

# The Occult Tradition of the Tarot in Tangency with Ibn ‘Arabī’s Life and Teachings

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## PART TWO

Toward the beginning of this essay we saw that the Ur-Tarot—the distant but direct ancestor of the Marseilles deck (the oldest extant specimens of which date from the early eighteenth century, though it was probably standardized in the seventeenth) and the less remote progenitor, also, of the ruinously modified Italian-noble packs of the early fifteenth century—became widely known in Europe in connection with the popular spread of massproduced playing-cards (*naipes*, *naibi*) originally imported from the Arab world—perhaps via Jativa, in former Andalusian territory—by the middle of the fourteenth century. As both Florence and Viterbo (where *cartes saraceni* were documented in the 1370s) are in closest contact with the western coast of the Italian peninsula, we may assume that the *naibi* of those regions derived from or were, in fact, the *naipes* of Andalusia–Spain. Since neither town had access to a port, one must suppose, further, that the original transshipments of cards, probably by way of Genoa and Pisa, began occurring sometime *before* their first recorded appearances inland. Moreover, it can be assumed, as well, that playing-cards were early imported through southern French ports such as Marseilles and Montpellier, and, indeed, that they would soon be manufactured there as papermaking became widespread across the northwestern Mediterranean coast. Now, it was precisely the immediate descendents of the defeated Albigensian Cathari mentioned in our opening paragraph who dominated the incipient papermaking industry in southern Europe for centuries. Could it be those latter-day ‘Gnostics’ of Provence-Languedoc who were responsible for the effective propagation of the Tarot by the ingenious entrepreneurial innovation of combining the series of emblematic trumps, or *atouts*, with the new

fashion of inexpensive playing-cards?<sup>37</sup> That would help to explain why most of the jargon relating to the cards—the titles of the trumps and the name, Tarot, itself—came to be generally in French, even in other countries. And it is very significant, I think, that it was mainly in those regions where the Cathar heresy laid down its deepest roots in the twelfth century—certainly including northern Italy, Lombardy and Veneto—that Tarot cards were later to find their most hospitable reception, continuing down to the present day.

The Cathari scenario, then, seems to me much more plausible than the ‘Ferrara Triangle’ theory of origin promoted by the positivist authors of *A Wicked Pack of Cards*.<sup>38</sup> Their thesis—that the Tarot was *originally* a game invented in Lombardy-Romagna, somewhere in the Po valley between Ferrara, Bologna and Milan in the early fifteenth century—for all of its empirical pretensions, is, as a matter of fact, *no less invalid* than the first wild-eyed speculations of the “imaginary Magi” of Gallic occultism as represented by Antoine Court de Gébelin—that the *Jeu des Tarots* was a disguised gift of the Nile from time immemorial. As explanatory arguments both theories miscarry equally—the first because, pretending to adhere to the evidence, it arrives at the obtuse finding it secretly sought all along (viz., that the ‘occult’ cartomantic tradition of the Tarot, base though it be, was baseless); the second because, although acutely intuiting an apposite conclusion, it proffers as evidentiary proofs thereof the most patently imaginative fictions (rather in the way that Schliemann thought he found Troy by reading Homer). For there are two curious ironies in connection with Court de Gébelin’s discovery of the Tarot and his “absurd” theory that it was the remnant of an ancient Hermetic *Book of Thoth*: 1) that this inspired antiquarian-archeologist, a Swiss-born Protestant minister and Freemason, was not

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<sup>37</sup> Steven Runciman, an early authority on the Neo-Manichaeans, following the (unacknowledged) lead of A. E. Waite, cautiously opined that the Tarot does seem to contain a Cathar component. On the reading of Gnostic paper-watermarks, see the pioneering studies of Harold Bayley.

<sup>38</sup> See n. 6 in Part One of this article. The theory was earlier stated in *The Game of Tarot* (Cambridge, 1980), by Michael Dummett, the third of the triumphery credited for *A Wicked Pack of Cards*. I do not necessarily deny that “the game of Tarot” was devised or revised for Italian aristocrats in the second quarter of the fifteenth century by clever people who catered to aristocratic tastes any more than I would care to question that Gottlob Frege was responsible for the invention of ‘logical positivism’ (Prof. Dummett’s specialization). But I do *not* agree that that game has any more to do with the origin and nature of the Tarot than positivism has to do with logic (or perhaps the Professor will be inclined to concur?) and am content to present ‘occultism’ (the philosophy of religion, of things unperceived but conceived, the *Via negativa* and creative mythopoeia of Pythagoras, Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus, etc.) as the polar antithesis of ‘positivism’ (the scientific logic-chopping legalese of Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes, Aquinas, etc.). The virtual esoterism of contemporary logical-positivist language exceeds in obscurantism the worst excesses of Scholastics *or* occultists.

improbably himself (albeit unbeknownst to himself) an offshoot from the stump of Montségur—that is, a scion of those very Provençal proto-protestants who, four centuries earlier, had facilitated the spread of playing-cards by their activities as papermakers; and 2) that his belief in the Egyptian origin of the Tarot was, in a broad, roundabout way, basically sound (inasmuch as the Fātimids of Great Cairo *were* probably the initiators of those who ‘invented’ the Ur-Tarot—as I will hypothesize, at any rate, in a moment), even though he may have had nothing to substantiate it beyond the enthusiastic Egyptomania of Freemasonic circles in pre-Napoleonic France. Court de Gébelin had good reason to believe he had uncovered a true Rosetta Stone of occult hierosophy, but it would not begin to yield up its wellsprings of wisdom until touched by the wand of Éliphas Lévi’s researches in the following century.

I have suggested that the children of the seemingly-vanquished Albigensians took their revenge on the orthodox establishment of Europe in the fourteenth century through their promotion of the Tarot, the “Devil’s picturebook,” by means of the handy new device of playing-cards (for the blood of Abel is the vocal spirit of cartomancy). But who were those indomitable Gnostic-Christian heretics who, at one point around the beginning of the thirteenth century, appeared on the verge of permanently replacing Roman Catholicism in Languedoc and other isolated mountain enclaves from the Pyrenees to the Piedmont? Only from the historical perspective of modern times has it been fully appreciated that what was known as the Albigensian sect in France was merely the latest, westernmost consolidation of a powerful missionary movement (the same called *Patarini* in northern Italy) that had its base of operations in the Balkans and Dalmatia, where it went by the name of *Bogomilzvo*—the teachings of Bogomil (= *Theophilos*, ‘beloved of God’), a tenth-century Bulgarian preacher-priest.<sup>39</sup> The essence of Bogomilism was a puritanical reformism and pacifistic nationalism—in effect, the Gnostic seed of the great Protestant transformation of Christendom, both theologically and politically, representing the first faint morning-redness in the sky that would in due course incarnadine the world with the light of free thought. The Bosnian Gnostic church, in its turn, simply constituted the

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<sup>39</sup> Bogomilism became the official state church of Bosnia-Herzegovina during Ibn ‘Arabī’s lifetime (but within three centuries the whole region would be Muslim). Both the monarchian Gnosticism of Bosnia and the more radically dualist Dragovitsan sect of Dalmatia were vigorously evangelistic, with important missions in northern Italy and southern France.

westernmost Balkan extension of the same revolutionary-evangelistic tendency that had found expression as Paulicianism among the Armenians of Asia Minor since the seventh century. When Arab Muslim armies crossed the Taurus mountains into Anatolia, heading for Constantinople, they came in contact with the anti-Byzantine Paulicians, who made common cause with them, establishing their military headquarters at Tephrike (Divriği), near present-day Malatya. The Paulicians had much in common with the important second-century charismatic-apocalyptic, or pentecostal, sect of Montanists in Phrygia (of which Tertullian was a member), whose second leader was the prophetess, Maximilla. But all rightly-guided schools of Christian Gnosis are illuminated by the magisterium of the beloved disciple, Prester John, as we have seen. Thus, it would be possible to trace an unbroken chain of Gnostic movements from Patmos to Provence, from the beginning of the Christian dispensation down to the time of Ibn ‘Arabī and Francis of Assisi, and to hypothesize an evolution of the Tarot out of the “little book” (*biblaridion*) of John the Divine, which tasted “sweet as honey” in the mouth but turned the stomach sour (see *Rev.* 10: 9).

