

They that burn you for a witch lose all their coals. [Denham Tracts, 84]

Folk memory never relinquished its affection for the ancient religions. Sometimes it gave voice to a wistful hope for the deliverance of the old ways. The beloved old deities, it was said, were cursed to wander as spectres. Their banning could only be lifted under very particular, difficult circumstances, which tradition alludes to as a tree germinating and growing over a great stretch of time.

Stiff conditions emphasize the difficulty of the task of redemption. The one who will achieve it will be rocked as an infant in a cradle made out of wood from a shoot that has only just begun to grow. Or its seed has not even germinated, and the cradle can only come from a cherry stone that a bird drops between the stones of a tower. Or out of those stones two fir-trees must spring from a single root, and grow to be a century old, and be cut on a certain day and taken downhill on another, and out of the stouter tree's wood the cradle will be made. [Grimm, 968-69]



Witches dancing with wolves and goats. L. Fischer, *Buch vom Aberglauben*, 1794

Icelandic folklore says that the *vaettir*, venerated as guardians of the land for centuries, had to leave the places under their protection after christianization. [Sc Arch] The *enchantées* of Ariège disappeared from Languedoc at the coming of Catholicism. [Seb I 445] A French Basque legend says that the *lamignas* went away from the Pyrenees after Roland crushed them—dating the decline of goddess animism from the time of Charlemagne's invasion. [Sebillot I, 229] The *Elucidation*, a medieval French prequel to the Grail cycle, relates how outrages against the female guardians of sacred wells caused their withdrawal and a consequent drying up of lifeforce. It says that these violations caused that country to become the mythic Wasteland.

Legends recount the old deities' loss of powers. In the Gard region of France the *fées* used to be able to lift mountain stones as if they were made of wool, but as their bread lost its virtue the stones came to seem heavier to them. [Sebillot I, 317] The *fanettes* of Limousin vanished after a flood covered their dwelling-place. In Normandy, peasants said that the grottoes are shrinking and retreating into the earth

until one day they will be closed. [Sebillot I, 433]

In the 1800s a group of children reported seeing the “people of peace,” in antique dress, leaving Scotland. [Briggs 1976: 206] Many blamed capitalist privatization and industrial development for the spirits’ departure. At Menstrie in Clackmanshire, a faery was heard to lament the intrusion of stone fences, cotton-mills and the plough. [FFS, Fife, 315] At Glenshee in Perthshire, “the screech of the steam-whistle” drove its many faeries under the earth. [Evans-Wentz, 86]

The Scottish highlander John Dunbar attributed the faery flight to destruction of the wild places by enclosure of the commons: “... one reason no one sees them now is because every place in this parish where they used to appear has been put into sheep, and deer, and grouse, and shooting... Before the big sheep came, the fairies are supposed to have had a premonition that their domains were to be violated by them.” [Evans-Wentz, 94]

Bretons also said that the *fées* “disappeared as their country was changed by modern conditions.” At Mené people said they had been gone since the end of the 1700s; on the coast, that they vanished around 1800. [Wentz, 206] One Basque tradition attributes the disappearance of the *lamiñas* to the ox-drawn plow. Another says that it was due to the building of rural chapels.

In the 20th century, Basques said that firearms drove out Sorguiñ, the *lamiñas* (faeries) and other old deities, particularly the guns manufactured in the city of Eibar. [Barandiaran, 82, 86] A Swedish tradition from Småland says the trolls left Skurugata when the grenadiers met nearby, beating drums, blowing horns, and firing their guns. [Booss, 25] Balkan legends concur on this point. The *vily* used to live in close contact with humans, helping them with harvests and teaching them agriculture.

But so soon as men had departed from their old virtues, and the shepherds had thrown away their flutes and drums and songs, and had taken whips into their hands and commenced to crack them in their pastures, cursing and swearing, and when, finally, the reports of guns were heard, and nations began to make war against each other, the vily left the country and went to foreign lands. [MAR, 257]

In Lysgaard, Denmark, a story was told of a couple of the servant class who lived near the mounds. A little man in a red cap came and asked them to “hold our dwellings in peace.” They agreed. The *bergfolk* helped them in hard times, as when the wife nearly died in childbirth or when the family was too poor to buy new horseshoes. In time the family prospered. One day, the little man returned to invite them to the mound. All the *bergfolk* were plunged in grief. After dinner, the king thanked the family for being good neighbors. He explained that the *bergfolk* were leaving Jutland on account of the proliferation of churches in the land, whose loud bell ringing they could bear no longer. They were moving to Norway, “as the greater number of our people have done long ago.” Saying farewell, each one picked up a stone and tossed it into the wife’s apron. Then they left with their knapsacks, single file. Later the wife found the stones had turned into precious gems. [Booss, 482]

