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Hermetic Tradition

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Hermetic Tradition

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Hermeticism, the Gnostic cult surrounding the writings comprising the *Corpus Hermeticum* probably originated in the Hellenistic Era around 300 BC . It has interested historians of religion ever since Marsilio Ficino and his colleagues at the 15th century Platonic Academy at Florence initiated scholarship which was later evolved into the field of Comparative Religion.

Spread and Influence of Hermeticism

The Hellenistic fusion of Hermes with Thoth¹ was closely associated with Neoplatonism. Iamblichus, the 4th century head of the Syrian School of Neoplatonism, began his answer to Anebo in *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldaeans, and Assyrians*, London 1999 (see www.new-library.com/zoller/links for the current link to the Prometheus Trust which offers the Talyor translation of this work) with the assertion that Hermes, the God who presides over language and true science, was the God to whom the ancestors dedicated their inventions and sacred writing.

From at least the 6th century until the Renaissance Hermeticism (together with Neo-Platonism) comprised the esoteric tradition of the West, an esotericism which maintained close ties to the Middle Eastern centres of the cult: first at Alexandria and the Syrian School of Neo-Platonism and later Harran² and Baghdad.

¹ We find Hermes recognisably as such in Egypt at a late date-i.e. in the Hellenistic period (beginning from about 300 BC.) when he is already merged with the Egyptian God Thoth. But surely this fusion did not happen over night- it had already begun perhaps as early as 600 BC.

² "In a sense the old scientific center of Alexandria was moved bodily to the eastern part of the Arab Empire. The schools of medicine were transferred by the Calif Omar II between 717 and 720 to Antioch and Harran. ---Arab Science, Edwin P. Hoyt, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975. p. 34.

Among the Harranian Sabians and many of the later practitioners of the Hermetic Arts, the philosophical doctrines of the *Corpus* seem to have provided the theory and rationale. The practical astrological, alchemical and magical texts which were not included in the *Corpus* (many of which are older than the *Corpus* in as we find it today), nevertheless provided the practical means by which the ideal of human perfection were to be achieved .

Such is the impression one gets from the 11th century *Picatrix* or *Ghaya al-Hakim*, which clearly belongs to this tradition and from other closely connected traditions such as Iamblichus's 4th century Neoplatonic Theurgy, as well as Ficino's 15th century *De vita coelitus comparanda*,³ and H.C. Agrippa's 16th century *Occult Philosophy*.⁴ This interpretation is also supported by Ibn Khaldun's discussion of the magical practices of the Nabataeans who seem to be the inhabitants of Harran (see *Muqaddimah*, chapter VI, section 27)⁵ .

From the Middle Eastern centres Arabic Hermeticism reached Spain following the Moorish conquest of the Visigothic kingdom in 711 and probably after the establishment of the Omayyad dynasty in 756 AD.

³ Cf. Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*. Ficino quotes Trismegistos clearly in chapter 13 and chapter 26 while both in these chapters and elsewhere he makes Trismegistos play hide and seek with us now appearing as himself; now as Mercurius, now as the astrological planet Mercury. In chapter 26 Ficino, obliquely referring to the *Asclepius* asserts that Plotinus follows "Mercurius" (sc. Hermes Trismegistos) in making living statues by means of demons and natural things.

⁴ In this connection we might suggest that Bruno's Hermeticism amounts to a continuation of this tradition.

⁵ *The Muqaddimah*, by Ibn Khaldun, trs Franz Rosenthal, NY: Pantheon Books, 1958, pp 160-170. Vide *quoque eodem opere*, vol I, p221 where the legend of the head is discussed in connection with the *Ghaya*, and Vol II, pp, 258, 264 where the site of Jerusalem is said to have originally been the site of a Sabian Temple to Venus.

It is likely to have reached Sicily not earlier than the Arab Conquest of the island in 878⁶, where, from all appearances it remained ensconced throughout the Norman domination (11th and 12th centuries) and its inclusion in the Holy Roman Empire in the 12th and 13th centuries.

