

Modern “Western” culture is saturated in demonized concepts of the witch, while lacking knowledge about authentic cultural practices in its own past. So it will surprise many to find that the oldest names for witch in European languages emphasize their spiritual gifts: powers of prophecy, divination, and incantation; of healing, herbal knowledge, shapeshifting and shamanic flight. Some cultures named witches after their magical staffs or masks or animal spirits. Others described them in language relating to Wisdom, Fate, and the Mysteries. With few exceptions, the old witch-titles honored them as cultural authorities, in sharp contrast to later diabolist stereotypes that portrayed witches as cursers and destroyers.

One of the Norse names used for such women was *fjölkyngi*, “of manifold knowledge.” [Magnusson IV, 452] The English cognate *cunning woman* is based on the same ancient root of “knowing,” which survives in the expression “beyond his ken.” It is related to *gnostic* and *know* and Sanskrit *jñana*. Norse also had *vísendakona*, literally “wise woman,” and *vítka* (“sorceress”), both derived from another archaic root of seeing and knowing. The Latin *saga* (“wisewoman”) survived in French as *sage-femme*. The Russian witch-name *знахарка* means a “woman who knows.” Crossing into the Uralic language family, the Finnish word *tietäjä* is an ungendered term for “knower.” The more common Finnish word for “witch” is *noita*, closely related to *noaidi*, the Sámi title for a shaman.

PROPHETIC WITCHES

The Fates I fathom, yet farther I see | See far and wide the worlds about.
[*Völuspá* 29, in Hollander, 6]

Many names describe the witch as a foreknowing seeress, in both Slavic and Celtic languages. In Russian she is *vyed'ma*, in Polish *wiedzma*, and in southern Slavic tongues, *vyeshchitsa* or *vedavica*: all meaning “knower.” (Every Slavic language has some form of this word for wisewoman; see table at the end of this chapter.) These Slavic names come from the same Proto-Indo-European root *weid, “to see,” as the Russian verb видеть or видать, “to see,” and as the Vedas, “knowledge.”

The Old Celtic root *wel-, “to see,” shares the same deep root. It in

turn yielded the Gaulish word for “witch,” *uidlua* [Lambert, 167] and its close relatives: Welsh *gwelet*, “seer,” and Old Irish *velet*, later *fili*, *filed*, *banfilé*, “poet, seer.” [Meyer 1906:176; West, 28] The name of the Irish prophetess Feidelm descends from that root. [Lambert, 167. Romanized as Fedelma] So does Veleda, the title of a revolutionary Bructerian seeress in the ancient Netherlands. [West, 28. On Veleda, see <http://www.sourcememory.net/veleda/?p=8>]

The English translation of *fili* as “poet” fails to convey its cultural prestige or its spiritual context. The *fili* was supposed to be skilled in three powers. First and foremost was *imbas forosnai*, the “wisdom that illuminates,” which was inspired vision and prophecy. The seeress Feidelm and the woman warrior Scáthach were said to prophesy from *imbas forosnai*. [Kinsella, 239] The significance of *teinm láida*, “breaking of pith or marrow,” is no longer understood, except that it involved chanting. The third technique was *díchetal di chennaib*, “chanting from heads,” a spontaneous incantation. [Kinsella, 239, 356, 124]

Proto-Indo-European *weid also gave rise to the Old Irish word *wissuh, “knowledge,” which produced *ban-fissid*, “seeress.” [Meyer 1906: 176] More recent Irish titles—*ban feasa* “wisewoman” and *cailleach feasa* “wise old woman”—derive from that same root. [O Cruialaoich, 72] So does the pivotal concept *imbas*, “wisdom,” from *imb-fiuss or *imb-fess, “great knowledge.” This derivation is quite old, already given in the prologue to the *Senchas Mór*, in the early 8th century. [Chadwick, online]

The *fáith* or *ban-fáith* was a prophetic woman “expert in super-natural wisdom.” [Chadwick / Dillon 1972: 153] The modern



France, 6th-8th century

Irish form *banfháidh* (also *fáidhbhean*) is based on *fáidh*, “seer, prophet, sage,” with an interesting late usage as “the Fates.” [www.teanglann.ie/en/fgb/banfháidh] The related noun *fáith* meant “divination.” [West, 27] The title *ban-fílid* / *ban-file*, from the same root as Gaulish *uidliua*, “witch,” signified a female bard or poet, which in Irish had strong spiritual connotations. The druid-names will be more fa-

miliar to most people: *ban-druí* or *ban-draoi*, “druid-woman.” [Meyer 1906: 176, citing the *Book of Leinster*] Linguists think that Celtic *fáith* was borrowed into Latin *vates*, “divinely inspired seer, soothsayer,” and *vaticination*, “prediction, prophecy.” The Indo-European root meant “possessed, frenzied, inspired.” [West, 28]

Spiritual inspiration is also the basis of the Latin *divina*, “diviner, one who performs divination.” [Filotas, 219. A *mulier divinator* is also mentioned.] Isidore of Seville admitted that *divinus/divina* means a person filled with the divine, although he saw these soothsayers in a very negative light. (But like other priests of his time, he was obliged to acknowledge that the *divini* were often right, an agreed-upon public opinion.) He identified two kinds of seership, “one which comes from art,” such as reading lots, and “the other from prophetic frenzy”—in other words, an oracular ecstasy.



[*Etymologiae* VIII, 9.14, in Filotas, 228-9] Latin *divina* flowed out into French *devine* or *devineresse*, Italian *indovina*, English *diviner*, and Welsh *dewines*.

The English word *soothsayer* means “truth-sayer.” The same meaning occasionally pops up in Church Latin as *veratrix*. [Grimm, 1615] The *auguriatrix* (“woman who reads omens”) is listed among people targeted in Charlemagne’s repression of pagans. Arno of Salzburg also listed the *auguriatrix* among *incantatores* and other “sorcerers” that people turned to in times of trouble. They were reputed to heal sick people and animals. [Filotas, 233, 250]

The clergy preferred to use Latin titles, and occasionally Greek ones like *sybil* and *pythonissa*. *Pythia* (“snake woman”) was the ancient title of the Delphic oracle who, inspired by her serpent-spirit, prophesied in spiritual ecstasy. A millennium later, medieval clergymen adopted the latinized *pythonissa* as a term for entranced and prophetic witches from the Vulgate translation of the Bible. Thus, an 8th century Irish text quotes the condemnation in Leviticus of people who had “a python or divinatory spirit.” [Filotas, 96] Around the same time, the *Homilia de sacrilegiis* says,

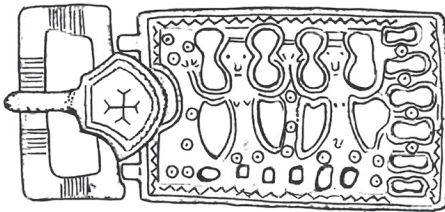
And those who are *divinus* or *divinas*, that is, *pythonissas*, through whom

the demons give answers to those who come to question them, who believe what they say, and go to the hidden place, or listens to anything from the demons, is not a Christian, but a pagan.” [Homilia de sacrilegias III, 5, in Caspari, 6]

Romanized terms have obscured or eclipsed indigenous witch names in many places. By late antiquity, the Gauls and Hispani were calling healers and diviners *ariolae* (female) and *arioli* (male). Though the masculine plural supposedly included females, French bishops went out of their way to specify women in their attacks on the “*arioli* and *ariolae*.” [More on the *ariolae* in my forthcoming volume, *Women in a Time of Overlords*.] People consulted them in Nature sanctuaries, or invited them to their homes for divinations, healings and purifications. The priesthood insisted that their ceremonies and incantations were made to demons, but this barely dented their great popularity. [Filotas, 95, 231] German bishops at the synod of Erfurt (932) went so

far as to prohibit fasting “because it is perceived as being done more for the sake of divination [*ariolandi*] than as a supplement to Catholic law.” [Filotas, 239]

A 9th century penitential reveals that people were fasting “in honor of the Moon for the sake of a

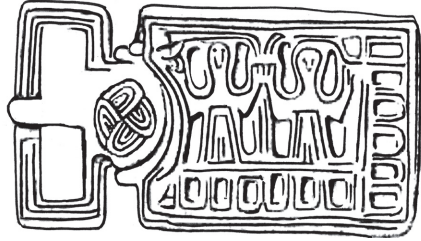


Invokers, Merovingian buckle, France
cure.” [Pseudo-Theodore, in Filotas, 131]

DIVINERS

An important group of witch-names derives from Latin *sortiaria*: “one who influences, fate, fortune.” It is based on *sors* (genitive *sortis*), meaning “destiny,” “oracular response,” and “lots.” [Harkness, 70] From the same root came *sortilega*: “reading or gathering of lots”—or of “fates.” The root *legere* means “to gather, select, read” (modern Italian still retains the sense of “read”) but its oldest foundation is the Greek *legein*, “to gather.” In the early middle ages, *sortilega* still signified a lot-caster, as indicated by Isidore of Sevilla. (In Spanish, *sortiaria* still means divination by lots or cards.) From *sortiaria* comes *sorcière*, which became the primary word for “witch” in French. It was

borrowed into English as *sorceress*, a female-marked word. Its first attested use (c. 1384) predated *sorcerer* (1526) by 150 years. [*The Online Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. *sorcery*.]



Sortiaria soon lost its specific meaning of divination, and began to be used for many kinds of witch-

Invokers on buckle at Arbon, France

craft, including healing and weather magic. Pirmin of Reichenau ordered his parishioners, “Do not believe weather-sorceresses, nor give them anything for that reason, nor *inpuriae* [impure women?] who, they say, men put on the roof so that they can tell them the future, whatever of good or evil is coming to them.” [Filotas, 170] The *Corrector sive Medicus* also deplores the custom of sitting on the roof to see future events. An anonymous sermon uses the same epithet *inpurae* for women who set out offering tables on January 1. [Filotas, 172]

An early 9th century denunciation of soothsayers and enchanters refers to those who interpret dreams. [Council of Paris to Louis the Pious, in Filotas, 221] So does the Capitularia written by an archbishop of Tours in the same period. [Wedeck, 257] Ghärbald of Liège placed “those who observe dreams” among lot-casters, soothsayers, and amulet-wearers in his Belgian capitulary. [Filotas, 292] In fact, over twenty penitential books refer to dream interpreters (*somnariii*), though none give many details. [Filotas, 236] An 11th century Spanish manual warns priests against those who “practiced or scrutinized dreams, woolwork or sorcery.” [Filotas, 243-4] (Once again, textile arts are related to divination and witchcraft.) Old High German sources also refer occasionally to old women who interpreted dreams. [Mattias Lexer, *Mittlehochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, in Brauner, 135, n. 39] Words for “dream-readers” are recorded in Norse and Old English. [AS *swefn reccan*, ON *draum rāda*, in Grimm 1145]

Sermons, penitentials, and other priestly sources conflate the *sortilegi*, *divini*, *arioli*, *incantatores* and *praecantatores*, often using them interchangeably. [Flint, 217; Filotas, 227ff] The writers are often deliberately cryptic, avoiding detailed description of the customs. Their language is also confusing, with the meanings of the Latin

words drifting on ethnic tongues. But however poor their mastery of Latin, the priests adhered to its masculine default, which obscures women from view except when the writer goes out of his way to name them. About two dozen texts do explicitly name female diviners and enchanters. But language conceals many others, as Bernadette Filotas points out: “Burchard of Worms himself, who time and again identified women as the principal practitioners of magic, never gave the feminine form of any word for magician.” [Filotas, 220-21. She says “women tend to vanish behind the inclusive masculine words in all but approximately six percent of the texts studied.” But “inclusive” is a strange way to describe a linguistic convention that obliterates the presence of women.]

