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The Wicca and the Horned God



The etymological origin of the word "Wicca" is Anglo-Saxon and means "the craft of the wise" or "wisecraft". From here it is but a short step to the debasement of the name to "witchcraft", a name which has remained in use since its first recorded employment in approximately A.D.700 to the present day, to denote the religion of the followers of the Old Religion, or the "Craft", as it is known to initiates. There are few written records of the Old Religion in pre-Christian Europe, and those still extant date from soon after the arrival of the missionaries and were made by Christian ecclesiastics, so that allowance must be made for the religious bias of the writers.

As was mentioned above, little is known of the early history of the Wicca, since the only historical evidence of the time was written down by the Christians on their arrival. However, in the Cave des Trois Frères at Ariège in southern France is a paleolithic painting depicting a man clothed in the skin and wearing on his head the antlers of a stag. The hide of the animal covers the whole of the man's body, the hands and feet being drawn as though seen through a transparent material - thus conveying the information that the figure is a disguised human being and not a stag standing on its hind legs. Around him are various representations of animals which are placed where they can easily be seen by the spectators, while the figure of the horned man can only be viewed from that part of the cavern which is most difficult of access. This fact suggests that a great degree of sanctity was attached to this representation, and that it was purposely placed where it was screened from the gaze of the profane. A like painting of the same period exists in Dordogne, the only difference being that, instead of animals, twelve human figures surround the horned god.

The end of the paleolithic period saw the temporary interruption of the cave-paintings until the arrival of the Bronze Age. Now the horned man is found again, in Egypt, Mesopotamia and in India. In the Near East the figures were either male or female and the horns were those of cattle, sheep or goats. The stag-antlers are lacking, possibly because the stag did not occur in those lands or else was so uncommon as not to be of importance as a food animal.

Horned gods were common in both Babylon and Assyria. The copper head found in one of the gold tombs at Ur is very early - possibly dating from before the time of the first Egyptian dynasty - that is, before Menes united the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt in c.3200 B.C.

In Egypt, too, horned gods were in plentiful supply. The chief of these was Amun-Ra, originally the local deity of Thebes, later the supreme god of the country, and is usually represented in human form wearing the curved horns of the Theban ram. But the greatest of all the horned gods of Egypt was Osiris who appears to have been the Pharaoh in his aspect of the incarnate god. The Crown of Osiris, of which the horns were an important part, was also the crown of the monarch, indicating to all who understood the symbolism that the king as god was the giver of all fertility.

The Indian figures of the Horned God, found at Mohenjo-Daro, are of the earliest Bronze Age. There are many examples, and in every case it is clear that a human-being is represented, either masked or horned. The most remarkable figure is that of a man with bull's horns on his head, sitting cross-legged and, like the Ariège figure, surrounded with animals. This representation may be the predecessor of a Shiva and is called "Pasupati - Lord of Animals".

Though it is not possible to give an exact date to the early legends of the Aegean, it is nevertheless evident that there also the Horned God flourished throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages. The best known, on account of the dramatic legends attached to his cult, was the Minotaur, the offspring of a foreign bull and a Cretan queen. The sanctity of the ram in the Aegean in the early Bronze age is shown in the legend of Helle and Phrixos. Of the horned gods on the mainland of Greece, Pan is the best known to the modern world, and, in fact, when modern witches wish to use an image of the Horned God, it is generally either a representation of Pan or of Osiris that is used, the legendary death and "resurrection" of the latter being very akin to the witches' beliefs of the legendary beginning of the Wicca as a fertility cult.

A few rock-carvings in Scandinavia show that the Horned God was known there also at the time of the Bronze Age. It was only when Rome started on her career of conquest that any written records were made of the gods of Western Europe, and these records show that a horned deity, whom the Romans called Cernunnos (pronounced Karnayna) meaning simply "The Horned", was the supreme deity of Gaul. The importance of this deity may be shown by reference to the altar found under the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. The date of this altar is well within the Christian era; on three sides are figures of minor gods represented as small beings, but on the fourth is the head of Cernunnos, of gigantic proportions as compared to the others. He has a man's head, and, like the Ariege painting, he wears stag's antlers, these being further decorated with rings of withy. Like his paleolithic prototype, he is bearded, but, in accordance with Roman artistic ideas, the deity is not masked, the horns and their appendages being fixed to his head.

This particular deity was most probably the god of the witches, since he conforms in every respect to the picture of the god worshipped by them. The other possibility is that of Pan, Dionysos or Bacchus, since all these three deities are horned and are all directly concerned with saturnalia and other rites connected with fertility.

Of the Old Faith in pre-Christian Britain, there are, as usual, but few records, but, as Dr. Murray says: "It is contrary to all experience that a cult should die out and leave no trace, immediately on the introduction of a new religion. The so-called conversion of Britain meant the superficial conversion of the rulers only; the mass of the people continued to follow their ancient customs and beliefs with a very thin veneer of Christian rites".

