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## Book Reviews

Ronald Hutton, *The Druids* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007). xvi + 240 pp., $29.95 (cloth).

Having addressed the history of modern Pagan Witchcraft, the history of Paganism and the history of agrarian festivals in several excellent (if occasionally controversial) scholarly volumes, historian Ronald Hutton's new book continues to examine topics first explored in an earlier collection of essays (*Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, Hambledon Continuum 2003). He now turns to a history of the Druids, and does so in what is intended as a volume for lay readers as well as academics.

Druids are a problematic subject for scholars, quite simply because so little evidence exists that tells us anything reliable about them. Hutton says as much—and frequently—reminding readers that history is a tale, and often a martial one, told by both victors and victims about their enemies and oppressors. But the Druids were not merely warriors; they were (if the many, many books written on them are to be considered) philosophers, healers, political advisers, magicians, musicians, poets, and scientists. Many believed, and for a long time, that the Druids built Stonehenge (or at least spent a great deal of time there). They may have practiced human sacrifice—making them no different from a number of other groups studied by historians.

Getting at whether any or all of this is true is no small task, and perhaps it has taken an historian of Hutton's gifts and unique position to address this murky history in a contemporary Pagan context. This he attempts to do by analyzing the voluminous source material, much of it literary or even fictional, which makes for a fascinating meta-history in and of itself. If I may be permitted an irreverent observation, Hutton's central thesis regarding the history of the Druids may be summed up in the now-famous and oft-invoked line from the parody "rockumentary" film *This is Spinal Tap*, in which a performance by "Druids" is used to introduce the song "Stonehenge" in concert: "No one knows who they were or what they were doing."

As with some of Hutton's previous books, the chapters are divided along thematic lines, in this case a kind of archetypal grouping of Druids as they have been perceived throughout history. Each chapter begins with a paragraph or two describing the most dramatic and recognizable of these types: for example, the "Patriotic Druids" served as historians and priests of their communities, and "preserved and communicated a sense of all that the past, the deities and the land itself had provided to make up an inheritance worth defending to the death." Subsequent chapters on Wise Druids, Green Druids, Demonic Druids, Fraternal Druids, Rebel Druids, and Future Druids explore a myriad topics related to the complex mystique of these historical enigmas. Hutton effectively explores what will be familiar topics among scholars who have studied Druids: the unreliability of sources such as the Coligny calendar, the accounts by Pliny and Caesar, the vast compendium of forged and hybridized documents by Iolo Morganwg (whose influence upon the "scholarship" of Druids is nearly immeasurable); the groundbreaking studies on stone circles by writers like Stukely and Aubrey; and the intriguing development of secular, traditional Druid lodges and, later, the newfangled Druid orders.

One trend Hutton examines is the fascinating competitiveness among European nations who seemed to disown or embrace the Druids in their midst, as various writers and scholars contributed to their fashionable popularity that waxed and

waned over the last few centuries. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the Scots, the Welsh, the Irish and the English, not to mention the French and the Danes, have all, at some point in time, clamored to demonstrate the authenticity or superiority of their respective Druid legacies. Readers will no doubt be interested in the many modern and contemporary references to Druids in literature and media: Hutton also considers obscure source material such as the Gilbert and Sullivan musical *The Pretty Druidess*, the cult film *The Wicker Man*, novels by Terry Pratchett, and so on, although I admit I was slightly disappointed not to see mention of Howard Brenton's controversial 1980 play, *The Romans in Britain*.

For contemporary Paganism scholars, the discussion of current Druid groups and activities may be of particular interest, and Hutton's access to the papers and meetings of various organizations has yielded some richly detailed explorations. Those in the know (and many of us who merely believe we are) have heard of the many conflicts and difficulties plaguing contemporary Druid groups in the United Kingdom and the United States. (Most recently, there has been the uproar over the disinterment of human remains found at Avebury, which several Druid groups have protested based on their belief in their own ancestral connection to them.) Hutton's descriptions and explanations are even-handed. Controversial figures like Arthur Uther Pendragon, founder and leader of the Loyal Arthurian Warband, who is described as "a mystic, with a strong sense of having been called by destiny to his present role as the contemporary representative (and perhaps literal reincarnation) of the legendary King Arthur," are discussed with the same deference and respect as Philip Carr-Gomm, founder of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, who lent materials for Hutton's research.

The most noteworthy feature of this new book, for those readers familiar with Hutton's previous scrupulously researched work, is the utter lack of footnotes within the text. Indeed, the book has only a chapter of "Source Materials" at the end, but it is very thorough, and written in an accessible prose format. *The Druids* contains plentiful and lavish color illustrations, also something of a departure for Hutton. *The Druids* is the "first of a pair" of books, "based on the same research" as Hutton states in his introduction. The second volume, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of Druids in Britain*, is forthcoming in June 2009 from Yale University Press and promises to be larger, and "in a chronological format rather than a thematic one," which may prove a friendlier and more familiar approach for scholarly readers who have grown used to Hutton's impeccable and frequently entertaining citations.

*Peg Aloi*
*Emerson College*

Christine Wicker, *Not In Kansas Anymore: Dark Arts, Sex Spells, Money Magic, and Other Things Your Neighbors Aren't Telling You* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005). 304pp. $13.95 (paper)

*Not in Kansas Anymore* is an ethnographic account of what Wicker refers to as "the magic people." Although this term seems clumsy, it is part the book's project of breaking down perceived barriers between individuals involved with esoteric and magical traditions and the so-called "mainstream." Wicker notes that "millions of Americans" have had experiences and harbor beliefs that defy a rational worldview, and the book suggests that the difference between "magical people" and everyone else is only one of degree. Although scholars often cite Gallup polls indicating that a majority of Americans believe in the supernatural, Wicker has attempted to put a face on these statistics. It is unfortunate that the subtitle of the paperback edition ref-