

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

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## PART ONE

Following the prudent exodus of both Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides from their Andalusian homeland in the twelfth century and the later vicissitudes of Averroes and Abū Madyan occasioned by intrigues in the Almohad court, Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) was virtually the last great name of Arabic intellectual culture to arise in the Islamic West, or Maghrib. The sole exception to this sweeping statement, the case of Ibn Khaldūn (d.1406), ‘inventor of sociology’, is rather a confirmation of the assertion since his genius was utterly ignored until the last century and (like Averroes) he was only appreciated by his contemporaries for the more unoriginal ballast of his work. At about the same time that independent spirits were becoming scarce in the Muslim Occident, migrating to the Orient by way of the southern Mediterranean littoral, the Albigensian *Cathari* (neo-Manichaean Gnostics) were being eradicated from the Christian northern shores, having been expelled from Aragon in 1194 and, through the following century, massacred in Provence and Languedoc. This is not to suggest that the two sociopolitical contexts, Maghribine and Provençal, are otherwise in many ways comparable, however, since the stultifying conformist pressures in the Islamic territories, on the one hand, and those in the Christian, on the other, were really due to nearly opposite factors. The Maghrib had entered a period of political, economic and cultural decline from which it has only lately begun to emerge, whereas the northwestern coastlands of the Mediterranean basin (the oldest foreign footholds of Rome as far as the Ebro) were experiencing a cultural efflorescence—indeed, an *awakening*, as if from a long winter of slumber, which was actually the first stirrings of what would come to be called the Renaissance (*al-nahḍah*). New populations from Europe and the East were flooding into the Mediterranean regions of Lombardy,

Provence, Languedoc, Catalonia and other parts of Spain, where the ground was being tilled for opportunity by the bloody purges of the Albigensian Crusade and Inquisition (not to mention the new frontiers being opened further south by the ongoing *Reconquista*), just as the Muslim intellectual elite were effectively continuing the same circuitous trend on the wheel of historical fortune by retreating from their westernmost provinces to the Arab heartland in the East. Ibn ‘Arabī joined the flow of that movement when he made his fateful pilgrimage to Mecca and subsequently extended his peregrinations north and west through the ancient highlands of Upper Mesopotamia and Anatolia.

My reason for drawing attention to this counterclockwise circulation around the North African, West Asian and southern European shores of the great Roman Sea has to do with an abiding interest I have nurtured for some time in the vexed question of the origin—or, barring that, at least the relatively recent history—of that mysterious series of twenty-odd symbolic pictographs featured in the packs of old European playing-cards known by the name of Tarot, or *Taroqqi*. While most researchers today would probably agree that cards were evidently introduced into Christian Europe in the second half of the fourteenth century as an importation from the Islamic (specifically, the Arab) world, just *how* this crosscultural bequest was effected is quite difficult to determine since—like so many intersocietal phenomena—the connecting currents generally seem to have flowed under the surface of the perfunctory record-keepers’ notice. But the chronicler, Nicolas de Covelluzzo, was reported by a kinsman to have noted that “the game of cards which comes from the land of the Saracens [Arabs], who call it *Naib* [*nā’ib*] was brought to Viterbo [Italy] in the year, 1379.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, cards have always been called *naipes* in Spain and Portugal, and *naibi* by the earliest Italian sources. These facts are in perfect accord with the circumstance that the spread of the popularity of playing-cards in the West was facilitated and even borne along by the local development of papermaking. The word, card, derives from *khartēs/charta* (paper), the first European manufactories of which were established on the Mediterranean coast of Andalusia just prior to Ibn ‘Arabī’s lifetime and had begun to appear in northern Italy (which enjoyed close mercantile

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by the historian, Feliciano Bussi, in his history of Viterbo published in Rome in 1740 (p. 213). *Naibi* were also attested in Florence a few years earlier. Playing-cards were first invented in China (as were the techniques of papermaking and mass printing), and the idea was undoubtedly adapted in India and Persia before reaching the Arabs, probably during the ‘Abbāsīd period.

relations with Andalusian ports) by the following century and, thereafter, in France and Germany. To the production of cheap paper was applied the technology of mass stencilling, and a pack of cards was soon within reach of the European Everyman. It is necessary to add at this point, however, that there is no evidence—and, I think, little likelihood—that the primitive Andalusian *naipes*, or *nā'ibs*, ever included the peculiar set of symbolic–pictorial, extra-suit ‘trump’ cards (known as *trionfi* and *atutti* in Italian, *atouts* in French) which we especially intend by the name, Tarot.<sup>2</sup> For the probable origin and significance of these we will have to look in some other direction.

The oldest playing-cards which have physically survived to the present day are generally thought to be those from several elegant hand-painted Tarots produced in northern Italy toward the first half of the fifteenth century,<sup>3</sup> but they are manifestly *not* representative of the original design of the pack, neither singly nor collectively, as Robert V. O’Neill has pointedly observed in his insightful study, *Tarot Symbolism*.<sup>4</sup> Tarots had evidently been documented as early as 1392 at the royal court in Paris,<sup>5</sup> so they can hardly have been “invented in northern Italy in the early fifteenth century”, as the authors of a recent putative exposé of the occult tradition allege (conveniently ignoring O’Neill’s work).<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the expensive, custom-made Tarots commissioned

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<sup>2</sup> In this article I will use the word, Tarot, to denote specifically these emblematic trump cards, sometimes called the *major arcana*, irrespective of how their relationship to the other 56 (or 52) ‘pip’ cards, the *minor arcana*, of the four-suit pack is conceived.

<sup>3</sup> The painted Egyptian Mamlūk playing-cards found in the library of the Topkapı Saray Müzesi, Istanbul (No. Yeni 1066), and first described by L. A. Mayer in his “Mamluk Playing Cards”, *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale*, Cairo, 38 (1939), pp. 113–18—which was reprinted in *Mamluk Playing Cards* (Leiden, 1971), edited by R. Ettinghausen and O. Kurz—have been assigned to the fifteenth century (see *ibid.*, p. 5), so they could possibly be as old as the earliest surviving Italian Tarots (though they probably date from the *end* of the century, a generation or so before the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517). In a postscript to the reprint, however, Ettinghausen announced the discovery of part of another Egyptian playing-card (acquired by E. de Unger among paper documents recovered from the Cairo Geniza) which appears to date from the twelfth or thirteenth century and may, therefore, be Ayyūbid or even Fāṭimid (see *ibid.*, pp. 9–10, and Figs. 56–7). In his “Further Comments on Mamluk Playing Cards” (*Gatherings in Honor of Dorothy E. Miner* [Baltimore, 1974], pp. 51–78), Ettinghausen corrects some of the many erroneous assumptions in the earlier publications and describes yet other evidence of Middle Eastern cards which would pre-date the oldest ones produced in Europe. Thus, although the Mamlūk cards described by Mayer are actually Turkish, there is evidence that they are based on earlier Arab (Fāṭimid) models.

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 5–6 of O’Neill’s book, and pp. 81 and 91–5, where he belatedly (and understatedly) makes his case. *Tarot Symbolism* was published by Fairway Press (Lima, Ohio) in 1986 and has, unfortunately, since gone out of print, although it remains indispensable to the serious student of Tarot symbolism.

<sup>5</sup> See S. Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of Tarot*, vol. II (Stamford, Conn., 1986), pp. 68–70. Although the cards painted for the distracted King of France in 1392 may no longer exist, there is little reason to doubt that they were emblematic Tarots, not just ordinary four-suit ‘pip’ or ‘court’ cards.

