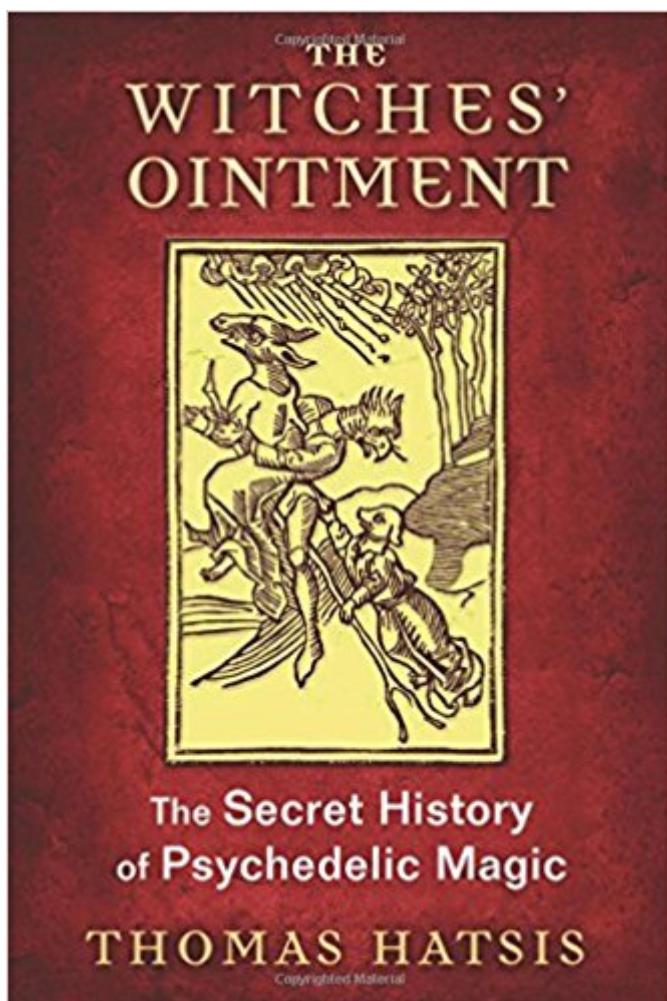


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The Witches' Ointment: The Secret History Of Psychedelic Magic



Synopsis

An exploration of the historical origins of the “witches’ ointment” and medieval hallucinogenic drug practices based on the earliest sources. Details how early modern theologians demonized psychedelic folk magic into “witches’ ointments.” Shares dozens of psychoactive formulas and recipes gleaned from rare manuscripts from university collections all over the world as well as the practices and magical incantations necessary for their preparation. Examines the practices of medieval witches like Matteuccia di Francisco, who used hallucinogenic drugs in her love potions and herbal preparations. In the medieval period preparations with hallucinogenic herbs were part of the practice of *veneficum*, or poison magic. This collection of magical arts used poisons, herbs, and rituals to bewitch, heal, prophesy, infect, and murder. In the form of psyche-magical ointments, poison magic could trigger powerful hallucinations and surrealistic dreams that enabled direct experience of the Divine. Smeared on the skin, these entheogenic ointments were said to enable witches to commune with various local goddesses, bastardized by the Church as trips to the Sabbat--clandestine meetings with Satan to learn magic and participate in demonic orgies. Examining trial records and the pharmacopoeia of witches, alchemists, folk healers, and heretics of the 15th century, Thomas Hatsis details how a range of ideas from folk drugs to ecclesiastical fears over medicine women merged to form the classical “witch” stereotype and what history has called the “witches’ ointment.” He shares dozens of psychoactive formulas and recipes gleaned from rare manuscripts from university collections from all over the world as well as the practices and magical incantations necessary for their preparation. He explores the connections between witches’ ointments and spells for shape shifting, spirit travel, and bewitching magic. He examines the practices of some Renaissance magicians, who inhaled powerful drugs to communicate with spirits, and of Italian folk-witches, such as Matteuccia di Francisco, who used hallucinogenic drugs in her love potions and herbal preparations, and Finicella, who used drug ointments to imagine herself transformed into a cat. Exploring the untold history of the “witches’ ointment” and medieval hallucinogen use, Hatsis reveals how the Church transformed folk drug practices, specifically entheogenic ones, into satanic experiences.

