

# The Book of the Law

***Liber AL vel Legis*** ([ˈlɪbər aːɛl ˈleːɡɪs]), commonly known as ***The Book of the Law***, is the central sacred text of Thelema, allegedly written down from dictation mostly by Aleister Crowley, although his wife Rose Edith Crowley is also known to have written two phrases into the manuscript of the Book after its dictation. Crowley claimed it was dictated to him by a preternatural being calling himself Aiwass, but the three chapters are largely written in the first person by the Thelemic deities Nuit, Hadit, and Ra-Hoor-Khuit respectively.

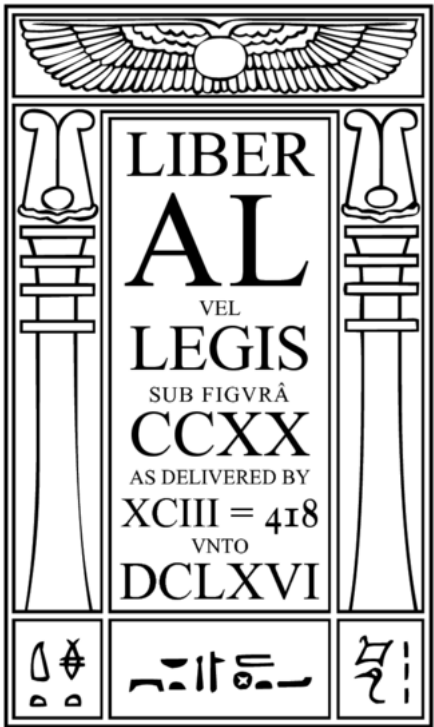
Through the reception of the *Book*, Crowley proclaimed the arrival of a new stage in the spiritual evolution of humanity, to be known as the "Æon of Horus".<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> The primary precept of this new aeon is the charge to "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law".

The book contains three chapters, each of which was alleged to be written down in one hour, beginning at noon, on 8 April, 9 April, and 10 April in Cairo, Egypt, in the year 1904.<sup>[4]</sup> Crowley says that the author was an entity named Aiwass, whom he later referred to as his personal Holy Guardian Angel. Biographer Lawrence Sutin quotes private diaries that fit this story, and writes that "if ever Crowley uttered the truth of his relation to the *Book*," his public account accurately describes what he remembered on this point.<sup>[5]</sup>

Crowley himself wrote "Certain very serious questions have arisen with regard to the method by which this Book was obtained. I do not refer to those doubts—real or pretended—which hostility engenders, for all such are dispelled by study of the text; no forger could have prepared so complex a set of numerical and literal puzzles[...]"<sup>[4]</sup>

The book is often referred to simply as ***Liber AL***, *Liber Legis* or just *AL*, though technically the latter two refer only to the manuscript.

## *The Book of the Law, or Liber AL vel Legis*



Authors	Aleister Crowley
	Rose Edith Kelly · Aiwass
Country	Egypt
Language	English
Genre	Thelema
Publication date	1909

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# Creation

## Summons

According to Crowley,<sup>[6]</sup> the story began on 16 March 1904, when he tried to "shew the Sylphs" by use of the Bornless Ritual to his wife, Rose Edith Kelly, while spending the night in the King's Chamber of the Great Pyramid of Giza. Although she could see nothing, she did seem to enter into a light trance and repeatedly said, "They're waiting for you!" Since Rose had no interest in magic or mysticism, she took little interest. However, on the 18th, after he invoked Thoth (the god of knowledge), she mentioned Horus by name as the one waiting for him. Crowley, still skeptical, asked her numerous questions about Horus, which she answered accurately supposedly without having any prior study of the subject:

1. Force and Fire (I asked her to describe his moral qualities.)
2. Deep blue light. (I asked her to describe the conditions caused by him. This light is quite unmistakable and unique; but of course her words, though a fair description of it, might equally apply to some other.)
3. Horus. (I asked her to pick out his name from a list of ten dashed off at haphazard.)
4. Recognized his figure when shown. (This refers to the striking scene in the Boulak Museum, which will be dealt with in detail.)
5. Knew my past relations with the God. (This means, I think, that she knew I had taken his place in temple (See Equinox



The Stele of Revealing (Bulaq 666): Nuit, Hadit as the winged solar disk, Ra Hoor Khuit seated on his throne, and the stele's owner, Ankh-af-na-khonsu

Vol. I, No. II, the Neophyte Ritual of the G.D.) etc., and that I had never once invoked him.)

6. Knew his enemy. (I asked, "Who is his enemy?" Reply, "Forces of the waters—of the Nile." She knew no Egyptology—or anything else.)
7. Knew his lineal figure and its color. (A 1/84 chance.)
8. Knew his place in temple. (A 1/4 chance, at the least.)
9. Knew his weapon (from a list of 6.)
10. Knew his planetary nature (from a list of 7 planets.)
11. Knew his number (from a list of 10 units.)
12. Picked him out of (a) Five, (b) Three indifferent, i, e, arbitrary symbols. (This means that I settled in my own mind that say D of A, B, C, D, and E should represent him and that she then said D.)

We cannot too strongly insist on the extraordinary character of this identification.

