



MURATARE 2006

Nick Clements
 Soundoftheheart
 DVD: Region 0
 52.26 mins: £10.00
 Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is a unique film about the Samburu circumcision ceremony described by Nick Clements in his article in this issue of Sacred Hoop Magazine. I think every article in Hoop should have its own accompanying DVD. To be able to watch what happens, and visit the location - albeit through the front of your TV screen - brings a greater deal of depth than mere words alone.

The film, made with the blessing and guidance of the tribal elders, records their male initiation rites, performed once in a generation. But I must say that as a Western male I watched this film with some trepidation, even though Nick told me no boy was filmed 'under the knife', and rest assured - he was



truthful. The whole topic of circumcision is obviously emotive and a challenging concept for many people. I've also never, I have to admit, felt any draw to African spiritual traditions.

Now, having got that off my chest, I can admire Nick's production of the film, as it could not have been easy to make, given its nature, location. It has a home-movie quality, rather than 'BBC slick', which does not in any way distract, in fact it actually goes well with the nature of the film - recording a ceremony that may never be repeated again, a historic document for posterity.

The filming covers the many elements of the whole ceremonial process: the elders teach, the boys make bows and arrows, the mothers make huts and beds, the boys are cut, the boys rest, the boys paint themselves with mud at the sacred lake, the boys graduate and become warriors - all set against



their beautiful rugged homelands in Kenya. The film is narrated by one of the elders, and has English subtitles.

There is of course no comment on whether this is a barbaric ceremony or not, it is simply recorded, and all its aspects are laid out from which you can draw your own conclusions. I think Nick has done a superb job, the film is interesting and is an excellent recording of a vanishing tradition.

Available from
www.soundoftheheart.com
nicolascléments@btinternet.com



MUNAY-KI

Alberto Villoldo
 The Four Winds Foundation
 DVD: Region 0
 127.50 mins
 Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This copyright-free DVD talk on a series of nine initiations from teacher of Inca spiritual traditions Alberto Villoldo is in several parts: an introduction about the teachings, film of the actual giving of the initiations, and interviews with those taking part about what the teachings have meant to them. The film gives a taste of the initiations - but you have to receive them yourself first-hand to be able to really use them, and especially to pass them on to others.

Despite the fairly frequent use of the word 'shamanism' in the film, I can't really say the teachings come over as very shamanic in a classical-anthropological sense; they seem to be more in the line of energetic healing techniques, and if I am honest I got a bit bored half-way through, as this kind of 'homogenised new-age-tinged spiritual teaching' is not my cup of tea. This might well be my failing - other people may well get a lot from them.



The film is mostly of Villoldo sitting in a chair talking, but it has some interesting short sections showing traditional Inca shamans performing what look like blessing or prayer ceremonies. More of these ethnographic sections would have made what I felt was a rather static-feeling film, a little more dynamic.

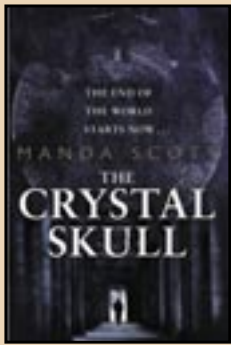
Although I felt the film was somehow 'corporate', rather slick, it did contain interesting information and would be valuable to anyone thinking of working with Villoldo.

You can make your own mind up as it's available to watch on the internet for free. It's in several parts - the first being found at: www.video.google.com/videoplay?docid=195196750871907582

www.munay-ki.org
www.thefourwinds.com



REVIEWS



THE CRYSTAL SKULL

Manda Scott
Bantam Books
HB £12.99 / \$25.00 364 pages
ISBN 9780593055700
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Manda can write a credible, action-packed story with dialogue that does not appear as if it has come of the back of a cereal packet - Dan Brown this is not. And her long-time association with shamanism adds to the depth and authenticity of the plot.

The story races across centuries and continents, as its characters learn the secrets of a beautiful, and scarily powerful ancient crystal skull, hidden for centuries in a cave in the North of England. A page turner, a ripping yarn, a book I enjoyed from start to finish. Nothing didactic here, nothing that is going to make your world turn upside-down in an esoteric way, but plenty that will get you reading till the wee small hours if, like me, you enjoy a good book while tucked up in bed. A great read of magic, murder, science, caving, travel, snake bites, apoplexies, galleons, daggers and doublet-and-hose, from a consummate story teller - never a dull moment. I loved it.

