

The Theologians

Guide based on:

Evelyn Fishburn & Psiche Hughes, *A Dictionary of Borges*

Various reference books.

Huns (Hunos) Nomads who came from east of the river Volga, invading Europe in the fourth century as far as the Danube and establishing an empire in Central Europe. They acquired a reputation for military skill and ferocity, and became rich by exacting tribute from people whose lands they agreed not to plunder. In the fifth century the Huns attacked the eastern Roman Empire, advancing deep into Greece. Lab. 150 (119): in 452, led by Attila, they invaded Italy but were finally driven away by famine and plague. On his death, Attila's empire was divided among his sons and its power rapidly disintegrated. Lab. 150(119) *Aleph* 35

Civitas Dei 'The City of God': St Augustine's main theological work. Written between 413 and 425, it consists of 22 books in which Christianity is presented as a growing civic system in the face of the decaying Roman Empire. Lab. 150: with reference to the belief that events recur 'at the centuries' end', Borges has observed that several chapters of book 12 of *Civitas Dei* try to refute the theory of cyclical time (see *Eternidad* 81). The controversial passage which was read as if propounding, rather than refuting, this theory occurs at the end of chapter 14, where Augustine refers to Solomon's observation that 'there is no new thing under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 1:10). Augustine, however, explains that these words do not mean, as has been said, that Plato will come back 'at long but fixed intervals' to teach 'in the same city, in the same Academy and to the same students'. Such a doctrine would be totally against the Christian faith, for once 'Christ dies for our sins.. he dieth no more'. The chapter ends with a quotation from the Psalms condemning outright anyone who believes in cyclical return: 'The wicked walk in a circle' (12:8). Lab. 151 (120): the reference to Augustine's statement that 'Jesus is the straight path' paraphrases another passage in the same chapter in which he condemns the 'false, circuitous ways' of 'treacherous and false teachers' and invites Christians not to stray from the right path but to follow the true doctrine (bk. 12, ch.14, para. 1). Lab. 150(119) *Aleph* 37

Plato (Platón) (427-347 BC) An Athenian philosopher, the disciple of Socrates whose teachings he expanded in his early dialogues, illustrating Socrates' inductive system which aims at knowledge through a process of dialectic. [...]

Aquileia An ancient town in central Italy near the shores of the Adriatic, founded by the Romans in the second century BC. From its position it was a strategic base for expeditions to the north east of the Roman empire. In 12-10 BC, for example, during the wars against Pannonia, Augustus established himself for a time in Aquileia. In the third century it became an episcopal see; its bishops expounded *The Three Chapters* (a collection of writings on the divinity of Jesus). In 452 it was razed to the ground by Attila, king of the Huns. Lab. 155 (124): the presence of the Histrionic heresy in Aquileia, obviously apocryphal, could be an allusion to Pope Virgilius' condemnation of *The Three Chapters* in 548; they were later pronounced heretical at the Council of Constantinople in 553. Aquileia eventually broke with Rome, and its bishop Macedonius took the title Patriarch in defiance of Rome. It remained schismatic until the seventh century. Lab. 150(119) *Aleph* 35

Danube (Danubio) The second largest river in Europe after the Volga, rich in historical and political associations. [...]

Wheel (rueda) A universal symbol. Lab. 150 (119): its circular form, without beginning or end, has been used as an emblem of eternity, 'monotony' and the recurrence of events. [...]

Serpent (Serpiente) A symbol present in most mythologies and religions with varying meanings. In Christianity it is both an emblem of Christ and of saints and the disguise of Lucifer as the tempter in the Garden of Eden. Lab. 150 (119): the serpent is also a symbol of re-embodiment and multiplicity of lives. According to Origen, it belongs to Gnostic imagery, as the 'earth-encircling dragon' (*Contra Celsum* 6.25.351). The cult of the serpent occupies an important place in Gnostic mysticism, some of whose sects derive their name from it, such as the Ophites (from the Greek *ophis*, 'snake') and the Nassenes (from the Hebrew *nahas*, 'snake'). H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (1958), states that in the oppositional vein characteristic of Gnosticism, according to which symbols are interpreted against their traditional acceptance, the biblical God is seen as a symbol of cosmic oppression and the serpent, through its action in the Garden of Eden, as the symbol of redemption. The serpent's deed in inducing Adam and Eve to disobey their creator and taste the fruit of knowledge marks the beginning of all *gnôsis* (knowledge) on earth. One sect, the Peratae, regarded Jesus as a particular incarnation of the serpent since he brought lightness to a world of darkness. In Syrian-Egyptian *gnôsis* the serpent is seen more conventionally as a corrupter, taking the form of an earth-encircling dragon: an allegory of the evil spirit who rules the world. Lab.150(119) *Aleph 35*

Cross (Cruz) An ancient mystical symbol indicating originally the four cardinal points of the earth and so signifying life. It has also been seen as a phallic image and an emblem of immortality. In the history of Christianity it is associated with the passion and death of Christ and has become a symbol of reparation and redemption.

