

A Microcosm of the Esoteric Revival: The Histories of the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram

Graham John Wheeler

grahamjohnwheeler@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the sources that underlie the best known of all the rituals that have emerged from the modern esoteric revival: the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBRP), which was formulated in the late-Victorian period by the creators of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. A close study reveals that the sources of the LBRP are extraordinarily varied; and, in some cases, extremely old. This eclecticism shows how religious rituals and other “invented traditions” tend to be assembled from a bricolage of pre-existing materials, part familiar and part mysterious. The Golden Dawn’s eclecticism also served the practical function of bridging the gap between the Christian and pagan interests/allegiances within its membership. Moreover, the construction of the LBRP provides an example of how older, more fluid traditions of esoteric knowledge came to be codified and standardised by the Golden Dawn in the context of the modern occult revival.

Keywords: esotericism; occult revival; religious ritual; ritual; ritual magic

The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBRP) is the best known of all the rituals that have emerged from the modern occult revival. It was originally developed and popularised by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in the late-Victorian period; and it continues to be found in numerous esoteric contexts today, not least because popular introductions to ceremonial magic and related subjects continue to teach beginners the LBRP in what is recognisably its Golden Dawn form.¹

1. This is true of e.g. Duquette, *The Magick of Aleister Crowley*, 58 and *Enochian Vision Magick*, 191–92; Rankine, *Climbing The Tree of Life*, 247–51; Christopher, *Kabbalah, Magic and the Great Work of Self-Transformation*, 18–22; Kraig, *Modern Magick*, 39–49; and King and Skinner, *Techniques of High Magic*. It is also obviously true of sources that explicitly situate themselves within the

In this article, we will undertake a detailed examination of the LBRP. As our point of departure, we may take the memoirs of one of the better-known recruits of the Golden Dawn: the writer Arthur Machen (1863–1947). Machen wrote scathingly about his involvement with the order, which he called the “Twilight Star”. One of his criticisms was that it was an essentially modern construct – an incoherent assemblage of materials from disparate traditions:

Any critical mind, with a tinge of occult reading, should easily have concluded that here was no ancient order. . . . For ancient rituals, whether orthodox or heterodox, are founded on one *mythos* and on one *mythos* only. They are grouped about some fact, actual or symbolic, as the ritual of Freemasonry is said to have as its centre certain events connected with the building of King Solomon’s Temple, and they keep within their limits. But the Twilight Star embraced all mythologies and all mysteries of all races and all ages, and “referred” or “attributed” them to each other and proved that they all came to much the same thing; and that was enough! That was not the ancient frame of mind; it was not even the 1809 frame of mind. But it was very much the eighteen-eighty and later frame of mind.²

This article will examine the evidential basis for Machen’s intuition. We will trace the disparate sources and origins of the different parts of the LBRP, analysing in turn the successive component parts of the ritual. We are going to unscramble the egg. This is, perhaps surprisingly, an exercise that has not been undertaken before. The LBRP will serve in our analysis as a microcosmic exemplar of processes that operated more broadly when Victorian occultists sought to revive or recreate the Western esoteric tradition in modern times.

Golden Dawn tradition, such as Cicero and Cicero, *The Essential Golden Dawn*, 147–49. One result of this is that there are numerous videos featuring the LBRP posted on YouTube. See also Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*, 243 on the importance of the ritual.

2. Machen, *Things Near and Far*, 153–54. The significance of 1809 is that it was the date of a watermark found on some leaves of the Cipher MS on which the order’s rituals were based. Machen’s words echo Aleister Crowley’s complaint, in his publication of the rituals, of “the ‘mixed-biscuit’ type of symbol which is . . . chosen so as to ‘show off’ superficial knowledge” (“The Temple of Solomon the King (Book II)”, 266 fn.).

The Golden Dawn was established in London in 1888. It was the first group of the English ritual magic revival to experience any degree of success. The structure of the order was essentially masonic, being based on initiation into private lodges (or “temples”) through a system of hierarchical grades. The Golden Dawn’s rituals form a highly elaborate and rather confusing system based on complex, interlocking religious and mystical symbolism. The rites may be seen variously as an impressive monument of scholarship and erudition; a fine piece of late-Romantic performance art; or, if one shares Machen’s perspective, a confusing, semi-coherent mishmash that will have served to confuse rather than to enlighten.³ In any event, the Golden Dawn system was distinctively a product of its time.

The Golden Dawn rituals had their origin in the “Cipher MS”, a mysterious document which takes its name from the fact that it was written in a cipher derived from the *Polygraphiae* (1561) of the German abbot and scholar Johannes Trithemius. The Cipher MS came to light under disputed circumstances through the offices of the physician and Freemason William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925).⁴ The document’s authorship remains unconfirmed, but it may well have been composed by another Mason, the recently deceased occultist Kenneth Mackenzie (1833–1886).⁵ It contains only a skeletal outline of rituals and doctrine: for example, it prefigures the LBRP and the other pentagram rituals of the developed Golden Dawn system, but it nowhere sets them out in full.

The Golden Dawn rites are a strange mixture of scholarly research and mysticism: “the product of antiquarian, if not scholarly, research motivated by a desire to experience supernatural communion with Divinity and, indeed, to

3. For a more favourable assessment than Machen’s, see e.g. Bogdan, *Western Esotericism*, 121–22 (quoting in turn Gerald Yorke to the same effect).

4. The classic account and analysis may be found in Howe, *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, Chapter 1. Cf. also e.g. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Scrapbook*, esp. Chapter 2. In this article, the pages of the Cipher MS are cited from Runyon ed. *Secrets of the Golden Dawn Cypber Manuscript*. The other standard edition of the MS is Kuntz ed. *The Complete Golden Dawn Cipher Manuscript*.

5. This theory was advocated by, amongst others, the leading Golden Dawn historian R. A. Gilbert: see “Provenance unknown: A tentative solution”; “Supplement to ‘Provenance Unknown’”; “From Cipher to Enigma”; and *The Golden Dawn Scrapbook*, 5–6.

become divine”.⁶ There is still very little published work on the documentary sources of the rituals. The process by which they were composed remains obscure: the evidence simply does not survive. Most of the credit for putting the rituals into their final form is normally given to Westcott’s protégé Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918). Mathers was an eccentric who spent many hours in the British Museum’s Reading Room trawling through the Western esoteric tradition for material to revive. He was not necessarily solely responsible for elaborating the Golden Dawn system – in particular, it has been argued that Westcott had a greater role than has generally been recognised⁷ – but this article will proceed on the assumption that he may be credited as the principal hand.

The LBRP was the only ritual (other than the grade ceremonies) that was revealed to members of the Golden Dawn’s “first” or “outer” order, which prepared members for entry into the more exclusive “second” or “inner” order. The LBRP was “the nearest thing to a purely magical ritual found within the First Order curriculum”.⁸ It was disclosed to neophytes immediately after their initiation, in order that they “may have protection against opposing forces, and also that they may form some idea of how to attract and to come into communication with spiritual and invisible things”.⁹ Members were counselled to perform the ritual in the evening; a slightly different version, geared to invoking rather than banishing, was to be performed in the morning.¹⁰ In the context of the Golden Dawn system, the LBRP and its invoking equivalent sat alongside a set of other, similar rites known as the Supreme Ritual of the Pentagram and the Rituals of the Hexagram. In addition to daily performances of the LBRP, Golden Dawn initiates were recommended to use the ritual for cleansing before

6. Fuller, “Anglo-Catholic Clergy”, 189.

7. See Gilbert, “From Cipher to Enigma”.

8. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians*, 60. See also Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 35, 38.

9. Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 3:11.

10. Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 1:107. It may also be noted here that a cut-down version of the rite appears in the well known “Bornless Ritual” (3:262).

a magical operation; as a “protection against impure magnetism”; and as part of a technique to “get rid of obsessing or disturbing thoughts”; they were also told to visualise themselves performing it as an exercise in meditation.¹¹

As is well known, the Golden Dawn splintered into pieces from around 1900; its successor orders, such as the Stella Matutina and the Alpha et Omega, were mostly moribund by the outbreak of World War II. Some of the Golden Dawn’s rituals appeared in a pirated edition in Aleister Crowley’s periodical *The Equinox* from 1909–13. The rest were published in 1937–40 by Israel Regardie, who had accessed them through his membership of the Stella Matutina. Interestingly, Aleister Crowley played a significant role in the preservation and transmission of the LBRP. He incorporated it into his *Liber O* (1909), which seems to have been the first time that it appeared in print. He subsequently produced a version of the ritual in an ancient Greek idiom, the “Star Ruby”, in *Liber XXV* (1913); as well as publishing a lesser known adaptation of it in *Liber V vel Reguli* (1929).

