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Article abstract

Dianic Witchcraft, a subgroup of the larger feminist spirituality movement, was founded in the early 1970s. Dianics practice feminist witchcraft and meet in female-only covens, focusing solely on the Goddess. I examine this emerging tradition using Deborah Heisley's theories about the perceived gendered nature of food, as well as the thinking of Susan Starr Sered about the role of food in female-dominated religions. How does a religious group composed entirely of women and consciously focused on women's lives deal with food within religious rites and outside of them? Do the foods used by Dianic witches reflect their political or spiritual belief Systems? By analyzing the food practices at a large, Dianic community holiday ritual in Los Angeles and through interviewing two members of Dianic covens about their personal religious practices involving food, I propose some preliminary findings about the role of food in this growing spiritual tradition.

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May You Never Hunger
Religious Foodways in Dianic Witchcraft

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Caroline Walker Bynum, in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, argues that food was the primary metaphor in women's spiritual expressions and experiences in the late Middle Ages. One reason for this is that food fell within women's domain. "To prepare food is to control food. Moreover food is not merely *a* resource that women control; it is *the* resource that women control — both for themselves and for others" (Bynum 1987: 191). In *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women*, Susan Starr Sered claims that "emphasis on food and food preparation is one of the clearest and most common themes of women's religions. Cross-culturally, food is an especially sacred symbol because it is ingested — incorporated into the body of the believer" (Sered 1994: 133). Sered finds some commonalities among the twelve religions she considers female-dominated. These religions are usually focused on this world rather than an afterlife and they find the sacred in the profane, mundane world. They base interaction with divinities or spirits upon interpersonal and familial models, maintaining relationships with the deities as they do with family members. And the rituals usually involve food prepared for the spirits, and later consumed by the participants. "The accent is on socializing with the gods. In women's religions, neither people (shamans) nor offerings ascend; rather, god, spirits, and ancestors descend and join in the communal, human experience" (Sered 1994: 138). The deities are invited over for dinner, and bonds of reciprocity and relationship are thus created and maintained between humans and non-humans.

How do the observations made by Bynum and Sered hold up in a religion which is being self-consciously created by twentieth-century urban women?

In this essay, I will look at a Los Angeles organization of Spiritual Feminists who practice what they term "Dianic Witchcraft" or "feminist Witchcraft." Other practitioners of Wicca may also call themselves "feminist Witches" (particularly those trained since the late 1970s in the tradition created by Starhawk) and often see their spirituality as an outgrowth and furtherance of their political beliefs, as do Dianic witches. However, Dianics, who meet in female-only covens and concentrate solely on the Goddess, are the most marked of the larger group of feminist witches; they are the "radical feminists" of the spiritual feminist community. I will examine this emerging tradition in light of Sered's theories about female-dominated religions, and theories of the gendered nature of food proposed by Deborah Heisley (Heisley 1992). How does a religious group composed entirely of women and consciously focused on women's lives deal with food within religious rites and outside of them? What is the place of food within ritual, both public and private? Do the foods used by Dianic Witches reflect any political or spiritual belief systems? Do they confirm or refute Heisley's findings about foods symbolically categorized as "female" food in her research? By analyzing the food practices at a large, Dianic community holiday ritual and through interviewing two members of Dianic covens about their personal religious practices involving food, I propose some preliminary findings about the role of food in this growing spiritual tradition.

When compared to the twelve female-dominated traditions examined by Sered, the practices of this particular sect, as I have come to perceive them, show both differences from and similarities with her ideas about the role of food in women's religions. Because Dianic Witchcraft is a religion that is only twenty-seven years old, one that is overwhelmingly made up of women who have chosen this path as adults, and because of the political and social implications of food practices and women's roles, the familial and generational aspect Sered finds in so many of her examples seems to be lacking. Feminist Witchcraft has no dogma or accepted creed, and so is filled with adherents who create highly personalized and idiosyncratic practices, which nonetheless do fall within certain broad boundaries. These factors help explain why, although food is very important in certain ways and to certain women in this movement, the majority of practitioners do not create the kinds of "feasts for the deities" Sered describes in her work. Yet many of these women share the feeling of my informant Cheryl, who said: "I have had a total shift in how I perceive food since practicing [Dianic] Witchcraft."

Feminist witchcraft is a subgroup of Spiritual Feminism. This broader religious and cultural movement, which includes feminist Christians, Jews, New Agers, and other Neopagans[1], grew out of the political feminist movement, although for many years the political feminists chastised the spiritual feminists for supposedly taking attention away from political action. Cynthia Eller, in *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America*, describes the position of the first spiritual feminists in this way:

> They did not just want the freedom to do what men had always done (though they generally wanted that too); they also wanted the freedom to do what women had always done, but to see it valued differently. Further, they wanted to use not just traditional political means for reaching these ends, but to utilize the full range of their capabilities to live in new, self-realized ways as women, and to offer other women the cultural space to do the same (Eller 1995: 45).

The subset of Spiritual Feminism known as Dianic Witchcraft was started by Zsuzsanna Budapest (known as "Z" to her friends and followers) in 1971 in Los Angeles. Budapest is a Hungarian immigrant and blended the Eastern European folk magic traditions of her mother with her own emerging feminism. She founded the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, which indicated by its very name the blend of political awareness and religion that would mark Dianic witchcraft in years to come. Dianic witchcraft, named for the Roman virgin goddess of the hunt, is practiced solely by women, and worships divinity only in female form. This separatism is seen as necessary for women in a patriarchal world, a religious "room of one's own" in which to heal wounds inflicted by

