

NEO-PAGANISM: RITUAL AND LIFE FORGED BY THE BURNING TIMES

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by
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ABSTRACT

The Burning Times has been of interest to both scholars and practitioners alike over the past few decades. The interest typically focuses on those that died and the discrepancy of the number of those who perished. While the historical and sociological aspects of the Burning Times are fascinating, when the analytical lens is shifted to examine how the Burning Times affect present-day practitioners, it proves to be just as fascinating and much more subtle. Paganism's practitioners greet the Burning Times with a sense of ambivalence. The Burning Times balances between being meaningful and meaningless. The Burning Times can be understood through legitimacy, myth, and space and time through two means. First, it can be seen, through Ritual practice within Pagan covens. Second, the Burning Times can be seen when Pagans make the decision whether to be "out" or closeted. Throughout both of these areas of study, the element of ambivalence can be seen.

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Neo-Paganism: Ritual Forged by the Burning Times,” presented by Linda Spencer, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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GLOSSARY

Burning Times- A time period referenced to a historical time from around 1000 CE through the seventeenth century when it is said that over nine million people were tortured and burned by church and public officials on the assumption that they were the Christian version of Witches. It is said to have been very profitable for both church and state. Historians indicate that the majority of people tortured and murdered were women.

Circle- A created barrier by practitioners of magick when gathering with a coven or solitarily. Casting a circle is a way to protect and control the magick raised within its barrier. The circle is not considered flat or two dimensional, but rather all encompassing; 360 degrees, not only level plain surrounding the practitioner, but also above and below the practitioner; like a bubble

Coven- A group of people who meet to magickally work and/or worship in an organized fashion. 'Traditionally' a coven should be made up of 13 individuals.

Craft, The- This is another term for the practice of magick, especially Witchcraft.

Deosil- A clockwise motion, symbolic of positive and constructive energies. It is the Sun's apparent motion around the Earth in the Northern Hemisphere. This direction is utilized when creating some circles.

Esbat- A term for the meeting of a coven; based on the cycles of the moon. There are five potential Esbat gatherings that can take place during the course of a month: the full moon, the new moon (also known as the Dark Moon), the first quarter and the third quarter. At anytime during the lunar cycle, magick can be used.

Magick- The art and science of focusing your will and emotions to effect change both in the world around you and the world within you. Magick is neither good nor evil, positive nor negative. It is the use of the power that determines the path it will take.

Malleus Maleficarum- A book written by Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, whose translation means "The Witch Hammer", was considered a Witch-hunters manual to detect and prosecute those accused of Witchcraft.

Neo-Pagan- A follower of a nature-based religion. Strictly translated as 'New Pagan'.

Neo-Paganism- (also spelled Neopaganism and also known as Paganism) a New Religious Movement (NRM) which attempts to recreate ancient Pagan religious traditions and reverence for nature. It takes a variety of forms known as 'paths'.

Pagan- A follower of a nature-based religion, however, the origins of the term translate it to mean “rural”, “rustic”, or “of the countryside.” Another characteristic is that it refers to people who were not worshippers of a monotheistic God. Pagan implies not Christian or Jewish.

Paganism- A blanket term to refer to groups defined by either their religious beliefs or in some cases lack thereof. Due to its capability of covering a wide variety of groups, there seems to be no one universally accepted definition. Paganism is also said to be the religion utilized in pre-Christian Europe which was then overrun and replaced by Christianity. All Wiccans and Witches fall under the NRM of Pagan. Wicca and Witchcraft are religious groups under the umbrella of Paganism.

Path- This term has multiple meanings. On one hand it is the same definition that would be found in the dictionary: a route, course, or track along which something moves; a course of action, conduct or procedure. It is coupled with the term Pagan to imply that this path is dictated and adhered to through Pagan principles

Quarter(s)- The magic circle is broken up into quarters, each creating a 90 degree angle from the center and flaring out to encompass the circle and beyond. Each quarter is associated with an element. The Eastern quarter corresponds to air; The Southern quarter corresponds to fire; The Western quarter corresponds to water; The Northern quarter corresponds to earth. All four of the quarters and elements make up the body of the circle and are further associated with certain characteristics.

Ritual- A focused mental and physical ceremony to either honor or thank one’s chosen pantheon or nature, or to perform a specific magickal working or act. Rituals need not be mechanically planned, spontaneous rituals can be very effective.

Sabbat- Because of Paganism’s connection to the agricultural cycles of the earth, the Sabbats are meant to represent seasonal birth, death and rebirth. Each Sabbat is spread throughout the year roughly six weeks apart. There are a total of eight seasonal festivals.

Wicca- An earth based religion which was formed by Gerald Gardner. A religion influenced by pre-Christian beliefs and practices of western Europe that affirms the existence of the supernatural power (as magic) and of both male and female deities inherent in nature. Wicca also emphasizes ritual observance of seasonal and life cycles.

Wiccan- A follower of the earth based religion known as Wicca; worships deities in pairs (a God and Goddess) and can utilize magick. A Wiccan will adhere to the Wiccan Rede.

Wiccan Rede- The Wiccan Rede is a statement that provides the key moral system in the religion of Wicca. Its most common tenet is, “An it harm none, do what ye will.”

Widdershins- Counterclockwise motion used in some magickal workings, circle casting or ceremonies.

Witch- A practitioner of Witchcraft. Does not necessarily adhere to the Wiccan Rede.

Witchcraft- A Pagan religion that incorporates sorcery or magic. Does not necessarily observe the Wiccan Rede. A use of magic to effect outcomes and goals.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The dominant faiths in America today include Roman Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism. However, an incredible array of lesser-known religions is flourishing also. These smaller religions are known as New Religious Movements (NRM). One of these NRMs is Neo-Paganism. Neo-Paganism is also referred to as Paganism. Paganism is a religion that is very diverse and is practiced in a multitude of ways including elements of polytheism, animism, and pantheism. The Pagan belief structure incorporates an openness to add new practices, along with a desire to reconstruct practices of old. It is said to be a pre-Christian religion, and practitioners believe magic is a source of power.

Exploring a subject matter as broad as Paganism can be overwhelming, but focusing on a group of practitioners defined as a Coven allows for deep study. History associated with Paganism varies greatly from group to group.

The intent of this thesis is to delve into the ways new practices are connected with beliefs about the past by modern Pagan practitioners and develop an argument that there is a connection between the tragic history of the Burning Times (1400-1800) and present-day Pagan ritual practice. I measure this effect through three guiding questions. First, do the practitioners of Paganism believe the Burning Times provide historical threads that essentially bind the modern day practitioner to those that have come before? Second, do practitioners believe that the Burning Times lends legitimacy to the faith in that there is a fundamental sense of martyrdom? Third, do practitioners believe that the Burning Times

creates a unifying history of persecution and sacrifice, which provides a sense of shared meaning and/or experience? It is further suggested that these ideas manifest themselves in the way modern day Pagan practitioners perform their ritual and live their lives.

Historical scholarship has focused on numbers and the legitimacy of the Burning Times as a static event. This research challenges that stance. It no longer matters the number of those killed during the Burning Times. What is more important is how it affects the present-day practitioner. Informing the present from the past and deep past would make an extraordinary inquiry. Generally, this research could be very useful in understanding how historical events affect the modern day. That is to say, how history can be brought forward to bring relevance to the present.

There are some larger ramifications of the study of religion and society. The past can be relived in the present day, not just remembered. Religious ritual transmutes time. It involves bodily involvement that happens in the present and connects to the past. These issues are explored herein.

This thesis will unfold in six chapters. The second chapter is a review of literature. This chapter is broken down into three sections: Pagan authors, authors that write about Witchcraft from a social context and theoretical contributions that could be applied to this research. The third chapter describes the methodology used in this study. This is a mixed methods research. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used through surveys, in-depth interviews and participant observation. The fourth chapter includes a review of the results. The fifth chapter will be a discussion of theoretical conclusions as understood through four elements: legitimacy, myth, ritual, and time and

space. The sixth chapter will look at implications of the research and conclude this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Witches¹ in the twenty-first century tend to long for times past, a Tolkien era rich in fantasy, honor and magic. This magical past also contains painful reckonings of persecution and violence. When attempting to get at the heart of something as complex as Witchcraft², the practitioners struggle at times to translate this past into contemporary relevance. From an outsider's point of view, one can see patterns linking Pagans to other religions in legacies of persecution. This can be seen in the persecution in Germany, during World War II with the mass genocide of the Jewish people. Another example includes the Mormons moving across the Great Plains in an attempt to find some place to call home and practice their faith. Instead, they find themselves circling the wagons in an attempt to ward off a massacre planned by rival Mormons. A third example would be when Native American Indians, whose faith was considered savage by the occupying European Protestants, were forcibly converted and essentially experienced cultural genocide. The historical experience of Witchcraft presents similar narratives to these other belief systems. They too have a time of persecution. Within the "mythistory"³ of Witchcraft there is a time known as the "Burning Times."

There is much controversy in regards to the legitimacy of the Burning Times. The controversy around the persecution of Witches is not so much about whether it

¹ I will use the term 'Witch' or 'Pagan' as opposed to the term(s) 'Wicca' or 'Wiccan' because we are looking at the Witch trials that took place prior to the concept of Wicca, whose origin is in the 1960s. While this exploration of the Witch trials affect modern day Wicca practitioners as well, I will not be differentiating between the two unless those individuals interviewed define themselves as that.

² I will use Witchcraft and Paganism interchangeably from this point forward.

³ I use the term 'Mythistory' because the Burning Times and how practitioners remember it has elements based in myth as well as history.

happened, but rather the numbers of those killed and the motivation for the killings. How does the Burning Times affect the way that Witches think about their practice and the meanings of their practice in present-day America? How does this lend legitimacy to a religion that challenges mainstream religious beliefs today? These are some questions that are kept in mind throughout this research.

This literature review is organized in three ways. First, there is an analysis of Pagan authors' written contribution to the Burning Times, how they discuss it and present it to their target audience.⁴ There is an ambivalence found in such Pagan authored texts, which will be further linked to ambivalence expressed in statements by informants. Second, there will be a review of the origin of the "nine million-person death toll" in particular texts and how it has moved from an authoritative voice to a myth. These texts have a particular social agenda to support. Third, an exploration of potential social scientific theoretical explanations is undertaken to see how the Burning Times might inform modern day Pagan practice.

Present-Day Neo-Pagan Perspective

Many Pagan authors do not spend a lot of time discussing the Burning Times. It is a passing word in relation to something else. Very few authors even make a reference in the index of their texts. This begs the question as to whether this time period was a defining moment for Witchcraft. There is almost always some type of inclusion of the "9 million Witches" killed, but rarely an in-depth explanation. Also, the question must be asked, if there is such a need to claim the Burning Times as a part of Witchcraft history,

⁴ Scholarly writings are writings that I have classified to be organized based on a scholarly framework and method. Pagan authors are speaking from the perspective of the practitioner and/or proponent.

why is there so much ambivalence? One author, to be examined in more detail later, claims that scholars force present-day Witches to deny the Burning Times, as well as, embrace it.

While some of these authors include the Burning Times as an integral part of Paganism, others dismiss it. The ambivalence found amid authors is transmitted to the practitioners. Most Pagan authors pass over the Burning Times superficially, but also claim it to be of great importance. What is it about the history of Witchcraft and Paganism that invokes such ambivalence?

Pagan authors today produce many books creating a mass market on Pagan literature. It can hardly be consumed in its entirety. Most books tend to include some historical recounting. The formula for most books on Paganism tends to be very similar. They start with the concept of animism, cave drawings, and the hunting and gathering society framework. Following that, they move into a romantic period, the heyday for practicing Witches and Sorcerers where they were revered and respected. This was a time of agrarian values—working the land and being at one with the seasons. Afterwards, there is a sharp downward turn to the Burning Times. The Burning Times sent Witches underground never to be heard from again, until one day, in the middle of the twentieth century, upon the repeal of the Witchcraft Act, Witches started “coming out of the broom closet.” Gerald Gardner, who is hailed as the father of modern day Witchcraft/Wicca wrote and published, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*. This text encouraged a more public identification with Witchcraft.

As one of the first primary practitioners/authors of Witchcraft, Gerald Gardner did spur the revival of the present-day version of Witchcraft. He explains that he was a

descendant of the Black Forest Coven, and that he had been taught firsthand from “Old Dorothy,” said to be a Witch living in the Black Forest. Gardner takes great pains to create a lineage to the Witches of the past. He wrote of the atrocities of the Burning Times and the importance of secretive meetings that were meant to take place skyclad.⁵ Orgies and sexual intercourse, according to Gardner, were imperative in order to reenact the Great Rite.⁶ He was effectively shaping the new face of Witchcraft, insisting (whether legitimate or not) that these traditions were handed down to him from another Witch.⁷ He wrote about the Burning Times and its implication on this sacred religion. In *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner suggests, there is a direct connection to the Burning Times through the cup or chalice, a tool used in ritual creation. He states, according to the Farrars, when discussing why the cup is never mentioned or presented along with other magical tools,

The answer I get is: In the burning time this was done deliberately. Any mention of the Cup led to an orgy of torture, their persecutors saying that it was a parody of the Mass; also the riding or dancing pole (broomstick) was cut out. Censer and pentacle were substituted and explanations made to fit what their persecutors expected.⁸

This however, appears to be conjecture on Gardner's part. A cup might be considered a standard household item as opposed to the censer and the pentacle.

Gardner has an outlandish story about his induction into Witchcraft. One thing to keep in mind about Gardner is that there is very little evidence to suggest that his claims are true. Gardner, for the Pagan community, tends to be held in high regard as one of the

⁵ Meaning ‘clad by the sky’; meetings were to take place in the nude. The idea is that you are in your purest form in front of the God and the Goddess.

⁶ The Great Rite is the part of the Witch’s ceremony when the God and Goddess mate in order to bring the coming son (sun) and to create the life cycle: Birth, Life, Death. In the original ceremonies, the acting High Priest and High Priestess performed the sex act within the ritual. Present day, the Great Rite, is performed symbolically using the ritual blade (athame) and the chalice of wine. Obviously, the athame acts as the penis, which is dipped into the chalice, which represents the vagina.

⁷ Dorothy Clutterbuck, claims of her being a Witch is still in question. There is much controversy about her religious affiliation along with whether ‘Old Dorothy’ was really Gardner’s initiator.

⁸ Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches Bible Compleat* (Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1996), 290-293.

only contemporary links to the Witchcraft of the past. This could be for many reasons. Gardner allows present-day practitioners to link through him to a purer version of what it means to be a Witch. This link, in essence, allows present-day practitioners to have a thread to the past.

Gardner's perspective allowed him to play on the sensibilities of the people from the 1950s and into the 1970s. People were looking for a new direction in religious enlightenment and this new religion appeared to be strongly rooted in pre-history. In theory, it was a wonderful alternative to the mainstream organizations. It provided all the familiar signs of faith, including a history and persecution, but without the dogma. In addition, it used a language that was not utilized in the mainstream religions-it used the concept of "Magic." It was through Gardner and the Wicca movement that people began to recognize that they could effect change in their life. In other words, instead of believing in some separate being (i.e. the Christian God), people who are drawn to Paganism believe that the divine is within. Instead of going to hear someone's interpretation of the religion, you take part and learn about it yourself.

The popularity of Gardner and the Pagan movement allowed him to make the mold of what it means to practice Witchcraft. He addressed the Burning Times from the perspective of an amateur anthropologist. Gardner stressed the significance of people killed during the Burning Times and how Witches should come out in the present due to previous injustices. Such injustices should not continue today.

Doreen Valiente is one of the traditional Pagan authors in this century. She is said to have organized the writings of Gerald Gardner and provided some much needed eloquence to his scribbled thoughts. She penned several books including: *The Rebirth of*

Witchcraft and *An ABC of Witchcraft*. She recalled old authors such as Charles Leland, who wrote a Pagan text, *Aradia*. Leland's poetic prose is considered a definitive Pagan text and outlines the myth/history of the Goddess. Valiente draws upon Leland for the purpose of outlining her predecessors. She also calls on Margaret Murray (*The Witch-Cult of Western Europe* and *The God of the Witches*) for stabilizing her history, along with Sir James Frazier (*The Golden Bough*) and Robert Graves (*The White Goddess*) who stabilizes Pagan myth. She takes all the "classic" Pagan texts, or the texts that assist in creating a history of Paganism, to outline and create a chronological history to Paganism. Frazier's and Graves' books seem to be more of fantasy and myth, while Murray's reader was a scholarly attempt. These three manuscripts are wildly different, but they provide a thorough history according to Valiente. Despite the time it took for her to do this, very little time is spent looking at the Burning Times. At best, it is simply a segue to some other topic.

Other Pagan authors stress the importance of the Burning Times, in order to support their interests and focus as a public figure. Starhawk comes from the feminist perspective, as well as, an activist for Witchcraft. She works hard within the Pagan community, as she actively pursues injustices and works to dismantle them. Starhawk is renowned for her activism and tireless work in the realm of feminism and politics. She provides a voice for modern day practitioners. As a practitioner, teacher, and author, she states in her book,

...to reclaim the word Witch is to reclaim our right, as women, to be powerful; as men, to know the feminine within as divine. To be a Witch is to identify with nine million victims of bigotry and hatred and to take responsibility for shaping a world in which prejudice claims no more victims.⁹

This statement is the starting point from which Starhawk works. Starhawk's perspective and writing comes straight from the woman's experience as a suppressed being. She utilizes the idea that Witchcraft was founded long before any mainstream religion and operates from the assumption that its basis was divine femininity. Her argument is that the Goddess is in and of all things. The Goddess is the "Creatrix, Mother and Destroyer."¹⁰ From this place, she views the Burning Times as an assault upon women. The persecutions were a means to control women, but it was also an empowering time. The Renaissance and Reformation were a time of:

...great flowering of art, science and humanism-a time when constricting chains of dogma were thrown off, a time of questioning and exploration, of the birth of new religions and the reevaluation of the corruption in old institutions, a time of discovery and enlightenment but it was also a time of persecution. The persecution was directed primarily, not exclusively, against women¹¹

She continues by suggesting that the number of Witches executed ranged from 100,000 to 9,000,000. Once again, by using these inflated numbers, Starhawk brings to mind a virtual mass extermination of womankind. The written word begs the reader to draw on their emotions of the mistreatment of women and to give legitimacy to the claim that all men were responsible for this atrocity.

