

Walk like an Egyptian:

Egypt as authority in Aleister Crowley's reception of *The Book of the Law*

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Abstract

This article investigates the story of Aleister Crowley's reception of *The Book of the Law* in Cairo, Egypt, in 1904, focusing on the question of why it occurred in Egypt. The article contends that Crowley created this foundation narrative, which involved specifically incorporating an Egyptian antiquity from a museum, the 'Stèle of Revealing,' in Egypt because he was working within a conceptual structure that privileged Egypt as a source of Hermetic authority. The article explores Crowley's synthesis of the romantic and scholarly constructions of Egypt, inherited from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, as well as the uses that two prominent members of the Order made of Egyptological collections within museums. The article concludes that these provided Crowley with both a conceptual structure within which to legitimise his reformation of Golden Dawn ritual and cosmology, and a model of how to do so.

In 1904 British ceremonial magician and Golden Dawn renegade, Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), travelled with his wife, Rose (1874–1932), on an extended honeymoon to Egypt; at that time still part of the Ottoman Empire although occupied by the British since 1882. Between the 16th of March and the 10th of April, while living in Cairo, a series of clairaudient communications delivered to Rose, in combination with experimental rituals performed by Crowley, culminated in an event known as the Equinox of the Gods. A subsequent trip by the couple to the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities led to the discovery of a talisman, the Stèle of Revealing, which in turn precipitated an otherworldly dictation to Crowley of a sacred text by a supernatural being named Aiwass. This text would become known as *The Book of the Law* and it marked the inauguration of a New Aeon with Crowley as its prophet.

We are entirely dependent on Crowley's sketchy record for information about what would become known as the 'Cairo Working'. He recorded the events at the time, later annotated and expanded his original notes, and would continue to analyse and refine the narrative for the rest of his life. Although Rose was intimately involved in the experiences as well, we have no idea what she thought as she did not commit her impressions to paper. Others who were peripherally involved; the conservator of the Egyptian Museum, Émile Brugsch and his assistant Georges Daressy, hover indistinctly about the margins of the story, while the only other major player was

the disembodied Aiwass.¹ The events of the Cairo Working as recorded, it seems, were a matter solely concerning Aleister Crowley and the Egyptian gods. The lack of information outside Crowley's frame has not stopped later authors from discussing the Egyptian episode however, although not often in a particularly analytical manner.

John Symonds, Crowley's literary executor, provides an abbreviated version of the events leading up to Aiwass's dictation which, while mainly faithful to Crowley's own record and later elaborations, subsequently degenerates into an attempt to depict Crowley as a Satanist by identifying Aiwass as the Devil and confusing Hoor-par-Kraat (the child Horus, whom Aiwass represented) with the Egyptian deity Set and hence the Christian Satan.² Israel Regardie, one time student of and secretary to Crowley, also provides a brief rendition of the Cairo Working, but is mainly concerned with the psychological motivations of Crowley and Rose and the idea that *The Book of the Law* may contain repressed material from Crowley's psyche.³ Gerald Suster provides a compressed version of the events in Cairo and spends time discussing the contents of *The Book of the Law* as an apologist rather than a critical analyst.⁴ Martin Booth assigns little time to the events leading up to the dictation by Aiwass and, although like Regardie attempts to supply possible explanations for Rose and Crowley's motivations, does so in a simplistic manner.⁵ Lawrence Sutin is the most analytical; his rendition of the Cairo events deriving from a close reading of what he presents as Crowley's highly subjective narrative. While providing a sufficiently critical reading of the events preceding the revelation by Aiwass, Sutin is more interested in analysing the psychological mechanism behind apparent divine revelations.⁶ Richard Kaczynski's version also necessarily sticks closely to Crowley's records without however, delving deeply into the events before the dictation by Aiwass, and is mainly focussed on the result of the Cairo Working: the cosmology and the ethical system contained in *The Book of the Law*.⁷

¹ Crowley and Rose socialised during their time in Cairo, but if they mentioned their ritual project to anyone, it does not seem to have been recorded. They also had household servants in their apartment, who might have been expected to have heard and/or seen something of the events. Aleister Crowley et al. (Hymenaeus Beta. ed), *Magick Liber ABA: Book Four, Parts I-IV* (Maine: Samuel Weiser, 2000), 433.

² John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley* (London: Macdonald, 1971), 61-6.; *The King of the Shadow Realm. Aleister Crowley: his life and magic* (London: Duckworth, 1989), 65-9.

³ Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: An Interpretation of Aleister Crowley* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1970), 461-508.

⁴ Gerald Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast: The Life, Work and Influence of Aleister Crowley* (London: W H Allen, 1988), 125-134.

⁵ Martin Booth, *A Magick Life: A Biography of Aleister Crowley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2000), 181-188.

⁶ Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 117-134.

⁷ Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo* (Tempe: New Falcon Publications, 2002), 99-104.

As Marco Pasi notes, closer study focussing in on specific aspects of Crowley's life, rather than further production of broad biographies, is the direction in which Crowley scholarship ought to head.⁸ This article attempts to do just that in regards to Crowley's narrative of his experiences in Egypt. It is accurate to say that from the literature both by and about Crowley that we know, generally, *what happened* during the events surrounding the reception of *The Book of the Law* in Egypt. What is less evident however, is *why it happened in Egypt*. It is the contention of this article that Aleister Crowley created the foundation narrative of the reception of *The Book of the Law* in Egypt, and with particular regard to an object in the Egyptian Museum, because he was working within a structure that privileged Egypt as a source of Hermetic authority. While in Egypt, Crowley challenged the rules of Golden Dawn-style ritual procedure, made void his Golden Dawn oaths, severed relations with his former mentor, Samuel Liddell Mathers, and usurped the latter's role as sole conduit to the Secret Chiefs.⁹ The fact that this occurred in Egypt can be traced to the Hermetic tradition's promotion of Egypt as *the* repository of ancient wisdom. That it incorporated an Egyptian antiquity is a result of the new science of Egyptology. This article will investigate Crowley's record of the reception of *The Book of the Law* as a narrative that expresses the tensions between two different constructions of Egypt: the Hermetic and the Egyptological.

In order to do this the article will begin by explaining how, as knowledge of the Egyptian hieroglyphs and hence ancient Egyptian language gradually became lost in Late Antiquity, Egypt came to appear mysterious. This will be followed by elucidation of the circumstances whereby, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Egypt began to shed its esoteric image as the hieroglyphs were deciphered, scientific observation rendered Egypt's material culture visible to a European audience, and the discipline of Egyptology became established. After an explanation of the reasons for maintaining the arcane image of Egypt by certain sectors of society, the article then moves on to situate the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn within that category. Analysis of the fusion by the Golden Dawn of both the cryptic and Egyptological presentations of Egypt is then followed by several examples of how this manifested within their rituals. The focus next shifts to the uses made by Golden Dawn co-founder, Samuel Liddell Mathers, of Egyptological resources in both the British Museum and the Louvre. Subsequent to this is an investigation into prominent Golden Dawn member, Florence Farr's, activities in the Egyptological section of the British Museum. This leads into an elucidation of Aleister Crowley's experiences within the Golden Dawn, particularly in regards to Mathers and Farr. His journey to Egypt and the ritual experiences he had there are then analysed. Crowley's incorporation of an Egyptian antiquity into his project is then discussed, followed by the depiction of the climax of his time in Egypt: the reception of *The Book of the Law*. The article then concludes that the presentation of Egypt by the Golden Dawn and the uses made of Egyptological collections in museums by Mathers and

⁸ Marco Pasi, "The Neverendingly Told Story: Recent Biographies of Aleister Crowley," *Aries* 3: 2 (2003): 244.

⁹ Martin P. Starr notes that Crowley would exhibit a "lifelong pattern of usurpation." Martin P. Starr, "Chaos from Order: Cohesion and Conflict in the Post-Crowley Occult Continuum," *The Pomegranate* 8: 1 (2001), 98.

