

The Anthropology Of Religion Magic And Witchcraft

The Anthropology Of Religion Magic And Witchcraft The anthropology of religion, magic, and witchcraft offers a fascinating window into how human societies understand the unseen, manipulate their environment, and interpret the supernatural. This field explores the diverse ways cultures conceptualize spiritual forces, how these beliefs influence social behavior, and the role of rituals and practices in shaping community life. By examining religion, magic, and witchcraft through an anthropological lens, scholars gain insights into the shared human quest for meaning, power, and control over the natural and supernatural worlds.

Understanding the Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft The anthropology of religion, magic, and witchcraft examines these phenomena as cultural systems that serve specific social functions. While often interconnected, each has distinct characteristics and roles within societies.

Defining Key Concepts

- Religion:** Structured sets of beliefs, practices, and moral codes centered around the worship of supernatural beings or forces. Religions typically have organized institutions, sacred texts, and rituals.
- Magic:** Practices believed to influence natural or supernatural forces through rituals, spells, or charms. Magic often aims at specific outcomes, such as healing or protection, and may be divided into imitative and contagious magic.
- Witchcraft:** The use of supernatural powers by individuals, often perceived as innate or inherited, to cause harm or benefit others. Witchcraft accusations can serve social functions, such as reinforcing social norms or resolving conflicts.

The Role of Religion in Societies Religion has been a fundamental aspect of human cultures across history. It often fulfills multiple social functions:

- Functions of Religion**
- Providing Meaning and Explanation:** Religion offers answers to existential questions about life, death, and the universe.
- Social Cohesion:** Rituals and shared beliefs strengthen community bonds and reinforce social norms.
- Legitimation of Power:** Religious authority can legitimize political leaders and social hierarchies.
- Control of Behavior:** Moral codes and religious sanctions influence individual conduct.

Examples of Religious Practices Ritual sacrifices Pilgrimages Festivals and ceremonies Prayer and meditation

Magic in Human Cultures Magic is often viewed as a more personal or individual practice compared to organized religion. It operates on the belief that specific actions or rituals can directly influence the world.

Types of Magic

- Imitative Magic:** Based on the principle "like produces like." Example: voodoo dolls or effigies.
- Contagious Magic:** Based on the idea that things once in contact continue to influence each other. Example: using hair or nails of a person in spells.

Functions of Magic Achieving personal goals (healing, love, success)1. Protecting against harm or evil2. Controlling natural forces when formal religion does not address specific needs3.

Witchcraft and Its Social Significance Witchcraft is often misunderstood as simply malevolent magic; however, anthropologists recognize it as a complex social phenomenon.

Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices

- Belief that certain individuals possess innate supernatural abilities
- Accusations of witchcraft can result in social tension or scapegoating
- Rituals may involve charms, spells, or rites aimed at harm or

