



53. RENAISSANCE MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

Dmitrij Sergejevič Mereškovski¹ began his novel *The Resurrection of the Gods* with an episode of great interest. A party of peasants, engaged by some humanists, are requested to excavate the countryside around Rome and for vestiges of pagan antiquity.



1. Search for the ancient Gods in the ruins

Eventually, a diaphanous sculpture of a Roman deity emerges from the ground like a ghostly apparition. «The Gods rise again», the exultant humanists think, and with them they plan to resurrect the pre-Christian civilization. In reality, what they unearthed is an idol that indeed was a divinity in the classical age, but that at the time of the dig is nothing but a receptacle of inferior influences that hence are set to free to spread everywhere, changing the general mentality.



2. Prāṇapraṭiṣṭhā ritual

¹ Poet and novelist (Saint Petersburg 1865- Paris 1941), one of the founders of the Russian Symbolist Movement. This movement should not be confused with that of the same name which arose in France, which spread throughout Europe bearing all the worst neo-spiritualist tendencies, imbued with all morbidness and vice of romantic Decadentism. For this movement, the symbol represented an alternative degenerate, hallucinated, occult and individualistic reality, an inhuman escape from positivist obtuseness. Russian Symbolism, on the contrary, represented the search for the meaning of sacred symbols present in the different religions and traditions of the past and present, interpreted mainly in the light of Orthodox Hesychasm. These symbolists, through the search for 'Divine Sophia', aimed at opposing the antichristic corruption of modern civilization. Among the main exponents were Vladimir Soloviev, the monk Pavel Aleksandrovič Florenskij (executed by order of Stalin), Jurgis Baltrušaitis, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Nikolái Berdiáyev and Zinaida Gippius, who became Mereškovski's wife. This author, admittedly anti-communist, was certainly not "politically correct", at least according to today's view. This is the reason why the so-called democratic regimes and their servants have organized a conspiracy of silence around him.



In the *Hindū* tradition the icons of the Gods must be consecrated and animated with the *prāṇapraṭiṣṭhā* ritual. The vital force that the celebrating *brāhmaṇas* instil in inert matter must be constantly nourished by offerings of the devotees and rituals constantly repeated by the *pūjārīs*. The image (*mūrti*) of a God abandoned by devotees and celebrants, gradually loses effectiveness, returning to be a simple mass of stone or metal. If the image is broken, mutilated or even simply scratched¹, it cannot longer represent the divinity and, through the rift, harmful influences can creep in, those same influences haunting ruined shrines or abandoned temples. If an unearthed *mūrti* appears intact, after appropriate reconsacration, can be reused; but if it were damaged in some part, it would be dealt with as a fearsome subtle entity such as *piśāca*, *bhūta*, *bīr* (*vīra*) or *rākṣasa* and thus confined to a safer place².



3. Goddess Trivia

This is what really happened at the end of the Middle Ages. Previously, the situation had remained for long centuries under the control of initiatic organizations and of ecclesiastical and imperial structures. In some peripheral areas, only later converted to Christianity, legends and superstitions of the ancient Latin, Celtic and, mostly, Germanic religiosity remained. As often happens, among the lower strata of the society survived the obsession of the most morbid aspects of ancient beliefs. In particular, the memory of the Roman Goddess Trivia³ lived on; a nocturnal deity who procures abortion and leads to the underworld of the dead, but who also nurtures necromancy and the return of the larvae to the world of the living when duly invoked in the crossroads on moonless nights. On the equinox nights, when the gates of hell are believed to remain open, the Goddess is said to lead the dead to a wild hunt. On those nights, the inhabitants⁴ of the countryside used to lock themselves in their homes waiting for dawn and, with it,

¹ This is well known to relentless propagandists of religions who invaded India on the wave of various military conquests. It has been the malignant attention of those invaders to destroy or, at the very least, to scar the *mūrtis* of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism in order to prevent their ritual use. And this insanity has not yet subsided, as evidenced also by recent episodes.

² It is significant that even today the intact images exhibited in the archaeological museums are object of worship with flowers and garlands.

³ This deity called Hecate by the Greeks, was the dark hypostasis of the Goddess Diana-Artemis. Now, just as the latter was the huntress deity accompanied by a pack of hounds, so too was Trivia associated with dogs. But in this case, it was the jackal-dog, carrion-eater. These two aspects later merged together.

