

MYDDLE EARTH

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
PAGAN FEDERATION MIDWEST AND WALES
DISTRICT



INCOMMUNICADO

a Poem by Gary

Today I left my phone at home
Today I left it home alone
Today I left my phone on charge
And went

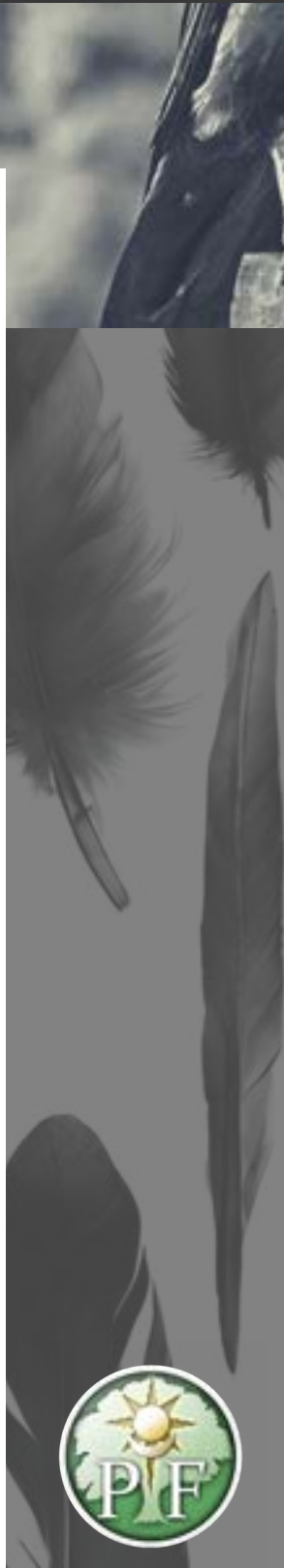
No photos so it didn't happen.
No proof of 6 hours on the beach,
No swimming, chilling selfie pics
To show

Cooking and sitting round the fire
Didn't happen if you weren't there
Does it count if I don't share?
Don't care

I could tell of the calmness of the sea
I'd describe the sunset vividly
The dolphins jumping in the bay
But no

No one on social media will know
No likes will give that dopamine glow
No comments or emoji gifs
Hey ho

My memories will live inside my head
My mind will store the clouds instead
The Dolphins and the sky so red
Are mine and mine alone because
Today I left my phone at home
#Sorrynotsorry



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DISTRICT MANAGERS' REPORT - Samhain 2023

BY AUDREY & RICHARD
DISTRICT MANAGERS, PF MID-WEST AND WALES

Hello,

Autumn is a time of year that many people dread. The weather is cold and wet, daylight hours are much reduced and household expenses increase with the need to turn on the heating and indoor lights. Others take delight in the season with its dusky aromas of multi-coloured leaves, abundance of fungi, the time to put on woolly mittens and layer our clothing. Being nature lovers, Pagans can find something to love about every time of year, knowing that all is transient. Enjoy this period of Nature's rest in whatever ways you can. Indulge your senses, kick through the scattered leaves and settle down in a comfortable cosy armchair with a hot drink and a stack of books at your side. Storytelling is a Winter pastime since before humans used written language, so why not write your own stories? Every person is unique and we all have a tale to tell. If you think yours aren't worth sharing, think of the stories you've heard from other people: how curious, comical, surprising, amazing they were. Your own have that same potential, and are worthy of a page or two in Myddle Earth. True-to-life or fantasy, exotic or just-down-the-road, tell us something to remember!

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Are you involved in a SACRE? (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education)

Are you an educator? Please see this message from the PF Education Manager:

"I am looking to compile a list of PF members who currently sit on SACREs, and also for any members who would like to sit on a SACRE and are interested in finding out more about it.

It would also be useful to have a list of people who would be willing and able to visit schools to speak about aspects of Paganism if requested by the school. This would be subject to DBS checking and training."

Please contact us <mwaw.dm@paganfederation.co.uk> if you are interested in this important work, and we'll pass your contact details to the PF Education Manager.

As ever, we send thanks and good wishes to you all

Audrey & Richard - District Managers, Pagan Federation Mid-west and Wales

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Myddle Earth is distributed four times a year to local PF members (and a few others). Your contributions are essential to make this a great magazine. Don't be shy, get in touch. After all this is Your magazine.

COPY DEADLINES

- 31 December for Imbolc Issue
- 31 March for Beltaine Issue
- 30 June for Lughnasadh/Lammas issue
- 30 September for Samhain issue

ADVERTISING

This is free for non-profit making ventures. For commercial advertising, prices are available on request. Adverts can be emailed to the Editor or posted (see address opposite)

Submission Guidelines

Your submission should meet the following guidelines:

- the content must have a pagan-theme or be of interest to the Mid-West and Wales Pagan community;
- articles should be submitted as a MS Word document or OpenOffice document.
- use a friendly, casual tone as we want to make the content as accessible as possible.
- authors are responsible for the accuracy of references and reference citations;
- images need to be of high quality, minimum resolution 300dpi, preferably in .jpeg format. Please ensure you have copyright permission for their further publication.

Please note the following before submitting your content:

- We reserve the right to abridge articles and to edit them for clarity, style, grammar and accuracy;
- All articles remain the copyright of the author;
- For Welsh language submissions, please accompany with the English translation;
- Although every effort will be made to accept your contributions for publication, we reserve the right to refuse submissions;
- We are sorry but we are unable to pay for submissions; and finally
- If you would like a copy of our GDPR statement, please email mwaw.editor@paganfederation.co.uk

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the Pagan Federation or its Officers.

WE ARE RECRUITING A NEW VOLUNTEER MAGAZINE EDITOR AND ARE NOW SEEKING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST



Wren is having to step down as **Myddle Earth Editor** due to work commitments and we are now seeking a new volunteer to take over the role, ideally in time to co-edit the Imbolc issue. If you've liked how the magazine has evolved over the last couple of years and think adding your creativity will help it continue to grow and develop, then please get in touch. The magazine is currently produced in Canva (free) and then converted to a .pdf document. However, this isn't carved in stone if you are more familiar with other software. If you would like to find out more, and are a member of the Pagan Federation, please get in touch with the District Managers, Richard and Audrey. Their email address is mwaw.dm@paganfederation.co.uk



LITTLE QUIZ

What colour represents:

- 1.The sun, activity, nobility, passion?
- 2.The north, Earth, the Sung dynasty of China?
- 3.The setting sun, lunar hare, immortality?
- 4.Luxury, happiness, love, splendour?
- 5.Majesty, justice, Jupiter?

