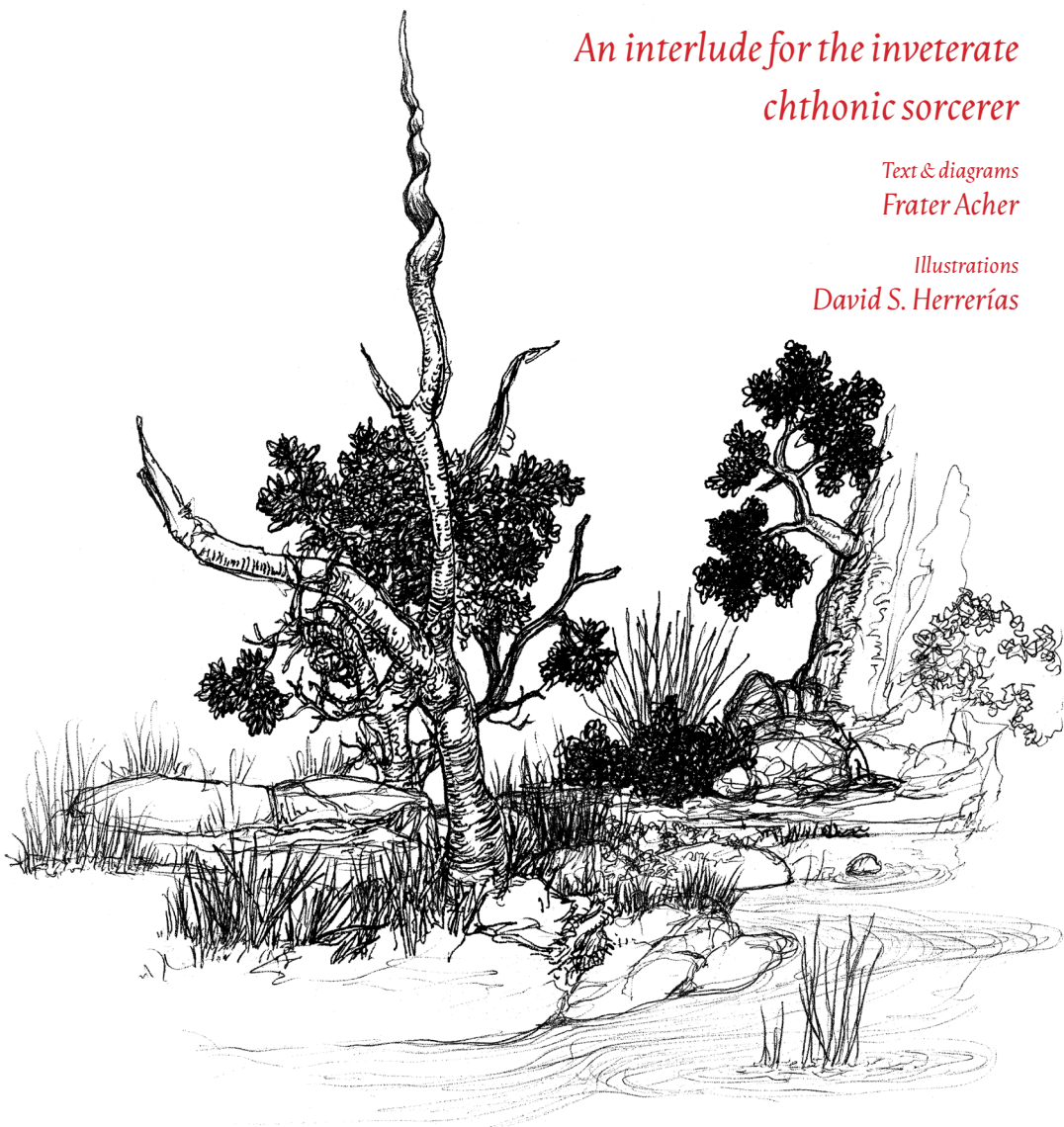


Goëtic Common Sense

*An interlude for the inveterate
chthonic sorcerer*

*Text & diagrams
Frater Acher*

*Illustrations
David S. Herrerías*



Copyright 2021 © Frater Acher

Büchlein Morgenstern, Volume 3

All rights reserved

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

All images © David S. Herrerías

Written, designed, typeset
and published by Frater Acher

Typeset in *Arida* by Latinotype
and *Guglia* by Leo Colalillo

**lucus Auentino suberat niger ilicis umbra,
quo posses uiso dicere, Numen inest.**

**Under the Aventine there is a grove black
with the shade of holm-oaks; at sight of it
you could say, 'There is a spirit.'**

—*Vergil, Fasti, Book III, 29*

**Not size-up-and-solve,
but marvel-and-respect.**

—*Clifford Geertz,*

Goêtic Common Sense

*An interlude for the
inveterate chthonic sorcerer*

Text & diagrams

Frater Acher

Illustrations

David S. Herrerías



1.0 Locating the Goês

1.1 Those Who Wander At Night

1.2 *Tólma*, the Vice of the Goês

1.3 Craft, Product, Creativity

1.4 Scythian Lineage vs. Spirit Tutelage

1.5 The Daimonic Play

2.0 Slipping into Goêtic Skin

2.1 From Experience to Exegesis

2.2 The Hexed Notion of Common Sense

2.3 The Goêtic Dividual

2.4 The Goêtic Implements

2.5 Contrasting Goêtic vs. Solomonic Work

3.0 Conclusion: Goêtic Common Sense

PREAMBLE

This essay is an exploration to unravel its ironically chosen, yet quite seriously intended title: *Goëtic Common Sense*.

As such, this essay is an investigation into spirit-practice through a goëtic lens. Specifically, it is exploring the essential tenets that become *common sense* if one dares to look at the world through the emic lens of the goês. That is, the world of their spirits as well as the (anti-)social world of the goês themselves.

I am grateful to all the authors mentioned for their unique contributions. Some of their findings align with my conclusions and others allowed me to sharpen my own perspective. Just as goetic practice is taught mainly by spirits, so is writing about these experiences a collaboration in spirit with all the authors who have chartered similar territory before.

Finally, explicit thanks are due to David S. Herrerías for the generous contribution of several original, magical drawings. Oscillating on the threshold of natural, animal and spirit realm they perfectly illustrate the nature of goëtic topography.

LVX,

Frater Acher

May the serpent bite its tail.

၇၀၃





2020

1. LOCATING THE GOËS

1.1 THOSE WHO WANDER AT NIGHT

In the last thirty years, much research has come to light on the linguistic term and historic context of the figure of the *goês*. This essay is not the place to provide a survey or summary. We have shared some of our perspective – largely following Walter Burkert’s original assessment – in *Clavis Goëtica* (Hadean Press, 2021). Here we want to cut a narrow swath through the thicket of offered academic perspectives, some of them very redundant, to encourage an emic perspective on the practice of the *goês*.

If by a blow of good luck or maybe ill fortune we found ourselves wandering the streets of an Athenian town of the fifth century BCE, we could stride out and search for the *goês* ourselves.

Of course, we’d quickly find ourselves entangled in all kinds of trouble: The people we look for most likely never used this term for themselves. Others, unfortunately, used it as a social stereotype and applied it liberally to whomever they intended to throw a decent insult at.

It wouldn’t take long for us to establish a semantic field, that is a cloud of recurrent words, into which the term *goês* was essentially interwoven: Heraclitus (end of 6th century BCE), as allegedly quoted by Clement of Alexandria (2nd century CE), associates them with “those who wander in the night (*nyktipolois*): Magi (*magois*), bachants (*bakchois*), maenads (*lênais*), initiates (*mystais*)”.¹ Most other people would have toned down such appraisal further by also closely relating them to quacks and charlatans, as well as imposters and desecrators of the official religious cults.

1 — fr. 14 DK, quoted after Bremmer, 1999, p. 2, also compare: Georg, Luck; *Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature*, in: *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, Volume 2: Ancient Greece and Rome, London: Athlone Press, 1999, p. 104

Plato in his laws would have liked to make short trial with the riffraff of the *goêtes* because his ideal state condemned any form of private religious cult with lifelong imprisonment.²

This draws Plato less as an enemy of the spiritual practices underlying the broad term *goêteia* as such, than as a protector and preserver of the general order of the *polis*.

For either the *goêtes* were imposters who tarnished the reputation of the official religio-magical cults, or they were renegades and deserters who by their arrogance and folly upset the orderly relationship of power, wealth, and the regulated dealings with spirits and gods.

Plato, thus, highlights the central tenet of the *goês*, and all their companion *night-wanderers* such as witches and *magoi* and *pharmakoi*, who operated in a spirit of reckless self-empowerment: They were

2 *But as to all those who have become like ravening beasts, and who, besides holding that the gods are negligent or open to bribes, despise men, charming the souls of many of the living, and claiming that they charm the souls of the dead, and promising to persuade the gods by bewitching them, as it were, with sacrifices, prayers and incantations, and who try thus to wreck utterly not only individuals, but whole families and States for the sake of money, — if any of these men be pronounced guilty, the court shall order him to be imprisoned according to law in the mid-country jail, and shall order that no free man shall approach such criminals at any time, and that they shall receive from the servants a ration of food as fixed by the Law-wardens. And he that dies shall be cast outside the borders without burial; and if any free man assist in burying him, he shall be liable to a charge of impiety at the hands of anyone who chooses to prosecute. And if the dead man leaves children fit for citizenship, the guardians of orphans shall take them also under their charge from the day of their father's conviction, just as much as any other orphans. For all these offenders one general law must be laid down, such as will cause the majority of them not only to offend less against the gods by word and deed, but also to become less foolish, through being forbidden to trade in religion illegally. To deal comprehensively with all such cases the following law shall be enacted: — No one shall possess a shrine in his own house: when any one is moved in spirit to do sacrifice, he shall go to the public places to sacrifice, and he shall hand over his oblations to the priests and priestesses to whom belongs the consecration thereof; and he himself, together with any associates he may choose, shall join in the prayers. — Plato, Laws, Book 10, 909a-909e*

impious fools who traded in religion illegally, and dared to wreck whole family lineages and states for the sake of money.³

The incantation-chanting, chthonic sorcerer, engaged with the restless dead and riding the telluric tides, was equally a representative of an uncanny kind of spirit-work, as well as, especially since the fifth century BCE, a common slandering stereotype.⁴ At the same time, their personas and work were dismissed as “fraudulent and illusory” and yet feared as “nonetheless something dangerous.”⁵

Located on the social ladder (of descend) somewhere above the common root-cutter, and yet below the magical professional⁶, the *goês* presents the (almost forgotten) blueprint for the daemonic figure of the *witch* since Early Greco-Roman Antiquity. Both of them represent figures of transgression, of violations of not only normative religion, but even more essentially social coexistence.⁷ Their constant communion is not one of fellow humans, but of spirits that have remained largely nameless to and unbound by the priestly leaders of the formal temple-cults and later churches.

