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Manifesto of the BLACK THORN LEAGUE

Hakim Bey

1. According to orally-transmitted teachings of Noble Drew Ali, founder & Prophet of the Moorish Science Temple of America: – Ireland was once part of the Moorish Empire; that is, the celts were Moslems, & there were black moors from N. Africa also present in Ireland. But the moors were expelled by militant Christianity – this event is disguised in the legend of St. Patrick’s expelling the snakes – for which reason the MST celebrates St. Patrick’s Day, in a mood of irony perhaps, in expectation of an eventual Return.
2. In Noble Drew Ali’s system, celts are considered an “Asiatic race”, & thus potential converts to Moorish Science. We consider NDA’s theories to be racial but not racist, because (again according to oral tradition) they were based (at least in part) on spiritual affinity. “Europeans” who wished to Join the MST (including some of the later founders of the Moorish Orthodox Church) were declared to be really celts or “Persians” –

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(which may have something to do with the oft-remarked similarity of Eiran and Iran).

3. NDA's hidden history of Ireland may be taken as an esoteric metaphor -but it is supported in some surprising ways by archaeology & even "official" history. In the first place, the celts are an Asiatic race, or at least the most recent arrivals in the west from the mysterious "Hyperborean" heartland of the Aryans – last of those nomadic migrations which settled India, Persia & Greece.
4. Second: What is one to make of those early Celtic crosses inscribed with the bismillah ("In the Name of God", opening words of the Koran) in kufic Arabic, found in Ireland? The Celtic Church, before its destruction by the Roman hierarchy, maintained a close connection with the desert hermit-monks of Egypt. Is it possible this connection persisted past the 7th/8th centuries, & that the role of the monks was taken up by Moslems? by Sufis? in contact with a still-surviving underground Celtic Church, now become completely heretical, & willing to syncretize Islamic esotericism with its own Nature-oriented & poetic Faith?
5. Such a syncretism was certainly performed centuries later by the Templars & the Assassins (Nizari Ismailis). When the Temple was suppressed by Rome & its leaders burned at the stake, Ireland provided refuge for many incognito Templars. According to The Temple & The Lodge, these Templars later reorganized as a rogue Irish branch of Freemasonry, which (in the early 18th century) would resist amalgamation with the London Grand Lodge. The Islamic connection with masonry is quite clear, both in the Templar & the Rosicrucian traditions, but Irish masonry may have inherited an even earlier Islamic link – memorialized in those enigmatic crosses!

bolize the special mission our order will undertake toward Celtic-Moorish friendship. The BLACK THORN LEAGUE will be open to all, regardless of whether they are MOC members or not, providing only that they support this particular goal.

15. “Black” in our title signifies not only the black banners of the moors but also the black flag of anarchy. “Blackthorn”, because the tree symbolizes druid Irelands & is used to make cudgels. “League”, in honor of the various Irish rebel groups which have organized as such. Other organizational models include such Masonic-revolutionary groups as the Carbonari, or Proudhon’s anarchist “Holy Vehm”, or Bakunin’s Revolutionary Brotherhood. We also emulate certain anarcho-Taoist Chinese tongs (such as the Chaos Society) & hope to evolve the kind of informal mutual aid webworks they developed.
16. The League will bestow the Order of the Black Thorn as title & honor, & will hold an annual conclave & banquet on St. Patrick’s Day in memory both of Noble Drew Ali’s vision, & of those rioters of 1741 who conspired in low taverns to overthrow the State.

Bring The Snakes Back To Ireland!