Answers on page 12





FRAU HOLLE AND FRAU BERCHTA

THE START OF A SERIES OF ARTICLES ABOUT PAGAN DEITIES
BY ELISABETH BUSHELL

A few months ago I told you all I was passionate about the Celts and that was why I had chosen a Celtic based path. I think Celtic ideas were always in the back of my mind but in my younger days I had another passion, Germany and all things German. That came out in my desire to study a subject that no-one in my family had even considered. While Celtic matters now dominate my life (as far as they can), Germany is not far behind and I decided to look up German deities and mythology and see what I could learn. Most of the early Germanic deities and mythology became part of the Norse pantheon, but two deities remained German and are still recognised in spiritual circles in many parts of Germany. These are Frau Holle and the Frau Berchta.

Frau Holle can be found in Grimm's Fairy Tales. Her name may come from the German "huld" (gracious, friendly, sympathetic). The name "Hludana" is found in several inscriptions in Latin, which may relate to Frau Holle but no-one is certain. There have also been connections made with the Virgin Mary. Marija Gimbutas believes she may pre-date the German pantheon, but again no-one is certain. Frau Holle receives and cares for children who died as infants. She may also be known as the Dark Grandmother and the White Lady. Her festival is in the middle of winter. She is associated with spinning and weaving and has been associated with witchcraft in German folklore.

In pre-Christian days, masked processions were held at Christmas-time which have been linked to Frau Holle and the Wild Hunt. Early Church documents link her to Diana and by the 11th century she seems to have been a women's leader (advocate?) and involved with broom riding. In the 16th century, Martin Luther used her image to personify shortcomings of hostile Reason in theology and she is recorded as sending hundreds of women with sickles, for what purpose it is not clear. In the 17th century people talked of her "crowds of maenads" in the Voigtland. More recently links have been made to Hekate, Artemis and Epona, among others, as well as to the tale of Cinderella. Researchers believe she is of pre-Christian origin and may be based on similar figures throughout Europe.



Her mythology is as follows. A widow lived with a daughter and stepdaughter but favoured the daughter over the stepdaughter. The daughter was idle while the stepdaughter did the work in the house. One day the step daughter pricked her finger on the spindle of the spinning wheel. She leaned over to the nearby well to wash the blood away and the spindle fell into the well. She was afraid of being punished for losing it so jumped into the well after it. She landed in a meadow and came upon an oven full of bread. The bread asked to be taken out so she did and walked on. Then she found an apple tree that asked to have its fruit picked. She did and finally came to a cottage and a woman who agreed to let her stay if she would help with housework. The woman said she was Frau Holle and the girl agreed to stay. After a while the girl wished to return home. Frau Holle was pleased with her kindness and hard work so made a shower of gold fall upon her. She also gave her the spindle and suddenly the girl was home again.

The mother wanted the same thing for her own daughter and told her to spin by the well. However the girl threw the spindle into the well and then jumped in. She refused to help the bread in the oven or the apples on the tree. She arrived at Frau Holle's cottage and agreed to work with her but quickly became lazy. Frau Holle threw her out and as the girl stood at the gate, pitch spilled over her. Frau Holle told her it was what she had earned and shut the gate.

Frau Berchta is a different matter altogether. Also called Perchta, the English equivalent name is Bertha and she was known and worshipped in Austria and Southern Germany, mainly the Alpine regions. Her name may mean "the bright one" (is there a link to Brigid there, perhaps?) and is derived from Old High German. It may also come from the German feast Berchtentag or the Epiphany, which is generally considered to be her feast day. Some people believe that the name Perchta comes from Old High German and means "hidden" or "covered". On occasions she has been linked to Frau Holle and the Grimm brothers called her Holle's southern cousin because of the areas the two covered.



Some descriptions call her beautiful and white as snow, others call her elderly and haggard (is there a link to the Triple Goddess there, beautiful being the maiden, elderly the crone, although no mother representation known?). Other descriptions again talk about one large foot, which Grimm thought showed she could shape-shift into animal forms. He also noticed that Bertha with a strange foot also appeared in Middle German, French, Latin and Italian tales. Austrians see her as an old woman with wrinkles, bright eyes, a hooked nose, dishevelled hair and tattered clothes

Berchta supports cultural taboos, such as the ban on spinning on holy days. She is supposed to roam the countryside at Yule and enter homes during the twelve days of Christmas, particularly on Twelfth Night. If the children and any servants had worked hard, she would leave a small coin in a shoe or pail. If not, she would slit them open, remove the stomach and guts and replace them with straw and pebbles. She would dole out the same punishment if they ate anything other than fish and gruel on her feast day. Not someone to annoy!!

Her cult required people to leave food and drink for her and her followers in the hope of gaining wealth and abundance but was condemned in the 15th Century during the *Thesaurus pauperum* and *De decem praeceptis*. Later church announcements linked her to Holda, Diana, Herodias, Richella and Abundia. In the 16th Century, her followers were called Perchten and this name was also given to animal masks worn in festivals in the mountainous regions of Austria. Some masks were called “Schoenperchten” or beautiful Perchten and are said to bring luck and wealth to people during Twelve Nights’ festivals. Other masks were “Schiachperchten” or ugly Perchten with fangs, tusks and a horse tail to drive out demons.

Two very different characters, neither of which I would like to mess around with!!



Tilly Treehugger - Embracing Change

"The planet isn't going anywhere...we are!" (George Carlin, American comedian 1937-2008)

One of my heroes, quoted above, had the right idea when it comes to the erroneous language used by many environmentalists. Earth has been around for a very long time and has endured an enormous range of climates, but it still holds together just fine and can shake us humans off like raindrops from a broom. It isn't "the planet" that we need to work on saving, but our ways of living, our societies and how they function. Why do I think this distinction is important? Because the deniers and doubters who think nothing seriously bad is happening will jump on anything that sounds vague, and a phrase like "saving the planet" comes under that heading. It's too much to take in, even if a person is open to the concept of impending ecocide. A sense of being overwhelmed and defeatist can then take root, to the point where we throw up our hands and give up. I have actually heard people say this. "What's the point in doing anything? The planet is doomed!" It's such an enormous thing to focus on, when we can break it down to easily-understood chunks that people can relate to. Work on something that affects our everyday lives and look for clear, do-able solutions. Above all, I believe it is vital to get away from a deep and abiding fear of change. We'd better get used to the idea of things changing radically, because they are, and it is becoming a fight for survival. Change is a constant factor of existence and life would be impossible without it. The opposite is stagnation, rigidity, nothingness.



