

Autarchs

The Urth list — 13 messages, 7 voices, 26 Sep 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5754>

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Andrew Mason — 26 Sep 2010, 19:24

Jeff Wilson wrote:

Typhon is the first to carve his face into the western Andes, at least. The Autarchs that follow do likewise, but there seems also to be a succession of Autarchs before Typhon, or at least a succession of people whose minds are inherited by the post-Typhon succession. URTH, XLI: "and I began, as I walked on, to search those veiled lives that lie behind the last, memories that I have scarcely mentioned in this narrative, that dim as they grow stranger and stretch backward, perhaps, to Ymar, and behind Ymar to the Age of Myth."

It's not clear to me that Autarchs eat the brains only of Autarchs: the stated aim of the practice is to make the whole Commonwealth present within one person. Though of course this raises the question who might have maintaining a chain of brain-eaters before Ymar's time.

One piece of evidence that the autarchy existed in some form before Ymar arises in connection with the Antechamber; we are told that before Ymar, all crimes committed around the House Absolute were judged by the Autarch himself. I suppose, though, that this might be another case of the loose use of 'Autarch' to mean 'ruler'.

Jeff Wilson — 26 Sep 2010, 21:36 · in reply to Andrew Mason

On 9/26/2010 2:24 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:

Jeff Wilson wrote:

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In that case, what distinguishes autarchs from those rulers who are not?

Jane Delawney — 27 Sep 2010, 01:56 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 26/09/10 22:36, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 9/26/2010 2:24 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:

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the stated aim of the practice is to make the whole Commonwealth
present within one person. Though of course this raises the question
who might have maintaining a chain of brain-eaters before Ymar's time.

Is there any evidence that anyone did? I don't see it. There's that 'perhaps' in Severian's musing (really, he has no idea at all how far back the 'inherited' memories go; he has no direct access to Ymar for instance - as Conciliator, Sev doesn't even recognise the guy at first, when he's supposed to have ingested Ymar's memories alongside those of all the other Autarchs) and while someone, somewhere, has to have introduced the tradition along with its essential mediator, the alzado, it's not at all clear when this happened.

Sev tells us several times over that it's only the most recent memories which are at all clear. While he is aware at some level of the multitude of individuals that dwell within an Autarch, he has direct and detailed access to the memories of no more than two or three of them - and in his case, the most prominent alternate is Thecla; no Autarch, but rather something of an innocent bystander.

In that case, what distinguishes autarchs from those rulers who are not?

I submit that save in the case of Ymar, who was the first, the distinction is precisely in the ingestion of the memories of the predecessor. Ymar, it is quite clear, did not perform the alzado ritual upon his predecessor Typhon. There's no question about this; it simply didn't happen. How do we know for sure? Well - when Sev finds Typhon's dessicated and then resurrected body, it has two heads, and they are both intact. Nobody has taken an oyster-knife to Typhon's skull; nor to Piaton's for that matter.

I think also that this distinction is probably the motivation behind Vodalus's resurrectionist cult. By ingesting the memories of what is probably quite a random selection of individuals ('Not another tribade ...!'), he is attempting to turn himself into a kind of faux Autarch. That's his ambition after all. His lover Thea refers at one point to an imagined future time 'when Vodalus is Autarch' (she imagines herself as his Autarchia); and Vodalus himself is desperate to recover the Autarch's crashed flyer when he's informed by his spy (the Old Autarch himself of course) that the Autarch is with him in the wreckage. This would be an ideal brain-eating opportunity; but Vodalus blows it.

In his message, the Old Autarch is referring to Severian, whom he knows to be his destined successor; not to himself. (Perhaps he thinks that Sev will be physically strong enough to resist, or that Vodalus simply won't consider that the person that his temporary ally Agia is pursuing could be Autarch in waiting). Vodalus has no idea that his spy is really the Autarch himself. So when his agents (of whom he fondly believes Agia to be one) recover the occupants of the craft and he sees only his spy (obviously gravely injured) and Agia's quarry, he simply wonders where the Autarch may have gone, and thus lets an opportunity to seize the throne slip through his hands.

It's all in the neural chemistry. Perhaps Vodalus thinks that if he ingests a sufficient number of memories, some of which may come from individuals who have held positions in the House Absolute, he will eventually get to know enough of the Words to be able to claim the throne (on

behalf of the exultant class, even).

So: while there's very little information on /why/ this tradition started, I think it's clear enough how it operates (that UOTNS phrase, 'Epitome of Urth', turns out to be entirely appropriate) and also that Ymar started it.

jd

Jeff Wilson — 27 Sep 2010, 05:33 · in reply to Jane Delawney

On 9/26/2010 8:56 PM, Jane Delawney wrote:

On 26/09/10 22:36, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 9/26/2010 2:24 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:

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Is there any evidence that anyone did? I don't see it. There's that 'perhaps' in Severian's musing (really, he has no idea at all how far back the 'inherited' memories go; he has no direct access to Ymar for instance - as Conciliator, Sev doesn't even recognise the guy at first, when he's supposed to have ingested Ymar's memories alongside those of all the other Autarchs) and while someone, sometime, has to have introduced the tradition along with its essential mediator, the alzado, it's not at all clear when this happened.

Sev tells us several times over that it's only the most recent memories which are at all clear. While he is aware at some level of the multitude of individuals that dwell within an Autarch, he has direct and detailed access to the memories of no more than two or three of them - and in his case, the most prominent alternate is Thecla; no Autarch, but rather something of an innocent bystander.

