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# A Tale of Two Secret Books

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# A TALE OF TWO SECRET BOOKS

OR, HOW AND WHY THE ARMENIAN MAGICAL *BOOK OF THE SIX THOUSAND* EXISTS BUT SOME PEOPLE THINK IT DOESN'T AND H.P. LOVECRAFT'S *NECRONOMICON* DOESN'T EXIST BUT SOME PEOPLE THINK IT DOES, AND WHY THEY'RE BOTH WRONG.

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("Knowledge to die for" conference, The Free University of Berlin and the Max Planck Institute, May 2011)

*Visători din toate ţările, uniţi-vă!*[1]

## 1. PREFACE

In August 1936, even as Germany was presenting to its guests at the Berlin Olympic Games an image of peace, order, and prosperity, Adolf Hitler wrote a private memo to Hermann Göring setting out the reasons for the four-year war plan the latter was to take charge of that October. The Reichsführer explained that in the period between the French and Russian Revolutions the forces of international Jewry, manipulators of both capitalism and communism, had systematically replaced the traditional ruling classes of Europe. Time was now short: if Germany did not start a war to eliminate the Jews first, they would exterminate the German people. As the date of the planned attack on Poland neared, Hitler moved from veiled threats in his public pronouncements to the open declaration, in a speech of January 1939 to the Reichstag, that if a new war were to begin, it would lead, not to the bolshevization of Europe, but to the extermination of the Jews of the continent. Such a change— from a plan penned secretly in a personal missive to an ominous boast from the podium, from secrecy, that is, to revelation— is characteristic of the treatment of esoteric knowledge in times perceived as apocalyptic.

The *locus classicus* for this idea of a Jewish conspiracy aimed at world domination, embracing ostensibly opposed economic systems, cosmic in its dimensions and blood-chilling in its cynical enmity to the human race, is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the secret program of the plotters. No such plot ever existed, and the book itself is a forgery concocted by the Tsarist Russian police at the turn of the century on the basis of a French satire. So not only is the content of the book fanciful, but the book itself was a recent fake, known to be so at the time Hitler, Rosenberg, and the other Nazi ideologues read it. They chose to believe in its authenticity as an esoteric document and to act in reality upon its fictive dangers— to admit otherwise would have undermined their entire program. Within a few years most of my family in Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, Salonica, and Krakow were dead. The book that helped kill them, lives: the government of Iran today

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[1] A character in Mircea Eliade's short story *Pelerina* ("The Cape", 1975) prints a subversive, back-dated issue of the Romanian State organ *Scînteia* in which the Communist slogan is altered to read "Dreamers of the World, Unite!" See the discussion by J.R. Russell in "The Science of Parting: Eliade, Iranian Shamanism, and the View from Tomis," *Studia Asiatica*, Bucharest, XI (2010.1-2), pp. 89-97.

distributes free copies of the *Protocols* all over the world while sponsoring terrorist attacks on Jews in various countries and planning and advocating the extermination of Israel. And belief in a Jewish or Zionist conspiracy is the common currency of both the extreme right and the lunatic left. Hannah Arendt prophesied that anti-Semitism would be the only -ism to survive the 20th century: she was right, if one accepts that both left and right are united in the international "Socialism of fools".

The horrible record of Nazism and the vitality of one of its spiritual and political heirs, the radical, extremist brand of politicized Islam,[2] tells us about belief in and use of esoteric knowledge and secret books and their effect on reality. It does not matter whether the knowledge that hidden volumes purport to contain is true or even whether the books themselves are authentic, for people to believe in them, often against all the better evidence of reason; and to act upon them, often with extremely dire consequences. They are fictions that make facts, chimerical triggers that release real bullets, unrealities that undermine reality. They are the repositories of desires and expressions of fears that already exist but require a certain, formal mode of expression. When T.S. Eliot famously said that man can bear only a very little reality, he might have added, that is why he negates, or alters, or enhances reality through the invention of fiction. The application of imagination to perceived phenomena in order to shape something new and fictional, but malleable and useful, is perhaps the essence of human artistic creativity. It is so important that Brian Boyd may be right in his assertion that it is an evolutionary adaptation. However it can be harmful, too: Jorge Luis Borges in his short story "Tlön, Uqbar, and Orbis Tertius" presents an allegorical, fictional treatment of the process whereby barbaric Nazi fantasy supplanted, within the productions of art and literature, civilized Western rationalism: volumes of the fictitious (and mendacious) *Encyclopedia of Tlön* in the story metastasize and supplant those of the *Britannica*. We will be concerned here with magical, rather than political, esoterica; and with respect to these, one's observation that people can eagerly embrace what they know to be untrue was anticipated long ago. For in Jewish Midrashic literature and the *Qur'ān* there are two fallen angels (the latter calls them Hārūt and Mārūt, figures who began their careers innocently enough as the pair of Zoroastrian Amahraspands who preside cozily over the waters and the plants) who are given leave by God to teach men magic, with the proviso that they first inform each prospective pupil— this is called nowadays a disclosure statement— that everything he is about to hear is a lie. Nobody ever cancels the lesson; and magic with its buttressing

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[2] On the *Protocols* generally, see Stephen Eric Bronner, *A Rumor about the Jews*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. The book is still very widely distributed, by both governments and private organizations. The author has, for instance, an English edition of *Jewish Conspiracy: The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, Tehran: Sepehr, n.d., published and distributed by the Islamic Propagation Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a preface by the organization's International Relations Department citing selectively anti-Jewish verses from the *Qur'ān*. It is important to stress that there is a vital, ancient Iranian Jewish community whose language is Judeo-Persian; and the sort of virulent, murderous anti-Semitism of Christian Europe that produced the pogroms and the Holocaust is completely absent from traditional Iranian culture.

mythologies has never ceased to be popular.[3] Reason not the need! Life indeed imitates art, though sometimes in ways that Oscar Wilde and the Bard would have found abhorrent.

This study considers two secret books of magical practice and esoteric knowledge. Nothing— or, at least, very little— in either of them is verifiably true but that has not stopped people from believing and acting upon what they say: they fulfill a need the mind is evidently able to compartmentalize, that is, effectively to separate from the rational apperception of reality in the performance of everyday tasks. You can read the astrological predictions at the back of the daily paper and believe them on some level; but you will not employ astrology to fix a motorcycle. We shall consider presently how the use of different languages or kinds of language informs and enables the experience of the esoteric in secret books.[4] The first text, the Armenian *Vec' hazareak*, or "Book of the Six Thousand" (hereafter abbreviated *Vh*), attributed to the seventh-century scientist Anania of Širak, exists in many manuscript copies and versions (which have been duly noted in print for well over a century, in Frederick Conybeare's catalogue of the Armenian MSS in the British Museum, etc.), but its terrifying and charismatic aura is so great that it is referred to often and affrightedly by hearsay, some authors asserting that it does not exist, even though it does. The other, the *Necronomicon* (hereafter, *N*) is a book invented and used in his short stories by the American writer of horror fantasy and science fiction, Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937), who heard the title in a dream he remembered upon waking. In his short story "The Dunwich Horror" Lovecraft noted that there were copies kept under lock and key at Miskatonic University (which does not exist) in Massachusetts, at the Bibliothèque Nationale (which does), and at Widener Library at Harvard (which also did, last time I checked). Shortly after I was appointed to my chair in Armenian Studies at the latter institution, Widener Library forwarded to me for reply a letter from a gentleman in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, requesting the loan of the *N*. It was my sad duty to inform him that there was no such book; but it is still a mystery to me how or why I was chosen to respond. And I suspect I am far from alone. August Derleth, a writer of horror fiction who founded the Arkham House publishing company that reprinted Lovecraft's works told Colin Wilson, an English writer whose corpus includes a superb Lovecraftian tale, "The Return of the Lloigor", that he often received

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[3] "Hārūt and Mārūt: The Armenian Zoroastrian Demonic Twins in the *Qur'ān* Who Invented Fiction," forthcoming in Julia Rubanovich and Shaul Shaked, eds., *Proceedings* of the Irano-Judaica conference at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, October 2010.

[4] The use of bureaucratic jargon— Eichmann's *Beamtersprache*— of the sort the wartime German Jewish diarist from Dresden, Victor Klemperer, famously describes in his *Lingua Tertii Imperii* assists this ability to dissociate categories of experience, so that it becomes possible to be a cold-hearted or sadistic mass killer and a gentle and devoted family man at the same time. Euphemisms for killing remove from murder its sting of sin; while the overall content and context of the language that contains such euphemisms lift the speaker and hearer into another kind of consciousness, another frame of reference and different moral universe. This is not to say that it is not also employed, deviously, to hide crime from view.

earnest requests for the *N*.[5] Surely his correspondents, and mine, knew Lovecraft's work was fiction, but they wanted to believe— and persuaded themselves— that it was not. Writers abhorring the vacuum have in the interim gone one better and written several different versions of the *N*, mainly mixing Lovecraft's invented mythology with the standard *materia magica* of grimoires. Most are in print, testimony both to the public's desire that the book should exist, even though it doesn't, and to the happy-go-lucky driving principle of capitalist marketing: there's a sucker born every minute.

## 2. The Book of Six Thousand Years

The Armenian *Vh* is the name assigned to a number of widely differing compendia of magical texts in manuscript (no printed text with the title exists except for this writer's articles about it), at the core of all of which is a table of multiplication using the numerical values of the 36-letter classical Armenian alphabet. Most of these manuscripts contain astrological and angelic magical material and instructions about how and when to work a spell for good or ill. Some of the manuscripts contain magic squares and sigils as well. But since the core is not necessarily related to all the other parts of any given manuscript of the text, there is no *Quelle* of the *Vh* from which a stemma might be constructed. This lack of linear cohesion, of textual integrity, seems to be a salient feature of esoteric traditions, which are unregulated since by their very essence they preclude the authority of an exoteric tradition against which they can be judged, verified, and corrected. And it is a circumstance one encounters, correspondingly, in the study of oral literature as well, where textual control and authority are absent, though for different reasons. It is possible of course for an association of esotericists to be formed— a secret society— so as to establish a canon of correct editions of their hidden texts. But even if one takes the case, say, of the Masonic encoded book of the three principal degrees of initiation, which different jurisdictions print in fairly large runs for the education of Brethren entering the Craft, one must recognize that the visible text is at best an incomplete *aide memoire* to more important and deliberately unwritten rituals, words, and actions. And when a magical text is employed primarily to malefic purposes, as the *Vh* seems often to have been, then even a group of practitioners such as a coven of witches will of necessity conceal and isolate itself for fear of retaliation by the other, endangered members of society. The texts of black magic are then likely to be produced in relative isolation.