Take the matter of how we get our energy supplies. There has been some resistance lately about wind farms, how they will be "an eyesore". All this belly-aching about what changes these will bring to our landscape or seascapes makes me wonder about past human-built structures that scarcely get noticed as they've become so commonplace. Think telephone poles and their wires lining roadsides both urban and rural. How about a succession of electricity pylons and their cables strung across fields, or the cast-iron railings of a gasworks. People got accustomed to seeing them, and although more functional than pretty in their design, they were all new once. Solar panels on a house roof look a little strange at first, but that applies to everything. I'm not in favour of covering fields with the things, but desert locations shouldn't be a problem and there's lots of space on buildings, surely?

Centuries-old windmills are now seen as quaint and picturesque, featuring on calendars, postcards and even chocolate boxes: the ultimate accolade! Were these new buildings once scorned as "monstrosities", or "a blot on the landscape"? Possibly they were, but the increased production they brought to the processing of grain was a revolution. In short, any change can be difficult at first, but tolerated and embraced when we see the good it can do. William Morris of the nineteenth-century 'Arts and Crafts' movement believed that we can design even the most functional and mundane things with beauty as well as usefulness, so let's do that.

Tilly's Top Tip

Go easy on yourself. Laugh often, especially at some of the daft things you do. Taking life terribly seriously is a draining and useless exercise. Be kind and generous to yourself every day, in the ways you'd like others to be. Do something nice for others every day, even if it's just a smile. Life should not be suffered, but enjoyed.

A Bard's Tale: Animals in Folktales and Lore

By Andy Harrop-Smith

Hi, my name's Andy Harrop-Smith, Druid, storyteller, folklorist and a bit of a historian. All at an amateur level of course. I enjoy researching folklore and history to inform my stories and I'd love to share some of my findings with you.

A focus on: RAVEN - Part 1

For the Samhain edition of ME there were several animal options to choose from, but one kept returning to me in different ways, Raven, who else? Raven is one of my favourite birds, mainly because it conjures such polarised emotions. A creature of many guises, it inspires both awe and fear. And its related tales are wonderful!

Since there is so much information on this amazing bird, I've split my offering into two parts. Next time I'll deal with the mythological and Shamanic aspects of Raven.

Biology/facts: Raven is the largest member of the Corvidae/Crow family, of which there are 120 different species including Carrion Crows, Magpies, Jays and Choughs. This totally fascinating and beautiful creature is one of the world's most intelligent birds. Raven can make and use tools to gather food, eating either carrion or hunting live prey.

The Raven has a language all of its own and communicates to others of its species with over 30 different calls. It can copy human speech and the calls of other animals which gives it a symbiotic relationship with both Wolves and humans. Studies have indicated that Ravens may call to a Wolf pack to lead them to where prey is located, and it will then follow the pack, benefitting from their kills. Inuit hunters will also follow the path taken by Raven which often leads them to prey.

Raven loves to play, and will swoop and tumble in the sky just for fun or perhaps as a courtship ritual. I have been privileged to watch Raven's airborne acrobatic antics at Castell Dinas Bran (Raven Castle!) overlooking Llangollen on several occasions.

These birds are long-lived and can live up to 40 years, but 20 to 30 is more usual. Not surprisingly the Raven has a very acute sense of smell and can discern the odour of dead and decaying flesh from a great distance. So too Ravens can see over long distances with their bright, piercing eyes. A most formidable yet endearing bird.



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Folklore: So, let's deal with the downside of Raven folklore first, its association with 'Halloween', and to a lesser extent, Samhain. In past times when superstitious belief was more common, Ravens were often looked upon with fear, and the collective noun for their gathering is an 'Unkindness of Ravens'. Western European tradition often sees Ravens as dark, malevolent birds of ill omen, heralding death. This is perhaps due to Ravens being carrion eaters, and therefore they are often present at scenes of mass death such as battlefields, or perhaps pecking at the corpse on a gibbet (they eat the eyes first!). In the 10th Century Anglo-Saxon poem, 'The Battle of Brunanburg', it states:

***'They left behind the butchered bodies,
Flesh for the Raven, the black-coated bird,
With the horny beak'***

Shakespeare used Raven as a portent of death in both Macbeth and Hamlet, and the two great death-predictors, the Cailleach and the Bean-Sidh could both take the form of a Raven. Ravens would often be seen perched on the chimney or roof of a dwelling in which the deceased was laid out, brought there by their acute sense of smell no doubt.

As always, it depends on where you live as to whether Raven is considered to be lucky or unlucky. In England to see one bird was lucky, but in Wales this was considered a bad omen and a disastrous time to set out on a journey. But if one landed on your roof, the household would prosper. If you factor in the Magpie rhyme, 'One for sorrow, Two for joy...', life would have got very complicated. Best to stay in, just in case!

It was thought that Raven was one of the guises taken by the Devil, and to hear the bird 'cronk' three times was considered to be the cry of the Devil in his feathered disguise. It could be countered by spitting, crossing the fingers of the right hand and turning 3 times in a Sun-wise direction. That seemed to be the remedy for all things Devil-related, and I'm sure that by the end of the day our forebears would have been quite dizzy from spinning around at every supposed sign of Old Nick! A Raven was thought to be a 'Witches' familiar who were also able to transform into the bird to escape from persecution, or to get to their 'diabolical Sabbats' and Covens. These days they generally use the car!

If the bird wasn't the Devil in disguise, it was probably the spirit of a murder victim who had not been given a proper burial. Obviously. In Wales and Kernow/Cornwall, King Arthur was thought to live on in the form of a Raven/Chough, hence it was unlucky to kill one, and often men would doff their hats at the appearance of this Royal bird, a much better idea!

In the North East of England, naughty children were threatened that the great black bird would fly down and whisk them off to Hell if they did not behave or used fowl (!) language. In the days when egg collecting was a favourite pastime, to plunder the nest of a Raven would ensure the death of a new-born child.

A Bard's Tale: Animals in Folktales and Lore

By Andy Harrop-Smith

Folk remedies: Our ancestors could have some pretty daft ideas regarding medicine, and Raven broth was said to cure gout and blindness...this may have been due to the fact that Ravens will peck out the eyes of corpses, thus they were assumed to be able to restore vision. I'm in some doubt about the gout, but there again I've never seen a Raven limping. Raven's eggs may be used to dye the hair black, but should only be applied when the mouth is full of castor oil or the teeth will go black as well. Probably best to stay grey.

