



A History of Pagan Europe

Prudence J. Jones , Nigel Pennick

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With this second edition bringing the books completely up to date with analysis of recent work in the area, A History of Pagan Europe is the first comprehensive study of its kind, and establishes Paganism as a persistent force in European history with a profound influence on modern thinking.

From the serpent goddesses of ancient Crete to modern nature-worship and the restoration of the indigenous religions of Eastern Europe, this wide-ranging book offered a rewarding - often provocative - new perspective on European history.

This second edition includes:

expanded discussion of the significance of the Olympian pantheon and the interrelationship of Greece and the Near East, and of the synthesis of paganism and Christianity new analysis of twentieth-century paganism and the coherence of paganism across time a new glossary and chronology.

A History of Pagan Europe is essential for all readers interested in the development of religions across the centuries and around the globe.

A History of Pagan Europe Details

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From Reader Review A History of Pagan Europe for online ebook

Larry Cahoon says

This is a difficult topic over a long period of time and a vast geography and therefore hard to cover well.

The authors seem to start out with a time based description by covering Greek and Roman cultures but then it becomes obvious that they have chosen to cover the topic by geography. With that choice they end up frequently jumping backwards and forward in time. This approach makes it difficult to get the feel of how history progresses. This becomes critical when the issue of how the christian church interact over time with the pagan culture and gaining an understanding of the evolution of how they treated the pagan beliefs.

This is important as the authors try not to just describe the pagan cultures in Europe over time, but also try to describe the interaction of the christian church with those cultures. This dual purpose flows throughout the book.

All of these are good goal and worthy of presentation, but the way the authors present the material it make it difficult for the reader to get the big picture of what the beliefs were and what was happening historically. The reader must make significant effort to get the most out of the book.

A shortcoming of the book is that the reader should not be expected to have a good feel for the place names mentioned in the text. The maps in the book are inadequate to fill that gap in understanding.

Jaime says

Not a New Age book but a chronicle of Pagan peoples and influence in Western history.

Jack says

This was a difficult read, but it was also extremely informative. I've had to read it three times to glean the information that I wanted from it, which is why it's taken me so long to post this review.

As the casual observer can tell, I am fascinated with those portions of history that are either sugar-coated, glossed over or ignored in mainstream education - unless you choose to become a history major.

This book, along with Ramon Jiminez's "Caesar & The Celts" fills in a few gaps in a Doctoral Thesis sort of way. Now do dig through their bibliographies for more nuggets of reading!

Alan Tate says

This book is truly loaded with information and is great to get an overview of european history, not just beliefs and practices. The chapters are about different regions but they all overlap each other. There is an

overview of both beliefs and history of the peoples in each chapter. It reads like a collection of wikipedia articles and constantly lists places and groups of people I had to look up. And I mean constantly, but to fit this much information into 220 pages, there are things that have to be sacrificed. Sometimes it was annoying and they were just trying to do too much. Its 400 A.D. and a sentence later its 800 A.D. and then 200 A.D. a sentence after that. I give it 4 stars because I feel I learned so much information from it. I am just starting to research a lot of history and this book gave me a firm ground to stand on for the entire continent of Europe, and I feel few other books could accomplish that, and in 220 pages. I had more of an understanding of mythology and folk-practices than history, so if one were well versed in the opposite, they may have a different experience. I hung up a map of europe beside me and know the continent inside out now. I feel the information is pretty unbiased. Much less biased than most history books because the person actually has religious understanding. The writers are pagan practitioners, and I agree with other reviewers that they may have tried to come across as so unbiased that the book comes across as dry at times, like an encyclopedia. I dont recall really disagreeing with much, but in the last chapter, I feel that the writers really were excited to show the development of modern neo-paganism so much that they got a little biased on the couple of pages about the Third Reich, insisting that there is really no connection with Paganism, which I agree with for most followers but there are some pretty irrefutable facts to the contrary, at least among many higher-ups and people who helped start the movement towards German nationalism, which was really developing for 100s of years. I mention that because I think they were so into trying to present pagan revival as something so innocent that they didnt want to look at the real facts in some minority of cases. As I said, I see no real distortion of information that is intentional, the writers just clearly have a belief that all pagans are, while many times in history ruthless just like monotheist leaders but not in the same dualist, world transforming and prejudiced way, fully accepting of other religions because they believe in the other peoples Gods. That may be true to a pretty large degeee but its not entirely true. Many Pagans were upset when idols from other countries were brought in, destoryed short lasting temples instituted by an emporor or Pharoah who thinks differently than them, and actually sometimes did persecute cults even in Greece. Its much less common than in Monotheistic times and usually didnt result in mass killing but its there in a different way, although kindof understandable usually by what they are suppressing (which are often things that are not easy to coexist with in an organized society). And clearly at some point when mythology became more matriarchal, there had to be some degree of putting down older beliefs and cults, although they clearly survive. So...its not all necessarily bright and sunny in Pagan history, although we certainly dont see Crusades and such. I mean, they said that Viking raids are understandable because thats their way of life and view of the world, but wouldn't a group of Knights slaying people in the Balkans have the same view of themselves. That said, clearly Monotheists missionaries and such were less accepting and more ruthless. Im not arguing that. Its a fine book. Its slow at times and I got tired of looking stuff up but its the best book I've seen to get an entire overview in a small space and I'll probably read it again because I can't recall everything because there was so much to take in.

