

# MYSTICISM, INITIATION AND DREAM

Andrew D. Chumbley



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*We might symbolise the process of oneiric spiritualisation as a "siderealisation" - a translation of the flesh to the stars - back to the domain of the Gudean goddess, back to the domain of the primordial smaragdine book.*

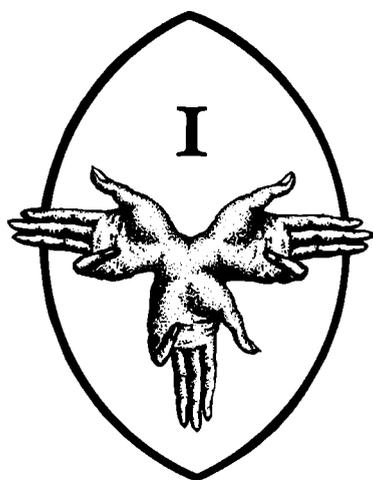
**W**RITTEN as an undergraduate at SOAS University of London in 2001, *Mysticism: Initiation and Dream* would foreshadow the concerns of Andrew Chumbley's later doctoral research on the transcendental nature of dreaming. In the course of his exposition, the concepts of the Initiatic Dream are traced to furthest antiquity, epitomized by the participatory nature of the Mystic within the Oneiric Realm. The axiomata of Dream Reification and Rarefaction are introduced as defining processes of this twilight pilgrimage, both of a gnostic and illuminative character.

At the time of his matriculation, the author had already established a solid reputation as an occult author and practitioner of widely varying spiritual disciplines. His highly acclaimed books *Azoetia* (1992) and *Qytub* (1995) arose not only from the solid foundation of magical practice and theory, but also from a highly complex mystical dream-praxis, perfected for many years. Though forming the core of his coursework, *Mysticism* – together with the bulk of his SOAS essays – were written in a transcendent dialogist style altogether in concord with the body of his occult work.

Drawing upon sources as diverse as the dream-vision of Christian saints, Sufic oneiric texts, and Bon-po terms, Chumbley here presents an arcane cartography of the dream as the eternal vessel for the perichoresis of matter and spirit.

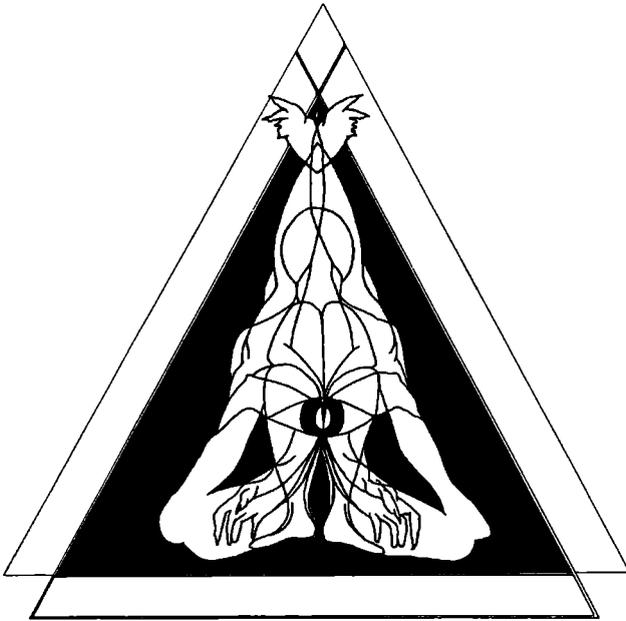








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Monograph I  
Mysticism: Initiation and Dream

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# Mysticism: Initiation and Dream

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“Hwaet! A dream came to me at deep midnight  
when humankind kept their beds  
— the dream of dreams! I shall declare it.”

*The Dream of the Rood*  
Anon, 701 AD.



# I

## The Universality of the Dream, the Particularity of Interpretation

We all dream; it is a mystery in which all humankind participates. I realise that this is an assumption, but it is one that I have no qualms in asserting as fact: the dream is an experiential universal for humanity. As the illustrious Sufi Ibn 'Arabi wrote in the *Futubat*: "The only reason God placed sleep in the animate world was so that everyone might witness the Presence of Imagination and know that there is another world similar to the sensory world." (Chittick, 1989). Indeed, although the moment of waking may permit forgetfulness to draw a swift veil over the strange proceedings of the night and much that we dream may fall from conscious awareness back into the mysterious regions from whence it arose, there is without doubt no man or woman who has remained untouched - unmoved by the forms and forces of oneiric reality. Insofar as the capacity to dream is a universal doorway for mankind, set nightly ajar for the unknown to arise in consciousness, the dream is a potential portal for the "Other" - the "numinous" (Otto, 1914) to enter the individual and to transform the mundane, to shift the borders of meaning and, quite literally, to initiate change.

No matter how seemingly meaningless or trivial, the remembered dream always affects the waker - if only to bemuse and present the apparent irrationality of our human condition. Thus, as we are aware from common experience, dreams may affect us in many ways distinct from the numinous; they may bring change of an emotional, psychological, or perhaps even physiognomical character, but it is the capacity of dreaming to bestow insight of a profound religious order which concerns us here. More so than this, the crux of our subject will be to consider the power of the dream to act as an "initiatory" context

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for mystical realisation and, by an overview of culturally diverse examples, to examine the different modes of ontological and epistemological status imputed to the dream in its operation as an initiatory mediator between “self” and “other”. For whilst “dream” may be a universal category of experience, it is the particularities of its interpretation and description that may vary from one mind to another, more so between different systems of belief (cf. Sharma, 1980). And yet if there are universals of interpretation - if dreaming possesses roles which traverse boundaries that customarily separate faith from faith, discourse from discourse, that in itself is a scintillating thought!

*...many cults of many gods have been founded, and will continue to be founded, because of encounters with supernatural beings, omens, oracles and death-bed visions.*

Epinomis, attrib. to Plato,  
(cited in Kilborne, 1987.)

No matter how dazzling the quest may be, before proceeding with this exploration it seems only pertinent to posit some preliminary ideas and suggestions, to raise a few issues for consideration and, hopefully, to outline a methodological approach which is appropriate to both an empathic and questioning study.

## II Considerations: Preliminary Thoughts and Methodology

*"To this day, many Indian sects hold that anyone who dreams that he is initiated has in fact been initiated."* (O' Flaherty, 1984.)

*"... there exists no such thing as "auto-initiation" .... initiation by its innermost structure can only take place as a matter of relation."* (Wilson, 1996.)

We might say that the dream transforms the dreamer; that it possesses the ability to "initiate", to bestow new meaning, to motivate new beginnings (Latin: *initium* - beginning), to permit our entrance (literally "en-trance"; Latin: *inire init* - to go in) to new orders of relation between ourselves and the "other". Whether we consider that "otherness" to lie within ourselves or to exist beyond the parameters of our psycho-physicality is a matter where interpretation differs according to theological, philosophical and ideological systems<sup>1</sup>; and yet, irrespective of interpretation (which usually comes after the event of dreaming), the fact of the matter is that when we dream of a person they act "as if" they were independent from the dreaming self - they assume a distinct autonomy and thus remain "other" to us. This permits relation to exist in dreaming, whether such is viewed as an internal psycho-physical dialogue of our own unconscious making or as an external-internal dialogue with a spirit, god, demon or prophet. *Post factum* interpretation does not affect the

1. For example, in the analysis by Tertullian, circa 400 c.e., dreams may come from outside oneself - from God or from demons, or from inside - from bodily products which permit sleep to become articulate. (see Kilborne, 1987: *Encyclopaedia of the History of Religions*, article: Dreams)

appearance of dreams whilst dreaming<sup>2</sup>. Logically, this observation does however permit us to distinguish between two potential types of initiatic dream: firstly, the dream in which initiation takes place and is recognised as such by the dreamer whilst dreaming; and secondly, the dream which is interpreted *post factum* in a manner so as to serve an initiatic function and thus cause the dream to appear mantic. The former might be termed “revelatory”, the latter “prognostic”; (examples of both will be included below).

Mysticism is notoriously difficult to define. According to Louis Dupre, writing of mysticism in the *Encyclopaedia of the History of Religions* (1987 edition): in 1899 alone, Dean W. R. Inge listed at least twenty-five definitions. Reading this, we can only guess as to how many times this has multiplied during the last century. Nonetheless we might say that anyone reading the works of recognised mystics such as Dudjom Lingpa (1835-1904 c.e.), Rumi (1207-1273 c.e.), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179 c.e) *et alia*, will gain some general notion of what mysticism is - most probably borne out of a sheer sense of the infigurable wonder which its exemplars transmit. Irrespective of a formal definition we may at least posit certain “hallmark” characteristics or “concerns” shared by different forms of mysticism:- an experiential intimation or comprehension of an Absolute Truth; a search for “hidden meanings”; an understanding or experience of concealed or esoteric realities; a union or communion with the Absolute constituting the direct experience of a transcendent state; and so forth. Our purpose here is not to rationally delimit “mysticism”, were such an objective even possible, but to attempt an exploration of a known context - “the initiatic dream” - in which mysticism has a definite field of operation. Given the potential of such a study to encompass topics and tangents beyond our present ambit, specific focus will be brought

2. The exception to this principle might be where one is schooled in an interpretative code to the extent that one dreams in its language, in the same manner that one schooled in the *Ars Memoria* of Ramon Lull might remember solely according its language, (see Yates, 1966.). The dream of the Sumerian High Priest Gudea (Third Millennium B.C.E.) may be an example of this integration of dream and interpretation, see below.

to bear on areas in which initiatic dreaming has a powerful and distinct role, such as symbology, textuality, and ritual praxis.