Curiously enough, the next couple of publications of the LBRP came from Christians rather than Crowleyans. In 1915, an initiate of the Stella Matutina, Father J. C. Fitzgerald, published a pared-down and Christianised version of the rite.¹² Subsequently, in 1930, the Christian esotericist Dion Fortune publicised a key element of the LBRP. In her book *Psychic Self-Defence*, Fortune recommended the use of banishing earth pentagrams as protective tools; and she described herself as using pentagrams in combination with certain “Names of Power that are unsuitable for disclosure in these pages”.¹³ As we shall see, these are more or less obvious references to key elements of the LBRP. After Fortune, there came Israel Regardie, who published the text of the LBRP in his *Tree of Life* in 1932;¹⁴ following which he included it in his full edition of the Golden Dawn rituals.

11. Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 1:107–8; 3:11, 15; see also 3.28.

12. See Fuller, “Anglo-Catholic Clergy”, 305–7.

13. Fortune, *Psychic Self-Defence*, Chapter 18 (pages unnumbered).

14. Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 166.

Gerald Gardner, the founder of Wicca, subsequently imported the LBRP into early versions of the Wiccan sacred text, the Book of Shadows.¹⁵ Although the ritual did not survive in its complete form as an established part of the Wiccan tradition, Gardner did bequeath to Wicca various elements that are found within it, including the use of pentagrams and the practice of casting a magical circle by reference to the cardinal points of the compass.¹⁶ In broader perspective, the first mass-market magical “self-help” book to recommend the LBRP seems to have been *The Magician* (1959), which was published by one of Dion Fortune’s followers, W. E. Butler.¹⁷ As we have already noted, the LBRP has since become ubiquitous in popular introductions to esotericism and ceremonial magic.

We may now move on to examine the component parts of the LBRP itself. We will employ the ritual text contained in Israel Regardie’s original publication of the Golden Dawn papers, which appears to be essentially the same as that used by the original order.¹⁸

15. See e.g. page 7 of “Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical”, Gardner’s original MS which underlay the Book of Shadows: a version is available online at www.oldways.org/documents/geraldgardner/ye_bok_of_ye_art_magical.pdf [accessed 17 May 2019].

16. Gardner was not, however, concerned with *banishment*. He noted that ceremonial magicians’ circles, like that cast in the LBRP, were regarded as being protective, whereas a witches’ circle “is to keep in the power which they believe they can raise from their own bodies and to prevent it from being dissipated” (*Witchcraft Today*, 26). Contrast the words of Israel Regardie: “The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram is the ceremonial magician’s way of casting a circle of protection” (*The Middle Pillar*, 178). As a matter of historical accuracy, there is doubt as to whether circles did originally have a protective function for ritual magicians: see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 161.

17. See Butler, *Magic and The Magician*, 228–31.

18. See Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 1:105–6. There have been no advances in research that have led to any modifications of the text in subsequent editions of Regardie’s work. The text of the LBRP was not included in R. G. Torrens’ separate publication of the Golden Dawn rites in 1973 (*The Secret Rituals*). The earliest text of the LBRP which the present author has been able to locate is found in a collection of MSS held at Freemasons’ Hall in London (call number GBR 1991 GD 2/1/13). The author intends to analyse these MSS further in a later publication; but it is sufficient to note here that their contents are consistent with a dating in the 1890s. The discussion below will indicate a couple of minor respects in which this very early text differs from Regardie’s.

The “Qabbalistic Cross”

Take a steel dagger in the right hand. Face East.

Touch thy forehead

and say ATEH (thou art)

Touch thy breast

and say MALKUTH (the Kingdom)

Touch thy right shoulder

and say VE-GEBURAH (and the Power)

Touch thy left shoulder

and say VE-GEDULAH (and the Glory)

Clasp thy hands before thee and say LE-OLAM (for ever)

Dagger between fingers, point up and say AMEN.

This is the first part of the LBRP: it was used elsewhere in the Golden Dawn system in group rituals.¹⁹

The first thing to note is that the ritual script is written partly in a foreign language (Hebrew), with English archaisms (“thy”, “thee”). These unusual linguistic features are characteristic of sacred texts in different cultures. Archaic English would have been familiar to Victorian Englishmen as a sacral vernacular from the Anglican liturgy and the King James Bible. Hebrew is obviously the sacred language of Judaism; and for Golden Dawn members it would have had, more specifically, associations with the Kabbalah. It bears noting, however, that the Hebrew elements of the LBRP are linguistically problematic. It would be more correct to use the definite article *ha* in front of the names of the three sephiroth *Malkuth*, *Geburah* and *Gedulah*. The Sephardic pronunciation is used, but again, in an imperfect form. For example, in the names of the sephiroth, *Malkuth* is rendered in the correct fashion – contrast the Ashkenazi *Malkus* – but *Gevurah* is rendered as *Geburah*. This is proof, if proof were needed, that we are dealing with a constructed ritual put together by gentiles. (One might also make the point that there is no sign in the LBRP of the Aramaic language, which is just as important as Hebrew in the Kabbalistic tradition.)²⁰

19. See Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, e.g. 2:158, 160, 197.

20. See e.g. Mopsik, “Late Judaeo-Aramaic”.

The ritual begins with the practitioner facing east (and indeed east was a place of significance in other Golden Dawn ceremonies too). It is well known that the traditional Christian liturgy, in both its Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox forms, was performed facing an altar located in the east. This eastward-facing posture was invested with eschatological significance: one turns to the east to greet the returning Lord.²¹ The posture is far older than Christianity, however. It may be traced back to ancient pagan practices – not only from the Graeco-Roman world, but also from the Near East, India and Africa – which were linked to sun-worship.²² It is noteworthy in this context that the Cipher MS associates the east with the rising sun: the ‘golden dawn’, so to speak.²³ The cardinal points, moreover, have symbolic meanings in Freemasonry, a point to which we will return. As will become clear, this congeries of Christian, pagan and masonic symbolism is entirely typical of the LBRP and of the Golden Dawn system generally.

As we have intimated, the three main nouns mentioned in the text are Kabbalistic. *Malkuth* and *Geburah* are the names of sephiroth, while *Gedulah* (greatness) is an alternative term for the sephirah *Chesed*. In carrying out the prescribed physical actions, the magus is identifying his physical body with the Tree of Life, in which *Malkuth* is at the base and *Geburah* and *Chesed* are on either side of the central pillar. Despite these plainly Kabbalistic associations, however, the basic framework of this part of the LBRP would seem to have a Christian inspiration. Not only does it involve making the sign of the cross like a Catholic or Orthodox believer,²⁴ the text recited by the initiate strongly

21. This point was made by no less a person than Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, esp. 68–70. Note also, in this context, his point at 83: “very early on the east was linked with the sign of the Cross”.

22. See Dölger, *Sol Salutis*, 20–60.

23. See pages 3 and 5.

24. At some point, the direction of the horizontal part of the cross was altered from the Roman Catholic left-to-right to the Eastern Orthodox right-to-left. This is apparent from a comparison of the Regardie text with the earlier text mentioned in n16 above. Oddly, however, the earlier text adopts the Orthodox tradition of making the cross with the thumb and the first two fingers, whereas Regardie’s does not (Catholics generally use the whole hand).

resembles the concluding part, or doxology, of the Lord's Prayer (*Pater Noster*) in its Protestant iteration. This text ultimately comes from the Bible, from Matthew 6.13:

For yours is the kingdom [*basileia*], and the power [*dynamis*], and the glory [*doxa*], for ever. Amen.