John of Pannonia (Juan de Panonia) There is no theologian by this name in the history of Christianity. Borges may have been thinking of the Hungarian poet Ivan Csemicki (1434-1473), bishop of Croatia, who wrote in Latin and adopted the name Janus Pannonius. Ancient Pannonia corresponded to areas of present-day Hungary, Croatia and Austria and was finally subdued by Augustus in 9 BC. Lab. 150(119) *Aleph 35*

Procrustean (Procrusto) 'Appertaining to Procrustes.' In Greek mythology Procrustes had two iron beds of different sizes on which he forced strangers to lie. Those who were too short he hammered out and those who were too long he lopped. Lab. 151 (120): a procrustean argument is one unfairly cut to size to fit the point it aims to prove.

Plutarch (Plutarco) (c.46-c.120) A prolific Greek biographer from Chaeronea, in Boeotia, whose *Parallel Lives* of Greeks and Romans (of which 23 pairs and 4 single lives survive) and *Moralia*, a varied collection of ethical, religious, physical, political and literary studies, made him the most influential Greek writer in the Renaissance. Lab. 157 (126) alludes to Plutarch's description of Caesar's reaction to the news that

Pompey had been murdered on the orders of the King of Egypt: 'From the man who brought him Pompey's head he turned away with loathing as from an assassin; and on receiving Pompey's seal ring, he burst into tears' (*Life of Pompey* 8). Lab. 151 (120): the dialogue *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* (*Moralia* 29) discusses the reasons why the advice and prophecies of the Greek gods were no longer to be heard in his day in the traditional places where oracles used to be consulted. Plutarch suggests that this is the result of Roman rule and the effect of the Romans' practical mentality on the Greeks' awareness of the metaphysical. The dialogue also discusses the possibility that more than one world exists. Plutarch, however, refutes the Stoic hypothesis that these worlds are supervised by several Zeuses, on the grounds that 'it is preposterous that there should be many supreme gods bearing one name' or 'an infinite number of suns, moons, Apollos, Artemises and Poseidons in the infinite cycle of worlds'. Gods, Plutarch continues, though born with the world and ending with it, are not tied to its physical nature like statues fixed to a pedestal; not participating in this nature, they are totally incorruptible and free from all limitations. Lab.151(120) *Aleph* 36

Stoicism A school of thought that flourished in Greek and Roman antiquity. It was one of the loftiest and most sublime philosophies in the record of Western civilization. In urging participation in the affairs of man, Stoics have always believed that the goal of all inquiry is to provide man with a mode of conduct characterized by tranquillity of mind and certainty of moral worth.

Apollo (Apolo) The Greek god of the arts, identified with the sun. His main shrine was at Delphi. Lab. 151(120) *Aleph* 36

Diana The Roman goddess of hunting, chastity, the moon and childbirth, identified with the Greek Artemis, twin sister of Apollo.

Poseidon The Greek name (in Latin Neptune) for the god of the sea, originally the god of earthquakes and water. Poseidon was the son of Kronos, the brother of Zeus and after him, with Pluto, the most important of the gods. Lab.151(120) *Aleph* 36

Nego (Latin) to deny

Autem (Latin) moreover, however, but, also

Nequaquam (Latin) by no means, not at all

Augustine (Agustín) (354-430) One of the four Fathers of the Christian Church. In his youth Augustine abandoned the Christian faith, but he returned to it in 386. When he became bishop of Hippo he described his spiritual struggle in his *Confessions*. After his conversion he was fully engaged in church activities and religious controversies, denouncing the preachings of the various Christian sects which had sprung up before orthodoxy had been formalised. Dominant among these sects were the Manichaeans, who saw the world as the scene of a conflict between good and evil, and the Pelagians, who held that the sin of Adam did not affect the rest of humanity - a doctrine expounded by Augustine's pupil Coelestus, who was later tried and excommunicated. According to Augustine all human nature is sinful and divine intervention is imperative. This view dominates his moral and theological treatises, his *Letters*, the commentaries on the Gospel, and his main work *Civitas Dei* ('City of

God'), which elaborates the theory of human predestination: the principle that God has established *a priori* who will be damned and who saved. Lab. 151(120) *Aleph 37*

Ixion A character in Greek mythology who was pardoned by Zeus for killing his father-in-law and taken up into heaven. When he tried to violate Hera, however, he was condemned to remain tied to a revolving wheel. Lab. 151(120) *Aleph 37*

Prometheus (Prometeo) 'The forethinker': in Greek mythology a Titan who brought fire back to earth when Zeus had hidden it away. Lab. 151 (120): for this, or another offence, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock and set an eagle to devour his liver. As he was immortal, his liver was renewed each night. Eventually he was rescued by Hercules. Lab.151(120) *Aleph 36*

