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Charisma and Memory in a Spiritual Community: The Case of Damanhur in Italy

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Abstract: This paper explores the dynamic relationship between the spiritual community of Damanhur and its founder, Oberto Airaudi. Scholars consider Airaudi to be an example of Weberian charismatic leadership that was sui generis; the community, however, experienced an early routinisation, which granted it longevity and stability. Doctrinal and social evolution instead suggests a change in this charismatic relationship over the years, which occurred in four phases. His charisma passed from the ability to perform occult practices (occultist), to ideate a syncretic cosmology centred on Damanhur (religious), eventually allowing him to become an “inspirer from the outside” (inspirational). The last phase explains the survival and partial routinisation of the charisma after his death (post mortem). The study primarily relies on the analysis of Damanhurian writings, with a particular focus on the initial ten years. It also incorporates qualitative data from fieldwork and ethnographic material available in the scientific literature. The analysis suggests that Damanhur did not start as a charismatic community but as a social experiment. The development of Airaudi’s charisma, via a syncretic mythology based on a religious concept of memory, absorbed Damanhur’s social dimension, shaping it according to a collective spiritual endeavour aimed at reconnecting human beings with their divine inner nature.

Keywords: charisma; memory; Damanhur; Oberto Airaudi



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1. Introduction

This paper explores the dynamic relationship between the charismatic leadership of Oberto Airaudi (1950–2013), founder of the spiritual community of Damanhur, who established the doctrine of Damanhur, and the social organisation of the community. Damanhur is a federation¹ of communities located in Piedmont, in northern Italy, which is home to nearly 400 people (Lo Presti and Gilli 2023, p. 47). Their collective endeavor revolves around the pursuit of an “exemplary utopia”, a social experiment deeply anchored in spirituality, art and creativity, and a steadfast commitment to sustainable living practices (Palmisano and Pannofino 2014). The first community was established in 1979² by Oberto Airaudi, a renowned occultist practitioner in the early 1970s, along with a dozen companions hailing from the city of Turin (Ciravegna 2020, p. 17). Fascinated by esotericism from a young age, Airaudi became not only the spiritual guide of Damanhur but also an artist and a healer.

Over the years, the charisma of Airaudi is believed to have undergone a process of transformation, which encompassed and eventually moulded the social ideal of the community. As shall be seen, he based his charisma on a syncretic concept of “memory” of vaguely Gnostic derivation, on which he elaborated a paradigm of “collective spirituality”. Scholars have considered Airaudi a typical charismatic leader, however “anomalous”: he rejected the title of “master”, and used to leave for long periods of time (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 87–88). His resigned charismatic style allegedly led to an early routinisation of his authority during his lifetime without diminishing his personal charisma (Ibid., p. 258). Instead, in this paper it is argued that his charismatic leadership went through four distinct types of charisma (occultist, religious, inspirational, and post mortem), which aligned with

his role within Damanhur. This progression is consistent with the socially constructed nature of charisma (Wallis 1982).

This proposal has two corollaries. First, Damanhur did not emerge as a charismatic community, but as a social experiment. Second, there has been no conventional routinisation: instead of creating something radically new, Airaudi influenced the pre-existing community of Damanhur. Notably, elements that are now considered specific to Damanhur did not appear until the late 1980s: for example, its dual nature, both social and esoteric, and its spiritual mission as “City of the Future” (Gagliardi et al. 1993). While these changes granted greater autonomy to the community, they were always subject to Airaudi’s leadership, and based on the belief that his extraordinary powers—ranging from magic to healing and knowledge—came from the memories of his previous lives (Palombo 2017b, pp. 68–69).

The present study mainly stems from Damanhurian writings between 1978 and 1990, examining how recurring themes and ideas in these writings reflected or shaped the evolving relationship between Airaudi and the community³. Additionally, the analysis draws from ethnographic materials in the existing literature (Berzano 1998; Cardano 1997; Cardano and Pannofino 2018; Del Re and Maciotti 2013; Maciotti 1991; Palmisano 2020; Palmisano and Pannofino 2021, 2023).

In the second section, I discuss the applicability of the Weberian concept of charisma to Airaudi, and how it intertwines with the concept of “memory”. The second section delves into the sociological interpretations of the charismatic persona of Airaudi, examining how it connects with the concept of “memory”. The Weberian ideal-type of “charismatic leader” assigned to him proves particularly valuable in comprehending the social dynamics inherent in charismatic authority, challenging the notion that it is a static phenomenon (Wallis 1982, p. 35). This characteristic becomes apparent in the third section, where a typology of Airaudi’s four charismatic phases is developed by referring to the historical context and available sources. In the conclusion, the results of the analysis are addressed, as well as its advantages and limitations.

2. A Double Framework: Charisma and Memory

The federation of Damanhur is commonly regarded as having originated as a charismatic community centred on Airaudi, that was however capable, in a short time, of endowing itself with its own structure, eventually leading to the esoteric city opening up to the secular city (Pace 2000). Airaudi remained a fixed point of reference for the community until after his death in 2013 (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 257–60; Maciotti 2023). For this reason, Damanhur has proven to be unique among new religious movements (henceforth, NRMs) with regard to charisma. Airaudi always enjoyed strong charismatic recognition from the Damanhurians, but he presented himself and was described as an “anomalous” leader; humble and elusive, if not utterly absent (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 86ff, 259). Furthermore, since its beginning, the community displayed a strong predisposition to producing norms and organising collective life down to the smallest details (Ciravegna 2020, p. 28). Both the characteristics of his charismatic leadership and the development of Damanhurian institutions do not contrast with the Weberian type of charismatic authority, but encourage a reexamination of the social construction of Airaudi’s charisma, which diverges from the linear model of routinisation usually applied.

According to Cardano (1997, p. 101), the uniqueness of Damanhur stems from its “dual nature”. The social dimension is democratic and based on equality. The spiritual dimension, on the other hand, could be described as a hierarchical “hierocracy”, whose summit was occupied by Airaudi, the “Oberto father” or “Oberto lord” as Damanhurians called him; responsible for setting the pace of each affiliate’s initiatory advancement, as well as the broader and more general work of magical and spiritual development of the entire community (Cardano 1997, pp. 99–101). While Airaudi held both *de facto* and *de iure* positions as the charismatic leader of the community (Ibid., p. 100), he did not adopt an authoritarian approach. Rather, he tried to act as “a frame with three sides”: instead of enclosing the spiritual experience within a predetermined framework, he preferred to leave

one side of the frame open to individual experimentation (Cardano 1997, p. 101; Palombo 2017a, p. 175).

