These women may be portrayed ambiguously: later accounts of the (historic) queen Gunnhildr—a woman exercising power in a man’s world—are from her opponents’ point of view (Blain 1998). The later-written romances and sagas of ‘old times’ (*foraldursögur*) deal with the fantastical, and the seeresses become stock figures, the ‘wicked witch’ of more recent folk-tales. In these fantastic stories seidr or magical practice is increasingly portrayed as evil (Jochens 1996).

References to men as seidhworkers are fewer, but they do exist. Thus, we are told in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* that “fiorgrímur hastened to his seidr and built a scaffolding and worked fjölkyngi with all ergi and skelmiskáp (devilry) ...” (Ch. 10). Kotkell of *Laxdæla saga* uses both seidr and galdr (sung spells, often associated with rune magic), more often associated with men. There, however, seidr and galdr appear entwined together—Kotkell builds a seidr-platform, ascends it, and with his sons chants galdr to raise a storm.

One of the half-brothers of Eiríkr Blóðøx (*Gunnhild’s* husband), is described as a seidhmadhr, Rögnvaldr rettilbeini, put to death by his half-brother and father, along with 80 other seidhmenn, for reasons that may have more to do with politics than religion.

The account of Óðinn’s performance of seidr, from *Ynglingasaga*, repeats the

negative association of the term ‘ergi’, for men who are seidhworkers:

But after such witchcraft followed such weakness and anxiety [ergi], that it was not thought respectable for men to practice it; and therefore the priestesses were brought up in this art. (trans., Samuel Laing, London, 1844)

In reading these accounts, it is necessary to place them in context, historical, cultural and political. The accounts were written long after the occurrences they purport to describe, within a christianized Iceland which was part of the European political system. They say more about discourses of magical or shamanic practice in the 13th century than in the 10th. Reading them, we do not know how the people of the 10th century considered seidr, and it seems unlikely that one view would have prevailed. The accounts themselves are at times supportive, at times critical—and often magic is mentioned when it is performed against the leading figures of the sagas. Context and description may be capable of multiple interpretation, as for instance in the verse about Heidhr from *Völuspá*:

Heidi hana hétu	hver er til húsa kom,
völu velspáa,	vitti hún ganda;
seidr hún kunni,	seidr hún leikin,
æ var hún angan	illrar brúðhar.

(Kuhn (1962):*Völuspá* 22)

This verse is conventionally interpreted negatively, chiefly from the last line, translated approximately as “ever was she welcome / to evil women.” Recently it has been suggested by several people within Heathenism (notably Jörmundur Ingi, head of the *Ásatrúarmenn* in Iceland), that the words of this line could bear an alternative interpretation, ‘ever she was welcome to women in trouble’. Indeed, if the phrase ‘illrar brúðhar’ is taken literally, it

Seidr appears ... most often as a female activity ... Male seidhworkers (seidhmenn) were spoken of as ‘ergi’, a term of insult relating to behaviour seen as ‘unmanly’.

tice cannot be understood apart from its ‘social dimensions’; including how seidhworkers were regarded, and regarded themselves, within specific cultural and historical contexts of the 10-12th centuries CE, and the present-day, late 20th century revivals of heathenism in North America and the UK.

Interestingly, seidr is different from other forms of shamanistic practices because not all of the community accepts or is happy with the practice of it. seidr has certain connotations which people (past or present) find unacceptable. It is also under-studied in academia, as are neo-shamanisms generally, because researchers (particularly archaeologists) avoid ‘religion’ in the past due to a perceived lack of evidence: a kind of ‘shamanophobia’ (Dowson 1996).

In the sagas, seidr appears as a somewhat marginal phenomenon, and the seidhworker is often feared, or set apart from the community in some way. Old Norse society and religion were not, apparently, ‘shamanic’. However, on closer inspection

being re-invented as community practice, as part of ‘Northern European’ religion known as Heathenism or *Ásatrú*.

In the sagas, seidr appears primarily as women’s magic: *Ynglingasaga* holds that the first practitioner of seidr was Freyja, who taught this magic to the *Æsir*. In the Eddic poems, we meet the völvu, or prophetess who speaks the great poem *Völuspá* (the speaking of the seeress), and Heidhr (who may be Freyja herself, or may be another name for the völvu who is speaking). Freyja in the poem *Lokasenna* is described as ‘fordædha’, a word for a (usually evil) magic working-woman. In the sagas, in addition to *fiorbjörg* the seeress of *Eiríkr the Red’s* saga, numerous women are described as *seidhkonur* (seidhwomen), or as illusion-workers or shape-shifters (Blain 1999). Some of these sagas deal with the everyday lives of Icelanders, and while they were composed some two centuries after the episodes they purport to record, people are portrayed in them as engaging in activities of a fairly usual kind, so that the concept of the seid-

could suggest Heidhr as a midwife, doing her magic for the relief of young women in labour. The verse then would become:

Heidhr she was called
when to houses she came
a vólva well-forespeaking,
staffs enchanting
seidhr she knew,
seidhr performing in trance
ever she was welcome to women in need.

It is possible that at the time of composition the verse was ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so. Today, the verse is quoted by scholars and some Heathens as evidence of the 'evil' image of seidhr and of those who performed it.

Finally, although we have not seen this discussed elsewhere, there remains a possibility that the mostly-female gendering of 'seidhr' in the literature relates in part to connections with Sámi shamanism. The Sámi of the time of the sagas were a truly shamanic people, foragers and fishers engaging in small-scale reindeer breeding and developing trade links with their Norse neighbours, with large-scale reindeer herding being a later development (Hultkrantz 1994). In repeated instances, Norse women are described as trained by 'Finnish sorcerers', generally considered to have been Sámi shamans—Gunnhildr being the most obvious example. Recent Sámi shamanism was gendered: their shamans were male, often with female assistants. Elsewhere gendering of shamanistic practice is quite common, for instance most San shamans are male (Katz 1981), Korean shamans are mainly female (Kendal 1996). Is there a possible link between the mostly male gendering of Sámi shamans and the mostly female gendering of seidhworkers of the sagas, coming from a non-shamanic community

to be trained as 'assistants' in a shamanic one? This can of course only be speculative. Additionally, in saga times the strict gendering of Sámi shamanism may have been less, as 'Finn' women are spoken of in the sagas as working shamanistic magic, though it is not clear that they were doing so on behalf of the community as the mediator between people and spirits. Sámi shamans, on the other hand, were acting as specialists, for the community (Pentikäinen 1984). (It is not suggested here that all seidhr is derived from Sámi practices; as Hultkrantz (1992) points out this has been raised in the literature but never demonstrated. Here we imply only that by saga times 'Finns' appear to have been seen as teachers of seidhwomen.)

MEN WHO DO SEIDHR TODAY

Today's seidhworkers draw directly on accounts from the Sagas and Eddas. They are in a sense living the stories, inserting themselves into their narratives in attempting to reconstruct seidhr-practice. These reconstructions are challenged both within and without the community of Heathens, by those who say there is little evidence for seidhr, that the details are not known or that in any case seidhr was 'evil magic', done primarily to effect ill fortune. In reply, seidhworkers point to links between their practice and other forms of shamanic journeying, healing and divination. This, then, is a debate about narrative and meaning, occurring within a framework of reconstructed spirituality and religious belief. Yet the reconstruction takes place within a late twentieth-century world, using its discourses and assumptions about gender, magic, 'evil', religion and shamanism, which may be very far

removed from the discourses and assumptions of 10th century practitioners.

Today's seidhworkers have read the saga material, they know the reputation of seidhr and the taunts of 'ergi' that were applied even to the god Óðhinn (the master magician, who we are told had the greatest knowledge of seidhr). Yet for sei-

time jobs, social connections outside Heathenism, families or partners. Within Heathenism, they regard themselves as community workers—though 'community' may include not only human people but animals, plants, deities, land-spirits, and, at times, ghosts. Their work may include divination (high-seat seidhr, or the

Kotkell of Laxdæla saga uses both seidhr and galdr (sung spells, often associated with rune magic), more often associated with men. There, however, seidhr and galdr appear entwined together ...

dhworkers, their work is integral to identity formation. Here we examine narrative accounts of four present-day male seidhworkers, with different degrees of experience of seidhwork and for whom the meanings of 'seidhr' differ, and discuss how they speak of their entry into seidhr and how their seidhwork is implicated in identity construction.

For example, Jordsvin speaks of what seidhr means for him, in general:

It has enriched my life ... And, ah, I am satisfied it's real. I'm happy with it. It, it seems to be a service to the community. Do I enjoy doing it? Yeah. I like my animal spirits, I visit with them. Ah, I like the journey work, I've gotten directions through the underworld journey, on how to get to see Ran and Egir and how to see the Svartalfar and their forges ... (Jordsvin 1996)

This sense of enrichment is echoed by others. So, how do they reconcile the reputation of seidhr with their everyday lives? For these people are not thrill-seekers, not attempting to shock the uninitiated (or 'freak the mundanes'). They have day-

trance journey in quest of answers to specific questions of others), mental-health work, healing, dealing with spirits, 'unhaunting' on behalf of others, and particularly for Bil, the seidhman who comes closest to the model of classical shamanism, working with those who are dying, to ease their spiritual transition.

Yet they have read the literature, and know the reputation. They point out that while many people within the Heathen community have an interest in seidhr, and may engage in solitary journeying, relatively few—and fewer men—are anxious to learn to become community seidhworkers.

Here we return to the epithet 'ergi' applied to male seidhworkers, among others. Often this has been glossed by scholars and Heathens alike as 'passive homosexual', and various colourful descriptions of imagined seidhr activity have been given to account for it (e.g. Jochens 1996: 74). Within Ásatrú, some have expressed the opinion that 'seidhr is

... [many] have interpreted 'ergi' in terms of rejection of conventional masculine ideology, including, today, rejection of violence as a first line approach to dealing with interpersonal problems.

for women and gay men' (quoted from an email discussion on an Ásatrú mail list). This is tinged with homophobic implications. That heathenism is not immune to the homophobia of the wider society is evident from Jordsvin's experiences.

I occasionally get bigoted rants via email, usually from young males high on testosterone and bravado, usually with blatant homophobic content. Large sections of the Heathen community really need some education on this matter. (Jordsvin)

Homophobic implications may extend to all male seidhworkers. One seidhman says:

Having been practicing seidhr for a good while now, the 'ergi' accusation gets thrown at me on a regular basis, usually with some very uneducated and childish interpretations along with it. (Malcolm)

While there are indeed gay male seidhworkers, they do not define the field. Jordsvin, a trained seidhworker, is now assisting in training others, female and male, gay and straight. He says:

The concept of sexual orientation *per se* is a modern one. There do seem to be references in the lore connecting men who do seidhr with men who have sex with men, more specifically, men who are in the receptive role during such activities. Obviously, this should not be an excuse for bigotry against gay people today. Gay men and women seem often to show a knack for seidhr, but heterosexual men can and do learn it and do it quite well.

Interpretations of the old material, 'the lore', are not constant, however, even

among today's seidhworkers. As Bil points out:

That seidhr was not much liked during the late Viking era is quite obvious ... I can think of several things about seidhr that people could find disgusting (Odhin's little practice of necromancy probably raised a few eyebrows). To call something an aberration or a name which indicates unusual (to the average public) sexual practice when it is disliked by a group of people is a fairly common thing among the various Germanic peoples and Europeans at large. 'Homosexual' is used as a common insult... (Bil)

Malcolm, who suggested this topic for research, pointed out that 'ergi' may have a broader meaning than specifically sexual behaviour. He and others have interpreted 'ergi' in terms of rejection of conventional masculine ideology, including, today, rejection of violence as a first line approach to dealing with interpersonal problems. There can be many speculations as to reasons for the application of the epithet in the past. It may have had the primary meaning of 'coward', which a related word still has to present-day Scots.

In the poem Lokasenna, Ódhinn and Loki use the epithet 'argr' of each other. Opinions differ in the Heathen community on how this should be interpreted. On the one hand, as the accusation against Loki relates specifically to sexual activity, it is claimed that the meaning is to become 'like a woman' or to be 'used' 'like a woman'. (Loki changed into a mare, and

bore a foal.) This links with the interpretation of argr or ergi as involving sexual contact, 'passive' or 'receptive' homosexuality, so that when Loki states:

Enn flic seidha kóðhoSámseyo í
oc draptu á vétt sem völor;
vitca líki fórtu veflióðh yfir,
oc hugdha ec flat argis adhal,

But you once practiced seidhr on Samsey
and you beat on the drum as witches do
(völor, volvas, seeresses)
in the likeness of a wizard (vitki) you
journeyed among mankind
and I thought that showed an ergi nature,¹

the implication is that Ódhinn also had engaged in 'receptive' sexual practices. The counter-argument is that it is not one specific set of behaviours that is referred to, but more generally behaving in ways that would be seen as not within the usually-accepted masculine repertoire. Loki did something that was 'not masculine' (giving birth to a foal) and Ódhinn did something else that was also 'not masculine' (performing seidhr, beating a drum, journeying as a *vitki* or sorcerer, activities associated in that culture with women).

The words 'passive' and 'receptive', in this discourse, are worth an article in themselves, implying as they do a direct equation of homosexual practice with a model of heterosexuality that is heavily reliant on 'active male, passive female' constructions: a 20th century psychological/psychoanalytic elaboration of 19th century ideas about womanhood, severely critiqued from feminist and queer theory approaches today. But they remain part of the discourse of both academics and heathens who read these passages. It may be more useful to regard the word 'ergi' as primarily an insult, that can be used to convey the meaning either of 'homosexual

man' or of 'acted upon sexually' (in the sense in which warriors have been described as treating defeated enemies) but need not definitively state this. Most of the uses of the word, including those in Lokasenna, are of this nature. And this is how it is interpreted by some of the men who perform seidhr today. Bil Linzie says:

... 'effeminism' and cowardice were two character traits which were frowned upon and ... both were lumped into the category of 'ergi'. Also, it is fairly easy to tell that the 7-12th century Norseman used the term as an insult. True connections between the terms 'ergi' and 'seidhr' are speculative at best.

A seidhman in Scotland relates that the word 'ergi' is still used there today:

I was challenged (aged 15 or so) to fight someone, and refused, and was accused of being 'argi' ... dealing with it by throwing the attacker into a puddle, and refusing to 'give him a good kicking', was still considered 'argi'. I got the impression that what was meant, was cowardice, in terms of holding back violence considered to be 'appropriate'. My relatively non-violent solution was considered 'argi', just as failure to fight at all was. (Malcolm)

The utterance had the connotation of 'coward, unmanly, not using the resources men are expected to use'. Similarly, the Icelandic terms become a way to site men within discursive concepts of masculinity. Used with a context of present-day Heathenism, they carry mixed messages, and position those who use them, or those of whom they are used, according to the discursive constructions of present-day masculinity. 'Ergi' may still be used as an insult; alternatively it may be used by a practitioner to try to uncover, or explain, the meaning of his seidhr-work or the ways in which his identity is changing or developing.

Often this relates directly to the concept

of seidhr as shamanistic practice, in which the seidhworker becomes an intermediary and interpreter between the community of human people and those of spirits, including ancestors and deities, associated with the human community or the land. Many seidhworkers point out that this involves a loss of 'ego' or an abnegation of self or of privilege. Some relate this to the concept of 'ergi'.

