

SATANISM:  
SIMILARITIES  
BETWEEN PATIENT  
ACCOUNTS AND  
PRE-INQUISITION  
HISTORICAL SOURCES

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## ABSTRACT

*Today patients who describe to a therapist fragmentary flashback-like scenes of participation in satanic rituals face the same credibility problems that twenty years ago would have confronted a patient who was recounting scenes of sadistic incestuous abuse. Some clinicians have one conceptual framework within which to place such material; they hear it as delusional. This paper presents another set of descriptions of satanic rituals: those drawn by historians from pre-Inquisition primary sources. The aim is to assist clinicians in considering as one possibility that such a patient is describing fragmented or partially dissociated memories of actual events. As early as the fourth century elements of a satanic mass were well described: 1) a ritual table or altar; 2) ritual orgiastic sex; 3) reversals of the Catholic mass; 4) ritual use of excretions; 5) infant or child sacrifice and cannibalism often around initiation and often, involving use of a knife, and ritual use of; 6) animals; 7) fire or candles; and 8) chanting. Extending the historical search from 400 to 1200 A.D. yields only a few new elements: 9) ritual use of drugs, and 10) of the circle, and 11) ritual dismemberment of corpses. Two clinical accounts of satanic rituals are compared with historical accounts. Ideally, the possibility that a patient had experienced actual involvement in some bizarre and abusive ritual would be one of many possible viewpoints explored in the therapeutic unravelling of such material.*

Credibility is a key issue in the treatment of patients who have experienced extreme childhood trauma. In the past, their accounts of sadistic incestuous rape, incest pregnancy, being locked in closets or partially buried were often misinterpreted as fantasy or delusion. Because of their dissociation and perceptual distortions, their heightened longing for parents and the wish that the abuse had never occurred, these patients sometimes adopt rather than challenge a therapist's skepticism about the reality of prior child abuse and collude in framing their fragmentary memories as a sign of their own pathology (Goodwin, 1985; Weinshel, 1986; Summit, 1988).

However, since child abuse became reportable in the mid 1960s and sexual abuse in the mid 1970s, observations of the high prevalence of incestuous abuse (Russell, 1986) and of the severity of associated physical and emotional abuse in ongoing cases (Goodwin 1982) have allowed some therapists to consider more strongly the possibility that even extreme accounts of sadistic torture in childhood may refer to actual events. Even with adults, long after the abuse, it has been possible to obtain independent confirmation of the validity of some victims' memories of severe physical and sexual traumatization (Braun, 1986; Herman & Schatzow, 1987; Kluft, 1985; Schreiber, 1979).

However, when these same patients begin to describe ritual abuse occurring in the context of satanic worship, many therapists return to a skeptical stance, assessing this material as based on fantasy or delusion, not on the resurfacing of dissociated memories of actual events. These images seem so alien to normal experience that both patient and therapist lack a framework, other than the diagnostic criteria for psychosis, within which such frightening and often fragmentary images can be assembled, organized and understood.

Currently, several kinds of efforts are being made to supply a data base for ritual abuse equivalent to what has been developed for extreme childhood abuse. Therapists, sometimes working in study or support groups, are collecting accounts from many different victims so that they can begin to recognize typical patterns. Victims too are meeting in groups or networking through newsletters to share their experiences. Written descriptions, by those victims who retain clear narrative memories, are being compiled for use in bibliotherapy. Law enforcement agencies are documenting material and eyewitness evidence in newly founded cases which can be compared with accounts obtained clinically. Autopsies of known victims of ritual abuse and confessions by perpetrators provide additional sources of data (Summit, 1988).

In this paper we propose yet another data-based framework for use in listening to clinical material about satanic ritual abuse—accounts of satanism compiled by historians.

Historical materials proved useful in establishing the existence over many cultures and many centuries of extreme physical and incestuous abuse (Williams & Money, 1980; Goodwin, 1982, 1988; Wolff, 1988). By analogy, if it can be shown that certain satanic cult practices have been documented over many centuries, this knowledge could help therapists and patients deal matter-of-factly with similar material when it emerges in psychotherapy.

