

= Aradia , or the Gospel of the Witches =

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 .

Leland 's work remained obscure until the 1950s , when other theories about , and claims of , " pagan witchcraft " survivals began to be widely discussed . Aradia began to be examined within the wider context of such claims . Scholars are divided , with some dismissing Leland 's assertion regarding the origins of the manuscript , and others arguing for its authenticity as a unique documentation of folk beliefs . Along with increased scholarly attention , Aradia came to play a special role in the history of Gardnerian Wicca and its offshoots , being used as evidence that pagan witchcraft survivals existed in Europe , and because a passage from the book 's first chapter was used as a part of the religion 's liturgy . After the increase in interest in the text , it became widely available through numerous reprints from a variety of publishers , including a 1999 critical edition with a new translation by Mario and Dina Pazzaglini .

= = Origins = =

Charles Godfrey Leland was an American author and folklorist , and spent much of the 1890s in Florence researching Italian folklore . Aradia was one of the products of Leland 's research . While Leland 's name is the one principally associated with Aradia , the manuscript that makes up the bulk of it is attributed to the research of an Italian woman that Leland and Leland 's biographer , his niece Elizabeth Robins Pennell , referred to as " Maddalena " . According to folklorist Roma Lister , a contemporary and friend of Leland 's , Maddalena 's real name was Margherita , and she was a " witch " from Florence who claimed a family lineage from the Etruscans and knowledge of ancient rituals . Professor Robert Mathiesen , as a contributor to the Pazzaglini translation of Aradia , mentions a letter from Maddalena to Leland , which he states is signed " Maddalena Talenti " (the last name being a guess as the handwriting is difficult to decipher) . However , pagan scholar Raven Grimassi presented a document at the Pantheacon convention on February 17 , 2008 , revealing that Maddalena 's last name was actually Taluti . This document was reproduced from The International Folklore Congress : Papers and Transactions , 1892 , page 454 .

Leland reports meeting Maddalena in 1886 , and she became the primary source for his Italian folklore collecting for several years . Leland describes her as belonging to a vanishing tradition of sorcery . He writes that " by long practice [she] has perfectly learned ... just what I want , and how to extract it from those of her kind . " He received several hundred pages worth of material from her , which was incorporated into his books Etruscan Roman Remains in Popular Tradition , Legends of Florence Collected From the People , and eventually Aradia . Leland wrote that he had " learned that there was in existence a manuscript setting forth the doctrines of Italian witchcraft " in 1886 , and had urged Maddalena to find it . Eleven years later , on 1 January 1897 , Leland received the Vangelo by post . The manuscript was written in Maddalena 's handwriting . Leland understood it to

be an authentic document of the " Old Religion " of the witches , but explains that he did not know if the text came from written or oral sources . Maddalena 's correspondence with Leland indicated that she intended to marry a man named Lorenzo Bruciatelli and emigrate to the United States , and the Vangelo was the last material Leland received from her . Author Raven Grimassi , at the Pantheacon convention on February 17 , 2008 , presented a copy of a letter written by Leland (housed in The Library of Congress) . The letter states that Maddalena did not follow through with her plans , but instead left her husband and worked in Genoa for a period of time before returning to Florence .

Leland 's translation and editing was completed in early 1897 and submitted to David Nutt for publication . Two years passed , until Leland wrote requesting the return of the manuscript in order to submit it to a different publishing house . This request spurred Nutt to accept the book , and it was published in July 1899 in a small print run . Wiccan author Raymond Buckland claims to have been the first to reprint the book in 1968 through his " Buckland Museum of Witchcraft " press , but a British reprint was made by " Wiccans " [sic] Charles " Rex Nemorensis " and Mary Cardell in the early 1960s . Since then the text has been repeatedly reprinted by a variety of different publishers , including as a 1998 retranslation by Mario and Dina Pazzaglini with essays and commentary .

