

Shaking the Tree, Breaking the Bough: The Golden Bough (online, 10–12 Feb 23)

Online, Feb 10–12, 2023

Deadline: Jul 1, 2022

Caroline Tully, University of Melbourne

Shaking the Tree, Breaking the Bough: The Golden Bough at 100

Precisely 100 years ago Sir James Frazer published the final—and now most popular—version of his magnum opus *The Golden Bough* (1922). In the past century we have, of course, learned to scorn the overblown theories of this Victorian-era historian of ancient religions, dissecting the flaws in his methodology, noting his inaccuracies, and criticizing his overly universalizing tendencies. Then we analyze data pertaining to religions both ancient and modern exactly according to his tenets. Minoan Mother Goddesses, Near Eastern sacred prostitution, the fertility of the land in the body of the king, dying and rising gods and sons of gods, thousands of so-called fertility figurines, and modern devotions to matricentric pagan religions all hail from the pages of this openly discredited volume.

It is time to reevaluate the pernicious influence of Frazer and his *Golden Bough* on the study of ancient and contemporary religions and related disciplines. Why is every goddess a fertility goddess (even the warrior goddesses)? Why does the Minoan goddess dominate her lover/son? If Frazer's theory of dying and rising gods has been discredited, why does it form the core of one of the world's major religions? To what extent did he inform our analyses of Dionysos, mystery cults, and other aspects of Greek mythology? Why is temple prostitution still considered to be a staple of Mediterranean cult practice? How clear or warped is the lens through which modern reconstructionist religions perceive their ancient antecedents and models? How viable is it to study ancient myth through cross-cultural analysis, understanding the death of Baldr through the *Rex Nemorensis*, or Pluto as Merlin (or was that vice versa), or....?

Finally, we must ask ourselves to what extent religious studies and its related humanities of History, Classics, Assyriology, and Literary Studies amongst others have been unduly and continuously (if unconsciously) influenced by “trendy” notions of the past and present. What “theories” are really just habits, nostrums passed down through the generations? How can we tell? And, perhaps most importantly, how can we tell when we are doing it again?

Areas of consideration for this conference include:

Ancient Religions (e.g. Ancient Near Eastern, Minoan, Roman)

Comparative Religious Studies

Biblical Studies

Pagan Reconstructionism

Neo-Paganism

Art and Interpretation

Literary Studies

Theory in Historiography and a Historiography of Theory

Keynote Speakers for the Conference are:

Dr. Helen Cornish, Goldsmiths, University of London

Dr. Cynthia Eller, Montclair State University, Emerita

Professor Ronald Hutton, University of Bristol

Professor Christine Morris, Trinity College Dublin

Professor Martti Nissinen, University of Helsinki

The conference is sponsored by the University of Melbourne, Australia. DATES: Friday, February 10 – Sunday, February 12, 2023. All presentations via Zoom. Please send abstracts of no more than 500 words to goldenboughconference@gmail.com by 1 July 2022.

Reference:

CFP: Shaking the Tree, Breaking the Bough: The Golden Bough (online, 10-12 Feb 23). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 14, 2022 (accessed Apr 18, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/36938>>.