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JAMES GEORGE FRAZER

THE GOLDEN BOUGH

A STUDY IN MAGIC AND RELIGION

I VOLUME, ABRIDGED EDITION

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梁小民

PREFACE

THE primary aim of this book is to explain the remarkable rule which regulated the succession to the priesthood of Diana at Aricia. When I first set myself to solve the problem more than thirty years ago, I thought that the solution could be propounded very briefly, but I soon found that to render it probable or even intelligible it was necessary to discuss certain more general questions, some of which had hardly been broached before. In successive editions the discussion of these and kindred topics has occupied more and more space, the enquiry has branched out in more and more directions, until the two volumes of the original work have expanded into twelve. Meantime a wish has often been expressed that the book should be issued in a more compendious form. This abridgment is an attempt to meet the wish and thereby to bring the work within the range of a wider circle of readers. While the bulk of the book has been greatly reduced, I have endeavoured to retain its leading principles, together with an amount of evidence sufficient to illustrate them clearly. The language of the original has also for the most part been preserved, though here and there the exposition has been somewhat condensed. In order to keep as much of the text as possible I have sacrificed all the notes, and with them all exact references to my authorities. Readers who desire to ascertain the source of any particular statement must therefore consult the larger work, which is fully documented and provided with a complete bibliography.

In the abridgment I have neither added new matter nor altered the views expressed in the last edition; for the evidence which has come to my knowledge in the meantime has on the whole served either to confirm my former conclusions or to furnish fresh illustrations of old principles. Thus, for example, on the crucial question of the practice of putting kings to death either at the end of a fixed period or whenever their health and strength began to fail, the body of evidence which points to the wide prevalence of such a custom has

been considerably augmented in the interval. A striking instance of a limited monarchy of this sort is furnished by the powerful mediaeval kingdom of the Khazars in Southern Russia, where the kings were liable to be put to death either on the expiry of a set term or whenever some public calamity, such as drought, dearth, or defeat in war, seemed to indicate a failure of their natural powers. The evidence for the systematic killing of the Khazar kings, drawn from the accounts of old Arab travellers, has been collected by me elsewhere.¹ Africa, again, has supplied several fresh examples of a similar practice of regicide. Among them the most notable perhaps is the custom formerly observed in Bunyoro of choosing every year from a particular clan a mock king, who was supposed to incarnate the late king, cohabited with his widows at his temple-tomb, and after reigning for a week was strangled.² The custom presents a close parallel to the ancient Babylonian festival of the Sacaea, at which a mock king was dressed in the royal robes, allowed to enjoy the real king's concubines, and after reigning for five days was stripped, scourged, and put to death. That festival in its turn has lately received fresh light from certain Assyrian inscriptions,³ which seem to confirm the interpretation which I formerly gave of the festival as a New Year celebration and the parent of the Jewish festival of Purim.⁴ Other recently discovered parallels to the priestly kings of Aricia are African priests and kings who used to be put to death at the end of seven or of two years, after being liable in the interval to be attacked and killed by a strong man, who thereupon succeeded to the priesthood or the kingdom.⁵

With these and other instances of like customs before us it is no longer possible to regard the rule of succession to the priesthood of Diana at Aricia as exceptional; it clearly exemplifies a widespread institution, of which the most numerous and the most similar cases have thus far been found in Africa. How far the facts point to an early influence of Africa on Italy, or even to the existence of an African population in Southern Europe, I do not presume to say. The pre-

¹ J. G. Frazer, "The Killing of the Khazar Kings," *Folk-lore*, xxviii. (1917), pp. 382-407.

² Rev. J. Roscoe, *The Soul of Central Africa* (London, 1922), p. 200. Compare J. G. Frazer, "The Mackie Ethnological Expedition to Central Africa," *Man*, xx. (1920), p. 181.

³ H. Zimmern, *Zum babylonischen Neujahrsfest* (Leipzig, 1918). Compare A. H. Sayce, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, July 1921, pp. 440-442.

⁴ *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, pp. 354 sqq., 412 sqq.

⁵ P. Amaury Talbot in *Journal of the African Society*, July 1916, pp. 309 sq.; *id.*, in *Folk-lore*, xxvi. (1916), pp. 79 sq.; H. R. Palmer, in *Journal of the African Society*, July 1912, pp. 403, 407 sq.

historic relations between the two continents are still obscure and still under investigation.

