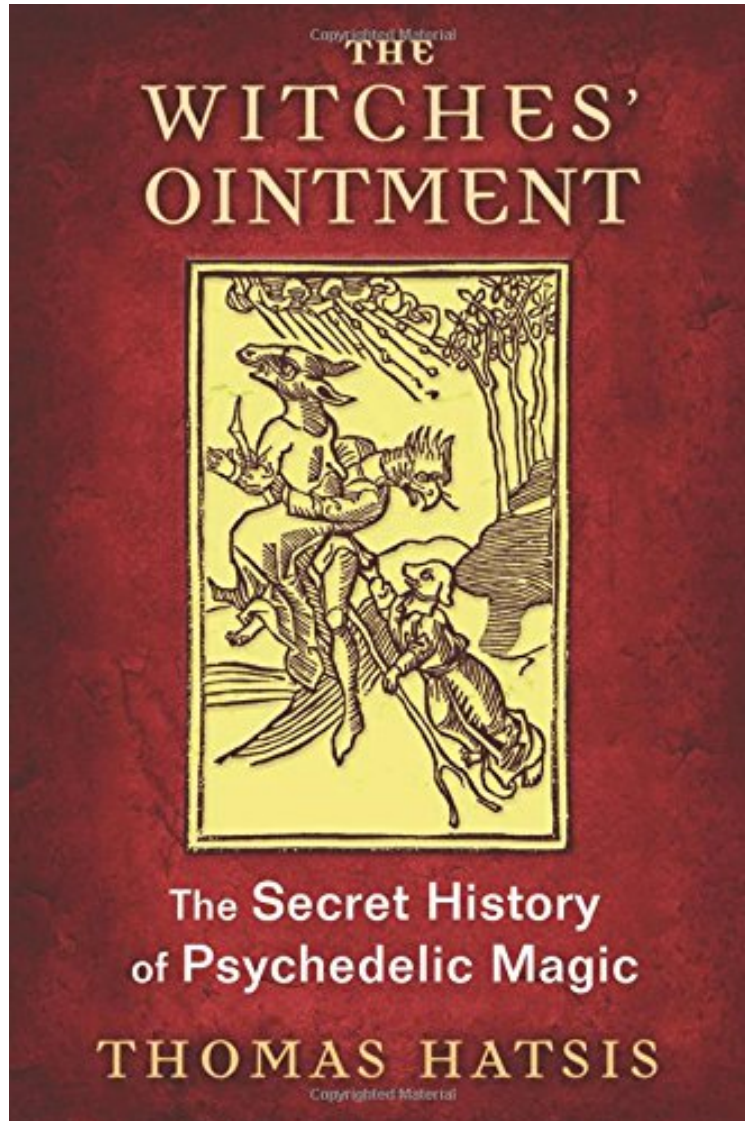


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The Witches' Ointment: The Secret History of Psychedelic Magic

Thomas Hatsis

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Thomas Hatsis : The Witches' Ointment: The Secret History of Psychedelic Magic before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Witches' Ointment: The Secret History of Psychedelic Magic*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I'm glad to report that *The Witches' Ointment* by Thomas Hatsis ...By David D. Salisbury *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.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. aBy LucieA 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. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Very good. By CustomerVery good book with some common sense on the subject. The research is from a sober academic perspective, 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.

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 *veneficium*, 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. Smear 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.

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's 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's 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 Hatsis 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) About the Author Thomas Hatsis is a writer, educator, and historian with a masters 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. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Introduction A woman, alone at night, pulls a small ointment jar from a chest hidden beneath her bed. Opening the container, she scoops a handful of the foul-smelling goop--the witches ointment (*lamiarum unguentum*)-- into her palm. She turns to an ordinary broom in the corner, the kind her neighbors foolishly believe has no further use than sweeping or maybe killing a mouse; at present, this woman intends to do neither. Grasping the besom from the shadows, she smears the long, wooden handle with her witches ointment; straddling the oily broom, she is instantly lifted into the ether. Out the window to join scores of women who have similarly anointed implements, she soars aside demons that fill out the entourage. As they glide over rooftops and clouds, dotting the moon in their wake, all are careful not to mention the name of God or Christ, lest they plunge to their death. They are traveling to a faraway meadow--leagues beyond the watchful eyes of the clergy and their neighbors--where they will join others already assembled, reveling and worshipping Satan: the Sabbat. Should any newcomer wish to join Satans congregation, she must pay homage to him by renouncing her Christian faith and trampling upon a large cross conveniently placed before her feet. Finally, she must solidify her devotion by planting the obscene kiss (*osculum infame*) on the Devils derriere. Now a full member of the sect, she will join the others in a fine banquet of murdered children. They will feast heartily only to discover that the food lacks all taste, and oddly leaves the diners still hungry. Afterward, she would engage in such wicked debauches as dancing backward and fornicating with demons. Satan had