6. It’s interesting to note that Noble Drew Ali’s Masonic initiations may not have been limited to Prince Hall or black Shriner transmissions, but may also have included some hidden lines connected to Irish masonry, & dating back to Revolutionary days in American history. It is known that many common soldiers in the British Colonial Army were masons affiliated with the Irish rather than the London Grand Lodge. This “class” difference -was reflected in the American Revolutionary Army, whose officers were “official” masons but whose private ranks tended to be “Irish”.
7. Historians sometimes forget that in the 18th century, in America, the Irish were generally considered “no better than Negroes”. In 1741 on St. Patrick’s Day in New York a riot broke out, involving a conspiracy which included Irish, African, & Native American men & women – naturally “of the meanest sort.” Some Irish conspirators were overheard to swear they’d kill as many “white people” as possible. The uprising failed & the plotters were executed. As the bodies of two hanged in the open air decayed in an Iron gibbet, “observers noticed a gruesome, yet instructive, transformation. The corpse of an Irishman turned black & his hair curly while the corpse of Caesar the African, bleached white. It was accounted a ‘wondrous phenomenon’” (Linebaugh & Rediker, “The Many-Headed Hydra”).
8. Clearly the Celt & African were linked not only in the gaze of the oppressor class, but also in their own world-view – as comrades, as somehow the same – in a solidarity which extended to Indians & to other “Europeans” who fell beneath the level of the “respectable poor” into the category of slaves & outcasts. Racist feelings did not divide the 18th century poor & marginalized – as

would become the case under later Capitalism. Rather the marginalized of all races constituted an underclass & moreover, an underclass with some awareness of itself, hence with a certain power (the power of the “strong victim”). This consciousness might well have been developed in part by Irish-black “masonry” of some sort. And Noble Drew Ali might have known of this tradition, which he masked (or perhaps unveiled) in his parable of the snakes — & celebration of March 17th.

9. In another interpretation of St. Patrick’s anti-reptilism, the “snakes” he banished were in fact “druids”, i.e. Celtic pagans. The snake may have been an emblem of the Old Faith, as it is for many forms of paganism, including African (Damballah) & Indian (the Nagas) — & even for the Ophite Christianity of Egypt (Christ himself depicted as a crucified snake).
10. Celtic pagan lore was embedded in the Romance traditions especially in the Arthurian material — & here once again. we find ourselves in the world of the Arabo-Celtic crosses. For the romances are permeated with “Islamic” consciousness. In Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* & Eschenbach’s *Parzifal* many Saracen (i.e. Moslem/Moorish) knights are depicted not as enemies but allies of the Celts — & in the latter book the entire story is attributed to Moorish sources (which are now lost). Saracens, Christians, & crypto-pagans are united in a mystical cult of chivalry which transcends outward religious forms, & is emblemized not only in pagan symbols like the Grail & the Questing Beast, but even in such cultural borrowings as the lute (al-‘ud in Arabic), or indeed the cult of romantic/chivalric love, transmitted from Islam to the west by Sufis in Spain.

11. Ireland’s contacts with Spain certainly extend back into the Islamic period, & the so-called “Black Irish” may have as many Moorish as castilian genes. Medieval Irish monks probably absorbed Sufism & Islamic philosophy along with the art of the illuminated manuscript — witness the extraordinary stylistic resonance between the Book of Eells & the Kufic Korans of Omayyad Spain. If St. Francis could visit N. Africa & come back to Italy wearing a Sufi’s patched cloak, so the Irish might easily borrow from Egypt & al-Andalus.
12. All speculation aside, the Moorish Orthodox Church entertains its own esoteric interpretation of NDA’s teachings on these matters. We heartily endorse his “elective affinity” theory of affiliation with a greater spiritual Celto-Asiatic “race”. DNA counts for something, but soul for a great deal more. “Every man & woman their own vine & fig tree” (one of NDA’s slogans) is not a matter of fate but of character, not of birth but of choice.
13. In our historical/imaginative exegesis & unfolding of NDA’s parable, we have uncovered a complex of heretical Islamic & Moorish cultural strands linking Celtic neo-paganism, esoteric Christianity, & the Arthurian cycle, thru Sufism & masonry, to the perennial libertarian struggle of the marginalized & oppressed peoples of the “Atlantic” world.
14. We propose to embody this poetic complex in a popular chivalric order, devoted symbolically to the cause of “bringing the snakes back to Ireland” — that is, of uniting all these mystical strands into one patterned weave, which will restore the power of its synergistic or syncretistic power to the hearts of those who respond to the particular “taste” of its mix. We have borrowed this slogan from contemporary neo-pagans in order to sym-