My sexuality is heterosexual. I was never approached by the ghosts who follow me to change that in any way. I was, however, severely 'lambasted' for carrying too much of a 'macho attitude' and was forced to make many changes in that area. (Bil)

Let us return to Jordsvin's suggestion that gay men may have an advantage in practicing seidhr, that they may—in his words—be more 'called' to it, be a little better or learn it a little easier'. It may not be that sexuality as such is at issue here, rather that men whose sexuality is ambiguous, or who are marginalized because of sexuality, are in a position where they must attend to levels of meaning that escape from, or that are not obvious to, those privileged by dominant discourses of gender: thus it becomes easier to lose ego-attachment. This has of course been noted elsewhere! Lewis and others have discussed, for instance, spirit possession as a way of reversing conventional power relations, the claiming of power by people who otherwise have little (Lewis 1989). Conversely, feminist scholarship has pointed to needs for those in disprivileged positions to develop multiple ways of understanding the world. Dorothy Smith's 'bifurcated consciousness' comes to mind (Smith 1987). If in today's society women and gay men are more used to dealing with multiple understandings of social rela-

tions, and interpreting one understanding in terms of another, indeed this may constitute an advantage in seidhr, or any form of shamanistic practice.

seidhworkers are anomalous figures, working within a broad cultural framework in which dominant discourse rejects concepts of 'the spirits' or 'deities' and yet within specific contexts or learning paths where spirits or deities are the teachers. There are issues here of suspension of control, for both men and women, but in Western society it has been men who are assumed to 'control'. Within traditional shamanic practice, spirit 'helpers' indicate possibilities or work to be done, set the pace, give directions. These seidhmenn give accounts of working with spirits (in Bil's case, nine ghosts) that could come directly from the anthropological descriptions of shamanic practice—which they have also read.

We conclude this paper as a dialogue. We each have observations and involvements with seidhr practice, bringing our own perspectives to the work. Robert is an archaeologist researching the impact of neo-shamanism on archaeological and anthropological discourses, ancient sites and indigenous peoples. Personal involvement with heathen shamanism requires that he explores the researcher-practitioner position. Jenny has been involved with community development of seidhr practices, as practitioner and researcher. We speak each from where we are, attempting an understanding of shamanistic practice within small-scale religious communities on two continents.

From one perspective (a limited one), ergi can be seen as a man becoming like a woman (a negative perception defining

woman in relation to man rather than in her own right, with obvious negative connotations for men). However our ancestors defined ergi (which may have changed over time from possibly a beneficial experience to a largely undesirable one), ergi

This narrative opens possibilities for interrogation of his transition, and comparison with Bil and Malcolm.

JB: Obviously it's a very personal account and one that will 'make sense' to people who are using the same discursive

Within Ásatrú, some have expressed the opinion that 'seidhr is for women and gay men' ... That heathenism is not immune to the homophobia of the wider society is evident ...

today might better be understood in a wider perspective. The basis of the discussion is the narrative of a man named James, who is discovering himself as a seidhworker, and undergoing and analysing a series of personal transitions in the process. The narrative returns to the contested interpretation of 'ergi'. He says:

For me, seidhr focuses on the 'male' and 'female' deities Woden and Freyja, in rituals of possession. The rituals also involve spirit creatures, including two lynxes, and a berdache. With Freyja, her cats, and the berdache, the experience transcends conventional understandings of gender. At times it can be described as experiencing female, or male, or both. It is always gendered, but sometimes expressing how it is gendered is difficult. This is something I am still learning to come to terms with, explain and interpret.

I think many people (especially men) would find seidhr disturbing because of how it makes them feel (apart from the radical change into shamanic consciousness), going beyond stereotypes of male, female, gay, etc. For me, seidhr with Freyja allows an integrating understanding of what it is to be male, female and other multiple possibilities. That is empowering and affects how I live with my reality, world, local and spiritual communities. It changes who I am.

frame of reference. It's situated knowledge, the account is specific to his situation and to his interaction with his deities. And it's cast as a political statement, a challenge to established gender discourses. A third (or fourth, fifth, sixth) gender, is a political location ... Robert, you've seen the reverse situation, of women doing spirit-possession/god-possession with a male deity. How do you 'read' this in the light of that experience?

RW: The men practicing seidhr today, who speak here, have come to shamanism by diverse roots and their understandings of it vary. We are, after all, living in a multivocal, postmodern society; the 'global village'. Yes, I observed a possession ritual conducted by Diana Paxson and the Hrafnar community in San Francisco. These instances involve possession by Odin for the purpose of divination. It can be described as 'seidhr' because that is what the community names it, and as 'shamanic', since our understanding of shamanism and possession largely agrees with Lewis (1989). Among the Hrafnar, the number of women and gay male par-

participants suggests they certainly had a propensity for seidhr, but there were straight women and men also present who were equally active in the proceedings. It does seem though, that seidhr in all these examples attracts many individuals who are questioning and engaging with what it means to be a gendered being.

gender reorientation, then, cohere with other ethnographic instances in which sex (defined biologically) loses clarity and standing because cultural view redefines what it is to be male, female and other third, fourth (multiple) genders, in meaningful ways. The dialogues with Malcolm, Jordsvin and James show how Western

... the sei:worker becomes an intermediary ... between the community of human people and those of spirits ... Many seidhworkers point out that this involves a loss of 'ego' or an abnegation of self or of privilege.

First, it provides very particular, even peculiar examples of certain 'heathens' doing unconventional practices—unconventional to their own religious communities and the Western society they live in. Second, it exemplifies some of the difficulties that rigid (Western scientific) definitions of gender involve. Indeed, these and other ethnographic examples reveal difficulties with the definition of berdache, ergi and seidhr in terms of sexuality. Furthermore, our culture is science based and requires categories based on biological sex to understand gender differences. I think however, that most people would object to being defined in terms of what their reproductive strategy is, or who they have sex with. I am sure most people don't think they are adequately described in terms of 'male' and 'heterosexual' (or female, gay, etc). These categories are simply value-laden judgments which marginalise the rest of what makes people who they are.

These Heathen examples of religious

people are, within their own religious framework, examining gender and reinterpreting the past. What is more, Western society is having to get to grips with gender issues such as these.

JB: In a sense women may have it a bit easier than men seem to, in terms of seidhr acceptance. Because seidhr was described as female, and is presented as that still today, it's assumed that women seidhworkers can be categorized in ways that are acceptable socially and people get past that into at least some of the rest of 'who they are'. Whereas I've seen Jordsvin pigeonholed, to some extent, as a 'gay man' (which definitely is part of who he is, but doesn't define him or how he does seidhr); and Bil and Malcolm say that these questions arise. It's an example of an intersection of gender and sexuality that many in today's society find very hard to deal with.

I'm seeing this as being much more about gender and power relationships than sexuality, at least in the past—the ways

gender was constructed and used in the creation and maintenance of centralized power, for instance. seidhr was contested and gender was contested, and the insult 'ergi' was used as part of this. And as you point out the word may have earlier held different implication. Now it's part of today's discourse for people in the community and still used politically

RW: Clearly some Heathens have problems with seidhr, ergi and homosexuality, and link these three together. However, this has little to do with the past; they are simply imposing their own western ideas onto what seidhr may have been in the past, and translating that onto contemporary practitioners. Clearly, 'reviving' past religions is a political and contested act, much the same as archaeological approaches are. But today, you don't have to be a woman or gay to practice seidhr, as the experiences of Malcolm, Bil and James attest. That seidhr is empowering and life-transforming for its practitioners and the communities they work with is the important point. Also, they are not appropriating Native American or other indigenous spiritual traditions; they are examining their own pasts. These benefits, unfortunately, seem to be all too often overlooked by homophobic or suspicious spokespersons in both Heathen and academic communities.

JB: Regarding your comments we incorporated earlier about seidhr not being shamanic because it's not accepted by the whole community, though—I'm seeing changes in the community's relation to seidhr, which are interesting. Partly this is because of the ways the Heathen/Ásatrú communities here in North America are developing—those people who are most

uncomfortable with seidhr and 'ergi' also tend often to be those who are most 'folkish' or right-wing and farthest politically from the mainstream. And as the communities are becoming more defined, people who are part of 'mainstream' Heathen practice are becoming much more exposed to seidhr and ideas of seidhworking. Indeed some now say that seidhr is central to their thinking on Heathenism and relations with deities and spirits. This is fascinating—it's an opportunity to watch a potentially shamanic community in process of formation, and defining itself partly in opposition to non-shamanic communities.

CONCLUSION

The meanings that seidhmenn associate with seidhr have arisen from their researches and experiences, and from the ways in which they are treated by the communities within which they are practising or learning. They construct identity through a constant positioning of themselves within a community that can be at times hostile and distrustful of ambiguities, as they develop their community work. In developing their specific shamanistic practices, men and women are actively involved in research, in constituting meaning, in moving among discourses of past and present, even as they move between the worlds, or between realities, in their trance-working. Their lived experiences, therefore, reflect the meanings of the past, conveyed by the stories they have read, but are not defined, or confined, by these, as they interpret their experiences, creating a community within a community, developing and living their own stories today.

NOTE:

1. Locasenna, 24. First three lines from the translation by Carolyn Larrington (1996: 89), Larrington's fourth line gives 'and that I thought the hallmark of a pervert' which while keeping the spirit of 'insult' does so in such a way that it serves as an illustration of what we're saying about academics' assumptions about the word 'ergi'. Old Icelandic from Kuhn (1962).

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Harran: Last Refuge of Classical Paganism

by Donald H. Frew

For many years, I have been researching and writing a book on the subject of the origins of the modern Witchcraft movement. I now believe that a direct line of transmission can be traced from the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgy of late antiquity to the beginnings of the modern Craft movement in the 1930s. Of course, any such transmission must be embedded within the wider context of the transmission of Hermeticism in general from the Classical world to the European Renaissance and the beginnings of the Enlightenment.

Anyone looking into this history cannot help but be struck by a glaring gap. At the end of the Pagan world in the latter days of the Roman Empire, so the sources tell us, several Hermetic and Neoplatonic scholars left the Empire to go "to the East". At the beginning of the revival and rediscovery of Classical knowledge in Europe, Classical texts in Arabic translations, including the Hermetica (the revealed teachings of Hermes Trismegistus), came back to Europe "from the East". What happened during the 500 or so years in-between? And where "in the East" did classical Greco-Roman knowledge (and possibly classical Greco-Roman Paganism) survive?

One name comes up over and over again: Harran. Even so, there is relatively little information about this ancient city in West-

ern sources. As more and more of my sources pointed to Harran, and in the face of an almost total lack of available information about the city and its people, I resolved to go and see for myself, talk to the local authorities and scholars, and find what I could. Anna Korn and I visited the area in January of 1998. This article incorporates many of our findings.

HARRAN BEFORE THE NEOPLATONISTS

The city of Harran was founded c. 2000 BCE as a merchant outpost of Ur, situated on the major trade route across northern Mesopotamia (Green 1992: 19). The name comes from the Sumerian and Akkadian "Harran-U", meaning "journey", "caravan", or "crossroad" (Kurkcuoglu 1996: 11). For centuries it was a prominent Assyrian city, known for its Temple of Sin, the Moon God (Green 1992: 23). While many modern Pagans may balk at the idea of a Moon God, the people of upper Mesopotamia lived in a different world than do we. Harran is in the middle of a flat, dry plain that was described as a "barren wasteland" even in antiquity, nourished only by its many wells (another possible meaning of "Harran-U" is "broiling heat"). In this baking, desolate landscape, the Sun was an enemy and the Night a comforter. The Moon, the ruler of the Night, must therefore be the supreme deity and therefore, to a patriarchal culture, male. Sin was the giver of fertility and of oracles. In this latter capacity, he also served as kingmaker. Many rulers sought his blessings and confirmation of their reign, endowing the city of Harran and its temples with riches in the process.

As early as the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE, the Harranians established a pilgrimage site at the Giza Plateau in Egypt

(Hassan 1946: 34). In later centuries, they would say that the Pyramids were the tombs of their gods, Idris (Hermes) and Seth (Agathodaimon) (Green 1992: 110, 174, 212).

In the 6th century BCE, after the fall of Nabonidus, Harran was ruled by the Persians until the coming of Alexander the Great. In the 4th century BCE, Alexander conquered the area. After him, Harran was part of the Hellenistic Seleucid Kingdom until the 2nd century BCE, when the Parthians conquered the Seleucids. In the 1st century BCE, the Romans arrived. During this time, Harran passed through many hands, usually at least nominally under foreign authority, but in practice independent. It was during this period that a Roman army led by Crassus was defeated by the Parthians near Harran (called Carrhae by the Romans) in May 53 BCE. It was one of the worst military defeats in Roman history; one the Romans would never forget (Stark 1966: 114-23).

In the 4th century, 363 CE, the last Pagan Emperor Julian stopped at Harran at the beginning of his Persian campaign. He consulted the oracles at the Temple of the Moon (called either "Selene" or "Luna" by Roman historians, reflecting Roman ideas of the Moon's gender). The oracles warned of disaster. Julian ignored the warnings and was killed during the campaign; some say by a Christian in his own ranks (Smith 1976: 114). His body was brought back by way of Harran, and Harran was the only city in the Empire to declare citywide mourning after his death.

This complex history of Harran is important in order to understand the city's even-

I now believe that a direct line of transmission can be traced from the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgy of late antiquity to the beginnings of the modern Craft movement.

tual fate. For much of its history, Harran welcomed any would-be conqueror that came along, switching allegiances at the drop of a hat, and so peacefully going on about its own business.

THE COMING OF THE NEOPLATONISTS

By the 6th century, Paganism in the Roman Empire was fighting a losing battle for survival. Pagans had been forbidden to teach, and finally, to sacrifice. Temples were being closed, if not destroyed, all over the Empire. In 529 CE, the Emperor ordered the closing of Academy at Athens, the last true bastion of Pagan learning in the Empire. In response, many Neoplatonists, invited by a Persian monarch who knew the value of philosophers, fled "to the East", specifically, to Harran (Chuvin 1990: 137). There, they founded a Neoplatonic academy that survived at Harran up into the 12th century (Chuvin 1990: 139, 149).

Neoplatonism began as a school of philosophic / spiritual thought in the 3rd century CE with the works of the Roman philosopher Plotinus (b. 205 CE). Educated in Alexandria, he traveled to Persia and eventually settled in Rome to teach. Beginning with the Middle Platonic concept of the Divine Creator of the universe, or Demiurge, Plotinus

introduced three radical concepts.

First, he postulated the existence of a divine, ineffable unity more fundamental than the Demiurge. This he called "the One", although it was also sometimes called "the Good", "the True", and "the Beautiful" (akin to the "Dryghton" of some contemporary Craft traditions).

Second, Plotinus argued that all Being emanates from the One through a hierarchy of realities consisting of: the One → Mind (the Gods & the Demiurge) → Soul (the Daimons) → Matter, and at the same time returns to the One. The Natural World, as we experience it, is the interaction of the organizing properties of Soul with the chaotic properties of Matter.

