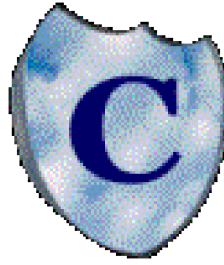
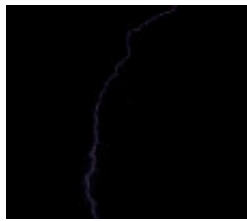


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## Welcome

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### Margaret Alice Murray (1863-1963)



**Written and compiled by George Knowles.**

1920's she began writing about her theories on the origins and organization of witchcraft predating Christianity. At the time many of her colleagues ridiculed her work, yet today some of her books have gained classical status. These include: *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* - published in 1921, *The God of the Witches* - published in 1933 and *The Divine King in England* – published 1954.

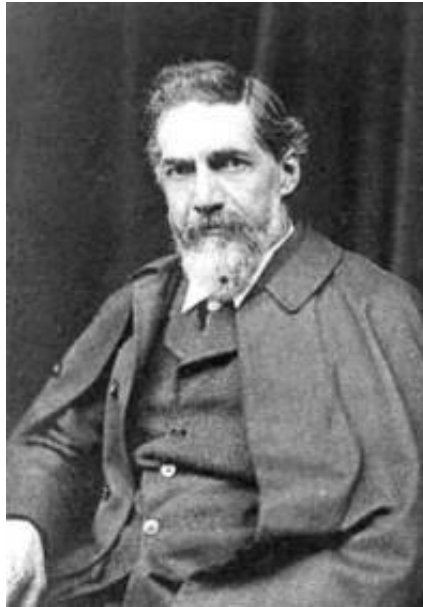
Margaret Murray was born in Calcutta, India, on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1863, and was the younger daughter of James Charles Murray and his wife, Margaret Carr. James, whose family had been in India for several generations, was by then the managing partner of a firm of Manchester merchants, while his wife came from a religious Northumbrian family and initially had gone to India as a missionary and social worker, working to better the circumstances of Indian women.

Margaret spent much of her early life flitting between India and England, with a brief period 1873–5 spent in Bonn, Germany. She was educated mainly by her mother in India, but when visiting family in England she would often stay with her uncle John Murray, the Vicar of Lambourn in Berkshire, and later the Rector of Rugby, who helped to flesh out her education. Indeed it was from him she acquired an interest in ancient history and monuments.

However, back in India her first career choice was in nursing. In 1883, she trained for three months—the most her father would permit—at the Calcutta General Hospital as the first ‘lady probationer’ in India, and acted briefly as ‘sister-in-charge’ during an epidemic. On her return to England in 1886, she was forced to give up her hopes of a nursing career due to her stature, being a mere 4 feet 10 inches tall, she was considered too small to qualify. She next tried a career in social work, first in Rugby and then in Bushey Heath, Hertfordshire, where her parents finally settled in 1887 after their return from India.

It was not until January 1894 that Margaret entered University College London and started on the career for which she is best known. However, because it was difficult in those days for a woman to receive advanced degree's in specialist subjects such as Archaeology, her main choice of study, she had to approach it in a roundabout way and take a degree in Linguistics instead. Perhaps because of these difficulties, during her early days at college, she became one of the early pioneering “Suffragette's” speaking out for women's rights.

The study of Linguistics led her on to the study Egyptian hieroglyphics and Egyptology, during which time she made the acquaintance of Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, the world renowned Egyptologist. In the late 1890's Petrie allowed her to join his excavations at Abydos in Egypt, as well as others in South Palestine and England. Under his guidance she able to specialise in Egyptology and Archaeology, and was made a junior lecturer in 1899, assistant lecturer in 1909, lecturer in 1921, senior lecturer and a Fellow of University College London in 1922.



### Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie

She was also the first female Egyptologist to be employed by the Manchester Museum at the University of Manchester. In 1908, she undertook the unwrapping of “The Two Brothers”, mummies thought to be from a Middle Kingdom non-royal burial excavated by Petrie in Egypt. This was regarded as the first interdisciplinary study of mummies, and pioneered the way for future scientific unwrappings.



