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## Denominations

In discussing the forms and types of Paganism, it is necessary to use a flexible typology, because practitioners do not necessarily fall neatly into distinct categories. There are identifiable denominations in Paganism, named groups or traditions of Pagan practice, but there are also forms of practice that run across the denominations, such as eclectic and solitary practice. There are also overlapping religious movements and types of religious practice that generate cross-denominational forms of Pagan practice, such as shamanism, feminist spirituality, and New Age practices. Shamanism, feminist spirituality and Goddess religion exist as religious traditions in themselves, but they also overlap with Paganism as forms of Pagan practice. Some traditions discussed as denominations can also be seen as forms of practice, such as specific family traditions and reconstructionist traditions. The generally diverse and flexible structure of Paganism makes Pagan traditions difficult to categorize.

The majority of practitioners practice an eclectic form of Paganism. Eclectic forms of Paganism are traditions or practices that draw from multiple traditions, blending them into new forms, either for specific rituals or to create new Pagan denominations. A ritual can be eclectic, an individual's solitary practice can be eclectic, and a tradition can be eclectic but stable over time in an individual's practices or in group practices. An individual or group might, for example, construct a ritual on the basis of what feels right, taking inspiration from a folk practice described in Luisah Teish's *Jambalaya*, using a reproduction of a Cretan goddess figure, and playing Cuban drum music during the ritual, weaving multiple elements into a new synthesis. A solitary practitioner might develop relationships

with the goddess Hecate from the Greek pantheon, as well as Brigid from Celtic mythology, and consistently bring together elements of both cultures in all her/his ritual work. Some groups form an eclectic practice that develops into a denomination of Paganism, such as the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (discussed with other Witchcraft denominations below), and the Church of All Worlds.

The Church of All Worlds, known as CAW, is a pantheistic, often polytheistic eclectic denomination. Members are not necessarily Pagan, as local groups are completely autonomous, but many are. CAW practitioners share a common recognition of divinity as immanent, or within humans and the rest of nature. As discussed in chapter 7, CAW is modeled after the Church of All Worlds in the novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*, but Zell, Christie, and other early members of CAW also drew on other sources of inspiration. Despite Ayn Rand's antireligious stance, her novels *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* were also important influences in the formation of CAW, particularly in the context of creating an alternative to the strict upbringing that many experienced growing up in the 1950s. Other important sources were emerging research on ecology and ancient cultures, and Abraham Maslow's ideas about self-actualization.<sup>1</sup>

Many Pagans are solitary practitioners, meaning they practice their religion singly rather than in a group. As solitaries, they are not members of any particular group with an identifiable denomination, but they may feel an affinity for a particular tradition. They form a "hidden majority" of Pagans,<sup>2</sup> perhaps constituting up to 70 or 80 percent of practitioners, according to estimates made by an executive of a popular publisher of Pagan books<sup>3</sup> and Witchvox.com cofounder Fritz Jung.<sup>4</sup> Academics report a lower proportion of solitaries, but still more than 50 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Pagans choose solitary practice for a variety of reasons. Some are "in the broom closet" and do not want coworkers or neighbors to know they are Pagan. Others have not found a group to their liking, or are temporarily between groups. Some simply prefer a solitary practice. Solitaries may be in contact with their local Pagan community through friends but are not practicing together, or they may have contact with other Pagans through online communities (listservs, chat groups, and web rings) or through regional festivals. Solitaries are more likely than other practitioners to live in rural areas and small towns. They tend to be in their twenties and correspondingly single. They are also more likely than group practitioners to be heterosexual, and, according to at least one study, they are less likely to be politically active than group practitioners.<sup>6</sup>

The general acceptance within Paganism of solitary practice as a legitimate form of practice is perhaps structurally unique to Pagan religion,<sup>7</sup> but it may be less acceptable or common in some denominations of Paganism than in others. Wiccans appear to be more likely to value group

practice over solitary practice, with some practitioners viewing coven training as necessary to becoming “a *real* Witch.”<sup>8</sup> Practitioners in initiatory traditions in particular are more likely to regard solitary practice as inferior. The individualism of solitaires presents a challenge or resistance to the routinization and institutionalization of Paganism.<sup>9</sup> A solitary Witch can initiate her/himself by whatever means desired, but in an organized tradition like Gardnerian Wicca, a teaching coven must be found, and initiation must be sought through a predetermined and highly structured process. Solitaires do not have to agree with anyone about how to conduct a ritual, and they may have no interest in teaching others or in serving the larger Pagan community, whereas in group practice, practitioners generally learn from elders and develop group norms as a matter of course.

Paganism also takes on a number of forms of practice in its overlap with New Age spirituality, Goddess religion, feminist spirituality, and shamanism. Feminist spirituality can be regarded as a form of practice (feminist Paganism) and a denomination within Paganism, as with Dianic Witchcraft and the Reclaiming tradition, but feminist spirituality and Goddess religion are also movements that extend beyond Paganism. Paganism is interrelated with Goddess religion, feminist spirituality, and women’s spirituality more broadly through the common use of metaphors, images of deity as Goddess, and understandings of divinity as immanent in women’s bodies and in nature more generally. Practitioners emphasize the equality, and sometimes the superiority, of women.

