



December 15 2008

Hi all!

There is so much in this issue that there isn't even any space for me!

Good Yule!

Diana

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Religion and Politics in South Africa
by Damon Leff, PFI-SA National Coordinator

In August South African Pagans were reminded that sometimes, evil does resurrect. The National Party (formerly the New National Party - which merged with the ANC in April 2005, formerly the National Party which enforced apartheid on South Africans - both Black and White) was registered with South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission on 28 August as a political party.

Under the direction of its most outspoken leader, Juan Duval Uys], the National Party (NP) will campaign for the reinstatement of the death penalty (outlawed in South Africa in 1995), public executions, and the suppression or religious minorities regarded as offensive to Christian and Muslim supporters of the NP. Uys publicly declared his intention to change the constitution to enable the NP to implement its barbaric and prejudicial policies.

On its website Uys reaffirmed his vision for the NP with regard to education and religion. On a page entitled 'Religious Instruction In Schools' Uys stated: "Satanism Not Recognised - The National Party respects the practice of all religions in our country, but will not tolerate satanism. The NP will outlaw all practices directly linked to satanism."

I contacted Uys on 18 August on behalf of the South African Pagan Rights Alliance (SAPRA) to find out what religious minorities he classified as 'satanic' and intended to suppress. Most Christians in South Africa tend to identify all occult / esoteric belief systems and spiritualities as 'satanic'. Uys replied to my query by saying, "We will not allow witches to operate in South Africa under NP Government. We and our supporters can not associate ourselves with anything that are (sic) linked to Satanism."

I responded by expressing my dismay that the NP intended to repeat pre-1994 Nationalist Christian propaganda and discrimination against Witches and Witchcraft in South Africa. I informed Uys that in South Africa, self-defined Witches represented a small but visible religious minority. Pagan Witches have government appointed religious marriage officers and officially recognised religious groups and faith-based organisations. I explained that our own faith-based organisation (SAPRA) was formed in 2004 in order to protect the constitutional right to religious freedom and belief of self-defined Pagans (including Witches) and to defend and protect Witchcraft as a bone-fide religion.

I affirmed that SAPRA regarded his statement to "not allow witches to operate in South Africa under NP Government" as intent to suppress and discriminate against Witchcraft and Witches in South Africa and that the Alliance would therefore not support the Nationalist Party in any form and would, at every available opportunity, denounce the religious prejudiced policies of the National Party.

Uys responded to my second letter by saying, "We don't have a problem with your view on our policy, but we will NEVER (sic) regard Satanism or witches as a form of religion. Our major support comes from Christians and Muslims etc, we will never link this party to Satanism or witchcraft. We will make this very clear during elections 2009."

SAPRA initiated a letter writing campaign encouraging Pagans and self-defined Witches to object to the NP's discriminatory policy on religion. The NP eventually disabled its contact form but it could not ignore the number of objections lodged by individual Pagans. On behalf of both SAPRA the South African Pagan Council (SAPC), SAPRA submitted a formal objection to the NP against its policy on religion and religious instruction in schools.

I also submitted an objection on behalf of both SAPRA and the SAPC to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) against the registration of the National Party as a political party on the grounds that the NP's policies on religion and religious education propagate the contravention of the constitutional right to freedom of belief and religion to recognized religious minorities and intend to prevent membership of the NP on the grounds of religious affiliation by excluding identified religious minorities as undesirable.

On 28 August the IEC's Chief Electoral Officer ruled that the National Party's submitted constitution did not contravene section 16 of the Electoral Commission Act - the NP's submitted constitution does not discriminate on the basis of religion or belief.

Clearly, while the NP's submitted constitution may not have contained any discriminatory content, the party's policies on religion as advertised on its website indicated that until the end of August 2008, the NP had every intention of discriminating against South Africans on the basis of religion and that the party had already publicly identified the religious minorities the NP intended to suppress.

But it appears, perhaps precipitated by Pagan protests, that since the beginning of September the NP's policy on religion, now under the direction of the NP's new Spokesperson for Religion and Cultural affairs and National Director of the NP's Legal Services, J.M.T. Labuschagne, has undergone a radical shift from the far right conservative bigotry of Uys. On 1 September the NP removed the statement regarding Satanism from their web-page on religion and education and Labuschagne published a new page entitled 'National Party South Africa (NP) On Paganism'.

In it Labuschagne stated, "We have noted with great concern that there is a misunderstanding amongst the Pagan community regarding the NP's statement on Satanism. We would like to state it unequivocally that the National Party does not hold any ill feeling against the pagan community. On the contrary, the National Party would endeavour upon election to protect the rights of the Pagan community. We understand the response from the Pagan community regarding our policy towards Satanism. It is well known that paganism has wrongly, and to the great detriment of the Pagans, been associated with Satanism by ill-informed officials. However, the National Party wishes to advise that we fully support



freedom of religion and that there would be no witch-hunt of any practitioners of Wicca, Odinic Rite or any of the other Pagan practices. Pagans are welcome to celebrate Imbolc, Beltane or any other festival in public, as long as the particular group does not break any of the laws of the Republic. The reference to Satanism refers to destructive religion that developed as an inversion of Christian beliefs and is an open worship of evil. Paganism does not worship evil and it is a force for good in society. The senseless killing of a 16-year old boy at a school in Krugersdorp under the alleged influence of Satanism has prompted the suggestion that there should be acted against Satanism. [Finally, again we wish to advise that the Pagan community can rest assured that their rights to worship will be protected by the National Party once we have been elected to office. We sincerely hope this statement has clarified all misunderstandings regarding our religious policy."

A "misunderstanding amongst the Pagan community regarding the NP's statement on Satanism... "? Hardly!

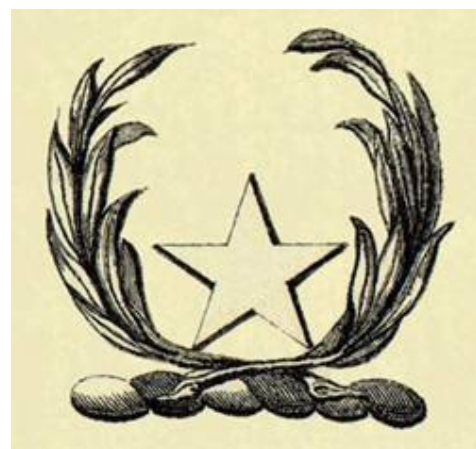
Clearly the misunderstanding, to which Labuschagne refers in his press release, wholly belonged to Mr. Uys who, on behalf of the National Party, undertook to promote a religious policy that clearly and plainly intended to discriminate against identified religious minorities, namely Satanism (not a Pagan religion) and Witchcraft (a Pagan religion).

Whilst SAPRA and S.A. Pagans generally were relieved and welcomed Labuschagne's statement of tolerance with regard to Paganism in South Africa, I believe the NP's statement was nothing but a political move to counter potential negative publicity in light of their previous statement made in correspondence to SAPRA. Labuschagne knows that political parties may not promote policies which contradict the essence of the Bill of Rights, namely equality and dignity.

As it stands, the NP's statement of acceptance of Paganism, whilst flattering for Pagans, remains in my opinion in contravention of the Bill of Rights in that it clearly reaffirms the NP's intention to openly and publicly discriminate against Satanism.

Should Pagans allow the NP to discriminate against any minority religion, as long as it's not us? Obviously, if we are going to remain true to the spirit and letter of the Bill of Rights the answer must be no. But that's a different struggle and one Satanists themselves must challenge.

Refreshing as it is to know that Witches in South Africa live in a country where we are afforded the opportunity to object, to petition, to challenge the status quo and sometimes, to win our argument for religious equality and dignity for all South Africans irrespective of belief, opinion or religion, this short and bitter-sweet campaign should remind us to remain constantly vigilant. If history has any lesson for us it is that the evil of the past was built on the prejudices of today.



***Indian Paganism:
The Last Living Expression of Aryan Beauty
By Savitri Devi***

Another, and perhaps a more expressive word for Hinduism would be: Indian Paganism.

The Christian missionaries call "Pagans" all those who are neither Christians, nor Mohammadans, nor Jews, that is to say, all those whose religious tradition has no connexion with the Bible and tradition of the Jews. We accept the word, because it is a convenient one. It points out some sort of similarity between all non-creedal religions of the past as well as of the present day.

Once, practically all the world was "Pagan." Now that half its people have been converted either to Christianity or to Islam, the number of Pagans is less. That is no proof of the lesser value of different Paganisms, compared to the great creedal religions. It is surely an advantage, to be numerous; but it is no virtue. And therefore the number of its followers has nothing to do with the value of a cult.

We have remarked that among the so-called Christians, there are more and more people who are not total believers in the Bible at all, but "free thinkers." And we have said that free thought in all matters, including religion, is a feature of Hinduism. This does not mean that we consider all the free thinkers of the World as Hindus.

Philosophically, Hinduism is an attitude of mind, and an outlook on life. But it is not only that. It is a number of cults, among which one may choose. And, whatever cult it may be, it is a cult, one of the immemorial Pagan cults, surviving in the midst of the modern world. The Hindus are one of the few modern civilised people who are openly Pagans.

The Japanese, with their official Shintoic ritual, are another of these people. And they being one of the leading nations of the modern world, their example is priceless. They show magnificently that, even if it be indispensable to adopt any new mechanical inventions, in order to compete with other nations, and live, yet it is not necessary to adopt the religion and the civilisation of the inventors, wholesale. Aeroplanes and war-tanks, and modern banking business on a broad scale, can perfectly go together with the existence of a Solar dynasty of king-Gods, in whose Godhood everyone actually believes, as well as an Egyptian did, six thousand years ago. When India, freed from internal weakness and foreign yoke, will become again a world power, then she will, still better perhaps than Japan, stand as a witness of such sort of truth as this.

In the meantime, she remains the last great country of Aryan civilisation, and, to a great extent, of Aryan tongue and race, where a living and beautiful Paganism is the religion both of the masses and of the intelligentsia.

Last Fortress of Ancient Ideals

If those of Indo-European race regard the conquest of pagan Europe by Christianity as a decadence, then the whole of Hindu India can be likened to a last fortress of very ancient ideals, of very old and beautiful religious and



metaphysical conceptions, which have already passed away in Europe. Hinduism is thus the last flourishing and fecund branch on an immense tree which has been cut down and mutilated for two thousand years.

We like this word "Paganism," applied to the Hindu cults. It is sweet to the ears of more than one of the fallen Aryans of Europe, accustomed to refer to "Pagan Greece," and to "Pagan beauty" as the most perfect expressions of their own genius in the past. That is also why we use the word, preferably to any other.

India has perhaps never enjoyed yet, even in the days of her glory, the world-wide popular fame she enjoys nowadays. This world-wide fame is greatly due to the repeated assertion of Hindu "spirituality," and to the philosophy of non-violence, preached by Mahatma Gandhi.

Very few people have grasped the spirit of Christ as well as Mahatma Gandhi, and several other prominent Hindus of the present day and of the last century. And among the few Europeans who have been sincerely attracted by Hinduism, practically all have sought, in it, if not a doctrine, at least a moral creed, or, better say a moral attitude of love and kindness -- the very same thing they could have found in Christianity, if only they took the trouble of separating the simple and luminous personality of Christ from all theological and heretical entanglements. In other words it is, generally, the dream of a better Christianity that brings fair people from across the seas to "serve mankind" in the Ramakrishna Mission, or to express their pure devotional love as inmates of some Vaishnava Math.

The Hindus of the present day like such admirers. Many of them also like the idea that there is more true Christian spirit among outstanding Hindus, than among most Christians. There is nothing to say about these likings, if not that they are, to a great extent, a subtle expression of unfortunate India's deep-rooted inferiority complex.

Pure spirituality (realisation of one's soul) naturally transcends creed, as well as ceremonies. So a realised Hindu will look like a realised Christian. That is true. It is true also that, in such a complex set of teachings as those contained in the innumerable Hindu books (including Jain, Buddhist, Vaishnava etc., scriptures), there are many elements which are to be found also in Christianity. Others will say that there are a great deal of Hindu elements (or Buddhist elements) which have crept into Christianity, and there are theories to prove this influence of Indian thought. And one may safely assume that the failure of Christian preaching among the educated and fully conscious Hindus, is mainly due to the existence of these elements. A religion of love is not a new thing to India, as it must have been to the people of ancient Europe.

But all this does not lessen the fact that the Hindu religion, both as a set of philosophies and as a cult, has also the characteristics which Aryan Paganism had, before it was overcome by Christianity in the West. We find here, like in ancient Greece, contrary philosophical tendencies, with a very few main common ideas between them (such as the idea of transmigration of souls, for instance,

and one or two others). And, what is more, we find in Hindu cult, in Hindu life, that essential thing, which is the only one worth living for: Beauty.

Visible beauty leads to the invisible, says Plato.

Nowadays, when people speak of India, they seem to speak too much of its invisible beauty, and to ignore the visible. "Spirituality, spirituality...." They all talk of it, those who know something about it, and those who know nothing. It is the fashion. One does not look like a friend of India, if one does not put stress on that point. Nor does one feel like a true Indian patriot.

But nobody puts stress upon the physical beauty of the Hindu people. Yet they are Hinduism, they are India, more than all the philosophies put together; and the first qualification, for a nation as well as for an individual, is the beauty of its body. No mean soul can reside in a really beautiful body. The body expresses, reflects the interior self. And a beautiful race is a noble race, with high possibilities. People speak of Hindu culture as of an abstract entity, as if it could have grown anywhere and everywhere. They forget to say that those who live it, as a nation, are amongst the most beautiful races of mankind. There is, no doubt, a mysterious identity between that culture and them.



To a great number of Hindus, the Hindu ritual has a great symbolical value. To the large majority of the Hindus, it is practically everything. Yet, nobody puts stress upon the visible beauty of the Hindu daily "puja," of the Hindu festivities, of the Hindu ceremonies. Many educated Hindus seem to think it below their dignity to praise, in their religion, what appeals to one's eyes and ears, what is "exterior."

But it is not possible to deny the attraction of beauty.

We have mentioned the burning regret of the past, among some Western Aryans, who seem to have a retrospective consciousness of what their race was, and an idea of what perhaps it could have been still, had their ancestors been faithful to the old national cults of Europe. This nostalgia for the past is not a new thing in the Christian West and Near East. It begins sixteen hundred years ago, with the desperate attempt of the Emperor Julian to restore the religion and society of the "Ancient World" to their former splendour, and it increases, in the heart of the few, as the "Ancient World," seen from a greater distance of time, seems more and more lovable.

This Ancient World had its shortcomings. It had its vices also, which brought its down-fall. But its wise men were the pride of human intelligence. And above all, it is lovable for what Europe and the Near East have never known since: the open cult of Visible Beauty. This cult is to be found nowhere, nowadays, except in to last sunny home: Hindu India.

It is said that, one day, Julian tried to organise a procession through the streets of Constantinople, in honour of Dionysos, the God of impetuous Joy, and overflowing Life.

But it was already too late, and the attempt proved a failure. The procession was but a ridiculous show, and when returning, at evening, after it was finished, Julian was as sad as if his eyes had embraced the whole gloomy future of the Mediterranean World. It is said that he was sitting in the gardens of his palace, in front of old blocks of marble, half-hidden with ivy, when a faithful friend, guessing the cause of his sadness, asked him: "What else did you expect? These are the days of our death. What was your aim, in ordering this procession? What did you want?" The Emperor looked at him silently; then, pulling aside the ivy, he pointed out to him what was behind: a master-piece of some artist of the ancient days: a procession in honour of Dionysos, carved out in white marble; a smile of the World's youth; a thing of beauty: "This is what I wanted."



This was at the time when the great Samudra Gupta was ruling over India.

Oh! if only Julian could have seen what a display of beauty, in daily life and in festivities, and in processions in honour of Gods and Goddesses much akin to his, was going on, over there! If only he could have seen that Aryan Paganism would live and flourish forever, in that luxuriant land; that India would preserve the World's youth from age to age, through an endless future!

Then, certainly, he would have blessed the great country, with tears of joy.

Just go to Madura or to Rameswaram, nowadays, and see a real Hindu procession there, with elephants bearing immemorial signs of sandal and vermilion upon their foreheads, and draperies of silk and gold flowing over their backs, down to the ground; with flutes and drums, and torches reflecting their light upon the half-naked bronze bodies, as beautiful as living Greek statues; with chariots of flowers, slowly going around the sacred tank. Just see the pious crowd (hundreds and thousands of pilgrims, gathered from all parts of India), throwing flowers, as the chariots pass. And above all this, above the calm waters, the beautiful crowd, the mighty pillars, the huge pyramidal towers, shining in the moon-light ... above all this, behold the one, simple, phosphorescent sky.

Just watch an ordinary scene of Hindu life: a line of young women walking into a temple, on a festival day. Draped in bright coloured sarees, sparkling with jewels, one by one they come, the graceful daughters of India, with flowers in their hair, with flowers and offerings in their hands. In the background: thatched huts, among the high coconut trees and green rice-fields all around -- the beauty of the Indian countryside.

One by one they come ... like the Athenian maidens of old, whose image we see upon the prize of the Parthenon. The lover of Beauty, Julian, the Sun-worshipper, if only he could have seen them, would have said, beholding the reality of his own dream: "This is what I wanted!"

