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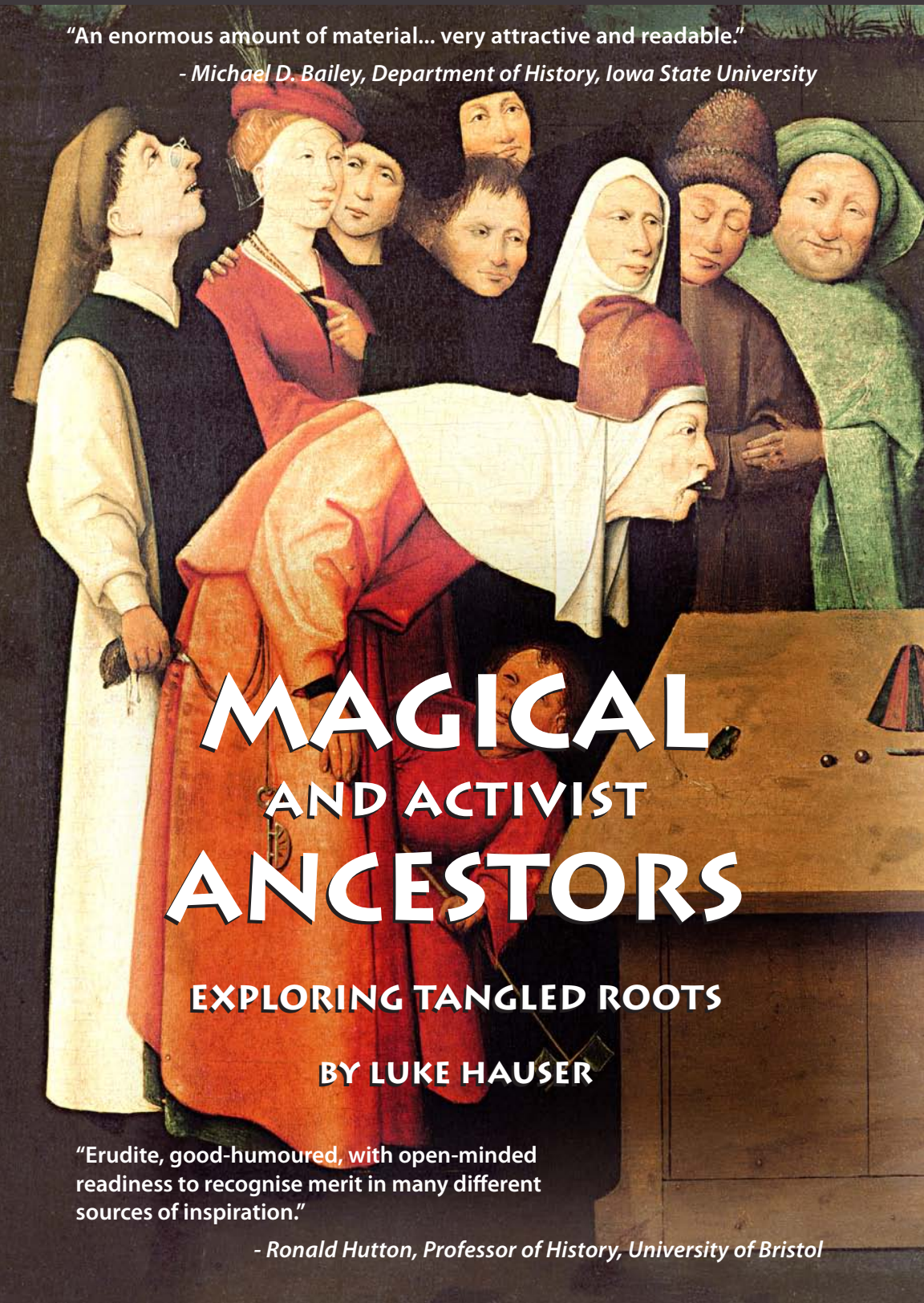

"An enormous amount of material... very attractive and readable."

- Michael D. Bailey, Department of History, Iowa State University

MAGICAL AND ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

EXPLORING TANGLED ROOTS

BY LUKE HAUSER

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- Ronald Hutton, Professor of History, University of Bristol

"A deep dive into pagan and magical history – and a lot of fun to boot!"

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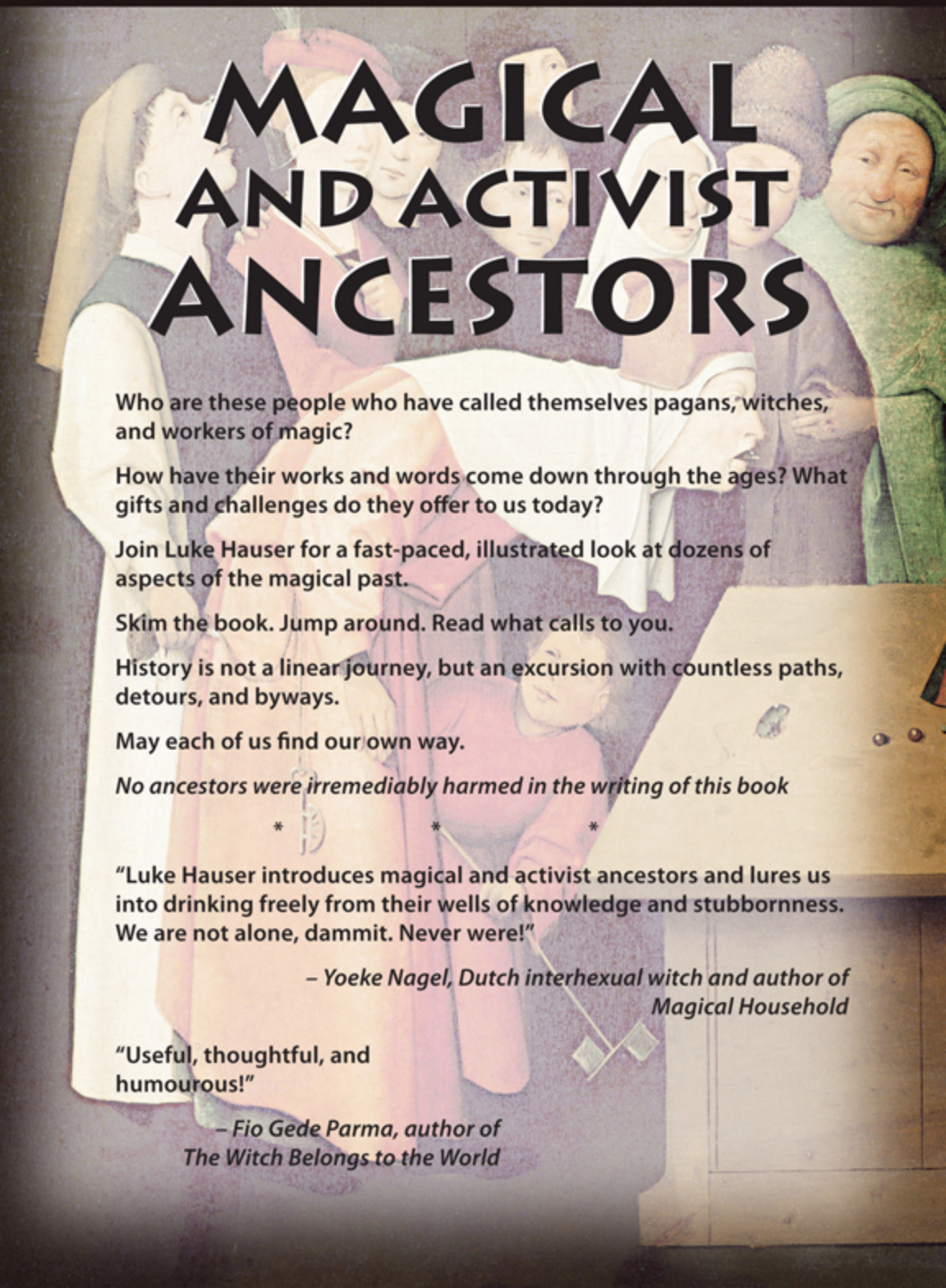

MAGICAL AND ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

Who are these people who have called themselves pagans, witches, and workers of magic?

How have their works and words come down through the ages? What gifts and challenges do they offer to us today?

Join Luke Hauser for a fast-paced, illustrated look at dozens of aspects of the magical past.

Skim the book. Jump around. Read what calls to you.

History is not a linear journey, but an excursion with countless paths, detours, and byways.

May each of us find our own way.

No ancestors were irremediably harmed in the writing of this book

* * *

"Luke Hauser introduces magical and activist ancestors and lures us into drinking freely from their wells of knowledge and stubbornness. We are not alone, dammit. Never were!"

– Yoeke Nagel, Dutch interhexual witch and author of Magical Household

"Useful, thoughtful, and humourous!"

– Fio Gede Parma, author of The Witch Belongs to the World

ABOUT

MAGICAL AND ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

"Erudite, good-humoured, generous, with that open-minded readiness to recognise merit in many different sources of inspiration that is one of the best features of the Reclaiming tradition."

- Ronald Hutton, Professor of History, University of Bristol

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"Useful, thoughtful, and humourous. Our ancestors must have hounded Hauser day and night to bring this through."

– Fio Gede Parma, international teacher, initiated witch, and author of The Witch Belongs to the World

Illustrations created by various beloved ancestors who have donated their work to Wikimedia Commons.

The identities of many of these artists are no longer known on this side of the veil. I'm guessing we'll learn their names in due time.

Front cover by Hieronymous Bosch.

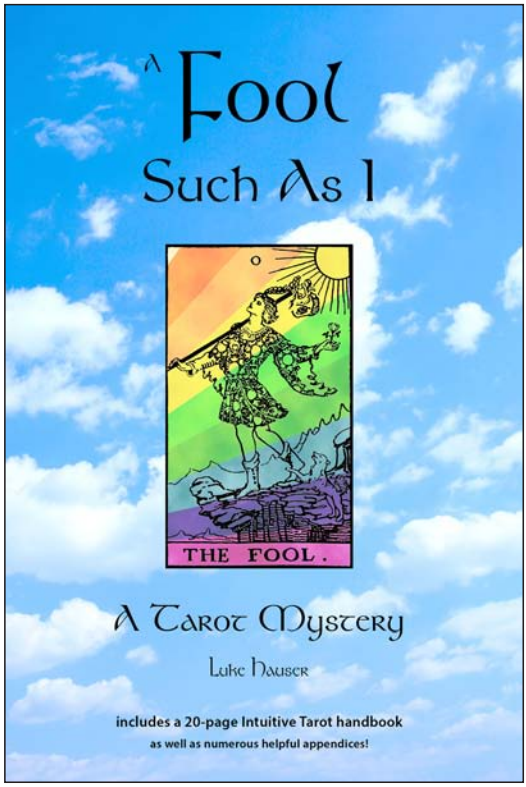
Yes, that Hieronymous Bosch.

MORE HISTORY FROM LUKE HAUSER!

TAROT!? NEOPAGANISM?! MYSTERY!!!?

The owner of Arcane Wisdom Magicke Shoppe is dead.
His irreplaceable Tarot deck is missing....

If you love Tarot & Paganism – watch out!



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MAGICAL AND ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

MAGICAL AND ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

EXPLORING TANGLED ROOTS

LUKE HAUSER

GROUNDWORK
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Kindle version at kindley places.
Links & free download of book: WeaveAndSpin.org/ancestors/

Author's Notice

This is a work of parajournalism – a direct, impressionistic encounter with reality, or at least a reasonable simulacrum thereof. The author makes no great claim to originality, and in fact might have inadvertently purloined the best parts of the book. Thank you!

The author claims to have exercised all possible diligence in researching, writing, and proofreading this book.

Notwithstanding this commendable effort, it is possible that typographical errors, punctuational atrocities, and historical inaccuracies may have made their way surreptitiously into the text. The author apologizes in advance, and promises to sack the responsible parties!

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Wikimedia Commons for images, which are credited wherever possible. Particular appreciation to the inimitable Hieronymous Bosch for the cover illustration.

Thanks to Ronald Hutton and Michael Bailey for reviewing portions of this book and encouraging the author in his efforts. Thanks to Ronald Decker for reviewing the Tarot section as well as the author's novel, A Fool Such As I.

Thanks to: Reclaiming Quarterly, WeaveAndSpin.org, Reclaiming Witchcamps, Bay Area Reclaiming groups, the Spiral Dance, and the international Reclaiming network. May a thousands spirals bloom!

Additional appreciations can be found at the end of the Magical Ancestors and Activist Ancestors sections.

To ancestors of all epochs, ages, races, cultures, genders, orientations, affiliations, and especially to historical custodians of every type – thank you.

To my descendants – apologies, and best of luck!

OTHER BOOKS BY LUKE HAUSER

available as print editions or free PDFs – visit

DirectAction.org/freebies

Para-Fiction

Direct Action: An Historical Novel

Therefore I Am: A Philosophical Murder Mystery

A Fool Such As I: A Tarot Mystery

The Hardy Girls Mysteries

The Mystery of Rafferty's Farm

The Mystery of the Derailed Train

The Mystery of the Sunken Sloop (TBA)

Nonfiction

Teen Earth Magic: An Empowerment Workbook

Dancing the Spiral: A Companion to the Writings of Starhawk
for Circles & Solitaries
(TBA – available now as PDF)

About the Author

Luke Hauser lives in a garage in the Greater Berkeley Metropolitan Area, and is a parajournalist in the service of the Goddess and nonviolent revolution.

He organizes and teaches in the Reclaiming Tradition of magic and activism – see back pages of this book for links.

Luke Hauser's books – fiction and nonfiction – are rooted in reality. This is particularly true of the Hardy Girls mysteries, which provide the secret key to the author's oeuvre.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

A few years ago, while working on a mystery novel about the history, legends, and lore of Tarot, I began jotting notes about the history of Western magic.

Not an exhaustive overview, but a personal book of ancestral shadows. An invocation of my own past.

You know, things like pyramids and labyrinths and alchemy and anarchism and Rosa Luxemburg and so on.

Well, the novel – A Fool Such As I: A Tarot Mystery – is complete and getting my usual number of sales and free downloads (which is to say, a few and a lot). Links to print and free PDF at DirectAction.org/fool/

Before turning to the arduous yet inescapable task of writing Volume II (The Sapphire Codex: An Alchemical Mystery), I decided to collect my notes, go on Wikipedia and scavenge a bunch of old graphics, and produce the present volume – mostly for my own amusement and edification.

It is, after all, my journey. And I personally downloaded all of the pictures.

Interpersonal Resonances

Perhaps some sections will resonate for you. Others may push your buttons. You may find a few eminently skippable.

Possibly you will be inspired to go on Wikipedia and download your own ancestors. Maybe you'll feel compelled to write your own book.

If so, please send me a link to the free PDF.

Personal Apologia

I offer no apologies for my ancestors. They can speak for themselves. Anyway, I don't recall choosing them – they just sort of appeared.

However, I do want to mention that my perspective is based in a particular tradition and practice – namely, the Reclaiming Tradition. I came to magic and ritual by way of direct action, not spiritual searching. At Witchcamp, I volunteer for firetending (with a side shadow of ancestral trancing).

I am not experienced in other contemporary traditions except as they overlap with Reclaiming.

Bon Voyage!

Enjoy your excursion through one person's version of the magical and activist past.

And while you're at it, please download and read all of my other books and tell your friends about them (see page 126).

The author thanks you in advance!

South Berkeley / Samhain 2023

INTRODUCTION

Who are these people who call themselves pagans, witches, and workers of magic? Where did they come from?

Are they heirs of ancient witchy feminist pagans who survived underground until their rediscovery by Gerald Gardner? Descendants of Goddess-worshiping, Stonehenge-building Druidic Celts? Disciples of Renaissance Hermetical Cabalistic alchemists whose transmutational formulae have eluded interpretation until our very day?

Or is the truth a bit more humble? Are we sometimes more like magpies looking for shiny objects to decorate our spiritual nests?

Does It Really Matter?

Connecting with and honoring the divine and the Earth is a present-day, living relation. It isn't based on rediscovering or accurately re-creating the past. Today's practices are grounded in the here and now.

Yet these practices have a past – a past often obscured by layers of colorful legend and wishful thinking.

This book is one person's search for some of the reality behind the myths.

Prefatory Postmodern Reflections

There are countless ways of narrating history, from the fanciful to the footnoted. Every version is both personal and political in its choices and emphases. Perhaps

every version is mythical. My hope is that this version has some connection to the lived experiences of my ancestors.

In the best postmodern tradition, here are a few things this book is *not*:

• It is not a comprehensive history of magic – it's Western magic from the perspective of (one of) today's practicing pagans.

• It is not a history of contemporary paganism – it's an attempt to bring the story to around 1980.

• It is not a footnoted paper – a bibliography follows, but otherwise it's one person's sense of how we got here.

Linear ABCs

Writing a narrative tends to imply a linear development of history. The many subsections and overlapping dates of this book highlight the non-linear, multi-threaded nature of our backstory.

Think of this as a pleasant excursion, not a treadmill.

Read what calls to you. Skip around as you wish. Feel free to ignore entire sections.

A Final Warning!

Just know that if Reclaiming should turn out to be the culmination of the entire 5000-year history of Western paganism, you may be tested on this material when you arrive at the Isle of Apples.

Don't say you weren't warned!

Luke Hauser, Parahistorian

Cultural & Activist Ancestors

A major part of neopaganism's backstory is found not in ritual circles or magic classes but in the streets.

Grassroots spiritual groups are heirs to a long tradition of action, commitment, and resistance.

For a survey of movements that have inspired today's magical activism, see the Activist Ancestors chapter, page 87.

MAGICAL ANCESTORS

A NOTE ON WESTERN ORIENTATION

Most of this book traces "Western" influences.

By this I mean the regions west of Persia – namely Mesopotamia, Egypt, North Africa, the Mediterranean areas of Europe, and eventually Northern Europe.

Toward the end I'll look briefly at Eastern (ie, east of Persia) influences, and also at appropriated influences from Native American and Afro-Caribbean traditions.

1: Ancient Legacies

Prehistory
Approx 2.4 million to 10,000 BCE

Before we get to history proper, let's pause to remember our prehistoric forebears – those early sapient types who figured out which berries to eat, things you can do with rocks, and what happens when you rub two sticks together.

Along the way they found time to populate the furthest reaches of the planet, create language, paint cave walls, and domesticate animals. At some point they started noticing the patterns of the stars, the changing of the seasons, and how rivers rose and fell. Some people think that the earliest myths were ways of keeping track and passing along this sort of knowledge.

All in all, it's not a bad track record.

Legacies: Language. Art. Astronomy. Fire!

Prehistory
Approx 10,000 to 3000 BCE

While we're musing on early times – what about those little goddess figures like the Venus of Willendorf or the woman holding up a snake in each hand?

They're officially "prehistory" as well – ie, before written sources. No accounts tell what the figurines might have meant or been used for, or what their creators thought about magic, religion, or life in general.

Still, there are two sources – well, three, counting intuition. But

let's look at those that academia acknowledges:

(1) surviving artifacts, from megalithic ("giant stone") structures such as Stonehenge to more human-scaled human and animal figurines, stone tools, weapons, etc.

(2) archaeological remains such as the excavated foundations of ancient villages or ritual sites.

Consider the "goddess" figurines such as the Venus of Willendorf or the snake-handling woman from Crete. Whether or not they were intended as deities, these female sculptures suggest societies with strong, positive images of women.

Did they embody "feminist" values? Archaeology supports this theory. For instance, the excavations at Catal Huyuk (modern Turkey) reveal a small city on an open plain with no defensive walls, no fortifications, and burials with no weapons and little distinction of wealth. Riane Eisler and others suggest this indicates a peaceful, egalitarian society.

A Stonehenge-type cluster of huge stone pillars was excavated in the 1990s at Gobekli Tepe in Southern Anatolia (modern Turkey). The site seems to date from about 10,000 BCE, thousands of years before the earliest known cities or literate cultures anywhere in the world.

No walls, permanent dwellings, or other urban structures have been found at the site, suggesting Gobekli Tepe was a rendezvous site for hunter-gatherers, not a year-round habitation. Did these forebears gather for spiritual ceremonies? Trade fairs? Skills sharing? Early iterations of Burning Man? All of the above?

In Britain, at the Western end of Europe, pre-Celtic groups also built huge stone circles around 3000 BCE. As with Gobekli Tepe, we have no written accounts of the purpose of these structures or how they were built.

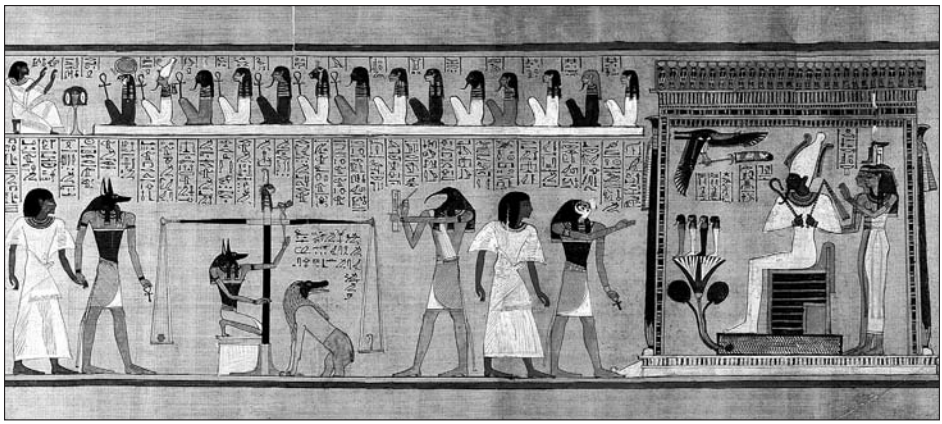
The apparent orientation of Stonehenge toward the Summer Solstice sunrise has long been noted. Recent archaeology suggests alternately that Stonehenge may have been a burial and ritual site oriented toward the setting Sun at Winter Solstice.

Legacies: The notion that once, prior to 5000 years of bloody patriarchal history, there may have existed peaceful, cooperative, woman-honoring societies which endured for centuries or millennia. This inspiration overthrows Hobbesian ideas of an incessantly violent, all-against-all prehistory, and provides a plausible vision of a world radically different from today.

Ancient Egypt

c. 3500 - 400 BCE

With Egypt and the pyramids we enter the written history of the West. Many pyramids were built as royal tombs which, if they didn't endow their occupants with eternal, slave-attended life, at least had the merit of preserving hordes of artifacts



Egyptian souls being weighed in the presence of Ma'at, goddess of divine justice? Or a scene from a local market? Maybe a creative painter included both?

and writings for posterity (kind of like our descendants excavating our attics and storage units).

Despite an economy and culture based around the annual flooding of the Nile, much of Egypt has a dry climate favorable to the survival of papyrus. This preserves a written record spanning several millennia and makes the region a key source for the study of ancient spirituality and culture.

Hieroglyphics – Today understood as an ornate phonetic script with some special characters, hieroglyphics were long believed to be a secret language whose meanings, originally revealed only to initiates, had been lost amid the shifting sands of time. Seen as arcane symbols (no doubt hiding deep spiritual secrets), hieroglyphics became the archetype of the "secret magical language" that inspired generations of magicians and alchemists.

Book of the Dead – Egypt has always been known for its mysterious and elaborate rites around death, burial, and the afterlife. The famous Book of the Dead is a collection of ceremonies for sending souls to a prosperous and happy afterlife. Intended for the Egyptian elite, the book and its traditions have gone on to inspire funeral rites in many societies and social strata.

Legacies: Egypt's gift to all subsequent Western cultures is an obsessive concern for the well-being of the dead. In ancient Egypt the concern was primarily with the pharaoh and his family. Eventually Christianity, Gnosticism, and the mystery cults democratized the afterlife.

Modern pagan groups often orient the Wheel of the Year around Halloween/Samhain – the time when the veil is thin between the worlds of the living and the dead. Reclaiming's founding ritual, the ancestor-focused Spiral Dance, was held at Samhain 1979 (and every year since).

Mesopotamia
c. 3500 - 400 BCE

Mesopotamia – the land watered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers – saw a succession of regional empires such as Sumeria, Assyria, and Babylonia. Mesopotamian forebears created or advanced irrigation, metal working, city states, the West's earliest astronomical data, and written language, in which they recorded the oldest-known Western literature and myths (Inanna, Gilgamesh, et al).

Thanks to scribes using durable clay tablets, a huge trove of original documents survives. Ranging from accounting records to magical spells, from royal chronicles to rambling mythic narratives, they give a rich picture of some of the oldest known literate societies.

What sorts of magic did these ancestors do? Spells survive for purification of temples, appeasing the anger of gods and goddesses, protection from disease or injury, and charging a stone or talisman.

One spell seeking help from Ishtar required the person to gather "dust from a quay, dust from a ferry, dust from a bridge, dust from a crossing of four roads, dust from a city gate, dust from a dais, dust from the door of the Ishtar temple..." – and that was just the first step!

Legacies: Ancient Mesopotamia left a legacy of religio-magical narratives, including creation myths, pantheons of deities and demigods, heroic combat with monsters, journeys to the land of the dead – the earliest "magical fiction." Much of Western mythology traces roots back to this region and period.

Mesopotamia is the source of some classic ritual and Witchcamp myths, led by Inanna's journey to the underworld. If someone is tracking copyrights in the afterlife, neopagans are going to owe 4000 years of royalties.

Crete & Minoan Civilization
c. 2000-1500 BCE

The island of Crete, which in an age of small ships was relatively isolated and safe from predatory Mesopotamian and Egyptian armies, was the first Mediterranean civilization to develop enduring architecture and written language.

Around 1500 BCE a small-scale urban society flourished, with stone buildings and a highly-evolved artistic culture. Famous frescoes show young men and women leaping over bulls – as sport, ritual, or both?

