

Jon Kaneko-James



MAY 8, 2015 · 9:34 PM

The Shepherd Witches of Normandy



In his book *Grimoires, A History of Magical Books*, Owen Davies writes of how Thomas Tryon, the English mystic, learned to read while working as a Shepherd. In Tryon's writings, he leaves the passage, '[The] Shepherd and Husbandman understand something of Nature, putting out their own Eyes, and boasting what Wonders they can see with other Mens.' Likewise, Davies records that John Cannon, while a child, met a shepherd who introduced him to the magical arts contained in a copy of Agrippa's *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*.

A Brief Note

I must admit, I've partially only included an introductory paragraph from Davies' superb work to show that I made every attempt to write from as many sources as possible. I usually try to use four or more sources for these blog posts, but as I researched for this particular entry, I found that every source tracks back to William Monter's *Toads and Eucharists: The Male Witches of Normandy, 1564-1660*. If there is another work that has eluded me, I apologise, and I do hope that someone makes me aware of it.

Since I really want to write about the shepherd witches of Normandy, I've followed suit with Robin Briggs, Owen Davies and Brian Levack in publishing a précis of Monter's original work.



Male Witches in Normandy

While the evidence does hold out that in general (with the exception of Iceland and certain Scandinavian and Eastern European countries), in 1565 over half of the defendants tried at the Parliament of Paris, and three quarters of those tried at the Parliament of Rouen, were men.

The Parliament of Rouen was particularly severe in terms of its sentencing: a survey showed that Rouen dispensed a larger number of death sentences for sorcery than any of its neighbours. Witch trials were unusually regular, judging that at least one death sentence for witchcraft was passed every year from 1582 to 1619, and lasted longer than in neighbouring regions. In Iceland cultural traditions biased witchcraft away from women, but as Monter wrote, Normandy lies at the centre of Northwestern Europe.

Although Normandy had a centralised court, the Duchy maintained several legal convention of *clamour de haro* and an annual contest where a criminal could be pardoned, but it is not proven that any witch was ever pardoned at said festival.

Yet... Norman witchcraft was overwhelmingly male. In 1540, Monter writes that two young shepherds from Gisors were executed for sacrilege after stealing hosts from the mass for a sorcerer who was never found. In 1542, Laurens de Limoges was sentenced to be hanged for sorcery and his body burned, but successfully appealed and was instead banished. In 1577, two shepherds were tried (again, in Gisors) for being 'accustomed to bewitching, causing deaths of people and animals for twenty years'. According to Monter, both had been tortured for sorcery after appealing the decision of the Rouen parliament. After 1625, Monter writes, Norman witchcraft was a male monopoly.

The Shepherd Witches



In May 1603, a twenty year old shepherd appealed a conviction for witchcraft in Rouen, after already being banished from the district of Moulins because of sorcery. This time he was hanged and burned for 'execrable blasphemies of the name of God'. Interestingly, although five of his twenty five witnesses were priests, the parliament reduced his sentence to a public apology followed by life in the galleys.

A second shepherd that year was fifty years old, and had been previously condemned for sorcery. Another man accused him of making 'a pact with the enemy of the human race', and it would seem that he did know some degree of folk magic: despite denying spells to set wolves on a stranger's flock, he admitted knowing how to protect his own flock by the use of a special prayer. In this case, the man was examined by parliamentary surgeons, and was found to have no feeling in a patch on his left side during his second day of examination.

A final examination, for this article, proves that there might have been some fire behind the smoke of witchcraft. In June 1603 two men were arrested at a rowdy wedding in Sainte-Croix-des-Pelletiers. According to trial documents, the shepherd Guillaume Beuse had performed an impotence spell known as 'the ligature' during his sister's marriage, while a pharmacist named Etienne Moreau pretended to undo it with a different ritual. According to authorities, Moreau had been arrested 'in possession of a bad book containing many recipes and magical signs', including a piece of paper scrawled with odd symbols, and 'four pieces of virgin parchment containing invocations of evil spirits', which led to Beuse's banishment from Rouen, and Moreau's sorcerous materials being burned.



CHAPTER XVI

GYPSIES, TOADS, AND TOAD-LORE

"I went to the toad that lies under the wall,
I charmed him out, and he came at my call."

Masque, of Queens," BEN JONSON.)



THE toad plays a prominent part in gypsy (as in other) witchcraft, which it may well do, since in most Romany dialects there is the same word for a toad or frog, and the devil. PASPATI declares that the toad suggested Satan, but I incline to think that there is some as yet undiscovered Aryan word, such

as *beng*, for the devil, and that the German *Bengel*, a rascal, is a descendant from it.¹ However, gypsies and toads are "near allied and that not wide" from one another, and sometimes their children have them for pets, which recalls the statements made in the celebrated witch trials in Sweden, where it was said by those who professed to have been at the Blockula, or *Sabbat*, that the little witch [p. 256] children were set to play at being shepherds, their flocks being of toads.

I have been informed by gypsies that toads do really form unaccountable predilections for persons and places. The following is accurately related as it was told me in Romany fourteen years ago, in Epping Forest, by a girl. "You know, sir, that people who live out of doors all the time, as we do, see and know a great deal about such creatures. One day we went to a farmhouse, and found the wife almost dying because she thought she was bewitched by a woman who came every day in the form of a great toad to her door and looked in. And, sure enough, while she was talking the toad came, and the woman was taken in such a way with fright that I thought she'd have died. But I had a laugh to myself; for I knew that toads have such ways, and can not only be tamed, but will almost tame themselves. So we gypsies talked together in Romany, and then said we could remove the spell if she would get us a pair of shears and a cup of salt. Then we caught the toad, and tied the shears so as to make a cross—you see!—and with it threw the toad into the fire, and poured the salt on it. So the witchcraft was ended, and the lady gave us a good meal and ten shillings." (For a Romany poem on this incident *vide* "English Gypsy Songs," Trübner and Co., 1875). And there is a terrible tale told by R. H. Stoddard, in a poem, that one day a gentleman accidentally trod on a toad and killed it. Hearing a scream at that instant in the woods at a little distance, followed by an outcry, he went to see what was the matter, and found a gypsy camp where they were lamenting the sudden death of a child. On looking at the corpse he was horrified to observe that it presented every appearance of having been trampled to death, its wounds being the same as those he had inflicted on the toad. This story being told by me to the gypsy girl, she in no wise doubted its truth, being in fact greatly horrified at it; but was amazed at the child *chovihani*, or witch, being in two places at once.

In the Spanish Association of Witches in the year 1610 (*vide* Lorent, "Histoire de l'Inquisition") the toad played a great part. One who had [p. 257] taken his degrees in this Order testified that, on admission, a mark like a toad was stamped on his eyelid, and that a real toad was given to him which had the power to make its master invisible, to transport him to distant places, and change him to the form of many kinds of animals. There is a German interjection or curse "*Kroten-düvel!*" or "toad-devil," which is supposed to have originated as follows: When the Emperor Charlemagne came into the country of the East Saxons and asked them whom they worshipped they replied,

¹ Dit is onzin. Bengel betekende oorspronkelijk 'knuppel', van 'bangen' = slaan, kloppen (De Vries 1971, 44f).

"Krodo is our god;" to which the Emperor replied "Krodo is all the same as Kroten-düvel!"² "And he made them pay bitterly by the sword and the rope for the crime of calling God, according to their language, by a name different from that which he used; for he put many thousands of them to death, like King Olof of Norway, to show that his faith was one of meekness and mercy."

It is bad to have one's looks against one. The personal appearance of the toad is such as to have given it a bad place in the mythology of all races. The Algonkin Indians—who, like Napoleon and Slawkenbergius, were great admirers of men with fine bold noses—after having studied the plane physiognomy of the toad, decided that it indicated all the vices, and made of the creature the mother of all the witches. Nothing could have been more condemnatory; since in their religion—as in that of the Accadians, Laps, and Eskimo—a dark and horrible sorcery, in which witches conciliated evil spirits, was believed to have preceded their own nobler Shamanism, by which these enemies of mankind were forced or conquered by magic. Once the Great Toad had, as she thought, succeeded in organizing a conspiracy by which Glooskap, the Shamanic god of Nature, was to be destroyed. Then he passed his hand over her face and that of her fellow-conspirator the Porcupine; and from that time forth their noses were flat, to the great scorn of all honest well-beaked Indians.

The old Persians made the toad the symbol and pet of Ahriman, the foe of light, and declared that his *Charfester*, or attendant demons, took that form when they persecuted Ormuzd. Among the Tyrolese it is a type of envy; whence the proverb, "Envious as a toad." In the Middle [p. 258] Ages, among artists and in many Church legends, it appears as Greed or Avarice: there is even to this day, in some mysterious place on the right bank of the Rhine between Laufenberg and Binzgau, a pile of coals on which sits a toad. That is to say, coals they seem to the world. But the pile is all pure gold, and the toad is a devil who guards it; and he who knows how can pronounce a spell which shall ban the grim guardian. And there is a story told by Menzel ("Christliche Symbolik," vol. i. p. 530), that long ago there lived in Cologne a wicked miser, who when old repented and wished to leave his money to the poor. But when he opened his great iron chest, he found that every coin in it had turned to a horrible toad with sharp teeth. This story being told to his confessor, the priest saw in it divine retribution, and told him that God would have none of his money—nay, that it would go hard with him to save his soul. And he, being willing to do anything to be free of sin, was locked up

² De Saksenkroniek van Bothe meldt voor het jaar 780: op de Hartesburg heeft Karel de Grote een afgod, lijkend op Saturnus, door het gewone volk echter Krodo genaamd, bij de overwinning van de Oostsaksen neergeworpen. Zou deze gebeurtenis werkelijk zijn voorgevallen, dan hadden deze toch waarschijnlijk de toentertijd levende kroniekschrijvers, zoals de omverwerping van de Irminzuil, herdacht. Er is echter een beeld van deze Krodo overgeleverd, dat hem als man voorstelt, die op een grote vis staat en in de rechterhand een vaas met bloemen, in de linker een omhooggericht rad houdt. Waaruit de gelijkenis met Saturnus zou bestaan is niet duidelijk. (Vollmer, 302a)

in the chest with the toads; and lo! the next day when it was opened the creatures had eaten him up. Only his clean-picked bones remained.

But in the Tyrol it is believed that the toads are themselves poor sinners, undergoing penance as Hoetschen or Hoppinen—as they are locally called—for deeds done in human form. Therefore, they are regarded with pity and sympathy by all good Christians. And it is well known that in the Church of Saint Michael in Schwatz, on the evening before the great festivals, but when no one is present, an immense toad comes crawling before the altar, where it kneels and prays, weeping bitterly. The general belief is that toads are for the most part people who made vows to go on pilgrimages, and died with the vows unfulfilled. So the poor creatures go hopping about astray, bewildered and perplexed, striving to find their way to shrines which have perchance long since ceased to exist. Once there was a toad who took seven years to go from Leifers to Weissenstein; and when the creature reached the church it suddenly changed to a resplendent white dove, which, flying up to heaven, vanished before the eyes of a large company there assembled, who bore witness to the miracle.³ And one day as a wagoner was going from Innsbruck to Seefeld, as he [p. 259] paused by the wayside a toad came hopping up and seemed to be desirous of getting into the wagon; which he, being a benevolent man, helped it to do, and gave it a place on the seat beside him. There it sat like any other respectable passenger, until they came to the side-path which leads to the church of Seefeld; when, wonderful to relate! the toad suddenly turned to a maiden of angelic beauty clad in white, who, thanking the wagoner for his kindness to her when she was but a poor reptile, told him that she had once been a young lady who had vowed a pilgrimage to the church of Seefeld.

