

FREEMASONRY AND THE OCCULT AT THE COURT OF PETER THE GREAT

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One of the dominant themes expounded by Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich in his speech at Peter the Great's funeral in February 1725 was of the Tsar as the embodiment of a "Mason King"; a Pygmalion figure, who had hewn a glorious statue from coarse stone. As he stated: 'All of Russia is your statue, from you it is recast . . . and in your emblem it is not falsely portrayed'¹. The theme of the Tsar as a "wise architect" is also expounded by many of the leading propagandists of the Petrine era, such as Feofilakt Lopatinskii and Gavrilla Buzhinskii, who described him as a "wise builder" and a "kind architect" and as the all wise and first architect building the Russian state².

The symbolic representation of Peter hewing, or sculpting, the statue of Russia has obvious strong Masonic resonances. Indeed, Douglas Smith entitled his recent study on Russian Freemasonry, *Working the Rough Stone*, in reference to the general aim of Russian Freemasons, which was to reshape a rough stone so that its original state became unrecognisable³. No longer covered with unhewn and jagged surfaces, it was to be 'scoured, planed . . . and smoothed out'⁴. No mention was made by Smith to Peter the Great in this regard, yet this is one of the most frequent symbolic metaphors used to praise the Tsar during his reign.

Moreover, it is highly likely that Peter the Great himself devised this symbolic metaphor, as he adopted it for use in his personal stamp in 1710 or 1711 (fig. 1)⁵. On the print, the Tsar is portrayed with a hammer and chisel in his hands and a crown on his head. A gown is on the shoulders of the statue of "Russia" with a sceptre and orb in her hands and a crown on her head.

To the right, two classical columns are clearly visible; in the sky is a cloud and portrayed in it is a triangular "all-seeing-eye", containing the Hebrew

¹ Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaiia*, 298.

² Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaiia*, 32, 80.

³ Smith, Douglas, *Working the Rough Stone*.

⁴ Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 5.

⁵ See Matveev, V.Iu, 'K Istorii Vozniknoveniia I Razvitiia Siuzheta "Petr I, Visekaiushchii Statuii Rossii"' in: Sapunov & Ukhanova, *Kultura I Iskusstvo Rossii XVIII Veka*, 26-43.



Fig. 1. Personal stamp of Peter I, F.Kh. Bekker, 1711-1712 (?), The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. Source: Sapunov, B.V. & Ukhanova, I.N (eds.), *Kultura I Iskusstvo Rossii XVIII Veka*, 29.

name of God (Yahweh or Jehovah) and above this is the Latin inscription “Adiuvante”. The two words in combination read as “with God’s help” and signify the divinely sanctioned nature of the Tsar’s mission as a Mason-King sculpting his country into a perfected form.

In addition, the print of Peter the Great as the sculptor of the statue of Russia, judging by its description in literature, was also three-sided⁶. On the second side was portrayed a two-headed eagle (the Imperial emblem of Russia), under three crowns. Furthermore, a breast shield was portrayed with a rider and the sign of the Order of Andrew the First Named was suspended to the shield without chains. On the third side was an “all-seeing-eye” and under it was an arm reaching out of a cloud, holding a crown inscribed with the Latin motto “Dat et Aufert” (Give and Reward). Peter used this personal stamp consistently up until at least 1720 and it also played an important role in the celebrations held in the wake of the Nystad Peace of 1721. Intriguingly here, however, it is Peter himself who is being carved by a worker-mason and at the top the triangle does not contain the name of God, but three “7’s”, a highly symbolic reference to the fact that the Great Northern War spanned twenty-one years and was divided into three significant periods—a fact seen as divinely preordained by Russian officials, such as Prokopovich and Peter himself (fig. 2).

In this regard, one can note the speech delivered by Prokopovich at the Uspenskii Cathedral in Moscow on 30th August 1721 (OS), to mark the conclusion of the peace with Sweden. Explicit reference is made to the prophetic

⁶ See *Devizi Russkikh Gerbov*, 1.



Fig. 2. Circular Relief, B.C. Rastrelli & A.K. Nartov (?), 1723-1729 (?), The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. Source: Sapunov, B.V. & Ukhanova, I.N (eds.), *Kultura I Iskusstvo Rossii XVIII Veka*, 34.

calculations of Ezekiel, Daniel and John, as regards the division of the Great Northern War into three periods of seven years. Prokopovich then elaborates on this theme by stating:

Did we not receive Divine reward in the Trinity in the preceding war, since the Trinity was formed by the rewards of triumph? . . . But since the number of the Trinity—as in Holy Scripture, so also in the actions of people—often tends to use considerable prime numbers (about which there is not space now to converse), and we complete the triple monarchical decree and the rewards of the council of triumph thanks to this . . . we recognise, from this, that daily and incessantly and eternally we are obliged for thanks from up high, . . . the preceding war in question and the peace were established by blessing from the all generous right hand of his adopted children⁷.

Peter the Great also went to great lengths to orchestrate celebrations of the Nystad Peace based on the symbolic length of the war in relation to the Holy Trinity. He ensured that the Peace was announced from the Trinity Cathedral in St. Petersburg on September 4th 1721 (OS) whilst three cannon shots resounded from the nearby St. Peter and Paul Fortress. The Tsar also stated:

⁷ Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 265-66.

‘Since the thrice seven length of the war; it is then necessary to give thanks to the Lord God thrice everywhere as in St. Petersburg’⁸. This required all municipalities to organise three celebrations: (1) as soon as the news reaches them, (2) on October 22nd 1721 (OS) and (3) on January 28th 1722 (OS), which coincided with the religious *Maslenitsa*, or Shrove Tuesday, festival.

The two columns visible in the motif of Peter as a “Mason-King” can be interpreted as the pillars of Jachin and Boaz. Indeed, according to Masonic legend, these pillars can be linked to the rule of the House of David in Jerusalem. ‘He (Yahweh) will establish the throne of David, and his kingdom to his seed for ever’. Legend also has it that the coronations of later kings of the Davidic dynasty took place at these pillars⁹. It is significant, therefore, that panegyric literature, plays and triumphal parades provide plentiful evidence of a concerted effort, from at least as early as 1704, to symbolise the Russian monarch as a new King David building a new House of Israel. This symbolism is entirely resonant of the Davidic-Solomonic myth of Freemasonry, as outlined in the Old Charges, which states that King David began to build the temple in Jerusalem and loved masons, giving them charges according to Euclid¹⁰.

The theme of David defeating Goliath is a popular and consistent theme in panegyrics, acting as a metaphor for Peter’s triumphs over the Swedish monarch, Charles XII in the Great Northern War. Prokopovich, for example, stated in one panegyric that Peter was striking at the head of the new Goliath and was carrying the Russian nation—God’s living regiment—towards a New Israel¹¹. Further popular themes included linking the Tsar’s close friendship with Alexander Menshikov to King David’s bond with Jonathan, as described in the Book of Samuel¹². It seems likely that this biblical comparison was endorsed by the Tsar himself, as the Dutch scholar Jozien Driessen has recently argued that the painting “The Parting of David and Jonathan” (1642) by Rembrandt (fig. 3), which hangs in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, was purchased by the Tsar whilst in Holland in 1716¹³.

⁸ *Zhurnal*, 1770-1772, Vol. I, 175.

⁹ Cf. Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry*, 146.

¹⁰ Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry*, 21.

¹¹ Prokopovich, *Sochineniia*, 34.

¹² Prokopovich made this link in a panegyric to Menshikov made in 1709. See Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 63.

¹³ Driessen, *Tsar Petr*, 103-04.



Fig. 3. *The Parting of David and Jonathan* (1642), Rembrandt, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

The betrayal by the Cossack Hetman, Ivan Mazepa prior to the Battle of Poltava in 1709 was also directly compared by the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy in 1710 to Absalom's conspiracy against David, his father¹⁴.

Undoubtedly, the most developed use of the symbolic metaphor of Peter as a new King David can be found in two panegyrics by Gavrilla Buzhinskii, the Chaplain of the Fleet and a staunch supporter of the Petrine reforms. In a speech delivered in 1714 to honour a Russian naval victory, Buzhinskii used the occasion to quote extensively from the first book of Chronicles and the first book of Kings. From Chronicles he chose chapter twenty-eight, in which David stands before his people and declares how 'I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building'. Furthermore, in 1719, to mark the seventeenth anniversary of the taking of the Swedish fortress of Schlüsselberg, Buzhinskii gave a speech entitled "Key to the House of David". In this speech, he describes how the Swedish fortress of Schlüsselberg was considered impregnable, but that to the Russian "House of David" was given the key and the sacristan and that 'the pious monarch'

¹⁴ Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 66.

Peter I, had unlocked the castle. He then quotes from Isaiah 22:22: ‘the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open’.

The theme of Peter as a new King David consequently entailed that the new city he built on the River Neva was symbolically seen as a New Jerusalem—and not merely as many have noted as a secular New Amsterdam or an Imperial New Rome. Buzhinskii was most explicit in referring to Petersburg as a New Jerusalem, when he spoke in 1717 in praise of the city and quoted from Isaiah: ‘Shine, shine new Jerusalem! God’s glory illuminating thee’. Other notable ecclesiastic figures referred directly to the city as “newly crowned”, as a “place of particular wonder”, and as a city in which God is well disposed, citing the words of Psalm 147: ‘Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee’¹⁵. Peter the Great also frequently referred to the city as his “Paradise” and “Eden”. Evidence of this can be found in a number of letters he wrote to Alexander Menshikov, such as one dated April 7th 1706 (OS):

I cannot omit to write to you from this Paradise where, with the help of the Almighty, everything is fine . . . We may be living in heaven here; only we must never forget, as you know yourself, to place our hope not in man but in the will and grace of God¹⁶.

Menshikov too, when writing to the Tsar, described the new city as the “promised land”¹⁷.

The clear sense in which key members of the Petrine hierarchy, including the Tsar himself, viewed his mission in biblical terms has never been fully examined. No doubt this has something to do with the continuing assumption that the reforms carried out by Peter the Great were implemented on a Western model characterised by secular and rational thinking. Even in the current post Soviet climate this supposition has not been significantly revised.

Thus, whilst some historians have recently highlighted the fact that Peter the Great held a strong private faith, this has been tempered by stressing the

¹⁵ Stefan Iavorskii, in a speech made on the name day of the Tsar, referred to the city as ‘newly crowned . . . a place of particular wonder’. See *Vedomosti*, Vol. II, 258. Gavrilla Buzhinskii spoke of St. Petersburg as city in which ‘God is clearly disposed’. See Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 80. Feofilakt Lopatinskii cited Psalm 147 when speaking at a ceremony to celebrate the Nystadt Peace in January 1722 (OS). See Grebeniuk, *Panigiricheskaia*, 255.

¹⁶ *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol. IV, 207.

¹⁷ Baehr, *The Paradise Myth*, 69.

fact that religion played no part in determining his approach towards reforming the Russian state. Even more pronounced in existing literature is the sentiment that the Petrine Court was a safe-haven from the occult and esoteric. For example, W.F. Ryan, in his recent historical survey of magic in Russia, entitled *Midnight at the Bathhouse* (the first such work in English) gives short shrift to the issue of the occult during the reign of Peter the Great. He states:

Peter's practicality belonged more to the Enlightenment than to the seventeenth century and there are few traces in him or his court of the occult interests of his father Tsar Aleksei and his sister Sofia . . . There is no evidence that these subjects interested him as anything more than offences against good order and manifestations of discontent¹⁸.

It is widely accepted, therefore, that interest in the occult and mysticism only resurfaced in Russia with the emergence of Rosicrucian Freemasonry, introduced in 1782 by the German J.G. Schwarz and soon embraced by the prominent Muscovite writer and printer, Nikolai Novikov. The birth of Russian Freemasonry, closely affiliated to the Hanoverian system in England, can be officially traced back to 24th January 1731 (OS), when the minutes of the Grand Lodge in London recorded the appointment of John Phillips as Provincial Grand Master of Russia and Germany. Arguably a more significant step occurred in 1740, when James Keith was appointed Grand Master solely of Russia. This accepted chronology of events surrounding the introduction of Freemasonry on Russian soil discounts the legends recited by Russian Freemasons of the latter part of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, which champion Peter the Great as Russia's first Freemason.

There are two principal legends. Firstly, that Peter the Great was initiated into the Masonic Brotherhood by Christopher Wren whilst residing in England in 1698 and secondly, that when Peter departed after his second European tour in 1717, he carried a Masonic statute with the authority to found a lodge¹⁹. The validity of these legends is dismissed by modern commentators, such as the respected British scholar Anthony Cross, who states: 'Peter the Freemason . . . would seem to be essentially the creation of later generations of Russian masons'²⁰.

¹⁸ Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight*, 1999, 23.

¹⁹ A summary of these two legends can be found in Pipin, *Masonstvo v Rossii*, 83.

²⁰ Cross, 'British Freemasons', 43.

Whilst these legends are impossible to prove, I believe it is mistaken to deny the obvious attractions Freemasonry—particularly of a Jacobite hue—would have held to the young Tsar. For example, in addition to portraying himself as a New David and a Mason King, Peter also had a definite liking for secretive Brotherhoods and chivalrous orders. The presence of some form of Brotherhood at the Russian Court seems to be confirmed by Charles Whitworth, the official British Resident in Moscow, who wrote in 1706 of a ‘Brotherhood . . . as true as pleasant’, in which ‘a great glass of wine sanctified the occasion’²¹. As regards chivalrous Orders, one should note that in 1697 the Tsar corresponded with Raymond Perellos, the Grand Master of the Maltese Order of Knights, writing a letter of recommendation for one of his principle military figures, Boris Sheremetev²². When he reached Malta, Sheremetev was initiated into the Order and took part in a ceremonial banquet to honour John the Baptist. Furthermore, on his return to Moscow in February 1699, the Tsar honoured him at a banquet and permitted him to permanently wear his Maltese Cross²³. Peter the Great also founded a Russian Order—the Order of St. Andrew (the First Named)—directly after his return from his first Grand Embassy in 1698. It would seem that his decision was influenced by his observation of a ceremony of the Order of the Garter at Windsor Castle in England.

Peter the Great also displayed a marked religious tolerance and a passion for scientific inquiry wholly in line with the ethos of Freemasonry as it developed during the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. His religious toleration can be clearly seen, for example, on his first Grand Embassy in 1697 and 1698, when he and his retinue visited the Reformed Churches and Synagogues of Amsterdam. In England, the Tsar personally visited and took part in services at Quaker Meeting Houses in Gracechurch Street in London and in Deptford, and he requested plans for educational reform from Francis Lee of the Philadelphian Society. He also met the liberal Bishop of Salisbury, Gilbert Burnet, on a number of occasions and in one of these meetings the pair discoursed for over four hours on scriptural matters²⁴.

The Tsar also exuded a scientific curiosity, deeply imbued with religious meaning and occult tendencies. Even a cursory glance at his attitudes towards

²¹ Letter of 24th January 1706 (OS): The British Library, Stafford Papers, Add. MS 31128, f.34.

²² *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol. I, 154-5.

²³ Ivanov, *Ot Petra Pervago do Nashikh Dnei*, 84.

²⁴ Cross, *Peter the Great*, 34.

the study of such disciplines as astronomy, natural science, mathematics and alchemy reveal a monarch saturated with a scientific worldview still more commonly associated with the supposedly more religiously orientated and credulous minds of the seventeenth century. Peter the Great's stance *vis-à-vis* astronomy is crystallised by remarks he is credited to have made at a Paris Observatory in 1717, where he makes plain his belief in the divine nature of the universe:

Here for the eyes are opened a book of the miracles of God, which clearly shows the great wisdom of Creation! . . . I would advise the Godless and free thinkers to study astronomy and to be a little more often at the observatory, when the earthly sphere is not sufficient to convince them and when they wander through it blindly²⁵.

The Tsar's enthusiastic interest in the macrocosmos was equally matched by his passion for natural curiosities and monstrosities engendered in the earthly microcosmos. He made sure to visit every possible Cabinet of Rarities on his travels and negotiated the purchase of the renowned collections of Albert Seba and Frederick Ruysch, after visiting their Cabinets in Amsterdam. These collections formed a considerable part of the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera, founded by the Tsar in 1714. A revealing insight into the Tsar's views on the human monstrosities on display within Russia's first public museum can be gleaned from a decree he wrote in 1718:

There is only one creator of all creation, and that is God. And the Evil One has no power over any living creatures. For monsters are the result of internal damage, of fear and the thoughts of the mother during her pregnancy²⁶.

The Tsar was also keen to witness chemical experiments on his foreign travels, which included the Paracelsian alchemist Moses Stringer demonstrating the art of separation in London in 1698 and certain 'curious chemical concoctions' formed by Louis Lemery in Paris in 1717. Whilst visiting an experimental scientist in The Hague in the same year, the Tsar is reported to have made the following intriguing statement:

I neither belittle nor revile an alchemist, the search for converting metal into gold, of the mechanic trying to find eternal movement . . . such type of people should be encouraged in every way, and not despised²⁷.

²⁵ Nartov, *Razkazi Nartova o Petr Velikom*, 93.

²⁶ Cf. Anemone, 'The Monsters of Peter the Great', 592.

²⁷ Nartov, *Razkazi Nartova o Petr Velikom*, 96.

As regards eternal movement, Peter the Great was fascinated with Johann Bessler's quest to invent a *Perpetuum Mobile*, embodied in the so-called *Wheel of Offyreus*, and indeed went to great lengths to purchase this contraption²⁸. Considering the Tsar's open-minded scientific curiosity, it is entirely in character that he should have been an enthusiastic patron of esoteric experimental science at the Russian Court and surrounded himself with statesmen fascinated in alchemy, natural magic and even astrology.

Most legends attest that the first Masonic lodge in Russia went by the name of the "Neptune Society" and initially met at the Sukharev Tower on the outskirts of Moscow, home to Russia's first Mathematical and Navigation School and first Observatory. Meetings apparently took place in the fencing hall and involved chemical and other experiments, according to some nineteenth century sources, with Peter the Great as Junior Warden. Two other alleged members of this Society were Jacob Bruce, a Jacobite sympathizer, and Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich, who fulfilled the role of Orator. These two figures were undoubtedly among the Tsar's most intimate and powerful statesmen and provide fine examples of the extent to which interest in the occult actually flourished at the Petrine Court²⁹.

1. *Jacob Bruce (1669-1735)*

With the exception of the Tsar, Jacob Bruce played the most central role in Russian Masonic legends and was ranked as one of the highest dedicated Masons, who was allegedly 'profoundly and fruitfully penetrated into the secrets of the Masonic Order'³⁰. Bruce was the son of a Scottish immigrant, and his talents were utilised by the Tsar in an amazing variety of ways. He was a Field Marshal in the Russian Army, the head of Russia's first

²⁸ See Collins, *Perpetual Motion*, 1997.

²⁹ Although is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that apart from Bruce, there were two other Scottish Jacobites who were allegedly members of the so-called Neptune Society: General Patrick Gordon (1635-1699), who purportedly acted as First Overseer, and Henry Farquharson (c.1675-1739). Both have strong links to Scottish Jacobite Freemasonry. On Gordon, see Collis, 'Patrick Gordon'. Farquharson was enlisted into Russian service in 1698, whilst the Tsar was in England. As head teacher at the Moscow Mathematical & Navigation School he worked extremely closely with Bruce. Farquharson studied under the staunch Jacobite, Professor George Liddel, at Marischal College in Aberdeen. In addition to being a staunch Jacobite, Liddel was a Non-Operative Freemason of the Aberdeen Lodge. On Farquharson's career in Russia see Fedosov, 'A Scottish Mathematician in Russia', 102-115.

³⁰ Ivanov, *Ot Petra Pervago do Nashikh Dnei*, 82.

Mathematical School, the Director of the State Typography, the President of the Mining and Manufacturing Colleges and the Director of the Petersburg Mint. As well as this, he was one of the country's chief diplomats, and was instrumental in brokering the Nystad peace treaty with Sweden in 1721. As already noted, Bruce was the head of the Mathematical and Navigation School, based in the Sukharev Tower. Furthermore, it was Bruce who established Russia's first observatory there on the third floor in 1699, and indeed he resided there for a lengthy period before moving to St. Petersburg.

The Canadian scholar Valentin Boss has referred to Bruce as Russia's 'First Newtonian' and credits him with facilitating the adoption of a "modern" character in scientific inquiry³¹. The popular image of Bruce in Russia, however, has long been associated with sorcery. Pushkin famously wrote that Bruce was the 'Russian Faust' and many colourful oral legends surrounding him survived into the 1920s³². According to these legends, he created a housemaid from flowers, flew over Moscow and resurrected a dead dog—a story reminiscent of Bulgakov's classic tale *The Heart of a Dog*. He was a man who could predict the weather and people's fates by observing the stars and consulted many rare books when concocting powders and remedies³³. Many of these legends relate to Bruce's nocturnal activities at the Sukharev Tower and a nineteenth century author, Ivan Lazhechnikov, even wrote a novella based on them, entitled *The Sorcerer at the Sukharev Tower* (1844).

These oral legends stand in stark contrast to the portrait of the rational scientist painted by Boss, yet their fantastical quality derives from the fact that in reality, Bruce, the experimental scientist, did indeed immerse himself in the esoteric arts. The clearest indication of this are the so-called "Bruce Calendars" supervised by Bruce himself. Six of these calendars were printed between 1709-1715 and they contain a mixture of astronomical expertise with a wealth of astrological predictions and religious symbolism.

The second sheet of the Bruce Calendars, from 1709, contains considerable Masonic character and religious mysticism. At the top it is dominated by an all-seeing-eye in the shape of a triangle, surrounded with the inscription: 'Divine God in his holiness, God of the Israelites'. Below this are quotes from Psalm 20, which begins with the apocalyptic phrase: 'The Lord hear

³¹ Boss, *Newton & Russia*, 33.

³² See Pushkin's unfinished historical tale *The Arab of Peter the Great*, based on his own grandfather.

³³ See Baranov, *Legendi o Grafe Briuse*.

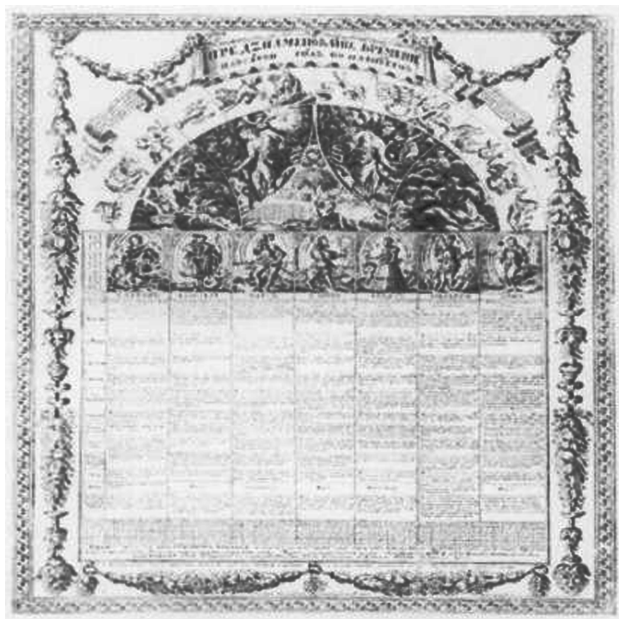


Fig. 4. *Bruce Calendar*, Third sheet (1710), The Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

thee in thy day of trouble’, and Psalm 67, an exhortation to bless God. Most significant of all, however, is that at the bottom two festivals are noted: the birth of Christ and the Day of the Masons³⁴. The importance specifically attached to the Mason’s Day, couched as it is in an astrological sheet replete with religious mysticism and Old Testament citations, is extremely suggestive when one bears in mind Bruce’s alleged links to the Masonic movement. The third sheet, dating from 1710, is entitled *Omens for the Times for every day according to the planets* and gives predictions for events in Russia up until 1821 (fig. 4)³⁵.

The fourth sheet, in a similar vein, provides omens for events based on translating the solar calendar into the lunar calendar. A long list of advantages to be gained by observing these lunar and astrological positions are then stated. These include suitable times to steam in the *Bania*, or Russian sauna without being struck down with sickness, conducive times to let blood

³⁴ Filimon, *Iakov Brius*, 419-21.

³⁵ Filimon, *Iakov Brius*, 421-30.

and the appropriate time to hang minerals in order to emit pleasant effects. It also lists the best times to instigate a battle and the most suitable days to buy wild animals³⁶.

Bruce's private library collection reflects his interest in astrological matters and contains many rare works, including tracts by the two principle authorities cited in the Calendars—Johann Zahn and Wolfgang Hildebrand³⁷. Apart from these two figures, one also finds a number of other works by eminent German astrologers of the seventeenth century, such as Tobias Beutel, Stanislaus Acxtelmeier, Christoph Nottangel and Johann Jakob Zimmermann (2 works)³⁸. Bruce's library collection also holds astrological tomes by a number of prominent English astrologers of the second half of the seventeenth century—William Lilly, Richard Saunders, George Parker and Joseph Moxon³⁹. Lastly, one can find works by esteemed Italian astrological practitioners, such as Girolamo Cardano, Giovanni Antonio Magini and Flaminio Mezzavacca⁴⁰. It seems Bruce also had an interest in the related discipline of geomancy, possessing six works on the subject. This included a collection of tracts on geomancy by Abu Hali ben-Omar and Nicolas Catanus's *Geomantischer Schöpfen-Sul* (1704)⁴¹.

Works on natural magic and the occult are also abundant in Bruce's library collection. An exhaustive survey is not possible here, but even a list of authors provides some insight into the scope of the collection. Thus, in his personal collection, Bruce could consult works by, among others, Ramon Lull, Alessio Piemontese, Giambattista della Porta, Athanasius Kircher, Caspar Schott, Johannes Staricius, Dethlevus Cluverus, the Abbe de Vallemont, Christianus Democritus (alias Johann Conrad Dippel) and Democritus Abderyta⁴².