He also says that the huge volume and jumble of memories are the obstacles to his direct recollection, and he has to search for the desired ones among the great pile. This means he would constantly be coming across other memories along the way, and he is able to attribute them to various sorts of people that he mentions include children and peasant wives and scholars. He apparently comes across some memories that seem to be older than those of Ymar - any memory of utterly uncarved mountains, for instance, and this is from his perspective in URTH, after being in the confidence of Inire the analeptic supplier for a decade.

Sev confirms that he has knowledge of them that he does not choose to include in the narrative, so he does have considerable knowledge of the second hand memories, if only by repetition of memory since it would be unlikely that any of the original brain cells would last more than a century or two even without multiple ingestions.

The answer could be that alzado users habitually seek other alzado users to assimilate, so that there are many successions of memories hidden among the scholars of the post-Imperial era, and the Autarchy has acquired at least one that goes back into deep history.

Or, there might be a few star-sailors in the mix.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

António Pedro Marques — 27 Sep 2010, 11:30 · in reply to Jane Delawney

Jane Delawney wrote (27-09-2010 02:56):

On 26/09/10 22:36, Jeff Wilson wrote:

In that case, what distinguishes autarchs from those rulers who are not?

I submit that save in the case of Ymar, who was the first, the distinction is precisely in the ingestion of the memories of the predecessor.

I don't think one needs to go to that. A monarchy is characterised by hereditary succession, divine right, exercise of power for its own sake. The Autarchy is supposed to have been the opposite: non-hereditary, rulers from lowly backgrounds, rule in the name of the community. In fact, quite like

some periods of the roman imperial system.

Of course, like has been said, someone not familiar with the term 'autarch', or only with a previous meaning of it, might just take it for an adequately high regal title.

David Stockhoff — 27 Sep 2010, 11:53 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Exactly.

On 9/27/2010 1:33 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Gerry Quinn — 27 Sep 2010, 12:18 · in reply to Jane Delawney

From: Jane Delawney

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We're probably not meant to think too deeply about the implications of the Vodalus method, which seems to work quite well even though no brain need be ingested. Nobody mentions it, but shouldn't it be possible to obtain the memories of the living in the same fashion, by cutting away and eating some less essential tissue (something the size of a finger joint is apparently enough). It would be useful for conducting interrogations, if nothing else...

- Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn — 27 Sep 2010, 12:21 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: "Jeff Wilson" <jwilson at io.com>

He also says that the huge volume and jumble of memories are the obstacles to his direct recollection, and he has to search for the desired ones among the great pile. This means he would constantly be

coming across other memories along the way, and he is able to attribute them to various sorts of people that he mentions include children and peasant wives and scholars. He apparently comes across some memories that seem to be older than those of Ymar - any memory of utterly uncarved mountains, for instance, and this is from his perspective in URTN, after being in the confidence of Inire the analeptic supplier for a decade.

Didn't that 'memory' of uncarved mountains come from old photographs?

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Andrew Mason — 27 Sep 2010, 14:44 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 9/26/2010 2:24 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:

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As I understand it, what properly distinguishes an autarch is that he rules himself: that is why Ymar and his successors chose that title. However, most people probably don't know that; having lived under an autarch for a thousand years, they think of that as the normal term for a ruler. Both Jonas (as Roy mentioned) and Cyriaca refer to ancient rulers as autarchs, before pointing out that strictly speaking this is wrong.

Lee Berman — 27 Sep 2010, 16:30 · follows Andrew Mason

Andrew Mason: As I understand it, what properly distinguishes an autarch is that he rules himself: that is why Ymar and his successors chose that title.

I find it difficult to understand the semantic distinction between an autarch and a despotic monarch like Typhon. If anything, the autarch seems to rule him/herself less as he/she seems to be somewhat answerable to a powerful exultant class below them and the dictates of cacogens above them (not to mention Father Inire, wherever he fits in).

All I can think is that it is a wishful title for the future. An Autarch will eventually be a self-ruler of the people because he/she will eventually house all the people of the Commonwealth within his/her consciousness. (that's the goal, obviously it fell far short of completion; as I see it, just another sham game piece in the cosmic manipulation of Severian).

Jeff Wilson — 28 Sep 2010, 01:31 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 9/27/2010 7:18 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: Jane Delawney <mailto:jane_delawney at sky.com>

I submit that save in the case of Ymar, who was the first, the distinction is precisely in the ingestion of the memories of the predecessor. Ymar, it is quite clear, did not perform the alzado ritual upon his predecessor Typhon. There's no question about this; it simply didn't happen. How do we know for sure? Well - when Sev finds Typhon's dessicated and then resurrected body, it has two

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I was speculating aloud on that 2-3 months back. The only reason I can think of that Vodalus doesn't do both people from the wreck is that he anticipates having to give one up to the Ascians but doesn't know which one, and doesn't think the injured one would survive being "sampled" in this way.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

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It's the "oldest pictures" (photographs seem not to have been reintroduced into the Commonwealth, possibly due to the lack of silver) that would serve to verify that a hypothetical memory of utterly uncarved mountains comes from before Typhon's reign. This still wouldn't be the Age of Myth, which by definition would have left no readily verifiable artifacts.

I'm not citing a specific memory of exceptional age, because Sev doesn't record the distinguishable content of any, but he does mention the quantity of disordered and "strange" memories that are accessible to be searched through. He does mention knowledge of previous donors coming up unbidden on occasion, so there are certain comprehensible memories there still, and his supposition that they extend back into the Age of Myth implies that sometime he remembers things that can't be placed in any historical era on record, as well as some that might match the times of the earliest successors of Ymar, so that some memories that have no particular historical context could be those of Ymar himself.

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This doesn't distinguish them from Typhon, who owes fealty to no one else.

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