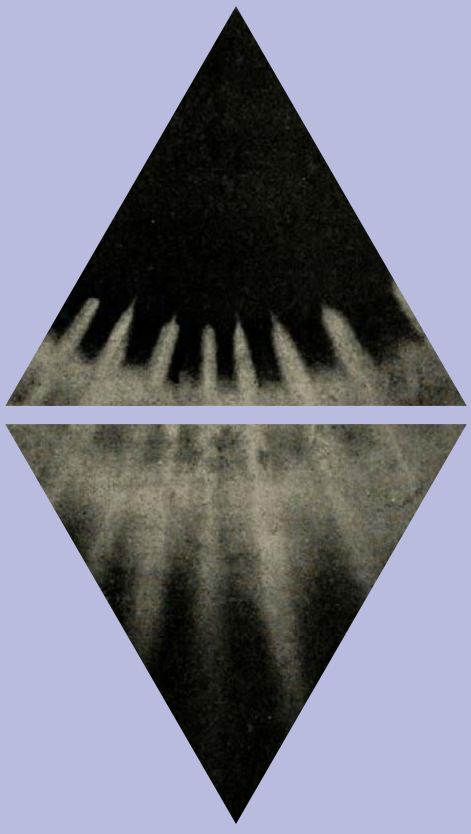
Correspondences

8.1 (2020)



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Transformations and Troubled Times

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Welcome to issue 8.1 of *Correspondences.* This issue sees the light of day amidst the ongoing crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. This year's unique public health challenges have affected nearly every dimension of academia, and the lasting repercussions of the present crisis are yet to be grasped. During this tempestuous time, we are proud to present our readers with a fresh issue representing the latest in esotericism scholarship. As we are currently in the midst of the crisis, it is difficult to predict how our subject matter will be affected by the pandemic and its aftermath. However, scholars of (Western) esotericism and related fields are, arguably, uniquely situated to theorise and shed light on urgent issues such as the (continued) prevalence of conspiracism in present-day discourse, and it is likely that future issues of the journal will bear the mark of the ongoing turbulence in one way or another.

As (relatively) recently appointed Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Correspondences,* having assumed this position in late 2019, issue 8.1 is the first which I have had the pleasure of working with from beginning until completion. As our field continues to grow, and is perhaps more relevant than ever, I am honoured to have been invited to play a role in the continued development of *Correspondences* as a free, interdisciplinary, open-access forum for established and emerging scholars in esoteric studies and adjacent fields. Over the coming years, we are planning to increase the interdisciplinary reach and impact of our journal through a number of exciting collaborations, which we look forward to unveiling in due course.

Recent years have witnessed a deepening and expansion of the temporal, geographical, and conceptual range of the study of esotericism, as epitomised

by, for instance, the establishment of the Occult South Asia Network (OSAN), the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE), the Esotericism, Gender, and Sexuality Network (ESOGEN), and (less recently) the Network for the Study of Esotericism in Antiquity (NSEA). In light of our developing field, the Editorial Board of *Correspondences* has been expanded this year, and we are delighted to welcome new board members Margarita Simon Guillory (Boston University), Jay Johnston (University of Sydney), Liana Saif (University of London), Chiara O. Tommasi (Università di Pisa), Gauri Viswanathan (Columbia University), and Shin'ichi Yoshinaga (Maizuru National College of Technology). We also take the opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude to our existing Editorial Board members Egil Asprem (Stockholm University), Henrik Bogdan (University of Gothenburg), Juan Pablo Bubello (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Peter Forshaw (Universiteit van Amsterdam), Christian Giudice (London), Kenneth Granholm (Stockholm), Amy Hale (Helix Education), Boaz Huss (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), and Birgit Menzel (Universität Mainz), for their ongoing hard work and commitment to upholding the scholarly integrity and quality of *Correspondences*.

As usual, the articles in this issue represent a mix of perspectives and approaches to the study of (Western) esotericism. While the present issue offers particularly rich reading for those with a special interest in esotericism in modernity, the contributions herein also indicate how sometimes vastly anterior sources inform and are reworked in modern esoteric worldviews and practices. In "A Microcosm of the Esoteric Revival: The Histories of the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram", Graham John Wheeler conducts a close reading of the sources for one of the most popular rituals to have emerged from *fin-de-siècle* occultism: the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBRP), formulated in the late-Victorian era in the context of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Wheeler contends that the LBRP is based on a diverse mix of sources, some of which are very old, and that the ritual epitomises the eclectic approach of the Golden Dawn founders, bridging the divide between Christian and pagan interests among the initiates of the order.

In their article "'The Light is Burning Pretty Low': The 1948 Correspondence between Samuel Lewis and Gershom Scholem", Boaz Huss and Jonatan Meir analyse the 1948 correspondence between the esteemed Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem and harbinger of the Jewish New Age, Samuel Lewis (alias Sufi Sam). Their correspondence, which followed the second-edition publication of Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* sheds new light on the reception of esoteric Kabbalah in the United States, as well as the interchanges between academic scholarship and modern occultism in the twentieth century.

Finally, in "The Tetractys and the Hebdomad: Blavatsky's Sacred Geometry", Malin Fitger examines the Western reception of Sanskrit terminology and its impact on occult conceptions of subtle anatomy, with a focus on H.P. Blavatsky's works. Fitger indicates a significant doctrinal change occurring between Blavatsky's major works *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), analysing how and why a notion of three human principles (body, soul, and spirit) was replaced by a seven-part model. Fitger also proposes a hypothesis to explain the centrality of the number seven in Blavatsky's cosmology, situating Blavatsky's ideas about numerology, mathematics, and geometry among contemporary authors.

As usual, the present issue also contains a number of book reviews, curated by our Review Editor, Justine Bakker. Susannah Crockford reviews Anthony d'Andrea's *Reflexive Religion: The New Age in Brazil and Beyond*; Andrea Franchetto reviews Dan Attrell and David Porreca's English translation of the *Picatrix*; Amy Hale reviews Shai Feraro and Ethan Doyle White's edited volume *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West,* which celebrates the twentieth anniversary of Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon* (1999); Liana Saif reviews Alireza Doostdar's *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny*; and Kurosh Amoui reviews Michael Muhammad Knight's *Magic in Islam.* We extend our gratitude to those who have contributed articles and reviews to this issue, as well as to our peer-reviewers for their hard work in ensuring the quality of our journal.

Research Article *Correspondences* 8, no. 1 (2020): 5–44

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

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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 Cypher 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 recognised[7] – 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 [*hôd; 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 *tetrakys*. 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 others[37]

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 MERMERIOUT[38]

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 Solomonic tradition, from the *Hygromanteia* onwards. More pertinent to our current inquiry, however, is the fact that names of God are used in the Solomonic 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.

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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 Solomonic 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 *Atah 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, Adonaï.[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 Sîn 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 side[66]

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".

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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 confected, 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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"The Light is Burning Pretty Low": The 1948 correspondence between Samuel Lewis and Gershom Scholem

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Abstract

This article presents the brief correspondence between Samuel Lewis (a.k.a. Sufi Sam), one of the founding figures of the New Age movement, and Gershom Scholem, the great scholar of Kabbalah. The correspondence, which took place in the spring of 1948, in the midst of the hostilities between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, followed the publication of the second edition of Scholem's grand opus, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, in which Lewis found much interest. The article, which presents some newly-discovered documents from Scholem's archive, examines the publication and early reception of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, the encounters Scholem had with contemporary occultists and spiritual seekers, and new information concerning esoteric-Kabbalistic circles in the United States, which is found in the letters. The correspondence emphasizes the cultural and personal differences between the herald of the Jewish New Age and the founder of the academic study of Jewish Mysticism, and at the same time it highlights the mutual interests and cultural exchanges between academic scholars and modern occultists.

Keywords: Gershom Scholem; Samuel Lewis; Sufi Sam; Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism; Kabbalah Scholarship; Occult Kabbalah; Kabbalah in America; Jewish Theosophists

In the early spring of 1948, in the midst of the hostilities between Arabs and Jews in Palestine and shortly before the declaration of the State of Israel, an interesting exchange took place between Gershom Scholem, the great scholar of Kabbalah, and Samuel Lewis (who was later known as Sufi Sam), one of the founding figures of the New Age movement. Their brief correspondence, which we present below, contains new information concerning esoteric-Kabbalistic circles in the United States at that period, and sheds light on the reception of Scholem's *Major Trends in*

Jewish Mysticism. The letter emphasizes, at times in an amusing manner, the cultural and personal differences between the German-Jewish scholar from Jerusalem and the Jewish-Sufi spiritual seeker from San Francisco. At the same time, the correspondence between the herald of the Jewish New Age and the founder of the academic study of Jewish mysticism highlights mutual interests and cultural exchanges between academic scholars and modern occultists.

[1]

The idea to pen the influential *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* came about by chance, in 1937, in the midst of Gershom Scholem's correspondence with Shalom Spiegel, then of New York. Scholem wished to travel to New York "to inspect the Kabbalistic manuscripts held in the United States."[1] Yet this swiftly developed into a much larger plan, which would include a series of lectures sponsored by Salman S. Schocken.[2] A detailed list of the manuscripts Scholem located in New York and those he sought to have reproduced has been preserved, and he appears to have dedicated much of his trip to the study of Sabbatianism.[3] He wrote openly of his discoveries, signing a letter written then to S. Y. Agnon as "the one who dwells in piles of manuscripts and resembles a leaf of parchment more than a human being."[4] The discovery of dozens of manuscripts and their identification in the libraries he visited were no less important than the actual lectures he delivered, and at the time he certainly did not imagine the tremendous future impact of the book in which they would

1. Shalom Spiegel to Gershom Scholem, 16 June 1937, Gershom Scholem Archive, 41599· Correspondence, Folder 2523.1, The National Library of Israel.

2. For preliminary accounts of Scholem's visit to the United States, see Dweck, "Gershom Scholem and America"; Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, 131–44. On Schocken and his sponsorship see Meir and Yamamoto, "The Open Book," 16–17, 19.

3. "Gerhard Scholem, Record of Manuscripts on Cabbala Used, Feb.–March 1938," Scholem Archive, Correspondence, Folder 1716. A unique 36-page booklet entitled "Cabbala-Manuscripts in New York" that contains a list of the manuscripts Scholem discovered in New York is preserved in the Scholem Archive, Series 15, Folder 43. See Meir and Yamamoto, "The Open Book," 16–18.

4. Gershom Scholem to S. Y. Agnon, 9 May 1938, Scholem Archive, Correspondence, Folder 16.2.

be published. The positive reception of the addresses, delivered on February 28 and March 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9 spurred Scholem to adapt them for publication.[5]

The lectures had been written by Scholem in German and Hebrew and subsequently translated into English by his close friend George Lichtheim. The text of the lectures is only partially extant in Scholem's archive, yet it is evident that it underwent many changes as it was adapted for publication, even doubling in length. According to Scholem, the book, published by Schocken in Jerusalem in 1941, was written on the basis of lectures delivered between the summers of 1939 and 1940.[6] It was not a receptive moment for such works and the book received relatively little attention.[7] Scholem was not satisfied with the printed edition for other reasons as well, and felt that it needed to be updated with additional chapters.

[2]

Scholem had already commenced work on a second edition of the book in 1945. In a number of letters, he expressed his desire to append a tenth chapter on Nahmanides and the origins of Kabbalah. This chapter was indeed written, but ultimately incorporated into a later publication.[8] The negotiations with Schocken

5. In the pamphlet: "Jewish Institute of Religion announced Six Lectures by Dr. Gerhard Gershom Scholem of Hebrew University, Palestine, on *Jewish Mysticism: Major Trends*," *Prospect* (1938), 4 pp., Scholem Archive, Series 09, Folder 268.8.

6. Scholem, *Major Trends*. On the adaptation of the lectures for publication, see *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*, 256; Scholem Archive, Correspondence, Folder 2523.2. See also Meir and Yamamoto, "The Open Book," 19–26.

7. See "Reviews on Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 1941–1980," Scholem Archive, Series 09, Folder 268.8.

8. Scholem Archive, Correspondence, Folder 2523.2; Scholem, *Briefe* (1), 44; "Original Document: Letter from Gershom Scholem to Shalom Spiegel," 77 [in Hebrew]. Scholem wrote further in 1942 regarding the expanded edition of *Major Trends*, "I am awfully upset that I did not utilize the full expanse of the book and write a tenth chapter on the first signs of the Kabbalah and the circle of Nahmanides. I would have arrived at the symbolic number of the ten *sefirot*, as well as present in a fitting and synthetic manner one of the most important yet difficult subjects I have encountered in my research, one on which I have labored for years. Precisely such a chapter on the development of Kabbalah would have been the sole one with an organic place within the structure of the book. If I were to adapt the book into Hebrew, I would

were exhausting, leading to the appearance of a revised, but not expanded, edition in 1946.[9] Scholem was upset by the process but sensed that the time was right to reissue the book, which might now be better received. A document from 1946 contains an extensive list of distinguished scholars to whom Scholem requested Schocken send copies of the work, as a gift or as a review copy; among them were Leo Baeck, Karl Jaspers, Rudolf Bultmann, Carl Jung, Charles Puech, Georges Vajda, Jacob Epstein, Thomas Mann, Hans-Joachim Schoeps, Margarete Sussman, Evelyn Underhill, and Aldous Huxley.[10] This list provides a sense of the circles in which Scholem hoped his book would be read. The second edition indeed received far more attention, beginning in the summer of 1947, and was widely reviewed (most prominently by Hannah Arendt).

[3]

Scholem's book likewise engendered religious, spiritual, and prophetic feelings among certain readers, some of whom found in *Major Trends* a call for a new spiritual era. Such responses were largely prompted by the final page of the work. For example, Scholem's colleague Shmuel Hugo Bergman wrote the following in the Hebrew daily *Davar* on the occasion of the former's 50th birthday:

> Gershom Scholem completed his great work on the major trends in Jewish mysticism with the following words . . . : "That is the position in which we find ourselves today, or in which Jewish mysticism finds itself. The story is not ended, it has not yet become history, and the secret life it holds can break out tomorrow in you or in me. Under what aspects this invisible stream of Jewish mysticism will again come to the surface we cannot tell. But I have come here to speak to you of the main tendencies of Jewish mysticism as we know them. To speak of the mystical course which, in the great cataclysm now

add many things." Scholem to Schocken, 6 July 1942, Schocken Archive, Privat 8, 882/2. Parts of this added chapter were incorporated into Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah* [in Hebrew]. See Smith and Scholem, *Correspondence*, 15, 20. See, as well, Meir and Yamamoto, "The Open Book," 20, 29.

9. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 2nd ed.

10. Gershom Scholem, "Liste für Geschenkexemplare von *Major Trends*, 26.11.1946," Scholem Archive, Series 03, Folder 335.

> stirring the Jewish people more deeply than in the entire history of Exile, destiny may still have in store for us — and I for one believe that there is such a course—is the task of prophets, not of professors."[11] Here, I believe, lies Scholem's great mistake. The Jewish people in its current spiritual and physical condition cannot permit itself this dichotomy between "prophets" and "professors." We cannot accept that a man like Gershom Scholem will be solely a historian and linguist and train his students to be historians and linguists—with all due respect to Scholem's scholarly enterprise. With the completion of his fifth decade, we feel that he now bears a new, greater responsibility. Until now he has been permitted to study other people's words and elude or pass by in silence when pressed about his own take on the matter. That time has passed. . . . A special responsibility rests upon he who has dedicated his life to the study of the esoteric movement and penetrated deeply into the spiritual life of Israel. Others may lighten their burden and avoid the matter, but he who has made a covenant with the spirit of the past bears responsibility for the spirit of the future.[12]

Scholem responded privately (in a letter addressed to Bergman and his wife, Escha):

> I do not know if I might satisfy Hugo's demands and I am quite doubtful. For I have lost my faith in straightforward "gospels" and I cannot disclose if even one "harbinger" has yielded any blessing. I am inclined to the opinion that the very naiveté of the direct appeal to humanity as if it is possible at this very moment to repeat with new or different words the truth of "Tell, O man, what is good" is responsible for the failure of such attempts, even if it is not presented in Buber's false mantle of Elijah, etc.[13]

A number of other responses to *Major Trends*, many written in a spirit similar to that of Bergman, were addressed to Scholem in private letters. These responses, largely unpublished, contain a number of surprises, among them a letter to Scholem from Samuel Lewis, a Jewish occultist from San Francisco, who wrote Scholem "to see if we may not be of service to each other in some manner."[14] Lewis informed Scholem about his spiritual quests and the esoteric circles he

11. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 249–50.
12. Bergman, "le-Gershom Scholem," 4 [Hebrew].
13. Scholem Archive, Series 01, Folder 0239.2, 12 December 1947; Scholem, *Briefe* (1), 331, 457–58.
14. Gershom Scholem Archive, Correspondence, Series 1, Folder 1583, The National Library of Israel. Both Lewis's letter and Scholem's response are presented at the conclusion of this article.

was affiliated with. He enquired about contemporary Kabbalists in Jerusalem, and expressed his wish to bring together Jewish and Muslim mystics. Scholem responded cordially, although with a markedly ironic tone. He enquired about Lewis's esoteric studies, and about the California Kabbalists Lewis was acquainted with. However, he did not hide his disregard for modern esotericists and expressed his doubts concerning the ability of mystics to further peace in Palestine. Scholem's answer concluded the correspondence between the scholar and the spiritual seeker. Probably Lewis was discouraged by Scholem's sarcasm, and Scholem did not find any further interest in Lewis and his spiritual quests.

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Samuel Lewis was not the first spiritual seeker to approach Scholem and communicate with him. From the very beginning of his career, Scholem was approached by occultists who were interested in Kabbalah, and he met and corresponded with them. Notwithstanding his disparagement of occultist Kabbalah and his denial of the historical significance of contemporary Jewish Kabbalah, Scholem did find some interest in contemporary practitioners of Kabbalah.[15] Before turning to discuss in more detail the correspondence between Lewis and Scholem, we would like to examine some of the previous communication Scholem had with occultists (many of them of Jewish origin) who found interest in his Kabbalah scholarship.

In 1921, while working on his PhD dissertation at Munich University, Scholem became acquainted with the circle of the Jewish occultist Oscar Goldberg (1885–1953). Scholem, who was introduced to Goldberg's writings by Walter Benjamin, had some acquaintances among his followers.[16] Scholem relates that the members of the group found him interesting "not only because

15. Burmistrov, "Gershom Scholem und das Okkulte,"; Huss, "'Authorized Guardians'," 93–94; Hanegraaf, "The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah," 108–9.

16. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 146–49; Scholem, *Walter Benjamin*, 97–98.

