

2022

Mystic Crystal Revelations: Crystals in Ritual Practice and Folk Belief from the Iron Age to the Age of Aquarius

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Recommended Citation

Presley, Kathryn, "Mystic Crystal Revelations: Crystals in Ritual Practice and Folk Belief from the Iron Age to the Age of Aquarius" (2022). *Hare & Bell Writing Contest*. 16.
https://scholarspace.jccc.edu/hare_bell/16

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In 18th and 19th century England, the excavation of tumuli was a popular pastime for scholars and lay anthropologists alike. The tombs exhumed during this period held some of the most thought provoking burial treasures in that country's history. From the late 1700s through the 1800s, excavation of 7th century burial clusters in southeastern England, specifically around Kent, uncovered several small crystal spheres. These spheres were all found lying between the knees of the inhabitants of these graves - all women. The markings and wear on the crystals seem to suggest that they were regularly worn suspended from the waist. Similar spheres have been found all over Europe, most notably in northern France (Brittany), Germany (particularly west of the Rhine), the Netherlands, and throughout Scandinavia as well as Italy. This paper will focus on those areas that most directly relate to the Anglo-Saxon crystals: the British Isles, France, and Germany.

The discovery of the Kentish crystals has been a catalyst for the academic discussion of ritual crystal use in the western world for almost two and a half centuries. The Kentish crystals initially excited many scholars, who saw them as providing a window into the ritual life of their Pagan ancestors and the role crystallomancy may have played in that life. This interpretation has been largely dismissed by modern academics, who argue that this is an imposition of modern *Neopagan* practices onto pre-modern cultures, and further, that any attempt to draw connections between contemporary Pagan practices and pre-Christian rites is unfounded.

In this paper, I will attempt to give a historical account of crystallomancy - the ritual use of crystalline stones of glass for divination - and crystal healing in the British Isles and western Europe. I will refer to crystallomancy and crystal healing as a tradition. I have defined "tradition" as an established set of actions or beliefs that has been passed down from generation to generation, either by writing, spoken word, or practice. In my research, I have found a continuous line of evidence describing the practice of crystallomancy and use of crystals for healing rituals stretching from 450 CE all the way up through the 21st century. My intention in this paper is to show the evolution of folk religion and ritual from the 5th century to the modern era, demonstrating a continuous tradition of crystal use in western Europe that extends into contemporary Pagan practices, and through this make a case for the reinterpretation of

the significance of the Kentish crystals. I will refer to this as the historical-continuity argument.

The historical-continuity argument consists of three premises: first, given a mass of textual evidence recording ritual crystal use in the British Isles and throughout Europe from 450 CE onward, it is highly improbable that the Kentish crystals are anomalous and have no connection to this commonly acknowledged practice; second, complex systems do not appear out of thin air, but rather are built upon simpler practices that coalesce into a systemic practice and further, a ritual that has become common enough to be recorded has likely been practiced for several years prior to its documentation; third, when a long pattern of behavior and belief exists in a particular culture or region, it is reasonable to assume a connection between historical practice and modern practices that share a highly similar nature.

The earliest work addressing the Kentish crystals is the *Nenia Britannica*, written by the Reverend James Douglas. Douglas believes that the crystals found in Kent were magical instruments used in Pagan rituals. To support his argument, Douglas provides a lengthy account of crystal scrying in the East and recounts the well-documented exploits of Paracelsus the Great and Dr. Johannes Dee.¹ Scrying refers to a form of divinatory practice where the practitioner attempts to divine information about events from which he or she is separated by time, space, or both through the interpretation of reflections on the surface of a crystal or other reflective surface.

William Wylie asserts that the crystals in the Anglo-Saxon graves were most probably amulets. He proposes that the larger crystal spheres, as well as smaller crystal beads found in the area, were protective stones designed to aid warriors in battle. This interpretation seems unlikely, however, as the crystal spheres unearthed in southeast England were exclusively found in the graves of women, and the crystal beads were found in the graves of both men and women.²

Gerard Baldwin Brown agrees with Wylie. He writes that it is well known the crystal sphere held magical properties, and that the folk practices associated with such

¹ Douglas, James. *Nenia Britannica: or a sepulchral history of Great Britain; from the earliest period to its general conversion to Christianity*. London, 1793. Relevant passages to be found on, 14-19, 116, and 131.

² Wylie, William. *The Fairford Graves*. Oxford, 1852.

spheres can be traced back to at least the Middle Ages.³ However, Brown postulates that the magical property was associated not with the crystalline substance itself, but rather the spherical shape. Brown is probably mistaken on this point. Even setting aside the fact that there are many lapidaries that note the specific attributes of crystals and other stones, regardless of shape, the fact that no spheres made from other substances were found would seem to indicate that the choice of material was significant.

Charles Roach Smith in the introduction to his *Inventorium Sepulchrale*, argues that there is no need to suggest any fanciful role for these crystals. Roach Smith suggests it is more likely that these stones were valued for aesthetic beauty alone.⁴ This is possible, but again if it were simply the fashion to wear gems suspended from the waist, we would expect to see more variety. The only gems that have been preserved in this fashion are crystalline, usually quartz and beryl. If these were just fashionable accessories, why do we not find spheres of onyx, garnet, agate, peridot, or any other of the multitude of precious and semi-precious stones known to jewelers and craftsmen of the time?

In *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, Audrey Meaney postulates that the crystal balls dating from the 7th century would not have been used for scrying, but rather might have been used for lighting fires, or to impart some magical healing property to water or wine.⁵ Meaney does not specifically make note of any ritual application for fire kindling, but the kindling of ritual fires was an important act in many cultures, particularly in the Scottish Highlands. Many areas of the British Isles would regularly kindle need fires - ritual fires that were supposed to protect villages from pestilence and disease.⁶ We also know from the writings of Pliny that crystals were commonly used throughout the Roman Empire to focus the sun's rays to cauterize wounds and start fires on the battlefield. Given this, it seems possible that the fire-starting capacity of crystals like those found in Kent could have been applied to the lighting of ritual fires. Taking into account their size and the fact that they appear to

³ Brown, Gerard Baldwin. *The Arts in Early England: Saxon Art and Industry in the Pagan Period*. New York: Dutton, 1915, 404-405.

⁴ Faussett, Bryan and Charles Roach Smith. *Inventorium Sepulchrale*, p. xxvi, London, 1856.

⁵ Meaney, Audrey L. *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*. Oxford, England: B.A.R., 1981.

⁶ Kelly, Walter Keating. *Curiosities of Indo-European Tradition and Folk-lore*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1863, 46-54.

have generally been worn suspended from chains, it seems highly likely that these crystals were healing charms ritually dipped into water and other liquids. Crystals were commonly used in healing rituals that involved silvering - a practice where a stone or amulet is dipped into liquid, often water or wine, with the intention of imparting the healing properties of that object to the liquid. The silvered liquid is then ingested or used to bathe the ailing area.

In *Dark Age Economics*, Richard Hodges posits that these crystals may have been gifts that were exchanged in order to cement alliances or marriage contracts.⁷ He suggests that the crystals might have been presented to a bride to signify her tie to her new clan. While there is certainly evidence for clan-associated stones in the British Isles, this does not seem to be a plausible explanation for the role of the Kentish crystals. If the crystals discovered in southeastern England were indications of marriage or alliance, we would expect to see some more significant differences between the stones to indicate associations with particular clans. Many Scottish clans did have familial charm stones which were associated with their particular clans; however, they were generally kept in the Chieftain's house. The importance placed on these charm stones makes it seem unlikely that they would be passed with a dowry. We also would not expect such a stone to be buried with a recipient, but rather passed down to the inheritor of the Chieftain title. Even if we take on an explore Hodges' explanation, we have to ask why spherical pieces of crystal would be given as gifts to mark such significant events? If the crystals were given with matrimonial alliances, the significance of the gift would have been tied to the significance of the stone, which, with the family-associated Scottish stones, was an associated magical property.