Starhawk's belief suggests that women are the cradles for the Divine, and women's sexuality and magic threaten the male counterpart. Strong women are to be

⁹ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 32.

¹⁰ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 217.

¹¹ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 186.

respected, revered and even, in a sense, feared, simply because they are women. The average Pagan knows of Starhawk and either finds her insights and perspectives invaluable or useless. However, many seem to suggest that she is valid and provides insight into their personal magical practice. She, one of the only authors reviewed in this section, draws heavily on the persecutions to drive her philosophy home.

Raven Grimassi acknowledged that the witch-hunt was primarily after women. He suggests that the Witch-hunt is our human history and shameful for all human kind. Magic makers need to understand and learn from that experience. In his book, *The Witches' Craft: The Roots of Witchcraft and Magical Transformation*, Grimassi explores the “true” roots of Witchcraft. His experience is one of being a part of Strega through his family lineage and that Strega traditionally has a strong connection to history and family strengths. The tradition, Strega, is the Italian sect of Witchcraft. Italy, which tends to be very Catholic in present day, still incorporates many tenets of Witchcraft as part of its Catholic culture. “Folk magic” works in tandem with Catholic practice. For example, the hearth in the family home is infused with magic.¹²

Grimassi begins the text with an assessment of the average practitioner of Witchcraft. He perceives that practicing Witches do not delve into information deeply because of the great breadth that now exists. This extensive pandering to Witches is both a blessing and a great disservice. It is a blessing because it does get a lot of information out there. The disservice causes repetitious, and very superficial material. He suggests that followers of Witchcraft can only know of the sensationalism of the Witch trials,

¹² The hearth is the natural gathering place in many homes around the world but seems to be especially in the Italian home. The hearth is in the kitchen and acts as a source of heat but also a way to cook food. In addition, on the folk magic side, it is a conduit to the ancestors. The hearth is where offerings are given to ancestors and Befana (a Pagan Goddess-which bestows blessings upon the family). While Catholicism is the mainstream religion in Italy, many folk magics are incorporated as well.

hunts, manuals, court records, and persecutions. However, the real sadness to this history is that Witches do not have a true understanding of the work the Witches did. He suggests that the history of the Witch is so vague, abstract, and misunderstood. The way modern Pagans practice now and how the Witches of old practiced are completely different, especially when you look at the political and social climate of the past.

What is interesting in Grimassi's book is that he never mentions the Burning Times or mass persecutions and deaths as such, but states that indeed people were killed because of their involvement with Witchcraft. After making this point, he continues by saying the scholars attempt to disprove the validity of persecutions and the history of the Witch. He neither draws upon the sensationalism of the Burning Times, nor does he play up the usual nine million figure. He appears to be offended the scholars he explored did not focus on this element of the Burning Times and the history of the Witch, while he did the exact same thing. The practical parts of his book (how to cast circle, how to perform ritual, explanations of the ritual tools) were very similar to many other Pagan authors. It was his analysis of the historical facts that lacked content.

Raymond Buckland, another well known author and contributor to modern day Pagan practice, delves into the history of Witchcraft. He makes the claim that the origin of Witchcraft is found in Paleolithic times. While weaving a thread from 25,000 years ago to the present, he makes a stop at the persecutions. He claims that Witches were killed during the Burning Times due to allegations of devil worship, which he corrects by stating, the devil is Christianity's invention, not Witchcraft's. He firmly sets blame on Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger and their creation of the Witch-hunting text, *The Malleus Maleficarum*. Buckland does say, however, that the theological faculty of the

University of Cologne had attempted to separate itself from these writings. Buckland states that *The Malleus Maleficarum* created the starting point for the frenzy of the Burning Times. He ends his recounting by stating, “A rough estimate of the total number of people burned, hung or tortured to death on the charge of Witchcraft, is nine million. Obviously not all of these were followers of the Old Religion.”¹³ He further states that social issues were the cause of many deaths, citing specifically the Salem Witch Trials as a classic example of how a petty grudge could turn into accusation, torture, prosecution, and death.

Silver Ravenwolf, a Wiccan, is one of the most well-known Pagan authors in the United States. She has authored several books and they are easily digestible. Her most referenced book, *To Ride a Silver Broomstick*, does not delve into the historical aspect of Witchcraft. However, she does give a reference to the Burning Times in her “Magickal Jargon” section of the text. Her definition is:

...it is in reference to a historical time from around 1000 CE through the 17th Century when it is said that over nine million people were tortured and burned by church and public officials on the assumption that they were the Christian version of Witches. This turned into an extremely profitable venture, as all land and property was seized from the accused individual and portions given to the accuser (in reward fashion) and the remainder seized by the church officials. Historians indicated that the majority of people tortured and murdered were women and children.¹⁴

Montague Summer’s works, surprisingly, are utilized a great deal in Pagan writing. He was a Roman Catholic priest who specialized in occult activity. He was responsible for the English translation of *The Malleus Maleficarum*. He knew Aliester

¹³ Raymond Buckland, *Buckland’s Complete Book of Witchcraft* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1986), 5-6.

¹⁴ Silver Ravenwolf, *To Ride a Silver Broomstick: New Generation Witchcraft* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1997), 19.

Crowley¹⁵ and was well known within occult circles of his time (1880-1948). Though, the modern Pagan practitioner would not view Summers writing with skepticism. He was originally a drama writer, and then he became increasingly interested in Witchcraft, Vampires, and Werewolves. Even so, Summers is unapologetic for the role that the Church played in the Witchcraft Trials. In terms of being a positive contributor to Pagan writing, in *The History of Witchcraft*, he makes an argument that the Inquisition's sole purpose was to discover heretics, which he separates from Witches. He does not write off the Old Religion because it can be seen in Christianity.

Just as, in our own churches, objects that have belonged to the Saints are exposed for the veneration of the faithful, so in the old temples visitors were shown diverse curiosities whose connexion with a god or a hero would command their respect. Can anything further be needed to prove that the veneration of Holy Relics is merely a pagan survival?¹⁶

He continues by suggesting that the church, in its role as the inquisitor, was looking for heretics in comparison to Christianity, and according to him, Witches were not heretics. They were merely incorporating old customs with the new Christian faith. Also, according to Summers, heretics being put to death were not common. He also suggests that the Church rarely stepped into individual counties' trials. The high profile trials, such as: Joan of Arc, Francis Stuart (5th Earl Bothwell), and others of noble birth and royalty, would include, some magistrate of the church there. Summers insists that there was a definite difference between heretics and Witches, but does not exactly map out the difference between the two. When reading writings either as scholars, Pagan

¹⁵ Aliester Crowley was more a Magician than a Witch. He used magic by 'the left hand' or so he's accused of. He took one of the major tenets of Witchcraft, Do what ye will, an it harm none and adapted it to say, Do what ye will is the whole of the law. He worked to perfect the art of Magic without the 'frilliness' of Witchcraft or Covens. He is said to have known Gardner and even be associated with many public entertainers including Jimmy Page. He is also said to have influenced many of Gardner's magical workings.

¹⁶ Montague Summers, *The History of Witchcraft* (New York: Carol Publishing Company, 1993), 31.

authors, or neither, the words “heretic” and “Witch” seem to be interchangeable.

Summers also states that those accused of being heretics could still partake in the Catholic mass, but were forbidden to take part of the communion. Other than that, little discipline was enacted upon those who were not fully Catholic.

The question of heretic and Witch, while in the mind of most Pagans seem to be one and the same, suggests an ambivalence that is found in Paganism. Generally speaking, a heretic is someone who sits in contradiction to an established religious tradition. Witches certainly do this. Perhaps the difference is that Witches tend to have another religious practice to take Catholicism’s place, or incorporate folk traditions in tandem with Catholicism, while heretics may simply speak out against the church. The distinction is important while at the same time, not.

Janet and Stewart Farrarr are a husband and wife team who contributed to the breadth of Pagan authorship with several books. However, even after Stewart’s death in 2000, Janet still continues to write for the modern Pagan practitioner. Their contribution through their text, *A Witches’ Bible Compleat*, is considered a must have for anyone studying Witchcraft. It was one of the first books available that completely outlined the Witches Sabbats from the Alexandrian sect of Paganism. The Farrarrs were the first authors for this research that dedicate an entire chapter to understanding the state of Pagan practitioners in the present-day. They also discuss the issues of the Burning Times and how it trickles into present-day social and religious subjects.

The Farrarrs took an analytical look at what it means to be a Witch present day.¹⁷ They start by looking at the repeal of the Witchcraft Act, which was recreated into the Fraudulent Mediums Act. In the Act’s most basic concept, the new law does not allow

¹⁷ I suspect it has changed further since the authoring of their text, which was in 1984.

for “persecution” of Witches, but rather regulates the way psychics can do work. They say that ever since the repeal of that law, Witches have been able to publish and write books. They continue by saying that even though the repeal allowed Witches to be out, it did not end the persecution of people who identified themselves as Witches. Bigotry and mistreatment were still prevalent. They suggest that over time, many news outlets and talk shows, while some tend to lack credibility, were coming to Witchcraft and Wicca as a legitimate trend and needed to be understood. However, many Witches continued to stay secretive of their beliefs

The Farrars insist that Witches must come out and change the stereotyped image that they have. It is their duty to do so, but, should be done subtly. It is not about being flamboyant; it is about doing it respectfully and honorably. According to the Farrars, when you live a Witch’s life, actions speak louder than words. They further suggest that the revival of Paganism was inevitable, and that Witches are needed because of the Environmental, Ecological, Spiritual, Political, Classist, and Racist tendencies that exist.¹⁸ Humanity as a whole could benefit from a few more Witches working toward justice. They end their chapter by saying,

We are not suggesting a crusade; religious crusades tend to acquire a momentum of their own which distorts their nature and destroys their original intent. The nature of Wicca is that of small-group, autonomous flexibility and the developments of individual psyches by co-operation among friends. May it always remain so.

But Wicca and its covens exist in a real and changing world. What we are suggesting is that witches should persistently expand their consciousness of that changing world and their role in it-and remember always that the function of tradition is to provide nourishing roots, not to impose blinkers or shackles.¹⁹

¹⁸ Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches Bible Compleat* (Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1996), 268-272.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 279-280

The Farrars, like Gardner, Starhawk and Ravenwolf, provide texts that are among the first that many Witches pick up when they come to this path. The Farrars provide a “traditional” set of ideas. They attempt to reconstruct what Witches may have done in the past. The Farrars experience included straddling the change both before and after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act. Many present-day authors do not have the understanding or experience that living through that time period would have provided.

Scott Cunningham is the author of *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, which is among the first books that a new Witch has on his or her bookshelf. In some ways, Cunningham is much like Ravenwolf. He is easily understood and enjoyable to read. He is not overly ceremonial and he embraces the concept of what works for you to incorporate into your practice. Cunningham’s focus is on ritual preparation and magical properties of crystals and herbs. He has written many texts in regards to these two subject matters.

Cunningham’s writing generally is intended for new practitioners. He touches on a lot of aspects of Wicca, but he does not go into an in-depth discussion. In regards to the Burning Times, there is no mention. Though, to be fair, very little history is incorporated into his text.

Lastly, Dorothy Morrison a powerful Witch of the Georgian tradition has penned many books. From her workshop at the Heartland Pagan Festival, it was very obvious that she is strong in personality and speaks her mind clearly without mincing words. She too, like many Pagan authors, is an active Witch providing texts to aid practitioners in perfecting magic. In one such handbook, she outlines what it means to be a Witch and the magic that a practitioner should be capable of doing. She is definitely a hands-on

teacher. It is, however, clear at least within this text, that she does not spend any time outlining the Burning Times.

The Georgian Tradition is a tradition based off of Gardenarian, Alexandrian and Etruscan lore and practice. George Patterson, Zanoni Silverknife, and Tanith established this framework in California during the 1970s. Magic is the most important component to this tradition, and mastering it is the goal. This tradition is oath bound and is sometimes called “British Traditional Wicca.” This label can be misleading, as it does not have a traceable lineage back to the covens of England. Perhaps, this is one reason why Morrison does not explore the Burning Times in her text.

All of these prior texts are designed to introduce the reader to the subject matter of Witchcraft. These authors were found to be the most commonly used, as declared by my informants. The authors vary in their uses of history and reference to the Burning Times. Because of this, these publications still invite the following questions. Does the Burning Times give meaning, legitimacy, or validity to this path? Does it affect modern day practice? Is the story of Witchcraft incomplete without the telling of the persecutions? In addition, are the Burning Times actually met with a shared sense of ambivalence throughout the Pagan community? Some practitioners find it very important, while others barely recognize it. Generally, authors seem to do the same.

Sociological Perspective

To think of the execution of nine million people invokes many feelings. It is almost unfathomable to think that millions of people were put to death simply for believing in a religion. While there are many holes in this theory of nine million people

dying during the Witch-hunts, it does call upon humans' basic response of emotions. The following authors pose arguments as to why the Burning Times happened. Most commonly they come from a feminist perspective, but there is also an exploration of property acquisition by the Church and government. These authors are not creating their discourse from the perspective of a Pagan nor a scholar.

If we start from the beginning of the controversy, then the first step is to track down the origin of the nine million death toll. In its original form, Matilda Joslyn Gage in *Woman, Church and State*, suggests that

it is computed from historical records that nine millions of persons were put to death for witchcraft after 1484 or during a period of three hundred years, and this estimate does not include the vast number who were sacrificed in the preceding centuries upon the same accusation.²⁰

Yet, Gage does not provide any citation that will allow an exploration of this number and its origins. We can only assume that it came from some research on trial records or perhaps, county or province records. As scholars, however, we are left wondering where this figure comes from and what facts may back up Gage's allegation which inspires such conviction. Most likely, there would have been very little reliable information available for her to make this assessment.

Another concern with Gage's essay is that it is written as fact. This, in turn, provides an opinion to circulate as fact, within both the Pagan and scholarly circles. Its authority is reified as it is passed onto both scholars and Pagans as historical fact. Witches will tend to use this as a factual base to their faith. At the same time, there is ambivalence toward the Burning Times. Pagans will still utilize this skewed history to prove an argument. Scholars and researchers question the ways facts about the Burning

²⁰ Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman, Church and State* (New York: Humanity Books, 2002), 246.

Times are constituted. By critically assessing why the argument is being made, from whom the argument is being made, and where the professed facts are coming from, scholars can understand why an argument is being framed the way it is. It is only within the last twenty years that this query has surfaced. This is probably due to an influx of people coming to Wicca and Paganism as a source of faith, along with Paganism as a growing area of interest for scholars who study New Religious Movements.²¹

Gage was ahead of her time,²² in the sense that she was a leading women's rights activist. It is through this lens that she argues the oppression of women by men. In her writings, she attempts to outline the exact wrongs and persecutions that women have suffered at the hands of men. She ties these oppressive acts directly to the Christian church and Western society. Her assertion demonstrates an important alliance between Witchcraft and women's oppression. What a powerful statement it is to say that the majority of nine million of those tormented and killed were women. It is suggested that only a quarter of all killed were men, children, and animals.

Margaret A. Murray's²³ book, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, spends an extraordinary amount of time piecing together a concept of a Dianic Cult²⁴ in existence in pre-Christian Britain. While Murray does not invoke Joseph Campbell,²⁵ the author of *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, he suggests that pottery shards, including the

²¹ ARIS, 2008. According to the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) New Religious Movements have grown consistently from 1990 until the last survey in 2008. Wicca, Paganism & Witchcraft are all considered NRMs. From 1990 until 2008, there was a growth of 2.1%.

²² Gage was a fierce advocate for women's rights and was at the forefront of the suffrage movement. At the time, she would have been considered well versed and educated. Her methods were lacking on discerning the validity of her information and she assessed the value and number of nine million, perhaps to bolster her perspective.

²³ Margaret A. Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

²⁴ Dianic is a term that is used to describe women-only groups that focus on their femininity and on a Goddess-only faith. Originally, it was associated with the cult of Diana, the virgin huntress of Italian version of Witchcraft, known as Strega.

²⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of the God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: Arkana, 1991).

female form, were found between 4500-3500 B.C.E. This would help support Murray's theory. The focus of her book was not necessarily intended to support the idea of nine million Witches, but to discuss the value and history of a pre-Christian fertility cult that evolved into a Witch-cult in Western Europe during Murray's time period. If it is true that a pre-Christian fertility cult did exist and evolved, it was Murray who explored this and suggested that there would not necessarily be a hunt by the Church to find Witches to torture and kill them. Instead the new religion of Christianity would be adhered to on a superficial level, and the values of the old religion within the Witch cult were ingrained and still followed whole-heartedly. Murray suggests that it was merely the rulers of the various areas of Britain that converted, but the masses did not. Murray also warned her readers that the writings available to her should be viewed critically as the victors are the ones who write the history. Very rarely do we hear the conquered voice.

The idea of nine million Witches killed does not make it into Murray's book, but she discusses the actual technique of torture and death of those accused and tried for Witchcraft. She makes it clear that lives were lost, but her intent, with the publication, was to show that remnants of a religion still remained long after the mass conversion to Christianity by the Europeans. Even still, Margaret Murray's work lacks credibility among scholars.

Among Pagan authors, she is widely cited and is considered a forerunner to explaining the foundation of Paganism, or more specifically, Witchcraft. It is said that Gerald Gardner utilized her book as a blueprint to create Wicca. In her attempt to create a timeline of Witchcraft, she was lax in citation. Therefore, the scholarly elite devalues Murray's work.

Other authors have utilized the Burning Times and have dubbed it the “holocaust against women,” in order to construct feminist arguments. Diane Purkiss²⁶ and Mary Daly²⁷ are the forerunners to this feminist framework. Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* explored the Witch persecutions in Europe and actually utilized the nine million number. Daly was considered ahead of her time with her radical feminist perspectives. Like most activists, she is extremely outspoken. Daly, drawing from a previous lineage of writings, including Murray and Gage, utilized Gage’s estimation and echoed her sentiments as to the reason why women had been killed during the Burning Times. Daly equates the Witch trials with Chinese foot-binding and Indian Sati to demonstrate patriarchal control of the female body. The exploitation and the physical torture of women was nothing more than a means of patriarchal control that assumed many forms. Thus, the focus for these trailblazers was the plight of women and how the Burning Times exemplified a reversal of prior female control. The feminist perspective plays a very important role for many within the Pagan community. While the authors’ focus may not be from the religious persecution perspective, it certainly is feminist.

