A Double Issue of The Pomegranate:
The First Decades of Contemporary Pagan Studies

This issue of The Pomegranate offers two papers that touch on different facets of Pagan religion from around the globe. Dmitry Galtsin explores different treatments of the Divine Feminine by several late-nineteenth-century Russian authors, while Archana Barua (Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati) looks at one particular instance of the magico-religious cults of the Tantrikas of Assam.

Beyond those two articles, the remainder of this issue is devoted to a special section, “Paths into Pagan Studies: Autobiographical Reflections.” This section is guest-edited by Douglas Ezzy (University of Tasmania), who suggested in late 2014 that as Pagan studies was in at least its third decade as a subfield of its own, it would be appropriate to look back over its history. He approached a variety of scholars whose presentations and publications were among the first, and almost all of them responded enthusiastically. To keep from breaking their essays into two groups, we decided to make this a double issue so that they could be read at once.

For myself, I would like briefly to tell the story of some areas of publishing in Pagan studies. The summer 1984 issue of the home-published “zine” Iron Mountain: A Journal of Magical Religion contain what might have been the first American articles in this nascent field: “Inventing Witchcraft: The Gardnerian Paper Trail” by Aidan Kelly (b. 1940) and “Pagan Renaissance and Wicca Witchcraft in Industrial Society: A Study of Parasociology and the Sociology of Enchantment” by the sociologist R. George Kirkpatrick (1943–2005) of San Diego State University and two of his graduate students, Rich Rainey and Kathryn Rubi.

1. Short for either “magazine” or “fanzine,” a zine is a noncommercial magazine on a specialized topic, originally homemade, now also online.
Both of these works were placed firmly in the study of new religious movements. The latter paper tested “the secularization hypothesis,” the idea held by many academics that organized religion’s public influence was waning in industrial societies, becoming more of a private matter, and that the rate of religious involvement declined with people’s increasing education. Interestingly, Kirkpatrick, Rainey, and Rubin found that their respondents (mostly Wiccan) were more highly educated than the general American population. They postulated that these Pagans suffered from “status inconsistency,” because they appeared to be under-rewarded financially; despite their education, 80 percent earned less than the median income. Beyond issues of secularization, the three San Diego researchers touched on several others that still occupy Pagan-studies scholars, including the idea of re-enchanting the world, the inspiration drawn from notions of “ancient matriarchies,” the politicization of Paganism as exemplified by Starhawk’s writings, ideas of a new religious pluralism in the United States, and issues surrounding their subjects’ thoughts on secrecy and persecution.

In a foreshadowing of the sometimes uneasy relationship between scholars, practitioners, and scholar-practitioners, which are explored by several of the contributors to this issue, the publication of the sociologists’ article was accompanied by three responses. Isaac Bonewits (1949–2010), a leading American Druid and author of several influential books on magic, ritual, and Druidry, noted that the researchers were “genuinely gullible” about some Pagan groups claims of antiquity and pointed out several ways in which their study was not representative. Ann Forfreedom (b. 1947), a Dianic Wiccan priestess and author from Sacramento, California, accused...
them of perpetuating stereotypes and of misrepresenting feminist Witchcraft: “On the topics of feminism and feminist Pagan traditions the paper approaches fiction.” I myself critiqued the paper for over-generalizing, for naively treating such categories as “visionary” and “Earth Religion,” and for using what I considered to be ill-fitting concepts such as “normlessness” and “authoritarianism” while “failing to come to grips with what a 20th-century polytheistic religion in a technological society might be.”

The material in Kelly’s article would later be incorporated into his book Crafting the Art of Magic and its later expanded edition, Inventing Witchcraft.

No doubt seeking publication in a known, peer-reviewed setting, Kirkpatrick, Rainey, and Rubi also presented their ongoing research two years later in the journal Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology.