A widespread Basque legend explains how paganism gave way to Christianity. In Ataun they used to say that the pagans saw a luminous cloud approaching from the east. An old sage told them that “the Kixmi [monkey] has been born and the end of our race is at hand; throw me off the nearest cliff.” They ran westward, followed by the cloud, and when they came to the valley of Arraztaran, buried themselves under a great stone slab, which was ever afterward called Jentillari, “stone of the pagans.” A local dolmen carries this name. [Barandiarán, 141-2]

The French gave similar names to megalithic monuments, many of them heavily colored by diabolism: La Pierre du Sabbat, La Pierre aux sorciers, or La Cuisine des sorciers. Sometimes, accused witches were burned at dolmens. [Parrinder, ••] But the megaliths retained their sacred associations in many rural districts.

A stone goddess near Baud in Morbihan had a stone trough that collected rainwater at the base. Sick people went there for healing, and young people bathed there for love and life. A female menhir was made into the gatepost of St Martin’s churchyard in Guernsey. Into the mid-1800s the peasants offered

food and flowers to her, “but in 1860 the churchwarden to destroy its sanctity had it broken in two...” [Evans-Wentz, 404]. “La Gran'mère du Chimquière” (Grandmother of the Cemetery) has now been restored and offerings to her flourish again.

Three fées who lived in the Grotte-des-Fées of Sancey-le-Grand brought prosperity to the families of those who prayed to them. All maidens who brought offerings to them received good, fine-looking husbands, especially those who promised to be judicious. Apparently one of these maidens was accused of sexual improprieties and was mocked by the boys for it. Their derision reflected not only on her, but on the power of the “good women,” which offended them greatly. And so they left the Doubs country forever. [Sebillot I, 448]

The same thing happened with a Basque spirit described as a “young pagan,” who used to descend the mountain to spin with the women of Aya. A youth insulted her, and she stopped coming. [EYak or, 68] Often the guardian spirits abandoned the country they used to roam because of disrespect and ungratefulness on the part of the human inhabitants. The Scots used to leave milk offerings for the *glaiстеag*, a wilderness spirit of the deer, but she became offended when dairymaids left boiling-hot milk for her. In other places, the faeries departed when people no longer left any offerings for them.

In Sardinia, the *janas* of Monte Manai near Macomer used to come off the mountain on festival days to dance rounds with the people to the sound of panpipes. One day the *jana* Ciula came to the dance, and abandoned herself to its pleasures. Her companions called to her from the hills to check her gold buttons, and she discovered that they had been stolen. Realizing that humans were greedy and wicked, the *janas* left forever, abandoning their rock houses. [Fiabe, 74]

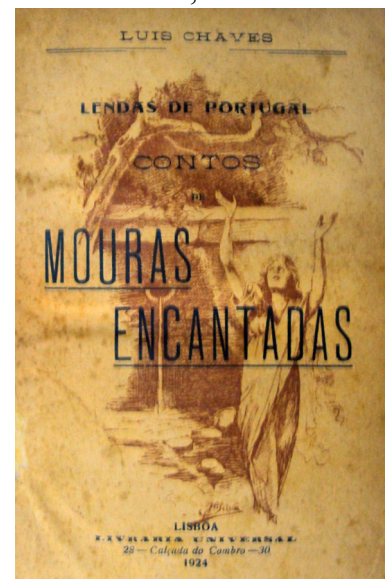
The German *holzfrala* (forest woman) used to visit houses and fields and stables, and often performed work for the families there. Mothers told their children that she rewarded good behavior and punished bad children by dragging them into a cave in the woods. Twentieth century Franconians say that no one has seen her for a long time. She left the country because people played tricks on her. [Sebald, 28]

LONGING FOR DELIVERANCE

The Welsh told of mournful “gray ladies” who wandered at crossroads, hillsides and ruins. One used to wail by Penylan Well at twilight. She once told a man that she would be released from bondage if he held her firmly around the waist while keeping silent. But he cried out, and she lamented, “Two hundred years before I shall be free.” A Green Lady used to watch people tie rag offerings around Marcross Well. Another water woman was said to be imprisoned in a well near Nantlle for alleged misdeeds—yet her pagan significance as fate-goddess lingered. Her wailing presaged a death. [Jones, 127]

The Portuguese *mouras encantadas* also need human help to lift the spell that binds them. Usually the person fails to perform the required ritual correctly. A *moura* near Turquel asked a herd-girl to bring her a magical cake, made out of dough kneaded in a new basin with fresh spring water, without salt, and baked in a new oven. But the girl did not do any of these things, and the *moura* disappeared, crying, “Ai, you have doubled my spell.” Other helpers were asked to place three little loaves on a certain rock and walk around it three times, or bake a bun shaped like a horse, or to throw a hotcake into the fountain at midnight. [Gallop, 78-9] These look like descriptions of rituals that used to be performed in honor of the well goddess.