The place of the feminist perspective within Witchcraft allows for a representation of the female divine, the Goddess, in worship. It allows females to find some solace away from the patriarchal, and monotheism of mainstream religion. It allows the communion of both men and women to find strength from a deity that commiserates with nature rather than transcendence. This is very different from the concept of Christianity in which the only representations of the feminine are a Virgin

²⁶ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

²⁷ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: Women’s Press, 1979).

Mother and a whore... both of which are named Mary. Within the Goddess traditions of Witchcraft, the representations of the feminine divine are vast. This provides the followers of this path a holistic, egalitarian and balanced religion.

Diane Purkiss²⁸, another feminist scholar, challenged the idea that the church and social patriarchy, motivated Witch-hunts and burnings, thus ultimately portraying women as weak and helpless victims. Purkiss suggests that women were not victims, but that they proudly went to the pyre when that was their fate. She argues that they believed so strongly in their craft, that they did not fear the consequences of practicing Witchcraft. This essentially proved that those women were so inspired by their practice, ritual, and faith that it was not something to avoid when the time came to leave this physical plane.

Purkiss, follows in Daly's steps claiming that the myth of the Burning Times was about power and gender and had little to do with religion. While scholars and practitioners alike, search for legitimacy and significance of the Burning Times within Paganism, other oppressed groups find massacre stories to be useful symbols that give meaning to strife and struggles. It is symbolic on many levels. There is a belief that the persecutions happened due to a growing cult called Christianity and its need to snuff out Paganism, its main competitor. On one level, it is persecution based on religious beliefs. Another level would be persecution based on gender, age, appearance, political and capitalistic power. Purkiss states that, "the myth reminds all of us that we want to find ourselves in the past, that we scan the past looking for confirmation of who we are, who we want to be. We search for something to aim for and something to aim against."²⁹

²⁸ Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 1996.

²⁹ Ibid., 26.

As alluded to in the beginning of this section, another way that authors utilize the Burning Times to buttress their argument is property procurement and economic exploitation. We find another significant contribution to understanding the historical context of nine million killed through Robin Briggs³⁰. He suggests that in fact there were forms of Witchcraft beliefs, that were widespread, but it was more of a way of life than a defined religion. He also stresses that the beliefs of Witchcraft are ancient, tenacious, and still observable today in both Europe and the United states. This could correspond to Margaret Murray's Witch-Cult. Briggs also suggests that Witchcraft's roots run through history from the ancient times. He supports this by saying that even though there may have been persecutions, they were sporadic at best and relatively brief. In short, he argues that Witchcraft's history is continuous. There is no disruption in the timeline of Witchcraft.

Briggs also looks at the argument that the church is responsible for the trials, torture, and eventual death of Witches, but, he actually challenges this. Instead he suggests it is the breakdown of local social and political structures within communities and society caused the outbreak of persecution. He suggests that small town social and political institutions are to blame for these sporadic Witch hunts and trials. He also suggests that the longer a town experienced these trials and burnings, the more extraordinarily theatrical they became and pandered to the people.

This further suggests that from the political perspective, the evaluation and the seizure of property for political and economic gain was more likely a factor than the diabolical attempt by the Church to destroy Witches. This flies in the face of the

³⁰ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Viking Penguin Publishing, 1996).

traditional reasons of why the myth of nine million people and animals perished.

Through Briggs, the myth that religious oppression is the sole reason for the persecution of Witches is challenged. This reflects our understanding of why the persecutions were not more intense as we have been taught to believe. How do we move from an impressive nine million to a meager 40,000 victims? We must come to the conclusion that people were killed because they were Witches and the Church or government wanted to gain their property and assets.

Briggs also contends that many parts of Europe never even saw a trial between the fourth and the nineteenth century. He states that the legitimacy of trial records and historical documents, that have been used to serve as a foundation to many assertions, has proven to be false. One of these was Etienne Lamothe-Langon whose writing about the Inquisition and the Witch trials are considered highly imaginative and false.³¹ Despite this, authors and researchers use his writing as legitimate representations of history. Another was Bartolus of Sassoferrato,³² who supposedly wrote his experiences of being a juror at many Witches' trials when in fact his writing was once again fictitious prose, and the trials were non-existent.

Briggs' text is extremely dense in its information, but he clearly takes the time to explore the myths, history, and social context of the time of the trials and the present day. Jenny Gibbons³³ cites Briggs as one of the most accurate and thorough writers on the subject. Her article, *Recent Developments in the Study of the Great European Witch Hunt*, is central to this study. She reviews concerns and challenges to the account of

³¹ Ibid., 404.

³² Ibid., 404.

³³ Jenny Gibbons, "Recent Developments in the Study of the Great European Witch-Hunt," *The Pomegranate* 5, (1998), 2-16.

“nine million killed” There is a plethora of information on this topic to date, but her article sparked an interest in many people to question the potential validity of this history. Gage and other authors inflated the estimation of those killed, in order to include those that we do not know about. The problem is that the missing deaths have been added possibly ten-fold.

The most moving part of Gibbons’ study is her plea to Neo-Pagans, suggesting that whether nine million or nine hundred were killed, the true concerns should lie in understanding the developments that took place to allow such a massacre to happen. The old adage of, “If we do not know our history we are doomed to repeat it” is her strong message. It is up to the individual to be informed and look at this event “honestly, in more detail and using the best data available”³⁴ to understand it.

The works in this section are important to this research because they explore what the implications were outside of the realm of Witchcraft or Paganism. They discover some of the social issues and perspectives that could be gleaned from the persecution and what were the motivating factors outside of just Witch-hunting. They are important because, again, we go back to the issue of ambivalence. Within present-day Witchcraft, it is not an event that is at the forefront of their practice or mundane lives. When the Burning Times could be a side effect to a greater social issue such as governmental or church greed, or the subjugation of a woman, it inspires great emotions and even actions.

Theoretical Perspective

The importance of the narrative of nine million Witches burned at the stake and how it affects modern day Pagan practice must be explored and explained through the

³⁴ Ibid.,16.

lens of theory. Theoretical frameworks offer a possibility as to how a potentially fictitious and vague event from so long ago, could impact a modern practice. I draw selectively on a handful of theorists. The following is a compendium that assisted me in making sense of this research.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim can be applied to any research that incorporates religion. Due to the abstract nature of Paganism, it was imperative to provide a basic framework of religion that can be applied both to mainstream religions, as well as, those smaller viable religious options. Durkheim suggests four defining factors of religion and all of them can be easily applied to the study of Paganism. First, religion acts as a disciplinary.³⁵ It teaches how one should behave in society. If society is religion, then it is moral. Self-control is something that most people exhibit, but religion, according to Durkheim, is what dictates behavior. In the case of Paganism, many tenets dictate how one might act in society at large.

The second function of religion is that religious ceremonies, Sabbats, bring people together.³⁶ In the field, the celebratory Sabbats tend to be more populated than the usual classes. They are meant to gather for a ritual, as well as, a feast. Many times, the feasting is more important than the actual ritual because it was about being with one another and breaking bread with close friends and family. The second function of religion as Durkheim defines it, is very important within the framework of Paganism.

The third aspect of religion is that the ceremonies and rituals should provide an emotionally revitalizing effect on the participants.³⁷ You could ask many practicing Pagans how they feel after a particularly intense ritual, and they will likely respond with

³⁵ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 11-13.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

³⁷ Ibid., 14-15.

something along the lines of how they could not fall asleep that night, or they were buzzing with energy. Since, ritual has a lasting, revitalizing effect and creates a connection that is shared with one another in Paganism, it exhibits exactly what Durkheim discusses.

Last, Durkheim suggests that ritual provides people with a sense of belonging.³⁸ When an individual feels like they belong, one can overcome obstacles and become stronger through experiences. While there are elements of not belonging to the larger society, a coven can provide the outlet that someone needs in a very powerful way. Pagans within the confines of a coven, or with like-minded others, can explore ideas and subjects they may not be able to in other settings.

Durkheim's treatise is included because Paganism is a slippery subject. As a religion, Paganism meets significant criticism as to whether it exhibits characteristics that deem it as a religion. It lacks a specific form, as so many mainstream religions have, and at the onset, there had to be a declaration, on behalf of the research that Paganism is a viable religion and provides all the functions that Durkheim outlines.

The exploration of Mircea Eliade's concept of the Sacred and the Profane provides helpful potential understanding of how the mythhistory of the Burning Times can be utilized in Pagan ritual. Eliade's work is utilized within the discipline of religious studies, and it is used as a means to understand the Sacred in relation to the Profane. At its base, Eliade's theory suggests that religious behavior is not only an imitation of, but also a participation in sacred events and thus restores the mythical time of its origin. He also explores the importance of Origin Myths and sacred time.

³⁸ Ibid., 15-17.

. . . Only the Sacred has value, only a thing's first appearance has value and, therefore, only the Sacred's first appearance has value. Myth describes the Sacred's first appearance; therefore, the mythical age is sacred time, the only time of value: primitive man was interested only in the beginnings. . . . to him it mattered little what had happened to himself, or to others like him, in more or less distinct times. . .³⁹

This aspect of his theory is useful. In an attempt to adapt it to this research, his theory might be illuminating. For instance, if we use the Burning Times as an origin myth, two assumptions can be made. One assumption includes that Witchcraft existed before that time, as opposed to a Christian figment. The other assumption goes back to how real Witches went underground. It completely changed the face of what Witchcraft looked like then, and it most certainly impacts how it looks today. Had there been an unbroken religious practice from the pre-Burning Times until now, there would not be a constant reinvention of what ritual practice or the Sacred looked like.

In addition, Eliade's concept of defining the Sacred and Profane as what separates the parts of people's lives can readily be applied to the actual ritual practice of Paganism. The concept of casting a circle is just as impermeable as walking into a church or temple. Circle creation is a defining line between others and Pagan practitioners. Keeping others out and keeping practitioners in, keeping the magic contained, while keeping the mundane out, and keeping structure in and chaos out is the reason for the circle's existence. It is one of the best examples of how one can keep the profane and the sacred separate. If someone with any skill is casting a circle, it will be a most powerful barrier.

Another area to explore from Eliade is his declaration of primitive man's tendencies to live in the sacred as possible.⁴⁰ The parallels between his suggestion of

³⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religions* (Florida: Halcourt, Inc, 1957), 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 12.

archaic man and the desire of many Pagans present-day are uncanny, as can be seen in the following: “. . .the sacred is equivalent to a power, and, to reality. The sacred is saturated with being. Sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacy.” Pagans attempt to live a holistic and sacred life. To imply that this tendency is lost with ancient man opens up an interesting study for contemporary man.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman introduce the concept of reality as socially constructed. People in society at large, as well as smaller groups, give meanings to why things are done and thus, create reality. Their treatise suggests that individuals’ interactions with one another are habituated. All people have roles to play in society, and society has dictated how and what those roles are.

Taking Berger and Luckman’s theory and applying it to a group of Pagans and the religion of Paganism, can extricate many subtle meanings. The meanings in this research are associated with the mythhistory of the Burning Times, and how and if it manifests itself in present-day ritual. One example that may be explored within is how the Sabbat of Samhain is celebrated. Many Samhain celebrations include a time to acknowledge those who have died-- both those who were known to us and those who were not. While attending many Samhain rituals, there have been mentions of the victims of the Burning Times. So, ritually speaking, taking a moment to acknowledge the accused, of Witchcraft, could be a way of bringing the Burning Times into present-day practice.

Through Berger and Luckman’s work, light can be shed on how the knowledge of the Burning Times are understood through texts that are available to the Pagan practitioner. Some texts merely pass over that mythhistory only mentioned, in relation to something else. Though in many covens, there are classes dedicated to the subject matter.

Why is it passed over in the written word, but then taught as an important part of Paganism?

Berger and Luckman's most basic treatise is the following.

...persons and groups interacting together in a social system form, over time, concepts or mental representations of each other's actions, and that these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. When these roles are made available to other members of society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized. In the process of this institutionalization, meaning is embedded in society. Knowledge and people's conception (and belief) of what reality is becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Social reality is therefore said to be socially constructed.⁴¹

The framework outlined by their theory, most predominately helps with this subject matter. In an attempt to understand the placement of the mythhistory of the Burning Times within the Pagan practitioners' framework, this theory will get to the minute details. Understanding why certain practices are done and how they might reflect the Burning Times is the goal of including this theory in this research.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic research of the Azande people⁴² and understanding the social function of Witchcraft and oracles, played an important part in this research. Meanings of certain acts, words, or thoughts could not be understood, unless it is seen and understood within the framework of the social setting that is being studied. Evans-Pritchard's work allows a researcher to look at various ritual settings and understand them as practical and logical within that context. Perhaps outside of that

⁴¹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 8.

⁴² E. E. Evans-Pritchard. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

environment, those actions and words would be dysfunctional, but within the ritual setting much can be gleaned in understanding the motivations.

Evans-Pritchard's jumping off point was from Lucien Levy-Bruhl. While Levy-Bruhl looked at "primitive" and "scientific" modes of thought, Evans-Pritchard actually set to analyzing the differences between the two, and if so, what they are and how they might function in social contexts. The Azande were his subject of research. As he studies the Azandes' "notions of natural and supernatural causation and interference in people's lives,"⁴³ it calls to mind the thoughts that present-day Pagans have about an interconnectivity of the same idea of natural and supernatural causes and challenges in their lives.

Evans-Pritchard did not view societies that others term as "primitive." He looked at them as different. When he looked at magic and Witchcraft, he viewed these as elements that were valuable in the societies. Within Paganism, the use of magic is one of the most common elements among all of the sects of Paganism. As a defining part of Paganism, magic and its use is an aspect that connects the modern day practitioner to the practitioner of the past. Magic and oracles, as Evans-Pritchard discovered with the Azande, were a source of mediation and problem solving.⁴⁴ This method was based on rational thought by the Azande people and to their understanding and knowledge of their environment. To some extent, modern Pagans utilize magic for the same reasons.

Evans-Pritchard also explores closed systems of thought. This is directly connected to the notions of natural and supernatural as stated above, but further discusses that these ideas are rational and systematic within their social system. Within that

⁴³ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

society, their knowledge is considered closed and self-perpetuating. It is not closed in the sense of isolation from others, but closed in the sense of the social structure, and the meanings that are applied to knowledge. Within Paganism, there are certain beliefs and knowledge that constantly recycle themselves from one practitioner to another, not wholly in the way that Evans-Pritchard applies it. However, it certainly can inform beliefs, when it comes to the Burning Times, and it can be seen in the ritual practices that are passed down in individual covens.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard gives way to Robin Horton. Horton expands on Evans-Pritchard, in saying that not only are there closed systems of thought, but that there are open systems of thought as well.⁴⁵ To better understand what is being studied it is imperative that there is an understanding of one's social location and how that shapes one's thoughts. While both traditional beliefs and Western science are based on theoretical thought, Horton argues that the differences between these knowledge systems in practice and form are due to their states in open and closed cultures.⁴⁶ He classifies scientifically oriented cultures as "open" because they are aware of other modes of thought, while traditional cultures are "closed" because they are unaware of alternatives to the established theories. The varying sources of information in these systems results in differences in form, which Horton asserts, often blinds observers from seeing the similarities between the systems as two applications of theoretical thought. Paganism in America has a basis in primitive, closed culture, but is having to coexist in a society that makes it hard to not be open and aware. Horton's theory could possibly be explored in

⁴⁵ Robin Horton, *African Traditional Thought and Western Science* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 35

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

this sect of American society that seems to want to incorporate primitive ideals into modern modes of thought.

Clifford Gertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, defined culture as, “...a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”⁴⁷

His work again is something being utilized to understand what kind of power the past might have over the present or future. Pagans today have an idea of the historical event of the Burning Times, but within the context of the Pagan community and that religious identity, it affects the way in which they view others. Geertz provides an example of how to provide a full color description of settings and situations (as seen in his essay on cock fighting), in which to make sense out of the environment and observations taking place throughout this research. Functionalism is a word often thrown around, when citing Geertz, and in the case of this research, form and order is a means by which to understand the ritual setting.

Victor Turner’s concepts of *communitas* and *liminality* are another lens to better understand this subject matter. *Communitas*, the way Turner utilizes it, looks at how the community is a community; the way there is social equality, solidarity, and a common social goal. In addition, this community experiences *liminality* together. There is a struggle to achieve enlightenment together. Turner uses these terms as defining points to study the ritual setting. He also alludes to the sacred and the profane, although he uses the term ‘secular’ in place of profane.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

⁴⁸ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (New York: Walter d Gruyter, 1995), 94-97.

Turner's concepts can be utilized in this study because Pagan practitioners are not that easy to come across for various reasons. In this case, it is because they do not have large gathering places to attend. They meet in small groups and cultivate meaningful relationships with the others. There is a very real sense of *communitas* and liminality in the coven setting.

Anthony Wallace's *Revitalization Movement* and Alice Beck Kehoe's *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization* looked at how ritual practice is synthesized with practitioners' beliefs.⁴⁹ Many aspects of these writings can be applied to this research. Wallace's revitalization model can be seen in the timeline that is Paganism.⁵⁰ Ritual practice and the concept of Paganism, in general, seem to take on the shape of an amoeba. It constantly shifts and changes, more slowly at a larger level, but at the individual level, there is a constant give and take in developing ritual practice.

Through the stress and fear of the Burning Times, many defining practices of Paganism were either changed or completely let go in order to survive. There has been a very real recreation and restructure to what it means to be Pagan.

In the present day, there is a constant reformulating, revitalizing, and recreating of practices that make up a modern Pagan practitioner. These new or recreated practices may be due to the Burning Times, or it might be due to the general philosophy of Paganism to take what works and leave the rest. Either way, the concept of revitalization, in regards to Paganism, is one theoretical concept that could focus the understanding of present-day Paganism and its connection to the past.

⁴⁹ Alice Beck Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2006).

⁵⁰ Anthony Wallace, Religious Revitalization Movements. *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956).

Last, Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember* looks at the concept of how "social memory" is passed down through generations.⁵¹ Most memory is passed down via the written word, but Connerton looks at how practices, pregnant with meaning and memory, are passed down in and as traditions. He further suggests that images and knowledge can be conveyed and sustained through ritual performances. This can take place through performative situations because according to Connerton, memory is bodily.

Many religious ceremonies are passed down from historical times and foundations. If we are doing the same ritual ceremony from all those years ago, then there are direct correlations to that faith and that faith's history. Is that the same for Paganism, as there was something of an interruption into the natural evolution of it? From the place of the Burning Times, does the memory of it manifest itself somehow in Pagan ritual? All these questions allow for an interesting exploration into Connerton's theory as it applies to this research.