Farr, provided Crowley with both a conceptual structure within which to enact and legitimise his ritual and cosmological reforms and a model of how to do so.

Mysterious Egypt

From around the third millennium BCE until the end of the fourth century CE the Egyptian language had been written in hieroglyphic script.¹⁰ After the Greek alphabetic script was adopted in the Hellenistic period, knowledge of hieroglyphs gradually became lost. The Greeks, and later the Romans, did not create an account of the Egyptian language and its various scripts; and erroneous ideas about hieroglyphs started to gain ground.¹¹ The Christian Church subsequently discouraged hieroglyphic writing, associating it with Paganism, and the last hieroglyphic inscription appeared at the temple of Isis at Philae during the reign of Theodosius in 394 CE.¹² The fact that hieroglyphs were unable to be read however, only served to increase their prestige as they were believed to embody secret knowledge.¹³ It would be well over a thousand years before this idea was debunked.

The inability to read the ancient Egyptian language meant that Egyptian culture was transmitted to subsequent generations through a Greek and Roman lens. Egyptian deities were visually rendered in a classical rather than Egyptian style and texts claiming to expound ancient Egyptian religious and philosophical concepts were written in Greek or Latin.¹⁴ The works of Herodotus, Plato, Diodorus, Plutarch, Strabo, Pliny, and Juvenal, among others, contributed to an increasingly imprecise image of Egypt.¹⁵ The particular texts of interest for the purpose of this article however, are those of the Hermetic tradition; psuedepigraphic texts purporting to expound ancient Egyptian wisdom and believed during the Renaissance to date to the time of Moses.¹⁶ Although exposed as dating to the early centuries CE by Isaac Casaubon in 1614 and subsequently abandoned in intellectual circles, the Hermetic presentation of Egypt as a

¹⁰ Cyrus H. Gordon, *Forgotten Scripts: Their Ongoing Discovery and Decipherment* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 22.

¹¹ Paul Jordan, "Esoteric Egypt," in *Archaeological Fantasies*, ed. Garrett G. Fagan (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 113.

¹² Penelope Wilson, *Hieroglyphs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 86.

¹³ Erik Hornung, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 12–13.

¹⁴ James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London: Routledge, 2005), 6–22.

¹⁵ Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 19–25.

¹⁶ Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 61–3, 60. Cosimo de Medici had engaged Marsilio Ficino to translate the works of Plato from Greek into Latin but in 1460, after becoming aware of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, prioritized the latter's translation over the former, believing it to be much older than Plato.

repository of ancient wisdom retained its importance within European secret societies such as Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry.¹⁷ In these organisations ancient Egypt was considered to be the source of all religion, knowledge and architecture—‘not an ancient dead culture but a living tradition that could be inherited and carried on.’¹⁸

Scholarly Egypt

The split between Hermetic Egypt and scholarly Egypt can be dated to 1822 when Jean-François Champollion deciphered the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Before that time hieroglyphs were generally considered to be symbolic, containing mystical or spiritual ideas. Once texts written by the ancient Egyptians themselves were able to be read, students of ancient Egypt no longer had to rely solely on Greek, Latin or Arabic writings about Egypt.¹⁹ The decipherment of hieroglyphs marked the creation of the discipline of Egyptology and its split from what Hornung has termed ‘‘Egyptosophy’’, the study of an imaginary Egypt viewed as the profound source of all esoteric lore.’²⁰ The fantasy image of Egypt continued however, in a parallel tradition alongside the academic one, creating a rift between scholarly and occult Egypts, in Leirich’s definition, between Egypt: ‘the historical time and place known to Egyptologists’; and Ægypt: ‘the place where man and gods had constant communication, divinity and truth were always present and magic worked’.²¹

Early nineteenth century Europe witnessed not only the translation of ancient Egyptian language, but also became privy to accurate representations of ancient Egyptian art and architecture as a result of research conducted by the savants who had accompanied Napoleon during his invasion of Egypt in 1798, as part of the Commission des Sciences et Arte d’Egypte.²² In 1802 Dominique-Vivant Denon’s (1747–1825) *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute-Egypte, pendant les campagnes du general Bonaparte* was published, followed in 1828 by the multivolume *Description de l’Egypte*.²³ Subsequently enthusiasm for all things Egyptian became widespread

¹⁷ Ibid., 91–2. Jan Assmann, foreword to *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus* by Florian Ebeling (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), vi–xiii.

¹⁸ Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 118. Curl, *Egyptian Revival*, 230.

¹⁹ Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Penguin, 2006), 106–8.

²⁰ Wilson, *Hieroglyphs*, 101. Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 1, 3.

²¹ Christopher I. Leirich, *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 132, 4.

²² Stuart Harten, ‘‘Rediscovering Ancient Egypt: Bonaparte’s Expedition and the Colonial Ideology of the French Revolution,’’ in *Napoleon in Egypt*, edited by Irene A. Bierman, (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2003), 34.

²³ Ibid. Considered by many to be the most influential work of colonial scholarship ever produced.

in nineteenth century taste.²⁴ As well as starting an aesthetic trend these discoveries meant that there was now—theoretically—no reason for maintaining historically inaccurate beliefs about much ancient Egyptian material culture. Ancient Egypt’s visual style could be seen for itself rather than through the mediating lens of the Greeks and Romans.²⁵

It may be considered surprising then that in the wake of these advances in Egyptology which, as Leirich explains, have subsequently been promoted as examples of the triumph of reason over superstition and ignorance, that in the late nineteenth century the appeal of unscientific ‘Egyptosophy’ would be as strong as ever.²⁶ The image of mythical Egypt had been around for centuries however—scholarly Egyptology would not succeed in ousting it within a few decades. In addition, rather than hamper adherents of the pre-translation romantic view of magical Egypt as might be expected, Leirich maintains that scholarly Egyptology actually liberated them. The divide between Egypt and ‘Ægypt’ meant that people such as occultists were exempt from justifying their claims to skeptics and could now read Egypt however they wished.²⁷

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

In exactly this way, a little over sixty years after the decipherment of hieroglyphs a group of British aesthetes would deliberately bypass the lessons of Champollion’s phonetic hieroglyphs, ignore accurate visual representations of Egypt, and favour Graeco-Roman interpretations of Egyptian culture, all in the service of a magical spirituality: this group was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Originating in a background of Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, the Golden Dawn inherited both an understanding of the importance of revelation as a method of acquiring knowledge and a pervasive ‘Ægyptian’ aesthetic which, in combination with aspects of the new scholarly Egyptology, would manifest within their cosmology and rituals.

That the creators of the Golden Dawn, Dr William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925), Samuel Liddell Mathers (1854–1918), and Dr William Robert Woodman (1828–1891), were familiar with scientific Egyptology and the logic behind Champollion’s translation of hieroglyphs is beyond doubt.²⁸ Evidence from Westcott’s library confirms that they had access to Champollion’s decipherment method in the form of the 1825 *Essay on Young and Champollion’s system of Hieroglyphics*, by H. Salt, and accurate representations of Egyptian art and architecture as

²⁴ Curl, *Egyptian Revival*, 304.

²⁵ Ebeling, *Secret History*, 131.

²⁶ Leirich, *Occult Mind*, 132.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁸ Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 1.

depicted in Denon's two volumes on Egypt.²⁹ An additional resource was the large Egyptological collection in the British Museum, acquired since the mid-eighteenth century, which provided authentic visual representations of ancient Egyptian deities and people.³⁰ As will subsequently become evident, museums were to play an increasingly important role in three Golden Dawn members' negotiation between Hermeticism and Egyptology.