Bruce also owned a sizeable Cabinet of Rarities and a private chemical laboratory, befitting a man who was undoubtedly the foremost expert on chemical matters in Russia at the time. One can see the clear influence of

³⁶ Filimon, *Iakov Brius*, 430-35.

³⁷ Bruce owned a copy of Zahn's *Oculus Artificialis* (1685). See *Materiali dlia Istorii Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, Tom V, 1742-1743*, St. Petersburg, 1889, No. 176. Bruce owned an original edition of Hildebrand work on natural magic, *Magia Naturalia das ist, kunst und Wunderbuch darinnen begriffen Wunderbare Secreta, Geheimnusse und Kunststuckke* (1610). See *Materiali*, No. 772.

³⁸ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, No. 82; *Materiali*, No. 407, *Materiali*, No. 26 (manuscript section), *Materiali* Nos. 1055 & 1195 respectively.

³⁹ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, Nos. 426, 603, 519 & *Materiali*, No. 1320 respectively.

⁴⁰ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, No. 149 & *Materiali*, Nos. 338 & 334 respectively.

⁴¹ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, Nos. 32 & 154 respectively.

⁴² See both Saveleva, *Biblioteka* & *Materiali* catalogues.

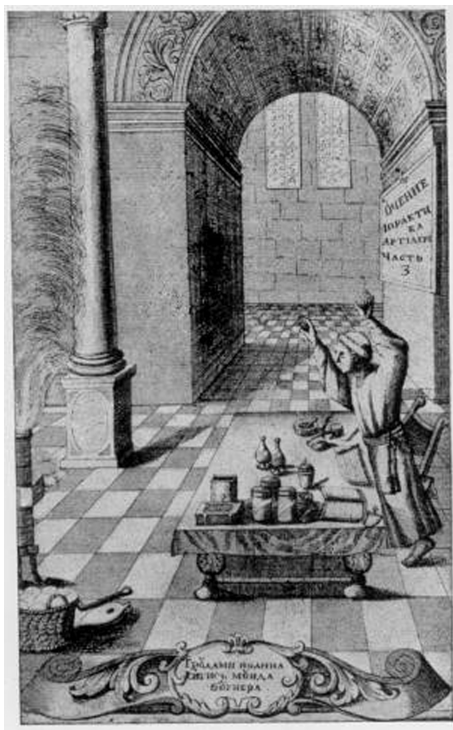


Fig. 5. Illustration to *Uchenie i Praktika Artilerie* (1711).
Source: Petrov, *Sobranie Knig*.

alchemy in the frontispiece to part III of a textbook for artillery, printed in 1711 and edited and translated by Bruce (fig. 5).

Judging by his extraordinary collection of alchemical volumes, many of which were first editions and extremely rare, Bruce must have possessed considerable knowledge of alchemical principles. I have counted at least 143 clear alchemical works by 88 different authors in his collection, including Paracelsus (3 works), Valentin Weigel (1 work), Jacob Böhme (4 works) and the *Waterstone of the Wise* by Johann Siebmacher, attached with letters in defence of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood⁴³. Indeed, Bruce had an alchemical work by Sincerus Renatus—*I.N.J. Göldene Quelle der Natur und Kunst*,

⁴³ See Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 70-72; 21-24 & Saveleva, *Biblioteka*, No. 362 respectively.

(1711)—a man who set out the rules and constitution of an alleged Rosicrucian Order in the 1710s⁴⁴. In its entirety, Bruce's alchemical collection alone is enough to discredit the theory that the occult was of no interest to members of the Petrine court. This, however, is far from the only source indicating such interest among senior statesmen in Peter the Great's Russia.

2. Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736)

Feofan Prokopovich is renowned as being Peter the Great's chief propagandist and principle ecclesiastic ally, referred to by James Cracraft as the 'first authentic voice of the early Enlightenment in Russia' and by Robert Massie as a 'modern eighteenth century man who happened to be a cleric'⁴⁵. For the past century at least, however, scholars have ignored the seemingly less enlightened sides to his worldview, such as the fact that he held to a literal interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Thus, he located the Garden of Eden on the Persian Gulf in Mesopotamia and stated that the Serpent in the Garden of Eden was genuine⁴⁶. He cites his authorities on Creation as St. Basil, Ambrosius, Theodoretus, Augustine, Philo and Josephus Flavius, with the only contemporary figure cited being Johann Zahn (mentioned above), whose work *Specula Physico-Mathematico-Historico* (1696) follows in the Hermetic and occult tradition of Kircher⁴⁷. Furthermore, Prokopovich undertook to demonstrate the mathematical possibility of placing all the animals in Noah's Ark and argued against the existence of the Phoenix on the grounds that God did not create a partner for it⁴⁸. He also remarks that it is absurd to state that there was no rainbow before the deluge and argues that 'by bidding to show' such a phenomenon, God gave 'a sign of his nearness'⁴⁹. What is more, he believes in the existence of the firmament and stated that heavenly bodies have an influence on earthly bodies⁵⁰. Prokopovich's exegesis advocated the study of Hebrew and Greek for the correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and he was fascinated with the question of the Divine Names of God—writing a tract on Pseudo-Dionysius' *Names of God*⁵¹. Prokopovich's

⁴⁴ See Saveleva, *Biblioteka* No. 648.

⁴⁵ Cracraft, *The Church Reform*, 54; Massie, *Peter the Great*, 790.

⁴⁶ Morozov, *Feofan Prokopovich*, 131-44.

⁴⁷ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 299-310.

⁴⁸ Morozov, *Feofan Prokopovich*, 130; Prokopovich, II, p. 307.

⁴⁹ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 455-56.

⁵⁰ Morozov, *Feofan Prokopovich*, 139.

⁵¹ See Tikhomirov, *Traktati*, 16-18.

world was also one in which angels and demons were present. On angels, Prokopovich writes that one should not doubt their existence, although 'one ought to note that angels do not have the form of God in such a direct sense, in which there is in people'⁵². As regards demons, he again states a belief in their existence and even gives three ways of distinguishing genuine cases: (1) they can explain secrets which a person in a natural condition cannot explain; (2) they can speak languages which they have never learned; (3) supernatural actions⁵³.

In his *Natural Philosophy*, written in 1708 and used as a principal textbook on the subject when he taught at the Kiev Academy, Prokopovich reveals clear beliefs in occult qualities⁵⁴. In the section on stones and gems, for example, he provides a list of their various benefits. Thus, an emerald worn on the finger or hung to its full extent protects against epilepsy, whilst a ruby can oppose poisons and putrefaction, protects from the plague and gladdens the soul⁵⁵. Prokopovich also writes favourably on alchemy, arguing that although alchemists have at present not succeeded in creating artificial gold, it should not be concluded that it is impossible and will not be perfected in the future⁵⁶. He reinforces his argument by even referring to the alchemical expertise of angels:

Angels by nature have the knowledge to foresee which material and which correlations are somehow necessary for the creation of real gold. Consequently, when (alchemists) form everything correctly and mix at the right time, then real gold is created⁵⁷.

Indeed, according to Prokopovich, an alchemist's search for gold is a productive quest and has led to people mastering the separation of metals and the invention of many useful things⁵⁸. In Prokopovich's *Natural Philosophy*, the alchemical works of Daniel Sennert are frequently cited as authoritative texts on chemical matters. Thus, Prokopovich draws on Sennert when describing the alchemical process of separating mercury from sulphur and salt:

Daniel Sennert names it a divine liquid or spirit, of which with great effort it is possible to separate from fine sulphur and from simple and very rare salt⁵⁹.

⁵² Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 309.

⁵³ Morozov, *Feofan Prokopovich*, 141-42.

⁵⁴ This constitutes much of the second volume of the *Filosofski Tвори*.

⁵⁵ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 494-501.

⁵⁶ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 154-56.

⁵⁷ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 156.

⁵⁸ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 156.

⁵⁹ Prokopovich, *Filosofski Tвори*, 394.

Interestingly, even at his deathbed in 1736, an alchemist was present—known simply as Jacob the Alchemist—who subsequently became one of the principle beneficiaries in his will⁶⁰.

Prokopovich's library collection reflects his attraction to esotericism. It contains a substantial number of alchemical texts, by at least thirty-four different authors, including original editions of Petrus Severinus' *Idea Medicinae Philosophicae* (1571), Johann Hartmann's *Praxis Chymiatrica* (1683), Johan Finck's *Enchiridion Dogmatico-Hermeticum* (1618) and Otto Tach's *Hippocrates Chymicus*⁶¹. Prokopovich's library is especially rich in occult works. One finds, for example, the collected works of Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, Porta's *Magiae Naturalis*, Cardano's *De Rerum Varietate*, three editions of Lemnius' *Occulta Naturae Miracula* and Marcellus Palingenesis' *Zodiacus Vitae*, as well as a host of works by other Renaissance and early modern writers on natural magic and the occult⁶².

In the past, Prokopovich's passion for learning and scientific experimentation has been viewed solely from a post-Enlightenment perspective, in which his reading of Baconian and Cartesian theories has been stressed⁶³. Whilst it is true that works by both Bacon and Descartes are present in his library, one has to substantially broaden his breadth of learning in order to fully appreciate the intellectual worldview of this fascinating and hugely influential figure. I would argue, therefore, that it would be far more accurate to compare Prokopovich's *Natural Philosophy*—his principle statement of scientific views—to the spirit of scientific inquiry advocated by Athanasius Kircher, a towering late Renaissance figure, which rests on a profoundly religious worldview saturated with occult beliefs.

3. Robert Erskine (1677-1718)

A third figure worthy of mention, in light of links to Freemasonry and the occult, is Robert Erskine FRS, a Scottish physician and Jacobite, who arrived in Russia in 1704⁶⁴. By the time of his death in 1718, he had risen to become

⁶⁰ Chistovich, *Feofan Prokopovich i ego Vremia*, 648.

⁶¹ See Verkhovskoi, *Uchrezhdenie*, Nos. 1570, 1708, 925 & 1814 respectively.

⁶² See Verkhovskoi, *Uchrezhdenie*, Nos. 1659, 1144, 1661, 1723, 1808, 2962, 2678 respectively.

⁶³ See, for example, Cracraft (above).

⁶⁴ Erskine was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society on 30th November 1703, along with his colleague Richard Mead. He was nominated by Sir Hans Sloane.

one of Peter the Great's most trusted and important figures. Erskine fulfilled the role of the Tsar's Chief Physician, was head of the Russian medical establishment and was given the prestigious honour of being the first Director of the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera and its Head Librarian in 1714.

Astonishingly, it seems Erskine amassed one of the largest private alchemical collections in Europe for the age—a secret that has remained deeply buried inside the archives of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences Library up to this day. It is double the size of Bruce's own noteworthy collection, and contains at least 287 separate works by 157 different authors⁶⁵. This quantity well exceeds the noted collection of Isaac Newton and is actually somewhat larger than the renowned collection of Hans Sloane. Two of the most remarkable inclusions in a remarkable collection are an original first edition of *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz* and a rare 1615 Strasbourg edition of both Rosicrucian Manifestos, accompanied with Adam Haselmayer's *Reply* and three others affirming the credibility of the Brotherhood⁶⁶. Erskine's alchemical interests were no doubt cemented by training at the University of Utrecht under the noted alchemist and Chemistry Professor, Johann Conrad Barchusen (1666-1723). In a similar fashion as both Prokopovich and Bruce, Erskine also amassed an extraordinarily rich stock of other volumes on the occult. A small sample being a 1552 edition of Iamblichus's *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum Chaldaeorum*, a work on astral medicine purportedly by Hermes Trismegistus, Caspar Longinus' *Trinum Magicum*, containing a rich collection of ancient sources of magic, Kircher's accounts of Egyptian magic, a work by Johannes Staricius on the magical power of Egyptian shields, Gutsavus Selenus' encyclopaedic work on cryptography, entitled *Cryptomenytices Cryptographia* (1624) and Gabriel Naude's defence of natural magicians⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ The great majority of Erskine's library collection is housed at the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences Library. A catalogue exists listing Erskine's books in this location, entitled *Katalog Knig Biblioteki Areskina R.K. 1719* can be found in Fond 158, Opis 1. d214a. Helsinki University Library also has almost two hundred of Erskine's collection and is listed in the Havu & Lebedeva catalogue (see fn. 41).

⁶⁶ See *Katalog Areskina*, Areskine Libri Medici in Octavo et Duodecimo 27, No. 390 & 389 respectively.

⁶⁷ See *Katalog Areskina*, Areskine Libri Philosophic. Histor. et Philologici in 8vo et 12o, 55., No. 381; Areskine Libri Philosoph. Historici et Philolog in Quarto 39, No. 55; 31ob. Areskine Libri Medici in 8vo et 12o, No. 583; Areskine Libri Philosoph. Historici et Philolog. In Folio 33, No. 12 (*Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, Rome 1652-54), Areskine Libri Philosoph. Historici et Philolog. In Folio 33, No. 13 (*Oedipus Pamphilius*); 57ob. Areskine Libri Philosophici, Histor. et Philologici in 8vo et 12o, No. 478. 36ob; Areskine Philosoph. Historici et Philolog in Folio, No. 162.; Areskine Libri Philosophici, Histor. et Philologici in 8vo et 12o 58, No. 480.

Erskine's links to Jacobite Freemasonry are strong. He was a cousin of the Earl of Mar, who led the Jacobite Rebellion in 1715 and who was also allegedly the Grand Master of the Order of the Temple⁶⁸. Erskine's Grandfather was the 2nd, or 7th Earl of Mar, the favourite childhood companion of King James I and he was also related to Chevalier Andrew Ramsay, the noted champion of mystical Eccossais Freemasonry in the 1730s, whose patron was the Earl of Mar. Robert Erskine maintained contact with the Earl of Mar and his own brother, Sir John Erskine, whilst in Russia and formed part of a Jacobite network that spanned the continent. From a letter addressed to the Earl of Mar and written by George Mackenzie, the official British Resident in St. Petersburg and agent to Mar, it seems clear that some form of Jacobite Masonic network existed in St. Petersburg—with Robert Erskine at its centre—from at least as early as 1714. This letter is worth quoting in full:

St. Petersburg, ye 29th of October o.s 1714

My Lord,—To the very best of Guarantys there is stil allow'd time according to the circumstances, or nature of the principals, for whose sake these are enter'd into; tis true I had the honour to write yor Lordp. The 8th instant, that within a ffortnight thence and less, you were to expect a letter from Dr. Areskine; tho' it may not so soon appear to yor Lordp. Both of us has acted with the utmost good faith, for there's above a week, that he gave Mr. Naroskin a letter of recommendation to your Lordp. He is chambellan and Realtion of the Czar, and has the advantage to be destin'd the Bearer of an answer to a letter, our Monarch wrote this Prince from Hanover; as he is to have several other matters given him in charge, whereof, Without breaking throw the Masson Word, I hope, as to a Bror Mechanick of his Czarian Maty, it will as yet be allow'd me to acquaint you so far, that he is to carry, say they, a sea Compass to our King: the value of that present is that 'tis of this Prince's own gradation, and the box of his own turning. What the other things may be? Are also Joyner's work; but not being so compleat a Carpenter as to let out all the cunning, without being seen, your Lordp, having so long ago pass't the Essay Master will enough be apprised of it there, before the whole is come to a walding, to return to the Dr's excuse and my own, that Gentleman having being kept up here till sledge-way, which My Lord in good English is to say, more snow; tho' that's been already our weather above a month⁶⁹.

Mackenzie refers to the "Masson Word" and to a certain Mr. Naroskin, a "Bror Mechanick of his Czarian Maty". From this letter we know that Mr

⁶⁸ *Statutes*, xv-xvi; Baigent, *The Temple & the Lodge*, 228-334, 376-77.

⁶⁹ Cf. Paul, *Miscellany*, 408-10.

Naroskin was a Chamberlain and a relative of the Tsar and it seems he is also acting as some kind of courier or messenger between various royal houses. The indication that a Naryshkin was linked to Freemasonry is highly significant, as Peter the Great held an extremely tight bond with the members of his mother's (Natalia Naryshkina) family. It is my believe that the Naryshkin in question here is Semen Grigorovich Naryshkin (c. 1680-1747), an extremely close aide to the Tsar up until 1718, when he was implicated in the affair surrounding the Tsarevich Alexei and was forced into exile in France.

Semen Grigorovich Naryshkin was indeed a Chamberlain (*Komnatnii Stolnik*) to the Tsar, as well as serving as a General Adjutant. In 1708, he was also awarded the rank of Captain in the Lifeguards of the prestigious Preobrazhenski Regiment⁷⁰. Furthermore, Naryshkin was also frequently utilised as a personal courier and diplomatic messenger by the Tsar, as well as being entrusted with missions to hire craftsmen and purchase artefacts in Italy and Germany⁷¹. No doubt the Tsar drew on the Western European education and widespread connections of his younger kinsman⁷². Naryshkin had, after all, been enlisted as one of only thirty-five so-called "Volunteers" (which included the Tsar himself in its ranks) who accompanied the Russian Grand Embassy to Western Europe in 1697. The young Naryshkin remained in Western Europe for two years, prior to moving on to Berlin in 1699, where he received an education in military engineering and languages.

The intimacy of the relationship between Naryshkin and the Tsar is indicated by their correspondence, in which the former refers to Peter as "Uncle" and signs his letters with the affectionate diminutive "Senka"⁷³. As one of the few young "Volunteers" to receive a Western education, Naryshkin was a shining example of the new breed of boyars, or Russian aristocrats, much vaunted by the Tsar. As a descendant of the Naryshkin clan, Semen would have also encapsulated, in Peter's eyes, the noble and progressive stock of his own bloodline.

⁷⁰ *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol. XI, 366-367. Interestingly, the Tsar also awarded himself the rank of Captain of the Preobrazhenski Regiment.

⁷¹ *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol. XI, 122.

⁷² In 1711, for example, Naryshkin was sent on a lengthy diplomatic mission to Florence and the Court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo de Medici III. Furthermore, in 1712, he was sent on a mission to Denmark and in 1713 he embarked on a mission to Vienna. It should also be mentioned that Naryshkin later became Russian Ambassador to Britain, between the years of 1740-1747.

⁷³ See Gordin, 'Delo Tsarevicha Alekseia', 134; *Pisma i Bumagi*, Vol I, 78.

The connection between the Naryshkin clan and Freemasonry in post-Petrine Russia is extremely strong, with eight members of the family documented to have been Freemasons during the eighteenth-century alone⁷⁴. One of these seven, Semen Kirillovich Naryshkin (1710-1775), is officially recorded as Russia's first Freemason, having been initiated into a lodge in Paris in 1737⁷⁵.

In the person of Semen Grigorovich Naryshkin, however, it is hard to think of an individual more suited to the aristocratic and learned ideals of Jacobite Freemasonry and with such ample opportunity to familiarise himself with its milieu in Western Europe. Thus, the tantalising proof that Naryshkin was a "Brother Mechanick" of the Masonic Order as early as at least 1714, with close links to Jacobitism through Robert Erskine and the Earl of Mar, opens up the real need to re-examine the presently accepted view, which marks 1731 as the year in which a Hanoverian form of Freemasonry penetrated into Russia. Furthermore, whilst little is known of the scientific or theological beliefs of Naryshkin, the clear occult interests of Erskine, Bruce and Prokopovich provide a fascinating insight into what still remains something of a hidden and taboo area in the history of Petrine Russia.

Prior to concluding, it is also worthy of note that Bruce, Prokopovich and Erskine all embraced a tolerant form of Christianity, in line with the ethos of Freemasonry, which was imbued with mystical and eschatological elements. Bruce was strongly attracted to German Pietism and his house was a centre for Pietists from Halle who began their activities in Russia from his residence⁷⁶. His Pietist inclinations are clearly revealed in his library collection, which contains many Pietist works, including a significant collection by Phillip Jacob Spener⁷⁷.

Prokopovich was also strongly attracted to Halle Pietism—corresponding with August Francke and sending seminary students to study at Halle. Indeed, Francke sent Prokopovich an edition of Johann Arndt's *True Christianity*, which he subsequently ordered to be translated into Russian⁷⁸. His strong

⁷⁴ See Serkov, *Russkoe Masonstvo*, 2003.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 19. Intriguingly, S.K. Naryshkin also served as a diplomat in London at the same time as S.G. Naryshkin, during the early 1740s.

⁷⁶ Winter, *Halle*, 84.

⁷⁷ Bruce owned four works by Spener, which are stored in Helsinki University Library. See Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 90-93.

⁷⁸ Winter, *Halle*, 1953, 28; Chistovich, *Feofan Prokopovich i ego Vremia*, 589. Arndt's text was subsequently banned in 1742, during the reign of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna.

attraction to reformed Protestant groups can also be seen in his particular attraction to prophetic literature, such as the notorious *Lux e Tenebris*, edited by Comenius, of which he owned two editions, and many prophetic and millenarian works by other authors, such as Johannes Piscator, Johann Alsted, Johannes Coccejus, James Ussher and Campegius Vitringa⁷⁹. Prokopovich's attraction to reformed Protestantism merged with a deep devotion to certain mystical Christian Neoplatonist Church Fathers, such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor, who he frequently cites as authorities on scriptural matters. Erskine too had a sizeable theological collection, which reflects his upbringing as a Scottish Episcopalian. Many Jacobite Episcopalian Physicians from the North East of Scotland, as Erskine was, were renowned for their mystical tendencies at the beginning of the eighteenth century and it is significant that Erskine's religious texts indicate he also shared this outlook. One finds, for example, works by the Scottish mystics George Garden and Henry Scougall, as well as other texts by Thomas a Kempis, Johann Arndt, Gottfried Arnold, William Penn and John Norris⁸⁰. Erskine also owned a whole raft of eschatological texts by such noted figures as John Napier, Alsted, Joseph Mede and a remarkable eleven works by Pierre Jurieu⁸¹.

Conclusion

The triumvirate of Bruce, Prokopovich and Erskine were three of the Tsar's most valued statesmen and helped to enact the Petrine Reforms. They were undoubtedly progressive figures, yet retained religious faith *and* occult inter-

⁷⁹ Verkhovskoi, *Uchrezhdenie*, Nos. 273-4 (*Lux e Tenebris*). Prokopovich also owned ten other works by Comenius: Nos. 1797, 2470, 2471, 2480, 2500, 2654, 2921, 2925, 2927. He owned three works by Piscator: Nos. 746-8; six works by Alsted: Nos. 1088, 1276, 1666, 1741, 1805, 2917; two works by Coccejus: Nos. 425, 2360; Ussher's *Anales Veteris Testamenti*: No. 1043 and three works by Vitringa: Nos. 71, 283, 284.

⁸⁰ Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 104, 198, 132; *Katalog Areskina*, Areskina, 58ob. Areskina Libri Theologici in Octavo et Duodecimo, No. 6; four works by Gottfried Arnold: see Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, No. 14 & *Katalog Areskina*, 45ob. Areskina Libri Theologici in Quarto, No. 323 & *Katalog Areskina*, Areskina Libri Theologici in Octavo et Duodecimo, 59, Nos. 21 & 22; Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 175 & 165.

⁸¹ See Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 161, *Katalog Areskina*, Areskina Libri Philosoph. Historici et Philolog in quarto 38, No. 11 & 47ob. Areskina Libri Philos. Histor. et Philolog in 8vo et 12o, No. 86 (Alsted 2works); Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, No. 155 & eleven works by Jurieu: Havu & Lebedeva, *Collections*, Nos. 135-37 & *Katalog Areskina*, 45ob. Areskina Libri Theologici in Quarto, No. 325, 58ob. Areskina Libri Theologici in Octavo et Duodecimo, Nos. 1-5 & Areskina Libri Theologici in Octavo et Duodecimo 59, No. 41.

ests that have been entirely overlooked by historians who have perceived them solely as wholehearted representatives of modern, secular and enlightened thought. There also exists ample evidence that Peter the Great himself shared a very similar outlook to these figures. These revelations do not necessitate a rejection of the long-standing assumption that the Russian Tsar looked to the West for his vision of a modern Russia. It merely requires the realisation that Western Europe itself had not undergone a radical paradigm shift towards the rational and secular, in the Kuhnian sense, at the start of the eighteenth century.

Indeed, I would argue that it is possible (and constructive) to radically re-evaluate the entire Petrine reform project in light of the ideals of Christian reformists of the seventeenth century, such as Francis Bacon, Johann Valentin Andreae and Jan Amos Comenius, in which science and religion fused to create an eschatological, yet progressive vision. Within this strand of Christian-utopian thought, both Masonic style brotherhoods and occult practice were given the freedom and scope to flourish throughout Europe, with Russia being no exception.

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Résumé:

Le règne de Pierre le Grand est considéré comme étant l'une des époques la plus marquante et contestée de l'histoire russe. Les réformes de cette période ont souvent été envisagées en tant que transformation ascendante d'une société désuète ou comme l'abrogation pernicieuse de la culture russe traditionnelle. Cette dichotomie réside dans une idée convenue du rationnel et du séculier de Pierre le Grand et de son règne.

Cette communication tente de réévaluer la dichotomie par l'étude de l'influence occulte et maçonnique qui prévalait à la cour de Pierre le Grand. Ces deux aspects complémentaires de la société et la culture pétrine ont été censurés ou mis à l'écart par des générations successives d'historiens, pourtant ceux-ci ont exercé une influence considérable sur certains des hommes d'état les plus puissants de l'époque, y compris le Tsar lui-même. L'examen de l'influence maçonnique et occulte de la Russie pétrine peut aider à surpasser l'image séculière forte de Pierre le Grand, sans remettre en cause la nature progressiste de ses réformes.

La première partie de l'article envisage les représentations symboliques solides du Tsar en tant que "Roi Maçon" et architecte d'une nouvelle Russie. Celle-ci dévoile une campagne convergente pour décrire Pierre le Grand comme le nouveau Roi David, conduisant son peuple (les nouveaux Israélites) vers les terres promises et la Nouvelle Jérusalem, concrétisée par la fondation de St. Pétersbourg. Nous examinerons ensuite comment la vision du monde de Pierre le Grand (sa tolérance religieuse, sa curiosité scientifique tournée vers l'ésotérisme et sa passion pour les sociétés chevaleresques) était entièrement compatible avec les idéaux de la Franc-Maçonnerie, telle qu'elle se développait au XVIII^{ème} siècle.

