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# Correspondences

Online Journal for the  
Academic Study of Western Esotericism

*Editors*

Jimmy Elwing and Aren Roukema

1.1 (2013)

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## Editorial

### Jimmy Elwing and Aren Roukema

Welcome to *Correspondences*, a new online journal devoted to the academic study of Western esotericism. Since this is the inaugural issue, let us introduce you to the history and purpose of our venture. The idea for this journal came in Autumn 2012, when we were both working with a student magazine devoted to Western esotericism at the University of Amsterdam. Although we both enjoyed this experience, we perceived a need for a wider forum in which scholars of all levels could publish high quality academic work, thus stimulating dialogue unfettered by the cost and delays of subscription based publishing options. We shared this idea with some scholars in the field and our initiative was pushed forward with enthusiasm. The result of this encouragement, plus months of hard work for ourselves, the peer reviewers, and all who submitted, sits before you on your desktop, or glimmers from the screen of your tablet or smartphone.

These days, it does not require much imagination to envision the swift decline of the printed journal. Some experts have even recommended that we take advantage of technological advances and software innovations to get rid of journals altogether.<sup>1</sup> However, technology alone will not revolutionise academic publishing—cultural and political change must also occur. Prestigious journals, relying on an “intrinsic hierarchy” existing in the eyes of researchers, continue to charge high subscription fees and maintain

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<sup>1</sup> Bjorn Brembs, Katherine Button, and Marcus Munafo, “Deep Impact: Unintended Consequences of Journal Rank,” arXiv preprint arXiv:1301.3748 (2013): 2.

closed access to their publications, despite the plethora of technological options available. This system has been shown to suppress interdisciplinary research,<sup>2</sup> and create barriers to the quick dissemination of research.<sup>3</sup> This is perhaps less of a problem in some areas of the humanities, but researches of contemporary phenomenon risk having their research become out of date before their article comes to print as much as any theoretical physicist. In all fields, the slowness of publication remains an impediment to fruitful discussion. Knowledge should not be stored in castles guarded by subscription fees, but should be easily accessible beyond the moats of institutional access and the drawbridges of delay.

*Correspondences* joins a growing movement of web-based journals that seek to transcend entrenched cultural, economic, and political barriers within academia through the flexibility and openness offered by cyber-communication. We join this new knowledge culture in the hope that we will be able to offer researchers a more flexible form of dialogue through publication. However, while we seek to promote open access as much as possible, we do not intend to go so far as to forfeit the rights of authors to control the distribution of their work.

Those familiar with Antoine Faivre's classic working definition of Western esotericism<sup>4</sup> will recognise a certain flirtatious banter in the name *Correspondences*, but the name's reference to communication is more important to our project. Our goal is to create a wide forum of discussion in the field of Western esotericism. We invite established academics, students of any level, and non-affiliated scholars to contribute to *Correspondences*. The only criteria for acceptance are quality research, clear expression of ideas, and an original contribution to knowledge. We encourage any and all to submit, regardless of personal background, but for our particular framework of discussion we require that articles take a sceptical approach driven by critical analysis of sources and data, rather than personal belief.

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<sup>2</sup> I. Rafols, et al., "How Journal Rankings Can Suppress Interdisciplinary Research: A Comparison Between Innovation Studies and Business & Management," *Research Policy* 41 (2011): 1262–82.

<sup>3</sup> Brems et al., 2.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 10–15.

In order to ensure a high level of quality we follow a double-blind peer-review process. We are fortunate to be supported in the peer-review process by an editorial board composed of some of the leading scholars in the field, whose primary role is to assist us in networking with the most experienced researchers in the areas pertinent to articles considered for publication. With this method we have been able to combat one of the most central difficulties facing a journal devoted to the study of Western esotericism, namely that a small group of researchers are dealing with a complex body of issues and currents that span millennia, cover the globe, and require specialised knowledge of diverse disciplines and philosophical contexts. As part of solving this problem, we have selected editorial board members from a variety of geographical and cultural milieux.

In the last two decades the academic study of Western esotericism has undergone a process of professionalisation and developed into a well-respected field of research. This professionalisation started with Antoine Faivre's work in the early 1990s, and was followed by an increased theoretical debate as to what exactly demarcated the field we commonly know as "Western esotericism."<sup>5</sup> In keeping with our goal of promoting open discussion, we have resisted joining this debate. Rather than take a particular position, *Correspondences* hopes to stimulate discussion on issues of boundary and definition, such as that found in this issue in Kennet Granholm's article, where, speaking of the difficulty of applying traditional models of Western esotericism to popular culture, he argues that no distinction should be made between authentic esoteric discourses and forms of popular culture that are seen to merely borrow from esoteric imagery or philosophy.<sup>6</sup> The field of research gathered beneath the umbrella term of

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview of various discussions of the term see Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 6–20; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 2–17; Andreas B. Kilcher, "Seven Epistemological Theses on Esotericism: Upon the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Amsterdam Chair," in *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenburg (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2009), 143–48; Kocku von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35, no. 2 (2005): 88–92; Arthur Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> See Kennet Granholm, "Ritual Black Metal: Popular Music as Occult Meditation and Practice," *Correspondences* 1, no. 1 (2013): 7–9.



“Western esotericism” is unusually (almost cripplingly) broad. The temporal, geographical, and cultural diversity of the field requires different definitions for the field at different times. For example, while the component traditions studied by scholars of Western esotericism can often be related to each other because they have been rejected as valid forms of knowledge by the dominant knowledge forms in their particular time and place, early modern forms of these same traditions gained a high degree of acceptance in their own time.<sup>7</sup> The diversity of the field is very much displayed in this issue: we see Matthew Twigg’s article on antique gnosticism in the near east next to Ethan Doyle White’s discussion of modern witchcraft in England, and Kennet Granholm’s approach to contemporary ritual black metal in a Swedish context paired with Johan Nilsson’s view of the transformation of Chinese spiritual philosophy in the work of Aleister Crowley.

Regardless of creed or worldview, we hope that all readers will benefit from this journal and seek to contribute in some form to discussion surrounding the plethora of traditions and currents researched in Western Esotericism. We are excited with the quality of research in the articles of this first issue and hope to only increase this already high standard in further publications. We hope that you enjoy this issue of *Correspondences* and that it motivates you to join the discussion that is Western esotericism.

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<sup>7</sup> Kilcher, “Seven Epistemological Theses,” 147.

# Ritual Black Metal

## Popular Music as Occult Mediation and Practice

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### **Abstract**

From the creative fantasy of musicians to the fearful imaginations of concerned parents and fundamentalist crusaders, Metal music has frequently been linked to the occult. It is, however, only recently that the occult milieu as represented by initiatory orders and segments of the broader Extreme Metal scene have been brought close enough to each other to spawn an identifiable “Ritual Black Metal” scene characterized by explicit, systematic, and sustained engagements with the occult. Members of this scene, particularly the musicians involved in it, not only demonstrate an interest in occult subject matter that surpasses most of what came before, but explicitly claim their artistry to be an expression of the occult in itself—as divine worship or communion, an expression of and tool for initiatory processes, and/or an explication of seriously held beliefs. In this article I examine the Swedish Ritual Black Metal scene, with some detours to the Finnish scene when closely connected to the Swedish one, by looking at both scenic institutions and key artists.

### **Keywords**

Extreme Metal; Black Metal; Dissection; Watain; Ofermod; Saturnalia Temple; Forgotten Horror; Jess and the Ancient Ones; The Devil’s Blood; Misanthropic Lucifer-Order (MLO); Temple of the Black Light; Dragon Rouge

### **Introduction**

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Metal music and the occult are no strangers to each other.<sup>1</sup> Metal bands have frequently been accused of engaging in occultism by concerned conservative commentators, and many artists in the genre have since the beginning been fascinated by occult themes and symbols. Some artists have engaged more deeply with the occult, explicitly using their music to mediate occult philosophies or even using it as a tool for magical practice. Such artists have, however, remained isolated exceptions in a genre where most artists have claimed nothing more than being fascinated by occult symbolism. That is, until recent times. The number of Extreme Metal bands, particularly of the Black Metal variety, that frame their artistic pursuits as occult practice has increased since the 1990s, in the 2000s slowly forming its own small scene focused on the occult within the broader Extreme Metal scene. As many of the bands involved in this scene identify as Black Metal and describe their performances as divine worship, communion, or magical rituals, or in other ways connect their artistic activities to ritual magical practices, it is suitable to speak of a “Ritual Black Metal” scene.<sup>2</sup> This paper explores that scene in a particular Swedish context, by turning an eye to key scenic institutions and artists, and their connections to more conventional occult milieus. This article represents a work in progress, and thus presents initial reflections rather than a conclusive analysis.

### Theoretical and Methodological Preliminaries

Before dealing with the main topic of this article a number of theoretical and methodological concerns need to be addressed. First, it may appear out of place to use the term “popular culture” in reference to such a radical and seemingly marginal phenomenon such as Black Metal. In the common understanding of popular culture the focus is on the word “popular,” framing it as “cultural activities or commercial products reflecting, suited to, or aimed at the tastes of the general masses of people.”<sup>3</sup> Extreme Metal is,

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<sup>1</sup> While the terms “occult” and “esoteric” have different connotations in the study of Western esotericism I will be using them interchangeably in this article.

<sup>2</sup> “Occult Black Metal” could also have been used to label the scene, but it does not sufficiently highlight the rhetoric of framing artistic activities as ritual magical *practice*. Interestingly, shortly after submitting the first version of this article, the Finnish band Deathchain, which has more and more started to link its music to magic and the occult and has members who are active in other bands discussed in this article, released its seventh full-length album with the title *Ritual Death Metal*.

<sup>3</sup> “Popular culture,” Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/popular+culture>.

however, a global phenomenon,<sup>4</sup> and is one of the few musical genres that has been able to sustain a global scene rather than being divided into national ones which have no contact with each other. It could thus be argued that while Extreme Metal may not be “popular” in the meaning of being culturally dominant in any particular national context (though it could be argued that it nearly is so in Finland), it is popular with regard to its global impact. Many Extreme Metal artists and fans would also strongly object to the music being labelled “popular.” This is a result of discursive strategies inherent in *Rock*, an analytical category rather than the musically defined genre Rock, revolving around the quest for authenticity and artistic seriousness, in opposition to the perceived pursuit of mass commercial profits and lack of significant artistic aspirations in *Pop*, again an analytical category distinguished from the musical genre Pop.<sup>5</sup> *Rock* is based on a “rejection of those aspects of mass-distributed music which are believed to be soft, safe or trivial.”<sup>6</sup> Extreme Metal, which can be incorporated in the category *Rock*, is dependent on these discursive formations, and this explains both the aversion to the term popular and the emergence of new genres when old ones are felt to have been compromised due to having too broad of an appeal.

Beyond the common understanding, scholarly and cultural expert-discourse has conventionally defined popular culture in contrast to other cultural forms, such as “high/elite culture,” both “high” and “folk” culture, or as constituting a resource for opposing mass or dominant culture.<sup>7</sup> These types of definition are problematic, and in current research on religion and popular culture the term has increasingly come to stand for “the shared environment, practices, and resources of everyday life in a given society.”<sup>8</sup> The focus is then on new arenas and functions of religion instead of on essentially distinct and dissociated types of culture. In this perspective a conventionally defined “high culture” artefact can be part of popular culture if it is used as such by people in their everyday life. An example would be the use and interpretation of the Mona Lisa beyond the institutions of “fine art”, such as on postcards, in commercials, in Dan Brown’s *The DaVinci Code* (2003), and so forth. In the study of religion and popular culture a focus on everyday religiosity marks a shift away from theological

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<sup>4</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Frith, “Pop Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rock and Pop*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 94–96.

<sup>6</sup> Keir Keightley, “Reconsidering Rock,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rock and Pop*, 109.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*, 14.

interpretations and conventional institutions, instead paying attention to uses and interpretations of religion by “non-experts.”

Second, existing definitions of and perspectives on the esoteric are not particularly well suited for the study of popular culture. This relates particularly to Antoine Faivre’s approach,<sup>9</sup> which was the dominating paradigm for a long while and still exerts influence among scholars outside the study of Western esotericism. The Faivrean approach easily lends itself to making distinctions between “true” and “simulacrum” esotericism, something Faivre himself does in an article dealing with esotericism and fiction.<sup>10</sup> Faivre looks at the intentions of authors and receptions by readers and concludes that if a piece of fiction includes elements of “proper esotericism” but no “esoteric wisdom” it represents “borrowings” from the realm of esotericism, and when the fiction in question does not include “proper esotericism” but the reader nonetheless appears to find “esoteric wisdom” in it, it is a case of “misinterpretation.” Similarly, Henrik Bogdan discusses the “[m]igration of esoteric ideas into nonesoteric materials,”<sup>11</sup> implying a division into “real” and “simulacrum” esotericism in the vein of Faivre. Other approaches, such as Kocku von Stuckrad’s discursive one,<sup>12</sup> while not being as problematic as Faivre’s, do tend to expect some level of “serious intent” among the subjects of inquiry. When studying popular culture it is best to forgo such expectations, which are difficult to assess anyway, and look at the whole “field of discourse on the esoteric” which includes positive, neutral, and negative uses and depictions of “traditional” esoteric symbols, themes, tropes of communication etc., as well as discourse centred on higher knowledge and the dialectic of the hidden and the revealed. What one should *not* do, however, is to attempt to determine whether the subject examined is “properly” esoteric or not. This is an area where this article could run into problems, in a potential distinction between “properly occult” Metal and Metal that simply uses the occult in a superficial way. With inspiration in Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, though not in any deeply theoretically related fashion, this can be avoided by a focus on different performances of the occult, per the perspective on the

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<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Antoine Faivre, “Borrowings and Misreadings: Edgar Allen Poes’s ‘Mesmeric’ Tales and the Strange Case of their Reception,” *Aries* 7, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>11</sup> Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 20.

<sup>12</sup> Kocku von Stuckrad, “Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation,” *Religion* 35, no. 2 (2005); Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

whole “field of discourse on the esoteric” mentioned above. The Ritual Black Metal bands described here are thus not more occult than other bands; their performance of the occult is simply different, involving a rhetoric where musical and lyrical expressions are framed as primarily occult rather than artistic.

Third, the concept of “scene” is central to this article. This term, which is often used by members of various popular music cultures, was given a theoretical dimension developed in youth and popular music culture studies in order to provide an alternative to problems with the term “subculture.”<sup>13</sup> “Scene” has several advantages over the latter. First, it acknowledges the fluid nature and varying degrees of engagement in popular musical cultures whereas a focus on subcultures tends to operate in an “all or nothing” fashion where a person’s participation in a subculture excludes him/her from participation in “dominant culture” or other subcultures. In the latter the focus is on the most immersed participants, whereas the former includes every scenic involvement of any sort, from artists to people who only occasionally go to concerts, as well as the production, mediation, consumption, and so forth, of the popular music in question.<sup>14</sup> Second, the term takes into account the spatial and temporal localization of societal interaction, highlighting the interconnectedness of different dimensions of particular popular musical environments, and functions as a practically oriented mapping tool.<sup>15</sup> As it goes beyond traditional musicological terms such as “genre [which] signifies a mode of producing music (e.g. ‘ballads’)... [and] ‘style’ [which] signifies a specific mode of producing those genres (e.g. ‘heavy metal ballads’),”<sup>16</sup> it is more useful when discussing the understandings and boundary work of artists and fans which go beyond mere musical and lyrical qualifiers.

Fourth, studying popular music scenes by approaching its artists introduces a number of difficulties. Artists tend to spend much time giving interviews for both fanzines and established magazines and the time and effort required for a scholarly interview might not seem worthwhile, particularly as the benefits to the artist’s career are nearly non-existing. As with any fieldwork-based research, one needs to secure an access point to the field and find a “network” through which the research can be

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<sup>13</sup> Marcus Moberg, “The Concept of *Scene* and its Applicability in Empirically Grounded Research on the Intersection of Religion/Spirituality and Popular Music,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 26, no. 3 (2011): 404.

<sup>14</sup> Moberg, “The Concept of Scene,” 405.

<sup>15</sup> Moberg, “The Concept of Scene,” 406.

<sup>16</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 11–12.

conducted.<sup>17</sup> As for my research, I was in the lucky position of having “a foot in the door,” so to speak. Through my previous research on and continued engagement with the Swedish occult milieu I was both familiar with a number of artists in the scene and known as someone who has a deep understanding of the occult. My musical interests and engagements established me as someone who could also understand the music, style, and rhetoric. Together, my contacts and my “dual competence” secured my access to the scene. One could say that my status as someone who is familiar with the scene gave me access in ways not possible for other scholars, whereas my status as a scholar gave me access in ways not possible for regular fans. As a consequence of my network being based on my contacts within and through the magic order Dragon Rouge<sup>18</sup> I have had to rely on existing interview-material from fanzines and magazines when it comes to bands whose members are not aligned with the order. This is something I hope to remedy in the near future.

While granting access, this dual competence also introduces potential bias. While being fairly inactive, I have remained a member of Dragon Rouge since the start of my initial fieldwork in 2000. I have been a fan of Extreme Metal and related genres for most of my life and involved as a musician since my teens. In a combination of these factors I have come to be involved as a guitarist in one of the bands discussed in this article, Forgotten Horror. As a response to potential problems of bias, I clarify that my interest lies in social relations and matters of rhetoric and discourse and I am dealing neither with matters of doctrine nor metaphysics. As should be clear when reading this article, my goal is not to present Ritual Black Metal in a positive (or negative) light but to describe and analyze the functions and forms of scenic construction and maintenance. A trained scholar should be able to write about subjects close to him/her without undue bias, and it is up to the reader to determine whether I have succeeded or not.

A further problem in studying artists is that most of them cultivate a public image, which could be compromised by scholarship and certain kinds of journalism, and participating in research could be seen as potentially detrimental to the artist’s career. This might make it difficult to convince artists to agree to interviews, but may also result in misrepresentations in cases where the researcher takes statements in magazine interviews at face value. For example, much writing about Black Metal ignores or is oblivious

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<sup>17</sup> Michael A. Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 27.

<sup>18</sup> See Kennet Granholm, “Dragon Rouge: Left-Hand Path Magic with a Neopagan Flavour,” *Aries* 12, no. 1 (2012).

to the intricacies and discursive strategies of the genre and consequently fails to recognize the genre-inherent aggressiveness as primarily a rhetoric device.<sup>19</sup> Artists may thus be concerned with guarding their public personae while simultaneously being worried that scholars will misrepresent them due to being unable to comprehend the genre and its style and discourses. The issue of public persona versus private sentiments is particularly pertinent in regard to the published interviews used as a secondary material in this article, but it does relate to the primary interview material as well. For example, prior to the official interview one of my interviewees clarified that he is “answering as a Black Metal artist” and that his answers therefore might differ if we were discussing in private. However, as my focus is on the rhetoric employed in the Ritual Black Metal scene and not on “true convictions” this is not a problem.

### A Brief History of Metal Music

While this is not an article on Metal music in a general sense on Metal music in general, a brief overview of the history of it, its philosophical and discursive background, and its various esoteric connections is needed in order to contextualize the particular forms and expressions of Metal this article deals with. This is particularly necessary in relation to so called Extreme Metal, not only due to relatively little research having (thus far) been done on it, but also due to developments in it being particularly pertinent to “the occult turn” in the contemporary scene.

The beginning of Heavy Metal as a musical genre is usually traced to the late 1960s, with the release of the debut albums of Deep Purple (1968), Led

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<sup>19</sup> For an example of exaggerated focus on violence in Black Metal see Michael Moynihan and Didrik Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Venice: Feral House, 1997). When violence in the Black Metal scene is discussed the church burnings in Norway in the early 1990s and Varg Vikernes’s killing of Mayhem guitarist Øystein Aarseth in Oslo, Norway, in 1993, are most often mentioned. The other examples highlighted are Jon Nödtveidt and “Vlad’s” killing of a homosexual man in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1997, and Mayhem vocalist Pelle “Dead” Ohlin’s suicide in 1991, and the subsequent use of a photograph of Ohlin’s corpse on a Mayhem album cover – a photograph was taken by Aarseth and was in fact used as an album cover, but on a bootleg release of a Mayhem concert and not on an official album (see Ika Johannesson and Jon Jefferson Klingberg, *Blod, eld, död – en Svensk metalhistoria* (Stockholm: Alfabetabokförlag AB, 2011), 74). These acts are certainly noteworthy, and while such acts of violence are sometimes glorified (see e.g. Jon Kristiansen, “Dissection,” in *Metalion: The Slayer Mag Diaries* (Slayer 12, May 1998), ed. Tara G. Warrior (Brooklyn: Bazillion Point Books, [2011] 2012), 379) they are hardly representative of the scene as a whole.



Zeppelin (1969), and Black Sabbath (1970).<sup>20</sup> These bands were influenced by Blues-based Hard Rock and Psychedelic Rock as well as the 1960s counter-culture with its penchant for rebelliousness, but the music was more extreme and messages of peace and love gave way for portrayals of a grimmer world.<sup>21</sup> Sonically, Metal music is characterized by “heavy drum and bass, virtuosic distorted guitar, and a powerful vocal style that use[s] screams and growls as signs of transgression and transcendence.”<sup>22</sup> The “New Wave of British Heavy Metal” from the mid 1970s introduced faster, heavier, and more melodic and complex forms of Metal, eventually inspiring the development of American Heavy Metal and the Extreme Metal genres that emerged in the 1980s.<sup>23</sup> The key Extreme Metal genres are Thrash, Death, and Black Metal.<sup>24</sup> The first of these was pioneered by bands such as Metallica and Slayer, both of whom released their debut albums in 1983, and usually revolves around complex melodic forms and socially critical lyrics. Death Metal, and often the faster and “punkier” Grindcore, usually has growled vocals and a less melodic structure, and is centred on morbid portrayals of death and decay.

The most extreme genre of Extreme Metal, Black Metal, emerged in the late 1980s to early 1990s. The genre-label is taken from the title of the band Venom’s second album from 1982 and was, primarily in hindsight, applies to bands that that incorporated overtly anti-Christian and “Satanic” themes in their lyrics and overall image from the early to mid 1980s. Besides Venom, the Swedish Bathory (debut album in 1984) and the Danish Mercyful Fate (debut album in 1983) are considered representatives of a “first wave of Black Metal.” It is, however, the Norwegian “second wave” of the early

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<sup>20</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 2; Marcus Moberg, “The Internet and the Construction of a Transnational Christian Metal Music Scene,” *Culture & Religion* 9, no. 1 (2008): 85. Particularly the release of Black Sabbath’s self-titled debut album is commonly regarded as the start of Heavy Metal. See Ian Christe, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), viii, 5–10; Marcus Moberg, *Faster for the Master!: Exploring Issues of Religious Expression and Alternative Christian Identity Within the Finnish Christian Metal Music Scene* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2011), 110.

<sup>21</sup> Moberg, “The Internet and the Construction,” 85; Moberg, *Faster for the Master!*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 9. Walser is describing the British blues bands that he regards as the precursor to Metal music, but this applies equally well to most forms of Metal.

<sup>23</sup> Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 102–103, 109–110; Moberg, *Faster for the Master!*, 112.

<sup>24</sup> These three genres are usually presented as following each other in a succession but this greatly simplifies actual developments. Furthermore, Extreme Metal genres blend into each other and genre definitions have at least as much to do with the self-identifications of artists and listeners as with musical differences, complicating clear demarcations of specific genres.

1990s one most often thinks of when the term Black Metal is mentioned, and it is this scene in which a self-identification with the term first occurred. In contrast to Death Metal the vocals in early “second wave” Black Metal were commonly shrieked rather than growled, the guitars shrill with an emphasis of the high and upper mid frequency bands, and the production value intentionally low. The early Norwegian scene was represented by bands such as Mayhem (first album in 1987), Darkthrone (first album in 1991<sup>25</sup>), the one-man band Burzum (first album in 1992), Immortal (first album in 1992), Satyricon (first album in 1993), Emperor (first album in 1994), and Gorgoroth (first album in 1994).

### Extreme Metal and the Occult Connection

Metal has from the very beginning embraced occult notions and themes, as well as having been accused of being directly connected to occultism and Satanism by its detractors. Already the Blues that preceded it was surrounded by stories of deals between musicians and the Devil.<sup>26</sup> Black Sabbath had a certain flirtation with darker occult themes, apparent in the name of the band itself as well as in image and lyrics. Led Zeppelin referred to occultist and magician Aleister Crowley in several of its songs, largely due to guitarist Jimmy Page’s long-lasting fascination with the infamous mage.<sup>27</sup> In the 1980s Ozzy Osbourne, former lead singer of Black Sabbath, continued his exploration of the occult with the song “Mr. Crowley” on his first solo album, *Blizzard of Oz* (1980). Thrash Metal band Slayer included songs titled “The Antichrist” and “Black Magic” on the debut album *Show no Mercy* (1983) and Metallica included the instrumental song “The Call of Ktulu”<sup>28</sup> on the 1984 album *Ride the Lightning*. Swiss band Celtic Frost—two members of which started out in the “first wave” Black Metal band

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<sup>25</sup> Darkthrone’s first album *Soulside Journey* is commonly not regarded a Black Metal album. From the band’s second album *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* from 1992, onwards, however, this label is commonly applied.

<sup>26</sup> A famous example concerns blues artist Robert Johnson who was said to have met Satan at a crossroads and sold his soul in order to become a great guitar player. See Jon Michael Spencer, *Blues and Evil* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), xiii.

<sup>27</sup> At one time Page even owned Crowley’s old Boleskine House on the shore of Loch Ness in Scotland. The website <http://fusionanomaly.net/aleistercrowley.html> (accessed October 16, 2009) lists several of the influences of Crowley in Led Zeppelin, as well as other details relating to Jimmy Page’s interest in Crowley.

<sup>28</sup> This is, of course, an influence of H. P. Lovecraft’s horror literature, which is in itself immensely popular in the contemporary occult milieu.

Hellhammer—included references to alleged Satanist Gilles de Rais (1404–1440) on its first album *Morbid Tales* (1984) and to Lovecraftian beings on the 1985 EP *Emperor's Return*. The occult was a common theme in early Death Metal as well, and Morbid Angel included songs named “Immortal Rites,” “Visions from the Dark Side,” and “Bleed for the Devil” on its first album *Altars of Madness* (1989). The occult was virtually the dominating theme in the slow and brooding genre known as Doom Metal, exemplified by bands such as Saint Vitus,<sup>29</sup> Pentagram,<sup>30</sup> and Candlemass.<sup>31</sup> Even Glam Metal band Mötley Crüe had allegedly planned on naming its 1983 album *Shout with the Devil*, but decided instead on *Shout at the Devil* after negative occult experiences of bass player and lyricist Nikki Sixx.<sup>32</sup>

It is, however, largely with Black Metal that the engagement with the occult started to be more structured and sustained, with undertones that can more clearly be categorized as religious. Black Metal, at least in its Norwegian “second wave,” is commonly described as Satanic.<sup>33</sup> It is true that overtly Satanic themes as well as Satanic self-descriptions and self-identifications emerged relatively early, but it has been argued, on good grounds, that this was largely due to the influence of the mass media portraying the genre as Satanic. In short, in January 1992 Burzum's Varg Vikernes (1973–) gave an interview where he claimed responsibility for a number of church burnings,<sup>34</sup> which led to a moral panic<sup>35</sup> and a media

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<sup>29</sup> The band's self-titled first album was released in 1984, and contains the song “White Magic/Black Magic.”

<sup>30</sup> First self-titled album in 1985. The very name of the band is, of course, an occult reference.

<sup>31</sup> Candlemass's first album, *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*, was released in 1986, and includes songs with titles such as “Crystal Ball” and “A Sorcerer's Pledge.”

<sup>32</sup> Tommy Lee et al., *The Dirt – Mötley Crüe: Confessions of the World's Most Notorious Rock Band* (New York: Regan Books, 2002), 88.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*; Gavin Baddeley, *Lucifer Rising: A Book of Sin, Devil Worship and Rock 'n' Roll* (London: Plexus Publishing, 1999). Commentators such as Moberg (*Faster for the Master!*, 119, 123–24) do acknowledge the pagan influences and themes. Thomas Bossius, *Med framtiden i bakspeglen: Black metal och Trancekulturen – Ungdomar, Musik och Religion i en Senmodern Värld* (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2003), 75, 103–105, 114, 117–20, does so as well, but seems to regard the paganism-influenced bands as distinct from Black Metal proper, which he regards as being Satanic in its essence.

<sup>34</sup> The interview is reproduced in English in Moynihan & Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 333–35.

<sup>35</sup> For a discourse analytical approach to social problems and moral panics, see Titus Hjelm, “Religion and Social Problems: A New Theoretical Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

frenzy focused on stories about “Satanism in Norway.”<sup>36</sup> This escalated a year later with Vikernes’s murder of Mayhem guitarist Euronymous (Øystein Aarseth, 1968–1993), and the convictions of several individuals involved in Black Metal for a number of the church burnings that had occurred in Norway in the early 1990s. The Norwegian documentary film *Satan rir media*<sup>37</sup> (*Satan Rides the Media*) clearly shows how the Satanism-label was applied by the media, how dubious “cult experts” validated this, and how the number of arsons drastically increased in the process—from approximately one per year in the early 1990s to fifty arsons altogether between 1992 and 1996.<sup>38</sup> Satanism became an identity marker in Black Metal, largely due to the media-created Satanism providing a “script” that Norwegian “second wave” Black Metal musicians and fans could use for antinomian purposes.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, the “first wave of Black Metal” was far more explicitly Satanic when it comes to lyrical content. To give a few examples: The debut album of Venom, *Welcome to Hell* (1981), includes songs such as “Sons of Satan” and “In League with Satan” and most songs include references to things

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<sup>36</sup> For discussion of Norwegian media portrayals and constructions of Satanism, see Asbjørn Dyrendal and Amina Olander Lap, “Satanism as a News Item in Norway and Denmark: A Brief History,” in *Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism*, ed. James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007). For a similar example from Finland, see Titus Hjelm, “Driven by the Devil: Popular Constructions of Youth Satanist Careers,” in *Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism*, ed. James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Torstein Grude, *Satan rir media* (Torsten Grude/TV2, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> Bossius, *Med Framtiden i Bakspejeln*, 99, contradicts this and claims that the frequency of “Satanic activities” lessened after the conviction of Vikernes, but does not name any sources for these claims. Bossius also buys wholeheartedly into the tale of a “black circle” and a “Satanic hierarchy” consisting of leading members of the Norwegian Black Metal scene (Bossius, *Med Framtiden i Bakspejeln*, 97). Although the existence of such a circle was claimed by Black Metal artists around 1993/4, no evidence for anything but a loose gathering of friends has surfaced. The claim has subsequently been contested by members of the Black Metal scene (see e.g. Varg Vikernes, “A Personal Review of Gavin Baddeley’s Book ‘Lucifer Rising: Sin, Devil Worship and Rock ‘n’ Roll,” August 13, 2004, [http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/lucifer\\_rising\\_review.shtml](http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/lucifer_rising_review.shtml)). In all likelihood the “circle” was simply an unorganized group of likeminded scene participants, and not any sort of “satanic secret society.” “The Black Circle” is very similar to what has been detailed in Satanic Panics elsewhere (and other moral panics and conspiracy theories), and it is reasonably safe to assume that the pre-existing model of clandestine conspiracies and the “satanic character” of Norwegian Black Metal claimed by mass media was used by musicians to gain scenic legitimacy.

<sup>39</sup> Egil Asprem, “Heathens up North: Politics, Polemics, and Contemporary Norse Paganism in Norway,” *The Pomegranate* 10 (2008): 53–54, shows that media representations of Satanism in Norway predate the rise of “Satanic” Black Metal.

such as Satan, demons, and Hell. All the albums of Swiss band Hellhammer, including the first demo *Satanic Rites* (1983), include references to Satan. The same goes for Swedish band Bathory from its first album *Bathory* (1984) to the late 1980s,<sup>40</sup> as well as for most of the other important “first wave” bands such as Destruction, Sodom, Sarcófago, Tormentor, Death SS, and Blasphemy. The references to Satan in Norwegian “second wave” Black Metal are far less frequent. Mayhem and Gorgoroth are the two bands that most frequently promote a Satanist outlook, and the latter only from its 1996 album *Antichrist* onwards. Early albums by most other bands do contain references to Satan, but the character commonly is used as a representation of the pre-Christian, in a heathen framework of “longing for a long lost pre-Christian past,” “nature-romanticism,” and the “importance of a ‘folk’.”

It is for this reason, and as I consider the term Satanism to be of little analytical value,<sup>41</sup> that I have argued that early Norwegian Black Metal should be characterized as heathen rather than Satanic.<sup>42</sup> In addition to this general heathen discursive framework references to Old Norse, pre-Christian myth, religion, and culture are at least as plentiful as references to Satan in early Norwegian Black Metal. Burzum’s self-titled debut album from 1992 contains an ode to the Babylonian god Ea and seemingly a cry of sorrow for an imagined lost pagan past (in the song “A Lost Forgotten Soul”). This theme of sorrow for “lost tradition” recurs in songs such as “Det som en gang var (Was Einst War)” [What Once Was] on the 1994 album *Hvis lyset tar oss* [If the light takes us]. Darkthrone’s album *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* (1992) contains several explicit references to pre-Christian mythologies, and is infused with a similar longing for a pre-Christian past as apparent in Burzum’s “Det som en gang var.” Emperor’s 1994 album *In the Nightside Eclipse* exhibits the same romantic longing, as it contains the song “Cosmic Keys to my Creations and Times” with the following more general

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<sup>40</sup> Bathory’s “satanic phase” started to come to an end with the band’s 1988 album *Blood Fire Death*, with heathen themes dominating from the 1990 album *Hammerheart* onwards.

<sup>41</sup> See Kennet Granholm, “Embracing Others Than Satan: The Multiple Princes of Darkness in the Left-Hand Path Milieu,” in *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009); Granholm, “The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism: The Temple of Set and the Evolution of Satanism,” in *The Devil’s Party: Satanism in Modernity*, ed. Per Faxneld and Jesper Aagaard Petersen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Kennet Granholm, “‘Sons of Northern Darkness’: Heathen Influences in Black Metal and Neofolk Music,” *Numen* 58, no. 4 (2011). See also Gry Mørk, “Why Didn’t the Churches Begin to Burn a Thousand Years Earlier,” in *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identities*, ed. Thomas Bossius, Andreas Häger, and Keith Kahn-Harris (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

esoteric line of text: “They are the planetary keys to unlimited wisdom and power for the Emperor to obtain.” Even Mayhem’s *Live in Leipzig* (1992) contains the song “Pagan Fears” and Gorgoroth’s debut album *Pentagram* (1994) the song “(Under) The Pagan Megalith.” The early 1990s Norwegian Black Metal was certainly anti-Christian, but an adversarial stance towards Christianity does not automatically equate to Satanism or Devil Worship.

## The Contemporary Ritual Black Metal Scene in Sweden

Occult elements were quite clearly present in the early Norwegian Black Metal scene, but it would take some time before any engagement with the occult was more organized and systematic. From about the mid 1990s more sustained attempts to create a form of Ritual Black Metal were in place, but it was not until the final years of the first decade of the twenty-first century that the critical mass had been achieved and a scene of relative prominence, with several bands, record labels, fanzines, venues, and fans interconnected, emerged. Ritual Black Metal represents a development within an existing musical scene, resulting in the emergence of a new “sub-scene” which, while connected to the larger Extreme Metal scene, has its own identity and institutions, as well as more pronounced and focused connections and engagements with the occult milieu represented by esoteric orders. Representatives of this scene not only claim a serious religious-philosophical attitude, but frame their artistic activities as religious-occult practice. In interviews, the occult aspects are also commonly placed in the foreground.<sup>43</sup> Most bands in the scene self-identify as “Black Metal,” but musically there is considerable diversity. For example, internationally, whereas bands such as Watain and Ofermod can easily be recognized as stylistically being Black Metal, others such as the Dutch The Devil’s Blood and the Finnish Jess and the Ancient Ones are stylistically most closely related to 1970s Hard Rock, and Saturnalia Temple could be termed as Doom and/or Stoner Metal.

From my observations and discussions with scene members, confirmed by Tuomas Karhunen,<sup>44</sup> the Metal scene has moved towards a stronger occult and magical inclination in recent years. According to Karhunen, this might be due to a number of artists becoming more deeply involved with occultism and the practice of magic, which in turn leads to other artists

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<sup>43</sup> See e.g. Wolf-Rüdiger Mühlman, “Saturnalia Temple: Im Auftrag des Drachen,” *Rock Hard* 299 (April 2012); Joel Malmén, “Ofermod” [interview], *Sweden Rock Magazine* 97 (November 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Tuomas Karhunen, interview, March 3, 2013.

becoming interested as well. Karhunen explains that this is a growing magical current evoking a collective energy, which leads to new musical expressions. However, while interest in practised occultism and magic has grown, opposition has increased as well, with accusations that some bands claim a magical pedigree simply in order to increase their fan base.<sup>45</sup>

While a transnational Ritual Black Metal scene exists, and various local scenes throughout Europe and the Americas, I think that it is safe to say that the scene is most prominent in Sweden. In Sweden, Ritual Black Metal has also built scenic institutions such as networks and special venues. On the one hand, some fans may prefer Ritual Black Metal but are unlikely to limit their engagement with Metal to only this scene. On the other hand, some scene participants may be less interested in Metal in general and prefer other forms of musical expression, but participate due to their occult interests. As for scenic institutions, most bands in the scene release their records on small independent record labels—though there are exceptions to this, Ofermod’s 2012-album *Thaumiel* was released by Spinefarm Records, which is an independent business unit of Universal Music Group. To my knowledge, however, there are no record labels that exclusively focus on Ritual Black Metal in Sweden.<sup>46</sup> Still, there might be labels that exclusively interested in bands with occult engagements, and who then release records by artists in many different genres, including Ritual Black Metal. These aspects of the scene certainly warrant investigation, but lie outside the scope of the present article.