Third, Plotinus explained that while this hierarchy is ontologically true, emanation (*prohodos*) and return (*epistrophe*) are neither temporal nor spatial. In other words, all things are always both emanating from and returning to the One and exist simultaneously at all levels of the hierarchy. (An excellent, simple introduction to the concepts of Neoplatonism can be found in David Fideler's *Introduction to Porphyry's Letter to His Wife Marcella*, Zimmern 1986: 7-35. For a more in depth presentation, I recommend R.T. Wallis' *Neoplatonism*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1972)

Plotinus focused on a contemplative, ascetic approach to union with the One, as did his student Porphyry (b. 233 CE), who is responsible for organizing Plotinus' teachings into the text known as *The Enneads*. However, Porphyry's student, Iamblichus of Chalcis (b. 250 CE), favored an approach to the One that was known as "theurgy" or "god-making". If the One is immanent in all of the Natural World, reasoned Iamblichus, then not only is the Natural World inher-

ently good, but all things in the Natural World are paths to the One. Iamblichus also introduced a concept now called "the law of mean terms". This stated that for there to be any communication between any two things or concepts there had to be a third thing in between that partakes of both. Since this idea can be applied *ad infinitum*, it meant that there could be no gaps between the levels of reality. The spiritual universe of the Neoplatonists, therefore, became fluid and continuous, without defined boundaries between its many constituent parts and levels.

Neoplatonic theurgy used techniques that we would recognize as "natural magick" in rituals designed to facilitate union with the One. Its source material consisted of the writings of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus (as well as earlier Platonists), the Egyptian writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus (the *Hermetica*), the texts collected as the *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM), and collected teachings (the *Chaldean Oracles*) "channeled" from Hekate and other deities by two 2nd century Roman theurgists (the *Juliani*). With these texts as guides, Neoplatonic theurgy focused on two forms of "god-making": deity possession and the creation of animated statues. The former was very similar, if not identical, to the practice modern Witches know as "Drawing Down the Moon", and indeed this phrase was used in antiquity to describe this practice. The latter involved techniques that we have all but lost, but vestiges of which remain in the certain contemporary Craft traditions.

Neopythagoreanism was a 1st century CE revival of the number mysticism of Pythagoras. Incorporating elements of astrology and Eastern magical lore, it was very popular

with Iamblichus and was eventually subsumed into Neoplatonism.

Proclus of Athens (b. 412 CE) was the last major Neoplatonic writer before the closing of the School at Athens and the flight of the surviving Neoplatonic theurgists to safety in the Persian Empire.

In addition to its emphasis on philosophy and theurgy, the later Neoplatonists also stressed the importance of traditional Pagan popular religion (Athanassiadi 1993: 7-8; Shaw 1995: 148-152). The continued performance of time-honored rites formed a necessary foundation to the more intellectual pursuits of Neoplatonic philosophy. The Neoplatonists sought to incorporate and synthesize the practices of all Pagans known to them, believing that all were divinely inspired. In this, they were in tune with the syncretic nature of their age, in which composite, cross-cultural deities such as Serapis and Jupiter-Ammon came to predominate. Accordingly, most Neoplatonists not only continued to practice traditional popular Paganism, but were also initiates of Mithras, Isis, and others. The 4th century Neoplatonist, Macrobius (writing in *SATURNALIA*), reconciled the mythologies of the many Pagan traditions by asserting that all Gods were actually aspects of a single Sun God, and all Goddesses aspects of a single Moon Goddess, and that really there was just the God and the Goddess—and beyond them, the One, of course (discussed in Godwin 1993: 142-143).

When Julian attempted his revival of traditional Paganism in the 4th century, he asked his friend Sallustius to write a sort of “catechism” of Paganism from a Neoplatonic point of view. This text, *On the Gods and the World*, survives (best version is Nock 1926). It is not insignificant, I think,

that Gerald Gardner refers to this text in *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (Aquarian Press, 1959):

Now, the thing that will, I think, strike most the consciousness of the reader who is well versed in the teaching of the higher types of spiritualist and occult circles generally is not the antiquity of this teaching of Sallustius, but its startling modernity. It might have been spoken yesterday. Further, it might have been spoken at a witch meeting, at any time, as a general statement of their creed ... the spirit of his [Sallustius'] teaching, the spirit of the Mysteries of his day, which is also the spirit of the beliefs of the witch cult, is timeless. (Gardner 1959: 188-189)

(In other words, Gardner specifically states that this Neoplatonic text from the ancient world may be understood as explaining the theology of the Craft as he understood it. This statement alone should engender interest in Neoplatonism on the part of contemporary Witches.)

HARRAN UNDER ISLAM

In 717 CE, the Muslim caliph Umar II founded the first Muslim university in the world at Harran. To give this university a good start, Umar brought many of the last remaining Hermeticists from Alexandria and installed them at Harran. A later Harranian author, Ibn Wahshiya, would write about these Hermeticists in the mid-9th century CE:

The Hermesians let nobody into the secrets of their knowledge but their disciples, lest the arts and sciences should be debased by being common amongst the vulgar. They hid therefore their secrets and treasures from them by the means of this alphabet, and by inscriptions, which could be read by nobody except the sons of wisdom and learning.

These initiated scholars were divided into four classes. The first Class comprehended the sect *Hara'misah Alhawmiyah*, who were all descendants of Hermes the Great. ... No man in the world was acquainted with any of their secrets: they alone possessed them.

In response [to the closing of the Academy at Athens in 529CE], many Neoplatonists ... fled “to the East”, specifically, to Harran. There, they founded a Neoplatonic academy that survived ... up into the 12th century.

They were the authors of the books commonly called the books of *Edris* (Enoch) [Hermes]. They constructed temples dedicated to spirits, and buildings of magical wisdom. The few of those, who in our time are acquainted with this knowledge, live retired in some islands near the frontiers of China, and continue to tread the steps of their forefathers. [Hammer-Purgstall notes that this might refer to the Brahmins.]

The second class of the Hermesians, called *Hara'misah Alpina'walu'ziyah*, the sons of the brother of Hermes, whose name was *Asclibianos*. ... They never communicated their secrets, and Hermetic treasures to any body, but they preserved them from generation to generation, till our days. ...

The third class was called *Ashra'kiyu'n* (Eastern) or children of the sister of Hermes, who is known amongst the Greek by the name of *Trismegistos Thoozdios*. This class was intermixed with some strangers and profane, who found means to get hold of the expressions of their hearts. Their sciences and knowledge are come down to us.

The fourth class, denominated *Masha'wun* (walkers, or peripatetic philosophers), was formed by the strangers, who found means to mingle with the children and family of Hermes. They were the first who introduced the worship of the stars and constellations, and who forsook the worship of the God of Gods. (Be his glory exalted—there is no other God but him!) From hence came their divisions, and everything that has been handed down to us, proceeds originally

these two sects, the *Ashra'kiyu'n*, eastern, and *Masha'wun*, peripatetic philosophers. (Hammer-Purgstall 1806: pp 23-30)

Later in the 8th century, Harun al-Rashid (the caliph of the *Arabian Nights*) founded the *Bayt al-Hikmah* (“House of Wisdom”) at Baghdad to be a center for the translation of Greek and Latin texts into Arabic. Scholars from Harran would later be brought there.

In the 9th century, 830 CE, the caliph Abdallah al-Mamun (son of al-Rashid) arrived at Harran at the head of a conquering army and what happened next has dominated both scholarship on Harran and the potential for archaeological excavation ever since.

THE “CON-JOB STORY” AND THE “SABIANS” OF HARRAN

Al-Mamun was outside the gates of the Harran, intent upon razing the city. He demanded to know if the inhabitants were Muslims. No, they said. Were they Christians or Jews? No. Well, al-Mamun said, if they were not *ahl al-kitab* (“People of the Book”), they were not protected from violence by the Qur'an and he would sack their city. What happened next depends on whom (or more properly, what) you believe (Green 1992: 4 -6, 100-123; Gunduz 1994: 15-52).

Some accounts say that the Harranians replied, “We are Sabians!”

One account, that of the writer Abu Yusuf Isha' al-Qatiy'i, a Christian historian of the time who tended to make both Pagans and Muslims look bad, says that al-Mamun gave the Harranians a week to come up with an answer. The Harranians then consulted a

lawyer knowledgeable in Muslim law who told them, "Tell him you're Sabians. No one knows what they are, but they're protected!" Either way, the Harranians claimed to be Sabians, produced a copy of the Hermetica as their "Book" and claimed Hermes (recognized by Muslims of the time as one of the prophets leading up to Muhammed) as their prophet.

The question hinged (and still hinges) around three verses in the Qur'an (Ali 1405 AH: 26-27, 308-309, 953-954):

*Qur'an 2:62

Those who believe (in the Qur'an),
And those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Christians and the Sabians,
Any who believe in Allah
And the Last Day,
And work righteousness,
Shall have their reward
With their Lord on them
Shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

*Qur'an 5:69

Those who believe (in the Qur'an),
Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Sabians and the Christians
Any who believe in Allah
And the Last Day,
And work righteousness,
On them shall be no fear,
Nor shall they grieve.

*Qur'an 22:17

Those who believe (in the Qur'an),
Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Sabians, Christians,
Magians, and Polytheists,
Allah will judge between them
On the Day of Judgment:
For Allah is witness
Of all things.

At this point, history becomes a matter of doctrine, with one's preference being determined by one's interpretation of and beliefs about the Qur'an. Whether or not the Harra-

**Neoplatonic theurgy used
techniques that we would
recognize as "natural magick"
in rituals designed to facilitate
union with the One.**

nians were indeed Sabians, according to modern scholarship, depends in large part on whether the scholar is a Muslim or not.

In the days of al-Mamun, the dominant interpretation of Islam was known as Mu'tazilism (Green 1992: 130-135). Mu'tazilism relied upon an approach called *kalam* ("rationalist theology") and argued that revelation was an ongoing process in which scripture guided and informed direct mystical experience of the divine, to which one then applied reason in the analysis and understanding. Mu'tazilism was the view of the Abbasid caliphs (including both al-Rashid and al-Mamun) and led to a valuing of the philosophical writings of the Greeks and Romans. Most of the writings available to them were those of the Neoplatonists and the Hermeticists. The logical and philosophical arguments of the Neoplatonists in support of theurgy could be used to support the Mu'tazilite reliance on *kalam*. After the Abbasids, Mu'tazilism was replaced in a period of religious upheaval by a new dominant interpretation of Islam, Ash'arism. Ash'arism was and is much more devotional in approach, focused primarily on the Qur'an and Hadith (recorded sayings of the Prophet). It is much more conservative than Mu'tazilism, downplays mysticism (although there is a certain grudging acceptance of Sufism), and definitely wants noth-

ing to do with Paganism. (Interestingly enough, under Ash'arism the followers of Shi'ite Islam, which also believe in a form of continuing revelation, would rely on the arguments of the Harranians for support, protecting them where possible from oppression. The idea of Shi'ite Muslims protecting Pagans from oppression will no doubt surprise many modern Pagans.)

The Ash'arites would much rather believe the "con-job story" than think that the Prophet in any way endorsed any kind of Paganism. Ash'arism remains the dominant interpretation of Islam to this day.

Accordingly, books by modern Muslim scholars (e.g. Gunduz) tend to endorse the "con-job story", while books by modern non-Muslim scholars (e.g. Green) tend to point out the problems with it:

1) The primary source for the "con-job story", Abu Yusuf, had a vested interest in making both the Harranians and the Muslims look bad, the former as con-men and the latter as their dupes.

2) The Harranians had been paying the poll tax to the caliphate for many years. Only People of the Book could do so.

3) Harran was an extremely well known center of learning at the time. There is no way that al-Mamun or his administrators could not have known about their religion.

4) The Harranians are called Sabians in Muslim documents at least 75 years before al-Mamun's visit.

The only reasonable conclusion is that the Harranians were indeed Sabians. If so, what did the Prophet mean when he included them in the protected people? Mecca at the time of Muhammed was steeped in traditions of the earlier prophet Abraham. Abraham came to Mecca from Harran (the Well of Abraham, mentioned in

the Old Testament, is outside the city). It is entirely possible that Muhammed was aware of the religion of the Harranians and distinguished its philosophical / theurgical approach from the "idolatry" of the Pagans around Mecca.

At any rate, the continuing controversy around the identification of Harranians as Sabians means that in modern discourse one must always refer to "Harranian Sabians" to distinguish them from the many other attempts to identify the Sabians as another group.

However, from the time of al-Mamun, in common usage "Sabian" became virtually synonymous with "Harranian". And as the writings of Arabic scholars about the planetary religion of the Harranian Sabians became more widespread, "Sabian" became synonymous with "astrologer" and sometimes "sorcerer", as had the word "Chaldean" among the Romans.

(An etymological aside ... The very early connection between Harran and Egypt mentioned above, while noted by Egyptologists, has been largely ignored by those studying Harran. As a result, a possible source for the name "Sabian" has also been ignored. Most have focused either on the Arabic verb *saba'a*, "to convert", the Hebrew word *saba*, meaning "troops", the Ethiopic word *sbh*, meaning "dispensing alms", or the Syriac verb *sb'*, "to baptize". I lean towards the Egyptian root *sba*, meaning "star", "star-god", and "teacher". As both followers of what has been called "astral" religion and renowned teachers and scholars, this would seem to be appropriate and fitting.)

THE SURVIVAL OF PAGANISM AT HARRAN
Late in the 9th century, the Harranian Pythagorean Thabit ibn Qurra was invited to

found a Sabian school at the *Bayt al-Hikmah* in Baghdad. Thabit was adamantly Pagan, but maintained his position as an advisor to the caliph, even when making statements like:

We are the heirs and propagators of Paganism. ... Happy is he who, for the sake of Paganism, bears the burden [of persecution] with firm hope. Who else have civilized the world, and built the cities, if not the nobles and kings of Paganism? Who else have set in order the harbours and the rivers? And who else have taught the hidden wisdom? To whom else has the Deity revealed itself, given oracles, and told about the future, if not to the famous men among the Pagans? The Pagans have made known all this. They have discovered the art of healing the soul; they have also made known the art of healing the body. They have filled the earth with settled forms of government, and with wisdom, which is the highest good. Without Paganism the world would be empty and miserable. (quoted in Scott, 1982, 105)

Note: Thabit used the Syriac word *han-putho*, usually translated as “pagan”, but also possibly meaning “a possessor of the true religion” (Green 1992: 114).

In the 10th century, the amir ‘Adud al-Dawlah issued an “edict of toleration” specifically permitting traditional rites of Harranian Pagans.

In the 11th century, after the Muslim conquest of North Africa and Spain, the *Ghayat al-Hakim* (“Aim of the Sage”), a book known in Latin as the *Picatrix*, was written in Spain by “al Majriti” (Pingree 1980; 1986). Considered the basis of the grimoire tradition of Europe (including material that survives down into the Books of Shadows of certain modern Craft traditions), the *Picatrix* includes significant material about the religion and rites of the Harranians. This same “al Majriti” is also our source for the *Rasa’il Ikhwan al-Safa*

(“Epistles of the Brethren of Purity”), a mystical Muslim order incorporating teachings from Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and even Buddhist sources (Netton 1991). Both books contain material from each other and have a Harranian source (Nasr 1993: 25-104). Whether “al Majriti” was himself a Harranian Sabian is unknown.