<sup>6</sup> R. Decker, Th. Depaulis and M. Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The Origins of the Occult Tarot* (London, 1996), p. ix. These researchers deny that the Gringonneur cards were Tarots, but with

by noble patrons in northern Italy—as well, no doubt, as the three packs known to have been painted by Jacquemin Gringonneur for Charles VI of France a whole generation earlier—are nothing more than derivative, modified copies of an already-established prototype (we will call it the *Ur-Tarot*), ‘de-mythologized’ to suit the political tastes and biases of the aristocratic optimates who paid for them. That explains why, in all of the extant handmade decks, the ominous, or ‘anti-establishment’ Atouts numbered XV and XVI—The Devil and The Tower, or *La Maison Dieu*—are never included (and the same could be said for Atout II, The Popess), and other bowdlerizations of the original imagery were introduced to placate the religious and secular powers-that-be. That being the case, we must assume that the standard series of the *Ur-Tarot* had become familiar, even somehow popular, in France and Italy, at least, by the end of the fourteenth century (as the evidence indicates), and presumably much earlier.<sup>7</sup> Now, recall that the Andalusian *naipes*—which, we premised, did not originally contain the emblematic trumps—were first documented in Italy in the century preceding the earliest extant Tarots produced there and only thirteen years prior to the first documentation of playing-cards in France. Here we have, then, enough information to lay the ground for the hypothesis of the origin of the *Ur-Tarot* which I will adumbrate in this article.

Before proceeding further with my thesis, however, it is necessary to make two important points which will neutralize certain otherwise inevitable sources of confusion. First, in order to appreciate the substance of what will be presented hereinafter, the reader should become acquainted with the imagery of the particular Tarot cards known (and easily procurable today) as the “Marseilles deck”, commercially produced and sold by the French company, B. P. Grimaud. (Except for the colors of the Grimaud Marseilles pack—which were standardized in 1930 but, alas, are simply arbitrary—most of the images are quite adequately representative of what we will be calling the *Ur-Tarot*). Unless otherwise indicated, then, in this paper the word, Tarot, refers specifically to the readily available Marseilles deck, no other version or attempted ‘rectification’ having any bearing on our discussion. The second

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insufficient warrant. O’Neill has (unnecessarily) gone along with their contention as to the provenance of the earliest Tarots—and, indeed, it makes no real difference to the viability of his interpretation in contradistinction from theirs.

<sup>7</sup> Many possible indications of the existence of playing-cards in France, Italy and even Germany throughout the fourteenth century have been adduced, but in each case the documentation has been

proviso is nearly as requisite to avoid a host of pitfalls and stumbling-blocks for the beginner in this study. The student will be well advised to forego the assistance of most books on the subject of Tarot until he/she has gained enough familiarity with the underlying system to allow them to deal critically with what others may assert. Until now, the only publications evincing real authority as to the true meaning of the Tarot since Antoine Court de Gébelin's 'discovery' of the *Livre de Thot* in 1775 have been those of the influential nineteenth-century occult theorist, Alphonse Louis Constant, best known by his qabbalistic *nom de plume*, Éliphas Lévi.<sup>8</sup> Others who were in a position to speak (such as H. P. Blavatsky) dared not,<sup>9</sup> whereas those who were *not*—and their name is legion—have braved volumes. Certain French authors (such as Gérard Encausse, known as Papus) who have not departed too much from what Lévi taught may be read without grave disadvantage, but there is hardly a single writer in English—with the qualified exception of O'Neill—whose constructions on the Tarot are not best honoured in the breach.<sup>10</sup> That is because, as things have turned out, virtually all British and American investigators in this field have opted for one of two equally fruitless extremes, each deserving of the other: either the all-denying, imaginal-retentive academicalism of the dogmatic skeptics—truly, opportunistic bottomfeeders of the occult tradition they deride—or else the flip-side of the same cheap token, the shallow-water magicmongering gullibles who have swallowed the line of a forged “cipher manuscript” propagated by that Victorian frat-boys' club styling itself the “Golden Dawn”. I am sorry to have to appear so utterly dismissive,

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called into question by experts (see, for example, Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of Tarot*, vol. I (1978), pp. 24–5.

<sup>8</sup> Lévi's observations on the subject are scattered throughout his works, but may be gleaned, especially, from his *Transcendental Magic* (Eng. trans., London, 1896), the structure of which is based on the Tarot sequence. Court de Gébelin published his pioneering findings on the Tarot in vol. 8 of his monumental *Le Monde primitif* (Paris, 1781), pp. 365–410, with illustrations of the cards. (This passage includes the monograph ascribed to the Comte de Mellet, who may or may not have been the real 'discoverer').

<sup>9</sup> Blavatsky wrote briefly on the Tarot—which she referred to as the Taro, or Rota (Wheel) of Enoch—in Section 9 of the addenda to *The Secret Doctrine*, which were published posthumously in Vol. 5 of the Adyar, 1971 edition (pp. 109–12).

<sup>10</sup> This includes Westcott, Mathers, Waite, Cowley, and all of their latter-day minions. With a doctorate in biological science, O'Neill has not really been trained for professional research in Classical studies, and his amateurism is painfully apparent in many places (for example, he regularly uses “Dionysius” to mean Dionysus, “Trismagistus” for Trismegistus, and “Eleusian” for Eleusinian). Notwithstanding that, the very persistence of his myopic gropings seems—not unlike the “Peter” in the Solar-card imagery treated below—to have brought him closer to uncovering the secret doctrine than any other independent investigator known to me.

but it really is necessary to insist on the stone that the builders have rejected if we would base ourselves upon a sure foundation.

It has been said that of the principal branches of traditional western occultism—magic and alchemy, astrology and numerology, Qabbalah and Tarot only the latter was not fully developed by the earliest phases of the Renaissance. That view is fundamentally flawed, however, due to the vain distraction of the phenomenal proliferation of cartomancy in the last century, along with the inherent difficulty of recognizing genuine Tarot doctrine even when it is encountered in early sources. In a later study I will show how the existence of an Ur-Tarot is proven in certain well-known works of Hellenistic philosophy, but as that demonstration will involve the disclosure of the secret order of the cards, we must content ourselves at this stage with preliminary hypotheses and allusions suggested by outward images. The reader who wishes to follow what is indicated here will have to remain open-minded and flexible for the time being. Suffice it to say, then, that there is evidence (which will be adduced later) that the esoteric Tarot system was known to the great Italian humanist, Francesco Petrarca (1304–74)<sup>11</sup>—so that it must be dated, at least, to as early as the first half of the fourteenth century. Moreover, it will become clear that the inventors of the Tarot were in communication, or communion, with elements deriving from the Muslim Near East—that, indeed, they were *initiated* thereby, as the Islam-based community, in its turn, had been instructed by the seventh-century Hellenic devotees of Sophia. The whole cycle of this esoteric history is emblazoned in the triumphal sequence of the Tarot, each card corresponding to one century since the dawn of the Common Era. To touch upon just a few salient points which concern us here: Atout IV stands for the fourth century, when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion of the Roman empire; Atout V represents Pope Leo the Great who, in the fifth century, established the primacy of the Catholic papacy in the west; while Atout VI has for one of its several meanings that of ‘The Choice’, and in our present context it signifies the historic stand-off between the titanic Byzantine and Persian powers in the sixth century. But to *whose* choice is the reference? Atout VII depicts the triumph of Islam as the victorious Hāshimite Khalīfah in the guise of the Christic

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<sup>11</sup> The justification for making public this partial exposition of the esoteric system of the Tarot lies in the fact that certain ‘half-truths’ have lately gained some currency—for example, the theory that the cards were designed as a parody of the Medieval triumphal parades celebrating the Roman Carnival, such as form the subject of Petrarch’s *Trionfi*. But far from being copied after the Triumphs, the Tarot is actually the *source* of inspiration of the celebrated suite of poems, as we will see in due course.

priest-king, Aaron, with his golden diadem, ephod, and urim and thummim, ‘mounted on his throne on the seventh day’, with all the equilibrated energy of the two imperial engines, eastern and western, harnessed under his yoke.