The Sicilian court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen was certainly an important hermetic centre being the meeting place of Islamic and Christian occultists and scientists such as Michael Scot, Guido Bonatti, and many Moslem scientists, including the Egyptian mathematician al-Hanifi⁷. From Sicily and Spain, we see evidence of the spread of hermetic mysticism throughout the 11th to 14th centuries.

Brother Anselm of Turmeda, a Majorcan, known to Moslem Spaniards as the Sufi teacher named Abdullah el Tarjuman. He wrote *Dispute of the Ass with Brother Anselmo*. It is a literal translation of parts of the *Rasa'il* of the Ikhwan al-Safa. Angel Gonzalez Palencia calls attention to him, in *Hispania*, XVIII, 3, October 1935. Also cf., Father Juan Andres, an expelled Jesuit, who wrote *Origin, progresos y estado actual de toda la literatura* 1782 where he tried to show the debt of the Spanish to the Arabs and even asserted that St Thomas drew on them⁸.

⁶ To my knowledge there is no evidence of any survival of a practical, living tradition of Hermeticism in the West between Constantine's adoption of Christianity and the Arab conquest of Sicily. From the literary point of view we have three important works in Martianus Capella's Wedding of Mercury and Philology, Firmicus Maternus' astrological *Mathesis*, and the Latin *Asclepius*. A living tradition of Hermeticism remained an Arabic affair until the 12th century when many alchemical, astrological and magical books were translated into Latin. Al-Mas'udi (885-956AD) is one of our earliest sources for the Harranian Sabians. He also transmitted a recipe for making gold attributed to the Omayyad prince Khalid ibn Yazid (635-704 or 708AD) who was reputed to have been a student of the Hermetic Arts. His full name was: Khalid ibn Yazid ibn Moaonia, Prince Oneeyade. He is said by some sources to have been the first Arab to take up the study of alchemy. He was a relative of the 6th Shiite Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq (d.765) and possibly knew Geber (Jabir ibn Hayyan As-Sufi, died 815).

⁷ Qaisar ibn Abu Al-Qasim ibn Abd al-Gani ibn Musafir Alam al-din al-Hanifi. mathematician, astronomer, engineer. B. Asfun, Upper Egypt, c. 1178-9 or 1168-69; studied in Egypt and Syria. Studied music and the sciences under ibn Yunus. Wrote treatise on Euclid's postulates. Built water mills on the Orontes, also fortifications; built second oldest Arabic celestial globe. Died 1251.

⁸ Idries Shah's The Sufis, London: Octagon Press 1964, 1977.

Hermeticism was enthusiastically spread throughout Italy and the rest of Europe by Humanist scholars during the 15th through 17th centuries as is indicated by the numerous translations, editions and wide distribution of the *Corpus Hermeticum* during those centuries.

Another flurry of interest, this time spearheaded by occultists and theosophists, erupted in the 19th century during the so-called "Occult Revival". This "marginal" interest is credited with stimulating scholarly interest again in the 19th and 20th centuries. {see Antoine Faivre, article "Hermetism" p.301 in Mircea Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion*.}

Everywhere we track an interest in Hermeticism we find, simultaneously, a leap of scientific, economic or literary achievement, though it is not always possible to show a direct connection between the two facts.

The Hellenistic Age is an example. Great advances in science and economics were made due to Alexander's newly created cosmopolitan civilisation.

Ptolemy I instituted a state socialism in Egypt. This has been discussed in Durant's, *The Life of Greece*, Simon and Shuster, New York, 1939, pp 587-592. There is reason to believe that the Ptolemies supported syncretistic cults such as that of Serapis as well as the Hermetic Cult as a way of creating a Greek dominated cosmopolitan population in order to more easily dominate their Egyptian holdings.