Whether the explanation which I have offered of the institution is correct or not must be left to the future to determine. I shall always be ready to abandon it if a better can be suggested. Meantime in committing the book in its new form to the judgment of the public I desire to guard against a misapprehension of its scope which appears to be still rife, though I have sought to correct it before now. If in the present work I have dwelt at some length on the worship of trees, it is not, I trust, because I exaggerate its importance in the history of religion, still less because I would deduce from it a whole system of mythology; it is simply because I could not ignore the subject in attempting to explain the significance of a priest who bore the title of King of the Wood, and one of whose titles to office was the plucking of a bough—the Golden Bough—from a tree in the sacred grove. But I am so far from regarding the reverence for trees as of supreme importance for the evolution of religion that I consider it to have been altogether subordinate to other factors, and in particular to the fear of the human dead, which, on the whole, I believe to have been probably the most powerful force in the making of primitive religion. I hope that after this explicit disclaimer I shall no longer be taxed with embracing a system of mythology which I look upon not merely as false but as preposterous and absurd. But I am too familiar with the hydra of error to expect that by lopping off one of the monster's heads I can prevent another, or even the same, from sprouting again. I can only trust to the candour and intelligence of my readers to rectify this serious misconception of my views by a comparison with my own express declaration.

J. G. FRAZER.

1 BRICK COURT, TEMPLE,
LONDON, *June 1922.*

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE KING OF THE WOOD	1
§ 1. Diana and Virbius	1
§ 2. Artemis and Hippolytus	6
§ 3. Recapitulation	7
II. PRIESTLY KINGS	9
III. SYMPATHETIC MAGIC	11
§ 1. The Principles of Magic	11
§ 2. Homoeopathic or Imitative Magic	12
§ 3. Contagious Magic	37
§ 4. The Magician's Progress	45
IV. MAGIC AND RELIGION	48
V. THE MAGICAL CONTROL OF THE WEATHER	60
§ 1. The Public Magician	60
§ 2. The Magical Control of Rain	62
§ 3. The Magical Control of the Sun	78
§ 4. The Magical Control of the Wind	80
VI. MAGICIANS AS KINGS	83
VII. INCARNATE HUMAN GODS	91
VIII. DEPARTMENTAL KINGS OF NATURE	106
IX. THE WORSHIP OF TREES	109
§ 1. Tree-spirits	109
§ 2. Beneficent Powers of Tree-spirits	117
X. RELICS OF TREE-WORSHIP IN MODERN EUROPE	120
XI. THE INFLUENCE OF THE SEXES ON VEGETATION	135
XII. THE SACRED MARRIAGE	139
§ 1. Diana as a Goddess of Fertility	139
§ 2. The Marriage of the Gods	142
XIII. THE KINGS OF ROME AND ALBA	146
§ 1. Numa and Egeria	146
§ 2. The King as Jupiter	148

X CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
XIV. THE SUCCESSION TO THE KINGDOM IN ANCIENT LATIUM	152
XV. THE WORSHIP OF THE OAK	159
XVI. DIANUS AND DIANA	161
XVII. THE BURDEN OF ROYALTY	168
§ 1. Royal and Priestly Taboos	168
§ 2. Divorce of the Spiritual from the Temporal Power	175
XVIII. THE PERILS OF THE SOUL	178
§ 1. The Soul as a Mannikin	178
§ 2. Absence and Recall of the Soul	180
§ 3. The Soul as a Shadow and a Reflection	189
XIX. TABOOED ACTS	194
§ 1. Taboos on Intercourse with Strangers	194
§ 2. Taboos on Eating and Drinking	198
§ 3. Taboos on showing the Face	199
§ 4. Taboos on quitting the House	200
§ 5. Taboos on leaving Food over	200
XX. TABOOED PERSONS	202
§ 1. Chiefs and Kings tabooed	202
§ 2. Mourners tabooed	205
§ 3. Women tabooed at Menstruation and Childbirth	207
§ 4. Warriors tabooed	210
§ 5. Manslayers tabooed	212
§ 6. Hunters and Fishers tabooed	216
XXI. TABOOED THINGS	223
§ 1. The Meaning of Taboo	223
§ 2. Iron tabooed	224
§ 3. Sharp Weapons tabooed	226
§ 4. Blood tabooed	227
§ 5. The Head tabooed	230
§ 6. Hair tabooed	231
§ 7. Ceremonies at Hair-cutting	233
§ 8. Disposal of Cut Hair and Nails	233
§ 9. Spittle tabooed	237
§ 10. Foods tabooed	238
§ 11. Knots and Rings tabooed	238
XXII. TABOOED WORDS	244
§ 1. Personal Names tabooed	244
§ 2. Names of Relations tabooed	249
§ 3. Names of the Dead tabooed	251
§ 4. Names of Kings and other Sacred Persons tabooed	257
§ 5. Names of Gods tabooed	260