Similar tales are told in Asturias, where buns that turn into horses are



given to the *xanas* to break their enchantment. The people of Torazo said that their ancestors used to leave raw eggs at the *xanas*' fountain on the morning of St John. They hid and watched for the *xana* to emerge. People were sure they existed, saying their grandparents had seen them: "The elders tell it as the truth." At Pintuelas, however, the people brought stones in their carts to throw at the *xanas* when they passed their well. [Canellada, 263, 256] One informant said with regret, "But the *xana*'s song was lost over time, and now no one is able to repeat it for us." [Canellada, 261]

A German fisherman while throwing his nets was suddenly confronted by a spectral "white lady" with a bunch of keys who stood on the riverbank. She told him that his wife had just given birth and to go bring the baby to her, so that she could kiss him and be redeemed. When the fisherman went home, he found that she had spoken truly, but he was afraid to take the child to her before the priest baptised it. Then he did bring the infant to the river, but the clairvoyant faery sat there grieving, because she could be delivered only by kissing an unchristened child. So she continues to appear on the bank searching for her release. [Grimm, 965]

Now the pervading thought in all this of being banned and longing for release I take to be just this, that the pagan deities are represented as still beautiful, rich, powerful and benevolent, but as outcast and unblest, and only on the hardest terms can they be released from the doom pronounced upon them. The folktale still betrays a fellow feeling for the white woman's grief at the attempted deliverance being always interrupted and put off to some indefinitely distant date. [Grimm, 968]

Sometimes the story is told of the elves. In the Franconian mountains, little glowing men silently helped the lost get home. One helped a peasant home from the tavern many times. Each time he was given a coin and disappeared with a grieved sigh. One night the peasant had no money to give him, so he told the little man, "May the Lord reward you this time." The spirit was overjoyed at the blessing: "That's what I was waiting for." He was never seen again. [Sebald, 24]

Another German legend says that a water spirit called the *neck* once expected offerings in return for teaching seekers to play music. Two boys playing near the river saw the *neck* strumming his harp. They shouted at him, "What do you sit and play here for, *neck*, you know you will never be saved." The spirit threw away his harp, crying bitter tears, and submerged himself in the water's depths. He still waits for someone to promise his redemption. [Grimm, 493. The river Neckar is named after this ancient water spirit.]

In Dalarna, Sweden, they told a story about the water-man who was playing psalms on his fiddle. The chaplain came by and told him he would not be saved. The water-man broke his fiddle and became so downcast that the priest relented and said, maybe it would be all right after all. [Booss, 324] In an Irish version, the faeries accosted a priest travelling by night, asking if they would ever be saved, and wailed piteously when he answered no. [O hOgain, 188]

One Irish informant recalled long ago hearing the old women call the banshee "one of the fallen angels which God cast out of heaven." [Lysaght, 44] Another Irish source explained local animism in a slightly friendlier way: "as the fairies fell from heaven, God relented somewhat and said that, 'where they are, may they stay there.'" So they live in air, water and land. [O Hogain, 187]

Eastern European folklore tells of the "blessed" (Russian *blajini*, Ukrainian *blazhenni*) or "kindly ones." They are called *rakhmane* in Polish Galicia, *rochmen* in Bukovina, names that derive from the Hebrew word for compassion, and reflect the influence of a large Jewish population in these regions. The "Blessed" are a lost people, meek and beloved of god, who live far in the south, on the edge of the world, next to a river fed by all streams. Some said they were children who died before baptism, living where the sun never shines. Women and children used to throw red eggs into the streams for them at Easter. [Newall, 57-8. The Lucerne Swiss and Austrians along the Danube filled eggshells with oil, lit wicks in them, and floated them downriver.]