Bible scholars have long known that this is a problematic text. It does not appear in the earliest surviving MSS of the Gospel of Matthew, nor in the parallel version of the Lord's Prayer in Luke. It appears only in later MSS of the Byzantine textual tradition.²⁵ It is probably an interpolation, and it is left out by most new Bible translations, just as it was absent from the Vulgate and the traditional Roman Catholic liturgy. Nevertheless, the doxology has a long history. The early Christian treatise known as the *Didache* (1st/2nd century CE), which was influenced by Matthew's Gospel, contains a version of the Lord's prayer with the following line:

For yours is the power [*dynamis*] and the glory [*doxa*] for ever.²⁶

It is quite likely that the doxology was inspired by a text from the Hebrew Bible, from the First Book of Chronicles – the same text, in fact, that Kabbalistic rabbis believed disclosed the names of the sephiroth.²⁷ The relevant passage consists of the following words, which are attributed to King David:

Yours, O Lord, are the greatness [*gedulah*; LXX *megalosyne*], the power [*geburah*; *dynamis*], the glory [*tiphereth*; *kauchema*], the victory [*netzach*; *nike*], and the majesty [*hód*; *ischys*]; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom [*mamlakah*], O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.²⁸

25. See e.g. Liefeld, "The Lord's Prayer", 162.

26. *Didache*, 8.2. See further e.g. Keith, "Lord's Prayer".

27. See e.g. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 161, 263.

28. 1 Chron. 29.11; translation from the New Revised Standard Version. The word "kingdom" does not appear as a noun in the LXX, so there is no correspondence with *basileia* in the Lord's Prayer doxology.

We can be quite sure that the creators of the Golden Dawn knew about this passage, and the consequent correspondence between the Lord's Prayer doxology and the Kabbalistic sephiroth. Here is a translation of a passage from the central Kabbalistic text known as the *Zohar*, which refers to the passage from Chronicles:

663. And in the book of the dissertation of the school of Rav Yeyeva the Elder it is thus said and established, that the beginning of the beard cometh from the supernal CHSD, *Chesed*, Mercy.

664. Concerning which it is written, “LK IHVH HGDVLH VHGBVRH VHTHPARTH, *Leka*, Tetragrammaton, *Ha-Gedulah*, *Ve-Ha-Geburah*, *Ve-Ha-Tiphereth*, Thine, O Tetragrammaton, *Gedulah* (another name for *Chesed*), *Geburah*, and *Tiphereth* (the names of the fourth, fifth, and sixth Sephiroth, which Protestants usually add to the end of the Lord's Prayer, substituting, however, *Malkuth* for *Gedulah*), Thine, O Tetragrammaton, are the Mercy, the Power, and the Glory (or *Beauty*)”. And all these are so, and thus it (the beard) commenceth.²⁹

The significance of this translation is that it comes from none other than Samuel MacGregor Mathers; and it was first published in 1887, just before the inception of the Golden Dawn. Indeed, Mathers' translation of the *Zohar* was the first translation to appear in English (albeit it was only a partial one, based on Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's earlier translations into Latin).³⁰

Yet the occultist who first noticed the resemblance between the Lord's Prayer doxology and the Kabbalistic sephiroth was not Mathers. It was Éliphas Lévi. Lévi had been a Roman Catholic seminarian, so he would perhaps have been struck by the fact that the doxology in the Greek New Testament which he and other clerics studied in seminary was omitted from the church-approved prayers that ordinary Catholics recited and listened to in the course of their daily observances. This anomaly seems to have set him thinking: perhaps the doxology had a mystical significance and had been deliberately withheld from the uninitiated. He wrote:

29. Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, 327. The passage comes from Portion *Ha'azinu*, Chapter 41 in “The Lesser Holy Assembly”.

30. See Huss, “Translations of the Zohar”, 99–100.

The sign of the cross adopted by Christians does not belong to them exclusively. This also is kabbalistic and represents the oppositions and tetradic equilibrium of the elements. We see by the occult versicle of the Lord's Prayer ... that it was originally made after two manners, or at least that it was characterised by two entirely different formulae, one reserved for priests and initiates, the other imparted to neophytes and the profane. For example, the initiate said raising his hand to his forehead, "For thine", then added "is", and continuing as he brought down his hand to his breast, "the kingdom", then to the left shoulder, "the justice", afterwards to the right shoulder, "and the mercy" – then clasping his hands, he added, "in the generating ages". *Tibi sunt Malchut et Geburah et Chesed per aeonas* – a sign of the cross which is absolutely and magnificently kabbalistic, which the profanations of Gnosticism have lost completely to the official and militant Church. This sign, made after this manner, should precede and terminate the conjuration of the four.³¹

Mathers and the other Golden Dawn leaders were quite familiar with Lévi's work; and the fact that they replicated the Hebrew solecisms in the passage above makes the influence almost certain.

We may observe that Lévi was seeking to add two additional components to the Kabbalistic symbology of the sephirah and the Lord's Prayer doxology. First, he made reference to the "elements", meaning the four elements of the classical Greek philosophers: earth, air, fire and water. The "conjuration of the four" denotes the magician's endeavour to impose his will on the four elements by undertaking various exorcisms and prayers – which were, in fact, borrowed into other parts of the Golden Dawn system. This "conjuration" exercise had deep roots. The grimoires of Christian ritual magic used the idiom of conjuration or exorcism for both spirits and objects; and the tradition of exorcising objects goes back at least as far as patristic Christian baptismal ceremonies.³² The four elements will become more important in the subsequent parts of the LBRP. For the present, we may note that, aside from their pagan Greek antecedents, they featured in traditional Jewish thought, including the Kabbalistic tradition.³³

31. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 222.

32. See Young, *A History of Exorcism*, 30–40.

33. See e.g. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, esp. 1.1.3.10–4.2. For a Kabbalistic example, see the

It may also be observed here that Lévi considered four to be a sacred number, a notion that goes back to the ancient Pythagoreans and their doctrine of the *tetrakeys*. As we will see, the number four is embedded in the structure of the LBRP: it relates not only to the four elements, but also to the four cardinal directions, four divine names and four archangels.

The second new component that Lévi added was the Roman Catholic sign of the cross. (The use of the dagger as a tool to perform the crossing motion may come from the tradition of Solomonic magic.)³⁴ Cruciform symbolism is a recurring theme of the Golden Dawn rites – there is the cross, the crucifix, the *crux ansata*, and in the ritual of the Adeptus Minor grade, the initiate is physically bound to a cross. Superficially, this is unsurprising, given that the Golden Dawn originated among Christians in a Christian country. But the crosses in the Golden Dawn system are not (or not necessarily) the cross of Christ. In general terms, of course, the cross may be seen as one of the basic trans-cultural symbols of humankind;³⁵ but we can be more specific than that in identifying what it might have meant to Mathers and his colleagues. In the footnotes to the passage quoted above, Lévi cites sources pointing to the Rosicrucian and Kabbalistic associations of the cross. For other contemporary writers, its associations were outright anti-Christian: there existed a small but significant literature which maintained that the cross was of pagan origin.³⁶ As we will see, the cross was also specifically linked in the Golden Dawn rites

quotation from the *Zohar* in the next section.

34. See e.g. *Key of Solomon*, 2.8. The use of the dagger, however, seems to be a later development. The earlier version of the LBRP text mentioned at n16 above states more vaguely that the tool should be “any convenient steel instrument, or other weapon”; and that an initiate of the Adeptus Minor grade should use his magical sword or lotus wand. In his first publication of the LBRP in 1932, Regardie wrote that “the sword to represent the dispelling critical faculty of the *Ruach* [a Kabbalistic term for one of the levels of the soul] is usually the instrument employed in this connection” (*The Tree of Life*, 166).

35. See e.g. Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, s.v. “cross”.

36. See e.g. Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, Chapter 5, Section 6; Ward, *History of the Cross*; Thomas Inman, *Ancient Pagan and Modern Christian Symbolism*.

to the Egyptian deity Osiris. The cruciform motifs in the Golden Dawn, then, offer a good example of the skilfully ambiguous or syncretic way in which the order's creators made use of the diverse stock of religious symbology that they had available to them.

In conclusion, the origins of the first part of the LBRP lie in a series of eclectic connections made by nineteenth-century occultists between such disparate bodies of material as Kabbalistic mysticism rooted in the Hebrew Bible; devotional observances from the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox branches of Christianity; and the legacy of ancient pagan religion. This is a surprisingly extensive yield from a text consisting of only 64 words.

The pentagrams

Make in the Air toward the East the invoking PENTAGRAM as shown and, bringing the point of the dagger to the centre of the Pentagram, vibrate the DEITY NAME – YOD HE VAU HE – imagining that your voice carries forward to the East of the Universe.

Holding the dagger out before you, go to the South, make the Pentagram and vibrate similarly the deity name – ADONAI.

Go to the West, make the Pentagram and vibrate EHEIEH.

Go to the North, make the Pentagram and vibrate AGLA.

Return to the East and complete your circle by bringing the dagger point to the centre of the first Pentagram.

