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Wolves, Goats, Martyrs and War: a History of Valentine's Day

By Blake Kritzberg

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by: **Blake Kritzberg**

Valentines Day is one of the most enigmatic of holidays, having appeared in many forms. But all “Valentine’s Days” have drawn suspicion. In fact, after hundreds of years of attempted reform, Christian observance came to an end when the Catholic Church purged St. Valentine’s Day from its calendar in 1969.

Still, the holiday continues to inspire an annual avalanche of cards, not to mention the mass consumption of chocolates, flowers and sometimes, pricier presents. What do we commemorate when we celebrate Valentine’s Day?

- Running with the Wolves

If you’ve ever researched the history of Valentines Day, you know it began with wolves and ancient Spring magic. The earliest instance we know of starts with the tough old shepherds and founders of Rome who feared and respected the wolves that preyed on their flocks. Once a year, they held sacrifices to Lupercus, the god of shepherds, enemy of wolves, and friend of dogs. Other shepherds sacrificed to Faunus, who also protected shepherds but was part goat.

The celebration, called Lupercalia, was held during early spring, which since time immemorial has been a season for purification. All the ancients saw that in the winter, the earth fell quiet and covered itself in white. Late winter and early spring was the time for human purification also, to be followed closely by fertility magic.

- Something Old, Something New

Rome still celebrated Lupercalia after it had matured and become a great republic. In fact, all civic life came to a halt for the festival.

Because of the Remus and Romulus legend, Lupercalia enjoyed great respect. Sons of noblemen were appointed to be Lupercalian priests, or luperci, and tasked with a number of duties. Each year

they sacrificed a dog (for Lupercal) and a goat (for Faunus) at the bottom of a cave at Palantine Hill. Wearing nothing but goat hide, they cut thongs from the skin and ran the perimeter of "old Rome," slapping women with the bloody strips. Women put themselves forward for this, meaning to be purified and made fertile. (Our month of February, Febrarius, means "month of purification.") Afterward, Rome indulged in a love lottery in which young men drew young women's names from a jar and became their "partners" for a time.

Eventually, the Roman upper-crust grew too refined to feel at ease with Lupercalia. Cicero sniffed that the luperci were:

A certain wild association of Lupercalian brothers, both plainly pastoral and savage, whose rustic alliance was formed before civilization and laws.

A certain politician made sport of Lupercalia's anachronistic air by wearing his luperci skin to work and haranging his fellow senators.

Eventually, Lupercalia began to fall out of favor, although Augustus revived it for a time in a fit of national patriotism.

- The Church Triumphant

The church is sometimes vilified for its Lupercalian edits. It found the love lottery unacceptable, as well as the luperci. But rather than ban the fete outright, it tried assimilation.

First, the love lottery was replaced with a high-minded version, where each man drew a saint instead of a girl and was invited to emulate that saint throughout the year. (This custom is sometimes observed today). Then the purification aspect was re-clothed in a feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary, scheduled for early February. As for fertility magic, the church dodged this altogether, although one can see traces of the purifying and "greening" impulse in the spirit and chapel decorations of Lent.

As for the fourteenth of February, the church dedicated the day to the Christian martyr, Valentine. Contrary to the sugared rumors that have sprung up around him (or more accurately, them -- there were several St. Valentines), the saint almost certainly had nothing to do with love or romance.

- Knights in Shining Armor

Lupercalia had been well and truly squelched in Rome. But to the west and north, where the Age of Chivalry triumphed, Europeans could not let the tradition molder and with childlike zest, revived it. The English cast off the papal practice of drawing saints, but their new notions of chivalric love led to a more innocent type of boy/girl lottery than Rome had ever seen. Young girls drew on the power of dream pillows -- filled or pinned with aromatics like bay leaves or lavender -- to catch a glimpse of their future mates. Small children dressed in adult clothes and roamed the streets, gently mocking the "new" fascination with love:

"Good morning to you, valentine

Curl your locks as I do mine--
Two before and three behind.
Good morning to you, valentine."