In addition, historians of witchcraft have more experience than do therapists in analyzing the issues of skepticism and credibility that are inherent in studying satanism. Russell (1972) describes eight levels of skepticism exemplified by various historians who have tried to interpret primary sources. He describes these 8 possible stances, as follows: 1) The most skeptical stance holds that satanism was never practiced and that not even the Inquisitors believed it existed. The Inquisitors were motivated by malice and avarice to invent satanism as a justification for torture, execution and the seizing of property. Stance 2) holds also that satanism never existed. Inquisitors and other inhibited, hyperreligious people believed it existed because they were projecting their own sexual and aggressive wishes on to outsiders. Stance 3) again holds that satanism never existed but asserts that some people were so deluded and psychotic that they believed themselves to be witches. Processes outlined in positions 1) and 2) further elaborated the delusions of these few psychotics into a mistaken belief in the existence of satanic cults. Stance 4) holds that satanism never existed as an organized cult, but that there were some ancient folk beliefs and magical practices which Christianity tried to stamp out. Stance 5) is that there have been isolated groups of people over the centuries who worshipped the devil or engaged in other practices which were interpreted as devil worship. Stance 6) is that for many centuries a secret, formal witchcraft cult has existed and it still exists. Margaret Murray (1921) has hypothesized that this cult can be traced back to Greek and Roman worship of Artemis/Diana. Stance 7) holds that not only is there a formal witchcraft cult, but its members are able to fly, shapeshift, and do many other things not dreamt of by modern science. Stance 8) is that not only does satanism exist, but Satan is a real entity locked in an eternal struggle with another real entity, God, and all history is the record of their warfare. This would describe the position of historian Montague Summers (1926).

Among historians, as among therapists, it is considered more respectable to be identified with one of the more skeptical views. However Russell (1972) believes that extreme skepticism itself is a product of history, born within a late nineteenth century liberal and optimistic view of man which our twentieth century experience of total war and genocide has illuminated as more culture-bound than objective.

These eight levels of skepticism seem as applicable to clinicians as to historians. In our experience many of our patients are treated by psychiatrists who view such accounts as delusional and whose skepticism level regarding satanic cults can be described in stances one to three. These patients often subsequently seek out exorcists or clergy whose belief systems are best characterized by levels seven or eight.

This paper uses historical materials to open up skepticism levels four, five and six as possible cognitive frameworks for therapists.

As with clinical data, there are many questions about the validity of historical data. To minimize these issues we will use only primary sources from before the Inquisition, that is, before 1200. The use of propaganda, torture and seizure of property by the Inquisition so distort historical materials from (.hat era that we have elected to discard them. Historical cases in the 280years since the end of the witch hunt hysteria are not considered in this article.

## THE SATANIC MASS, 100 A.D. - 1200 A.D.

Roman documents beginning in the second century A.D. (Eliade, 1976; Benko, 1984) describe incest and cannibalism as part of the ritual of certain Christian sects and cite this as justification for the Empire's resolve to abandon its usual policy of religious tolerance in order to outlaw and persecute Christians.

Christian documents, for example the writings of St. Clement in the third century, attempt to differentiate mainstream Christian practices from the rituals which Roman officialdom found intolerable. The suspect practices were ascribed by Clement to Gnostics with whom he was engaged in theological struggles on other grounds (Howland, 1957). Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library (Robinson, 1957; Doresse, 1960) gave access to theological documents from the Gnostics themselves, thus providing a third viewpoint, in addition to Roman and Christian sources. Although each of these three sources reflects a particular political bias, by comparing all three it is possible to construct a concensual view of Gnostic ritual and theology.

The most graphic account of the rituals which the Roman government found objectionable comes from Epiphanius, an Egyptian monk and later Bishop, who lived from 315 to 403. His account reveals a definite and expectable anti-Gnostic bias; however no reasons have been found to doubt his assertion that the details he recounts were acquired through a strategy worthy of a contemporary investigator-he presented himself as an initiate.

