

The Scroll of Set

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Editor: Margaret A. Wendall IV°

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[1] The Star of Bethlehem

- by Margaret A. Wendall IV°

The following article was published last May in *The Magic Cat*, when our Christian neighbors had just finished their celebration of Easter. It seems appropriate to reprint the article at the beginning of the Christian cycle.

Osiris is a nocturnal Sun-god, a god of the chaos of night, and his original birth as the light of Ra was symbolic to the Egyptians as the origin of all humanity. If Osiris is a Sun-god of chaos, so is his daily counterpart Ra. As the noonday Sun, a cold either bless the land and its inhabitants with life-giving light and warmth or he could lust as easily scorch the earth and kill all living things.

In the morning the Sun-god is Horus, and at sunset it is Atum or Tum. Thus, we have so far the child-Sun, Horus, the adult Sun at noon as Ra, a dying Sun as Atum, and a dead Sun as Osiris. The Sun at night fought Apep and his fiends (symbols of darkness) and overthrew them. The sequence was repeated daily, with Osiris always the victor, and at dawn the Sun was resurrected as Xepera. One might note that Xepera is one of the nine gods who destroy damned souls, and Atum is damned! The cycle so far is:

- Dawn = Horus/nativity.
- Noon = Ra/adulthood.
- Evening = Atum/death.
- Midnight = Osiris/tomb.
- Next Dawn = Xepera/resurrection.

Because the entire mythology of these gods is connected with the Sun, we might expect to find stars involved, and we do. There are four principal goddesses, all of whom at one time seem to have been forms of Isis connected with the solar legend:

- Selket (Antares) announced the autumn equinox ca. 5000 BCE.
- Nephtys (Vega setting at the winter solstice, as well as all stars when they rose or set, and sunset itself).
- Nuit (Alcyone in the Pleiades) announced the vernal equinox ca. 500 CE.
- Isis (Sirius rising) announced the summer solstice and the Nile flood, the life-giver of Egypt.

Along with these there are goddesses of the four cardinal points. And each of these seems to have been a form of Isis: North, Uatchet; South, Nekhbet; East, Bast; and West, Nuit. One must also consider that the Egyptian name for Isis is *Auset*, a feminine form of the Egyptian of Osiris, *Asar*. *Auset* gives life and *Asar* takes it away.

With this *dramatis personæ* in mind, it should not surprise us that Christians celebrate the annunciation at the vernal equinox. The god Thoth appeared to Isis to announce the forthcoming birth of Horus, and we find a hymn to Nuit, the Isis of the vernal equinox, in *Gods of the Egyptians*, Volume I, page #459:

Hail, great star, thy birth has not been accomplished. Hail, great star, unknown one. Thou art doubly hidden in the mysteries of the Tuat. Hail, great star, thy linens have not been unwrapped. O, open them. Hail, hidden one. My door to thee is closed. Come and receive the soul of Osiris, and protect it with thy two hands.

In the passage above, "Tuat" can mean "womb". Then, as in Mary's seclusion, Isis hid herself in papyrus swamps until the time came for her to bring forth her firstborn son, Horus. Uatchet (the "Elizabeth" of this story) was with her and helped her. Nekhbet was called the mother of the Sun (also pharaoh's mother), and here again Uatchet plays the role of nurse.

In Bubastis the soul of Isis resided in Bast, and she was called the "lady of life". One word for "life" has a star-symbol as a determinative, and Bast could also be called the "lady of the star". Mary is "Stella Maris" (star of the sea). As Ra-t, Bast is the wife of Ra.

In Christianity it is John the Baptist who is born at midsummer, June 25th. In Egypt stars were seldom gods, but heliacal rising of Sahu/Orion occurs just before that of Isis/Sirius near the summer solstice. Orion was one asterism a pharaoh desired to become in death, because his role would thus become that of John the Baptist in Christianity: He would foretell the birth of the savior.

