



Wicca Magickal Beginnings - A Study of the Possible Origins of the Rituals and Practices Found in This Modern Tradition of Pagan Witchcraft and Magick

Sorita d'Este

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The origins of the Wiccan Tradition have long been a subject of debate amongst practitioners and scholars alike. Did Gerald Gardner invent the tradition? Is Wicca a survival of a British folk magick system? Could it be a continuation of a European tradition of Pagan Witchcraft? Might it be that it evolved from Victorian ceremonial magick, or perhaps it is the modern manifestation of the medieval Grimoire Tradition? In this book the authors explore the possible beginnings of the tradition by examining the practices in the context of magickal and spiritual thought spanning thousands of years. Through setting aside the endless debates about initiatory lineages, they look beyond the personalities of the people and instead focus on what they consider to be at the heart of the tradition - the practices. Evidence from many previously uncredited and unconsidered sources is examined. This clearly shows how all the significant component parts of Wiccan ritual and practice have roots reaching back, in some instances thousands of years, before its public emergence at the hands of Gerald Gardner in 1950's England. They explore the sometimes surprising antecedents for key practices such as initiation, magick circles, ritual tools, the invocation of the Guardians of the Watchtowers, Drawing Down the Moon and The Great Rite. The precedents for the Book of Shadows, Wiccan Rede and Charge of the Goddess are also considered as part of this groundbreaking work. Wicca Magickal Beginnings may well answer as many questions as it creates about the true origins and nature of what is probably the most influential of the Western Esoteric Traditions today. Through combining scholarly research with practical knowledge, the authors clearly illustrate that the future of the tradition lies in utilising the rich diversity of its past, through the appreciation of its magickal origins and the untapped potential inherent in it. This book will be invaluable to anyone with an interest in the history, practices and beliefs of the Wiccan Tradition - and its links to Paganism, Witchcraft, the British Folk Traditions and Ceremonial Magick.

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From Reader Review Wicca Magickal Beginnings - A Study of the Possible Origins of the Rituals and Practices Found in This Modern Tradition of Pagan Witchcraft and Magick for online ebook

Narrowearth says

This for me is simply the best book ever written on Wicca! I bought it when it first came out but was told by a Gardnerian priestess to avoid reading it as it was rubbish; but subsequently many people have recommended it and I checked out the reviews on Amazon where there are loads more recommendations and thorough reviews going into detail of why this is a great book, so I became curious. I found my copy, dusted it off and started reading.

Wow. Not only is this a well written book, it displays something which is rare in books on Wicca which is a true sense of neutrality from the authors. Throughout they make it clear when they are stating their own opinion and all the information they share they carefully present references for which means you can check it out in more detail. They also have a wicked sense of humour sharing little bits of side information which made me chuckle more than once. Both the authors have been contributing fresh research into very specialised areas of folklore, magical history and modern magical practice for some years now. A quick search reveals that they have authored, or co-authored probably about 30 or 40 books between them, on a wide range of subjects. Their approach seems to be to go back to basics and look at the origins and foundations of things, but they do so in an intelligent way and in no way jeopardising the standard of their work, nor do they fluff it up for the mass market. I got the impression that they are interested in knowledge and building firm foundations by cleaning house and looking at the sources, rather than always relying on what people say - i.e. secondhand information and at worse, gossip!

Wicca Magickal Beginnings is wonderful. It appeals to me as a Gardnerian initiate because it shows that it is probable that Gerald Gardner did in fact not quite make it all up, though he clearly added to the material which was handed down to him. It is likely he got it wrong sometimes, but he also got it right because here we are still talking about him and his work! What I like about it is that the authors found a way of presenting the material which I think initiates and non-initiates will both benefit from, without breaking any oaths. In fact they did so a way which I applaud them for. I have recommended this book to friends in the OTO, friends in the Golden Dawn and friends who are goddess worshipping pagans. All of them are benefitting from it in different ways.

The book analysis the rituals of Gerald Gardner's Wicca and shows where those rituals may have originated from. It shows that the roots are much older than we are made to believe, that the roots are sometimes not what we are told they are and much more. I love how they show that the term Wicca was used for witches before Gerald Gardner, the Charge of the Goddess analysis is superb and the material on the Magic circle stands out for me. But so much more has been valuable and I keep going back to reread sections and check things.

I disagree with very little in this book, because the authors themselves makes it so clear that they are simply presenting possible sources and so one cannot help but benefit from their unbiased honest approach.

