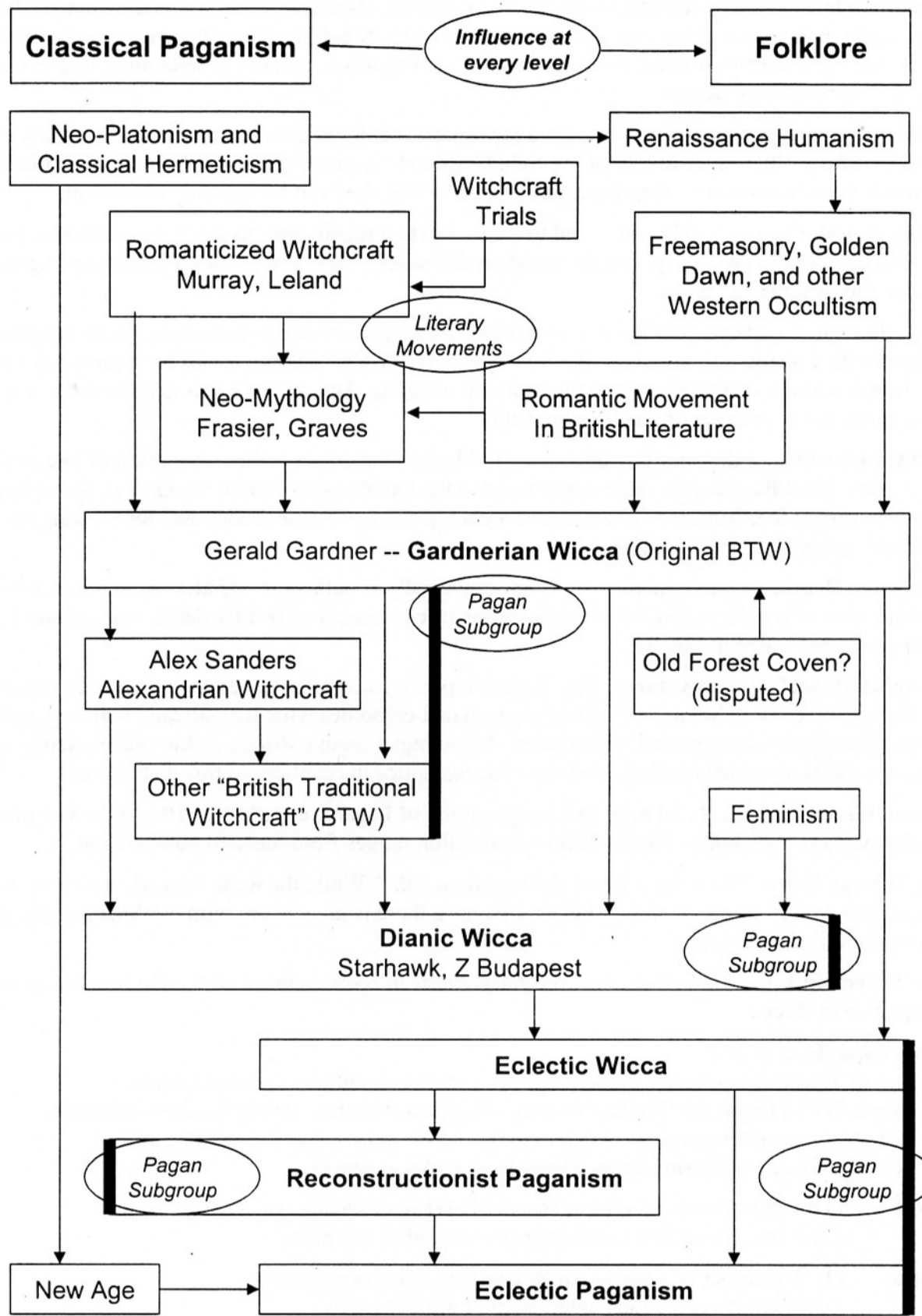


Roots of Modern Paganism



Modern Paganism: Concepts and Terms

Modern Paganism is a non-doctrinal, post-Christian religion (or family of religions) which uses symbols and images from pre-Christian religions, but which invests authority in personal religious experience.

Non-Doctrinal: In sharp contrast to Abrahamic religions, Paganism is not defined by belief. Pagans worshiping in the same group can hold utterly contradictory beliefs. Thus Paganism has no “faith” to which one must adhere. Instead, the role of “faith” in Paganism consists of remaining true to one’s personal spiritual experiences.

Consequently, Paganism has no place for a systematic theology. Sometimes it is useful to talk of one Great Goddess, other times to talk of multiple Gods and Goddesses. Little or no attempt is made to reconcile these statements – they are mythic truths which need not be logically consistent.

Ritual Based: Paganism uses ritual, and to a lesser extent meditation, to facilitate spiritual experience. The cohesion of the group is primarily based on this shared experience, not on intellectual agreement as to what the experience “means.”

Post-Modern: Paganism does not regard any text as having an absolute meaning. Texts are used or omitted with a poetic utilitarianism. If a text evokes the “right” feeling, it will be included in a ritual, sometimes without overmuch regard for its literal meaning. The role of a text is to facilitate a spiritual experience, not to embody an unchanging truth.

Goddess(es): One of the very few universals in Modern Paganism is the recognition of one or more Goddesses. Most Pagans give more importance to the Goddess(es) than to the God(s). Some Pagans, however, regard the Gods and Goddesses as archetypes, or as human constructs for viewing the Ultimate, rather than as actual beings.

Life After Death: Pagans generally – but not universally -- believe in life after death, most commonly in some form of reincarnation. Most Pagans give little concern to life after death, concentrating instead on meaning and value in this life.

“Coming Home” vs. Conversion: Few Pagans report a conversion experience. Far more common is the feeling of “coming home,” of finding a group that embodies what they already believed and/or connects with previous spiritual experiences. Most Pagan groups strictly forbid proselytizing, but have no reservations about advertising. Very few Pagans notice the subtlety of this distinction.

Coven, Grove, and Circle all refer to a congregation of Pagans, usually 3 to 10 people who meet regularly in a private home. Higher-level organization ranges from loose to non-existent.,

The Wiccan Rede: “*An it harm none, do what thou wilt.*” While the Rede is nearly universal within Wicca, and widely accepted among Eclectic Pagans, there is no concern with establishing any general agreement on what it means.

The Threefold Law: “*Whatever one does for good or ill returns threefold.*” Also near universal acceptance in Wicca.

Subgroups (from chart):

British Traditional Wicca – closely follows rituals as taught by Gerald Gardner.

Dianic Wicca (from the Goddess Diana) – Goddess-centered, strong feminist influence.

Reconstructionist Paganism – greater attempt to be authentic to ancient Paganism.

Eclectic Wicca/Paganism: freely adopts from various sources.

Witch (1) A practitioner of Wicca, especially BTW or Dianic.
(2) A traditional folk spellcaster of some other tradition.

Druid: (1) A member of a particular Reconstructionist organization.
(2) Members of various older, smaller organizations.
(3) Any eclectic who feels like calling herself a Druid.