It is not possible to say on present evidence whether there were associations of black magicians as such in Armenia, though there seems to have been a religious underground of "candle-extinguishers" (Arm. *čragamah*, literally "lamp-death", probably a calque upon Pers. *čirāγ-kuš*, "lamp-extinguisher") whose practices are described in scandalous and blasphemous terms by their Muslim and Christian detractors. In his *Bostān* the medieval Persian poet Sa'dī describes an encounter between the devil and a man who expresses surprise that the prince of darkness is a much pleasanter gentleman than scripture has led him to believe. *Qalam dar dast-e došman būd*, replies Satan— "The pen was in the hand of the enemy." So here, too, one must approach descriptions of

[5] See George Hay, ed., *The Necronomicon: The Book of Dead Names*, London: Skoob, 1992, p. 13.

heresy by the *soi disant* orthodox with due caution. What may have offended the orthodox, male-dominated establishment, and led to vivid exaggeration, though, was the acceptance by this underground and by other heterodox sects, such as the Borborites, of female sexuality; and it is therefore interesting that although the known copyists of manuscripts of the *Vh* are men, at least one user of it was a woman.[6] The mid-19th century ethnographer Garegin Sruanjteanc‘ mentions a witch, a woman named Korec (pronounced in Western Armenian /Goredz/), who had a *Vh*. She was clairvoyant, and could enter houses through the *ertik‘*— the smoke hole in the conical ceiling of the traditional Armenian home, the *glxatun*, above the central hearth.[7] The twelfth chapter of the prayer book *Matean oł̇bergut‘ean* (“Book of Lamentation”) of the tenth-century mystical poet St. Gregory of Narek is a supplication for divine protection of the home against assault by demonic powers at night, and it is still recited as a popular prayer or spell against witchcraft. It specifically mentions the smoke hole, which could be covered by a flap but was like any chimney always open of necessity and thus a potential means of supernatural access for a witch (or Santa Claus!); so it is fair to suppose that the old woman was lonely, feared, and disliked. And it is correspondingly unlikely she met other witches over coffee to compare and collate copies of the *Vh*.[8]

What does the basic schema of the *Vh* mean? There is a single letter representing 6000, *c‘o*, but the number is represented often in a combinatory fashion, as *zṙ*, that is, *za* (6, the sixth letter, z) times *ṙa* (1000, the 28th letter, a trilled r formed of two r’s joined together as a single symbol). Six and twenty-eight are Pythagorean “perfect” numbers. The first, six, is the number of the days of Creation, of the week before the Sabbath, and of the number of millennia (or half of the number, since twelve is also the duration in some schemas) the world is to exist before the apocalypse. The second, twenty-eight, is the number of days of the lunar cycle and of the month. So the ordinal values of the two letters, together with their numerical use by multiplication to form the number associated with key Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian cosmological schemes of the duration of the universe from creation to apocalypse, would endow Anania’s outwardly simple table of arithmetic with powerful occult linkages in numerical mysticism, in the natural cycle of time, and in the religious schema of the beginning and the end. The ancient Romans

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[6] See J.R. Russell, “The Word *chragamah* and the Rites of the Armenian Goddess,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 5, 1990-1, pp. 157-172; and “The Mother of All Heresies: A Late Mediaeval Armenian Text on the *Yuškaparik,” REArm* 24, 1993, pp. 273-293. On earlier and analogous practices in the regions of Armenia and contiguous countries, see Stephen Gero, “With Walter Bauer on the Tigris: Encratite Orthodoxy and Libertine Heresy in Syro-Mesopotamian Christianity,” in Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986, pp. 287-307.

[7] See J.R. Russell, “The Book of the Six Thousand, An Armenian Magical Text,” *Bazmavēp* 147.1-4, Venice, 1989, pp. 221-243, esp. p. 236.

[8] John Updike’s Witches of Eastwick are associated by previous friendship and by attraction to the same man; but their (fictional) sodality is sundered by the after-effects of their maleficence. Prof. Tanya Luhrmann’s study of modern English covens, *Persuasions of the Witches’ Craft*, indicates that even where there are well organized groups, each comes up with its own grimoire.

referred to magicians as *mathematici*; and Armenian *mathematici*— *hamarołk'*— might indeed employ Anania's table in their magical operations and their contemplation of cosmic secrets. If they believed that perfect numbers with their corresponding sounds and diurnal periods and divisions of the celestial equator, were connected by affinities and animated by diverse powers capable of discharging energies and influences, then they might manipulate these for beneficent or malign purposes— the instructions for such rituals, some helpful and others harmful, in Armenian magical manuscripts suggest the same practitioner did both. Though this reveals a kind of amorality in magic, there is also a lively conviction that all phenomena, tangible and intangible, are connected to each other and are deeply imbued with meaning, in harmonies and symmetries expressible by numeration and computation.

Now any alphabet whose letters are used to represent the numbers by decimal series— 1-10, then 20-90, then 100-900, etc.— would produce the same result as the Armenian. But few ancient alphabets of the Mediterranean and Iranian worlds have as many letters as the thirty-six of Armenian: Hebrew, whose letters are also used in magico-mathematical ways, has only twenty-two. Roman magicians had only a few more letters in Latin; and tended to focus on the seven vowels. Mesrop Maštoc', the fifth-century saint who invented the script after intensive study crowned by mystical vision, assigned to his system exactly thirty-six, no more, no less.[9] This is itself the number of the decans, the Sanskrit *nakṣatras*. These are the beings that preside over each ten-degree span of the celestial ring; and they figure very prominently in Greek and Indian astrology. A list of them with their names, powers, presiding supernatural beings, and sigils comes at the beginning, too, of the post-11th-century Islamic magical encyclopedia *Ghāya al-ḥakīm*, "Goal of the wise man"— the famous *Picatrix* of the West. The Armenians were familiar with the Muslim text, translated parts of it, and used its scheme of the decans in conjunction with the *Vh*. Nor was the order of the Armenian letters arbitrary: Our Lord Jesus Christ declares that He is the Alpha—the first letter of the Greek and Hebrew alphabets— and the Omega. The latter is the last letter in Greek; in Hebrew, though, it is *tav*; and the latter was written often in His lifetime as a cruciform symbol, rather like a simple lower-case t. The final and 36th letter of the Armenian alphabet is neither a long *o* nor a *t*, but the aspirate *k'ē*; but it is the upright ligature called a chrismon, that is, the Chi-Rho symbol: it both looks like the Cross and also is the Greek abbreviation of the name of Christ Himself. So the pioneer invented script of the Christian East was designed expressly to affirm Christ's declaration. Whatever the uses to which later magicians put the letters and their numbers, there is no doubt that Maštoc' himself was a devout Christian.

[9] In the twelfth century, two more letters, *ō* and *f*, were added; and the ligature representing the letters *e* and *w* (pronounced *yev* and meaning "and" when written alone) is often treated nowadays as a separate, thirty-ninth letter. On the work and methods of Maštoc' see J.R. Russell, "On the Origins and Invention of the Armenian Alphabet," *Le Muséon* 107.3-4, 1994, pp. 317-333.

It would seem, then, that the task of the seventh-century mathematician and occult scholar Anania of Širak, creator of the table of the *Vh*, was not to invent anything new but to discover what Maštoc‘ had already hidden two centuries earlier. And what he himself found was still not to be revealed to the unworthy and the unprepared.[10] To Anania himself is attributed this statement, bearing out the suggestion: “It is a treasure hidden in this land of Armenia and a precious gem concealed in the house of Togarmah, for it is the mother of all arts, together with all division… all the skilled men of the Greeks in our region beheld it and were amazed, and if a man comprehends this then he knows what meanings are hidden therein; and if not, he who enters herein is unable to comprehend or to hear the entirety by means of the written letter whatever he does, for each one relates twelve thousand orations.”[11] The late Armenian manuscript of the *Vh* in the British Library catalogued by Frederick Conybeare opens with this advertisement, repeating Anania’s term *ganj*, “treasure”— though the list is woefully topsy-turvy, even with reference to great Armenians, the general chronological order of whose lives one might have expected the writer to know better. The purpose of the copyist is not to recount history, though, but to impress upon one the awe-inspiring antiquity and pedigree of the book: “This great treasure was transmitted by the great philosophers and *Mazdeans, and by Dionysius the Areopagite and the idolatrous philosophers and our father Abraham, down to Plato and Aristotle and Porphyry, down to the great Armenian philosopher Anania of Širak, indeed from them down to Sahak and Mesrop. In the Armenian language it is called the Reckoner (*hamarołakan*), which is the Six Thousand (*vec‘ hazareak*), and the Greeks call it the *Ōxlat‘at‘* [Arabic, *al-xaṭāṭ*, “the letters”- JRR]…”[12] But it does mention, at least, both Anania and Mesrop (Maštoc‘).

Considering that the core of the *Vh* is a table of multiplication, it is to be expected that the tradition should emphasize in particular mathematical accuracy; and indeed a MS of the *Vh* in the library of the Armenian Convent of St. James’ in Jerusalem warns that if the arithmetical computations that are required to accomplish the magical rites described in the text are done wrong, then the effect will be damage rather than attainment of the result one is seeking, “as though you wanted to apply antimony to your eyes and poked them out instead.”[13] The same text instructs one to light something to give off smoke (Arm. *cxelik‘*) in a pipe: this could be simply the practice of suffumigation, which, along with sigils and other ritual ingredients, is supposed to attract or compel supernatural

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[10] See J.R. Russell, “On An Armenian Magical Manuscript (Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, MS 10558),” in publication, 2011, *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, Jerusalem.

