

The Leaper Between

An Historical Study of the Toad-bone Amulet; its forms, functions, and praxes in popular magic.

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CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter I](#) **Toad or frog-bone charms in Pliny's *Natural History***

[I.I.](#) The basic motifs of praxis

[I.II.](#) Orality and Influence before and after Pliny

[Chapter II](#) **The recurrence of the bone as a charm of protection, love or hatred**

[II.I.](#) Agrippa and the reiteration of Pliny's recipes (1509)

[II.II.](#) The Two-bone Charm: the Hook and the Shovel

[II.III.](#) The bone-charm in Scot (1584)

[II.IV.](#) Apocynon: the bone-charm in Topsell (1658)

[II.V.](#) The magical context of the toad 1600-1800

[II.VI.](#) Further romantic uses of the toad-charm in the 1800's

[Chapter III](#) **The toad-bone as a device of control and magical power**

[III.I.](#) The bone as an embodiment of witchcraft power (1800-2000)

[III.II.](#) The bone as a horse-controlling charm

[Conclusion](#)

[Bibliography](#)

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"And the Lord spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt. And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt."

(King James Bible, Exodus, Ch. 8. vs.5-7.)

[Back](#)

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to examine the magical lore, beliefs, and practices involving the 'toad-bone' amulet, a magical object which is literally what its name suggests: the bone of a toad. Throughout Europe and further afield, occult praxes involving this amuletic type have occurred in various forms over a remarkable period of some two thousand years. Its recorded uses begin with Pliny's 1st century recipes for various frog/toad charms for love, protection, and agrarian fertility. Later, during the medieval, renaissance, and early modern periods, forms of toad-derived amulet - a magical bone, stone, or powder - recur widely throughout the lore of magic, alchemy, and witchcraft. The occult prowess connected to the bone form of toad-derived amulet reaches an apotheosis in Great Britain during the 19th and 20th centuries, when the bone is used in a ritual of magical self-initiation and becomes a veritable embodiment of control and power over the natural world. Within this historical span, the toad-bone amulet assumes a variety of roles and meanings, interweaving, and frequently tangling, several different strands of folklore and magico-religious praxis. The purpose of this essay is to unravel this history and attempt to set it in context within the far broader field of European and, where appropriate, world-wide occult praxis. A focused study of the toad-bone amulet has thus far not been attempted by scholars working in the History of Magic. In many respects this essay represents an initial foray into the topic.

The role of batrachia (frogs and toads) in European magic is extensive, particularly in relation to early modern witchcraft. One has only to examine 15th-19th century pictorial and literary portrayals of the Witches' Sabbath, or the accounts of witches' familiars, to affirm the close associations between frogs, toads, witches, the Devil, and practices of maleficia in general. However, as our opening quotation from Exodus suggests, the relations between batrachia and magical praxis are far older. From this early biblical quotation, one might hypothesise that the associations between batrachia and vengeful/malefic sorcery are rooted in an ancient Judaic/Middle Eastern religious milieu. This hypothesis is compounded by the early Christian linkage between batrachia and evil itself, as can be read in Revelations, Ch.16. v.13-14. Here we see '*unclean spirits like frogs*' as the very envoys of diabolic power and apocalyptic miracle-working.

That these biblically-forged links lent impetus to the medieval and early modern associations between batrachia and witchcraft in Europe is probable. However, such associations may actually be rooted in a far older strata of religious ideas than those of the biblical context, as we may see from an examination of Zoroastrian scriptures. Therein the associations between the toad and the evil sorcerous being, Ahriman, are such that the toad is Ahriman's first and last physical form in the whole scope of historical time. Given the time-span and geographic scope for these few examples, it is possible to detect an embedded 'theological' view of batrachia as demonic and negative creatures. How far such a belief was held at a popular level, outside theological and textual contexts, is difficult to ascertain, although our present study does provide some indications. Even with local variations being considered, we can surmise that wheresoever read and heard, scriptural views would no doubt have compounded negative associations within popular and learned thought alike, and in terms of biblical influence, we must bear this factor in mind when later analysing the data of our topic within the early modern European witchcraft and cunning-folk practices (c.f. Kieckhefer, 1976).

We must also comprehend that the negative characterisation of batrachia has an opposite side. It is likely that far from being perceived in a wholly malefic way, batrachia were related from very early times in both European and Near Middle Eastern contexts to good fortune, fertility, and weather magic (see Gimbutas, 1989, pp. 251-55; and Lurker, 1980, pp. 52-3). An interesting example of benign significance is the ancient Egyptian association between frogs and primeval fertility. This exceedingly old idea endured well into the Late Period of Egypt, when the frog was adopted by early Coptic Christians as a symbol of rebirth, often with the epithet of Christ: '*I am the Resurrection*' (Lurker, *ibid.*).

As we can see, in different contexts batrachia have been used to symbolise extremes of good and evil, even becoming identified with both Christ and the Devil; a potent duality for any symbol. On deeper consideration, one may postulate a view that frogs and toads, as creatures of curiously metamorphic nature, have been utilised simply as 'totems of magical power'. As such, they are ambiguous creatures, embodying a liminal territory, not only between the elements of water and earth, but between good and evil - thus equally able to embody extremes of benefic and malefic influence.

From a survey of world mythology and folklore, it can indeed be seen that the connections between batrachia and magical practices (for both good and ill) are innumerable, ranging from the 175th spell in the Middle Egyptian Coffin texts, the Atharva Veda formulae for causing rain, 17th century European toad-doctoring, to the modern East Anglian practices of the so-called 'Toadmen'. On one hand, this may perhaps seem unremarkable; the pharmacopoeiae of occult systems, when and wheresoever they are operative, take in the natural world as a whole. As such the repeated inclusion of a wide-ranging animal species is inevitable. Nonetheless, the repeated links between batrachia and magic are notable, particularly where recurrence features consistent modes of ritual praxis and a continuity in the form of the derived talisman, indicating what might be termed a nascent form of tradition. As will be shown, this potential is catalysed and nascency changes to emergence: the toad-magic recipes of antiquity become a focus in the early modern period for a self-conscious and autonomic

practice of ‘witching’. This particular aspect of the amulet’s history is of particular importance to the study of early modern witchcraft, indicating (at least in a British context) one particular strand of popular cunning folk magic that has endured with remarkable resilience and adaptability until the present-day.

Given the two thousand year span for our specific topic - the toad-bone amulet, it is inevitable for its significances to be embedded in a sprawling complex of occult lore. Where relevant, aspects of this broader field will be drawn in to the present discussion. Nonetheless, our attention will from here-on focus principally on the context of European magical lore and the task of delineating the specific pathways of the toad-bone tradition.

Before proceeding, it must be stated that the uses and forms of the toad-bone amulet do not follow a clear linear progression through time. Its uses as a healing charm, a love charm, an animal-controlling amulet, and so forth, recur and overlap. Furthermore, the apparent distinction between its forms (either as a bone - singular, double, or multiple, a stone or jewel, or even a powder) is a matter of curious inconsistency in the historical record, with the forms at times indistinguishable and at other times clearly distinct. Adding to this complexity, the profusion of data for some periods and the sparsity in others presents difficulties, and at times leaves the search for conclusions outstanding. Nonetheless, a continuity in praxis can be seen.

In order to establish a high degree of specificity, the present essay hereafter deals solely with the ‘bone’ form of the amulet, making only such comments about the more well-known toad-stone or *crepaudina* as are needful. To assist in clarification I have divided the essay into sections and sub-sections dealing with thematic contexts of the amulet, its variant recipes and functions. The overall aims of the study are to delineate the history of this singular object, to demonstrate the various ways in which it has operated as a focus of power, and to impart a sense of how this object, as an element of ancient magical praxis, has endured, accrued meanings, and accumulated significances. In many ways, the aim is to show the longevity of a ritual pattern, irrespective of the shifting idioms of belief in which its actuations have been situated.