In a field of permanent tension, the etic depiction of the *goês* oscillated between two realms: From a vantage point of cosmological order they were identified as dangerous transgressors, violators and inflictors of crisis in the natural, social and divine world. From a vantage point of economic interest, however, they were the operative agents of an illicit marketplace that traded access to power.

The diagram on the opposite page illustrates this etic tension, and foreshadows how it is resolved by an altogether different emic perspective. Such emic view, i.e. the inside view of the *goêtes* on themselves,

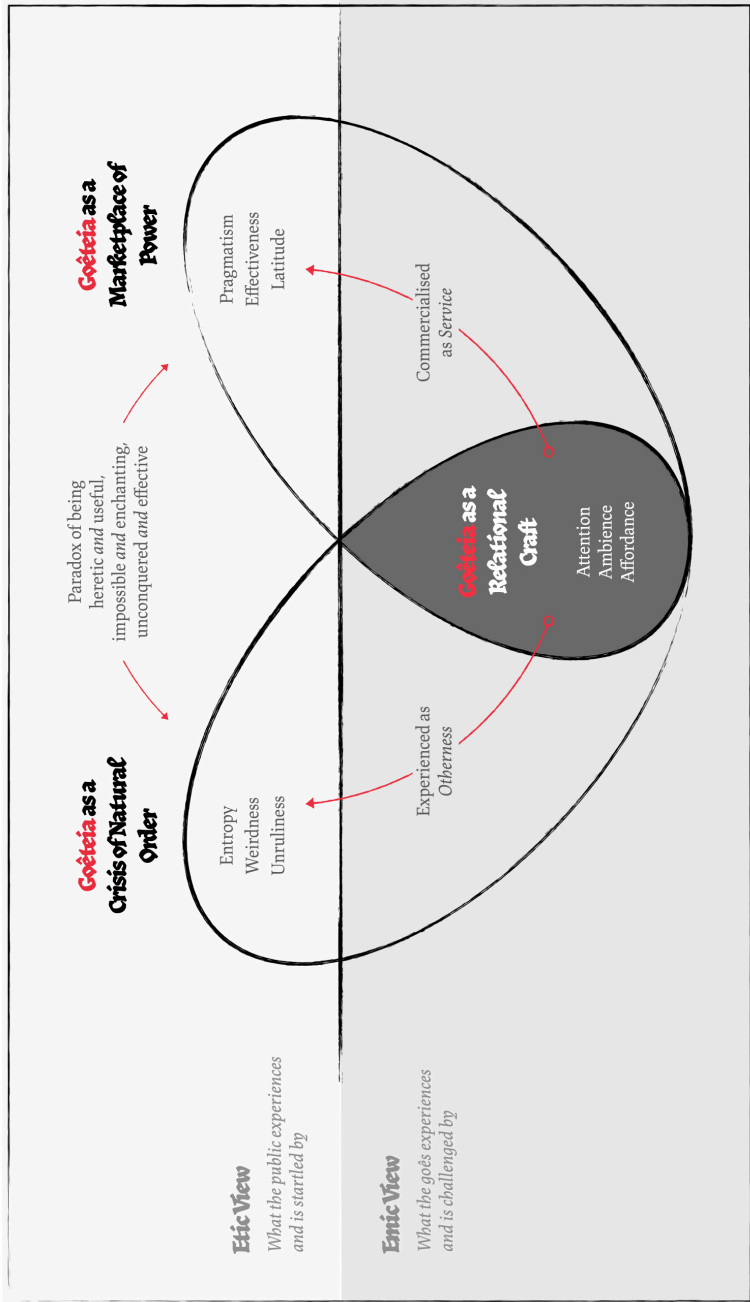
3 see the quote in the previous footnote: Plato, *Laws*, Book 10, 909a-909e

4 Stratton, 2015, p. 90/91 and p. 96/97

5 Kyle, p. 126

6 Blanco Cesteros, 2017, p. 110

7 Fraser, 2015, p. 128



has never been of interested to the outside community. Because largely, talking about *goêtes* and witches alike since Antiquity has been “a tool accentuating Otherness in the service of thinking about Self.”⁸

1.2 TÓLMA, THE VICE OF THE GOÊS

Plato, as we have seen, argues from a position of orthodoxy, and expresses the voice of political reason, focussed on preserving stability and balance for the social collective. As such, he expresses an artificial ideal and by no means the lived reality of Athenians at the time.

Wandering the streets, however, we might have picked up on a word that nicely condenses Plato’s artificial view with the broader public perspective on the *goês*. Whatever one made of their legal status, *goêtes* by many would have been considered epiphanies of *τολμάω*.

Tolmáo is an Ancient Greek verb that is hard to pin down in its full linguistic breadth. We find it translated as “I undertake, take heart either to do or bear anything terrible or difficult”. Elsewhere, it is defined as the ability “I have the courage, hardihood, effrontery, cruelty, or the grace, patience, to do a thing in spite of any natural feeling, dare, or bring oneself, to do”.⁹

Judging, thus, not by the technicalities of their practices, but by their social position, *goêtes*, accordingly, were people who displayed *tólma* like few others, meaning their “moral effrontery and audacity know no bounds.”¹⁰ They were presumed to display a reckless character marked

8 Stratton, 2015, p. 96

9 Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott; *A Greek-English Lexicon, revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1940, cited after <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=tolma/w>

10 Dickie, 2001, p. 45

by “a quality of the actively resolute and frequently criminal spirit.”¹¹

What we can establish, therefore, with reliable accuracy is that *goêtes* were (perceived to be) moral transgressors, who operated from the fringe of society in a private mago-mystical setting, offering their service for coin.

The notion that the *goês* took a contrarian and renegade position towards the divine order was further emphasised from the late fifth BCE century onwards. Their personification of *tólma* became a central theme in this largely politically motivated attack.

An apt example of the inner connection of the term *tólma* with the antithesis to the divine order is found in Plotinus in the 3rd century CE.

*The word tolma and its cognates occur relatively seldom in Plotinus but nevertheless in important contexts where they are used in a pejorative sense to describe the origin of plurality, at the level of Nous or soul, as a kind of unwarranted secession in counterpoint to the optimistic theory of emanation by which plurality and ultimately this universe are the spontaneous and beneficial product of the One.*¹²

*Through that unyielding pride (tolma) the soul has chosen its own dissimilarity over the unity of the One. The soul's only way out of such obstinate separation and dissipation is to reunite itself with the divine.*¹³

Following the trace of *tólma* we begin to see a historic thread that leads from the ancient *goêtes* to the essential theory of emanation in Neoplatonism, and describes an explicitly *luciferian* trait: An attitude of reckless self-empowerment and unyielding pride, even if the consequence is the disintegration of divine order.

11 Wilson, 1971, p. 292

12 Smith, 1996, p. 76 – for a further exploration of the theme: N. J. Torchia: *Plotinus, Tolma, and the Descent of Being. An Exposition and Analysis*, New York: Peter Lang, 1993

13 Meconi, 2009, p. 5

Historically, as we have seen, it was figure of the *witch* who became the successor to the ancient *goês*. Both terms are here applied in a cross-gender sense, neither identifying nor restricting it to women and/or men.

When we choose to focus on the older of the two terms in this essay, we do this partly in recognition of the liminal research done by Jake Stratton-Kent.¹⁴

Additionally, the term lends itself to these explorations as its field of meaning has remained more constrained than the one of the *witch*: From its first emergence in Ancient Greek it denotes the spirit-worker who operates on the far periphery of the social community or *polis*.¹⁵

In the topography of a culture the term *goês* marks the final boundary-stone before one breaks off from the known (spiritual) territory and into *Otherness*. The intention of this essay is to allow for the consideration that the very conditions that turned the term into a word of ostracism and slander, from an emic perspective might be desirable and worthwhile qualities.

1.3 CRAFT, PRODUCT, CREATIVITY

Defining the social position of the *goês* is a much easier undertaking than narrowing down the array of their practical craft.

If indeed we have had the chance to wander the nights among these vagabonds, wandering priests and charlatans, it is very unlikely we would have ever succeeded in codifying and compiling the range of technical

14 See his ongoing research as well as his *Encyclopædia Goetica* published by Scarlet Imprint: Volume 1 'The True Grimoire' (2009), Volume 2 'Geosophia: The Argo of Magic' (2010) and Volume 3 'The Testament of Cyprian the Mage' (2014).

15 Bremmer, Jan N., 2016, p. 63-65

services they offered to paying customers.

According to Plato *goêteia* encompasses the following.

[...] besides binding-spells and hauntings, the creation of illusion by making objects appear to be present that are not really there; the illusions that consist in the goês himself taking several different forms; drawing and alluring persons, presumably whether they like it or not; casting spells over fierce wild animals and reducing them to submission; knowing what pharmaka to put into food to effect alterations in states of mind; reducing men by incantations [epodai] and pharmaka to an inarticulate numbness; and finally calling up the dead from the Underworld.