Pace (2000) notes that Damanhur successfully overcame the charisma of the founder and reached a high degree of institutionalisation, whose initial phases were characterised by a high level of creativity, closer to the Weberian “status nascenti”, but also by submission to the leader and mechanical solidarity. Over the years, institutionalisation facilitated the transition to organic solidarity, whereby individuals follow self-discipline while respecting collective norms of coexistence. He defines this process as the “réussite sociale du charisma”, by which Damanhurians assured the continuity of the social experience despite the fading charisma (Pace 2000, pp. 575–77).

In the interviews collected by Maciotti, Airaudi perfectly exemplifies the Weberian model of charisma (Del Re and Maciotti 2013). Despite lacking inherent legitimacy, he successfully attracted individuals first within the Horus centres and Pranotherapy school and later within the Damanhur Federation. However, Maciotti highlights Airaudi’s “reluctance” to wield power (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 257–58; Maciotti 2023, p. 282; Palombo 2017a, p. 13), noting that he rejected the title of “master”, preferring instead the role of “inspirer from the outside” (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, p. 259). He thus motivated Damanhurians to find solutions independently, without relying solely on his guidance (Ibid., pp. 87–88). His charisma was predominantly expressed by inspiring Damanhurians and propelling them toward greater knowledge (Ibid., pp. 86–92)⁴. Nevertheless, Damanhurians recognised a charisma of a philosophical, alchemical, healing, and spiritual nature in him (Ibid., pp. 86–92). All in all, the figure that emerges from the interviews is a leader who offered his pupils tools to unlock alternative worlds and thus reach him on the road to awakening (Ibid., pp. 77–89).

For Berzano (1998, p. 15), Airaudi embodied the Tibetan figure of a *tulku*: a being who, having attained the state of a *bodhisattva*, can maneuver in space and time to embody his own “wisdom mind”, and help others achieve liberation from *samsara*. From a sociological point of view, the evolution of consciousness corresponds to an untiring “status nascenti”, the continuous transcending of traditional norms, which is peculiar to Damanhur (Berzano 2017, 2023).

The special status enjoyed by Airaudi, while unconventional in relation to the community, was rooted in a distinctive concept of memory. Airaudi’s charismatic feature, evidenced in Damanhurian literature, prominently revolved around the notion that memory is a means of spiritual enlightenment. This is a narrative leitmotif in his writings (Airaudi 1978a, 1984, 2004), and is also systematically presented in doctrinal texts (Palombo 2017a, 2017b; Faruolo 2021).

The concept of “memory” in religions has drawn significant attention in various academic works, which varies in accordance with the specific context or meaning attributed to it (Sakaranaho 2011; Borgeaud 1988; Eliade 1963). When dealing with memory, Damanhurian spirituality presents many similarities with other religious traditions, and especially Gnosticism and Eastern spirituality, which it draws on through Theosophy. Indeed, it recalls Blavatsky’s akashic memory (Blavatsky [1888] 1908, p. 358; Introvigne 1999, p. 142).

In essence, Damanhurians believe that nearly every material form houses a fragment of a shattered god (Cardano 1997, p. 253). Living beings, especially humans, have forgotten their divine origins, much as they forget their rebirths with each death. Remembering previous existences allows individuals to become aware of their true divine nature, urging them to reunite the fragments of the god to restore its spiritual perfection (Faruolo 2021, pp. 16–19). Airaudi acted as the alchemical catalyst for this process, maieutically awakening the disciples’ memories and drawing the knowledge needed to complete it from his own memory (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, p. 91).

There is “little consensus on the exact meaning” of charisma (Irons 2023, p. 15) because it applies to various situations. Even though it stems from reflection on power legitimization (Riesebrodt 1999), charismatic authority also applies to religious leaders (Irons 2023, p. 15; Prophet 2016; Tucker 1968, p. 731). In particular, NRMs, such as Damanhur, offer a

valid perspective to examine “the formation and use of charisma” due to their recent establishment (Irons 2023, p. 18; Prophet 2016, p. 36; 2021).

In Weber’s formulation, charismatic is an ideal-type of legitimation of authority that rests neither on a personal relationship with a traditional position of power nor on obedience to impersonal laws. Charismatic authority is endowed by an emotional relationship with the person of the leader and his/her gifts of grace, which are deemed extraordinary, i.e., charisma (Weber 2018, p. 555). Charismatic authority, contrary to the legal and traditional counterparts, is irrational and inherently revolutionary; it is also alien to, and sometimes critical of, established power (Riesebrodt 1999). Its normative foundation lies in the words of the leader, whose superior qualities allow him/her to establish new principles for the lives of the disciples. Charismatic authority knows only self-imposed limits and determinations, and is “eternally new” because it initiates an everlasting “status nascenti” opposed to existing constraints (Weber 2018, pp. 315–16, 342, 549–55).

Weber also insisted on the extraordinariness of charismatic authority (Pace 1991, p. 29; Weber 2018, p. 315). While traditional and legal authorities deal with fixed, consistent, and countable needs, charisma applies to everything beyond everyday life, to what is heterogeneous and unpredictable (Weber 2018, p. 315). Its extraordinary nature makes its existence labile and in need of unceasing confirmation (Ibid., p. 318). The recognition by proof (*Bewahrung*) indicates its social nature and embodiment in the charismatic community (*Gemeinde*). The *Gemeinde* is fundamentally unstructured, though it can rapidly adopt forms of partial organisation (Theobald 1980, p. 85). If, for whatever reason, disciples stop recognising the charisma of the leader, his/her authority immediately loses legitimation (Tucker 1968, p. 753ff; Wallis 1982; Weber 2018, p. 555).

For Weber, charisma is a complex social and symbolic phenomenon (Pace 1991, p. 35; Wallis 1982, p. 38; Weber 2018, p. 558), which subject to processes of generation, manipulation, and preservation (Wallis 1982, p. 27). In other words, “becoming charismatic is not a once and for always thing”, as the case of David Berg (1919–1994), founder of the Children of God⁵, exemplifies (Wallis 1982, p. 35). Within the group, the “broader elite” (Wallis 1982, p. 35) or “charismatic aristocracy” (Prophet 2016, p. 41; 2021, p. 188) contributes to the social construction of a leader’s extraordinary status. They are members entrusted with the process of “charismatisation”, tasked with supporting the charismatic nature of the leader and communicating it to fellow disciples and new members (Prophet 2016, 2021). Charismatic authority tends to be weakened by attempts to transform it into a daily ruling (Weber 2018, p. 341). The relationship between these forms of organisation and the charismatic persona is evidenced at the moment of the succession of charisma, usually because the leader’s death triggers the process of routinisation (Pace 1991, p. 31). In this context, charisma is a resource that may produce conflict (Pace 2000).