[Back](#)

I -Toad or frog-bone charms in Pliny’s *Natural History*

[Back](#)

I.I. The basic motifs of praxis

As we have already indicated, the earliest references to toad-bone charms occur in Pliny’s *Natural History*, XXXII XVIII (circa 77 AD). Amidst various magical prescriptions, Pliny relates the wonders of the ‘Rubetae’ or red ‘bramble-frogs’. He describes these as the largest of frogs and identifies them with the so-called ‘toads of the ancients’. Aside from

magico-medicinal recipes which relate the use of the frog's right and left eyes for healing purposes, Pliny gives a version of a weather-related formula, a form of which also occurs in Apuleius (Armstrong, 1979, op.cit.). This formula speaks of placing a toad inside an earthenware pot and burying it in a field in order to avert storms. Although this does not concern the bone-charm explicitly, the formula contains elements relevant to later bone-orientated praxes. In fact, from this formula we can extract three initial motifs, or recurring themes of bone-charm praxis; namely : 1) the internment of the toad in a vessel; 2) the burial of the interned toad; and 3) the toad in relation to weather magic.

In another recipe (Opie and Tatem, 1989, p.409), Pliny relates that '*By throwing into boiling water a small bone.... found in their [the toads'] right side, the water will immediately cool.... this bone may be found byletting ants eat away the flesh*'. This recipe provides us with three further motifs which recur throughout the later history of the amulet: 4) the method of obtaining the bone is to flense the toad's flesh by letting ants eat it away; 5) the bone's power is connected to water; and 6) the bone's power goes against the quality of the water; in this case against its temperature.

Pliny further relates that: '*another bone... has the property of assuaging the fury of dogs, and, if put into the drink, of conciliating love and ending discord.... Worn, too, as an amulet, it acts as an aphrodisiac, we are told.*' (Opie and Tatem, ibid.). Again, this recipe provides us with important motifs: 7) a toad-bone charm can be used to control animals; in this case, dogs; 8) the bone can be put into drink; 9) the bone can be worn as an amulet; and 10) it can be used to change relations between people, ending disharmony and promoting love.

In each of these recipes one further motif, much recurrent in later praxis, is 'silence': no words, incantations, or prayers accompany the use of the bone amulet. Exceptions to this do occur in the modern period (after about 1850), particularly in the context of love-orientated charms (*vide infra*).

The eleven motifs here extracted are emphasised precisely because they form the basic components found intermingled and modified in most of the later medieval and early modern recipes involving the toad-derived amulet, whether it be a bone, a stone, or a powder in form. Whilst in many sources we find these forms distinct, the praxes for obtaining them repeatedly share the same elements. In terms of the bone-charm specifically, we shall see combinations of these motifs, again and again

[Back](#)

I.II. Orality and Influence before and after Pliny

Pliny's own source for his toad recipes can, at this stage in research, only be speculated upon, but it is almost certain that many of the later authors (Topsell, Agrippa, etc.) were inspired by Pliny's *Natural History* in their own discussions of batrachian formulae. This being said, the likelihood that the Roman author Pliny, the Greek Apuleius, and later European authors drew independently upon a common stock of widespread orally-

transmitted folk magic cannot be dismissed. Absence of such recipes from the intervening textual sources do not constitute evidence of absence from actuality. Furthermore, since Pliny was only recording charms that were already in popular usage, the existence of a far earlier group of associated charms is certain. In this respect the Ptolemaic Egyptian, Aramaic, and other possible sources must be investigated. Given Pliny's military sojourn in Lower Germany, circa 46 A.D., a Germanic source for his magical recipes might also be postulated (Tyson, 1995, pp. 822-3).

For a thousand years after Pliny, references to the use of batrachia in European magic are scant, being largely confined to Anglo-saxon Leech-books and early accounts of malefic sorcery (see Meaney, 1981, p. 259; Pollington, 2000, *passim.*). Explicit references to the toadstone begin to proliferate from the 1200's onwards and references to the bone-charm after the 1500's. It is however probable that these charms persisted throughout the first millennium, their *recorded* usage only falling into abeyance, or as yet remaining undiscovered by research. Our principal indication of such persistence is the sheer geographic spread of toad-bone lore and cognate ritual praxes from the medieval period onwards (*vide infra*). Although we could surmise a widespread embeddedness of the charm and its variants in oral culture and popular magical usage, conclusions about the early context as yet require further research.

[Back](#)

II - The recurrence of the bone as a charm of protection, love, or hatred

[Back](#)

II. I. Agrippa and the reiteration of Pliny's recipes (1509)

The recipes of Pliny are repeated with great clarity and but small embellishment amidst the plethora of Natural Magical formulae in Agrippa's '*Books of Occult Philosophy*', drafted circa 1509 and first published in Germany in 1531. We read: '*And Pliny reports that there is a red toad that lives in briars, and brambles, and is full of sorceries, and doth wonderful things: for the little bone which is in his left side, being cast into cold water, makes it presently very hot, by which also the rage of dogs is restrained, and their love is procured, if it be put in drink; and if it be bound to anyone, it stirreth up lust. On the contrary, the little bone which is on the right side, makes hot water cold, and that it can never be hot again, unless that be taken out, also it is said to cure quartans if it be bound to the sick in a snake's skin, as also all other fevers, and restrain love, and lust.*' (Trans. Freake, 1651).

The effect of the German text and its English translation on popular beliefs in toad amulets is difficult to ascertain, but it is probable that throughout Europe, particularly in Germany, Holland, and Britain his accounts would have compounded popular practices already firmly in place. Whilst the encyclopaedic work of Agrippa undoubtedly contributed to the 16/17th century resurgence in ritual magic, his emphasis on Natural

Magical formulae would also have breached the apparent divide between learned ritualism and the pragmatic spellcraft of popular folk magical techniques. In terms of our specific topic, the work of Agrippa may very well have assisted the spread of notions about the toad and its magical uses, however his mention of such is slight in comparison with the other contents of his work. Nonetheless, the clarity of his summary from Pliny does underline certain facets of toad-amulet lore which are to be seen later in a more unified form, namely the ability to incite love, to heal, and to protect.

[Back](#)

II.II. The Two-bone Charm: the Hook and the Shovel

Of note in Agrippa's reiteration of Pliny is the emphasis placed on the opposition between two magical bones - one for inciting and one for restraining. This is a notable point which is sometimes seen elsewhere. Thompson (1908), for example, cites in a footnote (p. lxiv), a recipe nearly identical to that seen in Pliny, but as recorded in Indian magical praxis (in *Folklore in Mossoul*, 1907, 287, No.59): *'The bones of a frog, buried for seven days and then exhumed, would, if cast into water, automatically show themselves good for either love or hatred; if they sank they would form the base of a charm for hate, but if they floated they were to aid lovers.'*

G. E. Evans (1960, p.247-8), also cites (paraphrasing Ghose, p.151, no date) an Indian charm using two bones, which is again useful to compare with Pliny's recipe: *'...the frog was wrapped in a piece of white linen and given astrological benedictions. It was then put on an ant hill at sunset. The ants ate the flesh and left the bones, and two bones were then kept. One of these was to hook the object desired - the lover in this case; the other to reject him.'* Evans goes on to give the anatomical specifics of the two bones: *'This latter bone was called the shovel, and is probably the supra-scapula of the frog. The hook or wish-bone..... is without much doubt the ilium, the chief bone on the frog's pelvic girdle'*. Of note in this version is the aspect of *'astrological benedictions'*, indicating that the practice had to a great extent become firmly embedded in its Indian context.