= = Contents = =

After the eleven @-@ year search , Leland writes that he was unsurprised by the contents of the Vangelo . It was largely what he was expecting , with the exception that he did not predict passages in " prose @-@ poetry " . " I also believe that in this Gospel of the Witches " , comments Leland in the appendix , " we have a trustworthy outline at least of the doctrine and rites observed at [the witches ' Sabbat] . They adored forbidden deities and practised forbidden deeds , inspired as much by rebellion against Society as by their own passions . "

Leland 's final draft was a slim volume . He organised the material to be included into fifteen chapters , and added a brief preface and an appendix . The published version also included footnotes and , in many places , the original Italian that Leland had translated . Most of the content of Leland 's Aradia is made up of spells , blessings , and rituals , but the text also contains stories and myths which suggest influences from both the ancient Roman religion and Roman Catholicism . Major characters in the myths include the Roman goddess Diana , a sun god called Lucifer , the Biblical Cain as a lunar figure , and the messianic Aradia . The witchcraft of " The Gospel of the Witches " is both a method for casting spells and an anti @-@ hierarchical " counter @-@ religion " to the Catholic church .

= = = Themes = = =

Entire chapters of Aradia are devoted to rituals and magic spells . These include enchantments to win love (Chapter VI) , a conjuration to perform when finding a stone with a hole or a round stone in order to turn it into an amulet for Diana 's favour (Chapter IV) , and the consecration of a ritual feast for Diana , Aradia , and Cain (Chapter II) . The narrative material makes up less of the text , and is composed of short stories and legends about the birth of the witchcraft religion and the actions of their gods . Leland summarises the mythic material in the book in its appendix , writing " Diana is Queen of the Witches ; an associate of Herodias (Aradia) in her relations to sorcery ; that she bore a child to her brother the Sun (here Lucifer) ; that as a moon @-@ goddess she is in some relation to Cain , who dwells as prisoner in the moon , and that the witches of old were people oppressed by feudal lands , the former revenging themselves in every way , and holding orgies to Diana which the Church represented as being the worship of Satan " . Diana is not only the witches ' goddess , but is presented as the primordial creatrix in Chapter III , dividing herself into darkness and light . After giving birth to Lucifer , Diana seduces him while in the form of a cat , eventually giving birth to Aradia , their daughter . Diana demonstrates the power of her witchcraft by creating " the heavens , the stars and the rain " , becoming " Queen of the Witches " . Chapter I presents the original witches as slaves that escaped from their masters , beginning new lives as " thieves and evil

folk " . Diana sends her daughter Aradia to them to teach these former serfs witchcraft , the power of which they can use to " destroy the evil race (of oppressors) " . Aradia 's students thus became the first witches , who would then continue the worship of Diana . Leland was struck by this cosmogony : " In all other Scriptures of all races , it is the male ... who creates the universe ; in Witch Sorcery it is the female who is the primitive principle " .

= = = Structure = = =

Aradia is composed of fifteen chapters , the first ten of which are presented as being Leland 's translation of the Vangelo manuscript given to him by Maddalena . This section , while predominantly made up of spells and rituals , is also the source of most of the myths and folktales contained in the text . At the end of Chapter I is the text in which Aradia gives instructions to her followers on how to practice witchcraft .

The first ten chapters are not entirely a direct translation of the Vangelo ; Leland offers his own commentary and notes on a number of passages , and Chapter VII is Leland 's incorporation of other Italian folklore material . Medievalist Robert Mathiesen contends that the Vangelo manuscript actually represents even less of Aradia , arguing that only Chapters I , II , and the first half of Chapter IV match Leland 's description of the manuscript 's contents , and suggests that the other material came from different texts collected by Leland through Maddalena .

The remaining five chapters are clearly identified in the text as representing other material Leland believed to be relevant to the Vangelo , acquired during his research into Italian witchcraft , and especially while working on his Etruscan Roman Remains and Legends of Florence . The themes in these additional chapters vary in some details from the first ten , and Leland included them partly to " [confirm] the fact that the worship of Diana existed for a long time contemporary with Christianity " . Chapter XV , for example , gives an incantation to Laverna , through the use of a deck of playing cards . Leland explains its inclusion by a note that Diana , as portrayed in Aradia , is worshipped by outlaws , and Laverna was the Roman goddess of thievery . Other examples of Leland 's thoughts about the text are given in the book 's preface , appendix , and numerous footnotes .