Corsicans believed that the faeries had not entirely left the country. They still go out from their

caverns from time to time, walking around the countryside in disguise. They like to imitate well-known people and talk with the peasants. They carry the names of their grottoes. [Sebillot I, 446]

Near Rampegårde in Sweden, people said that a water-woman appeared with a snake at lake Helsjö every hundred years. In 1809 thousands flocked to the lake after children tending cattle saw a beautiful woman there, who showed them a snake. [Grimm, 588]

Basque elders led annual ceremonies at the cave of Zugarramurdi, a shrine of the goddess Mari, in recent memory. They sacrificed a ram or two at the cave to roast at her hearth, and feasted on mutton, bread, and wine at midday. They left the cave by forming a long line with hands clasped or joined by handkerchiefs, and walked in procession down to the village. Old people danced in front of the priest's house and moved on to the town square to dance the Sokadantza. [Barandiaran? 124-5]

In the Cornish village of Newlyn, people kept up the pagan cult of the Bucca. The townsfolk of Penzance liked to taunt Newlyn villagers by calling them Buccas. They resented the ridicule, which only made them the more determined to hold on to the old beliefs. They said that the Tolcarne troll, a pleasant-faced old man in a leather vest and hood, lived in the rock at Newlyn. Some called him the Wandering One or Odin the Wanderer. Into the 19th century people were still going to the rock to call up the troll, holding a leaf of ash, of oak, and of thorn while reciting an incantation. [Evans-Wentz, 176]

An extensive account of the staying power of the pagan faery faith appears in Mrs. Balfour's *Legends of the Lincolnshire Cars*. Katherine Briggs relates that in the old days the people of the marshes "had many strange ways and words to keep danger from them, and to bring good luck. In the churches the priests would sing their services, but the old people set more store by the old ways that the priest knew nothing about." They wakened the earth in the spring with "many strange words," turning the soil in the fields, and waiting at dawn every morning with salt and bread in hand for the Green Mist to appear that signified the coming of spring. [*Dictionary of British Folk Tales*, 201]

These Lincolnshire fen people made offerings to faeries they called the "greencoaties" or the "tiddy (little) people" or the Strangers (a name that resonates with the Greek *exotica* and Sicilian *donne di fuori*). It was they who brought out the buds and blossoms, and butterflies, and worms, and all the exuberant pulse of life on earth. In the summer they danced on stones in the moonlight, and people used to make fires on those stones and smear them with blood offerings.

A man from Lindsey told Mrs Balfour: "Fo'ak thowt as tha Stra'angers he'ped th' co'n to ripen, an' ahl th' green things to grow'a; and as tha p'inted th' purty colours o' th' flowers..." as well as the fruits and leaves. To win favor with the "tiddy people," the fenfolk offered them first flowers and first fruits of their crops, laying them on a flat stone. Before eating at home, they spilled a bit of bread and a drop of milk or beer into the fireplace "to kep th' greencoaties fro' hunger 'n thu'st."

As long as this was done, all went well. But in time, the offerings stopped and more people went to church. The new generation forgot about the Strangers. "Only the wise women remembered." This angered the strangers, and harvests began to fail, the animals and children sickened, the men drank and the women took opium. The wisewomen "got together and made a solemn ceremony of divination, with fire and blood. And when they learnt what was working the mischief, they went all among the people, and summoned them to gather at the crossroads in the deep twilight... and explained the usages of the older people." So the women and the men said they would resume the old customs, and things improved. [Briggs, 384-5]

Another account says that the Tiddy Mun, a being with long, tangled white hair and beard and screechy laughter, controlled the level of the waters. He was angered when men began to drain the fens, a development that provoked much popular protest in the 1600s. Misfortunes began to multiply, especially deaths of babies and animals. The fen people responded with a ceremony, bringing fresh water and pouring it as an offering to the Tiddy Mun. They heard the wailing of dead babies, then the call of pewits, in sign of forgiveness. After that the community began to prosper again. [Briggs, 395-7]

Animist Sanctuaries

The surviving animist consciousness among the people kept alive their veneration for old trees and groves and wells. They believed in their inherent power, which was dangerous to anyone who harmed them. In Borrisokane, Ireland, it was said that anyone who burned even a chip of the Bell Tree on his hearth would have his house burned down. This old ash figured in May Day rituals. [Briggs, 159] Other sacred trees were the Bile Tartain ash in Meath, the yews of Ros in Carlow and in Mughain in Kildare. [O hOgain, 169]

An old taboo protected a giant beech in the fields of Kokke-dal near Copenhagen, though the forest surrounding it had long since been cut down. Danish legend said a girl took refuge under the tree during a storm, and a lady in white appeared. She told the girl that she would one day be the mistress of Kokkedal, and made her promise to prevent the tree ever being cut down. Later, when the young woman married the landlord, she established a tradition that all future owners had to leave the beech standing. [Craigie, 186]

The Groac'h Lanazol, a Breton faery, is said to have prevented her lands from being sold at auction. The prices kept rising, and the castle was about to be gavelled off to a buyer when a gentle but imperious female voice rang out: “A thousand francs more!” Everyone craned to see who this new bidder was, but no women were present. The notary asked, “Who spoke?” The voice answered, “Groac'h Lanazol,” breaking up the meeting. Those few who ventured near the castle after sunset could see her walking the grounds. [Evans-Wentz, 187-8] The Breton word *groac'h* or *wrac'h* corresponds to Welsh *gwrach*, which can mean either witch or hag.