The most prominent feature of this part of the LBRP is the use of the four Hebrew names of God. We may note that a different set of divine names (in both Hebrew and the “Enochian” language of John Dee and Edward Kelley) is used in the LBRP's sister ritual, the Supreme Ritual of the Pentagram. These other names include “Elohim” in the south and “El” in the west. In truth, using the names of God or gods in magic is a very old practice. Such names were employed in practical Kabbalah; and Hebrew divine and angelic names are attested as being widely used in ancient Jewish magic. Interestingly, gentiles were already borrowing them in this early period. Gideon Bohak has written:

In addition to the Tetragrammaton and its derivatives, we find many of the old epithets of the Jewish God, including Adonai, Sabaot, El, Shaddai, *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* (“I-am-who-I-am”), or just *Ehyeh*, Holy Holy Holy, the God of the battle-formations (of Israel), the God of retributions, the One who sits upon the Cherubim, the God of the spirits for all flesh, and many others³⁷

This is all of a piece with the Golden Dawn’s practices in the LBRP and other rituals. Nevertheless, the LBRP does not merely contain divine names: it presents us, specifically, with four divine names which are distributed at the four cardinal points around a magic circle. This arrangement requires some further analysis.

The concept that different spiritual entities are associated with the cardinal directions has ancient roots. For example, one Graeco-Egyptian magical papyrus contains the following passage, in which four names of spirits are associated with the “four regions”:

Eros, darling PASSALEON ÉT, send me my personal [angel] tonight to give me information about whatever the concern is. For I do this on order from PANCHOUCHI THASSOU at whose order you are to act, because I conjure you by the four regions of the universe, APSAGÉL CHACHOU MERIOUT MERMERIOUT³⁸

The entities named in this spell are evidently spirits or daemons rather than gods. This association of lesser spiritual entities with the cardinal points also survived in the Christian Solomonian tradition, from the *Hygromanteia* onwards. More pertinent to our current inquiry, however, is the fact that names of God are used in the Solomonian tradition for purposes including (but not confined to) empowering magic circles.³⁹ Magic circles themselves are extremely old, their roots lying in antiquity.⁴⁰ Such are the origins of this part of the LBRP.

37. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 306. See also Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton*, 169–72.

38. Taken from the spell at PGM VII.478–90 (translation from Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*).

39. See e.g. the digitised examples of Solomonian magic circles (together with the associated text) among the illustrations at <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/ksol.htm> and <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/ksol2.htm> (*Key of Solomon*) and <http://www.sacred-texts.com/grim/lks/lks08.htm> (*Lesser Key of Solomon*) [all accessed 17 May 2019].

40. See generally, on cardinal points and circles in ancient Graeco-Egyptian magic, Skinner,

How much of this history would Mathers have known? As we shall see, he was certainly familiar with Solomonic magic. In addition, by at least the turn of the twentieth century, contemporary scholarship had traced the origin of the protective magic circles of the Christian grimoires back to ancient Assyria. It remains unclear whether Mathers knew about this research, but at least one of the relevant scholars knew about *him*.⁴¹ As for the Greek Magical Papyri, Mathers' knowledge of them would necessarily have been limited: some of the material from the papyri had been made public; but they were not published in anything like full form until Karl Preisendanz' Teubner edition of 1928–31.⁴² Mathers was handling materials that had older, and perhaps more interesting, origins than he realised.

If Mathers himself had been asked to explain this part of the LBRP, it is likely that he would have made reference to Freemasonry. Freemasonry is the most historically immediate source for the circular motion that is prescribed for the initiate. Circumambulation appears on a number of occasions in the Golden Dawn rituals, and several times it is said expressly to represent the course of the sun.⁴³ The cardinal points were linked together in a pattern of solar symbolism: in the Neophyte ritual, it was explained to initiates that the east is “the place where the Sun rises”; the south is the place of “Heat and Dryness”; the west is where the setting sun brings about an “increase of Darkness and decrease of Light”; and the north symbolises “Cold and Moisture”.⁴⁴ In the same way, Freemasonry attributed symbolic meanings, related to the path of the sun, to the cardinal points,

Techniques of Graeco-Egyptian Magic, 70–74, 82–90. See also Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 159–61 on magic circles in later times.

41. See Thompson, *Semitic Magic*, lx, where the eminent archaeologist Reginald Campbell Thompson makes a gratuitously slighting reference to Mathers' translation of the *Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*.

42. The publication history of the papyri is summarised in the Introduction to Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*.

43. See Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, e.g. 2:267, 277, 3.58. See also the link which is made with “the course of the sun” in relation to the Lesser Rituals of the Hexagram at 3:36.

44. Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 2:14–16.

and used clockwise circumambulation in its ceremonies. The traditional masonic ritual texts affirm that “the sun rises in the East”, the south symbolises “the Sun at its meridian”, the west “mark[s] the setting sun”, and the north is the place of darkness.⁴⁵ One influential nineteenth-century masonic encyclopaedia declares that this symbolism “is a portion of the old sun worship, of which we find so many relics in Gnosticism, in Hermetic philosophy, and in Freemasonry”.⁴⁶ As other esotericists have observed, circumambulation may be found in the rituals of a number of religions around the world, with the clockwise, solar patterning being associated in particular with Hindu and Tibetan traditions.⁴⁷

The cardinal points have other meanings in the LBRP besides representing the stations of the sun. We may reiterate that a God-name is assigned to each of them; and we must also mention here the links between the cardinal points and the four classical elements. In the Golden Dawn rituals, east is associated with air, south with fire, west with water and north with earth. These associations are all part of a broader pattern of mystical correspondences – a subject of intense interest for Golden Dawn occultists. It is well known that a staple of the Western esoteric tradition is the enterprise of identifying and exploiting correspondences between different ideas and things located in different realms of reality. This enterprise has been central to Western esotericism and magic since antiquity, when Middle- and Neo-Platonist philosophers and theurgists posited that the cosmos was permeated by *synthémata* or *symbola* (“signs”, “signatures”) of the gods. The Golden Dawn ranks alongside the Catholic Reformation-era scholar Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) as one of the most influential generators of correspondences in history. Its developed system of correspondences was immortalised in 777, an enormous and disorderly collection of matches

45. The relevant texts have, of course, been published repeatedly, and there are minor variations in the wording. The quotations above are taken from http://www.stichtingargus.nl/vrijmetselarij/ovo_remul1.html [accessed 17 May 2019].

46. Mackey, *An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, 535; see also 165–66, 237–38 and 727.

47. See e.g. Guénon, *The Great Triad*, 50–51.

between Hebrew letters, Kabbalistic concepts, gods, colours, gemstones, tarot cards, drugs and other things besides, which was subsequently published (in lightly edited form) by Aleister Crowley in 1909.

To return to the correspondences embedded in the LBRP – one Golden Dawn text explains the attribution of the elements to the cardinal points by referring to the *winds*:

This attribution is derived from the nature of the winds. For the Easterly wind is of the Nature of Air more especially. The South Wind bringeth into action the nature of Fire. West winds bring with them moisture and rain. North winds are cold and dry like Earth.⁴⁸

This explanation is surprising and idiosyncratic. It allows us to identify the ultimate source with a high degree of confidence: a second-century CE treatise known as the *Tetrabiblos* which was composed by Claudius Ptolemy, the ancient Graeco-Roman astronomer and astrologer. In the *Tetrabiblos*, the winds are expressly associated with the four cardinal points: the east wind being dry, the south hot, the west damp and the north cold.⁴⁹

So much for the correspondences between the cardinal points and the elements. How do the names of God fit into the picture? One explanation for the allocation of the divine names to the different directions makes reference to the pattern of solar symbolism that we have already mentioned:

The name of *YHVH*, the Tetragrammaton, is vibrated after the pentagram is drawn in the east. ... Tradition tells us that *YHVH* is a symbol for the highest, most divine name of God. Therefore it is appropriate that this name is vibrated in the east, the place of the dawning of the light. ...

Adonai, meaning “lord”, is the name vibrated after the figure is traced in the south. ... The name “lord” carries with it connotations of high rank, especially power, rulership, and dominion. Here the name is associated with fire and the south, the direction of the sun’s greatest strength. ...

48. Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 3:14. The same text also puts forward an alternative, “Zodiacal” set of correspondences: fire-east, earth-south, air-west and water-north.

49. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 13. The third-century alchemical author Zosimos of Panopolis subsequently also wrote about correspondences between the elements and the cardinal points, mentioning specifically east-air and south-fire (*On the Letter Omega*, 6).