I had access to the Hebrew sources, but primarily because an old friend of mine had told them that I was studying the Kabbalah."[17] Scholem emphasized the difference between Goldberg's circle's interest in Kabbalah and his own as follows: "The Kabbalah was highly regarded by them, not only because of the religious and philosophical aspects that prompted me to study it, but on account of its magical implications, about which Goldberg (the only one in the circle who really knew Hebrew) had the most extravagant notions."[18] Scholem relates that he had a "wholly negative attitude toward the attempts to draw me into this circle, and toward the pseudo-kabbalah that was presented to me in Goldberg's name."[19] Despite his negative attitude to Goldberg's "schizophrenic character" and to his circle of "metaphysical magicians," Scholem wrote an entry on Goldberg for the *Encyclopedia Judaica*,[20] and mentioned him as one of the Jewish scholars who transformed Kabbalistic ideas into forms of modern thought.[21] In 1921, Scholem paid a few visits to Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932), a well-known author who was interested in occultism, and who was affiliated with various esoteric groups.[22] Scholem was introduced to Meyrink by Robert Eisler (1882–1949), a controversial historian of religion who was interested in Kabbalah and esotericism and who was a regular contributor to the journal *The Quest*, edited by G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933), Madame Blavatsky's former secretary, who founded The Quest Society after he left the Theosophical Society.[23] In his

17. Scholem, *Walter Benjamin*, 97. See also idem., *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 146 (the friend was Karl Türkisher).
18. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem,* 146. See also idem., *Walter Benjamin*, 97.
19. Scholem, *Walter Benjamin*, 97–98.
20. Scholem*,* "Oscar Goldberg," 705.
21. Scholem*, Kabbalah*, 85.
22. Frenschkowski, "Gustav Meyrink," 327–31.
23. On Eisler see Hakl, *Eranos*, 100–2. On Scholem's connection with Eisler, see Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem,* 126–35. Scholem also published an article in *The Quest*: "Chiromancy in the Zohar": 255–56. In his introduction to Scholem's article, Mead relates that the translation from the Zohar was taken from a collection of physiognomic passages in the Zohar that Scholem sent to Eisler for future publication in a series of Jewish mystical texts (ibid., 255).

partial autobiography, *From Berlin to Jerusalem,* Scholem relates the following: "One day, Eisler said to me that he told Gustav Meyrink in Starnberg about my Kabbalistic studies, and that Meyrink wanted to invite me over to have me explain some passages in his own writings to him."[24] Scholem, who read Meyrink's novels *The Golem* (first published in 1915) and *The Green Face* (first published in 1916), relates that he had to shake his head over the "pseudo-Kabbalah" in them. Nonetheless, he went to visit Meyrink, whom he described as "a man in whom deep-rooted mystical convictions and literarily exploited charlatanry were almost inextricably amalgamated."[25]

Meyrink showed Scholem a few passages from his novels and asked him to explain them to him. Meyrink said that, although he wrote them, he did not know what they meant. Explaining it, observed Scholem, "was not very difficult for someone who not only knew the Kabbalah but also about its misuse or distortion in the occult or theosophic writings of Madame Blavatsky's circle."[26] Scholem gave one example, the words "CHABRAT ZEREH AUR BOCHER" that appeared in *The Golem.*[27] Scholem explained to Meyrink that the words must be the mystical name of a lodge, retranslated into Hebrew, "something like 'Lodge of Aurora's Seed'."[28] However, Scholem wrote fifty years later that he found out that the words were a retranslation of the title of the Frankfurt Jewish masonic lodge, Loge Aurora zur aufgehenden Morgenröte, which was "incorrectly transcribed by some ignoramus in an English book in Meyrink's library."[29]

24. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 132.

25. Ibid., 133.

26. Ibid.

27. Meyrink, *The Golem*, 99. The words appear also in another passage in the novel, ibid., 146.

28. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133. Scholem assumed at that time that ZEREH transliterated the Hebrew word זרע= seed). He gave a similar explanation to these words in a letter to Sigrid Mayer, dated 9 February 1976. See Scholem, *Briefe* (3), 125–26 (letter 115) (and see ibid., 367, n.3).

29. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 134. On the history of Loge Aurora zur aufgehenden Moregnroete see Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939*, 57–72. As far as we know, there is no evidence that the name of the lodge was translated into Hebrew in a form similar to the words that appear in *The Golem*.

Scholem was not aware that the words in *The Golem* (which mean "shine morning light") were the Hebrew name of the "Order of the Golden Dawn," according to the Cipher Manuscript,[30] the founding document of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn that was probably compiled by English occultist, Kenneth R.H. Mackenzie (1833–1886).[31] Meyrink's direct source was most likely the "Historic Lecture for Neophytes," which was written by William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925) and circulated amongst the neophytes of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.[32] The words that were written in the Cipher manuscript in Hebrew "חברת אור בוקר" appear in the "Historic Lecture" in Latin characters "Chabrath Zereh Aur Bokher."[33] It is interesting to note that Scholem's speculation concerning the source of the Hebrew words in Meyrink's novel was used by both scholars and contemporary adepts of the Golden Dawn as proof of the authenticity of the discovery narrative of the Cipher Manuscript.[34]

30. See Ellic Howe, "The Golden Dawn Cipher Manuscript," added December 26, 2016, accessed January 2020, https://archive.org/stream/EllicHowe-TheGoldenDawnCypherManuscrit/EllicHowe-TheGoldenDawnCypherManuscrit_djvu.txt. The Hebrew words חברת זרח אור בוקר appear under the English words, "Order of the Golden Dawn" which are written in the cipher used in the manuscript.

31. Wheeler, "The Finding of Hidden Texts," 4–6.

32. Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 22. It is interesting to note that, according to the "Historical Lecture" the German name of the order was "Die Goldene Dämmerung."

33. Ibid., 25. Meyrink encountered the Hebrew words in Latin transcript either in a manuscript version of the "Historical Lecture" or in one of the published references to it, in which the words appeared: Gustav Mommsen's "Letter to the Editor" in *Notes and Queries* (December 8, 1888); Westcott's lecture on *Die Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer* (1888); Westcott in Blavatsky's *The Theosophical Glossary* (1892); or A.E. Waite's *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (1924). We are grateful to Henrik Bogdan, who provided us with this information. The words appear in slightly different spellings in each of the above sources.

34. Suster, "Modern Scholarship and the Origins of the Golden Dawn," 167; Prinke, "Deeper Roots of the Golden Dawn," 16; Renatus, "The Sabbatian Qabalah and its relation to the Golden Dawn," https://gyllenegryningen.blogspot.com/2009/04/sabbatian-qabalah-and-its-relation-to.html; the author of this lecture, Tomas Stacewicz, the former imperator of the Golden Dawn temple in Sweden, argues on the basis of Scholem's hypothesis for the Sabbatean sources of the Golden Dawn's Qabalistic tradition.

Scholem related that he visited Meyrink once or twice more following their first meeting (in which Meyrink also showed him a copy of John Woodroffe's *The Serpent Power*) and that Meyrink offered him the opportunity to write a fictional biography of Isaac Luria for a series of biographies of great occultists that he planned to publish.[35]

Another occultist that approached Scholem, a few years later, was Israel Regardie (1907–1985). Regardie sent a letter to Scholem, on March 4, 1929, from 55 Avenue de Suffren, Paris. This was the address of the famous occultist and magician Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), with whom Regardie studied and served as his unpaid secretary. Regardie presented himself to Scholem as a twenty-one-year-old American, of Jewish origins, who had been extremely enthused by the "Holy Qabalah." Regardie writes that he is currently "studying under a Qabalist (who is not Jewish)," without disclosing the name of his teacher. He says that he encountered certain problems regarding "Zoharic and Yetziraistic philosophy," which he believed could be solved by someone familiar with Jewish psychology, an aspect of Jewish esotericism he was not familiar with. Hence, he decided to write to Scholem (whose name he found in *Hartmann's Who's Who in Occult, Psychic and Spiritual Realms*),[36] to ask him if he could collaborate with Crowley, or inform him about other Jewish Kabbalists who could correspond with him in English or French. "I am of the opinion that a Jewish Qabalist of some years experience and study could collaborate with my present Teacher, and much benefit could be mutually derived." Regardie signed the letter with his magical name in Hebrew letters נחש (=snake) and its numerical value, 358.

We do not have any indication that Scholem responded to the letter, and we do not know if he was aware at the time that Regardie was a student of Crowley, whom

35. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 134.

36. Hartmann, *Hartmann's Who's Who*, 21: "Scholen [sic], Dr. Gerhard, of Jerusalem. Author, pupil of Prof. Fritz Hommel of Munich University. Complete Biography [sic] of all existing books and articles in periodicals on Kabbalistic texts and problems, completed, to be published."

he considered a "humbug."[37] However, in later years, Scholem purchased and read Regardie's first book, *A Garden of Pomegranates: An Outline of the Qabalah,* which was published in 1932.[38] Scholem noted in his copy of the book that Regardie was Crowley's secretary, and scribbled many question and exclamation marks in the margins. Concerning one passage in the book, he exclaimed: "nonsense!"

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Almost twenty years after Regardie's attempt to recruit Scholem to collaborate with Crowley, another American occultist, Samuel Lewis, who was also of Jewish origins, sent a letter to Scholem, who by now was a renowned scholar of Jewish mysticism. Lewis had read Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* in the years after its second publication. Upon finishing the book, which he reported having read "with joy and gladness from beginning to end," he sent Scholem an enthusiastic letter, dated March 14, 1948.

Samuel Leonard Lewis was born in San Francisco in 1896 (a year before Scholem) to an affluent Jewish family. A spiritual seeker since his youth, Lewis first encountered the Theosophical Society when he visited the Palace of Education at the 1915 World's Fair held in San Francisco.[39] In 1919, he met Ada Martin, also active in the Theosophical Society, who introduced him to Sufism. Ada Martin, née Ginsberg (1871–1947), the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants, was active in the Theosophical Society and the Martinist Order. In 1911, she met the Indian Musician and Sufi teacher Inayat Khan (1882–1927), who delivered a lecture on Indian Music at the Vedanta Society in San Francisco. Martin, who became Inayat Khan's first American follower, was initiated by him and took the Arabic name Rabia. Rabia Martin established a Western Sufi organization, initially called "The Chistie Branch of the Sufic

37. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 2.

38. Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*. Scholem's copy is held at the National Library of Israel, Scholem Collection 8609.

39. Lewis, *Spiritual Brotherhood*, 48.

Order of America." In 1918, she opened the Kaaba Allah Sufi retreat in Fairfax, California, a small town not far from San Francisco.[40]

According to Lewis's account of his meeting with Martin, his first question to her concerned Kabbalah:

> In November 1919 he is walking on Sutter Street; he sees a display of books. He is unaware of how but soon he is upstairs facing a little dark-haired lady. She is Jewish. "You can explain the Kabbalah?" he asks. "Yes, and all religions." "What is Sufism?" "Sufism is the essence of all religions. It has been brought to the West by Hazrat Inayat Khan." The woman is Murshida Rabia A. Martin, Inayat Khan's senior disciple, and his first appointed Murshida.[41]

Lewis became a member of Martin's Sufi order and joined the Kaaba Allah center, from where he sent his letter to Scholem, in 1948. Lewis was similarly interested in Martinism, Kabbalah, and Hinduism, and also studied Zen Buddhism with Nyogen Senzaki (1876–1958), one of the first Zen masters in the United States. Later (likely soon after writing to Scholem), Lewis left the Kaaba Allah group, possibly over disputes concerning the succession of Ada Martin, who had died in 1947. Lewis worked in various odd jobs and traveled to Japan, India, Pakistan, and Egypt. In the late 1960s, Lewis began to draw young disciples from among the ranks of the counterculture and declared himself the spiritual leader of the hippies. He became known as Sufi Sam, developed the dances of Universal Peace, and published several books. He spent the last years of his life in the Lama Foundation New Age community, in New Mexico, where he died in 1971.[42]

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Lewis penned his letter to Scholem after reading the latter's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. He told Scholem that he read the book with joy and declared that it "throws light upon innumerable problems and which may clear the way

40. Bowen, *A History of Conversion*, 22, 215–18, 220–24; Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*, 159–60.
41. Lewis, *Spiritual Brotherhood,* 48 (Introduction).
42. Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam,* 353–54; Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*, 222–23, 225–28.

for the future in many directions." Lewis's enthusiasm reveals the impact that *Major Trends* had on contemporary spiritual seekers. Western occultists such as Lewis believed that they and Kabbalah scholars shared common goals and that academic research was compatible with their spiritual search.

Lewis's letter contains fascinating information about esoteric circles in California and their interest in Kabbalah. Lewis mentions one of his teachers, a Mr. Meyer from Oakland, whom he refers to as the last Kabbalist in his area. According to Lewis, Meyer was born near Vilna and educated in Safed, yet was despised and persecuted by the local Jewish community. It was Meyer (as well as Inayat Khan), Lewis writes, who taught him about the parallels between original Judaism and Hinduism. According to Lewis, "Mr. Meyer claimed that some prophets were Arabs, that the teacher of Moses was a Hindu, etc. and all his statements can be verified by scholasticism and science."

Lewis also mentions Elias Gewurtz, who, he says, resided in the same building in which he wrote his letter—i.e., the Kaaba Allah Sufi center in Fairfax. Elias Gewurtz (1875–1947) was a Jewish Theosophist born in Dembitz (Dębica), Poland, to a notable rabbinic family. In the early 1900s he immigrated to London, where he joined the Theosophical Society.[43] Gewurtz left England in 1914 and settled in California, where he continued his affiliation with the Theosophical Society and other esoteric groups.[44] Gewurtz published several books and articles on Kabbalah (some of them together with another Jewish Theosophist from London, Leonard Bosman).[45] Gewurtz based much of his

43. Huss, "'Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews', 141–42. In 1902, Gewurtz converted to Christianity (see the Church of London Births and Baptisms, 1813–1916). The rumors about his conversion reached his hometown. Nonetheless, Gewurz never mentioned his conversion in his writings and he in later years presented himself as Jewish.

44. Gewurz resided in different locations in Southern California until his death in San Bernardino in 1947. We are grateful to Philip Deslippe for kindly providing us with information about Gewurtz's date and place of death, as well as some other documents concerning his life in the United States.

45. Gewurtz's publications about Kabbalah include Gewurtz and Bosman, *The Cosmic Wisdom*; Gewurtz, "The Qabalah"; idem., *The Hidden Treasures of Ancient Qabalah*; idem., *The Mysteries of the Qabalah*; idem., *Beautiful Thoughts of the Ancient Hebrews*.

perception and knowledge of Kabbalah on the writing of the French occultist Antoine Fabre d'Olivet (1768–1825). In his letter, Lewis relates that Gewurtz, who suffered from poor health, was engaged in the translation of the Zohar as well as of Fabre d'Olivet's *The Hebrew Language Restored*. In his letter, Lewis discusses the interest he and his circle had in the teaching of Fabre d'Olivet and his followers (Stanislas de Guaita, Alexander Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, and Papus). He writes that his original teacher (this is probably referring to Ada Martin[46]) was initiated in Fabre d'Olivet's school and that he himself had written an unpublished work on this approach. Lewis mentions Miss Nayan Redfield (possibly Marie Louise Redfield, 1869–1948), the translator of Fabre d'Olivet's writing into English.[47] Lewis says that he worked as her part-time secretary and that he has in his possession a copy of her unpublished translation of the Zohar.[48]

Lewis also mentions his "spiritual brother" Shabaz C. Best from Rio de Janeiro and advises Scholem to write to him. Shabaz Best (Cecil Eric Britten Best, 1882–1972), was an English banker who had lived in Rio de Janeiro since the 1920s, having previously been a member of the Theosophical Society in England. He became a follower of Inayat Khan and established the first branch of the Sufi movement in Brazil.[49] He also had a keen interest in the teachings of Fabre d'Olivet.[50]

46. On Ada's Martin connection with the Martinist order, see Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam*, vol. 1, 215–16.

47. We have not been able to find much information on Redfield, who, according to the introductions to her publications resided in Hartford, Connecticut. Nayan Louise Redfield's translations of Fabre d'Olivet are *Hermeneutic Interpretations*; *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*; *The Hebraic Tongue Restored*; *Cain, a Dramatic Mystery in Three Acts, with Fabre d'Olivet's Arguments against Lord Byron*; *The Healing of Rodolphe Grivel, Congenital Deaf-Mute*.

48. In a letter to Dr. Oliver L. Reiser, from 1966, Lewis writes that he urged Redfield to translate the Zohar. He relates that in the framework of his research for the project, he met "at least one real Kabbalist" who imparted to him, among other things, that Moses had two teachers, one in Egyptian wisdom and one in Indian teachings. Diaries 1966, Murshid Samuel Lewis Online Archives https://www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/diaries/diaries-1966?highlight=WyJyZWRmaWVsZCJd (accessed January 2020). He is probably referring to Meyer, the Oakland Kabbalist he mentioned to Scholem.

49. Sedgwick, "Sufism in Latin America," 11–12.

50. According to Best, he based his book *Genesis Revised* on an English translation of *The Hebraic Tongue Restored* made by Nayan Redfield, which he revised into more modern English. See Best, *Genesis Revised*, 9. Best also published *The Drama of the Soul*, which was first published in Portuguese as *Mistérios e Misticismo da Bíblia - Ciência da Alma* (Rio de Janeiro, 1949). For more information on Best, supplied by his daughter, Joyce Best, see the Nekbakht Foundation website, accessed December 2018, https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/bio/Sketches.htm.

Lewis writes in his letter that he first heard of Scholem and his work from T. Reich, a fellow San Francisco resident of Jewish parentage.[51] "Between the two of us," he writes, "we have quite covered all the deeper mysticisms of earth – Sufism, Zen Buddhism, Transcendental Buddhism, Esoteric Christianity, Vedanta, Hindu Yoga, etc." Finally, Lewis informs Scholem that he had previously been in close touch with Dr. Sossnitz. Lewis is referring to Dr. Isaac Sossnitz (1872–1967), the translator into English of Adolphe Franck's *The Kabbala: or, the Religious Philosophy of the Jews*. Lewis mentions, as well, Sossnitz's father (the famous scholar Joseph Judah Löb Sossnitz, 1837–1910), attributing to him the opinion that the Kabbalistic doctrine was derived from Zoroastrianism (an opinion held by Adolphe Franck).[52]

Lewis describes himself in the letter as "a Jew and a Sufi." He seems to identify with "the famed Surmad" (i.e., the sixteenth-century Sufi of Jewish origin, Sarmad),[53] as well as with Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank, noting that "the common experience of Mr. Reich and myself, which seems to take us outside the pale of the synagogue, and of Mr. Meyer … seems to point in the direction of Zevi and Frank."

As mentioned above, Lewis believed that *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* was of spiritual significance and assumed that he and Scholem had a common mystical goal. He tells Scholem, "your work seems both clear and self-explanatory and includes what I think is most important – the validity of the inner experience itself." (The last words were underlined by Lewis.) Lewis sees a connection between the religious message he attributes to Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* and the "thesis of establishing Kabbalistic mysticism as a meeting ground of Spiritual Judaism and Christianity," which he found in the novel *East River* by the Yiddish writer Sholem Asch, published in English translation in 1946.

51. Ted (Theodore) Reich is mentioned many times in Lewis's letters and diaries, which are found in the "Murshid Samuel Lewis Archive," http://www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/archive-home. For an interview with him see Ted Reich, "Remembrance by Reich, Ted." Reich says in the interview that he met Lewis in the Theosophical Society in San Francisco in the late 1920s.

52. On Sossnitz and the publication of Franck's book in English, see Meir, "The Beginnings of Kabbalah in America," 238–39.

53. On Sarmad, see Katz, "The Identity of a Mystic," 142–60; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *The Jewish Encounter with Hinduism*, 31–38.

Lewis expressed interest in the contemporary Kabbalists in Jerusalem that Scholem mentioned in his book:[54] "You have mentioned that there are still a few in Jerusalem, and presumably in Safed, who have maintained contact with the inner light." In the face of the imminent war in Palestine, Lewis expresses his wish to bring together Jewish and Muslim mystics, claiming that "I have been for years working, quite ineffectively, upon the possibility of those who have had this inner light contact in Judaism and Islam coming together to try to prevent great bloodshed." Lewis concludes his letter with a statement of what he regarded as his task as a Jew and a Sufi: "As a Jew and a Sufi I would like to do what little I can in this seeming momentous task; whoever loses, I lose, and I feel that more lose. I have no political program as such, but the zeal to effect the brotherhood of man in the Fatherhood of God, in deeds, not words."

[6]

Notwithstanding the difficult situation in Jerusalem, which was under siege at the time, Scholem answered Lewis promptly (the date of his letter, April 5, marked the commencement of Operation Nachshon, which aimed to break the siege on Jerusalem). Scholem's reply is very cordial, although somewhat ironic. He thanks Lewis for his letter and the interest he took in his book and expresses his hope that he will make use of it "in the way it suits you best." Scholem addresses the writing of Fabre d'Olivet, which he is familiar with, but divulges that he does not consider him as highly as does Lewis. He expresses interest in the California Kabbalists whom Lewis met and in the esoteric studies that Lewis pursued with "so much zeal." Scholem is especially interested in Elias Gewurtz, whose book *Beautiful Thoughts of the Ancient Hebrews* he had in his collection. Scholem does not conceal his scorn for "this gentleman" and expresses puzzlement over the alleged Kabbalistic citations in his book, claiming

54. Scholem mentions contemporary Jerusalem Kabbalists on only a few occasions in *Major Trends*. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 278, 328–29.

the following: "I have never understood the mind of this author in putting out this book, not a single quotation of which is authentic. His quotations have nothing to do with what is contained actually in the source he mentions, and I would appreciate it very much if you have an explanation of this kind of modern pseudoepigraphy." Scholem wonders whether Dr. Martin Meyer, who wrote the introduction to Gewurtz's book, is the Kabbalist from Oakland that Lewis mentioned in his letter.[55]

Scholem distinguishes his position towards esoteric studies from that of Lewis and his circle. "I must confess," he writes, "that I have never been initiated into any esoteric circle, and in interpreting Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism at all, I have been relying on my own intuition and that measure of understanding which a careful analysis of difficult texts on a philological basis may afford."[56]

This was a further expression of the same attitude Scholem maintained towards the Kabbalists of Jerusalem. He did not view them as a significant form of Jewish mysticism, even as he took interest in their writings and collected every work they published. He even stated in one place, "What remained of Bet-El was something like Yoga. I had the feeling that I was dealing with a group of Eretz Yisrael Jewish-style Yoga practitioners."[57] While Scholem later proposed a wide-ranging project to investigate "late Kabbalah," including developments outside of Judaism, he does not seem to have altered his estimation of present-day Kabbalist phenomena.[58]

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55. Dr. Martin Abraham Mayer (1879–1923), who wrote the introduction to Gewurtz's *Beautiful Thoughts of the Ancient Hebrews*, was a scholar and the rabbi of the Reform synagogue Temple Emanuel El in San Francisco. Mayer visited Palestine in 1901–1902 and maintained an interest in esoteric and alternative religious movements (in 1912 he invited Abdul Baha, the leader of the Bahai movement, to speak in Temple Emanuel). However, he was not born near Vilna and was not a resident of Oakland.