As for mageia or mageutike, it is impossible on the basis of the two references to it in Plato to say whether its extension coincided for Plato with that of goeteia or pharmakeia, but since attraction-spells fall within the province of both goeteia and mageia, there is some reason to think that it did.¹⁶

Here now we face the heart of the academic problem: To pin down the craft (or abominations) of the *goês* modern scholars mainly depend upon historically transmitted case-lists of magical procedures. Some see this list pivot mainly on necromancy and curses, others believe it to also include poisons, potions and herbal remedies, and others again see validity in the claim that *goêtes* also offered private initiations into the mysteries.

Trying to define the topography of a craft by the specific *products* it creates is a futile endeavour: A good cook can produce countless new dishes, a good carpenter can produce a myriad of tools from wood, a stonemason drives their innovation into stone, and a blacksmith pulls it from the anvil. What defines their potential range of offerings is not

16 Dickie, 2001, p. 45

tradition, but the limitations of their own *imagination*, as well as the mundane relation of *supply and demand*.

What constitutes the actual basis of all crafts are not the artefacts they each have come to be known for, but rather the essential raw materials of their work: A cook works with food and fire, a carpenter with wood and blade, a stonemason with rock and chisel, and a blacksmith with iron, forge and anvil.

Only once we have sufficiently reversed the process of creation from artefact to raw materials, we begin to realize how wide and open the possibilities of each craft are. Equally, we begin to see how culturally dependent some of the choices made by craftspeople are, as well as how universal other phenomena and conditions of their work will always remain. – It's in this vein that the *goês* represents a craft that works with the raw materials of *spirits and thresholds*.

If anything, the remarkable characteristic of the *goês's* craft was that it wasn't confined by orthodoxy or any social boundaries. Because the *goês* and their work stood outside the order of the *polis*, because they were constantly at risk of being persecuted by it, they did not need to bow to its traditional regulations and taboos. The service a *goês* offered depended not on any traditional notion of what they *were meant to offer*, but on three much more personal considerations:

- their personal mastery (or lack thereof) in working with *spirits and thresholds*,
- their personal willingness (or insouciance) to adhere to a particular moral code,
- and their personal affordability of any moral boundaries, given the very narrow sliver of economic opportunity that was open to them in Ancient Greek.

As we can see, the *goês* represents the ancient paradigm of the lone magical practitioner. They operated on their own, unsupervised, and unconstrained by fashion or taboos. Some of their *dishes* might have

killed, and some of them might have conjured the dead. Some of them might have poisoned, and others might have healed. And just like today in magic, many, so many of their *services* probably did nothing at all, except for putting on a good show, leaving their clients out of pocket, and forcing the *goês* to wander to the next town before dawn broke.

1.4 SCYTHIAN LINEAGE VS. SPIRIT TUTELAGE

The consideration of *raw materials* of a craft, rather than their *artefacts*, also leads us to a new evaluation of the academic discussion on whether the *goês* should be considered an Ancient Greek form of the *shaman*.¹⁷

Maybe some day historians will find material proof for a direct line of spiritual-technical transmissions between the Scythians and the Ancient Greeks. Or possibly they do not. At its heart, this does not at all affect our undertaking to take an emic perspective of the work of the *goês*.

Our investigation follows the line of thought coined by Ioan P. Couliano and his *morphodynamics*.¹⁸ To find striking similarities between Ancient Greek, Scythian – and for that matter, even modern day – magical practices we do not at all need to assume and prove a

17 See for example Burkert vs. Bremmer.

18 Couliano postulated that endless historic analysis to pin down precise transmission pathways of ideas from culture to culture, continent to continent, or one area to the next, was ultimately not only a fruitless attempt, but essentially an inadequate method for the actual problem at hand. He wanted to replace the traditional historical method with a new kind of approach to studying history which he termed *morphodynamics*. – For an in-depth exploration see his book *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism*, New York: Harper Collins, 1992. For a short introduction see my Paralibrum book-review [here](#).

direct line of written or oral transmission. For such similarities in cultural artefacts as well as personal techniques of practice, can easily be explained from the raw materials themselves: Independent of where and when we find ourselves on this planet, there are only so many ways one can work with *spirits and thresholds*.

Once a human has made contact, it is the spirits themselves that will guide the genuine practitioner – whatever tribal and ancestral descent their DNA might reveal. Wherever and whenever practitioners have worked with spirits of similar nature, these intelligent species would have been predisposed to share similar techniques of *contact-creation*, *world-modification* and *meaning-making*.

In taking such a stance, we are not advocating for a reductionist-universalist perspective, that reduces the beauty and wonder of cultural diversity to biologically determined responses to natural stimuli. In fact, we are making much less of a statement about humankind at all. Rather, we are trying to convey that similarities in spirit-working techniques across time and cultures might be rooted in the ontological consistency of the spirit-reality encountered by humans.

The souls of the departed have not changed in their ontological reality since Ancient Babylonian times. Not all, but many spirits have remained the same; and so have the thresholds over which we can approach them. What has evolved then is our human cognitive-cultural interface through which we are encountering their *Otherness*.

Maybe this has further underpinned the uncanniness of the *goêtes*: That their eponymous *wailing*, their calling to the spirits seemed fallen out of time and place, lacking polish and embellishment of taste and fashion, but reverberating in an atavistic barbarism that posed offence and insult to the polis. After all, the noble Greeks might have feared few things more than to be perceived as *savages*.¹⁹

19 Bierl, 2009, p. 5/9

1.5 THE DAIMONIC PLAY

Such dynamic of fear and fascination between *goês* and *polis* further explain, why we find many traces of the chthonic sorcerer's shadowy figure in the Ancient Greek Comedy²⁰: Through the safe bars of the performative play, *Otherness* appears in domesticated form, and the threat to the collective and individual self is transformed into controlled dramatic effects.

Otherness, thus, is captured and curated in a play that leads through the short tunnel of fear into laughter and the self-assurance of the orthodox culture of the *polis*.

*The signifying practice of Old Comedy is characterized by the temporary reversal of the world and the return to a primordial, chaotic past. Something similar is played out in seasonally repeated rites, especially in so-called exceptional festivals of Dionysus and Demeter, on which the simple comic acts are often based. Briefly, the polis transports itself back to a primeval time before civilization in order to laughingly reassure itself of its own identity in contrast.*²¹

The dramatic use of the performative possibility of the 'shaman', on the other hand, has nothing to do with the question of origin, which can ultimately never be definitively clarified, but is much more a theatrical means of expression as well as a mental construct to implement the genre-

20 Bierl, 2009

21 Die Signifikantenpraxis der Alten Komödie zeichnet sich durch die temporäre Verkehrung der Welt und die Rückkehr in eine primordiale, chaotische Vergangenheit aus. Ähnliches wird auch in jahreszeitlich sich wiederholenden Riten, insbesondere in sogenannten Ausnahmefesten des Dionysos und der Demeter durchgespielt, auf denen die einfachen komischen Handlungen häufig basieren. Kurzzeitig versetzt sich die Polis in eine Urzeit vor der Zivilisation zurück, um sich im Kontrast lachend ihrer eigenen Identität zu vergewissern. — Bierl, 2009, p. 1

constitutive fall into atavisms as well as the necessary search for magical remedies from the complementary counter-worlds.²²

Above all, the Goës is a quick-change artist. By masking he can get a new appearance at will. Mask, disguise, wig, change of voice, representation and imitation play a major role. For Plato, γόης and μιμητής (mimetes) belong closely together. The goës has in common with the performer and actor that he behaves like gods, produces himself in front of an audience, puts them under his spell in order to purify them by producing pleasure and/or terror. This is where the so-called catharsis doctrine comes in, also a reflex of magico-hieratic practices in the Pythagorean environment. Such itinerant priests [...] also see themselves as purifiers. From all this, the proximity of the séance to a theatrical performance becomes clear.²³

The figure of the goês, thus, represented an open “breach of the democratic civilization consensus.”²⁴ Their unsteadiness and

22 Die dramatische Verwendung der performativen Möglichkeit des ‘Schamanen’ hat hingegen nichts mit der Frage des Ursprungs zu tun, die letztlich nie endgültig geklärt werden kann, sondern ist viel eher ein theatrales Ausdrucksmittel und mentales Konstrukt, um den gattungskonstitutiven Sturz in Atavismen sowie die notwendige Suche nach zauberhaften Heilmittel aus den komplementären Gegenwelten umzusetzen. — Bierl, 2009, p. 2

23 Vor allem ist der Goës ein Verwandlungskünstler. Durch Maskierung kann er sich nach Belieben ein neues Äußeres verschaffen. Maske, Vermummung, Perücke, Stimmveränderung, Darstellung und Nachahmung spielen dabei eine große Rolle. Für Platon gehören γόης und μιμητής (mimetes) eng zusammen. Mit dem Darsteller und Schauspieler hat der Goës gemein, daß er sich wie Götter gebärdet, sich vor einem Publikum produziert, es in seinen Bann zieht, um es durch Erzeugung von Lust und/oder Schrecken zu reinigen. Hier setzt die sogenannte Katharsislehre an, ebenfalls ein Reflex magisch–hieratischer Praktiken im pythagoreischen Umfeld. Solche Wanderpriester [...] verstehen sich auch als Reiniger. Aus all dem wird die Nähe der Séance zu einer theatralischen Performance deutlich. — Bierl, 2009, p. 8

24 Bierl, 2009, p. 9

performative fluctuation between human-, animal- and spirit-realm²⁵ gave a human form to the realm of the untamed daemonic.

What the social community remembered and integrated into its dramatic or comedic plays, therefore, was the *effect the presence of the goêtes had on them*. It was not the genuine work or inside view of what it meant to walk a path of chthonic sorcery.

Historic records of *goêtes*, whether they stem from the 5th century BCE or the 2nd century CE, are valuable material to learn about the social tension between these unruly and uncanny individuals and the normative core of the collective.

The actual ark in which the knowledge and practice of the *goêtes* has sailed through millennia and will continue to sail on, on the other hand, is to be sought in the direct mediation by the spirits.

