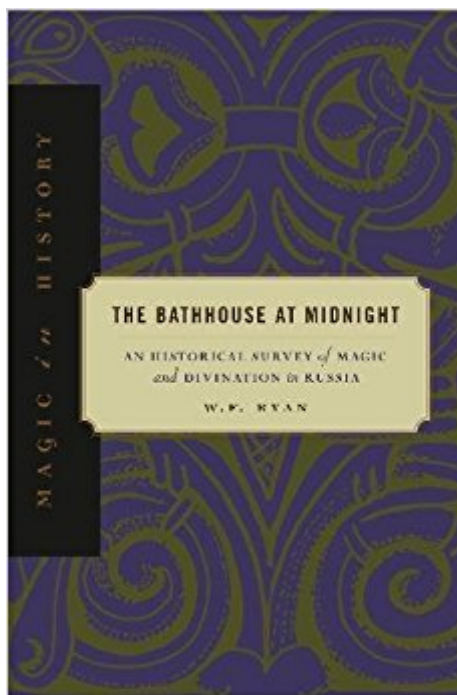




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# The Bathhouse At Midnight: An Historical Survey Of Magic And Divination In Russia (Magic In History)



## Synopsis

The title of this book refers to the classic time and place for magic, witchcraft, and divination in Russia. *The Bathhouse at Midnight*, by one of the world's foremost experts on the subject, surveys all forms of magic, both learned and popular, in Russia from the fifth to the eighteenth century. While no book on the subject could be exhaustive, *The Bathhouse at Midnight* does describe and assess all the literary sources of magic, witchcraft, astrology, alchemy, and divination from Kiev Rus and Imperial Russia, and to some extent Ukraine and Belorussia. Where possible, Ryan identifies the sources of the texts (usually Greek, Arabic, or West European) and makes parallels to other cultures, ranging from classical antiquity to Finnic. He finds that Russia shares most of its magic and divination with the rest of Europe. Subjects covered include the Evil Eye, the Number of the Beast, omens, dreams, talismans and amulets, plants, gemstones, and other materials thought to possess magic properties. The first chapter gives a historical overview, and the final chapter summarizes the political, religious, and legal aspects of the history of magic in Russia. The author also provides translations of some key texts. *The Bathhouse at Midnight* will be invaluable for anyone—student, teacher, or general reader—with an interest in Russia, magic, or the occult. It is unique in its field and is set to become the definitive study of Russian magic.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

—A work of encyclopedic proportions, *The Bathhouse at Midnight* is sure to be the standard

reference on Russian magic for years to come. For being essentially a catalogue, the book reads very smoothly. . . . Thus, this book can be read from cover to cover or, with the detailed table of contents and the index, it can be used to look up a particular phenomenon or beliefs. It will make a fine textbook, and for mature scholars, this is not only a valuable reference tool, but piece of scholarship very much worth emulating.ââNatalie Kononenko, *Russian Review*â

William Ryanââs ambitious volume attempts a comprehensive survey of manifestations of magic throughout Russian history. . . . The result is a veritable encyclopedia of magical phenomena and beliefs, drawn from an extensive range of sources, but particularly from medieval texts and ethnographic data collected in the nineteenth century. . . . Ryanââs book is a tour de force. It is likely to remain the fundamental reference work on magic in Russia for generations to come.ââEve Levin, *Slavic Review*â

The *Bathhouse at Midnight* is an excellent study and source book of Russian supernatural and magical beliefs that should be read by anyone working with Russian supernatural belief, with the comparative study of beliefââwhether Slavic, European, or Indo-Europeanââor with Christian folk religion.ââDavid E. Gay, *Journal of Folklore Research*â

Ryanââs master work now provides a thorough, well-documented survey of an extremely rich and fascinating area and constitutes an invitation to any serious student of magic and its practice to consider entering this previously uncharted territory.ââBruce McClelland, *History of Religions*â