## Scenic Institutions

The scenic institutions I will look at are two venues that are exclusively for bands engaged in the occult; the festivals Arosian Black Mass in Västerås (100km West of Stockholm) and Forlorn Fest in Umeå (in Northern Sweden). Forlorn Fest was first arranged in November 2010,<sup>47</sup> with the second festival on November 30 to December 1, 2012. The first Arosian Black Mass was arranged on November 11–12, 2011,<sup>48</sup> with the second

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<sup>45</sup> Karhunen, interview.

<sup>46</sup> In the US, though, the record label/book publisher Ajna focuses exclusively on occult music (Ajna Offensive, <http://www.theajnaoffensive.com>) and also publishes ritual magical and occult literature (Ajnaound, <http://www.ajnaound.com>).

<sup>47</sup> Forlorn Fest, “2010,” accessed March 6, 2013, <http://www.forlornfest.com/index.php?p=5>.

<sup>48</sup> Last.fm, “Arosian Black Mass,” accessed March 6 2013, <http://www.last.fm/festival/1967833+Arosian+Black+Mass>.

festival on November 23–24, 2012. Neither festival is presented as a place for “fun and party” as is the case with most other Metal festivals in Sweden and elsewhere. Instead, a sombre attitude dominates. As the organisers of Forlorn Fest write:

Forlorn Fest is an annual Deathworshipping Black Metal festival ... aim[ing] to be a showcase for occult music, art, and other creative outlets. ...only bands who truly embrace Death and everything that comes with the spirit of Black Metal are wellcome [sic] through the gates.

This festival is not a place for fun and joy, it is the opposite of festivals such as Sweden Rock, House of Metal, Wacken Air or Sonisphere. Instead of aiming to get as many visitors as possible, we aim to get the most dedicated audience who will add to the overall feeling of the festival<sup>49</sup>

The organizers of Forlorn Fest start their presentation on their Facebook page with “We welcome thee into the Church of Death”, and go on to state that the mission of the festival is “[t]o give the wanderers of the Left Hand Path, a truly one of a kind experience of what the essence of Black Metal is all about.”<sup>50</sup>

The organizers of Arosian Black Mass present their festival in a similar manner:

Arosian Black Mass is not a ‘Black Metal festival’ but is centered around occult esoterism in art, music and dark spiritual practice. The whole event will have its focus upon an esoteric process within which all participating artists will play key roles. The visitors shall expect a complete arcane impression through visions, audio and atmosphere. It is meant to be an extraordinary experience that they will never forget!<sup>51</sup>

“Not a Black Metal festival,” as it is in quotation marks, should here probably be understood as the venue not being comparable to “regular” Black Metal festivals, and possibly even being a “true Black Metal festival” in contrast to those that do not operate with an occult grounding. Both festivals thus use an elitist rhetoric in which authenticity and an exclusive audience are valued over drawing large number of attendants.

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<sup>49</sup> Forlorn Fest, “About,” accessed November 12, 2013, <http://www.forlornfest.com/index.php?p=3>.

<sup>50</sup> Forlorn Fest, “Facebook; Information,” accessed November 12, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/ForlornFest/info>.

<sup>51</sup> Arosian Black Mass, “Information,” accessed November 13, 2013, <http://www.ariosian-black-mass.se/info.html>.



I visited both festivals in November/December of 2012. While there were similarities, for example artists at both festivals being chosen on the grounds of them framing their music as closely and authentically related to the occult, there were differences as well. Arosian Black Mass had a broad range of different acts, ranging from the experimental ritual ambient act Arktau Eos to the Black Metal of Ofermod. The festival also included occult video showings, displays of occult artwork, and vendors selling occult books and ritual supplies. In contrast, the bands playing at Forlorn were of a more conventional Black Metal variety, and while they all framed their music as occult in philosophy and/or practice, the performances at the festival did not include traditional ritual magical elements in the same way as at Arosian Black Mass. The band Ofermod was an exception, and included a magical ritual in its performance. Unlike Arosian Black Mass, no vendors of occult books and supplies or displayers of occult art were present. Arosian Black Mass also seemed to attract a more international crowd, with people having travelled from around Europe, but also from e.g. South America, in order to participate. The audience at Forlorn Fest was mostly Swedish, as well as being a more traditional Metal crowd.

There are also scenic institutions that tread the border between occult fraternities and band activity. One example is the Luciferian Flame Brotherhood (also going by the name Serpent Flame Brotherhood), consisting of members of a number of Black Metal bands that operate on an occult basis. Mika Hakola of the Swedish band Ofermod and one of the instigators of the Brotherhood says:

I work on bringing together adepts from different Left-Hand Path-traditions for cooperation on a more mundane plane... to help spread the dark spiritual heritage and in that way help other dark-adepts to pave the way for a Draconian/Luciferian era where each tradition which is allied with the powers of darkness have a place and function.<sup>52</sup>

The goal with the Brotherhood is thus not to become an initiatory order in itself, but to direct the musical expressions of the occult to align them with ritual magical practice.

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<sup>52</sup> Belfagor (Ofermod), e-mail interview by author, October 12, 2012; Malmén, "Ofermod."

## A Closer Look at Ritual Black Metal Bands

In a more detailed look at the Ritual Black Metal scene I will focus on a number of Swedish bands that have an expressed and/or known connection to esoteric groups, specifically Dragon Rouge and the Misanthropic Lucifer Order (MLO). Dragon Rouge is a self-described dark magical initiatory order founded in 1990, and today has members throughout the Western world.<sup>53</sup> The beginnings of the Misanthropic Lucifer Order are less clear, but in its own account MLO was formed in 1995.<sup>54</sup> In the beginning MLO was a small group closely connected to the Black Metal scene and particularly the band Dissection,<sup>55</sup> but around 2006/2007, after the suicide of Dissection front man Jon Nödtveidt (1975–2006), the group was reorganized as The Temple of the Black Light and has since then strongly distanced itself from the Extreme Metal scene.

The second album of Dissection, *Storm of the Light's Bane* from 1995, is in terms of lyrics and artwork not in any significant way different from other Black Metal albums of the time and there is very little focused esoteric treatment. In 1997 Nödtveidt was arrested for being accessory to murder, and Dissection was inactive until his release in 2004. During his time in prison and after his release Nödtveidt engaged more explicitly with the philosophy of MLO, focusing his band as “the voice of MLO.” In an interview from prison in 2002 Nödtveidt assures that he is still composing music and says: “I handle my music and lyrics as powerful instruments for channelling and expressing the sinister and Chaotic energies of the anti-cosmic impulse.”<sup>56</sup> The original release of *Storm of the Light's Bane* contains the text “We hail you by the metal of death!” In the 2006 “ultimate reissue” of the album this text has been changed to “We hail you by the anti-cosmic metal of death!” with “anti-cosmic chaos-gnosticism” being the chosen self-description of MLO,<sup>57</sup> and the text “Dissection is the sonic propaganda unit of MLO” has been added. Dissection’s final album, *Reinkaos* from 2006, is full of esoteric references and symbolism related to the chaos-gnostic teachings of MLO, where physical existence is presented as a prison created

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<sup>53</sup> See Granholm, “Dragon Rouge.”

<sup>54</sup> Jon Kristiansen, “MLO: Misanthropiska Lucifer Orden,” in *Metalion: The Slayer Mag Diaries* (Slayer 16, Fall 2001), ed. Tara G. Warrior (Brooklyn: Bazillion Point Books, [2011] 2012), 549.

<sup>55</sup> Fredrik Gregorius, *Satanismen i Sverige* (N.p.: Sitra Ahra, 2006), 53.

<sup>56</sup> Jon Kristiansen, “Dissection: Fear the Return,” in *Metalion: The Slayer Mag Diaries* (Slayer 17, May 2002) ed. Tara G. Warrior (Brooklyn: Bazillion Point Books, [2011] 2012), 548.

<sup>57</sup> Gregorius, *Satanismen i Sverige*, 55.

by the demiurge, and with Lucifer/Satan as the liberator.<sup>58</sup> Everything indicates that Nödttveidt's suicide in 2006 was directly linked to his interpretation of MLO philosophy rather than being a desperate act committed in a depressed state of mind. He released *Reinkaos* on Walpurgis Night 2006, announced the split-up of the band two weeks later, arranged a final elaborate concert with exclusive merchandise on Midsummer day and at the concert he meticulously greeted all fans who wished to meet him.<sup>59</sup> Nödttveidt methodically wrapped up his musical and publically religious affairs. A week later he gave his last interview, at the end of which he announced his plans to “travel to Transylvania”—which in Black Metal culture is a euphemism for suicide due to Mayhem vocalist Pelle “Dead” Ohlin wearing a T-shirt with the print “I [Love] Transylvania” at the time of his suicide.<sup>60</sup> On August 16, 2006, Nödttveidt was found dead in his apartment with a gunshot wound in the head, surrounded by candles and an opened “Satanic Grimoire” in front of him.<sup>61</sup> The book was most likely *Liber Azerate*<sup>62</sup>—the key text of MLO,<sup>63</sup> and Nödttveidt would seem to have committed ritual suicide, in line with MLO's view of physical existence as something one should seek escape from.

Erik Danielsson, lead singer of the band Watain, played bass in the last incarnation of Dissection and was close to Nödttveidt. The first album of Watain, *Rabid Death's Curse* from 2000, includes quite standard “third wave” Black Metal symbolism with inverted crosses, goat heads in inverted pentagrams, and numerous mentions of Satan in a general anti-Christian framework. From there on the symbolism and content gradually becomes more diverse, ambiguous, and classically occult. The standard inverted crosses and goat head-pentagrams are absent and instead we see a broader range of symbols and images such as a snake spitting in three cups with the labels “mens” (mind), “animvs” (soul), and “corpvs” (body),<sup>64</sup> the all-seeing eye familiar from e.g. Masonic art,<sup>65</sup> an animal-headed angel holding a

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<sup>58</sup> Due to copyright laws I am unable to quote lyrics. However, access to the lyrics are readily available on the Internet. See Darklyrics, “Dissection Lyrics. Album: Reinkaos,” <http://www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/dissection/reinkaos.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Johannesson and Jefferson Klingberg, *Blod, eld, död*, 191–23.

<sup>60</sup> Johannesson and Jefferson Klingberg, *Blod, eld, död*, 191–23.

<sup>61</sup> Deathbringer, “Dissection Guitarist: Jon Nödttveidt Didn't Have Copy of ‘The Satanic Bible’ at Suicide Scene,” September 3, 2006, <http://www.metalunderground.com/news/details.cfm?newsid=21582>.

<sup>62</sup> Frater Nemidial, *Liber Azerate: Det Vredgade Kaosets Bok* (N.p.: MLO Anti-Cosmic Productions, 2002).

<sup>63</sup> Gregorius, *Satanismen i Sverige*, 52.

<sup>64</sup> Watain, *Casus Luciferi*.

<sup>65</sup> Watain, *Casus Luciferi*.

sword,<sup>66</sup> Hebrew characters,<sup>67</sup> a wolf's head,<sup>68</sup> a goat with its serpentine backside encircling a cross,<sup>69</sup> a Baphomet-like figure,<sup>70</sup> four triangles with each containing a ritual tool associated with one of the four elements,<sup>71</sup> and pictures of band members engaged in rituals.<sup>72</sup> The third album, *Sworn to the Dark* (2007), is dedicated to Nödtveidt and starts with the song “Legions of the Black Light” which is set quite firmly in an MLO anti-cosmic worldview,<sup>73</sup> and might possibly reflect the new name of MLO. In an interview from 2007 Danielsson also says that MLO “are the only Satanic organization I fully support.”<sup>74</sup> Watain’s live performances have been called “live rituals”, and Danielsson described the band’s shows in the following way:

...every WATAIN show, no matter if it is in front of 10 punks or 3000 insane Chileans, is holy to us and serves as a communion between us and the forces unto which we direct our praise.<sup>75</sup>

As for what the band means to him he says:

To me, WATAIN is a symbol of my inhuman self, a proud monument of darkness in a world of illusive light. As such, it portrays the sides of my self that have victoriously broken the shackles of existence. ... So yes, everything in my life can be found in relation to WATAIN...<sup>76</sup>

In discussing Black Metal as a genre, Danielsson says: “Inhuman energies is [sic] what makes Black Metal interesting, and even more so; divine,”<sup>77</sup> clearly defining Black Metal as something that goes beyond musical expression.

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<sup>66</sup> Watain, *Casus Luciferi*.

<sup>67</sup> Watain, *Casus Luciferi*.

<sup>68</sup> Watain, *Sworn to the Dark*.

<sup>69</sup> Watain, *Sworn to the Dark*.

<sup>70</sup> Watain, *Lawless Darkness*.

<sup>71</sup> Watain, *Lawless Darkness*.

<sup>72</sup> Watain, *Sworn to the Dark*.

<sup>73</sup> See Darklyrics, “1. Legions of the Black Light,” <http://www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/watain/sworn-to-the-dark.html#1>.

<sup>74</sup> Pete Woods, “Interview with Watain,” accessed November 14, 2013, <http://www.metalteamuk.net/interview-watain.htm>.

<sup>75</sup> Jon Kristiansen, “Watain: Black Metal Militia,” in *Metalion: The Slayer Mag Diaries* (Slayer 20, December 2010), ed. Tara G. Warrior (Brooklyn: Bazillion Point Books, [2011] 2012), 668.

<sup>76</sup> Kristiansen, “Watain,” 669.

<sup>77</sup> Kristiansen, “Watain,” 669.

As for the Dragon Rouge-inspired bands, Saturnalia Temple is led by Tommie Eriksson who is a long-time and active member of the aforementioned order, and who has published an introductory book on the order's teachings and practice.<sup>78</sup> In contrast to many other bands in the scene, Saturnalia Temple's first album *UR* from 2008 contains very little in the way of obvious magical sigils or symbolism, other than a magic square on the CD itself, a Babylonian statue on the front cover, and the title "UR" written in runic form. The lyrics, however, deal with initiation and are very similar to ritual magical texts familiar from a Dragon Rouge context. The second album *Aion of Drakon* from 2011 clearly references Dragon Rouge in its title, and has plenty of symbols/sigils on the cover. Musically, Saturnalia Temple is perhaps most closely related to Doom Metal, Stoner Metal, and Classic Metal in the vein of early Black Sabbath. Eriksson, however, describes the music of his band as "Black Magic Metal,"<sup>79</sup> which is also the title of a song on *Aion of Drakon*.

I will focus on the band Ofermod in more detail. Mika Hakola/Belfagor, the driving force of the band, is a member of Dragon Rouge<sup>80</sup> and all lyrics of the band relate to and interpret material familiar from the context of the order. The 2008 album *Tiamtū* contains plenty of "Demon sigils drawn by frater B.A.B.A, sorore Ararita and sorore A.J for ritual purposes and qliphotic invocations..." and the songs are described as ceremonies "lead [sic] by frater B.A.B.A (Michayah Belfagor), Master of ceremony..."<sup>81</sup> The lyrics to the 2012 album *Thaumiel* are written by Hakola and other members of Dragon Rouge, with each song accompanied by a sigil created by the author of the lyrics in question. Hakola describes the album artwork as "the visual grimoire," and the album as a whole as "a grimoire which deals with Samael."<sup>82</sup> The title itself refers to the qliphotic sphere "Thaumiel", with qliphotic kabbalah being the basis of the Dragon Rouge initiatory structure.<sup>83</sup> In the mid to late 1990s Hakola started to use the term "Orthodox Black Metal" to differentiate his music from "less serious/true" Black Metal, and the term has since then become popular with many other bands. Hakola says:

today it [Orthodox Black Metal] has evolved to be orthodox in a more proper sense as many musicians who use this term in reference to their music have

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<sup>78</sup> Tommie Eriksson, *Mörk Magi* (Sundbyberg: Ouroboros Produktion, 2001).

<sup>79</sup> Personal communication with Tommie Eriksson.

<sup>80</sup> Malmén, "Ofermod."

<sup>81</sup> Ofermod, *Tiamtū*.

<sup>82</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Granholm, "Dragon Rouge."

learnt esoteric ways of contacting the dark side of existence and its inhabitants and in that way can truly call themselves orthodox in their dark spirituality.<sup>84</sup>

He also feels that Black Metal needs to have this esoteric dimension in order to be proper Black Metal, and continues: “I am also very fond of bands such as Saturnalia Temple, JATAO [Jess and the Ancient Ones], Ghost, Therion and so on, but for me these bands are Black/Death as the lyrics determine the genre.”<sup>85</sup>

*Thaumiel* was released on the record label Spinefarm, which is a Finnish independent business unit of the multinational Universal Music Group, something which Hakola sees as providing “an opportunity to spread the qliphotic currents ... to a larger audience”,<sup>86</sup> and “...sows seeds of chaos in our listeners’ minds.”<sup>87</sup> He regards his band as being “different from 99% of the bands that use the same denominator [Black Metal] as it for us is a spiritual musical style dedicated to the darkest of forces which ultimately involves the Luciferian illumination.”<sup>88</sup> As for the music Hakola says:

... this is not only about music but in the highest possible degree magic ... each text is bound to some form of either individual ceremony or ceremonial experimentation by several adepts during a longer period ... The dark occult symbolism is what makes OFERMOD OFERMOD and not another mediocre so called ‘Black’ Metal band ... Without dark magic, where would the source to the insanity-wisdom that I must get in contact with in order to write a song be found? ... I need to turn inwards to the limitless reservoir of dimly enlightened darkness where I in the shadows which are cast from far away find a red thread that makes my fingers move in a frenzy over the neck of the guitar until the chaos is transformed into something which by human ears can be perceived as music with a structure. OFERMOD IS magic, OFERMOD IS occultism, the music we deliver is a reflection of where I am situated initiatory when I create it.<sup>89</sup>

For Hakola and Ofermod, “music and magic are ... one and the same essence, the Great Dragon’s breath and ‘heartbeat’ as a sort of chaos-pulse that the one who listens really carefully in the silence in him/herself can become aware of.”<sup>90</sup> While the songs are closely aligned with Hakola’s

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<sup>84</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>85</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>86</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>87</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>88</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>89</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>90</sup> Belfagor, interview.

personal initiatory process, he says that the magic of his music differs from his more private magical practice. The former is more intuitive whereas the latter is more structured. Still, Ofermod has at times used more conventional ritual elements in shows, but Hakola wants to present its magic strictly through music in the future. More conventional magical rituals will be limited to non-public pre-show preparations. For Hakola magic is always present in Ofermod, as the band's songs "can in the highest degree be viewed as rituals."<sup>91</sup> Hakola concludes: "What else could they be when I've emptied my soul in them for so long in the creative process? It's not regular music, that's for sure."<sup>92</sup>

While this article is focused on the Swedish scene and Swedish bands, the phenomenon does exist elsewhere. The Dutch band The Devil's Blood is an interesting example. The band was formed in 2006,<sup>93</sup> released its first demo in 2007, and then released a number of EPs and two full albums<sup>94</sup> before ending its career in January 2013.<sup>95</sup> Musically, the band is more akin to 1970s rock music, but it is nonetheless regarded as fitting in an Extreme Metal context, and has even played as a warm-up act for Watain, due to its occult focus in its lyrics.

I will end this article with a short discussion of two bands, which though being Finnish and not Swedish are connected to the Swedish occult milieu through one particular member. Tuomas Karhunen is lyricist, composer, and guitarist for both Jess and the Ancient Ones and Forgotten Horror.<sup>96</sup> The former was conceived as an idea in 2008 and realized as a band in 2010,<sup>97</sup> and while it has been compared to Devil's Blood due to both being musically inspired by 1970s and early 1980s rock and pop music, having an occult focus in lyrics and symbolism, and having a female lead singer, there are significant differences in both music and approach. Jess and the Ancient Ones is particularly interesting due to having garnered an impressive following in a very short time, demonstrating that the occult interests fairly large audiences. The band's self-titled first album reached number seven on

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<sup>91</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>92</sup> Belfagor, interview.

<sup>93</sup> Eduardo Rivadavia, "The Devil's Blood: Biography," accessed March 4, 2013, <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/the-devils-blood-mn0001021127>.

<sup>94</sup> The Devil's Blood, "Incantations," accessed March 4, 2013, <http://thedevelopsblood.com/incantations>.

<sup>95</sup> The Devil's Blood, "Declarations," accessed March 4, 2013, <http://thedevelopsblood.com/declarations>.

<sup>96</sup> While I do not write lyrics or music for the band, I play guitar at live shows.

<sup>97</sup> Karhunen, interview.

the Finnish official album sales list<sup>98</sup> and number one on the list of Finnish music magazine *Rumba*,<sup>99</sup> which collects sales statistics from specialist music shops, and its most recent mini album *Astral Sabbath* reached number fifteen on the Finnish official sales list.<sup>100</sup> The official video for the song “Astral Sabbath” had been viewed 16,196 times a month after having been uploaded to YouTube.<sup>101</sup> Similarly to *The Devil’s Blood*, *Jess and the Ancient Ones* has been accepted in the Extreme Metal scene and frequently plays at Metal venues—even though its musical style is more closely related to 1970s Surf Music, Occult Rock, and Folk Rock than to any form of Extreme Metal.

Forgotten Horror was founded in 2004 by Karhunen, released its first demo in 2007, and its first album, *The Serpent Creation*, in 2011. A second album is scheduled to be released in 2013. Musically the band can be characterized as Black Metal, but with strong influences from Thrash Metal, leading some commentators to define it as “Blackened Thrash.” According to Karhunen both Forgotten Horror and *Jess and the Ancient Ones* are deeply immersed in the occult and magic, including lyrics dealing with occult themes, occult symbolism being prominent on album artwork, and live shows sometimes described as rituals.<sup>102</sup> There are differences as well, though. *Jess and the Ancient Ones* deals with the occult in a relatively subtle way, not hiding its interests but not directly announcing them either. Forgotten Horror, however, engages with magic and the occult in a far more direct way, representing Karhunen’s personal explorations of the Left-Hand Path, dealing with and expressing his own initiatory process, as well as functioning as a tool for magical work. While Karhunen is a member of *Dragon Rouge*, he is careful to stress that neither of his bands is any kind of “propaganda unit” for the order. Forgotten Horror does, however, function as a voice for Karhunen’s personal approach to magical practice and his initiatory process within *Dragon Rouge*.

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<sup>98</sup> Musiikkituottajat, “Suomen virallinen lista – Albumit 22/2012,” <http://www.ifpi.fi/tilastot/virallinen-lista/albumit/2012/22>.

<sup>99</sup> *Rumba*, “Todellinen superyllättäjä Rumban listan keulille,” accessed March 4, 2013, <http://www.rumba.fi/todellinen-superyllattaja-rumban-listan-keulille-30952>.

<sup>100</sup> Musiikkituottajat, “Suomen virallinen lista – Albumit 09/2012,” <http://www.ifpi.fi/tilastot/virallinen-lista/albumit/2013/09>.

<sup>101</sup> *Jess and the Ancient Ones*, “Astral Sabbath,” YouTube, accessed March 4, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hgWxb1bXkE>.

<sup>102</sup> Karhunen, interview.



## Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the emergence of an occult-focused scene of Extreme Metal which I have termed Ritual Black Metal. I have provided a background to the occult in Metal music and an overview of some key scenic institutions and artists in a Swedish context. One interesting fact about the Ritual Black Metal scene is the tendency to focus so strongly on an “occult core” as the defining feature that musical attributes are overshadowed. Consequently, the scene involves bands such as Ofermod and Watain that can in a musical sense easily be identified as Black Metal, as well as bands such as Saturnalia Temple and The Devil’s Blood that have closer musical affinities to other genres of Rock and Metal. Another interesting factor is that many of the bands in the scene, at least in Sweden, have ties to occult orders. There are thus connections between the occult milieu and the Black Metal scene in which certain magic orders become scenic institutions in the Ritual Black Metal scene.

I have earlier written about a convergence of Black Metal and Neo-folk scenes, primarily with Black Metal artists turning to musical expressions derived from Neo-folk.<sup>103</sup> My contention was that this can in part be explained as attempts to re-radicalize a musical genre which was seen to have become too “safe” due to its growing appeal for broader audiences, and the turn was to non-Metal musical expressions with a religious emphasis, as Black Metal could not be made more radical in terms of music. Ritual Black Magic represents a similar development, a re-radicalization of Black Metal through a “religionization” of it, in the course of which musical style becomes secondary to lyrical expressions and the rhetoric of occult and magical engagement as the core of the genre. The other side of the coin is that some artists are uninterested in labelling themselves as Black Metal, expressing the sentiment that most bands in the genre have little to do with (true) occultism, implying that while their music may be called Black Metal by others it is distinguished from the majority of the bands so labelled.<sup>104</sup> For some fans, artists making such assertions are seen as more authentic than others, authenticity being the main currency for “subcultural capital”<sup>105</sup> in Extreme Metal, while others accuse them of simply “flashing the occultism card” in order to gain attention.<sup>106</sup> However one chooses to label

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<sup>103</sup> Granholm, “‘Sons of Northern Darkness’.”

<sup>104</sup> Karhunen, interview.

<sup>105</sup> Sara Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

<sup>106</sup> Karhunen, interview.

specific bands, the Ritual Black Metal scene is characterized by involving artists with vastly differing musical styles which nonetheless are seen as embodying the same essence and thus accepted as worthy participants on same the playing field. Assessing the “seriousness” of Ritual Black Metal is neither of interest nor possible in the analytical framework of this article, but some conjectures of the personal occult careers of artists in the scene can be made. It is clear that many of the artists involved in the Ritual Black Metal scene identified as Satanists in their youth and were primarily engaged in a rebellion against both Christian and dominant secular sensibilities. As they have grown older, rebellion for the sake of rebellion has lost its appeal, and a youthful fascination with occult themes has grown into a more conscious and sustained engagement with occult philosophy and ritual magic. This has, in turn, provided new models for younger artists and fans to follow.

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# The Temple-Mystical Background to a Valentinian Saying of the Saviour *The Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI, 1) 10.18–38

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## **Abstract**

*The Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI, 1) is a Nag Hammadi text which appeals to a Christian congregation, apparently consisting of both Valentinians and non-Valentinians, for unity in the face of divisions in the church caused by the jealousy of some over the superior spiritual gifts possessed by others. The work makes use of several sayings of the Saviour, portrayed as “the living teacher,” one of which is an otherwise unattested Valentinian saying (10.18–38). This article investigates the Temple-mystical background of the saying, situating it within a current of thought that associated the flesh of the crucified Christ with the veil of the holy of holies, and considered his post-resurrection ascension to be an enthronement experience. The emphasis on imitating Christ in his humility and suffering reaches a crescendo in this saying, where the Valentinian soul is exhorted to enter into Christ, beyond the veil, and be enthroned therein as preparation for their pneumatic heavenly ascent.

## **Keywords**

*Interpretation of Knowledge*; Valentinianism; Temple; Veil; Crucifixion; Mysticism

## **Introduction**

*The Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI, 1.1.1–21.35; henceforth *Interp. Know.*) is a highly fragmentary Valentinian text preserved amongst the Nag

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Hammadi codices.<sup>1</sup> In recent years it has drawn increased scholarly attention due to its employment of the Pauline imagery of the church as a Body with Christ as its Head.<sup>2</sup> Several recent studies have focused particularly on determining the literary genre of the work in light of this theme and how it is employed to address the situation of a divided Christian community in the latter pages of the text (15.10–21.34). Some time ago, Klaus Koschorke argued that it was a “gnostische Gemeindeordnung,”<sup>3</sup> but since there is very little evidence that *Interp. Know.* sets out to provide a set of rules for the community to follow, this suggestion has been largely discarded.<sup>4</sup> Elaine

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<sup>1</sup> The text is now available in three critical editions with introductions, translations, and commentaries in English, German, and French; John Turner and Elaine Pagels, “NHC XI,1: The Interpretation of Knowledge,” in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, and XIII*, ed. Charles W. Hedrick (NHS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 21–88; Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *Die Auslegung der Erkenntnis: (Nag Hammadi Codex XI, 1)* (TU 142; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1996), 6–49; Wolf-Peter Funk, Louis Painchaud, and Einar Thomassen, *L'Interprétation de la gnose (NH XI, 1)* (BCNH 34; Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010). On the poor condition of the manuscript, see Stephen Emmel, “Exploring the Pathway That Leads from Paul to Gnosticism: What is the Genre of The Interpretation of Knowledge (NHC XI, 1)?,” in *Die Weisheit – Ursprünge und Rezeption: Festschrift für Karl Löning zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Fassnacht (Münster: Aschendorff, 2003), 265–66; Emmel estimates that of 800 lines in the original text, only 585 have at least one letter fragment remaining, and only around 60 lines are more or less complete, and none from pages 1–8, and mostly from pages 15–21.

<sup>2</sup> Paul uses this imagery in Romans 12:4–5, 1 Corinthians 12:14–26; Ephesians 4:15–16; and Colossians 1:18, 24, 2:10, 19. The idea of Christ as the Head of the Christian community is found particularly in Ephesians 4:15 and Colossians 2:19. On the relation of *Interp. Know.* to the Pauline epistles, see Ismo Dunderberg, “Body Metaphors in 1 Corinthians and in the Interpretation of Knowledge (NH XI, 1),” in *Actes de huitième congrès international des études coptes, Paris, 28 juin – 3 juillet 2004* Volume 2, eds. N. Bosson and A. Boud'hors (Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 833–47; largely reproduced in Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 147–58; note however, Plisch, *Auslegung*, 4; Plisch urges caution in straightforwardly identifying *Interp. Know.* as Valentinian on the basis of certain Pauline terms and images, the employment of which is not uniquely Valentinian. Instead he suggests that in *Interp. Know.* “ein christlicher Gnostiker in bewusster Paulustradition ein aufregendes (weil) eigenständiges Stück Theologie vorgelegt hat” (“a Christian Gnostic has submitted, deliberately in the Pauline tradition, an exciting (because) independent piece of theology.”) (All translations from modern languages are my own.)

<sup>3</sup> “Gnostic Church Order.”

<sup>4</sup> Klaus Koschorke, “Gnostic Instructions on the Organization of the Congregation: The Tractate Interpretation of Knowledge from CG XI,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. Proceedings from the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978, Volume 2, Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. Bentley Layton (SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 757–69; Koschorke, “Eine neugefundene gnostische Gemeindeordnung: Zum Thema Geist und Amt im frühen Christentum,” *ZThK* 76 (1979): 30–60; for the rejection of Koschorke’s characterisation of *Interp. Know.*, see for instance, Emmel, “Pathway,” 261–63; and Dunderberg, “Body Metaphors,” 839.

Pagels understood it as “a homily intended for delivery in a service of worship,” a judgement often repeated,<sup>5</sup> but which has now been rendered inadequate on formal<sup>6</sup> and generic grounds.<sup>7</sup> Stephen Emmel advanced the idea that *Interp. Know.* is a philosophical epistle after the style of the *Treatise on Resurrection* (NHC I, 4) and Ptolemy’s *Epistle to Flora*, but the lack of any clear epistolary markers and unwarranted speculation on the content of the missing opening lines of the text have led to this suggestion failing to gain widespread acceptance.<sup>8</sup> Philip Tite has argued convincingly for the paraenetic nature of *Interp. Know.*, a judgement which certainly holds true of the latter section of the text (15.10–21.34), but which Tite suggests runs throughout the work.<sup>9</sup> Ismo Dunderberg has recently challenged Tite’s view, instead suggesting that *Interp. Know.* is a case of “deliberative rhetoric.”<sup>10</sup> However, upon closer inspection, Dunderberg’s rejection of *Interp. Know.* as paraenesis in favour of deliberative rhetoric emerges as little more than semantics, since his definition of deliberative rhetoric shares several key features with Tite’s presentation of paraenesis.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine Pagels, “The Interpretation of Knowledge: Introduction,” in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, and XIII*, ed. Charles Hedrick (NHC 28; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 22; Pagels, “The Interpretation of Knowledge (XI, I): Introduction,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James M. Robinson (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 472; also Madeleine Scopello, “Interpretation of Knowledge,” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* Volume 4, ed. A.S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1301; John Turner, “Knowledge, Interpretation of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Volume 4, ed. D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 93–95; Plisch, *Auslegung*, 3; Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ‘Valentinians’* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 86; and Thomassen, “The Interpretation of Knowledge,” in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 651.

<sup>6</sup> See especially, Emmel, “Pathway,” 263–65.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Tite, “An Exploration of Valentinian Paraenesis: Rethinking Gnostic Ethics in the *Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI, 1),” *Harvard Theological Review* 97.3 (2004): 277–78; “The early Christian homily is a problematic literary category: as a designation of genre, it is not identified with a specific set of social and literary dimensions, and therefore fails to serve any analytical function. Indeed, to identify a text as a homily has tended to be a means of avoiding the problem of genre, and consequently the homily has become an ill-defined catch-all category.”; this judgement is repeated in Tite, *Valentinian Ethics and Paraenetic Discourse: Determining the Social Function of Moral Exhortation in Valentinian Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 187–88; see also Dunderberg, “Body Metaphors,” 839.

<sup>8</sup> Emmel, “Pathway,” 264–65.

<sup>9</sup> Tite, “Exploration”; Tite, *Valentinian Ethics*, 184–216.

<sup>10</sup> Dunderberg, “Body Metaphors,” 839–42; Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 153–54.

<sup>11</sup> Dunderberg, “Body Metaphors,” 840–41 n. 26; Tite, “Exploration,” 280–83; Dunderberg bases his definition of deliberative rhetoric on observations from Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991); Dunderberg states that the main

In the introduction to the most recent critical edition of *Interp. Know.* (2010), Louis Painchaud, at first glance, rather hedges his bets regarding the literary genre of the work, showing great sympathy with Emmel's notion of a single addressee, while also suggesting that it may have reached a wider audience, and taking account of both homiletic and paraenetic features. However, he rightly draws a sharp distinction between the two homiletic sections designed to instruct the recipients (3.25–8.38 and 9.17–14.38), and the paraenesis designed for practical application (15.10–19.37), before a closing exhortation (20.14–21.34).<sup>12</sup>

Thus far, the vast majority of research has focused on the paraenesis in 15.10–19.37, since these pages are better preserved, and are where the Pauline Head-Body image is mainly employed. On the other hand, comparatively little attention has been paid to the earlier pages of the text (1.1–8.38), probably because of extremely poor preservation. But nor has the fascinating, and slightly better preserved, section at 9.17–14.38 received the attention it deserves. These pages contain several sayings from a figure called either the “teacher of immortality”<sup>13</sup> or “the living teacher,”<sup>14</sup> representing the Saviour-Christ, in 9.28–10.38, followed by what Painchaud has described as a “complex Midrash” on these sayings in 11.15–14.38.<sup>15</sup> The first set of these sayings in 9.28–38 is a collage taken from the Gospel of Matthew:

Now this is his teaching: “Do not call to a father upon the earth. Your Father, who is in heaven, is one.<sup>16</sup> You are the light of the world.<sup>17</sup> They are my brothers and my fellow-companions who do the will of the Father.<sup>18</sup> For what use is it if you gain the world and you forfeit your soul?<sup>19</sup> For when we were in the darkness we used to call many ‘father’, since we were ignorant of the true Father. And this is the great conception of all sins ...”<sup>20</sup>

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distinction between paraenesis and deliberative rhetoric is that while the former offers general moral exhortation, the latter addresses a specific problem.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Painchaud, “Introduction,” in *L'Interprétation de la gnose (NH XI, 1)* (BCNH 34; Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010), 21–31.

<sup>13</sup> *Interp. Know.* 9.19; **ϣⲁⲗ ⲛ̅ⲧⲏⲛ̅[ⲧⲁ]ⲧⲏⲟⲩ**; all citations of the Coptic text of *Interp. Know.* are taken from Turner's critical edition, unless otherwise stated. All English translations from *Interp. Know.* are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>14</sup> *Interp. Know.* 10.14; **ⲡϣⲁⲗ ⲉⲧⲁ[ⲛ̅ⲗ]**; this is Funk's reconstruction.

<sup>15</sup> Painchaud, “Introduction,” 37.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 23:9.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 5:14.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 12:50; cf. Mark 3:35; and Luke 8:21.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 16:26; cf. Mark 8:36; and Luke 9:25.

<sup>20</sup> **ⲧⲉⲩⲥⲮⲱ ⲛ̅ⲗⲉ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲉⲓ ϣⲉ ⲙ̅ⲛⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̅ⲏⲧ̅ⲛ̅ ⲗⲉⲓⲱⲧ ϩⲓϣ̅ⲛ̅ ⲡⲕⲁⲗ ⲟⲩⲉⲉⲓ ⲡ[ⲉ] ⲡⲉⲧ̅ⲛⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲉ̅ⲟ̅ⲛ̅ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ⲡⲏⲩⲩⲉ ⲛ̅ⲧⲱⲧ̅ⲛ̅ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛ̅ ⲙ̅ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̅ⲁⲥⲛⲏⲩⲩⲩ ⲗⲩⲱ**

However, this sequence is followed by a first-person saying from “the living teacher” which is otherwise unattested in ancient sources. It is the aim of this paper to draw out the mystical background of the saying and demonstrate its position in the broader context of ancient traditions concerning the crucified flesh of Christ as being consubstantial with the veil of the holy of holies, as well as the idea of the risen Christ’s enthronement at the Ascension. It is crucial that we properly understand the background to these sayings, and particularly this otherwise unattested Valentinian saying, since it is these sayings and the commentary on them in the pages following that form the doctrinal and theological backbone to the closing paraenesis.

