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“From the second Elohim till the third, five words appear. From here on: light – created, concealed, contained in the covenant, entering the rose, emitting seed into Her. This is the tree bearing fruit with its seed in it. That seed endures in the actual sign of covenant. Just as the image of the covenant is sown in forty-two couplings of that seed, so the engraved, explicit name is sown into forty-two letters of the act of Creation.”

– *Haqdamat Sefer ha-Zohar (Introduction to the Zohar)*

MARK OXBROW
**SANTA MUERTE:
THE CULT OF SAINT DEATH**



The earliest written records noting a 'Santa Muerte' date to the eighteenth century. In 1797 an Inquisition record, named 'Concerning the Superstitions of Various Indians from the Town of San Luis de la Paz' tells us that a group of 'thirty Indians' met in the 'silence of night' and drank peyote in their chapel. They lit candles 'backwards', made little dolls dance, struck at crucifixes with wax candles and tied up a figure of Santa Muerte with wet cord, threatening to whip it if it failed to miraculously meet their demands. Then, for over 200 years, Saint Death all but vanished . . .

Welcome to Tepito, one of Mexico City's most dangerous neighbourhoods. You step up on the sidewalk, walking quickly. The streets are crowded with families setting up market stalls under a patchwork of yellow and green tarpaulins. You can buy almost anything in the street markets of Tepito: burritos, huaraches, quesadillas, tequila, pirated movies and music, counterfeit clothes and sneakers, fake toys, narcotics, illegal firearms. Concrete walls are painted with murals and littered with graffiti. A torn *lucha libre* poster peels from a telephone pole. An elderly lady smiles as you buy a red candle from her stall.

You turn the corner and there, grinning down at you from her altar, is Saint Death. Santa Muerte's skull face stares out from her veil. Her bones are shrouded in the folds of her white wedding dress. She holds a scythe, like the grim reaper, in one skeletal hand. In the other hand she holds the orb of the world. Santa Muerte's followers dress and tend her with care. Her bony neck is strung with bead necklaces and she wears a thin gold crown. Her altar is lit by hundreds of candles and covered in offerings of flowers, cigarettes, money, apples, chocolate and alcohol.

Santa Muerte has been condemned as 'infernal' by the Catholic Church, labelled a 'narco-saint' and flagged in connection with drug violence, ritual murder and human sacrifice by FBI and US Marshal officers

Millions pray to Santa Muerte in her native Mexico. She has devotees in all walks of life, from police officers, lawyers and prison guards, dressmakers, hairdressers and grandmothers, to prostitutes, drug dealers, gang leaders and murderers.

Santa Muerte has been condemned as 'infernal' by the Catholic Church, labelled a 'narco-saint' and flagged in connection with drug violence, ritual murder and human sacrifice by FBI and US Marshal officers.

In a few short years her cult has blossomed and spread across the border into the United States. Santa Muerte chapels and altars can be found from Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay to Washington DC and New York City. Her cult has laid down roots in New Mexico, Texas and Arizona and is growing across America, as the Skinny Lady steps out of the shadows into the mainstream.



Close-up view of a Santa Muerte south of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico

Some have argued that Santa Muerte's origins can be traced back to ancient Aztec death-goddess, Mictecacihuatl. Mictecacihuatl ruled the underworld alongside her husband, the god, Mictlantecuhtli. They were the Lord and Lady of the Mictlan, the Aztec realm of the dead. Mictecacihuatl watched over the bones of the dead in the afterlife and appeared as a living skeleton. It was said that her mouth gaped wide open so she could devour the stars in the sky.

Could devotion to an Aztec goddess really have survived in secret for almost 500 years? The Spanish, led by Hernando Cortes, conquered the Aztecs under Montezuma in 1521. The great Aztec capital, Tenochitlán, fell. The Spaniards destroyed it and founded Mexico City in its place. Some say that belief in Mictecacihuatl, the 'Keeper of the Bones', survived the Spanish conquest and resurfaced in the celebration of El Día de los Muertos – the Day of the Dead.