56. This passage is cited in Burmistrov, "Gershom Scholem und das Okkulte," 33–34.

57. Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, 38. See Huss, "Ask No Questions," 141–58; Garb, "The Modernization of Kabbalah," 2–3, 5, 16; Meir, *Kabbalistic Circles*, 9–15.

58. In 1962, Scholem proposed a fascinating project to the Bollingen Foundation concerning "late Kabbala" (see, among other places, Scholem Archive, Folder 134.2). He proposed writing

Scholem, in his letter, is skeptical of the possibility of interfaith dialogue between Jewish and Muslim mystics that Lewis suggested. "The light is burning pretty low in Palestine at the present," he remarks, "and I have not noticed any peculiar inclination on the part of the mystics of several religions to come together to settle the matter according to their own lights." He concludes the letter with words which remain relevant to this day—"I still hope that there will be a way to maintain peace and happiness for those of our people who need it most."

The letters presented here are held in the archive of Gershom Scholem at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem.[59] Scholem's letter was previously published in the second volume of his collected letters.[60] However, it is entirely incomprehensible without the broader context presented here, not to mention Lewis's letter itself. One hopes that future editions of Scholem's letters will not print the one-sided correspondence of Scholem but rather include the complete correspondence in order to present a broader and more complete picture of the complicated web of figures who took interest in his work.

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a book on the history of Kabbalah from 1600 to modern times (a five-year project), with an emphasis on Sabbatian remnants, Hasidism, Lithuanian Jewish society, the Kabbalah of the *RaShaSh* in the Land of Israel, and the spread of Kabbalah beyond Jewish society. The Foundation indeed funded this project. Various drafts pertaining to the project are preserved in a number of folders in the Scholem Archive; these have the potential to shed new light on Scholem's relation to modern Kabbalah, as well as significantly alter the criticism of certain scholars. On Scholem and the Bollingen Foundation, see Meir and Yamamoto, "The Open Book," 32–33.

59. Gershom Scholem Archive, Correspondence, "Lewis," Series 1, Folder 1583, The National Library of Israel.

60. Scholem, *Briefe* (2), 5–6.

[Letter 1]

133 Hillside Drive,
Fairfax, Calif.
March 14th, 1948
Prof. Gershom G. Scholem,
The Hebrew University,
Jerusalem, Palestine

Dear Professor Scholem:

I have just completed your "Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism" (second edition) which has been read with joy and gladness from beginning to end, which throws light upon innumerable problems, and which may clear the air for the future in many directions. Those who have read "East River" by Scholem Asch may be lead [sic] toward a new view of religion. His thesis of establishing Kabbalistic Mysticism as a meeting ground of spiritual Judaism and Christianity is, I believe, entirely correct, and can be easily proven, but there still is an atmosphere of awe, suspicion, ignorance and repugnance in regard to what has become known as the fantastic, superstitious and transcendental.

I am taking the liberty to write to you to see if we each may not be of service of each other in some manner. One realizes that this may be a daring step. For not only do most of the synagogues of this part of the world look upon mysticism with askance, but Kabbala most of all. Indeed the last Kabbalist I knew in these parts, a Mr. Meyer of Oakland, Calif. – born near Vilna, educated at Safed – was despised by his brethren and persecuted until the rise of Hitler made a few see that their course was not altogether wise. The learned, of course, are entirely under the influence of Graetz and Margolis.

I am writing this letter in a room and building which originally housed one Elias Gewurz. He had studied Kabbala and was an avid writer but poor health thwarted his efforts. He was engaged in two efforts, the translation of "Zohar"

and the French "Hebrew Language Restored" by one Fabre D'Olivet. His secretary-pupil also studied with a learned Kabbalistic-Rabbi whom I never met, and I was instructed in turn, to some degree. Later I acted in part time secretarial capacity to a Miss Nayan Redfield, a linguist, who has translated and published the above work by Fabre D'Olivet, and also his "Hermeneutic Interpretation of the Social State of Man;" also "Zohar," privately. We have this unpublished, the manuscript being, as you say, about twice the length of Sperling's work, and containing all kinds of valuable footnotes. Here my story branches out in several directions, and I hope you do not mind the details:

Fabre D'Olivet was a French scholar and linguist. His teacher, Court de Gebelin, attempted to restore the original Indo-Aryan language and anticipated the work of the Grimms, Muller, etc. by generations. But he was a theosophist and his reasoning was repugnant to "scientists" who eject, more than reject God.

F.D. chose to do a similar work with the Semitic tongues and in his "Hebrew Tongue Restored" containing the Cosmogony of Moses, he throws considerable light upon original Hebrew and the roots thereof. In the Hermeneutic Interpretation he applies the philosophy of the Sacred Name of God to the history of mankind, showing that the principles associated with A, M, Sh are basic to everything.

His work was continued in France by Stanislaus de Gauita, St. Yves-D'Alvedre, "Papus," and occult orders such as the Martinists. My original teacher was initiated in these schools and I learned therefrom also. Besides Miss Redfield, my spiritual brother,

Mr. Shabaz C. Best
Rua Julio Ottoni 579,
Santa Teresa,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

has continued his own researches, and is about to publish his findings. If he has not read your book, I am wondering whether it would be possible for you to write to him and tell him of your other works. I am sending him the name of

your publisher. For my own part I have written in the same field (unpublished) demonstrating the the [sic] principles involved in the sacred letters do apply the [sic] problems of the day.

I heard about you and your work first from Mr. T. Reich of San Francisco. Our life has been strangely parallel. We have known each other since boyhood and are both of Jewish parentage. We have both taken unusual but quite parallel paths and between the two of us we have quite covered all the deeper mysticism of earth – sufism, Zen Buddhism, Transcendental Buddhism, Esoteric Christianity, Vedanta, Hindu Yoga, etc. In the end we come to no difference, only agreement.

From Mr. Meyer, the Oakland Kabbalist, and from Pir-o-Murshid, Inayat Khan, my original teacher in Sufism, I learned of the Parallels between the original Judaism and Hinduism. Any investigation into this field at once clarifies some of the language of Berashith (and the Torah) generally, the the [sic] book of Jonah. Mr. Meyer claimed that some prophets were Arabs, that the teacher of Moses was a Hindu, etc. and all his statements can be verified by scholasticism and science.

What is more interesting is the validity of experiences and the common goal that is actually reached when one is trained, shall we say, in meditation, "yoga," deep devotion, etc. the common acceptance of the universality of Light, for instance, overcomes all the smaller differences which are met at the start of the path.

The common experience of Mr. Reich and myself which seems to take us outside the pale of the synagogue, and of Mr. Meyer, who was not only persecuted, but married a Christian (therefore non-Jewish) lady, seems to point in the direction of Zevi and Frank. I had already known that one or two Sephardics had become Sufis, and saints at that. I mentioned this recently to a Hindu Sufi and he tells me that in his land, not only the famed Surmad (teacher of the elder son of the Emperor Shah Jehan) was a born Hebrew, but many saints of his land also, and he could name them.

I do not know whether this is important. Years ago I was in close touch with Dr. Sossnitz whose father claimed that the Kabbalistic doctrines were

derived from Zoroastrianism. He published his work and would accept no criticism. A glance at the book known as "Dabistan" published at the time of the above-mentioned Saint Surmad, and with his cooperation, shows definitely that there has been a "secret doctrine" and "'esoteric methods" for ages, even [sic] since Egypt was founded. Your work seems both clear and self-explanatory and includes what I think is most important – the validity of the inner experience itself. Mystics are not externalists who go around borrowing ideas or patterns.

I do not feel it proper to write further on the above unless you are interested. I feel it wise to turn slightly to another subject. You have mentioned that there are still a few in Jerusalem, and presumably at Safed, who have maintained contact with the inner light. I have for years been working quite ineffectively, upon the possibility of those who have had this inner light contact in Judaism and Islam coming together to try to prevent great bloodshed. Perhaps it is too late at this moment, but even if there be war, how can real heart-peace be established without more understanding and mutual sympathy.

I have spoken to Arabs and Muslims of all groups and spent some time (alone) in Washington, D.C. hoping to find a path to peace, not through politics, but through human contacts. But all the methods have been based upon the forcefulness of pressure-groups and for practical purposes, the rejection of God as Reality. I do not wish at the moment to go into the various messianic outlooks. They would either confuse the issues further – or, actually clear them up.

But if there are men who speak to God and to whom God speaks, though they be of various languages, religions and outlooks, how is it possible for that God to speak differently to them in the language of the spirit? As a Jew and a Sufi I would like to do what little I can in this seeming momentous task; whoever loses, I lose, and I feel more lose. I have no political program as such, but the zeal to affect the brotherhood of man in the Fatherhood of God, in deeds, not words.

Faithfully,

Samuel L. Lewis

[Letter 2]

28 Abarbanel Road
Jerusalem
April 5, 1948
Mr. S.L Lewis
133 Hillside Drive
Fairfax, Calif.
U.S.A

Dear Mr. Lewis

I am in receipt of your interesting letter of March 14th. I wish to thank you very much for the interest you have taken in my book and I hope you will be able to make use of it in the way it suits you best.

I was very interested to hear about the Kabbalists in California whom you have met and of the esoteric studies which you have pursued with, it seems, so much zeal. I must confess that I have never been initiated into any esoteric circle, and in interpreting Kabbala and Jewish Mysticism at all, I have been relying on my own intuition and that measure of understanding which a careful analysis of difficult texts on a philological basis may afford. I am pretty well acquainted with the work of Fabre D'Olivet whose book about the Hebrew languages I have in my library, but I can not estimate him as highly as you seem to do, interesting though as his book may be.

What makes me wonder most is your reference to one Elias Gewurz whose room you occupy at present. I have never met this gentleman and have been quite puzzled about his personality on account of a book of his which I have in my collection. It is called "Beautiful Thoughts and the Ancient Hebrews" with an introduction by a certain Dr. Martin Mayer. (can this be the Meyer of Oakland, California?) [sic] whom you mention as the last Kabbalist you knew in your parts?) this book is supposed to contain a kind of anthology from Kabbalistical writings, many of them from manuscripts in the British Museum. I happen to be acquainted a little with original texts of Rabbinical literature

and with the Kabbalistical manuscripts and other texts from which this book claims to be based. I have never understood the mind of this author in putting out this book, not a single quotation of which is authentic. His quotations have nothing to do with what is contained actually in the source he mentions, and I would appreciate it very much if you have an explanation of this kind of modern pseudepigraphy since I do not see the reason why he should have to put his thoughts into the mouth of old books instead of claiming them as his own illuminations. If you are acquainted with his pupils and his way of teaching, you may be able to enlighten me on this score.

I do not know if there is anything you can do from your point of vantage for furthering the course of peace in Palestine, however desirable that certainly would be. The light is burning pretty low in Palestine at present, and I have not noticed any peculiar inclinations on the part of the mystic of several religions to come together to settle the matter according to their own lights. I still hope that there will be a way to maintain peace and happiness for those of our people who need it most.

Yours Faithfully,

Gershom G. Scholem

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The Tetractys and the Hebdomad:
Blavatsky's Sacred Geometry

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Abstract

This article traces essential sources behind the Western reception of Sanskrit terminology on the concept of subtle anatomy, focusing on the late nineteenth-century when the Theosophical Society and its forefront, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, first presented it to a Western audience. A doctrinal change took place around 1880–81 in an interaction between American, European, and Indian Theosophists, distinguishing Blavatsky's major works *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). The subject of how and why the first doctrine of *three* human principles (body, soul, and spirit) developed into her later version including *seven* human principles is carefully examined. A new hypothesis on why the number seven became the backbone of Blavatsky's entire cosmology is also presented. According to this, the seven-fold subtle anatomy was there since the grounding of the Theosophical Society (1875) and was rooted in specific numerological, mathematical, and geometric speculations which Blavatsky shared with several other contemporary authors. The article explores Blavatsky's interpretation of some related arithmological themes in nineteenth-century American literature such as the Pythagorean *tetraktys,* "the tetrad," "the pyramid," "the cube," and "the hexagram."

Keywords: Theosophical Society; Helena Blavatsky; Arithmology; Sacred Geometry; Chakras, Subtle Body

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Theosophical renderings of Sanskrit terms were crucial in forming the Western reception of the concept of subtle anatomy.[1] Many Westerners today have encountered Sanskrit terms like *prana*, *kundalini*, *nadis*, and *chakras*.[2] In India, Tibet, and East Asia, the number of chakras ("energy centers") in the subtle anatomy varies. The modern "Western

1. Wujastyk, "Interpreting the Image," 20.
2. Survey on Swedish conceptions of subtle anatomy made by Fitger. See forthcoming dissertation.

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schema," however, has a relatively standardized seven-fold structure. The chakras are generally also correlated to the seven colors of the rainbow.

We will examine how the Theosophical Society's most prominent leader, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) formed the ideas behind the seven-fold schema of subtle anatomy and we will search for reasons behind her choice of number seven as the structuring cosmological principle. The article is based on a historical analysis of source material published before Blavatsky's move to India (1878–79) compared with similar conceptions among her contacts and literary influences. It also examines secondary scholarship on the subject.

We will begin with a brief résumé of the academic discussions about "theosophical orientalism," after which we will take a look at Blavatsky's idea about a "universal mystery language" and her emphasis on *numbers* as a point of departure when looking for correspondences. "God geometrizes" was one of Blavatsky's favorite expressions, but what did she mean by that? We will explore how her conception of the "universal mystery language" was linked to a literary genre called arithmology and the esoteric speculations about "Pythagoras tetraktys." We will also examine her views on Kabbalah in connection with these speculations. Lastly, I will show the presented discourse was central in nineteenth-century freemasonry and among mythographic authors of that era.

At first glance, it may look as if Blavatsky's doctrinal change from *three* to *seven* human principles (related to the seven chakras) occurred due to her confrontation with Hinduism and Buddhism. There was, however, a previous process leading up to this shift — a process which, I will argue, largely depended on the mentioned arithmological themes prevalent in the nineteenth-century masonic and mythographic discourse. This kind of literature influenced Blavatsky immensely — both before and after her Indian period. My comparison of sources is temporally synchronic; that is, it compares conceptions of subtle anatomy among (mostly Anglo-American) nineteenth-century authors. It is also typological, focusing on the conception of subtle anatomy and the vital

energy that it is supposed to consist of. Another concept related to "the Western model of subtle anatomy" is the aura. Second-generation Theosophical leaders further elaborated on this concept.[3] The Society also cultivated a growing interest in Orientalist translations and interpretations of Tantric philosophy.[4] John Woodroffe's (1865–1936) illustrated English translation of the Tantric text *Satchakra-nirūpana,* (*The Serpent Power,* 1918) and Charles W. Leadbeater's (1854–1934) *The Chakras* (1927) became seminal in the consolidation of the Western seven-fold model of subtle anatomy.

Theosophical Orientalism[5]

In his book *Yoga Body,* Mark Singleton examines the Western reception and appropriation of the concept of yoga. In the late 19th century when the Theosophical Society broke new ground in India, *hatha yoga* with focus on bodily exercises was regarded as a symbol of an outdated, superstitious form of Hinduism. Singleton convincingly shows how occultists of this period viewed yoga as a kind of magic.[6] Blavatsky saw hatha yoga as a low and selfish sort of magic, contrasting it against the intellectual and spiritually high-standing *raja yoga*.[7] At the very beginning of the yoga-renaissance, bodily postures were usually condemned by academic Orientalists and other Westerners as well as by high-caste Hindus. From about the 1920s and onwards, there was a shift in the Western appropriation of yoga towards identifying it more with gymnastics and health-promotion than as before, with fakirs and "Eastern magic."[8]

The Theosophical Society's use of Eastern concepts is a highly complex issue. Based on Edward Said's classical reasoning one could argue that the

3. The shapes and colors of subtle anatomy surrounding the body.
4. Baier, "Theosophical Orientalism," 336.
5. The term is coined by C. Partridge in "Lost Horizon," 309–34.
6. Singleton, *Yoga Body*, "Introduction."
7. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, 7:145–71
8. Singleton, *Yoga Body*, ch. 2–4; De Michelis, *History*, ch. 5–6.

Society — from a perspective of power relations — was guilty of plagiarism as well as corruption and colonialism.[9] However, as Richard King (as well as other critics of Said) has observed, Said's version of Orientalism does not account for how *both* Eastern and Western cultures could use the encounter of their cultures in their own identity formation.[10]

Julian Strube has stressed the fact that "modern Tantra should not simply be seen as a one-way street of Western imaginations but rather as the outcome of complex global exchanges."[11] Indian authors contributed greatly to writings on Tantra in *The Theosophist* during the first part of the 1880s.[12] Authors like Barada Kanta Majumdar and Sabhapati Swami thereby promoted a growing interest in Tantric concepts like *chakras* and *kundalini* among Theosophists, altering the previously negative image of Tantra. Strube points to the fact that the esoteric appropriation of Tantra, in the early 20th century, largely depended on John Woodroffe's English translations and interpretations of the Tantric philosophy. Woodroffe wrote under the pseudonym "Arthur Avalon," however, behind the pseudonym were also his Indian collaborators, who helped him in his translation and interpretations.[13]

The Western reception of the chakra-system has also been discussed by Julie Hall [Chajes] in "The Saptaparna" (2007) and more recently by Karl Baier in "Theosophical Orientalism" (2016). According to Chajes there was no direct parallel teaching on subtle anatomy to that of Blavatsky's, in either Eastern or Western traditions. Her working hypothesis is that Blavatsky — although inspired mainly by Western esotericism — invented the seven-fold division due

9. Said, *Orientalism,* 63–67.

10. King, *Orientalism,* 86.

11. Strube, "Tantra," *Dictionary of Contemporary Esotericism,* forthcoming.

12. Baier, "Theosophical Orientalism," 326–27.

13. "His writings are decisively influenced by the very same Bengali tantric movement that had initiated the Theosophist debate in the 1880s. [Ati Behari] Ghose belonged to this milieu, and Majumdar, one of the active Theosophist authors on the topic, was also one of Woodroffe's closest collaborators" (Strube, forthcoming).

to her need of an all-encompassing system.[14] Baier shows that early members of the Theosophical Society had ideas about "the significance of certain body centers for spiritual development," before they learned about the South Asian *chakras*.[15] According to him, the Indian vocabulary helped the Society in developing a more elaborate system than they had before. Baier also highlights the potential benefits that the teaching of "the ascent through the chakras" could offer the society in terms of occult practice,[16] since they had previously only focused on astral projection as the means to come in contact with "the higher spheres."

