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Contemporary Witchcraft in Great Britain

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Contemporary Witchcraft in Great Britain

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Děkuji vedoucí mé bakalářské práce Mgr. Kamile Velkoborské Ph.D. za pomoc a podporu při zpracování.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this Bachelor's thesis is to present contemporary Witchcraft in Great Britain, primarily Wicca. It is not a common religion but little information is known to the general public because of religious movements like paganism. My aim is to acquaint the reader with the main characteristics and key terms of Wicca.

The thesis consists of six chapters further divided into subsections. The first chapter provides information about the primary objective of the study and outlines the contents of individual chapters.

In the second chapter of my thesis I describe main terms related to Wicca which may be helpful for the reader in order to better understand the context of my study.

Chapter three summarizes the history of this modern religion from the beginning in the Old Stone Age till present. Although my objective is contemporary Witchcraft, in my opinion the historical part plays an important role here that is why this chapter provides a great deal of information. Wicca is seen as an old religion in the new world.

The next chapter deals with the two main traditions in Wicca, the Alexandrian and Gardnerian tradition, where I describe the beginning of these traditions and provide a little information about their founders.

Chapter five is dedicated to the rites, habits and festivals of Wicca which is the most extensive part of my Bachelor's thesis. I focus especially on their festivals where I explain the main characteristic of each festival to the reader. This chapter also includes a detailed description of one ritual which is pursued on a festival to show the character of rituals performed by Wiccans.

The final part of the thesis is the most interesting one from my point of view. In this last part I comment on an interview I had with a British Wiccan and thereby acquired an insider's point of view. The whole interview is attached to my thesis and available in the appendix.

The reason why I chose contemporary Witchcraft as a topic for my Bachelor's thesis is because I am an atheist and I was always interested in religion and its philosophy. The second reason why I chose this topic is that in my opinion it is important to open our mind to new religious movements and the existence of Wicca also belongs to the general knowledge now because the number of Wiccans is still growing.

2 CONTEMPORARY WITCHCRAFT IN GREAT BRITAIN - WICCA

2.1 The definition of the term “Wicca”

Wicca is seen as contemporary witchcraft but more as an old religion in the modern world.

Specialized literature describes Wicca as “a predominantly Western movement whose followers practice witchcraft and nature worship and who see it as a religion based on pre-Christian traditions of northern and Western Europe.” [1]

Vivianne Crowley, an author, psychologist, and a High Priestess and teacher of the Wiccan religion, claimed that “Wicca is the religion of Witchcraft or Wisecraft which is at the forefront of the Pagan revival. It is a religion worshipping ancient Pagan deities. It is also a Mystery tradition to help us grow in understanding of ourselves and hence nearer to the Gods, a system for developing and using psychic and magical powers, and a body of natural lore which is often called natural magic.” [2]

Wicca is a modern religion, which was invented in the 20th century and it is possible to find different elements from other religions here. This means Wicca is eclectic and it consists of paganism, ritual magic, western esotericism and eastern traditions from India, where Chakras play an important role, and of kabbalistic elements from the Jewish religion. Wicca worships the God and the Goddess, it is a duotheistic religion. Paganism on the other hand is a polytheistic religion.

The rede of Wicca: “If it harms none, do what you will.” [3]

Wicca is divided into two types: Solitary Wicca or self-initiated Wicca and British traditional Wicca with a traditional initiation. Self-initiated Wiccans perform rituals alone and Wiccans initiated by someone or by a coven perform rituals mostly in their coven. The interviewee I have asked explained that a Wiccan can perform rituals on sabbats also alone, but the intensity is higher in a coven. It depends on the person

himself/herself which type they choose, which type is the best for them. Wiccans in general have a modern point of view and they are flexible in various fields regarding their beliefs.

2.2 Explication of the most important terms

2.2.1 Witchcraft, Witch

The meaning of the term “witch” seems to be clear for the majority of people. The common dictionary defines a witch as “a person, usually female, who practises or professes to practise magic or sorcery, esp black magic, or is believed to have dealings with the devil”. [4] It is obvious that the word “witch” has a predominantly negative meaning in public. But it is important not to forget, that the time is changing and the context of the word “witch” has changed, too. A witch can be a woman or a man and witches today tend to be young, attractive and congenial. This phenomenon is explained by many authors on contemporary witchcraft and Wicca, but it is also shown in movies and TV series like “Charmed”.

Today, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica online the term “witchcraft” is explained in three contexts: “the practice of magic or sorcery worldwide; the beliefs associated with the Western witch-hunts of the 14th to the 18th century; and varieties of the modern movement called Wicca”. [5]

The terms “witch” and “Wiccan” are connected to each other, but it is important to distinguish these terms because not every witch is a Wiccan.

2.2.2 Paganism, Pagan

A common dictionary describes *pagan* as “a member of a group professing a polytheistic religion or any religion other than Christianity, Judaism or Islam. Or a person without any religion; heathen”. [6] The word *pagan* originates from the Latin word *paganus* which means

countryman, dweller in the country. Pagans worship the nature and they are inspired by ancient religions from Europe, Egypt and Asia. Paganism today, also called Neopaganism includes many branches and Wicca is one of them. [7]

2.2.3 Esotericism

Esotericism is more difficult to define. Common dictionaries do not have enough information, but Henrik Bogdan, a historian of religions [8], asserts that “Esotericism can be described as a form of spirituality which stresses the importance of the individual’s quest for knowledge, or gnosis, of the divine aspect of existence”. [9]

It is necessary to perceive the esoteric world as a whole in which connections of mystical links exist.

2.2.4 Occultism

The Encyclopedia Britannica explains occultism as “various theories and practices involving a belief in and knowledge or use of supernatural forces or beings”. [10] Sometimes occultism is connected with evil and Satanism in public opinion, this claim is again inaccurate. The word occultism originates from the Latin term *occultus*, which means *hidden, secret*. This term tends to be used among scholars to denote specific developments in esotericism during the 19th century. Henrik Bogdan claims that “occultism, and in particular magical currents, represents a highly eclectic form of esotericism with strong emphasis on the experiential or practical aspects of esotericism. This practical orientation is made evident through a wide range of techniques aimed at causing altered states of consciousness.” [11] And these techniques include evocations and invocations of angels and demons, meditation, tarot cards, sexual magic, all these techniques are practical and this confirms, that occultism is not a matter of belief but a matter of practice. [12]

2.2.5 Magic, Magic and Witchcraft

Magic seems to have a close connection to esotericism, because magic has a similar view of the world. Kocku von Stuckrad [13] claims that “Magic seeks to intervene in the energetic field of reality through rituals, visualization or the mental concentration of one’s own will. Magic thus creates an operational realm for esotericism.” [14]

The common dictionary explains the term *magic* as “the secret power of appearing to make impossible things happen by saying special words or doing special things, the art of doing tricks that seem impossible in order to entertain people.” [15]

Aleister Crowley, a famous English occultist, made a clear clarification and division between the words, magic, illusion and tricks in order to entertain people. He claims that “magick” [16] is rather connected with science than with religion. Crowley described it in the year 1929 as “the art or science of causing change in conformity with will, the science of understanding oneself and one’s condition, the art of applying that understanding in action”. [17] In the 1940s he claimed “magic is the study and use of those forms of energy which are (a) subtler than the ordinary physical-mechanical types, (b) accessible to those who are *Initiates*”. [18]

Magic can be seen as the practical part of Wicca today which includes their structured ritual training.

2.2.6 Magic and Witchcraft

Magic and Witchcraft are connected to each other and they should not be understood as different aspects. Magicians are well educated and they try to perfect their spiritual skills and knowledge. They have different goals than witches have. Magicians try to achieve personal transformation or unity with godhead. Witches on the other hand have more practical goals like bringing different qualities into our lives (love, health, etc.).