### The Text: *The Interpretation of Knowledge 10.17–38*

The saying is as follows:<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17b</sup>παχερ̄ ν̄γαρ <sup>18</sup>[νεϛ ϛ]ε πκοσμ[οc] πωκ ν̄γαρ εν πε ν̄ <sup>19</sup>[νεκω]π  
 ν̄τ[μορ]φη ε̄τν̄[ζ]ητ̄ϛ̄ χεοῡζη̄ῡ <sup>20</sup>[πε αλ]λα οῡ[αθη]γ̄ μ̄ν̄ [οῡκ]ολλαςic

ΝΑΦΒ̄ΡΚΟΙΝΩΝΟC ΝΕ†ΡΕ ΜΠΟΥΩΦΕ Μ̄Π|ΕΙΩΤ̄ ΕῩ Ν̄ΓΑΡ ΠΕ ΦΗΥ ΕΚΩΑΝ † ΖΗΥ  
 ΜΠΚΟCΜΟC ΝΚ† ΛC† ΝΤΕΚΦΥΧΗ ΕΝΦΩΟΠ̄ ΝΓΑΡ Ζ̄Ν ΠΚΕΚΕΙ ΝΕΝΜΟΥΤΕ ΑΖΑΖ ΧΕ  
 ΕΙΩΤ̄ ΕΝΟΕΙ ΝΑΤCΑΥΝΕ ΑΠ|Ε|ΙΩΤ̄ Μ̄ΜΗΕ ΑῩΩ ΠΕΕΙ ΠΕ ΠΝ|Α|C̄ † Ν̄Ω Ν̄ΝΝΑΒΕΙ ΤΗ... ;  
 Turner’s translation. As with all but one (page 19) of the twenty-one pages of main text of *Interp. Know.* (excluding the flyleaf of Codex XI which may have contained a superscript title for *Interp. Know.*), the opening lines of page 10 are missing, making it impossible to know for certain precisely where this section of “teaching” finished. On these lines, see Michel Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 101–105; Tite, “Exploration,” 283–85; Tite demonstrates the chiasmic structure of these lines; and Einar Thomassen, “Commentaire,” in *L’interprétation de la gnose (NH XI, 1)* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2010), 127–29; also Thomassen, “The Interpretation of Knowledge,” 653; Thomassen argues that these teachings come from either the same or a similar sayings source to that used by Clement of Alexandria, as opposed to coming directly from the gospels themselves. If one accepts Thomassen’s hypothesis, it certainly supersedes that of Plisch, who saw a connection with a sayings collection used by 2 *Clement*. For this, see Uwe-Karsten Plisch, “Die Rezeption Bekannter und Unbekannter Herrenwörter in NHC XI, 1,” in *Der Gottesspruch in der Kopt. Literatur: Hans Martin Schenke zum 65. Geburtstag*, (ed.) W. Beltz (Halle, 1994), 85–87; Plisch. *Auslegung*, 106 n. 87.

<sup>21</sup> All following citations of *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38 are from this translation. The Coptic text provided follows the critical edition of Turner, except on one important occasion (line 22) where it follows the more cautious edition of Funk. The reasons for this are stated below. In all citations of the Coptic text I have retained the square brackets from Turner’s edition indicating lacunae in the manuscript. In the English translations in the main text, I have removed them for readability (except above), but retained them for the Coptic in the footnotes. Shorter quotes from ancient sources appear in the main text, but longer ones are confined to footnotes.

ΧΙ Τ<sup>21</sup>[CΒΩ] ΝΑ[Ε ΜΠΕΕΙ ΝΤΑΖ]ΟΥΝΟΝΟΥ <sup>22</sup>[ἄ] ΟΥ]ΖΗΥ [ἴ]Ν[ΟΥ ... ΠΕ]  
 ΤΦΥΧΗ ΑΥ<sup>23</sup>[Ω Ν]ΤΕΧΙ ΜΠΕ[QCXHM Π]ICXHM <sup>24</sup>[ΠΕ]ΤΦΟΟΠ ΖΑΤ[ΕΖ]Η  
 [ΜΠ]ΩΤ ΠΛΟΓΟΣ <sup>25</sup>[Α]ΥΩ ΠΧΙΣΕ ΠΕΕΙ [Α]ΤΡΕ[С]ΑΥΝΕ ΜΜΑQ  
<sup>26</sup>[Ε]ΜΠΑΤΕΡΠΑΛΑΝ ΕΦΟΟΠ ΝCΑΡΖ <sup>27</sup>ΝΤΕ ΚΑΤΑΔΙΚΗ ΖΟΜΟΙΩC ΔΕΙCΒΑΚ Α  
<sup>28</sup>ΠΕΖΟΥΟ ΧΕΚΑΣΕ ΖΙΤΝ ΠΑΘΒΕΙΟ ΕΕΙ <sup>29</sup>ΝΑΧΙΤΕ ΑΖΡΗ ΑΠΙΝΑΘ ΝΧΙΣΕ ΠΜΑ  
<sup>30</sup>ΝΤΑΖΑΖΑΕΙ ΕΒΑΛ ΝΖΗΤῒ ΑΖΟΥΧΙ <sup>31</sup>ΜΜΟ ΑΠΕΕΙΖΙΕΙΤ ΕΡΕΦΑΝΠΙCΤΕΥ<sup>32</sup>Ε  
 ΟΕ ΑΡΑΕΙ ΑΝΑΚ ΠΕ ΕΤΑΧΙΤΕ ΑΠCΑΝ <sup>33</sup>ΤΠΕ ΖΙΤΝ ΠΙCΧΗΜΑ ΕΤΕΝΕΥ ΑΡΑQ  
<sup>34</sup>ΑΝΑΚ ΠΕ ΕΤΑΒΙΤΕ ΖΙ ΝΑΝΑΖΒΕ· ΒΩΚ <sup>35</sup>ΑΖΟΥΝ ΖΙΤΝ ΠΕCΠΕΙΡ ΠΜΑ  
 ΝΤΑΖΑΕΙ <sup>36</sup>ΑΒΑΛ ΜΜΕΥ ΑΥΩ ΖΩΠ ΜΜΟ ΑΝΕΘΗ<sup>37</sup>ΡΙΟΝ ΠΙΦΟΡΗΜΑ  
 [Ε]ΤΕΡΦΟΡΕΙ ΜΜΑQ <sup>38</sup>†ΝΟΥ ΜΠΩ ΕΝ [Π]Ε [ΕΡΕ]ΦΑΝΒΩΚ

17<sup>b</sup> For he said <sup>18</sup>[to him,] “Now the world is not yours. <sup>19</sup>[You should not  
 est]eem the [fo]rm which is in it as a profit, <sup>20</sup>[but] as a [loss] and [a  
 pun]ishment. Receive instead the <sup>21</sup>[teaching of the one who was] reproached,  
<sup>22</sup>[it is] a profit and [a ...] O soul! And <sup>23</sup>receive [his shape.] [This] shape <sup>24</sup>is that  
 [which] exists before [the] Father, the Logos, <sup>25</sup>and the height; this let you know  
 him <sup>26</sup>before you were led astray while in the flesh <sup>27</sup>of condemnation. Likewise  
 I became <sup>28</sup>very small so that through my humility I <sup>29</sup>might take you up to the  
 great height, the place <sup>30</sup>from which you had fallen. You were taken <sup>31</sup>to this pit.  
 If you still believe <sup>32</sup>in me, it is I who shall take you <sup>33</sup>above through this shape  
 that you see. <sup>34</sup>It is I who shall bear you upon my shoulders. Enter <sup>35</sup>in through  
 the rib, the place from which you came <sup>36</sup>forth and hide yourself from the  
 beasts. <sup>37</sup>This burden which you bear <sup>38</sup>is no longer yours. If you enter ...”

There are several important textual observations to be made here before we  
 begin to analyse the theological background to the saying. Firstly, are we  
 dealing with one or two shorter sayings (lines 18–20 and 27b–38), or one  
 longer saying (10.18–38)? The critical editions are divided on this point.  
 Firstly, in the English critical edition, Turner considers 10.18–20 to be one  
 short saying ending at “punishment” (**ΚΟΛΑCΙC**), with no further direct  
 speech on the page. In the German critical edition, Plisch considers there to  
 be two short sayings from 10.18–20, and then again at 10.27b–38. Finally in  
 the BCNH critical edition, Painchaud believes that 10.18–38 consists of a  
 shorter “logion” in 10.18–20a ending at “punishment” (**ΚΟΛΑCΙC**), and a  
 longer address of the Saviour to the soul in 10.20b–38.<sup>22</sup> However, in the  
 translation, he opens the quotation marks at 10.18 and leave them open for  
 the remainder of the page, suggesting perhaps that the logion forms the  
 opening of the Saviour’s address, and not a separate piece of direct speech.

Turner’s edition makes poor sense of the first-person address in 10.27b–  
 38, where the words are clearly put into the mouth of the crucified Saviour

<sup>22</sup> Painchaud, “Introduction,” 31.

in the form of a direct speech. Painchaud’s rendering is plausible, although it is confused by the fact that in the introduction to the critical edition, 10.18–20 is considered as an independent logion of “the living teacher” which apparently forms a “coherent ensemble” with those of 9.27–38 quoted above, and is then followed in 10.20–38 by an address of the Saviour to the soul, but without any clear indication of how the two are grammatically separate.<sup>23</sup> Only Plisch’s German text edition of *Interp. Know.* 10 is entirely consistent with what he argues in his commentary.

According to Plisch, the two sayings in 10.18–20 and 10.27b–38 are linked by the use of **ΖΟΜΟΙΩΣ** (Gk. **ὁμοίως**; “likewise”) in line 27. He argues that this adverb functions to tie the two sayings together either side of the *author’s* address to the soul which has been inserted to give the text a smoother flow.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, he states that, “Die (unmittelbare) Verknüpfung von Zitaten oder Textstücken desselben Autors mit **ὁμοίως** ist durchaus geläufig.”<sup>25</sup> However, the two examples adduced by Plisch to substantiate this assertion with regard to *Interp. Know.* are extremely poor.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 31, 36–37.

<sup>24</sup> Plisch, *Auslegung*, 111 n. 100.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. “The (direct) linking of quotations or pieces of text from the same author with **ὁμοίως** is entirely familiar.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. The first example is the Berlin Evagrius-Ostrakon (P. Berol. 14 700) published in Hans-Martin Schenke, “Das Berliner Evagrius-Ostrakon,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 116 (1989): 90–107. Plisch notes two such uses of **ὁμοίως** in this ostrakon at Recto 10 and Verso 2. In fact, the word that appears in these two cases is **ΟΜΟΙ**, which Schenke translates as “gleichermaßen” (“equally”). In his commentary (100), Schenke states that **ΟΜΟΙ** is indeed an abbreviated form of **ὁμοίως**, and that it can be written both with and without the *horeh* (**Ϸ**) for aspiration. Besides the different renderings of **ὁμοίως** in the Evagrius Ostrakon (**ΟΜΟΙ**) and *Interp. Know.* 10.27 (**ΖΟΜΟΙΩΣ**), the fact remains that **ΟΜΟΙ** is not used in the ostrakon to connect two instances of *quotations* from the same author. Rather, it is used firstly (R 10), to juxtapose the *cursing* of one who worships graven images and the *blessing* of the patient man with a gentle spirit; and secondly (V 2), to link the fleeing of both God and the good Christian from evil. Plisch’s second example is from a homily of Severian of Gabala published in Leo Depuydt and Paul Chapman, eds., *Encomiastica from the Pierpont Morgan Library Volume 1* (Lovanii: Peeters, 1993), 228. Besides the likelihood that this homily is a later, perhaps 8th century, pseudepigraph, **ΖΟΜΟΙΩΣ** (as it appears in Severian’s homily) is again *not* used to link quotations or pieces of text from the same author, as Plisch implies. Instead, **ΖΟΜΟΙΩΣ** is used to draw attention to the fact that Severian’s homily was delivered “in the shrine of Michael Archangel south of the city on the day of his commemoration, the 12th day of Hātōr,” *just like* the homily of Athanasius of Alexandria which was also delivered “on the 12th day of Hātōr in the shrine of Michael,” and is recorded immediately before Severian’s homily in the manuscript. Hence, neither of the examples adduced by Plisch offer a parallel to the use of **ΖΟΜΟΙΩΣ** in *Interp. Know.* 10.27 in support of his argument.

While it is not impossible that **ϩΟΜΟΙΩC** functions in 10.27 as an interjection to signal direct discourse,<sup>27</sup> there are at least two good reasons for thinking that this is not the case and that we are instead dealing with one long saying from 10.18 to somewhere in the lost opening lines of page 11. Firstly, while **ϩΟΜΟΙΩC** can be used to link ideas and themes, or as a signal for direct speech, the idea that it can be used to *re*-introduce direct speech seems uncertain, and we would expect some particle such as *je* to indicate a following piece of direct speech.<sup>28</sup> Hence, there is no clear grammatical indication in 10.27 to suggest that the first person singular address that follows is part of a new piece of direct speech, which would suggest that it is a continuation of an already existing speech. Secondly, if the address in 10.18–20 really is picked up again in 10.27, as Plisch suggests, how do we account for the shift from a second-person masculine singular addressee in 10.18–20,<sup>29</sup> to a second-person feminine singular addressee in 10.27–38? If Plisch is correct in suggesting that these are two parts of a single saying that originally went together in a non-extant sayings source,<sup>30</sup> then there would have been an unqualified shift from masculine to feminine grammatical forms which, while invisible in the Greek *Vorlage*, comes to the surface in the Coptic translation. The best explanation only appears once we take 10.18–38 as a single piece of direct speech. By taking the definite article phrase in 10.22 (**ⲧⲫϩⲭⲏ**) as a vocative (“O soul”), as Plisch and Painchaud do, we can identify the moment at which the address shifts from a masculine singular to feminine singular addressee.<sup>31</sup> If this is the case, the saying of the Saviour begins by addressing a male individual, possibly a Valentinian

<sup>27</sup> See Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* 3rd ed. Rev. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), CG 523; cf. CG 240 and 245; **ϩΟΜΟΙΩC** is not listed by Layton as a “Non-Inflected Interjection,” but would seem to fit the pattern.

<sup>28</sup> The particle **ⲭⲉ** is used consistently in *Interp. Know.* as a marker of direct discourse alongside a verb of speaking; 1.28 (**ⲓⲡⲡⲣⲓⲭⲟⲟⲩ ⲭⲉ**); 10.17–18 (**ⲡⲉⲭⲁⲩ ⲛ̅ⲒⲀⲢ [ⲛⲉⲩ ⲭ]ⲉ**); and 16.33 (**ⲓⲡⲡⲣⲓⲭⲟⲟⲩ ⲭⲉ**); and compare also the reported discourse in 9.28–38 (**ⲧⲉⲩⲥⲬⲱ ⲛ̅ⲒⲘⲉ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲉⲓ ⲭⲉ**). Note that in the case of 10.17–18, we are relying on Turner’s reconstruction; Plisch and Funk both reconstruct this lacuna as **ⲡⲁⲭⲉⲩ ⲛ̅ⲒⲀⲢ [ⲭⲡⲓ]ⲉⲡⲓⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ** (“For he said, ‘Reject the world!’”). In this case, there is no particle **ⲭⲉ**, but only the verb of speaking. Both reconstructions are perfectly plausible.

<sup>29</sup> 10.18 **ⲡⲓⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲡⲱⲕ ⲛ̅ⲒⲀⲢ ⲉⲛ ⲡⲉ ⲛ̅**; 10.19 **ⲛⲉⲕⲱⲡ ⲛ̅ⲧⲙⲟⲣⲫⲏ ⲉⲧ̅ⲛ̅Ⲓⲫⲏⲧ̅ⲩ̅**.

<sup>30</sup> Plisch, *Auslegung*, 111 n. 100.

<sup>31</sup> In the text of 10.17b–38 provided above, I have indeed adopted the more cautious reconstructions of Plisch and Funk. At 10.22, Turner instead has reconstructed **ⲟⲩⲓⲒⲏⲩⲩⲛ̅ⲓⲛ̅ⲓⲟⲩⲛⲁⲩⲣⲉ ⲛ̅ⲓⲧⲫϩⲭⲏ** “an advantage and a profit for the soul.” As opposed to assuming a direct address function for the definite article phrase, Turner instead explains the second-person feminine singular forms as an address to the church (**ⲧⲉⲤⲕⲁⲛⲥⲓⲁ**), since 9.17–18 reports that the “teacher of immortality” did so address it.

catechumen (10.18–20a), then invokes his (female) soul to receive the teaching of “the one who was reproached” (10.20b–27a), that is, the crucified Christ, and proceeds to deliver the teaching of that figure to the soul (10.27b–38).

Two further textual points need to be addressed concerning 10.18–38: the problematic reconstruction of 10.22b–23, and the translation of 10.24–27a. In the first place, the extant manuscript of 10.22b–23 reads **αΥ[·]ΤΕΧΙ ΜΠΕ[·]ΙCΧΗΜΑ**. Turner reconstructs **αΥ[Ω Ν]ΤΕΧΙ ΜΠΕ[QCXΗΜΑ Π]ΙCΧΗΜΑ**, and translates, “And receive his shape. It is the shape ...”; Plisch reconstructs **αΥ[Ω Ν]ΤΕΧΙ ΜΠΕ[CΜΑΤ ΜΠ]ΙCΧΗΜΑ**, and translates, “Und empfang die Gestalt dieser Erscheinung ...”;<sup>32</sup> and Funk reconstructs **αΥ[Ω Ν]ΤΕΧΙ ΜΠΕ[CΜΑΤ ΜΠΠ]ΙCΧΗΜΑ**, and translates, “Et comprends la forme et la figure.”<sup>33</sup> While all of these are grammatically plausible reconstructions, the lacuna appears to be of seven letters at the very least, making Plisch’s suggestion less likely. On the other hand, Plisch is the only editor to translate the demonstrative article of **ΠΙCΧΗΜΑ** as “*this* shape.” If we take this demonstrative as anaphoric, then it most likely refers back to a previous use of **CXΗΜΑ** in the passage, as would be possible in Turner’s reconstruction, but not in Plisch’s or Funk’s, since they reconstruct **CΜΑΤ** in the lacuna.<sup>34</sup> If we accept Turner’s reconstruction, but emend his translation to make the demonstrative article more vivid, then we have: “And receive his shape. This shape ...” In doing so, the contrast between receiving the divine **CXΗΜΑ** of the crucified Christ (10.23), and rejecting the material **ΜΟΡΦΗ** of the world (10.19), is more forcefully brought out. Furthermore, Turner’s reconstruction of the possessive article **ΠΕQ** (“his, its”) in **ΠΕ[QCXΗΜΑ]** seems highly likely in light of the parallel it discerns between “Receive instead the teaching of the one who was reproached” (**ΧΙ ΤCΒΩ ΝΔΕ ΜΠΕΕΙ ΝΤΑΖΟΥΝΘΝΟΥQ**) (10.20–21) and “Receive his shape” (**ΧΙ ΜΠΕQCXΗΜΑ**) (10.23), thereby creating a close connection between epistemology (the teaching) and ontology (the “shape”) in relation to salvation.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, “his shape” (**ΠΕQCXΗΜΑ**) makes good sense in light

<sup>32</sup> “And receive the form of this shape ...”

<sup>33</sup> “And consider the form and the figure ...”

<sup>34</sup> See the comments on the demonstrative **ΠΙCΧΗΜΑ** at 10.33 in Louis Painchaud, “L’utilisation des paraboles dans l’*Interprétation de la gnose* (NH XI, 1),” *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 428.

<sup>35</sup> Note also Thomassen’s observation that if we read **ΜΠΕ[CΜΑΤ]**, the **ΠΕ** could in fact be understood as the second person feminine singular possessive article, instead of the definite article; see Thomassen, “Commentaire,” 130–31; Thomassen in fact adopts this reading in his new English translation of *Interp. Know.* in Thomassen, “The Interpretation of Knowledge,” 657; where he translates, “And receive *your* form and that shape ...”



of 10.32–33, where the crucified Saviour states that he shall take the soul above “through this shape that you see” (ΖΗΤῆΝ ΠΙCΧΗΜΑ ΕΤΕΝΕΥ ΑΡΑQ).

Finally then, there is the issue of the translation of 10.24–27a; the shape which the Valentinian soul is exhorted to receive is qualified as “that [which] exists before [the] Father, the Logos, and the height; this let you know him before you were led astray while in the flesh of condemnation.”<sup>36</sup> Like Turner, I understand the CΧΗΜΑ to be that which exists before the Father, and the Logos, and the height. Plisch and Painchaud view things differently. Plisch translates, “... die existiert angesichts des Vaters! Der Logos und die Höhe ist es, was du kanntest bevor du irregeleitet wurdest, als du als Fleisch der Verdammnis existiertest”;<sup>37</sup> while Painchaud translates, “... qui sont devant le Père. C’est le statut et le rang élevé, que tu connaissais avant que tu ne t’égares et ne sois condamnée à devenir chair.”<sup>38</sup> Again, all are perfectly grammatically plausible. However, against Painchaud’s translation, λόγος can of course be used as a technical term in Valentinianism, as is the case in *Interp. Know.*, denoting one of the Aeons of the Pleroma, which would speak against the notion that it here means “status.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, although ΠΙCICE is not a widely attested Valentinian technical term for denoting the spiritual realm, at 10.29–30 “the great height” (ΠΙΝΑC N̄ΙCICE) is identified as “the place from which you had fallen” (ΠΜΑ N̄ΤΑΖΑΖΑΕΙΕ ΑΒΑΛ N̄ΖΗΤQ). Likewise, in 13.33–34, Christ is depicted as looking down “from in the height” (ΑΒΑΛ Q̄N ΠΙCICE) to the members of the church upon the earth. All these examples give a specifically spatial sense to ΠΙCICE, which is lost in Painchaud’s translation, “high rank.” This saying clearly refers to “the height” as the original home of the soul, and that to which it shall return through the redemptive power of Christ.

However, there is still the issue of whether “this shape” is that which exists before the Father, the Logos, and the height (Turner), or only before the Father (Plisch and Painchaud). The problem with Turner’s and my own translation of this passage is that there is no conjunction between “the Father” and “the Logos” (ΠΩΤ ΠΛΟΓΟC ΑΥΩ ΠΙCICE), perhaps suggesting

<sup>36</sup> [ΠΕ]ΤΨΟΟΠ ΖΑΤ[ΕΖ]Η [ΜΠ]ΩΤ ΠΛΟΓΟC [Α]ΥΩ ΠΙCICE ΠΕΕΙ [Α]ΤΡΕ[C]ΑΥΝΕ ΜΜΑQ [Ε]ΜΠΑΤΕΡ̄ΠΛΑΝΑ ΕΨΟΟΠ N̄CΑΡΖ N̄ΤΕ ΚΑΤΑΔΙΚΗ. Plisch and Funk both reconstruct ΕΝΕΡΕ[C]ΑΥΝΕ at 10.25, resulting in slight variations in translation (see below).

<sup>37</sup> “... that exists in the face of the Father! The Logos and the height is what you knew before you were led astray, while you existed as flesh of the damnation.”

<sup>38</sup> “... which are before the Father. It is the status and the high rank that you knew before you were estranged and were condemned to become flesh.”

<sup>39</sup> Besides 10.24, logos appears seven times in *Interp. Know.*, three times to denote the divine hypostasis; 3.28; 17.35; and possibly at 4.36; and four times to denote some kind of spiritual gift or learning; 16.32, 37, 38; and 21.29.

therefore, a new sentence starting with “the Logos” (ΠΛΟΓΟΣ). However, while Plisch’s translation is certainly acceptable,<sup>40</sup> it is also possible that “the Father” (ΠΩΤ) and “the Logos” (ΠΛΟΓΟΣ) exist in an asyndetic relationship,<sup>41</sup> in which linked entity terms can be listed without a conjunction, thereby expressing a particularly close relationship. Unlike the closely related figures of the Father and the Logos, “the Logos” and “the height” are connected by ΑΥΩ on the grounds that they are not as conceptually close, with one being a *figure* and the other being a *place*. If this is accepted, the soul is indeed exhorted to receive the pneumatic shape which exists in the divine presence of the Father, *and* the Logos, *and* the height.

This covers the major philological issues of *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38 and their divergent renderings in the three most important critical editions. From line 26 onwards, page 10 of the manuscript is fairly well preserved with only a few small lacunae, the restoration of which the critical editions all agree upon. Therefore, having established that we are dealing with one long saying of the Saviour, or “the living teacher,” the crucified Christ, I now turn to the soteriological scheme underlying our saying, and how it compares to those of related Valentinian texts. By seeing how well the soteriology of *Interp. Know.* maps onto the soteriologies of related Valentinian texts, one can more accurately exegete certain otherwise mysterious elements of our saying.

### The Soteriological Landscape of *Interpretation of Knowledge* 10.18–38 and Related Texts

*Interp. Know.* 10.18–38 begins with an exhortation to the Christian not to esteem the flesh, but rather to reject it as some kind of “loss” (ΑΘΗΥ) and “punishment” (ΚΟΛΑCIC). Instead, the Christian ought to receive the teaching of the crucified Saviour, since this really is a “profit” (ΖΗΥ) for the soul. As such, the soul must receive the “shape” (CΧΗΜΑ) of Christ, which is that which it possessed primordially, before being imprisoned in the flesh by the beastly archons. Christ’s redemptive earthly mission was designed to reverse this state of affairs. This reversal is made possible by Christ’s self-sacrifice on the Cross; the crowning moment of his “humility” (ΘΒΕΙΟ), via which the soul can return to its original divine position in “the great height” (ΠΙΝΑC ΝΧΙCΕ). By a show of faith, the soul can re-enter the divine realm through the “rib” (CΠΕΙΡ) of the crucified Christ, hide itself from its

<sup>40</sup> See Plisch, *Auslegung*, 110–11.

<sup>41</sup> Layton, CG 145, 231, and 237.

adversaries, and have the burden of the flesh alleviated. This entry into the body of the crucified Christ is thought to facilitate a heavenly ascent. This soteriology is unpacked further in *Interp. Know.* 11–14, which as was mentioned above, has been called a “complex Midrash” on the sayings of 9.28–10.38.<sup>42</sup>

To begin with, *Interp. Know.* 11 states that when “the female” ([**TE**]C<sub>2</sub>IME), that is Sophia, brought forth “her seed” (ΠΕCCEΠEPMA), she did not have “any other garment” (KEAAΓE N̄Z̄BCOY) for them except the soul. As such, “the beasts” (N̄[Θ]HP[ION]) then entrapped the soul in a “garment of the condemnation” (ΩTHN N̄TE TKA[T]A[Δ]IKH), that is, the flesh.<sup>43</sup> So, the spiritual seed is encased in a soul by Sophia, before the soul is then imprisoned in the fleshly body by the evil cosmic powers. According to *Interp. Know.* 12, “the Son” (Π[ΩH]PE) therefore “appeared in flesh” (OYΩ[N̄Z̄] ABA[λ] N̄CAPZ) so that the imprisoned souls might “become glorious” ([Ω]ΩΠE ENZA EAΓ) by means of “the humiliated one” (ΠPECΦΩC), and receive grace through “the one who was reproached” (Π[ENΓ]AZOYNOYOC̄).

*Interp. Know.* 13 then identifies this process of the souls’ glorification through Christ the Son as being achieved by means of Christ’s crucifixion, for “When he cried out, he was separated from the Church like portions of darkness from the Mother, while his feet provided him traces, and these scorched the way of the ascent to the Father.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, upon Jesus’s death-cry, the souls’ path back to the Father was illuminated. But furthermore, we read: “For the Head drew itself up from the pit; it was *bent* (PEKT̄) over the Cross and it looked down to Tartaros so that those below

<sup>42</sup> Note that the opening lines of each of these pages are entirely missing, lines 1–11 on page 11; 1–9 on page 12; 1–8 on page 13; and 1–7 on page 14; and still more lines are preserved so poorly that nothing can be made of them.

<sup>43</sup> 11.27–28; cf. 10.26–27: “flesh of condemnation”; CAPZ N̄TE KATAΔIKH; and 6.29: “bound us in nets of flesh”; MOYR M̄M[λ]N N̄Z̄NABH N̄CAP[Z].

<sup>44</sup> N̄[TA]P[E]QA[Ω]H[λ] M̄M[EN] AYΠWPX N̄Π[H] ABAλ Z̄N TEKKH[CI]A N̄ΘE Z̄NTAI[E] N̄ΠKEKEI ABAλ Z̄N TMEY NEΦOYPI[TE] ΔE AYT̄ NEΦ N̄Z̄NIXNOC AYΩ [ANEEI]ΩPΩ N̄TEZIH N̄T[OI]N̄BOK A[ZPH] ΦA ΠΩT.; cf. *Tripartite Tractate* 118.28–119.16; On the soteriology of this passage, see particularly Wincenty Myszor, “Kreuz, Leib Christi und Kirche (Excerpta ex Theodoto 42 und ‘Die Auslegung der Erkenntnis’, NHC XI, 1),” in *Coptica, Gnostica, Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, eds. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier (Québec: Les Presses De L’Université Laval, 2006), 610–13; also see the relevant remarks on the mystical dimensions of the concept of “the way” (TEZIH; Gk. ἡὸδός) in April DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 69–73.

might look above” (13.25–29).<sup>45</sup> This image is clearly borrowed from the Johannine crucifixion narrative, where upon his expiration in 19:30, Jesus “*bowed his head and gave up his spirit*” (κλίνας τὴν κεφαλὴν παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα).<sup>46</sup> Here then, Christ is depicted gazing down into the world, here designated as “Tartaros,” from the Cross.<sup>47</sup> The nuance of this passage is simple; Christ’s divine element, “having been separated from the Church” (i.e. his Body), has ascended up to the Limit of the Pleroma and now peers down into the cosmos below. In doing so, he allows the members below to gaze upwards into the divine world of their origin. This is explained further in 13.30–36: “For in the same way as, for example, when someone looks into a well, the face of the one who looks down looks up, this is also the way when the Head looked from in the height to his members; the members rushed above, (to) the place where the Head was.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, Christ the Head staring down at his Body the Church on earth is like someone seeing themselves in a reflection, and just as when we see ourselves in a reflective surface, our image is drawn back to us, so too the Church is drawn up to where Christ is.

Christ’s redemptive self-sacrifice takes on a different dimension in *Interp. Know.* 14, where we read in 14.28–38,

When the great Son was sent after his younger brothers, he spread out the edict of the Father and announced it, opposing the All. And he took away the old bond of condemnation. And this is what the edict was: “Those who have been made slaves and have been condemned by Adam, have been delivered from death, received the forgiveness of sins, and have been redeemed by ...”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> [N̄T]A2[Α]ΤΑΠΕ ΓΑΡ ΣΩΚ [H̄]ΜΑΣ ΑΖΗΗ ΑΒΑΛ Z̄M ΠΖΙΕΙΤ N̄ΤΑΥΡΕΚΤC Z̄ΙΧM ΠΕΣΤΑΥΡΟC ΑΥΩ A[C]ΩΩΠΤ ΑΠ[Ι]ΤN ΑΠΤΑΡΤΑΡΟC ΧΕΚA[CE] ΝΕΤΗΠCΑΝΠΙΤN ΕΥΑΩΠΤ ΑΤΠΕ.

<sup>46</sup> Also see Turner, “NHC XI,1,” 83; Turner suggests that this image may also allude to the recognition scene of John 19:26–27.

<sup>47</sup> The “Cross” (Σταυρός) here is certainly the Valentinian technical term indicating the Limit or Boundary (Όρος) which separates the Pleroma from the realms beneath it; see for example, Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.2.4; 3.1; 3.5; and *Exc. Theod.* 42.1; on this concept, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 279–83.

<sup>48</sup> N̄ΘΕ N̄ΓΑΡ N̄ΟΥCΜΑΤ ΕΡΕΨΑΝΟΥΕΙ ΩΩΠΤ ΑΥ[Ω]ΩΤΕ ΨΑΡΕ· ΠΖΟ M̄ΠΕΝΤΑΖΩΩΠ[Τ] ΑΠΙΤN ΩΩΠΤ ΑΤΠΕ ΤΕΕΙ ΤΕ ΘΕ N̄[Τ]ΑΡΕΤΑΠΕ ΩΩΠΤ ΑΒΑΛ Z̄NΠ[ΧΙ]CΕ ΨΑ ΝΕCΜΕΛΟC ΑΖΑΝ M̄MΕΛΟC ΠΩΤ ΑΤΠΕ ΠΜΑ ΝΕΡΕΤΑΠΕ ΨΟΟΠ [H̄]ΜΕΥ N̄ΤΑC; Funk’s and Plish’s reconstruction of ΑΥ[Ω]ΩΤΕ ΨΑΡΕ at 13.31 has been preferred here to that of Turner, who reconstructs ΑΥ[ΕΕ]Ι ΤΟΤΕ ΨΑΡΕ.

<sup>49</sup> N̄ΤΑΡΟΥΤN̄ΝΑΥ ΘΕ M̄ΠN[Α]C N̄ΨΗΡΕ N̄CΑ ΝΕCΣN̄ΗΥ N̄ΚΟ[Υ]ΕΙ ΑCΠΩΡΩ ΑΒΑΛ M̄ΠΔΙΑΤΑΓΜΑ [H̄]ΠΩΤ ΑCΩΩ M̄ΜΑC ΕCΤ ΑΖN ΠT[H]P̄C ΑΥΩ ΑCΩI M̄ΠΧΕΙΡΟΓΡΑΦΟΝ ΝΕC ΠΑΤΚΑΤΑΔΙΚΗ ΠΕΕΙ ΝΔΕ Π|Ε Π|ΔΙΑΤΑΓΜΑ ΕΝΕCΨΟΟΠ ΠΕ ΝΕ[N]ΤΑΖΟΥΕΕΙΤΟΥ ΝCΑΟΥΑΝ ΑΖΟΥΩ[Ω]ΠΕ ΝΚΑΤΑΔΙΚΟC Z̄N ΑΔΑΜ ΑΖΟΥN[Τ]ΟΥ ΑΒΑΛ M̄ΠΜΟΥ ΑΖΟΥΧI M̄ΠΚΩ[Ε] ΑΒΑΛ N̄ΝΟΥΝΑΒI ΑΥΩ ΑΖΟΥCΩΤΕ M̄ΜΑΥ Z̄IΤN.

Although the words of the Father’s edict are cut short by a lacuna at the top of page 15, the meaning is clear. Firstly, in being crucified, Christ inaugurated a new covenant, or “edict,” to replace the old Adamic one, which is here described as a “bond of condemnation.”<sup>50</sup> That which was inaugurated by Adam brought about slavery, death, and sin. Christ came to reverse this by means of his self-sacrifice. It is clear from the imagery in 10.34–36 that the evil Adamic covenant was not the result of his transgression of God’s will, but rather the separation of Eve from Adam’s side, which apparently brought death into the world.<sup>51</sup> Hence we see in our saying, Christ, in his role as the Second Adam, exhorting the soul to return whence it came (his rib), and thereby restore the primal androgyne, overcome death, and receive redemption, being “reborn in the flesh and blood of (the Saviour)” (12.37–38; **Ν̄CΕΧΠΑΝ Ν̄ΚΕCΑΠ Ζ̄Ν ΤCΑΡ[Ξ ΑΥΩ Ζ̄Μ] ΠCΝΑC Ν̄ ...**).<sup>52</sup>

Thanks to *Interp. Know.* 11–14, the overall soteriological scheme of *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38 is therefore much clearer; the spiritual seed, having been clothed in a soul by Sophia, and then in a fleshly body by the beasts/archons, need to put off this “garment of condemnation” once more. This release from bodily imprisonment is achieved through Christ’s descent into the world and his glorification of the seed by means of his “humiliated” body on the Cross. By being crucified, Christ opens the way of ascent to the

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<sup>50</sup> Although the crucifixion is not mentioned explicitly in this passage, it is clearly meant to be evoked not only by the immediate context, but also by the verb **ΠΩΡΩ ΑΒΑΛ** “stretch out,” alluding to the position of Christ on the Cross. This is corroborated to some degree by *Gospel of Truth* 20.23–27, “For this reason Jesus appeared; he put on that book; he was nailed to a tree; *he published the edict of the Father on the cross* (**ΑCΤΩCΕ Μ̄ΠΔΙΑΤΑΓΜΑ ΑΒΑΛ Ν̄ΤΕ ΠΩΤ Ζ̄ΠΕΘ̄ΡΟC**).” Here it is also on the Cross that the edict of the Father is proclaimed; see also *Gos. Phil.* 63.21–24, “The eucharist is Jesus. For he is called in Syriac ‘Pharisatha,’ which is ‘the one who is spread out,’ for Jesus came to crucify the world (**ΤΕΥΧΑΡΙCΤΕΙΑ ΠΕ ΙC ΕΥΜΟΥΤΕ ΓΑΡ ΕΡΟC Μ̄ΜΝΤCΥΡΟC ΧΕΦΑΡΙCΑΘΑ ΕΤΕΠΑΙ ΠΕ ΠΕΤΠΩΡΩ ΕΒΟΛ ΛΙC ΓΑΡ ΕΙ ΕCΤΑΥΡΟΥ Μ̄ΚΟCΜΟC**);” on this “pun,” see Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 222.

<sup>51</sup> See also *Gos. Phil.* 68.22–26; 70.9–22; *Gospel of Thomas* §22; *Exegesis on the Soul* 133.6–15; on the passages from *Gos. Phil.* and the *Exegesis on the Soul*, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 101–103; 214–17.

<sup>52</sup> On the primal androgyne, see particularly, Wayne Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *History of Religions* 13, no. 3 (1974): 165–208; Meeks especially recognises the prevalence of this image in “Gnostic” and Pauline ritual and thought. On the Adam-Christ typology and its importance for the restoration of the primal androgyne in Valentinianism, see Benjamin Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 31–50.