The earliest written records noting a 'Santa Muerte' date to the eighteenth century. In 1797 an Inquisition record, named 'Concerning the Superstitions of Various Indians from the Town of San Luis de la Paz' tells us that a group of 'thirty Indians' met in the 'silence of night' and drank peyote in their chapel. They lit candles 'backwards', made little dolls dance, struck at crucifixes with wax candles and tied up a figure of Santa Muerte



Raising of Santa Muerte images during a service for the deity on Alfareria Street, Tepito, Mexico City

with wet cord, threatening to whip it if it failed to miraculously meet their demands.

Then, for over 200 years, Saint Death all but vanished. Santa Muerte emerged in 2002 when Señora Enriqueta Romero Romero (known to devotees as Doña

The Cruz family cares for a carved wooden statue of Santa Muerte. Her skull face gazes out as devotees bring her offerings, but for many years this statue stood in a local church. The church said the statue was Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

Queta) carried her statue of the Skinny Girl out of her one-bedroom home to Alfarería Street in Tepito, Mexico City. Doña Queta set up a public altar to Santa Muerte, which now attracts devotees from across Mexico and all the way from the United States.

Doña Queta had been a believer in Santa Muerte for many years, but she kept her devotion secret as the Catholic Church was opposed to Saint Death. Decades after she first prayed to Saint Death, Doña Queta's son made his mother a gift of a huge Santa Muerte statue. She decided it was simply too large to set up inside her home and finally felt able to make her devotion public.

In the town of Tepatepec, Hidalgo, the Cruz family cares for a carved wooden statue of Santa Muerte. Her skull face gazes out as devotees bring her offerings, but for many years this statue stood in a local church. The church

said the statue was Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. (Saint Bernard built the Cistercian order and wrote the Rule of the Knights Templar.)

Catholic churches around the world contain the relics of saints and martyrs. I once spent a surreal day in Paris. I visited the city's cathedrals and chapels and saw tiny fragments of saints' teeth and shards of bone wrapped in gold thread, cushioned on red velvet in gold caskets. That morning I visited the Parisian catacombs, where thousands and thousands of skulls and bones are piled high and are crafted into decorative chambers and tunnels.

But the precious relics of the saints are believed to be the mortal remains of men and women that lived and died. Santa Muerte was never 'alive' and she never died. She is a living skeleton. Death incarnate.

This devotion to Saint Death is condemned by the Catholic Church. The Bible, in Romans 6:23, states 'the wages of sin is death'. The Church teaches that death is God's punishment for sin. In the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, their sin condemned all human lives to end in death. Jesus Christ faced many enemies during his life, but his last enemy was death itself. Jesus conquered death when he was resurrected following the crucifixion. A Mexican priest, Father Sergio Roman, put it simply: 'to worship death is to

worship the enemy of Christ.'

In 2009 the Mexican President, Felipe Calderon, ordered the destruction of Santa Muerte altars. More than forty holy sites along the United States/Mexico border were bulldozed, the altars razed to the ground. The Mexican Government had effectively declared war on the Skinny Girl.

In the last few years the Catholic Church and the Mexican Government have fought against the cult of Santa Muerte, but devotion to the Bony Lady has continued to grow. After Pope Benedict XVI resigned, the Argentine Cardinal, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, became Pope Francis, the first Latin American Pope. He leads a Catholic Church that is at war. It is waging a global conflict to win souls as the twenty-first century sees the world grow increasingly secular and the church's influence decline. Latin America is a major battlefield and the Catholic Church is losing.

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, is seen as a modern thinker in the Catholic Church. He famously tweeted the chorus of Lou Reed's song *Perfect Day* when the legendary singer died. In 2013 Cardinal Ravasi condemned the cult of Santa Muerte as 'blasphemous', encouraging devotees in Mexico to abandon the folk saint. He said, 'religion celebrates life, but here you have death... It's not religion



*Young man with
Santa Muerte
image on Alfareria
Street, Tepito,
Mexico City, after
service to the deity*

just because it's dressed up like religion; it's a blasphemy against religion.'

Cardinal Ravasi reinforced the image of the Bony Lady as a narco-saint:

The mafia, drug trafficking and organised crime don't have a religious aspect and have nothing to do with religion, even if they use the image of Santa Muerte.