But let us backtrack a moment and carefully consider a particular qualification we must make in our Cathari hypothesis. It is plausible to conjecture that the latter-day ‘Albigensians’ were the shrewd marketeers who thought to combine the symbolic Tarot trumps and the Arabian *naibi*, and they evidently had the means and disposition to manufacture and distribute the new product. But from that it does not follow that those particular sectarians were the actual creators of the Tarot, and, despite some significant indications that they *may* have been (which I will discuss in a later study), I do not think that they were. The Tarot system implicit in this article is, *ex hypothesi*, an esoteric, occult doctrine corresponding to what *Ismā‘īlī* Shī‘ites call *Ta‘līm*, the special education, or educement (ex-doctrination), of the impeccable Imām revealed only to initiates. Many academic authorities deny that the Cathars had such a secret doctrine or were ‘occultist’ in that sense, ignoring the rather determinant fact that they are not privy to the actual credo of the *perfecti* (initiates) but only their public teachings promulgated among the *credentes* (believers who had not yet received the spiritual baptism, or *consolamentum*). Be that as it may, it does seem to me that a distinction can be made between Cathar Gnosticism as we have received it and the secret doctrine of the Tarot (as we can conceive it) which, in some ways, resembles the difference between generic Imāmism (represented now by ‘Twelver’ Shī‘ism) and

the distinct, esoteric doctrine, or *Ta'lim*, of the 'Sevener' Ismā'īlīs.<sup>40</sup> Without hoping to convince any who need convincing, I would hypothesize a more direct, more *deliberate* connection between the European and the Near Eastern spheres of activity than the centuries-long chain of association outlined in the preceding paragraph. And what more likely candidate to qualify as such a connecting link between, precisely, France and the Levant, or *Outremer*, than the Crusader order of Knights Templar, founded by nine French nobles in Jerusalem in 1119? From that time until 1291 when the last Latin military outpost in the Holy Land, Castle Pilgrim, was abandoned, the Knights Templar fully participated in the highest affairs, religious and political, of two worlds, the Christian and the Islamic. In this almost unique pivotal position in Christendom there was only one confessional entity that resembled the Templars on the Islamic side—the *Nizārī* Ismā'īlīs of Syria, commonly known as the 'Assassins' (coll., *hashshāshīn*), followers of the Old Man of the Mountain, or *Shaykh al-jabal*.<sup>41</sup>

Even if the generous reader will allow that a Frankish nobility with some experience of the Crusades would, indeed, represent an ideal milieu in which the Tarot might have originated, there is no proof, of course, that the Templars were the specific agency responsible—much less that the Ismā'īlīs were involved. The hypothesis that I offer is merely that, an hypothesis, but it is one that is plausible, and it is not without some circumstantial warrants. The key description of the Tarot is that, like the *Apocalypse* of St. John, it is a 'book' the chapters of which number twenty-two—that is, three series of seven, plus one. I have indicated how, among other things, the three septenaries correspond to the twenty-one centuries of the historical era common to the 'Judeo-Christian' and Islamic civilizations up to the present day—the first heptad relating to Greco-Roman antiquity, the second to the Muslim peoples (Arabs, Persians and Turks) of the 'medieval' period, and the third to the European nations (chiefly, France, Germany and England) of modern times. Such a tri-phase

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<sup>40</sup> To give an example of evidence that the Tarot is not strictly Cathari: the trump card entitled The Judgment (which actually represents a resurrection, or initiation) does *not* appear to depict the *consolamentum* as we know it from descriptions. On the oft-neglected distinction between actual esoterism (*ta'limīyah*) and the general "dis-allegorization" of *ta'wīl* (exegesis) which is the more proper understanding of the term, *bāṭinīyah*, see W. Ivanow, *Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism* (Leiden, 1952), pp. 23–5.

<sup>41</sup> Many researchers (most, unfortunately, not critically qualified) have pointed to the interesting similarities, both doctrinal and structural, between the Templars and the Assassins. For students of Ibn 'Arabī it is worth keeping in mind that the period of Templar–Assassin 'communication' spanned precisely the lifetime of the Shaykh al-Akbar, who witnessed the definite beginning of the demise of both organizations.

sequence in itself, if accepted, highlights the central importance of the Islamic component in the scheme. Moreover, when we consider the centre, or pivot, of the chronological system, the brilliant *Fāṭimid dynasty of New Egypt in the eleventh century*,<sup>42</sup> we find that not only the form but the very content of Tarot doctrine is present in germ in *Ismāʿīlī* theosophy (as represented in the encyclopedic *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*). The Fāṭimids of Egypt reached the zenith of their achievements in power, prosperity and cultural wealth during the long and glorious reign of the Caliph al-Mustaṣir (1036–94), whom Muslim historians accuse of forming a secret alliance with the invading Crusaders (to stave off the more dangerous threat of the Saljūqs). Although the Egyptian empire, like the cultivated greenhouse flower that it was, quickly withered after the dissensions following this ‘period of living dangerously’, the all-conquering genius of the cosmopolitan *Azhar* radiated its splendour from India to Andalusia (where Ibn Masarraḥ al-Jabalī may have operated as an early Fāṭimid agent) as long as the historical window of opportunity remained open.

Among the most signal qualities of Fāṭimid culture in Egypt was the creativity of their experimentation and accomplishments in the field of fine arts. Indeed, as we noted earlier, Richard Ettinghausen has adduced tangible evidence that the oldest extant playing-card identified outside of China–India may be Fāṭimid—of which the existing Mamlūk packs are mere copies (see n. 3 in the first part of this article, *JMIAS*, vol. XXXI). In line with our argument, then, I would hypothesize that the real creators of the Ur-Tarot (or, rather, the *Umm al-kitāb* underlying it) were the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlīs of Cairo, who passed the precious treasure on to their Templar beneficiaries in Jerusalem *sub rosa*. Of course, this intriguing theory presupposes that the Fāṭimid invention comprised the prototype of the set of emblematic images of the Tarot and not just the *minor arcana*, the pip-cards of the ordinary fifty-two card deck as represented in the surviving Mamlūk and Saljūq or Ayyūbid specimens.<sup>43</sup> For that, the

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<sup>42</sup> The crucial significance of the eleventh century is also evident in the fact that the movement of the Crusades began then—exactly one thousand years after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. On the rumoured relations between the Templars and the Fāṭimids of Cairo, see the very suggestive footnote on pp. 130–1 of *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*.

<sup>43</sup> I realize that this hypothesis might appear to contradict my previous suggestion that the Cathars of southern France were the first to combine the Tarot trumps and the ordinary *naibi* in the first decades of the fourteenth century, but the latter innovation would have resulted in an actual marketable product, whereas the proto-Tarot that I attribute to the Fāṭimids of Egypt may well have existed in only one unique exemplar which may or may not have been integrally associated with a pack of ordinary cards. In any case, the earlier Egyptian model would not have been known (though perhaps it was heard of) by the later European ‘innovators’.

sceptic will object, there is no actual proof. But I would point out that such figurative images as we have in the Tarot, some of them suspiciously resembling angelic or Deiform icons, could hardly be expected to survive in the sternly iconoclastic world of Islamdom apart from the sort of secretive, exclusive society that would have carefully preserved them from the glare of outsiders. Even the rare non-figurative Mamlūk cards which have come down to us could only have remained intact as they did as part of the royal Ottoman effects (war-spoils acquired from the conquest of Egypt in 1517) maintained in such special preserves as the Topkapı Saray Museum. Only with the coming of the age in which the iconophilist peoples of Europe acquired the technical and material means of mass-printing could Tarot cards become the popular vehicle of imagination that we know today. Nevertheless, the diligent student of Tarot symbology might hope to uncover *some* faint trace of a prior Islamic imagery in the cards—if, indeed, the people of our Beloved *did* once encamp in this place, as I believe. The small piece of evidence lying unremarked in our tableau of The Sun that I will now offer for the reader’s consideration may be found just convincing enough to sustain hope that, truly, there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, or lost that cannot be recovered.