Airaudi’s case exemplifies the social construction and, above all, the dynamic nature of charismatic authority. Although it did not aim to immediately revolutionize the whole of Italian society, Damanhur originated from sources that were highly critical of contemporary society, which is why it sought to go beyond the “everyday” dimension by undertaking a social experiment under the guidance of Airaudi. While this study does not explicitly identify a charismatic aristocracy, the social organisation of Damanhur was undeniably shaped by the evolution of Airaudi’s charisma. Particularly noteworthy was his ability to instill the concept of memory as a lost heritage in need of reclamation, both at individual and collective levels, via spiritual means. The subsequent section delineates four key phases of this process, offering a structured insight into the genesis and evolution of his charismatic influence and his profound impact on the Damanhur community.

3. The Four Phases of Airaudi’s Charisma

In this paper, a nuanced understanding of the charismatic relationship is proposed by identifying four distinct types of Airaudi’s charisma. These types, rather than being separate, are sequential developments of his underlying charisma:

- Occultist (1975–1985);

- Religious⁶ (1985–1992);
- Inspirational (1992–2013);
- Post mortem (2013–today).

Time frames are selected according to significant events within the community. However, they are not separated by distinct, clear-cut boundaries. Since this subdivision is made to facilitate analysis and interpretation of the case, the individual stages do not enjoy the same importance. More specifically, the second phase is key to understanding Airaudi's charisma. Conversely, the fourth phase is limited, both by the recentness of the events it describes and the death of Airaudi.

Moreover, this framework is not intended to challenge other similar temporal distinctions, such as the one proposed by Cardano (Cardano 1997, p. 82; Berzano 1998, p. 16; Pace 2000, p. 577) and further elaborated by Cardano and Pannofino (2018, pp. 4–5)⁷. The analysis takes into account changes in the persona of Airaudi, the community, and the broader socio-cultural context.

3.1. Occultist Charisma

Airaudi was born in 1950 in Piedmont into a middle-class family. Accounts of his childhood usually highlight the unexceptional environment in which he spent his youth, contrasting with his quiet but remarkable abilities, such as healing the bruises of his playmates (Airaudi [2011] 2020, pp. 73–78; Maciotti 2023, p. 279)⁸. In his twenties, he began immersing himself in the occultist milieu of Turin. In 1975 he co-founded the Horus Centre for Parapsychological Research and Information (henceforth, Horus Centre) with Benedetto Lavagna (Cardano and Pannofino 2018, p. 4). He also became an accomplished pranotherapeutic healer, starting a school of pranotherapy⁹ in 1976 (Maciotti 2023, pp. 278–79).

To some extent, Damanhur is the social expansion of these experiences. In around 1977, Airaudi and his colleagues came up with the idea of creating a place where they could conduct the research of the Horus Centre every day, and not just on a few evenings of each week¹⁰ (Maciotti 2023, p. 280). The early works of Airaudi (1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1987a, 1988) provided the foundational exploration of these subjects, delving into occultist practices such as hypnosis, spiritualism, and chromotherapy.

Initially, he stressed the importance of knowing how to die and live well in *this* life (Airaudi 1978a). He claimed everyone could attain this goal if they were willing to trust the humble claims that he made to legitimise his knowledge: namely the memory of his previous existences (Ibid., p. 8). While not (yet) integrated into a comprehensive cosmology, this idea reveals the fundamental tenet of Damanhurian doctrine that salvation originates in *memory*. This concept of memory would later take on Gnostic overtones, with a greater emphasis on the divine splinter within every human and living being that Damanhurians try to reawaken, freeing themselves from self-oblivion (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 117)¹¹. In these first years, however, Airaudi did not express—at least in his books—any such idea. He just felt called to report his own experience so that other people could avoid repeating his mistakes (Airaudi 1978a, p. 8). The instructions were mere suggestions that everyone could follow independently from their religion (Ibid., p. 9).

The members of the Horus Centre wanted to experience a new kind of society, based on the esoteric principles they believed in, which was free of individualism and more attentive to people and nature; hence the radical ban on smoking, the rejection of medicalisation and consumerism; and the stress on care for ecology, alternative healing, and living a pure and healthy life that might provide better preparation for reincarnation (Airaudi 1978a).

Damanhurians-to-be chose to establish “the village of a city-tribe, a nucleus of humanity” because they felt that human beings could not fully realise their nature in coeval society, bound by countless shackles: anguish, insecurity, careerism, unbridled ambition, “the taxes, the car, the fine, the neighbour upstairs making noise, the shop downstairs robbed, the fear of entering the bank, school, drugs, work. . .”; Airaudi and his companions wished to “rescue us from ourselves, reclaiming a human dimension” (Airaudi 1988, p. 26–27). They realised that “the gap between the teachings drawn in Horus and ‘normal life’, with its

emotionality and its ugliness, with its compromises, has become wider, deeper and unbridgeable" (Ibid., pp. 27–28). The awareness of living at the dawn of the Age of Aquarius, or the will to realise it, urged a personal inner transformation, to be cultivated within the unconstrained framework of Damanhur.

From a political perspective, the initial "military" government, led by Airaudi (Cardano 1997, p. 82), rapidly gave way to more democratic and participative constitutions (Cardano 1997, p. 82). In Constitution I (1981) Damanhur even decided to welcome anyone who wanted to approach and share the community system, even if they did not necessarily adhere to its esoteric beliefs (Ciravegna 2020, pp. 28–29).

As a young occultist, Airaudi displayed the necessary charisma to attract individuals interested in parapsychology, the paranormal, and the occult, who first joined him at the Horus Centre and what would later become the Federation of Damanhur. However, it is reasonable to believe that Damanhur did not initially emerge as a charismatic community, at least in the Weberian sense of a fundamentally deconstructed social group dependent on the leader.

Certainly, Airaudi was perceived by others as "extraordinary", and as an excellent occult practitioner and a gifted pranotherapist, whose superior abilities provided insights into realities beyond the industrial and consumer-driven world that Damanhurians collectively rejected. Moreover, the "revolutionary" scope of the Damanhurian enterprise, which challenged external society by trying to create an entirely new one, should not be underestimated (Berzano 1998, p. 55). Rather, what was at stake was the question of a charismatic authority giving rise to a community that is not the classically understood *Gemeinde*, but rather a group fundamentally regulated from its outset by legal forms of authority, such as constitutions. This was in turn related to the question of a religious charisma that did not rest on a clear religious-spiritual vision, which would allow the social enterprise to be read as a religious-spiritual enterprise. This shortcoming will emerge more clearly in the next phase, when the social sphere of Damanhur is subordinated to the spiritual sphere.

Instead, in this period, Damanhur more closely resembled a social experiment enriched by esoteric interests than a spiritual community rooted in religious tenets. Some elements of Damanhurian thought emerged in this first period, namely the reality of reincarnation of the spirit and the possibility of influencing it before death¹² (Airaudi 1978a, 1978b). However, these beliefs were a loose collection of thoughts and practices related to the occult and paranormal, rather than a fully developed philosophical system rooted in everyday Damanhurian life. Therefore, those who initially joined the first Damanhurians might be regarded as active members rather than mere followers, and could even be seen as co-founders of the community. In fact, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that they deemed Airaudi to be a prophetic leader or that they saw Damanhur as a collective mission to save the world. Adopting Pace's terminology (Pace 1991, p. 32), Airaudi was comparable to a "performer" who showcased his charismatic qualities through practical demonstrations.

Many of these thoughts started to coalesce only after the "Game of Life" in 1983, a venture in which Airaudi travelled across Italy to perform magical experiments and attract new members to the community (Meijerink 2003, pp. 160–62; Cardano and Pannofino 2018, p. 4)¹³. This event not only provided a chance for the "pioneers" to interact with outsiders, but also laid the foundation for Airaudi's role as the spiritual guide of the community.

3.2. Religious Charisma

Airaudi began to articulate the Damanhurian doctrine in his writings around 1983, and it had begun to consolidate and assume clearer form by the late 1980s (Airaudi 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1985). He gradually abandoned occultist practices as an end in themselves, and instead sought to establish an approach "in which the personal experience and reflection that arise are more important than the prodigy, in order to redefine the characteristics of human beings and their connections with other expressions of life" (Palombo 2017b, pp. 67–68).

Concurrently, the community underwent a significant transformation in 1986–1987, aligning the communal project with Damanhurian thought. Therefore, the construction of Airaudi's charisma seems to have gone hand in hand with the greater organisational complexity of the social sphere of Damanhur, dismissing the idea of “routinisation”.

Three elements immediately show an evolution of Damanhurian thought towards a “magical-esoteric vision”: the myth of Enkidu, an entity of alien origin, which assumed the guise of a gorilla to aid Airaudi in his esoteric pursuits (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 68); the PanRevive (1989) project, whereby Damanhurians strove to reawaken the environmental consciousness of the planet, personified by the god Pan¹⁴; and the time travels Airaudi claimed to have conducted, in around 1985, to Atlantis¹⁵. According to community members, Damanhur is an attempt to reclaim the vast esoteric knowledge inherited by Atlantis from preceding civilisations¹⁶, which was subsequently lost when it sank into the sea.

Damanhurians held that Atlantean esoteric doctrine yearns for *spiritual evolution* through magical practices to reach true human (divine) nature, and stressed that each entity (living beings and crystals) holds a splinter of what they refer to as “Primaeval Divinity Man”. This immortal deity of pure consciousness, entered the realm of matter eons ago and, in its ceaseless pursuit of evolution, fragmented itself to experience reality, and eventually forgot its nature. Among all forms of matter, humans have been entrusted with facilitating its evolution, transmitting magical knowledge from civilisation to civilisation (Faruolo 2021, pp. 16–19).

In what would later become the Damanhurian belief system, the initiatory path of the members, expressed in narrative form in the “Trilogy of the Initiate”, has considerable importance (Airaudi 2004). Originally published as single monographies¹⁷, they are not treatises but can instead be considered the summa of Airaudi's thoughts about the esoteric mission of Damanhur.

The contents of the books revolve around OroCritshna¹⁸, the “envoy with memory” (Airaudi 1987b, p. 7): in a post-industrial world where humanity has regressed to a primitive existence, OroCritshna strives to rekindle memories of the great ancient civilisations among the survivors¹⁹. His followers must engage in the “Game of Life”, awaiting awakening “when the master would have decided and allowed” (Airaudi 1987b, p. 8). In *Sette porte scarlatte*, OroCritshna's successor, the monk Vadusfadamo²⁰, leads some disciples on the path to illumination through seven trials²¹. The fourth gate, where each member gains memories of past lives, is crucial to continue the journey (Airaudi 2004, pp. 273–80). Within the framework of Damanhurian initiatory asceticism, the fourth gate prepares initiates for the transmutation or alchemical distillation of the spirit, the fifth gate helps them for overcome the conditioning of others, and the sixth gate helps the overcome the fear of death. The construction of the seventh and final gate is still pending. Until now, disciples have traversed the gates individually, either succeeding or failing alone. Henceforth, they must work collectively to pave the way for spiritual evolution (Ibid., p. 277).

Therefore, to advance in its spiritual pursuits, Damanhur had to transition from fostering individual spirituality within a community to adopting a form of collective spirituality for the community as a whole. For Airaudi, awakening is an individual concern that can only be attained through a collective effort (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 295).

In this context, Airaudi was Vadusfadamo, guiding the Damanhurians in their collective esoteric venture; but he was also OroCritshna,²² because he did so by his maieutic abilities, as witnessed by a Damanhurian: “So, surely, [Airaudi helped me open] the door of memory, of a memory that is not only tied to the present but a wider memory, an impressive capacity for thought, for multi-thinking” (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 91–93).

Two events exemplify the impact on the community of this new collective spirituality: the “Rite of the People” and the promulgation of Constitution V (Ciravegna 2020, p. 30)²³.

Performed in December 1986²⁴, the “Rite of the People” signified the shift from a shared to a collective spirituality, leading “each individual to recognise himself as a conscious part of something greater than the community family” (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 32). According to Zattini, the “People” is “a collective entity with a common mind,

produced by the quality of spiritual, social and emotional human aggregation. It is a living creature [...] a collective individual” (in [Berzano 1998](#), p. 11).