But it is not through the forms and colours of popular Hindu cult alone that Hinduism is a religion of beauty. Its conception of God, creative and destructive, is the expression of a broad artistic outlook on life and on the universe.

In creedal religions, the centre of interest is man; the background, man's short history, man's misery, man's craving for happiness; the scope, man's salvation. God, man's Father, has a particular, and somewhat partial tenderness towards this privileged creature of His.

In intelligent Hinduism, this anthropomorphic view has no place. The centre of interest is this eternal universe of Existence, in which man is only a detail. God is the inner Force, the deeper Self, the Essence of that Existence -- the "Greatest Soul." (Paramatma).



No personal likings and dislikings, in Him. No special favour to any of the creatures that appear and pass away, in the course of time. Nothing but an endless succession of infinite states, of infinite expressions of the unknown Thing, which is the reality of all things; a dancing succession of birth and death and rebirth, over and over again, which is never the same, and yet, is always the same; a play, (lila) which has no beginning nor end, nor purpose, but which is beautiful, whatever may be the temporary fate of any particular species, in its course.

The fate of all species, of all individuals, is to grow slowly more and more conscious of the beauty of the Play, and, at end, to experience their substantial identity with the Force which is playing -- playing with its own Self. Nobody knows what this Force is, except those who have realised it in themselves. But we all adore It, and bow down to It. We do not bow down to It because we know It, and because It is God. It is because we bow down to It, that we call It God. And we bow down to It and worship It, in its millions and millions of expressions (those which destroy us, as well as those which seem to help us), because, in its millions and millions of expressions, It is beautiful.

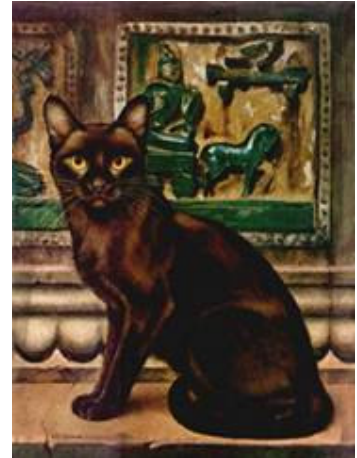
Creation is only half the Play of Existence. Men thus generally worship only one side of God. But the Hindus praise Him all round, for the beauty of His Play. They praise Him in Destruction, as well as in Creation. They praise His Energy (Shakti) in Mother Kali, in Durga, in Jagaddatri, in Chinnamasta, continuously destroying and recreating Her own Self; in all the ten "Mahavidyas," who are one and the same. They praise Him in the Dancing King (Nataraj), whose feet are over-treading life, and destroying it in a furious rhythm, ... while His dispassionate face, expressing Knowledge, is as calm as the smiling sea. Creation and destruction are one, to the eyes who can see beauty.

And the greatest praise to India is this: not only are her people beautiful; not only are her daily life and cult beautiful; but, in the midst of the utilitarian, humanitarian, dogmatic world of the present day, she keeps on proclaiming the outstanding value of Beauty for the sake of Beauty, through her very conception of Godhead, of religion and of life.

The preceding text is the third chapter of Savitri's A Warning to the Hindus (Calcutta, 1939).

Common Superstitions **Which ones do you believe in?**

- A rabbit's foot brings good luck
- An apple a day keeps the doctor away
- To find a four-leaf clover is to find good luck
- If you walk under a ladder, you will have bad luck
- To break a mirror will bring you seven years bad luck
- To open an umbrella in the house is to bring bad luck
- To find a horseshoe brings good luck
- Step on a crack, break your mother's back
- You can break a bad luck spell by turning seven times in a clockwise circle
- Garlic protects from evil spirits and vampires
- Our fate is written in the stars
- At the end of a rainbow is a pot of gold
- Clothes worn inside out will bring good luck
- Wearing your birthstone will bring you good luck
- If you blow out all of the candles on your birthday cake with the first breath you will get whatever you wish for
- To have a wish come true using a wishbone, two people make a wish, then take hold of each end of the bone and pull it until it separates. The person with the longer end gets his or her wish
- An itchy palm means money will come your way
- Crossing your fingers helps to avoid bad luck and helps a wish come true
- A lock of hair from a baby's first haircut should be kept for good luck
- A bird that comes in your window brings bad luck
- To refuse a kiss under mistletoe causes bad luck
- For good luck, wear new clothes on Easter
- An acorn at the window can keep lightning out of the house
- When a dog howls, death is near
- It is bad luck to chase someone with a broom
- To find a penny heads up, brings good luck
- If you shiver, someone is casting a shadow on your grave
- To make a happy marriage, the bride must wear: something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue
- The wedding veil protects the bride from the evil eye
- You must get out of bed on the same side you got in on or you will have bad luck
- Evil spirits cannot harm you when you are standing in a circle
- A cat will try to take the breath from a baby
- Warm hands, cold heart
- Cold hands, warm heart
- It is unlucky to rock an empty rocking chair
- To kill an albatross is to cause bad luck to the ship and all upon it
- To give someone a purse or wallet without money in it will bring that person bad luck



The Crystal Clear Waters of Mount Elbruz **by Michael Berman, Phd.**

Versions of the Prometheus saga can be found throughout the Caucasus as it was to Mount Elbruz that Prometheus was chained. The variant presented below is Kabardian and was taken from *Georgian Folk Tales*, translated by Marjorie Wardrop. The Kabardians are Circassians, and Kabardino-Cherkess is an Adyge language which is spoken in the Kabardino-Balkaria autonomous region of the North-West Caucasus between Karachay-Cherkessia and North Ossetia. The people who inhabit the region are Moslems, “but with significant remaining traces of Christianity and paganism, even to the present day” (Hunt, 2004, p.9).



Conference of Circassian princes in 1839-40

From the album 'Le Concasseploresque. Dessine d'apres nature par le Prince G.Gagarin', Paris, 1847. Scanned from pdf-file *Оружие Народов Кавказа* of E.G. Astvatsaturyan, St. Petersburg: Atlant, 2004. Located on the website «Encyclopedic Album of Chircassian weapon» (www.nartalbum.com) Grigory Gagarin (1811-1993) *This image is in the public domain because its copyright has expired. This applies to the United States, Canada, the European Union and those countries with a copyright term of life of the author plus 70 years.*

The Prometheus Saga – a Kabardian variant

A long, long time ago, a certain giant who had one eye in the middle of his forehead dared to penetrate into the secrets with which God had surrounded the summit of Mount Elbruz. He came to the saddle between the two peaks, from the rocks at the foot of which a well of crystal clear water springs up. But God would not permit that, and chained the violator of His secrets with a long chain to the rocks. Many years have passed since then. The giant has grown old. His long beard reaches to his knees; his once mighty frame has become bent and his proud countenance is covered with wrinkles. To punish him still more God sent a bird of prey, which lies up every day to peck at the giant's heart. And when the tormented giant bends forward to drink, the bird swoops down and sucks up the water down to the last drop. The water of that spring has a wonderful power; whosoever drinks of it will live forever.

But a time will come when God will be angry with the sons of Adam. Then He will set the one-eyed giant free, and woe betide mankind. For he will wreak vengeance on them for his long sufferings.



The Waters have been described as the reservoir of all the potentialities of existence because they not only precede every form but they also serve to sustain every creation. Immersion is equivalent to dissolution of form, in other words death, whereas emergence repeats the cosmogonic act of formal manifestation, in other words re-birth (see Eliade, 1952, p.151).

As Eliade points out, in whatever religious context we find it, water invariably serves the function of dissolving the forms of things, and it can be seen to be both purifying and regenerative. 'The purpose of the ritual lustrations and purifications is to gain a flash of realisation of the non-temporal moment ... in which the creation took place; they are symbolical repetitions of the birth of worlds or of the "new man" ' (Eliade, 1952, p.152).

The idea of regeneration through water can be found in numerous pan-cultural tales about the miraculous Fountain of Youth. So pervasive were these legends that in the 16th century the Spanish conquistador Ponce de Leon actually set out to find it once and for all -- and found Florida instead. In Japanese legends, the white and yellow leaves of the wild chrysanthemum confer blessings from Kiku-Jido, the chrysanthemum boy who dwells by the Fountain of Youth. These leaves are ceremonially dipped in sake to assure good health and long life. One Native American story describes the Fountain of Youth created by two hawks in the nether-world between heaven and earth. Those who drink of it outlive their children and friends, which is why it is eventually destroyed.

What follows is a guided visualisation based on the story presented above. If you are working on your own, it is suggested that you record the script, perhaps with some appropriate background music. You can then lie somewhere comfortable, where you will not be disturbed, and play the recording back to yourself as you go through the process described.

The Healing Power of Water

SCRIPT FOR THE GUIDE: (To be read in a gentle trance-inducing voice). Make yourself comfortable and close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths to help you relax. Feel the tension disappear stage by stage from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. Let your surroundings fade away as you gradually sink backwards through time and actuality and pass through the gateway of this reality into the dreamtime. (When the participants are fully relaxed, begin the next stage).

You find yourself standing at the foot of the two peaks of Mount Elbruz, a place of power, where many have come before you for, and where many will no doubt

come after you. And you know, whatever your problem is, that it is here you will find help, and that is what has brought you to this place.

Ahead of you there's a winding path, leading up to the summit. The climb is steep but you're determined and refuse to be deterred. And the higher you climb, the stronger your resolve becomes, the resolve you have to achieve what you have set out to do.

Eventually you come to the saddle between the two peaks of the mountain, where, from the rocks, a well of crystal clear water springs up. And, as you know, the water of this spring has a wonderful power; whosoever drinks of it will live forever in that their spirit for enjoying and making the most of life will be rekindled and never die again. This is the moment you have been waiting for.

And, as you stoop down low to cup the water in your hands and savour it, take a minute of clock time, equal to all the time you need, to appreciate the renewed spirit it fills you with, like liquid crystal running through your veins ...

And you know now, with an unflinching certainty, such as you have never experienced before, that never again will life seem to be nothing more than a chore to you, that never again will you feel that you can't go on. For, refreshed and revitalised, you know now that you will never grow tired of life again, and that as a result, you are now able to act and move forward once again. So take a minute of clock time, equal to all the time you need, to reflect on what it is you have blessed with today ...

And now that the purpose of your journey has been accomplished, now that your spirit has been rekindled, the time has come to make your way back home, back, back, down the side of the mountain, back, down to the base where you stood at the start of your journey and back on to the track that leads you to your home, back, back, back to the start of your new life and back to the place you started from.

Take a deep breath, let it all out slowly, open your eyes, and smile at the first person you see. Stretch your arms, stretch your legs, stamp your feet on the ground, and make sure you're really back, back in ..., back where you started from. Welcome home!

Now take a few minutes in silence to make some notes on the experiences you had on your journeys, which you can then share with the rest of the group. Or take a few minutes in silence to make some notes on the experiences you had on your journeys, which you can then make a note of in your dream journal. And now you might like to turn to the person sitting next to you and share some of the experiences you had on your journeys

Although Michael originally trained as a Core Shamanic Counsellor with the Scandinavian Centre for Shamanic Studies under Jonathan Horwitz, these days his focus is more on the academic side of shamanism, with a particular interest in the folktales with shamanic themes told by and collected from the peoples of the Caucasus. For more information, please visit www.Thestoryteller.org.uk

The Influence of Italy on Wicca and Druidry ***By Philip Carr-Gomm***

This is a story about Witches, Druids, nudism, the opera, and Italy.

I'd like to start by dedicating this essay to my father, who now in his 84th year, can still remember swimming naked with both the protagonists of this talk, at a nudist resort in Hertfordshire – probably Five Acres, part-owned by Gardner and the site of the first shrine of Wicca, the witches' cottage where his coven meetings were held, or possibly Spielplatz, just nearby and the site of Britain's oldest Naturist Utopian community. He can't remember what the three of them talked about as they lay in the sun afterwards, but perhaps one day I'll ask him to be hypnotically regressed to recall the conversation.

There they were in the pale English sun: the editor of a history magazine and two of the key figures in the 20th century revival of European paganism.

It was around 1954 or 1955 that this happened: a key time for the emergence of this phenomenon. The Witchcraft Act was repealed in Britain in 1951, and in 1954 Gardner's book 'Witchcraft Today', edited by Nichols, was published which began the process of popularization of witchcraft and the promotion of Wicca specifically as a religion or magical path.

The following year - 1955 - was destined to be the year in which the worlds of opera and the inner mysteries of Paganism and specifically Druidry collided to produce a triad of unique and powerful manifestations: it was the year two of the greatest opera singers the world has ever known began their careers thanks in differing ways to the Druids.

Pavarotti's singing career was launched at the Llangollen eisteddfod in 1955 when he sung in a male choir from his town in Italy that won a prize. He returned to sing at Llangollen 40 years later in 1995. And Maria Callas' career was launched when she played the Druid priestess Norma in Bellini's opera that same year. And in the same year that these two stars began their extraordinary trajectories across the firmament of world opera, an opera - Michael Tippett's 'The Midsummer Marriage' - was performed for the first time in London that also owed its existence in a certain way to one of the inner mysteries of both Wicca and Druidism.

What on earth was going on? What were the stars doing in 1955? Let's home in on the details to look at the unfolding of this phenomenon more closely.

Let's go back to 1951 - the year the Witchcraft Act was repealed. Where were Nichols and Gardner that year? In Italy - and specifically at Pompeii. We do not know whether they were there together or independently.

Philip Heselton, biographer of Gardner, feels that "they probably didn't go together. Gerald was always in the habit of "wintering abroad" for about two months each year, mostly January and February, to avoid the severity of the English winter, which did not suit him and brought on his asthma. In none of his letters does he mention Ross being with him. The most likely thing would perhaps be that Ross went to Pompeii some time during the summer of 1951 and

told Gerald about what he had seen, which made Gerald curious to go and see it, perhaps even to choose Italy as the destination of his annual 'wintering abroad' trip.

Let me read you now an excerpt from Nichols' account of his visit, published in my father's history magazine Past and Future August 1960 and titled Extract from 'An English View of Italy - Pages from a Travel Diary in Holy Year 1951'



ITALY - INITIATION AT POMPEII

At Pompeii too graves and darkness dominated. One wanders for hours; everywhere there is the scent of thyme in the quiet air, the ancient shops, the runnel-like streets with stepping-stones, the school and gymnastic ground, the forum, the town's temples, administrative offices and public lavatories, all stand in a silence of sunlight.

And amid this sunlight the darkest thing was the most impressive, that dim Villa of the Mysteries of Isis or Orpheus. Large painted rooms of initiation and instruction; the mother Isis, Silenus and his masks, Bacchus, the little cupid, the bride prepared for the mystic marriage, the child being instructed in the scripture of the legend. These realistic-imaginative paintings, with their background of heavy red, make a concrete impact on the mind as the reconstructed shops, the statues and the wall inscriptions, somehow do not. Some great emotional discharge had occurred here, an untold story wished to be heard from the pictures. What was it that these walls wanted to say?

Some message of discovery of a truth, some deep conviction of the oneness of spirit with flesh, of old Silenus ridiculed with masks, of Venus as a young woman whispering her secrets into the ears of the young bride-to-be with a curved veil... and the young lad being taught from the book, what is he learning? That the mysticism of the flesh is the way of life? I cannot accept that this may be merely a normal villa with eccentric décor, merely because it is not built in temple fashion; nobody really knows, but I feel that this was a place of enlightenment. This 'villa' was most probably a temple for initiations into the women's part of an Orphic cult, exempt from interference, run by an emperor's sister.

Italy exerted a powerful influence on the development of modern Wicca through the work of Charles Leland, which influenced Gardner and those around him such as Doreen Valiente. The Charge of the Goddess is probably the single most influential piece of writing that 'sets the tone' and attracts people to Wicca. Although it has often been reworked - by Valiente, Starhawk and others - it is the Italian material recorded by Maddelena and translated by Leland, that lies at the heart of the Charge, and I think it is important to recognise the importance of this contribution of Italy to the core vibration or essence of Wicca.



So here these two Englishmen were in Pompeii absorbing the influence of the Goddess, of “Venus as a young woman whispering her secrets ...That the mysticism of the flesh is the way of life...”

My proposal here is that they both metaphorically drunk from the cauldron of the goddess – from the well of her inspiration, in Italy but also elsewhere, and that they then mediated the inspiration they received in different ways that resulted in the two most vibrant expressions we have of paganism today: Druidry and Wicca.

They returned to England and over the next few years cooperated on the book that was to launch Wicca into the world. As a ‘sign that they were free’ they met together at the two naturist resorts I mentioned. In fact they had probably begun meeting, first at Spielplatz and then at Five Acres, during the war.

Here we have the wonderful image of two men sitting naked on a lawn in Hertfordshire talking about the subjects that fascinated them – religion, paganism, history, magic – while German bombs rained down on London. One – Gardner – in his fifties, the other in his thirties.

