

ATLANTIS AND HYPERBOREA

An Inquiry into the Cyclical Mysteries

*With a Reconsideration of the René Guénon's Rendition of the Cycle of
Manifestation in Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles, The King of the World, and The
Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*

by Charles Upton

Now I a fourfold vision see
And a fourfold vision is given to me
Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And three fold in soft Beulas night
And twofold Always. May God us keep
From Single vision & Newton's sleep.

~ ~ *William Blake,*
from a letter to Thomas Butts

René Guénon and his followers, notably Frithjof Schuon and Martin Lings, take as one of their central cosmological principles that cosmic manifestation is entropic, not evolutionary: whatever has come into outer manifestation from the Unseen World has already begun to die. Thus the traditional prophesies of the end of “this world” are not the products of “clairvoyance,” arbitrary myth or random visionary experience, nor are they projections or extrapolations based on past events or present conditions. Rather, they are based upon a cosmological context: the doctrine of the “cycle of manifestation,” called by the Hindus the *Manvantara* or *Mahayuga*, composed of four *yugas* or world-ages. Guénon and those influenced by him consider the Hindu picture of this cycle to be the most intelligible and complete, though a similar notion also appears in Greco-Roman mythology. (The idea of a cycle-of-manifestation may be found the Abrahamic religions as well, but here the doctrine is less explicit, more veiled in symbolism and allegory.)

The Greek word for such a cycle-of-manifestation is *aion*, which is translatable either as “world” or as “age.” When Jesus says “behold I am with you always, even to the consummation of the world” or (according to a different translation) “of the age”, he is positing the reality of such a cycle. It is interesting that *aion* can be translated into English by either a spacial word (“world”) or a temporal one (“age”). The reason for this is that *aion* denotes precisely a spacio-temporal reality. We visualize a year spacially as a cycle of four seasons, as we visualize a twelve-hour period in terms of the circular dial of a clock. Time is not purely linear; it is also cyclical, periodically returning to analogous (though not strictly identical) points: dawn, noon, dusk, midnight, the vernal equinox, the summer solstice, the autumnal equinox, the winter solstice. Anything that orbits, from the spinning of an electron around an atomic nucleus, to the wheeling of a galaxy, to (perhaps) the birth and death of the universe (a word that means “one turn”) -anything that exhibits *periodic motion* -- is an example of a cycle in this sense. The word *aion* denotes the spacio-temporal reality of such a cycle – a cycle of time considered *sub specie aeternitatis* as a single quasi-spacial form, what the Hindus call the “long body.” Any form or being that exists in time can also be viewed from the “outside,” from a point that is relatively eternal in relation to that form, and so seen as a single, “simultaneous” history of itself, a kind of *histomap*. The term for this level of reality, in Eastern Orthodox theology, is *aeonian time*.

In any given cycle-of-manifestation, an eternal reality “enters” time, moving from simultaneity toward succession. What is eternally present in synthetic mode is analyzed temporally, and therefore appears successively; in Plato’s words, “time is the moving image of Eternity.” But this move from eternity to time does not happen “all at once.” Though eternity and time are in one sense absolutely discontinuous, necessitating a radical break, a “fall” or “ascension”, in the passage from one to the other, in another sense the path from eternity to time moves through a number of stages, passing from the relatively more eternal toward the relatively more temporal, in the direction of the “absolutely temporal” – a point which can never be reached, however, since “pure sequence” would negate form absolutely, in which case there would be nothing to pass from one sequential phase to another. Manifestation is thus intrinsically entropic. An

eternal form “in the mind of God” appears in space and time, and is simultaneously veiled by its own manifestation. It becomes progressively more subject to history and contingency -- and when it has consumed the energy of the initial impulse that brought it into manifest existence, it dissolves. Its dissolution unveils the eternal archetype of that form, which never entered manifestation – the naked radiance of which initiates the next cycle of manifestation.

It is in the context of this successive passage from eternity to time, or rather from aeonian to linear time, that the doctrine of the existence of earlier world-ages – which are not just earlier points in our own type of historical time -- makes sense. And *the kind of sense* it makes also stretches from the relatively eternal to the relatively temporal. Near to the eternal end of the spectrum, a *yuga* (the *Satya-Yuga* or Golden Age) is symbolic; at the temporal end of the spectrum, a *yuga* (the *Kali-Yuga* or Iron Age), touches upon and embraces history as we understand it. Thus the true significance of the “end of this world” cannot be grasped without an understanding of both the symbolic and the quasi-historical aspects of cyclical manifestation, which necessarily includes an understanding of the quality and meaning of the “prior” states of the cycle, states which from one perspective are earlier in a temporal sense – given that we recognize that the quality of time was different in earlier ages – but according to another have “priority” not in a historical sense, but in an ontological one.

Legends of ancient and mysterious lands, “long ago and far away,” legends of Agarttha, Shambhala, of the Terrestrial Paradise, the seat of Prester John, Atlantis, Lemuria, the Mount of the Prophets – stories like these always seem to collect around profound spiritualities, especially esoteric ones. On one level they are mere “exoticism” or “spiritual romanticism.” Those who entertain such dreams may never grow beyond them; they are in danger of letting their spiritual lives be trapped on the level of barren imagination.

But what of those who never allow themselves to entertain such dreams? Will, intelligence, sentiment are nothing without Grace – and one of the channels of Grace, at

least in the initial stages of the Path, may be the Imagination itself, which Blake called “an Intellectual Fountain.” In apophatic contemplation (contemplation of God’s Transcendence, based on the denial of His comparability to anything in the domain of manifestation), the profane imagination, based on individual fear and desire and its collective extensions, is negated; God is recognized as an unknowable Essence beyond all thought and feeling, beyond all name and form. But in cataphatic contemplation (the contemplation of God’s Immanence, the recognition that He is in a sense comparable to all things, since without His Reality, no thing would be), Divine Imagination is born. Divine Imagination is objective Imagination, manifesting as the Imaginal Plane or *alam al-mithal*, the place where the “image-exemplars” of Divine Realities appear as conscious, living symbols – as they do, on another level, in material reality.

So the mythopoetic lore of imaginal worlds, manifest on the psychic or intermediary plane, may have a valid and *spiritually operative* relationship to the world of metaphysical Principles, the intelligible plane – and this is definitely true of the “cyclical mysteries,” the legends of earlier aeons which were (and *are*) less constricted, less materialized than the world we presently inhabit. To project our contemporary concept of linear historical time backwards into earlier world ages is problematic, since different ages have different essential qualities; to consider previous *yugas* to be nothing more than earlier historical periods as we presently define them is to blind ourselves to these qualities. Yet earlier worlds are not mere allegories of higher ontological levels; they were (and are) real manifested worlds – formal worlds, not transformal intelligible Principles.

Traditional cosmology sees the present world and the present generation as “descended” from the heroes and fathers of earlier ages who were ontologically more exalted than we are. They were taller than we are, lived for hundreds of years, were free from disease, etc. And these heroes, ancient kings, fathers, patriarchs or demigods were in turn descended from the gods, the celestial paradises, then from the intelligible Principles, and ultimately from the Creator Himself. God-as-Creator, in other words, was almost universally viewed in traditional cosmologies as the First Ancestor – literally

“God the Father.” And this hierarchicalization of history is also clearly discernable in the cyclical lore of many nations and religions – the Hindus, the Greco-Romans, the Mayans, the Hopi, the Lakota, the Australian Aborigines, and many African tribes. The “earlier” a world-age is, according to these cosmologies, the more clearly it appears as eternal level of Being; the “later” an age is, the more closely it resembles our idea of an historical period. So the “trajectory” of a given cycle-of-manifestation is not a straight line, or even a circle, but rather a helix. Turning three times, it descends through four levels; and when it returns to its compass-point of origin for the third time – in other words, when it reaches its nadir -- it undergoes a “pole shift” from accelerating history to motionless simultaneity; the perspective changes from that of the last grains of sand speeding through the neck of the hourglass to the nearly motionless mass of sand below it, after which the glass is inverted: nadir becomes zenith. In Guénon’s words, from **The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times**, pp. 159-160:

It is sometimes said, doubtless without any understanding of the real reason, that today men live faster than in the past, and this is literally true.... If carried to an extreme limit the contraction of time would in the end reduce it to a single instant, and then duration would really have ceased to exist, for it is evident that there can no longer be any succession within the instant. Thus it is that "time the devourer ends by devouring itself", in such a way that, at the "end of the world", that is to say at the extreme limit of cyclical manifestation, "there will be no more time"; this is also why it is said that "death is the last being to die", for wherever there is no succession of any kind, death is no longer possible. As soon as succession has come to an end, or, in symbolic terms, "the wheel has ceased to turn", all that exists cannot but be in perfect simultaneity; and this can also be expressed by saying that "time has changed into space". Thus a "reversal" takes place at the last, to the disadvantage of time and the advantage of space: at the very moment when time seemed on the point of finally devouring space, space in its turn absorbs time....