We will quote directly his description of the Phisionites, written more than 1600 years ago, and characterized by historians as "one of the most repulsive stories in ancient literature" (Benko, 1967, 1984, P. 65).

"I will now come to the place of depth of their deadly story (for they have various false teachings about pleasure). First they have their women in common. And if a stranger appears who is of the same persuasion, they have a sign, men for women and women for men. When they extend the hand for greeting at the bottom of the palm they make a tickling touch and from this they ascertain whether the person who appeared is of their faith. After they have recognized each other, they go over at once to eating. They serve rich food, meat and wine even if they are poor. When they thus ate together and so to speak filled up their veins to an excess they turn to passion. The man leaving his wife says to his own wife: Stand up and make love with the brother. Then the unfortunates unite with each other. After they have had intercourse

in the passions of fornication they raise their own blasphemy toward heaven. The woman and the man take the fluid of the emission of the man into their hands, they stand, turn toward heaven, their hands besmeared with the uncleanness, and pray... bringing to the father who is the nature of all that which they have on their hands, and they say, 'We offer to thee this gift, the body of Christ. And then they eat it. their own ugliness, and say, 'This is the body of Christ and this is the Passover for the sake of which our bodies suffer and are forced to confess the suffering of Christ. . . [Here Epiphanius describes that the Phibionites do the same with the menstrual blood of the woman, and they call it 'the blood of Christ. ] They have intercourse with each other but they teach that one may not. beget children. The infamy is committed by them not for the sake of begetting children, but for the sake of pleasure, because the devil plays with them and mocks the image formed by God. They bring the pleasure to its end, but they take to themselves the sperm of their uncleanness, not for the purpose of begetting children, but to eat their shame themselves. And if someone from among them is detected to have let the natural emission of semen go in deeper and the woman becomes pregnant, then hear, what even worse they do: they pull out the embryo in the time when they can reach it with the hand. They take out the unborn child and in a mortar, pound it with a pestle, and into this mix honey and pepper and certain other spices and myrrh, in order that it may not nauseate them, and then they come together, all this company of swine and dogs, and each communicates with a finger from the bruised child. And after they have finished this cannibalism finally they pray to God, saying, 'We did not let the Archon of lust play with its but collected the mistake of the brother.' And this they consider to be the perfect Passah. Many other horrible things are done by them. For when they again get into this rage among themselves, they smear their hands with their own emission. They stretch them out and pray with the besmeared hands naked in the whole body that through this practice they may find with God free conversation." (Panarion 26.4-5, quoted from Benki, 1984, pp. 65-66).

Thus as early as the fourth century, we see documented certain elements of a "satanic" mass: 1) it is a secret feast; 2) a sexual orgy; 3) with reversals of elements of the Christian mass; and 4) the ritual use of blood, semen and other excretions; and 5) infant sacrifice and cannibalism (other Roman sources indicate this was an important part of initiation and that the initiate was made to wield the sacrificial knife).

Other early Roman and Christian documents indicate that animals-dogs, snakes and donkeys-were part of these rituals, as well as torches and the ritual use of total darkness (Oulton & Chadwick, 1954; Benko, 1984). The chanting of the names of archons, a hierarchy of angels related both to Satan and the transcendent God, was also part of the Gnostic mass (Howland, 1957; Doresse, 1960; DeGive, 1971).