The British Museum at this time functioned as an intellectual center where members of the London academic, literary, journalistic and artistic circles regularly met. The museum's library staff was also part of this literary world and the museum's senior keepers lived on site and were accessible for social and research purposes.³¹ The Golden Dawn's founders, who were known to frequent the British Museum, would have had access to Samuel Birch (1813–1885), Keeper of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum from 1866 to 1885, who had established Champollion's system in England, as well as the Assistant Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities from 1893 to 1924, (Sir) Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge (1857–1934), who was also fully conversant with hieroglyphic Egyptian.³² Birch had published translations of hieroglyphic texts by 1838 and books on Egyptian hieroglyphs and grammar by 1857 and 1867 respectively. He had also made the first translation of the collection of funeral texts known as the *Book of the Dead*.³³ Budge too had translated many Egyptian texts including the *Papyrus of Ani*, one of the most noted versions of the *Book of the Dead*, by 1895.³⁴ The founders of the Golden Dawn may very well have interacted with the British Museum's curators: it was later rumoured that Budge extended his helpfulness to the point of permitting a Golden Dawn temple within the museum itself.³⁵

²⁹ George Mills Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn* (London: Macmillan Press, 1974), 296. Library item number 113. *Egypt - Essay on Young and Champollion's system of Hieroglyphics, by H. Salt, illustrated; 8vo, Lond. 1825*. Although they may not have been aware of every Egyptological publication in existence including Henrich Brugsch's 1855 grammar of Demotic, his *Dictionnaire hiéroglyphique et démotique* compiled between 1867 and 1882, or Adolph Erman's *Neuägyptische Grammatik* of 1880.

³⁰ Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), passim.

³¹ David Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London: The British Museum Press, 2002), 189.

³² Warren R. Dawson and Eric P. Uphill, *Who Was Who In Egyptology* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1972), 27-8. Ibid., 27, 45.

³³ John David Wortham, *The Genesis of British Egyptology 1549-1906* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 97.

³⁴ Dawson and Uphill, *Who Was Who*, 45-6. The actual papyrus, donated by Budge, had been available in the British Museum since 1888.

³⁵ Mary Katherine Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1995), 155, 430. n.4.

Despite their access to the most up-to-date apparatus of scholarly Egyptology, the Golden Dawn appeared not to be overly interested in or convinced by the picture of ancient Egypt now available through the decipherment of hieroglyphs. Egyptological books were a minority in Westcott's library, the collection mainly consisting of Hermetically-sympathetic material such as works on Horapollo's and Kircher's symbolic and allegorical interpretations of hieroglyphs.³⁶ Nor were they constrained by the real appearance of ancient Egyptian deities, or Egypt's chronology. Combining both pre- and post-decipherment approaches to ancient Egypt, Golden Dawn rituals were syncretistic constructions that included the Egypt filtered by the Greeks and Romans, the Ægypt of Hermeticism, and scholarly Egypt. The metanarrative of scientific Egyptology was incorporated but not privileged by the Golden Dawn because they sought not the real, historical Egypt, but the evocative 'Ægypt' of *illud tempus*, "that [distant] time".³⁷

Egypt in Golden Dawn rituals

The Golden Dawn included components of translated Egyptian texts to into their rituals. In the Neophyte Ceremony, the ritual of induction into the Order intended to signify the journey from the darkness of ignorance to the light of understanding, the blindfolded candidate was taken by ritual officiants through various symbolic points within a temple room.³⁸ The most important officiants bore titles derived from the Eleusinian Mysteries such as 'Hierophant', 'Kerux' and 'Dadouchos', explicitly situating the Neophyte Ceremony within the tradition of ancient mystery cults.³⁹ In all, ten officiants within the ritual each represented an ancient Egyptian deity (the Hierophant representing two), considered to be physically present within the room. A further eleven Egyptian gods attended without human representation, in addition to which the presence of another forty-two deities, the 'Assessors' derived from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, must have made for a rather crowded temple.⁴⁰

The Freemasonic pillars, Jachin and Boaz—in the Golden Dawn, Hermes and Solomon—situated in the eastern part of the temple were Egyptologically updated by being decorated with

³⁶ Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, 291–304.

³⁷ Lehrich, Christopher I. *The Occult Mind*, 2.

³⁸ Israel Regardie, *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic*, vol. 6, (Scottsdale: New Falcon Publications, 1990), 1–23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁰ The translation of *The Book of the Dead* utilised within the Neophyte Ceremony was the 1867 one by Keeper of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum, Samuel Birch. Erik Hornung and David Lorton, *Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 15. Mathers specifically mentions Birch in regards to the *Book of the Dead* in his discussion on the symbolism of the pillars in the Neophyte Ritual. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 3, 6. There were sixty-four deities within the temple, eleven of whom possessed the bodies of the ritual officiants while the other fifty-three were invisible. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 8, 62–6.

vignettes from Spells 17 and 125 from the *Book of the Dead*.⁴¹ The former consisting of a doctrine regarding the sun god and the latter, the so-called ‘Negative Confession’.⁴² These were re-interpreted in Golden Dawn teaching as:

...represent[ing] the advance and purification of the Soul, and its uniting with Osiris the Redeemer; in that Golden Dawn of an Infinite Light wherein the soul is transfigured; knows all and can do all; for it hath become joined unto Eternal Gods.⁴³

Frequent reference to the Four Elements (fire, water, air and earth) throughout the Neophyte ritual, along with a ‘sacred repast’ consisting of a symbolic elemental feast consumed at the ceremony’s conclusion, evoke the Hellenised Isiac initiation in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (11.23).⁴⁴

This syncretistic combination of Pharaonic-period funerary literature with components of Greek and Roman mystery initiations within the Neophyte Ceremony was typical of Golden Dawn rituals. In higher degrees members learned mystical signs encapsulating the story of Osiris’ murder by Typhon, the mourning of Isis, and Osiris’ eventual resurrection (Plutarch. *De Iside et Osiride* 13-19).⁴⁵ Another set of gestures enabled initiates to rend and see beyond the ‘veil of Isis’ (Plutarch. *De Iside*. 9), a prerequisite to entering the ‘tomb of Osiris’ within which, after experiencing a symbolic death, they were reanimated through a version of the Opening of the Mouth ceremony.⁴⁶ The Golden Dawn’s syncretism also lent itself to re-dressing ancient Egyptian deities who were subsequently visualised in garments of symbolic complimentary

⁴¹ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 3, 2.

⁴² Raymond O. Faulkner (trans), *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. Carol Andrews (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 44–50. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1895, 1960), 576–621.

⁴³ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 3, 10.

⁴⁴ ‘I went up to the borders of Death; I put the threshold of Proserpina beneath my heel; I passed through the trials of earth and air, fire and water; I came back up alive. At midnight I saw the sun flaring in bright white light; I went down to the gods below, up to the gods above, face to face; I worshipped them at their side.’ Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*. trans. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 249. Which, according to Mary Lefkowitz, was considered the ‘Egyptian Initiation par excellence’ in later centuries in Europe. Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 98. The symbolic ‘meal’ consisted of smelling a rose for air, feeling a flame for fire, eating bread and salt for earth, and sipping wine for water. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 6, 5–22 passim.

⁴⁵ The ‘L.V.X.’ Signs. John Gwyn Griffiths (trans), *Plutarch’s De Iside Et Osiride* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970), 137–147.

