

Walk like an Egyptian:

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

Caroline Tully

c.tully@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au

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 Lehigh’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 Arts d’Égypte.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’Égypte*.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. Lehigh, *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 Lehigh 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, Lehigh 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 Lehigh, *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 Lehigh, 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.