Calculate the odds! We cannot find a mathematical expression for tests 1,2,4,5, or 6, but the other 7 tests give us:  $1/10 \times 1/84 \times 1/4 \times 1/6 \times 1/7 \times 1/10 \times 1/15 = 1/21,168,000$

Twenty-one million to one against her getting through half the ordeal!<sup>[4]</sup>

Crowley also gives a different chronology, in which an invocation of Horus preceded the questioning. Lawrence Sutin says this ritual described Horus in detail, and could have given Rose the answers to her husband's questions.<sup>[7]</sup>

As part of his 'test' for Rose, Crowley claimed they visited the Bulaq Museum where Crowley asked her to point out an image of Horus. Much to Crowley's initial amusement, she passed by several common images of the god, and went upstairs. From across the room<sup>[4]</sup> Rose identified Horus on the stele of Ankh-ef-en-Khonsu, then housed under inventory number 666 (since moved to the Egyptian Museum of Cairo, number A 9422). The stela would subsequently be known to Thelemites (adherents of Thelema) as the "Stele of Revealing."

On 20 March, Crowley invoked Horus, "with great success". Between 23 March and 8 April, Crowley had the hieroglyphs on the stele translated. Also, Rose revealed that her "informant" was not Horus himself, but his messenger, Aiwass.

Finally, on 7 April, Rose gave Crowley his instructions—for three days he was to enter the "temple" and write down what he heard between noon and 1:00 P.M.

## Writing

Crowley said he wrote *The Book of the Law* on 8, 9 and 10 April 1904, between the hours of noon and 1:00 pm, in the flat where he and his new wife were staying for their honeymoon, which he described as being near the Boulak Museum in a fashionable European quarter of Cairo, let by the firm Congdon & Co. The apartment was on the ground floor, and the "temple" was the drawing room.

Crowley described the encounter in detail in *The Equinox of the Gods*, saying that as he sat at his desk in Cairo, the voice of Aiwass came from over his left shoulder in the furthest corner of the room. This voice is described as passionate and hurried, and was "of deep timbre, musical and expressive, its tones solemn, voluptuous, tender, fierce or aught else as suited the moods of the message. Not bass—perhaps a rich tenor or baritone."<sup>[8]</sup> Further, the voice was devoid of "native or foreign accent".

Crowley also got a "strong impression" of the speaker's general appearance. Aiwass had a body composed of "fine matter," which had a gauze-like transparency. Further, 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 should destroy what they saw. The dress was not Arab; it suggested Assyria or Persia, but very vaguely."<sup>[8]</sup>

Despite initially writing that it was an "excellent example of automatic writing,"<sup>[9]</sup> Crowley later insisted that it was not just automatic writing (though the writing included aspects of this, since when Crowley tried to stop writing he was compelled to continue. The writing also recorded Crowley's own thoughts). Rather he said that the experience was exactly like an actual voice speaking to him. This resulted in a few transcription errors, about which the scribe had to later inquire.

Note, moreover, with what greedy vanity I claim authorship even of all the other A∴A∴ Books in Class A, though I wrote them inspired beyond all I know to be I. Yet in these Books did Aleister Crowley, the master of English both in prose and in verse, partake insofar as he was That. Compare those Books with The Book of the Law! The style [of the former] is simple and sublime; the imagery is gorgeous and faultless; the rhythm is subtle and intoxicating; the theme is interpreted in faultless symphony. There are no errors of grammar, no infelicities of phrase. Each Book is perfect in its kind.

I, daring to snatch credit for these [...] dared nowise to lay claim to have touched The Book of the Law, not with my littlest finger-tip.<sup>[10]</sup>

He also admits to the possibility that Aiwass may be identified with his own subconscious, although he thought this was unlikely:

Of course I wrote them, ink on paper, in the material sense; but they are not My words, unless Aiwaz be taken to be no more than my subconscious self, or some part of it: in that case, my conscious self being ignorant of the Truth in the Book and hostile to most of the ethics and philosophy of the Book, Aiwaz is a severely suppressed part of me. Such a theory would further imply that I am, unknown to myself, possessed of all sorts of praeternatural knowledge and power.<sup>[8]</sup>

Crowley's former secretary Israel Regardie, on the other hand considered this statement by Crowley to be no real objection to Aiwass being a part of Crowley's unconscious mind, claiming that:

It can safely be said that current psychological theory would agree that any one person is possessed of all sorts of knowledge and power of which he is totally unconscious... Both Freudian and Jungian theory are on the side of such an assumption...<sup>[11]</sup>

In his introduction to his edition of *The Law is for All*, Israel Regardie stated:

It really makes little difference in the long run whether *The Book of the Law* was dictated to [Crowley] by a preterhuman intelligence named Aiwass or whether it stemmed from the creative depths of Aleister Crowley. The book was written. And he became the mouthpiece for the Zeitgeist, accurately expressing the intrinsic nature of our time as no one else has done to date.<sup>[12]</sup>

Crowley himself was initially opposed to the book and its message. "I was trying to forget the whole business."

The fact of the matter was that I resented *The Book of the Law* with my whole soul. For one thing, it knocked my Buddhism completely on the head. ... I was bitterly opposed to the principles of the Book on almost every point of morality. The third chapter seemed to me gratuitously atrocious.<sup>[13]</sup>

Shortly after making a few copies for evaluation by close friends, the manuscript was misplaced and forgotten about. It would be several years before it was found, and the first official publication occurred in 1909.

*The Book of the Law* annoyed me; I was still obsessed by the idea that secrecy was necessary to a magical document, that publication would destroy its importance. I determined, in a mood which I can only describe as a fit of ill temper, to publish *The Book of the Law*, and then get rid of it for ever.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Changes to the manuscript

The final version of *Liber Legis* includes text that did not appear in the original writing, including many small changes to spelling. In several cases, stanzas from the Stele of Revealing were inserted within the text.

