

The Little Book of Witchcraft

Leo Ruickbie

Based on Leo Ruickbie's *Witchcraft Out of the Shadows: A Complete History* (Robert Hale, 2004)

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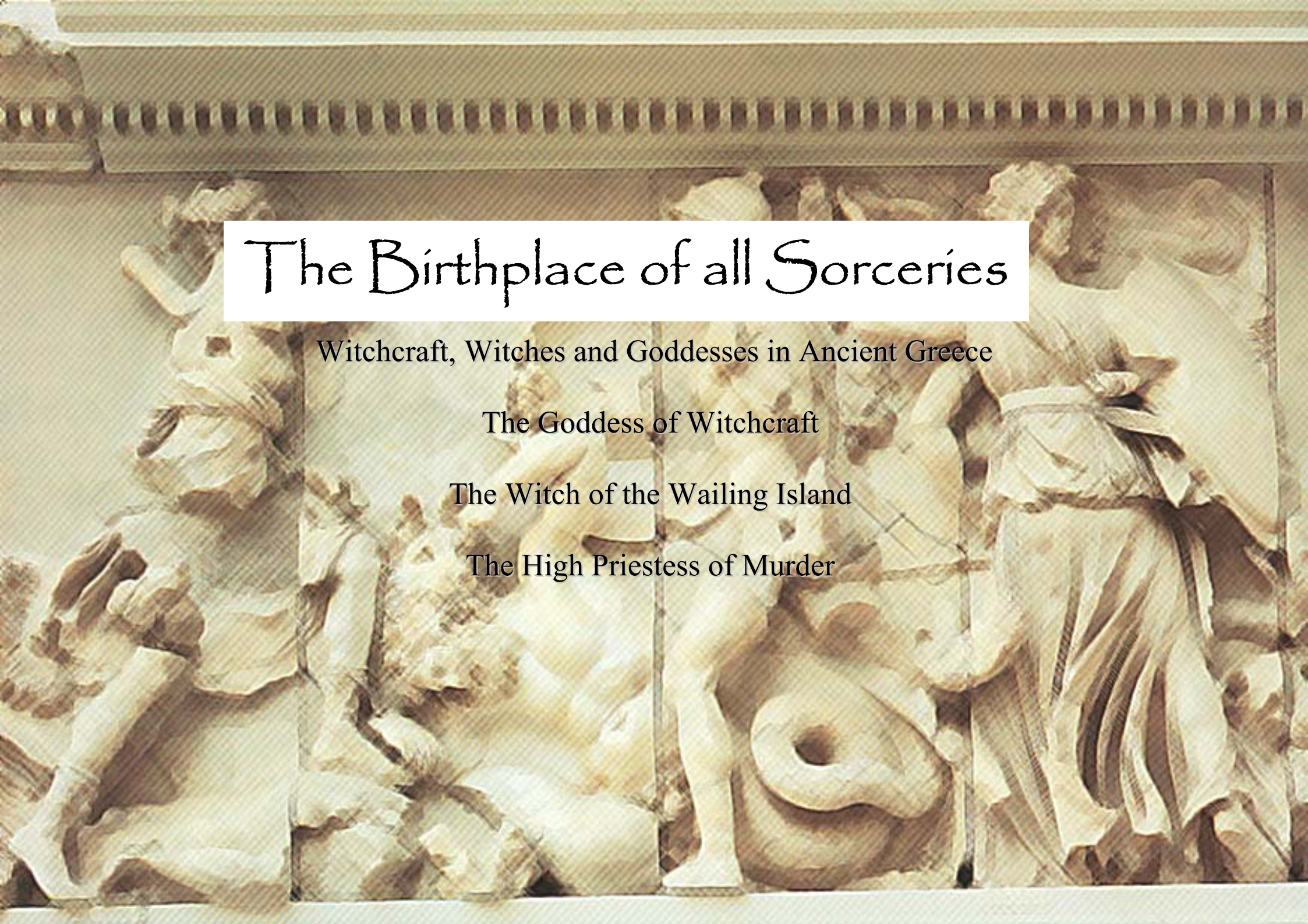
Part 1. Age of Shadows