Both men realized that the world needed a return to a spirituality based upon a love of the Earth and her Seasons – the ravages of war and industrialization made it obvious. Both men had drunk from the same well, but different hands had cupped the water – so let’s see how different, and yet how similar they were:

Both men never had children, were asthmatics, keen nudists, and well-traveled. They both became ordained as Christian ministers in obscure unorthodox churches. They both became Druids – Gardner at least eight years before Nichols, who joined the Ancient Druid Order in 1954. And they both had significant help in their work from formidable female companions – Doreen Valiente for Gardner and Vera Chapman for Nichols.



But there were critical differences between the two men – Gardner was married, Nichols a life-long bachelor. Gardner was self-educated (he managed to avoid school altogether) while Nichols was a Cambridge Academic. Gardner was a hedonist, Nichols an ascetic. Gardner was a maverick and politically conservative, while Nichols was keen to be accepted by society and was a socialist.

The result of their being so different – almost polarized one could say – was that the inspiration of the Goddess, the need in the World Soul for a new religious impulse, flowed into two complementary channels. The flamboyant maverick Gardner developed a religion that was sensual and worked practical magic, the more restrained and cerebral Nichols threw his energy into promoting an approach that was more intellectual and was concerned with the magic of artistry, of bardistry, more than with the magic of spell-making.

Half a century later, we can see how much the two different paths Gardner and Nichols chose to promote have flourished as a result of their involvement. Just as the two key proponents of Druidry and Wicca in the modern era were united in many ways, so are these two paths, with their (usually) threefold initiation systems, their use of the circle, the directions and the elements, and their 8-fold

cycle of seasonal celebrations. But they are also as different as were those two men.

Many people find them sufficient paths on their own, but many also find the two paths work well together. If Nichols and Gardner were alive today, many of us would want to hear them speak at the same conferences, teach beside the same well.

Comparing the differences between them and the gifts they gave to the world shows how creativity can arise from the meeting of complementaries – how diversity and difference rather than conformity and unanimity fosters creativity.

And if they were alive today I'm sure both of them would be delighted to tell us of the story of their travels in Italy – and of how they were inspired by the Charge of the Goddess, whose resounding words 'And so ye shall be free in everything' echoed through their lives, inspiring them to foster two extraordinary paths of freedom.

Philip Carr-Gomm

Website: <http://philipcarrgomm.druidry.org>



Intermezzo
By Astrid Goosens

A few weeks ago I was going to a gallery. The paintings there were all views of the sea and the beach.

The gallery is in the middle of the country, far away from the North Sea. A man gave a small introduction about the paintings. Suddenly he started talking about global warming, the melting of the polar ice and that the place where we were standing would be located on an island, even if the place was now 8 meters above sea-level.

Everybody started talking. The man said: 'you don't have to be scared, this will only happen by the year 2080.' And everybody started to laugh.

My brains began to work in overdrive. By the year 2080 I'll be 110. Maybe I'll be still alive, you never know.

A few days ago I saw a small part of an infomercial. It was about global warming. We would have between 4 to 10 years to change this process, because if the earth got 2 ° Celsius warmer, the process would be irreversible.

From then on I got scared.

***Repeal of S.A.'s Witchcraft Suppression Act
by Damon Leff, PFI-SA National Coordinator***

In a recent document published by the South African Law Reform Commission (SALRC) the following statement appears:

"Legislative reform to the Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957 - The South African Pagan Rights Alliance has requested the Commission to investigate whether the proposed Mpumalanga Witchcraft Suppression Bill (2007) and the existing Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957 undermine the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms and rights of existing religious minorities in South Africa by deliberately criminalising and prohibiting rights of the religious minorities' to exist and to practice their religion."

SAPRA submitted this appeal for legislative reform to the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development and the South African Law Reform Commission in February and July 2007. The SALRC has agreed to conduct a preliminary investigation in order to determine whether or not Act 3 should be repealed.

A meeting has been scheduled with the SALRC for Thursday 4 September 2008 in Pretoria. I will be attending this meeting on behalf of this Alliance and will be joined by Luke Martin (Convener of the South African Pagan Council) Dr. Dale Wallace (Academia), Enmarie Potgieter, Samantha Perry, Phephile Maseko (Traditional Healers Organisation) and Paul Slabbert (Lawyers for Human Rights).

Act 3 was created with the intention of suppressing indigenous African practices, practices incorrectly identified as 'witchcraft'. Traditional Healers will confirm that they have never and do not identify their traditional African practices and religions as 'witchcraft' and that they regard the existence of Act 3 as prejudicial to their constitutionally guaranteed right to belief and religion.

The continuing existence of Act 3 criminalises identified practices, some of which are associated with and practised by both Traditional Healers and self-defined Pagan Witches (Witches who follow a religious path identified as Paganism). The Act criminalises South African citizens who do self-identify as Witches and who do practice Witchcraft.

The Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957 is unconstitutional. To the extent to which this Act provides for the suppression of witchcraft, a recognised belief system and religion, this Act contradicts several sections of Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), including:

A. Section 1 (a)

The Republic of South Africa is one, sovereign, democratic state founded on the following values: Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.

B. Section 3 (2) (a)

All citizens are equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship

C. Section 7 (1) and (2)

This Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. The state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights.

D. Section 9 (1) to (4)

(1) Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.

(2) Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.

(3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

(4) No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.

E. Section 10

Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.

F. Section 12 (1)

Everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person.

G. Section 15 (1)

Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.

H. Section 16 (1) (b) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes b. freedom to receive or impart information or ideas;

I. Section 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of association.

J. Section 22

Every citizen has the right to choose their trade, occupation or profession freely.

K. Section 31 (1)

Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community

- a. to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language; and
- b. to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.

This Alliance would argue that Act 3 must be declared unconstitutional and invalid to the extent to which this legislation identifies one group of persons (Witches), on the grounds of belief (Witchcraft), to be prohibited and criminal.

Witches of Cornwall

By Kate Ravilious

Macabre evidence of age-old spells surfaces in an archaeologist's front yard



Archaeologist Jacqui Wood holds a fragment of a cauldron unearthed from a buried spring-fed pool near her home. This and other artifacts she has found point to a long history of ritual and witchcraft. (Manuel Cohen)

Over the centuries, many in the British Isles have appealed to witches in times of need--to cure a toothache, concoct a love potion, or curse a neighbor. Witchcraft, the rituals of a number of pagan belief systems, was thought to offer control of the world through rites and incantations. Common as it has been over the past several centuries, the practice is secretive and there are few written records. It tends to be passed down through families and never revealed to outsiders. But archaeologist Jacqui Wood has unearthed evidence of more than 40 witchy rituals beneath her own front yard, bringing to light an unknown branch of witchcraft possibly still practiced today.

Wood's home is in the hamlet of Saveock Water in Cornwall, a county tucked in the far southwest corner of the country. For thousands of years people have raised crops and livestock in its fertile valleys, and its coastline of dramatic cliffs, secluded coves, and pounding surf was once a haunt for smugglers. Cornwall is a place time forgot; steeped in folklore, myth, and legend; and purported to be inhabited by pixies, fairies, and elves. So it should come as no surprise that it has also been home to the dark arts.

When I visit Saveock Water it is raining, which adds to its unearthly atmosphere. Wood, a warm lady with sparkling hazel eyes, greets me in her cozy white-washed barn while rain hammers on the roof. She moved to Saveock Water 15 years ago because it was an ideal location for her work in experimental archaeology, replicating ancient techniques, including those used in farming or metallurgy. Since then she has carried out her experiments, such as growing ancient crop varieties, unaware of what lay under her fields. In the late 1990s, Wood decided to do some metalwork research by re-creating an ancient kind of furnace. "I dug down into the ground to construct a shelter close to the furnace and I discovered a clay floor," she says.

Wood was excited but busy with other projects and left the find undisturbed for a few years. In 2001, she gathered some archaeology students to explore it further. "It was a nightmare to dig because the field is covered in a soft rush grass with a dense web of roots, and the soil is heavy and laden with water," says Wood.

While digging a hole for another project, Wood discovered a late Mesolithic clay platform in her field. She found that small pits had been dug into the platform at a later date, and contained bizarre collections of items including swan skins, pebbles, and bird claws.



As the group peeled off layers of turf, they discovered the clay floor was an extensive man-made platform--probably a foundation for a group of ancient dwellings. During a break in the rain, Wood takes me out to have a look. What used to be a half-acre marshy field is now a slippery clay surface, covered with small plastic crates protecting finds. Based on flint fragments embedded in the clay, a Danish specialist dated the site to the late Mesolithic, around 8,500 years ago.

But as Wood and her team excavated the platform over the next few seasons, unusual features began to emerge. They came across strange rectangular holes, about 15 by 10 inches, in the clay. "At first we thought they must be postholes or something," says Wood. But the first of the holes, about 6 inches deep, was lined with white feathers. The pits cut through the clay platform, so Wood knew that they had to date to a later time, but only an expensive radiocarbon test could pin it down. "We guessed it might have been a bird-plucking pit, a common farming practice at the turn of the 19th century," says Wood.

But that couldn't be the case--Wood found that the feathers were still attached to the skin, which had been laid in the pit with the feathers facing inward. A bird expert from the local zoo confirmed they came from a swan. On top of the swan skin, Wood found a pile of pebbles and a number of claws from different birds. She later learned that the stones came from a coastal region 15 miles away, though no one knows why they were brought from so far. Someone had gone to considerable trouble to gather the contents of this pit. That season, Wood and her colleagues found eight pits, two of which contained odd collections of bird parts, and six of which had been emptied, but with a few telltale feathers and stones left behind.

"Over the last 30 years I've been quick to dismiss ritual as an explanation for unusual archaeological finds," says Wood. "It usually means that the archaeologists can't think of anything better. So now it seems especially ironic that I end up with a site absolutely full of ritual."

More unusual finds came in 2005. Sandwiched between two of the rectangular pits was a round pit with a swan-feather lining. On top of the swan feathers nestled 55 eggs, seven of which contained chicks that would have been close to hatching. The shells of the eggs had dissolved, but the moist environment had preserved their membranes. Remains of magpies--birds associated with luck and superstition even today--had been placed on each side of the eggs.



Many of the ritual pits Wood and her colleagues unearthed, which date from the 17th century to just decades ago, contained eggs. The shells have dissolved, but the membranes remain, as do feathers of chicks that were close to hatching.

By that time Wood was convinced that only witchcraft could explain her unusual finds, but no one had ever heard of anything like this. Radiocarbon tests revealed the swan skins dated to around a.d. 1640, the time of civil war in England and a

very dangerous period to be practicing witchcraft. "Any sort of pagan worship was classified as witchcraft at that time, and punishable by death," says Wood. "If caught, they would have been burned at the stake." To make things worse, swans were royal symbols and property of the crown, so killing a swan was doubly risky.

Witch trials were common during the 16th and 17th centuries, and sometimes a few whispers were enough to see someone hanged. "During the 1650s more than 25 people were sent to Launceston Gaol [prison], in Cornwall, after a woman was accused by her neighbors of being a witch. She promptly implicated others in her alleged practice of the dark arts, some of whom were executed," says Jason Semmens, assistant curator at the Horsham Museum in Sussex and an expert on witchcraft in Cornwall during the 17th century.

And yet witchcraft remained popular, says Marion Gibson of Exeter University, a specialist on 16th- and 17th-century paganism. "Every village would have had people thought to be skilled in magic in one way or another and people in the area would go to them for their specialist services, just as we might go to a lawyer or plumber today."

Wood leads me to one of the pits and pulls the plastic lid off. I get a sense of the shock she must have felt when she found them. Swan feathers line the pit and muddy, wrinkled egg membranes sit on top. A shiver runs down my spine as I imagine someone coming here in the dead of night, digging a hole, and carefully placing these offerings in it. What made them desperate enough to risk death if caught?

Two spring-fed pools on Wood's land were places of ritual offering. Visitors seeking good fortune deposited everything from scraps of cloth, to straight pins, hair, heather branches, and nail clippings.



One explanation is that some of the pits contained offerings to St. Bridget (or Bride) of Ireland, the patron saint of babies and infants, who may be associated with the pagan goddess Brigid. "My theory is that maybe if you got married and didn't become pregnant in the first year, you might make an offering to St. Bride in a feather pit," says Wood. Women who then became pregnant might have had to empty their pits and burn the contents, she postulates.

Wood and her colleagues had further spooky discoveries ahead. Not far from the three pits, they uncovered the remains of a spring-fed pool, carefully lined with white quartz, and containing 128 textile scraps, six medieval straight pins, shoe parts, heather branches (associated with luck), fingernail clippings, human hair, and--it doesn't get more witch-like--part of a cauldron.

"Two of the pieces of fabric contained wool and silk, indicating they originally belonged to someone of high status," says Wood. Others were coarser and may have come from those of lower status. Looking at the textile fragments stored in little plastic boxes in Wood's barn, it is hard to believe they are 350 years old--the vivid blues, golden yellows, and vibrant greens were preserved by the moist environment.

Further excavation uncovered a stone-lined drain and a second pool that only fills in winter. Wood realized that the pools were much older than their contents,

and that this site may have been special to people for thousands of years. Based on stratigraphic evidence, she believes the quartz-lined pools are 6,000 years old. "The white quartz would have made the pools glow in the moonlight, and we think they may have been very special, a place of ritual for people in those times," she speculates.

If the pools do date back that far, they retained their sacred status throughout the ages, as by the 17th century people were using them as a place of offering, throwing in personal fragments (such as fabric and hair) for good fortune. However, the practice stopped in the late 17th century, when the crown paid locals to fill in the pools (along with other "holy" wells in Cornwall) to prevent pagan rituals.

Now that Wood has rediscovered the pools and word of them has spread, they have again become a special site for those of mystical inclination. While I chat with Wood in her barn, a homeopath, a practitioner of alternative medicine, arrives to collect water from the spring. He believes it has unique properties and comes every day to collect his family's drinking water.

Experts are baffled by the finds. The closest similar example of witchcraft is the witch-bottle, popular during the 17th century. "You could retaliate against someone who bewitched you by placing some of your own urine, hair, and nail clippings into a bottle and burying it. As the contents decayed, so would the witch, and her curse would suffer and be lifted," explains Semmens.

Present-day witches, shamans, and druids have taken interest in the site, and visit to offer their explanations for Wood's discoveries. Mike Slater, a witch from a pagan community in Bristol, thinks the pits and pool offerings have an amorous motive. "It has long been known that swans pair for life. Also nail parings and hair are commonly used in love spells," he says.

Wood's 2008 field season brought more unusual discoveries. "We have been uncovering some extraordinary animal pits," says Wood. One was lined with the skin of a black cat and contained 22 eggs, all with chicks close to hatching, in addition to cat claws, teeth, and whiskers. Another held a dog skin, dog teeth, and a baked pig jaw. The week prior to my arrival, Wood's students uncovered a pit that contained a mysterious seven-inch iron disk with a swan skin on one side and animal fur on the other. The biggest shock of all came from the radiocarbon dates for these pits. The cat pit dated to the 18th century, while the dog pit dated to the 1950s. "And I doubt it just suddenly stopped in the 1950s," says Wood. "It is plausible that it could still be continuing now."

It is not clear whether the pits were the work of a single family or a countrywide guild of witches. One lead came from a conversation between a member of Wood's excavation team and some locals in a pub. They recalled that there was a family, the Burnetts, reputed to be witches, that lived near Wood's house. Two sisters resided there until the 1980s, so it is possible the dog pit could have been their work. Today a relative of the Burnett sisters is still there, but Wood--for whatever reason--hasn't yet plucked up the courage to visit.

Kate Ravilious is a science writer based in York, England.

<http://www.archaeology.org/0811/etc/witches.html>

Summer Solstice at Hagar Qim

by Sabrina Zurgani

21st June 2008

Large groups of people who have booked months in advance gather at Hagar Qim temple on the Summer Solstice. Pagans and non, wake up early to witness the phenomenon about to occur. But for pagans the morning is not about history, astronomy, physics or mythology. It's a spiritual journey marking the cycle of the world and in so doing it marks the cycle of our lives.



Around 6 am the Sun starts rising languidly to the right of the temple and as it always does it slowly advances towards the temple. Neolithic temples are built in the shape of the Goddess and when one passes through the trilithon centre doorway it's like stepping into her life generating, life nurturing womb. Hence on this day the first rays of the Sun illuminate the left part of this doorway.

Simultaneously, round 6:30 am the rays of the Sun pass through a hole in a megalith known as the oracle hole. The rays hit the top of a high free-standing megalith and are reflected back on to a low standing slab. The reflected rays form the shape of a waning crescent moon on to the slab. The symbolic meaning of this is thoroughly breathtaking. The moon is uncovered every night by the rays of the Sun and she is uncovered again in Hagar Qim. The God of the Waxing Sun meets the Mother Goddess for the last time.



The crescent moon then starts moving downwards on the slab forming the shape of the spherical full moon of the Mother. Hence the God, in his full glory, makes love to the Goddess.

The moon elongates and moves further downwards until it has formed a yonic shape on the ground. It's the closest one can get to witness the God lovingly impregnating the Goddess. Then the yonic shape starts getting smaller and smaller until the rays of the Sun disappear in to the ground and the Earth and the Sun have become once again, one.