The hypothesis that the original (or, rather, the immediately-precedent) inventors of the Ur-Tarot were the Fāṭimids, ‘Sevener’ Shīʿites, is consonant with the fact that the second septenary of the sequence does not ostensibly correlate with external, political–historical persons and events. Instead, the series of four cardinal virtues—Justice, Wisdom, Temperance, Strength—succeeded by a mysterious triad of *inverted* values, is suggestive of the more ‘otherworldly’ offices of the Hidden Imāms. Still, it is a safe guess that the Death-card, numbered XIII, commemorates Hülagü’s annihilation of Baghdad in 1258—but also, more specifically, the effective extirpation of the *Nizārī* Ismāʿīlīs from Persia by the Mongols and from Syria by the Mamlūks in the thirteenth century. But, then, whose spagyric ‘transmutation’, or psychic transmigration following the body’s putrefaction, is symbolized by Atout XIV? In other words, who was born at the end, the sabbath, of the second septcentennium to bring the light of Gnosis, the sacred Fire, from the ancient Near East to the juvenile-delinquent tribes of the European north—the Normans, Germans and Slavs? His name survives only as a most blatantly poetic metaphor—a symbol, more of the nature of a myth or fairy-tale than a legend—the better to forstall any futile tendency toward the carnalization of personality and the crystallization of idolatry. The mystic name to which I refer is CHRISTIAN ROSENKREUTZ, the eponymous father of the brotherhood of the Rosy Cross, or Rosicrucians. According to the published legend,<sup>12</sup> Frater C . . . R . . . C . . . was born in Germany in 1378; at the age of sixteen he travelled to Damascus, whence he was conveyed by Arabs to a secret place called “Damcar”, where he was greeted by wisemen (*ḥukamāʾ*) who already knew his name and had been waiting for him. He sojourned there for three years, receiving instruction in arcane sciences, as well as Arabic language (from which he translated the book, *M*), before passing on to Cairo and Fez, where he continued his education in occultism—especially, evocation of the *Jinn* (whom the Paracelsans call Elementals)—then on

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<sup>12</sup> See the *Fama fraternitatis* (1614), translated by A. E. Waite in *The Real History of the Rosicrucians* (London, 1887), chap. 3, pp. 64–84. The version included in *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, by F. A. Yates (London, 1972), pp. 238–51, unaccountably fails to cite the name, “Damcar” (as distinguished from Damascus). In chap. 9 of *ibid.* (pp. 125–9), Yates shows (what many earlier “cranks” had already known) that Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* is reminiscent of the *Fama* legend.

through Spain to his homeland. There, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, he founded the movable, winged College, the Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, to serve as the veritable Ka'bah of the new society, which consisted, at first, of four members, then later of eight, who were replaceable, like the *abdāl*.

The third septenary of the Tarot, then, relates to what we term the modern age, the time of the dominance of the northern peoples of Europe and America, whose rise to hegemony has been concomitant with the evolution of a cold, results-oriented realpolitik of humanist-secularism, capitalism, militarism and scientism, working toward the centralization of national power and its outward projection through technology. This dynamic, amoral spirit was personified in the Machiavellian prince, Roderigo Borgia, who achieved unregenerate man's ultimate ambition by being elected the last pope of the fifteenth century. Thus, Atout XV portrays him as the 'abomination set up in the Temple', the 'Dweller on the Threshold'—which is the Antichrist and the Nietzschean Superman, who must come first before the end may ensue. Atout XVI, The Lightning-struck Tower (*burj*), foreshadows the *Protestatio* of the Diet of Speyer (1529), when the northern princes called down upon the head of the church the fire of reformation ("for everyone will be salted with fire"). The Star (XVII) was interpreted to prefigure the sighting of some *stellae novae* which suddenly appeared in Serpentarius and Cygnus in 1604, and the author of the *Confessio fraternitatis* was not the only learned man in seventeenth-century Europe to see in this sign of hope the astral harbingers of a time "when the World shall have slept away through the Night the intoxication of her poisoned and stupefying chalice, and with open heart, bare head and naked feet shall merrily and joyfully go forth to meet the Sun rising in the morning."<sup>13</sup> Now, the drunken night of the soul pictured in Atout XVIII aptly suggests the bloody *dénouement* of the age of 'rational enlightenment', but in what sense can we understand The Sun to represent the *nineteenth century*—a time of blindest materialism and mechanization of consciousness, with the degradation of Descartes' vedāntic *Cogito* to the level of a super-ape's will to survive? That brings us to the specific objective of this article: an analysis and exposition of the traditional imagery of Atout XIX, entitled *Le Soleil*, by way of an

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<sup>13</sup> *The Real History of the Rosicrucians*, p. 93. Cf. *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 256–7 (and p. 48, n. 1, where the interest of Johannes Kepler and John Donne in the new stars is noted). Of course, the real import of the prophecy of The Star was the publication of the *Fama* and *Confessio*, not to mention Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *Novum Organon* (1620).



opportune example of how Tarot pictograms are to be read, but also with a view to offering, at least, some slight traces of the Near Eastern, Islamic provenance of the symbolism. The standard tableau for that card from the Marseilles deck is as shown below:



Pictured are two young boys—brothers, even twins—dressed only in loincloths, standing side by side before a stone wall, beyond which is a resplendent solar orb with smiling human face. The boy on the left, whose name is Simon Peter (Shimʿūn Ḥajar), is blind and holds out his hands to feel his way, while the one on the right, named John (Yuḥannā, Yaḥyá), compassionately guides his brother's steps, touching him on the shoulder. The immediate background for this distinctive imagery is the last chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, where the risen Christ Jesus is allegorically described as manifesting himself to some disciples by the Sea of

Tiberius. These latter, led by Simon Peter, had been fishing all night but caught nothing. As dawn was breaking the Lord Jesus appeared on the beach, but the disciples did not recognize him on account of their uninitiate state of spiritual nescience. When the Master commanded them from the shore to cast their net on the right side of the boat, “the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast” at the last supper—that is, John—recognized his voice, so that his eyes were opened and he advised Peter that it was the Lord who spoke. Hearing this and believing, Peter girded himself—for he was naked, stripped for work in the torrid summer heat—and he dove into the sea and swam ashore toward the voice. Gaining land, the disciples breakfasted on the fish they had caught over a charcoal fire, after which Jesus questioned Peter: “Simon bar Jonah (son of John / the dove), do you love me more than these do?” “Yes, Lord,” he answered, “you know that I love you.” But the Lord demanded of Peter the same question two more times (the three queries correspond to his three denials of Christ during the night of trial, before the cock crowed), indicating that the disciple had actually failed the initial two examinations of his knowledge—for the first question tested his consciousness of the universality of the Divine Self (*Ātman*) achieved in *samādhi*, while the second tried his ability to comprehend the intuitive-transcendent gnosis of *Buddhi* (angelic intellect) by means of *dhyāna*. But Simon Peter’s zealous love of Christ proved to be of the nature of *Manas*, the more ego-conscious rati-ocination of *homo sapiens* (“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for *the way you think is not God’s way but man’s*”), and the appropriate form of his ministry to the flock of the Good Shepherd was deemed to be his assuming the day-to-day economy of the church, to which the Master alludes in these oddly graphic terms:

Verily, verily, I say to you, when you were young you girded yourself and walked where you would. But when you are old *you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not will to go* (John 21: 18).