The zenith symbolizes the eternal (not temporal) point of origin, the Throne of the Most High God. And when zenith-as-eternal-origin is projected upon the horizontal plane, its point becomes the North. The *axis mundi*, the vertical path connecting Origin and manifestation, is vertical at any point on the earth's surface, as revealed by the fact that one of its central symbolic manifestations is the human spinal column and the erect stature of the human form. But for most of the human race, the pole of the earth considered as a psycho-physical object points to the North; therefore, when cyclical symbolism is expressed on the level of the four directions and the four seasons, its point of origin is North, and its moment of beginning the Winter Solstice. Among the mythic expressions of this fact is the legend of Hyperborea, the "Land Behind the North Wind," the original homeland of the human race, a land of eternal Spring. (The idea of a land of Eternal Spring in the far north was undoubtedly suggested by early explorers' tales of the arctic summer, during whose "white nights" the sun never sets; this "never-setting sun" was most probably the origin of the Hyperborean Apollo, one of whose epithets is *Sol Invictus*, "The Sun Unconquered.") The North Wind symbolizes the flow of cosmic manifestation, a flow that grows ever "colder" – more contracted, more materialized, more literalized – as it departs from its celestial Source. The coldest point in this southward-flowing current of cosmic manifestation is the point of physical or spiritual death, which corresponds to the material North Pole; the growing warmth of the lands south of this Pole is organic, not spiritual, though it does reflect the higher warmth of Hyperborea itself, according to the law that the material plane furnishes the most complete and stable symbols of the Celestial one. And above the material Pole is the Pole Star, the gateway to Hyperborea itself, which is *ontologically* higher than the material North as well as quasi-physically so, and which may indeed be compared to a Golden Age, the Paradise of Saturn, a land of Eternal Youth. To travel deliberately in the direction of the Arctic and its numbing cold suggests the path of apophatic contemplation, the realization of God in his purely Transcendent aspect, which requires a death to the world, an ascetical *metanoia* by which the contemplator turns his inner attention away from God's richly multiple and perilously confusing outer manifestation in the cosmic South, and toward "the still point of the turning world" (in the words of T.S. Eliot from **The Four Quartets**). The rigor of this Transcendence is symbolized in

Ezekiel 8:3 by the “inner gate [of the Temple] that looketh toward the north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy”: the Transcendent God is a “jealous God” who “will have no strange gods before Him.” And this sacrificial turn is compensated for by a realization of the Terrestrial Paradise – not on some “paradise island” in the South Seas, but in the subtle Imaginal Realm, the *alam al-mithal*. (The fact that Dante’s Mount of Purgatory first appears as an island in the southern ocean, then undergoes an *enantiodromia* whereby the constellations of the polar North appear above it, symbolizes the withdrawal of the “projection” of paradise from this world, which can never fully embody it, and the transplanting of that paradisaical image to its true home on the Subtle Plane, in the realm that Muslims call “The Earth of Hurqalya” or “The Eighth Clime”.)

In the Old Testament the quarter of the South is represented by the Queen of Sheba, who was a pagan polytheist. In 1 Kings 10:1-10, she travels north to visit Solomon, brings him rich gifts, and blesses the One God; esoterically, this represents *apocatastasis*, the realization of the Divine Immanence, the restoration of all things in the Deity; the microcosmic aspect this restoration is the spiritual Path. Legend identifies the Shulamite of the Song of Songs with Sheba, who is in turn identified with the Queen of the South mentioned in Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31. The word *Shulamite* or *Shulamith* means “daughter of peace”, just as *Solomon*, whom legend identifies with the lover of the Shulamite in the Song of Songs (also called the Song of Solomon) may be translated as “prince of peace.” While the Queen stays in the South, she remains hidden in self-involvement, coiled within herself, in a state the Hindus call *avidya-maya*, under which God is veiled by His own manifestation and the world of material nature appears sovereign and self-sufficient. When the Queen of the South travels north, however, she is transformed from *avidya-maya* into *vidya-maya* -- in Old Testament terms, from the “foolish woman” to the figure of “Wisdom” in the ninth chapter of Proverbs. She becomes the Shulamite of The Song of Songs, the bride of King Solomon, the King here representing the pole of Essence (*Purusha*) and the Queen the pole of Substance (*Prakriti*). While spiritual knowledge remains in the North it remains, in terms of human life, abstract and lifeless; and the South of the “natural man” is all too literal, detail-

oriented and *polytheistic* to embody it. But when the Queen of the South, the Shulamite, marries Solomon, the King of the North, then the Hyperborean Wisdom is fully realized and embodied in the “minute particulars” of this world. She is his *shakti*, his *shekhina*, his principle of manifestation – and unless Wisdom is fully manifested, who can call himself wise? The marriage of North and South is the union of Heaven and Earth, the quality of which, as described in the text and commentary of Hexagram 11 of the **I Ching**, Richard Wilhelm’s translation, is precisely *peace*.

In the mid-1970’s, in San Francisco, California, I underwent a “Hyperborean initiation,” partly precipitated by the effects of my attending a Black Crown Ceremony presided over by the Gyalwa Karmapa of the Tibetan Karmapa Lineage or the Kargyupa Sect. This is one of the many public “empowerments” provided by Vajrayana Buddhism, where the reflected grace of actual initiation is transmitted to the faithful as a kind of virtual initiation. During the course of the ceremony, the crowd meditated upon figure of the Karmapa, who doffed his pointed “Tibetan mitre” and donned the Black Crown; this symbolized the dropping of his human identity and his assumption of the archetypal identity of the Bodhisattva Chenrezig or Avalokiteshvara. Those in attendance who were able to contemplatively “follow” this transformation were given a foretaste of the transcendence of their own human limitations – something which could only have been actualized through full initiation into the Vajrayana Way, with all its attendant transmitted graces and directed practices – or, perhaps, through a future initiation into an equally valid Way.

Some time after attending this ceremony, I had the following dream:

I am faced with a figure who is both the Gyalwa Karmapa and Merlin. He is wearing a conical hat like a “sorcerer’s” hat or a Tibetan mitre. He directs my attention with a pointing-stick to a large diagram: the Sun in the Moon Cradle, which is a downward-curving crescent Moon upholding the Sun as in a boat, with long wavy rays radiating from its disc. The figure points to six points on the lower crescent of the Moon and connects them, by means of lines, to six somewhat

closer-together points on the upper arc of the Sun. I take this to mean that the Six Lokas or realms of illusion of the Buddhist Kalachakra (wheel of samsaric existence) are a projection into the relative world of Six Forms of Enlightened Mind.

Then the dream changes. I begin to dream about those ancient straight lines drawn on the earth's surface that John Michell, in his book **The View Over Atlantis**, calls "leys" – except that in my dream they are called "eber lines." A voice says: "An eber line can be drawn from any point to any other – but few remember that it is possible to draw an eber line straight up to God."

This dream took place in 1976. I should make clear at this point that when I call this dream a "Hyperborean initiation," I am using the word "initiation" very loosely. Initiation is properly the establishment of a connection between a spiritual aspirant and an initiatory lineage – *silsila* in Sufi terminology – which stretches in an unbroken chain back to the founder of a given revealed religion. Initiation entails relationship with a spiritual master, and puts the aspirant in the field of the grace or *baraka* of the master and his predecessors, as well as giving him both the right and the power to practice certain spiritual exercises. However, it is also true that particular visionary experiences can confer virtual or preliminary "initiations" which, God willing, can sometimes function as more-or-less reliable signposts on the Path -- or rather, on the path to the Path. In times like ours, when legitimate spiritual authority is becoming harder to access, Divine Mercy sometimes provides valid guidance outside what we would think of as traditional channels. Yet unless such intimations finally result in the connection of the aspirant to an established traditional path, what might have been guidance will most often turn out to have been little more than delusion and a waste of spiritual potential – unless God wills otherwise.

