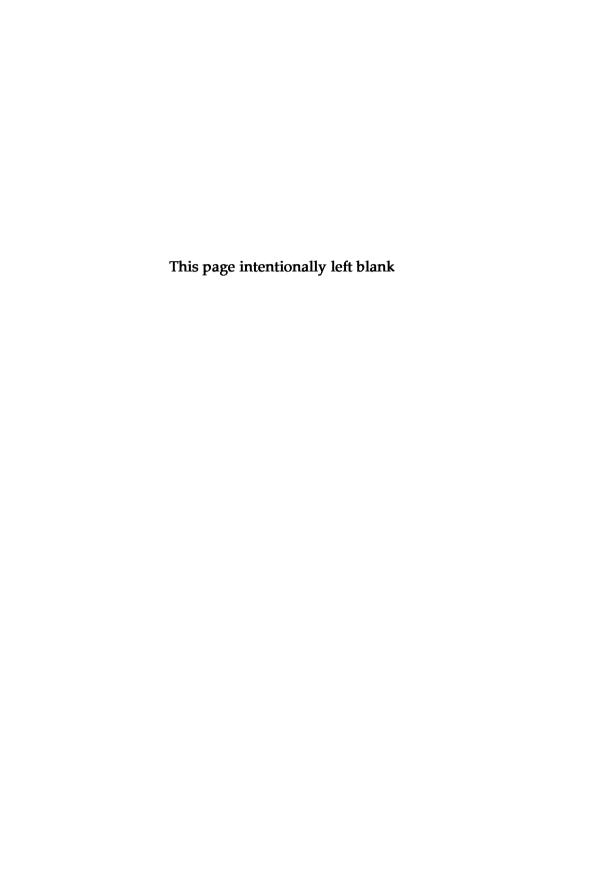


A HISTORY OF PAGAN EUROPE



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Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick



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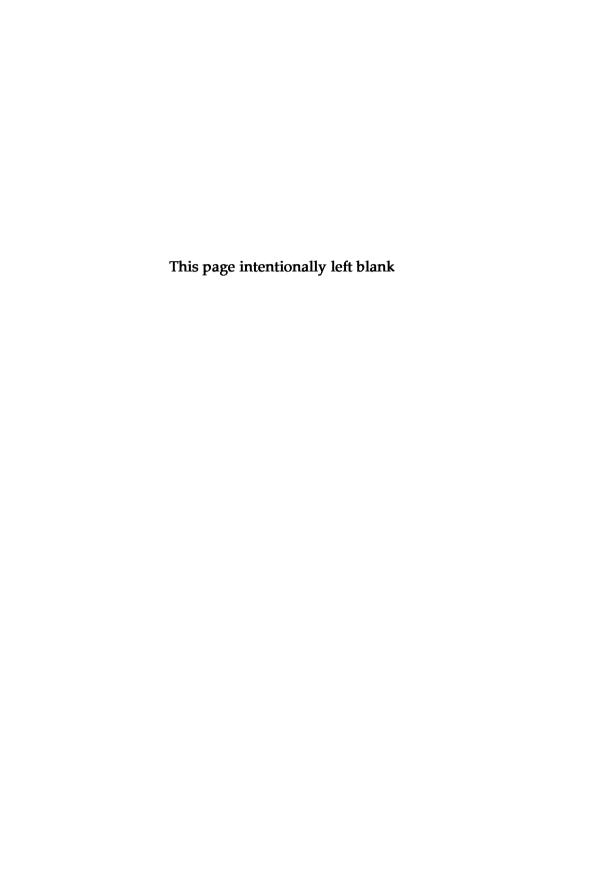
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CONTENTS

	List of illustrations Preface and acknowledgements	vii xi
1	INTRODUCTION: PAGANISM OLD AND NEW	1
2	THE GREEKS AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN	5
3	ROME AND THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN	25
4	THE ROMAN EMPIRE	53
5	THE CELTIC WORLD	79
6	THE LATER CELTS	96
7	THE GERMANIC PEOPLES	111
8	LATE GERMANIC RELIGION	138
9	THE BALTIC LANDS	165
10	RUSSIA AND THE BALKANS	184
11	PAGANISM REAFFIRMED	196
	Notes Bibliography Index	221 232 243