For this Phibionite sect, these ritual elements were part of a complex theology. Satan was seen as the creator and Prince of this world. The God of transcendence was felt to be incredibly distant and weakened by his creation of Satan, the universe and human beings. Satan, not God, was the archi-

'cast of creation, that part of nature visible to human beings including sin and pain; Satan was understood to be the God of the Old Testament (Wilson, 1968). The aim of worship was to unite with the higher God the transcendent sparks of light and knowledge that had become dispersed and imprisoned in earthly bodies. Many Gnostic sects viewed coitus as a means for unification of two sparks of light. For example, Simon Magus, the magician who was an early prophet of Gnosticism, traveled with a former prostitute whom he renamed Helen and described his union with her as a union with ultimate knowledge and wisdom (Howland, 1957). The Carpocratean sect held that it was necessary to experience every possible sin and sexual practice so that the soul could gain enough knowledge to be freed from the body and the world (Oulton & Chadwick, 1954; Grant, 1966, 1967). Procreation, however, was seen as a negative, since this further dispersed the transcendent energy and imprisoned yet another soul in a human body. Some Gnostic sects practiced celibacy in order to avoid procreation. The Coptics, on the other hand, a surviving non-heretical sect were able to use parts of Gnostic cosmology to justify both monogamous marriage and procreation. They hold that human beings are imitating the transcendent God when they endure the experiences of dissolution that accompany the creation of a new world, which is the aim of marriage, house-holding and childrearing (Yamaguchi, 1970).

Later documents indicate that variations on the Satanic mass continued to be practiced until 1200 with many of the elements described by Eusebius (Howland, 1956). A sixth century law prescribed fines not only for those eating human flesh but for the man who carried the cauldron to these rites (Russell, 1972). The Synod of Rome in 743 (Russell, 1972, p. 70) declared, "If anyone prepares tables, makes incantations or leads dances, he shall be anathema." A ninth century saint described cultists dancing backward around a sacred tree. In about 800, one of Charlemagne's laws for newly conquered Saxony read, "If anyone sacrifices a human being to the devil, and offers sacrifice to demons ... let him be put to death" (Russell, 1972, p. 67). Later imperial rules proscribed drinking potions on May 1, indicating that drug use may have been part of the celebration on this pagan holiday. In about 1010 Burchard of Worms wrote, "One must not believe that there are women who believe they sneak out at night while their husbands are asleep, pass through closed doors, and travel long distances to kill Christians and eat them or else cut out their hearts and replace them with a straw" (Russell, 1972, p. 81). The first witchcraft trial in Orleans in 1022 involved four accusations: 1) holding sex orgies at night in an abandoned building; 2) carrying torches and then extinguishing them, performing the remainder of the ritual in total darkness; 3) chanting the names of demons and adoring the devil; and 4) burning the babies conceived at these orgies and making the ashes into communion wafers. The second witchcraft trial near Soissons in 1114 involved almost identical allegations except the meetings were held in a cave and the orgiastic activities were specified as including anal intercourse and homosexual contacts (Russell, 1972).

In summary, these later documents add little to the early Roman descriptions of the Satanic Mass except mention of

ritual circle dances, drug use, and dismemberment of corpses to extract human hearts.

Thus using only pre-Inquisition historical documents one finds evidence of a ritual which included the following elements: 1) a secret nocturnal feast at a special table; 2) ritual orgiastic sex involving incest, homosexuality and anal intercourse; 3) reversals of elements of the Christian mass; 4) ritual use of blood, semen and other excretions; 5) sacrifice of embryos and infants often using knives followed by cooking in a cauldron and/or ritual cannibalism-this was especially connected with initiation; 6) ritual use of animals; 7) ritual use of torches and darkness; 8) chanting of the names of demons; 9) drinking a drugged potion; 10) dancing backwards in a circle; and 11) dismembering corpses with particular emphasis on seizing the heart.

### **USING THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK IN PROCESSING EMERGING FLASHBACK MATERIAL**

The following is an account of a flashback written by an incest victim in her mid twenties who had been diagnosed previously as having paranoid schizophrenia. She herself viewed this flashback as evidence that she was *crazy* and self-mutilated after the therapist suggested that she write down her perceptions and consider, as one possibility, that they were fragments of memories.