The Early History of Witchcraft in Europe

The Birthplace of All Sorceries: Witchcraft in Ancient Greece

East of Midgard: Witchcraft in Northern Europe

South of Heaven: Witchcraft in Mediaeval & Early Modern Europe



The Birthplace of all Sorceries

Witchcraft, Witches and Goddesses in Ancient Greece

The Goddess of Witchcraft

The Witch of the Wailing Island

The High Priestess of Murder

Witchcraft has no origin, it has always been with us. Yet like the roots of our very civilisation itself we can trace where it has come from and how it has developed over the millennia. And as with our civilisation so too do our ideas of witchcraft find their most identifiable beginnings in Ancient Greece.

Magic was not the preserve of women in the ancient world, but in the tales of the heroes, warriors who preferred the drawn sword to the wand, the magic-users they encountered were almost always women—an arrangement greatly enjoyed by Odysseus, though the ruin of Jason. Nor was magic the preserve of goddesses: Hermes was the greatest magician amongst the Olympians. Yet it is a goddess who has become most closely associated with Witchcraft: Hecate, ‘she who works her will.’

Circe: the marooned goddess who turns men into animals and rules them with her wand, a terrifying temptress who knows the abominable secrets of necromancy, this witch of the Wailing Island is yet a teacher of magic arts and the initiatrix of heroes. Her complex character embodies the ambivalence of the Hecatean witch-priestess and pre-figures the separation of black and white witch.

Medea: she knew every form of murder—parricide, regicide, infanticide—and every way of doing it. Yet the High Priestess of Murder is the driving force in one of the greatest myths ever told and a dramatic portrayal of the power of lust and the pain of betrayal. Her story is a Greek witchcraft tragedy.