Available from high street bookshops or from Amazon etc.



FLIGHT OF THE GOOSE

Lesley Thomas
Far Eastern Press
PB \$19.95 431 pages
ISBN 0 9678842 1 7
Reviewer: John Patrick

What an extraordinary novel. Set in the far arctic lands of the Bering Straits in the early 1970's, it tells the story of the meeting and the relationship

between a US environmentalist, desperate not to be sent to Vietnam, and a deeply emotionally-damaged, ostracised young Inuit girl, whose painful history is revealed as the pages turn...

Written with poignant and often amazing insight into the Inuit culture (see Lesley's article *Visions of the End of Days* in this issue), the book is a love story, it is a tale about Inuit shamanism, a portrayal of the conflict between cultures, and a glimpse at what happens to the smaller of the cultures when a more dominant one collides with it.

And, along with the richly-described human characters in the book, is another character; throughout it all the arctic lands themselves hold the stage, the sunlight and warmth of summer, the darkness and coldness of winter, the crash of the arctic oceans, the spirits of the seals and the cry of birds.

Lesley deals with the shamanism and sorcery in a very realistic way so that not once did I feel I had wandered into a fantasy novel where the author was trying to portray 'ancient magic' without any real idea what it actually was, or what it smelt like. In fact the whole book is congruent, the storytelling is compelling, and quite frankly I couldn't put it down - and I bet you won't be able to either.

Available from high street bookshops or from Amazon etc.



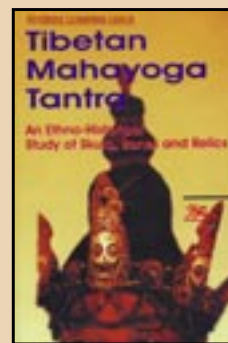
WEATHER SHAMANISM

Nan Moss with David Corbin
Bear & Co Books
PB £11.99 258 Pages
ISBN 1 59143 074 7
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

You may recall that these two authors wrote an article on weather in the last issue of Sacred Hoop (*Weather Talking*). Interacting with the weather spirits is a major part of the shamanic traditions of many cultures - after all, weather happens everywhere and effects everyone. This book goes into fascinating detail and includes sections on shamanic ethics, harmonising our relationship to the weather, and even working with the weather spirits as an aid to healing.

With a hands-on, easily readable style, the book gives lots of anecdotes, insights and much practical information about this generally neglected aspect of shamanism, and it is well worth exploring.

Available from high street bookshops or from Amazon etc.



TIBETAN MAHAYOGA TANTRA

An Ethno-Historical Study of Skulls, Bones and Relics

Andrea Loseries-Leick
BR Publishing Corporation
HB US\$ 38.33 258 Pages
ISBN 81 7646 642 5
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

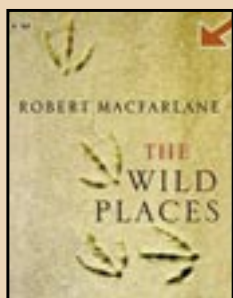
This is a rather obscure book on a rather obscure subject, so its appeal will be limited, but for anyone interested in the ritual use of human bones within the shamanic traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, it will be a must. It is the only comprehensive book on the subject, and the author is both a practicing *tantrika* (tantric magician) and a professor and head of the Department of Indo-Tibetan studies at an Indian university.

The book is well written and filled with interesting first-person experiences and anecdotes, which make it a joy to read. It includes sections on the history of ritual bone objects in both Siberian and Central Asian shamanism, as well as Indian tantra, the making and use of thighbone trumpets, skull drums, beads of bone, bone divination methods, the use of relics and magical items of attack and protection, and even has a short description of a 'cloak of invisibility' made from bones and animal parts - Harry Potter eat your heart out - it's instructions being given to the author by a knowledgeable yogi-sorcerer and 'tamer of revived corpses' (Tibetan zombies or *ro lang*).

The author explains how the Tibetan fixation with bones and its related magical knowledge probably originates from Central Asian shamanism. Probably not a book for the faint hearted - it contains one or two disturbing photos of corpses - but for those involved with, or interested in, Tibetan Buddhism or unusual magical crafts, it will make an unmissable book.