In common with the frog, the toad is an emblem of productiveness, and ranks among creatures which are types of erotic passion. I have in my possession a necklace of rudely made silver toads, of Arab workmanship, intended to be worn by women who wish to become mothers. Therefore the creature, in the Old World as well as in the New, appears as a being earnestly seeking the companionship of men. Thus it happened to a youth of Aramsach, near Kattenberg, that, being one day in a lonely place by a lake, there looked up at him from the water a being somewhat like a maid but more like a hideous toad, with whom he entered into conversation; which became at last friendly and agreeable, for the strange creature talked exceeding well. Then she, thinking he might be hungry, asked him if he would fain have anything in particular to eat. He mentioned in jest a kind of cakes; whereupon, diving into the lake, she brought some up, which he ate. So he met her many times; and whenever he wished for anything, no matter what, she got it for him from the waters: the end of it all being that, despite her appalling ugliness, the youth fell in love with her and offered marriage, to which she joyfully consented. But no sooner had the ceremony been

³ Het is duidelijk dat niemand kan weten van de 7-jarige reis, die de pad heeft gemaakt. Het verhaal is op het volgende verhaal gebaseerd, waarin de betoverd geweest zijnde vrouw vertelt van haar pelgrimage.

performed than she changed to a lady of wonderful beauty; and, taking him by the hand, she conducted him to the lake, into which she led him, and "in this life they were seen never more." This legend evidently belongs to frog-lore. According to one version, the toad after marriage goes to a lake, washes away her ugliness, and returns as a beauty with the bridegroom to his castle, where they live in perfect happiness. [p. 260]

I have also a very old silver ring, in which there is set a toad rudely yet artistically carved in hæmatite, or blood-stone. These were famous amulets until within two or three hundred years.

If you are a gypsy and have a tame toad it is a great assistance in telling fortunes, and brings luck—that commodity which, as CALLOT observed, the gypsies are always selling to everybody while they protest they themselves have none. As I tested with the last old gypsy woman whom I met: "*What bâk the divvus?*"—"What luck to-day?" "*Kekker rya*"—"None, sir," was the reply, as usual,—"I never have any luck." So like a mirror they reflect all things save themselves, and show you what they know not.

"I've seen you where you never were
And where you never will be
And yet within that very place
You can be seen by me.
For to tell what they do not know
Is the art of the Romany."



Toads and Frogs: Religious Fables, Folklore, Legends, and Stories

From all-creatures.org
Articles Archive

Religious Fables, Folklore, Legends, and Stories

Toads and Frogs

From Ulo Valk, The black gentleman: manifestations of the Devil in Estonian folk religion. Folklore Fellows Communications, vol. 127, no. 276. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2001.

Submitted by By Yuri Klitsenko, Russia

[Ed. Note: The devil (Satan) is indeed very clever to have fooled so many people, including Christian church leaders, into believing that any of God's created earthly beings are demonic and deserving of torture and death! Even the serpent (snake) in Eden was an ordinary snake who listened to the devil. If we follow this demonic line of thinking, then all humans and animals should be "stomped on" because we have all listened to the devil at one time or another. We know that the Lord does not desire any living being to die, for we are told in Romans 8:18-25 that the whole of creation is groaning in anticipation of the coming of the children of God to free it from all corruption. In this and other writings, Yuri Klitsenko exposes many of these tricks of the devil designed to lead believers astray. We should not believe these superstitions about "demonic" animals.]

It is a common guise of the Devil which occurs already in the Revelation: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." (Rev. 16:13-14.)

In the Middle Ages the toad was a witch's animal, i.e. a demonic helper of a witch. In 1580 a witch was burned in Steiermark, Germany and the watchful executioner noticed an extraordinarily large toad rushing straight towards the water. Needless to say, it was the escaping demon. (Petzoldt 1990: 116.) G. L. Kittredge describes the beliefs about toads in medieval England: "The Devil, who squat like a toad at the ear of Mother Eve in Eden, is always at hand in the churchyard after service, waiting in that guise for some evil-minded communicant to feed him

with a bit of the consecrated wafer: whoever thus sacrifices to Satan will straightway become a witch or wizard. The relation of witches to toads (or frogs) is notorious; and, like everything else in this department of superstition, it is founded on fact. Toads are not uncommon in earth-floored huts, and doubtless they were sometimes petted by solitary old women who, esteemed as witches, regarded themselves as such and thought the creatures were really imps or demons. Anyhow, toad-familiars are as commonplace as cats." (Kittredge 1929:181-182.)

The toad as well as the snake (serpent) occur among the manifestations of the Devil in the exempla of medieval sermons (IE 1557, 1562, 1563, 2738, 4882). Both creatures have a somewhat devilish status also in Estonian folk religion, which is reflected in the widespread belief that killing those animals is a pious act for which a certain number of sins will be forgiven:

He who kills a viper will be forgiven the sins of one day, but he who kills a toad will be forgiven the sins of nine days. HII 20, 716 (10) < Vändra - H. Mett (1889).

If you kill a toad, you will be forgiven nine sins. The toad is the animal of the Evil Spirit (kurivaim). ERA II188,191 (43) < Lääne-Nigula < Martna - E. Ennist (1938).

Yet the frog (or toad) and the snake occur very seldom among the manifestations of the Devil in Estonian popular religion: both cases were found only on three occasions. This serves as another example of the adoption of folkloristic influences as if through a filter which has kept out some potential loans or prevented their survival in the local belief system. It is difficult to explain this phenomenon, but one of the reasons could be that the foreign ideas did not fit in the local tradition and stood out as incredible and artificial. This is why the images that are very influential elsewhere will not be adopted into the local culture; even if the people are aware of them, they will not be universally accepted. Mall Hiimäe has pointed out that the traditional Estonian attitude to wildlife, including reptiles and amphibians, reflects the ecological mentality of the people (1987: 851-852). It also reflects the pre-Christian layer of the tradition where snakes and frogs/toads as the embodiments of the souls of the dead had a special status. This may be why the Devil did not take on the shape of a toad or a snake in Estonian folklore (for the grass snake as a domestic snake see Loorits 1990: 39-40). All this has nevertheless not prevented Estonians from performing the Christian act of piety of killing a viper or a toad.

There is a tale, the style and content of which reveals literary elaboration, recorded in Saaremaa where the Devil takes the form of a small toad and hides himself in a woman's apron from a thunderstorm (H14, 392 (3) < Sa - C. Alias (1893)). In one of the legends of the type "The Devil among the dancers," the Old Bad Boy (vanapagan) appears in the form of a strange youth who is pushed against the wall by a strong boy. All that is left is a toad whom the innkeeper burns on the advice from a wise man. In the end the strong boy is found hanged, the inn burns down and the innkeeper commits suicide (E 10825/28 < Amb -J. Ekemann (1894)). The abundance of episodes and the exceptional motifs in the story give an impression of partial fabulation.

The following belief account is also rare but there is no reason to doubt its traditionality:

There used to be many witches in Tuhala, and even now they think that some people can bewitch other people's animals. One cottager in Tuhala had the Old Hairy (vana sarvik) living in a box in the shape of a frog. H II 37, 564 (1a) < Kose - T. Wiedemann (1892).

The idea that demons of a lower rank who help the witch live in the latter's house in the form of an animal, especially as a toad or an insect and often in a box, was widespread in Europe. This

belief was certainly based on real life: toads may have been kept by healers or fortunetellers as demonic pets. Reginald Scot (1538-1599), one of the first opponents of the witch trials, derided the idea that the devils may be "made tame, and kept in a box" to do service to their mistress (Kittredge 1929: 180). The French lawyer and demonologist John Bodin (1530-1596) laid down the principle that to keep toads in pots, though a suspicious circumstance, is not a sufficient grounds for condemnation to death (*Daemonomania...* 1580; see Kittredge 1929: 182).

Many farms in Estonia had special, so-called Tönn's bushels for offering. There are belief accounts saying that those were sometimes inhabited by animals, domestic snakes, but probably also by the toads:

There was an animal, too, in the Tönn's bushel (Tönnivakk). In Lelle and Kärü the Tönnivakk was given to the son or daughter as a present at their wedding. Tonn is a treasure-hauler who brings his master riches. ERA II19, 536 (4) < Juuru < Rapla - R. Pöldmäe (1929).

An interesting case has been described by J. B. Holzmayer, which confirms that the above Estonian belief account recorded by T. Wiedemann is authentic:

The toad

There was a man who wandered around a lot in Saaremaa and he told me that once on New Year's Eve he had stayed overnight in Upso farm in Sörve. At midnight stepped in Upso Hendrik (the master of the farm, a famous wizard) and thinking that the guest was asleep, spread a rug on the floor. Then he took his box, put it in the middle of the rug, opened it and let out a toad to whom he said the following words:

Üppa Jummal, Karga Jumal,
Ue astä öñne peale!

Jump, god, spring, god,
For the good luck in the new year!

Then the toad jumped on all four corners of the rug and then back into the box. Hendrik closed the box and took the toad away. Holzmayer 1872: 37 < Kuressaare.

Yuri Klitsenko is a Russian living in Moscow. He works for the Russian Orthodox Church.

Witchcraft spells with toads

Amira 4:36 PM [White Magic](#)

The witchcraft and spells with toads occupy a prominent place in the magical folklore of many societies. These amphibious creatures are known to have a variety of magical properties, since its ability to help predict the weather, to the healing of warts, and the attraction of good luck. Let's take a look at some of the most popular superstitions, omens and love with toads and frogs that have come down to us.

Witchcraft with toads

In some parts of the Appalachian Mountains, it is believed that if you hear a croaking frog exactly at midnight, it means that rain is on its way. However, in some societies, it is just the opposite - frogs croaking the day indicate upcoming storms.

There is an old British legend that says that carry a frog dissected in a bag around the neck will prevent attacks of epilepsy.



Live toads also appear in a number of folk remedies. It is believed that putting a toad live in the mouth cure candidiasis, and to swallow - preferably small - live toads can cure a whooping cough and tuberculosis. Rub a live Toad in a wart cure, but only if it sticks to the Toad in a tree and let it die.

Some cultures believe that Toad reaching the House attracts good luck - others say that it is bad luck - the Xhosa tribe says that a toad in your home could be making a curse or a spell. Either way, it is generally considered a bad idea to kill a toad. Maori believe that kill a toad can bring floods and torrential rains, but some African tribes say that the death of a toad will attract droughts.

For the ancient Egyptians, frog-headed goddess Hekt was a symbol of fertility and birth. The frog with fertility Association is rooted in science - every year, when the Nile River flooded its banks, the frogs appeared everywhere. The annual flooding of the delta meant rich soil crops, so the croaking of frogs millions well could have been an indicator that the farmers would have a season of abundance.

Toads have only been in Ireland for a few hundred years since students from Dublin released in nature. However, there are some folk tales about toads in Ireland, including those who can predict the weather according to the color of a frog.

In the Christian Bible, a plague of frogs is deployed over the land of Egypt. This was the way to show the dominance of the Christian God over the gods of ancient Egypt. In the book of Exodus, the following verses detailing how frogs are sent to scare the population of Egypt:

Then the Lord said to Moses: "go to Pharaoh and say to him: thus speaks the Lord." It frees my people to serve me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold I will smite all your country with frogs. The Nile will be filled with frogs that have up to your House, in your bedroom and on your bed and in the houses of your servants and your people, in your ovens and in your cupboards. The frogs rise on you, on your people and on all your servants."

As you can see, the toads and frogs have affected in various ways, for better or for worse, many peoples and cultures of antiquity. His power and his contact with the divinity is sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, but there's no denying that its power is real. Let's see now, one of the spells with toads which have reached our times since ancient times.

Love Spell with toads

From the old Britain, more than 400 years ago, comes this sorcery with toads, which according to its original author (who remains anonymous) this kind of magic served not only to find a lover but also to help find treasures and even prevent theft and punish thieves. According to the book, the best way to seduce a woman is:

"Take a frog and put it in a pot. Bury the pot into an anthill near a crossroads.

After nine days, two of the bones of the frog must be removed and placed in a stream or a river of flowing water.

One of them will float upstream. Make a ring, take the part that has swum against the tide and put it in the ring. When a woman put the ring on her right hand, she will not rest until you are with you".



Animals and Witchcraft (The Witches Familiar)

Frogs and Toads



Written and compiled by George Knowles

Commonly found on all continents except Antarctica, frogs and toads throughout the ages have attracted awe and revulsion from many cults and cultures. Many differing and contradictory beliefs have survived to the present day, and past associations with witchcraft, medicine, weather, birth, death and rebirth continue to stimulate many superstitions and fears.

Frogs and Toads are amphibian creatures of the order 'Anura', meaning 'without a tail'. There are some 24 different families of frogs and toads with more than 3,800 species. Frogs usually have squat bodies with smooth moist skin, bulging eyes that allow them to see in all directions, no tail, webbed feet for swimming and strong hind legs for jumping. There are no clear distinctions between frogs and toads, except that toads generally have dry warty skin and short hind legs more suitable for walking than for jumping. Both are commonly found in warm moist tropical regions, but they can also be found in mountains and deserts.