### Petrie, Murray and one of the “The Two Brothers”.

Margaret’s interest in witchcraft began around 1915 after she became ill during work on an excavation in Egypt. Returning home to England she convalesced at Glastonbury. In her autobiography: *My First Hundred Years* (William Kimber, London, 1963) she states: “I chose to convalesce in Glastonbury and one cannot stay in Glastonbury without becoming interested in “Joseph of Arimathea and the Holy Grail”. As soon as I got back to London, I did some careful research. This led to a paper on: *Egyptian elements in the Grail Romance.*”

Her interest ignited, Margaret began a serious study of witchcraft. She started working from contemporary  
[controversial.com/Margaret Alice Murra...](http://controversial.com/Margaret-Alice-Murray...)

records of witches and witchcraft trials, then moved on to researching medieval and renaissance documents, including those related to the trials of Joan of Arc and Gilles de Rias. At the same time she conducted field studies throughout Europe. Her findings led to the publication of her first book about witchcraft: *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1921.). Her theories concluded that witchcraft was widespread and rooted in European Pagan fertility cults that extended back to the Palaeolithic era. This caused a deal of controversy among her peers and her opinions were ridiculed.

Undaunted, Margaret continued to study witchcraft as a sideline to her main career in Archaeology and Egyptology. A shrewd and critical scholar, her work did not go unrecognised, in 1924 the University College London made her an Assistant Professor of Egyptology, a post she held until her retirement in 1935.

Margaret's second book on witchcraft: *The God of the Witches* (First published by Sampson Low, Marston and Co., Ltd., 1931.), concerned the Horned God of Witchcraft and her theories on how this figure dated back to Palaeolithic times as a fertility god. The book was almost totally ignored until after the Second World War, and the repeal of the witchcraft Laws in 1951. At this time (Oxford University Press, New York, and Faber and Faber Ltd, London.), reissued the book in 1952 whence it became a classic best seller.

After her retirement from University College in 1935, Margaret continued to study witchcraft and travelled about the country giving lectures on her theories. Then in 1945 a mysterious murder incident occurred in the Cotswolds. It had all the indications of being a witchcraft ritual slaying. On the 14<sup>th</sup> February 1945, an old man called Charles Walton of Lower Quinton was found dead under a tree on Meon Hill, a ritual meeting place for witches. His body was pinned to the ground with a pitchfork and his throat and chest had been slashed in the form of a cross. (February 14<sup>th</sup> was also Candlemas by the Old Calendar, and one of the Great Sabbats of the Witches.)

The police investigating the murder came up against a wall of silence, and no arrest was ever made. Margaret disguised herself as a visiting artist and spent a week in the area with a sketchbook in hand. She was actually conducting her own investigation. Later she publicly stated that she believed the murder victim had been killed because of local fear and belief in witchcraft. Charles Walton had been slain because someone feared his powers as a witch.

In 1953-1955, Margaret was made President of the Folklore Society, another distinguished accolade and an incredible achievement at the age of 90. She followed this in 1954 with her third and perhaps most controversial book about witchcraft: *The Divine King in England* (Faber and Faber, London.). In this she advanced the theory that many early English sovereigns, those dating back from William the Conqueror in the 11<sup>th</sup> century through to James 1 in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, had died by ritual murder. This in keeping with the ancient sacrificial themes of the "Slain God" and "Divine King's" of old pagan religions. It caused a storm of protest from her colleagues who moved to dismiss all her writings on the topic of witchcraft.

Margaret was a prolific writer and author, and published more than a hundred books and articles on Anthropology, Archaeology and Egyptology. However, many scholars and historians today, still ridicule and dismiss her books on Witchcraft as of little historical importance. Yet these books, like the books of Sir James Frazer and Charles G. Leland, were the guiding inspiration used by Gerald B. Gardner and others, when shaping the reformation of the modern day Wicca/Witchcraft movement.

Margaret remained active well into her old age, and in her one-hundredth year published not only her last

academic work: *The Genesis of Religion* (1963), but also her own autobiography entitled: *My First Hundred Years* (William Kimber, London, 1963.). In it she records her belief in reincarnation, her faith in the human soul, and the soul's survival after bodily death. Two days after her one-hundredth birthday, she was still able to attend a celebration held in her honour University College London.

A few months later Margaret's health failed and she was admitted into the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital, Welwyn, Hertfordshire. There she died peacefully on the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1963. Her funeral was held later on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 1963 and her body cremated at the Golders Green crematorium in Middlesex.

Margaret Murray will no doubt first be remembered for her prolific academic contributions to the science of Archaeology and Egyptology, then secondly for her contributions to the early development of contemporary Witchcraft, but she also had a humorous side to her character. On occasion she was want to practice the Craft she studied, and more than once she was reported by friends to have cast spells in a saucepan in her efforts to reverse academic appointments for which she disapproved. Such activities may not have been entirely serious, but her sense of humour was well developed, as demonstrated by her remark to Leonard Cottrell in a BBC broadcast she made at the age of ninety-six: "I have been an archaeologist most of my life and now I'm a piece of archaeology myself." She was without doubt one of the most remarkable and outstanding women of her generation.

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## Best wishes and Blessed Be

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