CONTENTS

CHAP.	xi PAGE
XXIII. OUR DEBT TO THE SAVAGE	262
XXIV. THE KILLING OF THE DIVINE KING	264
§ 1. The Mortality of the Gods	264
§ 2. Kings killed when their Strength fails	265
§ 3. Kings killed at the End of a Fixed Term	274
XXV. TEMPORARY KINGS	283
XXVI. SACRIFICE OF THE KING'S SON	289
XXVII. SUCCESSION TO THE SOUL	293
XXVIII. THE KILLING OF THE TREE-SPIRIT	296
§ 1. The Whitsuntide Mummers	296
§ 2. Burying the Carnival	301
§ 3. Carrying out Death	307
§ 4. Bringing in Summer	311
§ 5. Battle of Summer and Winter	316
§ 6. Death and Resurrection of Kostrubonko	317
§ 7. Death and Revival of Vegetation	318
§ 8. Analogous Rites in India	319
§ 9. The Magic Spring	320
XXIX. THE MYTH OF ADONIS	324
XXX. ADONIS IN SYRIA	327
XXXI. ADONIS IN CYPRUS	329
XXXII. THE RITUAL OF ADONIS	335
XXXIII. THE GARDENS OF ADONIS	341
XXXIV. THE MYTH AND RITUAL OF ATTIS	347
XXXV. ATTIS AS A GOD OF VEGETATION	352
XXXVI. HUMAN REPRESENTATIVES OF ATTIS	353
XXXVII. ORIENTAL RELIGIONS IN THE WEST	356
XXXVIII. THE MYTH OF OSIRIS	362
XXXIX. THE RITUAL OF OSIRIS	368
§ 1. The Popular Rites	368
§ 2. The Official Rites	373
XL. THE NATURE OF OSIRIS	377
§ 1. Osiris a Corn-god	377
§ 2. Osiris a Tree-spirit	380
§ 3. Osiris a God of Fertility	381
§ 4. Osiris a God of the Dead	381
XLI. ISIS	382

CHAP.	PAGE
XLII. OSIRIS AND THE SUN	384
XLIII. DIONYSUS	385
XLIV. DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE	393
XLV. THE CORN-MOTHER AND THE CORN-MAIDEN IN NORTHERN EUROPE	399
XLVI. THE CORN-MOTHER IN MANY LANDS	412
§ 1. The Corn-mother in America	412
§ 2. The Rice-mother in the East Indies	413
§ 3. The Spirit of the Corn embodied in Human Beings	419
§ 4. The Double Personification of the Corn as Mother and Daughter	420
XLVII. LITYERSES	424
§ 1. Songs of the Corn Reapers	424
§ 2. Killing the Corn-spirit	425
§ 3. Human Sacrifices for the Crops	431
§ 4. The Corn-spirit slain in his Human Representatives	438
XLVIII. THE CORN-SPIRIT AS AN ANIMAL	447
§ 1. Animal Embodiments of the Corn-spirit	447
§ 2. The Corn-spirit as a Wolf or a Dog	448
§ 3. The Corn-spirit as a Cock	450
§ 4. The Corn-spirit as a Hare	452
§ 5. The Corn-spirit as a Cat	453
§ 6. The Corn-spirit as a Goat	454
§ 7. The Corn-spirit as a Bull, Cow, or Ox	457
§ 8. The Corn-spirit as a Horse or Mare	459
§ 9. The Corn-spirit as a Pig (Boar or Sow)	460
§ 10. On the Animal Embodiments of the Corn-spirit	462
XLIX. ANCIENT DEITIES OF VEGETATION AS ANIMALS	464
§ 1. Dionysus, the Goat and the Bull	464
§ 2. Demeter, the Pig and the Horse	469
§ 3. Attis, Adonis, and the Pig	471
§ 4. Osiris, the Pig and the Bull	472
§ 5. Virbius and the Horse	476
L. EATING THE GOD	479
§ 1. The Sacrament of First-Fruits	479
§ 2. Eating the God among the Aztecs	488
§ 3. Many Manii at Aricia	491
LI. HOMOEOPATHIC MAGIC OF A FLESH DIET	494