Feminist spirituality spans a number of religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and others. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for example, is active in Christian feminist spirituality, as is Judith Plaskow in Jewish feminist spirituality. The Fellowship of Isis is an eclectic and pluralist Goddess group practicing feminist spirituality. They were founded in 1976 in Ireland and quickly became an international group. The Fellowship of Isis is not exclusively Pagan, but multifaith.<sup>10</sup> Like some other groups in Goddess religion, it is not restricted to women. Some men participate in Goddess religion and feminist spirituality, but not when it is characterized as “women’s spirituality,” a term that, ironically, is meant to be inclusive of non-feminist identified women. Goddess religion is sometimes seen as a type of women’s spirituality, because practitioners may or may not identify as feminist. Some practitioners of women’s spirituality do not use anthropomorphic metaphors such as “Goddess” for the divine, or do not perceive the Goddess as a person external to themselves. Whether feminist spirituality, Goddess religion, or Paganism is described as a subset of the others is often chosen based on what an author or speaker wants to emphasize.

Feminist spirituality began in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States, at about the same time on the east and west coasts. In

California, Z. Budapest coined the term in 1972.<sup>11</sup> In Massachusetts, Mary Daly called on women to form an “exodus community” in her 1971 sermon at Harvard Memorial Church, when she called on feminists to leave the church and create a new community outside patriarchal institutions. The feminist spirituality movement developed in a variety of small groups at about the same time. In some feminist groups, a spiritual dimension evolved over time: some consciousness-raising groups became spirituality groups and began doing ritual as well as holding discussions in circle. Some early Pagan women’s spirituality meetings might be described as a cross between Gardnerian ritual and a consciousness-raising group, as women shared their personal experiences sitting in a circle and brought spiritual practice into the group by creating a sense of sacred space.

Various groups using the acronym “WITCH” in the 1970s were originally wholly political in focus, but they picked up on the fact that the witch hunts had targeted women and that modern women were also oppressed, and they began to reclaim the word “witch” through feminist spirituality. Those in the women’s movement who desired a spiritual aspect to their politics encouraged each other to form covens and invent new traditions that valued women if they did not like what they found in existing Pagan groups, some of which used to be quite sexist and/or heterosexual. Some Pagans have been critical of practitioners of Goddess religion and feminist spirituality for their use and understanding of mythic history, particularly their ideas about matriarchal prehistory, but liberal feminism has largely permeated Paganism in North America.

Pagans have developed shamanic forms of Witchcraft, Druidry, and Heathenry, creating an overlap between Paganism and neo-shamanism. Pagans create shamanic forms of Wicca and Druidry through the work of writers such as Caitlín and John Matthews. In Heathenry, Jenny Blain, Robert Wallis, and Diana Paxson have developed shamanic forms of practice. “Shamanism” usually refers to indigenous religious practices for relating with spirits, the otherworld, or extraordinary reality. “Neo-shamanism” generally refers to contemporary practices inspired by, but not in continuity with, indigenous practices of shamanism. Shamanism is a category of religion created by academics, initially from reading reports of traders and travelers. Academics first identified shamanism with the Tungus people of Siberia, from whom they took the word “shaman.” Subsequently, it came to be associated with similar indigenous practices in other places. Western academics constructed the idea of “shamanism” initially from indigenous groups, and they continue to associate shamanism with indigenism, although such practices may be universal.<sup>12</sup>

Shamanism shares with Paganism a number of practices and beliefs, such as magic, trance, possession, and raising energy. Practices of both are

often directed toward healing, and both involve relationships with other-than-human persons. However, shamans usually undergo an initiation process quite different from that practiced in Pagan groups. For shamans, it is usually a severe experience of confrontation with one's mortality, often through illness or a trance experience of dismemberment. Paganism overlaps with shamanism primarily in the form of neo-shamanism rather than indigenous shamanism. It is labeled "neo" because it is reconstructionist rather than in continuity with indigenous practices.

Neo-shamanism is sometimes called "urban shamanism," usually in the context of universalized versions of shamanic traditions removed from their cultural origins,<sup>13</sup> such as Michael Harner's "core shamanism."<sup>14</sup> Indigenous critics of neo-shamans have called such practitioners "white shamans" and "plastic medicine men."<sup>15</sup> Neo-shamanism is sometimes "dismissed as nostalgic, and challenged as having reduced Shamanism to its lowest common denominators: essentially drumming, vision quests and Otherworld journeys. It is frequently marked by typically modern individualism, vague universalism and woolly psychologization."<sup>16</sup> However, some shamanic practitioners, particularly those who are reconstructionist Pagans, argue that they are practicing their own indigenous traditions in reviving traditions of their Saxon, Celtic, Norse, or Icelandic ancestors. In addition, some practitioners are quite nuanced in their understanding of how they are reconstructing traditions, and are politically aware of issues of appropriation.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the desires of many Pagan practitioners, Paganism also overlaps with New Age spirituality. "New Age" refers to a new era in human consciousness. It is sometimes associated with the "Age of Aquarius" as a post-Christian era. Aquarius is the sign following Pisces, taken in this context to represent Christianity, in the progression of the Zodiac (going backward in relation to the order of the birth signs in astrology). This progression of ages is a reinterpretation of the twelfth-century Joachim de Flores' division of history into the ages of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, corresponding, respectively, to the ages of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian New Testament, and the Holy Spirit. In the New Age interpretation, the three ages are changed to the ages of Aries (the Father), Pisces (the Son), and the New Age of Aquarius.<sup>18</sup>