The name of *Eheieh* is vibrated after the western pentagram is drawn. *Eheieh*, meaning “I am”, is the divine name of Kether. The west is the place of sunset, the completion of the sun’s journey across the sky. . . . The west is a symbol of the completion of the soul’s journey and the goal of spiritual growth. Therefore the west is an emblem of Kether, the goal which we seek throughout our incarnation on earth and which we hope to reach at the end of life. . . .

After the northern pentagram is drawn, the word *Agla* is vibrated. . . . [T]he sentence from which *Agla* is formed is *Atab Gebur Le-Olam Adonai*. This means, “Thou art great forever, my Lord”, which is a powerful invocation — clearly calling upon all the might of Adonai to aid and guide us through the darkness of things unknown. *Agla* is vibrated in the north because that is the direction of the greatest symbolic cold, darkness, shadow, illusion, and the unfamiliar.⁵⁰

It has not proven possible to find evidence of this interpretation being advanced by any commentator prior to Israel Regardie in the 1930s. It may be original to him: it certainly has the feeling of being a retrofitted explanation. If it is, the original reasons for Mathers’ allocation of the divine names to the cardinal points must remain a matter of conjecture. Perhaps the allocation was not based on any earlier source. Perhaps it was purely arbitrary. As we shall shortly see, Mathers was not necessarily punctilious about such things.

In any event, despite the use of authentic Hebrew God-names, the correspondences found in this part of the LBRP are not well-founded in the Kabbalistic tradition. The Jewish Kabbalistic sages certainly posited correspondences between the cardinal points, the elements, the names of God and the sephiroth; but they did not necessarily employ the combinations that are found in the Golden Dawn system. One passage in the *Zohar*, for example, sets out the following attributions:

Come and see: Fire, air, water and dust – these are primordial ones, roots of above and below; those above and below are sustained by them. These are four, in four directions of the world: north, south, east, and west – four directions of the world, inhering in those four. Fire to the north, air to the east, water to the south, dust to the west.⁵¹

50. Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 191–92.

51. See Matt, *The Zohar*, 83.

It also bears noting in this context that there was one strand within the Kabbalah which held that only *three* basic elements existed. This, in particular, was the doctrine taught by the *Sefer Yetzirah*. This foundational text of the Kabbalistic tradition was a major influence on the Golden Dawn from the Cipher MS onwards, and Westcott produced a translation of it in 1887, in the period when the order was gestating.

This points to an important insight which arises from close study of the LBRP, and which has implications for the way in which we view the Golden Dawn rituals more generally. Mathers, Westcott and their brethren were not drawing on and preserving an immutable body of timeless esoteric wisdom. They were prepared to diverge from traditional source materials, and indeed they *had* to do so to the extent that these materials were inconsistent within themselves. This was true in relation to the Kabbalah and also as regards Christian ceremonial magic. In the Solomonic grimoires, we find combinations of divine names and cardinal points that are both inconsistent and divergent from their usage in the LBRP.

Mathers, for one, was perfectly aware of this. In his translation of the *Key of Solomon*, which was published at the time of the birth of the Golden Dawn in 1888, he writes:

And within these Four Circles thou must write these four Names of God the Most Holy One, in this order:—
At the East, AL, El;
At the West, IH, Yah;
At the South, AGLA, Agla;
And at the North ADNI, Adonai.⁵²

These correspondences clearly have nothing to do with those in the LBRP. But Mathers was not troubled by such matters. He adds in a footnote:

The MSS. vary as to the point whereat each name is to be placed, but I think the above will be found to answer.⁵³

52. Mathers ed., *The Key of Solomon*, 16.

53. *Ibid.*

This is a very revealing comment. Where Mathers' sources were inconsistent, he was prepared to cut the Gordian knot and impose what he considered to be a practical solution. This points to a wider insight to which we shall return: the role of the Victorian occult revivalists in the development of Western esotericism was not merely to restore old traditions, it was also to codify and solidify a body of what had previously been more flexible ideas and materials.

Moving on to the pentagrams which the magus is directed to draw: these are, within the framework of the Golden Dawn magical system, "banishing Earth" pentagrams. This is determined by the directions in which their constituent lines are drawn in the air. We will return shortly to the subject of the pentagram as an esoteric symbol.⁵⁴ The sister ritual of the LBRP, the Supreme Ritual of the Pentagram, also uses pentagrams, drawn in different ways, which are attributed to the other three classical elements and to the fifth element of spirit. In addition, the Supreme Ritual uses other signs at this point in the action, including most notably the astrological glyph of Aquarius in the east, the glyph of Leo in the south, the outline of an eagle in the west and the glyph of Taurus in the north. These signs are in turn associated with the four classical elements and with the four Kerubim: supernatural entities which can be traced back to the Hebrew Bible and the vision of Ezekiel which exerted such influence on the Kabbalistic tradition.⁵⁵ Again, the correspondences which are implied here are not necessarily traditional. In particular, they differ from those found in Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, which were in turn repeated at the start of the nineteenth century by Francis Barrett.⁵⁶

54. Note that the concept of a banishing pentagram appears to have predated Mathers. It is already found in the Cipher MS, page 14 - although this page may be written in a different hand from the rest of the MS.

55. See e.g. Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 3:10-14, 18-19; also 3.121-2. Ezekiel 1.10 describes the cherubim as having four faces: of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. Revelation 4.7 describes four separate creatures with those same faces. The link with Ezekiel and Revelation was acknowledged explicitly by Mathers: see Gilbert, *The Sorcerer and his Apprentice*, 40. In 1882, not long before the Golden Dawn rituals were composed, the four Kerubim had been depicted on the cover of Edward Maitland and Anna Kingsford's work of Christian esotericism *The Perfect Way*.

56. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia*, 2.1.7; Barrett, *The Magus*, 112. The corres-

The invocation of the archangels

Stand with arms outstretched in the form of a cross and say: –

BEFORE ME RAPHAEL

BEHIND ME GABRIEL

AT MY RIGHT HAND MICHAEL

AT MY LEFT HAND AURIEL

The position described in this part of the LBRP, in which the initiate stands with his arms stretched out horizontally, was referred to in the Golden Dawn as the “Calvary Cross”. It also served as the position representing the god form of “Osiris Slain” – god forms being physical postures associated with Egyptian deities. As we have already intimated, cross-based symbolism was one way in which the Golden Dawn sought to elide Christian and pagan religious traditions, thereby dissolving a dichotomy that was basic to conventional Victorian thinking.

The four archangels named in this part of the ritual are all mentioned in Jewish scriptural texts. Gabriel and Michael appear in the canonical Book of Daniel, while Raphael appears in the deuterocanonical Book of Tobit in the Septuagint, and Uriel appears in the apocryphal Books of Enoch and Second Esdras. It is interesting to note that the four archangels had been borrowed into pagan magic as early as the Greek Magical Papyri.⁵⁷ Three of them (Michael, Gabriel and Uriel) also appear in the Gnostic texts of the Nag Hammadi collection.⁵⁸

It has been claimed that this part of the LBRP has an identifiable source in a traditional Jewish prayer that was easily accessible in the nineteenth century, even to gentiles like Mathers.⁵⁹ The prayer in question is sometimes referred to as the “Bedtime Shema” (*Kriyat Shema Al HaMitah*, also rendered as e.g. *Kriyas Shema*). But the likelihood is that this prayer is not where the four archangels in the LBRP come from; rather, the Bedtime Shema and the LBRP both appear to

pondences in these sources are: lion-east-fire, calf-south-earth, eagle-west-earth and man-north-water.

57. See e.g. *PGM* VII.1009–16, 1017–26 and XC.1–13.

58. See e.g. the text known as the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.

59. This claim is made, notably, in the Wikipedia page relating to the LBRP: see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesser_banishing_ritual_of_the_pentagram (accessed 17 May 2019).

have an earlier common source in Jewish literature. The clue is found in one of Westcott's writings: "According to one Jewish tradition which has met with much Christian support, [there] are four principal Angels who stand around the throne of Jehovah; they are Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel".⁶⁰ The throne is not mentioned in the Bedtime Shema, and so we may surmise that Westcott – and presumably also Mathers – probably knew of the motif of being surrounded by the four archangels from another source, one which did mention God's throne. The motif appears in such a form in mediaeval rabbinical writings; and it is suggested that this is the ultimate origin of this part of the LBRP, perhaps mediated through some more recent Christian source or sources.⁶¹

The invocation of the four archangels stands out somewhat in Jewish practice, as the notion of praying to angels was traditionally disapproved of in monotheistic rabbinical Judaism. The invocation of angels first appears in Jewish prayer in the *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* from late ninth-century Babylonia:

When a person goes out at night at no specific hour, he should say: God is on my right, and Uziel is on my left, and Nemuel is before me, and Sha'a-shuel is behind me. The presence of God is above my head. Save me Lord from an evil affliction and from an evil satan.⁶²

It would seem that this text was known to some esotericists in the Golden Dawn tradition, as the notion of the presence of God being above one's head appears in a later variant of the LBRP used by the Stella Matutina.⁶³ It is not clear, however, whether the text influenced Mathers' original composition of the LBRP.