Highly recommended as THE book to read if you have an interest in Wicca, or any of the modern forms of pagan witchcraft or ceremonial magic. This is a book which will benefit even the most experienced of practitioner.

Jody says

This is a really neat book that deals with the history of the Pagan faith. It considers the whole and then evaluates lots of little facets and where they came from: Book of Shadows, "do as ye will," skyclad, athame, circles, draw down the moon, etc.

An enormous bibliography with many books I'd like to read. This is a great reference book.

Meika says

I feel the need to rate this honestly, and it appears to be beloved, so I'll explain... Caveat: I am not a practitioner of Wicca. I'm intellectually curious about occult and folk religions. I picked this up in a small bookstore in Virginia, selecting from amongst an array of practical guides and spellbooks, hoping to find something a little more rigorous, and I feel that this book makes an effort but falls short for me. It's a great overview of current traditions and it does present historical documentation and numerous theories as to the basis of Magick, hence the stars I gave it.

Jon says

What makes the Wicca, the Wicca?

It isn't the personalities. It isn't the subculture that has grown around it. It isn't any particular interpretation as to why we do what we do. What links the Wicca is in our practices. This is where commonality is found among us.

They are also the steadiest part of Craft. While a plethora of Wicca-derived practices are flourishing, the practices mentioned in this book are still part of the practice of many.

It's important that people have looked, and continue to look, at the personalities and cultural effects in the history of the Wicca, but it is timely to have a book looking at the history of what is core to the Craft itself.

If you are of the Wicca yourself, or if the practices of the Wicca has been an influence upon your practice, then this is may well be the most important book on our history, yet written. If you have an outsider's interest in our history, then the approach taken here should be more than novel enough to have plenty of interest.

There will be some threading over old ground for quite a few readers, but apart from bringing in fresh items of interest as well, even those bits that you may think there is little more to say about, contains plenty of new insight and thorough and close reading.

I don't agree with all their conclusions. One that comes to mind is the examples of use of the word "Wicca" prior to Gardner--to my mind these are all clearly looking at the word as an historical artefact and so not really comparable to bringing the word into modern usage. Also, rather than state that the Craft was not religious, I would take the same practice-based nature of the Craft and say that this is a way of understanding

religion in terms of praxis rather than doctrine that is important to our Craft, but not unique to it. As such, I would say that we are not a "faith" or a "creed", but we do still have a religion.

This disagreement doesn't make me hesitate to give this book no less than 5 stars. Rather, I'm grateful for the source material they offer here that helps disagreements like this be debated intelligently from informed positions.

Constantinos Nterziotis says

There are not much to say. The book is well documented, with very nice conclusions, small chapters, easy to follow and challenging sometimes. The reader will surely broaden his/her spiritual horizons. The main subjects of Wicca are well presented and many comparisons are made with medieval grimoires, Golden Dawn techniques, O.T.O. rituals and sometimes with references to ancient civilizations.

Steve Cran says

Do you want to get down to the roots of Wicca and understand the magic behind behind the religion that Gerald Gardner introduced/ invented in the early 1950's. If the answer is yes then this awesome over view is for you. Since the emergence of what is what is called "Wicca" in the 1950's there has been much controversy as to whether Gerald Gardner invented this religion or was initiated into it. The book covers the magical history of all the practices contained in Wicca, offering a different approach then Ronald Hutton who gives over a straight history of development.

Practice by practice the author's Sorita d'Este and David Rankine give the most recent history of each idea and then go back to it's most ancient historical practice. Starting with the emergence of Wicca the authors state the controversy of Wicca's beginning and then give you there hypothesis which sound rather agreeable. Gerald Gardner was initiated into a coven that practiced witch craft but when he released it to the public he added a whole bunch of stuff. Most of the material he added into his religion derived from the works of Aleister Crowley, Charles Leland, Key of Solomon and Frazier's Golden Bough. While many practices and chants were derived from these Ceremonial Magic sources. They also had antecedent many stretching back to Ancient Egypt and Babylonia.

The religion of Wicca may seem dubious for a variety of reasons. One is that Gerald Gardner himself made many false statements. The reasoning behind these false statements could be that Gerald Gardner was being unethical in trying to promote Witchcraft or was he merely protecting oath bound material.