In terms specific to our consideration of mystical oneiric initiation, it is the subtle and interior mode of relation that obtains between the dreamer and the hypostatised Absolute or transcendent reality - as deity, saint or spirit<sup>3</sup> - that particularly concerns us. For it appears that irrespective of waking ideological convictions the indefinable subject of a mystic's endeavour - the Absolute, for want of a better generalism - appears to obtain a definite relation with the dreamer, that is to say, it may assume personified forms, theophanies or 'hypostates'<sup>4</sup> which are conducive to the mystic's progression towards the Absolute, whether as *'fana, nirvana, or a unio mystica*. This thread of consistency will provide one theme for further exploration, itself being supportive to our linkage of mysticism, dream and initiation via the notion of "relation".

Initiation takes many forms; it may be the transmission of a single word - as in the bestowal of the *tessarae* or password in the mysteria of Mithras or the all-containing mantra whispered by a dying Lama to his heart-disciple; it may be the complex ritual *diksha* between chela and guru; the drinking of a sacred elixir - as in the *kykeon* of Eleusis or the knowledge-transmitting potion of the sixteenth century Basque witches. In all such instances the exteriority of ritual words and actions are effective insofar as they facilitate an interior change in relations between the initiate and the initiator, whether the latter be figured as man, deity, mantric syllable, or phytognostic sacrament.

Even in religious deeds that appear wholly physical to an observer, such as dancing, scarification or fasting, it is the interior dimension of Mind or Spirit which provides their interpretative

3. Such an hypostate may even take the form of a sacred object, as in the Christopagan text "Dream of the Rood" (Anon, 701 c.e.), where the cross of Jesus' crucifixion possesses autonomous sentience, acting as a kind of divinized tree to communicate with the dreamer.

4. The term "hypostate" is used here in the Plotinian sense of an emanation, the nature of which is a particularised microcosm imaged-forth from a previous source or higher emanation. (Plotinus, *Selected Works*, trans. by Taylor, 1929).

context for initiatory change<sup>5</sup>, and thus potentially for mystical development. Needless to say, dreamed initiations proceed from an interiority belonging wholly to the dreamer (and the initiating subject/object), and as such the acknowledgement of their sacred function or nature may well be a private concern, but when it is needful for the dream to serve a sacred function in a greater socio-religious context it is the exterior acts of telling and interpretation, that is, the language of their reification, which may modify and determine their religious role and character. Whilst an interior change or “new beginning” validates an initiation in terms private to the mind of the participant, it may be the exteriority of such acts as “miraculous” which serves to legitimise an initiation to others. The *chos-rje* oracle-priests of Tibet are perhaps a good exemplar of this, for it is their external display of being inhabited by deities and being able to show their powers and prophetic veracity that will finally legitimise an initiatic standing (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1993). The *houngan* and *bocor* possession-priests of Haitian Vodou, whose songs most always derive from theophanic dreams, are similar in that a deific presence in the human vehicle is the hallmark of initiatic legitimisation (Metraux, 1959; Hale, pers. comm. 1999).

These examples are not without relevance to our principal focus, as will be seen further below. Both are however notable in that they serve to illustrate an aside comment which may prove to be of greater import in considering mysticism as defined within a particular system. Namely, both examples lie on the cusp between “mysticism” and “shamanism” when both categories function as separate and purely academic modes of discourse. However, I fear that their apparent scholarly division is an “etic” border unavoidably transgressed in our particular study of dream initiations, especially if we consider that an

5. Initiations partaking of a seemingly total exteriority, such as Australian aboriginal rites of passage in which the process of becoming a man is ritually ‘signalled’ by the penis sub-incision of adolescent novitiates, may appear to lack an interior dimension, but the external “bloodying” has initiatic meaning rooted in its simulation of a mythological deed which is “interior” to the mystical dimension of ancestral being, the so-called “dreamtime” (cf. Knight, 1991).

interaction or communion with a deific being or transcendent state is a hallmark of the genuinely mystical. In a more detailed context several “emic” models, ideas or constructs of mysticism are necessary if we are to minimise generalisation and superimposition, and maximise phenomenological accuracy<sup>6</sup>.

Mysticism and Initiation as abstract notions are intimately connected, more so than by the fact that a relation between “self” and “other” is intrinsic to the existence of both. Two other connections of interest are worthy of stating: secrecy, which again recalls the aspect of “interiority” in mystical experience; and secondly, the linkage clearly evidenced by etymology.

As has been frequently attested in mystical writings.... from Buddhist scripture to Thomas a Kempis, the highest states of the mystic cannot readily be communicated via literal means, it is this very incommunicability that endows mysticism with a nature implicitly secret or “esoteric”. As noted by Dupre (op. cit.) the search for “hidden meanings” is often an integral motivation for the mystical. However, secrecy has its own language. Indeed, the semiotically transcendent nature of dreams, which is to say, the faculty of dreams to pass behind or beyond the literal and external languages of man and communicate in dimensions of interiority by means of the purely symbolic, leads us to consider the ability of the mystical to communicate in its own language: the language of the Imaginal. This links us to the literally “pre-dictive” interpretation of dreams; again, a subject for further explication below.

As noted by Burkert in his study of the ancient Greek and Roman Mystery cults (1987), secrecy was a necessary concomitant to the process of initiation. Indeed, as stated by

6. Certain “motifs” of a shamanic character, such as the dream or dream-soul assuming the form of an animal which travels and returns to the dreamer’s mouth, may be found in contexts usually designated as “mystical”. The dream of Ibn ‘Arabi (see Wilson, op.cit.) in which he received the Sura al-Shu’ara is a good example; therein the dream assumed the form of a white light which became a mysterious animal that left and re-entered the dreamer’s mouth. Such motifs clearly blur the boundaries of analysis and demonstrate the transliminality of the dream between spiritual categories of understanding and praxis.

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Pausanias, himself an initiate of the Eleusinian Rites (circa 200 BC), such prohibitions could be powerfully re-inforced:-

*“My dream forbade me to describe what is within the wall of the sanctuary; and surely it is clear that the uninitiated may not lawfully hear of that from the sight of which they are debarred.”*

(1, 38, 7, trans. Frazer, cited in Eliade, 1967.)

We may follow this vein of thought by etymology. The Greek *muein*, cognate with *myein* (to initiate), literally means “to keep silent”. Furthermore, the Greek *mysteria* (mysteries), *myein* (to initiate), and *myesis* (initiation) translate to the Latin as *initio*, *initiare*, and *initiatio*, by which means the word “initiation” enters our present language. Whilst in a purely historical sense the paradigmatic notion of the mystical as “a spiritual awareness of the Ineffable” (Dupre, op.cit.) was not really clarified until the writings of the fifth-century Christian theologian Dionysis the Areopagite, it maintains and derives impetus from certain conceptual integers from the classical Mystery religions (Burkert, op.cit.). The case in point being the transformation of *muein*, the classical initiatory “secrecy”, to the hesychastic notion of “wordless contemplation”. Compounded by Platonic and Christian metaphors, the classical *mystes*, or initiate, becomes the paradigmatic *mystikos* or mystic.

A further etymological linkage, of especial relevance to a study of the oneiric and the mythic, derives from the philological overlap of the Mycenaean Greek word-group *my(s)* - *mysteria* with a cognate verb *telein* meaning “to initiate” or “to accomplish” (Burkert, op.cit.). The verb “to accomplish” may also be rendered in Greek as *karanoo* which links to *keras* meaning “horn” (Jones, 1957). This links us to the mythic “Gate of Horn”, which Penelope describes in Homer’s *Odyssey* as the gateway for truthful dreams - dreams which both initiate and lead to physical reification as literal “accomplishments”.

Having discussed the few preliminary notions of "relation", "interior/exteriority", "initiation" *et alia*, it seems pertinent to consider a particularly interesting anomaly of oneiric initiation: the universal possibility of its "imminence". Unlike sacred ritual, which is a specific process constituting religion in its many and particular manifestations, the dream is an activity in consciousness preceding manifestation and one which may inform religious acts and beliefs in general; in short, the very capacity to dream and for that capacity to motivate or affect religious activities is potentially universal.

Furthermore, we must admit that in dreaming anything is possible<sup>7</sup>, no matter how defined or interpreted *post factum* by the individual, culture or system of belief. Just because we may not have had a mystical dream up to this very moment in our lives does not preclude the possibility of such occurring in the future. The fact is: each and every one of us may have a dream in which mystical experience occurs. The initiatic dream is therefore possibly imminent for us all. This, and the very fact that we all dream in one way or another, marks our study as highly unusual; the subjective/objective divide is immediately trespassed. Whilst some systems of practice (such as *Istikhara* in the Oveisi Order of Sufis, "Sleeping in the Bushel" in the Mao Shan sect of Taoism, or "the Practice of Night" in Dzogchen Buddhism) actively seek to generate lucidity in dreaming, active consent is by no means a universal requirement for a dream to occur. Although consent is usually an undisputed prerequisite to a religious activity or experience, in the case of dreaming I am unsure whether it is even of relevance. Dreams have motivated the building of temples, caused religious conversion, and have augured the births and deaths of prophets and incarnations, and often no-one asked for such advice; the dreams just occurred (Sharma, *op.cit.*). Whether sought for, consciously generated, or wholly intrusive, a dream is surely perceived only because the

7. e.g. The border between the living and the dead becomes non-existent; we can fly, transform to animal bodies, and so forth.

dreamer is an able recipient for such interior communications to occur." This acknowledged, "receptivity" might be a more suitable description for the state which permits a mantic dream to be had.