> The Theosophical study and appropriation of cakra systems promised twofold enrichment: a better understanding of the subtle body, its anatomy, and physiology, and a more precise conceptualization of the theory and practice of astral projection.[17]

Both Baier and Singleton have highlighted the significant contribution of mesmeric Theosophical interpretations of the *chakras*.[18] Baier points to the fact that Blavatsky already in 1877, in *Isis Unveiled* (referred to as *Isis* in the following), described how yogic meditation stimulates the senses of the astral body so that "the most ethereal portions of the soul-essence can act independently of its grosser particles and of the brain."[19] According to Blavatsky the clairvoyant abilities which could be seen in mesmerized persons and the *samadhi* of the yogis only differed in the degree of "seeing" that was reached. Five years later, in his introduction to the *Yoga Sutras* (1882), Henry Olcott (president of the Theosophical Society) interpreted kundalini yoga as "self-mesmerization" and stated that the difference between a mesmerized subject and a yogi was that the yogi has not only self-consciousness but also self-control. Olcott continues discussing how "the current of nerve aura" is directed through vital points of

14. Hall, "The Saptaparna," 11, 25.
15. Baier, "Modern Yoga," 341.
16. Baier, "Mesmeric Yoga," 337–38.
17. Baier, "Theosophical Orientalism," 341–42.
18. Baier, "Modern Yoga," 8; Singleton, *Yoga Body,* 44–51.
19. Blavatsky, *Isis*, 2:590.

the yogi's body (*The Yoga Philosophy*, iii).[20] These observations are also confirmed by John Patrick Deveney's findings, which suggest that Theosophists identified the higher states of yogic meditation with astral projection.[21]

Initially, Blavatsky had a profoundly negative view of Tantra. In the first years in India, she and Olcott collaborated with the reform movement Arya Samaj which also disputed Tantric literature harshly. They imagined Dyanand Saraswati as a genuine yogi but eventually became frustrated by his "lack of occult training."[22] Quite soon, Blavatsky changed her opinion about him and criticized him heavily. Nevertheless, after one member in Bengal wrote about his negative experiences of *pranayama* (yogic breathing exercises), critique of the body-oriented yoga exercises (referred to as hatha yoga) started to grow within the Theosophical Society. This resulted in yet another shift towards a more Western concept of meditation, introduced by Gondolphin Mitford and Damodar Mavalankar.

During the last years of her life Blavatsky taught a very personal variant of kundalini yoga to the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, connecting the chakras with "the higher triad" and "the lower quaternary" of her seven principles[23] — although she still condemned hatha yoga exercises.[24] Her system was, however, (according to remarks made by members of the group) very hard to grasp, something which led William Quan Judge (the forefront for the society in America) to reintroduce yogic technics again, but now from Patanjali's eight-fold path (although with some references to kundalini yoga).[25]

A central question if we are to understand the background and influences of Blavatsky's teachings on subtle anatomy is how well versed she was in Eastern religion during the first years of her authorship. Several researchers

20. Baier, "Mesmeric Yoga," 156.

21. Deveney, "Astral Projection," 33; J. Ennemoser's *History of Magic* seems to have inspired Blavatsky's first conception of "subtle energy-centers"; Blavatsky, *Isis*, 1:26.

22. Baier, "Mesmeric Yoga and the Development of Meditation," 154.

23. Blavatsky, "Esoteric Instructions," 697–99.

24. Blavatsky, "Esoteric Instructions," 5.

25. Baier, "Mesmeric Yoga," 157–58.

have concluded that her knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism was primarily influenced by: 1) Orientalist translations and interpretations of Hindu and Buddhist texts, and 2) representatives of the Indian reform movements who were influenced by enlightenment ideas, Orientalism, and Protestant theology.[26]

However, Blavatsky and Olcott had a few Eastern acquaintances before they moved to India. One of them was Peary Chand Mittra, who became a member in 1877. Mittra was a Spiritualist medium, well-versed in Western literature, and a member of both the British National Association of Spiritualists and the Brahmo Samaj. He later became the head of the Theosophical section in Bengal.[27] In 1877 he wrote an article titled "The Psychology of the Aryas" in the journal *Human Nature* where he addresses some of the terms that Blavatsky used in her later version of the subtle anatomy — *atma*, *manas,* and *lingua sarira*. Mittra depicted *atma* as "the soul" and *manas* as "the mind."[28] In 1880 he also describes (from a Spiritualist perspective) how certain spirits "act on the nervous system" and cause the subtle body to develop. It is similar to the effect of yoga, but it can go faster with the help of spirits, he explains.[29] In the same year the Indian Theosophist S. Row linked "Pythagorean" arithmology with Indian concepts.[30]

Older studies have argued that Blavatsky adopted the Indian concepts of subtle anatomy but interpreted them according to Western sources[31] — a view that Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Julie Chajes also have confirmed.[32] Nowadays

26. Baier, "Theosophical Orientalism," 324–26; Partridge, "Lost Horizon," 314; Urban, *Tantra, Secrecy,* 61; Trompf, "Theosophical Macrohistory," 378–80.

27. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 327; Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 336–37.

28. In 1880, Mittra also published an article titled "Stray Thoughts on Spiritualism" where he speculated on "the development of the subtle body, the body of the soul." One year later he also published a small compendium called *On the Soul.* This text is quite ambiguous regarding the numbering of the human principles.

29. Mittra, *Stray Thoughts*, 5–6.

30. Row, "The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac."

31. Von Glasenapp, *Das Indienbild*; Wichmann, "Das Theosophische Menschenbild"; Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*.

32. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 455; Hall [Chajes], "The Saptaparna," 24.

researchers have slightly refined their view of Theosophical Orientalism, highlighting the reciprocity in the influence between Indian, European, and American Theosophists and how the exchange of ideas and concepts sometimes makes it complicated to talk about "East" and "West" as separate cultural spheres. Baier has described the process as a "reverse reflection" between, on the one hand, high-caste English-speaking Indians (often themselves Theosophists), and on the other hand, European and American Theosophists who were interested in and highly valued Hinduism and Buddhism. Both parties had an interest in cooperation. The Indian Theosophists needed to define their identity both with respect to British colonial power and to Indian reform movements such as Arya Samaj. The European and American Theosophists, in their turn, had a desire to define themselves as "the others" in their own culture. The Indian teachings and terminology gave the Theosophical Society their sought for identity of "the Other," as well as the exotic status of being familiar with Eastern spiritual teachings (which were supposed to be more genuine and closer to the Eternal Wisdom). It also gave them a chance to develop and systematize their doctrine of subtle anatomy so that it became easier to explain such phenomena as astral projection (which was already practiced in the society).

The Universal Mystery Language

According to Hanegraaff, Blavatsky used cannabis (which could be bought at regular pharmacies and was considered "healthy" at the time).[33] It is likely that *Isis,* at least partly, was written in an intoxicated state (an insight that perhaps can be small comfort to readers exhausted from trying to analyze it). The two volumes of *Isis* are crammed with quotes and references to religious texts and philosophical teachings, works on history of religion, literature, and science, medical treatises and articles on archaeology, geology, anthropology, as well as to history of art. Blavatsky herself also admitted to the fact that *Isis* is very difficult to read:

33. Hanegraaff, "The Theosophical Imagination," 13.

> Finally, that the work [*Isis*], for reasons that will be now explained, has no system in it; and that it looks in truth, as remarked by a friend, as if a mass of independent paragraphs having no connection with each other, had been well shaken up in a waste-basket, and then taken out at random and—published. Such is also now my sincere opinion.[34]

One of Blavatsky's acquaintances, Robert Bowen, stated that Blavatsky had compared her searching of "the secret doctrine" with the practice of Jana Yoga, describing how she used to see "mental images floating before her inner eye."[35] This confirms Hanegraaff's account of her method when writing *Isis*[36] and could also be related to what Tim Rudbøg has shown to be Blavatsky's use of the word Theosophy. According to Rudbøg, she used the term on three ontological levels: one historical level tied to the original Wisdom Religion; one practical level tied to Divine Ethics; and one abstract level linked to the meaning of intuition or higher truth.[37] In this article we primarily address the abstract meaning of the word Theosophy.

In the beginning the Wisdom Religion had belonged to all people, Blavatsky explained. At this archaic age, humans had shared a "universal mystery language," whose elements were still to be found in symbolism and mythologies throughout the world.[38] This idea must be seen in the light of nineteenth-century intellectual discourse where the "search for an origin" was highly fashionable.[39] The comparing of symbology was an indispensable part of Blavatsky's rhetoric.[40] An early influence within this field was Georg Friedrich Creuzer (*Symbolik und Mythologie*, 1810–12).

34. Blavatsky, "My Books," 242.

35. Algeo, *Blavatsky, Freemasonry*, 33.

36. Hanegraaff, however, emphasizes that the Theosophical view on clairvoyance markedly differed from that of mesmerism and Spiritualism and that Blavatsky's imaginative ability was deemphasized by herself and her successors (Hanegraaff, "The Theosophical Imagination," 12).

37. Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 101.

38. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 1:xliii. During the fourth root-race, however, the wisdom was abused for black magic. As a consequence, the doctrine was hidden in secret symbols whose esoteric significance was preserved only by a chain of initiated masters (Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 117–18).

39. Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 179–80.

40. Rudbøg also notes that she was familiar with great "system thinkers" like Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, More, Cudworth, Newton, Boehme, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 366–71.

Blavatsky refers to him in a letter to the Spiritualist H. P. Corson Cornell, stating that she — like all the enlightened occultists before her times — was "searching for a system that should disclose to them the 'deepest depths' of the Divine nature and show . . . the real tie which binds all things together." She continues, "I found at last–and many years ago–the cravings of my mind satisfied by this theosophy taught by the Angels and communicated by them" (February 16, 1875).[41]

To describe this underlying universal core, Blavatsky had to make comparisons between contemporary and historical teachings and concepts in a very eclectic way (a method which Egil Asprem has named "programmatic syncretism").[42] Lévi was one of her precursors in this way of writing, and many esoteric groups presented their teachings in similar ways.[43]

Since she was a perennialist, Blavatsky did not believe in "pure religious traditions," but in an underlying "Esoteric core" which could be found in all traditions. Asprem also emphasizes the important role of *numbers* in Blavatsky's system and that they can work as a form of mnemonic system as well as a point of departure when looking for correspondences.[44] It is quite clear that Blavatsky needed more systemization during this period and the literature that Blavatsky quoted (or plagiarized) often had arithmological speculations in common.

> It is recognized by modern science that all the higher laws of nature assume the form of quantitative statement. This is perhaps a fuller elaboration or more explicit affirmation of the Pythagorean doctrine. Numbers were regarded as the best representations of the laws of harmony which pervade the cosmos. We know too that in chemistry the doctrine of atoms and the laws of combination are actually and, as it were, arbitrarily defined by

41. Blavatsky, *The Letters of Blava*tsky, 1:96–97. As Rudbøg has shown, a passage in her letter to Corson was copied directly from Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah* (Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy in Context."

42. Asprem, "Kabbala Recreata," 132–53. "The Theosophical Society treated the newly available cultural data with a deliberately syncretistic attitude, relating cultural data regardless of time and space, but with a programmatic basis, always with the aim of improving the sum outcome" (Asprem, "Kabbala Recreata,"136).

43. Asprem shows how the occult Kabbala in The Golden Dawn worked like a mnemonic system. It offered (just as the tetraktys of Pythagoras did for Blavatsky) a numerological map through which concepts from different traditions could be linked.

44. Asprem, "Kabbala Recreata," 132–53.

> numbers. As Mr. W. Archer Butler has expressed it: 'The world is, then, through all its departments, a living arithmetic in its development, a realized geometry in its repose.' [45]

The literary genre of arithmology has influenced Western esotericism profoundly.[46] According to Mark Blacklock, Blavatsky was part of a very popular "uncritical and extra-academic tradition of mystical geometry." "Pythagorean ideas" as well as Plato's *Timaeus* were at the center of interest in the circles that she moved.[47] In this genre Pythagoras is portrayed as the first Western initiate into the "mysticism of numbers" which he, the legends say, learned from the Egyptians and Indians.

According to Leonid Zhmud, systematic arithmology was developed by the Greek Academy, mainly inspired by Plato's oral teachings on "the ten ideal numbers" — the *decade*. While traditional number symbolism had focused on the importance of individual numbers (for example, 3, 7 or 9), the arithmological speculations were linked to the *decade* and thus organized in a system that — in addition to its philosophical and theological meaning — accounted for the purely mathematical properties of numbers.[48]

According to esotericism scholar Jean-Pierre Brach, arithmology can be described as "a 'qualitative' approach to numbers and mathematical objects in general . . . by what is known as 'correlative thinking' . . . linking the quantitative values of mathematical entities to a vast array of correspondences."[49] This line of thinking has often been linked to religious and esoteric ideas about "The Great Chain of Being," and conceptions of "a ladder with seven steps" — from the divine sphere down to the earthly realm. The ladder favorably includes conceptions of "subtle levels" between the physical and the spiritual world. All the above-mentioned ideas can also be found in masonic teachings among

45. Blavatsky, *Isis* , 1:xvi.

46. According to Godwin, Pythagorean Arithmology — often combined with Christian Kabbala — has influenced Western esotericism right up to our days (Godwin, "Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism," 22).

47. Blacklock, *The Emergence*, 137.

48. Zhmud, "Greek Arithmology," 322–24.

49. Brach, "Mathematical Esotericism," 405.

Blavatsky's near acquaintances and there is good reason to assume that she got many of her speculations directly from her early masonic contacts as well as her familiarity with masonic literature. One of the common themes in this literature was the strong emphasis on the number seven as an ordering principle in nature and in creation.

To summarize our discussion so far, it is reasonable to assume that Blavatsky was searching for some sort of unifying system or, as she expresses it, "*the real tie which binds all things together*."[50] eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Neoplatonism were major influences before her move to India,[51] and there were some arithmological themes repeatedly discussed by Blavatsky as well as by other mythographers of her time. We will look at some of the most significant works which came to benefit Blavatsky when she tried to systematize her great cosmological vision.

"God geometrizes"

> [Numerals] are a key to the ancient views on cosmogony, in its broad sense, including man and beings, and the evolution of humanity, spiritually as well as physically. The number *seven* is the most sacred of all, and is, undoubtedly, of Hindu origin. . . . It is not possible to solve fully the deep problems underlying the Brahmanical and Buddhistic sacred books without having a perfect comprehension of the Esoteric meaning of the Pythagorean numerals.[52]

"God geometrizes" is one of Blavatsky's favorite expressions,[53] and she associated "Theosophy" — in the abstract sense of the word — with "inspiration" and "higher intuition."[54] The subtitle of *Isis* — "*A MASTER-KEY to the Mysteries*" - could therefore refer to the notion of a geometric and numerological key behind the mysteries of creation. Also related to this are speculations about the "squaring of the circle" — a concept we will soon return to.

50. Blavatsky, *The Letters*, 86.
51. Chajes, "Reincarnation in H. P. Blavatsky's," 70–72 (with reference to Hanegraaff).
52. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:407, 409.
53. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, 3:196, 313; 7:292; 14:62; *Isis,* 1:508. The expression is often attributed to Plato but is a phrase cited by Plutarch as "typically Platonic" (Kahn, "Pythagoras," 57).
54. Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 120.

Blavatsky actually writes that *Senzar* (an ancient sacred language upon which her teachings in *The Secret Doctrine* are said to be based) is not a language in the usual sense.[55] It is rather depicted as *a system of archetypal symbols*, often systemized through *geometric figures and numbers*. The numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 10 as well as the circle, the triad, the tetrad, and the cube, are the most prominent ones. "The six-pointed star" (Solomon's seal) is also central, as is the Pythagorean *tetractys* (see explanation below) and the concept of *Tetragrammaton* יהוה (God's name in Judaism).

The Kabbalistic "Tree of life" with its *sephiroth* provides the map to Blavatsky's system.[56] According to Blavatsky, the foundation of existence was an impersonal *Parabrahm* with no active role in the creation of our world. Instead she wrote of the active agents — or "builders of the architecture of the cosmos" — as *Dhyan Chohans*. They were the *demiurges* which constructed the cosmos following a drawing found in the Divine thought (*Logos*):

> The imaginary atoms . . . are like automatic workmen moved inwardly by the influx of that Universal Will directed upon them, and which, manifesting itself as force, sets them into activity. The plan of the structure to be erected is in the brain of the Architect, and reflects his will; abstract yet, from the instant of the conception it becomes concrete through these atoms which follow faithfully every line, point and figure traced in the imagination of the Divine Geometer.[57]

Already in 1875, Blavatsky had a numerical "basic structure" that she tried to apply — and she had not invented it entirely on her own. Plutarch was essential to her already in 1875[58] — most likely as interpreted by nineteenth-century mythographers such as George Oliver and John Yarker.[59] Like them she emphasized the cosmological significance of certain numbers holding a special position because of their role in the creation. In *Isis*, she repeatedly states that

55. She describes Senzar/"Zend-zar" as a "Hieratic Code" and notes that the word "Zend" cannot be linked to any language. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings,* 4:517–18 & 14:100–101. This is also Algeo's opinion (See *Blavatsky, Freemasonry*, 29 and *Senzar: The Mystery*).

56. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 328.

57. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 1:62.

58. Rudbøg refers to *The Letters of Blavatsky,* 1:213–14.

59. Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 349; Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 2:601.

"everything in this world is a trinity completed by the quaternary" explaining the Pythagorean doctrine in the preface of the first volume:

> The One is God, the Two, matter; the Three, combining Monad and Dyad, and partaking of the nature of both, is the phenomenal world; the Tetrad, or form of perfection, expresses the emptiness of all; and the Decade, or sum of all, involves the entire cosmos.[60]

One of the red threads in *Isis* is the "Pythagorean triangle" or the *tetraktys* (from *tetros* meaning "four").

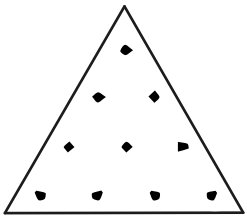

Figure 1. Illustration by Fitger.

Pythagoras is mentioned 146 times in *Isis*. The concept of the *tetraktys* (*tetractys/ tetraktis/tetractis*), also called "tetrad," "tetragram" or *Tetragrammaton* and depicted as a "quarter" or "quaternary," is mentioned sixty-nine times altogether. But how are these terms related? Blavatsky talks about "the triad" (a group of three) plus "the tetrad" (a group of four) and the sum of these, making "the heptad" (a group of seven). She also connects 3 + 4 = 7 to the human constitution:

> The Pythagoreans called the number seven the vehicle of life, as it contained body and soul. They explained it by saying, that the human body consisted of four principal elements, and that the soul is triple, comprising reason, passion, and desire. The ineffable WORD was considered the Seventh and highest of all, for there are six minor substitutes, each belonging to a degree of initiation.[61]

Blavatsky traces the *tetraktys* in Hindu, Egyptian, Chaldean, and Persian mythology, in Gnostic sects (such as the Ophites), in the Bible and in Kabbalah.

60. Blavatsky, *Isis*, 1:xvi.
61. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:418.

Towards the end of her life, in her instructions for the Esoteric Section, Blavatsky explains the concept in the following way:

> In occult and Pythagorean geometry the Tetrad is said to combine within itself all the materials from which Cosmos is produced. The Point or One, extends to a Line—the Two; a Line to a Superficies, three; and the Superficies, Triad or Triangle, is converted into a Solid, the Tetrad or Four, by the point being placed over it.[62]

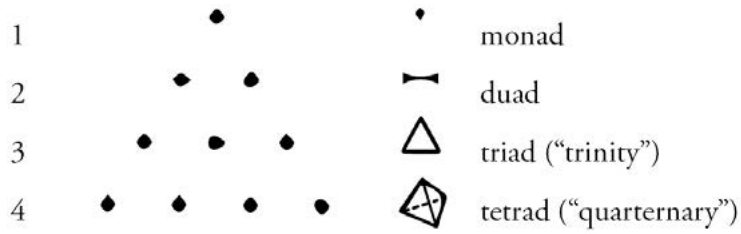

Figure 2. Illustration by Fitger.

The *tetrad* contains the numbers three and four and at the same time, the whole *tetractys* (the *decade*), symbolizing the manifested cosmos — our world of three dimensions.[63] Blavatsky begins chapter 9 in *Isis* (vol 2) with a quote from the mathematician Theos of Smyrna[64] stating that the tetraktys contains "the nature of all things."[65] Her speculations about the *tetraktys* (and its connection to the number seven) are also similar to Proclus's[66] commentary on the *Timaeus* as translated by her favorite nineteenth-century Platonist — Thomas Taylor (1820):

62. Blavatsky, "The Transactions"; Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, 10:355. The same way of reasoning is found in Oliver's *Signs and Symbols*, 207.

63. A few times later on Blavatsky also mentions speculation about a "fourth dimension" and its connection to the seventh (Blavatsky, *Collected Writings,* 5:151–52).