⁴ In the Anglo-Saxon world the dark Halloween holiday has been preserved and, like all the aberrations that come from there, it is spreading everywhere as an unreasonable fashion. Although the homologated culture maintains it to be a Celtic term to indicate the evening before the All Saints' Day (All Hallow's Eve) of Christianity, it is clear that Halloween refers to a previous period. It is much more likely that the term indicates the opening of the doors of the Germanic hell (hall, hölle).



the return to the normal order¹. In the early Middle Ages this figure already overlapped that of Frau Hölle, the Lady of Hell of Germanic folklore².



4. The procession of the Perchta

What is certain is that in the medieval period the beliefs of the plebs and the very subtle influences of these remnants of bygone religions were carefully avoided and kept under control. In fact, when in 1231 Pope Gregory IX established the Inquisition, this new institution for a long time only committed itself to repressing cases of abnormal religious cults. Its main function was, therefore, to pursue heresies such as, for example, the Albigensian, Waldensian or Dulcinian ones, or doctrinal distortions of the spiritual Franciscan or Joachimite Franciscan sort.



5. "Flight" of the witches

The very Hermetic magic was thwarted more for its ability to induce its followers to assume heterodox positions, rather than to prohibit the production of paranormal phenomena. Only in 1326 Pope John XXII, with the bull *Super illius specula*, extended the application of the laws against heretics also to magic practices, without however defining them doctrinally and dogmatically heretical. It is a fact that up until

¹ Julio Caro Baroja, *Las brujas y su mundo*, Madrid, Revista de Occidente, 1961, cap. IV.

² Nordic hell is connected to the idea of ice and snow. For this reason, Frau Hölle, as well as her counterpart Frau Perchta or Lady Bertha, is the snowy queen of the winter that leads to 'white death' by frostbite. It is known for her large feet or goose feet. Even her helpers suffer from the same deformity.



about 1420 or so there were not many magic trials. The imputations of diabolical sorcery only increased after 1450¹.

By sorcery is meant the confluence of two different phenomena; the first is that of possession, the second consists in magic as an empirical science. Possession is generally connected with a psychic imbalance from which the individual is disturbed from birth. This pathology can worsen in the adolescent period, giving rise to a complex and differentiated phenomenology case by case. The person has the sensation of hosting an alien presence that tends to control the will of the possessed person. In some cases, when he is at the mercy of such a subtle suggestion, he experiences certain paranormal powers. Among these are often the sensation of flying in the air and penetrating the bowels of the earth, the ability to assume animal forms², and the ability to hear voices spoken by invisible beings³.



6. Magic transformation into animals

All things considered, the phenomenon of possession in other non-monotheistic religious contexts would have led to the practice of shamanism. Beside possession, we find the practice of magic in ceremonial form for the purposes of incantation, curse, clairvoyance, medicine and pharmacopoeia, the latter particularly aimed at the preparation of love filters.

The end of the Middle Ages represented the end of the control of tradition over society, with the spread of an anti-religious mentality even among the lowest strata of society. If in the past everything that was forbidden or reprehensible was kept at a distance, with the beginning of humanism also the people turned their attention to the acquisition of miraculous powers that religion seemed no longer able to guarantee. Instead of locking themselves in their homes fearful of the wanderings of purgatorial souls in Lady Hölle's wake, a profusion of witches and sorcerers⁴ committed themselves to take part in the Wild Hunt. In the absence of a flight favoured by air spirits, witches and sorcerers relied on certain magic ointments. This magical expedient, unknown in the Middle Ages, is clearly taken from Lucian of Samosata's *Metamorphosis*, which demonstrates how widespread was the humanistic cultural influence also at a popular level. Soon, the frightening air procession of souls on their way out of the hells of the medieval

¹ Andrea Del Col, *L'Inquisizione in Italia. Dal XII al XXI secolo*, Milano, Oscar Mondadori, 2006, parte I, cap. V. The trials that took place in Toulouse between 1335 and 1350, whose details on the Sabbath seemed to anticipate those contained in the records of the following centuries, are actually hoaxes fabricated in the first half of the 19th century (Norman Cohn, *I demoni dentro. Le origini del sabba e la grande caccia alle streghe*, Milano, Unicopli, 1994, capp. I-II).

² These phenomena were later separated, giving rise to the belief of lycanthropy and vampirism.