East of Midgard

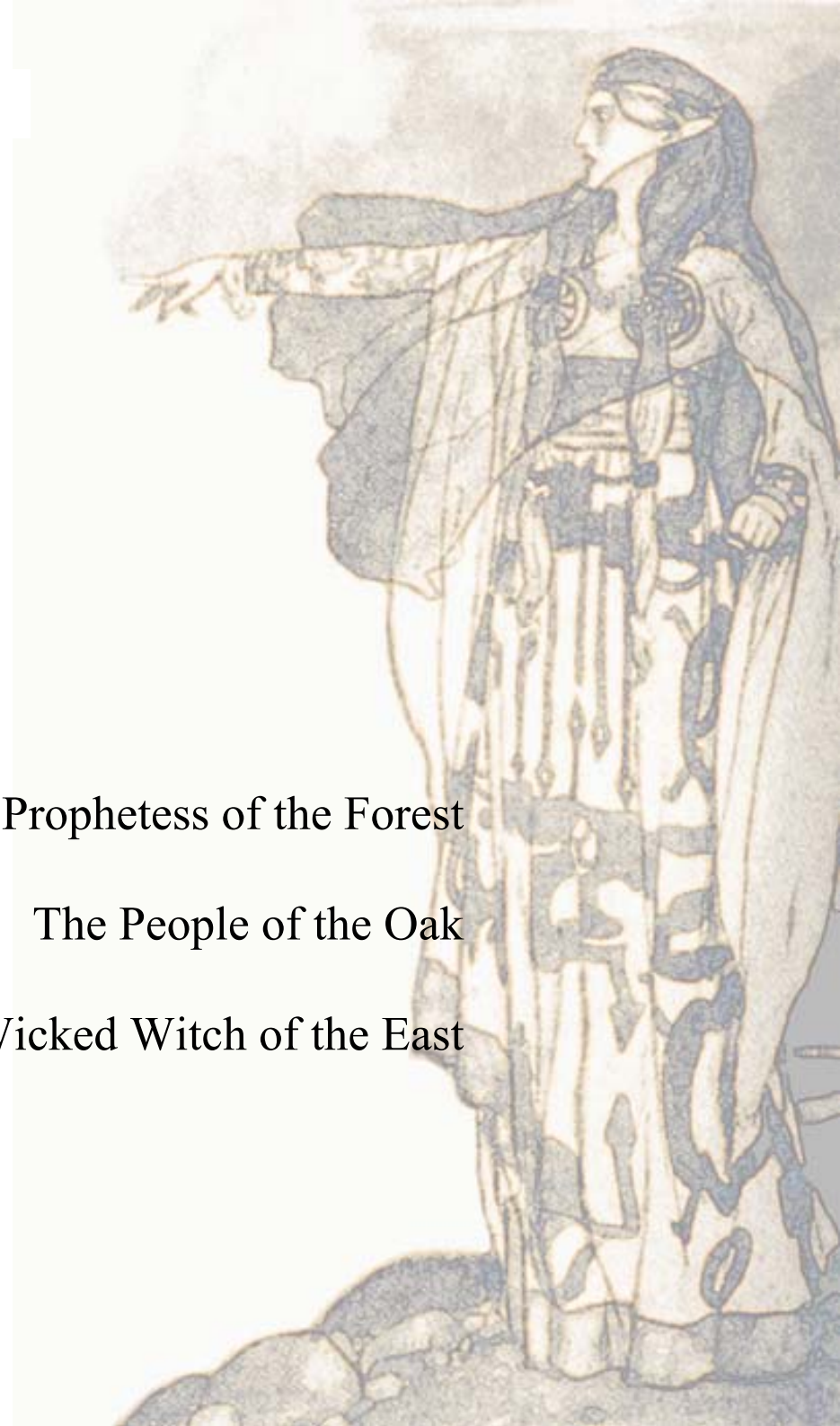
Witchcraft, Magic and Religion

amongst the Pagan Tribes of Northern Europe

The Prophetess of the Forest

The People of the Oak

The Wicked Witch of the East



In the mythological imagination of the Northern Europeans, East of Midgard was their very own ‘Birthplace of All Sorceries,’ the home of the greatest and most feared Witch, Angerbode. Encircled by impassable mountains and trackless forests, the peoples of Northern Europe held Witchcraft dear, both as the font of wisdom and the scapegoat of disaster.

The Prophetess of the Forest: the warrior tribes of the northern forests believed their women were endowed with prophetic powers. And what was persecuted as witchcraft by Christianity was celebrated as natural by the Pagan peoples of Europe. But even before Christianity's corrupting effect, religious differences between Pagan Rome and the rest of Europe would lead to bloody slaughter.

In Gaelic Druid means “knowing the oak,” for the priests of the Celtic tribes kept the sacred oak groves and harvested the miraculous mistletoe that twinned itself about the trees. Within the grove the Druids held court, administering justice, foretelling the future of the tribe and negotiating with the gods on their behalf.

The Wicked Witch of the East: Lodfafner describes a figure familiar to us, like Shakespeare's "midnight hags" in *Macbeth*, or the Wicked Witch of the West in the *Wizard of Oz*, Angerbode is the personification of evil, which must, perforce, be ugly and old. She inhabits a place beyond the world of the ordinary (Midgard, the middle garden, is the home of man), a fantastic region where nature is forged from the swordsmith's deadly metal, and consorts with the demonic enemies of the gods and mankind.

Catskin clad, singing the Warlock Song, seething her enchantments in a cauldron and working magic against the sun, under the cloak and riding the chant; faring forth as a trampling fiend, flying on fence-rail and broomstick in the Wild Hunt with Holler, such was the ‘witch’ from East of Midgard. The Pagan *seið-kona* was the blueprint for the Christian witch; and the fear of the Witches’ Wild Hunt would become the basis for the unstinting Witch Hunt that would ravage Europe.

The background of the slide is a painting of a winged cherub or angel. The cherub is depicted in a dynamic, almost dancing pose, holding a hammer. The sky is filled with swirling, ethereal patterns in shades of blue and white, set against a reddish-brown background. In the lower part of the image, the top of a building with arched windows is visible. The overall style is reminiscent of a classical or Baroque painting.