New Age spirituality exhibits a tendency toward millenarianism and apocalypticism, or the belief in a coming inevitable cataclysmic change, with the end of the era of Pisces and the beginning of a New Age. This New Age is thought to be an age that will be less corporeal, and in which humans will ascend to a higher consciousness. New Age spirituality tends toward a dualistic understanding of matter and spirit, seeing the natural material world as an illusion or as somehow secondary to the spiritual (ethereal or astral). It tends to have a transcendental outlook, and, being

influenced by theosophy, it is more universalistic than Paganism, taking elements from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity.

New Age spirituality is a type of religious outlook that is found in a number of religious traditions, and is often not identified with any religion in particular. There are Buddhist, Christian, and Pagan New Age practitioners, for example. The New Age is not easily delimited because it has no identifiable religious institutions, and practitioners rarely identify themselves as New Agers. Arguably, "New Age" should be understood as an adjective rather than a noun, since it is not so much a movement as a set of tendencies or characteristics found in various religions and movements. Religious traditions can be examined in terms of to what extent or degree they can be described as New Age, rather than by classifying them as part of the New Age movement, which does not exist as a quantifiable entity.<sup>19</sup>

Some researchers present Witchcraft as a subculture of the New Age movement, or use "Witchcraft" and "New Age" interchangeably.<sup>20</sup> In categorizing Paganism with the New Age, some researchers inaccurately present Paganism as "world rejecting."<sup>21</sup> Pagans almost invariably see the divine as immanent within rather than transcendent of the natural world. Few Pagans believe in a radically transcendent deity or godhead.

Pagans often joke about the difference between New Age and Pagan events, saying that it can be summed up in two decimal points: if three dollars admits one to a Pagan workshop, a similar New Age workshop will cost three hundred dollars. Pagans tend to portray New Age practitioners as "fluffy bunnies," superficially playing with belief in angels, channeling, spirit helpers, and animal guides. Pagans suggest that New Agers focus on good, "white" energy, without recognition of the necessary roles and importance of death and darkness. Noting problems with the New Age use of such metaphors of white and light in terms of racism, Pagans tend to present New Agers as more concerned with personal development than Pagans are, at the expense of political and environmental awareness. Pagans suggest that the New Age focus on good energy as white light indicates a lack of depth and a failure to recognize one's shadow side. However, it is possible that Pagans themselves project what they dislike about their coreligionists onto New Agers in their presentation of New Agers as superficial practitioners who draw from too many, too diverse sources without awareness of issues of appropriation. The lack of people who identify as New Age practitioners is conspicuous.

Witchcraft can be seen as a form of practice within Paganism, but also as a group of denominations. Generically, practitioners refer to these traditions as "the Craft," a term that originally referred to Masonry, a Western mystery tradition that influenced some of the early forms of Witchcraft, notably Wicca. Practitioners of the Craft are called "Witches" or "Wiccans." Some of these practitioners wear a pentacle pendant or ring, a five-pointed

star inside a circle, as a marker of their religious identification, as some Christians wear a cross, and some Jews the Star of David. Witches form the largest portion of Pagan practitioners, but of these, not all are practitioners of Wicca. Wicca may be the most visible and largest denomination within Paganism, but counting practitioners is confounded by people meaning different things by "Wicca." In Britain, "Wicca" refers exclusively to Gardnerian and Alexandrian traditions, while in the United States it is often conflated with Witchcraft and Paganism more generally. Some call Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca "British Traditional Witchcraft," but in Britain this refers to family or hereditary traditions. Some practitioners use the label "Wicca" simply because they prefer it to "Witch."

Some who identify themselves as Wiccans regard initiated Wiccans as the most committed Pagans and suggest that only those trained in a coven are "real" Witches, or that Pagans who do not identify themselves as Witches are simply hiding their identity as Witches. This has led some researchers to report that Witches are more committed to their religion than other Pagans.<sup>22</sup> However, some Pagans see this attitude as domineering. Many reject the labels "Witch" and "Wiccan," to distance themselves either from what they see as the questionable history of Wicca, or from the fabricated association with heretics killed as "witches" in medieval times.