Given such an anomalous condition for our subject, we must ask: how may we proceed to study this, by what methods?

Whilst a particular and scientifically exacting methodology could be adhered to in theory, for a subject in which we all participate, albeit potentially or just possibly, our methodology will be coloured more so by subjectivity than might perhaps be unadmittedly usual. It therefore seems only honest to state that the approach herein commended will incorporate three particular modes of thought: the historical, phenomenological and the participatory. By the historical I mean quite simply "the study of the past", and thus that certain dreams recorded or interpreted as "initiatory" in significance during some past situation will be cited and used as subject-matter. In so doing a wide variety of sources will be utilised.

By phenomenological method I imply that an attempt will be made to deal empathically with our subject-matter, without undue imposition or bias by the student<sup>9</sup>. Such an approach inevitably removes modernist interpretative frameworks from our study, such as the psycho-analytic methods of Freud (*Die Traumdeutung*, 1900), Adler, and so forth<sup>10</sup>, and the more recent physiological-causative theories of dreaming as proposed by Hobson and McCarley (1977). Such theoretical standpoints, whilst of consideration in an historiographic study of dream interpretations, stand in stark contrast to the beliefs of those for

8. Even in the case of seemingly "organised" dream-cults, such as the medieval European Benandanti, Dona de la Fuera *et alia*, as recorded in Ginzburg, Henningsen, and Carrington, dream episodes and meetings simply occur for the participants; consent is rarely an issue. A spiritual predilection is a more apt description of "receptivity" in these instances. (See Ankarloo and Henningsen, 1993, for an overview.)

9. The phenomenological method is described by Van der Leeuw, Otto, Bleeker, Kramer *et alia*. See article in Eliade, 1987: Phenomenology.

10. With the possible exception of Jung, whose works tend toward a more empathic comprehension of dreaming.

whom the visionary dream is something divine, numinous and irreducible. It is the beliefs of the visionary that form the substance for our study and not otherwise.

By “participatory” I mean that I shall draw upon data from personal experience, namely that resulting from my own involvement in religious contexts where the significance and role of dream initiations has been directly experienced or has been communicated to me.

By a self-conscious and critical union of these means I hope that a bridge may be cast in our minds as a meeting-place for both the mystic and the scholar. As aforesaid, a wide variety of source materials will be used - such a bridge must be built of many different elements. Indeed, this seems eminently fitting in our present age, living as we are at the beginning of the third millennium (e.v.), when an individual has access to more sacred texts and religious situations than ever previously known. Today, perhaps more so than in any yesterday, we may hold in a single palm the symbols of many, if not all, of the major world faiths, and all of these may now impinge upon the dreaming mind as much as upon the waking consciousness of the religionist scholar. With an awareness of this imaginative scope we shall attempt to proceed, hopefully to lend substance to our few initial ideas, and more so to explore and discover what we may from the illimitable treasury of the dream.

*“Dreams are journeys, explorations of the interior infinite, starry heavens within. Dark mysteries, exquisite and dreadful, await penetration. Going to sleep is a new awakening...”*

(Siegel, 1980.)

### III - Dream-reification: The Initiatic Dream as Author, Symbologist, Composer and Prophet

One of the earliest recorded dreams is that of the Sumerian High Priest Gudea (circa 3000 B.C.E.; Third Dynasty of Ur), whose mantic night-vision serves well to reveal the composite mystical, authorial and symbological capacities of oneiric activity:-

*“In a dream, Gudea saw a man of tremendous stature with a divine crown on his head, the wings of a lion-headed bird, and a “flood-wave” to the lower part of his body; lions crouched to his right and left. This huge man commanded Gudea to build his temple, but he could not grasp the meaning of his words. Day broke - in the dream - and a woman appeared holding a gold stylus and studying a clay tablet on which the starry heaven was depicted. Then a “hero” appeared holding a tablet of lapis lazuli on which he drew a plan of the house. At the same time a specially bred male donkey was impatiently pawing the ground.*

*Since the meaning of the dream was not clear to him, Gudea (still asleep!) decided to consult the goddess Nanshe, who interpreted dreams for the gods. Gudea went with lifted head to the court of the temple, where he made sacrifices, poured out libations, and offered prayers. He then told her his dream, and she interpreted it for him...*

*The man of tremendous stature is Ningirsu (Nanshe’s brother) who commands the building of the temple Eninnu. The breaking of the day is Ningishzida, Gudea’s personal god, rising like the sun. The woman holding the stylus and tablet is Nidaba, the goddess of writing, who directs Gudea to build the house in accordance with the “holy stars”. The “hero” holding the tablet of lapis is the architect Nindub, who carries the plans and the bricks of fate. The impatient donkey is Gudea himself...impatient to commence the work of the dream.”*

(Paraphrased from Kramer, 1963.)

Not only does Gudea meet and converse with his gods in a mystical dialogue, but he gains the interpretation of his dream *in situ*. The symbolism of his dreams therefore conforms solely to the mode of interpretation which the dream itself dictates; the dream acts as symbologist and as author of meaning. This becomes more interesting when we consider the causative link posited by the French scholar, Jean Bottero (1992) between dreaming and writing. He points out that the first “words” in Mesopotamian script (possibly the earliest script in itself) are pictographs, they link image with idea by direct representation. When representation becomes indirect, the image links with ideas by association, thus a sign for the perceivable becomes a symbol for the conceivable. By such means “logic” was provided for divination: repeated observation of one event presaging another formed a “code” of omens which was *“entirely parallel, even here and there identical, to that of script, from which the experts, informed about the value of “divine pictograms”, could decipher exactly and univocally their message concerning the future.”* (Bottero, op.cit).

The image dreamed by Gudea of the “woman holding a gold stylus and a clay tablet on which the starry heavens were depicted” might now seem like a ‘supra-encyption’, an over-coded symbol for a process of dream-initiation in which “text” and “meaning” are revealed directly to the dreamer. On a global scale this image reverberates through the entire genre of “dream-books”, where a dreamed “symbol” is interpreted and becomes an “omen”, and thereby a prophetic means for reification - of making the future by a very literal “pre-diction”.

“Dream-books” are collations of dreams and their interpretations<sup>11</sup>. It has been asserted by Peter Lambourn Wilson (in his seminal study of Sufic and Taoist initiatic dreaming

11. One might consider that “dream-books” - as aggregates of oneiric symbology and interpretation - may literally become embodied in the form of ritual specialists and dream-interpreters. Specialised classes of priestly dream-interpreters are known to have existed in Ancient Egyptian religions (Hornung, 1983), in Classical Greek and Roman religions, and also in certain traditions of Sufism. In the latter case a Sheikh may assume such a role in the greater context of his spiritual service to a *halka* or circle of disciples.

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entitled "Shower of Stars", 1996) that "the dream-book may be the most ancient unbroken continuous literary genre on Earth". Indeed, Wilson goes on to say that certain dream interpretations are common to interpreters as historically distinct as Artemidorus (second century AD.), Ibn Sirin (33 A.H.), and Marie Laveau (a nineteenth-century New Orleans Voodooist). It is certain that as a genre the dream-book is a textual motif of vigorous and outstanding longevity, as a brief list will evince:

*The inscriptions of Gudea*, (circa 3000 BC)

Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty Manuscript (1275 BC)

*Oνειροκριτικά* by Artemidorus (circa 200 AD)

*Artharva Veda*, sixty-eighth appendix (circa 600 AD)

*Somniale Danielis* (poss. circa 900-1000 AD)

*Pitron Halamot* of Solomon b. Jacob Almoli (circa 1515 AD)

*Astrologaster* (1620)

*La Sibila* (Anon. circa 19-20th century)

Such texts are formed by recording dreams and the physical events which follow after them; patterns are noted and thereafter form the "code" of meanings: the symbology of a particular cultural mode of dream-interpretation. As aforesaid, this logic of "repeated observations" is identified by Bottero (op.cit) as integral to the development of Mesopotamian script. But more than this, Bottero's theory, coupled with the "logic" whereby dream-books are collated, posits a causative link between dreaming and symbolism as a whole, and even accounts for cultural diversification since dreams will continue to inform and modify a code of interpretation. The method of a dream-book's

collation, whether textually or orally<sup>12</sup>, necessitate that dreaming occurs first, interpretation second, and thus that symbology evolves as a direct consequence of the former informing the latter. Although such a chain of thought might lend new substance to “dream-origination” theories of religion, types of which have surfaced in Tylor, Jung and Eliade, our point here is to underline the motivational force supplied by dreaming in reifying the mystical apprehension of supernatural realities.

One might hypothesise that the external “re-membrance” (as opposed to dis-membrance) of the theophanic dream-(body) establishes a new order of wholeness or unity in meaning for the dreamer and all who become subject to the interpretative “text” deriving from the dream. By casting a network of interpretations about perceivable objects - in which one thing links with many others by an association born of the oneiric - the cosmos in all its diversity is subject to a unitive theophany of “meaningfulness”, and by such means the interpretative framework initiates us, back into the dream: “myth” becomes the dream-thinking of culture (c.f. Wilson, *op.cit.*). In these terms an etymology linking “recitation”, “bardic tradition” and “dreaming” becomes highly interesting; for the very word “dream” in Anglo-Saxon means “song”<sup>13</sup> (Skeat, 1902).