Gale R. Owen-Crocker, who has made a study of Anglo-Saxon dress, takes issue with the conclusions drawn by Douglas and Meaney. Owen-Crocker dismisses the idea that these crystal balls may have had some pre-Christian, Pagan or ritual significance. She claims that this is improbable because there is no record of any magical or ritual use of crystals earlier than the Middle Ages, and argues that such use was not widespread until the Renaissance. In addition, Owen-Crocker claims that there is no evidence for

⁷ Hodges, Richard. *Dark Age Economics: Origins of towns and Trade, A.D. 600-1000*. Bloomsbury Academic, 1989.

the use of crystals in healing rituals prior to the modern age. Owen-Crocker argues that if there is any religious significance to the crystals, it must be Christian.⁸ Along the same line of argument, M. O. H. Carver in *The Age of Sutton Hoo* writes,

...even if one is tempted to see anything specifically religious or 'pagan' in the earlier custom, one must remember that it does not become common among the Franks until the sixth century, the first generation after the conversion of Clovis to Christianity.⁹

Despite the certainty of their assertions, both Carver and Owen-Crocker are very much mistaken. Evidence found in earlier burial grounds easily disproves Carver's claim about the appearance of crystals being tied to the spread of Christianity in the Frankish empire. On such burial is the tomb of Childeric I, Clovis' father, d. 481 CE, which contained a crystal globe.¹⁰ Owen-Crocker's claims are simply not supported by the archaeological and textual evidence. There are dozens of references to healing rituals that date back to the Medieval period, and there are accounts of scrying in England going back to the 5th century. These are cited by many other authors, including Meany. Both George Kunz and Theodore Besterman have made extensive studies of crystal magic in Europe. Kunz expressed skepticism as to whether the crystals actually achieved their intended magical ends, but has no doubt about whether such practices existed. Besterman has published what amounts to a two-hundred-page, annotated bibliography of sources on crystal magic in ancient societies around the world. F. Marian McNeill has published a very thorough study of the folk traditions in Scotland, which includes a lengthy list of magical stones (mostly crystals), their lineages, powers, and history.¹¹

There are a number of primary sources that refute the claims of Owen-Crocker, Smith, and Carver. The works of Kunz, Besterman, and McNeill are particularly valuable

⁸ Owen-Crocker, Gale R. *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*. Woodbridge, England: Boydell & Brewer, 2010, 94-5.

⁹ Carver, M.O.H. *The Age of Sutton Hoo: the Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1992, 248.

¹⁰ Effros, Bonnie. *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. Childeric's grave contents are listed on p. 120.

¹¹ Kunz, George Frederick. *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*. London: J.B. Lippincott, 1913; Besterman, Theodore. *Crystal Gazing: a Study in the History, Distribution, Theory, and Practice of Scrying*. Kila, MT: Kessinger, 1924; McNeil, F. Marian McNeill. *The Silver Bough*, vol. I. Glasgow: MacLellan, 1977 (reprint), 94.

because they have collected so much textual and anecdotal evidence on folk traditions and lapidary lore. There are also a number of treatises and articles published in archaeological and folklore journals by British scholars during the 19th century. Of these, the work of John Aubrey and William Jones are especially important as documentary evidence.

Some of these works do not meet the current prevailing standards for academic publications. Besterman and Kunz were not academics. Besterman was a largely self-educated librarian and bibliographer. Kunz was a prominent mineralogist, educated at Cooper Union, whose expertise and knowledge of rock and mineral lore garnered him an honorary doctorate from the University of Marburg,¹² as well as awards from Columbia University and Knox College of Illinois. Although the writings of these two authors may not meet our contemporary standards due to their education level and publishing houses, the contributions of each to the knowledge of lapidary folklore have been far more substantial and significant than some modern scholarly sources. Besterman's *Crystal Gazing* is functionally a bibliography of early lapidary sources, which he has categorized geographically and chronologically. Kunz quotes extensively from primary sources, in addition Kunz's conclusions and commentaries provide valuable insight into the common mindset regarding lapidary magic and medicine in the early 20th century.

The journal articles that I cite from late 19th and 20th century archaeological and folklore societies were peer reviewed and considered to be academically sound at the time they were published. While some may take issue with whether such publications adhere to the current standards of peer evaluation, the major value of these articles is their documentation of folk practices and of the common belief of educated individuals in the 1800s and 1900s that these practices were continuations of ancient practices that had been passed down for generations. This is significant because it indicates that lapidary medicine and crystal magic continued to be practiced in the British Isles well into the modern era, and clearly demonstrates that it was a commonly acknowledged practice.

¹² This honor was revoked in 1920, due to Kunz's alleged affiliation with the French and English alliance against Germany.

In addition to the sources described above, I will make use of recent publications from popular New Age presses in my discussion of contemporary Pagan practices. These sources are important and highly relevant as they are descriptive of modern practices and are the sources modern practitioners of Pagan religions read for instruction. As such, I believe these publications will most accurately reflect modern Pagan practices.

I. DIVINATION

The image of the mystic conjuring images in a crystal ball is perhaps the most familiar symbol of magic and the occult in the modern world. Today crystals are so closely associated with the New Age and Neopagan movements that they have become a cliché, appearing in books, television shows, and movies. Gypsy fortune telling games are common at carnivals and arcades, even the occasional bowling alley. As prevalent crystal ball imagery is in contemporary popular culture, it would be easy to assume that it is a modern contrivance, but, in fact, crystals and crystal gazing have captured the imagination of the western world for centuries. Although it has changed some in its presentation, crystal gazing shows up in popular literature dating back to the early Middle Ages and was part of folklore long before that. When we think of crystal divination today, the first thing that comes to mind is the crystal ball, but crystallomancy is not limited to globular quartz. Historically, crystallomancy included divination by every variety of reflective body, except water. Indeed, the term crystal was traditionally applied to all crystalline stones - beryl, amethyst, aquamarine, emerald, etc. - as well as glass, not just quartz.¹³ In fact, beryl and not quartz was the stone of choice for divination in much of western Europe up through the first half of the 19th century. George Kunz writes, "...that the beryl produced a greater number of visions than any other mineral was the old belief, which is upheld in some quarters today."¹⁴

¹³ John Aubrey has a chapter in his *Miscellanies* called "Visions in a Beryl or Crystal", and he does not distinguish between the two in operation or function, and often uses the term crystal as a generic category for all crystalline stones. In the *Höllenzwang*, Faust asks to be told the means of invoking a spirit into a crystal, *either glass or quartz*. The instructions, which he is given, refer to having a glass-maker craft the crystal. In modern practices, distinctions between glass, quartz, beryl, or even obsidian, are rarely made as regards function.

¹⁴ Kunz, George Frederick. *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*. J.B. Lippincott Co., 1913, 212. \

Archaeological excavation in southern England revealed that the crystal ball had made its appearance in Britain by the late 7th century. Similar orbs have been found in Germanic graves, most notably along the Rhine and upper Danube, as well as in northern France, Italy, Scandinavia, and throughout the rest of Europe. Some were found with perforated spoons like those in Kent. A mounted crystal sphere was found in the tomb of the Merovingian king Childeric the I (ca. 481 CE) at Tournai, Belgium. Five others were reportedly taken from royal graves in Saint-Denis during the French Revolution, and a few other orbs were found in a house belonging to the canons of St. Giovanni Laterano, a prominent church in Rome. These orbs were discovered with an alabaster funerary urn that had been hidden in a stone pillar. The nature of the other artifacts found with the urn indicate that the remains were those of a woman.¹⁵ Going back further, Reginald Smith notes that these crystals were very similar to the early Teutonic crystal orbs that were found in the Greco-Scythian graves, which he estimates date back to the third and fourth centuries BCE.¹⁶

The physical descriptions of the Kentish spheres indicate that they could have been designed for ritual use. Most of the crystals that have been recovered were obviously designed to be suspended from a chain. This, combined with the frequent pairing of the crystals with perforated spoons, has led some scholars to believe that they were used in ritual healing practices such as the silvering of wells, where the crystal would have been dipped into the water with the goal of transmitting its healing properties to the liquid which could then be consumed or used for bathing. This practice is well-documented in the British Isles, particularly in Scotland and Wales. It is possible, however, that such crystals could have been used instead for catoptromancy - a branch of divination that makes use of both reflective surfaces and water simultaneously. In Scottish folklore, many charm stones are reputed to have both divinatory and healing powers.¹⁷ The stones found in southeastern England are remarkably similar in description to the charm stones that McNeill reproduced in *The Silver Bough*. They also

¹⁵ Meaney gives a complete listing with tomb numbers in *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, 85.

¹⁶ Smith, Reginald. *Victoria History of the Counties of England*. Woodbridge, UK: Published for the Institute of Historical Research by Boydell & Brewer, 2008.

¹⁷ McNeill, F. Marian. *The Silver Bough*. Glasgow: MacLellan, 1977. See chapters on earth and stone magic.

match the descriptions of many crystals that have been preserved in British folklore to which magical powers were attributed. We can compare McNeill's photographs of clan stones with the sketches of the Kentish crystals in Meany's *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* (Figs. 1 and 2).¹⁸

Figure 1: Photographs of Scottish clan stones from McNeill.

¹⁸ See pp. 80-81 and 92-93 in McNeill, and 81 and 95 in Meaney.