When Peter then asked the Lord Jesus about John, he was answered: “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” Thus, while the office of the papacy is to be occupied by successive mortal incarnations (this is the meaning of Peter’s being ‘girded’ and ‘carried’ by another, who would oversee the metempsychotic process), St. John, who is the Hidden Imām, remains to this day in

the same body that walked with the Son of Man in Galilee. Through the magisterium he inspires the popes. In following his secret lead they follow the Father infallibly (see *Matt.* 16: 17).

The two figures are shown as twins because they belong together and are complementary in activity, although their natures are opposite and conflicting, as night and day, heat and cold, fixed and volatile, cube and sphere, etc.<sup>14</sup> Éliphas Lévi assimilates them to faith and reason in human consciousness and eloquently argues for their skilful separation and combination so that, like Jakin and Boaz, the black and white, right- and left-hand pillars in the porch of Solomon's temple, together they might support the keystone of the arch that stands for the source and ideal foundation of the structure. The same author also observes that the ancients adored the Sun in the form of a black stone, called Elagabalus—from Helio-gabalus (*shams al-jabal*), which signifies the same as 'Mountain of God' (*jabal Allāh*) but connotes, also, the *Qiblat Allāh*, which is the centre of the earth. (As the Ka'bah is the hub of the wheel of the Islamic world, so do 'all roads lead to Rome', the seat of St. Peter, the cubic base and Black Stone of the Catholic hierarchy).<sup>15</sup> But that the perfect Son of Man is the true *Qiblah* and only Way to God was the moral of the demonstration vouchsafed to Peter, John and James (*Ya'qūb*), the 'pillars' of the church, when the Lord Jesus was transfigured before their eyes in glory, with Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor (see *Matt.* 17: 1sq.), "and his face shone like the sun." Betraying his characteristically obtuse impetuosity, Peter proposed to set up three tabernacles in honor of Jesus, Moses and Elijah, but even as he spoke a cloud overshadowed them, causing terror,

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<sup>14</sup> Originally, it was perhaps our Peter and John who were the *Boanērges*, 'sons of thunder = lightning' (*Benū bārāq*), the dual positive and negative charges producing all electrical phenomena in nature; while James, the brother of the Lord, was the 'twin, or counterpart', of Jesus, making up the fourth cardinal point of the compass. (Compare this to the quaternary formed by Ibn 'Arabī and Badr al-Ḥabashī, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawī and Abū 'Abd Allāh b. al-Murābiṭ in Tunis: "We were the Four Pillars, upon which the body (*shakhṣ*) of the World and Man are based".)

<sup>15</sup> In an interesting myth of the Yazīdī sect recorded by N. Siouffī ("Notices sur la secte des Yezīdīs", *Journal Asiatique*, 7<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 20 [1882], pp. 353–4), God is said to have created the angel Gabriel in the form of a bird and placed him on the world-tree next to Himself. When He asked him, "Who am I and who art thou?" the angel replied as truthfully as he could, "Thou art Thou and I am I." At that, however, God banished him, causing him to fly off over the waters of creation for ages. But in due course, like the dove of Noah, he returned to his starting-point, and he must have then given a more philosophically correct answer to the same question after studying the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī, since he was permitted to stay on the world-tree with God thereafter. Similarly, when Jesus asked Simon bar Jonah who he thought him to be, he replied, "Thou art the Christ of God," for which answer he was made the foundation-rock of the church. But had he answered, like John, "Thou art Myself," he would have been his beloved forever. Thus, Peter, the black stone, is like the raven who flew away from his Master, whereas John is the white dove who found no place to rest until he returned home.

and a voice from the obscurity was heard to affirm: “This is My Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!” The disciples fell on their faces as though dead, but the Lord came and touched them; and lifting their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.<sup>16</sup> Concerning the ‘laughing Sun’ portrayed so prominently at the head of Atout XIX, it should be noted that this commonplace trope in Semitic mythology does not always augur well, as may be appreciated in the image of the Hebrew Mountain-Deity, *Yahuwah* (YHWh), in *Psalms II* (verse 4), which clearly presents the wrathful aspect of the solar energy, laughing *in derision* at the nations which wildly rage against the rule of His Anointed.<sup>17</sup> The humane gesture of the gentle Jesus, then, may be represented more in the figure of his beloved disciple, John, than in the gloriously aloof Helios overhead.

Both Moses and Elijah are solar hero-exemplars, but when placed together heraldically, as here, they represent the antithetical natures, the ambivalency of the Sun—blinding and enlightening, warming and incinerating, laughing delightfully or else menacingly. Elijah’s trial by fire on Mount Carmel (the vineyard of God) was a contest with the priests of another, Canaanite Sun-god, Ba’al (> Apollo). In preparation for it, the prophet repaired the ruined altar of Yahuwah on the mountain by assembling twelve stones (the number of stones on the top layer of the wall in our illustration), representing the sons of Jacob—who was granted the honorific, *Israel* (strong against God), by virtue of his tenacity in the spiritual struggle throughout the Dark Night of the Soul (see *1 Kings* 18: 30–1). Incapable of seeing in the gloom, Jacob could not tell with whom he was grappling, but he obstinately refused to let his adversary go and, as daylight gathered, was finally able to behold his face. Hence, he called the place *Peniel* (face of God) since, as it seemed to him, he had seen the Face of God and lived—for which blessing he paid by receiving a low blow, causing him, Oedipus-like, to *limp* thenceforward (see *Gen.* 32: 24–31). Now, it is worth noting that Elijah chided the Ba’alites among the children of Israel precisely for their ritual dance—a kind of hobbling (*‘aqal*), or limping on one leg, then the other (see *1 Kings* 18: 21 and 26)—although it was not so much the hobbling that he deplored as their duplicitous equivocation in standing first on one leg, then the other, making no

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<sup>16</sup> The disciples themselves associated the appearance of the resurrected Lord to the fishermen at Tiberias and his transfiguration on Mount Tabor (see *2 Peter* 1: 13–18; and cf. *Matt.* 17: 9).

<sup>17</sup> See I. Goldziher, *Mythology Among the Hebrews and Its Historical Development* (London, 1877), pp. 92–6. The seventh verse of the second *Psalms* also ties it to the glorification of Jesus as anointed Messiah.

commitment to either Ba'al or Yahuwah, as it were. In reality, of course, it was not the Face of God that Jacob beheld, but that of his initiator—none other than Isaac ('one who laughs' = the sun), the son of Abram ('father on high' = the starless sky). For as the Master taught in the so-called *Gospel of Philip*: "When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. But when the Light comes, the one with sight will see the Light, while the one who is blind will remain in darkness."<sup>18</sup> Because Isaac was willing to submit himself in sacrifice to the extinction of eclipse he has been granted the everlasting Light, and in the effulgence of his joy therein his face shone so brightly that even the purblind was able to perceive it, by reflection—"as in a glass, darkly". By its own ecstatic consciousness, Buddhi, which is the *ānandamayakosha* (the vehicle, or veil, of bliss) of Sanskrit psychology, communicates a modus of intellectual vision to its beneficiary, Manas, the *vijñānamayakosha* (veil of intellect), as the sun conveys its light to the moon.