What is the meaning behind Wicca? When was it used by Gardner? In fact he himself may never have used Wicca as a name for his religion, especially in his earlier works. The word Wicca goes back many centuries and the term "Wica" actually did mean witch or one who could bend reality. The meaning though was not positive as many societies even one that predated Christianity like the Norse and the Greeks had negative views of witches. Witches were workers of evil. Something which Wiccans were not. big questions as to why he used the term witchcraft which carried such a negative connotation. If they had used a different term might Wicca have been more positively viewed. The practices of Wicca are more closely aligned to the practitioners in the Ancient Temple then they were to witches.

Charles Leland's book on Aradia was thought by many to be dubious and non scholarly. However, written works going back to the 14-15th century tell of witches dancing naked under the moon worshipping Diana at the shores of lake Nehme. An interesting side fact was that Diana was sometimes referred to as the "Queen of Heaven" and association given to many female deities from the Middle East most notable Ashtoret who was a Canaanite/Phoenician Goddess. Aradia was the name of a city founded by the Phoenicians in Tuscany before the Etruscans became a society. The influence can be most profound.

The idea of a mother Goddess who is all goddesses is nothing new. In Crowley's works there is Nuit the mother Goddess who came from Egyptians mythology. There is also Ashera from the Canaanite pantheon. The Shechina is god's wife in Judaism as Sophia is the Goddess of wisdom. In a work called the "Golden Ass" Isis is mentioned as the mother goddess of all. Then comes the question of a horned god. Most know of him as Cernunnos "The Horned One" the idea of a horned god was prevalent in many ancient cultures. Amon Ra being a great example. In India there was a goddess and a horned god who died for part of the year and was reborn. Much like Cernunnos. In many Wiccan practices Cernunnos a Celtic deity is a paramour of Aradia, an Italian Deity. One wonders how this is possible. Yet archaeological evidence shows that Cernunnos had shrines in Italy.

This book is a profound addition to any collection on magical books. The reader will be blessed with an informative and very interesting read. The book is so interesting and written in reader lay person friendly manner that one will breeze through and be glad for the experience wishing it could go on longer. 5 stars out of five stars.

Titus L says

Wicca Refreshed; Likely Lineage Revealed

This book entails a refreshing and objective overview of the plausible origins and developments of many magickal aspects and their development into modern Wiccan traditions. Chapter by chapter the authors examine individual practices and their developments over time such as the Magick circle, Wiccan Rede and Witches Athame for example.

Having recently read Ronald Hutton's research in *The Triumph of the Moon*, which seems to demonstrate that despite the history of Cunning Folk, Wise Women and many others, that Wicca as it exists today has little or no direct connection with any magick traditions of earlier times, this book - if we are able to join the dots between movements and grimoires, convincingly portrays an opposite view. Here we see that the Wiccan traditions do indeed follow a historical lineage, even if individual practices have understandably changed over time - by which mean we may see that they are living traditions rather than archived curiosities, that the spirit of magick has maintained a constant and responsive cultural presence, possibly since very ancient times. This book also explores how Gerald Gardner, the apparent father of modern Wicca, may owe more than is usually stated to Aleister Crowley, Charles Leland, the Key of Solomon and Frazier's Golden Bough among others.

The co author's Sorita D'este and David Rankine provide numerous references in an extensive bibliography for the academically determined to double check their assertions and contexts, some good humored asides of interest and some objective conjecture that invites an opened mind to assess for themselves- based on the

evidences gathered - the likely origins of each aspect under consideration.

As a believer in informed understanding I would therefore recommend this book, to be considered in conjunction with other authors research, to any who seek a practical view of the possible lineage of Wicca and Magickal traditions in Britain and the World today.

Rachel says

Very entertaining and informative.

I certainly learned things that I was not aware of before.

I recommend that every Wiccan read this. It's a very succinct exploration of a multitude of various sources. D'este and Rankine have already taken care of the Herculean task of sifting through those various sources, and we get to reap the benefits. Far more accessible than *Triumph of the Moon*, though I still advise any Pagan to pick that work up and have a look. Hutton's work is referenced more than a few times in *Magical Beginnings*.

This work shows that Wicca does have some far-reaching roots, and these pages explore just where some of our tradition may have originated, whether that be from the grimoire tradition, folk practice, or the flurry of occult resurgence and development that took place in England during the Victorian age. Each theory is thoroughly explored and explained, with numerous examples of evidence on display to support and uphold it, or as the case goes with the theory that Wicca was born out of the cunning folk traditions that preceded it, shown to be highly unlikely.