Crete is famous for the myth of King Minos, the Minotaur, and the labyrinth in which the beast was imprisoned. Although today we think of labyrinths as circular, some people have suggested that the origin of the myth was later visitors seeing the

ruins of the maze of stone buildings that made up the capitol at Knossos (Crete was destroyed by earthquake or invasion or both).

Legacies: Labyrinths! The prominence of women in sacred and social contexts (such as bull leaping).

GREECE

C. 800-300 BCE

A century ago, Greece was hailed as the progenitor of all that is good and true and Western. Besides inventing classical art and architecture, they worshiped a neatly-organized pantheon and wrote unrivaled epic poems about journeys to strange lands. In their spare time, they saved Europe from the Persian hordes.

Today Greece is studied in a Mediterranean context, its classical art seen as a late flowering of Egyptian and Mesopotamian styles. The Homeric poems (written down around 800 BCE) develop a genre of combat and tall tales dating back to Gilgamesh (written down perhaps 1500-1200 BCE).

Pythagoras and his school, flourishing in the 500s BCE, emphasized numerical and musical proportion, including the idea that movements of the planets and stars create the "harmony of the spheres."

Pythagoras is said to have believed in reincarnation and the transmigration of souls, and claimed to recall several past lives. Some sources say he was a vegetarian except for ritual sacrifices.

Greek science, building on Mesopotamian (and possibly Indian/Vedic) traditions, worked out theories about the nature of physical reality. Empedocles (c. 450 BCE, about a century before Plato and Aristotle) is credited as the first to identify four basic physical elements: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire (solid, liquid, gas, and energy).

Aristotle later added a fifth element, sometimes called Aether or Quintessence,

The chill dignity of Greek and Roman goddesses has never been surpassed.

which he saw as constituting the unchanging heavenly bodies.

Greek philosophy explored the world as science and observation (Aristotle), and also as to its ultimate nature and purpose (Plato). Plato saw the world of spirit/intellect as the true reality – the physical world is just a pale shadow. This idea will recur over the centuries, notably via Gnosticism.

Greek magic continued trends from earlier ages, with spells for healing, success, and love. Writings suggest a distinction between the divinatory practices of official temple priests versus the disreputable "goetia," or low magic, of commoners and foreigners.

Greece's prejudice against non-Greeks coined the word "magic," from magos, a Persian (hence foreign) priest. The term came to mean any unofficial practitioners of common goetia – as opposed to "religious" practices of the official Greek priesthood. Latin and subsequently other European languages adapted the term (magia, magie, magish...).

Legacies: Greek goddesses, gods, heroes, anti-heroes, and their all-too-human stories are a favorite repository of past wisdom, insight, and bemusement.

Theories of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle simmer beneath later trends in philosophy, religion, and magic.

The four basic elements held sway for two millennia, although much adapted over the centuries. Only around 1800 were they supplanted by the modern panoply of chemical elements.

The Golden Dawn and British Wicca, adapting older traditions, correlated the four classical elements with the four directions and other quadrads to symbolically anchor magical circles.

We also inherit from Greek ancestors a collection of biases such as a strong emphasis on male domination of all forms of public culture, as well as a tendency toward dualistic, either/or thinking – particularly in ethics, where good/bad dichotomies continue to plague Western culture.

Celtic Traditions
c. 800 BCE to 800 CE

According to one intuitive poll, 89.7% of contemporary neopagans claim at least one recent matrilineal Celtic ancestor.

Who were these reproductively prolific forebears?

The term "Celts" refers not to a homogeneous ethnic group, but to a cultural network that shared pottery and metal-working styles and probably a family of languages. Starting around 800 BCE, these iron-age peoples expanded from (areas today known as) the Hungarian plains to cover much of Central Europe as far as Britain, Spain, and Northern Italy.

Celtic groups traded extensively with Greek city-states, and are among the "barbarian" peoples recorded by Greek writers. Around 387 BCE, Celtic tribes living in northern Italy attacked and sacked Rome, then a relatively isolated city-state.

Later, as Rome began to expand northward after 200 BCE, the loosely organized Celts were either absorbed into the Roman empire (Northern Italy, Gaul, and Southern Germany) or driven north and west – some to Britain and eventually Ireland, where Celtic culture blended with older traditions.

By the later centuries of the Roman Empire (c. 200 CE forward), Celtic-identified groups were no longer a major factor on the continent.

Roman writers around 100 CE mention Celtic deities, syncretizing (combining) them with their Roman counterparts so that, for instance, honoring Lugh might still be acceptable so long as you paid homage (and taxes) to Mercury at the same time.

Quick – make up a story about what is happening in this picture! Detail from Gundestrup cauldron, Celtic c. 100 BCE.

In Ireland, the traditions continued to evolve. Irish and/or Celtic goddesses were syncretized with Christian saints – the best-known being Brigid. Sacred wells were "re-christened" – only to be rediscovered as pagan shrines in modern times.

Around 800 CE, Irish monks wrote down Celtic legends as they were being told at that time. These narratives, closely interwoven with other strands of Irish lore, are much loved by modern pagans, and help form today's image of Ireland as the Celtic homeland.

Legacies: Brigid and her sacred wells. The names of our cross-quarter sabbats (Samhain, Beltane, etc). A pantheon of deities and stories. Decorative motifs for pagan jewelry.

We also inherit a certain amount of misinformation about Celtic culture and deities, based on Christian overlays from the Middle Ages and over-hasty folkloric interpretations from the 1800s.

ROME
C. 400 BCE TO 400 CE

Far from an ethnic enclave, Rome was a hodgepodge. The city's founding myths call the earliest Romans runaways, fugitives, and freebooters. I've always felt an affinity.

Organized as an aristocratic republic around 500 BCE, Rome transformed into an empire around 25 BCE (following civil wars involving Julius and Augustus Caesar). At its peak around 250 CE, the Empire spanned the Mediterranean region including most of North Africa, Western Europe to the Rhine and Danube, and east to encompass the Balkans, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt. The Empire traded with India via the Arabian Sea, and had secondary contacts as far as China and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although the Empire was never a homogeneous whole, many people (soldiers, officials and their families, scholars, missionaries, craft specialists, etc) traveled far and wide. Cities (common throughout the Mediterranean, rare in the North) hosted a variety of cultures, classes, and religions.

Many religions were tolerated. Roman policy was to repress or punish only actual harm, disruption, or law-breaking – conformity of opinion or belief was not expected (although honoring the official deities was demanded of most people – the Jews being a notable exception – see below).

The result was a vast mixing of cultures and sharing of ideas, stories, and techniques – including magic. Many foreign cults gained a toehold in the capitol – those of Dionysus, Cybele, Mithras, and the Great Mother among others.

Roman literature, known for classics of history and politics, also left satirical portraits of different sorts of people. Poets like Virgil and Lucan crafted vivid descriptions of elderly, hag-like women who worked maliciously inhumane spells – an image that haunted the European imagination for centuries until it helped animate the witch hunts.

Legacies: Modern affinity for Greek myths and deities stems from the fact that Rome, which lacked a developed mythology of its own, merged its deities with Greek gods and goddesses and preserved their stories in Latin poetry. The European Middle Ages (the Age of Latin) passed this classical heritage on to Modern times.

Rome bequeathed the idea of broad religious tolerance – an ideal the West has struggled to regain ever since.

It also routinely crucified dissidents, prophets, and messiahs, and gave Europe its abiding image of the evil witch.

JEWISH TRADITIONS
ROMAN ERA TO MIDDLE AGES

Judaism produced a written scriptural sourcebook going back centuries and figuring repeatedly in the history of magic and religion. Christians, Gnostics, and Muslims ad-

opted parts of Jewish scripture as their own, each giving the older material a new spin.

During the Roman era, Jews were an important regional religious group. As many as one-sixth of people around the eastern Mediterranean were Jewish. Besides the often-volatile Middle East, there were large Jewish populations in Alexandria, Antioch, and other cities. Roman authorities had the wisdom to exempt the monotheistic Jews from the usual "Worship the Emperor as a God" requirement.

Jewish scriptures, developed and refined over centuries, preserve ancient tales and narratives. The Genesis creation story, including the Garden of Eden, is a founding myth for virtually half of the planet. Tales of giants, floods, epic combats, exile and wandering, perseverance and hope – these are a legacy to all of the West.

Ancient Judaism had its own esoteric traditions, including tales of magical combat by Moses and Aaron during the Egyptian sojourn. Rods turn into serpents, frogs rain down from the skies, seas are parted, and commandments are carved into stone (twice) by a jealous and rather moody deity.

Moses presenting the Ten Commandment tablets on Sinai, from the Sarajevo Haggadah, 14th century.

Jewish scriptures contain several injunctions against magic and witchcraft. These have been subjected to a wide range of interpretations over the centuries, particularly after Christianity put imperial power behind them.

In later ages the intricacies of Hebrew script itself were subjected to painstaking religio-magical analysis, with everything from divine knowledge to power over demons promised to those who persevered. Kabbalah developed as a tool for explicating the creation and meaning of the universe – and wound up influencing Tarot divination – see page 61.

Legacies: Faith in a better tomorrow stems partly from the Jewish idea that history is *not* circular and repetitive, nor a simple decline from a past Age of Gold. History has

a direction and purpose – the "golden age" might lie in the future, not the past.

A related idea is that of Tikkun Olam: working to heal, repair, and restore the world.

Hebrew scriptures are deeply rooted in the Western cultural psyche, and help create a sense of what religious myth is all about. The arcane numerosophy (number-wisdom) of Kabbalah has shaped the West's subconscious sense of what numbers mean – see page 61 regarding interpretations of Tarot.

These scriptures inspire the idea that people can talk back to power – Hebrew prophets provide stirring examples of commoners speaking truth to kings.

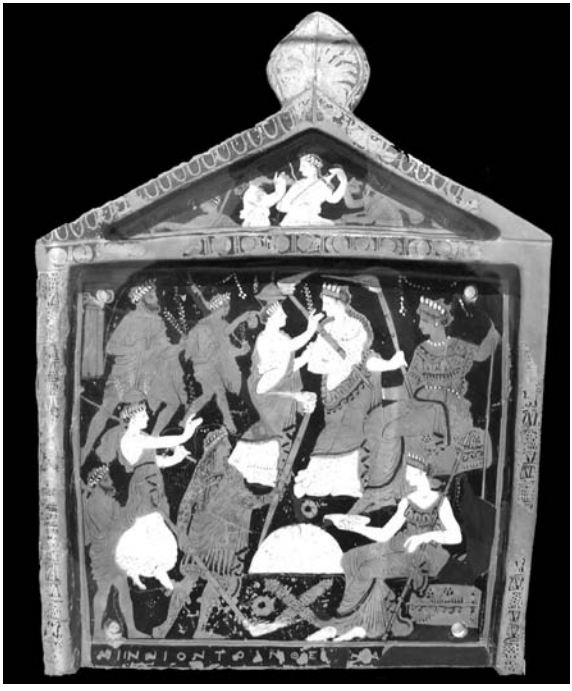
On the flip side, we don't treat our writings as sacred scripture – not yet, anyway.

Mystery Cults

Approx 500 BCE to 500 CE

The term "mystery cult" is a modern category that includes various ancient initiatory and often ecstatic devotional groups and practices. Some were year-round congregations, others annual gatherings which endured for centuries.

The name is misleading. These were not "cults" in the modern sense, but more like ever-evolving congregations and gatherings. Annual pagan events such as festivals and Witchcamps carry on this tradition.



The mid-4th century Ninnion Tablet depicts an ancient rave – or is it the Eleusinian Mysteries? Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

The term "mysteries" doesn't mean that they met secretly, or that they gathered to read the latest fantasy fiction thriller. Rather, it suggests that the meaning of the rituals could not be expressed in language, but had to be experienced by each person.

One of the most famous of these "cults" is that of Persephone at Eleusis near Athens. The Eleusinian Mysteries, part of a longer festival, seem to have been a personal journey of discovery and self-awareness, culminating with insights into the meaning of life and death.

Many devotees took part in this ritual twice (lists of participants survive – so much for confidentiality!).

One writer (Bowden) suggests that people may have attended once as a novitiate, spent a year in devotional practice, then returned to re-experience the ceremonies and complete their initiation.

For most people, Bowden suggests, this was sufficient. A small number returned and became the guides and organizers for the next sets of initiates.

Other cults included Mithras (popular among soldiers but closed to women – a fatal flaw), Bacchus, Cybele, and the Great Mother. Some had sacred sites such as Eleusis or Samothrace. Others were urban or wandering groups.

Some of these cults engaged in ecstatic, possibly drug-or-alcohol-fueled processions and rites involving loud and jarring music, wild dancing, and flagellation.

The Romans, generally tolerant of various religions, didn't take kindly to civic disturbances. For instance, over-enthusiastic Bacchian celebrations were violently suppressed around 186 BCE.

This sort of attack on a religious group seems to have been relatively rare in the Roman world, where magic and religion were persecuted only when harm or disruption occurred or was feared (see Rome, page 26).

Early Christianity may have been seen by some contemporaries as similar to these mystery traditions.

Not surprisingly, when it gained political power after c. 385 CE Christianity moved to close down competing cults.

Legacies: Witchcamps, retreats, and festivals, where people gather to connect with the divine and our own deepest selves, are a distant offshoot of the Eleusinian Mysteries – and Persephone has graced more than a few Witchcamps!

The notion of a "year and a day" for initiations may stem from annual cult gatherings. If you attended twice – once as a novitiate, and again in order to become initiated – a year-and-a-day was the shortest period possible (unless you were a celebrity such as an emperor, in which case the waiting period might be waived).

And the ecstatic aspects of some of these movements, if not a direct influence, have a familiar ring to those who love dancing around a ritual bonfire.

Alexandria, Neoplatonism, & the Greek Magical Papyri

c. 100-400 CE

Founded at the time of Alexander "the Great" (c. 300 BCE), the Graeco-Egyptian port of Alexandria became a cosmopolitan cultural melting pot, bringing together the disparate threads of the Eastern Mediterranean.

During the Roman era, many spiritual and magical traditions built strong roots in Alexandria, including Gnosticism, Christianity, Neoplatonism, Stoicism, Judaism (Jews may have been a quarter of the city's population), and others.

Neoplatonism – Philosophical tendency which, building on Plato's ideas, saw spirit as the ultimate nature of reality. All being has its origin in and radiates out from pure spirit – the material world is a distant emanation, with all of the planetary spheres and lesser spiritual realms arrayed between Earth and the divine source.

This idea that the material world is a devolution from the purity of the spiritual source took a more visceral form in Gnostic myths describing creation as a harsh fall from divine grace – see below.

The Greek Magical Papyri are a loosely-connected group of manuscripts from Roman-era Egypt. Written mainly in Greek, they reflect ideas current in Alexandria and the Graeco-Egyptian cultural orbit. They rank among the most complicated magical workings ever committed to writing.

Mostly lost for centuries before modern rediscovery, the magical papyri mix elements from Greek, Egyptian, Jewish, and mystical traditions into elaborate spells, formulae, recipes, chants, workings, and rituals. They contain instructions for commanding demons, making amulets, preparing magical ointments, etc.

One papyrus features an invocation of the divinity Mithras, who is implored to bestow upon worshipers a vision of immortality. Some manuscripts use "voces magicae," or magical nonsense sounds, to call on spiritual and celestial powers.

The texts, probably a tiny fraction of what once existed, come from an era when older Egyptian, Greek, and Roman practices were declining in the face of the mystery cults and Christianity. The papyri may have been an attempt to memorialize elaborate rituals that were fading from common usage.

Legacies: Neoplatonism suggests that humans have incredible spiritual abilities.

The complicated rituals and workings of the Greek Magical Papyri set the gold standard for ceremonial magic. Though the original texts were lost for centuries, the memory of complex Egyptian magic served as inspiration for Arabic, Medieval, and Modern ceremonial formulations.

Even non-ceremonial traditions such as Reclaiming inherit basic ritual structures within which we improvise, including elemental and deity invocations.

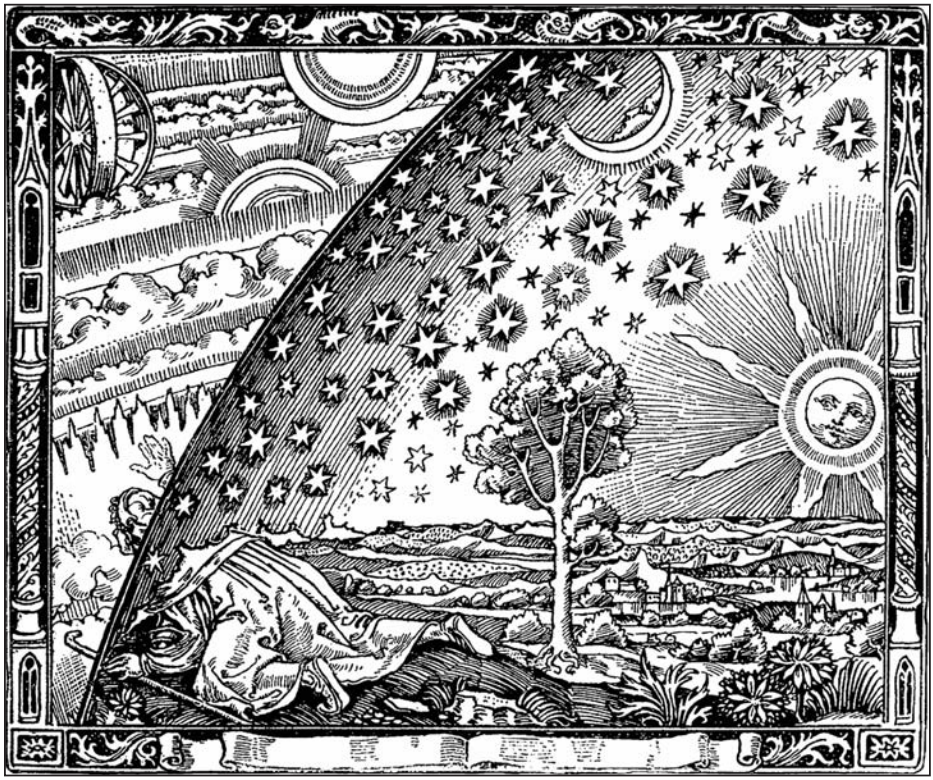
Neopagans have also been known to talk nonsense, carrying on the tradition of the voces magicae.

Gnosticism
Flourished 100-400 CE

Gnosticism, 2000 years after it first flourished, continues to exert a strong influence on alternative spirituality. Once believed to be a dissident Christian movement, the discovery of a library of original texts at Nag Hammadi (Egypt) in 1945 has shown it to be a distinct spiritual tendency in the diverse and polyglot Roman Empire.

While Gnosticism was not a "religion" and can't be reduced to a single set of beliefs, many texts exhibit strong anti-material tendencies. The divine source of all reality is far beyond the material realm, beyond planets and stars, beyond any conception of deity that we mere mortals can imagine. This spiritual source is the font of all light, truth, understanding, being, etc. (Gnosticism adapts ideas from Neoplatonism – see above).

The Earth, on the other hand, is a fallen realm, about as far from the divine source as one can get. Some Gnostic texts spin wild stories about the origins of Earth involv-



Break on through to the other side – a Gnostic seeker ascends through the planetary and celestial spheres and catches a glimpse of the upper realms. Note the gear-wheels at upper left, turning the spheres. Illustration, known as the Flammarion engraving, probably from 1800s.

ing the sexual escapades of a demigoddess named Sophia, or Wisdom. In these accounts, she actually isn't all that wise, and the creation of the cursed Earthly realm is pretty much laid at her doorstep.

Humans, created at the tail end of this sordid process, are lost in a miasma of material confusion. But deep inside each of us – or some of us, anyway – there lies buried a spark of the original source. Our goal is to escape material, worldly temptations and follow that spark back to an awareness of our divine source. If we achieve this knowledge ("gnosis"), and learn the proper passwords to say to various celestial guardians, we can re-ascend to heaven upon our Earthly death.

Given the shape of things, it's tempting to agree with the part about the Earth being a "fallen and cursed realm." I often feel that way when I first wake up.

On the other hand, some of us are given to saying that the Earth *is* the Goddess, that the Earth is a living, divine being, itself the source of our life. So what gives?

During the period when Gnosticism flourished, the spiritual seeker (and later Christian saint) Augustine of Hippo, a city in North Africa, saw it this way: "God created the Earth, and it was good. What screwed things up was humans eating the apple and falling from grace. Our fall dragged down the entire planet, which is why it appears to be a cursed place of pain and suffering. The fault lies with erring humans – Earth itself is good."

Legacies: Neopagan groups such as Reclaiming with no official thealogy tend to mingle both ends of this spectrum. Gnostic-style scorn for the material world alternates with veneration of the Earth as the Goddess's body.

Leaving aside the bit about the apple, I think Augustine's solution is close to the mark – the Earth itself is divine, but humans are seriously screwing it up.

Alchemy

Ancient Times to c. 1000

Okay, now for some serious magic! Alchemy calls across the centuries as a material praxis, a psychological-spiritual tool, and as inspiration to pursue our wildest dreams – transmuting the "prima materia" (first material) of this world into the gold of our visions.

Through Western history – encompassing ancient Egypt, Roman-era Gnosticism, Medieval Islam, and Renaissance Europe – the term "alchemy" has comprised a loosely-connected group of beliefs and practices. Unlike, say, Tarot (with its well-documented beginnings and fairly compact 500-year history), alchemy is not a single historical thread.

In ancient Egypt and its neighbors in Mesopotamia and around the Mediterranean, alchemical practices may have originated in metallurgical workshops, which due to the value of metals were generally connected to royal palaces or temples. Processes

Alchemical tip – keep your pet lion handy in case any snakes materialize and need to be eaten!

of purifying, mixing, and tempering metals were closely-guarded guild secrets.

Similarly, specialists working with dyes and pigments were able – through a series of "alchemical" purifications and concentrations – to transmute ordinary plants and minerals into long-lasting coloring agents. Such skills must have seemed to outsiders like magic.

These basic physical and chemical processes laid foundations for the experimental developments of later centuries, and can be traced in the early histories of chemistry and physics. The technical skills remained part of Western culture even at its lowest ebb.

During the later Roman era, Hermetic writings used alchemical imagery to weave ideas from Judaism, Neoplatonic philosophy, and the mystery cults, recasting metallurgical processes as stages in a spiritual journey (see above and below).

We'll resume this thread during the Renaissance.

Legacies: Few modern pagans practice material alchemy, sometimes referring to it as "Harry Potter" magic – ie, the kind found only in fiction.

Yet many of us believe that "magical" change is possible both in our personal lives and in the wider world, and nurture hope that we can achieve some sort of transmutation before it's too late.

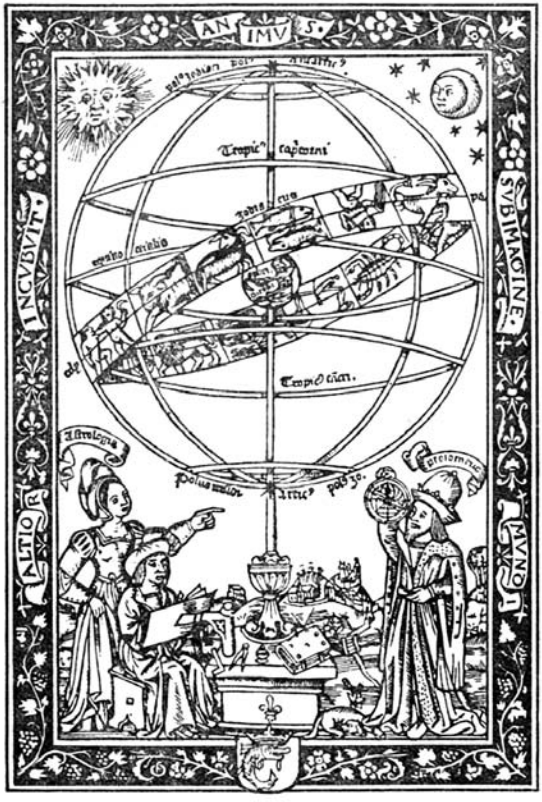
DIVINATION & ASTROLOGY
PREHISTORY TO ABOUT 1500 CE

Divination is recorded far back in human history. Astrology, casting lots, studying the flights (or entrails) of birds, and many other ways of predicting coming events have been used in different societies – each considering its own methods sacred, and others to be magical or superstitious.

Times change. Today we have highly-refined weather prognostication at our fingertips, but entrail reading is a lost art.

Astrology, on the other hand, has had its devotees since ancient Babylonian times – and Babylonian sophistication suggests a long prehistorical backdrop of observation and study of the night sky.

Early observers recognized that the stars and planets, as seen from Earth, trace recurring patterns through the heavens. The recognition of the ring of "zodiacal" constellations through which the sun and planets appear to move is quite ancient. However, different cultures have counted different numbers of constellations, with the number twelve settling in only around Roman times.



Casting horoscopes goes high-tech – a super-sized armillary sphere from Renaissance times.

The applications of astrology have also changed over the centuries. Texts from various cultures survive, suggesting that in ancient times the stars were seen as predicting the fate of kingdoms and royalty, but not particularly you or me.

When the methods came to be applied to ordinary people, they were used more to discover a person's character or the overall arc of their life than to predict day-to-day happenings.

Another common use was finding the most propitious time for a certain event – eg, a journey, marriage, or the beginning of a project. People still speak of the power of the waxing or waning moon or Mercury retrograde. Ancient astrology made intricate cal-

culations involving multiple heavenly bodies.

Given these changes, there is no continuous tradition of interpretation, or even longterm agreement about which astral phenomena are to be interpreted. Astrology as practiced today – interpretation of personal charts, sometimes on a day-to-day basis, seems to be a relatively recent development.

Legacies: Astrology is practiced in many magical circles today, although it doesn't often determine our calendars – that is, rituals, classes, and camps are not typically scheduled according to astrological factors (although these may be noted during planning).