Most frogs are aquatic and will often sit in water with just their eyes and nose above the surface. The eyelids of a frog cannot move and to close its eyes, they must draw them back into their sockets. They also do this while swallowing food, since the in-drawn eyes add pressure to the roof of the mouth helping to move food down into the throat. Frogs have teeth in the upper jaw, but these are quite feeble and used only to grip it's prey rather than for chewing. The prey can be anything that fits into the frog's mouth such as: insects, spiders, snails, worms and small fish; bigger frogs may even eat mammals such as: mice, small birds and other frogs. Many frogs have

a long sticky tongue, which they use to capture their prey.

Not all frogs have a long tongue; those that don't, use their fingers to feed prey into their mouths. Frogs have 4 fingers on their front feet, and 5 toes on the back. A frog's long hind legs allows them to jump great distances, often more than 20 times their body length. To survive a frog must keep its skin moist, which is why they can usually be found close to water, and why they like to hide in moist places while on land. They also have glands that secrete mucus helping to keep their skin moist. While frogs have lungs, they also take in oxygen through the skin, which aids respiration when underwater. Most frogs regularly shed the upper layer of their skin (the epidermis), and the old skin is usually eaten.

Frogs start mating when the males of a species move to breeding ponds and begin croaking their mating calls to attract females. They do this using a vocal sac, which produces sounds unique to their own kind that the females can identify with. When they meet, the male climbs on the back of the female and puts his arms around her in a strong grip, a position called "amplexus". When the female lays her eggs, the male releases his sperm to fertilize them. The number of eggs laid can number from a few hundred to thousands. The time it takes the eggs to hatch varies between species, but usually takes between 6 and 21 days.

From the egg emerges a tadpole, a fish-like creature with a round body, a tail and gills. Tadpoles do little more than eat, feeding mostly on algae when still young, and later on plants, insects and dead animals. After about 6-9 weeks, the tail starts to disappear and is replaced with arms and legs. The hind legs appear first, then the arms. The tadpole then develops lungs and just before it becomes a real frog, the gills disappear. The whole process usually takes between 12-16 weeks, and when complete, the newly formed frog leaves the water. The life span of a frog depends on the species and can range anywhere between 2 and 40 years, but the average is more likely between 4 and 15 years.

Poison

The toad more than the frog is most commonly associated with poison. When a toad is molested it secretes or ejects poison that irritates the eyes and mucous membranes of many, but not all of its predators. The poisons of the Colorado River toad (*B. alvarius*) and the Giant toad (*B. marinus*, also called the cane toad) affect animals as large as dogs, and in some instances can cause temporary paralysis or even death. Dried toad poison has been used to treat various ailments in the past, and it is known that some species of toad poison can produce hallucinogenic effects in humans.

Contrary to popular belief, toads do not cause warts.

Myths and Folklore

For thousands of years, frogs and toads have been associated with myths, folklore and magic. Sadly many of these myths and tales portray them as demons, creatures associated with the devil. Some cultures however viewed them in a positive light, and saw them as representative of good fortune, protection, rain and fertility. In some cultures the frog symbolized resurrection and a higher stage of spiritual awakening. In the Rig Veda creation myths of the Hindus, the Great

Frog supports the universe and is representative of the matter from which all is created.

In ancient times clay used to make pottery was collected from the banks of natural rivers and lakes, sites that would have had an abundance of frogs and toads. The peoples of ancient Mesopotamia for example, collected clay from along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, where they undoubtedly encountered frogs and toads and later adopted them into their religious beliefs.

The Egyptians believed frogs to have been formed from mud and water, a belief that seems to have materialized as a result of rivers flooding during the rainy season, at which time frogs reproduced in such quantities that thousands of tiny frogs and toads invaded walkways and public areas; they even entered private homes and in general were regarded as pests. This phenomenon was dubbed “Frog Rain”, because such occurrences always happened after the first heavy rains of the season. As such frogs became associated with weather predictions because they would begin croaking just before rains.

In Egypt the frog was most commonly associated with the goddess Heket (or Heqet), the goddess of fertility and childbirth who assisted Isis in her ritual to resurrect Osiris. Heket is depicted as a frog-shaped goddess, whose priestesses trained as midwives. They wore amulets, jewellery and other ornaments that bore her image. Frog shaped knives placed on to the bellies of pregnant women and newborn babies were believed to protect their youngsters. Frogs in general were so important to the early Egyptians they were often embalmed after death.

In ancient China the toad was a trickster and a magician, a master of escapes and spells. But he was also the keeper of powerful secrets. One legend tells a story of a wandering wise old man called Liu Hai and his three-legged toad companion Ch'an Chu. Ch'an Chu knew the secret of eternal life, and due to his masters kindness he revealed the secret to the wise man. In Japan a similar legend involves the Gama-Sennin, also known as Kosensei, a wise old man with a hunched body and a warty face. Kosensei wanders the land with his toad companion, who teaches him the secret powers of herbs, including the secret of immortality.

Frogs and toads go through at least one major transformation during their lives, that from tadpole to adult. Many also shed their skins regularly as they grow, and some even eat their discarded skin. These transformations may explain why many cultures saw frogs and toads as symbolic of re-creation, or as keepers of the secrets of life after death. Members of the Olmec tribes of early Mesoamerica created images of a toad as the ‘God of rebirth’, reborn after consuming itself and thus caught up in the never-ending cycle of life and death.

As much as the frog was seen as a symbol of life and birth, it was also seen as a symbol of death. Some European myths tell that it was bad luck to kill a frog for they housed the souls of dead children. In the ancient Zoroastrian religion of the Middle East the frog was associated with Ahriman (the most evil of all beings). In Europe, it wasn't until the Middle Ages that the frog was given such an unfavourable reputation, and the frog went from being a sacred symbol of creation to a manifestation of evil. The frog (along with other animals) was quickly associated with Witches, and thought to be their devoted magical animal used to carry out all sorts of diabolical deeds.

In early Christianity, demonologists often referred to frogs as the ‘Witches Familiar’ or

'Agent of the Devil'. The fact that frogs resided in swamps and stagnant pools, often dirty and unsanitary places, was used to exemplify the power of consecrated holy water to expel evil spirits and purify sinners. Witches were thought to use frogs and toads in satanic rituals, and to concocted malicious sounding spells and potions from their body parts. Some believe that a witch could be identified by a mark shaped like a toad's foot secreted on her body or that the image of a toad would be visible in the left eye. Other myths tell of witches extracting toad secretions, or collecting toad saliva for use in flying potions and invisibility spells.

In the Witch trials at St. Osyth in England, Ursula Kempe's young son testified that one of her four familiars, a black toad named Pigin, had once caused illness in a young boy. Toads were also popular as poisonous ingredients in potions: "the women-witches of ancient time which killed by poysoning, did much use toads in their confections". Witches were also believed to control the weather by concocting brews from frogs, toads and snakes, often referred to as "Toad Soup". Undoubtedly, many experienced illness or death after ingesting or applying some sort of frog-made brew including their toxic secretions. Such folklore and popular mythology was the result of Inquisitional propaganda to eliminate the old Pagan religions and prosecute Witches with charges of heresy during the persecution years.

Frogs and toads since ancient times have been highly regarded for possessing medicinal properties. Pieces taken from a frog's body were used as aphrodisiacs to aid impotence and boost fertility. A frog's liver was believed to be an antidote to all poisons, while a toad's lungs provided the means to the "perfect murder of a wayward husband". In many Shaman traditions of the Americas, hallucinogenic compounds derived from toads are used in religious rituals for communion with the spirit world and for self-transcendence. In many cases, these myths have some foundation in truth, as some species contain compounds both poisonous and hallucinogenic. **One of the most widely told myths concerning the toad is that of the "Toad-Stone", a fabulously jeweled stone that grows inside the toad's head. This jeweled stone when placed in a ring or a necklace, would heat up or change colour in the presence of poison, thereby protecting the wearer from the dangers of poisoning, a common threat in the Middle Ages.**



It is warty, chubby, clumsy, adorable, and has a very long history of being associated with witches, the devil, and poison. The toad is a beloved symbol and familiar of the witches. I have long wanted a pet toad, just an ordinary little Western Toad (*Bufo boreas*), but have not wanted to tame one and keep it in a terrarium instead of its home in the wilds. I have instead been happy just to encounter them in nature whether saving one who was burying himself in the middle of a trail from being stepped on or catching a huge one by a river who was hiding under the large green leaves of false lily of the valley in spring.

“What d’ye lack? What d’ye lack? I can pound a toad in a mortar, and make a broth of it, and stir the broth with a dead man’s hand. Sprinkle it on thine enemy while he sleeps, and he will turn into a black viper, and his own mother will slay him.” ~ Oscar Wilde

“The toad is one of the shapes assumed by a demon when he sits upon a witch’s left shoulder. Thanks to the two tiny horns borne on his forehead, a toad was recognisable as a demon, and witches took infinite care of him. They baptized their toads, dressed them in black velvet, put little bells on their paws, and made them dance.” ~ Grillot de Givry

Once upon a time I heard a hint of a rumour that toads were used in flying ointments. Considering my reputation with flying ointments and my use of animal bits in magic, I of course found it necessary to research this curious idea and found not only documentation but modern scientific and experiential proof that the toxins contained within a toad’s skin and glands can indeed produce a psychoactive substance.

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

In the Arras witch trials from 1459-60 clerics charged the witches with feeding toads wafers stolen from holy communion and then using the toads to make a sacrilegious flying ointment.

In 1487 the evil *Malleus Maleficarum* (“Hammer of the Witches”) was published and listed toads as one of the ingredients of witches’ flying ointments.

In 1606 William Shakespeare includes a toad in his witches’ infernal brew in *Macbeth*: “Toad, that under cold stone days and nights host thirty-one swelter’d venom sleeping got, boil thou first i’ th’ charnel pot.”

In 1611 an elderly Basque woman named Maria de Illara confessed the devil appeared to her as a mysterious man and taught her to pound toads with water and use the results to make an ointment which she and other witches rubbed on their chests, stomachs, and arm pits in order to fly to their sabbats.

In 1615 French doctor Jean de Nynauld noted in his work *On Lycanthropy, the Transformation and Ectasy of Sorcerers* that toads were often added to the flying ointment recipes of witches and lycanthropes.

In the mid to late 1600s this flying ointment recipe appeared (likely from a witch trial): make an ointment from belladonna, datura stramonium, monkshood, and celery seeds. Add to it one toad and simmer until the flesh falls off the bones. Strain and rub upon the body, arm pits, forehead, and broom to achieve flight.

Later witch trials tell of Spanish witches using toad blood in their ointments, English witches using whole live toads, Swedish witches using the toad’s fat, snake venom, and herbs, German witches frying whole toads in oil for ointments, and similar tales reaching into the far corners of Eastern Europe.

This is all only European evidence of the use of toads as a psychoactive and ritual substance. There is much more evidence of peoples from South America and Africa also using toads as poison and entheogen, but for the sake of specificity I will keep this piece focused on European tradition.



SCIENCE (THE BAD NEWS)

Yes, today we know that some species of toad produce an alkaloid called bufotenin which is closely related in chemical make-up to DMT and psilocin (a relative of psilocybin). More interestingly, it is also present in fly agaric (*amanita muscaria*) mushrooms which may validate our ancestor's association of toads and toadstools. The bad news is that the common European toad contains only a very tiny amount of bufotenin (0.3% of the dried secretions) and a much large quantity of bufagin, a steroid not an alkaloid, which is an anaesthetic and not a psychedelic. It would still be useful, however, for creating a sleepy, dream-like state when combined with the traditional solanaceous flying ointment herbs. The toads containing the largest amounts of bufotenin are found in the Southwestern USA, Northern Mexico, South America, and China. The only toad which supposedly creates enough bufotenin to be a strong psychoactive is the Colorado River Toad (*Bufo alvarius*).

As with herbs, the preparation of the toad is very important. Bufotenin does not work when ingested so no amount of toad licking or potion-making is going to show any results. Bufotenin is excreted through the skin of the toad and so the skin must be dried, powdered, and either smoked, snorted up the nostrils, or rubbed on the skin.