### Chapter 1

For example, chapter 1, page 2, line 9 was written as "V.1. of Spell called the Song" and was replaced with:

Above, the gemmèd azure is  
 The naked splendour of Nuit;  
 She bends in ecstasy to kiss  
 The secret ardours of Hadit.  
 The wingèd globe, the starry blue,  
 Are mine, O Ankh-af-na-khonsu!

On page 6 of chapter 1, the following is in the original manuscript:

And the sign shall be my ecstasy, the consciousness of the continuity of existence, the unfragmentary non-atomic fact of my universality. *along with a note:* Write this in whiter words But go forth on.

This was later changed to:

And the sign shall be my ecstasy, the consciousness of the continuity of existence, the omnipresence of my body. (AL I:26)<sup>[15]</sup>

Again in chapter 1, on page 19, Crowley writes, (*Lost 1 phrase*) *The shape of my star is—*. Later, it was Rose who filled in the lost phrase:

The Five Pointed Star, with a Circle in the Middle, & the circle is Red. (AL I:60)

### Chapter 3

The last chapter contains a few spelling changes, and includes large chunks inserted from Crowley's paraphrase of The Stele of Revealing.

The phrase "Force of Coph Nia", which is found in chapter 3, on page 64 (verse 72), was filled in by Rose Kelly because that place in the manuscript had been left incomplete as not having been properly heard by Crowley during the supposed dictation.<sup>[16]</sup> Israel Regardie proposed that Coph Nia could have been intended to represent Ain Soph, the Cabalistic phrase for Infinity, and that Rose might not have known that Hebrew letters are written from right to left or their meaning.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Speakers

Although the "messenger" of *Liber AL* was Aiwass, each chapter is presented as an expression of one of three god-forms: Nuit, Hadit, and Ra-Hoor-Khuit.

The first chapter is spoken by Nuit, the Egyptian goddess of the night sky, called the Queen of Space. Crowley calls her the "Lady of the Starry Heaven, who is also Matter in its deepest metaphysical sense, who is the infinite in whom all we live and move and have our being."<sup>[17]</sup>

The second chapter is spoken by Hadit, who refers to himself as the "complement of Nu," i.e., his bride. As such, he is the infinitely condensed point, the center of her infinite circumference. Crowley says of him, "He is eternal energy, the Infinite Motion of Things, the central core of all being. The manifested Universe comes from the marriage of Nuit and Hadit; without this could no thing be. This eternal, this perpetual marriage-feast is then the nature of things themselves; and therefore, everything that exists is a "crystallisation of divine ecstasy", and "He sees the expansion and the development of the soul through joy."<sup>[17]</sup>

The third chapter is spoken by Ra-Hoor-Khuit, "a god of War and of Vengeance", also identified as Hoor-paar-kraat, the Crowned and Conquering Child.

Crowley sums up the speakers of the three chapters thus, "we have Nuit, Space, Hadit, the point of view; these experience congress, and so produce Heru-Ra-Ha, who combines the ideas of Ra-Hoor-Khuit and Hoor-paar-kraat."<sup>[18]</sup>

The book also introduces:

- The Beast (The Great Beast 666, TO MEGA THERION, Aleister Crowley) See Therion (Thelema)
- The Scarlet Woman, also known as Babalon, the Mother of Abominations
- Ankh-af-na-khonsu (the historical priest associated with the Stele of Revealing)

## Interpretation

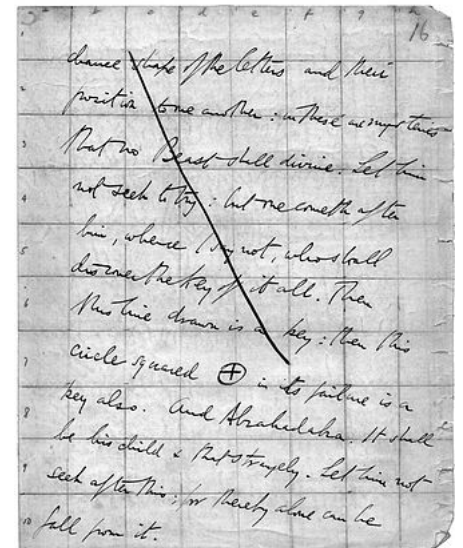
Thanks in large part to *The Comment*, interpretation of the often cryptic text is generally considered by Thelemites a matter for the individual reader. Crowley wrote about Liber AL in great detail throughout the remainder of his life, apparently attempting to decipher its mysteries.

The emancipation of mankind from all limitations whatsoever is one of the main precepts of the Book.<sup>[19]</sup>

Aiwass, uttering the word Thelema (with all its implications), destroys completely the formula of the Dying God. Thelema implies not merely a new religion, but a new cosmology, a new philosophy, a new ethics. It co-ordinates the disconnected discoveries of science, from physics to psychology, into a coherent and consistent system. Its scope is so vast that it is impossible even to hint at the universality of its application.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Symbolism of the "New Aeon of the Child"

The child is not merely a symbol of growth, but of complete moral independence and innocence. We may then expect the New Aeon to release mankind from its pretence of altruism, its obsession of fear and its consciousness of sin. It will possess no consciousness of the purpose of its own existence. It will not be possible to persuade it that it should submit to incomprehensible standards; it will suffer from spasms of transitory passion; it will be absurdly sensitive to pain and suffer from meaningless terror; it will be utterly conscienceless, cruel, helpless, affectionate and ambitious, without knowing why; it will be incapable of reason, yet at the same time intuitively aware of truth. I might go on indefinitely to enumerate the stigmata of child psychology, but the reader can do it equally for himself,