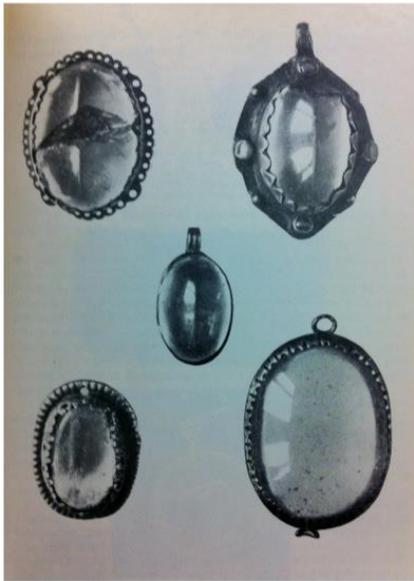
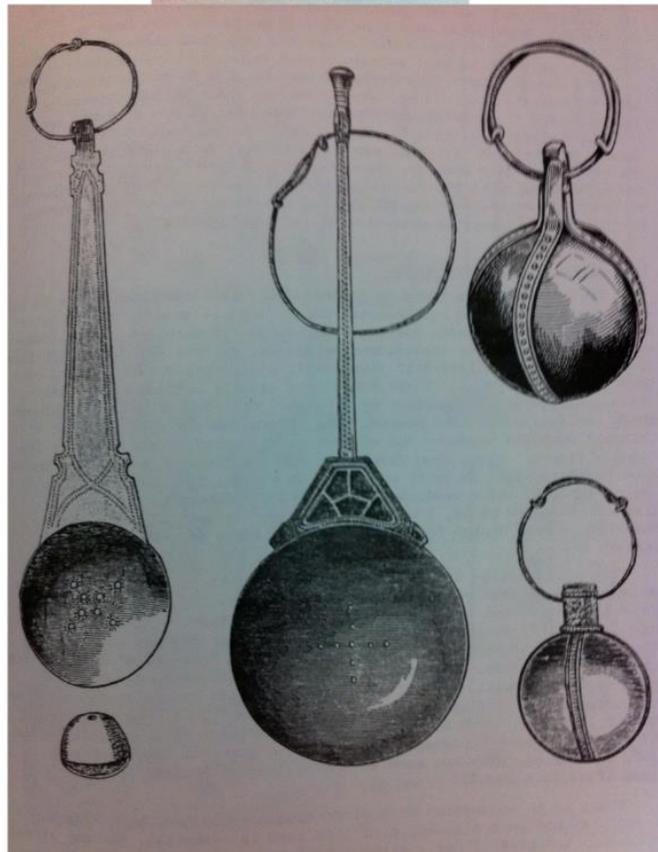
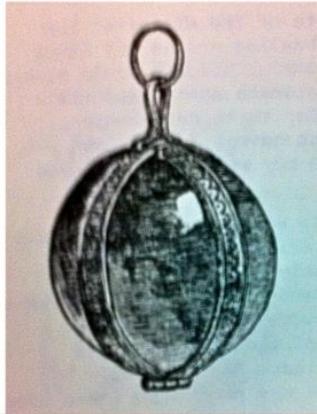


Figure 2: Sketches of Kentish crystals from Meany.



Despite the obvious physical similarities between the two, Owen-Crocker and other scholars have maintained that there is no evidence of any sort of connection

between the Kentish crystals and the scrying practices that have been so well documented from the Renaissance through the modern era. Owen-Crocker also denies that there is any historical evidence to indicate that the use of crystals in healing existed before the modern period. Owen-Crocker writes,

Though the dipping of [crystal] balls in water (and perhaps recovering them with spoons perforated for drainage) seems plausible enough, the practice of dipping crystals in water to cure man or beast is only documented as a modern phenomenon. The custom of using crystals for “scrying,” crystal-gazing for divination and other purposes, is not recorded before the Renaissance. The Germanic people probably copied the use of crystals from the Romans, who certainly utilized them as curative amulets, but it was related to their ice-like appearance rather than any supposed magical properties; using them to cool hands, and according to Pliny, for cauterizing [wounds]... the fashion for wearing crystal balls may have come from the continent with Franksih brides whose families had come under the influence of Christianity; or the objects may have been part of a luxury trade, which appealed to wealthy pre-Augustinian Christians.¹⁹

Owen-Crocker does not offer much evidence for her assertion about the supremacy of the Christian influence over local folk belief and practice. In addition, her claims about lack of historical documentation for both healing rituals and scrying rituals using crystals are simply incorrect. In the following pages, I will lay out the historical evidence for both crystal gazing and healing practices going back well before the time frame Owen-Crocker claims to be the earliest evidence of such practices.

Owen-Crocker herself says that the northwestern European tribes may have derived their talismanic use of crystals from the Romans, so let us start by turning to Greco-Roman society. In *Gemmarium Annularium*, Liceti discusses ancient modes of divination and reproduces an image from an Ophite divination ring (Fig. 3). This ring depicts two figures holding a sphere up to a flame in an attempt to discern a vision.²⁰

¹⁹ Owen-Crocker, Gale R. *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*. Woodbridge, England: Boydell & Brewer, 2010, 94-95.

²⁰ Reproduced in William Jones' *Finger Ring Lore*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1877, 101.

Figure 3: Ophite Divination Ring.



Gerard Baldwin Brown notes the similarities between the crystals found in southern England and a crystal found in a Greco-Scythian grave dating to the third or fourth century BCE.²¹ There is also documentation of catoptromancy in ancient Greece. Catoptromancy is a method of divination where crystals or mirrors are used in conjunction with water. Pausanias writes about a method of divination that was performed at the Temple of Demeter at Patrae where a mirror was lowered into the temple fountain by a small cord until its lower edge touched the water; the reflections in the mirror were then interpreted.²²

Scottish and Irish folklore are full of stories of stones with magical divinatory powers. Often these stones are reputed to have Druidic origins. The attribution of magic stones to Druids was a popular belief held by a large number of people, including academics, through the late 19th century. In fact, many of the various archaeological and folklore society journals take the Druidic origins of these stones as a given. Perhaps the most famous of these legendary Druidic stones is the *lial fáil*, or stone of Destiny.²³

Many articles published in the journals of 19th century folklore, archaeological, and antiquities societies recount popular folk-belief that had been preserved in the villages of Wales and Scotland. According to these folk traditions, crystals were strongly

²¹ Brown, Gerard Baldwin. *The Arts in Early England: Saxon Art and Industry in the Pagan Period*. Dutton, 1915, 405.

²² Pausanias, VII.xxi.12. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on healing.

²³ The *lial fáil*, also called the *leice*, *meanal*, *meanal leice*, or *meadenhall leice*, is described in legends, as well as archaeological reference books, as a large crystal kept by the Druids and used for soothsaying and healing. There is some discussion as to whether the *lial fáil* and the Stone of Scone are one and the same. Both were used in the coronation of kings, and both were said to prophesy the length of a King's reign and that of his progeny, but the Stone of Scone is most often reported to be Scotch sandstone, while the Stone of Destiny is purportedly crystalline.

connected with Druidical figures, and served a religio-political function. These articles present as common knowledge the idea that the Druids were familiar with the practice of crystal scrying. Marie Trevelyan, comparing popular folk belief and tradition in early 20th century Wales with older traditions, gives a description of a crystal that was said to have been worn by the Arch Druid,

The Arch-Druid wore upon his girls the Crystal of Augury, encased in gold. It was part of the Druidical regalia... These balls were sometimes policed and unset, or set in gold, silver or other metal.²⁴

Trevelyan's description is remarkably similar to the orbs found in Kent.

The Irish Epics make repeated references to the Druids' divinatory powers.²⁵ Ronald Hutton discusses this in *Blood and Mistletoe*. Hutton, however, undercuts his discussion with this analysis:

The problem is whether any of the methods of divination employed by the Druids in the Irish Epics can be treated as historical, or whether all should be classed as possible or probably inventions of medieval authors trying to imagine how ancient pagans would have behaved.²⁶

Much like the comments made by Owen-Crocker quoted earlier, it is hard to understand how Hutton managed to overlook hundreds of years of evidence of a thriving divinatory folk practice in the British Isles. Medieval authors would certainly not have had to "invent" ideas of how ancient Pagans might have behaved. The pre-Christian folk traditions were still being practiced. Church documents have been preserved that discuss strategies for eradicating such beliefs and practices, not to mention literary references and court transcripts. This was not a practice that suddenly popped into existence at the beginning of the Middle Ages; it was a long standing folk tradition. If the Druids were indeed familiar with crystal scrying, as is recorded in folk tradition, crystallomancy would have appeared in the British Isles well before the Common Era, and possibly before the Roman occupation. This is of course impossible to prove or disprove given the lack of written documentation from that period. The veracity of

²⁴ Trevelyan, Marie. *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales*. London: E. Stock, 1909. Reprinted in 1977 by Kessinger.

²⁵ Dillon, Myles. *The Cycles of the Kings*. London: G. Cumberledge, 1946, 19, 28; Koch, John T. & John Carey. *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2003, 150, 221.

²⁶ Hutton, Ronald. *Blood and Mistletoe*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009, 37.

folklore is immaterial to the discussion here, my goal with this discussion is simply to give an idea of how far back the folk tradition dates *itself* in the British Isles.

