

# WITCHCRAFT

## A CONCISE GUIDE



### ISAAC BONEWITS



## In the Names of

Ibis Headed Thoth & Starry Crowned Isis,  
of Hard Visaged Athena & Brightly Winged Hermes,  
of the Clever Legba & the Wise Erzulie Freda,  
of Melodious Sarasvati & the Graceful Dancing Ganesh,  
and of All Other Divinities of Wisdom, Art, & Science;

## A Spell

is Hereby Placed upon All who Read these Words!

### If

You should Steal this Book  
or Borrow it and Return it Not  
to its Rightful Owner,

### Who is:

---

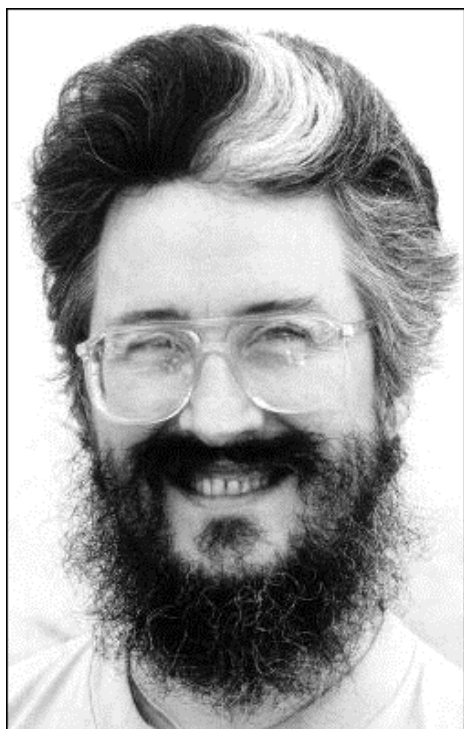
### Or If

You should Use this Book for any Rite or Spell  
that would Injure or Enslave any Innocent Person  
or Cause Harm to Our Holy Mother Earth,

### Then Shall

All your Tools and Weapons Turn against you,  
All Beauty and Joy Depart from your Life,  
and All your Cunning Avail you Naught  
Save Sorrow and Despair,  
Till you have Made Full Restitution  
for your Crime.

**Caveant Malefactores!**



*Isaac Bonewits, circa 1997*

**Witchcraft:**  
**A Concise Guide**  
**or**  
**Which Witch is Which?**

by  
**Isaac Bonewits**

With a Preface and Appendix  
by  
**Ashleen O'Gaea**

*Witchcraft: A Concise Guide*  
Third Edition (version 3.1)  
Published by [PocketPCpress](#)  
ISBN: 1-58929-246-4

Copyright © 1971, 2001 by Isaac Bonewits  
All rights reserved.

Available in print from [Earth Religions Press](#).  
Originally published in ebook format by PocketPCpress  
as *Witchcraft: A Concise History* in 2001

Portions previously published in html format  
on the author's website: <[www.neopagan.net](http://www.neopagan.net)>

Cover design (pentacle art) © 1990 by Robin Wood  
(Used with Permission)

“Reconciling with the Moon” © 2001 by Ashleen O’Gaea  
first published in *Circle Magazine*, Summer 2001

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part,  
in any format whatsoever,  
without permission from the author.

**This book is dedicated to:**

All My Priestesses  
(soon to be a major motion picture)  
who have revealed more faces of the Goddess  
than mythographers ever know —  
not just Maiden, Mother, or Crone,  
but also Trickster, Lover, Bard, and Editor.

*“She changes everything She touches and  
everything She touches changes.”*





## Contents:

|                                  |      |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Foreward: by Ashleen O’Gaea..... | xiii |
| Preface: by the Author .....     | xvii |

### Part One: A Brief History of Witchcraft

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Chap. 1: What Does the Word “Witch” Mean? .....                                | 1  |
| Chap. 2: Classic Witches and Wizards .....                                     | 7  |
| Chap. 3: Gonna Take a Shamanistic Journey.....                                 | 13 |
| Chap. 4: Gothic Witches and the<br>“Burning Times” .....                       | 17 |
| Chap. 5: Witches as Pagan Cultists?.....                                       | 27 |
| Chap. 6: Family Tradition, Neogothic, and<br>Immigrant Tradition Witches ..... | 35 |
| Chap. 7: The Early Anthropologists Step into<br>the Debate.....                | 43 |
| Chap. 8: Gerald Gardner Creates “Wicca” .....                                  | 49 |
| Chap. 9: The First Neopagan Heretics.....                                      | 69 |
| Chap. 10: Sisters Doing It for Themselves.....                                 | 77 |
| Chap. 11: Witchcraft in the Post-Modern World ...                              | 81 |

### Part Two: Wiccan Beliefs and Rituals

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Chap. 12: What Wiccans Believe.....                              | 87  |
| Chap. 13: Varieties of Wiccan Ritual.....                        | 95  |
| Chap. 14: The Sources of Wiccan Ritual .....                     | 101 |
| Chap. 15: Current Variations in Wiccan<br>Ritual Structure ..... | 105 |
| Chap. 16: Using Music and Poetry<br>in Wiccan Rites.....         | 121 |

**Part Three: Wiccan Resources and References**

|                                      |  |     |
|--------------------------------------|--|-----|
| App. 1:                              | Etymological Notes .....                                     | 135 |
| App. 2:                              | A Micro-Glossary.....  | 139 |
| App. 3:                              | Classifying Witchcrafts.....                                 | 145 |
| App. 4:                              | “Principles of Wiccan Belief” .....                          | 153 |
| App. 5:                              | Recommended Books on Ancient<br>and Modern Witchcraft.....   | 157 |
| App. 6:                              | On and Offline Wiccan Resources.....                         | 177 |
| App. 7:                              | <i>Reconciling with the Moon,</i><br>by Ashleen O’Gaea ..... | 179 |
| Afterward: A Few Last Thoughts ..... |  | 195 |

Foreward  
by  
Ashleen O'Gaea



Which witch is which? That was (at least comparatively) an easy question to answer back in the 1960s when Rosemary and Ray Buckland brought Wicca to the United States. There were, then, a few self-styled “witches-with-a-small-w,” and there were Gardnerians [followers of the religion started by Gerald Gardner and his friends in the 1940s, see Chapter 8] and Gardnerian-trained entrepreneurs. But after forty years of sometimes explosive growth in the U.S. and around the world, it’s hard to tell the players even *with* a scorecard. *Witchcraft: A Concise Guide* is better than a scorecard.

Now, any Neopagan author *could* do at least most of the same research Bonewits has done over the years, but not many Wiccan authors have *bothered*. There’s been a trend in the last decade toward a development of new Traditions [denominations] rather than to look deeply into the origins of Neopaganism *or* delve into the magical and

ethical principles underlying Wiccan practice.

That's been exciting, and certainly worthwhile — but now that Wicca is reasonably well known and still growing, it's more important than ever that we Witches get a handle on our history *and* a precise command of our vocabulary. If we don't, we risk not just stalling Wicca's growth, but setting it back.

Isaac Bonewits has been doing reality checks for Wicca for a number of years now. Initiated into “one of the most distinguished (and prolific) of all the Gardnerian ‘family lines’ in America,” he knows Wicca from the inside out, and in this work he shares the definitions and distinctions he's developed from his intimate experience and original research. When you're talking about Neopagan Witchcraft, Bonewits is an author, advisor, and scholar you want — no, let me be stronger: he's someone you *need* on your side.

When we use the word “witch,” what do we mean? How do we distinguish the Traditions of Wicca? How the heck old is this religion, anyway? These are questions that the Neopagan community has debated for nearly half a century, and they come up again for every generation of Wiccans. There are other books that discuss them, but none so “concise” as this one, and consequently, none so useful.

For thirty years or more, Witches have worked to earn mainstream religions' and other institutions' acknowledgment of Wicca as a "real" religion, worthy of respect. Thanks to this effort — always hard and sometimes perilous — Wicca is recognized now, and it's better understood and accepted every day. But every time someone speaks from ignorance, or speaks imprecisely about Wicca — even if the error's not noticed immediately — it sets that work back and disrespects our forebears and our colleagues. *Concise Guide* in hand (or on screen), *all* of us can uphold Wicca's reputation accurately.

With *Witchcraft: A Concise Guide*, Bone-wits has made it easy to understand Wicca's history and structure meaningfully. Beyond that, he offers one of the best bibliographies I've seen — his reading list alone makes this book indispensable on any serious priest's or priestess' bookshelf. But there's something else that makes this book special, and that's how reader-friendly it is. It's scholarly enough to be worthwhile reading, but it's far from dry or boring, and short enough to take along wherever you go. The chapters and appendices are clearly titled, and that makes this *Concise Guide* easy to use as a reference: you don't have to read the whole book every time you're looking for a particular fascinating detail or discussion.

From the etymology of “our words,” to the development and distinction of Wiccan Traditions, to the order of our services, to recommended books and on-line resources, Bonewits takes us on a tour of Wicca, blending an initiate’s point of view with a sociological perspective. Here is the context and commentary we all need to discuss Wicca intelligently amongst ourselves, with other Neopagans, and with non-Pagans.

As for the self-styled “witches-with-a-small-w” that came out of their broom closets when Wicca made its appearance in the U.S.? Who better than the man who coined the terms by which we know them now — “Fam-Trads,” “Neogothics,” and “Imm-Trads” — to talk about their place in the modern Craft community?

Call *Witchcraft: A Concise Guide* a Wiccan *Cliff’s Notes* if you will. Bonewits’ years of research are summarized here as he guides readers step by step through Wicca’s histories and diverse origins. In his Appendices, he presents equally well-researched and useful material that transforms background information into common sense and practical applications. This book is an argument-settler, and one you’ll want to carry and quote for years to come.

Ashleen O’Gaea is the author of *The Family Wicca Book: The Craft for Parents & Children* as well as *Raising Witches: Teaching the Pagan Faith to Children*.

## Preface



This book is the product of many years of reading scholarly works, some of them well respected by their colleagues, some heretical (then or now), and a few genuinely ground-breaking ones here and there. Just as important in many ways, however, have been the words and actions of those brave women and men who have founded, invented, stolen, modified, mutated, and otherwise perpetuated the many old and new systems of magic and religion that I have been informed for forty years were what “Witchcraft” was really all about.

At the risk of offending someone whose name I am sure to forget, I would like to specifically mention and thank the following as having helped along the way — whether they meant to or not — with knowledge, wisdom and wit:

Margot Adler, Victor Anderson, Gavin Bone, Stuart Clark, Scott Cunningham, Alister Crowley, Mircea Eliade, Janet & Stuart Farrar, Donald Frew, Gavin Frost, Gerald Gardner, Ronald Hutton, Richard & Tamara James, Aiden Kelly, Frederick Lamond, Sybil Leek, Patricia Monaghan,

Jeffrey Burton Russell, Starhawk, Doreen Valiente, and Carl Weschke. Other authors whose works influenced this book are mentioned in Appendix 5 (and parenthetical comments to “see So-and-So” refer to books there).

The following are some of those who have shown me the many ways that the Goddess can manifest inside a Wiccan circle: Arlynde de Laughlin, Sally Eaton, Rusty Elliott, Yvonne Frost, Magenta Griffiths, Elspeth of Haven, Anodea Judith, Alta Kelly, Deborah Lipp, Phaedra Oorbeck, Selene Vega, and Gaia Wildwood. My knowledge of Wiccan priestcraft would be considerably poorer without their priestesscraft.

This book would not have been written for another twenty years, if not for the encouragement of Douglas Clapp of PocketPC press and my old friend Mark Bartel/Marcus Barccani of Virtual Publishing Group, neither of whom wanted to wait for the 1,000 page tome I’ve been writing for the *last* twenty.

I know it’s traditional for an author to accept responsibility for all the errors that may have crept into his or her work, and to excuse those who may have just been thanked, and I really should do that... but, really, it’s all their fault!



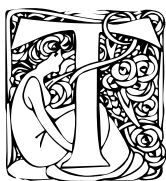
Part One:

A Brief History  
of  
Witchcraft



## Chapter 1: What Does the Word “Witch” Mean?

*“Who were the witches?  
Where did they come from?  
Maybe your Great-great-  
grandmother was one...”*



This is one of those “easy” questions that require complex answers, since during the 1,200+ years that the word has been known, hardly anyone seems to have agreed with anyone else on a proper definition. Even those who call themselves “witches” today, or who point to others as being such, differ widely as to their interpretation of the term.

Is a “witch” someone who does magic, or who reads fortunes? Is a witch someone who worships the Christian Devil? Is a Witch (capital letter this time) a member of a specific faith called “Wicca?” Is a witch someone who practices Voodoo, or Macumba, or Candomble? Are anthropologists correct, when they define a witch as anyone outside of an approved social structure who is suspected of doing evil magic and/or of being a monster who can curse people with

the “evil eye?” Were the first witches originally shamans, munching on psychedelic herbs and mushrooms?

All these definitions have been claimed as accurate in the past and are used to this day by both friends and foes of (whatever they consider to be) witchcraft. Most people discussing the topic seem to have their own pet definition and are outraged at those with different ideas.

Is there a way out of this quagmire? Is it possible to distinguish between “real” and “fake” witches? Much of the evidence that would enable us to give positive answers to the relevant questions has been deliberately suppressed or destroyed, centuries ago, by those with religious, economic and/or political axes to grind. However, some aspects of the problem can be cleared up with the help of a little linguistic and historical investigation.

As some people may already know, the word “witch” in Modern English comes, via the Middle English *wycche*, from the Old English/Anglo-Saxon *wicce* (feminine) and *wicca* (masculine). The plural noun was *wiccan* (now used with a capital letter as an adjective for followers of Neopagan Witchcraft, see Chapters 8 and 9).

All these words referred to agents or performers of *wiccian*, apparently meaning “sorcery or magic,” and they all came from the Germanic root *wic-*, one of a cluster of

similar-sounding roots that all referred to bending, changing, turning, waking, and possibly shouting.

(I know that many people are bugged by etymology, so before people get antsy, I have put most of the formicable details into Appendix 1.)

The Indo-European cultures, like most, clearly associated concepts of speech, intention and the performance of magic, and at least some of the time expressed these ideas in terms of bending, twisting, and weaving. Those are extremely common concepts worldwide for magic and divination (see *Real Magic*). The references to twisting may have been negative, while those to weaving tie in with hints from other sources that the Western Indo-Europeans may have had their own version of what later developed into the Hindu and Buddhist magical systems known as *tantra* (based on Sanskrit *tan*, “to weave”).

There is little here to indicate an ancient *religious* role for witches except as assumed representatives of the energies of chaos (the “Outsiders” in Proto-Indo-European myths — see *Druidism: A Concise Guide* and the works of Dumézil in Appendix 5). All Indo-European cultures had specific words for “priest,” “priestess,” “healer,” “midwife,” “diviner,” “matchmaker,” “advisor,” “wise one,” etc. — few of which appear to have been linguistically related, except in the most meta-

phorical sense, to the various words which became *wicce/wicca* in Old English, and eventually “witch” in Modern English.

Despite the modern Wiccan belief that *wicca* originally meant “wise one,” it looks like what it really meant was: (1) someone who bent things to his or her will, (2) someone who could turn aside evil or good, and/or (3) someone who could cast spells — all with a neutral-to-negative connotation even among the “Paleopagans” (see Appendix 2). The “wise one” derivation may have been suggested to Gerald Gardner, the inventor of Wicca as a religion (see Chapter 8), by the word *wica*, which *may* have meant “wise.” Or he might have been thinking of the word *wysard* (or “wizard”) which *does* mean “wise one” and which was used in the Middle Ages as a term for a male witch after the masculine form of *wicca* had been forgotten.

Whatever else they may have been, for good or ill, Paleopagan witches were *not* the priests and priestesses of “The” Old Religion (as if there had ever been only one) of Ancient Europe, despite the claims of many Neopagan Witches. We know quite a bit about the Paleopagan priests and priestesses in pre-Christian Europe, but their exact relationships, if any, to local witches is unclear.

A hint can be gleaned from the fact that the Celtic clergy were called “druids.” That

word goes back to the Proto-Indo-European root *\*dru-*, the source of other words with such meanings as “oak,” “firm,” “strong,” and “true.” There is no doubt that the druids were involved in tree worship (which was indeed common throughout Europe) and that oaks were among the favorite trees in northern climes for this worship. It could be that the druids were called such because they represented the “firm” and “strong” principles of their faith — they were, after all, the highest religious authorities among the Celts.

By contrast, the tree most associated in myth and history with witchcraft seems to have been the willow (PIE *\*wy-*). Perhaps the willow-like “bending” and “chaos” of *wiccecraft* and the oak-like “firmness” and “order” of *draíocht* (“druidism”) may point to an ancient distinction between the social functions played by each (see *Proto-Indo-European Trees*, by Paul Freidrich; *The New Comparative Mythology*, by C. Scott Littleton; and *The Plight of a Sorcerer*, by Georges Dumézil).

We do know that, even at the height of the witch-hunting hysteria in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, the terms used to refer to the victims (such as *bacularia*, *fascinatrix*, *herbaria*, *Hexen*, *Wettermacherinnen*, etc.) all meant people (usually women) with real or assumed herbal, magical, and prophetic knowledge or powers, who

were believed to be able to control people, raise storms, and kill or cure humans and animals.

Almost all tribes had full or part time healers, who used both herbs and magic. Frequently they also had seers and weather predictors/controllers. Midwives, almost always female, were also common, and there was frequently a priest and or priestess working at least part time. What causes confusion, especially when dealing with extinct cultures, is that many tribes combined these various offices into different people. Sometimes the healers were the midwives, sometimes the healers weren't midwives but were seers, etc.

As will always be true, in this as in every other area of human activity, all sweeping statements are completely wrong.



## Chapter 2: Classic Witches and Wizards



What jobs did the people I call **Classic Witches** originally perform? We know their later functions, after the Christian conquest, included healing (with medicines and/or magic), inducing fertility and abortions, providing love potions and poisons, predicting and/or controlling the weather, blessing and cursing, fortune telling, etc. So, for our purposes here, we shall define a Classic Witch as follows: a person (usually an older female) who is adept in the uses of herbs, roots, barks, etc., for the purposes of both healing and hurting (including the making of poisons, aphrodisiacs, hallucinogens, etc.) and who is familiar with the basic principles of both passive and active magic (see my book *Real Magic*), and can use them for good or ill — as she chooses.

A typical Classic Witch, being an old peasant, might also be a font of country wisdom and superstitions, as well as a shrewd judge of character. Such a person would be of great value to local peasants,

but would also be somewhat frightening and resented.

But what did the Classic Witches do when there were still Pagan priests and priestesses around? Remembering that almost everyone in a Paleopagan culture will do simple folk magic for him- or herself, did the Classic Witches exist side-by-side with the clergy, handling simple or private matters while the clergy handled complicated or public ones? Did the Classic Witches merge with the remaining Pagan clergy after the Christian conquest, or replace them entirely? Did the Classic Witches only begin to exist after the clergy had been overthrown, because they were the remnants of that clergy and their descendants, now looked upon with distrust? Nobody really knows, though lots of people have theories.

There do seem to have been religious communities of both genders in Celtic territories, patterned perhaps in a similar way to the ones in India formed in the woods by retired householders who have left their previous castes and duties behind. The ones for Celtic women have been described as being situated on islands surrounded by willow trees which, as mentioned above, were the trees most associated with witchcraft. There were also individual mystics living solitary lives in the woods, perhaps similar to the *arhats* (saints) of India.

Some Priestesses of Freya in parts of Scandinavia, for example, lived as solitary mystics, minding small temples and riding from village to village with statues of Freya for rituals at various times of the year. Could the Classic Witches have been descended from such communities or individuals?

And where do the “wizards” fit in? The term “wise one” could have been merely a compliment, applied to anyone showing extraordinary wisdom about a topic (even today it is used that way in British slang). Contrary to the beliefs of many occultists and theologians, wisdom never has been perceived as limited strictly to people involved in magic and religion.

The folkloric figure of the wizard is just as late a development as is our knowledge of witchcraft, in the early Middle Ages, yet he too may point to an earlier truth. A wizard is usually described as a loner, a stranger who wanders about performing wondrous deeds with little equipment save a staff or sword. In fact, the description is very similar to that of the Scandinavian god Odin as He walks about the earth. Odin is associated with the dark/dangerous half of the Indo-European “first function” caste of magicians and priests (see Littleton and Dumézil). Could it be that the term *wysard* became attached to various Pagan priests who had gone into hiding, and who traveled from

village to village, providing some of the old priestly services to people now no longer able to get them? Or were wizards really just medieval equivalents to the “cunning folk,” much of whose business was undoing the supposed curses of witches, and whom folklorists recorded in England as recently as the early twentieth century?

Classic Witchcraft itself was not a crime during the first ten centuries of the Christian era. Only if a witch caused actual physical damages could he or she be prosecuted, and then for causing harm, not for practicing witchcraft. Indeed, it was official Church policy that all the magic produced by non-Christians was “illusionary” or “demonic,” and that belief in the ability of anyone to fly through the air, cast spells, etc., was a Pagan, and “therefore” heretical belief. The official Church document on this was the *Canon Episcopi*, purporting to be from the fourth century, but actually forged around 906, which (in Rossell Hope Robbins’ translation in his *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*) read in part:

It is also not to be admitted that certain abandoned women perverted by Satan, seduced by illusions and phantasms of demons, believe and openly profess that, in the dead of night, they ride upon certain beasts with the pagan goddess Diana, with a

countless horde of women, and in the silence of the dead of night fly over vast tracts of country, and obey her commands as their mistress, while they are summoned to her service on other nights.

But it were well if they alone perished in their infidelity and did not draw so many others along with them into the pit of their faithlessness. For an innumerable multitude, deceived by this false opinion, believe this to be true and, so believing, wander from the right faith and that relapse into pagan errors when they think that there be any divinity or power except the one God...

...It is therefore to be publicly proclaimed to all, that whoever believes such things or similar things loses the faith...

This Churchly arrogance was the official party line for several centuries and caused theological trouble later when the Inquisition wanted to persecute people for doing what Church doctrine had earlier said was impossible. This indication, coming as late as 906, that the Church was aware of Pagan survivals in its heartland of Italy (assuming that they meant the ancient Roman Diana, and not another goddess of similar nature)

was taken by some writers in the mid-twentieth century as evidence for theories that the great witch hunts (see Chapter 4) were aimed at an underground Pagan cult of Diana worshipers. However, it proves nothing except that there were at least a few Paleopagan survivals connected with women's religious practices in Christendom — something we know from other sources as well.

When the *Canon Episcopi* was announced, there were still unconverted Paleopagans in northern and eastern Europe building temples, carving statues of their gods, giving sacrifices to trees and streams, and so on. There may well have been similar survivals throughout western Europe, for an Anglo-Saxon law of about the same time condemns supposed witches for worshipping wells, trees, stones, etc. This seems to indicate that for several centuries after the Christian conquest of Europe, at least some people called “witches” were only mildly Christianized. This law isn't evidence of an organized cult of witches, however, nor are the worship activities mentioned in it part of the usual modern theories of how a postulated cult of witches worshiped.

## Chapter 3: Gonna Take a Shamanistic Journey...



Most Westerners became aware of shamans and their beliefs and practices when Mircea Eliade published his classic *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* in 1951 (first in French, then in English in 1964). As he described it, “shamanism” was a complex but clear cluster of phenomena.

Shamans were and are:

- (1) tribal officials in
- (2) hunter-gatherer cultures who
- (3) were usually reluctant recruits who
- (4) underwent a harrowing death and re-birth experience that
- (5) enabled them leave their bodies at will while
- (6) deities or other spirits possessed them and/or
- (7) they traveled to other worlds to
- (8) represent their tribe to the deities or
- (9) find and return the errant souls of sick members of their tribe.

Eliade asserted further that most shamans were from central or eastern Asia (or among their distant relations, the Native Americans), that they shared a particular form of “x-ray art,” often used some sleight of hand in their healing magic, and sometimes used mind-altering substances as aids to leaving their bodies.

In 1968, Carlos Castaneda began publishing a striking series of fantasy novels that he successfully passed off as anthropological research for many years, about a Native American shaman named Don Juan who supposedly taught him all about the magical and spiritual uses of peyote, datura, and funny mushrooms.

In 1973, Michael Harner said in a book he edited, *Hallucinogens & Shamanism*, that the “flying ointments” referred to in many medieval documents as having been used by witches seem to have regularly contained various hallucinogenic herbs such as belladonna, henbane, datura, etc., which can in combination produce illusions of flying as well as visions of wild orgies and dancing.

Throughout the 1970s, books about the spirituality of hallucinogens met an eager market. Castaneda kept cranking out more novels, later Lynne Andrews and other New Age authors began telling similar tales, and Harner published books about shamans in the Amazon jungle. Together, these authors redefined shamanism as any system of



magic or religion that used mind-altering substances — which is, of course, most of them at one time or another. Eliade's once-clear definition became lost in a psychedelic cloud of vague generalities.

Morning Glory Zell pointed out in the late 1970s that users of belladonna around the world frequently report seeing the same "White Lady," Whom they associate with various moon and sea goddesses, just as users of peyote from different cultures often meet the same green vegetation deity (most commonly known as San Mescalito). She felt it possible that independent cults of similar belladonna users could have sprung up in multiple parts of Paleopagan Europe, and that they might have survived here and there into the Middle Ages. She called this idea, **Shamanic Witchcraft**.

Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, others were to call their new versions of Wicca (or Neopagan Witchcraft — see Chapter 8) by the same term, even though these others did not advocate or use psychedelics in their worship. They did, however, wave feathers and crystals around and pound on drums, so they figured that was close enough to shamanism...

It seems clear to me that Classic Witches fulfilled almost none of the characteristics Eliade outlined as essential to shamanism. They weren't tribal officials; they were outcasts. They lived in or on the outskirts of

settled agricultural societies, rather than hunter-gatherer ones. There is very little evidence that trance-mediumship was a major part of their activities. Europe certainly wasn't part of Central Asia!

So it is unlikely that either they or any of the other witches in this book were the remnants of pre-Christian shamans (unless there were witch-hunts in Lapland or Finland, about which I've heard nothing). Ironically, the *Benandanti* of medieval Italy (see Chapter 6), which started out as a cult dedicated to *fighting* witches in a spirit world, may be the closest to matching Morning Glory Zell's original concept.

## Chapter 4: Gothic Witches and the “Burning Times”



y the eleventh century any remaining Classic Witches who might have been worshipping Pagan deities in the Church's territory had pretty much died out or gone far underground. Most of the Paleopagan cultures of western and central Europe had been destroyed, and pacification programs had been instituted against any remaining objectors. Having slain all available competition outside of the Church, the Christians proceeded to slay each other. The Inquisition was founded and Crusades mounted against heretics (which were much more successful than the Crusades mounted against the Moslems, who had the rude habit of winning).

Heretic roasting became a lucrative source of wealth, power, and sexual satisfaction for both the Inquisitors and their civilian helpers. Eventually, however, they began to run out of heretics to kill. This was disastrous for them, since many Inquisitors and nobles had built their fortunes on confiscated property taken from their victims. A

few hopeful sadists, however, had been suggesting to the Popes for quite some time that sorcery and witchcraft should be declared heretical. This was done slowly over a period of two centuries.

In 1324 Bernard Gui wrote a manual for heretic hunters that strongly influenced later ones. In 1376, Nicholas Eymeric published a popular handbook for inquisitors, which was in use through the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1428, the Church created a six-point definition of a particular heresy in Calais and Arras (France) that was to eventually be used in a new definition of “witchcraft.”

The victims there were tortured until they confessed to:

- (1) making a pact (a legal agreement) with the Christian Devil,
- (2) having sex with the Christian Devil,
- (3) flying around at night (as in the *Canon Episcopi*) with the Christian Devil,
- (4) working magic,
- (5) attending secret meetings at night, and
- (6) being sexually promiscuous (having more sex than the inquisitors were).

(Wiccan author Gavin Frost has pointed out that limiting the term “witch trials” to only those cases involving these six particular characteristics is one way in which

the numbers of those killed for witchcraft can be limited to the lower estimates.)

In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued some Papal Bull officially sanctioning the arrest and trial (that is to say, the torture, conviction and execution) of anyone accused of such consorting with demons.

Soon after, two Catholic priests, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, wrote and published (with the Pope's approval or "*Imprimatur*") one of the more infamous books in history, *Malleus Maleficarum* or *The Hammer of [female] Evildoers* (which Montague Summers translated as "The Witches Hammer"). This was used along with the previous witch-hunters' manuals to guide and justify three hundred years of atrocities committed against women, children, and men for the thought-crime of "witchcraft."

The theological excuses were easy to manufacture, especially by experienced Bible scholars such as Kramer and Sprenger, and were defended in Church literature well into the mid-twentieth century — see *The Inquisition*, by Fernand Hayward, published by the Church's Society of St. Paul and with a full *Imprimatur* and *Nihil Obstat* (official Church approval) in 1965.

Since there was only "one God, one Faith, and one Church," anyone disagreeing with the Roman Catholic Church (or the later Protestant Churches) about anything was automatically a heretic. By similar du-

alistic reasoning, anyone using a system of magic outside of Christian control and approval was “obviously” doing it with the help of the Christian Devil. Satan was, after all, the only other god allowed to exist in Christian mythology — though they killed you if you called him one. Since the Christian Devil supposedly would not give magical power to people who weren’t “his own,” the accused witches “must” therefore have been worshipping him.

Many of the early Christian “heresies” had threatened the theological and political power of the Bishop of Rome, who was now called the Pope. The Popes were especially sensitive on this matter, since most of the non-Roman Bishops considered the Popes to be heretics themselves, who had unlawfully usurped the powers of the early Christian Council of Bishops. Most of the Bishops from the other forty Catholic Churches still feel that way today.

Having crushed all opposition and declared their opponents to be the ones who were “really” the heretics, the Bishops of Rome grabbed for all the religious and secular power they could get. Thus, as I often say, the Roman Empire never actually fell, it just changed hands and continued under new management!

Wherever the Roman Catholic Church went, it would first wipe out the native Paleopagan culture, then, after a few decades

or centuries, start executing heretics. The Roman Church had a vital psychological, political, and theological interest in keeping the attention of Christendom focused on real or imagined enemies. This was similar to how corporate and political leaders in the second half of the twentieth century focused the attention of the world on the “Communist Peril,” thus deflecting movements aimed at making them accountable.

Through a series of astonishing theological gymnastics, Pope Guilty VIII and the leaders of the Inquisition managed to declare that the *Canon Episcopi* (discussed in Chapter 2) was in essence “irrelevant” or referred to some other cult of a similar description. They couldn’t actually say it was “wrong” because it had been considered Church Law for hundreds of years.

However, after 1484, it was heresy if one did *not* believe in witches who flew through the air and had magical powers given to them by the false deity they worshiped — only now, that deity was said to be Satan instead of Diana. Thus the Church created out of thin (if busy) air a brand-new kind of “witchcraft,” the *religion* of Satanism, which I call **Gothic Witchcraft**. (It should be noted that I coined this term in 1979, before the rise of the “Goth” subculture of vampire fans.)

The details of Gothic Witchcraft were easy to invent. Since Roman Catholicism

was the only “true” religion, and since Satan was deemed the opposite of their God, Satanism must thereby be an exact reversal of Roman Catholicism. (Other Christian sects accused the Gothic Witches of reversing *their* particular version of the One True Right and Only Way to worship.) From here sprung fully formed the whole concept of the “witches’ sabbat,” “Black Masses,” and the like.

Previously, the concept of “Black Masses” had referred to masses (the standard Catholic liturgy) said for the dead — in which Catholic priests usually wore black vestments — only performed for people who were still living, as a kind of curse!

The ancient Roman urban legends about Evil Cultists who profaned sacred things, ate little babies, held wild orgies, etc., previously used against early Christians, and then by them against Paleopagans, Jews, and heretics for centuries, were dusted off and laid at the feet of Gothic Witches. These lies were repeated constantly, with evidence manufactured to support them. It was rather like what happened in the *Satanic Panic* of the 1980s (see Jeffery Victor’s book of that title) when Americans and Britons decided that there was a global conspiracy of baby-killing devil worshippers sacrificing hundreds of thousands of people in Satanic orgies.



This insanity was (and is) rooted in the Dualist paranoia of Christian mythology, which describes an eternal cosmic battle between Good and Evil. Therefore, anyone who was not a good Christian (by local definition) was committing “spiritual treason” by helping the enemies of Christendom. This was far worse than mere political treason (which was more of a pastime than a crime in those days). Gradually, the power of Satan increased in the Christian mythos, until he was credited with an entire anti-church of his own. The congregation of this anti-church was said to consist of heretics in general and Gothic Witches in particular.

I really should not go into the details of the persecutions (often called the “Burning Times” by modern Witches) against suspected (and therefore “guilty”) Gothic Witches, since most readers may not have strong stomachs (they can skip to the next page if they like). Somewhere between 50,000 and a quarter-million women, children, and men were killed. Estimates of the total body count vary widely among scholars, depending upon their biases and academic fashions. The victims were raped, maimed, mutilated, and murdered in ways that make the atrocities of modern stormtroopers and death squads look like child’s play.

People were torn limb from limb by wild horses, flayed alive (having all their skin removed), covered with boiling tar, had red-

hot irons locked around their bodies, had toenails and fingernails ripped off, toes, fingers and testicles crushed. Women had their hair burnt and nipples torn off, and jagged irons shoved up their genitals, or, if they were “attractive” women or girls, were raped to death.

Most of this, mind you, was what was done during *questioning*, before “guilt” had even been “proven” and sentence passed. The actual executions were swift and merciful by contrast: hanging, burning alive, strangulation, drowning, etc.

The whole pseudo-legal point of the torture was to ask the accused people long, involved questions, and to force them to answer “yes” or “no.” The torture continued until the victim “confessed” all she or he was told to say. Then they were taken out of the torture room and asked the same questions, with the threat of further torture if they did not reaffirm their confessions. Once a confession was reaffirmed, the Inquisitors could state in the official records, “the accused confessed without torture,” and send the victim (usually a woman or girl) back into the torture room for the “good Christian men” to do with as they pleased.

After a few decades, many of the Inquisitors themselves began to believe the Big Lie their predecessors had invented. They put more and more pressure on the civil authorities to torture and execute witches and

other heretics, threatening to have them executed as heretics themselves if they did not comply. Thus, in direct opposition to Christian defenses to this very day, it was the Bible-quoting Inquisitors who urged the civil courts on, not the other way around. Yet once the civilians realized that they could share in the political, economic, and sexual benefits of witch-hunting, they became equally zealous.

These horrors were not confined to Roman Catholicism; after the Protestant Reformation, the new religious leaders agreed with the old that Gothic Witches deserved to die. So they proceeded to roast accused Gothic Witches, heretics, Catholics, and each other. The Bible translators working in England managed to insert the English word “witch” into several parts of the scriptures where “a Devil-worshipping sorceress” could not possibly have been meant (the ancient Hebrews had no “Devil” figure for anyone to be worshipping). The infamous “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” line, for example, actually referred to poisoners, but the witch-phobic King James, like Christian Fundamentalists today, loved how the mistranslation could justify his hatred and violence towards accused witches.

What, beside the greed and sexual depravity of the Christian clergy, turned witch hunting into a socially accepted activity? Many scholars have offered many theories,

ranging from the Church's fear of the upcoming scientific worldview, to a sexist reaction against strong women, to a homophobic reaction against real or alleged lesbians and gay men, to a conspiracy by medical doctors against midwives. All these theories have something to offer, so we should not let ourselves be trapped by monothesisism (by insisting on a single explanation).

Part of the answer, I feel, lies in the fear that magic and psychic phenomena can cause in ignorant people. Even the Classic Witches had inspired fear as well as respect. With ten centuries of Church propaganda drumming it into the populace's heads that all magic came from either Jehovah or Satan, more fear of magic workers developed. When the Black Plague wiped out a third of Europe's population almost overnight, preachers were quick to suggest that it was punishment from the Christian God for laxity in Christendom. Jews, Gypsies, strangers, and other unusual people were scapegoated on an unprecedented scale. This soon included itinerant magical workers such as the Classic Witches.

For more details on this whole, sick mess, consult Rossell Hope Robbins' book, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* and Jeffrey B. Russell's *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans*.

## Chapter 5: Witches as Pagan Cultists?



as there actually a secret, underground movement to act as the peg upon which the Church could hang its branding irons? Could the Classic Witches have actually been the leaders of a European-wide Pagan revival or survival, a Paganism that the Church merely distorted into a Satanic cult?

Since the Classic Witches would commonly be among the elder members of any village social structure — it takes a long time to become adept at healing, herbology and divination — they *could* have been at the fore-front of any sporadic efforts to preserve Pagan customs. They *could* have helped to organize dances, parades, and other folk customs with which tiny remnants of the old religions could have been kept alive. However, we have no historical record of anyone called a “witch” ever doing so.

Furthermore, Ronald Hutton has shown, in *The Stations of the Sun* and *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, that many of the customs we have long been taught were Paleopagan survivals were really medieval

or Renaissance inventions. That would make them Mesopagan (mixed Christian and Pagan systems, see Appendix 2) customs at best. The little we can plausibly say about the Classic Witches, therefore, is a far cry from the now well-known theories of an organized cult of Pagan witches spanning the entire continent.

Margaret Murray is the writer most associated with these theories. In the early twentieth century, after a successful career as an Egyptologist, she decided to study a topic she apparently knew nothing about — medieval Christian history. She took the “confessions” wrung from the supposed Gothic Witches and compared their artificially constructed similarities (caused by the Inquisitors’ use of torture manuals such as the *Malleus*) with collections of folk beliefs and customs from England, Brittany and Italy. The major conclusions she came to in her book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, first published in 1921, were astonishing, at least to modern scholars.

Murray argued that there *had* been a gigantic, anti-Christian cult in medieval Europe, only it had been Pagan instead of Satanic. Furthermore, the leaders of this cult *might* have been witches, as the descendants of the postulated priestesses of “the Old Religion.” This religion, she speculated, was a belief system based on the worship of Diana (and Her male counterpart Dianus!)

and was so well organized that every witch in Europe had essentially the same theology, ethics, cosmology, and rituals.

A “Dianic Witch” (Murray was the first to use this term) could supposedly travel from Denmark to Italy, from England to Poland and be accepted into the local services. This, she said, was why the persecutions happened — there really was a gigantic threat to Christianity, only it was run by *Pagan* witches.

This is an important theory that needs discussion, for many Neopagan Witches and Feminist Witches (see Chapters 8–10) accept it as “proven” and it has been published as absolute truth in many books, including a few encyclopedias (Murray wrote the *Britannica* entries on witchcraft for several editions).

Evidence in favor of witches as leaders of a religion of *any* sort is rare, as is evidence of any “universal” cults (of specific, named deities) among European Paleopagans, while contrary evidence is plentiful (serious readers may wish to consult the Paleopagan section of Appendix 6). However, for the sake of argument, let us pretend there really was a unified “Old Religion” of some sort throughout Europe, which survived intact into the Christian era. Could the customs and beliefs of such a cult survive 500 to 1,500 years of oppression?

There are certain factors required for the safe transmittal of a real tradition from generation to generation. It must be written down and physically preserved, or else it must become part of an oral literature supported by public approval of the bards, actors, storytellers, etc. Either way, it will usually be altered by the requirements of the literary, theatrical, or poetic forms used, as well as by the religious expectations of the intended audience.

Unfortunately, there are no equivalents yet discovered to the *Eddas* or the *Mabinogion* (collected tales of Norse and Welsh mythology, respectively) that present the entire mythology of the “Universal Witch Cult” as practiced by our hypothetical ancestors. Granted, a large number of people have claimed that the above-mentioned texts are just chock full of references to the Old Religion and are “really” about the Witch Cult. The fact remains, however, that the sacred scriptures of the postulated Witch Cult’s beliefs and practices (with the exception of quotes from old poems and folk songs) were never found in written form until the last hundred years.

Christianity did not provide much in the way of support for competing religions. The Church accepted some local planting and herding customs and holidays, turned some of the local deities and nature spirits into saints and demons, and went merrily on its



way subverting and co-opting the faiths of the conquered tribes. Now, it could be argued that as an underground movement, the Witch Cult might have provided a subculture that gave public support to an oral literature of religious witchcraft.

But Europe of the Middle Ages was not the England or America of today where religious subcultures may be tolerated, even if despised. A subculture has to be substantial to provide the necessary amount of support. Bards have to eat, after all, and so do dramatists, dancers, and polytheologists. Long before any survival or revival could have reached the necessary size, it would have been subverted or destroyed by the Church.

It's useful here to look at the *maranos*, a secret underground of Jews in Catholic Spain. In 1492, the King of Spain ordered all Jews to leave Spain, convert to Catholicism, or be executed. Many left, many died, but many others chose to convert, some of them under false pretenses. These "underground" Jews practiced their faith in secrecy while acting in public as good Catholics. When caught, they were referred to as *maranos*, Spanish for "pigs" — used because it was a word especially insulting to Jews, who considered pigs unclean animals.

After World War Two, many of the *maranos* went public, demanding to be allowed to immigrate to Israel under the "Right of

Return,” which says Jews anywhere in the world have a right to move to Israel and become citizens. In order to determine the validity of their claim, the government of Israel sent a team of linguists, anthropologists, and rabbis to Spain to interview them. The *maranos*, they discovered, knew that they were supposed to study the “Old” Testament and ignore the “New,” light candles and say special prayers on Friday nights and Saturdays, and use *mezuzim* and other Jewish talismans their ancestors had hidden away. That, and a handful of Hebrew words, was all the *maranos* knew about being Jewish (for details, read *The Mezuzah in the Madonna’s Foot*, by Trudi Alexy).

Thus we have a group of highly literate people with a rich and deep tradition of organized religious beliefs and practices, who lost 99% of it after only 500 years underground. Just how likely is it then, that Paleopagans, most of them illiterate, would have been able to keep their religion alive for nearly twice that long — let alone for three times that long as believed by some Neopagans — without public support for families of myth-memorizing clergy?

Yes, the medieval peasants built need-fires at certain times of the year; yes, they followed the agricultural customs of their ancestors (and invented new ones). None of these activities prove, however, that they had any idea, magically or religiously, of

what they were doing. This is why outside observers make remarks such as, “The peasants really did this because...” or, “They were actually worshiping an old Pagan god named Murphy, who...”

*You do not need a religious or magical reason to perform customary or enjoyable acts.* The mere fact that, “This is the way my grandfather did it,” or that, “Actually, I’ve always rather enjoyed orgies,” is more than sufficient to ensure that some form of that act will be perpetuated. After all, in magic and religion as in many other fields, you do not have to consciously understand what you are doing in order to get results (though it usually helps). Just because a group of peasants is performing a ritual of possible magical efficacy, or one that is at least constructed according to the basic Laws of Magic (see *Real Magic*), does not prove that they have had someone train them in the art of magic. Nor does a belief that a ritual is old and “authentic” make it so.

To the average medieval peasant, the Church provided nearly every religious comfort that the old belief systems did, except for one area of life: sex. The Church provided nothing except monogamous marriage to fill that niche. So it was all the more likely that older sexual customs would be preserved, with or without a magical or theological context that would provide a deeper meaning. I’m willing to grant that the peasants

sometimes went into the woods to hold orgies. But it is entirely possible that they only wanted to have some fun, not get enlightened.

It was fashionable for scholars a hundred years ago to interpret many European folk customs as Paleopagan survivals under thin Christian veneers. However, even if some of them were genuine customs, there is little or nothing to suggest that the people practicing these customs knew that, or that they were in touch with each other, or that they shared more than the vaguest of common beliefs. Thus, the theories of both the Inquisition and Margaret Murray about The Great Witchcraft Conspiracy must be dismissed as highly unlikely, at best.

## Chapter 6: Family Tradition, Neogothic, and Immigrant Tradition Witches



ould there have been links between underground Pagans who were *not* peasants? Based on the well-known historical principle that rich people don't get persecuted as much as poor people do, it has been suggested that throughout Europe and the British Isles it would have been possible for wealthy families and minor nobility to quietly continue Paleopagan practices as private "family business."

Tempting though this theory might be to those who long for Pagan survivals, it ignores the important fact that many Inquisitors chose rich or well-off victims precisely *because* they had wealth, which would then be split between the Church and the local secular authorities.

However, considering that even today these local leaders, who live in small cities and outside of large towns, are notoriously conservative about family customs, it is *possible* that some such survivors of the witch-hunts might have prospered, while keeping their family secrets. Whether such families

thought of themselves as being “witches” of any sort, or “Pagans,” or just plain “family,” cannot now be determined.

I have met people who claim to be descended from such families, and they have usually referred to themselves as witches. To describe these people — and to my everlasting regret — I coined the term **Family Tradition Witches** or “Fam-Trads,” though one could also consider some of them merely “Neoclassic Witches” (see Appendix 3). Why do I regret coining the term? Because scores of dishonest people subsequently used the term to describe themselves in the Neopagan community and online, in order to impress the gullible and to avoid having to provide proofs of their claims.

Historically, however, the petty nobility, unlike the wealthier and more traveled major nobility, are often highly suspicious of outsiders — even those people from their own country, let alone foreigners. This is infertile ground from which a complex communication network, strung out across scores of European cultures, could have sprung, as hypothesized by Murray and her followers.

Thus, while it’s possible that Fam-Trads exist today and have been practicing customs some of them *now* describe as “witchcraft” for centuries, there is no real evidence that the influence of any given family might have spread more than a hundred miles or

so, at least not before the twentieth century. There is also no convincing evidence that the customs handed down by these families were (a) uncontaminated by later customs and/or (b) in agreement with the beliefs some Neopagan and Feminist Witches have concerning the postulated Witch Cult. On the contrary, there is a great deal of evidence against both of these possibilities, especially the former.

The witch persecutions went on for over three hundred years, finally petering out first in Western Europe, then in central and southern Europe, throughout the 1700s. In all that time, with all those murders, not one shred of proof was ever produced — that would stand up in a modern court of law, anyway — to show the existence of an organized Pagan or Satanic cult among the peasantry. (One possible exception was the *Benandanti* in Italy, discussed in Carlo Ginzburg's *Night Battles*, which was an *anti*-witch cult with Mesopagan roots.)

One note of true irony is that the creation of Gothic Witchcraft by the Church did manage to produce actual Satanic groups — not among the peasantry, but at the Court of Louis XIV, King of France. Members of the highest ranks of the nobility, trying to relieve their royal boredom, reportedly engaged in hideous crimes and asinine theatrics, holding Black Masses and slaughtering infants just as the Church had told them

was the way it was properly done. In 1662, their cover was blown, a scandal ensued, and many of the middlemen and women in the case were punished (though few of the nobles were, of course). In that same year, by a curious coincidence, Louis issued an edict that, in effect, restrained witchcraft trials throughout France.

Even today, however, there are **Neogothic Witches**: modern Satanists who are trying their very best to be everything the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches said (and say) they should be. Fortunately, only a few crazies go so far as to perform human sacrifice like they are “supposed” to. Though they represent only a tiny percentage of the people now calling themselves witches, Neogothics grab all the publicity they can get, in order to present themselves as more important than they really are.

Naturally, there are conservative Christian groups who are delighted to have the Neogothic Witches around to support their doctrine that “all witches worship the Devil.” Some supposed ex-Neogothic Witches are now making lucrative livings as traveling evangelists, denouncing their former (imaginary) ways. If you meet any of them, you might want to ask why they are not in prison, if they really committed all the awful crimes they claim? After all, secular law does not recognize a supposed “Born Again”



experience as absolving criminals from paying for their crimes.

After the Burning Times finally ended, no one seemed very interested in witches anymore. Modern Europe was dawning and the powers of the churches dwindling, at least among the intellectuals of the day. Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy and Spiritualism were sweeping over Europe and America, along with the mechanistic and dualistic worldview of Science (which became a new religion for many). All these new belief systems had drastic effects upon rich and poor alike.

Millions of peasants emigrated from Europe to the Americas, most of them the descendants of farmers and serfs. Others came as convicted criminals or indentured servants, working for wealthy landowners. It is possible, in some cases, that the rich émigrés *could* have been members of Fam-Trads, sent to earn their fortune, or to establish new holdings, or to escape quasi-legal persecution at home.

During 300 years of settlement in the Americas, many Mesopagans — both peasants and purported Fam-Trad Witches — *could* have emigrated and continued with their Mesopagan ways out in the colonial boondocks.

If so, most likely it would have been those settlers originally from the wilder parts of northern and eastern Europe and

the British Isles (where Paganism lingered longest) who would have had the most remaining bits of Pagan customs. These people might then have mixed their beliefs and magical practices with those of the Native American and African-descended peoples they would meet in the New World. Years ago, I designated these *highly* postulated witches **Immigrant Tradition Witches** or “Imm-Trads” (the latter admittedly not my most felicitous abbreviation).

The Classic Witches seem to have dwindled in prestige during this time, but *if* there were, in fact, Fam-Trad Witches existing, they would not have been so badly affected. Being, as postulated, better educated and more intellectual, they might have had a sophisticated enough set of metaphysics — and a better understanding of magic and psychic powers — so that new ideas would have been less traumatic. However, since Scientism was rapidly becoming the supreme religion in the West, it is reasonable to suppose that most members of Fam-Trads would have made efforts to conceal their “superstitious” beliefs and magical systems.

Some might have gotten involved in Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism in the eighteenth century, or Spiritualism and Theosophy in the nineteenth. All of these movements were more respectable than witchcraft, and would still have allowed the Fam-

Trads to practice occult arts, albeit with increasingly Christian and non-European spiritual and magical content.

It is a reasonable *speculation* that, as the years went by, members of the postulated Fam-Trads would have absorbed and incorporated more and more from these other sources, handing new information as well as old down to the next generations. They might have carelessly let their descendants think that a Rosicrucian spell or alchemical meditation was a legitimate part of the family's Pagan heritage. Thus, by today we would have Fam-Trad Witches who would be closer to being Theosophists or Spiritualists than to being Classic or Neoclassic Witches.

As modern medicine and pharmacology developed, fewer people would turn to any remaining Classic Witches for aid. Except in isolated villages, it appears that witchcraft in western and southern Europe slowly died out. Not much is known (in English books) about what happened to similar people in eastern and northern Europe.

I believe that the dying-out process was much slower there for two reasons: firstly, because material technology did not spread as quickly in those regions, especially outside the cities, so the pre-industrial skills of Classic Witches would have remained useful longer. Secondly, these areas were Christianized later than the southern and western

regions, and so the people had more of their Pagan beliefs and practices left at the time religious authority collapsed in the face of scientific authority.