To define these terms clear enough I used the table, which was created by Kamila Velkoborská in her study. [19]

Table 1: Magic and Witchcraft

Magic	Witchcraft
High magic	Low folk witchcraft
Formal, importance of intellect, rational consciousness, well planned	Less formal, emotionally charged, intuition, spontaneity, less predictable
A well elaborated system of training and initiations within a concrete occult order	Hereditary, training within the family or social group
Apollonian tradition: intellectual pursuit, stately ceremonies, conscious rational mind	Dionysian tradition: extatic vision, trance, individual consciousness and its merging into nature
Sun and light	Moon and the dark
Goal: perfection of ego, personal transformation, unity with godhead	Goal: work within and for the social group, within the religious frame of the social group

2.2.7 Coven

A coven is a small group of people practising witchcraft and rituals together. The most suitable size for a coven is a group of thirteen, but it is not precisely delimited, covens may be larger or smaller. Members of a coven, also called witches, meet on thirteen full moons and these meetings are called “Esbats”. Witches celebrate not only esbats, but also “Sabbats” and these are festivals of the “Wheel of the year”. Wiccans have special rituals for each sabbat. Covens either meet outdoors or in a temple, which they have created at home. [20]

2.2.8 High Priest, High Priestess

On Wiccan websites, the High Priestess is described as “a woman who leads a Coven or a Wiccan ritual. So she will obviously be very knowledgeable about Wicca / Witchcraft”. [21] The High Priest is described similar, the difference between them is only the gender and the High Priest is subordinate to the Priestess, but not in a way of diminishing. It is explained as “the way a lover serves the beloved”. [22] The role of leadership is not exactly clarified in Wicca. It is not possible to describe the High Priest and Priestess as “the one, who has the power”. To become a High Priest or Priestess it is necessary to learn more about ourselves, to accept challenges, to learn new skills and after this process, members of a coven automatically ask for advice and guidance. A High Priest and Priestess have a great deal of responsibility for the coven. They do not have to be only highly skilled in Wicca and Witchcraft, they also arrange their meetings for esbats and sabbats, for the rituals the High Priest and Priestess are necessary and they teach other members. [23]

2.2.9 The Goddess, the God

Wiccans worship the Great Goddess or also called Isis, Demeter, Aradia, Diana, Aphrodite, Bride or Bridget. According to Vivianne Crowley the various names of the Great Goddess are seen as the aspects of the Goddess in the whole world, “the Goddess who is present in all cultures at all times”. [24] The Goddess has three aspects: the Maiden or Virgin, the Great Mother and the Crone or Wise One. These three aspects represent the life cycle youth, marriage and death or the cycle of a woman pre-fertile, mother, post-fertile. An important symbol is the moon and its three phases waxing, full and waning that represents the Triple Goddess. [25] (see app.2, image 2, p 55)

Triple Goddess

Every aspect of the Goddess has its own specific meaning. The Maiden or Virgin does not mean non-sexual like many people would think, but Virgin in this case means “a woman not owned by or needing man”. [26] According to Morgana, an English writer and Wiccan, “the maiden, virgin phase is only the first stage of being a woman”. [27] It is the beginning of woman’s whole development. The Maiden may be emotionally and sexually frigid, but like the moon continues to become full, so does the Maiden, who transform into her next phase, the Mother. [28] (see app. 2, image 1, p 55)

The waxing moon and the Virgin are symbols for growing, but full moon and Mother symbolize the top of their power. The Mother has increased her qualities, especially fertility. “The full moon is symbolized by Woman in her most splendid and radiant form”. [29]

The Crone or Wise One is associated with the waning moon. The Crone symbolizes wisdom and she is prepared to “meet the divine”. In this phase, woman does not concentrate on fertility anymore, only on spirituality. Morgana claimed that “the Crone is the expression of the highest feminine wisdom”. [30]

2.2.10 The God

Wicca worships not only the Goddess, but also the God, it is a duotheistic religion as mentioned above. The God has a great deal of names e.g. Cernunnos, Lugh, Pan, Zeus and Osiris, but his most familiar name is the Horned God. The God represents many aspects, but not a triple deity like the Goddess. Horns are seen as a symbol for strength, power and potency and these also became talismans and magical amulets. The Horned God is also called the Lord of Death and resurrection. [31] (see app.2, image 3, p 56)

In Wicca it is not possible to search for a difference in connection with power or strength between the God and the Goddess. They are seen

as equal, like a couple, the God can not exist without his Goddess and vice versa.

3 HISTORY

Wicca has many sources in history although it is a new spiritual direction, also called religion. The historical part is important in this case, because history is seen as a source of inspiration for this modern movement.

3.1 The Old Stone Age

According to Vivianne Crowley, we have to look back to the Old Stone Age around 12,000 years ago onwards. [32] Diverse paintings on walls of caves were found by scientists and Crowley asserts: “These are paintings in glowing colours of the Horned God of the animals, God of the hunt and God of the hunted, who controlled the movements and fertility of the herds of deer, wild bison and larger, fiercer game, on which our ancestors depended”. [33] Not only animal paintings were found there, they also created symbols for pregnancy like bulging bellies, breasts and vaginas. All those symbols stood for the Mother, the Goddess, who brought fertility to the people. Just this fact tells us that Wicca is a religion, in which the main role is played by the Goddess. [34]

3.2 The New Stone Age

With the New Stone Age the idea of the Goddess and the God has changed. With the development of agriculture, the settlement and the realizing of time it was found that the Moon has an effect on people’s lives. Especially the women’s menstrual cycles and the earth, the growing of plants, fields and crops were noticed. The Moon commenced to be an important symbol which represents the female principle.

The moon has three aspects – waxing, full and waning. It is also possible to define the moon as woman’s life – pre-fertile, fertile, and post-fertile or the aspects of the Goddess – Virgin, Mother and Crone or Wise One representing the three main phases of life, youth, marriage and death. [35]

By the time people realized that not only the Goddess brought the life to plants, fields, crops, animals and people. It was found that there was another phenomenon that was needed – the man or the God. The woman was not impregnated by the moon, as people believed in the past, but by the man, the God. Now we have the Goddess and the God. [36]

3.3 The Iron Age

The next period is the era of the Celtic culture, by 500 BC, which had influenced Wicca a lot. The main role in this Celtic culture, in their religion, was played by Druids. Druids had an oral tradition and they believed in reincarnation. The Celts did not believe in evil, there was no hell and heaven, no sin and punishment. Everybody went to “Summerland” after death, where the rebirth commenced. People were not afraid of death, because rebirth was their assurance. [37]

The four major festivals of Wicca today: Samhain, Imbolg, Beltane and Lughnasadh originated from Celtic festivals. The first celebration Samhain (pronunciation Sow’in) or Halloween takes place on the last day of October. The traditional rite included slaughtering animals, which could not be kept through the winter, after slaughtering, their meat was salted to keep the tribe. [38]

The second one, Imbolg or Oimelc, also known as Candlemas was celebrated on the first day of February. The settlement of the Celts grew, finally they inhabited also the mountains in Scotland and Wales and they became dependent on sheep. Imbolg was the festival of the Goddess Bride and she made the land fertile for the coming year. Different plants could grow and animals could be born again. For example snowdrops seemed to be a sign that “the Goddess had walked the land”, contends Vivianne Crowley. [39]

The next celebration was Beltane in May. Bright fires were lit on hills all over the land. Fire was seen as a symbol for the waxing power of

the sun. The typical rite was blessing the cattle and driving them through the fire to clean their hides of parasites. [40]

The last common festival was Lughnasadh, the festival of the God of Light, a Celtic God of the sun and war, last evening of July and first day of August. This was a great celebration, in Wicca today this celebration is called Lammas. [41]

The Celts believed that women were great warriors and queens. Again we can recognize that the woman plays an important role in Wicca and a balance between the man and the woman was found.

Vivianne Crowley describes in her book *Wicca: A Comprehensive Guide to the Old Religion in the Modern World* that the Celts always believed that the Gods were worshipped best outdoors. People created separate altars which were later destroyed by Christian missionaries. [42]

Around the time of Christ there were tendencies to unify the many Gods and Goddesses into a trinity of Mother, Father and Child. By 305 BC the Egyptian Pharaoh Ptolemy I. established a new faith which should be acceptable to the Egyptians and the Greek. The new trinity of Gods was the Goddess Isis, her husband, the God Sarapis and their child Horus. [43] It was proved that worshipping of Isis existed not only in Egypt, but also in Britain. Isis the Goddess is immanent, transcendent and mysterious and exactly these attributes show the Goddess in Wicca. [44]

3.4 Paganism

Pagans and Wiccans of today divide former paganism into two types: Paganism of the temples and Paganism of the woods. Paganism of the temples had stately ceremonies in clean white robes, they focused on the conscious rational mind and they had symbols of light and sun. [45]

On the other hand Paganism of the woods was paganism of “ecstatic vision, trance and a loss of individual consciousness”. The main role was represented by the nature and on the contrary to Paganism of

the temples, Paganism of woods had rites of drumming and darkness and rites of the moon. They celebrated freedom rather than control by the state and they returned to nature. In Roman Times, Paganism of the woods was later associated with witchcraft, because the state disagreed with their practices and rites, with their mystery traditions. The devotees of Paganism of woods were accused of plotting against the state and they were imprisoned or executed. There were a few misunderstandings and misinterpretations in these two religious directions. Vivianne Crowley asserts “we must have both Sun and Moon, light and the dark, conscious and unconscious if we are to find our spiritual destiny.” [46] The Mediterranean world seemed to be somewhat confused about the religion, however a new religion commenced – Christianity.