Researchers report that some remote tribes cut or burn themselves and then rub a live toad into the wound – though I would not recommend this method for health and safety reasons.

EXPERIENCE (THE GOOD NEWS)

Despite the disappointing evidence from the scientific community, experiential use has shown different results. One amateur researcher Adrian Morgan reports his successful, if unpleasant, experiments using the European common toad and the European green toad resulting in trailed images, light traces, colour saturation, saliva build-up, and general intoxication. Though he reports mild psychedelic effects with more pronounced anaesthesia, it is likely due to the species of toad used and also the sex as female toads produce twice as much bufotenin as males. He also reports that bufotenin and its relatives can survive temperatures higher than 125°C (257°F) and therefore can survive being heated in a witch's cauldron to make a flying ointment. This is very good news.

There are also those who have smoked the skin of Colorado River Toads and Cane Toads and have reported much stronger psychoactive effects. If one were to craft a flying ointment using a toad, it may be wise to use the species that have a larger amount of bufotenin over bufagin.



TOAD PREPARATION

European witches and exotic tribesmen most likely scared or pissed off the toad as much as possible to get it to excrete as much toxins as it could before skinning it or boiling it for their concoctions much like the Haitian bokor would do in order to prepare the infamous zombie poison. One can also milk the glands of a live toad for the toxins instead of killing it, though I'm sure the toad is not appreciative of it. Toads are endangered in North America and increasingly rare due to habitat loss. It's best to leave the living ones alone.

The most humane way to collect the bufotenin is to collect freshly dead toads. This isn't as hard as it sounds if you go hunting for dead toads during breeding season or late autumn. Due to the way toads mate (in giant gang banging clusterfucking balls of male toads wrapped around a single female in a pond) many of them drown in the

process (especially the female who they're trying to impregnate but end up suffocating). In autumn, sudden cold snaps can kill off toads before they have a chance to hibernate and you can often find their frozen corpses. How do you know if a dead toad is fresh? Go by the smell.

Take your dead toad home, wash it, and carefully skin it. If the skinning is too much to handle, simply cut off the glands on each side of its head instead. Dry the skin completely and then grind it to a powder with a mortar and pestle. It is now ready for smoking, snorting, or infusing into a flying ointment. If you wish to keep the bones too, boiling the toad will be the quickest way, but also the smelliest – do this outside. The slow way would be to bury it wrapped in burlap in a pot of soil that will be left outside and well-watered for 2-5 months (depending on the size of the toad). After this time exhume it, pick out the bones, and wash them.

Added (common sense) note: *research the species of toad before you handle it with your bare hands and use it in any way. Some toads are very poisonous and contain more toxins than just bufotenin and bufagin, some of which can be very harmful.*

A MODERN TOAD FLYING OINTMENT

Using my own knowledge of traditional flying ointment herbs and their dosages, I have taken the 17th century recipe mentioned above and brought it to life by infusing aconite flowers, belladonna leaf and berry, datura stramonium seeds, celery seeds, fly agaric caps (for the association), and poplar buds in sunflower oil and beeswax and to this mixture adding the skin of an already dead cane toad (which are killed by the hundreds as an aggressive invasive species in many countries today).

The result is an updated and more traditional version of my previous toad ointment recipe that can be used for soul flight, shape-shifting, and to aid in work with a toad familiar or any toad magic or rites. It should not, however, be used by those with a

serious morphine allergy due to the belladonna content. If you are interested in this ointment it can be purchased here: [Black Arts Foundry](#).



RESOURCES

- [“Broomsticks and Toad Skins” by the Quantum Biologist, Oct 29, 2010.](#)
- *Toads and Toadstools: The Natural History, Folklore, and Cultural Oddities of a Strange Association* by Adrian Morgan, 1995.
- *Herbs and Things: A Compendium of Practical and Exo*

Witchcraft and the Walking Toad! *January 21, 2015*

Author: [Beach Combing](#) | in : [Modern](#) , [trackback](#)



If you want to know what beliefs were really held out in the wilder parts of the English countryside in the nineteenth century there are two important sources: folklore collections and, more to Beach's taste, legal proceedings. Every so often a member of the British rural classes with conservative inclinations and beliefs, which would have shamed many of his or her contemporaries back into the Middle Ages, appears in the dock and defends extreme actions through obvious sincere beliefs in witchcraft and kindred superstitions. We are here at East Dereham in Norfolk, April 1879. The offence was that William Bulwer had hit and assaulted Christiana Martins daughter of Mrs Martins. But what soon emerges is his belief that the Martins family were all witches. Enjoy the clerk trying to prevent the flow of obscenities.

The following case of alleged witchcraft has recently been heard at the East Derham petty session: William Bulwer, Etling Green, was charged with assaulting Christiana Martins, a young girl, who resides near tha Etling Green toll bar. Complainant deposed that she was 18 years age, and on Wedneaday, the 2nd mat., the defendant cams to and abused her. The complainant, who looked scarce more than a child repeated, despite the efforts of the magistrates' clerk to stop her, and without being in the least abashed, some of the worst language that it was possible to conceive—conversation of

the most gross description, alleged to have taken place between herself and the defendant. They appeared to have got from words to blows, and, while trying to fasten the gate, the defendant hit her across the hand with a stick.

William though had his reasons though. Beach has never come across this strange toad belief: can anyone help me track it down, drbeachcombing AT yahoo DOT com For frog witch beliefs follow [the link](#).

Mrs Martins [mother of C] is an old witch, gentlemen, that is what she is, and she charmed me, and I get no sleep for her for three nights, and one night, at half-past eleven o'clock, I got up because I could not sleep, and went out and found a 'walking toad' under a clod that had been dug up with three-pronged fork. That is why could not rest; she is a bad old woman; she put this toad under there to charm me, and her daughter is just as bad, gentleman. She would bewitch anyone; she charmed me, and I got no rest day nor night for her, till I found this 'walking toad'(laughter) under the turf. She dug hole and put there to charm me, gentleman, that is the truth; she is a bad old witch. I got the toad out, and put it in cloth, and took it upstairs and showed it my mother and 'throwed' it into the pit in the garden. I can bring it and show it to you, gentlemen.'

Those inserted 'laughters' are always a problem. When 'Hodge' hears laughter in court, he is in serious trouble.

Mr Hyde (laughing): What do you say, she bewitched you?

Defendant: Yes, sir. She went round this here 'walking toad' after she had buried it; and I could not rest by day sleep by night till I found it. She is a bad old witch, and is not going to come it over me though. Her daughter is as bad she is, and encourages her in it.

There follows a nice Victorian non-sequitur, but note that William cannot stay away from the witching. Note too that fascinating 'she is not fit to live': the defendant is still living in the burning years!

The bench: Do you go to church?

Defendant: Sometimes I goes to church, and sometimes I goes to chapel, and sometimes I don't nowhere. Her mother is bad enough to do anything; and to go and put the 'walking toad' in the hole like that, for man which never did nothing to her, she is not fit to live, gentlemen; and to do such a thing, it is not as if I had done anything to

her. She looks at lots of people, and I know she will do some one harm. (Laughter.)

The Chairman: Do you know this man. Superintendent Symonds? Is he sane? (Laughter.)

Superintendent Symonds: Yes, sir, perfectly. (Laughter.)

Defendant: It is quite true, gentlemen. I showed the toad to my mother, and can bring for you to see.

Of course, in these unenlightened times the offer was gently refused and poor William was fined 1 shilling and 12 shillings six pence costs. Presumably the Martins went cackling back to their coven.

21 Jan 2014: Our friends at Obscuragator write: "Walking Toad" is a nickname for the natterjack toad, *epidalea calamita*. The only account I could find of a witch trial where the alleged witch was accused of using a toad (or in this case toads) to keep a person from sleeping was Oliffe Bartham of Shadbrook in 1599. From the Wikipedia entry for the Bury St. Edmunds witch trials, there is this: "Oliffe Bartham of Shadbrook was executed,[7] for "sending three toads to destroy the rest (sleep[8]) of Joan Jordan".[6]" I came across a few witchcraft forum posts that make mention of the story Mrs. Martin and an article about the incident was (apparently) printed in Reynolds's Newspaper (London, England), Sunday, April 13, 1879; Issue 1496. Also, more than one poster made mention of the "Toad Bone ritual." Beach has some problems with this as the two rituals seems very different but the toad bone ritual (with pictures!) has been covered in a previous post. Huge thanks to Obscuragator!!

25 2015 Jan Bob S: 'Being keen on strange stories to do with toads and frogs, I was interested in your posting regarding the folklore beliefs regarding toads and witchcraft appearing through the court case in Norfolk. I suspected that the term "walking toad" referred to the natterjack toad, sometimes known as the "running toad". This view was confirmed in a webpage titled American Folkloric witchcraft which is relevant both to this, and to your previous posting regarding toads and horse-whispering, which provides other accounts of the toad bone and its use. This site states that a "walking toad" is the natterjack toad, although the description given of a toad with a yellow band round the neck doesn't quite fit- the yellow line is down the back. <http://afwcraft.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/toad-bone-amulet.html>. From this webpage I found a link to the following detailed historical and folklore treatment of the toad bone amulet, with a great bibliography:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20041015023500/http://www.the-cauldron.fsnet.co.uk/toad.htm>. The following relevant passage appears: "The commonplace association in East Anglia between the toad-bone ritual and the possession of witchcraft power is indicated by the fact that the very word for 'bewitchment' or the practise of enchantment in Norfolk was 'tudding'; lit. 'toading' (Porter, [Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore]1969, pp.50-51). In the Folklore Record (II.pp.207-9) of 1879, it is interesting to note that a man charged with assault, excused himself by declaring that the woman assaulted was a witch who had bespelled him by means of a 'walking toad' (Kittredge, [Witchcraft in Old and New England] 1929). A 'walking toad' is a Natterjack, the type of batrachia most commonly recommended for the bone ritual in the East Anglian accounts (see Evans, 1960, 1962)." Walter Rye in his "Index Rerum of Norfolk Antiquities" (1899) p.82 gives the following references to "Walking Toad" superstitions which would be interesting to follow up : East Anglian i:310, 364 ; East Anglian iv: 191, .

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000508/18920611/107/0004>
<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000444/18901104/033/0002> I have just found those East Anglian references here- they don't add much!

<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.a0002036234;view=1up;seq=322>

<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.a0002036234;view=1up;seq=376>

Also I came across an account of the incident in East Dereham involving the Walking Toad, written by Augustus Jessopp in a magazine in Nov 1882 and appearing in a later book of his writings. The author, a clergyman in Norfolk/ Suffolk (which he refers to as Arcadia) disguises the names of the characters involved, and the place name, but provides extra details which, if not just the workings of his literary imagination, add something to the account as reported from the court case. The chapter in the book is worth reading for its references to other local folklore too. (See details of sources, and text on the attached word document) The case is mentioned in passing in a newspaper cutting (Sheffield) on surviving superstition which you may find interesting. The cases mentioned may all be known to you already, or may lead to interesting blog-fodder!

25 Jan 2015: Liz writes in: 'Regarding toads and their use in witchcraft, I vaguely remember reading that a witch was accused of hitching a toad to a miniature plough to

blast the crops of a farmer who had incurred his wrath. I have a feeling that it was the man murdered in the UK just after the war and was found on a hill with slashes on his face, presumably in a 'cutting above the breath' act.'

28 Feb 2015: Bob wrote back with some more stuff: Sorry Bob that this comes up so late. 'You noted in your original post you'd be interested to know more of the beliefs behind the incident of the walking toad being buried. Quite rightly, this appears to be different to the toad bone ritual, which also involves burying a toad (but in an anthill, in order to get the bones of the toad). Christina Hole in her "Witchcraft in England" (1945) has the East Dereham case (page15), citing the Leigh Chronicle of 17th April 1878. She writes: "In 1879 William Butler of Etling Green was charged at East Dereham Petty Sessions with striking and abusing Christiana Martins, a girl of eighteen. His defence was that she and her mother were both witches and had prevented him from sleeping by burying a "walking toad" near his house. This was an ancient and well-known form of magic, and a charm to secure command over a fellow-creature by destroying such a toad and using its bones is still known in Norfolk" The last sentence seems to hint at a recognised toad ritual or spell, differing from the toad-bone one, but I could find no explicit reference to it, apart from one modern reference: In "Charms Spells and Curses" an e-book by Victor J. Banis (2012), p.58 we find: "If a walking toad be buried in the name of a certain person, and the one casting the spell circle around it, the one whose name was pronounced will not rest by day or night until he find it and burn it." I am unsure if this come from an old source, or has just been suggested by the Etling Green case itself. In my researches into the "entombed toad" phenomenon some years back, I collected a number of references to toads being buried enclosed in flowerpots and other sealed containers by those experimenting or just curious about the toad's alleged long vitality- but that is another story! However, I certainly remember finding some references to a tradition of toads being buried in earthenware pots, in the context of a fertility ritual. I will look to see if I can find these notes....' We can hope!