Witchcraft groups are organized into covens. These are usually small local groups with generally less than a dozen members, although outer-court groups may include many more people. Witchcraft has generally followed the basic form and structure of Gardnerian Wicca. Perhaps not all Witchcraft traditions are derived from Gardnerian Wicca, but all seem to be influenced by it in their use of the seasonal festival cycle and in the structure of individual rituals. Other Witchcraft traditions are not necessarily bi-theistic, as Wicca generally is.

The Gardnerian and Alexandrian denominations of Wicca are initiatory mystery traditions. Initiates are sworn to secrecy, taking an oath not to reveal the secrets of their initiation. Some Wiccans have criticized others for revealing oath-bound material, particularly for publishing versions of the *Book of Shadows*. Gardnerians and Alexandrians can be traced back to initiation by Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente, or Alex and Maxine Sanders, and sometimes both lineages, as in Algard traditions such as the Farrars' and the Wiccan Church of Canada. Mary Nesnick coined the term "Algard" to describe the tradition she formed through joint initiation in Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca.<sup>23</sup> A number of practitioners have been initiated in both traditions.

Gardnerian and Alexandrian groups maintain a hierarchy of status based on levels of initiation, lineage, how many practitioners one has initiated, and how many covens have hived off from one's group. "Hiving off" is the process of forming a "daughter" coven when enough new

people have been trained and initiated to require the formation of a separate group. Gardnerian and Alexandrian covens are traditionally said to be made up of between three and thirteen members, but more often they include between five and eight people. Sabbat celebrations open to the public may be much larger. There is no laity within the Gardnerian and Alexandrian traditions, but practitioners make distinctions between neophytes or novices, who are new students; first, second, and third degree initiates; high priests and priestesses (coven leaders); and “witch queens” (high priestesses who have a number of daughter covens).

Through the publication of how-to books on solitary practice and books supporting self-initiation, a variety of traditions have emerged within Wicca. All forms of Wicca, when distinguished from Paganism more generally, with the exception of some Dianic groups that self-identify as Wiccan, tend to be bitheistic, revering a Goddess and a God, sometimes called the “Lady” and the “Lord.” Individual covens often use more specific deity names, such as Cernunnos and Ceridwen, or Arianrhod and Lugh. Often the Goddess is elevated in importance, just as the high priestess is elevated in relation to the high priest. Wiccan groups emphasize balance of the sexes and sometimes require the polarity of male and female ritual partners. Wiccans typically meet at the esbats (based on the cycle of the moon, usually at the full moon, but sometimes at the dark of the moon) and at sabbats (the eight seasonal festivals).

Feri (or Faery) Witchcraft is a denomination started by Victor and Cora Anderson in the United States in the 1950s or 1960s, with possible antecedents as early as the 1920s. It began as a mixture of South American folk magic, Kabbalah, Haitian Vodou, and a shamanic interpretation of Hawaiian Huna traditions. There are a number of branches in the Feri tradition, some of which have been more heavily influenced by Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca than others. Feri claims a non-Gardnerian origin through Victor Anderson’s reported membership in a coven known as the Harpy coven in southern Oregon in the 1920s and 1930s. Anderson also often told a poetic story of his initiation in 1926 by a small African woman who told him he was a Witch.<sup>24</sup> He came upon her sitting nude in circle, surrounded by brass bowls of herbs. She initiated him through sex and told him the secrets of the tradition, and he then had a vision of the Horned God. Anderson indicates that he decided to start a coven many years later after reading Gardner’s *Witchcraft Today*.<sup>25</sup> This would have been in the 1950s, according to Cora Anderson’s memoir *Fifty Years in the Feri Tradition*, although Victor had initiated Cora by 1944, shortly after they were married.<sup>26</sup> Some of the later versions of the Feri tradition appear to have developed largely in conformity with Gardnerian Wicca, which some scholars suggest Anderson may have initially believed to be an authentic pagan survival, although Cora indicates that Victor thought



Gardner was wrong, even if he did the best he could. In the original branch of Feri, Hawaiian influences were more important than Gardnerian ones. Anderson spoke Hawaiian fluently, having learned the language as a child.<sup>27</sup> He connected the *menehune* of Hawaii with the Fairies of Western Europe, believing both to be a race of little people who spread out of Africa thousands of years ago.<sup>28</sup> Inspired by the Huna belief in three souls, and other religious traditions that support the idea of three souls, as well as Max Freedom Long's writings on the unconscious "Younger Self" and conscious "Talking Self," Feri Witchcraft supports the idea of a third soul, which is the sacred or Deep Self.<sup>29</sup> This idea has been taken up by many in the Reclaiming tradition, through Starhawk, who studied with the Andersons and was initiated into the Feri tradition, which she, like many, refers to as the "Faery" tradition.

The New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (NROOGD) is an eclectic denomination of Witchcraft that began in San Francisco, California, in 1967. It is a coven-based initiatory mystery tradition inspired by literary and anthropological sources, particularly Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*. Aiden Kelly is one of the major figures in NROOGD, and his criticisms of Gardner's claim to have been initiated into a preexisting group may be related to NROOGD's pride in being a modernly invented tradition. NROOGD first formed out of a course assignment on designing a ritual. A group of friends performed the ritual a few times, and they were surprised at how much they enjoyed their experience of raising power, so they formed a group in the late 1960s. Other prominent members in NROOGD are Don Frew and Diana Paxson.