ILLUSTRATIONS

MAPS

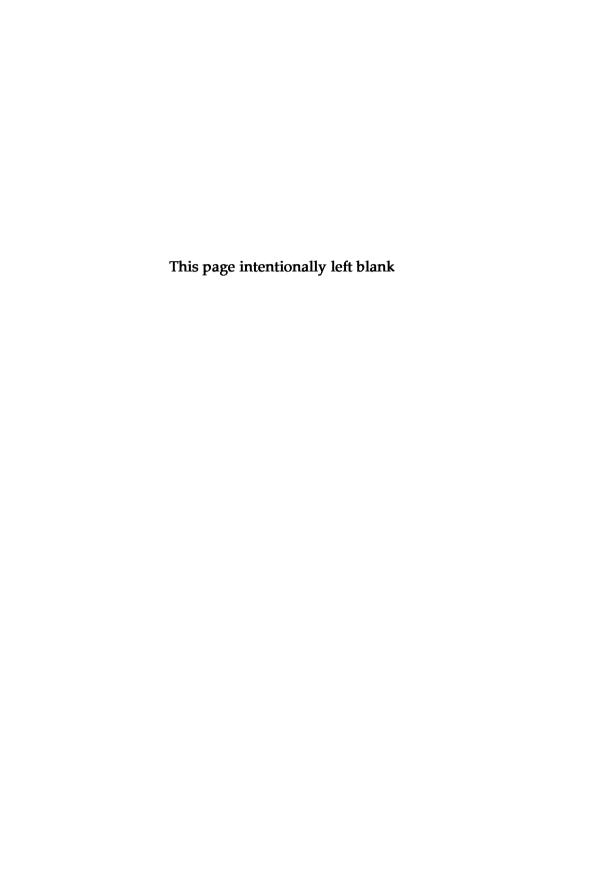
	The Roman Empire at its maximum extent (dates in brackets denote short-term occupations) The Baltic and East-Central Europe, tenth to twelfth century	xiii xv
	PLATES	
2.	Cretan seal showing female figures, 1500 BCE	7
2.2	2 The Lady of the Wild Things, painting on a Boeotian	
	amphora, 750–770 BCE	12
2.3	3 The Oresteia. Vase from Magna Graeca showing the judgement	
	of Athene on Orestes, 350–340 BCE	16
	The goddess of the Underworld: Persephone enthroned	18
2.5	Roman coins with representations of the temple of Aphrodite	
	at Kouklia (Old Paphos), Cyprus	21
	Goddess building a trophy, fourth century BCE	24
3.	Medieval wall-painting of the black Sibyl of Europe in the	
	Madonna shrine at Piani, Liguria, Italy	30
3.2	2 'Goddess' image in niche on a house at Costarainera, Liguria,	- /
	Italy, 1992	34
3.3	3 Wire caducei, symbols of Mercury, from a sacred well at	/0
, .	Finthen, Mainz, Germany, first century CE	40
	Roman tombstone from Spain with swastikas	55
	Roman altar with swastikas, lunar horns and Daeg rune	67
Э	Image of the goddess Sequana, deity of the river Seine,	0.2
_ ^	France, from the Romano-Gallic shrine at the river's source	82
ر.∠	2 Well-offering in the form of a 'dolly' from Kilmacrenan,	02
5 3	Donegal, Ireland, 1894	83
	First-century BCE hill-figure at Uffington, Berkshire, England	87
٠.٢	Samhain Cake, Cambridgeshire, England, 1987	90