⁴⁶ The Veil of Isis was a metaphor for Nature derived from Plutarch’s description of the statue of Saite Isis ‘I am all that has been and is and will be; and no mortal has ever lifted my mantle.’ (*De Iside*. 9), later elaborated by Proclus with the additional sentence ‘The fruit I bore was the sun.’, which during the eighteenth century was considered to be an extremely profound and sublime metaphor for ‘veiled truth’ by poets, musicians and philosophers. Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 134–5. Golden Dawn members of the Adeptus Minor grade utilised the ‘Portal Signs’ to ‘open the veil’. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 8, 17–19. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 7, 151. Probably the version of The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony found in Budge. Budge, *Book of the Dead*, 433–50.

colour schemes deriving from Hermetic colour theory; while human ritual participants donned the Pharaonic *nemyss* headdress and crook and scourge.⁴⁷ Egyptian gods were even combined with the revelations of Elizabethan Magus, John Dee (1527–1609), where, in the form of images most probably derived from the *Mensa Isiaca*, they became chess pieces in the complicated spiritual game derived by Mathers, ‘Enochian Chess’.⁴⁸

Samuel Liddell Mathers

Samuel Liddell Mathers, the brains behind the majority of Golden Dawn rituals, was a prime exponent of mixing Hermetic wisdom with scholarly Egyptology.⁴⁹ Originally mainly self-educated in the British Museum’s Reading Room, and obviously a highly motivated scholar, Mathers followed on in this self-directed course after the establishment of the Golden Dawn researching magic, alchemy, symbolism and ancient Egyptian religion. One who would become a future student of his, William Butler Yeats, described him as a man of ‘much learning but little scholarship’.⁵⁰ Financially supported by Westcott ‘as a full-time student of the occult’, Mathers would have been able to spend ample amounts of time in the museum looking at both Egyptian statuary and studying textual material.⁵¹ Another future student of his, Arthur Edward Waite, described seeing him ‘staggering as usual under a load of books, and he said “I have clothed myself with hieroglyphics as with a garment,” so I inferred he was then deep in Egyptology’.⁵² In 1887 Mathers even met his future wife, Mina Bergson, in the British Museum in the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery where she was sketching statues.⁵³ So enamored of ancient Egypt would the couple become that by the late 1890s they would establish a cult of the goddess Isis in the flourishing Paris occult scene.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 7, 62. H.E. Whistler, “Ancient Egyptian Kerchiefs,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 11: 11 (1916), 240–1. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 126.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Woolley, *The Queen’s Conjurer: The Science and Magic of Dr Dee* (Hammersmith: HarperCollins, 2001), 3, 322. The *Mensa Isiaca* was a bronze tablet dating to the 1st century CE and made for a Roman Isis sanctuary, it depicts Egyptian-style deities, but the accompanying hieroglyphs are only decorative and make no comprehensible sense. Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 185. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn* vol. 10, 95–108.

⁴⁹ Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 77.

⁵⁰ Howe, *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 34.

⁵¹ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 75.

⁵² Howe, *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 34.

⁵³ Sister of philosopher Henri Bergson. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 41–2. *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁴ James Webb, *The Occult Underground* (Illinois: Open Court, 1974), 153–90. For a detailed account of Mathers’ Parisian Isis cult see Caroline Tully, “Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and Isis,” in *Ten Years of Triumph of the Moon*, eds. Dave Evans and Dave Green (Hidden Publishing, 2009), 62–74.

By the time Mathers and Mina (later ‘MacGregor’ and ‘Moina’) moved permanently to Paris in 1892 Mathers’ years of amateur Egyptological studies in the British Museum had paid off. When visiting the Louvre’s substantial Egyptian collection he could confidently pontificate on the meanings of ancient Egyptian statuary which he did through a Hermetic, rather than an Egyptological lens.⁵⁵ One of his students, Max Dauthendey, relates that ‘we often visited the vaults of the Louvre which contained the great Egyptian collections. In the process I learned a good deal about the secret traditions of the occultists.’⁵⁶ Despite Mathers’ lack of professional Egyptological qualifications he projected expertise as is evident from several admiring newspaper articles which mention how both he and Moina lectured on Egyptian religion, held soirées for those interested in the subject, and staged public performances of ‘Rites of Isis’ at the Théâtre Bodinière in Paris.⁵⁷ In fact Mathers did not approve of professional Egyptology, at least in regards to ancient Egyptian religion. In discussing the Parisian Isis mysteries which he and Moina had been facilitating from 1896, he explained that Egyptian religion involved ‘beautiful truths... dead to the Egyptologist, but so living and so full of vital force to [us].’⁵⁸

Florence Farr

Another avid frequenter of museums was Florence Farr (1860–1917), who was initiated into the Golden Dawn in 1890. Farr would attain the position of national leadership of the Order by 1897, representing the Paris-based Mathers.⁵⁹ As a successful Golden Dawn initiate it was to be expected that Farr would become fascinated by Egyptian religion, considering the large part it played in Golden Dawn ceremonies, as well as Egypt’s ubiquitous presence in Late Victorian London exhibitions.⁶⁰ In addition to assuming responsibility for the entire Order in Britain, Farr

⁵⁵ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, xvii. Marc Etienne, *Journey to the Afterlife: Egyptian Antiquities from the Louvre* (Sydney: Art Exhibitions Australia Limited, 2006), xiv-xvi.

⁵⁶ Ithell Colquhoun, *The Sword of Wisdom: Macgregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn* (New York: Putnam, 1975), 88.

⁵⁷ Andre Gaucher, “Isis a Montmartre,” *L’Echo du Merveilleux* (1900): 446–9 passim.; Frederic Lees, “Isis Worship in Paris: Conversations with the Hierophant Rameses and the High Priestess Anari,” *The Humanitarian* 16: 2 (1900), 82–87 passim. Golden Dawn students certainly thought he was an Egyptologist as seen in Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom*, 88. Even today Mathers is considered to have been an Egyptologist according to Jean-Pascal Ruggiu and Nicolas Tereshchenko, “Introduction Historique du Temple Ahathoor N° 7 de Paris,” accessed 31 November, 2008, <http://www.golden-dawn.eu/eu/displaycontent.aspx?pageid=109>. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, xviii.

⁵⁸ Lees, “Isis Worship in Paris,” 83.

⁵⁹ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, xv–xviii.

⁶⁰ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 8, 62–6. Dominic Montserrat, “Unidentified Human Remains: Mummies and the erotics of biography,” in *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the human body in antiquity*, ed. Domenic Montserrat (London: Routledge, 1998), 172–180. For an in-depth study of Farr’s Egyptian pursuits, see Caroline Tully, “Florence and the Mummy,” in *Women’s Voices in Magic*, edited by Brandy Williams (Stafford: Megalithica Books, 2009), 15–23.

composed and performed complex rituals to Egyptian deities, lectured publicly on Egyptological subjects, wrote two Egyptianising plays, and after resigning from the Golden Dawn in 1902, was conducting her own ‘Egyptian’ initiations by 1903.⁶¹ Like Mathers, Farr utilised the British Museum as a place for both artistic inspiration and study.⁶² Farr took immersion in the museum further than Mathers however, when while researching material for her book, *Egyptian Magic*, in the museum in 1895 she ‘made contact’ with what she described as ‘an Egyptian Adept’.⁶³

This Adept was a long-dead ancient Egyptian that Florence obviously felt perfectly comfortable about ‘speaking’ with. Ancient Egyptians had a habit of manifesting themselves to kindred spirits in the 1890s—even London journalists reviewing exhibits of Egyptian antiquities were liable to ‘reanimate and evoke the people of the past in a quasi-psychic way... as if through a medium.’⁶⁴ The idea that one could converse with the dead was a staple of Victorian Spiritualism and it was a cornerstone of the Hermeticism that imbued the Golden Dawn that all knowledge is obtained through revelation, not reason.⁶⁵ Consequently it was not at all unusual for Farr to believe that she could receive information through a discarnate entity she met in the British Museum.

Farr’s ancient Egyptian contact was ‘Mut-em-menu’, a coffined mummy acquired by the British Museum in 1835, which can still be seen there today.⁶⁶ Like other museum attendees, Farr would have been under the impression that Mutemmenu was ‘a lady of the college of the God Amen-Ra at Thebes’, however more recent research shows that this description is only half correct.⁶⁷ While the coffin is indeed that of Mutemmenu, a Chantress of Amun, dating from the 19th or 20th Dynasties (c.1295–1069 BCE), the mummy in the coffin dates from the Roman period (30 BCE–

⁶¹ Robert A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Scrapbook*, (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, Inc, 1997), 147. Florence Farr and Olivia Shakespear, *The Beloved of Hathor and The Shrine of the Golden Hawk* (n.p. n.d). Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, xix. Gilbert, *Golden Dawn Scrapbook*, 147.