The exception is the lunar cycle, with some circles and communities gathering to honor New or Full Moons.

II: Medieval Magic

(Approximately 500-1500 CE)

Two Magical Threads

Richard Kieckhefer, in his short book on Medieval magic, suggests two intertwining threads:

- common traditions – ordinary, day-to-day practices
- learned traditions – consisting of two broad tendencies:
  - literate magic – elaborate ceremonies and spells performed by educated elites
  - natural magic – unlocking the hidden secrets of nature

Common Traditions: Practical Magic

Common traditions comprise the ordinary practices of non-professionals – charms, amulets, incantations, curses, herbology, etc – the sorts of things that people of past times probably did not consider to be "magic" at all, but simply, "how you do such and such."

Common traditions include healing, divination, love potions, spells to increase confidence or performance, and more. Techniques included, at various times and places, concocting tinctures, casting lots or horoscopes, spell work, water or flame scrying, creating amulets and written charms, and so on.

These practices embodied a great deal of folk wisdom (along with miscellaneous superstitions and prejudices). Every aspect of life might have its special spells, charms, and incantations.

Some might be simple herbal salves or poultices. Others might be as complex as

those of a woman in Todi (Italy) charged in 1428 with working spells to cure illness using a bone from an unbaptized baby, creating a contraceptive by burning a mule's hoof, and transferring an injury to another person by means of a potion involving thirty different herbs.

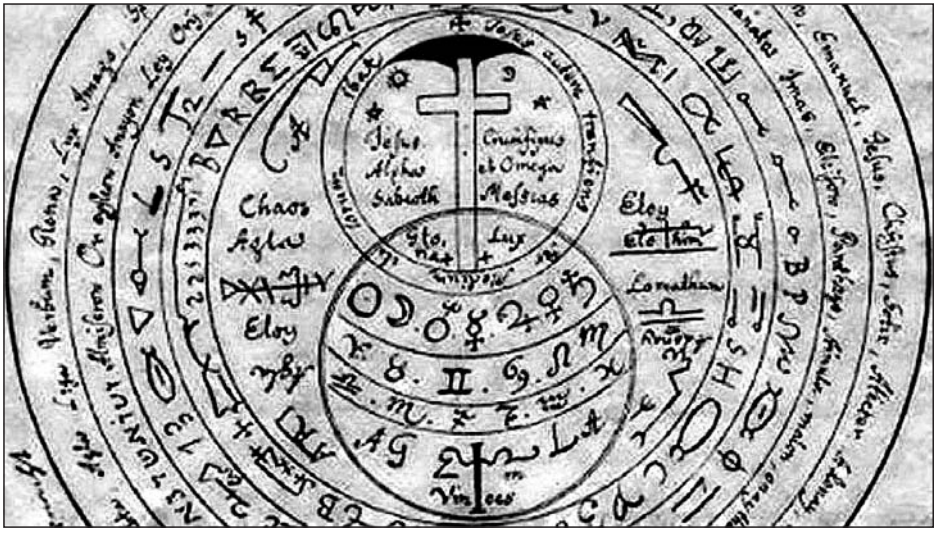
Legacies: The view that magic is a practical tool to be used and shared in day-to-day life. An informal quality to spells and invocations, and a collective and co-creative approach to discovering "what works."

Learned Traditions: Literate Magic & Necromancy

Welcome to the realm of necromancy. Literally the word refers to invoking and working with spirits of the dead. But the term has come to encompass formal ritual magic in general, and especially summoning spirits, angels, demons, and the like.

In an age when only the educated few could read, and given the literate nature of necromantic rituals (which sometimes copied or parodied the Catholic mass), it is unlikely that ordinary people had much involvement in these rites. Investigations and prosecutions for demonic magic focused on clerics, not common people. (This will radically change with the witch hunts after about 1500.)

From earliest history until the Enlightenment of the 1700s, few people doubted that the world included not only humans and other animals, but also a host of spirits. In polytheistic times these might be seen as deities, demigods, or the spirit of a place or a natural feature such as a waterfall.



Imagine your birth chart looking like this – from a Medieval manuscript.

Poor ergonomics – an occupational hazard of Medieval scribes.

In the Islamic and Christian Middle Ages, when official theology denied the existence of any spirits outside God's control, these beings came to be seen as angels and demons ultimately subordinate to the monarchical deity – a neat binary division of all supernatural energy into good and evil that lingers today.

Building on older practices, some Jews, Muslims, and Christians developed illicit rituals and spells for summoning and commanding such spirits in hopes of obtaining assistance in love, treasure-finding, or professional endeavors.

Some of these rituals survive in manuscripts (often ironically thanks to church and monastic libraries), revealing an obsession with lists of divine and spirit names that, if perfectly recited, will compel a given spirit to appear and do the ritualist's bidding. Goethe's Faust illustrates this sort of ritual – as does the 17th century Book of Abramelin.

Enough manuscripts survive to show that Medieval clerics (a general term for anyone educated in the church-controlled universities, not necessarily a priest or monk) considered their activities to be "magical," and were willing to run the risk of discovery and punishment in return for the hope of power and wealth.

This sort of fussily arcane magic merged with the alchemical revival around 1500. Both faded in the face of the scientific revolution from about 1650 forward.

Legacies: Well, for starts, people today write a lot of books about spirituality and magic.

Some people see the world as populated with myriad spirits, although tending to agree with the ancients that they are spirits of places and other autonomous beings, not God-controlled subordinates.

Reclaiming Tradition rituals sometimes invoke and work with deities and nature spirits, but avoid commanding or restraining them, seeing it more as a "power-with" relation.

Learned Traditions: Natural Magic

A second academic trend was so-called natural magic – the search for the occult (hidden) properties of nature.

That plants and stones have properties which can be discovered and utilized is nothing new – once humans discovered honey and berries, the search was on. Imagine the amazement of people first seeing grain transmuted into bread, or soft clay being shaped and fired into a hard, reusable vessel. Talk about magic!

However bookish the Middles Ages could be, some people were always alert for new substances and new ways of doing things. Some were fanciful, such as a given stone's ability to tame dragons, others quite real, such as the development of new dye pigments.

Natural magicians searched for hidden properties by studying the resemblances of different objects. For instance, beets were believed to be good for the blood because their juice is deep red.

Natural magic has strong connections to the "common traditions" discussed above. Ordinary people throughout history have been just as likely to discover a new truth or natural fact as experts, although in retrospect we rely mainly on literate (and usually male) sources such as Albertus Magnus (Albert the Great, d. 1280) to learn about them.

Christian and Islamic theologians wrote extensively on natural science, and later generations foisted countless books about plant magic and alchemy on Ibn Sina, Albertus Magnus, and others.

As shown below, when Christian authorities began to charge that *all* magic involved demonic invocations, practitioners of natural magic answered that they were simply unlocking secrets that God had hidden in the natural world.

This defense worked up to a point – but when the new discoveries (for instance, in physiology and astronomy) began to undermine established authorities, it became another story.

Legacies: Nature is magical, and it behooves us to learn its secrets. Nuff said!

Arabic Astral Magic

700 to 1100 CE

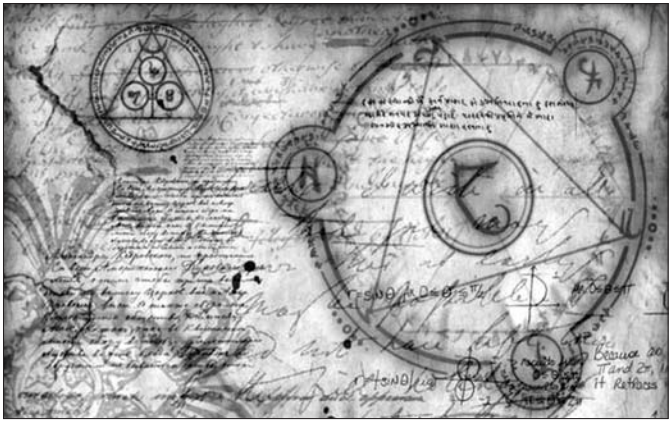
Islam arose in Arabic lands in the early 600s. By 800 CE, the religion had spread from Morocco and Spain to North India. Constantinople (modern Istanbul) and coastal Italy were besieged.

While not politically united, Islam fostered a common cultural climate. Heir to Greek

and Egyptian legacies, Islamic regions flourished while most of Europe languished in the post-Roman "dark ages."

Over subsequent centuries, hundreds of Arabic manuscripts on a wide range of topics were translated into Latin, forming the basis for later Western philosophy, science, and magical theory.

Not surprisingly, at a time when its literature, architecture, and medicine were the most advanced in the West, Islamic regions also produced cutting-edge magic. Foremost among the techniques that eventually made their way into broader circulation were astral and talismanic magic.



Complex calculations characterize Arabic astral magic. Fortunately, we are no longer tested on this material in Elements of Magic classes.

Astral magic is built on the Neoplatonic notion of a magical/spiritual "fluid" that flows through and unites the cosmos. Stars and planets especially focus this energy, and trained magicians can tap into astral emanations and draw them into objects to create talismans.

Talismans are magically-charged objects which can range from pieces of parchment to precious gems. The material of which the talisman is made affects its power – for instance, copper is especially effective in drawing love energy from Venus.

The object might be inscribed with names, words, and/or images to attract and focus the desired energy. The talisman might then be charged by placing it under the rays of a particular astral body – for instance, leaving a love talisman in the starlight when Venus is especially bright.

Legacies: Talismans! Neopagans do their part to preserve this heritage by including craft fairs at many gatherings. Modern pagans carry on older practices of magically charging objects such as necklaces, rings, and amulets.

Arabic astral magic bequeaths a sense that the universe is pervaded with magical/spiritual energy. The challenge is to learn to tap into and direct this energy.

Pre-Industrial Europe: A Culture of Misfortune

As our survey moves toward the era of the European witch trials, let's pause to remember the conditions of life for people prior to about 1800. Some have referred to this pre-industrial society as a "culture of misfortune," in which death and catastrophe were routine occurrences.

In a time when half of all children died by age 10 (and half of those by age 1), when inexplicable illness could strike at any moment, when a freak hailstorm could destroy a year of agricultural work and everyone was one bad harvest away from hunger – any of these might set off a search for scapegoats.

Among Europe's favored scapegoats have been Jews, heretics, foreigners, and witches. Why witches were specially targeted after about 1500 will be discussed below.

Legal and extra-legal executions in times of crisis may have been more common than scant records show, and accusations against neighbors might often have included witchcraft or magic.

However, until the era of the witch hunts (discussed below), this did not lead to serial trials where each suspect was coerced to accuse others.

The Demonization of Magic

c. 500 BCE to 300 CE

Now let's survey a longterm development that will become horrifyingly relevant around 1500 – the demonization of magic. This very brief overview will try to show how negative attitudes toward magic and alternative spiritual trends changed and hardened over two millennia, culminating in the era of the European witch hunts around 1500-1700.

In ancient polytheistic societies, people were accustomed to encountering and even participating in a variety of spiritual practices. The practices of other people, especially foreigners, might be seen as alien, disturbing, or perhaps magical, but not illegal. The Greek term "magi," originally referring to Persian (ie, foreign) priests, came to be applied to unofficial metaphysical workers in general.

The diverse Mediterranean societies of the Hellenistic era (around 300-50 BCE) needed religious tolerance in order to function. The common traditions of magic (see above) were shared and accepted, and were repressed only when specific harmful effects were perceived or feared.

During the Roman Imperial era (c. 50 BCE to 400 CE), when the entire Mediterranean world was politically and economically united, urban people regularly witnessed other rites and practices.

Roman authorities tolerated other religions so long as the adherents didn't cause

disturbances and made the requisite sacrifices to the official Roman pantheon (Jews, a sizeable minority in the Eastern Roman world, were granted an exemption so long as they paid their taxes and didn't cause trouble).

When magic or alternative spirituality was persecuted, it was mainly because of a perceived threat to social order. The first persecutions of Christians seem to have been a combination of their refusing to honor Roman deities coupled with Nero's search for scapegoats for the burning of Rome around 64 CE.

Magical practitioners may have been snared by laws against fraud or failed attempts at healing – but people were arrested for the harm they allegedly caused, not for their beliefs or general practices.

The Demonization of Magic
c. 300 CE to about 1500 CE

With the advent of Christianity, and especially after about 350 CE when it became the dominant religion of the late Roman Empire, views toward magic and alternative spirituality gradually shifted. Let's survey that change.

Up till about 300 CE, Roman, Greek, and other ancient pagan religions were polytheistic. Foreign religions and deities might be regarded as equally powerful for their own devotees, as less powerful but still quite real, or as various names and aspects of one's own deities.

Thus Greeks recognized that Persian magi were powerful priests in their home society.

Assyrians seem to have seen other deities as real but less powerful (after all, whose gods won the war?).

And the Romans said, "Your gods are really just different names for our gods!" They carried this syncretism so far with Greece that later generations have seen Greek and Roman deities as interchangeable – Rome simply took over Greek myths and legends and applied them to their own deities.

Judaism is an exceptional case, probably passing from monolatry (recognition of multiple deities but worship of only one) to full monotheism – ours is the only God, and yours either don't exist or are demons.

Christianity took on this aspect of Jewish thought and added a new element – organized state power. From about 380 CE forward, Christian authorities engaged in official campaigns to eradicate all vestiges of older "pagan" practices. Persecutions were turned on adherents of older beliefs, sacred sites were closed and often destroyed, temples were rebranded as churches, and spirits repurposed as angels or saints (or as demons – stay tuned!).

Historians debate the causes of this shift toward monotheism, some noting that the far-flung Roman Empire demanded more unity of belief than diffuse pagan systems could provide. Given the Empire's tendency to civil wars and secessionist move-

ments, what would unify people from Britain to Palestine, from the Danube to North Africa? Maybe if everyone were compelled to believe in One True God...

Okay – but how does this connect to demonizing magic?

Suppose you are a Christian authority living in a diverse world with many surviving religions, cults, and practices. There's no way you are going to convince all those other people that their practices are empty and meaningless – they know better.

A Medieval necromancer, following written instructions, invokes a demon within the bounds of a magical circle. Warning: Always read entire manual before attempting this procedure at home!

Christianity's answer – yes, your practices work – but only because you have invoked demons to assist you! Christian authorities such as Augustine didn't deny the power of these spirits – rather, they condemned as demonic any appeals to spirits other than the Christian God.

Natural magicians (see above) argued: "We are simply unlocking hidden powers of nature that God created – what's demonic about that?"

Christian authorities led by Thomas Aquinas (c. 1250 CE) shot back: "You use verbal incantations – this proves you are actually appealing to a demonic spirit whether you recognize this or not. All magic, all spells, all invocation of any power other than God implies an appeal to demonic power."

That's hard to answer – and will become very problematic when ordinary people start getting accused of invoking demons because they chant over medicinal herbs.

Norse/Germanic Traditions

c. 100 to 1200 CE

As with Celts, Romans, and other ancient peoples, the Norse and Germanic groups were probably not homogeneous ethnic tribes, but ad hoc networks of peoples living north and west of the Rhine.

Roman-era writers such as Tacitus (c. 100 CE) describe the Germans (aka "barbarians") as nomadic warriors and traders with no settled (ie, urban) culture. Archaeologists have found few permanent settlements east of the Rhine from the Roman period. Small artworks similar to Celtic metalwork have been found in graves, along with luxury goods and artifacts from southern cultures.

Spared the civil wars and invasions of the late Roman and early Medieval era, northern trader/marauders (sometimes called Vikings) moved south into old Roman areas and conquered Normandy, Sicily, Britain, and the North of Russia by about 1100 CE. A network of Northern trading cities, the Hanseatic League, was among the strongest economic regions of the West by 1200.

Beginning around 800 CE, Norse explorers began to settle Iceland. This tiny island, insulated from outside influences for long periods, gave birth around 1100 CE to a series of poems and prose writings known as the Eddas. These epics describe the dysfunctional familial relations of Norse deities and heroes, along with a striking vision of the end of the world.

Runes are symbols which may have been part of alphabets used to write Germanic languages before the adoption of Latin script. Some Medieval texts attribute magical power to the runes – in the poem Havamal, Odin recounts a runic spell that can cause a corpse to speak. While runes are used today for divination, there is no written transmission of meanings from older times.

Political overtones – White supremacists have for the past century adopted certain (usually male) members of Norse pantheons as their semi-official deities. This malleability is not unique to Norse deities, but in today's rapidly evolving cultural mix it presents a special challenge to social justice and anti-racist organizers.

Legacies: Written down in relatively recent times, the tales of the Norse pantheon offer a coherent mythological framework with psychologically complex narratives. While some Witchcamps and local Reclaiming groups have avoided Norse myths due to political complexities, goddesses such as Freya have found a place in Reclaiming, and Winter Witchcamp has especially engaged with these deities and traditions.

Runes are popular today as divination tools and meditation sigils. Explanations of rune meanings in accompanying books are modern, intuitive interpretations.

GRIMOIRES

C. 1200 TO THE PRESENT

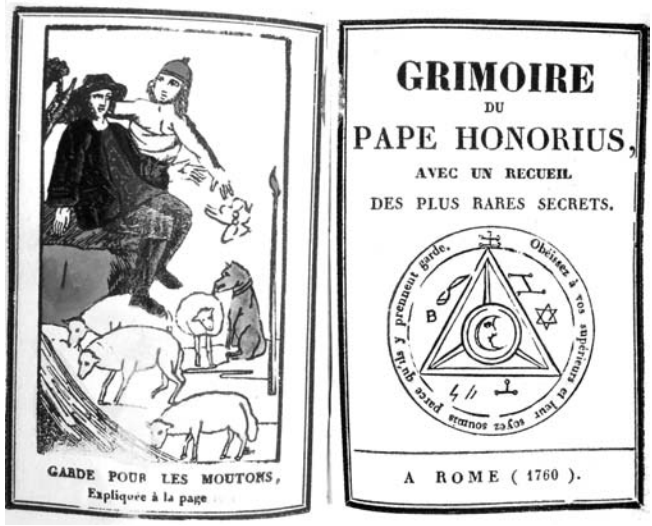
The word "grimoire" is a catch-all term covering everything from personal spell books to obsessively-detailed instructions for invoking angels and demons.

The Book of Abramelin, The Key of Solomon, and the Sworn Book of Honorius are grimoires from the Medieval or Early Modern eras. Each offers step-by-indecipherable-step instructions on how to invoke spirits and compel them to do your bidding, find

buried treasure, and/or grant your heart's desires.

Alchemical texts are grimoires of a sort – and like the elaborate invocatory manuals you have to wonder if anyone ever seriously performed these rites, or if they were concocted to dupe gullible financiers.

Around 1950, Wiccan pioneer Gerald Gardner applied the term "book of shadows" to his personal magical notebook (later edited and published by Doreen Valiente).



This once-famous grimoire from the 1700s purports to be written by Pope Honorius III (d.1227). King Solomon (supposedly c. 1000 BCE) is also credited with authoring a notorious book of spirit invocations that actually dates from around 1500 CE. The Key of Solomon was translated into English and edited by MacGregor Mathers of the Golden Dawn.

The term gained favor, eventually popping up on television, in movies, and in books for teen witches.

Today the terms grimoire and book of shadows are used interchangeably by many people for a personal collection of magical spells, workings, chants, instructions, jokes, and miscellaneous wisdom of varying practical value – a combination magical journal and compendium.

Legacies: Today's magical "how-to" books are descendants of grimoires, where we share intricate details of how we actually do magic (see Dancing the Spiral, page 120).

Just as we feel about older grimoires, people in the future will probably consider our writings a bit wacky.

Ah, well – at least they'll know we existed. And what is remembered lives.

herbology
FROM PREHISTORY TO THE INDUSTRIAL ERA

From time before history people have gathered herbs and other plants for cooking, medicine, dyes, rituals, and other uses.

A 16th century "Book of Secrets" attributed to the long-dead Albertus Magnus promised to reveal the hidden virtues of herbs, stones, and various marvels of the world.

In Homer's Odyssey, the wise woman/goddess Circe mixes unspecified plants with cheese and honey and uses them to turn Odysseus's crew into pigs. Helen of Troy is described as putting a drug into cups of wine that quieted all pain and strife for the rest of the day – with a suggestion that she knew a thing or two about using "cunning drugs" to manipulate people.

As these examples illustrate, knowledge about and gathering of herbs has been women's work since ancient times. This was unquestioned in Europe and around the Mediterranean up to about 1500.

Around that time, university-trained physicians began campaigning to limit and eventually outlaw herbalists, midwives, and other natural healers. In law and elite society, herbalism and popular remedies were seen as backward and superstitious.

Despite official pronouncements, most people must have continued to rely on popular healers and techniques they had long known. During the Early Modern period (c. 1500ff), women offering such services were increasingly harassed by authorities.

That the years 1500-1750 were also the period of the European witch hunts is noteworthy, and has led some to posit a strong connection – that the hunts were at least partly aimed at eliminating independent women's voices and practices.

Undeniably, some strands of witch hunting, exemplified by the Malleus Maleficarum (a popular and luridly misogynist inquisitors' manual), were obsessed with the power of women.

However, scholarly opinion today is skeptical about "repressing powerful women" as a major motivating factor in the witch hunts (see Chapter IV, page 53ff).

It still seems worth noting the "coincidence" that the hunts targeted older women – keepers of much of society's oral wisdom – precisely at a time when male-dominated, literate academia was driving these women out of medical and healing practices.

Legacies: Herbalism is stronger today than in a couple of centuries. Skills are openly taught and herbs can (mostly) be legally obtained, although conflicts still arise with mainstream medicine and state regulations.

The idea that the witch hunts aimed at suppressing independent women was very popular in the feminist circles that gave birth to Reclaiming and other pagan groups of the 1970s and 80s.

People proudly claimed the label "witch," taking the word to mean powerful, nonconformist women (and eventually people of all genders).

III: Renaissance Magic

The Renaissance

Italy, 1400–1520

The Modern era opens with two broad cultural trends – the Renaissance and the Reformation. Neither was a single chain of events, and neither can easily be summarized. Each influenced modern paganism.

The Renaissance, narrowly defined, spans Northern Italy from about 1400 to 1520. Artists and literary types fancied themselves midwifing a "rebirth" of ancient art and letters. Architecture and sculpture adapted styles from ancient Rome. Painting (of which little survived from the ancient world) developed in a more visually realistic direction.

Interesting from today's perspective is the revival of ancient pagan stories and characters. Particularly in Florence, pagan-inspired subjects appeared prominently in art for the first time in centuries – a current that would grow to encompass all of Europe by the 1600s.

Expanding a Medieval trend, scholars continued to discover ancient texts, translating and publishing them using the new moveable-type presses. Ancient Roman authors such as Ovid and Virgil achieved new fame, and old Mediterranean myths, never totally lost, rose again to prominence.

Renaissance "humanism" emphasized human experience (as opposed to focusing on the divine), with attention to the human form in art and humane values for society.

These trends radiated out from Italy over the following centuries and dominated European art and culture through the late 1800s.

Legacies: Today's familiarity with many Graeco-Roman myths and deities grew from this re-invigoration. Western culture's sense of "refined" art – whether to be imitated or revolted against – stems from the Renaissance.

Ecological thought has expanded humanism to encompass all life on the planet.

THE HERMETIC TEXTS

Let's back up and weave another thread from the Mediterranean world of the late Roman era that blossomed in the Renaissance.

Around 300 CE, Constantine – the emperor who later (c. 330) legalized Christianity – decided that the capital at Rome was too distant from the most economically valuable areas of the Empire – particularly Egypt, a trade entrepot and a major source of grain for the empire's cities. He built a new capital known as Constantinople (today Istanbul), and moved most of the government there.

The Roman Empire soon dissolved into two relatively independent areas – the Greek-speaking East based in Constantinople, and the Latin West still ruled from Italy (Rome and later Milan and Ravenna).

By 600, the West had crumbled into smaller states and dependencies. The East remained controlled by Constantinople, and came to be called Byzantium, with its religion known as Greek or Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Beginning in the mid 600s, Islamic forces rapidly conquered the Middle East, Egypt, and North Africa. Most of Spain was Islamic by 750. Byzantium, although still powerful, was reduced mainly to the Balkans and Greece. For the next half millennium this was the political situation.

During this period, Western Europe was the least advanced of these regions. Byzantium continued developing ancient Greek learning. Islam inherited the classical traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean and especially Alexandria. Both far outstripped Western Europe in literature, philosophy, science – and magic.

Some of this wisdom filtered through to Europe, particularly via Spain, a meeting ground for Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

When Turkish armies captured Constantinople after 1450, Greek scholars fled to Italy, bringing with them many ancient texts long lost to the Latin world. Among these were numerous dialogs of Plato.

Even more incredible were the Hermetic texts from Alexandria – so called because some of the dialogs include the Graeco-Egyptian god Hermes Trismegistus.

Today dated to around 200 CE, the writings were long believed to be from ancient Egypt – older than Homer, older than Moses. They were called "prisca theologia" – first or pristine theology, a direct revelation from God.

The short pieces – most of them unknown in Latin-speaking Europe from the fall of Rome until the Renaissance – contain ruminations on the origins of the universe, the meaning of human existence, and communion with divinity.

During the Renaissance and beyond, the Hermetic texts influenced philosophical and spiritual circles with a vision of ancient truth that might unify Europe's many bickering Reformation-era religions.

Legacies: Although people today are more likely to look for inspiration to nature and community than ancient texts, many share a desire to find "original truth," to get

back to the core of connection to spirit.

The Hermetic texts also tap into a deep-seated human desire to believe that somewhere out there, someone knows the "real" truth about life!

Medieval & Renaissance Alchemy

c. 1000 to 1700

Let's pick up the thread of alchemy introduced in ancient times. During the Medieval period, alchemical and chemical studies flourished in Islamic areas. Manuscripts were occasionally translated from Arabic into Latin, intriguing scholars such as Gerbert of Aurillac, who became Pope Sylvester II in 999.