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

5.5	2,000-year-old Celtic images kept at Newhouse Farm, Stretton Grandison, Herefordshire, England	94
6.1	Sheela-na-gig and beastie on mid-twelfth-century church at	
	Kilpeck, Herefordshire, England	99
6.2	Chalk graffito of labyrinth and 'Celtic Rose' pattern (c.1600) in	
	the abandoned medieval stone mines at Chaldon, Surrey, England	101
6.3	May Garland, Northampton, England, 1826	103
6.4	Thirteenth-century graffito of a dancer wearing the Pagan	200
	'Celtic Rose' pattern, in the church at Sutton, Bedfordshire,	
	England	106
6.5	Scouring the White Horse hill-figure at Uffington, Berkshire,	
	England, 1889	108
6.6	Eighteenth-century milkmaid's dance with silver plate, London	110
7.1	Maypole at Winterbach, near Esslingen, Baden-Württemberg,	
	Germany, May 1992	113
7.2	Early runestone with horseman, dog and wend-runes, Moybro	_
	Stenen, Uppland, Sweden	115
7.3	Romano-Frisian altar-shrine of the goddess Nehalennia from	
	her shrine on the sacred island of Walcharen, the Netherlands	117
7.4	Plan of the royal Vé (sacred enclosure) at Jellinge, Denmark,	
	in Pagan and Christian forms	120
7.5	Northern tradition eightfold time-space wheel from Rímbegla	
	by Stephán Björnssen, Copenhagen, 1780	123
7.6	Eighteenth-century Yule pastry mould from Frisia, showing the	
	spinning, horned goddess	125
7.7	Wildberg image, possibly of a priest in ceremonial dress	128
7.8	Images on the Gallehus Horn	129
7.9	Viking-age hogsback tombstone from Brampton, Yorkshire,	
	England, with bear-cult and house of the dead imagery	132
7.10	The temple at Uppsala, Sweden, sixteenth-century engraving	
	by Olaus Magnus	137
8.1	Reconstruction of a seventh-century horse sacrifice at Lejre,	
	Denmark	139
8.2	Foundation-offering of a cat and rat, found in 1811 and	
	preserved in W. Eaden Lilley's department store, Cambridge	142
8.3	The Norse Pagan trinity of Frigg, Thor and Odin, sixteenth-	
	century engraving by Olaus Magnus	143
8.4	Twelfth-century mural of the goddess Frigga riding a distaff,	
	in the cathedral at Schleswig, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany	145
8.5	Shepherd saluting the setting moon, from a German	
	shepherds' calendar of 1560	149
8.6	The Weird Sisters, from the story of Macbeth in Holinshed's	
	Chronicles, 1577	151

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

8.7 8.8	Sixth-century helmet panels from Torslinda, Öland, Sweden The Saxon lunar god, from R. Verstigan, <i>A Restitution of</i>	155
	Decayed Intelligence, Antwerp, 1605	157
8.9	Horn Dancers at Abbots Bromley, Staffordshire, England, 1897	158
8.10	, , , e	
	1939	159
8.11	Twelfth-century carving of Woden, his ravens Hugin and	
	Munin, and swastikas, symbol of Thunor, in the church at	
	Great Canfield, Essex, England	161
8.12		163
9.1	Wooden images of Baltic divinities, late medieval	167
9.2	Shoemakers' Guild labyrinth dancing-place at Stolp, Pomerania	
	(Słupsk, Poland), from the <i>Pommeranische Archive</i> III, 1784	169
9.3	The Lithuanian deities Perkūnas and Perkūnatele	
	(Zemyna), as envisioned in the sixteenth century	172
9.4	German greeting card, c.1925, showing the Pagan sun-tree	175
9.5	Lithuanian Pagan worship, showing fire altar and sacred snake	
	(Zaltys), sixteenth-century engraving by Olaus Magnus	178
9.6	Lappish altar with images of Thor, offerings of reindeer skulls	
	and vegetation, from Johannes Schefferus, 1671	179
9.7	Lappish shamans in trance, from Johannes Schefferus, 1673	182
9.8	The Norse god Ulli (Ullr), deity of winter hunting,	
	seventeenth-century Swedish print	183
10.1	Guising animal heads (Perchtenmasken) for midwinter	
	ceremonies, eighteenth century, Salzburg, Austria	188
	Medieval dancers in animal guise	197
11.2	The divine harmony, from Luc Gafurius' Practica musice,	
	1496, showing Pagan divinities and cosmology in Renaissance	
	context	199
	Poseidon-fountain, Heidelberg, Germany	202
11.4	The Great God Pan, from Athanasius Kircher	203
	The goddess Luna	208
11.6	Woden depicted on a stained-glass window at Cardiff Castle,	
	Wales, mid-nineteenth century	213
11.7	The Walhalla at Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany	215
11.8	Hermes, patron of trade. Stone carving and shrine by Hildo	
	Krop, on the Wendingen-style Schipvaarthuis, Amsterdam,	
	1911	217



PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been in the making for twenty years, since one of the authors lived in Canada, a European culture made intangibly different by the absence of encrusted layers of European history. Part of the reason for this intangible difference is made clear in the present volume. The European Pagan heritage is one that is generally overlooked, but here we bring it to light.