This literature review is extensive. There are many levels to understanding the Burning Times and how that event affects modern day Pagan practice. Starting with Pagan authors, there is a sense of ambivalence. There is a part that expounds on the importance of the Burning Times, its importance to Pagans and history, and the other part that dismisses it. The second section deals with how the Burning Times are used to make progress on social fronts, most prominently feminism, and also, property confiscation. Framing the Burning Times, as a by-product to larger social issues, is an important aspect to be included when understanding the present day implications. Last, there is a look at the many social scientific theoretical frameworks that provide the tools necessary, to

⁵¹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.

provide a deep analysis when seeking how a tragedy such as the Burning Times can be brought to the present.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the methods employed during this research. In addition, the sample will be described. Last, the strategy used to analyze the data will be explained and discussed.

The sample in this study is derived from three partially overlapping sources. The participants came from the local Pagan community, a large Pagan festival that takes place in the Midwest and two covens. Three methods were used as well surveys, in-depth interviews and participant observation. Being on the outskirts of the Pagan community for many years made it very easy to gain access, not only to well-publicized events, but also to intimate meetings.

Quantitative Methods

The quantitative method used to gain knowledge was a survey that was distributed at a rather large Pagan festival. The Heartland Pagan Festival (HPF) takes place every year on Memorial Day weekend and typically has an attendance from between 700 and 1200 people. It is one of the largest Pagan festivals in the country and occurs in McClouth County in Kansas. The attendees include Pagans from a variety of sects along with Naturists and Pagan friendly individuals. The first festival was organized in 1986 and has occurred every year since.

This survey was accessible to all of the attendees at the Pagan festivals. A tri-fold poster was created explaining the desire to have participants along with what the survey

was for and to what ends it would be used for was intended to educate the volunteer and provide a sense of anonymity. This set up was in two different places on the site. I was not present, however, I did let the informants know where I was if they had questions.

The survey provided very general and simple questions to gain basic knowledge about Pagan practitioners. It also provided a way to poll a wide range of individuals in a relatively small, intimate gathering, in a defined geographic area. People who attend Heartland come from all over the United States; there are even a few people who travel from over seas. The survey was set up in four parts⁵². The first part was intended to gain information on basic demographics about the participants. This fundamental information included gender, age, ethnicity, education, occupation and marital status.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Gender

Variable	Labels	N	%
Gender	Male	47	38.5%
	Female	73	59.8%
	Other	2	1.6%

For the variable of “Gender” the label of “Transgendered” was also included. No volunteer used that label to describe themselves, however. There are people within the Pagan community who could be described as transgendered. With the option of choosing “Other,” no participant chose “Transgender.”

Age was another variable measured, however, I did not include this break down in this paper due to the fact that it would have simply shown the age of those attending the

⁵² See appendix C

festival. Age, as a variable of demographics in this research, would have shown a younger person would be more inclined to festival attendance than an older individual.

In the survey, choices were provided for the variable of “Ethnicity.” In addition to the labels below, also included were “Asian” and “Hispanic or Latino.” No one described themselves as “Asian” or “Hispanic or Latino.”

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: Ethnicity

Variable	Labels	N	%
Ethnicity	Caucasian	103	85.1%
	African American	5	4.1%
	Native American	11	9.0%
	Other	3	2.4%

In regard to occupations held, there was not one kind of job that Pagans found themselves in. Quite frankly, their occupations ran the gambit. The question in the survey was open ended. Every profession from an accountant to a writer was within my sample. There was no correlation that could be seen between what participants in this survey did for their occupations and their classification as some sect of Paganism.

Education level was an important variable for this research. While formal education was not necessarily paramount for the Pagan philosophy, being well read as a Pagan was important.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics: Education Levels

Variable	Labels	N	%
Education Level	Some High School	1	.8%
	Completed H. S.	13	10.7%
	Some College	62	50.8%
	Completed B.A.	37	30.3%
	Completed M.A.	5	4.2%
	Completed Ph.D	2	1.6%
	Technical College	2	1.6%

Table 4. Descriptive statistics: Marital Status

Variable	Labels	N	%
Marital Status	Never Married	22	18.0%
	Married Legally	30	24.6%
	Married Ritually	3	2.5%
	Live with S.O./lover	23	18.9%
	Divorced	24	19.7%
	Separated	3	2.5%
	Other	16	12.9%

The second section of the questionnaire included inquiries about what religious tradition the participants were raised in, how they define themselves now, whether they are out about their beliefs, and what event or events drew them to this religious tradition.

These inquiries were important because it allowed these participants to define themselves. It gave them the opportunity to provide a history of their religious evolution. The question about religious upbringing was open-ended. These labels were terms that the participants chose. There are some redundancies when it comes to the classification of Christianity, however, this is due to the specifics of the practice.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics: Religious Upbringing

Variable	Label	N	%
Religion as a child	Christian	40	32%
	Catholic	21	16.8%
	Pentecostal	1	.8%
	Mormon	4	3.2%
	Baptist	24	19.2
	Pagan	1	.8%
	Agnostic	1	.8%
	Mishmash	20	16%
	Other	3	2.4%
	None	4	3.2%

Table 6. Descriptive statistics: Present-Day Religious Tradition

Variable	Label	N	%
Religion Now	Pagan	36	29.5%
	Witch	15	12.3%
	Wiccan	27	22.1%
	Druid	2	1.6%
	Faery	3	2.5%
	Other	21	17.2%
	No Answer	18	14.8%

Table 7. Descriptive statistics: Out about beliefs

Variable	Label	N	%
Out or Not	Out	81	66.4%
	Not Out	6	4.9%
	Situational	34	28.7%

The question in the survey, “What brought you to this religious belief?” was not an open-ended inquiry. The labels below, except the “mishmash of reasons,” were provided for the volunteers. What was provided in the survey was an option that stated, “Other, please define.” Many answers included a combination of reasons or they checked several of the labels to be applied. This is where the “mishmash of reasons” came from.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics: What brought you to this belief?

Variable	Label	N	%
Deciding Factor	Books	9	7.4%
	Family Tradition	5	4.1%
	Paranormal Exp.	6	4.9%
	Closeness to a powerful, spiritual force	26	21.3%
	Friend Practiced	17	13.9%
	Other	24	19.7%
	Mishmash of Reasons	35	28.7%

The third section of the survey focused primarily on ritual practice. The questions that were explored in this section were whether or not Pagan practitioners performed ritual, why they performed ritual, whether or not they give offerings to the ancestors or deities, if they use some sort of ‘ancient’ language or language of the past, and what the purpose of their ritual normally is. Two ideas can be explored in this section. One is whether ritual practice is an integral part of Pagan practice, but also if there is a feeling that there is a connection to the past. The first question, “Do you perform ritual” was meant to get a baseline of whether ritual was a useful Pagan practice. Pagans are not going to perform ritual if they do not think it is purposeful.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics: Do you perform ritual?

Variable	Label	N	%
Ritual	Yes	107	87.7%
	No	15	12.3%

Another inquiry, “Why do you perform ritual?” was an open-ended question. Because Pagans create and perform ritual for a variety of reasons, it was important in this question to allow the informants to use their own words to describe why they create ritual. Despite the many justifications, it was very clear that most rituals take place for a multitude of reasons simultaneously. In addition, some participants could not articulate the exact reason for why they perform ritual.

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics: Why do you perform ritual?

Variable	Label	N	%
Reason for Ritual	Mishmash of Reasons	42	33.6%
	Connection, worship, commune with deities, ancestors & other beings	24	19.2%
	Magick or attuning to energy	13	10.4%
	Prayer & Giving Thanks	6	4.8%
	Something Ethereal	5	4.0%
	Celebration	1	.8%
	Don't perform Ritual	2	1.6%
	Create Sacred Space	7	5.6%
	Other	22	17.6%

Table 11. Descriptive Statistics: Do you give offerings at your rituals?

Variable	Label	N	%
Offerings	Yes	83	68.0%
	No	33	27.0%
	No Answer	6	5.0%

Last, the fourth section of the survey focused on the Burning Times. Questions asked were, first and foremost, whether they knew what the Burning Times were, whether they believed nine million people were killed during the Burning Times, did they

believe that this persecution lent legitimacy to Paganism as a viable religious tradition, does the Burning Times give historical ties from the present-day to the past, does the Burning Times provide a unifying history to Paganism, does the Burning Times give a group mind, do you believe that people died due to religious persecution, and do you believe that people died due to the label of Witchcraft. The inquiries in this last section were very important for getting a general understanding of the importance of the Burning Times to present-day practitioners.

Table 12. Descriptive Statistics: Knowledge of the Burning Times

Variable	Label	N	%
Knowledge	Yes	111	91.0%
	No	10	8.2%
	No Answer	1	.8%

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics: Do you believe 9 million Witches were killed?

Variable	Label	N	%
Belief	Yes	68	55.7%
	No	33	27.0%
	No Answer	13	10.7
	Missing Value	8	6.6%

Table 14. Descriptive Statistics: Does this lend legitimacy to Paganism?

Variable	Label	N	%
Legitimacy	Yes	52	42.6%
	No	51	41.8%
	No Answer	14	10.7%
	Missing Value	5	4.1%

Table 15. Descriptive Statistics: Does this provide historical threads to the past?

Variable	Label	N	%
Historical Threads	Yes	75	61.5%
	No	30	24.6%
	No Answer	13	10.7%
	Missing Value	4	3.3%

Table 16. Descriptive Statistics: Does this provide a unifying history?

Variable	Label	N	%
Unification	Yes	87	71.3%
	No	17	13.9%
	No Answer	14	11.5%
	Missing	4	3.3%

The last four questions were meant to invoke an emotional response. Perhaps making them less emotionally charged, or adjusting the wording would have changed the responses.

Table 17. Descriptive Statistics: Does this provide a group mind?

Variable	Label	N	%
Group Mind	Yes	82	67.2%
	No	18	14.8%
	No Answer	15	12.3%
	Missing	7	5.7%

Table 18. Descriptive Statistics: Do you believe that people died due to religious persecution?

Variable	Label	N	%
Religious Persecution	Yes	108	88.5%
	No	2	1.6%
	No Answer	10	8.2%
	Missing	2	1.6%

Table 19. Descriptive Statistics: Do you believe that people died due to the label “Witchcraft”?

Variable	Label	N	%
Died due to label	Yes	109	89.3%
	No	1	.8%
	No Answer	10	8.2%
	Missing Value	2	1.6%

This questionnaire was greatly inspired by Margot Adler’s research and survey that led to her book, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*⁵³. Helen Berger’s book *Voices from a Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*⁵⁴ and Loretta Orion’s book, *Never Again the Burning Times: Paganism Revived*.⁵⁵ These three sources helped to create the design for this survey.

The data from this survey were gathered at the 2005 Heartland Pagan Festival. At this particular festival there were 907 attendees. One hundred and twenty two questionnaires were collected. These one hundred and twenty two respondents represented 10.3% of the attendees.

⁵³ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: The Resurgence of Paganism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) 443-465.

⁵⁴ Helen Berger, Evan A. Leach & Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices From the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

⁵⁵ Loretta Orion, *Never Again the Burning Times: Paganism Revived*. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press 1995).

The data collected were analyzed with SPSS. Statistical tests were run to assess relationships based on the answers to the surveys. These surveys were used overall in this research as a very general backdrop to the more intense and in-depth interviews. They were useful for allowing generalities to be made about the greater community of Pagans.

Qualitative Methodology

Participant observation and in-depth interviews make up the qualitative elements of this research. Over the course of this study, I was engaged with the local Pagan community generally and was officially apart of two covens. I took part in the Heartland Pagan Festival and took in workshops and lectures.

Two covens allowed me access. Through participant observation I could experience the cycle of the year with each coven as they experienced it. One coven was considered a 'peer group' and the other was hierarchal. They each have their good points and bad. Coven A, the peer group coven, is very small. It has a group of individuals that are considered advanced students and they are organized through consensus. They create their classes, their Sabbats and trips as a group by means of agreement. Coven B, the hierarchal coven, is much larger. There are many personalities in this group that can wreak havoc, but they are fiercely loyal to one another.

As an observer, both covens provide different experiences and they both seemed clear in what their goal was. For example, in Coven A, because they were considered upper level practicing Pagans, they worked a lot of magic and worked on cultivating their skills at a hands on level. Coven B, on the other hand, had such a variety of people at

different levels it was hard for them to do some of the upper level magic that was done in Coven A. Both covens' goal was to advance in magic and enlightenment.

In addition to taking part in two covens, in-depth interviews served as an intimate way to draw out of the volunteers their beliefs about the Burning Times and their ritual practice. All the volunteers seemed quite candid when talking about their beliefs and faith.

An interview schedule⁵⁶ was used to keep the in-depth interviews on a loose track. It was important for the sake of this research to allow for a meandering by the informant to relay their beliefs in their own words. The interview schedule followed the same questions that were found in the survey but the volunteers were allowed to elaborate on any given point. Obviously, the surveys were much more black and white in the method of gathering information.

The in-depth interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to well over two hours each and they were transcribed. Key elements in similarities or outliers were pulled out picked apart. Quotes, coming directly from the participants, sharing views expressly, were integrated into this thesis.

This mixed methodology allowed for a multilayered understanding of this subject matter. It allowed a quick general look at the present-day Pagan through the surveys. It allowed for a more detailed analysis through the in-depth interviews, and it allowed for a deeper understanding of the Pagan experience through the actions and nuances uncovered through participant observation.

⁵⁶ See Appendix D

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter will examine the results of the methodology. First, the statistical tests will be presented based on the questionnaires that were distributed. All of the statistical tests are tests of significance to determine relationships. Second, the results of the interviews will be outlined. Last, key ideas that came through from participant observation will be presented. The next chapter, the discussion, will look at all these outcomes in more detail and through theoretical analysis.

Statistics

When this research began, the question of whether there was a direct connection between the mythhistory of the Burning Times and present-day ritual practice of Paganism was of paramount interest. In an attempt to show this connection, it was important to look at who embraced, believed or otherwise understood the history of Witchcraft and how they practiced Pagan ritual. Through the statistical data, it was found that the demographics of my sample were not really important as explanatory factors. Yes, it did provide a broad stroke in regards to the type of people that were drawn to Paganism. It was when inquiring about religious practice and the participants' understanding of the historical persecutions where demographics were the least revealing element that came into play.

It could be inferred that education impacts the beliefs of the Burning Times. There certainly appears to be an exercising of critical thinking when it comes to the

Burning Times, generally speaking. Not everyone, however, appears to have one single thought about the Burning Times.

Seven correlations were run. The first test was a Pearson correlation between the two variables, “Do You Believe 9 Million Were Killed” and “Education”. To get a baseline correlation between who believes this mythhistory and their education level appeared to be the best place to start. Pearson correlations measure a relationship from negative to positive between -1.00 and +1.00. In the case of this first test, the correlation is .796, which shows a compelling positive correlation between ones education level and whether one believes the mythhistory of 9 million Witches were killed during the Burning Times.

The second Pearson Correlation test run was again looking at the linear relationship between “Education” and whether my sample believed that “People died due to the label of Witchcraft.” Again, there was a positive significant relationship of .592. In comparison to the first test the relationship is not as strong but it is positive nonetheless. It begs the question of why is there a greater relationship between education and the belief of 9 million Witches killed versus the second test between education and people dying due to the label of Witchcraft. Since the questionnaires were anonymous and there was not a follow up, it can only be inferred that due to the education level of my participants, they did believe that 9 million Witches were killed but not necessarily due to the label of Witchcraft. This sample does believe that other factors played a part in the killing of all of these people.

The second factor is that many people of this sample had a higher than average (if we consider graduation from High School average) education level and many of the

participants believed that nine million Witches were killed, when research from many sources and scholars declare not nearly that number was executed. The reality of the matter is that people were killed and most likely other social issues were the reason, so if an inference was employed that not all of the people killed were Witches then how could there be agreement with the statement that nine million Witches were killed? Perhaps participants believe the mythhistory because it is just that, it has manifested into a type of myth for those who classify themselves as Pagan.

The third and fourth tests looked at the variable of ritual practice in connection to their beliefs about the Burning Times. The third test looked at why “ritual performance” is done in relation to whether there is “knowledge of the Burning Times”. According to the significance, there is a weak positive correlation between the two variables. With a significance of .259, it does show a positive correlation, but it is not strong. It does show, in generalities, that there is a relationship, however.

The fourth test looks at a possible correlation between whether the sample believed in the mythhistory of “9 million were killed” and whether or not they “perform ritual”. In this test, the goal was to see if any correlation could be drawn between these two variables. As it turned out, there was a positive significant relationship of .666. What can be determined is, just simply, those who believe that nine million were killed also perform some type of ritual.

The next three correlations look at whether people are out about their beliefs in connection to three other variables. The first test looks at whether there is a relationship between “being out about their beliefs” and whether or not they “believe 9 million were killed” during the Burning Times. With a significant positive correlation of .843, there

certainly is a connection between these two variables. What could be concluded about this test is the belief that nine million Witches were killed has an above average likelihood of informing the decision of being out about this sample's religious beliefs. This outcome is one of the strongest correlations in this research.

The second test of this trio, looks at how one is "out about their beliefs" and whether or not they "believe that people died due to religious persecution." With a correlation of .528, the relationship is positive and significant. In comparison to the last test, the variable of whether those persecuted were killed due to religious persecution clearly is not as strong as the belief that nine million Witches died, but this too could have some weight as to whether someone is out. It is a challenge to escape the fact that this research is happening in the Bible belt of the country and there seems to be an unseen stigma that hangs in the air if you are not a follower of some form of traditional Christian faith. Another generalization that could be drawn is that it might not even be intentional. The leeriness experienced by some Pagan practitioners might be unknown to them; it could be something they are unaware of. Therefore, it could be some connection that is never fully realized. The connection of being out with knowing about the Burning Times along with believing that nine million Witches perished due to some motivation of persecution may be completely subconscious.

The last of this line of tests looks at whether there is a relationship between "being out" and whether the participants "believed that people died due to the label of Witchcraft." With a positive significance of .494, there is a relationship; however, it is average. Again as with the last test, it could be that there is some kind of subconscious relationship. The time, place, and climate are different than they were at the peak of the

Burning Times, but it appears there is a small fear among Pagan practitioners about being discovered.