The Norse had an expression for consulting a diviner: *ganga til frétta* “go for news,” or “institute an inquiry.” [Shetelig and Falk, 423] Old Norse *frétt* corresponded with Old High German *freht* and Old English *fyrht*, “divination, oracle.” [Bosworth-Toller online: www.bosworthtoller.com/finder/3/fyrht] *Fyrht* appears in King Cnut’s catalog of forbidden heathenisms in the year 1020, along with “the worship of “heathen gods, and the sun or the moon, fire or rivers, water-wells or stones, or forest-trees...” [Winchester laws, in Thorpe Vol I, 162] The sagas refer to another kind of divination, *thriefa*, involved touching a person’s body in order to read and foresee events to come, especially fate in battle, is mentioned. [Svenson, 18]

The Latvian word for “witch,” *burt*, derives from *burtas*, lots, and *burten*, “to divine or conjure.” These words are related to Lithuanian *burtas*, “lot,” and *burtininkas*, “lot-caster.” [Grimm, 1617. The male form is *burtneks*]

The Basque *sorguiñ* or *xorguiña* derives from the same root as *sorceress*, adding the suffix *guiñ* / *eguiñ* “which means somebody who does or makes something.” [Baroja, 150] So a *sorguiña* is a fate-maker, who deals in destiny. The British *weirding-woman* and *weirdwife* also act upon destiny, which is the meaning of Old English Wyrð.

Similarly, a complex of Latin-root words (*hechicera*, *faytillera*, *facturière*, *faiturière*, *fatucchiera*, etc.) describe the witch as a “doer, maker”—one who causes things to happen. The deep meaning of the Slavic root *charodeia* (Russian *чародейка*) also originated from an Indo-European root “to make,” [West, 36-8. It has the same root as

Sanskrit *kṛti*, “do, make”; Lithuanian *kerai*, “magic”; and Middle Irish *creth*, “poetry.”]

The Basque diviner was called *azti*. Like healers and the *sorgiñes*, she acquired spirit helpers called Mamarro or Galtzagorri. The *azti* were said to keep as many as four of these spirits living in their needlecases. The Basque word for these containers, *kuthun*, can also mean “amulet, book, or letter”—all magically charged things. [Barandiaran, 79 (using the Spanish *afiletera*); Baroja, 232-3]

The witchen nature of the needlecase seems to grow out of its association with spinning. Early medieval archaeological finds suggest a similar spiritual charge for threadboxes buried with women, some of which contained herbs, including camomile (Gumbsheim, Germany), henbane (St Aubin, Switzerland), and umbelliferous seeds (Yverdon, Vaud). But only one kind of herb in any one box, which makes it clear that they are not likely to be medicinal but rather amuletic. [Meaney 1981: 61-63]



*Threadbox, Burwell,
Cambridgeshire*

The going assumption has too often been that no prophetic women really existed in the early “Christian” period. Priestly denunciations prove otherwise. The women are there, being reviled by men like Aldhelm of Malmesbury. Writing around the year 700, he inveighed against the “empty gibberish of falsity from talkative prophetesses and soothsayers” [*a pithonibus et aruspibus uana falsitatis deleramenta garrientibus*, *Prosa de uirginitate*, chapter 44, in Hall 2004: 96] This English bishop was obsessed with degrees of sexual purity—and with stamping out heathen culture, which as yet had barely been touched by the royal decrees of conversion.

While the clergy showed contempt, they also projected their fear. Before long, priestly opposition had pushed “sorcery” toward a meaning of illicit and harmful magic. Early medieval capitularies were already assigning negative meanings to *sorciaricus* / *sorciaria* (“sorcerer”). [Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, 1690, in <http://hypo.geneve.ch/www/cliotexte/sites/Histoire/Sorcellerie/corpus.html>. 3/29/08] This trend only accelerated with time.

CHANT, INVOCATION AND CHARMS

Incantation was called *galdr* in Norse. The witch-name *galdrakona* referred specifically to a woman who chanted. The Saxons had a related word, *galdor*, from which were named the *galstre* or *galdriggei*, “enchanter” (both feminine forms). (The Middle High German cognate, *galster*, meant “spoken magic, spell.”) [Grimm, 1616. Hall 1916: 128 on *galdriggei*] Even more interesting is the Anglo-Saxon *wyrtgælstre*, “herb-chanter.” Through their voice and breath and words, the chanting women brought spirit to bear on matter, and transformed it by infusing it with consciousness.

The Latin *incantation* means singing into, invoking by chant, from *canto*, “song, chant.” The clergy sometimes called witches by the Latin title of *incantatrix*, which gave rise to French *enchanteresse* and, in turn, to English *enchantress*. Church councils were constantly prohibiting the singing of charms. Usually, they included divinations alongside incantations, like the council of Clovesho in 750. [Crawford, 159] Theodore’s Penitential prescribes penance for “a woman [who] performs diabolical [sic] incantations or divinations,” as well as for any who observe “omens from birds, or dreams, or any divinations according to the custom of the heathen.” [XV, 4, in McNeill/Gamer, 198] Penitential books were doing their best to stamp out the *incantatores* and *precantatores* to which people flocked for healing, protection, and other blessings. These witches did more than chant; they gave counsel, and with it healing and protective remedies, in the form of herbs, amulets, knotted ties, and other medicine objects. [Filotas, 249, n. 195]

“*the woman enchants, the serpent enchants*”

Back in the 5th century, Caesarius of Arles singled out female *incantatrices*, warning christians, men in particular, not to seek them out for healing or prophecy. He said it was better for a man “if he does not send for a soothsayer, if he does not make bindings, he does not admit any enchantresses. The woman enchants, the serpent enchants.” [Filotas, 250, n. 207. This, and one other reference to a *herbaria*, are the only times Caesarius specifies female practitioners.] That misogynist trope is foundational priestcraft. As Bernadette Filotas summa-

rizes from English and Frankish sources, “enchantment was typically the practice of women.” And they did it for female purposes, which included weaving, conception and contraception, and birth, as well as protection from men. The Pseudo-Egbert penitential condemns Anglo-Saxon women for using incantations to conceive. [Filotas, 283]

The *carminatrix* was named from *carmen*, another Latin word for “song.” From it descends French *charme*, and in turn the English *charm* and *charmer*. These medieval names referred to women who chanted healing verse and performed ritual cures. In medieval Spanish such women were called *ensalmadoras*, a name that implies that they used Christian prayers in their chants. Germans called them *se-gencærinne*, “signers,” for the gestures they made over people. [Grimm, 1035] In modern Irish, *cailleach phiseogach* is a common name for an old sorceress who works spells or charms. [<http://www.teanglann.ie/en/fgb/piseogach>]

The word “spell” itself originally meant “speak, tell” (Old English *spellian*, Anglo-French *espeller*, Old French *espelir*: “mean, signify, explain, interpret”). [<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=spell>] The meanings of these words stretched over time, so that a German source used *carmen* to mean amulet, as in something that was sung over. [Pirmin of Reichnau, in Filotas, 256] This semantic drift is common, as other examples will show.

In Ireland, incantation was a means of revealing *imbas forosnai*, the “wisdom that illumines.” The *Táin* shows Fedelm chanting a long prophecy to Medb of Connaught. Nora Chadwick saw this state of inspiration as having originally been “the special métier of women.” One of the old sources she mentions is the lost *Druim Snechta*, of which only fragments survive. One says that the British witch Scathach practices *imbas forosnai*. [Chadwick, online. She notes that both stories present the practice of *imbas* as originating in Britain, where Fedelm goes to study *flidecht*. However, the bulk of the stories about these arts are about men, especially Finn MacCumhaill.] Some sources describe Imbas as “a process of revelation brought on by a mantic sleep.” [Chadwick, online. The three arts are named in the *Uraicecht Becc*, which gives the variant spellings *tenm laegda*, *imus forosnad*, and *dichedul do cennaib*. Metrical Tractates from the *Book of Ballymote* and *Book of Leinster* also refer to them. Most of them talk about men



*The Moylough Belt Shrine, Eire,
8th century (detail)*

and animal sacrifice.]

Imbas was classed with two other arts, both involving incantation. In the first, *teinm laida*, “illumination of song,” inspiration comes through chanting, a true signature of shamanic ecstasy. One source says that *teinm laida* belongs to the fourteen streams of poetry. *Teinm* is thought to derive from *tep-*, meaning “heat,” the same root as Sanskrit *tapas*, which also describes intensive spiritual practices. According to the

Prologue to the *Senchas Már*, different kinds of offerings were made for *imbas forosnai* and *teinm laida*. These “heathen rites” were the reason that Patrick abolished them, “for neither *teinm laida* nor *imbas forosnai* could be performed without the accompaniment of heathen offerings.” [Chadwick, online] In addition to abolishing these two forms of *filidecht* (seership), the laws of Patrick also admonish kings not to deal with druids or “pythonesses.” [Joyce, 238]

Cormac’s Glossary, circa 900, concurs that these arts were considered too pagan to be permitted. Only *dichetal do chennaib* was allowed to continue under Christianity. The phrase is variously translated as “to chant in prophetic strains,” as “poetry from the head,” or “chanting from the bones.” [Chadwick, online] It was also described as “a declaration from the ends of his bones at once.” Early sources hint that *dichetal do chennaib* involved moving the fingertips in some way. [Kinsella, 239, 356, 124] One writer associates it with “chanting by means of the hazels of prophecy,” apparently referring to divinatory wands. [Chadwick, online] This fragment recalls the hazelnuts of Wisdom that fall into the Well of Segais, at the source of the Boyne, where they turn the bellies of the salmon purple. Irish lore recounts how seers sought out this fountain in hopes of attaining illumination.