South of Heaven

Witchcraft in Medieval
and Early Modern Europe

The Yoke of the Gospel

The Witchcraft Heresy

The Hammer of the Witches

When Shall We Three Meet Again?

The Witches of the European Dark Ages come flying towards us out of the past's stygian mire in a wild cavalcade, riding devils and broomsticks, followed by black cats and poisonous toads to be consumed in the fires, not of Hell, but of fear and hatred, greed and lust. For all they lived and for all they died, too often too soon and too horribly, they were only part real, part invented. Worshippers of strange gods, healers with strange powers, they come from stranger times when rumour and suspicion were judge and executioner, when fear and loathing were law and order.

Rome, 381 CE, the senate proscribes the “worship of idols” and in Edward Gibbon’s memorable phrase Rome submits to the “yoke of the Gospel,” but the year 313 marks the real turning-point. It was in this year that the then emperor of Rome, Constantine the Great (274-337), legalised Christianity. After a series of battles he seized complete control of the Roman Empire in 324. Christianity followed in his wake and now Paganism would feel the wrath of persecution.

“ Those who try to induce others to perform such evil wonders are called witches. And because infidelity in a person who has been baptised is technically called heresy, therefore such persons are plainly heretics”

—*Malleus Maleficarum*, part I, question I.

In 1484, Innocent VIII issued the Papal Bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus* as a confirmation of papal support for the inquisition against witches. Although its affect was seemingly restricted to Northern Germany, Innocent VIII was extending the power of the Inquisition over districts formerly out-with its jurisdiction and thereby laying the foundation for the extensive Europe-wide persecution of those accused of witchcraft.

The battle that Christianity had been fighting against the armies of witchery ended, not with the thunder of the Inquisitors' Hammer, but with the judges' gavel. And as the witches appeared, at last, to be vanquished, in the already dying light of Christianity's setting sun, it was not they who stood in the dock. Two spectacular events stand as prime examples of the way in which witch-hunting reached its apogee and by the same process burnt itself out in the Seventeenth Century. These are the brief career of Matthew Hopkins, Witch-Finder General, and the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts.

Part 2. Born of Shadows

The Origins of Modern Witchcraft

Celtic Twilight & Golden Dawn: The Revival of Witchcraft & Magic

The Craft of Invention: The Creation of the Wiccan Religion

Out of the Cauldron, Into the Fire: The Growth & Development of Wicca



Celtic Twilight and Golden Dawn

The Origins of the Modern Religion of Witchcraft

The Old Religion

In the Vault of the Adepts

A Sunday School Teacher and the Witch Cult

The European witch-hunts were over, but witchcraft and the idea of witchcraft would never die out. In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries witchcraft was re-examined, re-interpreted and, ultimately, re-invented.

To the ancients witchcraft was largely viewed as maleficent magic. To the Christians witchcraft was a Satanic conspiracy to corrupt the souls of good people. But now, to the scientific rationalist, witchcraft was something else entirely: it was the Old Religion.

Victoria was on the throne, the British Empire was at its zenith, and four men were about to turn the secret tide of history. To all appearances they were Victorian gentlemen, serious, scholarly, but inwardly they were spiritual pioneers, forging a new empire of the soul that knew no boundaries. It was their destiny to unlock the Vault of the Adepts.

A formidable spinster, devoted to her work and her mentor, Sir Flinders Petrie, Margaret Murray (1863-1963) made the single greatest impact on the idea of witchcraft in the Twentieth Century. The idea was that the witchcraft persecuted during the medieval and early modern period was in fact the survival of the pre-Christian Pagan religion of Europe.

As the Celtic Twilight dimmed into night and the Golden Dawn brightened into day, all the right elements were now in place: a working system of modern magic and a theory of witchcraft as the ancient Pagan religion of Europe. What they lacked was a unifying force.