Father, and having himself ascended, he proceeds to draw up the spiritual souls towards him by means of his Body, the Church. In doing so, Christ reverses the effects of the division of the primal androgyne, principally, slavery to the fleshly body, death, and sin. Such an “Adam Christology” is a feature of Paul’s thought, most explicitly in Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 and 45–49, such that salvation is conceived of as “a reversal of the cursedness of Adam,” and therefore “a recovery of the paradisiacal state.”<sup>53</sup>

In light of this soteriological scheme, we can make much better sense of the crucified Christ’s mysterious exhortation to the soul to “Enter in through the rib (σπειρ; Gk. πλευρά), the place from which you came forth and hide yourself from the beasts” (ΒΩΚ ΑΖΟΥΝ ΖΙΤῆ ΠΕΣΠΕΙΡ ΠΜΑ ΝΤΑΖΑΕΙ ΑΒΑΛ ΠΜΕΥ ΑΓΩ ΖΩΠ ΠΜΟ ΑΝΕΘΗΡΙΟΝ). In this command, two biblical scenes are clearly resonant. The first of these is the crucifixion narrative from the Gospel of John, specifically 19:34, where we read that although Christ’s legs were not broken, “Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side (πλευρά) with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.”<sup>54</sup> Secondly, the imagery also clearly evokes the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib in LXX Genesis 2:21–22: “And God cast a trance upon Adam, and he slept, and he took one of his ribs (πλευρά) and filled up the flesh in its place. And the rib (πλευρά) that he had taken from Adam the Lord God fashioned into a woman and brought her to Adam.”<sup>55</sup> This double allusion is made possible in *Interp. Know.* by virtue of the fact that it is by means of Christ’s self-sacrifice on the Cross that the deficient Adamic covenant can be replaced with a new divine edict, for it is through the spear-wound in Christ’s side that the primal androgyne is restored when the soul enters into it. We find a strikingly similar soteriological scheme in the *Gospel of Philip*.

<sup>53</sup> Grant Macaskill, “Paradise in the New Testament,” in *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views*, eds. M. Bockmuehl and G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64.

<sup>54</sup> ἀλλ’ εἰς τῶν στρατιωτῶν λόγῃ αὐτοῦ τὴν πλευρὰν ἐνυξεν, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν εὐθὺς αἷμα καὶ ὕδωρ.

<sup>55</sup> καὶ ἐπέβαλεν ὁ Θεὸς ἕκστασιν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀδάμ, καὶ ὑπνωσε· καὶ ἔλαβε μίαν τῶν πλευρῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεπλήρωσε σάρκα ἀντ’ αὐτῆς. καὶ ὠκοδόμησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὴν πλευρὰν, ἣν ἔλαβεν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀδάμ, εἰς γυναῖκα καὶ ἤγαγεν αὐτὴν πρὸς τὸν Ἀδάμ.; The LXX edition used here is Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

*The Gospel of Philip*<sup>56</sup>

According to *Gos. Phil.* 68.22–26, “When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist. When she was separated from him death came into being. If he enters again and attains his former self, death will be no more.”<sup>57</sup> Similarly in 70.9–12, “If the woman had not separated from the man, she should not die with the man. His separation became the beginning of death.”<sup>58</sup> However, “Because of this Christ came to repair the separation which was from the beginning and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation and unite them.”<sup>59</sup> By separating the primal androgyne into male and female, Adam and Eve, death came into the world. The redemptive work of Christ is to restore this androgynous state and thereby give eternal life.

This union between male and female according to *Gos. Phil.* takes place in the “bridal chamber”: “But the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. Indeed those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. Thus Eve separated from Adam because it was not in the bridal chamber that she united with him.”<sup>60</sup> But *Gos. Phil.* 69.14–70.9 goes further, equating the Valentinian sacraments, including the bridal chamber, with the three rooms of the Jerusalem Temple:

Baptism is the holy building. Redemption is the holy of the holy. The holy of holies is the bridal chamber ... Because of this its veil was rent from top to bottom. For it was fitting for some from below to go upward. The powers do not see those who are clothed in perfect light, and consequently are not able to detain them. One will clothe himself in this light sacramentally in the union.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup> All references to *Gos. Phil.* are to Bentley Layton’s critical edition and Wesley Isenberg’s translation in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7. Together with XIII, 2\**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1)*, and *P.Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, ed. Bentley Layton, (NHS 20; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 142–215.

<sup>57</sup>  $\bar{\eta}\zeta\omicron\omicron\gamma \ \bar{\nu}\epsilon\rho\epsilon\epsilon\gamma\zeta\alpha \ [\zeta]\bar{\eta}\alpha[\Delta]\alpha\bar{\mu} \ \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\mu}\bar{\eta}\bar{\mu}\omicron\gamma \ \omega\omicron\omicron\pi \ \bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\rho\epsilon\sigma\pi\omega\rho\chi \ [\epsilon\rho]\omicron\gamma \ \alpha\pi\mu\omicron\gamma \ \omega\omega\pi\epsilon \ \pi\alpha\lambda\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu} \ \epsilon\gamma\omega\alpha\omega\omega[\kappa \ \epsilon\zeta]\omicron\gamma\bar{\nu} \ \bar{\eta}\gamma\chi\bar{\iota}\tau\epsilon \ \epsilon\rho\omicron\gamma \ \bar{\mu}\bar{\eta}\bar{\mu}\omicron\gamma \ \bar{\nu}\alpha\omega\omega\pi\epsilon.$

<sup>58</sup>  $\bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\mu}\pi\epsilon\tau\zeta\bar{\iota}\mu\epsilon \ \pi\omega\rho\chi \ \epsilon\phi\omicron\omicron\gamma\tau \ \bar{\nu}\epsilon\sigma\bar{\nu}\alpha\mu\omicron\gamma \ \alpha\bar{\nu} \ \pi\epsilon \ \bar{\mu}\bar{\eta}\bar{\phi}\omicron\omicron\gamma\tau \ \pi\epsilon\gamma\pi\omega\rho\chi \ \bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\gamma\omega\omega\pi\epsilon \ \bar{\eta}\alpha\rho\chi\bar{\eta} \ \bar{\eta}\pi\mu\omicron\gamma.$

<sup>59</sup> 70.12–17;  $\delta\bar{\iota}\alpha\tau\omicron\gamma\tau\omicron \ \alpha\pi\epsilon\chi\bar{\rho}\bar{\varsigma} \ \epsilon\bar{\iota} \ \chi\epsilon\kappa\alpha\alpha\varsigma \ \pi\pi\omega\rho\chi \ \bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\zeta\omega\omega\pi\epsilon \ \chi\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu}\omega\rho\rho\pi \ \epsilon\gamma\bar{\nu}\alpha\varsigma\epsilon\zeta\omega\gamma \ \epsilon\rho\alpha\tau\gamma \ \pi\alpha\lambda\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu} \ \bar{\eta}\gamma\zeta\omicron\tau\rho\omicron\gamma \ \bar{\eta}\pi\sigma\bar{\nu}\alpha\gamma \ \lambda\gamma\omega \ \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\tau\alpha\zeta\mu\omicron\gamma \ \zeta\bar{\eta}\pi\pi\omega\rho\chi \ \epsilon\gamma\bar{\nu}\alpha\tau \ \bar{\nu}\alpha\gamma \ \bar{\eta}\bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omega\bar{\eta}\zeta \ \bar{\eta}\gamma\zeta\omicron\tau\rho\omicron\gamma;$  see Plisch, *Auslegung*, 113; Plisch rightly connects *Gos. Phil.* 70.9–17 to *Interp. Know.* 10.34–36; on this soteriology in *Gos. Phil.*, where Christ is the Second Adam who reunites the primal androgyne, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 214–17.

<sup>60</sup> 70.17–22;  $\omega\rho\epsilon\tau\zeta\bar{\iota}\mu\epsilon \ \delta\epsilon \ \zeta\omega\tau\bar{\rho} \ \alpha\pi\epsilon\sigma\zeta\alpha\epsilon\bar{\iota} \ \zeta\rho\alpha\bar{\iota} \ \zeta\bar{\eta}\pi\pi\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma \ \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\tau\alpha\zeta\zeta\omega\tau\bar{\rho} \ \delta\epsilon \ \zeta\bar{\eta}\pi\pi\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma \ \omicron\gamma\kappa\epsilon\tau\bar{\iota} \ \sigma\epsilon\bar{\nu}\alpha\pi\omega\rho\chi \ \delta\bar{\iota}\alpha\tau\omicron\gamma\tau\omicron \ \alpha\epsilon\gamma\zeta\alpha \ \pi\omega\rho\chi \ \alpha\lambda\delta\alpha\bar{\mu} \ \chi\epsilon\bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\zeta\zeta\omega\tau\bar{\rho} \ \epsilon\rho\omicron\gamma \ \alpha\bar{\nu} \ \zeta\bar{\eta}\pi\pi\alpha\varsigma[\tau\omicron]\varsigma.$

<sup>61</sup> 69.22–25; 70.1–9;  $\pi\bar{\nu}\alpha\pi\tau\bar{\iota}\varsigma\bar{\mu}\alpha \ \pi\epsilon \ \pi\bar{\eta}\bar{\iota} \ \epsilon\tau\omicron\gamma\alpha\alpha\bar{\nu} \ [\pi]\varsigma\omega[\tau]\epsilon \ \pi\epsilon\tau\omicron\gamma\alpha\alpha\bar{\nu} \ \bar{\eta}\pi\epsilon\tau\omicron\gamma\alpha\alpha\bar{\nu} \ \pi\epsilon\tau[\omicron\gamma\alpha]\bar{\alpha}\bar{\nu} \ \bar{\eta}\bar{\nu}\epsilon\tau\omicron\gamma\alpha\alpha\bar{\nu} \ \pi\epsilon \ \pi\bar{\nu}\bar{\nu}\bar{\mu}\bar{\phi}\omega\bar{\nu} \ \dots \ \epsilon\tau[\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu}]\epsilon \ [\pi]\bar{\lambda}\epsilon\bar{\iota} \ \alpha\pi\epsilon\gamma\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\pi\epsilon\tau\alpha\varsigma\bar{\mu}\alpha \ \pi\omega[\zeta] \ \chi\bar{\iota}\bar{\mu} \ \pi\bar{\iota}\varsigma\alpha \ \bar{\eta}\tau\tau\epsilon \ \omega\alpha\pi\bar{\iota}\varsigma\alpha \ \bar{\mu}\bar{\eta}\pi\tau\bar{\eta} \ \bar{\nu}\epsilon\omega\omega\epsilon \ \gamma\alpha\rho \ \epsilon\zeta\omicron\epsilon\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu}\epsilon \ \chi\bar{\iota}\bar{\mu} \ \pi\bar{\iota}\varsigma\alpha \ \bar{\eta}\pi\tau\bar{\eta} \ \bar{\nu}\sigma\epsilon\omega\kappa \ \epsilon\pi\bar{\iota}\varsigma\alpha \ \bar{\eta}\tau\tau\epsilon \ \bar{\nu}\epsilon\bar{\nu}\tau\alpha\zeta\bar{\iota} \ \zeta\bar{\iota}\omega\gamma \ \bar{\eta}\pi\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\bar{\iota}\omicron\bar{\nu} \ \bar{\nu}\omicron\gamma\omicron\epsilon\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu} \ \bar{\mu}\alpha\rho\omicron\gamma\bar{\nu}\alpha\gamma$

Here, the bridal chamber is actually identified as the holy of holies of the temple, “the place where only the High Priest enters” (69.21–22; ΠΜΑ ΕΩΑΡΕΠΑΡΧΙΕΡΕΥ[Σ] ΒΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΜΑΥ ΟΥΑ[Α]Ϟ). According to *Gos. Phil.*, access to the bridal chamber *qua* holy of holies has been granted to the Valentinian by virtue of Christ’s self-sacrifice on the Cross. For in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, it was when Jesus screamed the words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and let out a final death-cry that the temple veil “was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). Similarly, *Gos. Phil.* 68.2–627 quotes Jesus’s death-cry and states that the veil of the holy of holies was “rent from top to bottom,” thereby facilitating a heavenly ascent for those who are below.<sup>62</sup> For when “the holies of the holies were revealed” (ΝΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΝΝΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑΥΩΑΠ ΕΒΟΛ), the formerly enslaved spiritual seed “will be free and the captives ransomed” (ΝΑΡΕΛΕΥΘΕ[ΡΟΣ ΑΥΩ] ΝΣΕΣΩΤΕ ΝΑΙΧΜΑΛΩΤΟΣ).<sup>63</sup>

Even from this very brief snapshot of the complex soteriology of *Gos. Phil.*,<sup>64</sup> to which we will have cause to return, we can see that it lays out a strikingly similar scheme to that which we have outlined in *Interp. Know.* In both texts, death is understood to be the result of the separation of Eve from Adam, and the redemptive mission of Christ is to heal this division by facilitating a reunion of male and female. Furthermore, in both *Interp. Know.* and *Gos. Phil.* it is Christ’s self-sacrifice on the Cross that actually brings

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ΕΡΟΥ ΝΒΙ ΝΑΥΝΑΜΙΣ ΑΥΩ ΜΑΨΘΕΜΑΖΤΕ ΗΜΟΥ ΟΥΑ ΔΕ ΝΑ† ΖΙΩΩϞ ΗΠΙΟΥΘΕΙΝ ΖΗ ΠΗΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΖΗ ΠΖΩΤΡ; There is a great deal of scholarly literature on ritual in *Gos. Phil.*, but for the role of the Temple specifically, see April DeConick, “The True Mysteries: Sacramentalism in the ‘Gospel of Philip,’” *Vigiliae Christianae* 55, no. 3 (2001): 225–61; DeConick, “Heavenly Temple Traditions and Valentinian Worship: A Case for First-Century Christology in the Second Century,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 308–41; for a general overview of ritual in Valentinianism, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 333–414; see also his important critical study of the passage in *Gos. Phil.* which is principally responsible for the opinion of many scholars that the Valentinians practiced a fivefold sacramental system, Einar Thomassen, “*Gos. Philip* 67.27–30: not ‘in a mystery,’” in *Coptica, Gnostica, Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, eds. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2006), 925–40; see also the classic essay, John D. Turner, “Ritual in Gnosticism,” in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts* eds. John D. Turner and Ruth Majercik (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 83–139.

<sup>62</sup> *Gos. Phil.* 70.1–4; 85.5–13; on the theme of the crucifixion and the tearing of Christ’s flesh-veil, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 220–28; 293.

<sup>63</sup> *Gos. Phil.* 85.19–29.

<sup>64</sup> For a much fuller account, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 143–399; also, Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 90–102.



about this reunion. At this stage, the two schemes appear to diverge slightly, for although both state that Christ's crucifixion makes the reunion possible, in *Gos. Phil.* this is achieved by the tearing of the temple veil so that the Valentinians can enter the bridal chamber, or holy of holies, and restore the primal androgyne. On the other hand, in *Interp. Know.* the union is achieved by means of the soul-Eve's entry into Christ-Adam's spear-wound, thereby restoring the primal androgyne.

*The Excerpts of Theodotus*<sup>65</sup>

In *Exc. Theod.* 43.2–65, Clement of Alexandria preserves a detailed Valentinian soteriological scheme which shares several key themes with those outlined in *Interp. Know.* and *Gos. Phil.*<sup>66</sup> To begin with, in an allusion to the creation of Eve from Adam's rib in Genesis 2:21–23, *Exc. Theod.* 51.2 states that when Adam says of Eve, "This is now bone of my bones" (τοῦτο νῦν ὀστοῦν ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων μου), "he alluded to the divine soul which has been hidden in the flesh" (τὴν θεϊὰν ψυχὴν αἰνίσσεται τὴν ἐγκεκρυμμένην τῇ σαρκί). However, this is no ordinary soul, but rather one that is "full of spiritual marrow" (53.5; μυελοῦ γέμουσα πνευματικοῦ). Here then, Eve is portrayed as the spirit-imbued soul which was extracted from Adam's rib, and placed into a fleshly body.<sup>67</sup> Next, in 58–59, the Aeon Jesus descends to earth. He began by putting on "a seed from the Mother" (Σπέρμα ... παρὰ τῆς τεκούσης), then he put on "the psychic Christ" (ὁ ψυχικός Χριστός), who was an invisible "image of the Saviour" (εἰκόνα τοῦ Σωτῆρος), and finally "a sensible body" (αἰσθητοῦ σώματος) made from "the invisible psychic substance" (τῆς ἀφανοῦς ψυχικῆς οὐσίας). This psychic Christ then descended into "the kingdom of death" (τὴν τοῦ θανάτου βασιλείαν), that is, the cosmos, and "saved and bore aloft" (ἀνέσωσεν καὶ ἀνήνεγκεν) that which was "consubstantial" (ὁμοιοῦσα) to his psychic body. *Exc. Theod.* 61 states explicitly that this salvation and ascent was achieved via the crucifixion, for "through the outpourings from his side" (διὰ δὲ τῶν ἐκρυσθέντων ἐκ τῆς πλευρᾶς; cf. John 19:34) we know that Christ has

<sup>65</sup> All translations from *Exc. Theod.* are my own. The text edition is that in Robert Casey, ed., *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (London: Christophers, 1934).

<sup>66</sup> For an analysis of the soteriology of *Exc. Theod.* 43.2–65, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 62–72; Thomassen (29) also points out that *Exc. Theod.* 43.2–65 seems to be a continuous excerpt from a single source which is very similar to that used by Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses* I.4.5–7.1.

<sup>67</sup> The same Eve-Soul allegory appears in *Gos. Phil.*, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 214–17.

become free from passion, and as such “the psychic elements are borne aloft and saved” (τὰ ψυχικά ... ἀνίσταται καὶ ἀνασῶζεται), since they are that which is consubstantial to him. On the other hand, the spiritual elements which have received their souls as “wedding garments” (ἐνδύματα γάμων), receive a higher type of salvation, since they will put off their souls at the eschaton. But in the meantime, they too are borne aloft within the psychic substance.

Much like in the soteriological scheme of *Interp. Know.*, *Exc. Theod.* 43.2–65 describes the threefold human (spiritual seed, soul, and flesh) being saved through the self-sacrifice of the crucified Christ, by whom they are saved and borne aloft by virtue of sharing in his spirit-imbued psychic substance, while the flesh is “dissolved in the fire.”<sup>68</sup> *Exc. Theod.* 62 takes the analogy between the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib and the body of the crucified Christ even further. It states that the psychic Christ is now enthroned at the right hand of the demiurge “so that they may see the one whom they have pierced” (62.1–2; ἵνα ἴδωσιν εἰς ὃν ἐξεκέντησαν; cf. John 19:34, 37). However, what they pierced was only “the appearance” (τὸ φαινόμενον), that is, his psychic body, while the psychic Christ himself remained unharmed, since “a bone of him shall not be broken” (62.2; ὅστοῦν γὰρ αὐτοῦ οὐ συντριβήσεται; cf. John 19:36). In other words, Christ’s “bones” are of psychic substance, “just as in the case of Adam, the prophecy allegorized the soul as a bone” (62.2; καθάπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἀδάμ τὴν ψυχὴν ὅστοῦν ἠλληγόρησεν ἢ προφητεία). In this case, *Exc. Theod.* states that the psychic Christ, whose appearance suffered the spear-wound, is consubstantial with Eve as she was separated from Adam. Taking this to its logical conclusion, for *Exc. Theod.*, the participation of the spirit-imbued souls in the psychic body of Christ is typologically identical to the return of Eve to Adam’s rib. While it is going too far to suggest that the image in *Interp. Know.* 10.34–36 is directly dependent on this claim of *Exc. Theod.*, or vice versa, the same idea is clearly being expressed. The soul, being a type of Eve, is drawn to the consubstantial crucified Christ, the Second Adam, and borne aloft by him.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, in *Exc. Theod.* 63–65, the female spiritual seeds become the brides of the male angelic bridegrooms, and together pass into “the bridal chamber” (ὁ νυμφών), having put off their souls, which they received as garments, and enter the Pleroma. Again the union of male and female is the

<sup>68</sup> *Interp. Know.* 14.25–26 (βαλλ<α> ζῆν πκωζῆτ); *Exc. Theod.* 52.2, “at its dissolution ... in its passage through fire” (ἐν τῇ διαλύσει ... ἐν τῇ διὰ πυρὸς διεξόδῳ).

<sup>69</sup> For the Adam-Christ typology in *Exc. Theod.*, see Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 43–49.

soteriological key, thereby repairing what had been divided in Adam and Eve.<sup>70</sup>

### *The Soteriological Scheme*

Despite each having their own distinct features, the three Valentinian works surveyed here present a fairly consistent soteriological scheme. Each one emphasises the imprisonment of the spiritual seed, first being encased in a soul, and then thrust into a material body. All three emphasise the problems caused by the separation of the primal androgyne into Adam and Eve, with *Interp. Know.* and *Gos. Phil.* particularly stressing that “death” was the result of this division. All three depict Christ’s redemptive mission on earth as being centred on the restoration of this male-female unity, with the crucifixion being the decisive redemptive event. In *Gos. Phil.* the temple veil was rent at the moment of Christ’s death, thereby opening the way to the bridal chamber *qua* holy of holies where the male and female could reunite; in *Exc. Theod.* we saw that by his spear-wound the psychic Christ was purged of passion and drew the spirit-imbued souls towards him, carrying them upwards; while in *Interp. Know.* Christ’s spear-wound is understood as the gap left by Eve’s separation, which the soul can enter, re-fill, and similarly be borne aloft.

As was pointed out earlier, *Gos. Phil.* appears to be distinctive in that it expresses this soteriological scheme using imagery from temple mysticism, so that entering the bridal chamber is akin to entering the holy of holies, since the divine presence resides within. On the other hand, *Exc. Theod.* apparently employs the same sort of temple mysticism elsewhere. For example, *Exc. Theod.* 38 states that the Aeon Jesus was called out from “the holy of the holies” (τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων) to sit on “the throne of the Place” (τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ Τόπου),<sup>71</sup> so that he might “provide the seed with a passage into the Pleroma” (τῷ σπέρματι δίοδον εἰς πλήρωμα παράσχη). In other words, Jesus descends from the Pleroma, here understood as the holy of holies, but also as the bridal chamber in *Exc. Theod.* 64, and is enthroned in an intermediate position to usher the spiritual seed into the Pleroma.

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<sup>70</sup> See *Exc. Theod.* 21.

<sup>71</sup> “Place” (ὁ Τόπος) here is clearly the Valentinian technical term referring to the demiurge and/or his realm beneath the Pleroma; see also *Exc. Theod.* 34; 37; 38–39; 59.2; *Tripartite Tractate* 100.9; and Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* VI.32.7–9; This recalls *Exc. Theod.* 62.1, cited above, where “the psychic Christ sits on the right hand of the Demiurge” (κάθεται ... ὁ ψυχικός Χριστός ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ).

Hence, according to Theodotus in *Exc. Theod.* 26–27,<sup>72</sup> Jesus is also called “the door” (ἡ θύρα; cf. *John* 10:7)<sup>73</sup> because it is through him that the spiritual seed enter the Pleroma, having come up to “the Limit” (ὁ ὄρος), and having entered the Pleroma through “the second veil” (τὸ δεύτερον καταπέτασμα), and become “high-priestly” (ἀρχιερατικὴ). In other words, both *Gos. Phil.* and *Exc. Theod.* understand the Pleroma to be the true heavenly holy of holies, to which Jesus Christ grants access to the spiritual seed.

Given the overlapping soteriological landscapes of our three texts outlined above, one might suggest that we could expect *Interp. Know.* to have a similar temple mysticism underlying it, since it shares so much with other Valentinian texts which articulate such mystical ideas. The remainder of this article will assess this possibility by analysing the address of the crucified Christ to the soul in *Interp. Know.* 10.27–38. The words of these lines shall be studied in light of the early Christian tradition of associating the flesh of Christ with the veil of the Jerusalem temple’s holy of holies.

## The Flesh of Christ and the Temple Veil

In 10.34b–37a, Christ exhorts the soul: “Enter in through the rib, the place from which you came forth and hide yourself from the beasts.” It has been noted on several occasions above that this part of our saying of the Saviour alludes to both *John* 19:34 and *Genesis* 2:21–22. Plisch notes that here, the wound in the side of the crucified Christ is being depicted as the entrance to Paradise, the place where Adam and Eve coexisted in their primal androgynous state.<sup>74</sup> However, one might also suggest that Christ’s spear-

<sup>72</sup> 26.1; ὡς φησιν ὁ Θεόδοτος (“as Theodotus says ...”); this is one of five occasions that Clement explicitly quotes Theodotus; also in 22.7; 30.1; 32.2; 35.1; for more detail on how Clement cites Valentinian views, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 29.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Shepherd of Hermas Similitudes* IX.12.1–8; here the Son of God is “the gate” (ἡ πύλη) through whom those who have received the divine Name shall pass into the kingdom of God.

<sup>74</sup> In arguing for the familiarity of the idea that Christ’s side-wound forms such a portal, Plisch cites the fourteenth-century Sahidic poem of “Triadon” §487: “<sup>1</sup>Let us psalm him with instruments and strings, <sup>2</sup>for it is he who had his side pierced with a spear, for it is <sup>3</sup>the tool which is the hand of the cherub in the place of a knife, <sup>4</sup>opened to us the way to the Tree of True Life”; **ΜΑΡΕΝΦΑΛΛΕΙ ΕΡΟΦ ΖΝ ΖΕΝΟΡΓΑΝΟΝ ΜΗ ΖΗΧΟΡΤΕ ΧΕ ΝΤΟΦ ΠΕΝΤΑΥΤΕΞ ΠΕΦΣΠΡ ΖΝ ΟΥΛΟΓΧΗ ΧΕ ΝΤΟΦ ΓΑΡ ΤΕ ΤΕΣΚΕΥΗ ΕΤΖΝ ΤΟΙΧ ΜΠΕΧΕΡΟΥΒ ΙΜ ΜΠΜΑ ΝΟΥΒΟΡΤΕ ΑΣΟΥΩΝ ΝΑΝ ΝΤΕΖΗ ΕΠΩΗΝ ΜΠΩΝΖ ΝΑΛΛΗΘΙΝΟΝ.** My translation; for the original Coptic text and a German translation, see Peter Nagel, ed., *Das Triadon: Ein Sabidisches Lehrgedicht des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Halle, 1983), 81; for Plisch’s

wound is *also* being understood here as the mystical portal to the heavenly holy of holies, and that *Interp. Know.* thereby participates in an ancient exegetical and apocryphal tradition concerning the flesh of the crucified Christ and its ontological connection with the veil of the Jerusalem Temple. I say “also” because the concepts of the Edenic Paradise and the holy of holies were by no means mutually exclusive in antiquity.<sup>75</sup>

This tradition of associating the flesh of Christ with the Temple veil goes back to the Synoptic Gospels, all of which can be understood to imply some kind of connection between the two in their crucifixion narratives. According to Mark 15:37–39: “Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son.’”<sup>76</sup> The account in Matthew 27:45–54 is slightly different, with several other eschatological signs occurring upon his death, such as a great earthquake and the raising of the deceased saints, while the centurion is accompanied in his confession by others who are guarding Jesus. Luke 23:44–47’s account is still more varied, with the rending of the veil accompanying the daytime darkness which occurs before Jesus’s death, and the centurion merely exclaiming that Jesus was indeed “righteous” (δικαιος). Mark and Matthew particularly emphasise the contemporaneous nature of the two events of Jesus’s death and the tearing of the veil. Even more so, the structure of Mark 15:37–39 suggests

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German translation, see Plisch, *Auslegung*, 112–13; Plisch, “Rezeption,” 90; In this stanza, the Roman spearman is replaced with a cherub, thereby making the act of piercing Christ’s flesh part of the divine will for human salvation, since the gap in Christ’s flesh becomes the portal to Paradise and the Tree of True Life. However, by comparing *Interp. Know.* with a fourteenth-century poem, Plisch stretches our text beyond its interpretive field.

<sup>75</sup> E.g. *Jubilees* 8.19: “And [Noah] knew that the garden of Eden was the holy of holies and the dwelling of the Lord”; cf. 4.23–26; also, in the story of the Four Who Entered Paradise/the Garden (פרדס), Rabbi Akiva passes through “the curtain” (פרגוד), having been deemed worthy to behold God’s glory; see Rachel Elijor, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization: Oxford, 2004), 246: “The Pardes or the Garden of Eden is a celestial model of the earthly Temple on the Day of Atonement.” Paradisiacal imagery (e.g. the Tree of Life) also appears alongside temple imagery (e.g. the throne of God) in John of Patmos’s vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 22:1–5; see Macaskill, “Paradise,” 74–81; Macaskill notes that of the three occurrences of “Paradise” (παράδεισος) in the New Testament (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7), “all of the texts seem to reflect the equation of the heavenly paradise with the heavenly temple” (81).

<sup>76</sup> ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἄφεις φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐξέπνευσεν καὶ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη εἰς δύο ἀπ’ ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω. ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ κεντυρίων ὁ παρεστηκὼς ἐξ ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ ὅτι οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν εἶπεν· Ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν.

some kind of conceptual proximity between the body of Christ and the Temple veil. Harry Chronis even goes so far as to suggest that Mark's description of the centurion as the one who "stood facing him (Jesus)" (ἐξ ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ), uses "one of the idiomatic expressions for entering the Temple, for standing 'in the presence' or 'before the face' of God."<sup>77</sup> Chronis suggests therefore, that for Mark, the torn veil represents the ultimate theophany, the presence of God being revealed to those outside the holy of holies. The confession elicited from the centurion was the result of him finding himself in the divine presence; the face of the dying Christ being identical to the face of God in the holy of holies.<sup>78</sup>

But it is not only the Synoptic authors that may be taken to imply such a connection. John 2:19–21 depicts Jesus telling the Jews in the Temple, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I shall raise it up," and although the Jews doubted him, the Evangelist clarifies the situation: "But he was speaking of the Temple of his body."<sup>79</sup> This again draws a parallel between the Temple and Jesus's body, and specifically between the restored Temple and Jesus's resurrection body, which rises after three days in the tomb.

The connection between Christ's body and the Temple veil is finally made explicit in the Epistle to the Hebrews 10:19–20, where we read that, "we have confidence to enter the sanctuary (τὰ ἁγία) by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (καταπέτασμα), that is, through his flesh."<sup>80</sup> It is difficult to demonstrate

<sup>77</sup> ἐναντιόν is used in this context at LXX Exodus 27:21; 28:12; 34:24; Leviticus 1:3; 4:7; Deuteronomy 12:18; 18:7; and Psalms 87:2; 94:6; 108:14, 15.

<sup>78</sup> Harry Chronis, "The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37–39," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982): 110–11.

<sup>79</sup> The same Jesus saying is implied in Matthew 26:61; 27:40; and Mark 14:58; 15:29; on the metaphorical uses of the saying in the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas*, where Jesus's resurrection body is the New Temple, see Gregory Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 146–53; but especially DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics*, 117–21.

<sup>80</sup> Just as in the Synoptic crucifixion accounts, scholars have debated whether the "curtain" in Hebrews 10:20 refers to the inner veil separating the holy of holies from the holy place, or the outer veil separating the sanctuary and the court. In the case of Hebrews 10:20, it seems clear that it is the inner veil; see Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 283–87; Attridge points out that the author of Hebrews uses τὰ ἁγία as a designation for the holy of holies, meaning that the curtain which gives access is certainly the inner veil. It is also worth noting that on the two other occasions that Hebrews speaks of the καταπέτασμα (6:19; 9:3), it refers to the inner veil which gives access to the divine within; on the term καταπέτασμα in the LXX and the rending of the veil in Mark, see Timothy Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Gray states that of the thirty-nine occurrences of καταπέτασμα in the LXX, thirty-

any direct dependence on the Synoptic crucifixion accounts, but the fact that for Hebrews, it is through Jesus's blood sacrifice that he opened up access to the holy of holies for other Christians, suggests that the same theological and soteriological message is being conveyed: the torn flesh of the crucified Christ has thrown open the path to the face of God; a new, mystical path that obviates the necessity of the mundane cult.<sup>81</sup>

The association is taken further in the influential second-century apocryphal text known as, among other things, the *Protevangelium of James*, which in part tells the story of the Virgin Mary's childhood and the immaculate conception. Mary is depicted as having grown up in the Temple, danced for the high priest on the step of the altar (7.3), and been fed from the hands of angels (8.1). But at the age of twelve, shortly before her adolescence, Mary was forced to leave the Temple lest she defile it. As such, she was granted by divine favour to Joseph (9.1). The council of priests, needing a new veil for the holy of holies, commissioned a team of seven virgins, including Mary, to fashion the new veil. By lot, Mary received the duty of weaving the royal purple and scarlet segments. Crucially, it was at the exact moment that Mary "drew out the thread" to begin work on the new veil that an angel of the Lord announced that she would "conceive by [the Lord's] Word." Furthermore, as Mary brings the completed purple and scarlet veil to the priest, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, remarks

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five refer to the inner veil - Exodus 27:21; 26:34, 35; 26:33 (3 times); 26:31; 30:6; 35:12; 37:3; 39:4, 19, 40; 40:3, 5, 21, 22, 26; Leviticus 4:6, 17; 16:2, 12, 15; 21:23; 24:3; Numbers 3:10, 26; 4:5, 32; 18:7; 1 Kings 6:36; 2 Chronicles 3:14; 1 Maccabees 1:22; 4:51; Sirach 50:5; see also Larry Hurtado, *Mark* (New International Biblical Commentary) (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995), 267–70; and in Matthew, see Daniel Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199–201; Gurtner also favours the interpretation that it is the inner veil which is torn; but see also Howard Jackson, "The Death of Jesus in Mark and the Miracle from the Cross," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 28; Jackson argues that it must have been the outer veil which was torn, since only the outer veil would have been visible from the Mount of Olives, where he suggests Golgotha was located, thereby allowing the centurion to see the veil torn, inspiring his confession. Such historicizing interpretations of eschatological symbols and rhetorical images seems to me to be unhelpful in the extreme; Timothy Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 140–43; Geddert actually lists thirty-five different interpretations given by scholars for the rending of the veil at Christ's death in Mark, many of which pertain to the debate about which veil is torn. Of course, the thirty-five interpretations are not all mutually exclusive. In fact, many are mutually entailing.

<sup>81</sup> Hebrews 6:19–20; 9:11–25; 10:19–22; see especially, Scott Mackie, "Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of Theological Studies* 62 (2011): 77–117; also, Frederick Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 250–251.

on the blessed conception (10.1–12.3).<sup>82</sup> This text develops the association found in the New Testament that the fate of the flesh of Christ is typologically and ontologically linked to the fate of the Temple veil; they are both created and destroyed contemporaneously. Might the saying of the Saviour in *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38 be drawing on, or participating in, this same mystical tradition?

### *The Interpretation of Knowledge 10.18–38 and the Christological Veil*

It was noted above that the image of Christ's pierced flesh from John 19:34 is alluded to in *Interp. Know.* 10.34.b–37a,<sup>83</sup> and that the Gospel of John 2:19–21 understands the body of Christ to itself represent a Temple. Already we can see how, via this exegesis of the Johannine crucifixion narrative, the Valentinian audience of *Interp. Know.* may have understood this command from the crucified Saviour to be an invitation to enter the Temple of his body, piercing the veil of his flesh and entering the holy of holies. But of course it was quite normal in apocryphal literature to find the Gospels' crucifixion narratives being synthesised to create an original picture. The *Gospel of Peter* 2–6, for example, appears to draw on each of the four canonical Gospels for its own crucifixion narrative.<sup>84</sup> *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38 is no different in this respect. For although John 19:34 is most explicitly alluded to in 10.34b–36a, the designation of the crucified Saviour as “the one who was reproached” (ΠΕΡΙ ΝΤΑΖΟΥΝΟΝΟΥΩ) at 10.21–22a clearly draws on the Synoptic crucifixion scenes as opposed to the Johannine

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<sup>82</sup> English translation in J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 48–67; as Elliott remarks in his introduction to the text, the *Protevangelium of James* was one of the most important early apocryphal gospels, with over one hundred Greek manuscript witnesses, in part or whole. Many Mariological traditions stem from it, not least the one described above, which is also taken up in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* 8–9; James of Kokkinobaphos *Homily* 4; and Cyril of Alexandria *De Adoratione* 9; and many others. On the latter two of these and other Late Antique and Byzantine authors use of this tradition, see Nicholas Conostas, “Symeon of Thessalonike and the Theology of the Icon Screen,” in *Thresholds of the Sacred*, ed. S.E.J. Gerstel (Washington: Harvard University Press, 2006), 163–83; Conostas notes that such patristic and Byzantine exegetes “understood the ‘veil of the flesh’ (Heb. 10:20) to be a type of the primordial ‘firmament’ (Gen. 1:6), the result was an exegetical tour de force in which they body, tabernacle, temple, and cosmos formed a single edifice, the keystone of which was the archetypal figure of the incarnate Logos” (182).

<sup>83</sup> *Interp. Know.* 10.34b–37a: “Enter in through the rib, the place from which you came forth and hide yourself from the beasts.”