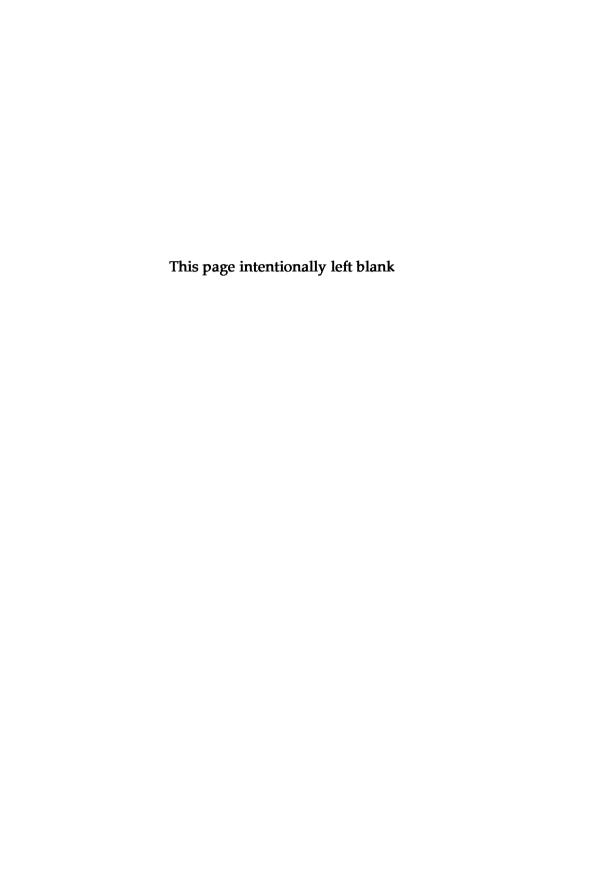
Over the years many people have helped with ideas and research. For the present volume, two people in particular have given of their time and expertise and our manuscript would be much the poorer without them. One is Mr Phil Line, who kindly offered his considerable knowledge of Finnic and Baltic religion in reading our chapters 9 and 10. The other, and principal helper, is Dr Ronald Hutton, who valiantly read through the whole manuscript, making many observations on matters of fact, restraining any impulse to comment on points of interpretation, but keeping us up to date with current scholarship on the subject. Any errors that remain are ours and not theirs.

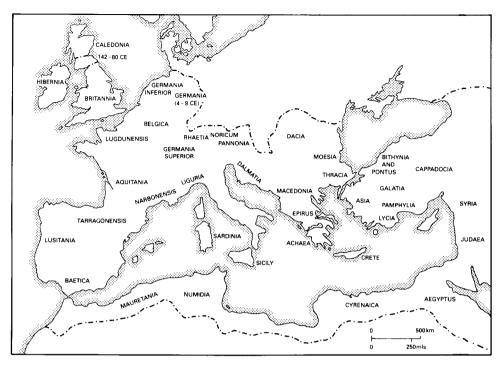
We are acutely aware that worthwhile research is impossible without easy access to literary sources and commentaries. The open bookstacks of the Cambridge University Library are a blessing to the serious investigator, and its friendly and helpful staff turn research into a pleasure.