In several places Leland provides the Italian he was translating . According to Mario Pazzaglini , author of the 1999 translation , the Italian contains misspellings , missing words , and grammatical errors , and is in a standardised Italian rather than the local dialect one might expect . Pazzaglini concludes that Aradia represents material translated from dialect to basic Italian and then into English , creating a summary of texts , some of which were mis @-@ recorded . Leland himself called the text a " collection of ceremonies , ' cantrips , ' incantations , and traditions " and described it as an attempt to gather material , " valuable and curious remains of ancient Latin or Etruscan lore " that he feared would be lost . There is no cohesive narrative even in the sections that Leland attributes to the Vangelo . This lack of cohesion , or " inconsistency " , is an argument for the text 's authenticity , according to religious scholar Chas S. Clifton , since the text shows no signs of being " massaged ... for future book buyers . "

= = Claims questioned = =

Leland wrote that " the witches even yet form a fragmentary secret society or sect , that they call it that of the Old Religion , and that there are in the Romagna entire villages in which the people are completely heathen " . Accepting this , Leland supposed that " the existence of a religion supposes a Scripture , and in this case it may be admitted , almost without severe verification , that the Evangel of the Witches is really a very old work ... in all probability the translation of some early or later Latin work . "

Leland 's claim that the manuscript was genuine , and even his assertion that he received such a manuscript , have been called into question . After the 1921 publication of Margaret Murray 's The Witch @-@ cult in Western Europe , which hypothesised that the European witch trials were actually a persecution of a pagan religious survival , American sensationalist author Theda Kenyon 's 1929 book Witches Still Live connected Murray 's thesis with the witchcraft religion in Aradia . Arguments

against Murray 's thesis would eventually include arguments against Leland . Witchcraft scholar Jeffrey Russell devoted some of his 1980 book *A History of Witchcraft : Sorcerers , Heretics and Pagans* to arguing against the claims in *Aradia* , Murray 's thesis , and Jules Michelet 's 1862 *La Sorcière* , which also theorised that witchcraft represented an underground religion . Historian Elliot Rose 's *A Razor for a Goat* dismissed *Aradia* as a collection of incantations unsuccessfully attempting to portray a religion . In his *Triumph of the Moon* , historian Ronald Hutton summarises the controversy as having three possible extremes :

The Vangelo manuscript represents a genuine text from an otherwise undiscovered religion .

Maddalena wrote the text , either with or without Leland 's assistance , possibly drawing from her own background with folklore or witchcraft .

The entire document was forged by Leland .

Hutton himself is a sceptic , not only of the existence of the religion that *Aradia* claims to represent , but also of the existence of Maddalena , arguing that it is more likely that Leland created the entire story than that Leland could be so easily " duped " by an Italian fortune @-@ teller . Clifton takes exception to Hutton 's position , writing that it amounts to an accusation of " serious literary fraud " made by an " argument from absence " ; one of Hutton 's main objections is that *Aradia* is unlike anything found in medieval literature .

Mathiesen also dismisses this " option three " , arguing that while Leland 's English drafts for the book were heavily edited and revised in the process of writing , the Italian sections , in contrast , were almost untouched except for corrections of " precisely the sort that a proofreader would make as he compared his copy to the original " . This leads Mathiesen to conclude that Leland was working from an extant Italian @-@ language original that he describes as " authentic , but not representative " of any larger folk tradition . Anthropologist Sabina Magliocco examines the " option one " possibility , that Leland 's manuscript represented a folk tradition involving Diana and the Cult of Herodias , in her article *Who Was Aradia ? The History and Development of a Legend* . Magliocco writes that *Aradia* " may represent a 19th @-@ century version of [the legend of the Cult of Herodias] that incorporated later materials influenced by medieval diabolism : the presence of ' Lucifero , ' the Christian devil ; the practice of sorcery ; the naked dances under the full moon . "

= = Influence on Wicca and Stregheria = =

Magliocco calls *Aradia* " the first real text of the 20th century Witchcraft revival " , and it is repeatedly cited as being profoundly influential on the development of Wicca . The text apparently corroborates the thesis of Margaret Murray that early modern and Renaissance witchcraft represented a survival of ancient pagan beliefs , and after Gerald Gardner 's claim to have encountered religious witchcraft in 20th @-@ century England , the works of Michelet , Murray , and Leland helped support at least the possibility that such a survival could exist .