[11] *Ganj ē cackeal i yerkirs Hayoc‘ ew akn t‘aguc‘eal i tun T‘orgomay zi mayr ē amenayn aruestic‘ handerj amenayn bažanmamb… tesin amenayn čartark‘ Yunac‘ i merum nahangis ew zarmac‘an, ew t‘ē ok‘ imanay zsa, na gitē, t‘ē inč‘ imastk‘ en i sma cackeal, ew t‘ē č‘ē or mteal i sa, č‘i karē imanal kam grov bovandakn lsel, zi amenayn mi ŽB Ṙ čaṙs xawsi*, cit. by Russell, “Six Thousand,” p. 320.

[12] British Library Or. MS 6471, fol. 233a-b, tr. by Russell, “Six Thousand,” pp. 239-243.

[13] Jerusalem MS 3669, cit. by Russell, “Six Thousand,” pp. 232-234: *kam t‘ē əst aynm zač‘k‘n carureln i bac‘ ač‘k‘n hanes*.

beings in magical practices where their cooperation and intervention are sought; but the mention of a pipe suggests the possibility that inhalation might also be meant, perhaps of such mind-altering drugs as hashish or opium, both of which were very common everywhere in the Near East where Armenians lived. As to the warning in the manuscript, it is a commonplace perhaps that inaccuracy often is dangerous and leads to counterproductive results; but this aspect might have led to the belief that the *Vh*, such an ancient and central text of Armenian esotericism, was also especially dangerous— so fabulously perilous, indeed, that over time those not directly involved in the practice or study of magic, and hearing only whispered hints, came to doubt its very existence.

Thus the American-Armenian scholar Bedros Norehad wrote a book, not many miles from the house on College Hill, Providence, RI, where the writer H.P. Lovecraft was dying. The volume, which was funded by the Works Progress Administration created by President Roosevelt to help the arts and letters during the Great Depression, is a study of the large Armenian immigrant community of the New England region. Norehad states: "Belief in magic, too, has been prevalent among the Armenians, but it has not thrived in the atmosphere of the New World. However, they talk about a book of magic called *Vetzhazarya*, which supposedly contains all the secrets of the occult science. There are reputed to be a few copies of this book **and no person has actually seen it** [emphasis mine- JRR]."[14] A Boston correspondent answered a published query of mine in 1981 with these cautions: "[The *Vh*] is not understood by the common individual and its uses are abused to destructive purposes."[15] It was not clear from his letter whether he had actually seen the thing himself. At the end of the 19th century an ethnographer of the Armenians of the region of Sebastia (Sivas) warned that people went mad from reading the *Vh*, which he describes as "the teaching of the natures and secrets of the demons, and the one who reads it becomes acquainted with the demons, who submit to him."[16] Its image had clearly become one of danger more than wisdom— the charisma of evil now clung to it. And the Boston writer expresses a paradox often encountered both in esoteric texts and in comments about them: the secret meaning of such a book can be perceived only by one

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[14] Bedros Norehad, *The Armenians in Massachusetts*, Boston, MA: WPA Federal Writers' Project, 1937, p. 128. The cities of southern New England, particularly industrial towns and working class districts in Massachusetts and Rhode Island such as Worcester, Lynn, Chelsea, Watertown, and Pawtucket, were the early center of Armenian immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: from there, migrants moved to the factories of Detroit and Wisconsin, and the farms of Fresno and the Central Valley of California. Mr. Norehad was an immensely learned, cultivated, and courtly man whom I knew towards the end of his life, when he worked for the library of the Armenian Diocese in New York. He wrote, then, with intelligence and discernment about a large population from which he drew his data; and this makes his (inaccurate) statement all the more impressive. It is not as though one or two doubted the existence of the *Vh*: many did, and so did a writer who could have known better.

[15] See J.R. Russell, "The Book of the Six Thousand: An Armenian Magical Text," *Bazmavēp*, Venice, 147.1-4, 1989, p. 236.

[16] Y. Čanikean, *Hnut'iwnk' Aknay* ["Antiquities of Akn"], Tiflis, 1895, pp. 145-146.

who already knows it. This partial or total ignorance of the *Vh* is striking, since copies continued to be made till quite recently.

For a particularly intriguing example of a recent text of the *Vh*, one may consider an Armenian magical manuscript copied *ca*. A.D. 1892 and now in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York. It begins with a list of the decans from the *Ghāya al-ḥakīm* and contains various magical texts, including a long version of the *Vh*. It is unusual and probably unique in that a Sephardic Jew owned and annotated it in both Hebrew square character and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) in Hebrew cursive, even transliterating the Armenian names of the signs of the Zodiac as they were pronounced in the Western dialect, into Hebrew script. On the flyleaf at the beginning of the little notebook in which the Armenian text had been copied, we find this formula, in Hebrew square characters: *tm's b'd'n ysw'd w'd's nrpn'gds*. This is easily recognizable as a variant form of a spell in Arabic letters, *Tamāġis Baġdisawād Waġdās Nūfānāġādīs*, found in the sixth chapter of the third book of the Arabic *Ghāya,* where it is called the name of the Pneuma of one's perfect nature. The text was translated into Hebrew, so our Sephardic annotator— from his marginalia it may be assumed with confidence that he was fluent in the sacred tongue— could have got the spell from there, rather than from an Arabic book, whether the *Ghāya* itself or some other text or grimoire. The Jewish writer adds, *šā'alūnī ḥoxmēi Yišma'ēl [scil. Yišma'ēl] pērūš ēlū ha-tēvōt*, "The wise ones of Ishmael asked of me the explanation of these words." This would suggest that the owner of the MS enjoyed enough of the reputation of a learned adept himself for Muslims to ask him about the meaning of a non-Arabic spell they might have suspected was Hebrew, a language closely associated in Muslim tradition with all things magical. He does not go on to provide the explanation— to say what the jumble of letters **does** mean, though; and it would not be rash to venture the suggestion that he simply did not know. The *Ghāya* introduces the words thus: "But the practical use and the knowledge of this science— may God strengthen you!— is accessible only to the one in whom its nature is established. Aristotle in his book *al-Isṭamāḫīs* refers to it when he says, 'The perfect nature is a power of the philosopher that augments his knowledge and wisdom.'" The spirit, or Pneuma, of one's perfect nature goes by the name of the spell; and one is to invoke it in an elaborate magical ritual when the Moon first enters Aries.[17] In his *Muqaddima* ("Introduction" to history) Ibn Khaldūn cites the *Ghāya* as calling the spell "the dream word of the perfect nature". One is to pronounce these words while falling asleep and mention what one wants, and it will be shown to him in a dream. So even if it is a proper name, its use and intended effect are those of a spell. Ibn Khaldūn adds that he has heard of a man who after a partial fast and several nights of *dhikr* exercises (i.e., the trance-like state induced by a ritual of "remembrance" of God through the continuous recital of sacred formulas and names) did this and a person appeared to him and identified himself as his "perfect nature". He renders the spell in a manner closer to what we find in the Hebrew of MS 10558: *tamāghis ba'dān yaswādda nawfanā ghādis*. Neither the *Ghāya* nor Ibn Khaldūn has anything to say about what the spell means, only that it is a name. F. Rosenthal in his translation of the *Muqaddimah* suggests that the

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[17] See Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner, *"Picatrix": Das Ziel des Weisen von Pseudo-Maǧrīṭī* (German version translated from Arabic), London: Warburg Institute, 1962, pp. 198-201.

words are Aramaic in origin and might originally have been a sentence *Tmaggeš b'eddān swādh(?) waghdhaš nawmthā ghādeš*, with the rather prosaic meaning "You say your incantations [lit. "magianize"— JRR] at the time of conversation(?), and the accident of sleep happens."[18] So we have a kind of mantra in the *Ghāya* in an ancient language, now for all practical purposes gibberish, a language now without human context or meaning beyond its intrinsic, advertised esoteric power. Either run together to form a name or separated into the discrete words of a sentence, the formula has to do with purposeful or revelatory dreaming. The mantra is quite well known in Islamic tradition, and a Jew with a keen interest and background in magic adds it as the *incipit* of an Armenian manuscript containing both portions of the *Ghāya* and a version of the *Vh*. Why did the Ladino-speaker add the formula in careful Hebrew lettering right at the beginning? It is possible that he regarded the spell as the missing but essential first incantation of the order of a magical ritual to be performed.[19]

The first Aramaic word restored by Rosenthal, *tmaggeš* "you magianize", could refer to magic in general, of course. But it is to be remembered that the Aramaic speakers of Late Antiquity lived in very close proximity to the real McCoys— the Magi (MPers. *mowbedān*) themselves, who constituted the powerful clergy of the Zoroastrian state religion of the Sasanian Empire. And there we do encounter a very interesting incident indeed of a visionary dream induced by the performance of a ritual that very likely also involved a trance-inducing spell. The third-century high priest Kartīr left several epigraphic accounts of his visionary journey to the otherworld: much attention has been devoted to these texts, for they are unique in the Sasanian corpus and reflect an extraordinary situation in which the state religion responded to an existential challenge. Such a visionary journey does, however, have prominent precedents in Iranian tradition: the first is the vision of the seer Jāmāspa, vizier of the first Mazdean king, Vīštāspa, in the archaic epic fragment *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, "Memorial of Zarēr", which bears linguistic traces of Parthian. The second case is the drug-induced, death-like *Himmelsreise der Seele* described in the several recensions of the *Ardā Vīrāz Nāmag*, "The Book of the Righteous Vīrāz", a remote precursor of Dante.[20] One crux in the interpretation of Kartīr's inscriptions is the Middle Persian expression he uses in his first-person narrative to describe what he did to induce his dream- or spirit-journey: Middle Persian *ēwēn mahr*. The first word can mean "a kind of", or "ritual" (cf. the Armenian loan *awrēn(k')* "custom, law", and Persian *āyīn*), or "mirror" (cf. New Persian *āyina*). It has recently been argued by Prof. Martin Schwartz on the basis of the latter meaning that

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[18] Franz Rosenthal, tr. and comm., Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. I, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958, pp. 212-213 and n. 311. If this is right, it is rather banal, except for the reference to the operation of magic itself. The Aramaic word derives from Old Persian *maguš*, the nominative ending likewise borrowed into Greek *magousaios* "a Zoroastrian" but not *mageuō*, "perform a Magian rite, sacrifice"; in Armenian, the Parthian form yields *mog-em*, "perform magic", *mogpet* "chief priest", etc.