"Candles in a circle-someone cutting the bottoms with a huge butcher knife. I'm on a table. My arms are up. I think I'm tied down. It smells. It's dark. The walls move. He's there in front of me. Got something shiny on. It smells. He's doing something. Can't see. Can't move. See his face, it's ugly. Satan. Shiny cape or something. Puts my legs up. Putting something in me. Cold. Don't know what it is. He's talking slow like a record in slow speed. Don't know what he's saying. I sink to the floor. I'm in under the floor. Can't see me. I sing to myself."

"He's got a candle. I can't see what else he's got. It's going in me, it hurts. I feel sick. He's laughing; it's a scary laugh. I feel sick, don't move."

"Now he's on me. He twisted me around, stay still. It hurts and he's breathing. The table's hard. Twisted me again on my back. My legs are up and it hurts and I feel sick and I can't breathe and I can't move. I want to get down. There's candles. He's still on me, in me. I go away with the flickering candles. I don't know where I am. In a room with candles and a table."

Comparing this account with descriptions of the Satanic mass by Epiphanius and others, we find the following familiar elements: 1) the ritual table or altar; 2) ritual and unusual sexual practices; 3) use of some type of vestments in imitation of the Catholic mass; 4) although excretions are not specifically mentioned, the presence of a smell is suggestive; 5) a knife is being used; 6) no animals are described here; 7) ritual use of candles; 8) slow unintelligible chant-like verbalizations are described; 9) drugs are not mentioned, but there is sensory distortion and impaired consciousness; 10) candles are arranged in a circle; 11) dismemberment is not mentioned.

In this case the patient was able to continue to think

about and talk about her flashbacks and at present has coherent, sequential memories of ritual abuse that feel to her like real memories, not hallucinations.

Another patient, a woman in her mid thirties, came to treatment with narrative memories of her childhood initiation into a cult. She recalled, at age 4 or 5, standing in a circle of people in black robes, whose faces she could not see. Some were holding torches; the leader had a circle drawn on his forehead. She described being in an unused barn with bales of hay stacked at one end. There was a butcher block table in the center, and two knives with gold blades. There was a fire with a pot on it. Two farm children, a brother and a sister, 7 and 5 years of age stood in the center of the circle. The patient remembers feeling, "I don't want to be there. . . want to go away." She remembers seeing an urn with blood in it, because "they already killed a pig." The brother and sister were tied onto the table, with the girl being made to fellate her brother, while the leader was "putting things inside her, putting blood inside her, hurting her." The two victims were made to eat feces and the group urinated on them. The patient describes hearing shrieking and chanting going on during much of this. Then, the patient was put on the table and made to perform oral sex on the girl, and after, "they take turns doing different sex things." She felt hate for the leader, asking "why did he make me do it?" The patient was then given the knife with which she had to "make cuts first and suck the blood. . . they scream and scream. . . cut off penis and chew it. . . they cut him open, take out stuff and cut it apart. . . cut off head and everything. He is put in the pot to eat later." Then, the girl "screams awful screams, cut open.

. . . cut apart, put knife inside her, she is put in pot. . . blood everywhere... try to collect to drink or put in stew." Next, the patient was placed on the table, while the leader was "putting blood and other things in (body parts of the sacrificed children were put into her orifices) ... they took turns eating body parts of kids, drinking blood from inside-then they'd try to put their penis in different places. . . I didn't fight. . . it hurt and yet felt good... I felt real wet and smelly. After they were done I felt sick and hurt but couldn't say anything. . . then ate human stew-all of us."

Comparing this more extensive patient account to the eleven elements derived from early historical accounts, we see the following: 1) the ritual table; 2) ritual and unusual sexual practices; 3) reversal of Christian elements in the robes; 4) ritual use of blood, urine and excrement; 5) the use of knives, and a cauldron over fire for sacrifice and cannibalism of children; 6) ritual use of a sacrificial pig; 7) ritual use of torches; 8) chanting; 9) no drugs are described; 10) the ritual use of the circle both in the formation in which participants stood as well as the circle drawn on the leader's forehead; and 11) dismemberment of the bodies, although the heart is not specifically mentioned.