<sup>84</sup> Also *Exc. Theod.* 61.



narrative.<sup>85</sup> Only in the Synoptic Gospels is the crucified Christ mocked in this way. More specifically, in Matthew and Mark, while the passersby “deride” him (**ΧΙΟΥΑ ΕΡΟΥ**; Gk. βλασφημέω), and the priests, scribes, and elders “mock” him (**ΩΒΕ ΝΩΩ**; Gk. ἐμπαίζω), it is the two “bandits” (**ΛΗΣΤΑΙ**) being crucified with him who “taunt” or “reproach” him (Matthew 27:44 **ΕΓΝΟΣΘ̄ ΝΗΟΥ**; Mark 15:32 **ΑΓΝΕΘΝΟΥΘ̄**; Gk. ὀνειδίζω). This corresponds well with the exegesis of the Parable of the Good Samaritan in *Interp. Know.* 6.17–38, where the “bandits” of Luke 10:30 (**ΛΗΣΤΗΣ**; Gk. λησταί; 6.19) are interpreted as the hostile archons who imprison the soul and are responsible for the division in the church.<sup>86</sup> In 10.18–38, it is these who mock and reproach the crucified Christ.

The same synthesis of New Testament crucifixion scenes is found in *Interp. Know.* 13.14–38’s depiction of the Saviour on the Cross. Firstly we read at 13.14–20: “When he cried out (**ΝΤΑΡΕΦΑΨΘΗ**), he was separated from the Church like portions of darkness from the Mother, while his feet provided him traces, and these scorched the way of the ascent to the Father.”<sup>87</sup> In the Synoptics, Jesus is said to “cry out” on the Cross (Matthew 27:46 **ΑΝΑΒΟΑΩ**; Mark 15:34 **ΒΟΑΩ**; Luke 23:46 **ΦΩΝΕΩ**), whereas in John 19:30 Jesus simply “says” (**ΛΕΓΩ**) his last words. The verb **ΑΨΘΗ** here is the Sub-Akhmimic form of the Sahidic **ΨΚΑΚ**, “to cry, shout”, and is used in the Sahidic versions of Matthew 27:46 and Luke 23:46. But on the other hand, in the same scene at *Interp. Know.* 13.25–29, we read: “For the Head drew itself up from the pit; it was bent (**ΡΕΚΤ̄**) over the Cross and it looked down to Tartaros so that those below might look above.”<sup>88</sup> As noted earlier, this image of the crucified Christ slumped on the Cross at the moment of death so that his head is “bowed” (**κλίνω**) is taken from John 19:30, and is a detail which is absent from the Synoptics.

Clearly, therefore, the Valentinian author of *Interp. Know.* readily combines both Synoptic and Johannine crucifixion themes, and more importantly, uses both to elucidate how Christ’s humility and humiliation on the Cross facilitated the ascent of the soul to the divine presence of the Father.

<sup>85</sup> Although the designation here is heavily reconstructed, it is almost certainly correct since in the following pages, which represent a “complex Midrash” on our saying and the other teachings of the “teacher of immortality,” similar designations occur on multiple occasions: 12.15–16; 12.25–26 (**ΠΕΝΤΑΧΧΙΝΑΘ̄Ν̄**; “the one who received reproach”); 12.27–28 (**ΠΕΝΤΑΧΟΥΝΘΝΟΥΘ̄**; “the one who was reproached”); 12.30 (**ΠΕΝΤΑΥΝΘΝΟΥΘ̄**; “the one who was reproached”); 12.36 (**ΠΕΝΤΑΥΝΘΝΟΥΘ̄**; “the one who was reproached”).

<sup>86</sup> See Painchaud, “L’utilisation,” 422–24; cf. *Exc. Theod.* 53.1.

<sup>87</sup> For text, see n. 44 above.

<sup>88</sup> For the text, see n. 45 above.

Furthermore, there are hints in *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38 that the Markan centurion’s mystical vision of the unveiled face of God in Mark 15:37–39 has been appropriated to a new Valentinian mystical understanding of Christ’s passion. For in Mark, it is “when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw in this way that he breathed his last” (ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ κεντυρίων ὁ παρεστηκώς ἐξ ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ ὅτι οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν), that he confessed the divine Sonship of Jesus. Timothy Gray has recently noted that the word order of this verse emphasises the “seeing” of the centurion, since the participle ἰδὼν is placed as the first word of the sentence in order to contrast him with the mockers who demanded that they “see” (ἴδωμεν) him come down from the Cross to make them believe (15:32), as well as those who mistakenly thought that Jesus was crying out for Elijah and waited to “see” (ἴδωμεν) if the prophet would save him (15:36).<sup>89</sup> But of course, as we saw above, the positioning of the centurion in relation to the crucified Christ (ἐξ ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ) uses a phrase which is familiar from earlier Jewish theophanic entry formulae, suggesting that part of the reason that the centurion sees *and understands* Christ’s divinity, is the fact that the Temple veil of his flesh has been rent, revealing the hitherto hidden face of God.

In light of this, the language concerning the “shape” (ΣΧΗΜΑ) which is to be received by the Valentinian’s soul becomes quite significant. Firstly, “This shape is that which exists *before* (ΖΑΤΕΖΗ) the Father, the Logos, and the height” (10.23–25). The preposition ΖΑΤΕΖΗ, “in front of, before”, translates many Greek prepositions, including ἐναντία (e.g. Ezekiel 40:47). In *Interp. Know.* 10.23–25, the preposition takes on an explicitly mystical flavour, since it expresses the proximity between the form taken by the Valentinian soul and the transcendent Father. And secondly, in 10.31–33 we read: “If you still believe (ΠΙΣΤΕΥΕ) in me, it is I who shall take you above through this shape (ΠΙΣΧΗΜΑ) *that you see* (ΕΤΕΝΕΥ ΑΡΑΦ).” Much like in Mark 15:39, where the centurion’s confession is elicited on the basis of his “seeing” the divine form of Christ, our Valentinian saying suggests that on the basis of a confession of faith, the soul shall “see” and “receive” the divine shape, via which they shall achieve a spiritual ascent. While there is no reason to think that the author of *Interp. Know.* is directly drawing on Mark 15:37–39 for this vocabulary, the theological and soteriological message is strikingly similar. On the other hand, there is a clear reference to the Johannine resurrection body, where in John 20:27, the risen Jesus says to Thomas, “Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe” (φέρε τὴν χεῖρά σου καὶ βάλε εἰς τὴν πλευράν μου, καὶ μὴ γίνου

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<sup>89</sup> Gray, *Temple*, 194–96.

ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός).<sup>90</sup> Whereas John’s risen Christ invokes Thomas to enter his side so that he might believe, *Interp. Know.* 10.31–36 inverts the doctrine of faith so that belief in the resurrection body of Christ is the *prerequisite* for entering it: “If you still believe in me, it is I who shall take you above” (10.31–33).<sup>91</sup>

In this way, our saying of the Saviour in 10.18–38, and especially the command to enter through his pierced side need not only be an allusion to John 19:34 and the broader Johannine resurrection Christology, but may also have in view the typological identification between the flesh of Christ and the Temple veil found in the Synoptics, made explicit in Hebrews, and developed further in apocryphal literature.<sup>92</sup> We have already seen in *Gos. Phil.* and *Exc. Theod.* how some Valentinians understood Christ’s expiration on the Cross and the rending of the temple veil to be causally, and therefore typologically, connected, indicating that these two mystical objects were considered to be consubstantial, and how Christ’s self-sacrifice was thought to open the way of access to the holy of holies. Moreover, there are further terminological parallels between our saying of the Saviour and related Valentinian literature which suggest that a Temple-mystical context is being evoked in *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38.

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<sup>90</sup> For a critical exegesis of this scene and its doctrine of faith, see Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 119–23.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Interp. Know.* 1.23–38; “But it is a great thing for a man who has faith, since he is [not] in unbelief, which is the [world. Now] the world [is the place of] unbelief [and the place of death.]”; ΟΥΝΑΣ ΔΕ ΝΩΘΩ Π[Ε] ΝΝΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΕΥΝΤΕΦ ΜΜΕΥ [ΝΤ]ΠΙΣΤΙ[Σ Ε]Ι[ΦΩΝ ΤΗΝΤΑΤΝΑΖΤ[Ε ΕΝ] ΕΤΕ [ΠΚΟΣ]ΜΟΣ ΠΕ· ΠΚΟΣΜ[ΟΣ ΝΔΕ ΠΕ ΠΜΑ ΝΤ] ΜΝΤΑΤΝΑΖΤΕ Α[ΥΩ ΠΜΑ ΗΠΜΟΥ]; Turner’s translation.

<sup>92</sup> On how later tradition actually conflated the Johannine and Synoptic crucifixion accounts, even to the point of identifying the Johannine spearman and the Synoptic centurion as one figure named “Longinus” (e.g. *Acts of Pilate* Recension A 16.7; Recension B 11.1), see J. Ramsey Michaels, “The Centurion’s Confession and the Spear Thrust,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 (1967): 102–109; Patristic authors also developed the notion of the consubstantial nature of Christ’s flesh and the Temple veil in significant and relevant ways. For example, for Tertullian of Carthage (*On Baptism* 9 and 16), the blood and water which spilled forth from Christ’s wounded side are a symbol of the inauguration of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, since those who believed in his blood were bathed in the water of baptism, and those who were bathed in such water also received his blood to drink; likewise John Chrysostom (Homily 85 on the Gospel of John) understands the piercing of Christ’s flesh to be the founding of the sacraments, and in Homilies 15 and 19 on the Epistle to the Hebrews he states that the holy of holies is indeed heaven, and by means of the veil of Christ’s flesh, one comes to enter heaven, for “it concealed his divinity” (κρύπτουσα τὴν θεότητα); and also Theodoret of Cyrus (*Dialogue of Orthodoxos and Eranistes* 1), who describes the flesh of Christ as a “screen” which covers the glory within.

When the crucified Christ instructs the Valentinian soul to enter his rib, he also tells her: “hide yourself from the beasts (**ΝΕΘΗΡΙΟΝ**).” According to *Gos. Phil.*, the living sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross obviated the earthly sacrificial cult that worshipped the beasts: “Indeed, the beasts (**ΖΝΘΗΡΙΟΝ**) were the ones to whom they sacrificed. They were indeed offering them up alive, but when they offered them up, they died. As for man, they offered him up to God dead, and he lived.”<sup>93</sup> Similarly, “God is a man-eater. For this reason, men are sacrificed to him. Before men were sacrificed, beasts (**ΖΝΘΗΡΙΟΝ**) were being sacrificed, since those to whom they were sacrificed were not gods.”<sup>94</sup> In these two passages, the beasts (**ΘΗΡΙΟΝ**; Gk. θήριον; pl. θηρία) are identified with both the things being sacrificed, and the things being sacrificed to, suggesting that the earthly Temple cult is performed in the service of the beasts, the demiurge and his archons, by those who come from them and are consubstantial with them. Hence, *Gos. Phil.* says of the true heavenly Temple cult, “A bridal chamber is not for the beasts (**ΝΘΗΡΙΟΝ**), nor is it for the slaves, nor for defiled women; but it is for free men and virgins.”<sup>95</sup> Again the bridal chamber is identified as one of the “buildings for sacrifice” (**ΝΗΕΙ ΜΑ ΝΉΠΡΟΣΦΟΡΑ**; *Gos. Phil.* 69.14–15) in the Temple, a place in which men and virgins can enter, but beasts cannot. This corresponds well with the present interpretation of the imagery in *Interp. Know.* 10.34b–37a, namely, that once the Valentinian soul has entered through the veil of Christ’s flesh, it can hide itself from the beasts in the temple of his body, having ceased to be a slave (14.34–38).

In the *Excerpts of Theodotus*, it is likewise clear that these “beasts” are to be identified with the hostile psychic powers of the demiurge. According to *Exc. Theod.*, “the demiurge ... made ... the beasts out of fear” (48.1–3; ὁ Δημιουργὸς ... ποιεῖ ... ἐκ τοῦ φόβου τὰ θηρία), and “he fashioned an

<sup>93</sup> *Gos. Phil.* 55.1–5; **ΝΕ [Ζ]Ν[Θ]ΗΡΙΟΝ ΓΑΡ ΝΕ ΝΕΤΟΥΤΕΛΟ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΝΑ[Υ] ΝΕΥΤΕΛΟ ΜΕΝ ΜΗΜΟΟΥ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΕΥΟΝΖ ΝΤΑΡΟΥΤΕΛΟΟΥ ΔΕ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΑΥΜΟΥ ΠΡΩΜΕ ΑΥΤΕΛΟΟΥ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΗΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΦΜΟΟΥΤ ΑΥΩ ΑΦΩΝΖ**; cf. 55.6–14; Notice here that Christ is identified as the man whom was sacrificed and lived. In *Gos. Phil.* 75.22–25, the living water of baptism is described as “a body” (**ΟΥΣΩΜΑ**), for, “It is necessary that we put on the living man (**ΠΡΩΜΕ ΕΤΟΝΖ**; lit. “the man who lives”). Therefore, when he is about to go down into the water, he unclothes himself, in order that he may put on the living man (**ΕΦΝΑΨ ΠΗ ΖΩΩΦ**; lit. “he shall receive that one on him”); **ΩΠΕ ΕΤΡΗΨ ΖΩΩΝ ΗΠΡΩΜΕ ΕΤΟΝΖ ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΕΙ ΕΦΕΙ ΕΦΒΗΚ ΕΠΙΤΗ ΕΠΜΟΟΥ ΨΑΚΚΑΚ ΑΖΗΥ ΨΙΝΑ ΕΦΝΑΨ ΠΗ ΖΩΩΦ**; Here, the sacrificed Christ is the one who is “put on” in the baptismal waters.

<sup>94</sup> *Gos. Phil.* 62.35–63.4; **ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΟΥΑΜΡΩΜΕ ΠΕ ΔΙΑ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΣΕ[ΨΩ]ΨΤ ΗΠΡΩΜ[Ε] ΝΑΦ ΖΑΤΕΖΗ ΕΜΠΑΤΟΥΨΩΨΤ ΗΠΡΩΜΕ ΝΕΨΩΨΩΨΤ ΝΖΝΘΗΡΙΟΝ ΝΕΖΝΝΟΥΤΕ ΓΑΡ ΑΝ ΝΕ ΝΑΕΙ ΕΤΟΥΨΩΨΤ ΝΑΥ**.

<sup>95</sup> *Gos. Phil.* 69.1–4; **ΜΑΡΕ ΠΑΣΤΟΣ ΩΠΠΕ ΝΝΘΗΡΙΟΝ ΟΥΤΕ ΜΑΦΩΠΠΕ ΝΝΖΗΖΑΛ ΟΥΤΕ ΝΣΖΙΜΕ ΕΦΧΟΖΗ ΑΛΛΑ ΨΑΦΩΠΠΕ ΝΖΝΡΩΜΕ ΝΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΟΣ ΜΗ ΖΝΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ**; for the same use of **ΘΗΡΙΟΝ** in *Gos. Phil.*, see 71.22–27; 79.5–10; 81.7–8.

earthly and material soul, irrational and of the same substance as the beasts” (50.1; ψυχὴν γεωδὴ καὶ ὑλικὴν ἐτεκτήνατο ἄλογον καὶ τῆς τῶν θηρίων ὁμοούσιον). Furthermore, in an exegesis of Mark 1:13, *Exc. Theod.* has it that Jesus prevailed over the “beasts” (θηρία) and their “ruler” (ἄρχων) in the wilderness after his baptism, and concludes, “Therefore, it is necessary to equip ourselves with the armour of the Lord and keep body and soul invulnerable” (85.1–3; δεῖ οὖν ὀπλισθαι τοῖς κυριακοῖς ὄπλοις ἔχοντας τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἄτρωτον). In these passages, the “beasts” are unequivocally identified with the demiurge and his archons, the ones against whom the Valentinian must guard their soul by means of baptism and the “armour” of Christ that it provides for them to put on.<sup>96</sup> The same identification with the archons can be made in *Interp. Know.*, since it is the beasts that are said to imprison the soul in the flesh.<sup>97</sup> But by entering Christ’s Temple-Body, the soul can hide from these beasts and remain invulnerable during heavenly ascent.<sup>98</sup>

In other words, based on evidence both internal to *Interp. Know.*, and that drawn from related external sources, it seems quite plausible that our saying of the Saviour does indeed understand the flesh of the crucified Christ to be the equivalent of the inner veil of the heavenly temple. By entering Christ’s pierced side, the soul simultaneously finds itself in the divine presence and restores the Edenic androgyne, thereby overcoming death. One final piece of evidence must be marshalled in support of this Temple-mystical interpretation.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *Gos. Phil.* 75.21–25 in n. 92 above.

<sup>97</sup> *Interp. Know.* 11.27; see n. 43 above; cf. *Interp. Know.* 6.29; *Exc. Theod.* 53.1.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *Gos. Phil.* 70.5–9; see n. 61 above; It has been pointed out to me by an anonymous reviewer that this beast-imagery is also common in persecution and martyrdom texts, e.g. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* 5.19–6.8; *Saint Blandina and the Martyrs of Lyons* 1.37–42; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 27–42; *Acts of Andrew* 39; in the case of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* (NHC VI,1), Jesus Christ explains to Peter concerning the path to the heavenly city, “many are the robbers and wild beasts on that road (ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΝΑΨΕ ΝΑΗΤΗΣ ΜΗ ΝΘΗΡΙΟΝ ΕΤΖΙ ΤΕΖΗ ΕΤΗΜΑΥ)” (5.26–28) who seek to “kill” and “devour” those making the journey. The “robbers” (6.19; ΛΗΤΗΣ; Gk. λησταί) and “beasts” (10.36–37; 11.22, 23, 24, 26, 31; ΘΗΡΙΟΝ; Gk. θήριον; pl. θηρία) are similarly related in *Interp. Know.*, where they stand for the demiurge and his archons. In the martyrdom of Blandina, she is hung “in the form of the cross” (διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ σχήματι) as bait for the “beasts” (θηρία). But, having “put on Christ” (χριστὸν ἐνδεδυμένη), she overcame the evil powers, and “won the crown of immortality” (τὸν τῆς ἀφθαρσίας στεφανωμένη στέφανον); on the “crown” in *Interp. Know.*, see below.

## Borne on the Shoulders of Christ

In *Interp. Know.* 10.34, the crucified Saviour states that once they have entered through his wounded side; “It is I who shall bear you upon my shoulders” (ΑΝΑΚ ΠΕ ΕΤΑΒΙΤΕ ΖΙ ΝΑΝΑΖΒΕ). Commentators have correctly drawn attention to the imagery borrowed from the Lukan Parable of the Lost Sheep, where Jesus recalls how once the shepherd has found the lost sheep, “he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices” (ἐπιτίθησιν ἐπὶ τοὺς ὤμους αὐτοῦ χαίρων) (Luke 15:5). Similarly, *Interp. Know.* 10.26–27 describes the fate of the soul in the world, where it has been “led astray (ΠΑΛΑΝΑ) while in the flesh of condemnation” (ΠΑΛΑΝΑ ΕΨΟΟΠ Ν̄ΣΑΡΞ Ν̄ΤΕ ΚΑΤΑΔΙΚΗ), while the Matthean Parable of the Lost Sheep describes the sheep as “the one that went astray” (τὸ πλανώμενον) (Matthew 18:12). Furthermore, the material world of the flesh into which the soul has fallen is termed “this pit” (ΠΕΞΙΖΙΕΙΤ) in *Interp. Know.* 10.31, while in Matthew 12:11 the sheep falls into a “pit” (βόθρονος).

However, I am not convinced by the idea that *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38 contains an allusion to the Parable of the Good Shepherd from John 10. It has been suggested that the “rib” or “side” (σπειρ) of Christ in 10.35 may be an allusion to Jesus’s assertion, “I am the gate for the sheep ... Whoever enters by me will be saved” (ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρα τῶν προβάτων ... δι’ ἐμοῦ ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ σωθήσεται) (John 10:7–9). As Thomassen understands it, “le bon Pasteur ramène la brebis égarée jusqu’à la clôture, et lui dit d’entrer par cette ouverture alors qu’il guette les animaux sauvages.”<sup>99</sup> The problem with this interpretation is that σπειρ certainly translates πλευρά from John 19:34 and Genesis 2:21–22, and not θύρα from John 10:7–9.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, in

<sup>99</sup> Thomassen, “Commentaire,” 132: “the good shepherd brings the lost sheep up to the fence, and tells it to enter through this opening as he watches out for the wild beasts”; see also Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 86–87; Plisch, *Auslegung*, 112 n.104, also notes the connection, but does not develop the idea.

<sup>100</sup> See n. 73 above; also *Exc. Theod.* 26.2–3: “Wherefore whenever he would say, ‘I am the door’, he means that you, who are of the superior seed, shall come as far as the Limit where I am. And whenever he enters in, the superior seed also enters into the Pleroma with him, brought together and brought in through the door” (ὅθεν ὅταν εἴπῃ “ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρα”, τοῦτο λέγει, ὅτι μέχρι τοῦ ὅρου οὗ εἰμι ἐγὼ ἐλεύσεσθε οἱ τοῦ διαφέροντος σπέρματος· ὅταν δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς εἰσέρχῃται, καὶ τὸ σπέρμα συνεισέρχῃται αὐτῷ εἰς τὸ πλῆρωμα διὰ τῆς θύρας συναχθὲν καὶ εἰσαχθὲν); the context is indeed very similar, and it seems likely that Christ’s role as the θύρα in *Exc. Theod.*, is played by his πλευρά in *Interp. Know.*, since both designate Christ’s soteriological function as the portal to the divine realm of the Pleroma. Nonetheless, the πλευρά of *Interp. Know.* 10.35 cannot be a straightforward

drawing this parallel, Thomassen straightforwardly equates the singular “wolf” (λύκος) of John 10:12 with the plural “beasts” (NEΘΗΡION) of *Interp. Know.* 10.36b–37a.<sup>101</sup> In this instance, the connection between Valentinian souls and New Testament sheep seems forced.

While the allusions to the Parable of the Lost Sheep are not to be denied, we need to bear in mind the important point that when *Interp. Know.* uses New Testament parables, it does not necessarily derive their meaning from their New Testament setting, but rather appropriates the elements of the parable to a new Valentinian context in which a new meaning is constructed.<sup>102</sup> If the Temple-mystical background suggested here is accepted, we might also advance a new interpretation of the Saviour’s promise to carry the Valentinian soul upon his shoulders and into the presence of the Father.

In *Exc. Theod.* 42.1–2 we already have the doctrine that “the Cross is a sign of the Limit in the Pleroma, for it divides ... the world from the Pleroma. Therefore, Jesus by that sign carries the Seed on his shoulders and leads them into the Pleroma.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, it is by means of his crucifixion and ascension that he carries the spiritual seeds of the Valentinians back into the Pleroma. This is of course identical to what we find in *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38. But the image of being carried up to heaven on the shoulders of divine figures also finds a strong parallel in apocryphal resurrection traditions, such as those found in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 3.16–17 and the *Gospel of Peter* 39. In the former, we read, “the angel of the Holy Spirit and Michael, the chief of the holy angels, will open his grave on the third day, and the Beloved, sitting on their shoulders, will come forth.”<sup>104</sup> Both Jean Daniélou and Jonathan Knight are surely correct when they

allusion to the θύρα of John 10:7–9; on *Exc. Theod.* 26 and its relation to *Interp. Know.*, see Myszor, “Kreuz,” 609–610.

<sup>101</sup> In Luke 10:3, Jesus describes his sending of the Seventy to proclaim the Kingdom of God as being like sending “lambs into the midst of wolves” (ὡς ἄρνας ἐν μέσῳ λύκων), but this is too far removed from the proposed context.

<sup>102</sup> See Painchaud, “L’utilisation,” 423.

<sup>103</sup> Ὁ Σταυρὸς τοῦ ἐν πληρώματι Ὁρου σημεῖόν ἐστιν, χωρίζει γὰρ ... τὸν κόσμον τοῦ πληρώματος. διὸ καὶ τὰ σπέρματα ὁ Ἰησοῦς διὰ τοῦ σημείου ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων βαστασας εἰσάγει εἰς τὸ πλήρωμα.; The connection between *Exc. Theod.* 42 and *Interp. Know.* 10.34 is recognised in Turner, “NHC XI,1,” 81; and Thomassen, “Commentaire,” 132–33; On the general relation of *Exc. Theod.* 42 to *Interp. Know.*, see Myszor, “Kreuz.”

<sup>104</sup> Greek text in R.H. Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (London, 1900), 93; ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ Μιχαὴλ ἄρχων τῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν ἁγίων ὅτι τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ αὐτοῦ ἀνοίξουσιν τὸ μνημονεῖον, καὶ ὁ ἀγαπητὸς καθίσας ἐπὶ τοὺς ὤμους αὐτῶν ἐξελεύσεται.; Plisch, *Auslegung*, 112 n. 101, notes the parallel in passing.

understand *merkabab* mysticism to underlie this scene, whereby the angelomorphic Christ enthroned above the two angels recalls the typical position of God in Old Testament theophanies (e.g. 1 Kings 22:19; Isaiah 6:1–7; Ezekiel 1:26–27; cf. *1 Enoch* 14).<sup>105</sup> Similarly in the *Gospel of Peter* 39, which may be dependent on the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the soldiers guarding the tomb, having seen two angels descend from heaven, report that “they saw three men come out from the sepulchre, two of them supporting the other and a cross following them.”<sup>106</sup> Of course, if we are to understand the Saviour’s promise to bear the soul upwards upon his shoulders in *Interp. Know.* as enthronement imagery, it would seem to represent a major shift in Christological perspective. The *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Gospel of Peter* both use enthronement imagery as a means of demonstrating Christ’s superiority over the angels and making him analogous to God,<sup>107</sup> whereas *Interp. Know.* would have the Valentinian soul being enthroned *on Christ*. On the other hand, given that *Interp. Know.*’s Christology is of Christ as Saviour, this may not be quite so shocking. In fact, given the following words concerning the Christ-Saviour, this reversal is to be entirely expected:

He has no need of the glory that is not his; he has his own glory with the Name, which is the Son. But he came that we might become glorious through the humiliated one who dwells in the places of humiliation. And through this one who was reproached we receive the forgiveness of sins ... But if we overcome (lit. “be above”) every sin, we shall receive the crown of victory, just like our Head was glorified by the Father.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One: The Christology, Social Setting and Theological Context of the Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 45, 80–81; Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 53–56; Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. John Baker, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 254–55; Knight rightly argues that although this scene draws on the scene of the two angels attending the empty tomb in Luke 24:4 and John 20:12–13, it evidently also draws from extra-canonical oral tradition. But see also Jonathan Draper, “What did Isaiah See? Angelic Theophany in the Tomb in John 20:11–18,” *Neotestamentica* 36 (2002): 63–76; Draper argues that the author of the Gospel of John did in fact have the *merkabab* of Isaiah 6 in mind when constructing his scene of the empty tomb; note also Tertullian’s provocative idea that the Temple veil was rent at Jesus’s death by the escape of the two cherubim which formed the Divine Throne within (*Against Marcion* 4.42).

<sup>106</sup> ὁρῶσιν ἐξελθόντας ἀπὸ τοῦ τάφου τρεῖς ἄνδρας, καὶ τοὺς δύο τὸν ἕνα ὑπορθοῦντας καὶ σταυρὸν ἀκολουθοῦντα αὐτοῖς; Daniélou, *Theology*, 244 notes a further case of similar imagery in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. *Vis.* I.4.4; see also Jackson, “Death of Jesus,” 28; Jackson suggests that in Mark, Jesus’s crucifixion is in fact his enthronement at the right hand of God, fulfilling the messianic promise of Mark 14:62.

<sup>107</sup> See Knight, *Disciples*, 45, 80–81.

<sup>108</sup> *Interp. Know.* 12.19–26 and 21.30–34;  $\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{Q}}\overline{\text{P}} \chi\rho\epsilon\iota[\alpha \text{ EN}] \overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{E}}\overline{\text{A}}[\gamma \text{ ETE P}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{Q}} \text{ EN}] \overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{E}} \overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{Y}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{E}}\overline{\text{Q}} [\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{E}}]\overline{\text{Y}} \overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{Q}}[\overline{\text{E}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{Y}} \overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{I}}\overline{\text{N}}] \overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{I}}\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{Q}} \overline{\text{Z}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{N}} \overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\overline{\text{R}}\overline{\text{E}}\overline{\text{N}} \overline{\text{E}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{E}} \overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\overline{\text{Q}}\overline{\text{H}}\overline{\text{I}}\overline{\text{R}}\overline{\text{E}} \overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{E}} [\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{Q}}]\overline{\text{E}}\overline{\text{I}}$



Christ has been enthroned in Glory with the Father by means of his possession of the divine Name. But by receiving the crown as Christ did,<sup>109</sup> the Valentinian can also become glorified, that is, enthroned. The crown that Christ received can hardly be other than that which was given to him before his crucifixion (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5), which he now wears in heavenly glory (Hebrews 2:9) by virtue of winning victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:54–55), a victory we can now share in through Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57), thereby receiving enthronement in a similar manner (cf. Revelation 4:4). In our interpretation of the saying of the Saviour in *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38, the Valentinian soul can partake in Christ’s victory on the Cross by entering through the veil of his flesh, passing into the holy of holies of his body, being enthroned upon his “shoulders,” and being glorified via the “crown of victory.”<sup>110</sup> One might suggest therefore, that some kind of throne-mysticism forms the background for the Saviour’s promise to bear the soul upon his shoulders.

## Conclusion

By way of a conclusion, I would like to close with some observations on how the foregoing discussion illuminates some aspects of the broader hortatory purpose of *Interp. Know.*, particularly the paraenesis of pages 15–19 and the closing exhortation of pages 20–21.

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ΝΔΕ ΑΤΡΝ [Φ]ΩΠΕ ΕΝΖΑ ΕΛΥ [ΖΙΤῆ ΠΡΕ]ϞΦΩϞ [ΕΤ]ΦΩΟΠ ΝΝΙΜ[Α ΝΤΕ Π]ΦΩϞ ΑΒΑΛ  
 [Ν]ΔΕ ΖΙΤΟΟΤϞ Ν[Ο]Ι ΠΕΕΙ ΝΤΑΖΧΙ ΝΑΟΝΟ ΤΝΧΙ ΜΠΚ[Φ]Σ ΑΒΑΛ ΝΝΝΑΒΙ ...  
 [Ε]ΝΦΑΝΦΩΠΕ ΝΔΕ ΝΤΠΕ ΝΝΑΒΙ ΝΜ ΤΝΝΑΧΙ ΜΠ[Α]ΚΑΑΜ ΜΠΧΡΟ ΝΘΕ ΝΤΝΑΠΕ  
 ΝΤΑΖΧ[Ι] ΕΛΥ ΖΙΤῆ ΠΩΤ. Not all of these reconstructions are certain, although there is

almost total agreement across the three critical editions. The most significant disagreement in the critical editions exists for the reconstruction of ΠΙ[ΡΕΝ] (“the Name”) at 12.21–22. Both Plisch and Funk reconstruct ΠΙ[ΩΤ] so that the sentence reads, “Er hat seine eigene Herrlichkeit bei dem Vater, welche die Sohnschaft ist (“He has his own glory with the Father, which is the Sonship”) (Plisch); and “il possède sa propre gloire auprès du Père, en tant que Fils” (“he possessed his own glory with the Father, as the Son”) (Funk); on *Interp. Know.* 21.30–34, and the theme of sin more generally, see Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism*, 101–105.

<sup>109</sup> See Emmel, “Pathway,” 270 n. 48; Emmel notes that the ΝΘΕ (“in the manner”) in 21.33 signals the *type* of crowning they shall receive, i.e. that the Valentinian is crowned in the same way as Christ was.

<sup>110</sup> It might further be suggested that if *Interp. Know.* 10.34 is indeed combining imagery from apocryphal enthronement traditions on the one hand, and the Parable of the Lost “Sheep” (πρόβατον) on the other, then the enthronement of “the Lamb” (τὸ ἄρνιον) in Revelation 4–7 (e.g. 7:17) would have provided a useful proof-text, for although the terminological link is absent, the conceptual link is very strong.

To begin with, our saying of the Saviour clearly pertains to the use of the Pauline Head-Body imagery in pages 15–18. In these pages, the broader, non-Valentinian, Christian community is encouraged to identify both themselves and the Valentinian Christians as part of the same Church-Body with Christ as their mutual Head. For although the unequal “outpouring of (spiritual) gifts” (16.30; **ΑΠΟΖΡΟΙΑ ΝΗΝΕΖΜΑΤ**) from the Head upon the members of the church may seem unjust, it is important that the members do not become “jealous” of one another (15.21, 29, 30, 38; 17.28; 18.31; 21.22; **ΦΘΟΝΕΙ**; Gk. φθονεῖν), since in reality the source of these gifts is always the same; the Logos who is “rich, *not jealous*, and kind” (17.35–36; **ΟΥΡΗΜΑΟ ... ΝΑΤΡ̄ΦΘΟΝΕΙ ΑΥΩ ΟΥΧΡΗΣΤΟΣ**).<sup>111</sup> For, “in this place (i.e. the cosmos), he gives away gifts to his people without jealousy” (17.36–38; **Ϛ† ΑΒΑΛ Ζ̄Ν ΝΕΙΜΑ Ν̄ΝΔΩΡΕΑ Ν̄ΝϚΡΩΜΕ ΑΧ̄Ν Ρ̄ΦΘΟΝΕΙ**). Instead of being jealous, those with inferior spiritual gifts are instructed to “pray” (16.22; **Ϟ[Λ]ΗΑ**), or “ask” (17.32–33; **[ΑΙ]ΤΕΙ**; Gk. αἰτεῖν), for the “grace” (16.23; 17.34; **ΧΑΡΙΣ**; Gk. χάρις) which flows from the crucified Christ (12.27–29). On the other hand, one who is jealous blocks their own “path” (**ΖΗΗ**),<sup>112</sup> “since he excludes only himself from the gift, and he is ignorant before God” (15.31–33; **ΕϞΨΑΡΨΡ̄ Μ̄ΜΑϞ ΟΥΑΕΕΤϚ Ζ̄Μ ΠΕΖΜΑΤ ΑΥΩ ΕϞΟΕΙ ΝΑΤΖΗ[Τ] Μ̄ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΣΨΕ ΑΡΑϞ**).

The Pauline imagery reaches its climax on pages 17–18, where the quality of spiritual gift received, and therefore one’s standing in the church, is equated to a more or less important body part. The community is exhorted not to be jealous over whether they have been put “in the class of a hand, or an eye, or a foot” (18.31–32; **Ζ̄Ν ΟΥ[ΜΕ]ΡΟΣ ΝΒΕΛ Η ΟΥΒΙΧ Η ΟΥΡΙΤΕ**), but rather to be thankful that they exist as part of “the Body” (18.34; **ΠΨΩΜΑ**; Gk. σῶμα), since when such members exist apart from the Body, “they die” (17.22; **ΣΕΜΑΥΤ**).

We have seen how according to the present understanding of our saying of the Saviour, the soul is exhorted to enter the body of the crucified Christ, and in doing so restore the primal androgyne and overcome death on the one hand, but also be enthroned within the veil of Christ’s flesh, thereby receiving the glory of Christ’s victory over death. Much of the mystical background to this saying, which we saw was developed by the Valentinian author in *Interp. Know.* 11–14, is here subsumed to the needs of the

<sup>111</sup> It is clear that Christ and the Logos are identical in this imagery, both being the Head who is the source of the Body-Church’s spiritual gifts, since the Logos is here described as **ΟΥΧΡΗΣΤΟΣ** (lit. “a kind/good one”), whereas **ΧΡΗΣΤΟΣ** is used as a Christological title in 15.17 (also in 1.20, 23, but these are almost entirely restored by Turner).

<sup>112</sup> See *Interp. Know.* 13.19 in n. 44 above.

immediate, impending, or perceived social crisis, such that the saying is most powerfully employed for its graphic image of participation in the Body of Christ, now understood as the church, the new temple. Certain elements of the saying's underlying mysticism permeate the paraenesis nonetheless, such as the crown of glory in 21.31–34. But perhaps most vividly preserved from our saying is the notion that once one has entered the Body-Church of Christ, “the archons and authorities” (20.22–23;  $\text{ΝΑΡΧΗ ΜΗΝ [ΝΕΖΟΥΣ]ΙΑ}$ ), formerly “the beasts”, can no longer find the soul, and “when they cannot see them, since they (the members of the Body) are freemen in the spirit, they tear that which is manifest (the flesh),”<sup>113</sup> and “they are mindlessly mad” (20.37;  $\text{ΣΕΛΑΒΙ ΖΗ ΟΥΜΝΤΑΘΗΤ}$ ). Clearly the more mystical elements of *Interp. Know.* 10.18–38, as well as the inclusive nature of the idea that the psychic substance can partake in, and be glorified within, the Body of Christ, made our saying of the Saviour an appropriate sectarian foreword to the more ecumenical paraenesis which constituted the *raison d'être* of the work as a whole.

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<sup>113</sup> 20.31–34;  $\text{ΝΤΑΡΟΥΤΗ[Ω]ΘΗΒΑΜ ΑΝΕΥ ΑΡΑΥ ΕΥΡΠΟΛΙΤΕΥΕΣΘΑΙ ΖΗ ΠΠΝΕΥΜΑ ΦΑΡΟΥΣΛΑΠΗ ΜΠΕΤΟΥΑΝΖ ΑΒΑΛ}$ .

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# **An Elusive Roebuck Luciferianism and Paganism in Robert Cochrane's Witchcraft**

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## **Abstract**

The English occultist Robert Cochrane (1931–1966) has remained an enigmatic figure ever since his death under mysterious circumstances almost fifty years ago. The Magister of a coven known as the Clan of Tubal Cain, Cochrane was a co-founder of Cochranean Witchcraft and a vocal critic of Gerald Gardner (1884–1964) and mainstream elements of the Wiccan movement. Cochrane's legacy is today evident in a variety of contemporary magico-religious groups, including the rejuvenated Clan, the 1734 tradition and the wider "Traditional Witchcraft" current of Western esotericism. Recent academic thought has maintained that Cochrane's tradition was a form of contemporary Paganism akin to that of Gardner, although this has not gone unchallenged; in recent years, Cochrane's successor Shani Oates (1959–) has argued that Cochraneanism is not a tradition of the Pagan Craft, but should instead be understood as a Luciferian and Gnostic spiritual path quite distinct from contemporary Paganism. In this article, the author endeavours to explore this complicated issue, using both historical textual sources and information obtained from oral histories.