The motif of four (or five) angels who surround a person is found not only in Jewish but also in Christian, Islamic and Manichaean texts. It has appeared in both liturgical and magical contexts, including amulets and incantation

60. See Gilbert, *The Magical Mason*, 128.

61. See *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 4 and *Numbers Rabbah (Bamidbar Rabbah)*, 2.10. For a later Christian source that would have been available to Mathers, see Gill, *An Exposition*, 55.

62. Levene et al., "Gabriel is on their Right?: Angelic Protection in Jewish Magic", 192.

63. The evidence for this is a text entitled "The Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram" which is held in the library of Freemasons' Hall, London (call number BE 699 STE). The relevant wording reads: "And above my head the Glory of God!"

bowls, from antiquity to modern times.⁶⁴ The identity and directions of the angels are not consistent in this body of material;⁶⁵ so, again, the Golden Dawn had no fixed traditional set of correspondences to preserve. When we try to track the motif back in time, the trail leads us to the profoundly pagan world of Babylonia in the second millennium BC. Here is a text from that world, in which an exorcist is invoking the protection of the gods:

I am the Exorcist and Šangamahhu-priest of Ea,
I am the purification priest of Eridu,
the incantation which he casts is dedicated to bringing calm.
When I go to the patient,
when I push open the door of the [house],
when I call out at his gate,
when I cross the threshold,
when I enter the house,
with Šamaš in front of me and Šin behind me,
with Nergal on my right,
and with Ninurta on my left,
when I approach the patient, and lay my hand on the patient's head,
may the good spirit and good genius be present at my side⁶⁶

This part of the LBRP, then, is a very old piece of Near-Eastern paganism, mediated through the Abrahamic faiths and articulated in Jewish language. Again, Mathers had stumbled on something that had more baggage than he could have realised.

We noted above that there are no fixed traditional attributions of the archangels to the cardinal points. How, then, did the archangels acquire the positions that they occupy in the LBRP? The Golden Dawn correspondences between the archangels and the *elements* go back at least as far as Agrippa (as

64. See e.g. Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 27–28; Shaked, “Manichaean Incantation Bowls in Syriac”, 58–92; Levene et al., “‘Gabriel is on their Right’: Angelic Protection in Jewish Magic”.

65. See Levene et al., “‘Gabriel is on their Right’: Angelic Protection in Jewish Magic” for a table of different angels and directions.

66. For the text, see Geller, *Healing Magic and Evil Demons*, 110–13.

plagiarised by Francis Barrett).⁶⁷ But the correspondences between the archangels and the *cardinal points* depart from those in Agrippa. It is evident that they were generated by mapping Agrippa's archangel-element correspondences onto the separate set of element-direction correspondences derived from Claudius Ptolemy. This is a prime example of the kind of conceptual surgery that was performed by the Golden Dawn in the course of creating its magical system.⁶⁸

The two stars

BEFORE ME FLAMES THE PENTAGRAM –
BEHIND ME SHINES THE SIX-RAYED STAR

Here, the magus declares that he is positioned between the pentagram and the hexagram – two important esoteric symbols. The pentagram, which we have already met in an earlier part of the LBRP, has become inextricably associated with the occult tradition, to the extent that it serves quite widely in popular culture as a symbol of magic and witchcraft. The historical roots of the symbol are profoundly deep. Pentagrams are archaeologically attested in Europe and Asia as far back as the Stone Age; and they found their way into religious and philosophical currents ranging from Pythagoreanism to Paracelsianism.⁶⁹ Most relevantly for our purposes, both the pentagram and the hexagram appear specifically in the Solomonic tradition – for example, in the magical tool known as the “seal of Solomon” – and they were subsequently borrowed into Freemasonry.⁷⁰ The pentagram and hexagram symbolism in the LBRP is likely to derive from these sources, as mediated primarily through the writings of Éliphas Lévi.

In general, in the Golden Dawn system, the pentagram is the sign of the microcosm, while the hexagram is the sign of the macrocosm. In esoteric thought,

67. Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia*, 2.1.7; Barrett, *The Magus*, 112.

68. It may be worth noting that this had already been done before Mathers came on the scene. The LBRP's system of correspondences between archangels, elements and cardinal points is apparent in the Cipher MS.

69. See e.g. the remarkable Stöber, *Drudenfuss-Monographie*.

70. See e.g. Waite, *A New Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, 2:108–10.

of course, the microcosm is the lower level of reality which corresponds to the higher universal level – “as above, so below”. Hence in this part of the LBRP, the magus is locating himself between the two levels of reality. The microcosm can be equated to the human body, which explains a reference in the Golden Dawn papers to “the power of the Pentagram constituting the Glorified Body of Osiris” – another reminder of how Egyptian symbolism permeated the order.⁷¹

The association of the pentagram with the microcosm goes back at least to Paracelsus and Agrippa, but it probably came to the Golden Dawn through Lévi. It is worth quoting the French magus’s Gothic prose on this subject at some length:

We proceed to the explanation and consecration of the sacred and mysterious pentagram. At this point, let the ignorant and superstitious close the book; they will either see nothing but darkness, or they will be scandalised. The pentagram, which, in gnostic schools, is called the blazing star, is the sign of intellectual omnipotence and autocracy. It is the star of the magi; it is the sign of the Word made flesh; and, according to the direction of its points, this absolute magical symbol represents order or confusion, the divine lamb of Ormuz and St John, or the accursed goat of Mendes. It is initiation or profanation; it is Lucifer or Vesper, the star of the morning or the evening. It is Mary or Lilith, victory or death, day or night. . . . The pentagram is the figure of the human body, having the four limbs, and a single point representing the head...

The sign of the pentagram is called also the sign of the microcosm. . . . The complete comprehension of the pentagram is the key of the two worlds. It is the absolute philosophy and natural science.⁷²

Given what we know of Lévi’s influence, this is a very plausible source for the use of the pentagram in the Golden Dawn system. But there was also another relatively recent potential source: the German Romantic poet and polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The vital clue to Goethe’s influence is found in the following piece of advice that was given to members of the Golden Dawn: “In all cases of tracing a Pentagram, the angle should be carefully closed at the

71. Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 2:160. The notion of a glorified body is also Christian: see e.g. 1 Corinthians 15.35–55.

72. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 224–25.

finishing point”.⁷³ Why would this seemingly trivial matter be emphasised? The answer, it seems, lies in Part 1, Scene 3 of Goethe’s *Faust*. Mephistopheles explains to Faust that a pentagram is preventing him from leaving the latter’s study. How, then, did he manage to enter in the first place? It appears that there is a fatal gap in the shape of the pentagram:

MEPHISTOPHELES: I must confess that forth I may not wander,
My steps by one slight obstacle controlled, –
The wizard’s-foot, that on your threshold made is.

FAUST: The pentagram prohibits thee?
Why, tell me now, thou Son of Hades,
If that prevents, how cam’st thou in to me?
Could such a spirit be so cheated?

MEPHISTOPHELES: Inspect the thing: the drawing’s not completed.
The outer angle, you may see,
Is open left – the lines don’t fit it.⁷⁴

The peculiar detail of the incomplete pentagram appears to indicate that *Faust* influenced the usage of the pentagram in the Golden Dawn – and it is clear that the scene in question was known to contemporary occultists.⁷⁵ Interestingly, this is the only element of the LBRP which appears to have been consciously borrowed from a work of fiction.

As a final point regarding the hexagram, the words “behind me shines the six-rayed star” are often altered in modern versions of the LBRP to “in the column shines the six-rayed star”. The “column” in this formulation appears to be the middle pillar of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life – with which, as we mentioned earlier, the magus is associating himself. The “in the column” wording first seems to appear in Crowley’s “Star Ruby” variant of the LBRP.