The breath of its grasp, the depth of its treatment of specific subjects, and the good judgment and erudition Ryan displays throughout make it an essential reference book for Slavists and folklorists.ââLinda Ivantis, *Folklorica*â

All in all, Ryanââs book is a marvelous contribution to Slavic studies. It is great fun to read as well.ââLinda Ivantis, *Folklorica*â

The *Bathhouse at Midnight* remains, nonetheless, an outstanding compilation of magic and its associated beliefs in Russia, as well as their relations to Western forms.ââJennifer B. Spock, *The Historian*

W. F. Ryan is academic librarian of the Warburg Institute at the University of London, School of Advanced Studies. He has published widely on the subject of magic in Russia and is co-author of the *Penguin Russian Dictionary* (1995) and co-editor of numerous scholarly books, including *Anglo-Russian Relations in the Age of Peter the Great* (1998).

I find this book to be extremely interesting. The author spent years studying the topic and Russian culture in general. He addresses a huge amount of data from his studies of Russian magic and divination. What I find most interesting about the book is that he examines some of the accepted ideas from scholarship about Russian culture and asks if they are valid. He argues, for example,

that "dvoeverie" is not a uniquely Russian phenomenon, but that it is typical of many cultures that accepted Christianity. Too often, in my opinion, scholarship about Russia created concepts about Russian culture without addressing the same or similar phenomena in other cultures. This parochialism is going away in recent years. Whether the author intended it or not, this book contributes to the weakening of that parochialism. At least that's my opinion.

This book is a great survey. The sources used are brilliant. And it provides a great grasp on the subject, while being very clear what it will and will not cover. I definitely suggest this if you're interested in Russian history, mythology, or magic studies.

This is a fantastic book full of details on the history of Russian Orthodox religion, belief in magic and superstitions! Amazing reference source!! So glad I got it!

This book is very scientific and precise, but it is not easy to read.

This is the definitive source for Russian magic and folk beliefs. It will be a great addition to any occult library. It's not the type of book one would sit down and read cover to cover, but you will find yourself consulting it or just flipping through it and reading whatever catches your eye. The writing style itself is approachable and easy to follow and the table of contents is very helpful. The book is organized well, so you shouldn't have to dig through it trying to track down whatever you are looking up; it all should be in one place. The subject matter is, of course, fascinating. It covers magic across all Russian and even surrounding countries (Belorussia, Ukraine, etc.) make frequent appearances. If you have an interest in Russian pagan beliefs, this is the book for you.

This is THE book of Slavic magic. I just used this book as the main source for my thesis on magic and folk custom in Russia. Out of all the books I researched this one has, by far, the most information in a very well laid out format. Most of Ryan's sources are primary texts and are well recorded if you ever want to do further study. It's also a great source for anyone who just wants to learn more about the magical side of Slavic culture. And I found it very easy to read.

Reading Russian non-fiction hasn't been this entertaining. This book by W.F. Ryan is ultimate choice for learning about Slavic magic. It has almost everything: origin of magic, Western European influence (both in and out), photos of Slavic ornaments, descriptions of divinatory ways of life, and

cited sources. The only flaws I can find are repeated words throughout. Examples: ". . . sleeping like like a lion . . ." or ". . . there would would have been . . ." though many are not really distracting. All in all, this is the ultimate non-fiction book about Slavic (mainly Russian) magic. A-

Would you eat potatoes if you believed that they grow out of the anus and genitals of a dead oriental magician? Do you want to know what anyone is thinking? There is a way by using peas and snakes. "If a madman is touched by a diamond he will be cured of his malady" (good to cure your mad relatives, although perhaps out or reach for much of the common folk). Do you laugh at it? Russian have believed that way for centuries, and similar beliefs have been shared (do not use the past tense!) by the other European -and American- people too. All this and more is compiled in a very orderly way by the author, in a masterful work that can be savoured by the professional historian and educated layperson alike. Besides, the book is not a difficult reading (content: 5 stars; pleasure of reading: 4 to 3).(...)

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