The earliest written reference to crystallomancy I have found in Britain dates to ca. 450 CE. The future St. Patrick and Bishops Auxentius and Issernius convened a synod, and one of the primary edicts that resulted was a decree that condemned any Christian who believed that there was a *lamia*, or witch, “in the glass.”²⁷ Crystallomancy continued to be a problem for the Church for the next several centuries. John of Salisbury (ca. 1120-1180) titled a chapter of his *Politicraticus* with the heading “Crystal seers; malignant spirits at times foresee the future because of the subtlety of nature, of long experience in events, and of the revelations of higher powers; they often deceive, either deceiving themselves or being deceived; they follow the indubitably wicket ways of the crystal seers.”²⁸ In it, John condemns the actions of crystal gazers and further condemns those who seek their services. He even discusses an incident from his boyhood where he was compelled to take part in a divintatory ritual by a priest who tortured him. The fact that early Church officials saw crystallomancy and scrying as a threat that needed to be dealt with in 5th century Britain, over a century before the Kentish orbs and their owners were buried, clearly indicates there was a developed practice of crystal gazing in Britain prior to the arrival of those orbs, and the Kentish crystals could well have played some role in divinatatory practice. From John of Salisbury’s descriptions we know that the practice of crystal gazing continued to be popular for the next several centuries.

Lazarus Spengler recorded an early case of medieval crystal gazing, reported in *Die Sitten und gebrauche der Deutschen* by F. Nork. Spengler reports that he was given a crystal by a nobleman from Nürnberg. The nobleman told Spengler that he had used the glass many times to discover the location of lost objects with great success. The nobleman demonstrated the stone’s power for Spengler, who claimed to verify its accuracy. Spengler recorded that the nobleman left the stone in his possession, and that Spengler subsequently destroyed it.²⁹

²⁷ Bury, J.B. *The Life of St. Patrick*. London, 1905, 324; Kunz, *Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, 179-80; “Synodoum episcorporum Patricii, Auxilii et Issernani,” in Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, vol Liii, Parisiis, 1865, 823.

²⁸ John of Salisbury. *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers*, ii 28, trans Joseph B. Pike. Londong: Oxford University Press, 1938).

²⁹ Besterman, 64; F. Nork. *Die Sitten und Gebrauche der Deutschen*. Stuttgart, 1849, pp. 647-8.

Roger Bacon (1213-1292), the famous medieval scientist and magician, was reputed to have a “glass” in which he could see things that were happening in distant places, and which was consulted by people who wanted to check on distant relatives.³⁰ These alleged mystical activities of “Doctor Mirabilis” (one of Bacon’s affectionate nicknames) have been preserved famously in Robert Greene’s play on Friars Bacon and Bongay,³¹ published in 1594. Additionally, a pamphlet widely circulated in the 1600s describes Bacon’s magical glass as follows,

...any man might beholde anything he desired to see, within the compass of fifty miles round about him. With this glass he had pleased diverse kinds of people: for Fathers did often times desire to see how their children did, and Children how their Parents did, one Friend how another did, and one Enemy (sometimes) how his Enemies did; so that from far they would come see this wonderful glass.³²

In *Early Prose Romances*, W. J. Thoms writes that the stories of Bacon’s magical glass “are fictions, no doubt derived from his renowned skills in optics.”³³ Of course, the fact that Roger Bacon is now regarded as one of the originators of the modern scientific method does not preclude the possibility that he might have been involved in occult or mystical activity. That aside, the true nature of Bacon’s amazing glass, whether mystical or mundane, is irrelevant to our current discussion. Before the romantic idealization of Roger Bacon as a beacon of rationalism shining through the superstitious Dark Ages, Bacon’s legacy revolved around his mystical undertakings, and our primary concern is with the common understanding of folk belief and practice. Besterman writes,

In all the stories told of Bacon appear the brazen head and magic glass that between them could speak and see all things.³⁴

³⁰ Kunz, 182.

³¹ Greene, Robert. *The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay 1594 (B.M.C. 34.C.37, (1594) and (1630), 162.H.1)*. AMS Press, 1970.

³² Anon. *The Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon Containing the Wonderful Things that He Did in His Life: Also the Manner of his Death; with the Liues and Deaths of the Two Coniurors, Bugye and Vangermast. Very Pleasant and Delightfull to Be Read.* 1627.

³³ Thoms, William John. *Early Prose Romances, with Bibliographical and Historical Introductions*. London: Nattali and Bond, 1858, vol. I, 186.

³⁴ Besterman, 41.

There can be little doubt that Bacon's contemporaries were familiar with scrying since they accused him of being a practitioner of it so fervently that even 200 years after his death the association remained.

Robert Mannyng of Brunne, writing at the beginning of the 14th century composed the following verse under the heading "On Witchcraft and Dreams":

Gyf you in swerve oper [or] yn bacyn,
Any chylde madyst looke theryn,
Or yn thumbes, or yn cristal -
Wycchecraft men clepyn [Callyn] hyt al³⁵

The reference to crystal in Mannyng's verse demonstrates that crystal divination was well-known in the early 1300s. Indeed, the fact that Mannyng references crystal gazing among a list of other ancient modes of divination without elaboration or explanation would seem to indicate that this was a common practice with which a large number of people were familiar. In a court transcript from the late 15th century, we find the confession of William Byg (known as lech) who admitted to being a specularius. Lech stated that he had earned his livelihood for a year or two by finding stolen property through the aid of his crystal. His confession described the process he used when crystal gazing. According to Lech's testimony he made use of an intermediary in his scrying - a practice that goes back to ancient Rome. Lech would make the standard invocations to the heavens and then address the intermediary saying, "Say me true chylde, what man, what woman, or what chylde has stolen y thing?"³⁶ The testimony of Lech is clear evidence that crystal gazing was a common activity, a folk tradition that was practiced not just by members of the educated class, like Roger Bacon, but also by the common people.

By the beginning of the 16th century, references to crystal gazing pop up all over the place. This is the period that Owen-Crocker argues saw the genesis of the practice of crystal gazing in Europe. Clearly, the previous references demonstrate this is not the

³⁵ Mannyng, Robert & William (de Wadington), *Robert of Brunne's "Handlyng Synne," A.D. 1303 with Those Parts of the Anglo-French Treatise on which it was Founded, William of Wadington's "Manuel Des Pechiez,"* ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. Early English Text Society, 1901, p. 13, lines 351-354.

³⁶ Raine, J. "Divination in the Fifteenth Century by Aid of a Magical Crystal", in *The Archaeological Journal* (London, 1856), xiii, 372-4. - Also quoted in Besterman, 52-53.

case, but in addition to textual documentation of crystallomancy prior to this era, the ritual surrounding crystal scrying in this period is quite complex. It would be highly unlikely that such a sophisticated practice would appear suddenly with no context or history of development. The scrying systems of the Renaissance are marked by the addition of a variety of holy and angelic names. While these lengthy invocations were used by more formal magicians and divination practitioners, the average folk practitioner's process did not change that much. The major shift that occurred in this period was the use of the crystalline stone for divinatory purposes began to outshine alternative methods prevalent in earlier eras. In the late 16th century, Reginald Scot wrote,

But the woonderous devises, and miraculous sights and conceipts made and contained in glasse, doo farre exceed all other...for you may have glasses so made, as what image or favour soever you print in your imagination, you shall think you see the same therein. Others are so framed, as therein one may see what others doo in places far distant; others, whereby you shall see men hanging in the aire; others, whereby you may perceive men flieng in the aire; others, wherein you may see one coming, and another going; otheres, were one images shall seeme to be one hundred, etc.³⁷

Both Abbot Trithemius (1462) and Paracelsus (1493-1541) wrote extensively on crystal gazing. Trithemius even gives recommendations for the best system of mounting a crystal for scrying:

Procure of a lapidary good clear pellucid crystal, of the bigness of a small orange, i.e., about one inch and a half in diameter; let it be globular or round each way alike; then, when you have got this crystal fair and clear, without any clouds of specks, get a small plate of pure gold to encompass the crystal round one half; let this be fitted on an ivory or ebony pedestal... Let there be engraved a circle (A) around the crystal with these characters [Fig. 4] around inside the circle next to the crystal; afterwards the name "*Tetragrammaton*". On the other side of the plate let there be engraven "*Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael*;" which are the four principal angels ruling over the *Sun, Moon, Venus* and *Mercury*; but on the table on which the crystal stands the following names, characters, and must be drawn in order.

³⁷ Scot, Reginald. *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. New York: Dover, 1972, 179. Originally published by Reginald Scot in 1584, printed by William Brome.

First the names of the seven planets and angels ruling them, with their seals or characters. The names of the four kings of the four corners of the earth. Let them be all written within a double circle, with a triangle on a table; on which place the crystal on its pedestal; this being done, thy table is complete and fit for the calling of the spirits...³⁸

Figure 4: Trithemius' crystal preparation instructions, characters to be inscribed next to the crystal.



Trithemius goes on to lay out a detailed description of the ritual procedure for calling spirits into the crystal to produce a vision. Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, more commonly known as Paracelsus the Great, declared that such complex ceremonies were unnecessary. In part two of the *Coelum Philosophorum*, Paracelsus writes:

To conjure is nothing else than to observe anything rightly, to know and to understand what it is. The crystal is a figure of the air. Whatever appears in the air, movable or immovable, the same appears also in the speculum or crystal as a wave. For the air, the water, and the crystal, so far as vision is concerned, are one, like a mirror in which an inverted copy of an object is seen.³⁹

Clearly, even by the mid-15th century, an elaborate crystallomancy ritual structure was already well developed. It is highly unlikely that such a complex ritual system could have coalesced over a period of a few years or even decades. It is far more reasonable that the intricate procedures that we start to see recorded in the 15th and 16th centuries are the products of folk traditions that evolved over many generations, spanning several centuries.