French peasants recounted how a woodcutter who chopped down the Marriage Oak, where vows used to be exchanged, died soon afterwards. There used to be a woods near Cuse with a dozen ancient trees known as the Blessed Oaks. Processions and pilgrimages and dances were held under these trees. The government had them cut down around 1832. The women of the community predicted misfortune and observed that harvests declined after the Blessed Oaks were destroyed. [Sebillot, I, 293]

Megalithic monuments were under the same divine protection. The Welsh told of great storms that rose to protect mounds, stone circles and other holy places. [Jones, 124] The Irish also predicted misfortune to anyone who damaged the ancient sites. [O Hogain, 190] When road-building engineers tried to lay a road through a fairy-rath near Ballinrobe, “the people rose almost in rebellion, and the course had to be changed. The farmers wouldn't cut down a tree or bush growing on the hill or preserve for anything.” [Wentz, 38] In more recent times, roads have been re-routed to avoid destroying trees. In 1960, the Irish government sent a team of archaeologists to do a preliminary survey of the Mound of Cruachan known as Medb's Tomb. Local farmers chased them off, with exhortations to “Let our Medb be,” or something along that line. The survey was called off. [Mike Walsh, Imbas listserv, 9/30/97]

Anyone who disturbed megalithic sites was believed to risk terrible misfortune. The Basques said that men who tried to dig for treasure under a dolmen at Irukutzeta were driven off by a monster that came at them out of the earth. [Barandiaran, 98] A long famine occurred after villagers on the lower Loire destroyed the stone houses of the beneficent *fées*, because people were bothered by singing during their full moon dances. [Sebillot I, 228-9]

A 19th century Frenchwoman was talked out of building a house on Mont Saint (“holymount”) by locals who considered it foolhardy to intrude on a faery sanctuary. It was well known that on full moons the *fées* used to emerge from the Creux des Fées dolmen to dance all night on Mont Saint. [Sebillot I, 228-9]

A sacred stone called the Pierre Chevettaz was said to protect the hamlet of Villarenger against



Ar wrach (witch) of Huelgoat, Bretagne

floods and fires. Villagers opposed attempts to move the stone, which was balanced on a small base. Six or seven cupules, connected with engraved lines, were cut into the rock. “Numerous crosses have been engraved to christianize the magic rock” in more recent times. [Thevenot, 192]

In Savoy, the stone statue of Notre Dame de la Vie had been venerated since Gaulish days. Sometime in the mid-1800s, some revisionist chopped off her “opulent chest,” leaving only traces. “Around the same time, perhaps, there was an attempt to place an object, such as a cross, on top of her head, where there is a deep excavation...” This meddling caused her face to split. A hole was driven through the rock and a pipe inserted to redirect the flowing water. [Thevenot, 194] Nevertheless, people continued to bring offerings for the Lady of Life into the 20th century. [For more information, see my 2012 article on Notre Dame de la Vie at <http://www.sourcememory.net/veleda/?p=522>]

The attempt to move “an ancient basin stone” from Allengrange in the Black Isle of Ross-shire had negative consequences. In 1832 an old man carried it home, and for the next three nights he was plagued by mysterious loud noises, until on the last night cattle bellowed, dogs howled, and a terrible voice thundered, “Put back the stone.” It took a relative dying of a fatal accident to get him to return the stone. Fifty years later, a proposal to take the stone to Inverness Museum met with an outcry. [Buchan, 267]

The Odin Stone stood north of the Standing Stones of Stenniss on Orkney Island. People left offerings of food or ale there, and carried out rites of healing and blessing. They passed children through a hole low in the stone. Agreements were sealed, marriages plighted by hands clasped through the stone while swearing an oath to Odin, which was universally held inviolable. A farmer from another place took down the stone in 1814 and used it to build a cowshed. The enraged locals tried to burn down his house several times. [Sigurd Towrie, “The Odin Stone,” www.stowrie.demon.co.uk/index.html]