The following "exegesis" of the dream was composed in 1978:

Re “leys”: John Michell speaks of the discovery, made since the advent of aerial photography, of a series of absolutely straight lines of prehistoric vintage drawn all over the island of Britain. They are preserved in prehistoric earthworks, Roman roads, and short stretches of country roads and rustic paths. These lines take no account of geographic contours, but pass straight over all obstacles. Along a given *ley* (so named because the syllable “ley” or “lea” appears in many place-names along such routes) will appear a number of prehistoric sites, cathedrals – usually built on pre-Christian sacred points – or Celtic stone crosses, all in perfect alignment. On major sites, such as Stonehenge, Avebury, Woodhenge and Glastonbury Tor, several leys are found to cross. Michell speaks of an identical system in China, where the lines are called “dragon-paths.” Some believe these paths were channels established to conduct the flow of terrestrial magnetism, which was tapped on a seasonal basis by means of ceremonies conducted at sacred “nodes” at various points along the track, points which were oriented to various heavenly bodies, as Stonehenge is toward the Sun. He shows that similar ceremonies took place in Britain, one purpose of which was to stimulate the fertility of the earth. The British leys, like their Chinese counterparts, are also mythologically associated with dragons. (Since Ireland is known to harbor no native serpents, could the legend of St. Patrick’s driving of the snakes out of Ireland be a veiled reference to the suppression of such worship?) William Blake, too, hit upon the idea of leys, which in his system comprise a Druidic “dragon temple” covering the whole of Britain.

So much for “ley” – but what about “eber”? Very well: While thumbing through S. Foster Damon’s **A Blake Dictionary**, I ran into the name “Eber,” under the entry “Peleg.” These names were taken from the genealogy in the tenth chapter of Genesis, where Peleg and Joktan are given as sons of Eber (the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews), Peleg being so named because “in his days was the earth divided.” And later, while reading Charles Squire’s **Celtic Myth and Legend**, I came across the name Eber again: According to ancient Irish chronicles, Eber Scot was one of the sons of King Milé – leader of the Milesians, the first Celtic invaders of Ireland – who, in a dispute with his brothers over the new land, suggested and saw to it that the land

was divided. (This tale can be explained, of course, as a monkish attempt to reconcile Biblical history with Irish legend.) So, apparently, leys *are* eber-lines.

Curious; and it would have remained little more than a curiosity, had I not found, 28 years later, in the year 2004, the following passage from René Guénon's **Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles**, p. 24:

Hyperborea obviously corresponds to the North, and Atlantis to the West; and it is remarkable that although the very designations of these two regions are distinct, they may give rise to confusions since names of the same root were applied to both. In fact, one finds the root under diverse forms such as *hiber*, *iber* or *eber*, and also *ereb* by transposition of letters, signifying both the region of Winter, that is, the North, and the region of evening or the setting sun, that is, the West, and the peoples who inhabit both....The very positions of the Atlantean center on the East-West axis indicates its subordination with respect to the Hyperborean center, located on the North-South polar axis. Indeed, although in the complete system of the six directions of space the conjunction of these two axes forms what one can call a horizontal cross, the North-South axis must be regarded as relatively vertical with regard to the East-West axis, as we have explained elsewhere.

The eber-line which is “drawn straight up to God” in my dream is precisely the *axis mundi*, the vertical path; the six points on the arc of the Moon connected with six other points on the arc of the Sun are the cosmic realities represented by the six directions of space, placed in relation to the formless archetypes of these realities within the Transcendent Intellect; they are possibly related to the Six Grandfathers in Black Elk's vision (see below), and to the vision recounted in the ninth chapter of Ezekiel of the “six men [who] came forth from the higher gate, which lieth toward the north.” (See René Guénon, **The Symbolism of the Cross**; also Leo Schaya, **The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah**, citations for “serafim”.)

According to the religion of the Lakota, as recounted in **Black Elk Speaks** by John Neihardt, the North-South axis is called the Good Red Road, and the East-West axis the Black Road of difficulty. The point on the earth's surface where these two roads cross is *wakan*, holy – and they cross, of course, at the very point where one presently stands, wherever that may be. The Lakota call South “the direction we always face,” – and in saying this they speak as “realized” Hyperboreans. Hyperborean spirituality, on the level of *aspiration*, is oriented toward the North, the “original homeland” to which the aspirant wishes to return – but the Lakota, as it were, see themselves as occupying the North already, seated at the border between cosmic manifestation and the higher celestial worlds, at that point which the Qur'an calls “the lote-tree of the farthest limit.” From this farthest point, this *ultima Thule* (cf. references to *Thule*, *Tula* in Guénon's **Symbols of Sacred Science, Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles**, and **The King of the World**), they gaze toward the South, into the visible universe. (On another level, the Lakota are oriented toward the East, which for ritual purposes they take as their sacred point; East is the point of Revelation, symbolized by the Eagle. The North, however, is the quarter of the Buffalo, the symbol of Totality; the coming of White Buffalo Cow Woman to the Lakota, to bring the sacred pipe, a symbol of the universe -- analogous in many ways to the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant -- was thus a Hyperborean theophany.) As Guénon suggests, the North-South axis, the Good Red Road, is the projection of the Vertical Path, the *axis mundi* – the Lakota symbol for which is the “sacred tree within the hoop of the world” – upon the horizontal plane. If someone is an “upright man” – in Hebrew, a *tzaddik* -- then the Red Road, the path of life as indistinguishable from the path of the Spirit, stretches before him; his Way is clear. The Black Road, however, lies athwart this path, tempting him to deviate from his true course; this is the stroke that always “thwarts” him. To one facing toward the South, the East-West axis stretches between Left and Right. To nod one's head “yes” is thus to posit the *axis mundi*, and by extension the Red Road, while to shake one's head “no” is to evoke the Black Road, the road of negation and self-contradiction.

In their annual migrations, the animal herds and the migrating birds travel the Red Road, along the magnetic lines of the earth. And insofar as the North-South axis is

assimilated to the *axis mundi*, these migrations – especially those of the birds, most particularly the geese and the swans – naturally symbolize the passage between from this world to the next and back again. The Irish hear in the honking of migrating geese the voice of the “Gabriel hounds,” who carry the souls of the deceased to the other world. And certain Siberian shamans, who claim to have been “born in the North,” know how to ascend the *axis mundi*, symbolized by a birch tree, by riding on a goose, and so enter the other world. (Shamanism as a whole includes the clearest surviving examples of an ancient Hyperborean spirituality; see **Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy** by Mircea Eliade.) Likewise an epithet of certain Hindu yogis is *paramhamsa*, “exalted gander” or “gander of the beyond,” undoubtedly indicating their ability to travel from this world to the next and back again, like the shamans. On a higher level, that of pure contemplation, this ability to cross the barrier separating life and death symbolizes the yogi’s complete transcendence of conditional existence, by which “this world” and the “next world” are realized as one. And *hamsa* (by the Hindu principle of *nirakuta*, a kind of etymology based on the morphological similarities of words rather than their historical derivation) is also *hang-sa*, the “natural mantram” of the human breath. The assimilation of *hamsa* to *hang-sa* identifies the *axis mundi* with the human spinal column; as the geese fly north in the summer and south in the winter, so the breath rises from root to crown while inhaling (*hang*) and sinks from crown to root while exhaling (*sa*). By thus identifying his inhalations and exhalations with the seasons of the year, the yogi recognizes the cycle of the breath as a microcosmic *mahayuga*, an entire cycle of creation, dissolution and renewal. And since this cycle is experienced within the context of his own body, sitting erect and motionless in meditation, he experiences himself as no longer subject to the vicissitudes of cyclical manifestation, but as transcending them because encompassing them; he is thus effectively eternalized. The realized yogi, the *paramhamsa*, no longer turns within the cycle of the Great Year; the Great Year turns within him.

Perhaps René Guénon’s most controversial book is **Le Roi de Monde** or **The King of the World**. Though just as rich in metaphysical insight and symbolic hermeneutics as the rest of his work, some have felt that Guénon had allowed himself in

this work to be dazzled by a romantic exoticism of the Shangri-la variety, under the dubious influence of Ferdinand Ossendowski, whose stories of *Agarttha*, the mysterious and supreme spiritual powerhouse in Central Asia where the hidden King of the World reigns over the destinies of men, had seriously diverted him from his high calling of expositor of pure metaphysics. (Marco Pallis took pains to convincingly debunk Ossendowski's Asian travel tales in an article in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Winter/Spring 1983.) It is clear, however, that Guénon was interested more in the cosmological symbolism of the King of the World and his hidden kingdom of *Agarttha* than he was in its literal reality -- though he did not absolutely deny the possibility of a geographical *Agarttha* and a flesh-and-blood King of the World.