Indeed, in Lithuania and other Baltic states, Paleopagan and/or Mesopagan survivals were reported well into the twentieth century. It's possible, however, that these were the Mesopagan results of artificially created nationalist revivals of folk customs, similar to what produced the fraternal Mesopagan Druid movements in France and England in the eighteenth century (see *Druidism: A Concise Guide* for details).

## Chapter 7: The Early Anthropologists Step into the Debate



From 1860 to 1880, a scholar named J. J. Bachofen conjectured, from predominately speculative etymological evidence, that an “Age of Mother Right” had existed early in human history. By this he meant a time in which women were more powerful than they were in the Christian era. Indeed, we know today that northern and western European Paleopagan women did have more egalitarian relations with their men than their unhappy Christian descendants had. Bachofen’s thinking, however, was based on Hegelian logic and Social Darwinism, both then quite fashionable.

An obscure writer named Karl Marx quickly adopted and expanded the idea of this “Age.” Marx thought it logical that an “inferior” society run by women would have naturally preceded the innately “superior” ones run by men. Eventually, this concept of a “matriarchal age” became an integral part of Marxist Social Evolution theory. Though hardly anyone except feminist or Marxist theoreticians talk about it anymore,

it was an extremely popular idea among the intellectuals of the day.

From 1880 to 1900, much important work was done in the archeology of the Mediterranean and in comparative mythology and folklore (the study of other people's religious beliefs). Sir James Frazer published the first volume of his monumental *Golden Bough* in 1890, proposing his theories about the presence of the "Divine King" and goddess worship in most European cultures. In 1897, Karl Pearson published a speech he had given six years earlier, "Woman as Witch," as an essay in *The Chances of Death and Other Studies*. Pearson had investigated European folklore and the witch-hunts and had concluded that the "witches" had been holdovers from Bachofen's Age of Mother Right.

Bachofen and Pearson provided the theoretical framework that would be used by major figures in the soon to come Mesopotamian witchcraft revival (see Chapter 8). They also influenced those scholars who interpreted the "Venus" figurines (found by archeologists in various parts of Europe and called such in ridicule) as evidence for a universal Goddess Cult entrenched within a postulated Near Eastern and European matriarchal society.

In 1899, the respected folklorist Charles Leland published *Aradia: or the Gospel of the Witches of Tuscany*. It was a study of the

folklore of members of a peasant culture in northern Italy about what they supposedly called the “Old Religion.” The book contained stories, legends, rites, and traditions concerning a goddess named *Aradia*, who was the messianic Queen of the Witches, having inherited her powers from her mother, Diana — and her father Lucifer! It shows a heavy Christian influence and the customs contained do not seem to go directly back further than the seventeenth century or so. But *Aradia* does show that at least *some* peasants might have retained (or regained) self-images as Pagans even unto the turn of the twentieth century.

Leland’s source for the book was a woman (some say his mistress, though why that would matter I have no idea) named Maddalena. She was apparently a “cunning woman” (amateur healer and curse averter) who had been collecting folklore materials for him for several years, most of which depicted witches as evil. Leland had heard rumors about a secret book that described a religion of witches and, after much urging, Maddalena produced a manuscript for Leland. It has been suggested (and hotly debated) that she may have written it herself in order to please Leland; but Leland thought it reasonably authentic in that it repeated at greater length things she had already told him verbally. However, Leland edited this book, as he had two previous

ones based on materials supplied in part by Maddalena (*Etruscan Roman Remains and Legends of Florence*), with his own heavy assumptions about surviving Paleopagan beliefs and practices. He also mixed references to cunning folk and witches, despite the former occupation's hostility to the latter.

If the document was authentic, it is amusing to think that in 1899, but a stone's throw away from Rome, there was a Mesopagan cult of Diana worship still active. Could this have been a direct survival of those "abandoned women" the Church said believed that they flew through the night with Diana? *Perhaps*.

However, there had been enough of an obsession with Greek and Roman mythology by Renaissance artists and scholars that Pagan beliefs could have been resurrected (in a highly mutated form) by the gradual sifting down of data to the peasants. *Perhaps* some started worshiping Diana just to spite the Christian clergy. Centuries later, their descendents *might* believe that they had worshiped Her continuously. This, of course, is pure speculation. It is entirely possible that among the wild hills of Tuscany (and elsewhere in Italy and Sicily) genuine Paleopagan traditions *might* have survived, including a cult of Diana. Yet if that is the case, what happened to the cults of all the other Roman and Etruscan gods



and goddesses? After all, the “Old Religion” in Italy had *many* deities!

From 1900–1920, the fields of comparative religions, mythology, folklore, anthropology, archeology, sociology, and psychology began to develop as “real” sciences in Europe and America. A tremendous glut of conflicting data and theory was amassed that would be mined for decades, heavily influenced by academic and cultural fashions reaching back to the eighteenth century. Tons of books were published on the beliefs (real or imagined) of Paleopagan cultures, folk societies, and non-literate tribes around the world. The power of tribal magical systems became evident to researchers, though many (for racist, creedist, and ethnocentric reasons) preferred not to admit this. Monothesisism was the order of the day.

During these same years, the public became more aware of psychical research. Both Spiritualism and Theosophy became popular, and ceremonial magic was being revived in England and Europe. In the British Isles, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn had attracted influential artists, poets, and other mystically inclined intellectuals, from its beginning in 1888 to its schisming in the early twentieth century.

World War I put an end to the isolation of many villages in Europe, forcibly bringing the survivors into the twentieth century. Many peasant cultures, with whatever

Mesopagan customs they might have had, were irrevocably disrupted.

In 1921, Murray published *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, (see Chapter 5). Sometime between 1920-1925 in England (according to personal conversations with Sybil Leek and Gavin Frost), a few folklorists seem to have gotten together with some members of the Golden Dawn, as well as Mesopagan Druids, Rosicrucians, Theosophists, and a few supposed Fam-Trads to produce the first modern “covens” in England. It seems clear that they were grabbing eclectically from any source they could find in order to try and reconstruct the shards of their imagined — and highly romantic — Pagan past.

Murray’s next book, *The God of the Witches*, came out in 1933. By this time, archeologists and anthropologists had disproved the theory of a universal “Golden” matriarchal age — though today neither Marxists nor some feminists will admit it. Folklorists and other scholars had begun to show the enormous variation of folk beliefs throughout Europe and had torn the theories in Murray’s first book to shreds. Nonetheless, Murray went even further out on her limb, claiming that witches throughout the continent had worshiped the same Goddess and Horned God, following Frazer’s theories exactly, and had set up a political underground as well as a religious one.

## Chapter 8: Gerald Gardner Creates “Wicca”



In 1938, a retired British civil servant, amateur anthropologist, and Freemason named Gerald Gardner met the members of the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Crotona and their Rosicrucian Theatre. The Fellowship had started as a Co-Masonic lodge from the mixed gender form of Freemasonry founded in the 1920s by Annie Besant, well known as an early Theosophical leader. But inside the Fellowship there supposedly existed an inner circle, this one calling itself the New Forest Coven and claiming to be a group of Fam-Trad Witches who had kept “The Old Religion” of Witchcraft alive.

It seems that the lodge, the theatre and the coven — which may have been overlapping, rather than subsets of one another — were, as Fred Lamond, a surviving member of Gardner’s last coven (see below), puts it:

...three experimental groups practicing Theosophy, Rosicrucian magic, and reconstructed witchcraft according to the theories of Margaret Murray. It was the latter group that Gerald joined, and in which he found

‘everything he had longed for all his life,’ according to his biography *Gerald Gardner: Witch* [written by Sufi scholar Idries Shah, under the name of journalist Jack Bracelin].

Gardner was later to say that all of the members of the coven were very old and apparently the last of their kind. Having decided that their beliefs and practices were fragmented and incomplete (whether as overt or covert reconstructions), Gardner began to research and write new rituals, customs and beliefs for himself in a highly eclectic fashion. In 1939, Gardner published his first (bad) novel, *A Goddess Arrives*, based in part on a vision he had of the Goddess some years earlier in Cyprus. She was to become ever more central to his life’s work. Lamond told me:

Gerald admitted that the group’s membership consisted largely of middle class intellectuals with a large element of ex-colonial administrators like him. And he said its rituals were ‘sketchy.’ Where Gardner starts being creative with the truth is when he claimed the New Forest coven included among its members a couple of hereditary cunning men and that these provided the continuous initiatory link to Stone Age witchcraft. While I have not seen the New Forest Coven’s

membership list — for obvious reasons, this was highly oath bound — I must say that any cunning men among their members kept their knowledge very much to themselves. The stock in trade of British cunning men was horse-whispering (a benign horse training method recently publicized by Monty Roberts) and weather magic, while their partners the wise women were (or are as some of them are still around) highly knowledgeable of medicinal plants. None of this was ever passed on by Gerald: his spell casting was strictly and only mental thought projection boosted by the raising of physical/emotional power...

...I visited Cecil Williamson in 1994 and asked him about his recollections of witchcraft groups in the New Forest area. He told me that after Margaret Murray published her *Witch Cult in Western Europe* in 1924, many magical groups started looking for hereditary cunning men and/or wise women to join their groups and instruct them about what witches actually did. According to Cecil, these cunning men listened carefully to what the magical groups' preconceptions were and then fed these back to them, but didn't volunteer any information that the

magical groups didn't already have. So it is quite possible that the Crotona Fellowship went hunting high and low for genuine horny handed sons of the soil to join their experimental witchcraft group and got two, but this would explain why these cunning men never passed on their herbal and weather control knowledge. Gerald probably genuinely believed that their presence gave his group a lineage back to the Stone Age because that is what he wanted to believe himself.

Gardner worked on his project throughout World War Two, taking material from any source that didn't run away too fast. He was on friendly terms with the (in-)famous occultist, poet, "pervert," and Mesopagan prophet Aleister Crowley, whom he met only a few months before the latter's death in 1947. Crowley gave him a charter to found a branch of his ceremonial magic organization, the *Ordo Templi Orientis* (O.T.O.), and granted him membership (with or without initiations being performed or money changing hands) in the Fourth Degree of that eleven-degreed organization. After Crowley's death, Gardner apparently spent at least a year trying to revive the moribund British O.T.O., before giving it up to concentrate on his Witchcraft project instead.

Crowley *may* also have given Gardner permission to use some of his poetry and ritual materials, which Gardner certainly did in any event, leading to claims years later by critics that Gardner had paid Crowley to write rituals for him. As some folks have said, this charge is ridiculous on the face of it, for if Crowley had written them, the poetry would have been *much* better.

Lance Sieveking, in his autobiography, *The Eye of the Beholder*, claims that in 1922, Montague Summers (author of several credulous books on werewolves, vampires and the Inquisition), told him that Crowley and he were “both honorary members of several of the best covens” and had attended “many a sabbat” together. Oddly, there is no mention of this unusual membership or activity in Crowley’s obsessively detailed and thoroughly “shameless” diaries, which are otherwise quite blasé about many ideas and activities that even today are shocking to some.

There is an old rumor (still being told today) that Crowley had been “kicked out of” covens for refusing to obey their priestesses. This story was started by some of Gardner’s less-scrupulous competitors, who were trying to assert the existence of pre-Gardner priestess-led covens. When author Gavin Frost asked Louisa Leek, who was a friend of Crowley’s, about these stories, he tells me,

She laughed her head off. [She said,] ‘Crowley could never have stood the middle-aged housewife types that were in the later covens.’ Apparently, he held out for young, succulent, and intelligent.

According to Frost, Louisa Leek (mother of Sybil Leek) was a member of a British occult group, the “Pentagram Club,” that competed with Gardner and his friends in the Witchcraft-inventing process.

Today there remains *zero* evidence that Crowley had any conscious hand in the creation of Gardner’s religion of Witchcraft, or its rituals, and even less that he had ever been initiated into or practiced *any* form of witchcraft. He would have cheerfully bragged about them if he had! The people who invented these tales were simply, to use the technical historical term, *lying*.

Gardner’s Crotona associates may have been, as he claimed, members of a surviving coven of Fam-Trad Witches. Or they may have been, as Fred Lamond, Gavin Frost, Ronald Hutton, and others believe, just a motley assortment of British occultists who had decided to create a new religion based on the books of Murray, Frazer, Leland, and other folklorists (to which Gardner would add the ideas of romantic poets, nudists, and nature religionists). Indeed, there apparently were several groups of British oc-



cultists, with overlapping memberships — England is a very small island — who were attempting to (re-)create Murray's religion of Pagan Witchcraft at the same time.

Whether or not he had “authority” to do so, from an ancient coven that may or may not have existed, Gerald Gardner founded his own coven during World War II (or shortly thereafter) and went merrily on his way. The war, unfortunately, had a devastating effect on occultism in Europe. The Nazis exterminated at least half the Gypsies in Europe, along with many astrologers, psychics, Freemasons, Rosicrucians, Theosophists, Spiritualists, and other members of minority belief systems. By 1940, if any of the postulated Fam-Trad Witches had been left in Europe, few would have survived, precisely because they had been masquerading as all those other kinds of occultist. Their carefully crafted cover stories would have left them obvious targets.

In 1948, Robert Graves published *The White Goddess*. Up to this point, would-be witchcraft reconstructionists had mostly been following the works of Leland, Frazer, and Murray, all of whom were at least attempting to be scholarly and scientific, albeit heavily influenced by the academic fashions of their time (unlike modern scholars who are, naturally, immune to such subcultural biases). Now Graves, a writer of historical novels, a classicist, and a roman-

tic poet, jumped into the act. The results were not pretty — or more precisely, that's all they were.

The purpose of *The White Goddess* was to prove that the Universal Goddess Worship theories were correct. To accomplish this took considerable acrobatics. He jumped back and forth from the Mediterranean to the British Isles and across great gaps of time. He constantly asked his readers to accept a “slight” bit of illogic and error, then built these up into gigantic megaliths of theory. While admitting he spoke no Celtic language, he appointed himself an authority on Welsh language and customs. He used obsolete and inaccurate translations of Celtic poetry, when there were good ones around in 1948, perhaps because the accurate translations wouldn't have supported his ideas as well. Graves' enthusiasm for the idea that all goddesses are either “Maidens,” “Mothers,” or “Crones” had a major effect upon what would become the “duotheology” (see Appendix 2) of the Mesopagan Witchcraft movement.

(Graves, like Murray, is a good example of the “Retired Professor Syndrome,” in which a perfectly competent academic retires, gets bored, and decides to write a book on something he or she knows nothing about — with embarrassingly bad results.)

In 1949, Gardner published another bad novel, *High Magic's Aid*, under the pen

name of *Scire* (“knower”). He apparently wanted to advertise that he was a member of Crowley’s magical order, since the note “4=7” appears under his name, indicating to the cognoscenti that he had reached the level of “Philosophus” in the O.T.O. Then as now, it was rare for anyone to actually work through the middle grades of the system (nepotism and graft always being a much faster way to rise), and as we have seen, Crowley had given him that rank after knowing him only a brief time. Perhaps Gardner wanted people to assume that he had a solid background in the Golden Dawn and tantric-based O.T.O. system of occult theory and practice, or perhaps he was sincerely studying them and intended to integrate them into his Witchcraft religion.

In 1951, the British Witchcraft Act (aimed at those who “pretended” to be witches) and the Vagrancy Act (aimed mostly at “Gypsies” and other traveling diviners who were assumed to be frauds) were both repealed (along with all the previous witchcraft laws in England) and a variety of “witches” surfaced. The most famous of these was the previously mentioned Sybil Leek, who claimed to be what I have called a Fam-Trad Witch (she may actually have been one if we consider her mother’s supposed activities with the Pentagram Club).

In 1951, Gerald Gardner moved to the Isle of Man, settling into a building known

as the Witches Mill, and running Cecil Williamson's Folklore Centre of Superstition and Witchcraft there as the "resident witch." Since Gardner had come to believe that a priestess must lead every coven, he began initiating likely candidates, and in 1953 initiated Doreen Valiente — one of his best decisions.

She rewrote most of his early ritual materials, dumping much of the early borrowings from Crowley, whom she loathed. Later she wrote her own excellent books, including *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present*, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, and *Witchcraft: a Tradition Renewed*. After she left the coven, Gardner worked with several other women as priestesses, including Patricia Crowther (also author of several books, including *Lid off the Cauldron*, *Witches Were for Hanging* and *High Priestess*), Monique Wilson, Eleanor ("Ray") Bone, and others.

In 1954, Murray published *The Divine King in England*, in which she claimed, essentially, that every king of England had died ritually, as in Frazer's *Golden Bough*. By this time there were few scholars in the world who would believe her arguments, based as they were on obsolete theories, selective evidence and sloppy logic. But there were plenty of would-be witches happy to accept it all.

From the middle 1950s on, new covens split off from Gerald's original one, both le-

gitimately, through the process known as “hiving-off,” wherein a Third Degree woman with other members leave amicably with permission to begin a new coven, and illegitimately, through the process known as “stealing a copy of the *Book of Shadows*.” This last term, often abbreviated as *BOS*, was the name Gardner gave to his magical, initiatory, and pseudo-historical text.

Many versions of texts claiming to be from Gardner’s original *Book of Shadows* have been published at one time or another, either by Gardner himself, his followers and spiritual descendants, or various plagiarists trying to cash in on his work. Gardner himself sent (badly) typewritten copies of his early drafts of rituals for the holidays, poems and theological meditations, etc., to his initiates, asking for corrections and advice on whether the material “felt right.”

I obtained copies of some of these in 1973 (see Chapter 9), long before I was initiated into any tradition of Wicca (those initiations include one into a supposed Polish Fam-Trad in the late 1970s, into NROOGD — see below — in the 1980s, and into Gardnerianism in the 1990s). They supported many suspicions I had long had about the history of Wicca.

That said, it should also be noted that *there is no such thing as “the” Gardnerian Book of Shadows!* This is true not only because Gardner was constantly changing his

own copies, but also because every Gardnerian initiate is supposed to be encouraged to add new materials and to pass these down to her or his own students in turn (with everything noted as to author and date of addition). So, no two copies of the *BOS* are identical and no one will ever be able to publish a “complete” edition.

Gardner’s vision of Witchcraft was of a structured system with elders knowing more than newcomers, but with the members considering each other as more-or-less equals, in keeping with the “peasant religion” mythos. His earliest initiation scripts, as seen in his novel *High Magic’s Aid*, had each member being labeled a “priest (or priestess) and witch” at their very first “Degree.” Gardner had borrowed the Masonic pattern — and much of their scripts — of three “degrees” of initiation. However, he soon discovered the “90/10” rule common to most organizations, large or small: 90% of the work gets done by 10% of the members (while 90% of the complaining is done by a different 10%). So he soon had to invent the terms “High Priest” and “High Priestess” for the people actually fulfilling leadership roles.

The first splitting of one of Gardner’s covens was apparently when the priestess (Valiente) left with most of the members and formed her own coven. Soon the term “hiving-off” was coined, on the metaphor of

young female bees leaving a successful hive with a few males to start new hives. Eventually, the High Priestess of a coven that had experienced successful hivings-off was known as a "Witch Queen." In a royalist nation, that was bound to cause problems, but not as many as it was to cause later in democratic countries.

The first hiving happened because Valiente and the others were opposed to the increasingly lurid interviews Gardner was giving to the British tabloid press (note to most Americans: these made — and make today — the *National Enquirer* look like the *New York Times*). Ironically, just such a lurid interview had attracted Valiente's attention to Gardner in the first place! Doreen and company also disapproved of some of the women Gerald was initiating (he did have a sweet tooth for young, attractive women, no matter how talentless).

I can offer two arguments in Gardner's defense here. (1) a stronger than average libido is extremely common among both male and female founders of new religions throughout history, and (2) I believe he was working on what we could today call a "Witches' Pyramid Scheme." By initiating as many young people as possible, and encouraging all of his initiates to do the same, he hoped that out of the large numbers who would eventually be initiated, enough of

them would prove to have been good choices and would be able to keep his religion going.

This strategy worked surprisingly well. For example, one of Gardner's daughter covens initiated a couple named Rosemary and Raymond Buckland to all three Degrees. The initiations happened in a relatively short time, but this was (and still is) common in Masonic and other fraternal lodges, so Gardner allowed and encouraged quick initiations. The Bucklands then went to the United States and founded a coven in Long Island, New York. This coven became the source of one of the most distinguished (and prolific) of all the Gardnerian "family lines" of initiates in the United States. Indeed it's the line in which I eventually received my Gardnerian Wiccan initiations — not that I'm biased, of course...

When the Bucklands divorced sometime later, Rosemary got custody of the coven and quickly handed the High Priestess position down to another woman in the group. This left Raymond Buckland in a tight spot, for under the rules that had by then been created, a High Priestess must preside at all initiations. To solve his dilemma, Raymond Buckland invented Seax (or "Saxon") Wicca as an admittedly new denomination — or "Tradition" as all such new sects became known — into which anyone could initiate him- or herself. That let the rabbit out of the hutch and apparently she was already



pregnant! Buckland's stamp of approval on self-initiation set off a population explosion of Witches. Meanwhile, other initiates of Gardner's various High Priestesses and daughter covens took his religion to Canada, Europe, Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere around the world.

The less-legitimate, light-fingered groups mentioned earlier commonly claimed, as did members of other competing Witchcraft revivals/inventions in England, to belong to traditions of Witchcraft that pre-dated Gardner's efforts. Yet somehow almost all of them wound up using rituals, customs, and vocabulary that were obviously derived from early drafts of Gardner's.

One of the early competitors, Robert Cochrane, was the one who in 1964 started referring to Gardner's new religion as "the Gardnerian Tradition" or "Gardnerianism." Gardner himself called it by several different names over the years, including "the Art," "the Craft," "the Old Order," and "Wica" (with a single "c"). Eventually just about everyone settled on the last term, restoring the missing second "c" and making "**Wicca**" (with a "k" sound) the more-or-less official generic term for what was to eventually become Neopagan Witchcraft (see below).

The first and most famous of those to schism from Gerald was Alex Sanders, who was later to make a career for himself as the purported "King of the Witches." Some have

said that Alex's initiation was "not valid" since a First Degree priestess rather than one who held the Second Degree gave it to him. Lamond says:

As if that mattered! Alex was a natural medium and had been practicing ceremonial magic for a considerable time before his entry into Wicca, which is why he imported more kabalistic practices into his tradition than there are in Gardnerian Wicca. Like many ceremonial magicians who practice too much ... he had lost the ability to distinguish between planes of reality and really believed the whoppers he told people, like being initiated on the kitchen floor at the age of six by his grandmother.

Later, Alex or someone from his coven initiated (probably to the Second Degree only, and probably by mail) an American woman named Jessie Wicker Bell. She later became the "Lady Sheba" of *Lady Sheba's Book of Shadows* — which simply plagiarized parts of Gardner's *BOS* (a popular sport for a few decades). Bell also took part of the Frosts' Church and School of Wicca correspondence course (as have a surprising number of supposedly authentic holders of Ancient Wiccan Traditions). Her attempts in the early 1970s to get herself declared

“Queen of the Witches” in America met with little success, however (see next chapter).

I cannot in this short study give an adequate history of how Gardner’s followers carried the faith to America and elsewhere. Suffice it to say, that by the middle 1960s, there were a handful of Gardnerian covens operating in the United States and Canada, and other parts of the English-speaking world. By the 1970s there were dozens more independent Traditions of Wicca flourishing throughout the English-speaking world. Both Aidan Kelly’s *Crafting the Art of Magic*, though severely flawed, and Margot Adler’s classic *Drawing Down the Moon* cover this material well (at least for the United States and Canada). The growth in numbers of Traditions and their members since has been astronomical.

The many current varieties of Wicca can be ranged on a spectrum of orthodoxy-to-heterodoxy thusly: on the conservative or orthodox side we will find:

- Gardnerians
- Alexandrians
- Georgians
- other groups that call themselves “British Traditionalists”

Groups that would be on the liberal or heterodox end of the spectrum would include:

- The New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (or NROOGD, a tradition proudly self-invented in Berkeley, California in the 1960s, which chose a silly-sounding name to keep out people with no sense of humor)
- the gay and/or bisexual and/or straight groups who call themselves “Elvish” or “Fairy/Faery” Traditions (including that of Starhawk, author of *The Spiral Dance*)
- various Feminist Witchcraft groups discussed in Chapter 10.

Most Wiccan groups, of course, fall somewhere in between.

Many on both ends of the spectrum like to create a dichotomy (often a dualism) between (1) the “Traditionalists,” who are the members of conservative groups with a legitimate (or purported) lineage back to Gardner or other British covens, and (2) the “Eclectics,” who are those who are liberal in their practices, following the technique of using anything that works no matter where it comes from.

Some Wiccan groups cheerfully call themselves Eclectic, but the word is often used by the conservatives to imply that the liberals don’t have The Real Truth and have to make things up as they go along (as if that were a crime).

Similarly, the liberals often use the word Traditionalist to mean “stuffy and rigid.” The vast majority of Wiccans are religiously neither conservative nor liberal (on this particular spectrum), but somewhere in the middle, so in keeping with the principles of Western Dualism (see Appendix 2), they are usually accused by Wiccans at each extreme of belonging to the “enemy’s” camp.

Beyond all the arrogance and egotism of these arguments, the primary difference between the eclecticism practiced by both the orthodox and the heterodox Wiccans, going all the way back to Gardner himself, is not the *amount* of material borrowed from other sources, but rather the *speed* at which new material is accepted as a permanent part of each Tradition/denomination.

