

Eostre in Britain and Around the World

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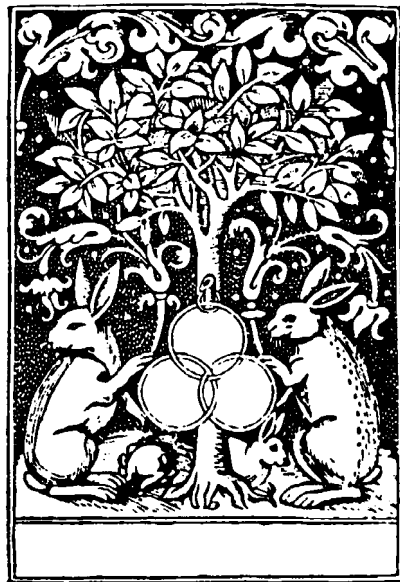
It is no coincidence that the Spring Equinox, Passover, and Easter all fall at the same time of year.

The Christian Easter is a lunar holiday and always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox. If the full moon is on a Sunday, Easter is the next Sunday. Why don't the powers that be allow Easter to occur on a full moon Sunday? Probably the Christian Easter is too masculine a day, being the resurrection of a monotheistic male god, to be allowed to occur on such a powerfully feminine time as the true full moon.

Passover, also a lunar spring holiday, falls on the first day after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox. So while it too is never on a true full moon, Passover is always just one day after, which as **magick** goes is often close enough for much of what needs to be done.

If you look up Easter in Webster's you will see the word has very little to do with Christianity. It is derived from the name for the Saxon goddess Eastre,

and the Old German Eostre, Goddess of the East. Eostre was originally the name of the prehistoric west Germanic Pagan spring festival, which is not to say that this same festival was not celebrated world over by many other names.



The Romans celebrated their Spring holiday on March 15th as Hilaria, the festival of Cybele. It was a festival of fertility and birth. In Greek tradition, **Persephone** returned to her mother Demeter on March 21st or 22nd. In modern England March 25th is called Lady Day and is Persephone's day, now disguised as the Feast of the Annunciation of Mary.

I was delighted to recently discover that many of the Iranians who escaped from **Khomeini's** fundamentalist Islamic rule of terror into exile — and no doubt many still trapped — are actually quite Pagan in their beliefs. A friend of mine was kind enough to explain to me that March 21 remains Noruz, the ancient Persian New Year. Many Persians grow new seeds at this time of year and each family member must jump over seven fires made of thorns and bushes in a purification ritual. Special treats of seven dried fruits and nuts are given out, and eggs are colored and put on a family altar alongside a mirror, coins, sprouted grains, water, salt, and tulips. Sound at all familiar?

Spring Equinox is the day when darkness and light are equal and it is a very clear marker of 1/4th of a solar year. For this reason it should be no surprise that hot cross buns are baked and sold at this time of year. The cross on top is clearly not a crucifixion cross. It is **equal**-armed and shows the four equal seasons divided by the two solstices and two equinoxes. In fact, it looks exactly like the symbol for the equinox, a cross inside a circle.



The hot cross bun song goes something like this:

*Hot Cross Buns! Hot Cross Buns!
One a penny, two a penny,
Hot Cross Buns!*

*If you have no daughters,
Give them to your sons.
One a penny, two a penny,
Hot Cross Buns!*

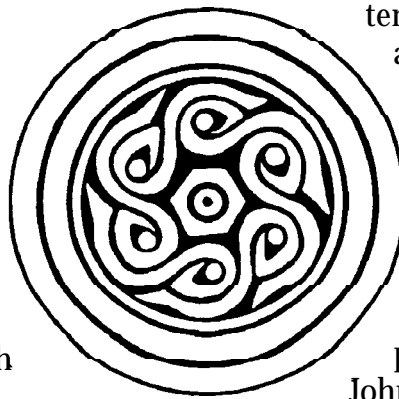
I would guess, although I have never read this anywhere, that these buns were originally cakes for the Goddess, baked on the Equinox, and handled by the women in each family because they were the Priestesses to the Goddess. If you were unlucky enough to have no daughters, a son could fill in in a pinch. On the other hand, “sons” does rhyme with “buns” and sometimes a snake is just a snake.

Eostre is Goddess of the east and also of dawn, and as such Easter was and remains a time of birth, rebirth of the sun, fertility, and the return of spring to the land. The Saxons called the entire month of April “Eosturmonath”. Eggs, a symbol of continuing life and resurrection long before the legend of Christ became widespread, were colored yellow and gold in Egypt and Greece and exchanged as gifts to honor both Eostre and the Sun god. The Chinese were painting their spring eggs red as a symbol of new life as early as 900 B.C.E.

The Easter rabbit, or Easter Hare as it is called in Britain, also dates to B.C.E. The Hare was sacred in Celtic times and was believed to chase away winter. That’s why you eat hare pie at Easter (at least if

you’re English). The hare was also sacred to the Saxon goddess Eastre. Later, hares became known as witch animals, or familiars.

In Manchester and Yorkshire, which are in the North of England, people still perform Pace Egg plays at Easter. (Pace is short for Paschal, or Passover). These plays are ancient mumming plays in which the Pagan rite of winter being killed by spring is acted out. Usually a fight is depicted, where a dragon (winter) is killed. Someone else is also killed but gets resurrected, just as green things die and are reborn each spring.



It’s hard not to see the myth of Jesus and his death and resurrection as one more variant on the ancient mummers play, or a slightly-off version of John Barleycorn. In the Christian instance an entire segment of the world population became fixated on one facet of the resurrection myth until that fixation blocked out all other Gods and Goddesses, all other stories.

In Lancashire, also in the North of England, the Britannia Coconutters dance through the streets on Easter Sunday. The Coconutters are a Morris team of locals that dress in black, red, and white — white for the Goddess, red for the blood of fertility (you aren’t fertile if you don’t bleed), and black for the end (death) of winter. I’ve seen these north country Morris teams perform and they really are the most vital and Pagan of all the teams in England. They positively reek of mystery combined with down-to-earth farming sensibility.

The modern day Druids have a “Spring Equinox” ceremony annually at Tower Hill Terrace in London. It takes place

the Equinox and begins at noon. But keep in mind that the Druids are not Wiccan (nor what our friends in ADF might recognize as Druish either) and may not necessarily perform ceremonies to which you are accustomed.

For us, the Equinox is a time to bless seeds for spring planting, balance raw eggs on one end, and generally celebrate the blossoming of Spring in all her glory. It is a time of promise, when the year stretches ahead of us like a vast green pasture unmarked by road or track, where only faint traces of the intentions of Candlemas part the grasses like a finger of wind. We nurture our promise, give it shape and form, until the unmarked green matures to the well-tilled field and Harvest Home.

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