Note: David Pingree has pointed out that many of the Greco-Roman magical texts evident in the *Picatrix* passed into Arabic by way of Sanskrit, picking up Indian magical terms and Sanskrit names for the Gods along the way (Pingree 1980). Truly, Harran deserved the name “crossroad”.

THE LAST DAYS OF HARRAN AND THE RETURN OF PAGANISM TO EUROPE
Later in the 11th century, 1081 CE, the Temple of Moon God was finally destroyed by al-Shattir, an ally of Seljuk Turks, contemporaneous with the rise of Ash’arism (Green 1992: 98-100). At this point, the “con-job” story became the “official” Muslim view. Also late in the 11th century, c. 1050 CE, the Christian writer Michael Psellus, studying in Constantinople, received an annotated copy of the *Hermetica* from a scholar from Harran. It is quite possible that these were sacred texts that had escaped the decline and ultimate destruction of the temples (Scott 1982: 25-27, 108-109; Copenhagen 1992: xl; Faivre 1995: 182). Copies of the *Hermetica* eventually made their way to Western Europe, igniting the interest of Cosimo de’Medici who, in 1462, set a young Marsilio Ficino to the task of translation. Thus began Europe’s fascination with the *Hermetica* (Copenhagen 1992: xlvii-l; Faivre 1995: 30, 38-40, 98).

During the First Crusade, Harran was often contrasted with its neighbor to the

[The] Neoplatonist, Macrobius ... reconciled the mythologies of the many Pagan traditions by asserting that all Gods were actually aspects of a single Sun God, and all Goddesses aspects of a single Moon Goddess ...

north, Edessa (known today as Urfa). Edessa was the birthplace of the prophet Abraham and the first city to convert to Christianity (Segal 1970: 60-81). Edessa converted after its king, Abgar, wrote to Jesus requesting healing. The apostle Thaddeus came with a cloth bearing the image of Jesus’ face. Abgar was healed and his kingdom converted. The cloth, known as the Mandyllion, was an important relic during the Crusades (Segal 1970: 215; Wilson 1998: 161-175). (Recently discovered documents have led some to believe that it is the same cloth that later came to be called the Shroud of Turin.)

In the 12th century, Edessa was the capital of the short-lived Crusader County of Edessa. The Knights Templar occupied the city and are described as “roaming about the countryside at will”. Their presence might explain an unusual architectural feature that survives at Harran. In the Citadel, there is a Christian chapel of Crusader architecture (Lloyd & Brice 1951: 102-103). There is no record of any Crusaders ever conquering the city (Segal 1970: 230-251; Green 1992: 98; Gunduz 1994: 133). The presence of the chapel would appear to indicate a peaceful Crusader presence. The fact that the chapel is side-by-side with the Citadel’s mosque,

even sharing an entry hall, is even more striking. It was far more common for chapels and mosques of that time to be built on top of each other or to be co-opted one from the other. Is this another example of the city’s remarkable religious tolerance?

This chapel also contains a feature, a floor of black basalt brought from hundreds of miles to the East, which is found in only

one other place at Harran. The floor of the temple of the Moon God (currently under the remains of the Grand Mosque) is of the same black basalt construction. Muslim accounts have always referred both to a temple of the Moon God under the Grand Mosque and to one in the Citadel (Lloyd & Brice 1951: 96; Gunduz 1994: 204; Kurkcuoglu 1996: 17). The black basalt floor under the Crusader chapel suggests these Crusaders, whoever they were, built their chapel on top of the Citadel’s Moon God temple.

Edessa delighted in contrasting itself, the first Christian city, with Harran, the last Pagan holdout. Unfortunately, Edessa is higher up the water table from Harran. As Christian Edessa grew and prospered it sank more and more wells, gradually drying up the wells of Harran.

Finally, in 1271 CE, the Mongols conquered the area around Harran. They decided that Harran was too much trouble to control (they would probably open their gates to the next army to come along), too remote to garrison, but too valuable to destroy. They arrived at an unusual and dramatic solution.

They deported the populace of the city, walled up the city gates, and left it.

There is no record of the city being destroyed, sacked, burned, or in any other way damaged. The space enclosed by the city walls gradually filled up with wind-blown dirt.

Since that time, only three parts of Harran have been kept relatively clear of covering soil. The Citadel at the south end of the city and the central tumulus in the center are on hills and so remained above the accumulated debris. The area of the university (and its Grand Mosque) have been kept clear by human effort because of its historical and religious significance to Muslims. Everything else is about thirty feet below the current ground level. It is difficult to over-estimate the treasure-trove of artifacts and knowledge waiting to be uncovered. One has to wonder why it hasn't been excavated.

A TREASURE WAITING TO BE UNCOVERED ... OR DESTROYED

The most recent archaeological information on Harran can be found in three articles published in issues of *Anatolian Studies* by Seton Lloyd and William Brice in 1951 and by D.S. Rice in 1952. These expeditions confined themselves to surveying the site and clearing the rubble from in front of one of the city gates.

H.J.W. Drijvers, author of *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, visited Harran sometime in the 1970s, and Tamara Green, author of *The City of the Moon God*, visited Harran in 1977, but both confined themselves to observing the discoveries previously reported and did not uncover any new material.

Nurettin Yardimci has headed a small but meaningful effort at Harran, doing restora-

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tion work on buildings that were falling down and working with a Belgian team to excavate the Roman-period dwellings on the central tumulus, but this effort had to be suspended in the mid-90's after only a couple of seasons due to Kurdish violence (Bucak 1998: pers. comm.). The results of the tumulus dig have not yet been published.

Harran remains virtually untouched. Why? The reasons appear to be financial, social, and religious.

When Anna and I met with Eyyup Bucak, the Director of the Museum in Urfa, he was obviously haggard and over-worked. He explained that the Turkish government is engaged in what is called the GAP project, a dam across the Euphrates that will provide water for irrigating the Harran Plain. The rising waters behind the dam will eventually cover six important Neolithic sites. Accordingly, rescue archaeology is underway at a furious pace. This has taken all of their funding and energies for many years. While Dir. Bucak said that he would welcome foreign interest in Harran, the Turkish government's regulations make it very difficult for

foreign archaeologists to work in Turkey. Turkey has a long history of their archaeological treasures being plundered by foreigners.

The GAP project is bringing irrigation to the Harran Plain. Irrigation means crops; crops means farmers; farmers mean settlement. When Lloyd, Brice, and Rice visited Harran in the 50s, only a few of the "distinctive beehive huts" of the local nomads could be found in the filled-in area inside the old city walls. Now, permanent houses are being built there. Turkey does not exercise "eminent domain" over archaeological sites. Whatever is under a house is lost forever.

Anna and I also met with two professors of Muslim theology from the local University of Harran at Urfa, Dr. Mustafa Ekinci and Prof. Kamil Harman. Dr. Ekinci is a specialist in esoteric movements in Islam. We explained what we were studying. They not only knew nothing about the early Muslim and pre-Muslim movements we were studying, but actively disapproved of our studying them. The Ash'arite view of the Harranians prevails and contributes to a lack of interest in excavating Harran. (And when the topic drifted into them inquiring about our own religious beliefs... the evening got interesting and we sorely taxed the abilities of our able translator.)

Harran was a thriving Mesopotamian and later Hellenistic city of some 10 to 20,000 people for nearly 3000 years. Towards the end, for about 500 years, Harran would appear to have been a kind of intellectual refugee camp for educated members of the mystery cults of late antiquity, eventually becoming the font from which Hermetic and Neoplatonic learning returned to Europe.

Many of the Pagans of Harran had fled

the triumph of Christianity in the West. All of them, including the practitioners of the indigenous Moon cult, were surrounded by an ever-expanding Islam. The Pagan community of Harran must have lived with a constant awareness of being the last refuge of the old Pagan religions. These "Pagan refugees" would have had every reason to preserve their traditions for future generations. Some were Mithraists, well aware of the concept of turning cycles of ages. Others would have known that their own sacred texts, the *Hermetica*, predicted the fall of Paganism, and its eventual return:

Hermes Trismegistus speaking to his student Asclepius:

[24] ... since it befits the wise to know all things in advance, of this you must not remain ignorant: a time will come when it will appear that the Egyptians paid respect to the Divine with faithful mind and painstaking reverence—to no purpose. All their holy worship will ... perish without effect, for the Divine shall return from earth to the Heavens, and Egypt will be abandoned. ... When foreigners occupy the land and territory, not only will reverence fall into neglect but, even harder, a prohibition under penalty prescribed by law (so-called) will be enacted against reverence, fidelity, and divine worship. Then this most holy land, seat of shrines and temples, will be filled completely with tombs and corpses.

[25] ... In their weariness the people of that time will find the world nothing to wonder at or to worship. This world—a good thing that never had nor has nor will have its better—will be endangered. People will find it oppressive and scorn it. They will not cherish this entire world, a work of the Gods beyond compare, a glorious construction, a bounty composed of images of multiform variety, ... a unity of everything that can be honored, praised, and finally loved by those who see it, a multiform accumulation taken as a single thing.

How mournful when the gods withdraw from mankind! Only the baleful angels remain to mingle with humans ...

[26] ... When all this comes to pass, Asclepius, then ... the Gods ... will restore the world to its beauty of old so that the world itself will again seem deserving of worship and wonder, and with constant benedictions and proclamations of praise the people of that time will honour the Gods... And this will be the geniture of the world: a reformation of all good things and a restitution, most holy and most reverent, of nature itself, reordered after the passage of time... which is and was everlasting and without beginning. (adapted from Copenhagen 1992: 81ff.)

Ibn Shaddad, who wrote a financial inspection report on Harran in 1242 CE, only twenty-nine years before its demise, described cisterns feeding public fountains, four *madrasas* (theological colleges), two hospices, a hospital, two mosques (in addition to the Grand Mosque), and seven public baths. To these, Ibn Jubair, who visited the city in 1184 CE described "the city's flourishing bazaars, roofed with wood so that the people there are constantly in the shade. You cross these *sugs* as if you were walking through a huge house. The roads are wide and at every cross-road there is a dome of gypsum." (Rice 1952: 36-39)

Harran was the last haven of Mediterranean Paganism up until the 11th century—only 800 years ago. It was never destroyed, it was never sacked, and it was never dug up by treasure hunters. It was just abandoned and allowed to fill in with dirt. And it has never been excavated. It is not difficult to imagine that under some 30 feet of wind-blown sand and dirt, the heritage of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Paganism is just waiting, intact, for someone to dig it up.

But they'll have to hurry...

Another effect of the GAP project, and its attendant increased irrigation, is that the water table of the Harran Plain is once again

rising. Whatever treasures are waiting underground, whatever documents survive (and the Museum believes there are likely to be many), will soon be below the water table.

I hope that an increased awareness of Harran's place as a repository of our Pagan heritage will lead to the necessary conservation and study of these sites that are so important to the history of Western Paganism. I fully expect the final unveiling of Harran to rival Pompeii in the splendor and value of its contents.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS & ARTICLES ON HARRAN & HARRANIAN RELIGION:

(Note: I am indebted to Brandy Williams for first making many of these texts available to me and for sharing the fruits of her own extensive research on the subject.)

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Another View of the Witch Hunts

by Max Dashu

*In response to Jenny Gibbons' article
in The Pomegranate 5 (Summer 1998).*

I would like to offer an alternative to the locked-in polarity between often-uninformed Wiccan takes on history and the denial by many academic historians that repression of social groups and of culture played any role in the witch hunts. Yes, the story is more complex than the Church stamping out paganism, though that suppression is part of the story and can not be disregarded. The history of witch persecution begins with repression by feudal rulers, with a strong patriarchal impetus already visible. It may have very old Indo-European roots. But it's also clear that priestly advisors urged on kings like Charles the Bald and Alfred the Great. Bishops carried out a less severe but determined repression of the old religions for over a thousand years.

No, a majority of those burned during the mass hunts were not healers and diviners, but yes, they were a targeted group, in significant numbers in places like Italy, the western Alps, and Scotland. Pagan themes do surface in trial testimony, turning into diabolist narratives under torture. They also figure in popular images of the witch, though in an increasingly distorted way as diabolism penetrated into popular culture.

There are perceptible differences in the way academic writers approach pagan

themes, especially when comparing English and American historians to the Europeans. As a group, the Anglo/Americans seem much more resistant to recognizing the role of diabolism in shaping the hunts and in supplanting still-current beliefs of pagan origin. A lot of exciting work is being done in Europe examining pagan content in the witch trial transcripts themselves, including Juhan Kahk's studies of Estonian hunts, Gustav Henningsen on trials of faery healers in Sicily, Bengt Ankarloo's work on Sweden, and Behringer's book on Bavarian beliefs, *The Shaman of Oberstdorf*. The pagan factor is also recognized by Robert Muchembled, Michèle Brocard-Plaut, William Monter, and Eva Pócs, among many others.

Probably the most impressive body of 'pagan' research comes from the Italians, going back over three decades. These historians include not only Carlo Ginsburg, whose work is well known and available in English, but others—including Lucia Muraro, Giuseppe Bonomo, Carlo Bondi, Ermanno Paccagnini—whose books have not been translated. They offer an important perspective on the much-overlooked Italian hunts. Some do us the favor of reproducing portions of the original trial transcripts so we can see what the 'witch' said, and how she was browbeaten and tortured into repeating diabolist cant.

THE FIRST WITCH HUNTS

The 'new chronology' replaces one mythology with another. The old mythology said that the witch hunts happened in the Middle Ages. The new academic mythology insists that no significant witch hunting happened until early modern times. Robin Briggs claims that there was "no risk" of witch

burnings before the 14th century because "until then the relative skepticism of the ruling elites, together with the nature of the legal system, excluded the possibility" (Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 397). Many writers equate witch trials with diabolist trials, going so far as to say that no 'real' witch trials occurred until the 1400s. This, and their failure to analyze the nature of the information we have about medieval witch persecutions, is profoundly anti-historical.

Feminist historians have been pointing out for a couple of decades that the Renaissance inaugurated the worst witch hunts, but it is also clear that these grew out of an earlier history. Laws empowering kings and lords to persecute witches were enacted throughout western Europe from the early feudal era. The earliest barbarian codes, such as the first Salic law, were more concerned with punishing defamation *as* witches than with witches themselves. Those who committed magical harm paid a fine, the same as for a physical attack. The Norse codes treated sorcery similarly.

Under christianization, Roman law was brought into play, and burning at the stake appeared. A late recension of the Salic law ordered burning for those who killed with incantations. Roman law heavily influenced the Visigothic code, which ordered burning at the stake for worshipping 'demons,' and flogging and enslavement for diviners and other witches. The Lex Rotharii of north Italy forbade witch-burning, but allowed lords to kill their (female) subjects as witches.