25 Bierl, 2009, p. 10





2. SLIPPING INTO GOËTIC SKIN

2.1 FROM EXPERIENCE TO EXEGESIS

We established the premise that goëtic patterns of practical sense-making (i.e. common sense) might be tied more to interspecies-contact than to time, place and the related historic artefacts.

Obviously, this immediately puts us at odds not only with the common method of reconstructing Western magic in 21st century academia, but also with the common method of attempting to practice it: Still today the predominant approach to Western magic is one of *exegesis*. Its orthodox sequencing proceeds from *text* to *ritual* to *experience*.

Especially the *ritual tradition* within Western Magic venerates books — may that be in the form of manuscripts or fine editions, of grimoires or technical primers — as the main medium of encountering, engaging and enabling magic. Two-thousand years of Christian persecution and five-hundred years of social and cultural marginalisation have ossified what once was a fluid experience to begin with.

Today, magic is mainly handed forward in time, as well as retraced backwards, through the medium of the written record. This is starkly at odds with the simple realisation that all magic begins and ends with a living encounter. In principle, any natural magical tide moves in the opposite direction of textual exegesis: It flows from immediate *experience* into observed *patterns* (i.e., rituals) and finally into *records* thereof (texts). As history proves for the *goês*, in large parts their spirit-work seemed entirely unconstrained by any need of literal fixation. In the absence of the requirement to formalise or ossify one's lived experience, they could devote their life entirely to the work. And leave (almost) no trace.

As such, we can already assert that it would indeed be plain *goëtic common sense* to always focus on phenomenology (i.e. the observation

and exploration of what is), and leisurely despise orthodoxy (the defence and assertion of what must be). But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

For there is no thing so good, that it cannot also be evil: but there is no thing so evil, that it cannot become good again. He who takes care of both of them and experiences both of them in fact, is the means between both, and is called a KNIGHT of the LORD his GOD, who UNIFIES BOTH IN ONE.²⁶

2.2 THE HEXED NOTION OF COMMON SENSE

An emic perspective of the goëtic experience will be impossible, unless we can establish a foundational appreciation of what I am calling *Goëtic Common Sense*.

Having explored the figure of the goês in the previous chapter, let's take a moment to level the playing field on the hexed notion of *common sense*. Despite the fact that the term is implicitly defined by its plainness, its accessibility and straight-forwardness, it actually is a labyrinthian wildcard of complex cultural codes.

In his liminal article *Common Sense as a Cultural System* (1975), Clifford Geertz provides several critical definitions for our further exploration. According to Geertz, common sense is a function of “colloquial culture”²⁷. It presents itself as “down-to-earth, colloquial wisdom”²⁸ that

26 *Denn es ist kein Ding so gut, es kann nicht auch böse sein: dagegen ist kein Ding so böse, es kann nicht wieder gut werden. Wer sich nun dieser beider annimmt und beider Eigenschaft in der Tat erfährt, derselbige ist das Mittel zwischen beiden, und wird ein KNECHT des HERREN seines GOTTES genannt, der BEIDE IN EINES VEREINIGT.* — Johannes Beer, cited after: Franckenberg, 1639, p. 17-18

27 Geertz, 1975, p. 6

28 Geertz, 1975, p. 8

offers access to conclusions about the world, at which members of a culture arrive without much pondering.

However, these seemingly straight-forward logical insights are not at all *obvious* because they are true in a scientific or ontological sense.

Rather, they reveal themselves to us in the disguise of unavoidable facts because they are deeply interwoven in “the ancient tangle of received practices, accepted beliefs, habitual judgements and untaught emotions those squared off and straightened out systems of thought and action [...] that are so prominent a feature of our own landscape, that we can't imagine a world in which they, or something resembling them, do not exist.”²⁹

Because of its deep entanglement with foundational cultural assumptions, common sense pretends to be part of the “realm of the given and undeniable” and that “its tenets are immediate deliverances of experience, not deliberate reflections upon it.”³⁰

*Religion rests its case on revelation, science on method, ideology on moral passion; but common sense rests its on the assertion that it is not a case at all, just life in a nutshell. The world is its authority.*³¹

*As a frame for thought, and a species of it, common sense is as totalizing as any other: no religion is more dogmatic, no science more ambitious, no philosophy more general.*³²

*[...] what falls between [the elements of natural order] is a darkness, an offense against reason.*³³

29 Geertz, 1975, p. 6

30 Geertz, 1975, p. 7

31 Geertz, 1975, p. 8

32 Geertz, 1975, p. 17

33 Geertz, 1975, p. 18

Common sense is an element of “the so-called phenomenology of everyday life”³⁴: It is instilled not through explicit curriculums or codes, but through “the school of hard knocks”. Because whoever in a given culture decides to diverge from the elemental “tissue of commonsense notions”³⁵ is quickly – and at the most basic level - associated with “ignorance, stupidity or incompetence”³⁶.

Common sense, therefore, is the ubiquitous mortar that seals the myriad bricks of cultural accomplishments against the invasion of doubt and entropy. It reassures all of its members of the simple conviction that the plain man “is on top of things”.³⁷

*Men plug the dikes of their most needed beliefs with whatever mud they can find.*³⁸

And if received ideas of the *normal and the natural* are to be kept intact, strong collective sanctions and rigorous consequences in persecuting disaccordances – or even worse: deliberate renegades – have to be maintained at all times. This is where where we close the loop to our exploration on the *goês* above: In a spectacular overuse of *tólma* and a Promethean abuse of spiritual techniques, they are the primeval villains of violating collective common sense.

But how then, we want to ask, would this problem have looked from the other side of the coin?

If *goês* had not violated Athenian common sense to turn entire families and cultures at risk, to turn the mortar of the *polis* and public cults brittle and prone to entropy, how could their motivation be reframed from an emic, an insider’s perspective?

34 Geertz, 1975, p. 9

35 Geertz, 1975, p. 9

36 Geertz, 1975, p. 12

37 Geertz, 1975, p. 12

38 Geertz, 1975, p. 13

In such a daring undertaking, we must not fall into the trap of wanting to identify a mythological “ur-story”³⁹ of the *goês*, that single-handedly reveals the inner sense-making patterns of *goêteia*. Rather, we have to acknowledge the basic principle through which common sense generates and validates itself, if achieved and established outside of the *common collective*: That is, through *first-hand experience*.

Following the morphodynamic approach of Ioan P. Couliano, aspects of shared common-sense-making discovered through modern anthropological research in other animistic cultures might shed light on the possible emic experience of the *goês*. Such relationships would not be seen as arising through supposedly direct lines of transmission, but as arising naturally from the raw material of the animistic craft: *spirits and thresholds*.

While Burkert’s notion of *goês* as Ancient Greek *shamans* might have been an oversimplification⁴⁰, their practice seems to have shared qualities that we also find in the lived experience of many animistic spirit-workers. Examples would be the ability to work without a fixed written tradition, without codified training but from direct tutelage of spirits, as well as the focus on working alone and in absence of any form of socially institutionalised orthodoxy.

Reversely, spirit-work that attracts the same slandering and rejection by the normative society as the ancient *goêtes* did, indicates not necessarily a consistency in practice, but a consistency in relation to the *polis*, i.e. the majority of a community. Characteristic descriptions of spirit-working transgressors, taboo-breakers, outsiders, and insurgents against the normal order of the world, all point towards the same anti-social complex we have come to know as the territory of the *goês* in Ancient Greek.

Finally, and much to the disdain of the eventual academic reader, we use the term *goês* in relation to our own personal spirit-practice and

39 Geertz, 1975, p. 17

40 Bremmer, 2016, p. 63-65

experience. We have explained the notion of *modern goêtes* in *Clavis Goetica* (Hadean Press, 2021) and provided three baseline criteria that underpin such spirit-work:

- The ability to travel in spirit (or vision),
- an inclination to work with the chthonic realm and the spirits of the natural landscape surrounding us, and
- an abnegation of excessive control and coercion of spirits, in favor of a more cautionary approach in selecting spirits for consorting⁴¹ and collaborating. Furthermore, familiar spirits are used as a protective layer for the *goëtic* operator.

⁴¹ also see: Jason Miller, *Consorting with Spirits - Your Guide to Working with Invisible Allies*, Newburyport: Weiser Books, 2022



2.3 THE GOËTIC DIVIDUAL

To access *Goëtic Common Sense*, we best begin with exploring how a *goês* might have thought of themselves in the world.

To gain a foothold on such a journey, we have to break with the stereotype that the *goês* by definition would have been an anti-social individual. Let's consider the possibility that being a *goês* was not a stroke of bad luck, coupled with retreating to the last resort of earning a living from curses, *defixiones* and self-made concoctions. Rather, the fact that the *goês* might have comfortably abstained from the *polis* and the centre of the human community, might point to the reality that their social pivot focussed elsewhere entirely.

We can learn a lot about the world of the spirit-working *goês* by attempting to see the world as nothing but a pattern of dynamic relationships. In such scenario, whether one was ostracised from *human relationships*, would not necessarily make one less social, but rather shift the gravitational point of one's social network towards *relationships with non-human persons*.

It's worthwhile fully immersing ourselves in this scenario. Luckily, the British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern invited us to do exactly that: In 1988 Strathern coined the term of the *dividual* in order to refer to a person that is constituted of relationships.⁴² That goes to say, the actual essence of this person is *not found* in their discrete specialness⁴³ but in their unique way of *being woven into relatedness*.

Embracing the concept of the *dividual* and applying it to one's lived reality has profound implications: It concerns not only the idea of personhood in a singular sense, but also as a collective. According to such a view, neither cosmology nor ecology can any longer be broken

42 Marilyn Strathern; *The gender of the gift: Problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988

43 The German kabbalistic term '*Sondersein*' invites for further exploration.

down into giant seed-boxes of orderly differentiated unique species or elements. Knowing the world, instead, begins to focus on *relatedness*. Between shifting horizons, morphing outlines, and dynamic tides we no longer attempt to freeze a moment in time and pin down its static characteristics and peculiarities. Instead, we find ourselves immersed into *a river of relatedness*, where each thing only comes into being through the relation it establishes towards its ambience. Considering the reality of the *dividual*, means considering the periphery, the borderlines, the contact zones as the sphere where life infuses itself with reality and meaning.