I spoke to Dr R. Andrew Chesnut, a leading expert on Santa Muerte, asking if the Vatican's denunciation would make believers turn away from the Skeleton Saint:

No, the Cardinal's condemnation won't have an impact on devotees. Most Santa Muertistas are not institutionally practising Catholics, so many aren't aware of the denunciation and others really don't care.

Dr Chesnut is Professor of Religious Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and author of *Devoted to Death*, the world's first academic work on Santa Muerte. He was first drawn to Saint Death in 2009, when the Mexican Government had Santa Muerte shrines destroyed as part of their war against the drug cartels.

In recent years Saint Death has appeared in *National Geographic*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Huffington Post* and *Time Magazine*. She has appeared in shocking headlines linked to prostitution, kidnapping, people-smuggling, the drug trade and ritual murder.



Read the full article in Volume 5 of
The Heretic Magazine

The *Dying* Light



Greg Taylor

“There was a profound experience that happened when he left his body. It was visible. Let’s just say, you wouldn’t need to light the room if you were trying to film it. He just . . . lit the room.”

‘SUNRISE DOESN’T LAST ALL MORNING,’ a cloudburst doesn’t last all day,’ sang George Harrison on the title track to his first post-Beatles solo album, *All Things Must Pass*. Although the song is naturally seen as an ode to the impermanence of human life, the lyrics also note that never-ending change means that those left grieving can look to the future with hope: ‘Darkness only stays at night-time, in the morning it will fade away.’ But Harrison also intimated, through lyrics written in the first person, that those who die might move onwards too: ‘None of life’s strings can last, so I must be on my way, and face another day.’

Three decades after writing this song the former Beatles guitarist went ‘on his way’ in the literal sense,



All things must pass. George Harrison in Vrindavan, India, 1996

Neuropsychiatrist, Peter Fenwick, was amazed to find in a survey of palliative carers that *one in every three* reported accounts of ‘a radiant light that envelops the dying person, and may spread throughout the room and involve the carer.’

dying on 29 November 2001, aged just 58, after a battle with lung cancer. Is it possible that Harrison (a devotee of Indian mysticism) truly did move on, in some sense, to ‘face another day’? Intriguingly, the extraordinary life of George Harrison seems to have been matched with an extraordinary death, going on the events his wife Olivia witnessed as the former Beatle shed this mortal coil:

There was a profound experience that happened when he left his body. It was visible. Let’s just say, you wouldn’t need to light the room if you were trying to film it. He just . . . lit the room (*Living in the Material World*, documentary by Martin Scorsese, 2011).

The lazy response to the above testimony would be to mark

down Olivia Harrison’s observations as hyperbole – the poetic wish-fulfilment of a grieving wife – except for the fact that she is far from alone in witnessing strange phenomena such as this at the deathbed of a loved one. As I pointed out in my recent book, *Stop Worrying! There Probably is an Afterlife*, there have in fact been numerous cases in which those caring for the dying have described seeing a bright light surrounding the dying person, exuding what they relate as ‘a raw feeling of love’ (Dr Peter Fenwick: ‘Dying: A Spiritual Experience as Shown by Near Death Experiences and Deathbed Visions’, 2004). And when I say ‘numerous’, I am not exaggerating: neuropsychiatrist, Peter Fenwick, was amazed to find in a survey of palliative carers that *one in every three* reported accounts of ‘a radiant light that envelops the dying person, and may spread throughout the room and involve the carer’, a description which sounds remarkably similar to the ‘profound experience’ recounted by Olivia Harrison. In a similar Dutch study the numbers were even more staggering: *more than half* of all carers reported observations of this ‘dying light’!

Read the full article in Volume 5 of
The Heretic Magazine

Astrology, King Jesus & King Arthur

Ralph Ellis



In my previous article, in Issue 4 of the *Heretic Magazine* and adapted from the books, *King Jesus* and *Mary Magdalene*, we saw that both the Old and New Testaments are actually infused with a great deal of astrology, if we did but know how to discover and identify it. Having done so, it would appear that a large segment of ancient Judaism and original Christianity actually dealt with the veneration of precessional astrology/astronomy. Why? It is my assertion that this veneration arose because this was the only accurate method of maintaining a royal and a cultural history over many millennia

WITH PRECESSIONAL ASTROLOGY YOU ONLY need to mention the symbol of the zodiac that an event or monarch was associated with, and the era for that event or monarch can be narrowed down considerably – sometimes to just a few years.

