

TREE CULTS IN NORTHERN MAGIC

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"They worship verdant trees and wells. They also worship a tree of great size, it stands under the open sky; in their language they call it Irminsul, which in Latin is a world pillar since it is holding up everything".

–Rudolf, monk in the abbey of Fulda, around 860.

It is unquestionable that trees had a central role in ancient cultures. Especially in Europe and in other parts of the world that had great forests have these cults been common. In Germania, Tacitus informs us that the Germanic tribes "worshipped trees and groves". It was generally believed that trees had souls, some more than others. That some trees became central in cults can be deduced to the belief that their position and inherent power made them different. A common belief was that the souls of the forefathers entered trees after death. The wisdom and power of the deceased was then believed to live on in the tree.

There are many facts that indicate that certain endo-cannibalistic cults flourished along parts of the Swedish coasts, and probably in other parts of Europe too during the stone age. We can assume that these cults believed that they could inherit the power and abilities of the deceased by consuming the body. This desire to keep the powers of strong individuals in this world can be found in many ancient cultures. Death has been viewed more as a change of state than an end. A transcendence to another state or place. Perhaps there was a belief that certain parts of the soul were left in the body after death and could be consumed. This must be viewed as a primitive and most of all repulsive practice but nevertheless it does confirm that there was a belief that parts of the soul remained in the body and could be inherited through consumption. The parts of the soul that remain are probably the lower form of the aura, an etheric body of energy that is created during life and is bound to this plane. One can assume that it fades away slowly after the death of the body since it can not find energy. If the remaining relatives and tribe members wanted to keep and contact this etheric body, and if they had a tree that was central for the tribe, it can have melted into the tree and received energy through the cult of the ancestors. If a certain tree or grove was used by cults during a long time, many souls probably created a higher being together with the tree. If the same tree or grove was central for many hundreds of years or more a powerful symbiosis between the cult and the tree can have been reached. There are many descriptions of a meeting with the god in the grove. The grove was viewed as a sacred area that could not be entered without special preparations. The Germanic cult of the Semnonerna had groves which could not be entered without an iron ring around the arm or leg. The Chatterna had a similar practice where the iron ring that probably was an arm ring was ritually removed in the grove when the person had shown courage in battle. The removing/entering of the ring/circle have a central role in the rites of initiation.

A ring around the neck was central in the cult of the goddess Nerthus. According to Tacitus this goddess was worshipped in a carriage drawn by slaves on an island in the ocean. After the service the slaves were killed by drowning. When not used in ceremonies the carriage was kept in a grove. Nerthus is a fertility deity and is related to the earth goddess Erda. We can assume that the island is Gotland, but the cult of Nerthus was probably practised also on other places in Scandinavia.

According to Wilhelm Mannhardt the tree cult had its origin in mans observing of a plant, and that man through this observation understood a similarity between himself and the plant, and thus he believed that it had a soul just like he before believed himself to have. Often trees had names and many believed that trees could bleed. Mannhardt thought that the forests was not generally home for souls resembling to the human soul, he differs between the concepts of "Baumseele" and "Waldgeist". Baumseele can be likened to a tree with a soul of the type described above while Waldgeist is the beings of the forest called fairies, elves or trolls. Cults around these beings can also have existed, mountains and big stones have often been viewed as trolls or as homes for trolls and other beings. It is not impossible that this cult was practised by farmers or others that lived far away from other people. There are many stories about house gnomes and other beings that lived around human population. People did not pour out hot water on tree roots or on the ground without first warning the gnomes that could be living under the ground. Sometimes trees have been viewed also as homes for nature spirits. It is hard to say exactly were the limit between the nature spirits and the human souls in trees is. It is not impossible that a human soul takes the form of a nature spirit after death. From a magical perspective this does not seem unlikely. A tree was often planted when a person was born, a life tree. If the tree flourished it meant good luck for the person. If the tree died it could forebode (or cause) the death of the person. These trees was called care-trees or protection-trees and was often Oak or Oxel but also Maple, Linden, Ash and in southern Sweden also Hylle. Pregnant women would embrace these trees to achieve a safe birth. There were also trees that were used only for healing. A kind of rite de passage was performed, often with children, when a person was drawn trough a divided tree or through other hole in the tree. This was a rebirth through the womb of the tree. One can assume that these trees were also used for more magical purposes. From a dark magical perspective this is of great interest and corresponds to the womb of the night/ forest – Lilith. Iron nails or pieces of wood that had touched an open wound or infected tooth was hammered into the tree. Then the tree was believed to inherit the disease. Often the same tree was used several timed and became taboo. If such a tree was chopped down or destroyed by accident it meant great misfortune and death. No leaves or branches could be taken from the tree. Only if the top was first cut off could the tree be chopped down. A tree that was central for a larger group of people was of course more powerful and could forebode or influence the future of the group. Now we are getting closer to the descriptions of world trees, trees that had an enormous influence on a great area, perhaps the whole world. Irminsul is such a tree. According to certain sources this tree could be found at the Externsteine, other sources places it somewhere more generally in the Eresburg area. Independent of if and where the Irminsul existed it is an interesting symbol of a world tree. The tree was destroyed by Charlemagne in the year 772. Though we must consider the fact that many believe that it must not necessarily have been a tree. The Irminsul can have been another object or place. Nevertheless the symbol of the Irminsul as a world pillar is very useful. Charlemagne wanted to crush the foremost symbol of the heathen cult to open the gate for his religious/political crusade. The meaning of the name Irminsul can be interpret as great pillar or pole. The name Irmin is the same as Jormun which means great or high. Jormunr the great is a name for Odin. Gandr was the name of the magical wand or staff that was used during magical journeys, this can correspond to the witches broom of the myths that was used to reach the other side. The Germanic word stab can mean both sacred wand and a statue or picture of a god. This leads us to the name Jormungandr which can be translated as the great wolf or wand/pole, but considering that jormun can be a name for Odin, Jormungandr can mean Odins wolf or wand/pole. The wolf have been the one carrying the witch to the other side. The journey to the other side is made possible by the kundalini which can take numerous forms, the wolf or the wand can be symbols of the kundalini. In the light of this, Jormungandr can mean the great dragon (kundalini). During sejd the central magician was often positioned on a pole or other