There were numerous scientific advances in Hellenistic Alexandria. We have only to mention Apollonius, Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, Hero's studies of pneumatics, Claudius Ptolemy's *Astronomical Works*, Menelaus, Nichomachus, Theon, Pappus, Metrodorus. Hermes, is probably the god to whom Proclus refers when, at the end of the first prologue of his *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, he asserts that it is the god who is the patron of Mathesis, who perfects ability in those who apply themselves to esoteric mathematics. This same god was conceived of as the source of the idea of the Mathesis Universalis or esoteric mathematical science of all knowledge to which Proclus several times alludes.

According to Clement of Alexandria, whose source was Iamblichus, Hermes was the author of from 42 to 36,525 books. (Note the number! $365.25 =$ the number of days in the Solar Year.) Clement tells us that 36 of the 42 dealt with the philosophy of the Egyptians and that the remaining 6 dealt with medicine. The *Ebers Papyrus*, which dates from 1550 BC is generally held to be one of these medical books.

The syncretism of Hermes and Thoth affected the contemporary Romans. Cicero (106-43 BC) contributes to the fusion of Hermes-Thoth with the Roman god Mercury. In *De Natura Deorum*, iii, 56, he equates Hermes (whom he identifies as the fifth man so named) as the slayer of Argus and identical with the Egyptian god Theuth (Thoth).

Hermeticism influenced intellectual and scientific development of Rome as well as the Hellenistic Middle East. An example of this is Martianus Capella's *Wedding of Mercury with Philology*. This text, which represents an indigenous European Hermeticism - a literary survival of old Roman Hermeticism, exerted a powerful influence on the subsequent Latin liberal arts tradition. This highly influential allegorical text of the 5th century teaches the seven liberal arts, and was used as a text book throughout the early Middle Ages.

In it Mercury (Eloquence) and Philology (Learning) are personified and depicted as getting married. The guests at the wedding are personifications of the Muses, Gods, Goddesses, the Arts and Sciences. Although many of the guests bear names that seem to identify them with the Olympian Gods, the setting is not Mount Olympus but the celestial spheres of heaven. Astrology is the backdrop and Neopythagoreanism and Hermeticism underlie the allegory. At one point in the allegory, Philology calculates the numbers in her name and in Mercury's unspoken "divine name". The exact passage in the text frustrated centuries of commentators until Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) decoded it as "Thouth" or Thoth, i.e. Hermes.

Islam and Sabianism

The Sabians preserved classical antiquity. Hermeticism represents a theological astrology, Gnostic in nature, which has dominated the structure, goals and methodology of the esoteric tradition in the West since its formulation. From the third century BC to the Renaissance, the esoteric tradition was almost exclusively based on the Hermetic tradition coalescing at an early date (but not in all places) with the Neoplatonic tradition.

Thus, for Thibet Ben Qurrah, a 10th century exponent of the Hermetic Tradition and perhaps the most advanced mathematician and astronomer of his day, his people, the Harranian Sabians, were "the inheritors of Classical Heathenism," that is, continuators of the classical philosophical polytheistic religion. The Sabians carved out a place for themselves in Islamic society as astronomers, physicians and makers of precision astronomical instruments such as astrolabes. Due to their nominal acceptance of the Torah and possession of the Hermetic Books they were accorded religious toleration by the Moslems and are specifically mentioned in the Koran along with Christians and Jews as the "People of the Book."

Al-Mansur (712?-775), was the second Abbasid Caliph. His full name was: abu Ja`far `Abdullah al- Mansur. he was patron of science and encouraged translation of Greek and Latin classics into Arabic. He also moved the capital to Baghdad.⁹

He was responsible for the founding of Baghdad and the establishment there of the Bait al- Hikma (House of Wisdom). To the Bait al-Hikma came Ishaq ibn Hosein and his son, Hosein ibn Ishaq, both Nestorian Christians sent by the Byzantine Emperor at Al-Mansur's request with books on astronomy, astrology and other scientific texts.

⁹ See Steinschneider Europaeische Uebersetzungen. Abteil 63f.; Millas Tradducciones p.155 on Almansoris iudicia seu propositiones of Yahya ibn abi Mansur.(Almansor) translated by Plato Tiburtinus in the first half of the 12th cent.