In this light it is worthwhile noting that in addition to providing meta-textual frameworks for symbolic systems via the oral and literary genre of dream-books, oneiric inspiration of a mystical order can provide impetus for ritual incantations, music, song and dance.<sup>14</sup>

12. To gain a broader understanding of this theory which links dream to symbology we must take account of interpretative frameworks accrued and transmitted via orality. The Jainist system of the fourteen “great dreams” is a good example of this (see Sharma, *op.cit.*), as is the rural Tibetan (Chophel, 1983).

13. The further link between song, charm and “runo” (given that “runo” can mean both a poetic text, a recitation and a single letter) in the Anglo-Saxon, Finno-Ugaric and Norse epic literature might lend weight to the earlier connection between “dreaming” and “writing” drawn from the Gudean example (c.f. Ervast, 1999).

14. Dream-reification in pictorial form is also known. The English artist Austin Osman Spare, 1875-1957, would often wake up to find a picture completed by his bedside. (See Grant, 1999, and Semple, 1996)

## MYSTICISM INITIATION AND DREAM

For example, in the 11th century c.e. the Tibetan Buddhist Machig Labdron<sup>15</sup> received a number of songs directly from the Goddess Arya Tara for use in the *gChod* practice; a mode of dream-transmission which is still extant for practitioners of her lineage (Edou, 1976). In contemporary practice of Dzogchen Buddhism a certain dance called "The Vajra Dance" is used by students of the famous Tibetologist Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche. Once again, the entirety of the dance was received in dream from a deific source (Norbu, 1986). Although ultimately Buddhism posits no final ontological reality for deities, dreams or everyday reality, the epistemological status of dreaming as a source for religio-philosophical knowledge and inspiration remains a constant notion. We may compare this with contemporary beliefs about dreaming in Haitian Voudon and New Orleans Voodoo. In both cultural settings for Afro-American religiosity, songs for calling the gods are frequently taught to devotees in dreams. I was informed by a recent initiate of New Orleans Voodoo (B. Hale. pers.comm. 1999) that he came to receive initiation, not because of a waking vision, conversion or interest, but because he dreamed of a god called "Agwe", a sea-deity, and that in his dream he was singing aloud a praise-song to call this deity. Of particular note was the fact that his wife listened as he sang aloud in his sleep and confirmed much of his dream when he awoke; the dreamer had never heard of Agwe and only found out the meaning of his dream at a later date. A parallel example derives from another personal source, a researcher of Voudon in Haiti. Drawing from his field-research he played a recording to me of some dozen or so songs which he had taped during a Voudon ceremony in "Capacion", 1996; all of the songs - lyrics and melodies - had been dreamed by the presiding *houngan* or high priest (Giles, pers.comm. 1996). In both of these examples the dreamer apparently travelled to "Guinea"- the domain of the gods, an underwater or ancestral abode, and met there with the

15. Machig is highly notable in being a female lama in a highly male-dominated culture, and more so as the founder of the only Tibet-based Buddhist lineage (all others being rooted in India), (Edou, 1976).

powers who told them the songs and melodies. Whilst the epistemological status of the dream as a theophany of musical form remains the same as in the Buddhist examples, the formal ontological status is markedly different. For the Voodooist the realm of the gods is as real as the everyday world, perhaps more so - for the realm of "Guinea" is an eternal type of the African homeland. In these examples, and perhaps in many others of comparative type, the dream-song mediates between the divine and the worldly; the post-dream ontological settings seem to differ from culture to culture, but the role of the dream remains. However, one might note that the "formal" modes of understanding a dream may be markedly different from the popular interpretation; in the basic inspirational sense for both Buddhist and Voodooist (and many others) the power of a theophanic dream might be identical.

Returning to the image of the Gudean "goddess of writing" as a motif of mystical dream-reification we would do well to consider the entire scope of the dream's "descent" into matter. As well as being an author of pictographic writing, symbological systems, song, music and dance, the initiatic dream has a powerful role to play in the epiphany of scriptures and holy books. In this sense the Gudean goddess presages a long line of theophanic texts bestowed from the hands of deity to humankind. In fact another name of this Ancient Meso-Sumerian deity of dreams, dZiddiqun, can be found as the name of an angel presiding over veridical dreams in Sufism - 3000 years later! (Bottero, op.cit).

Dream-manifested books may be received via direct dictation, symbolic intimation, dream incubation, or even via concrete materialisation. To gain a clearer purview of this phenomenon it is pertinent to cite and compare some exemplars from specific cultural milieus. For each example we should consider the ultimate source of the text, its mode of legitimisation, its canonical status, and fundamentally the manner in which it draws down the divine or mystical reality via oneiric mediation into the empirical sense-based perception of the mundane. In

this manner, following on from earlier considerations, the downward path of the mystical dream to incarnative being is gradually being traced.

*“By God, there is not one single letter which was not written under divine dictation, lordly projection or spiritual inspiration in the very depths of my being.”*

Ibn ‘Arabi, writing of his *Futubat* and other works (cited in Addas, 1993.)

In classical Sufism the visionary dream-text par excellence is the *Umm al-Kitab*, the “Mother of the Book” or heavenly prototype of the Qur’an itself. Parallels have been drawn between this *Tabula Rasa* and the Hermetic *Tabula Smaragdina*, both partaking of the virid/veriditas numinosity<sup>16</sup> - a quality which eventually materialises in the Oveissi prophet Al-Khidir. The “Mother of the Book”, whilst being the “Word of God” transcending all physical books, is nonetheless hypostatised in revelation to the Prophet Mohammed after his six month retreat in the Cave of Hira<sup>17</sup>. Although the Book itself is orally transmitted to him in a waking state, via the “speech” of the Angel Gabriel, the condition of the Prophet’s receptivity is established by veridical or true-dreaming during his retreat period. Furthermore, it has been observed that this “retreat” or prayerful sojourn has overtones of an Asklepiian dream-incubation (Wilson, op.cit.).

In attempting to understand the reception of the Book we must remember that the Prophet was “unlettered”, but only in an exoteric manner. The Book was made manifest to him via angelic speech and was later recorded by disciples through a kind of

16. Ibn ‘Arabi writes of his *Futubat* in a similar manner, describing a luminous tablet being set before him upon which the letters radiated in the form of radiant green lines (Addas, op.cit.).

17. Hira; “Hiraa” is the name of an old ‘Arabian daemon of dreaming (Wilson, op.cit.)

"symbolic transmission": certain texts being inscribed on visible objects such as leaves, bones or pieces of bark, and on invisible places such as the "breasts of men" (Arberry, 1964). Furthermore, to fully appreciate the esoteric nature of the Qur'anic revelation, we must attempt to comprehend the Sufic notion of the on-going manifestation of the prototypal *Umm al-Kitab*: the continuous "descent of the Book" in the so-called "shower of stars".

For its Sufic adherents, the Qur'an is a book "written in eternity", its manifestation occurs throughout all temporality as though the original event of its revelation is attenuated - one moment stretched out through every instant of realisation, very much in the manner of time within dreams. By this process the essence of the Book is revealed to the saints - the so-called "Friends of God" - in similitude (but not exactitude) to the spiritual paragon of their Prophet. In his work *A Quest for the Red Sulphur* (1993) Addas has written, citing Ibn 'Arabi, that

*...Mohammed received revelation in three different modes. Firstly he received the Book in its aspect of furqan during the Night of Destiny (laylat al-qadr); secondly he received it as qur'an during the month of Ramadan; and finally he received it progressively over a period of twenty-four years in a shower of stars. It is this "starry" descent of the Qur'an - a direct perception of the original revelation, not to be confused with methodical memorisation - which was experienced by the saints."*

As expounded by Wilson (op.cit) and Corbin (1969) the mystical reality of the "Book" is mediated between the heart (*al-Qalb*) of the "servants of God" and the transcendent condition of the Umm al-Kitab through dream and vision - through the agency of the Imaginal World (*Alam-al-mithal*). Ibn 'Arabi<sup>18</sup> comments directly about his own experience of the mystical descent of the Book:-

18. It is of note in rê. oneiric theophanies that Ibn 'Arabi's own twelve volume opus Meccan Revelations was dream inspired. Another work of note is the *Tarikh -i-Uwaysi* by Uzgani, a history of the Khadirian dream-order of Sufis, written via a form of *Istikhara* or Sufic dream incubation. (Wilson op.cit.)

## MYSTICISM: INITIATION AND DREAM

*"In a dream I saw a being who was one of the angels; he gave me a piece of agglutinated earth free of any dust and bottomless in depth. When I was holding it in my hands I discovered that this piece of earth was none other than His Word, 'Wherever you find yourself, turn towards Him...thank Me and do not be ungrateful!' (Qur'an 2:150-2). I was stupefied; I was unable to deny either that this was the very essence of these verses, or that it was also a piece of earth. I was then told: 'This was the way in which the Qur'an was revealed to Mohammed.'" At the same time I saw the Messenger of God, who was telling me: "This is how they [the verses] were revealed to me: experience it for yourself. Can you deny what you are witnessing?"*

(cited in Addas, op.cit)

From this quotation we can extrapolate a number of moot points:- the familiar angelic figure presiding over the transmission of knowledge; the "dream-text" itself; the esoteric and (oneiro-) syntactic identity between theophanic forms, that is, the unitive coding of both text and text-symbol as a single revealed truth. Indeed this particular dream-cognition of the Qur'anic descent epitomises the transliminality of oneiric initiatory contexts; sign, symbol, text, sublimity of knowledge and materiality of re-presentations - the boundaries blur, but this itself is a "hallmark" quality serving to reveal the imaginal domain of the spiritual activity.