As a zine, Iron Mountain definitely was not peer-reviewed; I know this, for I was its publisher, editor, typesetter, and circulation manager during its three years of existence (four issues), before it succumbed to the financial pressures of graduate-student life. Later, I would be delighted to learn that Fritz Muntean, who founded The Pomegranate when he, in turn, was a graduate student at the University of British Columbia, cited Iron Mountain as one of his influences when he created The Pomegranate in the late 1990s. Originally subtitled “A New Journal of Neopagan Thought,” The Pomegranate gained its current subtitle, “The International Journal of Pagan


11. With Iron Mountain, material was typed into my Kaypro II, a suitcase-size personal computer sold in the mid-1980s—my first home computer. Then I took a 5.25-inch floppy disks to the office of a nearby weekly newspaper, where it was typeset into galleys, which I then cut up with X-Acto knives, coated on the reverse with hot wax, and pasted onto layout sheets before taking the sheets to a printer for printing on 8.5x14 inch paper, which I then folded and saddle-stapled. Fritz had the advantage of ten years, which meant that he had a Macintosh computer and workable desktop-publishing software.
Studies,” when it joined Equinox Publishing’s stable of scholarly journals in 2004, gaining an editorial board and status as a formally peer-reviewed journal. (For more on The Pomegranate’s first incarnation, see Muntean’s essay in this issue.)

Fritz Muntean, in fact, was an early member of the Pagan group that Kelly had helped to form in 1960s San Francisco, the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (NROOGD)—a name chosen to parody the grandiose nomenclature of so many esoteric groups and “orders.” In the mid-1970s, Kelly, an editor for the scientific publisher W. H. Freeman and Co., earned a PhD at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. As part of his academic work, he began to apply methods of biblical textual criticism to a key Wiccan text, the Book of Shadows (BoS). Not a published book (until 1971), the BoS was a manuscript tradition, first introduced by Wiccan founder Gerald Gardner (1888–1964) in the 1950s as a text purportedly passed down from earlier centuries. Gardner had insisted that it could only be passed on by hand-copying, teacher to student. Kelly, however, studied several early versions, comparing them with other of Gardner’s writings, and was able to advance arguments about the new religion of Wicca’s history that contradicted its “official” narrative. His publication in Iron Mountain was one of the first airings of this material outside the GTU.

Meanwhile, other social scientists were approaching the new Pagan religions. Marcello Truzzi’s 1972 article “The Occult Revival as Popular Culture: Some Random Observations on the Old and the Nouveau Witch,” was often cited, although it was already outdated in terms of contemporary Paganism, spending much time on distinctions between “white” and “black” magic, astrology, Satanism, and what Truzzi called the “domestication” of the supernatural.


The sociologist Gini Graham Scott carried out field research on NROOGD, which became part of her book Cult and Countercult: A Study of a Spiritual Growth Group and a Witchcraft Order (1980). And I still smile at the memory of the graduate student in anthropology who gave a presentation at Colorado College circa 1983 on her field work with a Wiccan coven, which she spoke of as “my people,” as though they were a lost tribe in the Amazon.

Scholars of religion seemed slower to take up the study of contemporary Paganism, with the exception of Aidan Kelly, as mentioned, and some others in the area of new religious movements (NRMs). It is indicative that scholars of NRMs did not get their own program unit in the American Academy of Religion (AAR) until the 1990s, two decades after concerns about “cults,” “gurus,” “mind control,” “deprogrammers,” and the like had burst upon the American cultural scene. (For more on early conference presentations on Pagan studies, see Wendy Griffin’s and Michael York’s essays in particular.)

As Wendy Griffin mentions in her essay, Pagan studies first appeared within the AAR in the mid-1990s. Our progress toward program-unit status began at the 1995 annual meeting in Philadelphia, when Selena Fox and Dennis Carpenter, the heads of the Wisconsin-based Pagan organization Circle Sanctuary, attended the meeting. Selena and Dennis organized an informal meeting for people interested in studying Paganism(s); as I recall, we all sat in a circle, introduced ourselves and briefly summarized our interests, and that was about all that there was time for. The next year in New Orleans, a small group met and decided that we should do something, so we started an email listserv, the Nature Religion Scholars Network. Already there was a small schism building: should “Paganism” describe a religion, a family of religions, or what Adrian Ivakhiv describes as “sensibility, an approach to the world, a philosophical


16. She did, in fact, bring groceries to the high priestess.
17. A clinical psychologist, Carpenter teaches at the University of Wisconsin, Richland. Circle Sanctuary’s website is http://www.circlesanctuary.org.
mindset, or even a way of conceiving of religion that is more encompassing than others,” which is closer to what Michael York argues in in parts of his book Pagan Theology?18

At the following year’s annual meeting, in San Francisco, Graham Harvey and others argued for a formal program unit. A proposal was drawn up and submitted to the AAR Program Committee, which rejected it on the grounds that we had not demonstrated that we could not meet our needs in other units, such as the New Religious Movements or Women and Religions groups. But in 2004 we were successful on our second attempt, gaining provisional status in 2005 and more permanent status thereafter. (From 1998–2004 we scheduled “additional meetings,” which began as 90-minute sessions with paper presentations and grew to half-day mini-conferences.)

