



The Lost Gods of England

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A survey of the myths, legends and religious beliefs of the ancient Anglo-Saxons.

The Lost Gods of England Details

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From Reader Review The Lost Gods of England for online ebook

Eilif Salemonsén says

Immensely interesting and entertaining! Also funny. "As I say, a people bred from Briton crossed Saxon (after AD 450), crossed Dane (after AD 800), crossed Norman (after 1066) could well appear to be mongrel." Fascinating to see how the names of the pagan gods have survived in place names in England, in just the same way as in Scandinavia. A very interesting book! Read it!

Stephen Squire says

interesting subject but the narrative was really dull. Couldn't finish.

Mark says

Very interesting attempt to bring Anglo Saxon paganism to life using comparisons with Norse mythology.

Prenna says

Despite being of it's time in places, the author has a friendly and engaging writing style. A good intro to pre-Christian, Anglo-Saxon religion.

Ryan Kriste says

Absolutely brilliant book! I read a few reviews of it before reading it and people complained that he manipulates the evidence to fit his reasoning, which may be true, but I would have done the same if I was writing the book. The evidence for the old Gods in England is rare and therefore comparisons with other Germanic sources (where those have survived better) are required. I loved that the book was written before the internet and the current Heathen revival therefore he doesn't 'assume' what may have become the currently accepted opinion. For instance he looks at the evidence to show whether Odin, Woden or Wotan were in-fact the same deity or not and which one was worshipped in England. I feel I have learned more of the old Gods now that I have read this book.

Gabriel Clarke says

Hmm. This book is cited by pretty much every work on Anglo-Saxon neo-paganism I've encountered to date. It's relatively old (1970s) but little if any new literary evidence has emerged since then. What has developed is the archaeological record but there again, little has turned up to support his more wildly optimistic conclusions. Branston is very happy to rely on circumstantial evidence when it suits him but equally happy to ignore it when it doesn't.

The core of his speculations depends on an assumption that Christian chroniclers of pagan practices (e.g. Bede, the Beowulf scribe and so on) accurately described pagan practices or hid them under a very thin layer. So Bede's discussion of the pagan year is taken to accurately reflect pagan practice. Later writers such as Ronald Hutton robustly question this, pointing out that Bede was more likely to be projecting the by now well-established Christian calendar. Branston also has a habit of detailing long passages and summations from Snorri et al and concluding "it is likely beyond reasonable doubt that the AS believed something very similar, or assuming that Viking imports in the north of England are cognate with AS beliefs at a time when Mercia, etc had been Christian for 300 years.

Interesting for the materials it gathers together and the comparative mythological work summarising the equivalences between different strands of Indo-European myth but mostly useful for providing grounding for more critical readings of pagan/heathen texts.

Philip Armstrong says

A scholarly but accessible overview of a much neglected subject. Branston's work is well-written and engaging throughout. Inevitably, due to the paucity of direct references for English, or Anglo-Saxon deities, much of the discussion focuses on their cognate Norse and Germanic forms, but this in itself helps broaden our understanding of the gods our ancestors worshiped. A tricky book to get hold of, but worth the effort if comparative mythology is of interest to you.

dragonhelmuk says

Book with some very interesting ideas. Huge nationalistic and migrationist biases, but otherwise quite refreshing. All the evidence is here, even if the conclusions are rubbish. Archaeological and homonymic evidence is very good. The pictures are pretty too:

(author ready to embrace Norse mythology)

the really important consideration for us to reach after studying Wayland Smith is that chance has played an extraordinary part in the survival of the written and graphic evidence of him : three of the four native sources came within a hair's breadth of utter destruction and the fourth is so allusive as to be useless for reconstructing the original tale without outside help. What is true of Wayland is likely to be true of others. We may note too, the remarkable agreement between Old English and Old Norse versions of the tale in spite of a difference of some four or five hundred years in the setting down of the story in England and Iceland. Wayland's Bones' are everywhere scattered about the Old English landscape; it will be my task to assemble as many as may be into an articulate skeleton and then to clothe that skeleton with flesh. Many bones are no doubt destroyed or lost for ever, and the resurrected being will have to limp, even as Wayland himself did of old.

(occasional nationalist and racist arguments)

but none of these interbreedings was what might be called in genetical terms 'a violent out-cross' such as would have been the case if Britain had been successfully invaded by an armada of Chinese or Red Indians or African Bushmen. Apart from any alteration in physical appearance that would have befallen the new Island Race under such circumstances, one has only to suppose a pagoda in Canterbury, a totem-pole in Trafalgar Square and rock paintings on the Cheddar Gorge to begin to imagine the cultural changes that would have ensued.

(Branston at his best when sticking to philological evidence)

it is rewarding to speculate from what we know of Indo-European vocabulary as to the kind of life its speakers led. We can say they were hunters and grazers wandering after wild beasts and fresh pasture; but they also knew how to sit down in one place, for a season at least, to enable them to plough, cultivate, sow and harvest a crop. They were able to grind grain and bake it into bread. Their vocabulary tells us that Indo-European speakers knew the ox, cow, horse, sheep and pig as well as the goose and duck, but they did not know the ass, camel, lion, tiger nor elephant. Whatever else they drank, they certainly recognised the uses of milk. It is important to understand something of their family life: the words for father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter and grandchild are all original Indo-European. 'Widow' is original and so is 'daughter-in-law' but not 'son-in-law'. One may deduce from this that among Indo-Europeans it was customary for the son when he married to take his wife to live in his father's house; while married daughters went to live with their husband's parents.

