

ASSOCIATION OF POLYTHEIST TRADITIONS

*Conference 26 May 2007: Gods and Sacred Places
The Manchester Museum*

Paper abstracts and Programme

Stories and why we need them

Word Weavers and Myth Smiths

Robin Herne

A brief reflection on some of the issues posed to contemporary polytheist storytellers, and their role as purveyors of information about the Gods. Topics touched upon will include – the role played by myth in how we comprehend Gods and other spirits; reciting myths in ritual as a sacrifice of words; the storyteller as oracle – loaning your mouth to the Other's words; creating tales for the storyless; stories for the Dead; stories for the Tribe; storytelling as an act of communion.

(In the evening we will have stories and songs in the Burlington Bar.)

The Reburial Issue – I

Polytheists and the British Reburial Issue

Jenny Blain

How has the 'reburial issue' arisen and why is it hitting headlines? From highly publicised calls for reburial of the Paviland 'Red Lady' to concerns of museum curators and archaeologists, and to the negotiations and discussion in this very museum last year (and ongoing), why is this issue of importance today and how does it relate to the claims by indigenous peoples elsewhere? This paper will give a brief introduction to the issue in today's Britain and raise some questions on the relationships of people, 'ancestors' and landscape as they may be seen by today's Polytheists.

What does "respect" mean?

A discussion of responses to the reburial question

Yvonne Aburrow

Not all Pagans feel strongly that ancient human remains should be reburied. Yet those who do not feel that way do not lack respect for their ancestors, they just show that respect differently. This paper will examine what different groups mean by respect, and look at the discourses from which these meanings emerge; on the one hand, a 'timeless' and holistic concept of landscape and a view of archaeologists as rationalist scientists, and on the other, a sense of landscape as a historical construct, and of archaeologists as restoring connections with our ancestors, and a range of positions in between.

Further, it will suggest a selection of possible compromises on the treatment of human remains.

Sacred Places

Celebrating Thornborough henges

A personal journey with George Chaplin

For more than five years George Chaplin, along with campaign groups Friends of Thornborough, Heritage Action and TimeWatch, has been fighting against the quarrying of the wider landscape and archaeology of the Thornborough Henges in North Yorkshire. The campaign has had a partial victory, with permission to quarry some areas of the ritual landscape of Thornborough withheld.

However, despite significant support for the campaign, George freely admits that the outcome of the campaign appears to have been that even more quarrying is destined to take place at Thornborough, with two quarry companies now involved and North Yorkshire County Council apparently about to make the area one preferred for quarrying - a significant move that makes further new quarrying almost a formality.

George also freely admits that prior to Christmas 2007, his relationship with the pagan community was, on a personal level, firmly at arms length. "Pagans were a tool to be used, a group of likely supporters with weird ideas". But after Christmas last year, George has taken an entirely more positive stance towards pagans "something inside me woke up, my spiritual self, it answered a lot of questions and put the importance of Thornborough to me onto an entirely new level".

Now George says he will find it very difficult to run the same sort of campaign for Thornborough, in fact, he is convinced that to continue to do so will make more quarrying inevitable. So George is devising a new strategy for Thornborough. It is not a defence against quarrying, but a celebration of one of Britain's most important pagan capitals. "Thornborough needs to be famous, our task is give it that fame not because of quarrying, but because of Thornborough itself".

The Reburial Issue – II

The Ice Princess of the Altai: frozen mummies, heritage management and indigenous beliefs in southern Siberia

Ken Lymer

In 1993 excavations of a frozen tomb in the Altai mountains of southern Siberia revealed the body of a mummified woman that was over 2500 years old. She was finely dressed, wore an elaborate headdress, and her skin was delicately tattooed with the stylised images of mythical animals. She was also buried with five sacrificed horses dressed in richly decorated bridles and saddles. These spectacular findings resulted in her being popularly called the "ice princess". The discovery of the ice princess was not only important to the field of archaeology (and, of course, to the advancement of science), but also to the indigenous peoples of the Altai who claimed her as one of their own. Her body has become engulfed in a storm of political disputes that revolve around the question of ownership and the treatment of the dead. On the one hand, archaeologists insist that she has to be kept permanently on display in the museum, while, on the other hand, many Altaians have persistently called for her to be reburied back in her home in the Altai mountains. These controversies have not been resolved and still fuel tensions to this day. Thus, this paper provides a timely review of the ice princess as well as examining the issues of heritage, indigenous rights and beliefs, and the treatment of ancient human remains by archaeologists.

Overview Timetable:

9.30 onwards – registration 10.00 Welcome 10.15-11.00 Panel 1 - stories 11.00-11.15 break, chat
11.15- 12.45 Panel 2 – Reburial Issue I: Polytheist and Pagan views
12.45-13.45 break for Lunch
13.45-14.45 Panel 3 – Sacred Places 14.45-15.00 break, chat 15.00-15.45 Panel 4 – Reburial Issue II 15.45-16.00 short break
16.00-16.45-ish Roundtable – Gods and Polytheists 16.45-17.00- wrap-up plenary session 19.30 onwards – stories, music and poetry in the Burlington Bar

1. Telling stories

- Robin Herne
Word Weavers and Myth Smiths
- discussion

2. Reburial issue I

- Jenny Blain
Sacred landscapes, 'reburial' in Britain and some issues for polytheists
- Yvonne Aburrow
What does 'respect' mean? A discussion of responses to the reburial question
- Linda Sever and others
A report on the *Lindow Man* consultation
- discussion and ideas

3. Threatened Sacred Landscapes

- George Chaplin
Thornborough Henges and a personal journey
- Tina Smith and others
Update on places and issues.

4. Reburial Issue II

- Ken Lymer
the Ice Princess
- questions and discussion

5. Roundtable discussion:

- Gods, Wights and animism – with spirits in the land, (why) do we need 'Gods'...?

The Association of Polytheist Traditions is a British-based non-profit educational and networking organisation run by and for polytheists. Contact us at:

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