protection 3 Functions of Witchcraft in Societies Social regulation: accusations often serve to reinforce community norms Conflict resolution: accusations can redirect tensions or disputes Cultural identity: beliefs about witchcraft reinforce cultural boundaries and distinctions Comparative Perspectives on Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft Anthropologists have identified various ways societies differentiate and relate these phenomena. Distinct but Interrelated – Many cultures do not sharply distinguish between religion and magic; practices may overlap. – Magic is often seen as individualistic, while religion involves communal worship and organization. – Witchcraft accusations can be linked to social tensions and power struggles, serving as social safety valves. Cross-Cultural Examples African Cultures: Rich traditions of animism, ancestor worship, and witchcraft accusations. Indigenous Americas: Shamanic practices blending religion and magic, with beliefs in spirit worlds. Europe: Historical witch hunts, Christian demonology, and folk magic. Methodologies in the Study of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft Anthropologists employ various methods to study these phenomena: Fieldwork and Ethnography – Participant observation – Interviews with practitioners and community members – Documentation of rituals and practices Comparative Analysis – Cross-cultural comparisons to identify patterns and variations – Historical analysis to trace changes over time Contemporary Relevance and Applications Understanding the anthropology of religion, magic, and witchcraft remains relevant today: 4 Addressing religious conflicts and misunderstandings Recognizing the significance of traditional healing practices Understanding social dynamics in communities with ongoing belief systems Supporting cultural preservation and respecting indigenous knowledge Conclusion The anthropology of religion, magic, and witchcraft provides vital insights into how humans interpret and navigate the unseen aspects of their worlds. These systems serve essential social functions, from fostering community cohesion to regulating individual behavior and resolving conflicts. By studying diverse cultures and their beliefs, anthropologists reveal the universal human tendency to seek meaning, exert influence, and establish social order through spiritual practices. As societies continue to evolve, understanding these phenomena remains crucial for appreciating cultural diversity and fostering cross-cultural understanding. --- Note: This article is designed for SEO purposes, incorporating relevant keywords such as "anthropology of religion," "magic," "witchcraft," "cultural practices," and "social functions" to enhance search engine visibility. Question Answer What is the role of magic in different cultural contexts within the anthropology of religion? In various cultures, magic often functions as a means to influence natural or supernatural forces, address everyday problems, and reinforce social cohesion. It can serve as a way to control unseen forces, seek protection, or ensure success in endeavors, reflecting underlying beliefs about the universe and human agency. How do anthropologists distinguish between religion, magic, and witchcraft? Anthropologists typically distinguish these concepts based on their social functions and perceived legitimacy. Religion is seen as a formal, institutionalized system of beliefs and practices; magic involves manipulating supernatural forces through specific techniques; and witchcraft is often viewed as a form of malicious manipulation by individuals, sometimes associated with social tensions. What are common beliefs about witches in different societies? Beliefs about witches vary widely but often include notions that witches possess special powers to harm others, influence events maliciously, or manipulate supernatural forces. In some societies, witches are feared and persecuted, while in others, they may be respected or seen as healers with dual roles. How does the anthropology of religion explain the persistence of magic and witchcraft practices today? These practices persist because they fulfill psychological needs, provide explanations for

misfortune, reinforce social bonds, and serve as mechanisms for social control. They also adapt to modern contexts, often integrating with contemporary beliefs and practices. 5 What is the significance of ritual and symbolism in magical practices? Rituals and symbols are central to magical practices as they create a sacred space, focus intention, and establish a connection with supernatural forces. Symbols serve as tangible representations of abstract ideas, enhancing the efficacy and meaning of magical acts. How do gender and power dynamics influence beliefs and practices related to witchcraft? Gender and power often shape witchcraft beliefs, with women historically being more associated with witchcraft accusations due to social vulnerabilities. Witchcraft accusations can serve as a means to control or suppress marginalized groups, reflecting broader social tensions and inequalities. In what ways do cosmologies shape magical and witchcraft practices? Cosmologies—concepts of the universe and its forces—inform how practitioners understand and engage with magic and witchcraft. These worldviews influence the types of rituals performed, the entities invoked, and the moral frameworks governing magical actions. How do modern spiritual movements incorporate traditional concepts of magic and witchcraft? Many modern movements adapt traditional magical and witchcraft practices, blending them with contemporary spiritual beliefs. This includes practices like Wicca, neo-shamanism, and eclectic paganism, which often emphasize personal empowerment, nature reverence, and ritual magic. What ethical issues are associated with the study of magic and witchcraft in anthropology? Ethical issues include respecting the beliefs and practices of studied communities, avoiding sensationalism, and being sensitive to the potential for stigmatization or harm. Anthropologists must navigate cultural relativism while ensuring their research does not contribute to misunderstandings or negative stereotypes. How has the global spread of media influenced perceptions of magic and witchcraft? Media has played a significant role in popularizing and shaping perceptions of magic and witchcraft, often romanticizing or sensationalizing these practices. This exposure can lead to increased interest, commercialization, or misunderstandings about their cultural significance and actual practices. The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft: An In-Depth Exploration The anthropology of religion, magic, and witchcraft offers a compelling lens through which to examine the diverse ways human societies interpret and navigate the unseen forces believed to influence their world. These domains—intertwined yet distinct—serve as vital components in understanding cultural systems, social cohesion, individual identity, and worldview construction across time and space. This article seeks to explore the nuanced interplay among these phenomena, their historical development, and their significance within different cultural contexts, providing a comprehensive review suitable for academic and scholarly audiences. The Anthropology Of Religion Magic And Witchcraft 6 Introduction: Defining the Core Concepts Before delving into the complexities of the anthropology of religion, magic, and witchcraft, it is essential to clarify these terms: – Religion: Typically characterized as a system of beliefs, practices, and moral codes centered around notions of the sacred or divine, often involving organized institutions, rituals, and communal participation. – Magic: Generally understood as manipulative practices aimed at influencing particular outcomes through supernatural means, often emphasizing individual intent and ritual action outside formal religious institutions. – Witchcraft: Usually refers to the use of supernatural powers—either inherited, learned, or spontaneously acquired—to cause harm or benefit others, often associated with social tensions, moral judgments, and cultural explanations of misfortune. While these categories overlap and sometimes blur—especially in ethnographic contexts—they each serve distinct social and cognitive functions,