Folk tales: Many folk tales from around the world try to explain why the Raven's feathers are black. In the Old Testament of the Bible, Raven was the first bird that Noah sent to look for land after the flood. When the bird left, his feathers were pure white and he sang a beautiful song. But on Raven's late return, Mr Noah turned the bird's plumage to black, and gave him an ugly 'cronking' call as punishment for the bird lingering to feast on the bodies of the drowned. No such thing as a free lunch! It was much the same story in the Austrian Tyrol. The white feathered and vain Raven washed every day in a certain mountain lake. One day Jesus came to wash there, and found the water polluted with the Raven's continual washing, and so as a punishment he turned the bird's feathers black. The tale doesn't hold much water (no pun), and what was Jesus doing in the Tyrolean Alps in the first place? In the Qur'an's version of the story of 'Cain and Abel', it was the Raven who taught Cain how to dig a grave for the brother he had murdered.

And on that happy note, I shall conclude Part 1.

Thanks for listening.

Andy.

If anyone has any comments, anecdotes or other information please feel free to contact me on:
andy.harrop121@btinternet.com

Members' Art Gallery



What can you see?

Member **Helen** has sent in one of her photos to share with us. She writes:

“I'm a Pagan and love being in woodland. I was on holiday in North Wales and was taking pics of Goddess Mother Nature at her finest. When I reviewed the pics at the end of the day, I saw what looked like Mother Nature staring back at me!

Her beauty never fails to amaze me, and we are so lucky to have such beautiful green spaces to explore and enjoy”.

ALL THE IMAGES IN THIS ISSUE ARE FROM CANVA OR PROVIDED BY THE AUTHORS THEMSELVES

WE'D LOVE TO SEE MORE OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS AND DRAWINGS / PAINTINGS.

PLEASE DO SEND THEM IN WITH A COUPLE OF SENTENCES ABOUT YOURSELF AND THE IMAGE

Little Quiz Answers

Answers

- 1.Red
- 2.Brown
- 3.Yellow
- 4.Orange
- 5.Purple

(Source: 'An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols', JC Cooper, T&H 1978)

Hekate as a Psychopomp

By Francis Billinghamurst

- Writer and Moon Books' Author

As the seasonal wheel of the year turns, it becomes increasingly noticeable that we are now in the dark half of the year. The hours of daylight have shortened, the trees steadily shed their leaves, and there is a distinct chill in the air.

Samhain. Taken from the Gaelic meaning “summer’s end”, this is the seasonal festival where ancestors are honoured and, as the earth seems to be drawing all its energy inwards as a sign of introspection, we too are encouraged to undertake some self-reflection. Within contemporary witchcraft, as with other forms of the craft, this is the time where psychopomps are called upon to help us descend into the Underworld, or into the deeper reaches of our consciousness.

The word “psychopomp” comes from the Greek meaning “guide of the soul” where certain beings guided the soul from the land of the living into the realms filled with shadows. There are a number of gods and goddesses that are available to use for this journey more notably Anubis, Gwyn ap Nudd, or even Hermes. However, for this article, I will focus on Hekate, not only because of her association with the Underworld itself, but also as her role as the light bearer.

Much has been written about Hekate these days as her popularity increases, yet she remains a rather complex deity. Often associated with magic, witchcraft, ghosts and necromancy, Hekate is often considered to be of Greek origin, largely due to Hesiod’s Theogony that explained the rise of the Olympian Gods. However, if this work is read correctly, it indicates that Hekate actually falls outside this collective order.

According to Hesiod (who lived between 750 to 650 BCE), Hekate was the only child of two Titans, Perses and Asteria, pre-dating her to the Olympian family and the one who “Zeus, the son of Cronos honoured above all. He gave her splendid gifts, to have a share of the earth and the unfruitful sea. She received honour also in starry heaven, and is honoured exceedingly by the deathless gods ...”. (Theogony 404-452). However, as with other goddesses where there has been an attempt to assimilate them into a dominating culture, there are always cracks that appear. In Hekate’s case, these cracks related to her having originated outside of the known Greek world of Hesiod’s time.

Having originated amongst the Carians of Anatolia (modern day Turkey), where some of the earliest inscriptions describing the goddess has been found in late archaic Miletus, Hekate was considered a protector of entrances. Her most important sanctuary is believed to have been at Lagina, a theocratic city-state where the goddess was served by eunuchs, and was celebrated through sacrifices and festivals.





One reason for her complex nature should be due to her many epithets. Even the image of her holding the torches could be interpreted as Hekate Phosphoros (light-bringer/light-bearer), Hekate Dadouchos (torchbearer) or even Hekate Purphoros (fire-bringer). The commonality of these aspects is the twin torches or lamps. Here it is often perceived as a guiding light of the goddess herself, however lamps are also said to have been placed at the crossroads in order to light the choice of path that the seeker would take.

This liminal and protective role resulted in statues of the goddess being placed at the gateways to cities as well as doorways to domestic houses. Hekate also had a special role at three-way crossroads where the ancient Greeks set poles with masks of each of her heads facing different directions. This eventually led to the depiction of the goddess as possessing three heads (or even three conjoined bodies).

The crossroads' connection with Hekate appears to have stemmed from her original role as a goddess associated with the wild and untamed places, and in order to people to gain safe passage through such areas, offerings were left at the crossroads. Later, during Roman times, Hekate was known as *Trivia*, meaning "the three ways". In the 7th century, Eligius was said to have warned his recently converted Christian followers not to "make or render any devotion to the gods of the trivium, where three roads meet, to the fanes or the rocks, or springs or groves or corners".

It is interesting to note that whilst the earliest depictions of Hekate were not in triple form. According to Lewis Farrell, the earliest known monument of Hekate was a small terracotta image depicting the goddess seated on a throne with a chaplet bound round her head. Farrell goes on to state that this was recognition that the goddess was worshipped in Athens prior to the Persian invasion around 480 to 479 BCE.

It was Hekate's torches that, according to some versions of the myth, aided in the retrieval of Persephone from Hades' domain. However, due to the eating for pomegranate seeds, Persephone remained forever bound to the Underworld God, even if it was only for a few months each year.

One of the first public Samhain rituals I attended occurred when I was briefly living Cardiff, Wales. The coven I belonged to at the time had joined the university pagan group to observe the sabbat in local woodlands. I recall us dancing around the fire, chanting "Hekate, Cerridwen, Dark Mother let us in". As this was back in the 1990s, and Hekate was primarily connected with the crone aspect of the triple goddess who in turn was perceived as the darker facet of the goddess. Such an association, even back then, never sat well with me which was one of the prompts for me to eventually write *Encountering the Dark Goddess: A Journey into the Shadow Realms*.