3.5 The Church

Christianity was declared by the Roman Emperor Constantine to be the official religion of the Empire in the 4th century. [47] This new religion is seen by Wiccans of today as an intolerant masculine monotheism where other religions were not accepted in early years. The Church became the dominant religion of Europe after a period of a thousand years. Many Kings and Queens converted to Christianity, other religions have risen and Paganism almost disappeared. In Britain Paganism began to die in the 8th century because of the conversion of the Saxon Kings and bishops published a lot of books condemning those who practiced Paganism. Finally King Canute, Danish King of England, issued laws against Pagan traditions and rites in the 11th century. [48]

In the 10th century the Bishop of Verona in Italy complained that about one third of the population in the whole world worshipped the Goddess (Diana or Herodias) and from that moment on the absolute resistance against Paganism and other magical phenomena called “witchcraft” had begun. It is said that the penalties for witchcraft were milder in earlier years, but this had changed fast. In the 13th century

Witchcraft became a heresy, because witchcraft came to mean worshipping the devil. The Witch-hunt started when people began to be superstitious and every terrible or uncomfortable situation was believed to be caused by the Devil or his servants, the witches. Witches were now officially accused of undermining the Church and the state. [49]

Witch-hunting commenced in Germany in the 15th century. In the year 1484 Pope Innocent III. issued a paper, Papal Bull, denouncing Witchcraft. In 1486 Dominican priests Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger created the famous *Malleus Maleficarum* – Hammer of Witchcraft. [50] This work was first published in Germany in 1487. Its main purpose was to challenge all arguments against the existence of witchcraft and to instruct magistrates on how to identify, interrogate and convict witches. Vivianne Crowley says that this book was: "an official blueprint for torture and murder." [51] Hammer of Witchcraft was known all over the world and translated into many languages.

No English edition of Hammer of Witchcraft appeared until 1584 and more positive works about Witchcraft were published by the Englishman Reginald Scot – *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. [52] In Britain Witch-hunting was less popular. Their penalties were not as hard as in other countries, where burning at the stake and horrendous torture were common. In England witches were sentenced to death by hanging, drowning and psychological torture like sleep-deprivation were allowed but on the other hand physical torture was illegal. It was ascertained that about 110,000 persons were tried for witchcraft, but no more than 60,000 were executed. [53] In the 17th century Witch-hunting also came to America. The Puritan settlement in Salem is best known for their cruel acts. [54]

3.6 Modern Paganism

There are two main sources of inspiration in Wicca: paganism (the pre-Christian tradition, mentioned in chapters above) and the tradition of Western mysteries or i.e. Hermeticism. [55]

People began returning to paganism but in a different way in the 15th and 16th century. The original paganism was interrupted, ideas of magic were added and a new, modern paganism was created. Magic commenced to be important a great deal and many works about magic were found for e.g. *Corpus Hermeticum*, a core document of the Hermetic tradition, found and studied in 1450 although it is supposed to be written in the 1-4th century. [56] To show the character of a Hermetic work:

The Glory of all things is God, Godhead and Godly Nature. Source of the things that are, is God, who is both Mind and Nature – yea Matter, the Wisdom that reveals all things. Source [too] is Godhead – yea Nature, Energy, Necessity, and End, and Making–new–again. [57]

Picatrix, also one of the very first magical documents, of which the author is unknown and first signs of this work are from 1256. Picatrix contains all important topics of magic in theory and practice and also is known that it was the popular literature of the Crown prince Rudolf II. [58]

Another important work is *De Occulta Philosophia – On Occult Philosophy* written by Cornelius Agrippa, a German magician, occult writer, theologian, astrologer, and alchemist, in 1531. These writings contain opinions about astrology, divination, occultism, the runes, the tarot and magical correspondences. [59]

Since the time these works were published the supernatural was considered by a part of population as not dealing with the devil but it started to be understood as something based on natural psychic gifts in the 16th century. Magical ideas grew faster and the Church fought and lost battles in stopping these developments. The time began to change and so did the people and their opinions.

The killing of magicians and witches had almost stopped and it seemed that Giordano Bruno would be one of the last. He had experience with the supernatural already in his childhood. Giordano Bruno agreed with the pagan view: the divine is in nature. He was arrested several times and fled to different countries because of his beliefs. He wanted to form a new religion which would overthrow the corruption of the Christianity. On 17 February 1600 Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for his beliefs. [60]

In the 18th century different magicians commenced to band together in magical societies (Martinists, Illuminati, Rosicrucians). Their magical practices were secret but their existence was not. For the first time ever magic was taught. [61]

The most important movement in Wiccan history was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn which influenced Wicca a great deal.

3.7 The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

The Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn was a magical order, which was active in Britain in the end of the 19th century and it was known as the highlight of the British Rosicrucian movement. The Golden Dawn was a secret order and not every person had the opportunity to be involved. Members of the Golden Dawn ensured the secrecy with rituals of initiation, which candidates had to pass.

The rituals of initiation that the order used are of incalculable importance for the subsequent development of Western esoteric rituals of initiation. Through the elaborate rituals of initiation the candidates were exposed to a composite form of Western esotericism, which is termed *Occultism* by scholars. The foremost characteristic of Occultism is its composite nature, that is, the belief that a wide variety of phenomena are linked together, and further, that these phenomena to a certain extent are explanatory of each other. [62]

There were kept all classic hermetic studies, *kabbalah* and features of occult or esoteric masonry. In the rituals of the Golden Dawn there are

references to alchemy, astrology, Tarot, kabbalah, geomancy and ritual magic. [63]

The goal of each candidate was to achieve a higher degree in the Order. There were ten degrees and before they were admitted to a higher degree they had to become competent in a wide range of esoteric practices and they had to learn the symbolism and technicalities of alchemy, astrology, Tarot and kabbalah. [64]

Every degree and all these teachings were part of a coherent whole, a precise, simple structure of the kabbalistic Tree of Life. (see app.2, image 4, p 56)

At the core of the initiatory system of the Golden Dawn lies the Tree of Life with its ten spheres or *Sephiroths* and twenty-two connecting paths. The degrees were connected individually to a certain *Sephira* and the candidate symbolically journeyed from the lowest degree to the highest one. [65]

To these *Sephiroths* the degrees mentioned above are adequately attributed.

“It is this connection to the Tree of Life that makes the initiatory system of the Golden Dawn unique in the sense that it was the first of its kind and marks the beginning of a new trend in Western esotericism.” [66]

The Golden Dawn added new, important information to Wicca and inspired the Wicca of today a great deal.