The following double blessing that crafty Israel finagled out of his aged father, Isaac, alludes to a final element of symbolism we must account for in our trump card:

May God grant thee the dew of Heaven and the fatness of the Earth (*Gen.*  
27: 28).

In the illustration given above, twelve drops of celestial 'dew' (Lat., *ros*) precipitate from the daylight sky (whereas in Atout XVIII the 'terrestrial dew', a perspiration from the fat of the land, evaporates, gravitating toward the moon). This solar dew, according to at least one abstruse alchemical interpretation, is the coagulation of Light—its corporealization, so to speak. The Arabic verb, *nadā*, means 'to be moist with dew (*nad<sup>ān</sup>*)', but its primary denotation is 'to assemble, convene, gather together', and its most common connotation, 'to call together, convoke; invite to come.' *Al-nidā'* (the call) is synonymous with the Ismā'īlite *da'wah*, and *munād*<sup>in</sup> (summoner, propagandist) with *dā'*<sup>in</sup>. In this sense the dew-drop is the product, or effect, of the call to come together. The other Arabic term for dew, *ṭall*, is cognate with a verb meaning 'to emerge, come into view, appear', and the oft-employed poetic expression, *aṭlāl*, indicating the 'traces, or vestiges (of a former encampment of the beloved)'. Thus, dew symbolizes the delicate, faint appearance of that which is

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<sup>18</sup> See B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York, 1987), p. 339, no. 48. The reference is actually to Mary Magdalene, of whom much was forgiven because she loved so much.

transcendent, supersensual, noumenal, Numinous. Whatever the relevance of these considerations from a ‘classical’ alchemical perspective, it would appear that just such a recondite notion of dew, or *ros*, was entertained by the much-maligned (= Malāmite) magician-mathematician and crypto-Rosicrucian, John Dee (d. 1608), who, in his *Monas hieroglyphica*, not only blazoned the above-quoted verse from Isaac’s blessing on the title-page of the book, but also had engraved thereon two cosmic pillars, representing the Sun and the Moon, each with ‘dew’ falling from them and collected in bowls at the base of the pillars. As regards the peculiar Hermetic diagram featured in the midst of the *Monas*’ temple design, C. H. Josten has pointed out some of its many echoes in later occult literature—most notably, in *The Chemical Nuptials of Christian Rosencreutz*.<sup>19</sup> Our concern here is merely with the symbology of Atout XIX, which does, however, seem to be quite consonant with these notions.

What is this subtle *Nidā*’, or Call, which is bodied forth in the drop of dew, and *where* is the earthly height on which it is culled, or collects, and *when* does all of this come to pass? At the midnight hour in the darkest night of one’s life the chosen Elect is transported to the centre of the world which is the mystical, magical Mountain of the philosophers called Carmel, Tabor, Horeb, Hermon, Moriah, Meru—and any number of other appellations, all ultimately naming the same. He or she will be escorted there by a Guide who meets them in the way, although, notwithstanding that, the ascent can be only by one’s own labor and efforts. The formation of the dewdrop, quite simply, represents the process by which human hearts become consciously aware of the Divine Light within and are, thereby and thus, existentially transmuted from mere flesh to the “living and philosophical stones” of the Mystical Body of Christ. The way in which this Mystery transpires has been allegorized many times, but hardly more suggestively than in a charming opusculum entitled *Lumen de lumine*, or *A New Magical Light Discovered and Communicated to the World*, by Eugenius Philalethes (d. 1665)—otherwise, Thomas Vaughan, twin brother of the Silurist lyric poet, Henry Vaughan.<sup>20</sup> The frontispiece of that work features an engraving which I recommend to the reader (indeed, the entire book would well repay perusal). Therein

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<sup>19</sup> See Josten’s translation and discussion of the *Monas hieroglyphica* in *Ambix*, 12 (1964), pp. 84–221 (see, especially, pp. 98 and 112, and plate 2). Cf., also, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (pp. 45–7, 37–40, plate 10a), where it is noted that the *Monas* diagram may also be found in the third engraving of Heinrich Khunrath’s celebrated *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* (1609).

<sup>20</sup> Edited and introduced by A. E. Waite (London, 1910). The *Lumen de lumine* appeared in 1651, a year before Vaughan’s publication of an English translation of the *Fama* and *Confessio*.

an invisible Mountain of the Magi is depicted towering between the emblematic Sun and Moon. The summit of the height is laden with the fruit of God's vineyard (*karm Allāh*)<sup>21</sup>—which is the same as the rosy flower (*nāḍir*) and purest gold (*nuḍār*) of Nazareth, but it is equally the sacred Soma/Lunaria of the ancient Hindus. The approach thereto is hedged off by a dangerous region of monsters spawned by deranged imaginations which fatally waylay the unwary. At the foot of the Mountain in a charmed circle is an altar with a perpetual flame called the light of Nature. Underneath this is a cache of treasure guarded by an enchanted green dragon, the alchemist's volatile Mercury, whose coils enclose a child, discalced, seated on a hoard of priceless pearls below the words, *Non nisi parvulis* (except to one of these little ones)—indicating how they must be qualified who would aspire to enter such an inviolable sanctum (cf. *Mark* 10: 15). For the disciples asked the Lord Jesus when will he be manifested to them in his true glory, to which he responded, according to St. Thomas the Twin:

When you strip naked without being ashamed, and take your garments and put them under your feet like little children and tread upon them, then you will see the Child of the Living One, and you will not be afraid.<sup>22</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Gospel of Thomas* Jesus describes his disciples as children living in a field that is not theirs. When the owners of the field come and demand it of them, “they take off their clothes in front of them *in order to give it back to them*, and they return the field to them.”<sup>23</sup> Not only does this interesting parable explain the esoteric meaning of the two boys' near nakedness in our tableau, but it unexpectedly accounts for the bizarre gymnosophism of *Mark* 14: 51, which must ever embarrass the exoterists. The imagery of Atout XIX also presents an admirable illustration of the last chapter of the Jewish scriptures, from the book of *Malāk-ī* (My angel/messenger):

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<sup>21</sup> The eremitical Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (boasting the affiliation of Sts. Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Lisieux) was founded in Palestine in the twelfth century, around the time of the birth of Ibn 'Arabī, and was transported to Europe at about the time of his death. The Carmelites claimed Elijah as their local patron, but Mount Carmel was sacred to the Essenes and Pythagoreans, as well.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *The Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 387, no. 37; and the *Gospel of Thomas*, translated by M. Meyer (San Francisco, 1992), p. 39. See, also, *ibid.*, p. 84, for the following saying of Jesus quoted in a Manichaean psalmbook: “The vain garment of this flesh I have stripped off, and I am saved and purified; I have caused the clean feet of my soul to trample upon it confidently; with the Gods that are clothed with Christ have I stood in line.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33, no. 21 (cf. *The Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 384).