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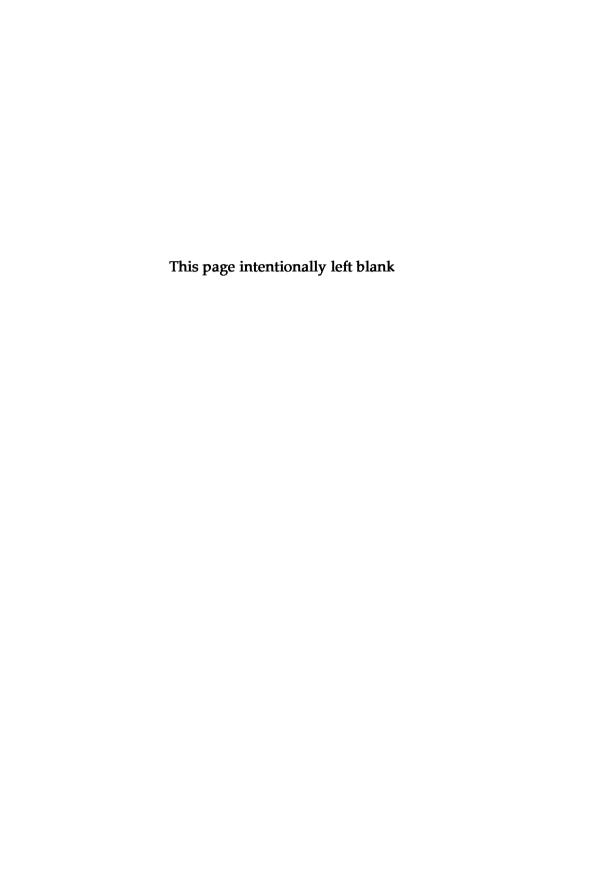
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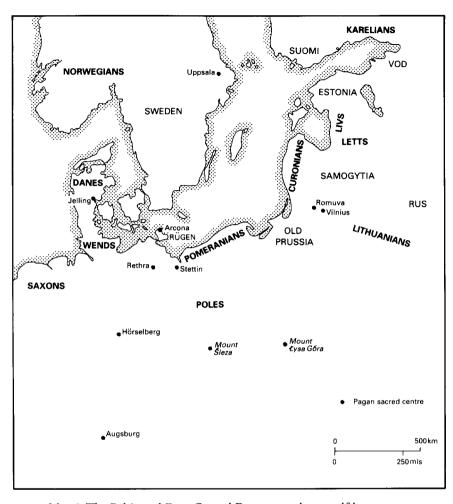
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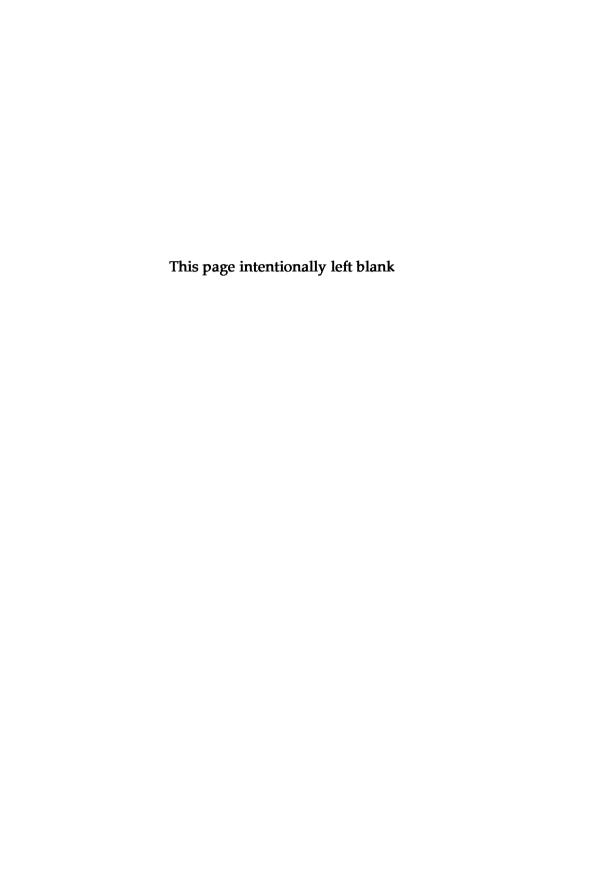


Map 1 The Roman Empire at its maximum extent (dates in brackets denote short-term occupations).





 ${\it Map~2}$ The Baltic and East–Central Europe, tenth to twelfth century.