Of all the texts upon which we drew to cast light on the imagery of the two human figures in Atout XIX (illustrated in Part One, p. 67), only the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* provided us with an explicit description of the disciples as *children* (see at nn. 22 and 23 in Part One, p. 75)—and it is virtually impossible that the Tarot tableau could be based on that work (since, of course, it was not rediscovered until the last century). The apocalyptic symbolism from *Mark* 14: 51 of “a young man ... with nothing but a linen cloth wrapped around his waist” and the innocent child seated on the treasure-trove in the frontispiece to Thomas Vaughan’s *Lumen de lumine* are only partially applicable to our picture, and although the ‘prediction’ of Jesus regarding the destiny of St. Peter recorded in *John* 21: 18 (see Part One, p. 69)—which evidently was before the mind’s eye of the Tarot designer—contains the phrase, “when you were young”, in the first clause, it is to be noted that the description of the disciple with outstretched hands being led by another as though blind, is specified there to apply to his *old* age. None of these Christianate passages by themselves then would seem to adequately account for the depiction of two boys, apparently twin-brothers, in the Sun-card. But an even more striking omission therein is the *wall*: not a single text we have cited makes reference to an actual wall of any type. The closest thing to it

would be the stone altar (*madhbaḥ*) dedicated to Yahuwah that Elijah repaired on Mount Carmel (see Part One, p. 71); and then there was, also, Vaughan's cubic altar of Nature with the hedghog's labyrinth of tunnels running underneath it—but neither of those figures were at any time described as really analogous to a wall such as we see in Atout XIX. Then where does that notion in connection with two young brothers come from? Anyone familiar with the Qur'ān will immediately think of the well-known passage from the *Sūrat al-Kahf* (the Chapter of the Cave) in which the mysterious, mirific Guide of Moses known as al-Khaḍir performs three inscrutable acts: 1) damaging a boat; 2) killing a boy; and 3) repairing a wall (*jidār*) owned by two young brothers that had fallen down and charging no fee for it on the grounds that:

... It belonged to two orphan boys (*ghulāmān yafīmān*) in the town, and underneath it was a treasure (*kanz*) belonging to them. Their father had been righteous, and thy Lord willed that they should come of full age and then extract their treasure as a Mercy from thy Lord. I did it not of my own bidding. This is the *ta'wīl* of that wherewith thou couldst not bear patiently (*Qur'ān* 18: 82).

I submit that the symbolism of the Tarot Sun-card cannot be properly understood without reference to this passage from the Islamic Scripture, which is one of its underlying prooftexts. The figures are represented as two young brothers standing before a wall (which hides a treasure) *because of this particular verse from the Qur'ān, which evidently had already been explicated by our stochastic Muslim esoterists* in such a way as to relate it to the very biblical themes we have expounded in this study—the ascents of Moses and Elijah, the transfiguration of Jesus, and perhaps even—why not?—the last chapter of St. John's Gospel treating of the distinct heritages of Sts. Peter and John, the heraldic twin-pillars of the Church, the symbolic orphan-brothers in our picture. If that is the case, then the designers of the Ur-Tarot must have had some association with some Muslims.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, the *Ismā'īlī* hermeneutists would have viewed this famous mystical passage from the Qur'ān as their rightful preserve, and if an opportunity could be found therein for opening up a ground of common interest with their new Christian 'allies', the Templars, then it is precisely the kind of intelligence that would have been seriously shared between the

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<sup>44</sup> Although the Qur'ān was translated into Latin as early as 1143, very few of the Knights Templar, at least, knew any languages besides French and some Arabic.



two communities. Both were élitist, conspiratorial, highly independent minorities with vastly disproportionate power and influence within their respective orthodox religio-political environments, in which they were equally looked upon askance. (While the *Nizārī* Assassins were also, of course, rivals of the Templars in Greater Syria, they, too, actually had more reason to favour the presence of the Franks.) I would not assume that our hypothetical Fāṭimid proto-Tarot necessarily bore a very close outward resemblance to the particular series of symbols that has come to characterize the Marseilles deck, either in style or in substance. Even the Ur-Tarot which I am attributing to the Knights Templar may well have been considerably different from what we might suppose—especially in the final, third septenary of *atouts*. According to my personal speculation, I would think that the form of the Tarot as we know it would have been determined, above all, by the exigencies of *the new situation created by the shocking fall from grace of the Knights Templar*—the ‘Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Jesus Christ’—when, at dawn on Friday, the thirteenth of October, 1307, every Knight of the Temple in France was arrested in a police raid ordered by the rapacious Philippe le Bel, the “first modern king”. Seven years later, the last Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, was tortured and executed on a small island in the Seine, and the Tarot was soon thereafter (along with other precious relics, including the Shroud of Turin) bequeathed to the ‘great orphan’, humanity.

The symbolism of the wall in the narrative of Moses and al-Khaḍīr is very important because of what it promises to reveal (to wit, the Treasure). Then what does the wall signify in itself—that is, what is it? According to a popular Ṣūfī *Tafsīr* (ascribed to Ibn ‘Arabī but actually the work of the fourteenth-century Akbarian epigone, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī), the wall in verses 77 and 82 of *Sūrat al-Kahf* stands for the ‘Soul in tranquility’ (*al-naḥs al-muṭma’innah*).<sup>45</sup> While that interpretation may be tenable, Ibn ‘Arabī himself propounds a much more revealing one elsewhere; but before presenting it, let us briefly inspect a few gems from a truly ancient, profoundly esoteric text—one that was totally unknown for millennia and only came to light in that “heroic age of excavation”, the nineteenth century, even though it formed, in fact, the original basis of the biblical legend of the Noachian flood as well as the qur’ānic account of the encounter between Moses and al-Khaḍīr. But our immediate expedient in turning to the Sumerian–Babylonian epic of

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<sup>45</sup> *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-karīm* [falsely attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī] (Beirut, 1981), vol. 1, p. 770.

Gilgamesh is to finally break down an obstacle of prudent esotericism made much too strong for far too long—I mean *the mystery of the wall*. For when Gilgamesh, the fifth king of Uruk (*Warqah*, ‘a leaf/sheet/card’) after the deluge, reaches Utnapishtim (‘he who saw life’, the Babylonian Noah), who lives “at the mouth of the rivers”, to demand the secret of immortality, the deathless Imām gives him, instead, all that can be given—the wisdom of the Wheel of life, which is TAROT:

There is no lasting permanence. Do we build the wall of a house to stand forever? Do we seal a contract to hold *ad infinitum*? Do two brothers divide an inheritance for all time? Does the flood-tide of rivers endure always?

It is only the nymph of the dragonfly who sheds her larva that sees the Sun in his glory.

From ancient times there has been no permanence ...<sup>46</sup>

What Gilgamesh, heroic in his desire for an eternal name, found so hard to bear was that the essence of heroism is sacrifice.<sup>47</sup> It is in tragedy that we find meaning, in dying that we live. Utnapishtim later hints at this in his reminiscence of how, in the fullness of time, the Wisdom-God, Ea, whispered to the wall of his reed-house secretly: “O Wall, hearken and reflect! O Utnapishtim, *tear down your house* and build an ark!” *Jidār* and its synonym, *jadr*, signify a ‘wall’, but, specifically, the ‘foundation’, the oldest part thereof (as in the Ka‘bah), as opposed to an ‘enclosure’, which would be a *ḥā’it*.<sup>48</sup> It can designate, also, a ‘barrier’, such as Dhū l-Qarnayn (an apt epithet of Moses, among others) erected between the cosmic-terrestrial Twin Peaks (*Mashu*, the goal of Gilgamesh, thought to be the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges) to restrain the chaotic hordes of Gog and Magog.