1. The New Age movement is an umbrella term for those who believe in or practice some blend of Western occult practices and/or mysticism, Eastern mysticism (including Buddhist or Hindu varieties), Native American-influenced spiritual practices, and other emerging "psychic" phenomena. Neopaganism takes many forms, but is usually identified as either earth-based religions in the Western tradition (Greek, Norse, Celtic, etc.) or revivals of pre-Christian religions. Wicca, or Witchcraft, is a form of Neopaganism which sometimes claims to be a revival or survival of a European pre-Christian religion. Wicca in its present form seems to have begun in the late 19th century, influenced by the Golden Dawn and other ceremonial magic organizations, and to are taken shape in the mid-twentieth century. There are several different traditions of Wicca, although they all share certain features and forms of ritual; some of these divergent branches include Gardnerian witchcraft, Alexandrian witchcraft, the Faery tradition, the reclaiming tradition created by Starhawk (an initiate in the Faery tradition), and, of course, Dianic Witchcraft.

male-dominated society, affirm women and femaleness physically and spiritually, and connect with a deity or deities immanent within the self and all things. Some practitioners are heterosexual, some are lesbian; the movement attracts many lesbians because of its concentration on women and emphasis on the bonds between women (Eller 1995: 55-60). The main successor to the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1 in Los Angeles is Circle of Aradia[2], or COA, led by Ruth Rhiannon Barrett, who was initiated by Z Budapest. COA is based in Topanga Canyon and also in West Hollywood. The organization is not a coven, defined as a small group of Witches, numbering no more than thirteen, who are vowed to each other and meet on a regular basis. It is instead a teaching organization, offering a series of classes and public seasonal rituals. COA serves as an umbrella group and a religious community for the women in Los Angeles who practice feminist Witchcraft. Many small covens are formed by women who met in COA classes or rituals. COA is the largest Dianic Witchcraft community in the U. S., and has recently become part of a legal nation-wide church of feminist Witchcraft called the Reformed Congregation of the Goddess; this means that members who pass the required course of study may become ordained as legally recognized ministers/priestesses.

Dianic witches have no formal dogma or theology (or thealogy, as they prefer), but several generalizations may be made about their spiritual practices. They operate within the Neopagan movement, meaning they make use of ritual formats and concepts developed in this century by several "re-created" magical traditions, while adapting them and innovating new forms and practices as they see fit. They conceive of divinity as both one and many simultaneously; often women will speak of "The Goddess" or "She of the Ten Thousand Names" and also of "Goddesses" or particular goddesses from various cultures. Eller observes that "This pattern of an ultimate monism coupled with an intermediate or functional polytheism is a pattern found in several world religions (among them Hinduism and Buddhism)... and is also typical of the alternative religious tradition in America" (Eller 1995: 134-135). Most practitioners use the concept

2. In Italian folk tradition, Aradia (sometimes known as Herodias) is the daughter of Diana who came down to earth to teach and lead the witches, often giving them power against unjust landlords. In the late nineteenth century, Charles Godfrey Leland claimed to have found an extant pre-Christian group of rural witches in Italy devoted to Aradia, and his book, *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches*, contains rituals and prayers collected from them (Leland 1974 [reprint]). However, this book does not seem to be used by Circle of Aradia as a source of ritual material.

of "the triple Goddess," who includes the aspects of maiden, mother, and crone, thus incorporating the phases of a woman's life and the phases of the moon into a deity who is singular/linear and multiple/cyclical (Eller 1995: 133). The Goddess is thought to be immanent, present in all things and all people; practitioners often bless each other in ritual by saying "you are Goddess," and feel that accepting the Goddess' presence within the self is essential to overcoming anti-woman patriarchal messages from the larger society. The female body is celebrated and seen as sacred, especially those parts and functions which have been devalued by the larger society; menstruation, lactation and female sexual desire are holy, and women are encouraged to love the roundness of their bodies and to refuse to follow the fashion industry's obsession with thinness. The earth is sacred, and ecological awareness is encouraged as part of a sacred path. Eller's description of the broader movement is particularly true for Dianic witchcraft: "The 'sacred game' in feminist spirituality is immersion in the natural world rather than escape from it" Eller (1995: 136). Finally, women's strength, wholeness, rage, and independent identity are celebrated. These concepts are all apparent in the foodways of the members of Circle of Aradia.

Ordinarily, food does not play a part in the actual rituals performed by COA. There is no "sacred meal" similar to the Christian Eucharist, which occurs during ritual. Occasionally food may be incorporated into a ritual — there might be a large bowl of berries or a basket of bread on the altar for the women to partake of during the actual religious rite. However, this is not usually the case. Some of the philosophical reasons I will discuss below may serve to explain this absence of food, as might certain practical considerations arising from the sheer numbers of women who attend: usually at least 150. However, a very important component of every ritual celebration is the "potluck" feast that takes place when the ritual is over. Each woman is requested to bring a vegetarian food dish or non-alcoholic drink to share with the others. Since spiritual "energy" or power has been raised for the magical work done within the ritual, it is seen as necessary to *ground*, releasing any excess energy leftover from the ritual, and to return to the physical (Eller 1995: 99). "The process of returning to the world and ending the ritual begins with the sharing of food," writes Starhawk, a feminist witch (though not a Dianic — she does work with men and with male deities) whose writings have been highly influential in the Neopagan movement as a whole, as well as within the Dianic community (Starhawk 1989: 169). In my own fieldwork, I have found that Dianics are unique among Neopagan groups in Los Angeles in that they serve

only vegetarian food and allow no alcohol at their feasts; other Wiccan or Neopagan rituals I have attended served both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food, and included alcoholic as well as non-alcoholic beverages. However, this distinction is not always apparent in other parts of the country, where non-Dianic Witches also often prefer vegetarian feasts and non-alcoholic drinks.