*"...precisely because it is 'imagined', the Image, once recognised as such, betokens something that is not illusory but real and meaningful: for indeed, to recognise it for what it is 'to wake up', and to invest it with one's marvellous power,..."*

(Corbin, 1969.)

For the Sufi, "imaginal" does not equate with "imaginary" in the sense of fantasy; the realm of the imaginal is the world of sentient archetypes, where symbol and myth obtain their own level of sentience. Should any doubt arise in understanding visions from the imaginal, the sign of absolute veracity is the presence (*hadrat*) of the Prophet; for no *djinn* or mental deception can assume his form. Such "presence" may enter the Sufi's visions not solely by the visible recognition of the Prophet, but also through the dream-images of Sufic saints - in those who have "realised the Mohammed of their own being".

For the Muslim the prototypal *Umm al-Kitab* exists in a transcendent and absolute manner, identical in the unity of God. Dreams proceeding from the Will of God are like shadows of His brightness or are as emanations, possessing their own degree of reality according to their exact nature - whether they are revelatory, prophetic, or psychopompic. Epistemologically the dream interpretation framework in which such dreams occur is constructed according to coding of Islamic scripture<sup>19</sup> and tradition (see Ibn Sirin, for example), but essentially certain notions remain constant trans-culturally: a dream can manifest the sacred, can prophesy the future, can be a symbolic lesson, and so forth.

The Sufic notion of the *Umm al-Kitab* may be favourably compared with the Buddhist notion of *Buddhavacana* (lit. Buddha-word), signifying the eternal doctrine of the Buddha or simply "dharma" (Skr: dharma. Tibetan: *chos*). For the Buddhist, the teachings of the dharma, whether Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, are similarly "written in eternity", although ultimately - and specifically in the metaphysic of the Madhyamika - they have no final ontological reality: they are part of dualistic samsaric reality just as you and I are. Aspects of dharma-teaching manifest according to the requirements and spiritual capacities of a particular time, place and generation of humanity. Dreams provide a potentially constant route of

19. It is said that the Qur'an has seven, seventy or seven hundred esoteric levels of interpretation.

atemporal context - a Pure Land or Buddha-realm - in which initiatic relations may occur. Dream-teachings, whether manifest as empowerments (Tib: *wang*), texts, as speech (Tib: *lung*) or object, all constitute initiations (Tib: *dbangbskur*. Skrt: *abhiseka*) and carry a sense of lineage (Skrt: *parampara*). In Tibetan religion especially, both Buddhist and Bon-po<sup>20</sup>, the very concept of a dream bestowing initiatory empowerment and insight is very well-attested and is often accorded the highest epistemological and philosophical status as Buddhavacana (see Norbu, op.cit., Namdak, 1993).

In the Bon-po and Nyingma schools, there is a class of text<sup>21</sup> and sacred object called "Terma" (Tib: *gterma*) meaning "treasure" (Thondup, 1983). The canonical terma teachings are repositories of Buddhist doctrine mystically secreted in the form of yellow scrolls, mind-secrets<sup>22</sup>, dorjes, phurbas, crystals, or statuary, by Guru Padmasambhava (circa 10th C.) or one of his dakini-consorts in readiness for a future time of dispensation - a time when the world will require a very specific teaching. A terma teaching is locked away in a sense that no other form of teaching or scripture is; it is magically "closed" until its predestined locator and decipherer - a tertön or "treasure-finder" is wholly ready to find and 'read' it. A terma scroll may be hidden in solid rock or lie within the jaws of a naga spirit in the depths of some lake; its text may consist of merely two or three lines written in a cipher called "dakini script" - a form of text that can only be read by an appointed and predestined individual. One might say that the terma is not even manifest until its time; it is somehow "out there" waiting for its time of reification.

As an instance of the oneiric and mystical text in abstract, the terma is an exceptional exemplar, but it is all the more awe-

20. I shall maintain the use of Buddhist terms in discussing oneiric texts in Tibet. Although the Bon-po religion is a distinct entity, the religio-philosophical terminology in our subject area overlaps to a great extent.

21. Termas, whilst a class of literature or object, exist in many sub-classes; each with distinct lineage requisites and canonical specifications. (Thondup, 1983)

22. Termas of the so-called "Mind-mandate Transmission" remain hidden in pure mind-space until they can be "read" by an appointed tertön or "treasure-finder" (see Thondup, op.cit)

inspiring when one looks at an instance of the actual dream-initiations which surround a terma's epiphany. A number of startling accounts are given by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche in his works on Dzogchen Buddhism, *The Crystal and the Way of Light* (1986), *Dream Yoga and the Practice of the Natural Light* (1984) et alia. One particular example, from his childhood, I have found particularly memorable:-

*"While there [in the retreat cave of the tertön Kyenze Qosgi Wanqyug (sic)] I had a dream one night, in which a dakini appeared to me and gave me a small scroll of paper on which there was written a sacred text. She explained that the text was very important and that on waking I should give it to my uncle. By this time my practice had already developed to the extent that I could maintain awareness throughout my sleep and dreams, and in this dream I knew I was dreaming. I remember closing one of my fists around the scroll, and then closing the other fist tightly around the first.*

*The rest of the night passed uneventfully, and when I awoke at dawn, I found that my fists were still tightly clenched one around the other. When I opened my hands, I found that there really was a small scroll in the palm of one hand. I at once went in great excitement to knock on the door of my uncle's cave, [who was engaged in morning retreat practice]. He came to the door and I explained what happened and showed him the scroll. He looked at it for a moment, quite calmly, and then said: 'Thank you. I was expecting this.'*"

This incident from Norbu's youth is charmingly innocent in contrast to the convoluted processes sometimes engaged in by tertons in executing the commands of dakinis for locating and deciphering terma treasures. Tulku Thondup (1983) recounts

these initiatory pilgrimages and ordeals in great detail; I shall here summarise but a few. Often a dream, vision, or waking visitation presages the search, sometimes the tertön must be accompanied by a ritual “support” - a yogini, whose presence esoterically gains him permission to proceed.

On following the directions of awakened memory or spiritual counsel, the tertön may find the location of a terma in a cliff, lake, or cave, and must somehow “open” the site to remove the concealed items. Once procured a terma scroll, most always saffron yellow in hue, must be literally “awakened” to permit its reading. The “sleeping” text may consist of one symbolic letter, a few lines of script or code, or a whole prayer, and it is the role of the tertön to gain access to the wisdom locked therein. When “awakened” from its own oneiric state the terma liberates its knowledge and the tertön may then write down, often in numerous volumes, the wisdom which arises therefrom. In the case of the Mind-mandate Transmissions of terma, the teachings are locked in pure mind-space by Guru Padmasambhava and only through a tertön being a reincarnate lama of the requisite lineage can the mind-space become accessible to waking or meditative consciousness, once more to manifest as a teaching. In all cases, terma teachings can only be communicated to another via initiatory transmission: the telling of their dream is itself innately ritualised. Before a terma is discovered it is regarded as existing in an otherworldly domain known as *beyul*, a kind of land ontologically and mythologically comparable to the European Elphame or Faerie, a curious dream-reality to which we shall turn later.

In Taoism another example of dream theophany can be found which is worth citing, principally because its original epiphany founded a sect known as “Mao Shan”, particular in its subsequent focus on oneiric modes of meditation. Poul Anderson, in his work *The Method of Holding the Three Ones* (1980), recounts the reception of the founding text called “Jin-que-di-jun san-yuan-zhen-yi jing” circa fourth century c.e.. “*The starting point was a series of revelations received by a young man*

*called Yang Xi during the years 364-70 c.e. In his nightly visions he was visited by several Perfected or Immortals, zhen, who descended from their abode in the Shang-qing Heaven in order to transmit their teaching and dictate their texts to him.”*

As we can see, the motif of the Gudean goddess recurs again and again: the angelic immortal holding tablet and pen. In our three examples the dream operates as the initiator of a teacher, the bestower of a mystical body of knowledge, and the motivator of spiritual tradition: the quill is passed on and the visionary recipient translates the eternal to the temporal. The ritual telling of the mystical dream begets its own lineage; the psychic interiority of its secret being moves into the outward esotery - the mysteria of silsilah and sampradaya. In entering such a lineage or tradition, in hearing the dream, we are initiated by it - we begin a path back into the eternal.

*“Write, what you see and hear! Tell people how to enter the Kingdom of Salvation!”*

(Hildegard of Bingen, 1141)<sup>23</sup>

To proceed with the downward or reificatory course of the mystical dream, we may say that as a sacred imaginal force it “mediates” the eternal and thereby impresses the a-temporal upon the temporal; it quite literally makes the future via the revelation of its own symbological role, its pre-dictive spelling out of what will be.

Proceeding from “text” the reifying dream initiates matter: it prophesies the birth of an avatar, a bodhisattva, messiah or saint. Once again we are in a position to note a universality of the oneiric, for no matter the ontological status imputed to dreaming in a belief system, a dream is trans-culturally recognised as a valid means for prophesying the coming to flesh of a holy being. In

23. Compare the command of the god Asklepios to Aristides: “Straight from the beginning the God ordered me to write down my dreams. And this was the first of his commands.” (Behr, 1968, cited in Kilbourne, op.cit.).