Not very easy to get - the publisher is in India, although the copy I bought came very quickly. Buy it online from:

www.easternbookcorporation.com/moreinfo.php?txt_searchstring=15243



THE WILD PLACES

Robert Macfarlane
Granta Books
HB £18.99 340 pages
ISBN 978 1 86207 941 0
Reviewer: Jan Morgan Wood

Robert Macfarlane is a climber of trees. One day, from the vantage point of a favourite beech tree in Cambridge, he experienced a deep need to find if

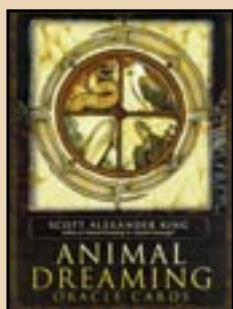
there were any truly wild places left in the UK. This was the start of his explorations chronicled in a direct and lyrical style, his personal responses to a series of very different terrains.

He contacted friends who might know of such wild places and set off to make his own word map of them before they too disappear. His acute observations, his obvious love of the natural world, and his encounters with people, creatures, trees and all the elements of the landscape, shine out from these pages in a very readable, very human and loving account of his explorations. At the end of it I felt I had shared vividly in the experiences of landscape, and learned from the wealth of factual observations, historical links and natural lore that he weaves effortlessly.

This book is carefully crafted, including an extensive and excellent reading list and index. But this is not an academic or scientific work, despite its rich underpinning of information; it is a compelling traveller's tale told by a fireside, a warm human tale in which the author is a very real player, sharing with us his own highs and lows, losses and joys along the way.

It is sometimes hard to appreciate the presence of the natural world on our doorstep, but this book reveals an ancient and ever-present land that is full of magical wonder and gritty reality - real mud, real sunshine, real physical challenges and real beauty. Read this book and you will look around with new eyes - and maybe the inspiration to make a word map of your own wild places.

Available from high street bookshops or from Amazon etc.



ANIMAL DREAMING ORACLE CARDS

Scott Alexander King
Blue Angel Gallery
44 cards + guidebook
ISBN 978 0 9802865 3 3
Reviewer: Jan Morgan Wood

You may already be familiar with Scott's prolific output, and his dedicated work introducing people to

the sacred qualities of the creatures he works with and loves. This set of oracle cards is divided into four 'suits', one for each of the elements, and the animals featured are from Scott's home, Australia.

The cards are large format and are beautifully illustrated, while the accompanying guidebook is clear and concise.

What use would the cards be outside of Australia? Well my experience of spirit animals is that they pop up anywhere on the globe - and they may well want to visit with you...

Available from high street bookshops or from Amazon etc.



DODO

Kouame Sereba
KGS Productions KGSCD 00807
CD: (Full Price). Length: 53.48 mins.
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

The dodo is a musical bow, a jawharp-like instrument found in many cultures across the world. Here it is the West

African form of the instrument, played solo and also to accompany song, producing rich overtones and a general mesmeric atmosphere. Soft, entrancing and rather delightful, the sound envelops you, and is a little like a lullaby, the tones of the bow underpinning it all in a rhythmic, timeless way.

Available from regular outlets
www.myspace.com/kouamesereba



SANDTRACKS

Tiris
Sandblast Music
CD: (Full Price). Length: 44.56 mins.
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

North African desert blues, from another of these wonderful bands that are following in the footsteps of the mighty

Tinariwen, Tiris bring yet more fruits of the oasis to the West.

Whereas Tinariwen are in a way 'no-frills', just wonderful raw guitars, drum and vocals, this album by Tiris is far more produced, and as such has lost some of the direct grittiness of the sands. Synths, acoustic guitar, brass and even piano sections, take the sound to a more sophisticated level; it's rounder, more polished. But paradoxically it is also more traditional in places than Tinariwen, as it seems to find a balance between the traditional and the contemporary; Tinariwen in a way have gone for a raw, direct middle ground - a sort of Saharan folk-rock, whereas this is at times more like Saharan folk-pop.

Accessible and fun, funky and slick, but with a sense of a deep desert past - check them out. Both Tiris and Tinariwen have myspace pages - so you can find them both out at the links below.

Available from regular outlets
www.myspace.com/tirisws
www.myspace.com/tinariwen



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www.mindbodyspirit.co.uk