Dans la deuxième partie de l'article, nous nous concentrerons sur les liens maçonniques et les forts intérêts occultes de Jacob Bruce (1669-1735), Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736) et Robert Erskine (1677-1718)—trois des plus grands hommes d'état de la Russie pétrine. Bruce, issu d'une famille jacobite écossaise, jouait un rôle actif dans presque tous les ressorts de la vie d'état russe, de l'armée à la promotion des sciences et de l'éducation. Prokopovich était la figure ecclésiastique la plus éminente de la Russie pétrine et un fidèle partisan des réformes de l'Etat de Pierre le Grand. Erskine, comme Bruce, descendait d'une famille Jacobite puissante d'Ecosse; il appréciait être proche de Pierre le Grand. Il était son Médecin en Chef, Directeur de la Chancellerie Médicale Russe et Directeur de la Kunstkamera de St. Pétersbourg et de la bibliothèque.

Ce triumvirat a joué un rôle actif dans la transformation de l'état Russe, toutefois, ils ne symbolisent pas des incarnations archétypes des lumières purement rationnelles et séculières. Ils affichaient tous un grand sentiment religieux et un intérêt marqué pour l'ésotérisme. Bruce et Erskine, en particulier, avaient de fortes attaches avec la Franc-Maçonnerie Jacobite. Pierre le Grand exhibait des intérêts similaires et était leur fervent bienfaiteur. Ainsi, nous espérons que notre article mettra en avant la prédominance nette des idéaux Maçonniques et d'une fascination pour l'occulte dans la Cour pétrine et permettra de façonner les transformations édictées durant cette période pivot de l'histoire russe.

Abstract

The reign of Peter the Great is regarded as one of the most significant and contentious epochs in Russian history. It has been customary to view the reforms of the period as either a progressive transformation of an antiquated society or the destructive suppression of traditional Russian culture. This dichotomy rests on an accepted perception of Peter the Great and his reign as rational and secular.

This paper attempts to revise this dichotomy by focussing on the Masonic and occult influence prevalent at the Petrine Court. These two complimentary aspects of Petrine society and culture have been censured or overlooked by successive generations of historians, yet they exerted a considerable hold on some of the most powerful statesmen of the period, including the Tsar himself. The importance of studying Masonic and occult influence in Petrine Russia lies in the fact that it can help to overcome the starkly secular image of Peter the Great, without denying the progressive nature of his reforms.

The first section of the article examines the powerful symbolic representations of the Tsar as a "Mason King" and architect of a new Russia. It reveals a concerted campaign to portray Peter the Great as a new King David, leading his people—new Israelites—to their promised land and a New Jerusalem, crystallised by the foundation of St. Petersburg. This is then followed by examining how Peter the Great's worldview—encompassing religious tolerance, a scientific curiosity open to esotericism and a passion for chivalrous societies—was wholly compatible with the ideals of Freemasonry as it developed at the beginning of the eighteenth-century.

The second part of the paper focuses on the Masonic links and strong occult interests of Jacob Bruce (1669-1735), Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736) and Robert Erskine (1677-1718)—three of the most prominent statesmen in Petrine Russia. Bruce came from a Scottish Jacobite family and played an active role in practically all fields of Russian state life, ranging from the military to the promotion of science and education. Prokopovich was the most eminent ecclesiastic figure in Petrine Russia and a loyal stalwart of Peter the Great's state reforms. Erskine, like Bruce, also descended from a powerful Jacobite family in Scotland. He enjoyed a close relationship with Peter the Great and was his Chief Physician and Head of the Russian Medical Chancellery, as well as being Director of the St. Petersburg Kunstkamera and Library.

This triumvirate played an active role in transforming the Russian State, but do not represent the archetypal embodiments of purely rational and secular enlighteners. They all displayed a strong religiosity and a marked interest in esoteric matters and Bruce and Erskine, in particular, had strong ties to Jacobite Freemasonry. Peter the Great displayed similar interests and acted as their enthusiastic patron. Thus, it is hoped that this paper will reveal the significant extent to which Masonic ideals and a fascination with the occult were rife at the Petrine Court and helped to shape the transformations enacted during this pivotal period in Russian history.

LES DRAMES-MYSTÈRES DE RUDOLF STEINER:
TRANSCRIPTION LITTÉRAIRE D'UN SAVOIR ÉSOTÉRIQUE
ET / OU TENTATIVE ÉSOTÉRIQUE DE RÉCONCILIATION
ENTRE L'ART ET LA SCIENCE AU DÉBUT DU 20^e SIÈCLE ?

AURÉLIE CHONÉ

Die hohen Kunstwerke sind zugleich als die höchsten Naturwerke von Menschen nach wahren und natürlichen Gesetzen hervorgebracht worden. Alles Willkürliche, Eingebildete fällt zusammen: da ist die Notwendigkeit; da ist Gott.

Goethe, *Italianische Reise*, Rom, den 6. September 1787¹

L'article suivant s'inscrit dans un axe de réflexion portant sur les relations entre littérature et connaissance développé par l'Université Marc Bloch de Strasbourg². Il reprend en partie ma communication au troisième congrès européen de la "Society for Literature and Science" (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore) qui a eu lieu à Paris en juin 2004 sur le thème "Conversation entre les arts et les sciences: nouvelles synergies", dans le cadre d'un atelier animé par Madame Christine Maillard sur l'interaction des sciences et des sciences occultes dans la littérature (18^e-20^e siècles). Les Drames-Mystères de Rudolf Steiner m'ont semblé une œuvre particulièrement intéressante au regard des relations entre l'art, en l'occurrence l'art dramatique, et la science, ici la "science de l'occulte" développée par le fondateur de l'Anthroposophie, et surtout la théorie de la connaissance qui la sous-tend et qui fut explicitement formulée par Steiner³.

Le but de la Société anthroposophique créée par Rudolf Steiner en 1912/1913 est la pratique de la "Science de l'Esprit" (*Geisteswissenschaft*) dans une ou plusieurs de ses composantes (médecine, pharmacologie, pédagogie, agriculture, etc.); la "Science de l'Esprit" est une "science de l'occulte" au

¹ Goethe, cité par Steiner dans *Kunst und Kunsterkenntnis*, 213.

² Cf. Maillard (éd.), *Littérature et théorie de la connaissance 1890-1935*.

³ A ma connaissance, les Drames-Mystères n'ont pas encore réellement fait l'objet d'études approfondies dans les milieux universitaires. Les seuls travaux que j'ai trouvés sont issus des milieux anthroposophiques eux-mêmes. Cf. par exemple: Smit, *Lebensdrama—Mysteriendrama*; Fels, *Studien zur Einführung in die Mysteriendramen Rudolf Steiners*.

sens que Steiner donne à ce terme dans le livre du même nom⁴, à savoir une science ayant pour objet la connaissance de la réalité suprasensible, c'est-à-dire la réalité inaccessible aux organes des sens, en opposition à la science au sens traditionnel du terme, qui a pour objet la connaissance de la réalité sensible. Steiner est surtout connu pour ses écrits théoriques⁵; il l'est généralement moins pour ses productions artistiques, qui touchent pourtant à des domaines aussi variés que l'architecture, la sculpture, la peinture, l'art du mouvement, l'art de la parole, la poésie et le théâtre⁶; c'est à ce dernier art que je me consacrerai dans cet article, sachant qu'il est intimement lié aux autres. Entre 1910 et 1913, Rudolf Steiner créa et mit en scène à Munich quatre *Drames-Mystères*⁷: *La Porte de l'Initiation* (1910); *L'Epreuve de l'âme* (1911); *Le Gardien du seuil* (1912); *L'Éveil des âmes* (1913). Depuis, ces drames sont régulièrement donnés à Dornach sur la scène du Goetheanum, édifice qui fut spécifiquement construit pour leur représentation en 1913. Ce nouvel art théâtral intimement lié à l'eurythmie est né de la collaboration entre Rudolf Steiner et sa femme, Marie Steiner-von Sivers.

A propos du premier Drame-Mystère, Steiner écrit: 'Ce drame rosicrucien doit permettre d'expérimenter comment ce qui anime la vie anthroposophique sous tous ses aspects peut s'exprimer dans l'art'⁸. Steiner cherche donc à exprimer, à traduire, transcrire, sous une forme artistique, en l'occurrence dramatique, le contenu du savoir véhiculé par la science de l'esprit. Nous verrons comment il s'y prend, en nous appuyant notamment sur l'“épistémocritique”⁹—une approche relativement récente du texte littéraire—et en

⁴ Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*.

⁵ Cf. par exemple: *Die Philosophie der Freiheit: Grundzüge einer modernen Weltanschauung; Das Christentum als mystische Tatsache; Theosophie; Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse höherer Welten?; Aus der Akascha-Chronik*... et une multitude de conférences sur les sujets les plus variés: mystères d'Orient et d'Occident, art, éducation, médecine, sciences naturelles, pédagogie, etc.

⁶ Cf. Wiesberger, *Rudolf Steiner: Das literarische und künstlerische Werk*.

⁷ *Vier Mysteriendramen* (1910-1913), GA 14. Dans la suite de cet article, je citerai toujours les Drames Mystères (DM) dans la deuxième édition revue et corrigée chez Triades (Paris 1991). Premier volume: *La porte de l'initiation / Die Pforte der Einweihung* (I), *L'épreuve de l'âme / Die Prüfung der Seele* (II); second volume: *Le gardien du Seuil / Der Hüter der Schwelle* (III), *L'éveil des âmes / Der Seelen Erwachen* (IV). Préface et traduction de S. Rihouët-Coroze, texte bilingue.

⁸ Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (Vortrag vom 17. September 1910, GA 125, 2. Auflage, Dornach, 1992), in: Sixel (éd.), *Die Mysteriendramen*, 14: 'Dieses Rosenkreuzer-mysterium soll eine Probe sein, wie in Kunst ausfließen kann das, was alles anthroposophische Leben bewegt'.

⁹ Michel Pierssens, dans son ouvrage *Savoirs à l'œuvre*, propose un des premiers modèles

soulignant les dangers inhérents à une telle entreprise. Puis, nous verrons que le but de Steiner est beaucoup plus large qu’une simple traduction d’un savoir ésotérique puisqu’il s’agit pour lui, à travers cette œuvre, de témoigner de la parenté profonde entre un “art” et une “science” qui tous deux trouveraient leur origine dans une vie spirituelle comprise comme la source de toute connaissance véritable—l’art apparaissant alors comme l’aspect pratique de la science.

1. *Les drames-mystères: Traduction littéraire d’un savoir ésotérique, la “science de l’esprit”*

Les Drames-Mystères contiennent, transposés sur un plan artistique, les différents aspects de l’enseignement théorique de Rudolf Steiner, notamment sa théorie du karma et de la réincarnation¹⁰, le problème du mal¹¹, la christologie¹² et la théorie de la connaissance¹³. Le but n’est pas de développer chacun de ces points—ce serait d’ailleurs impossible dans le cadre de cet article—mais d’insister surtout sur le dernier aspect, fondamental pour les relations entre littérature et connaissance qui nous intéressent ici.

1.a. *Le karma individuel et inhérent à un groupe humain—la réincarnation*

Les Drames-Mystères décrivent la destinée d’un cercle de personnes liées par leur karma, les diverses situations de leur vie et les crises qu’elles traversent, ainsi que les événements et expériences qu’elles vivent dans les mondes suprasensibles, dans leur incarnation actuelle et dans leurs incarnations précédentes au Moyen Âge et dans les temples égyptiens. Au centre des Drames, se trouve le “héros”, le personnage central: le jeune peintre Johannes Thomasius. Les autres personnages prennent plus ou moins d’importance

permettant d’analyser les effets cognitifs et esthétiques de la rencontre entre un savoir et une œuvre.

¹⁰ Steiner, *Die Offenbarung des Karma; Theosophie; Wiederverkörperung und Karma; Esoterische Betrachtungen karmischer Zusammenhänge*.

¹¹ Steiner, *Die spirituellen Hintergründe der äußeren Welt: Der Sturz der Geister der Finsternis*.

¹² Steiner, *Das christliche Mysterium; Der Christus-Impuls und die Entwicklung des Ich-Bewußtseins; Das Ereignis der Christus-Erscheinung in der ätherischen Welt*.

¹³ Cf. par exemple: Steiner, *Theosophie; Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse höherer Welten?; Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie; Die Mystik im Aufgange des neuzeitlichen Geisteslebens* (surtout l’introduction); *Grenzen der Naturwissenschaft und ihre Überwindung; Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*.

selon le rôle plus ou moins grand qu'ils jouent dans l'initiation de Johannes. Maria, l'amie de Johannes, le professeur Capésius et l'ingénieur Strader sont très proches de Johannes, viennent ensuite les personnages qui gravitent autour d'eux (Théodora, Félix et Félicia Balde, les amis de Maria, Theodosius, Retardus et Romanus, etc.). Bénédictus, le guide spirituel de ce groupe d'amis, explique:

Dans les jours du passé de la terre, il se forma
Un nœud entre les fils
Que le karma tisse au cours du devenir.
Ce nœud resserre les vies des trois êtres humains.
Sur lui brille désormais
La claire lumière de ce lieu d'initiation¹⁴.

Dans le premier drame, Johannes prend conscience de la faute qui pèse sur lui: avoir abandonné et finalement tué une femme qui l'aimait. La découverte de son karma génère en lui une très grande souffrance. Par la méditation, il se transforme en l'être à qui il a causé une profonde souffrance, et souffre donc lui-même cruellement. Dans le second drame, Capésius, Thomasius et Maria ressentent le besoin de défricher le karma individuel et collectif qui les lie, en se plongeant par la méditation dans leurs vies terrestres antérieures. Le sixième tableau décrit justement une vision rétrospective qu'ils ont de leur vie au début du XIV^e siècle. Maria, en déchiffrant ses vies antérieures, prend conscience des dettes qui lui restent à payer et réalise qu'il lui faut se séparer de Johannes pour accomplir son propre destin et pour que celui-ci puisse accomplir le sien; Bénédictus lui explique que ce qu'elle a vécu avec Johannes à la fin du premier drame était une image, qu'il s'agit maintenant de transformer en réalité. Le Maître déclare à la jeune femme:

Autrefois, le père n'a pas pu trouver accès
Auprès du cœur de son fils. Mais désormais
Il accompagnera sur son chemin spirituel
Le Moi de ton ami¹⁵.

¹⁴ II, 3107-3112: 'Es formte sich in alten Erdentagen / Ein Knoten aus den Fäden, / Die Karma spinnt im Weltenwerden. / Ihm sind verwoben dreier Menschen Leben. / Es strahlet jetzt auf diesen Schicksalsknoten / Der Weihstätte hohes Geisteslicht.'

¹⁵ II, 3120-3122: 'Der Vater konnte in dem frühern Sein / Des Sohnes Herz nicht finden; doch jetzt wird / Der Geistessucher deines Freundes Selbst / Auf dessen Weg ins Geistesland begleiten'.

1.b. *Le problème du mal*

D'après Steiner, les hommes sont freinés sur ce chemin initiatique par deux forces adverses, les deux entités que sont Lucifer et Ahrimane. Lucifer, le 'Maître des désirs' (II, 3134), tente de perdre l'homme dans le tourbillon des passions et des sentiments, tandis que Ahriman utilise le système nerveux et l'intellect de l'homme pour lui faire mener une vie automatique et séparée de la réalité. Les Drames-Mystères dépeignent l'action de ces forces: dans les deux premiers drames, Strader et Capésius subissent l'influence d'Ahrimane; ils sont coupés de la réalité spirituelle et vivent dans leur monde intellectuel. Seuls les contes de Dame Balde rafraîchissent le savant Capésius et seule la liaison avec Theodora fera sortir Strader de sa vie machinale et triste. Thomasius subit d'abord l'influence de Lucifer, qui lui inspire une passion sensuelle pour Theodora: 'Lucifer veut séparer Thomasius de Maria / Et l'enchaîner à l'avenir / Par le pouvoir d'un amour injuste et faux'¹⁶. Or,

D'après les lois sévères du karma
 Thomasius et Théodora ne doivent pas
 Être liés dans la vie par la passion
 Si l'un d'eux éprouve pour l'autre
 Une attirance qui ne repose pas purement sur l'esprit,
 Il contrarie de ce fait des lois cosmiques.
 Thomasius contrevient donc, en son cœur,
 A l'ordonnance des hautes puissances du destin¹⁷.

Dans *L'Eveil des Âmes*, Johannes échappe à l'emprise de Lucifer (onzième tableau) grâce au 'vœu sacré' de Maria (IV, 2523-2525). Quant à Strader, il subit encore l'influence d'Ahrimane par l'intermédiaire de Ferdinand Le Goupil, qui le fait douter de son œuvre en s'appuyant sur des arguments intellectuels. Mais Ahrimane ne peut rien contre Strader tant que l'âme de Theodora l'accompagne (IV, 2737-2745).

¹⁶ III, 1546-1548: 'Maria sollte von Thomasius / Getrennt und er an Lucifer in Zukunft / Durch falsche Liebesmacht gebunden werden.'

¹⁷ III, 1524-1531: 'Thomasius und Theodora sollen / Nach strenger Schicksalsmächte Fügung nie / Im Leben sich in Leidenschaft begegnen. / Sie widersetzen Weltgesetzen sich, / Wenn einer von dem andern fühlen wollte, / Was nicht im Geiste ganz allein gegründet'.

1.c. *La christologie*

La christologie propre à l'Anthroposophie est également présente dans les Drames-Mystères. La voyante Theodora perçoit par exemple, lors d'une de ses "transes", l'action du Christ à partir du monde éthérique¹⁸:

Jadis le Christ a vécu sur la terre,
Et la conséquence en fut
Que maintenant sous forme d'âme il embrasse
Le devenir humain.
A l'essence spirituelle de la terre il s'est uni.
Les hommes ne pouvaient pas encore le contempler
Tel que sous cette forme il se révèle,
Car leur faisait défaut l'œil spirituel
Qui dans l'avenir doit surgir¹⁹.

1.d. *La théorie de la connaissance: l'initiation à la connaissance des mondes "supérieurs", suprasensibles*

Comme Robert Musil l'a fait avec *L'Homme sans qualités*²⁰, mais vingt ans avant et d'une manière très différente, Steiner cherche à lutter contre la fragmentation moderne des savoirs, contre le clivage entre sentiment et raison qui conduit à un appauvrissement de la connaissance et, de manière plus générale, contre l'échec d'une théorie de la connaissance reposant sur la séparation entre le sujet et l'objet de la connaissance. De la même manière que Musil, Steiner conçoit ses personnages comme les prototypes des différents savoirs de l'époque, mais contrairement à lui, il ne le fait pas dans l'idée implicite d'"essayer" de manière empirique et d'"évaluer" les pratiques discursives contemporaines, mais bel et bien d'illustrer le chemin du héros vers une connaissance dépassant les différents savoirs parcellaires en les unifiant. Le constat est pourtant le même: la situation de départ des Drames-Mystères reflète le chaos moderne de la fragmentation des savoirs que décrira Musil, deux décennies plus tard, en 'mélangeant les styles et les discours sans jamais en dissoudre les contradictions dans une unité factice, donnant à voir, mais aussi à expérimenter le grouillement de dissonances et de contradictions dans

¹⁸ Cf. Steiner, *Das Ereignis der Christus-Erscheinung in der ätherischen Welt*.

¹⁹ I, 484-492: 'Es lebte Christus einst auf Erden, / Und dieses Lebens Folge war, / Dass er in Seelenform umschwebt / Der Menschen Werden. / Er hat sich mit der Erde Geistesteil vereint. Die Menschen konnten schauen ihn noch nicht, / Wie er in solcher Daseinsform sich zeigt, / Weil Geistesaugen ihrem Wesen fehlten, / Die sich erst künftig zeigen sollen'.

²⁰ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*.

lequel notre modernité est née²¹. Tandis que Musil laisse parfois transparaître, dans son roman, la possibilité d'un 'autre état'²², d'une 'connaissance non-ratioïde', Steiner décrit le parcours initiatique du personnage principal, le jeune peintre Johannes Thomasius, du chaos initial vers la possibilité d'une "connaissance unitaire", d'une liaison entre la science et l'art aux sources de la connaissance véritable, qui est con-naissance de soi en même temps que naissance à soi et au divin en soi. Cette initiation ne concerne pas seulement Johannes, mais également son amie Maria, l'ingénieur Strader et l'historien Capésius. Elle comprend différentes épreuves (rencontre avec le gardien du seuil, confrontation avec les entités lucifériennes et ahrimaniennes, etc.) et plusieurs étapes vers des degrés croissants de connaissance (imagination, intuition, inspiration), que chacun d'eux franchit de manière différente et à des rythmes différents. Mais tous sont initiés à la 'connaissance des mondes supérieurs' par leur guide spirituel, Benedictus. Lors de cette initiation qualifiée de "rosicrucienne" dans le premier drame, ils se plongent dans des phases de méditation et d'imagination qui les mènent au seuil du monde spirituel. La connaissance de soi passe par la connaissance de ses vies antérieures; sans cette connaissance, l'homme n'est 'qu'un rêve qui se rêve lui-même' (II 2610), il reste éternellement lié 'au néant de [son] être' (II 2688). C'est Maria qui parvient la première à la connaissance de ses vies antérieures et des mondes spirituels. A la fin de *L'épreuve de l'âme*, elle comprend son propre karma:

Les forces du destin voulurent m'octroyer
 Le regard qui remonte vers les temps reculés.
 Et un signe aussi m'a été donné
 Qui m'apporte la volonté du sacrifice
 Pour guérir les âmes
 Dont la trame de vie au cours des temps
 Devra toujours s'unir à la mienne.
 J'ai vu dans sa forme corporelle antérieure
 L'âme de Johannes se détourner de son père
 et je vis aussi les forces qui m'entraînaient
 A séparer du fils le cœur du père.
 Ce père se tient aujourd'hui devant moi,
 Me demandant compte de cette ancienne faute. (. . .)
 Je reconnais les suites de mes propres actions

²¹ Dahan-Gaida, *Musil, Savoir et fiction*, 24.

²² 'der andere Zustand' Cf. Musil: *Ansätze zu neuer Ästhetik*, 675.

Dans la souffrance que j'ai ressentie
Quand j'ai dû repousser de moi Johannes²³.

Maria atteint donc, dès *L'épreuve de l'âme*, le 'lieu consacré' (II, 3115). Capésius, qui a eu la vision fugitive de ses vies antérieures, s'en approche et se sent 'Rempli d'une joie suprême, / Libéré de l'ornière des sens, / Elargi jusqu'à l'univers' (II, 2649-2657), même si sa vision s'évanouit aussitôt. En parlant de lui, Bénédictus déclare, à la fin de *L'épreuve de l'âme*: 'Un autre homme s'achemine vers la lumière du Temple. / Il n'en atteindra que plus tard le portail / Pour pénétrer en ce lieu d'initiation' (I, 2978-2979). Mais c'est le parcours de Johannes Thomasius qui est décrit de la manière la plus détaillée. Au début du premier drame, il prend conscience que chaque personnage représente un aspect particulier de la connaissance. Theodora représente la connaissance clairvoyante:

Quand elle entre en cet état,
Elle est presque entièrement
privée de tout souvenir
et ses yeux ne voient plus.
Elle sent d'autant mieux alors ce qui l'entoure
Qu'elle ne le perçoit pas.
Une lumière toute particulière
S'allume dans son regard.
Alors lui apparaissent des formes
Troubles au début comme des rêves,
Ensuite si précises
Qu'on est bien obligé de les interpréter
Comme des prémonitions de l'avenir²⁴.

L'ingénieur Strader représente la connaissance scientifique, logique, intellectuelle, qui n'admet que le monde sensible et rejette tout ce qui est d'ordre

²³ II, 3070-3091: 'Mir haben Schicksalsmächte schenken wollen / Den Blick, dem Vorzeittage sichtbar sind; / Und auch die Zeichen sind mir schon gegeben, / Die mich den Opferwillen lenken lehren, / Dass Heil erwachse jenen Menschenseelen, / Mit deren Lebensfäden sich die meinen / Im Erdenwerden stets verbinden müssen. / Ich sah in ihrem frühern Erdenleibe / Johannes' Seele sich vom Vater wenden / Und sah die Mächte, die mich selbst getrieben, / Den Sohn dem Vaterherzen zu entfremden. So steht mir jetzt der Vater gegenüber, / Mich mahnend an die alte Lebensschuld. (. . .) / In jenen Schmerzen, die ich tragen musste, / Als ich Johannes von mir trennen sollte, / Erkenn'ich eigner Taten Schicksalsfolgen'.

²⁴ I, 416-428: 'Wenn sie in jenen Zustand fällt, / Ermangelt sie fast ganz / Der Gabe der Erinnerung. / Es ist ihr auch des Auges Kraft genommen, / Sie fühlt dann mehr, was sie umgibt. / Sie sieht es nicht. / Dabei erglimmen ihre Augen / In eigenartigem Licht. / Dafür erscheinen ihr Gebilde, / Die anfangs traumhaft waren, / Die jetzt so klar doch sind, / Dass sie als Vorverkündung späterer Zukunft / Nur zu verstehen sind'.

spirituel dans le domaine de la foi. Strader fait preuve de scepticisme par rapport à tout ce qu'on ne peut pas prouver scientifiquement, en l'occurrence le contenu de la conférence que vient de donner Bénédictus, la citation suivante faisant implicitement référence à une théorie kantienne de la connaissance:

Ces phrases semblent très séduisantes à l'esprit
 Mais ne font que leurrer les cœurs crédules.
 On voit s'ouvrir les portes d'un domaine
 Au seuil duquel, perplexe, s'arrête
 Toute recherche scientifique prudente.
 Il sied à qui s'est voué
 A cette recherche
 De reconnaître
 Que nul ne peut savoir
 D'où découlent les sources de la pensée,
 Ni où reposent les fondements de l'existence.
 Et bien qu'un tel aveu soit dur
 Pour qui voudrait approfondir
 Ce qui réside au fond du savoir,
 Il faut en prendre son parti: pas de recherche,
 Qu'elle se tourne vers l'extérieur ou l'intérieur,
 Qui n'oblige à reconnaître la limite du savoir.
 Si nous dépassons la zone
 Que cernent la raison et l'expérience,
 Nous sombrons dans un abîme²⁵.