Eric Tanafon says

I've re-read this book several times, though its shortcomings are more apparent to me now. The writers were over-ambitious, and a bit biased toward Wicca and Celtic culture. But on the other hand, where else would you find a recipe to reverse the effects of baptism? (Hint: it involves alder bark.)

What A History of Pagan Europe does well is to convey that in Europe, as elsewhere, civilization was invented by Pagans; that Christianity's takeover was often violent, involving forced conversions of entire cultures; and that nonetheless, Pagan outlooks and practices continued far later than most people would think. I'll also say that the bibliography is helpful, and there are a fair number of footnotes (though still, not

enough), which is unusual for something Nigel Pennick had a hand in. (In his other books you're always thinking, "Wow, that's interesting. I'd like to know more, but hmmm...there's no reference. How does he know that?")

But the book tries to cover too much ground too quickly, and the focus isn't always clear. I'd have liked to see more in-depth analysis of the worldview and the gods of each culture, rather than general statements about Pagan religion and a quick list of gods and goddesses with their main attributes. But the title of the book does say "History", and the text is rife with names, dates, and places. The pictures that are included are good and interesting (though sometimes placed out of context), but it would have been nice to have some more to help navigate through the sometimes dense text. Also, the lack of maps is a problem. There are a bunch of places where a tribe would be mentioned who lived north, or south, or across from some river or valley I've never heard of, and it would have been helpful to get *some* idea of where the hell these people were!

With all its faults, though, this is an important book that can help point one towards materials for deeper study. I will probably be reading it again.

Andy says

This was a generally informative book and I did learn a good deal of information. However, the organization and writing style hindered the actual transmission of that information. It seems that the authors really wanted to write two books. One would have been a discussion of various Indo-European religions, their similarities, and how they evolved. The other book would have been focused on the historical migration of various Indo-European pagan groups, their interconnections, and their conflicts with Christianity and Islam. Unfortunately, the authors chose to write one book encompassing both issues. This forced the discussions to lack sufficient depth in a number of areas and also created some confusion as the authors would frequently bounce between topics with only cursory explanations (or, almost as frequently, no explanations at all for an assertion). Overall the good outweighs the bad, but the bad prevents this book from being as good as it could have been.