The interest in ancient texts that characterized the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, coupled with the advent of moveable-type printing around 1450, led to a profusion of "scientific" books, not least alchemical treatises. Many survive, copiously illustrated with obscure and fascinating drawings and diagrams (Carl Jung discusses these graphics from a psycho-spiritual viewpoint in his intriguing book on alchemy). Some of these texts are so obtuse and convoluted that one suspects their main function was to defraud gullible aristocrats.

Hieronymus Bosch (d. 1516), in one of his more restrained moments, reminds us that illusion and stage tricks are part of magic.

Rosicrucians – around 1600 the notion of personal and collective transmutation flowered in the mysterious Rosicrucian writings (as obscure as any alchemical treatise), which seem to have been connected to a political movement aimed at abolishing the Holy Roman Empire and promoting local religious and political autonomy.

The Rosicrucian vision of a world of tolerance and peace was crushed during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648).

Yet the dream of alchemical transmutation and the synthesis of the philosopher's stone persisted well into the Modern period. In the late 1600s famed scientific innovator Isaac Newton devoted major efforts to alchemy.

The skepticism of the Enlightenment, coupled with the rise of modern experimental science, finally laid to rest the arcane formulae of alchemy. Practical skills such as distillation, metallurgy, and manufacture of tinctures and dyes, pioneered by alchemy, paved the way for modern chemistry and other sciences.

Legacies: Few present-day witches and magi maintain fully-equipped alchemical laboratories, and today's aristocrats are notably parsimonious when it comes to patronizing esoteric researches.

Yet the alchemical vision continues to inspire people working to change themselves and the world – real change begins with the "prima materia" of the present, and seeks to transmute it through a series of purifying steps.

Good luck to us!

Professionals and Writings

Many practices discussed in this book are considered "magic" only in retrospect – people at the time probably thought of herbs, incantations, and spells not as magic but as "what you do for this problem." When a parent kisses a child's bruise to "make it well," we carry on this practice (see Common Traditions, page 36).

Renaissance magicians, on the other hand, proudly claimed the title, and had little hesitation about monetizing their practices. Some, such as John Dee and Giordano Bruno, enjoyed intermittent favor at royal courts.

The development of moveable-type printing around 1450 greatly increased the dissemination of books and ideas. This period saw a flowering of alchemical writings, and alchemists found patrons for their researches and profusely-illustrated tomes.

Astrological books and tables abounded. William Lilly gained fame when he read the stars to predict Parliament's victory in the English Civil War of the 1640s.

Translations and new editions of long-lost classical authors such as the transcendent spiritualist Plato and the materialist Lucretius challenged narrow aspects of Medieval European thought.

Learned magicians achieved great respect in some circles – but this trend came to an abrupt end after 1600, killed by a combination of religious war, the repressive Catholic Counter-Reformation, and the growing scientific outlook of European intelligentsia after about 1650.

Legacies: Modern traditions inherit the idea that magic can be openly taught and shared (and published!), and that it takes study and practice to get good at it.

Renaissance Magic
four personalities

Joan of Arc – Born in 1412, Joan is usually seen as a vestige of the Middle Ages. Of interest here are her claims to direct communications and visions from God. Her channeled messages seemed to aid the French in defeating the occupying English forces, and Joan was seen as a miracle worker. She was eventually captured by the English and executed as a heretic (and according to popular report, a "witch"), but an aura both of sanctity and magic has surrounded her ever since.

Paracelsus – Born 1493 in Switzerland, Paracelsus was educated as a medical doctor and also steeped in the Hermetic philosophy described above. He sought folk remedies and disdained classical medical texts. Building on alchemical ideas, Paracelsus developed chemistry-based healing theories that were a forerunner of modern pharmaceuticals. In 1525 he was ejected from a teaching position at Salzburg for supporting the losing side in the German Peasants' War.

John Dee – Born 1527 in Britain, Dee straddled the transition from magic to science, and probably did not draw a distinction between his mathematical career and his metaphysical and Hermetic researches. Dee attempted angelic communications and created the "Enochian" script with medium (and likely fraudster) Edward Kelley as part of a plan to revivify the wisdom of the ancients and heal the Protestant/Catholic breach. Around 1585 Dee traveled to Prague and had an audience with Emperor Rudolf II. The visit may have inspired the Rosicrucian pamphlets that appeared in the next generation – pamphlets that called for a new spiritual era that transcended old divisions (see page 49).

Giordano Bruno – Born 1548 in Italy and educated as a Dominican, Bruno developed elaborate theories about astral energy and magical methods for invoking it. He adopted the heliocentric model proposed by Copernicus, and carried it further by seeing every star as a sun surrounded by planets with their own life. Bruno traveled Europe writing, lecturing, and generally alienating everyone he met. Around 1590 he returned to Italy, apparently hoping to convert the Pope to his new magical ideas. This didn't go well, and in 1600 Bruno was executed as a heretic.

The Reformation
c. 1500 to 1650

Why are we delving into Christian history? It turns out that some modern pagan traditions have roots in Protestant movements.

The Protestant Reformation of the 1500s, associated with names such as Luther and Calvin, followed several centuries of unsuccessful localist movements including Waldensians, Hussites, and Wycliffites. Each of these was labeled heretical and

violently repressed in the name of a unified Roman Catholicism.

Around 1520, a faction of German states (Germany consisted of several hundred autonomous states only loosely federated as the Holy Roman Empire) backed the Lutheran movement, and soon several other state-backed Protestant groups had taken root in North-Central Europe. After a generation of ideological sparring, Northern Europe collapsed into religious and civil wars after 1550.

The religious wars, particularly in the German states, provide the broad context for the witch hunts. While the wars did not focus on witchcraft, the decades of devastation left people desperate and looking for scapegoats. The wars also fostered a climate of spiritual battle that saw the Devil behind simple acts of village magic.

The Reformation highlighted the relation of the individual soul to deity. Broadly speaking, the Catholic Church placed the relation in the hands of professional clergy who were authorized to perform sacramental-magical acts such as changing wine into the blood of Christ. These priests "mediated" people's relationship to God.

Protestants emphasized the individual's direct, "unmediated" relationship with God, primarily through prayer. The purpose of clergy was to teach and exhort, not mediate.

Although these fundamental differences impacted European thought for the following several centuries, they made little difference as far as witch hunting. Luther and other reformers placed at least as much emphasis on demonic and Satanic dangers as did Catholicism, and hunts happened under both Protestants and Catholics.

Legacies: The Protestant emphasis on a direct, personal relationship with deity has colored less-structured neopagan movements.

Reclaiming and kindred groups explicitly state: "Each person is their own spiritual authority." Priestesses function as facilitators and organizers, not mediators of the divine.

Protestants also bequeathed a disdain for centralized, hierarchical structures. Reclaiming as well as other "anarchist" networks such as Food Not Bombs inherit this Protestant tradition of decentralized, autonomous local congregations and groups (see also the Activist Ancestors chapter regarding Congregationalists, page 90-92).

IV: EUROPEAN WITCH HUNTS
1450 TO 1750

THE WITCH HUNTS
WHAT/WHEN/WHERE/WHY

Now we come to a disturbingly fascinating period of our history. For people who today proudly claim the title "witch" or describe their work as "magic," as well as communists, anarchists, and activists of various stripes, the hunts and trials stand as a stark reminder of the vulnerability of people on the margins of respectability.

What led various regions and localities of Europe to engage in prolonged searches for and trials of suspected Devil-worshiping witches?

Why did the hunts mostly happen in this period, and not earlier or later? How do they connect to a broader pattern of scapegoating that pervades Western (and perhaps much of human) history?

Who were the victims? What did they have in common? How did they try to explain themselves?

In the Bibliography (see page 84) I'll recommend a short article and several longer studies which illustrate the complicated and shifting patterns of the witch hunts.

Here I'll survey some of the broad outlines.

First, some numbers. The total number killed is impossible to determine, partly because the number of alleged witches murdered by non-judicial "lynchings" can never be known. It is possible that some of the judicial hunts and trials began in response to lynchings, with authorities trying to re-establish control of volatile situations.

Still, the past century of archival research allows at least a general sense of the scale. Numbers in the millions, once commonly cited, are badly mistaken – in fact, virtually impossible, given the small population of Europe at the time.

Present-day scholars, after studying trial records across the continent, put the likely

total of officially executed witches at between forty and sixty thousand over the course of about three centuries.

Of these, a majority were executed in German-speaking areas between about 1550 and 1650 – the period of the worst Protestant-Catholic wars, culminating in the Thirty Years War that raged across Germany. Central authority collapsed, and nothing reined in local scapegoating rampages.

Some of the largest documented waves of executions occurred in the western German bishoprics of Trier, Mainz, and Cologne, where several thousand people were killed over the course of just a few decades around 1600.

These mini-states lacked strong central governments, and none was subject to an appellate court. When popular opinion and local officials ran amuck, there were no higher institutions to stop the momentum.

What about the Catholic Inquisitions? Ironically, these disreputable bodies didn't have such a bad record during the witch hunts. The Roman Inquisition, controlled by the papacy, put an early end to hearsay evidence and demanded that all cases follow strict legal procedures. Although some witches (and magician Giordano Bruno – see page 51) were subsequently executed, no major hunts ensued in the Roman jurisdiction.

Similarly, the north of staunchly Catholic France, where the Paris Parlement acted as a sort of supreme court, demanded around 1500 that all capital cases be sent to Paris for judicial review. Few if any major hunts happened in their jurisdiction after this point.

Hunts seem to have happened mainly in areas where central authority was weak or compromised by war. England's worst period of witch hunting was during the civil war of the 1640s. France's worst incidents were in outlying areas (Normandy, Lorraine) with no accountability to Paris.

THE WITCH HUNTS

A SATANIC CONSPIRACY?

During the Middle Ages, clerics and other educated people (mostly men) were occasionally prosecuted for magic, demonic rituals, and the like (see "Learned Traditions" in Chapter II above).

In the 1300s, several high-profile legal cases charged aristocrats with using magic to attempt to murder royalty. The Order of the Knights Templar was broken up after 1307, its members charged with obscene magical acts.

These upper-class cases remained isolated. When the great hunts emerged in the 1400s, the victims were overwhelmingly ordinary people – often elderly women from the fringes of society.

Did the victims actually call themselves witches? Unless they were insane, probably not. As Ronald Hutton has established, the term "witch" was in the past mainly used on

other people, not one's self. To be identified as a witch was dangerous, possibly lethal.

A key step in justifying the witch hunts was the idea of a Satanic conspiracy to destroy Christendom.

Individual cases of witchcraft had long been prosecuted as heresy. Initial accusations sometimes came from neighbors and other common folk – but could take on the nature of "hunts" and mass executions only when church and state got involved.

Unlike earlier eras where a single person or small group was accused of using evil magic, cases after about 1450 often included charges of participating in the (sexually-charged) rituals of Devil-worshiping cults, and suspects were tortured until they admitted to being part of a Satanic conspiracy and named other participants.

This obsession with groups or sects of witches parallels the success of breakaway Protestant sects during the Reformation – heresy was increasingly seen as a group vice, not an individual deviance. (Protestants were no different, demonizing one another and the Roman church.)

The ducking of a witch, from a chapbook by John Ashton (1834). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

How did the everyday magical acts of common people get caught in this dragnet? We saw in Chapter II the gradual "demonization" of magic. Where older cultures saw magic as problematic only when harm was done or perceived, some in the later Middle Ages developed the idea that *all* magical acts were demonic because they invoke a conscious spiritual being in order to accomplish their effects.

Combined with the belief that witches (and heretics) must belong to secret cults and sects, this seems to have led authorities to launch "hunts" to eradicate heresy, deviance, and witchcraft. Official Christianity seemed under attack, and authorities looked for scapegoats.

In some cases, these scapegoats were Jews, or Romany, or foreigners in general. Jews and Muslims were forced to convert to Christianity or leave Spain in 1492.

Around 1500, tensions focused on witches, and often on older women. Why this happened at this time remains a complex question.

THE WITCH HUNTS
WHY WERE OLDER WOMEN TARGETED?

Archival research confirms that a large majority of witches and magicians executed during the period of the great hunts were women. In some places they made up 90 percent of victims.

To account for the high percentage of women persecuted and killed during this era, it has been popular since historian Jules Michelet in the mid-1800s to cite the deep-grained misogyny of Christian churches (both Protestant and Catholic) as the driving force behind the hunts.

Although Christian attitudes couldn't have helped matters, this doesn't explain why the witch hunts happened around 1500 instead of, say, 500 or 1000 CE, when attitudes were just as misogynist.

And why did the Roman Inquisition lead most jurisdictions in curbing the hunts? Something further must have been involved.

Social factors played a role. An earlier chapter discussed herbalism – a gendered field occupied mainly by women. In Western societies prior to about 1500, the healthcare and healing of most people was in the hands of women. The rare university-educated male physicians treated royalty and aristocrats (often to their detriment).

Beginning in the Early Modern era, educated doctors campaigned to ban women from practicing medicine and even midwifery.

Women were also displaced from economic and social importance as the beginnings of capitalist production moved male laborers away from farms and home workshops.

These and other factors may have rendered older women less essential to town and village societies and heightened gender tensions at a moment when other conflicts and disasters were leading people across Central Europe to look for scapegoats.

For more on the complex topic of gender and the witch hunts, see the Bibliography beginning on page 84.

THE WITCH HUNTS
WHY IN THESE TIMES AND PLACES?

Witch hunts were not incessant. They broke out sporadically – now here, now there.

Why were witches particularly persecuted – and accused of a Satanic conspiracy, no less – at particular times and places? Why did the worst excesses happen between about 1550-1650, and why mainly in Central Europe?

This chapter can't offer answers, but here are some factors to consider:

- the Protestant Reformation (1517ff), which challenged centuries-old patterns of authority and spawned a wave of religious wars.

- Christianity's demonization of magic and the idea of an anti-Christian conspiracy.
- the early stages of the capitalist upheaval, which unsettled social relations and economic patterns.
- misogynistic trends aggravated by incipient capitalism, including devaluation of the role of women in production and reproduction (eg, suppression of midwives).
- climatic trends including a "little ice age" around 1550, leading to diminished harvests.
- scientific and technological changes, including the development of moveable-type printing around 1450, European colonization of the Western hemisphere in the 1500s, and the Copernican revolution beginning around 1530.

A German illustration of the Mora witch trial, Sweden 1669. Fourteen women and one man were decapitated and their bodies burned.

These trends contributed to an atmosphere of displacement and unpredictable change. Place this in a "culture of misfortune" as described earlier, add the religious wars in Northern Europe beginning around 1550, and possible explanations emerge for why the worst hunts happened when and where they did.

This may account for the timing – but why witches, and not, say, Jews? This was demographics. Where Jews were found in sizeable numbers, as in the city-state of Trier, they were also targeted.

Witches, on the other hand, could be found anywhere, in whatever quantities desired.

THE WITCH HUNTS
HOW THEY ENDED

As noted above, the large-scale witch hunts seem to have happened mostly in areas where government authority was weak or compromised. As the worst of the reli-

gious wars wound down around 1650, central governments reasserted power.

Hunts were avoided or ended earliest in areas with strong central authority – the papal jurisdictions covered by the Roman Inquisition, the North of France covered by the Paris Parlement.

Broadly speaking, the hunts moved West to East, beginning and ending earlier in Western Europe. This parallels the earlier evolution of strong governments in the West.

Developments described below such as the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment led to the growth of skepticism about the very possibility of magic or witchcraft. By 1700, most educated Europeans considered even self-confessed witches to be deluded people incapable of doing real harm. Church authorities promoting witch hunts and the persecution of heretics were considered ignorant and backward, a trope that Voltaire built his career on.

By 1750 the hunts and most official executions had ended. A new era had arrived in which magic was not persecuted, but ridiculed.

Legacies: A somewhat morbid fascination with witches as counter-cultural icons par excellence, coupled with a realistic concern that political and religious "witch hunts" continue – not least in the US, where a "Satanic abuse" hysteria spread as recently as the 1980s (investigations turned up no actual cases).

The anti-communist crusade around 1950 ("McCarthyism") derailed many lives and featured one of the worst aspects of witch hunts – suspects being coerced into giving the names of others.

V: AN AGE OF SCIENCE

MAGIC GOES UNDERGROUND

After several centuries of witch hunts, followed by growing skepticism and anti-spiritual thought, magic was in sad shape.

Isaac Newton (d. 1727) was one of the last European intellectuals who pursued magic as a serious vocation. His manuscripts reveal deep interest in alchemy and biblical numerology – deciphering the secrets of the Hebrew scriptures by assigning numerical values to words and letters.

French writer and social activist Voltaire, two generations younger (and himself a major propagator of Newton's scientific ideas), laid into spirituality and dogma with such witty venom that by mid-century most forms of magic had gone underground.

Alchemical researches continued, and we'll see below how Tarot was "rediscovered" around 1780. But many prominent writers of the period tended to be skeptical, even materialist (Diderot, D'Holbach).

During the early 1800s, in the wake of the defeat of the French Revolution and Napoleon, Europe saw a spiritual revival. The milieu was reactionary and often royalist – a political bent that colored some later magical writing and did nothing to engage advanced thinkers.

Legacies: Many people today come to magic and paganism as adults, having grown up in a society and educational system that ridicules such beliefs and practices. Among political radicals, all forms of spiritual interest can be suspect as "opiates of the masses."

This gives rise to the expression, "in the broom closet" – borrowing metaphor and practice from LGBTQ allies, folks reveal their magical inclinations to people one at a time, while keeping it veiled from others – often including families.

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

This section won't trace the development of modern science, but notes some aspects that pertain to today's traditions.

From the mid 1600s the West saw the development of an experimental approach to knowledge. Earlier exemplars such as Roger Bacon (d. 1292, Oxford) can be found, but the dominant approach of the Middle Ages and even the Renaissance was a close study of past texts and authorities. A newly-discovered manuscript or a fresh interpretation meant more than observation of the world.

By 1700, this had largely changed. Galileo, Harvey, and Newton redefined knowledge to answer the demand that theory be validated by observation and experiment.

The results have been spectacular – an end to famine, cures for diseases, and a standard of living (in much of the West, at least) that our ancestors never dreamed possible.

Till about 1930 this approach passed virtually unchallenged. Subsequent developments including world war, holocaust, atomic weapons, and environmental degradation have raised questions about the unbridled (and profit-driven) development of experimental science divorced from a humane vision or ethical concerns.

Legacies: Many neopagans tend to be science-based, sharing a broad skepticism about old-style magic such as levitation or shape-shifting. This has led some people to redefine "magic" to mean social and personal transformation.

Approaches to magic and ritual today are often "experimental," in that people try to read the energy of the moment and improvise, more than consulting authorities or scripts.

TAROT: DIVINATION FOR THE PEOPLE!

Playing cards were introduced into Europe around 1350, probably from Islamic areas. Their ultimate source may have been India or China, and they reflect the same sort of "number" magic as tossing coins or sticks and noting their patterns.

The earliest European cards included four suits of ten numbered cards plus three or four court cards per suit. The suits may derive from Medieval Egyptian designs.

Around 1440, Italian game players and artists added a series of additional cards which today we call the Major Arcana and created the game of Trionfi (google for more information and rules).

The additional cards functioned as trumps in trick-taking games – as opposed to designating one of the four suits as trump, as many games do today.

Although professionals may study for years, anyone can intuitively read Tarot – a magical tool for the people!

Tarot cards were used for esoteric purposes quite early. In one account from the

later 1400s, a card was assigned to each person at a party, and others said how they thought it applied (or not).

Modern divinatory use of Tarot cards is first documented (so far) in the mid-1700s, probably inspired by popular fortune tellers. Romany people, renowned as seers and palm readers, may have helped popularize cartomancy.

Suggestions that Romany people pioneered Tarot divination, while intriguing, are unsubstantiated – will evidence emerge as researchers examine police and court records?

A common design at that time (still available today) was the Tarot de Marseilles, actually based on Northern Italian models.

Around 1780, a minor French aristocrat named Court de Gébelin came across the cards and concluded that they were a pictorial form of the legendary Egyptian Book of Thoth, passed secretly through the ages. The idea that the cards conceal ancient wisdom has been with us ever since. Perhaps it's true.

The Star card from one of the many variants known as the Tarot de Marseilles, a 1700s design actually from Northern Italy.

Several writers expounded Tarot theories during the 1800s. Eliphas Levi (see page 65) integrated Tarot and the numerology of Hebrew letters to "discover" occult interpretations of the Major Arcana (most post-1970 scholars have found this artificial, although Ronald Decker sees Kabbalistic echoes in interpretations of the Minor Arcana).

This ethereal theorizing culminated around 1900 with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (see page 67), which following Eliphas Levi wove Tarot into a unified fabric of Western magic that included astrology, alchemy, Kabbalah, and other arts.

Around 1910, Golden Dawn members Arthur Waite and graphic artist Pamela Colman Smith created an intricate yet accessible deck. Re-published in 1971, it has become "the" iconic Tarot. Originally called the Rider-Waite deck (Rider was the first publisher), today it is often called the Waite-Smith deck.

Tarot bubbled underground through the 1900s. Aleister Crowley and painter Frieda Harris created the Thoth deck around 1940 (widely available since around 1968).

With the advent of the new age movement in the 1960s and 1970s, Tarot exploded. Decks and books multiplied, readers emerged from the shadows, and scholars began

to study the 500-year trajectory of this colorful magical tool.

Legacies: Tarot is widely used among magical folk for discernment and insight – to help with a decision or to show various perspectives on an issue. Rituals, classes, and entire retreats can be built around Tarot.

Some reading is intuitive – interpreting the images directly. Other times people read book-meanings – an evolving tradition that dates at least to the 1700s.

A working known as the Journey of the Fool uses Tarot to map out a spiritual quest (included in Dancing the Spiral – see page 120).

For a tongue-in-cheek look at Tarot and magical history, see Luke Hauser's novel, A Fool Such As I: A Tarot Mystery.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT: THE RISE OF SKEPTICISM

The 1700s in Western Europe are called the Enlightenment – a period that built on the scientific revolution to develop a secular, critical approach to many facets of society.

Writers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu turned harsh eyes on traditional social and political institutions, a trend that culminated in the French Revolution of 1789. Diderot and others developed early evolutionary theories, debunking older ideas of unchanging, God-created species.

Many aspects of traditional spirituality and magic came under fire as well – in Keith Thomas's felicitous phrase, the world was "disenchanted."

As mentioned above, the harshest weapon was ridicule. Belief in spirituality and metaphysics became tokens of ignorance and lack of critical thinking, leaving only a vague deism in which God created the world and disappeared.

Legacies: Contemporary paganism exists in a skeptical, a-spiritual society. Tell a non-pagan that you are a witch, and you get "that smile." Tell an educated person that you do magic, and watch them awkwardly change the topic.

Actually, you get the same reaction if you say you are a revolutionary.

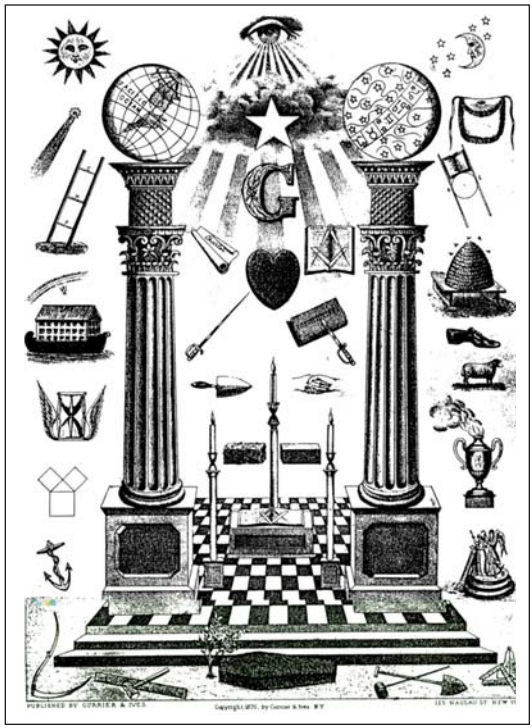
Awkward smiles aside, is there a deeper level at which we don't take ourselves seriously? Do we secretly discount the idea that magic (and a good deal of hard work) can actually create a peaceful, beneficent, sustainable world?

What do we believe we can accomplish with all this ritual and magic stuff? Enquiring minds would like to know!

FREEMASONRY: CEREMONY & INITIATION
1600-1900

Amidst an era of science and skepticism, Freemasonry, tracing its mythical roots to Medieval craft guilds, was founded around 1600 as a network of fraternal lodges. From probable origins in Scotland, the movement of secret initiatory societies spread to England and then across Europe and its colonies, reaching Pennsylvania as early as 1715.

The local lodge forms the basis of Masonry. While sharing an initiatory and ceremonial framework, each lodge elects its own officers and follows its own schedule. Lodges also function as social, mutual support, and charitable organizations. Traditionally, lodges accepted only free (non-slave or servant) white males.



Did Freemasons ever meet a symbol they couldn't interpret? Two dozen arcane images accompany the twin pillars from Solomon's Temple in this 1870 Currier & Ives graphic. Courtesy Gene Goldman.

Egyptian and Graeco-Roman motifs are common in lodges and rituals, along with ceremonial trappings such as processions, altars, and robes.

Candidates for admission receive initiation through a series of grades or degrees. Varying from place to place and over time, initiations involve knowledge of craft tools, practices, or history, as well as specific ceremonies for each degree. During initiations, members are often required to swear fidelity to the lodge and its covenants, as well as never to reveal Masonic secrets to outsiders.

Founders of later traditions including the Golden Dawn were trained in Freemasonry.

Legacies: Freemasonry provides a ceremonial and initiatory framework followed by many later traditions, most prominently the Golden Dawn, which passed them on to early Wiccan and neopagan groups.