A number of years ago when Samhain drew near, I would head to a specific location in the hills behind where I live that was ravaged by what is known as the "Ash Wednesday" bushfires of 1980 when horrific fires nearly reached Adelaide here in South Australia. One of the 50 or so houses destroyed was one that a friend of mine called "The Manor" (although it is hardly a manor compared to British standards). We would make our way through the regenerating scrubland to what was once the garden in the shadow of the house ruins. Hekate was the goddess central to these rituals as my friend was dedicated to her, more so when one year during an attempt to make a blood offering, the knife slipped and she ended up with a nice "H" shaped scar near her thumb. Deity can have an interesting way of claiming you.



A simple candle would be lit, incense set to smoulder upon a charcoal disk, a glass of wine poured as a libation and a cake from the local Greek bakery left as an offering amongst the decaying leaves. We would settle down to journey into the Underworld with the goddess of the three ways shining the way with her torches of illumination. The format of one such meditation I have included in *Encountering the Dark Goddess: A Journey into the Shadow Realms*, where Hekate appears at a crossroads with her torch, illuminating the path we are to travel down. Sometimes it is not uncommon for these three pathways to present themselves as the three realms that Zeus acknowledged the goddess ruling over – the earthly realm, the starry heavens, and the Underworld.

Due to her numerous epithets, there are just as many ways of working with Hekate. These days we know that there is more to her than the “Dark Mother” from the 1990's chant. Despite this, in my heart of hearts, Hekate will continue to remain deeply woven with Samhain.

¹ Hesiod, *Theogony*, Translated by Gregory Nagy (Center for Hellenic Studies

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⁵ Farnell, Lewis Richard, “Hecate in Art”, *The Cults of the Greek States* (Oxford University Press, 1896)

About the Author

Frances Billingham is an initiated witch and magic maker living in South Australia who has an interest in folklore, mythology, and ancient cultures. She is a prolific writer, with her latest offerings being *Encountering the Dark Goddess: A Journey into the Shadow Realms*, *Contemporary Witchcraft: Foundational Practices for a Magical Life* and *On Her Silver Rays: A Guide to the Moon, Myth and Magic*, all published through Moon Books. Frances is found on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, and can be contacted through the Mystical Soul Academy (<https://www.mysticalsoulacademy.com>).



The Sky At Night for this Season

BY HANNAH

Intrafaith Interests

The Intrafaith team would love to hear from you, what was it that drew you to your path?

And in case you missed the latest Intrafaith blog on the PF Communities website, here it is for you.

A to Z of Intrafaith

In this series of blogs, I'm hoping to cover as many of the paths and general terminology that can be considered as being associated with paganism. We are a community rich in diversity and the blog will highlight this. Starting with "A"

Alexandrian Wicca – a tradition within the religion of Wicca. It was founded by Alex Sanders (after which it is named) and his wife Maxine. The tradition was established in the 1960s and is largely based on Gardnerian Wicca but contains other elements including Qabalah, Hermeticism, ceremonial magic and Enochian magic.

Alchemy – a philosophical tradition and considered a protoscience in its original context. Today it can be more of a spiritual path in modern esoteric circles, applying Hermetic principles and practices relating to mythology, religion and spirituality.

Ancestor Worship – the practice of rituals to commemorate and/or venerate the spirits of departed ancestors.

Animism – from the Latin meaning "breath" "spirit" or "life," it is the attribution of living spirit to all things including animate beings, inanimate objects, places and natural phenomena.

Asatru – a contemporary revival of a Northern European polytheistic religion. The name is an Icelandic term meaning "faith in the Aesir." Often referred to as Heathenry.

Atheopaganism – an earth honouring religious path rooted in science.

Children and Families Update

Here at **Families HQ** we continue to work hard creating content for your young ones to learn about Paganism whilst getting creative themselves through the Aether patches. There are lots different themed patches to work through and we release a new one four times a year.

Plus don't forget our FREE magazine released twice a year, the next issue is out at the Winter Solstice Our monthly blogs continue, you can check them out at

<https://www.pfcommunity.org.uk/category/children-families/>

November

13th – new moon 9:27

27th – full moon 9:16

December

12th – new moon 23:32

22nd – Winter Solstice 3:27

27th – full moon 00:33

January

11th – new moon 11:57

25th – full moon 17:54



The Dark Side of the Fairies

By Daniela Simina

Writer and Moon Books' Author

“She doesn’t remember much, except the sudden wind sweeping through and then the earth spinning beneath her feet. The cows came home by themselves, and this is how we knew that something happened to Ana. We found her lying on the ground,” said the man, looking at Grandma imploringly, while nervously turning his hat in hands. “She cannot stand. Can’t even crawl,” the man added, his voice breaking.

“The lele must have taken her legs,” said Grandma, the reputed medicine woman and fairy seer everyone trusted for advice. The six-year-old me froze. In Romania, lele were known as powerful and dangerous fairies.

“Ana only tried to get to the last bit of grass, before it’s all gone...” meekly said the man trying to defend his wife.

Grandma cut him off. “Oh, sure! Why don’t you go to tell lele what they should and should not do to trespassers?”

Then, Grandma turned briskly and angrily toward Ana. “Don’t you get it? Not only did you cross into one of Their places fully knowing that you should not, but you did so during a time when fairies are very active in our world. Grass from a fairy glen? In October? Now have at it!”