These statistical tests allowed for a look at variables in the simplest way and test them to determine if relationships or correlations exist between them. With all the statistical tests that were run, there does in fact, appear to be correlations that are positively significant.

In-Depth Interviews

The interviews provided a plethora of information. The Burning Times do fit into the practice of practitioners; it just is not black and white. To be clear, the informants readily admitted that their understanding of a Witch's life at the height of the Burning Times was unrecognizable to a Witch now. Both these Witches are very different. In fact, many participants expressed that they probably would not be able to identify a Witch from that time period due to the evolution that has occurred. A majority believed that people were killed during the Burning Times but all of them were not Witches. Social expectations and situations were the culprits for the killings; to be absolute, religion and the spread of Christianity were a part of that.

According to the research questions, there were three areas to be explored. First, does the Mythhistory of the Burning Times provide threads that bind modern practitioners to those that have come before? Second, does the Mythhistory of the Burning Times lend legitimacy to the faith? And, third, does the Mythhistory of the Burning Times provide a unifying history of persecution and sacrifice that in turn provides a sense of shared meaning. By extension, these three ideas, if embraced by the

Pagan community, are in this research, thought to manifest in the way modern day Pagan practitioners perform ritual. This would happen because traditions would be similar and ritual practice would incorporate many of the same elements from place to place.

When looking at that first research question, whether the Burning Times provide historical threads to modern Pagan practitioners, there seems to be a resounding no. Explanations that were uncovered suggest that Witches in the past does not necessarily relate to Witches now. The fact that there were persecutions and some people died who may have been Witches does not automatically mean there is a relationship. And, because we do not know what happened during the Burning Times or exactly how rituals were performed makes it a huge challenge to create that connection. That being said, trying to draw an actual timeline from the Burning Times to present-day American Pagans is conjecture at best; however, there does seem to be a respect for the past and the persecutions that took place on a human rights level.

The second research question, does the Burning Times lend legitimacy to the Pagan faith, encouraged many questions to come forth. Defining what legitimacy means was tricky. Legitimacy calls to mind many ideas such as tradition or traditional, rightness in terms of a rightness to exist on the world stage of religions, or authenticity in terms of mirroring the Witches of old. The term legitimacy was a hard one to pin down and many of the interviewees did not like the term or having to give a reason for legitimacy. For the most part, these subjects would say that the Burning Times did not provide legitimacy to the Pagan faith. More than one member of the sample thought that people having to die for this religion to be legitimate did not make it legitimate to them.

Part of the issue here was that the term “legitimacy” was not defined for the participants. They had to determine what legitimacy meant to them and measure the Burning Times and modern Pagan practice and see if legitimacy was a term that they would use. Legitimacy was not a term that they used. I could infer that the term itself tainted the question because the term legitimacy has to be determined in comparison to something else. In this case, it would mean, there would need to be a comparison to another religion or structure that is considered legitimate. In American culture, Christianity is certainly considered a legitimate religion and the most popular. Paganism can exist and indeed does outside of the social acceptance of Christianity but being Pagan in a predominately Christian country can cause some hostility toward Christian doctrine.

While the consensus was that Paganism did not need to be legitimized by the Burning Times, the meaning of what legitimacy meant to my subjects muddled the waters more than anticipated. The contributors either outright stated or alluded to the fact that their own magical, mystical, or ritual experience was all they needed to legitimate Paganism for them.

The third in the research questions, does the Burning Times provide a unifying shared meaning within the Pagan community, has an equally challenging outcome. Attempting to have unified anything among Pagans is a difficult undertaking. Paganism seems to breed thinking--critical thinking at that. It is not possible to be unified about how the Burning Times impact present-day Pagan unification because Pagans believe to varying degrees about the Burning Times. There is not a level playing field at the start, so with this community, you are not going to end up remotely in the same place. It is not possible.

Is this due to the fact that so much is in question about the Burning Times factually or is it because Pagans tend to pick and choose what they believe about the Burning Times, independently? Toward the end of this research, there does not appear to be a unifying event or teaching that all Pagans subscribe to. To this end, the answer to the third inquiry is that the Burning Times does not provide a unifying shared meaning within the Pagan community.

Due to the fact that the surveys produced a resounding yes to the research questions, while the interviews yielded a clear no, there is a need to look at the actions and nuances that take place in the coven and ritual setting. This outcome is strictly based on the answers that people gave. The history of the Burning Times and the persecution that took place against Witches and non-Witches, men, women, children, and animals does not innately influence ritual. If it does, it is not at the conscious level. According to the volunteers, when it came right down to it, the Burning Times did not manifest itself radically in ritual practice or even mundanely. Again, from the participants, there is a working knowledge of the Burning Times, but it has no impact on ritual practice, save for a nod, of acknowledgement, on Samhain or when the subject is broached. Ritual practice may be brought forward from texts that state this was how it was done five hundred years ago, but somehow having the Burning Times impact the ritual does not occur, according to the informants.

However, there did seem to be an agreement, albeit to varying degrees, which the potential for another Burning Times could happen. There is a feeling that it would not occur, to the extent as the original persecutions. But, rather, it would not be solely about religion but about many social issues and injustices.

One impact the Burning Times has on a practicing Pagan can be seen in the mundane world. Certain circles, outside of those that are Pagan friendly, are not privy to the knowledge of the individuals' personal religious practice. Among like-minded individuals and because the community is small, Pagans feel comfortable out in those circles but not out at work or unrelated environments. Very few individuals can live their life completely cloaked within the Pagan community. They would have to own a 'New Age' store or work in an atmosphere that would allow complete transparency. The reality is that individuals have to make a living to provide for themselves and their families, and more likely than not, it will not be in a completely Pagan setting. The Burning Times or the fear of persecution is found in this realm. Pagans determine who and how they will be out to people outside of their Pagan community. One of the participants, Laura, spoke about how she had come out to more than one friend and they no longer spoke to her. It only takes one of those experiences to make you wary of sharing that part. She conveyed that she did not need to keep putting her hands on the hot stove to know that it is hot.

Leslie, another volunteer, also countered that in fact that is exactly why she lost her job. "No," she said, "that's not what it says on paper, but that was the reason." Discrimination does exist in the mundane world. Most likely due to fear and misunderstandings, found in popular culture and news stories of the past calling people Witches or Satanists like Bob Berdella.⁵⁷

It is hard to believe that in today's American society that someone could be fired from a job or have a friend turn their back on them because of their religious beliefs. On

⁵⁷ Bob Berdella was one of Kansas City's most infamous serial killers. In the news he was called a "Witch" or a Satanist when he was discovered. Part of this was because he owned an "occult" shop where he sold some of his victim's bones. He was not a Witch but now the public correlated someone like Bob Berdella with being a Witch, the public's fears skyrocketed about that sect of society.

one hand, Americans embrace freedom of religion but on the other hand they have institutionalized discrimination.

While the Burning Times is not obvious in Pagan practice, it does in fact manifest itself in modern Paganism. The mythhistory of the Burning Times is subtly seen within the ritual or coven setting as might be expected, but also where you might least expect to see it. The ripples of the Burning Times are seen in the work place or around the dinner table filled with family or even friends. The ripple is found at PTA meetings or neighborhood association meetings. There is a subtle fear of coming out to non-like-minded individuals. Hints to a practitioner's other than Christian leanings tend to be common, but coming right out and removing all doubt is something that is done with much thought. A public expulsion is what develops from coming out. Many of the participants had many supportive experiences in their coming out but there was also someone or something that made it clear that Paganism was not an acceptable choice when choosing a religious practice. Many informants conveyed that more than anything those reactions were based on misinformation or fear. When you are coming out to certain sects of Christianity the mere fact that you do not subscribe to Christian belief condemns you to hell.

From a sociological perspective the study of Paganism is fascinating. There are many perspectives and opinions that could be explored. Many theories can be applied to understand Pagan practice and practitioners. Paganism is like no other religion, and yet, it is exactly the same. It evolves and changes to accommodate its practitioners. There are always universal truths that can be found from one religious structure to another, but the way Pagans' live their lives outside of the structured meetings, appear to be different.

Participant Observation

The inclusion into two covens made a great impact upon this research. As most hard sciences can declare the results of their research in a very clear fashion, that was not to be the case, in this study. Close and trusting relationships are created within the confines of a strong coven. It almost seems as if they are unbreakable bonds. Many participants declare their covens as “chosen family,” or even, “best friends,” and as an observer it can easily be seen.

One’s involvement in a coven can be for many reasons. Obviously a Pagan might be drawn to a coven for community or to study under the tutelage of a certain High Priest or High Priestess. One could be drawn to study with a coven because of a hierarchal set up. Again, there are many reasons why people are drawn to a coven, but first and foremost it is the circling with like-minded individuals that seem to be of paramount importance.

As a participant, the nuances of the reality, thoughts, feelings, and ideas were easily discernable. Due to the safety of the environment, inquiry was met with a great willingness to discuss and provide clarification by these practitioners. Observation proved to be even more important than the actual participation. As with all people, sometimes the things that are said are quite different from what is meant. After much time was spent with these two covens, it is the things that are said that are just as important as those that are not.

This research utilized a mixed methodology. To be clear, the outcomes that came out of this study must be understood in the nature of each method used. The surveys

provide a very black and white look at a group of Pagans. The intention was to gain a lot of knowledge with little variation. The in-depth interviews were intended to gain knowledge as well, but in a different fashion. Many of the questions were the same as in the survey, but the interviews allowed for an explanation. The interviews allowed for a meandering in which the participants could articulate why they answered the questions the way they did. The participant observation provided nuances and actions, which allowed for a different kind of analysis. The answers gained from the surveys and the in-depth interviews were sometimes contradictory to the actions and the traditions that took place in the coven setting. In addition, all three of these methods brought to light essential features that made this research worthwhile.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The goal of this thesis is to draw correlations and connections from the past to the present, generally. As the Burning Times was a significant event from the past, it is proposed that it has effects on the present through three means. The Burning Times provides historical narrative threads that bind modern practitioners to those that have come before. It lends legitimacy to the faith. It provides a unifying history of persecution and sacrifice that produces a sense of shared meaning. These three characteristics will further manifest in the way modern day Pagans practice their faith and live their lives.

These three means are met with a kind of ambivalence. There is a desire to embrace the Burning Times, while at the same time denying it. There is an underlying knowledge of the Burning Times, but it is not brought into the practice of Pagans with any great intention. The indecisive manner, of most practicing Pagans, allows them to vacillate on what the Burning Times mean to them, how much they incorporate that history into their practice, and what it means to the present generation of self-proclaimed Pagans.

There are three areas that theoretical application proves to be useful within this thesis. When making a connection to present-day Paganism from events of the past, three key issues can be examined. Legitimacy, myth, and rituals understood from a theoretical perspective, can show how the past can impact the present Pagan practices through time and space. The perspectives of the participants themselves further support these

theoretical frameworks. Through Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann⁵⁸, Mircea Eliade,⁵⁹ and Paul Connerton,⁶⁰ a very clear connection can be established within Paganism from what is considered history and present-day Pagan practice.

To begin with, Berger and Luckmann examine knowledge and its construction. Berger and Luckmann's central thesis is that reality is socially constructed. In terms of reality, we understand it through knowledge. We "know" our "reality" in varying degrees. Berger and Luckmann summarize their treatise by saying,

The central concept of The Social Construction of Reality is that persons and groups interacting together in a social system form, over time, concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. When these roles are made available to other members of society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized. In the process of this institutionalization, meaning is embedded in society. Knowledge and people's conception (and belief) of what reality is becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Social reality therefore is socially constructed.⁶¹

The sociology of knowledge understands human reality as socially constructed reality. The basic concept of Berger and Luckmann's theory has to do with how social knowledge originates. Repeated patterns of behavior create roles that people in society play, such as customs, how others' behavior is interpreted, institutions, routines, and habits. We can anticipate in a situation how someone will react or how a range of reactions might come about. Berger and Luckmann acknowledge the importance of theoretical and scientific knowledge as a "social stock of knowledge," but they insist that this collection of knowledge should not be over utilized in understanding the human

⁵⁸ Peter Berger, Professor at Boston University and Thomas Luckmann, Professor of Sociology at the University of Konstanz wrote "The Social Construction of Reality." This text is a central contributor to this study. Both authors have other books published.

⁵⁹ Mircea Eliade was chairman of the Department of History of Religions at the University of Chicago. He has many books to his credit.

⁶⁰ Paul Connerton, Professor of Sociology at Cambridge University.

⁶¹ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 1-5.

condition, or as Berger and Luckman call it, the natural attitude. Immersing oneself into a group to be studied and interacting one-on-one allows a true understanding to be developed. When it comes to the social construction of reality, watching and participating within a group is a much more productive way to truly recognize the knowledge that creates an understanding of society.

Theoretical knowledge and the natural attitude must be acknowledged but ethnographic research is a very important part of this study. When gaining access to the Pagan community, discovering the meanings that ritual has for its participants and the thoughts and perceptions of what it means to be Pagan were ascertained. It allowed the subjects to convey their understanding in their own words.

The concept of legitimacy is one that Berger and Luckmann contribute to when it comes to the subjects of practicing Pagans. Through knowledge that is gained, and used to create religious practice, the question of legitimacy arises. The ways, in which Pagans know things about their religious path, is what legitimizes it.

Berger and Luckmann recall Eliade when looking at the importance of myth. Myth has a very valuable role in the present-day experience of Pagans. Eliade notes that, in traditional societies, myth represents the absolute truth about primordial time.⁶² According to Eliade, this was the time when the Sacred first appeared, establishing the world's structure—myths claim to describe the primordial events that made society and the natural world be that which they are. Eliade argues that all myths are, in that sense, origin myths: "myth, then, is always an account of a creation."⁶³ Many traditional

⁶² Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (London: Harvill Press, 1960), 23.

⁶³ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper and Row. 1963, 6.

societies believe that the power of a thing lies in its origin.⁶⁴ If origin is equivalent to power, then "it is the first manifestation of a thing that is significant and valid"⁶⁵ (a thing's reality and value therefore lies only in its first appearance).

According to Eliade's theory, only the Sacred has value and only a thing's first appearance has value. Therefore, only the Sacred's first appearance has value. Myth describes the Sacred's first appearance. So, the mythical age is sacred time,⁶⁶ the only time of value: "primitive man was interested only in the beginnings [...] to him it mattered little what had happened to himself, or to others like him, in more or less distant times."⁶⁷ Eliade postulated this as the reason for the nostalgia for origins that appears in many religions, the desire to return to a primordial paradise.⁶⁸

Paul Connerton's goal is to show that bodily practice and engagement is a way to preserve the past. Memory, as enacted by physical engagement, connects us to the past. Ritual performances are ways that we connect to the past and take part in a physical, bodily way. When looking at rituals, in this case, religious, its purpose per the application of Connerton, is to invoke a bodily connection, rather than a conceptual connection to the past. In ritual, we can invoke a sense of likeness and common practices to those people of the past and bring them forward to the present day. Attempting to bring "the" past into the present results in a complicated affair when text becomes the primary means of transmission.

What is found within the coven setting and the people associated with these covens are the association of legitimacy, myth, and ritual. They are important elements in

⁶⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁶ Eliade. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* pg. 23.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pg. 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pg. 44.

their religious practice, as well as, in their profane lives. Space and time also enhances the meanings of legitimacy, myth, and ritual. The following analysis looks at these terms and what they mean for Pagan practitioners, both in their words and in an interpretation with the help of Berger and Luckmann, Eliade, and Connerton.

Legitimacy

Legitimation, according to Berger and Luckman, is attained through the symbolic universe. Legitimation is “the process of ‘explaining’ and ‘justifying.’”⁶⁹ One way this occurs, is when there is an agreement on the state of the world. Even though, according to Berger and Luckmann, knowledge precedes value, knowledge and value determines legitimacy. In other words, individuals can live in society with some assurance that they really are what they consider themselves to be, as they play their routine social roles. Once there is an identity defined, in our case a Pagan identity, a Pagan acts in society, the way a Pagan is meant to act. Through knowledge that is gained as a Pagan, they play the part of a Pagan in the larger society. In other words, based on the symbolic universe, practicing Pagans know how they are supposed to act, both as a Pagan within the Pagan community, as well as, a Pagan in the larger society.

According to Berger and Luckmann, symbolic universes act as a matrix of knowledge that everyone has in a given framework. If we look at the practitioners of Paganism, there are some generally accepted beliefs, in theory. As a source of legitimation, symbolic universes provide explanations for why people do things the way they do.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid. 92-104

⁷⁰ Berger and Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, pg. 95-104.

Writers in the Pagan genre and their interpretation of historical events are a very important contribution to the symbolic universe. Authors that were the trailblazers for this genre (for my oldest practicing Pagan participants, who were looking for books in the 70s and 80s) were considered authorities on the subject of Witchcraft or Paganism. These authors provided a how to manual for anyone interested in Paganism. Those authors included Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, Margret Murray, and the Farrars. Other authors at the time that pedaled knowledge about the occult, which Paganism would have fallen under, included Isreal Regardie and Aleister Crowley. In addition to these writers, some practitioners would include readings about the Arthurian Legends, Mists of Avalon, writings by Robert Graves and poetry by William Butler Yeats, to name a few. Those authors that have been around the longest are held in higher regard, despite whether a practitioner incorporates every little thing author's lay out in their texts. We just have to look at Marie's first six books that were required reading. All those authors are coming from different perspectives; they practice their religion in very different ways and incorporate different practices to make it relevant to them.

It was through these texts that many Pagans understood the history and myths that accompany this faith. It is problematic, in some respect, that these morals, history and myths are not nicely compiled into one text that outlines the tenets of the faith. Borrowing from Connerton, inscription can be seen when Pagans seek out knowledge. Most devout Pagans have to piece together their own researched belief for incorporating Paganism in their lives. In addition, since Paganism incorporates many beliefs under its umbrella, hardly any act or belief is dismissed as having no value. This idea is where we get hybrid belief structures, like Christo-Pagans or Afro-Paganism. Practicing Pagans

tend to enjoy some fluidity in how they practice their spirituality. For example, Elizabeth, another participant, described how in one case, she could meditate on a certain outcome to a problem she was having and do a spell to help expedite her desired outcome. However, in another case, she incorporated the prayer, Hail Mary. Many Pagans draw from other religious frameworks. The term “spiritual” is a catchall. It is broad, but it implies a kind of diligence. The term, and the practice also allows for a possibility of incorporating whatever is necessary to come closer to deity, or “enlightenment”, or an end goal. Due to the complex nature of Paganism and the unwillingness of its practitioners to be boxed in, there are, in theory, some generalities that can be agreed upon. For example, most Pagans have a fundamental understanding of the Burning Times. They know that it is a historical event but how that affects them presently is less clear. Some practitioners believe it has no connection to Pagan history or present-day Paganism. In fact, Susan, another interviewee, stated, “I think the Burning Times were a very sad time in Christian history.” However, others see the Burning Times as a reason why higher-level magic is kept secret. While others still see the Burning Times strictly as a reason for not being out as a Pagan in the larger society. In addition, some Pagans question its legitimacy as a “witch-hunt” at all, citing economic and power struggles as the culprit. The meanings they take away from the Burning Times vary widely.