The rite closes with a repetition of the “Qabbalistic Cross”.

73. Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, 3:11.

74. Taylor trans., *Faust*, 50.

75. It was mentioned shortly before the foundation of the Golden Dawn in Collins, “The Theosophical Meaning of Goethe’s Faust: I”.

*

It is time to draw the strands of our inquiry together. There are two principal points to be made in relation to the examination that we have conducted: the first may be summed up in the word **eclecticism**, and the second in the word **codification**.

As to eclecticism, it has become abundantly clear that the sources of the LBRP were extraordinarily varied, and in some cases extremely old. The ritual itself was a modern creation – there is no evidence that anything like it existed in any form before the 1880s – but it was heavily and self-consciously indebted to earlier sources. These sources range from the exorcism rites of pre-Christian Mesopotamia to Éliphas Lévi’s ruminations on the Lord’s Prayer, taking in Jewish mysticism and Solomonic magic on the way. They were brought together in the late Victorian era to create something new that was distinctly different from the sum of its parts.⁷⁶ It is particularly interesting that, in a number of cases, the ultimate sources of the LBRP are likely to have been obscure to Mathers, and to his fellow Golden Dawn magi, since they came to the latter through mediated channels. It is sometimes said that the Golden Dawn initiates were playing with supernatural forces that they did not fully understand. The secular scholar cannot affirm or deny such a notion; but we *can* say that Mathers and his brethren drew on rites and symbols that sometimes went back much further than they are likely to have suspected. They did not fully grasp where their own system had come from. This is not, of course, an uncommon phenomenon in the religious world, nor one that is confined to the esoteric domain.

Mention of Mathers brings us to the question of how far the LBRP can be regarded as an idiosyncratic product of one man’s interests and activities. If one shares Arthur Machen’s negative value judgement, it is easy to attribute the eclecticism of the LBRP, and of the Golden Dawn rituals more generally,

76. This reflects a broader tension in the Golden Dawn between novelty and tradition, which has ignited an ongoing debate about how “modern” the Golden Dawn system was: see e.g. Plaisance, “Magic Made Modern?”.

to the personal obsessions of Mathers – that man of “much learning but little scholarship” (W. B. Yeats); that “comic Blackstone of occult lore” (A. E. Waite).⁷⁷ Such a notion should be challenged, however. In this regard, Mathers was not, for once, behaving eccentrically. As we have intimated, the LBRP, along with the rest of the Golden Dawn system, amounts to a microcosmic exemplar of trends and phenomena that are characteristic of the esoteric revival more generally. Mathers’ magpie-like appropriation of ideas and symbols, collected together and decontextualised from their circumstances of origin, was far from unique. The Golden Dawn emerged out of and ran parallel to other currents – including high-degree Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism and Theosophy – which borrowed, and experimented with, ideas and symbols of diverse and exotic origins. Egil Asprem, for example, has shown in some detail how nineteenth-century occultists from Lévi onwards creatively appropriated Kabbalistic concepts for their own spiritual purposes, disembedding them from their Jewish context in the process.⁷⁸

There is, of course, a bigger picture here. Outside the esoteric subculture, the era in which the Golden Dawn gestated was particularly fertile in comparativism. The enterprise of finding and linking together elements of disparate cultures was very much in vogue: this is what lay behind Machen’s reference to “the eighteen-eighty and later frame of mind”.⁷⁹ As the characteristically Victorian forces of technology and imperialism brought ethnographic data flooding into the European intellectual world, the temptation to fashion that data into ambitious comparativist constructs affected many contemporary thinkers and writers,

77. O’Donnell and Archibald eds., *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 162; Waite, *Shadows of Life and Thought*, 124. Mathers himself later boasted that his task as a reviver of esotericism “required a knowledge of many languages and an enormous amount of work”, and that he was accordingly “probably the busiest man living”. He made these claims in one of the court cases which he was involved in with Aleister Crowley: see the contemporary press reports in e.g. *The Globe*, 27 April 1911, 10–11 and *The Jarrow Express*, 28 April 1911, 6.

78. Asprem, “*Kabbalah Recreata*”. Lévi himself was influenced in this regard by the seventeenth-century work of Knorr von Rosenroth.

79. Machen did, admittedly, underestimate how far back the comparativist tradition could be traced. Its roots dated back in some respects to the sixteenth century: see e.g. Stroumsa, *A New Science*.

not just on the occultic fringe of society, but among academic anthropologists and scholars of religion and mythology. The Golden Dawn appeared just a few years after the publication of E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), at a time when F. Max Müller was about to commence his Gifford Lectures (1888–1892) and the first edition of James Frazer's *Golden Bough* was shortly to come out (1890).⁸⁰

Another respect in which Mathers' eclecticism is unsurprising is that it exemplifies how the rituals of new religious movements tend to be assembled from a *bricolage* of older, pre-existing materials. It has been stated that “[o]ld and well-established rituals predominantly serve to maintain and stabilize prevailing religious traditions, while rituals in NRMs [New Religious Movements] are elements in the installation of experimental novelties”.⁸¹ Yet, paradoxically, it would seem that such novelties often require the impression of age and authority that is derived from well-constructed rituals based on semi-familiar models. The same paradox may be seen in the broader category of “invented traditions” that grew up in the period of unprecedented social and economic change between 1870 and 1914, as discussed in the classic volume edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.⁸² In his critique of Hobsbawm and Ranger's work, Guy Beiner noted that the success of invented traditions “very much depends on their association with transformations of existing traditions”.⁸³ In this vein, a Golden Dawn initiate would be presented with quasi-masonic ceremonies in King James Bible English, studded with words and gestures that were in part broadly recognisable and in part impressive and exotic. The resulting impression of familiarity, mystery and antiquity must have gone a long way to dispel any sense that the initiate was participating in an essentially novel

80. See further e.g. Nicholls, “Max Müller and the Comparative Method”. Asprem makes the comparison with Frazer's *Golden Bough* explicit in “*Kabbalah Recreata*”, 133–34.

81. Rothstein, “Rituals and Ritualization in New Religious Movements”, 335.

82. Hobsbawm and Ranger eds., *The Invention of Tradition*. See also subsequently Lewis and Hammer eds., *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*. Alison Butler identified the Golden Dawn as an example of invented tradition in *Victorian Occultism*, 17, 173–74.

83. Beiner, “The Invention of Tradition?”, 6.

endeavour, using texts which Mathers had concocted out of books in the era of phonographs and steam turbines.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the eclectic and academic nature of Mathers' work is likely to have been irrelevant to its effect on those who participated in his rituals. As the scholar of ritual Catherine Bell has noted: "Purity of lineage has never been an important principle of ritualization; evocative symbols and familiar practices are readily revised for new purposes or reinterpreted for new communities". Bell was writing in the context of Soviet Communism – a kind of political NRM – and its bureaucratically composed public ceremonies. Such observances were at least partially effective in engaging citizens of the Workers' Paradise: "They would find in these rites bits of folk custom remembered from childhood, songs sung in school, formalities that fit their expectations for proper etiquette, and tedious bits of government ideology".⁸⁴ One does not have to strain too hard to find a parallel here with the likely effect that Mathers' researches in the British Museum had on the middle-class Victorian Christians who entered the Golden Dawn's temples. A more immediate parallel is offered by another nineteenth-century NRM for which an elaborate and eclectic liturgy was created: the Catholic Apostolic Church, or Irvingites. John Bate Cardale (1802–1877) equipped the new Irvingite church with a Eucharistic service that was combined from Anglican, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox elements, going back to the patristic period but mediated in many respects through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholarly writings.⁸⁵ The basic similarity of Cardale's endeavours to those of Mathers is evident; and it bears noting that the Irvingite liturgy was generally considered even by outsiders to be moving and impressive.

It should be recognised that eclecticism is not confined to NRMs. It is not unusual for established religious communities to draw their rituals creatively

84. Bell, *Ritual*, 231. See also 235–56 on the Black American holiday of Kwanzaa, which was created in the 1960s out of authentic but eclectically selected African cultural data.