L'historien Capésius incarne une connaissance érudite qui, une fois lasse de son savoir intellectuel desséchant, se ressource au contact des mondes spirituels grâce aux contes de Dame Balde, même si lui-même ne comprend pas comment cela est possible; en parlant de Capésius, Bénédictus déclare, à la fin de *L'épreuve de l'âme*: 'Son travail de savant a implanté en l'âme / Les germes de la pensée. / C'est ainsi qu'ils doivent atteindre la lumière de l'esprit / Et mûrir hors du Temple' (II, 2978-2979). Felix Balde représente quant à lui une mystique de la nature, Romanus une connaissance axée sur l'activité, l'autre Maria et Theodosius une connaissance axée sur l'amour, etc.

²⁵ I, 272-291: 'Es spricht berückend zu dem Menschengestalt / Und lockt doch nur des Menschen gläubig Herz; / Man meint zu öffnen Türen in die Reiche, / Vor denen ratlos und bescheiden / Die streng bedächtig Forschung steht. / Und wer in wahrer Treue / Zu dieser Forschung lebt, / Ihm ziemt es zu bekennen, / Dass niemand wissen kann, / Woraus des Denkens Quellen strömen / Und wo des Daseins Gründe liegen. / Wenn solch Bekenntnis auch recht hart der Seele wird, / Die allzugern ergründen möchte, / Was jenseits allen Wissens liegt: / Der Denkerseele drängt ein jeder Blick, / Ob er nach aussen sich bemüht, / On man ins Innre ihn gerichtet hält, / Des Wissens Grenze doch gewaltig auf. Verleugnen wir Vernunft / Und was Erfahrung uns gewährt, / So sinken wir ins Bodenlose'.

Thomasius, conscient du clivage existant entre une connaissance sensible qui rejette tout ce qui est d'ordre spirituel dans le domaine de la foi ('Vous vous êtes livrés à la lumière des sens, / Vous ne pouviez plus que *croire* en l'esprit', I, 473-474), et une connaissance "mystique" qui voit l'esprit dans la nature, éprouve une très grande souffrance face à cette multitude de connaissances partielles, parcellaires, séparées les unes des autres; son désespoir est immense: 'En ces instants, / Chaque mot fut pour moi / Le signe épouvantable / De mon propre néant' (I, 922-926). Pour reprendre une image du conte de Goethe, les différents modes du connaître sont mélangés comme les métaux qui composent le dernier roi du conte, alors que seul l'or, seule la connaissance spirituelle, ne se mélange pas aux autres métaux.

Le premier Drame-Mystère témoigne d'une évolution importante de Thomasius, qui subit l'influence positive de Maria, et par son intermédiaire de Bénédictus: le jeune peintre parvient à exprimer l'esprit dans l'œuvre d'art; le portrait qu'il fait de Capesius exprime l'essence de l'être de Capesius, qui, émerveillé, lui dit:

Je vous entends souvent redire
Que vous ne devez votre art
Qu'à cette faculté
De vivre consciemment en d'autres mondes,
Et que vous ne pouvez
Rien introduire dans votre œuvre
Que vous n'ayez d'abord contemplé en esprit.
En vos œuvres, Je vois l'esprit qui se révèle²⁶.

Parallèlement à cette évolution de Thomasius, on voit Strader, de son côté, tomber dans la dépression et se détourner de sa recherche spirituelle. Dans le troisième drame, il constate en Thomasius 'les puissants effets de la discipline spirituelle sur une âme humaine. (. . .) Ces expériences [lui] enlevèrent la foi / qu'il avait eue dans la raison et la science, mais ne lui apprirent rien qu'[il] pût comprendre en ce temps-là. (. . .) [Il continua] à vivre machinalement et tristement (. . .) La technique à laquelle [il] s'adonnait / Devait [lui] procurer oubli et diversion. [Son] expérience fut un calvaire' (III, 1302-1314), jusqu'au jour où il se liera vraiment à Theodora.

Dans le troisième Drame-Mystère, Thomasius tente de réunir les différents modes du connaître, et en particulier de 'réconcilier la science qu'on estime

²⁶ II, 2920-2928: 'Ich höre oft euch wiederholen, / Dass ihr die Künstlerschaft / Allein der Gabe dankt, / Bewusst in andren Welten zu empfinden, / Und dass ihr nicht erst im Geist erschaut. / Ich seh' an euren Werken, wie der Geist / Sich wirksam offenbart.'

aujourd'hui / Avec l'antique et sainte Mystique' (III, 665-666)—ce qui est aussi le but de l'Anthroposophie; grâce à l'œuvre de Thomasius, qui est parvenu 'A fournir à la science qu'exige notre époque / Un ouvrage qui fait la preuve / Des valeurs spirituelles, / Ces valeurs que jusqu'ici on ne put trouver / Que par la mystique et par l'initiation', 'le sens commun et les disciplines sacrées' peuvent être réunis harmonieusement (III, 485-501), la mystique peut s'appuyer 'sur la connaissance qui ne veut admettre que le monde sensible' (III, 650-654):

Porté vers ces cimes de l'esprit,
 Se sentant vivre dans les puissances créatrices,
 Il peignit des tableaux qui agissaient comme s'ils vivaient.
 Ce qui eût porté tout autre artiste que lui
 A s'en tenir sagement à un tel résultat
 Et à le consolider fermement,
 Ne l'incita qu'à mettre le talent acquis
 Au service de ce qui pourrait le mieux
 Secourir les hommes.
 Il vit clairement qu'une science de l'esprit
 Ne pourrait être alors bien fondée
 Que si la discipline scientifique et la pensée exacte
 Étaient libérées par l'artiste de leur raideur dogmatique,
 Car elles auraient ainsi la force intérieure de s'élever
 A un sens de l'existence en communion avec l'univers²⁷.

Dans le quatrième Drame-Mystère, Thomasius doit réaliser concrètement son projet dans la scierie-menuiserie de Hilarius Féaldieu—lequel met ses ateliers sous la direction artistique du peintre:

Ainsi, ce que nos machines produiront
 Recevra de son esprit une forme artistique
 Qui introduira dans la vie quotidienne des hommes,
 Avec l'utilité, une noble beauté.
 L'industrie doit s'unir à l'art
 Pour pénétrer de goût la vie de tous les jours.
 J'ajoute ainsi au corps sans vie de la matière

²⁷ III, 520-534: 'Er malte dann, in Geisteshöhen getragen / Und in den Schöpfermächten sich erlebend, / Die Bilder, die wie Wesen wirken konnten. / Was jeden andern Künstler wohl getrieben hätte, / Auf dem betreten Felde höchste Ziele, / Sich klug begrenzend, kräftig anzustreben, / Ihm war es Anlass nur, erworbenes Können / In solcher Art zu nutzen, die am besten / Dem Menschenheile sich erweisen würde. / Es ward ihm klar, dass Geisteswissenschaft / Nur wahrhaft gut begründet werden könne, / Wenn Sinn für Wissenschaft und strenges Denken / Durch Künstlergeist von steifer Formensucht / Befreit und innerlich erkräftet werde / Zum wahren weltverwandten Sein-Erleben'.

—Car telle m'apparaît notre production—
L'âme qui peut seule lui conférer un sens²⁸.

Dame Balde aussi se réjouit en comprenant que le projet de Strader et de Thomasius s'efforce 'd'incarner l'esprit dans la matière' (IV, 1179):

J'ai vu en esprit danser gaiement les princes de mes contes
Et mes petits esprits du feu,
Devenus mille marionnettes, toutes belles et artistiques.
Ainsi, je les ai vus, toute heureuses en pensée,
Chercher le chemin des chambres d'enfants²⁹.

Ce que les drames racontent, c'est donc l'histoire du mouvement anthroposophique lui-même et son but, le passage à une ère nouvelle, capable de réunir les différentes formes de savoir, notamment la connaissance mystique, suprasensible, représentée par le collège mystique, et la connaissance pratique, scientifique, sensible, incarnée par l'ingénieur Strader. Ce but explique l'échec apparent de l'initiation du jeune néophyte dans *L'Eveil des âmes* (huitième tableau, IV, 2202-2230). Loin d'être un 'sacrilège'—comme le pensent les mystes présents lors de la cérémonie d'initiation dans le temple égyptien—cet acte marque 'l'aurore du bel éclat que sur l'Hellade un soleil nouveau allait jeter au cours des temps' (IV, 2370-2375).

2. Les moyens utilisés par Steiner pour traduire artistiquement l'*Anthroposophie*

Si je reprends les concepts de l'épistémocritique, on a à faire dans ce cas précis à un "scientifique" (même si c'est un scientifique d'un type particulier) qui prend la plume pour écrire des pièces de théâtre; le "traducteur" étant identique à l'auteur, il ne devrait pas y avoir de déformation ou de réorganisation du savoir traduit, ni d'apparition de nouveaux savoirs; pour "traduire" la science de l'esprit dans un discours fictif, imaginaire, Steiner construit un système composé de figures, il s'agit d'un système de modéli-

²⁸ IV, 66-74: 'So wird, was wir mechanisch leisten können, / Von seinem Geiste künstlerisch gestaltet / Und zu der Menschen Taggebrauch dann liefern, / Was nützlich ist und edle Schönheit trägt. / Gewerbe soll mit Kunst zur Einheit werden, / Alltätiglich Leben mit Geschmack durchdringen. / Ich füge so zum toten Sinnesleib, / Als welche unsre Arbeit mir erscheint, / Die Seele, die ihr erst den Sinn verleiht'.

²⁹ IV, 1180-1184: 'Ich sah im Geiste meine Märchenprinzen / Und meine Feuerseelen lustig tanzen / In tausend Puppenspielen, kunstvoll schön; / So liess ich sie schon, hochbeglückt im Denken, / Den Weg in Kinderstuben eifrig suchen'.

sation secondaire, fortement intertextuel—le premier Drame-Mystère, par exemple, fait implicitement référence au Conte du Serpent Vert de Goethe³⁰—et dont la réalisation sensorielle est capitale: les Drames-Mystères doivent être représentés dans un espace bien précis, conçu pour leur représentation, sur une scène particulière (la grande scène du Goetheanum), avec un décor et des costumes aux couleurs précises³¹ (par exemple, IV, 5^{ème} tableau: la robe de Félix est d'un violet clair, ceinture d'or), aux sons spécifiques (on doit à Adolf Arenson les compositions musicales qui ont accompagné la représentation des Drames-Mystères), avec des acteurs ayant une gestuelle et une diction particulières; je laisserai ici de côté les différents arts parallèles nécessaires à la représentation des Drames-Mystères dans l'esprit de leur auteur (architecture, peinture, musique, etc.) pour me consacrer plus particulièrement au travail de la langue (notamment dans sa dimension articulatoire), également typique des poèmes de Steiner comme les thèmes de méditation du semainier³², le calendrier de l'âme³³ ou la danse des planètes³⁴. Mais d'abord, il convient de se pencher sur la structure même des Drames-Mystères.

2.a. *L'organisation des Drames en tableaux de la vie de l'âme*

Les Drames-Mystères, véritables “peintures de la vie de l'âme”, sont organisés en “tableaux scéniques” retraçant les événements de la vie de l'âme (*‘Seelenvorgänge in szenischen Bildern’*). Ces images n'ont rien de symbolique, il s'agit d'expériences intérieures aussi réelles pour celui qui a part au monde spirituel que les personnages et les événements du monde sensible³⁵. Ces tableaux, considérés comme “réalistes” par leur auteur, représentent sur la scène des événements purement psycho-spirituels; les personnages apparaissent soit dans leur corps physique, soit en tant qu'âme dans le monde des

³⁰ Selon les propres dires de Steiner, les germes laissés en lui par ce conte en 1889 auraient mûri en lui et seraient ressortis 21 ans plus tard, en 1910, sous forme d'images le dépassant lui-même. Chaque personnage du conte est transformé en une figure du premier Drame-Mystère: la belle Lilie est devenue Maria, le jeune homme est Johannes Thomasius, l'homme à la lampe est Félix Balde, sa femme est Felicia, etc. Cf. Sixel (éd.), *Die Mysteriendramen*, 9-14.

³¹ Steiner donna des indications extrêmement précises pour la mise en scène: costumes, décors, collaboration étroite avec les eurhythmistes . . . Il créa lui-même une toile pour un décor en 1911 (*‘Lichtesweben’*).

³² Steiner, *‘Meditationen’*.

³³ Steiner, *‘Anthroposophischer Seelenkalender’*.

³⁴ Steiner, *‘Kosmische Dichtungen’*.

³⁵ DM, deuxième volume, 257.

âmes, à travers la méditation de Johannes ou d'un autre personnage³⁶; les forces de l'âme sont parfois personnifiées; c'est le cas pour les amies de Maria, qui représentent les trois forces de son âme: Philia incarne la pensée (nix), Astride le sentiment (sylphe) et Luna la volonté (salamandre). Ces tableaux sont en outre dépourvus de toute tension dramatique au sens classique du mot, également dépourvus d'action extérieure et d'"effets scéniques".

Steiner est pourtant conscient de la spécificité de la littérature par rapport à la science: 'penser le rigoureux et l'universel sous la catégorie de l'individuel et de l'irrégulier. En transformant les structures simples de la science en figures complexes, [la littérature] autorise le jaillissement de fragments de "réel pur", de morceaux de vie qui échappent au système'³⁷. D'ailleurs, quand des éléments autobiographiques apparaissent, les personnages perdent leur caractère exemplaire pour acquérir un peu de vie, de chair et de chaleur; les drames perdent, au moins sur un plan sensible, un peu de leur caractère abstrait, froid et austère. Steiner s'est certainement représenté en Thomasius et a représenté Marie, sa seconde femme, dans la figure de Maria; il rapporte vraisemblablement une histoire personnelle dans l'épisode poignant où Thomasius décrit les remords qui l'assaillent des années après avoir quitté une femme qui l'aimait et qui est morte de chagrin suite à cette séparation. Cette mise en situation individuelle, vivante et concrète d'idées abstraites, reste cependant exceptionnelle dans les Drames-Mystères.

2.b. *Le travail de la langue*

Steiner utilise toujours le lexique de l'Anthroposophie ("Geistesland", "Schicksalsmächte" . . .), mais d'une manière différente de celle de ses écrits théoriques. Le style est volontairement déclamatoire, par exemple dans ce passage où Maria s'adresse aux trois forces personnifiées de son âme—lequel repose sur une allitération en [w] et sur la répétition des voyelles [e], [i] et [ei]: 'Ihr, meine Schwestern, die ich / In **W**esenstiefen finde, / **W**enn meine Seele sich **w**eitet / Und in die **W**eltenfernen / Sich selbst geleitet (. . .)'³⁸.

La fréquence très grande des "mots doubles" ('Wesenstiefen', 'Weltenfernen', 'Weltenliebe'; 'Weltenwege'; 'Ätherhöhen'; 'Erdenpfade' . . .), qui fait peut-être référence, de manière symbolique, à l'existence de deux réa-

³⁶ Par exemple: l'âme de Theodora dans III, l'âme de Felix Balde dans IV.

³⁷ Dahlen-Gaida, 'Du savoir à la fiction', 487.

³⁸ II, 541-553. Comme nous le verrons plus loin, ces consonnes et voyelles ont une signification spirituelle.

lités—la réalité sensorielle, perceptible par les sens, et la réalité occulte, inaccessible à la perception sensible—contribue indéniablement à une certaine lourdeur du style, ainsi que la nominalisation très fréquente; en français, on ne peut d'ailleurs rendre les très nombreux infinitifs substantivés ('das Menschenfühlen', 'das Menschenstreben' . . .) que par le recours au pluriel (les sentiments humains, les aspirations humaines . . .).

Les bases nominales sont souvent des composés déterminatifs (à structure hypotaxique). Le terme déterminé a fréquemment un signifié topographique ('Tiefen', 'Höhen', 'Pfade', 'Spure', 'Ferne', 'Kreise', 'Nähe'), comme si, à travers l'association fréquente d'une topologie à une réalité spirituelle, Steiner voulait explicitement configurer le monde spirituel. Déterminant et déterminé semblent d'ailleurs interchangeables (par exemple, 'Höhenwelten' se trouve aussi souvent que 'Weltenhöhen').

En outre, le déterminé apparaît souvent au pluriel—un pluriel qui semble indiquer aussi bien la pluralité des mondes (physique, astral, mental, spirituel . . .) que celle des entités qui le composent ('Weltenmächte') et des incarnations humaines ('Weltenwege'). Le terme "Ewigkeit" est pratiquement toujours utilisé au pluriel: 'Ewigkeiten', ce qui ajoute à son côté solennel. Notons encore que le déterminant "Welten" est très fréquent: 'Weltenliebe', 'Weltenweiten', 'Weltengründe', 'Weltenwille', 'Weltenwerden', 'Weltentiefen', 'Weltenzaubermacht' . . . Il souligne le caractère cosmique de tous ces événements, qui ne se limitent pas seulement à cette incarnation-ci, mais remontent à des périodes beaucoup plus reculées.

On remarque aussi un changement caractéristique de style quand des êtres spirituels entrent en scène et prennent la parole; les vers se font plus lyriques, plus courts, plus musicaux; plus les êtres sont spirituels et élevés, et plus les vers deviennent denses, leur forme approchant celle du mantra, c'est-à-dire une parole apparentée au Verbe créateur³⁹ (au sens de l'Évangile de Jean). Citons, par exemple, la Voix de la conscience spirituelle, en notant l'effet perlocutoire de ses paroles: 'Les dettes qui lui restent à payer, / Les tâches qui lui furent confiées, / Qu'elles montent du fond de son âme'⁴⁰, ou encore ces deux vers prononcés à plusieurs reprises par le Double de Johannes: '*Verzaubertes Weben / Des eigenen Wesens*' (en italiques dans le texte).

Pour conclure cette partie, je citerai encore une fois Laurence Dahan-Gaida:

³⁹ Nous reviendrons plus loin sur l'importance de la parole mantrique dans les Drames-Mystères.

⁴⁰ II, 612-614: 'Was als Schuld ihr geblieben, / Was als Pflicht ihr gegeben, / Entsteige ihrem Seelengrunde'.

C'est sans doute là où elle courtise le plus assidûment l'inconnu que la littérature trouve son lieu le plus propre; là où elle découvre et invente librement, dégagée des contraintes extrapolées à partir de ses savoirs, qu'elle se constitue comme un jeu de langage différent, qui ne feint de se soumettre à des règles que pour mieux affirmer sa liberté⁴¹.

Si l'on considère que le fondateur de l'Anthroposophie ne fait que traduire sous une forme dramaturgique la doctrine anthroposophique, on pourrait déduire de ces propos très justes que Steiner ne "courtise" pas du tout l'inconnu dans ses Drames-Mystères, et l'on aura même du mal à reconnaître une quelconque valeur artistique ou littéraire à ce texte très lourd, pratiquement impossible à comprendre si l'on ne connaît pas la théorie steinerienne, qu'on jugera à peine digne d'être lu et étudié, ou seulement à titre de curiosité historique; l'assimilation de savoirs hétérogènes, chez Steiner, sera considérée comme réduite à son minimum puisque le lecteur qui connaît l'Anthroposophie lit entre les lignes et reconnaît l'enseignement théorique de Steiner dans ce qui est présenté sur scène; les Drames-Mystères, dans cette perspective, apparaissent comme un "théâtre d'idées" extrêmement pauvre du point de vue littéraire. Cependant, cela serait méconnaître, à mon avis, le sens même du message des Drames-Mystères, leur objectif et leur raison d'être. En effet, ce que Steiner propose à travers eux, c'est en réalité de révéler l'esprit dans le vêtement de l'art.

3. *Les drames-mystères, révélation de l'esprit dans le vêtement de l'art: Vers une reconciliation de l'art et la science*

3.a. *Création d'un nouveau genre ou renouvellement de formes anciennes?*

On ne saurait dire que Steiner ait créé, avec ses Drames-Mystères, un genre complètement nouveau. Le terme même de "mystère" fait référence aux mystères antiques, et notamment aux Mystères d'Eleusis, qui visaient à initier les mystes au cours d'une cérémonie complexe de plusieurs jours; comme le rappelle Karl Kerényi, ces mystères n'avaient rien à voir avec la mise en scène dramaturgique d'un contenu mythologique⁴². Les petits et les grands mystères d'Eleusis fournirent pourtant à Edouard Schuré (1841-1929), au début du 20^e siècle, le sujet d'une pièce de théâtre intitulée *Le drame sacré*

⁴¹ Idem, 486.

⁴² Kerényi, *Die Mysterien von Eleusis*, 39-40.

d'*Eleusis*, qui fut représentée lors du congrès théosophique européen à Munich en mai 1907, et qui inspira grandement Steiner⁴³. Le terme “mystère” évoque également les Mystères de l'Eglise⁴⁴, petites pièces de théâtre jouées dans, puis devant les églises au Moyen Âge, qui représentaient des scènes religieuses (Adam et Eve chassés du Paradis, la naissance de Jésus, etc.)—saynètes que les anthroposophes jouent encore aujourd'hui à certaines occasions (Noël, Pâques, etc.). Le terme “drame” fait quant à lui référence à la tragédie grecque qui, elle, mettait en scène les mythes de façon dramaturgique, et possédait, selon Aristote, un pouvoir de purification (“katharsis”) des passions du spectateur. Assistant à un tel spectacle, l'être humain se libérerait des tensions psychiques, qui s'extériorisent sur le mode de l'émotion et de la sympathie avec l'action représentée (induisant pitié, colère, etc.)⁴⁵. Steiner utilise le terme de “Drames-Mystères” pour réunir consciemment les deux aspects: initiatique avec les mystères, artistique avec les drames. Il rappelle d'ailleurs lui-même que la science et l'art n'étaient pas distincts dans l'Antiquité: ils étaient encore intimement liés au sacré—que l'on songe au penseur essentiellement religieux que fut Pythagore (4^e siècle avant J.C.), lequel envisagea le nombre dans une perspective religieuse et mystique, tenta de réaliser un lien entre l'homme et le divin et, sur la base de ce lien, de transformer la cité. A l'aube du 17^e siècle, l'astronome Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) était encore convaincu que la physique céleste et la physique terrestre ne sont pas deux physiques, mais une seule; soutenu par sa foi, il croyait en une architecture divine, unique, régissant à la fois la Terre et les planètes, unies dans la mobilité. Cela n'empêcha pourtant pas l'ap-

⁴³ Cette représentation fut suivie de celle des Enfants de Lucifer, du même auteur, en 1909.

⁴⁴ La fin du Moyen Âge marque l'apogée du genre dramatique, notamment du théâtre religieux: ‘Le genre le plus en vogue au 14^e siècle est le miracle, dont dérivera à la fin du siècle le drame profane. Un autre genre est le mystère. (...) Le mot mystère n'apparaît pas avant le 15^e siècle. Le terme, écrit en ancien français *mistere*, dérivé probablement du latin *ministerium* (métier), est propre à l'espace français et définit des pièces représentant dans sa totalité la vie d'un saint ou mettant en scène la vie du Christ. Il faut rappeler que le mot n'a jamais eu le sens de mystère dogmatique. Jusqu'en 1400, aucune œuvre dramatique ne s'appelle mystère, mais bien jeu, représentation, miracle. Dans son acception dramatique, le terme s'applique d'abord aux mystères muets, sorte de tableaux vivants. À partir de 1450, le mot sera employé pour désigner des pièces sérieuses, dont le principal sujet est la Passion du Christ. Dès le début du 15^e siècle, les textes des mystères sont organisés en vertu d'un schéma fixe, s'articulant autour des moments principaux de la foi’. Cf. Voicu, *Histoire*; voir également: Accarie, *Le Théâtre sacré*.

⁴⁵ Dans sa Poétique, Aristote banalise pour ainsi dire la catharsis en menant à son terme un lent processus de laïcisation des pratiques cathartiques largement répandues dans la culture grecque archaïque.

parition, dès la Renaissance, d'un nouveau paradigme, celui de la science moderne, reposant sur l'observation de phénomènes purement extérieurs et sensibles⁴⁶. Art et science se sont donc constitués, en Occident, à travers un dispositif discursif commun, institué d'abord par les mystes, puis par l'Eglise, et ils ont ensuite frayé à l'ordre temporel des voies parallèles et subversives, contre l'institution des mystes, puis de l'Eglise⁴⁷, se forgeant une identité grâce à leur différence constitutive—la science répondant aux exigences de la transparence et de l'objectivité, l'art étant le lieu de déploiement de la subjectivité, de la fiction et de l'imaginaire. Si l'on considère que le fondateur de l'Anthroposophie cherche à travers ses Drames-Mystères à réunir à nouveau l'art et la science—non seulement la science sacrée, mais également la science comme on l'entend au 20^e siècle, y compris donc les sciences naturelles—on en déduira qu'il "courtise" de manière intense l'inconnu, et la valeur singulière des drames apparaîtra clairement, comme la tentative de renouveler les formes anciennes du drame et du mystère en créant un drame initiatique adapté à l'homme du 20^e siècle, qui ne soit ni un jeu artistique ni une loi scientifique, mais 'le reflet des mondes spirituels', pour reprendre l'expression du poète Christian Morgenstern. Cette conception de l'œuvre artistique comme médiatrice entre l'homme et le divin s'apparente à celle des grands poètes romantiques⁴⁸ et post-romantiques⁴⁹, mais le grand "modèle" de Steiner, sur le plan dramaturgique, est certainement le *Faust* de Goethe, en particulier sa deuxième partie, qui est restée pour la plupart de ses interprètes très obscure, et pour laquelle Steiner a donné de nombreux commentaires et des indications scéniques très détaillées⁵⁰, aujourd'hui encore suivies à la lettre par les metteurs en scène de cette pièce au Goetheanum.