There is no evidence in the Christian *Bible* that Jesus was born at the winter solstice. There is much evidence that indicates a summer-solstice Nativity. First there are the shepherds. Even in the relatively mild climate of the Middle East, they would have taken refuge in tents in winter, whereas in summer they would be more likely to be outdoors. If the "angelic host" refers to the Milky Way, it is so much more predominant and beautiful in summer than in winter that this too is a clue to a Midsummer event. Even Cygnus, the Northern Cross, is overhead in summer [and it would have been in the year 0 CE].

It is only the duration of the trip made by probably Babylonian sorcerers (the Magi) to the court of Herod - a trip that might have lasted six months - that points to a possible winter Nativity. I suspect, though, that the Christians, who didn't fix the date of Christmas until the fourth century CE, probably combined their version of the Egyptian legend with the timing of the Roman Saturnalia festival, which does occur in Midwinter and which needed to be suppressed.

The words "Nephtys" and "Bethlehem" are worth noting. "Bethlehem" means "house of bread", and Nephtys is the "lady of the temple". There is another goddess, Nepit, who is a grain-goddess, and grain was always used in festivals of Isis. As the Greek Apollo, Horus is a god of grain, whom the Greeks considered to be born in Bethlehem.

Grain and its by-products, beer and bread, played an important part in the mystery plays of pharaoh's succession. He passed them out to symbolize that by sacrificing grain, bread and beer are produced; and in his death he is succeeded by his son, a new pharaoh. In the Christian communion ceremony the symbolism is the same, but the beer has become wine. And in their hatred of the Egyptians, Jews take great pain not to eat leavened bread at their vernal equinox festival, Passover.

If the star of Bethlehem were any of the things we are led to believe - a supernova, comet, or conjunction of major planets, it should not have taken a group of foreign magicians to bring this to the attention of Herod. Even the shepherds could have gotten word to him. Were there no Hebrews at all who noticed it? One explanation is that the star was something that rose [and set] regularly, a star with meaning to all peoples of the Middle East except the Hebrews [who looked upon astronomy as one of the works of the Devil].

The real or legendary Herod realized that the star was Sirius, and that the newborn king of the Jews was in fact Horus, an Egyptian heresy; and the slaying of children would certainly have done as much to wipe out this heresy as similar Christian slaughters have since. It is significant that Joseph/Osiris, Mary/Isis, and Jesus/Horus fled to Egypt, where the entire story originated.

As Isis, Sirius picks up her new-born Sun/son, Horus, from his manger in the fields on the eastern banks of the Nile and carries him across the sky until the winter solstice, when Nephtys buries him as Atum. As Nephtys, Vega attends the Sun's burial in the northern region of the sky, and follows him in his travel in the tomb as Osiris until his resurrection as Xepera. Selket, the scorpion Antares, is present to aid in destroying Apep and the fiends of darkness; and every spring Alcyone as Nuit is ready to receive

anew the good news that the Sun will be reborn.

One further analogy between the Christian and Egyptian legends is that, after their return from Egypt, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are found in Jerusalem. At the age of twelve in the Bar Mitzvah, a Jewish boy is initiated as a man, and Jesus is found answering questions put to him by priests, who are astonished at how much Jesus knows. Comparing the Egyptian legend, parts of which are at least 6,000 years old, with the relatively new Christian story, this knowledge is understandable. Christians admit that Jesus is the one into whose mysteries they desire initiation. Horus also needed no initiation.

The mythology of Sirius in the Egyptian religion, then, is that she is Isis, the mother of the new-born Sun, Horus, whom she is often pictured nursing as a mother would. Isis is the prototype of the Christian Mary, mother of "God". And Sirius - not some rare astronomical event - is the "star of Bethlehem" which announced the birth of Horus/Jesus. In Egypt we find the triad of Osiris-Isis-Horus. In Christianity the same triad is Joseph-Mary-Jesus.

At the vernal equinox we, like Isis/Nuit, receive the good news to prepare for the birth of the Sun/Horus at the summer solstice. We also celebrate the resurrection of the Sun/Xepera, who died as Atum at the winter solstice, attended by Vega/Nephtys.