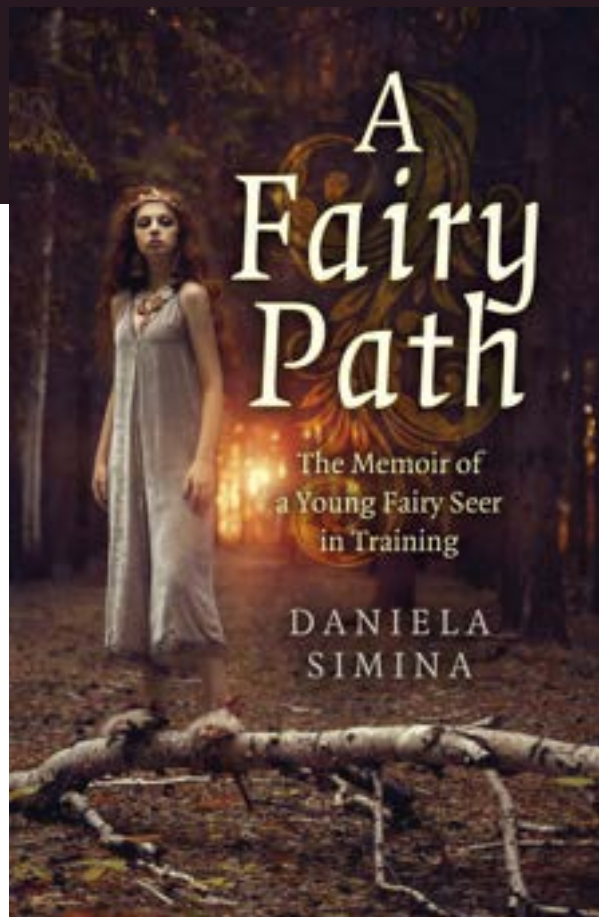
Ana, whom I knew well, never took fairy beliefs seriously and always made fun of her husband who was her exact antipode. Me? By the age of six, I had seen, heard, and experienced enough to make me believe in fairies, spirits, and magical powers. I was wondering if Ana’s condition was something that could be fixed and what would healing entail. I voiced my questions out loud. Perched on the bench near the wall and bundled up in a blanket as I was, I had gone unnoticed. My voice startled Ana’s husband who nearly jumped out of his skin. I snickered.

“The child...” mumbled the man.

“Never mind the child,” said Grandma, handing Ana a cup of steaming tea.

I wanted to know, of course, what the tea was made of and if there was a way to ask the lele or other fairies to cure Ana. I wanted to know if Grandma could ask them. But Grandma began to talk to Ana and her husband, so I held back the torrent of questions.

I had heard about fairies punishing mercilessly what by human standard would be minor offenses, but I thought such stories were exaggerations. However, after witnessing what happened to Ana, I began to rethink my own beliefs. Ideas about fairies clashed in my head.



The Dark Side of the Fairies ... continued 2

Ana had taken her two cows to pasture in the glen by the hillock where fairies were believed to reside. Some of the elderly warned sternly against taking animals to pasture there, cutting grass, or us children playing. But to have her legs “taken” for something so small? It seemed cruel. Excessive. According to Grandma, the authority on the subject, said there were fairies beyond any shade of doubt. It was not what I wanted to hear, but she kept insisting about how dangerous fairies could be no matter how much I shook my head and covered my ears.

I was deeply disappointed. I wanted to believe the stories in children’s books, of kind, gentle, and gift-giving fairies. I wanted to believe the tales where fairy punishment was never cruel and usually lasting until the protagonists learned their lesson. I really wanted to believe in that version of fairy, and in the person who wrote about it. I had high regard for people writing books: I assumed that all writers must be very knowledgeable, and the stuff they put in writing to be tried and true. But in explaining to me the difference between stories meant to teach children valuable life lessons and practices from folklore meant to keep people alive around fairies, Grandma burst that bubble.

It was too much for the six year old me to grasp the mercurial quality of fairy nature, so I began to argue in favor of the good fairy/bad fairy dichotomy. I argued as hard as I could with Grandma and with her wise old friend. They listened patiently to my ranting, until I got tired and stopped. Reluctant at first, I began to pay attention to what the women said. They made me reason, and by questioning and reasoning, I learned.

I learned that Sânzien, the fairies I was championing as the kindest among all beings, can also drive people mad and arouse passions that may incite people to violence. It is not their default, but sometimes they do it. On the other hand, Iele, or Rusalii, the fearsome ones, who punish mercilessly, can also miraculously heal people from fairy-induced ailments. They don’t do it all the time, but only during their eponymous holiday, the Feast of Rusalii. On that occasion, Iele act by means of ritual dancers whose sacred performance is overseen by Fairy Queen Rusalia (Aradia) to whom the dancers swear an oath.

As time passed, I became fascinated with the parallelism between fairy traditions from several cultures. I found out that the dark side of fairies - watered down to nearly disappear in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ literature – was well preserved in some folklore and old traditions.

For example, same as Romanian fairies, the Irish sí are feared for good reasons. The sí can abduct people in revenge for damage caused to fairy property. In the story “Sí Gaoithe or Fairy Wind” , Mrs. Heyes, a young mother, was abducted by the sí because her husband cut a tree growing on fairy grounds. Fortunately, she was returned to her family under the condition that Mr. Heyes immediately plant another tree. Upon returning Mrs. Heyes to her husband, the fairy warned Mr. Heyes that if he trespasses once more, he’ll never see his wife again. (The Schools’ Collection, Volume 0739, Page 036). Also, from Irish lore comes the story of a man who cut a tree on a fairy fort after which his hair fell off completely never to grow back. (The Schools’ Collection, Volume 0111, Page 67)

The Dark Side of the Fairies ... continued 3

But sometimes, an ailment caused by fairies fulfills the role of an initiation. Upon recovery, complete or partial, the person finds themselves bound to work in partnership with fairies. Ann Jefferies, whose story took place in seventeenth century Cornwall, is one such example. Ann suffered what appeared to be a stroke. She was unconscious for a while and when she regained her awareness Ann said that she connected with fairies. Following that incident, Ann received healing powers, knowledge, and even food from fairies.

You may wonder what happened to Ana. No doctor could explain why she had lost function in her legs. For months, her family took Ana to the town's clinic weekly for treatment. Yet progress was almost non-existent. In Spring, during the Feast of Rusalii, her family convinced Ana to undergo ritual healing. The Cālusari /Kuh-loo-shari/ danced around her and nudged her to move, but nothing happened. When the dance ended, the dancers disbanded and mingled with the bystanders. I, along with other kids, went to "steal" threads from the Cālusari's belts as was customary. Those threads and bits of herbs the dancers carried were credited with protective powers against many ills. We were lucky, or maybe the dancers feigned to be distracted so we could get away with our "thieving".

I ran to show Grandma my loot when I saw... Ana. On one knee and holding onto her husband, she was trying to push herself up. She didn't stand right away, but by the time Winter was upon us, Ana was walking around supported by crutches. The following Spring, we were invited to come and see Ana's husband performing the Cālus /Kuh-loo-sh/ dance. Desperate to save his wife, he had vowed to become a ritual dancer if Rusalía, the Queen of Iele granted Ana healing. Last time I talked to him, he was initiating his eldest son into the mysteries of Cālusari. For him and for Ana the line blurred forever. What happened to them half a century ago, was it a good or a bad fairy deed?

Fairies are powerful and alluring, their nature the very definition of paradox: wild and dangerous and also healing and gifting. Their dark side is real and demands caution. But dark is not synonymous with evil, and nature – fairy nature for that matter- is beyond the good vs bad dichotomy.