## **Keywords**

Traditional Witchcraft; Robert Cochrane; Luciferianism; Contemporary Paganism; Contemporary Witchcraft

## **Introduction**

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Over the course of the twentieth century, a plethora of different individuals and groups sprung up throughout Britain and North America, all claiming that their particular brand of beliefs and practices should—or at least could—be considered to be “witchcraft.” This emotive word had brought untold misery to thousands in the Early Modern period, when across Europe and its North American colonies, those considered “witches” were persecuted as agents of the Devil bent on causing harm and bringing Christendom to its knees. In utilising such a term, these esotericists wished to draw a connection between their own Craft and the alleged practices of those individuals who had been vilified several centuries before. However, there was no theological unity among these twentieth-century spiritual seekers, who were adherents of new magico-religious movements with widely differing approaches on everything from magical ethics to cosmological conceptions. From the atheistic outlook of Anton LaVey’s Satanic Witches, to the monotheistic Goddess-venerating position of Zsuzsanna Budapest’s Dianic Witches, a great diversity was apparent among these groups, whose only unifying factors seemed to be the performance of rituals with magical intent and the use of the term “witch” itself.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I intend to delve into the theological ideas of just one of these modern-day Witches; an Englishman best known under his pseudonym of “Robert Cochrane” (1931–1966).

A working-class West Londoner by birth, Cochrane’s real name was Roy Bowers, although he liked to hide behind a series of magical *noms de plume* when dealing with outsiders to his Clan. Circa 1961, when he was living near Slough in Buckinghamshire, he was involved in the construction of the Thames Valley Coven of Witches, around which he built a wider occult family, the Clan of Tubal Cain. Although others had played a key role in the coven’s creation—among them his wife Jane Bowers, George Stannard (circa 1912–1983) and Ronald White (1928–1998)—Cochrane’s charisma saw him installed into a position of leadership as “Clan Magister.” Together, they formulated a unique tradition, inspired and influenced by the published tomes of Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903), Margaret Alice Murray (1863–1963) and, most importantly perhaps, the poet Robert Graves (1895–1985).<sup>2</sup> Telling new initiates that the Clan were actually practising a

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of many of these witchcraft groups, see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham: AltaMira, 2006); Owen Davies, *America Bewitched: The Story of Witchcraft after Salem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The most thorough account of the coven’s early development is provided by John of Monmouth with Gillian Spraggs and Shani Oates, *Genuine Witchcraft is Explained: The Secret*

centuries-old tradition that had been handed down to him in a hereditary fashion, Cochrane began publicising his views regarding the “Old Craft” within a number of esoteric publications, namely *Pentagram*, the published arm of the Witchcraft Research Association, founded in 1964 to unite the self-professed “witches” of Britain.<sup>3</sup> Cochrane’s relationship with many of these rivals was fractious, and in particular he was very vocal in his denunciation of the Gardnerian tradition of Pagan Witchcraft that had been founded in the late 1940s or early 1950s by Gerald Gardner, allegedly based on his experiences with an earlier New Forest coven. Such animosity did not, however, prevent Cochrane from corresponding with many Gardnerian initiates, welcoming the ex-Gardnerian Doreen Valiente (1922–1999) into his Clan, and probably receiving a secret Gardnerian initiation himself from a West London coven.<sup>4</sup> In 1966, after experiencing a particularly rough patch in his private life, which resulted in the collapse of his marriage, he undertook a suicidal Midsummer ritual from which he never recovered.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his untimely passing, Cochrane left behind an ever-expanding legacy. Stannard and White went on to found a Pagan group known as The Regency, while the Clan member Evan John Jones (1936–2003), who inherited the mantle of Magister, went on to publish several books that displayed a clear influence from the Cochranian way of working.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1980s, Jones also initiated two American occultists, Ann and Dave Finnin, into the Clan, and they proceeded to found their own branch back home in California. As problems arose in the relationship between Jones and the Finnins, in 1998 he handed over control of the Clan to an Englishwoman, Shani Oates, who with “Robin the Dart” has operated it from Derbyshire ever since. Cochrane’s legacy can furthermore be seen in the “1734” tradition of Witchcraft, founded by American Joseph Wilson (1942–2004) circa 1974, based in part upon the teachings that Cochrane had imparted to him by correspondence. As the “Traditional Witchcraft” current within

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*History of the Royal Windsor Coven and the Regency* (Milverton, Somerset: Capall Bann, 2011); see older summary in Michael Howard, *Children of Cain: A Study of Modern Traditional Witches* (Richmond Vista: Three Hands Press, 2011), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Cochrane’s claims regarding his hereditary tradition can be found in Doreen Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (London: Robert Hale, 1989), 117, 120–21.

<sup>4</sup> Ethan Doyle White, “Robert Cochrane and the Gardnerian Craft: Feuds, Secrets, and Mysteries in Contemporary British Witchcraft,” *The Pomegranate* 13, no. 2 (2011): 33–52.

<sup>5</sup> Cochrane’s final months and death are documented in Gavin Semple, *The Poisoned Chalice: The Death of Robert Cochrane* (London: Reineke Verlag, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Evan John Jones, *Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed* (London: Robert Hale, 1990); Evan John Jones with Chas S. Clifton, *Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1997).

Western esotericism came to increasing prominence in the 1990s, in large part as a rejection of mainstream trends within Pagan Witchcraft, Cochrane became an almost tutelary figure, and I believe that he warrants the title of “Father of Traditional Witchcraft” more than any other. Certainly, no other “Traditional Witch” has been quite so influential across the past half century, with many of today’s covens and practitioners citing his writings as a significant influence over their particular praxes. Recent years have also seen increasing scholarly interest in Cochrane and his tradition, best known as “Cochrane’s Craft,” from both academic and independent perspectives.<sup>7</sup>

But what of the theistic underpinnings of Cochrane’s Craft? What “supernatural” entities did he believe that his Clan interacted with on their quest for magical efficacy and mystical gnosis? It is to this question—more perplexing than it might initially seem—that this article shall turn. From an examination of the available published literature, it is clear that within the academic fields of Pagan Studies and the study of Western esotericism the consensus has remained that Cochrane followed a tradition which was a variant of the Pagan Witchcraft religion, having many similarities in its basic structure to Gardnerianism, Cardellianism or Alexandrianism. Such a religion is often referred to as “Wicca,” a term that began to be applied to the Pagan Witchcraft faith in the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> This is the picture of Cochrane’s Craft painted in the historical studies authored by Ronald Hutton, Leo Ruickbie and Chas S. Clifton, and is perfectly in keeping with the image of this tradition that can be found in the published writings of several figures who actually knew Cochrane and worked in his Clan, namely Doreen Valiente and Evan John Jones.<sup>9</sup> This image depicts the Cochranian tradition, or as Hutton once called it, “Cochranian Wicca,”<sup>10</sup> as a tradition venerating a Horned God and a Goddess, commemorating four seasonal sabbats and meeting in covens for magico-religious rites much as the many other burgeoning Wiccan traditions were doing at the time.

However, in recent years sustained criticism of this interpretation has

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<sup>7</sup> Academic approaches include Doyle White, “Robert Cochrane,” and Hutton, *Triumph*, 309–318 while independent approaches include Howard, *Children* and John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*.

<sup>8</sup> Ethan Doyle White, “The Meaning of ‘Wicca’: A Study in Etymology, History, and Pagan Politics,” *The Pomegranate* 12, no. 2 (2010): 185–207.

<sup>9</sup> Hutton, *Triumph*, 309–318; Leo Ruickbie, *Witchcraft Out of the Shadows* (London: Robert Hale, 2004), 130–34; Clifton, *Hidden Children*, 19–22; Valiente, *Rebirth*, 117–136; Jones, *Witchcraft*.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Hutton, “Modern Pagan Witchcraft,” in Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds., *The Athlone History of Magic and Witchcraft in Europe Volume Six: The Twentieth Century* (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), 57.

come from Shani Oates, the current Maid of the Derbyshire Clan of Tubal Cain, who has argued that Cochrane's Craft is not in any way a tradition of Pagan Witchcraft, but that it is instead a Luciferian-Gnostic path, thereby belonging to an entirely different magico-religious spiritual tradition. In this she has been supported by other figures involved in Cochranean and related forms of Witchcraft, such as Stuart Inman of the 1734 tradition, and with these new ideas on the table, it is certainly worth making a greater attempt to try and fathom the murky depths of Cochrane's Craft and truly establish the nature of the beast. I propose the possibility that from its early years, Cochrane's Craft may have drawn from both Luciferian ideas and from the rising Pagan Witchcraft movement, thereby fashioning a syncretic blend between Luciferianism and Paganism. Furthermore, I show that such a syncretic blend is not without precedent, and can be identified elsewhere in the contemporary Witchcraft movement.

There are four main sources that those wishing to study Cochrane and the development of his tradition can draw from, all of which have contributed to the production of this article. The first of these are the writings of Cochrane himself, all of which were produced between the period from 1963 to 1966. These are comprised of both his published articles, which appeared in such esoteric magazines as *Psychic News*, *New Dimensions* and *Pentagram*, and his personal letters, which were sent to three of his correspondents and which have become publicly available since his death.<sup>11</sup> The second is a group of papers containing letters and early drafts for the coven's rituals which have come to be known as the Stannard documents, having been possessed by that particular Clan member for many years; these date from between 1961 and 1966.<sup>12</sup> The next set of sources are the accounts of Cochrane and his coven written by those who knew him first hand, namely Doreen Valiente and Evan John Jones, both of whom were members of the Clan.<sup>13</sup> The fourth and final source that I make use of are the beliefs and practices of those modern covens who continue in the initiatory line of Cochrane, several of which refer to themselves as the "Clan of Tubal Cain." One must accept here that this latter source is perhaps the most unreliable, because it relies on an oral transmission from Cochrane through Evan John Jones and then onto others, during which time there was

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<sup>11</sup> Evan John Jones, Robert Cochrane and Mike Howard, *The Roebuck in the Thicket: An Anthology of the Robert Cochrane Witchcraft Tradition* (Milverton, Somerset: Capall Bann, 2001); Robert Cochrane with Evan John Jones and Michael Howard, *The Robert Cochrane Letters: An Insight into Modern Traditional Witchcraft* (Milverton, Somerset: Capall Bann, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Published in John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*.

<sup>13</sup> Valiente, *Rebirth*, 117–136; Jones, *Witchcraft*.

ample chance for these groups to adapt and evolve, leading to the situation where some of the contemporary Clans of Tubal Cain might be practising forms of the Craft that Cochrane himself would not entirely recognise. It must be born in mind that religious traditions are rarely static, and are constantly experiencing a process of renewal and human agency.

Accompanying these four sources, I can also look for guidance from a fifth area; the second-hand comments and evaluations of the Cochranean material that have been produced by historians and researchers in recent decades, most notably Ronald Hutton and the esotericists Gavin Semple, Michael Howard, and John of Monmouth.<sup>14</sup> This material is interesting, although not being a primary source it must be treated with some scepticism and as this article shall show, I do take issue with some of their assumptions and assertions.

### **Paganism, Luciferianism and why it matters?**

For those readers who may be unaccustomed to the varying different magico-religious movements whose members self-describe as “witches,” I will provide a brief overview of how Pagan Witchcraft and Luciferian Witchcraft are construed and why, in the context of this article, it matters into which of them the tradition of Cochranean Witchcraft—as originally practised by Cochrane and his coven—can be best categorised.<sup>15</sup> Although there are areas of commonality and mutual influence, the two offer distinctly different theological and cosmological worldviews, venerating different deities and performing different ritual praxes. It must be stressed that such categories did not exist during the 1960s, when both would have been subsumed under the broad heading of “witchcraft,” but I nevertheless use them here as useful analytical groupings.

Pagan Witchcraft is a religious tradition within the wider contemporary Pagan (or “Neopagan”) movement, having developed between the 1930s and 1950s in Britain before spreading and evolving into a global phenomenon centred in the United States. Taking as its basis the erroneous theories of Egyptologist Margaret Murray about a historical pre-Christian

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<sup>14</sup> Hutton, *Triumph*; Howard, “Modern Pagan”; Semple, *Poisoned*; Howard, *Children*; John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*.

<sup>15</sup> Here I use the capitalised “Witchcraft” to denote a particular magico-religious tradition, i.e. Pagan Witchcraft or Luciferian Witchcraft, just as the name of Islam or Christianity would be capitalised. In contrast, I use the lower case “witchcraft” when referring to the use of the term more generally.

Witch-Cult, the available evidence points to the Pagan Craft actually having several independent origins, as different occultists dotted around the country began to create their own versions of the religion using Murray's theories as a basis. Undoubtedly the most prominent was Gerald Gardner, the founder of the Gardnerian tradition, which was up and running in some form by 1953. Pagan Witchcraft, or "Wicca" as it came to be better known in the 1960s and 1970s, typically revolved around the duotheistic veneration of a Horned God and a Goddess, the commemoration of seasonal dates known as sabbats and the practice of magico-religious rites either in covens or solitarily. This was a structure gleaned in part from the works of Murray but also from the American folklorist Charles Leland's alleged account of Tuscan witchcraft, *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches* (1899).<sup>16</sup>

Luciferian Witchcraft, as it is understood amongst its proponents, differs in that it revolves primarily around a belief in Lucifer, whom its adherents view as a positive and significant figure in human history; they seek to venerate and cooperate with this entity in order to attain gnosis. The academic Fredrik Gregorius distinguished this Luciferian movement from the various varieties of Satanism—as propagated by occult groups like the Church of Satan or Order of Nine Angles—by highlighting that the former typically viewed Lucifer in a non-Christian mythological setting.<sup>17</sup> Although the figure of Lucifer has had some influence on the Pagan Craft through the likes of *Aradia*, this esoteric current can be further distinguished from Pagan Witchcraft in that many contemporary Luciferian Witches consider their faith to be basically Gnostic, something absent from Pagan Witchcraft.<sup>18</sup> Although the term "Luciferian" itself was first devised by the Inquisition in reference to Medieval heretics,<sup>19</sup> the term "Luciferian Craft,"

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the history and development of Pagan Witchcraft see Hutton, *Triumph*; Clifton, *Hidden Children*; Doyle White, "Meaning of 'Wicca'." For more on the beliefs and practices typical of Pagan Witchcraft see Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagans in America* (London: Penguin, 2006 [1979]) and Graham Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism* (second edition) (London: C. Hurst, 2007), 35–52.

<sup>17</sup> Fredrik Gregorius, "Luciferian Witchcraft: At the Crossroads between Paganism and Satanism," in *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*, ed. Per Faxneld and Jesper Petersen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 230–31.

<sup>18</sup> For some Luciferian practitioner perspectives, see Nigel Jackson and Michael Howard, *The Pillars of Tubal Cain* (Milverton, Somerset: Capall Bann, 2000); Michael Howard, *The Book of Fallen Angels* (Milverton, Somerset: Capall Bann, 2004); Shani Oates, *Tubelo's Green Fire: Mythos, Ethos, Female, Male & Priestly Mysteries of the Clan of Tubal Cain*, (Oxford: Mandrake, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Gareth J. Medway, *Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 12.

from which “Luciferian Witchcraft” can be extrapolated, was invented and propagated by Michael Howard, a British Luciferian who achieved notability as the editor and publisher of *The Cauldron*, a British esoteric journal devoted primarily to Traditional Witchcraft, which has been running since 1976.<sup>20</sup> Other notable recent exponents of Luciferian Witchcraft include the Cultus Sabbati, a closed fellowship of initiates following a tradition known as the Sabbatic Craft, first propounded by English occultist Andrew D. Chumbley (1967–2004) in the early 1990s, as well as the American Michael D. Ford, who has authored a number of books on the subject and who leads the Order of Phosphorus.<sup>21</sup> Looking further back in time, it seems apparent that Luciferian elements are also associated with earlier magical practices. In nineteenth-century France, Roman Catholic polemicists were accusing the Freemasons of venerating Lucifer, while there is evidence that one of the British esoteric orders influenced by Freemasonry, the Society of the Horseman’s Word, did indeed include Luciferian elements within their praxes.<sup>22</sup> A fuller historical investigation is certainly required, but we might tentatively suggest that there were elements of the Luciferian mythos within nineteenth-century British folk magic.

If it can be shown that Cochrane’s Craft was indeed a Pagan Witchcraft group akin to that of Gardner or Charles Cardell, then it can be viewed as a part of the same burgeoning religious movement which here I term “Wicca.” On the other hand, if it can be shown that the original philosophy of Cochrane’s Craft was Luciferian in basis, then it makes comparisons with Gardner, Cardell, and other Wiccans much harder because it will have foundations that are fundamentally different from those of the Pagan Witchcraft movement. In such a scenario, it should perhaps not be viewed as a chapter in the development of the Wiccan religion, as it was in Ronald Hutton’s study, but as a chapter in an as-yet unwritten study of Luciferian history.

Alternatively, a third scenario could see Cochraneanism as a distinct religious movement in its own right that adopted both Pagan and Luciferian elements in a syncretic blend. Such a tradition would not be unprecedented, and can be seen as far back as 1899, with the publication of Charles Leland’s *Aradia*. An American folklorist, Leland had been collecting folk tales and

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Howard, personal communication, 25 June 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Gregorius, “Luciferian Witchcraft,” 241–47.

<sup>22</sup> Medway, *Lure*, 11. More on the Society of the Horseman’s Word can be found in Hutton, *Triumph*, 61–64; Russell Lyon, *The Quest for the Original Horse Whisperers* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2003); Ben Fernee (ed.) *The Society of the Horseman’s Word* (Hinckley, Leicestershire: The Society of Esoteric Endeavour, 2009).

traditions in Tuscany for several years when his informant, Maddalena, allegedly brought him this text, the gospel of a secretive cult of witches, before promptly disappearing. Scholars have debated whether the text represents the genuine teachings of a religious group or a fictitious creation of either Magdalena or Leland; it seems most likely that it contains some genuinely folkloric components but is nonetheless a late nineteenth-century creation. Certainly, no other trace of this Tuscan witch religion has ever been found.<sup>23</sup> The theology contained within *Aradia* mixes the figure of Lucifer, here described as “the god of the Sun and the Moon, the god of Light, who was so proud of his beauty, and who for his pride was driven from Paradise,” with the Classical pagan deity of Diana, asserting that they had a child, the titular Aradia, who is sent to Earth to combat the Roman Catholic Church and aristocracy, teaching the peasants magic in order to do so.<sup>24</sup>

Such a scenario can also be seen in the work of the Anglo-American occultist Paul Huson (1942–). Huson’s *Mastering Witchcraft: A Practical Guide for Witches, Warlocks & Covens* (1970), blends together elements of both magico-religious movements into a cohesive whole, fashioning a new theology in the process. In this influential tome, Huson outlined a theology heavily influenced by *Aradia*, in which Witches could venerate a Horned God and a lunar Goddess (just as most Wiccans would do), but also referring to Lucifer and Diana as primordial deities. These are all seen as figurative forms of “the Mighty Ones,” or “Watchers,” spiritual entities who in ancient mythologies came to Earth to breed with humanity, in doing so imparting their knowledge and wisdom—an inherently Luciferian and Gnostic concept.<sup>25</sup> The Craft propagated in Huson’s book had not been taught to him by any pre-existing covens or Witches, but he had instead developed it himself based upon what he read in the available literature about witchcraft and magic, most notably *Aradia*, Arthur Edward Waite’s

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<sup>23</sup> Hutton, *Triumph*, 142–48; Robert Mathiesin, “Charles G. Leland and the Witches of Italy: The Origin of Aradia,” in *Aradia or the Gospel of the Witches: A New Translation*, ed. Mario Pazzaglini and Dina Pazzaglini (Blaine: Phoenix, 1998), 25–58; Sabina Magliocco, “Who Was Aradia? The History and Development of a Legend,” *The Pomegranate* 18 (2002): 5–22; Sabina Magliocco, “Aradia in Sardinia: The Archaeology of a Folk Character,” in *Ten Years of Triumph of the Moon: Academic Approaches to Studying Magic and the Occult: Examining Scholarship into Witchcraft and Paganism, Ten Years after Ronald Hutton’s The Triumph of the Moon*, ed. Dave Evans and Dave Green (n.p.: Hidden Publishing, 2009), 40–60.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Leland, *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches* (London: David Nutt, 1899), 1; the book’s theology is discussed in Gregorius, “Luciferian Witchcraft,” 231–34.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Huson, *Mastering Witchcraft: A Practicing Guide for Witches, Warlocks & Covens* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1970).



*Holy Kabbalah*, Robert Henry Charles's translation of *The Book of Enoch*, and Evan Wentz's *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Britain*.<sup>26</sup> As this illustrates, it is by no means impossible that Cochrane's original theological position blended Luciferian and Pagan elements together, just as Leland's *Aradia* had done, and in a similar manner to that which Huson would undertake during that same decade. This Pagan-Luciferian mix could potentially explain why both later Cochranians and those studying the tradition have come to radically different understandings of Cochrane's original theology.

### The Evidence of Robert Cochrane's Writings

Though he never published any books in his short life, Cochrane was nevertheless a fairly prolific writer, and today historical researchers can turn to a number of his surviving writings in order to get a better insight into his own particular understandings of the Craft. Heuristically, we can divide these sources into two categories. First, the published work which appeared in both magazines like *Psychic News*, *New Dimensions* and *Pentagram*, and in a book authored by the journalist Justine Glass, *Witchcraft, the Sixth Sense – and Us* (1965), and second, the un-published material, contained largely in the surviving letters written to correspondents such as Norman Gills, Joseph Wilson and William G. Gray (1913–1995). Cochrane's writings provide us with what is perhaps the best insight into his mind, but at the same time it must be recognised that they reveal only what he was willing to reveal to others who were outside of his coven, and furthermore might not reflect the wider beliefs of his coven members.

Cochrane claimed to be descended from a family of practising Witches who had passed down their secretive tradition from at least the Early Modern witch hunt. Problematically, all such "Hereditary Witchcraft" stories must be treated with scepticism; following his death his widow admitted to Doreen Valiente that the entire story had been a fiction.<sup>27</sup> However, of

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Kane, "Mastering Witchcraft," *The Cauldron* 135 (2010): 29–31; Paul Huson, personal communication, 15 November 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Cochrane had made such claims in a letter to Joseph Wilson, 6 January 1966, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 21; letter to William Gray, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 126; in letter to Norman Gills, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 151; in "Genuine Witchcraft is Defended," *Psychic News* (9 November, 1963) and to Valiente, *Rebirth*, 117. Jane Bowers's admission appears in Doreen Valiente, unpublished notebooks, 11 December 1966. For the unreliability of "hereditary witchcraft" claims see Adler, *Drawing*, 608–609 and Hutton, *Triumph*, 305.

particular interest here is his claim that his father had been one of “The Horsemen,” i.e. a member of the Society of the Horseman’s Word, who might have adhered to Luciferian ideas.<sup>28</sup> The accuracy of this claim remains debatable, and although there is certainly nothing implausible in the idea that Cochrane grew up in an “esoteric family,” Michael Lloyd, the son of Cochrane’s sister, has denied the existence of any esoteric practices within the family. Instead, Lloyd notes that Cochrane only became interested in the occult after attending a Society for Physical Research lecture while studying at an art academy in Kensington.<sup>29</sup>

Cochrane included a number of references to his theological and cosmological beliefs in his writings. Repeatedly, he makes it clear that he believed in a singular divine force, a Godhead, which he varyingly called “Supreme Deity,” “Old Fate,” “Force,” and “Truth,” and which he proclaimed to be that which all true Witches sought to glimpse.<sup>30</sup> Accompanying this Godhead, his writings indicate that he believed in the existence of other entities as well, terming them “the Gods.”<sup>31</sup> In a piece written for the reporter Justine Glass, in which he interpreted the explicitly Christian carvings of the St. Duzec menhir in France as “a complete recapitulation of Craft theology”—one of many pseudohistorical and pseudoarchaeological interpretations he would advocate—he claimed that two of the petroglyphic figures carved there represented “the God of the witches” in his guise as a blacksmith and the Goddess, while a third was interpreted as “the Horn Child” who is “the child born of the union of the masculine and feminine mysteries.”<sup>32</sup> In his letters, he makes reference to a

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Cochrane, letter to Joseph Wilson, 20 December 1965, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> The term “esoteric family” was first propounded by Robert Mathiesen and Theitic, *The Rede of the Wiccae: Adriana Porter, Gwen Thompson and the Birth of a Tradition of Witchcraft* (Providence, RI: Olympian Press, 2005), 90–91. Martin Lloyd’s statements on the issue can be found in Howard, *Children*, 43, 46 and Strimstrum, 5 February 2012 (07:39), comment on Nicholaj de Mattos Frisvold, “Seven Flaws in Mike Howards’ Children of Cain,” *The Starry Cave*, 27 January 2012, <http://www.starrycave.com/2012/01/seven-flaws-in-mike-howards-children-of.html> (archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6DFw74Vzx>).

<sup>30</sup> Robert Cochrane, Response to “A Reader’s Knotty Problem,” *Pentagram* 3 (March 1965), 10, reproduced as “Cord Magic” in Jones et al., *Roebuck*, 52–53; Robert Cochrane, “The Faith of the Wise,” *Pentagram* 4 (August 1965), 13, reproduced in Jones et al., *Roebuck*, 56; Robert Cochrane, letter to William Gray, 27 May 1964, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Cochrane, “Witches’ Esbat,” *New Dimensions* (November 1964), reproduced in Jones et al, *Roebuck*, 47; Cochrane, “Faith of the Wise,” 13–14, reproduced in Jones et al, *Roebuck*, 56.

<sup>32</sup> Justine Glass, *Witchcraft, the Sixth Sense – and Us* (London: Neville Spearman, 1965), 142–46.

wide variety of different mythological figures, from goddess figures like the “Three Elemental Mothers” and the “Earth Mother” to pre-Christian gods like Pan, Osiris and Baldur, and even figures from established world religions like Jesus and the Buddha.<sup>33</sup> He was sufficiently well read to feel capable of pulling together examples from a variety of different contexts to illustrate the points that he wanted to make regarding mysticism and magic. Despite the influence he had taken from pre-Christian mythologies, he did not like to categorise Witchcraft as a form of paganism, seeing them as being related but distinct; for him, Witchcraft “retained the memory of ancient faiths” but unlike paganism was an “occult science.”<sup>34</sup> Accompanying these beliefs, his writings also make it clear that he believed in fairies, considering them to be elementals, and claiming that one had accompanied his family for generations.<sup>35</sup>

As far as I can identify, there are only two references to Lucifer or Luciferianism within the corpus of Cochrane’s writings, both of which are contained within his communication with Norman Gills, a Witch who allegedly ran his own coven from his Oxfordshire home. One comes from an undated letter in which he made reference to Lucifer as “the Angel of Light” who appears as a “tall golden man, moving rapidly” and who is sometimes seen with “wings of fire.” However, he warned, “few can face that vision without aid from an even Higher Source.”<sup>36</sup> The other appears in an undated document entitled “the basic structure of the Craft” which he also supposedly sent to Gills. Here, he refers to “Lucet” as one of the seven children of the Gods, stating that:

Lucet is the King of Light, Fire, Love and Intellect, of Birth and Joy... the Child. He is visualised as a bright golden light moving quickly with wings. Thieving and mischievous. Sometimes he comes as a tall golden man, moving rapidly, other times the wings of Fire surround him, but few can face the vision without aid

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<sup>33</sup> Cochrane, letter to Wilson, 6 January 1966, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 23; Cochrane, letter to Wilson, 16 February 1966, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 32 and 37; Cochrane, letter to William Gray, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 60.

<sup>34</sup> Cochrane, “Genuine Witchcraft”; Cochrane, letter to William Gray, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 82. Cochrane’s views on this issue are clarified and expanded by Evan John Jones, “Will of the Gods,” *Comhairle* 5 (Summer 1999), reproduced in Jones et al, *Roebuck*, 152–58.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Cochrane, letter to William Gray, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 62; Robert Cochrane, letter to William Gray, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 120.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Cochrane, letter to Norman Gills, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 157.

from an even Higher Source. At time he is winged at the foot; at others upon the head, behind the glorious hair.<sup>37</sup>

Upon discovering the existence of this document in the late 1990s, Evan John Jones expressed his opinion that it was a fake, and had not been written by Cochrane at all. Jones passed this belief on to Shani Oates, who has in turn maintained it, despite the fact that it provides the most convincing piece of historical evidence connecting Cochrane to Luciferianism.<sup>38</sup> Michael Howard, who discovered it alongside Jones, has noted that Jones expressed surprise that the Luciferian elements existed within the Cochrane letters, as if he were unfamiliar with them.<sup>39</sup> It is possible that he simply did not wish the Luciferian elements of the Clan's mythos to be revealed to an outsider, although Howard was himself a proponent of Luciferian Witchcraft, and therefore would not have been shocked or offended by such a revelation. Clearly, a deeper textual evaluation of this document is required to either authenticate it or show it to have been produced by someone other than Cochrane.

I can identify only two other potentially Luciferian elements within Cochrane's letters. In another missive to Gills, he mentions a "Serpent" whom he associates with the element of Earth, which Howard considered to be a representation of Lucifer.<sup>40</sup> In a letter to Joseph Wilson, Cochrane also refers to "the star crossed serpent" as being the owner of "[a]ll things that are of this world."<sup>41</sup> Howard identified this entity as Azazel, who appears as a demonic entity within traditional demonology but who was previously one of the Watchers in the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, a core influence on Luciferian mythology.<sup>42</sup> Whether these identifications are accurate or not is open to debate.

Although dismissing the legitimacy of the one piece of explicit Luciferianism within Cochrane's corpus, Oates has argued that the Luciferian elements are instead "implicit" in his writings, a claim supported

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Cochrane, letter to Norman Gills, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 164.

<sup>38</sup> Shani Oates, personal communication, 6 October 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Howard, "Traditional Witchcraft and: Historicity and Perpetuity: An Interview with Michael Howard," Three Hands Press, 2011, [http://www.threehandspress.com/children\\_of\\_cain\\_interview.php](http://www.threehandspress.com/children_of_cain_interview.php) (archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6EPSVusuv>).

<sup>40</sup> Robert Cochrane, letter to Norman Gills, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 176–77.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Cochrane, letter to Joseph Wilson, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Howard in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 29.

by Stuart Inman.<sup>43</sup> Personally, I cannot see any of these implicit references, but am an outsider who is neither a member of the Clan nor a practising occultist. Perhaps such implicit elements would be visible only to those who have had practical experience within the tradition, and who are trained in deciphering Cochrane’s “poetic mysticism.” Cochrane himself maintained: “the nature of proof can only be shown by inference and by participation, not by intellectual reasoning.”<sup>44</sup> Problematically, what one individual considers implicit within a given text might be very different to what another might see within those very same words; deciphering implicit meanings remains firmly within the realm of subjectivity. The fact that such elements cannot be explicitly highlighted forces me to conclude that such evidence is inadmissible for the purposes of historical enquiry.

### The Evidence of the Stannard Documents

Up until his death, one of the coven’s founding members, George Stannard, kept many documents pertaining to its organisation and development in his possession. Following his death, these were examined and published by John of Monmouth in his important volume, *Genuine Witchcraft is Explained*, which I have positively reviewed elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> These documents include drafts for rituals, letters sent among coven members, and signed oaths, written primarily by Cochrane but with contributions from a variety of group members. It is certainly worth examining these sources for theological references, although it must be born in mind that such documents rarely have a singular authorship, and are often draft documents, works in progress representing ideas expressed by the Clan but which might not have represented their beliefs in practice.

One of the most important of these documents is also one of the earliest: “The Writ and Constitution of a Coven to Diana.” Existing in three separate forms, each dating from 1962, it represents attempts by the early coven to agree on a set of principles satisfactory to all six of its then members. Within the main text of the first draft of the document are various references to “the Goddess,” ultimately removed by the final revision. In another passage,

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<sup>43</sup> Shani Oates, personal communication, 6 October 2010; Stuart Inman, “Traditional Witchcraft” talk, Treadwell’s Bookstore, 23 September 2010; personal communication, 07 November 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Cochrane, “Faith of the Wise,” 13, reproduced in Jones et al, *Roebuck*, 57.

<sup>45</sup> John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*; Ethan Doyle White, review of John of Monmouth’s *Genuine Witchcraft is Explained*, *The Pomegranate* 3, no. 2 (2011): 280–82.

also removed from the final revision, it refers to the coven's Maiden, High Priestess and eldest female member each embodying one of three aspects of the Triple Goddess: "the Virgin," "the Mother" and "the Destroyer," forming a "Moon triad."<sup>46</sup> The choice of Diana as the group's goddess figure is quite possibly adopted from Leland's *Aradia*, a book that had a clear influence on the Clan's early rites; certainly, three of their invocations directly quoted Leland's gospel.<sup>47</sup> In two documents devoted to magical dances and purposes, both the Godhead and the Goddess are referenced, as is "the Goddess Dance" to be performed on May Day.<sup>48</sup> The Goddess once more reappears in the written instructions for a fertility rite known as "Drawing Down the Moon," in which the goddess is invoked "to manifest through Her devotees,"<sup>49</sup> and she appears yet again within the "Rite of Initiation."<sup>50</sup> "The Theory of Witch Practice" speaks of both the Goddess and the God, also noting that "the names of the Gods are found in Arthurian Legends," with a written message to Ronald White noting that Cochrane believed these names were "Gwen and Arthur."<sup>51</sup> This god is described as "Old Pan, Earth God" in the document discussing Midsummer rituals, alongside a Goddess who is "Mother of all Creation, Womb of the world, Nature, Divine Goddess."<sup>52</sup>

As these examples should make clear, the Goddess, who is in at least one example referred to as Diana, played a key role in the coven's early theology. She was accompanied by a god, who was on at least one occasion referred to as Pan, the horned-goat deity of Arcadia, and both were seen in context of a wider Godhead. The overall picture presented by these documents is one of

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<sup>46</sup> "The Writ and Constitution of a Coven to Diana," three revisions, 1962, reproduced in John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 371–73, 381–82, 390. For further commentary, see John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 12–13.

<sup>47</sup> "Aradia Conjurations," not dated, reproduced in John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 741–73. For further commentary, see John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> "Dance Forms and their Meaning" and "Magical Purposes and Dances," 1961–62, reproduced in John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 395–405. For further commentary, see John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 24–35, 475.

<sup>49</sup> "Drawing Down the Moon," 1961–62, reproduced in John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 406–07. For further commentary, see John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 33–34, 475.

<sup>50</sup> "Rite of Initiation," 9 March 1962, reproduced in John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 412–16. For further commentary, see John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 42–43, 475.

<sup>51</sup> "Theory of Witch Practice," 1961–62, reproduced in John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 418–20. For further commentary, see John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 43–46, 476.

<sup>52</sup> "Midsummer Ritual," late 1962–63, reproduced in John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 425–30. For further commentary, see John of Monmouth, *Genuine Witchcraft*, 476.

a Clan theology that is Pagan, and indeed fertility-based, in structure, much in keeping with the theology of Wiccan traditions operating in Britain at the time, influenced to a clear extent by Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* (1948). There is nothing here that explicitly suggests any Luciferian or Gnostic elements, even though there is an influence from *Aradia*.

### **The Evidence of Doreen Valiente and Evan John Jones**

Our third line of enquiry involves an examination of the published writings provided by two prominent British esotericists who had been Clan members during the 1960s: Doreen Valiente and Evan John Jones. Having come to be venerated by Pagans and occultists across the world as the “Mother of Modern Witchcraft,” Valiente had first entered the world of the Craft in 1952, when she began a correspondence with Gerald Gardner, who subsequently initiated her into his tradition the following year. Rising to become High Priestess of his Bricket Wood coven, she made a significant contribution to the Gardnerian liturgy before splitting unamicably from Gardner in 1957. Maintaining her belief in the Murrayite Witch-Cult, she set about contacting other supposed survivals of this religion, meeting Charles Cardell, enrolling in Raymond Howard's Coven of Atho mail-order course and eventually encountering Cochrane through mutual friends. Fascinated by his tradition, Valiente asked him so many questions that he later felt that he had to initiate her so that “she will understand.”<sup>53</sup> She worked within his Clan until *circa* 1965, when she developed misgivings over his antagonistic attitudes towards traditions other than his own, and when it reached the point that he called for a “Night of the Long Knives” against the Gardnerians, she “rose up and challenged him in the presence of the rest of the coven,” proclaiming that she was “fed up with listening to all this senseless malice” and promptly left.<sup>54</sup> Upon Cochrane's death she remained in contact with various other members of the Clan, including his widow and Evan John Jones, although went on to focus her practices elsewhere.

