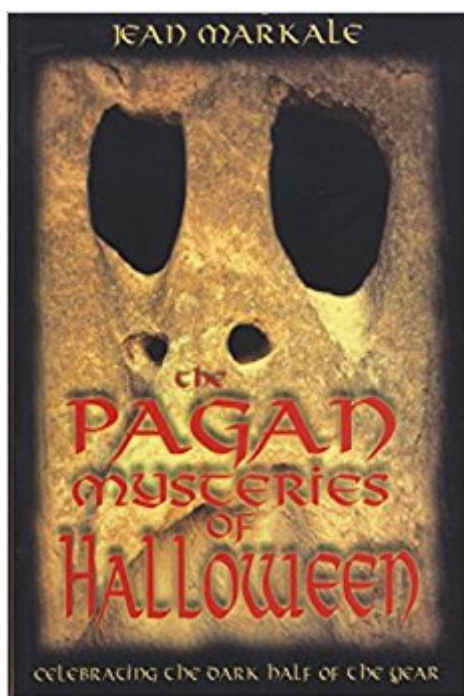


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# The Pagan Mysteries Of Halloween: Celebrating The Dark Half Of The Year



## Synopsis

A comprehensive examination of the rituals and philosophies of the Celtic holiday of Samhain, the inspiration for Halloween.â € Presents the true meaning of this ancient holiday and shows how contemporary observances still faithfully reflect the rituals of pagan ancestors.â € Explains why this holiday, largely confined to the English-speaking world since the advent of Christianity, has spread throughout the rest of Europe over the last two decades. One of humanity's most enduring myths is that the dead, on certain nights of the year, can leave the Other World and move freely about the land of the living. Every year on October 31, when the children of the world parade through the streets dressed as monsters, skeletons, and witches, they reenact a sacred ceremony whose roots extend to the dawn of time. By receiving gifts of sweets from strangers, the children establish, on a symbolic plane that exceeds their understanding, a fraternal exchange between the visible world and the invisible world. Author Jean Markale meticulously examines the rituals and ceremonies of ancient festivities on this holiday and shows how they still shape the customs of today's celebration. During the night of Samhain, the Celtic precursor of today's holiday, the borders between life and death were no longer regarded as insurmountable barriers. Two-way traffic was temporarily permitted between this world and the Other World, and the wealth and wisdom of the sidhe, or fairy folk, were available to the intrepid individuals who dared to enter their realm. Markale enriches our understanding of how the transition from the light to the dark half of the year was a moment in which time stopped and allowed the participants in the week-long festival to attain a level of consciousness not possible in everyday life, an experience we honor in our modern celebrations of Halloween.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Celtic scholar Jean Markale explores "the shadowy zones" of All Hallow's Eve in *The Pagan Mysteries of Halloween*. Though the name comes from the Christians' All Saints' Eve, Halloween can be traced back thousands of years to Samhain--the beginning of the "dark half" of the Celtic yearly calendar. As a feasting and merrymaking festival, Samhain lasted about three days, and attendance was mandatory, according to Markale. It was also the time when fairy folk made themselves available to humans, and the borders between the worlds of the living and the dead were said to blur. Markale is a thorough historian, offering a plausible account of how Samhain evolved into the modern day celebration. For readers seeking general Halloween information, Markale may be too dry and detailed. But for those intrigued by pagan festivals and lifestyle, this could be as delectable and coveted as a bag of Halloween candy. --Gail Hudson

Markale, a French specialist in Celtic traditions, traces the history of Halloween from its origins as a Samhain festival, discussing its juxtaposition with the Christian All Saints Day and its modern renaissance as a mischievous children's holiday. Although the text is generally quite evenhanded, some oversimplifications creep in, as when Markale calls November 2, the Day of the Dead, "a kind of `ancestor worship' that dares not say its name," or when he claims that "we know" that the dead walk about on Halloween night "because some people have witnessed it." Markale is best when he sticks to history, claiming, for example, that after centuries of suppression in Europe, Halloween found new life among 19th-century Irish immigrants to America. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

This is an interesting and highly detailed book about the origins and evolution of Samhain and Halloween, with a strong emphasis on Celtic traditions, practices, laws, customs, and rituals. Markale writes on page five: "In reality, as we will see later, it is these oft-decried profane rituals that are the origin of Christian ceremonies." He goes on to explain how many of the pagan traditions and rituals, such as those performed on Samhain, became incorporated into Christian practice and have been traditionally celebrated as part of our Halloween festivities. This book is much more technical and historical than other Halloween books, and because of that can be slightly dry in spots. At other times, the wording may be a little odd - but that is a purely subjective observation and shouldn't hinder anyone from reading it. Overall, I definitely recommend this book for anyone interested in the real history of Samhain. "The Pagan Mysteries of Halloween" was the first book on Halloween that I ever read and I think it is useful for several reasons. First, it helps put to rest some of the myths