The fact that the Israelites were Shepherds (Aries) and they were battling with Apis-bull worshippers (Taurus) during the infamous ‘golden calf’ affair at the foot of Mount Sinai, immediately tells us that this event occurred just after the constellation of Taurus had ceded its dominant position to Aries, at the vernal equinox (the

spring equinox). In other words, this slaughter of the Apis-bull worshippers by Moses happened just after the Great Month of Taurus turned into the Great Month of Aries in about 1750 BC. And if we equate the Israelite Exodus with the Hyksos shepherds’ Exodus out of Egypt to Jerusalem (as narrated by Manetho), then this would be correct, for the accepted date is around 1570 BC (this religious dispute had simmered for more than a century). Likewise, when Pharaoh Alexander III and Pharaoh Ptolemy III were pictured wearing the horns of the ram, this also identified them with the Great Month of Aries,

which ended in about AD 10. And, in a similar fashion, Jesus' peculiar transmutation from a Lamb of God (Aries) to a Fisher of Men (Pisces) places his birth in the early first century, which it evidently was.

Thus, it would appear that the ancient Egypto-Judaic priesthood were guardians of the Day Book, the diary and biography of the royal dynasties of the Egypto-Judaeans and, to track those dynasties and the many momentous events in their lives, they used precessional astronomy to shape their chronological framework. They no doubt also used precessional astronomy to make predictions for the future, and thus secured their exalted position within Egypto-Judaeon society as the guardians of all wisdom, be that for the past, present or future.

But our knowledge of precessional astronomy was nearly exterminated in AD 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans (*The Jewish Wars*, Josephus Flavius). As I relate in the books, *King Jesus* and *Jesus, King of Edessa*, Jesus was not a pauper prince of peace, but a warrior king of Edessa in northern Syria – of the very same family who fomented and prosecuted the Jewish revolt in AD 70, according to the historians Josephus Flavius and Moses of Chorene. The aim of this royal family had been to take over the Roman east, with a view to taking over the entire Roman Empire (the throne of Rome being vacant at this time). But the plan went

horribly wrong when the Romans used the might of their near-invincible army to ravage Judaea and destroy Jerusalem. In this era the great traditions of precessional astrology were held almost exclusively by the Nazarene Fourth Sect of Judaism – the Church of Jesus and James – and so the destruction of the Nazarenes of Edessa was very nearly a terminal blow to the veneration of the precessional zodiac (as opposed to the veneration of the emasculated annual zodiac that we see in magazines today). If a knowledge of precession was to survive, then these ancient traditions would have to be relocated elsewhere and, if necessary, go underground. So where did they go?