Bishops at the Council of Paris (825) called for rulers to "punish pitilessly" witches, diviners, and enchanters who practiced "very certainly the remains of the pagan cult" (de Cauzons, 118). In 873, the

THE ITALIAN HUNTS were colored by a strong pagan subtext. Trial records say that witches gathered to revere the goddess Diana, "wise Sibyllia," or the "lady of the good game." A weaver-diviner tried at Mantua in 1489 said that this "mistress of the games" had appeared to show him "the properties of herbs and the nature of animals" (Ginsburg, 12, 28, 50). Up through the 1530s, accused witches told inquisitors at Modena that they worshiped not the devil, but Diana. A Brescian trial of the same period refers to the folk goddess as Befana. But gradually, over the course of decades of torture-trials and burnings, the goddess of the witches is demonized, subordinated to the devil, and finally, in the late 1500s, replaced by him.

Pagan content is also rife in the Scottish trial records, with testimony of encounters with the Queen of Elfame and the faery folk. Quite a number of those tried as witches were in fact healers, like Geillis Duncan, whose arrest after a night call touched off the North Berwick craze, or Bessie Dunlop, who had visions of the faery host and learned how to prepare medicine from a dead acquaintance among these 'good wights.' Less well-known are the Orkney and Shetland islanders burned during the 1600s for 'saining': performing animist cures with three stones, fire and water, by stroking, brushing, and charming, or by ritually walking around lakes. The primary charge against many of the accused was "giving you sel furth to haue sick craft and knowledge" or "to have skill to do things." Although these are technically secular trials, they were driven by the Presbyterian kirk (Folklore Society #49, pp 55, 61).

French king Charles the Bald issued new laws ordering all counts of the realm to hunt down and execute sorcerers and witches in their domains "with the greatest possible diligence" (Quierzy-sur-Oise statutes, in Russell, 73). Alfred 'the Great' decreed death, exile or heavy fines for witches and diviners, and of women who consulted charmers and magicians, added: "Do not let them live." These provisions were repeated by Edward and Guthram; then Ethelred ordered witches exiled; but Ethelstan (928) renewed the call for them to be burned at the stake (Ewen, 3-4).

I see no reason to assume that these laws went unheeded and unused. Manorial lords acting as haut-justiciers did not keep records of trials, and very few records of any kind survive from this period they call the Dark Ages. Chroniclers mention witch-executions, such as the women tortured by aristocrats into saying that they had bewitched count Guillaume of Angouleme in 1027, or the executions of Sagae (wisewomen) by Wratislav II of Bohemia and his brother, the bishop of Prague, in 1080 (Fournier, 63-65; Lea, 1280). Around 1100 Caesarius of Heisterbach reported that judges had witches and wizards burned at Soest in Westphalia (Grimm, Jacob, *Teutonic Mythology*, tr., James S. Stallybrass, London: George Bell & Sons, 1883, p 1622). Thirty were burned at Graz in eastern Austria in 1115 (Russel, 321, fn 20-1). The Arab trader Abu Hamid al-Gharnati wrote in 1153 that the Kievans accused old women of witchcraft "about every twenty years," and subjected them to the water ordeal. "Those who float are called witches and burned ..." (Klaniczay, *Magie et Sorcellerie*, 217).

Burning seems to originate with the Romans, but witch-executions by drowning

are also attested. Chronicles say the Frankish prince Lothair drowned the lady Gerberga as a witch in a river, "as is customary with sorcerers." (Fournier, 63) In 970, an English widow was drowned as a witch at London bridge (and her male accuser thereby succeeded in seizing her property, a theme reprised some 700 years later). (Crawford, Jane, "Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England," (1963) in Levack, Brian, ed., *Witchcraft in the Ancient World and Middle Ages* (1992), p 167). Bishop Serapion reported Russian witch-drownings in the 1270s, and other Russian witch executions are recorded for the 11th to 13th centuries (see Zguta, Russell, "Witchcraft Trials in Seventeenth-Century Russia" *American Historical Review*, December, 1977).

The Spanish reiterated their witch laws in the 11th to 13th centuries, adjudicated by the ordeal of red-hot iron. *Fuero Cuenca* is typical: "A woman who is a witch or sorceress shall either be burnt or saved by iron" (II, 1, 35, in Baroja, 82). Females are the stated targets, and the laws treated the minority of men entangled in sorcery trials with unambiguous favoritism. The Forum Turolii code (1176) ordered female witches to be burned, but shaved a cross on the men's heads, scourged them and banished them (Weddeck, Harry E., *A Treasury of Witchcraft: A Sourcebook of the Magic Arts*, Citadel Press, NY 1970, p 257). Spanish women were subject to the ordeal of incandescent iron, which was used to test female chastity and fidelity, establish paternity, and determine whether a woman had induced abortions, cast spells or prepared potions (see Heath Dillard's excellent discussion of these issues in "Women in Reconquest Castile," in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard, U of Pennsylvania Press, 1976. In some corners

of Europe, such as Transylvania, insubordinate male serfs were also put through this ordeal). The ordeal of iron was also used as a sexual trial for German women in the same period, as well as in witch trials in 13th century England and the Black Forest in the 15th century.

Witch persecution was reaffirmed by urban communes in Italy, as in the municipal laws of Venice (1181) and later, Florence, Padua and other cities. German magistrates followed suit. The *Sachsenspiegel* (1225) and *Schwabenspiegel* (1275) prescribed burning at the stake for witches, then Hamburg, Goslar, Berlin, Groningen and Bremen. The Norman kings of Sicily and England decreed laws against witches, including Henry I and Edward I, who called for burning. This penalty was reiterated in the *Fleta* code toward the end of the 1200s and in the *Britton* code a few decades later. The *Treuga Henrici* (1224) ordered burnings of "heretics, enchanters and sorcerers" in the German empire (Cauzons, 212). Many more laws were passed across western Europe during the 1300s.

When pope Innocent IV gave his blessing to inquisitorial torture in the 1252 bull *Ad Extirpanda*, he called on rulers to punish heretics "as if they were sorcerers" (Lea, 431). The pope was addressing people still accustomed to thinking of the stake as a punishment for witchcraft, and so referred to the long-

standing precedent of feudal witch-burning as a model for the repression of heresy.

This brief summary of early witch persecutions sketches their importance as a foundation for the mass hunts. The elements of sex, class and pagan content already figure in strongly. This early data also raises questions about the numbers which have been so

confidently declared as the maximum of witch-executions. I don't find an argument from silence convincing, since documentation for this period is so sparse, and manorial trials (and even municipal ones) nearly invisible in the historical record.

In the late middle ages, a sea change took place as diabolism was injected into the witch persecutions. This ideology originated among theologians and scholastics, with a hefty helping of Roman-era themes of orgies, unguents, and

baby-killing. Imposed by church and state over a period of centuries, against considerable resistance, it became the crucial ingredient in forging the mass hunts. The blood libel in particular was the wedge that shattered the historic solidarity of the common people against elite repression of their culture(s).

There is much more to be said about the evolution of diabolist hunts in the 1300s than I have space to discuss here. Hansen rightly pointed to the western Alpine countries as the early crucible of diabolist witch trials. Ginsburg has contributed an important part

The history of witch persecution begins with repression by feudal rulers, with a strong patriarchal impetus already visible. It may have very old Indo-European roots.

of the puzzle: how the scapegoating of Jews and lepers, with charges of poison powders and blood libel, spread and evolved into diabolist persecutions of 'sects' of witches. More remains to be uncovered about how these secular witch hunts in Dauphiné, Savoy and Valais were related to the intensive inquisitorial purges (backed up by invading armies) in the same region during the 14th century. It's critical to note that these repressions were propelled by elite powers and interests.

Popular resistance to the clergy's repression of their folk rites and healers comes into focus in the sermons of the famous preacher Bernardino da Siena. In 1427, this 'saint' used inflammatory charges of baby-murder to turn people against their traditional folk healers, which he called *femmine indavolate*, 'devil-ridden women.' He deplored Romans' disbelief of his stories about witches ("what I said was to them as if I was dreaming") and the fact that the Siense chose to "help and pray for" witches denounced to the secular lord. Bernardino implored his audience to denounce the witches, not to feel sympathy for a woman who (he claimed) had diabolically killed twenty or thirty babies: "If it happened to you, that she had killed one of your children, how would that look to you? Think of others!"

Fra Bernardino told people that it was

their duty to denounce all suspected witches to the Inquisition right away; otherwise they would have to answer for it on Judgement Day. After a series of these incendiary sermons in 1427, so many people were reported as incantatori and streghe that the friar had to consult with the pope about how to handle all the denunciations pouring in. Their solution is typical of witch-hunting illogic: they decided to arrest those accused of the worst crimes. So those whose enemies told the tallest tales were burned (Bonomo, 262-3).

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doesn't address the solid evidence assembled by those historians—notably Henry Charles Lea and Joseph Hansen—of inquisitorial hunts in northern Italy, eastern France and the Rhineland during the 1400s and early 1500s. Lea can be excused for including the Lamothe-Langon fabrications, since this forgery was not exposed until a century later. But its misinformation was far from being "the last great piece of 'evidence'" of witch-hunting inquisitors, as Gibbons claims.

In 1258 Alexander IV denied inquisitors' petition for authority to try divination and

sorcery cases, limiting them to cases manifestly savoring of heresy. However, it didn't take inquisitors of a demonological bent long to invent pretexts to work around the papal ruling. Only forty years later, canonist Johannes Andreae added a gloss that effectively nullified it: "Those are to be called heretics who forsake God and seek the aid of the devil." He broadened the definition of heretical sorcery to include pagan prayer, offerings and divinations (all demonized, of course) as well as sorcery based on christian symbolism (see Russell, 174; and Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*, 131).

The trend of redefining witchcraft as heretical grew in various inquisitorial manuals of 1270, 1320, and 1367. A shift occurred in the later 1300s, as the relatively sedate attitude to folk witchcraft visible in Gui's 1320 manual gave way to Eymeric's scholastic diabolism in 1367, and to the first recorded inquisitorial witch burnings a few decades later. The bishops' centuries-long campaign against pagan observances was seen as manifestly ineffectual, and the more militant inquisitors were eager to take a turn. To ensure their jurisdiction, they claimed that a dangerous 'new heresy' of devil-worshipping witches had arisen and was threatening christendom.

Almost all the demonologies of the 1400s and early 1500s were written by inquisitors, who often refer to witch trials that they or other inquisitors conducted. The formative diabolist literature was penned by Dominican inquisitors, including Eymeric, Nider, Vineti, Jacquierius, Visconti, de Spina, Prieiras and Rategno, as well as Kramer and Sprenger. Their books build on the demonological framework laid by scholastic theologians and by papal bulls like Gregory IX's 1233 *Vox in Rama* (which attacked insurgent

peasants as devil-worshipping heretics led by 'sibyls'). Inquisitor Etienne de Bourbon tried witches in the early decades of the Inquisition, using the same diabolist paradigm as Gregory: a devilish black cat presiding over orgies, while his colleague Bernard de Caux tried a woman in 1245 for healing and 'other sorceries.' But there is no evidence of executions in these early trials, and records of (Inquisition) witch executions only begin to appear in the late 1300s.

In 1385, inquisitor Antonio da Savigliano was already blending witchcraft with heresy in trials at Pignarolo and Turin. Inquisitors at Milan tried Sibilla Zanni and Pierina de' Bugatis as witches in 1384 and burned them for relapse four years later (their testimony was loaded with pagan content, revolving around a goddess who revealed the secrets of nature and revived the animals the witches feasted on). Other trials were going on in this period, according to Bernardo Rategno, inquisitor at Como, who wrote in 1508 that "the sect of witches began to pullulate only within the last 150 years, as appears from the old records of trials by inquisitors of our Inquisition at Como" (*Tractatus de Strigiis*, cited in Bonomo and Ginsberg). These records do not seem to have survived—though Ginsberg points out that scholars have not been allowed to examine the Como archives—but such testimony points to early Inquisition persecutions. The diabolist inquisitor Prieiras made a parallel comment, dating the 'witch sect' back to 1404.

By this time witchcraft-minded inquisitors clearly had papal support. In 1409 pope Alexander V commissioned Pons Feugeyron to prosecute people spreading "new sects and forbidden rites," who practiced "witchcraft, soothsaying, invocations to the devil, magic spells, superstition, forbidden and

pernicious arts.” In 1437 Eugenius IV issued a bull to all inquisitors authorizing them to prosecute people for sorcery: not just magical harm-doing, but also divination, healing, weather-witching, and adoration of ‘demons’ (Lea, 224). In 1451 Nicholas V authorized the head inquisitor of France to prosecute diviners and to punish those who spoke ill of this bull as rebels (Cauzons, 409). Some years later, Calixtus III ordered witch-inquisitions in numerous cities of northern Italy. The 1484 Hexenbulle of Innocent VIII clearly had its precedents. Papal calls for witch-inquisitions accelerated and continued through most of the next century.

Some of the most severe witch hunts of the 1400s were carried out by Italian inquisitors in the alpine foothills, at Como, Bergamo, Valtellina, Mendrisio, Turin, and in Piemonte. They were already raging by mid-century. In 1484, the inquisitor of Como carried out mass arrests of witches, so many that secular officials warned him not to overdo it. Popular memory still recalls 1484 as a year of burnings. The following year, 41 witches were burned in nearby Bormio. Other burnings took place at Milan, where few documents have survived. But these burnings were numerous enough to provoke a rebellion in 1516, when peasants protesting inquisitorial witch hunts brought them to a temporary halt. In 1518, at the other end of the Alps, inquisitors burned eighty witches in Val Camonica, ‘valley of the witches,’ and informed the Senate of Venice that another 70 were in prison, while 5,000 more were suspected. Inquisitors also had a large number burned at Bologna in 1523, where Pico della Mirandola wrote that executions went on daily, under mounting protests (see Bonomo for a fuller description of these Italian hunts; also Ermanno Paccagnini’s *In*

Materie de Stregarie, 1989).

Savoy was another epicenter, and western Switzerland, especially by inquisitors at Vevey and Neuchatel around 1437-42. Among those arrested in France in the 1430s were two women who defended the memory of Jeanne d’Arc—whose burning inquisitors had collaborated in—and the one who refused to recant was burned (this is according to Nider’s *Formicarius*, which refers to other witch trials by an inquisitor at Evian). In northern France during the mid 1400s, inquisitors Nicholas Jacquier and Pierre le Broussard hunted witches, as well as an unnamed inquisitor of Artois, and others active at Dijon and Lyons in Burgundy from 1460 to about 1480. German inquisitors tried witches at Thalheim and Heidelberg between 1446-75.

In the early 1500s, Inquisition witch trials took place in the Rhineland and over much of eastern France and northern Italy, as well as in Navarra, Catalunya and Aragón. The feminist-humanist Agrippa was forced into exile from Metz in 1519 after intervening to save an accused witch (the only evidence against her was that her mother had been burned as a witch). Inquisitor Nicholas Savin lost no time in torturing and burning another woman. Agrippa later described the inquisitors as “rapacious wolves” and “vultures gorged with human blood” (Lea, 545; Bonomo, 247-8).

REHABILITATING THE INQUISITION

Edward Peters’ influential book *Inquisition* omits all mention of inquisitorial witch trials (the bias of this author is best illustrated by his description of heresy as ‘theological crime’—a worthy companion to Orwellian ‘thought crime’). Peters employs a clever leger-de-main to avoid describing witch

trials by papal inquisitors; just as his narrative arrives at the cusp of these persecutions, he skips over to deal with the (state-run) Spanish Inquisition. When he returns, it is only to describe details of how the papal Inquisition was reformed into the Roman Inquisition (in 1540). In this way, he nimbly side-steps the diabolist witch frenzy of papal inquisitors in the 1400s and early 1500s, which shaped the ideology, methods, and course of the witch craze, including the secular trials.

