About the cover

The Green Man

Photograph by Dr Alex Paton

At first sight, this bucolic-looking Green Man on the outside of the east wall of the 13th century church at Chadlington, Oxfordshire would seem inappropriate on a Christian building. In fact, he is a common feature of churches throughout Britain and the continent, a pagan symbol adapted by the church from folklore in the same way as yew trees, holy water, dates of ancient festivals, and the names of heathen goddesses for some of its saints. The Green Man appears in many guises, but typically the head and face sprout leaves, branches and roots of oak, ivy and other ‘sacred’ plants; while generally regarded as friendly, he has a reputation for high spirits, trickery and licentiousness, celebrated in many a country festival. Characters with similar qualities can be traced back to Roman, Celtic and Egyptian myths; a magnificent stone carving from the ruins of Hatra, the mysterious Parthian city in northern Iraq which flourished from 500 BC, is clearly a relative. But the true ancestor of the Green Man can be traced back even further—to Enkidu, the wild man who helps to defeat the evil forces of nature in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the king who is thought to have ruled the Sumerian city of Uruk around 2700 BC.

Alex Paton