Constitution V (February 1987) followed immediately afterwards, introducing three main changes. First, Airaudi became one of the three “King/Queen Guides”, overseeing the community’s commitment to its spiritual goal. Second, Damanhur was split into three “Bodies”: the School of Meditation (esoteric sphere), the Game of Life (innovation sphere), and the City (social sphere). Third, Damanhur’s esoteric mission was explicitly stated: it became the “Holy city of the future, the first door, the first step, through which one can access the great spaces of mind and spirit” ([Gagliardi et al. 1993](#), p. 29). It is “a place of symbols and sacred signs destined to regenerate the spirit of the individual faithful and the community: it is their ideal city, the sacred mountain, the new Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God on Earth” ([Berzano 1998](#), p. 50).

These developments suggest a probable shift in the Damanhurian experience. What initially began as a social experiment had, over a decade, acquired a religious overtone, expressed by a collective spiritual evolution that was embodied in the “City of the Future”. From this moment on, the “dual nature”—social and esoteric—of Damanhur arises, and aims to merge the spiritual project with the community ([Cardano 1997](#), p. 88, n. 10).

In essence, Airaudi’s leadership, a harmonious blend of mystical heritage and pedagogical skill, crafted a narrative that not only justified his role but also fostered a profound sense of community and purpose among his *followers*.

3.3. Inspirational Charisma

In subsequent years, Airaudi gradually withdrew from direct political involvement in Damanhur, appearing to relinquish his charismatic presence. According to some scholars, the strategic distancing of charismatic leaders from their followers can be seen as a method to strengthen charisma ([Prophet 2016](#), pp. 37–38; [Wallis 1982](#)). In the case of Airaudi, this transition was facilitated by the enduring charismatic authority he held as a spiritual guide.

According to [Pace \(2000, pp. 577–79\)](#), Damanhur adopted an approach of “internal institutionalisation”, which replaced the first “creative” and charismatic phase with the 1989 constitution, emancipating itself from the charismatic influence of the founder²⁵ and becoming an “esoteric republic”²⁶. This marked the opening of the esoteric society to the secular one ([Pace 2000](#), p. 579).

The discovery of the underground temples by Italian police in 1992 is emblematic of this process. This then sparked a political debate about their preservation that forced Damanhur to open itself up to the public, making it renowned in Europe and beyond²⁷.

During these years, Damanhur experienced robust economic development. In 2004 it created the Damanhur Consortium and purchased the former Olivetti factory in Vidracco, renaming it “Damanhur Crea”²⁸. Damanhur also committed to entering local politics through the movement Con Te, per il Paese. In 1999, Damanhurians even managed to elect a community member as mayor of Vidracco (TO), and others as city councillors in surrounding areas ([Ozzano 2023](#)).

This is the moment when the social experiment of Damanhur tries to apply to the outside society, in order to “transform an initiatic path in a project of alternative global society” ([Pace 2013](#), p. 212)²⁹. This new trend emerges from efforts to relate more frequently to other similar realities³⁰. The openness of this period foresees their present commitment to globalisation or, as they call it, the “damanhurisation of the world” ([Palmisano 2023](#), pp. 159–62)³¹.

From a doctrinal perspective, no major innovations were introduced during the 1990s–2000s. Instead, there was a focussed effort on delving deeper into existing themes, progressively codifying them, and introducing new elements to the established framework.

The establishment of the *Tecnarcato* (2001), which was the fourth Body of Damanhur that was tasked with overseeing and promoting the spiritual evolution of every Damanhurian, marks a significant development. The *Tecnarcato* aimed to harness individual

spiritual growth for the collective benefit of the community as a whole (Cardano and Pannofino 2015, p. 141; Ciravegna 2020, p. 36, n. 79).

Airaudi still held onto his role of “ruler” of the “spiritual Damanhur” (Cardano 1997, p. 99), as evidenced by the achievement of “the magical under-taking of modern times”, which involved: (a) the separation of temporal planes (1979); (b) the liberation of the synchronic lines (1999); (c) the completion of the Triad project (2002) (Faruolo 2021, pp. 261–300).

While the esoteric significance of these events elaborated by the community cannot be fully examined here, it is crucial to grasp the essence and purpose of this narrative. According to the Damanhurians, these rituals were the culminating part of a mission bestowed upon Airaudi by a council of wise men in the future, approximately 600 years in the future (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, p. 320; Airaudi 2004, p. 25ff; Palombo 2017a, p. 80).

When he was still a boy, a stranger gave Airaudi a trunk of esoteric writings, from which Airaudi regained the memory of his previous lives (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 279–80; Airaudi [2011] 2020, p. 168). He thus remembered that he had been sent back in time with the imperative task of establishing a new temporal plane, the one we live in today, to prevent the destruction of humanity and the ultimate detachment of the *primaeval* deity’s consciousness from matter, which would eventually signify the end of every life form. Therefore, the founding of Damanhur is the last chance for humanity to restore the connection with the gods of the Triad and reignite the path toward spiritual evolution (Palombo 2017a, p. 80; 2017b, pp. 68–69)³².

The community stands in every aspect as the tangible realisation of the mission entrusted to him³³; and Berzano (1998, p. 15) rightly compares him to the forgiving and loving figure of the *tulku*. This view is consistent with his refusal to participate in the community rites, as his humble reluctance is also a sign of his spiritual superiority (Cardano 1997, p. 273).

Considering this, the profound significance of his persona stood in contrast to his demeanour within the community, as recounted by the Damanhurians. For example, he never used his leadership position to exploit the community, and instead consistently supported citizens (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 85–101). Additionally, according to some, he maintained a reserved and even overly shy disposition, and stimulated Damanhurians to find solutions by themselves instead of relying on his opinion (Ibid., pp. 87–88). Airaudi mainly exercised his charisma in inspiring Damanhurians, pushing them towards greater knowledge (Ibid., p. 92).

While it is true that Airaudi distanced himself from the “esoteric republic”, his spiritual vision deeply influenced the foundations and principles of the community in the post-1987 era. While referring to the institutionalisation of Airaudi’s charismatic authority may effectively elucidate the social outcomes reached by Damanhur, it falls short when the aim is to address the origins and evolution of his charisma (Ibid., p. 258). Instead, the concept “pastor” could provide valuable insights, as the community derives a strong identity and purpose from his charismatic leadership (Pace 1991, p. 32; Rossin et al. 1985; Gagliardi et al. 1993).

It would appear that the isolation of Airaudi from Damanhur was possible precisely because he had managed to secure his role as a charismatic leader. Hence, his charisma remained unscathed and was not diluted by routinisation. In some ways, the mythological-messianic elaboration, featuring him as the central character, allowed him at once to step away from the community and provide it with a religious foundation.