In 'The Golden Bough' (Vol.II, p.345), J.G. Frazer relates the use of a nigh identical two bone charm extant in Bohemia circa 1864: *'You catch a frog on St. George's Day, wrap it in a white cloth, and put it in an anthill after sunset or about midnight. The creature croaks terribly while the ants are gnawing the flesh from its bones. When silences reigns again, you will find nothing left of the frog, but one little bone in the shape of a hook and another little bone in the shape of a shovel. Take the hook-shaped bone, go to the girl of your choice, and hook her dress with the bone, and she will fall over head and ears in love with you. If you afterwards tire of her, you have only to touch her with the shovel-shaped bone, and her affection will vanish as quickly as it came.'* A structurally identical formula is also given in a Romany text entitled *Zingara Fortune-teller* (Anon., 1901, p.18).

Of particular significance in these recipes is the consistently dual function ascribed to the bones, as well as the anatomical precision regarding which bone attracts and which

repels. The method of selecting the bones changes, but the use for either love or repulsion remains. Notably, this twofold nature occurs in recipes which use two bones with separate functions, as well as in those which prescribe a single bone with both functions. During the 19/20th centuries, recipes advocating a single bone become the most frequent, thus compounding the ambiguity of the charm by uniting dual functions in a single object. A further point of note is the recurrent use of a 'white linen cloth'. Although such a cloth would pragmatically allow ants to pass freely to-and-fro, it seems from the recipe in Scot, as well as the Nevern case (both treated below), that the cloth also has a symbolic function.

[Back](#)

II.III. The bone-charm in Scot (1584)

After Agrippa, our next source for the use of the bone-charm is Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584. Therein (VI VII) we read: '*A frog's bones, the flesh being eaten off round about with ants, whereof some will swim, and some will sinke: those that sinke, being hanged up in a white linnen cloth, ingender love, but if a man be touched therewith, hate is bred thereby.*'

Reading this one might assume Scot to have derived his recipe directly from Pliny. However, Scot indicates that this is an account of practices drawn from popular magical usage; how widespread it was in or beyond England we are not told. The similarities with Pliny's version are clear: the use of ants to flense, the use of water to catalyse the magical capacity of the bone, and the ability of the bone to effect the relations between people. Differences in Scot's version focus on the agency of the water as a selective mechanism and upon the dual use of the same bones for both love and hatred. The sinking/swimming motif, coupled with the potential for venereal harmony or disharmony, place the batrachian amulet in an ambiguous position - itself being neither good nor bad, but equally able to cause benefic or malefic results. Scot's version, in its use of 'bones' plural, all with dual functions, is a midpoint version of the recipe, lying between the two-bone and single-bone charms. Given that the complex of praxes surrounding the bone-amulet are mobile in the currents of oral culture, it is inevitable that variations of the basic motifs will arise. Nonetheless, the basic ritual pattern, being based solely on a series of easily remembered actions, remains the consistent thread.

[Back](#)

II.IV. Apocynon: the bone-charm in Topsell (1658)

After Scot, we next encounter the bone-charm in Topsell's bestiary *The Book of Living Creatures* (Vol. II, *The History of Serpents*, pp. 726-727, 1658). Topsell relates, in his section 'Of the Toad': '*...it is said that there is a little bone growing in their sides, that hath a vertue to drive away Dogs from him that beareth it about him, and is therefore called Apocynon.*'

This brief recipe recounts Pliny's original formula of protection from canine anger, however Topsell - who is consistently diligent to state the reputable authorities from whence his information is drawn - does not provide a source for the bone charm. Another source, most probably oral testimony, may thereby be inferred. Topsell's account is also notable in that it is the sole source for an actual name of the bone-charm. The word he gives - *Apocynon*, literally means 'dog-bane'; also the name of a poisonous plant (*Apocynum*). Of further interest is Topsell's detailed discussion of the toad-stone amulet, in which he cites several notable authorities and their opinions upon it. Of particular significance is his citation of Brasavolus' merging of stone and bone imagery, showing that the lore associated with different toad-derived amulets was by no means consistent or clearly defined. What seems evident is that the histories of the toad-stone and bone amulets are not wholly separable, but inform each other to form a single narrative - one facet of which is our present concern.

[Back](#)

II. V. The magical contexts of the Toad 1600-1800

After Topsell's account, little information about the bone-charm emerges again until the 19th century. In the intervening period the extant material focuses more upon the stone form of the toad-derived charm. In this context the toad-amulet maintains its protective powers and partakes of the broader magical topic of bezoars, or animal-derived stones, thereby drawing in another complex strand to the accumulating body of lore. Despite the protective and beneficent powers attributed to the toad-stone, the malefic powers of the creature are greatly compounded during this intervening period by the increasing associations between batrachia and witchcraft. This is particularly evident in the frequent accounts of toads and frogs as witches' familiars in Great Britain. (The famous 1662 Aulderne case of the toad-drawn plough being a notable exemplar.)

To a great extent, it appears that throughout the period of the witch trials toads became synonymous with maleficia and popular magic; references to toads in relation to the Sabbath, the Devil's salve, and diabolism are widespread throughout the literature (Kittredge, 1929, *passim*). Of particular note are the references to a form of witchcraft self-initiation (see Davies, 1999, p.178), in which one attends the service of communion, but retains the consecrated host until out of church. Once outside, one feeds the host to the first creature one meets. This is invariably a toad, which sometimes - but not always - is the Devil himself embodied. One might dismiss such a tale as another of the theological fantasies about supposed witch-activities were it not for certain facts: references to its usage range extensively through the demonological and folklore literature of Europe; references do not always mention the Devil, merely the feeding of the host to a toad; and its apparent use extends to the early 20th century. Of particular interest is the case of this ritual recorded by Murray in a letter circa 1954. Therein she tells that how she was informed by a local headmaster in the Nevern area of Wales about a reputed 'witch' family who were believed to have used this practice at the beginning of the 20th century. The area and date are notable. As found by Worsley in 1968 (2000, pers. comm.), memories of the toad-bone ritual (along with a number of other popular

magical customs) were very much alive in the Nevern area throughout the 20th century (*vide infra*). During the summer of 2000, I conducted research in this area and found that at least one family was still strongly associated with witching powers (Howard, pers. comm). That this type of toad-related witchcraft initiation was still believed in and reported as extant as part of local folklore is notable. Whilst different in form to the bone-orientated witchcraft initiations which are examined below, it is striking that of the three extant examples of a witchcraft or magical self-induction rite used amongst British cunning-folk or supposed witches, two of the rites involve the same creature (see also III.I). Given the well-attested use of the toad or frog as a familiar or cursing agent in British folk-magic (Kittredge, op.cit.; Davies, op.cit.), we must entertain the likelihood that such self-induction rituals as that of the 'toad and host' or toad-bone were far more prevalent than previously thought.

During the same period as the witch-trials we also find the general magico-medicinal use of batrachia prevalent throughout Europe, particularly in connection to plague-associated amulets (Baldwin, op.cit.). This pervades the popular traditions of magic and emerges most distinctly during the 17-19th centuries in the form of 'toad-doctors'. In this context, parts of batrachian anatomy (legs, heart, eyes, etc.) were placed in pouches and worn as charms to absorb, cure or avert illness. Toad-doctors, being predominantly male specialists in toad-augmented healing magic, are also documented by Davies (1999) in 19th century South-east England. The data treating of this class of cunning-man/healer show clearly how closely the animal species was associated with curing in general and with the popular traditions of cunning-craft magic. The fact that the toad could be identified with both medicine and maleficia during the same historical period compounds the overall ambiguity of the creature itself, but betrays the general sense of occult potency with which it was thought to be endowed.

[Back](#)

II.VI. Further romantic uses of the toad-charm in the 1800's

Returning to the subject of the toad-charm as a romantic spell, we find a notable variant amongst the 19th century formulae of the Miller's Word Society in North-east Scotland (Singer, 1865). In this context, we find a spell identical to one given in Albertus Magnus' *Book of Secrets*, in which a frog's tongue is used to reveal a women's inmost thoughts and feelings. Whilst not a bone-charm, it is notable because of its historical location, its controlling character, and the connection it implies to the later use of toad or frog charms amongst the society derived from the Miller's Word, namely the Scottish 'Society of the Horseman Word', and thereafter to the East Anglian practices of horsemen (*vide infra* III.II).