The mysterious 'grid' page of Liber AL's manuscript. "for in the chance shape of the letters and their position to one another: in these are mysteries that no Beast shall divine. ... Then this line drawn is a key: then this circle squared in its failure is a key also. And Abrahadabra."

and every idea that comes to him as characteristic of children will strike him as applicable to the events of history since 1904, from the Great War to Prohibition. And if he possess any capacity for understanding the language of symbolism, he will be staggered by the adequacy and accuracy of the summary of the spirit of the New Aeon given in *The Book of the Law*.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Qabalah of *The Book of the Law*

The general method that Crowley used to interpret the obscurities of *Liber AL* was the Qabalah, especially its numerological method of gematria. He writes, "Many such cases of double entendre, paronomasia in one language or another, sometimes two at once, numerical-literal puzzles, and even (on one occasion) an illuminating connexion of letters in various lines by a slashing scratch, will be found in the Qabalistic section of the Commentary."<sup>[8]</sup> In *Magick Without Tears* he wrote:

Now there was enough comprehensible at the time to assure me that the Author of the Book knew at least as much Qabalah as I did: I discovered subsequently more than enough to make it certain without error that he knew a very great deal more, and that of an altogether higher order, than I knew; finally, such glimmerings of light as time and desperate study have thrown on many other obscure passages, to leave no doubt whatever in my mind that he is indeed the supreme Qabalist of all time.<sup>[20]</sup>

He considered the various gematria values of certain key words and phrases, overlapping between the English, Greek, and Hebrew languages, as evidence of the Book's praeterhuman origin.

... it claims to be the statement of transcendental truth, and to have overcome the difficulty of expressing such truth in human language by what really amounts to the invention of a new method of communicating thought, not merely a new language, but a new type of language; a literal and numerical cipher involving the Greek and Hebrew Cabbalas, the highest mathematics etc. It also claims to be the utterance of an illuminated mind co-extensive with the ultimate ideas of which the universe is composed.<sup>[19]</sup>

How could he prove that he was in fact a being of a kind superior to any of the human race, and so entitled to speak with authority? Evidently he must show KNOWLEDGE and POWER such as no man has ever been known to possess.

He showed his KNOWLEDGE chiefly by the use of cipher or cryptogram in certain passages to set forth recondite facts, including some events which had yet to take place, such that no human being could possibly be aware of them; thus, the proof of his claim exists in the manuscript itself. It is independent of any human witness. The study of these passages necessarily demands supreme human scholarship to interpret— it needs years of intense application. A great deal has still to be worked out. But enough has been discovered to justify his claim; the most sceptical intelligence is compelled to admit its truth. This matter is best



studied under the Master Therion, whose years of arduous research have led him to enlightenment. On the other hand, the language of most of the Book is admirably simple, clear and vigorous. No one can read it without being stricken in the very core of his being.

The more than human POWER of Aiwass is shewn by the influence of his Master, and of the Book, upon actual events: and history fully supports the claim made by him. These facts are appreciable by everyone; but are better understood with the help of the Master Therion.<sup>[21]</sup>

The existence of true religion presupposes that of some discarnate intelligence, whether we call him God or anything else. And this is exactly what no religion had ever proved scientifically. And this is what *The Book of the Law* does prove by internal evidence, altogether independent of any statement of mine. This proof is evidently the most important step in science that could possibly be made: for it opens up an entirely new avenue to knowledge. The immense superiority of this particular intelligence, AIWASS, to any other with which mankind has yet been in conscious communication is shown not merely by the character of the book itself, but by the fact of his comprehending perfectly the nature of the proof necessary to demonstrate the fact of his own existence and the conditions of that existence. And, further, having provided the proof required.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Prophecy of the Book

Crowley would later consider the subsequent events of his life, and the apparent fulfilment of certain 'predictions' of the book, as further proof:

The author of *The Book of the Law* foresaw and provided against all such difficulties by inserting in the text discoveries which I did not merely not make for years afterwards, but did not even possess the machinery for making. Some, in fact, depend upon events which I had no part in bringing about.<sup>[19]</sup>

One such key event was Charles Stansfeld Jones claiming the grade of Magister Templi, which Crowley saw as the birth of his 'Magical Son'. Crowley believed that Jones later went on to "discover the Key of it all" as foretold in the book (II:76, III:47). Crowley believed that Jones' discovery of the critical value of 31 gave Crowley further insight into his qabalistic understanding and interpretation of the book. Upon receiving notification of this discovery, Crowley replied:

\ = 418. "Thou knowest not." Your key opens Palace. CCXX has unfolded like a flower. All solved, even II.76 & III.47. Did you know  $\Pi = 3.141593$ ? And oh! lots more!<sup>[22]</sup>

## The Comment

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Based on several passages, including: "My scribe Ankh-af-na-khonsu, the priest of the princes, shall not in one letter change this book; but lest there be folly, he shall comment thereupon by the wisdom of Ra-Hoor-Khuit" (AL I:36), Crowley felt compelled to interpret *AL* in writing. He wrote two large sets of commentaries where he attempted to decipher each line.