⁴⁶ Steiner, 'Anthroposophie und Naturwissenschaft', Zürich, 12. November 1917, in: *Die Ergänzung heutiger Wissenschaft durch Anthroposophie*. Voir aussi: *Der Entstehungsmoment der Naturwissenschaft in der Weltgeschichte et Grenzen der Naturwissenschaft und ihre Überwindung*.

⁴⁷ Dahan-Gaida, 'Du savoir à la fiction', 14.

⁴⁸ Selon Victor Hugo par exemple, le Poète est un mage, un voyant inspiré, un "rêveur sacré": 'Dieu parle à voix basse à son âme / Comme aux forêts et comme aux flots! (...) Car la poésie est l'étoile / Qui mène à Dieu rois et pasteurs!' *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, vers 277 (avril 1839).

⁴⁹ Dans le sonnet 'Correspondance' (*Spleen et idéal*, IV), Baudelaire met en pratique un principe esthétique qui lui a été inspiré par la théorie des correspondances de Swedenborg. Selon celle-ci, il existe des relations cachées entre les choses et les êtres, qui donnent un sens au désordre apparent du monde. La synesthésie, qui dévoile les parentés entre les sens, donne accès la correspondance "horizontale", qui ouvre à son tour la voie ascensionnelle de la correspondance "verticale" avec l'infini.

⁵⁰ Steiner, *Geisteswissenschaftliche Erläuterungen zu Goethes "Faust"*. Voir aussi Wiesberger:

3.b. *Les caractéristiques d'un "nouveau" genre dramatique*

Je propose de baptiser le genre dramatique du Drame-Mystère "drame initiatique eurythmique", parce que son but est de témoigner du monde spirituel à travers le langage de l'eurythmie tout en suscitant l'initiation du spectateur.

3.c. *Le drame initiatique*

Steiner utilise différents moyens pour susciter l'"éveil" du spectateur, son ouverture à la dimension spirituelle de l'art et de la vie. En premier lieu, les Drames-Mystères reposent sur une distanciation favorable à leur valeur éducative. Ils apparaissent comme une pièce jouée dans la pièce, entre les préludes qui retracent la conversation de deux amies, Estelle et Sophie, la première voulant convaincre la seconde de l'accompagner à une représentation artistique alors que celle-ci a prévu d'assister à celle des Drames-Mystères (premier prélude). Grâce à cette distanciation, le spectateur est amené à prendre conscience que le sujet même des drames, qui retracent le processus intérieur de transformation du jeune artiste Thomasius, peut s'appliquer à la création des Drames-Mystères eux-mêmes. En manifestant dans la matière la démarche spirituelle de son auteur, le combat intérieur de celui-ci pour la créer et surtout sa victoire, l'œuvre est censée témoigner du monde spirituel et permettre au spectateur de devenir lui aussi acteur, en éveillant en lui une quête spirituelle. Dans cette perspective, le rôle de l'art n'est pas seulement d'apporter la beauté dans le monde, mais aussi de guérir le cœur de l'homme en quête de Dieu. Le Drame-Mystère est donc un vecteur essentiel de l'approche artistique nouvelle que Steiner appela de ses vœux, et qui consiste à "spiritualiser l'art" en le reliant de manière consciente au "monde spirituel", et non, comme dans l'Antiquité, de manière inconsciente, sur la base d'une clairvoyance naturelle⁵¹.

Par ailleurs, l'évolution et l'initiation des personnages centraux des drames ont pour le spectateur, de par leur caractère exemplaire, une portée éducative:

Rudolf Steiner, 144: Etwa 20 Bleistiftskizzen zur Inszenierung von Szenen aus Goethes Faust am Goetheanum in Dornach 1915-1916.

⁵¹ Cf. la conférence donnée par Steiner à Dornach le 5 juillet 1914, 'Die wahren ästhetischen Formgesetze'. Dans cette conférence, Steiner retrace dans ses grandes lignes l'histoire de l'art en Europe: celui-ci serait d'abord né de la perception clairvoyante et atavique du cosmos. Puis l'art imitatif serait apparu, atteignant son apogée en Grèce pour la sculpture et à la Renaissance pour la peinture (avec Raphaël et Michel-Ange). Cet art imitatif devrait maintenant se transformer en pénétrant de manière consciente dans le monde spirituel.

elles lui permettent de se situer lui-même dans son parcours initiatique. Chacun peut se reconnaître dans l'un ou l'autre des personnages, et dans son mode de connaissance personnel.

Enfin, Steiner utilise un langage chargé de symboles que seul le spectateur en recherche peut décrypter au fur et à mesure de son initiation. Les sceaux que Steiner a lui-même dessinés pour chaque Drame-Mystère évoquent le langage chiffré des initiés, caractéristique de la “disciplina arcani” en usage chez les alchimistes. Comme le note Roland Edighoffer, ce langage chiffré, également utilisé par les Rose-Croix, ne saurait être compris comme un artifice inutile ou un goût pour la cachotterie: il ‘signale en réalité les mystères de la vie et de la nature, qui échappent à l’interprétation rationnelle ainsi qu’à toute formulation littérale, de sorte que seuls les hiéroglyphes et les symboles, grâce à leur ambivalence essentielle, sont capables d’en manifester la polysémie’⁵².

3.d. *Le drame eurythmique*

Mais les Drames-Mystères, pour témoigner du monde spirituel, utilisent encore un autre langage: l’eurythmie, qualifiée de ‘langage visible’⁵³, de ‘chant visible’⁵⁴ en ce que les sons formés par le larynx et les organes phonatoires sont transposés dans le mouvement et sont ainsi rendus visibles. A travers des gestes spécifiques, l’eurythmiste cherche à rendre visibles les lois spirituelles qui reposent dans chaque voyelle, consonne, syllabe, en chaque mot parlé, en chaque sonorité. Steiner conçoit ainsi tout un système d’analogies ayant sa logique interne: à chaque consonne correspondent un signe du zodiaque, une région du corps, un état de l’âme et un geste précis (par exemple, la consonne T correspond au signe du lion, à la région de la poitrine et au sentiment de l’enthousiasme; la posture consiste à être debout, les deux bras levés en V des deux côtés du corps⁵⁵); à chaque voyelle ou diphtongue correspondent une planète au sens anthroposophique du terme (*au* correspond au Soleil, *a* à Vénus, *i* à Mercure, *ei* à la Lune, etc.⁵⁶), un métal, une plante et un organe, etc. Le principe des correspondances entre voyelles et planètes n’est pas nouveau dans l’histoire de l’ésotérisme occidental, même si Steiner ne mentionne nulle part les sources possibles de son inspiration.

⁵² Edighoffer, *Les Rose-Croix*, 283.

⁵³ Steiner, *Eurythmie als sichtbare Sprache*.

⁵⁴ Steiner, *Eurythmie als sichtbarer Gesang*.

⁵⁵ Steiner, *Eurythmie als sichtbare Sprache*, 173.

⁵⁶ Idem, 192.

L'eurythmie, en tant qu'art du mouvement⁵⁷, est né au début du 20^e siècle au moment où de grands danseurs comme Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958), le théoricien d'un des grands courants fondateurs de la danse moderne, l'expressionnisme, et Mary Wigman (1886-1973), sa figure emblématique—tous trois séjournèrent au Monte Verità—s'efforçaient de réformer l'art chorégraphique figé de l'époque en créant une danse moderne expressive. Isadora Duncan, qui créa en 1904 sa première école de danse à Grunewald, une banlieue de Berlin, et rassembla son célèbre groupe connu sous le nom de "The Isadorables", fut l'une des premières danseuses à développer une véritable philosophie de la danse: elle accorde une importance particulière à la respiration naturelle, qu'elle compare au mouvement des vagues de l'océan; elle fait reposer le mouvement sur des lois naturelles et spirituelles et non sur des considérations formelles liées à l'espace géométrique; elle privilégie les costumes simples, partant du principe que regarder un danseur danser se suffit à soi-même; les costumes de ses danseurs, sortes de grandes toges arrivant au genou ou à la cheville, sont les mêmes que ceux utilisés pour l'eurythmie.

Il est clair que Rudolf Steiner et Marie von Sivers connaissaient ces théories. Mais l'eurythmie n'est pour eux ni une danse ni une pantomime; elle saisit les gestes latents des sons de la poésie et de la musique et les agrandit à une participation des bras, des mains, du corps entier. Ces gestes "sonores", habités d'âme et de vie, structurent l'espace dans des mouvements d'ensemble très variés. Pour Steiner, faire de l'eurythmie signifie représenter des mouvements et des gestes, non point passagers, éphémères ou arbitraires, mais cosmiques, pleins de sens, qui ne peuvent être différents de ce qu'ils sont, et ne peuvent jamais émaner de l'arbitraire personnel de l'âme humaine; faire de l'eurythmie, c'est donc retourner aux mouvements originels⁵⁸.

Comme pour le *Faust* de Goethe, Rudolf et Marie Steiner ont donné des indications scéniques permettant d'"eurythmiser" certains passages des Drames-Mystères, le mouvement dansé et le rythme appuyant le langage articulé et lui donnant forme, force et respiration—le résultat devait être une sorte d'"œuvre d'art totale", révélant l'essence même de la science sacrée, la connaissance spirituelle, à travers les principaux arts (chant, danse, poésie . . .). En ce sens, ne pourrait-on pas comparer la réconciliation entre l'art et la science attendue de la représentation des Drames-Mystères à l'espoir

⁵⁷ Les mouvements eurythmiques s'expriment aussi, grâce à la perception suprasensible des couleurs et des mouvements, à travers des formes plastiques ou peintes.

⁵⁸ *Eurythmie als sichtbare Sprache*, Erster Vortrag, Dornach, 24. Juni 1924.

d'une fusion harmonieuse entre la raison et le sentiment, acquise dans l'unité synthétique du "Gesamtkunstwerk", que ce soit celui de Wagner ou des artistes de la Sécession viennoise?

3.e. *L'Anthroposophie en acte: un art qui plonge aux sources de la vie*

Le prélude met lui-même en scène deux manières différentes d'aborder l'art: celle d'Estelle et de Sophie; il apparaît que Steiner est pleinement conscient des critiques que l'on pourrait adresser aux Drames-Mystères quand il fait dire à Estelle:

Et j'ai peur quand je pense que toi, chère Sophie, tu préfères à cet art si vivant ce qui ne me semble être pourtant qu'un genre allégorique et doctrinal de schémas, de marionnettes, et de symboles, très éloignés de tout ce qui chaque jour fait appel à notre pitié, à notre bonté active⁵⁹.

Et Sophie (sans doute une incarnation de Sophia, la sagesse) de répliquer:

Comme tant d'autres, tu appelles (. . .) en matière d'art, réel et original, ce qui d'après moi renie précisément l'esprit. Nos idées, elles, associent une liberté pleinement consciente avec les forces spontanées de la vie. (. . .) Tu ne *veux* pas voir que l'idée plonge dans l'esprit vivant, remonte jusqu'à la source de l'existence. C'est elle le plan créateur qui se déroule dans les êtres. Pas plus que la graine *n'enseigne* à la plante comment elle doit pousser—mais fait en elle apparaître la vie—nos idées *n'enseignent*: elles nous pénètrent, éveillent la vie, dispensent la vie dans notre être⁶⁰.

Pour mieux comprendre la conception de l'art de Steiner exprimée ici par Sophie, il peut être utile de rappeler quelques idées fondamentales de son esthétique. Steiner distingue trois domaines: 'Le domaine du sensible non idéal est la réalité, le domaine de l'idéal non sensible est la science, celui du sensible idéal est l'art'⁶¹. Il s'appuie sur les réflexions de Goethe sur la sci-

⁵⁹ I, 27: 'Und mir graut, wenn ich nun denken soll: Du, meine liebe Sophie, ziehst diesem Interesse an lebensvoller Kunst etwas vor, was mir doch nichts anderes zu sein scheint als die abgetane lehrhaft-allegorische Art, welche puppenhafte Schemen statt lebendiger Menschen betrachtet und sinnbildliche Vorgänge bewundert, die fernstehen allem, was im Leben täglich an unser Mitleid, an unsere tätige Anteilnahme sich wendet'.

⁶⁰ I, 29: 'Du nennst wie so viele (. . .) in der Kunst das naiv und ursprünglich, was den Geist in meiner Auffassung verleugnet. Unsere Art der Weltauffassung vereinigt aber volle bewusste Freiheit mit der Kraft des naiven Werdens. (. . .) Du willst nicht einsehen, wie der Gedanke in den schaffenden Geist taucht, an des Daseins Urquell rührt und sich entpuppt als der schöpferische Keim selbst. So wenig die Samenkräfte die Pflanze erst lehren, wie sie wachsen soll, sondern sich als lebendig Wesen in ihr erweisen, so lehren unsere Ideen nicht: sie ergießen sich, Leben entzückend, Leben spendend in unser Wesen'.

⁶¹ 'Über das Kosmische und seinen Zusammenhang mit Kunst und Leben', um 1890/91, in: *Kunst und Kunsterkenntnis, Grundlagen einer neuen Ästhetik*, 39: 'Das Reich des unideellen

ence du beau pour rejeter l'idée courante de l'esthétique allemande, selon laquelle le beau serait l'Idée, le divin, apparaissant sous une forme sensible. Pour Steiner, c'est exactement le contraire: le beau est une forme sensible qui se manifeste sous la forme d'une Idée, 'dans le vêtement du divin'⁶²; le beau apparaît comme s'il était l'Idée, celle-ci n'existant pas encore, devant être créée. Le véritable artiste est donc alchimiste: il continue l'œuvre de la création, de la nature; en ceci, il a une mission cosmique⁶³. En résumé:

L'art ne peut avoir pour mission de représenter l'idée elle-même. Car ceci est la mission de la *science*. Si les idées fondamentales de l'esthétique allemande étaient justes, alors il n'y aurait, au niveau de leur contenu, aucune différence entre la science et l'art. Ce dernier n'aurait qu'à représenter sous une forme sensible ce que la première exprime par la parole (l'idée). Cette simple réflexion prouve que l'art doit avoir une tout autre mission. Et celle-ci est justement la mission inverse de celle de la science. Tandis que celle-ci a à représenter le divin dans la forme de la *pensée immédiate*, telle qu'elle plane sur le sensible, dans une forme purement idéelle, l'art doit *faire monter* le sensible, l'expressif, le figuratif, dans la sphère du divin. (. . .) C'est justement parce que l'on n'est pas satisfait du réel dans sa forme originellement propre que naît la nostalgie de le rendre divin. Pourquoi devrait-on vouloir donner une autre forme au divin, qui accorde en lui-même la satisfaction suprême?⁶⁴

En étudiant Goethe, et notamment ses *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*—œuvre qu'il a lui-même éditée et commentée entre 1884 et 1897⁶⁵—Steiner prend de plus en plus conscience du lien étroit entre l'art, la science et la religion. Dans ses conférences sur l'art, il cite par exemple ces mots de Goethe:

Sinnlichen ist die Wirklichkeit, das Reich des unsinnlichen Ideellen ist die Wissenschaft, jenes des Sinnlich-Ideellen ist die Kunst.'

⁶² Idem: 'im Gewande des Göttlichen'.

⁶³ Steiner, 'Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik', Wien, 9. November 1888 (Autoreferat), in: *Kunst und Kunsterkenntnis, Grundlagen einer neuen Ästhetik*, 33-34.

⁶⁴ 'Über das Kosmische und seinen Zusammenhang mit Kunst und Leben', um 1890/91, 38-39: 'Die Kunst kann nie und nimmer die Aufgabe haben, die Idee selbst darzustellen. Denn dieses ist die Aufgabe der *Wissenschaft*. Wären die Grundgedanken der deutschen Ästhetik richtig, dann gäbe es dem Inhalte nach eigentlich keinen Unterschied zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst. Die letztere hätte nur das in anschaulicher Form darzustellen, was die erstere durch das Wort (den Gedanken) ausspricht. Diese einfache Überlegung beweist, dass die Kunst eine ganz andere Aufgabe haben muss. Und diese ist die gerade entgegengesetzte wie jene der Wissenschaft. Hat diese das Göttliche in Form des *unmittelbaren Denkens* darzustellen, so wie es über dem Sinnlichen schwebt, in reiner ideeller Form, so hat die Kunst das Sinnliche, Anschauliche, Bildliche *hinaufzuheben* in die Sphäre des Göttlichen. (. . .) Gerade aus der Unbefriedigung an dem Wirklichen in seiner ureigenen Gestalt geht die Sehnsucht hervor, es zu vergöttlichen. Warum sollte man aber das Göttliche, das an sich schon die höchste Befriedigung gewährt, in eine andere Form bringen wollen?'

⁶⁵ Steiner (éd.), *Goethe, Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*.

Je pense que l'on pourrait appeler la science la connaissance du général, le savoir déduit; l'art, en revanche, serait la science appliquée à l'action; la science serait la raison et l'art son mécanisme, raison pour laquelle on devrait l'appeler aussi science pratique. Et ainsi, la science serait enfin le théorème, et l'art le problème⁶⁶.

Pour celui qui sait voir au-delà des apparences, le beau est 'une manifestation de lois naturelles secrètes'⁶⁷ qui n'auraient jamais été découvertes sans lui. Steiner fait complètement sienne la conception goethéenne de l'art exprimée dans les aphorismes *Sprüche in Prosa*. Comme Goethe, Steiner est bien conscient de l'impossibilité d'exprimer le contenu de l'art de manière conceptuelle, et donc de l'impertinence d'une esthétique qui chercherait à formuler avec des mots ce qui est exprimé dans l'art; il cite et commente lui-même en ce sens l'aphorisme suivant de Goethe: 'L'art est un médiateur de l'indicible; vouloir le communiquer à son tour par des mots est donc insensé'⁶⁸. C'est pourquoi Steiner lui-même accorde dans ses Drame-Mystères beaucoup plus d'importance aux images—censées agir directement sur l'âme du spectateur—qu'à des concepts abstraits et froids qui ne s'adresseraient qu'à son intellect. Les images appartiennent en effet au monde de l'âme, à ce monde intermédiaire par excellence, situé entre le monde sensible (ou matériel) et le monde intelligible (ou spirituel), à cet univers qu'Henry Corbin a si bien appelé le "mundus imaginalis", ou "monde Imaginal"⁶⁹, et qui est le levier essentiel de l'artiste pour configurer le monde spirituel, pour lui donner forme. Le deuxième drame est appelé 'tableau de

⁶⁶ Steiner (éd.), *Goethe, Sprüche in Prosa, Einleitung und Anmerkungen von Rudolf Steiner*, 201 (1023): 'Ich denke, Wissenschaft könnte man die Kenntnis des Allgemeinen nennen, das abgezogene Wissen; Kunst dagegen wäre Wissenschaft zur Tat verwendet; Wissenschaft wäre Vernunft, und Kunst ihr Mechanismus, deshalb man sie auch praktische Wissenschaft nennen könnte. Und so wäre denn endlich Wissenschaft das Theorem, Kunst das Problem'.

⁶⁷ Idem, 162 (aphorisme 811): 'Das Schöne ist eine Manifestation geheimer Naturgesetze, die uns ohne dessen Erscheinung ewig wären verborgen geblieben'.

⁶⁸ Steiner (éd.), *Goethe, Sprüche in Prosa, Einleitung und Anmerkungen von Rudolf Steiner*, 164 (820): 'Die Kunst ist eine Vermittlerin des Unaussprechlichen; darum scheint es eine Torheit, sie wieder durch Worte vermitteln zu wollen'.

⁶⁹ Dans 'Pour une charte de l'Imaginal', Henry Corbin définit la fonction du "mundus imaginalis" et des Formes imaginale 'par leur situation médiane et médiatrice entre le monde intelligible et le monde sensible. D'une part, elle immatérilise les Formes sensibles, d'autre part, elle "imaginalise" les formes intelligibles auxquelles elle donne figure et dimension. Le monde imaginal symbolise d'une part avec les Formes sensibles, d'autre part avec les Formes intelligibles. C'est cette situation médiane qui d'emblée impose à la puissance imaginative une discipline impensable là où elle est dégradée en "fantaisie", ne sécrétant que de l'imaginaire, de l'irréel, et capable de tous les dévergondages'. In: *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste*, 10.

vie scénique’ (*‘szenisches Lebensbild’*); et chaque drame voit se succéder des ‘images’ ou ‘tableaux’ (*‘Bilder’*), comportant eux aussi des images au sens propre, puisque la peinture constitue un élément très important du décor⁷⁰. Nous avons déjà évoqué le langage imagé, symbolique, des Drames-Mystères. Steiner dit avoir laissé agir en lui les images du conte du serpent vert de Goethe, qui ont resurgi sous une forme nouvelle dans son drame rosicrucien; il émaille également lui-même le texte de ‘contes imagés’ (*‘Märchenbilder’*)⁷¹, comme ceux de Dame Balde⁷², qui rafraîchissent Capésisus grâce à leur ‘trésor d’images’ (*‘Bilderschatze’*), ou celui de Dame Kuhne sur le Bien et le Mal (II 2279-2303). Ces images peuvent être comprises, ou mieux, méditées, par tout lecteur, même peu au fait de l’enseignement anthroposophique. L’imagination est d’ailleurs la première étape sur le chemin de la connaissance (avant l’intuition et l’inspiration) et l’activité imaginative peut être exercée autant sur des symboles (par exemple celui de la rose-croix, de la croix noire dont le centre est entouré de sept roses rouges lumineuses⁷³), des images issues de contes ou de mythes, que sur certains mots ou phrases possédant une force comparable à la puissance de la parole poétique—puissance capable de transformer celui à qui elle s’adresse. Steiner a lui-même créé de nombreux “mantras” pour ses élèves de l’école ésotérique, comme support de leur méditation⁷⁴. A titre d’exemple, le mantra suivant—‘Plus rayonnant que le soleil / Plus pur que la neige / Plus subtil que l’éther / Est le Soi / L’esprit dans mon cœur. / Ce soi est identique à Moi; Je suis ce Soi’⁷⁵—met l’accent sur l’impossibilité de saisir conceptuellement le ‘Soi-Esprit’; grâce à l’utilisation du degré 1 des adjectifs “strahlend”, “rein” et “fein”, il entend contrecarrer la tendance humaine à toujours intercaler une représentation

⁷⁰ Outre Steiner, qui a lui-même peint un tableau pour une scène des Drames-Mystères (*‘Lichtesweben’*), deux peintres anthroposophes—Marie Stinde (1853-1915) et la comtesse Pauline von Kalkkreuth (1856-1929)—ont fourni un immense travail au Goetheanum.

⁷¹ Lors d’une conférence donnée à Berlin le 6 février 1913, Steiner a souligné le caractère particulier du conte: celui-ci permettrait, comme nulle autre œuvre d’art, d’éprouver un sentiment de joie profonde face à l’image immédiate qu’il transmet, tout en sachant qu’il provient d’une expérience profondément intérieure de l’âme. Cf. *‘Märchendichtungen im Lichte der Geistesforschung’*.

⁷² Cf. par exemple I 2341-2376, II 1160-1279.

⁷³ Steiner décrit la méditation sur le symbole de la rose-croix de manière détaillée dans *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss*, 309-311.

⁷⁴ Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Stunden, Gedächtnisaufzeichnungen von Teilnehmern: Seelenübungen, Band I; Seelenübungen Band II: Mantrische Sprüche*.

⁷⁵ *Seelenübungen I*, 86: ‘Strahlender als die Sonne / Reiner als der Schnee / Feiner als der Äther / Ist das Selbst / Der Geist in meinem Herzen / Dies Selbst bin “ich”; “Ich” bin dies Selbst’.

(*Vorstellung*) entre le sujet percevant et l'objet de son observation. Il s'agit de s'observer soi-même percevant, d'observer comment l'Idée rejoint l'objet perçu, de fermer ses sens à tout ce qui n'est pas ce mantra (ou tout autre objet de méditation), de laisser passer toutes les représentations susceptibles de s'interposer entre soi et le mantra, de s'en imprégner totalement, et enfin de le laisser disparaître, et de rester en contact avec l'énergie sans forme qui apparaît alors, ne plus rien vouloir, laisser advenir (étape comparable à la huitième phase du *Râja-Yoga* appelée "samâdhi"⁷⁶). De nombreux mantras émaillent les Drames-Mystères, comme celui-ci, que Bénédictus donne à méditer à l'enfant de Maria⁷⁷:

Emplis ton âme ce soir,
Jusqu'à ce que t'enveloppe le sommeil,
De la force de cette parole:
'Les puissances de lumière m'emportent
Dans la demeure de l'esprit'⁷⁸.

Citons aussi les vers répétés de multiples fois '*O Homme, connais-toi!*'⁷⁹ et '*O Homme ressens-toi!*'⁸⁰, ou ces paroles, prononcées par Bénédictus à l'attention de Maria et Johannes à la fin du septième tableau de *La Porte de l'Initiation*, qui évoquent les deux "réalités spirituelles" de la vérité et de l'amour, et donnent la clé permettant de célébrer grâce à leur union le mariage de l'âme et de l'esprit:

L'essence active de la lumière
Rayonne d'un être humain à l'autre
Pour emplir le monde de vérité.
La grâce de l'amour
Répand la chaleur d'une âme à l'autre
Pour susciter la béatitude des mondes.
Les messagers de l'esprit
Unissent l'œuvre bénie des hommes
Au but final des mondes.
Et si l'homme, qui en un autre se retrouve,

⁷⁶ Pour une description plus détaillée de ce parcours initiatique, voir Choné: 'La réception de l'Inde chez les ésotéristes occidentaux de la fin du XIX^e siècle', 60-68.