Two explicit examples of the bone-charm for romantic purposes can be found in Addy (1895; cited in Hole, ed. 1961, pp.167-8); one from Derbyshire and the other from Yorkshire. The latter example is as follows: '*...an East Yorkshire girl... put a pin-struck frog into a box and left it there until it was dead and withered. Then she removed a small*

key-shaped bone from the carcass, and secretly fastened it to the coat of the man she wished to marry, saying,

"I do not want to hurt this frog,

But my true lover's heart to turn,

Wishing that he no rest may find,

Till he come to me and speak his mind."

This particular recipe clearly resembles our earlier formulae, particularly the 1864 Bohemian recipe given by Frazer (op.cit.). Here we see the continued themes of the bone as an agent for gaining love, as well as for controlling and changing relations with people. Other examples of this particular usage can be found in Romany lore, in *Zingara Fortune-teller* (op.cit.) and Leland's *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling* (1962, p.119). What is unusual about the Yorkshire example is its use of a spoken charm, a characteristic which emerges very rarely.

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As we have seen, the toad-derived amulet can be used both to attract objects of desire and repel objects of fear; to alter one's relations with women, men, and dogs; and to affect the temperature of water. In Leland's *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-telling*, we can even read of an account, involving the familiar motifs of flensing, ants, vessel, and burial, which relates the use of the bone-charm to assist in selling merchandise (1962, p.26). We can also compare the examples of so-called 'toad-frog' bone-charms given in Harry Middleton Hyatt's voluminous books on 19/20th century African-American Hoodoo, which relate the amulet's use in gambling magic (1935, Vol. 1, p.561).

Having clarified the powers of the amulet for various kinds of attraction and repulsion, it is the bone's uses for horse and other animal manipulation, as well as its involvement in the self-conscious acquisition of magical power, to which I shall now turn. It should be noted that the divide between categories of usage is herein employed merely to assist in the presentation of data; in reality multiple uses overlap and shift from case to case. Despite this shift in application and the gradual elaboration of the charm's powers, the essential vocabulary of the amulet's ritual motifs appears constant amid its various accounts. In this sense, the longevity and resilience of the amulet lies in the enduring nature of its rituality - in the fact of its formula being an easily memorised and orally-transmitted set of prescribed actions.

[Back](#)

III - The toad-bone as a device of control and magical power

[Back](#)

III.I. The bone as an embodiment of witchcraft power 1800-2000

As we have observed, the toad is a creature with long associations with diabolic power and witchcraft. It would seem that sometime during the late 18th century or early 19th century, the diabolic associations of batrachia in general merged with the ritual praxes associated with the bone. Previously, (at least judging from the extant sources) the bone is purely an amulet, with neither divine or diabolic significance, nor any particularly religious overtones in its magical operation. During the 1800's this changes, most notably in East Anglia. The practice of obtaining the toad-bone, whilst retaining its flensing, ant-hill, vessel, burial, and water motifs, draws in elements redolent of formal ritual magic and malefic witchcraft. Furthermore, it appears that the ritual's solitary performance nonetheless gave individual practitioners a kind of 'generic association' within a class/type of cunning-craft, each practitioner becoming a self-acknowledged 'Toad-witch' or 'Toad Man'.

In the following examples of toad-bone praxis, both amongst cunning-folk and horsemen (vide III.II), we see the emergence of a fully developed ritual for obtaining magical power. The basic motifs of the original formulae from Pliny are still in evidence, but the components of his separate recipes connect together (in oral testimony and actuation), and are viewed as a kind of initiatory process by its practitioners. In many cases, the presence of explicitly diabolic components mark off this category of the toad-bone's usage as distinct. In previous accounts, the bone-amulet is part of a much wider body of popular magical lore, but in our present context, the bone's use becomes the identifying mark or rite of passage for a distinctive popular magical tradition in and of itself.

In Haggard (ed., 1935, pp. 13-14) we read the following account of the full toad-bone ritual. This version is recounted by an old Norfolk poacher, who states that he had learnt the charm from his grandmother, a person who was quite evidently a typical rural wise-woman. The indications given in the text for the ages of the poacher and his grandmother probably locate the grandmother's version of the charm approximately around 1850. Of particular note in this account is the explicit use of the term '*witch craft*'. It appears that the poacher is simply relating the grandmother's autonymic employment of the term. We read:

'There was one charm she told me of wich was practiced wen any one wanted to get comand over there fellow creaturs. Those that wished to cast the spell must serch until they found a walking toad. It was a toad with a yellow ring round its neck, I have never seen one of them but I have been told they can be found in some parts of the Cuntry. Wen they found the toad they must put it in a perforated box, and bury it in a Black Ant's nest. Wen the Ants have eaten all the flesh away from the bones it must be taken up, and the person casting the spell must carry the bones to the edge of a running stream the midnight of Saint Marks Night, and throw them in the water. All will sink but one single bone and that will swim up stream. When they have taken out the bone the Devell would give them the power of Witch craft, and they could use that power over both Man and Animales.'

The resemblance to earlier versions is evident in the repeated motifs of internment, flensing, ant-hill, bones sinking/swimming, and wordless action. In the connection to water, one can sense echoes of Scot's recipe with some bones falling and some bones floating; only the choice of bones kept for use has reversed and now the water is actively flowing. The truly startling point of difference is that the bone is transformed from a simple amulet into a sign that one has received the power of 'witchcraft' directly from the Devil himself. The bone becomes a token of the infamous 'diabolic pact' (see Clark, 1999; Kierkhefer, op.cit. in re. pact).

Another example of an 18th century rural wise woman using the ritual for the explicit purposes of gaining power was published in the *Eastern Counties Magazine* (1901). Here we read of one Tilly Baldry, a wise-woman living in the area of Huntingtoft, and held in both fear and apparent admiration for being a witch. As the article graphically relates, her magical skills included the ability to make her adulterous husband walk home backwards sixteen miles from his mistress' house; the power to curse the mistress to her death (despite the efforts of another cunning-man to save her); and also the ability to stop milk turning to butter. How she became a witch is related thus:

'You ketch a hoppin' toad and carry that in your bowsom till that's rotted right away to the back-boon. Then you take and hold that over running water at midnight till the Devil he come to you and pull you over the water... and then you be a witch and you kin dew all mander of badness to people and hev power over 'em.'

The commonplace association in East Anglia between the toad-bone ritual and the possession of witchcraft power is indicated by the fact that the very word for 'bewitchment' or the practise of enchantment in Norfolk was 'tudding'; lit. 'toading' (Porter, 1969, pp.50-51). In the *Folklore Record* (II, pp.207-9) of 1879, it is interesting to note that a man charged with assault, excused himself by declaring that the woman assaulted was a witch who had bespelled him by means of a 'walking toad' (Kittredge, 1929). A 'walking toad' is a Natterjack, the type of batrachia most commonly recommended for the bone ritual in the East Anglian accounts (see Evans, 1960, 1962).