What are we to make of the myth of le Roi du Monde? And how real might this myth turn out to be in material, historical terms?

As myth, Guénon identifies the King of the World with the Hindu *Manu* – first lawgiver and archetypal human being – of the present cycle-of-manifestation, from whose name derives the very word “man.” In one aspect, *Manu* is the representative in cosmic manifestation of God as the Primordial Ancestor – which is why it is in no way erroneous to identify him with the figure of Adam in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, especially since both Jews and Muslims recognize Adam as the First Prophet, and therefore -- at least implicitly – as the Primordial Lawgiver. (In much the same sense, the Zoroastrian *Gayomard* is both First Man and First Prophet.)

In terms of the Hierarchy of Being, the meaning of The King of the World is as follows: Every material form simultaneously exists, in different modes, on every plane of being. A material stone, or plant, or animal, or human body is a truncated symbol, or partial reflection, of a form inhabiting the psychic or intermediate plane, which in turn symbolizes an entity residing on the angelic plane, which itself is symbolic of an essence occupying the archangelic or intelligible plane, which itself is an emanation of the Logos, the transformatory Origin of all form, which is also God's eternal act of self-understanding in terms of cosmic creation viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. If that stone did not

simultaneously exist on all planes of being, if it were not in continuous, vital connection to the Logos, it could not appear in material reality: the Hierarchy of Being is the living “stem” of every object in universal manifestation.

And what is true of stones is true of men. If the Human Archetype did not exist on all levels of being simultaneously, if he were not in fact the secret essence of the Logos itself, which the esoteric teachings of many traditions – Sufism within Islam, Kabbalah within Judaism, as well as various forms of Christian esoterism – identify with the Primordial Man, then there would be no men on earth. Therefore, no matter how far humanity has fallen, our Archetype, our *fitra* or primordial human nature, remains in its original integrity; this is “The King of the World.” If every fall is, in *one* sense, a fall into illusion, then it must be true – in *one* sense – that the fall was illusory, that man never fell. (The consequences of this illusory fall are, unfortunately, all too real.) Just as the Zoroastrian *fravashi* or *fravarti* is the aspect of my soul which never descended into material manifestation, so the aspect of Adam that never ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is, precisely, le Roi du Monde. And those archaic religions, including many of the religions of Africa, certain aspects of Siberian Shamanism, and the Chinese/Taoist worship of the Yellow Emperor, which are oriented not to the Savior, the lawgiving Prophet or the redeeming Avatar – who comes later in the cycle in order to redress its corruption – but to the Original Ancestor, are worshipping the King of the World. Among these we may class the Mandaeans of Iraq, who worship not Christ, the Second Adam, but rather the Secret Adam, the First Man.

But in a much more restricted sense, we have already met, in various forms, the King of the World; he was alive in the 20th century and has survived into the 21st. Who else, after all, was the Gyalwa Karmapa when he donned the Black Crown? Who else is the Dalai Lama? Who else is the master of any Sufi order? Who else is the Shi’ites’ Hidden Imam? There may or may not have been a single incarnate and universally-recognized King of the World in Central Asia, but all these well-known figures are certainly aspects, or instances, or delegates of that Kingdom. The Jewish Kabbalists and Muslim Sufis both possess a lore of the Hidden Hierarchy and its Pole -- that One whose

degree of spiritual realization is pre-eminent in his own time, he whom the Sufis call the *qutb*, the Pole of the Age. In certain ages the *qutb* may be generally known, though his true identity as Pole of the Age will be not be realized by everyone. In other ages, he remains hidden. The master of every Sufi order is, in essence, the presence of this very *qutb* for his followers – if, that is, he is a true master. The Vajrayana Buddhists possess a similar lore. So in a certain sense, the King of the World is no mystery. Many today are outwardly familiar with him, though certainly not everyone who has heard of him recognizes him for who he is. So let us not wrangle too much about Guénon’s own rendition of le Roi de Monde; it is clear that he was on the right track.

However, the lore of Vajrayana Buddhism does present us with a figure who, even more than the Gyalwa Karmapa or the Dalai Lama, seems to fulfill many of the criteria of Guénon’s King of the World. If we replace the mysterious Kingdom of Agarttha (a word which means “ungraspable”, and thus may have originally have been more an epithet than a place name) with the much better attested Kingdom of Shambhala, we may find in the lineage of the Kings of Shambhala the possible prototype of Guénon’s (and Ossendowski’s) King of the World. Shambhala is a realm where myth and history intersect. As a geographical kingdom subject to terrestrial history, Shambhala may have been located north of the Tarim Basin in Central Asia – eastern Turkestan, to be exact – which is north of Tibet; as a “pure land,” it is the “area” of the *alam al-mithal* associated with the tantric tradition known as the Kalachakra, which forms an important part of Vajrayana Buddhism, though it is pre-Buddhist in origin and may have affinities with the Hindu Vedanta. The first of the Kings of Shambhala was Suchandra (878-876 BC?); the last will be Raudra Chakri (2327-2427 AD). **In The Wheel of Time: The Kalachakra in Context**, pp. 56-57, by Geshe Lhundub Sopa, Roger Jackson and John Newman, the King of Shambhala is described as follows:

The Kalki (the lineage king) of Shambhala binds his hairlocks on top of his head; he wears a sacred headdress made out of dyed lion’s hair and a crown marked with the symbols of the five Buddha families. He wears the costume of a universal emperor (*chakravartiraja*), and fortunate people are able to obtain the

good path by simply seeing or touching him. The Kalki's emblematic earrings and the bracelets on his arms and legs are made of the gold from the Jambu River. The light of his ornaments mixes with the light that rises from the white and red luster of his body. It shines out to the horizon; it is so bright that even the gods cannot bear it.

The Kalki has excellent ministers, generals and a great many queens; He has a bodyguard, elephants and elephant trainers, horses, chariots and palanquins. His own wealth and the wealth of his subjects, the power of his magic spells, the nagas, demons and goblins that serve him, the wealth offered to him by the centaurs, and the quality of his food are all such that even the lord of the gods cannot compete with him.

Since the Kalki has a great many queens, he has many sons and daughters. However, when the Kalki-to-be is born (it does not matter whether he is the oldest son or not) there is a rain of white lotus flowers, and for one week prior to his birth the crown prince's body emits light like a radiant jewel. The queen mother, a daughter of one of the ninety-six satraps of Shambhala, is distinguished by the fact that at the time of her birth a rain of blue lotuses falls and a huge, previously unknown flower grows in front of her home. The Kalki and the queens possess the four aims of life [identical to the Hindu *ashramas*]; sensual pleasure, wealth, ethics and liberation. They never become sick or old, and although they always enjoy sensual pleasure, their virtue never decreases. The Kalki does not have more than one or two heirs, but he has many daughters who are given as vajra ladies during the initiations held on the full moon of *Caitra* each year.

The fact that Shambhala is situated north of India, north of the Himalayas, north of Tibet and north of the Tarim River, and the related legend that the Kings of Shambhala counted among their servants the centaurs, emblem of the constellation of Sagittarius, whose month borders the Winter Solstice, mark it as a Hyperborean kingdom, the Polar King of which is the Kalki, around whom the entire universe of the Kalachakra revolves, just as the universe of China – or the entire universe seen as centered in China, identified as the “Middle Kingdom” – revolved around the Emperor when he ascended the Altar of

Earth within the Temple of Heaven in Beijing on the Winter Solstice, and worshipped the Pole Star. And the Kalki's "heraldic" colors, red and white, are shared – interestingly enough – by a more familiar Hyperborean figure, Santa Claus. Like the Kalki, Santa is also served by elemental spirits, the elves. And the figure of Santa Claus and his reindeer has shamanic affinities as well. Some scholars associate the red and white costume of Santa Claus with the scarlet, white-spotted psychedelic mushroom *amanita muscaria* or fly agaric, which is used by certain Siberian shamans, and which mycologist R. Gordon Wasson considers to be the sacred *soma* plant mentioned in the Hindu Vedas – an attribution also accepted by Huston Smith. In the words of the Rig-Veda:

We've quaffed the Soma bright
And are immortal grown:
We've entered into light,
And all the gods have known.