3.7.1 The History of the Golden Dawn

The Legend of the development of the Golden Dawn commenced with the establishment of Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRiA) by T.W. Little (1840-1878). On February 12, 1888, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was officially created by W.W. Westcott, S. L. Mathers, and Dr. W. R. Woodman, Supreme Magus of the SRiA. [67] On March 1, 1888, Westcott, Mathers and Woodman opened the Isis-Urania Temple in London, where hermetic students of the Golden Dawn were taught and

where the members practiced their rituals. In less than a year about sixty new members joined the Order, new temples were opened in Britain. [68]

The Order of the Golden Dawn bloomed but since Dr. Woodman died and Mathers became the head of the Order, everything had changed and the activity of the Order fell. Aleister Crowley [69], an influential English occultist, took advantage of this crisis and met Mathers in 1897. Crowley became a member immediately in 1898 and a friend of Mathers. Since 1901 the order split into smaller groups (e.g. Stella Matutina) and also Crowley set a new order in 1907 the Astrum Argentum. [70]

The Order of the Golden Dawn left a remarkable estate for all branches of the occult esotericism: The Keys of Solomon examined by Mathers and his translation of The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage. And magical rituals and operations were enriched by kabbalistic elements which were originally from the Jewish religion. [71]

4 THE TWO MAIN TRADITIONS IN WICCA

4.1 Gardnerian Wicca

Although Wicca originates from ancient traditions the traditional British Wicca was established in the 20th century in Britain by Gerald Gardner. (see app.2, image 5, p 57)

Gerald B. Gardner (1884-1964), an educated folklorist and *occultist*, launched British traditional Wicca in the 1950s. He claimed that he was initiated into a *coven* of New Forest witches in 1939 by Dorothy Clutterbuck, a member of the New Forest coven of witches, but she never confirmed to be a witch in public. All these secrets were published by Gerald Gardner after her death in 1951. [72]

Gardner wanted to make Wicca available for more people and he caught the public's attention through his two books *Witchcraft Today* published in 1954 and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* published in 1959. [73]

In these books Gardner claimed that "witchcraft was a pagan, pre-Christian religion that had survived through the centuries as a secret tradition, despite efforts of the church to destroy it during the witch trials in the 16th and 17th centuries". [74] He had different ideas from other witches at that time, the other witches wanted to keep the craft secret and closed, Gardner on the contrary wanted to publish this new movement because his opinion was that Wicca could fill the spiritual and religious needs of many people so he published the books. [75]

According to Gardner the religious tradition of witchcraft is based on two deities: a goddess and a horned god. Fertility worship and magical rituals were practiced. [76] Gardner found a religion which has still a rest of the traditional village Wise-craft with pagan traditions. [77] Gardner's religion is based on seasonal cycle, out of doors, natural, using the Wise-craft of the ancestors and worshipping the god and the goddess.

Three major strands of belief and practice had merged: ecstatic and shamanistic practices of Paganism of the woods, Paganism of the temple, and magic. In the 20th century the word Witchcraft had come to mean not just a particular form of magic using incantations and spells, but a whole system of religious philosophy and belief. [78]

Classical pagan mysteries, ritual magic, paganism of Rome and Greece, the knowledge of Western Esotericism and religious traditions from India, all this transformed Wicca from an old religion into a modern one, the religion of the 21st century. [79]

Witches are organized in small groups called covens, these are secret and new members are admitted only through rituals of initiation, which were used by magical societies such as the Rosicrucians and these rites have its origin in the old Egypt (rites of Isis). [80] Gardner admitted members into his coven and thanks to his publicity Wicca became known all over Britain. A great deal of new members joined his coven and were initiated by Gardner himself and other covens were established. Gardnerian witches became one of the major branches of Wicca. In 1963 Gerald Gardner initiated Raymond Buckland, an English American writer on the subject of Wicca and a High Priest, who then spread Wicca and its teaching in America. [81] After Gardner's death 1964 some of Gardner's initiated witches got leading positions in the witchcraft movement. [82]

4.2 Alexandrian Wicca

Alex Sanders (1926-1988) was an English occultist and High Priest in the religion of Wicca, responsible for founding the tradition of Alexandrian Wicca during the 1960s. He claimed that he was initiated into witchcraft by his grandmother, a lady called Mary Bibby from Bethesda in North Wales, at an early age. According to the book *King of the Witches: The World of Alex Sanders* he was seven years old when he went to his grandmother's house and found her naked in a circle of clothes and other things, practising magic. She told him he must never tell

anyone and to make sure she initiated him. He had to take off his clothes, kneel down and with a small, sickle-shaped knife she cut him on his scrotum. [83] His grandmother told him: “You're one of us now, and all the power of heaven and earth will strike you if you break your promise. I'll teach you things you never heard of, how to make magic and see the future.” [84]

In Sanders' opinion, he was the one, who represented the genuine witchcraft, not Gardner. Sanders called himself The King of the Witches. [85] He claimed: “When the *News of the World* got on to me – trying to do an exposé – my boast of power suddenly started to work. And in actual fact I became the King of the Witches. And I thought if I am going to get persecuted then I might as well *die* like a king. And I have kept that image in my mind.” [86] In 1961 he was initiated to a coven, a Gardnerian one. Sanders went to see Gerald Gardner to take *The Book of Shadows* to copy it. [87]

Doreen Valiente, an influential English Wiccan and also a High Priestess of one of Gardner's covens, asserts that in her point of view Sanders was not initiated by his grandmother like he said but by a Gardnerian Priestess. [88] There are different opinions about Sanders' initiation, he was seen as a typical “media” witch. Because of his conspicuous claims which he published in the media there were some controversies with the Gardnerian witches. After Gardner's death Sanders presented Wicca not only in Britain but also elsewhere in Europe. Sanders established his own tradition, the Alexandrian tradition. He set up own covens and their members went through initiation ceremonies by Alex Sanders and his wife Maxine. [89]

These two traditions, Gardnerian and Alexandrian, use almost the same ritual material. The differences between these two traditions are minor, especially in rituals of initiation, but the Alexandrians focus more on ritual magic than on folk paganism. [90] Both traditions spread to the

United States in the 1960s and 1970s. Here, the movement was much larger than in Britain. [91]

There were a few conflicts about the establishing of the first tradition but now it is seen as well known that Sanders' knowledge derived from Gardner and also his Book of Shadows was a Gardnerian one, "It is practically identical", contends Doreen Valiente. [92] (see app.2, image 6 – 8, p. 57-58)

5 RITES AND TRADITIONS

Modern witchcraft is seen as a fact. It is not just a hobby but like Janet and Stewart Farrar, authors of books on Wicca, wrote:

It is no longer an underground relic of which the scale, and even the existence, is disputed by anthropologists. It is the active religious practice of a substantial number of people. Wicca is both a religion and a Craft.[93]

Like any other religions, its purpose is to put the individuals and the group in harmony with the divine. As a Craft its purpose is to heal and achieve practical ends by psychic means, help people with their problems. [94] The two main functions of Wicca are to worship the Gods and to perform magic. Wicca has a nature-based attitude and is ritually expressed. Witches enjoy rituals, they fulfil and encourage them. Their rituals may be different from coven to coven according to their individual spirit and the traditions they were taught (e.g. Gardnerian tradition, Alexandrian tradition, Celtic, Dianic and so on). It depends on which they are based on. Wicca is an inclusivist religion, it has an inclusivist view of religion. They recognized that other traditions work too not only their chosen one.

There exists a framework which is common to all Wiccan paths: the Eight Sabbats (Festivals). These are key points in the natural year called Wheel of the year and it was already mentioned that Wicca is a nature-based religion. These Sabbats are celebrations, they could be also seen as acts of thanksgiving to the Gods. The magical working on the other hand takes place generally at thirteen Full Moon esbats when witches ask the Gods for help. "Sabbats frequently end with a feast. We eat and drink of the bounty of the Goddess and God to celebrate and honour what they have provided for us." [95]

The witches' Sabbats are eight:

Imbolg, 2nd February (also called Candlemas, Oimelc, Imbolc).

Spring Equinox, 21st March (Alban Eilir).

Bealtaine, 30th April (Beltane, May Eve, Walpurgis Night, Cyntefyn, Roodmass).

Midsummer, 22nd June (Summer Solstice, Alban Hefin).

Lughnasadh, 31st July (August Eve, Lammas Eve, Lady Day Eve).

Autumn Equinox, 21st September (Alban Elfed).

Samhain, 31st October (Halloween, All Hallows Eve, Calan Gaeaf).

Yule, 22nd December (Winter Solstice, Alban Arthan).