In the *Höllenzwang* (1575), Dr. Faustus asks Mephistopheles whether crystals can be made to allow one to see things distant in both time and space. Mephistopheles

³⁸ Trithemius, Johannes. "Trithemius's Book of Secrets and Doctrine of Spirits" in *The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer*, vol. 2, trans. Francis Barrett. Lackington, Allen, and Co., 1801, p. 135.

³⁹ Bombast, A.P.T. *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast, of Hohenheim, called Paracelsus the Great*. Translated by Arthur Edward Waite. London: James Elliott & Co., 1984, 14.

replies that such a thing is possible, and directs Faustus to go to a glassmaker on a Tuesday, in the hour of Mars (the first, eighth, fifteenth, or twenty-second hour of the day). The spirit then gives Faust two sets of instructions for how to consecrate the crystal. One method is to bury the crystal in a woman's grave; the other is to immerse it in the baptismal water of a first born male child for three weeks. After this the appropriate spirits must be called into the crystal, Mephistopheles recommends Auxeruel and Adadiel).⁴⁰

Most crystal scryers constructed or acquired their speculae from a glassmaker, but some are reputed to have come into possession of their crystals through more mystical means. Dr. Johannes Dee is perhaps the most famous scryer in British history. Dr. Dee was, for a time, a prominent figure in the court of Emperor Rudolph the II, and was highly favored by Queen Elizabeth I. According to Dee, a pair of angelic figures brought him a crystal "as big as an egg: most bright, clear and glorious," which he refers to as his "shew stone."

E[dward] K[elly] loked toward my west wyndow, and saw there first vppon the matts by my bokes a thing, (to his thinking) as big as an egg: most bright, clere, and glorious: and an angel of the heth of a little chyld holding vp the same thing in his hand toward me... I went toward the place, which E K pointed to: and tyll I cam within two fote of it, I saw nothing: and then I saw like a shaddow, on the ground or matts hard by my bokes vnder the west window. The shaddow was rowndysh and less then the palm of my hand. I put my hand down vppon it, and I felt a thing cold and hard: which (taking vp I) perceyued to be the stone before mentioned.⁴¹

Dee's diaries are full of intricate diagrams, descriptions of various spirits, angelic names, and invocations, correlating to a highly intricate system of scrying employed by Dee and his intermediaries, most notably Edward Kelly.

The Christian leadership continued fighting the menace of crystallomancy into the Renaissance. In the 1530s, the Abbot of Abingdon wrote to Thomas Cromwell, chief minister of Henry VIII:

It shall please your Maistership to be advertesed that my Officers have taken here a Preyste, a suspecte parson, and with hym certeyn bokes of conjuracions, in whiche ys

⁴⁰ Kunz, 187-188.

⁴¹ Whitby, Christopher. *John Dee's Actions with Spirits: 22 December 1581 to 23 May 1583*. Routledge, 2012, 138.

conteyned many conclusions of that worke; as fyndyng out of treasure hydde, ocnsecratyng of ryngs with stones in them, and consecratyng of cristal stone wheryn a chylde shall lokke, and se many things.⁴²

The copying and preservation of manuscripts is known to have been a common activity for many monastics and clergymen, so it is not surprising that certain members of the clergy were copying and preserving lapidary texts and grimoires that contained procedures for crystallomancy and divination. Indeed, the instructions concerning the use of the *erdenspiegel*, or “earth mirror,” were preserved in a 17th century manuscript written by a Capuchin priest. His writings are translated by Kunz:

The mirror is to be set about two inches above a board, and the questions to be answered placed beneath it. The scryer is recommended to place three grains of salt upon his tongue, whereupon he is to repeat a prayer and cross himself. He now takes the mirror in his hand and breathes upon it three times, repeating the words, “in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.” He then takes the mirror in his hand and breathes upon it three times, reciting the following incantation: “O thou holy archangel N.N., I pray to thee most fervently through the great and unsearchable name of the Lord of all Lords and King of all Kings, Jod, He, Vau, He, Tetragrammaton, Addonay, Schaday, receive my greeting and give ear to the humble petition, which I offer in the name of the great and highest God, Elohim, Zebaoth, that thou shalt appear to me in the world-mirror, and give me knowledge and instruction in answer to my questions.⁴³

We can see in the incantation above strong similarities to the instructions provided by Trithemius, as well as many other calls⁴⁴ and invocations that have been preserved. Like so many folk traditions, the ritual elements of scrying became blended with and incorporated many elements of Judeo-Christian theology and language. Despite the efforts of the Church to suppress such activities, or perhaps because of it, much of the language describing crystal gazing in the Medieval and Renaissance periods is full of references to angels, the Christian representation of the trinity, and the Hebrew names for god and specific angelic names and titles.

⁴² Ellis, Henry. *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History*. London: Richard Bentley, 1847, 41.

⁴³ Kunz, 185.

⁴⁴ A call is a specific invocation that is used with the crystal. The formula for the call is generically the same for all manners of scrying; however, there are often adjustments made depending on the nature of the tool being used and the nature of the crystal itself.

In his *Miscellanies*, John Aubrey relates the tale of a beryl crystal in Norfolk. This crystal belonged to a minister, then later to a miller, and was used by both to great diviniatory success. Aubrey writes,

It came first from Norfolk; a minister had it there, and a call that was used with it. Afterwards a miller had it, and both did work great cures with it, (if curable) and in the Beryl they did see, either the receipt in writing or else the herb. To this minister, the spirits or angels would appear openly and because the miller (who was his familiar friend) one day happened to see them, he [the minister] gave him [the miller] the aforesaid Beryl and call... The Beryl is a perfect sphere, the diameter I guess to be something more than an inch: it is set in a ring, or circle of silver, resembling a meridian of a globe: the step of it is about ten inches high, all gilt, at the four quarters of it are the names of the four angels, viz. Uriel, Raphael, Michael, and Gabriel.⁴⁵

This description provides a good example of how the divinatory and healing applications of such stones can be blended. The description of this stone sounds very similar to the stones found in the Kentish burial mounds. It may be that this was a common design for setting crystals, or perhaps this divinatory crystal was leftover from an earlier age, or even modeled on an earlier stone that was believed to have mystical qualities. The similarity of design does seem to support the idea that the Kentish crystals were used for a ritual or mystical purpose.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the calls associated with divinatory crystals became more complex. Some of them read more like legal documents, and in a sense they were. As far as scryers of this era were concerned, they were conjuring up a powerful spirit and parameters of the encounter had to be very carefully laid out to ensure the scryer's question was answered to their satisfaction, and, perhaps more importantly, that they were not harmed by the entity. Reginald Scott records an example of this type of legalistic invocation in *Discoverie of Witchcraft*,

... By all things created and confirmed in the firmament and by their verities and powers I constrain the spirit N. to appear visible in that christall stone, in the faire forme and shape of a white angel, a green angel, or a black angel, a man, a woman, a boie, a maiden virgin, a white greyhound, a divell with the great horns, without anie hurt or danger of our bodies, or soules, and truly to inform and shew unto us, true visions of all things in

⁴⁵ Aubrey, John. *Miscellanies Upon Various Subjects*. London: Printed for W. Ottridge, 1784, 219-20.

that christall stone, according to thine oth and promise, and that without any hindrance or tarrying, to appear visiblie, by this bond of words read over by mee three times upon pain of everlasting condemnation. Fiat, fiat, Amen.⁴⁶

Trithemius' call is similarly dense:

Oh God! Who art the author of all good things, strengthen, I beseech thee, thy poor servant, that he may stand fast, without fear, through this dealing and work; enlighten I beseech thee, oh Lord! The dark understanding of thy creature, so that his spiritual eye may be opened to know and see the angelic spirits descending here in this crystal: and thou, oh, inanimate creature of God, be sanctified and consecrated, and blessed to this purpose, that no evil phantasy may appear in thee; or, if they do gain ingress into this creature, they may be constrained to speak intelligibly, and truly, and without the least ambiguity, for Christ's sake. Amen. And forasmuch as thy servant here standing before thee, oh, Lord! Desires neither evil treasures, nor injury to his neighbor, nor hurt to any living creature, grant him the power of descrying those celestial spirits or intelligences, that may appear in this crystal, and whatever good gifts (whether the power of healing infirmities, or imbibing wisdom, or discovering any evil likely to afflict any person or family, or any other good gift thou mayest be please to bestow on me), enable me, by thy mercy and wisdom, to use whatever I may receive to the honor or thy holy name. Grant this for thy son Christ's sake. Amen.⁴⁷

According to a 15th century grimoire known as the Munich handbook, the crystal is activated by the repetition of divine names.⁴⁸ This belief certainly seems to be confirmed by many calls, such as that used with the *erdenspiegel*, which are crammed full of divine and angelic names. This style of invocation remained popular for several hundred years. Arthur Edward Waite, writing in 1909, recorded the call he used with his scrying crystal. He claimed to have recovered it from a Medieval Latin manuscript.