Finding introductory knowledge about Paganism has indeed become easier. Access to information, via Internet and small local businesses that mask themselves as “New Age” provide a great resource to seekers. There are many groups in the Midwest region, who supply different classes or Sabbat meetings. New Age and Pagan

bookstores, such as: White Light Books, Crescent Springs and Aquarius, are excellent resources for solitary practitioners. These stores often have information boards, so that solitaires, and even people that are part of covens, can find classes ranging from Wicca 101 classes to Tarot classes.

An absolute way legitimation is created for Pagans is through the study of books, coven and community interactions, and taking part in ritual. The symbolic universe provides an explanation for why they believe what they do. Paganism and the practice of Paganism is the symbolic universe to the greater social institutions. In short, the symbolic universe legitimizes the established institutions.⁷¹

The function of legitimation is to make objectively available and subjectively plausible the 'first-order' objectivations that have been institutionalized....Proverbs, moral maxims and wise sayings are common on this level...[as well as] explicit theories...symbolic processes...a general theory of the cosmos and a general theory of man...The symbolic universe also orders history. It locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future.⁷²

If we look at the present-day Pagan practice and how it is connected to the past, knowledge gathered through various means provides historical legitimacy. Part of the process of growing and learning on the Pagan path is reading. There are so many authors and books on various aspects of Paganism that once a practitioner decides to study this religion, there is an unlimited amount of information. In the coven setting, the High Priests and High Priestesses determine what books are worthwhile for the style of coven that they run. Usually, reading lists accompany the new student, once they are invited into a coven. As a solitary Pagan practitioner, books are determined important in two ways. Practitioners hear through word of mouth about important books that might create

⁷¹ Ibid., 92-104.

⁷² Ibid., 92-104.

a well-rounded individual, or they can start acquiring books randomly at any store, as these are so widely available, or check them out from local libraries.

In the coven setting, reading lists are created for each level of the degree. For example, Maria stated when she was talking about the first coven she had worked with,

There were six books that were mandatory for the new initiate to read: *Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* by Scott Cunningham, *To Ride a Silver Broomstick* by Silver Ravenwolf, *Spiral Dance* by Starhawk, *Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft* by Raymond Buckland, *Drawing Down the Moon* by Margot Adler and *A Witches Bible Compleat* by the Farrars. That was quite a variety of authors.

Most of these texts were meant to be easily digestible by someone new to this religious framework.

When looking at the Burning Times as a source of legitimacy of present-day Paganism, many theories must be taken into account. Authors of Pagan books provide some varied theories, and many books are written regarding the origins of present-day Paganism. Some authors suggest that modern day Paganism has a direct line back to the Paleolithic times. Cave drawings and various representations of “deity” suggest an early Goddess fertility cult is the origin of all religion. Raymond Buckland definitely has this outlined in one of his texts. Still, other authors propose that it was the Middle Ages and the old medicine woman that lived on the outskirts of some little European town. Others still recognize Gerald Gardner as the creator and founder of present-day Wicca. Aside from the Theosophical Society in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the writings of Margaret Murray, Doreen Valiente, and Gardner, were among the first to bring Paganism to the public in the mid-1950s. He declared himself a Witch, as opposed to merely an occultist. This distinction was quite a risk and done almost immediately, upon the repeal of the Witchcraft Act.

Legitimation is also created by Pagan authors and texts considered central to any well-read Pagan. This is where we find a useful contribution from Paul Connerton and his idea of inscribing practices. Members from both covens have spent their time in their early years reading all the standard texts, including but not limited to Raymond Buckland, Starhawk, Margot Adler, Dorothy Morrison, Scott Cunningham, T. Thorn Coyle, and Janet and Stewart Farrar. These authors spent time outlining the Pagan history, practice, and goals of anyone, who would set foot to the Pagan path. Some practitioners express the challenge of coming to Paganism in the seventies, when few books were available, and the Internet was far from accessible at that time. Most recall finding books from, primarily, Doreen Valiente, Gerald Gardner and the Farrars, but they also explained that by the 1980s, many more authors were writing including Starhawk and Raymond Buckland.

Another aspect of legitimacy is how Pagan authors encourage Pagans to come to their own conclusions through their magical experiences. Legitimacy can be the way there is a bridge from historical significance of practice and an involvement in crafting a practice that is unique to the practitioner. This, therefore, defines the path for practitioners and determines what the long-term goal is, which, could be anything. It can include enlightenment, clergy hood, magical prowess; the possibilities are endless (although what the participants always conveyed, it was for enlightenment). This kind of long distance directing from authors, along with coven-sponsored management, does foster a sense of legitimacy to Paganism and the Pagan-based knowledge that is accessible. I would contend that this legitimacy is found in Paganism by the individual practitioner through the ability to define what it means to them or the small group of like-

minded individuals they practice with, that improves their day-to-day lives, along with striving for a goal that is the culmination of their study and practice on the Pagan path.

Another way, that legitimacy can be seen in Paganism, is found in its movement from an unknown religious framework to an increasingly recognized religious framework. When people hear the terms “Pagan” or “Witch” or “magic,” they think of fairytales and books of fiction in the present-day. There is the idea that people, who define themselves as a Pagan or a Witch, cannot be taken seriously or there is disbelief that such individuals exist in the present-day. There appears to be an evolution that exists in Paganism. In fact, over the course of the past decade, events like Pagan Pride Day (PPD)—an event that takes place in many cities around the country--have grown considerably. The Midwest has experienced great growth in acceptance. These events allow for networking and connections that could certainly provide some education and resources for someone on the Pagan path, but not seeking a coven or a conglomerate of people to practice with. Some PPD events have had their share of picketers from the likes of Fred Phelps,⁷³ but overall, the events are peaceful and act as a way to get information to people that are interested in Paganism, as a viable religious option, as well as a safe place for holding a dialogue with opponents.

The flipside of acceptance is a need for discretion. Like Fred Phelps, there are others that fear practitioners of Paganism. In some respect, this fear and hatred lends some legitimacy to Paganism. If Paganism is perceived as a threat, then there is something that challenges the status quo, which, in turn, could be seen as a legitimating element.

⁷³ Phelps is a Baptist pastor of the Westboro Baptist Church, which is based out of Topeka, Kansas. He tends to be highly inflammatory and challenges First Amendment Rights with his hate speech and hate propaganda.

Myth

According to Berger and Luckmann, myth is a maintaining mechanism for symbolic universes. As symbolic universes represent a type of legitimation, myth acts as universe maintenance.

In any case, the oldest universe-maintaining conceptualizations available to us are mythological in form. For our purposes, it is sufficient to define mythology as a conception of reality that posits the ongoing penetration of the world of everyday experience by sacred forces.⁷⁴

While recalling Mircea Eliade, Berger and Luckmann propose myth as a support to reality. Myth acts as a classification of the strength of motivation and the resulting consistency of the overarching legitimating framework. They suggest that mythology should be distinguished from ideology and theology; mythmakers have a weaker motivation and a lower regard for consistency, while ideologists are much more rigidly determined and religious proponents give harsh treatment to dissenters or heretics. This distinction reveals the relative fragility of myths as sources of validity, when confronted with anomalies that they cannot explain or contradictions that give rise to normative (moral and ethical) dilemmas. If myths lose their connection to the real world, then their usefulness will depend upon how successfully mythmakers can insulate themselves from popular scrutiny or elite dissent.⁷⁵

The myth of the Burning Times can be seen in the present day in subtle ways. When taking the Burning Times as a sacred myth, and even more specifically, a myth that shaped the creation of present-day Paganism, then many things could be understood. As a centralized myth for Pagans, the Burning Times teaches many lessons to Pagan practitioners. It provides a break from the deep past to the present day. It provides a

⁷⁴ Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 110.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 134-146.

warning for the present-day Pagans about being out, and it requires present-day practitioners to reconstruct Paganism.

The Burning Times, today, provides a break from what was considered Paganism in the deep past to what Pagans practice today. Since Paganism was about the cycles of agriculture in pre-Burning Times, contemporary practitioners lack a direct connection to this relationship to time. The impact of being tied to the earth, in such an intimate way, a situation of life or death cannot be separated from artificial clock time. This, however, does not mean that reenactments of rituals are not meant to recall that connection; they are, but the severity and the importance is lost.

The Burning Times also imparts a very important lesson about danger. One of the most important warnings that seem to transfer to the present day is the danger of people knowing that you are Pagan. While it is subtle, and in today's world there is an accepted idea of freedom of religion, there runs a very small chance of repercussions for following this religious path. Standing outside of dominant society could get you harmed if you are not careful.

The Burning Times, as a myth, requires present-day Pagans to create their own religion on the individual level. Due to the general importance of myths, lessons in what is right and what is wrong, guides today's Pagans on how to maintain a cover, while being a practicing Pagan. If Witches and Pagans were pushed underground by the Witch hunts and no records or Book of Shadows were kept from that time on, it would make sense that what is considered sacred today in the folds of Paganism is a sense of reconstructing not only what it meant to be Pagan but also how to conduct ritual. Part of this is due to the lack of written records, Hereditary Witches and Pagans rarely had

written books about how they do things, but it was passed down orally and through experience. Present-day practitioners lack a strong historical recounting of how rituals were done.

Pagan mythology outside of the Burning Times touches upon a connection to life during the Paleolithic time in many beginners' books on Paganism. Due to this, it has become a part of Paganism. As a creation myth, connection to the Paleolithic time would have present-day Paganism rest in antiquity. There is no way to legitimize this. Many Pagan practitioners do use this connection to the deep past as a defining element to Paganism to prove it to be a viable religion and a way to discredit other mainstream religions. This history is used to show other religions as young and unevolved.

The Burning Times are problematic, in regards to taking all of it, without question. Many people question its legitimacy on many different levels. Some question the numbers of those killed, whether they were all Witches, and whether it was merely a language game, using the term, "Witch," as a way to go after women or acquire property. In some respect, these details do not really matter. The real issue is that every Pagan attaches their meaning to "The Burning Times," their understanding and what they are willing to believe may vary however. The Burning Times provide a very important myth to the followers of Paganism.

Ritual

Ritual practice, for Paul Connerton, is bodily knowledge. While looking at how Pagans know aspects of their religious traditions and why they do and believe the things they do, Connerton suggests that bodily engagement is yet another way of knowing. By

incorporating practices through ritual performances, social memory is brought forward. Yes, literary texts convey one way of knowing; bodily involvement is another way of knowing. This section looks at the importance of ritual and how it relates to the historical events of the Burning Times.

When looking at Connerton's definition of bodily practice, the subject of Paganism or any religious framework can be studied. Connerton states, "...words, images and bodily practices help us preserve the past."⁷⁶ While there is a certain amount of faith that a Pagan practitioner has to have, when performing various ceremonies, there is a definite attempt to make a connection through the actions done in a ritual to bond those practitioners to the past. Furthermore, he states that many of the actions done today, even those of a mundane value, are actions that are centuries old, and we may not even realize it.⁷⁷ Certainly, artifacts can be used as an example. When clay figures of the Venus of Willendorf were discovered, there was a strong argument for Paganism having existed since 22,000 B.C.E. Many theories have suggested that it is a representation of the earliest form of Paganism. Regardless of its truth, the Venus of Willendorf has been called upon within many rituals, which seems to show a good argument. This, in a roundabout way, makes a connection to Pagan practice today, from all those centuries ago. She is utilized as a goddess representation, and while some people may not know the history about her, they do know that she is old and tied to present-day practitioners.

Connerton further states that there is a connection between inscribing and incorporating practices.⁷⁸ These practices have a continuous relationship. He states that regardless of the relationship, there will always be a dominant practice. Inscribing

⁷⁶ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 72.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 72.

practices are memories transmitted through the written word⁷⁹ (i.e. through knowledge) Incorporating practices are ones actively participated in.⁸⁰ Usually they are intertwined, with one affecting or determining the other. A look at the Pagan ritual determines both forms of memory co-exist. Ritual can be created, either lifted from a Pagan author, or personally written for the specificity of the ritual. One part of ritual, which rarely changes, is the words that are spoken during simple feast. In this example, both Coven A and Coven B utilize this tradition. When cakes and ale are shared around the circle, a simple exchange happens from person to person. After the High Priest and High Priestess bless the cakes and ale, they pass the cakes and the ale to the circle of practitioners. Usually, the movement goes around the circle deosil.⁸¹ As the cakes and ale are a blessing ensuring the necessities of life, it would make sense to pass them sunwise. The person to your left offers you the plate of cakes or feeds it to the person next to them, with the blessing, “May you never hunger”. In response, the person receiving the cake would answer, “Thou art the God” (if the person is a male) or “Thou are the Goddess” (if the person is female). When it comes to ale, the blessing is “May you never thirst,” and the same response is given. Within Coven B, this is a tradition and is acted out in every single ritual. This part of the ritual is taught to every new practitioner and put into practice. Similar sayings range from the *King James Bible* to Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land*, to even to some prose by Doreen Valiente.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁸¹ Deosil is the direction of the sun. In other words things move around the circle from east to west. Within many Pagan traditions deosil is the “prosperous path”. It is the right course. Its opposite is Widdershins. Widdershins moves backwards traveling from west to east or counterclockwise. If a practitioner has specific magic to do, they might move in a corresponding direction. The most common affiliations might be in regards to banishing something or trying to bring something to you. These might be determining factors why you might go backwards or forwards within a given ritual.

This tradition is inscribed in many ways and incorporated in a way meaningful to the Coven setting.

According to Paul Connerton, we understand history and our social environment through memories. He classifies them as different kinds of social memory. Connerton provides three types of social memory. Personal memory claims, cognitive memory claims and habit memory are the three types of social memory. This third type, habit memories, can be seen in any type of ritual or ceremony.⁸² This can be understood broadly as remembering how to read or write, how to ride a bike, how to wear a shirt. When these habit memories are lost, perhaps in an act of Alzheimer's or a coma, one is unable to conduct a normal life in society. Habit memory is a key element of social life. Understanding the space in which one finds community, in this case, Pagan groups or covens, allows one to have a sense of identity in which it is negotiated and established.

Another way habit memory is incorporated is when creating Sabbat rituals within Paganism. There are certain guidelines that exist with each Sabbat because each Sabbat represents a cycle of the season. For example, with the Sabbat of Yule, it is the longest night of the year. It represents that the light is coming back. It is, in essence, the birth of the Sun, (therefore, it can be seen how Christianity could easily transform this holiday into the birth of the Son). This means many things. In Pagan myth, it means that the Holly and Oak King fight to rule over the year.⁸³ With these particular rituals, whether you incorporate the myth of the Holly and Oak King, it does not really matter. Yule still

⁸² Ibid., 25-29.

⁸³ One myth that gets utilized with both of the groups that I attended was the fight of the Oak and Holly King. The fight happens on the Yule and Midsummer (the Solstices) celebrations. The Holly King rules from Midsummer to Yule and the Oak King rules from Yule to Midsummer. They represent different things. The Oak King represents the process of fertility and the fruit that comes from that fertility. He represents life and transformation. The Holly King represents harvest and hibernation. He represents death and transformation.

represents the longest night and shortest day of the year, and in terms of how that affects the cycle of the earth and life, it will always be the same.

While Connerton does not bring up suspension of belief, two other theorists provide an interesting concept that can be seen put into action within the Pagan ritual. Berger and Luckmann suggest in their discussion of suspension of belief, “The transition between realities is marked by the rising and falling of the curtain.”⁸⁴ As a curtain in a theatre falls, a transition from one reality to another takes place. An audience member at the theatre is transported to another time and place. Pagan ritual practice could not exhibit this more. In the Covens attended, along with various public rituals,⁸⁵ there are similarities with how a ritual might be performed. Typically, the framework of a ritual is as follows: there is a gathering of people in a circle, a circle is created through words and visualization, and quarters are called.⁸⁶ Spirit is called (although not all groups include this), the Deities are called, some magical working is prepared and performed, simple feast is taken (cakes and ale) and then the Deities are let go, Spirit is let go, the quarters are let go and then the circle is opened.

Depending upon the type of group you are visiting, most likely there will be some type of circle creation. The manner in which that is done may differ. For example, in one group one person will walk the perimeter of the circle with an athame,⁸⁷ speaking some incantation. The act of walking the circle with an athame is done to actually cut the

⁸⁴ Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 25.

⁸⁵ Some covens in the Midwest do actively advertise for solitary or interested individuals to come experience a coven Sabbat. They utilize websites like WitchVox or the Witches Voice to get people seeking information in touch with Pagan clergy and groups.

⁸⁶ Quarters are the 4 cardinal directions. Each quarter has certain qualities associated with it: East-Air, South-Fire, West-Water and North-Earth. A fifth element may also be included with some groups and that represents Ancestors or Spirit. This fifth element is called after the four elements in a separate process.

⁸⁷ An athame is a ritual blade or knife.

circle out of the mundane. The act is done to create a special space out of an area that already exists.

Another way the circle could be created is to stand in the center, directing energy to the eastern quarter with an outstretched hand turning in a small circle while invoking a circle to create around the people that are taking part in the ritual. Even more interesting, Marie, one of my informants described casting circle exactly as Berger and Luckmann did. “I envision sheer, colored fabric dropping from above. If I start in the east the color is yellow and then it moves through the color spectrum to red to blue to green and then back to yellow.”⁸⁸ It is like a curtain falling and separating us from the mundane.”⁸⁹ This circle creation is very much what Berger and Luckmann relay as a curtain falling.

The very purpose of casting circle (along with many other aspects of ritual) is to create a separation from the everyday events to magical events. Its purpose is to create tension and awareness of magic, in addition to cultivating a connection to the people within the circle.

