

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas.

Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended by one or two issues

Don Frew writes:

Dear Pomegranate,

I was pleased to see Kate Slater's review of Sarah Iles Johnston's *Hekate Soteira* in *The Pom* #7. My own book on Craft origins is looking to the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgists of late antiquity, both Roman and Arab, and I have long felt that this area has been strangely ignored by today's Neopagans. As worshippers of the Gods, how can we ignore such striking and inspirational texts as the *Hermetica* and the *Chaldean Oracles*, texts that were believed to be from the Gods' own mouths?

One problem, I think, has been a perception of patriarchal sexism in the texts. Slater alluded to this in her references to the "divine Father" and "transcendent male divinity" in her explanation of the cosmology of the *Chaldean Oracles*. Such language can be very off-putting to modern Neopagans. However, such language is often an artifact of the biases of the translators, rather than of the original authors. For example, in the Brian Copen-

haver translation of the *Hermetica* (Cambridge, 1992), the translator notes that the texts almost exclusively use the Greek word *anthropos* (meaning "all human beings of either gender") to refer to the "Primal Man", while only rarely using the word *aner* (meaning "male persons") (p. 107). At the same time, the texts say of the "Primal Man", "He is androgyne because he comes from an androgyne father..." (p. 3). This would certainly suggest an ambiguity (or inclusivity) regarding the gender of the Divine that is rarely well-communicated in the English translations, which tend to persist in the convention of translating androgynous terms as "man" and "father" and "god". A more enlightened view (to modern sensitivities) is expressed throughout the *Hermetica*, but one has to "dig" a bit to find it. Witness "Asclepius 21" (p. 79):

Do you say that god is of both sexes,
Trismegistus?
Not only god, Asclepius, but all things
ensouled and soulless...

Unfortunately, a tendency on the part of modern translators to favor male nouns and pronouns has made such texts as the *Hermetica* and the *Chaldean Oracles* less accessible to modern Neopagans than they should be.

Slater's explanation of Chaldean cosmology struck me as being a bit jumbled and I couldn't help but wonder if it had been edited somewhat for length. Hermeticism and Neoplatonism are rather exotic to many modern readers and it can be quite difficult to compress a coherent summary down to the length of a book review. Even so, I thought she did an admirable job. I would like to suggest a few places for enthused readers to continue following

this thread.

The first stop would be the *Chaldean Oracles* themselves. An excellent translation by Ruth Majercik is available from E.J. Brill (1989). This edition also includes a very helpful introduction explaining the Chaldean theurgical system and was used by Johnston in writing *Hekate Soteira*. Next, I would recommend *The Goddess Hekate*, edited by Stephen Ronan (Chthonios Books, 1992). This is actually an anthology, reprinting many hard-to-find articles on Hekate (and related entities like Gorgo, Mormo, and Baubo), but the bulk of the book is a long essay by Ronan titled "Chaldean Hekate". Written after the publication of both Johnston's and Majercik's books, it references both and serves as an excellent supplement since Ronan includes fragments of the Oracles that Majercik left out. Ronan also includes new translations of several Hymns to Hekate.

There is a real wealth of amazing material becoming available on the Pagan religions of late antiquity. Johnston's book is a great place to start. Thank you, Kate Slater, for turning folks on to it.

Blessed Be,
Don Frew
Berkeley, California

Ken Lymer writes:

Dear Pomegranate,

I would like to invite you and your readers to attend our conference entitled: *New Approaches to the Archaeology of Art, Religion and Folklore—'A Permeability Of Boundaries?'*

We postgraduates in the Department of Archaeology, Southampton University (UK), are holding a two-day conference on

the 11th and 12th (Sat-Sun) of December 1999. This will provide a forum for postgraduates to present their research to a wider audience. But in the spirit of its title, the conference welcomes papers from other interest groups including established academics, non-academic researchers and followers of different paths. It is our intention to explore the diverse territory between the boundaries of archaeology, art, religion and folklore. In recent years these themes have become more prominent and their boundaries more permeable. Our conference will provide the opportunity for the exploration of these boundaries.

We will explore these themes in four sessions entitled: 1) rock art; 2) archaeology and art theory; 3) images through time; 4) art, religion and magic. We will also have a keynote address by Professor Richard Bradley (noted archaeologist and author of several papers on the cup and ring marks of Britain). The conference will close with an evening debate that will speculate on 'alternative archaeology' and has it truly happened?

Southampton is located in the county of Hampshire. An optional post-conference trip is offered on Monday to the archaeological sites of Hampshire. For those looking to continue on a pilgrimage of 'Merry Olde England', Southampton is not far from Stonehenge, Avebury and King Arthur's round table in Winchester. Southampton is also where the Titanic made its fateful departure from. It is also worth noting,

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