NROOGD rituals emphasize poetry and artistry. They are designed to be beautiful and to bypass intellectual skepticism by appealing to the senses aesthetically. NROOGD rituals are often led by three priestesses and a priest. Practitioners invoke the Goddess in triple form and perform chanting and dancing on the theme of Persephone's descent into, and return from, the underworld.<sup>30</sup> Their rituals often also include spell work and the sharing of food. Like other Witchcraft traditions, NROOGD has eight main festivals, but in place of the fall equinox celebration, they hold an annual ritual based on the ancient Greek Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>31</sup> Like other Pagan groups in the Bay Area of California, NROOGD regularly holds public sabbats in addition to private events within covens.

Dianic Witchcraft is a feminist, Goddess- and women-focused denomination. Some Dianics practice in a separatist fashion, excluding men and any sense of male deity, as in Z. Budapest's early practice. Some practitioners focus on the Goddess in a monotheistic manner as a single overarching deity, but Dianics are often polytheistic, drawing on a variety of goddess figures. Even when practitioners focus on Goddess in the singular, She is apt to be recognized in three forms: maiden, mother, and crone.

Practitioners also often recognize divinity as immanent in themselves, identifying with Artemis, for example, as the “virgin” huntress, who is virgin in the sense of being neither married nor a mother. Most Dianic groups are women’s-only groups, and they often practice an eclectic form of Witchcraft in covens.

Reclaiming is also a feminist Witchcraft tradition but is egalitarian in focus, including both men and women. It is a nonhierarchical denomination, and groups within it run on consensus. Reclaiming is distinctive for its blend of politics and spirituality; its activities are oriented toward empowerment and emancipation. Reclaiming is anarchist, organized into largely autonomous cells, but members also practice in covens for ritual work. Initiation is available for those who choose to undertake it, but it is not required for participation. Reclaiming began as a teaching collective in San Francisco, California, offering courses in Witchcraft and Goddess spirituality. The Reclaiming Collective obtained tax-exempt status in 1990 after incorporating.<sup>32</sup> The Reclaiming tradition grew in the Bay Area, but also through intensive weeklong apprenticeship courses in the summer, which came to be known as “Witchcamps.”

Reclaiming practitioners practice an eclectic ritual style, summarized as “EIEIO,” which stands for ecstatic, improvisational, ensemble, inspired, and organic. In San Francisco, Reclaiming practitioners tend to use the Celtic deity names Brigit and Lugh for the Goddess and God, following the legacy of Starhawk’s initiation into the Faery tradition, but the multicultural context of San Francisco also influences Reclaiming practitioners. They celebrate Samhain, for example, in conjunction with the Day of the Dead, through the influence of Mexican American traditions.<sup>33</sup> Reclaiming groups elsewhere are autonomous and take on a variety of different forms depending on the inclination of practitioners and their cultural contexts.

Family traditions, practitioners of which are sometimes called hereditary Witches, constitute a form of practice and a group of denominations. Family tradition groups are founded on the claim of a practitioner to have learned Witchcraft from a family member, stereotypically a grandmother, rather than from books or public groups. They often indicate that they have learned their practices from an oral tradition, and that this is why there are no written records supporting their claims. These traditions are often largely based on the practices of Gardnerian Wicca, but with further inspiration drawn from the culture of the practitioner’s ethnic background, as in Leo Louis Martello and Lori Bruno’s Italian American Witchcraft (Stregheria). Martello and Bruno formed the Trinacrian Rose Coven in the late 1970s based in part on a family folk-healing tradition. Z. Budapest draws on Hungarian folk traditions in her practice and has described herself as a hereditary Witch. According to some scholars, Victor and Cora Anderson’s use of folk magic in the Feri tradition they

founded locates the Feri tradition also as a family tradition.<sup>34</sup> The claims of family traditions and ancient mystical heritage have been dismissed by some as a coping mechanism for a lack of substance in such traditions, but embracing folk practices can also be a form of resistance against the leveling process of assimilation into American culture and the secular devaluation of folk traditions.<sup>35</sup>

While some denigrate practitioners such as Raven Grimassi (a pseudonym) for making questionable claims about family traditions, Grimassi's tradition of Italian Witchcraft can be viewed in terms of "folklore reclamation and ethnic identity creation."<sup>36</sup> His folklore-enhanced practices may be interpreted as a form of resistance to the melting pot of dominant American culture. Grimassi claims to have been initiated by his aunt into a family magical tradition of folk healing that included divination and techniques for removing the evil eye.<sup>37</sup> He claims that his Aridian tradition is a North American branch of Tanarra, a version of "the Old Religion" from central Italy, brought to the United States by his relatives. He describes it as a blend of Italian traditions aimed at restoring the Witchcraft tradition given by Aradia. Some scholars suggest that his tradition appears to be created out of Leland's *Aradia* and from generic Wicca, with Etruscan or Tuscan window dressing drawn from folklore, remarking that he does not name his sources, whether written, or his relatives.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that Grimassi's practice of Stregheria as *la Vecchia Religione*, "the Old Religion," is based on a family practice derived from Leland's *Aradia* in a previous generation, but its resemblance to Gardnerian Wicca suggests that the tradition is derived from Gardner's practices as much as from Italian sources. However, this is unlikely to be a problem for Italian American practitioners, especially if they are engaged in folklore reclamation and identity creation.