No doubt pedestrian scholarship will lose patience with my tendency to “blur and blend” such disparate periods of time and discrete bodies of literature, but the fact is that in the spectacular twentieth century—which could well be called the age of the Tarot Revolution—endings were joined to beginnings, subsuming everything between them, and what had been occult secrets became common knowledge with the discoveries at Qumran and Nag Hammadi. The wall has fallen down, the treasures are unearthed, and the orphans are presented with a choice: to follow Wisdom and live in

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. N. K. Sandars, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (New York, 1972), pp. 106–7.

<sup>47</sup> Translate that: What Peter, so avid in his love of Jesus, found too hard to realize was that he who, Christlike, is willing to lay down his life, lives forever in Christ. It is as easy as falling off a log.

the light (like the nymph of Atout XXI) or the way of the World and burn like the worm (for God promised Noah that his children would not be destroyed again by *water*). An attentive reading of the Gilgamesh epic could bring to light more than one mystery of the Tarot—things carefully concealed by prophets and priests for thousands of years, now cast out to the tender mercies of professors and poets for the time remaining. A comparison with the texts we have examined in this article would elicit some edifying contrasts. Whereas al-Khaḍir marred a fishing-boat in order to save it from being confiscated by an extortionate king, Gilgamesh in a fit of rage damaged the boat of Utnapishtim’s ferryman over death’s waters, Urshanabi. Actually, what he destroyed was the T-shaped mast and the sacred *Urnu* serpents, together forming the talismanic caduceus that assured safe passage over the toxic waters of death (even as the brazen serpent of Moses raised up on a staff allowed the Israelites to travel through the snake-infested wilderness). Hence, Gilgamesh had himself to act as the mast by holding out his arms in the shape of a ‘T’ so that the wind caught in his clothing (similarly, it was only when Moses kept his arms outstretched that the Israelites triumphed over their enemies in battle). Gilgamesh was unable to maintain possession of the universal medicine, or Catholicon, symbolized as a Rose of the sea. The latter was purloined by a serpent that plunged into a well, taking the treasure back to its place of origin. In the qur’ānic version, a ‘fish’ (*ḥūt*, cognate with *ḥayyah*, ‘a snake’?) which had been dead was revived and absconded into a secret underwater tunnel, or pipe (*sarab*), at the Rock (*al-ṣakhrah*) where the Two Seas meet, and it is Moses and his ‘servant’ (*faṭān = ghulām*) who retrace their steps to the place where al-Khaḍir is found.

The great Ṣūfī master, Ibn ‘Arabī (whose honorific title, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, could be latinized as *Magister Trismegistgus*), devoted Chapter 366 of his monumental *Meccan Revelations*, on the gnosis of the ‘ministers’ (*wuzarā’*) of the rightly-guided Mahdī, to a kind of eisegetic commentary on the qur’ānic *Sūrat al-Kahf*.<sup>49</sup> The latter is named in reference to the mysterious ‘People of the Cave and the Inscription’ (*aṣḥāb al-kahf wa-l-raqīm*) of verses 9–26 of *Sūrah XVIII*. To be very brief with a bone of serious contention, the last term, *al-raqīm* (which is said to have

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<sup>48</sup> The ‘Wailing Wall’ (*ḥā’iṭ al-mabkā*) in its present form would more properly be termed a *jidār*.

<sup>49</sup> See *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah* (Cairo, 1911), vol. 3, pp. 327–40 (especially pp. 336–7), partially translated and annotated by J. W. Morris in *Les Illuminations de la Mecque*, by M. Chodkiewicz et al. (Paris, 1988), pp. 119–44 and 511–30.

been originally a Greek word), may be taken to refer to the sky<sup>50</sup> above the firmament of the wall in our Tarot tableau, whereas the ‘Cave’ is the nether region *sub muro*. As for the ‘companions’ of the Cave themselves, they are only referred to in the Arabic Scripture as righteous “young men” (*fityah*, cognate with *futūwah*, ‘chivalry, knight-hood’) who took refuge therein to save the purity of their religion from an idolatrous world, but scholars have pointed out that they are evidently the same pious youths who found similar refuge in Ephesus (where St. John had lived) during the third century. As the Qur’ān emphasizes, few really know whether they are three, five or seven, for the Scripture only specifies that there are *two* parties of them (see verse 12) and that *one* of them is a non-partisan ‘Speaker’ (v. 19). In verse 25 it is said that they tarried in the Cave for *three hundred* years (the number of the first two Arabic letters of *raqīm*), to which they added *nine* (the number of ‘ṭ’)—comprising the radicals of ط ر و ق, the original form of *Tarocco*, *Tarok* and *Tarox*. The number, nine, figures prominently in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *eisegesis* of the Chapter of the Cave in the *Futūḥāt*, cited above, since it treats of a novena of characteristics, or powers, of the Mahdī, which are personified as nine ‘viziers’ (prefiguring the nine founding members of the Rosicrucian brotherhood): efficacious perception, understanding of Divine Speech, awareness of the interpenetration of things, striving to serve the needs of mankind, knowledge of the Unseen, etc. Now all of the nine qualifying powers are eminently present in al-Khaḍīr (not to mention Melchizedek or Jesus)—therefore, he is none other than the Imām al-Mahdī, than whom none need expect any other.

As for the symbolism of the number, nineteen (the number of the Sun-card), it underlies the very structure of an important (but rather forbidding) treatise by Ibn ‘Arabī entitled *Manzil al-manāzil al-fahwānīyah* (The Way-station of Way-stations, [being] the *Fahwānīyah*).<sup>51</sup> There the *sūrahs* of the Qur’ān are classified into nineteen categories (the major *manāzil*) according to the type of their opening words—that is, how they begin—the first station including the chapters that open with the phrase,

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<sup>50</sup> As it does in a tradition of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (cited in E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* [repr., Cambridge, 1984], s.v., *raqīm*).

<sup>51</sup> Edited by S. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ (Cairo, 1995), which publication was reviewed by G. T. Elmore in “Some Recent Editions of Books by Ibn al-‘Arabī Published in the Arab World” (forthcoming). The neologism, *Fahwānīyah*, denotes the Divine Logos which is impressed upon the *tabula rasa* of mystic man’s mind—*fāhu ilā fīya* (His mouth next to mine), *mukāfahat* *an*. In the context of our Sun-card imagery, it is worth noting that the close, *tactile* connection between the two brothers is meant to convey a sense of the intimacy of initiatory inspiration, which can only be passed on “in a whisper, mouth to mouth.”

“Praise be to God”; the second comprising the many chapters that begin with one or another combination of mysterious letters; the third, those beginning with the vocative particle, “O”, etc.—down to the nineteenth, devoted to *sūrahs* the first word of which is an imperative, such as *Qul!* Not only is the entire taxonomy of the Scripture thus based on the number, nineteen, but the epitomizing Station of all stations, which is the *Basmalah*—“In the Name of GOD, the Compassionate Compassionator!”—is conventionally written with nineteen letters in Arabic: *B-SM AL-LH AL-RḤMN AL-RḤIM*. These vocables, which are believed to sum up the whole Scripture, are themselves subsumed in the dot which underlies their very first letter, . In terms of our now-familiar Tarot imagery, we might well say that that point below the line represents the hidden Divine Treasure buried beneath the wall of the orphan-brothers. The God-taught saint who knows that singular Secret is able to effect the accomplishment of his own will simply by correctly intoning that line of sound. And this Theurgic efficacy of the number, 19, is operative in the macrocosm, as well, since it is by causing the 7 astrological planets to traverse through the 12 houses of the Zodiac that God initiates all changes in the world of elemental nature; while, in the sphere of ‘Men’ (*al-rijāl*, the Ṣūfis), the 12 *nujabā’* (whom the children of Israel call *nuqabā’*) cooperate with 7 *abdāl* (4 *watads*, two Imāms and one *Quṭb*) in the economy of the mystical hierarchy.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Paradise is divided into 19 realms: 4 genera of 4 species each, plus 3 different conditions. The special symbolic significance of the number, 19, in fact, has long been propounded in numerous esoteric systems in the Middle East—Ismā‘īlī, Druze, Yazīdī and Bahā’ī—and even in modern times an ingenious Pakistani computer specialist has sought to prove that the Qur’ān is based on the particular quantity, 19.<sup>53</sup>

It is in an early work of Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (*K. ‘Anqā’ mughrīb*),<sup>54</sup> composed when he was still in southeastern Spain at the turn of the thirteenth century (corresponding to the end of the sixth Islamic century) that the

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<sup>52</sup> See *Manzil al-manāzil al-fahwānīyah*, p. 111, and the review cited in n. 51. Ibn ‘Arabī’s usage of some of these terms (e.g., *nujabā’* and *nuqabā’*) in the *Manzil* varies from the definitions given in his own *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-sūfiyah*.