Needless to say, the Solstice at Hagar Qim is a very powerful experience. What was most gratifying was the feeling of complete and utter love and tenderness during the hieros gamos (sacred marriage). A whole new meaning was given to Litha. My lesson was to stop walking and start dancing. It was: Love, make love, be happy, be merry, live to the full even if you **know** that tomorrow will be grey. All we have is today, so might as well dance our way through it and in the process, like the God, create something beautiful.



Click on the link below to watch a short video of the solstice at Hagar Qim.

Note: Keep following the links on the site till you get to the video.

http://web.genie.it/utenti/m/malta_mega_temples/qimalign/orcout.html

***Meeting the Orishas of the Afro-Brazilian tradition –
A strong, direct, shamanic relationship with the deities
By Silvia Soricaro (Translated with permission, by Luna Verde)***

When I met the Orishas it was a discovery, during a period of my life when I was tired and lacking in confidence about all spiritual and magical paths which I had walked until that moment, and then I could revalue some facts and leave other facts behind me, as often happens in this situations.

I felt already the need of a stronger, immediate, shamanic and direct relationship with Deity, beyond all books, rituals or ceremonies written from others, which I never felt as really mine.

The Orishas can be considered as individual divine expressions of the Absolute, which are considered as androgynous principles in the afro-brazilian traditions, and because of its complexity, unapproachable to man, this principle acquires several names: Zambi in Umbanda, Nzambi or Nsambia in Palo, Olofi, Oloddumarè and Olorun in Santeria (meant as the Creator, The Universal Law and the Vital Force), these names change according to a Bantu or Yoruba derivation.

They say that in ancient times there were more than four hundred, and as someone could consider this number to be exaggerated, it makes sense when we think that in Africa, where they come from, there were many kingdoms and each one had its guardian divinity, often connected with a town, a river or any specific place. These divinities had of course several names and attributes according to the area where they came from, Yoruba (Nigeria), Bantu (Congo and Angola) and Jeje (nowadays Dahomey, where the Loà were born).

During this dark period which everyone remembers with the sad name of Slave Trade, many inhabitants of this area were captured to be exploited as animals for the progress of the New World. Between the survivals of those terrible journeys there were obviously not only ignorant men and women, as a certain information want us to believe for many years, but also kings and ministries of ancient kingdoms, maybe captured and sold to the white people from any enemy king.

These men and women brought their culture and their divinities, which joined together and gave birth to the various cults which still exist nowadays, like Santeria or Regla of Osha and the Palo at Cuba and the United States, the Candomblè in Brazil (from this were born the Umbanda and the Quimbanda, which are mixed with the local cults and other European spiritualistic traditions) and the Voudou at Haiti and Santo Domingo.

At the moment we have different traditions, even when many people mix them up in a sort of cauldron where anything which comes from these traditions is considered as a sort of black magic, used from smart exploiters who manipulate the consciousness and the soul of those who meet casually a magician or macumbero. Of course these are only macabre fantasies coming from media propaganda, where anything different or unknown gets the mark of a result of ignorant and not developed superstitions.

The reality is something else, it is a matter of deep spiritual and religious cults, in which the relationship with the divine is deeply personal, immediate, strong and real, beyond any possible description, from which we “western” people can learn a lot, because we often forget that being “possessed” from a deity is not diabolical or dangerous, when we do this with knowledge and respect.

At the moment there is quite a peculiar phenomenon, to my mind, a sort of “globalization” of these traditions, which if made in a proper way, studying their origin, their history and their legends, could surely represent an enrichment for everybody.

We need to consider that we are dealing with initiatic traditions, in which there are precise processes and rules to be followed. We can choose anyway to follow the cult of the Orishas without joining a specific tradition, because not everybody feels like being ready for initiation, which means duties and responsibilities.

Of course, when we want to “invoke” the Orishas we need to know at least some basic elements which let us to come in touch with their Axè (energy, power) in a balanced and conscious way.

Each Orisha can be distinguished by aptitude, place, colours, food and offers, and especially by personality... in short, the most known are:



Oxalá:

.. who is considered the lord of all heads, the sky from which union with earth, his sister Oduduà, life was born. He is often compared with Jesus, because he is considered the direct child of the supreme divinity between men.

He has two directions or manifestations, Oxalufà who represents the archetype of the old wise man, patient and merciful, and Oxaguian, who represents the young warrior, fighting for high ideals.

His colour is white, he wants offers and foods only in this colour, like Canjica (broken white maize), coconuts, milk, rice, some white bakery and animals, and he often asks that his offers must be wrapped in cotton.

He is connected with all that is peace, serenity, balance and his Axè is used to cure physical and mental stress, especially to prepare refreshing baths for the Ori (head).

His traditional day is the Sunday, his metal is silver, and his stone the diamond or rock crystal, his drink mineral water or white sweet wine, his power places are hills, mountains and generally isolated open places where a lot of tranquillity can be found.

His children are quiet, wise people with a strong inner discipline, attracted to spiritual ways and often studious and prepared. Their mean fault is a certain bent to stubbornness, sometimes excessive conservatism in the children of Oxalufà and in the imposition of their ideas to the detriment of everybody and everything in the children of Oxaguian.



Yemanjá:

She is perhaps the most honoured and known in the whole world, she is the mother of all, her name means indeed “mother of the fish children” (Yeye Omo Ejà), whose children are those who live in the Ocean of Life’s primordial waters...

She is compared to the Virgin Stella Maris, she is the Queen of the Sea, and as extension of all what is connected with it, like intuition, dreams, emotions and the Moon.

She is often depicted as a beautiful woman at the height of her maturity, emerging from the salted waters while white roses and shells come out of her stretched out hands, giving and giving herself.

She is the charming mermaid, full of love and compassion, but also the unfathomable and scary abyss, she has many faces, like the ocean.

Her day is the Saturday, the her stones are the aquamarine, turquoise, crystal and pearls, her metal is silver, her colours light blue, white and transparent, she loves sweet fruity smells, mirrors, jewellery and she prefers offers like light coloured foods and sweets like mousse, pears, rice creams, dulce de leite (milk pudding) and she asks drinks like mineral water and champagne.

Her children are altruistic, sensitive, maternal and protective, they tend towards to be busy with everybody, risking sometimes taking not enough care of themselves. They look for settled relationships and feel lonely when they can’t get them. They feel strongly their responsibilities and familiar duties, that is why they look for a partner who can give them the stability and affection they are looking for and they absolutely need to give.



Oxum:

I have a personal affection and veneration for this splendid Orisha, who often helped and advised me in difficult moments like a sister...

Charming, vain and extremely feminine, sensual and sometimes a bit capricious, she is associated with beauty and fertility, meant as creativity more than maternity (like her sister Iemanjá), in fact she is the guardian of the artists and she is considered as the Aphrodite of the Yoruba pantheon; her Axè is traditionally used for love and feelings questions. She is connected to economical and social prosperity and to money.

Her colour is yellow, because of her connection with gold and because, as a legend tells, this Orisha was poor in the past and had only one dress, but because she cared a lot about her own appearance and clothing, she washed it so often in the river that this got the same colour.

She is considered as the favourite wife of Xangò, often fighting against Iansà and Oba to get high in the favour of this lady-killer and masculine Orisha, who seems

not to appreciate her enough and gives her not the love she should receive. A legend tell that Oxum cried often because of the behaviour of her husband, and that Eshu was trying to cheer her up, and one day she gave her a powder which she used to transform herself into a dove and escape from Ifà, but later she regretted this.

She represents the feminine power par excellence and every woman's dignity, which she is defending courageously from abuse of power, she is connected also to the menstrual blood which represents the mystery of fertilization and feminine power.

Her power places are rivers and lakes, her day the Saturday, her metals gold and copper, she loves perfumes, jewels, golden coins, mirrors and all affected feminine tools, she likes sacrifices such as melons, yellow pumpkin and eggs and especially honey, which it is needed to be tasted before given to her, her symbolic animals are the peacock and the duck.

When she shows up she often mimes the gesture of a woman bathing in the river, combing her hair, putting on perfume and asks for her own jewels which she cares so much about. She dances in a gentle and sensual way, holding de abebè in her hands, a golden mirror which she also uses for magical purposes.

The children of Oxum are extremely charming and they often have the gift of diplomacy which they use to avoid even the most difficult obstacles with their sweetness and a smile. They have often a strong social and economical ambition, and they are very clever when they need to make up strategies to reach their goals.

They love to be surrounded from friends and admirers, they hate loneliness and sometimes they find difficult to face the end of a relationship, and they adore being courted and to be in the spotlight. They have a natural charm and feel for beauty which takes them to art, fashion or showbiz.



Xangô:

The Orisha of thunder and justice. Regal, impetuous and irascible, is considered the King of Oyò (town in Nigeria), he is a warrior, proud and severe, he protects the judges, lawyers and his Axè is often used to win disputes or trials.

Orisha, masculine and lady-killer is the real macho with several relationships... Traditionally he has three wives, Obà, the archetype of the traditional bride, his official wife, respected guardian of the fireside, Oxum and Iansà who in a lot of pataki (legends) are fighting with each other to gain his favours.

He is connected to the stone mines, his element is fire, his colours white and red, (he is connected to Fulgurite, the Rayos Stones (lightning stones), his day is Wednesday, his symbol is the double axe and his traditional offer the Amalà.

When he shows up, he dances in a solemn and majestic way, brandishing his axe and moving as throwing the thunderstones on earth.

His children are strong, severe and very proud. They are often aware of their own power which sometimes they exaggerate and they don't accept easily to be contradicted or opposed, sometimes this is the reason of violent anger and of losing their deep sense of justice, which normally distinguishes them, especially in love matters, where they are invincible... They are born leaders and they have remarkable political and entrepreneurial talents.



Iansà:

She is the uncontested lady of storms and winds, but her domain is extended also to the cemeteries, she rules the egun (the spirits of dead) and her Axè is used to banish obsessions, enemies and evil eye of each sort. She is fast, changeable, passionate and impetuous; she shares her domain with her favourite partner Xangò, with whom she often fights because of her impetuous, independent and aggressive personality. She is an Amazon who fights for defending freedom and rights, especially women's, she does not accept bonds or compromises, throwing arrows and electric bursts against the adversaries.

When she dances she turns whirling, shaking the sword and the Iruexim, a fly swatter made of horse tail which she uses to scare the egun.

Her colours are dark red but also black, according to the manifestation... a well known one, venerated and feared is Iansà Bale, depicted as a pale figure with long dark hair moving in the wind, bringing the moans of the ghosts and which's war cry shakes the souls of living and dead. The traditional day dedicated to her is Wednesday and she is compared with Saint Barbara.

Her children are restless, extrovert and explosive, they tend to fight for their rights, also in an aggressive way. They are loyal and they hate every kind of subterfuge and hypocrisy, straight to the extreme, also when they could be damaged from their own behaviour. They are very sensual and have many relationships, and because of their temper and impatience in too intense relationships, they find it difficult to keep them long lasting and stable.



Ogun:

Warrior Orisha, brother of Xangò, he is masculine, brave and pugnacious, often impulsive till violent. He is connected to the forging of metals, especially iron, and that's why he can be compared for some aspects to Vulcanus, but he also has some martial characteristic and is connected to military and police corps but also to the revolutionary who fights to defend his own freedom and of his people.

Legends tell that during his forgery work he was often helped from his wife Oyà, who didn't like that kind of life, and tired of the situation, fell in love with Xangò, decided to escape changing herself into a buffalo.

Ogum pursued her and during a violent argument they chopped each other in little pieces with their swords, Ogun in seven pieces as many as his characteristics and Oyà in nine pieces, becoming then Iansà (from Iya Mesan, the mother split into nine parts, like the nine tributaries of the river Niger to which she was originally associated).

His colour is blue, his day Tuesday, his metals iron and bronze and his power places are roads and railways, while his Axè is extended to war, defence but also to work, his instrument is the sword.

His children are strong, brave and stubborn, they throw themselves into any quest, also the most dangerous, with determination and sometimes too recklessly, they are generous and ready to defend their beloved and family by any means, sometimes they are too quick-tempered, tending towards using weapons or being too litigious.



Elegbarà (Elegba):

He is considered as the messenger of the Orisha, the one who intermediates and to whom one must necessarily bring offers and prayers, because if he is annoyed, he can decide to close the "channelings" and possibilities.

He is considered the lord of fertile Chaos, from which anything can begin and where anything must return, sooner or later. He is cunning, irreverent, ambiguous but also merry and benevolent.

He is considered the guardian of houses, and that's why statues or other things consecrated to him are situated just behind doors, to drive back and defend from any negative attack and from any intrusion.

He is also the guardian of roads, crossroads and passage areas (doors, crossroads etc), he closes and opens the doors permitting to the mankind his fulfilment in any sector of life.

Because of this important and essential function he became the most important entity (together with de Pomba Gira, his feminine side) honoured in the Brazilian cult of the Quimbanda.

His colours are red and black, his number 3 or 7, traditional offers are cigars, rum or "cachaca", according to the referring tradition, one of the most known ritual food in Brazil is the farofa (manioca flour with dendè oil), his day is Monday. He is often associated to Saint Antonio from Padua.

His children have a vivid intelligence, which they easily use in an illicit or correct way, according to their will and their individual emancipation, they are good speakers and merchants and they always know how others must believe what they want.

They normally have a lot of friends and interests, they are wanted for they cheerfulness, their most important faults being their inconsequential behaviour and the tendency to get easily bored.

Calendars in Stone by Watersfall



The day of the Autumn Equinox marks the beginning of Fall, when day and night are of equal length. From this day on, the days get shorter and the nights grow longer. The actual equinox takes place for just a few moments where the centre of the sun can be seen directly above the equator.

Megalithic temples such as the Mnejdra temple, mark the rising sun at certain important times of the year. Together, the temple axis, the entrance portal, and the elaborately constructed and decorated inner apse portal, form a "Solar Calendar".

On the winter solstice (21st December), the rays of sunrise pass across the left side of the entrance, meeting the edge of the slab at the right hand side of the temple (see picture below). On the spring equinox (20th March) the sun's rays pass straight through the doorway unto the temple's altar while on the summer solstice (21st June), the rays of the morning sunlight greet the right hand side of the temple's facade, to cross to the left slab inside the chamber. On the autumn equinox (22nd September) the sun's rays move further left, passing again through the centre of the main doorway, discharging light into the chamber. The cycle then starts again at the winter solstice.

The solstice and equinox alignments of the temples make it quite evident that people in prehistoric times depended on knowing the changing seasons through the movement of the stars, the moon and the sun. This knowledge allowed them to keep track of the agricultural cycle on which they depended for survival.

Log-on to the Heritage



Malta website:

<http://www.heritagemalta.org/index.html> or contact them on 2295 4000 or 2295 4300 for more information on solstice and equinox temple bookings.

God's Third Leg
(Or: Can the Christian God get an erection?)
By Martin J Burn - The English Atheist.

No, seriously, can the Christian God get an erection? This is an important question. Why? Well, it will point us towards something of the true nature of the Christian God, if it exists, and maybe point us towards the way that Christians comprehend their non-existent Supreme Being.

So, let's suspend our disbelief for a moment and have a quick ponder.

I have a penis, my next door neighbour and his son both have a penis (one each), and there's an almost 50/50 chance that you have a penis. And I'm sure that the strange looking woman I saw in the cafe on the A47 last week has some sort of a penis as well. We know from reading the Christian Bible that man is made in the image of God or Gods (Genesis 1:26), so it is quite evident that God does indeed have His own one-holed pink piccolo. If God is truly omnipresent (everywhere) then his Old Man - even in it's very limpest, most flaccid state - must be absolutely HUGE. It cannot be anything less than the most magnificent schlong in the whole universe. It is a third leg above all other third legs, probably the size of several dozen super-clusters of galaxies. Forget about all the other God's that are depicted with willeys (erect or otherwise), the Christian God's one-eyed trouser-snake really does make every one else's look depressingly microscopic. Goodness knows, his testicles alone must measure tens of thousands of light-years in diameter. Heck, one of His wrinkly, scrotal prune-skin crevices alone could quite easily swallow up several hundred solar systems! But for all the men out there who may be reading this, try not to get too depressed - God's post-elephantine todger is not made of any real substance, it can only be made of 'spirit' or some other such non-existent paranormal material. The same immeasurable stuff that God Himself is made of.

I think that we can safely assume that God does not have a foreskin, because that would be a tad hypocritical of him wouldn't it? But who or what performed the surgery for His circumcision? Perhaps God just told His mammoth foreskin to disappear, and poof! off it went. We don't know, but we can say that if a knife was used it must have been terribly sharp. And big. Sharp enough to incise the unwanted dangly bit of the ultimate perfect being, and big enough to span the vast astronomical distances of the Godly prepuce.

But getting back to the original question, can God get an erection? Can He pump up His volume? Can the Master of the Universe drag weed? Well, I don't think that He can, and I have several reasons as to why. Firstly, a penile erection is indicative of sexual excitement, and unless there is a Mrs. God in Heaven, Mr. God would not get aroused for the reason of opposite gender, marital rumpy-pumpy. Nowhere in the Bible does it say there is a companion Goddess. And next, as every man knows, John Thomas sometimes has a mind of his own, he stands to parade ground attention for no apparent reason at the most inconvenient of times, usually on an over-crowded tube train whilst wedged tight between a geriatric nun from Cardiff and a small group of Japanese tourist businessmen. But if God is the perfect being we are told of by the Christian clergy, this situation would not, could not happen to Him.

