

so-glad-you-asked-about-the-easter-bunny

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SPEAKERS

Megan Goodwin, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Eddie Izzard



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:18

This is keeping it 101, a killjoys introduction to religion podcast. In 2022-2023, our work is made possible through a UVM reach grant as well as a Luce AAR advancing public scholarship grant. We're grateful to live teach and record on the current ancestral and unseeded lands of the Abenaki, Wabanaki and Auco Cisco peoples. As always, you can find material ways to support indigenous communities on our website.



Megan Goodwin 00:40

What's up nerds? Hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions race, gender and politics.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:46

Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam race and racialization and South Asia.




Megan Goodwin 00:51


on today. We're so glad you asked us about whether major Christian holidays or just pagan holidays in Jesus drag. That actually might be my paraphrase. I don't think you actually said that. I said that. You asked us about whether Christians appropriated existing festivals like the winter solstice or the vernal equinox to get folks to convert and whether say the Easter Bunny is proof that deep down this holiday really belongs to pagans in the upper or lowercase p why I'm so glad you





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:26

this is not my thing nerds.


 Megan Goodwin 01:30
Your trip don't


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:31
I don't care for this. But I will say


 Megan Goodwin 01:39
Why are you laughing? So just to not care? For those amusing? You're funny?

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:48
Oh, I'm a sort of clown am

 Megan Goodwin 01:50
I? Yeah. Rip. Right. Why? Why? Why isn't this your sort of thing?

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:56
I mean, for lots of reasons, starting with anti semitism but ending with Listen, my kids hate the Easter Bunny. I can't even keep my composure guys like, legit. My eldest is obsessed with the Easter Bunny in a way that makes no sense whatsoever. Like, I don't know where she's getting it from. But one day she she comes home. And she's like, "okay, the Easter Bunny is a bunny." And I was like, "Yes". And she goes and it holds a basket?. And I was like, I guess so. She's like, and it's filled with eggs. And I'm like, Yup, and she's like, and the bunny laid the eggs. And I was like, Sure. And she's like, and the eggs have food and prizes in them. And I was like, yes, not baby chickens. And she was like, and this is because Jesus is dead? She was like, Is this the one where Jesus is dead? Or Jesus is alive? And I was like, a little bit like you're

 Megan Goodwin 02:59
not true to curse, correct.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:03
And like my son, who's four years younger hears this story. And it's just like, you're both incredibly wrong. The Easter Bunny is about It's about candy and presents. And you're terrible

incredibly wrong. The Easter Bunny is about candy and presents. And you're terrible because we don't get any of those. And I was like, I guess this is not the moment to make a Passover. We get really shitty crackers. Now. Joke. But anyway, my kids are like obsessed with the Easter Bunny, like the Easter bunny comes up in dinner conversation. I want to say once every couple of weeks, like they're obsessed with this like, mammal, bird. Jesus hybrid, unclear, like not sure what it is. And they're suspicious of it. And they like want to know if it's related to Santa, because that also doesn't make sense to them. So anyway, I I just don't care for the Easter Bunny. But the nerds so Alright, go ahead. Let's, let's hit it.

M

Megan Goodwin 04:12

Yeah, all right. All right. So let's let's keep this one short and sweet for a change. There's a popular notion that all the bunnies and eggs and treats that symbolizes Easter in popular culture, which folks are usually using for shorthand to mean American pop culture, whether they realize it or not. They're like the money's in the eggs and the candy and the whatever are actually evidence of Easter's quote unquote, pagan roots. I am going to get you a little clip from an old classic Eddie Izzard, a stand up piece, wherein she explains that yeah, the chocolate is because of the wood of the cross and data's what had happened. And then the whole punchline is really like No, these are very clearly pagan holidays.

E

Eddie Izzard 04:57

So the pagan religion had very big festivals remember on Easter and Christmas, Christian religion came along had very big festivals at Easter and Christmas. Jesus died on one was born on the other Hmm. Because, Jesus, I do think that exists, you know, and he was, I think a guy had interesting ideas and the Gandhi type era and the Nelson Mandela type era you relaxed and groovy and the Romans not relaxed and groovy. No, no, no. So they murdered him. And then kids eat chocolate eggs, because the color of the chocolate and the color of the word on the cross Well, you tell me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:37

Okay, well, we we love. Eddie Izzard. Obviously, she's our favorite. I hear you saying that this humorous observation is maybe not 100%. factual, and that all comedians are not also historians like yours truly. So you don't so saving so? How dare you besmirch the name of Eddie.