“Behold, the Day comes, burning like an athanor [*al-tannūr*], when all the arrogant and the evildoers will be stubble. ‘The day that is coming shall burn them up’, says Yahuwah Šabaōt, ‘leaving them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My Name, the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS [*shams al-šidq*] will shine forth with healing in its wings [*sci.*, rays]. You shall go out leaping like calves to pasture [children running and playing naked in the sunlight], and you shall tread upon the wicked [sinful garments of former incarnations], who will be ashes under your feet [earth/flesh of the ‘field’ owned by the angelic steward, *al-Mālik*] on the Day when I act’, says Yahuwah Šabaōt” (*Malachi* 4: 1–3). In other words, the Sun of pure Truth, the apostolic Light of absolute transcendence, is the Living One, Yahuwah Šabaōt, who presides over the other, lesser Lights that comprise the Elohim, the seven archontic Aeons, or Ages. As these are, in a sense, the emanations of the effulgent Light ‘poured out’ (*šabīb*) from the Sun, each the overflow, or ‘remnant’ (*šubābah*), of the reservoir preceding, they are symbolized as ‘youths’ (*šibyān*) of graduated ages—two such ‘boys’ (*šabīyān*) being pictured in Atout XIX. They personify the Fifth and Sixth Ages of human evolution, as I hope to show in a later study, God willing. For now, let us note that after the verses from *Malachi* just quoted the prophet goes on to mention Moses (embodying the traditional, written law of the Elohist) and Elijah (representing the extra-curricular, esoteric teachings of the reforming Yahuwists), who will “turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the virtuous” (*Luke* 1: 17). It is this crucial ‘turning’ function of the super-prophetic Guide (*al-hādī*), represented by the Seer, the right-hand child/father in our illustration, which must be understood before we may appreciate the significance of the illustrious Sixth Age heralded in the *Confessio*.

Returning to the engraved frontispiece of the *Lumen de lumine*, standing to the left of the mountain and altar is a young man, no doubt portraying Eugenius Philalethes himself, fully dressed with a blindfold over his eyes. As such, he typifies the postulant for initiation, who was always referred to as “Peter” (implying his ignorance) in Cathari rituals. His hands are reaching outward, trying to feel his way,<sup>24</sup> but he is about to step out of the safe sphere of light (which he cannot see). Poised on

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<sup>24</sup> Standing on the Areopagus, St. Paul lectured the Athenians: “... and (God) made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope *that they might feel after Him* and find Him. Yet He is not far from each one of us, for ‘in Him we live and move and have our being’, as even some of your poets have said” (*Acts* 17: 26–8).



the right side of the altar is an Angel, or winged Genius, with one foot in the dark region and the other in the light, brandishing a sword of fire in her right hand and holding out a ball of Ariadne's thread in her left. With the sword she wards off the evil phantasms of the sphere of outer darkness, and with the clue of thread is prepared to lead the sightless Peter-Eugenius through the labyrinth of Nature to the metaphysical Mountain. In the book itself, this angelic Guide is represented under two distinct guises—one called the *Prester*, or "Priest that governeth the works of Fire," the other a graceful maiden named after the muse of pastoral poetry, Thalia. Note that, similarly, Dante had two different escorts—Vergil and Beatrice—but in the present case it is the *female* guide, Thalia-Ariadne, the spirit of Nature, who meets the hero first and conducts him safely through the underworld. That it is Vaughan himself who is the blinded aspirant of the *Lumen* frontispiece becomes clear in the opening pages of the book as the author paints a haunting word-picture of the total darkness and silence into which he had entered, which was gradually relieved, first, by the whisper of a soft wind laden with the perfume of flowers, then by a pleasant *humming of bees*—which disconcerted him, for he had thought that it was midnight. Following this realization, a faint purple haze that reminded him of the mythic *Sol mortuorum*, the sunlight of the Elysian fields, began to spread before his eyes. Suddenly, in the midst of the misty glow a twinkling silver star appeared like a flower of flame which, as it blossomed, its rays illuminated the thick, verdant foliage of the grove in which our Peter now found himself, as though in a veridical temple of Nature. All around him the brightening starlight met with droplets of dew, creating a myriad of glittering refractions, as though the earth were paved with diamonds. Such "rare and various accidents" distracted the author's soul until he noticed that, indeed, he was not alone, for a most beautiful young woman stood before him, attired in diaphanous silks of a hue "so green that I never saw the like, for the colour was not earthly," ... but "her whole habit was youthful and flowery; it smelt like the East and was thoroughly aired with rich Arabian diaspasms;" and "her very walk was *green*, being furred with a fine, light grass that felt like plush, for it was soft and pearled all the way with daisies and primroses."<sup>25</sup>

Silently signalling him to follow, the verdoy virgin led Eugenius out of the canopied grove so that the sky became visible directly overhead, but he was amazed

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<sup>25</sup> *Lumen de lumine*, pp. 4–5. Muslim tradition attributes the same greening effect to the footsteps of al-Khaḍir, or Khidr (on whom, see below).

to notice that *they actually seemed to be at the very centre of the world-sphere*, with the earth towering high above them all around like a surrounding mountain-chain, as though it were the egress of a long, mineral tunnel. His enchanting Cicerone was decidedly averse to discourse, but our author resolutely inquired as to her name—which she confided as being merely one of her favorites, *Thalia* [from Gr., *thallein*, ‘to bloom’], “for I am always green [= *al-khadrā*’] and I shall never wither”<sup>26</sup>—although she cares little for such labels, being the ever-aromatic Rose by any other name. She informed him that the rocky highlands around them were the fabled Mountains of the Moon (= *Qāf*), also called the mountains of India by Arab alchemists,<sup>27</sup> and that the magical, spermatic–viscous liquid falling soundlessly from their peaks and pouring over the glistening turrets of saltish rocks was none other than the invisible Nile River which fructifies the whole earth. At this juncture in our mystic itinerary the narrative becomes impossible to follow sensibly, as the fair maiden and her charge plunge into the labyrinth of empirical phenomena under the altar of rational idealism (symbolized as a hedgehog’s maze of passageways beneath the wall, or hedge, of Atout XIX). There Eugenius is granted the Key and Seal of Magia (corresponding to the sword and thread of his Lady) by which all things may be bound or loosed in accordance with man’s will, and he was brought to the presence of a secret, living Light in which “I saw those things that I must not speak of” (p. 13). This unmentionable subterranean brilliance is symbolically iconographed in Éliphas Lévi’s notorious depiction of that abomination of the Knights Templar, *Baphomet* (= Sophia Lucifuge), the dreaded Dweller of the Threshold<sup>28</sup>—which, readers of this

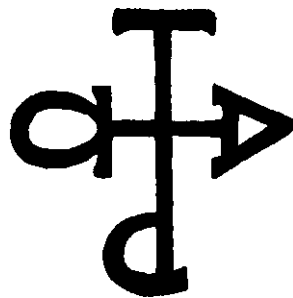
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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6. The Arabs call the sky *al-khadrā*’ (smaragdine, emerald-colour), which hue, they say, is reflected (or tinged) from the mountains of Qāf at the ends of the earth. This colour, of course, as well as Thalia’s taciturnity, evince an archetypal correspondence with the mysterious guide of Moses in the *Sūrat al-Kahf* (which we will consider in a moment).

<sup>27</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 21. Vaughan’s many calques of Arabic terms are, naturally, very obscure for the most part, although hints of the original meanings are frequently detectable. For example, “Halicali” (< *al-qālī*, ‘sal alkali’) Vaughan takes to signify ‘the *summum bonum*’—possibly from *al-lā* (highest) and Gr., *kalos* (good)—by which he intends “the catholic receptacle of spirits, blessed and impregnated with light from above,” otherwise, “a sealed house [*bayt makhtūm*], full of light and Divinity” (p. 33). Exoterically, all of this is figured in the Ka’bah, the cubic domus of Salt; but esoterically the ‘summit of good’ refers to the ‘peak, or crown’ (*al-qulā*) of the mystic mountain, *signifying the human head*: The *sahasrāra chakra* at the crown of the cranium is the point at which the Divine pentecostal Fire enters / exits the body. Receptivity to this is symbolized by the clerical tonsure. Hence, Peter is traditionally represented as bald (Lat., *calvus*) on the pate. *Calvaria* derives from the Hebrew, *gulgo Teth*, Graecized as *golgotha* (s-kull). Arabic *qalqala* means ‘to shake, convulse’, and *qalaq* is the ‘agitation’ of the mountain of Revelation, shaken by Divine fire, as the verb, *qalā*, means ‘to bake, roast = calcine’: to reduce to calx, or potash, as lime, soda, etc.