Anglo-Saxons called the chanting witch *leóð-rūne* or *leóþ-rūne*,

leod runan

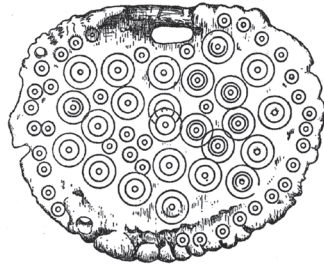
“song mysteries.” *Leóð* also means poetry or verse. [Hall 1916: 187. Compare Old High German *leod* (modern *Lied*)

Irish *lóid*, Scots *laoidh*, “song, poem,” French *lai* and English *lay*, in the medieval sense of a poem. [Some of these are given in West, 33.] Anglo-Saxon lexicographers marked the pagan underpinnings of this name: “Cockayne translates the word ‘heathen charm,’” according to Toller-Bosworth, who also translates *fondien leódrunen* as “incantations”. [Toller-Bosworth, 631. *Fundian* means “to try, aspire, intend, desire.”] Christine Fell reads *leod-rune* as a variant of the poetic Old English *leoðurun* (“sung mystery”). [Fell 1991, 206–8, in Hall 2004: 124] Alaric Hall concurs, “*Leoðurun* denotes holy mysteries and the Middle English *leodrone* prophecies...” [Hall 2004: 124] But these important word was strangled by persecutory stigma (see chapter 4).

Charmers cured by knotting hanks of colored thread, and by laying on hands. Some invoked the Nine Maidens, whose healing spells were common across northern Europe. Audrey Meaney refers to an Old English charm invoking the Nothðæs (Needs) who are Nine Sisters, and compares it to a Danish runic inscription on a pine wand, in which the Nine Needs (*nouthær*) lying on a black stone out on the sea chase away a fever. [Meaney, 18-19; compare Mitchell, 64] These Need-names might relate to Norns, going by two lines in the *Sigrdrífumál*. The valkyrie Sigrdrífa recommends that runes should be cut “on the nail of the Norn” and “mark your nail with nauð” (the Need-rune). [*Sigrdrífumál* 17, in Bek-Pedersen, 274]

The Nine Maidens also resonate with the Nine Giantesses of the Sea, at the edge of the Earth. In a much later Scottish witch trial, Bessie Smith said that she “charmed the heart-fevers” by invoking “the nine maidens that died in the boortree in the Ladywell Bank,” and giving her patients wayburn leaf to eat for nine mornings. [Chambers, 539]

Treatment through touch, stroking, and making passes over the body was sometimes called “bettering”: Anglo-Saxon *bētan*, Middle Dutch *böten*, Old German *puozan* all meant “to remedy, heal.” [Grimm, 1236] “Among our peasantry there are old women still who profess *böten*, stroking, pouring, and charming by spells.” [Grimm, 1151] The Welsh had a



*Antler pendant,
Friesland, Netherlands*

constellation of words based on the same concept. *Swynaw* meant “to comfort or cure; to charm; to bless; to save harmless,” and also to preserve. *Swynawg* “possessed of a preserving virtue.” *Swynedigaeth*, “the act of preserving or remedying by some hidden virtue; a preserving by charm.” A woman who did this was a *darswynws*. [Pughe, s.v. *swynaw*; 395; for *darswynws* he gives only the masculine form.]

women's spells

Gaulish: *bnannom bricto*

(Plomb de Larzac)

Irish: *brichta ban*

(Liber Hymnorum)

The witches often treated people through animist ceremonies: placing healing stones on sick bodies or passing children through openings in the earth or by immersions into south-running water. These shamanic arts did not fade away of their own accord. They were much in demand,

and in spite of centuries of repression, they persisted. In birth magic, for example, women used “herbal or animal remedies, amulets, girdle [belt], charms and invocations, physical manipulation and various rites relating to springs and stones.” [Freitag, 74] The stones could be large boulders or rock “beds” in which women desiring to conceive would lie, or small stones that could be tied on the mother’s body or used in other ways.

The Gaulish and Old Irish cultures ascribed powers of incantation to women using nearly identical phrases. A rare Gaulish inscription found in a tomb at Larzac, France, refers to a sisterhood of enchantresses (*uidlua*). In a spell inscribed on a lead plaque is the phrase *bnannom bricto*, “women’s spell, charm” [Lambert, 154, derives these spell-names from IE **bhregh*, “to declare solemnly.”

“against the spells of women,
of smiths and druids.”

The Gaulish phrase *Bnannom bricto* has an exact Irish correlate, *brichta ban*, in the *Liber Hymnorum*. This text, attributed to St Patrick but dated much later, is itself a spell. But this spell of a Christian monk is notorious for chanting “Against the spells of women, of smiths and druids.” [*Fri brichta ban ocus goband ocus druad*, in Rhys 1901: 295]

Medieval bishops and canon lawyers attempted to wipe out the peasantry's use of incantations for vision, blessing, healing, and protection, because those chants had traditionally invoked pagan deities, and because the priesthood now arrogated the chanting of litanies to itself. The priest singing Mass is performing an incantation that is supposed to magically transform wine and wafer into the body of his god. But the Church claimed that power of enchanting only for a doctrinally restricted brotherhood, denying it to females or people of ecstatic spiritual traditions. Its hierarchy forbade the *incantatrix* to practice the universal human sacrament of invoking Spirit. It slandered the pagan European chants (and sometimes even christianized ones) as devilish. If the Night Chant of the Diné or the Maori Creation Chant had existed in Europe, they would have attempted to ban them just as they did the enchantment of the witches.

HEALING WITCHES

Many witch-titles have to do with medicine and healing. Some mean "herb-woman," like the Frankish *herbaria* and Spanish *herbolera*, both of which had already been demonized. The *Lex Alamannorum* gives "herbalist" as a synonym for witch, in its most negative sense: *stria aut herbaria*. *Stria* (from Latin *strix*, "screech-owl") was a primary Roman name for "witch." Churchmen often rendered *herbaria* as *venefica*, "poisoner," following Roman patterns of vilification and demonization. [Grimm, 1616, 1068] The Greek missionary St Cyril rebuked his Slavic parishoners for going in illness to healers he called "accursed women." [Ralston, 420]

But the witch-herbalist knew of plants for sickness and binding up wounds, for childbirth and purifying the blood. She brewed herbs and roots to make healing drinks, made salves, and combined these medicines with ceremonial acts, in what we today call "wholistic healing." She used knotting, healing belts, rubbing with stones, healing touch, and herbal smudges. [Flint, 245. Caesarius described some of these acts in Sermo 184] She gathered herbs to bless houses and barns, burned or scattered them, hung wreaths over doors and beams; and tied blessing plants around the necks of cows and other animals.

Penitential books are full of references to people using *ligaturas* (ties) for healing and protection, or wearing bundles of herbs, bones

or pieces of iron, as pendants, tied on or sewn into clothing. [Caesarius of Arles, Eligius of Noyon, and a 9th century penitential from Tours, in Filotas, 254-5, 263] The *Sermon on Sacrilege* gives a long list of illnesses and physical problems that were treated by “songs and incantations,” and by various folk remedies, such as hanging amulets such as the “serpent’s tongue around a person’s neck. [*Homilia de Sacrilegiis* V, 17, in Caspari, 10. Audrey Meaney (1981: 12) identifies the “serpents’ tongues” as fossilized shark teeth.]

Herbal mysteries were the province of the Saxon *lybbestre* and Old German *luppararā* (later *lublerin*), “female healer.” [Grimm, 1651] These names for healing witches descend from *lyb* and *luppa*, which both mean “vitality” “medicine.” [Grimm, 1037; Bosworth-Toller online: <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/021917>] *Lyb* is related to the word “life” itself. The Anglo-Saxon verb *libban* (*lybban*) means “to live, be, exist.” [Hall 1916: 192] It designates “medicine” both in the sense of curative herbs or powders, and as something animated by sacred power.

Modern explanations define *lib* / *lyb* as “something medicinal and potent, a harmful or powerful drug, φάρμακον.” [Cockayne, 397] There is a special irony to translators’ using the word “drug,” and even “poison,” rather than “medicine,” to translate *lyb*. [Hall 1916: 192 also has “drug, poison, charm: witchcraft.”] (The negative charge laid on these heathen terms dies very hard.) The corresponding Icelandic word *lyf* could mean either a healing plant, or some other spirit power. [Toller, 647; <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/021917>]

So *lybbestre* translates as “woman who works with life-force,” or “medicine-woman.” Many spiritual concepts of the Anglo-Saxons sprang from the etymological matrix of *lyb*. *Lyfja* meant “to heal.” *Lybcraeft* was the wisdom of witch-herbalists, who supplemented their pharmacological knowledge with transformative and protective magic. [In more reductionist terms, Hall (1916: 192) calls *lybcraeft* “skill

gloss

a translator’s
explanation,
comparison

in the use of drugs, magic, witchcraft.” Cognate words existed in Old German: *lupperie* “medicine, healing,” *luppærinne*, “sorceress,” and *lublerin*, “female healer.” [Grimm, 1037, 1616, 1651]

Amulets crafted from herbs, animal claws, crystal, amber and other essence-filled things, were

called *lybesn*, *lyfesna*, or *lybesa*. [Meaney, 14; Grimm, 1103; Toller, 647] This word also encompassed the meaning of “offering” and “favorable omen,” as implied by the Latin gloss *strena*. [<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/021920>] *Lyb-corn* (“healing grain”) referred to medicinal seeds, especially purgatives like euphoriba or spurge or hellebore. [Cockayne, 397] *Lyb-corn* leaves were also given in an herbal compound for people suffering from mental illness. [Leechbook III, 41, in Meaney, 228]



Healer infuses blessings into a herbal potion, with her mortar and pestle in the foreground.