In one chapter of her autobiography-cum-history of Pagan Witchcraft, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (1989), Valiente provides us with what is our best surviving eyewitness account of the Clan's practices. In this she documents not only her own personal impressions of Cochrane and his Craft, but also some of their rituals and beliefs, something that is of great help in assessing

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<sup>53</sup> Robert Cochrane, letter to William Gray, undated, reproduced in Cochrane and Jones, *Robert Cochrane Letters*, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Valiente, *Rebirth*, 129.

them. She states that the Clan “observed the Sabbats and the Esbats on the same dates” as the Gardnerians, and that they “worshipped the Goddess and the God as the ancient powers of primordial nature.” Several pages on she comments on Cochrane’s “devotion to the goddess of the witches” and remarks that the forked top of the “ritual stang”<sup>55</sup> represented “the horns of the Horned God.”<sup>56</sup> She then proceeded to relate that:

As in Gerald Gardner’s version of the Craft, the Old One, the Horned God was the ruler of death and what lies beyond, as well as the power of male fertility, whereas the Goddess was the giver of life... But in Cochrane’s rituals the emphasis on the Old One as the Lord of Death seems to me, on re-reading them, to be much more obsessive than it was in Gerald Gardner’s.<sup>57</sup>

As should be apparent, the picture of Cochrane’s Clan painted by Valiente is one that is very much in keeping with the wider Wiccan movement, appearing theologically similar to the Gardnerian Craft. She explicitly states that Cochrane’s Clan adhered to a Horned God-Goddess duotheism, and makes no suggestion that Cochranian Witchcraft was Luciferian, or even contained Luciferian elements. Oates has suggested that this was because Valiente wished to comment on her experiences with Cochrane in terms that would have been understood more generally in the esoteric community, a point of view with which I respectfully disagree; Valiente’s descriptions of the Clan theology are particularly explicit, and I see no indication that she was using them as a veil to explain Luciferianism.<sup>58</sup>

Then living in London, Evan John Jones had been introduced to Cochrane and the Clan through Jane, with whom he worked at the same company. Following Cochrane’s suicide, he settled down to a life away from the occult limelight in Brighton with his wife and three children, running a coven as Clan Magister.<sup>59</sup> Jones released his first book, *Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed*, in 1990, and an introduction was provided by Valiente, in which she remarked that the book was about “an older witchcraft” than Gardnerianism, one that was rooted in the practices of the Witch-Cult—practices which she believed would disturb a great many contemporary

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<sup>55</sup> Within the Traditional Craft movement, a “stang” is a two-pronged ritual implement, typically a forked stick or a pitchfork

<sup>56</sup> Valiente, *Rebirth*, 117–18, 121, 123.

<sup>57</sup> Valiente, *Rebirth*, 123–24.

<sup>58</sup> Shani Oates, personal communication, 6 October 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, Cochrane, Howard, *Roebuck in the Thicket*, 9; Jones, *Witchcraft*, 17; Jones, “Interview with Evan John Jones,” *The Cauldron* 107 (February 2003); Michael Howard, personal communication, 25 October 2010.



Pagans, also stating that Witchcraft as a faith revolved around “the primeval Mother Goddess and the Horned God.”<sup>60</sup> Jones noted that the book was not a text containing the practices of “an old tradition that has been handed down to me through my family,” as several recently published books had dubiously claimed. Instead, Jones asserted, it offered a combination of “old and new,” a mix of his own personal ideas and those taught to him by “one who was of the old witch tradition” (i.e. Cochrane) accompanied with those learned “from a very knowledgeable and scholarly author and witch” (i.e. Valiente).<sup>61</sup> As his explanation makes clear, the book was not designed to accurately expound on the original beliefs and practices of Cochrane’s coven, but instead used them as bedrock upon which much else had been built. Its utility as a source for learning about early Cochraneanism is therefore limited, but it is nonetheless worthy of examination.

The one thing that is notable about the book is that the theology that it propagates is inherently Pagan in nature, and there is no mention of Lucifer or overt exposition of Luciferian theology. It discusses the “Old Gods and the Goddess,” referring to the “Mother Goddess” and the “Horned God,” as well as the “Four Great Sabbats” of Candlemas, May Eve, Lammas, and Hallowe'en.<sup>62</sup> Oates has related that in one of her conversations with Jones, which would have taken place in the late 1990s or early 2000s, he informed her that when he had originally approached the publisher with the manuscript, it included a great deal of Luciferian material. According to this account, the publishers disapproved, and only agreed to publish the work if these elements were expunged.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to corroborate this with the Robert Hale Company, who have no surviving correspondence from that period.<sup>64</sup> It remains an intriguing idea, but is unprovable unless earlier drafts of the text come to light.

Jones’s next book appeared six years later in the form of a collaboration with the Colorado-based Pagan and professional academic Chas S. Clifton (1951–), who had just finished production of the four-volume *Witchcraft Today* anthology series for the Llewellyn company. Jones contributed to the third of these volumes with a piece titled “Sacred Mask and Sacred Trance,” in which he commented that “unlike the [San] Bushman, we do not see the Godhead in animal form; instead we have the old Horned God and

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<sup>60</sup> Doreen Valiente, “Preface,” in Jones, *Witchcraft*, 7–13.

<sup>61</sup> Jones, *Witchcraft*, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Jones, *Witchcraft*, 19, 23, 158–59.

<sup>63</sup> Shani Oates, personal communication, 10 October 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Gill Jackson, Managing Director of Robert Hale, personal communication, 27 October 2011.

Goddess.”<sup>65</sup> This piece led to correspondence with Clifton, who had gained an interest in Cochrane from his involvement in the 1734 Craft. In the resulting book, *Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance*, also published by Llewellyn, the duo discussed the use of masks as ritual props to induce shamanistic experiences, a technique Jones had been experimenting with. The final chapter of the work was devoted to a brief exposition on Cochrane and his Clan, in which Jones referred to a belief in “the God of vegetation” and “the Goddess,” proceeding to reference “the Old Horned God” and “Triple Goddess,” and stating that Cochrane stressed the existence of a Godhead behind all these deities. He furthermore commented that “we believe that the Godhead manifests itself in the aspect of the Goddess, the Horned God, and the Young Horned King—the mother, the father, and the child,” however here he appears to be referring to his then-current praxes, rather than the beliefs of Cochrane back in the 1960s.<sup>66</sup> Michael Howard has informed me that this book contained ideas that Jones had adopted from an Oxfordshire group separate to the Clan whom he believed had been founded in the 1940s, operating within a Northern European mythos. Elsewhere, Jones commented that this group were “Horned God orientated.”<sup>67</sup> Clifton and Jones would only meet in person in 1999, when the former was attending an archaeology conference at the University of Southampton. Clifton took time out to visit Jones and his wife Val in Brighton for a few days, where they spent their time discussing esotericism and military history. When I asked Clifton if Jones had referred to any Luciferian elements within Cochranianism, he informed me that he could not recall any mention of Lucifer or Luciferianism, either within their correspondence or in person.<sup>68</sup>

Jones and Clifton had planned a second collaboration, *The Castle and the Cave: Further Steps in Traditional Witchcraft*, and a manuscript had been produced, although personal issues meant that it never saw completion. Parts of the original manuscript ended up in *The Roebuck in the Thicket*, co-edited with Howard, while Oates would later edit the manuscript, publishing it as *The Star Crossed Serpent: Volume I* in 2012. Again, it contains references to “the Goddess, the Old Horned God, and the Young Horn King,” but no explicit reference to Lucifer.<sup>69</sup> As such, we have no textual, historical

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<sup>65</sup> Evan John Jones, “Sacred Mask and Sacred Trance,” in Chas S. Clifton, ed. *Witchcraft Today III: Witchcraft and Shamanism* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1994), 175; Chas S. Clifton, personal communication, 05 April 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Jones with Clifton, *Sacred Mask*, 157–59.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Howard, personal communication, 26 October 2010; Jones, “Interview,” 8.

<sup>68</sup> Chas S. Clifton, personal communication, 05 April 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Chas S. Clifton, “Living Between Two Worlds: TWPT Talks to Chas Clifton,” *The*

evidence that Jones ever saw Cochrane's Craft as a Luciferian spiritual path, and instead it seems he devoted much time to espousing a tradition that was based in contemporary Paganism. That is not to say that there were no Luciferian aspects to early Cochranianism, for it might have been that Jones was either unaware of them at this point or intentionally wished to keep them a secret. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but equally absence of evidence is not in itself evidence of intentional secrecy.

### The evidence of the contemporary Clans

In 1982, a married American couple named Ann and Dave Finnin travelled to England in search of information about Cochrane. First becoming involved in the Craft in 1974 through the Gardnerian Ed Fitch, they had befriended Joseph Wilson and joined his 1734 tradition before founding their own Californian coven, The Roebuck, in 1976. In England they visited the ceremonial magician William "Bill" Gray, a friend of Cochrane's who gave them the deceased Magister's own ritual cord and put them in contact with Evan John Jones. Jones proceeded to show them several of the places where the Clan once worked, teaching them a number of the coven's ritual techniques, and kept in contact when they returned home, guiding them in their praxes by correspondence. In 1983, Jones suggested that they be initiated into the Clan, undertaking an apprenticeship, again by correspondence, until they could return to England in May 1986 where, on a Brighton hill, he adopted Ann into the Clan through a laying on of hands, after which she was allowed to initiate Dave. Returning to California, they set up their own Clan of Tubal Cain as Maid and Magister, working as a closed inner adjunct to The Roebuck.<sup>70</sup> The Finnins have maintained that the Cochranian tradition as they received it was neither Luciferian nor Gnostic in content, suspecting that these must have been later additions made during the 1990s. In their eyes, it was a Pagan tradition, not dissimilar in certain respects to Gardnerianism, but with definite distinctions in its ethos and many of its practices.<sup>71</sup> They noted the reference to Lucet in

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*Wiccan/Pagan Times*, July 1999, <http://www.twpt.com/clifton.htm> (archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6DqJy9w2D>); Evan John Jones and Shani Oates, *The Star Crossed Serpent: Volume I* (Oxford: Mandrake, 2012), 9, 64.

<sup>70</sup> Ann Finnin, *The Forge of Tubal Cain*, (Sunland, CA.: Pendraig, 2008), 12, 23–36, 53–60, 74–75; Ann and Dave Finnin, "The Clan of Tubal Cain," *Ancient Keltic Church*, September 1997, <http://ancientkelticchurch.org/CTubalCain/index.html> (archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6DEXjORRB>).

<sup>71</sup> Ann and Dave Finnin, personal communication, 13 September 2009.

Cochrane's letters but decided to interpret this not as Lucifer but as a mythological figure from the mediaeval mythologies of the British Isles: the Irish Lugh Samildanach, and the Welsh Lleu, whom they saw as interchangeable figures.<sup>72</sup>

During the mid-1990s, Jones contacted Michael Howard, editor of *The Cauldron*, in which Jones would publish a series of articles. Although an initiated Gardnerian well acquainted with the Pagan movement, Howard was also a Luciferian, having been introduced to the tradition in the 1960s by the ceremonial magician Madeline Montalban (1910–1982), founder of the Order of the Morning Star.<sup>73</sup> By the time of their meeting, Jones was operating the Clan through a coven in Sussex, occasionally being joined by Cochrane's widow Jane for magical workings.<sup>74</sup> The duo decided to collaborate on the production of an anthology assembling several of Jones's articles from *The Cauldron* along with the majority of Cochrane's own published articles. The anthology gained the blessing of Jane Bowers, and was published by Capall Bann as *The Roebuck in the Thicket*. They followed this work with a sequel, *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, which gathered together the late Magister's correspondence with Gills, Gray and Wilson.<sup>75</sup>

It would be through Howard that Jones was introduced to Shani Oates. Oates was an initiated Gardnerian, but after reading one of Jones's articles in *The Cauldron* felt sufficiently awed that she wrote to Howard in order to pass on her appreciation to its author. Thus, a correspondence began in 1996, and in 1998 Jones invited her to his Brighton home, where he announced his intention to appoint her Clan Maid. A month later, in September, she returned in order to undergo the necessary rites, and after appointing a Clan Magister, "Robin the Dart," the following year, Jones handed over the reigns of the Clan, giving the couple the group's regalia.<sup>76</sup> In ensuing years, Oates emerged as a well known figure in the British Craft community, giving public talks, writing for a variety of magazines, and publishing a series

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<sup>72</sup> Finnin, *Forge*, 43.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Howard, "A Seeker's Journey," *The Cauldron* 135 (2010): 3–11. For more on Montalban see Julia Philips, *Madeline Montalban: The Magus of St Giles* (London: Neptune Press, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Michael Howard, personal communication, 25 October 2010. Although referred to as "Jean" in Valiente, *Rebirth*, the identity of Jane Bowers was first publicly revealed in Semple, *Poisoned Chalice*.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Howard, personal communication, 26 October 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Jones and Oates, *Star Crossed Serpent: Vol I*, 9; Shani Oates, "Shani Oates: Maid of the Clan of Tubal Cain," *Patheos*, 25 January 2011, <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Shani-Oates-Maid-of-the-Clan-of-Tubal-Cain-Part-1-Le-Corbeau-1-25-2011.html> (archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6DEXtMQOz>).

of well-received books on the subject.<sup>77</sup> It was she who first brought the claim that Cochraneanism was Luciferian and Gnostic to public attention, asserting that the Clan “bears little resemblance to Paganism” (here echoing Cochrane’s own comments), but involves the belief in a “Great Higher Council of Seven,” a group of non-corporeal “angelic beings” who had tutored mankind during prehistory, teaching them such secrets as the use of fire, agriculture and metallurgy. She believed that echoes of these benefactors can be found in various mythologies across the world, but primarily those of Mesopotamia, and that it was “this (spiritual) ancestral legacy that we celebrate, honour and revere within our rites and ceremonies.”<sup>78</sup> She emphatically rejected ideas of a Wiccan Horned God-Goddess duality within the Clan mythos, informing sociologist David V. Barrett that the deities were actually

the horn god, as in the horns of Moses... and the female Creatrix is a Triune deity, most closely expressed as the embodiment of Truth, Love and Beauty – the Gnostic Triple Mothers, not in any sense even remotely connected to the Goddess of popular neo-paganism.<sup>79</sup>

Jones died in 2003, but in his final years corresponded with Caroline Tully, an Australian involved in both Wicca and Thelema. At a time in her life when she was taking a practical interest in Traditional Witchcraft, Tully contacted Jones, and received two letters back during the course of 2002, in which he discussed the possibility of her opening a branch of the Clan in Australia. The letters contained no mention of Luciferianism or Gnosticism, but they contained no explicit discussions of Paganism either.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusions

Now that I have explored the available evidence, what can be said regarding the nature of Cochrane and the early Clan’s theology? In his writings,

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<sup>77</sup> See Shani Oates, *Tubelo’s Green Fire*; Shani Oates, *The Arcane Veil: Ten Discourses on the Craft and the History of Magic*, (Oxford: Mandrake, 2011); Jones and Oates, *Star Crossed Serpent Vol I*; Shani Oates, *The Star Crossed Serpent: Volume II* (Oxford: Mandrake, 2012); Shani Oates, *A Paean for Hekate* (n.d.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012); Shani Oates, *The People of Goda* (n.d.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012).

<sup>78</sup> Oates, *Tubelo’s Green Fire*, 10, 15–17.

<sup>79</sup> Oates, quoted in David V. Barrett, *A Brief Guide to Secret Religions: A Complete Guide to Hermetic, Pagan and Esoteric Beliefs* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2011), 303.

<sup>80</sup> Evan John Jones, letters to Caroline Tully, 30 April and 6 June 2002.

Cochrane made it clear that he believed in a Godhead, an entity apparently pantheistic or panentheistic in basis, and sought to glimpse this divine Truth through a path of mysticism. He also believed in “Gods,” entities that his coven sought to interact with, publicly referring to a Witches’ triad between the God, Goddess and Horn Child. His private writings speak of many different gods and mythological figures, only one of whom is Lucifer, who is given no special prominence. Problematically, the authenticity of this piece of evidence is in doubt, with some believing that it was a later addition to the corpus; further, careful specialist analysis of the document in question is required. The Stannard documents, which go beyond Cochrane’s personal theological beliefs to cover those of the entire early coven, once again refer to a Godhead, but place a great emphasis on the Goddess, identified as Diana, and a lesser one on the God, at least once identified as Pan. This general theological structure is not dissimilar from that being practised by Gardner and other Pagan Witches at the same time, and an argument could be made, based upon this evidence alone, that early Cochraneanism was a tradition within the Wiccan movement.

When discussing Cochrane’s Clan in her published work, Doreen Valiente considered it comparable in several respects to Gardnerian Wicca, stating that it revolved around two deities, a Horned God and a Goddess. A very similar portrait was painted by Evan John Jones, who also claimed that Cochrane’s Clan had held to a belief in a God, Goddess and Horn Child, each an aspect of a higher Godhead, within his published writings. This too accords with the image of Cochrane’s Craft as a contemporary Pagan tradition. Jones furthermore made no mention of Luciferianism in his extensive communications with Ann and Dave Finnin, or in his lengthy discussions with Chas S. Clifton or Michael Howard. In fact, there is no textual or oral evidence that he believed there to be Luciferian elements within Cochrane’s Craft from 1966 through to 1998, and instead he repeatedly portrayed it as a Pagan tradition with theological beliefs akin to those of various Wiccan traditions of the same era. Here we have two possibilities; that either he had been hiding the Luciferian elements from outsiders during those decades, or that he only began to see Cochraneanism as a Luciferian tradition himself in the late 1990s, perhaps as a result of a spiritual experience or a new understanding of Cochrane’s writings. I have not been able to find the evidence to prove either case.

From the historian’s perspective, the Luciferian elements within Cochranean Witchcraft can only be securely dated to the early twenty-first century, when they were propagated as a part of the Clan praxes of the group led by Shani Oates. One possibility is that Oates herself inserted these

Luciferian elements, but she maintains that they were passed to her from Jones. For Oates and her Clan, Cochrane's Craft, as a living, evolving tradition, is Luciferian-Gnostic in structure, and from a religious studies perspective, these beliefs are entirely valid on their own, without the need for a clear historical precedent. However, at the same time there is the Clan of Tubal Cain being run by Ann and Dave Finnin in California as an explicitly Pagan tradition, one that could be categorised as Wiccan. Ann Finnin has commented that she has "serious doctrinal issues with [Oates's] interpretation" of Cochranean Witchcraft, and that "the two interpretations are very different."<sup>81</sup> This is certainly true, and Cochrane's Craft is now a magico-religious tradition divided along theological lines starker than the Catholic-Protestant divide within Western Christianity.

So, faced with the fact that most evidence strongly suggests that Cochrane's Craft of the 1960s was broadly contemporary Pagan in nature, what of Oates's claim that Cochrane was following a Gnostic and Luciferian spiritual path? Although it would not be possible to describe it as *likely* given the evidence at hand, it is certainly *possible* that Cochrane personally adhered to a Luciferian theology, even if this was not made explicit within the wider Clan's theology. He might have felt that this was a personal matter, and not something that should be shared with his coven comrades, fearing that they might have been put off by any diabolical undertones in the use of Lucifer as a deity. It is clear that the early coven was influenced by *Aradia*, a book that blended Pagan and Luciferian elements into a singular theology, so Cochrane would have been aware of the possibility of venerating Lucifer as a Witches' deity. It *could* be that Luciferian and Pagan elements co-existed in the coven, the former being held to by Cochrane while other members favoured explicitly Pagan theological structures. Certainly, Stannard and White seemed to favour Paganism, forming the explicitly Pagan Regency in 1966, while in his later years Cochrane was beginning to feel that he wanted to move away from coven work and undertake his Craft solitarily or with Jane. In such a scenario, we might suggest that figures like Valiente and the Finnins, having a familiarity with Gardnerian-based Wicca, naturally emphasised those Wiccan elements of Cochraneanism that appealed to them, negating the more implicit Luciferian aspects. Equally, Evan John Jones could have come to embrace these Luciferian elements towards the end of his life, passing the tradition on to Shani Oates with this new understanding of it. Although highly conjectural and lacking in supporting evidence, this scenario remains within the realms of possibility.

Despite a rich string of contenders ranging from Aleister Crowley to

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<sup>81</sup> Finnin, quoted in Barrett, *Brief Guide*, 307.

Andrew Chumbley, Robert Cochrane remains perhaps the most enigmatic occultist of twentieth-century Britain. Here was a man who could found a tradition, heavily influence several others, become an inspirational figurehead for the wider Traditional Witchcraft movement and yet still leave a veil of enigma around his core beliefs. Was he, like Gerald Gardner, Charles Cardell and Sybil Leek, trying to establish a tradition in the vein of the Murrayite Witch-Cult that would be devoted to a Horned God and a Goddess and commemorate Sabbats? The evidence could certainly support this conclusion. Or was he instead purporting a tradition of Luciferianism with underpinning Gnostic philosophies that he connected with earlier witches and magical practitioners? From the evidence at hand, I'm forced to the conclusion that this seems unlikely. Perhaps, as I have suggested, his true beliefs were somewhat of a syncretic mixture of both, having drawn from both Luciferian ideas and the literary sources behind the blossoming of Pagan Witchcraft. Hopefully further evidence will come to light—just as the Stannard documents have done in recent years—which will help to either confirm, or successfully refute, my hypothesis and shine further light on this fascinating historical figure.

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# Defending Paper Gods Aleister Crowley and the Reception of Daoism in Early Twentieth Century Esotericism

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## Abstract

This article explores the representation of Daoism and Chinese religion in the writings of Aleister Crowley. The influence of Asian religions on the occult revival of the late nineteenth century has often been recognized. Even though much has been said about the perception of Indian religious traditions in European and American esotericism, the influence of Chinese religion on the same environment remains lesser known. At a time when the Theosophical Society started Buddhist schools in Ceylon, Crowley traveled through China arguing with Christian missionaries and sleeping in Daoist temples. Later he praised Laozi as a saint in his Gnostic Mass, proclaimed Daoism “the best of all [mystical] systems” and claimed to have received the original and uncorrupted version of the *Daodejing* in a religious vision; all this in an intellectual climate where Chinese religion was widely viewed as stagnant and escapist superstition. Although engaging in aggressive anti-missionary polemics Crowley was actually locked in a position of simultaneous rejection of and dependence on missionary Sinology; a form of dependence deeply intertwined with trends of modernity and secularization in early twentieth century Western esotericism.

## Keywords

Aleister Crowley; Daoism; Travel writing; Western esotericism; Western reception of Chinese religion

In 1906 English occultist Aleister Crowley traveled on horseback through the distant Chinese province of Yunnan. The regions he visited were poor,

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and home to the dangers of malaria and opium, but the journey was to be the beginning of a lifelong fascination with Daoism. This article explores Crowley as an example of the early twentieth century fascination with Chinese religion within Western esotericism and tries to make sense of his ambivalent relationship towards dominant representations of Chinese culture in the intellectual climate of his times.

## The Esoteric Reception of Chinese Religion

In studies of the historical relationship between China and the West there is broad agreement that Western representations of Chinese culture and society underwent a radical change over a period ranging from the 1500s to the colonial expansion of the nineteenth century. Descriptions of the Chinese Empire brought home by early travelers like Marco Polo had a utopian flavor, and the Jesuit missionaries who were active in the country from the sixteenth century had a relatively tolerant attitude towards Chinese culture and religion. They spread the image of a society that was admirable in many ways and in some respects even superior to Europe.

The idealization of Chinese culture reached its peak during the eighteenth century and then transformed radically in line with the expansion of European imperialism in Asia, and the changing values of the West after the Enlightenment. As a result, the Chinese empire came to be perceived as a stagnant and superstitious rival.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, studies of Western representations of China conducted by Sinologists and historians like Colin MacKerras, disregard the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth there were religious movements in Western societies whose attitudes to Chinese culture and religion differed significantly from those prominent at the time. Within movements related to esotericism, like theosophy or Guénonian traditionalism, there was a widespread interest in Chinese religion. The image of East Asia in the journals and books published by members of these movements had more in common with the idealized China of the Jesuits than with the contemporary image of an empire in decline.

It would be a mistake to interpret these dissenting voices as irrelevant or obscure. In recent decades, research has shown that esoteric movements at

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Ulrike Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

the time helped to shape the Western image of Asian religions.<sup>2</sup> Movements such as the Theosophical Society played a significant role in terms of shaping the widespread Western perceptions of India and Tibet. The theosophists also contributed, albeit in their own way and with their own goals and motives, to political developments in India leading up to independence in 1947.<sup>3</sup>

The influence of Asian religions has come to be perceived as important to developments of esoteric thought around the turn of the last century. Wouter Hanegraaff discusses the issue in the context of the theory of secularization of esotericism in his influential work *New Age Religion and Western Culture*.<sup>4</sup> However, even though several examples of the Indian influence on turn-of-the-century occultism have been explored,<sup>5</sup> very little has yet been done with regard to the relationship with East Asian religions.<sup>6</sup>

Although the topic is largely uncharted, there was a widespread interest in Chinese religion, especially Daoism, in the occult environment around the turn of the last century. For example, it is easy to find essays on Daoism in esoteric journals from this period. Journals like the theosophical *Lucifer*, the Martinist *Le Voile d'Isis*, or more general occult periodicals like *The Occult Review*, often published essays on the subject of Chinese religion. Such an interest was shared by many of the movements associated with the esoteric environment of the period. Within the Theosophical Society itself the interest in Indian and Tibetan religion was more pronounced, but subjects related to Daoism and Chinese Buddhism were recurring themes in publications related to the organization.

The Daoism enthusiast, and former member of the French Foreign Legion, Albert de Pouvourville influenced René Guénon and the French traditionalists, and interest in Chinese culture is a recurring feature of Guénon's writings. The same can be said of the journal *Études traditionnelles*

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Åsa Piltz, *Seger åt Tibet! Den Tibetanska Diasporan och den Religiösa Nationen* (Lund: Dept. of History and Anthropology of Religions, Lund University, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> On the influence on Indian women's suffrage see Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). On Theosophy and the building of Buddhist schools on Ceylon, as well as on connections with the Indian Home Rule Movement see Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon* (New York, Schocken Books, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Hugh B. Urban on the influence of Tantra in the West. Hugh Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Some exceptions exist, e.g. Leonardo Sacco, "La tradizione taoista nel pensiero di René Guénon," in *Aries* 8, no. 1 (2008): 63–89.

that was closely linked to Guénon. The Thelemic movement founded by Aleister Crowley is another example. The interest begun by Crowley was carried on by later Thelemites and is present in the works of authors like Kenneth Grant and C.F. Russell. Crowley placed Daoism in such high regard that he believed himself to be a reincarnation of the mystic Ge Xuan<sup>7</sup> and wrote paraphrases of Daoist writings. He also frequently and aggressively criticized Christian missionaries for their views on Chinese religion and their methods in spreading Christianity in Asia. Even though his attempt to spread Daoist teachings in the West at a time when the general intellectual climate was hostile to Chinese religion should be of broad interest even outside the study of Western esotericism, his writings on the subject have remained unexamined by historians of religion.

This article will give an overview of the influence of Daoism on the worldview of Aleister Crowley and explore the representations of Chinese religion that appear in his writings. It will also discuss the cultural context constituted by mainstream images of Chinese religion, based on the works of British protestant missionaries, and contrast these with the views of Crowley. Finally, it will explore the idea that although Crowley was an outspoken critic of dominant representations of China in the West, he was ultimately unable to completely free himself from the underlying logic of these representations. In this he reflects important tendencies within the esotericism of his time.

This article will begin by providing an account of Crowley's journey through China during the winter and spring of 1905–1906, a journey that proved to be an influential event in his life, as it was the beginning of his sympathy with Daoism and Chinese culture. The second half will discuss Crowley's understanding of Daoism and its intellectual context.

## **The Walk Across China**

Crowley arrived in China during turbulent times. In the nineteenth century the Chinese empire had been the center of a series of severe conflicts involving the expanding colonial powers of the West as well as internal turmoil based on regional, political, religious and ethnic animosities—from the Opium Wars to the Taiping Rebellion, which although almost unknown in the West was one of the bloodier conflicts in world history.<sup>8</sup> A few years

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<sup>7</sup> See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Ge Xuan," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> The conflict was partly connected to the spread of Christianity in China (as was the

before Crowley's journey through Yunnan the Boxer Rebellion had erupted and a few years later the Qing dynasty collapsed and was replaced by the Chinese republic under Sun Yat-sen.

By the beginning of the twentieth century there had been a British presence in China for about two centuries. Before the time of the first Opium War the British activity in the empire was almost exclusively related to trade. In Canton, the only harbor that was open to the British, the East India Company and a small number of independent merchants had been operating since the early 1700s. By the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the British made a series of failed attempts to establish closer diplomatic ties with the court in Beijing as well as to convince the Chinese government to lift restrictions on trade.<sup>9</sup>

Yunnan was the focus of Crowley's accounts of his journey, but it was by no means a representative province of the Chinese Empire. Located as it is outside the major Han centers of population, it was perceived as exotic and distant to the inhabitants of the political and economic centers of the kingdom. Yunnan was known for its difficult, mountainous terrain and for malaria that was said to affect Han Chinese and other non-indigenous groups especially hard, a fact that the Qing bureaucracy viewed as an obstacle to the governing of the province. Perhaps the best example of how Yunnan was viewed by its rulers was the fact that criminals or deserters within the imperial army could be sentenced to exile in the province, a punishment known as "military exile for life to an insalubrious region."<sup>10</sup> In addition, Yunnan was at this time one of the world's major producers of opium. It was here that *mafén*, widely held to be the premier Chinese variety of opium, was cultivated. Opium from the district was highly regarded in Europe where it was popular within the French literary drug subculture at the turn of the last century. This subculture exerted a certain influence on Crowley's views on drugs.<sup>11</sup> His interest in opium is one of the major themes in the narrative of his Chinese journey.

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better known but less deadly Boxer Rebellion).

<sup>9</sup> Ulrike Hillemann, "At the China Coast," in Ulrike Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> David A. Bello, "To Go Where No Han Could Go for Long: Malaria and the Qing Construction of Ethnic Administrative Space in Frontier Yunnan," *Modern China* 31, no. 3 (2005): 283–317.

<sup>11</sup> In the beginning of the twentieth century there was a tendency in some writers, occultists and heterodox religious authors to view opium almost as an "entheogen," and to interpret what were known as opium dreams and related states of intoxication as potentially artistically or spiritually valuable. This tendency can be traced back to Thomas De Quincey and English romanticism on the one hand, and to the Western reception of Chinese opium



Some decades before Crowley's arrival the province had been the scene of ethnic and religious violence, and it was to this ravaged land that Crowley arrived in December of 1905. With him were his wife and child, an unknown number of porters, a nurse and his personal servant Salama Tantra. Crowley was used to this way of traveling from his previous two attempts at ascending major peaks of the Himalayas. They traveled in the only way possible—on foot or on ponies and donkeys. Sometimes they camped outdoors; sometimes they lodged in temples or inns.<sup>12</sup> The journey, from the Burmese border in the west, through what is today Tengchong, Baoshan, Dali, Kunming, Mengzi and Hekou,<sup>13</sup> to the border of Tonkin in the south, took about three months. In March they reached Hanoi, and from there Crowley traveled to Shanghai, where he arrived on the sixth of April 1906. The account of the journey comprises chapters 56 and 57 of Crowley's autobiography. All in all the narrative is relatively brief. Another even shorter description of the journey was published in "The Temple of Solomon the King" in *The Equinox*,<sup>14</sup> but its focus is almost exclusively on the spiritual exercises Crowley performed during the period, which are of no interest to the subject of this essay.

"The walk across China," as it has become known in Thelemic circles, has as a rule been neglected in biographies on Crowley. In the first place this is probably due to the laconic nature of the sources. Perhaps another reason has been the fact that the journey coincides with a period in Crowley's religious development that has often interested his biographers. The focus on Crowley's inner life has tended to distract from the external events, and from his reflections on the experiences of the journey itself.

British travelogues of the Victorian and Edwardian period are often more than the picturesque adventure stories, balancing between romanticizing naïveté and bigoted condescension in their representations of Chinese

smoking during the second half of the nineteenth century on the other. Such ideas were the inspiration for a genre of turn of the century opium fiction, represented by authors such as Claude Farrère and Jules Boissière, but they also pervade works of non-fiction, like a handbook on opium smoking written by Albert de Pourville. In this context opium was often associated with East Asian (especially Daoist) religion and mysticism. Crowley was influenced by this view of the drug and conducted experiments with it himself. Regarding the cultivation of opium in Yunnan and Chinese opium culture in general see Frank Dikötter, *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China* (London: C Hurst, 2004); Yangwen Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> The narrative reconstructed here is based on the one published in Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* (London: Penguin Books, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Modern names in Pinyin have been given as a rule for Chinese place names mentioned by Crowley.

<sup>14</sup> The relevant part is in *The Equinox* 1, no. 8 (1912).

society, that they may seem to be at first glance. They reveal just as much about their authors and the worldviews of these authors as they reveal about the alien manners and customs of the foreign land they purport to describe. In the case of Crowley and other travelers they represent excellent examples of how representations of Chinese society and culture were created and contrasted with English identity.

Although *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* contains no detailed reflections on the religious life of Yunnan, Crowley made some scattered remarks on things he saw during his journey; among other things he mentions religious art. However, the aspect of religious life that most interested Crowley was the presence and activity of foreign missionaries in the province. It is easy to dismiss the recurrent attacks on missionaries in *Confessions* as just an expression of Crowley's well known antagonism towards Christianity, but his assertions on the subject are linked to attitudes and ideas connected with the Western perception of Chinese religion. They are also the beginning of a growing fascination with Daoism that would always retain an element of hostility towards the influential missionary narrative of Chinese religion as decadent and ready to be replaced by a vibrant and modern Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

As has been stated above, during the sixteenth to eighteenth century discourse on Chinese culture in the West was dominated by Jesuits, and during the nineteenth and early twentieth century representations of China were shaped by mainly British, protestant missionaries. The differences between these two groups can be schematically summarized in the following way. The Jesuits regarded Chinese culture as admirable, considered parts of Chinese religion compatible with Christianity, and aimed their missionary efforts at nobility and the elite in order to create acceptance for their own religion. The protestant missionaries viewed Chinese culture as decadent, and held that it was impossible to combine Chinese religious practices with life as a Christian. Unlike the Jesuits they focused their attention on the masses.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the protestant missionary movement often had connections to European merchants and to the colonial projects of their home countries. Even if British missionaries sometimes were in disagreement with their countrymen, for example on the subject of the opium trade, they were often sympathetic towards Britain's colonial and

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<sup>15</sup> Almost forty years later, in the last years of his life, he would still publish comparisons between Christianity and "Chinese Thought" where the former is severely criticized. See for example the paragraph on the "Prince of disks" in *The Book of Thoth*. See Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Thoth* (Stamford: U.S. Games Systems, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Eric Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies: Christian Missionaries Imagine Chinese Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

economic expansion. They frequently regarded the spread of Christianity as the only way to convince the Chinese of the value of free trade.<sup>17</sup>

It would be unfair, however, to characterize the accounts of Chinese religion by protestant missionaries as entirely polemical and hostile. There was of course a certain amount of diversity of opinion among missionaries even during the nineteenth century, and there was debate and disagreement within the missionary societies. Several pioneering Western Sinologists and students of Chinese languages were also missionaries, among them the famous James Legge. Missionary Sinologists made some of the first translations to European languages of historical texts relating to Confucianism, Daoism and Chinese Buddhism.<sup>18</sup> Despite this, it cannot be denied that the principal attitude of the missionaries was hostile. Daoism and Buddhism were seen as problematic expressions of superstition and idolatry hindering the modernization of Chinese society. When the Taiping rebels destroyed Daoist and Buddhist temples in the 1850s and 1860s, many Western missionaries expressed their support.<sup>19</sup> The missionary view of Chinese culture was to a large extent shaped by their understanding of the Christian reformation as well as by common nineteenth century tropes of degeneration. Eric Reinders states the following:

[The] protestant narrative of Christian history was superimposed onto Chinese history: a degeneration from an original pure community to institutional idolatry, followed by (at least the possibility of) a Reformation. Protestant history pictured Christianity as having fallen from a bright early moment into centuries of ritualism until it had been purified in the reformation.<sup>20</sup>

It is worth pointing out that Crowley was never such an obvious opponent of missionary ideology as one might imagine. Although the religious ideas he would develop obviously stood in opposition to Victorian and Edwardian evangelicalism in many ways, there were also deep similarities. A suspicion has existed for some time among several of Crowley's biographers about the possible similarities between some areas of Thelema and the Plymouth Brethren ideology that had shaped Crowley's upbringing.<sup>21</sup> With the recent tendency in the academic study of religion to treat Crowley and other expressions of early twentieth century esotericism as serious objects of

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<sup>17</sup> Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge*, 66.

<sup>18</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley* (Tempe: New Falcon Publications, 2002), 101.

research, a certain influence from protestant theology on Crowley's writings has been recognized.<sup>22</sup> In this context it could be said that Crowley shared many of the values inherent in the Victorian work ethic that permeated much of missionary ideology (such as the value of self-improvement and the ideal of actively engaging society).