5.1 The Sabbats

Imbolg

This sabbat takes place on the 2nd February, it is a fire festival, but the emphasis is on light rather than fire. Imbolg should bring the spring back to the earth, time to banish the winter and it revives the year. The light is returning and strengthening against the darkness of the winter. An important symbol for this festival is the moon. The moon is the light symbol of the Goddess, because it has a triple aspect of Maid, Mother and Crone or it is also seen as enchantment, ripeness and wisdom. And Wiccans welcome the Goddess, who is renewed, reborn as the Maid. Lunar light is also seen for inspiration. Imbolg is a feast of Brigid (Brid, Brigante), a triple Muse-Goddess, who brings fertility. [96]

Spring Equinox

The celebration of this sabbat is on 21st March, it is a solar festival. Light and dark are in balance and it is a time of fertility, new life, balance and harmony. Rites are best performed at dawn, the time between light and dark. The Spring Equinox is seen as a typical seed time. Daffodils, tulips and crocuses are blooming and blossoms are appearing on trees.[97]

Bealtaine

Celebrated on 30th April, somewhere also on 1st May. It is the celebration of May Day. In the old tradition the greatest festivals were Bealtaine (the beginning of summer) and Samhain (beginning of winter). There are two themes: fertility and fire. On Bealtaine the Great Father impregnates the Great Mother. A typical symbol is the maypole which represents a phallus, an erect penis, it is a phallic symbol, which stands for the reproducing force of nature. Bealtaine is a festival of sexuality and fertility.

The next theme is fire, especially the Bel-fire, the fire of a Celtic God Bel, God of the light with sun-like qualities. The Bel-fires were lit on hilltops to celebrate the return of life and fertility to the world. In early years people were used to jump over these fires, young men and women for a husband or wife, a pregnant woman jumped to have a safe delivery and cattle was driven through its ashes to have a safe milk-yield. On 1st May, cattle was taken off to the summer pastures till October (Samhain), this custom is still used in the Alps on the same dates. [98]

Midsummer

Midsummer is celebrated on 22nd June, it is a quite new celebration, because it was added later by Gerald B. Gardner and imported from the Middle East. The Sun-God is now the highest, brightest and his day at its longest. Witches invoke the Sun-God to “put to flight the powers of darkness” and bring fertility to the land again. Flowers are in bloom and this feature is seen as sexual maturity, they are ready for pollination. People are active and strong, their energy is at the top. Midsummer is the peak of light and warmth. In some traditions it could be seen as a battle of powers between light and dark, between the Oak King and the Holly King. The Oak King is the ruler of the year from winter till summer and the Holly King from summer till winter, so the Oak King is defeated by the Holly King on Midsummer. [99]

Lughnasadh

This sabbat takes place on 31st July or 1st August, it is the first harvest festival, named after the Celtic God Lugh. Lughnasadh is the season of harvest to recognize that summer is coming to an end, autumn starts and it is time to pluck ripe apples, grapes and early grain. It is the time of the fullness of life and it could be seen as a celebration of the bountiful earth and as a thanksgiving to the Goddess for her plentiful harvest. [100]

Autumn Equinox

Celebrated on 21st September, second harvest festival, completion of the harvest. Making wine from the rest of the fruit is typical. It is time to be satisfied with the work which was done during summer, time to reap the benefits. Important is the acknowledgement of the waning power of the sun and the waxing power of the dark. Autumn Equinox is also the time of equilibrium, day and night are equal. [101]

Samhain

Takes place on 31st October, also known as Halloween, it is a death festival.

The leaves are falling from the trees, the earth prepares for sleep. This sabbat is to remember those who have died and honour them. On Samhain is the veil between the worlds the thinnest, so it is possible to contact the spirits of the dead. It is the time of propitiation, divination and communion with the dead, but also a feast, where Wiccans eat and drink. Samhain is the end of one cycle, but the beginning of another, the dark winter half of the year begins. This festival has its origin in the Pagan Celtic tradition. Herders led the cattle and sheep down from their summer pastures, all harvest must be gathered in and bonfires are light. Non-Wiccans also celebrate this festival, but they call it Halloween and Christians celebrated it as All Hallows' Eve. In the old tradition it was

common to slaughter animals, which could not be kept through the winter and the feast continued with celebrating in costumes, mostly costumes of animals. Today we know Halloween as a festival with pumpkin lanterns, costumes and going from house to house to collect sweets. [102]

Yule

Yule is celebrated on 22nd December, Winter Solstice, when the sun is at its southernmost point in the sky. On this day, Wiccans celebrate the return of the waxing sun, rebirth of the Sun-God. Now the Holly King, God of the waning year, is defeated by the Oak King, God of the waxing year. The Goddess who was Death-in-Life at Midsummer is at the moment Life-in-Death, the Queen of the cold darkness is re-fertilized and brings back light and warmth. Yule is the darkest time and longest night, but it is a turning point, a promise to return to the light. It is a celebration of bringing back the season of plenty. Similar to Christmas, it is common to have a fir tree, which can be decorated, but it can not be cut, it has to be alive, because this tree represents life, evergreen, everlasting life. On Yule, life triumphs over death. [103]

5.2 Description of ritual habits

Witches rather practice their rites outdoors and naked in nature, this is professionally called *skyclad*. According to Alex Sanders clothes are like a barrier. He claimed that: "We believe nothing should come between us and our god, that clothes are a form of deception or concealment, and that we must keep nothing from each other." [104] Working outdoors is not always possible for them. It depends on climate and also that not all covens have the access to private land and witches have to create a temple in their houses, which is quite frequent.

Wiccans always practice their rites in a sacred circle. The circle can be at any size which will be comfortable for the coven. The circle is not

exactly circular like the nature has not a precise form. Vivianne Crowley claimed that:

The circle is an archetypal symbol of wholeness that has been used for millennia as a sacred place for healing and refuge. The circle is said to exist between humankind and the Gods, between the astral world and the physical, between the psychological and the spiritual, in a space where those who are in the physical body can meet with non-physical forces in a safe and harmonious way. [105]

The circle is seen as a place of peace and after the setting and clearing of the circle, it is necessary to prepare the altar. The altar is placed in the circle in the north or at the centre facing north. Wiccans use north because it is seen as a sacred direction and the home of Gods. [106]

5.2.1 The altar

The altar could be a table, it is always decorated the same, but on sabbats there are special symbols for each sabbat added e.g. flowers. Here is a list of tools which should be present on the altar and beside it when Wiccans perform rituals. (see app.2, image 9 – 11, p. 59-60)

- a pentacle at the centre
- North candle behind the pentacle
- a pair of candles on each side, which represent the element of fire
- a goblet of red wine or mead
- a wand
- scourge of silken cords
- small bowl of water, which represents the element water
- small bowl with salt, which represents the earth
- the cords (red, white and blue, nine feet long)
- white-handled knife
- each witch's athame, it is a ceremonial dagger with double-edged blade and usually a black handle, it is a main ritual implement

- incense-burner, represents the air
- hand-bell
- dish of cakes or biscuits
- the sword in front of the altar on the floor or on the altar

After setting these subjects on the altar, there is a candle placed on the eastern, southern and western point of the circle. The East represents the Air, South the Fire, West the Water and North the Earth. A fifth spiritual element is created, the Ether or Spirit, at the centre of the circle. [107]

5.2.2 Book of Shadows

Every religion has its own book, a holy script, which has been the same from the past till the present, it is fixed. Wicca on the contrary is an oral religion. Covens only use The Book of Shadows, also called Book of Lights, Book of Light and Dark, which contains spells and all the rituals. This book is considered as the witch's magical diary and notebook combined. The Book of Shadows is passed to new initiates who must copy it by hand. Each witch adds then their own new spells or other material when they have learned more and discovered other spells or phenomena. [108]

Today witches can use The Book of Shadows in a form of a CD and all necessary material is kept on a personal computer. The Book should include the following information:

- The magical and occult laws: The magical and spiritual laws and if a witch belongs to a coven, then coven rules and coven laws are included.
- Magical and spiritual cosmology: Diagram of the realms and paths a Wiccan has to analyze and create a diary of their experiences within each realm.

- Magical Exercises: List of exercises and descriptions of working with Elements. Feelings should not be mentioned in this part.
- Rituals: this part of the Book contains descriptions of sabbats, circle casting and magical workings.
- Correspondence tables: This part is dedicated to correspondences which were discovered during exercises with Elements and during other magical working.

The Book of Shadows should be also present at a ritual. [109]

5.3 An example of a ritual

Bealtaine (30th April – 1st May)

This ritual is described in the Witches' Bible from Janet and Stewart Farrar, but after the interview with a Wiccan, I recognized that each coven can celebrate their rituals in a different way.