conspired to rule the world and conscripted gullible witches to help carry out his nefarious plans. He would eventually send his flock away, but not before instructing them in the malefic arts (maleficium, or evil magic), which included preparing ointments and potions from the remains of dead children. These mixes were used to inflict harm or death upon the populace, raise storms and disease, and stir hatred between pious Christians. The above, more or less, is what demonologists believed witches practiced during the Burning Times (ca. 1550-1650), when tens of thousands of women and men burned for their supposed diabolic crimes. The Sabbat itself was a composite idea, fueled by the literate class appropriation and redefinitions of numerous templates. Indeed, all of these acts associated with the Sabbat--night-flying, demonic congregation, Satan worship, wild orgies, cannibalism, and celestial insurgency--were quite separate ideas once, deriving from folklore, ecclesiastical ideas regarding heresy, common ideas about magic, and demonology that had been developing over the preceding centuries. Scholars largely agree that the Sabbat first appeared in Europe within the texts of ecclesiastics writing between the years 1430-1450. These components were tampered with and eventually amalgamated into the diabolical witch, performing her maleficia, within the larger witch cult. One of these offenses, though, was a newcomer to the stereotype of the witch. While all those other ideas evolved over the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, the notion of an ointment used to fly through the air only started appearing in records around the early fifteenth century, at the cusp of the theological formation of the witch stereotype. Witches ointments were magical drug (veneficium) pastes, ointments, and oils that women and men were said to smear over their bodies; those anointed would then fall into a deep sleep (soporatum), experience fantastic visions, and upon waking claim to have traveled great distances and copulated with others. Contemporary reports have led some modern scholars to theorize that the so-called witches ointments contained soporific, hallucinogenic, or otherwise psychotropic ingredients mostly culled from the Solanaceae family of plants and that the effects of these drugs were the cause of such bizarre delusions. This theory is not without evidence; most historians of medieval European magic agree that several kinds of medical folk magic existed and were practiced by low-strata women and men. There is little doubt that this folk magic involved the use of plants and herbs in remedies and potions. Mostly when ointments and potions are mentioned in trial records, they are used to heal; cause insanity; incite love, harm, or death in people; and/or cause harm and death to animals. This theory is rejected by others who believe that the ointments were a product of either harmless folklore or demonological theory . . . not effective mind-altering substances. However, there is previously overlooked evidence indicating that the witches ointment, like other aspects of the witch stereotype, had a foundation in real folk sorcery intentional drug use. Although trial dossiers are terse on the modes of folk magic, we can nonetheless get a taste of local magic by the practices that inquisitors and others of the literate class documented. Some of these arts involved weather magic, lot casting, invocation, image magic, medical magic, murder through magical means, poison magic, and love magic. . . . Other forms of veneficium specifically dealt with ingesting poisons and elixirs of various types, the contents of which comprise the present study. This book is the story of how veneficium got swept into the witch stereotype and became a tool of diabolical witchcraft in the opinions of the authorities. It is the story of an early medieval canonical belief, outlined in the famous canon *Episcopi*. It is the story of how the canon's original condemnation of a specific folk belief--that of night riding with ancient goddesses--was reinterpreted by theologians centuries later to prove that witches really did exist. It is the story of folk magic and the knowledge of poisons some people used to practice those arts. Finally, it is the story of how, within this theological redefinition of the witch in the early fifteenth century, the witches ointment was used to explain how witches flew to the Sabbat.