Sisyphus (Sísifo) In Greek mythology the son of Aeolus, punished for telling Asopus where Zeus had hidden his daughter Aegina. In Hades he was condemned to an endlessly repetitive task: rolling a stone uphill. 'Struggling with hands and feet alike, he would try to push it upward...but when it was on the point of going over the top... the pitiless stone rolled back down to the level' (*Odyssey* 11.593 ff). Lab.151(120) *Aleph 37*

Thebes Hekatompylos (Tebas Hekatompilos) The ancient capital of Boeotia, home of the mythical king Oedipus and the scene of other Greek tragedies. [...] Lab. 151 (120): the king of Thebes who saw two suns refers to Euripides' *Bacchae* (918): Pentheus, king of Thebes, grandson of Cadmus, the city's founder, has been initiated in the Dionysian rites and sent mad; he appears on the stage in a daze and utters the words: 'Why now! I seem to see two suns; a double Thebes; / Our city's walls with seven gates appears double.' Lab. 135 (106) *Aleph 7*, Lab. 151 (120) *Aleph 37*

Origen (185-254) An early Christian theologian, one of the greatest of the Christian teachers, initiator of a scientific system of criticism of the Old and New Testaments and author of *De Principiis*. In 202 Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, appointed Origen to supervise the exegesis of the sacred scriptures in order to fight heretical doctrines; he became jealous of Origen's reputation and later broke with him, asking that he be removed from his position and banished from Alexandria. Among the accusations Demetrius made against Origen was that, as a young man, he had mutilated himself in order to escape the temptations of the flesh (Lab. 153-4). Origen tried unsuccessfully to vindicate his position in a letter to the bishop of Rome; his former friend Heraclas joined his enemies, thus securing his own succession as bishop on the death of Demetrius (an episode which seems consistent with the motif of rivalry in 'The Theologians'). Origen's faith is based on a metaphysical system inspired by Neoplatonic and Gnostic ideas. Like the Neoplatonists, Origen held that the soul, existing before the body, contains traces of the divine; by rediscovering and following these traces it arrives at full participation in the divine nature. Matter, though created by God as the sphere in which souls are tested and purified, stands in opposition to the divine in a situation which verges on Gnostic dualism; God is the regulating immutable idea, and Christ, his word (or 'logos') from eternity, is the mediator within the dualistic opposition. Lab.151(121) *Aleph 37*

De Principiis The most important dogmatic work of Origen (c.185-c.254). The original Greek text is mostly lost, and what remains is a Latin translation by Rufinus.

The first three books are on the nature of God, the fall of the soul, anthropology and ethics; the fourth explains the divinity of the Scriptures. The text expounds the four main points in which Origen departed from orthodoxy: namely, the pre-existence of the human soul, the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ, the resurrection of the body into a purely ethereal being, and the final redemption of all men, and devils, through Christ's mediation. Lab. 151 (121): the passage comes from book 2 in which Origen professes the unceasing variety of all spiritual and physical events, arguing against those who assert that worlds 'will come into existence which are not dissimilar to each other' so that 'it will come to pass that Adam and Eve will do the same thing...there will be ...the same deluge... Judas will also a second time betray the Lord... Paul... will keep the garments of those who stoned Stephen...' (ch.3, sect.4). Lab. 151 (121) *Aleph 37*

Judas Iscariot (Judas Iscariote) (d. 30 AD) One of the twelve apostles. The name Iscariot probably indicates that he came from Kerioth, in southern Palestine. Lab. 100 (71), 151 (121): according to the accepted tradition, Judas betrayed Jesus to the Roman authorities for thirty pieces of silver, causing him to be arrested and executed. The episode is recounted in Matthew 26:14-16 and 47-49. Lab. 127 (97): the motive of the betrayal is uncertain. St John's hint at Judas's avarice (John 12:6) is not supported by the other three evangelists. Though his actions were viewed with abhorrence in the Christian Church, an apocryphal gospel of the second century rehabilitated him and he was venerated by the Gnostic sect of the Cainites. According to a Muslim belief, Judas defended Jesus and saved him from crucifixion. In the fourteenth century ad-Dimashqi maintained that Judas took on Jesus's appearance and was crucified in his stead. See 'Not one but all the things...' Lab. 100 (71) *Ficc.* 135, Lab. 125 (95) *Ficc.* 169, Lab. 151 (121) *Aleph 37*, Lab. 191 (158) *Aleph 106*

Paul, St (Pablo) (c.5-10 - c.67) The most important figure in the early history of the Church, whose theological principles were set out in his Epistles. Lab. 152 (121): while in Jerusalem to complete his education, Saul (as he was originally named) came across the followers of Jesus, whom he attacked and persecuted. He witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen, though he did not participate in it, merely guarding the cloaks of those who were stoning him. Lab. 130 (99): while Saul was on the road to Damascus on a mission to arrest some Christians, he was blinded, and converted, by a light 'from heaven' that shone 'round about him' (Acts 9:1-19, 22:5-16, 26:12-18). Paul died, a martyr, in Rome.

Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106-43 BC) A Roman orator, statesman and philosopher whose elegance of language has been a model of Latinity through the ages. Cicero's moral integrity and patriotism in defence of the republic permeate his forensic and political speeches, and his bulky surviving *Letters* have made him the best-known figure of the ancient world. During the year of his consulship (63 BC) he unmasked Catiline's conspiracy, but when he opposed the triumvirate planned by Julius Caesar, Pompey and Crassus he was forced into exile. On his return, reconciled to the triumvirate, he was made governor of Cilicia. When Caesar broke with Pompey, Cicero joined Pompey's forces; he did not, however, take part in the plot to assassinate Caesar. He also opposed the second triumvirate established by Octavian (Augustus) and wrote his *Philippics* against Mark Antony in 44-43 BC; after being hounded by Anthony and his vengeful wife Fulvia, he was executed. Cicero is also remembered as the author of treatises popularising Greek philosophy, including the

Academica priora and *posteriora* in which he opposes Stoic and Epicurean views. Lab. 152(121) *Aleph* 37

Academica priora Otherwise known as the *Lucullus*, after its main speaker. The first draft of the *Academica* was in two books. It was later recast in four, of which we possess part of the first (*Academica posteriora*) and the *Lucullus*. In it Cicero examines the question of the certainty of knowledge, supplying Latin terminology for Greek philosophical ideas. He tends to favour the Stoics, blaming the Epicureans for many failings, not least 'their neglect of literary style'. Lab. 152 (121): two passages in the *Academica priora* concern the possibility that people and events may be repeated across the universe. In the first Lucullus opposes Catulus' theory that 'in this world there exists a second Catulus, or indeed in countless other worlds there exist countless copies of him' (ch. 17, para. 5). In the second passage, alluded to in the story, Cicero mocks Lucullus' idea that 'just as we are at this moment close to Bauli ... so there are countless persons in exactly similar places with our names, our honours, our achievements, our minds, our shapes, our ages, discussing the same subject' (ch. 40, para. 125). Lab. 152(121) *Aleph* 37

Epistle to the Hebrews (Epístola a los Hebreos) An Epistle traditionally attributed to St Paul, though its authorship is now disputed. It seeks to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity to Judaism. Lab. 152 (121): in chapter 9 the repeated yearly sacrifices of the high priest in accordance with the Old Covenant are contrasted with Christ's atonement which is eternal: 'So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear a second time without sin unto salvation' (9:28). Lab. 152(121) *Aleph* 38

Matthew, St (Mateo) The author of the first gospel. [...] Lab. 152 (121): Matthew 6:7 reads: 'But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.' Lab. 154 (123): Matthew 6:12 is part of the Lord's prayer. Matthew 11:12: the full verse reads: 'And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.' Lab. 127 (97) *Ficc.* 172, Lab. 152 (121) *Aleph* 38

Pliny the Elder (Plinio) (23-79 AD) A Roman writer, author of the 37 volumes of *Historia Naturalis*, a source of information on every branch of natural sciences known to the ancient world. Pliny was exceptionally industrious and wide-ranging in his interests and wrote also on grammar, military strategy and Roman history. His scientific zeal was the indirect cause of his death for, in order to observe closely the eruption of Vesuvius, he set sail towards it and lingered too long and too near the volcano. [...]

Historia Naturalis A rambling scientific treatise by Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) which deals with geography, anthropology, physiology, botany, agriculture, medicine and the arts. Compiled from vast reading, and citing about 500 authors, of whom about 150 were Roman, it is a major source of our knowledge of ancient life. [...] Lab. 152 (121): the passage from book 7 where Pliny observes that no two faces in the universe are alike is to be found in chapter 1: 'human features... are so fashioned that, among so many thousands of men, there are not two in existence which cannot be distinguished from one another.' [...]

Pergamum (Pérgamo) A city of Asia Minor fifty miles north of Smyrna and fifteen miles inland. One of the most beautiful of Greek cities in the Hellenistic period, its library was second only to that of Alexandria. In 130 BC Pergamum passed to Rome; its people were early converts to Christianity. Lab. 152 (121): no record is known of a Council held in Pergamum. Lab.152(121) *Aleph* 38

Euphorbus (Euforbo) A Trojan hero who, when he was killed by Menelaus, then dedicated his shield in the temple of Hera in Argos (*Iliad* 17.45ft). Lab. 55 (30): to prove his theory of metempsychosis, or reincarnation, Pythagoras, who claimed to have been Euphorbus in a previous life, took down the shield from the temple wall and pointed to the name inscribed on the back (Horace, *Odes* 1.28.11). Lab. 152 (121): no record has been found of a heretic called Euphorbus burnt at the stake. In the light of Pythagoras' statement, the name could have been deliberately chosen to reinforce the concept of people and events returning through time, as believed by 'the heretics of the wheel'. Lab. 55 (30) *Ficc.* 67, Lab. 152 (121) *Aleph* 38