5.3.1 Preparation

The above mentioned tools are necessary for the rituals. On Bealtaine Wiccans place a cauldron in the centre of a circle with a burning candle inside it. This burning candle represents the Bel-fire. The altar is decorated with pieces of hawthorn and blackthorn. Female witches wear chaplets of these two combined. It is common for Wiccans to collect hawthorn and blackthorn on May Eve and apologize to each tree. Then a green scarf is placed next to the altar. Tapers are put close to the cauldron and the quantity depends on the number of members. The Witches' Bible claims that "as many wax tapers as there are people in the coven". [110] The last tool, cakes for consecration, should be placed in a bowl. [111]

5.3.2 The Ritual

Wiccans are used to pursue the Witches' Rune, a ring dance in a clockwise direction, and immediately after that, they spread around the

circle and keep clapping their hands. The High Priest use the before mentioned green scarf to throw it over the High Priestess and pull her to him, but she steps back from him. The High Priestess continues avoiding the High Priest with his scarf and other women from the coven help her, they step in his way. This process is repeated a few times and after that she finally allows him to capture her. The High Priest throws the green scarf over her head, pulls her to him, they kiss and he hands the scarf to another man of the coven. "This pursuit-game continues until every couple in the coven has taken part". [112] The green scarf is given back to the High Priest. This "game" begins again, the High Priest pursues the High Priestess, but it is slower compared to the previous one. This pursuing and eluding continues until the High Priestess stands between the cauldron and the altar. The High Priest finally captures her with the scarf and they again embrace and kiss. The High Priest drops the scarf and she releases him, he falls to his knees and lowers his head. A signal is given by the High Priestess – she spreads her hands and members of the coven stop clapping their hands. The High Priestess takes two women of the coven and places them next to the High Priest on each side. The three women put the green scarf mentioned above over his head like a shroud. Two men are called by the High Priestess to extinguish the two altar candles. The High Priestess with the rest of the coven kneel around the cauldron, but the High Priest keeps his position, he plays to be "dead". The High Priestess extinguishes the candle in the cauldron and then she says:

The Bel-fire is extinguished, and the Oak King is dead. He has embraced the Great Mother and died of his love; so has it been, year by year, since time began. Yet if the Oak King is dead-he who is the God of the Waxing Year-all is dead; the fields bear no crops, the trees bear no fruit, and the creatures of the Great Mother bear no young. What shall we do, therefore, that the Oak King may live again? [113]

The members of the coven answer:

“Re-kindle the Bel-fire!”

The High Priestess says:

“So mote it be.”

The High Priestess lights a taper from the Earth candle, kneels again at the cauldron and relights the candle in the cauldron, the Bel-fire.

Now she says: *“Take each of you a taper and light it from the Bel-fire.”*

The coven do so and now the two women mentioned above are instructed by the High Priestess to put off the scarf from the High Priest’s head and the two men have to relight the altar candles with their tapers.

The High Priestess declares: *“Come back to us, Oak King, that the land may be fruitful.”* and starts the invocation. She tries to invoke the God into the High Priest’s body. The God arises in his body and says:

I am a stag of seven tines;
 I am a wide flood on a plain;
 I am a wind on the deep waters;
 I am a shining tear of the sun;
 I am a hawk on a cliff;
 I am fair among flowers;
 I am a god who sets the head afire with smoke. [114]

Now the ring dance begins and every member carries his and her taper and they chant:

Oh, do not tell the Priest of our Art,
 Or he would call it a sin;
 But we shall be out in the woods all night;
 A-conjuring Summer in!
 And we bring you news by word of mouth
 For women, cattle and corn-
 Now is the Sun come up from the South
 With Oak, and Ash, and Thorn! [115]

They repeat the last sentence until the High Priestess extinguishes her taper and put it next to the cauldron. Every member has to do the same. After that the entire coven link their hands and circle faster and

finally every member has to jump over the cauldron with the Bel-fire when they are named by the High Priestess. When everybody has jumped, the High Priestess instructs them to sit down. After this whole ritual follows the feast where Wiccans eat, drink and relax. [116]

The Wiccan I have interviewed said that Wiccans love drama and games and they enjoy the rituals because all these rituals are connected with acting, drama and playing games.

6 INTERVIEW WITH A WICCAN

I used a semi-structured interview which means the interview is flexible and allows new questions unlike a structured interview in which questions are limited and fixed.

The interview was made on 9th March in Prague in a small café in the street Londýnská. The interviewee wished to remain in anonymity. She is a female in her thirties and she has lived with her partner in Prague for about eight or nine years. She is originally from Great Britain and had studied in Scotland. The interviewee was congenial and willing to answer all of my questions except one. The question was about her coven and she explained to me that a great deal of things connected with the coven and their practicing is secret.

She commenced with paganism, she claimed that “paganism was the beginning of all” and she had practiced paganism for ten years. Then she searched for a more structured training, in particular magical training and finally she came to Wicca. She has practiced Wicca for about three years now and joins a coven in Austria in Vienna.

The goal of this interview was to ascertain the insider’s point of view. For my study, it was necessary to obtain other information than only theory from specialized literature. During this interview it was discovered that Wicca is a flexible religion and it changes all the time. In comparison to Christianity and other monotheistic religions Wicca is open-minded. While in Christianity there are priests and their congregation, in Wicca everyone is a priest or priestess. If we imagine the typical picture of a church on a Sunday morning where the priest reads from the Bible and the congregation sits down and listens to him, in Wicca it is different. Every member plays his or her own role in the coven, everybody has to be active and Wiccans always connect with the divine themselves and to reach them they often use meditation or their rituals.

Wicca is also flexible in practice because every coven or individual may have different traditions or different ways to perform rituals. The

interviewee performs her rituals regularly with her coven or alone and she claimed that rituals are like games which fulfill them. She also recommended how people interested in Wicca can join a coven.

In fact I achieved my given goal of this interview. I had my own idea of Wicca as a way of working with ourselves, especially our mind or it is possible to claim that Wicca could be a kind of self-development and this interview confirmed it. The interviewee itself claimed that her personality has changed since she started to practice Wicca. (see app. 1, p 49)

7 CONCLUSION

The goal of this Bachelor's thesis was to present contemporary Witchcraft in Great Britain, especially Wicca, and its key features and to map the aspect of this modern religion.

I commenced with the main terms in this field and I continued with the historical part. I presented each important period in history which contributed to the development of this new movement. According to my exploration, Wicca seems to be a combination of Paganism and Magic and the greatest impact on British traditional Wicca had the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This order could be seen as a forerunner or model of Wicca today.

The two main traditions of Wicca were selected and described in the fourth chapter and it was discovered that they are similar to each other a great deal. Wicca is an open-minded religion and it is not a rule for Wiccans to use only one tradition, but they can use a combination of both traditions.

In chapter five I presented rites and traditions of Wicca including sabbats and a description of one ritual in detail. Although the information has been gathered from the Witches' Bible, it came to light that Wiccans perform their rituals as they want, on the basis of their own traditions.

In the end of this thesis I commented on an interview with a Wiccan and explained the collected information.

This Bachelor's thesis provides an outline on the new religion Wicca. The reader can use my exploration as an introduction to Wicca for a further study of the movement that is gaining more importance in English speaking countries.

The objective I was aiming to meet was successfully fulfilled. The main characteristics and the important ideas of Wicca are clearly defined because of the well-arranged structure and content of my thesis.

8 ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this thesis was to present main characteristics and key terms of contemporary Witchcraft, primarily the new movement Wicca. I listed essential terms connected with Wicca and their explanation. I also described significant periods in history of this religion because it is important to know the beginning of these ideas and the connections between them. An important part of my thesis comprises the description of Wiccan sabbats and rituals today. The secondary objective was to obtain the perspective of a Wiccan on the new religion by way of an interview, which was commented on in the last part of the Bachelor's thesis. It was confirmed that Wicca is really a modern religion that is gaining more and more members and is becoming more popular in public.

9 RÉSUMÉ

Hlavním cílem této práce bylo představit hlavní znaky a klíčové pojmy současného čarodějnictví, především nového hnutí Wicca. Vyjmenovala jsem podstatné termíny spojené s Wiccou a jejich vysvětlení. Popisovala jsem také významná období v historii tohoto náboženství, protože je důležité znát počátky těchto myšlenek a jejich spojitosti. Důležitou část práce tvoří popis Wiccanských svátků a rituálů v současnosti. Druhotným cílem bylo získat pohled Wiccana na nové náboženství prostřednictvím rozhovoru, který byl komentován v poslední části Bakalářské práce. Potvrdilo se, že Wicca je skutečně moderní náboženství, které si získává čím dál víc členů a je stále populárnější.