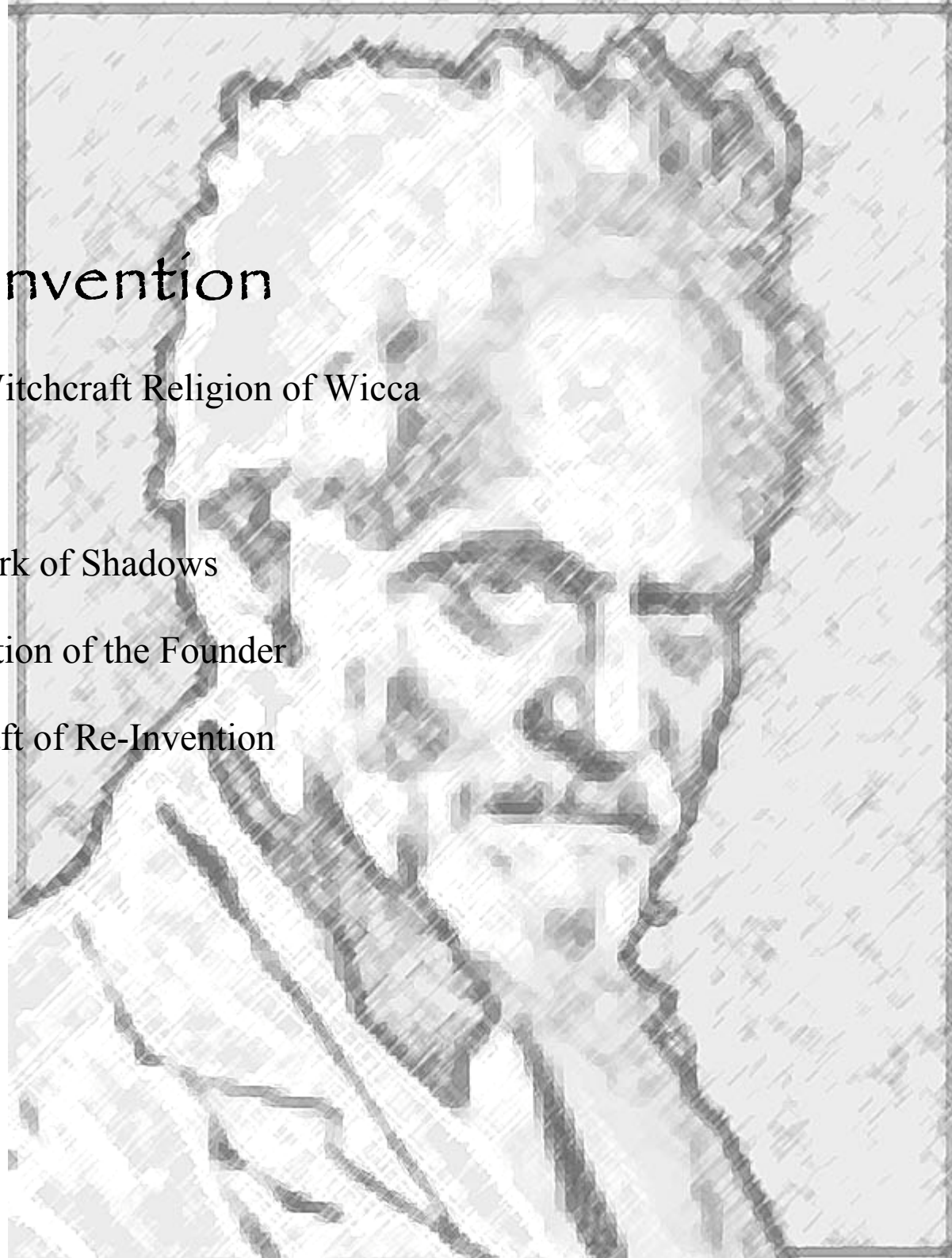
The Craft of Invention

The Founding of the Modern Witchcraft Religion of Wicca

A Work of Shadows

The Invention of the Founder

The Craft of Re-Invention



The founding process of the modern Witchcraft religion of Wicca begins with the invention of a tradition, leads to the invention of a founder, undergoes the discovery of both inventions and re-invents itself to survive. Currently Witchcraft is portrayed by its practitioners as a religion of invention with individual creativity at its core. Understanding the convolutions and convulsions of the birth of modern Witchcraft is central to understanding its character and structure today.