⁴⁶ Scott. XV. Xix. Also quoted in Besterman, 54.

⁴⁷ Barrett, F. *The Magus, Or, Celestial Intelligencer: Being a Complete System of Occult Philosophy: in Three Books Containing the Ancient and Modern Practice of the cabalistic Art, Natural and Celestial Magic, &c...Exhibiting the Sciences of Natural Magic; Alchymy, or Hermetic Philosophy Also the Nature, Creation, and Fall of Man...; to Which is Added Biographia Antiqua, or the Lives of the Most Eminent Philosophers, Magi, &c: the Whole Illustrated with a Great Variety of Curious Engravings, Magical and Cabalistical Figures, &c.* London: Printed for Lackington, Allen and Co..., 1801, II, iv., 136.

⁴⁸ Lng, Benedek. *Unlocked Books: Manuscripts of Learned magic in the Medievals Libraries of Central Europe.* University park: Penn State Univ, 2010, 172.

I exorcise, call upon and command the Spirit N, by and in the name of the Immense and everlasting God, JEHOVA< ADONAI< ELOHIM< AGLA< ON TETRAGRMMATON< and all that is therein – FILIUS< SOTHER< EMANUEL< PRIMONGENITUS< HOMOUSION< BONUS< VIA<VERITAS< VIRTUS< LEX< MEDIATOR< AGNUS< REX<PASTOR< PROPHETA< SACREDOS< ATHANATOS< PARACLETAUS< ALPHA< and OMEGA – by all these High, Great, Glorious, Royal, and Ineffable Names of the omnipotent god and of His only Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Second Essence of the Glorious Trinity: I exorcise, command, call upon and conjure thee – Spirit N. ___ wheresoever thou art, East, West, north, or South, or being bound to any one under the compass of the heavens; that thou mayst come immediately from the place of thy private abode and appear to me visibly and in fair and decent form within this crystal, stone, or glass. I do again exorcise and command thee powerfully – Spirit N. – to come and appear visibly before me in this crystal, stone, or glass – which I have thus and before mentioned – even by the virtue and power of those whereby I can bind all rebellious, obstinate, refractory spirits – ALLA< CARITAL< MARIBAL< CARIBAN< URION< SPTON< LOREAN< MARMOS< AGAIN< CADOS< YRON< ASTRON< GARDEONG< TETRAGRAMMATON< STRALLAX> SPIGNOS< SOTHER< JAH< ON EL< ELOHIM – by all aforesaid – I command thee – Spirit N – to make haste, come away and appear visibly to me, as aforesaid, without further tarrying; in the Name of Him who shall come to judge the quick and the dead, and the world by fire. Amen.⁴⁹

Waite's system for scrying was complex. In his *Manual of Cartomancy and Occult Divination* he gives explicit instructions for the cleansing and fortifying of the surrounding space as well as cleaning of the magical tools involved. He also includes a diagram of complex circles which include bindings, sigils, and angelic names. Aleister Crowley, an infamous contemporary of Waite's, reportedly had a system that was slightly less complicated. Crowley's scrying practice was described by his one-time friend and secretary, Israel Regardie,

The seer had with him a great golden topaz, set in a Calvary Cross of six squares, made of wood, and painted vermilion, which was engraved with a Greek Cross of five squares, and charged with the Rose of 49 petals. He held this, as a rule, in his hand. After choosing a spot where he was not likely to be disturbed, he would take this stone and

⁴⁹ Waite, A.E. *A Manual of Cartomancy and Occult Divination*. Kila, Mt: Kessinger Publishing, 1994 (reprint), 103-4.

recite the Enochian Call⁵⁰ and, after satisfying himself that the forces invoked were actually present, made the topaz play a part not unlike that of the looking glass in the case of Alice.⁵¹

Mirroring the growing interest in psychology, there was a shift in the late 19th and early 20th century and scrying procedures became more internal and reflective. Many occultists in this period began to view crystal visions not necessarily as the product of external spirits or demons, but rather as the manifestation of their unconscious mind. Unsurprisingly, the ritual and call became less formal during this era. These stripped-down calls and rituals were more similar to those recorded in the Middle Ages, although the feel is certainly more analytical and cold than you would find in many early folk practices. Kunz provides the following instructions for scrying in *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*:

Place the crystal on the table; protect it from reflections of surrounding tapers in front of the screen. The tapers are then to be lighted, the room being otherwise in perfect darkness, and the would-be scryer is to seat himself comfortably before the table, laying his hands flat upon it, and is then to gaze fixedly upon the crystal for half an hour.⁵²

This trend of simplified ritual practice continued into the 20th century. Manuals from this period focus less on complex invocations and more on simple directions, instructing inexperienced scryers on how to get the best results. In their well-known publication *The Witches Bible*, Janet and Stewart Farrar instruct their readers on scrying:

Seat yourself comfortably, preferably inside a magic circle, with your scrying device scooped in a black velvet cloth, in your hands, or in a suitable stand. The room should be dark and candlelit, with the candles arranged so that no reflections are seen in the ball or mirror.⁵³

Although most popular press books on scrying present a highly streamlined and user friendly system, many ceremonial magicians still make use of more complex rituals. While the lengthy invocation filled with a host of angelic names may not be the

⁵⁰ Regardie is referring to the Enochian invocation which Crowley referred to as the Call of the Thirty Aethyrs.

⁵¹ Crowley, Aleister, and Israel Regardie. *The Vision and the Voice*. Dallas: Sangreal Foundation, 1972 (reprint), 7-8.

⁵² Kunz, 215

⁵³ Farrar, Janet and Stewart Farrar. *A Witches' Bible; the Compleat Witches' Handbook*. London: Robert Hale, 1981, 108.

dominant fashion in modern Pagan and divinatory practice, the idea of spiritual beings being associated with or attached to scrying crystals has not been forgotten. In *Crystal Balls and Crystal Bowls*, Ted Andrews encourages scryers to acquaint themselves with the folklore of crystal gazing. He writes,

The myriad forces and expressions of nature have always been personified. Every flower has its fairy; every tree has its diva; every crystal has its angel. Whether we call them... any variety of names... It is enough to realize that there is some archetypal force that is manifesting and expressing itself through every aspect of nature.⁵⁴

Andrews also recommends practitioners meditate on an angelic archetype to foster a stronger connection with their crystal.

Like many religious ceremonies in the modern era, scrying rituals have become more simplified over the last century, with modern practitioners favoring practical implementation over pomp and flowery verse. Despite this, it is interesting how similar the description of the scrying experience has remained since Paracelsus. Paracelsus describes his experience as follows:

In crystal or mirror-gazing, the tincture radiates from the eyes of the gazer and collects on the surface of the crystal or mirror, and there forms a sensitive film in which the astral scenery reflects itself; and thus reveals... past, present, or future events.⁵⁵

Andrew Lang, George Kunz, and the Ferrars all describe the scrying process similarly. The modern authors consistently describe the scrying process in terms of the gazer staring into the speculum, the surface of the scrying tool becoming milky, as if covered by a film, which then becomes overlaid with images, like reflections on the glass, but materializing from nothing. Kunz attributes this effect to fatiguing of the optic nerve. The Ferrars suggest that the crystal functions as a trigger to release the intuition, allowing the unconscious mind to project awareness in the form of images or symbols that the scryer can then interpret.

It is important to keep in mind that our goal in evaluating these texts in an academic context is not to make judgments about the practice of crystallomancy itself. It is important that we do not make the all too common mistake of falling into the trap of

⁵⁴ Andrews, Ted. *Crystal Balls and Crystal Bowls*, 71

⁵⁵ Paracelsus and A.E. Waite. *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus*. Kila MT: Kessinger Pub., 2005 (reprint), I, 14.

thinking our role is to assess what we might personally feel the “truth” to be of the belief that we are recording, rather than to simply accurately report the practice. My purpose is to simply present the recorded practice and beliefs as to demonstrate how pervasive and persistent this practice and belief was, and to emphasize the clear pattern of belief that extends back through recorded history which we can use as a guide to help us better contextualize and interpret remnants of ancient cultures and communities. Clearly, we see a consistent pattern of belief and practice spanning several centuries. We have direct reports of the practice of crystal scrying from primary source documents, including early Church documents critical of the practice, and court records documenting the practice of crystal gazing as a profession. Since this is the historical context in which the Kentish crystals existed, we must seriously consider the potential that those spheres played a role as divinatory tools.