In the case of the conversion of the various tribes, the religion of the king was that of the tribe and thus when the king was converted to Christianity, the tribe generally followed its leader's example. However, these conversions were purely nominal in the majority of cases, and very often the king's successor reverted to the Old Religion. But whatever the religion of their leaders, the mass of the people adhered, at least in private, to the religion of their ancestors. Quite often the two religions existed side by side as was the case with Redwald, King of the East Saxons, who,

"in the same temple had an altar to sacrifice to Christ, and another small one to offer victims to devils".

This latter reference is strange since the witches, or more properly the worshippers of the Horned God, are only concerned with life and rebirth, not with death, and never in the course of the known history of the religion has any sacrifice of any living thing taken place; indeed, were it not for the fact that the economy at that time was based primarily on hunting, the Wica might well have forbidden the killing of any living creature whatsoever. There is one exception to this, however, but that will be dealt with at the proper time. There are thus two possible explanations for this passage. The first is that Redwald belonged to some other cult, possibly that of the Druids, who did sacrifice both men and animals. The other is that Bede may have been speaking in a metaphorical sense and that there was no letting of blood involved.

The existence of the Old Religion is proved by reference to the 'Liber Poenentialis' of Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury (668-690), which contains the earliest ecclesiastical laws of England, consisting of a list of offences, and the punishment due for each offence:

"Not only celebrating feasts in the abominable places of the heathen and offering food there, but also consuming it. If anyone at the kalends of January goes about as a stag or a bull; that is, making himself into a wild animal and dressing in the skin of an herd animal, and putting on the heads of beasts; those who in such wise transform themselves into the appearance of a wild animal, penance for three years because this is devilish."

Later, in the eighth century E.V., under the heading 'Law of the Northumbrian priests':

"If then anyone be found that shall henceforth practice any heathenship, either by sacrifice or by 'fyrt', or in any way love witchcraft, or worships idols, if he be a king's thane, let him pay X half-marks; half to Christ, half to the King. We are all to love and worship one God, and strictly hold one

Christianity, and totally renounce all heathenship."

And very much later still, in the eleventh century, in the Laws of King Cnut (1017-1035):

"We earnestly forbid every heathenism: heathenism is that men worship idols; that is, that they worship heathen gods, and the sun or the moon, fire or rivers, water-wells or stones, or forest trees of any kind; or love witchcraft, or promote 'worth-work' of any kind."

The reference to idols here is a little obscure, since there are no images of the Horned God. The best the followers of the Old Faith could do therefore was to worship 'menhirs', a French word meaning "boulders" or more properly, a pointed rock. These, as are trees, are phallic symbols, symbols of fertility. The priests of Elagabal, a Syrian deity, whose cult flourished under the Roman Emperor Varius Antoninus, used to worship their god under the guise of a pointed rock. The idea was that their actions, which included masturbation upon the rock, would give their god, symbolized by the sun, the power to rise again the next day. Although strange in worship, this religion was certainly totemic in nature. The witches never worshipped their god in this manner, but it is easy to comprehend the fact that phallic symbolism in worship had a large following in those days.

It is virtually impossible to understand the witch-cult without first comprehending the position of the deities of the Wica. The God, whose name is a closely-guarded secret, but who was called in general the Horned God, was known to his Christian contemporaries as the Devil, and was called by them Satan (more correctly Shaitan), Lucifer (more correctly Lucifuge - "The Light-Bringer"), Beelzebub and other names appropriate to the Devil of the Scriptures, with whom they indentified him.

The reason for this "mud-slinging" was two-fold. At first, not comprehending the situation, the missionaries, not unnaturally, mistook the Horned God for their own Devil on account of certain visual similarities, namely the horns and the animal likeness. On their realization of the true state of affairs, they also realized that the Wica was a firmly-established religion and constituted a grave threat to the survival of Christianity. Thus every means available had to be used to suppress this rival, and it was the Wica itself that provided the main excuse, in the person of the Horned God.

The Goddess, whose name also is a secret, is of greater significance to the witches themselves, although she is hardly known to the outside world. The Wica is matriarchal in basis and all prayers are directed to the Goddess. The legend of the deities of the cult is very akin to that of Isis and Osiris in Egyptian mythology. In the latter, symbolically, Osiris gave his power to Isis, and, in the same way, the Horned God was so enchanted by the youth and beauty of the Goddess that he made over all his powers to her. In the Coven the High Priestess is the spiritual leader, although the High Priest runs the external affairs of the Coven and deals with discipline.