In 1912, he prepared *AL* and his current comments on it for publication in *The Equinox*, I(7). However, he was not satisfied with this initial attempt. He recalls in his confessions (p. 674) that he thought the existing commentary was "shamefully meagre and incomplete." He later explains, "I had stupidly supposed this Comment to be a scholarly exposition of the Book, an elucidation of its obscurities and a demonstration of its praeterhuman origin. I understand at last that this idea is nonsense. The Comment must be an interpretation of the Book intelligible to the simplest minds, and as practical as the Ten Commandments."<sup>[23]</sup> Moreover, this Comment should be arrived at "inspirationally," as the Book itself had been.<sup>[24]</sup>

Years later in 1925 while in Tunis, Tunisia, Crowley received his inspiration. He published his second set of commentaries, often called simply The Comment,<sup>[25]</sup> in the Tunis edition of *AL*, of which only 11 copies were printed, and signed it as Ankh-f-n-khonsu (lit. "He Lives in Khonsu"—a historical priest who lived in Thebes in the 26th dynasty, associated with the Stele of Revealing). It advises the reader that the "study" of the Book is forbidden and states that those who "discuss the contents" are to be shunned. It also suggests that the book be destroyed after first reading.

Crowley later tasked his friend and fellow O.T.O. member Louis Wilkinson with preparing an edited version of Crowley's commentaries which was published some time after Crowley's death as *The Law is for All*.<sup>[26]</sup>

## Skeptical interpretations

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Crowley's former secretary Israel Regardie argued in his biography of Crowley, *The Eye in the Triangle*, that Aiwass was an unconscious expression of Crowley's personality.<sup>[11]</sup> Regardie stated that although Crowley initially regarded Aiwass as one of the secret chiefs, years later he came to believe that Aiwass was his own Holy Guardian Angel. Regardie argued: "If Aiwass was his own Higher Self, then the inference is none other than that Aleister Crowley was the author of the Book, and that he was the external mask for a variety of different hierarchical personalities ... The man Crowley was the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder, the outer shell of a God, even as we all are, the persona of a Star ... He is the author of *The Book of the Law* even as he is the author of *The Book of the Heart Girt with a Serpent* and *Liber Lapidis Lazuli*, and so forth ... these latter books reveal a dialogue between the component parts of Crowley. It seems to me that basically this *Liber Legis* is no different". Regardie also noted resemblances between *The Book of the Law* and these latter holy books, such as the inclusion of "rambling, unintelligible" passages, "some repugnant to reason by their absurdity, and their jarring goatish quality".

In 1906 Crowley wrote: "It has struck me – in connection with reading Blake that Aiwass, etc. "Force and Fire" is the very thing I lack. My "conscience" is really an obstacle and a delusion, being a survival of heredity and education." Regardie considered this an "illuminating admission" and argued that due to Crowley's early religious training he developed an overly rigid superego or conscience. When he rebelled against Christianity, "he must have yearned for qualities and characteristics diametrically opposed to his own. In *The Book of the Law* the wish is fulfilled". *The Book of the Law* was therefore a "colossal wish-fulfilment". Regardie noted that the Book's rejection of Judaeo-Christian mores was completely in accord with Crowley's own moral and religious values and that in this sense "it is his Book". Furthermore, although Crowley claimed to have initially objected to the Book's contents, Regardie said that he could not see what a person like Crowley would possibly object to. Regardie referred to Crowley's 1909 statement: "I want blasphemy, murder, rape, revolution, anything, bad or good, but strong", and pointed out that *The Book of the Law* delivered all these things.

Regardie also argued that Rose's ability to answer Crowley's questions about Horus and the Qabala was not as remarkable as Crowley claimed. Rose had been married to Crowley for eight months at this point and Regardie stated that Crowley may well have used Rose as a 'sounding board' for many of his own ideas. Therefore, she may not have been as ignorant of magick and mysticism as Crowley made out.<sup>[11]</sup>

Charles R. Cammell, author of *Aleister Crowley: The Man, the Mage, the Poet*<sup>[27]</sup> also believed the Book was an expression of Crowley's personality:

The mind behind the maxims is cold, cruel and relentless. Mercy there is none, nor consolation; nor hope save in the service of this dread messenger of the gods of Egypt. Such is *Liber Legis* in letter and spirit; and as such, and in consideration of its manner of reception, it is a document of curious interest. That it is in part (but in part only) an emanation from Crowley's unconscious mind I can believe; for it bears a likeness to his own Daemonic personality.<sup>[11]</sup>

Journalist Sarah Veale has also argued that Aiwass was an externalised part of Crowley's psyche, and in support of this hypothesis quotes Crowley himself as saying:

Ah, you realize that magick is something we do to ourselves. But it is more convenient to assume the objective existence of an angel who gives us new knowledge than to allege that our invocation has awakened a supernormal power in ourselves." (Kaczynski, 542).<sup>[28]</sup>

Veale also pointed out the similarity in rhythmic style between *The Book of the Law* and some of Crowley's own non-channelled writings. In *Magick in theory and practice*, Crowley claimed that invoking the "barbarous names" in iambic tetrameter was very useful. Many of his own poems are written in iambic tetrameter, such as this excerpt from "The Riddle", a poem to his former lover, Jerome Pollitt:

Habib hath heard; let all Iran  
who spell aright from A to Z  
Exalt thy fame and understand  
with whom I made a marriage-bed

Veale states that there are other similarities in writing styles besides the use of the same poetic meter. The fact that a supposedly discarnate intelligence just happened to have the same writing style as Crowley suggests that Aiwass may have just been part of Crowley's unconscious mind after all.

