

Notes from the Underground

The growth of contemporary Pagan religions has been matched with a surge of serious writing about Paganism (if you prefer, “Paganisms”). Increasing numbers of articles and books are coming out from self-identified Pagan scholars and from a greater variety of others who have moved past the original simplistic characterizations of Paganism as a bizarre and deviant subculture.

Through its history, *The Pomegranate* has sought to offer readers a selection of some of the best new research on Pagan religion, including book excerpts, reprints from other specialized journals, and recent conference papers. In some instances, however, scholars in this field have been hampered by the fact that there was no “peer-reviewed” journal, one in which major articles were reviewed anonymously by qualified outside scholars. This deficiency has also made it harder to present *The Pomegranate* to university librarians and to database compilers, another essential part of making its contents available to future researchers.

Changes beginning in this issue are signaled by a change in *The Pomegranate’s* subtitle, from “A Journal of Neopagan Thought” to “The Journal of Pagan Studies.” Dropping the “Neo-” prefix signifies two ideas. One is that contemporary Paganism is not as “neo-” as it was; it has gained its third and even fourth generation of adherents. A second reason for dropping “Neo-” is that *The Pomegranate* retains an interest in new interpretations of historic Pagan religions and of their interaction with other world views.

By adding “Pagan Studies” we hope to signal the birth of a scholarly discipline. In an

earlier issue of *The Pomegranate*, Michael York of Bath Spa University College defined “Paganism” as “an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationships by individual or community with the tangible, sentient, and nonempirical” (#11, Feb 2000, p. 9), a definition constructed to eschew “any true hierarchy between the temporal and permanent, between the physical and spiritual, or between this world and the otherworld.” While other definitions continue to be offered, this one offers editorial room for both historic and contemporary Pagan religions. Furthermore, we regard them primarily as religions rather than as folklore, urban subcultures, or literary creation, concentrating on their links and common elements rather than regarding them merely as precursors to or reactions against the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition. We plan to publish a gradually growing body of work to support that idea that “Pagan Studies” should be approached as a distinct entity and not always parceled out under other headings such as “new religious movements” or “feminist religion.”

During the past year, *The Pomegranate* gained the assistance of a new board of editorial consultants from different universities and different nations to help in our transition to being a true “refereed” journal. Their contributions are invaluable, and their presence signals our warm working relationship with the Nature Religions Scholars Network (NRSN), an informal network of researchers in the areas of Pagan studies and other nature-based spirituality. The NRSN meets each year during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and maintains a Web presence at <www.uscolo.edu/natrel>. Their assistance is invaluable, and we look forward to making the board of editorial consultants an important component in *The Pomegranate’s* growth.

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