³ The *Canon Episcopi* of the 10th century considered these prodigious events as simple fantasies, dreams or hallucinations.

⁴ In the present atmosphere of total imbecility, it is widely accepted the wrong belief that witches were exclusively women because of the misogyny of patriarchal society at the time. In fact, in witchcraft trials in Scotland, Iceland and Estonia, the majority of the convicted were men. (Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History*, Wiley Editing Services, 2004, pp. 147-164).



hunt turned into a grotesque swarm of witches converging on the orgiastic Sabbath to meet Satan in person¹.



7. Inquisition Court

As has been said, from the end of the 14th century the Inquisition began to investigate this new phenomenon² with growing concern due to its spread. In 1398, the University of Paris affirmed that the magical powers were real and not purely illusory, contradicting Gratian's *Decretum*, which in the 12th century, on the basis of St. Augustine and the *Canon Episcopi*, had supported the illusory nature of phenomena such as night flight, denying any effectiveness to the various evil warped by witches.



8. Joan of Arc to the Fairy Tree

A well-known case concerns the trial of Joan of Arc for witchcraft, although subsequent falsifications of documents have made it difficult to display historical evidence³. The sentence was decreed mainly on

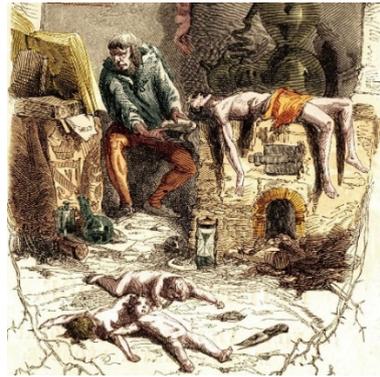
¹ The relationship between witchcraft, diabolical evocations and Renaissance culture is very well demonstrated by the episodes described by Cellini in his autobiography (Benvenuto Cellini, *La vita*, Novara, Istituto Geografico De Agostani, 1983, pp. 170-174). The reader will have the opportunity to learn more about this subject in the next chapters.

² Matteo Duni e Dinora Corsi (ed. by) *Non lasciar vivere la malefica: le streghe nei trattati e nei processi (secoli XIV-XVII)*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2009.

³ Jeanne des Armoises (1412-1431?) was certainly not a peasant girl, as the pious legend in the service of French nationalism says, but a well-known person at the court of the Dauphin and probably related to the royal house of the Valois. Not only was her story severely manipulated, but her religious mission was nothing more than a cover for a political plot. It is truly suspicious that she was beatified only in 1910 and canonized in 1920, five centuries after the events! André Bourrier, Grillot de Givry and Han Ryner, *La vérité sur le supplice de Jeanne d'Arc, victime de l'Église: la Pucelle a-t-elle été brûlée? S'est-elle échappée et mariée?*, Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, L'Idée libre, 1925. Another unclear subject is linked to the environment of the Romanian esotericists stationed in Paris, already militants of the Iron Guard and disciples of the disquieting seer Petrache Lupu. Vasile Lovinescu linked the figure of Joan of Arc to an alleged initiation centre located in the "Hyperborean Dacia". Although in much more prudent terms, Vâlsan also attributed to the Maid of Orleans a supposedly important "initiativ function", completely indemonstrable.



account of the mysterious voices that, since adolescence, the maiden of Orleans claimed to have heard at the "fairy tree", voices that she attributed to St. Michael the Archangel and Saints Margaret and Catherine¹. Various circumstances attest to the correctness of the verdict; moreover, the divine mandate for Joan's mission appears completely untenable, since it is difficult to understand why God had to be against Burgundians and English and partisan of the King of France. Furthermore, from the point of view of the legitimacy of succession, the true King of France was certainly not the infamous Charles VII. What seems more disturbing, however, was the collaboration and friendship of Joan with the Marshal of France Gilles de Rais.



9. Gilles de Rais' crimes

Since the beginning of the Renaissance there was a sudden increase in witchcraft. The historical turning point was marked by two ecclesiastical stances: the bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus* by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 and the publication in 1487 of the *Malleus Maleficarum* by the Dominicans Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger². These two documents testify to a sudden intensification of the witchcraft phenomenon throughout Europe. The bull gave orders to the Inquisition to intensify the repression of the new phenomenon, while the *Malleus Maleficarum*³ was an instruction manual for inquisitors on the different forms of witchcraft. In both cases the paranormal phenomena were described in real terms, demonstrating the poor discernment of Catholic theologians during the Renaissance period. On the other hand, what is beyond doubt is the uncontrolled spread of pseudo-religious, heathenish or openly diabolical practices at the popular level, parallel to the emergence of the pseudo-esoteric magic of Hermeticism among the educated classes. The ecclesiastical reaction, therefore, was justified in practice, although not supported by as much doctrinal clarity.