85. See Lancaster, "John Bate Cardale", 173–90.

from a body of source materials that originally came into being in substantially different contexts. One clear example of this is the Roman Catholic Mass. The components of this ritual derive from a varied combination of sources which have quite different origins, genres and functions. The laconic, repetitive *Kyrie* can be traced back to a mixture of pagan, Jewish and early Christian texts; the *Gloria* is a patristic hymn based on the model of the Psalms; the *Credo* is a technically precise theological statement which reached its developed form at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE); the *Sanctus* derives from the early Israelite prophet Isaiah's vision of the throne of God, spliced with a Gospel verse which refers to Jesus in a totally different context; and the *Agnus Dei* is based on a different verse again from the Gospels. The texts are a mixture of prose and verse, and they contain words from several different languages (leaving aside modern vernacular translations).⁸⁶ There are evident parallels here with Mathers' Golden Dawn texts, including the LBRP. The difference is that the latter were artificially concocted, not the outcome of a long, unplanned process of evolution: they were the product of book-learning rather than organic growth. But they *looked* the part, so to speak. Mathers' efforts – like those of Cardale and the Soviet *nomenklatura* – generated ritual products which had the same kinds of characteristics as are found in established religions. The fact that Mathers' sources were varied helped rather than hindered his success in this regard. The very eclecticism of the Golden Dawn rites concealed their artificiality: it made them look and feel organic and traditional, like the Mass.

A further noteworthy feature of Mathers' eclecticism was that it tied in with the essential ambiguity of the Golden Dawn's religious stance, as manifested by the apparently indiscriminate appropriation of language and imagery from Abrahamic and pagan *milieux*. On the one hand, the Golden Dawn presented itself explicitly as being affiliated with the Christian tradition. The order's pledge form stated:

86. Although dated, Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite* is still fundamental for the history of the Mass.

Belief in a Supreme Being, or Beings, is indispensable. In addition, the Candidate, if not a Christian, should be at least prepared to take an interest in Christian symbolism.⁸⁷

But yet – as adumbrated by the reference to “Beings” in the plural – the Golden Dawn rites made explicit reference to pagan gods such as Isis, Osiris and Horus. The rituals also encouraged the initiate to interact with the divine in ways that went beyond the boundaries of orthodox Christian worship, leading Ronald Hutton to remark of the LBRP: “It was far from obvious . . . whether the kingdom, the power, and the glory belonged to God or were being promised to the human carrying out the ritual”.⁸⁸

Over the years, some commentators have succumbed to the temptation to attempt to classify the Golden Dawn – and related esoteric orders – as essentially Christian or pagan. Gerald Yorke, a well-known figure in the British esoteric community, posited a division between *Hermetic* orders like the Golden Dawn, which “include some Christianity but do not stress it”, and *Rosicrucian* orders, which are primarily Christian. In this schema, Hermetists “try to become God”, while Rosicrucian Christians only try to “become as Christ”.⁸⁹ In the same vein, we may refer to the attempts of some writers to see A. E. Waite’s Golden Dawn successor order, the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, as safely Christian, while the Golden Dawn itself is labelled as occult and pagan.⁹⁰ Such divisions have the appearance of being ideological and self-serving. They amount to an attempt to force the source material into categories to which it is fundamentally resistant.⁹¹

The central feature of the Golden Dawn’s religious stance was its *essential ambiguity*. This ambiguity no doubt served a spiritual purpose in the eyes of the Golden Dawn magicians themselves. Egil Asprem has written of how the eclecticism of Golden Dawn-style occultism was characterised by “comparison, cross-

87. See Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Scrapbook*, 23.

88. Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 82.

89. See Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn*, 9–12.

90. See Roukema, *Esotericism and Narrative*, 77–78.

91. Cf. Roukema, *Esotericism*, 97.

reference and combination of material disembedded from their original contexts, in search for a universal, *perennial* truth underlying the particular phenomena”.⁹² This process was (Asprem argues) underpinned by a sincere quest for a universal truth or *sophia perennis* which manifested under diverse forms in the world’s different spiritual traditions. It is worth noting, however, that the Golden Dawn’s studied religious ambiguity served a practical purpose too. Victorian occultists wanted to stray from orthodox Christian ideas and praxis; but not necessarily *too* far. They could swallow the worship of Osiris more readily if he was elided with Jesus Christ, through cruciform symbolism and the language of death and resurrection.⁹³ The Golden Dawn had to accommodate recruits ranging from Anglican clergymen to the likes of Aleister Crowley. The eclecticism of the LBRP and the other rites served as a tool for easing the anxieties of the order’s more conservative members, while also providing material to stimulate those who were looking for an altogether more robustly counter-cultural experience.

So much for the eclecticism of the Golden Dawn. The second main conclusion to draw from our analysis of the LBRP is that the order’s rites were also *codificatory*. The process of drafting a ritual script for a new magical order – in particular, the need to incorporate correspondences in the time-honoured occultic manner – involved some significant choices. Choices had to be made between elements of what had previously been diverse and fluid traditions; and in some cases choices were made that flatly contradicted or departed from those traditions. Once made, the Golden Dawn’s choices took on an authority of their own for subsequent generations of esotericists.

This point has already been alluded to by previous writers, although it has not been pursued at length. Some years ago, Carroll Runyon noted that the Golden Dawn was required to choose between the competing correspondences

92. Asprem, “*Kabbalah Recreata*”, 136.

93. Admittedly, this probably did not apply to all Christian initiates. Some clergy were seemingly attracted to the Golden Dawn precisely *because* of its unorthodox theology rather than in spite of it: Fuller makes essentially this argument in “Anglo-Catholic Clergy”.

contained in the different versions of the *Sepher Yetzirah*.⁹⁴ More recently, Stephen Skinner has pointed out that the order's attributions of Hebrew letters to the planets and to the paths on the Tree of Life differ from those found in historical Jewish Kabbalistic traditions.⁹⁵ As for flatly departing from older source material, Egil Asprem has drawn attention to how Mathers was prepared to use “Enochian” material from the magic of Dr. John Dee which he found in the CIPHER MS even though he knew that the material in question was not true to Dee's original system.⁹⁶ In any event, the choices made by Mathers and his brethren, once they were written down, taught as a system and (eventually) published, were codified into something like an orthodoxy – or, more accurately, an orthopraxy.

This development was probably inevitable, given the enormous influence exerted by the Golden Dawn on the modern occult revival – it has been described as “the defining occult society in recent Western history”⁹⁷ – and the tendency to standardisation that is probably inherent in the mass marketing of occult materials. From at least Israel Regardie's time onwards, the Golden Dawn system came to be turned into a prepackaged product, and an industry-standard one at that. Here was timeless wisdom, to be followed rather than questioned. The dissemination of the Golden Dawn texts in and as popular books for novices lent the choices – contestable, even arbitrary – made by those who composed them an air of immutable authority. They were accepted by those who were not in a position to question them, and they exerted substantial influence even on those who were.

Once again, this is a particular case of a broader phenomenon. Christian scholars have made a similar point in noting that the invention of printing not only froze the text of the church's liturgy but also constituted it as a new,

94. Runyon, *Secrets*, 46–47.

95. And, in the case of the paths, from the original CIPHER MS: see Skinner, *The Complete Magician's Tables*, 18, 29–30.

96. Asprem, *Arguing with Angels*, 55.

97. Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 2.

reified authority-source.⁹⁸ In the case of the Golden Dawn, of course, the crucial development was not the *invention* of printing technology, but rather the increase in the number of esotericists who were interested in using it, together with the growth of a book-buying public with sufficient levels of wealth and literacy to sustain a small but viable market for books on unusual spiritual topics. It was no longer a world in which the occasional literate rabbi wrote down his Kabbalistic theories for posterity, freely reinterpreting and reshaping his inherited materials; but rather a world of modern communications in which the Golden Dawn brand was eventually to become a kind of Microsoft in the esoteric subculture. In such a world, the decisions that Mathers made while poring over his books have taken on a life of their own.

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The LBRP is only a short ritual, and one that might at first sight seem somewhat banal. But the examination that we have undertaken shows that it richly repays closer study. We have seen that the LBRP exemplifies the eclecticism of the sources of the Golden Dawn rites and how they have come to serve as the foundation of a modern esoteric orthopraxy. In these regards, the LBRP is far from being anthropologically unusual, even if its content would be found baffling by the uninitiated. The Golden Dawn and its members may be described as eccentric, but on closer inspection their ritual material proves to fit in well both with their own time and culture and with wider trends in the history of ritual and religion.

98. So e.g. Crouan, *The History and the Future of the Roman Liturgy*, 100: “instead of tradition guaranteeing the missal, the missal becomes the guarantee for the tradition”. See also on this point Daniélou et al., *Historical Theology*, 233; Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution*, 173, 338; Monti, “Late Medieval Liturgy”, 94; and Chadwick, “The Roman Missal”, 109.

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