I recently attended the spring equinox ritual organized by COA; for the purposes of this essay I will concentrate on the feast that took place after the ritual, since the ceremony itself did not involve food. The event was held at the Topanga Community Center in a multi-purpose room on a Saturday night and lasted from 7:00 to about 11:00, including ritual and feast. The room was filled with flowers and candles for the ritual, grouped on the mantlepiece of the large fireplace that takes up a third of one wall, and on a large square table, located at the north end of the room, just before the risers that lead to the stage. The table also held eight or nine small statues of goddesses in addition to the flowers and candles. On the west wall, across from the fireplace, a large, black, decorated cloth sewn with appliqued stars and a moon had been hung to cover a bank of windows. On the stage itself, separated from and above the floor where the ritual action took place, three long tables were set up in a U shape. When women first arrived at the hall, they gave their food for the post-ritual potluck feast to the women organizing the ritual, and these facilitators arranged the dishes on the tables. Next to the food tables, another table was set up to hold books, tapes, incense, and ritual items for sale during the post-ritual feast (all proceeds to benefit COA.).

The food on the tables was thematically arranged. Since about 125 women took part in the ritual and were lining up for the food, this organization was probably a good idea — it kept the lines moving smoothly. The first table held about twenty different kinds of bread. Some of the bread was storebought and some was made at home. There were some spreads, such as butter, hummus and other Middle Eastern-looking dips in small plastic tubs, but mostly the bread was eaten plain or dipped into other foods. There were crusty Italian loaves, rosemary and garlic breads, miniature pitas, round whole wheat loaves, corn muffins with cranberries, crackers, falafels, tortillas, tortilla chips and round chips made of beans. Almost all the breads were round in shape. Those which were not round were lumpy, "country"-style breads; none of the loaves were everyday sandwich breads such as one would purchase at a grocery store. As I rounded the corner of the table to the middle section of the U, the "main course" dishes appeared. These included green salads, potato salad, three bean salad, and a mushroom dish in a vinaigrette sauce. There were five or six rice

dishes, each mixed with some vegetable, such as peas, broccoli, onions, tomatoes, etc. Some were flavored with curry or other tangy spices, and some were bland. One was served from an enormous roasting pan whose cover had actually kept the dish warm during the two hour ritual — a nice touch, since there were no facilities to warm the food in the hall, and the women (and the food) had arrived about three hours earlier. Three different pasta dishes were offered, one containing rotelli with tomatoes, onions and cheese, one farfalle with tomatoes and broccoli in a light sauce, and one ziti with olives, tomatoes, and green peppers in a vinaigrette. A pot of vegetable soup (lukewarm, I suppose — I did not sample it) was near the pasta. Around the corner, on the last leg of the U, were the desserts. Intricately cut orange slices with no rinds were arranged artfully on a platter, and large, juicy strawberries and pieces of watermelon were placed next to them. A batch of brownies went very quickly, as did a sweet potato pie. A spice cake with icing beautifully decorated with flowers and leaves was displayed next to a tray of similar cupcakes, each with a flower on it. (One of the women plans to open a bakery, I was told, and is practicing her cake-decorating skills). At the end of the table was the selection of juices. There were large bottles of passion fruit juice, various types of cranberry juice combinations, raspberry-peach juice, and five bottles of apple juice, in addition to bottled water and mineral water.

After the ritual, the priestesses, facilitators and drummers were allowed to eat first, since they had been working for several more hours than had the rest of the participants. After this group, the women who had been designated during the ritual as the honorary maiden, mother and crone lined up, and then the rest of the women. Before eating or drinking herself, each woman was encouraged to "feed a sister," saying "May you never hunger" or "May you never thirst," a practice that originated in Gardnerian witchcraft but which was introduced into Dianic witchcraft by Z Budapest (Eller 1995: 100). Each participant was to have brought her own cup, plate and silverware, as instructed by the COA newsletter. "In honor of our Earth Mother, Circle of Aradia will not provide paper goods (with the exception of napkins)", the newsletter stated. However, this is a fairly recent development in COA's ritual rules, and some disposable utensils were available for those women who had forgotten to bring their own. Women broke into informal groups as they took their full plates and sat on the floor, on the risers, or on the edge of the stage to eat their meals and talk. There was a convivial atmosphere. During the ritual, the participants had "raised energy," creating and sustaining a powerful group spiritual force though the invocation of the Goddess, focused meditation, chanting,

drumming, and dancing, which was then directed towards the accomplishment of the goal of the ritual. Towards the end of the ceremony, the women had danced wildly to the drums for about half an hour, and so were now hungry, energized yet relaxed.

This post-ritual meal was the only time during the evening that the participants were able to talk informally and socialize, apart from greeting friends before the ritual if they arrived early. It is eating and talking together that cement the bonds of community, of family. The social aspect of the meal was more important than the food itself to Therese, a 39-year old Dianic witch who has been practicing for five years:

> For me, the food portion is important but only insofar as that it's a social time, because when ritual is over it's really late at night, and I don't want to eat pasta and beans and those kinds of things. I would rather just snack. I would rather just have some bread, maybe a little cookie (even though those things have sugar in them) just to kind of take the edge off. To ground a little bit. Sometimes I'm legitimately hungry, and I'm grateful for the occasional rice dish that I bump into. I need a meal [then], but I don't want to have a meal at 10: 00 at night. The ritual starts at mealtime, and I ate before I came, maybe, but still, that was five hours ago. I mostly like the idea that we're going to sit around and talk and hang out, and it's going to be our social time.

Therese does not like to cook, and she sees a political aspect to COA's practice of not using food as a ritual tool during its spiritual rites. "We are women, and we're feminist women, and we are making inroads into new ways of being women, and it's just too *traditional* to always associate us with food. And I think we don't want to have food as part of the ritual because of [its] association [with] women and traditional women's roles. But certainly we're hungry afterwards, like anyone, so we eat after, but I don't think we incorporate the food for that reason."