<sup>53</sup> See A. Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford, 1993), p. 224.

<sup>54</sup> Recently translated by G. T. Elmore in *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time* (Leiden, 1999). That translation (which had to overcome formidable obstacles) is fairly adequate for the most part, but the chapter featuring the so-called “man from Tabrīz”, which relates very allusively to the symbolism of the major figures in the *Sūrah* of the Cave (found on pp. 257 *et seq.* of the translation) leaves rather much to be desired, I am afraid. Fortunately, we will not have to deal with that chapter in this article.

Thrice-Great Master treats in greatest detail the symbolism of the qur'ānic parable of Moses and al-Khaḍir that we have been considering. In one of the final chapters of that book, called by the translator “Microcosmic Correspondences concerning the Seal/Mahdī”,<sup>55</sup> fourteen sections are divided into two each—one representing the external world, the macrocosm; the other, the interior, or microcosm—of which seven, at least, allude specifically to the precise passage from the *Sūrat al-Kahf* that would appear to have been illustrated in the Tarot tableau of the Sun. Not only that, but in one of the sections, the fifth, the author of *The Fabulous Gryphon* uses language that almost seems to refer *explicitly* to the rather recondite meaning which we attached to the last chapter of St. John’s Gospel and thought that we found graphically depicted in Atout XIX (see Part One, p. 68). Could this not signify that Ibn ‘Arabī is actually making furtive reference to an esoteric vehicle—perhaps derived ultimately from the *Ismā‘īliyah*—somehow corresponding to this ‘page’ of the Ur-Tarot? Whether or not such a strong case for the Fāṭimid hypothesis can be sustained, there is no question that the penetrating exegesis of *Sūrah XVIII*, verses 65–82, that Ibn ‘Arabī adumbrates in this portion of the *‘Anqā’ mughrīb* can be quite profitably applied to explicate *all* of the salient imagery of the Tarot Sun-card. Thus, in Section 3 of the aforesaid chapter (pp. 487–88), the microcosmic Sun of mystic man’s reality (*shams ḥaqqi-ka*) is said to have two risings (*maṭla‘ān*)—an external, perceptible one which is in the ‘East’ (= the phenomenal appearance) of his conditioned physical existence, and an inner, occult motion which is inherent to the individual nature but is not overtly evident in life until the advent of the predestined time (*al-ajal*), when the Genius-Sun will rise to consciousness out of the ‘West’, the noumenal Essence of one’s transcendent being. The first solar orbit, that of natural constraint, is personified by Pharaoh/*al-Jabbār* in Atout XV, while the second is represented by the inverse reflection of that in the Triumphant Sun. As long as the Divine Light abides in eclipse, as it were, unmanifest, the door of repentance remains open to the children whose lives may still be changed. But when the Dawn breaks there can be no more hope in time or space.

In Section 4 (pp. 488–89), Ibn ‘Arabī declares that this apocalyptic “Sun of the West”, which is a metonym of the rightly-guided Mahdī and the universal Seal of sainthood (namely, Jesus), is also no less than the Divine “hidden Treasure (*al-kanz*

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 484–504.

*al-khafī*) in the Western Ocean”—the latter being the primordial Elemental world in the macrocosm and the very Heart of God’s servant in the microcosm. Here the *baḥr al-gharbī/al-muḥīt*, the Atlantic Ocean—a variant symbol for the wall in our Sun-card—emblemizes the human Heart, the only locus capacious enough to ‘encompass’ the Divine Presence, according to the well-known *ḥadīth qudsī*:

Neither My earth nor My heaven can contain Me; [but] the Heart of My faithful servant comprehends Me.

Now, it is important to recognize that only by virtue of the arcane Treasure concealed under the obscuring wall can the latter figure in *Sūrah XVIII* (and Atout XIX), the wall, be thematically conflated with the all-surrounding Western Sea, as Ibn ‘Arabī does in this section. Furthermore, it is only because of the description of the Treasure as an *apocalyptic Sun occulted in the ‘West’* that the symbolism of the Atlantic Ocean can apply. But Ibn ‘Arabī could not have made these associations on the basis of the Qur’ān alone, so where did he derive the graphic idea of a revelatory Sun being interred under a wall until the fullness of time? I am not aware of such a peculiar motif finding expression in any published work prior to the *Fabulous Gryphon* (or after it, for that matter). If that notional image is what we see represented in the Tarot Sun-card, then, how can we account for a European designer of the tableau, in the fourteenth century (or almost any time thereafter, for that matter), exhibiting familiarity with an Arabic mystical work which was not to be translated into a western language until the modern era? Would it not make more sense to surmise that our Ṣūfī author was himself referring to an antecedent model—namely, the Fāṭimid prototype, or *Umm al-kitāb*, upon which the Templar Ur-Tarot would be based? I do not pretend to have a shred of direct testimony to support such an explicit theory, but I do think that the circumstantial evidence adduced here bolsters the plausible hypothesis we have been working under and allows us to continue in the expectation that more might eventually turn up.

Indeed, we have yet to consider what I take to be the strongest textual indication that Ibn ‘Arabī was cognizant of the specific esoteric interpretation of *John XXI: 18* that underlies the iconography of the two young boys in Atout XIX—corresponding to the orphan-twins who are the subject-matter of the next three sections of the ‘*Anqā*’ chapter of *Microcosmic Correspondences*. The fifth section (pp. 489–91) begins by stipulating that the Treasure can only be known by “one who

is a Spirit, not a body, the REAL teaching him Knowledge directly from His Presence (*min laduni-hi*),” as in the case of al-Khaḍīr (see *Qur.* 18:65). As we have established, the latter represents Buddhi, the sixth (actually, super-human) principle of man, while Moses stands for Manas, the fifth—on the left-hand pillar, the first rung of the Soul above the quaternary of Body. Hence, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that man can have no converse with Divine Knowledge as long “as he is in his ‘animal soul’ (*naḥḥu l-bahīmīyah*) [the fourth-3<sup>rd</sup> principle], heeding the importunities of his ‘vegetal soul’ (*naḥḥu l-nabātīyah*) [the third-2<sup>nd</sup> principle]. But if he rises above the level of bodies and quits the world of illusions he will be importunate in his request to those Knowers of the [occult] Regulations (*‘ulamā’ al-aḥkām*)—his ‘Conscious mind’ (*shāhidu-hu*) achieving a position where it could seek its ‘Unconscious’ (*ghā’ibu-hu*) in order to learn its intentions and methods.”<sup>56</sup> That is to say, when the human mind, Manas (= *nasamah*), frees itself from the extraneous tyranny of the ego-theistic Idol iconized in Atout XV and, passing beyond the Kantian perceptual manifold (= the *Aquaster* of Paracelsus), isolates itself in a state of transcendental meditation, abstracted from the senses, it naturally begins to reach out for contact with a higher source, so that, just as naturally, the fraternal kindness of the next-highest principle is ineluctably moved to offer the hand of friendship.<sup>57</sup> That is the auspicious moment pictured in the Tarot tableau of the Sun, and I cannot but think that our Ṣūfī master alludes to it.