## MYSTICISM: INITIATION AND DREAM

Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, Christianity or Judaism... the prophetic function of such heralding dream-visions is constant. In this respect we may say that the mystical dream initiates the divine by auguring its entrance into the world of physicality. Whilst such a dream-belief may be a universality, once again the signs by which a dream signals an incarnational “becoming” vary from place to place and time to time. Nonetheless to set two examples side by side will show both differences and identities:-

*“...behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.*

*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”*

(St. Matthew, Ch.1. 20-21.  
King James Version)

*“She dreamt of a handsome, white man holding a crystal vase with mantras engraved on it. This man bestowed initiation on the nun, and then dissolving into light he entered her body and impregnated her. Sometime after this dream she gave birth to Garab Dorje.”<sup>24</sup>*

(Namkhai Norbu, 1992.)

The dream annunciation, the heralding angel, the handsome white man, the impregnation by a man of light, the conception of the Holy Spirit... amidst their respective Christian and Buddhist framing the analogies of the dreams are embedded in a symbological coding, somewhat reminiscent of our “textual” dream-episodes. However our present point is not really to

24. Garab Dorje, circa 881 B.C according to Tibetan sources, is the first human teacher of Dzogchen or Atiyoga on Earth. (See *The Golden Letters*, trans. Reynolds, 1996.)

demonstrate an underlying unity of encryption motifs in such epiphanic dreams, it is rather to underline the very notion of dream-reification at the specific level of incarnative prophecy.

At its nadir the descending path of the dream centres upon geomantic motifs and the transference of power from the land to the dreamer. On the level of pragmatic sorcery, in both Malaya (Skeat, 1900) and in Essex (McNess, pers. comm. 1991) certain praxes of folk magic utilise encharmed sods of earth to gain dreams foretelling true love and fortune. In both instances the earth and thus its spirit (*genius loci*) are placed in proximity to the dreamer's body and are thereby believed to exert an influence which will manifest itself in a visionary or symbolic dream. On a more mystical plane, though nonetheless rooted in a telluric field of agency, we may consider the widely attested folk-belief in gateways to Faerie realms via dreaming on specific locales in the landscape and also the whole complex of beliefs which revolve around the "Rip van Winkle" type dream-sojourns in Elphame (Knight, 1983). In Welsh folklore there are a number of sites esteemed as geomantic power-zones, such as Carn Ingli in the Prescelis and Bedd Taliesin (Taliesin's Grave) in Llanfihangel. It is believed that if one sleeps at such locations, often in a stone formation resembling a chair, or within a cairn, that one will receive visionary dreams<sup>25</sup>, go insane, be gifted the boon of poethood, or else be pixy-led into another realm: the world of Faerie (Trubshaw, 1996). Either way the site itself is considered to have numinous powers capable of initiating a dreamer into new talents and spiritual domains. In the case of St. Brynach (circa sixth century), the power of Carn Ingli augmented his beatific visions of angels - a tale very much alive in the region of Nevern today, where both Christian and Faerie-faith images merge in a mythic comprehension of the landscape<sup>26</sup> (Howard, pers. comm. 1999). The interplay of local shrine-based

25. The power of dreaming at the tomb of a Sufi Master, or in the Copper Mountain caves of Padmasambhava is comparable to the Welsh belief in dreaming in cairns; similar blessings and boons may arise in all instances.

26. The belief in the landscape as a possessor of mythic sentience, especially in an oneiric capacity is best illustrated by the Australian aboriginal notion of "song-lines", for which see Bruce Chatwin's novel of the self-same name.

cults and the function of the visionary dream as syncretist is itself highly interesting. Pamela Berger, in her study (*The Goddess Obscured*, 1988) points out the power of dreams to integrate and to transform locality-based divine forms, one into another. She illustrates the process with reference to the early medieval period and the transformation of agrarian goddess-figures into Christian saints, such St. Walperga and St. Bride. As an example of the transformational shift, the case of Thomas the Rhymer is perhaps relevant here (Graves, 1961). His own entrance to Faerie was via a dream-vision of a woman he hailed as the Virgin Mary, but who revealed herself as the "Queene of Elfland". In this respect the dream may be regarded as initiating religious transformation, itself becoming a mystical syncretist - an active agency of spiritual change.

The locality-based types of dream-transference, from Albion to Faerie, occur in Arthurian Romance, in Welsh epic literature such as the Mabinogion, in medieval poetry and in later Elizabethan drama. As aforesaid, the Tibetan parallel of the *beyul* lands to the Brythonic Faerie-realm is indeed striking (see Levine, 1993). In all such instances the earth-empowered dream takes the dreamer into another realm, a place of virid splendour, a spiritual domain hidden in nature and location from the mundane. One might consider that the *genius loci* in the earth below the faerie wayfarer, like the rock beneath Jacob's head in Genesis 28, opens a liminal door for a visionary experience. Whilst for Jacob a heavenly axis of ascent and descent appears, for Thomas the Rhymer the dream initiates him into another dimension of being. For both the dream opens the way between worlds.

Reaching the nadir of dream-reification brings us to the point where the dream and dreamer both lie, as it were, on (or in) the green earth. This is the point where the initiating power of the oneiric reverses: the pathway of the dream as an agent of spiritual rarefaction begins. As shall be seen from the instances of dream incubation explored below, the good earth is a place most apt to end one path and to begin another, to signal a transformation of nature and a change in route.

#### IV - Oneiric Rarefaction: The Way of Ascent

*“It is the function of himma [creative will or meditation], utilising the imaginative faculty, to perceive the intermediate world [the world of images], and, by there raising the sensory data to a higher level, to transmute the outward envelope into its truth, so permitting things and beings to fulfil their theophanic function.”*

(Corbin, 1969.)<sup>27</sup>

It is related by Corbin that Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240 c.e.) considered the true ta’wil - the hidden meaning of dreams - not to lie in interpreting the forms and symbols of the imaginal realm in terms of worldly events, not in “reading” the dream with reference to “*the order of sensible things and events*”, rather, to accomplish the true ta’wil : “*one must carry sensible forms back to imaginative forms and then rise to still higher meanings*”. For Ibn ‘Arabi this ascendant path connotes a restoration in which the material world, “the visible temple”, becomes identified with “the mystical temple”, and thus is rarefied - translated to the spiritual order of perception. Such a mode of understanding, when applied to our earlier observations concerning the associative frame of meaningfulness which a dream-symbology can provide for the perceptible things of the mundane, serves to reverse the chain of causation. Instead of the mundane becoming more meaningful on its own level because of dream-interpretation, the mundane world becomes meaningful because the dream-interpretation translates its “sensible order” to a higher, more spiritual plane. The ta’wil thus signifies the literal dematerialisation of the dream from a mundane ambit of existence

27. Bracketing is my own.

28. c.f. Rumi: “When Khizr and Elias boasted of gaining it, they found the Water of Life and were no more seen.” Mathnawi, Third Story.

to a higher theophanic plane. It is as though the truth of an object in the world of physicality is re-read or re-perceived according to the gnosis of the primordial tablet - the so-called "Mother of the Book" and that the ascendant path of the dream denotes the transformation of the imagination from an organ of conception to an organ of divine perception.

We are then lifted to another plane of comprehension, in which the dream can operate as a creative extension of the divine will, causing the "existentiation" of imaginal beings on a material plane and a spiritualisation of matter by its re-cognition at a higher mode of perceptivity (c.f. Corbin, op.cit.). In such a transformation the reificatory path of oneiric initiation becomes a ladder of ascent - a path for rarefaction. The dream-incubating cairn, the dream-propheesied birth, the dream-told song, the dream-book dictated from the angel, - all become lexicographical keys through which the dream can be re-read as a way, not just of ingress from above to below, but of egress - of raising the consciousness. The dream opens a way for us to participate in the realities of the creative divine.

In a sense we might symbolise the process of oneiric spiritualisation as a "siderealisation" - a translation of the flesh to the stars - back to the domain of the Gudean goddess, back to the domain of the primordial smaragdine book. Such a symbolism seems apt indeed if we consider briefly the role of "stars" in esoteric dream praxis.

In the Mao Shan tradition a practice known as "Sleeping in the Bushel" is utilised, dating from around the fourth century c.e., which causes the body to be illumined with stellar numen:

*"At night, the adept must see the Big Dipper shining in the north, and then see himself lying within the constellation's expansive radiant light which covers him with a purple brilliance. Beyond this brilliance and within the seven stars of the bushel, nothing is visible inside or outside. Everything is flowing darkness. Then the glimmering rays of the seven stars change into seven boys, each of whom is placed on a star. Each of these boys exhales the light of one of the seven treasures (gold, jade or pearls) which nourishes the adept.*

*...After seven years of this practice, the adept's body will shine with the brilliance of the seven jewels".*

(Robinet, 1993.)