M

Megan Goodwin 06:00

I'm not besmirching. I am nearly fact checking which you know as an historian is love. Would would that all comedians had your commitment to the facts. But alas, it is as always more complicated than that. With your permission. I shall give you the quick and dirty lowdown on our friend, the Easter Bunny. Go ahead. Alright, top three things to know about pagans and the Easter Bunny. Thing One. There's no such thing as low pagans. Pagan is Latin for country dweller. It's an old timey way of saying Hicks. Basically. That's just true.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:40

I don't know why it struck me so funny. I knew that.



Megan Goodwin 06:42

I don't like I'm seeing JD Vance like hanging out in Rome and being like these folk and let me tell you about anyway. So yeah. Well, there are any number of historical populations whose practices marked seasons attended to nature and provided comfort and healing a group called the pagans has never existed. Let me just tell you, as someone who wants filed 501 C three paperwork to get a pagan Community Center started in Boston, that group still does not exist. She would never imagine me trying to get a group of folks who work with no fewer than like 10 different pantheons from all over the world to define pagan for tax purposes. Truly, just just picture it sounds like ridiculous sounds like an improv setup.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:23

That will never work.



Megan Goodwin 07:24

I'll give you one more. Yes. And one of them identified as a werewolf burns the entire tea shop to the ground.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:32

Truly I mean, let's be real. There are points in your life that I should never have been present for. And it is good that I was not



Megan Goodwin 07:40

Yeah, no.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:43

These are not my people. But I love you just the way you are. But also thank you for never inviting me to the places where I should never be. Thank you for knowing where I belong.



Megan Goodwin 07:54

And **it's not Pagan** Pride Day. 100% not. But I'm totally taking your eldest when she's old enough and just saying anyway, fair enough. Also, just to complicate, the pagans are not a thing. British historian Ronald Hutton specifically says that, quote, There is no known Northern

European pagan festival in March, there seems to have been a festival gap between early February and late April which would suit farming rhythms. So if we're assuming that even a bunch of different kinds of pagans are out and existing, which, yeah, sure they are, they're very much agricultural. And so their festivals are going to mirror agricultural farming rhythms. I honestly really like Ronald Hutton. He's kind of a like professional paganism killjoy. But so yeah, no, no the pagans and no vernal equinox pagan festival for Christians to gang, but hey, guess what? What? Funny, but I'm sorry, I'm not even sorry. I'm not actually even sorry. I'm sorry that I'm not sorry. But, and it's a Cottontail thing to Easter's actually way more about Pesach than anything else.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:00

Now, we're talking secretly about the Jews whenever we're talking about mystical bunnies with eggs secretly



Megan Goodwin 09:10

about the Jews. Yeah, that's the same thing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:12

I'm bracing myself for deep anti semitism. So hit me with it.



Megan Goodwin 09:16

I'm just doing a quick drive by on anti anti semitism. Yeah. But the timing of Easter is most likely an attempt to do some good old fashioned Christian and supremacy by presenting Easter as the true holiday of that season, not Pesach and you can thank the Council of Nicaea ce 325 for that one. No, thanks. I will not be thanking them. Yeah, no, no. Once again, the answer is anti semitism. At least in part. fucking knew it. She didn't do very smart very smart. And also, you know, all of history.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:45

Yeah, I'm I'm just good at inference.




Megan Goodwin 09:48

There's probably an anti semitism in there. Okay, check. Which brings us to thing three. What the fuck is up with African Barney man?




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:55


Honestly, that's what I'm asking. That's what our nerds are asking what What is up with the bunny?