The work of the Hermeticists in the Bait al-Hikma transformed the direction Islam was taking by joining to the militant zeal of the desert tribes an equally zealous cultivation of Greek Philosophy and Science. These were merged with Persian and Egyptian concepts and, above all with astrology, by which the Will of Allah could be read in the heavens. Behind all lay the occult doctrines of Hermes Trismegistos.

The famous Persian astrologer Abu Ma'shar (full name: Abu Ma'shar Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn `Umar al-Balkhi) 787-886 AD) is an example of the Hermetic influence on Arabic Astrology. His works (written in Arabic) represent a curious fusion of Sabian Hermeticism, Persian chronology, Islam, Greek science and Mesopotamian astrology. He was instrumental in fostering the identification of the Antediluvian Prophet Idris with Enoch and Hermes. During this time, the Harranians began to assert that Hermes and the Agathosdaimon who they claimed as their prophets were identical with Enoch and Seth. This fusion of Hermeticism with Islam (as seen in the writings of the Alchemist Jabir al- Hayyan, for instance) was also paralleled by similar fusion in esoteric Jewish and Christian circles.

Abu Ma'shar was an extremely successful practitioner of the astrological Art. He travelled throughout the Mid East in service to numerous Indian, Persian, Arab, and Egyptian chiefs of state. His reputation was established in the Christian West by Peter of Abano in the 13th century in his *Conciliator Differentiarum Philosophorum Et Precipue Medicorum* (Diff. 156) where he quotes the *Al-Mudsakaret* or (*Memorabilia*) of Abu Sa'id Schadsan, a student of Abu Ma'shar's who recorded his teachers answers and astrological deeds.

The *Memorabilia* -which have come to be known among scholars as "*Albumasar In Sadan*" due to traditional corruption of both men's names, is analysed by Lynn Thorndike in *ISIS* 1954 . It will suffice to say here that it is perhaps the only example of a medieval astrological hagiography. It portrays "the master" as a nearly omniscient wise man learned not only in the techniques of all branches of the Art but also in its traditional history and aware of the contributions of his predecessors. He is quoted, in *Albumasar In Sadan* (p.29 of Isis article), as admitting that he follows Messahala's method of projecting rays and in other locations admits to following other methods of Messahala (Masha'allah).

Abu Ma'shar's astrological works are of the greatest importance for the history of astrology and from the practical point of view of technique. His astrological works were widely translated in the 12th century, widely circulated in manuscript, and exerted a very powerful influence on the development of Western Astrology, being, as Richard Lemay has shown an important means by which Aristotelian Science entered Europe in the 12th century.

Alfraganus, (Al-Farghani),(or in full abu-al-`Abbas Ahmad al-Farghani) was a 9th century Turkish Christian astronomer. he summarised Ptolemy's *Almagest* in his own *Elements of Astronomy*. This work was basic to European astronomy until the 15th century. It was instrumental in bringing Aristotle to the Arabs. Alfraganus seems also to have been involved in the equation of Hermes with Idris.

Thabit ben Qurra, also known as Thebit ibn Korra, or Thibet Ben Qurrah (836-901) was a 9th century exponent of the Hermetic Tradition and perhaps the most advanced mathematician and astronomer of his day, his people, the Harranian Sabians, were "the inheritors of Classical Heathenism." He was author of numerous books on astronomy and at least one on meteorological astrology. He also proposed a curious and mistaken Theory of the Trepidation of the Equinoxes.

Another famous Harranian was the astronomer/astrologer Al-Batagni or al-Battani (abu-`Abdullah Muhammad ibn Jabir al-Battani) who lived circa 850-929. He spent more than 40 years making astronomical observations at Rakka. He corrected Ptolemy's work in connection with precession of the equinoxes and wrote a work on astronomy called the *Zij*. This was translated into Latin in the 12th century as *De motu stellarum*. He used sines instead of chords as Ptolemy had in the *Almagest*. He demonstrated the motion of solar apogee since Ptolemy's time and the variation in the apparent angular distance of the Sun, thus proving annular eclipses possible. He was one of the most important astronomers of Medieval Islam and his works greatly influenced Medieval European astronomy.