⁷⁷ Steiner a lui aussi écrit des prières à l'attention des enfants et de leur mère. Cf. 'Gebete für Mütter und Kinder'.

⁷⁸ I, 1273-1277: 'Erfülle dein Gemüt an diesem Abend, / Bis dich der Schlaf umfängt, / Mit dieses Wortes Kraft: / "Es tragen Lichtgewalten / Mich in des Geistes Haus."'.

⁷⁹ Par exemple I, 1083 (en italiques dans le texte): '*O Mensch erkenne dich!*'.

⁸⁰ Par exemple I, 3113 (en italiques dans le texte): '*O Mensch, erlebe dich!*'.

*Unit en lui amour et vérité,
La lumière de l'esprit rayonne dans la chaleur de l'âme*⁸¹.

Steiner insiste particulièrement sur la puissance transformatrice de la parole mantrique, qui doit conduire par la voie/voix de la méditation à la connaissance de soi et finalement à la transformation alchimique de soi. Bénédictus lui-même définit ainsi le mantra dans *L'Épreuve de l'Âme*:

Les mots du Livre n'enferment pas seulement
Le sens qu'ils expriment au moyen des pensées;
Ils entraînent les forces essentielles de l'âme
Vers les réalités de l'esprit;
On ne pénètre bien leur sens
Que lorsqu'est dessillé le regard des âmes
Qui laissent leur vertu opérer sur elles.
Ils ne sont pas les fruits de mon propre travail,
Ils me furent confiés par les esprits
Qui ont la connaissance des signes
Par lesquels le karma du monde se manifeste.
La vertu propre de ces mots,
C'est de conduire aux sources de la connaissance⁸².

Là, apparaît dans toute sa plénitude le rôle particulier des mots, du langage, de la littérature au sens fort, au regard de la connaissance: 'conduire aux sources de la connaissance', c'est-à-dire parvenir à une connaissance unitaire dépassant le morcellement des savoirs, et notamment le clivage entre science, art et religion. Il s'agit d'une "quête gnostique" au sens étymologique du mot "gnose", à savoir une connaissance, une connaissance de l'homme à l'esprit, au divin en lui:

En nous faisant naître, ou plutôt renaître, la gnose nous unifie et nous libère. Savoir, c'est être libéré. Il ne suffit pas d'énoncer des symboles ou des dogmes, il faut encore être engendré par eux dans le lieu même où s'accomplissent réellement les traditions spirituelles, lieu accessible à ceux-là seuls qui réussissent à

⁸¹ I, 2849-2860 (en italiques dans le texte): 'Des Lichtes webend Wesen, es erstrahlet / Von Mensch zu Mensch, / Zu füllen alle Welt mit Wahrheit. / Der Liebe Segen, er erwärmet / Die Seele an der Seele, / Zu wirken aller Welten Seligkeit. / Und Geistesboten, sie vermählen / Der Menschen Segenswerke / Mit Weltenzielen; / Und wenn vermählen kann die beiden / Der Mensch, der sich im Menschen findet, / Erstrahlet Geisteslicht durch Seelenwärme'.

⁸² II, 282-295: 'Es wollen meine Worte nicht das allein nur sagen, / Was als Begriffeshüllen sie verraten; / Sie lenken Seelenwesenskräfte / Zu Geisteswirklichkeiten; / Ihr Sinn ist erst erreicht, / Wenn sie das Schauen lösen in den Seelen, / Die sich ergeben ihrer Kraft. / Sie stammen nicht aus meinem Forschen, / Sie sind von Geistern mir vertraut, / Die kundig sind der Zeichen, / In welchen sich das Weltenkarma offenbart. / Zu führen an Erkenntnisquellen, / Ist dieser Worte Eigenheit'.

pénétrer dans le temps et l'espace propres à l'Imaginal. (. . .) [La gnose est une] connaissance non pas théorique, mais opérative et qui, pour cette raison, transforme le sujet connaissant—de même que l'alchimie est moins transmutation matérielle que transformation de l'Adepté lui-même⁸³.

Cette “quête gnostique” est présente dans bien des œuvres littéraires nées au début du 20^e siècle, notamment dans l'espace germanophone—que l'on songe à Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, Hermann Hesse, Gustav Meyrink⁸⁴. La littérature, loin d'être fiction, devient plus réelle que la réalité sensible elle-même puisqu'elle dévoile celle-ci comme illusoire et ‘nous fait voir à nous-même notre propre vie’⁸⁵, nous permettant non seulement de retrouver, grâce à elle, le Temps perdu, mais aussi d'accéder à une dimension dans laquelle le Temps n'a plus d'emprise⁸⁶.

4. *Conclusions*

Il est indéniable que les Drames-Mystères contiennent tout l'enseignement théorique de l'Anthroposophie. Cependant, Steiner ne vise pas seulement et avant tout à transcrire, traduire sous une forme dramatique le contenu du savoir qui est le sien—une telle retranscription dramatique d'un savoir théorique courrait le danger de devenir un “théâtre d'idées”, une simple exposition de thèses dépourvue de toute spontanéité, de toute légèreté, de toute valeur artistique. Son but est surtout de montrer que l'art et la science, en l'occurrence l'art sacré et la science de l'esprit, puisent à la même source: la connaissance spirituelle. Les Drames-Mystères, en tant que drames initiatiques eurythmiques, témoignent de l'existence d'une “interdiscursivité”⁸⁷ entre la littérature et le savoir ésotérique véhiculé par l'anthroposophie. Dans ce texte situé à l'intersection entre les discours de la science et de l'art sacrés, ce ne sont pas les mêmes “critères artistiques” qui prévalent que dans un texte littéraire “profane”; par exemple, la technique dont fait preuve l'artiste

⁸³ Faivre, *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental*, 18-19.

⁸⁴ Cf. Choné, ‘La théorie de la “connaissance suprasensible” chez Gustav Meyrink’.

⁸⁵ Proust, *A la recherche du Temps perdu*, *Le Temps retrouvé*, 896.

⁸⁶ Citons à ce propos ces vers connus du théosophe allemand Jakob Boehme (1575-1624): ‘Wem Zeit ist wie Ewigkeit / Und Ewigkeit wie die Zeit, / Der ist befreit / Von allem Streit’. Cf. Gerhard Wehr, *Jakob Boehme*, 45.

⁸⁷ Selon l'épistémocritique, l’“intertextualité” désigne les processus d'interpénétration entre différents discours, tandis que l’“interdiscursivité” fait référence à l'interaction entre les règles qui fondent ces discours.

devient secondaire par rapport au lien qui relie son œuvre au monde spirituel, témoignant du travail spirituel de l'artiste sur lui-même: 'La lumière de la vision spirituelle doit briller dans l'art, afin que la chaleur et la grandeur de l'art féconde de manière créative la grandeur et l'horizon de la vision spirituelle'⁸⁸. Steiner ayant le projet de transmettre dans ses drames la dimension sacrée du "mystère", il se devait de retrouver, au moins par endroit, le souffle du Verbe prophétique, le langage imagé de la parabole caractéristique des grands textes sacrés fondateurs. Dans cette perspective, les attributs du genre dramatique particulier qu'est le Drame-Mystère (style déclamatoire, absence d'action, lourdeur apparente du style, profusion des symboles, etc.) deviennent les caractéristiques d'un genre dramatique renouvelé et trouvent par la même leur justification. Les images, loin d'être des abstractions, deviennent des réalités bien vivantes capables de "parler" le langage de l'âme.

Ainsi, la réconciliation entre l'art et la science est au cœur des Drames-Mystères: sur le fond—puisque c'est leur sujet même: dans les deux premiers drames, le jeune peintre Johannes, qui représente l'art, est en opposition à celui qui était son père dans une vie antérieure, le savant Capésius, et Maria est responsable de leur séparation; dans les deux suivants, ils se réconcilient, notamment grâce à Maria, qui rachète ainsi sa faute—et sur la forme, puisque Steiner a cherché à "eurythmiser" la parole, les sons, les mouvements . . . toute la "matière première" qui constitue ses drames, afin d'insuffler à cette matière le souffle de l'esprit, de l'"animer" au sens premier du terme. Si cette "eurythmisation" des Drames-Mystères est réussie, c'est-à-dire si Steiner a tenu son pari de manifester l'esprit dans le vêtement de l'art, de refléter la connaissance spirituelle dans sa démarche artistique, c'est à chaque spectateur d'en juger lors d'une de leur représentation sur la scène du Goetheanum.

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⁸⁸ Steiner, 'Die Quellen der künstlerischen Phantasie', München, Zweiter Vortrag, 6. Mai 1918, 163-164: 'Licht des Sehertums muß leuchten in der Kunst, auf daß Wärme und Größe der Kunst befruchtend wirke auf Weite und Größe des Horizontes des Sehertums'.

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Résumé

Rudolf Steiner, qui créa la Société anthroposophique en 1912/1913, est surtout connu pour ses écrits théoriques; il l'est généralement moins pour ses productions artistiques, qui touchent pourtant à des domaines aussi variés que l'architecture, la sculpture, la peinture, l'eurythmie, l'art de la parole, la poésie et le théâtre. Entre 1910 et 1913, il créa et mit en scène à Munich quatre *Drames Mystères*—*La Porte de l'Initiation* (1910), *L'Épreuve de l'âme* (1911), *Le Gardien du seuil* (1912), *L'Éveil des âmes* (1913)—dans lesquels il exprime sous une forme littéraire le contenu du savoir véhiculé par la "Science de l'Esprit"; mais en créant un "nouveau" genre dramatique que j'ai qualifié de "drame initiatique eurythmique", et qui s'appuie notamment sur les formes anciennes du drame et du mystère, il cherche aussi à témoigner de la parenté profonde entre un "art" et une "science" qui tous deux trouveraient leur origine dans une vie spirituelle comprise comme la source de toute connaissance véritable—l'art apparaissant alors comme l'aspect pratique de la science. Il s'agira de voir si, en présentant les éléments d'une voie d'initiation spirituelle moderne sous une forme dramatique, Steiner a réussi son pari de révéler l'esprit dans le vêtement de l'art, c'est-à-dire de faire de l'"anthroposophie en acte".

Rudolf Steiner's Mystery Plays: Literary Transcripts of an Esoteric Gnosis and/or Esoteric Attempt at Reconciliation between Art and Science?

Rudolf Steiner, who founded the Anthroposophical Society in 1912/1913, is mainly known for his theoretical writings rather than for his own productions as an artist, although these concern as many and various domains as architecture, sculpture, painting, eurhythmy, speech, poetry and drama. Between 1910 and 1913, in Munich, he wrote and directed four *Mystery Dramas*: *The Portal of Initiation* (1910), *The Soul's Probation* (1911), *The Guardian of the Threshold* (1912), *The Soul's Awakening* (1913), in which he expresses, under the cover of literature, such knowledge as is otherwise conveyed in his "Science of the Spirit". But, by creating a "new" form of drama, which I have called the "eurhythmic initiatory drama", derived, more particularly from the older form of drama and from the antique "mysteries", he also seeks to give evidence of a deeper kinship between "art" and "science", both originating in spiritual life, regarded, in turn, as the only source of any real knowledge. Art, then, is but the practical side of Science, the remaining question being whether, by using drama to present the elements of a modern spiritual quest, Steiner did succeed in revealing the spirit under the veil of Art, in other words, to put Anthroposophy into action.

VISUAL GODS: FROM EXORCISM TO COMPLEXITY IN RENAISSANCE STUDIES*

KOCKU VON STUCKRAD

The pagan divinities are a hardy breed
(Joscelyn Godwin)

1. *The Problem of “Renaissance Paganism”*

Academic research into the cultural changes that took place in Europe between 1400 and 1650 is notoriously fraught with terminological difficulties. With regard to the place of paganism and polytheism in Western culture, three questions in particular stand in the foreground. Most generally, is it adequate to isolate a period as “Renaissance” or “early modernity” and what is gained by doing so? Is the period called “Renaissance” characterized by a *continuity* of pagan and polytheistic elements or do we have to address the presence of pagan semantics as *reception*, *revival*, or, rather, *invention*? And finally, in terms of concepts of “religion”, is the presence of pagan deities in public spheres an expression of “lived religion” or of a Renaissance “dream” of a pagan past that is syncretistically built into Christian “religion”?

Although Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) already spoke of the ‘dark ages’ (*tenebrae*), caused by the invasion of Rome, ‘the civilized world’, by the ‘Nordic barbarians’, his contrast does not signify a contrast between the pre-Christian and Christian worlds. The idea of *rinascita* (the Italian precursor of the Renaissance concept) was first expressed by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) but still restricted to the context of art history. *Rinascita* did not become an historical concept in Italy but in France, there known as *Renaissance*, through Voltaire (1694-1778) and other Enlightenment writers. The cultural

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circumstances of the nineteenth century first produced the concept of the Renaissance as a prominent and unique cultural age of preparation for “modernity”. This occurred between 1820 and 1830, before Jules Michelet’s great study *La Renaissance* (2nd ed. 1857) and Jacob Burckhardt’s classic *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) finally established its usage. These concepts reflect the notions of the nineteenth century, rather than the actual events in the fifteenth century¹. Therefore, many scholars today discard the notion of “Renaissance” as a useful category²; the alternative term “early modernity”, however, has also been criticized, because it carries a teleological ideology, thus constructing a straight development into “modernity”³.

Art historians in general and the Warburg School in particular played a crucial role in the twentieth-century debate about Renaissance paganism and the question of continuity and reform. Starting with Aby Warburg’s celebrated *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike* (1932)⁴, scholars described the existence of pagan symbolism in Renaissance art and culture as a conscious reception of ancient paganism. Subsequently, Erwin Panofsky introduced a differentiation between “Renaissances”—i.e. the “rebirths” of the gods in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—and the full-blown “Renaissance” of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. According to Panofsky, what we witness here is a ‘principle of disjunction’ that led to a ‘perspective distancing’ from ancient culture in the ‘real’ Renaissance⁵. In Panofsky’s words:

The “distance” created by the Renaissance deprived antiquity of its realness. The classical world ceased to be both a possession and a menace. It became instead the object of a passionate nostalgia . . . The Renaissance came to realize that Pan was dead . . . The classical past was looked upon, for the first time, as a totality cut off from the present; and, therefore, as an ideal to be longed for

¹ A critical analysis of notions of “Renaissance”, “Early Modernity”, and others is provided by Herzog & Koselleck, *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein* (see particularly Stierle, ‘Renaissance’); on Michelet, Burckhardt, and Huizinga see also Tollebeek, ‘“Renaissance” and “Fossilization”’.

² To be sure, the critical assessment of ideological biases of “Renaissance” is by no means new, as Ferguson’s influential study on *The Renaissance in Historical Thought* (1948) shows. But for today, Grendler, ‘The Italian Renaissance’, 15-17, even speaks of a ‘Renaissance bashing’; on the construction and meaning of “Renaissance” see also Gombrich, ‘The Renaissance’. Even art historians are critical about the usefulness of the category “Renaissance”, for instance Warnke, *Geschichte der deutschen Kunst*.

³ Grendler, ‘The Italian Renaissance’, 17-18; on the concept of “Early Modernity” see also Dürr et al., *Eigene und fremde Frühe Neuzeiten*.

⁴ See Warburg, *Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*.

⁵ Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art*, 84-85 and 108. On a critique of Panofsky’s concepts, see Hoffmann, ‘Panofsky’s Renaissance’.

instead of a reality to be both utilized and feared. The Middle Ages had left antiquity unburied and alternately galvanized and exorcised its corpse. The Renaissance stood weeping at its grave and tried to resurrect its soul⁶.

The French Romanist Jean Seznec had already in 1940 argued somewhat differently, questioning the notion of a “break with antiquity” in Renaissance culture. For Seznec, there was no “rebirth of the gods”, while the significant change took place as late as in the sixteenth century:

From being objects of love, the gods are transformed into a subject of study . . . Increasingly erudite and diminishingly alive, less and less felt but more and more intellectualized—such, from now on, it seems, is to be the inescapable evolution of mythology⁷.

Categories of “Paganism”—or, rather, “Heathendom”—had been prominent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century descriptions of Renaissance culture, from Friedrich Schlegel to Jacob Burckhardt to Friedrich Nietzsche. They reflect the dissociation of Christianity and modern culture and can be seen as a projection of contemporary identities onto an imagined past⁸. Twentieth-century analyses are no exception to this. Severe battles were fought between representatives of the Warburg School, such as Edgar Wind, who interpreted Renaissance art as a Neoplatonic charging of ancient paganism, and critics such as Horst Bredekamp and Jörg Traeger who hurled fundamental attacks against this “arcanization” of art history⁹. No matter how modern scholars decide to position themselves in this ongoing debate, it is apparent that the very notions of “Renaissance” and “paganism” are a powerful projection screen for historical imagination.

For the problem that concerns us here, special mention has to be made of E.H. Gombrich. In a revised version of his famous essay ‘*Icones Symbolicae: Philosophies of Symbolism and their Bearing on Art*’¹⁰, Gombrich critically assesses the way historians of art analyze the function of symbolic representation in Renaissance art. ‘One thing is clear’, Gombrich says:

⁶ Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, 112–113.

⁷ Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 321. The original French study was published in the *Studies of the Warburg Institute* in 1940 under the title ‘La Survivance des dieux antiques’; note the shift from ‘dieux antiques’ to ‘Pagan gods’ in the translation.

⁸ See Stausberg, ‘Die Renaissance des Paganen’, 3–6.

⁹ Wind’s classic study is *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*; cf. Bredekamp, *Edgar Wind*, and Idem, ‘Götterdämmerung des Neoplatonismus’. Traeger, *Renaissance und Religion*, 23–24, even notes: ‘Mit der Wiederkehr des antiken Geistes wurde so zugleich das Geheimnis seiner unsichtbaren Wirkungsweise beschworen. Die Kunstgeschichte war damit ihrerseits unterwegs zu einer Arkanwissenschaft, welche die Bilder gleichermaßen enträtselte und entmündigte’.

¹⁰ Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 123–195.

We cannot tackle this kind of question at all unless we are ready to abandon the assumptions about the functions of the image we usually take for granted. We are used to making a clear distinction between two of these functions—that of representation and that of symbolization . . . As soon, however, as we leave the ground of rational analysis we find that these neat distinctions no longer hold. We know that in magical practice the image not only represents an enemy but may take his place . . . We know that the “fetish” not only “symbolizes” fertility but “has” it. In short, our attitude towards the image is inextricably bound up with our whole idea about the universe¹¹.

Both “representation” and “symbolization” can be interpreted as academic strategies of “distancing” the presumed inherent power of images. Gombrich does not carry his analysis that far. But he raises the crucial point: ‘To the modern critic, in other words, the problem of personifications and indeed of all symbolism in art is an aesthetic rather than an ontological problem’¹². After tackling the Aristotelian and the Platonic doctrines of images, including the ‘non-discursive way’ which is superior for accessing higher truths, he uses the opinion of Renaissance Platonists for his own interpretation of Renaissance art—the idea that images have an inherent power if they preserve the proportions and rules of the Divine Intellect¹³. Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, for instance, renders the impression that

all these influences unite in it as rays in a burning-glass. Whatever the actual “programme” was that underlies this commission we know that it is the result of passionate efforts to re-evoke the “true” image of the goddess of love such as it had been created by the ancients¹⁴.

In coming to terms with the inherent “power” of images, Gombrich makes use of psychological—mainly Freudian—terminology. ‘In the dark recesses of our mind we all believe in image magic’¹⁵. He talks of the ‘dreamlike reactions to the image which always lurk on the fringe of our consciousness’¹⁶. But is the category of “dream” an appropriate analytical tool? Fritz Saxl had already in 1939 introduced the interpretational model of “dream” but questioned its usefulness¹⁷. These cautionary remarks notwithstanding,

¹¹ Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 124-125.

¹² Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 126.

¹³ Of particular importance here is Ficino; see Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 172-175.

¹⁴ Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 174-175.

¹⁵ Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 179.

¹⁶ Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 175.

¹⁷ ‘Their creations are descriptions of dreams, but who would say that they are *only* dreams? From the end of antiquity down to the 15th century these pagan ideas had never entered the mind of the dreamer in such a way as to be represented in art’ (Saxl, ‘Pagan Sacrifice’, 363).

many interpreters of Renaissance art in general and of the role of “pagan” divinities in public spheres in particular still cling to the image of “dream-like states” as an element of their interpretation. The most recent example of such an approach is a study by Joscelyn Godwin on *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance*. Godwin introduces his book as a study

about a state of mind and soul that arose in fifteenth-century Italy, spread through Europe along certain clearly-defined fault-lines, and persisted for about two hundred years, during which, although no one believed in the gods, many people acted as though they existed¹⁸.

It is a book about ‘cultivators of pagan fantasies’¹⁹ who are ‘touched by the pagan spirit’²⁰. In a review of Godwin’s intriguing book I argued that its underlying rationale is a religionist approach to religion that—artificially—differentiates between “real religion”, i.e. religion that people “believe in”, and some sort of mental state that is vaguely described as “fantasy” or “dream”²¹. Besides the fact that analytical categories such as “dream” or “fantasy” are too vague and too close to unverifiable concepts of “inner states of mind”²², the main problem of these interpretations lies in a discourse of *singularization* that rhetorically differentiates *the* religion from alternative religious options, ultimately leading to a discourse of “true” versus “false” religion²³.

In this article, I want to approach the problem of Renaissance polytheism and “paganism” from a different point of view. Under the headline of *material* and *visual culture*, cultural studies have recently broken grounds for a new understanding of religious dynamics in public spheres. Instead of harking back to religionist concepts of religion as “belief”, the visual, material, and public aspects of religion are moved to the center of scrutiny. I will first make reference to major contributions to medieval and early modern visual culture. Subsequently, I will apply these to examples of Renaissance pagan discourse. My goal in doing so is very modest, and mainly methodological:

¹⁸ Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 1. Neither Saxl nor Gombrich are mentioned in Godwin’s book.

¹⁹ Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 11.

²⁰ Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 13.

²¹ Von Stuckrad, ‘Review Godwin’.

²² Consequently, they are no analytical categories in the strict sense. On this problematic see von Stuckrad, ‘Discursive Study of Religion’; on Godwin’s dependence on Jungian archetypal theory, see von Stuckrad, ‘Review Godwin’.

²³ On the concepts of “singularization” see Gladigow, ‘Meaning/Signification’; Smith, ‘Religion, Religions, Religious’.

I do not claim a new interpretational “paradigm” in order to establish something like a “pagan religion” in Renaissance Europe; instead, I want to introduce visual and material aspects into the study of Western esotericism and reflect on the underlying discourses of inclusion and exclusion that so often have characterized academic study of religion. By questioning the scholarly focus on belief and text, new aspects of a *pagan discourse* will surface that reveal the complexity of polytheism and paganism in Europe between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries.

This pagan discourse also sheds new light on the complexities of an *esoteric discourse*. The persistence of pagan divinities in Renaissance culture—from Pletho’s exclusive polytheism to the scholarly revaluation of Hermes Trismegistus—is an expression of religious conflicts that ultimately fostered a pluralization of identities. If we want to scrutinize these processes, we will have to broaden our understanding of “esotericism”. I argued elsewhere that typological approaches to Western esotericism—notably Antoine Faivre’s influential list of characteristics—are of only limited use when it comes to questions of interreligious dynamics and processes of exchange between various cultural domains, such as religion, science, art, politics, philosophy, or law²⁴. An *esoteric field of discourse* crystallizes around claims of higher knowledge and ways of accessing such knowledge²⁵, thus transgressing the boundaries of religious traditions and cultural domains. It is precisely the—often rhetorical—negotiation of identities and the competition between various forms of knowledge that is at stake here. From a Foucauldian point of view²⁶, discourses are not the ideas that stand behind these negotiations, but the instruments of power and the strategies of inclusion and exclusion, which “materialize” in public spheres and societal organizations²⁷.

2. *Visual Culture*

Referring to the images of demons that were part of Romanic church portals and capitals, Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) once wrote to the abbot

²⁴ See especially von Stuckrad, ‘Western Esotericism’; and, more general, idem, *Western Esotericism*, ch. 1.

²⁵ As ways of attaining higher knowledge, “mediation” and “individual experience” are of paramount importance.

²⁶ See particularly Foucault, *L’ordre du discours*.

²⁷ With regard to visual culture, we can adopt Linda Simonis’s notion of *Verdichtung von Kommunikationszusammenhängen* in literature and art (Simonis, *Die Kunst des Geheimen*, 27); cf. my review of her book in the present issue of *Aries*.

William: ‘The multitude of these diverse forms is so rich and strange that it seems more pleasant to read in the marble stones than in books, and to spend the day with admiration of these details rather than with reflection about God’s commandment’²⁸. In a nutshell Bernard’s comment summarizes a major characteristic of Western culture from late antiquity to the present—a severe critique of images and their inherent seductive power, on the one hand, and an obsessive fascination with images, on the other. The skeptical attitude vis-à-vis images has often bordered on the phobic and led to iconoclastic action, even more so because this attitude was linked to accusations of idolatry and heresy²⁹.

Another important aspect of this discourse is the Western opinion that language and writing are the main achievements of civilization and the necessary precondition of “history”³⁰. As Peter J. Bräunlein notes:

Der Umgang mit Bildern wird der Sphäre des A-Logischen, des Irrationalen, des Magischen zugeordnet, Schreiben und Lesen der Sphäre des Rationalen. Das Bild verwirrt die Sinne, die Sprache ordnet Wirklichkeit und trennt Schein von Sein. Die Angst erregende Fantasie von einer Welt, die gänzlich von Bildern beherrscht ist, ist also keineswegs ein postmodernes Phänomen³¹.