Other references to the bone-ritual being employed to gain witchcraft power bring to the formula an element of competition between the Devil and the would-be witch. In *Lincolnshire* magazine (1936, No.24), for example, we are informed that one must (after the customary ant-hill flensing): *'take the bones and go down to a good stream of runnin' water at midnight an' throw the bones i' the stream. All the bones but one will go down stream, an' that one as wont go downstream is the breast-bone. Now, you must get 'old of this 'ere bone afore the Devil gets it, an if you get it an' keep it allus by you - in your pocket, or wear it - then you can witch; as well as that, you'll be safe from bein' witched yourself.'*

In other references (*vide infra*) the competition occurs later, in a kind of wrestling match between the practitioner and Devil. In all accounts of the ritual which feature this element, the bone must be kept in the practitioner's possession - no matter what the Devil does. The idea of getting the bone before the Devil does, or of beating the Devil in a

wrestling bout, does not recall the customary subservience of the human party as seen in the usual idea of the diabolic pact (c.f. Seligmann, *passim.*; de Givry, *op.cit.*). The idea of overcoming the Devil seems more in common with the ritual magic of grimoire texts, such as *Theurgia Goetia* or *Key of Solomon*, wherein demonic entities are controlled by the practitioner. This particular feature is notable, and leads one to wonder whether the ‘toad and host’ initiation procedure has been interpreted correctly as an act of profanation; surely both rituals indicate an attempt to subdue and dominate the Devil. However, in the context of grimoire-magic, devils and demons are subdued by the secret names of God and the angels. If, as suspected, the competitive element indicates a subjugation of the Devil to the Toad Man’s will without recourse to names of God or such like, it implies a different mode of understanding than the normative Christian ‘Good-Evil’ dichotomy in their magico-religious world-view. Whilst we may make this point, the evidence is ambiguous - some versions of the bone-ritual indicate a domination of the satanic, other versions explicitly acknowledge the pact, and other accounts are devoid of any such elements. In all cases, one can only consider what the actual practitioner reports. In many of the East Anglian accounts (e.g. Porter, *op.cit.* pp.56-57), as in the numerous African-American accounts of the structurally identical black cat-bone ritual given in Hyatt (*op. cit.* p.74, no. 254), the practitioners themselves willingly acknowledge the pact. This in itself is an important feature of the bone-ritual’s place in the history of witchcraft, for very rarely do we find the diabolic pact or the practice of witchcraft openly acknowledged by its human parties - both are consistently crimes or sins of which one is accused pejoratively (c.f. Hutton, 1999).

A particularly interesting account of the ritual involving the diabolic pact/competition motifs, derives from Nevern in Pembrokeshire, Wales; the locality mentioned formerly in connection to the ‘Toad and Host’ form of witch-induction. In personal discussion with the broadcaster and folklorist, Roger Worsley (2000), I was told how he had in 1968/9 conducted some research in the Nevern area relating to a Neolithic burial chamber and had come across the bone-ritual by chance. The cromlech is known locally as Trellyffeint, meaning ‘Toad-town’. This curious name derives from a legend about the chieftain supposedly buried there, a matter which is recorded by Gerald de Barri (Giraldus Cambrensis) circa 1188. Barri’s account is worth quoting in full, because of the evident similarities to our ritual, as well to the recipe given in Scot (*op.cit.*):

‘In our time, a young man [named Sisellus], during a severe illness, suffered as violent a persecution from Toads as if the reptiles of the whole province had come to be in agreement. And though destroyed by his nurses and friends, they increased again on all sides in infinite numbers, like hydras’ heads. His attendants, both friends and strangers, being wearied out, he was drawn up in a kind of bag, into a high tree stripped of its leaves and shred. Nor was he there safe from his venomous enemies, for they crept up the tree in great numbers, and consumed him, even unto the very bones...’ (cited in Worsley, 1980)

The Neolithic mound of Trellyffeint is evidently far older than Cambrensis’ account, and indeed one must consider that the tale he tells could itself date from before 1188. To one familiar with the toad-bone ritual the account is striking indeed; it almost reads as a

human-orientated version of it, with the boy Sisellus taking the place of the flensed toad, and the attacking toads taking the place of the ants. The *'kind of bag'* strung up a tree recalls the white cloth mentioned by Scot, and the phrase *'unto the very bones'* seems a direct allusion. If a connection does exist with the toad-bone ritual, as Worsley suggests, the dating of Cambrensis' account is important for our historical understanding of the practice. It is curious to note that local legend also relates that the nearby farmhouse kept a black marble toad on its mantel-shelf until the 19th century to commemorate the boy's untimely demise.

Although the tale of Sisellus has structural and symbolic similarities with the bone ritual, the connection between the cromlech itself and the ritual is far more direct. In further discussion, Worsley related that when he visited the Trelyffaint farmhouse in 1968 to enquire about the cromlech and its naming legend, he was told by the old farmer that although he didn't know why the site was called *'Toad's town'*, he did know *'how you became a Toad Man'*. The farmer's account is as follows:

'You caught and pinned a toad.... then you pinned the body over an ants' nest until the flesh had gone, leaving only the bones. These you took to the Caman brook, the little stream which flows through Nevern, and threw them in one by one. Eventually... one bone would turn and swim up against the stream, screaming as it went - this bone you caught and carried about in your pocket for three days and nights, returning to Trelyffaint tomb each night to walk round it three times, widdershins. At the third time, the Devil would try to get the bone from you - but if you survived that ordeal, you were then a Toad Man, and had power over animals.' (published in Worsley, 1987).

The farmer relating the account of the ritual stated that although he had not performed the ritual himself, his father had, circa 1890. Apparently his father had performed the rite in order to get power specifically over cattle, indicating that the ritual was known as a way of gaining power in general, but could be used for particular personal objectives.

The account is notable for several reasons. Its explicit reference to the Devil, although placed in a combative context, nonetheless affirms that in some way the power gained had a satanic connotation. Also significant is the autonymic use of the generic term - *'Toad Man'* - for the ritual's practitioner - indicating that at least a sense of implicit *'association'*, or of belonging to a *'type'* of magical practice, existed for those undertaking the rite.

Another point of note is the *'scream'* of the bone in its upstream movement. This phenomenon becomes a distinct motif in many of the 19/20th century East Anglian and African-American accounts of the bone-rite (Hyatt, op.cit.), and is again consistently associated with the work of the Devil. One is reminded of the scream associated with the uprooting of the mandrake in European magical lore. Considering that the Bible was a frequent resource for cunning-folk charms and textual passages (see Haggard, op.cit. Ch.2.), one possible explanation for the bone's supposed scream is the passage Ezekiel 37. 5-14 (the first historical mention of physical resurrection). In verse 7. we read: *'...as I*

prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.' (c.f. the account by Albert Love, cited below).

Also significant is the fact that this is one of the rare accounts where locational specifics are clearly stated, i.e. Caman brook and Trelyffaint cromlech. It seems reasonable to postulate that the cromlech was used in the ritual because of the site's association with otherworldly powers in general. Alongside the account of the bone-rite, Worsley also collected other tales of the cromlech's use in local magical practices. Interestingly, the site is reputed to have been used by Toadmen, plural - a significant point which will be dealt with below. One might consider that its use for the bone-rite was somehow rooted in association with the Sisellus legend, simply because many other similar cromlechs (without such legends) also exist nearby, and yet solely the Trelyffaint site is utilised.

From the accounts we have looked at in this section, it is evident that the toad-bone ritual takes the basic amulet-charm of previous centuries to an apotheosis, transforming its objective from a simple romantic/protective charm to a rite of passage into diabolically-derived witchcraft power. In the next section (III.II) I shall give examples of the rite amongst horsemen's magic, a context which overlaps with that of cunning-craft specialism, but is marked off by its gender and trade specificity. It is finally worthwhile citing two other references to cunning-craft usage, as these derive from the last fifty years of the 20th century and emphasise the fact of the practice's resilience.

G. E. Evans (1960, p.247) mentions hearing an account of the rite from Stowmarket, Suffolk, in which the purpose of gaining the bone was to obtain the power of 'wart-charming'. Although this is the only account of the rite practised explicitly for this purpose, such a skill was pervasively attributed to cunning-folk, including our aforementioned Norfolk poacher's grandmother (Haggard, op. cit.). Nonetheless, it is an example of the rite's power being bent towards an individual's predilection.