Scholar Joshua Gunn also argued that the stylistic similarities between the Book and Crowley's poetic writings were too great for it to be anything other than Crowley's work:

Although Crowley seemed to believe sincerely that *The Book of the Law* was inspired by superhuman intelligences, its clichéd imagery, overwrought style, and overdone ecophonetic displays are too similar to Crowley's other poetic writings to be the product of something supernatural.<sup>[29]</sup>

## Structure and title

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The technical title of the book is ***Liber AL vel Legis, sub figura CCXX, as delivered by XCIH=418 to DCLXVI***, although this title never occurs in the Book itself, which refers to itself as "the Book of the Law" and "the threefold Book of Law" (chapters 1:35, 3:75). CCXX is 220 in Roman figures, representing The Tree of Life (10 numbers times 22 paths), and is the number of verses of the Book in typescript. XCIH is 93, the enumeration of both "The word of the law" Thelema and Aiwass. DCLXVI is 666, the number of Crowley as Great Beast both as Adept and Magus. This is a way of saying that the book was delivered by Aiwass (whose number is both 93 and 418) to Crowley, who is The Beast 666.

The facsimile manuscript of the Book is not, however, numbered 220, but XXXI (31) as the first chapter's verses are unnumbered in the original manuscript: that is, no verse numbers were dictated to Crowley for chapter one. Both editions were titled by Crowley AL, pronounced "El", value 31, so therefore Liber 31 is the manuscript of *The Book of the Law* called AL (not be confused with Liber 31 by C. S. Jones (Fratr Achad), which is an exegesis of some of the qabalistic symbolism of the *Book*), whereas Liber 220 is the edited (strictly according to the editing instructions dictated as part of the text of the Book itself), printed form of the text: see *The Equinox of The Gods* for a full account by Crowley of the reception and publishing of the *Book* according to these internal instructions.

The original title of the book was *Liber L vel Legis*. Crowley retitled it *Liber AL vel Legis* in 1921, when he also gave the handwritten manuscript its own title.<sup>[30]</sup>

## Original manuscript

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A facsimile of the original handwritten manuscript was published in *The Equinox*, Volume I, Number VII, in 1912. In 1921, Crowley gave the manuscript its own title, "AL (Liber Legis), The Book of the Law, sub figura XXXI", to distinguish it from the typeset version. It is now sometimes referred to as simply "Liber XXXI".<sup>[31]</sup>

The original manuscript (<https://lib.oto-usa.org/libri/libero031.html>) was sent on Crowley's death to Karl Germer, the executor of his will and head of the *Ordo Templi Orientis* (O.T.O.). On Germer's death no trace of it could be found in his papers. There matters rested until 1984, when Tom Whitmore, the new owner of a house in Berkeley, California, began searching through the junk left in the basement by the previous owner. Among the used mattresses, lumber, and outdated high school textbooks were two boxes of assorted papers and ewspaper clippings dealing with Germer's affairs, the charter of the O.T.O. and an envelope containing the manuscript of *The Book of the Law*. Whitmore donated the papers to the O.T.O. How they found their way to a Berkeley basement remains a complete mystery.<sup>[32]</sup>

## Editions

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*The Book of the Law* was first published in 1909 as part of ΘΕΛΗΜΑ, a collection of the holy books of Thelema.<sup>[33]</sup> ΘΕΛΗΜΑ was privately published in London by the A∴A∴ as a three volume set, with *The Book of the Law* appearing in Volume III.<sup>[33][34]</sup> It was next published in 1913 as part of *The Equinox*, Volume I, Number X. In both of these early editions it is titled *Liber L vel Legis*. Subsequent published editions include:

- 1925 Tunis edition, only 11 copies printed
- Ordo Templi Orientis, London, 1938, privately issued (US edition 1942, although dated 1938)
- Weiser Books (Reissue edition; May 1987; ISBN 0-87728-334-6)

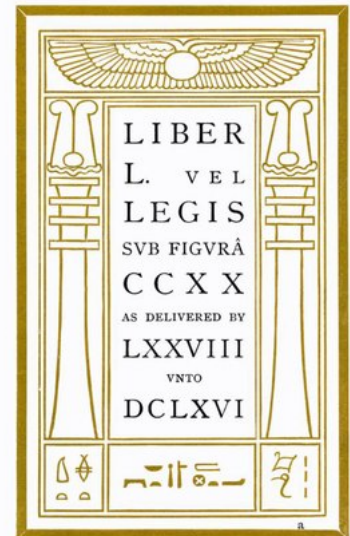
- Weiser Books (100th Anniversary edition; March 2004; [ISBN 1-57863-308-7](#))
- Thelema Media (100th Anniversary edition; (leather bound limited edition: 418 copies); March 2004; [ISBN 1-932599-03-7](#))
- [Mandrake of Oxford](#) (April 1992; paperback; [ISBN 1-869928-93-8](#))

*Liber AL* is also published in many books, including:

- *The Holy Books of Thelema (Equinox III:9)*. (1983). York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser. [ISBN 0-87728-579-9](#)
- *The Equinox (III:10)*. (1990). York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser. [ISBN 0-87728-719-8](#)
- *Magick: Liber ABA, Book Four, Parts I–IV*. (1997). York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser. [ISBN 0-87728-919-0](#)

And at least one out-of-print audio version common on [eBay](#):

- *The Book of the Law* Vondel Park Audio Book 2003



*The Book of the Law* as published in ΘΕΛΗΜΑ (1909)