Around 1770, French peasant men disguised as women attacked surveyors for the new landlord—which could only mean changes in use of the land. Soldiers were called, but the local women denied having anything to do with the attack, which they blamed on the *fayettes*. [Benoit, 77] The faeries sided with the oppressed in other cases. Cornish people said that the earth spirits came to the aid of mine laborers. A being called Cutty Soams liked to thrash cruel overseers and company men, and it was his special delight “to cut the traces or ‘soams’ by which the poor little assistant putters (sometimes girls) used then to be yoked to the wooden trams underground.” [Briggs, 85]

Humorous stories upheld the old Basque tradition of mocking the greedy. A stone slab on the Larrun heights had written on it, “It will not go hard for the one who turns me over.” Two youths once climbed up on a festival day and worked mightily to upend the stone, hoping to find a legendary treasure. At last they succeeded. Underneath they saw written: “It was well before; better now.” [Barandiarán, 98-9]

The Vestigial Goddess

The veneration of Befana continued in modern Italy. She was pictured as a thin old peasant woman who came down from the snowy mountains by night and entered houses through the chimney to leave gifts for children—or coal for those who misbehaved. Befana was honored with revelry on January 6, when villagers carried her image in procession, singing invocations. One of these songs, called **la befanata**, was sung by children, to whom she brought gifts. In some places people filled the image of Befana with oranges and candy; broken open like a piñata, it sent the children scrambling. [P. Toschi, *Tradizioni popolari italiane*, 1959, in C.S. McKenzie, Matrix, Dec 1987, 7]

Frau Holle survived in tales gathered by nineteenth century folklorists, even with the alterations and distortions that we know of today. Grimms' fairy tales preserve positive images of the Old Goddess as a blessing goddess of abundance and fateful spinner. These tales were rooted deeply enough to survive even the gynocide of the burnings. They also reflect the economic reality of poor girls and women being forced to spin for the support of their families. Spinning had fallen from a sacrament of the Fates to a

tedious necessity in a narrowing field of female occupations.

Some tales redefined the goddess who flies abroad on the winter-nights as a female rebel. Frau Gauden and her twentyfour daughters loved to hunt, and boldly declared that they would rather hunt than go to heaven. They were doomed for their impiety; the daughters turned into hounds, some pulling Gauden's cart as it went up into the sky until judgement day. They are said to be abroad during the Twölven (Winternights festival) driving through villages, and wherever an outside door is open, one of frau Gauden's dogs enters. He cannot be gotten rid of, whines all night long, and brings sickness and misfortune to the house until the next Ember season. So people took care to keep their outside doors locked after nightfall during the holiday. People at Semmerin said that a wisewoman counseled the changeling-banishing ritual of brewing beer in an eggshell to banish this hound. When this was done, the dog repeated the classic changeling's verse of astonishmen, and disappeared. [Grimm, 925-27]



Crowned with candles for the winter holidays, Frau Berchta brings fruits and gifts. Alsace-Lorraine.

Traces survived of rituals in honor of the Old Goddess. In one highland Franconian village, a boy was dressed in a cowhide to impersonate Iron Berta. Carrying a bell, he handed out nuts and apples to good children but thrashed bad ones. [Grimm, 1370] In Nürnberg they carried around images of Hell, a ship, and the Venusberg during the Schönbart-Running. [Grimm, 1366]

South Germans said that Perchta, queen of the *heimchen*, lived in the fertile valley of the Saale river. (The *heimchen* were the spirits of babies who died unbaptized, and thus came under the protection of the pagan goddess.) She worked underground with her plough, while her *heimchen* watered the fields. "At last the people fell out with her, and she determined to quit the country." On Perchta's Eve, the ferryman at Altar got word to be ready late at night. When he reached the riverbank, a tall, stately lady surrounded by crying children demanded that he ferry them to the other side. She got into the barge, the little

heimchen dragging in a plough and other tools and wailing that they had to leave that beautiful place. Perchta made the boatman cross again to get the rest of the children. All the while she was mending the plough, and she gave him the chips as her fare. Annoyed, he took only three, and tossed them aside; but by morning he found that they had turned to gold. [Grimm, 276]

Berchta devolved into a bugaboo to scare children. According to Grimm she was demonized more than Holle. This has to do with the geography of witch hunting: the south of Germany, land of Berchta, was ravaged more severely, and for longer, than the north, where Holle was still held in affection. But though Berchta's divinity had been degraded to demonhood, she remained a power acknowledged by peasant culture.