I should point out that this chapter — indeed all of this book — is greatly indebted for the clarification of the Gardner-Crowley relationship, as well as much else in the complex background of Wicca’s creation, to Ronald Hutton’s magnificent work, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. This meticulously documented book by a sympathetic historian pounds the final nails into the coffin of the claims Gardner made (and others inflated) that Wicca was an ancient surviving British Pagan religion of Witchcraft.

None but the most stubbornly fundamentalist of orthodox Wiccans can deny

Wicca's true history any longer, though I'm sure that some of them will continue to try. See Ashleen O'Gaea's comments on Hutton's work in Appendix 7 for a detailed review of Hutton's work and some similar conclusions to those I've expressed here.

## Chapter 9: The First Neopagan Heretics



Whenever mind-altering drugs become common in a culture or subculture, one of the common social repercussions is a renewed interest in matters magical and mystical. I'm speaking of opiates and hallucinogens here, not alcohol, tobacco, caffeine or refined sugar, (which most Americans pretend are not "really" drugs). Drugs of all these varieties are used in many tribal cultures to help train young magicians/clergy, because they give the trainee a direct appreciation of the magical Law of Infinite Universes (see *Real Magic*) and the related concept of "multiple levels of reality." Drugs are used as sacraments in many magical and religious systems around the world and an interest in either topic (drugs or magic) can lead to an interest in the other.

So it should have surprised no one that the "hippies" became interested in magic, mysticism, psychic phenomena, and new religious experiences. (For that matter, it should have surprised no one familiar with the history of monotheism that early psychedelic researchers such as Timothy Leary

would be treated as horrifically threatening “heretics.”)

Although Leary was often referred to as a “drug guru” by the tabloid press, he really had little interest in starting a religion. Others, however, were more enthusiastic (in the original sense of “breathed through by deities”). During the 1960s and 1970s, several new religious groups were started of the sorts that have since become known by their members as “Neopagan” (see Appendix 2). Each attempted to recreate or invent new religions using the Paleopagan polytheistic faiths as guides, but with an Aquarian Age disregard for monotheistic and dualistic assumptions. Gardner’s Wicca with its Goddess, Horned God, and other spirits, fit very nicely into this mold. As a result, the followers of Gardner experienced an unexpected and not altogether welcome population explosion as the handful of Gardnerian covens (real and imitation) became a dozen, then a score, then a hundred...

During this period, known then as the “occult boom,” members of a variety of Neopagan groups were communicating via the pages of amateur periodicals such as *Green Egg*, *Waxing Moon*, *Crystal Well*, and others (see Adler). Soon it became clear to the members of these groups that the Wiccans were Neopagans — or “could be with a little work” — and they and their offshoots



were called “Neopagan Witches” by the rest of the Neopagan movement.

These Neopagan Witches began to hold conventions and other meetings. At one of the earliest of these, a “Witchmeet” held in Minneapolis, Minnesota on September 20-23, 1973, hosted by Llewellyn Publications (later to become the largest publisher of Wiccan and other Neopagan books), three important events for the history of American Wicca took place.

First, Lady Sheba, claiming an Ancient Family Tradition of Witchcraft going back to the mythical Isle of Avalon, attempted to be recognized as the true hereditary Queen of American Witches (because her family had supposedly been the hereditary Queens of all British Witches). Not incidentally, she wanted everyone present to turn over copies of their *Books of Shadows* to her. As I recall, her intention was to combine them into a single “approved” *BOS* for all American Witches; much like the event in early Christian history when “authorized” scriptures were approved by a group of bishops and “unauthorized” copies (with inconvenient stories and doctrines) were carefully destroyed. To her chagrin, Lady Sheba was told firmly by the assembled Wiccans that, “We’re a democracy in this country — we don’t need a Queen!” (I must confess, I believe I was the first person to actually be rude enough to say that out loud.)

Second, the Council of American Witches was created. This short-lived group was to meet the following spring and adopt their *Principles of Wiccan Belief*, the first consensus document describing the Wiccan religion (see Appendix 4).

Third, I gave a speech titled “The Witch Cult — Fact or Fancy?” based upon an earlier article by myself in *Tournaments Illuminated*, the journal of the medievalist Society for Creative Anachronism, under the title “Where Hast Thou Been Sister?” It dealt with much of the materials mentioned in this study and came to very similar conclusions about what I rudely referred to as Murray’s “Unitarian Universalist White Witch-Cult of Western Theosophical Brittany” and Gardner’s supposed revival of it.

Stunned silence, then angry shouting greeted my speech. This escalated into a roar of anger and hostility after the speech was published (sans the bibliography, alas!) in *Gnostica News*, Llewellyn’s in-house magazine that I was later to edit. Thus, as a reward for my attempted scholarship, I became the first universally recognized heretic in the Neopagan movement.

(By that time I had been a priest in the Reformed Druids of North America for four years, and I considered those “Zen Unitarians” to be Neopagans, even if they didn’t — see my *Druidism: A Concise Guide* for details.)

Rebuttals were written and published in *Gnostica News*, and angry letters poured in to the Neopagan media from all over the country, until slowly, one by one, various Wiccan leaders began to publish letters and articles saying, in essence, “that so-and-so Bonewits is right,” though hardly any of them mentioned my name. Instead they talked about the need for honesty in relating the past of Wicca, about the joys of creating new religions, about how their movement could be redefined as a reconstruction from scattered fragments of how the Old Religions (plural now) might have been, etc.

Yet another significant event occurred early into my career as editor of *Gnostica News*. I was supervising the publication of an article by Aidan Kelly called “Textual Criticism and the Craft Laws,” in which he applied the techniques of Biblical textual analysis to compare previously published versions of what Gardner had called the “Ancient Laws of the Craft.” Carl Weschke, the owner of Llewellyn Publications, while discussing this article with me in his office, suddenly remembered some documents that had been sent to him by a person claiming to be one of Gardner’s early initiates. With an offhand comment that, “Perhaps these might be interesting to you,” he handed me a set of papers, which his correspondent had said Gardner himself had mailed to him for comments many years before.

My jaw slowly dropped as I realized that I was holding carbon (and “NCR-paper”) copies of documents that had been typed by Gardner himself (I could tell by the characteristic use of the lower case “l” to substitute for his typewriter’s broken capital “I”). Furthermore, they appeared to be early drafts of some of the materials that Gardner had always claimed in public were ancient — including the Craft Laws! Quickly, I made duplicates of the documents and, with Weschke’s permission, mailed a set to Kelly.

Those papers set Kelly on a path that ended in a complete revision of his theories. He had previously argued for a seventeenth century origin for the Laws. Soon he was writing a book that would circulate in photocopies for nearly twenty years among American Wiccans, arguing that those same methods of textual criticism proved that Gardner had synthesized nearly all of his supposedly ancient writings from previously published materials. In later years, Kelly discovered the document known as *Ye Bok [sic] of Ye Art Magical*, a hand-bound book in which Gardner wrote, scratched out, and amended the very first drafts of what would eventually become the rituals for his new religion (see Chapter 14).

Kelly became the second Neopagan heretic, even more widely reviled than myself, and his manuscript became the next-to-most famous and influential unpublished

book about Wicca, second only to the theoretical “complete” Gardnerian *BOS* itself. Thus it was all the more tragic that, when the manuscript was finally published as *Crafting the Art of Magic*, it was so drastically shortened, filled with internal Gardnerian political arguments, and marred by repeated cheap shots at Gardner’s (assumed) sexuality. I felt as if I had watched a friend paint a beautiful mural for twenty years, then throw mud all over it the night before it was revealed to the public.

But even before Kelly published his work, between the two of us and those Pagan scholars who followed, the Wiccan myth of antiquity had been thoroughly discredited. This was due in large part to Margot Adler’s discussion of our ideas in her amazing book *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. Her work made it clear, even to those of us who had been Pagans for years, just how vibrant, creative, varied, and evolutionary our religious creations were and could be.

*Drawing Down the Moon* became a self-reflective handbook showing us options and resources that many of us had never previously known, combined with gentle warnings of how we could go wrong if we weren’t careful. Every Neopagan should own a copy!

The major religious issues fought over by the Wiccan and other Neopagan movements

during the latter third of the twentieth century included those of hierarchy vs. autonomy, the related issue of lineage (or “apostolic succession”) vs. self-initiation, and the question of sexism and heterosexism in the Craft. Arguments raged over whether “Witch Queens” had any real or even appropriate authority over members of covens descended from them. People fought over whether “only a Witch can make another Witch” or if people could legitimately initiate themselves. Wiccans debated whether the heterosexual erotic imagery of the Goddess’ and God’s sacramental wedding constituted discrimination against homosexuals — for that matter, if homosexuals were even “allowed” to be Witches. Then they argued whether erotic activity performed in some orthodox Wiccan initiations should be seen as “sexual abuse” of the initiatees by the initiators.

Over the years, disputes over “allowable” or “forbidden” practices that were rooted in the alleged antiquity of the traditions (and Traditions) involved became of interest only to those decreasing numbers of Wiccans who still believed the Founders’ tales. Everyone else made their religious decisions about these issues based on their other social, political, and sexual beliefs and practices, which were evolving along with the rest of post-modern culture.

## Chapter 10: Sisters Doing It for Themselves



ne of the most important influences on the evolution of Witchcraft was the rise of the feminist movement in the 1970s. Many feminists were looking for new sources of spiritual growth, away from the male-dominated “Great Religions of the World.” This Women’s Spirituality movement became an integral part of feminist consciousness for many women, some of whom, inevitably, ran into Neopagan Witches.

Morning Glory Zell seems to have been the first Neopagan priestess to attend a major feminist event and to attempt to speak about “the Goddess” to the participants. Oddly enough, only one person — a man — showed up to listen to her, though her listing in the program booklet apparently affected many women who had never heard about Wicca previously.

Evidently, the discovery of a Goddess-worshiping religion in the late twentieth century was a delightful shock. Many women felt an immediate resonance, and in ever-increasing numbers had spiritual experiences with this Goddess. Since there

were already several Neopagan Witchcraft leaders (of both genders) who considered themselves feminists, an alliance or overlap of the two movements was a natural outgrowth of their meeting.

A few Wiccan denominations had already downplayed the Horned God part of their duotheology almost to the point of removing Him from their religions entirely. Perhaps these traditions to begin with had the highest population of strong women. When politically active feminists (especially lesbians and separatists) entered the Craft and started their own all-women covens, they decided that they could do perfectly well without any male deity at all and began developing “theologies” (see Appendix 2) focused exclusively on female deities, especially the One Universal Goddess.

Feminist Witchcraft was the result — systems of Wicca that became increasingly different from the Neopagan models, as various women (often with no real knowledge of or contact with the Neopagan movement) formed new sects in which a great deal of experimentation and creativity took place.

Most Feminist Witches soon accepted several dogmas, the majority of which matched those of Neopagan Witchcraft prior to my speech of 1973, although even more extreme: the Universal Goddess Cult covered the entire world, not just Europe; it



went back 100,000 years (not just 10,000) and so forth. These dogmas were backed by research that was even sloppier than that done a hundred years earlier. Historical, semi-historical or pseudo-historical statements or theories by any writer (male or female, qualified or not) that bolstered their dogmas were seized upon and inflated. Statements or theories that did not support those dogmas were ignored, minimized as being the products of male (or worse, “male-dominated”) minds, and/or were denounced as part of a millennia-old sexist conspiracy to suppress the Truth.

As more books were published in mainstream academia regarding the historical non-existence of matriarchies, for example, the definition of “matriarchy” was simply changed to match whatever a speaker or writer wished it to mean. Often the word was replaced by “matrifocal” or “woman-centered” or by various phrases indicating cultures in which the genders were more-or-less politically equal (for which there actually *are* a few historical examples).

The Feminist Craft grew (and is still growing) at a spectacular rate, and at this writing, members of these groups may very well outnumber those of the Neopagan sects from which they diverged. The number of groups of women who have formed covens completely independently is impossible to surmise and their theologies are no doubt

quite mixed, but feminist revisionist “her-story” is probably common to most or all.

While the Neopagan Witches were slowly ceasing to claim literal truth for their mythic history, the Feminist Witches continued those same myths, and in fact made them more spectacular and rich. It is only in the last decade or so that some Feminist Witches have begun to doubt these dogmas. Perhaps it is finally becoming known that dozens of committed feminist historians, anthropologists and archeologists of both genders have been unable to find a shred of evidence to support the idea that matriarchies ever existed, or that there ever was an organized religion of Witchcraft in Europe, and that the intact transmission of a complex pre-Christian tradition is not at all likely.

I suspect that the feminist movement will continue to produce, as has every other political movement in history, sloppily researched tomes in support of its ideals. There is, after all, no such thing as completely unbiased scholarship (no matter what some professors may claim) and feminists should be allowed to exercise their historical creativity as much as any other political group does.

Within a decade or two, however, Feminist Witchcraft groups may well admit that their various sects are not ancient relics but rather the brilliant and beautiful creations of modern religious visionaries.

## Chapter 11: Witchcraft in the Post-Modern World



So, what do we have in the way of modern witches at the dawn of the twenty-first century? There are those I've called **Neoclassic Witches**, who are herbalists and tarot card readers, and sometimes midwives, patterning themselves, consciously or unconsciously, after the Classic Witches.

Unfortunately, we also have **Neogothic Witches**, dressing in black robes and frightening the locals, attempting to fulfill Catholic and Fundamentalist expectations and annoying most other modern Satanists (who are far too arrogant to call themselves "mere witches" of any sort).

We even have some folks attempting to create forms of **Neoshamanic Witchcraft**, whether inspired by Zell's theory (mentioned in Chapter 3) or else just using the currently vague New Age concepts of shamanism combined with Wicca. It's ironic that, while authentic shamanism is about as nitty-gritty and practical as a magical system can get, the modern (Neo-)Shamanic Witches tend to be the "fluffiest" of "fluffy

bunny Pagans” (those delicate souls who believe in, “Nature pink in gum and paw”).

But the largest numbers by far, dwarfing those of all the other categories put together, are the overlapping communities of Neopagan and Feminist Witches, of whom there may well be over a million by now.

Defining who is or isn't a “real” member of these communities for statistical purposes is a complex task that changes the final tallies dramatically (see my *Neopaganism: A Concise Guide* for details on the difficulties). Nonetheless, our numbers will only grow in the coming decades, as our population seems (to us long-time observers) to have doubled in size every four or five years. Considering the many popular books about Wicca and Goddess Worship still filling the bookstore shelves long after the “fad” was supposed to be “over,” I see no sign of this growth slowing down. The recent arrival of books about us in Spanish, French, Russian, and other languages, indicates that this family of religions is just getting started!

For that matter, the increasing desperation of Catholic and Fundamentalist Christian leaders to attack us as a demonic threat would seem to show that the dinosaurs have finally figured out who the mammals that are going to replace them are!

Let me stress that the relative youth of the Neopagan and Feminist Witchcraft movements, the deliberately vague and unorganized nature of our beliefs and institutions, and some occasional shenanigans by our founders, are all utterly irrelevant to any judgment of spiritual power and worth for the religions as a whole. Can you imagine what scholars would have said about Judaism, Christianity, or Islam if they had been able to do this sort of historical analysis within each of those faiths' first century? Unlike the authorities of other major religions, Wiccans have neither the power nor the inclination to kill people for digging into our dirty laundry, and have made no major efforts to destroy inconvenient bits of historical evidence.

The deities we worship *are* ancient, no matter how new our religions or our insights about Them might be. A large part of the maturing of the Neopagan community over the past twenty-five years has been due to the realization that we don't have to tell fibs about an unbroken line of succession going back to the Stone Age in order to have worthwhile faiths.

As for how "unspiritual" our founders may seem, Lamond told me:

The reason Idries Shah took such interest in Gerald, to the extent of writing his biography, was [he said], "I

have it on good authority (I assume he meant the inner planes) that this group is going to be the cornerstone of the religion of the coming age. But rationally (and he looked despairingly at us sincere but woefully ignorant young people), I can't see it!"

Ah, but we still younger folks have lived long enough to see it! Uncle Gerald, Aunt Doreen, and all the other dreamers, scholars, poets and rakes working with them (and even sometimes against them) created a beautiful synthesis of ancient and modern religious, artistic, and magical archetypes, one that has grown and evolved into a huge family of emotionally satisfying and spiritually powerful belief systems.

During its first half-century, Wicca has been a beautiful dream-ship riding the crest of the Third Wave of post-modern civilization. The past, whether seen as "His-story" or "Her-story," is only the beginning...

Part Two:  
Wiccan Beliefs  
and  
Rituals





## Chapter 12: What Wiccans Believe



While this is not the place for a full-scale discussion of Wiccan duotheology, this chapter will give you the highlights and make the subsequent chapters more meaningful. Because Wiccans *are* Neopagans, whether all of them are willing to admit it or not, much of this is taken from my essay “What Neopagans Believe,” which I have rewritten many times over the years. A significantly expanded version of that material will be found in *Neopaganism: A Concise Guide*. As I say in that book,

Clarifying our doctrines (the things we do and don't believe) without descending into dogma (the things we are ordered to believe or disbelieve by someone in a position of power over us) is a vital step in the growth of any new religious movement. ... Not everyone in the Neopagan movement will use the term “belief” in reference to these concepts and many of these concepts have a wide variety of accepted interpretation. Even so, it's reasonably easy to list those ideas

with which a majority of us usually agree or disagree, and thus sketch the outlines of our doctrines.

Wiccans represent the vast majority of the Neopagan movement, and as such have affected the majority of the beliefs and practices of that movement. In the following, I have listed the beliefs as they are held by *most* Neopagans and added comments that are specific to Wiccan beliefs and practices. Be warned, however, that these are spiritual movements still very much in their early growth stages, and not all members of these movements may agree completely with any particular one of the beliefs I list.

To quote the often accurate (yet totally slanted) *Goddess-Worship, Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism*, by Craig S. Hawkins, “The idea of uniform or standardized beliefs and practices established and enforced by some authority is not only nonexistent in contemporary witchcraft, it is despised in principle.” How terrible of us!

(The book is part of a series of works that try to present more-or-less accurate information about minority belief systems, together with “refutations.” If you are interested in the technical jargon that Christian theologians use to describe Wiccan beliefs, or would just enjoy counting the dozens of rhetorical tricks, logical fallacies, and circular arguments that they will stoop to, you

might find this inexpensive book worth studying, or at least amusing.)

Hawkins also says, “Most witches evidence a contempt for having their beliefs and practices classified.” Maybe by hostile outsiders, but when talking amongst ourselves we don’t seem to have that much trouble articulating what we do and don’t believe. So let’s look at what most Neopagan Witches say when we’re discussing our duo- or polytheology.

Neopagans believe that *divinity is both immanent (internal) and transcendent (external)*. Deities can manifest at any point in space or time which They might choose, whether externally through apparent “visitations,” or internally through the processes known as “inspiration,” “conversation,” “channeling,” and “possession.”

Neopagans believe that *children are born holy*, since they have no barriers of consciousness between their selves and their indwelling deities. So we can believe in “original blessing” rather than “original sin” and we thus see no need for “salvation” from the latter. Because of this reverence for children, Wiccans and other Neopagans do *not* approve of any form of child abuse.

Neopagans believe that *divinity is as likely to manifest in a female form as it is in a male form*, and that the word “Goddess” makes just as much sense as the word “God.” Wiccans in particular believe that

feminine energies and values are needed to balance the masculine excesses of current cultures. Women and men are spiritually equal, and “masculine” and “feminine” attitudes, values, and roles are of equal importance, regardless of the physical gender of those exercising them. However, some Wiccan traditions reserve certain ritual roles to one physical gender or the other.

Neopagans believe in a *multiplicity of gods and goddesses*, as well as “lesser” beings, many of Whom are worthy of respect, love and worship. Neopagans have a wide variety of non-exclusive concepts as to the nature of these entities. Among Wiccans, female deities are usually seen as aspects or faces of a single “Triune” Goddess, most often described as a Maiden, a Mother, and a Crone. Male deities are likewise usually seen as aspects or faces of a single “Biune” God, most often described as a vegetation/hunting deity and a solar deity. Thus, Wicca is predominantly “duotheistic.” A significant minority worships only female deities, however.

Multiplicity of deities implies a multiplicity of truths, and *vice versa*, which leads most Neopagans to believe that *no one religion, philosophy, scripture, or other approach to understanding can explain the infinite complexities of the multiverse*. No one has a real monopoly on truth, only highly developed guesses and/or large armies.

Christian theologians call this an “open metaphysic” and find it terrifying. Because of the importance of divine immanence, personal experience can be just as important a source of truth as logic or reason might be, each on different levels of reality.

Neopagans *do not believe in, respect, or worship any divine or semi-divine figure of ultimate Evil*, leaving such concepts to the dualistic monotheists. They invented Satan; they can keep him. As a demigod who was created by Christian and Islamic fear, Satan/Shaitan plays no part in Wiccan or other Neopagan beliefs and practices. As for all those “demons” that some Christians are so obsessed by, those few Wiccans who believe in them at all tend to see them as merely predatory species of spirits in the astral bioregions, who are no more innately hostile to (or even interested in) humans than rattlesnakes or scorpions are.

Most Neopagans believe *it is necessary to respect and love Nature as divine in Her own right*, and to accept ourselves as part of Nature and not Her “rulers.” Many accept “the Gaia thesis” that the Earth’s biosphere is a living being. Gaia can be seen as the ultimate Earthly face of the Goddess as the Divine Mother. In some senses, this can be seen as a kind of animism (“everything has a spirit”), pantheism (“the divine is everywhere”), or panentheism (“the divine is in everything”).

Neopagans believe that *ethics and morality should be based upon joy, love, self-esteem, mutual respect, the avoidance of actual harm to others and ourselves*. Most Neopagans believe in some variant of the principle of “karma,” and affirm that the results of their actions will always return to them, sooner or later. Many Wiccans go so far as to believe that their karmic return will be three times as strong, for good or ill, as what their actions unleashed.

(Personally, I think the latter idea is both ridiculous and rooted in Christian Dualist theology, rather than the monism of Neopagan polytheology or the Polarism of Wiccan duotheology — matter and spirit are *not* separate and therefore they logically require no separate ethical rules or karmic conditions. The rules by which you live your secular life should be the same ones by which you live your spiritual life. When in doubt, figure out an appropriate metaphor.)

Neopagans believe that *human beings were meant to lead lives filled with joy, love, pleasure, beauty, and humor*. Neopagans may be carnivores, vegetarians, or omnivores, depending upon their individual religious beliefs. Some Neopagans abstain from alcoholic beverages, but most neither abstain nor disapprove of others drinking

Most Neopagans believe that *sexual ecstasy is a divine blessing and it can be a major source of spiritual growth and enlight-*

enment, though we vary widely in how, with whom, and under what circumstances we seek such ecstasy. Indeed, Gerald Gardner's original vision of Wicca was that it was to be a sex magic movement. Because Neopagans are sympathetic towards many sexual minorities and alternative relationship styles that have been persecuted by monotheistic religions, we attract many of them.

Neopagans believe that *with proper training, art, discipline, and intent, human minds and hearts are fully capable of performing most of the magic and miracles they are ever likely to need.* The performance of magic is a central practice in Wicca, as is divination. This belief clashes directly with monotheistic claims to exclusive miraculous abilities for their founders and saints, as well as their clergy's demands for exclusive "rights" to perform paranormal acts.

Neopagans believe in *the importance of celebrating the solar, lunar and other cycles of our lives.* We consciously observe the solstices, equinoxes and the points in between, as well as the phases of the moon, and the passages of our lives.

Most Neopagans believe in *some sort of afterlife as well as reincarnation,* usually involving rest and recovery in "the Summerland" (a term taken from Spiritualism) before reincarnating. There is a common belief that we grow spiritually through each life-

time and will continue reincarnating until we have learned all we need to.

Neopagans believe that if we are to achieve any of our goals, *we must practice what we preach*. Neopaganism, like any other religion, should be a way of life. Hence the popular Wiccan saying: “The Craft is not a Hobby.”

Most Neopagans believe that *healthy religions should have a minimum amount of rigidity and a maximum amount of flexibility*. Wicca, like the rest of Neopaganism, is an assortment of organic religions, which are growing, changing, merging, splitting, and producing offshoots.

Neopagans believe in *freedom of worship and belief* for all religious groups and individuals who are willing to grant us our freedoms in return — not always an easy agreement to get from other faiths — and in withholding social support for those who are bigots. We see religious tolerance as generally a sign of spiritual strength and confidence.

With all this as background, and remembering that for many Wiccans and other Neopagans these beliefs are thought of more as metaphors and artistic designs than as “doctrines,” let’s take a brief look at the different kinds of rituals that Wiccans practice.



## Chapter 13

### Varieties of Wiccan Ritual



cholars in the field of religious studies often call Wicca and other varieties of Neopaganism “magical religions.” By this they mean to indicate faiths in which the participants are encouraged and expected to actively perform their own magical or “miraculous” deeds, rather than passively waiting for some spiritual force to do it for them. Down through the ages the core meaning of “witch” has been someone who could do “magic.” Yet what exactly do we mean by that?