J.M. Hushour says

A pretty great book considering it was written by "modern pagans", whatever that is supposed to be. It's Routledge and has a nice bibliography so I figured I'd give it a chance even though neither author seems to have any academic credentials to put in the cover blurb. Whatever. I know better than to put any stock in academia. I also, however, know better than to put any stock in crystal-rubbing Stonehenge rimmers. That said, the book is surprisingly informative. All things, of course, have roots, especially religious traditions, which this is primarily a history of. The skeletal remains of what the authors call "pagan" seem uncontroversial at this point, but it is still an interesting coalescence of data, especially the bits on Scandinavia and the Baltics. Not much on the Mediterranean, which is kind of weird, but, whatever, Wiccans!

else fine says

I'm always a little leery of historians with an obvious axe to grind, and the authors of this book - better known for a series of New Age and Wiccan publications - definitely qualify. I think they overcompensated for their bias by being as dry and academic as humanly possible, thus rendering their legitimately interesting subject matter into a painful and tedious slog. If you can get past these two rather large hurdles, you will find a wealth of rewarding historical detail here, and a surprising look at European history for those of us who accepted without question that paganism was pretty much finished with the conversion of Constantine. Sorry, that sentence got really long.

Sverre says

A book of history can be reviewed from at least two main perspectives: 1. Does it present factual information without author bias, and 2. Does the text have a readable, comprehensible and logical format (i.e. is it accessible). As for the first, I think the authors have put in a lot of effort to provide the reader with well-known as well as obscure facts sifted from five thousand years of historical and archaeological research. It is unfortunate that also much of its contents relies on hearsay, guesswork and extrapolation. I believe that the authors, who reportedly are of the Pagan persuasion, have tried conscientiously to make a balanced and neutral presentation although in a few places I detect some tongue-in-cheek ironical digs.

As for the second perspective, its reader accessibility I would give it a failing mark. It is severely lacking in structure and focus. The text seldom stays on its stated chapter's topic for more than a paragraph or two. It jumps forward and back in time; it constantly inserts anecdotal information; it flightily tosses around facts, tidbits and asides, lacking scholarly depth. Overall its presentational form is a mishmash. However, its detailed index does redeem its disorganization to a great extent. Is it useful? For the generalist interested in the topic it does offer up a lot of information. As far as any academic worth is concerned many would probably rate it as mediocre.

It is fascinating to comprehend how faith and beliefs have existed since the advent of man/womankind. Some have been localized to a small group, others have gained worldwide acceptance. Over time beliefs have become superimposed on each other. More authoritative creeds have tried to push aside and even obliterate less authoritative ones. Today we are witnessing authoritative forms of Islam attempting to vanquish western civilization which has become secularized and liberalized, favoring cultural pluralism. This book proves that nothing stays the same. Changing loyalties and beliefs are often catalysts for confrontation and suppression. Lasting solutions are found in dialogue, diplomacy and compromise. The imprint of paganism is still an underlying factor in our modern time (e.g. traditional customs, celebrations and rituals). Since neo-pagans will be interested in reading this book about the past I wonder: Based on their naturalistic polymorphous beliefs can neo-pagans contribute to reach convergent solutions in today's world or is their interest quaintly isolated and insular, searching for the revival of obscure meanings from the past?

KC says

best when tracing the history of modern (neo)Paganism, the chapters on older Pagan history honestly read like the "Setting" material from an RPG handbook in their sweeping generalizations and broad-ass

brushstrokes. we get it! you're Pagan and angry (join the club)! that's your right! but it's not scholarship. go straight to Beard or Burkert for helpful studies of Roman or Greek religion, and crack open any Vampire: The Dark Ages sourcebook for overviews of Celtic, Nordic, or Slavic Paganism that are just as scholarly (read: not at all) and better-written.

Adrian Colesberry says

An interesting review book. Paganism pre-Constantine was just called religion of course and this examination of what we know is very useful to anyone interested in a non-sentimental view of those beliefs. It takes serious scholarship to come up with answers simply because most of what we know comes from hostile sources, Christian texts assaulting the "pagans."

Hugo Filipe says

The social and historical contexts represent a bigger part of this book, than the actual paganism bit. In fact, the gods and rituals are described in a manner that tries to address them as religion, there is definitely missing some romanticism on this book.

It looks more like an index of cults and adoration than an actual book, which is a shame. Nevertheless, books on this subject are somewhat rare, so it's still a worthwhile read.