Runes, Runic crosses (Runas, Cruces rúnicas) Runes were the characters of an early alphabet current in parts of northern Europe (Scandinavia in particular). The word is often used now to describe something secret and mysterious. Lab. 152 (122): the crosses which Borges defines as 'runic' are in fact wheeled crosses, the result of the fusion of Viking culture with Celtic Christianity. The wheel was a prominent symbol in early Norse mythology, where it represented the sun. Lab. 153 (122) *Aleph* 39, Brodie 98 (117) *Brodie* 148

Migne, Jacques Paul (1800-1875) A French priest, theologian and publisher of theological literature. His most important publication is *Patrology* (1844-66), a collection of 'the teachings of the Fathers of the Church' consisting of 217 volumes of ecclesiastical writings in Latin up to the time of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) and of 162 volumes of ecclesiastical writings in Greek up to 1439. The chief value of this work is that it contains texts that are not available in other editions. Lab. 153 (122): the introduction into *Patrology* of the writings of the character Aurelian is clearly apocryphal. Lab.153(122) *Aleph* 39

Constantinople (Constantinopla) The former capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, now Istanbul. Lab. 153 (122): in 553 Constantinople was the seat of a second Council which, among other dogmas, declared the divinity of Jesus and pronounced anathemas against all who opposed this creed. See Arianism. Lab. 153(122) *Aleph* 39

Arianism (Arrianismo) A heresy founded and promulgated by Arius (280-369). It was based on the denial of the divinity of Jesus, who was claimed not to be consubstantial with God but merely a reflection of him. Lab. 160 (128): the Arians converted the Visigoths, the Lombards and the Vandals. Lab. 153 (122): several councils of the Church were held to counter Arian beliefs, such as the Council of Nicea in 325, which proclaimed the divinity of Jesus, and the Councils of Constantinople in 381 and 553. The last of these reaffirmed the Nicene creed and pronounced anathemas against the Arians. Lab. 153 (122) *Aleph* 39, Lab. 160 (128) *Aleph* 48

Cosmas A sixth-century merchant and traveller born in Alexandria. After sailing to Africa and the Far East (for which he became known as Indicopleustes, or 'Indian sailor'), Cosmas retreated to a monastery and composed the *Topographia Christiana* (Christian Topography), with the purpose of denying the heathen hypothesis of the shape of the earth and proving the factual truth of biblical definitions of the universe. According to Cosmas, the earth is rectangular, its inhabited part surrounded by the ocean, beyond which lies the Garden of Eden. Lab. 153(122) *Aleph* 39

Tabernacle The tent or portable shrine carried by the Jews during their wanderings in the wilderness. It consisted of an inner sanctum known as the 'Holy of Holies' and an outer chamber used as a temple. The extensive description in Exodus (25-31 and 35-40) deals with the construction of the tabernacle, its precise measurements, the material from which it was built, its ornamentation, and even the colour of its curtains, all of which are laid down in minute detail. The tabernacle was believed to constitute the dwelling-place of the Lord, its symmetry and harmony being a reflection of divine perfection. Lab. 153 (122): the reference to the quadrangular shape of the Hebrew tabernacle accords with the overall pattern of the dimensions given for its construction. Lab.153(122) *Aleph* 39

Bousset, Wilhelm (1865-1920) A German theologian, the founder of a school of biblical studies, whose writings include works on the early Church and Gnosticism. Bousset highlighted the influence of Hellenistic traditions on the expansion of orthodox Christianity, claiming that many biblical passages stemmed from ancient myths of Egyptian and Babylonian origin. Lab. 153 (122): Bousset's standpoint was opposed to that of his contemporary Harnack. This rivalry, in the context of 'The Theologians', can be perceived in the differences within the theological schools mentioned in the story. Lab. 153(122) *Aleph* 39

Harnack, Adolf (1851-1930) A German religious historian and patrologist, famous for his formulation of Gnosticism as 'the acute Hellenisation of Christianity'. Harnack was opposed to any form of 'Hellenisation' (the interpretation of early Christianity in the light of Greek tradition), holding that Greek sources were an intrusion into Christian theology. As a result he was critical of traditional Christian dogma.

Macedonia An ancient nation in the Balkan peninsula on the Aegean corresponding nowadays to parts of Bulgaria, Greece and Yugoslavia. Lab. 153(122) *Aleph* 39

Carthage (Cartago) A city in North Africa sacked by the Romans in 146 BC after the Third Punic War. Lab. 153 (122): after the second century Carthage became an important centre of Christianity, counting among its bishops two of the Church fathers, Tertullian and Cyprian. Between 251 and 553 it was the seat of several ecclesiastical councils. [...]

Britannia (Britania) The name, probably of Iberian or Gallic origin, of the ancient Roman province of Britain. Christianity probably did not reach Britain before the middle of the third century. Lab. 153 (122): no mention has been found of a diocese of Britain during the sixth century. Reference to the inversion of crucifixes, though fictitious, may be an oblique allusion to the doctrine of the British lay monk Pelagius who in the fifth century questioned original sin and was charged with heresy. His

followers developed his theories, denying that Christ had to die for human redemption or act as an intermediary between man and his salvation. Lab. 153(122) *Aleph* 39

Caesarea Ancient port and administrative city of Palestine, on the Mediterranean coast of present-day Israel south of Haifa.