Martin Buber's dictum, *Dont' look at yourself, look at the world* takes on meaning of ontological consequence in this context: The aspiration to know oneself no longer holds the promise of finding the one fixed point from which we can unhinge the world. Instead, we find ourselves inborn into a never-ending motion of moving relations. And our very own Self constantly reconfiguring its essence and presence, depending on its state of relatedness to what and who is around us, right now.

Maintaining relationships, thus, becomes one with maintaining identity. Through the relatedness to other beings personhood emerges and stabilises itself within the fragile boundaries of mutually contracted affordances. As in the Western world we encounter obsession over curating and rigidly controlling images of selfhood, so the world of the *dividual* invites the risk of becoming overly attached to relationships which in return generate selfhood. Because like a spider that was one with her web, we are nothing without the points to which we have anchored our web. These relationships are what stretch out and support our most intimate sense of being a person of our own.

In both worlds, however, the essential challenge resides in exposing our notion of personhood to the all-penetrating power and ever shifting presence of ambience. The *individual* has to defend and prove themselves against the onslaught of non-self ambience; being unique is the focus point. The *dividual* has to constantly adjust their relatedness to the ever-changing stream of ambience; being in resonance is the

focus point.

Both *individual* and *dividual* float in the river of time. However, according to a non-animistic paradigm we float on the river of time in the nutshell of our *self*, which offers a last resort of self-curated independency. In the animistic world of the *dividual* we essentially are one with the river, and yet we emerge from it, in ephemeral shapes, morphed and defined by the shapes that float with us through time and space. Seeking abstract continuity is a fallacy in the world of the *dividual*. What marks its masters, instead, is their ability to adjust and concentrate attention on the ambience, and to quickly enter and resolve affordances with *Otherness*.

As such, from a traditional Western perspective, the idea of the *dividual* resides dangerously closely to the realm of the daemonic. Because the latter is known to be equally shape-shifting, as well as poisonous⁴⁴, defining its impact and agency by dosage and relationship alone.

Exploring the *way of the goês* through such a lens unlocks a surprising vista: After all, their careless neglect of human companionship could have been a side-effect of their essential relatedness to their non-human environment. If their spider-web of self was not anchored into human relationships, but relationships with spirits, it would have made them no less social, but only more active within a different part of the interspecies-ecology. By being *outcasts* from the norms of human society⁴⁵, they would have become *incasts* into the world of spirit-otherness. And vice versa.

Subsequently, and in following the 19th century folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè, we could speak of a *goês*, as “something of a fairy, and something

44 We use the term *poison* here in a Paracelsian sense, i.e. endowed with potency that can both heal and harm, depending on its doses and on what one intends to protect or change.

45 Gustav Henningsen, 2001, p. 195 - stated in relation to the ethnological term of the *witch*

of a witch, although one cannot really distinguish which is which.”⁴⁶ Such violation of a clear sense of human identity, can be read as an affirmation to the world of the *dividual*: The spirit-worker becomes part of the spirits they work with.

A crude and clumsy folk-culture echo of such way of *partaking in the spirit world*, could be found in the demonic pacts of the Late Middle Ages: Signing over one’s soul to a demon, takes on an entirely different meaning if we depart from a monotheistic sense of soul and self. In the world of the *dividual*, a spirit pact turns into a deliberately chosen anchor point of the spiderweb of Self, a weave that cannot exist outside of ecological relatedness. The only difference to socially accepted behaviour would be that the *goês* anchors themselves not into human community, but into a community of spirits. The *goês* deliberately settles in the unsettling periphery of *Otherness*.

As mentioned above, such intimate relatedness to particular spirits would equally explain why to this day the *way of the goês* is walked so comfortably in the absence of codified texts or institutionalised orthodoxy: First-hand lived relationships with specific spirits replace the dependencies on man-made traditions and cultural artefacts – may these be texts, rituals or other elements of culturally normative *habitus*.

Sitting in the womb of a cave, working with spirits in vision, is a surprisingly time-independent practice. Once we tune into the conscious of the spirits living deep within a mountain, we realise the vacuity of human words and time measured in human units. Two thousand five hundred years between a *goês* in Ancient Greek and modern times do not mean much in such realms.

Obviously, the academic scholar as well as the anthropologist cannot operate from such unapologetically emic perspective as they’d abandon and violate all standards of objectivity. However, it does explain to a degree why the “dirty and contemptible craft”⁴⁷ of the *goêtes* stood so

46 Giuseppe Pitrè, quoted after Gustav Henningsen, 2001, p. 195

47 Hopfner, Vol.2, 1983, p. 72, also see Vol.2, S47

calmly without any kind of culturally mediated crutches. Likewise, it might explain why the contempt was quite mutual; and why both the *goêtes* and the priests of the public cult might have found it *common sense* to call each other “desecrators of doctrine”⁴⁸.

Today, as then, the *goês* would have been found exactly there, where the social and man-made order has turned fragile, where the ritualised order is no longer maintained by the collective, but by the individual alone. They would have been found, where the world is *monstrous* in the eyes of the one who expects to see the *norm*.

2.4 THE GOËTIC IMPLEMENTS

We have established the notion that the *goês* might have accepted ostracism from humans, in order to take community with spirits. Such community of course would have taken the form of intimate year-, decade-, if not life-long relationships with particular hives of spirits, deities or demons. And, as we discovered in the idea of the *dividual*, such cohabitation and inhabitation might have significantly transcended the boundaries of the human self as we know them in Western modern society.

Thus, two practical pathways for relating to a possible emic perspective of the *goês* have emerged: The work with the raw materials of spirits and thresholds, as well as the perspective on personhood as a relational network which is ambience dependent and can be anchored into human, as well as non-human persons.

Further perspective on the latter point can be taken from Nurit Bird-David’s ethnographic fieldwork with the *Nayaka*, a small tribe in the shrinking tropical forest of the Nilgiris Hills of South India. Bird-David summarised many of her findings, as well as how these tie into other

48 Hopfner, Vol.2, 1983, p. 100

modern anthropological insights, in her liminal 1999 essay “Animism” *Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology*⁴⁹.

[The Nayaka] make their personhood by producing and reproducing sharing relationships with surrounding beings, humans and others. They do not dichotomize other beings vis-à-vis themselves but regard them, while differentiated, as nested within each other.⁵⁰

[...] each person is a composite of transferable particles that form his or her personal substance.⁵¹

As we immerse ourselves into the animistic-relational phenomenology described by Bird-Nurit, we come to realise that the implements a spirit-practitioner applies to master such a world would be entirely different from the paraphernalia we have come to know in Western Magic.

Many of the classical Western magical tools today are conceived as idealised energy containers: A wand stores fire energy, a pentacle stores telluric forces, a sword directs the forces of air, etc. The magician equips themselves with tools that contain natural forces in an extremely charged state. In the ritual then they mainly perform two functions: They make tamed natural forces accessible to the will of the operator. The magician - in conjunction with movement and utterance - acts as a release valve for the forces contained in each object.

Second, by becoming *ideal objects* of a particular element or cosmological force, these tools act as representations of that force throughout creation. Just as a spark is the seed of all fires everywhere,

49 Bird-David, Nurit (1999); “Animism” *Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology*, in: *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 40, No. S1, *Special Issue Culture—A Second Chance?*, University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. S67 – S91, online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/200061>

50 Bird-David, p. 73

51 Mattison Mines; *Public faces, private voices: Community and individuality in South India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; quoted after: Bird-David, p.72

a drop of dew is the seed of all oceans, and a breath is the seed of all storms, so too the respective magical tools become access points for the magician's will to achieve sovereignty over the entire element. As representatives of all generative and destructive forces of creation, they place the magician at the center of cosmic power.

Such a schematic outline of the description of Western magic paraphernalia already points to the essential idea: Their main purpose lies in the exclusive empowerment of the magician's person. Through their effective agency, the operator seeks to temporarily lift themselves *out of the web of creation* in order to briefly gain dominion over certain parts of it.

Specifically, in the 21st century West these tools are rarely still assumed to be animated by non-human persons. In most modern primers, their inherent logic follows the *energy model of magic*.⁵² Magical tools function as *containers and proxies* and rarely as dwellings of spirits.

Consequently, the tools themselves, once fully charged and consecrated, are considered to be independent of the environment. That is, a magic sword raised in autumn or in summer, by day or by night, in the Himalayas or in a New York basement, should always enable the magician to perform the same actions.

Once we follow through on the logic of the *dividual*, many of these assumptions seem rather naive.

In a paradigm that knows personhood only as a direct function of 'we-ness', that understands everything as a matter of lived relatedness, the attempt to isolate and store certain powers of creation becomes a fallacy. Similarly, viewing magic through the lens of empowering a single actor – i.e., the magician – misses the essential dynamic of power: In the world of the *dividual*, power is a temporary flash in the fabric of creation, which we temporarily grant one another, ignited by relationships. Not control and confinement, but alliance and affordance, in an ever-

52 see Frater V.:D.:(et al.), 2019, p. 233-247

changing web of ambience, are the tools of the magical operator.

The elemental fourfold order in Western Magic has long been expressed in the above-mentioned tools: Sword (air), wand (fire), pentacle (earth) and chalice (water). The fact that the elements have come to take such a prominent role in the magical paraphernalia of the West resides precisely in their key-and-lock function of *opening the gates* to magical power.

This logic needs to be replaced, if creation is considered an endless weave of spiderwebs, each one intertwined with another. Both the periphery and centre of 'our' web suddenly vanishes. Instead, we are invited to think of personhood in a much more fluid way: always shared, always co-dependent, always constituted by ever-evolving networks of relations.

We might want to reflect on mycorrhizal networks: The vast, underground networks established by a fungus in association with the roots of a plant, through which connections pass substances that both organisms need to grow. – We might be able to imagine not only fungus and tree, but an entire forest as such a network of co-dependencies and collaboration.⁵³ One leaf, one mycorrhizal cell, operating as the access point to the entire forest. And yet, each cell being nothing by itself. *Power* is not stored anywhere, but generated and upheld by the entire system collectively.