In this book we describe the hidden history of Europe, the persistence of its native religion in various forms from ancient times right up to the present day. Most people today are more familiar with native traditions from outside Europe than with their own spiritual heritage. The Native American tradition, the tribal religions of Africa, the sophistication of Hindu belief and practice and the more recently revived Japanese tradition, Shinto, are widely acknowledged as the authentic native animistic traditions of their respective areas. In marked contrast, the European native tradition, from the massive civilisations of Greece and Rome to the barely documented tribal systems of the Picts, the Finns and others on the northern margins of the continent, has been seen as having been obliterated totally. This tradition is presented as having been superseded first by Christianity and Islam and, more recently, by post-Christian humanism. In this book we argue that, on the contrary, it has continued to exist and even to flourish more or less openly up to the present day, when it is undergoing a new restoration.

But first to define our terms. The word 'pagan' (small 'p') is often used pejoratively to mean simply 'uncivilised', or even 'un-Christian' (the two generally being assumed to be identical), in the same way that 'heathen' is used. Its literal meaning is 'rural', 'from the countryside (pagus)'. As a religious designation it was used first by early Christians in the Roman Empire to describe followers of the other (non-Jewish) religions, not, as was once thought, because it was mainly country bumpkins rather than sophisticated urban freethinkers who followed the Old Ways, but because Roman soldiers of the time used the word paganus, contemptuously, for civilians or noncombatants. The early Christians, thinking of themselves as 'soldiers of Christ', looked down on those who did not follow their religion as mere stayat-homes, pagani. This usage does not seem to have lasted long outside the Christian community. By the fourth century, 'Pagan' had returned closer to its root meaning and was being used non-polemically to describe anyone who worshipped the spirit of a given locality or pagus.¹

The name stuck long after its origin had been forgotten, and developed a new overlay of usage, referring to the great Classical civilisations of Greece

and Rome, Persia, Carthage, etc. Early Christian writers composed diatribes 'against the Pagans', by which they meant philosophers and theologians such as Plato, Porphyry, Plutarch, Celsus and other predecessors or contemporaries. Much later, when Classical literature resurfaced in the European Renaissance, the literati of the time composed essays on Pagan philosophy, and by the nineteenth century the use of the word as a near-synonym for 'Classical' had become established. At the beginning of the twentieth century, D.H. Lawrence's literary group 'The Pagans' drew its inspiration from Greece and what he later called its 'big, old Pagan vision, before the *idea* and the concept of personality made everything so small and tight as it is now'.²

Lawrence's terminology has overtones of more recent contemporary usage, where 'Pagan' is employed once more in its root meaning to describe a Nature-venerating religion which endeavours to set human life in harmony with the great cycles embodied in the rhythms of the seasons. In what follows we adhere broadly to this convention, using the word 'Paganism' (capital 'P') to refer to Nature-venerating indigenous spiritual traditions generally, and in particular to that of Europe, which has been specifically reaffirmed by its contemporary adherents under that name. Pagan religions, in this sense, have the following characteristics in common:

- They are polytheistic, recognising a plurality of divine beings, which may or may not be avatars or other aspects of an underlying unity/duality/ trinity etc.
- They view Nature as a theophany, a manifestation of divinity, not as a 'fallen' creation of the latter.
- They recognise the female divine principle, called the Goddess (with a capital 'G', to distinguish her from the many particular goddesses), as well as, or instead of, the male divine principle, the God. (Throughout this book we use the word 'god' exclusively to refer to male divinities, not to the divine source or godhead itself.)

In this sense all native animistic religions worldwide are Pagan, fulfilling all three characteristics. A religion such as Hinduism is Pagan, but Judaism, Islam and Christianity are obviously not, since they all deny the Goddess as well as one or both of the other characteristics. Buddhism, which grew out of the native Hindu tradition, is a highly abstract belief system, dealing with that which is beyond time and manifestation rather than with the interventions of deities in the world. In its pure form it retains little in common with its Pagan parent. All three characteristics listed above are, however, shared by modern Paganism in its various forms with the ancient religions of the peoples of Europe, as this book will show.