elevated place (physically or mentally). The Irminsul can very well have been a seat of honour for magical ceremonies, an elevated place for higher states of mind.

The exact place of a cult tree is of great interest. The chosen trees were probably standing at power places. We have learned that man in ancient cultures had great knowledge about astronomy and the power lines that are surrounding earth, Ley lines or Dragon lines. No such trees from these cultures are left today to confirm this, but all stone formations (rune stones, ship tumulus, and graves) that have been found are all placed in a manner that reveals great knowledge about these power lines. With this in mind it does not seem impossible that also the trees that were chosen were standing on special power places. The groves where the trees stood were called stavgardr – an enclosure or fence with surrounds a pillar or tree. This kind of tree corresponds to the god Heimdall.

Magicians through all times have been interested in trees. Often magicians have reached enlightenment sitting under trees (Buddha). Trees represent both heaven (the crown) and the underworld (the roots) and the stem can represent the spine (the kundalini). This makes it very suitable to perform kundalini meditations under trees. When one needs to be grounded with earth it can be good to sit under a tree. Trees can link one with earth and help the energy to flow up through the body and avoid it to get stuck. Trees should be viewed as powerful entities that should be treated with respect. In the books by Castaneda Don Juan describes trees as very dark and powerful beings who can be hostile towards mankind. This can be understood today when we are exploiting forests very fast and have totally forgotten how important it is for us both physically and psychically.

The trees and groves that became objects of cults were believed to hold within them the gods or the power of the gods. This is something that the Christians realized and they decided to strike at the root of paganism to claim their superiority. In the area of Geismar the Germanic tribe of the Hessers lived. They had a grove in which a great oak stood, the oak was dedicated to the god Donar. When the holy Bonifatius wanted to christianize the area he cut down the oak. In Fositesland there was a sacred well that was destroyed by Wilibald the holy when he baptized three men in it. There are many examples of this kind of procedures. The churches were built on top of the pagan temples who were destroyed. But which god was worshipped in the groves?. In Germania chapter 39 Tacitus mentions the god of the Semnoner as regnator omnium. This has been interpreted as Jupiter optimus maximus by H.Hommel in an essay. He believed that this god was Tyr, Tiwaz. There are many things that are indicating that the cult of Tyr is very old and he was a sky god, thus the connection to Jupiter can be explained. Also Mars have been connected to Tyr. Hommel also claims that Tyr is identical with a supposed Svebian god called Erminaz or Irmin. But Neckel in an other essay that this regnator omnium is Wodan (Odin). There are a great number of lesser local deities. In southern Sweden Hyllemor (mother of the elder, the tree). She corresponds to the lady of the forest who was known all over Scandinavia. The lady of the forest was related to the kingdom of the fairies and the underworld. They were called "Vittran" or "Oknytt" in Sweden. The myths about kingdoms under the earth can be found all over the world. In Babylon and Assyria people believed in terrible demons who lived under the earth. In Armenia in the Caucasus area there were supposed to be beings from the underworld who were less hostile. On the Sinai peninsula and stretching down to Egypt certain earth spirits who were called Djinns were feared. These were often associated with trees and could take a human form. The Djinns could be very dangerous, they could cause disease and one could be enchanted by the desert and caught. From Krim to Kreta in the south entities called Kabirs were worshipped. They were small beings living under the earth. The Kabirs were the generative natural force of the underworld and special ceremonies were used to contact them. According to some sources the Greek god

Hefaistos (the master of blacksmiths) was the original father of the Kabirs. They were connected with mining, tunnels and caves. They were small dwarves with pointy hats, which could make them invisible. The Kabirs were supposed to have their origin in Lesser Asia. The Kabirs are quite similar to the dwarves in the European myths. According to the legends around Prometheus one of the first race of humans came from the underworld somewhere in the area of the Black Sea. The myths about Vril and Vril-Ya and Shamballah and Agartha are also interesting examples of civilizations under the earth. The myths about such kingdoms under the earth have lived on until the last fifty years. There are many Swedish myths about parallel worlds under the earth. From the ethnological archive of Östersund I have taken the following example:

In Kläppe there was a farm called Prisgård. They often had experiences of the Vättran (the fairy people). One day the mother of the house encountered a fairy woman in the barn. This woman tells the mother of the house that her farm is right underneath theirs and that it is much bigger.