The Alchemist's Garden

Growing with the Spirits

The Black Toad: Familiar and Prima Materia



In the middle of my black nightshade experience, I went up to the woods to escape from the heat. I took a path I've taken before, one walked by many. During my walk, I noticed a couple of things besides a lot of self-heal: toadstools and toad. There were two stands of toadstools. I have only rarely seen these in our woods, and when I have, they were usually pretty banged up. These had been rained on, because the white specks were gone, but they were bright enough orange that when I first saw them, I thought they were red plastic balls someone had thrown into the woods. Proud little toadstools, showing off their orange coats like embers. Odd.

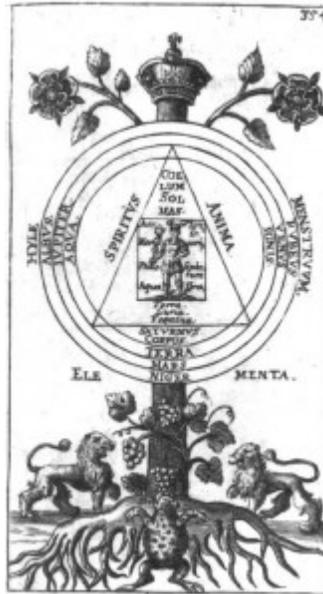
The other thing I saw was a black toad. There are plenty of toads around here, but they are all brown with spots. This is the first one I've seen that was black. Definitely odd. I figured I just hadn't realized that black toads live in this area. Well, they don't.

So I got to wondering if the things I saw had a connection to the experience I was having with black nightshade, which is certainly a toad of a plant and regardless of what Mr. Thayer says, has psychoactive effects, as does the toadstool (although these effects are of a different nature).



The first thing I thought of was the toad as a familiar of Early Modern witches in Britain, wonderfully described in Wilby's [Cunning-Folk and Familiar Spirits](#). This book is expensive right now, but an article she wrote on the topic ([The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland](#)) is available from a legitimate online source (one that honors copyright). Apparently some people kept toads as pets, which would come when called and which would be fed with milk. And of course, some of these toads ended up being identified as witch's familiars, just as some ordinary cats and dogs did. Some people give a materialist explanation for the Early Modern European witch's affinity for the toad, hinting that toad venom was a component in flying salves. Perhaps. That might account for why people kept them as pets, too—the venom might have had medicinal uses. At any rate, a connection was in fact made between witches and toads much as between hags and cats. [Scylla has been writing about familiars](#) and in fact used the same pic of the witch feeding her toad pets/familiars for her post re familiars as I chose to illustrate my posting on bufonics.

There's another toad tie-in here, though, and that is with alchemy.



In the old alchemical writings, the black toad is one of the lesser used symbols for either the process of fermentation (ruled by my sign, Scorpio) or for the Prima Materia undergoing the same. The identity of the Prima Materia in alchemy is kept secret in all the old written texts. Generally, it is said to be a substance widely and cheaply available but everywhere despised. I've seen a woodcut of it represented as blocks of wood on the road that people are tripping over. Elias Ashmole describes it this way in his poem about alchemy called "Hunting the Greene Lyon":

And choose what thou shalt finde of meanest price:
 Leave sophisters, and following my advice,
 Be not deluded; for the truth is one,

'Tis not in many things, this is Our Stone:
At first appearing in a garb defiled,
And, to deal plainly, it is Saturn's childe.
His price is meane, his venom very great
His constitution cold, devoid of heat.

Often this has been taken to be a description of lead (cheap, venomous, cold, dull (garb defiled), and definitely Saturn's childe), but in some alchemical graphics, the Prima Materia is represented by a black toad—also considered venomous, also in a garb defiled (covered with warts), despised, cheap (free), and Saturn's childe. You can see the toad at the "root" of this alchemical tree in the illustration. Perhaps one reason why the toad is connected with fermentation is because it develops from a fish creature (Water) to a land animal (Earth) with functioning limbs: toads are all about transformation, and transformation is an essential part of fermentation (turning, for instance, grapes into wine). Also, toads hibernate by burrowing down into the ground. They appear to be dead and can even freeze, but they awaken later, fine. Talk about a (literally) chthonic symbol.

The "c" word ties in to one way that the Prima Materia is figured in modern alchemy. In fact, I just wrote about this—the Barbaults considered dirt to be the Prima Materia. They used astrology and psychic powers to locate a particular patch of dirt which they dug up at an auspicious time and then treated with warmth, the addition of buds and young flowers of medicinal plants, and imbibed the earth with specially collected dew in order to cause ongoing fermentation. As a long-time gardener, I am very much drawn to this interpretation of the Prima Materia. (And speaking of fermentation, today I finally ordered the rest of the equipment I needed to start making wine. This week I should be able to pick up some fruit for that project.)



Scylla brought up how familiars fed upon their partner witches. Weirdly enough, there is a process described in alchemy that is translated graphically as a black toad feeding on a woman's white breast. This is in Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens.

At any rate, there's the toad as the Prima Materia, the foundational substance that is transformed, and the toad as the familiar. How could this be connected with my black nightshade experience, if it is?

Someone in another venue asserted that plants could be familiars but that communication with them was very difficult. Was black nightshade coming forward to offer itself as a familiar? That would certainly account for its very demanding character as well as its ubiquity. I seem to remember at least one of the witches in Wilby's book kept running into her would-be familiar, a man dressed in old-fashioned clothes. Black nightshade has a cold nature, its berries are black, it is ubiquitous, and it has its own "venom." I have puzzled over its overtaking of my garden, and have wondered if it is not simply a manifestation of the presence of the Dark Spirit of the Crossroads ("I am here"), of the Saturnian divine in plant form. But the discussion about familiars and the toad imagery have caused me to wonder about what exactly it is. Not that I'm asserting that black nightshade is attempting to become my familiar. Perhaps, though, there are some underlying similarities in the ways we communicate with plant spirits, familiars, and other spirits. I've been trying to disentangle all the threads, and that's why it has taken me so long to post. I have much more to say on this matter, but I look forward to any reactions folks might have.

August 9th, 2010 | Tags: [atalanta fugiens](#), [black nightshade](#), [black toad](#), [early modern witchcraft](#), [elias ashmole](#), [emma wilby](#), [familiars](#), [michael maier](#) | Category: [Magic & Witchcraft](#), [Plant Work](#)

12 comments to The Black Toad: Familiar and Prima Materia

• [sara](#)

[August 10, 2010 at 3:13 pm · Reply](#)

I would be interested to know if you encounter a black toad again, and where. I am totally in over my head and can't really come up with any impressions beyond that.

If it were not for the assignment of gender in Ashmole's poem, I would have taken the cold venomous childe of Saturn, in the garb defiled, to be a much-hated woman. Maybe someone driven out of the village for souring the milk, or bringing a scourge of locusts into the fields of barley.

Methinks there are so many layers of superimposed narrative in this that it'll be awhile before it gets tied together in a cogent fashion, if it can be. I don't think the dark spirit has a hand in this so much as it is background and a spectator to something more fundamental going on.

The toad could certainly be a familiar for you, but I think it would have been more than observation to bring that point home, and more than the interesting set of scientific knowns about toads which make them really symbolic creatures when it comes to the phase changes of alchemy and chthonic as well as above-ground nature. And in-the-water nature. Which brings to mind the elements of earth and water, certainly, and air because the creature respirates once it has completed that water phase w/ gills.

Something worrisome is that toads now are not the toads our alchemist and witching ancestors knew, thanks to the Pandora's box of modern chemistry and wasting habits, as well as transplantation into the environment as invasive species (look to the cane toad in Australia, for example). Toads (and frogs) are changing gender now, as fish are, and their habitats are increasingly being trashed with pollution. They're among those various sentinel species observed for changes in the foodchain and environment.

It has occurred to me a couple times that we're being warned of big changes.

herba15 [August 13, 2010 at 12:11 am · Reply](#)

Re the old woman who is driven out of town, the age thing does suit Saturn. Also, Saturn is associated with lonely places, although usually dark and shadowy ones. I think the rejected crone is a good metaphor for the Saturnian, though. Sure fits with the image of witchcraft in history as well.

The other thing is that weeds are despised by all.

I haven't seen another toad, but I haven't gone up to the woods again either. I've been hunkering down, staying close to home and doing home stuff, like canning. No toads around here, especially this year, when it's so dry.

- **The Scribbler**

[August 10, 2010 at 4:30 pm · Reply](#)

Reading in you posting of the toad-as-prima-materia, it leaped to mind that in that ubiquitous collection of the race's wisdom known as traditional fairy tales, if the slimy, unappreciated toad is kissed by a princess, its real nature is revealed; it is really a prince.

herba15 [August 13, 2010 at 12:12 am · Reply](#)

Certainly true that I think the toad represents something unappreciated, and this fits with the concept of Prima Materia as well—the prince (the Stone) concealed in the toad (the Prima Materia, despised by all).

§

[sara](#)

[August 13, 2010 at 2:10 pm · Reply](#)

Toads are symbolic in Aztec mythology, too. I read that in the Tubelo book yesterday, and scratched my head because the description w/ the toad at the base of the tree in that one graphic you posted was a good depiction of what I was reading.

- **Scylla**

[August 10, 2010 at 8:49 pm · Reply](#)

I think what matters here are the connections you are making.

Spirit speaks. It speaks subtly, and as you said... with a humor that falls dead for the ape brain. That's why we have such lovely visuals for alchemy, rather than straightforward words.

herba15 [August 13, 2010 at 12:14 am · Reply](#)

The visuals of alchemy have always been what attracted me to it and what continues to hold magic to me. My parents had picture books about science when we were kids, and I loved to look at the one that had pictures from alchemy. Some showed an alchemist working in his cottage, but others were actual alchemical graphics—so striking, so graphically beautiful, so much hinting of hidden treasures.

§

[Scylla](#)

[August 13, 2010 at 4:55 am · Reply](#)

If you've ever browsed my Deviantart account, you've seen my love of alchemical imagery (or, my blogspot icon is also the union of the seven planetary sigils).

I nearly wet myself when Adam Maclean (of the Alchemy Web) stopped by and commented on some of my work!

herba15 [August 13, 2010 at 10:12 am · Reply](#)

If he said something positive, consider it a high compliment. For years he was adamant that alchemy was practical and rejected "New Age" interpretations. Now he insists it's spiritual. I don't know what happened.

How do I find your deviantart account?

§ [Scylla](#)

[August 13, 2010 at 8:45 pm](#)

It's <http://entwinedscylla.deviantart.com> – Pretty easy to remember.

herba15 [August 14, 2010 at 2:39 pm](#) · [Reply](#)

Oh, I remember seeing your boxes! They're wonderful.

I read about your troubles with thieves. You might want to put a watermark on your pic. I just copied it to a clipboard and pasted it to GIMP with no watermark, so people can still use your art. This kind of thing makes my blood boil. I just this week sent a DMCA notice to Google about someone who has been using my kyphi text to pretend to sell my kyphi. She has refused to remove that text from her site. Once Google acts on it, it will no longer be in the search engine results. I have DMCA letters ready to go to Yahoo and to her webhost as well. A DMCA is really worth doing when you find your stuff being used without your permission.

• [Scorpio Toad □ A Fool's Journey](#)

[February 5, 2015 at 8:06 pm](#) · [Reply](#)

[...] first thing I run across web searching the symbolism was Toads as witches familiars, and I laughed out loud. I've been getting a lot of witch references lately, so perhaps I was [...]