Reconstructionist Paganism is a form of practice, and a group of denominations, that reconstructs the practices of pre-Christian traditions. Reconstructionist traditions differ from family traditions in that they aim to reconstruct the ancient traditions of a place and culture, for example those of Etruria, rather than using the later folk traditions of Tuscany in a largely Wiccan context, as in Grimassi's tradition. Reconstructionists often explicitly stress that their practices are not derived from the traditions of Wicca, New Age spirituality, or ceremonial magic. Most reconstructionist traditions have a high regard for scholarly knowledge of their traditions, and emphasize historical accuracy in their practices. Practitioners study archaeology and ancient and classical texts, striving to stay current with academic research. They tend to idealize different eras of the past, depending on the time of Christianization in the location of the culture they are reconstructing. Practitioners do not necessarily live in the geographic areas associated with the traditions they are reconstructing. However,

some do, and their traditions can be seen to some degree as indigenous movements.

Some Egyptian reconstructionist Pagans call their tradition Kemeticism, from “Kemetic,” referring to the land of Egypt. Practitioners regard the tradition as an African traditional religion, although most practitioners appear to be English-speaking white Americans. Some Kemetic practitioners focus on Ma’at (truth) and Netjer, understood as the single divine force that is manifested through a number of gods and goddesses. The Kemetic Orthodox tradition describes this interpretation of Netjer as “monolatry,” as distinct from monotheism.<sup>39</sup> Some Kemeticists focus on the ancient Egyptian mythology of Isis, Osiris, and Horus. Kemetic practice includes priestly and personal devotions, often through elaborate group rituals, and daily prayer. Practitioners also engage in ancestral devotions, giving offerings so that the ancestors will protect them.

Greek reconstructionists, who refer to their tradition as Hellenismos or Hellenism, revere the Olympic pantheon of gods and goddesses. Votive offerings to the deities are important to their religious practice, as well as hospitality in relation to other humans. “Hellenismos” refers to the religion of ancient Greece that the Roman emperor Julian attempted to revive. Julian was a nephew of the emperor Constantine and became emperor himself in 361, but he was killed just a few years later.<sup>40</sup> The Julian Society, an American group founded in the late 1960s, is not exclusively Hellenist, but is instead a nondenominational Pagan group. Hellenion is an American group that practices Greek reconstructionist Paganism. They obtained tax-exempt status in 2002.<sup>41</sup> Hellenists in general take inspiration from ancient writings such as the Homeric hymns and other works attributed to Homer, as well as those of Hesiod and Julian. They also take inspiration from archaeology.

Reconstructionists of Roman paganism refer to their tradition as Religio-Romana, reviving the name of the pre-Christian religion of Rome. They reconstruct the religion as it was practiced from the founding of Rome in 753 BCE to the beginning of the Christian Roman Empire in 394 CE, but they also take inspiration from pre-Roman Latin and Etruscan culture.<sup>42</sup> Reconstructionist practitioners of Religio-Romana, following ancient practice, value piety, family, community, and the state. Practitioners honor ancestors, *lares* (gods of the gate and household), and *di penates* (gods of the hearth and granary), as well as god/desses such as Iuppiter and Iuno, more familiar to English speakers as Jupiter and Juno. They also revere others in the Roman pantheon such as Minerva, Vesta, Ceres, Diana, Venus, Mars, Mercurius, Neptunus, and Volcanus (the last three more familiar as Mercury, Neptune, and Vulcan), as well as Apollo.

Celtic reconstructionism is popular in Paganism throughout the English-speaking world in the form of Druidry or Druidism. Druidic practices re-



**Figure 18.** Contemporary Druid (photo by Wendy Griffin)

construct Celtic culture based on archaeological information about the Celts in Britain and Western Europe, and scant written sources such as Tacitus' incidental comments on the Celts of Europe in *Germania*. Some Druidry is not Pagan; some, which Isaac Bonewits describes as "mesopagan," is monotheistic and is syncretic with Celtic Christianity. The ancient

Druids were a priestly class in Celtic culture made up of learned people who held the lore (stories and genealogies) of the people in their memories, and from whom political leaders were drawn. Roman incursions and Christianization eliminated the Druid class in Britain. A number of Druid groups formed in Britain beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for various political and religious reasons. Most members at that time were Christian, but in the 1960s and 1970s, some Druid groups emerged as Pagan. Some Pagan Druids joined existing Druid groups, and others formed new orders.<sup>43</sup>