Therese brings up an interesting point. Dianic Witches are rejecting society's stereotypical roles for women: they are feminists, some are lesbians, and they worship a female deity, working with magic and spells. By choosing the name "Dianic" or "Aradia" they are consciously identifying themselves with a *virgin, maiden* goddess; Diana was the Roman virgin goddess of the hunt, and Aradia was a maiden goddess also, from the information contained in Leland's book. Virgin (and maiden) have specific connotations in this religion. A virgin or maiden is not necessarily a woman who has not had sex, but one who is "whole and centered in her own being" (Morgan: 145). This

concept of the virgin as the self-directed part of a woman is described in detail by feminist Jungian psychologist Jean Shinoda Bolen in her book, *Goddesses in Everywoman*, an influential work among Dianic Witches:

> an important part of [the virgin's] psyche "belongs to no man"... Psychologically, the virgin goddess is that part of a woman that has not been worked on, either by the collective (masculine-determined) social and cultural expectations of what a woman should be, or by an individual male's judgment of her. The virgin goddess aspect is a pure essence of who the woman is and of what she values. It remains untarnished and uncontaminated because she does not reveal it, because she keeps it sacred and inviolate, or because she expresses it without modification to meet male standards (Bolen 1984: 36).

A maiden is also thought to be a young girl or woman without the ties that come with a settled sexual partnership or children. The members of COA are predominantly in their twenties and thirties. Ruth Barrett, the spiritual director and founder of the organisation, is in her forties, and some women are in their fifties and sixties. But approximately 75% or more of the membership is between the ages of 20 and 39. Though some of the members in this age range have children, most of them do not. As one member put it, "We are primarily in the maiden stage of our lives, and we're cultivating a lot of amazon-type values, like strength, will, taking care of our own needs, connecting with other women, like that. I mean, I celebrate the Mother and the mothering and creative aspects of myself, and also the Crone and my own inner wisdom. But I think I concentrate mostly on the maiden. Because it's so easy in this world to get knocked off your center and forget who you are."

In taking the name of a maiden goddess, and in evoking "non-traditional," powerful female images, young members of COA may be consciously constructing a female identity which is separate from that of their own mothers and grandmothers. Therese told me "I don't really gravitate towards going into the kitchen and whipping up something with all the women. Even though of course intrinsically we must reclaim these arts and elevate them to a position of respect that they should and used to have, and I understand the need for that. But I'm still in need of standing back from it before I can then approach it from a new perspective. I think that's why we don't use food more in ritual, because we still are in a period of stepping away from the old thing until it can be properly revisioned, and then we can return to it." It must also be borne in mind that these women live in a large city, and usually lead the extremely busy

lives typical of modern urban dwellers. For this reason, taking the time to cook, even for a religious occasion, may not be a priority.

However, although COA does not customarily use food within the body of its public rituals, the feast cannot really be separated from the preceding ritual. It takes place in the same physical location, a space now imbued with spiritual meaning for the participants. The purpose of the food is thought to be directly related to the ritual. "You can't do a ritual without food," Cheryl told me, "you need it to ground after all that energy work." The commensality of sharing food made by the participants, sitting and eating together, is also an important part of the experience of community, and community identity. The public rituals are the only time large numbers of COA women will gather and spend time together.

"Food... is laden with symbolic significance. Society commonly associates food with sexuality and gender; feminine/masculine is a basic symbolic principle of foodstuffs," declares Deborah Heisley, an assistant professor of Marketing at UCLA (Heisley 1992: 1). In an unpublished 1992 paper, Heisley proposes that gender symbolism largely determines the meaning and uses of foods for consumers, and investigates how stereotypical sex roles and the physical qualities of food influence perceptions of the gendered nature of food. Her study paired food items and through questionnaires and interviews in which the informants were asked to assign each item to either a masculine or feminine category, with an explanation of their reasoning for their choice. Each food item in the study was paired with each other food item, so that the contextual nature of the gender assignment could be observed. Heisley included milk, eggs, cheese, meat, fish, and various fruits and vegetables in her survey, and her respondents included men and women of different classes and income brackets. When comparing the foods, Heisley detected three main concepts that affected the assignment of foods to masculine or feminine symbolic groups: stereotypic provision roles, nutrition and usage expectations, and physical traits.

Although none of her respondents actually lived in a hunter-gatherer society, stereotypical notions equating men with hunting and women with agriculture determined many of the perceived masculine/feminine traits of food items. Milk and eggs were seen as female because they came from female animals, and were associated with birth and fertility or nurturance. Produce was seen as feminine because it came from a garden. Meat was seen as male because it came from an animal, or from male providers, and was associated

with death and violence (presumably through hunting). It was also seen as male because it was cooked.

Ideas of nutrition and usage also influenced the categorization of the food items. Produce was seen as more feminine than meat, milk or eggs because it was healthier or lighter, and good for those on a diet, whereas meat, milk and eggs were more masculine because "men eat them," and they make men big and strong. Protein was overwhelmingly seen as male, or as healthier for men. Meat was strongly associated with male virility, a point also made by Carol Adams in "The Sexual Politics of Meat," in which she documents not only the world-wide practice of giving more meat to men than to women or children, but also the class and dominance issues reflected in high-prestige meat foods and those who have the right to consume them. Adams relates our society's suspicions about the masculinity of men who are vegetarians to the cultural associations of female with produce and male with meat (Adams 1987: 51-55).

The physical traits of the food items were also used to define them as masculine or feminine, using stereotypic ideas of sexual roles as well as the physical differences between men and women. Thus produce is more feminine than meat because it is sweet, juicy, rounder, and smaller, while meat is tough, rough or coarse, and heavy. Heisley divides the physical attributes of food into nine categories: texture, shape, size, color, taste, seeds, construction, growth, and juiciness. When comparing meat to milk, meat was seen as more masculine because it was red or bloody; yet when vegetables and fruits were compared, redness was seen as a female trait. Food was female if it was a fruit or resembled a fruit, and masculine if it was a vegetable or resembled a vegetable, or complemented meat well. Feminine textures were smooth, soft, and mushy, while masculine textures were hard, crunchy, or rough. The shape of the fruit or vegetable was also compared to the contours of male or female bodies; thus, phallic-shaped vegetables were categorized as male, and round fruits or vegetables were labelled female. The roundness of various produce were seen to echo the roundness of female breasts, hips, or buttocks, as well as the round shape of a pregnant woman's belly. In addition, the female childbearing function was often linked in the respondents' minds with foods that produce seeds, or which were themselves seeds. Juiciness was also associated with femininity, as was growing in clusters or from a tree or flower, whereas masculinity was associated with growing in a singular construction, or below the ground (Heisley 1992: 2 - 16).