I enjoyed reading about how much common ground modern practitioners actually have, and I believe that information like this is valuable, especially right now with Internet 'witch wars' and the tendency of various traditions to lean in an insular direction. What I took away from all of this is that whether you call yourself a Wiccan, or a Thelemite, or a Ceremonial Magician of the Golden Dawn flavor, or a Traditional Crafter; we're all pretty much after the same thing, and our various schools of thought and practice have similar ideals born out of that universal desire. That's a very powerful message, and a heartening one.

I'm very grateful to both authors for the hard work that shows, without a doubt, the spiritual similarities we all share.

Frances Billinghamurst says

These days it is always a delight to read something about the history of Wicca that is appears to be actually researched (and thoroughly at that) and without the usual assumptions and "bitch wars" resulting from hidden agendas and basically sour grapes that unfortunately seems to appear in such books.

Instead of pre-judging Gardner as simply "a silly old man", or even as a bit of a perv, the authors of this book set about analysing various key aspects within the Wicca belief in an attempt to determine not only possible sources but also connections and reason why - moving beyond the standard "dismissing" everything cos "old Gardner was a bit of a fraud".

As a result of this mature and indepth study, they conclude with not one but THREE possible conclusions, and whilst summarising with their own, leaving it open for the reader to make up their own mind. At the end of day, I guess no one can be 100% sure what Gardner's inspiration, motives etc were .. but the conclusions given are extremely pulsable and offers much thought.

But that is only one aspect of this book - what the authors have also managed to achieve is to offer possibly sources and reasoning behind the inclusion of many aspects of Wicca rituals - such as:

Where the Drawing Down of Moon came from and its accurate history

Where Alex Sanders may have gained his inspiration for his circle that contains higher magickal names and symbols

Where the concept of "Perfect Love and Perfect Trust" came from

Meanings behind terms such as "watchtowers", the elemental pentagrams, the athame ...

This book was a thorough delight to read and I would highly recommend to anyone, beginner or advanced, interested in Wicca and its possible origins.

Michele says

I found the ideas presented in this book interesting and thought provoking.

Steve Cran says

Do you want to get down to the roots of Wicca and understand the magic behind behind the religion that Gerald Gardner introduced/ invented in the early 1950's. If the answer is yes then this awesome overview is for you. Since the emergence of what is what is called "Wicca" in the 1950's there has been much controversy as to whether Gerald Gardner invented this religion or was initiated into it. The book covers the magical history of all the practices contained in Wicca, offering a different approach than Ronald Hutton who gives over a straight history of development.

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views of witches. Witches were workers of evil. Something which Wiccans were not. big questions as to why he used the term witchcraft which carried such a negative connotation. If they had used a different term might Wicca have been more positively viewed. The practices of Wicca are more closely aligned to the practitioners in the Ancient Temple than they were to witches.

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Terri says

The authors do extensive research into the history and development of the modern day (Post Gardner) Wicca. Searching through occult societies, grimoires and writings, they show the history of Wiccan tools and ritual elements. A very interesting read.

Titus L says

This book entails a refreshing and objective overview of the plausible origins and developments of many magical aspects and their development into modern Wiccan traditions. Chapter by chapter the authors examine individual practices and their developments over time such as the Magick circle, Wiccan Rede and Witches Athame for example.

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changed over time - by which mean we may see that they are living traditions rather than archived curiosities, that the spirit of magick has maintained a constant and responsive cultural presence, possibly since very ancient times. This book also explores how Gerald Gardener, the apparent father of modern Wicca, may owe more than is usually stated to Aleister Crowley, Charles Leland, the Key of Solomon and Frazier's Golden Bough among others.

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As a believer in informed understanding I would therefore recommend this book, to be considered in conjunction with other authors research, to any who seek a practical view of the possible lineage of Wicca and Magickal traditions in Britain and the World today.

Matt says

Books on pagan traditions tend to be enjoyable to read OR well-researched and containing probable facts about the evolution of the tradition. I'm happy to say that this book ticks both boxes. D'Este and Rankine trace all the threads of argument on the origins of Wicca as transmitted by Gerald Gardner and later Dion Fortune, and draw strong evidence-based conclusions related to the origins of the tradition. Along the way, they plumb the depths of the history of grimoire magick and folk tradition, providing a wonderful bibliography for those seeking deeper study. If, like me, you've felt like pagan writing suffers from a tendency toward the introduction without the follow-up, please consider this volume as you seek the next tier.