The Hermetic Cult (now veiled in Koranic respectability by the fusion of Hermes and Enoch) with the added prestige of the Greek natural philosopher Aristotle provided the model that suggested that the way to Allah lay in studying his footsteps in Nature. On this symbol rested the entire foundation of Arabic science. It provided the justification for the study of Aristotle and all of Greek Science. This enabled the Hermetic magicians to erect a doctrinal edifice in which all the arts and sciences (including ethics, politics and economics) were subordinated to magic, astrology and alchemy.

This unified cosmological conception entranced the Christian Crusaders when they came in contact with the Arab Culture during the Crusades. In Europe it gave rise to Vincent of Beauvais's encyclopaedic *Speculum Universale* which was to be the literary prototype of the Gothic Cathedral- an encyclopaedia in stone dedicated to God in which through the choice and arrangement of the materials, as well as the manner of ornamentation (especially in the Rose windows and freemasonry around the porches and entrances) all the arts and sciences known to medieval man are portrayed for the public's edification.¹⁰

In the 250 years during which the Moslems tolerated the existence of these idolatrous survivors of the ancient Mesopotamian and Classical worlds, the Harranian Sabians were a pervasive intellectual and spiritual ferment in the Middle East. From 933 the Sabian community was persecuted by the Moslems. This became especially acute around 1100 when the community had been for some time leaderless and many of its number had already converted. Around this time there was a wave of Islamic Fundamentalism that was probably stimulated at least to some degree by the pressures of the Crusades. Alternatively it may have been due to the Mongols circa 1258 (see Margoliouth article on *Harranians* in *Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, London, 1917, pp 519-520) or it may have been related to the suppression of the Egyptian "Idrisids" by the Caliph and Mahdi Obaydullah in 922.

¹⁰ Cf. The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century by Charles Homer Haskins, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927, pp 308-310.

Transmission of the Hermetic Tradition To Christian Europe And Moorish Spain and Sicily

From this point on we must trace the transmission of the Hermetic Tradition to Christian Europe and Moorish Spain and the Sicily of Roger II & Frederick II. An important link in the tradition is Al-Idrisi's *Geography*.

Al-Idrisi (1099-1166) wrote *Geography* in 1154. He tells us the classic hermetic myth, the origin of which seems to be in *Corpus Hermeticum* VIII (IX) - That Existing Things Do Not Perish, But Men in Error Speak of Their Changes as Destruction and Death [vol II, p 124 in Mead and Asclepius 26, Vol II, p 356 in Mead:

"In Alchmim {in the neighbourhood of the eastern bank of the Nile} one sees a building called al-Berba {the Great Pyramid} , which was erected by the glorious Hermes before the Flood. He foresaw, in virtue of his arts, that the world would be destroyed by a catastrophe, although he did not know whether by fire or by water. For this reason he first built walls of earthy matters, free from combustible parts, and covered them with pictures and scientific emblems, so that, in case the world perished by fire, they would remain and even gain in solidity, so that those who came after could, read the inscriptions.

*Then, however, he caused a building of the hardest stone to be erected, providing thereby for the presentation of all sciences useful to man and said, " In case the catastrophe by water occurs, the buildings of earth will fall, but these [of stone] will remain and preserve science from destruction." When now the Flood occurred, everything happened as Hermes predicted. Buildings of the same kind are found in Esne and Denderah, but those in Alchmim are the most solid and are most remarkable by the number of their pictures, which represent not only the stars, but the different arts, and further the number of inscriptions is very great." *Geographie*, translated by Jaubert, Paris 1836,i,125.*

This myth repeats in esoteric literature both before al-Idrisi's day and after. In fact, it is so consistent that we may take it as certain that when we see its basic elements, we are in the presence of Hermetic Lore. The elements which comprise it occasionally change (sometimes the knowledge is placed in a column or columns, sometimes in a vault) but the theme is always one of the preservation of the arts and sciences or of hidden knowledge. We find it in the alchemical *Questions natural and mysterious (Physica et Mystica)* by Democritus or Bolos - probably 3rd century AD. It also appears in Rosicrucian Symbolism of the 17th century.