An analysis of the food offered at the feast I attended according to the categories proposed by Heisley revealed a preponderance of "female" food; this is perhaps not surprising considering the focus of the group and the fact that it was composed entirely of women. In fact, I noticed very few "masculine" food items whatsoever.

First of all, the feast was vegetarian, in keeping with Heisley's data that found produce is conceptualized as feminine. Women are requested to bring vegetarian dishes only to all COA rituals so that no woman will feel excluded, since both vegetarians and non-vegetarians can eat vegetarian food. This also makes it easier for the partakers of the feast, since a participant will not have to stop and ask if she can eat something (unless she is a vegan). In contrast to the non-Dianic Neopagan post-ritual feasts I have attended, called "cakes and wine," which usually have included some alcoholic beverages, COA has decided to support the struggle of women in recovery by removing the problematic drinks altogether. The value of inclusivity is thus emphasized. The common experience of being women, and women in a patriarchal society, is emphasized in the ritual, and the feast, composed of food and drink that all participants may consume equally, provides another common ground. Women eat and drink what is common to all of them, emphasizing what they share rather than their differences.

The textures and colors of many of the foods were also "female." The loaves of bread were mostly round, or had bulging contours, like the female body. The strawberries and orange slices, the cupcakes, and the falafels were all round. The strawberries were red and juicy, as was the watermelon, and many of the fruit juices were also red, or, in the case of apple juice, made from red fruit. While the female body in all its variety is honored in Dianic witchcraft, special attention is often given to the rounded secondary sex characteristics, especially the breasts, hips, and belly. In part this comes from honoring the fecundity and fertility of women, and follows ancient depictions of goddess and female figures in antiquity whose breasts and bellies were accentuated, such as figurines of Inanna, shown cupping her breasts and with wide hips, and the Venus of Willendorf, a figurine with prominent breasts, hips, thighs, and belly. Perhaps more importantly in current American society, Dianics consciously counteract the larger culture's preference for extreme thinness in women by celebrating women's roundness. Los Angeles is the home of the movie industry, which demands that women be very thin in order to be considered beautiful, and is an extremely body-conscious city, especially since the warm weather permits and encourages the wearing of clothing that reveals

the body most of the year. The average model today weighs 23% less than the average American woman; the average actress is thinner than 95% of the population (Wolf 1991: 184-185). In this culture, one that proclaims that a woman is beautiful (and hence powerful) only if she is thin (and so takes up less space in the world), it is a radical act to celebrate the sacredness of female roundness, of the beauty and power of curvy, ample female flesh. The roundness of the breads and fruits at this Dianic feast lets the women at the ritual honor the female body by ingesting foods that incorporate such contours. Here, a round belly does not take away a woman's power in the world; her power is enhanced by embracing her shape and taking its power into herself, through eating round foods.

The absence of meat made the staple dishes more feminine, according to the criteria revealed by Heisley's study. Potatoes are usually considered more masculine, yet served without meat and mixed into a side-dish salad they become more feminine. Salads, whether green or made from other items, are seen as feminine, as are sweet desserts. The spice cake was decorated with flowers, female markers according to Heisley's research. The brownies were chocolate as well as sweet, a double dose of femaleness. The entire feast was composed of "feminine" foods.

There are three types of rituals common to the Dianic community: large, public rituals held by COA, rituals held by small covens, and personal, solitary rituals. I interviewed two Dianic witches, Therese and Cheryl, about their use of food in the second two categories; as well I consulted some of the books on Dianic or women's rituals published by authors popular within the movement. Although Therese and Cheryl share many characteristics have in common (both are single women in their thirties, neither gets along with her mother, both express themselves artistically outside of their paying jobs, before becoming feminists both identified more with men than with women, and both are ardent feminists living in Los Angeles), they have very different attitudes towards the role of food in their spiritual lives. I realize that this is a preliminary study looking at a small sample of the many women in this diverse community. By providing two information-rich interviews in a "purposeful sampling,"[3] I hope to indicate directions for further research on this topics in particular and on the Dianic community as a whole.

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3. The concepts "information-rich cases" and "purposeful sampling" are taken from Michael Q. Patton's 1990 book, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods.*

Therese told me that she does not use food in her solitary practice, because she does not enjoy cooking, and because of her feelings about "traditional" women's roles. In addition, she is strongly opposed to personalizing the divine force too much, and so does not engage in offering food (or other items) to goddess/es. This is very unlike all the women's religions described by Sered, in which participants tend to make offerings of specially prepared food an important part of their relationship to deities or spirits. Therese explained:

> I don't like the implication of the separateness that would imply if you were giving someone a gift. It means they are a separate entity from you, and *here* you are and *there* they are, and [the gift is] for them. Because I really feel more comfortable with the idea that I am Goddess, and though I believe that... there are forces outside of me, they are within me and without simultaneously. To anthropomorphize them just doesn't attract me. I can anthropomorphize them for the sake of calling a force a human name as shorthand, calling the feeling of love Aphrodite; I understand that means it becomes a graspable point. But to then offer something to Aphrodite would objectify her too much, would make her too separate, would make her a little more, uhm, 'gynopomorphic' than I am comfortable with. I like the idea of divinity not being conscious the way I am conscious. So I would never offer something to a Goddess.

We discussed the concept of the "kitchen witch," one who uses everyday objects as magical tools rather than special tools set aside for ritual purposes, such as someone using the same kitchen knife to cut bread and then to cast a magical circle for a ritual (Starhawk 1989: 75-76). Although she does not like the thought of being defined by the kitchen (and "women's work"), Therese is attracted by the importance given to making the everyday sacred in this type of magical work.