64. Blavatsky refers to "Theon of SMYRNA."

65. "The Tetraktys was not only principally honored because all symphonies are found to exist within it, but also because it appears to contain the nature of all things." Quoted by Blavatsky, *Isis*, 2:417. She also refers to Proclus (*Isis,* 1:212).

66. In Taylor's translation, Proclus also refers to "seven local movements": the circle; up; down; left; right; forward and behind (Proclus, *On the Timaeus*, 461). This maybe gives another hint to how Blavatsky viewed the geometrical creation of the physical world symbolically depicted as a cube in a circle (see Fitger, "'The Circle Squaring Itself'.").

> All the genera, therefore, are seven, and the monad is exempt from the hexad. And the monad, indeed, is analogous to the one intellect which connects all the fabrication of generated natures; but the hexad is analogous to the more partial orders under this intellect (Taylor, 1816: 129).[67]

The link between the tetraktys and the seven-fold constitution of man existed as a continuous discourse in *Isis*, albeit not in its later completed and systemized form.[68] In an article written in *La Revue Spirite* (January 1879), Blavatsky defends her depiction of the human constitution as "a quaternity" and "a tetractys."[69] Even though I have not systematically examined the bibliography in *Isis*, I have come across the *tetraktys* and/or the conception of the micro- and macrocosmic "3 + 4 = 7" in all of Blavatsky's references listed below.[70]

Proclus, *On the Timaeus* (translated by Taylor)
Theon of Smyrna, *Mathematica* (Taylor)
Paracelsus' alchemical works[71]
Johannes Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico* (1480)
Jacob Böhme, *De signatura rerum* (1621)[72]
Athanasius Kircher, *Magnes; sive de arte magnetica opus tripartitum* (1641)
Robert Fludd, *Mosaicall Philosophy: Grounded upon the Essentiall Truth or Eternal Sapience* (1659)
Ralph Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678)
Thomas Taylor, *Theoretic Arithmetic* (1816)
Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis* (1836)
Dionysius Lardner, *Popular Lectures on Science and Art* (1850)
Eliphas Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel de la haute Magie*, (1854, 1856)
Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah Its Doctrine, Development and Literature* (1865)

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67. See also Proclus, *Proclus, On the Timaeu*s, 390.

68. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine,* 2:598 f.

69. "May we be allowed a comparison … between what our critic calls 'the triple hypostasis' and we 'the tetraktys'? Let us compare this philosophic quaternary, composed of the body, the périsprit, the soul and the spirit — to the ether — so well foreseen by science, but never defined — and its subsequent correlations. The ether will represent the spirit for us; the dead vapor that is formed therein — the soul." Blavatsky, "Erroneous Ideas," 14–15.

70. See Rudbøg's compilation of the bibliography of *Isis.*

71. Blavatsky cites several works by Paracelsus, but she may also have retrieved the quotes from Lévi's writings.

72. According to Böhme, God also revealed the world through a series of seven "Quellgeister."

Hargrave Jennings, *The Rosicrucians, Their Rites and Mysteries* (1870)
John Yarker, *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity* (1872)[73]
George Oliver, *The Golden Remains of the Early Masonic Writers* (vol. I, 1847) and probably also *The Pythagorean Triangle* (1875)
Charles W. King, *The Gnostics and their Remains* (1864)
Ralston Skinner, *Key to the Hebrew-Egyptian Mystery in the Source of Measures* (1875)

In *The Secret Doctrine* (and other later texts), Blavatsky refers to the Belgian Freemason Jean Baptist Marie Ragon (1781–1862) as one who had come close to understanding the universal mystery language,[74] and Ragon's interpretations of Pythagoras have many striking similarities with hers.[75]

Kabbalah and "the *tetractys* of Adam"

> Reject the Talmud and its old predecessor the Kabala, and it will be simply impossible ever to render correctly one word of that Bible.[76]

Pantheistic, Neoplatonic, and Gnostic emanation doctrines were popular among 19th century writers, but there was also a profound interest in Kabbalah[77] — often seen as the key to the esoteric truth in the Bible. Blavatsky, for instance, proclaimed that the doctrine of the divine light, called *Ain Soph,* was found in the biblical Books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Enoch, as well as in "John's Revelation," which according to her were wholly Kabbalistic and Hellenistic in their nature. She narrated how the Jewish Kabbalah had evolved from the "original Oriental Kabbalah" in which Moses was initiated in Egypt. Moses, however, to some extent distorted the original Kabbalistic doctrine.[78]

73. It is quite probable that she also knew of Yarker's *The Quadrature of the Circle* (1851).
74. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 1:311.
75. Ragon, *Le cours philosophique*, 230–35.
76. Blavatsky, *Isis*, 2:450.
77. Chajes, *Recycled Lives*, 109.
78. It is possible that Blavatsky was given this idea of separating "Oriental Cabala" from "Jewish Kabbalah" by her friend Emma Hardinge Britten's writings *Ghost Land* or *Art Magic* (1876) (Chajes "Metempsychosis," 215).

In Europe, Blavatsky believed that the Rosicrucians were the ones who had preserved the most genuine Kabbalah.[79]

Blavatsky also depended heavily on Eliphas Lévi in *Isis*. For Lévi, arithmology and Kabbalah were keys to the mysteries. "The *heptad*," the *tetraktys*, "the pyramid," and "the *tetrad*," were also reoccurring concepts in both of their writings.[80] According to Hanegraaff, Lévi valued Kabbalah so highly because he perceived it as "universal," making it possible to use it as a key for unlocking the secrets of all religions and philosophies.[81] Levi's "astral light" and the notion that "the astral body" dissolves after death were essential ideas for Blavatsky. Likewise, she was probably influenced by Lévi's idea that spiritualistic phenomena were caused by elemental spirits.[82]

According to Chajes, Blavatsky was familiar with many Kabbalistic texts and commentators, including *Zohar* and Isaac Luria's writings, although she interpreted them in the light of contemporary academic authors such as Adolphe Franck, as well as non-academics such as Lévi and Hargrave Jennings.[83] She frequently refers to *Kabbala Denudata* (1677–1684)—a collection of Latin translations of various parts of *Zohar* as well as other Kabbalistic writings – compiled by the German Christian Knorr von Rosenroth.[84] Chajes, however, convincingly shows that Knorr von Rosenroth was not Blavatsky's primary source and that her quotes were picked from an appendix titled "Kabbalah" in Samuel Fales Dunlap's book

79. Blavatsky's Kabbalah differed in part between her various writings. Marco Pasi has made an important analysis of Blavatsky's view on Kabbalah in relation to the ideas of her contemporaries (see Pasi, "Oriental Kabbalah").

80. Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel,* 723, 1256, 2489. " … Logos, according to Lévi, manifests itself on the highest level of creation as a symbolism of numbers; and their meanings and dynamics can serve as a universal hermeneutical key at all ontologically lower levels of reality" (Hanegraaff, "The Beginnings of Occult Kabbalah," 121).

81. Hanegraaff, "The Beginnings of Occult Kabbalah," 120–21.

82. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 288. Blavatsky also refers to the same series of "enlightened masters" as Lévi.

83. Chajes, "Construction Through," 34–35.

84. Hanegraaff notes that Kilcher has displayed how Lévi laid the foundations for the great influence of the work *Kabbala Denudata* in the Theosophical Society, as well as in esoteric Freemasonry, and the Golden Dawn. See Hanegraaff's "The Beginnings of Occult Kabbalah," 124–25.

Sod: The Son of the Man (1861).[85] Blavatsky also refers to "the most ancient Hebrew document on occult learning" — the *Siphra Dzeniouta*,[86] and according to Chajes she probably first heard of it through Lévi.[87]

Blavatsky's early interpretation of Kabbalah was also closely related to her doctrine of metempsychosis. Highlighting the importance of the number seven, she distinguished the three higher from the seven lower levels of emanation of the Divine Light (*Ain Soph*).[88] Christian Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah, its Doctrine, Development and Literature* (1865) may have influenced her on this point. King described how the three first *sephiroth* in the "Tree of life" form a triad which then spreads out into the seven lower *sephiroth*, which form "the Primordial or Archetypical Man" (but several other authors also make the same division into three higher and seven lower *sephiroth*).[89]

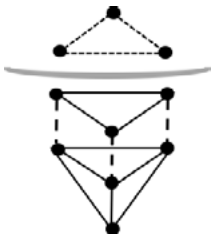


Figure 3. Illustration by Fitger.

One of the general themes in the second volume of *Isis* is that of "the fall" as depicted in *Genesis*. The fall should not, according to Blavatsky, be interpreted as an original sin, but rather as an allegory for the creation of the cosmos. The emanations of divine light depicted in *Isis* illustrate the same principle she later (in *The Secret Doctrine*) calls "involution." After physical death, the human spirit returns through the same seven "planes of light" — but now in the opposite,

85. Chajes, "Construction Through," 47, 55–56.
86. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 1:1.
87. See Lévi, *Fables et symboles avec leur explication*, ii.
88. Chajes, "Construction Through," 42.
89. E.g., Ginsburg, Yarker and Jennings.

ascending direction. On the macrocosmic scale, the latter process is what she calls spiritual "evolution." In Blavatsky's depiction of the fall, "the first Adam" is a pure and entirely spiritual being but the Adam of Genesis's second chapter is unsatisfied with the position given to him by the Demiurge (which is the same as "the first Adam" or "Adam Kadmon"). This "second Adam" or "Man of dust" strives in his pride to become a creator himself. As a result, the light from the highest divine triad is projected down into a fourth *sephira*, associated with the mythological figure "Sophia."[90] According to Blavatsky, "Adam Kadmon is the type of humanity as a collective totality within the unity of the creative God and the universal spirit."[91] So, the first triad develops into a quaternary — again reflecting her interpretation of the *tetraktys*.[92]

The Gnostic-Kabbalistic speculations in *Isis* also heavily depended on King's work *The Gnostics and their Remains* (1864). According to Coleman, Blavatsky plagiarized King as many as forty-two times in *Isis,*[93] and they both linked "the seven planetary spheres" to the allegory of "the fall." Further, King speculated on mystic and geometric interpretations of Gnostic findings.[94] Another parallel is his depiction of "the ineffable name of the Creator"[95] as well as Buddhism being the "ancient roots" of Kabbalah.[96] However, Blavatsky's "Gnostic-Kabbalistic cosmogony" was also inspired by Proclus and by Plato's *Timaeus* (which she repeatedly refers to in *Isis*). Proclus's commentary on *Timaeus* describes how the soul is constructed according to mathematical proportions through which it can shape the body as an image of the arithmetic and geometric ideas immanent in the world of ideas.

90. Blavatsky, *Isis*, 1:303; 2:ch. 4–6.

91. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:207.

92. "Strictly speaking, there is a TETRAKTIS or quaternary, consisting of the Unintelligible First monad, and its triple emanation, which properly constitutes our Trinity." (Blavatsky, *Isis* , 2:36).

93. Coleman's appendix in Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess*, 357; King, *The Gnostics and their Remains*, 31.

94. King, *The Gnostics*, 103–4.

95. King, *The Gnostics,* 103–4.

96. Chajes & Huss, "Introduction," 12.

Masonic symbolism in Blavatsky's works

> Well acquainted as may be a scholar with the hieratic writing and hieroglyphical system of the Egyptians, he must first learn to shift their records. He has to assure himself, compasses and rule in hand, that the picture-writing he is examining fits, to a line, certain fixed geometrical figures which are the hidden keys to such records, before he ventures on an interpretation.[97]

The initiative to found the Theosophical Society was taken after a lecture in Blavatsky's New York apartment (September 7, 1875), demonstrating the existence of a "secret geometrical key." The lecture was given by a George Henry Felt — engineer and elected member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science with patents on several technical inventions.[98] Felt, who was referred to as "a Freemason" in the press, was headlining "The Lost Canon of Proportion of the Egyptians."[99] Unfortunately, Felt's paper was lost in a fire, and we are left to interpret the audience's and journalists' comments about it.[100] According to them, however, Felt claimed to have found a mathematical and geometrical figure which served as a key to the underlying geometry of nature. He had presented his discovery on numerous occasions during the previous years, and it seems to have attracted relatively broad and partly positive interest among the audience. The "key" was also said to explain "the ancient science used to build the pyramids" — a secret knowledge that, according to Felt, had been passed from Egypt to Greece. Likewise, Solomon's temple was said to be built in accordance with it.[101] Felt called it the "Star of Perfection" and for his lecture he had brought a variety of photos and illustrations that were supposed to support his finding. How can we know what Felt's "Star of Perfection" looked like? We have at least two different sources that probably give us a relatively accurate picture. Figure 5, below, derives from a poster advertising Felt's lecture,[102]

97. Blavatsky, *Isis*, 1:155–56.
98. Demarest, "The Felt Working Group," 5–7, 19.
99. Santucci, "George Henry Felt," 254.
100. Santucci, "George Henry Felt"; Demarest, "The Felt Working Group."
101. Demarest, "The Felt Working Group," 56.
102. Santucci, "George Henry Felt," 251.

and figure 6 is a copy from one of the plates of his work, made by Claugde Bragdon and/or Viola de Grunchy before it perished.[103]

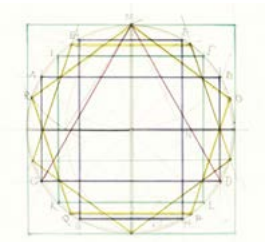


Figure 4. *Left*, the "Star of Perfection" from a poster advertising Felt's lecture.
Figure 5. *Right*, the "Star of Perfection" made by Claude Bragdon and/or Viola de Grunchy.

The same year as Felt presented the "Star of Perfection" at Blavatsky's apartment, the *Liberal Christian* (1875) wrote a review of one of Felt's lectures, asking if this was "anything more than a CAREFUL STUDY OF THE UNIVERSE'S LAWS and their marvelous harmony, whereby her mysteries can be unlocked, and the veil of Isis lifted?"[104] These words might as well have been Blavatsky's own. In 1875, she already spoke of Kabbalah as a far more advanced science than the sciences of her time. The hidden truth in the Kabbalah was concealed in "the secret teachings of the Orient." According to Felt, however, the Star of Perfection was not only the key to the ancient mysteries and the fundamental geometry of nature—with its help he also claimed to have succeeded in summoning elemental spirits. He confidently offered to demonstrate this and as a response Olcott suggested founding a society with the aim of practically exploring Felt's discoveries.[105] Felt collected money to prepare his research but disappeared before he had succeeded in showing any elementals.[106]

103. Demarest, "Back from Jerusalem," 8.

104. *The Liberal Christian*, 1875, described it as follows: "It consists of a circle with a square within and without, containing a common triangle, two Egyptian triangles, and a pentagon" (cited by Demarest, "The Felt Working Group," 12).

105. Olcott seems to have been most eager to investigate the elementary spirits. It may be that Blavatsky and other early members were more interested in the geometrical key, though.

106. Santucci, "George Henry Felt," 246.

Although Felt clearly blew the trumpet-horn, proclaiming that *he* was the one to have found "the Talmudic key," he was far from alone in these speculations. As we will see, ideas about similar keys were popular at the time – for example in the writings of John Yarker (another Freemason and acquaintance of Blavatsky).[107] We can compare the illustrations of Felt's "Star of Perfection" with some of Blavatsky's hints to a numerical and geometric key in *Isis* (above). Besides the symbolic figure shown below, she wrote: "'Attach thyself,' says the alchemist, 'to the four letters of the tetragram disposed in the following manner'," and to the left of the text is a curious figure made of the following three symbols.

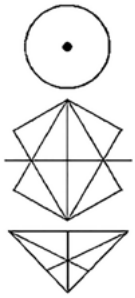


Figure 6. Blavatsky, *Isis*, vol. 1, 506.

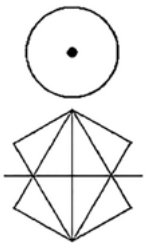
The text continues: "The letters of the ineffable name are there, although you may not discern them at first. The incommunicable axiom is cabalistically contained therein, and this is what is called the *magic arcanum* by the masters." "The ineffable name" is a masonic concept repeatedly referred to in *Isis*. It is a concept based on the Kabbalistic idea that the ultimate reality, or God, is symbolized by a lost name.[108] Blavatsky also makes a cryptic comparison with the element hydrogen, depicting its molecular structure,[109] and implies

107. Yarker, *Notes on the Scientific*; Blavatsky, *Isis*, 2:317, 374–77, 394.

108. Algeo, *Blavatsky, Freemasonry*, 34.

109. This is a typical example of what Rudbøg has identified as one of the most prominent of Blavatsky's discourses – that "the ancient masters" possessed a far more profound knowledge than her contemporary scientists (Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 136–204).

that her contemporary chemists did not understand the deep numerical and geometric principles inherent in nature.[110] The circle part with with a central point (depicted by, for example, Yarker) is common in esoteric contexts, often symbolizing the sun. But what about the other two symbols? Did they come floating to Blavatsky in "etheric mental pictures" or did she copy them from someone else? I believe that both answers could be true. Possibly, she creatively combined things that she had heard, seen, or read and visualized all of it in symbols animated by her imagination. If we search the figure from Felt's poster (figure 4) for Blavatsky's symbols in *Isis*, we can find at least two of them (figure 7) — as shown in figure 8 below.[111]



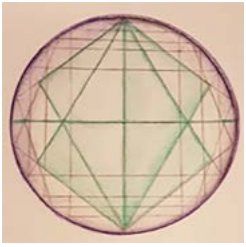


Figure 7. *Left*, two symbols from Blavatsky's *Isis*.
Figure 8. *Right*, illustration by Fitger of Felt's star with Blavatsky's symbols inside.

Felt's "Star of Perfection" is based on very basic geometric symbols that reoccur here and there in the literature that Blavatsky read and in the esoteric circles in which she moved. This makes it difficult to know if Felt was the one who inspired Blavatsky's "key" as given in *Isis*. It is, however, quite evident that numerical

110. "What is this mysterious athanor? Can the physicist tell us — he who sees and examines it daily? Aye, he sees; but does he comprehend the secret-ciphered characters traced by the divine finger on every sea-shell in the ocean's deep; on every leaf that trembles in the breeze; in the bright star, whose stellar lines are in his sight but so many more or less luminous lines of hydrogen?" (Blavatsky, *Isis*, 1:506).
111. Figure 7 depicts two of the three symbols presented as a "secret key" in *Isis*. Figure 8 is an illustration (by Fitger) of Felt's star with Blavatsky's symbols inside.

and geometric speculation had a very central impact on how Blavatsky chose to structure her teaching.[112]

Blavatsky mentions the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite[113] and the concept of "Kadosh"[114] a couple of times in *Isis* (also giving "the Cipher of the Knights Kadosh").[115] This Rite was also known as "Rite of Perfection" and in its 30–33rd degrees templar elements related to the concept of "Kadosh" are presented and developed.[116] A search for "tetractis" in masonic journals from the 1860s and the 1870s shows that this was a relatively frequently discussed concept.[117]

The illustration below ("Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret"[118]) is depicted in Albert Pike's *Morals and Dogma* (1871). Pike was a leading figure of nineteenth-century American Freemasonry.[119] It is also known as "the cosmic egg of Rebis," found in 17th-century alchemical writings (for instance in one of Blavatsky's favorites — Basil of Valentin's work).[120] The reader should pay attention to the similarity between Felt's "Star of Perfection" and the globe with a square and a triangle in the illustration. The concept of Pythagoras' *tetraktys* is very central in the Scottish Rite, it seems.[121] Pike wrote of the human principles as

112. "Any Kabalist well acquainted with the Pythagorean system of numerals and geometry can demonstrate that the metaphysical views of Plato were based upon the strictest mathematical principles. 'True mathematics,' says the Magicon, 'is something with which all higher sciences are connected; common mathematics is but a deceitful phantasmagoria, whose much-praised infallibility only arises from this–that materials, conditions, and references are made its foundation.'" (Blavatsky, *Isis*, 1:6.). For an interpretation of Blavatsky's geometrical conceptions in *Isis*, see Fitger, "'The Circle Squaring Itself'."

113. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:ii, 381, 390.

114. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:384, 388.

115. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:395.

116. Mollier, "Freemasonry," 90.

117. The Library and Museum of Freemasonry, "Masonic periodicals."

118. Of the grade 32.

119. Pike, *Morals*, 839.

120. Gilbert, "Freemasonry," 531–32.

121. "The number 4 occupies an arithmetical middle-ground between the unit and 7. . . . Thus, it is that Unity, complete in the fecundity of the Ternary, forms, with it, the Quaternary, which is the key of all numbers, movements, and forms. . . . Seven is the sacred number in all theogonies and all symbols, because it is composed of 3 and 4," Pike, *Morals,* 635, 771–72.