<sup>28</sup> See his *Transcendental Magic*, p. 186. “Baphomet” is a cypher for *Sophia* (wisdom) by the method of qabbalistic permutation known as *athbash* (BFUMT = SUFIA).

journal may be interested to know, is the very ‘icon’ memorialized in the ancient place-name, Qūnyah (< Ikonium). Thus, Vaughan quotes the great Paracelsus (d.1541): “He that enters the centre shall know why all influx of Fire descends against the nature of fire and comes from heaven downwards [cf. *Isa.* 14:12 and *Luke* 10: 18]; he shall know, also, why the same Fire, having found a body, ascends again towards heaven and grows upward [cf. *John* 3: 13–4 and 1: 51].”<sup>29</sup> For the serpent raised up on this rotar-cross gives light and healing:



but the same descending on the other side is death-dealing. More cannot be said on the matter for the simple reason that none would rightly believe it, nor can it be understood until such time as you may see for yourself. But that time will surely come, as is intimated in an anonymous epistle from a Brother of R . . . C . . . quoted, also, in the *Lumen*:

To this Mountain you shall go in a certain night—when it comes—most long and most dark, and see that you prepare yourself by prayer. Insist upon the way that leads to the Mountain, *but ask not of any man where the way lies: only follow your Guide* who will offer himself to you, and will meet you in the way; but you shall not know him. This Guide will bring you to the Mountain at midnight, when all things are silent and dark ... (p. 26).

The unknown Rosicrucian goes on to give a metaphorical description of the three trials that the postulant must undergo on this elevated ground, based on the account of Elijah’s ascent of Mount Horeb / Sinai in the first book of *Kings* (19: 8–14)—examinations by sound, word and idea. The prophet Moses, representing the Fifth

<sup>29</sup> *Lumen de lumine*, p. 75. Vaughan goes on to elaborate: “I say the grand, supreme mystery of Magic is to multiply the Prester (see below) and place him in the moist, serene aether, which God hath purposely created to qualify the Fire. For I would have thee know that this Spirit may be so chafed—and that in the most temperate bodies—as to undo thee upon a sudden ... Place him, then as God hath placed the stars, in the condensed aether of His chaos, for there he will shine—not burn” (*Lumen*, pp. 75–6).

Age, had previously undergone these tests (see *Exo.* 19: 16–20 and 33: 18–23), but the grade of his initiation was less exalted. As it had seemed to him, the vehement wind that crushed the rocks was the Divine herald’s trumpet-blast, while the thunderous earthquake that levelled the heights was God’s own voice, and the lightning-bolt from heaven that burned away all dross was His very presence;<sup>30</sup> but the saintly Elijah (as the Bible indicates) more clearly comprehended that God was *not present essentially* in those terrific actions. Although the blast of wind had shattered the mountain wall, the earthquake had unearthed the treasure-casket buried beneath it, and fire had purified the treasure of every earthly impediment to the discovery of its nature, yet the Secret could not be recognized until Elijah, prompted by the “still small voice” of the Holy Spirit, emerged from the Cave to the glorious resplendence of the new-dawning Daystar. Only then, in that free, open sunlight, is the Treasure truly revealed. And “the chiefest thing in it and most perfect,” writes our Brother, “is a certain exalted Tincture [*ṣibghah*],<sup>31</sup> with which the world—if it served God and were worthy of such gifts—might be tinged and turned into most pure gold” (p. 27). Now, this Tincture, or ‘transmuting Stone of the philosophers’, is itself personified in Elijah as the esoteric Hierophant who, by casting his mantle over Elisha (Alīsha’), transforms him, too, into a Seer like himself (see *1 Kings* 19: 19–21). Similarly, St. John the Baptist (*al-Ṣābiḡh*)—otherwise, the Sabian (*al-Ṣābi’*) ‘tinges’, or bleaches ‘white’ from sin, even as al-Khaḍīr, or Khiḍr, has the power to make ‘green’ (alive) or ‘gold’ (pure) by the mere touch of his footfall. All of these august personages symbolize the deathless, hidden Imām of the Sixth Age who, even now, faithfully pilots the World to its imminent apotheosis prefigured in the final Tarot trump (XXI).

Elsewhere in the *Lumen* (chap. 9), this same guiding Spirit is styled “the Prester of [the Oracles of] Zoroaster”—the Magister–Priest, or sacerdotal Artist of the works of the Astral Fire-world that animates and upholds the earth of our senses,

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<sup>30</sup> This is implicit, also, in the qur’ānic account of Moses’ vision of the Glory on the mountain in *Qur’ān* 7: 143 (where, however, the three trials are not distinguished): When God revealed Himself (*tajallā*) to the mountain, He demolished it, making it level ground (*dakk an*); and Moses fell down, unconscious (*ṣa’iqam*, ‘struck by lightning’). The prophet’s loss of consciousness is indicative of the imperfection of his gnosis, as is the bizarre statement (in *Exo.* 33: 23) that Moses saw only the ‘back’ of God—that is, his knowledge is *a posteriori*, so to speak, like that of the purveyors of *ex post facto* prophecy, the ‘ulamā’ (exoteric religionists); whereas the superior gnosis of the super-prophetic saint, or *walī* (friend of God), corresponds to the more *a priori* intuition of the bonafide lovers of Sophia, the Ṣūfis.

<sup>31</sup> When the Prophet Muḥammad emerged from the platonian cave of Ḥīrā’ he beheld on the horizon the awesome figure of the angel Gabriel, who proved to be the ‘tincture’ of his life, for that morning he went home an utterly changed man.

being the rarefied matter of natural souls from which fiery-pneumatic flowers sprout and blossom under the care of the Hieratic horticulturist. Eugenius exhausts his ingenuity with variant titles for this Astral Magisterium: it is the incandescent Breath of the *Terra Viventium* [*ard al-ahyā'*], the supersensual Orient and Divine-creative Wisdom, as well as the boundless Fountain of unconditioned Love and solely-pure Occult Light, which is the unsearchable Treasure of all treasures, impenetrable Intelligence and the inexpressible Countenance of Deity analogically emblemized in our Sun-card. It is the sacred Fire which so pervades the whole world that its spark may be found in splitting open a rock:

Suppose, then, we should dilapidate or discompose some artificial building, stone by stone; there is no question but we should come at last to the earth whereupon it is founded. It is just so in Magic: if we open any natural body and separate all the parts thereof, one from another, we shall come at last to the *Prester*, which is the Candle and Secret Light of God. We shall know the Hidden Intelligence and see that Inexpressible Face which gives the outward figure to the body. This is the syllogism we should look after, for he that hath once past the *Aquaster*<sup>32</sup> enters the Fire-world and sees what is both invisible and incredible to the common man. He shall discover to the eye the miraculous conspiracy that is between the Prester and the Sun; he shall know the secret Love of heaven and earth ... (pp. 73–4).

