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Aradia : The Gospel Of The Witches



Synopsis

Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches is a book composed by the American folklorist Charles Godfrey Leland that was published in 1899. It contains what he believed was the religious text of a group of pagan witches in Tuscany, Italy that documented their beliefs and rituals, although various historians and folklorists have disputed the existence of such a group. In the 20th century, the book was very influential in the development of the contemporary Pagan religion of Wicca. The text is a composite. Some of it is Leland's translation into English of an original Italian manuscript, the Vangelo (gospel). Leland reported receiving the manuscript from his primary informant on Italian witchcraft beliefs, a woman Leland referred to as "Maddalena" and whom he called his "witch informant" in Italy. The rest of the material comes from Leland's research on Italian folklore and traditions, including other related material from Maddalena. Leland had been informed of the Vangelo's existence in 1886, but it took Maddalena eleven years to provide him with a copy. After translating and editing the material, it took another two years for the book to be published. Its fifteen chapters portray the origins, beliefs, rituals, and spells of an Italian pagan witchcraft tradition. The central figure of that religion is the goddess Aradia, who came to Earth to teach the practice of witchcraft to peasants in order for them to oppose their feudal oppressors and the Roman Catholic Church.

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Customer Reviews

I would like to make a few corrections of people's assumptions. Everyone who reviewed this book made these assumptions which are grossly incorrect. 1) Lucifer (Latin for light-bearer) is mentioned only once in the Bible, Isaiah 14:12 where it is used to refer to the king of Babylon. In Aradia the title of Light Bearer or Dawn Bringer is used to refer to the God Dianus who was Diana's other half/soulmate in Etruscan Mythology. 2) Aradia was never meant to be "a forerunner to Wicca". It was a scholarly work by Charles Leland documenting the vestiges of witchcraft in Northern Italy. Against popular opinion Wicca does NOT mean "practicer of the Celtic paths" it has become the title of a religion (thanks to Gerald Gardner...who apparently wasn't able to determine the meanings of "simple words"). If you claim to follow the Old Ways you should at least understand that *all* Old Ways are worthy of respect, even the Italian ones. Obviously, Aradia greatly influenced the creators of the modern Wicca religion. It is the first time the Charge appeared in print. (It was later taken by Gardner for his covens and rewritten by Doreen Valiente.) There is a lot of negative magick in this book. Then again, it is thought that Maddalena either belonged to a group of witches who were called "Malandanti" (evil witches) or she was purposely feeding Leland false information. However, the roots of the witchcraft are evident. They were descendants of Etruria, still living in the ancestral homeland of Tuscany. They were still worshipping their ancient Goddess of Light, Diana and Her other half, Dianus called Lucifer or Light Bringer. I highly recommend this book for historical purposes.

First published over 100 years ago this little book probably would have vanished into obscurity like Leland's other works if it hadn't been one of Gerald Gardner's sources for building up his Wiccan traditions. While Leland claims to be presenting us with an authentic ancient, or at least medieval, treatise on the religion of the "strega" or Italian gypsy/witches, the text's validity is questionable. Leland claims to have obtained the manuscript from an Italian witch named Madellana who was the most recent witch in a long family line of witches. Critics have challenged the validity of the text & even Leland admits his manuscript is in Madellana's own handwriting. However, he attributes this to the fact that she had committed to paper what was a mostly oral tradition & not to the idea that she intentionally deceived him. Aradia contains little material that is recognizable as typical Wiccan

doctrine but behind the corrupted Latin invocations & spells lie the inspiration behind "The Charge Of The Goddess". There are no mention of familiar elements such as the pentagram & the word "Wicca" is never used. However, we find traces of what would become the ritual of "drawing down the moon" & the idea that meetings, or esbats, should be determined by a lunar calander & meetings were preferably held on nights of the full moon. We also encounter the requirement of ritual nudity. Besides the invocations, spells & rituals Aradia also offers a fair portion of witch mythology or witch-lore. There is the standard mother/moon goddess & father/sun god story. They differ from tycpial Wiccan myth in the fact that their union produces a divine daughter instead of a divine son.

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