Another word in this magical set was *lyblac*, which derives from *lyb-léca*, an Old English word for “doctoring” (later *leech*). [<http://www.bosworthtoller.com/021917>] It had a Gothic cognate, *lubjaleisei*, which was glossed in Greek as *φαρμακεία*. [Bosworth-Toller, loc. cit, L. Ecg. P. i. 8; Th. ii. 174, 34] (We only know this word because it was preserved in an early translation of Galatians 5:20, in which Paul denounces “the acts of the flesh,” among them “idolatry and witchcraft.”) [Moriz, 87] Both *lyblac* and *φαρμακεία* had an herbalist genealogy but came to be used as general terms for witchcraft, acquiring an increasingly pejorative sense. *Lāchenærinne*, the Middle German cognate of *læca*, meaning “healer,” also took on the meaning of “enchantress.” [Grimm, 1037]

Because of its pagan dimensions, *lyblac* met with hostility from the Anglo-Saxon priesthood, who loaded it with negative connotations. Thus it came to be defined as “sorcery, witchcraft, the art of using drugs or potions for the purpose of poisoning, or for magical purpos-

es.” [Bosworth-Toller *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/021921>] So too *lifesne* (amulets) are denounced in the same breath as “incantations or amulets or other hidden devil-crafts.” [*Purh heora galdor oððe lifesne oððe óðre dígolnesse deófolcræftes*, in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4, 27: <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/021920>]

The Anglo-Saxon preacher Aelfric chastised Christians who sought healing “and who then seeks health by forbidden practices, or in accursed incantations, or by any witchcraft.” [Meaney, 14-15]: “Nor ought a Christian man to enquire from the foul witch about his health...” The priest acknowledged that she may be able to tell him truths, but insisted that they come from the devil. [Meaney, 257] These attitudes were shared by clergymen all over Europe. Penitential books and sermons show that they not only demonized folk religion, but also disparaged its adherents, calling them “ignorant,” “uncouth,” “stupid,” “the rabble,” or “worthless women.” [Filotas, 28]

Ultimately, the *lyb* witch-word survived in Anglo-Saxon only through a shadow-word that was its grammatical negation. In his denunciation of sorcerers and enchanter, archbishop Wulfstan of York names to *unlybwyrhtan*, literally “unlife-workers.” [Wulfst. 194, 18, online: <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/033509>]. No attestations survive for *lybwyrhtan*, the positive word on which this term was based—an absence that speaks volumes. A direct parallel exists in the German transformation of *die holden*, “the beneficial [women]” to *die unholden*, which demonologists introduced as a word for “witch” in the 1400s. But older names persisted, like the Anglo-Saxon *wortcunning*, “herb-knowledge,” at least for a while.

From Norway comes a measure of how wide and deep the *lyb* / *lyfja* concept must have been in Common Germanic. *Lyf* is given as a Norse word for magical drugs as late as the early 1300s. [Shetelig and Falk, 415] It survives in an anathema against “herbs, runes, and enchantment” (*lif runir oc galldra*) in witchcraft statutes issued by a Norwegian archbishop of Niðaróss. [Mitchell, 167. He translates *gall-dra* as “magic,” which is certainly part of its broader meaning, though “incantation” is etymologically foremost.] In Norwegian, *lif* seems to have specialized into an herbal meaning, while in Anglo-Saxon it turned toward “amulet” or “charm.” In Icelandic, it appears as the Lyfjaberg, the “Hill of Healing,” a female sanctuary where the goddess

Menglöd sits with her Nine Maidens. [*Svipdagsmál*, 52-54]

**It is called Lyfjaberg, and has long
brought joy to sick and suffering.
She will become whole, though gravely ill,
every woman who climbs it.**

[Ellis Davidson, 163 (2002 ed, check 1998)]

Luppa also continued in use in Central Europe, as shown by prohibitions by Swiss churchmen in a Zurich MS dated 1393: “You shall not believe in magic nor in magic ointment [*luppe*] nor in witchcraft [*hesse*] nor in magic cure [*lachene*], nor in fire gazing [*für sehen*], nor in measuring for healing, nor in the night women [*naht frowen*] nor in the cry of the magpie, nor in the twitching of the eyebrows and cheeks, nor even in the magic herb betony. All this is unbelief.” [Zurich Pap. MSS B 223-730, in Grimm, 1478-79. Thanks to Christina Schlatter for translating the Old High German; also to Johanna Klappper and Gerda Wolff-Geiger.]

In Old High German too the meaning of *luppi* was turned inside out, directly reversed from “healing” to “poisonous.” The same negative shift occurred with the Latin word *potio*, “a drink,” which became specialized into “herbal brew,” then torqued into the French word “poison,” whence it was adopted into English. In spite of her connection with life and healing, priestly writers often called the medicine witch *venefica*, Latin for “poisoner.” [Grimm, 1652, 1150] By early medieval times *venefica* had acquired the connotation of “sorceress.” Thus Herard of Tours capped his 8th century listing of cunning folk with “the sorcery (*veneficis*) of women who invent various portents (or wonders).” [*mulieribus veneficis et qua diversa fingunt portenta*, in Filotas, 317] Not all scribes agreed that herbalists were harmdoers; in two texts *veneficus* was emended to *beneficus*, “one who is beneficent.” [Filotas, 293]

The use of *venefica* for herbalists and healers was stoked by the clergy’s campaign to brand contraceptive users and providers as murderers and “poisoners.” They used this staining epithet often. [https://www.academia.edu/9833263/Herbs_Knots_and_Contraception] Early European penitential books give abundant evidence of this distortion, which continued in the slander of midwives as babykillers in the late

15th century, most famously in the *Malleus Maleficarum*. From the 9th century on, the priesthood tried to scare people with persecutory spectre of *maleficia*—harmful sorcery. But their writings let us know that the common people saw witch-herbalists as healers, and continued to consult them as their physicians and all-round advisors on life matters, throughout the middle ages. In Scandinavia, “magical healers, especially women” were active from the Viking age up through the 20th century. [Price 2002: 231

One of Ælfric’s sermons groups together three elements of women’s witchcraft abhorred by the clergy: animistic child-blessings and healings; contraception and abortion; and female love potions. “Likewise some witless women go to cross-roads, and draw their children through the earth, and thus commit themselves and their children to the devil. Some of them kill their children before they are born, or after birth, that they may not be discovered, nor their wicked adultery be betrayed ... Some of them devise drinks [philtres] for their wooers, or some mischief, that they may have them in marriage.” [Skeat, 375] Assuming that virtuous married women never needed birth control, the abbot prefers to make the punitive claim that birth control is only a way for women to hide evidence of their love affairs.

The Latin penitential of Halitgar of Cambrai also inveighed against animist ceremonies, “Some men [watch out for that male default] are so blind that they bring their offering to earth-fast stone and also to trees and to wellsprings, as the witches teach, and are unwilling to understand how stupidly they do or how that dead stone or that dumb tree might help them or give forth health when they themselves are never able to stir from their place.” (Emphasis added) The phrase *swa wiccan tæcath* (“as the witches teach”) was added by an 11th-century Old English translator. [North, 276] This bit of commentary underlines the fact that the Anglo-Saxons understood “witches” within the context of pagan ceremony and healing.

*they bring their offerings to earth-fast
stone, and also to trees and to wellsprings,
as the witches teach...*

The English monk Cuthbert denounced “the false remedies of idolatry, as though they could ward off a blow inflicted by God the Creator by means of incantations or amulets [or any other mysteries of devilish art.” [Bede IV. 27, in Colgrave and Mynors, 432-33] The Austrian bishop Arno of Salzburg complained that people preferred folk heal-



Healing with serpent stone, Hungary mid-20th century. (After Dömötör)

ers and animist shrines to doctors and church. They dealt with plague and animal disease by going to “wicked men and women, seeresses, sorceresses and enchanters. [Filotas, 292]

All this looks very different from the wisewoman’s perspective. The herb woman chanted to her chosen plants, invoking their powers and virtues. Old English had a specialized name, *wyrtgælstre*, for the “woman who chants over herbs.” [Grimm, 1616; Meaney (1981: 65) identifies the source as BL MS Cotton Tiberius Aiii, circa 1050. But this sole attestation for the *wyrtgælstre* occurs in a menacing context: “a girl born on the fifth day of the moon will die worst, for she will be a witch (Lat. *malefica*; OE *yfeldæd(e)* and an enchantress with herbs (Lat. *herbaria*; OE *wyrtgælstre*.”] Another Anglo-Saxon remedy against “ælf-sickness” refers to herb-chanting, explaining “how one must sing over the plants before one picks them; and also how one must put those plants under an altar and sing over them...” [Leechbook III, BL Royal 12 D, LXI, 62, in Hall 2004: 113. Dated to 850-950 CE (107). See also Meaney, 68]

Early medieval priestly literature is full of prohibitions of pagan herb-chanting, from Martin of Braga (Portugal), Eligius of Noyon (Belgium), the Theodore penitential (England), Regino of Prum and Burchard of Worms (Germany), and the *Medicina Antiqua*. [Filotas, 276, and passim] A 8th century sermon forbids incantation over herbs [Filotas, 257] as does a German penitential around 1020:

“Hast thou collected medicinal herbs with evil incantations, not with the creed and the Lord’s Prayer...?” [*Corrector sive Medicus*, 65, in McNeill/Gamer, 330]

Healers also sang incantations over medicinal or blessing potions, as a condemnation in the *Homilia de Sacrilegiis* tells us. [*Homilia de Sacrilegiis* IV, 15, in Caspari, 9] The author intones that such people are “not Christian, but pagan.” Meanwhile priests everywhere threw up their hands and invented their own christianized charms to replace the pagan ones—and were often modeled on them.

In spite of their polemical tone, priestly sources demonstrate that gathering herbs was a religious act to pagan Europeans. Their use in blessing and protection was not restricted to witches. The common people gathered certain plants at the new or full or waning moon, or at dawn, midday, sunset, midnight, or on the ancient holidays such as Midsummers Eve. It was customary to approach the plant with reverence, ceremonially asking its permission to cut or uproot it. Some placed offerings of grain or honey before it or into the ground where they dug. Hungarians gathered the shamanic herb belladonna after offering bread, salt, and spices. [Dömötör, 127]

Such herb-gathering rites survived in modern Romania. The *babele mestere* (“skilled old women”) set out quietly at dawn to gather mandrake that they had previously “destined” for harvest by tying on a red ribbon. After digging up the earth around the plant, the wisewomen removed it, laid it on the ground and placed food and drink around it. They spoke a charm: “I give you bread and salt / It is for you to give me strength and health”; or simply “So that you will cure me.” The women shared a meal while embracing and caressing one another, then discussed the person the mandrake was for and how it would help them. [Eliade 1972b: 205, or 222]

On Midsummers Eve young Rumanian women would go out to search for the *cusitza* creeper. They tied red yarn on their finds, and hid the plant under green leaves. Then they drew water from three fountains. Before dawn on Midsummer’s Day, they dressed in their finest, gathered the vines, twined them around their heads, and went door to door singing and making merry. In the evening they carried out a divination using the jug of water collected from the three springs. [Beza, 56-8]

Many herbal invocations took the form of praise-songs: “Good day, holy plant *pivoine*, you are queen of the plants.” Medieval Europeans honored the peony (*pivoine*) in what one writer called “a veritable cult.” [*Codex Matrensis*, in Delatte, 69, 89, 117] The Transylvanians used to greet the belladonna plant every morning, calling her *Nagyasszony*, “great lady,” and paid similar honors to vervain. [Dömötör, 127] The Gauls esteemed vervain very highly for their rites, according to Pliny, and modern French herbalists continued to relate to it in a ceremonial manner. As recently as a century ago, Jacques Esquirol accompanied a Lyonnaise witch on her search for vervain on March 21. (The herb was believed to be most potent on the spring equinox.) After much wandering, the herbalist suddenly cried out and kneeled before a bunch of vervain. She began to move, sighing, speaking and praying, and only then did she gather the plant. [Benoit, 81] This way of approaching the plant aligns with both Siberian shamans and North American medicine practices.