3.4. Post Mortem Charisma

Airaudi “left the body” in June 2013 due to liver cancer, a disease that Damanhurians attributed to his tireless pranotherapeutic activity, wherein he absorbed an excessive amount of negative energy over the years, thus undermining his health. Even though his physical body perished, his immortal consciousness continues to exist, preserved in a superior state of spiritual evolution that can only be accessed by the channelling of a

collective entity (Maciotti 2023). From a certain point of view, nothing has changed, as his role of “inspirer from the outside” persists to the present day.

Indeed, the situation that Damanhur has faced in the last ten years, namely the absence of its founder and spiritual guide, aligns with the role ascribed to Airaudi as the inspiration of the community. Significantly, it is apparent that Damanhur is undergoing a type of “charismatic continuity”, wherein the influence of Airaudi remains ever-present on the community’s horizon. This phenomenon is more aptly elucidated by Berzano’s (2023, 2017, p. 189) allusion to a Damanhur “not-without”³⁴ Airaudi: although distinct, they are inseparable from each other because they embody the same spiritual experience.

Two crucial events support the interpretation of Berzano. Before his passing, Airaudi decreed that, after his death, three Damanhurians would become “Wise Members” (*Saggi*), with a mandate to oversee the community’s adherence to its spiritual guiding principles. This was, to all intents and purposes, an institutionalisation of charismatic legitimacy, in which, in accordance with the concept of “office charisma” (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 258–59), authority is transferred from the leader to an institution.

He also left behind numerous letters for a trusted Damanhurian to deliver at specific times to specific recipients, including individuals and groups within the community, whose contents reportedly included prophecies, suggestions, and invitations. Multiple versions of the same letter often exist, and the “postwoman” must decide which version to deliver on the basis of the given circumstances. Any remaining letters are then burned in a ceremony without being read (Maciotti 2023). In this case, Airaudi tries to extend his role as a spiritual guide beyond his death. Just as when he was alive, he teases and stimulates the Damanhurians; while his logic is not always clear, he leaves them the freedom and responsibility to pursue their esoteric path.

Both the development of an “office charisma”, through the appointment of the “Wise Members”, and the prophetic letters show that, despite his death, the presence of Airaudi remains strong within the community.

While the changes Damanhur is carrying forward are always deemed to be following Airaudi’s original inspiration, they sometimes seem to contradict certain principles that were in place at the beginning. In particular, Damanhur has abandoned any form of isolation from the outside world, striving to present itself as an “exemplary utopia”, a laboratory for social and ecological experimentation (Palmisano and Pannofino 2014). In line with this global approach, it has introduced *Vajne* citizenship, enabling individuals from anywhere in the world to affiliate with Damanhur, facilitating the establishment of and connections with remote locations such as Colorado, Australia and Japan (Palmisano and Pannofino 2023, p. 13). Their global ambitions are also underlined by their translation of Airaudi’s principal works (those of most significance to the Damanhur community) into the English, German, Spanish, French, and Russian languages.

Although many Damanhurians have provided important elaborations, it was Airaudi who originally provided the narratives, research framework and themes. After his passing, individual Damanhurians, acting on behalf of the Federation, are trying to systematically articulate the Damanhurian philosophy and convey Airaudi’s legacy (Faruolo 2021; Palombo 2017a, 2017b). Through their efforts, insights previously reserved for Damanhurians, and seldom shared with the outside world, become publicly available (Palmisano 2023).

Usually, the death of the leader marks the end of the charismatic legitimation and the start of conflict upon this “resource” (Pace 2000). To the best of my knowledge, nothing of this kind happened in Damanhur. Given that the “City” did not rely on his charismatic leadership, either because of routinisation (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, p. 258), the early “réussite sociale du charisme” (Pace 2000), or as stated by this paper—the later implant of the charisma over the community, there was no need to engage in such a struggle. Instead, the posthumous letters and the interpretation proposed by Berzano (2017, 2023) of Damanhur “not-without” Airaudi lead us to consider that a charismatic “post-mortem” influence could still be at play.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the interplay between the charismatic authority of Airaudi and the social organisation of Damanhur can be comprehended by observing through a lens that considers the gradual evolution of charisma across four distinct phases: occultist, religious, inspirational, and post mortem. The overarching notion behind this categorisation is that Damanhur did not start as a charismatic community, but rather as a social experiment; only later did Airaudi's charisma develop, thanks to the elaboration of a complex mythology that has a religious use of memory at its core. The charismatic development absorbed Damanhur's social dimension, shaping it in accordance with a collective spiritual endeavour that sought to reawaken the divine spark within every human and thus save the world. Airaudi then moved away from the community, acting as an "inspirer from the outside" without renouncing his charismatic status, which lasted even after his death.

This interpretation has the potential to provide valuable insights into Airaudi's charismatic leadership in Damanhur. Moreover, it facilitates a deeper comprehension of the community's social organisation, offering a possible explanation for its enduring stability, even after the leader's passing. The concept of early routinisation suggests a charisma that diminishes over time, yielding to the formalized actions of disciples (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, p. 258; Pace 2000, pp. 575–77). Conversely, analysis of the Damanhurian texts suggests that Airaudi not only enhanced his charismatic influence through spiritual maieutics but also that, crucially, the community gained greater institutional complexity from this very charisma.

From a theoretical standpoint, this case study underscores the inherently relational nature of charisma, and suggests it is based on recognition by a group of followers, and is not therefore an inherent individual quality (Weber 2018, p. 555; Wallis 1982). The study of NRMs such as Damanhur is therefore of particular interest to scholars because it enables them to witness charisma "in the making" (Prophet 2016, 2021).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that this study remains incomplete and somewhat limited in scope, primarily because of the esoteric nature of Damanhurian knowledge. The adherence to a tenet of secrecy by the Damanhurians, which was notably robust until 1992 and continues to be enforced today, poses a significant obstacle to establishing the development of Damanhurian thought and, by extension, the charismatic authority of Airaudi. Likewise, it is difficult to ascertain the real value of the Temples of Humankind. Cardano (1997, p. 175) argues that the temples are an embodiment of the spiritual vocation of Damanhur, which was clear in Airaudi's mind from the beginning. However, it is essential to note that the temples are not conventional places of worship, and are instead laboratories for magical rituals and experimentation. This in turn leads us to ask if the temples anticipated the religious-esoteric dimension of Damanhur and were, by implication, not subject to the changes that occurred throughout the years.