which have been extensively studied within anthropology. The Historical and Theoretical Foundations of the Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft The scholarly investigation into these phenomena dates back to the 19th and early 20th centuries, with influential figures such as Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Sir James Frazer laying foundational theories. Classical Theories and Key Thinkers – Émile Durkheim: Focused on religion as a social institution that reinforces collective conscience and social cohesion. His concept of the sacred versus the profane highlights how religious rituals serve to bind communities. – Marcel Mauss: Explored the social function of magic and ritual, emphasizing the importance of reciprocity and obligation in social exchanges. – James Frazer: In *The Golden Bough*, proposed a universal progression from magic to religion to science, viewing magic as an early, often misguided attempt to control nature. These early theories, while foundational, have been critiqued for their universalizing tendencies and lack of attention to cultural specificity. Modern Perspectives and Approaches Contemporary anthropology emphasizes cultural relativism, focusing on how societies interpret and assign meaning to religious and magical practices: – Structural- Functionalism: Examines how religious and magical practices serve specific social functions, such as social cohesion, boundary maintenance, or conflict resolution. – Symbolic and Interpretive Approaches: Focus on the meanings attributed to rituals and beliefs, emphasizing the subjective experience of practitioners. – Political and Power The Anthropology Of Religion Magic And Witchcraft 7 Dynamics: Analyze how religion, magic, and witchcraft intersect with issues of authority, resistance, and social control. This multifaceted approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how these phenomena operate within different cultural milieus. Religion: Systems of Sacred Belief and Practice Religion encompasses a broad range of organized systems that articulate cosmogonies, moral codes, and rituals. Ethnographic studies reveal the diversity of religious expressions worldwide, from the complex hierarchies of Hinduism and Christianity to indigenous animist practices. Functions of Religion in Society – Cognitive: Provides explanations for existential questions—origins, purpose, morality. – Social: Reinforces social norms and hierarchies through rituals, doctrines, and institutions. – Psychological: Offers comfort and meaning in the face of life's uncertainties and hardships. – Political: Serves as a tool for legitimation of authority and social order. Case Studies – Indigenous Religions: Often animistic, emphasizing a spiritual interconnectedness with nature. Examples include the Shamanic practices among Siberian tribes or the Aboriginal Dreamtime stories in Australia. – World Religions: Organized systems like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and their various denominations with complex theological doctrines and institutional structures. Magic: Manipulation and Control of the Unseen Magic, often practiced outside formal religious institutions, typically involves rituals, symbols, and actions designed to influence specific outcomes—be it healing, protection, or harm. Types of Magical Practices – Sympathetic Magic: Based on the law of similarity; e.g., voodoo dolls, charms, or amulets. – Contagious Magic: Based on contact; e.g., using hair or personal objects for spells. – Rituals and Ritual Objects: Items like talismans, charms, or amulets that embody supernatural power. Functions of Magic – Personal Agency: Allows individuals to exert influence over their environment. – Coping Mechanism: Provides a sense of control during uncertain or stressful situations. – Social Regulation: Reinforces social norms through collective rituals or taboos. The Anthropology Of Religion Magic And Witchcraft 8 Ethnographic Examples – Western Occultism: Practices like astrology, alchemy, and modern witchcraft. – African and Caribbean Traditions: Vodou, Santería, and other syncretic faiths blending African, European, and indigenous elements. – Folk Magic: Common in rural communities