The Anglo-Saxon *wyrtgaelstre* would have sung incantations like those in the “Nine Herbs Charm,” a series of plant-spirit invocations to mugwort, plantain, nettle, camomile, fennel and other herbs. A 10th-century priest recorded these pagan chants in a medical compendium called the *Lacnunga*. Though he mixed in names of the christian god, that of Wodan is still present, and the outlines of an older cosmology are still perceptible. The charm addresses plants as living powers:

Remember, mugwort, what you made known,
what you arranged at the great proclamation.
you were called una, oldest of herbs.
you have power for three and against thirty,
you have power against poison and infection,
you have power against the loathsome foe
 roving through the land. [Storms, 187]

Mugwort is a relative of North American desert sage, and a close relative of the herb burned in Chinese medicinal moxibustion. On all three continents, the local form of *Artemisia* was revered for its power

I an ynedu muczpyrte hpaes
 puamel dodefe hpaes pufe
 nadefe acpagan melde una
 puhattefe yldofc pyrta du
 milte pib.iii. pib.xxx. pumilte
 pib acpae pibomlyze pumilte
 pibpa laban decondlonpafid
 Ondpuvez brade pyrta modon

*Invocation to Mugwort, "oldest of herbs,"
 in the Nine Herbs Charm, Lacnunga,
 10th century England*

to bless and remove negative energy, disharmony and disease; and to purify and protect from danger. Pliny referred to the ancient belief that Artemis had revealed this herb, which even now retains the botanical name *Artemisia*. [Grimm, 1192] German carvers showed Mother Earth holding a horn-shaped basket of mugwort leaves on an ivory book cover circa 870 CE. [Gospel cover of Henry II, Bamberg Cathedral, now in Munich Library. See chapter 7]

Europeans believed that mugwort reaches its greatest power on the summer solstice. It was among the nine sacred herbs that peasant celebrants offered to the Midsummer bonfires over the centuries, which they brought home after the dancing to safeguard the household until next year's summer solstice. [Grimm, 1211, gives many examples of these customs.] It is likely to have been one of the herbs that Breton soothsayers used to lustrate houses in the mid-9th-century. [Filotas, 47] Frankish authorities also list "fumigators" (*suffitores*) among pagan practitioners in the same period. [Filotas, 160]

Russians told a thoroughly shamanistic tale about mugwort, which carried the secret name *Chernobyl* ("black one"). They said that a girl went searching for mushrooms in the old oak forest of Starodubsk. She saw a group of serpents curled up, and tried to retreat, but fell into a pit where they lived. It was dark there, and the snakes were hungry, but their golden-horned queen led them to a luminous stone. Licking it satisfied their hunger. The girl did as they did and remained with them until spring came.

Then the snakes made a ladder for her by interlacing their bodies, and she ascended from the underworld. Before they parted, the

serpent queen gave the girl the ability to understand the language of plants and to know their medicinal powers. But she warned her never to speak the name of Chernobyl or she would lose her knowledge. The maiden had this gift until one day a man asked her the name of the plant that grows along the footpaths, and before she realized it she had answered, pronouncing the taboo name of Chernobyl. All her knowledge left her, as the serpent queen's prediction came true. People say that this is where mugwort acquired its other name: Zabytko, the "herb of forgetfulness." [Rhode, 106-8]

Southern Slavs recounted similar stories of dragons or serpent queens who granted second sight to humans who lived in their underground world for seven or nine years. This initiation gave them the power to achieve wealth and to gain knowledge of the dead. [Pocs 1993: 29] The tale of Chernobyl indicates that mugwort was held to be very sacred—thus the secrecy around its ritual name—and that knowledge about it was transmitted after an initiation (communion with snakes in the underworld). The admonition to secrecy may also be seen as a folk reference to the danger of openly espousing the "Old Faith" (старая вера), the Russian name for pagan religion.

Just as the initiate must never reveal the name of Chernobyl, Russians gathered a "nameless herb" on the eve of *Kupala*—Midsummers' Eve. This so happens to be the time when people over many parts of Europe gathered mugwort for ceremony. Celebrants garlanded themselves, their children and animals; hung their homesteads with mugwort; cast it upon bonfires on the high places; and leaped over its smoke. The French made wreaths to wear to festival dances, throwing them into the bonfire along with their sorrows. [Grimm, 1211] Russians called the sacred bundle of mugwort *Kupala*, "shower," from a blessing rite of sprinkling water with it. They may have used the byname because the real name of mugwort was indeed taboo.



Animist interlace: silver panel from Ryazan, Russia

STAFF-WOMEN, AND OTHER GERMANIC TITLES

Scandinavia lay out of the church fathers' reach for a long time. The northern countries were not even nominally converted to Christianity until after 1000. As a result, pagan culture survived there in strength, and there were many names for the wisewoman and seeress. Old Norse texts refer to the clairvoyant powers of the *spákona*, "prophet-woman." She is also *seiðkona*, a word that has no English equivalent, but connotes "woman of ecstatic ceremony, enchantress."

And she is the *völva*, "staff-woman" (from *völvr*, "staff"). [Shetelig and Falk, 415; *volr*, in Turville-Petre, 317; Kauffmann, 28, renders *völur* as "wand-bearers." An old derivation of *völva* from *velja* / *valjan*, "to choose," is now rejected.] (The plural of *völva* is *völur*; later sources often use *vala* for the singular.) The staff has been used by shamans all over the world, from Zimbabwe to Japan to California. [See Dashu, *Woman Shaman: the Ancients*, 2013, on the shamanic staff.]

The *völva* was the Norse shaman par excellence. She went out on the land, gazing in silence and watching the signs of nature, a practice known as *utiseti*, "sitting out." She was adept in *seiðr*, a ceremony in which she entered trance at the center of a circle of women. Chanting of *seiðlatti* (trance melodies) fueled her spirit-journey and her inspired prophecy. This induction of trance was called *efla seið*, "fixing magic." [Grimm, 1042] Toward the end of the ceremony the *völva* gave oracular responses to people's questions. These seeresses roamed the countryside, often travelling with groups of singers. [*Fornaldssaga*, in Grimm, 1399]

Another major group of sorcery-words come from more southerly Germanic languages: Dutch *toverij*, Old Frisian *tauwerie*, German *Zauber*, and the Old English *teafor*. From the same root comes the Flemish *toveresse*, "witch." The Old High German form *zoupar*, in its variant spellings, is glossed as "divination." Icelandic has various forms including *töfur* (amulet, talisman or other magical object, but also meaning "incantation" and magical "fascination." [Grimm, 1615] A seeress was described as keeping *taufr*, "the instruments for making spells," in her skin bag, though the saga does not reveal what those might be. [*Thorfinns saga Karlsefnis*, in Shetelig and Falk, 415]

Low Germans sometimes combined *toverie* with the *wykke* / *witch*

words, as in *tovern und wykken*, or “go about with *toverye* and *wyckerie*”; and similar combinations. [Grimm, 1615] Most intriguing is a single Icelandic attestation of *töfranorn*, which looks like a fate, although the Latin gloss *saga* (“wisewoman”) suggests a living woman. [Grimm, 1032-33. Fornald. sög 3, 205 for *töfranorn*. Hall (147) shows *töfrnorn*, which he translates as “magical norn”; Mitchell (56) renders the word as “sorceress.”] The witch Búsla invokes the *töfranorn*, along with trolls, *álfar*, and giants, in a curse she is laying to prevent the *saga*’s hero from being executed. [*Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, in Hall 2004: 147]

SHAPESHIFTERS AND SPIRIT FLIGHT

Some names of the witch highlight her shamanic nature, and the transformative powers she worked with. She is described as taking the form of an animal double to make journeys in the spirit. In northern Europe, she often rides upon the wolf, whale, or walrus. Or she has animal spirit helpers. In Greece, the Pythia received power and knowledge from the serpent. The Italian *strix* assumed the form of an owl. If her flight was once revered as the dreamer’s journey, by Roman times she was reviled as a devourer of life-force who stole children and caused people to waste away. This idea was carried over into the Church’s negative interpretation of shamanic ways.

Under Roman rule, the Latin *strix* was adopted into Gaulish culture, becoming the *striga* of Provence and *stria* of the Franks. The loanword imported the Roman word’s negative connotations, and Church Latin circulated them ever more widely via its pronouncements against *strigae*, *stregonae*, *stregulae*, or *striones*. Only in her Italian homeland did the *strega* retain her positive associations with medicine, second-sight and magic, among the peasantry. In other countries—notably France, early on, and Switzerland and Hungary centuries later—women were persecuted as witches under the imported name of *striga*.

In seventh century Languedoc and in northern Italy, commoners called the witch *masca*, She-of-the-Mask. The Lombard *Lex Rotharii* refers to women being witch-burned under the name *mascae*. It permitted lords to burn women under their rule, but: “No one should

presume to kill the serving-woman of another [man] as witch [*stria*], which they call *masca*..." [*Lex Rotharii*, cap. 376, in Centini, 2] The word comes from a late Latin term *masca* or *mascara* that entered medieval languages as Italian *talamasca*, Old French *talmache* and *tamasche*, Old Dutch *talmasge*. [Grimm, 916; Robbins, 544]

Cilian refers to *Talamascæ Litteræ*, "Talamasca characters or letters," explaining them thus: "for the hidden things, and the things known only to sorcerers [soothsayers] and to the Talamascas, and to those who are agreed upon the meaning of their characters. [*pro occultis, et quæ talamascis ac sortilegis solis notæ sunt, et iis quibuscum de earum literarum significatione con ventum est*. DuCange: <http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/talamasca>] This comes very close to Germanic runes.