> I think that kitchen witchery would be women feeling the need to take the spiritual out of the realm of once a week on Sunday when we get dressed up and go to Church, and they want to bring it back to our daily lives. So it has an appeal to me, too. So that every day when I wake up, I'm going to have some spiritual ritual or small little routine that I do, like a self-blessing or eating mindfully or doing something, a meditation, that reminds me that I have a spiritual practice and that it isn't one that is done merely on Sundays or High Holy Days and performed for me only by duly anointed specialists, priests. We are all priests and priestesses of our own hearths and so kitchen witchery is very appealing. I try to do a simple thing every day, like if I'm walking down the street and there's a branch hanging over the sidewalk and it isn't sharp or dangerous, it's maybe a branch with a leaf on it, I let it touch me on the forehead. Or if there's a flower I try to smell it, just to somehow

> get in touch with the earth, because our feet are so often almost entirely on concrete. So little things like that will make me remember that I'm connected to the earth. Spiritual practices like that are the way out of the patriarchal mindset of religion being [for] specialists.

Her strong sense of the importance of bringing her religion into her everyday life is also revealed in the decor of her home:

> I also have sacred objects dispersed throughout my house, which would be the same idea of doing spiritual practices every day, not just on holy days... Things that I use for every day, like candle holders that I just use for light, not for a sacred purpose, they have some kind of a theme to them that lets me know that my spiritual practice isn't just on Sabbats[4]. Like my candle holders are spirals or snakes, or I've got art on the walls that is sacred, that is just for decoration, not for ritual purposes, that's just how I want to decorate my world. With sacred intention and a reminder that I live my religion every day. Sometimes I like the fact that I've decorated my house with things that I've made *myself* to remind me again that art isn't just for specialists, like religion isn't just for specialists, so the art in my house is made by me, or by other women artisans, or my friends who are artisans or painters, rather than commercial art. So it's a way to incorporate the sacred in one's everyday life. And that in a sense, though I'm kind of a woman that doesn't want to go *near* the kitchen, [is why] I would call myself a kitchen witch. Because of the broader interpretation of that [term].

Interestingly, Therese has redefined this term so that there is no "kitchen" in kitchen witchery. Although at first she did not identify with the term (possibly *because* of the word "kitchen" and the implication of cooking), in the course of the conversation she expands the boundaries of the "kitchen" to include herself, her entire domestic sphere, and what she considers important, and ends up claiming the term to describe her own practice and its values.

As for rituals held by her small coven (made up of about six women), Therese reports they rarely incorporate food into these rites, though once they did bake cornbread as a central part of a ritual. Therese usually brings bread that she buys at Trader Joe's (a local specialty food store), the same item she brings to the larger COA rituals. Her group has settled into a pattern according to which certain women always bring the same sort of food: one always makes a grain or rice dish, one always brings juice, a woman who loves to garden

4. The eight sacred holidays of the year for witches, which include the equinoxes, the solstices, and the four "cross-quarter" days that fall in between the others.

always brings fresh salad, and Therese brings bread. She says this was not planned, but developed tacitly, and she likes this system, as it helps members avoid situations where they all bring the same dish.

Therese was excited by how food would be used during the upcoming COA ritual for Beltane. Beltane is the Wiccan holiday celebrating sexuality and fertility in both nature and humans, and takes place on May 1. Neopagans as a whole use many European folk customs pertaining to Mayday (including the Irish name for this holiday), rites which usually involve Maypoles and lots of male-female sexual imagery. COA has developed its own interpretation of Beltane, which focuses on honoring women's sexuality, often emphasizing female sexuality as a force in and of itself, sexuality for oneself that is not necessarily part of a partnership. Sex is not only physically pleasuring oneself or one's partner but also the erotic force of life, an idea similar to the Hindu concepts of *kundalini* or *shakti*. Neopagans in general often conceptualize the year as the life cycle of a god and/or goddess. In this vein, Diachcraft also interprets Beltane as the time of the Goddess' menarche, the onset of female puberty marked by first menstruation. Therese was told by Kyra, the woman who is intending to open a bakery, that she might bring a special treat to the Beltane ritual:

> So for Beltane, Kyra wants to make these meringue yonis[5] with red jam filling! I think that would be just delicious! So I'm looking forward to Beltane to see if she's really gonna make yoni-shaped somethings with red filling. Well, you know when we had that [ritual] for Freya[6], and we were supposed to bring food that was red, and so I brought dried apricots and dried pears, because they look like yonis. I don't know, there's just something about that that just titillates me beyond belief. I just really am titillated by the idea of our genitals still retaining sexual power and attractiveness and eroticism, but out[side] of a context of objectification and pornography. So at a festival celebrating the sexual, like Beltane, we're gonna have food shaped like women's genitals, and we're gonna point and we're gonna laugh and we're gonna eat it, and we're gonna lick it and it's gonna be fun, it's going to be removed from the sleazy element of pornography. We can still celebrate sexuality with food. A yoni-shaped, an actual female genital, labia-shaped

5. The word *yoni* is Sanskrit for female genitalia. It has been appropriated by many Dianic Witches since it has no negative connotations for American women, unlike many other words for female genitals in English, and therefore is a word which can be used to signify positive associations and spiritual power connected to the vagina.
6. Freya is the Norse goddess of sexuality and fertility.