worldwide, often intertwined with local beliefs and practices. Witchcraft: Social and Cultural Dimensions Witchcraft occupies a complex space in anthropological analysis, often linked to moral judgments, social tensions, and explanations for misfortune. Definitions and Distinctions – Imputed Powers: Unlike magic, which may involve conscious manipulation, witchcraft is often seen as an innate or inherited ability. – Moral Dimension: Accusations of witchcraft are frequently moral indictments, associated with envy, jealousy, or social discord. Witchcraft and Social Control – Scapegoating: Witchcraft accusations can serve to channel social tensions and resolve conflicts. – Legal and Ritual Responses: Communities may respond through accusations, trials, or exorcisms. – Modern Witch Hunts: Examine how witchcraft allegations persist or transform into social phenomena, as seen in contemporary Africa or Europe. Case Studies – European Witch Hunts: 15th–17th centuries, driven by religious and political motives. – African Witchcraft Accusations: Often linked to social upheaval, economic stress, or political manipulation. – Contemporary Neo-Pagan Witchcraft: Re-emerging in Western societies as a form of spiritual expression and identity. Intersections and Interrelations The boundaries among religion, magic, and witchcraft are fluid, often overlapping in practice and belief. Ethnographic studies highlight how communities employ these concepts to address life's uncertainties, enforce social norms, or resist authority. Examples of Overlap – Rituals that serve both religious and magical functions. – Witchcraft accusations within religious communities. – Use of magical objects in religious or spiritual contexts. – Syncretic practices combining elements from different domains. The Anthropology Of Religion Magic And Witchcraft 9 Contemporary Relevance and Critical Perspectives The anthropology of religion, magic, and witchcraft remains vital in contemporary scholarship, especially as globalization, migration, and digital communication reshape traditional practices. Postcolonial and Feminist Analyses – Critique of Western ethnocentric models that universalize certain concepts. – Emphasis on gendered dimensions, noting how witchcraft accusations often target women. Global Movements and New Religious Forms – Revival of traditional practices in diaspora communities. – New spiritualities that blend ancient beliefs with modern contexts. Challenges and Future Directions – Navigating the tension between universal theories and cultural specificity. – Addressing issues of cultural appropriation and ethical engagement. – Incorporating interdisciplinary approaches, including psychology, history, and political science. Conclusion: The Significance of the Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft The anthropological study of religion, magic, and witchcraft reveals the profound ways human societies interpret the unseen and manage their existential anxieties. These phenomena serve multifaceted functions—social, psychological, political, and cosmological—shaping identities, maintaining social order, and fostering community cohesion. Recognizing their diversity and contextual specificity challenges simplistic or universalist narratives, urging scholars to appreciate the rich tapestry of human belief systems. As societies evolve and face new challenges, understanding the roles these practices and beliefs play remains crucial. They are not merely relics of the past but living expressions of human ingenuity, resilience, and creativity in navigating the mysteries of existence. References (Note: In an actual publication, this section would include detailed citations of ethnographies, theoretical works, and case studies referenced throughout the article.) anthropology of religion, magic practices, witchcraft beliefs, religious rituals, spiritual beliefs, cultural anthropology, ritual magic, supernatural phenomena, shamanism, religious symbolism