In Church Latin *talamasca* is glossed as a synonym for *larva*, which carries the meanings of "mask, double, ghost, shadow, image," and especially, "demon." [Du Cange: <http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/LARVAE>] Here again there is an overlap between the witch and the dead, with a suggestion that she channeled those spirits, or enacted them in ceremonies. Massimo Centini shows that *talamasca* was connected with "masquerades organized on the day of the dead." He cites an 882 order by the Frankish bishop Hincmar of Reims: "Do not permit them to do shameful games with bears, nor consent to them going carrying in front of them those masks of demons, which are commonly called *talamascae*." [Centini, 4]

In medieval German, *talmasca* referred to a masked person. *Tal-* appears to derive from *dalen*, "to whisper, speak in a droll manner, joke." "And so Talamasca would be a mask that mumbles or speaks in a strange manner like a spirit or a madman." [Centini, 4] In the modern folklore of Piemonte, *masca* means "witch" and also "spirits, shadows of the dead." [Bonomo, 480 fn 48] There it continued to be used as an insult toward women, as "witch," through the end of the middle ages and beyond. [Centini, 3]

Medieval Latin sources also used *larva* for spirits, including devouring hag-spirits and night-maras, but also for the dead. Gervase of Tilbury equated *larvae* with the old Greco-Roman *lamias*, "who the common people call *mascae* or in Gallic language *strie*." He quoted physicians as saying that they are "nocturnal visions that disturb the

souls of sleepers, causing oppression.” [Centini, 3] Countering this negative definition, interestingly, was the Jesuit Gaspar Schott, who wrote in 1657, “*lamia* and *strix* mean the same thing, namely, *saga* (‘wisewoman’).” [*Physica Curiosa*, in Robbins, 544] *Larva* was used in the first description of the famous witch-mountain Horselberg, in the early 1500s. [Grimm, 480; E. Hessus in *Bucol. idyl.* 5, Grimm, 936]

At one time, masks were used to invoke the ancestors and land spirits. Innumerable canon laws forbade women’s singing and dancing in churchyards, as well as masked ceremonial processions in the guise of stags and old women. Masked dancers and mummers were a common sight on medieval festival days, carried over from wholly pagan origins under a churchified template of saint’s names. They survived in Switzerland, Bulgaria, and other pockets of Europe.

A witch named Grima (“Mask”) is named in an Icelandic saga. Her family were Norse from the Hebrides: “All of them were very skilled in magic and were great sorcerers. [*Fóstbræða saga* 14, in Arent, 85] The Norse called those who were able to assume another form *hamleipur*. [Ankarloo 1994: 196] Alone among the gods, the witch Freyja possesses the shamanic *fyadrhamr*, “feather-form,” a magical cloak with the power to fly over the lands. Eddic poetry does not elaborate on this, mentioning it only when she loaned her witch-cloak to the transsexual trickster Loki. [*Thrymskviða* 3]

Many Celtic goddesses took the form of bears, wild pigs, deer and especially ravens, the allies of the prophetess. Flidais, the Irish goddess of wild animals, drove a chariot drawn by deer. The Scottish *glaisteag* oversaw, protected, and dealt out fates to the deer, and had deer feet herself. She punished hunters who were disrespectful to the deer. [See Chapter 6] The Morrigan took many forms, but especially that of a crow or raven. Shapeshifting swan-cloaked women appear in Celtic lays and Germanic faery tales. Valkyries sometimes took this form. Goddesses and *dísir* (female ancestors) take the form of *fylgjur*, apparitions that guide, warn, and protect. If analogies to other world traditions hold, these beings would also act as spirit helpers.

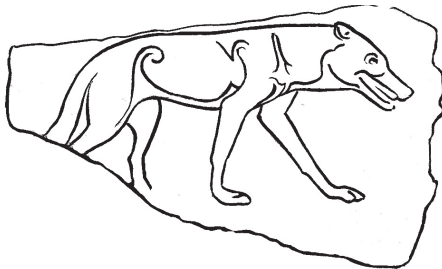
Folk tradition held that some people inherited or were divinely gifted with the shamanic power of shapeshifting. A 10th century Frankish penitential asked if people believe “that those who are commonly called the Fates exist,” or that when a person is being born, “they are

able even then to to determine his life to what they wish, so that... he can be transformed into a wolf, that which vulgar folly calls a were-wolf, or into any other shape.” [*Corrector sive Medicus* 5.151, Hefele, 22-23; McNeill/Gamer, 338]

The old Irish believed that people of certain clans possessed the power to take the form of wolves when they wished. One source reports that in the year 690 a wolf was heard speaking with a human voice. [Wood-Martin 1895: 118] Several centuries later, Giraldus Cambrensis recounted how “a monk wandering in a forest came upon two wolves, one of whom was dying. The other entreated him to give the dying wolf the last sacrament... [and] tore the skin from the breast of the dying wolf, laying bare the form of an old woman.” Afterwards the monk worried that it was sinful to give the sacrament to such a being—was it human or animal? [Yeats, 215]

A more orthodox version of this story says that a priest travelling through the woods in Meath was accosted by a man who asked him to confess his sick wife. The priest saw nothing but a wolf lying on the ground, and turned to flee. The wolf and her husband calmed his fears, so he performed the rite. Thinking that the wolf-woman might possess prophetic insight because of her shamanic form, he asked her about the English who were then invading Ireland. The wolf answered that God was punishing the Irish for their sins. [Gregory, 78] In this way, pagan traditions of shapeshifting were turned to the service of Christian moralizing.

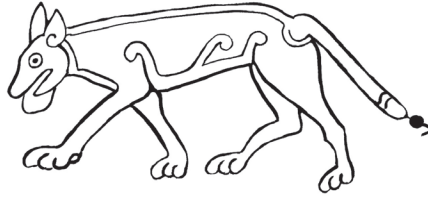
A strong cultural expectation that wolf-witches were female seems to have prevailed in Ireland. One of three categories of women penalized with reduced compensation for wrongs in the *Bretha Crólige* was “the woman who likes to stray in wolf-shapes.” Another category was



*Female wolf, Pictish stone,
Ardross, Scotland*

the wandering woman “who goes off with *síd*-folk”—with the faeries. This is a primary metaphor for Otherworld journeys in Ireland, and continued to be said of faery doctors like Biddy Early and Máire Ni Murchú. [See Schmitz, 1977] The third kind of disapproved woman,

“the sharp-tongued virago,” was the female satirist. [Bitel, 219] She was seen as a kind of sorceress, whose words had the power to raise up blisters on a deserving target. Male satirists had this same power, but the legal codes did not socially



Wolf, Book of Kells, Ireland

penalize—or demonize—them for it. Irish society was not as sex-egalitarian as is often claimed. The suppression of pointed female social critique, as hard as it is to track, was a pivotal change in Irish culture.

Irish folklore speaks of spells called *fith-fath* or *fath-fith*, which have the power to make a person invisible, to shift shapes, or to change things into different forms. Many Irish tales turn on transformations of this kind. Eithne went through many such changes after being cursed by her co-wife. But curses laid by others are a different matter than shapeshifting in ecstatic connection with spirit beings.

A hag riding on a giant white wolf was said to have stopped the Danish invasion of England under Harald Hardrada in 1066. A man named Gyth dreamed that a great witch stood on the island, opposing the king’s fleet with a fork and a trough. Tord dreamed that “before the army of the people of the country was riding a huge witch-wife upon a wolf, and she tossed the invading soldiers into its mouth.” [d’Este and Rankine, 91]

Witches were famous for allying with animal guardians or helpers, especially ravens, wolves, snakes or dragons. After the middle ages, witches’ doubles and spirit “familiar” were most often pictured as cats, toads, bats and hares, or occasionally a fox or bird. Savoyard tradition kept alive stories of witches who turned into wolves or bears. [Brocard, 44, 58ff] Shapeshifting and consorting with animal spirits were stock accusations of the witch hunts, and in later persecutions up to the 20th century.

In the old lore, witches and goddesses ride on dream-animals: wolves, horses, goats, or geese. The Norse poetic kennings for wolf called it “the trollwoman’s steed” and “the dusky stallion on which the Night-Farer goeth.” [McColloch, 81] Witches attain foreknowledge in their dream-journeys. The word used here—*trollkona*—can mean either a spirit or a woman with spirit power:

a witch woman on wolf did ride in the gloaming...
 full well saw she that soon would fall
 sigrlinn's son on sigarsvellir. [*Helgakvitha* 35, in Bray, 178]

A trollwoman mounted on a wolf is carved on a second-century runic stone at Hunnestad in Skåne, Sweden. She has often been compared to the supernatural Hyrrokin in Snorri's Edda. When the Aesir called her from Jötunheim to aid them, she came riding on a wolf with serpents for reins. [Ankarloo: 1993: 252-3] An old manuscript shows a witch riding on a wolf bridled with snakes. [McColloch, 81] A similar theme is found in the Balkans, where the *vila* (faery woman) rides a seven-year old stag bridled with snakes. [Grimm, c 433-5]

Another term for shamanic flight was *gandreid*, "staff-ride." *Fostbraethra saga* tells of a Greenlandish woman who slept fitfully, tossing and turning. When she woke, she told her son she had gone on a long ride on a *gand* through the heavens "and now I know the destiny of

those of whom I knew nothing before." [Ankarloo 1993: 252] Here again, as with the troll-woman riding a wolf in *Helgakviða*, a journey in the spirit reveals the future and hidden things. *Gandr* also signifies a helping spirit, enchantment or magic.

The *gandreid* evokes the familiar image of witches riding on the broomstick, or on distaffs or oven-forks. The *völva* carried a ceremonial staff that seems to have been understood as conveying her on journeys through the worlds, like the horse-staff of some Siberian shamans. (A Norwegian *völva* at Veka was buried astride



Wolf-rider stone at Hunnestad, Sweden, in the 1600s. All but two of seven stones were later smashed.

her staff, as if riding it.) Its folkloric equivalent is the witch's wand, whose potency is dramatized by its omnipresence in European faerie tales. The witch waves her wand, points it, or transforms a person or object by touching them with it. The Irish *luirgean* and Scottish *slachdan* were magical staves or wands that transformed what they struck. Even brooms figure as animated magical objects in Spanish tales of witchcraft, like the distaffs in French and Sardinian lore.

The Night-Farer's name is very old, predating the Germanic migrations: Old German *naht-fara*, *naht-frouwa*, *naht-rita*; Anglo-Saxon *niht-genge*; Old Norse *myrk-ritha* ("rider in the dark, the murk") or *qveld-ritha* or *trollritha*. [Ankarloo 1994: 196; Grimm, 723] Because the witch hunts have so thoroughly ingrained the idea that night is evil, these names have a sinister ring to modern ears. But *nahtfara* was also a title given to the propitious evening star. [Grimm, 723] The Scandanavian *völva* was praised both as "night-farer" and *spáfarar*, "prophetic traveller, a term is known from 13th century Icelandic laws prohibiting witchcraft. [Blain, 62. The repressive context for the single attestation of *spáfarar* parallels that of Anglo-Saxon *wyrtgælstre*.] No one could ask for a clearer reference to the shaman's journey.