⁶² Deirdre Toomey (ed), *Yeats and Women* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2nd ed. 1997), 110. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 155.

⁶³ Florence Farr, *Egyptian Magic* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1896, 1982). Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 195.

⁶⁴ Toomey, *Yeats and Women*, 130. n. 148. Montserrat, “Unidentified Human Remains,” 173.

⁶⁵ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1. Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 51.

⁶⁶ Spelled ‘Mutemmenu’, without hyphens, in the current catalogue: “Mummy Wrapping/Human Mummy,” The British Museum, accessed 23 December 2008, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=124292&partid=1&searchText=Mutemmenu&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=1.

⁶⁷ Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *A Guide to the First and Second Egyptian Rooms. Predynastic Antiquities, Mummies, Mummy-Cases, and Other Objects Connected with the Funeral Rites of the Ancient Egyptians* (London: British Museum, Dept of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, 1898). Cited in Toomey, *Yeats and Women*, 130. n.158.

395 CE) and is actually that of a man whose wrappings are padded and swathed so as to imitate feminine features such as breasts and rounded thighs.⁶⁸

It is understandable that in the 1890s this mummy would be taken at face value to have been female and Farr obviously deemed the priestess Mutemmenu a satisfactory link with the authentic Egyptian past. Fellow Golden Dawn member, William Butler Yeats, re-created Florence's British Museum experiences in his unfinished novel *The Speckled Bird* where the hero, Michael Hearne (Yeats), accompanied by Maclagan (Mathers), was to meet a certain woman at the British Museum who is later discovered meditating 'with her eyes half closed on a seat close to the Mut-em-menu mummy case.' She is not to be disturbed because, according to Maclagan, 'she is doubtless conversing with Mut-em-menu' who was, among other things, describing her past incarnations.⁶⁹ One of Farr's previous lives involved being Mutemmenu, so she was in essence, conversing with her ancient self.⁷⁰ Farr went to Paris in 1896 to confer with Mathers about her 'Egyptian Adept' and he agreed that because the Egyptian had responded appropriately to signs that Florence had shown her, she was indeed 'one of the 8°=3°', making her one of the 'Secret Chiefs'.⁷¹ Mathers subsequently gave permission for Farr to form a group with higher degree members of the Golden Dawn to 'work with' the Egyptian.⁷² Farr would maintain a relationship with her Egyptian Adept until she emigrated to Ceylon in 1912.⁷³

Aleister Crowley

Probably the most (in)famous Golden Dawn member, who would also make spectacular use of a museum, was Aleister Crowley who joined the order in late 1898 at the age of twenty three.

⁶⁸ "Coffin," The British Museum, accessed 23 December, 2008, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectId=129216&partid=1&searchText=6703&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=1. "Mummy Wrapping/Human Mummy." According to X-rays taken in the 1960s. James Putnam, *Mummy* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1993), 49. The mummy was most likely paired with this coffin by an Egyptian antique dealer, according to Warren R. Dawson and P.H.K. Gray, *Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum. I: Mummies and Human Remains* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1968), xii. Bridget McDermott, *Death in Ancient Egypt* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 2006), 190.

⁶⁹ William Butler Yeats, *The Speckled Bird*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976). Cited in Toomey, *Yeats and Women*, 111–12.

⁷⁰ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 169.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 169. Probably Golden Dawn signs symbolic of each grade or 'degree' in its ten-degree system. Secret Chiefs were equivalent to 'Unknown Superiors', a feature in many nineteenth and twentieth century Western esoteric societies, as for example, the 'Mahatmas' of the Theosophical Society. They were of so lofty an initiatory grade they need no longer inhabit earthly bodies. Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 193. n. 13.

⁷² Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 167. Mathers and Farr were obviously ready to believe that Golden Dawn degree characteristics were applicable to, let alone recognizable by, an ancient Egyptian.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 256.

Advancing rapidly through the grades, he had completed the Outer Order curriculum by 1899.⁷⁴ At this time Mathers, now sole head of the Order, was in Paris and Farr was acting head in England.⁷⁵ Although Crowley was qualified to advance to membership of the Second Order of the Golden Dawn, unbeknownst to him by November 1899 Farr, as Praemonstrix, had decided not to allow him to proceed to higher grades of initiation.⁷⁶ When Crowley eventually realised this he went to Paris and was initiated by Mathers who, while trying to maintain control of the Order in Britain from Paris, was finding the schismatic London branch slipping from his grasp.⁷⁷ The decision to initiate Crowley against the wishes of the Second Order in London was probably due to a combination of Crowley's persuasiveness, his reverence for Mathers whom he believed to be the only Order member genuinely in contact with the Secret Chiefs (as Mathers had declared in 1891), and Mathers' desire to maintain ultimate authority within the Order.⁷⁸ Crowley subsequently assumed the role of enforcer of Mathers' authority back in England, embroiling himself in disputes over the Order's premises and possessions, threatening members with suspension and generally increasing his unpopularity.⁷⁹ By April 1900 the London Golden Dawn branch had suspended all Mathers-sympathisers and left Crowley out in the cold. Over the next couple of years his intense admiration for Mathers transformed into scorn, seeing him as impotent in the face of the London Order's schism despite his claims of magical expertise, and eventually concluding that he had been abandoned by the Secret Chiefs.⁸⁰

Crowley in Egypt

Crowley went travelling after the debacle with the Golden Dawn, married Rose Kelly in 1903 and while maintaining an interest in Yoga, did not do much in the way of formal magic in that time.⁸¹ His disenchantment seems to have abated during his visit to Egypt in November as part of his and Rose's long overseas honeymoon. Having been such an ardent Golden Dawn student it must have been exciting for him to visit the land which ostensibly supplied the Order with much

⁷⁴ Howe, *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 192, 16. The 'Outer Order' consisted of the degrees from Neophyte 0°=0° to Philosophus 4°=7° in a ten-degree system, so only the first five degrees from zero to fourth.

⁷⁵ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 46, xvii.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 231–2. The Second Order consisted of the three degrees from Adeptus Minor 5°=6° to Adeptus Exemptus 7°=4°. Howe, *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 195, 16. Crowley was apparently denied admission to the Second Order on suspicion of "sex intemperance." Howe, *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 223.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 206.

⁷⁸ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, xvii. Ibid., 46, xvii.

⁷⁹ Howe, *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, 219–32.

⁸⁰ John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (eds.), *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 197, 334.

⁸¹ Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, 407.

of its spiritual authority. As he explained: ‘My gods were those of Egypt.’⁸² Crowley was quick to apply his Golden Dawn skills in the homeland of magic:

In the Great Pyramid on November 22 I performed a magical ceremony with remarkable results, the King’s Chamber being filled with the glory of IAΩ; and in the morning a practical work with Amoun resulted in my wife becoming pregnant.⁸³

Crowley and Rose left Egypt for a few months at the end of 1903 and returned again in February 1904.⁸⁴

Interlude: The Seeds of Competition

The blocking of Crowley’s advancement to the grade of Adeptus Minor by Farr in 1899 may have nourished rather than starved the seeds of magical ambition within him in more ways than simply that of bypassing her authority in favour of Mathers. While he does not sound resentful in his autobiography, it would be understandable for Crowley to have been both insulted and frustrated by Farr’s actions and he may have found himself thinking along the lines of “If I can’t join her, I’ll beat her.”⁸⁵ Although Farr was apparently in contact with an ancient Egyptian Secret Chief, she was out of the running of any competition for Golden Dawn leadership by this time because she had resigned from the Order in 1902.⁸⁶ Seeing as Crowley had also become disillusioned with Mathers and written him off as no longer being in contact with the Secret Chiefs, it meant that the position was vacant, there was an obvious void to be filled.