Arthur's Round Table

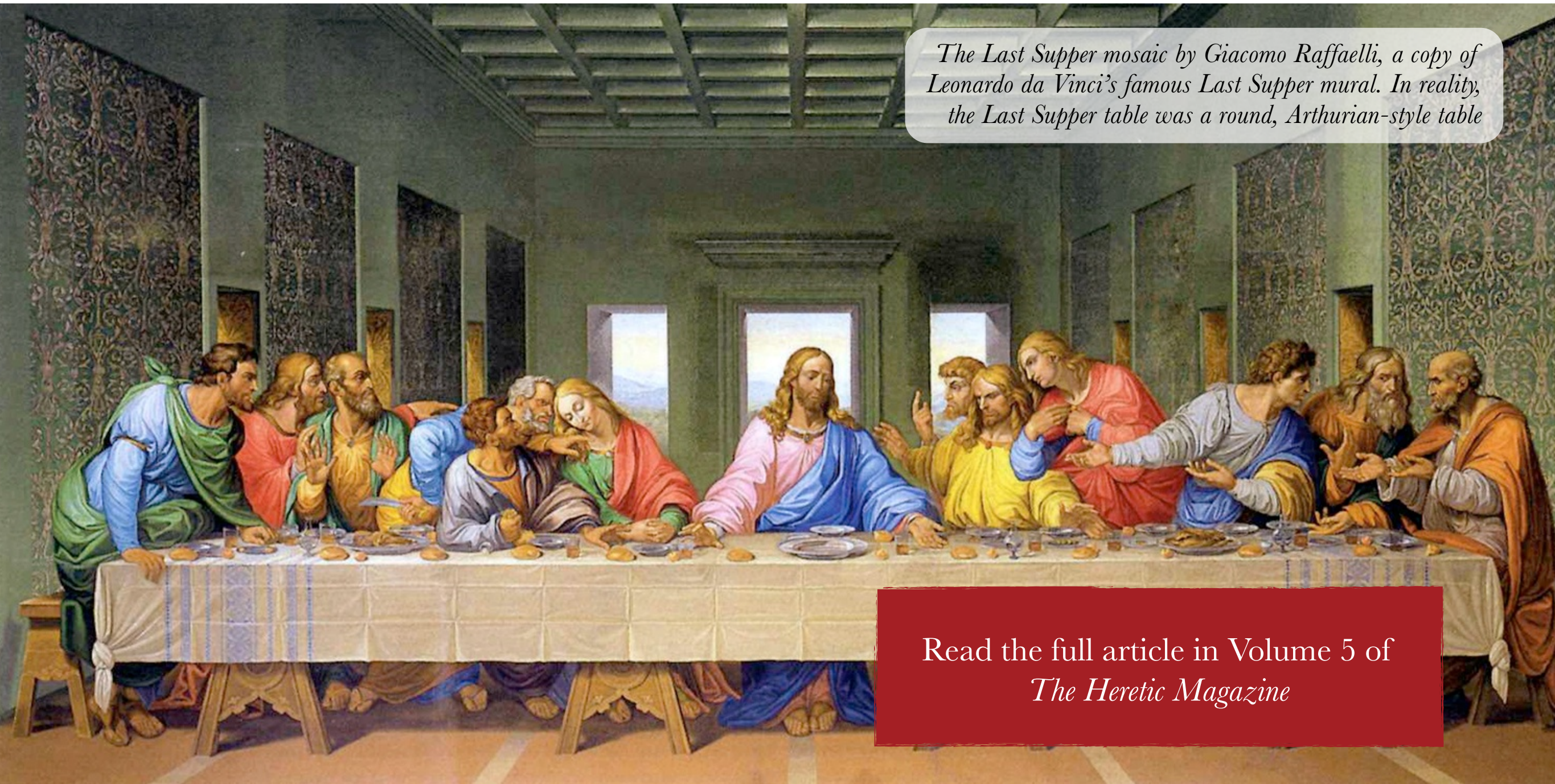
Surprisingly, it is my contention that many of these ancient traditions were transferred to England, where they became the foundation for mythologies that underpin the legends of King Arthur. It matters not at this stage whether King Arthur was a real person or not, as we are only looking here at the traditions and symbolism that surround this famous monarch. The identification of King Arthur in the historical record is another matter entirely, although the book, *King Jesus*, did come up with some rather startling evidence as to who

King Arthur really was.

So, in what manner is the precessional zodiac related to the legends of King Arthur? Well, it would seem that the historical and mythical thread for the zodiac is interwoven into the legends of the Arthurian Round Table, as narrated in the *Vulgate Cycle*, that enormous, but turgid and impenetrable, corpus of

Arthurian legend that is well known for its soporific effect. (The *Vulgate Cycle*, also called the *Lancelot-Grail*, is of uncertain authorship, but claimed to be by Walter Map. One of the books of the *Vulgate Cycle* is *Quest for the Holy Grail* (Queste del Saint Graal).)