Cainites (Cainitas) A heretical Gnostic sect mentioned by Irenaeus, Epiphanius of Salamis and other Christian writers. Their name was derived from the cult of Cain whom they acclaimed for withstanding the God of the Old Testament, regarded by them as the cause of evil in the world. The Cainites possessed an apocryphal *Gospel of Judas* and believed that Judas, being in contact with the 'Truth', was aware of providence and brought about Jesus's betrayal because he knew in advance that it had to happen. The Cainites stressed the importance of evil in perpetual contest with good for supremacy in the universe, and held a dualistic creed not unlike the system of the Gnostics. Lab. 153(122) *Aleph* 40

Phrygia (Frigia) A country in western and central Asia Minor subject in turn to the Lydians, Persians, Seleucids and Attalids. In 116 BC most of Phrygia was absorbed into the Roman province of Asia, and in 25 BC the remaining eastern part was included in the province of Galatia. Lab.153 *Aleph* 40

Dardania The name given by the Romans to the territory now corresponding to southern Serbia, derived from its first inhabitants, the Dardani, an Illyrian tribe first mentioned in the *Iliad* (2.819, 15.425). Under Constantine Dardania became part of the Roman province of Illyria, and its inhabitants were converted to Christianity. Lab. 153(122) *Aleph* 40

John of Damascus, St (Juan Damascene) (c.675-c.749) A Greek monk and theologian, declared a 'Doctor of the Church', who was the author of many books against heresy. John wrote extensively on the doctrine of Mariology, or the divine maternity of Mary, her exemption from original sin and her assumption into heaven. His anti-heretical writings deal mainly with the nature of God and human free will, which he relates to reason and describes as a manifestation of man's choice of good. Lab. 153 (122): the term 'forms' said to have been used by John in connection with the 'Histriones' is an allusion to his staunch defence of images in the Iconoclastic Controversy. This dispute, which agitated the Greek Church in the eighth and ninth centuries, was about the veneration of icons and its conflict with the ancient Mosaic prohibition against the use of images. John defended images on the basis of the theological significance of the incarnation of God, and the importance that this assumption of human nature in the body of Jesus had upon Christian dogma. Lab. 153(122) *Aleph* 44

Erfjord A fictional character who appears in several stories: in Lab. 39 (14) as Gunnar Erfjord, one of the inventors of Tlön; in Lab. 128 (98) as Erik Erfjord, a Danish Hebraicist; and in Lab. 153 (122) simply as Erfjord, a Christian theologian. Lab. 39 (14) *Ficc.* 29, Lab. 128 (98) *Ficc.* 174, Lab. 153 (122) *Aleph* 40

Nabucodonosor (more commonly **Nebuchadnezzar**) The name of three kings of Babylon, the most famous being Nebuchadnezzar II (c.630-562 BC) who drove the Egyptians out of Asia and annexed Syria to Babylon. Apart from being a brilliant

commander, Nebuchadnezzar II patronised the arts throughout his empire and made Babylon one of the 'wonders of the world'. Lab. 154 (122); the 'Nabucodonosors of Nitria' who 'grazed like oxen and their hair grew like an eagle's' is an allusion to the story of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream: of a tree reduced to a stump, presaging the divine punishment of his arrogance by madness. The quotation stems from Daniel 4:33 and tells of the fulfilment of the prophecy of the king's downfall: 'he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of the heaven, till his hair grew like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.' Lab.154(122) *Aleph* 40

Nitria An ancient valley in Libya near the Nile delta where flourished the cult of Serapis to whom sheep were sacrificed. Lab. 154 (122): in the fourth century a Christian monastery was founded in Nitria by Amun (c.320). Its monks lived in clusters of windowless cells and practised extreme asceticism. In 399 Amun and three other monks, who became known as the Tall Brothers, left the monastery for Alexandria to support the movement started by Origen and from there proceeded to Constantinople to defend his ideas. Lab.154(122) *Aleph* 40

Browne, Sir Thomas (1605-1682)

An English author and physician. Browne was a student of Platonism, the belief that the world is the imperfect reflection of a perfect system in which all things have a purpose and are worthy of observation. His style abounds in quaint expressions, latinate words and neologisms. His *Religio Medici*, the expression of a mind at once credulous and sceptical, was regarded by his contemporaries as a bundle of contradictions, and it was put on the Papal Index. A Spanish translation was published in *Sur*. Lab. 43 (18): the idiosyncratic quality of Browne's writing is clearly revealed in *Urn Burial*, considered the most imaginative and elegant of his books. Lab. 154 (123): the remark about the Histrionic gospels must surely be apocryphal. Lab. 43 (18) *Ficc.* 34, Lab. 154 (123) *Aleph* 40