Another example was learned in the course of personal correspondence with the popular occult author E. J. Jones (circa 1999). Therein I was informed that he once knew a local farmer in Sussex who had practised the ritual to induct himself into 'witchcraft'. The man in question used the bone as part of his farm-work, but also in his role as a leader of a modern magical group. This is notable as it shows the passing of the practice from the sphere of traditional farm-magic to modern ritual occultism.

As we have seen, cunning-craft usage of the toad-bone ritual seems to emphasise the aspect of power over things in general; any specifics, such as wart-charming, cow-charming, or correcting an adulterous husband, are individually orientated by each practitioner in isolation. As will be shown, this specificity becomes trade-centred in the use of the rite amongst horsemen.

[Back](#)

III.II. The bone as a horse-controlling charm

The use of the toad or frog-bone charm in its full ritual context is most famously associated with 19/20th century horsemen, particularly in the East Anglian counties of Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. Our main source-materials for this context are the works of the folklorist George Ewart Evans, who meticulously recorded the rural lore and farming customs of these areas from the early-to-mid 1900's. Additional research compounds many of Evans' findings, but also shows that the bone-charm was known for its horse-controlling powers in other areas, such as Wiltshire (Whitlock, 1992), Cornwall (Thomas, 1954), Pembrokeshire (Worsley, op. cit.), and North-east Scotland (Singer, 1865; McPherson, 1929). In almost all of the recorded instances of the ritual amongst horsemen, solitary performance is the hallmark of its initiatory context - much as it is amongst cunning-craft practitioners. Whilst the actual practice of the ritual is consistently solitary, the knowledge of the bone's power and of its use by an individual 'Toadman' was often situated in the collective initiatory or semi-secret context of a horseman's guild. In this latter sense, the bone's use appears to have existed both amongst members of the Scottish 'Society of the Horseman's Word' (being located in Orkney, Aberdeen, Perth, Ayrshire, Moray Firth regions) and amongst members of the derived guild, simply called 'The Horseman's Society' (located in the Midlands, East Anglian, and South-western counties). Whilst knowledge of the bone ritual occurs within the guild contexts of horsemanship, it also appears that the term 'Toadman' marked off a practitioner as a member of a distinct category of horsemen - possibly in a similar way to the manner in which a toad-bone using wise-woman was categorised as having 'power' in a specific way.

In terms of the East Anglian context, Evans provides us with numerous oral testimonies and reports of the full induction ritual (1960, Chs. 21, 23; 1966, Ch.2). Some of these accounts have the element of the diabolic pact, others are more medico-magical in orientation, recommending that the bone be 'dressed' in pungent oils in order to have efficacy in controlling horses. In all of the accounts he provides it is evident that those practising the ritual did so in all seriousness, and even when the horse-controlling power of the bone was attributed to pungent oils, the ritual's procedure 'for obtaining the one bone that goes against the current' remains in strong emphasis. It is certain that the knowledge of the practice's details, as much as its object and promised powers, was earnestly treasured as a thing both rare and potent:

'First of all not one in ten thousand knows what kind of frog it comes from, or would be able to recognise the bone if they saw it.... The frog you were after wasn't easy to come by: it were a rare kind. It were a black frog with a star on its back....'

(Evans, op. cit.)

The impression given by Evans is that the ritual's use is confined solely to men of a particular group of trades: ploughmen, grooms, farriers, and blacksmiths. However, as we have seen in the cases of Baldry and Haggard, the ritual was also being practised outside the horseman's domain by East Anglian wise-women. If Evans' impression of the trade and gender specificity of the rite was correct (at least from a horseman's perspective), it would appear that the ritual was operative in two 'closed' contexts during exactly the

same period and in either context for individually-oriented reasons. If the trade-specificity of the charm was not the case, it would be reasonable to surmise that the cunning-craft and horsemanry contexts overlapped and that knowledge of the toad-bone's power was actually more deeply rooted in shared East Anglian traditions of folk magic. It is more likely that this latter situation was originally the case during the early-to-mid 1800's, but that with the emergence of the closed and secretive guild of horsemanry after about 1875, knowledge of the bone and its horse-controlling powers was separated into a trade-specific context. That this may have been the case is suggested by later accounts of the rite which show trade-specific additions to its procedural structure, namely, a three night vigil in a stable (Porter, op. cit. p.56) or, as in our aforementioned Nevern case, to a cromlech - which happens to be situated in the midst of the Trellyffaint farmer's cow-pastures.

The over-emphasis upon the horsemanry usage of the bone, as seen in many 20th century popular texts and academic treatments, is simply due to the fact that Evans' texts have been the principal source available for any discussion of the practice, and no extensive collation of additional material has been attempted until now. In the context of his own specific research, Evans was perfectly correct in his associations of the rite with horsemanry. As he found, the ritual was indeed notorious amongst horsemen '*in the know*', and the possession of '*the owd frog-boon*' was for them a badge of reputation (Evans, 1960, p.270), as well as a by-word for prestige and 'black magic'.

One remarkably detailed and first-hand account of the ritual provided by Evans, is that of Albert Love (b.1886), a Norfolk horseman. Notably, in this account the ritual is actually named: "*He described the whole process as The Water of the Moon, ...*":-

'Well, the toads that we use for this are actually in the Yarmouth area in and around Fritton. We get these toads alive and bring them home. They have a ring round their neck and are what they call walking toads. We bring them home, kill them, and put them on a whitethorn bush. They are there for twenty four hours till they dry. Then we bury the toad in an ant-hill; and it's there for a full month, till the moon is at the full. Then you get it out; and it's only a skeleton. You take it down to a running stream when the moon is at the full. You watch it carefully, particular not to take your eyes off it. There's a certain bone, a little crotch-bone it is, it leaves the rest of the skeleton and floats uphill against the stream. Well, you take that out of the stream, take it home, bake it, powder it and put it in a box; and you use oils with it the same as you do for the milch. While you are watching these bones in the water, you must on no consideration take your eyes off it. Do [if you do] you will lose all power. That's where you get your power from for messing about with horses, just keeping your eyes on that particular bone. But when you are watching it and these bones are parting, you'll hear all the trees and all the noises that you can imagine, even as if buildings were falling down or a traction engine is running over you. But you still mustn't take your eyes off, because that's where you lose your power. Of course, the noises must be something to do with the Devil's work in the middle of the night....' "

(Evans, 1966, pp.217-8.)

Evans found that horsemen with the bone were openly accredited with astonishing and seemingly supernatural ability to manipulate horses, and that their reputation as 'Toadmen' carried particular awe and no small degree of fear. Christina Hole corroborates the dark repute of the bone in her 1950 article 'The Horseman's Word' in 'London Mystery Magazine'. Speaking of a blacksmith's assistant named George Kirk, she writes: "*it was noticed that he seemed to be able to do anything he liked with the horses that came to be shod. ... Naturally, Kirk was asked how he did this..... He said he had used the frog-rite and sold himself to the Devil. When Smith [the enquirer] declared his intention of doing likewise, Kirk replied, "Take my advice and don't; you will never rest if you do".*". In fact, as Evans, Hole, and Porter have shown, a horseman's use of the bone was not only associated with the Devil, but with madness and even a premature and violent death. It is evident that within the horseman's context, the reputation of the bone reaches a peak of diabolic infamy. That such a belief carried awe and deep respect amongst fellow horsemen must surely have added many a boast to the tale. We do well to consider that any practitioner of the ritual would had a vested interest in its reputation - for such would have marked him as a man of character and, potentially, of great professional skill.

The ability to control horses or other farm animals was an attribute long attributed to cunning-folk in East Anglia, and was often associated with the use of a 'whisper' or magical word (Hutton, 1999, op. cit.; Davidson, 1956; Casaubon, 1648). In many ways the 'bone' appears to have absorbed these old traditions and to have cohered - at least amongst horsemen - a particular monopoly as the signifying 'by-word' for the possession of magical power. In many of Evans' accounts, as in those given by Porter (op.cit.) the generic term 'Toad Man' is prevalent. Evans also makes use of the term 'witch', seemingly verbatim from his horsemen informants: '*A toadman was accounted a kind of witch*' (1960, p.246). We can compare this to the use of the term 'toad-witch' in Kittredge (1929, op.cit.).