Young men understand the value of a secluded solo stiffer, but I think that we can easily dispose of the theory that God enjoys a "swift one off the wrist", for one thing He's far too old to still be indulging in a quick hand shandy. I doubt if there is one Christian on the planet who would assert that God indulges in the occasional bout of solo sexual action. Self-gratification in the company of Mrs. Palm and her five lovely daughters could not possibly enter God's pure mind. Anyway, where would He go to be alone? What would He use for visual stimulation? And as for the results of such a colossal Godly five-finger-shuffle, well it hardly bears thinking about, as would the cost of an almost infinite number of galaxy-sized sheets of bathroom tissue - over an almost infinite period of time.

Ask several men if they have ever had a wet dream, some will say yes, and some will say no. The ones that say no are lying. Nocturnal emissions are a normal (and thankfully infrequent) part of the human male's unconscious bedtime life. But God, if he is aware of everyone and everything all the time does not go to sleep, so we can safely discount the overnight Divine astronomical tent pole. And the enormous wet patch that would seep outside the edge of the known universe, extinguishing several important proto-stars on its inexorable glutinous journey.

Is there any Viagra in Heaven? We will never know. But since God would not need any in the first place, the point is moot.

There is no reason to believe that God would use his monster sausage to expel fluid waste. He could not avail Himself of a wee-wee. How could God be perfect if He was capable of ejecting unwanted bodily fluids? He could not be capable of harbouring something that was not needed. Again, it would be an imperfection.

I have thought of some other reasons why the pretend Christian God would be unable to engender a massive portion of erectile tissue, but these are minor arguments. And I have already forgotten them anyway.

So there we have it, the imaginary Christian God can not get an erection. His pork sword would have to be permanently limp. It is a humongous, useless appendage. But why should this be important? Well, the next time you are arguing against the existence of God with a Christian, just ask him or her if there is anything that their perfect god can not do. They always say no, because they cannot say otherwise if they believe in a perfect God. This time, instead of hitting them with the 'creating a rock too heavy to lift' argument, go to it with the "Supreme Stiffer Is Not Possible Argument", courtesy of Martin J Burn - The English Atheist.



Another astronomer searches for God's other astral gonad.

***Finding the Real Magic –
a personal report on the Isaac & Phaedra Bonewits
weekend in Schwerte, Germany,
by Sothis***

Eurik and I have been studying ADF druidism for the last year, and so when we heard that the founder of the organisation Isaac Bonewits was touring Europe giving weekend seminars with his wife Phaedra, it didn't seem as if this was a chance we could turn down. So we took our little silver car on the longest drive of its life, all the way to an ecological centre near Dortmund in Germany, to meet the two legendary figures of Neo-Paganism, and hear what they had to say.

As we stumbled stiff-legged from the car we had our first glimpse of Isaac and Phaedra, walking through the yellow beech trees to the house. Both of them are silver-haired, Isaac was walking with a stick and leaning on Phaedra's arm. He seemed to me frail and elderly, yet this was an impression which was soon to be eliminated as we gathered in the seminar room to hear him speak. Wearing a bright white polar neck, and numerous druid and pagan pendants, with a curly grey beard and massy white hair, and looking absolutely relaxed, his presence seemed to exude around the room. Almost before we were sitting down, clutching our cups of tea, he had dived into an explanation of the laws of magic.



When I had pulled my attention from my breakfast of squashed gingerbread and focused on what was happening around me, they seemed to be talking about crystals and magic; or more specifically, the fact that crystals don't have any. They don't have any intrinsic magic power, said Isaac, their power comes from their colour – or, as Phaedra put it, crystals are shiny, and, just like magpies, humankind is drawn to glittery things. Crystals are no better or worse a magical system than Tarot, or Astrology. All of these things work, according to Isaac, because they trigger within us different psychic states, and thus allow us to tap into that energy, ch'i or life-force which is all around us. Indeed beauty; beautiful objects, beautiful dance, poetry, words, or pictures, seems to be a key to magic, in the Bonewits' formulation. More on that later.

What immediately caught my attention as we relaxed into the lecture was Isaac's idea that paradox is at the heart of magic. We all move in different realities; we all exist in a network of different values and truths, but because these different truths may seem to clash, doesn't mean that they aren't all true. An eighty year old lives in a different universe from an eighteen year old, but both lives are real. Reality is not single or simple; in fact reality, in Isaac's words, is 'a crutch for people who can't handle magic'. To do magic, you need to be aware that reality is multiple, and that if something works for you then you can use it, whether that be a room full of rose quartz crystals or an evocation of the dread Cthulu. This is the Law of Pragmatism: If something works, it is real.

He went on then to outline a theory of the Spheres of Comprehension, which is essentially that the world can be understood through different spheres, the sphere of art, the sphere of science, and the sphere of religion. Long ago, back

when human life began and we started to understand what was going on around us, the three spheres were overlapping - we understood science through art and art through religion. As we have evolved, the three spheres have separated; scientists leave religion for the priests, and artists leave science for the geeks ;-). But in the centre of these globes, in the space that still overlaps - where science can be art can be God - that is where magic happens. Magic, he seemed to be suggesting, is that state where everything is possible, and where opposites are one; the point where the Ouroboros comes back to swallow its tail.



To develop his point he continued in talking about the history of faith and magic, and the history of dualistic thinking. An idea he repeated throughout the weekend was that the history of our culture, all the way from Zoroastra and the idea of a good and evil god, through the Gnostic division of spirit and matter, to the adoption and adaptation of these ideas in Christianity, has turned us into dualistic thinkers. Even though many of us no longer hold to the view that life, morality, or even gods, divide into black and white, this split thinking still pervades our culture and our brains: 'it's the original poisoned water that we are swimming around in', as Isaac put it. Incredibly important, he kept stressing is to develop a pluralistic viewpoint: understanding that the universe, rather than being black/white, light/dark, right/wrong, is 'complicated, ambiguous and messy.'

After this he continued talking about ritual skills, and ADF ritual style. I say 'he', yet although Isaac was doing most of the talking, Phaedra interrupted throughout with a fluidity that made a duet of their lecture; either supporting with examples or restraining with qualifications when Isaac seemed to be getting carried away in his own conceptions. She also supervised group work, and we were all struck by her demonstration of group energy. After a few hours of sitting we were asked us to observe the feelings in our body. We were then told to stand, and cross arms, letting our palms rest one above the other. Immediately my hands began to tingle: without having done any visualisation or meditation, but with the simplest of arm movements we had dramatically altered the energy of the room. When we sat down again, I not only felt buzzing with energy, but far more open to a group which, up to that point, I had not felt particularly comfortable in. It made me think about how significant it is in a ritual to think not just about the individual energies or invocations of the participants, but really get the energy moving around the group as a whole.

After discussing ritual style for the afternoon, the evening consisted of the much-awaited ritual itself, lead by Isaac and Phaedra, with contributions from those who wanted; Eurik and I were quick to volunteer - how, after all, could we pass up the chance to work in an ADF ritual with the Bonewits'? It was fascinating to view their style in leading a ritual, and it was certainly a very powerful and enjoyable one, particularly Isaac's incredible sung invocations to the Morrigan and Dagda.

Afterwards, we all sat around and prepared ourselves to relax and drink beer:

thus were somewhat taken aback when Isaac and Phaedra commanded a 'bardic circle': moving around the group clockwise, each person had to recite a poem, story, joke, or sing a song. Despite being initially alarmed at such a request (I can't sing to save my life and jokes slip out of my head like fish): it was a truly beautiful evening, and a wonderful way to maintain the energy of the night, and keep things somewhat Pagan, and spiritual, and truly shared, rather than allowing the conversation to slip off into more general topics. We heard verse, stories, and all types of songs from German to English folk to the Beatles. The highlight for me was when Phaedra sang the old English folksong 'green grow the rushes' – the new, Neo-Pagan version, of course. Since she hadn't sung it, she told us, for twenty years, and only gave it a go on somebody's request, the rest of the group helped her somewhat haphazardly when she forgot the words. This did mean we ended up with lines like – '11 something somethings with Crowley', but we certainly kept the tune and spirit going. One of the runic blessings of the ritual had been the blessing of community, and sitting in the recreation room, all of us fumbling to get the correct words of an old folksong, translated into a hymn of modern paganism, typified, for me, precisely this blessing.

The next morning, we got up to a critique of last night's ritual, and then moved to what was certainly the most controversial part of the weekend, which was Isaac's comparison of Wicca and ADF druidism. When describing modern Wicca, about which he was scathingly, and, many of us thought, unnecessarily critical, Isaac suggested essentially that Wicca was Gerald Gardner's version of Tantra for the Western world. In a Wiccan ritual, according to Isaac, the primary form of power raising is sexual energy, either explicit or implicit. However, since British people tend to be much more repressed than those in the East and not so comfortable with dancing about naked etc, Wiccan rituals, from their very beginnings, found people trying to raise power through an energy with which they were neither comfortable nor familiar. In contrast, according to Isaac, ADF druidism uses art for its power-raising. Sacrifices to the gods in the form of poetry or dance, or vividly written invocations. I love the very idea of creating art to give to the gods, but as far as the Wicca/ADF comparison goes, I, as many of the others there, remained unconvinced. As one high priestess of a German Wiccan coven pointed out, Wicca has evolved a great deal from whatever Gerald Gardner meant, or didn't mean, it once to be.

I also cannot accept that Wicca doesn't use 'art' to raise energy, or, in fact, that you can so easily separate the two methods of power raising to such an extent. Just because a ritual doesn't include reading poems which are then given into the flames, doesn't mean that the participants aren't praising the gods, offering to the gods, with the craft of their imagination. Isn't the ritual form itself an artwork? A piece of sacred drama? A Wiccan ritual which re-enacts a myth, for example Persephone's journey to the Underworld, certainly works with the Persephone/Hades energy, which is sexual on one level, but only on one. Indeed, Isaac himself pointed out to us a number of times that body and spirit are not separate – this is only a misconception of dualism. So if body and spirit are not separate, then, how can sex and art be so mutually exclusive? A Wiccan myth-working ritual is a re-enactment of an imaginary or mythical experience in the material plane, and if that isn't art, then I don't know what is.

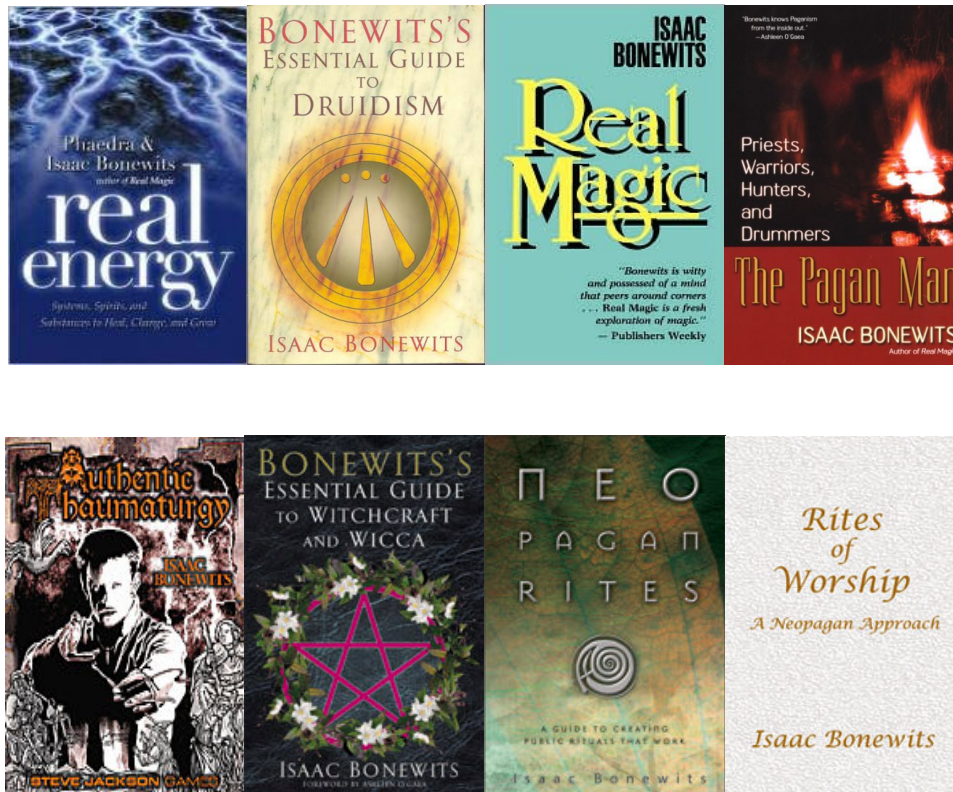
During this part of the seminar I was far more convinced by Phaedra than Isaac; who herself, as far as I understood it, has been a significant figure in the American Wiccan community. She pointed out that ADF and Wicca are not

mutually exclusive, and that they still do a number of Wiccan rituals. She also made the interesting suggestion that ADF work is more appropriate for large public rituals, and a Wiccan ritual, which tends to be more intense, better for private work. Considering the number of wonderful open ADF rituals Eurik and I have experienced while working with it, this idea thoroughly resonated with me.

One might think that all of this was enough for one weekend, but certainly not. Isaac ended the day with an intensive two-hour lecture about the twenty-six laws of magic: more information can be found here, for those who are interested. http://www.neopagan.net/AT_Laws.html I'm fascinated to see, now that I look at the web page, that he first formulated this as a guide for players of RPGs. All the more fascinating because these laws don't seem to belong to the fantasy world; but also have a perfectly practical application to everyday life. Even the more 'magical' seeming laws, such as the Law of Contagion, that objects or beings in physical contact with one another continue to interact after separation, has, as Isaac pointed out, recent backing from quantum physics. It just goes to show that there really are different, but equally valid, realities, as well as prove my own personal theory that the magic of fairy tales and fiction is not so far from 'real' magic after all.

In summary, it was a fantastic weekend, both rich and enriching. We wended our way back to Liberec buzzing with all of the new ideas we had come out with. I feel truly lucky that we had a chance to meet such venerable Pagan elders in the setting of the beautiful German countryside, and experience some magic with them.

Books by Isaac Bonewits



The Eleusinian Mysteries

By Edward A. Beach

The Eleusinian Mysteries, held annually in honor of Demeter and Persephone, were the most sacred and revered of all the ritual celebrations of ancient Greece. They were instituted in the city of Eleusis, some twenty-two kilometers west of Athens, possibly as far back as the early Mycenaean period, and continued for almost two thousand years. Large crowds of worshippers from all over Greece (and later, from throughout the Roman empire) would gather to make the holy pilgrimage between the two cities and and participate in the secret ceremonies, generally regarded as the high point of Greek religion. As Christianity began to spread, the Mysteries were condemned by the early Church fathers; yet the rites continued for hundreds of years more and exercised considerable influence on the formation of early Christian teachings and practices.

Our sources of information regarding the Eleusinian Mysteries include the ruins of the sanctuary there; numerous statues, bas reliefs, and pottery; reports from ancient writers such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Herodotus, Aristophanes, Plutarch, and Pausanias--all of whom were initiates--as well as the accounts of

Christian commentators like Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Astorias. Yet for all this evidence, the true nature of the Mysteries remains shrouded in uncertainty because the participants did, with remarkable consistency, honor their pledge not to reveal what took place in the *Telesterion*, or inner sanctum of the Temple of Demeter. To violate that oath of secrecy was a capital offense. (Aeschylus, for example, once had to fear for his life on account of coming too close to revealing forbidden truths.) For these reasons, scholars today must make use of circumstantial evidence and inferences, with the result that there is still no consensus as to what did or did not take place. Hence, we shall sometimes be forced to engage in the tentative weighing of alternative hypotheses, without always reaching definite conclusions.

Historical Antecedents and Cross-Cultural Influences

Eleusis was by no means the only place in Greece that featured yearly festivals in honor of a goddess of grain and the annual renewal of life. Similar rituals were characteristic of many centers of ancient eastern Mediterranean civilization, including islands as far north as Samothrace, as far east as Cyprus, and as far south as Crete. In all of these regions were cults of one or another Great Goddess of life, fertility, and the harvest, whose worship involved secret rites of purification and initiation. In Pylos (western coast of Messenia), for example, an ancient tablet (Fr. 1222) mentions annual rites in honor of a pair of goddesses draped in a veil, who would be led in a formal procession with great pomp and solemnity down to the sea for washing and purification (Faure 33). On the west coast of Asia Minor, Greek city-states were practicing the cult of the Phrygian goddess Cybele as far back as the seventh century BCE. Known among the Greeks primarily as the Great Mother, or simply as *Meter*, this originally foreign goddess of nature and fertility was early associated with Rhea or Demeter herself (Burkert 178). Indeed, according to some scholars, "Demeter and Cybele were but local forms of the Great Mother worshipped under diverse names all over Greece" (Harrison 158; Baring and Cashford 369).