Unlike the serious Lupercalian business of patriotism and the appeasement of gods, this kinder, gentler Valentine's day spoke of a young person's coming-of-age. Chivalry's themes of chaste love and longing played major roles.

Hail, Bishop Valentine! Whose day this is
All the air is thy diocese,
And all the chirping choristers
And other birds are thy parishioners ... wrote Donne.

The world grows old over and over again, and in England, Valentine's Day aged with it. The tradition of laying out for gifts took hold, with the height of luxurious gifting possibly reaching its height around Restoration England. Lords gave Ladies rings and brooches of staggering worth, and even Samuel Pepys (not a famous romantic) recorded having given his wife "a Turkey-stone set with diamonds." She was grateful, and as he noted, "I am glad of it, for it is fit the wretch should have something to content herself with."

- Initially Resistant

Pragmatic, puritanical America long withstood Europe's festivities, fending off fairies, maypoles, effigy-burning and even Valentine's Day. Women were scarce in the harsh days of the nation's dawn, and public displays of affection were outlawed in any case. It wasn't until the Civil War that the country relented: long, lonely rifts in families endeared the saint to them at last. Prior to the war, elaborate commercial valentines (including "mechanical" types) had begun to flood the market and grow more affordable.

Of course, this uncharacteristic flood of romance could not go unchecked, and the widespread embrace of valentines was closely followed by the "vinegar" valentine, a comic and sometimes, caustic type.

When the war ended, and Americans crept into the light of Reconstruction, they found a freshly industrialized nation. Along with it came a transcontinental railroad, typewriters, an internal combustion engine, and -- most importantly for Valentine's Day -- heart-shaped boxes full of commercial chocolates (a gimmick invented by the Cadbury brothers during the 1860s). Although fine diamonds and jewelry never quite became the norm among Americans, the standard "recipe" of cards, flowers, and a heart-shaped box of chocolates had been carved in the national psyche. Now Valentine's Day is only second to Christmas in number of cards bought and sent.

Blake Kritzberg is a copywriter, web designer, and proprietor of <http://www.e-free-greeting-card.com>. This article may be freely reprinted so long as this resource box and URL are preserved. Visit the website for listings and reviews of funny, spiritual and edgy e-cards.

~Happy Valentine's Day~

By Patricia *Lite* Hickman, RM

~Happy Valentine's Day~ by Patricia *Lite* Hickman, RM

"HAPPINESS IS...
SOMETHING YOU DECIDE ON,
AHEAD OF TIME" ~
Mrs. Jones, 92 yrs old

~HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY~ This is February, the month we celebrate love, not only relationship love, but more importantly, self love. Not everyone is in relationship, for those that are, I wish you the most Blessed Valentine's Day,,,ever :-)

For those that aren't, I wish you the most Blessed Valentine's Day,,,ever! This Valentine's Day (and month), celebrate the love you have in your life, friend(s), family, pet(s)~ celebrate loving yourself, and where you are right now. :-)

Grounding/centering, working on projects that have been put off in the household, or an extra 30 minutes of work-out time is also a good use of the energy.If you are feeling anger or frustration, or find yourself around angry people, or situations, just send yourself a beam of love or give yourself a hug -) Weather might also be a tad bit bizarre, as it has been in Wisconsin :-) Stay warm darlings, and if possible stay home :-)

The GOOD NEWS most people will focused on LOVE, this Valentine's Day. Love energy will be flowing for most of us, and that's the best energy we can operate under :-) let the love flow this February 14th. Let us approach it as a Return to Love, give yourself a hug everyday, just because, you deserve it :-)

I wish you Love and Light, during the month of February, and always~

Lite
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Psychic and clairaudient, I am, a Reiki Master, Healer, Minister and Metaphysician for more than 25 years. In order to find out the answers to my life, I studied Astrology, Tarot, Numerology, Religion, Psychic Phenomena, as well as Healing, Spirit Releasement Therapy and Psychic Self Defense. I am the Grandmother of 9 and reside in Milwaukee, WI

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