Within this great Arthurian library there are many accounts of the Round Table and one of them, *Quest for*



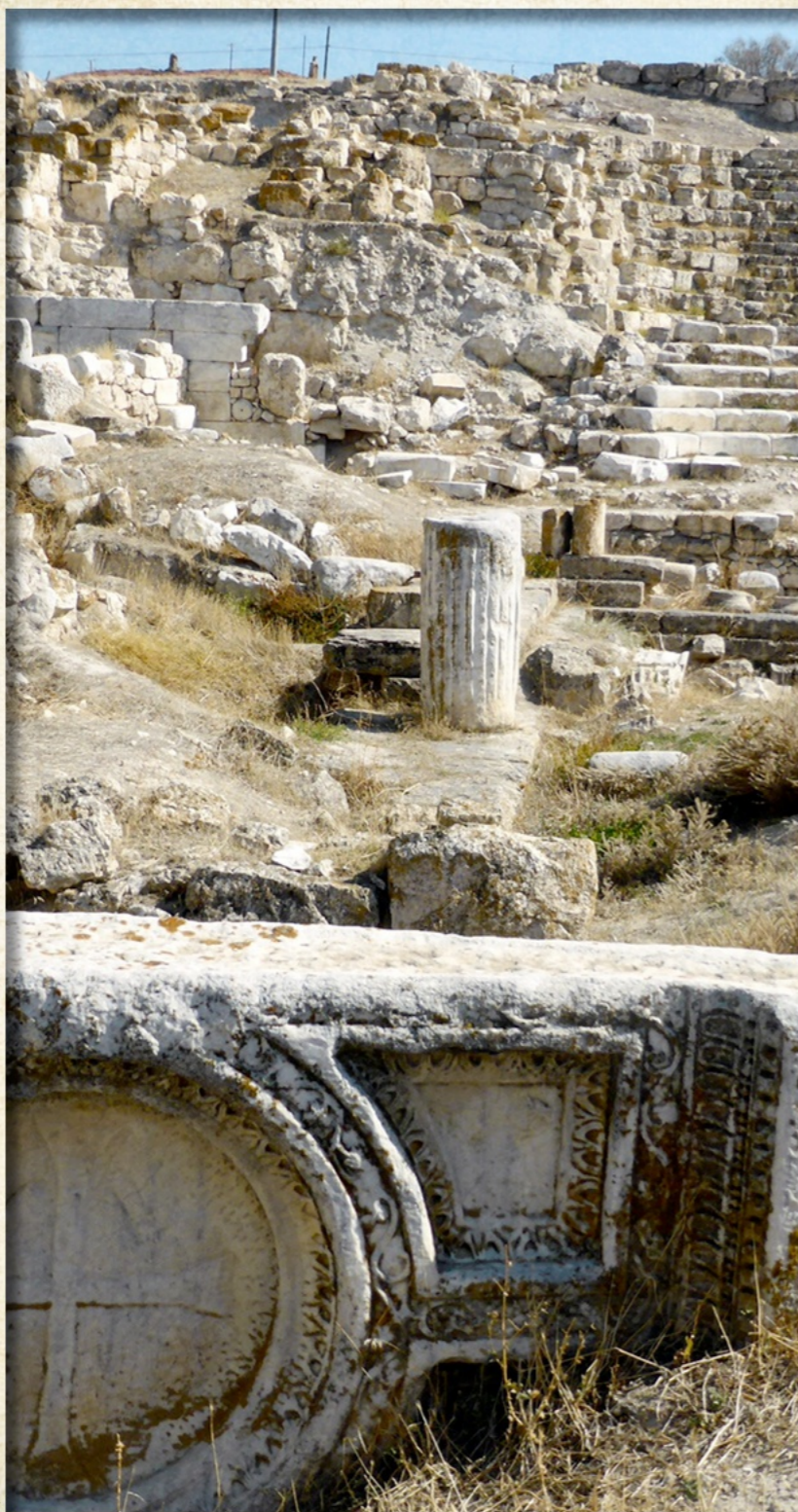
The Last Supper mosaic by Giacomo Raffaelli, a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's famous Last Supper mural. In reality, the Last Supper table was a round, Arthurian-style table

Read the full article in Volume 5 of
The Heretic Magazine

Unveiling the Stone Cradle

A night sky filled with stars, with a bright comet streaking diagonally across the upper left. Below the sky is a silhouette of a mountain range.

*An Interview with
Patrice Chaplin*



Hidden Gems



Pessinus: The Origin
of Cybele's Abduction
and the Attis Myth

Andrew Gough

In our current instalment of Hidden Gems, *Heretic* Editor, Andrew Gough, travels to an obscure, but important, site in his new homeland of Turkey. What he found amazed him.