[19] See discussion in Russell, "Armenian Magical Manuscript" *supra*.

[20] See J.R. Russell, "Kartīr and Mānī: a Shamanistic Model of Their Conflict" and "A Parthian *Bhagavad Gītā* and Its Echoes," repr. in James R. Russell, *Armenian and Iranian Studies* [=*AIS*], Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 9, Cambridge, MA, 2004.

the ritual involved a kind of catoptromancy (divination by means of a mirror) familiar from Egyptian, Hellenistic, and other schools of magic. That is not implausible, given the lecanomantic properties (divination by means of staring at the surface of a liquid in a bowl) ascribed in Persian tradition to the Cup of Jamšēd, the *jām-e Jam* of Classical Persian poetry and lore. The second word can mean "death" (<*$mṛθyu$-, cf. Armenian loan-word *ma(r)h*)— in which case the priest lay as though dead, as Ardā Wīrāz did— or "sacred word, *mantra*" (Avestan *mąθra*-, cognate to the better-known Indic word; cf. Armenian loan-word *margarē*, "prophet", lit. "*mantra*-maker"). I think that Kartīr's expression *ēwēn mahr* means "ritual mantra", and have proposed that the repeated use in his narrative of the Middle Persian of the famous and universally known Avestan formula *humata, huxta, hvaršta* "good thoughts, good words, good deeds" indicates that these very words in fact constituted the ritual mantra he employed on his out-of-body trip: the Zoroastrian prayer *Vīspa humata* "All good thoughts" explicitly affirms that the triad brings one salvation; and one might interpret the text to mean both that good thoughts, words, and deeds save one, and that the formula itself protective, salvific. The very familiar and obvious character of the formula— to this day the commonest Iranian souvenir is the divine winged man of the Achaemenian bas-reliefs, the so-called "*fravaši*" symbol, with the Persian words *pendār-e nīk, goftār-e nīk, kerdār-e nīk* ("good thoughts, good words, good deeds") inscribed above and around it— may be what conceals it. As the tale of the purloined letter illustrates (though Trithemius noted the same in his *Steganographia* centuries earlier), sometimes the best way to conceal something is to leave it in plain view.

A nameless Syriac poem entitled by later editors "The Hymn of the Pearl" or "The Hymn of the Soul" is attested as an interpolation in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*. It seems to be an allegorical teaching of the tenets of a Gnostic religion, probably Manichaeism, cast in the form of a tightly compressed Near Eastern heroic epic of the kind listeners in the Armeno-Iranian regions would have been accustomed to in entertainment. It would thus have captivated them and delivered its unexpected message— that death and escape from the prison of body are not only the end of life but its aim, since the Creator is wicked— to receptive ears. The text has a number of Parthian loan-words and can be dated perhaps to the early Sasanian period, around the same time Kartīr— a dire opponent of Manichaeism— flourished. It describes in the first person the quest of a prince of the East (by which Parthia is clearly meant) to recover the pearl of great price hoarded by a serpent in the sea of Egypt. The hero travels through Iran and Mesopotamia, but is drugged upon arrival in Egypt, land of sorcery and darkness, in the inn of the dragon. His father the king and the nobles send a letter in the form of an eagle to wake him remind him of who he is and what he has come to do; but instead of killing the worm with a vorpal blade going snicker-snack the way a proper dragon slayer is supposed to do, the Parthian "began to cast a spell (*məmaggēš*)"— to recite a ritual mantra!— and put the beast to sleep. Here, then, the familiar Aramaic verb is found again in the context of magic and sleeping, though its object and purpose are altered: instead of putting oneself to sleep to dream, one hypnotizes a foe in a *Drachenkampf*.[21] So the verb

[21] See J.R. Russell, "The Epic of the Pearl," *REArm* 28, 2001-2002, pp. 29-100, esp. p. 79.

has the same specific meaning when used in two widely separated sources, describing as Magian a rite the Magi indeed practiced.

Kartīr's formula (if that is what his words mean and if I have identified them correctly), with its thrice-repeated initial *h-* pronounced with a strong expulsion of breath, would be conducive to controlled, repetitive, rhythmic ventilation for inducing the sort of trance state shamans tend to employ for embarkation on an otherworld journey. The sound has semantic force by its association in Iranian with both "good" (*hu-*) and the verb *h-*, "to be". One may cite a coincidental and strikingly similar religious formula from the Armenian dossier. The tenth-century theologian and mystic St. Gregory of Narek (Arm. Grigor Narekac'i) compiled 95 meditative prayers into the *Matean oł̄bergut'ean*, "Book of Lamentation". These are intended to be recited aloud, at length and in tears, in order to induce a state of heightened religious feeling and of receptivity to the indwelling presence and outflowing grace of Christ. His prayer book, called by Armenians simply the *Narek*, has a magical reputation of its own: many of the chapters are used in protective, talismanic ways that have little to do with purely contemplative prayer; and the author himself drew upon the words and imagery of such lay magical texts as the *gaylakap*, or "wolf-binding" spell. It was believed by many that reading forty consecutive chapters with undivided attention conferred supernatural power upon a person, whom the demons would therefore try to distract. If he broke his concentration, they would swarm in and take possession of him.[22] Just as the table of multiplication of Anania based upon the Pythagorean constructions of a saint gained an increasingly evil repute, the more secret it became (until its existence was denied altogether), so the prayer book of another saint acquired an oblique association with the powers of darkness, the more powerful its effect was believed to be. Perhaps this is not quite as perverse as it seems: the atomic bomb would be an argument that the more power humans have access to, the more absolutely corrupted we are indeed.

A preface to part of the 33rd chapter of the *Narek* explains that it is to be recited with intense concentration, and repeatedly if need be, as part of the preparation for the ritual of the *Patarag* ("Divine Liturgy", lit. "Offering"), to enable the celebrant physically to behold the divine light descending upon the altar with the consecrated gifts: I have called this practice liturgical mysticism;[23] and it corresponds, *mutatis mutandis*, to the intensification of normal *halakhic* practice that Prof. Moshe Idel has illuminatingly discussed as one of the types of Jewish mysticism.[24] Armenian folk tradition ascribes

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[22] On Narekac'i generally, see James Russell, "Grigor Narekatsi," in John A.C. Greppin, ed., *Studies in Classical Armenian Literature*, Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1994, pp. 128-151.
[23] See J.R. Russell, "Armenian Spirituality: Liturgical Mysticism and Chapter 33 of the *Book of Lamentation* of St. Grigor Narekac'i," repr. in *AIS*.
[24] Keynote lecture, conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, 20 Sept. 2006, Bucureşti, România. One acknowledges also the stimulating and groundbreaking discussion by Prof. Martin Schwartz, University of California, Berkeley, of the poetics of the *Gāthās* of Zarathuštra, both at the conference and in many conversations over the years. His writing and teaching has inspired and informed the way I read the *Narek*.

magical properties to the *Matean*; and one who recites it uninterruptedly is supposed to acquire supernatural powers. From its very title it is evident that the text should provoke the emotional abreaction of tears. Though this aspect is alien to the Zoroastrian types of religiosity, the poetics Narekac‘i deploys to bring one closer to God must be relevant nonetheless. In chapter 3, God is evoked in a typical litany, of which several lines may be cited: *Amenap‘ayl čaṙagayt‘, xostovaneal loys,/ Antarakoys vstahut‘iwn, antartam hangist,/ Anyełli knik‘, ansahmaneli tesil, vkayeal anun,/Čašak k‘ałc‘rut‘ean, bažak berkrut‘ean,/* ***Hastič‘ hogwoc‘ hac‘****, awtar mt‘ut‘eanc‘ sēr, anerkbay xostumn,/ Cackoyt‘ c‘ankali, zgest ankaput,/ Awt‘oc‘ bałjali, zard p‘aṙac‘…* “Universally shining ray, light confessed,/ Undoubted certainty, resolute rest,/ Unchanging seal, unbounded vision, witnessed name,/ Taste of sweetness, cup of joy,/ Creator, bread of souls, love alien to the tenebrous, unequivocal promise,/ Desirable covering, raiment that cannot be stolen,/ Shelter sought, adornment of glory…” The passage stresses divinity as a light, banishing darkness, to which one goes with speech and an emphasis on certainty— as in the soul’s passage after death. God is the mystic’s food, shelter, and clothing.