In such a paradigm, the magical operator could swing a sword or wand as much as they wanted to without achieving any dramatic effect. Because it is not *air* or *fire* alone that holds affordance to do anything magical. No single element, spirit or operator does so. In the worldview of the *dividual* power cannot be segmented, sequenced, codified and contained. It can only be negotiated in an ever-evolving stream of mutual relations.

53 And one should add, by parasitism as well of course.



ἦ



Traditionally, the position the magician assumes in a ritual is in the centre of a circle, with a perimeter leading out into elementary gates and directions, as well as with a contact point above and below. If we switch into the worldview of the *dividual* we can still uphold this visualisation. However, we need to stop imagining this tiny *bubble of power* as a somehow divinely blessed diorama of the macrocosm from which the magician gets to direct all of creation. Instead we might want to consider this circle and periphery as a fungal *hypha*.

A *hypha* is a structural element of fungi. The term is derived from Greek *hyphē*, which is translated as *web*, and is itself rooted in the Greek word *hyphainō*: *to weave, warp, devise, produce*.

Some fungi, like the yeasts that ferment sugar into alcohol and cause bread to rise, consist of single cells that multiply by budding into two. However, most fungi form networks of many cells known as hyphae (pronounced HY fee): fine tubular structures that branch, fuse, and tangle into the anarchic filigree of mycelium. Mycelium describes the most common of fungal habits, better thought of not as a thing but as a process: an exploratory, irregular tendency. Water and nutrients flow through ecosystems within mycelial networks. The mycelium of some fungal species is electrically excitable and conducts waves of electrical activity along hyphae, analogous to the electrical impulses in animal nerve cells.⁵⁴

Considering the position of the *goês* in the operating process of performing their spirit-work as equivalent to a *hypha* gives us several clues:

- The *goês* themselves should be considered as a *tubular structure* within a giant *hyphae* network, through which information, elements, and consciousness travel.
- Thus, the *goês* ceases to be a delimited individual, a man or a

54 Sheldrake, 2020, p. 6

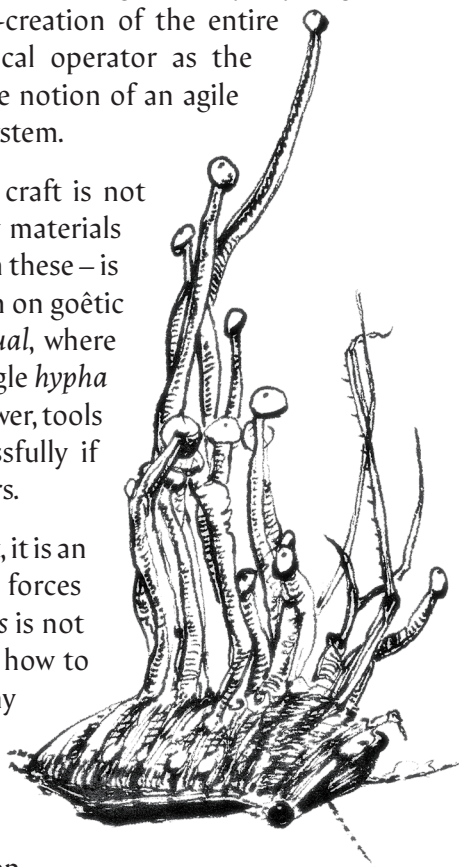
woman, and turns into a node in a network from which a process of *exploratory, irregular tendency* can be initiated.

- Any kind of purposeful change (i.e. the goal of *magic* or *goêteia*), must be preceded by an exploratory process of inquiry: At this moment, and in these specific circumstances, what is the state of the network, what and who is present, and how do they need to be involved in the intended process?
- The outcome of any operation then is not regulated by any single element of the *hyphae*, but by co-creation of the entire network. The notion of the magical operator as the dominant force is replaced with the notion of an agile integrator and activator of an ecosystem.

What we discovered above – that a craft is not defined by its creations, but by its raw materials and the creative dynamic emerging from these – is reaffirmed again in this short exposition on goëtic implements: In the world of the *dividual*, where the operator takes the position of a single *hypha* within a huge network of distributed power, tools of spirit-work cannot function successfully if they are conceived as discrete containers.

The physical tool is an artefact, at best, it is an echo, a memory imprint of the creative forces that shaped it. What matters to the *goês* is not this wand, or that sword, but knowing how to handle the creative forces that shape any wand, and any sword.

So let's explore the *inner implements* that might allow the *goês* to tune directly into the living forces of creation, without the override of the physical implement.



Here we return to Bird-David's anthropological research and her essay on *Animism revisited*. In a continuation of the observations made by her⁵⁵, we can draw a simple, triangular scheme that sheds light on the essential abilities of the *goês*, with which they intervene in the *hyphae* of the spirit-world, navigate this ecosystem, and initiate purposeful processes.

Attention here becomes the act of enabling contact, of sensing what is, and who the *goês* is in relation with. Attention forms a *goês*'s core capability of picking up information on the ecology of the present moment. It follows a much more radical slant here than mere observation: The *goês* partakes in whatever their attention touches upon. There is no personal essence in the *dividual* held back; but sending out their attention into the terrain of Otherness, makes them one with Otherness. The *goês* in their work, only exists on the threshold of encounters.

Ambience then becomes everything. Background and foreground converge into one, once each being can only be described by the ties it holds into others. The *goês* become an expression precisely not of a stable identity, but of their fluid relation to the environment. Their spirit-work cannot be codified and fixed into exegetical texts, because the conditions of a *hyphae* are a totality at every moment. There is no room for stagnant abstraction; but in the work of the *goês* efficacy is granted purely by what is in the here and now.

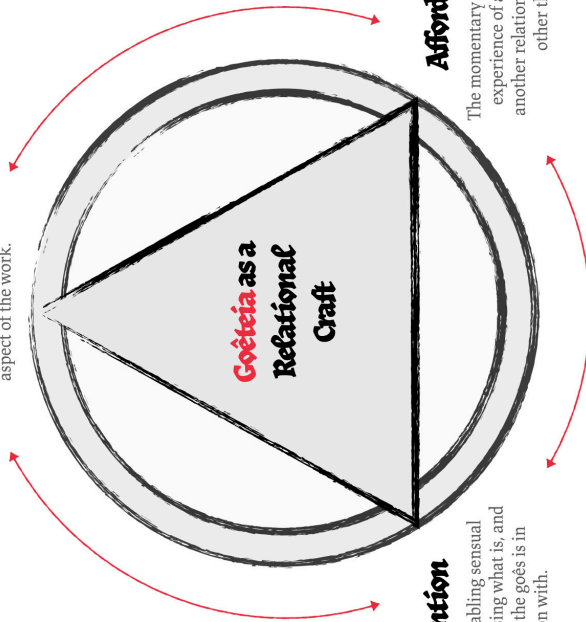
Affordance then is the currency upon which everything thrives and defines itself. Upon their journey into Otherness the *goês* continuously asks: In this very moment, what is N.N. willing to afford me, and what am I willing to afford N.N.? Right now, are we in a position to step into relatedness? And if so, then we will both become something else in this ephemeral relationship, for as long as it lasts, before we move on again.⁵⁶

55 see Bird-David, p. 74

56 *Things are perceived in terms of what they afford the actor-perceiver because of what they are for him. Their 'affordance', as Gibson calls it, 'cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-*

Ambience

The fluid relational environment that defines all aspect of the work.



Attention

The act of enabling sensual contact, of sensing what is, and who & what the goëts is in relation with.

Affordance

The momentary and responsive experience of affording one another relationship, and then other things.

We suggest that taking an emic perspective of the work of the *goês* requires a radical immersion into *the phenomenology of the (spirit-) world*: To make no assumptions about what might exist beyond the conditional phenomena we encounter in each moment. To embrace the fact that the world – and with it, we ourselves – constitutes itself anew in every moment through acts of situational relatedness.

Goêtic implements, in such context, have to be the lightest of travel companions, ready to shape-shift in any moment, to be broken and reassembled, to flow freely in the river of Otherness. Exploring and mastering the triangle of *Attention, Ambience and Affordance*, is a craft we can only aspire to *perfect* as one perfects e.g. breathing.

We all breath all the time; but some do it better than others. To the latter, breathing is no longer a mere subconscious natural function of their body; but they have become *related* to breathing, and learned how to ride on their breath into experience, ecstasy, and otherness.

2.5 CONTRASTING GOÊTIC VS. SOLOMONIC WORK

Such an animistic worldview stands in wonderful contrast to the obsession of Western magicians with classifying and categorising fixed lists of spirits and sealing them hermeneutically into hierarchical orders.

Such a positivist-rational approach to describing spirit-species makes perfect sense from the vantage point of monotheistic religions. From

objective. [...] It is equally a fact of the environment as a fact of behaviour. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and the observer. — James J. Gibson; *The ecological approach to visual perception*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979; quoted after: Bird-David, p. 74

the perspective of the *dividual*, however, it would be a false attempt to artificially ossify and stifle lived reality. Ambiguity of and dependence on the ambience are seen in our modern Western view as weaknesses to be overcome by the clear light of science. However, becoming comfortable with (and yet still effective in) these realities is the basic prerequisite for any tangible and concrete statement about reality in the realm of the *goês*.

Dr. Steven Skinner in his foreword to one of the most recent attempts of establishing such “orders of daemons”, asserts that magic “is not an art but a technique which has repeatable procedures and observable outcomes in the physical world. It relies upon the existence of spirits to accomplish these outcomes [...]”.⁵⁷

Such a statement not only applies the term *technique* in a rather narrow field⁵⁸. It also considers spirits as fulfilment agents of a human agenda. They become the figurative cogs, transmission bands and drips of oil in a vast automaton designed, built and operated by the mage.