Along with the Egyptian aspects of the Golden Dawn rituals, Crowley must have also been aware of the performative uses made of Egyptian antiquities within museums by both Mathers and Farr to enhance their spiritual status. He would have understood that Egypt was both a source and a sanctioning authority of magical power, and that one of the ways this could be obtained was through Egyptian antiquities in museums. Whether Crowley had consciously thought about this in between the time of his last contact with Farr and Mathers and his arrival in Egypt, it must have eventually crossed his mind that he had done better than to simply rely on British or French museum collections of Egyptian antiquities as they had done—he was now in Egypt itself.⁸⁷

⁸² Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 357.

⁸³ Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, xxxv.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 175, 193, 196, 544.

⁸⁶ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, xix.

⁸⁷ Mathers and Moina claimed to have been ‘converted to the strange and passionate mysticism of the worship of Isis during their travels in Egypt’, although this almost certainly untrue. They were reliant in Paris on the financial beneficence of their wealthy friend Annie Horniman, which might have but probably did not extend to paying for

The Equinox of the Gods

Ensnared with Rose in their Cairo flat, between mid-March and mid-April 1904, events would unfold which would prove Crowley to have a closer and more justified relationship to Egypt than Farr and Mathers could ever hope to. On the 16th of March he performed the *Bornless Ritual*, allegedly with the aim of showing Rose the spirits of the element Air. Rose saw nothing but instead seemingly became clairaudient, telling Crowley ‘They’re waiting for you!’⁸⁸ The following day she continued making cryptic pronouncements about ‘the child’ and ‘Osiris’, so on the 18th they together invoked the deity Thoth in order to obtain clarity on the situation.⁸⁹ Rose subsequently revealed that the god Horus wanted to get in contact with Crowley. Crowley claims to have been exasperated but intrigued by these vague comments as Rose ‘knew less Egyptology than ninety-nine Cairene tourists out of one hundred.’⁹⁰ He tested her with a mixture of Hermetic and Egyptological questions regarding Horus and was satisfied that she was ‘speaking with the authority of a God.’⁹¹

On the 20th of March—the eve of the vernal equinox—under instruction from Rose/Horus, Crowley performed a ritual to Horus that involved a significant departure from both the formulaic ritual procedure taught in the Golden Dawn as well as the script of their traditional *Equinox Ritual*. The result of this innovation was ‘a startling success’:

I was told that ‘The Equinox of the Gods had come’; that is, a new epoch had begun. I was to formulate a link between the solar-spiritual force and mankind...the Secret Chiefs...had sent a messenger to confer upon me the position which Mathers had forfeited.⁹²

As Sutin notes, in order to make this new link Crowley first had to break his old one: as he said in a later annotation to the record of the event “G:. D:. to be destroyed, i.e. publish its history and its papers.”⁹³ He would retroactively explain:

The Secret Chiefs ... had chosen me as their representative on account of my comprehensive knowledge of the Mysteries, my correct understanding of their real import and my literary ability.

them to visit Egypt. Ibid., 207, 155. Although Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom*, 86, suggests, without any evidence, that it did. Farr does not seem to have visited Egypt either.

⁸⁸ Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, xxxv.

⁸⁹ Ibid., xxxviii.

⁹⁰ Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 394.

⁹¹ As Asprem has shown Crowley was wont to do in regards to verifying visions and magical experience. Egil Asprem, “Magic Naturalized? Negotiating Science and Occult Experience in Aleister Crowley’s Scientific Illuminism,” *Aries* 8 (2008): 139–165. Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, 411.

⁹² Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 394.

⁹³ Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 121. Crowley et al, *Magick Liber ABA*, xxxviii.

The chief duty which they laid upon me was to publish the Secret Wisdom of the Ages in such a form that... the scholars of subsequent generations would be able to restore the traditions... They released me from my obligation of secrecy.⁹⁴

The Equinox of the Gods meant that the deity Horus would now ‘take the throne of the East.’ This can be understood in regards to the—now apparently passé—format of the Golden Dawn’s *Equinox Ritual*.⁹⁵ The purpose of this biannually enacted ritual was contact with the sun during the astrologically significant point of the equinox, symbolic of a new beginning, and the attraction of its ‘fresh current’.⁹⁶ Part of the ritual involved the participants changing roles: the officer who had for the previous six months played the role of Hierophant in the Neophyte Ceremony, representing Osiris, vacated his position at the equinox in favour of the officer representing Horus.⁹⁷ Crowley’s ‘Equinox of the Gods’ followed this structure, but on a cosmic scale signifying the shift from an ‘aeon’ (a time period of about 2000 years) ruled by Osiris to the new ‘Aeon of Horus’.⁹⁸ On an earthly level this provided a way for Crowley to break with his former mentor Mathers, identifying the latter with the ‘old king’, Osiris, and himself with the ‘rightful heir’, Horus. Crowley believed in the power of initiatory oaths and Secret Chiefs. He needed supernatural sanction to break his Golden Dawn oaths, dispense with the Order’s ritual structure, and outshine Mathers as the only genuine contact with the Secret Chiefs—Egypt provided this legitimacy.⁹⁹

To the Museum

According to his record of the events, despite the cosmic revelation of the Equinox of the Gods, Crowley still harboured some scepticism and the next day marched Rose off to the Egyptian

⁹⁴ Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 404.

⁹⁵ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 8, 1–13.

⁹⁶ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 6, 84.

⁹⁷ Aleister Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries on The Book of the Law* (Montreal: 93 Publishing, 1974), 137–8. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 6, 54. The Golden Dawn’s equinox ritual also included the exchange of the Order’s secret password of the previous six months for a new one symbolising the fresh current. Crowley saw this same format when ‘Aiwass, uttering the word Thelema [the new word of the aeon] destroyed completely the formula of the Dying God.’ Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 399.

⁹⁸ As Crowley would explain: The neophyte ceremony of the Golden Dawn prepared me for the New Aeon; for, at the Equinox the officer who represented Horus in the West took the throne of Osiris in the East. Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 399. Crowley explained ‘Aeons’ thus: ‘Within the memory of man we have had the Pagan period, the worship of Nature, of Isis, of the Mother, of the Past; the Christian period, the worship of Man, of Osiris, of the present... The new Aeon is the worship of the spiritual made one with the material, of Horus, of the Child, of the Future. Aleister Crowley, *The Equinox of the Gods* (Scottsdale: New Falcon Publications, 1936, rev. ed. 1991), 134.

⁹⁹ While still in Cairo he wrote to over a dozen friends and colleagues announcing that the Equinox of the Gods had come. On his way home to England he visited Paris where [instead of confronting him directly] Crowley wrote a formal letter to Mathers ‘informing him that the Secret Chiefs had appointed me visible head of the order... I did not expect to receive an answer.’ Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, xl.

Museum in order that she show him exactly which god was attempting to converse with him.¹⁰⁰ What happened next was seen as proof of the genuineness of Rose's revelation. Inside the museum she passed by several images of Horus, seeming to confirm Crowley's suspicions that she had no idea of his identity. After ascending to the first floor however, she stopped and pointed to a glass case 'There, there he is!' As Crowley explained 'There was an image of Horus in the form of Ra Hoor Khuit painted on a wooden stèle of the 26th Dynasty – *and the exhibit bore the number 666!*' This was an exciting confirmation for Crowley who, having come from a strict Christian background, had associated himself for years with the Biblical 'Beast of Revelation' whose number was 666.¹⁰¹

An Egyptian stela (pl. stelae) is a monument to the dead.¹⁰² The one Crowley was so impressed by was a double-sided, painted wooden example dating to the Late Third Intermediate Period, around 716 BCE, that can still be seen in the Egyptian Museum today.¹⁰³ It belonged to a Theban priest of Montu, the falcon-headed god of war, named Ankhefenkhons I.¹⁰⁴ The obverse of the stela depicts an image of Ankhefenkhons standing underneath a winged disk over which is stretched the Egyptian sky goddess, Nut; Ankhefenkhons stands to the viewer's right, behind an offering table, and worships the deity Re-Horakhty seated at the left.¹⁰⁵ The accompanying hieroglyphic text identifies the characters in the image, the offerings, classifies Ankhefenkhons as an 'Osiris' (that is, dead) and praises the solar deity in his aspects of Ra, Atum and Kephra, as

¹⁰⁰ Colin McLeod has convincingly demonstrated that the museum in question was the Egyptian Museum and not the Bulaq Museum as is commonly supposed. Colin McLeod, "The Secret Temple," Lashtal, accessed 2 October 2010, <http://www.lashtal.com/nuke/>. This is confirmed by the closing, moving and re-opening dates of the various incarnations of the museum in Cairo. Francesco Tiradritti, "The History of the Egyptian Museum," in *Egyptian Treasures from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo*, edited by Francesco Tiradritti (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 12–23.