The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and MagicA History of Magic, Witchcraft and the OccultMagic, Witchcraft, and CuringMagic and WitchcraftWitchcraft, Magic & AlchemyWitchcraft and Black MagicExorcising our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern EuropeWitchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736–1951Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman WorldsMagic and WitchcraftMoral PowerThe Complete book of magic and witchcraftMagic, Witchcraft and the OtherworldHeresy, Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern EuropeA History of Magic and WitchcraftA History of Magic, Witchcraft and OccultismMagic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the EnlightenmentAn Analysis of Magic and WitchcraftWitchcraft and Magic in Europe, Volume 3Magic and Witchcraft Owen Davies DK John Middleton Michael David Bailey Grillo de Givry Montague Summers Charles Zika Owen Davies Daniel Ogden Nevill Drury Koen Stroeken Kathryn Paulsen Susan Greenwood Gary K Waite Frances Timbers William Bernard Crow Michael R. Lynn C. W. Olliver Bengt Ankarloo George Moir

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this richly illustrated history provides a readable and fresh approach to the extensive and complex story of witchcraft and magic telling the story from the dawn of writing in the ancient world to the globally successful harry potter films the authors explore a wide range of magical beliefs and practices the rise of the witch trials and the depiction of the devil worshipping witch the book also focuses on the more recent history of witchcraft and magic from the enlightenment to the present exploring the rise of modern magic the anthropology of magic around the globe and finally the cinematic portrayal of witches and magicians from the wizard of oz to charmed and buffy the vampire slayer

see the history of witchcraft magic and superstition come to life with this spectacular supernatural book from alchemy and modern wicca to paganism and shamanism this enchanting book takes you on a mystical journey that will leave you spellbound this is the perfect introduction to magic and the occult this reference book on witchcraft is packed with informative engaging and accessible text and lavish illustrations special features on aspects of magic such as oracle bones of ancient china the knights templar and magic at the movies and plants and potions such as mandrake and belladonna examine topics in great detail quick fact panels that explore magic

origins key figures key deities use in spells structures of religions and more this indispensable witchcraft book explores the common human fascination with spells superstition and the supernatural it provides you with a balanced and unbiased account of everything from japanese folklore and indian witchcraft to the differences between black and white magic and dispelling myths such as those surrounding the voodoo doll and ouija expect the unexpected with a history of magic witchcraft and the occult it will open your eyes to other worlds discover forms of divination from astrology and palmistry to the tarot and runestones explore the presence of witchcraft in literature from shakespeare s macbeth to the harry potter series and the ways in which magic has interacted with religion whether you re a believer or a sceptic this richly illustrated history book provides a fresh approach to the extensive and complex story of witchcraft magic and the occult

cross cultural studies from many areas p 23 footnote on case of aboriginal in darwin hospital april 1956 seen as type of sorcery

prints drawings documents and text illuminate the development of the occult sciences to the nineteenth century

this collection of sixteen essays deals with the role of magic religion and witchcraft in european culture 1450 1650 and the critical role of the visual in that culture it covers the relationship of humanism and magic the intersection of religious ritual orthodoxy and power the discursive links between the visual language of witchcraft and contemporary anxieties about sexuality and savagery the introductory chapter urges us to exorcise our tendency to reduce historical experiences of the demonic to forms of unreason created in a distant past only then can we understand the role of the demonic in our historical definition of the self and the other richly illustrated with 112 images the book will interest historians and art historians

the only serious study of witchcraft and magic from 1736 to 1951brings together matters ranging from upper class spiritualism to rural witchcraft in an exciting and intellectually stimulating wayessential reading for all social historians and all h

in a culture where the supernatural possessed an immediacy now strange to us magic was of great importance both in the literary mythic tradition and in ritual practice in this book daniel ogden presents 300 texts in new translations along with brief but explicit commentaries authors include the well known sophocles herodotus plato aristotle virgil pliny and the less familiar and extend across the whole of graeco roman antiquity