The worship of the Horned God continued well into properly-documented historic times. In 1303, the Bishop of Coventry was accused before the Pope of doing homage to the Devil in the form of a sheep. The fact that a man in so high a position as a bishop could be accused of practising the Old Religion shows that the worship of the Horned God was far from dead and that it was in all probability still the chief worship of the bulk of the people. But the bishop's high position in the Christian hierarchy saved him from punishment as was the case of Lady Alice Kyteler in 1324 when she was tried before the Bishop of Ossory for her heathen beliefs. Although Lady Alice escaped, her commoner co-religionists were burnt, showing that there was ample evidence at hand.

The most famous recorded example of the continuance of the Old Religion was the case of the Countess of Salisbury, in the reign of King Edward III. She, while dancing with the King, dropped her garter and was at once overcome with confusion. The King, however, picked up the garter and fastened it upon his own leg with the words: "Honi soit qui mal y pense". It has always been assumed by the uninformed that it was quite natural for a lady to be embarrassed by the loss of so personal an article of apparel. However, the ladies of that period were inured to rough talk and it took more than a dropped garter to shock

them. The truth of the matter was that the garter was a badge of rank in the Wica and it showed that not only was she a worshipper of the Horned God, but also held a high position therein, possibly that of High Priestess. When the King attached the offending article to his own person he was, in effect, placing himself in the position of the Incarnate God in the eyes of his pagan subjects. Not content with his action in saving his dancing partner, he then instituted the Noble Order of the Garter with twenty-six knights (two covens - one for the King, one for the Prince of Wales). It is equally remarkable that the King's mantle as Chief of the Order is powdered over with one hundred and sixty-eight tiny garters, which, with his own Garter worn on the leg, makes one hundred and sixty-nine or thirteen times thirteen, (i.e. thirteen covens). This attribution may be entirely coincidental but, nevertheless, it fits the facts so perfectly that it cannot be ignored.

The underlying meaning of the sacrifice of the Divine Victim is that the spirit of God takes up its abode in a human being, usually the king, but it may be any other leader, who thereby becomes the giver of fertility to the people. Among other privileges his person becomes inviolate until his time has come. This is the origin of the Divine Right of Kings. After a set number of years, the king is then put to death to ensure that the spirit of God will not grow old like its human abode. The term of years was generally either seven or nine, but it varied according to circumstances. The principle of the Divine Victim is very old and nearly every cult has practised it at some stage in their history. Osiris was one, Jesus Christ was another, to name only two of the best-known examples, while the two best-known Victims of the Wica are William Rufus and Jeanne d'Arc.

William II (Rufus) reigned for precisely thirteen years from 1087 to 1100. E.V. He was "accidentally" shot in the back with an arrow in the New Forest. An interesting fact about him is that 'Rufus' meaning red, is the colour of witches. The true witch's hair colour is red, not black as is popularly supposed.

Jeanne d'Arc, "The Maid of Orleans", was a 'Pucelle' or High Priestess of the Wica, and was condemned to death for what she was, one of the strongest accusations being that she wore men's clothing, a thing at that time only done by witches. The fact, too, that she, a mere nobody, commanded an almost fanatical body of troops, showed that she must have held an extremely important position in the Wica, and as God Incarnate, until her time had come, her person was inviolate. It is also significant that she, like the other Divine Victims such as William Rufus, Thomas Becket, Gilles de Rais and Jesus Christ, made absolutely no attempt to save herself, by word or deed, but rather willed her death.

This is the only time that the Wica will ever draw blood, and the killing of the Divine Victim has always been scrupulously observed since the days of its conception.

Modern witches still worship the Horned God in the same way as did their ancestors. The four Great Sabbats, Candlemas (Feb. 1st), Beltane (April 30th), Lannas (August 1st), and Samhain (Oct. 31st), are still celebrated in the same way as they were hundreds, even thousands, of years ago, with dancing and feasting in honour of the God. While witches generally work naked (a fact which offends the sensibilities of delicately-nurtured persons), orgies never occur at the Sabbats; in fact, to quote a well-known and respected witch:

"Nudity soon loses its novelty, and most of us are more attractive to the opposite sex when we have a few clothes on".

Herbal potions are still prepared by those who know the secrets of preparing them and many of these potions were used hundreds of years before science 'invented' them. The art, in this respect, is declining, and fewer and fewer witches trouble themselves with learning the ancient secrets.

In all other respects witchcraft is a thriving religion, and, in spite of the fact that it refuses to countenance any form of proselytization, people, mostly young, come all the time to the High Priests asking for initiation. Such as are deemed fit for initiation are rarely persuaded to leave and, since the Wica is a way of life as well as a religion, they willingly follow its instructions. As for the practical point of view, the code of the Wica may be summed up in two lines of poetry from the "Book of Shadows", the witches' bible:

"Eight words the Wican Rede fulfil: