

Notes from the Underground

The relationships, both historical and modern, between indigenous spiritual practices and emerging religions with a base of support among the ruling elite has been a fertile ground for study during the last several centuries. While the origins of established religions are normally revealed through the analysis of their surviving texts, the study of native religiosity relies on information derived from folkloric and ethnographic research. All three of these methodologies have become far more powerful and reliable tools than they were even half a century ago, and today's more critical attitudes toward texts, along with more carefully nuanced interpretations of folkloric and ethnographic material, often produce results which may be surprising, but are always instructive.

In the first of three articles which examine the relationship between folk practices and 'establishment' religions, Sabina Magliocco, who recently graced our pages with a review of the new edition of Leland's *Aradia*, provides us with a unique and comprehensive overview of indigenous Italian magical beliefs and practices, contrasting this information with an evaluation of Italian-American Witchcraft or *Stregheria*, as popularized in recent years by writers such as Raven Grimassi and (the late) Leo Martello.

Jeremy Harte, in an article reprinted from *3rd Stone*, England's magazine of alternative antiquarian studies, presents a new interpretation of early Christian attitudes toward the sacred sites of Pagan Britain. This is particularly interesting in light of the recent writings of scholars such as Valerie Flint and Peter Brown concerning the early Church's previ-

ously unacknowledged willingness to absorb both magical practices and elements of the sacred landscape from the Paganism(s) that preceded it. In a third article, Touraj Daryaee, a scholar of Indo-Iranian religion, evaluates the early Zoroastrian admonitions against indigenous shamanic practices—most notably the use of psychotropic 'allies'—in light of the apparent acceptance and widespread utilization of these substances by subsequent generations of Zoroastrians.

Neopagan scholars have often noted that many of our beliefs and practices have their roots in the interface that developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries between Western occultism and Eastern mysticism. Christine Rhone's biographic sketch of Mirra Alfassa, the founder of India's Auroville community, discusses the roles played by several key figures in this important moment in recent religious history.

We are also pleased to offer our readers a pair of reviews of Cynthia Eller's new book, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, by two scholars of Women's Studies and Feminist Theology. We consider both this book and Ronald Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon* to be landmark publishing events. At the same time, we acknowledge that both of these books contain much that is controversial, and we encourage our readers to respond with analytic opinions and critical evaluations of this material.

A few issues ago we announced our intention to establish *The Pomegranate* as a refereed journal. The mechanisms for so doing are now in place, and only the details remain to be worked out and made available to our readers. This issue's feature article, by Dr Magliocco, is the first to have been peer-reviewed, and marks the beginning of *The Pom's* latest efforts to evolve into a more distinguished and acceptable academic publication.

Persephone's hard-working minions