Figure 9. "Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret."

seven and that Pythagoras had taught that that each soul was a vehicle.[122] He depicts Adam as "the human Tetragram" reflecting "the Divine Tetragram" in the exact same manner as Blavatsky.[123] Interestingly, Blavatsky also uses many expressions present in Pike's work, such as describing man as "a microcosmos, or little world"[124] or discussing "the matrix of the world."[125] Due to her grandfather's involvement, Blavatsky seems to have romanticized Rosicrucian Freemasonry since childhood,[126] but her relationship with Freemasonry was also split. On the one hand, she had several close masonic friends including her companion Olcott,[127] who probably was closer to her than anyone else.[128] Her early friend Albert Rawson was a Rosicrucian and highly initiated Freemason with a specific interest in "secret Oriental brotherhoods,"[129] as was Charles Sotheran, who helped Blavatsky with *Isis*. Like Blavatsky, Sotheran and Rawson were also both engaged in socialist circles.[130]

122. Pike, *Morals*, 667–70
123. Pike, *Morals*, 771; Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:276.
124. Blavatsky, *Isis*, 1:323, 502; 2:276; Pike, *Morals,* 667, 841.
125. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 1:147, 157, 212, 285; Pike, *Morals,* 668, 770.
126. Johnson, *The Masters Revealed,* 21–22.
127. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment,* 281; Algeo, *Blavatsky, Freemasonry*, 16.
128. Algeo, *Blavatsky*, *Freemasonry*, 42.
129. Goodrick-Clarke, "Western Esoteric Traditions," 279.
130. Godwin "Blavatsky and the First Generation," 19.

Sotheran who may have been the one who gave Blavatsky the idea of calling her teaching "Theosophy,"[131] was initiated by Yarker in the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis, the Scottish Rite, and the Rite of Mizraim. He was also the one who brought Blavatsky into contact with both Yarker and Kenneth Mackenzie.[132] Sotheran gave Blavatsky Yarker's *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity* (1872) when she was still working on *Isis*[133] and it seems to have become very influential to her writing. He was impressed by Blavatsky's draft, and he suggested to Yarker that the Freemasons should recognize Blavatsky for "her great work and her Esoteric knowledge." Yarker soon sent a certificate to Blavatsky for membership in the female branch of an Indian system called "Sat Bhai."[134] Not long afterward, Yarker also acknowledged Blavatsky by giving her the highest degree of "Adopted Masonry" in the Rites of Memphis and the Rites of Mizraim — the "Crowned Princess."[135]

Yarker, who was an active figure in "alternative masonry" during the 1870s and 1880s, had imported the Rite of Memphis from the United States to England in 1872.[136] He also tried to launch Sat Bhai in England, translating its name as "seven brothers, or seven birds of a species, which always fly by sevens." In *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity*, he repeatedly refers to "a ladder" with seven steps, which was said to symbolize emanation (descending) and initiation (ascending).[137] He wrote about "the two intertwined triangles" (the hexagram) linked to the Order of the Temple, referring to this symbol being used by the Indian Brahmans (a similar interpretation as Blavatsky's).[138] Knowledge of the Hindus' written language should have been something that

131. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 283–284; Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 422.
132. Goodrick-Clarke, "Western Esoteric Traditions," 280.
133. Blavatsky mentions Yarker's book on several occasions in *Isis,* 2:316–17, 374, 376–77, 394.
134. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, 1:311.
135. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:377.
136. Goodrick-Clarke, "Western Esoteric Traditions," 279.
137. Yarker, *Notes on*, 126–27.
138. Yarker, *Notes on*, 50.

interested Blavatsky at this time (before encountering Subba Row and other learned Indians). The idea of secret masters was also a part of Sat Bhai's mythology, since the founder, Archer, kept his alleged Indian guru's identity secret.[139] It seems reasonable to assume that Blavatsky's many personal contacts with masons, and the fact that her closest spiritual companion Olcott was highly initiated, added something to her knowledge of masonic symbolism acquired through literature.[140] She was keen to emphasize the authority, degrees, and knowledge of her Freemason friends and they emphasized her insights as well. Olcott and Blavatsky even had far-reaching plans to turn their Society into a masonic lodge with rituals and degrees.[141]

On the other hand, Blavatsky was a woman and thus she could never get an active role in Freemasonry that corresponded to the influence her male friends had. How involved she was is difficult to know, but it is hard to believe that she was given a role that matched her expectations and the knowledge she thought she possessed. Her and Yarker's respective recognition of each other was probably primarily an exchange that both had something to gain from. It is clear in *Isis* that Blavatsky wanted to show that she had special knowledge about Freemasonry. At the same time, she stated that Masonic Orders in Europe or the United States (apart from "a few consecrated brethren") had nothing worth keeping secret. She eloquently summarizes her view: "Like Christianity, Freemasonry is a corpse from which the spirit long ago flowed."[142]

Blavatsky notes that masonic symbolism is concerned with building Solomon's temple[143] and in the East this knowledge is called "seven-storied" or "nine-storied"; that Jesus was a Pythagorean and had both an "Exoteric" and an "Esoteric" doctrine (of which the latter had been transmitted to the Gnostics);

139. Goodrick-Clarke, "Western Esoteric Traditions," 279–80.
140. Algeo, *Blavatsky, Freemasonry*, 23.
141. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves,* 1:46; Goodrick-Clarke, "Western Esoteric Traditions," 280.
142. Blavatsky, *Isis*, 2:371–72, 388; Blavatsky, *Collected Writings,* 1:311ff.
143. Goodrick-Clarke, "Western Esoteric Traditions," 282.

and that Freemasons have carried on a knowledge that originally came from the Indian tradition. "The ineffable name" had existed in Egypt and was known by the Brahmins. She also mentions that the societies which she was involved with were Eastern, and thus she was under no oath to keep any secrets.[144]

It is clear that many of Blavatsky's ideas about "Rosicrucian Kabbalah" came from the writings of masons like Hargrave Jennings and John Yarker who wanted to establish a connection between modern Freemasonry and the Gnostic mysteries.[145] Regarding Blavatsky's beloved Pythagoras, Yarker wrote "so closely does his system resemble modern Freemasonry, that various documents and rites have assumed the absolute identity of the two."[146]

Hexagrams and the squaring of the circle

As is evident from the similarities in both their symbolism and way of reasoning, Blavatsky picked up much from Lévi. Referring to Agrippa, Lévi had drawn correspondences between the human body and the pentagram (five-pointed star) linking the seven planets to different parts of the body. The six-pointed star (Seal of Solomon or "the Grand Pentacle") was depicted by Lévi as "the most simple and complete abridgment of the science of all things." While the pentagram was said to symbolize the microcosm or the human body, the six-pointed star stood for the macrocosm.[147]

Blavatsky also speculated on the Seal of Solomon, concluding that it originally came from India (see figure 9).[148] Blavatsky's monogram (figure 10)[149] and the Theosophical Society's seal (figure 11) are here compared with two versions of

144. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:145–47, 355, 384, 402.
145. Chajes and Huss, "Introduction," 11.
146. Yarker, *Notes on*, 23.
147. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic,* 1213, 3951–53, 4485.
148. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 1:136.
149. Hesselink, "Early History."

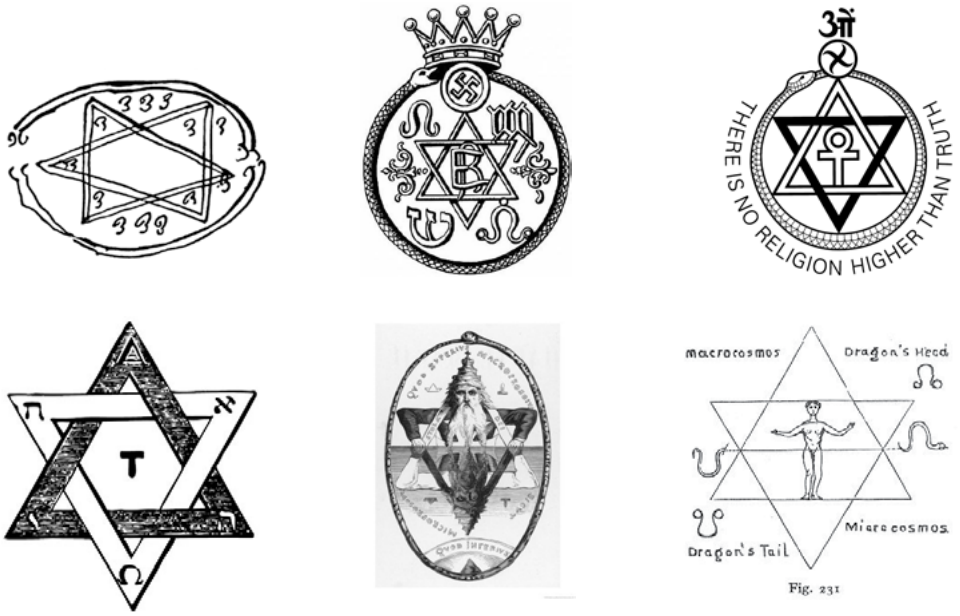


Figure 9. *Top left*, the Seal of Solomon.
Figure 10. *Top middle*, Blavatsky's monogram.
Figure 11. *Top right*, the seal of the Theosophical Society.
Figure 12. *Bottom left*, The Triangle of Solomon.
Figure 13. *Bottom middle*, The Great Symbol of Solomon.
Figure 14. *Bottom right*, Man, the Microcosm of the Universe.

Solomon's Seal as depicted by Lévi (figure 12, 13).[150] The similarity is evident. Several other authors in Blavatsky's bibliography shared similar representations (for example Jennings' *The Rosicrucians* — a work that she both referred to and plagiarized repeatedly).[151] The symbolism of the hexagram has a connection to the development of Blavatsky's seven-fold doctrine of subtle anatomy. Her article "The Six-Pointed and Five-Pointed Stars" explained it as consisting of *seven fields* (the six points plus one in the center) and thereby illustrating "the sev-

150. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 466, 1140.
151. Jennings, *The Rosicrucians*, figure on the cover sheet, and between pages 344-45.

en principles in man."[152] In another of her articles ("The Number Seven," June 1880) published about a year after her move to India, but before the seven-fold constitution had been established, she writes, "The ancients divided the human frame into seven parts; the head, chest, stomach, two hands and two feet; and man's life was divided into seven periods."[153]

Speculations (like Proclus') about the soul being constructed according to mathematical proportions have been relatively common in Western esotericism.[154] In connection with these ideas the nineteenth-century Neoplatonists, alchemists and occultists sought to solve the classic problem of squaring the circle. This is one of the classic design problems in geometry known since antiquity. Lévi,[155] Yarker, the mathematician John Parker, and Ralston Skinner are some of the authors which Blavatsky read early on who also discuss the square of the circle.

The mathematical problem involves constructing a square with the same area as a given circle. The problem was proven insoluble in 1882 when Ferdinand von Lindemann showed that p (pi) is a transcendent number and thus not constructible — which means that it is impossible to find the square of the circle. There are, however, a variety of methods that almost square the circle. Parker's *The Quadrature of a Circle* (1851) is an example of such an attempt — but the method was not accepted by academic mathematics. Skinner's *Key to the Hebrew-Egyptian Mystery in the Source of Measure* (1875) is a commentary on Parker's discovery. Blavatsky exchanged letters with Skinner[156] and refers to *Source of Measure* as well as other texts by Skinner. Later, in *The Secret Doctrine*, she mentions Skinner more than any other author except for Plato.[157]

152. Blavatsky, "Our Answer," 321.
153. Blavatsky, "The Number Seven," 237.
154. Brach, "Mathematical Esotericism"
155. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 104–7.
156. Santucci, "Theosophical History."
157. Rudbøg, "H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy," 224.

The philosophical importance that Theosophists have attached to the problem of squaring the circle is most likely about the symbolic significance of uniting the unlimited Divinity symbolized by the circle with the limited and ordered cosmos symbolized by the square. Blavatsky writes about the square of the circle a couple of times in *Isis*, stating that although it is not found on the physical plane this does not mean that it does not exist on a metaphysical plane.[158] The writings of the prolific Mason George Oliver played a pivotal role for Blavatsky.[159] His book *The Pythagorean Triangle: Or, The Science of Numbers* (1875), which she also plagiarized, specifically dealt with the *tetraktys* as well as "the remarkable properties of the heptad."[160]

Oliver's division in *The Pythagorean Triangle*[161]	Blavatsky's division in *The Secret Doctrine*[162]
1. The divine golden man	7. atna
2. The inward holy body from fire and light, like pure silver	6. buddhi
3. The elemental man	5. manas
4. The mercurial growing paradisical man	4. kama-rupa
5. The martial soul-like man	3. linga-sarira
6. The venerine, according to the outward desire	2. prana/jiva
7. The solar man, an inspector of the wonders of God	1. stula-sarira

It may seem strange to point to Oliver as a source for Blavatsky's seven-fold division, since in 1888 Blavatsky had some knowledge of different Indian teachings on the subject. However, it is quite possible that she knew of Oliver's division long before 1888. She used Oliver's *The Golden Remains* (1847) when

158. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 1:407.

159. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:389; Oliver, *The Freemasons Treasury*, 276; Oliver, *The Origin of the Royal Arch*, 143; Oliver, *The Pythagorean Triangle*, 170.

160. Blavatsky repeats Oliver's sentence in *Pythagorean Triangle* (p. 104) verbatim both in *The Secret Doctrine*, 2:599 and in "The Transactions," 355–56.

161. Oliver, *The Pythagorean Triangle*, 179–80.

162. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, xxv. Blavatsky seems to have changed stances on Oliver's third and fourth principles.

writing *Isis* and there is also a reference to "Rev. Dr. Oliver" in *Isis*.[163] According to Rudbøg the primary source of Blavatsky's information on masonic symbolism at that time was Mackenzie's *Royal Masonic Cyclopedia* (1877).[164] Under the entry "Tetractys" in this encyclopedia only one work is referred to, namely, Oliver's "The Pythagorean Triangle." Oliver's work should therefore have been read and known in contemporary masonic circles. Considering all this – together with Blavatsky's highlighting of the *tetraktys* in *Isis* – it is hard to imagine that she did not know about Oliver's division already in 1877. Her speculations about the *tetrad*, the *tetraktys* and number *seven* (found in *Isis*) are also very similar to Oliver's. Dewald Bester's dissertation, "H. P. Blavatsky, Theosophy, and Nineteenth-Century Comparative Religion" (2017), is the only work that I have come across yet which analyzes Oliver's influence on Blavatsky. He argues that Oliver probably inspired Blavatsky's seven-fold division of man, but according to him the similarities between the two end there.[165] Bester's conclusion that she already had a kind of "draft structure" and was searching for the appropriate terms to fit into her model of man seems perfectly reasonable. It is even probable that she visualized the principles in symbolic-pictorial form (for example as geometric figures) before a terminology was connected to these representations.

Conclusions

Blavatsky believed that the Wisdom-Religion originated in the East. The fact that she called it a "Pythagorean teaching" did not contradict this statement, since Pythagoras' knowledge was supposed to have derived from the Vedic teaching. What this article has tried to show, however, is that although Blavatsky's encounter with India influenced her in many ways, there is reason to assume that her choice of the number seven as the numerological basis of micro- and

163. Blavatsky, *Isis,* 2:358.
164. Mackenzie, *Royal Masonic*, 729.
165. Bester, "H. P. Blavatsky, Theosophy," 169.

macrocosm was made earlier on. In fact, it was an entirely natural choice for her given both her Orthodox Christian upbringing, her many Freemason friends, and the late 19th century mythographical discourse in general.

Both masons and mythographers shared the belief in a *philosophia perennis* where geometry and number mysticism were interwoven to describe a cosmogony. In Blavatsky's response to Row's criticism of her seven-fold division, she argues that it is seen "everywhere in nature" (as in the color spectrum of light or in the musical tone scale). She refers to the *tetraktys,* the pyramid, the *tetrad,* and the *sephiroth* (divided as 3 + 7) and manages to connect this to the quadrature of the circle, as well as to Skinner's and Yarker's theories. She also claims that her seven-fold doctrine is hinted at in a number of Indian sources.[166] When Blavatsky, in 1888, mapped Sanskrit concepts onto a Western esoteric-arithmological structure, she was not unaware of how these terms were being used in the yoga literature. The point is that she chose to map them in accordance with an extant genre convention of the "sacred seven."

The dispute between Blavatsky and Row all came down to the fact that while Row was defending a true depiction of Brahmanism, Blavatsky was a perennialist at heart and had no interest in seeing differences between traditions. The differences in divisions really did not matter that much to her since she meant that esoteric truth could be expressed in many ways, at many different levels of knowledge. There is no real contradiction, either between hers and Row's views or between her three-fold and her seven-fold doctrine, she argues (the latter was just a more thorough description). Western conceptions of subtle anatomy were further influenced by Besant and Leadbeater, followed by Woodroffe's works.[167]

166. Such as Atharvaveda, the Law of Manu, Nyaya Sutras, the Upanishads, Sankhya-Karika, and Atma Bodha by Sankarachary (Blavatsky, "Classifications of Principles," 91, 282–83.)

167. It is very likely that the seven-fold standardization of the chakra-system that has become so prevalent in Modern Yoga dates back to Pūrānanda Yatis's text *Satchakra-nirūpana* (a chapter derived from a Tantric text from 1577) which became known to the West through Woodroffe's translation in 1918. B. Majumdar mentioned this text in *The Theosophist* in 1880. He also translated texts for Woodroffe later on. Taylor, *Sir John Whoodroff,* 134; Baier, "Theosophical Orientalism," 313.

During the 20th century, and especially its latter half, there has been a great influence by Indian gurus and teachings in the West. As surprising as it may seem, the Theosophical doctrine of *seven chakras* corresponding to the *seven colors* of the rainbow, is still the dominating schema of subtle anatomy in the West.[168]

Much more could be said concerning Blavatsky's early influences. The focus here has mainly been nineteenth-century mythographers and masonic symbolism, but there were many other sources that probably also contributed to her choice of a seven-fold cosmology, one being the Spiritualist influence, where an important figure was Andrew Jackson Davis,[169] another being late nineteenth -century science.[170] She also compared the alchemical uniting of the *tri prima* (mercury representing "the mind"; salt representing "primeval matter" or "the body"; sulfur representing "the spirit") and the four elements to her theories regarding the *tetraktys*.

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168. Fitger, dissertation, forthcoming.

169. See for example Jeffrey D. Lavoie's *The Theosophical Society: The History of a Spiritualist Movement*, 2012.

170. See Asprem's "The Problems of a Gnostic Science" and "Theosophical attitudes."

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Anthony d'Andrea. *Reflexive Religion: The New Age in Brazil and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. vii + 175 pp. ISBN: 978-90-04-37819-3. €119.00 / $143.00

The most recent volume in Brill's *Religion in the Americas* series continues to mark out a space for presenting the latest research in the study of Latin American religions. The series takes the pluralization of the Americas seriously, expanding far beyond the USA. This volume continues that important concern, providing a thorough account of New Age religion in Brazil. It is a useful companion to *New Age in Latin America* from the same series, as it focuses solely on Brazil and also includes gestures towards the globalization of New Age at sites like Machu Picchu and Goa.

Speaking to the literature and theoretical traditions of the sociology of religion, Anthony d'Andrea constructs his account of New Age in Brazil around Anthony Giddens's concept of reflexivity. A fundamental component of modern societies, reflexivity refers to the routine incorporation and subsequent reconstitution of new information. Combined with the concept of invisible religion from Thomas Luckmann, and Robert Bellah's concern for increasing individualization, d'Andrea addresses the well-known and much discussed sociological theory of secularization. His argument revolves around the assertion that the core of New Age is the perfectible self through which reflexive religious individualism accrues meaning (21).