Fly agaric is a favorite food of reindeer, which is why the drinking of reindeer urine as an intoxicant is (or was) practiced in Finland, and elsewhere in the far north. I hasten to add that the world-age when the use of such plant agents as aids to Enlightenment was possible without dire consequences, except in very rare instances, has obviously passed, as we can clearly see if we can view with sufficient objectivity the social and mass psychological effects of the use of "psychedelics" or "entheogens." The "psychedelic revolution" of the 1960's opened door of the mass psyche to everything imaginable, including the projection of traditional mystical lore of both the East and the West into the mind of the masses. This door, unfortunately, could never quite be closed again, and little has been coming through it for the past few decades but the influences of the elemental and the demonic – those "infra-psychic forces" that Guénon, in **The Reign of Quantity**, saw as breaking into our realm through fissures in the "Great Wall" separating the material and subtle domains, and ultimately leading to the dissolution of the present world. This is precisely the effect of psychedelics or "psychic expanders" on the human soul: the attenuation, and sometimes the actual breaching, of the natural barrier designed to separate the human body, and thus the material plane itself, from the

animic and psychic planes. What was spiritually possible in, say, the Silver Age or *Treta-Yuga*, is in no way possible in these last days of the Age of Iron.

So the Kalki of Shambhala would certainly seem to correspond in many ways to Guénon's Roi du Monde – though the question of whether or not the lineage of the Kings of Shambhala still remains hidden in Central Asia on the human, historical plane, or whether it has “ascended into occultation” in the *alam al-mithal*, remains extremely difficult to answer.

The Pole is the lodestone to which all compass needles point, the point around which the Sun, Moon and Stars revolve, the “still point of the turning world”. The outer Pole is the extension of the earth's axis from the North Pole through and beyond the Pole Star. The inner Pole is the extension of the human spinal column from the *sahasrara* or crown charka through and beyond the imaginal Zenith, as a vertical “eber-line” or visionary ray of light. (The opening of the *sahasrara* by various tantric *sadhanas* is symbolized by the knot of hair that the tantric yogi – like the King of Shambhala – wears at the top of his head. And the blessing given by the Gyalwa Karmapa to the faithful after the Black Crown Ceremony is a closed fist planted firmly on the crown of the skull.) The secret kernel of the inner Pole is the point where the center of the human psyche is intersected by the ray of the Spirit; this is the site of the *qutb*, the Master of Masters. If the Heart is the Moon, the kernel of Spirit within it is the Sun – the indwelling transcendent Intellect – the Eye of the Heart. My dream of Hyperborean initiation was a visionary revelation of the Heart (the Moon) and the Spiritual Eye within it (the Sun.) (From another perspective, the Moon is the psychic aspect of the Heart, and the Sun the Spiritual aspect.) The word for “heart” in Arabic is *qalb*, from the linguistic root QLB or QBL having to do with “turning, overturning, turning around, returning.” The Moon, reflecting the Sun's light, turns through phases, but the Sun is constant. The spiritual Pole which appears within the darkness of the human psyche is the “Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” [John 1:9]. It is the transcendent Light whose eternal moment the Winter Solstice; it is the Midnight Sun. In the words of Henry Corbin

from **Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran**, following the exposition of Shaykh Karim Khan Kirmani:

The spiritual history of humanity since Adam is the cycle of prophesy following the cycle of cosmogony; but though the former follows in the train of the latter, it is in the nature of a reversion, a return and reascent to the pleroma....that is exactly what it means to “see things in Hurqalya.” It means to see man and his world essentially in the vertical direction. The Orient-origin, which orients and magnetizes the return and reascent, is the celestial pole, the cosmic North, the “emerald rock” at the summit of the cosmic mountain of Qaf, the very place where the world of Hurqalya begins....[p 71]

The Earth of Light, the Terra Lucinda of Manichaeism, is also situated in the direction of the cosmic North. In the same way, according to the mystic ‘Abd al-Karim Jili, the “Earth of souls” is a region in the far North, the only one not to have been affected by the fall of Adam. It is the abode of the “men of the Invisible,” ruled by the mysterious prophet Khizr. A characteristic feature is that its light is that of the “midnight sun,” since the evening prayer is unknown there, dawn rising before the sun has set. [p. 72]

The Midnight Sun also appears in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, as “the light [which] shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.” The psychic or natural man cannot encompass the Spirit or the reality of the Pneumatic Man; it must be darkened in spiritual self-annihilation before the Sun of the Spirit can dawn. And the only point where such annihilation can take place is the Spiritual Heart, which the Sufis identify as the *barzakh* or “isthmus” between the “two seas” of the material world and the realm of the Spirit, and which in mythological terms is considered to be the seat of the immortal prophet *Khizr*, the “green one”, and of the Earthly Paradise. Interestingly, the Arabic *barzakh* is quite similar in both sound and meaning to the Tibetan word *bardo*, which denotes either “intermediary plane” or “period of time between any two points considered as its beginning and end” – the letter “z” often

changing to “d” according to the laws of linguistic transformation. The present moment is always intermediary between the world of material concerns and identifications and the realm of the Spirit; it is only Now, in what the Sufis call the *waqt*, that the annihilation of the natural or psychic man and the realization of the Pneumatic Man can take place. And only the Human Form, as epitomized by the Spiritual Heart as center and ruler of the psyche, stands as intermediary between the material and Spiritual worlds; it is this that makes us, in Muslim terms, *khalifa*, God’s fully-empowered representative on earth.

But was Hyperborea ever a terrestrial homeland? Geology shows us no sunken continent beneath the Arctic Ocean, which has led many to speculate that the North Pole once passed through Greenland, or some other point on the terrestrial globe. Yet a frozen wasteland, even if there were solid earth beneath it, is not a very hopeful candidate for the cradle of the human race – at least in terrestrial terms. Thus it is much more likely that Hyperborea refers to a *spiritual orientation* than to a geographical area. The Siberian shamans, the traditional Chinese, the Zoroastrians, the Sabaeans, and certain esoteric groups within Islam consider the North, not the East or the West (as with the Greeks and the Irish, at least on one level) to be their sacred point of orientation (or rather “boreation”). “Hyperboreans,” then, are those who point to the Pole as their *celestial* homeland. Dante Aligheri, in his **Commedia**, reveals himself to be a Hyperborean in this sense. *Arktos*, the Greek word for “bear,” is the origin of our word *Arctic*, which is why the constellations circling the North Pole and called the Bears -- and in the last cantos of Dante’s **Purgatorio**, the Great and Little Bears appear above Dante’s *Arcadian* Earthly Paradise at the summit of Mount Purgatory (which according to earlier cantos is supposed to be in the southern hemisphere!). In an outward sense, Mount Purgatory is in the South; in an inner one, it is in the North; the passage from the realm of the Great Mother Nature in the South to the Terrestrial Paradise of the North requires spiritual purgation, a “pole shift” whereby the central attention of the Heart is shifted from outer manifestation to inner Source. (Hyperborea, however, may also have an historical, geographical significance; it may point an actual northern culture-area dominated by shamanism, comprising Siberia and possibly Finland, and including, along with various

other Arctic and North American peoples, the bear-worshipping Ainu of the Japanese northern island of Hokkaido.)

The Pole is the “unwobbling pivot” (the Confucian term) around which the sky revolves, the still point of the turning world. If the “turning world” is the Heart, then the Pole, the *Qutb*, is the Spirit. When the Heart starts to turn around the Pole instead of this or that object of desire or fear in the outer world, then it has returned from a state of dispersion (*tafriqah*) to a state of recollection (*jam*). This establishment of the Pole or *axis mundi* as the conscious center of the human microcosm is the aim of the practice of the Mevlevi Sufis known as “turning,” which has earned them the title of “whirling dervishes.” The dervishes of the Mevlevi Order, founded by Jalaluddin Rumi, practice turning counterclockwise on the left foot, the foot whose extended vertical axis passes most directly through the human heart. To one turning counter-clockwise, the world appears to be revolving *clockwise* around him, just as the universe turns around the Pole Star; during the practice of such turning a “pole shift” actually occurs when the sense that one is turning within a motionless world is suddenly replaced by the sense that one is actually motionless, that it is the world itself that is turning; one actually experiences oneself as transmuted into “the still point [or axis] of the turning world.” This, too, is a Hyperborean initiation, a virtual realization of the station of *qutb* – the *actual* realization of which, I hasten to add, is immensely more rare, difficult, and exalted. Rumi, who hailed from Afghanistan, may thus have been an agent for the introduction of certain elements of Central Asian, Hyperborean lore into the world of Sufism -- which has a Hyperborean element in any case, as Henry Corbin has shown. The Sufi master Ruzbihan Baqli, to take one example, once dreamed that he had “received oil from the constellations of the Bears.”