The Charge of the Goddess , an important piece of liturgy used in Wiccan rituals , was inspired by *Aradia* 's speech in the first chapter of the book . Parts of the speech appeared in an early version of Gardnerian Wicca ritual . According to Doreen Valiente , one of Gardner 's priestesses , Gardner was surprised by Valiente 's recognising the material as having come from Leland 's book . Valiente subsequently rewrote the passage in both prose and verse , retaining the " traditional " *Aradia* lines . Some Wiccan traditions use the name *Aradia* , or *Diana* , to refer to the Goddess or Queen of the Witches , and Hutton writes that the earliest Gardnerian rituals used the name *Airdia* , a " garbled " form of *Aradia* . Hutton further suggests that the reason that Wicca includes skyclad practice , or ritual nudity , is because of a line spoken by *Aradia* :

And as the sign that ye are truly free ,

Ye shall be naked in your rites , both men

And women also : this shall last until

The last of your oppressors shall be dead ;

Accepting *Aradia* as the source of this practice , Robert Chartowich points to the 1998 Pazzaglini translation of these lines , which read " Men and Women / You will all be naked , until / Yet he shall be dead , the last / Of your oppressors is dead . " Chartowich argues that the ritual nudity of Wicca

was based upon Leland 's mistranslation of these lines by incorporating the clause " in your rites " . There are , however , earlier mentions of ritual nudity among Italian witches . Historian Ruth Martin states that it was a common practice for witches of Italy to be " naked with their hair loose around their shoulders " while reciting conjurations . Jeffrey Burton Russell notes that " A woman named Marta was tortured in Florence about 1375 : she was alleged to have placed candles round a dish and to have taken off her clothes and stood above the dish in the nude , making magical signs " . Historian Franco Mormando refers to an Italian witch : " Lo and behold : in the first hours of sleep , this woman opens the door to her vegetable garden and comes out completely naked and her hair all undone , and she begins to do and say her various signs and conjurations ... " .

The reception of Aradia amongst Neopagans has not been entirely positive . Clifton suggests that modern claims of revealing an Italian pagan witchcraft tradition , for example those of Leo Martello and Raven Grimassi , must be " match [ed] against " , and compared with the claims in Aradia . He further suggests that a lack of comfort with Aradia may be due to an " insecurity " within Neopaganism about the movement 's claim to authenticity as a religious revival . Valiente offers another explanation for the negative reaction of some neopagans ; that the identification of Lucifer as the God of the witches in Aradia was " too strong meat " for Wiccans who were used to the gentler , romantic paganism of Gerald Gardner and were especially quick to reject any relationship between witchcraft and Satanism .

Clifton writes that Aradia was especially influential for leaders of the Wiccan religious movement in the 1950s and 1960s , but that the book no longer appears on the " reading lists " given by members to newcomers , nor is it extensively cited in more recent Neopagan books . The new translation of the book released in 1998 was introduced by Wiccan author Stewart Farrar , who affirms the importance of Aradia , writing that " Leland 's gifted research into a ' dying ' tradition has made a significant contribution to a living and growing one . "

Author Raven Grimassi has written extensively about Aradia in his popularization of Stregheria , presenting what he admits is his own personal rendering of her story . He differs from Leland in many ways , particularly in portraying her as a witch who lived and taught in 14th @-@ century Italy , rather than a goddess . In response to Clifton , he states that similarity or dissimilarity to Leland 's Aradia material cannot be a measure of authenticity , since Leland 's material itself is disputed .

Therefore it cannot effectively be used to discredit other writings or views on Italian witchcraft , nor is it a representative ethnographic foundation against which other writings or views " must " be compared . The Aradia material is , unfortunately , a disputed text with problems of its own when compared to the usually accepted folklore , folk traditions , and folk magic practices of Italy .

He agrees with Valiente that the major objection of Neopagans to this material is its " inclusion of negative stereotypes related to witches and witchcraft " , and suggests that comparisons between this material and religious witchcraft are " regarded as an insult by many neo @-@ pagans " .