



University of Szeged

Faculty of Humanities and Social  
Sciences



**CHALLENGING THE BINARY PRINCIPLES:  
LGBTQ+ WICCAN PRACTICE IN  
THE BERKANO WICCA TRADITION IN HUNGARY**

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For the purpose of this presentation, here are some work definitions:

(1) A Wiccan is someone who practices the Wiccan religion/spiritual path and has either received Wiccan initiation or has formally and ritually declared themselves Wiccan.

(2) While some Wiccans use the terms "Wiccan" and "witch" interchangeably, there are witches who are not Wiccans. Wiccans are a subgroup of witches.

(3) and both Wiccans and witches are subgroups of pagans. Pagans generally practice nature-centred religions. Although most Wiccans and witches identify as pagans, not all pagans are Wiccans or witches.

(4) When I use the phrase "witchcraft" in this thesis, I'm referring to the religious rites and practices, such as spell work that Wiccans and witches do. The phrase "Wicca" refers to religion as a whole.



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ninian Smart's Material Dimension of religion.

Jo Green's Queer Paganism

and Yvonne Aburrow's survey of Inclusive Wicca

Guided depth-in interviews with 5 witches, belong to Berkano Wicca Tradition coven in Hungary, in which two of them are lone-practitioners.

Analysis of Yvonne Aburrow's survey about inclusivity among Wiccan covens in the United States.



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to put a **spotlight** on how the **Berkano Tradition** works in Hungary regarding its **highly non-heterosexual members** and how these witches **reinvent** Gardnerian rituals for their own want or will while still establishing their queerness. During the **winter solstice of 2021 in Budapest**, I interviewed several Berkano witches who identified as **homosexual and bisexual**, these interviews addressing the topics of self-initiation, gender roles, and the personal objects they use in their coven altar and/or home altar. These qualitative research methods (interviews) were conducted in Hungarian, recorded digitally, and written down word-for-word in an audio transcript, as part of my Master's thesis.



# THE IDEA OF CONTEMPORARY PAGANISM FOR QUEERS

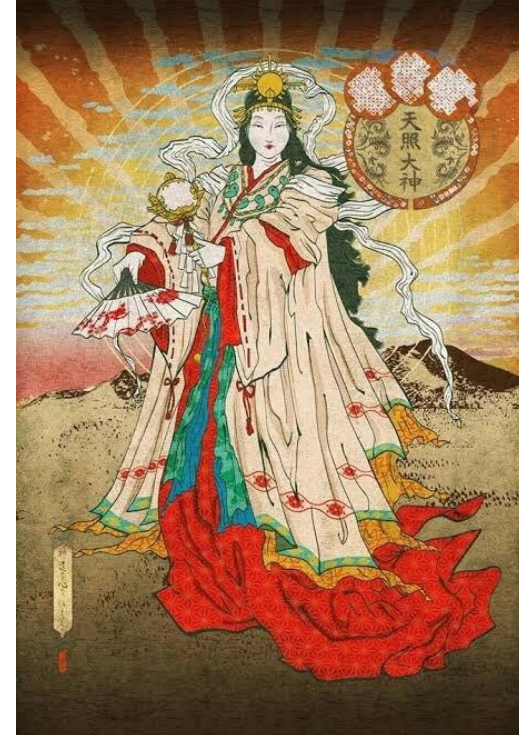
Contemporary paganism, as a whole is generally a **nature-based religion** with certain characteristics as for example, devotion to **multiple deities** (also known as polytheism), a respect for nature, belief in **magick** and sometimes the belief in **reincarnation**.

Contemporary pagan belief is centred on balance between the **binary** of **good and evil**, light and dark, day and night and importantly **masculine and feminine**. There is an acknowledgement of the feminine and masculine divine; there should not be a single male god, but also a balancing female goddess.



For queers the principle of gender confirms that the traditional binary worldview just doesn't apply.

The impact of **colonialization** on the truth of who these deities were and how they were worshipped is cannot be emphasised enough. There are examples of deities who change gender (for example Loki who changed gender to 'trick' unsuspecting humans, or Artemis who by being a huntress is said to be androgynous and thus can be seen to represent the 'masculine' aspects of hunting, determination and honour).



Examples are Ardhanarishvara (Hindu), Atum (Egyptian), Neith (Egyptian), Hermaphroditu/ Hermaphroditus (Greek), Athena (Greek), Baal (Ancient Palestine), Baphomet (Templars), Amaterasu (Shinto), Toyuke (Shinto), Kayanuhime (Shinto), Dionysus (Greek), Iphis/Iphys (Greek).