a survey of magic and witchcraft throughout history traces its earliest animist concepts about the universe s spiritual forces to the emergence of wicca and contemporary neopaganism discussing such topics as traditional shamanism medieval witchcraft satanism the occult the tarot and modern technologies reprint

neither power nor morality but both moral power is what sukuma farmers in tanzania in times of crisis attribute to an unknown figure they call their witch a universal process is involved as much bodily as social which obstructs the patient's recovery healers turn the table on the witch through rituals showing that the community and the ancestral spirits side with the victim in contrast to biomedicine their magic and divination introduce moral values that assess the state of the system and that remove the obstacles to what is taken as key self healing the implied sensory shifts and therapeutic effectiveness have largely eluded the literature on witchcraft this book shows how to comprehend culture other than through the prism of identity politics it offers a framework to comprehend the rise of witch killings and human sacrifice just as ritual initiation disappears

anthropology's long and complex relationship to magic has been strongly influenced by western science and notions of rationality this book takes a refreshing new look at modern magic as practised by contemporary pagans in britain it focuses on what pagans see as the essence of magic a communication with an otherworldly reality examining issues of identity gender and morality the author argues that the otherworld forms a central defining characteristic of magical practice integrating an experiential ethnographic approach with an analysis of magic this book asks penetrating questions about the nature of otherworldly knowledge and argues that our scientific frameworks need re envisioning it is unique in providing an insider's view of how magic is practised in contemporary western culture

in the fifteenth century many authorities did not believe inquisitors stories of a supposed satanic witch sect however the religious conflict of the sixteenth century reformation especially popular movements of reform and revolt helped to create an atmosphere in which diabolical conspiracies which swept up religious dissidents jews and magicians into their nets were believed to pose a very real threat fear of the devil and his followers inspired horrific incidents of judicially approved terror in early modern europe leading after 1560 to the infamous witch hunts bringing together the fields of reformation and witchcraft studies this fascinating book reveals how the early modern period's religious conflicts led to widespread confusion and uncertainty gary k waite examines in depth how church leaders dispelled rising religious doubt by persecuting heretics and how alleged infernal plots and witches who confessed to making a pact with the devil helped the authorities to reaffirm orthodoxy waite argues that it was only when the authorities came to terms with pluralism that there was a corresponding decline in witch panics

the author of magic and masculinity explores the history and development of magic and witchcraft in western society broomsticks cauldrons familiars and spells magic and witchcraft conjure a vivid picture in our modern day imagination while much of our understanding is rooted in superstition and myth the history of magic and witchcraft offers a window into the past it illuminates the lives of ordinary people in the past and elucidates the fascinating pop culture of the premodern world blowing away folkloric cobwebs this enlightening new history dispels many misconceptions surrounding witchcraft and magic that we still hold today from ancient greece and rome to the middle ages and the early modern era historian frances timbers details the impact of christianity and popular culture in the construction of the figure of the

with the development of demonology and ceremonial magic is combined with the west's troubled past with magic and witchcraft to chart the birth of modern wiccan and neopagan movements in England and North America. Witchcraft is a metaphor for oppression in an age in which persecution is an everyday occurrence somewhere in the world. Fanaticism, intolerance, prejudice, authoritarianism, and religious and political ideologies are never attractive. Beware the witch hunter.

Magic, witchcraft, and ghosts in the enlightenment argues for the centrality of magical practices and ideas throughout the long eighteenth century. Although the hunt for witches in Europe declined precipitously after 1650 and the intellectual justification for natural magic came under fire by 1700, belief in magic among the general population did not come to a sudden stop. The philosophes continued to take aim at magical practices alongside religion as examples of superstitions that an enlightened age needed to put behind them. In addition to a continuity of beliefs and practices, the eighteenth century also saw improvement and innovation in magical ideas. The understanding of ghosts and attitudes toward witchcraft. The volume takes a broad geographical approach and includes essays focusing on Great Britain, England, and Ireland, France, Germany, and Hungary. It also takes a wide approach to the subject and includes essays on astrology, alchemy, witchcraft, cunning folk, ghosts, treasure hunters, and purveyors of magic. With a broad chronological scope that ranges from the end of the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, this volume is useful for undergraduates, postgraduates, scholars, and those with a general interest in magic, witchcraft, and spirits in the enlightenment.