These three factors: legitimacy, myth, and ritual can be further understood through the use of space and time. Through knowledge and memory, the experience of Pagan practitioners can be understood by how time and space affects their knowledge in the present day. When looking at the Burning Times and how that moves forward to inform the Pagan experience, many subtleties are discovered.

⁸⁸ Each quarter has many correspondences. One such correspondence is related to color. The East is yellow hues; the south is red hues; the west is blue hues; the north is green hues and Spirit is usually associated with purples or even whites.

⁸⁹ Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 1966.

Space and Time

The concept of the continuity of time is something that Paul Connerton addresses. History is passed down in the form of traditions and memory and kept alive through reenactment. By physically recreating events, meanings are handed down.

Connerton examines the place of the bodily experience in regards to memory. We have the written word and language to express history and what has happened in the past, but Connerton says as scientists, regardless of what school we come from, are missing another tool, in which to understand what we are studying. The human body and its experience can convey many things about what we seek to learn.

While having an inscribed interpretation of the Burning Times, present-day actions are an incorporation of it. For example, ritual from the past was based on the cycles of the season, according to the authors of Pagan books. As rituals today are reenacted with that same intent, practitioners feel like they are connecting to the past. As the Burning Times were an attempt to banish Pagan practices, these rituals hearken back to a romanticized period prior to the Burning Times.

Connerton further suggests a concept of social memory--those things found in the past that can legitimize a present social order,⁹⁰ and in the case of this research, this idea of social memory can be applied, when it comes to whether someone is out in the larger society and in the way they conduct ritual. Pagan Sabbats can definitely be seen based in historical settings. Traditions, such as, jumping the broom at a wedding, used in other rituals besides Pagan, were incorporated to bestow an abundance of happiness at the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 61-62.

marriage. To hearken back to the importance of the agricultural cycle, the tradition of running through the fields with a broom to encourage fertilization of the earth for an abundance of crops, can be seen in certain Pagan rituals that take place in the present day. The ritual experience is passed down bodily. The body is engaged in the process of handing it down.

Space and time impact Pagans' lives in the present-day, since not all Pagans are out, in every social circle that they run in. They draw upon the Burning Times as a lesson as to what can happen, if you are out, and there is a sudden desire to eradicate practitioners. At the individual level, one can choose to be out or not, but the dominant society prefers that there are no challenges to the accepted societal structures. Acceptance by society, or lack thereof, is enough to control an individual's decision to be out, even if the lack of acceptance does not manifest in an all-out lynch mob.

Space and time are two elements that need to be explored additionally to how we understand ritual practice and outness. As space and time are also socially created, so too, are their meanings. Literally, the ritual space is considered cut out of the existing air, with a ritual blade or a wand. In order to make the space separate or sacred, a line could be literally drawn on the ground, a ritual blade could cut the air, and a wand is directed, or an incantation is spoken and the space is transformed. Profane time is suspended. You are no longer in a regular room or backyard. The work inside the circle is what matters, regardless how long it takes. One chant that is used for the creation of the circle is: "This is a time that is not a time, on a day that is not a day, in a place that is not a place." The circle itself is here, but not here. It can be seen and felt by those who are

meant to see it and not by others. Quite literally, this invoking of the circle is meant to suspend the sacred within the profane.

As alluded to earlier, being able to move between the ritual space and the mundane is mirrored also by how Pagans move from Pagan circles to non-Pagan circles. How Pagans relate to the everyday world is an interesting phenomenon because most Pagans are not completely “out” to the public. Aside from how Pagans interact with other, Pagans versus society, as a whole, has its own social institutions. So, being out, as a Pagan in a Christian society, can be a challenge and even frightening.

Pagan parents may raise their children to be Pagan, but having children in society as Pagan may cause many challenges. Teaching a child about the values and traditions of Paganism is in direct opposition to society at large. As these values and institutions of Paganism are passed down to the next generation, there also appears to be a transmission of attentiveness and also some secretiveness. Betty, of Coven B, teaches her son how to be Pagan and encourages his enthusiasm for the path, but there have been several times, when at school, he mentions something that strikes an interest in the teacher, who then questions him about what Paganism is. He is a very bright boy and answers the inquiries, but there was a time after such an exploration he avoided the topic of Paganism.

For a parent, who is Pagan, it is evident that there are two kinds of institutionalism imparted to their children. Institutionalization, going back to Berger and Luckmann, incorporate roles that individuals play within the confines of society. Institutions are embodied in individual experience by means of roles.⁹¹ Roles are adopted for Pagans to move between groups. One is to the greater society that is overwhelmingly not Pagan and the other, within the Coven, as a practicing Pagan. Through the parents’

⁹¹ Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 74.

understanding of society and the Coven, these roles are passed down. In the case of Betty and her son, she is a proponent for life experiences and feels that in some ways, her son must test the waters, in regards to being out, if he chooses, and that his experiences will teach him how to cope in day-to-day situations. The older children in Coven B have found that balance. This idea of socialization for Pagan children can be seen in Berger and Luckmann's treatise:

... a social world [is] a comprehensive and given reality confronting the individual in a manner analogous to the reality of the natural world...In early phases of socialization the child is quite incapable of distinguishing between the objectivity of natural phenomena and the objectivity of the social formations...The objective reality of institutions is not diminished if the individual does not understand their purpose or their mode of operation...He must 'go out' and learn about them, just as he must learn about nature . . .⁹²

Objective reality is created for Betty's son because it is not fully transparent, and he most likely does not know the underlying reason for why he incorporates the institutions that he does. It is something that he is taught, or as Berger and Luckmann describe, something that is "given" and "unalterable."⁹³ Another event that shows a shift in reality can be seen in regards to Betty. She relays the story about how her son shared what happened at Ostara,⁹⁴ with his teacher, who was curious but then chastised him. He did not realize that there was a difference in belief or understanding when he shared his experiences. He was not aware of the separation of beliefs.

Along with Pagan parenting, each individual adult must also determine whether or not they are going to be out. Pagans do not readily let people outside of the community

⁹² Ibid., 74.

⁹³ Ibid., 59.

⁹⁴ Ostara is a Sabbat that takes place around March 20th (it varies from year to year when it actually falls), which celebrate the first day of spring. It corresponds to the Christian Easter, but instead of celebrating the return of the Christ, they celebrate the return of the spring. Some traditions are similar to that of the Christian Easter.

know their religious faith. Their faith is compartmentalized away from the interactions they have with non-Pagans. On one hand, Pagans take for granted that they live in a country, which, theoretically, recognizes the freedom of religion. However, the reality is, that many of my interviewees are not out at work or places where they have acquaintances. Few wore symbols of their faith, such as, pentacles or symbols of the Goddess.⁹⁵ Many wear stones or various crystals, but those could be associated with New Age philosophy, which appear harmless to outsiders. Two of my interviewees expressed fear of being discovered they were Pagan, as they had experienced discrimination in the past from the workplace and correlated their mistreatment to the fact that they were out at work. Everyday, American life is imbricated with Christian-based religion. We see it in the manifestation of various holidays that send stores into a frenzy to ensure they can outfit any house with Christmas or Easter decor. People in the Pagan community and within the Covens I visited discussed the fact that American society is laden with Christian beliefs, which penetrate any non-Christian believer's home and life so much so, there is a fear of being out. There seems to be an opinion that the reality of everyday American life can be taken for granted for anyone who is of the Christian faith. If one is not a Christian in this country, one must seek solace in the small groups of like-minded individuals.

Space and time play another part in this research. All subjects have a relationship to time. Evolution in thought and action are affected by the events that take place in time. Bodily practice of ritual and Paganism before the Burning Times was very different than what is found today. For example, Sabbats and rituals at that time would have

⁹⁵ The symbol of the Goddess is the triple moon-two crescent moons flanking a full moon. Each crescent moon represents the waxing and the waning moons. The three phases of the moon acts as a representation of the Goddess as waxing, full, waning to the phases of life maiden, mother, and crone respectively.

greatly been based on the seasons, more so than now. Time was divided by agricultural process, as people were more involved in the process of food production, the crops need to be harvested or the livestock need to be culled. Therefore, Paganism was practical. When rituals were performed, they were meant to benefit the abundance of food. For example, during the trials, people accused of Witchcraft were said to be running through their fields with brooms, jumping on them as if they were flying. The meaning of this tradition was to bring about fertility to the crops that would sustain family and friends through hard weather. The crops' height at harvest time was dictated by the height of those in the ritual jumped. In other words, the higher one jumped would be the sympathetic outcome of the crops at the end of the season. Time was very literally associated with the cycle of crops.

This may have been acceptable before the Burning Times got underway, but obviously, as the persecutions started gaining ground, time and space took on a very different meaning. As Pagans were run underground, they were unable to maintain their previous lifestyle. The concept of secretiveness among Pagans can be seen through the continuum.

The event of the Burning Times provides a break between the time of the agrarian past and the industrial present. What started to happen was the meaning of time and space as a Pagan began to change. Defining oneself as Pagan meant that bodily adjustments had to be made. Choosing to be out, during the Burning Times was certain death. However, being out now is different, at least in North America. Being out in the United States tends to carry different forms of persecution or stigmatizing. As stated previously, there have been experiences of being fired from jobs and losing close friends.

Choosing the time and space to be out is how the Burning Times can directly be seen, as affecting present-day practitioners. This further incorporates the concept of sacred and profane.

Present-day Pagans are out in spaces that they deem as sacred and safe-their homes, the Covenstead, and with people that are, unconditionally, their friends. Though they shield themselves from the profane, choosing instead to stay concealed, perhaps at work, the PTA, or other places where they have lesser-known acquaintances. Time has taught these practitioners whether or not to be out. More common than not, it is not something that they outright share with everyone on the street. There may be hints that they are not Christian, but coming right out and removing all doubt is not commonplace.

Connerton suggests early on that the “experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past.”⁹⁶ This has a direct correlation to whether Pagans are out in the larger community. The only way to survive was to stay hidden. This concept that survival, as a practicing Pagan, must involve staying hidden is interesting. There are many articles written relaying the fact that many who were killed or assaulted in varying forms were not Witches or Pagans, but those that did go underground and kept quiet were, possibly, Witches. It would make sense from history that those who identify themselves as Pagan would be tight-lipped about their religious leanings. When it comes to actual ritual practice, the only writings assessable are those after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act. Authors and Witches like Gerald Gardner and Aleister Crowley taught the framework of Pagan ritual. Today, many practitioners perform rituals that may incorporate that framework but are updated. Many parts of a contemporary ritual are based on the old Ceremonial rituals, which hearken back to the

⁹⁶ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 2.

early twentieth century. At that time, they claimed that their rituals were based on old forms of ritual from the Masons and the Knights Templar. These mystical traditions contributed to the present Pagan ritual, along with celebratory seasonal rituals from Europe. Present-day ritual practice is definitely interspersed from a myriad of sources that can, in some way, be found in earlier generations.

Paganism, today, is not the same as it would have been if the Burning Times had never taken place. The Burning Times affects how Paganism would be seen not only through that time, but also hundreds of years later. If the intention of the Burning Times was to truly find Witches and convert or kill them then the spectacle of the Burning Times must have also been used to make an example of those accused. The Burning Times were a new beginning to Paganism. It marked the ending of one time and the beginning of a new life.

When speaking with Ashley, one of the participants, she was very willing to discuss her thoughts about the Burning Times.

If we look at those men that perpetuated that fear as having fear themselves for their mothers and their grandmothers for being the stern matriarchs that they were. I see the Burning Times primarily as a real shift in control. I mean so many things happened during the Burning Times and I saw the church supporting it from the background. I mean after Innocent VIII passed, you know supposedly that was the end of the Burning Times that was not even close. And in my opinion the Burning Times did not end until 1954. You know, when Freedom of Religion became an understood thing and this country didn't even repeal those restrictions of what you could worship until '72. I don't think that we've really, truly had freedom of religion and I think that the people that founded this country, the white, the Europeans that founded this country were running from the Burning Times for the fear of being persecuted, for the fear of whatever and came right over here and perpetuated the same crap.

She continued by saying,

I think the Burning Times had a profound effect on people and I think the effect that I see them having at this time is that if I generate a complete fear around the Burning Times then you know, if I walk this path, I run the risk of being hung or stabbed or being burned or whatever the case may be, then that puts people in a, um, different mindset. Survival is the strongest of the emotions. I think that the Burning Times are valid. I think they happened. And, I think that they were a combination of the church needing to present that masculine front....and the medical profession. You know, I think that's just how people are. You know, some people just want to latch on to any little tidbit to control other people and if you control enough then you can consider yourself a world power, I guess.

Marie offered perhaps the most alarming reflection when looking at the Burning Times.

The Burning Times I have a very strong connection with. I don't like the idea of people suffering. Especially when it comes to something that brings them joy and they're not hurting anyone and people don't understand it or don't have the balls to inquire about it. I think the Burning Times happened. I think that people died for...I think we have a romanticized version of what happened as Pagans. I think we can't possibly understand the hysteria that took place as American Witches. I don't think nearly as many witches died as nine million. I think people died that weren't witches for political and economic reasons. I think that it was complicated. I think that, completely off the historical aspect, I think that we better be diligent in this day and age because if we get a few more Bushes in office, some obliteration to us could happen again. I'm rambling but my point is that it was very complicated and people were scared.

As the few Pagans or Witches that existed would have done to survive, many went underground. They incorporated their beliefs as they could, in accordance with their lives, without drawing attention to themselves. Had people never experienced the need to be private and closed, in regards to their Pagan practices and rituals, the face of Paganism today would look very different.

Within the Pagan framework staying hidden is an example of Pagan habit memory. If there were a memory associated with The Burning Times and the persecution of Witches that make present-day practitioners remain hidden, then there would be a

good argument. It would seem that Pagan practitioners are more comfortable not being out. This is not fully conscious.

Further, Connerton calls upon Maurice Halbwachs and his theory that memory is socially constructed. Halbwach states,

... it is through their membership of a social group-particularly kinship, religious and class affiliations-that individuals are able to acquire, to localize and to recall their memories.⁹⁷

Within the confines of Paganism and more specifically from coven to coven, there is a recalling of memories or an agreed upon history of the Burning Times. It applies to Pagans who are not out in the larger society. These individuals can make it acceptable and safe to maintain in their groups of like-minded individuals, and justify it by calling on past persecutions. Very little weight is given to the Burning Times until it is worthwhile to bring it out for the sake of an argument. Not much thought is given to the Burning Times on a day-to-day basis, but if some discussion is brought up in regards to some kind of persecution, many Pagans instantly gravitate to the Burning Times as a reason either to revolt, claim victimization, continue living on the fringes, or stay quiet and hidden. It is the social environment of other Pagans that a discussion about this would come up. It is only when this discussion comes up that there is a connection to the Burning Times, outside of any ritual setting. In regards to the ritual setting, unless there is an Esbat⁹⁸ specifically determined to be about the Burning Times, Samhain is the only ritual that would incorporate the Burning Times easily. Through this setting, there is a folklore associated with this history: what the image of a Witch would be at the time of

⁹⁷ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 36.

⁹⁸ A Sabbat is a ritual celebrating the earth's cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth (there are eight throughout the year). An Esbat is a ritual celebrating the 13 full moons of the year. There are phases of the moon so an Esbat can also be performed at the other quarters of the moon's cycle. The Sabbats tend to represent the cycle of the God and the Esbats mirror the Goddess.

the persecutions, what the accusers would be like, how they would treat the accused, and the process of public treatment and execution of the accused. These images are also wrapped up with what the Witches' role in the town, both before and after, the accusations.

The social understandings of a "Witch" before the persecutions would have been a little different then after the scare spread. It is now known that a lot of the accusations were for political, religious, and proprietary reasons. Many people were sold on the untruths that were told about Witches and Pagans, either for the masses' own survival, or they came to believe the spreading fear.

In theory, Pagans and Witches, that made it underground, shared the history of the Burning Times. It was passed down through the generations, and then of course, when it was safe to be out, authors wrote about it. Many different curriculums began using the Burning Times to argue their own part.⁹⁹ In addition, many texts were written from the perspective of the accusers and victors, as it were, so they must be viewed with some skepticism, just as those that wrote from the Pagan perspective should be viewed with some skepticism.

It is Connerton's thesis that allows exploration of the action that takes place within the Pagan ritual, as well as, the Pagan community. His theory can be applied to ritual, as a method to understand why people do what they do in the present, but also as it connects to the past. In ritual, practitioners do what they do because they believe what they are doing is passed down from others that have gone before. They still have the freedom to embellish and create rituals that can apply to the present-day. Outside ritual,

⁹⁹ As seen in my literature review, Women's Studies, History, Social and Religious Studies utilize the Burning Times to prove various aspects of their study.

the bodily movement can be seen by the settings that one feels safe being out within, by choosing who knows their religious orientation.

All these theorists allowed a look at the Burning Times as it relates to modern day Pagan practitioners. Nuanced in their actions, outside of the sacred, and fiercely engaged, when inside the sacred, these practitioners walk a fine line. It is complicated. Nothing seems to be black and white, and the theories incorporated above were an attempt to understand the grey areas.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

When this research began, there were three inquiries made to determine how the Burning Times manifests itself into the ritual practice of Pagans. The first of those inquiries was whether or not practitioners believe the Burning Times provide historical threads that connect present-day Pagans to those of the past. The second asked if practitioners of Paganism believe the Burning Times lend legitimacy to the faith in that there is a fundamental sense of martyrdom. The third inquired if practitioners believe the Burning Times provide a unifying shared meaning for modern day Pagans. These three questions cannot be answered in a short and concise way.

Memory and how the past can be brought into the present in this thesis can be understood by invoking legitimacy, myth, ritual, and space and time. These elements help determine how Pagans make sense of the history of the Burning Times that is deemed seemingly important while ultimately dismissed in the present day. Legitimacy, myth and ritual, as mechanisms to understand both the Pagan life and Pagan ritual, are skewed to create meaning that differs from the past.

Being out and ritual practice are affected by the Burning Times but not in a grandiose way. The effects are subtle. As far as being out goes, it could be that it is just a facet of life one does not share with everyone, but it appears as though choosing to be out is determined very carefully by Pagan practitioners.

Ritual practice is also affected by the Burning Times, but it is due to a heavy reliance on authors that either attempted to piece together rituals as they occurred historically, or they were fabricated. In addition, the fact that ritual takes place in a

created circle, meant to separate those within the circle and those outside of the circle, or a separation of the profane and sacred, as Eliade would define it, could be left over from the fear of the Burning Times in that the circle protects and cloaks the practitioner.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the Burning Times do have some effect on the present-day Pagan practitioner. It is subconscious. It is done without knowing that it is being done, in regards to ritual practice. When it comes to being out, the Burning Times are not the primary reason that Pagans are not out. It is a fear of persecution or being shunned for the most part, but that subconscious fear is not connected to the Burning Times.