¹⁰¹ Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, 412.

¹⁰² Stelae were made of stone or wood and carved or painted with scenes or texts. They were also used to record historical events. Douglas J. Brewer and Emily Teeter, *Egypt and the Egyptians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 2007). xxii.

¹⁰³ The time of the overlapping 22, 23 and 24th Dynasties. While the Egyptian Museum in 1904 dated Ankhefenkhons I to the 26th Dynasty, K.A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 B.C.)* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1973), 190–1, places him in the 25th Dynasty, fl. c. 725 BCE; G. Vittmann, *Priester und Beamte in Theben der Spätzeit* (Vienna: n.p., 1978) suggests the end of the 23rd Dynasty, c. 716 BCE. Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, 745. n.257.

¹⁰⁴ Montu was associated with Horus by the 11th Dynasty under the name 'Horus of the Strong Arm' and in the New Kingdom was a counterpart of Re. Has the body of a man with a hawk's head and wears a headdress consisting of a solar disk and uraeus accompanied by two tall plumes. Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 203–4. Ankhefenkhons I came from a priestly family in which his grandfather, Wennofer/Iryiry I, was Third Prophet of Amun, his father, Besenmut I, a prominent official and his mother, Taneshet, a musician of Amun. Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 225. Cited in Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, 745. n.257.

¹⁰⁵ Aleister Crowley, *The Book of the Law* (Montreal: 93 Publishing, 1975), book cover.

well as Hathor, Mistress of the West.¹⁰⁶ The reverse of the stela consists of a rendition of the *Book of the Dead's* Spell 30A, the *Spell for not letting N's heart create opposition against him in the realm of the dead*, which is usually inscribed on a heart scarab, and Spell 2, *Spell for Coming Forth by Day and Living After Death*.¹⁰⁷

In Crowley's later rendition of this event in *The Equinox of the Gods* he sounds excited, explaining that the couple had not been to the museum previously, had no prior knowledge of its contents, and that coincidence was out of the question.¹⁰⁸ Later on in *Confessions* he seems more nonchalant, claiming that he simply 'dismissed [the catalogue number] as an obvious coincidence.'¹⁰⁹ Yet if he had not thought that the stela being item number 666 was vitally important at the time, there would have been no reason to have paid much attention to it at all. There were undoubtedly many other more glamorous examples of Horus in the museum if identification of the god by Rose was all that he had wanted. By March 23rd Crowley had dined with the conservator of the museum, Émile Brugsch (1842–1930), and had the hieroglyphic texts of the stela translated into French by the assistant curator, Georges Émile Jules Daressy (1864–1938).¹¹⁰ Between that time and April 7th Crowley translated the French into English and then into poetic paraphrases. He would later explain that he believed that the script on the stela contained 'a certain secret ritual of the highest rank' that the original ancient Egyptian author had recorded especially for him.¹¹¹ Less than a decade after the event he would identify himself as that author when he recalled being Ankhefenkhons in a previous life.¹¹² Crowley had 'sent' this stela to himself in a future life, back when he was an ancient Egyptian.¹¹³

The Book of the Law

Having severed his ties to the Golden Dawn, it was now time to formulate the predicted new link 'between the solar-spiritual force and mankind'. During the first week of April Crowley had been preparing to follow Rose's instructions for a ritual that involved entering the room they had assigned as the 'temple' exactly at noon, writing down what he heard for the space of one hour, and rising exactly at one o'clock on three consecutive days. This he did on April 8th, 9th and 10th,

¹⁰⁶ According to the translation by Alan Gardiner, and Battiscombe Gunn cited in Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, 413.

¹⁰⁷ Abed el Hamid Zayed, "Painted Wooden Stelae in the Cairo Museum," *Revue d'égyptologie* 20 (1968), 151–2.

¹⁰⁸ Crowley, *Equinox of the Gods*, 73.

¹⁰⁹ Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 394.

¹¹⁰ Crowley, *Equinox of the Gods*, 114. Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, 745. n. 258.

¹¹¹ Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 101, 275.

¹¹² Crowley, *Equinox of the Gods*, 126.

¹¹³ Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 275.

during which he clairaudiently heard and transcribed a voice belonging to a being called Aiwass who described himself as ‘the minister of Hoor-paar-kraat’.¹¹⁴ This otherworldly communication session would become known as the ‘Cairo Working’ and the three one-hour dictation instalments would become the basis for *The Book of the Law*.¹¹⁵

Crowley seems to have been inspired by the visual depiction of the deities on the obverse of Ankhefenkhons’ stela; Nut, Behdet, and Re-Horakhty, rather than its hieroglyphic text.¹¹⁶ In the sixty-one pages of *The Book of the Law* each of these gods is assigned a chapter in which they reveal themselves and command particular types of action to be performed. Nut, the personification of the sky, associated with the theme of resurrection as mother of Osiris and the deities featuring in the Heliopolitan mythic cycle, was assigned the first chapter.¹¹⁷ Crowley/Aiwass calls her ‘Nuit’, both an allusion to the French word for night and Kabbalistically significant.¹¹⁸ Nuit is ‘All that exists and the condition of that existence’.¹¹⁹ She is depicted as possessing a Venusian nature and concerned with sexual ecstasy on the mortal plane, mirroring a greater bliss resulting from post mortem union with the goddess. Nuit expresses the idea that humans should enjoy life and not fear death.¹²⁰ Behdet, a form of Horus depicted as a hawk-winged sun disk conveying the idea of the sun’s passage across the sky, is assigned the second chapter.¹²¹ Re-named ‘Hadit’, he is the complement of ‘Nuit’ and represents

¹¹⁴ Later Crowley would recall that he actually saw Aiwass as well. ‘He seemed to be a tall, dark man in his thirties, well-knit, active and strong, with the face of a savage king, and eyes veiled lest their gaze destroy what they saw.’ As Mathers and Farr had agreed that Mutemmenu was one of the Secret Chiefs, so Crowley assigned Aiwass a high status in the hierarchy of Hermetic Orders—‘He is thus an Ipsissimus, the Head of the A.:A.:’. Crowley, *Equinox of the Gods*, 118. Aiwass would also turn out to be Crowley’s Holy Guardian Angel. Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 610. Hoor-Paar-Kraat is obviously the Egyptian Har-pa-khered, Horus the Child, the Greek Harpocrates. Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses*, 132. Harpocrates was depicted in ancient Egypt as holding a finger to his lips signifying childishness, but was interpreted in the Hermetic tradition as instead, performing a mystical gesture of silence. Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 66. It is interesting regarding Aiwass being ‘the minister of Hoor-Paar-Kraat’ because ‘Har-Par-Krat’ was the secret word conferred upon the candidate in the Golden Dawn’s Neophyte Ceremony. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 6, 17.

¹¹⁵ Symonds and Grant, *Confessions*, 395.

¹¹⁶ The poetic paraphrases of the hieroglyphic texts on the obverse of the stela were inserted later into page 2 of Chapter One and page 10 of Chapter Three of *The Book of the Law*, as can be seen in the manuscript version, but the text on the reverse of the stela was not included at all. Crowley, *Book of the Law*, 10, 66.

