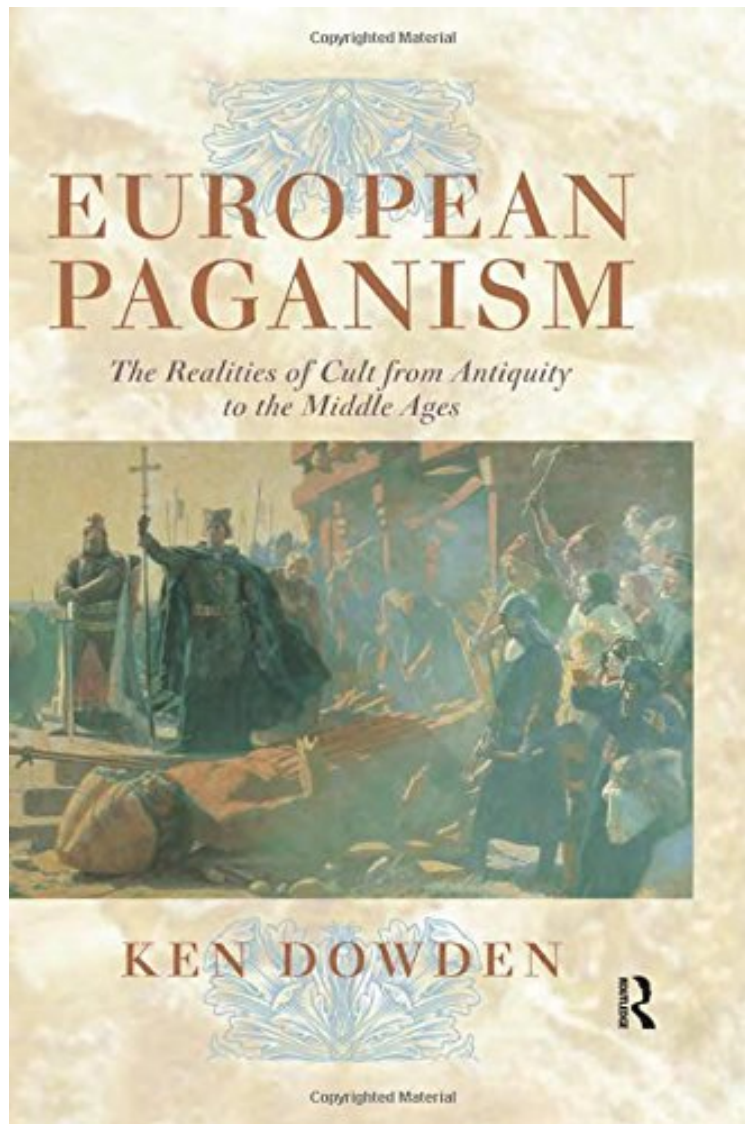


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## European Paganism

*Ken Dowden*

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#6622652 in Books 1999-11-30 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.75 x 6.50 x 1.251, 1.91 #File Name: 0415120349392 pages | File size: 58.Mb

**Ken Dowden : European Paganism** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised European Paganism:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. tremendous book By Joseph Amie Ken Dowden has written a wonderful book on the origins of Indo European religion focusing most of his efforts on Rome and Greek examples but also touching on Celtic, Germanic, etc. What makes this book stand out from others is in how it is written. There is no typical explanations around what god was representing what force of nature or society. Dowden takes another route exploring place and time. He shows how the environment and the landscape informed the religious experiences and

how these people were inseparable from the land they lived in. The rest of this book looks at a few other topics that are not always covered by authors attempting to tackle this large subject, cultic practice and Christian observations. The few chapters on cultic practice are quite interesting illustrating the actions taken from birth, burial, priestly, and of course the ultimate pagan rite, Sacrifice. Dowden uses mostly ancient sources and archeology to back up his overall conclusions, and never stretches to silly guess work that we tend to see in non academic authors. It's an easy trap to fall in to with this topic, but he firmly rests his work in historical context and not simplistic sensationalism. His heavy emphasis on landscape is certainly the strength of this book. I've never seen this approach and it changed a number of perspectives i had held prior to reading this. Wonderful book. i recommend this if you can find it. 28 of 33 people found the following review helpful. Great erudition...but, basically, a Procrustean bed

