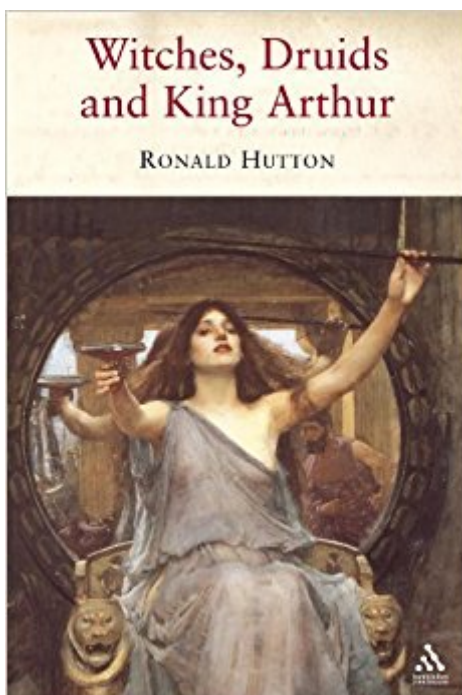


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# Witches, Druids And King Arthur



## Synopsis

In this book, Ronald Hutton brings his wealth of unusual knowledge on Paganism, myth, and ritual to the reader. Hutton is known for having a deep and sympathetic understanding of past and present beliefs that are often dismissed, and an ability to write lucidly and wittily. *Witches, Druids, and King Arthur* has a unique and accessible flavor and covers elegantly and entertainingly a wide range of beliefs, myths and practices and their place in history.

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## Customer Reviews

"A fascinating insight into different elements of paganism" - The Independent. "Essential reading for anyone interested in the history of Paganism and related matters" - *Woods and Water*, Winter Solstice, No. 84.

In this book, Ronald Hutton brings his wealth of unusual knowledge on Paganism, myth, and ritual to the reader. Hutton is known for having a deep and sympathetic understanding of past and present beliefs that are often dismissed, and an ability to write lucidly and wittily. *Witches, Druids, and King Arthur* has a unique and accessible flavor and covers elegantly and entertainingly a wide range of beliefs, myths and practices and their place in history.

This book is another compelling, if challenging entry from honored pagan scholar Ronald Hutton. Professor Hutton has brought us previous scholar tomes including *The Triumph of the Moon*, a history of modern paganism in Britain, and the historical survey, *The Pagan Religions of the British*

Isles, and Stations of the Sun, a history of the ritual year in Britain. As anyone who has read Hutton before will know the Professor's published work aims for the general reading audience, though without doubt an educated one. However, the challenges of reading Hutton are worth it, and it is no less so than in this reviewed work. The book's only flaw, in my opinion, is the fact that this is not a continuous work at all, but a collection of essays that the writer feels are related to each other. This is most true, though a couple, essays on ritual nudity and on the pagan elements in the writings of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, are interesting though they don't seem to fit within the general theme indicated by the title. The rest of the fascinating essays cover: How Myths are Made, Arthur and the Academics, Glastonbury: Alternative Histories, and histories of medieval and modern paganism. In the end, this is a book not to be missed. The discussion is lively and the information is profound. I heartily recommend this book.

Chapter nine of this book is titled "Living with Witchcraft". This chapter is a commentary about the author's experiences before and after writing *Triumph of the Moon*. It's a very interesting narrative about the politics of researching and writing about a controversial subject like paganism and witchcraft. By the end of the chapter, I was left with the impression that no matter how rational, scientific or tolerant a culture seems from the outside, the average fearful person in Western society is just a hair's width away from allowing the burning of witches, pagans (and their historians) at the stake once again. I think Ronald Hutton's skill, professionalism and political astuteness led to a positive outcome for all involved in producing *Triumph of the Moon*, but it's easy to see from the narrative that it could have been otherwise. It seems to me that this short narrative is compelling evidence that there is very real danger present in current Western society toward those who publicly expose themselves as witches and to those who even just associate with them. Potentially losing a home, a job, or custody of children is a type of violence approaching the direction of physical torture or killing. It also implies that this danger must have been many times higher in the recent and distant past. It seems quite plausible that people of the distant past who could be classified as having "Witch behavior, knowledge, or characteristics" could actually have been hiding in secret from persecution. There is some discussion of Gerald Gardner and the origins of Wicca. In another book, I've read a court description of a medieval Witches sabbat by a "witness". The sabbat description seemed to me like a bunch of kids going out into the woods to light a bonfire, dance, eat, smoke pot (described as a strange smell in the air), and to have sex. This kind of behavior will get you arrested today, I imagine this kind of "Witchy" behavior could get you killed in the past by the authorities. The point I'm trying to make is that from Hutton's narrative in this chapter there is ample

evidence that it is a good idea that Witches of today should keep their religious beliefs and practices publicly secret (or at least anonymous) just as it may have been kept secret in the misty past. I think the book is worth buying just for this chapter. I can't really comment on the rest of the book because I haven't finished it yet.

Hutton is, first of all, a good writer. I've found his books engaging and informative. This collection of essays was interesting and I'm glad I bought it.

This volume of Hutton's scholarship on pagan topics appears to be a collection of essays that were written over several years and have been assembled into a book format with little or no thought to common ground. Hutton displays his very pronounced literary centric view of history, anything that wasn't written, or the writing didn't survive, didn't happen. For example, in the chapter on "Paganism in the lost centuries, Hutton goes on and on about some irrelevant Middle Eastern city which may or may not have sheltered pagans among other religions. While that might be of interest to some Middle Eastern medievalist scholars, it has absolutely nothing to do with the history of western paganism. In his "Modest look at Ritual Nudity," Hutton accurately points out that Wicca is very unique in its use of nudity, and astutely understands that Wiccan nudity helps to separate the serious religious seeker from the casual wannabe. However, Hutton goes on and on with more irrelevant twaddle about ancient Greek art and Roman nudity. Overall it displays what Hutton admits to be his "religion," scholarship based on writing as the sacred. It is perhaps a good book for those who share Hutton's "religious" views about the sacredness of the written word, and the corresponding lack value of anything not written. I rate it a 3 because he has some interesting things to say, but seems to lack real understanding of his topic.

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