

## The Age of Magic Prohibition

Magic may have been prohibited by the church after the 4<sup>th</sup> century, but that did not stop many people, including Christians, from practicing and using magic. It was used as folk magic, throughout parts of Europe by common people to heal and to harm. Eventually the churches put a stop to folk magic and folk cures, and it became a fuel to stoke the fires of the Inquisition against witchcraft, a moral panic that lasted several centuries.

In Southern Europe, witchcraft, charms spells and rituals were a part of the spiritual experiences of the people of Slovenia Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Women were traditionally the witches of the villages and their work included healing magic, casting spells and the passing of knowledge on to new generations. Within the village there was a white witch, or one who healed, and a black witch, one who practiced a harmful kind of magic. Some of their work included using herbs and garlic that burned as incense or made into potions.<sup>1</sup>

In witchcraft, iron tools were buried in the ground of the area where an enemy planted crops to prevent their growth. These people used spirits, gods, demons, and animals within their beliefs to create their magic. Charms and talismans were used to protect from the effects of the evil eye. In Slovenia and Bulgaria, both men and women were able to use witchcraft.<sup>2</sup> The female witch used the power and energy of the moon or lunar goddess and the male witch's purpose was to protect the village people from evils. Witches were paid to create charms and to cast spells that either harmed or healed. In many ways their magic was natural and sympathetic.

The Slavic pantheon included many kinds of spirits, everything from household spirits to gods who caused misfortune and disease. Some of the gods invoked in curses and spells were the goddess Beda, who was responsible for the disasters, misfortune and unhappiness in life, and the Slavic pagan god Chernobog, who was known as the Black god, a god of diseases, evils, grief and woe.<sup>3</sup>

These people who used folk magic in Europe, generally known as cunning folk, had widespread influence throughout pre-Christian England, Europe, and even Italy. The word cunning referred to the old English word *kenning*, meaning wise man or woman.<sup>4</sup> It was a tradition

---

1 Conrad, Joseph L. "Bulgarian Magic Charms: Ritual, Form, and Content." The Slavic and East European Journal, Vol. 31, No 4.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 c.1325, also, prp. of cunnen "to know". Originally meaning "learned;" the sense

that they had healing or cursing powers through their family history, and it was often accepted that their powers were hereditary, as their knowledge had been passed down throughout the generations.<sup>5</sup> Of course, much of what we are able to know about this rests on anecdotal evidence, and stories.

Cunning folk were recognized as part of British and European rural life because of the important place they held in society. All the people of the village would consort the cunning man or woman for whatever ailed them, be it a natural cause or a supernatural one. These cunning folk would charge money for their services and make a living from making charms, using divination and astrology, and by using common folk cures. The cunning folk would also offer protection from witchcraft, cast love spells, provide divination, use healing, and even find lost property and missing loved ones.<sup>6</sup>

The cunning folk were healers, and they used herbs and other magical techniques to cure. Of course, these spells and charms were against the dictates of the Roman Catholic Church, but this was often ignored. It was not uncommon for the village priest to use the same cures as the cunning folk did, or even to consult with the cunning folk in the removal of a curse.<sup>7</sup>

In the end, most of these cunning folk were not charged with heresy simply because their services were needed to cure the sick and diseased of the village. At times, a cunning man or woman was used to reveal to inquisitors who was supposedly doing witchcraft and consorting with the devil. Although it was more likely for a cunning person to be tried in a witchcraft trial, the early church mostly overlooked these cases because these practices were so common amongst the people.<sup>8</sup>

By the year 330ad, The Roman ruler Constantine had created his new Christian empire, and the process of the Christian church and its beliefs began to spread throughout Europe by means of conquests and war. In this transition, the peoples of south Eastern Europe combined their pagan beliefs with Christianity, using demons and saints along with the traditional folk gods, within their recognized pantheon. Before the many witchcraft laws of the medieval era were enacted there was no clear dividing line between the use of demons or angels in magic, and both were used in spellwork.

---

of "skillfully deceitful".

5 Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft. Michael D. Bailey. The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2003

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

During the middle ages, the practice of pagan folk magic fell out of favor in the public eye due to the spread of the Roman Catholic church. The church created the Canon Law in the year 400 AD., a set of universal beliefs of the church, which deemed any witchcraft to be an act of heresy. Heresy is a word that was translated from the greek *hairesis* meaning "able to choose" and, *hairesis* "a taking or choosing", from which the word Heretic came from in the middle ages. As the church tried to assert their control by unifying the beliefs of the many different sects into one rule, they did not want people to have a choice. And those who did not follow the rules of the church became heretics, including Jews, Muslims and any other folk who was not Christianized or who did not agree with the teachings of the Church.

From the book by the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas, "Heretic...is one who either devise or Follows false and new opinion, for the sake of some temporal profit" To Aquinas and other rulers of the church, Heresy originated with unbelief, from a choice to live without faith.