History and Lore of the Toad

Written By: Kytheria of House Shadow Drake

Published in Open Ways Magazine, Samhain 2000 Issue, Pages 5-6

The toad, also referred to as the borax or stelon, has held an undeniable relationship with the lore surrounding the witch. The reasons for this association, however, are not commonly known. The toad has through history been linked with the darker side of the human experience. In alchemy, the black toad represents the first matter. By uniting with the eagle, the toad is then purified and transformed into the winged toad.

One of the first cultures that associated the toad with the forces of darkness came from Zoroaster in 600 BC when a decree was issued forth that all toads should be killed. In China the beliefs concerning toads were more benign in nature. There the toad represented the yin principle. They also saw the three-legged toad as being a symbol of the moon.

During the Middle Ages, the superstitions surrounding the toad in Europe linked this creature with the Christian Devil, whose own coat-of-arms featured three toads. It was believed that the toad was capable of poisoning people and was inhabited by the witch's familiar spirit. Dorsetshire folklore states that great care had to be carried out to prevent injury of the toad when removing it from one's house or cellar or else it might incur the wrath of the witch to whom the familiar spirit belonged to.

Sometimes the toad also figured into the way by which a witch could be identified. Basque tradition held that witches were marked with the symbol of the toad's foot. In the Pyrenees, the image of a toad could be found in the left eye of the witch.

The witch was thought to utilize the toads in their worship of the Devil by mangling the body of the toad. Sometimes the toad was killed and then used as a component in spells. One such ritual used the saliva of the toad mixed with sow-thistle sap which was then made into a lotion. The witch would then draw a crooked cross on her body in an attempt to render herself invisible.

The saliva of a toad was believed to be particularly harmful, and is sometimes referred to as swelter'd venom. The toad was thought to defend itself by spitting fire, and was also able to vomit poisonous fire. If a toad was to bite a person, the only way to make it let go was to pour boiling water on it. Upon the sight of a toad, in order to prevent any sort of evil effects, one should spit or throw a stone at the toad. It is also unlucky for a toad to jump over your foot, and in the folklore of some areas it is a sign of impending death.

The toad was also thought to hold an jewel within its skull referred to as a toadstone. Once extracted, the toadstone was believed to be capable of detecting the presence of poison and thus warn its owner by becoming warm to the touch, or when set into a ring it would become paler in color. Contrarily, the toad itself was held to be highly poisonous. Today, we know this to be true as the toad secretes indole alkaloid bufotenine from its skin. This poisonous substance was sometimes extracted by the historical witch for use in flying ointments.

Although the toad was associated with the darker powers, it also held strong ties to the female womb. In some parts of Europe there were small toad statuettes that were left at holy sites by

women seeking aid in fertility. It is said in Romania that a person who killed a toad was also capable of killing their own mother. Within Gypsy mythology, the Queen of Fairies was said to live in a castle that was shaped as a golden toad. Scottish folklore held that whoever carried a dried toad tongue over their breast would be successful in matters of love as they would be capable of bending any woman to their will.

Sometimes the toad was also given the ability to call the rains. In 1662, the Aulderdane coven was said to have utilized toads during a prayer for the "fruit of the land."

Toads have also been used by cunning-men to cure such sicknesses as the king's evil, scrofula, and rheumatism. In Devonshire, the hind leg of a dried toad was placed in a silk bag and worn around the patient's neck to cure the king's evil. For rheumatism, a toad was burned to powder and then placed in a silk bag and worn around the throat. In some instances, the diseased part of the patient was cut from the toad and the rest of the animal was buried. The part that was cut away is then wrapped in parchment and worn around the patient's neck.

The Toad Fair was held annually in Dorsetshire during the beginning of May by the local cunning-man during which charms were sold against various illnesses were sold. There are several regional differences as to the manner in which the charm was constructed. In Stalbridge, the legs of a live toad were torn off and then placed in a bag to be worn around the neck against scrofula and the king's evil.. These same charms in Lydlinch used the whole toad. The charm made in Blackmore Vale Dairy was good against the king's evil and tubercular wounds. The patient was first told to open their clothing so that their chest was bared. Then, the cunning-man chopped off the head of the toad and dropped the writhing creature into a muslin bag which was then suspended around their neck and dropped down the patient's chest. If the patient did not get nauseated by the experience they would live and the charm would be successful.

The Cambridgeshire Toadmen have perhaps the most extensive history with the toad as they continued their practices up until the 1930's. The Toadmen were said to have complete power over any horse. They acquired this power through an elaborate ritual which involved skinning a toad and then allowing the ants to eat the bones clean. The bones were then carried by the Toadman in his pocket until they dried. Then, on a full-moon night, he would take the bones and cast them into a stream of running water. The bones would then scream and one of them float upstream and leave the others. The Toadman would then quickly capture this bone and take it to either a graveyard or stable for three more nights. Then he would be subjected to a final tests where the Devil himself would attempt to make the man give up the bone. If the Toadman retained the bone he would be granted all of the powers that he had so diligently worked for.

Throughout history the toad has been a bridge to the otherworld. It is able to spend its life both in the water and on land. The toad often plays the part of the scapegoat, and is made to pay penance for the guilt of another. At other times it holds the mysteries of all that is feminine and calls the rain to the crops. Still, the toad is sometimes seen as an omen of impending death. It is through this duality that one is able to understand the relationship between the witch and the toad - the ability to transcend the mysteries of life and death.

References

1983 Armstrong, E. A. "Toad." *Man, Myth & Magic*. Richard Cavendish, ed. (NY: Marshall

Cavendish.)

1992 Bierdmann, Hans. Dictionary of Symbolism. trans. by James Hulbert. (NY: Facts on File.)

1989 Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. (NY: Facts on File.)

1967 [1846-1859] Hardy, James, ed. The Denham Tracts, vol. 3. (Nendeln/Liechtenstein, Germany: Kraus Reprint Limited.)

1967 [1878] Henderson, William. Notes on the Folklore of the Norther Counties of England and the Borders. (Nendeln/Liechtenstein, Germany: Kraus Reprint Limited.)

1994 Jackson, Nigel Aldcroft. Call of the Horned Piper. (Berks, UK: Capall Bann Publishing.)

1929 McPherson, J. M. Primitive Beliefs in the North East of Scotland. (London, UK: Longmans, Green and Co.)

1970 [1922] Udal, John Symonds. Dorsetshire Folklore. (Geneva: Switzerland: Toucan Press.)



[Home](#) - [Site Map](#) - [Updates](#) - [Awards](#) - [E-Mail](#) - [Link to Us](#) - [Chatroom](#)

Copyright 1994 - 2001 **House Shadow Drake**. All Rights Reserved.

House Shadow Drake, P.O. Box 291323, Temple Terrace, Florida 33678-1323

The Fantastic Toad

Author: Kiki's Cauldron

Posted: October 17th, 2010

Times Viewed: 3,568

With Halloween and Samhain around the corner, the image of the witch is all around us. Whether she's posing sweetly in a vintage card or in displayed as a crone in a store's window, she usually is in the company of her familiars: the cat and the toad. Even though today's society has embraced the sweet and precious kitty, the same cannot be said for the fantastic toad.

During Medieval Times, the toad was said to be a demon in disguise. In England, they were a symbol of misfortune, and the fear of getting warts from touching a toad prevailed. Because of these misconceptions, sadly, our society has been turned off to the proud nature of the toad. However, if we look at the toad's many faces, perhaps we can learn to embrace his charm and magick.

Toad's Connection to Earth, Fortune and Fertility

The toad's closeness to the soil and nature truly makes him a cherished child of Mother Earth. In ancient Mexican cultures, he was a symbol of Earth. He is one of the animals you want to have in your garden. This amphibian thrives on bugs that would normally do damage to crops and flowers. His song varies from species to species, yet its soothing voice lets us know that nature is blossoming. His presence, surprisingly, has historically been a symbol of fortune and fertility.

In parts of Central Europe, it was believe that toads were guardians of great treasures. Therefore, to treat a toad kindly could potentially mean being rewarded with a gift from his hoard. In Estonia, it was believed that house spirits or faeries took the form of a toad. As a result, they were well respected as signs of good fortune and wealth. Feng Shui pays tribute to the Chinese legend of the three-legged toad of the moon in the form of figurines, which are said to bring money and prosperity. Tin miners in Cornwall believed the sight of the toad while mining signaled a lucky strike.

Toads were a symbol of luck in love and fertility as well. Perhaps this is in part due to the many eggs it releases and the toad's birth and metamorphosis in water. One folk medicine remedy suggested that the blood of a toad was a powerful aphrodisiac. In Scotland, it was believed to be good luck if a toad crossed a bride's path. Votives and offerings in the shape of toads would be left in central European churches by the Mother Mary for smooth pregnancy and conception.

Toad's Connection to Witches

It was during the Burning Times that the confessions and legends of toads began to intermingle with the world of the witch. In one confession, a witch said that she gathered toads to bring with her for Sabbat celebration. Oddly, she dressed them in small black or scarlet colored velvet robes, fashioning some with bells. Another sorcerer confessed that his toad familiar gave him the ability to be invisible, transport to different places, and shape-shift into the form of any animal.

The toad's appeal in magick is most likely in part to its natural toxic secretions, called Bufotenine, which comes from glands behind their ears. This poison was allegedly used in potions, flying ointments, and in alchemy. Specifically, the skin of the toad was used in flying ointments, and in alchemy toads were considered to symbols the dark side of nature. Toads even received a small role in Macbeth as an ingredient in the witches' "charmed pot." Furthermore, many shamanic cultures revered the secretions of the toad for hallucinogenic experiences.

Toad's Connection to the Otherworld

In ancient Germanic regions, it was unlucky to kill toads because it was believed that human souls resided in them. The belief that human souls were inside the toad progressed into the idea that toads were actually sinners who passed over and were undergoing penance. As a result, toads were to be treated with sympathy and pity. One story from Godfrey-Leland states that one toad would crawl to the altar of "Saint Michael in Schwatz" on the evenings before festivals to pray and weep.

Toads even served as guardians for those who passed over. In Lithuania, there are grave markers in the shape of toads. Toad's magick also assisted in divination and amulets. In Ancient Egypt, small amulets of toads were worn as symbols of creation, birth, and rebirth. One object from the Late Dynasty of Egypt is most fascinating- it is a magic rod with small figurines of toads, frogs, and turtles, which were believed to be helpers to the Sun God. The object was used as part of a burial to guarantee rebirth and triumph over evil forces. In *Natural History*, Pliny explains that the bones of a toad had the ability to soothe quarrels and acts as an aphrodisiac. This could be the foundation for the lore of the "toad stone," the precious stones in the toad's head that could bring great happiness and detect poison. Many

an amulets are in the shape of toads, with the wish of drawing their magick and good fortune into the wearer's life.

The Toad as an Animal Totem

Welcoming the toad into your life will bring grounding energy. He represents strength, pride, and nature. If you are looking for a way to connect the element of earth and water, as an amphibian, the toad is able to traverse and master both of these. Much like the frog, the toad also expresses the ability to transform, as he does through his life. He can help gain the ability to see people and nature through keen observation as well as turn inwards for a deeper understanding of the self. More than anything, it is the toad's quiet pride and patience that allows it to prosper and bring luck and magick into the lives of those he touches.

A Toad Stone Alternative

On Samhain, you can perform a small spell to create your own toad stone. This gentle approach to creating a toad stone does not involve the harm of any animals, although you will need to get your hands dirty in the soil. You will need a piece of moss agate, a green candle, and vetiver oil. On the morning before Samhain, bring the moss agate to a place where you know toads reside. This could be in your garden, by a local pond, or if you are fortunate enough to have a toad as a pet, in your toad's tank. If you do not believe you have toads in your neighborhood, simply find a natural place in your garden or yard where you can place a figurine of a toad. Or, find a small pot and fill it with soil from outdoors, bring it indoors and place it by an image or figurine of a toad. Take the clean stone (don't anoint with oils- this could harm the toad) and bury it in the soil at this location. Recite the following incantation:

*Precious toad, spirit of the Earth:
I ask you to bless this stone,
so I may have fortune and love in my life.
And in return, I will revere you this Samhain eve.*

On Samhain eve, anoint the green candle with vetiver oil, and light it in reverence to the toad spirit. Take a moment to envision the toad, giving thanks to its presence in your life. If there is a specific magick you would like from the toad stone, whether it be for fertility, prosperity, divination, transformation, love, luck, or self-examination, envision yourself receiving the magick's end result. The following morning, retrieve the stone and carry it with you to bring good luck and fortune into your life. If you wish to bring the good fortune of the toad into your life, consider getting (or creating) a toad house in your garden. This way, you can enjoy the presence of the toad as a familiar in your life.