Surprisingly, Peters’ complete omission of any discussion of inquisitorial witch hunts has been adopted wholesale. Many writers ignore the 15th century and early 16th century trials and literature, without ever bothering to critique what has been written about them previously. Under this new orthodoxy, it no longer seems to be considered necessary to discuss the role of diabolism, or any period other than the height of the Burning Terror. Discussion can then focus on the less severe procedures of the post-1600 inquisitors, and even praise their relative ‘lenience.’ However, this approach begs the question of their original role in fueling the hunts.

The generalizations drawn from this narrowed focus are false, or at best, misleading. Gibbons states that, “The Inquisition almost invariably pardoned any witch who confessed and repented.” This was just not true in the 1400s and early 1500s. Church law

required that a witch who ‘confessed’ (said what the inquisitors wanted) be spared from death—the first time. If she was arrested again, she was burned as a relapsed heretic. This became a common pattern: once accused and tried, a ‘witch’ was likely to be suspected and denounced again. In practice, a second arrest was not necessary for a burning; if the witch retracted a ‘confession’ obtained under torture, she could be treated as relapsed.

The fiction that ‘the Church abhors blood’ required that those convicted by the Inquisition be turned over to ‘the secular arm’ for execution. Its charade of recommending mercy was sometimes exposed when civil authorities balked at carrying out the execution, as when the mayor of Brescia refused to burn witches condemned by inquisitors in 1486, or in 1521, when the Venetian

government blocked the burning of more witches. The pope became furious that the expected death sentences were not carried out (Lea’s account of these events is still well worth reading).

Even in the 1600s, it is inaccurate to say witches were ‘pardoned.’ Exile was a common penalty in both Italy and Spain (and especially dangerous for women). The Spanish also flogged ‘witches’ with 30 or 100 or 200 lashes (the latter penalty being common) and sentenced them to jails and workhouses (*Cirac Estopañan*, 230-46). Other penalties subjected the ‘witches’ to a

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public spectacle of humiliation and injury: they were forced to ride backwards on an ass, naked to the waist, wearing mitres painted with devils while the mob swarmed around, shouting insults and throwing stones and filth at them.

What's more, the Spanish Inquisition increased its witch trials from 1615-1700, and Portugal from 1700-1760 (Bethancourt, MSE, 186-7). Both Iberian Inquisitions were actively repressing pagan Indian and African religions in Latin America during the same period, using the same diabolist models as in Europe (see especially Laura De Mello Souza's, *O Diabolo e a Terra de Santa Cruz: Feitiçaria e Religiosidade Popular no Brasil Colonial*, São Paulo: 1987 (Companhia das Letras) and Silverblatt, Irene, *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru*, Princeton UP, 1987).

How 'lenient' the methods of the Roman Inquisition had been can be gauged from a document attempting to reform witch trial procedure as late as 1623: "The gravest errors in trials for witchcraft are daily committed by inquisitors, so that the Inquisition has scarcely found one trial conducted legally, with *women* (emphasis added) convicted on the most slender evidence, with confessions extorted by legal means, and has had to punish its judges for inflicting excessive tortures" (Robbins, Russell Hope, *The*

Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology, New York: Crown, 1959, p 269). Even after this, torture remained a factor, though more restricted, and death in prison a possible outcome.

RELIABILITY OF TRIAL RECORDS

Jenny Gibbons asserts that the trial sources come from "people who knew what actually happened" and who had "less reason to lie." I find this disingenuous. These records were produced by judges who presided over torture trials, attempting to extract from accused witches 'confessions' in line with diabolist doctrine. Their hunts were based on lies: that witches had sex with devils, murdered and ate babies, made powders to cause disease or hail. The defendant had to lie to stop the torture, then repeat the lies at the stake, (or assent to the

lies being read out) in order to receive the favor of being strangled before burning.

The assumption that "trial records addressed the full range of trials ..." is seriously flawed. In country after country, specialists note that trial records only began to be kept after a certain time—before that, there is little or nothing. Even afterwards, the archives are notoriously riddled with lacunae. Records for entire cities, counties or regions are often missing. Gibbons rightly praises Ewen's scholarship, but overlooks his point that judicial records only begin to

be sent to the royal archives in the 1330s, and much later (or never) for many counties. Even for the 1400s, wrote Ewen, the Public Record Office contains few records of assizes, and many later judicial documents were destroyed: "For the reign of Henry VIII practically nothing has been preserved ... (and for Elizabeth) the bulk has been destroyed" (Ewen, 40, 102-9, 71).

This pattern repeats itself in studies of most countries, with no records available until early modern times: 1576 in Denmark; the 1590s in Norway; the 1630s for Latvia—and even these are thin and incomplete. For Hungary, Gabor Klaniczay notes that "The loss of complete series of court records is especially frequent for the period before 1690 ..." He concludes that lynchings were a frequent occurrence during the Turkish occupation (EMod, 221).

In Savoy, Brocard-Plaut observes that that out of 800 trials cited by two judges of the period 1560 to 1674, only 40% appear on record. She states that many documents have been destroyed—not least because of the Savoyard practice of hanging the court record around the victim's neck before burning (Brocard, 153). In the Swiss Jura, judicial records are missing but burnings are visible in fiscal accountings for loads of wood, tar and executioners' fees. Monter writes that "... even when the records seem to be in fairly good condition, as for 17th century Valangin, the chance discovery of a parallel source can double the number of known trials for a particular decade." He adds that the gaps in the prison registers often occur in years known to have experienced "extremely heavy waves of trials throughout the canton" (Monter, 91).

Inquisition documents for entire periods appear to have been destroyed, as intimated

by Bernardo Rategno's 1508 reference to inquisitorial records of Italian witch trials from the mid-1300s, no longer extant. Local inquisitorial archives for Venice, Aquilea, and Naples are full of gaps, according to Bethancourt, who refers to a "massive loss of the trials ..." (Magie et Sorcellerie, 187-90). Of Italian cities, only Reggio Emilio has complete inquisitorial archives and many others, none at all (Romeo, Giovanni, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma*, Florence: 1990 (Sansoni Editore), 53). An unknown number of records were lost after Napoleon carried off the papal Inquisition's archives.

Political reasons sometimes account for incomplete record-keeping and deliberate destruction of records. Secular officials in the Basque country, for example, pursued hunts in defiance of the Inquisition's belated attempts to brake them. In France, 17th-century trial records were destroyed on a grand scale after local courts defied the central government in pursuing witch trials. Robert Mandrou notes large gaps in the Toulouse archives, with "only a few traces" of trials during the worst craze periods, when one lawyer wrote that its Parlement was dealing with cases 'daily.' The skimpy 17th-century court records of Bordeaux—missing cases known from other sources and with no record of the 'innumerable' mass trials of 1643-45—are easily explained; its parlement burned its secret registries in 1710. Pau, another southwestern capital where witch hunts were intense, also burned all of its Archives du Parlement shortly after 1700. (Mandrou, 19, 377-84) Mandrou also describes how freelance witch-finders ravaged the provincial hinterlands in 1620-1650, leaving no judicial traces. The French hunts are possibly the most underestimated

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witch hunts in Europe.

These massive, systemic gaps make me extremely skeptical of the conservative estimates—20,000 to 40,000, or even 10,000—now being advanced by some writers as the toll of witch hunt dead. Their adjustments for unrecorded executions are based on theoretical speculation and shaky assumptions (not least, the claim that deaths before 1400 were negligible). Historians have a tendency to be ruled by the nature of available documentation, which in this case is demonstrably flawed and incomplete. I appreciate that the popular figure of nine million burned is mythical, though my own count would have to include those who were drowned, branded, beaten, fined, imprisoned, scored, exiled, shunned, expropriated and deprived of their livelihoods. This much is certain: no one knows how many were killed.

SEXUAL POLITICS OF THE HUNTS

“Where we burn one man, we burn maybe ten women.” von Kaiserback, *Die Emeis*

The scapegoating of women was a major dynamic at work in the persecutions. They were the majority of those burned, however you want to slice it: averaging eight females to one male. In places the percentage of females exceeds 90%. Few regions show a male majority—and these rarely involve sizeable hunts. The action of misogyny is even more striking when you study the winnowing-out of accused males who were not prosecuted; who, when prosecuted, were convicted at significantly lower rates than women; and when convicted, often received more lenient sentences.

The pattern of witch hunts in most countries started with arrests of women, especially poor old women, the stereotypical witch. The numbers of men tended to rise as

the net widened, a consequence of the demand that the accused name other ‘witches’ under torture (as well as officials’ greed for confiscated property). When the number of men (and women related to important men) reached critical mass, a shut-off kicked in and halted the craze, til the next time. A significant number of accused men were related to women burned as witches. Other risk factors included age, disability, deformation. Given the diabolist fantasy of same-sex orgies, gays were probably targeted too, though this information was not recorded.

Some writers have claimed that medieval persecutions were directly mostly at men, focusing on the famous political trials spurred by court intrigues. But these trials were atypical; the very fact of their documentation is a result of the primary defendants’ prominence. Yet even these trials hauled common witches into court as an instrument to bring down the magnates—and burned them, whether or not the elite targets got off (as they often did). This is what happened in the 1315 trial of the bishop of Châlons; three women were tortured until they testified that he had gotten poison from them to kill his predecessor. They were burned, while the bishop got off. Even earlier, in 1309, the royal minister Enguerrand de Marigny forced a poor sorcière to testify against the bishop of Troyes. The sorcery charge was later turned on Marigny, who eventually went to the gallows—but only after his valet’s wife was burned at the stake. In England, the Witch of Eye was burned in 1441 in a successful plot to eliminate the Duchess of Gloucester, who was exiled (de Cauzons, 308-9; Lea, 185-92; Ewen, 40-1).

Witch-hunting was saturated with sexual

politics, most obviously in the frequent accusations of impotence “knottings” and female love magic designed to attract or bring back a mate. But female expression, mobility, and freedom were also at stake. During the mass hunts, women became suspect for going out at night, or being alone in the woods, or kindling a fire on a hilltop, or dancing, alone or in groups. Having drunk pints together at a tavern and caroused at each others’ houses was enough to indict some Scottish female revellers. Female speech had become dangerous, especially when a woman expressed anger at a wrong done to her. If she defended herself against verbal attacks, answered back to harassers, her defiance could be blamed for male impotence, or a dead horse, or a hail-storm.

In innumerable cases, the charge of witchcraft was a weapon ready for use against women. In Britain, Germany and Italian Switzerland, husbands accused their wives. Tiziana Mazzali found so many cases of husband-accusers in Poschiavo that she concluded that they “were able to easily get rid of their wives in this way,” observing that these men were frequently batterers (Mazzali, 154-5). Conversely, having a husband or other male relative willing to stand up for her significantly increased a woman’s chances of beating the charges (Karlsen, 71-5. Though her study concentrates on New Eng-

land, this was true in Europe as well).

Men as a group often enjoyed an entrenched presumption of immunity. In New England, males who incriminated themselves tended to be disbelieved or let off (See Karlsen, 53, 58-9). Male witch-finders claiming magical powers and even attendance at sabbats caused arrests and lynchings of many women in France and Bavaria. In the Italian Friuli, male *benandanti* acted as witch-finders, while their female counterparts were accused and tried as witches (later, after their usefulness in crushing the shamanic traditions was over, the men were also repressed by the Inquisition). Even in Finland, where most of those executed for witchcraft in the 1500s were men, the numbers of accused women rose under Swedish colonization, passed that of male defendants in the 1650s

until, at the height of the Finnish hunts, two thirds of those convicted were female. But the inland (non-colonized) Finns, who continued to think of sorcerers as men, tried very few witches (EMod, 383-86; 324-5).

Tracking the patriarchal repression of the hunts does not mean that this was ever their sole function, without relation to other socio-economic factors. It requires a longer view, taking the persecutions in their full historical context. Otherwise, the temptation to see them as rising full-fledged during the diabolist Terror leads to all sorts of miscon-

The Toulouse archives show large gaps, with “only a few traces” of trials during the worst craze, when one lawyer wrote that its parliament was dealing with cases “daily.”

ceptions.

Jenny Gibbons asks, if the hunts were about sexism, why shouldn't we be able to find greater bias against women in the border areas which were often flashpoints during the mass hunts? Although this question is already an oversimplification of the problem, I would answer that in some cases, at least, the reverse was true. The most dramatic example would be the Basques, whose high status for women is attested in ancient and medieval sources, and whose pagan culture survived into the 20th century. (For the record, Basque witch persecutions become historically visible in the late 1200s, with secular burnings and ordeals recorded during the 1300s.) We could also look to low-

land Scotland, whose women were noted for their "smeddam," or the famous freedom of Occitanian women, both in regions stricken by mass hunts.

I see plenty of reason to think that witch persecutions acted to curtail women's power, and brought about a behavioral devolution from earlier public expressions of that power. Contemporary literature is saturated with admonitions of the dire consequences for women who resort to witchcraft. One of the most dramatic examples is a German pamphlet which held up the burning of 85 women at Gülch in 1591 "so that it may serve as a warning to all honest women and maids" (Held, Robert, *Inquisition/Inquisición: A Bilingual Guide to the exhibition of*

Torture Instruments from the Middle Ages to the Industrial Era, Florence: Qua d'Arno, 1985, p 118).

But returning to the complexity of causes, I would emphasize that the peripheral areas are very often colonized regions which underwent hunts in the aftermath of colonization. Think of Sicily, Finland, Estonia, Catalunya, and even the southern French provinces, or the Spanish Netherlands. For that matter, the alpine societies qualify too, especially if you look at the common pattern of villagers being hauled off the mountains to be tried in urban centers. This colonial dynamic also had implications for the degradation of female status.

The subject of witch hunts is loaded with political ramifications. It is not just the feminists or the pagans whose analysis is colored by political interpretation. The orthodox camp visibly add spin to their history, whether it is in habitually defining witchcraft as diabolist maleficia while erasing all positive folk traditions, or in Peters' highly selective, bald apologia for the Church Militant, or Middelfort and Sebald arguing for a 'positive function' of witch hunting. Unexamined assumptions are rife in the sources most praised for their 'rigor,' as when Cohn calls the accused witches "deluded women," or Levack and Quaife dismiss them as "senile." Most stunning of all is the refusal to deal with the massive body of evidence that women were the pri-

It is not just the feminists or the pagans whose analysis is colored by political interpretation. The orthodox camp visibly add spin to their history...

mary targets of witch persecution, and the impact of that reality on Western civilization. Aldegonde de Rue voiced it in 1601, when she was accused: "But look, they say that all women are witches!" (Muchembled 1987: 194).

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Myth, History and Pagan Origins

by John Michael Greer

Over the last few decades, the debate about the origins of modern paganism has swelled steadily in volume, if not always in clarity. By any standard, there are some odd features to this debate. All through this debate, several odd features have maintained a persistent presence. Perhaps the oddest is the way that the question of pagan origins has almost always been framed in terms of history, as though its meanings and the implications of the question are limited to matters of bare historical fact.