In the early part of this century, Foucart theorized, on the basis of statements by classical authors (e.g., Herodotus Bk. 2) as well as the discovery at some Mycenaean sites of Egyptian figurines and small artifacts that the cult of Demeter in Greece originally derived, in whole or in part, from Egypt. Further support for this hypothesis comes from certain remarkable parallels between the myth of Isis (especially in the version presented by Plutarch in his *Isis and Osiris*, chs. 15 and 16) and that of Demeter (as recounted in the "Hymn to Demeter," see below). Among the details of these parallels are episodes in both stories involving infant princes who almost gain immortality--but not quite--at the hands of the respective goddesses.

On the basis of these correspondences, Foucart and his followers concluded that the Mysteries at Eleusis originally must have come from Egypt (Foucart 2-23; Magnien 44-46). Yet the fact that the sanctuary ruins in Eleusis evidently go back centuries earlier than the Hymn itself, and that excavations have unearthed no Egyptian artifacts there from that period, militates against this hypothesis (Mylonas 15, 276). On the other hand, since we know that Greek colonists and mercenaries had settled in Lower Egypt by the seventh century BCE (Leclant 245), it is reasonable to surmise that these Greek and Egyptian fertility goddesses had already begun to penetrate each other's cults and mingle in the minds of worshippers, perhaps by way of Cretan influences. There is still no consensus about this and it remains a topic of lively debate.

Many scholars today favor the view that the cult of Demeter probably derived from Thessaly or Thrace. They base this conclusion partly on references in Homer and other ancient authors to some evidently pre-Dorian temples to Demeter in the Thessaly towns of Thermopylae, Pyrasos, and Pherai; partly on certain etymological links connecting key words in the rites of Demeter to pre-Hellenic dialects from the north (Mylonas 14-20; Kerényi 111, 145). Other scholars point



out that Demeter may be the same as a goddess "Dameter," who is mentioned briefly in Linear B tablets from Pylos dating from approximately 1200 BCE. This evidence suggests that the cult of Demeter may after all have originated in the southern Peloponnesus (Ventris and Chadwick 289). But in any case, whether the specific cult of Demeter at Eleusis originated in northern or southern Greece, the undeniable parallels with worship of grain goddesses in other parts of the eastern Mediterranean region point to frequent contacts and the cross-fertilization of religious ideas.

Most closely related to the Mysteries at Eleusis here the so-called "Thesmophoria" (from *thesmoi*, meaning "laws," and *phoria*, "carrying," in reference to the goddess as "law-bearer"). These rites were celebrated by women only throughout all Greece in the month of Pyanepsion (late October), their characteristic feature being a pig sacrifice, the usual sacrifice to chthonic deities. The Greeks attributed special powers to pigs on account of their fertility, the potency and abundance of their blood, and perhaps because of their uncanny ability to unearth underground tubers and shoots. It was believed that mingling their flesh with the seeds of grain would increase the abundance of next year's harvest. The

ceremonies comprised fasting and purification, a ritualized descent into the underworld, and the use of sympathetic magic to bring renewed life back out of the jaws of death (Harrison 120-31; Baring and Cashford 374-77). Similarly, the Eleusinian Mysteries also revered swine and their rituals featured the washing and sacrificing of young pigs sacred to Demeter (although this took place on the beaches at Pireas near Athens rather than at Eleusis itself). The numerous correspondences suggest that the Eleusinian Mysteries were of a piece with the Thesmophoria, and perhaps shared the same historical origins.

The Hymn to Demeter

The Hymn to Demeter [DOC], 495 verses in length, is the canonical work associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries. Although traditionally attributed to Homer, it was probably written somewhat later, in the seventh century BCE (Evelyn-White xxxvi). The hymn recounts the story of Demeter and Kore (the Maiden, i.e., Persephone), how they were separated when Hades snatched Persephone up in his chariot as she was gathering flowers in a meadow and bore her down with him to the underworld. The story continues that Demeter, disconsolate over her daughter's loss, searched all over the world for her in vain. Finally, with the help of Hekate and Helios, she learned of her daughter's abduction and discovered, besides, that it had been approved in advance by Zeus himself.

At this point, the narrative introduces a lengthy interlude (lines 95 to 300) to explain how Demeter came to Eleusis and established her cult there. At the same time, the episode establishes her credentials as the bringer of immortality to humankind: When the goddess realized the role of the other Olympians in her misfortune, she abandoned her divine form and set forth disguised as an old woman from Crete. Eventually she reached Eleusis and set herself down by an old well (the Maiden Well, which later figured prominently in the Mysteries), her heart overflowing with grief. At this point she was accosted by the four lovely daughters of Celeus, a local chieftain, who befriended her and introduced her to their mother, Metaneira. So impressed was Metaneira by the old woman's dignified bearing that she offered her the position of nurse for her own infant son. Demeter accepted, and under her care the child thrived marvelously well. What the mortals didn't know, however, was that Demeter was secretly treating the infant with a series of mystical practices. Every night while the palace slept she would anoint his limbs with ambrosia and then put him into the fire. The child might have become ageless and deathless had the procedure continued; but unfortunately, Metaneira spied on Demeter one night, and when the boy was put into the flames she screamed in fright. At this, the indignant goddess broke off the treatment, revealed herself in her full divine majesty, and demanded that a temple be built in her honor. There, she would teach the people her special rites. And with that promise, Demeter disappeared.

After the Eleusinians had built their temple to Demeter, she stayed there and pined for her daughter, refusing to rejoin the other gods on Mount Olympus. Moreover, she refused to make the seeds sprout in the dark earth, and all the world began to suffer famine. Even the gods suffered from the lack of gifts and sacrifices. Father Zeus sent Iris and other gods to intercede with her, yet Demeter would not relent. Finally, the king of the gods dispatched Hermes down to Hades, bidding the lord of the underworld to give Persephone up and return her to her mother. Hades reluctantly agreed, but first he contrived to make Persephone

taste a small morsel of food--consisting of a single pomegranate seed--just enough to ensure, by a kind of divine symmetry, that she would always have to spend one third of every year with him (during the winter). And so Persephone was able to leave the underworld and return to the light, where she was reunited at last with her mother.

The poem ends with an invocation of the two goddesses and a promise of rich rewards to their devotees, both in this life and the next:

Happy is he among men upon earth who has seen these mysteries; but he who is uninitiate and who has no part in them, never has lot of like good things once he is dead, down in the darkness and gloom.... Right blessed is he among men on earth whom they freely love ... (lines 480-87, Evelyn-White 323)



Participants

Only those who spoke Greek and had shed no blood (or had subsequently been purified) were eligible to participate in the rituals at Eleusis. Each new initiate, known as a "*mystes*," would receive preliminary instructions and guidance from an experienced sponsor, or "*mystagogos*," who was often from one of the leading families of Eleusis. A *mystes* who returned a second time to Eleusis for induction into the highest levels of esoteric knowledge was known as an *epoptes*.

There were also numerous priestly functionaries connected with the proceedings: The *Hierophant*, or High Priest, would preside over the most mysterious and solemn portions of the ritual. He alone had the right to enter the secret chamber of the *Anaktoron*, where the sacred *Hiera*, or cult objects, were housed. The *High Priestess of Demeter* would share with the Hierophant the primary responsibility for presiding over the Mysteries. It is thought that she would assume the role of Demeter in a sacred drama reenacting the goddess's anguish and desperate search for Persephone. Most scholars also believe that the High Priestess would join the High Priest in performing an *ieros gamos*, or sacred wedding of symbolic significance (see below). The *Hierophantides* were two chief female assistants of the Hierophant who played a major role in the drama and initiation ceremonies. The *Panageis Priestesses*, also known as "bees," were celibate auxiliaries whose precise function remains unknown. Possibly they played a role in carrying the *Hiera* in the stately procession from Eleusis to Athens and back again. The *Dadouchos*, second male in rank after the Hierophant, was the torchbearer, who played an important role in the initiations. He alone at Eleusis had the authority to remove the stain of impurity from aspirants who had shed human blood. He and his female assistant, the *Dadouchousa*, were probably also responsible for the lighting effects in the *Telesterion* during the ceremonies. The *Hieorokeryx* was the official herald, whose stentorian voice would call the initiates to silence in

order for the Mysteries to begin. Finally, the *Priest at the Altar* would preside over the animal sacrifices and other offerings to the two goddesses.

The Ceremonies

The celebration of the Mysteries at Eleusis was an elaborate affair which took place over a period of nine days in the month of Boedromion (late September). For each day, there was a prescribed series of ritual actions that initiates were expected to follow in the proper order (Parke 53-72; Simon 24-35).

One day prior to the festival proper, a large crowd of participants would gather in Eleusis and proceed with much pomp to the sanctuary of Demeter in the Athenian agora. On the following day, 15 Boedromion, the actual festival would begin with a formal declaration in the agora announcing the event and inviting initiates to take part. From 16 to 18 Boedromion, the initiates would descend singly to the sea, each bearing a suckling piglet for purification and sacrifice. (Here the connection with the Thesmophoria, another ritual celebration of Demeter featuring a pig sacrifice, is most in evidence.) There would also be major sacrifices in honor of the city of Athens and other public institutions.

On the fifth day of the festival (19 Boedromion) the celebrants would proceed in formal procession from Athens back to Eleusis, bearing the sacred *hiera* as well as a statue of the boy-god Iacchos. The latter deity, who personified the shouts of exultation that the participants would periodically emit, was identified at least as far back as the days of Sophokles with Dionysos (cf. *Antigone*, vv. 1115 ff.). This identification constitutes *prima facie* evidence of a very significant connection between the Dionysian and Eleusinian Mysteries. Yet the point remains controversial.

The initiates would then rest, purify themselves, and maintain either a partial or complete fast. It is believed that they would break their fast as evening approached by drinking a special beverage known as the "*kykeon*," consisting of meal and water mixed with fresh pennyroyal mint leaves (the same brew that Demeter drank, as recounted in the Hymn, lines 210-11). Obviously, the grain in the drink was a symbol of Persephone, the eternal goddess who dies, goes under the ground, and then comes back to life again.

Scholars disagree widely over the significance of the *kykeon*. Some have maintained that it must have had a sacramental character involving a communion with, or assimilation of, the spirit of the deity (Loisy 69; Jevons 365ff.). On the other hand, Mylonas doubts that it had any such "mystic" significance, although he acknowledges that the drinking of the *kykeon* was an "act of religious remembrance" involving "an observance of an act of the Goddess" (259f.). Even on this muted interpretation, the similarity to the Christian Eucharist is striking.

As to the composition of the drink, it is generally agreed that it can have had no alcoholic content, since the Hymn expressly states that Demeter did not partake of wine. Yet it has been suggested that there might have been an admixture of some other intoxicating ingredients. Joseph Campbell, for example, has speculated that the grains of wheat may have contained small quantities of ergot, a natural hallucinogen often occurring in cereal products (video: "From Darkness to Light"). This hypothesis is rendered less plausible, however, by the extremely

volatile character of ergot infections (as in Saint Anthony's fire), which would have been difficult if not impossible to control safely.

When the *mystai* entered the sacred precincts of the Telesterion, they may have been required to utter a special, formulaic password, or "*synthema*," to confirm their readiness to participate in the rites. Clement of Alexandria has reported the contents of such a *synthema* as follows: "I fasted; I drank the *kykeon*; I took from the *kiste* [a cylindrical reliquary]; having done my task, I placed in the basket, and from the basket into the *kiste*" (*Protreptikos*, II, 18; Loeb 43). These obscure, but suggestive words have given rise to a plethora of imaginative interpretations; yet scholars are divided about the reliability of Clement's testimony.



What next transpired in the ceremonies remains hidden behind veils of piously enforced secrecy. Most scholars believe, on the basis of testimony from Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, that the Mysteries comprised three main components, known as the *deiknymena* ("things shown"), the *legomena* ("things said"), and the *dromena* ("things done"). We have already discussed aspects of the first two and will return to them again later. As for the *dromena*, these are believed to have included a ritual reenactment of the story of Demeter and Persephone, including the latter's abduction by Hades; Demeter's grief; her long, desperate search throughout the world for the departed goddess; the anguish of all living creatures as famine and death engulfed them. Very likely the initiates gained a sense of direct participation in Demeter's travail by searching with her and calling for her daughter in the same hallowed precincts which, according to tradition, actually witnessed these events. Then finally, perhaps illuminated in a sudden blaze of torchlight, there would have been the joyous moment of Persephone's resurrection, as she emerged from the underworld and returned to the loving arms of her mother. The dramatic intensity of this pageant, heightened (in all probability) by music and chanted invocations of the gods, would surely have created an awe-inspiring spectacle, whose memory the initiates would cherish for the rest of their lives.

Foucart has proposed, on the basis of a passage from Plutarch (cited by Themistius and preserved in Stobaeus), that in addition to representing the separation and reunion of the two goddesses, the Mysteries may also have led the initiates through gloomy infernal regions, with horrible images and ghostly shapes in order to recreate a grim foreshadowing of what awaits the uninitiated

(Stobaeus, "Agra" 107). Then, as Foucart also suggests, subsequent representations of a blissful afterlife in the company of the goddesses and other initiates would have produced a profound sense of relief and spiritual rebirth (392ff.). Other researchers have objected to this scenario on the grounds that the ruins at Eleusis include no remains of a stage installations, underground chambers, or any theatrical machinery such as would have been necessary in order to render the experience of a trip to the underworld (Noack 236ff.; Mylonas 268). Yet the absence of full-fledged stage equipment surely does not preclude the possibility of dramatic representations in some manner of an "underworld"--achieved through a judicious use of darkness, sound, and atmosphere. (Besides, a great deal could have been done with wooden props and settings, which of course would since have disappeared.) Foucart's hypothesis, though speculative, cannot be ruled out.

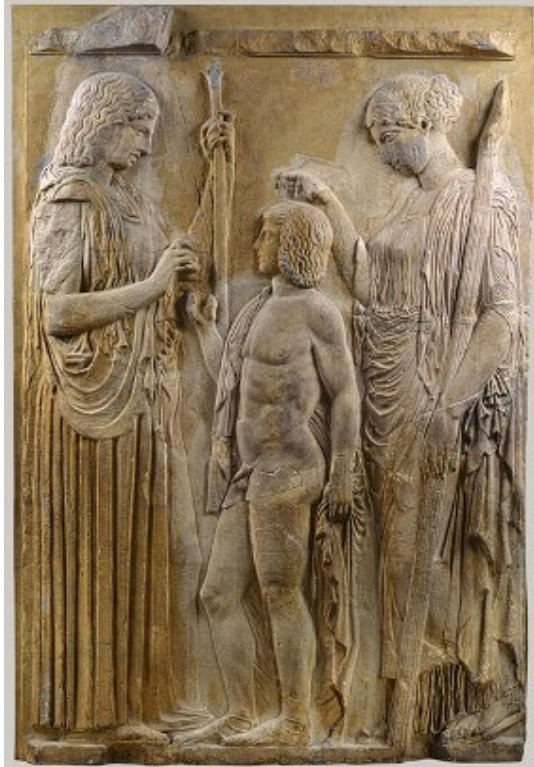
Interestingly, Wilamowitz and Kerényi have used the same argument about the absence of theatrical installations, underground chambers, and so on to contest even the prevailing theory concerning the enactment of Demeter and Persephone's story. According to these scholars, the supposition that the *dromena* at Eleusis took the form of a stage-play is absurd (Wilamowitz 481; Kerényi 141). But this is not to say that they would necessarily deny the occurrence of any dramatic representations whatever. Instead, Kerényi proposes (134) that the *dromena* may have been a sacred dance, perhaps similar to the labyrinthine rope-dances that were performed on the island of Delos. By means of stylized gestures and ritual moves in which the initiates themselves participated, it would have been possible to evoke a profound, even trance-like sense of union with the divine.

Yet another controversy concerns the question whether or not an *ieros gamos*, or Sacred Marriage, also featured in these rites. There are three or four pieces of circumstantial evidence, most of them originating in the statements of early Christian Fathers, which have been used to infer the existence of an *ieros gamos*: (1) According to Clement of Alexandria, Demeter was sometimes referred to as "*Brimo*" (the Mighty, the Raging), on account of her anger toward Zeus (*Protreptikos* II, 14; Loeb 35). (2) Hippolytus of Rome (third century) reports that "At night in Eleusis, [the Hierophant] appearing in the midst of many fires, proclaims the great and secret mystery, saying, 'The Holy *Brimo* has borne a sacred child, *Brimos*,' that is, the mighty (f.) [has borne] the mighty (m.)" (*Philosophoumena* V, 38-41; Migne 3150). (3) Asterios of Amaseia (fourth century), in a diatribe against the pagans' barbaric and obscene rituals, asked the following rhetorical questions: "Are not the height and culmination of your religion those Eleusinian Mysteries, whose vanities the people of Attica, and indeed all Greece, gather to celebrate? Is there not in that place a dark underground chamber [*katabasion*], where the Hierophant meets with the High Priestess alone? Are not the torches then extinguished, and do not the vast multitudes believe it is for their own salvation--what those two do together in the darkness?" (Asterios, in Migne 324) (4) In his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, Proklos Diadochos (fifth century) recounts the following: "In the ceremonies of Eleusis they would cry, raising their eyes to the heavens, 'rain' [*hyle*], and then, lowering them to the earth, 'be fruitful' [*kyle*]" (*Timaios* 293C; Festugière 34).