The phrase emphasized in bold characters deserves special discussion: obviously, there are three repeated *h*’s, as in Kartīr’s mantra. In Armenian, the prefix *h*-, from Iranian *hu*-, “good”, is an intensifier: *hskay*, “gigantic” (lit. “good and Scythian”), *hlu* “meek” (lit. “good and attentive”), *hzawr* “mighty” (lit. “good and strong”), etc. So the repeated use of the letter can have a semantic overtone and emphasis as in Iranian. The use of a triad must evoke the Trinity, too. *Hastič‘*, “creator, affirmer” from the vb. *astem* is a mediaeval— and probably accurate— *Volksetymologie* of *Astuac*, “God” and would thus represent God the Father; *hogwoc‘*, gen. pl. of *hogi*, “soul”, would refer to the Holy Spirit. *Hac‘* (pronounced *háts*, with final aspiration), refers to Our Lord Jesus Christ: the unmixed wine and unleavened bread become in the Mass His blood and flesh. The phrase acrophonically renders also the word for the Triune Christian God, *hASTič‘ hOgWoc‘ hAC‘ > ASTOWAC(‘)> Astuac* (Arm. *ow* is the conventional scribal diphthong for *u*, which is now pron. /v/ before a vowel: /*Astvadz*/). There is no doubt that Narekac‘i did this intentionally: in chapter 52.2 one finds the strophe *Ew ənd Hastołid mianal tēruni marmnoyd čašakmamb* “And to be united to you, O Creator [i.e., God the Father], through the tasting of your body, O Lord [i.e., the Communion bread of God the Son]”; in his *Ban xratu vasn ułił hawatoy ew mak‘ur varuc‘ aṙak‘inut‘ean* (“Logos of counsel on the orthodox faith and a pure and virtuous mode of life”), the economy of the wisdom of the Word of God is called *hac‘ i yerknic‘ iǰeal kerakur hogwoc‘* “bread come down from Heaven as the food of souls”.[25] Narekac‘i’s formula, found in a text meant to induce

[25] S. Grigor Narekac‘i, *Matean ołbergut‘ean ew ayl erkasirut‘iwnk‘, hazarameaki hratarakut‘iwn*, Ant‘ilias: *Tparan Kat‘ołikosut‘ean Hayoc‘ Meci Tann Kilikioy* [St. Gregory of Narek, *The Book of Lamentation and Other Works*, Millennary Edition, Antelias, Lebanon: Press of the Armenian Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia], 2003, p. 683. There is a multilayered play in this clause on the consonants of ethereal *erkink‘* “heaven”, where the transcendent Father is, and earthly *kerakur* “food”— the bread of the Son. The Armenian ear hears with *erkink‘* its partner, *erkir*— “earth”. The words were originally conceived, it would seem, as halves of a whole, or as a pair, each containing the element of *erku* “two”. *Kerakur*, itself a reduplicative form from the aor.

religious vision, has physical effect, phonetic and semantic marking, theological background and density, and poetic acrophony. It emerges from the sole— and principal— living *Chrétienté* of the Iranian world. This parallel from a related tradition of like poetic sophistication may at least strengthen the suggestion that, whether or not Kartīr's performance was done with mirrors; and his trance state, a death-like catalepsy— his *ēwēn mahr* might still have been an Avestan ritual *mąθra* of three words, its sounds and meaning emerging from the fountainhead of Zoroastrian faith.[26] Anania of Širak, author of the *Vh*, lived at the end of the Sasanian and the beginning of the Islamic period, at the midpoint between Kartīr's age and the time when St. Gregory of Narek flourished and the *Ghāya* was, most likely, compiled. He was no stranger to the qualities and symbolism of letters and sounds, and the "mantric" poetics of his own culture, as we have seen, has striking affinities with that of neighboring Iran. For Anania, as for a Late Antique speaker of Aramaic, the Magi were not yet generic representatives of the three ages and races of Man paying homage to the infant Christ. They were real Zoroastrians famed, among other things, for inducing spirit-journeys to other worlds.

Now, there is nothing in the core mathematical table of the *Vh* itself that specifically indicates the performance of a dream ritual, but we do know that Anania of Širak, the compiler of the table, did indeed have a visionary dream in chapel one day of the sort known both from Late Antiquity in both Sasanian Iran and the Mediterranean basin before him, and to the author of the *Ghāya*, centuries after him. In it, he requested and was given specific cosmological information by an *angelus interprans* who appeared to him as the sun in the body of a handsome youth: Anania wanted to know whether people lived in the Antipodes. The question reflects, not only an interest in the natural sciences and cosmology, but perhaps also a challenge to Christian conceptions of both. One may recall that the audacious and impious curiosity of Dante's Ulysses drove him and his shipmates through the Pillars of Hercules and south till they sighted the mount of Purgatory. God punished the travelers by sending a storm: three mighty waves (the Greek for a storm is *trikymia*, "three waves"; and here the Trinity is adumbrated as well) struck the vessel from Ithaka and the fourth caused it to founder. Anania's autobiographical account of his experience does not mention whether he deliberately induced the dream; but since his Greek mentor at Trebizond, Teukhikos, implored him to keep the experience a secret, it is reasonable to suppose there was something unorthodox about it, even beyond the doubt-revealing question Anania had posed. Since the angel's answer— that nobody lives Down Under, with a suitable and somewhat chiding Scriptural citation from *Job*— was wholly unobjectionable from the standpoint of orthodox Christian doctrine, perhaps Anania had employed a hypnagogic spell like the *Tamāghis* cited by the *Ghāya*, whose effect Ibn Khaldūn describes so memorably. So it could have been that magical practice that Teukhikos warned him against talking about; and although it is rash to argue from silence, maybe that it why it does not figure an otherwise candid narrative. As we

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stem *ker-* "eat", morphologically underscores duality; and phonetically it resumes and completes duality: *kERaKUr> ERKU* "two"!

[26] See J.R. Russell, "An Armenological Note on Kartīr's Vision,"*Dasturji Dr. Hormazdyar Dastur Kayoji Mirza Birth Centenary Memorial Volume*, Udvada (Gujarat, India): Dastur Kayoji Mirza Institute, 2010, pp. 253-258.

have seen, the Aramaic spell was carefully preserved for a very long time and meets the Armenian *Vh*, though added in Hebrew letters, in one manuscript. Anania might have had another spell himself, another kind of "magianizing". And the idea of a dream as something esoteric, intrinsically containing and imparting secrets, is hard wired into the Armenian language itself: the most common word for dream in it is the Iranian loan-word *eraz*, from Middle Iranian *rāz*, "secret".[27]

So the Armenian *Book of the Six Thousand* exists, though it is sometimes thought erroneously that it does not, it is of palpable antiquity, and it brings together a number of important elements of magic, most of which would remain secret to any reader not equipped to discover them. Its author had a dream vision he might have induced through a ritual involving a spell. Such ritual spells are known in the region before and after his time; and the most famous of these was added, only a hundred and twenty years ago, to a manuscript of the *Vh*. And now to a book that, properly speaking, doesn't exist, though it is sometimes thought, erroneously, that it does.

### 3. The Book of the Images of the Laws of the Dead

There are plenty of *Necronomicons* on the market; and the esotericist and cultist Kenneth Grant, a disciple of Alastair Crowley, has in a series of books tried to prove that the material itself of Lovecraft's "book" is genuine since it is uncannily akin, even in particulars that do not seem fortuitous, to what Crowley, independently, revealed— that is, both channeled from the spirit world information they received, Crowley thinking it religious revelation and Lovecraft regarding it as imaginative inspiration for his work as a writer of fiction.[28] Though one cannot categorically dismiss Grant as wrong, it is more likely that the British Satanist and the Providence writer, contemporaries in the Anglo-Saxon world, read the same books about magic and witchcraft and their dreams were freighted with the similar culturally determined and inherited themes and images, not to say neuroses. C.G. Jung quite unnecessarily elevated such affinities and coincidences to the level of mysticism, although he coyly skirted the admission that his cosmic "archetypes" and acausal "synchronicities" must of necessity be articles of faith rather than rationally provable phenomena. Those categories belong to his feud against Freud; and that conflict itself was, to some extent, an intellectual chapter of Germany's war against what the Jews were thought to represent, of a nostalgically anti-modern *Sehnsucht* and the irrational versus cosmopolitan, urban, liberal reason. Dreams are useful creative acts but they have sources; and to ascribe a dream image simply to an archetype is an act of desertion from the hard work of criticism.[29] None of that diminishes the importance of dreaming and dream imagery throughout the subjects we have treated; so it is most

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[27] See J.R. Russell, "Sleep and Dreaming in Armenian," *Proceedings* of the 4th International Conference on Armenian Linguistics, ed. by John A.C. Greppin, Ann Arbor: Caravan Books, 1992, pp. 147-169.

[28] The first of these volumes is Kenneth Grant, *Hecate's Fountain*, London: Skoob, 1992.

[29] Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung*, New York: Random Books, 1997, argues *inter alia* that Jung saw in dreams Mithraic images that he had in fact read about and seen illustrations of, but suppressed that evidence and presented the images instead as evidence that spiritual archetypes come unmediated to the unconscious.

interesting that H.P. Lovecraft averred that the name of the book he was to cite in his short stories, the *Necronomicon*, was not a conscious invention. It first came to him in a dream; and he interpreted the name, with the dream-logic a waking philologist would eschew as method though perhaps enjoy as poetry, as "The Book of the Images of the Laws of the Dead", containing three Greek elements: *nekros* "dead", *nomos* "law", and *eikōn* "image". Much ink has been spilt pointlessly in debate about the "correct" meaning of the word, with opinions split between *nomos* and *onoma* "name" on the second element of the compound, though it is fairly plain the writer's unconscious was creatively manipulating the *Astronomica* of Manilius, which he had read earlier. *Eikōn* and *onoma* grammatically do not work, nor is there any way the word Necronomicon can contain all three of the Greek words Lovecraft wanted it to have. The bed of dreaming can be limitlessly capacious, a veritable Plateau of Leng; but the bed of Hellenic compound formation is Procrustean indeed. That doesn't matter, since "Necronomicon" has no correct meaning: the word was subconsciously invented to start with, so the dreamer's own understanding is really what counts. Unlike Humpty Dumpty, the freely imaginative dreamer can make his neologism mean what he wants it to mean.