This ambivalent attitude towards the power of images has had tremendous impact on how historians of art and religion approached their objects. Whereas many art historians have held that an image must be “read like a text”, as an “illustration” of something that might also be expressed in words³², scholars of religion have focused mainly on philological approaches

²⁸ *Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti Theoderici abbatem* XII, in: *Patrologia latina* 182, 893-913; see Mertin, ‘Ikonoklasmus’, and Bräunlein, ‘Bildakte’, 202. Cf. the contextualization in Rudolph, *Things of Greater Importance*.

²⁹ See Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*; Bryer & Herrin, *Iconoclasm*; Engelbart, ‘Image/Iconoclasm’.

³⁰ This attitude has been criticized by anthropologists in particular, because it is part of a colonial and ‘normalizing discourse’ that intends ‘to fix the Other in a timeless present’ (Pratt, ‘Scratches on the Face of the Country’, 139). See also Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 1-35; von Stuckrad, *Schamanismus und Esoterik*, 110-112.

³¹ Bräunlein, ‘Bildakte’, 202.

³² See Gombrich’s analyses, discussed above. For an anthropological approach, see Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge*. Not surprisingly, the new tendency to move the *materiality* of culture from the margins into the center of scrutiny is paralleled by developments in contemporary art: in the 1960s and 1970s the key terms in art were “concept” and “materiality”; see Schneede, *Die Geschichte der Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert*, 215-235 (‘Der Ausstieg aus dem Bild: Material und Konzept’). The large field of *material culture* is made accessible in Buchli, *Material Culture*.

to religion, regarding images merely as phenomena that fostered the “readability” of religion³³. I think Charles Zika is right in pointing out that with the help of these scholarly models of interpretation Europe exorcised her demons to the margins of power, subsequently applying strategies to secure their distance³⁴. Liza Bakewell even talks of an ‘academic iconoclasm’: ‘images were kept to a minimum in scholarly publications, including ethnographies, because they were considered superficial and interfered with good (verbal) scholarship’³⁵.

At the same time, the ancient and medieval conceptualization of the power of images survived. Despite an ongoing critique (beginning with Xenophanes and Heraclitus) ‘bleibt das Muster “Präsenz der Bilder, Präsenz der Götter” Element einer longue durée in der Religionsgeschichte, gegen das sich jeweils ikonoklastische Appelle erst durchsetzen mußten’³⁶. The swaying between fascination with and exorcism of images has been even more fundamental because it was inseparably bound to the question of idolatry³⁷.

New Approaches to the Visual

That cultural studies during the last two decades increasingly turned their attention to the visual doubtlessly has to do with the emergence of new media, a presumed “loss of literacy”, and developments in twentieth-century art. A cornucopia of new studies addresses the *pictorial turn*, and a few scholars even talk of a shift of paradigm that has taken place in the various disciplines collaborating under the rubric of cultural studies. Exemplary is W.J.T. Mitchell who defines the ‘pictorial turn’ as ‘a postlinguistic, postsemiotic

³³ For both of these approaches the interpretation of Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is a telling example, and Godwin (*Pagan Dream*, 21-37) is correct in pointing at the difficulties of analyzing its splendid design only as a masterpiece of art and printing or as mere illustration; see also Wilson, ‘Oneiriconographia’.

³⁴ ‘We exorcise them [the demons] to the geographical, cultural and chronological margins—to the underdeveloped, the poor, the disadvantaged, the colonized; to the primitive, the savage, the uncivilised; to the medieval imaginary of magic and mysticism and dark age barbarism’ (Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons*, 4).

³⁵ Bakewell, ‘Image Acts’, 26.

³⁶ Gladigow, ‘Von der “Lesbarkeit” der Religion’, 118. He adds: ‘Kernproblem der systematischen Differenzierung von Bildlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit bleibt—über religionshistorische Epochen und Religionstypen hinweg—der Divinationsaspekt: Ist das Bild ein Epiphanie-Modus des Gottes, trägt die Schrift eine Offenbarung?’. See also Gladigow, ‘Präsenz der Bilder—Präsenz der Götter’.

³⁷ Kamerick, *Popular Piety*; see also note 29 above.

rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality³⁸. The difference between these approaches and the concepts of art historians, mainly of the Warburg School, is, first, that the image is no longer seen as a mere “representation” of an “idea” but as an element of discourse that is to be studied on its own terms³⁹; ‘the presented image is, at least in part, its own referent’⁴⁰. Second, focusing on the *materiality* and public *use* of images, a new interpretational framework is needed that transcends earlier concepts of art historians⁴¹. This does not mean that scholars have reached a consensus about the appropriate analytical instruments. In fact, as Hans Belting notes: ‘Eine allgemeine Theorie der Bildmedien steht . . . noch aus’⁴².

Instead of giving a general overview of these new approaches, I want to highlight three contributions that seem particularly important for our understanding of the role of the visual in medieval and early modern culture⁴³. The first one is the pictorial theory of Hans Belting that breaks new ground for future research. In contrast to other approaches to Renaissance visual culture, which still refer to the visual as representation⁴⁴, Belting goes a step further and construes a “pictorial anthropology” (*Bild-Anthropologie*) that

³⁸ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 16. From the perspective of religious studies, a very good assessment of the state of the art is Bräunlein, ‘Bildakte’; see also Bräunlein, ‘“Zurück zu den Sachen”’. As examples of the new scholarly interest in the visual see Mitchell, *Iconology*; Jenks, *Visual Culture*; Walker, *Visual Culture*; Heywood & Sandywell, *Interpreting Visual Culture*; Gladigow, ‘Von der “Lesbarkeit” der Religion’; Knieper & Müller, *Kommunikation visuell*; Mirzoeff, *Introduction to Visual Culture*; Barnard, *Approaches*; Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*; Sturken & Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*; Faßler, *Bildlichkeit*; Howells, *Visual Culture*. Cf. also Schanze, *Handbuch*; Klimkeit, *Götterbild*. Of particular importance are the publications that emerge from the very fruitful interdisciplinary research center at the University of Münster, Germany. Of the new series *KultBild. Visualität und Religion in der Vormoderne*, I want to highlight Ganz & Lentjes, *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren*, and Ganz & Henkel, *Rahmen-Diskurse*.

³⁹ Gombrich’s analyses stand somehow on the interface between these approaches and the *visual culture* concepts. While he rightly criticizes the artificial rationalizations of art historians, he does not take the next step that systematically asks for the practice of looking and the acts of displaying artifacts in the public sphere.

⁴⁰ Bakewell, ‘Image Acts’, 22.

⁴¹ For these developments in twentieth-century art, see Schneede, *Die Geschichte der Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert*.

⁴² Belting, ‘Medium-Bild-Körper’, 14; see also Boehm, ‘Bilderfrage’, 326: ‘Vergeblich fahnden wir nach einer entwickelten “Bildtheorie” oder “Bildwissenschaft” und die kunsthistorische Ikonologie, die das gesuchte Programm einer “bildlichen Logik” scheinbar im Namen führt, baut doch primär auf sprachliche Referenzen des Bildes und kaum auf seine visuelle Präsenz’.

⁴³ See Bräunlein, ‘Bildakte’, 207–216; Bräunlein, ‘Religionsgeschichte als Mediengeschichte’.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Farago, *Reframing the Renaissance*, and Erickson & Hulse, *Early Modern Visual Culture*.

integrates the three elements of *medium*, *image*, and *body*. In so doing, the materiality of the picture and image is not separated from its message, quite the contrary:

Das Medium ist gerade dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß es als Form (Vermittlung) des Bildes beides umfaßt, was man in Kunstwerken und ästhetischen Objekten von einander trennt. Der beliebte Diskurs von Form und Materie, in dem sich die alte Rede von Geist und Materie fortsetzt, läßt sich nicht auf das Trägermedium des Bildes anwenden. Man kann ein Bild nicht auf die Form reduzieren, die ein Medium empfängt, wenn es ein Bild trägt: ebenso wenig gilt für das Verhältnis von Bild und Medium der Unterschied von Idee und Ausführung. In diesem Verhältnis liegt eine Dynamik, die mit den herkömmlichen Argumenten der Bilderfrage nicht erfasst wird⁴⁵.

The dynamic can only be appreciated if the sensual and bodily aspect is taken into consideration. As Belting notes, the semiotic theory as

Abstraktionsleistung der Moderne trennte die Welt der Zeichen von der Welt der Körper in dem Sinne, daß Zeichen in sozialen Systemen zu Hause sind und auf Vereinbarung fußen. Sie wenden sich an eine kognitive statt an eine sinnliche, körperbezogene Wahrnehmung: selbst Bilder reduzierten sich dabei zu ikonischen Zeichen⁴⁶.

Belting's approach can be combined with what Liza Bakewell calls *image acts*⁴⁷, i.e. an application of Austin's theory of speech acts to the field of pictorial communication. Now we no longer ask, 'How to do things with words' (Austin), but 'How to do things with images' and 'What to do with pictures'. Bakewell understands images to mean human-made images, 'from body gestures to "great works of art" and everything in between'⁴⁸. Hence, it is not only the materiality that is at stake here, but the *visual act of communication* that images involve.

A third important contribution to the theorizing of visual culture comes from Thomas Lentjes. His research is crucial here because Lentjes conceptu-

⁴⁵ Belting, 'Medium-Bild-Körper', 13. On the development of Belting's theory see Belting, *Bild und Kult* (particularly pp. 11-19 on 'Die Macht der Bilder und die Ohnmacht der Theologen'), and, most recently, Belting, *Das echte Bild*.

⁴⁶ Belting, 'Medium-Bild-Körper', 14. Cf. also the theoretical considerations in Lanwerd, *Religionsästhetik*.

⁴⁷ Similar to Belting, Liza Bakewell notes that the study of image acts begins 'not with texts or objects . . . but with the human body' (Bakewell, 'Image Acts', 27-28).

⁴⁸ Bakewell, 'Image Acts', 22. Reference could be made to Jan Assmann, as well, who developed the idea of "iconic action" and showed its applicability for understanding pictorial communication in ancient Egypt; see Assmann, 'Macht der Bilder'. Cf. also the notion of "Bildakte" by Bräunlein, 'Bildakte'.

alizes the role of the visual in medieval and early modern discourse⁴⁹. To understand the *image acts* of that time, it is necessary to take concepts of medieval anthropology and aesthetic theory into account⁵⁰. Well into the sixteenth century, when the Reformation⁵¹ started to challenge these assumptions about the visual, outer images were often regarded as being closely linked to the inner visions of human beings. The interior of the human being was a projection surface for good and evil images, subsequently transforming him- or herself into these images. The ideal case, of course, was the *imago Dei*, the transformation of the inner person into Christ. With reference to Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *De Imaginatione* Lentes makes clear that *imago*, *imaginatio*, and *imitatio* were closely related in a medieval culture of seeing⁵². Tentatively he argues:

Letztlich wäre zu prüfen, ob die *imago Dei*-Lehre nicht den grundlegenden Schlüssel darstellt, um zu erklären, wieso die Imaginationstheorien weit über theologische Bestimmungen hinaus auf den imaginären Apparat ganzer Gesellschaften auszugreifen in der Lage waren: weil der Mensch immer schon Bild war, so sei wenigstens als These formuliert, funktionierte alle menschliche Bildung, Veränderung und Kommunikation über das Sehen und Gesehenwerden⁵³.

With regard to ritual practice, this attitude—which we can describe as a *communicational approach to images*—had a decisive effect on the way pre-Reformation culture handled images and artifacts, from limitations of sight in monasteries and their fashioning as visual spaces, to the development of complex exercises of imagination and the ritualized form of showing relics. The latter is particularly interesting, because the ritual “unveiling” of relics, statues, and other material objects is a crucial element of religious culture

⁴⁹ Lentes, ‘Inneres Auge’; cf. the whole volume, which is an example of the new appreciation of materiality and the body in historiography. See also Mertin, ‘Ikonoklasmus’; Ganz & Lentes, *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren*.

⁵⁰ As has been done by Gombrich (see above); cf. also Ganz & Lentes, *Die Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren*. The complicated scientific, religious, aesthetic, and philosophical discussions often focus on the concept of imagination; on this, see the overview and literature in van den Doel & Hanegraaff, ‘Imagination’.

⁵¹ As many contributions in Ganz & Henkel, *Rahmen-Diskurse*, demonstrate, the actual discursive processes were much more complex, however. Strategies for legitimizing cultic veneration of images were also applied in Protestant contexts; at the same time, the revival of image cults played a decisive role for Catholic identities in the age of confessionalization.

⁵² Lentes, ‘Inneres Auge’, 193–195.

⁵³ Lentes, ‘Inneres Auge’, 195.

until the Reformation⁵⁴. These rituals were full-blown image acts that aimed at the invocation of an image inside the observer.

Die Konfrontation mit Bildern wurde als elementarer Kommunikationsvorgang—als Tausch der Blicke—verstanden. Nicht nur der Betrachter erfasst das Bild mit seinen Augen, sondern er wird umgekehrt von diesem angeblickt. Das Beten und die Ausrichtung des Blickes—*intentio* . . . waren untrennbar verbunden, und die Erwidern dieses Blickes galt als selbstverständlich. Angestrebt wurde über den Augenkontakt eine physische Verbindung, in der es letztlich um die Übertragung von Kraft ging⁵⁵.

Hence, the practice of looking, displaying, visualizing, and imagination is a sensual action that creates a relationship between the observer and the object of observation.

3. *The Presence of Images as Visual Practice*

The *materiality* of pagan and polytheistic images—and their *uses*—in medieval and Renaissance culture is in my view a superb test case for the dynamic between image, medium, and body. As we have seen, recent contributions to pictorial theory and interpretation bring in a new dimension of analysis: the element of action and public performance. Put differently, the concept of visual culture allows us to interpret Renaissance artifacts and pictures with a framework of analysis that includes the sensual and bodily acts of imaging. Although this article is primarily concerned with methodological considerations, let me briefly elucidate the dimension of visual practice with two examples.

Diana and Actaeon

The ancient myth of the hunter Actaeon, who happened to observe the naked Diana with her Nymphs during their bath and subsequently was transformed into a stag and killed by his own hounds, was a favorite theme for sixteenth-century artists and their patrons. As Godwin tells us, this theme

⁵⁴ See particularly Schnitzler, 'Illusion'; Kühne, 'Ostensio reliquiarum'. Bräunlein, 'Bildakte', 215-216, gives further references, for instance of the pilgrimage to the Nuremberg *Heiltumschau* where since 1424 once a year the holy lance, a nail of Jesus's cross, and other objects were shown to the public. When the audience was not able to view the relic directly, people used mirrors to get contact, a "glance", of the relic.

⁵⁵ Bräunlein, 'Bildakte', 215, with reference to Guy P. Machal and Bob Scribner who relate this concept to medieval optical theories.

afforded the pleasure of painting as many nymphs as one liked, yet with a wholesome and simplistic moral: that for men to look lustfully at women drags them down to the animal level. Thus the joke is on the viewer, who by enjoying the painting is also spying on Diana's bath, and sharing in Actaeon's offense. Is it, however, an offense, or was Actaeon's punishment unjust? Does his painful metamorphosis, like the flaying of Marsyas, have a redeeming, spiritual meaning? Is it esoterically about using sexuality as a path towards the initiatic death of the ego? It all depends on one's point of view⁵⁶.

This is, of course, an apt remark that calms down overextended interpretations and generalizations, which too easily derive fundamental theses from individual contexts. For me here, it is not so much the art historians' interpretation that is at stake but the very effect of these images on the visitors.

We can compare two quite different visualizations of the Diana-Actaeon-Myth in the sixteenth century—the cycle of frescos by Correggio in the Camera di San Paolo in Parma (1518/19), and that by Parmigianino in the Rocca Sanvitale in Fontanellato, which was created in 1523 and 1524⁵⁷. The first of these frescos was painted for the Benedictine abbess Giovanna Piacenza who received in her “camera” nuns and visitors—hence, the images decorated a more or less public Christian room (see ill. 1). As Nova argues, the themes of the fresco purposely strengthen the absolute power of the abbess herself, who is identified with Diana and able to punish and control her nuns⁵⁸. Diana on the chimney (see ill. 2), as well as a Putto carrying Actaeon's head, dogs, and even ram heads, directly *face* the visitor. As visitors,

[w]ir finden alles bezaubernd, aber wir sind auch beunruhigt. . . . Der Betrachter fühlte sich isoliert, eingekreist und bedroht. Die Camera di San Paolo war als eine selbstbewußte manipulative Maschine der Macht geplant. Der Betrachter wird, wenn er nicht aufpaßt, wie Aktäon gejagt, weil Giovanna ihn überwacht und bestraft⁵⁹.

With regard to our guiding question, we can say that we are confronted with an image act that transfers Diana's power to the person of the abbess—a Christian abbess who is carrying the power of a pagan goddess.

Five years later, Parmigianino painted the same myth for a totally different usage (see ill. 3). Although he was inspired by the Camera del Correggio, the interpretation of this image act has to take into account that here the

⁵⁶ Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 16.

⁵⁷ See Nova, ‘Beobachten und beobachtet werden’.

⁵⁸ Nova, ‘Beobachten und beobachtet werden’, 89.

⁵⁹ Nova, ‘Beobachten und beobachtet werden’, 90.

fresco is created for very private use—maybe as a bath⁶⁰—by Galeazzo Sanvitale who ordered the fresco for his wife Paola Gonzaga. Contrasting the Correggio fresco, Parmigianino created an eroticised and voyeuristic version of the myth, in which the (male) observer can enjoy the beautiful Diana and her nymphs without feelings of guilt. ‘Es handelt sich um ein patriarchalisches Begehren des Anderen’, as Nova points out⁶¹. But this is only part of the message, because the artist worked ambivalent elements into the fresco. Most important is a real *convex mirror* that was built into the central oculus of the room, surrounded by the engraving *RESPICE FINEM* (“Consider your end” or “Consider your death”). Exactly when the observer recognizes his own—distorted—image in the mirror, he understands that he has been transformed into Actaeon because he saw the naked goddess. ‘Man kann also sagen, daß der Spiegel in der Mitte des Gewölbes das Zentrum eines ludi-schen und gleichzeitig selbstdestruktiven Vorgangs war, bei dem Galeazzo erneut die metamorphische Erfahrung Aktäons auf einer visuellen Ebene erlebte’⁶². In this image act, we can conclude, an *experience* is induced that transgresses the boundaries of “mere seeing” or intellectual rationalization.

Magic Gardens

If we consider Gladigow’s notion that the pattern of “presence of images—presence of gods” is a *long durée* in European history of religion, it will be particularly interesting to turn to the statues of pagan divinities that were part of Renaissance public spheres. Furthermore, these statues were crucial elements of Italian “magic gardens”, which rich individuals and clergy-men—interestingly enough, even high cardinals—laid out for their own use. Godwin gives a fascinating overview of these gardens and their particular “sense of wonder” that captures the visitor even today⁶³. The images of pagan divinities are integrated in a carefully constructed garden architecture, with grottos,

⁶⁰ The function as “bathroom” or boudoir is discussed in Nova, ‘Beobachten und beobachtet werden’, 90 (with references). For our purpose, it is enough to assume that the frescos decorated a private, and somehow eroticized, area of the house.

⁶¹ Nova, ‘Beobachten und beobachtet werden’, 91. Heinrich, ‘Der Untergang von Religion’, 85, interprets the Diana-Actaeon-myth as ‘eine Geschlechterspannung einbeziehende Wahrheits-Allegorie’. On the role of eroticism in Renaissance culture see Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*.

⁶² Ibid., 91. See also Nova’s discussion of the role of convex mirrors in changing attitudes toward the capability of images to directly address the observer. Heinrich, ‘Der Untergang von Religion’, talks of a ‘Verwandlungs- und Zerstückungsmächtigkeit der intellektuellen Existenz’—a community with the image that transcends the privacy of humanistic speculation into a kind of ‘Mysteriengemeinschaft’ (p. 86).

⁶³ Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 153–180.

fountains, and sometimes even technical tricks that made the statues appear as animated.

The garden of Villa d'Este in Tivoli, near Rome, is a telling example. Constructed between 1563 and 1572 under the governor of Tivoli, Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este (1509-1572), with Pirro Ligorio as architect and archaeo-logical advisor, the garden contains huge and complex fountains depicting dragons, heroes, the Diana (Artemis) of Ephesus with water pouring forth from her many breasts, and other installations. No matter how we want to interpret the "message" of this garden—whether we see in it a Hermetic, mystical way to initiation, or a symbol of resurrection, or a Neoplatonic parable⁶⁴—from a visual culture point of view the unity of medium, image, and body created a strong impression of "divine presence"⁶⁵ in the individual visitor (note that the "visitor" is no longer a mere "observer"). That in fact the visitor is part of the whole ensemble can be seen from the fact that he or she is at times even addressed directly. The Sibyl, for instance, a classic image of the *nympha loci*, is a recurrent theme in early modern garden architecture, as here in the Ariadne Fountain of the Villa d'Este (see ill. 4)⁶⁶. She is understood as the guardian of the place, securing its sanctity as long as she is sleeping. Often, the arrangement is accompanied by a warning, addressed to the visitor, as in the Belvedere in Rome: 'I sleep, whilst I hear the murmur of the soft water. Whoever should touch this marble basin, do not interrupt my sleep. Whether you drink or wash, be silent'. Hence, the visitor is not only participating in the scene, he or she has an important role to play in securing the sanctity of the place—a clear example of image act where the visitor is drawn into a ritual practice.

The motif of the sleeping nymph is a popular element not only in Renaissance gardens⁶⁷. An example from the eighteenth century is the private garden of England's famous Enlightenment poet and architect, Alexander

⁶⁴ Cf. Godwin's discussion of the respective interpretations by David Coffin, Emanuela Kretzulesco-Quaranta, and Maria Luisa Madonna (ibid.).

⁶⁵ Here, I refer to Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 153, who states: 'The Garden Magic is a mood that descends especially on the solitary visitor, a trancelike atmosphere of suspended excitement beyond words or the rational mind. In earlier times, when consciousness was less rigidified, it must have been stronger, leaving no doubt of the presence of Pan and his retinue'. Cf. my critical remarks in von Stuckrad, 'Review Godwin'.

⁶⁶ As Klaus Heinrich argued, the demigods and nymphs were even more powerful in the imagery of Renaissance culture than the pagan gods and goddesses; see Heinrich, 'Götter und Halbgötter'.

⁶⁷ See Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 149-151, on the transition from grotto to nymphaeum in Italian garden architecture.

Pope (1688-1744), who in 1720 built an artistic nymphaeum accompanied by verses of consecration to the pagan divinities: ‘Nymph of the Grot, these sacred springs I keep, / And to the Murmur of these Waters sleep, / Ah spare my slumbers, gently tread the cave / and drink in Silence or in Silence lave’⁶⁸.

4. Conclusion: From Exorcism to Complexity

Now, how can we apply these examples and considerations to our initial question about the presence and discourse of polytheism and paganism in Western culture? The most general impression is that focusing on the visual presence of pagan deities challenges common notions of a “Christian occident” with a monotheistic creed that in late antiquity won the upper hand over a pagan past⁶⁹. This narrative is dependent on a conceptualization of “religion” that is based on “faith”, inner states of mind, belief-systems, and (holy) texts⁷⁰. On a deeper level of analysis, these conceptualizations correspond to two strong currents in the academic study of religion: a *religionist conviction* and a *philological orientation*. Both currents in my view reflect strategies of distancing or even purgation and exorcism.

With the focus on faith and belief-systems, largely informed by religionist traditions of the nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, scholars employed a strategy of singularization⁷¹ and purgation on the basis of their terminological differentiation between “religion” on the one hand and “folk-belief”⁷²

⁶⁸ See Geyer-Kordesch, ‘Hieroglyphs of Nature’, 243. Geyer-Kordesch highlights the agency of place in these installations: ‘To engage the gods and the agency of place is indeed to involve oneself in ancient wisdom’ (245). Put differently: ‘The occult here is not a received tradition to be learned through the difficult ciphers of the secret world of hermetic tracts. Instead it is a place to go to and, through architectural enhancement or landscape gardening or the appreciation of nature, to participate in a glimpse of Elysium’ (246).

⁶⁹ This master-narrative is critically assessed by Perkins, *Christendom*. See also von Stuckrad, ‘Die Rede vom “Christlichen Abendland”’. On the concept of pluralism as a characteristic of European history of religion see Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, ‘Religionswissenschaftliche Überlegungen’.

⁷⁰ This is what Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, describes as a ‘discourse of sui generis religion’.

⁷¹ See note 23 above.

⁷² Likewise, the concept of “popular piety” can be interpreted as a result of this process of othering and distancing; as an example see Kamerick, *Popular Piety*. Idolatry and image worship, we are told, are something for simple folks, but can this distinction be maintained? Definitely, talking of a “pagan field of discourse” will blur or even dismantle such normalizing differentiations.

or “superstition” on the other⁷³. In so doing, they could easily dismiss irritating pagan or polytheistic phenomena as belonging to something else, but certainly not to the “domain of religion”⁷⁴. In addition to “folk belief” or “superstition”, there are other candidates of domains where these phenomena can be “distanced to”: art⁷⁵, philosophy, music, or literature may be mentioned here. In establishing concepts of religion that work in the hands of Christian theology, the academic study of religion helped to secure the distance of these seemingly threatening elements of Western culture⁷⁶.

The focus on text as the basis of religion likewise fostered interpretations of a unified Judeo-Christian monotheistic heritage in Europe; the philological orientation of the academic study of religion, so influential in the formation of the discipline, regarded “sacred books” as a corner-stone of religions, and subsequently lost sight of the possibility that religion can happen elsewhere⁷⁷.