There are stars announcing the birth of saviors in almost every religion known to us, and I suspect that the real star in most of them is Sirius - the brightest and most beautiful of all the fixed stars. These legends were a convenient way for priest/astronomers to reassure the ignorant masses of people that the Sun would indeed rise in the east the next morning. The astronomical events thus related are fact, but it seems incredible that in this day of general enlightenment, when people know why the Sun rises and sets, most people still need to rely on their legends to reassure themselves.

[2] Book Review:

Foundation's Edge by Isaac Asimov

- by Michael A. Aquino, VI^o

In the *Iliad* Homer relates the story of how Paris, son of the king of Troy and the goddess Artemis, was called before the three other principal goddesses Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena to decide which one of them was the most beautiful. Each offered him a bribe: Hera (queen of the gods) political power & statesmanship, Aphrodite (goddess of love) the most beautiful woman in the world, and Athena (goddess of wisdom) unsurpassed wisdom & knowledge. Paris chose Aphrodite and was rewarded with Helen, but of

course he was also rewarded with the displeasure of Hera and Athena, which resulted in the Trojan War.

In his fourth *Foundation* novel Isaac Asimov has retold this tale so skillfully that I doubt many [if any] readers will recognize its ancient heritage. The role of Hera is played by the First Foundation, bastion of political and military power in the galaxy. The Second Foundation [of psychohistorians ... which is about as close as a good “hard scientist” like Asimov will come to philosophers!] is the new Athena, championing the cause of a Platonic philosopher-king culture for the galaxy.

The third goddess appears in the semblance of a mystery planet named “Gaia”, the primeval Hellenic mother-Earth goddess. By this slight divergence from the Paris-legend, one presumes, Asimov endeavors to alter the choice to one between power, wisdom, and what one might call “compassionate humanity” (a sort of pastoral empathy with life throughout the galaxy).

Since Asimov devotes the first 3/4 of the book to showing the inadequacies and dangers inherent in the First and Second Foundations, it is not altogether surprising which “goddess” his new Paris will choose. *Foundation's Edge* ends on an appropriately “Bliss”-ful note, as Foundations #1 and #2, their memories wiped clean of conflict by Gaia, return to their parochial concerns in recivilizing the galaxy.

What makes *Foundation's Edge* something more than a space-age *Iliad*, however, is the cosmology which sneaks in at the end. I am always intrigued with scientists' approaches to the great questions of metaphysics - not because they have answers [they usually shy away from “blighting” their “scientific” (meaning “respectable materialistic”) reputations], but because they have at least seen through and dispensed with the religious foolishness of imprecise and uneducated minds. Having taken his two Foundations to the theoretical limits of human power, Asimov finds himself up against the question of the essence of humanity: What makes it unique, hence deserving of a special place amidst the life-forms of the Universe?

Gaia is not his answer, for Gaia proves to be the evolutionary construct of hyper-advanced robots [thereby neatly bridging the Foundation series with *I, Robot* and its successors]. It is no good to say that man is special because the First Law of Robotics (invented by man) says that he's special. The “benevolent humanitarianism” which Gaia offers the galaxy is thus the First Law extended to human beings themselves. Nothing wrong with this, but it falls short of the “human essence” question.

It is apparent that Asimov himself senses this, as he concludes *Foundation's Edge* with a hint that his “Paris” is now determined to search for the

original Earth (which has been misplaced & forgotten amidst all the ruckus of the Galactic Empire). “Paris” suspects that an even more mysterious power has deliberately concealed Earth from Gaia, which concealed itself from the Second Foundation, which concealed itself from the First Foundation, which concealed itself from the Galactic Empire ... If nothing else, the Foundation series is a gold-mine for conspiracy theorists!