## In popular culture

- [Toyah Willcox](#) took the name of her 1983 album *Love Is the Law* from *The Book of the Law*.
- The title of the song "The Whole of the Law" by [The Only Ones](#) is taken from *The Book of the Law* verse I:40 which reads in part "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law" and from II:60 which reads "There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt."
- Blues musician [Graham Bond](#) was highly influenced by Thelema and by *The Book of the Law*. The title of his 1969 album *Love is the Law* is taken from *Liber AL*, and other albums such as *Holy Magick* (1970) and *We Put Our Magick on You* demonstrate the influence of Crowley and Thelema, as do the names of his bands such as *Graham Bond Initiation* and *Magus*.
- A song by [The Church](#), "Song in Space", from their 2003 album *Forget Yourself*, includes the line "They say that in the future, every man and woman will be a star" which references *The Book of the Law* I:3 ("Every man and every woman is a star"). This reflects the interest of [Steve Kilbey](#) in Thelema.
- The song "Firm Hand" on the 1996 [Carcass](#) album *Swansong* is taken from *The Book of the Law* verse I:57, "*Love is the law, love under will.*" with the first *Love* replaced by *Hate*.
- On page 187 of the 1982–1989 graphic novel *V for Vendetta* by [Alan Moore, V announces \*via\* radio broadcast that he has cut the state's power to monitor and spy upon the civilian population, saying that for the following three days, "your movements will not be watched, your conversations will not be listened to, and '\*do what thou wilt\*' shall be the whole of the law."<sup>\[35\]</sup>](#)
- The 1993 movie *Ruby Cairo* features a scene in which a copy of *The Book of the Law* is discussed by the characters, though this has little bearing on the rest of the plot.
- The book is mentioned in the seventh volume of the Japanese light novel series *A Certain Magical Index*; here, it is regarded as one of the many 'Grimoires', forbidden magical books. The book is written in an indecipherable code, with the volume involving attempts to rescue or kill a character said to be able to decipher it. While both [Aleister Crowley](#) and [Aiwass](#) are featured in the light novel series, neither are heavily involved with the book (although it being written by Crowley and dictated by Aiwass is hinted at on various occasions).
- The 2003-2008 Comedy/Horror animated TV show *The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy* featured a show intro in which the character of Mandy would walk onto an empty screen, say something dire,

grim, or creepy, and walk off after which the show would begin. One of these featured Mandy saying "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law", taken from verse I:40.

- The book was part of a cipher published by an enigmatic organization Cicada 3301.
- The song "Black to the Blind" on the 1997 Vader album *Black to the Blind* references to book's Chapter I, verse 60: "*My colour is black to the blind, but the blue & gold are seen of the seeing. Also I have a secret glory for them that love me.*"
- The Yu-Gi-Oh Trading card game has an archetype called Invoked that is based on Crowley, and includes a Quick-play spell card called The Book of The Law.
- Andrew W.K. can be seen reading the book in the video clip for his 2010 single "I'm A Vagabond". Further Thelemic symbols and themes feature in the video clip for his 2021 single "Babalon".

## See also

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- English Qabalah

## Notes

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1. *Liber AL vel Legis* (<http://lib.oto-usa.org/libri/liber0220.html>) OTO, London, 1938. Introduction, IV.
2. Crowley, Aleister (1989). "49" (<http://hermetic.com/crowley/confessions/chapter49.html>). *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography* (<http://hermetic.com/crowley/confessions/>). London: Arkana. p. 399. ISBN 978-0-14-019189-9. Retrieved 9 December 2012. "I may now point out that the reign of the Crowned and Conquering Child is limited in time by *The Book of the Law* itself. We learn that Horus will be in his turn succeeded by Hrumachis, the Double-Wanded One: "But your holy place shall be untouched throughout the centuries: though with fire and sword it be burnt down & shattered, yet an invisible house there standeth, and shall stand until the fall of the Great Equinox; when Hrumachis shall arise and the double-wanded one assume my throne and place. Another prophet shall arise, and bring fresh fever from the skies; another woman shall awakethe lust & worship of the Snake; another soul of God and beast shall mingle in the globed priest; another sacrifice shall stain the tomb; another king shall reign; and blessing no longer be poured To the Hawk-headed mystical Lord!" (Chapter 3:34)"
3. Crowley, Aleister (1936). "8" (<http://hermetic.com/crowley/equinox-of-the-gods/eqotg8.html>). *The Equinox of the Gods* (<http://hermetic.com/crowley/equinox-of-the-gods/>). ISBN 1-56184-028-9. Retrieved 9 December 2012. "In this revelation is the basis of the future Aeon ... The new Aeon is ... of Horus"
4. Crowley, Aleister. *The Equinox of the Gods*.
5. Sutin, Lawrence. *Do What Thou Wilt* 2000. p. 122-140, 312
6. (Crowley 1974, ch.6)
7. Sutin, Lawrence. *Do What Thou Wilt* 2000. p. 120
8. (Crowley 1974, ch.7)
9. "The Holograph Manuscript of Liber AL vel Legis" (<http://lib.oto-usa.org/libri/liber0031.html?num=0>). Lib.oto-usa.org. Retrieved 8 January 2010.
10. The Equinox of the Gods, p. 106
11. Regardie, Israel (1982). "Chapter 15. The Book of the Law". *The Eye in the Triangle: an Interpretation of Aleister Crowley*. New Falcon Publications. pp. 473–494.
12. Crowley, Aleister (1983). *The Law is for All: an extended commentary on The Book of the Law*. Regardie, Israel (ed.) (2nd ed.). Phoenix, Arizona: Falcon Press. ISBN 978-0-941404-25-9.
13. *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, ch 50
14. *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, ch 60"