That focus seems sensible enough at first glance, since the modern pagan revival does have a history, one that deserves serious study. Still, it's increasingly clear that to treat the subject of pagan origins as a purely historical question is to evade the dominant issues of the debate. In my one previous contribution to the debate, my co-author and I focused purely on the historical dimension. The nature of the response made it clear that, whatever our intentions, the article was read by many people in terms of mythic issues (see John Michael Greer and Gordon Cooper, "The Red Lodge: Woodcraft and the Origins of Wicca," *Gnosis* 48 (1998), 50-58, and the letters column in the following issue, *Gnosis* 49 (1998) 4-9). Those issues come up, in one way or another, whenever the roots of modern paganism are discussed within the pagan community. They are not matters of evidence and

inference, sources and developments; they have to do instead with questions of validity, of meaning and of ultimate concerns. They are not questions of history, in other words, but of myth.

The real subject of the whole debate, in fact, is *the origin myth of modern paganism*. From this standpoint, the thicket of claims and counterclaims that surround these questions can only be effectively untangled by approaching pagan historical narratives at least partly from their mythic side—by understanding them as myths, with all that this implies.

Dealing with any dimension of myth nowadays, though, is a difficult matter. People raised in the industrial societies of the present era typically view myths through a set of unspoken and highly problematic assumptions. These assumptions are the ambivalent gifts of a culture that has very little understanding of myth in general, and even less of its own mythic underpinnings.

HISTORY AND MYTH

Some of the most important of these assumptions are coded into the very words we use to discuss the subject. To most people in modern Western societies, the word 'myth' means, simply, a story that isn't true. The phrase 'myth of racial superiority', for example, is used to mean that the claims made by racists of various stripes are factually inaccurate. The word 'history', in turn, is treated as an antonym of 'myth', and thus a synonym for 'truth'—or at least of 'fact'. Myths are stories about events that didn't happen, in other words, while history is what did happen. Thus any attempt nowadays to speak of pagan origin stories as myths tends to run up against the immediate response, "But this isn't myth—it's history. It's *true!*"

The myths of a culture or a subculture have tremendous power to shape ... human experience — one reason why such stories [are] treated with a good deal of suspicion in postmodernist circles ...

This sort of pagan-in-the-street definition is to some extent a caricature, but it reflects a real and pervasive attitude toward the realm of myth. That attitude comes out of the ideas and definitions of truth that came into fashion in the West around the time of the Scientific Revolution—ideas that restricts the concept of truth to the sort of thing that can be known by the senses and written up in newspaper articles. The literature on the modern West's blindness to the mythic is extensive, but not always useful. One of the best analyses is that of Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, Anchor, 1972.

In an earlier time, different definitions held sway. "Myths", as one classical philosopher put it, "are things that never happened, but always *are*" (this saying is attributed to the late Classical philosopher Synesius). This draws a distinction useful for understanding myth, but even so it can mislead. Myths can be made out of events that happened, or events that never happened, or a mixture of both. I propose that it's not the source that defines something as myth, but the function; not whether the thing happened, but whether it *is*—whether it goes beyond the merely factual into the realm of meaning and ultimate concern, of the deep patterns of interpretation through which people comprehend their experience of the world.

Myths, according to this understanding, are the stories groups of people use to teach ourselves about who they are and what the world

is like. They are the narratives that define a given vision of reality. The myths of a culture or a subculture have tremendous power to shape the universe of human experience—one reason why such stories ('metanarratives', in current terminology) have come to be treated with a good deal of suspicion in postmodernist circles—and that power is greatest when the myths are accepted blindly, unthinkingly.

HISTORY AS MYTH

It was reflections of this sort, in part, that motivated the rejection of myth by the founders and banner-bearers of the Scientific Revolution. They sought to purge society of myth, to replace myth with historical and scientific fact (See Roszak, 101-61, and Berman). That was the plan, at least; it's clearly not the way things turned out. Human beings are incurably mythic creatures. Take away myths from a group of people, and they will quickly construct new ones; demand that they believe facts rather than myths, and they'll construct their new myths using facts as the raw material.

This is exactly what happened in modern industrial societies. The mythical narratives of these cultures are called 'history', 'scientific theory', or just 'the way things are'—anything but 'myth'. Thus, for example, most people raised in American culture think of Progress as a simple historical fact, and never notice that in this idea they are actually touching on the ruling myth of the modern world.

**... not all myths are constructive, or positive, or useful.
... [Myths] shape consciousness, and therefore they
shape behavior. The myths one believes in determine
the world one creates, for good or ill.**

Myth, supposedly the antithesis of science, affects the sciences just as much as any other part of our culture. Thomas Kuhn in his magisterial *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, has demonstrated that the great shifts from one scientific paradigm to another are motivated less by changes in data than by the realization that the new paradigm tells a better story than the old one did. More telling still, the anthropologist Misa Landau has shown that scientific theories of human evolution are lightly rewritten hero myths of the classic type, with *homo sapiens* in the starring role, and every one of the incidents common to hero myths around the world present and accounted for (Landau 1984: 262-68. See also Lewin 1987: 30-46).

History is even more vulnerable to this sort of disguised mythology. The common notion that history is simply 'what happened' is naive, to use no harsher word; 'what happened' in any single day in any small town, recorded in detail, would fill volumes. The historian must select—must decide what is important and what is not—and makes the selection, consciously or not, on the basis of the story he or she is trying to tell.

Some postmodernist theorists have claimed, on the basis of such considerations, that history is simply another mode of fiction. Such claims, though, have been widely criticized as overstated, and this criticism seems reasonable. Historians are indeed in the business of storytelling, but the stories they tell are

bound by a set of very specific rules, foremost among them the rule that every event in their stories should be a verifiable fact. More deeply, though, history in the proper sense of the word has specific goals, as well as specific materials and rules; its purpose is to show the texture and flow of past events, in all their complexity and ambiguity, through a selection of illuminating facts. This purpose can overlap to some degree with the goals of myth (or of fiction), but overlap is not the same thing as identity.

In the modern fusion of history and myth, therefore, something is arguably lost on both sides. History and myth are both types of stories—but they are *different* types of stories. They have different goals and expectations and, usually, different raw materials as well. A story that tries to be both rarely succeeds well at either.

This is the kernel of truth behind the otherwise very questionable claim, made by certain modern pundits, that our society suffers from a shortage of myths. On the contrary, we have plenty of myths; we just call them 'science', 'history' and so on, and think that their validity depends on the accuracy of the facts that make up their raw material. We no longer examine them as myths; we no longer judge them on their strength and meaning on the mythic level. More important, we no longer ask ourselves what these stories are teaching us, what kind of world they are leading us to build.

MYTHS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Such questions remain highly relevant in the present situation, because not all myths are constructive, or positive, or useful. Consider the myth of racial superiority, mentioned above. This is a myth in both senses of the word, the deeper one as well as that of the person-in-the-street. It's a story that some people use to teach themselves about who they are and what their world is like. In the hands of a powerful storyteller such as Adolf Hitler, it's capable of shaping the behavior and destiny of entire nations. The results of such shaping can be traced without much difficulty in the history of the century now ending, and there are very few people who would argue that those results have been positive.

It's clear, therefore, that myths have implications and consequences. They shape consciousness, and therefore they shape behavior. The myths one believes in determine the world one creates, for good or ill. By examining the implications of a myth, it may be possible to guess at the sort of world that myth is likely to create.

THE MYTH OF PAGAN ORIGINS

There are many different accounts of the origins of modern paganism, backed up with historical claims of varying degrees of plausibility, and so far—as mentioned earlier—disputes about the claims have hidden the fact that what lies behind them is a single, powerful, and very distinctive myth. Setting aside all the arguments about historical evidence for a moment, and look at the myth itself *as a myth*, the whole debate takes on a very different character.

To help get past the historical dimension, I will outline the myth as though it were a folktale from some distant culture. Told in such a

way, it might go something like this:

Once upon a time, long ago, people lived in peace and harmony with each other and the world, following the teachings of their ancient pagan faiths. Then a terrible and tragic event happened. (The nature of this event differs from version to version—the introduction of Christianity, the arrival of patriarchal Indo-European invaders from the East, or any of several other variants.) This shattered the peace and happiness of that ancient time, bringing in its place savage persecution, oppression, and every kind of suffering.

Still, despite all this, a small remnant hidden away in deep woods and isolated places kept alive the ancient traditions in secret. The Burning Times are a testimony both to the savagery visited upon this small remnant, and the steadfastness with which they persevered despite all opposition.

Finally, in the fullness of time, the ancient traditions were revealed again, and people began to turn away from the oppressive system around them—a few at first, but then steadily more and more. The defenders of Christianity (or patriarchy, or whatever the villains of this tale happen to be called in any given version) have responded with renewed persecution, but their strength is weakening daily. Sooner or later, the whole process will conclude with a renewal of the golden age, and people will once again live according to the ancient traditions, in peace and harmony with each other and the world.

This 'folktale' version of the origin myth of modern paganism is derived from many sources drawn from the current pagan subculture. See especially the extraordinarily revealing "Life, Death, and the Goddess: The Gnosis Interview with Starhawk and Carol Christ," *Gnosis* 48 (1998), 28-34, in which Christ argues for the historical reality of a scheme basically identical to the one given here. There are, of course, some pagan origin accounts that do not follow the story given here, but it should be noted that claims of lineal connection between modern paganism and its ancient equivalents are not a necessary

part of the story; there are many full-blown versions of this myth that explicitly renounce such claims without impairing the myth as such.

OTHER VERSIONS OF THE MYTH

In trying to make sense of this myth and its implication, pagan scholars have one great advantage: it's not a new myth, or one unique to modern paganism. It's actually quite old, and it's found in many versions throughout the history of Western cultures. The names of the characters change from version to version, but the story remains essentially the same.

For the sake of comparison, here is another version, which is familiar to most people nowadays:

Once upon a time, long ago, people lived in peace and harmony with each other and the world, in the state of primitive communism. Then, a terrible and tragic event happened: the invention of private property. This shattered the peace and happiness of that ancient time, bringing in its place savage persecution, feudalism, and every kind of suffering.

Still, despite all this, a small remnant hidden away in the deeps of the proletariat kept alive the ideals of a classless society. The outbreaks of class warfare throughout the feudal period are a testimony both to the savagery visited upon this small remnant, and the steadfastness with which they persevered despite all opposition.

Finally, in the fullness of time, the precepts of dialectical materialism and proletarian solidarity were revealed, and people began to turn away from the oppressive system around them—a few at first, but then steadily more and more. The defenders of capitalism have responded with renewed persecution, but their strength is weakening daily. Sooner or later, the whole process will conclude with a renewal of the golden age, and people will live in the glorious dictatorship of the proletariat, in peace and harmony with each other and the world.

Again, the story is the same; only the names have been changed. Still, the historical

mythology of Communism—like the historical mythology of modern paganism—is a recent revision of a much older and more widespread myth. The most common form of that myth in Western culture is also one of the very earliest, and it's familiar enough that it shouldn't be necessary to repeat more than the beginning:

Once upon a time, long ago, the first two people in the world—Adam and Eve—lived in peace and harmony with each other and the world, in the Garden of Eden. Then a terrible and tragic event happened...

And so on.

The implications of all this are not likely to sit well with many people in today's pagan community. From the Original Paradise through the Fall, the righteous remnant in their isolated purity, the age of persecution, the redeeming revelation, the rising struggle between good and evil, all the way up to the New Jerusalem and the restoration of the original paradise—the core myth of modern paganism is structurally identical, point for point, with that of traditional Christianity.

WHAT THE MYTH IMPLIES

This in itself says nothing about what the myth implies, or what kind of world it creates for those that accept it. For that, mere labeling is inadequate. What is needed is a clear look at what the myth actually says and how it structures experience.

Here, we can only make a beginning at that task. A full exploration of this myth—the Christian myth of Fall and Redemption—could easily fill entire books. Still, there are at least a few points that can be seen clearly right away.

First of all, the myth we've described is a myth of *moral dualism*. There are two sides, and only two; one is right, and the other is wrong. There is no middle ground, no moral

... there is no balance being struck, no greater harmony created, only a struggle to the death. Peace and harmony are restored only when one side no longer exists.

ambiguity, only good and evil in stark contrast.

Secondly, the myth is *agonistic*—that is to say, it's a myth of war. The opposition between the two sides in the myth isn't complementary, like the Yin and Yang of Taoist philosophy, or the Oak King and Holly King of some Wiccan traditions; there is no balance being struck, no greater harmony created, only a struggle to the death. Peace and harmony are restored only when one side no longer exists.

Finally, the myth is based on a cosmology of *linear time*. It has a beginning and an end, and travels from one to the other once and once only.

It probably needs to be stressed that all three of these characteristics are very much part of the modern pagan version of the myth, not just the Christian and Marxist ones. It may be useful, for the sake of contrast, to imagine a pagan version of the myth that eliminated these features—that presented the relation between paganism and Christianity (or patriarchy, or whatever) as a creative balance between equally positive forces; that saw, let's say, the two of them as incomplete without each other, or forming some kind of greater whole in their union; or that traced out the historical struggle between them and then said, "And then, in another two thousand years or so, another monotheistic, patriarchal religion will rise up and start the cycle again—and isn't that *wonderful!*" Such versions of the narrative may be in circulation somewhere in the modern pagan community, but they seem

few and far between, at least at present.

MYTH AND IDEOLOGY

These points are central to the issues raised in this essay, because the three characteristics discussed above are among the central features that many modern pagans use to distinguish their own spirituality from Christianity and other revealed religions. Many pagan writers and teachers have claimed that pagan spirituality rejects moral dualism, ideologies of conflict, and linear time in favor of a cosmological polarity between opposites, in which each side is equally necessary and equally good, relating harmoniously in the endless dance of the cycles of nature and the turning of the heavens. The problem is that the historical claims and origin myths propounded by most of these same writers and teachers tell exactly the opposite story.

Such conflicts between ideology and mythology are not precisely rare nowadays, close equivalents may be found all over the cultural spectrum. One highly relevant example from outside the pagan community can be found in the writings of the Reverend Matthew Fox.

In his voluminous writings, Fox has some very harsh things to say about dualism. In fact, his argument—as presented at length in *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* and other books—is that there are two and only two kinds of religion: dualist and nondualist,

which are utterly opposed to one another. Dualism is absolutely evil, while nondualism is absolutely good. At one point he spends the better part of two pages running through a long list of polar opposites, defining one ('nondualist') pole as good and the other ('dualist') as bad (see especially pp 134-35, where the opposing powers of Fox's Manichean cosmos are set out in a convenient list). All in all it's one of the better examples of hardcore moral dualism you'll find this side of Gnostic scripture.

It's hard to imagine anything more typically dualist. Fox, in fact, is probably the most dualistic thinker on the modern theological scene. His ideology rejects dualism, but his mythology is yet another version—an ecological, feminist, politically liberal version—of the myth we've been discussing, and it's as deeply rooted in moral dualism as any of the others. His ideology and his myth are in conflict, and it's the mythology that wins out.