II. HEALING

In their 2010 exploration of folk healing, Moore and McClean write,

Crystals, amulets and gemstones have been used as healing objects, as well as for protections, decoration and adornment, in a range of cultural and healing traditions across the world. Crystal healing, or the “laying on of stones,” has been widely perceived by observers as the middle-class New Age healing activity par excellence.⁵⁶

Crystals have become so emblematic of the 1970s New Age movement (or rather the popular stereotype version of that movement) that it is easy to forget that crystal healing has been part of European culture for hundreds of years. Gale R. Owen-Crocker has argued that the use of crystals for healing practices is a modern development. This is perhaps the most puzzling of Owen-Crocker’s claims, given the substantial amount of evidence for pre-modern medicinal use of crystals and other stones.

The magical and medicinal properties of crystals were widely recorded in lapidaries and grimoires. There was little doubt in the Middle Ages that precious stones

⁵⁶ Moore, Ronnie and Stuart McClean. *Folk Healing and Health Care Practices in Britain and Ireland: Stethoscopes, Wands, and Crystals*. New York: Berghahn, 2010, 158.

could influence the health and disposition of those in contact with them. Lapidarian Anselmus De Boot writes,

That gems or stones, when applied to the body, exert and act upon it, is so well proven by the experience of many persons, that anyone who doubts this must be called over-bold.⁵⁷

Medieval literature also provides a valuable source of information regarding the popular understanding of medical uses of precious stones during the Middle Ages. Nichola Erin Harris discusses the use of stones in traditional folk medicine extensively in her dissertation, *The Idea of Lapidary Medicine: Its Circulation and Practical Applications in Medieval and Early Modern England: 1000-1750*. Harris concludes that literary sources reveal a clear cultural familiarity with the use of lapidary medicine.⁵⁸ We can easily find many references to lapidary remedies in the early chivalric romances. Chaucer, in his translation of *The Romance of the Rose*, describes a stone that rests in the girdle of the Lady Rychesse, which had magical properties.

Rychesse a girdle hadde upon
The bokel of it was a stone
Of vert greet, and mochell of might;
For who-so bar the stone so bright,
Of venom (thurte) him no-thing dote, ...
The mourdant, wrought in noble wyse,
Was of a stone ful precious,
That was so fyn and virtuous,
That hool a man could make
Of palsy, and of tooth ake.⁵⁹

A similar reference is found in Caxton's *Reynart the Foxe*, which is based on the 11th century story, *Roman de Renard*.

Yf only man seek in his body of venom/ or ylle mete in his stomack/ of colyk/

⁵⁷ De Boot, Anselmus. "Gemmarium et Lapidum Historia," lib. i. c. 25, lug bat, 1636, 103 – quoted in Kunz.

⁵⁸ Harris, Nichola Erin. *The Idea of Lapidary Medicine: Its Circulation and Practical Applications in Medieval and Early Modern England: 1000-1750*. Unpublished Dissertation Submitted to Rutgers University.

⁵⁹ Chaucer, Geoffrey and Walter W. Skeat. *The Romaunt of the Rose* lines 1085-1098 in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. London: Oxford University Press, 1967, 139. Also quoted in Harris, 3.

Stranguyllyon/ stone/ fystel or kanker or ony other sekenes/ sauf only the very deth late hym lye this stone in a little water/ and late hym drynke it/ & he shal forwith be hole & al quyte of his seknessis.⁶⁰

Chaucer and Caxton's references to the brightness of the stone, along with its ability to cure toothaches and illnesses associated with swelling, match quite well with the healing properties popularly ascribed to crystal. E.A. Wallis Budge writes in his work on amulets that crystals were used to treat dropsy and relieve toothaches.⁶¹ Caxton also makes mention of dipping the stone in water to benefit from its healing abilities⁶² - this was a common practice typically performed with crystalline stones.

F. Marian McNeil gives several examples of stone-based healing practices used in Scotland. Two of the most famous Scottish charm stones, the Lee Penny and the Keppoch charm stones, are purported to have healing powers. The Lee Penny, which belonged to the Lackhard clan and was immortalized by Sir Walter Scott in *The Talisman*, was reported to have been given to Sir Simon Lackhard by the wife of a Saracen chief in the mid-1300s. The Lee Penny crystal was renowned for its healing powers. McNeil writes, "to impart its power, it was drawn sun-wise around a vessel filled with water, and then *dipped* three times."⁶³ The Keppoch Stone belonged to the Macdonnells of Keppoch. It is described as an oval rock crystal the size of a small egg. The Stone was fixed in a silver brace and suspended from a silver chain. The Keppoch Stone is closely associated with Saint Bride's well (Tobar-Bride) outside Keppoch. Pilgrims would travel to receive the benefit of the stone's healing powers, which were said to be shared by the well. The Keppoch Stone was ritually lowered into the well reciting the following incantation:

Let me dip thee in the water,
Thou yellow, beautiful gem of power!
In water of purest wave
Which pure was kept by Bridget.

⁶⁰ Caxton, William. *This is the Table of the Historye of Reynart the Foxe*, 1481.

⁶¹ Budge, Ernest Alfred Wallis. *Amulets and Superstitions*. Oxford, 1930, 312. Print.

⁶² Caxton, *Historye of Reynart the foxe*, 1481

⁶³ McNeil, F. Marian. *The Silver Bough*, vol. I. Glasgow: MacLellan, 1977 (reprint), 94. Print. (emphasis added)

In the name of the Apostles twelve,
In the name of the High Trinity
And all the shining angels.
A blessing on the gem,
A blessing on the water,
And a healing of all bodily ailments
To each suffering creature.⁶⁴

The custom probably predates the incantation since Saint Bride, or Brigid is likely a syncretization of the older Celtic goddess Brigid with the Catholic figure Saint Brigid of Kildare.⁶⁵ It's quite likely that this well was a much older pilgrimage site that was updated to fit the paradigm of the new religion. Such healing wells are scattered all over the British Isles.

McNeil also discusses the magical stones that were kept by the Druids. We have already discussed the divinatory aspects of the Druid's Egg, but the legendary powers of that stone did not end there. According to Scottish folklore, the Druids carried stones with them that were called *glaine nan druidhe* or *gleini na drouth*, translated as "Druid's Egg." Timpson writes in *British Ecclesiastical History*,

Extravagant things have been reported concerning the miraculous eggs of the Druids. They were accustomed to be worn mounted in gold, as charms against disease.⁶⁶

The stories of these stones and their marvelous abilities go back centuries. Pliny discusses them in his *Natural History*. According to Pliny, these stones were worn as an insignia of Druidic rank.⁶⁷ There is some discussion as to what type of stone the Druid's Egg was. Most descriptions refer to it as crystalline in nature, but Pliny describes the stone as round, the size of a small apple, and having a shell that appeared mottled. This description has led some scholars, notably Meany and Gesner, to conclude that the Druid's Egg must have been some sort of fossilized echinoid or urchin. Such a trinket might match the description of Pliny, but is not inline with subsequent descriptions.

⁶⁴ McNeil, 93.

⁶⁵ Berger, Pamela C. *The Goddess Obscured: Transformation of the Grain Protectress from Goddess to Saint*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985. Print.

⁶⁶ Timpson, Thomas. *British Ecclesiastical History: including the Religion of the Druids, the Introduction of Christianity into Britain, and the rise, Progress, and Present State of Every Demonination of Christians in the British Empire*. London: Aylott and Jones, 1849. Print.

⁶⁷ Pliny. *Natural History*, 29,3.

Further, the magical properties traditionally associated with fossils are very different from those associated with crystals. Pliny asserts the stones he describes were worn as a mark of Druidic office. Charles Rogers, in *Scotland, Social and Domestic* describes a stone known as the Ardvoirlich gem. McNeil likewise discusses this stone. According to legend, the Ardvoirlich gem was once worn as a badge of office by the Arch-Druid. McNeil describes the stone as “a rock-crystal the size of an egg in shape spherical and hodgebacked and set in four silver hoops.”⁶⁸ Rogers further asserts that the Ardvoirlich gem was similar to the jewel on top of the national scepter of Scotland, which is a rock crystal.⁶⁹ Sir Walter Scott in a letter referred to the scepter of stone as being known to have once been in the possession of the Druids. Scott also writes that in his time, this stone, and the beryl stone that topped the royal mace, were believed to have been amulets, and were known as “Stones of Power” to the Highlanders.⁷⁰

In his 2004 book on sacred stone traditions, Gary Varner described the powers attributed to the Druid’s Egg as follows:

It occurred in various colors, including green, blue, pink, red, and brown, and some have perforations. Welsh folklore says that if you carry one of these stones in your pocket, all eye ailments will be cured.⁷¹

Crystals are often associated with the eyes. Dioscorides (40-90 CE) describes the medical uses of particular crystals, one of which is the treatment of diseases of the eye.⁷² The Druid’s Egg was also reputed to protect the wearer from the Evil Eye, a power that was also attributed to crystal.⁷³ Other magical properties attributed to the *glaine nan druidhe* included assurance of victory in debate and legal contests for the wearer, as well as granting the wearer access to and the favor of the royal court. These are also abilities associated with crystals. An entry in Albertus Magnus’ Book of Secrets reads:

If thou wilt overcome thy enemies and flee debate: take the stone, which is called beryllus. It is of pale colour and may be seen through as water. Bear it and thou shall

⁶⁸ McNeil, 92

⁶⁹ Rogers, Charles. *Scotland, Social and Domestic*. London: Charles Griffin, 1869, 213.