For it is in the passage immediately following that Ibn ‘Arabī precisely states the secret meaning of the mysterious words of Jesus to Peter-Manas: “You will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you *where you do not will to go*.” Now, the words emphasized here allude to the constitutional disinclination of the discursive Mind to submit patiently to the dictates of super-rational Intuition, which must resort to contractually *binding* its recalcitrant ‘brother’ by the inviolable regulations of Ṣūfī Courtesy and Wisdom (*aḥkām al-adab wa-l-ḥikmah*) in order to guide him into the way of Mercy. Referring to the encounter of Moses-Manas with Khaḍīr-Buddhi, Ibn ‘Arabī writes:

And when he [that is, the Conscious mind, *shāhidu-hu*, embodied in Moses] comes upon him [the Unconscious transcendent, *ghā’ibu-hu*, personified by al-

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 490.

<sup>57</sup> As, according to the Hermetic axiom, ‘there is no vacuum in nature’, so it can be assumed on faith that the highest evolved human principle must be in direct communication with a superhuman ‘spirit’.



Khāḍir], [the latter] binds him with his condition (*shartu-hu*) [that is, that he should not be questioned on anything until he had himself made mention of it] and assures himself of his contractual agreement (*'aqdu-hu*). Then [*al-Khāḍir*] *discloses to [Moses] the essential Meanings (al-ma'ānī) to which his natural disposition (ṭab'u-hu) was averse and against which his own nature/law (shar'u-hu) turned him.* But [*al-Khāḍir*] 'reminds' him and then [*Moses*] 'remembers', and he comes to know that, verily, God has communicated His Truth and determined [all things].<sup>58</sup>

Note that the line italicized neatly ties together Ibn 'Arabī's incisive diagnosis of the Mosaic mind, on the one hand, and the prognosis of Jesus as to Peter's future state, on the other. If it be objected that Ibn 'Arabī's words refer to Moses and al-Khāḍir, but manifestly *not* to the two qur'ānic brothers who own the wall, I will counter that metaphors, like Proteus, cannot always be kept from metamorphosing. Keeping that in mind, it may be that the real, esoteric relation between al-Khāḍir and the three inexplicable actions is hinted at in the fact, noted by Ibn 'Arabī, that a *dual* subject was responsible for "killing" the boy, while al-Khāḍir *alone* disabled the "boat", and *no* human agency was credited for repairing the wall *gratis*.<sup>59</sup> By voluntarily requesting initiation of al-Khāḍir, Moses participates in his own ritual slaying before he may cross the river of death to the Promised Land. As for the particular imagery of 'binding' or 'girding', it has a special significance that we need not go into on this occasion; but suffice it to observe that some Sun-cards show the two brothers with cords or halters around their necks which remind one of a similar memorial insignia worn by votaries of the *Yazīdī* sect.

In the sixth section my contention that the two orphan-owners of the wall are, symbolically, Moses and al-Khāḍir themselves would seem to be confirmed. There we read that "he who learns the reality of that Treasure [viz., al-Khāḍir] ... shall erect his wall and dwell in his house, demanding no recompence (*ajr*) and giving a Reminder (*dhikr*) to one who had rebuked him [*Moses*]—which alludes to the concealment of the Secrets concerning the One-Who-Magnifies-Himself above all

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 490–1.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 489. In *Qur.* 18: 81 al-Khāḍir declares that "we intended" that God should substitute another for the slain boy; in v. 79 he states that *he* wrecked the boat; and in v. 82 it is said that *he did not* repair the wall on his own authority.

others (*al-Jabbār*)<sup>60</sup> so that the people of rebuke (*ahl al-inkār*) might come to *see*. For they shall absolve themselves of guilt and be informed of the esoteric basis of these tidings” (cf. p. 491). From this we learn that the purpose of the erection of the wall is not only to veil the Secret (identity) of *al-Jabbār*, the Dweller of the Threshold, but also to reveal (i.e., re-veil) a Reminder (*dhikr*) so that the ignorant might *remember*—a reference to Socrates’ mnemonic theory of education, which had been the rationale of all the instituted public Mysteries. This incremental educational function of the *Dhikr*/ wall (erected free of charge) may also be detected in the last three verses of *Sūrah XXXVIII (Ṣād)*:

Say: I ask of you no wage (*ajr*) for it, neither am I of those who take things upon themselves. It is naught but a Reminder unto [all] the worlds, *and you shall surely know its tidings after a while (ba‘da ḥīn in)*.<sup>61</sup>

In the context of our present concern we are entitled to understand that this *Dhikr*—like hieroglyphics written upon an open wall exposed to general view but explicated only in special, nocturnal Mystic rites—is none other than the Tarot, the most successful paedagogic-mnemonic instrument ever devised by human ingenuity. Being to all appearances nothing more than a mere game of chance, a mental-child’s frivolous toy, it is made available to all and sundry in the world, high and low, free of charge. But in reality it is a *reminder* to everyone who sleeps in the Cave of this material earth, “and you shall surely know its tidings *after a while*”.

The element of time, of change and development, is the crux of the meaning of Atout XIX, the prominent figure of which resembles a sun-dial with seventy-two rays marking out the degrees of its circumference.<sup>62</sup> But it is the two orphan youths, owners of the incomplete wall, who embody the notion of *becoming*, the dynamism of imperfection, which is the essence of time. Only when they reach their Divinely-decreed maturity—that is, when they have evolved to realize their full potential—will the apocalyptic-revolutionary Time of Glory, the *Dawlat al-‘Izz*, come to be “on earth

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<sup>60</sup> This is a name of God in *Qur.* 59: 23 (where it is associated with the appellations, *al-‘Azīz* and *al-Mutakabbir*), but more typically the term denotes a tyrant, one who brooks no rival. As I have intimated, in the system of the Tarot the epithet refers to the symbolic figure in Atout XV.

<sup>61</sup> *Qur.* 38: 86–8. Compare the sense of “its tidings” (*naba‘u-hu*) here and Ibn ‘Arabī’s verb, *yunabba‘ū*, and “tidings” (*akhbār*) in the preceding quote.

<sup>62</sup> 72 is twice 36, the number of decans in the solar cycle of the Zodiac.

as it is in Heaven”. As Ibn ‘Arabī writes in Section 7 of the Correspondences, alluding to the qur’ānic brothers (as portrayed in the Sun-card):

When the Intellective spirit (*al-rūḥ al-‘aqlī*) reaches the end of its ‘waiting’/contemplation (*muntahá nazri-hi*) and the Reflective spirit (*al-rūḥ al-fikrī*) attains the object of its ‘need’/reflection (*ghāyat fakri-hi*) ... —at that time the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī*) will arrive as a Commander (*amīr*) and make the Intellective spirit a Minister (*wazīr*) [to him] and the Reflective one a Companion (*samīr*) [to the latter] and the Animal [spirit] (*al-ḥayawanī*) a Seat (*sarīr*) [for them all].<sup>63</sup>

Thus, the left-hand, sightless orphan stands for the Reflective spirit, the faculty of discursive thought, or reflection (*fikr*); the right-hand, seeing brother is pure intellect, or reason (*‘aql*), the faculty of aprioristic intuition; while the glorious Solar disc, representing the exalted father of the youths, is the quasi-Divine Spirit of holiness.<sup>64</sup> Microcosmically, the Holy Spirit correlates with the *Rūḥ al-laṭīfah* which, in the fullness of time, assumes the plenary command of all of its subordinate faculties, spiritual and intellectual, mounting, lastly, the vehicle, or ‘seat’, of the lowest quaternary of human components, powered by the subrational, vital spirits. In the theoretical-mythic metahistory of traditional Islamic eschatology these faculties are symbolized as the rightly-guided Mahdī and his ministers, but in the more practical, existential enactment of the same reality in the life of the individual Ṣūfī mystic the traditionary ‘Sun rising in the West’ (*shams al-maghrib*) was sublimated by Ibn ‘Arabī into a revolutionary formula of the ‘Seal of sainthood’ (*khatm al-wilāyah*) which was ideally epitomized in the charismatic personage of Jesus Christ, but could, obviously, be taken to apply to any truly exemplary ‘friend of God’, or Saint (*walī Allāh*)—such as Ibn ‘Arabī himself, to be sure. For that is the whole critical import of stressing the factor of the progressive development, growth, or evolution of the human spirit and intellect as personified in the orphan brothers—a notion which, ultimately, could only be given meaning and reality in the birth, struggle and victorious fulfilment of the Perfect Man by his own free, existential ‘Self-creation’.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Islamic Sainthood*, p. 492.