Cwn_annwn_13 says

Excellent book about the Pagan beliefs of the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons in England. I don't agree with some of Branston's conclusions but there is much to be learned from this book. The chapters on Thunor/Thor and Woden/Odin are worth their weight in gold. This book is a must read for anyone trying to unweave the tangled web that is Anglo-Saxon Heathenism.

Ancestral Gael says

I looked forward to reading this book after Kathleen Herbert's excellent "Looking for the Lost Gods of England". The book had excellent reviews at Amazon and so I thought it was worth buying the hardcover.

The book is presented as an academic tome, examining the archaeological evidence for the gods of the northern pantheon being part of the pagan tradition in England. It has various illustrations throughout of archaeological finds.

Here my interest ended. It has taken me several long months to get through this book because I find it so frustrating.

Perhaps the nature of archaeology has changed since this book was first written (1974), but I find the author only too willing to build very unstable bridges between what is fact and what he wants to be true. He almost forces the evidence to fit his theories and, to me, this seems like bad methodology indeed.

One can theorise, but one should be careful saying, "*The evidence could suggest this, or it could suggest that*", not: "*One has this theory and the evidence proves it categorically*", when there are clearly other explanations.

For instance, he provides explanations for various images found on objects; his tone and manner implying that his is the accepted meaning amongst historians, when, in fact, it is not. But, perhaps I am being too harsh? Perhaps at the time the book was written these theories were accepted, but time has seen them alter.

Gavin White says

This book was first published in 1957 and it shows. It is a valiant attempt to reconstruct a picture of Anglo-Saxon paganism from very limited native sources. To this end the author had to invent his own methodology, which basically boils down to examining the scant Old English sources and then comparing them to the better known Norse myths and legends. This is OK if you are careful with the sources but what I found difficult to stomach were some of the author's broader assumptions about ancient Indo-European myth and religion. Based on the dual presumption that Indo-European culture was patriarchal and Mediterranean cultures were matriarchal he tries (and to my mind fails) to come up with grand conception of ancient European culture. This tendency, although implicit early on, becomes all too manifest in the later chapters. This, along with a general attitude that ancient religion was little more than a primitive fertility cult, got quite annoying towards the end. Another criticism I would make is that the author almost completely ignores the issue of the sun goddess and moon god that is one of the more notable characteristics of North West European paganism. This could have been as good a tool for exploring the differences between the southern and northern traditions as any other. On the positive side - plenty of good photos.

Nev Percy says

This 1976 book is, as far as my experience stretches, the daddy of them all. It's been cited as a source in probably every other thing I've read on Anglo-Saxon (and by association/implication Norse) mythology, but you don't see it in bookshops any more.

Actually, having read a reasonable amount of other stuff, I didn't find much in this, the original, that hadn't been taken for granted and reissued in all the other books that've been written since. But it's good to have peeled back a layer and read this for myself.

It's rather an individual and subjective read. The author's voice is very prominent, falling somewhere between professorial, conversational and verbose. He analyses the material, but -- this often being slender -- the conclusions are necessarily personal. He is more discerning than some (amateur) historians can be and doesn't stretch everything beyond its credibility, but it might require a rather sympathetic view to share his conclusions.

I think I detect, between the lines, a proto-neo-pagan(!) seeking lore and information to support an inclination not just away from soulless modernity but towards a reverence for the Earth. There is mercifully no Anglo-Saxon 'Volkisch' tendency here, and anyone looking to support a race-specific and exclusive Theodism would be (further) wasting their time reading this book.

--Osric of Ossulston.

Ancestral Gael says

I looked forward to reading this book after Kathleen Herbert's excellent " *Looking for the Lost Gods of England* ". The book had excellent reviews at Amazon and so I thought it was worth buying the hardcover.

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Perhaps the nature of archaeology has changed since this book was first written (1974), but I find the author only too willing to build very unstable bridges between what can be stated as fact, and what he is desirous of being fact. The author almost forces the evidence to fit his theories and, to me, this is deplorable.

One can theorise, but one should be careful saying, "*The evidence could suggest this, or it could suggest that*", not: "*One has this theory, which the evidence categorically proves to be fact*", when there are clearly other explanations.

For instance, Brian Branston provides explanations for various images found on objects; his tone and manner implying that his is *the* accepted meaning amongst historians, when, indeed, it is not. Also the author's assertions of links between certain names in Old English and the Nordic gods seemed tenuous. Having read various books, and theories on the northern gods and looked at the links in various old languages, I felt Brian Branston took things that little too far.

Brian Branston is very enthusiastic about his subject, but, perhaps because of this zeal, he leaves much to be desired in terms of accuracy.

For me, at least, and my opinion is very personal, this book is one I will not be keeping; it contradicted far too many other books on archaeology and the northern gods. I prefer authors, researchers and archaeologists who are more open to possibilities beyond their own theories.

Janice says

I was totally mesmerized. An excellent read for those interested in mythology particularly those of Britain and the Nordic countries.

Clay says

Being consistently confused between the differences between Norse mythology and Anglo-Saxon mythology, I picked up this book. It was a good read and it turns out that things are confusing because little historical documentation remains about the Anglo-Saxon myths. In many cases English myths parallel those of the Norse, because they both stem from Indo-European tribes, yet there are some differences as well. If you want to learn of Woden, Thunor, Frig, and Wyrd, I suggest this book.