Masonic lodges modeled the creation of a decentralized network of voluntary societies outside the control of either church or state.

Anarchist-type groups such as Reclaiming (with no formal membership or graded series of initiations) have deliberately avoided the structures and hierarchies inherited from Freemasonry.

ROMANTICISM: AN INTUITIVE RESPONSE

Early 1800s

The so-called Romantic era blossomed following the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Partly a conservative reaction to the upheaval of the past decades, Romanticism elevated intuition and feeling to a position equal with reason.

Foreshadowed by Goethe and Rousseau, writers such as Austen and Scott took the "romantic" novel to heights never surpassed.

Pagan deities and myths colored the works of poets like Keats and Shelley.

Folklore – The Romantic Era saw the development of folklore movements which recorded stories and legends that literate society previously ignored. These were presented as the timeless heritage of an unchanging rural past. The Grimm Brothers and other famous fairy tale collectors date from this time, as do writers such as Bullfinch who systematized the chaotic jumble of ancient Greek and Roman sources into coherent, linear narratives.

Legacies: Today's awareness of folk and fairy tales stems from the research of this era. Many first encountered Greek myths via Bullfinch and his progeny. Romantic-era versions of tales and myths are often taken as "traditional."

HEGEL & HISTORICAL RELATIVISM

This profound and obtuse thinker paved the way for what is sometimes called "historicism" or "historical relativism" – the idea that historical movements can best be understood in the context of their own times, and philosophies and customs that seem irrational or convoluted today may have made perfect sense in their age.

Hegel also propounded a developmental view of history, in which humankind is spiritually evolving toward perfection and God-awareness – in other words, evolving into complete agreement with Hegel's system.

The rest of the 1800s sees one long reaction to Hegel – Marx's materialist interpretation, Nietzsche's individualist rebellion, Kierkegaard's angsty existentialism...

Legacies: Both cultural relativism and a developmental view of history are deep influences on today's views of human spirituality – as is angsty existentialism!

Georg Hegel is surprised to find himself in a book about magical history.

VI: A REBIRTH OF MAGIC

ELIPHAS LEVI

Almost forgotten today, Eliphas Levi (born 1810 as Alphonse Louis Constant) was the foremost French occult writer of the mid 1800s, and deeply influenced Theosophy and the Golden Dawn.

A former Roman Catholic seminarian, he Hebraicized his name after leaving school and undertaking study of the Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and Renaissance magic. His highly intellectual blend was the most sophisticated exposition of this tradition since the time of Isaac Newton (late 1600s).

From Marsilio Ficino and Arabic magicians he adapted the idea of an "astral light" or fluid that permeates all being. The magician operates by controlling and manipulating this fluid.

In his book High Magic: Its Doctrine & Ritual (1854-56, also called Transcendental Magic), Levi correlates Kabbalah, Hermetic writings, alchemy, and smatterings of ancient Egyptian and Greek traditions in a structure based on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet – which he implicitly correlates with the Major Arcana of the Tarot deck.

Read as a Tarot manual, the book still offers provocative insights, and illustrates Levi's syncretic ideal – the various types of Western esoterica are so many paths to a unified higher truth.

Levi also drew a famous image of a goat-faced Devil which he identified with Baphomet, allegedly worshiped by heretical Knights Templar in the Middle Ages. This fascination with the Devil betrays Levi's Christian background.

Legacies: As Levi taught, the various strands of Western magic are taken today as tending toward one goal – spiritual enlightenment. Writers such as Blavatsky, Jung, and Gardner were influenced by this unified approach to various metaphysical threads and traditions.

Levi's Hebrew-numerological interpretations of the Tarot Majors influenced Arthur Waite and Pamela Colman Smith, and through them many subsequent Tarot decks. Modern scholars see this association of Hebrew letters and Tarot Majors as stemming not from an older tradition, but probably from Eliphas Levi himself (see page 61).

HELENA BLAVATSKY & THEOSOPHY

Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) was a Russian-born metaphysical savant, author, and co-founder of the Theosophical Society.

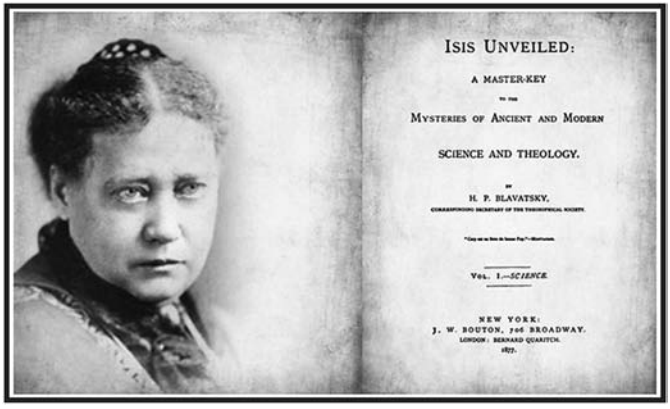
According to her own accounts, she traveled to India around 1850, where she encountered a group of spiritual masters who guided her development and teachings. These masters (she claimed) taught that beneath all human religions runs a single current of ancient wisdom, recoverable via esoteric traditions both Western and Eastern.

Active as a medium in the Spiritualist movement, Blavatsky asserted that the spirits contacted in séances and other ceremonies were not those of dead humans, but other types of spiritual beings. Something of a pantheist ("all being is divine"), Blavatsky referred to God as the root of all, from which all proceeds and into which all shall be absorbed at the end of the great cycle of being.

Her early thought was influenced by the Hermetic and Kabbalistic mix of Eliphas Levi, and she aimed to form a universal "brotherhood" of humanity as well as investigating the unexplained laws of nature.

In 1875 Blavatsky and others formed the Theosophical Society, which especially after she relocated to India in 1879 became a vehicle for introducing Eastern thought to the West. She was an early European convert to Buddhism.

Politically, she advocated for women's rights and leadership, but also propagated racist and anti-Semitic stereotypes of her day.


ISIS UNVEILED:

A MASTER-KEY

MYSTERIES OF ANCIENT AND MODERN

SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY.

H. P. BLAVATSKY,

VOL. I.—SCIENCE.

NEW YORK:
J. W. BOUTON, 706 BROADWAY.
LONDON: BERNARD QUARITCH.
1877.

Wisdom advises not to make jokes at the expense of the formidable Madame Blavatsky, who may still be watching over us.

Annie Besant – Blavatsky's successor as head of the Theosophical Society was Annie Besant (1847-1933), an ardent suffragette and an important voice for Indian independence. She was also involved in the early 20th cen-

tury movement known as Co-Masonry, which unlike Freemasonry admitted women to its ranks.

Besant claimed clairvoyant abilities, which she and others used to explore the secrets of the universe and the history of humankind. She co-authored a book called Occult Chemistry which traces her psychic explorations of natural phenomena.

Legacies: Blavatsky and Besant were early feminist influences on magical thought. Their notion that underlying the multitude of spiritual traditions runs a single core of divinity is sometimes expressed today as, "One Goddess, many names." Theosophy's blending of science and spiritual studies influenced modern pagan beliefs. Most of all, Theosophy helped introduce Eastern currents into Western spirituality.

HERMETIC ORDER OF THE GOLDEN DAWN
c. 1890-1900

No magical group or tendency ever got better press than the Golden Dawn. In existence barely a decade and consisting of about 200 members at its peak, the group left a radiant legacy of magical organizing that persists to this day.

The story of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is replete with forgeries, cryptic messages from secret masters, and enough betrayals to populate a whole series of pulp novels (see my Tarot novel...).

When they weren't busy forging founding documents or bitterly denouncing one another, the self-chosen leaders of the Golden Dawn drew up a whole panoply of rituals in which initiates advanced by stages similar to Freemasonry toward ever-higher revelations. Several temples were formed around Britain and in Paris.

The Sacred Magic of Abramelin, edited and translated by MacGregor Mathers of the Golden Dawn. The illustration shows the ancient Sator Arepo square. The palindrome was found in the ruins at Herculaneum, destroyed by Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE.

At first the Golden Dawn was conceived as a study group where initiates learned about past magical systems such as Kabbalah and Hermeticism as they worked through a series of graded ceremonies. Although the leadership was male, women were initiated on equal terms.

Soon, a second "inner" order was established with the intent of actually practicing magic. While their amalgam was influenced by the multi-layered magical theories of Eliphas Levi, the Golden Dawn was probably the first modern organization to attempt to revive and practice older systems of magic on an initiatory basis.

As the group splintered around 1900, a young Aleister Crowley attempted to force his way into the inner circles, resulting in desultory legal proceedings and publicity that led most members to abandon the group. Despite ongoing recriminations and accusations of fraud, most of the Golden Dawn rituals remained closely guarded secrets until they were published by former initiate Israel Regardie in the 1930s.

Legacies: The Golden Dawn serves as a general inspiration to create a practicing magical society more than in its details. Reclaiming, for instance, does not have graded levels of initiation, and rituals and teachings are neither scripted nor secret, as the tradition's voluminous and varied writings illustrate.

The modern quilt of Western esoteric practices derives more from Eliphas Levi than the Golden Dawn, although the latter continued this trend.

Perhaps a touch of the Golden Dawn's self-importance comes down to later pagans?

JAMES FRAZER

James Frazer (Scottish, 1854-1941), was an anthropologist and folklorist who wrote The Golden Bough (1890), a hugely influential study of mythology and religion.

The Golden Bough, a painting by J. M. W. Turner that inspired Frazer's book of the same title.

Frazer was among the first explicitly to connect magic, myth, and ritual to broader cultural developments. Following Hegel, Frazer saw cultures progressing through several stages: from magic to religion to science. Magic and myth, in Frazer's schema, constituted early (inadequate) attempts to understand nature and reality.

Frazer saw ancient religions as fertility cults that revolved around the worship and periodic sacrifice of a sacred king. The king was the incarnation of a solar deity who underwent a mystic marriage to a goddess of the Earth. He died at the harvest and was reincarnated in the Spring. Frazer saw this legend of rebirth as central to most world mythologies.

This theory was not borne out by closer readings of specific myths, and over the long run, scholars rejected many of Frazer's ideas. However, he had a major influence on Western literature and metaphysics via writers such as T. S. Eliot, H. P. Lovecraft, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell.

Legacies: Frazer is one source of the interpretation of seasonal rituals in terms of the death-and-rebirth of a solar god, a view that was popular around 1980 (although the key dates had become the Solstices, not the Equinoxes).

Frazer's idea of magic as primitive science is still common, and Frazer may have influenced the view of Samhain (Halloween) as the "new year of the witches."

ROBERT GRAVES

Poet and author (British, 1895-1985) of The White Goddess (1948). Expanding on Frazer's ideas, Graves proposed the prehistoric worship of a Europe-wide deity, the White Goddess of Birth, Love, and Death, who lies behind the diverse goddesses of various Western mythologies.

Building on Romantic-era literary evidence, Graves saw this Goddess worship as the original Western religion. In his eyes, myth and poetry spring from the ancient rituals of the White Goddess.

As belief in the Goddess faded in historical times, She weakened, and patriarchal Gods gained power. Conversely, the Goddess and the matriarchal values She embodies can be strengthened by our belief in Her (and, we might add, by our actions).

Graves (following Frazer) proposed a theory of myth and seasonal change, with the figure of the Holly King representing half of the year, while the other half is personified by the Oak King. The two battle ceaselessly as the seasons turn. Annual rituals commemorate this struggle.

Later scholars have questioned Graves' grasp of European and Celtic history and culture. Ronald Hutton calls him "a major source of confusion about the ancient Celts."

Legacies: The idea of a prehistoric cult of a Mother Goddess known under many names, as well as a ritual cycle that emphasizes the drama of the changing seasons.

DISTINGUISHED ANCESTORS
1900-1950

Let's pause to meet some ancestors that we won't have time to cover in depth:

Sociology & Anthropology: These new fields, developing around 1900, focused on the functional roles of religion and magic in social formation and maintenance. Writers such as Durkheim, Malinowski, and Weber explored ways that religion has provided social cohesion, while magic has traditionally served to bolster individual initiative. Anthropological studies attempted to place Western practices in a global perspective. Good survey: Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic, by Daniel O'Keefe.

Jane Ellen Harrison (British, 1850-1928): One of the founders of the study of Ancient Greek religion and mythology. Emphasized the experiential nature of religious and magical rites – ritual is a way we encounter things that cannot be put into language. Myths explain or preserve rituals. Popularized the idea that all goddesses are aspects of a "Triple Goddess" – maiden, mother, and crone. Emphasized the value of Greek vase painting for studying mythology, and wrote about ancient religious festivals and women's roles. Advocated for women's suffrage. One of the first British women to hold a career academic post. Book: Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion.

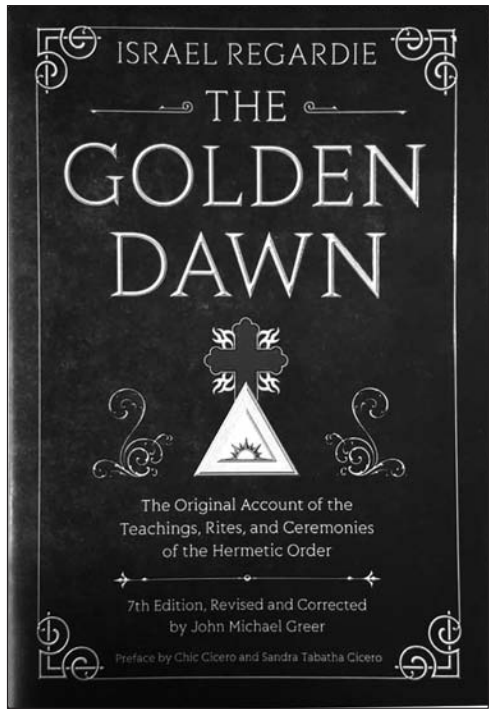
Sigmund Freud (Austrian, 1856-1939): Psychologist and social theorist. Developed notion of unconscious/subconscious actions and motivation. Emphasized dream interpretation and symbolic thinking, but used the term "magical thinking" to describe childish delusions that our thoughts affect the outside world. Freud's analysis of religion and magic was functionalist – beliefs and practices evolved because they filled social and psychological needs. A spiritual skeptic, he titled one book on religion, The Future of an Illusion. Interestingly, he used names from Greek mythology for psychological phenomena such as the Oedipus and Electra complexes and Narcissism. Books: Civilization & Its Discontents, Interpretation of Dreams.

Every history of magic needs a picture of Aleister Crowley in full Golden Dawn regalia. Photo WikiCommons.

Carl Jung (Swiss, 1875-1961): Psychologist and spiritual explorer. Initially a student of Freud, Jung spun off in his own metaphysically-inflected direction. Jung emphasized the social nature of consciousness, seeing it structured around collective, unconscious "archetypes" –

fundamental relations that humans encounter both internally and externally. Like Freud he focused on ways that spirituality and magic help individuals function in society. Jung delved into then-arcane topics such as Eastern mysticism and Western alchemy – his book Psychology & Alchemy is provocative (and has lots of pictures!).

Aleister Crowley (British, 1875-1947): Ceremonial magician and all-round unpleasant character. Educated at Cambridge, he joined the Golden Dawn near its demise, which he helped hasten by demanding advanced initiations. Channeled multiple books that might have benefited from a bit of developmental editing. Advocated for self-initiation as a magical journey (as opposed to a series of administered exams). Stated: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." Renowned for drug-sex-magic rites with people of various genders, which Crowley claimed were exercises of will power. Variously fingered both as a British intelligence agent and as a German sympathizer during the world wars. Key work: The Book of Thoth and related Tarot deck.



Israel Regardie did historians and magicians everywhere a big favor when he decided to reveal the original Golden Dawn rituals, into which he had been initiated. Perhaps there should be an expiration date on vows of secrecy?

THE COLLAPSE
1914-1930

By 1910, the Golden Dawn had dissolved into bickering and factionalism. Pamela Colman Smith and Arthur Waite had created their extraordinary, genre-defining Tarot deck – but its broader influence would not be felt until its re-publication in 1971. Eliphas Levi was dead, his work sinking into neglect.

World War I, 1914-1918, was followed by vast cultural changes. The waltz, immensely popular during the preceding decades, died abruptly, replaced by jazz and show tunes. Amid communist revolution, aristocracy and its values lost their hold on the European imagination. And magic took a hard fall.

A new era of literary and cultural criticism, deconstruction, and existentialism rendered obsolete elaborate theories such as those of Eliphas Levi. After all, if you are skeptical about all texts and any possible "truth" behind them, what do you gain by correlating Hebrew letters and Tarot cards?

As groups like the Golden Dawn failed to train a cadre of serious students, self-promoters like Aleister Crowley gobbled up attention, channeling one largely opaque volume after another. Under-informed writers like Manly Hall and Montague Summers flourished.

MARGARET MURRAY & THE MYTH OF PAGAN WITCHES

Worse, in 1921 respected British Egyptologist Margaret Murray (1863-1963) claimed to have uncovered substantial evidence that English witches were in fact underground pagans who celebrated a ritual wheel of the year and venerated the goddess Diana with joyous feasting and dancing (sound familiar?).

Later writers have suggested that Murray cherry-picked her evidence, sometimes citing old interrogation records of victims who were asked leading questions under coercion. By the 1970s her ideas were widely questioned by other students of the witch trials. Historian Keith Thomas called her theories "almost totally groundless."

Yet before its demise, her claim that witches were secret pagans inspired strangely varied offspring, including both Nazi ideologues and feminist neopagans.

Legacies: Following Murray, neopaganism has propagated via teachings, songs, and writings the idea that witch trial victims were repressed because they were secret pagans. Numbers of European witch hunt victims have been wildly inflated, claiming millions of deaths – as if 50,000 was not horrible enough.

NAZIS & WITCHCRAFT
c. 1925-1945

Ideas disturbingly similar to Murray's can be found among certain elements of the German Nazi movement.

Germany had a checkered relation to the occult, magic, and witchcraft. Beginning in the late 1700s, German folklorists (see page 64) built a romanticized image of the "deutschen Volke," whose essence is preserved in fairy tales, rural practices – and in the underground survival of a pre-Christian past.

Some high-ranking members of the Nazi Party, including Hess and Himmler, promoted what they saw as pagan folk customs, helping foster a revival of supposedly authentic Germanic traditions. "German witches" were openly celebrated. This was

part of a broader program of promoting "Aryan values."

The Nazis created a special "Hexen-Sonderkommando" unit (sometimes given as "H-Sonderkommando" or "Hexen-Sonderauftrag") – not a magical military squad, but a research team that gathered evidence concerning the witch trials. The goal was to prove that the hunts aimed to exterminate the last vestiges of Germanic paganism, persecuted for centuries by non-German (ie, Jewish-based) Christianity – thus giving a racialist tinge to theories propounded earlier by Margaret Murray and others.

On the flip side, the Nazis outlawed and actively persecuted many occultist groups, just as they did most non-Nazi formations, including Freemasons and many Christian sects. Some high-ranking Nazis such as Goebbels ridiculed belief in the occult. Nazi interest in magic seems mostly concerned with promoting racialist theories.

Footnote – after 1945, this Hexen-Sonderkommando research lay dormant for several decades until the 1970s, when a German scholar discovered and analyzed the files – ultimately debunking Nazi racial theories while helping inspire the vast archival research of recent decades.

Legacies: No one suggests that Western feminists learned their pagan history from Nazis. But the shared ideas warn about the malleability of magical and mythical legacies and how they can be twisted to serve all sorts of ends.

Nazi interest in paganism (and right-wing paganolatry today) are a reminder that cultural traditions have complex roots. Part of today's challenge is to see history clearly and begin to deconstruct these often-ignored aspects of the past.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

c. 1950

In the Sputnik Era that worshiped science and debunked "superstition," some magical trends continued beneath the surface. Writers such as Frazer and Jung inspired a new generation including Joseph Campbell and Hermann Hesse.

Israel Regardie, a former Golden Dawn initiate, published (1937-1940) the hitherto secret Golden Dawn rituals, giving outsiders (eg, pretty much anyone alive today) a look inside this pivotal community.

The Smith-Waite Tarot and other early twentieth century decks swam beneath the surface for decades before exploding in the 1970s.

Eastern practices and teachers continued to make inroads in the West via writings and personal appearances. New age psychological and spiritual trends blossomed, notably in California.

Aleister Crowley's increasingly eccentric take on magic (exploiting a reputation as "the wickedest man in the world") at least had the effect of breaking through the barrier of silence surrounding mystical practices.

VII: WICCA & PAGANISM TODAY

GERALD GARDNER, DOREEN VALIENTE & BRITISH TRADITIONAL WICCA

And now, after countless generations and more than a few by-ways, the grandparents of contemporary traditions step onto the stage.

Gerald Gardner (1884–1964) was an English author and organizer whose 1954 book Witchcraft Today is credited with bringing the Wiccan strand of paganism to public attention.

Retiring at age 50 after a foreign service career, Gardner settled near the New Forest in the south of England and joined a local Rosicrucian Fellowship. According to his own colorful account, he soon met and was initiated into a secret coven of witches which carried an unbroken lineage back to ancient times.

Citing the coven as an example of pre-Christian survivals that proved Margaret Murray's thesis about the unity of witchcraft and paganism (see above), Gardner proceeded to "revive" and propagate this tradition, mixing in ideas from Freemasonry, ceremonial magic, folklore, and Aleister Crowley (whom he met around 1947). Gardner's claims regarding the details of this historical lineage have been questioned by later scholars.

When British laws against espousing witchcraft (ie, laws against fraud and deceit) were loosened in the early 1950s, Gardner went public with the hugely influential book, Witchcraft Today. He founded a coven, entry into which was (and still is in this tradition) attained through initiation by a high priest or priestess who can claim descent from Gardner and the New Forest.

Gardner's brand of Wicca honors both God and Goddess (often the Mother Goddess and the Horned God, identified by Doreen Valiente as Cernunnos).

Gardner recruited a string of high priestesses including Valiente, emphasizing the

need for binary male and female energies.

Although built on a ceremonial base, the tradition emphasizes that each person must find their own truth and meaning in the rituals, an idea going back at least to the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The tradition teaches an ethical guideline, referred to as "The Wiccan Rede." In archaic language, it states, "An it harm none, do as thou wilt."

The Gardnerian tradition is also credited with the Law of Return (aka the Rule of Three), which states that whatever energy a person puts into the world – especially if it is magically charged – is likely to return on the sender threefold.

Gardner popularized the term "Wicca," Old English for "male witch," to describe his type of coven. He also used the term "Book of Shadows" to describe his personal magical journal.

Politically, Gardner worked within the imperial bureaucracy and supported the British Conservative Party.

Gradually Gardner's students began to form independent covens along the same lines, and a loose-knit "Gardnerian" tradition of Wicca spread throughout Britain and subsequently into Australia and the Americas in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Doreen Valiente (1922-1999) was a Wiccan writer and priestess who was responsible for many of the early rituals and liturgies of the Gardnerian Tradition. Initiated

What lies veiled behind the curtain? Still from a youtube video about Gardnerian rituals.

into Gardner's coven in 1953, she helped edit Witchcraft Today (Hutton credits her with removing much of the influence of Aleister Crowley).

Valiente brought to Wicca a strong Goddess orientation, and is credited with writing the most familiar version of The Charge of the Goddess, a poetic incantation that has served as one of neopaganism's guiding documents.

During the 1970s, Valiente joined a far-right political group, the National Front, and may have seen her pagan practices as connected. Given her other support for progressive causes, her motives are unclear, with some claiming she was an undercover spy for the British government.

British Traditional Wicca is a term used mainly outside Britain for various traditions that trace their lineage to the New Forest area. The most prominent of these traditions are Gardnerian Wicca and Alexandrian Wicca, but other traditions also claim a shared history.

Legacies: Wiccan and neopagan groups owe an immeasurable debt to Gardner and Valiente. From the broad merging of the practices of witchcraft and paganism, to details such as the Rede and the Charge of the Goddess, today's magical cultures are infused with their influences.

Most important is the emphasis on each person finding their own truth, which sits well with recent new age and anarchist tendencies.

Even where later generations have markedly differed, such as evolution away from gender binaries, such changes are often discussed in light of Gardnerian practices.

MARIJA GIMBUTAS

Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (Lithuania 1921 to US 1994) began her career in mid-century, gradually unearthing and studying hundreds of artifacts which she interpreted as evidence of Stone Age, Goddess-centric cultures that predated the warrior cultures of early written history.

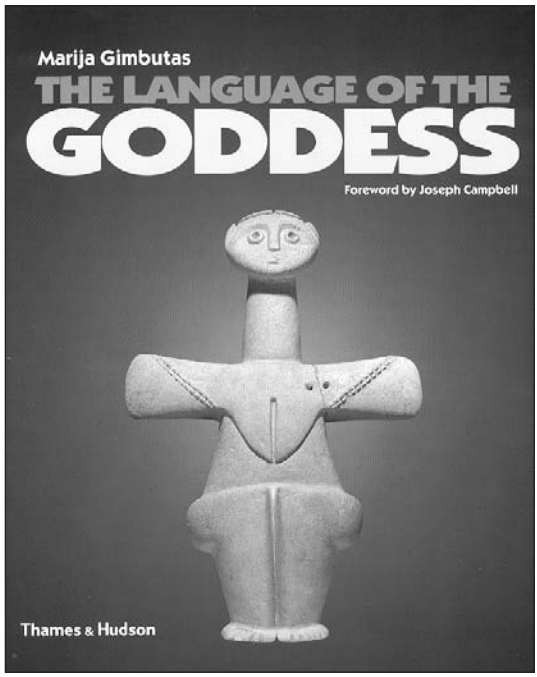
The Civilization of the Goddess (1991) presented an overview of her conclusions about Neolithic (Late Stone Age, c. 5000 BCE) cultures across Europe, studying settlement patterns, social structure, art, and religion.