By woolrich2 It's hard to know how to react to Professor Dowden's book. On the positive side, it covers a great deal of ground, has an impressive bibliography, and features some of the author's own translations (from Old English, German, and Latin, among other languages) of texts that were previously unavailable in English. On the negative side, it tries to cover far too much ground, often holds a contemptuous tone towards its subject matter or the author's voice seems quite sarcastic, and eventually, the whole book collapses by the author's attempt to create a sort of a template of "Indo-European Paganism" that fails to convince this reader. As Dowden himself admits, there's more than one "paganism" but rather a series of "paganisms." One can't hope to impose the straightforward narrative of one of the "revealed religions," i.e., Christianity, Islam, Judaism, upon a set of systems that varied very much, culture by culture and responded much to local conditions. The author admits this early, then reinforces it with repeated language to this effect later, but he then does the contrary in practice by trying to make everything fit an overarching general theory, step by step. The earlier chapters begin with fascinating discussions of the sacred groves, sacred waters, the landscape itself, culture by culture. The author wanders from the Aesculetum near Rome and the Grove of Diana at Aricia all the way to Lithuanian tree worship with its generous libations of beer. Dowden continues for many chapters along this route, with a sort of catalogue of paganisms, and their common denominators. This is interesting, although, he seems to hold contempt for his subject matter, especially when discussing the nature of divination or of the gods and their relationship to humanity. I find this to be a disadvantage to an author's appreciation of his subject matter, but this may be entirely my own prejudice. When the author reaches his penultimate chapter, he tries to tie all of the shards together, through linguistics and details to construct the following ideal template of Indo-European paganism: a council of elders (or of the people) meeting in a sacred grove every so many years (whether 5 or 7 or 9 or whatever) in order to conduct a series of sacrifices, especially human. I found his final denouement to be both unconvincing and trite: it largely fails his subject matter. As he himself admits, many of these pagan cultures had already either discarded human sacrifice or created symbolic substitutes (For example, the Romans outlawed human sacrifice by law in 97 B.C.E., while the Greeks regarded it as so taboo that they believed that Orpheus himself had legislated against it.). In my estimation, Dowden relies too heavily on Germanic and Lithuanian practice in order to enforce this viewpoint and is notably weaker in his arguments when dealing with Classical civilization. Overall, I find this book to be a notable effort by a man of obvious intellect, but it still fails.

2 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Read parts online but can't afford it

By Lance M. Foster I read parts of this excellent book online, courtesy of Google Books. What I read of it was wonderful. I was looking for info on Taranis and on the transition of paganism to Christianity. I was knocked out however by the second chapter on the landscape; the fact that "Once a sacred temple has been built, even when the building is destroyed, the place remains sacred" is also true of many other indigenous traditions including in the New World. It is sad for example that historic preservation bureaucrats pushing through permitting processes for development don't \_want\_ to understand that a site can remain sacred, for example, in Hawaii, even if the heiau (temple) is no longer there; that it is the SITE that was the reason the heiau was built in the first place. I can't speak to the reason the other reviewer didn't like the book, that it tried to mash everything into one umbrella theory in the last chapter. I also didn't think it was that disparaging of the old beliefs-- for an academic. I personally love encyclopedic mishmashes of fact that I can't find elsewhere very easily. The only reason I didn't give this 5 stars is that the price is way out of line for students and less well-off scholars; there should be a paperback available for around 30 bucks or so. There aren't any expensive plates so it just looks like needless price gouging. After all, I would think authors want to get their ideas out there, but at \$125 a pop, that's pretty tough for many to buy.

European Paganism provides a comprehensive and accessible overview of ancient pagan religions throughout the European continent. Before there were Christians, the peoples of Europe were pagans. Were they bloodthirsty savages hanging human offerings from trees? Were they happy ecologists, valuing the unpolluted rivers and mountains? In *European Paganism* Ken Dowden outlines and analyses the diverse aspects of pagan ritual and culture from human sacrifice to pilgrimage lunar festivals and tree worship. It includes: \* a 'timelines' chart to aid with chronology \* many quotations from ancient and modern sources translated from the original language where necessary, to make them accessible \* a comprehensive bibliography and guide to further reading.

'Masterful overview ... Dowden has a winning way with words, and a gift for making the complexities of faith simple

and accessible.' - The Independent'The book is a delight to read. Dowden has an attractive style, and chooses his quotations so that they illuminate the matters he is discussing.' - D. Cohen, Wood and Water, No. 71'European Paganism is vintage Ken Dowden and that, of course means its always challenging and informative and often very amusing.' - Greece and Rome'Hutton shows us that paganism is a matter of interest not only for the classicist and archaeologist, but for the modern historian as well. In doing so his Triumph of the Moon proves to be a triumph of cultural history.' - Owen Davies'This is a colossus of a book. It approaches a familiar subject from fresh angles and provides a whole new perspective on European Paganism ... One of the most important books to be written on the subject - ever!' - Pagan DawnAbout the AuthorKen Dowden is Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Birmingham.