Druids tend somewhat to resemble the stereotype of bearded men in long white robes conducting ceremonies in oak groves and at Stonehenge. Contemporary Druids are not necessarily bearded, but there are more men than women in Druidry, and they do tend to wear white robes for rituals. They also tend to have a special fondness for trees, and oaks in particular, and have negotiated with Britain's English Heritage department to gain access to Stonehenge to celebrate the summer solstice. Druid groups are organized into groves and orders: groves are local groups, while orders tend to be national or international organizations. Traditionally, the orders are divided into bards, ovates, and druids. The bards are storytellers and poets, the ovates are prophets and seers, and the druids are priests and leaders. Both learning and performance are important in Druidry.

Norse and Germanic reconstructionist traditions are collectively called Heathenry, sometimes referred to as "the Northern Tradition," or "Asatru" based on the Icelandic word meaning dedicated to the Æsir, a group of deities. Heathenry is practiced as an indigenous revival tradition in Iceland, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries. Asatru has been an officially recognized religion in Iceland since 1973. More generally, Heathenry is inspired by northern European traditions, sometimes more so than it is reconstructed, but practitioners see themselves as reviving the indigenous traditions of northern Europe, or Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic culture. Practitioners are not restricted to northern Europe but are found throughout Europe, as well as in North America and Australia. Membership in Heathen groups is not generally restricted by ethnic origin, but some groups are overtly racist and do restrict membership in this way.

Technically, the Æsir are the deities of war, which would imply that the Asatru are dedicated to the deities of war. However, despite this etymology, practitioners of Asatru are not just dedicated to the deities of war, but also to Norse deities more generally, including the Vanir, who are the deities of the land.

Racism and ethnic identity are ongoing issues in Heathen groups, but most mainstream groups try to preserve a sense of openness and inclusivity and are against racist members joining. Heathen groups seem to have an overall tendency toward right-wing politics, expressing conservative views on sex, politics, and history.<sup>44</sup> Because of this, many Heathen groups take an explicitly antiracist stance, although in the United States, Heathen Groups called “Odinists” do not necessarily renounce racism, and some are overtly white supremacists. Such groups take inspiration from the perceived warrior mythos of the Viking era but are rooted in ideas from Nazi Germany. Asatru groups are more likely to look to Iceland for inspiration. Odinism in Britain, for example in Odinic Rite groups, is not associated with Nazism. Heathen groups began to form in England in the early 1970s and in North America in the late 1970s, and the racist/antiracist division originates in that formative period, continuing to be a problem in some groups.<sup>45</sup>

Local Heathen groups are called “kindreds” or “hearths,” the structure and organization of which varies.<sup>46</sup> Local groups are most easily found through larger networking organizations such as the Ring of Troth, started by Edred Thorson in Texas, or Hrafnar, started by Diana Paxson in California, both of which are antiracist. The Ring of Troth also exists in Britain, in addition to Odinic Rite groups, and *Hammarens Orden Sällskap* is in Sweden. Some Heathens wear a hammer sign as a symbol of their religious affiliation, either to indicate their dedication to the god Thor or to Heathenry in general.<sup>47</sup>

Heathen groups share a common cosmology of nine worlds, linked through Yggdrasil, the world tree. Midgard, or “Middle Earth,” is the realm of humans. There are also the realms of the frost giants, the fire giants, and other giants (Jotnir); that of the Æsir (gods of war) and the Vanir (gods of the land and fertility); and the land of the light elves, the dark elves (dwarves), and the dead. In addition to gods and goddesses, Heathens recognize a variety of other-than-human persons, including spirits of the land, called *landvættir*. “Wight” is a general term for other-than-human persons in Heathenry, indicating sentient beings including gods, local and ancestral spirits, and others.<sup>48</sup> Heathens are more emphatically polytheistic than Pagans in some other traditions, and they are more likely to insist on the ontological existence of the gods and goddesses as actual beings rather than as metaphors or psychological forms.<sup>49</sup>

The most significant Heathen celebrations are Winternights, Yule, and Sigrblot. Winternights is a harvest festival honoring the dead and the beginning of winter. Yule is the winter solstice, celebrated as the New Year, and is a time for oaths. Sigrblot, meaning “victory,” is a celebration of the beginning of summer and may originally have been a ritual to ensure “victory” in the coming raiding season.<sup>50</sup> Heathens also hold ritual events

called *blots* to exchange gifts with the gods and with ancestors. Contemporary Heathens generally substitute the blood offerings of traditional *blots* with offerings of mead.<sup>51</sup> As discussed in chapter 7, practices such as this and *seidr* are reconstructed based on historical texts, such as the Icelandic Eddas and Sagas.