Reflexive Religion is an account of Latin American syncretism, with worthwhile content concerning globalization, nomadism, and tourism. There is an astute linking of New Age beliefs to Silicon Valley-style techno-utopianism. Standout chapters on psychology and popular New Age author Paolo Coelho are worth reading. There's an interesting discussion on New Age music and soundscapes which touches on a prevalent dimension of spiritual practice that rarely makes it into academic accounts. Perhaps New Age music is seen as too ephemeral by many scholars to be noteworthy, and even here it adds little to d'Andrea's core argument and is more of an aside in the introductory chapter. Generally

speaking, while the content of *Reflexive Religion* is thorough and well-researched, it does not connect in a consistent way with the core argument about reflexive religious individualism.

D'Andrea's book is clearly based on a deep and long-term association with New Age currents in Brazil and in other areas of the world. With material on Spiritism beyond Kardecism, little-studied groups such as Projectiology, and Brazilian parascience research, it makes a contribution to the growing English-language literature on New Age in Latin America. Theoretically, the orientation around the concept of the self is not new and reproduces the work of Paul Heelas without pushing the analysis any further. The conclusion that New Age appeals to middle-class secularized people who want to view themselves as "modern", "global" individuals who do not like boring old religion anymore is also commonplace in the field at this point. It adds no further clarification to the question of what the New Age "is", and does little to evaluate whether this is really the most interesting question in the field.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework is seriously lacking, undermining the value of the content. The use of terminology is consistently problematic. D'Andrea says he understands that "New Agers" do not identify as New Agers, then he says it is a heuristic and carries on using the term. If a heuristic is rejected by those it refers to, it deserves more than a sentence of acknowledgement. Ideally it should prompt a thorough re-examination of the terminology used by academics. There are further terminological lapses that accumulate gratingly on the reader. Santo Daime is called a "cult". Scientology is included in New Age. New Age is labelled as mysticism. People who engage in New Age are called "spiritualists". The effect of these lapses is to give the impression that the author is unfamiliar with the wider landscape of the study of new religious movements and spirituality.

D'Andrea also coins the neologism "new agerization" which refers to the appropriative dimension of New Age. Definitions like this are used in a consistently problematic way. Another glaring example is that d'Andrea asserts

there is an objective difference between religion and spirituality but does not substantiate this contentious claim. He also sketches a general theory of New Age based on the particular Brazilian case (20–22). While he claims this theory covers the New Age in general, no evidence beyond Brazil is presented to substantiate this claim. This conveys the idea that New Age is an easily identifiable thing to which certain practices can be unproblematically assigned. For example, assigning Scientology to New Age seems to be based on the fact that it fits his general theory and not on the extensive scholarship on Scientology undertaken for the last thirty years. Additionally, the style of the text suffers from poor editing, with numerous typographical errors. This undermines the complex use of language that often renders substantial theoretical terms unwieldy and overwhelming.

This book will be of use to those who work in the field of New Age studies and want to familiarize themselves with the content of Brazilian practices. It is likely to be more appealing to sociologists of religion than those in religious studies, simply because of the theoretical standpoints and use of literature.

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Dan Attrell and David Porreca. *Picatrix: A Medieval Treatise on Astral Magic*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. xii + 372 pp. ISBN: 978-0-271-08212-7. $39.95.

Dan Attrell and David Porreca offer an English translation of the *Picatrix*. To better appreciate my comments on the translation, it is useful for the reader to know what the *Picatrix* contains. Divided into four books preceded by a prologue, the *Picatrix* is one of the most famous texts in the history of learned magic. Commissioned by Alfonso X, king of Castile and Leon, this treatise is a 13th-century Latin rendition of the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*, a theoretical and practical compendium of astral magic written in Arabic by Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī in the 10th century.[1]

The *Picatrix* evidences a concern with legitimizing astral magic. In the prologue and Book One we are told that astral magic is not the outcome of an interaction with malevolent spirits but the result of pure devotion to God and awareness of the occult law that God created in the universe. Even though destructive purposes are often the goals of ritual operations included in the *Picatrix*, the laws that govern those operations are dependent on the spirits of heavenly bodies that act according to God's will. Knowing those principles is the ultimate goal of a righteous life. However, as explained in Chapter 1 of Book Two, to understand and perform astral magic, one should master the quadrivium (astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and music) and study metaphysics.

1. The work was first translated into Castilian, presumably by Yehuda ben Moshe, a Jewish astronomer known to have translated other astronomical texts for Alfonso X. Some time after the first translation was finished, the Castilian text was translated into Latin, presumably by Aegidius de Tebaldis of Parma. Only a few fragments of the Castilian version have survived in a 13th-century manuscript (Vat. Reg. lat. 1283[a]), which Alfonso D'Agostino edited in 1992: *Astromagia* (Napoli: Liguori, 1992). The Latin text, however, exists in many different manuscript copies spread across Europe. The Latin text differs in some respects from the *Ghāyat* due to interpolations during the process of translation and transmission.

There are three main types of ritual practices that the *Picatrix* describes. Firstly, the construction of talismans (*ymagines*). A talisman is a material object shaped according to astrological figures and made with materials that sympathize with astral bodies. It is thanks to these materials that talismans can harness the powers that come from the higher spheres. Secondly, there are rituals that involve suffumigations and long prayers to the planetary spirits to ask them to realize personal requests. Thirdly, there are rituals that aim to make the spirit descend and appear in front of the practitioner. The spirit will appear in a human shape, and the practitioner can then make his/her requests.

This review is an assessment of the overall quality of Attrell and Porreca's translation on the basis of their stated goal: to offer a translation "specifically intended for students and scholars of the history of science and magic" (2). There are other modern translations, but Attrell and Porreca are more explicit and unique in stating their goal,[2] and their statement implies the importance of having reliable translations to understand the complexity of magical literature.

The introductions of previous Italian and French translations have mainly highlighted the characteristics of the philosophical and astrological thought underlying the *Picatrix*. Generally, the *Picatrix* is based on Aristotelian thought and especially the concepts of the world of Ptolemy, the theory on the rays (*De radiis*) by al-Kindi, Empedoclean notions of attraction and repulsion, and Neoplatonic emanationist hierarchies.

Attrell and Porreca, while offering a general introduction on these themes, have focused their analyses on the practical aspects of magical operations. They

2. John Michael Greer and Christopher Warnock have translated the *Picatrix* in an edition addressing modern practitioners: *The Picatrix: Liber Rubeus Edition* (Phoenix: Adocentyn Press, 2011). The aim of the Italian translation edited by Paolo Aldo Rossi, *Picatrix. Dalla versione Latina del Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (Milano: Mimesis, 1999), and of the French one edited by Béatrice Bakhouche, Frédéric Fauquieret, and Brigitte Pérez-Jean, *Picatrix: Un traité de magie medieval* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) is comparable with Attrell and Porreca's. All of them, including the translation under consideration here, rely on the only existing Latin critical edition edited by David Pingree. Pingree's edition was published in 1986 and it relies on the majority of known manuscripts, the earliest dating from the 15th century.

supply charts categorizing the various ritual objectives found in the text. The majority of the objectives, according to Attrell and Porreca's categorization, deal with interpersonal relationships: "the large number of rituals directed at promoting – or more particularly, gaining the help or favor – of social superiors exemplify how important social hierarchy was to the author and intended readership of the *Picatrix*"(23). By contrast, the fulfillment of basic needs such as food is marginally covered in the *Picatrix*. Hence, Attrell and Porreca's analysis offers clues about the social class of the book's intended readership. The readers might have "occupied the middle rungs of the medieval academic or clerical ladder" of the Medieval Warm Period (900 C.E. to 1300 C.E) (25–26).

The index of celestial names and magical words and the index of substances and materials named in the *Picatrix* are useful tools for researchers, especially scholars dealing with the materiality of magic. The attention to material aspects is also reflected in the section about psychoactive and poisonous substances. The many endnotes, in turn, help to clarify the correct translation of substances, astrological terms, and names corrupted in the translation from Arabic.

Attrell and Porreca contend that a "word-for-word 'literal' rendering" of the *Picatrix* is almost impossible without reducing it to "'latinese' – or at worst, outright gibberish" (31). They have therefore taken liberties to "make the text appear to a twenty-first-century English reader as we believe it might have been understood by a typical European medieval or Renaissance magus" (31). They have eliminated redundancies that they claim do not provide any "additional clarity or meaning," removed the "excessive use of self-referential expressions," and "cut out extraneous adverbs and conjunctions" (31–32). I agree that a literal translation of the redundant Latin of the *Picatrix* would have made it less understandable and engaging in modern English. Indeed, the language used by the medieval translator is typical of the transformation of Latin that occurred in the 13th century: a technical Latin, simple in syntax and monotonous in style.

However, it is difficult to infer how a medieval or Renaissance magus might have understood what was written in the manuscripts. The *Picatrix* is in itself cryptic and labyrinthine and the ways we interpret small details can lead to very different translations. The case of a sentence in Book Two, Chapter 7 is an example. The Latin text reads "*Et est locus aspectus ad hoc, ut sit levitas operandi quousque ad optatum finem in opportuno tempore attingat.*"[3] Attrell and Porreca translate *aspectus* with a nominal predicate: "Location is an aspect toward the goal that the ease of the ritual endure all the way until one reaches the desired end at the opportune time" (98). However, *aspectus* can also be translated with the genitive case, changing the meaning completely: "And there is the appropriate place of the [astrological] aspect, so that there is ease in operating in order to reach, at the right time, the desired goal." My hypothesis that *aspectus* may be translated as a genitive case is reinforced by the fact that the following line suggests the same structure where the genitive case is evident:[4] "*Et locus ymaginis necnon et ipsius apparatus in aere vel in terra celandi vel manifestandi et aliis similibus*" ("and as well [there is] the place of the talisman and of the necessary things in the sky and on Earth that serves to show it or hide it, and other similar things").[5] Besides, we find that the astrological term *aspectus* is related to *locus* in some parts of the text.[6] Hence, it is even more plausible that the medieval translator is not thinking about a generic aspect but precisely that there is a proper place of the planetary aspects — an astrological one — that facilitates magical operations.

3. David Pingree, ed., *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the Ghāyat Al-Ḥakim* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1986), 58.

4. Even though they translate the second *aspectus* as a genitive, they have cut out *necnon* ("and also, and furthermore, as well"). Their translation is "The location of the image, its materials, whether it is in the air or on land, whether hidden or open, and other such factors [...] all these things are worthy of consideration" (98). Thus, ignoring *necnon* prevents us from reading the sentence as "*et est*" ("and there is") "*locus ymaginis necnon*" (the place of the talisman as well): "*et est*" is implicit and suggested by the previous sentence "*Et est locus aspectus.*"

5. Pingree, ed., *Picatrix*, 59.

6. Pingree, ed., *Picatrix*, 44-54, 217.

Attrell and Porreca do not reflect on important choices of translations like this one *vis à vis* the different translations of the previous Italian, French and German editions.[7] It would have been beneficial if they had supplied a critical glossary for clarifying choices of translation. A critical glossary would be useful for other words as well, such as *sensus*, which appears frequently in the text and which Attrell and Porreca often translate as "senses" or "sense perception" (41, 43, 63, 69).[8] However, that is not the only plausible translation in a medieval context where its meaning can also imply mind or intellect, and especially in the *Picatrix* where the relationships between sense perception, intellect, and mind are central.[9]

One choice that the translators are explicit about, is that of translating '*nigromancia*' as 'magic' throughout the text. According to them, since *nigromancia* is a corruption of the Greek term *necromanteia* ('divination through the dead') into 'dark (or black)' divination, and because "there are no forms of divinations pertaining to the dead in its pages," using the term 'necromancy' seems inappropriate (10–11). In addition, they argue that the meaning that the medieval translator had in mind for *nigromancia* does not reflect our conception of necromancy in popular culture, namely, "images of dark wizards summoning skeletons" (11). Hence, to avoid ambiguity and the transformation of the "noble and hieratic" astral magic of the *Picatrix* into a "hubristic" practice, they translate it with the more "nebulous word magic" (11). Linked to this is the fact that they contend that "those who secretly practiced *nigromancia* considered it the natural outcome, the consummation, of all medieval science, wisdom, and philosophy" (31).

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7. "*Il y a le lieu de l'aspect convenable pour faciliter l'opération de façon à ce qu'on atteigne au terme souhaité en temps opportun*," Bakhouche, et al., ed., *Picatrix*, 132; "*c'è il luogo dell'aspetto opportuno perché ci sia facilità nell'operare al fine di giungere, nel momento opportuno, allo scopo desiderato*," Rossi, ed., *Picatrix*, 88–89. The German translation of the Arabic text reads "the place of observation": "*Und zwar kommt im Frage der Ort der Observation und seine bequeme Zugänglichkeiten für den, der sie ausführt, damit er ihn zu der gewünschten Zeit erreichen kann*," Pseudo-Maǧrīṭī, *'Picatrix': Das Ziel Des Weisen von Pseudo-Maǧrīṭī*, translated and edited by Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner (London: The Warburg Institute, 1962), 105.

8. Cfr. "*intedimento*" and "*intelletto naturale*" in Rossi, ed., *Picatrix*, 31, 33, 53, 60; "*esprit*," "*intelligence*," and "*intellect*," Bakhouche, et al., ed., *Picatrix*, 47, 51, 79, 88.

9. See Chapter 1, Book 4; Pingree, ed., *Picatrix*, 174–78.

There is no doubt that the meanings of *nigromancia* in the late middle ages are many and different and that translating the term as 'necromancy' could misleadingly create parallels between the *Picatrix*'s *nigromancia* and other forms of illicit demonic conjurations that have nothing to do with the more 'natural' (even physical) techniques in the *Picatrix*. However, in my opinion, making explicit all the terminological variance regarding *nigromancia*, *magica*,[10] and *magia*[11] would have better illustrated the classifications and subcategorizations of magical knowledge and practice in the mind of the medieval translator. Chapter 5 of Book Two significantly describes that this magical knowledge (*sciencia*) can be divided into three parts: "*sciencia magica*" ('magical science'), which belongs to the Sabeans; "*sciencia stellarum*" ('the science of the stars'), which belongs to the Greeks and involves suffumigations, sacrifices, prayers, and scripture; and the use of words, incantations, music to bind spirits, and the altering of the senses, which belongs to the Indians who are considered the most powerful in "*artibus nigromance*."[12] Moreover, according to the *Picatrix*, Indians "sought oracles through severed heads" (85) and we can recognize a form of divination through the head of a dead body in *Picatrix* 3.11.54. This section describes how to prepare an ointment by cooking a human head with "fresh opium, human blood and sesame oil" for 24 hours (203). The oil that is produced "permits one to see those things one wishes to see" and "if you light a light with the oil or anoint something with it, or if you give a little of it to someone in food, you will see whatever you wish" (203–4). The use of human heads for necromancy have a long history dating to late antiquity. Emmanouela Grypeou finds evidence of the necromantic practice of using heads in rabbinic and Christian sources that indicate "a communication and shared cultural knowledge in the wider area of Mesopotamia around the 7th/8th centuries."[13] We can therefore infer that

10. "*sciencia magica*," "*magice science*," Pingree, 46.
11. *Magia* is not listed in the index of names of Pingree's edition, only the adjective *magicus*.
12. Pingree, ed., *Picatrix*, 46
13. For example, in *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the preparation of the *teraphim,* a severed human head

there may be evidence of transmission of necromantic practices in the *Picatrix* from late antiquity, which obviously have nothing to do with modern interpretations, but which deserve to be further investigated.

To conclude, scholars of medieval magic will have to carefully compare this new translation with the Latin text, and when necessary with the other translations available. Having this translation in English can certainly help scholars to shed light on the possible interpretations of the most obscure points of the text. For scholars and students who do not work specifically with medieval magic, the book is an excellent point of departure for understanding the main features of the text. The endnotes offer references for further primary sources and secondary literature. Compared to the study of ideas and theories, scholars of magic have paid comparatively less attention to substances and materials. As previously mentioned, the unique strength of this edition is the attention given to the materiality of magic, suggesting a path for further studies.

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rubbed with salt and spices and with an inscribed golden plate underneath the tongue, is described. The head would have been put into a hole in a wall, and it would have started to whisper. Similar stories are found in the *Targum Pseudo-Johnathan* (Genesis 31:19) and in the medieval compilation *Sefer ha-Yashar,* in which the head's divinatory power is attributed to "an influence by the planets," Emmanouela Grypeou, "Talking Heads: Necromancy in Jewish and Christian Accounts from Mesopotamia and Beyond," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 16 (2019): 3–5.

Shai Feraro and Ethan Doyle White (eds.). *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West: Celebrating the Twentieth Anniversary of 'Triumph of the Moon'*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. xiii + 259pp. ISBN 978-3-030-15549-0. $119.99.

Ronald Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon* is a work of scholarship that, in the twenty years since its publication, has achieved the sort of cultural prominence to which most academic publications merely aspire. Within the academic milieu, this 1999 study of Gardnerian Wicca demonstrated the rich, if relatively recent, history of contemporary Wicca and sheds light on the complex roots of the wider Pagan movement, a set of religions that has suffered from poor academic reception and continuing institutional marginalization. In *Triumph*, Hutton presents to his readers a complex tale of many threads, including intellectual movements and aesthetic sensibilities which coalesced in a particularly British mid-twentieth century cultural context to produce a new religious movement that has since spanned the globe. Equally as important to Hutton's scholarly impact, however, *Triumph* shaped the ways in which a community of religious practice has thought about itself. It roused internal debates among all contemporary Pagans, not just Gardnerian Wiccans, about origin myths and what constitutes "authenticity". Loved by most, loathed by a few, Pagans now talk about their history in "pre-Triumph" and "post-Triumph" terms. There is little doubt that *Triumph of the Moon* represents for many a key moment in the maturation of a religious community.

Thus, it is truly fitting that there have been two scholarly volumes, ten years apart in 2009 and 2019, produced as tribute to *Triumph of the Moon*. In addition to celebrating the text itself, these volumes have also served as measures of the state of scholarship about contemporary Paganisms, and specifically modern Witchcraft. The first of these volumes, *Ten Years of Triumph of the Moon,* edited by the late Dave Evans and Dave Green, was a more eclectic volume of scholarship, aiming to provide a snapshot of the state of Pagan studies and the study of

esotericism at the time. The present volume, *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West,* edited by two dynamic and enterprising younger scholars of contemporary Paganism, Shai Feraro and Ethan Doyle White, is in many ways a more tightly focused effort in its direct engagement with Hutton's scholarly legacy and influence. In this way the volume succeeds not only in honoring Hutton's oeuvre, it also demonstrates the impact of his research on the work of other scholars, which is high praise indeed.

Magic and Witchery, a volume in the Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic series, comprises an introduction by the editors, ten essays, and an afterword by Hutton. Most of the essays are focused on contemporary Witchcraft, although some essays address Paganism more broadly. Each author in the collection, generally deftly, explicitly refers to aspects of Hutton's work and uses Hutton's research as springboards for their own essays. While these efforts might in some contexts seem forced, for the most part the authors integrate Hutton's research in a way that indicates the presence of a wide-ranging scholarly conversation.

The strength of the volume is in the variety of scholarly approaches to modern Witchcraft, demonstrating the rich potential for research in this still emerging set of magico-religious cultures. Many of the essays draw in some way on Hutton's core themes of Romanticism, engagement with themes of nature, and uses of folklore. Sarah Pike and Sabina Magliocco, both of whom contributed ethnographically based essays to this volume, most explicitly explore the construction of "nature" in contemporary Pagan culture as generated by the Romantic Victorian literary sensibility that has infused the values and beliefs of contemporary Pagans. The volume's authors also expand into increasingly relevant areas such as political engagement, exemplified by both Pike and Shai Feraro's contributions. Both essays provide a fairly tight focus on Pagan environmental politics that build on the sacrality of nature, a key defining feature of contemporary Paganisms and Wicca. Chas Clifton's contribution mirrors Hutton's own methodological blending of folkloristics and historiography to look at the legends of flying

ointments among Traditional Witches. Unfortunately, Clifton does not provide as much evidence of the Traditionalist embrace of flying ointments as integral to their identity as his initial argument suggests. Helen Cornish contributes a wonderful interpretive piece, providing a fascinating account of how the heritage of witchcraft is framed and visually negotiated at the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Cornwall. Jenny Butler provides a recent history of the development of Wicca in Ireland, and the ways in which that tradition has engaged with the development of "Celticity" in the Irish context, again intersecting with Hutton's focus on Romanticism as foundational to contemporary Paganisms.