Two Medieval Muslim writers sketched conciliation of Neoplatonism and Sufism. They were Surhawardi d'Alep (1191) and Ibn Sab (1289). The latter was a correspondent of Frederick II. The former attempted to reconcile Sufism with Neoplatonism through association with the Agathodaemon (= Seth). The second through a chain of initiates descending from the three Hermes, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander, Hallaj, Shibli, Niffari (author of *Mawaquif*), Habashi, Qadib al-Ban, Shudhi (= Hallawi, the cadif of Seville) and himself (Ibn Sab). You will note that this chain of initiates completely by-passes Muhammad as well as Jesus. This tradition and lineage of hermetic teachers must be seen as an important antecedent to Ficino's later (15th century) "*Golden Chain*" of *Prisci Theologi*.

The Hermetic Tradition came to be the esoteric tradition of the Medieval World and has remained a vital esoteric tradition to this day. Thorndike, in his *History of Magic and Experimental Science*,¹¹ devotes an entire chapter to the subject of the "Hermetic Books in the Middle Ages" and shows how wide spread the association of Hermes with alchemy, magic and astrology is.¹²

¹¹ Vol.I, Chapter XLV, pp 214-228. Also the following chapter XLVI pp 229-235 on Kyranides is of interest.

¹² Thorndike also gives a partial list of Hermetic astrological, alchemical and magical works.

Everywhere Hermeticism went it exerted a magically transformative effect, teaching human perfection and the preservation of Greek learning. It was usually associated with the occult arts but it is not only through these that Hermeticism exerted its influence. Often it was through its suggestive and hidden use of symbolism or semiotics that it wrought its transmutations.

Hermeticism interested the scholars of the Cathedral School of Chartres¹³ (12th century) and also William of Conches¹⁴ and Hugh of St Victor¹⁵. The last, Hugh, takes great pains to alter the interpretation of Hermetic ideas to fit Catholic orthodoxy. Abelard (1079-1142) considered the author of the Latin *Asclepius*, "that most ancient of philosophers, great of name, Mercury, whom, on account of his excellence, men called a god."¹⁶

A possible example of a 13th century Hermeticist may be Roger Bacon. Bacon may have been a crypto-Hermeticist and therefore a heretic. He was suspected of heresy by the Franciscans {Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Vol. II, p 628} and condemned to prison in 1277 (the year that University of Paris issued its Condemnation of 1277 in which astrology and Aristotelianism -and other doctrines were condemned.) In his *Opus Maius* Bacon scrupulously exonerates the likes of Thabit ben Qurra (a self avowed polytheistic, idolatrous magician) from church condemnation-why? Bacon seems to be trying to create an illuminated elite within the church- ala Plato's Guardian Class? In his *Opus Minus*¹⁷ he refers to "Hermes Mercurius", as "The father of philosophers."

¹³ Cf Thierry's *De sex dierum operibus*

¹⁴ cf his *Commentarius in Timaeum Platonis*, Patrologia Latina CLXXII, 245-252 and his *De philosophia mundi*, Patrologia Latina CLXXII, 32-102. See also, Silverstein, Theodore, *Liber Hermetis Mercurii Triplicis de VI rerum principiis* in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du Moyen Age*. XXII.

¹⁵ Cf The Didascalicon of Hugh of St Victor, by Jerome Taylor, Columbia University Press 1968 (Intro 19-27).

¹⁶ *Theologia christiana* i.v. Patrologia Latina CXXVIII, 1141A

¹⁷ Opus Minus, ed Brewer, (1859), in RS XV, 313.

