

## The Alexandrian Tradition

The Alexandrian tradition of Wicca was established in the 1960s by Alex Sanders and his wife Maxine. Originally, Alex claimed to have been initiated by his grandmother when he was seven years old (reference, *The King of the Witches* by June Johns), but later admitted that this was untrue. In fact, he was initiated into a regular Gardnerian coven, by one of Patricia and Arnold Crowther's initiates, a lady by the name of Pat Kopanski.

When Alex began to publicize Wicca, he encountered strong opposition from more traditional members of the Craft. Some saw it as nothing more than a bid by Alex for personal notoriety; others that he was profaning a mystery. Whatever his motivation, the publicity certainly made people aware of his existence; he and Maxine initiated a great many people in the 1960s and 1970s, including Stewart Farrar and Janet Owen.

Janet and Stewart married, and over the past twenty odd years have published several books about Wicca. *What Witches Do*, published in 1971 (written during Stewart's first year as a witch), focuses completely upon the Alexandrian tradition, and remains the best guide to the way in which a typical Alexandrian coven operates. Rare, but perhaps still available in second hand shops, is a record of Janet's initiation, narrated by Stewart, called *A Witch is Born*, which also sheds some light on the traditional Alexandrian coven.

It is, of course, hard to quantify just what makes the essential "Alexandrian Tradition," as covens vary considerably, even within the same culture. I have yet to encounter two covens who work precisely the same way, even from the same line. Generally though, Alexandrian covens focus strongly upon training, which includes areas more generally associated with ceremonial magic, such as Qabalah, Angelic Magic, and Enochian. The typical Alexandrian coven has a hierarchical structure, and generally meets weekly, or at least on Full Moons, New Moons and Festivals.

Most Alexandrian covens will allow non-initiates to attend circles, usually as a "neophyte," who undergoes basic training in circle craft, and completes a number of projects, prior to being accepted by the coven for initiation to 1<sup>st</sup> degree. Some, though not all, Alexandrian covens will also welcome non-initiated "guests" at certain meetings. My own first experience of Wicca was as a guest of an Alexandrian coven.

Alexandrian Wicca uses essentially the same tools and rituals as Gardnerian Wicca, though in some cases, the tools are used differently, and the rituals have been adapted. Another frequent change is to be found in the names of deities and guardians of the quarters. In some ways these differences are merely cosmetic, but in others, there are fundamental differences in philosophy.

That said, over the last thirty years, the two traditions have moved slowly towards each other, and the differences which marked lines of demarcation are slowly fading away. Individual covens certainly continue to maintain different styles and working practices, but it is possible to speak today of "Wicca" encompassing both traditions.