Gimbutas explicated what she saw as the differences between the Old European system, which she considered Goddess- and woman-centered, and Bronze Age Indo-European patriarchal cultures which supplanted it.

Throughout the area of Southeastern Europe that she studied, Gimbutas found carved images of females that she interpreted as goddesses of birth, death, and regeneration. She inferred that women were particularly honored by Neolithic European people and that the primary deities were female.

Although this was long before any known writing, Gimbutas concluded from the images that Stone Age European matristic societies lived peacefully, venerated women, and espoused social and economic equality.

Extrapolating from her art-historical research, Gimbutas theorized that the art of Old Europe reflected a mythopoetic awareness of the sacredness and mystery of the natural world, and that behind the varied artistic manifestations of ancient goddesses lies an essential unity – these prehistoric cultures honored the Earth as feminine and divine.



Marija Gimbutas opened many eyes to the artistic and spiritual treasures of prehistory. Plus, her books have lots of pictures!

Other archaeologists have challenged Gimbutas's broad theories.

One called her "immensely knowledgeable but not very good in critical analysis." Others questioned her interpretation of figurines as "goddesses" and her projection of religious beliefs onto pre-literate cultures.

Legacies: Gimbutas has exercised a huge if under-acknowledged impact on feminist paganism, providing a plausible narrative of a time before patriarchy.

Her interpretation of even quite abstract Stone Age figures as female is convincing, providing a basis for more daring leaps of imagination.

While her ideas about a prehistoric Goddess cult remain controversial, authors such as Riane Eisler have built on her work, and their views of a peaceful, goddess-oriented culture inspire progressive visions today.

Some people feel that they are "reclaiming" this ancient Goddess heritage.

If further research shows that it never actually existed, still the vision that such a society is possible remains inspiring.

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATED PRACTICES

Before wrapping up with a look at recent Western influences, let's take a look at a tangled topic – traditions from which modern pagan movements have deliberately or unknowingly appropriated beliefs and practices.

At the end of the book (page 107) I'll look at the West's general propensity to appropriate (labor, land, culture). Here I'll focus on two examples of spiritual appropriation:

- Afro-Caribbean Traditions
- Native American Traditions

AFRO-CARIBBEAN (The Orisha)

In areas of North America where numbers of people have immigrated from the Caribbean and South America (eg, New York, LA, Bay Area, Florida), there are local communities practicing Santeria, Condomblé, and other traditions that work with the Orisha, a group of West African deities (also known as Yoruban deities).

In these areas, other people are sometimes able to participate (by invitation or sincere request) in ceremonies involving the Orisha.

These practices are incredibly complex compared to many neopagan rituals, with specific ceremonies, songs, and ways of approaching each of the Orisha.

Since the ceremonies often involve honoring and communing with ancestors, they appeal to people grounded in Samhain/Halloween-based magic.

Some people trained in working with the Orisha have helped lead and teach at Reclaiming camps and rituals. The results have been alternately beautiful and jarring, leading some to wonder whether we are ready to weave Afro-Caribbean and Euro-based traditions in open settings.

In particular, two issues have arisen:

- well-meaning people with limited training invoke one of the Orisha in an otherwise non-Yoruban ritual. This does not respect traditional practices.
- even if the invokers are well-trained, most people at the ritual do not know the songs and dances, or how to gracefully flow with the energy. Is this really a way of honoring deity?

The place to learn about and work with the Orisha is in dedicated ceremonies with initiated teachers.

Migene González-Wippler has written a short introduction to the Orisha and the complexities of their traditions – see Bibliography.

NATIVE AMERICAN PRACTICES

Modern pagans in North America have also borrowed various ways of doing ritual from our perception of Native American practices.

Actually, there is no such thing as generic "Native American practices." Rather, there are hundreds of tribes and bands, each with their own ways and beliefs.

Most events, rituals, and gatherings in Euro-settled North America and Australia happen on land appropriated from First Peoples. Although decimated by colonialism, descendants of these Peoples and tribes are still alive. Some still practice traditional ceremonies.

Every locality and bioregion had, and many continue to have, their own tribes and networks. Names can be learned and respectfully spoken, and acknowledgment can be made that the land was not ceded by the First People. Support can be given to present-day organizing by members of local tribes and bands.

An example of well-meaning appropriation – At Nevada Test Site around 1990, members of the Western Shoshone nation (whose land north of Las Vegas was appropriated for the nuclear test area) took part in a series of anti-nuclear protests. Tribal elders offered ceremonies and led processions to the gates of the site, where activists did civil disobedience (with over 4000 arrests around 1987-89).

During these gatherings, hundreds of mainly white protesters got to be part of Shoshone ceremonies. These (sometimes quite long) ceremonies were not especially participatory – we were guests, not students.

From this and similar engagements, non-Indigenous folks learned practices such as sage smudging, using animal bones as magical tools, or consumption of ceremonial substances. Smudging by wafting sage smoke with a feather (sometimes called "aura-cleansing" by pagans) seemed ubiquitous in paganish gatherings of the 1990s.

Some might say, "Similar practices were probably found among our more distant ancestors, too. Native practices are awakening us to our own past." If that resonates for you in your personal practice, fine.

Reclaiming's public rituals have mostly moved away from this. There are so many potential practices – why choose ones that seem tinged with appropriation?

What about the Elements, honored in many Native American traditions? Euro-heritage and other Western folks can point to somewhat continuous traditions from ancient Greece and Rome through Medieval Islam and Christianity and on to the modern pagan revival.

Still, if you live in North America, consider – when you first heard that each direction was connected to a natural element, what was your cultural association? I think mine was Native practices.

Pagans are probably not going to quit invoking the Elements any time soon. But we can be aware and not "cherry-pick" other aspects of Indigenous practices to ornament pagan rituals. As with the Orisha, the place to practice these ways is at Native

ceremonies. Open gatherings (sometimes called Pow Wows) are held in many parts of the country.

A note on terminology: Times and language change. The simple word "Indian" was mostly outdated by 1970, replaced by "American Indian" and "Native American." In more recent times, the terms "Indigenous" and "First People" have been used.

For more on cultural appropriation, see the Postscript to this book (page 107) as well as the Introduction to Dancing the Spiral (see page 120).

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES

In tracing the roots of modern paganism, magical history is only half of the story.

Some of our most beloved ancestors are political and cultural activists – folks who inspired our vision that ordinary people can join together and change the world!

Weaving all these influences into the present chapter proved impossible in the two-dimensional space of print media.

See the Activist Ancestors chapter for a survey of cultural and political threads such as feminism, the Civil Rights movement, and peace/anti-nuke organizing that helped midwife today's traditions. There's even a section on the hippies!

1960s & 70s

Here's a look at trends and names that carried magic and paganism to the present.

Other Traditions – Alexandrian tradition, NROOGD (The New Reformed Order of the Golden Dawn), Modern Druids, Victor and Cora Anderson's Feri Tradition, and others developed language and practices through the 1960s and 70s. Networks such as Covenant of the Goddess created links and common cultures among traditions.

Metaphysical Shops & Festivals – Metaphysical shops as well as convergences such as the Michigan Women's Music Festival, Merry Meet, Rites of Spring, and PantheaCon provided a hub for people to meet and network. Some continue, while some foundered on later cultural developments around gender and race.

Alternative Spirituality – The 1970s saw a wave of non-traditional spiritual movements, some adapting Eastern practices such as meditation, some advocating for sexual and emotional liberation, and some just thinly-disguised ego-tripping. Today's paganism inherits from this milieu both practices and self-critiques.

Luisah Teish – Born in New Orleans, Teish has been involved in multi-cultural rituals, and infused myth, story, and movement into various traditions.

Z Budapest – Z Budapest's feminist-inspired rituals created a context for activist eco-feminism. Her Dianic tradition excluded trans women (at least as of 2019), lead-

Contemporary Druids gather at Stonehenge. Photo by Sandy Raidy/WikiCommons.

ing to controversies at pagan events. Her song "We All Come from the Goddess" is an international classic (first recorded and recently re-recorded by Reclaiming).

Postmodernism – Modern paganism inherits from the broader culture a range of "postmodern" critiques including feminism, queer studies, decolonization, and a general post-binary, de-centering outlook on mainstream culture.

The Unknown – Finally I acknowledge the countless unknown, unnamed, and closeted witches and magical folk who have passed along legends, lore, and praxis.

UP TO THE MINUTE

It would take a more widely-traveled author to trace the many paths that paganism has followed since the 1970s. From my perspective, these publications will be useful to the story:

• Margot Adler's Drawing Down the Moon (1979, revised 2006) was the first comprehensive survey of neopagan movements. A clear, balanced journalistic look at pre-millennial traditions.

• Ronald Hutton's The Triumph of the Moon (2001, revised 2021) traces Wicca and paganism from about 1800 to the present. Extensive coverage of 1950-1980 traditions

and their founders – a rich and complex picture of pre-millennial paganism.

• Starhawk's The Spiral Dance (1979, updated 1999) is the founding text for Reclaiming groups and many other circles. Dreaming the Dark (1982) places witchcraft and magic in an activist milieu. Visit Starhawk.org for resources and current work.

• Jone Salomonsen's Enchanted Feminism (2001), based on interviews and personal experience, is a PhD study of San Francisco Reclaiming around 1990.

• John Sulak and V. Vale's anthology Modern Pagans (Re/Search, 2001) features interviews with Northern California pagans active around the millennium.

• Luke Hauser's Direct Action (2003) is a novelized account of the activist milieu in which contemporary paganism evolved. The book ends at the Spiral Dance ritual.

• Reclaiming Newsletter (1980-1996) and Reclaiming Quarterly (1997-2011) offer hundreds of articles spanning the decades – WeaveAndSpin.org/back-issues.

WHAT'S NEXT?

For paganism? Goddess knows, and the present author is humble enough not to speculate. Not in print, anyway.

I organize and teach in the Reclaiming Tradition of magic and activism. Founded

Solstice in the Streets – a colorful procession through downtown San Francisco, stopping at plazas, intersections, and corporate headquarters for street theatre. The day ended with a festive spiral dance. Photo by Luke Hauser.

in San Francisco in 1980, Reclaiming is an eclectic and evolving network. Groups around the Americas, Europe, and Australia share Reclaiming's Principles of Unity and organize retreats ("Witchcamps"), classes, and local rituals. For more information visit Reclaiming.org/about/, Witchcamp.org, and WeaveAndSpin.org.

In this corner of the multiverse, Reclaiming continues to absorb new influences. While remaining a feminist-inspired, ecstatic/celebratory tradition where each person is their own spiritual authority, change is part of Reclaiming's essence.

Youth-oriented camps such as Teen Earth Magic, Witchlets, and Redwood Magic as well as all-ages Witchcamps like Vermont and Tejas Web aren't just "passing along" traditions – they are cauldrons in which the visions of new generations reshape what Reclaiming is and will be.

Gender relations have always been prominent around Reclaiming, and recent developments have included statements of support for trans folks in our communities. (See interviews about gender in Dancing the Spiral, page 120.)

In recent years, inspired by the Decolonizing Actions in Reclaiming Communities (DARC) work group, the all-Reclaiming BIRCH Council has addressed racial diversity, inclusivity, and power issues (see WeaveAndSpin.org/less-racist/).

Camps and communities have taken root in Europe and Australia, and new communities have formed in Brasil, Costa Rica, and Venezuela. Reclaiming communities connect via zoom meetings, classes, gatherings, and rituals.

Via streaming, chants by Reclaiming and Starhawk (now in multiple languages) are heard and sung around much of the planet (visit WeaveAndSpin.org/playlists/).

As Reclaiming evolves, each region, community, camp, and circle brings its own practices and cultural challenges to the mix and inspires others to learn and adapt.

The journey continues. Today's spells create tomorrow's communities.

So mote it become!

THANKS FOR THE FEEDBACK!

Although the present author is ultimately responsible for all errors, omissions, etc, the following gave valuable feedback on early drafts of Magical Ancestors sections – many thanks!

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- Ronald Decker
- Gary Jaron
- Janell Mort
- George Franklin
- M. Macha NightMare

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more resources and free downloads – WeaveAndSpin.org/freebies

THREE BASIC TEXTS

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Berger, Helen – Witchcraft and Magic: North America
González-Wippler, Migene – Santeria: African Magic in Latin America
Anderson, Cora – Fifty Years in the Feri Tradition

Reclaiming's History

See pages 81-82, and visit WeaveAndSpin.org/spiral-dance-features

Online Articles from Reclaiming Quarterly

Short essays – visit WeaveAndSpin.org/history/

- Witchcraft and Magic in Europe (review of Ankarloo & Clark essays – see page 111)
- When the Drummers Were Women
- Ritual Art of the Ancient Celts
- Mithras and the End of Time
- Life in the Year 1000
- Medieval Background of the Healing Arts
- The Diggers and the English Revolution
- Nicolas Culpepper's Revolutionary Predictions
- A New View of the Burning Times (European Witch Hunts)
- Newton: Alchemy, Science, and the Death of Nature
- May Day and International Workers Day

ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

PART VIII

ACTIVIST ANCESTORS

A major part of modern paganism's backstory is found not in ritual circles or magic classes but in the streets. Today's pagans are heir to a long tradition of nonviolent resistance. Here is one person's sense of some movements which have inspired today's magical activism.

This chapter mainly covers Europe and North America. Sections on Gandhi and cultural resistance broaden the perspective.

DIGGERS & LEVELLERS
ENGLAND 1640S

In older times the term "diggers" was used loosely as an insult toward squatters and political dissidents. A famous group calling itself the True Levellers but known to history as *The* Diggers assembled during the English Civil War of the 1640s to occupy untended land outside of London.

Inspired by pamphleteer Gerard Winstanley, the group occupied several sites during Spring 1649 before being violently dispersed, not by Puritan authorities (who visited the site but left the Diggers undisturbed), but by thugs hired by local property owners.

The similarity to Food Not Bombs, Homes Not Jails, and other grassroots groups of recent decades is striking – reclaiming underused resources and redistributing them, even at the risk of state repression. This is a model for direct action organizing – we organize resources for those in need. If authorities stand back, we provide a necessary service. If they interfere, it highlights the injustice of the system.

The Diggers' legacy also lives on in fights against privatization of community resources such as schools, medicine, and housing – we advocate for the common good instead of private profit.

Levellers – This is another pejorative term thrown at political progressives of the

1600s who demanded decent conditions for working people, an end to the enclosure of common land, religious tolerance, and increased political participation. Drawing their base from among independent producers and craftspeople, most so-called Levellers didn't favor collectivism or communism.


THE
Declaration and Standard
Of the *Levellers* of *England*
Delivered in a Speech to his Excellency the Lord Gen. *Fairfax*, on *Friday* last at White-Hall, by Mr. *Everard*, a late Member of the Army, and his Prophesie in reference thereunto; shewing what will befall the Nobility and Gentry of this Nation, by their submitting to Community; With their invitation and promise unto the people, and their proceedings in *Windsor* Park, *Oatlands* Park, and severall other places; also, the Examination and confession of the said Mr. *Everard* before his Excellency, the manner of his deportment with his Horse, and his severall speeches and expressions, when he was commanded to put it off. Together with a List of the severall Regiments of Horse and Foot that have cast Lots to go for *Ireland*.
Imprinted at *London*, for G. Lawrence, April 23. 1649.

The Declaration and Standard of the Levellers of England – a pamphlet from the revolutionary era of the 1640s. Image courtesy WikiMedia Commons.

When censorship collapsed during the 1640s Civil War era, Levellers (and Diggers and religious radicals) flooded Britain with home-produced pamphlets – an inspiration to self-publishers everywhere!

Loosely-affiliated organizers in the Parliamentary Army and radical Protestant congregations pioneered the mass petition, notably the manifesto The Agreement of the People. While not a party in the modern sense, these agitators had tremendous influence in the army and radical circles, and their ideas were a force in English politics until the Cromwellian reaction of the 1650s.

Their broad program of justice and participation remains an inspiration to grassroots activists ever since.

England during the Civil War era was a place of incredible political, religious, and social upheaval. Among other groups (often so-named by adversaries) were Seekers, Manifestarians, Quakers, Fifth Monarchists, Ranters, and Muggletonians.

Christopher Hill's book, The World Turned Upside Down, is a colorful and inspiring look at radical groups of the era. There is also a short article about the Diggers on the WeaveAndSpin website – see page 85.

QUAKERS, UNITARIANS, & CONGREGATIONALISTS
1700S TO PRESENT

A survey of radical Protestant sects – let alone Jewish, Buddhist, Humanist, and other groups – would take an encyclopedia. Let's take a quick look at a few movements that have directly influenced Reclaiming and modern paganism.

The Puritan legacy – Although today's mainstream Protestant denominations are often progressive voices, they have their roots in Calvinist Puritanism – a tangled legacy indeed. In addition to moral constriction, the belief that salvation is an individual pursuit can feed indifference or hostility to collective solutions.

Quakers – Born amid the turmoil of the English Civil War (see above), the Society of Friends survived the post-1650 reaction by avowing political quietism and pacifism. Some emigrated across the Atlantic, establishing the colony of Pennsylvania. The pejorative name "Quakers" stuck.

Quakers have long been active in social issues such as the abolition of slavery and opposition to war and militarism.

During the First World War (1914-18), Friends Service Committees were organized in England and the US to assist members in resisting military conscription. Since that time, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has been involved in many progressive issues.

Quakers? Seekers? Ranters? Spiral dancers in funny clothes? Mid-1600s satirical illustration. Courtesy WikiMedia Commons.

AFSC members took part in Civil Rights activism and passed along techniques and philosophy of nonviolent resistance to the anti-nuclear movement (see below). Nonviolent activist practices reached 1980s groups like Reclaiming via AFSC trainers (see Nonviolence sections in Dancing the Spiral, page 120).

Unitarians – Originating in Eastern Europe during the Reformation, Unitarian beliefs found fertile ground in the England of the 1600s. Organized congregations began to form in the 1700s.

Among the various groups adopting the name Unitarian, the common thread is a belief that God is One, as opposed to mainstream Christianity's trinity. The groups have tended to be politically and socially progressive, dating back to their radical spiritual roots.

Unitarians are organized as independent congregations, and form part of a broad Protestant movement known as congregationalism – see below.

In the religious ferment of the early 1800s, some Unitarian congregations merged as the Unitarian Universalist Association. UU fellowships are active across North America, and support many progressive and community causes.

Some UU groups have a Pagan Interest Circle known as the Covenant of UU Pagans, or CUUPS. How do Unitarians address polytheism? "One Goddess, many names!"

Congregationalists – A loose term for a type of religious organizing that includes Unitarians, Quakers, Baptists, and other independent groups. Each local congregation handles its own affairs, hires its own clergy, pays its own bills, etc. In particular, there are no bishops or other hierarchical church officials above the congregation.

When the dust settled after the American religious ferment of the early 1800s, some Protestant groups formed a sect known as Congregationalists, which later merged into the United Church of Christ. The UCC still uses a congregationalist structure and is among the more progressive of Protestant denominations.

Reclaiming communities and camps are "congregationalist" in the sense that beyond accepting the Principles of Unity each operates independently. Reclaiming has a network of trained teachers, but local groups are free to choose among those teachers, and also to add others of their own choosing. (The formal requirement is that Witchcamps or classes taught in Reclaiming's name have at least one Reclaiming-trained teacher. Contact a local Witchcamp or ReclaimingSecretary@gmail.com for info.)

Protestant Reformation influences – see Magical Ancestors section, page 51.

Jewish Influences

See also the chapter on Ancient Magical History for more Jewish influences on neopaganism (page 26).

Jewish traditions of biblical commentary – where there are no recognized authorities, but volumes of debate over interpretation – have contributed to an ever-evolving culture of radical strategizing and organizing.

Also pertinent is the American Jewish development of independent congregations. The Rabbinic tradition – a direct and indirect influence on many of us – emphasizes holding power accountable along with hope for a better tomorrow.

Change is possible!

Suffragists
1800s-1920

The suffragists are notable as an early feminist movement with many factions dedicated to nonviolent direct action. Arising in the mid-1800s, the campaign for women's right to vote took until after WWI to succeed in most countries, and even then was often limited by social and racial factors.

The movement also advocated for wider women's social rights and participation.

Various factions favored lobbying, nonviolent activism, and property destruction. As

usual, actions that damaged property garnered the most media attention, and were often denounced as "violence."

Nonviolent actions involved women chaining themselves to railings in public buildings, refusing to pay taxes or fines, and going on hunger strikes, as well as mass marches and demonstrations.

As the movement evolved, fissures developed along class and race lines – would the women's movement challenge white privilege and elite dominance of politics, or did it simply seek to open more opportunities to already-advantaged people?

Throughout a century of organizing, the suffragist movement was a rare example of women's political leadership, and prepared women for participation in government as well as social leadership positions.

ANARCHISM
LATE 1800S

The original people to use the term "anarchist" are not exactly today's most prized ancestors. Give them props for coming up with a great name, and for the idea that we don't need leaders to tell us what to do.

Unfortunately, in its early days anarchism seemed often to attract unstable people who threw bombs or attempted to assassinate political leaders. In more than one case a vibrant mass movement was derailed by the violent actions of a few.

Around 1900 anarchist violence was critiqued by Lenin and others as a failure of revolutionary faith – resorting to private acts of violence betrays lack of confidence in a mass movement and the inevitability of socialist victory.

The main takeaway from the early history of anarchism is the vision of a leaderless, participatory democratic movement in which each person fully develops their own gifts and powers, coupled with a commitment to direct action.

This loosely anarchist approach is sometimes called "feminist process" – see page 100.

LABOR ORGANIZING
C. 1900

Labor movements have long been a backbone of popular resistance. Peasant uprisings, enclosure protests, Luddite and other incipient anti-capitalist movements, and finally socialist-inspired labor unions have helped focus working people's passions.

Activists are heirs to working people's pride, insisting that work is good and fulfilling, not something to be shunned and scorned – hence the amount of volunteer work some people do!

A gift of older labor movements is the idea of solidarity – of sticking together

through thick and thin (mainly thin). When a union strikes, everyone goes out. Those who refuse are pressured to comply. Facing massive corporations and their government agents, workers and their communities gained strength in unity.

International Workers of the World, or Wobblies – anarchist-influenced labor radicals whose heyday was around 1900. The Wobbly vision of one great union of all workers endures!

Other political movements have adopted the idea of solidarity, with varying success.

Essentially, solidarity works best when it is imposed by the situation – everyone works at the same factory, or everyone has the same minority skin color. As someone said: "When you're stuck together, you stick together."

Direct action movements have adopted solidarity as a resistance tactic, particularly when in jail. Protesters demand equal treatment, decent conditions, and that no one be singled out as a leader (note the connection with anarchism).

This "jail solidarity" works to a degree – basically, it works as long as people are "stuck together." Once some are offered release, solidarity becomes voluntary, and is much more difficult to maintain.

Ultimately, the legacy of working class organizing is a strong sense of the dignity of human labor, and a faith that our lives will go better if we stick together!

MARX, LENIN, & SOCIALISM
C. 1850-1930

How can this chapter not mention Marx, Lenin, & Company?

Yet speak their names and the witch hunters spring into action. The McCarthyite hysteria of the 1950s was aimed at all socialists – but particularly Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism. Even today the names are met with ignorance and fear.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a sharp thinker (as well as a cranky co-organizer). His attempts to establish working people's organizations ended in hair-splitting schism and bitter denunciations of "deviations."

Yet he bequeathed an optimistic sense that those striving to create a world of peace

and justice are moving with the inexorable tide of history. Marx's Hegel-inspired, developmental view of history suggests that within the capitalist socio-economic system are sown the seeds (ie, the new organizing structures) of its transcendence by socialism. Victory is inevitable if we persevere!

Marx's writing continues to inspire critical thinkers. Volume One of Das Kapital remains a solid introduction to economic analysis, and his political essays are short, pithy critiques of contemporary events. His theory of historical materialism is foundational in fields from radical economics to history to cultural studies.

Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) was a principle organizer of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. He had some good ideas, such as the need for a broad network of communications and a disciplined party capable of making decisions and carrying them out (amazing idea, huh?). His excellent essay State & Revolution articulates the need for new forms of social power, as opposed to simply capturing old offices and structures – hence the need for revolution, not reform.

He also helped pave the way for Stalin's dictatorship by insisting on the unquestioned power of Bolshevik party leadership. In Lenin's eyes, only the leadership of a disciplined communist party could correctly assess the revolutionary situation and offer clear direction to the working masses. Under Stalin, this became virtually one-person rule.

Lenin's legacy is largely negative – North American anarchism of the post-60s era grew in response to the Leninist-inspired, male-hierarchical radicalism of earlier times.


The Socialist

The Workingman's Paper — To Organize the Slaves of Capital to Vote Their Own Emancipation

WHOLE WORKING CLASS OF THE NATION IN JAIL

By Eugene V. Debs

MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE SWEET GRAFT FOR ONLY WE OF THEE I SING. LONG MAY OUR LAND BE BRIGHT WITH STANDARD OILY LIGHT PROTECT US BY THY MIGHT SWEET GRAFT OUR KING.

CAPITALISM

Our National Anthem—As Sung in the "ROCKY" Mountains

The Seattle Socialist, July 1906 – one of thousands of radical 'zines of the Progressive Era. Image courtesy UW Labor Press Project.

Sadly, Marx's economic critiques and Lenin's sense of disciplined commitment seem to have been lost along the way.

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) – German socialist organizer whose approach was more grassroots than Lenin's. While still an ardent socialist, she believed that revolutionary uprisings had to originate with popular agitation, and the role of the party

was to shape and channel this energy. Lenin accused her of expecting "spontaneous" revolution, compared to his own vision that the communist party would interpret and announce the time and place. Luxemburg's legacy continues to inspire fresh visions of Marxism.

