

Sheela-na-gigs: The Forgotten Daughters of the Ancient Goddess

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Overview

Sheela-na-gig is the name for the often crudely carved sculpture of an older woman with her legs spread apart, either pointing to or holding open her vulva. These carvings sat quietly on doorways, windows, arches, and capitals on the exteriors of medieval churches throughout the British Isles and parts of mainland Europe. Because of the sexually explicit gesture, embarrassed church officials and disgusted or disinterested archaeologists have often ignored these figures. Sheela-na-gigs were hidden, destroyed, or tucked away in museums.



Key Findings

The introduction and spread of the Abrahamic religions often suppressed evidence for female-oriented, pagan traditions. The female that had once been so highly revered became a symbol of sin and evil. Previous interpretations of the Sheela-na-gig identified her as a generic symbol of fertility or a warning against lust and sin. Due to being forgotten for so long and the bias of male-dominated archaeologists and historians studying them under the influence of modern religion, the true origin and meaning of the Sheela-na-gig has been obscured. If we look far enough back in time, we will see a world rich in goddesses and prominent female figures. I believe that the Sheela-na-gig is a direct descendent of these ancient goddesses and holds a much stronger, deeper meaning than she is given today.



Impact

By shining a light on the ancient history of female goddesses and the transfer of power from female to male, it is easier to place Sheela-na-gigs in their proper historical context.



Acknowledgements: Thank you to Dr. Lillian Joyce for her support on this project.