The *qibla* – another word which, like *qalb*, is based on the root QBL or QLB -- is the direction in which Muslims face to pray. The outer *qibla* is toward Mecca. The inner *qibla* is oriented toward the Pole (in human terms, the Master), which is distantly symbolized by the North, more directly located at the Zenith, and quintessentially situated in the Heart, whose kernel – the “Eye of the Heart” -- is *al-Ruh*, the Spirit.

The North is the visible point of Eternity in the created order. The East is the quarter of the perennial renewal of creation and revelation, the land of the Rising Sun. The South is cosmic manifestation at its fullest degree of expansion and deployment, the point at which matter is most completely differentiated, established and infused by the Spirit, insofar as this is possible. It is the terrestrial world become so like Paradise that it is now possible to actually forget Paradise itself, with dire though sometimes long deferred consequences (like those Gauguin suffered when he “went native” in Tahiti); so South is the quarter of the Great Mother, where God is most completely veiled by His own manifestation, and man most completely reconciled to, and engulfed by, the material world. And West is the quarter of matter in the process of becoming all-too-material, of the material world on its way to dissolution. [cf. Guénon, **The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times**, Chapter 25, “Fissures in the Great Wall”] The Spirit is deserting it; the Sun is setting; material manifestation is preparing to follow the Sun of the Spirit into the next *aion*, the next world. So West is the also the phase of death and the afterlife, the point at which Spirit sheds the husk of a dead world and begins its journey back to its original station in the heavenly world. This is why the Hesperides, the Fortunate Isles, the True West, all possess a certain nostalgic quality. This world has become too materialized, too alienated from the Spirit; the Golden Age, the Silver Age, even the Bronze Age are past; the path toward restoration now leads through the Gates of Death, to a land “beyond the sunset.” Likewise the Western Paradise of Amitabha Buddha, the “pure land” of Shin Buddhism, is the place where those who have not achieved perfect total enlightenment in this world can, by the grace of Amitabha, “ripen” into enlightenment after death.

The legend of Atlantis, the lost continent of the West, has this nostalgic quality – a quality accompanied and also partly veiled, in the subconscious memory of the human race, by the shock of the cataclysm that destroyed it. This quality is best rendered, perhaps, by the spine-chilling indigenous music of the Andes (played on flute, pan-pipes and *charango*, the Andean mandolin or treble guitar whose sounding-box is an armadillo shell), and in another way by the heart-rending nostalgia of certain Irish and Scottish

aires. The ship of human memory, riding the waves of such music, travels back 30,000 years, to human worlds now sunk in the collective unconscious by the shock of global cataclysm. All is lost – and yet, for those willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, all may be found again, fresh and incorrupt, bursting with vital energy, in the Land of the Ever-Young.

This is the psychic and cosmological quality of the Atlantis legend. But could it also have a historical aspect? Orthodox geology says “no.” Whatever we might fantasize about the Canaries, the Azores, the West Indies, there is simply no geographical evidence of a sunken continent anywhere in the Atlantic. And yet there are certain scholars who make a very good case for the material, historical existence of Atlantis – simply by identifying Atlantis with North America, or the Americas as a whole. The Aztecs, we should remember, who are thought to have invaded and conquered the Toltec Empire of Mexico from a point of origin somewhere in the territory now claimed by the United States, named their former homeland as *Aztlán* – a word close enough to *Atlantis* to make one’s hair stand on end.

So according to this theory, I am in Atlantis now. But the continent I inhabit is certainly not sunken – unless we admit that it is sunk in materialism, overwhelmed (in Blake’s words) by “the sea of Space and Time.” So whence comes the legend of the *lost* Atlantis, perhaps symbolized in Greek legend by the runner Atalanta, the woman no man could catch? A sunken continent may legitimately be compared to a woman who has forever denied her lovers any possible access to her – and who can outrace the setting Sun? The men who raced Atalanta to win her hand, and lost, also lost their lives – this being the precise quality of the Western Quarter, the land of “futurism,” where time accelerates and form is destroyed [cf. **The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times**, p 159ff.] And in line with Guénon’s assertion that Hyperborean terms were later applied to Atlantis, one of the epithets of Atalanta is *Arcadian*. When she finally *was* outraced by her future husband Hippomenes, it was through the agency of three *golden apples* given him by Aphrodite from her own temple precincts in Cyprus, the last of which Atalanta stooped to pick up when Hippomenes threw it, thus losing her stride.

Golden apples immediately suggest the apples of the Hesperides, the Western Isles – and though the island of Cyprus is in the eastern Mediterranean, it is certainly west of the continental Near East. The virgin Atalanta was able to inspire in men a nostalgia for the lost Paradise *without feeling it herself* – until, that is, she touched the third apple. Perhaps we can glimpse in this legend one aspect of the Western Mysteries: if the Hesperides can be made to feel nostalgia for *man* as well as man for the Hesperides, then the Western Paradise may be won. In the words of William Blake, from his Introduction to **Songs of Experience** : “O Earth O Earth return! /...Why wilt thou turn away/ The starry floor, the watry shore/ Is giv’n thee till the break of day.”

So when, and how, was Atlantis lost? A. G. Galanopoulos and E. Bacon in **Atlantis: The Truth behind the Legend** (1969), J.V. Luce, in **The End of Atlantis: New Light on an Old Legend** (1969), and Charles Pellegrino, in **Unearthing Atlantis** (1991), theorize that Atlantis was actually the island of Thera or Santorini, situated – like Cyprus – west of the Mediterranean coast of the Holy Land, Thera being directly north of Crete. It is a volcanic island which, in 1450-1500 BC (some date the event c.1628) violently exploded when the its erupting volcano split at the side, allowing an inrush of sea water. The explosion was several times larger than that of Krakatoa, the most powerful volcanic event in recorded history, which was also destroyed in a steam explosion. This cataclysm devastated the Mediterranean coasts, sent a mile-high tsunami crashing over the island of Crete, darkened the sun with volcanic ash, and effectively destroyed the Cretan/Minoan/Mycenean maritime civilization. It began a series of migrations and wars, one of which was the invasion of the Greek peninsula by the Doric tribes, the ancestors of the “classical” Greeks. Some scholars also theorize that the ten plagues (or some of them) which preceded the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt were actually volcanic in origin: the hail mixed with fire, the turning of the Nile to blood along with the death of all the fish, the darkness which covered the land, can all be put down to the effects of volcanic cinders and ash. And the parting of the Red Sea, which later closed over the Pharaoh’s army, suggests the arrival of a tsunami, during which the sea-level first sinks and then catastrophically rises; such a tsunami would have been possible (or rather inevitable) if – as some think – Sinai was at that time a strait rather than an

isthmus; it would certainly have been more feasible for the Children of Israel to have crossed a narrow strait rather than the Red Sea as we know it today. And the “pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night” that the Hebrews followed through the wilderness is a fair description of a rising volcanic plume.

Our major source for the Atlantis legend are the **Critia** and **Timaeus** of Plato, who recounts a history of the lost island supposedly based on an account that Solon heard from the priests of Egypt. Plato’s description of Atlantis as an island of concentric rings of land and water corresponds in some ways to the geology of Thera; and the legend that Atlantis was situated beyond The Pillars of Hercules – the Straits of Gibraltar -- is possibly explained by the fact that Thera is in actually west of another formation, in the eastern Mediterranean, which is also named The Pillars of Hercules.

But what of the *American* Atlantis mentioned above? Ivar Zapp and George Erikson, authors of **Atlantis in America** (1998), maintain that “Atlantis” sank beneath the waves when, around 12,000 years ago, sea levels abruptly rose due to melting polar ice, thus inundating coastal America. The authors give evidence to support their contention that before that time America was host to an advanced maritime civilization capable of crossing the Atlantic. This theory is further supported by the fact that certain *metis* societies (inter-tribal medicine societies) among the Native Americans of North America claim that they were in contact with Europe in ancient times. Travel across the Atlantic was dangerous; few probably attempted it, but some likely did. Regular trade routes might or might not have been established, but holders and seekers of spiritual lore and technical expertise may well have attempted the journey, given that knowledge is weightless, and takes up no space. Various Greek philosophers visited Egypt, Persia and reputedly India in ancient times; Bodhidharma took Buddhism from India to China; sages, as well as craftsmen and artists (including poets and musicians) were among the most traveled groups in earlier times, long before Marco Polo. Everybody else might be hunkered down, but the craftsmen and the sages were abroad, restlessly searching, or bursting with a knowledge that commanded them to spread it broadcast, like wind-blown seeds.