¹¹⁷ Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses*, 160–1.

¹¹⁸ Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 81-176. Although she is called ‘Nout’ in the Egyptian Museum’s French, and Crowley’s English prose translations. She does not become ‘Nuit’ (also ‘Nuith’) until Crowley composes the poetic paraphrases. Aleister Crowley, *The Holy Books of Thelema* (Maine: Samuel Wesier, 1983), 247–251.

¹¹⁹ Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 109.

¹²⁰ Crowley, *Book of the Law*, 9-30.

¹²¹ Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses*, 201-2.

individual life within the greater cosmic surround of the goddess, analogous to the sun as one star among the company of stars within the ocean of space.¹²² Hadit dwells within all manifestation as the life force; consequently ‘god’ must be understood as internal as much as external.¹²³ Re-Horakhty, as the speaker in the third chapter where he is known as Ra-Hoor-Khuit, is a fusion of Horakhty, ‘Horus of the two horizons’, god of the rising and setting sun, and the Heliopolitan sun god, Re.¹²⁴ A ‘god of War and Vengeance’, he symbolises the aggressive and focussed will power necessary for mortals to achieve their goals in life. A dual deity consisting of active—Ra-Hoor-Khuit—and passive—Hoor-Paar-Kraat—forms of Horus, this god epitomises the unity of opposites which ought to be the goal of human beings.¹²⁵

The Afterlife of the Stela

By 1909 Crowley had concluded that *The Book of the Law* was of global significance as the religious text par excellence of the New Aeon and subsequently self-published it in a three volume set.¹²⁶ As explained above, between the time of Late Antiquity and Champollion’s decipherment, Egyptian hieroglyphs gained their prestige from their apparent unknowability. By 1904, Crowley was able to resort to scientific Egyptology in order to discover what the hieroglyphs on Ankhefenkhons’ stela actually said. The original intention of the author of the stela—that the priest Ankhefenkhons successfully traverse the underworld and maintain life after death—was ignored however, and the stela was re-interpreted and appropriated for Crowley’s project of ‘formulat[ing] a new link between the solar-spiritual force and mankind’. The hieroglyphic text on the stela had nothing to do with the contents of *The Book of the Law*, the only link was the museum catalogue number 666 which had piqued Crowley’s interest in the deities depicted on its obverse.¹²⁷ As a Hermeticist Crowley—who was more interested in viewing the object through symbolism and Kabbalistic numerology than via Egyptology—could interpret Ankhefenkhons’ stela as a message.¹²⁸

¹²² The French translation spells his name ‘Houdit’, as does Crowley in his English prose translation. As with Nout, Houdit is modified to ‘Hadit’ (and ‘Hadith’) in Crowley’s poetic versification. Crowley, *Holy Books of Thelema*, 247–251.

¹²³ Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 183, 199.

¹²⁴ Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses*, 201. Re-Horakhty was depicted in a similar fashion to Montu with solar disk and uraeus, but without the plumes. *Ibid.*, 208.

¹²⁵ Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 258, 294.

¹²⁶ Crowley et al., *Magick Liber ABA*, xlv.

¹²⁷ As mentioned above, the poetic paraphrases of the hieroglyphs were inserted later.

¹²⁸ By 1909 Crowley would explain ‘Hadit’, as “a mathematical expression rather than a God.” Aleister Crowley; Victor Neuburg and Mary Desti, *The Vision and the Voice* (Maine: Weiser, 1998), 237. n.2.

Crowley's understanding of Ankhefenkhons' stela both differed from the original intention of its author, as interpreted in accordance with Egyptological history, and was explicitly Orientalist.¹²⁹ However, theoretically such an object is just, in Bohrer's words, 'a piece of dead matter until it is drawn into a dialectic, dynamic relationship with an observer'.¹³⁰ Crowley's treatment of Ankhefenkhons' stela provided it with an afterlife—as the 'kiblah' of his new religion, Thelema—that most other antiquities within its genre do not have.¹³¹ Thelemites, followers of Crowley who accept *The Book of the Law*, implicitly, or explicitly accept the talismanic nature of the stela.¹³² In Crowley's ritual, the 'Gnostic Mass', the central public ritual of the Ordo Templi Orientis, excerpts of *The Book of the Law* form part of the liturgy and a reproduction of Ankhefenkhons' stela features in a prominent position on the high altar where it is intended to represent 'the oracular connection...with the archaic energies of ancient Egypt'.¹³³ The stela as an antiquity has undergone the 'translation' of reception, changing in meaning as it passed from its original author, through the mediation of a museum to Crowley, to become a new object altogether intended for a wider audience.¹³⁴ As part of what is the continuous evolution of this artefact/text from producer to recipient, the authentic aura of the stela is today the object of religious pilgrimage to the Egyptian Museum, as well simultaneously maintaining a mass existence thanks to the age of technological reproducibility.¹³⁵

Conclusion

The Hermetic Egypt encountered through revelation as well as that of scientific Egyptology were combined in the activities of Crowley in Egypt in 1904, but his actions were not without precedent. His *alma mater*, the Golden Dawn, promoted a fusion of the romanticised Egypt of

¹²⁹ Harten, *Rediscovering Egypt*, 35.

¹³⁰ Frederick N. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22.

¹³¹ "The Kiblah," Tau Apiryon, accessed 2 October, 2010, <http://hermetic.com/sabazius/kiblah.htm>.

¹³² "A Syllabus of the Official Instructions of the A.:A.: Hitherto Published," Hermetic.com, accessed 2 October, 2010, <http://hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib207.html>.

¹³³ "The Invisible Basilica: Liber XV: The Gnostic Mass: Annotations and Commentary by Helena and Tau Apiryon", accessed 12 July, 2006, <http://www.hermetic.com/sabazius/gmnotes.htm>. The priest performing the ritual wears Egyptianising costume and represents Hadit, while the priestess assumes the role of Nuit.

¹³⁴ Louise A. Hitchcock, *Theory for Classics: A Student's Guide* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 81. As instructed within Chapter Three, verse 47 of *The Book of the Law* itself. Crowley, *Book of the Law*, 71.

¹³⁵ Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, 23. "The Pilgrimage," Lita Luise Chappell, accessed 2 October, 2010, <http://www.ockham-sound.com/goldenlotus-oto/archives/20>. Hitchcock, *Theory for Classics*, 81–2. See Stele of Revealing.com, accessed 2 October, 2010, <http://steleofrevealing.com/> and on YouTube, "The Actual Stele of Revealing - Great Artifact of Thelema," FatAlbertCamus, accessed 2 October, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8e7HbXBVuBg&feature=related>.

Hermeticism and Freemasonry with scientific Egyptology, and two influential Order members in particular publicly enacted this synthesis within the apparently sanctioning surrounds of a museum. After Crowley's experience with the Golden Dawn he sought to create a new magical tradition, but looked backward to the ancient Egyptian past for validation. By co-opting scholarly Egypt to a Hermetic end in the tradition of the Order, Crowley, while seeking to escape it, in fact worked within the metanarrative of the Golden Dawn's conception of Egypt as the source of Hermetic authority. While apparently constrained by his former interaction with the Order, its cosmological and ritual structure actually enabled Crowley to create and enact his reform thereof in a manner that seemed both coherent and sanctioned by authority, thereby perpetuating that structure.¹³⁶ Crowley was less interested in Egyptian culture, aesthetics or religion than in the power he could extract from association with its venerable antiquity. His accurate assessment of the spiritual clout possessed by ancient Egypt in the eyes of his peers meant that regardless of the actual function and meaning of Egyptian material culture, the simple fact of its Egyptian nature provided him with spiritual credibility and prowess. Ancient Egypt was a source of supernatural empowerment for Crowley which provided sanction for his assumption of the role of prophet of the New Aeon.

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¹³⁶ John Robb, "Agency," in *Archaeology: The Key Concepts*, edited by Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 4.

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