> food item with red jelly in the middle imitating blood! I mean, it is just so raw. It's not all nicey-nice. It's not just, you know, breasts. Here's labia with blood in it and we're gonna eat it. And we're thrilled. It's fun, and it's part of celebration. So I can't wait to see that. This particular celebration of Beltane is making me get a sparkle in my eye and rub my hands together and think *Oh boy! I'm gonna bring some more dried pears and apricots!*

Therese's excitement about the rawness of this in-your-face yet fun depiction of female sexual power and sex organs is primarily evoked by the image of *eating* pastries. Not only is the act of eating a way of being sexual (think of the metaphors for oral sex); this particular act of eating will actually imitate oral sex: Therese will eat a vagina-shaped pastry. Since many of the women in Dianic Witchcraft are lesbians, it is an especially appropriate expressive behavior for a Dianic Beltane: a woman eating a yoni-shaped pastry to celebrate both self-directed and woman-identified sexuality. There is also the reversal of typical pastry shapes which seemed to please her. The symbolic inversion of the "nicey-nice" teacakes with roses on them served by "traditional" women at tea parties turned into bleeding, vaginal pastries eaten with relish by Goddess women is appropriate for both the holiday itself and for Dianic witchcraft as a whole. When a woman eats a yoni pastry at Beltane, she is ingesting and embodying her beliefs about the spiritual power of women and of female bodies, making the physical sacred and the sacred physical. The fact that it is a *bloody* yoni is a reversal of all the taboos our culture has against menstruation. It is not hidden, shameful, or dirty; it is openly celebrated and ingested. This food item makes a statement about women's bodies, women's sexual power, opposition to pornography used by men to oppress women, and opposition to conventional societal values, all of which makes it not only appealing but exciting to Therese. This is food in the service of radical feminism, and so it is embraced by Therese in a way that other foods are not.

Therese's feelings about food were on one extreme of the spectrum that appears to exist within the Dianic community. However, her insistence on making the mundane world holy, of bringing a sense of sacredness to her everyday life, is a very typical attitude of feminist Witches. She tends to use her skills at creating art and ritual objects, her practice of meditation or self-blessing, and her daily awareness of the physical closeness of nature in order to accomplish this.

Cheryl, on the other hand, constantly uses food to make the mundane sacred. She laughingly attributed this to the fact that she is a Cancer: "We're stomach people!" Cheryl is 37 years old and has been a Dianic Witch for eight

years. She emphasizes the role of food in both her coven (a group of five women) and her own solitary religious life. "Food is a great ritual object," she declared. She described the uses of food in her coven's rituals:

> There are times when we use food as a symbolic object and will eat it in a ritual. Like at Hallowmass[7] we take a pomegranate, cut it open and pass it around for everyone to eat, saying "taste the fruit of life, which is death," and then we cut an apple through the middle so that the five-pointed star of the core shows, and pass it around to eat, saying "taste the fruit of death, which is life." Or we will eat bread at Lammas[8]. I think that food is a pretty important part of our rituals. It represents the products of nature, the things that we're celebrating, like birth, growth, death — we use seeds at spring rituals sometimes, to plant. There have been rituals where food is central. One spring we tasted fruit, peaches, as the juice of new life. And it is very present after our rituals! Our feasts are always amazing. Food has some pretty strong symbolic associations: nature, earth, potential energy, like the seeds of the pomegranate are knowledge, which are ingested and make a part of the self. Bread is a symbol of the power in grain, of transforming the harvest into comestible life energy. Once we made bread for Lammas, and made it a spell, kneading our thoughts and wishes into bread. It's really powerful to eat something you've invested your physical energy in, and all that energy has the intention of your desire, your spell. We've used honey to taste the sweetness of life, to use our sensual apprehension to remind you of beauty of every moment, of life, to be present in your body. It's a gorgeous taste. Food placed on the altar is consecrated or charged up, so later we eat it. We're all goddesses, so we offer it to ourselves, a reminder of our sacred life.

The physical and sensory aspects of food are very important to Cheryl, and food seems to be the perfect way to embody her religious beliefs. Her coven's use of food as a tangible symbol of spiritual knowledge is typical of the ways in which Dianic Witches use the physical to connect with the spiritual. Starhawk calls this "thinking in things." The things Cheryl likes to think with are usually things to eat. The immanent nature of her concept of divinity and the importance Dianic witchcraft places on the sacredness of each woman are

7. Hallowmass is also known as Halloween, or Samhain, and is the Wiccan new year and feast of the dead.

8. Lammas is a Wiccan holiday celebrating the first fruits of the harvest, and often bread or grain. Lammas is often translated as "loaf-mass," and in non-Dianic Wicca the holiday also honors Lugh, an Irish male solar deity, and may be called Lughnasa. Lammas takes place on August 1.

evident in her claim that the food in their rituals is offered to themselves, to the divine within them.

In her personal practice she puts food on her altar when she is working on a spell, a conscious ritual to effect change in herself or the larger world. She also offers food to the earth or to "the wild things" when she is hiking or performing rituals in the hills near her home in Sylmar. These practices seem to be linked to her concepts of the sacrality of the physical world and the importance of reciprocity.

> Yes, I put food on my altar. When I'm doing a ritual for abundance, I'll use a nice ripe fruit or strawberry. I've definitely used seeds, bowls of seeds, some of them edible. I've used drink, like wine or sparkling water, honey I use a lot, and those things all symbolize something to me about the fruits of labor, or fruition. I especially use honey because it will stay on the altar OK and won't attract bugs if you're careful. If I use food on the altar it'll be something I'll use or taste during the ritual. Though I don't use it as often as candles! When I would go up to do ritual on the hill, I would take a bottle and put milk and honey in it and as part of my ritual I would offer it to the earth, because it's really important to thank the earth and nature and Goddess for everything. Pieces of food I'm eating, I will throw out for the wildlife, like pieces of orange or apple core. Not trash! But food either new or half eaten. It's sort of like good karma. I use milk and honey a lot because it's so sweet and nourishing, and to see it soak into the ground makes me feel I'm enriching earth as she enriches me. It's a token of gratefulness.

Milk and honey, mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, are here given a Pagan meaning when Cheryl offers them to the earth. Pragmatic concerns about spoilage or bugs and symbolic meanings of fruitfulness or fertility play equal parts in her choice of food items to use on her altar or in a ritual, reflecting Dianic Witchcraft's concern with this world (as opposed to an after-life) and the unity of the physical and the spiritual.