There have been many studies on the role of women and witchcraft during this era. It is suggested that since the majority of accused witches were women, that women had been the main target of the witch trials. This may be true considering the patriarchal nature of Christianity, and how it eradicated any signs of female worship, and deemed all things feminine as evil, even from the start of creation. Women suffered the most torture of all being targeted for being 'sexually unnatural' compared to men. One author describes it in this way:



*"The early modern period, however, was characterized by the intersection of a peculiarly political definition of Christianity in which apostasy to the devil became the archetypal act of betrayal and a cultural atmosphere in which women as a category became the repository of a whole range of social and cultural fears."*<sup>9</sup>

During this era, many Jews were unfairly singled out and persecuted in many areas of Europe due to the Christian public's fear of the

---

9 New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology: Gender and Witchcraft Brian P. Levack. Routledge; illustrated edition edition (2001)

rituals and customs of the Jews. The Jews practiced their own kind of magic, and in the medieval era it was known both to Jews and to others that there were some who used magical powers. The first known prosecution of a Jew for witchcraft was in 1066, when two men were put on trial who were under suspicion of the church. The church always confiscated all personal property and money of those who were accused and executed.<sup>10</sup>

Their rituals and customs were demonized, they became wolves among sheep, and they were heretics of the church. To demonize is to demean the importance or validity of a religion, idea or personal character by ascribing an evil attribute to it.

The romans, who seemed to have perfected torture, including crucifixion, had created many devices to torture suspected witches. They were thrown into sacks filled with rocks and tossed into the water. If the witch survived it was because the devil had saved her, and if she died it was because her soul was taken by Satan. Accused witches were pricked with pins, hung on the Catherine Wheel, spun continuously in cages, stretched on the rack, drowned, burned alive at the stake.

They were tortured and coerced into confession of witchcraft and heresy. It was the belief of the church that they had spared the lives of these supposed witches by having them executed in their god's name. The trial had less to do with bringing justice than it was to make a public show of the power and authority of the truth, while pronouncing each victim of the court as guilty without even the slightest belief in a person's innocence.

The most influential book of this era was the Maleus Malificarum, the "Witches Hammer" authored in 1487, by the Inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger. It was used as a guide to identifying witches, for torturing them into confession, and also as a guide to prosecuting witches. This book described gatherings of witches that included naked dancing, Initiations of witches by the devil, orgiastic parties, and even baby killing and cannibalism. This book prescribed the use of holy candles along with other consecrated objects to ward off demons.

Many courts used this book as a document to persecute the accused. The church enforced its policy against magic. Descriptive writings and images of witches as the consort of the devil and flying on brooms, headed to a black mass or witches coven put fear into the accused.

---

<sup>10</sup>Antisemitism, a historical encyclopedia of Prejudice and persecution, Vol. 1  
Richard S. Levy

The belief in evil deeds was a concept created by the church and it was known in witchcraft courts as *maleficium*. It described witches who had supernatural abilities or those who supposedly signed a pact with Satan. Even though the book had been banned by the church by 1490 it was used in many courts.. all of those who were put on trial had no real connections with witchcraft or magic.

The church, along with various writers such as the influential witch hunter, Johann Weyer ( '*De Praestigiis Daemonum et Incantationibus ac Venificiis*' On the Illusions of the Demons and on Spells and Poisons, 1563, and '*Pseudomonarchia Daemonum*' The False Hierarchy of Demons, 1577). Weyer was the student of Agrippa, who was an influential occult writer, alchemist and philosopher.

There was also Nicholas Remy ("*Daemonolatreiae libri tres*" Demonolatreya 1595), who's book was very influential during the witch trials. Also, King James I ('*Daemonologie*' 1597) added to the various Christian mythological beliefs in demonic witchcraft. and added their own notions of demonic hierarchies and the attributes of demons. The artwork of this era often reflected the demonizing of the Jews by adding Jewish characteristics to the image of Satan.

Even while the church prohibited use of magic, there were Christian magicians who continued to use magic in ceremonial form, by calling upon their god in prayerful ritual ceremonies. This was known as theurgy and it was differentiated from pagan folk magics by it's focus on the Christian god, kabbalism and Christian ceremonial magic.

These kinds of magic were scrawled into manuscripts that were written and re-written, known as the Grimoires. The most famous of these is a collection of writings by several authors, known as the grimoire of Solomon. A.E. Waite suggested that this book began as a collection of writings dating as far back as the 14<sup>th</sup> ct. While it is hard to know the exact age of this book, a good estimate is that the modern versions of the text appeared after the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

The pagan magic of that era was demonized as well, now described as Nigromancy. Translated from the Greek it means 'Black Divination', also known as the Black Arts. It was a mistranslation of the word, Necromancy, a practice of the Greeks that used divination by reading signs within corpses. As a magic of the dead it was evil to the Christian theurgist who labeled this practice as "nigromancy", black magic.

Re-written by Crowley and Mathers, in the Lesser Key of Solomon, is a

---

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Edward Waite *The Book of Black Magic*

(translated) definition of this word, nigromancy - which declares all magic that is not pure and holy in intent is the work of Satan.

*"This Noble Science often degenerateth, from Natural becometh Diabolical, and from True Philosophy turneth unto Nigromancy. The which is wholly to be charged upon its followers, who, abusing or not being capable of that High and Mystical Knowledge do immediately hearken unto the temptations of Sathan, and are misled by him into the Study of the Black Art. Hence it is that Magic lieth under disgrace, and they who seek after it are vulgarly esteemed Sorcerers."*

The purpose of this magic seemed different, in that it was not considered heresy if the magic was Christian in origin. Some of these books taught how to summon demons and other books taught how to expel them. Other books were astrological and ceremonial. There are several main traditions of magic that have influenced or spawned various occult orders, authors, books and organizations based on the magic of these grimoires.

Visit <http://www.spiritualsatanist.com/articles/magick/basics.html> for more information on Witchcraft for Satanists. These articles are (c)Venus Satanus 2010 and may not be reproduced without permission.