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Customer Reviews

“The Witches” Ointment is, remarkably, the first full-length treatment of a topic that is central to our understanding of European witchcraft. Did the witches use psychoactive substances or not? This has long been debated but often on the basis of prejudice or inadequate information. We are fortunate that Hatsis has written an authoritative account, drawing deeply on primary sources and pursuing original lines of thought. Entertaining and highly readable, this book seems destined to be the definitive work on the subject. No doubt it will inspire others to see the witch cult in a new light. Highly recommended to all those who are interested in witchcraft, the history of drugs, and the more unusual byways of culture. A fascinating book. (Richard Rudgley, author of *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Substances*) “Hatsis’ treatment of this woefully neglected area in the body of drug history scholarship is sublimely applied and will no doubt become an important fixture in the canon of pharmacography. Superb! (Robert Dickins, publisher and editor of *Psychedelic Press UK*) “Tales of witches and toads, broomsticks and belladonna--documented herein are the exotic herbal potions and demonic flights of fancy that terrified and confounded the religious authorities of the Middle Ages. Exquisitely written and meticulously researched, Hatsis clears the supernatural mists of yore and roots out the various psychoactive agents lying at the heart of European witchcraft. A remarkably informative and wholly compelling read! (Simon G. Powell, author of *Magic Mushroom Explorer* and *The Psilocybin Solution*) “In this remarkable book, Thomas Hatsis reveals the hidden truth behind history’s most legendary ointments--the medieval bewitching potions--that supposedly lubricated broomsticks and fueled extracorporeal mystical journeys and hallucinogenic night flights, setting the stage for strange entity encounters and unholy copulations, animal transformations, and miraculous healings as well as diabolical poisonings, dangerous delusional deceptions, and harmful

“black magic.” In this impeccably researched and compulsively readable volume, Hatsis recovers the lost history of these magical medicinal brews and psychoactive formulas that have been hidden for centuries and hinted at in the mythic portrayal of witchcraft and sorcery. Hatsis’ scholarly research shines an illuminating spotlight on what is actually known about these visionary (and sometimes deadly) herbal mixes, and he expertly blends his meticulous studies with keen intuition in this uniquely envisioned volume, overflowing with rare historical treasures and fascinating speculations as well as the secret psychedelic ingredients for re-creating the legendary ointments. This book will appeal to anyone interested in herbal folk remedies, entheogenic medicine, the relationship between alchemy and science, and how heretical notions of healing influenced Western religious systems and modern medicine. A few words of caution: history compels you to use this book wisely or you may get burned at the stake! (David Jay Brown, author of *The New Science of Psychedelics* and *Frontiers of Psychedelic Consciousness*) “This wonderful book brews up a heady potion of folk herbs and psychedelics to intoxicate the conspiracy theorists and passionate disbelievers alike. With his objectivity and beautiful writing, Hatsis shines a light on the destructive Christocentric misogyny of the medieval world, whose holistic pagan medicine was certainly no more diabolical than our own modern Pharma Industry.” (Ben Sessa, MBBS, MRCPsych, author of *The Psychedelic Renaissance*) “A Historian of witchcraft, magic, Western religion, contemporary psychedelia, entheogens and medieval pharmacopeia, Thomas Hatis is well qualified to describe dozens of psychoactive formulas and recipes gleaned from rare manuscripts from all over the world as well as the practices and magical incantations necessary for their preparation. He also examines the various forms of sorcery such as poison magic and ecstatic trance, and explores the connections between the ointments and spells for shape shifting, spirit travel and bewitching magic.” (New Dawn, Robert Black, December 2015)

Thomas Hatsis is a writer, educator, and historian with a master’s degree in history from Queens College. The host of the website arspsychedelia.com, he has presented his research at several U.S. universities, including Yale, and published articles in the psychedelics journal *Psypress* U.K. He lives in New York.