CONTENTS

xiii

CHAP.	PAGE
LII. KILLING THE DIVINE ANIMAL	499
§ 1. Killing the Sacred Buzzard	499
§ 2. Killing the Sacred Ram	500
§ 3. Killing the Sacred Serpent	501
§ 4. Killing the Sacred Turtles	502
§ 5. Killing the Sacred Bear	505
LIII. THE PROPITIATION OF WILD ANIMALS BY HUNTERS	518
LIV. TYPES OF ANIMAL SACRAMENT	532
§ 1. The Egyptian and the Aino Types of Sacrament	532
§ 2. Processions with Sacred Animals	535
LV. THE TRANSFERENCE OF EVIL	538
§ 1. The Transference to Inanimate Objects	538
§ 2. The Transference to Animals	540
§ 3. The Transference to Men	542
§ 4. The Transference of Evil in Europe	543
LVI. THE PUBLIC EXPULSION OF EVILS	546
§ 1. The Omnipresence of Demons	546
§ 2. The Occasional Expulsion of Evils	547
§ 3. The Periodic Expulsion of Evils	551
LVII. PUBLIC SCAPEGOATS	562
§ 1. The Expulsion of Embodied Evils	562
§ 2. The Occasional Expulsion of Evils in a Material Vehicle	563
§ 3. The Periodic Expulsion of Evils in a Material Vehicle	566
§ 4. On Scapegoats in General	574
LVIII. HUMAN SCAPEGOATS IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY	577
§ 1. The Human Scapegoat in Ancient Rome	577
§ 2. The Human Scapegoat in Ancient Greece	578
§ 3. The Roman Saturnalia	583
LIX. KILLING THE GOD IN MEXICO	587
LX. BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH	592
§ 1. Not to touch the Earth	592
§ 2. Not to see the Sun	595
§ 3. The Seclusion of Girls at Puberty	595
§ 4. Reasons for the Seclusion of Girls at Puberty	603
LXI. THE MYTH OF BALDER	607
LXII. THE FIRE FESTIVALS OF EUROPE	609
§ 1. The Fire-festivals in general	609
§ 2. The Lenten Fires	609
§ 3. The Easter Fires	614
§ 4. The Beltane Fires	617
§ 5. The Midsummer Fires	622
§ 6. The Hallowe'en Fires	632
§ 7. The Midwinter Fires	636
§ 8. The Need-fire	638

CHAP.	PAGE
LXIII. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE FIRE-FESTIVALS . . .	641
§ 1. On the Fire-festivals in general . . .	641
§ 2. The Solar Theory of the Fire-festivals . . .	643
§ 3. The Purificatory Theory of the Fire-festivals . . .	647
LXIV. THE BURNING OF HUMAN BEINGS IN THE FIRES . . .	650
§ 1. The Burning of Effigies in the Fires . . .	650
§ 2. The Burning of Men and Animals in the Fires . . .	652
LXV. BALDER AND THE MISTLETOE	658
LXVI. THE EXTERNAL SOUL IN FOLK-TALES	667
LXVII. THE EXTERNAL SOUL IN FOLK-CUSTOM	679
§ 1. The External Soul in Inanimate Things . . .	679
§ 2. The External Soul in Plants	681
§ 3. The External Soul in Animals	683
§ 4. The Ritual of Death and Resurrection . . .	691
LXVIII. THE GOLDEN BOUGH	701
LXIX. FAREWELL TO NEMI	711
INDEX	715

CHAPTER I

THE KING OF THE WOOD

§ 1. *Diana and Virbius*.—Who does not know Turner's picture of the Golden Bough? The scene, suffused with the golden glow of imagination in which the divine mind of Turner steeped and transfigured even the fairest natural landscape, is a dream-like vision of the little woodland lake of Nemi—"Diana's Mirror," as it was called by the ancients. No one who has seen that calm water, lapped in a green hollow of the Alban hills, can ever forget it. The two characteristic Italian villages which slumber on its banks, and the equally Italian palace whose terraced gardens descend steeply to the lake, hardly break the stillness and even the solitariness of the scene. Diana herself might still linger by this lonely shore, still haunt these woodlands wild.

