

ON CORDS

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Mrs. Basford has raised an interesting point about the real purpose of cords, harvest twine, string dolls, etc. They appear to have originated from the woven strands of Old Fate, the major deity of all true witches. They are, of course, the origin of such descriptive terms as "spellbinders." When worked up properly they should contain many different parts--herbs, feathers and impedimenta of the particular charm. They are generally referred to in the trade as "ladders," or in some cases as "garlands," and have much the same meaning as the three crosses. That is they can contain three blessings, three curses, or three wishes. A witch also possesses a devotional ladder, by which she may climb to meditational heights, knotted to similar pattern as the Catholic rosary. The Celtic practice of binding the dead, used now as a devotional aid by some modern groups, was originally an indication that the dead person had undergone the necessary stages and purification towards the final judgement and redemption. The actual pattern of the knot was considered to be the important thing; the pattern formed by the lines of the binding being a symbol of secondary importance.

Alexander the Great, by cutting the Gordian knot, announced to all and sundry that he was going to cut his own fate with the edge of a sword. It was the action of a truly brave man, since the knot was bound upon the yoke of the Twin Bulls, the Masters over Life and Death. It may be that when he later built a temple to Nemesis he was attempting to buy off the terrible fate of his former action.

The art of binding is to be seen in one of its best forms in the old craft of thatching. The pegs and binders are traditionally put into a crossed shape, held by a final structure over the roof trees that also has a very close connection with Witchcraft.

The so-called "sacred object" held in such reverence by some witches was in fact a weaver's distaff--and could easily be mistaken for a phallic symbol. The weaver's distaff, bound with reeds or straw, appears frequently in rural carvings and elsewhere. It again has reference to the Craft and supreme Deity. It would appear that the witches were not in the least influenced by Freudian concepts.

There is good reason to assume that the nursery game of snakes and ladders originated in a much older pastime connected with binding. One aspect of the snake is that of the Tempter or Destroyer, and the game remains as a lesson upon life: one either ascends by the aid of the ladder, or descends via the snake. The action of the game is still dependent upon the throw of a black and white cube (dice)--a symbol of Fate from ancient times. Basically the cords of binding, as used today, are worked upon with mistaken enthusiasm. Originally they were cords of Fate, woven and bound into a charm for a defined purpose. Sometimes shaped into a semblance of the object or person to be influenced, they were also hung on a gatepost or nailed near to the object or person, preferably in a public place, as an indication of intent. In an Italian spell, the ladder is actually placed in the bed of the person to be enchanted. A beautiful witch ladder, incidentally, was once found in a church belfry: presumably one of the Old Craft could not sleep late on Sunday mornings because of the racket of the bells!

"Cat's cradle" as a game is interesting enough but as a form of witchery it becomes an interesting indication of the complex nature of the Craft. Each of the fingers on the hands of a witch has a defined meaning and purpose. It would be reasonable to assume that, to the knowing eye, the crosses and planes formed by the strings would tell much of a particular ritual.