surrounding Samhain and the Druids. Markale explains, for example, why and how the notion of Druidic human sacrifice on Samhain is a myth. He explains where some of these ideas come from, such as from ancient Roman records, and why they are almost certainly flawed. He spends much of the book detailing what we know regarding the actual customs of the Celts on Samhain. He describes Samhain thus: "The religious character of Samhain is clearly apparent . . . Samhain is also a political, legislative, judicial, and of course "commercial" festival inasmuch as contracts of all kinds were formally concluded then" (21). Next, Markale gives you a good history of how modern Halloween is really an amalgamation of various pagan and Christian traditions. He discusses All Hallows' and All Saints' Day. Third, the author writes about various other pagan traditions throughout the world, such as the Roman feast of Saturnalia, and discusses figures like Mithra and Sol Invictus. This gives the book some depth and allows you to compare and contrast. The only thing I don't really like about the book is the author's frequent criticisms of Christianity. But mature readers should be able to read a book without having the author's personal beliefs distract them from the historical information being presented. Again, I certainly recommend this book for its depth of research and breadth of information. However, if you're just beginning to study the history of Halloween, I would recommend reading the following before turning to Markale's work: "Halloween: An American Holiday, an American History" by Lesley Pratt Bannatyne, and "Trick-or-Treat: A History of Halloween" by Lisa Morton.

Samhain. This is a word that many people are not familiar with today. It is the ancient Celtic name that was transformed (by converts into Christianity centuries ago) into what has become known today as "All Saints' Day", "The Day of the Dead", "All Hallows Eve" or the better known name of Halloween. The ancient Celtic calendar, as author Jean Markale wrote in his book "The Pagan Mysteries of Halloween: Celebrating the Dark Half of the Year", was divided into two parts: the light half that begins with Beltane and the dark half that begins with Samhain. Originally a lunar calendar, the dates for Beltane and Samhain would shift with the orbit of the moon (similar to the Jewish calendar); but eventually, the two dates became fixed points in the more common solar calendar on May 1 and November 1. Because the Celts regarded a day to begin at sundown, Samhain begins on the eve of November 1, or October 31. For the Pagan Celts, Samhain was the beginning of the year and was celebrated for several days. Spiritually and symbolically, it was regarded as the time when the veil between the world of the living and the world of the dead (which the Celts referred to as the Other World) becomes very thin, allowing people from the land of the living and spirits from the Other World to cross between the two. The Pagan Celts also viewed Samhain (whose

celebrations lasted for several days) to be when time was essentially abolished or suspended. This is exemplified in some Celtic stories that Mr. Markale describes where an individual that enters the Other World at Samhain may, to this world, be gone for hundreds of years; but to the individual, perhaps only hours or days have passed. And the converse could also happen: someone who enters the Other World may think he/she is there for a very long time, but may have only been gone for a few minutes, hours or days in this world. Here to, the concept of birth, death and rebirth comes into play through the symbolism of the cauldron (such as the famous Gundestrup Cauldron), as well as with the mounds that the Celts made throughout Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and other areas that they inhabited as Mr. Markale accurately describes. Christian missionaries and evangelists who visited these areas (including the famous Saint Patrick), instead of completely eliminating the celebration of Samhain, replaced it with the concept of "All Saints' Day" or "The Day of the Dead". Though the Christian concept of an afterlife (which includes the possibility of punishment for sin) differs greatly from the Celtic one (everyone goes to the same Other World), symbolism such as the cauldron remain intact. Centuries later, children began to wear masks and carry carved out fruit with candles inside (jack o'lanterns) to symbolize the ghosts of the dead. This is but a very small sample of the exhaustive information that Mr. Markale wrote in what is seemingly a rather short book of less than 160 pages and only four chapters. Some readers may find "The Pagan Mysteries of Halloween: Celebrating the Dark Half of the Year" a little difficult (or dry) because of the amount of information packed within its pages or because of the translation of the book from French into English; but I rate the book overall with a resounding 5 out of 5 stars and highly recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about what Halloween is really all about. Mr. Markale also included a lengthy list of footnotes, an extensive bibliography and a very useful index.

Good insight into ancestral beliefs

This is a great read if you want to know the history of halloween. It has some interesting facts and I love reading it.

...that anyone could think this book is hard to read. Whoever does must have been home-schooled by Scooby-Doo. There's nothing difficult to grasp in this book, least of all the language. I couldn't find a single word on any page that I had to look up in the dictionary, for Heaven's sake! Although it was written by a formidable scholar with stellar credentials, it is a concisely-written page-turner for

readers who are interested in the mythic roots of Halloween, the origins of the Eve of All Souls, the pagan festival of Samhain. The only criticism I have of it is it uses words such as "carnival-like" and "manifestations" a bit too often, an easy oversight to forgive considering it is a translation. Come on kids, if it's a book about how to carve pumpkins you want, you can pick that up at the dollar store.

Received this book in a timely manor. Very happy with the book and the service. Good book for the first time Pagan read.

Very poor sentence structure. Lots of tangents and no unified argument

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