15. In his *Commentaries*, Crowley writes: "This phrase was totally beyond the comprehension of the scribe, and he said mentally—with characteristic self-conceit—'People will never be able to understand this.' Aiwass then replied, 'Write this in whiter words. But go forth on.' He was willing that the phrase should be replaced by an equivalent, but did not wish the dictation to be interrupted by a discussion at the moment. It was therefore altered (a little later) to 'the omnipresence of my body.' It is extremely interesting to note that in the light of the cosmic theory explained in the notes to verse 3 and 4, the original phrase of Aiwass was exquisitely and exactly appropriate to his meaning."
16. Crowley, Aleister (1996). *The Law is for All*. Thelema Media. ISBN 0-9726583-8-6.
17. (Crowley, *The Law of Liberty*)
18. (Crowley 1985, Lecture 2)
19. *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, ch. 49
20. MWT Chapter IV. online version ([http://www.hermetic.com/crowley/mwt/mwt\\_04.html](http://www.hermetic.com/crowley/mwt/mwt_04.html)). Retrieved 7 June 2009.
21. The Book of the Law, introduction
22. Liber 31
23. *Confessions*, p. 849
24. The Confessions of Aleister Crowley, p. 840
25. These commentaries are also called the Short Comment or Tunis Comment.
26. Crowley, Aleister (December 1996). *The Law is for All: The Authorized Popular Commentary of Liber Al Vel Legis sub figura CCXX, the Book of the Law*. Louis Wilkinson (ed.). Thelema Media. ISBN 0-9726583-8-6.
27. The Art of the Law: Aleister Crowley's Use of Ritual and Drama Justin Scott Van Kleeck (<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/ArtofLaw.htm>)
28. The Morton Smith-Aleister Crowley Connection, Part II, Invocatio, a blog mostly about western esotericism, 8 August 2011 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20121114112404/http://invocatio.wordpress.com/2011/08/08/the-morton-smith-aleister-crowley-connection-part-ii/#comment-71>)
29. Gunn, Joshua (2011). *Modern occult rhetoric : mass media and the drama of secrecy in the twentieth century* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=dtAm1e3S0CEC&pg=PA91>). University of Alabama Press. pp. 91–92. ISBN 978-0-8173-5656-9.
30. Hymenaeus Beta in Crowley, Aleister, *Magick: Liber ABA*, p. 753, n. 3
31. Crowley, Aleister (1997). *Magick: Liber ABA, Book 4, Parts I-IV* (Second revised ed.). Boston: Weiser. pp. 459, 464, 743. ISBN 0877289190.
32. John Michael Greer. *The New Encyclopedia of the Occult*. St Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2003, pp. 70-71.
33. Crowley, Aleister (1997). *Magick: Liber ABA, Book 4, Parts I-IV* (Second revised ed.). Boston: Weiser. pp. 421, 746. ISBN 0877289190.
34. "The Holy Books - Volume 3 - 1909" ([https://www.100thmonkeypress.com/biblio/acrowley/books/holy\\_books\\_3\\_1909/holy\\_books\\_3\\_1909.htm](https://www.100thmonkeypress.com/biblio/acrowley/books/holy_books_3_1909/holy_books_3_1909.htm)). *The 100th Monkey Press*. Retrieved 16 October 2020.
35. V Addresses the Public (<http://alexpeak.com/twr/vfv/speech/#2>), excerpts from *V for Vendetta* (1982–1989) by Alan Moore.

## Further reading

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- Cornelius, J. Edward, et al. *The Desk Reference: A Guide to the Works of Edward Aleister Crowley* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070202201253/http://www.redflame93.com/DeskReference.html>) at the *Wayback Machine* (archived 2 February 2007)
- Crowley, Aleister (December 1996). *The Law is for All: The Authorized Popular Commentary of Liber Al Vel Legis sub figura CCXX, The Book of the Law*. Louis Wilkinson (ed.). Thelema Media. ISBN 0-

9726583-8-6.

- Crowley, Aleister (May 2004). *The Book of the Law* (Centennial ed.). Red Wheel/Weiser. ISBN 1-57863-308-7.
- Thelemapedia. (2004). *The Book of the Law* ([http://www.thelemapedia.org/index.php/The\\_Book\\_of\\_the\\_Law](http://www.thelemapedia.org/index.php/The_Book_of_the_Law)).

## External links

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- O.T.O. scans of the Crowley handwritten manuscript of *The Book of the Law* (<http://oto-usa.org/l31.html>)
  - *The Book of the Law* (<http://lib.oto-usa.org/libri/liber0220.html>) complete text of the book
  - *The Book of the Law* ([https://web.archive.org/web/20110707173348/http://www.ashami.com/eidolons/A\\_Transcription\\_of\\_Liber\\_Legis](https://web.archive.org/web/20110707173348/http://www.ashami.com/eidolons/A_Transcription_of_Liber_Legis)) full text of the manuscript, examines the original text with changes
  - The Old and New Commentaries to *Liber AL vel Legis* (<http://www.hermetic.com/220/crowley-comments.html>) by Aleister Crowley
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Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The\\_Book\\_of\\_the\\_Law&oldid=1007871286](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Book_of_the_Law&oldid=1007871286)"

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