



Pagan Federation / Fédération Païenne Canada

To protect and promote the reputation of
Pagans and Paganism in Canada

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Comments??? Send them to us. Have something to say? Send it to us too. We are always looking for input from our members and we would love to print your article or comments.

From PFPC

We at PFPC would like to thank one of our members for their substantial donation this past Fall. It is with the help of members that PFPC can continue to do its part to protect and promote the reputation of Pagans and Paganism in Canada. Once again, a heartfelt thank you.

La Befana

By: Strega Witch

The legend of the Befana has had an important role in the imagination of all children of the world. Those who wish to relive the magic of the first wonders of infancy and understand the meaning and origins of this extraordinary figure, should be prepared to undertake a long voyage that will carry them back in time, to the origins of human's history. We'll discover what makes this personage so mysterious and arcane, because this little old lady so dear to children has continued to fascinate them for centuries, and they still await her arrival on the night of her holiday.

It's possible to demonstrate historically through archeological and anthropological statistics how archaic traces of civilization were conserved in the traditions of the Mediterranean world and survive through the form of images and symbols regarding mythic figures, such as that of the Befana. Some images connected to the figure of the Befana are revealed in an archaic agricultural context when the homes became stable and the cult of domestic folklore was established. In Neolithic culture, the houses of villages in Anatolia (Catal Huyuk) and other places had neither windows nor doors; the only entrance was through the wide, horizontal roof. The house was entered by a ladder which was then withdrawn in a defensive action. The Befana arrived in the homes through the chimney, an act that in the myths throughout the world is attributed to mythic figures as, for example, the spirits of the Montagnais Indians in North America, and above all the Nitu Natmate, ancestral spirits of the Papua-Melanesians, as well as other figures who bring gifts during the Christmas holidays.

Once the link between the figure of the Befana and the ancestral spirits is established, the Befana presents herself during the big holiday as a mythical ancestress who returns yearly. Her principal function is that of reaffirming the bond between the family and the ancestors through an exchange of gifts. The children receive gifts symbolizing archaic civilizations where they were considered the representatives of the ancestors to whom the offerings were destined, as shown by Levy-Bruhl in the structure of the

new years' eve festivities in Bering. Sometimes the Befana receives offers of food. In the popular dramatization in Tuscany, Italy, and elsewhere the Befana is a masked figure who guides the cortege of postulants and receives offers from families who, in kind, receive from her the gift of prosperity.

The Befana occupies a pedagogical function of an outside educator who rewards or punishes, and has an important role in the child's development. This Big Grandmother presided over the various phases of the life of the child, and of initiation rites which took place during the festivities of the New Year.



Regarding the stocking hung up on the chimney, she is not only the container of gifts or of offerings of food but is herself a gift, inasmuch as a manual product dedicated to mythical figures that are patrons of yarns and weaving, close to the Befana, such as Frau Holda and Berchta who visit homes during the Christmas period. The stockings may also have evocative functions.

In the mythical tradition, the Befana arrives flying on a broom, or even on a donkey. This testifies to her association with plants and animals which in antiquity had sacred values as representatives or simulations of totem-line ancestors, as well as divinities. In mythology, the branch is home to the spirit of the ancestors, which is why it has assumed the magical function of flight and could have a role of evocation as well as of distancing from the spirit. These actions were conceived as a voyage, a flight from a far-away kingdom.

Besides the link with the cult of the hearth, the Befana personifies a close link to fire itself, whether astral (brought from the stars, appearing as a meteor) or earthly (for example on the eve of the Befana holiday, bonfires are lit to burn her figure). This action is meant not so much as to exorcise a negative entity, as to re-accompany at the end of the big holiday the spirit of the

ancestors to the kingdom beyond the tomb through the symbolism of the ascending fire.

The Epiphany holiday includes purifying rites, and benedictions with water. The water prepared on the eve of Epiphany has a sacred and warding-off-evil-spirits value and is used in critical moments of family life. In the Abruzzo, Italy, it's called "Water of the Boffe."

The figure of the Kings Magi, in the historical tradition, were priests of the sacred fire. They were a privileged caste who, in the Zoroastrian Persia, waited until the fire expired. The Magi symbolized the three worlds: earthy gold, celestial incense, and myrrh from beyond the grave. These three substances can be linked to each of the three sacred fires of Vedica, India, and Avestica, Persia. Therefore, it is possible, through fire and gifts, to establish a connection between the Magi and the figure of the Befana in the expectation of the holiday of January 6.

Viking Christmas Carol

Author Unknown

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the Hall
Not a creature was stirring, not warrior nor thrall.
And I in my armor, my shield and my helm
Was drunker than anyone else in the Realm.
I staggered upstairs and fell into bed
While four quarts of mead were ablaze in my head.
Then up from below came the sounds of a brawl
So I grabbed up my axe and ran down to the Hall.
I missed the last step and crashed down in a heap
Thinking, "Why can't those low-lives downstairs go to sleep!"
When what to my wondering eyes should appear
But two brawny strangers, wielding mallet and spear.
I said to myself, "We'll soon have them beat!"
Then I noticed ten warriors laid out at their feet.
I gave out a yell and leapt into the fray...
I'll always regret my poor choice of that day.
For the one laid his hammer to the side of my nose
And up, up, up to the rafters I rose.
Then came a lone frightened voice from the floor,
"Those are no mortal warriors -- that's Odin and Thor!"

Then they looked at each other and they said,
"Battle's done.
Now they know who we are, it no longer is fun."
Then Thor raised his hammer, and his elbow he
bent,
And with a loud crash, through the ceiling they
went.
I crawled through the Hall and flung open the
door,
Not really sure that I'd seen them before.
The snow bathed in starlight, the moon like a
glede,
I saw them ride off on an eight-legged steed.
And I heard them exclaim, 'ere they flew out of
sight,
"TO HELA WITH CHRISTMAS, WE JUST
LOVE A GOOD FIGHT!"

PFPC is always looking for articles for the
newsletter. Submission date for the Spring 2008
issue is March 21, 2008