 Megan Goodwin 09:57


Oh man, I am truly truly so glad you asked. Alright, so a of all the bunny is relatively new. So there is a Western Germanic goddess named Easter II Ostre, and we get evidence of her and beads the reckoning of time, which is from the eighth century see, but he just includes her to reassure readers that Anglo Saxons were like way over her. Like she used to be a thing but whatever. I don't know her.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:24


I love that we're like dissing a goddess in writing. Great. I love

 Megan Goodwin 10:28

that's a lot super, super good practice. Well, he is venerable after all. Sidenote, and obviously this doesn't get included but it wasn't fooled definitely made several I don't know her jokes about friends and yesterday also, this interview made my entire life on pause. So Easter does get associated with hares which are like bunnies the bigger but the history is a little murky and some folks argue that bead actually made Easter up. The history of an Easter Bunny is even murkier. There's some noise about like Easter and also Freya, who's a Norse goddess who does a lot of things but fertility is in there. So Easter and Freya and fertility and hares in German folklore but an actual Easter Bunny might to probably be maybe not much older than your favorite century, at least morgenstein First, the 19th century, and probably actually dates to the early 20th century.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:23

Checks out everything cool happened then. We're just getting spoken with Dad.

 Megan Goodwin 11:30

Love it. We do have evidence of an Easter Fox and Easter Fox. Fox. Right German, possibly related to the things Fox is the Pentecost Fox. Which honestly sounds cute as hell. This actually might be where the eggs come in, folks, I'm sorry. Say

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:46

that again? The foxes are where the eggs come in.

 Megan Goodwin 11:46



Megan Goodwin 11:49

Yes, that's correct. Yeah. No, it's not a bunny. It's a fox. Get your shit together. Okay, keep going. Folks in southern Lower Saxony and northeastern Westphalia, these are parts of our now Germany used to walk around with a fox on Pentecost, which is 50 days after Easter and asking for donations. Like I don't know, like Easter waffling, I guess. And it was too early for fruits or flowers. So folks apparently gave them eggs.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:15

Can I ask a question? Is it 50 days after Christmas or 50 days after Easter?



Megan Goodwin 12:18

50. That was 50 days after Easter. But clearly I'm going to church I was just I was just asking you it's 50 days after Easter because Jesus comes back and there's a whole thing and yet that why am i I'm only asking



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:29

because if it's about Easter, why would it be 50 days after Easter? Right?



Megan Goodwin 12:35

It is 50th day after Easter Sunday. Okay, because that's the Holy Spirit comes back. And there's a whole thing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:43

Listen, I don't know shit. I just really thought we were trying to figure out where Easter came from. And it didn't make sense to me. And Easter seemed like it'd be 50 days after Christmas. Keep going. I'm sorry. It was just



Megan Goodwin 12:53

after the vernal equinox that's but it's actually been anti semitism. Right, so Pentecost happening 50 days after Easter, folks would walk around on Pentecost asking for donations people gave them eggs. Because that's what they had. And then the roots of that practice the the the Pentecost box or things fox sir, I don't know. Maybe possibly has something to do with Thor who has a red beard like a fox? I don't know. So delicious. Give them to me.




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:23

This is so confusing. You said you had a third? A third thing? Yeah, yeah. Did you know about


the bunny? And so far we are nowhere near an Easter Bunny. But keep going.

 Megan Goodwin 13:33

We did. There's a bunny in the 20th century. There's an, it's not actually a bunny. And then also, it's not actually a bunny for everybody now either. I've got a link in the show notes. But Davidson Harris has a hilarious if ya lo que Islamophobic bit about trying to explain to his friend class that no he's not using the wrong word. Bunny does actually bring the chocolate on Easter in America, which is how I learned and I guess he learned that in France. It's a bell that flies in from Rome. Who also brings chocolate for some reason.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:03

It's when non sentient Roman Bell brings chocolate to French children for Easter. Correct? Can I ask a question? Sure. There's a legit question. Okay. Direct all hate mail to Megan everybody. Like yeah, this

 Megan Goodwin 14:17

is where this one's my phone. Can go I'm just not give their kids candy. Like what? Apparently no,

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:21

no rigamarole around things that deliver candy like you have to like just give your kids candy. Can you not just love your kids out loud? Just give your fucking kids candy.

 Megan Goodwin 14:30

Now to wait to love your kids out loud. There has to be a bunny doing it

 14:39

like unharmed

 Megan Goodwin 14:39

I'm like Alright, sorry, girl. It seems right to be suspicious your your eldest child is right to be suspicious of the Easter Bunny.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:46

There's a lot to wrap this up because I'm like, I'm like this was disturbing to me. Yeah. Yeah, it's fair. So it sounds like there's no set we can't have stolen were appropriated pagan holidays. And by we, I mean, Christianity. Yeah. Because there's no such thing as the pagans trademark, right? Point number two that you've made is that all of this is sort of anti semitic because it's really about making Easter as important and therefore more important than Passover. The bunny is new in the historical framework. And I think I learned that everyone needs therapy. Just give your kids candy. If you want to, don't need a like far fetched animal to lay eggs, inexplicably that's filled with candy. Just tell your kids you love them and give him a Hershey bar for fuck city. Holy shit. My kids are getting so much ice cream when they come home.