Defining magic (or “magick” as those who want to disassociate themselves from stage magicians spell it) is a long and complex task. Since this is a *Concise Guide*, I’ll refrain from repeating my long discussion of this in *Real Magic* and *Authentic Thaumaturgy*. Here are the three definitions I normally use for “magic:”

- (1) A general term for arts, sciences, philosophies and technologies concerned with (a) understanding and using various altered states of consciousness within which it is possible to have ac-

cess to and control over one's psychic talents, and (b) the uses and abuses of those psychic talents to change interior and/or exterior realities.

(2) A science and art comprising a system of concepts and methods for the build-up of human emotions, altering the electrochemical balance of the metabolism, using associational techniques and devices to concentrate and focus this emotional energy, thus modulating the energies broadcast by the human body, usually to affect other energy patterns whether animate or inanimate, but occasionally to affect the personal energy pattern.

(3) A collection of rule-of-thumb techniques designed to get one's psychic talents to do more-or-less what one wants, more often than not, one hopes.

So what does "religion" mean? Here are my favorite definitions:

(1) The body of institutionalized expressions of sacred beliefs, observances, and practices found within a given cultural context.

(2) A magical system combined with a philosophical and ethical system, usually oriented towards spiritual beings.

(3) A psychic structure composed of the shared beliefs, experiences and related habits of all members (not just the theologians) of any group calling itself “a religion.”

Now, what’s a “ritual?” Again, there are many ways to define the term, but here is the one that I have found most useful:

Any ordered sequence of events, actions and/or directed thoughts, especially one that is repeated in the “same” manner each time, that is designed to produce a predictable altered state of consciousness within which certain magical or religious (or artistic or scientific?) results may be obtained.

One useful way to look at magic and the rituals associated with it is to consider the motivations of the people involved on a “secular-to-sacred” spectrum. Some see magic as a way to attain spiritual, intellectual, or psychological growth — this approach is known as “theurgy” (from Greek roots meaning “divine work”). Others do magic in order to change the physical world for the benefit of themselves and their loved ones — this approach is known as “thaumaturgy” (from the Greek for “wonder working”). Most Pagans (Paleo-, Meso-, and Neo-) have been or are interested in both. Thaumaturgy and theurgy are not opposites

in a *dualistic* sense, but can be seen as one possible set of *polar* opposites, with an infinite number of possible steps between (see Appendix 2). The vast majority of magical or religious rituals have a mix of the thaumaturgic and the theurgic.

With all that out of the way, let's look at the various sorts of magical and religious rituals that exist, all of which are done by some Wiccans on different occasions.

Most Wiccans tend to describe their rituals as being initiations, "sabbats" (holy day celebrations that are primarily theurgical), or "esbats" (monthly "working" rituals that are mostly thaumaturgical). Gerald Gardner took the second and third terms from the writings of the Renaissance witch-hunters. There are, however, more useful terms.

**Rites of worship** are mostly theurgical ones in which the primary purpose is to honor the Goddess and the God and to give Them our love and psychic (in both senses) energy. When done for more than the typically small coven, these rites become "liturgies" ("public works").

**Rites of passage** are ones in which the primary purpose is to recognize and/or cause a significant change in status/being of a new or current member of the religion. While this includes initiations, it also includes baby-naming ceremonies, coming of age rites, weddings, funerals, etc. Wiccan initiations generally combine all three of the

“types of initiation” that I have written about elsewhere: (1) recognition of status already gained, (2) ordeals of transformation, and (3) the “transmission of the gnosis” (connecting the initiates with the wisdom of their predecessors).

**Rites of intensification** celebrate solar and lunar cycles, and thus “holidays,” but may also serve to mark the beginning or ending of particular activities such as hunting seasons, planting and harvesting, etc.

**Rites of passion** are ceremonies of a sexual nature, based on tantric principles, in which sex may be used for magical purposes or *vice* (you should pardon the expression) *versa*. These rituals are notable far more for their absence than their presence, as the vast majority of Neopagans are white, middle-class, and still recovering from our dysfunctional childhood programming as anti-sexual Christians or Jews — not to mention our being surrounded by a sexually schizophrenic mainstream culture that can be guaranteed to misinterpret *any* sexual ritual.

**Rites of intimacy** are rituals done by couples or families, focused around the home and hearth, sometimes involving household shrines to matron and/or patron deities.

**Rites of solitude** are those rites done by individuals who have no others with whom they can share the other forms of ritual. While “solitaries” may no longer be the

majority of Wiccans, they are still a large percentage of us.

**Rites of magic** are ceremonies done primarily to accomplish specific magical goals, usually thaumaturgical. These are actually rarer than the image of the Witch as magic user would indicate.

It's possible, and indeed common, for two, three, or more of these types of ritual to be combined, depending upon the talents, intentions, situation, and wisdom (or lack of it) of the parties involved. Sexual rites, for example, would not be combined with any other sort of ceremony at which children would be present nor at which the general public is expected to attend. Solitary rites of passage can be difficult to pull off successfully, and all Wiccans may not recognize the results. Rites of intensification are usually combined with public rites of worship but may be solitary or familial events. Rites of worship may be combined with rites of magic when a community is faced with problems requiring divine assistance with spell casting.

In the chapters that follow, I'll be focusing on rites of worship, with notes on combining these with the other sorts, for the simple reason that most Wiccan rituals involve worshipping the Goddess and/or the God regardless of whether or not other activities may also take place.

## Chapter 14: The Sources of Wiccan Ritual



Regardless of the conflicting historical claims about whether there was ever a “real” coven into which Gardner was initiated, it is very clear from his own notes that he could have created the root liturgy of what was to become known as Wicca from available published sources and his own experiences in other Western occult organizations (books from several of which are known to have been in his personal library). I have studied the first draft materials found in Gardner’s *Ye Bok* (see Chapter 9), which he eventually developed into the first *Book of Shadows*. There is simply nothing within its pages that can be demonstrated to be a remnant of a surviving underground British Paleopagan religion.

There is a saying among scholars, “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence,” and generally this is true. However, in the field of liturgical design, missing evidence becomes quite important. *People writing rituals almost always start by reworking ceremonial materials with which they are already familiar.* As one example, the liturgies

of the Episcopal and Lutheran churches resemble those of the Roman Catholic Church from which they sprung. For another, the rituals that Aleister Crowley wrote for his branch of the *Ordo Templi Orientis* — an offshoot of the Masons that he turned into a more magically “oriented” group — incorporate phrases and actions found in the older rituals of the Masons, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and the initiation rites of the pre-Crowlean O.T.O. For a third example (which, of course, “proves all”), most of the early rituals of the Druid organization I founded, *Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship* (ADF), included segments from the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA) rituals I had learned years before; some of them, at least as I perform them, still do.

The earliest versions of Gardner’s initiatory and liturgical scripts, as written by him in *Ye Bok*, are filled with obvious borrowings from Freemasonry, the Renaissance “Goetic” grimoires (magical books), the writings of Crowley, etc. There are no prayers, incantations, ritual actions, or liturgical patterns that reflect any sources other than the (Judeo-Christian) Western mainstream of occult tradition, the then-available published materials on anthropology and folklore, some tantric methods he could easily have picked up in the Far East or through Crowley, and some poetry lifted from Kipling and Yeats. If Gardner had attended rites with



genuinely Paleopagan elements in England, even if he were forbidden to put secret words and phrases down on paper, Paleopagan patterns of worship should be visible in his private notes, yet they are not.

The authenticity of Gardner's "apostolic succession" from a Secret Underground Coven therefore becomes irrelevant. If there *was* a "real" coven that trained Gardner, the members of it apparently didn't show or tell him much of anything liturgical that was genuinely ancient or Pagan. This, however, may not matter much.

Gardner was extremely creative. He changed the Goetic magical techniques to make them usable by small groups of people instead of solitary magicians. He rewrote the first three Masonic initiations to make them applicable to both men and women (or stole them from the Co-Masons). He made sensuality and eroticism a central part (at least in theory) of his new/old religion by borrowing tantric techniques and symbolism. Finally, and most importantly, early in the 1950s he added Dion Fortune's syncretic theology of Isis and Osiris ("All gods are one God and all goddesses are one Goddess") and other polytheistic elements to make his creation genuinely Pagan — albeit Mesopagan. Around 1954, all of the notes he had made during the 1940s and early 1950s were transferred to a new book which became the first official *Book of Shadows*,

and *Ye Bok* was retired to the back of a file cabinet, where it would lie forgotten for twenty years.

Whatever their origins, the first versions of the Wiccan rituals (especially those for the holidays) were extremely sparse, being usually only a page or two of text. Following Gardner's advice that "it is ever better to do too much ritual than too little," the members of his new religion added materials to them. Over the years, the rites have expanded considerably, with enormous variations in detail but with the same liturgical structure usually being more-or-less retained.

Of course, Gerald also wrote in his personal *BOS*, according to Lamond, "As you gain in experience you can gradually reduce the amount of ritual and eventually drop it altogether. But newcomers must always be made to experience and practice the full rituals." So you may feel free to take the following chapters with a few grains of consecrated salt.

## Chapter 15: Current Variations in Wiccan Ritual Structure



For a variety of historical reasons, most of them having to do with (1) the secrecy of which Wiccans are so fond, (2) the seemingly constant necessity to invent new variations to convince students that one is not really stealing Gardner's and Valiente's material, and (3) Wicca's evolution as a typically decentralized "post-modern" collection of faiths, *there is no universal pattern for Wiccan ritual*, although the general shape is similar from group to group. Different Traditions do more-or-less the same ritual things but in differing orders and with different degrees of intensity and/or attention.

Most Traditions start with the participants doing some sort of personal purifications (herbal baths, fasting, etc.) before the ritual actually gets underway. These purifications are not prompted by a sense of impurity or sinfulness on the part of the participants, but rather reflect a need to begin focusing their consciousnesses, clearing away irrelevant thoughts, and showing respect for the Goddess and God, as well as

fellow coveners, much as members of many other religions do before attending services.

The nature of one's clothing (or lack of it) is another cue to one's inner self that sacred activities are about to take place, as well as another way to show respect to the Deities. The people attending the ritual therefore either dress in ceremonial robes or else strip down to a state of ritual nudity. The latter makes them "skyclad," from a Jain term for naked sages living in the woods who abandon all social concerns and class distinctions in their quests for enlightenment — another motive for Gardner to prefer it, in class-obsessed England.

Almost all Wiccan groups use a circle as the shape of their sacred space. Some have this shape physically marked on the ground or floor; most do not — which is why it often turns into a "magic oval." Most will have candles or torches set up, either just inside or just outside of the circle's line, at the North, South, East, and West intersections of two invisible lines drawn through the center of the circle. The spots are called "Quarter Points" or often just "the Quarters." Whether the directions are marked accurately with a compass or loosely as the room or other factors make convenient, also varies considerably.

Some Traditions have the almost universally used altar (usually a low table) outside this circle when the rite begins; others place

it inside either at the center or near one of the Quarter Points.

Some groups have everyone except the presiding clergy (usually a High Priestess or “HPS,” and a High Priest or “HP,” sometimes also a Maiden and/or a Green Man as assistants) wait outside the ritual area, usually in the Northeast (for reasons having to do with Masonic initiations), while it is prepared for the ceremony, and bring them in afterwards. Others begin with everyone in the circle.

Traditions that have the people in the circle and the altar outside of it may start with a “spiral dance” as first described by Gardner in *Witchcraft Today* and later in Starhawk’s wildly influential *The Spiral Dance*. After everyone has spiraled into the center of the circle and spiraled out again, exchanging kisses along the way, and are once more standing in a circle holding hands, the ring will be broken and the altar brought in. Unfortunately, as all too many can testify, the spiral dance often turns into a spiral “crack the whip” — and no, I’m not referring to ritual scourging here! I usually don’t recommend it except to groups composed solely of young and healthy types dancing on a smooth, flat surface.

Salt and water are usually exorcised and/or blessed by the presiding clergy, sometimes along with other substances such as incense, oil, candles, etc. These

items are used, either before or after the circle is “cast” (symbolically formed) to exorcise and/or bless the circle as a whole and/or all the people in it. As with the personal purifications, exorcisms done in Neopagan rituals have little to do with banishing evil spirits and much to do with re-tuning the spiritual energies of the objects and/or persons involved to make them appropriate for the work at hand. Just as a cook who had been chopping garlic would take care to wash his or her hands and the knife before beginning to chop the apples for a pie — or at least we hope so — these ceremonial steps are taken.

The circle is cast, usually, by having the High Priestess or Priest walk around it in a clockwise direction (except for some Wiccans in the Southern Hemisphere), starting at either the East Quarter Point (most common), the North (less common), or the South or West (both rare), with a consecrated sword, knife, wand, staff, or just fingers. These may be held in the air at any of several heights, pointed up, down, forward, or outward, or else dragged point-first along the floor or ground (the original technique in *Ye Bok*, where it was done by a male “Magus”) along the desired circle boundaries.

The term “casting,” by the way, used to mean “cutting” or “carving,” which is why the Goetic magicians used sharp swords to

actually mark the ground — and why I believe that a ceremonial Wiccan sword or knife should have a sharp point (edge too, but that's another discussion).

Among some heterodox/Eclectic/fluffy/shallow Wiccans (choose your favorite adjective here), the circle is “cast” by everyone holding hands and declaring it cast, because having someone do it alone is “elitist.”

If the congregation waited outside the circle while it was cast, they will then be brought into it through a “gate” (usually in the Northeast if anyone is paying attention) either symbolically cut for them at that time, or left “open” during the casting process (and “closed” after their entry). People are brought into the cast circle in a formal fashion, generally with exchanges of passwords and/or kisses, often with aspergings, censings, annointings, etc. Groups that practice binding and scourging may do it at this point in the ceremony, both as a purification process and as a way to start a flow of intentionally erotic *mana*, and/or they may wait until after the “Quarter Point Invocations” have been done.

(*Mana* is a useful Polynesian word that means magical, spiritual, artistic, emotional, athletic, and/or sexual energy. I haven't found another word yet that combines all these meanings so well.)

After the circle has been cast, exorcised, blessed, etc., and the people are all present

inside it (perhaps also exorcised and/or blessed), a series of invocations are usually spoken in four directions. These are done at or towards each of the Quarter Points, to spirits variously addressed as “the Mighty Ones,” or “the Lords of the Watch Towers,” or “the totem animals,” or “the nature spirits,” etc., or sometimes to various gods and goddesses associated with the directions. Some groups will add an invocation to/from the center, and some to the nadir (ultimate bottom) and zenith (ultimate top) as well. All these invocations, by asking for the protection and cooperation of spiritual Gate Keepers, finish the process of creating sacred space by further defining the cosmos of the participants.

In Starhawkian Wicca and some of the other heterodox Trads, the circle casting, Quarter Point Invocations, exorcism/blessing of the circle and people, etc., can be done completely or fragmentarily, and in any order or all at once, depending upon the consensus and/or whims of the participants.

Once the circle is complete, there is often a ritual process of invocation or evocation known as “Drawing Down the Moon,” which is usually done by the HP on behalf of the coven, upon the HPS (in a Feminist Wiccan circle the entire coven of women may speak the words). The intent is that the High Priestess (or sometimes all the women in



the circle, or everyone in the circle) will be able to manifest the Goddess to the coven through divine *inspiration*, *conversation*, *channeling*, or *possession*.

In this context, *inspiration* refers to the reception of ideas from the Goddess which arrive as abstract concepts without any pseudo-sensory input, and which the HPS must then put into words of her own before passing them on. *Conversation* implies that she “hears” the Goddess’ voice (sometimes accompanied by a vision of Her), can mentally converse with Her, and specific phrases can then be passed on from the Goddess. *Channeling* (known a hundred years ago as “mediumship”) means that the Goddess uses the High Priestess’ vocal apparatus to speak directly with the others in what amounts to a light or *partial possession*.

In all three of these levels of spirit communication, the High Priestess’ awareness of her own spirit or soul is still in her physical body. In a total or *full possession*, however, she will usually leave her body while the Goddess controls it, and will often have no memory later of what her body was doing or saying while the deity was in it.

Sometimes, if she is sufficiently possessed by the Goddess invoked, the High Priestess may give the members of the congregation, individually or as a whole, pointed advice and information from the Goddess. More often the HPS will deliver a

memorized speech known as the “Charge of the Goddess.” This has nothing to do with charging into battle or charging a bill to credit, but rather is from the Masonic habit of ceremonial officers giving “charges” (consisting of advice, expectations, and warnings) to their initiates. I suspect that the Charge was originally written so that an HPS who had failed to be literally (or literarily) inspired would have something worthwhile to say. Of course, being a good piece of prose — especially after Valiente rewrote it — the Charge is capable of being delivered in a truly electrifying manner that inspires new insights among the listeners.

A few Wiccan traditions will then do “Drawing Down the Sun” upon the High Priest (or again, sometimes upon all the men, or everyone in the circle). The HP may then deliver a “Charge of the Horned God” or other message from Him. Some traditions might do the drawing down of the God before that of the Goddess at certain holidays and/or only during certain seasons of the year. Many never do it.

Other forms of trance may be added to or substituted for Drawing Down the Moon and/or Sun. A ritual dance, more scourging, songs and chants, ritual dramas, initiations, handfastings (weddings) or other rites of passage, seasonal games, and/or spell-casting (in any combination and order) may follow or replace the Drawing(s) Down.

At some point, however, a ritual will be done which is known as “Cakes and Wine” (or “Cakes and Ale,” “Cookies and Milk,” etc.). This involves the blessing of food and drink by (usually) the High Priestess and the High Priest, then passing them around for the congregation to enjoy (the food and drink are passed around; hardly ever the clergy — darn it). Some traditions offer libations to the ground when outdoors, or in a bowl when indoors, before consuming the food and drink (libations made indoors are poured out onto the ground outdoors later).

Whether this communal meal is done before or after a rite of passage is performed or a spell is cast, and whether the meal is accompanied by general or topical discussion (if any), depends upon a given group’s theory of the meal’s function. Some believe it’s for strengthening the coven members before doing magic and/or filling them with energy from the God and Goddess; others that it’s for relaxing and reviving after magic has been done. Some fulfill all these functions by passing the cup only around the circle, to fill the participants with the power of the Goddess and God, then doing their “working,” then passing the cup around again with the cakes for revival and discussion/teaching.

Along with or (usually) as part of the Cakes and Wine ceremony, is a magical act known as the “Great Rite.” This is the pri-

mary symbol of the Sacred Marriage between the Goddess and the God, a central concept in Wiccan duotheology. The Great Rite was originally (in Gardner's notes) ritual sexual intercourse between the High Priestess and High Priest — or sometimes by all the couples in the coven — done to raise magical power, bless objects, etc.

However, almost from the beginning of Wicca, it has been done symbolically (“in token,” as Gardner called it) rather than physically (“in true”), through plunging a dagger or wand into a cup to bless the wine or ale. Gardner was, after all, working with middle-class and working-class British occultists, not the lower-class or upper-class types who might have been less inhibited in their sexuality. The relaxed and healthy eroticism of the Paleopagans of ancient India or Britain was already long vanished, thus dooming his dream of a revived Western Tantra from the start.

The few American Wiccans of the 1970s who attempted to restore this aspect of the religion were denounced as sexist, exploitative, and politically incorrect by many in the Neopagan community and effectively silenced or cast out. As a result, the community lost any ability it might have had to establish appropriate ethical controls for such practices.

Occasionally the Great Rite is used as part of a spell casting or initiation, or to

consummate a handfasting. A handful of traditions insist that some or all of these purposes require the sexual act to be physical rather than symbolic, but even these few traditions usually remove the acting couple from the sight of the rest of the coven (or vice versa).

When the participants are ready to end their ceremony, the Goddess and/or the God, as well as the entities invoked at the Quarter Points, will be thanked and/or “dismissed.” In some traditions, excess *mana* will be “grounded” (drained). These steps are done in varying order. At the end, the circle is often cut across with knife or sword, and/or the High Priestess walks quickly around it counterclockwise, and the ceremony is declared to be over.

There is confusion in the Wiccan traditions and literature over the use of the terms “open” and “closed” when referring to the magical state of the circle. Some groups will say “the circle is closed” early in the rite to indicate that the magical barriers have been fully erected (after casting and exorcism/ blessing, etc.) and that therefore no one is to enter or leave without special permission and precautions (ritual “gate” making). Others will say, “the circle is closed” at the end of the rite, to mean that the ceremony has come to a close. Conversely, some traditions use the phrase, “the circle is open” at the other’s same early

stage of the ritual in the sense of being “open for work” or the Gates between the worlds being open for communication with the Other Side. Still other groups will say “the circle is open” to mean that the ceremony is over and the magical barriers have been taken down.

This conflicting use of terms can be very confusing until you find out how a given group functions. Originally, the circle was opened at the beginning and closed at the end, following the Masonic practice of “opening” and “closing” lodge ceremonies (whence Gardner took the terminology).

All these variations in Wiccan ceremonial patterns fit roughly within the “Common Worship Pattern” I have described elsewhere. Some Trads match it more closely than others. It has been my experience that Wiccan ritual can be far more powerful and effective, both thaumaturgically and theurgically, if a liturgical design is chosen that is as close a match as possible to the Common Worship Pattern. This can be accomplished most easily by adding the missing steps from that pattern.

One thing you might notice if you attend many Wiccan rituals is that they tend to be “top-heavy:” half to two-thirds of their ritual structure consists of setting up the sacred space and doing the preliminary power raising (calling the Guardians of the Quarters, etc.). The supposed purpose for the

rituals, the Drawing(s) Down and spell casting or rites of passage, then take much less time, and the unwinding of the liturgy is often positively zoomed through. Perhaps these rites would be less top-heavy if extensive trance, dancing, or other *mana* generating and focusing methods were used for spell casting and/or rites of passage, instead of the five minutes' worth common in current Wiccan rites.

However, Gardner may have reasoned that modern Westerners need more time and effort to escape mundane reality than folks from other times and places did, so he deliberately elaborated the opening parts of the liturgy. Be that as it may, the ritual design presented next both inserts the “missing” parts of the common worship pattern and makes the middle of the ritual more important than the beginning or the end.

What follows on the next two pages is my expansion and ordering of the steps for a “standard” sort of Wiccan ritual — standard in the sense that you can be fairly sure this will regularly work as a ritual, not in the sense of it being required by anyone (including myself). I have done Wiccan ceremonies this way for decades now, with great success, and this is the pattern I teach my own Wiccan students.

## A Standard Wiccan Rite

*(Italics = optional activities)*

### **Preliminary Activities**

- (A) Briefing
- (B) Individual Meditations and Prayers
- (C) Sacred baths, other personal cleansing
- (D) Setting up the altar and ritual area
- (E) Ritual robing or disrobing

### **Phase 1: Starting the Rite; Establishing the Group-Mind**

Clear-cut Beginning: Consecration of Time

- (1) Announcement of Beginning

Consecration of Space and Participants

- (2) Blessing of the Elemental Tools
- (3) Casting of the Circle
- (4) Blessing/Exorcism of Altar, People, and Circle

Centering, Grounding, Linking, and Merging

- (5) Opening Unity Meditation
- (6) Ritual Purpose; Historical Precedent
- (7) Goddess (*and/or God*) of the Occasion; Reasons for Choice

### **Phase 2: Recreating the Cosmos; Preliminary Power Raising**

Invoking the Gatekeepers; Defining the Circle as Center

- (8) Inviting the Guardians of the Quarters
- (9) "Between the Worlds" Chant/Affirmation

### **Phase 3: Major Sending of Power to Goddess (*and/or God*)**

- (10) Descriptive Invocation of Goddess (*and/or God*)

Primary Power Raising (a.k.a. "Cone of Power")

- (11) Participants generate mana (psychic energy) by dancing, singing, chanting, etc.

The Sacrifice/Gift of Mana

- (12) Releasing of energy raised (a.k.a. the "Drop")

### **Phase 4: Receiving and Using Returned Power**

Preparation for the Return

- (13) Meditation upon Personal and Group Needs
- (14) Induction of Receptivity

Reception of Power from the Goddess (*and/or God*)

- (15) Drawing Down the Moon
- (16) Instruction from the Goddess; the Charge
- (17) *Drawing Down the Sun*



## Witchcraft: A Concise Guide

(18) *Instruction from the God; the Charge*

(19) *The Great Rite (or in Step 23)*

(20) *Cakes and Wine (Blessing and Passing)*

(21) *Acceptance of Individual Blessings*

Use of the Power Received

(22) *Reinforcement of Group Bonding*

(23) *Spell Casting or Rite of Passage*

(24) *Second Ritual Meal with Conversation and/or Instruction*

### **Phase 5: Unwinding the Energies; Ending the Rite**

Thanking of Entities Invited, in Reverse Order

(25) *Thanking the Goddess (and/or God)*

(26) *Thanking the Guardians; Closing the Gates*

(27) *Affirmation of Continuity and Success*

Unmerging, Unlinking, Regrounding, & Recentering

(28) *Closing Meditation*

Draining off Excess Mana

(29) *Charging of Tools (or Giving to Earth)*

Deconsecration of Space

(30) *Circle Closing/Ending*

Clear-cut Ending: Deconsecration of Time

(31) *Announcement of End (a.k.a. "Merry Meet and Merry Part")*

### **Following Activities**

(F) *Hugs all around!*

(G) *Return to secular clothing*

(H) *Removal of libation bowl, etc., to outdoors*

---

### **Supplies List:**

**Set:** *table/altar, fire-proof cloth, statues/images of Goddess (and/or God), Quarter Guardians/Elements symbols or icons, quarter candles/torches/lanterns, cauldron or other event-specific items.*

**Props:** *sword, athame(s), boline, wand, pentacle, chalice, bowl, salt/soil dish, incense burner & incense & charcoal (or stick incense & holder), salt or soil, water, altar candles and holders, crown for Goddess (and/or God), matches/lighter, plate, cups for all, cakes/cookies, libation bowl, wine/ale/beer (and/or juice/drinking water), napkins, bucket of sand or extinguisher, broom or other event-specific items.*

As the reader will have noticed, the ritual is divided into five “phases” plus some preliminary and following activities. The lettered or numbered items in the outline are the observable steps of the rite as it is performed, while those items without letters or numbers are explanatory.