On the basis of this evidence, many investigators have concluded that some form of Sacred Marriage probably took place at the Mysteries, and that this ceremony culminated in the symbolic birth (or rebirth) of a son. There are various proposals

as to who that child might have been: possibly Iacchos, the tutelary deity whose statue accompanied the dual goddesses on the pilgrimage from Athens to Eleusis; Ploutos, the god of wealth who sprang, according to Hesiod and Homer, from the union of Demeter and the mortal Iasion of Crete; Dionysos-Zagreus, a Cretan deity, who according to Orphic tradition was the offspring of Persephone and Zeus; Triptolemos, an early prince of Eleusis much represented on vases and urns; or even Persephone herself. Perhaps, indeed, the "child" represents a mystical merging and identification of all these together.

Mylonas, however, followed by Brumfield, denies that any Sacred Marriage, or any birth of a Sacred Child, took place (Mylonas 270, 311 ff.; Brumfield 203). Mylonas's arguments are too complicated to discuss here in detail, but in essence they are: (1) that Clement mixed up and confused elements from Phrygian, Orphic, and even Alexandrian cults with the Eleusinian Mysteries (288-305); (2) that Hippolytus could not have had any information about what was actually said in the most esoteric ceremonies at Eleusis, hence he filled in the gaps in his knowledge with plausible-sounding phrases of his own invention (305-10); that Asterios came too late in history to have had any reliable data available, and besides he was writing for an audience that also lacked first-hand knowledge (311-15); that the words alleged by Proklos to have been an unutterable secret ("*hye, kye*") could not possibly have been, since they were inscribed for all to see on a well beside the Dipylon gate of Athens (270, 310). Mylonas's primary concern throughout his book is to avert what he conceives as the "error" of *theokrasia*, the intermingling of distinct deities and religious traditions. Whether this is always an "error" may, however, be open to question--a question to which this article will return below.



In any case, after the performance of the *dromena*, the Hierophant would withdraw alone into the *Anaktoron* (the sacred, secret chamber of the *Telesterion*) and reemerge with the *Hiera*, those most mysterious and holy relics of Demeter and Persephone. In the full splendor of his sacerdotal dignity, he would reveal these to the initiates, who doubtless accepted them as objects that the two goddesses had personally consecrated and passed on to humankind. This culminating moment of the Mysteries was surely that which inspired the profoundest feelings of awe. Yet we have no idea today what the contents of the *Hiera* actually were. Theories have ranged from stalks of cut wheat, serpents, specially blessed bread, a stylized phallus or female pudendum (or both), ancient Mycenaean artifacts, or neolithic statuettes. In the final analysis, what the *Hiera* physically were is perhaps less important than how they were

presented and the spirit in which they were received.

As the festival wound down, the participants would dedicate special services in honor of the dead. Ritual libations would be poured on the ground, the

consecrated liquid flowing in the eastward and westward directions. The initiates (probably exhausted at this point) would then return to Athens singly or in small groups. There does not appear to have been any organized procession. This was a time for reflection and meditation.

Possible Connections of Demeter/Persephone with Other Deities

Among the most disputed issues in the scholarship is the question whether or not the rites held in honor of Demeter and Persephone also included significant connections with, or references to, other important deities and cults. These connections, if they existed, might have taken the form of explicit ascriptions of symbolic or sacramental roles to other gods and goddesses in the rituals; alternatively, they might have been implicit suggestions, indirect allusions to historical antecedents from other religious traditions. If the existence of religious-cultural connections of either kind could be determined with certainty, it would affect our understanding of the nature and significance of the Mysteries at Eleusis; for it is a general principle in religious studies that associations among deities parallel similar associations in the symbolic meanings attached to their cults.

The prime example of an explicit, though esoteric, connection between the goddesses of Eleusis and a deity from another cultic tradition would be the ritual association between Demeter and Dionysos from at least the fourth century BCE onward. The evidence in this case is fairly strong. It is known that these two deities were honored in Athens and elsewhere as "*paredroi*" [partner deities] (Pausanias 9.8.1; 9.22.5; 9.24.1); less certain is whether this partnership status had any deeper significance. Pindar (5th century BCE) spoke of Dionysos as the god "of the flowing locks who is enthroned beside Demeter" (*Isthmian Odes* VII, lines 3-5). The Orphics, who were widely influential and had their own Mystery celebrations, identified Dionysos-Zagreus as the son of Persephone and Zeus (Kerényi, 145, 148; Mylonas, 309). The Romans recognized a triad consisting of Ceres, Liber, and Libera, where Ceres corresponded to Demeter, Liber to Dionysos, and Libera to Persephone (Kerényi, 148). Stephanos Byzantios (6th century CE) recorded that the rituals in honor of Persephone were performed "in imitation of Dionysian happenings" ("Agra" 14). There is also a considerable amount of iconographical evidence, including pictures on ancient Greek vases from Attica and Apulia, testifying to a prominent Dionysian presence at Eleusis (Schmidt 162-65; Zuntz 407-11).

On the basis of this and other evidence, Schelling suggested already in the mid-nineteenth century that Dionysos and Iacchos were masculine counterparts of Demeter and Persephone--that indeed they were all aspects of a single deity (490)! In this century, Metzger has proposed that Demeter, Dionysos, and Persephone together formed a kind of holy trinity which presided over Eleusis (326ff.). Deubner has argued that episodes from the life of Dionysos most likely featured in the ritual representations at Eleusis (70). Harrison has gone so far as to assert that "all or nearly all their [the Eleusinian Mysteries] spiritual significance was due to elements borrowed from the cult of Dionysos" (539). Baring and Cashford follow Harrison in attributing a pivotal role at Eleusis to Dionysos (378f.). Kerényi does the same (127, 139, 148).

Yet even if Dionysos did come to hold a position in the festivals of Eleusis, some would argue that he assumed this function only in his capacity as the patron god

of drama and theatrical splendor, not for any constitutive role in the Eleusinian Mysteries as such. In that case, he might have been more analogous to a divine stage manager or set designer than to a ritual performer or object of worship in his own right. At any rate, Mylonas dismisses most of the ancient sources as confused about Dionysos' participation (238, 276). He insists that Dionysos had no significant role whatever in the Eleusinian Mysteries proper, although he admits (308, 318) that "in Roman times [Iacchos] was confused with Bacchus and Dionysos." Frank shares Mylonas's opinion that Dionysus played no important part in Eleusis (296).

The issue is obviously a thorny one, but in the present writer's judgment, the balance of evidence points to a definite correlation between Dionysos/Iacchos and Demeter/Persephone, at least in the later period and probably as far back as the sixth century BCE. Such a correlation, if true, would have greatly colored the experience of the Mysteries and drawn them closer into a syncretistic congruency of meaning with the Dionysian and Orphic Mysteries.

Underlying Hermeneutical Controversies

We have already noted the existence of numerous controversies concerning the exact contents of the events at Eleusis. Many of the answers are doubtless lost irretrievably behind millennia of secrecy. Yet the deepest debate concerns not so much the *contents* as the spiritual *meaning* of the Mysteries. In these concluding paragraphs, I shall briefly summarize this debate by means of contrasting two hermeneutical approaches that are almost diametrical opposites: that of Mylonas and that of Kerényi.

The central aim of Mylonas's book is to uncover the true character of the activities at Eleusis by scrupulously removing any false superimpositions originating from alien venues or traditions. In particular, as we saw, he wishes to combat the tendency toward religious syncretism, or "*theokrasia*," the indiscriminate intermingling of ancient deities and their characteristics. It is for this reason that Mylonas resists the idea that Dionysos had a presence in the cult of Demeter and Persephone; for this that he denies any mythological or ritual parallelism between the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries; for this that he refuses to admit the possibility of a mystical identification between Rhea and Demeter or between Demeter and Persephone; for this that he discounts the testimony of Clement of Alexandria and many others; for this also that he doubts a sacramental quality in the drinking of the *kykeon*.

Mylonas recognizes that in his zeal to recover the Mysteries in their original purity he is disregarding the opinions of numerous authorities who take more seriously the possibility of very early historical and religious associations between the deities worshipped at Eleusis and those of other cultic centers in the ancient world. Mylonas feels it necessary to reject such hypotheses because they nourish the unverified (and perhaps unverifiable) notion that religious ideas spring from transcultural impulses and needs deep within the human psyche. To treat this notion as a genuine scientific hypothesis, he thinks, can lead to an uncritical acceptance of highly questionable evidence. One quote will serve to illustrate Mylonas's general method of interpretation. In his discussion of the possible role of Dionysos at Eleusis, he writes:

. . . As we have seen, Dionysos had no part in the Eleusinian Mysteries and all references to his participation are later in date and are the result of his confused equation with Iacchos. In late Orphic tradition, according to Guthrie, Dionysos seems to be equated with Eubouleus [a minor character in the myth of Demeter and Persephone]. Guthrie's conclusion is based on evidence belonging most probably to the third century of our era, when traditions were confused and theokrasia became a common practice in Orphic literature. (309)

The kinds of questions and objections that Mylonas raises are important ones. Through his skeptical attitude and cautious methodology, he has performed an invaluable service to the study of ancient religions. By calling into question the sometimes facile conclusions that others have drawn, he makes one aware of the obligation to be ever-critical and vigilant in scholarship.

Entirely different is Kerényi's approach. Although he doesn't use the word, he evidently accepts *theokrasia* as a valid and unavoidable feature of living religious traditions. For him, the phenomenology of divinities and myths naturally involves cross-cultural connections and gives rise to "unscientific," seemingly illogical identifications. This is the reason why he admits, even welcomes, the commingling of Dionysian motifs with those of Demeter as complementary aspects of a single, possibly hermaphroditic deity; why he acknowledges the influence of Orphic and other traditions as powerful and early forces that helped to shape the Eleusinian festival; why he recognizes Rhea, Cybele, Artemis, Hecate, and others as coordinate manifestations of one archetypal Goddess-figure implicit in the human spirit; why he accepts the testimony of the Christian Fathers and other outsiders as significant, though flawed, indications of truths they themselves could not comprehend; why he also readily conceives the possibility that the psyche of a devout *mystes* could seem to merge via sacramental communion with the spirit of the Goddess.

In developing these ideas, Kerényi is aware that he is proposing a number of risky propositions, for he is basically treating as highly meaningful linkages--symptomatic of inner psycho-spiritual processes--what many other scholars would dismiss as merely fortuitous parallels, accidental accretions, or later interpolations. Yet Kerényi insists that one must be sensitive to the significance of these seemingly contingent connections if one is ever to succeed in recovering the inner dynamic of myths. The following passage will convey the flavor of his hermeneutical method. Speaking of the connection between the Erinys, goddesses of moral retribution, and the Demeter/Persephone duality, Kerényi writes:

There are two ways of considering connections like this between Erinys and the rulers of the Underworld. One way begins with the dispersed state of the various aspects of the gods and believes in a subsequent mythological combination of them, with the result that mythology is understood at best as a coordinating and embellishing activity of the mind. Our way is opposed to this. It begins with the mythological ideas, which are easily recognized by their pristine richness and many-sidedness. Mythology is then understood as the mind's creation of gods in the sense that something real and valid is brought into the world. Realities that disclose themselves are stages in a process of (budlike) unfolding, and every unfolding tends ultimately toward dissolution. The primary thing for us is not this final state, not the Erinys as spirits of vengeance, or Demeter and Persephone

existing independently side by side, but the historical Demeter Erinys who contains in herself her own Kore figure--Persephone. (125f.)

The virtue of Kerényi's approach is its depth of psychological insight. Through his explorations of the boundary zones whose unconscious associations link religious ideas, he has provided a valuable key for the interpretation of myths.

William James once remarked that there are two kinds of scholarly temperaments: those that dread above all the risk of possibly mistaking falsehoods for truths, and those that fear even more the risk of missing potentially valuable truths. Depending upon which type of disposition one has, one will prefer Mylonas's or Kerényi's hermeneutical method. Either way, the Eleusinian Mysteries will remain among the most intriguing, perennially fascinating legacies of the ancient world.

Concluding Comments and a Final Proposal

We have seen that the paucity of hard data about the Mysteries at Eleusis is counterbalanced by the wealth of speculative theories and hypotheses. At the risk of adding to the latter, it is worth considering the possibility that perhaps there was no unitary set of "secret" teachings at all, but rather a developing series of esoterica.

It is well known that the Mysteries continued for almost two thousand years, during which time the Greek world evolved tremendously in both intellectual and religious aspects. This period saw the transition from the traditional polytheism of Homer and Hesiod, through the beginnings of scientific philosophy in Thales, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and others, to the pinnacles of philosophical monotheism represented by Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. Similar transformations also occurred in the realms of literature, art, and historiography. It would be unreasonable, therefore, to deny that there could have been corresponding changes within the sacred precincts of the *Telesterion* as well. We know that the greatest intellects of the ancient world testified repeatedly to the salvific power of participation in the Mysteries--why then assume that those secret rites and teachings would not also have adapted to the times, so as to contain allusions to the deepest spiritual insights of which their devotees were capable?

To be sure, the outward phenomena of the rituals probably retained a remarkable consistency of form throughout the millenia of their practice, for this conservative tendency is characteristic of archaic religions in general. Yet the interpretations given to the ritual performances by the participants themselves may well have undergone substantial modifications over time. In particular, it seems not unlikely that a proclivity toward syncretism and *theokrasia* could have fused with philosophical speculations from about the fourth century BCE onwards, leading to a new type of religious mysticism and perhaps even containing intimations of monotheism or pantheistic monism.

It would be going too far to push this line of inquiry further, since there is no concrete evidence to support it. Yet there is cause to wonder whether the esoteric teachings of the Eleusinian Mysteries may not have helped in such a manner to prepare the way for the dawn of the Christian age.

SACRED WATERS, holy wells

by Mara Freeman

"Running water is a holy thing" - Old Somerset saying.

The westernmost edge of Cornwall is a land of rugged sea-moors strewn with giant stone megaliths; but it was in one of this ancient land's more gentle and hidden folds that my companion and I came across a relic far less imposing than the great stones and yet as silently expressive of ancient sacred practices: the holy well of St. Madron.

We reached the well by a narrow muddy path through twisted trees, under which the last of the spring bluebells softly glowed in the early evening light, and came upon the well, which is an open pool overhung by thorn trees. Although the place had an air of deep silence and sanctity, evidence of much recent activity was to be seen in the great number of rags, feathers, and even pieces of torn plastic bags that hung from the branches - votive offerings from an ancient ritual that still exerts a pull on late 20th century pilgrims.

It is an extraordinary thing to consider that there are still literally thousands of holy wells in the British Isles. Most of these are natural springs; some open pools like St. Madron's, while others are contained by a stone edifice, often covered. The majority, however, are in ruins, overgrown and no longer visited. Some have been desecrated by cattle or human presence. And yet, many, like St. Madron's, still continue to be a center of pilgrimage as they were from pagan times.

People visited the wells for their traditional virtues of healing and divination. If a physical cure was sought, the believer would drink or sometimes bathe in the water. And in fact, the water of some holy wells have indeed been found to contain curative properties, mostly due to the presence of certain minerals. But the healing influence of the wells was due to more than their medicinal qualities. The well itself was viewed as a shrine dedicated to the miraculous emergence of living water, in all cultures a symbol of generation, purification, and the matrix of life itself. To quote Mircea Eliade, "...water symbolizes the whole of potentiality; it is fons et origo, the source of all possible existence."

Supernatural qualities automatically cluster about the manifestation of such a powerful archetype. The holy wells of the British Isles were, in fact, such popular places of worship in pagan times, that the early Roman Church took great pains to stamp them out. But, as is the way with an unsuppressable archetypal force, the form changed while the essential mystery continued unaltered: the well as pagan temple metamorphosed into a Christian shrine.

And the rituals continued down the centuries: country people would make pilgrimages to the holy wells to seek relief for a variety of ills from rheumatism to scurvy, broken bones to leprosy. A great many wells were supposed to cure eye problems, which scholars have traced to the magical perception of the well as the eye of a god. And the sympathetic link between water and fertility led, as one might expect, to a number of wells gaining a reputation for curing childlessness.

In Oxford, for example, Child's Well "had vertue to make women that were barren to bring forth children," while St. Agnes Well at Whitestaunton in Somerset gained fame when Henrietta, the wife of King Charles I, was rumored to have wished for a child there, and became pregnant soon after.

At the well, the petitioner would leave a token piece of clothing, usually hung on a bush or a tree as at St. Madron's, so that the healing power of the well could act upon it. Such a custom led to Scottish healing wells becoming known as 'cloodie wells' - 'cloodie' meaning 'cloth.' The seeker would generally bring an offering to the well - usually a bent pin, which gave rise to the number of "pin wells" to be found in the British Isles. This humble gift was the successor of the great treasures discovered at the bottom of wells frequented in Celtic and Roman Britain: at Coventina's well in Carrowbaugh, Northumberland more than 14,000 coins, bronze figurines, jewelry, glass, pottery, and a human skull were discovered in the shaft.