Footnotes:

- Andrews, Ted. *Animal Speak*. Llewellyn Publications: St. Paul, MN, 2004.
- Arnold, Dorethea. "An Egyptian Bestiary." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*. Vol. 52, No. 4, Spring 1995. <http://www.istor.org/stable/3269051>. (accessed 10/14/2010) .
- Conway, D.J. *Animal Magick*. Llewellyn Publications: St. Paul, MN, 1995.
- Godrey-Leland, Charles. *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling*. Sacred Texts: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/gsf/index.htm>.
- Harper, Clive. "The Witches' Flying-Ointment." *Folklore*. Vol. 88, No. 1, 1977. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1259606>. (accessed 10/14/2010) .
- Kieckhefer, Richard. *Magic in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000.
- Luttichau, Chris. *Animal Spirit Guides*. Cico Books: New York, 2009.
- Morgan, Adrian. *Toads and Toadstools: The Natural History, Folklore, and Culture Oddities of a Strange Association*. Celestial Arts Publishing: Berkeley, CA, 1995.
- Murrell, Deborah. *Superstitions*. Amber Books: London, 2008.
- Powell, Shantell. *Toads, Magic, and Witchcraft*. <http://www.shanmonster.com/witch/familiar/toad.html>. (accessed 10/13/2010) .
- Summers, Montague. *History of Witchcraft and Demonology*. Kessinger Publishing, 2003.

The toad - symbolism

Dettagli

Categoria: [Symbology](#)

In China, the toad was regarded as the incarnation of the great beginning of Yang, and it was an attribute of God of Wealth, Liu Hai, and the idea of prosperity.

In Vietnam, the toad is associated with rain, fertility, wealth, and sexuality. In Egypt, frogs were considered sacred animals and depicted seated on a lotus. In the Bible, the toad is an unclean animal; the invasion of the toads is described as one of the "plagues". God said to Pharaoh: "... behold, I will send a plague of frogs on your whole country, so the river will swarm with frogs. They will come up out of the river and into your house..." (Ex. 8).

In medieval times the toad, compared to the frog, was described as a negative, hellish animal. Toads were covered as an indispensable object of witchcraft. They have been used for the preparation of potions, served as a company for a witch.

The glands of toads secrete a thick white poison, which serves as a natural defense weapon to repel the attacks of animals or humans. This poison, called bufotenin, is also commonly referred to as "toad's milk", and it is a hallucinogen. This poison is unpalatable and can also kill a man. Since the time of Zoroaster, who lived around 600 BC, toads were associated with many manifestations of evil.

In the Middle Ages it was thought toads to be evil.

The people believed that witches could turn into toads. Toads were the companions of witches at home of demons, who demanded to be served by witches. The witches, presumably, availed themselves of the toads, ordering them to poison enemies, or cause harm making them lame. On Saturday, toads did the tasks of housewives. In many magic potions, toads are an important ingredient.

According to legend the witches decapitated frogs, stripped their skin, and added to other strange ingredients. An ointment that is made from the saliva of the toad is the gist of a preparation that makes invisible the witch. In the popular magic, frog's ashes mixed with brandy are an effective antidote against drunkenness. Toads were used as amulets in necromancy and black magic. It was believed that toads are jewelry, the toad stone can be used to acquire the poison, the stone is heated close to the poison.

Especially effective was considered a ring with a stone amulet in the shape of toad.

In the Middle Ages, it was believed that during the meeting, for the worship of the devil, participants mutilated and cut toads into pieces. The impure witches, tapping the foot, sent the toads to the underworld. Some modern witches believe that toads are good companions because these creatures are easily manageable and they easily take care of themselves. In addition, toads transmit their mental properties. It is said that witches are able to suck the milk of the toad, without hurting it.

Toads, Witches and Murder in Stradbroke Village, Suffolk

TRACY MONGER (22ND JULY 2013)

TRACY MONGER recalls some strange “witchcraft” events in Stradbroke Village, Suffolk from 1599



We read a lot about the executions of witches in 1645 but other cases are interesting. This particular one was at Stradbroke village in Suffolk.

During June of 1599, Doll Bartham was accused of witchcraft and bewitching Joan Jorden.

Joan Jorden was sent three toads in total, the first was sent to prevent her from sleeping.

The second toad was sent and burnt a few days later.

Joan was advised to burn the third toad herself but she fell down the stairs and became unconscious when carrying the toad down the stairs.

The toad was taken by her employer to be burnt on the fire, as the toad was burning, a flame appeared at the bottom of the stairs, but the fire did not caused any damage.

Many witnessed Joan had fits and to some it seemed like she was possessed.

A lump was seen moving around her body, the size of a man’s fist.

On one occasion while she was bound to a chair during a fit, she struggled and broke it. It took six men to keep her in another chair.

Doll was accused of bewitching Joan.

A spirit called Gyles, which was thought to be Doll’s familiar, was sent to Joan.

Gyles was willing to answer questions asked by others.

Gyles claimed he had come for Joan's life and that he would also take her soul.
Gyles also claimed to have killed a child in a mother's womb.
He also claimed to have entered into another body, tearing his heart out, killing him.
A stillborn child and a man's strange death supported the claim by Gyles.
Another visit by Gyles woke Joan by "a great stroke on the bordes, like the fall of a great stone" and she cried for help.
A shadow is seen going to her bed and then she is thrown out of her bed, against the wall.
Joan was later found under her bed.
Four men pulled her out.
Her eyes were described as sinking into her head, with her head bending backwards, her mouth is shut and she lay as if she was dead.
Another occasion Gyles came in the shape of a cat, he came into her room at about 11pm, scraping on walls, knocking and shuffling.
He tried to wake her by clapping on her cheeks on her face and then kissed her.
He put pressure on her chest by sitting on her, until she could not speak.
He later held her hands so she could not move and he restrained her voice so she could not speak.
Gyles also appeared as a dark thick substance, which was a foot high.
Gyles spoke and a few people witnessed it.
They became convinced it was not faked as they could clearly hear both Gyles and Joan speaking at the same time.
Joan has been heard crying out "Barthram, thou hast killed me" in the middle of a fit and this was witnessed by numerous people including John Sheereman and Symon Fox (Joan's employer).
While imprisoned, Gyles claimed to have been serving Doll for 10 to 20 years. Doll appeared before the Lord Chief just of England at St Edmondsbury on the 12th July 1599 and she was executed for bewitching Joan.

TRACY MONGER is a paranormal investigator with Mysteries of Paranormal Research Association (MOPRA), based in Norwich, Norfolk. You can follow her on Facebook [here](#). Read her articles for Spooky Isles [here](#).

POSTED BY: PHILLIP NEWMAN JUN 30, 2016

In the poison'd entrails we throw.
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirtyone
Swelter'd venom sleeping got
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.¹

With this amphibious sacrifice and diabolical invocation, Act 4, Scene 1 of William Shakespeare's famous play *Macbeth* is opened. For, even in Shakespeare's time the toad was intimately associated with the magical arts. Indeed, one of the earliest witch trials documented at Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, England, was the execution of one Oliffe Bartham of Shadbrook, who had been accused of "sending three toads² to destroy the rest (or sleep) of Joane Jordan."³ From being the witches' familiar to being an ingredient in her infamous flying ointment to being a therianthropomorphization of the very witch herself, the toad is virtually inseparable from witches and their craft. George Lyman Kittredge, in his 1929 study *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, summed up the origin of the relationship thusly:

"The relation of witches to toads is notorious... The Devil, who squat like a toad at the ear of Mother Eve in Eden, is always at hand in the churchyard after service, waiting in that guise for some evilminded communicant to feed him with a bit of the consecrated wafer: whosoever thus sacrifices to Satan will straightway become a witch..."⁴

However, witches were not the only demographic to be accused of distastefully fraternising with toads. In 1233 Pope Gregory IX sent letters to several important German dignitaries, in order to stimulate action against certain heretics in the Rhineland. The letters included a detailed description of the alleged rituals of the declared heretics.

"When a novice entered the sect, the shape of a frog or toad appeared before him, which some heretics kissed on the hindquarters or mouth."⁵

Again, William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris between 1228 and 1249, insisted that

"a toad appeared to the followers of Lucifer and...these persons indulged in such abominations as kissing...a toad on the mouth."⁶

As the reader has no doubt connected, remnants of this latter accusation have survived to present day in the form of a charming fairytale; that of Iron Henry, better known as *The Frog Prince*.

Not every case of a toad reverence was surrounded by batrachophobia, though. Less diabolical were the secretive Toadmen of Britain, who were cited by Kevin Danaher as an early influence on the art of *horsewhispering*. ⁷The Toadmen are said to have held power over horses with the aid of a mysterious keyshaped bone found within the head of a toad. Their *Water of the Moon* ritual, for example,

"required that the horseman kill a...toad and hang the body on a thorn tree until only the skeleton remained. This is not unlike the mythical toadstone of bufonite recorded by Pliny the Elder in the first century. At full moon the man then had to take the skeleton to a running stream and throw it into the water. One small forked bone would detach itself from the rest and float upstream, and it was this bone from which the horseman would then derive power over horses."⁸
The toad bone also conferred upon its possessor the power to steal without the risk of being caught, it was believed.⁹

Strange as it is, the legend of the Toadmen society's mysterious *toad bone* is actually reminiscent of another strange artifact that was claimed to have been harvested from the body of a toad: the mythical *toadstone* or *bufonite*, first mentioned by Pliny the Elder. Thought to have been found in the heads of toads, toadstones were believed to be an antidote against any poison. Paul Taylor of the English Natural History Museum explains:

*"Toadstones were considered to be antidotes for poison and were also used in the treatment of epilepsy. As early as the 14th century, people began to adorn jewelry with toadstones for their magical abilities. In their folklore, a toadstone was required to be removed from an old toad while the creature is still alive, and as instructed by the 17th century naturalist Edward Topsell, could be done by setting the toad on a piece of red cloth."*¹⁰

As toads were frequently used to make poisonous mixtures, the use of the toadstone as an antidote against poison is an interesting innovation. Luckily, examples of toadstone rings survive to this day and are housed at the famous Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England.

Certain of the Alchemists, too, were preoccupied with toads, and the appearance of toads in Alchemical manuscripts has been read in a number of lights. For some, the toad represented the *prima materia* or first matter. For others, it was the very *lapis philosophorum* or stone of the wise itself. Others still interpreted the toad as being an indication of the *calcination* or *negredo* phase of the Alchemists' *magnum opus*. English occultist Aleister Crowley, on the other hand, in his ritual *Staurus Batrachou* or *The Cross of a Frog*, thought the toad an emblem of Mercurius, the patron of the Alchemical art. Perhaps the most prominent reference to the toad in Alchemy comes from the works of George Ripley, particularly the manuscript known as *The Ripley Scrowle*. In it, Ripley details a veiled Alchemical operation: The toad first drinks "juice of Grapes" until it is so filled up that it "casts its Venom" and "begins to swell" as a result of poisoning. The toad dies in its "Cave" and the usual sequence of colour changes follows: black, various colours, white and red. "Thus the Venom is changed into powerful Medicine."¹¹ Similarly, Alchemist and Rosicrucian apologist Count Michael Maier wrote in *Emblen 5* of his *Atalanta Fugiens*:

"To the woman's breast apply the chilly toad
So that it drinks her milk, just like a child.
Then let it swell into a massive growth,
And let the woman sicken, and then die.
You make from this a noble medicine,
Which drives the poison from the human heart."