Because Wiccans may or may not wish to follow particular practices in a given Tradition, or upon a specific occasion, optional activities and supplies are in italics, to make their status clear.

In future editions of this book, I will include a complete script and a step-by-step “walkthrough.” For now, let’s move on to discuss a very important “element” of ritual.

## Chapter 16: Using Music and Poetry in Wiccan Rites



Music and poetry are two of the most important arts for religious rituals of almost any kind, and Wiccan rituals are no exception to this ancient rule. Melodies, songs, chants, and recitations not only generate emotional responses in the participants, and thus increase the *mana* in the circle, but they also focus that *mana* both polytheologically (by reinforcing shared beliefs) and magically (by creating the shared images within which the group's *mana* will flow and be shaped).

Even if the members of a given coven are all “tone deaf” or “can’t carry a tune in a bucket,” they should still use music and poetry whenever possible and might wish to try “plain chant,” which is often easier to sing than fully melodic songs are.

In this chapter, I’ll present a few examples of how sung or rhythmically recited words can be effectively used in Wiccan ritual. I’ll use “HPS” for High Priestess, “HP” for High Priest (the usual two leaders in most Wiccan rites), “Wmn” for those women

other than the HPS, “Men” for those other than the HP, “Both” for the HPS & HP together, and “All” for...guess what?

Since the vast majority of Wiccan covens are of mixed genders, these examples will assume that situation, however, they can and should be rewritten to meet a group’s needs. I’m using mostly my own compositions here, not because I think that they are superior, but because I know where all the copyright credits belong — often a problem with popular Neopagan chants.

You will also notice that they reflect my own friendly and respectful approach to the deities and spirits rather than the classic arrogance and paranoia of the ceremonial magicians who influenced Wicca’s earliest stages.

### **Call and Response**

“Call and response” can be thought of as formalized conversation, usually between the leaders of a ritual and the other participants, in which they mutually reinforce their beliefs and intentions.

Here’s an example of how call and response can be used at the beginning of a ritual (in Step 1):

## **Opening Chant**

*(© 1989, 2001 words & music by IB)*

- HPS: Sisters, tell us why we're here?  
Wmn: We're here to worship the Goddess.  
HP: Brothers, tell us why we're here?  
Men: We're here to worship the God.  
HPS: We're here to worship our Lady dear,  
Who gives us courage to face all fear,  
Who brings us hope and love and cheer.  
We're here to worship the Goddess!  
HP: We're here to worship the Hornéd Man,  
Who gives us wisdom to understand,  
Who brings us strength for heart & hand.  
We're here to worship the God!  
HPS: Tell me sisters, why we're here?  
Wmn: We're here to worship the Goddess!  
HP: Tell me brothers, why we're here?  
Men We're here to worship the God!

This fully serves the liturgical purpose of announcing that the ceremony is beginning and why the people have gathered (to be reinforced in Step 6). Whether sung or chanted, it should be done liltingly — not droned — so the internal rhythm can get the ritual off to a spritely (so to speak) start.

Note the accented “e” in the third verse; it’s there to remind the HP to pronounce “Horn-éd” as two syllables, in order to maintain the rhythm.

Symmetry can be important in providing magical “closure,” so at the end of the ritual (Step 31), there should be a similar...

## **Closing Chant**

(© 1989, 2001 words & music by IB)

HPS: Tell me brothers, what we have done.  
Men: We have worshiped the Goddess!  
HP: Tell me sisters, what we have done.  
Wmn: We have worshipped the God!  
Both: We have been blessed with holy grace.  
Return we now to time and space.  
The circle fades without a trace.  
All: Our worship now is done!

The beginning recalls the first four lines of the *Opening Chant*, altered for final reinforcement and affirming that both mortal genders have honored both Divine Genders.

## **Repetition and Refrain**

The more the words, rhythm, and melody of one part of your ritual relate to similar aspects of other parts, the easier it is to create, maintain, and direct the group-mind of the participants. Wiccan ritual is ideally suited to take advantage of this principle.

Wiccan cosmology sees the “Four Elements” of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water as basic to all existence (a “Fifth Element” of Spirit links them together). The Four Elements are symmetrical, being four possible combinations of hot and cold, dry and wet. So repeated symmetrical references to them can easily be used reinforce that cosmology in the magical space being created/recognized.

Here's a song/chant to bless (in Step 2) the four elemental tools that will be used to bless and exorcise the circle (in Step 4):

### ***Elemental Tool Blessing***

(© 1989, 2001 words & music by IB)

*[HPS blesses incense]*

HPS: We bless thee oh creature of air,  
That thou mayest purify all;  
Freeing us here from all care,  
As on your bright wisdom we call.

All: So mote it be!

*[HPS blesses charcoal/flame]*

HPS: We bless thee oh creature of fire,  
That thou mayest purify all;  
Igniting our holy desire,  
As on your fierce courage we call.

All: So mote it be!

*[HP blesses water]*

HP: We bless thee oh creature of water,  
That thou mayest purify all;  
Cleansing each son and each daughter,  
As on your deep feelings we call.

All: So mote it be!

*[HP blesses salt/soil]*

HP: We bless thee oh creature of earth,  
That thou mayest purify all;  
Renewing all that of true worth,  
As on your strong power we call.

All: So mote it be!

Notice how each verse repeats the form and many of the words of the preceding ones, with modifications appropriate to the element concerned. This helps make the words easier to memorize for the speakers, reinforces what they have learned in religious classes, and connects later in the rite with the elemental attributions of the spirits associated with the Four Quarters.

The refrain at the end of each verse, “So mote it be,” is a phrase borrowed from Freemasonry, where it essentially means “Amen” or “So be it.” There used to be an organized movement within Wicca to insist on saying the more modern version, but the so-be-it union fell apart in 1991...

The use of a refrain that all can join also helps the members of the group avoid slipping into an experience of themselves as “audience” and “performers.” While this is a minor problem in the average Wiccan coven, it becomes a major issue in doing larger group rituals at holidays and festivals.

When creating the magical circle, Spirit can be seen to be present in the center of two crossing lines (North-South and East-West) that link opposite Elements associated with the cardinal directions. Using that idea, here’s another example of how repeating patterns can reinforce earlier ones, in a *Quarter Calling* (Step 8):



## **Quarter Calling**

(© 1990, 2001 words by IB, music by unknown S.C.A. bard.)

*[East]*

Winged One, Spirit of Air,  
    your children invite you here.  
Come on the winds of the sunrise,  
    give us your vision so clear.  
You are the gentle spring breezes,  
    you are the glory of flight.  
Winged One, Spirit of Air,  
    keep us wise through our rite.

*[South]*

Fierce One, Spirit of Fire,  
    your children invite you here.  
Come with your blazing noon passion,  
    banish all sorrow and fear.  
You are the flickering candle,  
    you are the bonfire bright.  
Fierce One, Spirit of Fire,  
    keep us brave through our rite.

*[West]*

Swift One, Spirit of Water,  
    your children invite you here.  
Come on the waves of the sunset,  
    bring to us joy and good cheer.  
You are the well of deep comfort,  
    you are the crashing waves height.  
Swift One, Spirit of Water,  
    keep us sure through our rite.

*[North]*

Hoofed One, Spirit of Earth,  
    your children invite you here.

Come from the mountains of midnight,  
with new strength and vigor appear.  
You are the field of our pleasure,  
you are the source of our might.  
Hoofed One, Spirit of Earth,  
keep us strong through our rite.

[Center]

Winged One...

Fierce One...

Swift One...

Hoofed One...

Keep us pure through our rite.

These words can be sung or chanted by the HPS, the HP, four volunteers, or whoever else wishes. Also, in any circle larger than nine feet across, have the callers stand at the opposite sides from the directions to which they are calling. That way, everyone in the circle will be likely to actually hear them! The pattern here is a little more complex than that in the *Elemental Tool Blessing*:

{Animal adjective} One, Spirit of {Element}  
your children invite you here.

Come {elemental metaphor} {time of day},  
{With elemental gift/resource}.

You are the {gentle aspect },  
you are the {frightening aspect}

{Animal adjective} One, Spirit of {Element}  
keep us {elemental virtue} through our rite.

Matching the *Quarter Calling* near the beginning of the rite is naturally a *Quarter Farewell* near the end (Step 26):

### **Quarter Farewell**

(© 1991, 2001 words by Deborah Lipp, music by IB.)

[East] Wise One...

[South] Brave One...

[West] Sure One...

[North] Strong One...

[Center] We bid you now hail and farewell.

Go by the powers that brought you,

Go by the unweaving spell.

As thy bright pentagrams fade,

Depart, 'ere the circle is gone.

[East] Winged One...

[South] Fierce One...

[West] Swift One...

[North] Hoofed One...

[Center] As we say, be it done!

As is usually the case with songs and chants near the end of a ritual, this matching bit is shorter and less ornate. Notice how the elemental virtues are mentioned first and the animal adjectives are used last, thus reversing the original order of terms.

Notice also that this *Quarter Farewell* doesn't use the all-too-common phrase, "Go if you must, stay if you will," that (far too) many Wiccans have added to their liturgies in recent years. At the Celtic feast of *Samhain* (known to moderns as Halloween), the

Gates Between the Worlds may usually be left open safely until dawn. On all other occasions, it's best to assume that the spirits of the Quarters (especially if They are deities!) have other things to do than hang around and party, and that a ritual's artistic, psychic, and spiritual closure requires their departure.

### **Sonorous Sometimes, Droning Never!**

Readers who have attended Wiccan rituals, especially at large festivals, will have noticed that many of them make frequent use of what I call...

#### ***The Generic Pagan Chant***

*(© 1993, 2001 words & music by IB — and 10,000 Pagans)*

A-minor, D-minor, A-minor, D-minor.

This is another Pagan chant.

You can tell that it's real old

'cause it sounds just like a funeral dirge.

A-minor, D-minor, A-minor, D-minor,

A-minor, D-minor, A-Flaaaat!

Too many people in the early decades of Wicca apparently decided that all our songs and chants had to be in minor keys, either to make us sound "more religious" to hostile outsiders, or because they assumed all "British Isles folk music" was that way. Of course, why they thought that Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Slavic, etc., gods

and goddesses would enjoy British folk music is beyond me...

The irony is that our supposed revival of a peasant religion should have had such upper-class biases against the rowdy sorts of music that members of peasant cultures usually enjoy!

So please! Unless you are at a funeral for someone (and maybe not even then), use music that is lively and happy. Try modal settings for your instruments, or at least major keys!

Wiccan music does not have to be pre-modern or stereotypically “folksy.” I have heard and enjoyed rock and roll, classical, and jazz in Wiccan rituals (punk, heavy metal, and clash music didn’t seem to work as well, but maybe that’s just me).

Encouraging your participants to bring drums and other musical instruments, especially rattles, shakers, and other rhythmic ones, can add a great deal of extra energy to many rituals — especially if the people using them bother to learn how! I know several priestesses who routinely bring small baskets of kindergarten-style shakers, tamborines, etc., to most rites, for handing out to those who don’t have their own.

I don’t, however, recommend that drummers at Wiccan rituals use authentic Sante-ria or Voudoun drum rhythms *unless they know exactly what they are doing!* The African deities *will* come when you call Them,

and They expect to be treated correctly according to *Their* traditions — not ours!

Feel free to use modern technology in your rituals. I have done Wiccan rituals in situations where microphones and a sound system were both available and necessary. They worked just fine, though we did have to be careful not to trip over the cords. Using remote headphones/mics will solve that particular problem, though you might want to disguise them as part of your ceremonial costumes.

If you can't get live musicians, use recorded ones through as good a sound system as you can manage. But don't bother trying to record the results of drawings down — the Deities seem to enjoy making that difficult.

In short, use the chants, music, and technology that will inspire and unify the participants, and that fits with the aesthetics of the rituals concerned. And always remember: "It don't mean a thing if it aint got that swing!"

Tape cassettes and compact discs of my second album, *Avalon is Rising!*, in which the *Quarter Calling* and *Quarter Farewell* appear, can be obtained from the ACE website at [www.rosencomet.org](http://www.rosencomet.org).

Part Three:

**Wiccan Resources  
and  
References**





## Appendix 1: Etymological Notes



inguistic clues must be treated cautiously, since words are slippery, slithery things. Often the same word will be used for different concepts that are not always closely connected, and most languages have concepts that are referred to by several different words, depending upon the emphasis desired. Even within a single tongue, both the spellings and the meanings of words change drastically with time. New words are invented and old ones forgotten; war and trade bring in slang and loan words that can replace venerable and respected terms. In addition, whenever possible we must consider the social and cultural environment in which a given word was used, a difficult task when most of the relevant data has been lost or destroyed.

We must also remember that ancient peoples did not know that linguists of later centuries would be trying to fit their word usage into nice, neat theories, so then as now they invented their own explanations for word origins, a process known to academics as “folk etymology.” Since things can

often become what they are called, we may observe the truth of the classic phrase that, “ontology recapitulates philology.”

Thus, this discussion is a great deal shorter than I had originally planned, as all my major sources on the topic start contradicting one another as soon as they go back more than ten centuries ago.

English, German, Icelandic, Irish, Latin, Welsh, and several other tongues are all members of what linguists call the Western branch of the “Indo-European” languages. That branch, in turn, is one of several outgrowths of an original postulated mother tongue called “Proto-Indo-European” (PIE). By comparing variations of a word, not just within a given language, but among and between its sister tongues as well, it is often possible to trace back its linguistic development from an original (postulated) PIE root. Such roots are usually printed with an asterisk preceding them to indicate postulated forms, as in *\*weg-* or *\*wy-*.

Many of the Germanic *wic-* roots that grew into *wicce* ‘witch’ may have come from a PIE root *\*wy-*, referring to willows and elms. This source word then began to be used to refer to the literal and metaphorical characteristics of those trees, the sorts of things made from them, and the techniques, such as twisting, weaving, etc., used to make those things (see *Proto-Indo-European Trees*, by Paul Freidrich).

What words were used during the Dark Ages, Middle Ages and Renaissance to translate *wicce*, *wicca*, and *wiccacraeft* into other European languages and vice versa?

The Greeks used the term *pharmakos* (source of our Modern English words pharmacist, pharmacy, etc.) based on the word *pharmakon* ‘drug, poison, spell.’ This is the etymological source of American preacher Billy Graham’s (in)famous statement, “The word witchcraft comes from the same word as drug and I think that proves something.” It certainly would, if the Anglo-Saxons had spoken Greek.

However, the Greek use of *pharmakos* for both “poisoner” and “spell-caster” apparently supplied the excuse for Bible translators many centuries later to translate the Hebrew word *kasgah* ‘poisoner’ as “witch” in *Exodus 22:18*, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” This deliberate mistranslation was designed to curry favor with the witch-phobic King James, for whom the translators of the *King James Version* made it a point to insert the English word “witch” into every possible verse concerning magical or divinatory activities in competition with the approved religious rulers.

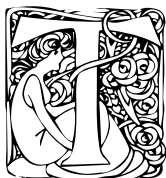
Later the Greeks used *magissa*, the feminine of *magos* ‘magician,’ (from the Persian priesthood called the *Magi*) to translate *wicce*. Latin authors and translators used *saga*, from *sagire*, ‘to perceive keenly,’

*praesagire*, 'to presage, or foretell,' as well as *striga*, 'a vampiric night owl,' *maga*, 'a female magician,' and *venefica*, 'a female poisoner or magician,' etc. The Italians used *strega*, and the Romanians used *striga*, both derivations from the Latin. The Italians also used *maliarda*, 'an evil charmer' and *fattuchiera*, from the Latin *fatum* 'fate.' The French used *magicienne/magicien* 'a female/male magician' and *sorciere/sorcier* 'a female/male sorcerer.'

The latter is usually explained as coming from the Latin *sortilegus*, meaning one who does divination or magic by casting of lots (small sticks or stones with special meanings) but may come from *sourcier*, meaning 'a water-well finder' or 'water diviner.' Germans, Danes, and others used words that translate as "magician," "wonderworker" "spell singer," "diviner," or "knowledgeable one," all usually in the female form.

While some of these terms may have been positive or neutral in their original connotations, many were always negative and only these hostile interpretations seem to have been remembered into the Middle Ages.

## Appendix 2: A Micro-Glossary



These terms appear quite a bit in this work, so the following pages may prove helpful to the reader unfamiliar with how the meanings of these words have evolved over the centuries, and how modern Pagans may tend to use them.

**Paganism (past usage):** The term “Pagan” comes originally from the Latin *paganus*, which appears to have had such meanings as “villager,” “country dweller,” or “hick.” The Roman army used it to refer to civilians (and we know how fond career military men are of civilians). Polytheistic as they were, the residents of Rome would never have referred to themselves as “pagans,” and were quite annoyed later when the early Roman Christians used “pagan” to refer to everyone who preferred to worship pre-Christian divinities. Over the centuries, “pagan” became simply an insult, applied to the monotheistic followers of Islam by the Christians, and vice versa, and by the Protestants and Catholics towards each other, as it gradually gained the connotation of “a follower of a false religion.”

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the word's primary meanings became a blend of "atheist, agnostic, hedonist, religion-less," etc., (when referring to an educated, white, male, heterosexual, non-Celtic European) and "ignorant savage and/or pervert" (when referring to everyone else). In the early twentieth century, various far-right groups began using the term to refer to their fascist/nazi philosophies, and some Mesopagans (see below) still do.

**Paganism (current usage):** Today many people in the English-speaking world proudly call ourselves "Pagan" with a capital "P," and to most of us, "Paganism" is a general term for polytheistic, nature-focused religions, old and new, with "Pagan" used as the adjective as well as the membership term. Like "witchcraft," however, it requires something in front in order to clarify exactly what sort of Paganism one is discussing — prefixes are what we've settled on.

**Paleopaganism or Paleo-Paganism:** The general term for the original polytheistic, nature-centered faiths of tribal Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, Oceania and Australia, when they were (or in some very rare cases, still are) practiced as intact belief systems. Of the so-called "Great Religions of the World," Classical Hinduism (prior to the influx of Islam into India), Taoism and Shinto (before the arrival of Buddhism), for example, fall under this category, though

many members of these faiths might be reluctant to use the term to describe themselves today.

**Mesopaganism** or **Meso-Paganism**: The general term for a variety of movements, both organized and non-organized, which were started as attempts to recreate, revive or continue what their founders *believed to be* the best aspects of the Paleopagan ways of their ancestors (or predecessors). However, they were heavily influenced — accidentally, deliberately and/or involuntarily — by concepts, attitudes, and practices from the monotheistic, dualistic, or nontheistic world-views of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or early Buddhism.

Examples of Mesopagan belief systems include: Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, and those forms of Druidism influenced by those movements; the many Afro-Diasporic faiths, such as Voudoun, Santeria, Candomble, etc.; Sikhism and other sects of Hinduism that have been influenced by Islam and/or Christianity; Mahayana Buddhism; Aleister Crowley's religion/philosophy of Thelema; and Odinism (most modern Norse Paganism). As this work shows, most so-called Family Traditions of Witchcraft (at least, those that aren't completely fake), as well as the more orthodox of the "British Traditionalist" denominations of Wicca, could also be included as Mesopagan.

**Neopaganism** or **Neo-Paganism**: The general term for a variety of movements, both organized and (usually) non-organized, started since 1960 or so (though they had literary roots going back to the mid-1800s). These were also attempts, like those of the Mesopagans, to recreate, revive, or continue what their founders *believed to be* the best aspects of the Paleopagan ways of their ancestors (or presumed predecessors). These were blended with modern humanistic, pluralistic, and inclusionary ideals, while attempting to eliminate inappropriate concepts, attitudes, and practices from the monotheistic, dualistic, or nontheistic world-views of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or early Buddhism.

Examples of Neopaganism would include the Church of All Worlds, most heterodox Wiccan traditions, Druidism as practiced by *Ár nDraíocht Féin* and Keltria, some Norse Pagan groups, and some modern forms of Buddhism whose members refer to themselves as “Buddheo-Pagans.” Oberon Zell, a founder of the Church of All Worlds, was the one who originally popularized the term “Neo-Paganism” in the 1960s and 1970s, though it seems to have been used first during the Renaissance.

*These three prefixed terms do not delineate clear-cut categories.* There is often a period, whether of decades or centuries, when a Paleopagan path may be turning into a



Mesopagan one, or a Mesopagan one into a Neopagan one. Furthermore, the founders and members of Mesopagan and Neopagan groups frequently prefer to believe (or at least to declare) that they are genuinely Paleopagan in beliefs and practices. This “myth of continuity” is in keeping with the habits of most creators and members of new religions throughout human existence, and should neither be discounted nor taken too seriously.

**Theology, Thealogy, Duotheology, or Polytheology:** Intellectual speculations concerning the nature of God (singular, male), Goddess (singular, female), “the God & the Goddess” (dual, as syntheses of all male deities and all female deities), or the Deities (plural, all genders), respectively, and His, Her, and/or Their relations to the world in general and humans in particular. These activities generally involve “rational” explanations of religious doctrines, practices, and beliefs. These explanations may or may not bear any connection to any religion as actually conceived and practiced by the majority of its members, or to any system of logic not rooted in the same assumptions.

**Monotheism:** A style of religion in which the theologians (or thealogians) claim that there is only one deity (theirs, of course) and that all other spirits claiming (or claimed) to be deities are “actually” demons in disguise (or a patriarchal plot).

**Henotheism:** A style of religion in which one deity (out of many) is considered to be the King or Queen of the Gods and assumed to be the proper prime focus of attention. This is what Judaism was, before all the other deities beside Yahweh were demoted in status to “archangels.”

**Duotheism:** A style of religion in which there are two deities accepted by the duotheologians, usually of opposite gender; all other deities worshiped are considered to be “faces” or aspects of the two main figures.

**Polytheism:** A style of religion in which the polytheologians claim that there are many deities, of varying power and nature, and many lesser spirits as well, all of who are considered to be “real” and to be possibly worthy of respect and/or worship.

**Dualism:** A religious doctrine that states that all the spiritual forces of the universe(s) are split into Good Guys and Bad Guys (white vs. black, male vs. female, straight vs. gay, etc.) who are eternally at war with each other.

**Polarism:** A religious doctrine that states that all the spiritual forces of the universe(s) are split into Guys and Gals (good, weird, horny, scary, whimsical, etc.) who are eternally in bed with each other.

Some of this material is taken from my *Polytheological Dictionary for Neopagans*.

## Appendix 3: Classifying Witchcrafts



s with the words “artist,” “doctor,” “scientist,” or “diviner,” the word “witch” is almost meaningless without some sort of qualifying adjective in front of it. Here is a brief review, in alphabetical order, of the classification system I have created to distinguish the various European and American sorts of witches from one another.

### **Witchcraft, Anthropologic**

Anything an anthropologist calls “witchcraft,” usually referring to:

(1) the practices of independent (real or supposed) magic users who are suspected of at least sometimes using their magic outside of their society’s accepted cultural norms, and/or

(2) a perceived state, often involuntary, of being a monster who can curse people with the “evil eye.”

This is pretty close to what the word “wicce” probably originally referred to, annoying as that may be to modern Wiccans.

### **Witchcraft, Classic**

The practices of the persons often called “witches” (if seldom to their faces) in pre-medieval Europe, to wit: midwifery, healing with magic, herbs, and other folk remedies, providing abortions, love potions, and poisons, divination, casting of curses and blessings, etc. A Classic Witch’s religion may well have been irrelevant to his or her techniques. After the monotheistic conquests, most survivors were — at least officially — Christians or Moslems. Some may have retained a certain amount of pre-Christian/pre-Islamic magical and religious knowledge. Classic Witches have continued to exist to this very day, in ever dwindling numbers, mostly in the remotest villages and among the Romany or other Traveling Peoples.

### **Witchcraft, Dianic**

(1) A postulated medieval cult of Diana and/or Dianus worshipers (Margaret Murray’s idea).

(2) Term used by some henotheistic Neopagan Witches to refer to their concentration on the Goddess.

(3) Term used by some Feminist separatist Witches to describe their practices and beliefs.

### **Witchcraft, Ethnic**

The practices of various non-English-speaking people who use magic, religion and alternative healing methods in their own communities, and who are called “witches” by English speakers who don’t know any better.

### **Witchcraft, Familial or “Fam-Trad”**

The practices and beliefs of those who claim to belong to (or to have been taught by members of) families that supposedly were “underground” Paleo- or Mesopagans for several centuries in Europe and/or the Americas, using their wealth and power to stay alive and secret. Even if they once existed, none of them could have a pure religious/magical tradition by now; instead, they would have bits of Paleopagan customs mixed with Christianity or Islam as well as every new occult wave that hit the West.

99.9% of all the people you will ever meet who claim to be Fam-Trad Witches are simply *lying*, or have been lied to by *their* teachers. Familial Tradition Witchcraft is also sometimes called “Hereditary Witchcraft” or even “Genetic Witchcraft.” These latter terms are used by those who think that they must claim a witch as an ancestor, in order to be a witch today, or who think that it “proves” them to be better than those without such ancestry.

