OPERA'S NOT OVER 'TIL AREPO RETURNS

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With the recent discovery in the north of England of yet another example of the famous Latin palindromic square illustrated at

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R O T A S
O P E R A
T E N E T
A R E P O
S A T O R
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the left, it is time to review the mystery surrounding this clever construction. Found at an archeological site in Manchester, this joins the other discoveries in various sites throughout the lands of the former Roman Empire. These include such as Cirencester, Pompeii and Dura-Europos in Mesopotamia. But, why should a simple message (the square translates as "the sower, Arepo, controls the wheels with care") have achieved such a widespread distribution? Is it, as some suggest, associated with Mithra, the Persian god of fire whom the Romans styled Mithras and extended his worship wherever they conquered? Or, is it Christian?

The evidence for Mithra escapes me, but the case for an esoteric Christian symbol is logologically brilliant. The whole square can

```
                A
                P
                A
                T
                E
                R
A  P A T E R N O S T E R  O
                O
                S
                T
                E
                R
                O
```

be transposed into a cross with two different synonyms for God as perceived by Christians. First, we have PATERNOSTER (Our Father), then we have Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

On the other hand, though no one wishes to promulgate such a theory, it could just be a clever word square that somebody created and others merely copied, a sort of Roman Kickshaw that was flawed by a non-word, AREPO.

To test my theory of Kickshavian origin, I devised a number of English-language word squares (given below), supplying definitions where necessary. Can any reader imagine what an archeologist two thousand years hence would make of any one of them which might survive? If, like their Roman counterpart, they were carved on stone and buried throughout the **Word Ways** distribution area what meanings can be devised? Note that the last of these is flawed by the use of the hyphenated term PUT-UP, though it, unlike the others, consists entirely of palindromes. The remainder mirror the original Roman example.

In the first square below, the asterisk can be replaced by D, H, M, R or S.

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* A L E S      A S S E T      A S S E T      A S S E T      L A T E S
A R E D E      S L I V E      S P A L E      S L E V E      A R E D E
L E V E L      S I R I S      S A P A S      S E X E S      T E N E T
E D E R A      E V I L S      E L A P S      E V E L S      E D E R A
S E L A *      T E S S A      T E S S A      T E S S A      S E T A L

S T A R T      D E D A L      S T R E W      S A P A S
T I L E R      E N E M A      T R E V E      A L U L A
A L U L A      D E W E D      R E F E R      P U T-U P
R E L I T      A M E N E      E V E R T      A L U L A
T R A T S      L A D E D      W E R T S      S A P A S
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In the list below, **obs** denotes obsolete modern English (plurals and verbal inflections may be presumed), and **Obs** denotes words obsolete before 1500 (plurals, etc., not presumable). **S** denotes Literary Scottish (not a dialect within Scotland). Literary Scottish is as valid as American English despite the tendency of Borgmann and others to equate it with any of the dialects of the British Isles.

ALULA n   the bastard-wing, those feathers on the first digit of a
    a bird's wing
AMENE adj   pleasant, agreeable
AREDE vb   to divine the meaning of (obscure words), interpret
    (dreams), solve (a riddle)
DEDAL adj   skilful, cunning
EDERA Obs n   ivy
ELAPS n   a genus of venomous colubrine snakes
EVELS obs form n/adj   EVILS
EVERT vb   to overthrow (a government), to upset (an argument),
    to frustrate (a purpose)
LADED   an acceptable variant form of LADEN (see OED)
LATES Obs form of n   LATTICE
SAPAS n   new wines boiled to a syrup: syrups of fruit juice,
    a conserve of fruit
SELAS   obs form of n   SELAH (which see)
SELAD   Obs form of n   SALAD
SELAH n   a Hebrew textual word, possibly indicating a pause
SELAM obs form of n   SALAAM
SELAR variant spelling of Obs n   CELURE, a canopy
SETAL adj   of or pertaining to the SETAE, bristles
SIRIS n   any of several trees including the acacia
SLEVE obs form of n   SLEEVE
SLIVE now dialect n/vb   (to) slice
SPALE S n   a splinter, chip or thin slice of wood
TRATS n   fishing lines with many hooks, used in the tidal waters
    of eastern England
TREVE obs n   truce
WERTS obs form of n   WARTS