Lovecraft's introduction of an icon— an image— underscores the uncanny, synaesthetic quality of the imaginary volume: what does a law **look** like? Perhaps Lovecraft means the book is associated with visions of things that are not normally visible— what one sees in a dream, in fact, in the first place. A reference to the *Necronomicon* first appears in an early story of Lovecraft's where one couplet he calls enigmatic is cited. Critics have compared it to the "Death be not proud" of the 17th-century English metaphysical poet John Donne: "That is not dead which can eternal lie,/ And with strange aeons even death may die." ("The Nameless City", 1921.) Lovecraft invented an early Islamic author of the book, too, whose name is as grammatically inaccurate as the "meaning" of the word *N*: "the mad Arab" Abdul Alhazred with his twin definite articles. Again, the point is not that the name ought to be ʻAbd al-haẓrat or the like, but that the book, like the *Picatrix*, is in Latin or English or other translation from Arabic. The wholly fictional English translation is "attributed" in Lovecraft's history of the *N* to the historically real occult scholar and court astrologer of Queen Elizabeth I, John Dee.[30] The motif of an imaginary, occult book used in successive short stories is not original to Lovecraft, of course: the psychic investigator John Silence of London dips into the (fictional) Sigsand Manuscript in various stories by his creator, Algernon Blackwood; and the scholarly writer of ghost stories, M.R. James, furnishes his stories with dire manuscripts and dangerous symbols as well.[31] The idea of a book harmful even to touch seems to derive from a passage in the *American Notebooks* of 1835

[30] As we shall see presently, Lovecraft invented an extraterrestrial language for which he used Arthur Machen's name Aklo, for his stories. Dee himself practiced divination together with a Welsh medium, receiving messages in another non-human, artificial language he called Enochian that is in places suspiciously similar to Welsh.

[31] Lovecraft mentions also the Pnakotic Manuscripts. Greek *pinax* is loaned as *pnak*, "tablet", into Armenian; and Lovecraft knew of the *Tabula Smaragdina* of Hermes Trismegistos. A coincidence; and we shall see it was one of several.

of Nathaniel Hawthorne: "an old volume in a large library, every one to be afraid to unclasp and open it, because it was said to be a book of magic."[32]

Several years after "The Nameless City", Lovecraft wrote his much more famous short story "The Call of Cthulhu", in which he mentions the *N* and the couplet just cited, which, a character in the tale avers, may be read with multiple meanings. Lovecraft's writing style was often florid, at worst a ghastly parody of Poe. The power of his work derives, not from his language, but from the rich structure of his sheer imagination, in particular his careful, sometimes subliminal deployment of highly charged mythological and social themes and images encountered in various cultures (without Jung's coloration, one would call them archetypes). The basic archetype is that of a divine or demonic being imprisoned for ages, regarded as an apocalyptic redeemer or destroyer (or both) is awaited by a secret, far-flung cult with the appurtenances of an exotic language, iconography, and ritual.

The story, then, gradually informs us that in ancient times beings from another world ruled the earth. They communicated **through dreams** with the earliest men, who founded a cult that survives amongst primitive and degraded or downtrodden people (he mentions Eskimos and mulattoes in particular) all over the world. One of the Old Ones, as the beings are called, is Cthulhu, whose name was Lovecraft's attempt to render the threatening, stentorian drumbeat-like sound of two unhuman syllables, the footsteps of a relentlessly advancing monster. He lies, dead but sentient, in the city of R'lyeh, which has sunk under the waves: here Lovecraft has combined the myth of Atlantis so hauntingly evoked by Poe in his poem "The City in the Sea" with the archetype of the hero or villain who is imprisoned till the end of a historical era. When the stars are right, Cthulhu will rise, and his worshippers, amidst joyous orgies, will destroy and slay with abandon in a "holocaust" of freedom. So the secret guarded by the Cthulhu cult involves the knowledge and use of astrology— an aspect Lovecraft would certainly have learned from the study of magical literature. In the story, the stars do move into the right alignment, the sunken city of R'lyeh explodes out of the depths to the surface of the South Pacific, errant sailors open the tomb of the god by accident, Cthulhu emerges and with this sardonic parody of Easter Sunday the apocalypse arrives.

Disdaining like the Communists of Marx's 1848 Manifesto to conceal his aims, the risen Cthulhu broadcasts his message through dreams to all. Lovecraft was to expand upon the idea of alien monsters returning to the world, with the explicit help of the *N* employed as a grimoire, in a subsequent tale, "The Dunwich Horror", of which we shall have more to say presently. In that story, the hero-scholar Dr. Armitage deciphers the coded diary of a half-human, half-alien creature Wilbur Whateley, who requires the *N* for rituals he is performing whose ultimate purpose is "the extirpation of the entire human race and all animal and vegetable life from the earth"— "clear off the earth" is the guarded euphemism the half-human Whateley himself employs in the enciphered diary. Lovecraft was inspired by the donnish (with a lower-case d) ghost stories of M.R. James to give his own tales academic settings— all the better for the introduction of forbidden,

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[32] See S.T. Joshi, *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos*, Poplar Bluff, MO: Mythos Books, 2008, pp. 35-37.

blasphemous tomes, sometimes cited and sometimes merely listed, complete with arcane pedigrees and references to real and fictional scholars and libraries.

The theme in *The Dunwich Horror* of a transnational, genocidal conspiracy of ugly, shunned half-human degenerates bent on world domination and mass murder, a plot set out in the secret tenets and scriptures of a blasphemous, apocalyptic faith, does not differ in its essentials, as one can see, from that of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; and his ruthless, repulsive villains match closely the image of the Jew (and, latterly, the Israeli) in Europe. Lovecraft's sturdy white male heroes— that is the less arty, neurasthenic ones that do not faint dead away upon realization of the truth— react to the conspiracy much as Hitler was to react to the message of the *Protocols*. They kill as many as possible of the presumed conspirators with the thoroughness and resolve of fulfilling a distasteful but dire moral imperative. Indeed Lovecraft openly shared the racial and ethnic prejudices of his time and class and place, despite his marriage to a Jewish woman, though in the end the rise of the Nazis to power across the sea appalled him. So the *N*, which the devotees of Cthulhu know, is a malefic work. In the case of the *Vh*, I have suggested widely differing manuscripts were kept and used by isolated witches. Lovecraft's *N*, by contrast, seems to belong to the canon of an entire, secret religion, one that is malefic as covens of black magicians are, but completely unconnected to the Abrahamic traditions rather than being a Satanic rebellion against them. Lovecraft was probably inspired here by Margaret Murray's *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, a book he had read and which he cites in lists of real and imaginary books in his stories. She contended that the European covens were in origin not malign inversions of Christianity or rebellions against it, but coherent, though dispersed, surviving communities of a pre-Christian fertility religion completely unrelated to and independent of the imported Near Eastern faith.[33] Lovecraft himself was a materialist who believed only in the provable truths of science; and his stories reflect this view to some extent. Man, he suggests, would go mad if he abandoned the comforting, protective illusions that endow his little life and the seemingly familiar world with significance and meaning. In the novella "From the Mountains of Madness" Lovecraft suggests that the Old Ones, to whom Great Cthulhu belongs, created human life as a jest or a mistake:[34] this nihilistic cynicism seems to be the aspect of his work that fascinates serious scholars like the French critic Michel Huillebecq.[35]

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[33] Murray's thesis was at first derided, but it seems to have some foundation. Johannes Weyer had suggested, several centuries before, that some witches were continuing a pre-Christian mode of religious practice we would nowadays call shamanistic; and Carlo Ginzburg, in his careful, early study of the Benandanti (*The Night Battles*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983) and the more self-indulgent, later book *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), restates and expands upon the thesis, bringing it up to date although in the latter work in a methodologically deplorable, uneven way (see the review article by Robert Bartlett, "Witch Hunting," *New York Review of Books*, 13 June 1991, pp. 37-38).

[34] See Joshi, p. 96.

[35] Although Lovecraft's work has at last been anthologized in a volume of the Parnassian Library of America, the stigma of pulp magazines and adolescent fascination with

But Lovecraft's world view, at least if one takes his art as a reflection of it (something fiction, of course, unlike systematic moral philosophy, does not oblige us to do), is not consistent. In "The Horror in the Museum" we learn that "great Tulu [the later Cthulhu]" is "a spirit of universal harmony… who had brought all men down from the stars." Such a cosmology is both meaningful and kind; and in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" there is a sort of aquatic variant of the myth of Adam and Eve: "Mother Hydra and Father Dagon what we all come from onct." Cthulhu's worshippers may take a dim view of the established order, but they seem to adhere to a religion with meaning and even a kind of goodness towards its own.

The couplet of the *N* first quoted allows for deeper, esoteric interpretation, and Lovecraft supplies this by way of a six-word mantra in an imaginary language of his own invention whose precise and literal meaning the Cthulhu-worshippers remember: *Ph'nglui mglwnafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgahnagl fhtagn*. "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming." Dreams again. The mantric verse is clearly an overt and detailed explanation of what the English-language, Donnish (with a capital d this time) couplet cited above merely hints at; and it, too, as we shall see presently, is a kind of couplet in structure, even more densely poetic than its precursor. Lovecraft does not tell us what language this is or even whether it is human; but the formula, like the *Tamāghis* (which also has six words) has gripped the imagination of readers. Elsewhere— but not in this story— Lovecraft refers to a dark language called Aklo. He borrowed the name from Arthur Machen's story "The White People", where it is mentioned as used for magical purposes, and says as much in his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. It is a fair guess that the Cthulhu mantra is in Aklo. Invented languages are not natural but they are still products of the imagination of speakers of natural human languages; so beyond a certain stage they necessarily exhibit etymology, morphology, and syntax. Consequently, compositions in them have a literary and poetic structure susceptible of analysis.[36]

So, for what it is worth, this is what I can make of the ritual formula. *Ph'* is a prepositional prefix, "in" (one recalls here Arabic *fī*); and *mglw-* means "die", with past participial ending *–nafh*. To *mglw-* one may offer a fortuitous but still interesting comparison to Armenian *mgl-el*, "to grow mouldy": the Soviet Armenian poet Ełišē Č'arenc' (Yeghishe Charents, b. 1897), who died the same year as Lovecraft, but from

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science fiction and fantasy still clings to his name in American scholarship. One recalls that Poe was little known and was not taken too seriously (Harold Bloom still disdains him) till Baudelaire wrote about him: French scholars now study Lovecraft and see him as a forerunner of the existential and the post-modern. *Vive la différence*.

