

# THE WANDERING JEW

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## The Wandering Jew

The Wandering Jew is the central figure of a widespread mediaeval legend which tells how a Jew, who refused to allow Christ to rest at his door while he was bearing his cross to Calvary, was condemned to "wander over the face of the earth" 'till the end of the world.

## The Legend

The typical form of the legend says that the Jew's name was Ahasuerus, and he was a cobbler. As he bore his cross, Christ came to Ahasuerus's door and asked to rest. However, the craftsman pushed Jesus away, and reviled him, saying, and "Get off! Away with you, away!" Jesus replied, "Truly I go away, and that quickly, but tarry thou till I come."

Another tradition says that the Wandering Jew was Kartaphilos, the door-keeper of the judgment hall in the service of Pontius Pilate. There he struck Jesus as he led Him forth, saying, "Go on faster, Jesus". Whereupon the Jesus replied, "I am going, but thou shalt tarry till I came again" (*Chronicle of St. Albans Abbey*; 1228).



The same Chronicle, continued by Matthew Paris, tells that Kartaphilos was baptized by \*Ananias, and received the name of "Joseph" - and at the end of every hundred years he would fall into a trance, and would then awake as a young man about thirty.

[\*Ananias was a disciple of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles describes how Ananias was sent by God to restore Paul's sight and convert him to Christianity.]

## German Variant

A German legend associates the Wandering Jew with John Buttadaeus, who was seen at Antwerp in the 13th century, again in the 15th, and a third time in the 16th century. Buttadaeus' last appearance was in 1774 at Brussels.

## French Variant

In a French legend, the Wandering Jew is named Isaac Laquedem, or Lakedion; another story has it that he was Salathiel ben Sadi, who appeared and disappeared towards the close of the 16th century,

at Venice, in so sudden a manner as to attract the notice of all Europe. Yet another legend connects him with the Wild Huntsman.

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### **The Wild Huntsman**

The Wild Huntsman is a spectral hunter of mediaeval legend who, with a pack of ghostly and demonic hounds, frequents certain forests, and who occasionally appears to mortals.

One account has it that he was a Jew who would not suffer Jesus to drink out of a horse-trough, but pointed to some water in a hoof-print as good enough for "such an enemy of Moses." (Kuhn von Schwarz, *Nordd. Sagen*, p. 499.)

German legend locates the Wild Huntsman in the Black Forest. (Sir Walter Scott, *Wild Huntsman*.)

French legend locates the Wild Huntsman (*Le Grand Veneur*) in the Forest of Fontainebleau, and he is considered to be \*St. Hubert. (Father Matthieu)

[\*St Hubert - Patron saint of huntsmen (b, unknown; d, 727). Hubert was the son of Bertrand, Due d'Aquitaine, and cousin of King Pepin. He was so fond of the chase that he neglected his religious duties for his favourite amusement. One day a stag bearing a crucifix threatened him with eternal perdition unless he reformed. Consequently, he entered the cloister, and became, in time, the Bishop of Liege, and the apostle of Ardennes and Brabant.

In art Hubert is depicted as a bishop with a miniature stag resting on the book in his hand, or as a huntsman kneeling to the miraculous crucifix borne by the stag. St Hubert's feast day is 03 November.

It was also believed that those who were descended of Hubert's race possessed the power of curing the bite of mad dogs.]

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### **Herne the Hunter**

In England, the Wild Huntsman became Herne the Hunter, who was once a keeper in Windsor Forest.

*There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter,  
Sometime a keeper here in Windsor forest,  
Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight,  
Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns;  
And there he blasts the tree and takes the cattle  
And makes milch-kine yield blood and shakes a chain  
In a most hideous and dreadful manner:  
You have heard of such a spirit, and well you know  
The superstitious idle-headed eld  
Received and did deliver to our age  
This tale of Herne the hunter for a truth.  
(William Shakespeare, "The Merry Wives of Windsor")*

According to Ainsworth (*Windsor Castle*, Harrison Ainsworth), "Herne" was one of the keepers of Windsor Forest in the reign of Richard II. He was favoured by Richard, which caused his fellow hunters to hate Herne, and to plot his demise.



(Illustration from *Windsor Castle*, Harrison Ainsworth - Herne the Hunter)

One day, as the royal party were out riding in the forest, Richard fell from his horse and was nearly killed when attacked by a stag. Before his attendants could reach him, the king was gored by a stag.

Herne jumped into the fray and killed the stag before it could attack again. During the struggle, Herne was fatally wounded by the stag. As Herne lay dying on the ground, a dark figure appeared out of nowhere and introduced himself as Philip Urswick. He then turned to the king and offered to restore Herne to full health for a reward.

The stag's head was cut off and bound onto Herne's own head, and he was taken to Urswick's hut, which was located on "Bagshot Heath". Urswick said that he would take care of Herne, to which Richard responded that if Herne recovered he would promote him to chief keeper.

The keepers, who were jealous of Herne, conspired with Urswick and between them they plotted Herne's downfall. Consequently, Herne was fully restored, but Urswick had caused that Herne's hunting skills were gone.

Good to his word, Richard promoted Herne to chief keeper, but he soon saw that Herne's skills had deserted him. Thus it was that Herne was demoted and became so grieved by the king's actions that he hanged himself from a great oak in Windsor Forrest. And to this day, Herne "walks" in winter time, about midnight, and "blasts trees", "takes cattle", and "makes milch-kine yield blood" - he wears horns, and indeed he rattles a chain in a "most hideous and dreadful manner".



*Why, yet there want not many, that do fear  
In deep of night to walk by this Herne's oak.*  
(William Shakespeare, "The Merry Wives of Windsor")

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