### **Witchcraft, Fairy/Faery/Faërie**

(1) Any of several different (and sometimes conflicting) Traditions of Meso- and/or Neopagan Witchcraft started by the blind poet and “scoundrel guru” Victor Anderson during the 1970s–1990s. He mixed British and Celtic folklore about the fairies, Gardnerianism, Voodoo, Max Freedom Long’s version of Hawaiian Huna, Tantra, Gypsy magic, Native American beliefs, and anything else he was thinking about at the time he was training the founders of each trad.

(2) Varieties of Neopagan Witchcraft focused around homosexual and/or bisexual images and magical methods rather than the heterosexual (and sometimes homophobic) ones used in most Wiccan trads.

(3) Other sects of Neopagan Witchcraft focused around real or made-up fairy lore, often taken from romantic poems, plays, and novels about the fairies. In most of these traditions, there is usually an assumption that the ancient assumed associations between fairies and witches were true, and that the fairies were “originally” the Paleopagan nature spirits and/or deities.

### **Witchcraft, Feminist**

Several new monotheistic or henotheistic religions started since the early 1970s by women in the feminist community who belonged to the women’s spirituality movement and/or who had contact with Neopagan

Witches. It is partially an outgrowth of Neopagan Witchcraft, with male deities booted unceremoniously(!) out of the religion entirely, and partially a conglomeration of independent and eclectic do-it-yourself covens of spiritually inclined feminists. The religions usually involve worshiping only the syncretic Goddess and using Her as a source of inspiration, magical power, and psychological growth. Their scholarship is often abysmal and men are usually not allowed to join or participate.

### **Witchcraft, Gardnerian**

The originally Mesopagan source of what has now become Neopagan Witchcraft, founded by Gerald Gardner and his friends in the late 1940s and 1950s, based upon his alleged contacts with British Fam-Trads. After he finished inventing, expanding, and/or reconstructing the rites, laws, and other materials, copies were stolen by numerous others who then claimed Fam-Trad status and started new religions of their own. (See Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon* for most of the messy details.) Though Gardnerians are sometimes called "the scourge of the Craft," together with the Alexandrians and members of some other British Traditions, they may be considered simply the orthodox branch of Neopagan Witchcraft.

### **Witchcraft, Gothic**

A postulated cult of devil worshipers invented by the medieval Church, used as the excuse for raping, torturing and killing scores of thousands of women, children and men. The cult was said to consist of people who worshiped the Christian Devil in exchange for magical powers they used to benefit themselves and harm others. (I coined this term many years ago, before the rise of the “Goth” subculture of the 1980s.) Also called “Diabolic Witchcraft” and “Satanic Witchcraft.”

### **Witchcraft, Grandmotherly**

Refers to the habit common among modern Witches of claiming to have been initiated at an early age by a mother or grandmother who belonged to a Fam-Trad but who is now conveniently dead, doesn’t speak English, and/or is otherwise unavailable for questioning.

### **Witchcraft, Immigrant or “Imm-Trad”**

Refers to the customs and beliefs of Mesopagan peasants and supposed Fam-Trad members who immigrated to the Americas and mingled their magical and religious customs with each other, the Native Americans, enslaved Blacks, and the previous immigrants. Examples would include the dozens of kinds of Voodoo and Hoodoo, Pennsylvania “hex” magic, and Appalachian magical lore.



### **Witchcraft, Neoclassic**

The current practices of those who are consciously or unconsciously duplicating some or many of the activities of the Classic Witches and who call themselves (or are called by others) “witches.”

### **Witchcraft, Neogothic**

The beliefs and practices of some modern Satanists, who work very hard to be everything that the medieval Church and current Fundamentalists say they should be. Some of them perform Black Masses, commit blasphemy and sacrilege towards Christian ideas and objects, hold (or long to hold) orgies, etc. There is some *small* overlap with the “Goth” subculture of the 1980s, but most Goths are interested in vampires, not demons.

### **Witchcraft, Neopagan**

Many new duotheistic religions founded since the 1960s, most of which are variations of Gardnerian Witchcraft but some of which are independent inventions and/or reconstructions based on real or supposed Family Traditions, Immigrant Traditions, literary creations, etc. — just like Gardner’s! Most groups who call what they do “Wicca” are Neopagan Witches, though some may be considered Mesopagan ones

### **Witchcraft, Neoshamanic**

(1) The beliefs and practices of those modern persons who are attempting to rediscover, duplicate, and/or expand upon the practices of (postulated) Shamanic Witches.

(2) Neopagan Witchcraft done with feathers, drums, crystals, and other New Age additions of a vaguely shamanic flavor. Most use drums and chanting rather than drugs to achieve their desired trance states.

### **Witchcraft, Shamanic**

(1) Originally, the beliefs and practices of members of *postulated* independent belladonna/Moon Goddess cults throughout pre-medieval Europe, remnants of which *might* have survived into the Middle Ages.

(2) Currently, Neoshamanic Witchcraft as done by those who do not use the Neo- prefix.

### **witchcraft-with-a-small-w**

The beliefs and practices of those modern persons following one or more varieties of Neopagan Witchcraft who refuse to admit it, usually while claiming to be Fam-Trad witches.

*Note that several of these categories are capable of overlapping and/or of being mixed by living individuals.*

## Appendix 4: “Principles of Wiccan Belief”

Adopted by the Council of American Witches,  
April 1974

*This is the document mentioned in Chapter 9 as having been the first attempt to synthesize a common set of beliefs for American Wiccans. While the organization behind it lasted only a few years, this statement has served as a “Touchstone” for many Wiccans ever since.*



We are not bound by traditions from other times and other cultures, and owe no allegiance to any person or power greater than the Divinity manifest through our own being. As American Witches, we welcome and respect all life-affirming teachings and traditions, and seek to learn from all and to share our learning. We do not wish to open ourselves to the destruction of Wicca by those on self-serving power trips, or to philosophies and practices contradictory to these principles. In seeking to exclude those whose ways are contradictory to ours, we do not want to deny participation with us to any who are sincerely interested in our knowledge and beliefs, regardless of race, color, sex, age, national or cultural origins, or sexual preference.

1. We practice rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life forces marked by the phases of the Moon and the seasonal quarters and cross-quarters.

2. We recognize that our intelligence gives us a unique responsibility toward our environment. We seek to live in harmony with nature, in ecological balance offering fulfillment to life and consciousness within an evolutionary concept.

3. We acknowledge a depth of power far greater than is apparent to the average person. Because it is far greater than ordinary, it is sometimes called “supernatural,” but we see it as lying within that which is naturally potential to all.

4. We conceive of the Creative Power in the Universe as manifesting through polarity — as masculine and feminine — and that this same creative Power lives in all people, and functions through the interaction of the masculine and feminine. We value neither above the other, knowing each to be supportive of the other. We value sexuality as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of Life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magickal practice and religious worship.

5. We recognize both outer worlds and inner, or psychological worlds — sometimes known as the Spiritual World, the Collective Unconscious, the Inner Planes, etc. — and we see in the interaction of these two

dimensions the basis for paranormal phenomena and magickal exercises. We neglect neither dimension for the other, seeing both as necessary for our fulfillment.

6. We do not recognize any authoritarian hierarchy, but do honor those who teach, respect those who share their greater knowledge and wisdom, and acknowledge those who have courageously given of themselves in leadership.

7. We see religion, magick, and wisdom-in-living as being united in the way one views the world and lives within it — a world view and philosophy of life, which we identify as Witchcraft or the Wiccan Way.

8. Calling oneself a “Witch” does not make a Witch — but neither does heredity itself, or the collecting of titles, degrees, and initiations. A Witch seeks to control the forces within him/herself that make life possible in order to live wisely and well, without harm to others, and in harmony with nature.

9. We acknowledge that it is the affirmation and fulfillment of life, in a continuation of evolution and development of consciousness that gives meaning to the Universe we know, and to our personal role within it.

10. Our only animosity toward Christianity, or toward any other religion or philosophy-of-life, is to the extent that its institutions have claimed to be “the one true right and only way” and have sought to

deny freedom to others and to suppress other ways of religious practices and belief.

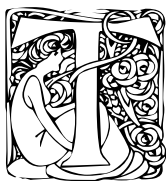
11. As American Witches, we are not threatened by debates on the history of the Craft, the origins of various terms, the legitimacy of various aspects of different traditions. We are concerned with our present, and our future.

12. We do not accept the concept of “absolute evil,” nor do we worship any entity known as “Satan” or “the Devil” as defined by Christian Tradition. We do not seek power through the suffering of others, nor do we accept the concept that personal benefits can only be derived by denial to another.

13. We work within nature for that which is contributory to our health and well-being.

*While Neopagan Witchcraft has no creeds that all must subscribe to, the above gives a good summation of what most Wiccans more-or-less agreed about as early as 1974. Compare it to my discussion in Chapter 12.*

## Appendix 5: Recommended Books on Ancient and Modern Witchcraft



The following books will get you started on understanding Paleopagan, Mesopagan and Neopagan Witchcraft. This topic is so complex that choosing titles and categories is extremely difficult, so remember that these are my current recommendations, not a list of “officially approved texts.”

### Paleopagan Europe: the Soil

*The Destiny of a King, The Plight of a Sorcerer, The Stakes of the Warrior, Archaic Roman Religion, Mitra-Varuna,* and others by Georges Dumézil. All worth reading if you want to know what pre-Christian European Paganism was really like.

*Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy,* by Mircea Eliade. This is the classic text on the topic, the one that made the term “shaman” well known before Carlos Castaneda, Michael Harner, and Lynne Andrews blurred it into uselessness. Why put it here? Because many modern Wiccans incorrectly believe that early witches were

shamans. I also highly recommend his three volume series, *A History of Religious Ideas*.

*The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Will Not Give Women a Future*, by Cynthia Eller. The Goddess doesn't need us to tell lies for Her. Eller analyses all the bits of the Universal Golden Matriarchal Age mythology and shows where they came from and why we can't believe them. She doesn't seem to be aware, however, that even the die-hards have been backpeddling recently.

*Proto-Indo-European Trees*, by Paul Friedrich. Primarily a linguistic monograph, this is the only book to cover in detail the various species of trees known to have had names in the PIE language. He includes a great deal of religious and symbolic detail without always realizing that he is doing so. The chapters on willows, elms, and oaks are most relevant for the history of witchcraft. Out of print but well worth hunting for.

*The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles, Their Nature and Legacy*, by Ronald Hutton. This is a brilliant review of the history, prehistory and pseudo-history of British Paleopaganism.

New from Ronald Hutton! *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination*. This will be a good book to read after Eliade's *Shamanism*.

*A History of Pagan Europe*, by Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick. Not as scholarly



as Hutton, yet certainly far better than the average work published on this topic. At least they don't include the common nonsense about universal matriarchies, unbroken lines of survival back to the Stone Age, etc. Their Baltic and Scandinavian materials may be a little shaky.

*The New Comparative Mythology, An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil*, by C. Scott Littleton. This is the best critical introduction to Dumézil's work, with an extensive bibliography of relevant books and articles by Dumézil and others. While others (including myself) have enlarged upon his theories, his views of common Indo-European cultural patterns (including religious beliefs, social classes, institutions and practices) were essentially sound and deserve careful study.

*The New Book of Goddesses & Heroines and O Mother Sun: A New View of the Cosmic Feminine*, by Patricia Monaghan. The first is a new edition of a classic work that is infinitely superior to many with similar titles. The second does an excellent job of showing that Sun Goddesses were just as common as Moon Goddesses to our Paleopagan ancestors. For many years, Monaghan was nearly alone as a feminist scholar who really is as committed to scholarship as she is to her feminism.

*Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*, by Alwyn & Brinley Rees. A

classic Dumézilian analysis of Celtic mythology and religion, based primarily on Irish and secondarily on Welsh materials. Gives an excellent overview of basic patterns of belief, showing how they reflected the social structures of the Celts — and *vice versa!* — and will explain much of the cosmology underlying real Celtic mythology and ritual (see *Druidism: A Concise Guide* for details).

*Pagan Celtic Britain*, by Anne Ross. This is a real classic! She covers the archeology and prehistory of Celtic Britain — “warts and all” — including a lot of stuff romantics would prefer be forgotten, yet with respect for the people involved.

*If you're wondering why most of this category is focused on Britain, it's because that's where modern Neopagan Witchcraft came from as well as where it claimed its roots were.*

### **Mesopagan Witchcraft: the Inquisition**

*The Inquisition: The Hammer of Heresy*, by Edward Burman. An historical overview of seven centuries of activity by the Unholy Office of the Inquisition. The author attempts to steer a middle path between various scholarly controversies. Remarkably, the “gentle” Franciscans get the blame they deserve, rather than just the Dominicans and the Jesuits.

*Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, by Stuart

Clark. A detailed analysis of how Christian Dualism promoted the ideas that eventually led to the great witch hunts.

*Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*, by Norman Cohn (revised edition). A classic work on the psychological and social origins of witch hunts. He covers the history of the ancient urban legend of baby eating, incestuous orgiasts revived by modern Christian Fundamentalists.

*The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, by Carlo Ginzburg. Yes, there really were people who thought they could fly through the air at night — only these folks did it to *fight* (what they thought were) witches. Then the Inquisition came along...

*Compendium Maleficarum*, by Francesco Maria Guazzo. This was the early seventeenth century successor to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, written by a man apparently just as gullible (or just as evil) as Kramer and Sprenger were.

*Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, by Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters [Editors]. When you actually read the documents of the times, you get a very different picture from both what we were taught in school and the current tales some Neopagans tell.

*The Malleus Maleficarum*, by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, [translated

with introduction, bibliography, and notes by Montague Summers]. This is an officially approved (the Papal *imprimatur* has never been rescinded) 1486 theological tome used by many inquisitors as “justification” for the atrocities committed against women, children, and men for the thought-crime of Gothic Witchcraft. There are Christians today who still accept their arguments and “evidence” of Satanic wrongdoing (though many would be shocked to know they were agreeing with Roman Catholic theology). Summers was a “Gnostic Catholic” priest and occultist who wrote credulous tomes about werewolves and vampires, and comments approvingly throughout his translation.

*The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*, by Rossell Hope Robbins. Even though he is a total cynic on the subject of magic, his book is one of the standards on the subject of Gothic Witchcraft and the Inquisition. He will tell you a great deal more than you really want to know about the torturing methods used against accused Gothic Witches.

*The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity*, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World*, all by Jeffrey Burton Russell. The author traces the “history” of the Christian Devil in exhausting

detail. If you're short on time, you might want to read his summing volume, *The Prince of Darkness*, instead.

### Mesopagan Witchcraft: the Seeds

*The Golden Bough*, by James Frazer (I prefer the Third Edition). One of the earliest and most influential works in the field of comparative mythology, at least as far as the English-speaking world was concerned. By the 1930s, most of his theories and interpretations were no longer accepted by social scientists, yet many of his core ideas became and remain a part, not just of Neopagan Witchcraft, but also of Western culture as a whole during the early part of the twentieth century.

*The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, by Robert Graves. While the history, comparative mythology, and Celtic Studies in this book are worthless, this book was one of the major sources of ideas for what was to become Mesopagan, then Neopagan Witchcraft. Unlike most of his other works, therefore, I can recommend it solely as an historical curiosity.

*Aradia: or the Gospel of the Witches – Expanded Edition*, by Charles Leland, translated by Mario (and Mama) Pazzaglini. A fresh translation of one of Gardner's main sources, with commentary by modern writers, some of them scholarly and some of

them not. Leland was a respected folklorist when he first published this work describing an underground Pagan cult in the mountains of Italy that had supposedly survived to his day (1899).

*The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, *The God of the Witches*, and *The Divine King in England*, all by Margaret Murray. Almost everything she had to say about the supposed survivals of Paleopagan cults into the Middle Ages (when their supposed members were persecuted as witches) has been thoroughly disproved by modern scholarship. Yet these are still important books with which modern Witches should become familiar.

### **Mesopagan Witchcraft: the Buds**

*A Goddess Arrives*, and *High Magic's Aid*, by Gerald Gardner. The first one is a (bad) novel, in which Gardner first explored ideas of reincarnation and goddess worship. The second is another novel in which he reveals much of his thinking during the years he was first creating Wicca. Both are now available in reprint editions from the Church & School of Wicca at <[www.wicca.org](http://www.wicca.org)> or from other online dealers.

*Witchcraft Today* and *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, by Gerald Gardner. The (officially) non-fiction books in which he revealed to the world that a secret underground religion of Pagan Witchcraft had survived into the

twentieth century, and what it was all about. Available in a special two book package with a CD of Gardner being interviewed and reciting incantations, from Mercury Publishing <[www.mercurypublishing.com](http://www.mercurypublishing.com)> or other on-line dealers.

*What Witches Do: the Modern Coven Revealed*, by Stewart Farrar. One of the first books published about the Alexandrian Tradition of Wicca, which at the time was 95% identical to Gardnerianism.

*Good Witch's Bible*, by Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Originally published as "*The*" *Witch's Bible*, it caused an uproar among American Wiccans because, among other crimes, it presented a form of Wicca that differed significantly from Gardner's. The authors claim that their form of Wicca comes from a British occult group that was competing with Gardner.

*The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, by Ronald Hutton. Tells how Wicca was created in the mid-twentieth century, based on literary, artistic, and academic fashions, the practices of fraternal orders and occult societies, old and new folk customs, and other cultural roots (real and imagined) going back to the 1700s. Hutton leaves no hope for those who wish to believe in a constantly existing Pagan religion in Britain or in a connection between the early modern witch trials and Paganism. *No one can claim to be knowledgeable about the*

*true history of modern Witchcraft who has not read and carefully studied this text.*

*Crafting the Art of Magic, Book I: A History of Modern Witchcraft, 1939-1964*, by Aidan Kelly. This is an excellent work of textual criticism of the key Gardnerian materials, showing where every line was borrowed or invented. Unfortunately, a constant stream of essentially pointless cheap shots at Gardner's sexuality mars what should have turned into a classic of religious history.

*The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, by Doreen Valiente. Her history of how she, Gardner, and a few friends created Wicca. Among other things, this is the book in which she finally took credit for her poetry and prose which many had been blithely calling "traditional" (and then plagiarizing).

### **Neopagan Witchcraft: the Twigs**

*The Tree: the Complete Book of Saxon Witchcraft*, by Raymond Buckland. The book in which the author invented Seax-Wicca, the first tradition of Wicca in which self-initiation was explicitly approved.

*The Truth about Witchcraft and Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, by Scott Cunningham. The first book is an excellent brief introduction to general Wicca, suitable for giving to worried friends and family. The second was the first widely distributed text on Wicca aimed at readers who had no coven



or prospects of having one. Very controversial when first published, but now recognized as a classic.

*The Witches' Goddess: The Feminine Principle of Divinity*, *The Witches' God: Lord of the Dance*, and *A Witches' Bible*, by Janet and Stuart Farrar. The first two books contain useful details about multiple deities and how their worship can be incorporated into Wiccan circles. The third is a rebinding of both *Eight Sabbats for Witches* and *The Witches' Way*, so it's a good introduction to the early orthodox Traditions of Wicca, with lots of fine ritual ideas.

*The Spiral Dance*, *Dreaming the Dark*, and *Truth or Dare*, by Starhawk. Starhawk was the first writer to discuss the political and social implications of Goddess worship in general and magic in particular. Unfortunately, she backed off from her radicalism as she began to sell to the New Age market.

*An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present* and *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, by Doreen Valiente. The first is a dictionary of sorts, used as a primary reference by many Wiccans during the 80s and 90s. The second presents her thoughts near the end of her life about Gerald Gardner, Wicca, and her role in the process of its creation (includes a lovely "Book of Shadows" section with prayers and ritual instructions).

## Neopagan Witchcraft: Some Flowers

*Deepening Witchcraft: Advancing Skills and Knowledge*, by Grey Cat. It's difficult to know what category to put this one in! An experienced Witch, Druid, and all-around troublemaker, Grey Cat provides a workbook/study guide/history for those Wiccan priests and priestesses ready to get serious about professionalism and competency in their Craft. When you don't know where to go to get the skills you need to serve your community, dig out this book, but be prepared — like my own writing, Grey Cat's is guaranteed to have something to offend nearly everybody!

*Wiccan Warrior: Walking a Spiritual Path in a Sometimes Hostile World*, by Kerr Cuchulain. A Pagan cop talks about what being a "warrior" means to him.

*Living Wicca: A Further Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, by Scott Cunningham. A sequel to his *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, this takes the individual Wiccan deeper into the Craft.

*Book of Shadows: A Modern Woman's Journey into the Wisdom of Witchcraft and the Magic of the Goddess*, by Phyllis Curott. The author was a high-powered corporate lawyer in New York City and a long-time member of the Covenant of the Goddess. Her book tells how she has managed to follow a spiritual

path seemingly a few centuries and several thousand miles away from her secular life.

*The Goddess Path: Myths, Invocations & Rituals* by Patricia Monaghan. The author of *The New Book of Goddesses & Heroines* presents a beautiful guide to contacting twenty different goddesses within, from cultures around the world. This is a spiritual workbook with questions and activities to be answered and performed by the reader.

*To Ride a Silver Broomstick: New Generation Witchcraft*, *To Stir a Magick Cauldron: A Witch's Guide to Casting and Conjuring*, and *To Light a Sacred Flame: Practical Witchcraft for the Millennium*, all by Silver RavenWolf. These books are among the clearest written for beginning and intermediate students of Wicca, although they do tend to be very “fluffy bunny” in their approach.

*When, Why ...If*, by Robin Wood. The famous Fantasy and Tarot artist provides an in-depth discussion of ethics from a Wiccan perspective. Readers may also enjoy her *Theory of Cat Gravity*, which explains many mystical matters that have long confused cat owners. Both books are available through her website at <[www.robinwood.com](http://www.robinwood.com)>

### Neopagan Witchcraft: the New Seeds

*Celebrating the Great Mother: A Handbook of Earth-Honoring Activities for Parents and Children*, by Cait Johnson and Maura D.

Shaw. Great ideas for sharing your reverence for the Earth with your children.

*Pagan Kids' Activity Book*, by Amber K. A coloring book for kids from 4 to 8, showing pictures of Pagan deities and worshipers.

*Pagan Parenting: Spiritual, Magical & Emotional Development of the Child*, by Kristin Madden. Shows how even the simplest of activities can bring magic to a child's soul.

*The Family Wicca Book: The Craft for Parents & Children*, by Ashleen O'Gaea. Down to earth advice on sharing the Wiccan religion with your children, parents, and other family members, whether you are an experienced or brand new Wiccan. Coming in October 2002: *Raising Witches: Teaching the Pagan Faith to Children*.

*Teen Witch: Wicca for a New Generation*, by Silver RavenWolf. Rather than bemoaning the current flood of teenagers interested in the Craft, the author prefers to empower them! In this best-selling title, she tells teens — and their parents — what they want and need to know about Wicca.

*Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions*, by Starhawk, Diane Baker, and Anne Hill. Ways to teach children an Earth-centered spirituality, using songs, stories, and simple rites.

---

**Spiral Scouts** <[www.SpiralScouts.org](http://www.SpiralScouts.org)> are a non-sexist, non-homophobic scouting program for Neopagan girls and boys, as well as members of other minority faiths and lifestyles.

## Neopagan Witchcraft: the Botanists

*Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today, Third Edition*, by Margot Adler. This is the latest edition of the classic book about the Neopagan movement in America — a book that galvanized the very community it was describing and changed it forever. *Every member of the Neopagan, Wiccan, and/or Goddess Worship movements in the USA should own this book* — at least if they want to understand our history since 1960. Note, however, that the “present tense” discussions of specific organizations and some other topics have inevitably become somewhat dated.

*A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States*, by Helen A. Berger. A look at the evolution and growth of Wicca in the U.S. over the last three decades.

*Witchcraft & Paganism in Australia*, by Lynne Hume. A scholar from Down Under describes the history of Australian Wicca and the ways in which it has adapted to a very non-European environment.

*Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, by James R. Lewis [Editor]. An anthology of essays by scholars, some of them within the Neopagan community, others complete outsiders.

*Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, by T. M. Luhrman. An anthropologist's "participant observation" research into the structures, personalities, beliefs, relationships, and concerns in some British covens. Highly educational for anthropologists and other social scientists, especially about the ethical and emotional conflicts inherent in pretending to join a religious community.

*Never Again the Burning Times: Paganism Revived*, by Loretta Orion. A sociological examination of U.S. Neopagans, built around a survey the author distributed at a number of Pagan festivals. Some interesting and intriguing insights into what makes Neopagans who and what we are.

### **Neopagan Witchcraft: Holy Days**

*Eight Sabbats for Witches*, by Stewart Farrar. The first book published that attempted to provide not just ritual scripts but a rationale for the eight-holiday system Gardner and friends adopted — and it wasn't easy! Also available bound as part of *A Witches' Bible* with *The Witches' Way*.

*Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* and *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700*, by Ronald Hutton. Like his other titles, these will shock and surprise those of us who thought we knew all about Pagan holidays.

*The Pagan Book of Days: A Guide to the Festivals, Traditions, and Sacred Days of the Year*, by Nigel Pennick. Discusses mostly European holidays and explains the astronomical and seasonal origins of most of them.