The *Witches’ Ointment* is a topical book I’ve been hoping someone would write for a very long time. I was apprehensive with my wait because I was hoping that someone would write it with both a solid, scholarly approach as well as a sincere interest in the occult lore of flying ointments and their

importance in folkloric witchcraft. I'm glad to report that *The Witches' Ointment* by Thomas Hatsis is a book that's filled that criteria. This book presents just about everything one might want in a book about the notorious witch's flying ointment. Poison, politics, romance, folklore, terror, and persecution are all elements present. The style of the book is narrative and relies on historical storytelling to cultivate a visceral feel for what life may have been like for ointment crafters and the people who sought them out. Each chapter focuses on different types of ointments throughout different parts of the world and times in history. Learning about the love potions of central Greece and the lethal liquids of the southeastern French countryside contribute to the global emphasis placed on the idea of supernatural and psychedelic infusions. While many modern witches are familiar with the idea of the ointment as originating from the British Isles through witch-trial records, Hatsis weaves together a more complete story of the unguent. He showcases its importance in magical folklore throughout the centuries. This is a refreshing deep-dive approach into a topic that's often left at the doorstep of modern herbal folklorists. A scholarly curiosity is required to prod further into what is truly a vast subject matter. One of the reasons this work shines is Hatsis' confidence in compiling many different stories of the salves without forcing a thesis on any central connection they may share across the world. This is important in an area like scholarly witchcraft where many authors search too hard to find common threads in what is really a whole other cloth. The fascinating lore of the ointments stands on its own here, giving respect to the myriad cultures that host it. The only reason I can find to give the title four stars instead of five is the sometimes lengthy detours taken from the topic. While many of the asides to the tales are worthwhile to give a sense of story and history, some sections steered too far away from the subject matter for me. It might be challenging to hold your attention. Nevertheless, every chapter is worthwhile and intriguing, all leading to deeper insight in a topic that's typically only approached at a surface level. *The Witches' Ointment* is an important work for readers interested in a wide variety of subjects. The witches among us will appreciate the scholarly treatment to what is usually considered a fringe topic in the Craft. Readers interested in psychedelic plants will be hooked by ancient stories of mixtures that stir the senses and bend the mind. Even secular botanists can't help but become enamored with learning about the many ways in which our ancestors used roots, leaves, and stems to shift their consciousness and experience the world in a new way. The book didn't seem to create much of a stir within the world of pagan literature, but I feel that has more to do with marketing and says nothing about the quality of the book, which is entirely worthy of a spot in the herbalism section of my personal library.

A very good and fascinating history book. Very well documented. Very well written. But don't expect to have old ointment recipes or neo-pagan point of view on every chapter! Hatsis is an historian and he makes a historian work. A very good work for those who are interested in. I definitely recommend it.

Very good book with some common sense on the subject. The research is from a sober academic predictive, but enlightened enough to express a common affinity for the folk tradition known as witchcraft. My greatest takeaway was his analyses of experimentation in the seventies with tropane alkaloids (witch's ointment ingredients) with three very different results. The conclusion being upon the varieties of spiritual/chemical/conscious experiences along with the real possibilities for others to invalidate opponent's limited conflicting conclusions. Overall, an educated, factual, thought-provoking glossary survey of the possibilities for real magic in the accounted experience realised through the witch's ointment along with the gross crimes of thought suppression and prejudiced intolerance.

This is a book on history. It's written at advanced college level and is a bit unorganized. It has a ton of information and is very thoroughly researched. It's just not very user-friendly for the average reader.

This book is mostly about the Medieval Period up to the Early Modern period, and how various toxic and enthroned if plants were used. The author shares a collection of anthologies from various historical sources. It seems more of a study of the witch trials than providing much practical information on the use of such ointments. A good book though if you are looking to understand the history surrounding these ointments.

This was a great continuation off of Carlo Ginzburg's work. If you like *Night Battles* or *Ecstasy*, you will enjoy this book. It spent a chapter briefly discussing the psychoactive ingredients contained in the ointment, and a lot of space exploring the mythology around it and proving it existed. I was personally disappointed with it for not going more into the roots of where the ointment came from (Greece, Egypt, etc...), but good despite that.

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