Zohar Hebrew, meaning 'splendour', 'the book of splendour': a mystical thirteenth-century work written in Castile in the Aramaic dialect and thought to be by Moses de Leon. It is a prime example of the literary form of Cabbalistic pseudepigraphy, its author pretending that it was the work of an apocryphal writer, hinting at mystical origins and permitting the persons in his dialogues a profusion of invented book titles and citations. Though considered the canonical book of the Cabbalists, the *Zohar* is not in any sense a systematic exposition of Cabbalistic doctrine but a work of mystical allegorisation in which the most seemingly insignificant verses of Scripture acquire unexpected depths of meaning. The style of the *Zohar* has been described by G. Scholem as 'tortuous and abstruse, lightened up occasionally by a magnificent clarity of symbolic expression'. Lab. 154 (123) refers to *Zohar* I, 240b, where the process of creation is explained as having taken place on two planes, one above and one below; the lower occurrence, the world of visible creation, corresponds to the higher world of the sephirot or Divine Emanations. This duality of creation is taken as a Cabbalistic explanation of the opening letter of Genesis, Beth, the numerical value of which is two. Lab.154(123) *Aleph* 40

Corinthians (Corintios) Two epistles by St Paul addressed to the Christians in Corinth. In the first, written in Ephesus in 57, Paul emphasises the unity of all Christians in Christ and answers questions on specific points of behaviour. All the

following quotations are taken from I Corinthians. [...] Lab. 154 (123): 'For we now see through a glass darkly': the 'perversion' of taking this famous apocalyptic quotation as proof that 'everything we see is false' is explained by its context. Now our heavenly vision is limited and obscured, whereas 'when that which is perfect is come' it will be complete.

Bloy, Léon (1846-1917) A French writer who became a Catholic convert and proselyte. His *L'âme de Napoléon* (1912), *Journal* (1939) and published letters are characterised by mysticism. Bloy's faith rested on the concept that man is saved through suffering and love, a source of mystical inspiration. Thus enlightened, he can understand his function in the economy of the universe, just as he can the verse of a liturgical text. This idea, akin to the Cabbalistic interpretation of creation, appealed considerably to Borges, and was quoted by him in his essays (Other Inq. 120,127). Lab. 154 (123): the allusion to Bloy, echoing the belief that each man has a counterpart in heaven in 'inverted reflection' of his identity, is probably based on the argument of the last chapter of *L'âme de Napoléon* entitled 'The Invisible Companion'. This refers to the doctrine of the guardian angel who accompanies each person, knowing and seeing what he does not know and see, and crying whenever he sins. 'Conforming with the law of supernatural equilibrium', the relationship between man and his angel must be such that the lowest of sinners will be under the protection of a high-ranking angel, capable of bearing the weight of his sins, while the angels appointed to great men such as Napoleon, would be 'humble and timid', the 'smallest of the Blessed Messengers'. Lab. 154(123) *Aleph* 41

Pythagoras (Pitágoras) (sixth century BC) A Greek philosopher whose ideas influenced much of Western thought. Pythagoras believed that nature rested on mathematical principles and was explainable in terms of numbers and their relations. He spoke of the connection between numbers and music, anticipating the concept of 'harmonic progression' in mathematics, and he also envisaged numbers in terms of shapes. The number ten was for him the essence of the numerical system, and its representation as the sum of the first four integers became a sacred figure. There are strong links between the Pythagorean intuition of reality and later Cabbalistic cosmological theories (see Cabbala). Lab. 55 (30), 155 (123): Pythagoras believed that the soul was immortal and transmigrated at death to another form of living being in a process of self-improvement and purification. [...]

Proteus In Greek mythology a prophetic sea god, the son of Oceanus and Tethys, who had the power of assuming any shape he wished in order to avoid capture. Lab. 192 (159): Homer describes Proteus as living in a cave near the island of Pharos: 'He will seek to foil you by taking the shape of every creature that moves on earth, and of water and of portentous fire; but you must hold him unflinchingly and you must press the harder' (*Odyssey* 4.417-20). Because he could assume whatever shape he pleased, Proteus was regarded as typical of the ever-changing aspect of the sea and, in the Orphic tradition, as the original matter from which the world was created. Lab. 155 (124): 'protean' means having the ability to assume all kinds of appearances. [...]