To address this question, a more in-depth exploration of the relationship between Damanhur and the Horus Centre over the years is essential. To the best of my knowledge, no systematic research of the centres has been conducted, despite the fact that this was where Airaudi's charisma first emerged.

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Notes

- ¹ Officially, since the promulgation of its Constitution VI in June 1989, Damanhur has considered itself to be a "federation of communities" (Ciravegna 2020, pp. 31–32). In fact, according to the statute, communities can accommodate a maximum of 220 individuals, a number that was already widely exceeded at that time (Introvigne 1996, p. 75).

- 2 Actually, the period of the foundation extends from 1977 to 1979. The construction of the first *nucleo*, the Damanhurian housing unit, began in February 1977 (Ciravegna 2020, p. 17); on 25 June 1978, Damanhurians performed a pact with the nature spirits of the place (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, p. 123); 1979 is considered the year I of the foundation (Rossin et al. 1985).
- 3 Sociologists in particular have studied Damanhur, although only since the early 1990s. In this article, textual source narrative, journalistic, apologetic, biographical, and doctrinal works, which were produced by the founder and some Damanhurians, are used to try to better understand the development of the community. The main focus is on Airaudi's works (Airaudi 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1984, 1985, 1987a, 2004, [2011] 2020) and Damanhurian rielaborations (Rossin et al. 1985; Gagliardi et al. 1993; Palombo 2017a, 2017b; Faruolo 2021). Scholars have already drawn on some of these writings, though this use has never been systematic or central to their analysis (Cardano 1997; Del Re and Maciotti 2013; Palmisano 2023). All the translations are mine.
- 4 According to the interviews he: (a) made complex things simple, (b) was a beloved teacher who stood aside, notwithstanding the infinite amounts of knowledge and wisdom he had, (c) acted as a scapegoat before Italian law, (d) was a helpful person, above all, (e) had maieutic and visionary abilities, (f) pushed them towards greater knowledge, (g) had an extraordinary ability to awaken inner senses and meanings, such as memory.
- 5 Also known as "The Family International", the Children of God was a controversial religious movement founded in 1968 by David Berg (1919–1994), who claimed to be the messenger of God. His followers often referred to him as "Father David" or "Moses David".
- 6 The Damanhurians do not consider themselves to be a "religion" and prefer to speak of a "philosophy" that is open to change and personal evolution (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 27). In this work, "religious" is used to indicate a more or less coherent set of beliefs and practices that, in the Damanhurian vocabulary, constitute a "magical-esoteric vision" (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 100). This vision is fiercely opposed to contemporary consumerism and helps to discover a "mystical sense" of reality. In this sense, for pragmatic reasons, no clear boundary is drawn between the "spiritual" and the "religious".
- 7 According to Cardano and Pannofino (2018, pp. 4–5), Damanhur went through five phases: (1979–1983) the foundation, with austere normative and leadership along military lines by Airaudi; (1983–1988) the "Game of Life" creative phase, with complete communion of goods, loosening of norms and major participation in the democratic process; (1988–1992) tighter control, because Airaudi wanted the economic activities to be more profitable; (1992–2001) the discovery of the underground temples resulted in the relaxation of economic pressure relaxed and a growth of creative inputs; (2001–2013) the *Tecnarcato* imposed increasingly stringent rules to govern the initiate's progress and raise the spiritual level; (2013–today) the death of Airaudi and leadership by those chosen by him.
- 8 A Damanhurian once referred to him as an "instinctive healer" (Palombo 2017a, p. 12).
- 9 Pranotherapy consists of healing by the placing of hands that "extract" the negative energies of the "aura" (i.e., the invisible and energetic body).
- 10 See *Pietre dell'Età dell'Acquario. Editoriali 1975–1988*: "[...] We don't want to escape, detach, and leave others in trouble. We are people just like all of you, except that we are trying to do something new. [...] Damanhur is not the village to escape the end of the world; it is the place to save ourselves from ourselves, finding ourselves in a human dimension. [...] Reconnecting with clean and good things. [...] perhaps we will rediscover human dimensions within ourselves and around us. [...] Damanhur will be the village of a city tribe. A nucleus of humanity" (Airaudi 1988, pp. 26–27).
- 11 See, for example, Filoramo (1990, p. 84) for a reference to the Gnosticism.
- 12 The slogan could be: "Viviamo per imparare a morire, impariamo a morire per vivere bene" (We live to learn to die, we learn to die to live well) (Airaudi 1978a, pp. 8, 10).
- 13 Also see Airaudi (1987b, p. 41) for insight into the creative habitus and the spirit of the "Game of Life": "[...] this game, exalts and destroys, annihilates and reconstructs; it makes disappear and creates. Every individual can be reborn. Every being from its own ashes can rise. There are no limits or restraints on the human will. And when needed, different answers are given to the same questions. Desire arises from lack of love, from the selfishness of those whose eyes are closed".
- 14 The project is related to the creation of the "Triad", which consists of tracing all deities created by man back to the three main ones: Horus, the sea goddess Bastet, and Pan. It went through the rite of the liberation of the synchronic lines in 1999 and finally came to an end on 12 August 2002. On the preceding 25 June, the new era of the Triad was opened: "[it] marked the first dawn of the new epoch, in which humanity may have the possibility of soul-awakening" (Faruolo 2021, p. 285). The Triad represents, from the esoteric point of view, man's re-establishment of a connection with all divine forces, enabling them to be allied to him on his path to awakening (Faruolo 2021, pp. 275–91). The Triad already appears in *Il mito delle maschere di zaffiro* (Airaudi 1984) with Horo, the Goddess of the Sea Vortexes and the Mysterious God. It was written in 1984, when Pan had not yet awakened the Damanhurian vision. Cf. Faruolo (2021, pp. 275–91).
- 15 Airaudi allegedly took the painter Dovilio Brero with him (1950–2008). According to some who left the community, when Dovilio was interviewed about the trip, he replied that it was only a "travel of imagination" (Cardano and Pannofino 2015, p. 150).
- 16 Before Damanhur, other civilisations across the universe pursued awakening, achieving incredible heights in technology, arts, and knowledge. They included the Human Galactic Empire, Lemuria, and Mu (Palombo 2017a, p. 123).

