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Issue #18 (March 2004)



# The Beast Within

 by Michael Surbrook

## Lycanthropy Around the World

Even a man who is pure in heart and says his prayers by night may become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms.

— *The Wolf Man*

The belief that certain humans have the ability to assume the shapes of wolves (and other animals) goes back for thousands of years, before recorded history, and can usually be traced to shamanist beliefs in the power of animals and their relationship to the men who hunt them. A shaman (tribal priest) would be asked to find the location of suitable prey or to ask animal spirits advice on hunting, the weather, or the motives of other tribes. The shaman would then journey to the world of animal spirits or assume the form of an animal himself to learn these answers. Hunters, impressed with the power and skill of certain animals, would in turn try to become more like the successful predators in the local area, often dressing in the skins of such animals in the hope that by acting like a certain animal they would gain some of the animal's power.

In Scandinavia, the Norse took the idea of assuming an animal's form for hunting and applied it to battle. There, men are recorded as fighting without coats of mail, biting on their shields, howling in battle, and fighting without thought to their own wounds. The Norse called this sort of man a *berserk*, which is usually translated to mean "bear-shirt," and the battle-rage they displayed was known as *berserkgangr*, or "going berserk." A similar type of warrior was called a *ælfhednar*, a "wolf-coat." Like the *berserks*, these men fought without mail coats, wearing wolf skins instead. Both types of men were greatly feared, as their ferocity was enough to overwhelm almost anyone on the battlefield. The Norse were not alone in this practice, however, as there are similar instances throughout the world of warriors who dress in the skins of fierce predators in order to hopefully assume some of the animal's power in battle. In Africa, there were men who dressed in leopard skins, while certain Aztec warriors (called "Jaguar Knights") used jaguar skins.

Although shapeshifters can be found the world over, the werebeast most people are familiar with is a product of Europe. Whereas stories of humans transforming themselves into wolves can be found throughout Europe, most of them seem to be concentrated in France, which was gripped by werewolf hysteria several times during the Middle Ages. A significant number of people, mostly men, were executed in France

after being charged with lycanthropy. Interestingly enough, in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, suspected werewolves were not executed, but instead confined to insane asylums, as the lawmakers of the time started to suspect that people accused of lycanthropy were, in fact, suffering from mental illness and were not supernatural monsters.

## The Werewolf in Europe

*Freddy:* Werewolf.

*Igor:* There.

*Freddy:* I beg your pardon?

*Igor:* (pointing to the woods) There wolf! (pointing up the road) There castle!

— *Young Frankenstein*

Probably the earliest accounts of werewolves in Europe come from the ancient Greeks. They had several stories of humans who became, or were turned into, wolves. The most famous was the tale of King Lykaon, who was turned into a wolf after sacrificing a child to Zeus. Another Greek story concerns the Arcadians. Every year, the Arcadians gave a sacrifice to Lykaian Zeus. During this ceremony, one of the worshipers was turned into a wolf, and would remain so for nine years. After the nine years were up, he would once again resume his normal form unless he'd eaten human flesh during that time, in which case he was doomed to remain a wolf forever. This theme recurs in a number of myths of the time, in which someone who had transgressed against the gods was turned into a wolf (or other animal) as punishment.

The first written account of a werewolf which can instantly be recognized as the ancestor of more modern werewolf stories is found in the novel *Satyricon*, written by Petronius in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. In the section known as *Trimalchio's Banquet*, Petronius' character Niceros tells a story to an assembled group of feasters; the tale goes something like this:

Traveling to meet his mistress one moonlit night, Niceros is accompanied by a soldier. Stopping by the side of the road to rest, Niceros is amazed to see his companion remove his clothing and set it beside the road. Urinating in a circle around his clothing, the soldier then transforms into a wolf. Niceros examines the soldier's clothing and sees it has turned to stone. Terrified, he flees to his mistress's house, slashing with his sword at the shadows. When he gets there, his mistress (a woman named

## LYCANTHROPES

A lycanthrope is the name used for someone who exhibits lycanthropy, the belief that one has transformed into a wolf. The word derives from the story of the Greek king Lykaon, who was turned into a wolf by Zeus, king of the Greek gods. Since people are described as assuming more than just wolf shapes, the proper term for such shape shifters would be "theriomorphs," or those who have an animal's form.

# Medieval Mercantilism

by David Howard

## Butcher, Baker, and Candlestick Maker

## Daily Life

### In the Beginning

In Medieval times, professions were wide and varied, but not as varied as they are today. This article will focus on the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, which is a very interesting period, in England, indeed.

In the last half of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, after a significant period of decline since the Roman times, mercantilism (‡literally “the practice, methods, or spirit of merchants; commercialism”) was on the upswing. Soon the wealth of merchants would empower them to rule over the nobility, rather than the other way around.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Century was a pivotal point in the shift of power away from feudalism. But, in this early Middle Ages Century, much of the richness and primitiveness of early Medieval culture was still intact – opening up opportunities for more mystery and superstitious ignorance.

### Feudal Economics

The term Medieval Mercantilism is used loosely, because Mercantilism proper did not take hold, generally, until the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. This term conveys, rather, a sense of the rising of trade, and the state and functions of the professions in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

The feudal economic system was what is now called a mixed economy: The Lord decided what was manufactured for his interests, but his subjects may produce more beyond their quota and sell it to others. International trade was existent, but of low volume in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. It was not until the 14<sup>th</sup> Century that Mercantilism, by its proper definition, took hold.

Medieval workers had a dawn to dusk workday. They rose at dawn and ceased work with the last glimmer of light. Work was generally hard, laborious, and exhausting for the apprentice, but for the master craftsman it was generally easier as his experience and apprentices eased the demands of his craft on him.

As with today’s labor economics, the higher a worker’s position in his respective career field, the more administrative a worker became, and the more prosperous. Also, his work became less strenuous as he climbed his career ladder.

### Occupations and Trades

There are far more professional occupations to talk about than are presented here, but some of the most interesting professional occupations are concentrated on. These occupations present many interesting possibilities for Medieval roleplaying, and some are time-honored professions or classes in fantasy roleplaying games.