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) was a late-comer to Lenin's hardline Bolshevism. Trotsky tended toward the theories of popular initiative favored by Rosa Luxemburg. This set him at odds with Stalin, who eventually had Trotsky assassinated. Trotsky spelled out a theory of "dual power," whereby revolutionary movements build autonomous institutions and bases of power that gradually supplant the old bourgeois institutions, until in a revolutionary moment the old powers are simply swept aside. Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution is inspiring and provocative.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) – Italian communist imprisoned by Fascist dictator Mussolini. In his influential Prison Notebooks, Gramsci developed the idea of "hegemony," of building alternative political, cultural, social, and economic power prior to and parallel with direct confrontations with authority. Post-1960s ideas of cultural activism owe something to Gramsci, as do analyses which move beyond crude economic determinism to acknowledge the key roles of ideology and social power. Gramsci's multi-polar approach to power helped open leftist strategizing to movements such as feminism (social power and the role of reproduction), environmentalism (awareness of the total costs and impacts of production), etc.

WALDORF & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Waldorf education, based on the teachings of Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925), aims to develop people's artistic, intellectual, and practical skills in a holistic manner. Learning by experience and cultivation of creativity are key aspects of Waldorf education. Standardized testing is usually limited to that required by the state.

Steiner believed that all people have a spiritual core and simply need support in finding it. In some Waldorf settings, students may participate in a variety of spiritual practices with none being prioritized.

Steiner has been criticized for propagating white supremacist attitudes that were common in his day (and perhaps have never abated?), and the Waldorf movement struggles with this legacy.

Waldorf and other educational alternatives influence our sense that each person brings unique gifts, that no one is "the expert," and that all of us can learn from one another.

Witchcamps also eschew standardized magical testing except as required by the state.

GANDHI & NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE
EARLY 1900S

Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) was a major organizer for Indian independence and a pioneer in the use of mass nonviolent direct action.

Basing his strategy in religious and philosophical commitments, Gandhi emphasized the notion of Satya, often translated as "Truth." Each person/spirit carries part of the Truth, but no one carries all of it.

Debates and arguments among people actually reflect internal disputes within each human being. To aim violence at another person is thus to attack part of oneself. Only by nonviolent dialog can we achieve a holistic sense of Truth.

For Gandhi, the quest for Satya was active, and he did not hesitate to confront authority. Civil disobedience actions were known as Satyagraha, or "truth-obstinacy."

As part of the independence movement of the early 1900s, Gandhi helped organize civil disobedience campaigns, including a 240-mile March to the Sea (1930) in protest of the British monopoly on salt. (The tax on government-supplied salt was a major source of revenue for the British, colonial overlords of India.)

Beginning with about 80 people, the march grew to tens of thousands. Thousands were arrested and/or attacked by police. Gandhi was jailed until early 1931.

Indian independence was achieved in 1947. The following year, Gandhi was assassinated.

Gandhi's ideas influenced later activists such as Martin Luther King Jr in the US and Steve Biko in South Africa. Both were also assassinated for their efforts, yet like Gandhi their campaigns ultimately had success.

Gandhi's notion of Satyagraha impacted US activist movements, but his influence has mainly been felt indirectly, particularly through the Civil Rights movement.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT
1950S & 1960S

No political current in the US shaped the modern direct action movement more than the Civil Rights struggle. Sparked by the social mobility and dislocations of the Great Depression and the WWII era, protests against racial bias began to spread across the South in the early 1950s.

Rosa Parks' dramatic refusal to give up a whites-only bus seat in 1955 launched a boycott that eventually integrated the Montgomery AL buses. The bus actions were part of a decade of sit-ins, marches, and civil disobedience aimed at ending Jim Crow segregation laws and practices.

Churches – independent congregations headed by local ministers and staff – formed the organizing backbone and anchored the longterm resilience of this movement.

Thousands of people took part in actions organized and led by Black people. Skillful use of media and especially the new medium of television carried dramatic images of nonviolent direct action to a huge audience.

The success of specific campaigns varied, often depending on the vagaries of court decisions. Many direct actions were not successful in their immediate goals.

But over the course of a decade persistent organizing and educational campaigns cumulatively led to the national 1964 Civil Rights Act – the most sweeping overhaul of race-related law since the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. Groups and networks forged during this struggle have carried on the organizing in subsequent decades.

The Civil Rights movement, with a strong emphasis on active nonviolence, pioneered tactics still used today – a group of people peaceably occupy or block access to a business or office and risk arrest or police violence when they refuse to obey commands to move.

Activism trainings, Summer Mobilizations, peace camps, conferences, and other gatherings passed skills and tactics from the 1950s through to the present day. Movements such as the anti-nuclear protests of the 1980s, the anti-globalization convergences of the early 2000s, and the recent wave of Black Lives Matter activism adapted these lessons and carried them into new issues and projects.

ANTI-WAR & NEW LEFT
1960S

The movement to end the Vietnam War revitalized broader activism among post-WWII generations, bringing skills and strategies from the Civil Rights and Labor Movements to a broader swath of society.

Protests on college campuses in the 1960s quickly escalated parallel to US involvement in the Vietnam War. Direct action tactics such as sit-ins and civil disobedience were adapted from the Civil Rights Movement, along with a strident tone reminiscent of 1930s labor strife.

Mass rallies, marches, and demonstrations brought countless (mostly young) people into the streets. 1967 saw the formation of the National Mobilization Committee which organized several large-scale protests.

As the war continued, protests escalated. Nonviolent actions, often initiated by Quakers and the Catholic left, resulted in destruction of thousands of irreplaceable draft records.

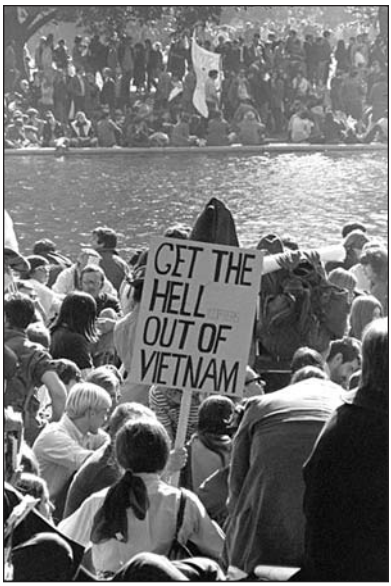
Teach-ins and underground newspapers wove anti-war activism with broader issues including imperialism, racism, and classism.

While popular music and 60s culture were also influences, the anti-war movement was distinct from the hippies, with their focus on personal freedom, psychic explorations, and "going with the flow" (see below). Later legend has conflated the two tendencies.

New Left – Economic and class critiques typified the 1960s New Left, a Marxist-infused tendency that broke with old-school communism and began to integrate social and cultural issues into Marxism. Antonio Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg were influences (see above). The New Left (and much of the anti-war movement) were in turn critiqued for their hierarchical, male dominated structures.

Debate has long raged over the role these movements played in (A) ending the war and (B) changing society for the better. The war did end (unlike some wars), and without a doubt the protests changed participants' lives.

The upsurge of direct activism, coupled with feminist and gay critiques of 1960s movements, informed the late 1970s milieu that gave birth to today's neopaganism.



National Mobilization Committee anti-war protest, Washington DC, 1967, Photo by Franke Wolfe, Wikimedia Commons.

FEMINISM
1950S TO 1970S

Feminism developed gradually out of the women's suffrage and temperance (anti-alcohol) movements. Some writers have identified "waves" of feminism, with the first wave overlapping the suffrage movement. This period focused on legal issues such as property and business ownership, and especially the right to vote.

The transition to "second wave" feminism was sparked by Simone de Beauvoir, whose book The Second Sex examined women's role as "other" in a male-dominated society. Her existential analysis inspired later thought about the experiences of People of Color, LGBTQ people, and other oppressed and marginalized groups.

Second wave feminism, sometimes called "women's liberation," describes the period from roughly 1960 to 1980, when movements gained strength first in the US and eventually throughout much of the world. The general aim was social and personal equality, not just political rights. This included a focus on reproductive rights, domestic violence and rape, and building women's economic alternatives.

This second wave especially influenced Reclaiming and other feminist pagan formations, which have been critical not only of the subordination of women in traditional Christianity, Judaism, and other religions, but also of men's domination of many alternative, activist, and pagan groups.

During this period, "Dianic" covens, circles, and groups formed and reformed, creating women-only spaces for spiritual exploration as well as social and political activ-

ism. Some of these groups continue to this day.

The feminist movement introduced the "conciousness-raising group" – an intimate circle who met to provide mutual support. Stories were shared, patterns emerged, and women could see that they were not alone in their struggles. This thread fed into the affinity group style of political organizing in the later 1970s.

Through the social and political activism of the 70s and 80s, "feminist process" became a catch-all term for non-hierarchical, nonviolent, consensus-based organizing. Many anarchist and direct action groups were loosely feminist in this sense.

Reclaiming formed in 1980 as an explicitly feminist group, although it included all genders from the start.

In practice, much of the tradition's leadership has been women and queer/trans folks, but people of all genders and orientations can be found among teachers and organizers. Within Reclaiming, feminism retains its wide-ranging "activist" meaning.

GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT
1950s TO 1980s

Gay rights organizing was largely underground and focused on social networks until the 1969 Stonewall riot in New York City sparked public activism. Pride parades sprouted in numerous cities around the globe, with San Francisco's event soon drawing a half-million people.

Over the next generation, particularly in response to the AIDS crisis, gay people were at the forefront of radical organizing in groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation.

With its original home base in San Francisco, Reclaiming (both as an activist formation and as a ritual group) has always included strong leadership by LGBTQ folks.

Millions march for gay rights and justice in São Paolo – a Guinness world record! 2014 photo courtesy Ben Tavener, WikiMedia Commons.

In recent years, young people in Reclaiming have been at the vanguard of shifting gender patterns and expressions – see the Teen Earth Magic Workbook, page 126.

The organizing methods of the

gay rights movement – small, intimate circles woven into a broader tapestry of movie houses, coffee shops, dance and bath clubs, and other social forums – illustrate the strengths of a decentralized network. If one group or tendency is disrupted, people migrate to other groups. There is no central leadership that can be repressed or coopted.

This provided a model for a decentralized network of circles and affinity groups that has typified many movements since the late 1970s – see the book Direct Action, page 123.

THE HIPPIES
LATE 1960S

And now a word about our oft-scorned but secretly-loved ancestors, the hippies! You don't have to convert to Fundamentalist Deadheadism to appreciate a movement that prioritized community and creativity over consumption – and taught millions of middle-class people the joys of used clothing.

While not remotely an organized movement, hippies are associated with the peace and environmental movements of the 1960s, as well as the spiritual awakenings of the era – they were "pagan" in the loose sense of the word. Probably it is no accident that Reclaiming, uniting spirituality and Earth-activism, first blossomed in the homeland of the hippies, San Francisco.

Woodstock (1969) was the archetypal "back to the land" event that inspired Rainbow Gatherings, peace camps, Witchcamps, Burning Man, and countless other convergences.

Hippie-jam music helped lay the foundations for acoustic pagan sounds – Reclaiming's Campfire Chants is a back-to-the-land acoustic album.

ANTI-NUCLEAR & ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS
1950S TO 1980S

Let's take a quick look at the cauldron in which the earliest Reclaiming affinity groups formed. These ever-shifting activist groups paralleled the magical circles, women's groups, artists' collectives, and social circles of the day.

As the 1960s anti-war movement faded, organizing shifted to environmental issues (the first Earth Day was held in 1970) and anti-nuclear activism. People had protested nukes since the 1950s, with a limited test ban treaty signed in 1963. Vietnam War protests took center stage in the later 1960s, but by the mid 70s anti-nuclear and environmental concerns were moving to the fore.

Disasters at Three Mile Island (1979) and Chernobyl (1986) drew increased public scrutiny of supposedly beneficent nuclear power, while the election of uber-mili-

tarist Ronald Reagan (1980) sent a wave of despair and desperation through those who cared about the future of the planet.

Around the world, people rose to demand accountability and disarmament, often through nonviolent civil disobedience actions. Inspired by the US Civil Rights Movement, people organized sit-ins, blockades, and occupations to disrupt the war machine and call public attention to the urgent need for change.

Northern California was a hotbed of activism throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s. During these years, paganish types took part in mass direct actions at Diablo Nuclear Power Plant, Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab, Vandenberg Air Force Base, Nevada Test Site, Headwaters Forest, San Francisco corporate headquarters, and other sites.

Anti-nuclear activism reached a peak in the 1980s. Photo by Keith Holmes/Direct Action.

These actions helped consolidate Reclaiming as a magical activist tradition, and the Pagan Cluster continues to this day.

CULTURAL RESISTANCE
1960S TO PRESENT

How to cover the grassroots culture of the entire planet? I'll settle for taking a look at strands which reached the West by the 1980s, influencing the evolution of radical culture.

Cuba and later Nicaragua modeled alternative economic and social systems where "popular culture" was of necessity homespun. Thanks to progressive community radio stations such as the Pacifica network, Afro-Cuban dance music and Central American Nueva Canción filtered through as less-commercial musical alternatives.

In the 1970s Reggae began to capture listeners around the world – probably the first musical genre from outside Europe and the US to achieve global influence.

In the mid 1980s the movement to end Apartheid in South Africa gained traction in the West, and led to an infusion of South African music – the vanguard of what would become an underground deluge of African pop by the 1990s. This introduced a more communal, less star-driven sense of pop music.

Hip hop music, dance, and graffitti art grew up in New York's Black neighborhoods in the late 1970s, spurred by low-income youth seeking artistic outlets that didn't require corporate sponsorship. Hip hop reached the streets of the Bay Area by the mid

The Mahotella Queens, one of the first South African groups to gain a Western following, brought a sense of collectivity to global pop music. Photo courtesy Vonvon, WikiMedia Commons

1980s, where it paralleled the vibrant hardcore punk scene – another do-it-yourself subculture.

Throughout the US Southwest, the influence of Mexico's Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead, honored each year on November 2) has inspired local processions and ceremonies. The annual procession in San Francisco's Mission District, co-sponsored for many years by Reclaiming, is probably the year's largest non-corporate event in the City (coverage in Dancing the Spiral – free download – see page 120).

Last but not least, how about our self-publishing predecessors – from Digger manifestos to labor pamphlets to anti-war tracts to environmental flyers, to DIY magazines such as GroundWork, Maximum Rock & Roll, and Earth First! Journal – this book's direct ancestors!

TODAY & TOMORROW

And so we reach today – and tomorrow. For Reclaiming, it means recording and releasing our own music (dozens of inspiring chants and songs – see Resources at end of book) and producing our own books, such as the one you're reading (more at WeaveAndSpin.org/freebies).

It means organizing retreats, intensives, Witchcamps, and family camps, each with its special focus created by participants.

It means younger generations questioning and challenging their elders (oh, Goddess...) – see our Teen Earth Magic Workbook, page 126.

And it means an open awareness about new cultural trends and influences that will

continue our evolution. As we sing on our latest recording (see page 121):

Ella cambia todo lo que toca, y
Todo lo que toca, cambia!

She changes everything She touches, and
Everything She touches, changes!

THANKS FOR FEEDBACK

The following folks gave key feedback on this activist history chapter – thanks!

- Steve Nadel
- M. Macha NightMare
- Laura Perlman
- Irene Vibra Kiebert
- Marg Hall
- Mary Mimi Gamson
- Dress
- George Franklin
- Patrick Diehl

A youth contingent assembles for an MLK Day march in Oakland, CA. Photo by Luke Hauser.

ACTIVIST ANCESTORS
A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Pagan Activism Origins

Starhawk – Dreaming the Dark

Luke Hauser – Direct Action: An Historical Novel

Activist Fiction

Starhawk – Walking to Mercury

Starhawk – The Fifth Sacred Thing

Starhawk – City of Refuge

Kate Raphael – Murder Under the Fig Tree

Kate Raphael – Murder Under the Bridge

T. Thorn Coyle – The Witches of Portland

Activist Nonfiction

Starhawk – Truth or Dare

Starhawk – The Earth Path

Starhawk – The Empowerment Manual

Lisa Fithian – Shut It Down: Stories from a Fierce, Loving Resistance

Luke Hauser – Teen Earth Magic Workbook & Dancing the Spiral

Activist Websites

Starhawk.org (all Starhawk, all the time!)

EarthActivistTraining.org (Starhawk & friends' trainings)

DirectAction.org (books, resources, downloads from Luke Hauser & friends)

ExtinctionRebellion.us (environmental activism)

Wslfweb.org (anti-nuclear and peace activism)

Activist Chants

WeaveAndSpin.org/playlists

AFTERWORD

APPROPRIATING INFLUENCES

As today's pagan traditions grow more complex and weave people from diverse backgrounds, issues of lineages and appropriation arise. Discussions in recent years led to inclusion here of sections on culturally-appropriated traditions such as Native American and Orisha-based practices (see page 78-79).

Among the feedback I received on early versions of this book was a thoughtful meta-note from Rashunda, who said that although she appreciated these sections, I said nothing about the *general* propensity to appropriate.

For better and worse, cultures borrow from one another. That part isn't new.

What is unique in the era of Euro-American dominance is the tendency to "capitalize" culture, including non-European traditions. Music, art, and spiritual practices are not simply appreciated – they are commodified and exchanged (for cash, for prestige, for cultural advantage, etc) with little regard for their original creators or contexts.

A Renaissance Hermeticist commands the Sun and Moon – a valuable skill! Appropriated from D. Stolcius von Stolcenbeerg, Viridarium Chymicum, 1624. Courtesy WikiMedia Commons.

Further, they are exchanged with the goal

of gaining more resources in order to commodify more culture. It's a never-ending, always-expanding cycle of appropriation of other people's creations. In a word – capitalism.

I am heir to that tradition. I absorb influences with the aim of expanding my horizons so I can absorb more influences. I haven't always been careful about the origins of those influences, their previous contexts, or my impact on other cultures. I apologize for that.

Neopaganism, and Reclaiming in particular, has crafted an eclectic grab-bag of spiritual influences. Through the years, many beautiful dances have occurred. And along the way, many toes have been stepped on.

May this book contribute toward increased awareness and a bit less toe-stomping.

– Luke Hauser, Parahistorian

BONUS FEATURES

REVIEWS OF RECENT HISTORIES OF MAGIC

THESE REVIEWS ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN RECLAIMING QUARTERLY ISSUE 100, MID-2010

FREE DOWNLOAD AT

WEAVEANDSPIN.ORG/BACK-ISSUES

Witchcraft and Magic in Europe

Six-Volume Series Unravels Neopagan Mythology

by Luke Hauser, Reclaiming Quarterly Issue 100, mid 2010 (slightly edited 2023)

Ever wonder what really happened during the Burning Times, and why the European witch hunts occurred when and where they did?

Who were the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Theosophists, and how did they shape our practices today?

What did Aleister Crowley, Margaret Murray, and Gerald Gardner contribute, and where did they get their inspirations and training?

Where did the European concepts of "witch" and "magician" arise, and how have they evolved over the centuries?

More chilling, how were witches and magicians steadily demonized from Ancient times until in the Burning Times magical practitioners were routinely accused of (and tortured into confessing to) a Satanic conspiracy against Christendom?

Finally, how is it that after centuries of repression and/or ridicule, magic and witchcraft are flourishing today?

Demolishing Our Mythology

For those of us who stay awake at night wondering about such things, Athlone Press's six-volume history of magic and witchcraft (published in the US by the University of Pennsylvania Press) sets a new standard in pagan scholarship.

The essays collected in these volumes survey the scholarly terrain around the year 2000, and pretty well demolish dozens of favorite myths and legends that have accrued over the years.

Whether the authors are challenging past exaggerations of the number of witch executions (a maximum of about 50,000 deaths in all of Europe is suggested, with

the majority found in Post-Reformation Germany), or debunking the magical and scholarly claims of venerable elders such as Gerald Gardner or Margaret Murray, these essays are a sober and meticulous reassessment of our heritage.

Footnotes abound, but most of the essays are quite readable. The list on page 116 offers a plan for reading highlights of the series. Each essay stands alone, and they can be read in any order.

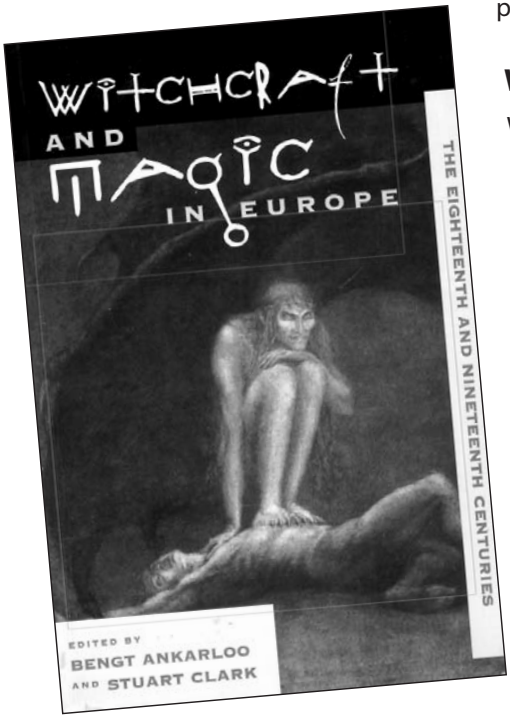
What – No Tarot?

Even in six volumes, gaps are evident. Renaissance magic gets short shrift, and astrology and Tarot are barely mentioned. Russia seems not to be considered a part of Europe.

Of more concern, the essays focus so narrowly on their given topics and geographical boundaries that it can be difficult to see witches and magic in their wider context.

For instance, Volume Four does a great job establishing a factual basis for the new estimate of witch executions during the "Burning Times" (current estimates, based on painstaking analysis of church and secular records, vary from about 40-60,000 total witch executions for all of Europe between about 1450 and 1750).

But I wonder how this compares with executions of, say, heretics or pickpockets? The scant evidence offered suggests that witchcraft was one of numerous "moral offenses," and generally not the most pressing to authorities.



Witch Hunts – Complex Patterns

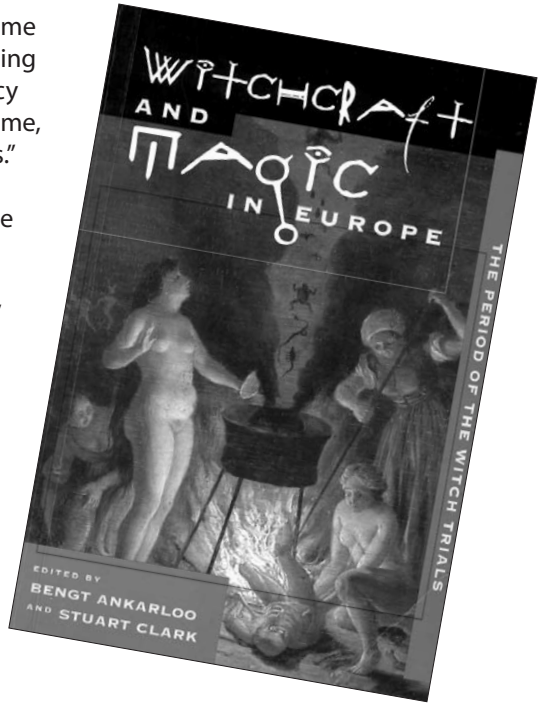
Why, during one era (yet at strikingly different times in various regions of Europe), was witch hunting suddenly an obsession for church and state authorities as well as common people?

The essays covering the organized witch hunts (roughly 1500-1750 – the Early Modern Era in Europe, not the much-reviled Middle Ages) show the complex interplay between popular persecutions, village scapegoating, and church and secular authorities.

Why witches became targets precisely at this moment remains somewhat a mystery. Yet these volumes offer a coherent picture of the progressive demonization of magic and witchcraft, tracing

the issue from ancient Greece and Rome through the Burning Times and showing how the notion of a Satanic conspiracy evolved from diverse sources to become, around 1500, the "hammer of witches."

Exacerbated by the strained religious situation in the century after the Protestant Reformation, this demonization led to a climate where witches were seen as the "Devil's apprentices" – a belief not widely known before this era.



Broad conclusions suggest that the common denominator of many hunts was a weak central government and/or judicial system.

Thus the decentralized and politically chaotic German states were the site of over half of all executions, while more stable and centralized France and England ended their hunts earlier and with far fewer deaths.

One interesting finding of the detailed archival studies conducted over the past half-century is that the Spanish and Roman Inquisitions, far from instigating systematic witch hunts, generally played a tempering role.

Organized witch hunts ended far earlier in Inquisition-dominated areas than in Protestant Germany and Scandinavia, due largely to the Inquisition's insistence on strict judicial procedure and evidence rules.

As to who the witches were, and who was targeted by the witch hunters, the variation across Europe is so great that no summary is possible beyond the fact that women were accused and executed more often than men in most places. The essays in Volumes Four offer succinct surveys of these divergent and fascinating patterns.

Neopagan Roots and Seeds

Volume Six features Ronald Hutton's essay on Modern Pagan Witchcraft.

Hutton, whose outstanding book The Triumph of the Moon (2001, revised 2021) covers this material in more detail, traces neopagan roots from Freemasons and Spiritualists, through predecessor groups such as the Theosophists (who acquainted Europeans with Indian philosophy) and the Golden Dawn (assemblers of the framework of modern pagan rituals), on to the mid-20th century revival inspired by Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, Aleister Crowley, and others.

In the process, Hutton takes a certain delight in uncovering the highly-fictionalized biographies of a number of our honored ancestors.

According to Hutton and other recent researchers, virtually every well-known neopagan author and magus of the later 1800s and the first half of the 1900s fabricated significant parts of their credentials, often to provide a "hallowed antiquity" to their innovative reconstructions of paganism.

Some of the fictions are easily unveiled, such as the Golden Dawn's claims to derive its organizing structure from a committee of supernatural "secret chiefs" who direct global esoteric efforts.