- 17 *Morire per imparare* (1987?); *Rinascere per vivere* (1987?); *Sette porte scarlatte: la strada ai fuochi centrali 888* (1988) (Airaudi 2004). Due to missing details and contrasting information, the date of publication of the first two volumes remains unclear. The 1987 date is a *terminus ante quem*.
- 18 This is a compound name of Horus and Krishna.
- 19 “Why then print such strange, absurd words, organized in such a way, as you are reading? Is it a speech for only initiates? And you who read who you are? What prevents you from reaching the dark message? Open these pages randomly, and you will always find the phrase suitable for you, the circumstance, the problem you are in. [...] What prevents you from finding all the answers within yourself? All the answers are in every man” (Airaudi 2004, p. 124). In addressing these words to the reader, Airaudi clarifies OroCrittshna’s task: he did not come to reveal a truth, but to awaken it in each person: this is because each person is essentially part of the divine, and it is only by rediscovering their true nature that they will be freed from the shackles of social conditioning.
- 20 This is a compound name. In the “Holy Tongue” (in Italian: *Lingua Sacra*)—or Atlantean Tongue—which was recovered by Airaudi and used for ritual purposes, vad- means “power”, usfad- means “consciousness”, and am- means “name”.
- 21 The first: to take the path, to have chosen. The second: widening one’s consciousness beyond the self. The third: to distinguish true wealth from false wealth. The fourth: remembering past lives. The fifth: transmutation or alchemical distillation of the soul. The sixth: freeing oneself from the conditioning of others and overcoming the fear of death.
- 22 In the long monologue that is *The First Book of the Initiate*, OroCrittshna “sits, in the evening, after work in the fields, among his fellows ‘who do not yet remember’ [...] and tells them what everyone, deep inside himself, already knows” (Airaudi 2004, p. 14).
- 23 Other changes include the creation of the “Vie” (Paths) in 1989 (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, p. 347), which was intended as the commitment to one specific aspect of Damanhurian spirituality, and to foster the spiritual evolution of the individual within the communitarian context. In 1987, the Free University of Damanhur was established as a precondition of the School of Meditation (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 73). In 1985, the Ritual of the Oracle was inaugurated (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 122–23), and subsequently tried to recover essential information about Damanhurians’ past lives. They are all reported in the first, so to speak, systematic text about Damanhur: *La via horusiana* (Gagliardi et al. 1993).
- 24 December, 6th 1986, h 21:21. It represents “the path of social and spiritual growth that Damanhurians are taking” (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 37). The magic meaning of the People is that “the People allows us to ‘hook’ the Damanhur Deity (who, as such, is still outside of time) to make her act on our temporal reality and be through it” (Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 34). Deities, in Damanhurian thought, are “super-entities capable of intervening in matter with a potential and temporal extension far greater than human possibilities” and their creation by man is the highest expression of magic (Faruolo 2021, p. 20). They are not to be confused with the Primaeval Gods, who are self-generated. Horus falls into the former category (Faruolo 2021, pp. 13–21, 275–91; Gagliardi et al. 1993, p. 107).
- 25 “Le pouvoir désormais ne se fonde plus uniquement sur la figure charismatique d’Oberto [...]; il repose aussi sur d’autres personnalité capables d’exercer un charisma de fonction” (Pace 2000, p. 579).
- 26 Damanhur became a school for political administrators, since the inauguration of Antonio Nigro as mayor of Vidracco: “La république ésotérique s’est ainsi transformée en une école de formation pour administrateurs politiques” (Pace 2000, p. 579).
- 27 The Temples of Humankind are a series of interconnected underground rooms of great magical values. Their realisation began in secret in 1978 and continues to this day. In 1992, an outcast from the community reported to the Italian authorities the building abuse, causing a legal dispute over the Temples. The Federation of Damanhur eventually won and maintained ownership of the construction. About the Temples, cf. Introvigne (1995), and Del Re and Maciotti (2013).
- 28 *Damanhur Crea* hosts a plethora of commercial activities and services, including craft workshops where mosaics and jewelry are produced; a local supermarket, a coffee bar, a polyclinic—whose services include physiotherapy—a conference hall/theatre; and Solerà, the Damanhurian renewable energies company (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, pp. 119–20).
- 29 “Un tale tipo di impresa comporta una strategia di comunicazione che, partendo dalla ricerca di una via-vita interiore esoterica, non disdegna, a un certo punto della sua evoluzione, di uscire allo scoperto e di far prendere corpo a bisogni puramente interiori” (Pace 2013, p. 206).
- 30 In 1997 it adhered to R.I.V.E. (Rete Italiana dei Villaggi Ecologici); in 1998, Damanhur and other associations founded the CO.NA.C.R.E.I.S. (Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità e Associazioni di Ricerca Etica, Interiore e Spirituale), and adhered to the G.E.N.-Europe (Global Ecovillages Network) (Del Re and Maciotti 2013, p. 347). Since 2011, it has held E.D.E. (Ecovillage Design Education) training courses, which are run by Gaia Education (<https://www.gaiaeducation.org/>, accessed on 30 November 2023) and G.E.N. (<https://ecovillage.org/sustainability-education/ecovillage-design-course/>, accessed on 30 November 2023) (Introvigne and Zoccatelli 2022).
- 31 “In other words, today’s mission is updated towards greater openness to the world which, on one hand, brings the world to Damanhur and, on the other, brings Damanhur to the world. The Wise Members write: ‘Damanhur welcomes the world, becoming its spiritual headlight and spreading its knowledge through the planet’”, *Il Progetto Vajne* (2018, 16) in Palmisano (2023, p. 161). The *Progetto Vajne* 2018 is a text addressed to pupils of the School of Meditation, and “Vajne” is a term in the Holy Tongue that means “spiritual evolution” (Palmisano 2023).

- 32 He was reincarnated in 88 bodies, spread across 22,000 years: “through which to experience the planet and lay the foundations for the ultimate incarnation: the one with the name and body of Oberto-Hawk [ed: his esoteric name]. Hawk carries with him the keys to access humanity’s great reservoirs of knowledge. He will receive fundamental information from his other selves distributed throughout time. He will awaken from childhood onwards his own profound memories. For Damanhurians, Hawk is the one who in different cultures is called avatar, envoy, enlightened one, master” (Palombo 2017b, pp. 68–69).
- 33 “And I’ve accumulated quite an intense experience, big enough to be able to gradually—I say—‘remember’ the details and put together all that you have just glimpsed, of what is the story of Damanhur” (Cardano 1997, p. 152).
- 34 Berzano explicitly refers to Heidegger’s “nicht ohne” category (Berzano 2017, p. 189).

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