While scholars of Paganism in the American Academy of Religion sought recognition as a subfield, conferences and meetings elsewhere in the world also produced results in terms of books and papers published. One of the first was Jim Lewis’s edited collection Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft (1996), which still has much value today.19 Its British counterpart, perhaps, was Nature Religion Today: The Pagan Alternative in the Modern World (1998), edited by Jo Pearson, Richard H. Roberts, and Geoffrey Samuel.20 Those were followed in 1999 by historian Ronald Hutton’s The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft, which brought together wide-ranging search on the cultural and literary history of magic and of witchcraft, as well as offering a history of contemporary Pagan Witchcraft, “the only religion which England has ever given the world.”21

Even before the Contemporary Pagan Studies Group received program-unit status from the AAR, Wendy Griffin and I had begun to acquire books for at Pagan studies series. I had met Eric Hanson, at

that time an editor with AltaMira Press, which specialized in such topics as archaeology and museumology, at the AAR annual meeting in 1998, and like all good editors, he wondered if I had any book projects. (I did have one, in fact, which became Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America.) First in the series, however, was the collection Researching Paganisms (2004), edited by Jenny Blain, Graham Harvey, and Douglas Ezzy. Researching Paganisms, as the name suggests, deals with all the complexities of research on living people and living religious movements, and with issues of reflexivity, compassion, and authenticity. It offers a great deal to anyone working with new religions, small religious communities, indigenous religions, and the like. Other books in the series were Barbara Davy’s Introduction to Pagan Studies (2007), Constance Wise’s Hidden Circles in the Web: Feminist Wicca, Occult Knowledge, and Process Thought (2008), and Kristy Coleman’s Re-riting Women: Dianic Women and the Feminine Divine (2009). By the time that Her Hidden Children was in production, however, AltaMira Press had become merely an imprint of a larger firm, Rowman & Littlefield, and not long after that, Eric Hanson was laid off. A new editor took over, we established a working relationship with him—and then he was let go as well!

The newest editor was completely clueless about the series, so Wendy and I decided to take it elsewhere. Since Equinox already published The Pomegranate, it was an obvious choice. Wendy, as she describes, was retiring from teaching, so Nikki Bado (Iowa State University) took her place as co-editor, recently joined by Scott Simpson (Jagiellonian University, Krakow). We acquired two more books, both edited collections: Pop Pagans: Paganism and Popular Music (2013), edited by two Australian scholars, Donna Weston and Andy Bennett (both from Griffith University) and a collection that Simpson co-edited by Kaarina Aitamurto (University of Helsinki), Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe (2013).

But our “Series in Contemporary and Historical Paganism” faced a rocky road. Equinox merged with another British publisher, Acumen, but there were problems, followed by a de-merger that left our series with Acumen in the hands of an unsympathetic editor. Nikki and I brought it back to Equinox; meanwhile, Acumen was acquired by Taylor & Francis (a division of Informa plc) and merged with its Routledge imprint, in whose catalog you may find just those two books from the series. Undaunted, we have other projects in the pipeline.

I want to highlight Aitamurto and Simpson’s book, because it was the first in our series to step outside the English-speaking world. While Ronald Hutton is correct to label Wicca as the first world religion to originate in England,27 new and reconstructed Paganisms have appeared in other places. In fact, one could well argue that contemporary Paganism began in Latvia and Lithuania in the 1930s. The scholars represented in this special section of The Pomegranate represent the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, but there are many more voices that could be heard. Possibly in a future issue of The Pomegranate we may be able to hear more of them.

Chas S. Clifton
Editor

Bibliography


27. Wiccan groups are active in various European countries and Brazil, while Wicca has also a small presence in India, Mexico, South Africa, and Thailand, among other nations.