The mirific conspiracy between the Prester and the Sun alludes to the pure love that binds Christ Jesus and St. John. Indeed, it is the latter's teaching of the *Paraclete* (the counsellor), or Holy Spirit of the Real (*Rūḥ al-Ḥaqq*), which both underlies and exemplifies everything said in this chapter: "When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth, for He shall not speak from His particular perspective [that is, from the conditioned perspective of the rational vehicle through whom He speaks], but whatsoever He hears [from Me, the Divine Logos] He will speak; and He will show you the things that are to come" (*John* 16: 13). That the Beloved disciple is the successor–heir of the Son / Word of God is to be inferred from *John* 19: 26–7. In the

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<sup>32</sup> I can do no better than quote the learned editor of the *Lumen*: "The *Aquaster* [or *Aquastor*], according to Paracelsus, is a simulacrum which stands for a thing but it is not the thing itself; it is, therefore, a type or symbol, like the phenomenal world itself, and the sense of the text seems to be that those who in deep meditation can suspend the testimony of phenomena may enter into the higher truth and understand in the noumenal world the ultimate reason of that which here manifests by means of omens and signs" (ed. Waite, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–8).

sense of inheriting the motherhood of the Virgin Mary at Calvary did he receive the seamless Mantle of Christ and become the Paraclete of the church, rather as Alīsha‘ was invested by Ilyās and ‘Alī by Muḥammad.<sup>33</sup>

Why does Vaughan qualify his Johannite Fire-master as a ‘Prester’ (< Gr., *presbyteros*, ‘elder’ = *shaykh*), or *priest*? Is not the ecclesiastical clergy headed by the papacy, the seat of St. Peter (and Moses, also, was a priest of Midian, according to ancient tradition)? As we learn in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, the real biblical archetype of messianic Christhood is the seminal figure of Melchizedek (= *malak al-ṣidq*, ‘angel of righteousness’), who was both prince and priest of Salem (peace), a place near the Jordan River where John later baptized.<sup>34</sup> When King David conquered Jerusalem, he assimilated the perennial-priestly ‘order of Melchizedek’ to the royal house of his new capital to form the classic Messianic dynasty into which the Expected One as ‘son of David’ would be born. Solomon, the magnificent sun-king of Jewish culture and historical builder of the great temple, was, thus, a prototype of the incarnate Christ (whose Mystical Body is itself the Temple, or Church), whereas the parentless Melchizedek personified the veritable Son of God, the Divine Sun, irrupting in the course of human history, His eucharistic sacrifice of ‘bread and wine’ actually constituting the radiant life and spirit thereof. As Priest He ‘immolates’ Himself as King for the life of His people. Broken down into tangible form: Peter is the passive ‘victim’ of the holocaust, who, by his very death, fulfills the Master’s order to “feed My sheep”, while John is the active ‘priest’, or hierurge, of the metempsychotic operation (who has earned this dignity by his willingness, like Isaac, to undergo the same). As long as he lives, however, Peter is the undisputed head of the church on earth, the left-hand pillar of manifest power. But as such his office is regal, not sacerdotal, and he more resembles Moses the Lawyer than Elijah the Artist: he holds a sword and scales, seated on the throne of judgment, not a staff and lantern, standing on the mountain of counsel. It is Prester John<sup>35</sup> who is the Old

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<sup>33</sup> And yet the three cases are different, exemplifying the investitures (or tinctures) of *Ātmā*, *Buddhi* and *Manas*—or Self, Spirit and Soul.

<sup>34</sup> See *John* 3: 23. The prooftexts concerning Melchizedek are *Gen.* 14: 18–20 and *Psalms* 110: 4, which are explicated in chaps. 5–7 of *Hebrews*. The figure of Melchizedek is further developed as an angelic archetype of Christic baptism and sacrifice in the gnostic Nag Hammadi scriptures and in at least one of the Dead Sea scrolls.

<sup>35</sup> Reports of the legendary Prester John, a conquering Christian potentate of India (first documented in Nestorian Syria), began circulating among Crusaders in early-twelfth-century Outremer, around the time of the formation of the military-monastic orders of the Hospitallers of St. John and the Knights Templar.

Man of the Mountain (*shaykh al-jabal*), the Antipope of all ultramontane Utopias, the Hidden Imām of the Fāṭimids, Assassins, Druze, Templars and Rosicrucians, the New Age Theosophical Master (Sans., *arhat*) of the Himalayas. When John Paul II and the Dalai Lama finally step out of their travelling-shoes, the Prester will lead them to another place and bring in others to replace them, just as he has done since the *Bateleur* first took up the instruments of his art over two millennia ago.

At this point we have dealt with most of the overt symbolism of the Marseilles Tarot Sun-card as reproduced in our illustration, above. The two children, one of them blind, standing before a stone barrier and below a beaming solar disc emanating rays and ‘dewdrops’, can be satisfactorily explained with reference to several biblical, gnostic, and later western magical and mystical texts, just a few of which have been cited herein. Some of those passages present the actual models upon which the Tarot imagery was consciously based: I have pointed out the biblical contexts of our present subject-matter derived from the last chapter of St. John’s Gospel, the last chapter of *Malachi*, the Synoptic episode of the Transfiguration of Jesus, and the Old Testament accounts of the mountain-ascents of Moses and Elijah—and allusion has been made to many other passages from *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Isaiah*, *Psalms*, and the New Testament epistles—but I would emphasize that Tarot iconography cannot be fully comprehended in terms of the Bible alone. Although the imagery of celestial dew, *ros*, originates in Isaac’s blessing of Israel recorded in *Genesis*, we have had recourse to the *Monas hieroglyphica* of the Elizabethan dean of Hermetics, John Dee, in order to elicit a plausible explication of that symbolism as it was construed by the creators of the current Tarot. Another British ‘Rosicrucian’, Thomas Vaughan, has thrown further light on all of the graphic elements of Atout XIX in his *Lumen de lumine*, also adding a feature not actually seen in the picture at all—*viz.*, the “enchanted Treasure” (*thesaurus incantatus*) intermured beneath a cubic rock of adamant, the base of a pyramid of carbuncle (see *supra*). We touched upon an occult tradition—a *jocus serius*—which indicated that Atout XV, the Scapegoat of Azazel (‘*Azīz Allāh*’), was the screen-image, or *ikonostas*, of that sacred Secret the divulcation of which is blasphemy (but *not against the Holy Spirit*, thanks be to God)—suggesting that there is a kind of geometric infrastructure governing the interrelations of the cards, which may be conceived as a cycle superposed over a cross.<sup>36</sup> It is by turning this dial *seven*

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<sup>36</sup> The wheel can be turned dextrally to spell TAROT, meaning the Way (*ṭarīqah*) of John-Elijah, or sinistrally to yield TORAT, meaning the Law (*sharī‘ah*) of Peter-Moses. It is interesting to note that

*times* that the safe containing the Holy of holies may be opened. But even then it is only when the correct combination has been divined (by a series of permutations of the cards) that the *Magnum Opus* can be initiated with any hope of success. In the meantime, the purpose of all this is to teach patience through trial and the meaning of the alchemical precept, *Laborare est orare* (work is prayer).

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the written Laws, or Scriptures, of both Judaism and Islam—Torah and Qur'an—have the same numerical value in Arabic as Tarot (1007). Thus, even as the way of Tarot could be said, half seriously, like St. Paul's libertarian doctrine of love, to 'stand the law on its head', so the prophetic Scripture of Islam, the *Tanzil* (sending-down from heaven), is given life and meaning by the *Ta'wil* (taking-back to the source) of the rightly-guided Sūfīs as exemplified by al-Khaḍīr (in *Qur.* 18: 78 and 82).