The missionary condemnation of Chinese religion often had these values as its point of departure. It frequently attacked Buddhism for being apathetic, feminizing and unworldly. It is not impossible that Crowley, if circumstances were different, would have shared in this criticism. It is clear that passivity and inactivity could be problematic concepts for him. This being said, Crowley's encounter with Western missionaries in China was characterized by violent dislike—almost, it seems, by actual violence. In *Confessions* he describes a confrontation between a missionary and a group of locals participating in a religious procession. According to Crowley, the missionary had reacted violently when he saw the image of some unidentified deity being carried through the village as a part of a Chinese New Year celebration:

...instead of attending to his own affairs [he] took it upon himself to insult (in wretchedly and comically illiterate Chinese) some villagers who happened to be carrying an idol in procession as part of the festivities of New Year's Day (January 25th). He might as well have spoiled a children's party on the ground that the fairy stories which amused them were not strictly true. The action was morally indistinguishable from brawling in church. I may not believe in the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, but I see no reason for inflicting my incredulity on the people of Naples. The villagers naturally resented the ill manners of this brainless boor and told him to shut up. He immediately began to scream that he was being martyred for Christ's sake. I told him that if I could have brought myself to touch him, I would have thrashed him within an inch of his life.<sup>23</sup>

Crowley's main point of criticism of missionaries in China was that they were uninformed in their approach and misled by an irrational belief in the superiority of their own particular version of Christianity. How, he asks in *Confessions*, could these people expect to convert Buddhists and Muslims when they were completely ignorant of the beliefs and practices of these

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<sup>22</sup> See Henrik Bogdan "Envisioning the Birth of a New Aeon: Dispensationalism and Millenarianism in the Thelemic Tradition," in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Aleister Crowley, *Confessions*, 483.

religions? Apparently he brought up the subject with missionaries he met on his journey. In *Confessions* the following resigned statement can be found:

Dr. Clark, the medical missionary of Talifu, received us with great courtesy and hospitality. I found him a sincere and earnest man; more, even an enlightened man, so far as it is possible for a missionary to be so; but that is not very far. I found him totally ignorant both of canonical Buddhism and of local beliefs. I tried to point out to him that he could hardly hope to show the natives the errors of their way of thinking, unless he knew what that was. But he declined to see the point.<sup>24</sup>

### Paraphrasing the *Daodejing*

At the time of his journey Crowley had yet to develop any clear views on the Chinese religions. It would be a while before he tried to formulate his own opinion as anything other than a negation of the attitudes formulated by the missionaries he encountered on his journey. During the following decades his interest in Daoism would become a growing component of his esoteric system. In the preface to his own edition of *Daodejing* he states:

The philosophy of Lao-tzu communicated itself to me ... This process, having thus taking root in my innermost intuition during those tremendous months of wandering across Yunnan, grew continually throughout succeeding years.<sup>25</sup>

References to Chinese religion are relatively rare in Crowley's works from the first years after the journey through China. Daoist texts like the *Daodejing* and the "Writings of Kwang Tzu"<sup>26</sup> became required reading in his new magical order of the A.: A.:, but otherwise Daoist religious figures, usually Laozi, are mentioned mostly in the context of lists of examples of religious traditions that also include Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Cabbalist texts, figures, and concepts. In *The Equinox* 1:2 an advertisement appears for the recently published 777 where it is stated that "[f]or the first time Western

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<sup>24</sup> Aleister Crowley, *Confessions*, 488. Crowley's enthusiasm for Chinese culture, and criticism of missionaries, did not stop him from mistreating his porters, however. In *Confessions* he does not deny beating servants for what he believed to be breaches of discipline.

<sup>25</sup> Aleister Crowley, introduction to *Tao te Ching, Liber CLVII* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> The citation can be found in Aleister Crowley ed., *The Equinox* 1, no. 8 (1912) and refers to Legges edition of "The Writings of Kwang Ze," published in *The Sacred Books of the East* series.

and Qabalistic symbols have been harmonized with those of Hinduism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Taoism, &c.” The example is typical and suggests that although Crowley was aware of Daoism (not banishing it to the nebulous category of “&c.”<sup>27</sup>) he viewed it as a not very differentiated part of what he considered to be humanity’s great expressions of religious truth.

It is also interesting to note that references to Chinese religion are rare in what Crowley considered to be the most important “magical workings” of the period. Chinese imagery is conspicuously absent from the visions recorded in *The Vision and the Voice* and *The Paris Working*, as are Chinese terminology and Chinese concepts (more or less) from the interpretations of those visions. There are some exceptions: a handful of enthusiastic endorsements of Laozi and Daoist writings, as well as Crowley’s interest in divination inspired by the *Yijing*.<sup>28</sup> The overall impression up until the end of the First World War, however, is one of a somewhat vague and lukewarm interest. If it is true, as he later stated, that he studied the *Daodejing* during the whole of this period, his study left few marks on his writings.<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the First World War, Crowley’s interest in Daoism seems to have deepened, as it from 1918 became more visible in his writing. In 1918 Crowley authored a paraphrase of the Oxford professor and missionary James Legge’s translations of the *Daodejing* and the *Qingjing jing*,<sup>30</sup> a result of an attempt to explore the texts using esoteric visionary techniques. According to Crowley, a spiritual entity called Amalantrah showed him Laozi’s “original” version of the *Daodejing* and made it possible for him to see mistakes in Legge’s translation—apparently unhindered by the fact that Crowley didn’t speak any dialect of Chinese.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the fact that he had visited China, and despite his own visionary experiences, Crowley’s interpretation of Daoism was largely based on texts included in the famous *Sacred Books of the East* series published by Oxford University Press. The series incorporated translations of writings related to religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. A closer look at Crowley’s sources reveals that a relatively small selection of texts seems to have been the foundation of his understanding of the subject. Most prominent among these were *The Daodejing*, the *Yijing*, the *Qingjing jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. In every case these texts are English translations of

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<sup>27</sup> Presumably left for Scandinavian pre-Christian religion and the likes, if we consider the actual content of 777.

<sup>28</sup> Crowley mostly used the transliteration “Yi King,” following Legge as usual.

<sup>29</sup> He makes the claim in Crowley, introduction to *Tao te Ching*.

<sup>30</sup> Transliterated “Khing Kang King” by Crowley.

<sup>31</sup> Crowley, introduction to *Tao te Ching*.

writings considered to be representative of Daoism by Western Sinologists.<sup>32</sup>

If we look for influences beyond the realm of the written word the matter becomes more challenging. It is difficult to rule out the possibility that Crowley came into contact with living informants who influenced his view of Chinese religion. It seems reasonable, for example, that he discussed the subject with people he met on his journey through China. It seems equally reasonable that he visited Chinatown when he lived in New York, and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that he could have met English-speaking Daoists there. There seems to have been a marked increase in his interest in Chinese religion during his stay in the city. However, the possibility that Crowley's view of Daoism was colored by such contacts in any significant way is contradicted by the fact that his interpretation of the religion, as we will soon see, is more reminiscent of the Daoism of late nineteenth century Sinologists than any of the popular Chinese expressions of the religion that existed at this time. Perhaps it is also telling that Crowley, who freely shared stories of his talks about yoga with Hindu teachers like Ponnambalam Ramanathan, or with strangers he met on the road in India,<sup>33</sup> never mentions anything similar with regard to Chinese religion. However, the possibility that such contacts could have exerted a limited influence on his views, concerning his interpretation of Yijing-based divination, for example, cannot be completely ruled out. Among other things this means that Crowley's chief sources of information on Daoism were texts translated by James Legge. The irony of Crowley having to rely on the work of a famous missionary seems not to have been lost on him<sup>34</sup> and was probably one of the reasons he created his own paraphrase of the *Daodejing*, as a way to escape Legge's "uninitiated" perspective.

Crowley's version of the *Daodejing* was written in the summer of 1918 during his stay on a small island in the Hudson River, called Esopus Island in his account of the story.<sup>35</sup> The book was never published during his lifetime, but Crowley often circulated the manuscript among his friends and disciples. Decades later, in *Magick Without Tears* (1954), he mentions his hopes of finding a publisher.<sup>36</sup> Crowley's version of the text is not as different from that of Legge as one might imagine. Even though he changed almost every passage of the book, many of the changes pertain to matters of

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<sup>32</sup> I will not pass any judgment on that assessment here. The proper place of specific Daoist writings within the history of Chinese religion is a subject of major controversy.

<sup>33</sup> See for example the story of the "villagers" of Madura in Crowley, *Confessions*, 255.

<sup>34</sup> He complained of what he perceived to be Legge's Christian bias as early as 1909. See "Reviews" in Aleister Crowley ed., *The Equinox* 1, no. 2 (1909).

<sup>35</sup> Sometimes spelled Aesopus.

<sup>36</sup> Aleister Crowley, *Magick Without Tears* (Tempe: New Falcon Publications, 1994), 231.

style. Often Crowley simplifies Legge's rather verbose text with no (or only slight) changes in meaning. In chapter 25, for example, Legge's "It may be regarded as the Mother of all things"<sup>37</sup> becomes "It is like the All-Mother."<sup>38</sup> The most easily noticeable changes in content are probably the addition of terminology from Western esotericism, Indian yoga, and Crowley's own religious system. Words such as "Samadhi,"<sup>39</sup> "zelator"<sup>40</sup> and "magick" all appear in Crowley's version of the text, even though they obviously have nothing to do with its original cultural context.<sup>41</sup>

To get a reasonably accurate view of Crowley's interpretation of Daoism it is helpful to study his *Daodejing* along with relevant passages in his works in general. In this way it could be argued that his understanding of Daoism is constituted by a couple of central themes that often recur in his writings. One such theme is the principle of *laissez-faire individualism*. Legge's version of the *Daodejing* contains several sections that are easily read as endorsements of this point of view. One of the clearest examples is chapter 57, verse 3:

Therefore a sage has said, "I will do nothing (of purpose), and the people will be transformed of themselves; I will be fond of keeping still, and the people will of themselves become correct. I will take no trouble about it, and the people will of themselves become rich; I will manifest no ambition, and the people will of themselves attain to the primitive simplicity."<sup>42</sup>

In Crowley's text this element is retained or even strengthened. It is probably a reasonable guess that passages like this were one of the things that attracted Crowley to the *Daodejing* in the first place. Similar views are a unifying theme running through his writings, and by focusing on them Crowley's construction of Daoism becomes tied to his views of the social, philosophical and mystical aspects of Thelema.

Another prominent theme in the *Daodejing* is the concept of *non-action*; "the sage manages affairs without doing anything," as Legge's version of the text states.<sup>43</sup> There are many examples in both versions, and the concept is strongly associated with Daoism in Crowley's writings in general. Even so, when approaching the subject there is a slight tendency for him to let the

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<sup>37</sup> James Legge, trans., "The Tao Teh King," in *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), 27.

<sup>38</sup> Crowley, *Tao te Ching*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> A mystical trance, or state of the mind, important in both Buddhism and Hindu yoga.

<sup>40</sup> A degree in Crowley's initiatory order, the A.:. A:..

<sup>41</sup> Crowley, *Tao te Ching*, 25, 42, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Legge, "The Tao Teh King," 101.

<sup>43</sup> Legge, "The Tao Teh King," 48.



concept of non-action blend into both the principle of laissez-faire and the idea of action without “lust of result” that is advocated by *The Book of the Law*. An example of the former can be found in a comment to chapter 7 of the *Daodejing* where Crowley states that it is only “unnatural action” that should be avoided, meaning any violation of the principle of laissez-faire.<sup>44</sup> This is quite clearly a departure from the concept of non-action as described by Legge.<sup>45</sup> Crowley’s interpretative efforts, as well as the fact that he often returns to the subject, seem to imply that he was both attracted and troubled by the concept.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps, for him, it was difficult to harmonize with the “solar phallic,” manly vitalism of Thelema. If so, at least he did not try to censor the celebration of weakness, water, femininity and passivity that is suggested by many passages of the *Daodejing*. “All men know that the soft overcometh the hard, and the weak conquereth the strong” is his rendering of the beginning of chapter 78 verse two.<sup>47</sup>

In placing focus on these themes Crowley’s interpretation of Daoism did not depart all that much from other interpretations of his day. Crowley’s version of the *Daodejing* simply brought it more in line with what he perceived to be the universal essence of mysticism, as well as with his own religious system of Thelema. To Crowley, universal mysticism, although theoretically found in every culture, was in practice a mixture of late nineteenth century occultist kabbalah and ritual magic in the tradition of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, as well as a version of yoga more or less close to the system presented in the *Yoga sutras* of Patanjali, interpreted by people such as Ponnambalam Ramanathan, Swami Vivekananda, Sabapati Swami, and Allan Bennett.

After the First World War it is possible to find more references to Daoism in Crowley’s works, and he also identified more strongly with this religion. Some of the more interesting examples of this are his belief that he was in fact a reincarnation of the Three Kingdoms period Daoist figure Ge Xuan<sup>48</sup> and his creation of the fictional character of Simon Iff. Simon Iff

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<sup>44</sup> Crowley, *Tao te Ching*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> In Legge’s version non-action is never limited in this way. That is, the principle is not understood as a prohibition against violating the freedom of others. Crowley’s interpretation of non-action as an exhortation of action without “lust of result” is closer to Legge’s interpretation. See for example the comment to chapter 29 where he states that: “The Tao forbids action with a personal purpose, and all such action is sure to fail in the greatest things as well as in the least.” Legge, “The Tao Teh King,” 72.

<sup>46</sup> See for example the discussion in Aleister Crowley, *Moonchild* (London: The Mandrake Press, 1929), chapter five.

<sup>47</sup> Crowley, *Tao te Ching*, 96.

<sup>48</sup> See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, “Ge Xuan,” in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio

was the protagonist of a series of detective stories Crowley started writing in the winter of 1916–1917. For some years he continued to write about the character that—correctly in my view—has often been regarded as an idealized self-portrait of Crowley in old age.<sup>49</sup> All in all he created more than twenty short stories portraying the adventures of Simon Iff, most of which were never published in his lifetime.<sup>50</sup> Simon Iff also makes an appearance in Crowley's novel *Moonchild* (published in 1929 but written in 1917). Considering that the character is an idealized mouthpiece of Crowley himself, the Daoist leanings of this esoteric detective are particularly noteworthy. Simon Iff is said to have spent ten years in China. "I was ten years in China. I've smoked opium as hard as anybody," as he puts it in "Outside the Bank's Routine" (1917).<sup>51</sup> His years in China gave Simon Iff a taste for the Daoist scriptures. About his enthusiasm for the *Daodejing* it is said that "he had read it every morning for forty years without once failing to find something new in it";<sup>52</sup> he refers to the text in several of the stories and often talks of "the Tao." His distaste for missionaries becomes apparent in "Desert Justice."<sup>53</sup> In *Moonchild*, Simon Iff's discourse on Daoist non-action comprises a large part of chapter five.

It is no coincidence that Crowley's enthusiasm for Daoism manifested itself through writing. As I will argue, Daoism, for Crowley, was an expression of "Chinese wisdom" or philosophy more than anything else. That is to say, what interested him in Chinese religion were the ideas, not the practices. There is, however, one major exception to this tendency: the *Yijing*.

Crowley's interest in the Chinese classical text the *Yijing*, and the divinatory practices that are traditionally connected with it, dates back to the time of his Chinese travels. As early as 1907, the year after the journey that took him through Yunnan, he authored the short *Liber Trigrammaton* that deals with the subject.<sup>54</sup> It seems reasonable considering the time frame that

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Pregadio (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> See Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 248; William Breeze, introduction to *The Simon Iff Stories & Other Works*, ed. David Stuart Davies and William Breeze (London: Wordsworth, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> The first stories were published in the periodical *The International* from 1917–1918. Recently a collection of all surviving stories has been published as Aleister Crowley, *The Simon Iff Stories & Other Works*, ed. David Stuart Davies and William Breeze (Ware: Wordsworth, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Crowley, "Outside the Bank's Routine," in Crowley, *Simon Iff*, 82.

<sup>52</sup> Crowley, "The Monkey and the Buzz-Saw," in Crowley, *Simon Iff*, 203.

<sup>53</sup> Crowley, "Desert Justice," in Crowley, *Simon Iff*.

<sup>54</sup> Later published in Aleister Crowley, *The Holy Books Volume III* (London: Privately published, 1909).

his interest in the subject originated in his experiences in China. As with Crowley's interest in Daoism in general, however, his fascination with the *Yijing* grew with time. It especially gained momentum just after the First World War. For example, the 1907 diary *John St. John* never mentions the *Yijing*, while the diary for 1919–1920 is full of references to it.<sup>55</sup> The much simplified the divinatory technique used by Crowley consisted in throwing a handful of sticks or coins on a surface and interpreting the pattern in which they fell.<sup>56</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s he made many important decisions on the advice of the *Yijing*. The decision to place the Abbey of Thelema, his experiment in communal living, in the Sicilian town of Cefalù, was one. Crowley tried to gain a better understanding of the practice in his usual way, by connecting it to the kabbalah, and later to the tarot. In *The Book of Thoth*, his work on the tarot, the symbols of the Chinese text are often compared to the tarot cards. He was proud of his studies. In *Magick Without Tears* he writes:

...my personal researches have been of the greatest value and importance to the study of the subject of Magick and Mysticism in general, especially my integration of the various thought-systems of the world, notably the identification of the system of the Yi King with that of the Qabalah.<sup>57</sup>

Crowley would continue to consult the *Yijing* for the rest of his life.

### Challenging the missionary Dao

Even if the content of Crowley's *Daodejing* didn't diverge all that much from Legge's translation it is clear that Crowley's estimation of Daoism differed from the influential protestant understanding of Chinese culture. This is seen when Crowley's understanding of Chinese religion is compared with important themes in the representations of the subject in the broader culture of Victorian and Edwardian Britain, especially those that expressed the dominant discourse represented by protestant missionaries and missionary

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<sup>55</sup> Aleister Crowley, "John St. John," *The Equinox* 1, no. 1 (1909). Aleister Crowley, "The Magical Record of the Beast," in *The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, ed. Kenneth Grant and John Symonds (London: Duckworth, 1972).

<sup>56</sup> Several traditional methods for divination by the *Yijing* are mentioned in Legge's introduction to his translation of the text. Crowley developed his own technique. James Legge, "Introduction," in *The Sacred Books of the East vol 16*, ed. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882).

<sup>57</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 2.

Sinologists. Perhaps it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that these views opposed each other on some levels. However, as we shall see, this did not exclude important similarities on others. Crowley did not regard Chinese religion as stagnant in relation to any of the common nineteenth century concepts of the evolutionary classification of religions or less systematic notions of degeneration common in missionary writings. This line of thinking was common in writings on Asian culture, whether stated explicitly, or implicit in the idea that other religions should learn from Christianity.<sup>58</sup> In Crowley's syncretic thinking, Daoism was represented instead as one of several "traditions" that could offer something to Western students of esotericism. There are several indications that Daoism had a particularly strong position in this system. Discussing the subject of founders of religion and their presumed mystical experiences in *Book Four*, Crowley writes:

Lao Tze is one of our best examples of a man who went away and had a mysterious experience; perhaps the best of all examples, as his system is the best of all systems. We have full details of his method of training in the Khang Kang King, and elsewhere. But it is so little known that we shall omit consideration of it in this popular account.<sup>59</sup>

Even though there are several examples of the same kind, too much should not be read into them. After all Daoism could never compete with yoga or occult ritual magic in the style of the Golden Dawn with regard to influence on Crowley.

The obvious syncretism of Crowley's religious views, and the apparent ease with which he incorporated influences from very different religious traditions and esoteric systems into his own worldview, was at least partly based on his belief in universal mysticism. This belief, in turn, was a reflection of an attitude that was commonly shared by esoteric thinkers long before Crowley, which Faivre called "the praxis of concordance" (one of the two secondary components in his definition of esotericism)<sup>60</sup> and viewed as the will to see a common core in diverse religious traditions.

Earlier expressions of this kind of thinking often rested on some version of perennialism that explained the common core of the world's religions by postulating a *philosophia perennis*, the teachings of which constituted the

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<sup>58</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> See Aleister Crowley, "Mysticism," in Aleister Crowley, *Book 4 I-IV* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1994), 10.

<sup>60</sup> See for example Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 14.

essence of all, or some, of the now existing religions.<sup>61</sup> Crowley never embraced this kind of historical explanation; instead he argued that the essence of religion is systematized knowledge based on mystical experiences that constitute a way of gaining empirical knowledge of a transcendent reality.

The idea of the foundation of religion as uniform and shared implies that it can be revealed by comparative studies, hermeneutical interpretation of sacred texts, and through spiritual practices, which of course was the means favored by Crowley.<sup>62</sup> This view of the essence of religion as mystical experience created a certain ambivalence in Crowley's writings because it could be understood both in terms of biological reductionism and supernaturalism.<sup>63</sup> To summarize, it is not the historical background that makes mystical traditions or experiences appear a certain way (though it might be the nature of the brain), instead it is the mystical experiences that shape the historical religions. One of the clearest articulations of this position in Crowley's writings can be found in the rather obscure, semi-pornographic *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz* (1910). It deserves to be quoted in full:

Now the revealing of one is the revealing of all: for from Fez to Nikko, there is one mysticism and not two. The fanatic followers of el Senussi can suck the pious honey from the obscene Aphorisms of Kwaw, and the twelve Buddhist sects of Japan would perfectly understand the inarticulate yells of the fire-eaters of el Maghraby. *Not that there is or has ever been a common religious tradition*; but for the very much simpler reason that all the traditions are based on the same set of facts. Just as the festivals of Spring all the world round more or less suggest the story of the Crucifixion [sic] and Resurrection, simply because the actual phenomena which every man is bound to observe in Nature are essentially the same in every clime: so also is Mysticism One, because the physiological

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<sup>61</sup> See Faivre, *Access*; for some further examples see Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>62</sup> See for example the subordination of ethical considerations to mystical experience in his discussion of yama and niyama in Crowley, "Mysticism," in Aleister Crowley, *Book 4 I-IV* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1994). Crowley's position on the value of intellectual interpretation is summed up nicely in the expression "experience and some knowledge of comparative religion" from the chapter on "Dhyana" in the aforementioned source.

<sup>63</sup> In connection with this, Marco Pasi's remarks on Crowley's interest in scientific naturalism are particularly interesting. See Marco Pasi, "Varieties of Magical Experience," in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

constitution of mankind is practically identical the wide world over ... We have then the right to buy our pigs in the cheapest market...<sup>64</sup>

Contrary to what the context or the tone might suggest, the views expressed here were meant to be taken seriously and the argument would reappear in several of Crowley's books. It did so in the context of Daoism too. In his preface to the *Daodejing*, Crowley claims to have studied "all varieties of Asiatic philosophy" and remarks: "The physiological and psychological uniformity of mankind guaranteed that the diversity of expressions concealed a unity of significance."<sup>65</sup>

Crowley didn't just place a higher value on Daoism than most of his contemporaries because he saw it as a part of a universal expression of religious truth. His understanding of Chinese religion deviates from the dominant discourse in other ways too. To begin with it should be noted that Chinese religion ("Chinese philosophy," "Chinese Thought" or any of the other expressions used by Crowley) almost exclusively meant Daoism. After his Buddhist period around the turn of the century Crowley almost completely lost interest in the religion.<sup>66</sup> He never had any specific interest in Chinese Buddhism. Predictably enough the same goes for Confucianism. Master Kong and his disciples are rarely mentioned by Crowley. The list of saints in Crowley's Gnostic Mass begins with Laozi but never even mentions Kongzi. Nor did he ever show any interest in Chinese, Islamic, or Christian movements.

In this way Crowley turned the hierarchy of religions often implicit in missionary and Sinological writings of his day upside down. Christian missionaries, beginning with the Jesuits, had traditionally viewed Confucianism as the most developed (or least reprehensible) form of Chinese religion.<sup>67</sup> Crowley and other writers on esotericism in the early twentieth century (like Guénon or de Pouvoirville) were early examples of the growing esteem of Daoism (or parts of it) during the second half of the century.<sup>68</sup>

At this point, however, we would do well to stop and ask the question what Crowley *did not mean* by Daoism. Interestingly enough, in defending the religion Crowley made no real effort to deny missionary charges of idolatry

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<sup>64</sup> Aleister Crowley, introduction to Aleister Crowley, *The Scented Garden of Abdullab the Satirist of Shiraz* (Chicago: The Teitan Press, 1991), 13.

<sup>65</sup> Crowley, introduction to *Tao te Ching*, 3–4.

<sup>66</sup> He even developed distaste for it.

<sup>67</sup> See for example Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 23–24.

<sup>68</sup> On the growing interest in Daoism in the West during the 20th century see J.J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West* (London: Routledge, 2000).

or polytheism. Instead he chose to ignore those aspects of Chinese religious culture that hostile critics labeled as such. Even if these religious expressions hardly bothered him the way they did members of the China Inland Mission or The London Missionary Society, they did not fit his views of the simplicity of Chinese religion, nor did Daoist monasticism or, apparently, the Chinese pantheon in any of its forms. There are almost no references at all to Chinese deities in Crowley's writings, not even the *xian* seems to have interested him that much, even though the idea of immortal spiritual masters would have fitted nicely with his belief in the secret chiefs. Ignorance is not a very good explanation, though a lack of information probably played a part.<sup>69</sup> Crowley had, after all, visited Chinese temples, and would have known that there were Daoist monks and cults devoted to specific deities, even if he didn't know the finer points of, say, Daoist alchemy.

### Paper gods

If we are to explain why Crowley ignored many of the elements of Daoism as the religion was actually practiced by the majority of its adherents,<sup>70</sup> we must look closer at a specific aspect of the Western representation of Asian religions, namely the focus on textual and archaic expressions. This aspect is interesting because it so clearly reflects and exemplifies broader trends in the development of Western esotericism in Crowley's time. It will then be clear that even though Crowley deviated from the dominant contemporary representations of Chinese religion in terms of his high regard for Daoism, he was in some ways dependent on the logic implicit in these representations.

A distinct tendency in Western interpretations of Asian religions well into the twentieth century was the fact that the archaic was valued higher than the contemporary, and written expression of philosophy or theology was valued higher than practice. If contemporary religious practice deviated from the archaic theory, it was a sign of decadence. As Reinders argues:

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<sup>69</sup> After all, if we were to add up the sources on Chinese religion mentioned by Crowley himself his real knowledge of the subject would have been somewhat slim.

<sup>70</sup> For a detailed account of what Daoist religious life could look like at the beginning of the twentieth century see Vincent Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking, 1800–1949: A Social History of Urban Clerics* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

The study of what was worthy in Chinese religion was for many years almost entirely a textual matter. Disparities between the ideas of the classical texts and observed practices in Chinese temples were explained as degeneration.<sup>71</sup>

This tendency was not only visible in the interpretation of Chinese religion, it was also apparent in Western writings on Buddhism in the same period. Philip C. Almond, who has studied interpretations of Buddhism during the nineteenth century, writes concerning this religion that:

It was to become progressively less a living religion of the present to be found in China, Nepal, Mongolia, etc. and more a religion of the past bound by its own textuality. Defined, classified, and understood as a textual object, its contemporary manifestations were seen in the light of this, as more or less adequate representations, reflections, images of it, but no longer the thing itself.<sup>72</sup>

Crowley was heavily influenced by Orientalist writings in his understanding of Buddhism.<sup>73</sup> And it is obvious that the inclination to prefer textual expressions of religion was a constitutive pattern of Crowley's understanding of Daoism. After all if James Legge hadn't chosen the specific handful of texts he chose from the vast Daoist canon, Crowley's understanding of what constituted Daoism could have been very different. That choice was hardly random, nor was Crowley a completely passive or completely unconscious recipient of other people's ideology. He embraced the basic pattern valuing the ancient and textual above the contemporary and practical.<sup>74</sup>

Crowley saw Daoism as something unchanging and unified, rather than as subject to historical change and divided into different movements and sects. He saw it as something that could be embraced as an autonomous individual, rather than as a member of a community. Even though he himself was a member of several occult orders, there is nothing in his understanding of Daoism that makes it necessary for anyone interested in this religion to submit to priests or other religious specialists. Lastly, he saw it as something primarily theoretical. It is true that he did practice a form of divination based on the *Yijing*, which he understood as Daoist. This is in

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<sup>71</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>73</sup> His interpretation of this religion was influenced by concepts such as the canonical-popular dichotomy underlying many early studies of Buddhism.

<sup>74</sup> Paradoxically perhaps, since it didn't fit that well with the almost sacralized modernism of *The Book of the Law*. But Crowley seems to have treated non-Western religious traditions differently in this regard.



itself interesting and constitutes a rare exception, at a time when interest in East Asian religions in the West was almost exclusively an intellectual pursuit. It does not, however, change the fact that for Crowley Daoism was predominantly about texts and ideas rather than practices. If it had been otherwise, he would perhaps not have gone so far as to follow in the footsteps of his mentor Allan Bennett, who ended up as a Buddhist convert and monk, but he would probably have shown a greater interest in the temple cult, monasticism, magic, alchemy, etc. that constituted Daoist religious practices.

As has been stated above, the belief in a shared essence of the world's religions has been common within esotericism since early modern times. It has been noticed several times however, by Faivre, Godwin and Hanegraaff,<sup>75</sup> among others, that this perennialist perspective was both vitalized and transformed in the nineteenth century as a result of the rise of the scientific and comparative study of religions and the growing amount of information that was made available by this enterprise.<sup>76</sup> One of the results was the rising interest in Asian religions exemplified by the Theosophical Society or by Crowley's interest in Indian and Chinese religion. Crowley's dependence on tendencies within the Sinology of his time is an interesting example of secularization in one of the senses explored by Hanegraaff in *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, that is in the sense of esotericism implicitly making the secular, academic study of religion a spiritual authority. This reliance on the academic study of religion by individuals like Crowley had consequences. One of these consequences was that the perspective and values of scholars and translators like Max Müller, Thomas Rhys Davids or James Legge came to color the views of those, like Crowley, who used their works as a way to access the sacred texts of Buddhism, Hinduism or Daoism.

## Conclusion

Crowley's journey through Yunnan was the beginning of a lifelong sympathy towards Chinese culture, as he understood it. Originally vague and nebulous, his sympathy later developed into an interest in Daoism, a religious system Crowley interpreted as an expression of a universal religious mystical truth.

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<sup>75</sup> See for example Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State of New York Press, 1994); Antoine Faivre, *Access*, 14; Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*.

<sup>76</sup> It reappeared in "triumphant form" in the nineteenth century as Faivre puts it.

In a climate largely skeptical to Chinese religion, Crowley praised Laozi and the wisdom he believed could be found in the *Daodejing*.

Crowley was severely critical of Christian missionary endeavors in China. He also understood the road to spiritual truth as primarily a practical one. Nevertheless, his Daoism was colored by the focus on the textual and on archaic expressions of religion that protestant missionaries shared with early Sinology and the academic study of religion. As a non-Chinese speaker he had to turn to the emerging Western study of East Asian religion for information on Daoist worldview and tradition. In this way, values and patterns of interpretation entered Crowley's writing from a source in relation to which he was ambivalent at best. Although engaging in aggressive anti-missionary polemics, Crowley actually became locked in a position of simultaneous rejection and dependence with missionary Sinology, a form of dependence deeply intertwined with trends of modernity and secularization in early twentieth century Western esotericism.

Crowley's interest in Daoism and Chinese religion lived on within the Thelemic movement. Later in the century examples of this are easy to find. Kenneth Grant, Crowley's one time secretary and prolific Thelemic writer, was fascinated by Chinese sorcery, and Crowley's interpretation of the *Yijing* influenced occultist Louis T. Culling, who dealt with the subject in his books, published in the 1960s and 1970s. When we turn to the broader perspective, however, considerably less is known.

The question of whether the occult movements of the early 1900s exerted any influence on the wider cultural interest in Chinese religion later in the century is impossible to answer in a satisfactory way without further research. Any such research will have to determine if the tendencies and patterns that shaped the understanding of Chinese religion in individuals such as Aleister Crowley continued to influence later interpretations of East Asian religion, or if these were molded by other patterns, emanating from other intellectual environments, other ideological conflicts, and other interpretative efforts.

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## Book Reviews

Gary Lachman. *Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2012. xx + 331 pp. ISBN-1: 1585428639. ISBN-13: 978–1585428632

“There are as many biographies of Helena Blavatsky as there are biographers.”<sup>1</sup>

The key to a good biography is turning a life into an engaging story without straying too far from the historical facts. Gary “Valentine” Lachman (born 1955)—former Blondie bassist who has successfully reinvented himself as a popular writer on “consciousness, culture and what happens when they meet”—must have a biographical skeleton key, for he has opened up the esoteric lives of Ouspensky (2004), Steiner (2007), Swedenborg (2009) and Jung (2010). His latest book dives into the “histerey” of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), whose past contains as much history as mystery (289).

Scholars of religion, especially in the field of Western esotericism, are well aware of the influence Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society have exerted on modern culture and religion. But “to the general public, [she] is virtually unknown” (xi). It is mainly for this lay audience that Lachman is retelling her story; for those who still believe that “popular interest in the occult, the esoteric and the spiritual started sometime in the 1960s” (90). Does this mean scholars need not bother with this book? Not necessarily. Lachman (xvii–xviii) also sets out to scrutinize the “legends, hearsay and lazy repetitions” that continue to be projected onto Blavatsky, by “tabloid

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<sup>1</sup> Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 380.

journalists” and “serious scholars” alike. There are two Madame Blavatskys, he reckons, the “foul-mouthed, over-weighed, chain-smoking charlatan,” on the one hand, and the “saintly, holy guru steadfastly following her destiny,” on the other, to which he intends to add a third “more fascinating, exciting, surprising and ‘real’ character” (4–5). That sounds very promising.

After a short introduction about her socio-historical significance, Chapter 1 turns to Blavatsky’s childhood, sketching a character profile that, Lachman admits, at times succumbs to the cliché of biographical writing “to see in early experiences patterns that will be repeated in later life” (10). Lachman recounts several strange events that, he thinks, could explain what started her “quest for the answers to life’s mysteries” (18).

Based on a desire to understand her extraordinary experiences, Blavatsky set out to travel around the world, running away from a short-lived marriage with a man twice her age. In Chapter 2 the reader learns about these Jules Vernian adventures across the globe and her numerous meetings with what Gurdjieff might call “remarkable men.”

In what is arguably the most original part of the book, Chapter 3 investigates Blavatsky’s suspect claim of having visited the proverbial “roof of the world,” at a time when no place was more inaccessible than Tibet, let alone to a heavy-set white woman (53). After objectively weighing pro and contra arguments—with a talent for connecting factual details from different sources—Lachman arrives at the understandable, but slightly disappointing, conclusion that we are “no nearer to knowing whether or not Madame Blavatsky was in Tibet ... In all honesty I do not know myself” (75).

Next, the reader follows Blavatsky on a boat to America, where she finds her way to a haunted farmhouse in Chittenden, to meet her “chum” Henry Steel Olcott—whom Lachman takes care not to portray as the “gullible, earnest dimwit” (94) he is sometimes made out to be. Chapter 4 describes their not entirely coincidental first encounter.

In Chapter 5, Lachman relates, tongue in cheek, “Blavatsky’s work as an esoteric undercover agent—an occultist in Spiritualist clothing” (94) as well as her subsequent distancing from Spiritualism in anticipation of the impending founding of the Theosophical Society. From this point on—not yet halfway through the book—the reader, like Lachman himself (121), indeed, begins to feel “a bit dizzy” from the myriad strands of this intricate story, which the narrative, regrettably, never completely recovers from.

The events around the writing of the first of Blavatsky’s “two gargantuan tomes” are related in Chapter 6. The fact that Lachman expresses his preference for *Isis Unveiled* over the commonly considered crown jewel of *The Secret Doctrine*—assessing the former as “more accessible, thought-

provoking and readable” compared to the “set-in-stone pronouncement” of the latter (155)—is one indication of the refreshingly bold self-reliance of this critical independent researcher. Lachman did his homework and is not afraid to take a stand.

A few years after the establishment of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky and Olcott decided to relocate in India, leaving third co-founder William Quan Judge behind. This sets the stage for Chapter 7. Enter several prominent characters, including Alfred Percy Sinnett and Emma and Alexis Coulomb, who will later come to play crucial parts during a seminal phase in the history of Theosophy. Leading up to these events, we first find out about the mysterious “Simla phenomena,” involving buried teacups and brooch filled pillows.

The scandal incurred by the controversial “Mahatma Letters”—the curious correspondence between Sinnett and Blavatsky’s Masters, allegedly through psychically transmitted letters—unravels in Chapter 8. Interestingly, Lachman decides there is no solid proof that Blavatsky communicated telepathically with her Masters, but stresses we cannot dismiss her claim on the grounds that telepathy is false *per se* (208). For him, it is a possibility or even a probability. The Coulobms and Richard Hodgson of the Society for Psychological Research concluded differently—their criticism would brand Blavatsky a fraud.

Blavatsky spent her remaining years in Germany, Belgium and England, largely bedridden, suffering from a failing body. In Chapter 9, Lachman describes the arduous road to completing her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, and briefly touches upon two minor works, *The Key to Theosophy* and *The Voice of the Silence*, without covering any new ground.

Finally, Chapter 10 relates some of the internal power struggles that took place in the wake of Blavatsky’s death, which lead to several breaches within the Society. Lachman briefly elaborates on the history behind the main branches.

Lachman concludes by positioning himself in the debate surrounding Blavatsky and her Masters: “I think HPB’s Masters were a *ludibrium* [“serious joke”] that got out of hand” (293–294)—a teaching strategy gone haywire. And about the grande dame herself: “My belief is that HPB was one of the most creative synthesizers in modern thought ... [who] produced at least two undeniable classics” (297). The question is, to return to my opening statement: does the chronicle leading up to these conclusions offer an engaging story that stays true to the facts?

On both accounts, only partially so. But, let me add right away, this is partially due to the ambiguous material itself—which explains why there are



as many biographies of Blavatsky as there are biographers. Lachman strikes a fair balance between conflicting facts and opposing appraisals of Blavatsky's "histerey"—a testament to his skill as a researcher and writer. And yet, the narrative deteriorates into a web of convoluted speculations a few times too often for any type of reader to get really pulled in. He has done an admirable job at creating *some* order in "the bundle of contradictions" that is Blavatsky (xii). Suspended between a popular story and an academic history, his is the most readable biography of this enigmatic lady, so far. Even though I am fairly confident that anyone interested in "HPB"—scholars and lay readers alike—will be able to appreciate this well-informed and well-argued narrative, I do suspect that both will feel shortchanged. Scholars will likely enjoy the story, but will not come away with startling new discoveries. Lay readers will not always enjoy the story, stunned by the startling torrent of historical strands, but will likely come away with new insights. Despite valiant attempts, Lachman never reaches through to "the real character," like he promised he would. And as a result, he fails to bring Blavatsky to life in the way that he did Ouspensky, Steiner, Swedenborg and Jung.

Dave Vliegenthart