[36] J.R.R. Tolkien's various invented languages are a case in point of artificial tongues with real poetics. His essay "A Secret Vice" (in *The Monsters and the Critics and other essays*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1984, pp. 198-223) is an admission there is something, indeed, decidedly autoerotic and maybe immature about a philologist who invents scripts and tongues, writes texts in them, and then composes commentaries and grammars about them. They do acquire a kind of animation then; and Tolkien sometimes wrote about them as though they possessed an independent existence (by then, in a way, they did), and even as though he had discovered, rather than created them.

the bullet of a Stalinist executioner, liked to use the consonant cluster in poems evoking the death of nature in autumn. The proper name and subject Cthulhu is placed at the end of the three-word hemistich; mirror-like, the only other proper name of the sentence, also bisyllabic— the toponym R'lyeh in accusative of location— is placed at the beginning of the second, three-word hemistich. The second word of the hemistich, *wgahnagl*, can be resolved into *wgah-* "dream" (cf. perhaps Arm. *vkay*, "witness", a Parthian loan word; the MPers. form is *gugāy*) and present participial ending *–nagl*, placing it in a position exactly parallel to the past participle in the first hemistich. And the verse ends strongly with the assertive finite verb *fhtagn*, "he waits." Elsewhere in the story a dreamer hears the simplified and repeated phrase *Cthulhu fhtagn!* meaning "Cthulhu waits!" The final words of the two hemistiches, then, form the essential message, each supported by two qualifying words. Understood in this way, the verse has a syntactic and semantic symmetry that impresses itself strongly upon the aesthetic sense of the hearer and reader. My associations of Aklo with Armenian and Parthian are wholly fortuitous of course, a kind of self-indulgent, Tolkienian game even; but they exemplify at least the real intellectual and emotional impact this invented tongue can produce on an admittedly impressionable mind. The poetics of the mantra is not impressionistic but formal and actual, though: once articulate words are formed, they are susceptible to study. Since Lovecraft's time, Aklo has given its name to collections of occult stories and has figured in the imaginative works of others. In his story (and comic book) "The Courtyard" Alan Moore, for instance, associates series of terms heard in Aklo under the influence of a drug with dissociating concepts that go progressively deeper into the brain, destroying human categories of thought, particularly morality, and replacing them with others. The language shapes the consciousness of those who use it in a radical way: mantra and bad acid trip meet Tlön, or, perhaps, just a not-very-*haute* vulgarization of Whorfian linguistics on steroids!

Many of Lovecraft's invented words in his earlier tales, which are about dream-escapes from the mundane waking world, were inspired by the pseudo-Indic inventions of Lord Dunsany, and are meant to sound orientally exotic and lush, with a euphony that sets them apart from the alien and grating extraterrestrial syllables of the later Aklo. Since dreaming figures so strongly in both the *Vh* and *N* traditions, it is perhaps worth mention in passing that an early Lovecraft story, "The Quest of Iranon" (1921) associates with sleep and dreaming the toponym Nithra: "… and at dusk I dreamed strange dreams… as I saw… the curving Nithra reflecting a ribbon of stars." Now, for English speakers (and Russians as well), the cluster *-indra-* or *-andra-* is perceived as euphonious and is very frequently encountered in glossolalic speech.[37] That is one reason Lovecraft might have invented what he wanted to be a pleasant-sounding name; and presumably he had read in his ramblings through Roman history of the Iranian god Mithra, as well. But the hypothetic Old Iranian **niθra-* (cf. Sanskrit *nidrá-*), "sleep", would have been the source of Middle Iranian **nihr*, also unattested, from which Armenian *nirh*, "sleep", undoubtedly derives. Again, the correspondence is, however haunting, purely fortuitous,

[37] For a discussion of the cluster see J.R. Russell, "Language of demons, language of men," in Sergio La Porta and Theo Van Lint, eds., *Festschrift Michael Stone* (in publication).

even if the hero's name is *Iran*on. But Lovecraft's resort, quite subconsciously, to the patterns of euphony common to glossolalic invention, is not coincidental at all.

The longest passage Lovecraft composed of the *N*, in splendidly pseudo-Biblical English (we do not have the original Aklo), is in the story "The Dunwich Horror": "Nor is it to be thought, that man is either the oldest or the last of earth's masters, or that the common bulk of life and substance walks alone. The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but between them, They walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. Yog-Sothoth knows the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the key and guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in Yog-Sothoth. He knows where the Old Ones broke through of old, and where They shall break through again. He knows where They have trod earth's fields, and where They still tread them, and why no one can behold Them as They tread. By Their smell can men sometimes know Them near, but of Their semblance can no man know, saving only in the features of those They have begotten on mankind; and of those are there many sorts, differing in likeness from man's truest eidolon to that shape without sight or substance which is Them. They walk unseen and foul in lonely places where the Words have spoken and the Rites howled through at their Seasons. The wind gibbers with Their voices, and the earth mutters with Their consciousness. They bend the forest and crush the city, yet may not forest or city behold the hand that smites. Kadath in the cold waste hath known Them, and what man knows Kadath? The ice desert of the South and the sunken isles of Ocean hold stones whereon Their seal is engraven, but who hath seen the deep frozen city or the sealed tower long garlanded with seaweed and barnacles? Great Cthulhu is Their cousin, yet can he spy Them only dimly. Iä! Shub-Niggurath! As a foulness shall ye know Them. Their hand is at your throats, yet ye see Them not; and Their habitation is even one with your guarded threshold. Yog-Sothoth is the key to the gate, whereby the spheres meet. Man rules now where They ruled once; They shall soon rule where man rules now. After summer is winter, and after winter summer. They wait patient and potent, for here shall They rule again."

The names in the passage, with the sole exception of Cthulhu, sound pseudo-Semitic: Shub-Niggurath evokes Tiglath Pileser, Nippur, and so on; while Yog-Sothoth has a Hebrew feminine plural ending. Compare also the *shoggoth*, a kind of monster Abdul Alhazred thought could be seen only under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs.[38] Kadath, sought in an early story in a "dream quest", has a Hebrew feminine singular ending. Lovecraft wrote an early story about submarine horrors, "Dagon": this the Philistine corn-god, the pillars of whose temple Samson tore apart; but Lovecraft chose to understand the name as that of an ichthyic divinity, cf. Hebrew *dag*, "fish". The text even follows in its sardonic way the Biblical Hebrew literary conceit of repetition of the same phrase with slightly different wording that is so monotonously familiar from the Psalms: words are spoken; rites are howled. The Old Ones were, are, and will be: this, too,

[38] In later stories Lovecraft decided to make the *shoggoths* real and visible: characters refer to them in terrified whispers and then emit unhuman shrieks, or else see them barreling down eldritch corridors and go stark raving bonkers: bad trip, man.

reminds one of such declarative locutions as the Hebrew "And He was, and He is, and He will be in splendor" in the Jewish prayer *Adōn 'ōlām*, "Lord of the Universe". The overall tone of the passage is both menacing and triumphal; and the crushing of cities and bending of forests recalls the Psalmist's vision of the Lord as a cosmic warrior, crushing the cedars of Lebanon, causing the mountains to skip like rams, and subjecting the poor earth to various other demonstrations of cosmic mayhem. Lovecraft invented also the pseudo-Egyptian Nyarlathotep; and the early Azathoth combines Egyptian Thoth with, perhaps, Semitic *'oz*, *'uzzā*, etc., "power" and the toponym Anathoth. Lovecraft's inversion of the sacred is not only linguistic and textual, but also topographical and directional: the Hebrews hated and feared the sea, with its Leviathan lurking in the dark depths, and revered Jerusalem on its mountain and the palace-halls of God on high. Lovecraft's dark sectarians offer worship to a Leviathan in a sunken tomb; and the promised land of the short story "The Shadow over Innsmouth" is the deep, submarine city of Y'ha-nthlei below, appropriately, Devil's Reef. There is one, and only one, major female character in Lovecraft's entire oeuvre: she is a destructive, powerful, alien monster with a distinctively Hebrew and feminine name, Asenath. Much ink has been spilt over the question of Lovecraft's sexual orientation: at the very least, one can conclude from his onomasticon that the Old Ones are bad, feminine, and Semitic. The Hebrew male plural most familiar to a speaker of English in such angelic appellations as Seraph-im and Cherub-im did not interest him, and did not evoke horror. He found sex repulsive; and that was certainly only heterosexual sex. If he had any homosexual desires, he buried them very deeply and rightly so, for his survival in New England would have depended upon extreme caution. Mongrel New York was a gay metropolis in the roaring twenties, as now; but one must recall that here in New England where I write, Harvard had just invented the *numerus clausus*, and was pursuing, judging in its "secret courts", and expelling hapless gay students— and the institution went on to destroy their lives by finding and contacting their potential employers over decades. This was the world in which Lovecraft lived.[39]

It is easy enough to perceive the literary pedigree of the sole long passage of the *N* Lovecraft's pen has vouchsafed us; but what of the origins of the brief, poetically intricate and allusively powerful verse in Aklo about the occulted, dreaming squid-dragon, great Cthulhu? I think this spell in an alien tongue might have had a particular source of inspiration, one that would even connect it, albeit remotely, to the other occult book we have discussed, the *Vh*! Lovecraft was raised by a puritanical mother and staid