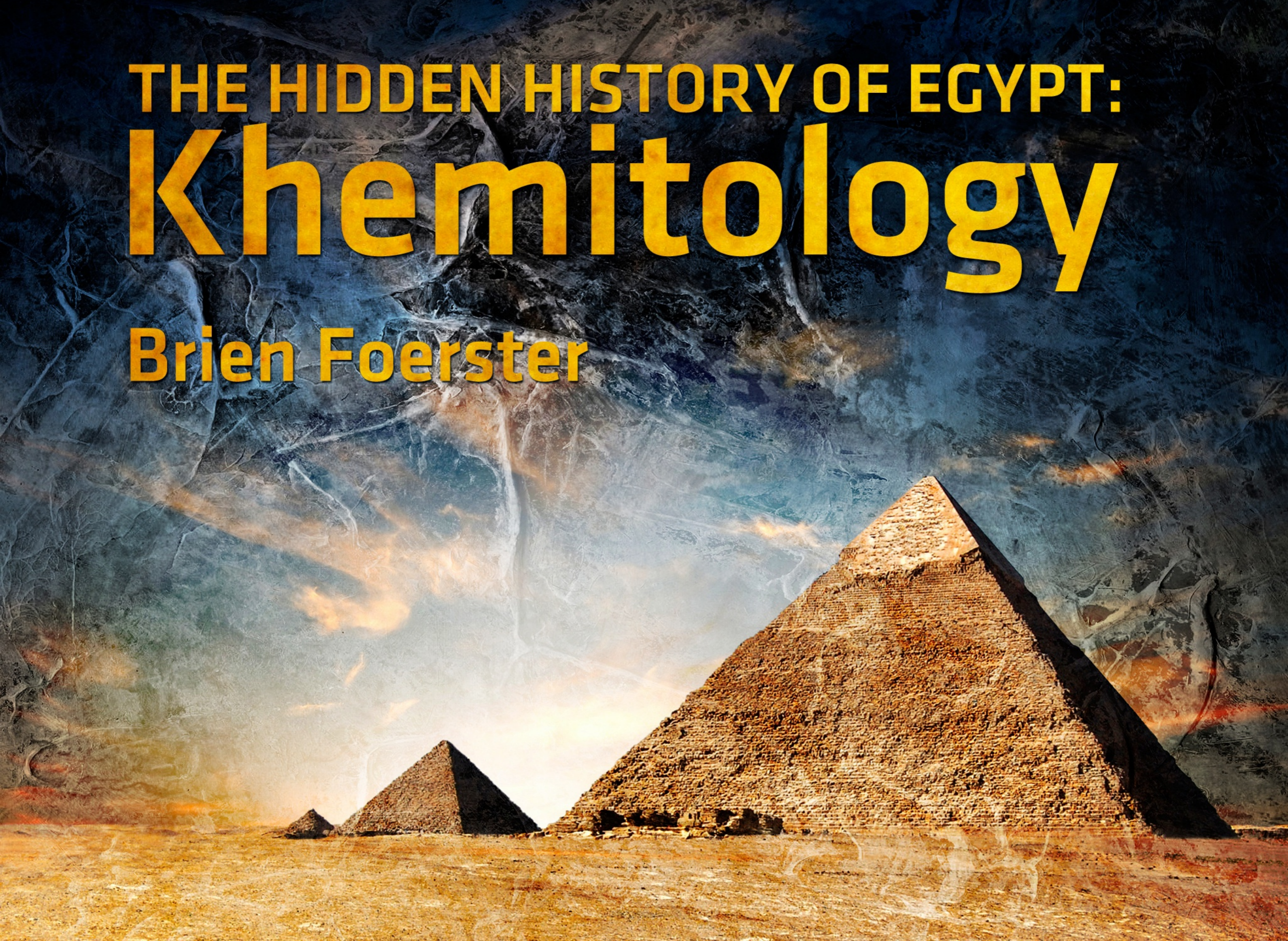
THE SHIFT OF THE AGES?

DAWN BRAMADAT



THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF EGYPT: **Khemitology**

Brien Foerster



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WHAT DO *YOU* BELIEVE?