Can the Mediterranean and American Atlantises in any way be reconciled? Some legends of Atlantis speak of two Atlantises, an earlier and a later one. Zapp and Erikson's submerged coastal America, then, might correspond to the earlier Atlantis, perhaps also recalled by the legend of Noah's flood, and Thera to the later one, which might possibly be the origin of certain events recounted in Exodus. After the 900 years separating Plato from the most common date given for the the destruction of the Greek island, certain legendary material about the earlier Atlantis could well have become attached to the story of the destruction of the later one; the characterization "island continent" may in fact be the product of a confusion between the submergence of part of a continent and the destruction of an island.

The submergence of coastal America would have been either gradual or cataclysmic. A slow melt of polar ice would not have destroyed the Atlantean civilization -- unless it forced the coast-dwellers back into an interior occupied by hostile and militarily superior nations. They would always have had a coast, and time to move any cities inland. A fast melt would correspond more closely to the Atlantis legend as we know it. And if trans-Atlantic trade, however sporadic, had existed, its sudden disappearance would indeed have suggested -- and actually represented -- the destruction of a world, especially if the traders hailed from a civilization that was either spiritually higher or technologically more advanced than was the Old World in that age. The voyages of Thor Hyderdahl across much of the Pacific on a balsa raft, and across the Atlantic in a reed-boat constructed according to an Egyptian pattern -- both in order to demonstrate that ancient legends of epic sea-journies might have had some basis in fact -- as well as the maritime exploits of the Polynesians and others, testify to the likelihood that world travel was much more common in the archaic world than we once believed. If a reed boat could cross the Atlantic (reminding us of the legend that, after the destruction of their former world, the Hopis arrived in the New World *inside floating reeds*), then it could certainly have been crossed by the much more technologically advanced ships of the Minoan civilization.

We are used to seeing the Mediterranean largely as a “closed sea” until the Vikings, and later the Renaissance explorers, opened the mind of Europe to the Atlantic and the New World. But the maritime technology that would have allowed Europeans to cross the Atlantic had been available since the Roman Empire, and even before that. Why (outside of the Roman colonization of Britain) was it never used? It is possible to speculate that the shock of the submergence of coastal America by melting ice, which would certainly have also submerged much of the coast of the Mediterranean, as well as the lands called *Logris* in British legend -- followed in later centuries by the destruction of Thera, which liquidated in one stroke the most advanced maritime civilization the Old World had produced up to that time -- created a sort of collective taboo in the European psyche against sea-travel beyond the pillars of Hercules, and possibly against expansive maritime imperialism in general, which would have been viewed as actions likely to anger the gods. This taboo was effectively broken by the Vikings, relative newcomers in Western Europe, whose historical memory stretched back not to the archaic civilizations of the Mediterranean and Near East, but towards the heartlands of Asia. Furthermore, the opening of the Atlantic and the New World to exploration during the Renaissance may have awakened long-buried memories of the Western Atlantis in the form of fantastic and legendary goals sought by some of the explorers and conquistadores: the Seven Cities of Cibola, and especially the Fountain of Youth, which clearly corresponds to the fountain of the water of life – or the water of creative manifestation – situated by Dante at the summit of Mount Purgatory, in the Terrestrial Paradise. (The taboo against “westerling” appears in the “Atlantean” Canto 26 of Dante’s *Inferno*.)

But history, as we know it, can never be the history of Paradise; and even less can *future* history fill this role. Those who wish to regain the lost Paradise through explorations of the West – the world of conditional, historical life, of evolutionism and scientism, the point where Spirit is finally reduced to matter, and where matter, seemingly bereft of Spirit, proceeds to its inevitable dissolution – can only reach that distant Land through the gates of death. For them, Paradise is nowhere else but beyond the grave. The true spiritual Path, however, the Path of “death-in-life,” is *counter-*

clockwise, moving against the *clockwise* current of Nature, the flow of manifestation; it is effected by a *reversal* of the cosmogonic process.

The four *yugas*, the four seasons and the four directions are analogous. The *Satya-Yuga* or Golden Age or Hyperborean Paradise is in the North; its season is Winter. The *Treta-Yuga* or Silver Age is in the East; its season is Spring – not the eternal Spring of Hyperborea, surrounded and protected by the rigors of Winter, but the temporal Spring of eternal renewal. (When Adam and Eve were exiled from their Hyperborean Eden – Hyperborean by virtue of the Tree of Life, which is the *axis mundi* – and traveled “to the east of Eden”, this represented the transition from *Satya-Yuga* to *Treta-Yuga*.) The *Dvipara-Yuga* is South and Summer; the *Kali-Yuga* is West and Autumn. The *Satya-Yuga*, according to Hindu doctrine, is four times as long as the *Kali-Yuga*, the *Treta-Yuga* three times as long, and the *Dvipara-Yuga* twice as long; as we have already seen above, time speeds up as the cycle descends, and is progressively changed from a cyclical to a linear form. The cycle of the four *yugas* is thus a clockwise-rotating path from Transcendent Source to visible manifestation (North, East, South, West), and is always centrifugal. As that Source, or the memory of It, becomes more and more externalized and literalized, the lost Paradise is progressively, ironically, uselessly, obsessively, and disastrously sought in physical exploration, revolutionary social experiments, fantastic “evolutionary” hopes, technological “progress,” and finally in the deconstruction of the human form itself. This is the way of collective destruction and the end of the present world: the “West” is always “Atlantis.” But the counter-clockwise-rotating Path of Return-to-Source (West, South, East, North) is centripetal, given that North, the pivot of the heavens as seen from the Northern Hemisphere, is the primal Center. The Spiritual Path is a motion away from literalism, from ever-accelerating linear time, from the “nightmare of history.” It is a Path whereby the image of Paradise is withdrawn from projection on the outer world, and re-deployed on an ascending scale of ever-higher planes of Being, each more radically “inner” than the preceding one. Instead of falling from the Eternal North to the East of perpetual renewal, thence to the South of immersion in material conditions, and finally to the West of chaos and dissolution, the Way demands that chaos (the West) be overcome through stabilization of one’s bodily

and “practical” material life (in the South); then that one’s life become open to the waves of spiritual insight, vitality and perpetual renewal emanating from the East; and finally that one avail oneself of this current of Divine Grace, like a salmon traveling upstream to spawn, till one finally arrives at the threshold of the *Qutb*, the Eternal North, the Gateway that leads beyond the cycles of nature, the still Point of the turning world. Once this Gateway is passed and the eternal Center realized, the universe is transformed from an obscuring veil into the universal Theophany; the natural world from which one had to withdraw one’s inner attention in order to travel the spiritual Path is restored on a higher level; rigorous Transcendence is transformed into merciful Immanence. One may now *look back* on the world of nature, and see it as circumambulating, in perfect obedience and punctuated and rhythmic praise, that adamantine Point – a Point which, speaking now in anthropological rather than cosmological terms, is the *atman*, the eternal Witness, the Eye of the Heart. And note: while the centrifugal path of manifestation is collective, and only becomes more collective as the cycle winds down, the centripetal Path of Return is always individual, and becomes ever more so as the transcendent *atman* is approached. As the Gospel parable teaches us, the grace of God abandons the ninety-nine and seeks the One. And when those many “ones” meet in the Eternal Human Form -- when they pass, together and alone, beyond the dimensions of space and time -- this convergence of irreducible solitudes as One Presence is the reality of the *apocatastasis*, the restoration of all things in God.

Atlantis is Memory – the Western gate to the other world, whose central sign and agent is natural death; this perhaps explains the addiction of the “Atlantean” Toltecs, Aztecs and Mayans to the practice of human sacrifice. It is *pitri-yana*, the Way of the Ancestors, who, by the power of cosmic nostalgia, become their own children again, forever, in endless repetition: “the sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose” [Ecclesiastes 1:5]. Hyperborea is the rigor of Transcendence, the Northern gate that leads to the other world by the power of sacrifice and spiritual ascent, rising bodily out of the South, then turning back to contemplate universal manifestation from the eternal Point beyond it. Its emblem is not *literal* human sacrifice, but rather the spiritual death and resurrection of the shaman, or of the esoteric initiate. It

is the *deva-yana*, the Way of the Gods; *I call it death-in-life and life in death* (W. B. Yeats, from *Byzantium*).

The Eternal Gates' terrific porter lifted the Northern Bar....