The collection also addresses underexamined segments of the modern witchcraft milieu. Andrew Chumbley's influential Sabbatic Witchcraft is given a treatment here by Ethan Doyle White, providing a tantalizing view of the expanding breadth of contemporary witchcraft traditions. Similarly, Manon Hedenborg White explores the ways in which witchcraft was characterized by Thelemites Jack Parsons and Kenneth Grant in the 1940s and 1950s, paralleling the early historical development of Gardnerian Wicca. These fascinating contributions only hint at the variety of existing modern Witchcraft tropes and traditions, demonstrating the need for more comprehensive scholarship which might include Dianic Wicca, more thorough examinations into Traditional Witchcraft, and the recent feminist intersectional Witchcraft, increasing the scope for applications of Hutton's research. It is worth noting that despite the title suggesting that the volume might include works on magic, there is, in fact, almost no primary focus on magic in any of the essays in this volume. Although Witchcraft and most forms of Paganism are magico-religious traditions in character, the topic of how these groups use magic is generally unexplored here, with the exception of the fascinating and convincing essay by Hugh Urban, which addresses the influences of Tantra on the development of the Gardnerian Great Rite. Van Gulik's essay on creativity in Wicca does examine the interpretative fields in which Wiccan magical experiences occur. However, this particular essay lacks clarity partially as

a result of idiosyncratic uses of terms such as "traditionalism" and "eclecticism", both of which have other established meanings within Wiccan and wider esoteric cultures, and also because of the author's lack of differentiation between different types of Wicca in his study.

The most serious drawback of this volume is a lack of consistency regarding terminology. It would have been helpful for the editors to use the introductory section to define key terms for this volume, and even to have provided a brief paragraph introduction of Gerald Gardner so as to avoid the redundancy in the contributions. Although I can understand why the editors might have been reluctant to impose such standards on contributors, some of the terminology can be confusing for a readership that may not know the distinctions in community usage. For example, in some essays British Traditional Witchcraft is used to refer to Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, but in others the phrase Traditional Witchcraft is used to denote specifically non-Wiccan witchcraft. Helen Cornish does the clearest job of disambiguating the terms in her contribution, and this strategy might have been used as a model for the introduction. Additionally, the essays occasionally drift into using Paganism as shorthand for Wicca without clarification, despite the fact that the Pagan community is quite varied and contains many non-Wiccans. Although the usages within the context of each essay were all correct, the readers might have benefitted from a stronger editorial hand.

Ronald Hutton's characteristically gracious afterword addresses the development of Pagan studies as an academic field, situated within the increasing public reception of Paganisms as legitimate religions. Hutton notes that the decentralization of modern Paganisms has contributed to an overall eclecticism and increasing cultural dynamism. He notes that although most people no longer fear or condemn modern Pagans as they might have even a quarter of a century ago, Pagans and Witches still suffer from a self-imposed oppositional identity which contributes to Paganisms' persistent marginality. As a result, the potential for societal integration of Pagans and Witches is limited, which

naturally will impact the fortunes of Pagan studies as an academic area of research. Hutton correctly observes that Pagans still lack societal and cultural power, influence and true advocacy, and while they are no longer considered dangerous, they are often not considered credible. This is no judgment on the part of Hutton, he is merely describing why Pagans and Pagan studies struggle for institutional recognition. Yet Hutton also compares the social position of Pagans today to the condition of the early Quakers, now hardly seen as a subversive sect, yet once intensely maligned. As Pagans do, in fact, share features and historical conditions with a variety of religions and spiritual traditions, taking a broader, more comparative approach might benefit Pagan studies and demonstrate the relevance of the field by deemphasizing the marginality of the subject matter. In the study of minority religions, it is all too easy to keep the focus on the characteristics which appear exceptional, but perhaps there is greater utility in engaging with wider common themes, histories, and comparisons, demonstrating how Paganism exemplifies wider trends in religious studies.

Overall, *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West* provides a useful addition to research on contemporary Witchcraft and Paganisms, while honoring its most important scholar. Yet given the increased visibility of Witchcraft as both a cultural phenomenon and as a religious identity, the volume feels limited in scope. This only strengthens the case for future collections that would expand beyond Hutton's core research areas to better demonstrate the robust and diverse state of modern Witchcraft and its suitability for serious inquiry.

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Alireza Doostdar. *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. xiv + 295. ISBN: 978-0691163789. $29.95.

The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny presents Alireza Doostdar's research on the spiritual landscape of modern Iran. His main argument is that, in the Iranian case since the nineteenth century, occult experimentations have involved epistemological manoeuvres to create and confirm a particular rationalisation of the unseen. Three interrelated processes are highlighted that reveal different types of Iranian "metaphysical" rationality, where the term metaphysical indicates "a modern rationalized form of the unseen and the occult," constituting an epistemological foundation to contemporary practices in Iran as experimenters respond to and depart from scientific legitimacy and state-sponsored "orthodoxy" (8–10). First, challenging the "superstitious" and "irrational" by adopting anti-traditional models and rejecting Islamic occult sciences and its practitioners such as "prayer writers" (*do'anevis*) or rammals. Second, to supplement the first process, a "new" metaphysical language needs to be applied taken from spirit-scientific frameworks that are construed as ideologically neutral, steering away from the spirit/jinn-based modalities of efficaciousness and opting for psycho-energist interpretations (5). Finally, this rationalisation is set toward social and individual holism in which "the metaphysical [is] in the service of attaining pious virtues, achieving health, tranquillity, and joy, or grappling with the problems imagined to be plaguing Iranian society" (5).

"The uncanny" of the book's title is understood as that which elicits "feelings of disorientation and discomfort that in turn become further prompts to rationalization along new pathways" (19–20). In other words, it is that unresolved feeling, an amalgam of curiosity and repulsion which incites inquiry. Doostdar links this to the concept of "wonder" that has historically formed an entire

genre of Islamic literature dedicated to the cultivation of fascination with the unfamiliar as it confronts the frameworks of scientific rationalizations in a certain geographic and chronological context. This tradition is exemplified by the cosmography of Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī (1203–1283), *ʿAjā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* ('The Wonders of Creation and the Marvels of Existents').

The book is divided into three main parts. The first focuses on traditional forms of engagement with the metaphysical, centring on the figure of the rammal, who occupies a liminal place as a practitioner of the occult arts and agent of the metaphysical within a more traditionally Islamic framework in terms of practice (geomancy, for example) and ideology (belief in jinn and the magical power of Qur'anic verses). Doostdar juxtaposes the rammal with the figure of the seeker of spiritual-therapeutics whose ideology is characterised by a tension between shunning the traditional for an aetiology of distress (curses) that employs quasi-scientific concepts of energy, frequencies, and inorganic viruses.

The second part largely focuses on the fascinating emergence of Spiritism within the Iranian intellectual milieu in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Francophone Spiritists were precursors to later kinds of "scientized spirituality"; they grounded "their religious cosmologies in what they took to be universal modern science and to tether their moral teachings to what they defended as objective empirical research" (113). They aimed to legitimize these practices in a Eurocentric post-Enlightenment atmosphere that privileged "the scientific" (*ʿelmi*), in opposition to superstition (*khorafa*) (3–4), with the former strongly correlating with modernity and progress. The second part of the book also establishes an epistemological continuity between the Spiritists and members of Cosmic Mysticism, founded by Mohammad ʿAli Taheri (b. 1956). The latter claims science "as a privileged path to truth but empirical methods are circumvented at crucial points in favour of intuition and mystical unveiling" (155). Cosmic Mysticism was at the height of its popularity during Doostdar's research in the 1990s.

The third part discusses the spiritual negotiations surrounding the "friends of God" (*awliya*), which refers to spiritual elite who have attained a high level of holiness and piety that often come with extraordinary abilities. Doostdar shows that in Iran, the friends of God are positioned between two poles of tension. First, state-supported Shīʿa "orthodoxy" sensitive to violations perceived to be caused by Sufi practices and leanings. Accordingly, the alleged friend of God becomes more akin to fraudsters and rammals, since they all actively seek wonder-work (*karamat*) (224), while the figure of the Howzeh trained scholar-friend of God remains the sanctioned model. The second is the need for promoting "new friends of God" via modern hagiographies since earlier models of piety were no longer attractive to the youth of postwar Iran with its growing institutional stability and capitalist appetite. A new genre of hagiographies emerged which were highly concerned about irreligiousness and the spread of "deviant" forms of spirituality. These forms would include Cosmic Mysticism that detaches itself from both the state's bureaucratisation of spirituality and traditional expressions of piety and self-discipline (181–83).

Doostdar succeeds in showing how these features of Iranian negotiations with the metaphysical emerge from particular events in Iranian history. These include the institutional reform after the 1905–1911 Constitutional Revolution which led to an explicit censure of the occult sciences, calling for enlightened education and attacking superstition under the ancient regime (50); the economic liberalisation post the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 which made available services and products to middle and upper classes, aimed at increasing material and spiritual, psychological and therapeutic prosperity (11); and the birth of the Islamic Republic induced by the 1979 Revolution which heightened anxieties "by disorientations linked to the bureaucratization and instrumentalization of piety" (216). Doostdar links these watershed moments to a historical concern for the reconciliation of religion and science, or Islam and "rationality" – whether it was the nineteenth-century notion of science or medieval Aristotelianism.

These circumstances, in turn, led to traits common to all the spiritual currents discussed in this book: For instance, given that metaphysical agency cannot "be simply denied or straightforwardly embraced," the discussed currents all embrace caution and ambiguity (54–55). With Islamic jurists, this manifested in many ways, including control over the circulation of occult texts and penalizing "fraud" (59–60), yet validating the learning and practice of the traditional occult sciences such as geomancy and *jafr* under specific conditions (61–63). We can also see caution and ambiguity with one member of Cosmic Mysticism – Lili Bayati – who identifies as being "extremely logical" yet submits to the view that the language of science cannot account for spiritual outcomes (161–63). With God's friends, and to some extent the Spiritists, caution and ambiguity are evident in strategizing edification through discretion and careful public disclosures (191–98). Other common traits include self-reflexivity, self-discipline, and self-care (116).

Doostdar aptly demonstrates, furthermore, the entanglement of Iranian spirituality with European esoteric currents. For example, in the case of Cosmic Mysticism, it is seen in the popularity of Rhonda Byrne's 2006 film *The Secret* which "captured the spirit of the 'success' (*movaffaqiyyat*) industry of self-help and prosperity literature and seminars that emerged amid economic liberalization and progressive commercialization after the 1980–1988 war with Iraq" (96). In the case of Iranian Spiritists, their engagement led to the "repurposing of Spiritist evidence for Islamic theological polemics" (118–19). Other entangled "western" currents such as the New Age movement, Theosophy, quantum mysticism, etc., are also mentioned (255, footnote 7; 18).

The Iranian Metaphysicals serves as an instructive example of how nineteenth-century notions of science were central to the refashioning of religious stances. As Nile Green notes, this led to the emergence of what he termed the "global occult."[1] By discussing the Iranian context, Doostdar confirms that esotericism and the occult

1. Nile Green, "The Global Occult: An Introduction," *History of Religions*, 54, no. 4 (May 2015): 383–93 (386).

are crucial to the development of modern understandings of religion and science. Through their universalism, global networks, and commitment to science and education, groups such as Iranian Spiritists and members of Cosmic Mysticism "joined Freemasons, Baha'is, reformist Sufis, Theosophists, and other innovators while also establishing a new grammar and practice of scientized spirituality that would endure far beyond their own immediate horizons" (113).

Readers from beyond Islamic studies, such as those interested in esoteric movements from a global perspective, would have benefited from a clearer exposition of what constitutes Shīʿa "orthodoxy," posited as the most virulent challenge to new religiosity and a force regulating the practice of the occult sciences (11–12). Such an explanation would have allowed a deeper understanding of the implications of experimenting with the metaphysical within the upper and middle class, as well as the poorer classes.

The Iranian Metaphysicals sheds light on an overlooked aspect to the study of modernity within Islamic cultures; namely, contemporary occult practices and theorisations, and their role in developing new forms that mediate between the local and the global, the community and the individual, and the "rational" and the abstruse. I hope such a study will launch more research in other global Islamic contexts in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, with similar vigour and nuance.

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Michael Muhammad Knight. *Magic in Islam*. New York: TarcherPerigee, 2016. 246 pp. ISBN: 978-0-399-17670-8. $17.00.

Magic in Islam is the outcome of the natural progression of Michael Muhammad Knight's career as a writer and, more recently, as an academic. Since his 2004 debut novel *The Taqwacores*[1] where he introduced "Punk Islam" as a distinct counter-culture phenomenon, Knight has been fascinated with fringe and marginalized narratives of Islam, with occasional references to Sufism, in order to challenge the mainstream perceptions of what Islam is and could be especially in the context of post-9/11 America. His interest in esotericism in particular further evolved in two books preceding *Magic in Islam*. In *William S. Burroughs vs. the Quran*[2] Knight engages in cut-up experiments while chronicling the life and works of Peter Lamborn Wilson (Hakim Bey) and discussing a history of Traditionalism and the Henry Corbin circle in Iran. In *Tripping with Allah: Islam, Drugs, and Writing*[3] he explores ayahuasca mystical experiences with members of Santo Daime that result in him having some entheogenic visions of Fatima and Ali (Prophet Muhammad's daughter and son-in-law). In fact, Knight's extensive body of writing over the past fifteen years has been largely autobiographical where he moves in between fiction, reality, and history to explore and express his own beliefs as a white American Muslim convert. Yet, after obtaining a PhD in Islamic Studies in 2016 and now being an Assistant Professor of Religion and Cultural Studies at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Knight's most recent works (including *Muhammad: Forty Introductions*[4]) have moved towards being more scholarly and impersonal.

1. Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores* (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2004).
2. Michael Muhammad Knight, *William S. Burroughs vs. the Quran* (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2012).
3. Michael Muhammad Knight, *Tripping with Allah: Islam, Drugs, and Writing* (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2013).
4. Michael Muhammad Knight, *Muhammad: Forty Introductions* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2019).

Magic in Islam thus is first and foremost a book by a counterculture creative writer who is now rather invested in scholarly and less idiosyncratic topics and discussions. Put differently, it is not an academic but a popular book, yet backed up by critical historical research within a post-structuralist framework that questions essentialist and religionist understandings of religion in general and Islam in particular, while also being sensitive about dialogues and interactions between Islam and other religious traditions (e.g. Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Judaism) in the formation of magical and esoteric discourses. As Knight asserts early in the introduction, the book could serve as an unconventional example of the "Intro to Islam" genre that became popular in the aftermath of 9/11. Knight's proposed readers are then ranging from anyone with limited or no knowledge of Islam or magic to experts of religious studies who would be interested in hearing about the overlooked yet enthralling and diverse engagements of Islam and magic.

Knight suggests in the introduction that "[m]aybe this book should just be called *Weird Shit in Islam*. . . . they're items that popularly go into our considerations of magic, esotericism, and the occult, and I'm interested in these things as engaged by people who call themselves Muslims. So whether or not we can reliably identify anything in the world as 'magic' or 'Islam,' here's a book about magic in Islam" (25). This assertion might be the clearest account of the scope of this project. In a way the book lacks a coherent main argument or thesis (in an academic sense), as it generally depicts snapshots of some intersections of "magic" and "Islam." Nevertheless, similar to some of his other projects (starting with *The Taqwacores*), Knight's main point is to showcase and prove that Islams (plural) "other" than the orthodox and the mainstream also exist or are possible to exist, as he sums up at the end: "Rethinking Muslim magics could open the floodgates for a wild new universe of interpretive possibilities" (200). That is to say, in the case of this book the readers learn about an Islam that has a complex and neglected history of magical texts, beliefs, practices, and rituals.

What is "magic" referring to in the context of this book? Knight treats magic primarily as a constructed category, a relegated *other* of the dominant discourses of religion and science (themselves being constructed categories as well). Emphasizing some colonial and ideological dimensions of these relational categories, Knight discusses how "magic, religion, and science as distinct stops along the march of civilizational progress affirmed the right—even the *duty*—of 'advanced' scientific nations to invade and colonize magical peoples who had failed to properly develop" (12). Even though Knight does not use Wouter J. Hanegraaff's term "rejected knowledge," he does in practice formulate magic as a form of knowledge that has been rejected through social and political power dynamics.[5] He notes for instance, with respect to the history of Islam, that "[t]here are also the intellectuals of the past who, for whatever reason, failed to become authoritative for later generations. When we leave them out of our books, we present Islam as an unchanging thing that exists outside of time, rather than as the site of contests between competing forces with different ideas about what constitutes the authentic and authoritative …" (2). The debate on the status of magic in Islam, according to Knight, is mainly a result of these power dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Meanwhile, Knight considers some alternative terms to the word "magic," in particular "esotericism" and "occultism" (at times he uses these terms interchangeably), yet his discussion on the reasons why he favors the former (as the proper umbrella term) to the latter two is brief and not quite convincing (for example he claims that using

5. Although Knight makes references to works such as Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Strausberg's edited volume *Defining Magic: A Reader* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013) or Olav Hammer's *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), it appears that he had not been familiar with the academic field of the study of (Western) esotericism at the time of writing *Magic in Islam*. I say "at the time," since in his recent article in the Special Issue of *Correspondences* on Islamic Esotericism (Michael Muhammad Knight, "I am Sorry, Mr. White Man, These are Secrets that You are Not Permitted to Learn: The Supreme Wisdom Lessons and Problem Book," *Correspondences* 7, no. 1 (2019): 167–200.) he uses the term "rejected knowledge" from Wouter J. Hanegraaff's *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

"esotericism" would blow his project wide open, but this could be similarly true about his usage of the term "magic" as a wide umbrella term).

The six chapters that follow the introduction (plus a conclusion at the end) read like a collection of essays where each touch on one particular aspect of the relation of magic and Islam. In Chapter 2, Knight discusses the status of magic in the Quran while paying attention to some problems of interpretation (for instance when it comes to the Arabic word *sihr* which connotes magic and sorcery). Chapter 3, "The Force of the Letters," looks at the Quran from another perspective: the power of letters, words, and writing, and recitation as a form of magical speech act. Here some healing and protective qualities of certain verses of the Quran are noted, in addition to the numerical values ascribed to letters. Chapter 4 examines the topic of astrology including its political and imperial dimensions, while further discussing the constructed boundaries of science, religion, and magic. This is where an additional chapter on alchemy [*kimia* in Arabic]—a topic surprisingly absent throughout the book—could have been appropriate in order to follow up on the problematic of relations between the three. Chapter 5, one of the more interesting chapters from a comparative viewpoint, investigates the figures of Hermes, Thoth, Enoch, Metatron, and Idris through the Muslim and Islamic sources. Chapter 6 is on dream interpretation and also touches on Knight's personal experiences of psychoactive visions from *Tripping with Allah*.

Whereas all these chapters are primarily concerned with materials from classical and medieval Islam that are mostly from Arabic-speaking regions, Chapter 7 suddenly shifts to 20th century African-American Muslim traditions (i.e. the Moorish Science Temple of America, the Nation of Islam, and the Five Percenters). As fascinating and informative as this chapter is (and note it is an area that Knight has done extensive research on for years and is a worthy source of scholarship), it damages the integrity of the book that overall deals with classical Islam within a theme-based framework. Perhaps a few more chapters on other contemporary or modern emanations of magic and Islam would have better justified the inclusion of this chapter.

Overall, *Magic in Islam* is hardly a systematic and comprehensive study of Islam and magic (or esotericism, to use the more common umbrella term). The word "in" in the title might indicate that the book deals with "magic" as a sub-category of "Islam," but that is not the case and perhaps using the word "and" instead would have clarified that the book works at the intersections of the two categories. Still, given the lack of reliable academic sources on the topic (not only in European languages but also in languages like Arabic, Turkish, or Persian) and the freshness of this area of study (i.e. Islamic Esotericism, or Islam and Esotericism) its publication is much welcomed and appreciated. The book can possibly be used for undergraduate level courses on the study of esotericism or religious studies courses on Islam despite its narrow scope, while its list of references, especially those from the field of Islamic Studies, can provide some excellent further readings for both students and researchers.

In the "Conclusion," Knight states that "[b]y no means did I seek to catalog every appearance of a text or practice found anywhere in the 'Muslim world' that could be branded as magic" (195). Reading this book, it becomes ever more clear how much such a comprehensive academic catalog (or encyclopedia or dictionary) is needed to map out the areas and topics for any future study of magic, esotericism, and Islam.

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