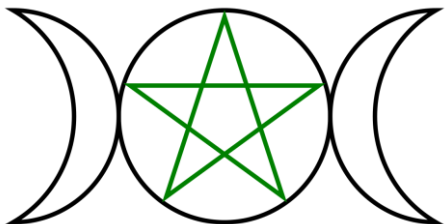


# MINOAN BROTHERHOOD AND DIANIC WICCA



The Minoan Brotherhood was explicitly founded as a "*Mystery/initiatory cult which erotically celebrates Life through male love.*" The founder, Eddie Buczynski's coven took the rituals of Gardnerian Wicca as its basis. He adopted the eight annual Gardnerian Sabbath festivals but associated them with ancient Mediterranean religious festivals. Insisting that even though his coven would contain only men, it should still embrace gender polarity, he set up the Cretan Snake Goddess Rhea as the tradition's primary deity. Accompanying her, the tradition was also founded to venerate her son, the Cretan Bull God, thereby being duotheistic in nature, like most other Wicca traditions.

Dianic Wicca was created for the feminine side of humanity, for women with feminist ideological background or same-sex orientations. Dianic Wicca, which was developed by a hereditary witch Zsuzsanna Budapest sprang out of the feminist movement, honours the Goddess but pays little attention to her masculine counterpart. They worship Diana or Artemis.





# BERKANO WICCA TRADITION



Berkano Tradition, initiated by its two founding members, Saddle and Osara LaMort, was the first to develop a distinctive identity. Its name refers to the \*berkano rune of the Elder Futhark. Berkano also publishes a monthly esoteric magazine called *Árnyak magazin* (Magazine of Shadow).

Berkano, as a coven, according to the members, is very inclusive and flexible about gender roles during the ritual. As noted earlier, a more traditionally Gardnerian coven would not allow a man to appropriate a woman's role in a ritual. But Berkano allows everything regarding gender roles and obligations as long as it does not impact negatively on anyone's boundaries.



## RESEARCH FINDINGS: FLEXIBILITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

The **priest** began the ritual by calling upon the **God** and **Goddess**, followed by the **priestess (leading the ritual)** who also said a number of spells and invited the initiates and students to take part in the calling upon the elemental guardians. The wine then was shared with all the participants. The athame and the chalice were used as well, while several incenses were burning around the edge and the centre of the ritual space. The ritual ended with us singing a handful of prayers fitting for the particular event's theme.

For solitary Wiccans, the ritual is even more **personal, unique, flexible, and individualistic** in nature. They would make a salt circle and take out all of the objects from their home altars. But there is no itinerary on what they should do chronologically. They would make it as flexible as possible to **accommodate their needs**, sometimes they would just do the ritual to attain divination, help, guidance, or to celebrate the sabbaths. One of my interviewees does their ritual in private, nobody may enter the room or disturb them during spellcasting or meditation.



# RESEARCH FINDINGS: MATERIAL AND OBJECTS

Smart describes the material dimension as one of seven dimensions of religion: sacred objects and places are included in this category. In Wicca, objects or tools used in the ritual and personal belonging –such as necklaces or clothes– are very important, whether for the coven or to the individual. A coven would typically use the following objects: ritual knife (athame), chalice, pentacles, salt, crystals, wine, incense, and wand, etc.







# PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

1. Why are Berkano Tradition and other Hungarian Wicca covens highly **dominated by queer members**? Hence I could not make a **comparative studies** with heterosexual members.
2. **Not everyone is willing to share** their personal belief and practice regarding Wicca (their home altar, Book of Shadows, with whom are the working, etc.)
3. Berkano only has **Hungarian members** and it seems they are not trying to open up for non-Hungarian witches, as their rituals and books are in Hungarian.



# INCLUSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE WICCA

Wicca is not by its nature **excluding**. So inclusive Wicca is not a movement or a new grouping within Wicca, it is simply **a label for a pre-existing set of ideas**. It is about including **different perspectives, sexual orientations, levels of ability, and understandings of the world**; not erasing these differences, but **celebrating** them and **working** with them.

Progressive Wicca is a movement which spans the **traditions** and emphasizes networking, closeness to **nature, personal growth** and co-operative development. Personal experience of other paths is welcomed and integrated into covens, and we do **not slavishly follow a Book of Shadows**, as we see Wicca as an **ever-growing religion** and the Book of Shadows **changes** and **grows** with each new witch.



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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!  
QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS ARE WELCOME!**

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