MYTH AND THE FUTURE

Fox's antidualist dualism is all the more important because you can find the same thing in most of the central texts of the modern pagan revival. Pick up books by Starhawk, Riane Eisler or any of several dozen others, and you'll find ringing critiques of dualist thinking phrased in highly dualistic terms. Myths have implications and consequences. They shape consciousness, and therefore they shape behaviour. More to the point, they are at the height of their power when they go unrecognized and unexamined.

Much of what this implies depends on what today's pagans want their spirituality to be, and how they want it to develop over time. The histories of Christianity, Marxism and several other related traditions provide numerous examples of the ways in which the

myth of Fall and Redemption tends to shape behavior and define the world. It may not be unreasonable to suggest that modern paganism, by embracing the same myth, may be headed down the same road.

If this is the road the pagan movement wants to take, well and good. Current initiatives in some parts of that community to establish a full-time paid pagan clergy, and to redefine pagan spirituality in terms of belief in some generally accepted set of doctrines, suggest that this process may already be well under way.

On the other hand, if that isn't what the members of that movement have in mind, there is plainly a good deal of work to be done. Some of that work, it might be suggested, is a matter of confronting some of the thoughtways of Western culture: a matter of learning to take myth seriously on its own terms, of facing the implications of myths and letting go of those myths that lead in directions we do not wish to take. Much of it, finally, has to do with learning the difference between myth and history, and realizing that the history of a tradition may have no particular bearing on its validity and relevance, or about the nature and powers of the mythic and spiritual forces in its deep places.

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BOOK REVIEW: The New Edition of Leland's *Aradia*

Aradia, or The Gospel of the Witches
by Charles G. Leland

Translated by Mario Pazzaglini, PhD and
Dina Pazzaglini; with additional material by
Chas S. Clifton, Robert Mathiesen, and
Robert Chartowich; foreword by Stewart Farrar.
Blaine, Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1998.

Reviewed by Sabina Magliocco
California State University, Northridge

In 1899, amateur folklorist Charles G. Leland first published *Aradia, or The Gospel of the Witches*, a collection of Italian spells, conjurations and legends which he claimed to have obtained from a Florentine witch named Maddalena. Leland translated the texts and strung them together with interpretations based on the prevailing folklore theories of his time, suggesting that they were survivals of a pagan religion dating back to the days of ancient Rome and Etruria. From the very beginning, *Aradia* has been surrounded by controversy. Neither Italian nor American folklorists have ever taken it seriously. Leland was suspected of having fabricated the text himself, as well as having invented his key informant. Even those who accepted her existence believed Maddalena, a Florentine fortune-teller of dubious repu-

tation, may have concocted material to satisfy the American folklorist who was paying her for information. In spite of this, as Chas S. Clifton demonstrates in his essay "The Significance of *Aradia*" (pp. 59-80), *Aradia* has become a fundamental text in the 20th century Witchcraft revival. A possible source for parts of the Charge of the Goddess, it has influenced many later Neopagan texts and thinkers, including Gerald B. Gardner or his predecessors in the New Forest coven, Doreen Valiente, and some of the most influential theologians in Dianic Witchcraft.

The publication of a new, expanded edition from Phoenix promises to shed light on many aspects of this intriguing document. The product of interdisciplinary collaboration, it includes Leland's original text plus a new translation by Mario Pazzaglini, essays by several scholars giving historical and cultural background, and some previously unpublished materials. The book is organized into three sections. Part I includes essays contextualizing the material: Robert Mathiesen's "Charles G. Leland and the Witches of Italy: the Origin of *Aradia*," Chas S. Clifton's "The Significance of *Aradia*," and Mario Pazzaglini's "Leland and the Magical World of *Aradia*." Part II consists of the texts themselves: Leland's original version, Pazzaglini's new translation, and a line-by-line translation with the original Italian, a corrected Italian version, the English translation, and annotations. Part III includes commentaries by Pazzaglini on magical principles in *Aradia* and on the firefly verses, an essay by Robert Chartowich entitled "Enigmas of *Aradia*," a ballad Leland composed in Italian called "La Bella Strega" ("The Beautiful Witch") and a photocopy of a letter sent

to him by Maddalena in 1895. As is almost inevitable in collaborative edited works, this one is somewhat uneven in tone and quality. While the new translation is valuable, and some of the contextualizing materials are very helpful in understanding *Aradia* as a document, others are more problematic.

ESTABLISHING AUTHENTICITY

The essays by Robert Mathiesen and Mario Pazzaglini in Part I go a long way towards clearing up some of the mysteries surrounding *Aradia*. In some ways, these are among the book's most valuable contributions. Working with Leland's personal papers in the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, and the Library of Congress, Mathiesen is able to establish that Maddalena was a documented historical person, and that she was Leland's principal informant for *Aradia*, as well as for *Legends of Florence* (1896) and *Etruscan Roman Remains in Popular Tradition* (1892). In fact, about half of *Aradia's* 15 chapters are actually materials which Leland had published in these other works (p. 35). By closely examining Leland's hand-written, pre-publication draft of the texts, Mathiesen concludes that while Leland revised much of the English text as he went along, the Italian parts show no editorial changes, suggesting that he was copying them from another source. This lends some credence to his claims that he received an actual manuscript from Maddalena.

But Mathiesen incisively observes that the text of *Aradia* is clearly intersubjective—it is the product of the interaction between two unique individuals, Leland

and Maddalena, and reflects both their interests. It is apparent that Leland's own views of magic, folklore and 'survivals' shaped his editing, translation and interpretation of Maddalena's materials. At the same time, Maddalena, a consummate fortune-teller, was skilled enough to intuit Leland's interests and predilections, and to select and edit material from her own tradition which she thought would please her patron. Mathiesen makes clear that while this does not detract from the text's authenticity, it does make it idiosyncratic rather than typical or representative of any Italian magical folk tradition.

What is quite typical of an Italian peasant worldview is the oppositional quality of the verses. Mathiesen shows how the anti-clerical, anti-hierarchical counter-religion of *Aradia* is actually in keeping with the flavor of much Italian folklore—the voice of peasants against their historical oppressors, the Church and the landowning elite.

The first part of Mario Pazzaglini's essay "Leland and the Magical World of *Aradia*" (pp. 81-105) further illuminates the peculiarities of the original text of *Aradia*. In translating Leland's Italian passages, Pazzaglini had before him a difficult task. He worked from the original manuscript, now among Leland's collected papers in Philadelphia. The manuscript is in Leland's own hand; the 'original' which Maddalena allegedly gave him has never been found. The Italian in the manuscript has multiple problems which make the translator's work especially vexing: errors in spelling, missing and misused words, lack of punctuation and diacritical marks, and lack of gender agreement between nouns and their modifiers. Pazzaglini explains this by suggesting that Leland

either copied incorrectly, or received a text composed by a person who made many errors in writing Italian. Yet these are not the sorts of errors usually made by a semi-literate native Italian speaker writing down a text. Perhaps the most likely interpretation Pazzaglini proposes is that the text at some point went from oral into written tradition, and that many errors are the result of mis-hearing Italian or Tuscan dialect words. Pazzaglini correctly points out that any collection of folk magical incantations would most likely have existed originally in dialectal form; yet the rhymes in *Aradia* are all close to standard Italian. He infers that at some point the texts went from dialect to standard Italian to English—a series of steps which leaves a great deal of room for mistranslation, misinterpretation and lost meanings.

Pazzaglini has been able to compare some of the material in *Aradia* with material currently in oral tradition in Italy, a fascinating and worthwhile endeavor. While some of his informants recognized in *Aradia* general principles pertaining to the magico-religious worldview of rural Italy (pp. 435-441), none reported ever having heard of the person of *Aradia* or of any witches' 'gospel.' In fact, the idea of writing down charms and cures is an anathema to most Italian folk magical practitioners. Pazzaglini

accurately observes that the *Aradia* material has very likely been 'de-Christianized' or 're-paganized' (p. 93), because actual Italian folk magical charms all have some Christian content. These observations reinforce Mathiesen's hypothesis about the idiosyncratic nature of *Aradia*.

Pazzaglini finds current Italian analogues to some of the chants and verses in *Aradia*. He points out in this essay and in "The Firefly Verses" (pp. 443-449) that several chants closely resemble widespread, well-known Italian children's rhymes used in counting out, hand-clapping games, dandling, jumping rope, and catching fireflies—an important clue to the origin of some of Maddalena's material. But unfortunately he presents only a few examples of analogues from contemporary Italian oral tradition. Here is where a

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greater knowledge of folklore and ethnographic methods would have been helpful. What is necessary here is a systematic examination of multiple variants of these chants to see which elements are stable over time and place, and a comparison of the *Aradia* material with all the other versions. This is not as difficult a task as it might seem; such chants are readily collected from any speaker of Italian (I remember many of them from my own childhood), and recorded, transcribed examples exist in the Italian Dis-

coteca di Stato and in the archives of the Facoltà di Storia delle Tradizioni Popolari at the University of Rome. Yet Pazzaglini seems strangely unaware of these sources. He limits his fieldwork to areas in his native Emilia-Romagna, a region of Italy near Maddalena's Tuscany, but nevertheless significantly different in dialect and folk culture. And he oddly refers to both Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany as "northern Italy," when linguistically and culturally they are better categorized as part of central Italy.

Pazzaglini is unfortunately out of his depth when it comes to observations about the nature of peasant life in rural Italy. Vast amounts of ethnographic data exist on this subject, yet he makes reference to none of it. His lack of ethnographic knowledge leads him to make some inaccurate interpretations: for example, he considers the ubiquitous nicknames by which families and individuals are known as a protective form of secrecy, when in fact they have been well-documented throughout the Latin Mediterranean as a form of social control, the very opposite of secrecy and protection. Even more problematic is his presentation of Italian rural communities as primitive isolates, preserving unchanged the traditions of yesteryear. In

fact these towns are very well-connected through trade and mass media with the European Economic Community and the outside world, and their folklore has changed to reflect new social realities. Many Italian words are either misspelled or not proofread—*strega* ('witch'; singular) and *streghe* (plural) are misspelled occasionally throughout, and on p. 96 he writes *la compagna* (the [feminine] companion) for *la campagna* (the countryside), leading the reader to wonder about inaccuracies in the rest of the Italian.

THE TRANSLATION

Pazzaglini's new translation is cleaner, closer to original Italian, and easier on the modern reader than Leland's artificial rendition. The new version has been stripped of archaisms and other devices Leland used to make the translation sound more 'old-

fashioned,' and thus authentic, to his readers' ears. What it loses in poetry it gains in accuracy, at least most of the time.

Much more interesting is the line-by-line translation, because we see the translator at work and comprehend the arduousness of his task. Here, the errors in the original Italian are clearly contrasted with Pazzaglini's attempts to clean them up, to correct the grammatical errors in agreement, verb tense, and phrasing which make the original so

problematic. Overall, he has done a remarkable job, and most of his interpretations and conjectures seem to be quite plausible. Occasionally, however, he slips up. On p. 408, for example, in translating Diana's curse upon Endymion, he translates "Che il tuo cuore ritto sempre possa stare / E al amore piú non portai fare ..." as "To have your heart always remain withdrawn / And you will no more be able to make love ..." (p. 408).

In fact, the couplet means something more like "May your heart always remain rigid / erect // And [may you] no longer be able to make love." Diana is either wishing upon Endamone a hard heart, or, more likely, 'cuore' (heart) is a euphemism for penis, as it often is in stornelli (Italian satirical songs), in which case she is cursing him with a perpetual case of priapism. Of course, no translation is ever perfect; but here, as elsewhere, Pazzaglini's missteps could significantly affect the interpretation of the work.

COMMENTARIES

If *Aradia* is not the book of shadows for a 19th century Italian witch cult—and at this point it should be amply obvious that it is not—then what exactly is it? Some of the commentaries by Robert Chartowich and Leland's Italian ballad "La Bella Strega" hint at answers. Chartowich suggests in his essay "Enigmas of *Aradia*" (pp. 451-460) that the material preserves references that might have originated with the Albigenians, one of the heretical groups persecuted by the Inquisition for worshipping Sophia, Isis and Diana (p. 455). Could fragments of this oppositional belief system have survived in the folklore of central Italy, to emerge in the legends of *Aradia*?

He further speculates on the connection between the fireflies, wheat sprigs, fairies and the Eleusynian Mysteries—but here his methodology seems to be based more on free association than on any kind of systematic discipline. His insight are provocative, but not supported by data; they provide material for further investigation.

The ballad Leland composed in Italian is illuminating because it shows that he knew Italian well enough to compose (bad) poetry in imitation of an existing folk tradition, and it demonstrates many of the same kinds of grammatical errors as the Italian verses in *Aradia*. This suggests that whatever Maddalena may have given him originally, Leland probably had a hand in re-shaping it. This was not at all unusual for 19th century folklorists, many of whom sincerely believed they were 'restoring' to ancient texts their 'original' meaning. In so doing, however, completely new works were born. The Grimm brothers, whose *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (1812) set the standard for European folktale collections, heavily edited their material, combining versions, changing endings, and otherwise shaping them to suit their own romantic aesthetics. Elias Lönnrot compiled the Finnish folk epic *The Kalevala* from fragments of ballads which had never been part of an epic tradition. It is in this scholarly context that Leland's *Aradia* must be understood. Neither a forger nor an inventor, Leland was merely compiling and editing material as many of his contemporaries had already done, shaping it to reflect his own biases and beliefs about the folklore as 'survivals' of a religion from an earlier historical period. In attempting to systematize his materials, he actually created a new and unique document.

**[Pazzaglini]
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and protection.**

Aradia

or The Gospel of the Witches

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Mario Pazzaglini, PhD, whose family origins on both sides are deeply rooted in the area where *Aradia* originated, has spent 25 years working on a new translation. He gives a line-by-line transcription showing where Leland made his original errors as a result of his lack of comprehension of the dialect of the area. The new translation is then presented in the same format as the original edition (which is also included here). Mario's research notes are included as well.

Robert Mathiesen, PhD, has been a member of the faculty of Brown University for over 30 years. During the last decade most of his research has been on the historical development of magical theories and practices in Europe and the Americas from the Middle Ages to the present. He writes on the origins of *Aradia*, including the culture and religion of the area, as well as the difficulties involved in translating the book.

Chas Clifton has been studying witchcraft and the occult for over 25 years and has a long list of published books to his name including *Modern Rites of Passage, Witchcraft and Shamanism*, and *Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance*. He writes on the significance of *Aradia* on the revival of modern witchcraft.

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Perhaps we should look at *Aradia* as the first real text of the 20th century Witchcraft revival. In fact, it strongly resembles the materials in many of our books of shadows: collections of folk rhymes, charms and stories from multiple sources with an attempt to systematize them and give them an underlying theology. Mathiesen, Pazzaglini and the editors of this new edition are to be commended for making this material available to scholars in a way that begins to expose the mysteries which have long surrounded it.

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She is a native speaker of Italian, having grown up in Italy and the United States. She has done field research in Italy on traditional festivals and folklore, as well as on Pagan groups in the San Francisco Bay area, and is currently completing a book on ritual and expressive culture in the movement. She is the author of several articles on Paganism, the guest editor of the special issue of Ethnologies devoted to Wicca, and has also published extensively on Italian folklore. During the course of her Pagan research, she became a Gardnerian initiate.