Upland Germans had to eat gruel and fish on Berthe's festival during the Twölven, just as they did on Catholic fast-days. They said that if they did not honor her with this observance, she would cut open their bellies, stuff them with straw, and sew them up

using a ploughshare for a needle and an iron chain for thread. [Grimm 273. Much the same is told of Frau Faste.] The German and Balkan custom of serving flour gruel or dumplings in the Old Spinner's

winter holiday seems to have archaic origins. Deep in central Asia, the Indo-European Tadjiks propitiate their spinner goddesses who oversee women's work with "various floury sacrifices." [Pocs, 26]

Many stories told of Perchta's anger because someone was spinning or merrymaking in the spinning room on Twelfth Night. She threw a bunch of empty spools into the room, ordering the offender to spin them full in an hour, when she would return. The spinster escaped her wrath by loading the spool with tow and covering it with a thin layer of spun flax, or other tricks. [Grimm, 274] Franconians told the same of Hölle: "On the high day comes the Hollefrau and throws in reels; whoever does not spin them full, she breaks their necks." [Brückner, in Grimm 269]

The Slavic *připolnitsa* was said to wring the necks of those who refused to answer her questions about flax. This demonized goddess gradually fell away. By the 19th century, peasants said she no longer appeared. [Grimm?]

In upper Bretagne la Diane is portrayed as a voracious beast. [Sebillot I, 327] A field in the Norman Bocage was haunted by an old spinner at the wheel, whose bobbin shone like hellfire. A spinning fairy in the Ardennes used to sit by the road and chase passers-by. Another, named Jeanne Malobe, appeared by night at Saint Suliac. She was always spinning and mumbling words which could not be made out. People saw her running along "shaking her distaff and pursuing the fantastic animals who made up the Wild Hunt." [Sebillot 1894: 24]



Berchta demonized: she still visits houses with her distaff, but has become a poor old witch and a terror who carries off children.

Surviving Holydays

Pagan festivals were kept vividly alive in Eastern Europe. A Russian scholar remarks, "Even in the

19th century there was a hidden peoples' calendar kept from the clergy." [Rybakov, 657] Among the major holidays were the winter festival Kolyada, with companies of singers going from house to house, Maslenitsa ("buttery one") in early spring, the Rusal'naia when women welcomed the *rusalky* back to the fields from the wilderness, and Kupalo ("showered one"), the Midsummer festival. [Ivanits, 6-11] Women went out on a hilltop or on a roof to raise their arms in an ancient invocatory gesture as they called forth Spring (*zaklinnanie vesny*). The peasantry adhered so loyally to Staraya Vyera, the Old Faith, that it was practiced in rural areas until the First World War.



Russian women's ritual gesture of calling in the Spring

Near 1700 a chronicler still reported that Earth was offered beer, milk and food at all meals cooked in Estonian homes. In the same period it was common for Latvians and Lithuanians to pour libations to Earth. Lithuanians also offered food to wooden goddesses hanging on firs or pines. [Matossian, M.K., "Vestiges,"121-3]

On major life occasions the Lithuanians set up wooden roofed poles adorned with suns, moons and stars, guarded by horses and snakes. Their purposes included bringing in good crops, marriage blessings, and curing illness. Rugiu Boba, the crone of the rye, was the last sheaf brought home. She was celebrated in the harvest festival and then kept until the following year's reaping. Reverence was still paid to Lada, the spring goddess, and the fateful Laima, though many of their traditions had bled over into the cult of Mary. [Gimbutas 1963: 192-95]

Halloween masks and lanterns, Yule logs, christmas trees, Easter eggs, braided festival loaves, Maypoles, Groundhog's Day: all are survivals of pagan customs that the church could not stamp out. Many localities kept up the Midsummer bonfires, and *les bonnes herbes de la Saint Jean* retained their prestige as healing and protective specifics. [Brocard, 139] But female participation in the celebration was now stigmatized: "At Vienna, common

women, loose girls danced at the Midsummer fire." [Grimm, 1467]

Grimm recorded folk rituals linked to the Old Goddess, or to the memory of an ancient priestess who led the Bructerii against Rome: "The country-folk on the Lippe, like those about the Meisner, go into the Hollow Stone on Easter-day... they think of Veleda, as the Hessians do of Holda." [Grimm, 1306] Of course, Easter had been the holyday of the Germanic goddess of spring, dawn and eggs, long before it was amalgamated into the Christian Feast of the Resurrection.