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12 APPENDIX 1

Chapter 6: Semi-structured interview with a Wiccan

The interview was made on 9th March 2012 in Prague in a small café in the street Londýnská. The interviewee wished to remain in anonymity. She is a young woman, she calls herself a Pagan and a Wiccan and she is a British citizen who lives now in Prague.

1) Could you tell me something about yourself?

“I am a teacher, I am with a partner for 7 years, I have been in the Czech Republic also for 8, 9 years. I teach literature, creative writing and linguistics at universities in Prague. In my free time I read and write. I like writing, I am writing a novel, and pagan activities like organizing pagan rituals and so on.”

2) Would you call yourself a Wiccan and since when?

“Yes, but I would call myself fundamentally a pagan and for me I would call myself a pagan who practices Wicca. Simply because I am also very interested in druidism and also different parts of Wicca. And I think that for some people it is easy to say just I am a Wiccan or I am a Druid. But other people think that lots of different parts make sense and for me I think that different parts together are the most important sometimes to make a lot of sense. So, yes I would say that I am a pagan but I would also say that I am a Wiccan. I define myself as a Wiccan for about three years.”

3) Why and how did you become a Wiccan?

“For 10 years I had been practising paganism. I was studying at a University in Scotland and I went to a summer school in California. There was a class on Greek mythology and the lecturer of the class was wonderful, he would speak for hours and hours about the Greek myth and

Greek religion. I was interested in pre-Christian religion and it really inspired me. And so when I went back to Scotland in my third year of University I knew that there was an active pagan society and I joined it and it took me a long time to decide because there were parts of it I was not sure about; hesitations and things. So that gave me the experience of paganism in Scotland and then I was in there for another year and then I moved to the Czech Republic. So then I started meeting the pagans and doing things in the Czech Republic. And about four years ago I realized that I am interested in a particular sort of maybe more structured training, magical training, meditations and things like that and also a lot of things were turning me towards Wicca. So I made contact with a group in Austria and I became a part of it. And from then I would call myself a Wiccan.”

4) Is there a difference between designations Wiccan and witch?

“I think if you would ask a lot of people you would get a lot of very different answers to that. Wicca as I practice it which is British traditional Wicca, began in its current form by Gerald Gardner and it is a practice of contemporary witchcraft. The word “witch” is completely indefinable. You have people in America who say that every woman has a witch inside them. It is similar but it is a different way of understanding. You can think of witch in the fairy tale world as a very old woman or you can think witch as a woman with powers. Language is a very complex thing and lots of different people would say different things, but Wicca is a sort of initiatory tradition practiced all over Europe and America.”

5) Are you in a coven or are you a self-initiated witch?

“I am in a coven in Austria, in Vienna.”

6) How many members are in your coven? How many women, men?

“I can not answer this question, I am sorry.”

7) How long does a ritual take?

“That is hard to define. It really depends on the ritual and also once you do a ritual you are not really thinking about timing, sometimes we have no idea how long it takes because actually within the circle you are in a place outside of time. So time is not important.”

8) Which tradition do you use? The Alexandrian tradition or the Gardnerian one?

“Actually my coven is a combination of these two traditions.”

9) How many practising witches are there in Britain today?

“I know that sort of people who classify themselves as pagan. I think that there was something about 10 or 15 thousand pagans and maybe 40% would be Wiccans. Then there are lots of people who would say they are witches even they are not associated with Wicca or paganism. So, I think that is a very difficult thing to define. And also witchcraft carries with it the sense that it is not something that you announce publically. That is a thing that you do for yourself or for people around you, to help the people that you know, the people in your circles, but it would not be something that is relevant to the public.”

10) Does it cost something to join a coven?

“No, it is free. I suppose, there might be witchcraft groups that charge for initiation or for training, but within my tradition, traditional Wicca, it is free.”

11) How do people react when they find out, that you are a Wiccan?

“That is an interesting question. It depends, as I said generally to people I define myself as a pagan. And when it is relevant, when it is not relevant e.g. at work I know I would not mention it and with friends. I think people nowadays are very open, especially in circles that I move. People around me think that is an interesting thing. My family for example is very

supportive. I do not think I had any very negative reactions. Once I told a colleague about that I went to a pagan conference and she laughed.”

12) How much time do you devote to the cult?

“Well, it takes a lot of time, my aim is to meditate every day and I think it is important. So, meditation, reading and studying. And I personally spend a lot of time organizing public rituals with my partner. But these are things I like to do.”

13) Do you celebrate all sabbats?

“Yes, and it depends, I can practice rituals myself or I can celebrate with my coven.”

14) What intentions are most 'spells' worked with?

“That is a difficult question. For me for example the celebration of Bealtaine is a spell in itself, and it is a spell that connects me with the landscape, it connects me with the seasons, it connects me with the energies around me, so that in itself, the celebrating of the seasons, is a spell. If I did magic, it would normally be healing. You can also have a spell to make money, I have never done it, I would not be against it, but I have never done it. I have done a few spells to bring me material things but very rarely, maybe once or twice.”

15) What uses is witchcraft put to?

“Like I said it could be healing. And of course it is general for who ever. I think that there definitely are witches, I do not know about Wiccans, but witches who would do magic for money, e.g. somebody would pay them for a love spell.”

16) Do you help other people with your rites and magical practice?

“Yes. I definitely would help friends who came to me with problems. But I feel that I am not ready yet to for example advertise tarot reading because I am a practising witch for three years.”

17) Why were witches usually depicted as ugly old women with broomsticks?

“The word “witch” is something so massive that it is impossible for us to classify it. Today, when we say “witch” we could mean a hundred different things. It is interesting that a lot of people think that witches were persecuted by the Christians but actually witch persecution started in a time before Christianity and there was always an attitude. Always when there have been people working with magic there has always been a huge amount of suspicion towards them. And probably in some cases that suspicion was fair. Some people worked with magic and they worked with it in a negative way. And in some cases it was simply jealousy or suspicion. And of course people are suspicious of things they do not know.”

18) To whom can people apply for membership, if they want to be a Wiccan? How can we contact Wiccans if they are secret?

“It really depends how or where or why or what kind of system they want to do. In Europe, the best organization for information is the Pagan Federation International because it basically creates and allows information and it gives addresses to contact. That is the main organization for public to connect to paganism. And in the last few months Pagan Federation has stopped functioning and the new Czech federation has taken its place called Česká Pohanská Společnost. And it performs a lot of similar functions as Pagan Federation. And if the person wants to join a coven then it would be a question of making contact with the coven

member and that probably would happen again through the pagan groups.”

19) Does a person who wants to join Wicca has to know something more about Wicca, more in detail?

“My coven recommends anybody who is interested to read Vivianne Crowley’s book on Wicca. And if they read that and they are interested in, that is enough.”

20) Many people think that Wicca is a sect, what do you think about it?

“Here we come to the question of the oral tradition, the question of the fact that a lot of the information in Wicca is not given until they are initiated. And it makes people suspicious and I have had a lot of conversation with people who say why is anything closed, it must be suspicion, there must be something to hide. And I actually think that, yes, sometimes if things are closed it is because there is something to hide but other times if things are closed, it allows a complete focus. And because Wicca is closed it is easy to confuse it with a sect but the secrecy takes an entirely different function, which is absolute focus, trust, you would trust all the people you are working with and that trust allows you to work on a very deep level. I have done a lot of public rituals, they are wonderful, I love them, but it is a different thing than working with the group.”