Roger Lewis says

A great Overview. This perspective for a chronology of Political and Religious Power structures is very valuable. Syncretism and Political Domination are the sticks and carrots of political economy. Supplemented with this Philosophical Tome. And I think something of a Red Pill experience would likely overcome most readers fresh out of High School State Education.
<https://www.amazon.com/Sociology-Phil...>

Rhyd Wildermuth says

The question of paganism in Europe doesn't present itself immediately as a matter of scandal, though the relative absence of histories on the subject does at least hint at the controversy of the topic. Usually relegated to Folkloric studies (with their classifications and archetypes) the issue of paganism is miserably under-treated.

Contention exists over the very definition of pagan--the general "western-academic" consensus is that it is a useless or over-used word, stolen by new-age neopagans to mean something somehow universal. History usually attempts to draw straight lines through time, successions of tendencies and thinkers one after the other until the present (or until the death of the idea), and is more than happy to this sort of thing as long as funding for "history of science" grants continue. Everything that can fit into the grand-narrative is important (or, conversely, nothing that has already been used in the grand-narratives matters), leaving the question of

pagan/indigenous beliefs of europe to the celtic-tapestry lot (of which, i'm told, i belong).

So, what then to make of the libraries and archives full of catholic denunciations of "pagan" practices remaining all the way into the 19th century? Offerings at well, shouting at the moon, refusing to eat certain animals or drinking certain things on certain days. Injunctions against paying any attention to the phase of the moon at all are rife. The Catholic (and its reformist-children) church has long tried to uproot these practises, and as facile as it might be to attribute such tirades to religious hysteria, the fact people that some people still throw spilled salt over their shoulder or that most of old bretons in northwest france still tie ribbons over "fairie wells" (i've seen it personally) suggests that the pagan-tendency was never fully uprooted.

So, come we now to Jones and Pennick. Their book is an inadequate (but welcome) addition to the shelf that so far only contains books like *The Golden Bough*. Slim (288 pages), well-researched, but unsatisfying. I don't mean to be hard on them, seeing as how they couldn't seem to secure any sort of funding whatsoever for their subject matter (and recieved rather vicious reviews by folklorists for disturbing their comfortable calculus). But it's too small, a tiny drop in an drained pool. Still, since it's something at all, and more than interesting to read, i highly suggest it. Work on the lithuanian pagan kingdom is appreciated (not original, but most wouldn't know where else to turn), but the sense that they're screaming into the wind is difficult to shake. They know they're not wrong, they're not being foolish, and yet they seem to apologise almost--take us seriously, they almost say, even though the reader probably already is. I did, i still do. But having read other accounts alluding to the same periods, i can't help but think they could use a little more confidence.

One thing they do well, however, is begin to place european paganism within the context of other paganisms. One of the biggest objections to anyone beginning to address the issue is the right-wing tendency of some european and anglo paganisms: every white-boy software coder was pretty certain he was scottish after *Braveheart*, and not a few of them used this new-found heritage to argue against other indigenous-rights movements (scots were an oppressed people, too, and so why are all the american First Nations complaining?). There's a way out of this, and it seems humorously simple, though one needs to look elsewhere (I suggest India--Chakrabarty and Leela Ghandi). J&P begin some of the work to link paganisms outside of racial/tribal groups (race didn't exist as a notion till the 19th century--is no one reading Hannah Arendt anymore?), and a lot more could be done, but again we come back to the question: why should J&P have to apologise for a bunch of white idiots at Microsoft calling themselves "goths in the traditional germanic sense"?

Grace Grant says

Here are my issues with the book: 1. From the get go it comparisons to obscure things to explain and area/people/or belief...so then you have to look up this other thing to figure out what it was trying to explain in the first place. 2. The book focuses more on the Romans and their influence of the world, then the pagan cultures themselves. 3. The language is that stodgy "I'm going to use as many obscure words as possible to make myself sound smart as will fit in a sentence 3 line sentence without saying anything as I can."

There are tidbits of interesting information, but even that is tainted by the outdated nature of the "history" presented.

Don't read if you don't have to. If you're in ADF ask your preceptor for more options.