As with Ripley's, Maier's toad has swelled from drinking, but rather than "juice of Grapes" he imbibes breastmilk.¹² This is not unlike the accusations hurled during the English witch trials that toads, as the witch's familiar, suckled the witch's breast. Another example of a suckling toad can be found in Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

As the sucking imagery might suggest, toads were also considered by many to be agents of fertility. The American Folklore Society records two such rituals in their *Memoirs* wherein a toad is used to divine or procure one's future mate. A ritual from Maine reads:

“Put a live toad into a box perforated with small holes, and set it on an anthill. Leave it for several days, until the toad shall die and the ants clean the bones. Wrap up the skeleton and put it under your pillow for three nights, and you will dream of your future husband.” 13

Another from Pennsylvania reads:

“Shut a toad up in a box bored full of holes, place near an anthill, and leave it until the toad dies and the ants clean the bones. A certain hookshaped bone is to be taken as a love charm. If this is fastened to the sleeve of a girl she will marry you.” 14

This latter example of course hearkens back to our British Toadmen, who used this same toad bone as a means to hold sway over horses, as opposed to lovers. The Mesoamericans and Aztecs too both worshipped a fertility goddess in the form of a toad. In Pre-Columbia it was Ceneotl, the many-breasted toad who presided over childbirth. The ancient Aztecs worshipped their goddess of death and rebirth, Tlaltechuti, as a toad. Even in ancient Egypt the toad (or in this case, frog) is present as a symbol of the frog-headed water goddess Heket, who presided over fertility.

Phillip Newman

P.D. Newman is a member of Tupelo Lodge No. 318, Free and Accepted Masons. He has had papers published by the MS Lodge of Research, Guthrie Scottish Rite Journal, Knight Templar Magazine, Ad Lucem Journal, The Invisible College, Dragibus, Disinformation, Reality Sandwich, Neuro Soup, Living Stones Magazine, The Working Tools Magazine, etc.



THE ARCANE ARCHIVE

a cache of usenet and other text files
pertaining
to occult, mystical, and spiritual subjects.

[TOP](#) | [RELIGION](#) | [SATANISM](#)

Luciferans

To: alt.satani.sm, alt.pagan, alt.magi.ck.tyagi
From: tyagi@houseofkaos.abys.com (tyagi/TOKUS)
Subject: Luciferans (LONG - Baskin/Smyth)
Date: Kali Yuga 49950413

"LUCIFERIANs: Medieval sects of occultists who mutilated Eucharistic wafers before an idol of Lucifer. The practice of witchcraft may have been initiated by a Luciferian sect in Milan. It was against this sect that Konrad of Marburg, the first German inquisitor, moved zealously in the first part of the thirteenth century. He extorted confessions from them 'proving' that they were out-and-out Satanists who worshipped the Devil as creator and ruler of the world."

Dictionary of Satanism, by Wade Baskin, Philosophical Library, 1972; pp. 202-3.

Below they are referred to as 'Luciferans'. Strange variations.

"In 1227 Pope Gregory VII sent Conrad of Marburg on a mission to Germany with unlimited powers to bring to the stake a sect of Satanists. This is the first instance of a fully organized witch-hunt in Europe and it set patterns that later generations were to follow. There had been rumours of Luciferans who worshipped Satan, kissed the backsides of toads and cats, and indulged in indiscriminate orgies. . . .

"As for the Luciferans they present the kind of problem that confronts us over and over again in trying to distinguish between fact and fantasy in witchcraft. It seems probable that there were sects practising Satanism, but fanatics like Conrad were all too quick to believe that they were fighting in a struggle where all mankind had gone over to the devil, and if the Archbishop of Mayence is to be believed he created what he set out to destroy."

Modern Witchcraft, by Frank Smyth, Castle Books, 1970; pp. 52-5.

"Early in the [13th] century rumours circulated of the hideous Satanic rites practised by a sect in Germany called Luciferans, and in 1227 the Pope sent Conrad of Marburg to root out the heresy and reform the Church in Germany. Conrad was a sadistic fanatic who had been spiritual director of St. Elizabeth of Thuringia and had delighted in beating and humiliating her. He descended on the Luciferans in the fierce conviction that he was called to do battle with Satan himself. The confessions he extracted were apparently made without

torture, but under the threat of death if the victim did not confess. If these confessions were accurate, the Luciferans were full-blown Satanists. They worshipped the Devil as creator and ruler of this world, complained that he had been unjustly and treacherously banished from heaven, and believed that he would overthrow the God of the Christians and return to heaven, when they would enjoy eternal happiness with him. They revelled in whatever displeased the Christian God and hated whatever pleased him. At Easter they would go to Mass, keep the consecrated hosts in their mouths and spit them out into a cesspool to show their contempt for Christ.

"When a man was initiated as a Luciferan he was taken to one of their meetings and made to kiss a toad on its backside or mouth. Or sometimes the thing he kissed looked like a duck or a goose and was the size of an oven. Then there came to him a man with black eyes who was pale, emaciated and icy cold. Possibly, he represented the Devil or lord of death. The initiate kissed him and lost his Catholic faith in that instant. Then everyone sat down to a feast and a large black cat appeared, emerging from a statue which was always present. The initiate, the leader of the group and any other members who were worthy of the honour, kissed the cat's backside. The leader said, 'What does this teach?' A member answered, 'the highest peace', and another added, 'And that we must obey.' The candles were put out and there was indiscriminate heterosexual and homosexual orgy. Afterwards the candles were relit and the figure of a man appeared from a dark corner. The upper part of his body shone like the sun, but from the hips down he was black like the cat. The leader cut off a piece of the initiate's clothing and gave it to the shining man, saying, 'Master, I give this to you which has been given to me.' The shining man answered, 'You have served me well, you will serve me more and better. I leave to your care what you have given to me.' Then he disappeared.

"This account of an initiation carries a certain conviction and it could have been stage-managed without too much difficulty. There are traces, in modern times, of a tradition among witches that Lucifer, 'the light-bearer', was the sun, an identification which could easily be made when the Devil was regarded as the ruler of life on earth. The shining man may perhaps have been intended to represent the Devil as both the sun of day-time -- the shining upper half of the figure -- and the sun of night, the black lower parts standing for the black sun, passing under the earth through the regions of darkness before the next sunrise. The black sun can be imagined as the leader of the stars, which follow his course towards the western horizon and disappear beyond it -- the stars fallen from heaven.

"The obscene kiss on the backside of an animal or person representing Satan became a stock charge in allegations of devil-worship, but where it originally came from is not known. It was evidently a symbol of utter submission and perhaps also of the reversal of conventional values."

The Black Arts, by Richard Cavendish, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967; pp. 324-5.

"In 1453 a sect of Brethren of the Cross was discovered in Thuringia. They practised flagellation and believed that Satan would regain his lost power and place, and would expel Christ from heaven. They celebrated orgies in secret by night.

"Early in the following century it was said that Bohemia was infested with thousands of Luciferans. In Italy, Pope Julius II ordered an inquisitor to proceed against 'a certain sect', which renounced the Christian faith, trampled on and dishonoured crosses, abused the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and took the Devil as their lord and master, offering him obedience and reverence.

"By this time the searchlights of persecution were being turned away from the Luciferans and similar heretical sects to be trained on the witches. Many of the sects had been accused of holding secret meetings at night and worshipping the Devil, usually in the form of a man, cat or goat. Some were specifically

charged with believing that the Devil rules this world and will eventually overthrow God. Even when these accusations were lacking, other heretical practices were classed as Satanic because they reversed Christian values -- renunciation of Christianity and hostility to the church; condemnation of marriage and procreation; slaughtering of children and cannibalism; orgiastic sexual practices and homosexuality. Most of this pattern of Satanism reappears in the witch trials."

Ibid, p. 327.

"Witches existed from very early times and were always thought to be in touch with evil spirits and the powers of the underworld. In medieval Europe the prince of the underworld and the master of demons was Satan and it is probable that the god of the witches was not the supposed 'horned god' of the hypothetical 'Old Religion' but the Devil of Christianity. The principal beliefs and rituals of medieval witches seem to have come from the Cathars, Luciferans and other sects accused of worshipping the Devil, though the witch religion drew on many other sources -- magic and sorcery, classical traditions, the Bible, pagan customs and beliefs, and accepted popular notions about the behaviour of witches.

"It is also likely that the persecution of Satanic sects and the witch trials themselves stimulated activities they were intended to suppress."

Ibid, p. 330.

tyagi /TOKUS
tyagi@houseofkaos.abyss.com

Satanism is merely a category of worldviews involving sympathetic interpretations of "Satan".

Diane Vera

--
If you wish to be sure I read your response to me, cc me via email. Thanks.
Contribute to the Netmage's Consortium Newsgroup: alt.magick.tyagi
Di vWeb: telnet bill.math.uconn.edu 9393 ** <ftp.portal.com/pub/ss/Usenet>

The Arcane Archive is copyright by the authors cited.
Send comments to the Arcane Archivist: tyaginator@arcane-archive.org.

**The ARCAN E ARCHIVE is brought to you
by the Lucky Mojo Curio Co. Occult Shop
Candles * Spiritual Supplies * Books**





And So I Shed My Skin, and Walked Away New: Frogs, Toads, and the Secret of Transformation

The life cycle of frogs and toads involves at least one major transformation, from tadpole to adult. Many also shed their skins regularly as they grow, and some species eat the shed skin. These spectacular transformations may explain why many cultures see frogs and toads as symbolic of re-creation, or as keepers of the secrets of transformations.

The Olmec tribes created images of a toad god of rebirth, eating its own skin. It is reborn by consuming itself, caught in a cycle of death and rebirth, like people, and like the natural world itself.

In many ancient Chinese tales and legends, the toad is a trickster and a magician, a master of escapes and spells. But he is also the keeper of the real, powerful secrets of the world, such as the secret of immortality. Many legends involve a wandering wise man called Liu Hai and his three-legged toad companion Ch'an Chu. The toad knows the secret of eternal life, and for his friendship reveals the secret to the wise man. In Japan a similar legend involves the Gama-Sennin, also known as Kosensei, a wise old man with a hunched body and a warty face. Kosensei wanders the land with his toad companion, who teaches him the secret powers of herbs, including the secret of immortality.

Interestingly, many of these Asian tales refer to the secret of immortality as a fungus growing from the toad's forehead. It has been suggested that this may be a link to the many shamanistic traditions of the Americas, where hallucinogenic compounds derived from frogs and toads are used for religious rituals of communion with the spirit world and self-transcendence.

Poison, Hallucination, Transcendence: The Alchemical Amphibian

One of the other forms of power that frogs and toads wield in many cultures and myths is chemical, or alchemical: frogs are viewed as the purveyors of poison or of powerful drugs, which can heal or induce

hallucinations. In many cases, these myths have some foundation in truth, as some species contain compounds both poisonous and hallucinogenic. Many tribes of South and Central America have used compounds from frogs and toads as poisons and hallucinogenic drugs for religious rituals.

In medieval Europe, toads were viewed as evil creatures whose blood was a potent poison and whose body parts had strange powers. Some of these views were created by writers from Classical Greece and Rome, whose opinions held great sway. Pliny the Elder imputed many strange powers to toads: a toad's presence will silence a room full of people; a small bone from a toad's right side will keep water from boiling; a bone from the left side will repel the attack of dogs.

A widely held superstition concerned the fabulous "Toad-Stone," a jewel that was supposed to be found inside the toad's head. This jewel, placed in a ring or a necklace, would heat up or change color in the presence of poison, thereby protecting the wearer from foul play. In Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, the Old Duke says,

"Sweet are the uses of adversity which, like the toad,
ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his
head."

Toads were also commonly seen as evil spirits, or as the "imp" or "familiar" who accompanied witches, assisting them in their evil designs. These familiars could also be cats, crows, insects, or dogs. In the annals of the witch trials at St. Osyth (England), Ursula Kempe's young son testified that one of her four familiars, a black toad named Pigin, had once called illness in a young boy. Toads were also popular as poisonous ingredients in potions. It was said that "the women-witches of ancient time which killed by poisoning, did much use toads in their confections." Male witches were also purported to use toads for their poisonous magic. Such folklore and popular mythology is the result of Inquisition propaganda and does not reflect Pagan religions.

Bombina bombina by Marek Szczepanek. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Toads: The Biochemistry of the Witches' Cauldron

By [Andrew Allen](#)

Published in [History Today](#) Volume 29 Issue 4 April 1979

[Science & Technology](#), [Social](#) [The European Witch-Craze](#)

Andrew Allen describes how the toad owes its relationship with witchcraft to the virulent poisons that its warty skin produces.

Many and tangled are the threads that connect the lives of animals to the mythologies and history of men. Perhaps the most interesting is the thread that runs from the evolutionary biology of the toad to the cauldron and broomstick flights of the medieval witch.

- See more at: <http://www.historytoday.com/andrew-allen/toads-biochemistry-witches-cauldron#sthash.zZDQTa5Y.dpuf>