In antiquity this sylvan landscape was the scene of a strange and recurring tragedy. On the northern shore of the lake, right under the precipitous cliffs on which the modern village of Nemi is perched, stood the sacred grove and sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, or Diana of the Wood. The lake and the grove were sometimes known as the lake and grove of Aricia. But the town of Aricia (the modern La Riccia) was situated about three miles off, at the foot of the Alban Mount, and separated by a steep descent from the lake, which lies in a small crater-like hollow on the mountain side. In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.

The post which he held by this precarious tenure carried with it the title of king; but surely no crowned head ever lay uneasier, or was visited by more evil dreams, than his. For year in, year out, in summer and winter, in fair weather and in foul, he had to keep his lonely watch, and whenever he snatched a troubled slumber it was at the peril of his life. The least relaxation of his vigilance, the smallest abatement of his strength of limb or skill of fence, put him in jeopardy; grey hairs might seal his death-warrant. To gentle and pious pilgrims at the shrine the sight of him might well seem to darken the fair landscape, as when a cloud suddenly blots the sun on a bright day. The

dreamy blue of Italian skies, the dappled shade of summer woods, and the sparkle of waves in the sun, can have accorded but ill with that stern and sinister figure. Rather we picture to ourselves the scene as it may have been witnessed by a belated wayfarer on one of those wild autumn nights when the dead leaves are falling thick, and the winds seem to sing the dirge of the dying year. It is a sombre picture, set to melancholy music—the background of forest showing black and jagged against a lowering and stormy sky, the sighing of the wind in the branches, the rustle of the withered leaves under foot, the lapping of the cold water on the shore, and in the foreground, pacing to and fro, now in twilight and now in gloom, a dark figure with a glitter of steel at the shoulder whenever the pale moon, riding clear of the cloud-rack, peers down at him through the matted boughs.

The strange rule of this priesthood has no parallel in classical antiquity, and cannot be explained from it. To find an explanation we must go farther afield. No one will probably deny that such a custom savours of a barbarous age, and, surviving into imperial times, stands out in striking isolation from the polished Italian society of the day, like a primæval rock rising from a smooth-shaven lawn. It is the very rudeness and barbarity of the custom which allow us a hope of explaining it. For recent researches into the early history of man have revealed the essential similarity with which, under many superficial differences, the human mind has elaborated its first crude philosophy of life. Accordingly, if we can show that a barbarous custom, like that of the priesthood of Nemi, has existed elsewhere; if we can detect the motives which led to its institution; if we can prove that these motives have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generically alike; if we can show, lastly, that these very motives, with some of their derivative institutions, were actually at work in classical antiquity; then we may fairly infer that at a remoter age the same motives gave birth to the priesthood of Nemi. Such an inference, in default of direct evidence as to how the priesthood did actually arise, can never amount to demonstration. But it will be more or less probable according to the degree of completeness with which it fulfils the conditions I have indicated. The object of this book is, by meeting these conditions, to offer a fairly probable explanation of the priesthood of Nemi.

I begin by setting forth the few facts and legends which have come down to us on the subject. According to one story the worship of Diana at Nemi was instituted by Orestes, who, after killing Thoas, King of the Tauric Chersonese (the Crimea), fled with his sister to Italy, bringing with him the image of the Tauric Diana hidden in a faggot of sticks. After his death his bones were transported from Aricia to Rome and buried in front of the temple of Saturn, on the Capitoline slope, beside the temple of Concord. The bloody ritual which legend ascribed to the Tauric Diana is familiar to classical readers; it is said that every stranger who landed on the shore was sacrificed on her

altar. But transported to Italy, the rite assumed a milder form. Within the sanctuary at Nemi grew a certain tree of which no branch might be broken. Only a runaway slave was allowed to break off, if he could, one of its boughs. Success in the attempt entitled him to fight the priest in single combat, and if he slew him he reigned in his stead with the title of King of the Wood (*Rex Nemorensis*). According to the public opinion of the ancients the fateful branch was that Golden Bough which, at the Sibyl's bidding, Aeneas plucked before he essayed the perilous journey to the world of the dead. The flight of the slave represented, it was said, the flight of Orestes; his combat with the priest was a reminiscence of the human sacrifices once offered to the Tauric Diana. This rule of succession by the sword was observed down to imperial times; for amongst his other freaks Caligula, thinking that the priest of Nemi had held office too long, hired a more stalwart ruffian to slay him; and a Greek traveller, who visited Italy in the age of the Antonines, remarks that down to his time the priesthood was still the prize of victory in a single combat.