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[39] There is one case where I think Lovecraft may possibly have allowed a latent homosexuality to shine through in a metaphorical coming-out story. The young narrator of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" takes a coming-of-age trip from the American Midwest to his family's ancestral home, a seaport where the natives have intermarried with Dagon- and Cthulhu-worshipping aquatic beings. He discovers he is one of them, and is about to shoot himself as his poor little cousin has done after the physical changes have begun to occur; but in a series of dreams the hero experiences a dread that turns to acceptance, and he resolves to return, dive under the sea, and live in wonder and glory forever. This writer read Lovecraft's tale at seventeen, when a terrible awareness was dawning that there was a universally detested name for what he felt and what he was. Suicides among gay youth, even after all the liberation movement has won, are still tragically frequent.

aunts: his father, Winfield, went mad when Howard was a little boy, and died of syphilis in an asylum. It is by now almost an article of faith among occultist devotees of Lovecraft's work that Winfield left at home in Providence a number of esoteric books that his reclusive, studious son devoured; and that among these volumes was none other than the *Picatrix*— that is, the *Ghāya al-ḥakīm*, in which the famous dream-inducing *Tamāghis* formula is featured. Though Lovecraft did read occult and magical books later on in life, and could have learnt of the *Picatrix* in the pages of Lynn Thorndike's massive histories of magic and science, the assertion that his father's library actually contained the *Picatrix* seems have been a mischievously playful— if not innocuous— invention of Colin Wilson.[40] The trick is a sore disappointment, but Lovecraft was, indisputably, very interested in Arabic and Persian literature and history and did read, cover to cover, *The Thousand and One Nights*, which is replete with magical spells, imagery, and occult ideas scarcely different from much of the narrative material of Islamic esoterica. He knew about Byzantine writers, too, particularly translators of Oriental works, and was fascinated by everything demonological. So it is most unlikely he would not have devoted particular attention to the *Picatrix*, learnt of its authorship and transmission, and been captivated by the array of occult learning it offers, had he known of its existence, even if not from his father's collection. Could the writer's Aklo spell of the dreaming and dream-inducing Cthulhu, associated with a magical book composed by a fictional Arab, have been inspired by the Aramaic spell to induce dreams found in the real magical book of a real Arab? It seems within the realm of possibility. But the octopoid god of the *Necronomicon* and the ritual mantra inscribed in a manuscript of the *Vec' hazareak* finally do meet in print, as it were, in a third and perhaps unexpected volume— one which exists.

## 4. The Book of the Cities of the Images and Laws of the Dream-Inducing Spell

The American writer William S. Burroughs, who died sixty years after Lovecraft, was the learned old man of the Beat movement: a visionary, a drug user, and an advocate of what he called the magical universe, seeing its conflicts and spells and phantasmagoria as a liberating curative to the totalitarian and entropic One God Universe, the OGU. His last major work, *My Education*, is compiled from a diary of his dreams, which shaped and enriched much of his writing; and in interviews, when asked what advice he might pass on to the coming generation, he encouraged younger writers to keep a notebook by their bedsides in which to record their dreams. In the 1980's Burroughs published his Western Lands trilogy, the first volume of which is *Cities of the Red Night*.[41] The novel begins with a sinister invocation that is also a kind of pedigree establishing the work's credentials and magical seriousness, rather like the introduction to the *Vh*. It lists abominable demons and pagan gods of various cultures, one of whom is "*Kutulu*, the Sleeping Serpent who cannot be summoned." This is, of course, none other than the

[40] See Daniel Harms and John Wisdom Gonce III, *The Necronomicon Files*, Boston, MA: Weiser, 2003, pp. 4, 24, 88-89, and 317 n. 9, referring to Hay, *Necronomicon*, pp. 49-50.
[41] William S. Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night*, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1981.

dreaming, octopoid Cthulhu of H.P. Lovecraft and his *N*.[42] Burroughs interpolated a fictional book, *Cities of the Red Night*, within the novel of the same name, itself a fiction. A good play of infinite regress, of the word as self-replicating virus, and a sardonic comment on the practice of fiction itself! (Towards the end of the novel, "Cities of the Red Night" mutates once again, into the name of a high school play advertised on a marquee.) It describes the cities of the red night, six in number, with these names: Tamaghis, Ba'dan, Yass-Waddah, Waghdas, Naufana, Ghadis. And they are, just as transparently, the words of the spell of the *Ghāya* that the Sephardi who owned a manuscript of the *Vh* copied into it. In reply to my query in a letter, Burroughs replied that he had not read the Arabic sources: his friend Brion Gysin, a painter living in Morocco and well-versed in Muslim culture, had told him the spell.[43] What I have sought to adumbrate by philological lucubration, then, Burroughs simply accomplished by fiat in a creative work: he united a historically real magical text with a literary, fictitious one, in a book that is itself a deliberate work of fiction but is certainly real as literature and as a manifesto of Burroughs' anarchic, heterodox vision of existence. The words of the spell are the names of cities here, **visible** entities, that is, like the icons of the *nomoi* of the *nekroi*: all three parts of Lovecraft's dreamed meaning of the name of the *N* are rendered actual. They are, like the active words of an Aklo mantra, also the sequential parts of a spell, transformative, cognitive stages that must be passed through in order, on a pilgrimage of intellectual liberation and occult insight; and the activating principle of each city is a refraction of the (in)famous dictum attributed to the medieval Persian Isma'ili Hassan-i Sabbah, Master of the Order of the Assassins (and the last character invoked in Burroughs' dedication), "Nothing is true; everything is permitted." The itinerary is to lead to these successive realizations: 1. Everything is as true as you think it is and everything you can get away with is permitted. 2. Everything is true and everything is permitted. 3. Everything is true and nothing is permitted except to the permitters. 4. Complete permission derives from complete understanding. 5 and 6. Nothing is true and therefore everything is permitted.

## 5. Some conclusions

The world, Wittgenstein suggested, is that which is the case, the complete aggregate of facts (*Tatsachen*). In a discussion of Mircea Eliade's understanding of the phenomenology of religion, Prof. Brian Rennie[44] has recently drawn attention to the Romanian scholar's use of the word in his native tongue for fact, *fapt*, to include not only objective phenomena but the subjective experience of their reception, the intellectual and emotional apperception that invests them with a meaning. This meaning, being a salient

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[42] William S. Burroughs knew of Lovecraft: in 1994, three years before his death, he permitted his short story of two decades earlier, "Wind die you die we die", to be reprinted in a collection of short fiction inspired by Lovecraft, *The Starry Wisdom* (Creation Books, n.d.), in which Alan Moore's story, referred to above, appears. The title of the anthology comes from that of an evil sect in Lovecraft's story "The Haunter of the Dark".

[43] See Russell, "Armenian Magical Manuscript".

[44] Lecture "Mircea Eliade, Fact and Interpretation: Sui Generis Religion, Experience, Ascription, and Art," Davis Center, Harvard University, 8 April 2011.

feature of an experienced reality, is a *fapt*; and Eliade drafted an essay with the enticing title "Faptomagic" that, apparently, was never published in its entirety. Texts of the *Vh* do exist in many copies and versions, and to that extent those who believe it does not, are wrong. However **The** *Vh*, the one containing all esoteric knowledge, endowed with awesome supernatural power, exists only as an imaginary construction, a reception of the phenomenon of one or another magical manuscript or of hearsay about one. But that belief, the one in *The* Book of the Six Thousand— the book whose existence Bedros Norehad denied, perhaps— is a *fapt*, an aspect of Armenian culture and folk belief that really does lead to certain attitudes and actions.

The *Necronomicon* does not exist as a book with a Library of Congress catalog number, whose author was a man named Abdul Alhazred; and those who say it does, are wrong. But for a text to be, one requires a written narrative and a title; and there is— or, one should say, there are, *Nekronomika*! They, together with Lovecraft's fragments, are *fapti*; and Burroughs' novel, the book that is within a book that brings together Cthulhu and the dream-spell of the *Ghāya*, is, if you will allow, metafactual faptomagic. It is a volume you can hold in your hands and find on the library shelf; and it brings multiple untruths together, books that do not exist and books that do about things that do not, into a new flight of imaginary creation that allows the reader to perceive, to kindle his mind, to participate as a creative human being in the great reciprocal game of minds and things, facts and *fapts*, that generates spiritual and material culture. But to what end? If there is some reasonable criterion applicable to esoterica, one suggests its moral content. The Zarathustra of Nietzsche transcended good and evil, becoming a "faptual" character in a powerfully influential book; but the actual, lesser known, historical Zarathuštra, author of the *Gāthās*, taught the opposite. Good and evil are the ground of being and every man has to choose.

So I must make my choice, a choice against both the magical, manipulated universe of the *Vh* and the malign terror of the *Necronomicon*— without, I hope, refusing the freedom and audacity of imaginative invention that is the true magic of literature. The conference called "Knowledge to die for", at which this paper is presented, is convened in the reunified capital of a country that once visited great harm upon the world because of a belief in secret knowledge to *kill* for. So how does one make knowledge, secret or revealed, something for our children to *live* by? Having begun with a letter written in Germany in 1936 informed by the evil message of a book purporting to be the revelation of a secret, I shall end with another letter, from in the same country and the same year, about faith in another revelation, but a good one. Dietrich Bonhöffer, who was to choose the glorious crown of Christian martyrdom in opposition to the Nazi Antichrist, wrote this to his brother: "One cannot simply *read* the Bible, like other books… Only if we expect from it the ultimate answer, shall we receive it." This clear formulation of how one is to receive the *Logos* seems to me to resolve the paradox posed once by the historian of early Christianity, Prof. Guy Stroumsa: the Eucharist is a mystery rite in a religion that has striven perhaps above all others to demystify, to proclaim openly all that it is, to be explicit about its mystery. For all that, to the reader without faith the Bible will remain a closed book; the Eucharist, a senseless magical rite. The kingdom of heaven, no less than the evil inclination, is within us, no less prepared to transform our perception of

phenomena into new experiences reshaping the real. The greatest mystery, the most important revelation, the deepest secret, then is not within the confines any book, however exotic and cryptic, but in that inner room where Our Lord Jesus Christ counseled us to pray, which St. John Chrysostom understood as the chamber of the heart, out of which the light shines in darkness; and the darkness encompasses it not.