This is a new release of the original 1928 edition.

During the Middle Ages, a shared European concept of magic emerged. In the early period, pagan beliefs and practices were absorbed into everyday culture, including the rituals of the church. The rise of the practice of white magic in the twelfth century became so popular that it caused a widespread determination in the church to condemn any unsanctioned beliefs or practices. The church and state, both centralized powers in a decentralized Europe, gradually sharpened their attitude toward magic in general and sorcery and witchcraft in particular, paving the way for the violent outbreaks of witch persecutions in early modern Europe. Witchcraft and Magic in Europe combines the traditional approaches of political, legal, and social historians with a critical synthesis of cultural anthropology, historical psychology, and gender studies. The series, complete in six volumes, provides a modern scholarly survey of the supernatural beliefs of Europeans from ancient times to the present day. Each volume of this ambitious six-volume series contains the work of distinguished scholars chosen for their expertise in a particular era or region.

From the preface: We have long wished that some English or foreign university would offer a prize for a history of magic and witchcraft. The records of human opinion would contain few chapters more instructive than one which should deal competently with the black art, for gross and painful as the details of superstition may be, yet superstition by its very etymology implies a dogma or a system of practice standing upon some basis of fact or truth, and however vain or noxious the superstructure

may be the foundation of it is in some way connected with those deep verities upon which rest also the roots of philosophy and religion for a grand error and such alone can at any time essentially affect the opinions of mankind in general is ever the imitation or caricature of some grand truth from one soil spring originally the tree which yields good fruit and the plant which distils deadly poison the very discernment of the causes of error is a step towards the discovery of its opposite the bewilderments of the mind of man when fully analyzed afford a clue to the course of its movements from the right track or at least enable us to detect the point at which began the original separation between truth and error alchemy led by no very circuitous route to the science of chemistry the adoption of false gods by the majority of the human race rendered necessary the dispensations of the jewish and christian schemes and the corruption of true reverence for the good the beautiful and the holy was the parent of those arts which under the several appellations of magic witchcraft sorcery etc drew their professors at first and the multitude afterwards to put faith in the evil the deformed and the impure magic and witchcraft are little more than the religious instincts of mankind first inverted then polluted and finally like all corrupted matter impregnated with the germs of a corrupt vitality so universal is the belief in spiritual influences and more especially in their malignant influences that no race of men no period of time no region of the globe have been exempt from it it meets us in the remote antiquity of asiatic life in the comparatively recent barbarism of the american borigines in the creeds of all the nations who ranged off thousands of years ago eastward and westward from their caucasian cradle in the myths he observances and the dialects of nations who have no other affinity with one another than the mere form of man no nation indeed can reproach another nation with its addiction to magic without in an equal degree condemning itself all the varieties of mankind have in this respect erred alike at different periods of their social existence and all accordingly come under the same condemnation of making and loving a lie the chaldean erred when dissatisfied with simple observation of the heavenly bodies through the luminous atmosphere of his plains he perverted astronomy into astrology the egyptian erred when he represented the omnipresence of the deity by the ubiquity of animal worship the hindoo erred when having conceived the idea of an incarnation he clothed with flesh and fleshly attributes the members of his monstrous pantheon the kelt and teuton erred when in their silent and solitary forests they stained the serenity of nature with the deified attributes of war and the more settled and civilized races who built and inhabited the cities of the ancient world erred in their conversion of the indivisible unity of the demiourgos or world creator into an anthropomorphic system of several gods

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