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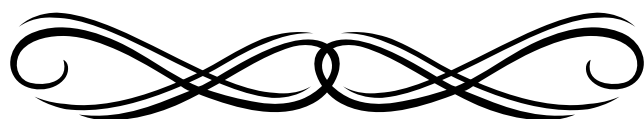
"Sí Gaoithe", "[The Schools' Collection, Volume 0739, Page 036](#)" by Dúchas © National Folklore Collection, UCD is licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#).

"Fairy Forts" , "[The Schools' Collection, Volume 0111, Page 67](#)" by Dúchas © National Folklore Collection, UCD is licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#).

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The Awakening - Years On - Part 2

By Coedwigwrr

Further to my submission in the Lammas edition of Myddle Earth, I thought it would be interesting to add other incidents from which I developed my feelings to the call of trees.

In my 'married years' I bought a cottage not one hundred metres from where I am now. It was small, with two bedrooms, small gardens to the front and rear and our first home. To me though, it was "base camp"! So close to my woods that I could spend as much time as work commitments allowed to walk the paths I had walked as a 6 year old. My wife too shared my love of the trees, though not in a spiritual sense. She considered them as just trees, but I felt that they were living beings, with spirits and strength. After a couple of years, a son arrived and it became apparent that the lovely cottage was simply not big enough. We eventually found a house in a suburban environment that was big enough and affordable. So after 3 years we moved. My heart was sad, but my head knew that it had to happen.

Suburban life was different. Neighbours rarely talked, cars raced down the roads in the small hours, car alarms sounded off intermittently. I was struggling. I just could not settle. This life was too different to the sounds of the trees, the night sound of the tawny owls in the woods and the morning bird song was silent, subdued by the incessant traffic. This was not me! I tried to console myself by setting up a small room at the top of the house and fitted it out with, books and all the small things I had collected while on my woodland walks. The window looked across farmland in the distance, which helped a little, but in the far distance, barely visible, I could just about make out my woods. One evening, I was in my room and I glanced over my shoulder and looked out. It was after rain and the air was clearer and the view was sharpened. The woods seemed nearer, bigger and greener. A lump came to my throat and the confirmation entered my mind. 'I do not belong here, I belong there'. I immediately went down stairs and found my wife in the kitchen. She could tell from the look on my face that something was not right. I blurted out "we cannot stay here, we don't belong". To my surprise she agreed almost immediately.

The following day, the house went on the market. It took 18 long months, but it finally sold. Luckily (or was it destiny!) the house next to the woods was also up for sale and by scraping all the money we had, we bought it. After only a year and a half away, I was back where I belonged, amongst the trees. We are only now beginning to understand the science behind the importance of trees. We are possibly a little too late, but the understanding of their importance is something for the future. All I can say is that they have a spiritual power that is unfathomable but very influential. They have a spirit which draws us in, holds us so very gently, but will never let us go.



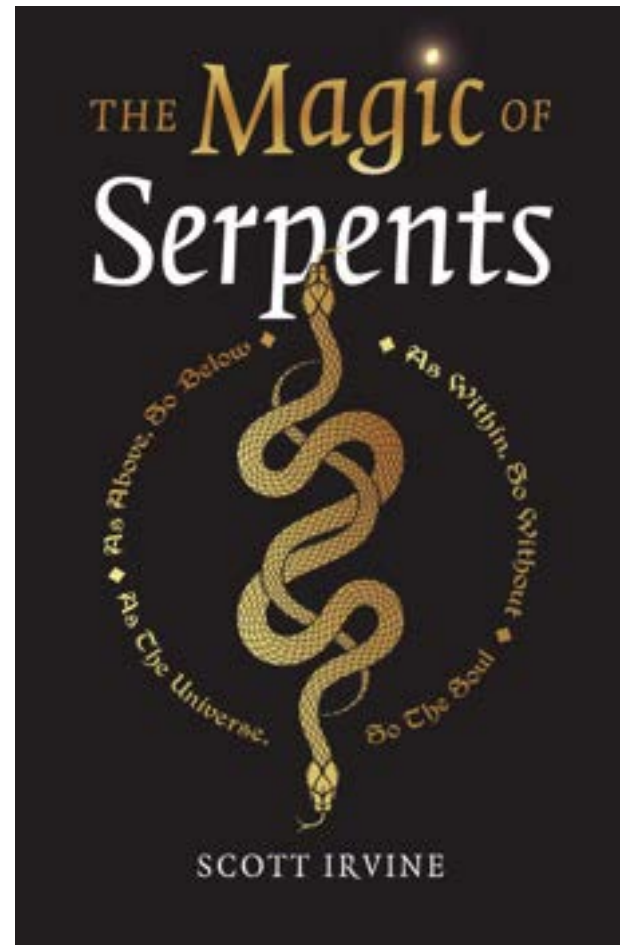
The Way of the Serpent

By Scott Irvine- Writer and Moon Books' Author

It is not hard to imagine serpents slaking their way across a world dominated by plant eating Triassic dinosaurs at a time when reptiles ruled the world. The oldest fossil of a snake that once lived 167 million years ago, the *Eophis Underwoodi* was discovered in a quarry near Oxford in 2015. The serpent is old and has survived the dinosaurs by 65 million years, have seen lands form and crumble, species rise and fall and are still here in every continent bar Antarctica. Serpents are here to stay, for millions of years yet, something we can't say about our own species. We can learn a lot from the snake, serpent, viper, asp, a creature known for its wisdom above anything else. There are many levels of understanding the symbolism of the snake. On a basic level, for shedding its skin two to four times a year depending on its environment reminds us of the transition between summer and winter, the eternal cycles of the seasons and represents letting go of outdated habits and thoughts. On a spiritual level, the serpent is a primal feminine force that uncoils from the base of the spine up through the body to unite with her heavenly love. On a philosophical level, the serpent represents the human ego sitting between the higher and lower consciousness. On an allegorical level, the serpent represents the old religion that existed way before the rise of YHWH and the curse of evil that befell him by the desert God. The snake was the Light Bearer who gave humanity fruit from the Tree of Knowledge so we could understand the mysteries of the universe.

Since the beginning of civilisation, two brothers vied for the Kingdom of the Earth, Enki and Enlil, Mesopotamian Gods offering different teachings for humanity. Enki, the Serpent King, wished to educate us so we could be like the Gods. Enlil, the Bull King, wanted to domesticate us and put us to work like the cattle in the city farms. We humans, according to Babylonian clay tablets, were created by the two brothers and their sister Ninmah from existing Earth beings to work the mines for precious ores and jewels to adorn the power of the ruling class, the Anunnaki Gods.