In recent years many people of European origin have been drawing on the ancient indigenous tradition as the basis of a new religion for the twenty-first century. This new religion, called neo-Paganism or simply Paganism, is most broadly a form of Nature-mysticism. It is a belief which views the Earth

and all material things as a theophany, an outpouring of the divine presence, which itself is usually personified in the figure of the Great Goddess and her consort, the God or masculine principle of Nature. Between them, these two principles are thought to encompass all existence and all development. In some ways this is a new religion for the New Age. Modern thought is represented in these two basic divinities whose influence is complementary rather than hierarchical or antagonistic. Present-day Pagans tend to see all gods and goddesses as being personifications of these two, in contrast to the situation in antiquity, when the many gods and goddesses of the time were usually thought of as truly independent entities. In its most widely publicised form, neo-Paganism is a theology of polarity, rather than the polytheism of ancient European culture.

But modern Paganism is also an outgrowth from the old European tradition. It has reclaimed the latter's sacred sites, festivals and deities from obscurity and reinterpreted them in a form which is intended to be a living continuation of their original function. Followers of specific paths within it such as Druidry, Wicca and Ásatrú aim to live a contemporary form of those older religions which are described or hinted at in ancient writings, as in Iceland, where Ásatrú is a legally established religion, drawing its guidelines directly from the Old Norse sagas and shaping their outlook into a form which is continuous with the past but appropriate for the twentieth century. At the opposite extreme, many neo-Pagans, in Anglo-Saxon countries in particular, follow no structured path but adhere to a generally Nature-venerating, polytheistic, Goddess-centred outlook which is of a piece with the general religious attitude chronicled here.

Why has Paganism arisen again in modern Europe and America? We deal with the historical process in the final chapter, but the underlying impetus seems to have been first, the search for a religion which venerated the Goddess and so gave women as well as men the dignity of beings who bear the 'lineaments of divinity'. This has been thought necessary by women whose political emancipation has not been paralleled by an equivalent development in their religious status. (Even in Pagan, polytheistic Hinduism the cult of Kali, the Great Mother, is one of the most rapidly growing popular religions at the present time.³) Secondly, in Europe and America a greater respect for the Earth has come into prominence. The ecological 'green' movement has gone hand in hand with a willingness to pay attention to the intrinsic pattern of the physical world, its rhythm and its 'spirit of place'. This has led to a renewed recognition of the value of understanding traditional skills and beliefs and their underlying philosophy, which is generally Pagan. And finally, the influence of Pagan philosophies from the Orient has gone hand in hand with this development, providing a sophisticated rationale for practices which might in former times have been dismissed as superstitious and unfounded. The Pagan resurgence thus seems to be part of a general process of putting humanity, long seen by both the monotheistic

religions and by secular materialism in abstraction from its surroundings, back into a more general context. This context is both physical, by reference to the material world understood as an essential part of life, and chronological, as shown in the search for modern continuity with ancient philosophies. The ancient religions are often not well known outside their areas of academic specialisation, and the evidence for their continuation is often misunderstood or misrepresented as 'accident' or 'superstition'. It is the evidence for such continuity which this book investigates.

The area of our study covers the whole of Europe, beginning with Greece and the eastern Mediterranean, home of the earliest written records; continuing west by way of Rome and its Empire; then through the so-called 'Celtic fringe' of France, Britain and parts of the Low Countries; then to what are now Germany and Scandinavia; and finally to eastern and central Europe, the Baltic states and Russia, which (apart from Russia and the South Slav states) emerged most recently into historical record. Europe in this sense is a geographical entity divided roughly into north and south by the Alps, and into east and west by the Prague meridian. After the Holy Roman Empire in the west and the Byzantine Empire in the east defined Christendom between them, Europe became a cultural unity, and its native religious tradition disappeared area by area into relative obscurity. This vital, yet half-hidden, European tradition is what we put on record here.

The centuries covered run from the dawn of recorded history to the present day: different timescales in different areas. The process of interpreting Stone-age remains is too extensive and currently too embattled to be capable of fair handling in the context of this book. It is enough to describe what people believed and what they did, at what times and in what places. In this lies a fascinating story, and we shall begin with the earliest records.

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(We have not given details of ancient texts, which are available in many editions, or of some of the articles in journals which are mentioned only once per chapter, especially in chapters 5–10. Details of these appear in the notes to the relevant chapter.)

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