Isaac Asimov, who could be excused for being a bit grumpy when George Lucas used big chunks of *Foundation* for *Star Wars* (the decaying Galactic Empire and the metallic Death Star/“Trantor”), must now be accused of nibbling from *Battlestar Galactica*, whose central theme involved a quest for the lost planet Earth. But the really important point is that no matter how far **forward** mankind advances technically and intellectually, the answer to the greatest and most important question is presumably to be found in its **past**, i.e. what it is, where it came from, and why it is significant.

There is probably no author with more appreciation for the scope and consequence of civilization and scientific achievement than Isaac Asimov, whose 260 books might as well be named the *Encyclopædia Galactica* themselves. Having stretched his mind to the limits of materialistic knowledge, he is now turning cautiously but perceptibly towards a quest for Atlantis, so to speak, and the mystery of humanity's origin.

What will he “find” in the next *Foundation* book? The last major science-fiction author to tackle this problem, Arthur C. Clarke in *Childhood's End* and later *2001*, took the convenient escape-route of a “Chariots of the Gods” origin, i.e. “ancient astronauts” who generated mankind as an experiment. This of course just adds another “step back” to Atlantis: Who made the “ancient astronauts”, etc.?

Asimov has his own version of the “ancient astronauts”, being “the Eternals”, and accordingly it's difficult to see how he can avoid his next *Foundation* book from drifting into the orbit of *Childhood's End*.

It is great fun speculating on how much of all this represents Isaac Asimov's actual beliefs/conclusions, and how much he would disavow [with his hand on a copy of *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*]. He can always dodge it as “science fiction”, but of course the metaphysical questions it poses are still real. If Asimov should “seriously” deny his carefully-developed *Foundation* hypothesis, what would he proffer in its place? There is, I suppose, always *Asimov's Annotated Paradise Lost*.

[3] Note Concerning Review of *Foundation's Edge*

- from Isaac Asimov, November 18, 1983

Dear Dr. Aquino,

Thank you for sending me your review of *Foundation's Edge*. It was certainly not my conscious intention to model Trevize's choice on that of Paris, but I have always been deeply immersed in Greek mythology and there might have been a certain unconscious modelling there. It is certainly an interesting idea.

[4] The Tarot: A Synopsis

- by Robert Menschel III^o

The Tarot is a very popular subject among most occult societies, but is relatively unimportant within the Temple of Set. We include only one book about the Tarot in our reading list, and mention of the Tarot almost never appears in our writings. This article discusses why some of us can benefit from the study of the Tarot. Of primary importance to this discussion is the philosophy of the Tarot. Why should an Initiate study and use the Tarot?

Tarot cards are very popular fortune-telling props, with several different decks being offered for sale in any well-stocked occult shop. Most occultists use the Tarot for some form of fortune-telling or divination.

Divination requires belief in a basically-unchangeable future. Instead we feel that any Setian whose eyes are open can control his/her own destiny. Setians are notably unpredictable, and seem to very successfully avoid predetermined futures.

The science fiction series *Dune* hypothesizes beings with the ability to foretell the future, and other beings who are temporarily "invisible" to the former - beings whose futures cannot be foretold. We Setians appear to succeed in being the unpredictable latter to the Tarot's former.

Instead Setians look upon the Tarot as a language, a symbolic [somewhat hieroglyphic] language which we can use to help our higher selves (that which we are Becoming) communicate with our active selves (that which we have Become).

Many of us can benefit from this aid to internal communication. It can serve both as a technique for bringing our active selves closer to our higher selves [speeding *Xeper* and as a means for communicating ideas and facts to our active selves].

There are dangers in attempting this communication. It is easy to believe that we are getting a message from our higher selves when instead we are simply reading what we **want** to read when we are being misled by our lower selves (that

which we have not yet outgrown).

Those of us who have the greatest need for this communications tool, who don't have easy communications with our higher selves unless we use tools like the Tarot, also have the highest degree of exposure to this danger. Therefore not all magicians should use the Tarot. To safely use the Tarot you need to have achieved balance and perception to the point that you know when a message is real or at least valid, versus when you might just be fooling yourself.