⁷⁰ Description of the Scottish Regalia by Sir Walter Scott, Bart., Edinburg, n.d., 13.

⁷¹ Varner, Gary R. *Menhirs, Dolmen, and Circles of Stone: the Folklore and Magic of Sacred Stone*. New York: Algora Pub., 2004, 84.

⁷² Dioscorides, V, 157.

⁷³ Meaney, 93.

overcome all debate and shall drive away thine enemies, and maketh thy enemy meek. It causeth a man to be well mannered. As Aaron saith, it giveth also good understanding.⁷⁴

The *Lithica*, a Greek text dealing with the virtues of precious stones, contains an entry that states the gods cannot resist the prayers of those who enter their temple holding a clear crystal ball in their hands. The *Lithica* also describes those who carry colorless or yellow crystals as:

Nobel their port and dignified their air;
Heroic majesty their form displays,
They that tranquility with courage joins
Shall best propitiate the powers divine.⁷⁵

The idea of carrying divine favor could easily be extended to include royal favor in later centuries.

The bulk of the physical descriptions of the *glaine nan druidhe* match that reported by Varner, not Pliny. Local folklore throughout Scotland, Ireland, and Wales describes the Druids as wearing a transparent crystalline stone. So the question we have to ask is, how might we reconcile the discrepancy between Pliny's account and the others? Lewis Spence put forward one possible answer. Spence suggested that the original Druid's Eggs may have been fossils as Pliny described them, and that later Eggs were fashioned out of crystal or glass.⁷⁶ Another possibility is that what Pliny saw was a raw crystal or geode. Uncut geodes (Fig. 5) are often spherical and may appear mottled, even bearing a strong resemblance to fossils.

Figure 5: Geodes⁷⁷

⁷⁴Trans. Michael R. Best, 34

⁷⁵ Orpheus, Eugen Abel, and Damigeron. *Lithica*. Berolini: Calvary, 1881, lines 301-305. Print. also quoted in Meaney, 90. The *Lithica* is attributed to Orpheus and is dated from the IV c. CE. It is one example of the Late Antiquity lapidary treatises, and describes the magical and medicinal properties of approximately thirty stones.

⁷⁶ Spence, Lewis. *History and Origins of Druidism*. Kessinger Publishing, 2003 (reprint), 163.

⁷⁷ Photos from Gem Center USA, www.gemcenterusa.com, accessed January 26, 2012.



There is also a possibility that what we are seeing is a conflation of two similar traditions. McNeil discusses tokens called “Serpent Stones.” These stones initially sound similar to the Druid’s Egg, but there are key differences. The mythic origin of the Druid’s Egg is that it is formed by the writhing of a large group of snakes that come together every year on the summer solstice. Since Druids were often referred to as snakes or dragons, this is likely an allegory. Serpent or Adder Stones were said to be found among the heather in the Scottish Highlands. These stones were also reported to be formed by a gathering of snakes, but unlike the Druid’s Egg, a Serpent Stone was a stone in which a hole had been worn by snakes rubbing against and through it. It is possible that we have two very similar legends that overtime got blended together on some points. Of course, it is also entirely possible that the stone upon which Pliny’s account was based was not the actual Druid’s Egg, but a fake.

Lapidary healing remained quite common in the British Isles up through the turn of the last century. Doctors regularly mixed powdered crystal and wine to treat a variety of ailments up through the mid-1800s, and several crystal balls have been found in Scotland which appear to date to the 18th century.⁷⁸ By this time, unlike on the continent, in Scotland it was much more common for crystal balls to be used in healing practices than divination. These modern era crystal balls were used in a manner identical to that described in Medieval and Renaissance texts. They were dipped into water, which was then believed to take on the healing properties of the stone. The water would then be given to the patient to drink, or used to bathe the afflicted area. Crystals were also frequently used in Wales and Scotland to treat disease in cattle. The cattle

⁷⁸ Conway, D.J. *Crystal Enchantments*. Freedom, CA: Crossing, 2000, 119. Print.

might be given water to drink that had been silvered with the crystal, or the crystal might be placed into a brook or stream through which the cattle would be driven. One stone, the Garvalla amulet, was reportedly hung around the neck of a sick animal so that when the cow lowered its head to eat or drink, the crystal would be dipped into its food and water.⁷⁹ Marie Trevelyan, writing in the early 20th century, relates an account of crystal healing from an elderly Welshman. She writes,

[He] told me that he remembered crystal balls being used for curing sickness and disease in man and beast. Water was poured over one of these stones, and afterwards given to the cattle and sheep to drink. Sometimes the stone was placed in a bowl of water, and the latter was afterward distributed among people who suffered from any mental or physical malady. People came long distances to the owners of these crystal balls – for water for their flocks and herds, or for maladies that attacked their relatives and friends... An incantation or prayer was uttered before the stone was dipped in the water. The following translation of the incantation in Welsh was given me:

“O thou stone of Might and Right/ Let me dip thee in the water --/
In the water of pure spring or wave, / In the name of St. David, / In
The name of the twelve Apostles, / In the name of the Holy Trinity/
And Michael and all the angels, / In the name of Christ and Mary His
mother! / Blessings on the clear shining stone! / Blessings on the clear
pure water! / A healing of all bodily ills/ On man and beast alike!”⁸⁰

Note the similarities between this incantation and the Keppoch stone invocation. We can see that the procedures used for crystal healing remained fundamentally unchanged through the modern period. Indeed, many of these practices are still used today.

A contemporary instruction manual on crystal use written by Judy Hall describes the various ways crystals can be used for healing,

There are several ways you can use these stones. You can place them on the affected part, or sweep the stones across your body to pull out disease and realign the subtle bodies. You can also wear a crystal. If you are familiar with meridia-based forms of therapy such as Shiatsu or

⁷⁹ Meany, 94.

⁸⁰ Trevelyan, Marie. *Folk-lore and Folk-stories of Wales*. London: E. Stock, 1909, 12.

acupuncture, you can use crystal wands on meridian points. As long as your crystals are not friable, you can put them in your bath. Or, you can make a gem remedy and take this internally, or bathe the affected part. You can also lay the stones out around your body, or around your bed, so that you are within their energy field.

Of course methods such as Shiatsu and acupuncture do not appear in early European texts. Our modern world has become increasingly interconnected and globalized. Increased speed of communication and contact with international communities and distant cultures has made it possible for people to share a variety of religious, ritual, and cultural ideas with the rest of the world. When complementary practices come in contact, they begin to influence one another. Just as Christianity absorbed local legends and figures of cultural significance, modern iterations of western folk traditions that come in contact with non-western traditions have been influenced by complementary systems and gradually new concepts become integrated into the practices.

CONCLUSION

This discussion has shown there is ample evidence of a well-defined tradition of crystal magic and ritual crystal use in Europe and the British Isles dating from at least 450 CE. Textual evidence demonstrates that crystal gazing and crystal healing were common practices in pre-modern western European societies, meaning that it is not only possible, but, in fact, probable that the crystal spheres found in the Kentish burial mounds were used for ritual and/or medicinal purposes. The fact that a significant source of the textual evidence for these early practices comes from letters documenting the Catholic Church's struggle to suppress and eradicate such practice indicates that the religious and ritual significance of these crystals was not Christian, but rooted in pre-Christian folk-beliefs or Pagan practices.

In this paper, I consulted a variety of primary source materials, including letters from church leaders, lapidaries, grimoires, journals, and private correspondence. I also cited literary works from the Medieval Renaissance periods as well as many secondary sources, such as scholarly works from the 17th through 19th centuries, instructional pamphlets, and early archaeological and folklore society journals. A number of more

recent scholarly publications were reviewed, including doctoral dissertations and published manuscripts. I also made use of some 20th and 21st century popular press publications when discussing contemporary ritual and folk practices. By consulting these modern publications, I was able to compare the practice of crystallo-mancy today with the ritual use of crystals in earlier periods. Despite the diverse nature of these sources, the information they contained was incredibly consistent, demonstrating a chain of primary and secondary source evidence supporting a continuous folk tradition of ritual crystal use in western Europe running from the early part of the last millennium to the present.

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting the conclusion that crystallo-mancy was an established practice more than a century before the dates assigned to the crystals uncovered in the Kentish burial mounds. A continuous stream of textual evidence running from century to century over 1500 years suggested the fundamental elements of that tradition were maintained, cultivated, and further developed over the centuries, and provides a tangible connection between pre-modern ritual activities and contemporary Pagan practices. Knowing that crystal magic was practiced well before the burial of the Kentish crystals, and that the practice continued for centuries after, the historical continuity model forces us to conclude that it would be unreasonable to interpret those crystal spheres to be an anomaly. Therefore, we should interpret the Kentish crystals as existing within that long tradition of ritual crystal use for divination and healing in western European culture.