Although the generic term 'Toadman' was used to denote some sense of commonality between solitary users of the bone, it is uncertain whether any sense of 'organisation' united fellow Toadmen in and of themselves or amongst horsemen; or whether, as in the cunning-craft context, the term denoted a category of practitioners with shared methods operating individually within a common field of traditional knowledge. The sources generally indicate the latter to be the case. As one would expect, practitioners of magic within or derived from the context of cunning-craft were customarily solitary individuals; as Hutton remarks, it was part of their mystique (1999, p.100). However, there are exceptions, indicating that in specific localities some degree of organised connection did in fact exist between Toadmen.

The principal example is our aforementioned case from Nevern in Pembrokeshire, Wales. According to local reputation the Trelyffaint cromlech was used by Toadmen -plural, as a site for *their* meetings. This local rumour has some substantiating evidence: the ritual performed by the Trelyffaint cow-farmer circa 1890 (*vide supra*), was actually accomplished in a group of fellow-labourers, with the farmer as the officiant (Worsley, pers. comm. 2001). In the account provided by the farmer's son, no mention is made of a

text from whence his father gained the ritual's prescription - and it seems probable that oral tradition amongst farmers or in the family was the ritual's mode of transmission. That the cromlech had accrued a local reputation at all is indicative of more than just a single isolated incident. This may however have an anomalous case; performing the ritual in a group is unknown elsewhere.

Nonetheless, whilst solitary performance is customary, the actual knowledge of the rite occurs frequently in the collective context of horseman's guilds. For example, in a source from Wiltshire (Whitlock, 1992), a horseman recounts the solitary toad-bone ritual as his initiation into horsemanship, but also recounts his initiation into 'The Horseman's Society'. The point made is that the secret meetings of the Society were used to share techniques of horse management and the use of the bone was a particularly important key to power. The East Anglian accounts by Evans appear to confirm this situation of collective knowledge and solitary usage, although it is unclear whether the collective context was the Horseman's Society proper or simply the secretive trade of being a horseman. Either way, the pattern of collective knowledge and solitary use of the bone-charm is retained. Sources such as Singer (1865) and McPherson (1929), mention batrachian spell-craft in the collective context of the Horseman's Word meetings in Scotland. Although no mention of the bone-ritual is made explicitly, it seems that the specific mention of '*the use of dead toads*' points rather strongly in its direction (McPherson, p. 291).

It has been asked (Hutton, 1999, p.64) whether or not the East Anglian horseman had the bone-ritual before the influx of Scottish horseman during the mid-19th century. Judging from our accounts of Baldry and Haggard (and possibly Scot), it would indeed appear that the bone-ritual was firmly embedded in the East Anglian context during the 1800's or earlier. Furthermore, Evans himself (1960, p.272), cites a horseman who states categorically: '*We had it here before the Scots came down. My father was born in 1862: he had it and my grandfather had it before him*'. This particular quotation is also of note as it points out a hereditary usage of the charm.

As for the Scottish context, some words are pertinent. The Scottish Society of the Horseman's Word, as ably demonstrated by Clark (1979, pp.154-6, *et al*) was a prototypical trade union, a kind of pseudo-Freemasonic guild. The guild derived from another Scottish group, the Society of the Miller's Word, most probably during the 17-1800's. The Miller's Word in turn drew heavily from Freemasonic ritual, an influence which remained in the Horseman's Society in both Scotland and East Anglia, albeit in another guise. As with East Anglian horsemen, the members of the Horseman's Word were accredited with the skills of 'horse whispering', and although their 'Word' has accreted the aforementioned cunning-craft associations and applications, its form originally derived from Freemasonic usage (Clark, *ibid.*). The secrets of horse management were taught in the Society only after a man was initiated formally and given the 'Word'. The structure of their rite was a kind of antinomian Freemasonry with transgressive and well-attested satanic imagery, such as reverence for Cain and backwards Bible-reading. The officiant of their rites was termed 'the Old Chiel', meaning the Devil. Although the 1865 text by Singer about the Miller and Horseman's Word does not actually refer to the bone rite, as we have said, initiates of the 'Word' were definitely

taught about ‘*the use of dead toads*’ in their spells and recipes. Although this is clearly indicative of the bone-charm, the Wiltshire case provides an explicit account of the bone ritual alongside mention of the Society, and thus could easily be a point where East Anglian and Scottish lore fused and overlapped.

It is possible that the ‘satanic’ elements of the Scottish Society inspired the East Anglian and Welsh accounts of the bone rite which mention the Devil, but as we have seen in the cases of Haggard and Baldry, the diabolic aspect of the ritual was already established in East Anglian cunning-craft practice during the early-to-mid 19th century. Furthermore, our early East Anglian accounts are attributed to female cunning-craft practitioners and thus remain well outside the male-dominated and highly secretive horse-labourer’s domain.

Nonetheless, some points of ambiguous evidence do remain outstanding in this issue of Scottish influence. For example, in the accounts derived from farm-workers in both the Nevern and East Anglian areas (see Evans; Porter; Hole, *op.cit*), we sometimes find a component of the ritual not present amongst female cunning-folk: a three night vigil - in Nevern to a cromlech, and in East Anglia to a stable. It could be conjectured that this added component gives the bone ritual a curiously ‘Christian’ pattern: the thorn-tree hanging of the toad equates with the crucifixion; the burial of the toad in the anthill equates with the internment of Christ in the tomb; the floating of the bone equates with the harrowing of hell; and the three night vigil with the period leading to the final resurrection of Christ. This may be a superimposition and is offered here as mere conjecture. Nonetheless, given that the Scottish Horseman’s Word Society are known to have utilised Christian imagery in inversion and satanic burlesque, the conjecture may hint toward an aspect of the ritual which was modified in light of the mid-to-late ingressions of Scottish horsemen to East Anglia (elsewise to contemporaneous praxis). An additional point of evidence, but this time of possible Scottish influence upon cunning-craft, is the reverence of Cain found in Buckinghamshire popular magic, circa 1940 (McNess, *pers. comm.* 1992); a feature, as we have said, of the Scottish Horseman’s rituals.

Although these conjectural points may be made for consideration, we must assert the more clearly proven fact that diabolic components of the bone rite were, as we have said, firmly in place amongst cunning-folk in early-to-mid 19th century East Anglia. This makes the three-night vigil and the reverence for Cain appear more akin to cunning-craft practices one might expect to be native to the region itself, rather than derived from elsewhere. Our considerations are therefore more valuable as indications of local variation and parallelism in a nation-wide practice, rather than of particular strands of influence. Our source-materials for Scotland, Wales, the Midlands, and East Anglia, indicate that the bone-ritual existed countrywide, and, as shown below, this may have been with good reason.

From 1835, the use of the toad-bone ritual in connection to horsemanship was a published fact. In *Country Horse-Doctor* (published in Swaffham, Norfolk, 1835), we read: "*To make a horse lay down. Get some grey toads - hang them on a white thorn bush*

till they are Dead, then lay them into an Ant hill, then...put them into a stream....then dry them and beat them to a powder, touch a Horse on the Shoulder to jade him and on the rump to draw him." Here we see the bone as a powder and also the dual powers of attraction and repulsion united in the single object. Importantly, the fact that this account is published in a book openly accessible to horsemen throughout Britain makes it unsurprising for the ritual to be widespread in their self-enclosed trade from the early 1800's onwards. This is compounded by the reiteration of the same recipe, word-for-word, in later horsemanship publications (e.g. Saville's 1878 *Horseman's Receipt-book*).