Demosthenes (Demóstenes) (384-322 BC) The most celebrated ancient Greek orator, whose speeches against Philip of Macedon roused the Athenians to fight for the freedom of Greece. A proposal that a golden crown be awarded to Demosthenes for public services was contested by his rival Aeschines, whose speeches had facilitated

Philip's entry into central Greece and the consequent capitulation of Athens. Later, while Philip's son Alexander was absent from Greece, Demosthenes attacked Aeschines in his oration *On the Crown*; to discredit him he described how as a boy Aeschines had helped his mother in her ritual initiations. From this passage Borges derives the reference to the Orphic mysteries in Lab. 155 (123). Despite the success of *On the Crown*, Demosthenes' life continued full of strife. He was sentenced to death and committed suicide. The rivalry between Demosthenes and Aeschines is consistent with the theme of rivalry in 'The Theologians'. Lab. 155(123) *Aleph* 41

Orphic (Órfico) Pertaining to the sect which takes its name from the mythical Orpheus, whose activities are recorded as early as the sixth century BC. Their creed rested on the principle of an original sin from which the soul eventually achieves liberation after the course of multiple lives, through asceticism and purifying rites. Lab. 155 (123): Demosthenes in the *De Corona* (330 BC) refers to Salazian or Bacchic rituals, whose routine was very similar to Orphic rituals. Purification with mud and other duties once performed by his rival Aeschines are mockingly described by Demosthenes (259): 'to clothe the catechumens... to wash their bodies, to scour them with the loam and the bran, and, when their lustration was performed... give out the hymn, "Here I leave my sins behind / Here the better way I find" ' making sure that 'no one ever emitted an ululation so powerful' as himself. Lab.155(123) *Aleph* 41

Carpocrates A second-century Neoplatonist from Alexandria, the founder of a heretical sect which believed in the dualism of good and evil, denied the divinity of Christ and held that the soul is imprisoned in the body from which it strives to be free. Lab. 155 (124): Carpocrates believed that a man could be redeemed only after he had undergone experiences of all kinds and committed every possible deed, good and bad. Carpocrates himself seems to have led a simple life, but his followers were often accused of gross indulgence and superstition. Lab. 125 (95), 155 (124) *Ficc.* 169 *Aleph* 41

Luke, St (Lucas) A physician, probably a gentile, author of the third synoptic gospel. Luke's gospel addresses its message of universal salvation through the life, death and teachings of Christ to all men. [...] Lab. 155 (124): Luke 12:59 reads: 'I tell thee, thou shalt not depart hence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.' Stemming from a passage called 'This fateful hour', it is part of a speech in which Jesus announces that his words will bring about conflicts of interpretation and loyalties, but that men must find the right course for themselves, for in the end they will have to answer for all their actions. Lab. 127 (97) *Ficc.* 171, Lab. 155 (124) *Aleph* 41

John, St (Juan) One of the twelve apostles, traditionally regarded as the author of the fourth Gospel. This differs from the other three (synoptic) Gospels by not setting out to give an account of Jesus's life and teaching, but being rather a meditative exposition of Christian doctrine. [...] Lab. 155 (124): this verse (10:10) is an extract from the parable of the Good Shepherd in which Jesus claims that the only means of access to the fold is through him, all other ways being those of thieves and robbers. The narrator suggests that the allegorical meaning of 'having life more abundantly' was misunderstood and taken to mean that life should include all forms of evil as well as good. Lab. 127 (97) *Ficc.* 172, Lab. 155 (124) *Aleph* 42

Theopompus Lab. 155 (124): This fictional Theopompus recalls:

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Theopompus (Teopompo) (b. 380 BC), A Greek historian, author of a history of Greece in twelve books of which only some fragments remain, and of *Philippics*. The latter is based on the reign of Philip of Macedon (360-336 BC) and contains long digressions on the nations with whom Macedon came into contact. The original text is lost, but fragments are quoted by Plutarch and other later historians. [...]

Berenice A city in southern Egypt on the Red Sea, founded in memory of his mother by Ptolemy Philadelphus in the third century BC. Lab. 135 (106) *Aleph* 8, Lab. 155 (124) *Aleph* 42

Genoa Italian: Genova , ancient (Latin): Genua city and Mediterranean seaport in northwestern Italy.

Aventinus (Aventino) The Aventine, one of the seven hills of Rome. Lab. 156(125) *Aleph* 43

Julius Caesar (Julio César) (100-44 BC) A Roman general, politician and man of letters, who defeated Pompey at the battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC, was appointed Dictator by the Senate and was murdered four years later. [...]

Mauretania (Mauritanos) An ancient kingdom in north Africa corresponding now to north Morocco and central Algeria. The kings of Mauretania became Roman vassals as early as the second century BC. Two centuries later Mauretania was annexed to the Roman Empire by the Emperor Claudius and divided into two provinces. Lab. 135: (106): in the fourth century, during the tetrarchy of Diocletian, Mauretania and other regions of north Africa were the scene of rebellions against the Roman army led by Maximian, the Emperor's colleague. Lab. 135 (106) *Aleph* 8, Lab. 157 (126) *Aleph* 45

Rusaddir Present-day Melilla, a port in Spanish Morocco, founded by the Phoenicians and eventually occupied by Rome. In the fifteenth century it was taken by the Spaniards. A revolt of Spanish officers in Melilla in 1936 marked the start of the Spanish Civil War. Lab.157(126) *Aleph* 45

Hibernia The Latin name for Ireland. Lab. 157(126) *Aleph* 45