### **Neopagan Witchcraft: the Rite Stuff**

*Real Magic: An Introductory Treatise on the Basic Principles of Yellow Magic*, by Isaac Bonewits. Though somewhat dated, this is the book that thousands of Wiccan teachers have used to train their students for thirty years.

*The Healing Craft: Healing Practices for Witches and Pagans*, by Janet and Stuart Farrar and Gavin Bone. The first Wiccan book I've seen specifically focused on the techniques and theories of healing body, mind and spirit. An excellent resource.

*The Witch's Magical Handbook and Tantric Yoga: The Royal Path to Raising Kundalini Power*, by Gavin and Yvonne Frost. The first is a compendium of their unusual and fascinating approach to practical magic. For those who want to try actually doing Witchcraft as Gardner originally intended it to be done, the second book is another of the Frosts' clearheaded guides to an overly mystified topic.

*The Pagan Book of Living and Dying: Practical Rituals, Prayers, Blessings, and Meditations on Crossing Over*, by Starhawk and

several others. Tools to help yourself or someone else die well.

*Advanced Wicca: Exploring Deeper Levels of Spiritual Skills and Masterful Magick* and *The Wiccan Book of Ceremonies and Rituals*, both by Patricia Telesco. These both go beyond the usual “Ritual 101” books and are well worth adding to any Wiccan library.

### Neopagan Witchcraft: Reference Books and Anthologies

*The Modern Craft Movement (Witchcraft Today, Book 1)*, *Modern Rites of Passage (Book 2)*, *Shamanism and Witchcraft (Book 3)*, and *Living Between Two Worlds: Challenges of the Modern Witch (Book 4)* All edited by Chas Clifton. This series of anthologies is excellent, containing essays by both Pagans and non-Pagans of widely varied scholarship.

*Witchcraft, Satanism & Occult Crime: Who’s Who & What’s What, a Manual of Reference Materials for the Professional Investigator*, by the Church of All Worlds’ Staff. An inexpensive yet invaluable tool for those concerned about “occult crime” and whether the neighborhood Pagans might be involved in “something terrible.” Can be bought from the Church of All Worlds <[www.caw.org](http://www.caw.org)>. Give one to your local law enforcement agency.

*The Circle Guide to Pagan Groups*, by Circle Sanctuary (see Appendix 6). Lists Wiccan



and other Neopagan groups, primarily in the U.S. and Canada.

*The Law Enforcement Guide To Wicca*, by Kerr Cuchulain. A manual written by a Canadian Neopagan police officer for his colleagues. This is the other title to give to your local Police.

*Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft, Second Edition*, by Rosemary Ellen Guile. The latest revision to a solid work of general education (except that she seems a little too trusting of the tales some folks tell her about their origins).

*Being a Pagan: Druids, Wiccans and Witches Today*, by Ellen Evert Hopman and Lawrence Bond. This book of interviews is an excellent introduction to current thinking in the Neopagan community. Of course, I may be biased because Druids in general (and myself in particular) are interviewed first — a real change from the usual emphasis on Wicca. Wiccans are, however, inevitably the primary focus. Previously published as *People of the Earth: The New Pagans Speak Out*.

*Modern Pagans: An Investigation of Contemporary Pagan Practices*, V. Vale and John Sulak. This is another excellent book of interviews with British and American Neopagans, both famous and obscure. Look here to find dozens of pictures — including baby pictures! — of myself and other Neopagans.

## Historical Overviews

*History – Remembered, Recovered, Invented*, Bernard Lewis. A brief introduction to the ways in which people filter history through their personal and cultural needs, fears, and wishes, even when they're trying to be unbiased. Out of print, but well worth hunting for.

*The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*, by Diane Purkiss. A feminist historian who doesn't allow her justified anger over historical atrocities against women to lead her into playing fast and loose with the facts, as she discusses all the different ways in which the image of the witch has been viewed in recent centuries.

*A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans*, by Jeffrey B. Russell. An excellent overview, biased a bit by the author's career focus on dualist heresies and the history of the Christian Devil.

*You will notice that there are very few books here from the Feminist Craft (other than Starhawk's and Patricia Monaghan's) or various supposed Hereditary Traditions of Witchcraft. That's because most of them have been of very poor quality over the years, as far as scholarship, logic, evidence of claims, or magical technique are concerned. However, some other good books have no doubt been overlooked, including some by friends and colleagues, so I will add them in future editions if people will politely bring them to my attention.*

## Appendix 6: On and Offline Wiccan Resources

### Networking Sites



**he Witches' Voice** can be found on the Net at [www.witchvox.com](http://www.witchvox.com). It has the world's largest existing database of Wiccan and other Neopagan contacts, as well as a huge library of articles and essays about Neopagan Witchcraft and other Pagan paths, plus a section designed for the needs of professional journalists.

**America Online** [www.aol.com](http://www.aol.com) has a very lively and active Neopagan community (many of whom are Wiccans), with chat rooms, libraries of text and graphics files, and message boards. Use the Keyword "Pagan" to access these.

There are over 2,500 Wiccan and other Pagan e-lists/groups, running from half a dozen members to 1,000+, of wildly varying knowledge at **Yahoo Groups** [www.yahogroups.com](http://www.yahogroups.com).

There are over twenty Wiccan and other Pagan "communities" that can be found on **MSN Communities** <http://communities.msn.com/>. These are like the older "BBSs" of the '80s & '90s.

### Group Sites

The **Aquarian Tabernacle Church** has its website at [www.AquaTabCh.org](http://www.AquaTabCh.org). This is one of the largest Wiccan churches in the world, with legal recognition in the U.S.A. and other countries. ATC provides a legal "umbrella" for qualifying covens desiring legal and tax-exempt status. Their email address is [atc@aquatabch.org](mailto:atc@aquatabch.org). They can be reached offline at: Box 409, Index, WA, USA 98258.

The **Church and School of Wicca**, run by Wiccan authors Gavin and Yvonne Frost, has their website at <[www.wicca.org/](http://www.wicca.org/)>. The Frosts offer correspondence courses, books, videos, annual get-togethers, etc. related to Frostian Wicca. Their email address is <[school@citynet.net](mailto:school@citynet.net)>. They can be written to via Box 297, Hinton, WV, USA 25951.

**Circle Sanctuary** can be found on the Net at <[www.circlesanctuary.org](http://www.circlesanctuary.org)>. It is “a non-profit Nature Spirituality center serving Wiccan, Shamanic, Goddess, Druidic, Celtic Mystic, and other Pagan folk worldwide.” It publishes the *Circle Guide to Pagan Groups* and *Circle Magazine*, both of which are major networking tools. Email: <[circle@mhtc.net](mailto:circle@mhtc.net)>. They can be written to via: Box 219, Mt. Horeb, WI, USA 53572.

The **Covenant of the Goddess** or “**COG**” at <[www.cog.org](http://www.cog.org)> is “an international organization of cooperating, autonomous Wiccan congregations and solitary practitioners.” They provide 501(c) (3) tax-exempt status as branch congregations to qualifying covens, as well as educational materials and advice to Wiccans dealing with the media. Their email address is <[info@cog.org](mailto:info@cog.org)>. Write to them via: Box 1226, Berkeley, CA, USA 94701.

I should also list **my own website**, which is <[www.neopagan.net](http://www.neopagan.net)>. While not focused on Wicca, it does contain articles and information of general Neopagan, Druidic, and magical interest.

There are also many online and offline newsletters, magazines, and journals of Neopaganism and Witchcraft, which may be found in your local esoteric, occult or New Age store, as well as tracked down through the websites listed above.

*These facts were good as of June 2002. These are mostly institutions that have been around for many years and are likely to remain so. If one of the above urls/addresses fails, search for current ones via major web search sites.*

## Appendix 7: Reconciling with the Moon

by Ashleen O'Gaia

*I asked Ashleen if I could include her review of Hutton's work in this edition of *Witchcraft: A Concise Guide*, not only because I agree with almost everything she says, but also because much of what she says about the need for Wiccans to accept and take pride in our true history applies to my research as well. [Words in square brackets are mine.]*



Donald Hutton, a Professor of History at the University of Bristol, has written a book called *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. The book is well researched, clearly and cogently presented, encouraging, and respectful. It's important for all those (and other) reasons — *and* because it will be devastating to some of us.

The friend who recommended that I read this book told me, “it blows everything out of the water.” I listened, stunned, as he explained that Hutton debunks all our myths; and when I started reading it, I reacted with the anger my friend had predicted. From etymology to events, Hutton deconstructs our history.

No, he says, Wicca wasn't handed down in secret through persecuted generations. This bit came from Masonic ritual, that from ceremonial magic, and the other from the Romantic poets or the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry. The genealogy he uncovers for modern Wicca is not disinteresting or dishonorable, just very dramatically different from the history most of us take for granted. But "Triumph of the Moon" is not a cynical or sarcastic title, and Hutton hasn't left us for dead. The more I refer to it, the better I like it; I hope to convince you not only to read it, but to see it as more hope and glory than gloom and doom.

Hutton calls it to our attention in his Preface that this "claims to be *a* history and not *the* history." He describes his work as:

...the first systematic attempt by a professional historian to characterize and account for this aspect of modern Western culture. As such it is an exploratory and tentative work, intended as an initial mapping out of an area which badly needs and deserves serious treatment by more scholars... In *Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, I took notice of the fact that Pagan religions existed in the modern British Isles, which sometimes claimed to represent an unbroken continuity of those who were

my principle subject. Virtually all academic scholars of ancient Paganism until that time had either ignored them (or in the case of Druids) cursorily dismissed them. My own book came down heavily against the claim of continuity, and, indeed, the notion that modern Paganisms had very much in common with those of the ancient world. On the other hand, I also formed the opinion that they were perfectly viable modern religions in their own right.

He then began to wonder “where, when, and why they had in fact arisen, if they had not survived continuously.” *The Triumph of the Moon* lays out the answers he’s found to those questions.

In the backs of our minds at least, most of us have known three things for a while. One, our emotional dependence on Wicca’s being an ancient religion reflects a patriarchal standard that is both inappropriate to our cosmology and beneath our dignity to accept. Two, Margaret Murray’s and Sir James Frazer’s scholarship proves to be inadequate by today’s standards. Three, “Gardner made it all up.”

Writers like Bonewits and Kelly have been telling us so for some time, but because Bonewits wasn’t [known to be] Wiccan and Kelly was “out to discredit Gardner,” it was

relatively easy to table their work, or ignore it, or deny it. Many of us took various related professional and scholarly debates to be fueled as much by conservatism and sexism as anything else.

Hutton's different, though. He's got a decent academic reputation, he's an expert in relevant fields, and he had access to primary sources. Just as important, however, is that he has no axe to grind, no point to prove. Throughout *Triumph* he is respectful of Wicca and consistently treats it as the real and legitimate religion it is. There is even a subtle undercurrent, I think, of excitement about Wicca's documentable history. We can't refuse to take Hutton seriously, and we can't ignore his challenge to Wicca's traditional history.

We must at last, however regretfully, consciously acknowledge that our beloved Medieval Witchcraft — the peasants' generations of proto-Wicca that disappeared into secret, sacred woods and hills while the Inquisition raged across the land, barely surviving till Gardner gave it public life again — never existed. Contrary to the slogan that Bonewits coined, "Never again the Burning," the truth seems to be "Never even once the Burning." As Hutton says, "[It is] established beyond any reasonable doubt that there was no long-lasting or wide-ranging persecution of witches in early modern Europe..." [although, it depends on your



definitions of all the words in that sentence].

Gardner, of course, didn't know that — he and most of his contemporaries accepted Murray's and Frazier's interpretation. It was "common knowledge" in his day that ancient Pagan religions survived the Inquisition by going underground, that those Pagan religions had been matriarchal, worshipping a Great Mother and Her horned consort, and that folk-tales represented memories of those ancient rites and ways. When Gardner developed Wicca, he sincerely understood himself to be redeveloping and restoring it. Those elements he knew not to be literally true he felt were spiritually, symbolically, or poetically true. I think he was right.

"It should be said that there is nothing inherently implausible in Gardner's claim to have been initiated into an existing religion," Hutton admits. But how much of himself Gardner put into the history of the New Forest coven is, I think, not the most significant aspect of the new truth Hutton tells us. In fact, my estimation of Gardner is rising as I see the magnitude of his accomplishment in Hutton's brighter light.

Once, the lack of evidence for ancestral Wicca's survival seemed reasonable: what evidence would a secret cult leave? But as Hutton says,

[S]tudies of heterodoxy in the period [1400–1800] have revealed that it is possible to track even tiny and secretive sects through the centuries, both through their own private papers and literature and the observations of outsiders, whether neighbors or local or central authorities. This is true even of the sixteenth century, let alone the seventeenth, when the breakdown of central controls during the Civil War allowed sectarian groups to flourish...

Gardner didn't have to address this new scholarship; but we do [see my comments about the *maranos* in Chapter 5].

By the early 1900s, Hutton's research suggests, British culture had been articulating a need for Pagan energy for about 100 years. Romantic poets from the mid-1800s on had been rhapsodizing about the English countryside as a last bastion of peace and quiet, and natural pleasures and transactions — a haven against the clogged and polluted urban centers which demoralized humanity. The "Merry England" movement was in full swing (and hasn't slacked off much since), and Christianity, along with attendant hierarchies and parallel authorities, was under attack from the arts and sciences.

In the process of laying all this out for us, Hutton does show that most of Wicca's

history is, in fact, a myth. But story breaking isn't his intent, and Wiccan readers need to stop the habit of responding defensively to new information. Never mind that there's still a scholarly debate over the origin and meaning of several of "our words," including "witch;" as Dr. M. Scott Peck reminds us in *The Different Drum*, everything is overdetermined (has more than one cause or origin). One of the roots of witch means "bend or shape," and I see no reason to give that up when it's worked so well so far. Thus, I propose to do a little bending and shaping here — not of the facts as we now must admit them, but of our approach and interpretation of them. Here's the story I "hear" in Hutton's work:

In the time before time, the Great Mother and Her horned Consort were worshiped universally, in various rites around the world. When Christianity emerged, there was a short period of "peaceful" co-existence, then a period of struggle, and — here's the part I'm getting from Hutton — then Paganism was pretty effectively wiped out. We can guess there must've been *something* going on as late as the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries, when laws against specific Pagan practices were still being written, but there's no evidence for survival after that.

Hutton's previous works, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isle*, *Stations of the Sun*, and *The Rise and Fall of Merry*

*England* all showed that modern Paganism hasn't much in common with the ancient style, and we may tend to bristle about that, but we don't need to. Any organized Paganism, with its personal responsibility (authority as well as accountability), and parity for women, was gone by the time the Inquisition was declared. About 40–50,000 people were executed for “witchcraft,” one of many heresies the Church opposed, and none of them were “us.”

But... but...

I think what happened is that Christianity did take over, had hundreds of years to make its best case, and was eventually found lacking in several respects. There were some consequences of the Inquisition years to deal with. There was a huge redistribution of wealth following the plagues' decimations of the population. An economic middle class gradually developed, and so did the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. All these changes kept things stirred up for a few centuries. But once the dust settled, people began to realize that the extant theology left something to be desired. Specifically, it left a *Goddess* to be desired

This desire was ever more specifically and insistently articulated in the 150 or so years before Gardner's lifetime. Reading Hutton, it's clear that the arts and social sciences — proper voices to declare longings of the heart, don't you think? — had been

preparing British culture for a restoration of a natural relationship to God(s). The Romantic poets' work was full of fair countryside peopled by wise men and wise women who knew the ancient lore of healing, and villagers who kept the old ways still.

The Industrial Revolution's developing social and political institutions were as intrusive and overbearing as the Church, and drove more and more people to Pagan country idylls and havens, real or imagined. Freudian and Jungian psychology had an effect. The far-reaching effects of colonialism were factors. Leland's *Aradia*, which he and many others wholly believed was evidence for Murray's and Frazier's theories, had an effect. Pan and Diana were still there — one only had to seek them out or, maybe, draw them out from within.

Typically of his underlying attitude toward points of Wiccan theology, Hutton puts it this way as he closes his third chapter:

...I am not necessarily suggesting that the deities themselves are in fact imaginary. Much of the tone of the past two chapters may be taken to imply that they are nothing more than projections — even if passionate projections — of the human heart and mind. This may well be so. It may equally well be true, however, that

human belief has actually given them life, or else that they have always existed and have been perceived anew because people now have need of them. These are questions which no historian — indeed no human — can resolve, and the functional nature of my idiom should not be allowed to obscure that fact.

What this book has shown me is that Gardner didn't "make it up" so much as he restored something he believed to have survived by the skin of its teeth. He might even have been an Avatar [a human who incarnates a deity]. Hutton might agree. "In religious terms, it might be said that he was contacted by a divine force which had been manifesting with increasing strength during the previous two hundred years, and that it worked through him to remarkable effect," he says in his chapter about Gardner.

The now-we-know-it's-a myth that Murray and Frazier boosted and several cultural pillars supported is still a precious story, and has a lot of life left in it. If the life it has comes from our belief, and us, we have both the right and the responsibility to understand that lineage as successful magic, or even a miracle, and not a calamity.

Remember the movie *E.T.* and the scene where the space-suited scientists took over the house? That sequence was shot from a

really low angle so that the scientists would look as scary to the audience as they did to young Henry. “Our” story about the Medieval Witches (Charlie Murphy’s “The Burning Times” is still a Wiccan anthem) turns out to be told from the same low angle, and it expresses the same sort of psycho-emotional truth as that scene in *E.T.* — *It’s not a lie, it’s a perspective.* We don’t have to stop telling this story, we just have to start hearing it differently.

At the same time, we can be proud of a new story: we really are “the Witches, back from the dead,” as one of the lines asserts in “We Are the Flow, We Are the Ebb,” a popular Pagan chant. What Paganism there was, was literally killed, and was so sorely grieved and missed that it had to be brought back. Hutton catalogues a growing longing for Her through the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and makes it as plain as your cat’s nudges for attention. If no one else but Gardner could have revived it, then we should be even more impressed with the synchronicity [and his genius].

Wicca’s still growing, and not just because everybody likes the pointy hats so well. Wicca is growing because the theology and cosmology makes sense to people. If there were no Wiccan-style witches before (about) 1950, well, it’s their loss! Fascinating details, interesting new connections, appreciation of a well-written book, and

the value of knowledge for its own sake aside, Hutton's book, like Bonewits', doesn't have to be devastating at all. It can, in fact, boost our energy considerably.

Both authors hope their work will inspire more research — and it should; there's no lack of threads to follow. Not having to maintain an allegiance to the literal truth of the medieval underground Witchcraft story frees us to uncover more of our real history, and to understand our mythic history in new ways.

And, listen to this! In another few hundred years, say by the next millennium, *our Wicca will be ancient*. That means that what we're doing today is establishing Wicca's ancient traditions. None of us, not once we've read Hutton, anyway, can think we are just "following" this religion. We are all reviving and creating this religion, still making its history. We are our own "ancestors in faith."

It's really even more exciting when you think of this line from the *Charge of the Goddess*: "...for if that which you seek you do not find within yourself, you shall surely never find it without." Well, we've now found that it *was* within ourselves before we found it without (and that's true about the way many of us came to Wicca, too). We find it without because we



create it from within. Could it be more fitting that this is how Wicca emerged?

Hutton considers Wicca's legitimacy as a full-fledged religion, too, and his discussion of Wicca in a beautifully named chapter, "Grandchildren of the Shadows," is a pleasure to read. It's good to see how close American and British Wicca really are, when the differences tend to get the emphasis; and we all need reminding now and again of the enormous progress we've made since 1950. He reviews the categories of religion presently recognized — cult, sect, new religious movement, native religion, nature religion, post-modern religion — and Wicca, he thinks, fits easily into none of these categories.

A new classification might be proposed here, of 'revived religion.' This is the only one ... which truly does justice to what is arguably the central and enduring characteristic of Pagan Witchcraft; that it is a modern development which deliberately draws upon ancient images and ideas for contemporary needs, as part of a wholesale rejection of the faiths which have been dominant since the ancient ways of worship were suppressed.

The true conceptual significance of Paganism, including Pagan Witchcraft [he concludes], is that it occupies the ground at which nature religion, post-modern religion, and revived religion intersect. None of these is a religious model which scholars trained in traditional history, theology, sociology, and anthropology find easy to understand; which is probably why, although Pagan Witchcraft has had a prominent public profile in Britain for half a century, it has been much less studied than other religious movements which have appeared or arrived more recently. Perhaps the present book will do something to alter that pattern.”

Let's be true to our history, live our myth, and take a hand in the alterations. Read Hutton's book, and let it change the pattern of your thought about Wicca and its history. Let *Triumph's* microhistories intrigue and delight you; let Hutton's references fill your reading list for summers to come! Go beyond the standard hagiographies and get to know the founders of our faith as the very human men and women they were — and let yourself be awed as you try to imagine doing the work they did! We may deeply mourn the crossing of

our underground ancestors to the realms of myth, yet through this loss we can still rely on Her promise of “peace, freedom, and reunion with those who have gone before.” This contingency has been provided for: “...to be reborn, you must die, and to die you must be born, and without love you may not be born; and this is all the magic.”

Hutton’s not rewriting our theology, and our beliefs do not depend on the literal truth of our myths. Be at peace in the knowledge that though Pagan sites and rites may have been overcome, the Goddess did not die, nor did people’s need for Goddess. On the contrary, people’s love for Her was so great that it brought Her Witches (that’s us!) back from the dead. Goddess is alive and magic is afoot — embrace this new freedom to explore other aspects of Wiccan myth and liturgy. (Our mythical ancestors are free now too, from our narrow imaginings, to join us in more thorough explorations of the inner realms.) And we can merrier meet our historical forebears again, with a renewed and extended appreciation of their achievements.

One of Starhawk’s best-known contributions to Wiccan liturgy is the chant, “She changes everything She touches, and everything She touches changes.” Bearing in mind the obvious implication

of Starhawk's chant that if you're not changing, She's not touching you, read Hutton's book and adjust yourself to the new reality. Read what the Goddess has written in your aura and on your soul, and be reconciled with the Moon.

"Reconciling with the Moon" was first published in *Circle Magazine*, Summer 2001, © 2001 by Ashleen O'Gaea.

## Afterward: A Few Last Thoughts



It's only fair to mention that this book is still very much a "work in progress." That's so for (of course) three reasons: Firstly, because I've been writing it for thirty years... When the idea was first suggested to me to publish an anthology of excerpts from the hundreds of pages I had slowly written for my "Grand History of Witchcraft," some of which I had published on my website, I knew that my toughest task would be deciding which parts to include and which to leave for the greater work.

Secondly, because I can never refrain from adding just a little bit more information, or fixing a few more typos, or updating a couple more book references, whenever I take a work into another edition. *Witchcraft: A Concise Guide* is the first "treebook" publication, but is the third edition of the original *Concise History*, which was first released as an ebook. In making the third edition, the text nearly doubled in size. This is really a "version 3.1" edition, since we decided to use it to inaugurate the Earth Religions Press imprint after difficulties with the first printer seriously delayed its earlier release.

Thirdly, and most importantly, this is still a work in progress because that's what Witchcraft is. What Wicca will become in the next few decades will depend upon what the myriads of new Wiccans hear the Goddess saying to them in the depths of their hearts; on whether the "invading hordes" of teen Witches are willing to listen to the real wisdom of their elders in the Craft while forgiving our occasional nonsense; and on whether those elders are willing to open their circles to the influx of enthusiastic "kids" who may have more energy than sense, but who love the Goddess as much as we do.

I believe that Neopaganism in general, and Wicca in particular, are just beginning a period of fabulous growth and influence. So we'd better do it right (and rite!) making sure to keep this a healthy and sane alternative to the dinosaurs of dualistic dogma dying all around us. How can we safely do this without losing our way in the woods? The Goddess already told us how:

Let my worship be within the heart that rejoices; for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.

And therefore, let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you.

So mote it be.

Isaac Bonewits  
Midsummer  
2002 C.E.

## *About the Author:*

Isaac Bonewits is North America's leading expert on ancient and modern Druidism, Witchcraft, and the rapidly growing Earth Religions movement. A practicing Neopagan priest, scholar, teacher, bard, and polytheologist for over thirty years, he has coined much of the vocabulary and articulated many of the issues that have shaped the rapidly growing Neopagan community, with opinions both playful and controversial.

As an author, a singer-songwriter, and a "spell-binding" speaker, he has educated, enlightened and entertained two generations of modern Goddess worshippers, nature mystics, and followers of other minority belief systems, and has explained these movements to journalists, law enforcement officers, college students, and academic researchers.

What reviewers have said about  
*Witchcraft: A Concise Guide*:

It has all of the clarity, energy, wit, and erudition to which I am accustomed in the rest of his work, and I am sure that it will now take its place in the canon of essential reading for American Pagans.

Prof. Ronald Hutton, Univ. of Bristol  
Author, *Triumph of the Moon*

This is clearly some of the best work we've seen in years and we are honored to call Isaac "one of our own."

Fritz Jung, The Witches' Voice  
[www.witchvox.com](http://www.witchvox.com)

Whatever your spiritual path, if you want to know the truth about the Burning Times and are interested in this new spirituality, this book is for you.

Gavin and Yvonne Frost  
Authors, *A Good Witch's Bible*

You will seldom find a more terse, cogent, and readable work on contemporary Wicca.

Phaedra Oorbeck, Vice President  
Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans

Fabulous — an intriguing way to begin research on witchcraft.

*PanGaia* magazine