<sup>64</sup> In the *Tafsīr* of al-Qāshānī (cited in n. 45) the orphan brothers are assimilated to the theoretical and the practical intellects and their righteous father to the *rūḥ al-quds* (see vol. I, p. 773).

Before concluding with the ‘*Anqā’ mughrib* we should note that Ibn ‘Arabī presents his key doctrine of the revelatory *khātām al-awliyā’*, the ‘Seal of the saints’, therein in the context of a remarkable chronological theory of the Seal’s appearance (*zuhūr*) in the year 683 of the Islamic lunar chronography, corresponding to 1284 in the solar, Christian (or Common) Era.<sup>65</sup> That number is arrived at by adding to 622 (the solar year C.E. marking the beginning of the Islamic era) the number of extra lunar years in that period, 20,<sup>66</sup> and multiplying the sum, 642, by two, producing 1284 (= 683 A.H.). Thus, the return of ‘Jesus’ as the Seal of sainthood would be to Muslims of the seventh Islamic century what the advent of Islam had been to worthy Christians in *their* seventh century: the liberating renewal of pristine Revelation. The great Muslim theorist of historiography, Ibn Khaldūn, discusses this date from the *Fabulous Gryphon* at length in his *Muqaddimah*, and he goes on to mention another, similar date (698/1299) prognosticated by the celebrated ninth-century Arabian philosopher and astrologer, Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī.<sup>67</sup> Although the sceptical historian sneered at the lack of precise agreement between such apparently arbitrary calculations, it is to be observed that both figures are based on the quantity, 600 (represented by the letter, ح, in Arabic; and ך, the *Mem*-final, which has the form of *Sāmekh* [60, the Greek Ξ] in Hebrew). Now, although Ibn Khaldūn (not to mention the American translator of the ‘*Anqā’ mughrib*) seems to have been unaware of the fact, the ancient 600-year epoch, called a “Neros”<sup>68</sup> by such early scientific investigators as Jacques Cassini (d. 1756) and Jean Silvain Baillie (d. 1793), constitutes the fundamental lunisolar cycle of astronomical time, being made up of thirty-one Metonic periods of *nineteen* years, plus one of eleven. The early Hebrews were quite familiar with this antediluvian system of measuring time, as we may gather from the age allotted to the patriarch, Noah, 600 years, when the deluge occurred (see *Gen. 7: 6*). There is much more that could be

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<sup>65</sup> See *Islamic Sainthood*, p. 233, n. 42. It should be noted that, as a matter of fact, all of the fourteen sections of the Microcosmic Correspondences in the *Fabulous Gryphon* can well be applied to the imagery of Atout XIX.

<sup>66</sup> In doing so, Ibn ‘Arabī was probably following the procedure apparently indicated in *Qur. 18: 25*, where the additional 9 may be the extra, lunar years that go into 300 solar years.

<sup>67</sup> See F. Rosenthal, trans., *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Princeton, 1967), vol. II, pp. 186–200 (especially pp. 189–90 and 194). The translator of the ‘*Anqā’* inexplicably omits mentioning al-Kindī’s prognostication, but it is worth noting that the philosopher is said to have accurately predicted the fall of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty in the middle of the 7th/thirteenth century (see *ibid.*, p. 218), perhaps basing the calculation on a simple duplication of the 622-year period.

<sup>68</sup> This term perhaps derives from  $N-Y-R (260) + Q (100) \times 10 = 3600$ , the sum of *six* Neroses and the tenth-degrees of the circle.

said about this singular cycle *which is reflected in the triple septenary structure of the Tarot*, but as we are nearing the end of our essay I will simply refer the reader at this time to Godfrey Higgins’s magisterial *Anacalypsis*, where two lengthy chapters have been devoted to the subject.<sup>69</sup>

In this article I set out to present a credible case for regarding the Tarot as of Near Eastern—specifically, Fāṭimid—provenance (although the Fāṭimids themselves received it from the Gnostic followers of St. John, perhaps, also, in Egypt). For this purpose we examined the iconography of one particular Tarot card, The Sun. While we found many ‘western’, Christian texts—biblical, apocryphal and mystical—that treated various aspects of the symbolism therein (especially, the radiant Sun itself and the two young brothers), it was only an Arabic Ṣūfī work from the turn of the thirteenth century (based on a chapter of the seventh-century Islamic scripture) that actually dealt with *all* of the symbolic imagery to be found in the Sun-card, including the wall *and* the secret Treasure hidden beneath it. Concerning the latter, not only does Ibn ‘Arabī correctly describe it, he also gives a subtle but unmistakable hint as to its esoteric relation to the ‘Devil’ concept—an exegesis which he could not have easily derived from the Qur’ān alone. Likewise, his description of the precise nature of the two orphans—particularly, the left-hand ‘Peter’ figure—is certainly extra-qur’ānic and purely Tarochian. In the natural economy of literary symbology there is really no warrant for supposing any significant distinction between Ibn ‘Arabī’s text and the Tarot Sun-card: the proper interpretation of each is identical to the other. Our task, then, is fulfilled, and what follows I offer merely as a further working hypothesis—or, perhaps I should concede, something more or less than that: a new *Fama fraternitatis* comprising a revised, back-dated legend of our Christian Father Rosy-Cross. For, since we have determined that Ibn ‘Arabī is our best source for explicating the meaning of Atout XIX, shall we not consider his prognostication of the historical epiphany of that apocalyptic Sun rising out of the West? Then let us say that Frater Christian Rosencreutz was born of noble Dutch blood somewhere in the

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<sup>69</sup> See Vol. I, pp. 166–216, first published in London, 1833 (repr., New York, 1927); and cf., also, the same author’s *The Celtic Druids* (London, 1829), pp. 48–51, which contains the following: “Amongst many other things [Baillie] has remarked that the knowledge displayed by the ancients of the movements of the sun and moon in their cycles of nineteen and six hundred years—the Metonic cycle and the Neros—prove that, long before Hipparchus, the father of modern astronomy, who did not correct but rather increased the errors of his predecessors, the age of the year was known with a degree of exactitude which Hipparchus had not the means of discovering; and that the slight errors in these ancient cycles were not found out till after the lapse of nineteen hundred years” (*ibid.*, p. 48).

dark-wooded heart of Europe in 1284 (that is, exactly two hundred years before his tomb would be re-discovered in 1484, setting the stage for the eventual publication of the *Fama* in 1614). He was raised in a monastery where he received an excellent education provided for by Knights of the Temple. In 1300, at the age of sixteen, he travelled to Damascus by way of Cyprus, thus fulfilling (albeit a year-and-a-half late) the prophecy of al-Kindī, mentioned above. As the last Crusaders had recently been ejected from the Holy Land, he sojourned in the Syrian capital at the pleasure of its Turkish overlords (with whom he found favour on account of “his precocious skill in physick”) until he made contact with Arabs who would convey him to the secretive Wisemen (*‘uqalā’*) of “Damcar”—whom I take to be *members of the Druze sect of the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges* inland from Sidon, about sixty kilometres due west of Damascus, in the region of the famous spring-fed caves (*Dam ghār*, ‘blood of the grotto’?) associated with the name of Fakhr al-Dīn.<sup>70</sup>