Many local animist goddesses survived as saints, such as the Belgian saint Godeleva of the Marshes. She was buried in a sacred cave near Bruges, and her pond had healing power. "The festival of St Godeleva kept at Longuefort maintained even in the 18th century a character which led to a violent dispute between the populace and the church dignitaries, who were determined to put it down." Another disfavored festival was the Drunken Vespers of St Berlindis, who was known as a protector of the peasantry. [Eckenstein, 30-1, 24-5]

A great many churches in Bavaria and Tyrol sported images of the bearded virgin saint-and-marriage-resister Kummerniss. One was destroyed by a Franciscan friar in the early 1800s. The bishop of Augsburg had announced his desire to suppress her images and veneration, "but refrained from carrying out his intention, being afraid of the anger of the people." [Eckenstein, 37]

In rural Wales, Lammas celebrations survived into the mid-1800s. An old woman from Myddfai told John Rhys that she remembered "thousands and thousands of people visiting the Lake of the Little Fan on the first Sunday or Monday in August, and when she was young she often heard old men declare that at that time a commotion took place in the lake, and that its waters boiled, which was taken to herald the

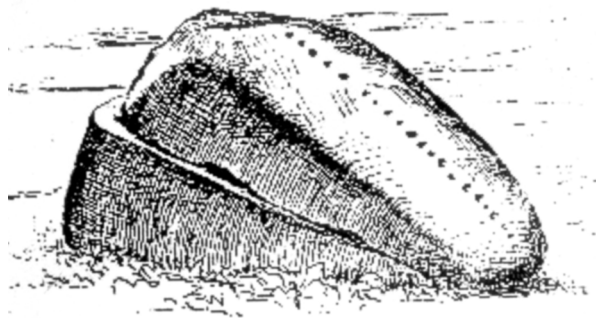
approach of the Lake Lady and her Oxen!” [Rhys, 15]

The Cloch-Daha (“Daghdha's stone”) was buried a couple of centuries ago in a last-ditch effort to suppress pagan rituals carried out in Ardmore. The rock was about two feet by eighteen inches, “hollowed into an oval trough-like shape, probably an old pagan *bullán* or rock-basin.” It had a hole in the center. Unmarried villagers celebrated a pagan custom with the Cloch Daha on Ash Wednesday. Into its center hole the young men put woven twigs, tied with long bunches of tow. Young women danced around the stone while spinning the tow, and afterwards rode through the village on logs pulled by the young men. [Wood-Martin 1895: 244]

The naked shiela-na-gigs met with opprobrium in modern times. Pressure increased to destroy these “idols,” or at the least, to neutralize and hide them. At Llandrinddod Wells in Wales, a “very witch-like figure of a shiela” was marked with a cross and buried under the church floor. A Reverend Tyrrell buried a shiela at Lavey, and another was buried at Lusk in the early 1800s. In some places, like

Binstead Church, the people blocked attempts to remove the shielas. [Andersen, 11-13, 28-30]

Victorian “restorers” of the Kilpeck church in Herefordshire took out some of the erotic stones. The shiela at Dowth Old Church was subjected to destructive hacking. Other defacements were inflicted on the shiela at Bilton, Yorkshire, and on a “Witch's Stone” on an Irish bridge at Clonlara. [Ibid, 32, 27-8] Another Witches’ Stone, grooved with 24 cupules lay on the earth at Ratho near Edinburgh. It was worn



Witches’ Stone, Ratho, Scotland

smooth by women’s custom of sliding down the stone in hopes of conceiving. It was destroyed around 1919.

[<https://megalithix.wordpress.com/2012/02/15/witches-stone/>]

Traces of a belief in reincarnation persisted in Bretagne, Wales, Ireland and the Scottish highlands, as Evans-Wentz documented. A Welsh minister told him that his own father spoke of an old Cardiganshire belief that humans used to exist on the moon in the world of middle light. Their mother was the moon, Brenhines-y-nef, the goddess of heaven. [Evans-Wentz, 386-392]

Scots on Lewis isle offered nocturnal libations to the sea spirit into the 1700s: “Shony, I give you this cup of ale, hoping that you'll be so kind as to send us plenty of sea ware, for enriching our ground in the ensuing year.” They poured the liquid into the sea, went to the church to light candles, then went to the fields to drink ale, dance, and sing. [Briggs, 363]

The christianization of hoary folk traditions can be tracked. An old Welsh kenning for rainbow was Cader Cerridwen, “Seat of Cerridwen,” the old Goddess of the Cauldron. In early modern times, the name was changed to God's Chair. [Trevelyan, 41] Scandanavians called the three stars in Orion's belt Friggerok (Frigg’s Distaff); over time the name was changed to Mariärok. This name of Mary's Distaff was adopted in various places, though an old Slavic tradition named them *babini sctapi*: “Old Women's Staves.” [Grimm, 727]