Others, such as Gardner's claims of advanced academic degrees and secret initiations, took more determined research to uncover. Yet in the end, these too fall under Hutton's skeptical blade.

The result is a bit sad. But like a glass of cold water, it clears the palate for whatever comes next. Any future claims of recently-discovered manuscripts, secret initiations, and the like will sound hollow.

American Oversights

Hutton is less successful in dealing with North American witchcraft. His best research depends on personal trust and communications. This web breaks down when he ventures across the Atlantic, where he seems to rely on readings of a few popular texts.

Thus he gives California witches such as Z Budapest and Starhawk their due, but tends to treat them as eccentric authors, not spokespeople for wider movements, networks, and groups. He scarcely acknowledges that Reclaiming exists.

Bruised egos aside, let's not return the favor by pretending that Hutton doesn't exist. His work is the standard by which subsequent histories will be measured, and he deserves to be carefully read as we gather the threads of our tradition.

North American traditions are given a more sympathetic reading by authors such as Helen Berger and Owen Davies. (See More Neopagan History, page 118.)

Postmodern Magic

In the finest postmodern tradition, many authors in the Athlone series include "methodological" sections where they puzzle over what exactly they are writing about.

The consensus seems to be a structuralist paradigm in which "magic" is defined as "whatever religion and science are not."

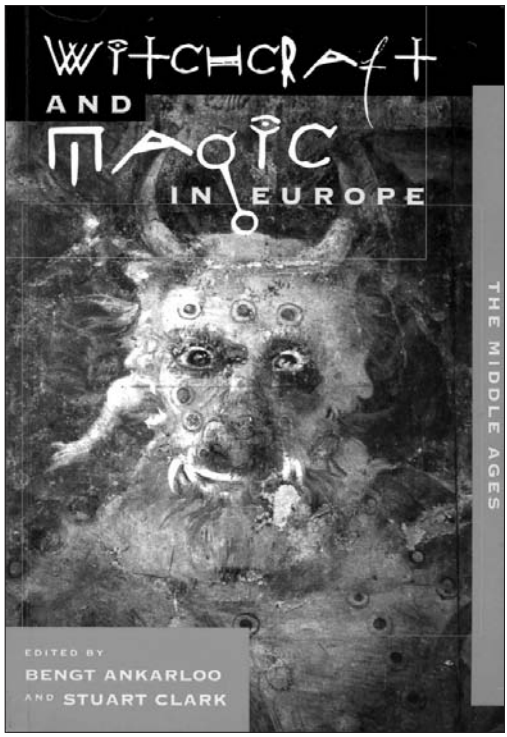
Through 2500 years of Western culture, magic has shown such incredible resiliency in the face of persecution and marginalization that it seems as if "magic" is necessary to the construction of key Western concepts such as "science" and "religion."

After all, any religion worth its credo must have heresies and blasphemies to combat. To paraphrase Voltaire, if witches and magic didn't exist, the church would have to invent them.

Which it fairly well did, judging from lunatic texts such as the infamous Malleus Maleficarum – just one of a thriving genre of witch hunting manuals, seconded by lurid popular tracts detailing the horrible crimes of witches. Add a dash of torture so

that the confessions matched the propaganda, and the witch hunts appeared justified.

Through European history there have been intentional practitioners of magic, witchcraft, sorcery, and diabolism. But during the witch hunt era their numbers and powers were never a threat to organized religion or public morals, and many executed "witches" had no connection to these practices. The demonization of witchcraft and "learned magic" served less to cleanse Christianity than to justify rampages of scapegoating violence (hardly the only instance in European history).



By showing how "magic" as a negative category is essential to the definitions of religion and science, the structuralist view offers an explanation of the survival of magic and witchcraft to the present day – although today's witches are more likely to run afoul of scientific than religious orthodoxy, and more likely to suffer ridicule than torture.

What seems beyond any easy explanation, certainly on the narrow scale of these essays, is why witchcraft and magic today are not simply surviving, but flourishing.

In the end, it is this flowering which gives such rich meaning to the Athlone series and the wave of new studies of magic. These books are not just "history" — they are the living source of our own practices.

George Franklin aka Luke Hauser reads history books while commuting at high speeds under the San Francisco Bay. He was Associate Chamberlain of the Revolutionary Pagan Workers Vanguard until the last purge.

Reading the Athlone Series

The Athlone/Penn series (see page 111) consists of focused essays, each under 100 pages. Most are quite readable, and some are fascinating.

A great introduction to the series is Ronald Hutton's Modern Pagan Witchcraft in Volume Six, which traces neopagan history from the late 1800s to the present. Hutton shows how groups like Theosophists, folklore societies, and the Golden Dawn, as well as individuals such as Aleister Crowley, Margaret Murray, and Gerald Gardner created the forms and practices that evolved into contemporary witchcraft.

Volume Four covers the peak period of the witch trials, surveying the intensive research of the past 30-40 years and drastically revising our understanding of this period.

The second essay of Volume Two offers short biographies of every witch, magician, wonder-worker, or sorcerer mentioned in ancient literature, including Circe, Solomon, Apollonius of Tyana, and Jesus of Nazareth.

Here's a suggested plan for reading most of the series, skipping the more specialized essays. Start with the second essay of Volume II:

Volume II.2 — Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature

Volume II.3 — Imagining Greek and Roman Magic

Volume II.4 — The Demonization of Magic in Late Antiquity

Volume III.1 — Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices

Volume III.3 — Medieval Church and State on Magic and Witchcraft

Volume IV.1 — Witch Trials in Continental Europe

Volume IV.2 — Witch Trials in Northern Europe

Volume IV.3 — Witchcraft and Magic in Early Modern Europe

Volume V.1 — The Decline and End of Witchcraft Prosecutions

Volume V.2 — Witchcraft After the Witch Trials

Volume V.3 — Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic, and Liberal Era

Volume VI.1 — Modern Pagan Witchcraft

Origins of Our Practices

In recent years, researchers have traced sources of some of our favorite practices and turns of phrase. Here are the oldest occurrences mentioned in the Athlone history series (from Athlone Volumes 5-6).

"So mote it be" – Scottish Freemason expression from about 1700.

Image of the witch as leader of popular resistance – La Sorciere, by Jules Michelet, 1862.

Watchtowers of the four directions – John Dee's "Enochian" Magic, c. 1600.

Elemental tool associations (air = dagger, fire = wand, water = chalice, earth = pentacle) – Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, c. 1890.

Earliest mention of "millions of witches burned" – Medica Sacra, by Richard Mead, 1755. The Athlone series puts European witch executions at around 40-60,000.

Drawing down deities (today sometimes call "aspecting") – Samuel L. Mathers of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, c. 1896, imaginatively recreating ancient Mediterranean practices.

"Coven" as a term for an assembly of witches – Scottish term from 1660s, brought into English usage by novelist Walter Scott around 1830.

"Neopaganism" as a descriptive term – W. F. Barry, in The Quarterly Review, 1891. Barry and other Christian critics used the term to belittle the growing interest in reviving ancient paganism.

The Triple Goddess (Maiden, Mother, Crone) – proposed by Cambridge professor Jane Ellen Harrison, 1903; and propounded by James Frazer in The Golden Bough (final edition 1922). The intent was that a single Triple Goddess lay behind the countless manifestations of specific goddesses, whose diversity could be reduced to one of the three aspects of the Great Goddess: Maiden, Mother, or Crone.

More Neopagan History

by Luke Hauser, Reclaiming Quarterly Issue 100 (WeaveAndSpin.org/back-issues)

Here are some recent works on pagan, neopagan, and magical history, plus a web resource where you can find many old magical texts in PDF format.

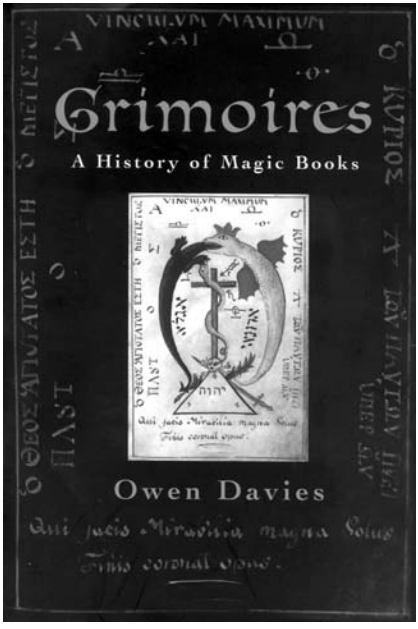
Magic and Superstition in Europe, by Michael Bailey (2006). Outstanding one-volume history of Western traditions.

The Triumph of the Moon, by Ronald Hutton (new edition 2021). Hutton's full-length treatment of neopagan history. Opinionated but carefully documented, particularly concerning the British background.

Grimoires: A History of Magic Books, by Owen Davies (2010). Social historian Davies turns his meticulous gaze to grimoires and "books of shadows," and in the process uncovers the hidden history of pulp literature. Entertaining and informative.

Witchcraft and Magic, edited by Helen Berger (2005). Essays surveying various recent Earth-based practices, including new age, pagan, and feminist strands.

Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age, by Antonia Tripolitis (2002). Mystery Cults, Mithraism, Hellenistic Judaism, and early Christianity. Dry but interesting survey of organized paganism before Christian dominance.



Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism, by Kurt Rudolph (1977). This study of the Nag Hammadi and related texts paints a complex picture of late-Roman Gnosticism – a spiritual tradition without centralized authority or dogma whose anti-material tendencies still echo today.

Enchanted Feminism: Ritual, Gender and Divinity Among the Reclaiming Witches, by Jone Salomonsen (2002). Salomonsen's ground-breaking study of the Reclaiming Tradition of magic and activism.

EsotericArchives.com – coordinated by Joseph H. Peterson. An incredible online compendium of grimoires and other magical texts available for free download.

Is this a golden age, or what?

RESOURCES & FUN STUFF

DANCING THE SPIRAL!

A COMPANION TO THE WRITINGS OF STARHAWK FOR CIRCLES AND SOLITARIES

BY LUKE HAUSER

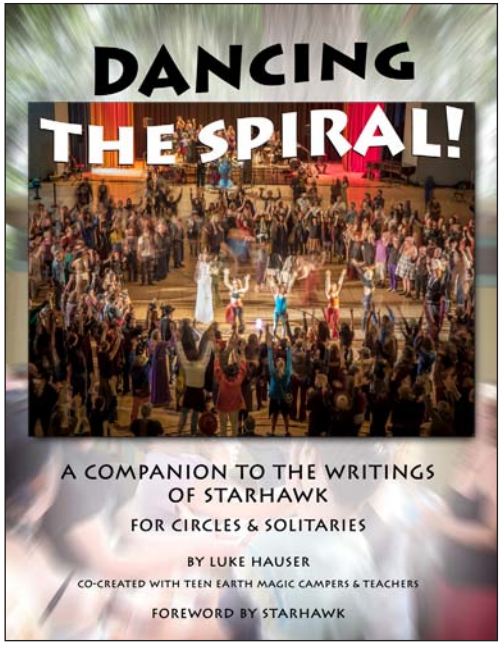
Next up from Luke Hauser – a handbook of practical magic!

Ritual skills, magical workings, activist skills and prep, Tarot, labyrinths, spell-work, and much, much more!

350 pages of Witchcamp-tested magic for individuals, classes, and circles.

Links to resources and music playlists, plus in-person and online rituals, classes, workshops, and retreats with Starhawk and Reclaiming.

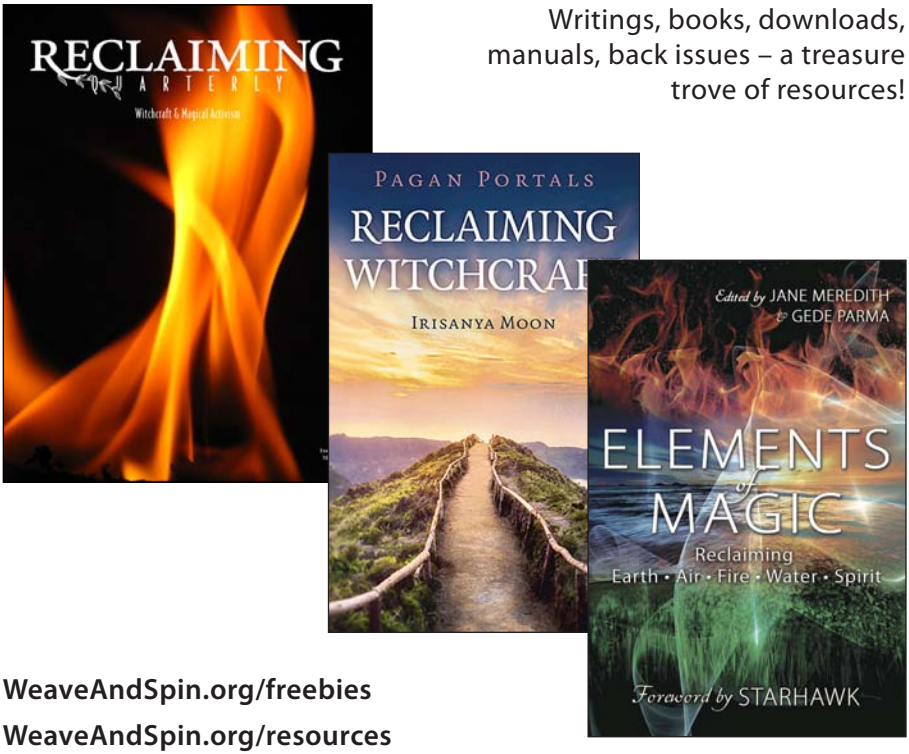
Publication is proceeding slowly, since we keep adding pages – but you can download the almost-completed draft now!



Free PDF download:

WeaveAndSpin.org/spiral

MAGICAL RESOURCES & MUSIC



Writings, books, downloads, manuals, back issues – a treasure trove of resources!

WeaveAndSpin.org/freebies

WeaveAndSpin.org/resources

WeaveAndSpin.org/archives

Reclaiming.org/reclaiming-books

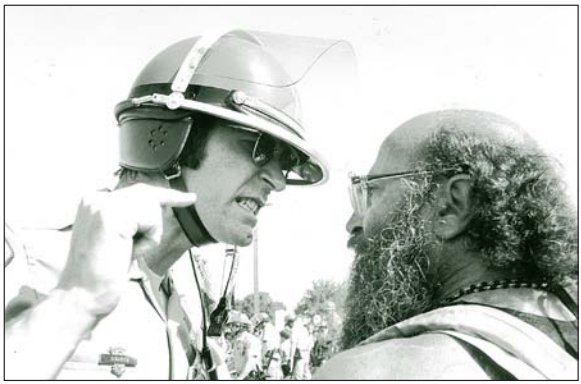
Chants & Music from Reclaiming

WeaveAndSpin.org/playlists

youtube documentary

A History of Nonviolent Direct Action

directaction.org/youtube/



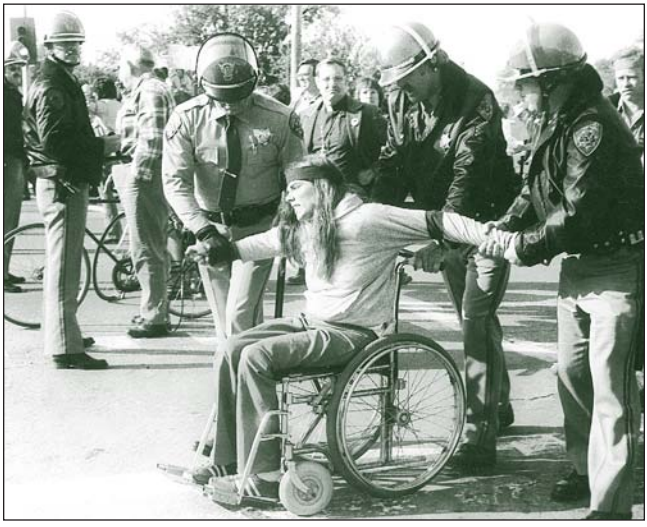
Join author Luke Hauser for an illustrated video journey through the history of nonviolent direct action in the United States.

The 25-minute show traces grassroots activism from its roots in the American Revolution, abolitionism, and the women's suffrage movement, through Civil Rights and anti-war organizing, anti-nuclear and peace movements of the later 1900s, and finally the vibrant social and environmental justice movements of today.

Illustrated with over 100 photos and images, the show follows the development of nonviolent civil disobedience, urban street tactics, and peace camps, culminating with Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion, and other direct action movements of recent years.

The video is a crisp 25 minutes – including intermission!

Produced by GroundWork and Reclaiming Quarterly, in connection with Luke Hauser, author of Direct Action: An Historical Novel.



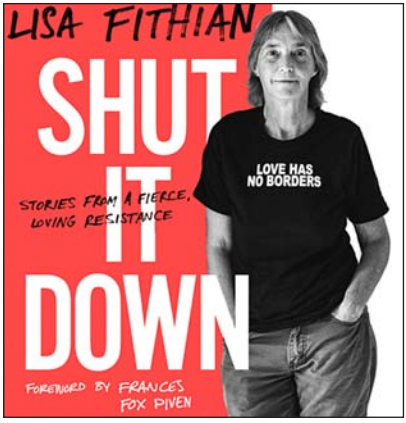
Photos by Janet Delaney (top) and Ted Sahl.

Three Activist Narratives

Memoir, History, Fiction

Sometimes we need handbooks. Sometimes we need a documentary.

And sometimes we need a good story!



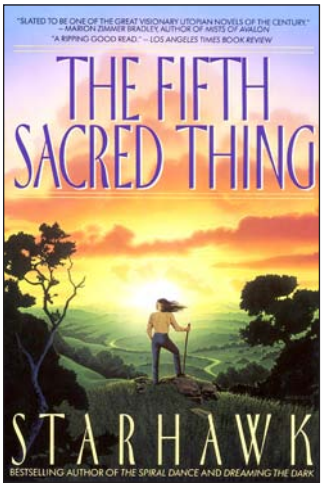
Shut It Down

Stories from a Fierce, Loving Resistance

by Lisa Fithian

A personal journey through a litany of global actions of the past two decades, sharing key lessons and insights from each.

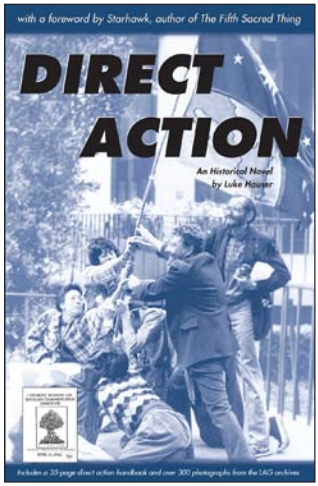
Follow the author from Seattle in 1999 through Occupy in 2011 to Standing Rock and Ferguson in recent years.



The Fifth Sacred Thing

by Starhawk

Conflict comes to a post-apocalyptic, rag-tag utopia where cooperation is uppermost and the Sacred Elements are valued unconditionally.



Direct Action: An Historical Novel

by Luke Hauser

Action-packed (and photo-filled) narrative of the vibrant activist cauldron that gave birth to today's direct action movements. Leavened with practical organizing tips as well as a wry sense of humor.

With a Foreword by Starhawk.

Getting Involved with Reclaiming

Camps, Classes, & Online Events

Reclaiming is an open and inclusive tradition, and welcomes all who share our values and Principles of Unity (see below). Reclaiming particularly extends a welcome to LGBTQ+ people, BIPOC folks, non-binary individuals and families, and young adults.

Local and online communities are active in Europe, Australia, and throughout the Americas.

People find Reclaiming through events, classes (online and local), Witchcamps and retreats, community rituals, and more. Some Reclaiming folks are community-oriented. Others are part of small circles. Some are solitary witches seeking like-minded people.

These pages share many ways to connect. Websites offer classes, events, and 40 years of writings and music. Join the international RIDL elist to keep up to date.

Or take the plunge and attend a class – or maybe a Witchcamp?

Reclaiming's Principles of Unity & More Info: Reclaiming.org/about/

Questions/Join Elists: ReclaimingSecretary@gmail.com

Reclaiming Websites

Reclaiming.org – basic info about Reclaiming, links to local groups, and more.

Witchcamp.org – dates and links to our Witchcamps and family camps in Europe, the Americas, and Australia.

Facebook – many Reclaiming groups have pages – search Reclaiming + your locale.

BayAreaReclaiming.org – local rituals, classes, and events in the San Francisco Bay Area – communities in the City, East Bay (Oakland/Berkeley/Etc), and North Bay.

ReclaimingSpiralDance.org – information, tickets, and volunteer opportunities for our biggest annual gathering in the Bay Area, each year around Samhain.

WeaveAndSpin.org – new Reclaiming Quarterly-sponsored site with current posts, archive highlights, links to music and videos, and much more.

WeaveAndSpin.org/playlists/ – youtube and spotify playlists for chants, trances, videos, and other recordings.

ReclaimingQuarterly.org – archival website of our former newsletter and magazine (1980-2011) – hundreds of articles, publications, downloadable files, etc.

DirectAction.org – free downloads of activist handbooks, Luke Hauser's novel of the same title, and other resources.

Reclaiming Listserves/Elists

Anyone can ask to join these lists. Email ReclaimingSecretary@gmail.com.

RIDL – Reclaiming International Discussion List – keep up with classes (including online), Witchcamps, activism, music, and more from around the Reclaiming network.

LivRiv – the Living River is the listserve of the Pagan Cluster – keep up with international activist organizing and find out how you can take part and/or support.

BARD & East Bay – Bay Area Reclaiming's elists, open to all who are interested. Local rituals, classes (online too), music and nature circles, activist gatherings, and more.

Reclaiming Witchcamps

Witchcamps are intensive retreats for the study of magic, ritual, and for building community and renewing our commitment to personal and world change.

Witchcamps include all levels of experience. Newcomers learn basic magical skills. Advanced paths apply these tools and skills.

Q: How many teen Witchcampers does it take to set up a tent? (See bottom of page.)

Witchcamps are inclusive and welcome anyone willing to work in accord with Reclaiming's Principles of Unity. Visit Reclaiming.org/about/

Camps are offered in Europe, Australia, and around the Americas. There's even an online camp! Some camps are family-friendly, and offer programs for various ages.

Witchcamp.org – current schedule of Reclaiming Witchcamps.

Reclaiming Classes – local, retreats, & online

Various Reclaiming communities offer classes and workshops in ritual, activism, personal growth, and more. For current offerings, join our elists and visit these websites:

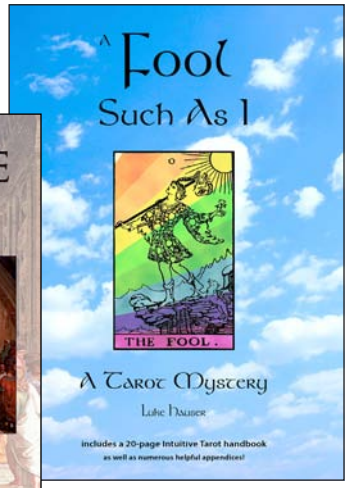
Reclaiming.org/worldwide | BayAreaReclaiming.org | WorldTreeLyceum.org

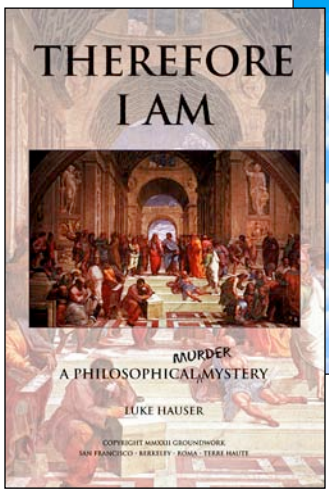
Questions/Join Elists: ReclaimingSecretary@gmail.com

Quiz Answer: *A: How many are in camp? It's a group effort!*

OTHER BOOKS BY LUKE HAUSER

Print editions & free downloads of all titles: DirectAction.org/freebies

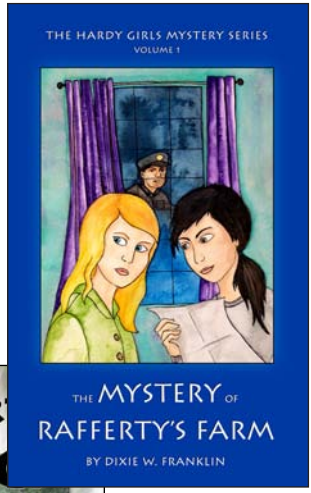




Para-Fictional Novels

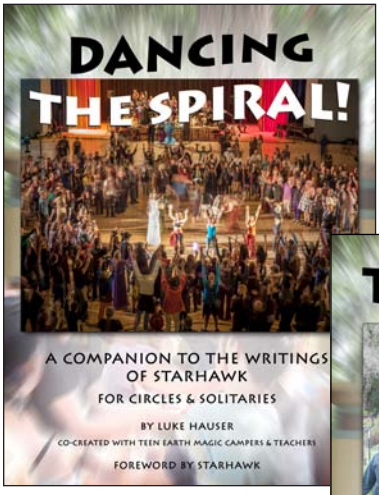
Sort of true, sort of fiction

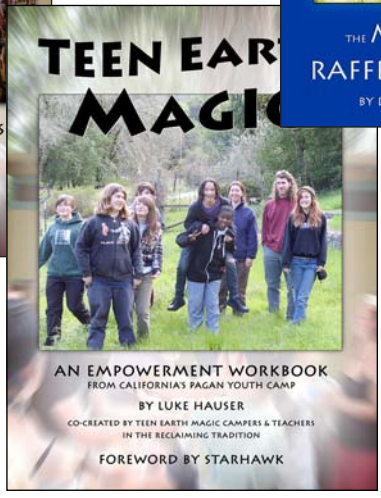
See preceding page for Direct Action: An Historical Novel



Hardy Girls Mysteries

For kids & others





Magical Nonfiction

Handbooks, history, exercises, resources, and more!