FROM HAGEDISSE TO HEXE

Another group of Old Germanic witch-names carried the sense of a woman who traveled in the spirit, and also of an ancestor or supernatural crone. The name in Old High German was variously recorded as *hagedisse*, *hagazussa*, *hegizissa*, *hegitisse*, and *haghtessen*. In Anglo-Saxons the word was *hægtesse* or *hagtis*; in medieval Dutch *hagetisse* or *haghdisse*. Over long usage these words gradually contracted, in German to *hazus*, *hazusa*, *hazasa*. In Middle High German the word was already beginning to slide into *hegxse* or *hexse*, in Swiss to *hagsch* or *hezze*, and in English to *hægesse* or *haetse*. [Grimm, 1039-41, 1618] It's important to understand that these terms referred both to female spirits, especially Otherworld beings, and the witches who invoked them.

The etymologists say that the deep meaning of *haga* is "hedge, border, boundary." Old English *haga* meant "enclosed area," often a homestead or house [Hall 1916:144]. (It is related to the *haw* in haw-

thorn (originally *hagathorn*), a tree with strong faery associations in Britain.) So *hagazussa* signified “hedge-woman” or “fence-woman,” a liminal being who is a boundary-traveler. [Franck, in Russell, 297, n.15; and Bosworth-Toller, online: <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/finder/3/haga>] She “courses between the worlds.” [Ruttner-Cova, 152]

The *hagazussa* is related to the *tunriða*, “hedge-riders” or “gate-riders” that Oðinn sees flying in the sky and tries to bring down. [*Hávamál* 154] Her German counterpart is the *zunritha*, “used of witches and ghosts.” [<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hag>] Late medieval Scandinavian laws refer to the fence-riding witch. In the Old Laws of Västergötland, a wild-haired woman is said to ride the gate “in a witch’s shape, ‘caught’ between night and day.” [Mitchell, 150-51] The lines appear in the form of an accusation before an all-male Swedish court: “Woman, I saw you riding on a fence with loose hair and belt, in the troll skin, at the time when day and night are equal.” [De Vries, 11]

The second component of the compound word *hægtesse* is also significant. Its spirit-meanings are shared over a wide range of Indo-European languages. The Proto-Indo-European root is **dhewes-* “to fly about, smoke, be scattered, vanish,” which is connected “with Norwegian *tysja* “fairy; crippled woman,” Gaulish *dusius* ‘demon,’ Lithuanian *dvasia* ‘spirit.’” [<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hag>] It also relates to Westphalian German *dus*, Cornish *dus* or *diz*, and Breton *duz*, all christianized to the meaning of “devil,” and Old English *dust*. [Webster’s *Third New International Dictionary*, 1019] Romans compared the Gaulish god *Dusios* to Pan; this deity also took plural form as *dusioi* or, in Latin, *dusii*. In late antiquity, Augustine and Isidore both referred to *dusii* as “incubi,” spirits who had sex with women. [*De Civitate Dei* 15:23; *Etymologiae* 18.11.103] But as late as the 8th century, *dusii* was still being used for spirits of the dead, *dusii manes*.] [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dusios>. I considered the idea that the second element in *hagedisse* was related to *dísir*, but could find no linguistic grounds for it, and plenty against it.]

The 10th century Anglo-Saxon cleric Aelfric used *hægtesse* in the sense of “woman of prophetic and oracular powers.” [www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hag] He connected the *hægtesse* with *pythonissa*, a Latin term for entranced seeress [Grimm, 1225] and

linked both terms with another witch-word: *Helle-rúne vel hægtesse pythonissa*. [www.bosworthtoller.com/finder/3/hægtesse] Both the *hægtesse* and *hellerune* were associated with female ancestors. (Chapter 5 looks at *hellerune* in greater depth.)

The modern Anglo-Saxon dictionary of Bosworth-Toller defined *hægtesse* as “hag, witch, fury,” while another source gives “witch, pythoness.” [Hall 1916: 143] These names overlap and are compared in several sources: “In late glosses, *hellerune* is given as an alternative to *hægtesse*, and *hægtesse* glosses words for the furies.” [Goldsmith, 110] One Anglo-Saxon source gives “*Hægtesse Tisiphona*,” naming one of the Greek Erinnyes (Furies). [www.bosworthtoller.com/finder/3/hægtesse] Another brings in a singular Erinys, and compares the *hægtesse* with Anglo-Saxon forms of the valkyrie, the *wælcyrge/wælcyrre*. [Goldsmith, 110] The Furies were a wrathful form of ancestral mothers, which is worth recalling when considering Anglo-Saxon spells that interpreted disease as attacks by *hægtessen*.

A much-studied Old English charm aims to expel *hægtessen gescot* (“hag-shot”) in combination with *ésa gescot* [aesir-shot] and *ylfa gescot* (elf-shot). [*Wid færstice* charm, in the *Lacnunga*, quoted in www.bosworthtoller.com/finder/3/hægtesse. Grimm, 1244, notes that *hægtessen* is singular.] The charm shows a fear of *hægtessen geworc*, which apparently means the “work” of a hag spirit, not a living witch. [Crawford, 159-60] Earlier in the charm, the *hægtessen* spirits are described as the “mighty women” who rode over the land and “sent screaming spears” (see chapter six). [Grimm, 1244]

Hægtesse also appears as *hætse*, a word that Ælfric used for Jezebel in translating the Vulgate’s *maledictam illam*, “that accursed woman.” [Going by modern stereotypes, Hall (2004: 172) thinks *hætse* for Jezebel implies “seductress,” but given the biblical accusation of her “many sorceries,” it is more likely to have signified “witch.” See II Kings 9:22] Old English placenames meaning “witch’s valley” gave modern Hascombe in Surrey and Hescombe in Somerset, “where the first element of the name is O.E. *hætse* or *hægtesse*, ‘witch.’” [Branston, 43] Similar phonological contractions occurred in Old High German *hesse* and *hezze*. [Zurich Pap. MSS B 223-730, in Grimm, 1478-79]

Hægtesse also relates to *hag*, symbolically if not etymologically. In folk tradition, “hag” designated a supernatural old woman at least

as often a human witch or old woman. Mary Daly drew attention to the evolution of *hag*, pointing to its archaic meaning given in *Webster's Dictionary* as “female demon: fury, harpy,” and as *nightmare* (in the sense of a female spirit), but only later as “ugly old woman.” She pulled up archaic meanings for the word *haggard*, which originally signified “untamed” (as of a hawk), “intractable,” “willful,” “wanton,” and “unchaste.” It also referred to a “wild-eyed” person. Daly’s final touch was a discovery loaded with sexual politics: “As a noun, haggard has an ‘obsolete’ meaning: ‘an intractable person, especially: a woman reluctant to yield to wooing.’” [Daly, 14-15]

English is full of magical hag-words, for the snake called *hagworm*, and the *hagstone*, “a naturally perforated stone used as an amulet against witchcraft.” [Websters, 1019] Another strand of meaning is found in Old Dutch *haghdisse*, with its variants *eghdisse*, *egdisse*, *haagdisse*, all meaning “lizard” (*hagedis* in modern Dutch). German *eidechse* has the same meaning, [Grimm, 1041] as did the Old Saxon *egithassa*. [<http://www.bosworthtoller.com/finder/3/hagedisse>]

In late medieval German, *hagazussa* was compressed into *hexse*, *hecse* and finally *hexe*. In Swiss it became *hagsh*, *haagsch*, or *hezze*. [Grimm, 1039-40, 1478-9] In Dutch it was *heks*. The word spread, with slightly different spellings, into the Scandinavian languages during the witch-hunt era, as continental demonologies migrated north. It was under the name of *Hexe* that multitudes of women would be burned.

Over many centuries, the priesthood gained a monopoly over the power of naming. Churchmen labored to remold folk culture to conform with their own worldview. They defined as devilish incantation and ecstatic dance, folk beliefs and ceremonies, and recast the old ethnic titles through a hostile lens. The Anglo-Saxon *wycce*, French *sorcière*, Spanish *bruja*, Russian *vied'ma* and Italian *strega* were powerful diviners and healers who were, as the priesthood constantly complained, respected among the people. Since the institutional priesthood felt rivalry with these old peasant women, it called their power dangerous. Later, they would define it as heretical, but in this period they still understood witchcraft as pagan, heathen.

The witches were female in a male-dominated society, and animist peasants ruled by aristocrats who were enforcing Christianity as

the state religion. Their position has similarities to that of Amazigh *kahinas* after the Islamic conquest of North Africa, to the legendary Nishan Shaman who faced repression from Confucian rulers in Manchuria, or the Maya and Diasporic Africans who were forced to catholicize their culture so that it could survive. In Spanish repression of Indigenous Peruvian culture, writes Irene Silverblatt, “Idolatry, curing, and witchcraft were blurred.” [Silverblatt, 175] The priesthood invented penitential manuals to repress European paganism, internally colonizing the ethnic cultures. A thousand years later, they turned to them to enforce Christianity on the Chumash in California. [See Fogel, 1988]

Patriarchal and imperial religions disapprove of women’s shamanic powers and consider them a threat to the order of dominion. Men felt threatened by witches whose direct personal power could potentially overthrow their social privilege. Conquerors felt threatened by the peoples they colonized. The same was true for any people who resist hegemonic systems of sex, ethnicity, class, or gender. As the European witch hunts gained momentum, all these groups ran a high risk of persecution for witchcraft.

The names for witches in the old ethnic cultures show that they were viewed as seers, prophetesses and diviners; as wisewomen, healers and herbalists; as chanters and invokers; as shapeshifters and women who journey in the spirit. The meanings of the English word “witch” were considered in chapter 2, and chapter 5 will go deeper into the *leóðrune*. But first comes an exploration of the rich cultural testimony about the Norse *völur* and their ceremonies.