From the Middle Ages up to the end of the 17th century the art of alchemy was identified with Hermeticism. Indeed the names were synonymous. The extensive alchemical literature has received more attention since the beginning of this century than previously, in part due to the interest in the subject brought about by the psychological doctrines of C.G. Jung. Nevertheless, a good deal remains to be done in connection with the study of this field as most of the important texts remain untranslated. Despite this obstacle, enough has been written about important alchemical works, such as those of Jabir al-Hayyan, to show the central importance of his Neopythagorean Hermeticism for the development of Chemistry.

With regard to the field of magic, it seems important to note that Ibn Khaldun asserts that there are three kinds of magic:

1. **Direct Willing** by which those with special power (he says the souls of such people are either saintly or satanic) are able to cause things to happen by means of merely willing them to occur.

2. **Mathematical Magic.** This entails astronomical/astrological methodologies. When such methods are occasionally combined with the worship of the planets. This division also includes an understanding of calendrics and chronology, also mechanics, hydraulics, pneumatics, and, more in our day, electricity.

3. **Hypnosis and Natural Science.** Some authors place meditation in this category.¹⁸

This classification, which is common to many books on magic, places magic squarely in the realm of psychology in that the human soul is the field of activity in every case.

¹⁸ This classification is reminiscent of that found in H.C. Agrippa's De Occulta Philosophia (1534) in which the author divides magic into Natural, Mathematical and Theological.

In the first case, the soul of the sorcerer is either saintly or satanic. In the second case, the will of the magician is employed in the fabrication of mathematical diagrams (which is licit in Islam) or perverted to the worship of the planets (which is forbidden in Islam). In the third case, delusion is employed by one person in order to mislead another either through hypnosis or through the application of items or substances either through sleight of hand or by substitution which will stupefy, cause hallucinations or facilitate suggestion. In all cases, therefore, psychological dynamics are at work.

Marsilio Ficino's impact on the development of Renaissance Humanism has been shown by Yates and others to rest not only on his translation of the Platonic writings, but on his earlier translation of the *Hermetic Corpus*. One can imagine a Renaissance without Plato but a Renaissance without the *Asclepius* and its off shoots such as Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* is unthinkable.

Closely associated with the philosophical writings of both Ficino and with those of Pico are magical writings: *De vita coelitus comparanda* - a text on astrological magic by Ficino and the "Magical Conclusions" of Pico's *900 Theses*.

The transmission of Hermeticism from Renaissance Italy to Holland, France and England was effected during Ficino's life by his extensive correspondence. Ficino's influence on John Colet has been discussed by Leland Miles in *John Colet and the Platonic Tradition*, London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1962.

Hermeticism's effect, via Ficino's Dutch correspondence, on the development of Dutch Protestantism and in particular on the articulation the Protestant work ethic seems a potentially fruitful area, as yet largely unexplored.

Heliocentricity is suggested in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (Libellus XVI, *Asclepius* 29). Ficino's circle included Dominicus Maria de Novarra who later became a friend of Copernicus. Copernicus himself recognised the *Corpus Hermeticum* as a source and encouragement for his own heliocentric cosmology.

Giordano Bruno's (1548?-1600) Hermeticism has been discussed at length by Frances Yates in her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1964. Bruno's advocacy of the Copernican cosmology, his place in the history of science and his connection with contemporary English philosophers associated with John Dee is well attested.

Closely associated with Hermeticism is Utopianism, probably due to the precedent of Plato's *Republic* which also seemed to travel with Hermeticism. [For instance the *Asclepius* was found with sections of the *Republic* along with the *Nag Hammadi* codices.] The *Utopias* of More, Bacon, Campanella and others also present themselves as possible exercises in alternative political visions inspired by the Hermetic exaltation of human freedom.

Athenasius Kircher (1601-1680), the German Jesuit and scholar taught mathematics and Hebrew at the College of Rome. He gave up teaching to study hieroglyphics and archaeology (1643). He is credited with the invention of the magic lantern (our slide projector).