Limitations

Along with all the typical challenges one has when creating a study, with a sample of the population, and the constant need to be reflexive, this research had a few limitations. This sample was taken from the Kansas City area, so these results may not be generally applicable to every other Pagan population in the country. While making a call for any and all people to participate, it must be kept in mind, only a certain kind of individual will participate. This is typical for any research, of course, but because it appears that being closeted is an element of Paganism, it has special meaning. It is a very large limitation for this thesis.

Recommendations for future research

The topic of Paganism and a perceived history of Paganism are fascinating. For others perhaps, it provides an interesting stepping stone for future study with concepts of

legitimacy, myth, and ritual. Additionally, it might be interesting to develop more on the concept of space and time as a Pagan. Future research could be focused on the concepts of being out in the Pagan community. Many possible avenues of study could be found in the discipline of New Religious Movements from the starting point of the Burning Times and present-day Paganism.

Appendix A: IRB Approval

SSIRB Protocol #: 060407 - Neo-Paganism: Ritual forged by the Burning Times

Page 1 of 2

Reminder: AOL will never ask you to send us your password or credit card number in an email. This message has been scanned for known viruses.

From: Hughes, Germaine
To: flojao@aol.com
Cc: Good, Megan; Saka, Kanylene
Subject: SSIRB Protocol #: 060407 - Neo-Paganism: Ritual forged by the Burning Times
Date: Thu, 18 May 2006 10:56:17 -0500

Linda Spencer
1225 S. 28th Street
Kansas City, KS 66102

APPROVAL DATE: April 21, 2006

SSIRB PROTOCOL #: 060407 - Neo-Paganism: Ritual forged by the Burning Times

Dear Mrs. Spencer:

Your study noted above was reviewed and approved with restrictions at the April 21, 2006 meeting of the Social Sciences Institutional Review Board.

you have met the requirements of the restrictions. Your study is approved.

The study is next subject to continuing review on or before April 21, 2007 unless closed before that date.

You may therefore proceed with your study. Notwithstanding the SSIRB's approval to conduct the study, in the following situations you must provide timely additional information in order to maintain the SSIRB's approval:

1. The SSIRB cannot approve studies for more than one year. Unless the SSIRB renews its approval, your authority to conduct this study will expire on the anniversary of your approval date. To request a continuation of your authority to conduct the study you will need to submit a completed Research Progress Report to the SSIRB office. Your authority to conduct the study cannot be continued until your completed Research Progress Report has received the necessary SSIRB review and approval. Therefore, you need to submit the completed Research Progress Report at least one month prior to the anniversary date of your project's approval/reapproval. However, if your study requires more than one extension, the applicable anniversary date may change from year to year. Consult your most recent approval/reapproval letter for the applicable anniversary date. Call the SSIRB office if you have questions about this.
2. If you want to make a change to the study, you must obtain the SSIRB's prior approval of the change.
3. If you want to add or delete investigators from the study, you must obtain the SSIRB's prior approval of the addition or deletion.
4. If a participant in your study is injured in connection with their participation, you must inform the SSIRB regarding this adverse event in a timely way.

Please inform the SSIRB when you complete the study.

If we can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to call the SSIRB office at 816-235-1764.

Best wishes for a successful study.

PLEASE NOTE:

If you are using a signed consent form you must use the copy of the consent form that has been stamped and approved by the SSIRB, which is attached, before you begin consenting subjects. All subjects must be consented on a copy of the approved consent form with the SSIRB Stamp. If requested, a hard copy of the stamped consent can be mailed to you.

Thanks,

Ms. Germaine L. Hughes
Compliance Specialist - IRB
Research Protections Program

<http://r03.webmail.aol.com/17385/aol/en-us/mail/display-message.aspx>

5/18/2006

Appendix B: Consent to Participate

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Neo-Paganism: Ritual Forged by the Burning Times

Linda Spencer

You are invited to participate in a research study about how writings of a religious nature affect practice of religion. In this specific case, I am exploring how the sacred narrative of 9 million witches burned at the stake affect modern day pagan practice.

I am seeking to find answers to this research within the pagan population with a sample of up to 30 people.

The purpose of this study is to get at the meanings that modern day pagan practitioners apply to their history and their meaning of ritual. Does the belief of a historical 9 million witches burned at the stake affect how pagans practice today in Midwestern America? If it does, how?

If you decide to participate, you will take part in a one-on-one interview. In this interview, you will be prompted to reflect on three issues in regards to the historical significance of this sacred narrative. One, does it or does it not affect how you practice today. Two, what is your perception of why people believe or do not believe this sacred narrative. Third, what does it mean, not only to believe the sacred narrative but what does it imply. The interview may explore other areas, as some interviews sometimes meander. The interview will take up to two hours. It will take place where the volunteer feels most comfortable. This formal interview will take place once.

Participation is completely voluntary. The participant may choose to cease participation or refuse to answer certain questions at any time without penalty. If you decide to leave the study, the principal investigator will destroy the information you have already provided. There will be no monetary or other compensation for your participation. This research holds no risk or benefit for you. However, if the need arises, pagan clergy is available who may need to discuss feelings or thoughts.

Confidentiality of your participation is held in high regard. To ensure confidentiality, the recorded interview and any notes taken during the session will be kept in a safe under lock and key. I will be the only person with access to these files, tapes and raw data. Upon completion of transcription, all tapes and the notes taken during the interview will be destroyed. However, it is necessary for you to know that while every effort will be made to keep confidential all of the information you complete and share, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study for quality improvement and regulatory functions.

The University of Missouri-Kansas City appreciates the participation of people who help carry out its function of developing knowledge through research. If you have any questions about the study that you are participating in you are encouraged to call Linda Spencer, the investigator, at 913-362-9649. Although it is not the University's policy to compensate or provide medical treatment for persons who participate in studies, if you think you have been injured as a result of participating in this study, please call the IRB Administrator of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-1764.

If you have any questions you are encouraged to contact the principle investigator.

Linda Spencer

1226 S. 38th St.

Kansas City, KS. 66106

913-362-9649

florjaa@aol.com

Participant Name _____ Date _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator Name _____ Date _____

Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C: Pagan Demographic and Belief Survey

Pagan Demographic and Belief Survey

You are invited to participate in a research study about how writings of a religious nature affect practice of religion. In this specific case, I am exploring how the sacred narrative (**Sacred Narrative is defined as writings, oral teachings or an event that gives meaning to some religious path**) of 9 million witches burned at the stake or the Burning Times affect modern day pagan practice.

I am seeking to find answers to this research within the pagan population with this survey.

The purpose of this study is to get at the meanings that modern day pagan practitioners apply to their history and their meaning of ritual. Does the belief of a historical 9 million witches burned at the stake affect how pagans practice today in Midwestern America? If it does, how?

If you decide to participate, you will fill out this survey. In this survey, you will be prompted to reflect on the historical significance of this **sacred narrative** on your present day practice. This survey will also ask demographic information as well as religious practices. This survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

Participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to cease participation or refuse to answer certain questions at any time. There is no monetary or other compensation for your participation. This research holds no risk or benefit for you. However, if the need arises, pagan clergy is available on site.

Instructions

Thank you for taking time for this survey. Your answers are very important to my study of pagan demographics and beliefs. The purpose of this study is to get to the meanings that are associated with various forms of paganism. The principle investigator is working on her Master's at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Linda via e-mail at florjaa@aol.com or while on site. Please be honest and give answers to the best of your ability.

*****Please do NOT write your name on this survey**

*****Individuals under the age of 18 should not complete this survey**

*****If you find yourself upset when doing this survey, please be advised that there is a Centering Dome and many clergy on site**

*****The confidentiality of you and your answers are very important. This survey is protected and maintained by the principle investigator**

*****This survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.**

Part I. These questions provide basic information for this survey.

1. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Transgendered
 - ☐ Other
2. What is your age? _____
3. What is your ethnicity?
 - ☐ White
 - ☐ African American/Black
 - ☐ Asian
 - ☐ Native American
 - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
 - ☐ Other
4. What is your completed level of education?
 - ☐ Through 8th grade
 - ☐ Some high school
 - ☐ High school diploma
 - ☐ Some college
 - ☐ A four year degree
 - ☐ An M.A., Ph.D or M.D.
 - ☐ Other _____
5. What is your occupation?
6. What is your marital status?
 - ☐ Never married
 - ☐ Married Legally
 - ☐ Married Ritually
 - ☐ Live with lover
 - ☐ Divorced
 - ☐ Widow/er
 - ☐ Seperated
 - ☐ Group marriage
 - ☐ Other _____

Part II. These questions address matters of pagan belief.

1. What was your religious upbringing?
2. Of the following categories, which one fits you best?
 - ☐ Pagan
 - ☐ Witch
 - ☐ Wiccan
 - ☐ Druid
 - ☐ Faery
 - ☐ Ceremonial Magician
 - ☐ Other, please define _____
3. Are you “out” about your beliefs?
 - ☐ yes
 - ☐ no
 - ☐ sometimes
4. What brought you to this religious belief?
 - ☐ Books
 - ☐ Family Tradition
 - ☐ Paranormal Experience
 - ☐ Closeness to a powerful, spiritual force
 - ☐ Friend practiced
 - ☐ Other, please define _____
5. Do you know what the “Burning Times” are? **(if not skip to Part III)**
 - ☐ yes
 - ☐ no
6. Do you believe in the sacred narrative of “nine million witches burned at the stake”?
 - ☐ yes
 - ☐ no
7. Do you believe that this sacred narrative lends legitimacy to this religious path?
 - ☐ yes
 - ☐ no
8. Do you believe this sacred narrative provides modern ‘pagans’ with historical threads to those practitioners of the past?
 - ☐ yes
 - ☐ no
9. Do you believe this sacred narrative provides modern ‘pagans’ with a unifying history of persecution and sacrifice?
 - ☐ yes
 - ☐ no

(OVER)

10. Do you believe this sacred narrative provides a sense of group mind and group experience?

☐ yes

☐ no

11. Do you believe that people died due to religious persecution?

☐ yes

☐ no

12. Do you believe people died due to the label of Witchcraft?

☐ yes

☐ no

Part III. These questions ask about your ritual practice.

1. Do you perform ritual?

☐ yes

☐ no

2. Why do you create ritual?

3. Do you give an offering to 'the Ancestors'?

☐ yes

☐ no

4. Do you use language that is reminiscent of the past?

☐ yes

☐ no

5. What is the purpose of your ritual?

6. Please share anything else you feel is important about your ritual or religious experience.

You may turn in this survey at the registration building, the merchandising booth or the dining hall.

Thank you for completing this survey!!

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

I. Biographical Information

1. Where are you from?
2. What level of education do you have?
3. What career/job do you hold?
4. Is your career/job and your faith in anyway correlated?
5. In what religious tradition were you raised?
6. Did you have a close family?
7. Does anyone else in your family believe the same way you do?

II. Foundation to beliefs

1. How did you come to this path?
2. How do you define yourself? Druid? Pagan? Witch? Wiccan?
3. Why do you define yourself with that word?
4. What does that word mean to you?
5. Do you practice solitary or in a coven?
6. Do you ever practice with groups? (if they're solitary)
7. Do you ever practice solitary? (if they're in a coven)
8. Do you practice ritual?
9. How do you create ritual?
10. How did you learn of this path? (books, high priestess, ect)
11. What kind of history do you associate with this path?
12. Do you hold the lessons of Gardner as our history or do you subscribe to the history of animism and prehistoric roots? Why?

III. The Burning Times

1. What are your thoughts of the Burning Times?
2. What significance does it have in your modern day pagan practice?
3. Do you consider it to be a "sacred narrative" of pagan practitioners? Why
4. Do you think that the idea of 9 million witches burned at the stake lends Legitimacy to paganism as a religion? Why or Why not?
5. In your opinion, does this sacred narrative provide historical threads that links modern and past practitioners? Why or Why not?
6. In your opinion, does this sacred narrative provide a unifying history of persecution and sacrifice which provides a present-day sense of group mind and experience? Why or Why not?
7. Are there any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share in respect to this topic of 9 million witches burned at the stake?

Appendix E: Laws Pertaining to European Witchcraft

Witchcraft Act of 1542:

It was not until the sixteenth century that religious tensions resulted in serious penalties for Witchcraft in England. Henry VIII's Act of 1542 was the first to define Witchcraft as a felony, a crime punishable by death and the forfeiture of the convicted felon's goods and chattels. It was forbidden to:

. . . use devise practise or exercise, or cause to be devised practiced or exercised, any Invocacons or cojuracons of Sprites witchcraftes enchauntementes or sorceries to thentent to fynde money or treasure ot to waste consume or destroy any persone in his bodie members, or to pvoke [provoke] any persone to unlawfull love, or for any other unlawfull intente or purpose. . . or for dispite of Cryste, or for lucre of money, dygge up or pull downe any Crosse or Crosses or by such Invovacons or cojuracons of Sprites witchcraftes enchauntementes or sorceries or any of them take upon them to tell or declare where goodes stolen or lost shall become. . .¹⁰⁰

The Act also removed a right known as benefit of clergy from those convicted of Witchcraft, a legal loophole that spared anyone from hanging who was able to read a passage from the Bible.¹⁰¹ This statute was repealed by Henry's son, Edward VI, in 1547.¹⁰²

Witchcraft Act of 1562:

England's most notorious Witchcraft Act was passed early in the reign of Elizabeth I. This act of 1562 provided that anyone who should "use, practise, or exercise any Witchcraft, Enchantment, Charm or Sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed," was guilty of felony without benefit of clergy, and was to be put to death. This law was broadened further by Elizabeth's successor, James I, who himself wrote a treatise on Daemonologie and due to the fact that James VI of Scotland had taken a personal interest in the trial of some accused Witches at Berwick on Tweed.

Witchcraft Act of 1563:

The Parliament of Scotland passed a Witchcraft Act in 1563. This Act made not only the practice of Witchcraft a capital offense, but those consulting with Witchces were also subject to the death penalty if found guilty.¹⁰³

Witchcraft Act of 1604:

In 1604, the year following James' accession to the English throne, the Elizabethan Act was broadened to bring the penalty of death without benefit of clergy to

¹⁰⁰ Gibson, Marion, *Witchcraft in the Courts. In Witchcraft and Society in England and America 1550-1750* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰² Gardener, Gerald B. *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1979), 254.

¹⁰³ Gibson, *Witchcraft in the Courts*, 15.

any one who invoked evil spirits or communed with familiar spirits. The new act's full title was *An Act against Conjuraton, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits*.¹⁰⁴ This statute was enforced by a Matthew Hopkins, a self-acclaimed Witch-Finder General.

The acts of Elizabeth and James changed the law of Witchcraft in two major respects. First, by making Witchcraft a felony, they removed the accused Witches from the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts to the courts of common law.

The provided, at least, that the accused Witches theoretically enjoyed the benefits of ordinary criminal procedure. Burning at the stake was eliminated, except in cases of Witchcraft that were also petty treason; most convicted instead were hanged.

Secondly any Witch who had committed a minor Witchcraft offense (punishable by one year in prison) and found themselves accused for a second time would be punishable by death if found guilty.

After the seventh century, Witch-hunting gradually died down as the influences of the Age of Reason began to take hold on the population.

Witchcraft Act of 1735:

This statute was replaced under George II by the Witchcraft Act 1735, marking a complete reversal in attitudes. No longer were people to be hanged for consorting with evil spirits. Rather, a person who *pretended* to have the power to call up spirits, or foretell the future, or cast spells, or discover the whereabouts of stolen goods was to be punished as a vagrant and a con artist, subject to fines and imprisonment.

How the Repeal Act came about in 1951:

In 1944, Helen Duncan was jailed under the Witchcraft Act on the grounds that she had claimed to summon spirits. It is often contended, by her followers, that her imprisonment was in fact at the behest of superstitious military intelligence officers who feared she would reveal the secret plans for D-Day. She came to the attention of the authorities after supposedly contacting the spirit of a sailor of the HMS *Barham*, whose sinking was hidden from the general public at the time. After being caught in the act of faking a spiritual manifestation, she was arrested during a séance and indicted with seven punishable counts: two of conspiracy to contravene the Witchcraft Act, two of obtaining money by false pretences, and three of public mischief (a common law offense). She spent nine months in prison.

Although Duncan has been frequently described as the last person to be convicted under the Act, in fact, Jane Rebecca Yorke was convicted under the Act later that same year. The last threatened use of the Act against a medium was in 1950. In 1951, the Witchcraft Act was repealed with the enactment of the Fraudulent Mediums Act 1951, largely at the instigation of Spiritualists through the agency of Thomas Brooks MP.

It is widely suggested that astrology may have been covered by the Witchcraft Act. From the 1930s onwards many tabloid newspapers and magazines carried astrology columns, but none were ever prosecuted.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 15-16.

The Witchcraft Act remained legally in force in the Republic of Ireland although it was never actually applied. Most old English laws were repealed in Ireland on May 16, 1983.¹⁰⁵

The British law is still in force in Israel, having been introduced into the legal system of the British Mandate over Palestine and with Israel having gained independence before the law was repealed in Britain in 1951.

Article 417 of the Israeli Penal code of 1977, incorporating much legislation inherited from British and Ottoman times, sets two years' imprisonment as the punishment for "witchcraft," defined as "Pretending to perform an act of witchcraft with the intention of material gain;" the law excludes the acts of a stage magician who expects no gain other than admission fees.

Fraudulent Mediums Act 1951:

The Fraudulent Mediums Act 1951 was a law in England and Wales which prohibited a person from claiming to be a psychic, medium, or other spiritualist while attempting to deceive and to make money from the deception (other than solely for the purpose of entertainment). It was repealed on May 26, 2008. There were five prosecutions under this Act between 1980 and 1995, all resulting in conviction. The Act was replaced by new Consumer Protection Regulations following an EU directive targeting unfair sales and marketing practices.

It also repealed the Witchcraft Act 1735. It is sometimes said, erroneously, that until 1951 British law recognized Witchcraft as real. In fact, the 1735 Act was the first to recognize that magic is impossible, explicitly stating that it was an act against fraud.

¹⁰⁵ Statute Law Revision Act of 1983.

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