Many ancient creation myths involve the force of the serpent as the instigator for life on Earth. The Greeks tell us their Mother Goddess Gaia arrived here from the chaos that was our universe at the time. She is the force that drives the cycles of nature, conception, gestation, birth, growth, reproduction, maturity and the death of the physical form. Gaia was 'born' between the sky and the ocean with passion and purpose only to find there was no solid ground for nature to take hold. To overcome this, Gaia danced on the still waters like the wind from which a giant serpent was formed. Gaia took on the shape of a dove and laid an egg. The serpent fertilized the egg from which everything in the world was hatched.



The Way of the Serpent continued ... 2

The Mesoamerican Feathered Serpent Kukulcan created the Mayan world with his brother Hurricane from the vibrations of their voices. After two failed attempts making people, first from mud that crumbled in the sun and melted in the rain, then from plants but were devoid of thought and unable to acknowledge their creators, success came by making four intelligent men from maize. The men were born with a great thirst for knowledge and showed great devotion to their Gods. In time, the adventures they had seeking the mysteries of the world they lived in began to overtake the time they worshipped their creators. When their knowledge started to rival that of the Gods, four women were created to distract them. Soon the men were busy keeping their children and their descendants under control, with the guidance of their Gods.

The Chinese Mother Goddess, NüWa, was human from the waist up with a serpent body below. She created people so she had someone to talk to and play with. Moulding a body with pairs of arms and legs and a head, NüWa was delighted to find it came to life when she placed it onto the ground and proceeded to produce more. Wishing to speed things up, NüWa dipped a reed from the riverbank into a pool of mud and twirled it around her head. The flicked mud turned into people as it hit the ground. NüWa continued making people until the final flicker of the setting sun disappeared behind the mountains.

The Australian Aboriginal Rainbow Serpent at the heart of their dreamtime story, I find the most fascinating and possibly reveals how we became to have a connection to a personal animal spirit guide in the first place.

The Rainbow Serpent emerged from a deep sleep underground on to the surface to instigate a new world. After her long rest, the serpent was full of spirit and thrust herself across the world creating mountains and ravines as she went. Rainbow Serpent then filled the land with water giving rise to nature. The vibrations of her activity caused all the animal spirits to wake up and join her on the surface. All was fine at first but then some of the animal spirits began fighting among each other and causing trouble and Rainbow Serpent struggled to keep them under control.

At the same time, two brothers, visiting Gods, passed by and decided to get involved. They discovered a jelly like substance in the mud and formed them into the shape of people, males and females so they could reproduce themselves in the physical world. All they required was a spirit to animate them. Rainbow Serpent offered those animal spirits that obeyed her laws would be rewarded with a human body that could explore the mysteries of the physical world through five senses.

The Cosmic Serpent is the primal feminine force in the universe also known as Lady Shakti. It is this power that drives the kundalini up the spine activating seven main chakras to become one with her beloved Shiva in heaven. First, the serpent, normally dormant in the root chakra needs to be awakened. It is the root chakra that connects the human spirit with the Earth spirits which can be awakened through engaging in a creative action like art, poetry, writing, dancing, anything that engages your full attention. Once Shakti is awake, the passion of Lakshmi and the drive of Kali begin to stir.

The Way of the Serpent continued ... 3

Of all the animal symbols, the snake is the most complex and ancient of them all. Calling on the power of an animal is asking to be drawn into complete harmony with the strength of its nature, becoming your teacher and connecting you to the Earth energies. The power of the snake spirit is the magic of creating, of manifesting spiritual ideas into physical reality. The serpent is a symbol of immense power in the realms of the occult, most notably with initiation.

The Greek letter T or the Tau Cross denotes the descent of the spirit from the higher realms representing the creative ray emerging from the maternal womb. The horizontal line represents the boundary between heaven and Earth, the sky if you like. The vertical line indicates the spiritual connection between God and humanity. A snake on the Tau represents the death of the lower passions leading to spiritual growth, a symbol of wisdom gained by someone successfully making the ascent into the spiritual realm. Initiates were tied to a Tau Cross and subjected to rituals developing an inner truth. A serpent, or sometimes a person nailed to the cross represents the occult side of death allowing the human spirit to find redemption, resulting in a resurrection as an enlightened being.

A snake, sometimes portrayed dead in the claws or beak of a bird of prey symbolises the lower nature of the Earth bound serpent defeated and the higher realms of existence is open for ascension.

A basilisk is a crowned snake with the power to destroy anything by gazing at it. It is a magical representation of wisdom; warning off anyone not spiritually and mentally prepared who could be blinded by its brilliance. A basilisk swallowing a person symbolises the initiation of someone given wisdom to both the physical and spiritual worlds.

The western world has seen the serpent cursed as a demonic symbol from the time of the Greeks. With its forked tongue suggesting hypocrisy and deceit and its venom capable of a painful and quick death, the serpent has unfairly in my opinion, become feared and representative of chaos and deception ever since.

All source material is from 'The Magic of Serpents' released by Moon Books June 2023.



An afterword from the Editor

Hi everyone, I hope your Samhain has been marked in a way that is meaningful to you. For myself I have been thinking about my ancestors and how to honour them. I don't just mean my blood relatives who have passed though of course they are very important. I am talking about those ancestors who are linked to me by what they did in life which has allowed me to be the individual I am today. I can practice my craft (at least in this country) freely and without fear of torture and execution. I can live my authentic self as a witch and a member of the LGBT+ community without the prejudice and retribution suffered by those who have gone before. I am given freedoms that were unknown to these ancestors in their own time. Amongst these ancestors are pioneers, heroes, victims and change makers. I honour them all.



I hope you have enjoyed reading this issue, which I feel was perhaps brought to you by the colour black. I certainly was feeling a very gothic vibe as I was putting it together. There have been some brilliant contributions from new and regular writers. You can look forward to more articles from Moon Books authors in 2024. Regular writer Andy and several others will be continuing their series of articles.

As you will have spotted earlier in the magazine, I am stepping down as Myddle Earth Editor. My day job has stepped up a gear. It has been great fun and it has really been a pleasure to be the first to read all your articles. I am sure amongst you there are Editors in the making. To find out more please email Audrey and Richard, the District Managers.

The Wheel of the Year turns and before you know it, we will be back with the Imbolc issue. Get your thinking caps on now and send in your contributions.

Samhain Blessings

Wren