Of the worship of Diana at Nemi some leading features can still be made out. From the votive offerings which have been found on the site, it appears that she was conceived of especially as a huntress, and further as blessing men and women with offspring, and granting expectant mothers an easy delivery. Again, fire seems to have played a foremost part in her ritual. For during her annual festival, held on the thirteenth of August, at the hottest time of the year, her grove shone with a multitude of torches, whose ruddy glare was reflected by the lake; and throughout the length and breadth of Italy the day was kept with holy rites at every domestic hearth. Bronze statuettes found in her precinct represent the goddess herself holding a torch in her raised right hand; and women whose prayers had been heard by her came crowned with wreaths and bearing lighted torches to the sanctuary in fulfilment of their vows. Some one unknown dedicated a perpetually burning lamp in a little shrine at Nemi for the safety of the Emperor Claudius and his family. The terra-cotta lamps which have been discovered in the grove may perhaps have served a like purpose for humbler persons. If so, the analogy of the custom to the Catholic practice of dedicating holy candles in churches would be obvious. Further, the title of Vesta borne by Diana at Nemi points clearly to the maintenance of a perpetual holy fire in her sanctuary. A large circular basement at the north-east corner of the temple, raised on three steps and bearing traces of a mosaic pavement, probably supported a round temple of Diana in her character of Vesta, like the round temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum. Here the sacred fire would seem to have been tended by Vestal Virgins, for the head of a Vestal in terra-cotta was found on the spot, and the worship of a perpetual fire, cared for by holy maidens, appears to have been common in Latium from the earliest to the latest times. Further, at the annual festival of the goddess, hunting dogs were crowned and wild beasts were not molested; young people went through a purificatory ceremony

in her honour; wine was brought forth, and the feast consisted of a kid, cakes served piping hot on plates of leaves, and apples still hanging in clusters on the boughs.

But Diana did not reign alone in her grove at Nemi. Two lesser divinities shared her forest sanctuary. One was Egeria, the nymph of the clear water which, bubbling from the basaltic rocks, used to fall in graceful cascades into the lake at the place called Le Mole, because here were established the mills of the modern village of Nemi. The purling of the stream as it ran over the pebbles is mentioned by Ovid, who tells us that he had often drunk of its water. Women with child used to sacrifice to Egeria, because she was believed, like Diana, to be able to grant them an easy delivery. Tradition ran that the nymph had been the wife or mistress of the wise king Numa, that he had consorted with her in the secrecy of the sacred grove, and that the laws which he gave the Romans had been inspired by communion with her divinity. Plutarch compares the legend with other tales of the loves of goddesses for mortal men, such as the love of Cybele and the Moon for the fair youths Attis and Endymion. According to some, the trysting-place of the lovers was not in the woods of Nemi but in a grove outside the dripping Porta Capena at Rome, where another sacred spring of Egeria gushed from a dark cavern. Every day the Roman Vestals fetched water from this spring to wash the temple of Vesta, carrying it in earthenware pitchers on their heads. In Juvenal's time the natural rock had been encased in marble, and the hallowed spot was profaned by gangs of poor Jews, who were suffered to squat, like gypsies, in the grove. We may suppose that the spring which fell into the lake of Nemi was the true original Egeria, and that when the first settlers moved down from the Alban hills to the banks of the Tiber they brought the nymph with them and found a new home for her in a grove outside the gates. The remains of baths which have been discovered within the sacred precinct, together with many terra-cotta models of various parts of the human body, suggest that the waters of Egeria were used to heal the sick, who may have signified their hopes or testified their gratitude by dedicating likenesses of the diseased members to the goddess, in accordance with a custom which is still observed in many parts of Europe. To this day it would seem that the spring retains medicinal virtues.

The other of the minor deities at Nemi was Virbius. Legend had it that Virbius was the young Greek hero Hippolytus, chaste and fair, who learned the art of venery from the centaur Chiron, and spent all his days in the greenwood chasing wild beasts with the virgin huntress Artemis (the Greek counterpart of Diana) for his only comrade. Proud of her divine society, he spurned the love of women, and this proved his bane. For Aphrodite, stung by his scorn, inspired his stepmother Phaedra with love of him; and when he disdained her wicked advances she falsely accused him to his father Theseus. The slander was believed, and Theseus prayed to his sire Poseidon to avenge the imagined wrong. So while Hippolytus drove in a chariot