~~ *William Blake, from The Book of Thel*

Afterword: The Hyperborean Temptation

As the present cycle of manifestation draws to its close, it becomes increasingly possible to discern the shapes of earlier world-ages; the faculty of cosmic intuition, as well as the sciences of history, archaeology and geophysics, respond to the “thinning” of the cosmic environment. Because the spacetime barriers of the present world are becoming ever more transparent as the cycle nears its end, the lineaments of the Golden Age of Hyperborea become progressively easier to make out through those fading outlines. Yet we still occupy the *Kali-Yuga*, and will until “the consummation of the age.” So it becomes necessary to ask the following question: Exactly what place, if any, do “Hyperborean intuitions” occupy in the spiritual life? Do they empower the spiritual Path, or merely distract one from it?

It is perhaps easier to see the dark side of the “Hyperborean Renaissance” than its spiritually effective aspect. The present flooding of the western world with Hyperborean psychic material – as the west was flooded by “Eastern” material during the 1960’s – is happening on a deeply unconscious level. When the Western masses were exposed to the lore of Hinduism and Buddhism, legitimate teachers and exemplars also arrived who could explain it to them, and guide them by means of it. But no viable and unbroken lineages exist which lead back to the Hyperborean Age; shamanic spirituality, which is our closest approach to such transmission, is largely degenerate, and in any case does not originate from the Golden Age proper, but from a later *yuga* – possibly the Silver Age – when the work of rebalancing the cosmic environment and fighting off the incursion of demonic forces had already replaced the “mass theophanic consciousness” of the *Satya-Yuga*. And in the absence of true lineages and teachers, the present Hyperborean incursion finds among its available interpreters only individual “geniuses”, as well as cranks, wizards and occult fantasists. René Guénon and his followers are almost alone in providing an adequate doctrine of the Hyperborean Age, and even in their case, such doctrine cannot form the *upaya* (method) of a true spiritual Path. We can see in the Goth culture of today’s youth – which does indeed bear certain clear affinities to Nazism and the doctrines of Friederich Nietzsche – the necessary effect of the dawning of

Hyperborean influences within the shrunken confines of the *Kali-Yuga*, which must inevitably result in such influences being taken on much too low a level.

The Six *Lokas* of samsaric existence, in the system of the Kalachakra, are as follows: the humans, the animals, the gods (*devas*), the hell-dwellers, the warrior-demons (*ashuras*) and the hungry ghosts (*pretas*). If we assign these modes of existence to the six directions of space, the following attributions seem plausible: *Devas* at the Zenith (Heaven); hell-dwellers at the Nadir (the Pit); animals in the South (the natural world); hungry ghosts in the West (the quarter where life and reality are most radically depleted); the human world in the East (the place where incarnate existence is open to spiritual illumination); and the *ashuras* or warrior-demons in the North. (This last attribution is supported by the fact that the *nagas* and *rakshsas* [goblins] who serve the Kalki of Shambhala are two classes of *ashuras*.) The *ashuras*, like the Norse giants and the Greek titans, are always trying to “take Heaven (the world of the *devas*) by storm”, but they never ultimately succeed. And it is certainly not hard to see the “warrior-demon” aspect of the “Hyperborean” Goth culture, since it is composed of little else. Just as the North is the projection of the Zenith onto the horizontal plane, so the “spirituality” of the North is necessarily on a lower level than that of the Heaven of the Zenith, the doorway to the celestial worlds. Transposed into terms of the spiritual Path, this indicates a “prometheanism” by which the Path is reduced to a destructive and self-defeating exercise of titanic self-will, which is the ego’s perennial misinterpretation and misapplication of spiritual zeal. Our road of access to God is only through our need; our point of contact with the Absolute is only through our self-annihilation. The *ashuras* and their worshippers, however, will have none of this. Like Nietzsche, they scorn humility and self-annihilation as mere bourgeois cowardice and sentimentality; they fail to understand these virtues as in fact representing an unsentimental courage of the highest order. The Greater Jihad, the “war against the self,” is infinitely hotter and more rigorous than the Lesser Jihad against outer conditions; if it were not for the outpouring of God’s Mercy, none would survive it, all would be defeated. How many people (dare I include among them the warriors of al-Qaeda?) flee into outer conflicts of all kinds, and ultimately into the arms of self-destruction, so as to avoid encountering the terrifying face

of the Ego, the *nafs al-ammara*, the Enemy Within? Suicide – especially when sacrilegiously identified with service to God – is infinitely easier to contemplate than this grim and terrible meeting.

Mythologically speaking, the *ashuras* are self-willed titans perpetually fighting to conquer Heaven; in terms of the spiritual Path, they are Heaven's *gargoyles* or *temple-guardians* -- that mass of hindrances, produced by our *own* self-will, which prevents us from attaining the celestial realms. But it should also be noted that Buddhism does not take the *devas* to represent Heaven in our sense of the word. The Kalachakra Tantra characterizes the “gods” as complacent and ignorant; their world, though pleasant, is just as much a product of anger, lust and ignorance as the other five *lokas*, and is equally impermanent. Even the world of the gods is part of the “round of existence” from which sentient beings must be liberated.

But the North, as a lower, psychic/cosmological reflection of the Zenith, does not only tempt to promethean self-will, but also to an even more dangerous inflation of the intuitive/intellectual faculty of the human soul -- these two transgressions together comprising the sin of spiritual pride. From the standpoint of the Imaginal Pole, it seems as if all manifestations of spirituality can be seen, evaluated and judged. And, on a certain level, this is true. Yet such a Hyperborean vantage-point, which alone makes possible an understanding of the Transcendent Unity of Religions (to use Frithjof Schuon's term), is not the true *ultima Thule*. The perspective it provides is necessary to any deep understanding of religious forms in these times, an understanding which becomes progressively more crucial as the *Kali-Yuga* winds down. But in terms of the concrete practice of the spiritual Path, though it may be the source of a valuable sense of context, it is neither effective doctrine nor useful method, neither *prajñā* nor *upaya*. Hyperborean knowledge in effect makes us too “big” to pass through what Jesus called “the eye of a needle.” We come to such knowledge partly through identification with it, but such identification must be broken before we can make real spiritual progress. Hyperborean intuition is what the Sufis call a state (*hal*), considered as a gift of God; it can never be a station (*makam*), defined as a fruit of the realization of the virtues, and of

the prime virtue of the spiritual Path, self-effacement. It is a knowledge which may, in the mystery of God's will, have the power to re-orient us to the eschatological grace of the latter days; but as a *possession*, it is useless. In terms of the work God demands of us, it does not represent even a single step.

The memory of the Golden Age such as is becoming increasingly possible in these apocalyptic times will necessarily suggest, to some, that we are about to return to such an age; this is perhaps the fundamental error of the New Age movement. But the truth is, we cannot, on a collective level, return to the Golden Age of this cycle, nor can the human collective reach the Golden Age of the cycle to come except through the door of physical death. To imagine that a human race sunk in the *Kali-Yuga* can collectively attain to the exaltation of the *Satya-Yuga* -- in historical terms -- is, in fact, one of the pillars of the coming Kingdom of Antichrist, and of the globalization process which is its herald; when the Golden Age is seen and sought through the eyes and hands of the Age of Iron – as with the “millennium” of Adolph Hitler – the result can only be the Great Inversion that René Guénon spoke of in the 39th chapter of **The Reign of Quantity**. (Interestingly, tradition teaches that the Antichrist will spring from the Tribe of Dan, who occupied the northernmost region of Judea in biblical times.)

Hyperborea is too big for us. In the vast majority of cases, the faculty that may intuit it can only reach that exalted place at the expense of the other faculties of the soul. When the spiritual intuition is inflated, the will is depleted or perverted, the affections poisoned, dissipated, or frozen solid. We must pay for such knowledge, and the only avenue by which such payment can be made is the spiritual Path. Only the Path of self-annihilation can transform the Hyperborean inflation from a potential demonic incursion into a *felix culpa*.

Hyperborean or Primordial spirituality – outside of a few extremely rare cases (and God knows best) – cannot be a Path for us. For the vast majority of believers, and also the vast majority of *esoterics*, only the revealed religions can provide spiritually efficacious forms of the Path, forms which are addressed to the fragmentation,

dissipation, petrification, and general *smallness-of-soul* of modern and postmodern humanity. We cannot overcome this smallness by inflating ourselves (given that we can't inflate ourselves without simultaneously dwarfing ourselves); we can only put our shrunken condition to good use by transforming it into self-effacement, humility and trust in God. To rival God by allowing our souls (in Sufi terms) to be "qualified by the Names of Lordship" is to lose Him; to approach him in our essential poverty – as when the Lakota brave will "lament" for a vision from Wakan Tanka -- is the only way to encounter the riches of His Mercy, His Knowledge, and His Power.