It is estimated that from the middle of the 15th century to the end of the 18th century about fifty thousand people were condemned for witchcraft. It is not clear what percentage of death sentences were carried out in these trials. What is certain is that the brazen Protestant propaganda unleashed all its fury against Catholicism and, in particular, against the Spanish Inquisition⁴. However, the reality is quite different:

¹ St. Margaret of Antioch and St. Catherine of Alexandria, as they were identified *a posteriori*; they are two virgins and martyrs of whom very little is known and who, in any case, had nothing in common with the alleged "patriotic mission" of Joan.

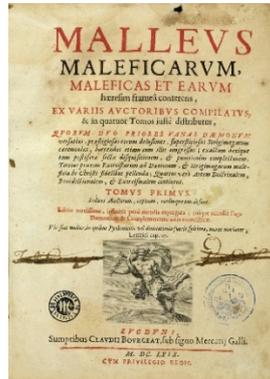
² No wonder the two friars were recently converted from Judaism. Overzealousness and fanaticism are a psychological result typical of conversions from one monotheistic religion to another, as was the case with the famous inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada OP.

³ Until the 17th century, the term *maleficae* was used to define witches. The term "witchcraft" came into use from the Enlightenment in order to stigmatize religious behaviour and positions.

⁴ "In the period in which torture was most prevalent in Spain, in Valencia, out of two thousand trials of the Inquisition in the period from 1480 to 1530, twelve cases of torture were found" (Jean Dumont, *L'Église au risque de l'histoire*, Paris, Critérion, 1981, pp. 378-379). We have already pointed out on other occasions the artificial construction of the *leyenda negra* against Catholic Spain carried out mainly by Elizabethan England and its Dutch and German Protestant vassals. We will have to return to the *leyenda negra* in more detail, considering that only a few courageous historians have expressed themselves on this



while in Catalonia alone from 1450 to 1630 little more than one hundred death sentences were carried out, in the rest of Spain they were just forty-nine¹.



10. The *Malleus Maleficarum*

Moreover, abundant documentation proves the constant ecclesiastical exhortation to the courts of the Kingdom² not to resort to torture.



11. Salem fires in North America

On the contrary, in the countries controlled by the Protestant Reformation, burning and torture were the order of the day, under the banner of the same cruelty described in the previous article “The Protestant Reformation. Luther’s emulators”. The inflexible and moralistic mentality of the various Protestant sects also spread overseas, where the ruthless repression of witchcraft took on forms of collective alienation³.

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historical falsification which continues to be promoted and divulged by the Anglo-Saxon Protestant peoples of Europe and North America.

¹ In Italy there were thirty-six and in Portugal four. In Catholic Ireland there was not even one conviction. P. Portone, “The zealous judge and the tolerant inquisitor”, in AAVV, *La causa delle streghe di Triora*, Arma di Taggia, Pro Triora Ed., 2014, p. 33.

² It is well known that canon law was entrusted to Dominican inquisitors, while the civil, criminal and police aspect were directly managed by the ‘secular arm’, that is, the court of His Catholic Majesty. Marina Montesano, *Caccia alle streghe*, Rome, Salerno Ed., 2012; Jean-Baptiste Guiraud, *Elogio dell’inquisizione*, Rino Cammilleri (edited by), Milan, Diffusione Libreria, 1994; Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari*, Turin, Einaudi, 1996; Rino Cammilleri, *La vera storia dell’Inquisizione*, Casale Monferrato, Piemme, 2006.

³ Paul Boyer e Stephen Nissenbaum, *La città indemoniata, Salem e le origini sociali di una caccia alle streghe*, Torino, Einaudi, 1986; Mary Beth Norton, *In the devil’s snare, the Salem crisis of 1692*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *La città indemoniata, Salem e le origini sociali di una caccia alle streghe*, Turin, Einaudi, 1986; Mary Beth Norton, *In the devil’s snare, the Salem crisis of 1692*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

