



Introduction to Contemporary Witchcraft

Historical Influences and
Precursors

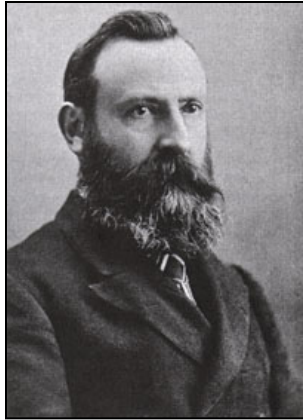


Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1888)



- Dr. William Westcott
- Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers
- The Isis-Urania Temple of the hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn
- Influenced by Rosicrucianism (Christian Rosenkreuze) and Freemasonry

Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn



Dr. William Westcott



Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers

- Great White Brotherhood (White as in Spiritual, not white as in caucasian!)
 - Three orders: Third (5 levels); Second (4 levels), Third (three levels – spirit beings only)
- 1. Belief in Correspondences
- 2. Trained Will (Willpower)
- 3. Astral Planes, Astral Entities

Aleister Crowley



- Initiated in 1898, rose rapidly through the ranks
- Left in 1900, conflict with Mathers
- Wrote The Book of the Law (1904)
- Aiwass (spirit guide)
- Law of Thelema
- Age of Horus
- Bad reputation (sex magic!)
- Died 1947

The Witchcult in Western Europe



- Margaret Murray (anthropologist)
- The Witchcult in Western Europe, (1921)
- Operative and Ritual Witchcraft
- Dianus/Janus
- Devil and Queen of Fairy
- Sabbats & Esbats
- Covens
- Fertility Rituals

Witchcult Ritual Sacrifices



- Murray says the witchcult had a variety of rituals –
 - Worship of god; dancing to increase fertility; rainmaking rituals to increase fertility of land; ritual sex; communal feasting; sacrifice.
- Blood Sacrifice
- Animal Sacrifice
- Child Sacrifice
- God Sacrifice

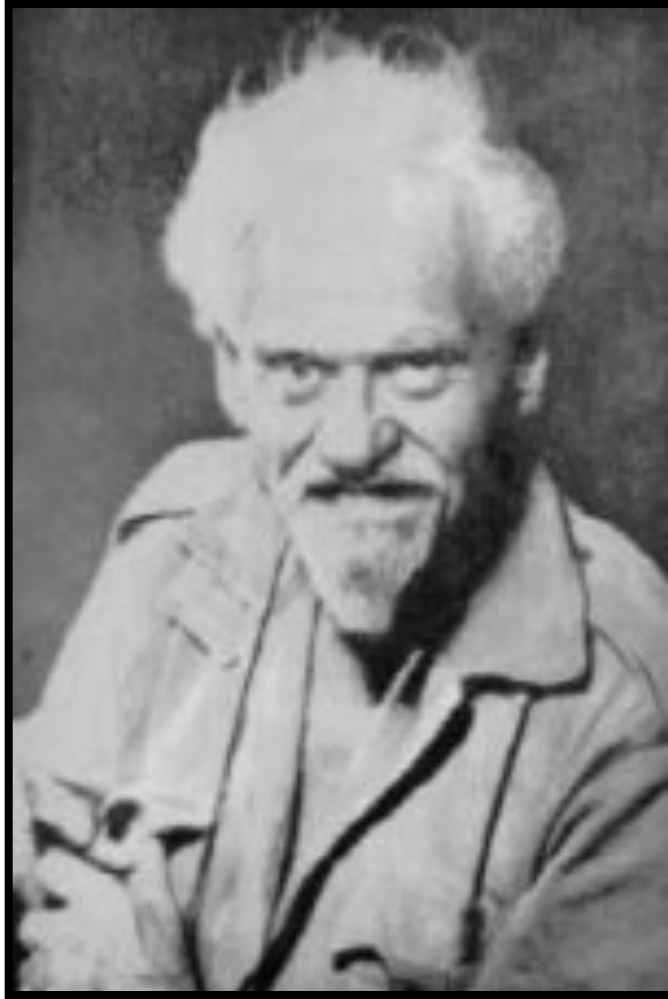
- Joan of Arc

Criticisms of Murray's Thesis



- Many are critical of Murray's thesis.
- Three main reasons:
- Unbelievable Stories
- Influence of Inquisitor's Manuals
 - Malleus Mallificarum (Sprenger & Kramer)
- Confessions under Torture

Gerald Gardner



- Born 1884
- New Forest Coven
- Meets “Dorothy Clutterbuck” 1936
- Initiated 1939
- Repeal of the Witchcraft Act (1951)
- Writes Witchcraft Today (1954)
- The Meaning of Witchcraft (1959)

Gardnerian Emphasis



- Goddess Oriented
- Skyclad worship
- 8 Seasonal Festivals
- The High Rite
- 3 Levels of Initiation:
 - Witch
 - High Priest or Priestess
 - Queen or Magus

The Origin Myth of Wicca



- Pan-European Goddess Religion
- Fertility, nature based spirituality
- Feminine aspect respected
- As Christianity spread, elements of this religion were incorporated or redefined by Christians, eg: Yule becomes Christmas, Horned God redefined as the Devil in Christianity



The Origin Myth of Wicca



- Old Religion kept alive in secret
- Multi-generational witches (unbroken lineage back to pre-Christian times)
- 8 Seasonal festivals
- Wiccan Rede

The Origin Myth of Wicca



- The Burning Times – 15th - 18th centuries
- Margaret Murray's thesis – that those killed for witchcraft really were witches
- Repeal of Witchcraft laws allowed some multi-generational witches to go public
- Modern witchcraft/wicca is therefore the direct inheritor of unbroken tradition
- True story? A symbolic story of origins?

The Impact of Historical Influences on broader witchcraft/pagan movement

- Very diverse movement, but also many common elements:
- Some commonalities stem from widespread influence of Golden Dawn & Crowley (hierarchical, correspondences, astral planes, human Will = magic, Law of Thelema)
- Others come from Murray - (sabbats, esbats, covens)
- Most can be traced to Gardner - not all Witches acknowledge debt to Gardner, but most do
 - Current debate among wiccan scholars - should ALL modern witchcraft be called “Gardnerian” to acknowledge importance of this historic source?
- Widespread influence of historic elements leads to common worldview, many common practices among contemporary Witches.