*The importance of hierarchy in magic cannot be overstressed. It is one of the basic principles acknowledged and utilised by magicians in all periods. It is well known that knowing the name of a spirit is reputed to give the magician control over that spirit. In order to coerce that spirit into carrying out the wishes of the magician, there are a number of other threats that the magician typically used.*⁵⁹

57 Steven Skinner, in: David Crowhurst; *Stellas Daemonum - The Orders of Daemons*, Nebueyport: Red Wheel/ Weiser, 2021, xiii

58 Just consider the *techniques* studied and applied in the liberal arts. Using a chisel and hammer is a technique that takes decades to master; and yet even an adept mason would be unlikely to define their work as simply applying ‘repeatable procedures’. Because they embrace the co-dependency of their work on the material they work with, their unique substance and structure.

59 Stephen Skinner, *Techniques of Graeco-Egyptian Magic*, Singapore: Golden Hoard Press, 2014, p. 53

Interestingly, despite these contrasts to the *dividual* world centred upon relatedness, we still discover similarities as well: For even in the *daeomonolatries*⁶⁰ the way a system of classification is established is by means of isomorphic relatedness. As Skinner states, the nature of the spirits is described according to their relation “to their zodiacal sign, their division into decans [...], planetary attribution, lunar mansions, and planetary days and hours.”⁶¹ That is, the very place and position of each spirit within the ecology of Western Magic is marked by means of likeness, or in other word, *relatedness*.

Yet, such process is presumed to be necessary only once: As soon as the relations are defined, they are pinned down, like the literal insect with a needle on a page, and are meant to remain defined, categorised and stable.

Furthermore, the human operator themselves is believed to stand outside of this field of relatedness. The mage is seen to work upon the spirit-world from a privileged position of protruding unaffectedness. The Hermetic notion of man as a microcosm has led many into the labyrinth of narcissistic hubris: Just because this microcosm holds potential to relate to everything else, does not make it superior to any other element of creation, but simply different. Man remains a single *hypha* in the *mycelium* that forms the ecosystem of creation.

Not a room full of paraphernalia, complicated calculations and long list of ancient spirit names are what empowers a magician to work with spirits. Rather, it's the invisible qualities of the open hand: *Attention*, *ambience* and *affordance* are the core skills that empower the *goês* to perceive when a spirit is present and whether it signals willingness to

60 We use this term here in echo of Nicholas Rémy early attempt to establish a clearly defined overview of spirit hierarchies in his *Daemonolatriae libri tres* (1595), which was later on edited by Montague Summers and translated as *Demonolatry* in 1929.

61 Steven Skinner, in: David Crowhurst; *Stellas Daemonum - The Orders of Daemons*, Nebueyport: Red Wheel / Weiser, 2021, xiv

afford them relationship.

The openness and uncertainty of the operative field in the world of *goês* presents an essential obstacle for a language-centred tradition such as Western ritual magic. The latter conceives of words as a lock-and-key system that triggers particular spirit-enabled performances. The *goês*, on the other hand, seems to do very well without complex overlays of man-made language precisely because their attention is focussed not on text, but on context. Such differences in paradigms and approaches, obviously, say nothing about the degree of power and agency inherent in their practices.

Unfortunately, Dr. Skinner's representation of Solomonic magic knows little of such relative and comparative exploration of spirit-working paradigms. Despite the brilliance of his historical reconstructions and his attention to detail, his personal assessments are often steeped in generalisations, biased judgments, and claims of no alternatives.

Working with spirits is rather like taming a wild horse. You need to be firm. You can't cozy up to them, and treat them like a pet, dog or something. Spirits can do bad things, and you don't want them to do that, and so you have to take account of good action. [...] You will have to bind them in a way, that they will do what you want.⁶²

Well, we like to point out that taming a wild horse is not about subduing the will and actions of a horse to a human agenda. Instead, it is about establishing a partnership of mutual respect and *an interspecies language that affords relatedness*. Equally, working with spirits in an animistic paradigm does not deserve belittlement, but more careful study and first-hand experience.

62 Stephen Skinner on the GlitchBottle podcast '101# Aleister Crowley's "Four Books on Magic" with Dr. Stephen Skinner', 13th October 2021, <https://www.glitchbottle.com/podcast/2021/10/13/101-aleister-crowleys-four-books-of-magick-with-dr-stephen-skinner>

Skinner's insistence to keep all spirits at least at an arms length⁶³, as well as subjected to an entirely human agenda, might be solid advice for a very particular kind of spirit. Unfortunately, his apodictic language doesn't invite for such diverse relativism.

The insistence of keeping the operator separated from and superior to the spirit-ecology reveals a crucial, predetermined breaking point in traditions of magic that have long departed from a relationship-based approach. The reasons why indeed spirits have to be subdued and coerced in their practice, might make much more of a statement about the mage's one-sided agenda than about ontological reality on a spirit level: If magic indeed is nothing but a technique to fulfil a human's agenda, why would it be good for anybody other than that human?

Of course, force and enforcement, as well as self-protective fortifications and embankments, have to be applied to all sides because operators in such traditions aren't exploring *Otherness* to understand it, but to colonise it. Magic in such vein is *going to war* against the very ecology its operators, unknowingly, form a part of. It is throwing fire and spears into the dark of a wood, wondering why all the emerging spirit-animals behave like wild beasts.

My personal invitation would be to stop the search for apodictic truth in magic, and to instead understand it as a vehicle to get involved with each other.

In fact – returning to Skinner's metaphor of the wild horse – many modern magicians would greatly benefit from studying animal behavioural science. In the typical anthropological focus, Israel Regardie once advised any aspiring magician to also undergo psychotherapy in parallel with their magical training. Wouldn't it be great to rebalance the focus on our own psyche, with a slightly stronger focus on the ecosystem?⁶⁴ One indeed might ask: Can a thread ever understand

63 *Daimones, demons, spirits and even gods needed to be kept at arms length [...]*. -- Stephen Skinner, 2014, p. 79

64 For further reading see: Plaisance, Christopher; *Israel Regardie and the*

itself, without exploring the nature of a weave first?

It would be powerful as well as hugely effective to build a solid foundation of ethology into the core curriculum of any magical order. Reading e.g. Edward Osborne Wilson and John Alcock, Michael Breed and Janice Moore would enable magicians to recognise that all social species — including the myriad of beings we like to group under the term *spirits* — can respond with a wide range of behaviours, from egotistic to cooperative and from altruistic to revengeful.

One might argue, just like with humans, their response depends mostly on environment and stimulus, or in other words: on a combination of *attention*, *ambience* and *affordance*, both on the spirit and the human side.

Psychologization of Esoteric Discourse, in: Elwing, Jimmy; Roukema, Aren (ed.); *Correspondences 3* (2015) - Online Journal for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism, s.l.: Creative Commons Online Publication, p. 5–54





3. GOËTIC COMMON SENSE

Let's take stock of what we learned about *Goëtic Common Sense*.

As such, we are inquiring to know: What are the key lessons *goêtes* across time and space would have all learned from *the school of hard knocks*, not because they worked from the same primers, but because they all worked with the same raw materials? What would their tenets be about the *tissue of common sense*, that enables them in their work to come out *on top of things*, or at least battered and bruised but alive?

Allow me to offer a couple of working hypotheses.

(1) It would be basic *goëtic common sense* that spirit-personhood is not stable. Rather, it would have been learned to be fluid and emergent. Such relational concept of personhood – or better: of the *dividual* – would have been considered to be true not only for humans, but also for non human persons, i.e. spirits. Just like weather-patterns or ocean-tides never exist independent of time and context, so also spirits only constitute themselves in the moment of affording one another relatedness.

(2) It would be basic *goëtic common sense* that many tools in magic are simply *aids to perceiving*. From stories and myths to sleeping out on the land, from holding a wand or drinking from a chalice to staring into black waters. All these experiences would have been meant to *facilitate sensing*. They do not hold knowledge in themselves, but they aim to awaken the senses of the *goês* to an ambience they otherwise would be unconscious of.

(3) It would be basic *goëtic common sense* that the ability to use and direct our attention is our greatest asset in spirit-work. A *goês* would have known that they can switch their attention's focus between objects and events. The latter is what they would have used in their spirit-practice mainly: Such attention seeks to perceive not discrete and stable objects, but the dynamic tides and movements that happen in relation to one

another. A *goês* would have asked themselves: Do I see a tree, or do I see the wind brushing through its branches? Do I see the plants in the clearing or do I see the patterns of light wandering over them? What is moving towards me in this moment, and what is moving away from me? And the *goês* would have known: Just as change occurs in relationships, so personality is only revealed in movement.

(4) It would be basic *goêtic* common sense that their work can be perfectly accomplished — both from the spirit and human sides — without the use of human words. A *goês* would have understood, that *language* can be afforded as an experiential category of relatedness. A *goês* would always invert the exegetical sequence of *text — ritual — experience*. They do not need to begin their spirit-path on ossified foundations; they can work from the foundation of the present moment in all its richness.

(5) It would be basic *goêtic* common sense that their work, above all else, is a relational craft. A *goês* would operate off the simple foundation that to be a knower of something, that something also needs to acquire knowledge of them. A *goês* would have known, from painful first-hand experience, that there is no space in creation that allows man to stand outside of the ecology they are woven into. The *goês's* presence affects everything, and everything affects the *goês's* presence in response. Spirit-work, therefore, cannot be performed in absolute categories, but reveals itself to the *dividual* as a *synthetic truth*.⁶⁵



65 Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) coined the differentiation of *definitional* versus *synthetic truths*. If we brutally simplified the man's complex language we could say a definitional truth is arrived at by pure logic. One does not need to go out into the world to establish its essential validity. A synthetic truth, on the other hand, depends not on reason and logic alone, but on a situational reality that can only be accessed through first-hand experience. see: Kant, Immanuel; *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999

As we have come to see, operating with goëtic common sense does not at all require us to trade off strategy against spontaneity, or even worse knowledge against naivety.

It will challenge us, though, to reconsider the value of being able to adopt to our ambience, to switch our attention from discrete objects to dynamic events, as well as to carefully consider the small basket of our own affordance.

