Werewolves in Greek and Roman Tradition

It’s time to define the werewolf myth in the ancient Greek and Roman tradition. In these dark months at the end of the year, even the people in the countries around the Mediterranean, with its relatively mild climate, tend to stay inside their homes more, sit at the fire place and tell each other stories. Some stories are dark and grim. They are told for many reasons, one of which being a lesson for the wee ones not to go play outside when it’s dark, because the city or village may hold many dangers for kids...like werewolves, cursed men that magically turn into gross animals, mostly wolves, at midnight, when the moon is full. They stare at you from their hiding places and jump at you from behind and strike out of hunger for human flesh and blood. Who hasn’t heard such stories from an early age on? Greek and Roman kids certainly have.

The Greeks and Romans even wrote these stories down in their literature. Herodotus in his Histories wrote that the Neuri, a tribe he places to the north-east of Scythia, were all transformed into wolves once every year for several days, and then changed back to their former shape. Vergil was also familiar with human beings transforming into wolves.

In Greek mythology, the story of Lycaon (lit. "the Wolf Man") provides one of the earliest examples of a werewolf legend. According to one version, Lycaon was transformed into a wolf as a result of eating human flesh; one of those who were present at periodical sacrifice on Mount Lycaeon was said to suffer a similar fate. In the Metamorphoses, the Roman poet Ovid vividly described stories of men who roamed the woods of Arcadia in the form of wolves.

The Roman scholar Pliny the ELder relates two tales of lycanthropy (Greek meaning: "the shape shift from man to wolf and back"). Quoting Euanthes he mentions a man who hung his clothes on an ash tree and swam across an Arcadian lake, transforming him into a wolf. On the condition that he attacked no human being for nine years, he would be free to swim back across the lake to resume human form. Pliny also quotes Agriopas regarding a tale of a man who was turned into a wolf after tasting the entrails of a human child. Obviously, these tales of eating human flesh and turning into a werewolf go back a very long time. There must have been times, very long ago, when humans would eat their own kind in times of hardship, hunger and bad conditions, during which lack of food dominated. Cannibalism has been known
to mankind probably as long as it has existed, but with culture coming up and growing, the awe of such human urges and the tendency to fight them has grown and yielded stories and myths like those of therianthropy (men in animal shapes) and werewolves. Their mission was to tell all humans what would happen if a human ate his own kind: he or she would turn into a feral creature, subdued to beastlike urges and eating human flesh and never be released from this curse, unless the correct formula was spoken over this person and an offering was made to the right deity. In fact, now that Ovid has been mentioned, his entire poetic work the *Metamorphoses* is nothing but a series of myths, mostly of Greek origin, in which the shape shift of a human or demigod into an animal (or a flower, tree or rock) is been depicted. Mostly, these shape shifts are the result of divine punishment for bad, i.e. unworthy or hubris-like) behaviour.

weerwolf002

In the Latin work of prose the Satyricon, written about 60 C.E. by Gaius Petronius Arbiter, one of the characters, Niceros, tells a story at a banquet about a friend who turned into a wolf (chapters. 61-62). He describes the incident as follows:

"When I look for my buddy I see he'd stripped and piled his clothes by the roadside...He pees in a circle round his clothes and then, just like that, turns into a wolf!...after he turned into a wolf he started howling and then ran off into the woods."

Many European countries and cultures influenced by them have stories of werewolves, including Albania (oik), Armenia (mardagayl), Croatia/Bosnia (vukodlak), France (loup-garou), Greece (λυκαινθρωπος - Ilycanthropos), Spain (hombre lobo), Argentina (lobizón), Mexico (hombre lobo and nahual), Bulgaria (върколак - varkolak), Turkey (kurtadam), Czech Republic (vlkodlak), Slovakia (vlkolak), Serbia/Montenegro (вукодлак - vukodlak), Belarus (ваўкалак - vaukalak), Russia (оборотень - oboroten'), Ukraine (вовкулака - vovkulaka and перевертень - pereverten'), Poland (wilkołak), Romania (vârcolac, priculici), Macedonia (vrkolak), Slovenia (volkodlak), Scotland (werewolf, wulver), England (werewolf), Ireland (faoladh or conriocht), Wales (bleidd-ddyn), Germany (Werwolf), the Netherlands (werewolf), Denmark/Sweden/Norway (Varulv), Norway/Iceland (kveld-ulf, varúlfur), Galicia (lobishome), Portugal/Brazil (lobisomem), Lithuania (vilkolakis and vilkatlakis), Latvia (vilkatis and vilkacis), Andorra/Catalonia (home llop), Hungary (Vérfarkas and Farkasember), Estonia (libahunt),
Finland (ihmissusi and vironsusi), and Italy (lupo mannaro). In northern Europe, there are also tales about people changing into animals including bears, as well as wolves.

The ancient Greek word for "werewolf" is lukanthropos, i.e. "wolf man" or "wolf human". This word has been adopted by other peoples, including the Romans, throughout antiquity. There is a saying in Latin: "Homo homini lupus" ("Man is wolf to man", i.e. man is a beast to his own kind), which may once have designated a werewolf tendency, but we cannot be sure about this.

Throughout Europe and throughout the ages, tales of werewolves have persisted throughout vast European lands. At the beginning of the 17th century witchcraft was prosecuted by James I of England, who regarded "warwoolfes" as victims of delusion induced by "a natural superabundance of melancholic."

But the tales and depictions of werewolves haven´t ended since then and they go on playing their magick tricks on people until this very day... so beware!!!!!!

Author: * Titus Pullo Lupus - 1 Post on this thread out of 875 Posts sitewide.
Date: Dec 5, 2010 - 07:30 weerwolf001

http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Post/1218710