In another form of the practice the stars and their indwelling deities are visualised to enter specific points of the dreaming body. A process such as this seems comparable to the tantric praxis of nyasa in which deities are "stored" in the body by imaginal transference from mind to flesh (See Kulachumani Tantra. Trans, McGee, no date. and Svoboda, 1993). The dream-visions of the Sufi Ruzbehan as related by Corbin (1966) are similarly of "stellar" interest:-

*"At that time I knew nothing of the higher theosophical science, and behold I saw Khidr. He gave me an apple from which I took a bite. 'Eat it all' he said, 'as I have eaten it all'. It seemed to me that there was an immense sea stretching from the Throne to the Pleiades, and I could see nothing else. It was like the irradiation of the sun. Then, without my willing it, my mouth opened and this whole sea of light entered, not a drop remained unabsorbed."*

In terms of this higher *ta'wil* of dream-initiations the role of figures such as Khidir in Sufism and Guru Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism are of importance as both guides and mystical instructors. The dream of Ruzbehan with its quasi-shamanic motifs of the gnosis-bestowing apple and the gustatory absorption of light are striking, more so when one understands that Khidr - as dream-initiator - knew the exact direction of consciousness in which the dreamer was being led. Yet it is less surprising, though nonetheless remarkable, if one considers the Islamic folk-belief that Khidir travels through the same location once in every five hundred years: as an immortal since the time of Alexander there is no-where he has not been<sup>29</sup>. He is thus the

29. Folklore attests that Khidr is known as Elias on the sea and Khidir on the dry earth. (Chumbley, 1995) An identity between Khidir-Elias and Jirjis (St. George) is also found, c.f. Rumi's *Mathnawi*, Story III.

initiatic psychopomp *par excellence*, and indeed no study of oneiric initiation, no matter how brief, would be complete without a mention of his name.

As aforementioned, the aspect of “interiority” is implicit to dreaming and dream-initiation; quite simply, the arena of oneiric initiatic relations lies first and foremost within the mind or spiritual awareness of the dreamer. This psychologistic type of interiority is transposed to esoteric practices of dream-incubation, that is to magico-religious practices wherein the would-be dream-recipient places him or herself within a location, such as a cave or dark room, in order to inculcate the possibility of a divinely inspired dream. I emphasise the aspect of interiority simply because the practices of incubation themselves appear to both replicate and ritually over-emphasise the isolated sense of “within-ness” peculiar to intense dream-activity.

*“The ancient Greek god of healing, Asklepios, appeared in dreams to pilgrims who slept at his temples. This practice was formalised as “incubatio”; that is, dream were deliberately incubated, like eggs, and hatched - as medical or magical prescriptions”.*

(Wilson, op.cit.)

In both Classical Greek and Roman civilisation the practice of Asklepiian dream-incubation was popular from around the fourth century B.C.E.. Its principal motivation was to gain healing and prophecy of a mundane order, nonetheless we should mark it as truly “mystical” insofar as the whole of the practice concerned direct communion with the deity itself. (The dream-conversion of Aristides is a particularly notable example.) Furthermore, the figure of Asklepios has profound soteriological resonance with Christ as the divine healer (Kilbourne, op.cit.). In this sense, the dream-deity or guide acts as a redeemer, drawing the devotee upward from both psychic and physical sickness to a condition of greater spiritual wholeness. In terms of our present study, the dream-incubating chamber of Asklepios is typologically an axial

point where the process of ascendant rarefaction begins its steady climb heavenwards.

As a type of dream-incubatory location, the Asklepiian chamber has parallels in the “Dark Retreat” of both Dzogchen Buddhism and Bon (c.f. Wangyal, 1993), in *Ishtikhara* the Sufic praxis of sleeping in proximity to the tombs of past Sufi saints (Feild, 1992), in the Voudon praxis of “couche”<sup>30</sup>, and in the prayerful isolation of the Christian monastic cell. Nonetheless, interiority as a condition for dream-incubation not only manifests in the physical sense. The Judaic Cabalistic text *Sepher Raziel* magically replicates this condition, not merely by the simple means of placing the dream-question or prayer on parchment beneath one’s pillow<sup>31</sup>, but by counselling the time-attested need for devoted spiritual seclusion. Here we merely re-frame the other initiatic pre-requisite, namely “secrecy”. In almost all forms of incubation the dream-seeker must move within - to a private location, where his devotions are hidden from all physical others, or else he must move away - outside the boundaries of civilisation, as in the case of the Norse dream-seeking praxis of *utiseti* (lit. “Out-sitting”<sup>32</sup>). In The Mao Shan praxis of “Sleeping in the Bushel”, interiority manifests in conjunction with sidereality, in that one magically dreams “in” the stars of the Wain. Ultimately, the three aspects of incubation, within-ness and secrecy pertain to a central characteristic of oneiric initiation: non-mediation.

30. In Haitian Voudon a special temple-room is set aside as a place for spiritual dreaming. In such a room a highly adorned bed is laid out, called “*Kabann Iwa*”, literally, “spirit-bed”. Initiates will regularly sleep in such beds to gain songs, visions, and prophecies from the loa or Voudon deities. *Couche* is an intrinsic part of the initiation rite itself. A candidate lays upon the magical bed for a number of days and is not permitted to speak or move, unless absolutely necessary. Once dreams have been had the initiation may proceed. (Hale, pers.comm., 1999)

31. Comparable to the mariner’s form of dream-incubation: “the letter in a bottle”. (Merrifield)

32. Out-sitting is a Norse shamanic practice where the practitioner walks outside the community enclosure and literally sits in the wilderness, waiting for a dream or vision. (Bauer, pers. comm. 1997)

Initiatic systems often devolve upon notions of lineage, of *silsilah* (Sufic term) and *parampara* (Hindu/Tantric term). As we observed at the beginning of this essay, mystical dreams simply occur, despite being sought for via incubatory praxes, no lineal authority of a visible order is ultimately needed for their manifestation. Where dreaming and initiation intersect figures such as Asklepios and Khidir fulfil a spiritual niche, acting as agencies of spiritual instruction and legitimisation for “masterless”, lineage-less, mystics. In the case of Khidir, his capacity as a guide of the “masterless” has taken on a well-attested historical function, most notably in the Uwaysi Order of Sufis<sup>33</sup>. The Uwaysiyya are a fraternity of Sufis who gain initiation solely via veridical dreams and whose lineage operates, as in dreams, above and beyond the orderly sequence of time and space - (in keeping with the higher ta’wil of ‘Arabi). For those without initiatic relations of an outer, worldly kind, (like Uways al-Qarani (d.670), the preceptor of the Uwaysiyya, who never met the Prophet Mohammed, although being his contemporary) the presence of Khidir intercedes and permits initiatic relations of an inner or imaginal sacrality.

Non-mediation may not only manifest in terms of a transcendental lineage, we may consider the fact that dreams, in their specifically mantic or prophetic function, cut through the linearity of time and expectation, and interject with sudden revelation decrees of futures as yet unconceived. The Biblical examples of dreaming, (Num 12:6; Gen. 20:3; 28:12-15; Mt. 1:20; etc), are principally of this character. Between God and dreamer there is only the dream and those within it. The visions of H. H. Dudjom Lingpa (1835-1904 c.e.), as recorded in the work *Refining Apparent Phenomena* (Tib: *Nang-jang*), clearly demonstrate this “non-mediation” between dreamer and deific power. In this work he relates a series of oneiric revelations which reveal unmediated and direct communications with

33. The Uwaysiyya are of particular note in re. dream initiation, but limitation of scope precludes greater comment. It is interesting in itself to note that Uzgani’s *History of the Uwaysis* was composed oneirically in consultation with the “deceased” initiates of the lineage (Wilson, op.cit)

numerous deities, buddhas, and dakinis; all of which result in a mystical apprehension of Ultimate Reality or Nirvana. Canonically the Nyingmapa Buddhists call this spiritual mode of direct intercession the “Short Lineage”.

As we implied near the outset of this enquiry, it appears that in the realm of mystical oneiric initiations the Absolute or Ultimate Reality, as posited in a religio-philosophical system, seemingly obtains existentionation as an hypostate: the infigurable objectivizes - becoming a “text” or a “symbol” of its own nature. Elsewise we may say that the Absolute emanates or assumes a persona, and thus is able to act as the “other” to the dreamer in the internal initiatic relation of a dream. Such an understanding, in keeping with ‘Arabi’s higher *ta’wil*, allows the seemingly autonomous entities of our dreams to actively mediate between humanity and the sacred “other”, and thus to lead us toward spiritual conditions that we may genuinely term “mystical”. In light of this, the role of psychopompic figures such as Khidir may be seen as expressions of the transcendental pleroma on the plane of the *Mundus Imaginalis*, the intermediate realm or *Alam al-milthal* of the Sufis. One might even go so far as to call such figures “imaginal refractions” of the Absolute, when that in itself is figured in terms of “light”, as in the Sufic “Black Light” or Buddhist “Clear Light” (c.f. Corbin, 1971).

Indeed, it is important to note that the photic metaphor of sacrality is to be found in all of the so-called Great Traditions of Mysticism<sup>34</sup>, and it is thus unsurprising that in dreaming the photic idiom for “enlightenment” obtains a nigh universal vocabulary - perhaps because “Light” itself is the medium of the imagination or intermediate realm. Coupled with the trans-cultural diversity of chromatic symbologies Light’s universality emerges in the many-tongued language of the Imaginal. The mystical apotheosis of which is, in both Sufism and Dzogchen, the ontological quiddity known as the “Body of Light”.

34. Christianity, Islām, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Buddhism, et al. all use light to signify the Highest state, whatever the ontological status imputed to the Absolute or Ultimate Truth.

