

A TWELVE-SQUARE?

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Happy enough to have found 10- and 11-squares, I then heard with a sense of foreboding that Ross Eckler was retiring as editor. With more time at his disposal, perhaps he would pre-empt my discovery of the twelve square, an object which I can scarcely believe is possible (It requires about four million 12-letter words). I fear to lose my reputation as the guru of large squares. Fortunately I came across the following:

I S I C H A D A M I O N
S E R R A R E P I N T O
I R A A S I M E L E I S
C R A T I B A R I N S I
H A S I N A S U O T I R
A R I B A T I N T I R A
D E M A S I C O A N O C
A P E R U N O I B E M I
M I L I O T A B U L E L
I N E N T I N E L E L A
O T I S I R O M E L I R
N O S I R A C I L A R I

This 12x12 array of letters is said to have originated in a Hebrew manuscript of The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage of 1458 “given by God, and bequeathed by Abraham”. An English edition appeared in 1898. My edition is dated 2004 (The Book Tree), and derives from a London edition of 1900. This is square 7 of Chapter IX of the Third Book, which is full of incomplete and complete “squares”. No source or explanation is given for any of the “words”. That being the case, this is not a word square. Its purpose is to transform Animals into Stones, not to amuse.

It appeared in Dmitri Borgmann’s *Language on Vacation* (1965). He repeated a story that the words were all the names of angels (or similar), though I can find none of them. Borgmann’s considered verdict was that it was a hoax, perpetrated by someone named Ira, whose name appears seven times. My own view is that if it doesn’t turn your cat or dog into a beautiful sculpture, then it truly is a hoax.

Borgmann also claimed to have found a 13-square “consisting exclusively of common, everyday words known to every eight-year old child”. Now there’s a Borgmann/Eckler contest!

The greatly increased knowledge of large squares in recent years indicates strongly that a 12-square would be extremely difficult or impossible to construct even using a large number of languages.

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