In the end, what it might lead us towards, could be the kind of practice that trades insistence on power hierarchies for a certain kind of light-footedness, both unknown and uncanny to the orthodox believer.

We might come to see *goëtia* as an invitation again, to work with what is present in this very moment. And then in the next. An invitation that allows us to fully immerse ourselves into the *ecology of Otherness*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & FURTHER READING

- Acher, Frater; Sabogal, José Gabriel Alegría; *Clavis Goëtica: Keys to Chthonic Sorcery*, West Yorkshire: Hadean Press, 2021
- Acher, Frater; *Holy Daimon*, Scarlet Imprint, 2018
- Acher, Frater; *Holy Heretics*, Scarlet Imprint, 2022 (forthcoming)
- Acher, Frater; *INGENIUM*, Scarlet Imprint, 2022 (forthcoming)
- Acher, Frater; *On the Foundations of Animistic Spirit Practice in Paracelsus's Works*, Büchlein Morgenstern Volume 1, s.l.: Online Publication, 2021
- Acher, Frater; *Rosicrucian Magic - A Reader on Becoming Alike to the Angelic Mind*, s.l.: TaDehent Books, 2021
- Bierl, Anton; 'Schamanismus' und die Alte Komödie. Generischer Rückgriff auf einen Atavismus und Heilung, in: *Religion: Lehre und Praxis: Akten des Kolloquiums*, Basel, 22. Oktober 2004, Athen: Archaïognosia, 2009, p. 13–35
- Bird-David, Nurit (1999); "Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology, in: *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 40, No. S1, Special Issue Culture—A Second Chance?, University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. S67 – S91
- Bird-David, Nurit; "Inside" and "Outside" in Kinship Usage: *The Hunter-Gatherer Naiken of South India*, *Cambridge Anthropology* 7(1), 1983, p. 47–57.
- Bird-David, Nurit; *The people and the ethnographic myth: An introduction to the study of the Nayaka*, in: Hockings, P. (ed.); *Blue*

mountains: *The ethnography and biogeography of a South Indian region*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989

- Bird-David, Nurit; *The Giving Environment: Another Perspective on the Economic System of Gatherer-Hunters*, in: *Current Anthropology* 31, 1990, p. 183–96
- Bird-David, Nurit; *Beyond “The Original Affluent Society”: A culturalist reformulation*, in: *Current Anthropology* 33, 1992, p. 25–47
- Bird-David, Nurit; *Beyond “The hunting and gathering mode of subsistence”: Observations on Nayaka and other modern Hunter-Gatherers*, in: *Man* 27, 1992, p. 19–44
- Bird-David, Nurit; *Sociality and immediacy, or, Past and present conversations on bands*, in: *Man* 29, 1994, p. 583–603
- Bird-David, Nurit; *Puja, or sharing with the gods? On ritualized possession among Nayaka of South India*, in: *Eastern Anthropologist* 49(3-4), 1996, p. 259-275
- Blanco Cesteros, Miriam; *Women and the Transmission of Magical Knowledge in the Greco-Roman World. Rediscovering Ancient Witches (II)*, in: Emilio Suárez de la Torre (ed.); *Magikê Technê. Formación y consideración social del mago en el Mundo Antiguo*, Madrid: Editorial Dykinson, 2017, p.95-110
- Bragg, Melvyn (ed.); *BBC In Our Time: Philosophy: Kant’s Copernican Revolution*, aired 3rd of June 2021
- Bremmer, Jan; *The Birth of the Term ‘Magic’*, in: *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Bd. 126, 1999, pp. 1-12
- Bremmer, Jan N.; *Shamanism in Classical Scholarship: Where are We Now?*, in: Jackson, P. (ed.); *Horizons of Shamanism: A Triangular Approach to the History and Anthropology of Ecstatic Techniques*,

Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2016, p. 52–78

- Buber, Martin; *Ich und Du*, Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1923
- Buber, Martin; *Das dialogische Prinzip*, Heidelberg: L. Schneider Verlag, 1954
- Crowhurst, David; *Stellas Daemonum - The Orders of Daemons*, Nebueyport: Red Wheel/ Weiser, 2021
- Daniel, E. Valentine; *Fluid signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984
- Dickie, Matthew W.; *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman world*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001
- Eth, Alexander (ed.); *Glitchbottle Podcast: Episode #101 - Aleister Crowley's "Four Books on Magic" with Dr. Stephen Skinner*, published 13th October 2021
- Franckenberg, Abraham von (ed.); *Johannes Beer; Gewinn und Verlust: Das ist ein Geistlicher und sehr Nützlicher Bericht, Wie man allerley Geistliche und Leibliche Himlische und Irrdische Gütter gewinnen und verliehren kan*, s.l., 1639
- Fraser, Kyle A.; Roman Antiquity, in: Collins, David J. (Ed.); *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.115-147
- Frater V.:D.:., Harry Eilenstein, Josef Knecht und Axel Bündenbender, *Magie heute. Berichte aus der Praxis*, Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2019
- Geertz, Clifford; *Common Sense as a Cultural System*, in: *The Antioch Review*, Spring 1975, Vol. 33, No. 1, Yellow Springs: Antioch College, 1975, pp. 5-26
- Gooch, Pernille; *Being-in-the-World: the Phenomenology of Indigenoussness*, in: Hornborg, A.; Kurkiala, M. (ed.); *Voices of the*

Land, Lund University Press, 1998

- Hallowell, Alfred Irving; *Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View*, in: S. Diamond (ed.), *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1960
- Harvey, Graham; Wallis, Robert J.; *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism*, Plymouth: Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, 2015
- Henningsen, Gustav; *'The Ladies from the Outside': An Archaic Pattern of the Witches' Sabbath*, in: Ankarloo, Bengt; Henningsen, Gustav (ed.); *Early Modern European Witchcraft - Centres and Peripheries*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001
- Hornborg, Alf; *Machine Fetishism, Value, and the Image of Unlimited Good: Towards a Thermodynamics of Imperialism*, in: *Man* 27, 1992, p. 1-18
- Hornborg, Alf; *Ecological embeddedness and personhood: Have we always been capitalists?*, in: *Anthropology Today* 14,2, 1998
- Ingold, Tim; *The Perception of the Environment - Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, New York: Routledge, 2000
- Kant, Immanuel; *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999
- King, John R. IV; *The Faculty of Abrac - The Tradition, Training, and Techniques of Commanding Spirits*, s.l.: Lulu.com, 2020
- Luck, Georg; *Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature*, in: *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, Volume 2: Ancient Greece and Rome*, London: Athlone Press, 1999, p. 91-158
- McCarthy, Josephine (ed.); *LXXXI - The Quareia Magicians Deck & Book - A Divinatory Card Deck for the Experienced Magician*, s.l.: Quareia Publishing UK, 2014
- McCarthy, Josephine, *QUAREIA – The Apprentice*, s.l.: Quareia

Publishing UK, 2016

- McCarthy, Josephine, *QUAREIA – The Initiate*, s.l.: Quareia Publishing UK, 2016
- McCarthy, Josephine, *QUAREIA – The Adept*, s.l.: Quareia Publishing UK, 2016
- Meconi, David Vincent; *Traveling without Moving: Love as Ecstatic Union in Plotinus, Augustine, and Dante*, in: *Mediterranean Studies*, Vol. 18, Penn State University Press, 2009, pp. 1-23
- Miller, Jason; *Consorting with Spirits - Your Guide to Working with Invisible Allies*, Newburyport: Weiser Books, 2022
- Mines, Mattison; *Public Faces, Private Voices: Community and Individuality in South India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994
- Plaisance, Christopher; *Israel Regardie and the Psychologization of Esoteric Discourse*, in: Elwing, Jimmy; Roukema, Aren (ed.); *Correspondences 3 (2015) - Online Journal for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism*, s.l.: Creative Commons Online Publication, p. 5-54
- Rémy, Nicholas; *Daemonolatreiae libri tres*, Lugdunum, 1595
- Richard von Dülmen (ed.); *Entdeckung des Ichs - Die Geschichte der Individualisierung vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Köln / Weimar / Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2001
- Osterling, Michael (ed.); *Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits - 'Small Gods' at the Margins of Christendom*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018
- Sheldrake, Merlin; *Entangled Life - How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*, New York: Random House, 2020
- Skinner, Stephen; *Techniques of Graeco-Egyptian Magic*,

Singapore: Golden Hoard Press, 2014

- Skinner, Stephen; *Techniques of Solomonic Magic*, Singapore: Golden Hoard Press, 2015
- Smith, Andrew; *Review: Tolma in Plotinus*, Reviewed Work(s): *Plotinus, Tolma, and the Descent of Being. An Exposition and Analysis* by N. J. Torchia, in: *The Classical Review*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 1996, pp. 76-78
- Strathern, Marilyn; *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988
- Stratton-Kent, Jake; *Pandemonium - A Discordant Concordance of Diverse Spirit Catalogues*, West Yorkshire: Hadean Press, 2016
- Stratton-Kent, Jake; *The True Grimoire*, London: Scarlet Imprint, 2009
- Stratton-Kent, Jake; *Geosophia - The Argo of Magic*, 2 volumes, London: Scarlet Imprint, 2010
- Stratton-Kent, Jake; *The Testament of Cyprian the Mage*, 2 volumes, London: Scarlet Imprint, 2014
- Stratton, Kimberley B; *Early Greco-Roman Antiquity*, in: Collins, David J. (Ed.); *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.81-114
- Sudhoff, Karl (ed.); *Theophrastus von Hohenheim, gen. Paracelsus, Sämtliche Werke*, Band I-XIV, München: Otto Wilhelm Barth, 1922-1933
- Summers, Montague (ed.); *Demonolatry* by Nicolas Remy, In *Three Books*, London: John Rodker, 1929
- Tyler, Edward B; *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, 2 Volumes,

London: John Murray, 1871

- Wilson, John R.; *Tolma and the Meaning of Talas*, in: *The American Journal of Philology*, Apr. 1971, Vol. 92, No. 2, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, pp. 292-300