M

Megan Goodwin 15:56

I actually like this like specifically in a Judaism frame, right? Because like you do need a holiday to explain to your kids why would you would give them tasteless flat terrible crackers for a week. But you just have candy because some of you Yeah, I'm like, I'm like genuinely.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:13

I'm like, you can't tell nerd but I'm like

M

Megan Goodwin 16:15

really sweaty and hot.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:19

Figure out why we've made up this like surveillance King for one holiday. Who like will get you if you're good but will punish you if you're bad. Like a mammal that lays eggs to give you candy. Like just give your kids candy I should give them presents without threatening surveillance their whole life. them candy without sending them into the woods. Look for mythical eggs.

M

Megan Goodwin 16:51

really should be a platypus, right because that's a mammal that lays eggs. In fairness, now



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:55

that I'm thinking about it, we did have to win chocolate in a gambling game for Hanukkah. So we're not we're not great. But you

M

Megan Goodwin 17:04

just search a fake leg to get fetch.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:06

No, that's money. That's current Sorry, sorry. So on a guilty one through an elaborate game of betting. Anyway,



Megan Goodwin 17:13

let's let's keep tracking. So final thoughts. See, we could do a cute, non depressing episode. I'm proud. You're welcome. You're welcome. All right, seriously, final thoughts. Fellow witchy folks, I totally get the impulse to be like, Oh my God, this was ours first or I'm talking to witches. So like, oh my gods and goddesses. This was ours. First. Western. European Christians love to steal stuff. But check out the British Museum just for starters. So this sounds very plausible, right? But like it's also bad history. And white western Christian imperialism gives us more than enough facts and violence is to be mad about. So like let's leave Easter in its various animals out of it. Also, something being new, isn't necessarily bad if for you interacting with the goddess Easter is about it. We're Freya, for that matter, is about bunnies and hares. That's cool. That's fine. Whatever. Cindy eller points out in the Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory that we don't need an invented past to create a richer and more just future.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:12

I'd like to share with



Megan Goodwin 18:19

you happy I should write about nonsense more often. broke me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:27

I'd like to pick up your stuff.



Megan Goodwin 18:35

And parents, thank you for not living up but also get therapy. Anyway.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:40

Don't pack up your stuff yet. Nerds. It's time for homework,



Megan Goodwin 18:43

homework. You know what? I'm just I'm just gonna do this one because, frankly,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:49

I can't do it. I'm muting my microphone.



Megan Goodwin 18:53

All right. I already mentioned the work of Professor Ronald Hutton. He has a chapter on the origins of Easter that I will link you to Adrian Bhatt has done a lot of work online around deconstructing the modern myth of the Easter Bunny. So his piece on the Guardian is still available and very readable. He also has it in thread form, which you know, I love and he did an interview for paif. iOS about the Easter Fox, which I am very fond of as well. I mentioned the David Sedaris piece, it is called Jesus shaves. It's from NPR is This American Life and I've got a clip for you there too. And then Andrew, Mark Henry has a religion for breakfast, not on Easter but on pagan and Christian holidays and where they do and don't overlap specifically about Saturnalia. So we've got a clip for that as well.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:38

Awesome. Shout out to Evie Wolf, Rachel Zieff and Juliana Finch the KI101 team whose work makes this pod accessible and therefore awesome, listenable, social media-able among many other things for which we are grateful.



Megan Goodwin 19:51

We sure are. You can find Megan, that's me, on Twitter @mpgphd and Ilyse @profirmf or the show @keepingit_101. Find the website at keepingit101.com. Find us on Insta if you want to and now we are on the tick tock drop us a rating or review in your pod catcher of choice and with that peace out nerds do your homework and solve the syllabus.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:15

I'm literally crying



20:35

kitten Easter Bunny did this all I said was used to run at the Menlo Park Mall was more convincing. He just jumped the railing and knock me down and let her go is under a lot of pressure will happen to him. The guy needs to Barney Sue kicked his ass coming