This form of the practice was still in use in mid-1900's, as Evans' numerous accounts verify. One of his informants, the Suffolk blacksmith Hector Moore, went on to give an interview for the BBC World Service (*End of the Line*, 1980). In this broadcast, the interviewer, Paul Heiney, reads out the ritual recipe from Saville's 1878 book and asks Moore if he has performed it. He is surprised when Moore replies 'Yes' and promptly goes on to say how the bones must be floated on the Full Moon night, how one bone goes upstream, and how it can be used to draw (lead) or jade (stop) a horse at will. The astonished interviewer responds, saying that no-one will believe him. To this, the old Blacksmith replies: '*at don't matter if they believe ya or not. That's a wonderful old thing!*'. Hector Moore's account is particularly significant, as it is the sole audio-preserved first-hand testimony of a self-confessed toadman.

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Some degree of cross-over and influence between cunning-craft praxis and horsemen's recipes is undoubted, but where distinctions and 'closed' contextualisations do appear, the fact of the co-temporal existence of oral tradition and horsemen's trade publications goes some way to explain the nuances of difference in form and application. With the advent of widespread mechanisation in the farming industry, the once ubiquitous heavy horse disappeared from the farm and with it vanished the various horseman's societies. After about 1960, no widespread accounts of the toad-bone ritual emerge in the context of horse-management. Our last informant in this particular context is indeed Hector Moore, a fortunate old-school blacksmith who was able to maintain employment shoeing recreationally-riden horses. Nonetheless, outside the context of horse-management, the history of the toad-bone continues. In this respect, and to at least point toward a future chapter on the charm's history, it is useful to cite a modern practitioner of the East Anglian cunning-craft tradition: '*When machines took over the functions of the horse on the farm, mystical horsemanship became almost obsolete, and most chapters of the Horsemen's Guilds were disbanded. But the related arts of Toadmanship... are still practised today in secret in East Anglia.*' (Pennick, 1995, p. 59).

Returning to Moore's account of the ritual, one is struck by the close identity of his procedural description with those found in Scot, Agrippa, Topsell, and Pliny. His stress of the deeds and of the inconsequential nature of non-practitioners' doubt or belief, emphasises the fact of the amulet's action-orientated rituality. Through the spectrum of our various accounts, and the interweave of romantic or diabolic elements, the basic prescription of the toad-bone amulet retains the patterning of simple motifs, much as we

enumerated in Chapter 1. The resilience of the practice through the changing idioms of application and association compels one to seek below the shifting surface of 'belief' and see in its paradigmatic 'rituality' a maintained strategy for securing 'power' and for wielding its influence over the natural world. Albeit that the single 'spell' we have examined is but one thread in a far greater tapestry, its history provides leverage for an examination of many important issues.

[Back](#)

Conclusion

In many respects the present essay has overviewed and drawn together the greater part of the extant references to the toad-bone charm and its praxes. Nonetheless, I would be the first to admit of the study's omissions. The wealth of data relating to relevant areas, such as the toad-stone, witches' toad-familiars, and the motif of the 'sweated toad' in alchemy, would doubtless add considerable depth and important perspectives to our discussion. In this respect, the present study has merely established groundwork for further and more extensive research, a matter which I intend fully to pursue in the future. Nonetheless, and to the best of my knowledge, the present essay is an original - albeit obscure - contribution to the History of Magic, however partial. Despite the topic's apparent obscurity, it is evident that the history of the bone-charm raises a number of important issues: i) the clear continuation and evolution of a recorded magical formula from antiquity, through the medieval and early modern periods, to modern popular magic; ii) the proof of an autonymic induction into 'witchcraft power' operative in the (late) early modern period, sometimes using a practitioner-acknowledged idea of the diabolic pact; iii) the fusion of oral, textual, and, in some instances, hereditary transmission of the induction process; and iv) the use of an autonymic descriptor (i.e. Toad Man/witch) for individuals participating (in isolation or possibly in collective association) within a category of cunning-craft/popular magical specialist. The complex significance of these issues and of their supporting evidence need not be explained here at length, save to say that each point has a definite bearing upon conclusions thus far reached by scholarship on the topic of European witchcraft, particularly the difficult questions of witchcraft's actualities, fictional constructions, and the exo/autonymic use of the very term 'witch'. The existence of the diabolic pact outside theological demonological texts; the existence of a practised witchcraft self-induction; the possibility of collective association amongst cunning-folk; and the notion of hereditary tradition amongst cunning-folk, are all points held in certain doubt by present scholarship (see Hutton, 1999). That our present study could supply data to challenge these conclusions, or at least to question them in a specific context on the basis of evidential support, is significant. However, as I said, I am the first to acknowledge that there is extensive work remaining to be done in the regions which I have only begun to explore.

These ulterior points aside, what conclusions may be reached in terms of the toad-bone amulet specifically? In the first instance, one has to ask why the bone of a toad should be credited with such importance; why the toad? The answer to this may lie in the ancient and theologically-compounded associations of the toad with the Devil. However, as

shown, the toad has also had distinctly benign connotations as well. Our answer may then lie in the implicit ambiguity of a creature whose metamorphic life-cycle is explicitly transliminal - the toad, as well as the frog, move from being wholly aquatic to being able to move at will between earth and water. Furthermore, as we have shown, the bone-charm can be utilised for both benign and malefic purposes, and is thus frequently an ambiguous object of control and power. The fact that international corollaries of the toad-bone ritual occur with other Devil-associated creatures (the black cat in the U.S.A. (Hyatt, op.cit.) and a bat in Russia (Ryan, 1999, p.182)), might appear to contradict this emphasis of ambiguity, but in these contexts the application of the bone is again for purposes both benign and malign. It is the very fact that a diabolic or 'adverse' creature is used as a basis for magical 'power' manipulation that is important. This fact stresses the intentional employment of a 'transgressive' element to augment the basic efficacy of a magical ritual - no matter its latter intentions for good or ill. If the ambivalent manipulation of 'power' is the desired result, then objects or creatures embodying the malefic 'other' are as potent a source as those elements of a purely celestial or divine nature (the names of God, for example). The fact that our ritual can combine the opposing elements of the diabolic pact and specific saints' days (Haggard, Frazer, op. cit.) is telling indeed, as is our proposed re-reading of the 'toad and host' induction (*vide supra*, p.17). In this respect, one might propose that the toad-bone, particularly in its witchcraft contexts, provides a point for the conjunction of opposing associations (love/hate, good/evil) with the intent of ultimately ambiguous 'power-mongering'. Doubtless in other contexts this rationale for power is differently constructed; this however provides further motivation for additional research.

This leads to our second point of note: the sheer geographic and historical scope of the bone-charm's praxis. The reasons for finding a structurally identical 'magic bone' ritual in India, Russia, Great Britain, and across the U.S.A., must lie both in its undeniable antiquity and in its widespread oral and textual transmission. That the charm appears so well-embedded in its Indian context seems indicative of a pre-colonial origin, and is thus an aspect of research remaining open to investigation. As pointed out (fn.55), the scope of such Indological research is vast. The same well be said for the African-American and Russian contexts.

Lastly, it is important to state that having overviewed a great deal of the literature relating to the whole topic of toad-derived amulets during the course of this project, it is evident that much confusion abounded in the medieval and early modern periods about the charm's exact form (as a stone, bone or jewel), indicating that the 'idea of a toad-derived amulet' was the consistent factor - not the form that the amulet actually possessed. In this respect, our topic extends far beyond the reach of the toad-bone. Compounding this conclusion, our other international corollaries indicate - insofar as they involve creatures other than the toad or frog - that future work should focus on the idea of the 'magic bone' as the central theme, and should seek to explore our proposed rationales of 'power' in particular relation thereto. For the present, acknowledging that omissions as well as discoveries point to the greater scope of knowledge, I shall conclude with the aspiration that this study has at least succeeded in opening up an area of interest for future discourse.

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[Back](#)

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