The development of oracular *seidr* is attracting more women to the denomination, which was initially of interest mostly to male practitioners. Other magical practices of Heathenry include *galdr* and *taufr*. *Galdr* is the chanting of runes, to attune practitioners to the rune and bring them into resonance with it, and can be combined with *seidr*.<sup>52</sup> Heathens may, for example, chant runes to bring themselves into harmony to pursue the common purpose of setting the stage for one among them to go into the deeper trance necessary for *seidr*. Some practitioners describe this as the majority of those participating going as far as to the gate of the underworld, while the one engaging in *seidr* goes through the gate. *Taufr* refers to the practice of making talismans, usually by carving runes onto objects, a practice evident from archaeological remains as well as from stories and poems.

Pre-Christian folk traditions have also been revived in the Baltic countries of Eastern Europe. The revived folk traditions of Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, and other Eastern European countries are most often practiced by people living in those countries, rather than in a multicultural diaspora context. Baltic reconstructionists tend to identify as Pagans through ethnicity rather than through adherence to other aspects of contemporary Paganism such as polytheism or reverence for nature. The history of these reconstructionist groups includes racism in celebration of ethnicity, but contemporary groups do not practice ethnic exclusivity. In practice, participation is generally restricted to those who know the relevant languages. Music is important in Baltic reconstructionist Paganism, with folk songs—*dainas* in Latvia, and *dainos* in Lithuania—serving as resources for ritual.<sup>53</sup>

Romuva is a reconstructionist group that began at the end of the nineteenth century in Lithuania, with Vyduna (Wilhelm Storosta) reviving folk celebrations in combination with theosophy. This group continued into the 1920s but was halted by the Soviet invasion of Lithuania.<sup>54</sup> It was revived again in the 1960s as a folklore group, which engaged in the collection of folk songs and dances and the re-creation of old festivals, under the name Ramuva. Despite the name change and the ostensible cultural rather than religious focus, it was disbanded again by the Soviets in 1971, only to reemerge during perestroika in 1988. It is now led by Jonas Trikunas, who has been involved with the group since the late 1960s. It became Romuva again in 1991, reviving the earlier name and connection with pre-Christian religion rather than just folklore.<sup>55</sup> Ethnicity and national her-



itage are important to Romuva members, but also harmony with and respect for nature. Not all members identify as Pagan, but many do.

In Latvia, the group Dievturi practices reconstructionist Baltic Paganism. "Dievturi" refers to "those who hold by the god Dievs," a high god of the sky. Practitioners also recognize Laima, the goddess of fate, and Mara, the goddess of material well-being, but they tend to regard them as helpers of Dievs. Dievturi was founded in 1926 by Ernest Brastins, who was executed by the Soviets in the 1940s. Some members were exiled to the United States during the Soviet persecutions, and they later returned to Latvia. The tradition gradually reemerged with the erosion of Soviet control in late 1980s. Janis Silins and Olger Auns currently lead the group. Under their leadership, Dievturi is not anti-Semitic, but Brastins was, and in his time Dievturi was closely linked with Fascist groups in Latvia such as *Perkunkrusts*, meaning "Thunder Cross."<sup>56</sup> Dievturi's practices are based on *dainas*, or folksongs that give detailed descriptions of ancient beliefs and customs, and which were developed specifically for solstice and equinox rituals.<sup>57</sup>

Pagans in Ukraine prefer to call themselves *yazychnyks* or *ridnovirs*, and their religion *yazychnytstvo* or *ridnovira*. *Yazychnytstvo* has no exact translation but refers to pre-Christian Slavic and revived Slavic traditions, while *ridnovirs* are practitioners of "native faith." Pagans in Ukraine and elsewhere in Eastern Europe differ from Pagans in English-speaking countries in their preference for thinking of their religion in ethnic terms as indigenous religion, and in their treatment of texts such as the *Book of Veles* and Lev Sylenko's *Maha Vira* as scripture. In addition, some Ukrainian Pagan groups, such as RUNVira, which began in the 1960s, are more monotheistic than polytheistic, and are led primarily by men. "RUNVira" is an acronym for *Ridna Ukraïns'ka Natsional'na Vira*, meaning "Native Ukrainian National Faith." Pravoslavia is another Pagan group in Ukraine, whose name refers to "right worship," in contrast to the "right practice" of orthodoxy in Christianity. Pravoslavia was founded in 1993 by Volodymyr Shaian, and it takes the *Book of Veles* as scripture. In contrast to most Pagans in English-speaking countries, Pagans in Ukraine tend to support right-wing politics and ethnic nationalism, sometimes with overt anti-Semitism.<sup>58</sup>

Pagans may joke "that Paganism is now a 'real religion' like other divided and divisive religions,"<sup>59</sup> but Pagan denominations do not often come into conflict over doctrinal issues. Practitioners sometimes come into conflict when they think an individual or group is trying to speak for all Pagans and they feel misrepresented. Other conflicts can arise when practitioners feel that others are judging their religious practices to be inauthentic based on criteria that they do not feel are appropriate. However,

Pagans hold it as an ideal that they are content to let others believe whatever they want and approach divinity however they feel is appropriate.

### FURTHER READING

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### NOTES

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