13 APPENDIX 2

Chapter 2.2.9: The Goddess, the God



Image 1: The Triple Goddess, from left (Maiden, Mother, Crone)

<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/UsefulNotes/Wicca?from=Main.Wicca>

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]

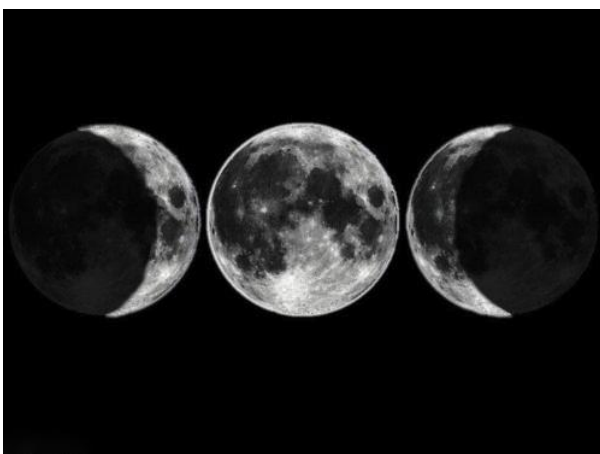


Image 2: The symbol of the Triple Goddess, the moon

<http://favim.com/image/138649/>

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]

Image 3: The Horned God

<https://sunandshield.wordpress.com>

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]



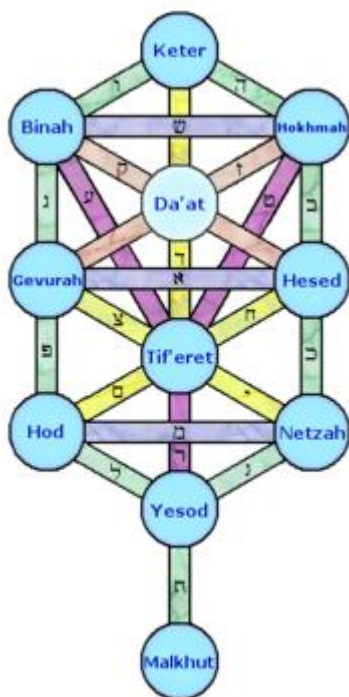
Chapter 3.7: The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

Image 4: The kabbalistic tree of life

[http://www.enotes.com/topic/Tree_of_life_%28](http://www.enotes.com/topic/Tree_of_life_%28Kabbalah%29)

[Kabbalah%29](http://www.enotes.com/topic/Tree_of_life_%28Kabbalah%29)

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]



Chapter 4.1: Gardnerian Wicca

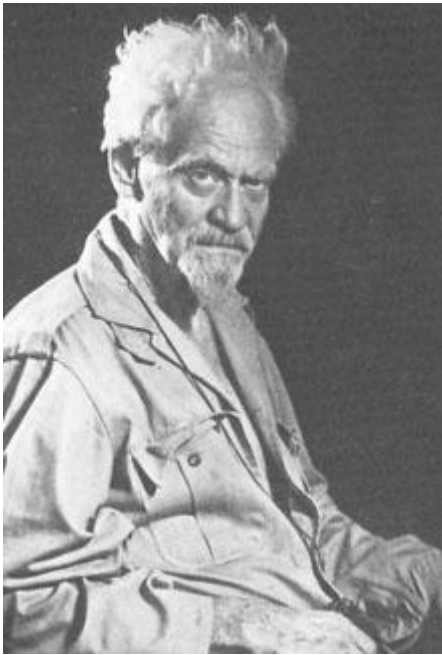


Image 5: Gerald B. Gardner

<http://www.ptmistleberger.com/essays-ii.php>

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]

Chapter 4.2: Alexandrian Wicca



Image 6: Maxine Sanders

<http://www.winterspells.com/1811/i>

nterview-with-the-queen-of-the-
witches-maxine-sanders/

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]

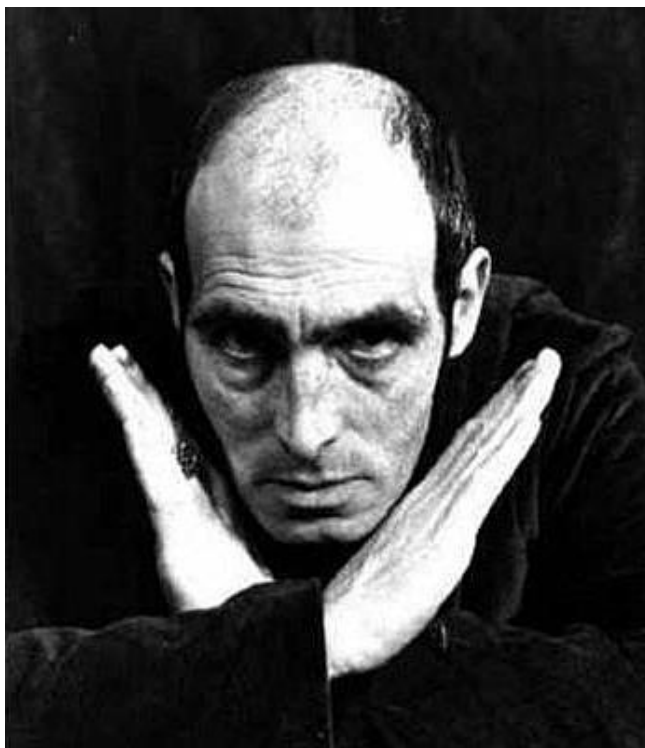


Image 7: Alex Sanders
<http://witchesworkshop.ning.com/forum/topics/alexandrian-wicca>
[Retrieved 4 April 2012]



Image 8: Alex Sanders and his wife Maxine
<http://moje-kniha-stinu.blog.cz/0903/alex-sanders>
[Retrieved 4 April 2012]

Chapter 5.2.1: The altar

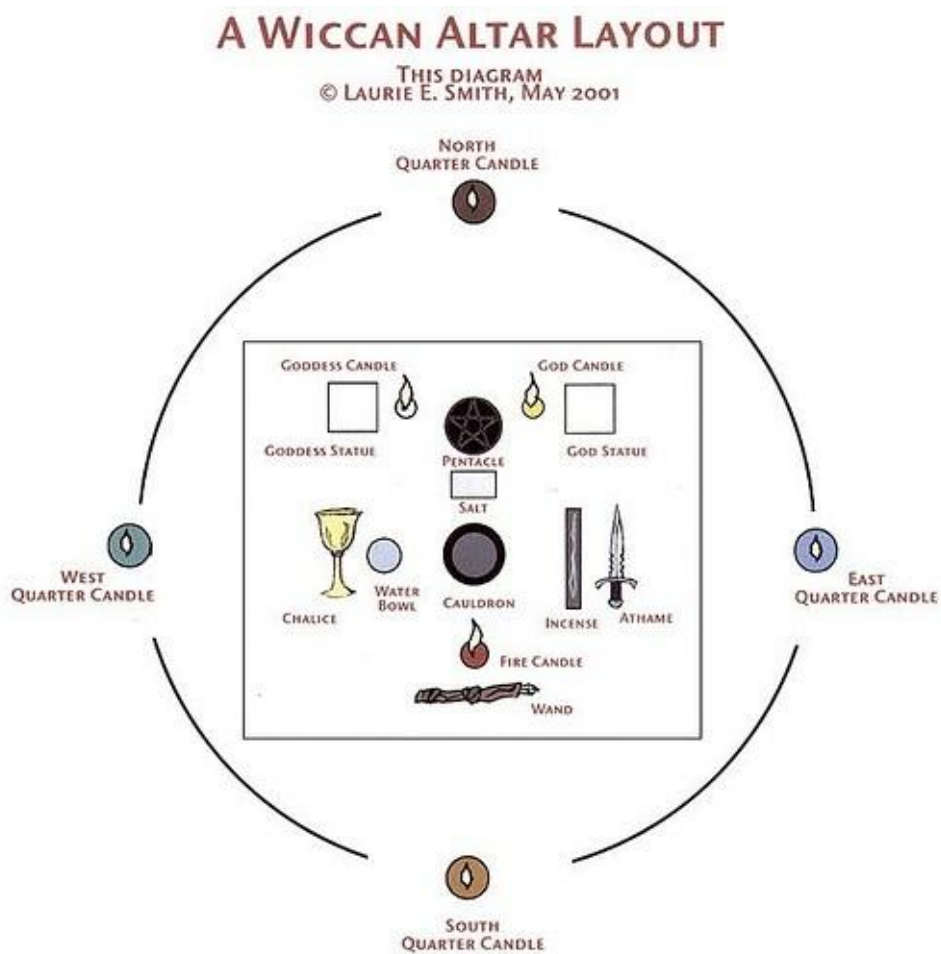


Image 9: The basic altar layout

www.flickr.com

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]

Image 10: The altar for a Wiccan ritual

<http://magickmaker.blogspot.com/>

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]



Image 11: The altar for a Wiccan ritual

www.silverspiral.org

[Retrieved 4 April 2012]