Cheryl began to garden after she became involved in Dianic Witchcraft, and uses the life of the herbs she plants as tangible metaphors for the cycle of life. When harvesting her herbs, or wild plants, she always says "Blessed be, creature of earth," as a blessing and a way of being mindful of her connection to the earth. "If I hadn't been practicing Wicca, I wouldn't bring this ritualistic aspect to cooking and eating," she says. Since cooking is a pleasure for her, she sees no conflict between her feminism and being in the kitchen. Food plays an important role in her life.

> I really have this thing about food. When I'm most depressed, I buy fruit and I'm happy again, or [I'm happy] when I'm making a recipe. It's more than symbolic. It's the action of being a Witch in your daily life, of having that mindset. Whenever I cook it's a mini ritual for me. It's a celebration of all the different fruits of the earth. They taste so good, our senses are so involved, and it's so nourishing to cook from scratch. It's life affirming to cook whole foods. I just like it. It's the one good thing I can do for myself. It balances me. All feasts are feasts for the Goddess.

Cheryl's attitude towards the role of food in her life and in her spiritual practice, and her appreciation for the role of the sensual aspect of food exemplify the *embodiment* of spirituality considered so important in feminist witchcraft. Rejecting the enforced duality between the mind and the body which characterizes many other religions, feminist Witches emphasize the physical and sensual aspects of their spiritual lives and bring their sense of the sacred directly into the physical. To ingest something is to make it part of oneself, and Cheryl does just that when she eats the seeds she put on her altar as part of a ritual for abundance. Food seems to be her primary magical tool. She seems to fit the role of "kitchen witch" in a more literal sense of the term than does Therese. Rather than avoiding the so-called traditional women's role of cook, Cheryl makes it part of her religious expression. As she blesses the herbs she harvests, and makes "mindful" meals out of whole foods for herself, she sanctifies the mundane. When she pours the viscous and symbolically-laden mix of milk and honey onto the earth, she uses food as an offering and to maintain a relationship with the divine, much like the women documented by Sered. Her statement that "all feasts are feasts for the Goddess" is a declaration of her belief in the immanence of deity and the sacrality of every day life.

A brief survey of some of the Dianic literature does show that food is often present in this tradition, although it does not hold the place that, for example, feasts for the orishas hold in Afro-Caribbean religions. In *Casting the Circle: A Woman's Book of Rituals* author Diane Stein never describes food within a ritual (Stein 1990). Starhawk advocates using food during three out of eight seasonal rituals, although she always mentions the post-ritual feast (Starhawk 1989). Ffiona Morgan's book, *Wild Women Don't Get the Blues* uses food placed on the altar and then ritually eaten in four out of eight seasonal rituals (Morgan 1991). Z Budapest's book *The Goddess in the Office*, a spiritual book for office workers, recommends that women stay in touch with the wild woman within them so as not to become stressed or deadened by the corporate world. She recommends many kinds of herbal teas (rather than coffee), and

the eating of "wild" snacks to feed the inner wild woman: almonds, raisins, dates, apples, figs, and honey (all female foods, according to Heisley's categories). "If you have sugar cravings, it is the Wild Woman who is needy. Keep a bottle of honey in your desk and take a small spoonful when you want to reach for those deadly pastries in the cafeteria. Take the honey on your tongue and mentally send a message to the Wild Woman, saying, 'This is for you, beloved.' Lick the spoon and enjoy it as slowly as you can. Honey kills sugar craving instantly, and it is excellent brain food" (Budapest 1993: 6). She also advises eating mindfully:

> Sit down with your lunch and bless it by saying something like this 'May this food I am about to eat support me in health, wealth and wisdom, the divine three. Blessed be. Actually what I say is a little less poetic: 'Thank you, tuna fish, for dying for me; thank you, onions, for dying for me; thank you, wheat, for dying for me,' and so on. Say these words silently — you don't have to let everyone know what you are doing by praying loudly in the cafeteria. (Budapest 1993: 17)

Budapest suggests making pleasure-noises when enjoying and experiencing one's food. "Wild Woman needs her food pleasures," she states (Budapest 1993: 18). Opposed to "power lunches" and all they imply, she recommends TLC (Tender Loving Care) lunches. Female co-workers can take these TLC lunches, in which they give each other strokes and enjoy each other's company, and thus shake the male hierarchy of the corporate office. She includes recipes for spells using food, such as "money" cookies to bring prosperity and vanilla cookies to attract a lover. Food, as described in this book, is both spiritually and emotionally satisfying, and nurturance seems the most important aim of all food providers.

The Dianic Witchcraft movement is a young religion. As the years go by it will be interesting to observe how rituals and spiritual practices change. The women now in their twenties and thirties may have different priorities when they are in their fifties and sixties; many women are bringing their children up in this religion, and the customs may change as the next generation brings its own understanding of the Goddess and its own needs to their religious expressions. The desire expressed by Therese to maintain distance from old associations with "women's work" may not be as important twenty or thirty years from now. Yet since the religion encourages personal interpretations, there will surely continue to be great variations in how women use and relate to food in this spiritual context.

Dianic Witchcraft has no feasts for the goddesses in which believers prepare and offer food dishes to spirits or deities in order to formally maintain a connection with them. However, the women do use food ritually as a way of physicalizing their beliefs, and, like Cheryl, all coven members conceptualize food as an important component of their spiritual practice. The foods brought for post-ritual feasts symbolically represent the female body, and are ingested as an expression of female power. Food is the medium through which the sacred and the political are concretized, as feminist Witches ingest round, juicy, red, sweet, seed-laden produce and grain dishes. The traditionally female domain of food becomes transformed into an arena in which feminist beliefs are literally embodied and incorporated, and patriarchal definitions of woman's body and place are defied. Eating foods imbued with feminist meanings in a sacred setting is a powerful act. The mundane is made sacred, and the spiritual becomes physical, reflecting the belief in the immanence of the divine. As each woman offers a bite of food to another in the post-ritual feast, saying "May you never hunger," she is feeding the Goddess in each woman, personalizing a connection with deity and with her community. She uses food to bless and nurture herself and others during a religious rite, just as Sered argues, so many women do the world over.

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