### **CONCLUSION**

Using historical materials dating from before the Inquisition, we have assembled a list of eleven elements of satanic ritual: 1) secret nocturnal feasting around a special table or altar; 2) ritual orgiastic sex involving usual practices; 3)

imitations and reversals of the Catholic mass, as, use of vestments; 4) ritual use of blood, semen, urine or excrement often connected with initiation; 5) sacrifice of fetuses or children involving the use of knives, caldrons, or fire and often including cannibalism; 6) ritual use of animals; 7) ritual use of torches, candles and darkness; 8) chanting, especially of names of demons; 9) drinking a drug or potion; 10) dancing backward in a circle or other ritual use of the circle; and 11) dismemberment of corpses and extraction of the heart.

It has been useful to compare these elements with the flashbacks and remembered narratives of satanic rituals produced by contemporary patients presenting the post-traumatic and dissociative disorders. Even the first fragmentary images described here included seven definite and two possible elements.

We do not suggest that concordance of a flashback image with historical accounts constitutes proof that the image derived from an actual experience. Rather, the utility of this framework is that it allows the clinician to help the patient review this material with that as one possibility. Ideally, a clinician would be able to assist the patient in viewing such images from all eight levels of skepticism. Even in cases where a perpetrator's confession or material evidence has documented the reality of ritual abuse, a victim may be quite skeptical of his own memories and may need to view them from stances one, two or three. The historical materials presented here are most useful in extending the dialogue within the middle levels of the skepticism spectrum. This involves entertaining the view that the patient may have experienced the practice of some magical or folk belief or may have chanced into a satanic or ideo-syncretic cult, or may have happened upon an ancient secret society with its own theology and hierarchy which might be thought of as analogous to the Mafia or the Ku Klux Klan. These mid-level stances are most useful when the clinical situation calls for a matter-of-fact exploration of feelings, sensations and images before they are categorized either as delusional, real, mystical or supernatural phenomena. Familiarity with these mid-level stances is also necessary in making clinical decisions about whether to report to child protection or advise the patient to contact law enforcement agencies or restrict family contact.

Further research is needed. The ritual elements compiled here for the satanic mass clearly apply to other sacrificial rituals including for example the pre-Christian Greek Eleusinian mysteries (Burkert, 1983) and non-Western rituals (Bataille, 1957; Eliade, 1976) including Mayan human sacrifices (Thompson, 1976). If asked to make up a ritual, what sort of narratives would pre-Oedipal children construct? schizophrenic patients? manic patients?

Our initial impression is of a fundamental difference between the accounts described here, despite their fragmentary quality, and the accounts of witchcraft we have collected from schizophrenic patients. In the latter the focus is on mysterious external forces and away from the human behaviors and upsetting interpersonal interactions that are so central to the above accounts. Also in schizophrenic narrative, the form as well as the content is bizarre and

disintegrated, and behavioral patterns mirror narrative disintegration; self care, in particular becomes fragmented (Arieti, 1974). In addition, paranoid schizophrenics are often preoccupied with issues of investigation and self protection; this is in marked contrast to patients who have described to us satanic mass experiences and who are often worryingly oblivious to these issues. Rather than trying to persuade investigators of the truth of their accusations, these patients remind us constantly that they are not certain about what happened.

If patient narratives such as the two described here can be understood as memory derivatives rather than delusions, does that necessarily imply that rapes or homicides have taken place? The Greek Eleusinian rituals included a simulated sacrifice of a child (Burkert, 1983). Interviews with purveyors of ritual (Taussig, 1985; Davis, 1987) reveal reliance on illusions, a sense of theater, intimidation, boasting, trance, and drugs. Until we obtain more information from those orchestrating satanic rituals, we cannot be certain to what extent accounts by observers either in historical or clinical contexts represent witnessed sadistic sexual practices, including homicides, witnessed awe-inspiring theatrical simulations, the effects of drug use and hypnosis or some combination of all of these and other perceptions. ■

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