KNOWER

Croatian: *vještica* (vyeshtitsa) “knower”

Serb: вештица (vyeshtitsa) “knower”

Bulgarian: вещица (vyeshitsa) “knower”

Macedonian: вештерка (vyeshterka) “knower”

(also appears as *vjescirica*, *vedavica*)

Polish: *wieszczycze* (vyeshtitse) “knower”

Russian: ведъма (vyed'ma) “witch, hag, harridan, hellcat, night-hag”;

znayushchie liudi, “people who know” healers called *znakharka*

Ukrainian: відьма (veed'ma)

Belorus: ведзьма (vyedz'ma) also вядзьмарка (vyadzmarka)

Polish: *wiedźma* (pron. veejma) witch, hag, harridan

Russian: знахарка “woman who knows”

Lower Germania: *veleda*, “knower, seeress”

Gaulish: *uidlua*

Welsh: *gweled*, *gwelea*

Old Irish *velet*

Irish: *filid*, *filed*, *file*, *banfilé* “poet, bard, prophet”

WISEWOMAN

Latin: *saga*, “wisewoman, witch”

French: *sage-femme* “wise woman”

Spanish: *sabia* “wise woman”

English: *cunning-woman* (related to *ken*: “know”)

Norse: *fjölkyningkona* “much-knowing woman”

Norse: *vísendakona* “wise woman”

Norse: *vitka* “wisewoman, sorceress”

Hungarian Roma: *cohalyi*

Irish: *ban feasa*, “wisewoman”

cailleach feasa “wise old woman”

Finnish: *tietäjä*, “knower,” “seer” (ungendered)

Slavonic: *hmana zena*: “common woman” (Slovenian or Slovak?)

OLD WOMAN

Polish: *kobieta stara*

French: *vieille-femme*

English, Scots: *old wife*

Polish: *baba* “crone, hag, old woman, witch”

Romanian: *hoanghină* “hag”

Lithuanian, Latvian: *ragana* “hag, crone, witch, harpy”
Irish: *cailleach*, “old woman”; *cailleach phiseogach* “sorceress, charmer”
ammait (archaic “witch, hag”; devolved into modern “fool, idiot”)
Welsh: *gwrach*, “hag, witch”
Norse: *spákerling* (“prophetic crone”),
galdrakerling (“spell-chanting crone”)
Sámi: *noajdiesaaikka* “shaman old woman”

PROPHETESS

Norwegian, Icelandic: *spákona*, “prophetic woman,”
spámeysja, “-maiden,” *spákerling* “-old woman”
spáfara, “prophetic traveler”
Scottish: *spaeing woman*, *spaewife*, “prophetic woman”
Old Irish: *fá*, *fáth*, *fáidh*, “prophet, poet”
banfáith, “woman-prophet, poet”
Latin: *vates*, prophet (loanword from Celtic)
Latin *sortiaria*, “fate-seeress,” *sortilega*, “lot caster”
French: *sorcière*
English: *sorceress*

DIVINER

Latvian: *burt*, *apburt*, “lot-caster, diviner”
burve “witch, sorceress, enchantress”
burtininké witch, sorceress, sibyl, pythoness
zīlniece, “diviner”
Latin: *divina*, *divinatrix*
French: *devine*, *devineresse*
Welsh: *dewines*
Basque: *azti*, “diviner”
Russian: *vorozheia*; *otgadchitsa*
Greek: *mantis*, “female diviner, seer,” from PIE root *men- (“mind”),
cognate with *maenad* and *maniac*; *mantic* still means “divinatory.”
Sardinia: *visionaria*, “enspirited woman”
ispiridada: “seeress”

ENCHANTRESS

Norse: *galdrakona*, “chant-woman”
Anglo-Saxon: *galstre*, “female chanter”; *wyrtgælstre*, “herb-chanter”
leodrune, “mystery-singer”

Finnish: *loitsija*: “chanter”

Latin: *incantatrix, praecantatrix, praecantrix*, “enchanter”

Italian: *ammaliatrice* “charmer, spell-caster, witch”

Sámi: *guaps* “woman who chants and divines”

Latvian: *vārdotāja*, “word-charmer”

Norse: *seiðkona* “trance-woman”

HEALER

Greek: *pharmakis*, herbalist,” as in “pharmacy”; later, “witchcraft”

Anglo-Saxon: *lybbestre*, from the root *lyb*, “life.”

German: *lupparara*, from *luppa*, “life,” related to “medicine, amulet”

Spanish: *saludadora*, “healer”

Italian: *guaratrice*, “healer”

Latvian: *dziedniece, dziedinātāja*, “healer”

English: *charmer*, “enchantress”

Italian: *erborista*, “herbalist”

Spanish: *herbaria* “herbalist” (became pejorative)

Romanian: *fermecătoare* “enchantress, charmer, mesmerizer”

Latin: *venefica* “poisoner” (pejorative word used of herbalists)

Spain: *ensalmadora*, “healer with chants or words”

German: *segoerinne* “blesser, enchantress, signer,” from *segen*, blessing

Croatian: *vilenica*, “faery-woman,” one taught to cure by the *vile* / faeries

Ireland: *bean leighis*, “medical woman”

Hungarian: *vajakos*, “healer”

Romanian: *vrăjitoare* “charmer, enchantress, spell-caster (from *vraji*, “spellbind, charm, enchant, entrance, fascinate,”

Welsh: *swynwraig* “woman who gives charms, remedies, amulets; who gives comfort, cures and blessings, who preserves.”

SHAPESHIFTER

Italian: *masca*, “mask, masked one, ancestral spirit, ghost”

Provençal: *masco*

French: *talmasque*

Dutch: *talmasche*

Norse: *hamleypur*, “shapeshifter”; **hamgengja*: “goer-in-a-form,”

Latin: *strix, strigis* “screech-owl (woman)”

Frankish (loan): *stria, striga*, “witch” (pejorative, supernatural vampire)

Italian: *strega, stregula, stregona*

DOER, MAKER

Spanish: *hechicera, faytillera*, “doer, maker, causer”

French: *facturière* (medieval)

Portuguese, Galician: *feiticeira* (fayteesheyra)

Italian: *fattuchiera* (fatuukiera)

Polish: *czarownica* (accent on ni) *czarodziejka, czarujaça kobieta*
“witch, enchantress,” from a root meaning “to do, make”)

Russian: *чародейка* (charodyeika) sorceress, enchantress, witch

Slovenian: *čarovnica* (charovnitsa)

Slovak and Czech: *čarodejnice* (charodyeinitse)

Basque: *sorguiñ, xorguiña*, “doer, maker”

sorsain, “birth guardian” (midwives?)

FATEFUL WOMEN

Latvian: *laumė* related to word for “fairy” and to the fate goddess Laima;
now “hag, witch”

Icelandic: *norn* “fate,” *galdranorn* “chanting fate,” both used as “witch”
töfranorn, witch or fate spirit, [Grimm, 1032-33]

English, Scots: *weird woman, weird-wife, weirding woman* “fateful”

SPIRITS OR ANCESTORS

Old German: *hagedisse* “hag, hedge-spirit, wild female being, witch”

Saxon: *hagetesse*

Old English: *hægtesse, haetse*

Middle Dutch: *haghetisse*

Old German: *hagazussa, hagzissa,*

Dutch: *hagazussa*

German: *Hexe*

Swiss: *hegse, hecse, hezze*

Norwegian, Danish, Dutch: *heks*

Swedish: *häxa*

Gothic: *haliorunna, haliruna*, “holy mysteries”

Old German: *helrune, hellerune*: (related to *haliorunnae*, goddess Hel)

Anglo-Saxon: *burgrune*: “mound-mysteries”

Norwegian, Swedish: *trollkvinne*: “troll-woman”

Norwegian: *trollkjering*, “troll-crone”

Swedish: *trollkäring*, “troll-crone”

trollpacka, “troll-packer, carrier, stower”

trollgumma, “ogress”

trollhäxa “troll-witch”

fortjuserska, förtrollerska, “enchantress”

välvillig “kindly, beneficent”

trolldom, trolltyg, häxeri: “witchcraft”

Polish: *jędza*, “raging”; *hag*, *virago*, *witch*

Welsh: *wrach, gwrach, gwrachod, gwrachiod, ngwrachïod, wrachïod, wrachod, ngwrach*, “witch, hag, dwarf, bundles of thatch or grain”

[Pughe 1832: 179 defines *gwr* as “A being endowed with power, will, or liberty; a man; a person; a husband...” but the female form is demonized.]

VARIOUS

Spanish: *bruja*, “heathen” (*bruzha*, later *brukha*)

Portuguese, Galician: *bruxa* (pronounced *bruusha*)

Catalán: *bruixa* (*brueesha*)

Occitanian, Gascon: *broucho* (*bruusho*)

English: *wycce, wicce, wich, wicche, witch*: “twiner, spinner, plaiter”

Dutch, German: *wykke, wikker*

Welsh: *gwiddon, gwiddonod, widdon, widdonod, ngwiddon, ngwiddonod*: “witch, hag, giantess”

Irish: *banthúathaid*, “woman of *túath*,” meaning “northern, on the left”; in patriarchal terms, “perverse, wicked, evil.” (Compare “sinister.”)

Sardinia: *magliia*, “knitter, mesh-worker”

German: *zauberin*, “female sorcerer, magic-maker”

Dutch: *tzouverijen, toveres, toeverse*

Flemish: *toveresse*

Frisian: *töfranorn*: *witch, diviner*

Greek: *μάγισσα* (*magissa*) *magic-maker*

Latin: *maga* *adept, magic-maker*

Serbian: *macisnica*, *adept, magic-maker*

Finnish: *tenhotar* *adept, magic-maker*

Albanian: *magjistare*, “female magician”

Polish: *guślarka* “sorceress, witch, woman who plays the *guslar* (a shamanic instrument of the Slavs)

Hungarian: *gule-romni*, “sweet” or “charming women”
Finnish: *hurmaava nainen* “charming / fascinating woman”
Finnish: *noita*, *noita-akka*: “shaman, shaman-crone”
Estonian: *nõid* “shaman”
Finnish: *noita*, “witch,” (ungendered)
 noita-akka, “shaman-grandmother”
 loitsija “spell-weaver”
 lumoojatar “enchantress, witch” (*lumota* “bewitch”)

Sámi: *noida*, “shaman”
kwepkas “woman versed in witchcraft”
gapishjaedne, “witch, sorceress”
shjarak, “female assistant to a *naoi'de*?”
rudok, “spokeswoman for the female supernatural”
[from Price 2004: 114; these don't look like literal translations]

ETYMOLOGY NOT FOUND

Polish: *ciota*
Russian: колдунья (*koldunya*)
Welsh: *hudoles* or *rheibes*, “sorceress”
ellyllesau, *ellylles*, *hellylles*, *hellyllesau*, “hag, witch”
Basque: *belagile*
Latvian: *žiezūla* “witch, harpy”
 kerētoja “enchantress, witch, sorceress”
Hungarian: *boszorkány* (Turkish loan word)