The healing power of wells was also accessed through what appears to be a British equivalent of dream-incubation. The Asclepian temples at which this form of therapy was practised in the Classical world were situated at sacred wells and springs; here the sick would fast and take part in rituals designed to invoke a healing dream. In Roman Britain a dream-temple was built at Lydney Park in Gloucestershire over several springs, while records indicate St. Madron's Well was used for this purpose also: in the 17th century, a miraculous healing was attested to by none other than the local bishop. A severely crippled man, John Trelille, "upon three several admonitions in his dreams, washing in St. Madern's Well and sleeping afterwards in what was called St. Madern's bed, was suddenly and perfectly cured." The bed of St. Madern (or Madron) was a nearby stone seat which was customarily used for dream-incubation purposes, no doubt a cold and highly uncomfortable but perfect medium for the disturbed sleep necessary to give rise to vivid and easily remembered dreams.

Recent research has, moreover, verified this strange connection between wells and dreams: Earth Mysteries researcher Paul Devereux, in *Earthmind*, recounts incidences where people have become unaccountably drowsy and fallen asleep at the site of a holy well, a phenomenon he correlates with the mildly radioactive properties found at many of the well sites.

Dreaming at holy wells was also used as a method of foretelling the future, possibly an echo of pagan times when, it seems, a female oracle presided over the well. This ancient practice was preserved down the years, albeit in a humbler manner, by the custom of country girls who would seek to know their future husband at the well.

For example, a serving-maid of Selby could not decide which of her suitors to wed, and so sought help from the nearby "Fairy's Pin Well", which had a reputation for divination. She drank from its water and asked the faery of the well to give her a dream of the man she should marry, whereupon she promptly fell asleep and dreamed that one of her suitors, dressed in festive clothing, approached her bearing a wedding ring. In addition, the faeries took the maid to Elfland, which highlights another important feature of the holy wells: that along with other sacred features of the landscape such as certain megaliths, caves, trees and lakes, they stand as entrances to the world of spirit - the Otherworld.

This is particularly appropriate because in Celtic mythology the Well of Wisdom stands at the center of the Celtic Otherworld, the spiritual source of all, of which the holy wells of Britain and Ireland are mere tributaries. Early Irish literature tells us how this well gushes up as a fountain in the courtyard of the palace of Manannan mac Lir, the king of the faeries. Over the well hang nine magic hazel-trees that drop their purple nuts into the water. Salmon - the Celtic fish of knowledge and mystic inspiration - eat the nuts and send the husks floating down the five streams that flow down from the well. And "the sound of the falling of those streams was more melodious than any music that men sing". In the wisdom tale, Cormac's Adventures in the Land of Promise, Manannan Mac Lir explains that the streams are the five senses through which knowledge is obtained, "and no one will have knowledge who drinks not a draught of the fountain itself and out of the streams. The folk of many arts are those who drink of them both."

Hence it is the healing and wisdom of the Otherworld that has been sought by petitioners of the holy wells throughout the centuries. This connection was clearly acknowledged by the Celtic well-pilgrims who would drink the water in a special cup made from the skull of a severed head, thus creating a direct link with the dead who reside in the Otherworld. Interestingly enough, at the well of Llandeilo in Dyfed, Wales, this pagan tradition was carried on in Christian guise up to this century: in order for the water to be beneficial, it had to be drunk from the skull of the Celtic Saint Teilo, whose church stood in ruins about the well.

In some holy wells, the Salmon of Wisdom is recalled by the existence of sacred fish that are an essential part of the well's magical properties. In Wales, for example, at the turn of this century, the stock of two "sacred fish" was replenished in the well at Nant Peris, Llanberis. This well was frequented by large numbers of invalids in the 19th century, who would watch the movements of the fish anxiously: if a fish appeared out of the recesses when water was taken, cure was certain; otherwise the water lacked any potency at all. And in Ireland, where the thinly-disguised pagan ceremony of "paying Rounds" is still practised at holy wells, we hear of the the well of St. Monachan in Kerry, about which was said there was "not a better well in Munster to give Rounds at; sure there is a salmon and an eel in it, and whoever has the luck to get a look at them may be sure they have the benefit of the Rounds."

We know too, that in folk-tradition, the wells were only visited at special times of the year: May or at Midsummer were the most popular, two turning-points of the Celtic year when the gates of the Otherworld were open wide. At these times, too, those Otherworld denizens, the faeries or pixies, were frequently sighted at holy wells.

It is not surprising then that a guardian of the Otherworld is usually found overseeing the holy wells of the British Isles. Although since the Christianization of the wells this figure is generally a saint of either gender, the well-guardian was originally female.

Dealings with the Otherworld in the Celtic tradition are generally facilitated by a female spirit or goddess. This is particularly so when the Otherworld is located beneath the earth, which in pagan Britain and Ireland, as in most cultures worldwide, was always regarded as feminine.

The well, therefore, was viewed as leading into the womb of the earth- mother herself, a concept graphically illustrated by the presence of the sheela-na-gig in the vicinity of some holy wells in Ireland. This female "fertility figure", carved in stone, stands with legs wide apart, holding open her vagina: close by stands the well - it, too, being an orifice from which life springs forth.

The sacred well as a miraculous irruption of spiritual power or numen into the everyday world was also, it seems, viewed as the nourishing breast of the earth-mother. Some local legends show clearly that the well-water was special because it was milky or creamy, as if it actually came from the earth-mother's breast.

At the well of St. Illtyd near Swansea, Wales, for example, close to the magical midsummer time, milk was said to have flowed forth instead of water. Here, "many who were present testified that while they were looking at the milky stream carefully and with astonishment, they also saw among the gravel curds lying about in every direction, and all around the edge of the well a certain fatty substance floating about, such as is collected from milk, so that butter can be made from it."

The healing and nourishing effects of the holy well waters emanate from the breast of the earth-mother, so it follows naturally that the spirit of the well was feminine. At Bath, for example, the local native goddess Sul gave her name to the Roman hot springs, *Aquae Sulis*, while in Carrowbaugh a ruined temple lies over the well dedicated to Coventina, the Romanized name of another native deity. A votive tablet shows her floating on a water-lily leaf; while a relief depicts three of her female attendants bearing goblets; out of one pours a stream of water.

These last figures may be the "damsels of the wells" referred to in one of the medieval texts dealing with the Holy Grail, about whom a poignant tale is told that illustrates the demise of the holy well as a vital sacred center of British culture. The story describes how travelers in Logres, (the esoteric name of the "Inner Britain"), were served with food and drink by the damsels of the wells. But an evil king raped one of them and stole her golden cup and "thenceforth never did the damsel serve any more nor issue forth of that well for no man that might come thither to ask for victual." As a result, the wells dried up and the country was stricken with drought, causing it to become the Wasteland that could only be redeemed when the Holy Grail was found. "The Kingdom was turned to loss, the land was dead and desert as that it was scarce worth a couple of hazel-nuts. For they lost the voices of the wells and the damsels that were therein."

What were the voices of the wells? Were these "damsels" in fact oracles, mouthpieces of the wisdom of the Otherworld? The story can be read on more than one level: it might refer to an ancient priestess order at sacred wells and its subsequent desecration and appropriation by a male priesthood - Druidic or Christian. In Jungian terms, it seems to refer to the destructive force of an over-dominant masculine consciousness and the patriarchal logos principle that reached its apotheosis in the Middle Ages.

Another result of the desecration of the wells, so we are told, is that the court of the Rich Fisher, who showered the land with prosperity and joy, could no longer be found: in other words, the spiritual center of the culture vanished into the unconscious, where in a materialistic culture like ours, it can only be accessed through dreams and visions.

But this center is only hidden, not utterly gone; we still come across echoes of the "voices of the wells" even down to this day. Many Christian churches were constructed near pagan sacred wells, and the early Celtic church used them for baptism until the Roman church replaced them with the font inside the building. A number of old churches contain a crypt or grotto that opens into a subterranean spring. This place - close to earth and water - is the innermost sanctum, the hidden holy center of the sacred enclosure.

In Ireland, pilgrimages to holy wells are still an important part of the Christian year; and an inordinate number of these fall upon St. Brigid's day, the old Celtic festival of Imbolc on February 1st. Numerous holy wells are in fact dedicated to this saint, who was once a Celtic goddess, Brighde, giving rise to the many districts called "Bridewell" throughout the British Isles today. Another name common to holy wells and subsequently districts is "Ladywell", as wells once dedicated to pagan goddesses and their priestesses were rededicated to the Virgin Mary under Christianity. Such wells are often connected with sightings of a White Lady, a ghostly figure, perhaps of the displaced well spirit or priestess.

More traces of a well priestess tradition survived till quite late in Cornwall: at Gulval Well, the seventeenth century chronicler Hals described - with not a little contempt - the habits of the "credulous country people" who visited the well for healing and divination purposes. The well was tended by an old woman who kept the well-site neat and clean, and broadcast the "virtues and divine qualities of those waters", which she dispensed in return for a fee. She gave oracles to strangers, and revealed the whereabouts of lost and stolen objects, including local cattle. For miles around she was highly regarded as the "priestess of the well", an ancient calling, of which she was one of the last of her kind.

And even today in some English villages, the local well is still honored by being decorated at the annual well-dressing ceremony. This ancient ritual is still enthusiastically practised, and has in fact developed into an intricate local craft of which local families are most proud. To "dress" the well, a wooden framework is coated with clay into which flower petals, leaves, berries, moss, feathers, seeds and cones are pressed to form pictures. These are generally of biblical subjects and in some villages a service is held at the well - a latter-day form of well-worship, in truth!

For a strong instinctual feeling for the numinosity of sacred waters remains in the modern soul, even if it only prompts the casual toss of a coin into a "wishing-well" - or the tying of a rag to a tree. As we stood at St. Madron's Well last spring, two awkward visitors in a foreign church, my companion and I fumbled through pockets and finally retrieved a crumpled handkerchief. Half-embarrassed, and yet moved by a deeper sense of the rightness of the act, each of us silently tied the pieces to a hawthorn branch before walking back in the gathering dusk.

◆ Mara Freeman 1994

Mara Freeman, British writer, lecturer, and storyteller, has studied Celtic sacred traditions for more than thirty years.



Hi all,

This document was signed at the Peace Palace today 10 December 2008.

Please sign in agreement at the following place:

<http://www.faithinhumanrights.org/read/english/english>

Thanks,

Blessed Be,

Morgana



On December 10th 2008, on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the Peace Palace, The Hague, the Netherlands, in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, high-ranking religious leaders representing the world religions and spiritual traditions, signed the Statement Faith in Human Rights.

In doing so, they jointly pronounce and confirm symbolically for all spiritual traditions that religion defends the human rights and fundamental freedom of every human being. They signed the Statement in the presence of representatives of major religions and beliefs, who will endorse the Statement.

The Statement Faith in Human Rights may thus initiate a widening process of responsibility and commitment for religious leaders and communities to uphold human rights. We invite everybody to endorse this statement and act upon it.

Preamble

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 2008, we, representatives of various world religions, are gathered at the Peace Palace, seat of the International Court of Justice, in The Hague, The Netherlands, to pronounce and confirm that our religions recognise and support the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every human person, alone or in community with others.

It must be acknowledged that sadly enough religion sometimes is being misused in a way which violates human rights. But now, while representing different faith traditions, we come together in unity to stress that religion has been a primary source of inspiration for human rights as our sacred writings and teachings clearly show:

“Someone who saves a person’s life is equal to someone who saves the life of all.”
(Qu’ran 5:32);

“A single person was created in the world, to teach that if anyone causes a single person to perish, he has destroyed the entire world; and if anyone saves a single soul, he has saved the entire world”
(Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5);

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself”
(Luke 10:27);

“Let us stand together, make statements collectively and may our thoughts be one” (Rigveda 10:191:2);

“Just as I protect myself from unpleasant things however small, in the same way I should act towards others with a compassionate and caring mind” (Shantideva, A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life);

“Let us put our minds together to see what life we can make for our children”
(Chief Sitting Bull, Lakota).

We recognise our responsibility towards our believers and to the world at large and reaffirm our intention to take all necessary steps both within our communities and in co-operation with others to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms for each and every person, irrespective of religion or belief.

Therefore, we solemnly state to take to our heart the following achievements, challenges and commitments:

I Human Rights: Achievements

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights celebrates the dignity of the human person, irrespective of religion, race, sex or other distinctions. As such it helps realise our shared vision of a religiously and culturally diverse world community striving together to promote and defend the rights and dignity of all. The Declaration has stimulated and inspired a new standard setting and good practice at national and international levels. We wish to emphasize the importance of two of its principles: that every person enjoys the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and that no one should be discriminated against on the basis of religion or belief.

2. States bear the primary responsibility to promote and protect human rights. However, we wish to underline that everyone has duties to the wider communities of which they form a part and only in which the free and full development of one's personality is possible. It is therefore important to make all people aware, through information and education, of their human rights and also of the common responsibility to make human rights a reality. In this regard we commend the valuable contribution of many religious and civil society organisations.

II Human Rights: Challenges

3. We express our deep concern that despite all achievements, the enjoyment of human rights in today's world remains a distant reality for many. Human rights

violations cause innocent people to die or to be seriously harmed resulting in untold suffering, loss and hardship. More than ever, in this world threatened by racial, economic and religious divisions, we need to defend and proclaim the universal principles of dignity, equality, freedom, justice, and peace, which are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Challenges to the acceptance of human rights and fundamental freedoms

4. The rights, freedoms and obligations laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are recognised all over the world. Nevertheless, they are not fully accepted everywhere. We observe tensions with regard to a number of specific rights, such as the freedom of religion or belief, the principle of equality and the prohibition of torture. We wish to state clearly that the Declaration should not be regarded as a 'pick-and-choose' list. There is an urgent need for a thorough reflection on the integral acceptance of each right.

Challenges to the interpretation of human rights and fundamental freedoms

5. Human rights are open to a variety of interpretations. The argument of cultural relativity of human rights is at times used to justify grave violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We therefore recall the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on Human Rights, wherein all States of the world agreed that "all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. (..) While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms." This implies that a continued dialogue is necessary among government representatives, religious communities, indigenous peoples and independent experts based on a dynamic interpretation of human rights.

Challenges to the implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms

6. Peace and security are essential conditions for the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Whilst States are entrusted to guarantee the peace and security of their societies and their citizens, this should not lead to curtailing basic human rights. We denounce the development of security measures and means that endanger human life rather than protect it, for example the tremendous worldwide expenditures on weapons. This life-threatening devastating power makes it imperative to look for peaceful means of resolving tensions.

7. The prevalence of violence within the international and national communities remains a source of serious concern and impedes the realisation of human rights. We call on all concerned to pursue all peaceful means of redress and to refrain from a misuse of violence. In addition, we wish to highlight the problem of structural violence within society and of domestic violence in particular. It is of utmost importance to counter this and to save by so doing the lives of the most vulnerable among us.

8. We note with serious concern the increase of intolerance in matters relating to religion or belief, of cases of incitement to religious hatred, overt or covert. While emphasising the importance of the freedom of expression, we deplore portrayals

of objects of religious veneration which fail to be properly respectful of the sensibilities of believers. We consider the freedom to have, to retain and to adopt a religion or belief of one's personal choice, without coercion or inducement, to be an undeniable right. Furthermore, the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief in any form of worship, observance, practice and teaching may only be subject to carefully defined limitations consistent with generally accepted principles of international law.

9. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights demands meeting basic human needs. The abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty to which more than a billion people are currently subjected, must be decisively altered. The human destruction of the environment has to be stopped. The process of achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (eight targets that 189 countries have pledged to meet by 2015) represents a key indicator of the commitment of States to realise human rights for all.

III Commitments

10. Adherents of various faith traditions have striven to protect human dignity. Religion has to stand for peace, reconciliation, universal values, mutual respect and upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms. Our faith traditions have been and are capable of providing inspiration and guidance towards realising these aims. We wish to reiterate our commitment to respect all human rights for all, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

11. The contributions that may come from religious inspiration and from the structures of religion or belief towards a fuller implementation of human rights include the need to:

study carefully our holy scriptures and teachings and to explore the theological rationale in defence of human rights; provide responses where harm has been done in the name of religion and seek ways of forgiveness and reconciliation in order to foster mutual respect and understanding among our communities;
address major threats to the full realisation of human rights by fostering concepts of peace, security and development that advance the full realisation of the Millennium Development Goals and make our shared world a safe place to live;

listen to the suffering of individuals, families and communities and assist them to tell and visualize their stories so that empathy may lead to solidarity and action;
encourage religious communities to become further engaged with human rights issues, both within and outside their community, and stimulate interfaith co-operation with mutual respect.

Conclusion

12. Humbled by the authority that is vested in the religions of the world and conscious of our shared responsibility to defend human rights, we fervently desire that this Statement will initiate a wider process, and will become a catalyst for transformation and change. In order to widen and deepen the support for human rights by religious communities we invite religious leaders around the world to endorse this Statement. We call upon believers everywhere to disseminate this Statement as widely as possible and act upon it.



Contact us !

On a national level, each country has a National Coordinator. This is the person you should write to with all your questions and you should keep him/her informed of changes of address or e-mail! If you cannot contact your National Coordinator, you can contact the International Coordinator.

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