In 1652-4 he wrote *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* in which, continuing the myth of Hermes's preservation of the arts and sciences, he asserted that the hieroglyphs were the Egyptians' record of the religious mysteries containing the "highest mysteries of Divinity" and their secret sciences: astrology, alchemy, and magic and that their religion was founded on the observation of the heavens. In the second volume of his *Oedipus*, he expounds the teachings of Enoch and Hermes Trismegistus along with those of Plato and other philosophers. In the second part of the volume he discusses mathematics, medicine, magic, alchemy and theology. His writings were to have a powerful impact upon the intelligentsia of Europe (both Catholic and Protestant) putting forth a concept which can only be called "Pan-Egyptianism".

Pan-Egyptianism was a movement based on Kircher's writings and the current understanding of the Corpus Hermeticum. It held that the Egyptians were the original civilisation and that they came into being at a fully developed stage without evolution. It was to inspire many other writers, historians, esotericists, archaeologists and others for centuries. This point of view was officially discredited by the translation of the Rosetta Stone by Champollion (1822).

We should keep in mind, when considering the above, that all knowledge of the Egyptian hieroglyphs was lost after the 6th century AD. Kircher was the first to attempt to interpret them but failed because he believed them purely ideographic. In 1787 Zoega suggested that they also had phonetic aspects. The Rosetta Stone, found in 1799 during the French occupation of Egypt ultimately enabled the translation of hieroglyphs. It bore the same message written three ways: a decree of the priests of Memphis in favour of Ptolemy V in Hieroglyphs, demotic script and Greek. Dr Young in 1818 asserted that the characters were alphabetic and Champollion proved the alphabetic/phonetic nature of the hieroglyphs by translating the stone using, for comparison an hieroglyphic covered obelisk at Philae.

Charles Francois Dupuis (1742-1809) followed in Kircher's footsteps. he was a French scholar, and a Professor at the College de France (1787) as well as a member of National Convention (1792) and Council of 500 (1795). He wrote *Le Origine de tous les Cultes ou Religion Universelle* (1795).

Dupuis puts forth the idea (from Kircher) that all religion is based upon the sky phenomena. One of the effects the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone had on Europe was to further drive a wedge between the intelligencia and "eastern mysticism" and to throw Europe back on itself, leading it to become more self reliant instead of looking to the ancient east for answers to present problems. Perhaps paradoxically, this "western consciousness" furthered the rising Eurocentrism and helped fuel 19th century Imperialism and chauvinism.

It has been suggested, again by Yates and her followers, that Freemasonry is a form in which Hermetic symbolism and ideals survived. Stevenson, in his *The Origins of Freemasonry*, Cambridge, 1988, makes a good case for this, though whether it is proven is open to discussion. At the very least there are clear overlaps between Freemasonic Idealism and Hermeticism and while the Fraternity may have shied away from Occultism after the 19th century, it is not far from the truth to say that 18th and 19th century Occultism (including Blavatsky's Theosophy) cannot be thoroughly or accurately understood without a familiarity with contemporary Freemasonic politics, policies, symbolism and organisational principles.

By the time we get to the 20th century we see the development of the hidden resources of the earth, especially in the case of petroleum, dominating the world economy and creating important centres of wealth and power - all based on travel and chemistry - all accounted for and kept track of by astute reckoning using lightning swift electronic bank transfer.

The figure of Hermes as god of communication and commerce was a frequently used icon in the 19th and early 20th centuries, representing both the guiding genius of industrialism and commerce as well as the means (import/export, electric power etc.) by which all his other gifts could be realised. We see it, for instance, gracing the temple of electrified transportation in New York City, the Grand Central Station. Mercury also shows up in the lobby of the National Gallery of Arts in Washington DC. This icon was consciously chosen by the architects who designed both these edifices and had to be approved of by the clients who paid for these buildings. And who were these clients? None other than the Railroad and Banking Barons who had built the transportation, business, banking and to a large extent the political systems that the respective Hermeses celebrate.

SPECIAL NOTE: digital copies of many of the original texts referred to in the main body of this Study may be obtained by application to the New Library archivist:

contact@new-library.com or on the Robert Zoller website:

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