There are many documented cases that are similar to this one. Man used to live close to nature and often experienced meetings with different entities and powers of nature. To be enchanted by the forest and or a mountain was reality in those days. From a magical perspective it does not seem totally unlikely that a powerful place could bind the soul of an unprepared person. This could cause confusion and lead the person astray, and even open up gates to the other side. The physical side of the person would either die or be perceived as crazy. The distance to the astral plane might have been less which could have led to more experiences. In some cases there were cooperation between the fairy people and humans. Human women have helped fairy women to give birth to children and have thus received rewards. Sometimes people have constructed roads on the places that belonged to the fairy people, this have often led to great problems with accidents and other strange occurrences. On Island they are still constructing roads and cities according to maps that are a thousand years old. They are avoiding to build on certain areas that belonged to the fairy people. But what is the fairy people? From one perspective they can be viewed as projections of different functions of existence. Often a certain being had responsibility over a certain animal or place. The house gnome could give help and protection. But if he was not treated with respect he could cause accidents or more likely just move away (which could lead to more sinister beings taking his place and that might cause "bad luck"). Just like the dead ancestors who were believed to live on in trees or groves the fairy folk was also believed to have great wisdom. Today we have removed the soul of nature and we are creating a destructive structure that growing rapidly. The world that they are existing in are today far away. But it is actually we that have embarked on a dangerous journey. We are cutting off our roots and are comforting ourselves with desperate materialism. Since we have lost the believe in the concept of the soul we can never reach fulfilment. We are trying to drench our thirst in the wrong well. Only through re connecting the inner and the outer dragon can we reach the balance of power that we need. Only then can we understand the truth that is obvious in occultism: As above so below. But there are many indications that the world kundalini is awakening. Every individual that are working with the kundalini force are contributing to the awakening of the world kundalini. Every system and state of consciousness have been spread by people. It is fascinating that deep esoteric secrets can be found in popular belief and folklore. There are a couple of different theories concerning the origin of the gnomes and other beings that exists under the earth. One theory tells us that Lucia (Lilith) who were the first wife of Adam gave birth to twins. Eve persuaded to leave Lucia since she was "breeding like the animals". Adam left Lucia and cursed her and their children under the earth. The cursed children of Lucia and Adam is the races that are living under the earth. Another myth reveals that Lucia was seduced by fallen angels and gave birth to their children. She was punished by being forced to live in the underworld. The majority of the popular myths are built around biblical themes. Lucifer,

the devil is often believed to be the one who rules the underworld together with Lucia. Some myths tell us that the races under the earth originate from Cain. In many myths it is the sexual activity of the mother that leads to the retreat into the underworld.

Another ceremony that was very important was the may pole ceremony. The may ceremony is related to the midsummer festivities. The may pole was meant to bring a good harvest and a fruitful summer. Branches of fir or spruce were used for protection from the ghosts that might disturb the peace. The sharp pattern of these trees was believed to frighten the ghosts. People who had been cursed in life were believed to return and haunt their relatives.

The last fifty years we have ignored and shut out connections and forces that have been respected for thousands of years or more. Though one might still find some old people in the countryside here in Europe that still remembers the old ways and respect the soul of nature, they are soon gone and this knowledge too. What Christianity could not destroy in a thousand years has now been utterly disintegrated. The last years "civilization and technology" have cut down spiritual family trees with the roots. Just like Christianity did with the cult trees, only this time we are not even aware that it is happening. When all threads that are connecting us with nature and all real spirituality is cut off we have no alternative but to escape into the false world that is sold to us in the form of cheap entertainment, luxury products and now also IT. Thus we will have no possibility to see what is really happening in the world. There are many layers and levels of modern development, but for a magician the most important side will always be the magical, and today the ignorance of the masses puts an enormous power in the hands of the magician. The fire of life will survive, in some form.

To work magically with trees

One should start with choosing a tree in some forest area nearby (the bigger forest the better, one should avoid forests that are close to big roads or other polluted areas). One should first send out a greeting to the tree mentally or vocally. It can be suitable to present oneself and mention for what purpose one wishes to use the place. After this one can sit down under the tree with the back against the tree and meditate. It can be suitable to visit the tree at least once a week and do a meditation. After a couple of times one should try to contact the tree. The contact will be intuitive and might reveal itself in dreams. The tree can be asked for advice for the magical progression and leave a symbolic gift in return (a coin, incense or other, when using incense never leave it before it is finished. In a dry season a forest fire might be the result otherwise). One can do the old rune magical practice of finding rune patterns on the tree. One should observe the leaves and the branches and the stem and try to see rune-like patterns. This can help to understand the power of the tree and the area. Trees are central in the draconian magic and can be very powerful and wise sources. Different trees and kinds are of a different nature and one should explore the forest until one finds a kind that feels suitable.