The danger is real. A magician who misleads himself is going to lose his way. Therefore you should not plan on acting on your readings unless you are well-balanced unless you are able to successfully determine whether a "message" is valid or imagined.

You don't need this balance to study the language of the Tarot or to do readings. You can practice the Tarot at any time. Simply don't act on your readings unless you are balanced and know that the readings are true.

The Tarot is a language - a symbolic language. To be able to read the language you have to be able to understand the symbols.

The symbols in the *Book of Thoth* come from numerology, the Cabala, astrology, and alchemy. To master the Tarot you would need to master these fields as well.

Fortunately we don't need to master a language to use it. We simply need to understand enough of it to send and/or receive the simpler messages. "Me hungry!" serves almost as well as "I worked through lunch-time today and that juicy, sizzling steak smells divine; may I have some please?"

To begin study of the Tarot you should be familiar with the four fields of symbolism. Read some introductory chapters on each if you need to. Then read Crowley's *Book of Thoth*. You'll probably need to read that book from cover to cover two or three times, since the subject matter is complex and since Crowley did not write simply.

Keep the cards handy while you read the book, and refer to the cards when Crowley refers to their colors, shapes, figures, and symbolism. Do your best to see the language.

At this point some Setians have tried to take time to "study" individual cards. This method has not worked in the cases with which I am familiar. Instead I suggest you no do actual readings.

Find a description of a well-defined layout, such as the 15-card layout described in the little booklet which comes with Crowley's deck. Choose a question of some importance to you, and magically do a reading, calling on your higher self to pick out the cards for the layout.

The advantage of this method is that the layout gives each position meaning, and gives meaning to the positional relationship between cards. You can use these defined meanings to enhance your comprehensions of the cards themselves.

Keep the *Book of Thoth* handy. You will probably want to use it to check out each card in your first several readings. You will refer to the book less often as you become familiar with the cards, but you will continue to need it on occasion for a long while.

Once you've begun to develop a familiarity with the cards, there are several tricks you can use to increase your faculty.

One trick is to do readings on trivial questions that require yes/no answers. Ask the questions, lay out the cards, and quickly determine the answer. You may then study the cards if you wish to verify and support the answer you so quickly read.

Another trick I use on occasion is to actually tell fortunes. I belong to Mensa, and I will sometimes use my Tarot cards to tell fortunes at our more free-wheeling conventions. At one event I told about 20 fortunes in a three-hour period. [These fortunes were for humans who can't avoid predetermined fate as readily as we can. They were also not the in-depth readings I do for myself or for my close friends.]

Another method of improving your skill - or perhaps it's a result of improving your skill - is the development of new layouts. Modify layouts with which you're familiar, and create new ones as appropriate for the cause of the reading.

Does the Tarot card reading work? As a student of the Tarot for several years now, I can state definitely that, yes, it does for appropriate questions.

Why does it work? Which questions are appropriate? Should you repeatedly ask the Tarot for information, or should you refer to it only on occasion for the really **big** questions? Is the Tarot a true book storing the wisdom of the ancients? You will develop your own opinions for these topics as you work with the Tarot.

[5] Yule be Glad to Know ...

- by Betty Ford III°

The Executive Director is pleased to encourage Setians who desire the warmth and cheer of a decorative tree in their homes at this time of year to indulge in same. I recall the old German lyrics:

O Tannebaum, o Tannebaum
Wie treu sind deine Blätter!

As co-opted by Christian choristers, this became the carol "O Christmas Tree". Not so. The fir tree, which in the midst of winter shows its *Treue* [translate: "steadfastness/ faithfulness"] - this being a mystic virtue among the ancient Viking and north European peoples - was originally a site for solemn ceremonies.

The High Priest contributes helpfully that the practice of decorating such trees dates from Druidic times, when strips of meat were thrown up into tree branches to divert air-demons, who would otherwise swoop down to the ground and gobble up young children. If you're becoming annoyed with yours, leave off the decorations - at least the edible ones.

A merry, merry Winter Solstice to you. Set be with you every one!