The central text of Wicca may be called the Book of Shadows, but its origins are even more shadowy. At least four versions of Gardner's key liturgical text have been identified.

Together they reveal the progression of Gardner's ideas, as well as the covering of his tracks. It was a work of shadows...

If Witchcraft is an invented tradition, then needs must that it have an inventor. Even though Witchcraft is still widely considered a ‘revival’ as we saw earlier, its derivative, syncretistic nature has been long recognised, as has Gardner’s role. That he is seen as the founder now only arises out of the discovery of his fraudulent foundation of Witchcraft.

The falsity of Gardner's claims was ignored in favour of the spirit of his creativity. Undoubtedly Gardner's exposure met something in the Zeitgeist that allowed Wicca to survive and increase. The disintegration of Gardner's claims met with the anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical ethos of the Hippy movement: the pursuit of new spiritualities, the desire for direct experience and the demand to do it for oneself. What emerged was a craft of re-invention.



Out of the Cauldron, Into the Fire

The Development of the Wiccan Religion after Gardner

The Mother of Modern Witchcraft

Britain's Number One Witch

King of the Witches

Witchcraft Goes West

Out of the seething cauldron of Gardner's fertile imagination, shameless plagiarism, energy and ambition came the most radical and fastest growing religion of the Twentieth and now Twenty-First Century. The fire of Gardner's inspiration rapidly spread through his books, newspaper articles and by word of mouth to touch an increasingly wide group of people. However, that fire also burnt Gardner.

A plain, owlshly bespectacled woman with a slight stoop and a friendly twinkle in her eye, wrote to Cecil Williamson, the proprietor of The Witches' Mill Museum of Magic and Witchcraft asking for more information on the Old Religion. She was Doreen Valiente, thirty years old, with a life-long interest in the occult, and living in the sea-side resort of Bournemouth. Williamson passed the letter to Gerald Gardner, then ensconced as his resident Witch, and so began one of the greatest creative partnerships in the history of modern Witchcraft.

With the death of Gardner the leadership of the Witchcraft movement fell vacant. And there was no lack of applicants for the post. However, Gardner had all but destroyed Wicca and the pretenders to his throne would claim a different descent, a more traditional and hereditary descent, and hence a more authentic descent.

To some he was the enfant terrible of British witchcraft, to others a poseur and a charlatan, concerned solely with his own aggrandisement, to himself he was England's self-appointed King of the Witches. Whatever the actuality of his claims his flamboyant style and love of the limelight certainly brought Alex Sanders the notoriety of being Britain's most famous Witch in the 1970s.

The situation in England was moribund. The media had seized upon the most flamboyant and extrovert characters on the Witchcraft scene, exposed them to the outrage of the public, and effectively destroyed them. Wicca itself was fragmented and consumed by numerous, ruinous internecine battles. It was largely those who fled England who ensured the Craft's survival and greater development.

Part 3. Empire of Shadows

Witchcraft in the World Today

The Society of Witches: A Profile of Modern Witches

Calling Down the Moon: Belief & Experience in Modern Witchcraft

Drawing the Magic Circle: Definition, Use & Effect of Magic in Witchcraft

Old Ways, New Directions: Evaluating Witchcraft

A painting of a witch in a dark hooded cloak, looking down. A white cat is perched on her shoulder, and a blue lizard is on her chest. The background is dark and textured.

The Society of Witches

The New Face and Form of
Witchcraft Beyond the Stereotypes

Portrait of a Witch

The Widening Circle

Coven and Hedgewitch

The red-rimmed eye, hooked, green nose with its hairy wart, and shock of unkempt hair protruding beneath a tall black pointed hat. That is what we all knew witches looked like when we were children. Yet growing older we came to realise that this bedtime bogey was a fiction, but there was nothing to fill its place. Until now...