As we noted earlier, Fra. C . . . R . . . C . . . was graciously received by the Arabic-speaking (but not entirely ‘Muslim’) adepts of Lebanon, who already knew his name and had been awaiting his arrival. The young neophyte resided with these sectarians for three years, studying “what great wonders they wrought and how Nature was discovered unto them”<sup>71</sup>—that is to say, magic, alchemy and Qabbālah. He also set himself to learning Arabic in order to translate the manual of axiomata abbreviated in the *Fama* as *M*—presumably related to an *organon*, or divinatory instrument, called the *Minutus mundus* (*Microcosmos*), or *Harmonia*, but also, apparently, to a *Rota mundi* (World-Wheel) and a sacred parchment known only as *T*.<sup>72</sup> (These terms we may understand to refer to esoteric prototypes of our Tarot.) From Lebanon the Pilgrim *Khawājah* journeyed overland by way of Jerusalem to Egypt, in which “he remained not long, but only took better notice there of the plants and animals” (p. 67), and from thence he was directed by his wise Teachers to sail to Morocco, where he spent more time in Fez studying the practical Magia associated with the Dwellers of the elements (*jinn*), as we noted earlier. In this connection the

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<sup>70</sup> For the *Fama fraternitatis*, see n. 12, above. Note that Sidon of Phoenicia was the fatherland of the Samian long-haired philosopher, Pythagoras, who spent several years in retreat on Mount Carmel (sacred, also, to Elijah and the Nādirites). According to H. P. Blavatsky, the man who was Jesus of Nazareth lived in a Druze body in the nineteenth century.

<sup>71</sup> *Fama fraternitatis*, translated by Waite in *The Real History of the Rosicrucians*, p. 66.

<sup>72</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 67, 70, 72, 75 and 78–80. The parchment, ‘T’, is said to be second only to the Bible as a treasure of the Rosicrucians, “which ought not to be delivered to the censure of the world” (p. 79).

author of the *Fama* commends the “Arabians” (by which he means the *Ismā‘īlī* Druze) for their fraternal association toward scientific ends, stating that

Every year the Arabians and Africans do send to one another, inquiring one of another out of their arts if haply they had found out some better things, or if experience had weakened their reasons. Yearly there came something to light whereby the Mathematics, Physic and Magic (for in these are they in Fez most skillful) were amended.<sup>73</sup>

The anonymous narrator of the *Vita and Itinerary* goes on to observe that although there was surely no want of Qabbalists, magicians, philosophers and physicians in his own native country, yet there was not enough brotherly love and kindness practiced there to cause them to work together and, so, relatively little had been or could be achieved. It was to remedy that very ill that Brother R. . . C. . . returned to Europe to establish the invisible college of the Rosicrucian brotherhood for the advancement of all arts and sciences.

It will be observed that in accordance with the amended time-line of my new, hypothetical legend, our loving Father must have passed through Spain and France *en route* to his homeland just prior to the fateful year, 1307, when the Temple would be struck down by Philip IV. This, perhaps, explains the words of the *Fama*, that “Brother C. . . R. . . returned again into Germany, the which he heartily loved, by reason of the alterations which were shortly to come [in France], and of the strange and dangerous contentions” (p. 70). The Rosicrucian fraternity, then, is simply the irrepressible offshoot of the doomed Knights Templar, as many have suspected. But the reader may wonder how it can be that I conjecture that the Templars received a proto-Tarot from the Fāṭimids (around 1119) when, according to the legend just recounted, Christian Rosenkreutz translated the same from an Arabic version kept by the Druze circa 1303. The fact that the latter is, after all, “just a myth” will not solve the problem, but I would suggest that we keep in mind that there were undoubtedly several phases of Tarot doctrine, each with its own version of the *Rota mundi*, or

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<sup>73</sup> *Fama fraternitatis*, in *The Real History*, p. 67. It is apparently from the last sentence that one would-be hierophant of the ‘Golden Dawn’, P. F. Case, derived an “occult tradition” that the Tarot was invented around 1200 in Fez as a kind of *lingua franca* for adepts meeting there at regular times from all over the world. In this connection it is apposite to mention, also, another *illuminato* of the last century, Idries Shah, who, in his popular book, *The Sufis* (New York, 1964), gave out some random hints of an assumed deeper knowledge of the Tarot and its roots in the Near East (see pp. 448–51). The well-known writer, P. D. Ouspensky, has also broadcast a few good seeds in much barren ground.

‘little book (*biblaridion*) of axioms’. For the purposes of this article I have adopted the following, purely artificial terminology: 1) the ‘Proto-Tarot’, or *Umm al-kitāb*, of the Fāṭimids and Druze (which were probably somewhat distinct, as well); 2) the ‘Ur-Tarot’ of the Templars and Rosicrucians, the latter being a ‘reformed’ version of the Templar Tarot designed by Fra. R. . . C. . . on the basis of the earlier, Druze template; and 3) the Tarot-proper as is manifested in the Marseilles deck, which was apparently produced by French Freemasons of the *Rose-Croix* in the first half of the eighteenth century—that is, a generation before the time of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin and Court de Gébelin. In some instances the changes between the several versions have been more or less radical, whereas in others—such as the case of the Sun-card—the imagery has remained much the same, as we have witnessed. In a later study I hope to demonstrate that compelling evidence of a ‘Tarot’ long preceding the Islamic versions is to be found in Greek and Roman literature, some of it antedating the Christian era.

After the plodding bipeds of historiography have given up the chase it is for the speedy hounds of philosophy and metaphysical speculation to try and run down the fox of Tarot’s origins. Theology (the study of Godly things) is mightily aided in the quest by placing its credence in the axioms of Revelation, which set it high on the mountain-top for a commanding view of the plane, but it is Theosophy (the wisdom—or, if you prefer, the opinions—of the Gods) that shows one the way into the very labyrinthine lair of the beast *and the way out again*.<sup>74</sup> For it is only through myth, the pleasant confection so sweet to the mouth, that alien Truth may be comprehended. Thus, we have heard that at the beginning of our common era the Light of Christianity rose in the far West of the old world of Asia—like the mythical *Shams al-Maghrib*, signalling the end of an age and the start of another, when the dying world of antiquity would pass its light of civilizing wisdom to the adolescent Semitic peoples of the south and then to the barbarous European nations of the north, who were entering the childhood of their development. This missionary movement was symbolized in the westward journey of the three Magi (Astral Fire-philosophers personifying the three highest principles of human consciousness, *Ātmā*, *Buddhi* and *Manas*, or Spirit, Soul and Mind) who, in order not to let King Herod (self-conscious ego) know where the precious Secret could be found, “departed to their own country by another way” (*Matt. 2: 12*)—that is to say, they continued their journey *westward*

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<sup>74</sup> No one doubts that it leads the way *into* the mental maze, but few prudent men and women believe that it shows the way *out*.



around the Western Sea, as it were. This procession of the Magi can easily be viewed in history in the successive waves, often overlapping, of Gnostic movements flowing out of Central Asia across Persia and Kurdistan, Armenia and Anatolia, over the Hellespont and into Europe, through Thrace, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Dalmatia, to Veneto, Lombardy, Provence, Languedoc, Catalonia and Valencia. In the journey of his life from Andalusia to Fez, Tunis, Cairo, Jerusalem, and thence (reversing the Prophet's 'Night flight') to Mecca and over the Fertile Crescent to Baghdad, Mosul, Malatya and Konya, Ibn 'Arabī entered into the powerful stream of that broad, circuitous world-movement, while, from time to time—as toward the end of his incredibly creative career—he swam *against* that current, upstream to the source, so to speak, where he was able to find the sanctuary needed to safely deposit the seeds of his teachings, and whence they would be sure to find their way back downstream to Europe, the land of his earthly birth.

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