If we re-read by the higher *ta'wil* the aforementioned keys of dream-reification, they become the rungs for our ascending ladder of rarefaction. Such rungs, symbolising stations or gradations of a mystical path, are often marked by chromatic indications of spiritual state. Photic constructs of psychic anatomy are utilised as a framework for mystical endeavour in the Sufism of Sohrawardi (d.1191) and Kobra, the Qabalism of the Zohar, and in the Tantric sampradayas of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Such frameworks devolve upon the notion of psycho-physical centres known as *cakras* in Tantrism, meaning "wheels" and *lata'ifa* in Sufism, meaning "locations". These centres of our spiritual anatomy are principally positioned in the spinal axis and each centre is associated with a specific chromatic irradiance - an indicator of activated mystical awareness<sup>35</sup>. At a certain point in mystical practice the Body of Light obtains an apparent autonomy and the practitioner is able to consciously exist in the imaginal realm as a Being of Light. Such attainment manifests as the ability to knowingly visit others in their dreams, to become a dream-initiator - as indeed did Ibn 'Arabi, who thuswise bestowed the Khirqah or initiatic mantle of a Sufi upon certain women (Addas, op.cit.).

The photic existentionation of the mystic is perhaps epitomised in the dream practice of Dzogchen Buddhism, where the body of the liberated adept becomes wholly of light, transforming him or her into a "rainbow body". (Norbu, 1992). This is of particular eschatological significance, since the attainer of a rainbow body wholly de-materialises, leaving behind nothing but nails and hair. Hagiographical accounts of this phenomenon are recorded well into the modern period (Tashi Gyaltzen, 1993).

Anomalous in the context of Buddhist philosophy, the nirvana or absolute liberation attained by a possessor of a rainbow body does not mean a cessation of individuality and unique self-will. Rather the rainbow-body carries the individual into a dimension

34. Both *Lata'ifa* and *cakras* are associated with colours, seed-phonemes or sacred letters, divine or saintly forms, musical notes, and so forth, forming an *Ars Memoria* of the spiritual body. (Svoboda, op.cit.). To the Sufi construct of the *Insani-Kamil* (Perfect Man) and the Dzogchen *Ja'lus* (Rainbow Body) we may favourably compare the Qabalistic notion of Adam Qadmon.

of pure luminosity, a state in which the adept can manifest in any time or place, waking or dreaming. It is as if the condition of photic being permits the individual to act as an agent of gnosis, moving hither and yon through the transliminality of the imaginal, becoming a teacher to all who seek the path. It is said that one has only to call upon such luminous ones as Khidr or Padmasambhava, and they will come... whether we recognise it or not. In attaining to the luminosity of the dream-body, the mystic is initiated into an active participation in the greater play of oneiric sacrality.

Before concluding, a final word about Khidir. It is said that his spiritual proximity is intimated as a “sudden flash of green light”, identical to that associated with the otherworldly Green Knight in the medieval epic of Gawain. Whilst cultural variants are common in colour symbolism, the faerie-hued thread of greenness seems to wend a way through many lands, perhaps because it signifies Life itself, particularly the fertility of true spiritual life. Khidir’s viridity recalls the smaragdine quality of the Heavenly Book and thus the “veridity” of the theophanic reality it signifies. This verdant quality similarly occurs in the visions of Hildegard of Bingen, who speaks of the *veriditas* or “greenness” of true visions in her *Scivias* (Fox, 1996). In being perceived in mundane waking consciousness, the green light of the heavenly dream-book is “translated” to numinous presence in what might be regarded as an out-sparking of the imaginal. The fact of our seeing it signifies our own translation, a realisation our own higher *ta’wil*.

## V - Conclusion

Our present study has perhaps been over-ambitious in its attempt to cover so many types of phenomena where dreaming, initiation and mysticism find some sort of common ground. Nonetheless in depicting an axis of heavenward and earthward motion through the space of “the mystical dream”, and in casting wide a constellating net of thematic motifs, I hope that some broad brush-stroke picture has been achieved, if only to adumbrate the possibilities of the subject and perhaps leave scope for it to exert its own effects upon the reader.

One error amongst many in this essay, I am sure, is the apparent omission of a comparative analysis of dream typologies, such as a side-by-side comparison between dream-types according to Aristotle, Tertullian and Ibn Sirin for instance. This “mistake”, however, is deliberate. Such an approach would have been more suited to an historiography of dream-types and thus less concerned with the specifically mystical aspect of the oneiric. From the broad sketch of mystical dream phenomena it should be apparent to the reader that a dream can communicate many states of transcendental consciousness, perhaps more so than waking because the laws of mortal “gravity” are abolished. Given its range of consciousnesses, a simplistic typology of good, bad and false dreams would have been grossly inadequate. The Dream, as an abstract category, can facilitate initiatory activity in a vast spectrum of forms, and it is perhaps most sagely treated of if we appreciate it as an arena of special consciousness - an arena potentially open to us all.

Like the angels ascending and descending on the dream-ladder of the Biblical Jacob, so oneiric visions of a mystical and initiatory order both ascend and descend in a simultaneity of reification and rarefaction. The focus of this dual action is of course the human individual. In her, or him, the sacred dream both achieves a manifestation - a “coming-to-flesh” of its own otherness, and a spiritualisation of matter - a raising of the dreamer to a higher index of meaning. It is as if the initiatory

dream is a window - a transliminal portal, set on the border between many worlds and many states, through which the divine numen shoots forth a starry beam; a ray with which to inflame the mystic's heart whilst on earth, but nonetheless to draw him heavenwards.

*“Every night Thou freest our spirits from the body  
And its snare, making them pure as rased tablets.  
Every night spirits are released from this cage,  
And set free, neither lording it nor lorded over.  
At night prisoners are unaware of their prison,  
At night kings are unaware of their majesty.  
Then there is no thought or care for loss or gain,  
No regard to such an one or such an one.  
The state of the “Knower” is such as this -  
even when awake.”*

(Sleep of the Body the Soul's Awakening.  
From the *Mathnawi* of Rumi,  
trans. Whinfield, 1973)



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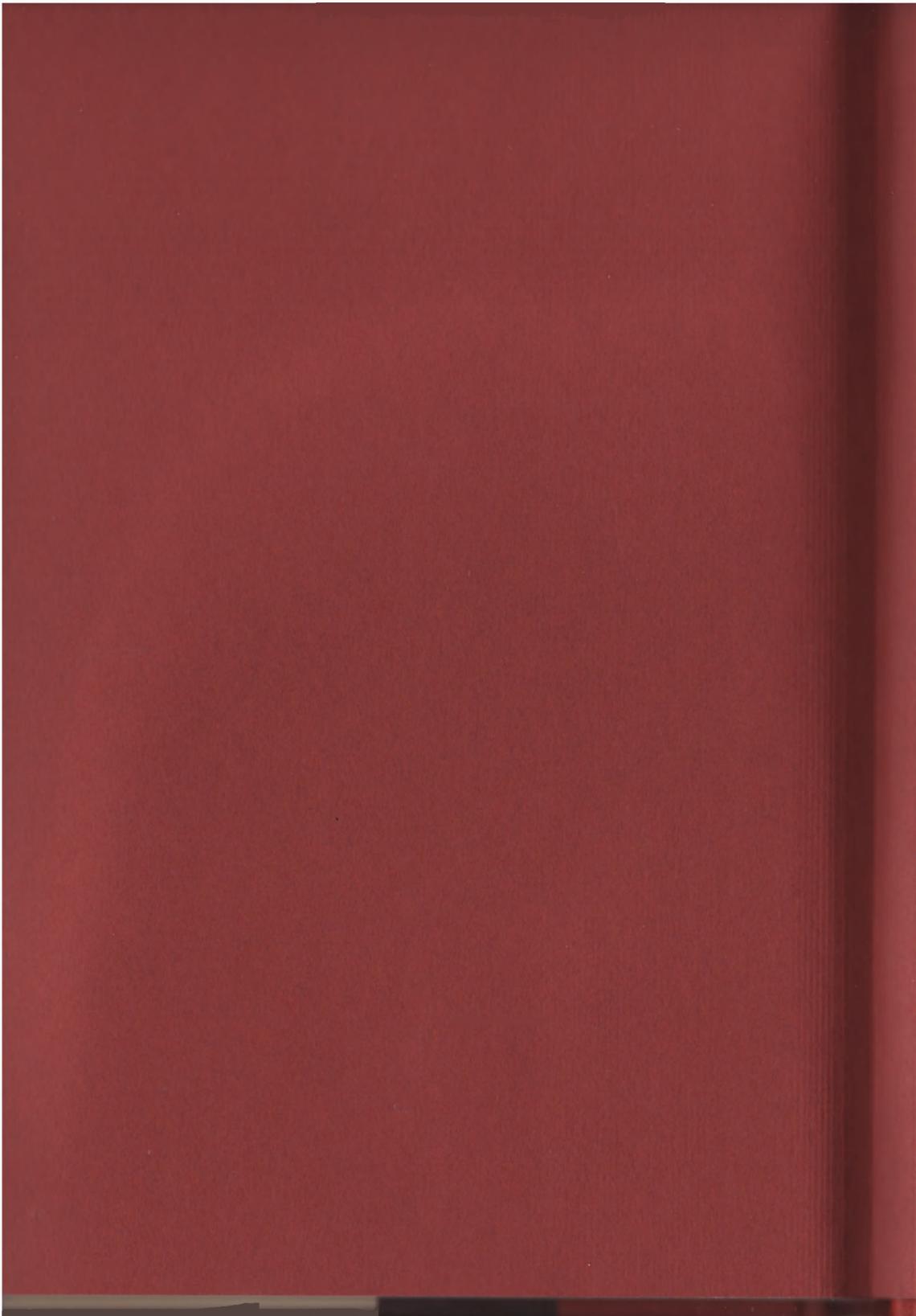
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