In 1954 Gardner bewailed that Witchcraft was dying out. This was perhaps a calculated part of the plan to launch his new religion: calculated to excite interest and concern. Witchcraft, at least Gardner's Witchcraft, certainly did not die out and today all the indications are that it is growing, if not thriving. The circle is widening.

In threes or thirteens, Witches always meet in symbolic numbers, at least that is what we always thought. Shakespeare's Witches in *Macbeth* were three in number, whilst from other sources we are led to believe that a coven is not complete without thirteen members. Thirteen is the number of bad luck.

But now? Do they still meet in threes and thirteens, and what about those work alone?

Calling Down the Moon

Belief and Experience in the Modern Religion of Witchcraft

God of a Thousand Names

The Mysteries of Witchcraft

Human Rites: The Role of Ritual in Witchcraft



I found that Witches' beliefs in deity ranged widely, from impersonal creative forces at one extreme to actual personalities taking a part in the individual's life at the other. The range of belief systems expressed ran the gamut from atheism to pantheism.

From my own research and conversations with Witches it is clear that what we might call the mystical had a very profound role to play in the lives of Witches. It touched upon their deepest and most intimate experiences.

The High Priestess stands skyclad within the circle, arms outstretched, clothed only in the flickering candle-light. The High Priest kneels before her and drawing an inverted triangle upon her from right breast, to left breast, to womb, returning to right breast, begins the incantation...

Drawing the Magic Circle

The Definition, Use and Effect of Magic in Modern Witchcraft

The Pretender's Art

Magic in Practice

Transformations: The Effect of Magic

“ The pretended art of influencing the course of events.” Thus does the *Oxford English Dictionary* define magic. Yet as we shall see the pretence is of the nature of theatre and the influence that it exerts is very real if only at the personal level. Simply put, magic is real and magic works. Yet not, perhaps, in the ways that the dictionary suggests.

Surprising as it may seem, not every Witch practices magic. Most do, however, indeed over ninety percent of those I asked said that they practised magic, but it is clearly not essential to being a Witch. When speaking to Witches for this research I asked them to define magic and then asked if they practised this. I did not apply a general definition of magic, the people I talked to defined the terms.

In *Witchcraft out of the Shadows* you will find out that Witches practise magic, how often they practise it, what they use it for, and how they define it, but what effect does practising magic have on the practitioner? When I asked the Witches I talked to what effect their magic had upon them they most often gave two answers...

Old Ways, New Directions

Evaluating Witchcraft
from its Earliest Beginnings
to its Future Potentialities

Shadows of the Past

After Christianity

The Re-Enchantment of the World

Witches and Witchcraft are no longer what they were thought to be. Gone are the pacts with the Devil, the evil imp familiars and toe-curling curses. In their place we find a vital religion practising spiritual equality and seeking the improvement of the world. Witchcraft changes the lives of those it touches and those it touches say it has improved their lives.

Yet the shadows of the past still lie over Witchcraft.

The pews are empty, the church doors are locked, the vicar is in retirement, his flock has wandered from the fold. Christianity in the West is in crisis. With increasing access to alternative forms of knowledge Christianity is no longer the only road to salvation. With the spread of free-market capitalism into every aspect of our lives, we are now even free to choose what spiritual path we will follow. And people are choosing Witchcraft.

When a famous and influential pioneer of the study of human society examined the nature and conditions of the modern world in which we live he characterised it as ‘disenchanted.’ The exact phrase Max Weber used - ‘the disenchantment of the world,’ - expresses a wide variety of interrelated phenomena from the increasing routinisation of everyday activity to the bureaucratisation of our lives, from the loss of a close relationship with the natural world to the degradation of human being itself. But what I discovered was that there was also something called Re-enchantment.

Read *Witchcraft Out of the Shadows* to discover the answers to the many questions raised here.

With 271 pages in total, 18 b&w and line illustrations (including many specially commissioned for the book), 20 charts and tables, 24 pages of notes, a bibliography of 215 entries, and 13 pages of index, *Witchcraft Out of the Shadows* is the most comprehensive new history of witchcraft and Wicca to be published this century.

The history of witchcraft and Wicca has just been re-written.

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