Discursive approaches in cultural studies in general⁷⁸, and the concept of “image acts” and “visual culture” in particular, challenge these analytical frameworks. If we take seriously the notion that religious ideas, convictions, and traditions are “acted out” in the public sphere, that they form part of people’s identities in a unity of image, message, and body, and that the materiality of religion is something to move to the center of scrutiny, we will perhaps arrive at a better understanding of the status of paganism in post-ancient Europe. ‘The pagan divinities are a hardy breed’, says Godwin⁷⁹. Maybe they are. But from the perspective of visual culture, they are definitely not a

⁷³ A classic example of this strategy is the 10-volume dictionary on superstition in German-speaking countries (Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*). This example also reveals that the singularizing discourse on superstition is inseparably linked to the discourse on “magic”.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith makes a similar argument with regard to the presumed “incomparability” of Christian and pagan religions that emerged from Reformation discourses and was subsequently transferred to late antiquity. Smith concludes: ‘This is exorcism or purgation, not scholarship’ (Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 143).

⁷⁵ See, once again, Heinrich, ‘Der Untergang von Religion’, who claims: ‘dann dürfen wir uns auch der Begrenzung dieses Stoffs: hier Religion und dort keine mehr, nicht anbequemen, haben wir nach Auf- und Untergang derartiger Konstruktionen . . . außerhalb der traditionellen Religion zu suchen’ (p. 78).

⁷⁶ At the same time, scholars were fascinated by the existence of these “survivals” that lurk right under the surface of modernity; see Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 51-112; Gladigow, ‘Anachronismus und Religion’.

⁷⁷ See Kippenberg & von Stuckrad, *Einführung*, 42-44.

⁷⁸ See von Stuckrad, ‘Discursive Study of Religion’.

⁷⁹ Godwin, *Pagan Dream*, 1.

“dream”, nor do they belong to a system outside “religion”. They form a crucial element of people’s identities. It is precisely the strategies of distancing, singularization, and exorcism that academic study of religion has to engage.

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Abstract:

Academic research into the cultural changes that took place in Europe between 1400 and 1650 is notoriously fraught with terminological difficulties. With regard to the place of paganism and polytheism in Western culture, three questions in particular stand in the foreground: Most generally, is it adequate to isolate a period as "Renaissance" or "early modernity" and what is gained by doing so? Is the period called "Renaissance" characterized by a *continuity* of pagan and polytheistic elements or do we have to address the presence of pagan semantics as *reception*, *revival*, or, rather, *invention*? And finally, in terms of concepts of "religion", is the presence of pagan deities in public spheres an expression of "lived religion" or of a Renaissance "dream" of a pagan past that is syncretistically built into Christian "religion"?

After a survey of influential contributions to this discussion, the article approaches the problem of Renaissance polytheism and paganism from a different point of view. Under the headline of *material* and *visual culture*, cultural studies have recently broken grounds for a new understanding of religious dynamics in public spheres. Major contributions to medieval and early modern visual culture are presented and subsequently applied to examples of what can be called a Renaissance pagan discourse. Arguing mainly methodologically, the article aims at introducing visual and material aspects into the study of Western esotericism and reflecting on the underlying discourses of inclusion and exclusion that so often have characterized academic study of religion.

Focusing on the visual presence of pagan deities challenges common notions of a "Christian occident" with a monotheistic creed that in late antiquity won the upper hand over a pagan past. This narrative is dependent on a conceptualization of "religion" that is based on "faith", inner states of mind, belief-systems, and (holy) texts. On a deeper level of analysis, these conceptu-

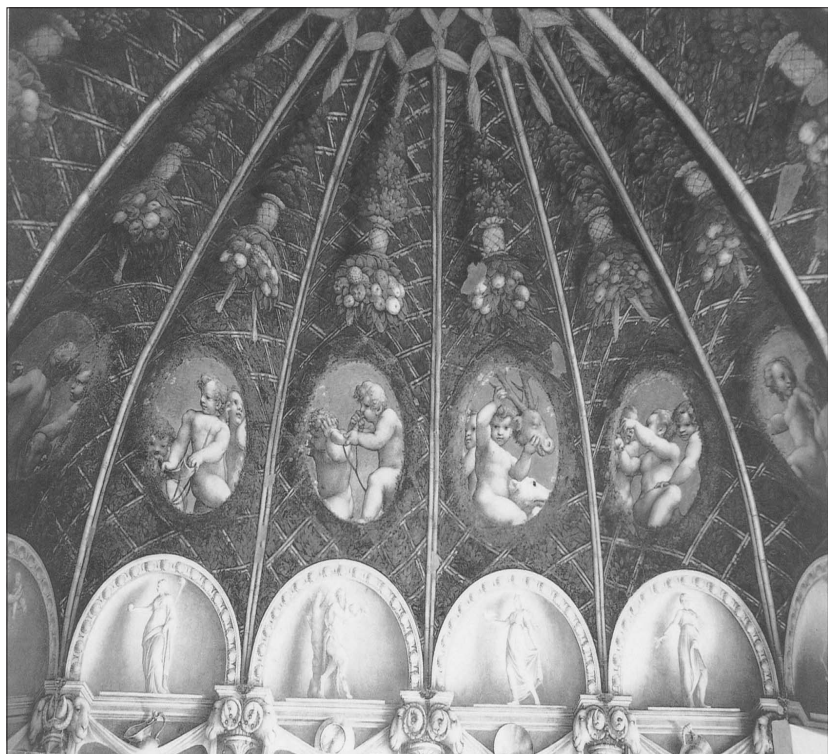
alizations correspond to two strong currents in the academic study of religion: a religionist conviction and a philological orientation. It is argued that both currents reflect strategies of distancing or even purgation and exorcism. If we take seriously the notion that religious ideas, convictions, and traditions are “acted out” in the public sphere, that they form part of people’s identities in a unity of image, message, and body, and that the materiality of religion is something to move to the center of scrutiny, we will perhaps arrive at a better understanding of the status of paganism in post-ancient Europe. From the perspective of visual culture, the pagan gods are not a “dream”, nor do they belong to a system outside “religion”. They form a crucial element of people’s identities. It is precisely the strategies of distancing, singularization, and exorcism that academic study of religion has to engage.

Sichtbare Götter: Komplexität statt Exorzismus in der Renaissanceforschung

Die wissenschaftliche Erforschung der kulturellen Veränderungen in Europa zwischen 1400 und 1650 ist bekanntermaßen mit terminologischen Schwierigkeiten behaftet. Was den Ort von Paganismus und Polytheismus in der westlichen Kultur betrifft, kommt drei Fragen besondere Bedeutung zu: Ist es überhaupt angemessen, eine Periode als „Renaissance“ oder „Frühe Neuzeit“ zu isolieren, und was ist damit gewonnen? Ist die Epoche der „Renaissance“ durch eine *Kontinuität* paganer und polytheistischer Elemente gekennzeichnet oder ist die Präsenz paganer Semantiken als *Rezeption*, *Revitalisierung* oder gar als *Erfindung* anzusprechen? Und schließlich lässt sich im Hinblick auf den wissenschaftlichen Religionsbegriff fragen, ob die Präsenz paganer Gottheiten im öffentlichen Raum Ausdruck einer „lebenden Religion“ ist oder eines „Traums“ von einer paganen Vergangenheit, den die Renaissance synkretistisch in die christliche „Religion“ integrierte?

Nach einer Übersicht über einflussreiche Beiträge zu dieser Diskussion bringt der Artikel eine neue Sicht auf das Problem von Polytheismus und Paganismus in der Renaissance ins Spiel. Unter den Stichworten *Materialität* und *Visualität* haben die Kulturwissenschaften in jüngster Zeit neue Analyseinstrumente zum Verständnis religiöser Dynamiken im öffentlichen Raum entwickelt. Wichtige Deutungsansätze mittelalterlicher und frühneuzeitlicher visueller Kultur werden vorgestellt und anschließend auf Beispiele für einen „paganen Diskurs“ der Renaissance angewandt. Die Ausrichtung des Artikels ist in erster Linie methodisch: er möchte die Elemente Visualität und Materialität in die Esoterikforschung einführen; damit ist eine kritische Reflexion auf die Diskurse von Inklusion und Exklusion verbunden, die über lange Zeit die Religionswissenschaft geprägt haben.

Die methodische Ausrichtung auf die visuelle Präsenz paganer Gottheiten stellt überkommene Auffassungen eines „Christlichen Abendlands“ in Frage, mit einer monotheistischen Überzeugung, die in der Spätantike die pagane Vergangenheit überwunden habe. Ein solches Narrativ ist eng verbunden mit einem Religionskonzept, welches auf „Glauben“, inneren Bewusstseinszuständen und (heiligen) Texten beruht. Hinter solchen Konzepten stehen wiederum zwei einflussreiche Tendenzen der Religionswissenschaft: eine religionistische Überzeugung und eine philologische Orientierung. Der Beitrag argumentiert, dass beide Strömungen Ausdruck von Strategien der Distanzierung oder gar der Purifizierung und des Exorzismus sind. Wenn wir jedoch davon ausgehen, dass religiöse Ideen, Überzeugungen und Traditionen im öffentlichen Raum „ausagiert“ und kommuniziert werden, dass sie Ausdruck von Identitäten in einer Einheit von Bild, Botschaft und Körper sind, und dass die Materialität von Religion vom Rand ins Zentrum der Aufmerksamkeit zu rücken ist, werden wir den Status des Paganismus im nachantiken Europa besser bestimmen können. Aus Sicht von *visual culture* sind die paganen Gottheiten weder ein „Traum“, noch gehören sie einem System jenseits der „Religion“ an. Sie sind ein zentrales Element von Identitäten. Es ist die Aufgabe der Religionswissenschaft, eben jene Strategien der Distanzierung, der Singularisierung und des Exorzismus zum Gegenstand ihrer Analyse zu machen.



Ill. 1. Correggio, Camera di San Paolo. Parma, San Paolo. Western Wall
From: Nova, 'Beobachten und beobachtet werden', 87



Ill. 2. Correggio, Camera di San Paolo. Diana on the Chimney
From: Nova, 'Beobachten und beobachtet werden', 88



*III. 3. Parmigianino, Sala di Diana. Fontanellato, Rocca Sanvitale
From: Nova, 'Beobachten und beobachtet werden', 83*



Ill. 4. Ariadne Fountain, Tivoli, Italy. Photo credit: Jocelyn Godwin

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

Wouter J. Hanegraaff in collaboration with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek and Jean-Pierre Brach (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, Brill: Leiden & Boston 2005. 2 vols. 1228 pp. total. ISBN 90-04-141871

The first thing to be said about this book is that its appearance is a major historic event. It is the first reference work of such high scholarly quality and comprehensiveness to cover the area indicated by the title; it helps to light up the territory more clearly than ever before; and it firmly establishes the relatively new discipline of History of Western Esotericism as a solid field of academic study. The editors are all leading specialists in the domain. Wouter J. Hanegraaff holds the Chair of History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam, established in 1999. Antoine Faivre formerly occupied the chair for the History of Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes within the Sorbonne—for many decades the only chair of its kind in the world. Roelof van den Broek is professor emeritus of the History of Christianity at the University of Utrecht and a well known expert on Gnosticism. Jean-Pierre Brach is Antoine Faivre's successor in the Sorbonne chair. Altogether there are over 180 contributors and some 400 articles covering a vast range of topics from alchemy to Zosimus of Panopolis by way of Blake, Boehme, Catharism, Freemasonry, Kabbalah, Neopaganism, Rosicrucianism, Tarot and Witchcraft, to name only a handful.

The publication of this handsome two-volume work is particularly meaningful for the present reviewer, who has been researching and writing in this field since the late 1960s and early 70s when, apart from the Sorbonne chair, Western Esotericism simply did not exist as an academic discipline. Only a few isolated academics, such as Frances Yates at the Warburg Institute in London, Antoine Faivre and Roland Edighoffer in France, Rolf Christian Zimmermann in Germany, and Eugenio Garin in Italy were doing serious work on various aspects of Hermetism, alchemy, Rosicrucianism and related subjects. Most academics, if they knew of the existence of such traditions, usually dismissed them as unworthy of serious consideration. Outside academe there was a handful of dedicated private scholars who, apart from myself, included Ellic Howe, the historian of astrology and the Golden Dawn; James

Webb, the historian of “rejected knowledge”; and some masonic scholars of the kind who wrote papers for the Quatuor Coronati research lodge. For the rest, the field was left to those esotericists, occultists, ritual magicians, Wiccans etc. who often wrote about these movements in books or popular journals. They were for the most part not scholars, but their world and that of the scholars sometimes interacted in interesting ways. In the early 1970s there was a boom in public interest in the New Age movement and in esoteric and occult subjects generally, bringing with it a spate of publications. One of them was a so-called “part-work” (a series of weekly modules that accumulated after a year or so into an encyclopedia) called *Man, Myth and Magic*, edited by Richard Cavendish, who himself had written a popular survey of occultism entitled *The Black Arts* (something of a misnomer). *Man, Myth and Magic* was “popular” in presentation and aimed at a mass readership, but the publishers had taken the trouble to appoint some well known academics to the editorial board, including the archaeologist Glyn Daniel, the psychologist William Sargent, and scholars of religion such as Mircea Eliade and R.C. Zaehner. Other similarly distinguished names appeared among the contributors, along with many writers who were not academics. The result was a curious mixture of the sensational and the serious, but the overall quality was higher than one might have expected. For example, Volume 6 under the letter “H” contained, inter alia, substantial and intelligently written articles on “Heresy” by S.G.F. Brandon, “Hermetica” by Olof Gigon, and “Hero” by H.R. Ellis Davidson. All of these authors were respected experts in their fields. I still possess a set of *Man, Myth and Magic* and refer to it from time to time. For years it was the most comprehensive reference work of its kind available. There were also numerous smaller encyclopedias and dictionaries of varying quality, dealing with esotericism, occultism, magic etc. Nevertheless I and my fellow scholars in those days would have given our eye teeth for a reference work of the quality of this dictionary. Few of us could have imagined that there would ever be the requisite academic climate for such a work, nor could we have predicted that, by the early 21st century there would be several university programmes teaching Western Esotericism, Hermeticism and related fields, and a whole new generation of young scholars doing outstanding work in these areas.

Turning to the dictionary itself, it is worth reading Wouter Hanegraaff’s helpful introduction, explaining the scope and rationale of the publication and the senses in which the terms “Gnosis” and “Western Esotericism” have been understood for the purposes of this book. Wisely the editors have avoided linking the work to one particular definition or theoretical approach.

'Specialists may quibble about boundary issues, disagreeing about whether this or that specific current or personality should or should not be included under the broad labels "Gnosis" and "Western Esotericism", but experience shows that by and large they think of the same domain and the same currents when they are using these terms'. He goes on to explain why it was decided to treat comparable Jewish and Islamic currents as "influences upon" rather than integral parts of Gnosis and Western Esotericism. This was done for the purely pragmatic reason that studies of Jewish and Islamic "mysticism" have developed relatively independently and have already achieved a degree of academic recognition in their own right. With respect to the currents covered by the dictionary, he points out that many of these 'have long been subjects of serious academic study, but only very recently have conditions begun to be created . . . that allow them to be seen in a larger historical context, so that their numerous historical interconnections are seriously explored and these various currents can be perceived as so many aspects of a much larger domain'. The reader, he says, 'will find here a dazzling variety of ideas and practices, reflective of ever-changing historical contexts and testifying to the remarkable creativity of the religious imagination'.

The high quality of the articles can be surmised from the list of contributors. The editors themselves have all written contributions in their respective fields. Hanegraaff's entries include, for example, a searching article on esotericism itself. Van den Broek has written equally searchingly about Gnosticism and many of its leading early exponents. Faivre's contributions are remarkably diverse, ranging from the Asiatic Brethren to Hermetic literature and from Christian theosophy to *Naturphilosophie*. Brach has written about, inter alia, correspondences, intermediary beings, number symbolism and Guillaume Postel. Other distinguished contributors include: the musicologist and scholar of esotericism, Joscelyn Godwin, whose contributions include a fascinating article on the esoteric dimensions of music from the 18th century to the present; the historian of chemistry, Lawrence Principe, who writes on alchemy; Roland Edighoffer on Rosicrucianism and related topics; and Monika Neugebauer-Wölk on the Illuminati.

One of the great merits of this dictionary is that it corrects certain scholarly biases and false dichotomies. For example, as Hanegraaff points out in his introduction, scholars of Hermetism used to draw a line between a "learned" or "philosophical" Hermetism and a "popular" variety that was considered debased and superstitious. In fact, the interaction between the two forms was highly complex, and the boundary between them was often blurred. Similarly, there was a tendency to draw a misleadingly sharp distinction

between religion and science and to attempt to assign esoteric traditions to one or the other. Here also the dictionary aims to present a more complex and holistic picture. Yet another tendency among scholars was to see esoteric, occult and Hermetic traditions as fixed in the past, the fossilized remains of something that became extinct when humanity learned to be rational, scientific and progressive. Thus, historians of alchemy would usually have stopped somewhere around the 18th century, not bothering even to mention its later manifestations. Writers who did concern themselves with later forms of alchemy were often of the C.G. Jung school of thought, which reduced alchemy to a set of metaphors describing a process of spiritual and psychological development. It is therefore highly pleasing to see how the subject is handled here in an extensive section with contributions from five different authors. Lawrence Principe provides a superb introduction, clearing away numerous misconceptions about the subject. The history of alchemy is then covered in four different periods by Bernard Haage, Herwig Buntz, Allison Coudert and Richard Caron. The last contribution, dealing with the 19th and 20th centuries, finally gives modern alchemists their due and shows that practical laboratory alchemy has a present and future as well as a past. Astrology also receives five articles and is treated in a similar holistic way, taking the story up to the 20th century.

Finally, let me offer a few suggestions for improvements, which the editors might like to bear in mind for future editions. One point concerns the indices: while there is an index of groups and organizations and an index of persons, there is no general subject index, and this detracts from the user-friendliness of the book as a research tool, especially when one is looking for a topic that has no main entry to itself. For example, one might have expected an entry on sexuality, given its important role in certain esoteric, occult and magical currents. As there is neither a main entry nor a subject index, the reader does not know where to find information on sexuality in relation to esotericism unless he or she is well informed enough to look under, say, "Crowley", "Ordo Templi Orientis" or "Paschal Beverly Randolph". With computer-indexing it should not be unduly difficult to insert a subject index in a revised edition. Absent from the index of groups and organizations is the name "Eranos", an omission that surprised me, given the importance of the Eranos meetings in connection with figures such as C.G. Jung (who receives an extensive entry, as one would expect). It also struck me that eastern Europe and Russia are rather under-represented. While there are excellent entries on the 18th-century Russian Freemasons Novikov and Lopukhin, there is virtually nothing on the rich esoteric and theosophical

scene in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. This included, for example, the brilliant writer Andrei Bely, whose works are replete with theological and occult references. The equally rich occult scene in Prague and Bohemia before and after the First World War is also hardly mentioned, apart from an entry on Gustav Meyrink and one brief reference to the influential magical writer Franz Bardon. I feel that some mention could have been given, for example, to the Prague group *Universalia*, an assembly of hermetists, kabbalists and Martinists that flourished in the late 1920s and 1930s and was revived after the fall of communism.

These comments are offered in a constructive spirit and can perhaps be taken into account when the dictionary is revised. In the meantime everyone working in the field of Western Esotericism and related studies will cheer the appearance of this work as a landmark in the history of the discipline. Those who worked on the Herculean task of creating it deserve our immense admiration and gratitude.

Christopher McIntosh

Linda Simonis, *Die Kunst des Geheimen: Esoterische Kommunikation und ästhetische Darstellung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Heidelberg: C. Winter 2002. 456 pp. ISBN 3-8253-1284-4

The historical, social, and political role of secret societies in the context of early modern and modern culture has been a subject of much scholarly debate. In his important study *Kritik und Krise*, Reinhart Koselleck already in 1959 suggested that the bourgeoisie found a form of sanctuary in Masonic lodges beyond the reach of the administrative state. The very secrecy of Freemasonry (the *Arcanum*) served as a protection against the absolutist state and ultimately helped to undermine it. The analyses of Koselleck, Ernst Mannheim (already in 1933), Herbert Dieckmann, Jürgen Habermas, and others have presented historiography with an apparent paradox: on the one hand, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment has been described as a *public* culture, with literature and critical philosophy addressing a wide audience; on the other hand, Enlightenment culture is the almost classical environment for the (re-)establishment of secret and esoteric communities. Although recent scholarship has established the many intrinsic links between—or even the mutual

dependency of—esotericism and Enlightenment, determining the place of esotericism in eighteenth-century culture remains a challenge for historians.

Die Kunst des Geheimen, based on the author's *Habilitation* thesis in Literary Studies at the University of Cologne, provides an original new approach to this seeming paradox. Linda Simonis starts with the observation that the strategies of interpretation applied in the history of ideas, as well as in sociology, are not sufficient for an adequate understanding of the complex dynamics involved. Instead, the author applies an approach that considers the *discursive* and *communicative* aspects of eighteenth-century culture as the appropriate instrument of analysis (see pp. 24 and 409). Referring particularly to Michel Foucault's discourse analysis (see her definition of "discourse" on p. 61) and to Niklas Luhmann's systems and communication theory, Simonis establishes the notion of 'esoteric forms of communication', which have had a decisive influence on the formation of modern culture. What we witness in eighteenth-century secret societies is a 'Verdichtung von Kommunikationszusammenhängen. . . . Auf diese Weise entsteht, so die hier vertretene These, im Feld esoterischer Diskursformen eine neuartige problem- und sachbezogene Disziplin, die in gewisser Hinsicht als Vorwegnahme jenes problem- und funktionsorientierten Verhaltens aufzufassen ist, wie es die moderne Gesellschaft erfordern wird' (p. 27).

In her discursive approach, Simonis conceptualizes the esoteric not with reference to a certain *content* or a historical *tradition* but as an '*esoterische Redeform*' or '*Verkehrsform*' (p. 29), i.e. as a distinctive form of talking and social performance. She identifies the '*Rosenkreuzerrede*'—the communicational practices and rhetorics of secret societies—as one of the main points of departure for a formation of eighteenth-century esoteric discourse (chapter 1, pp. 47-99). The Rosicrucian movement not only established new models of learned societies ('*gelehrte Soziabilität*'), but also a new 'type of communication', a *Redeform* (p. 51) that provided a medium for cultural discussion and literary exchange. These formed the basis for the establishment of Freemasonry and other learned societies in eighteenth-century Enlightenment that distanced itself more and more from religious entanglements.

Chapter 2 (pp. 101-178) engages the esoteric societies of the eighteenth century and argues that from a discursive point of view the ethical claims of Freemasonry indeed had a strong political dimension. But contrary to Koselleck's thesis, which is based on a strict antagonism between private and public spheres, Simonis subscribes to positions that argue for permeability and openness between these spheres (p. 110). She concludes that esoteric

discourses cannot be limited to particular social systems but have developed communicational practices of their own that affected various social orders, from politics to art and literature. Of paramount importance for Simonis's subsequent argument is her observation that an aestheticizing tendency is an inherent structural element of Masonic discourse: 'Den masonischen Sozietäten bzw. ihrer kulturellen Praxis eignet . . . noch vor jeder Behandlung und Bearbeitung im Medium der Literatur eine immanente ästhetische Struktur' (p. 128, see also p. 157). To substantiate this thesis, Simonis discusses various rituals among Freemasons and Illuminati, which she interprets with reference to Victor Turner in particular, highlighting the intrinsic relationship between ritual practice, performance, and theatre. Masonic ritual illuminates the transformation and "translation" of esoteric discourse into a new medium: on the one hand, this process is characterized by an increasing "textualization" of social esoteric communication; on the other hand, the 'esoteric ritual as a form of cultural performance' (p. 410) and the esoteric discourse's inherent aestheticizing quality fostered a new genre of literature and art.

This is perhaps the most intriguing part of Simonis's argumentation. With her open discursive framework of esoteric communicational practices she is able to bridge the gap between social and political history, on the one hand, and developments in eighteenth-century literature and art, on the other. While chapter 3 (pp. 179-245) describes the emergence of the "subgenre" of *Geheimbundroman*—exemplified with Jean Terrasson's *Sethos* and Karl Philipp Moritz's *Andreas Hartknopf*—as a materialization of the "arcane model" in literary form, chapter 4 (pp. 247-319) traces the public realization of Masonic ritual in music and opera. In her analysis of Mozart's and Schikaneder's *Zauberflöte*, the author puts more emphasis on the libretto as an element of performance than other interpreters have done; this brings her also to a detailed examination of Goethe's new version of the *Zauberflöte* libretto, an important yet often neglected work, which reveals a 'hermeticizing tendency' in the process of 'Literarisierung aufklärerischer Geheimtechniken . . . : Die literarische Umsetzung des Arkanums verlagert sich hier gewissermaßen von der Ebene der Semantik, der inhaltlichen Thematisierung, auf die Ebene der literarischen Form' (p. 319).

With these detailed analyses, Linda Simonis skillfully demonstrates her main thesis: 'Im Feld der esoterischen Techniken und Redeformen zeichnet sich so ein weitreichender Übertragungs- und Entwicklungsprozeß ab, der von den masonischen Soziabilitätsformen und Einweihungsriten über textuelle Umsetzungen in Freimaurererzählung und Geheimbundroman bis hin zur

Theaterbühne, zur Adaptation des esoterischen Rituals in Drama und Oper führt' (pp. 413-414; in congruence with her reflective approach, she adds that this, of course, does not mean a simple development or "influence"). Although her main thesis is well argued and substantiated, there remain weaknesses and questions that should be addressed in subsequent research. For one, Simonis's discussion of ritual and performance does not pay enough attention to recent debates in ritual studies; American contributions—by Catherine Bell and others—are missing almost completely, and a critical assessment of Turner's theory of ritual drama and theater would have been appropriate. Second, what I missed is a discussion of gender issues; from a discursive point of view, this would have been particularly important for Simonis's thesis that the *Freimaurerrede* is characterized by a 'heroic quality', which propagates a 'manly principle of heroic probation', distinct from other contemporary forms of discourse such as that of Romantic sentimentality (*Empfindsamkeitsdiskurs*) (see pp. 155-156). Third, and most astonishing, however, is the author's total disregard of kabbalistic discourses. Although the study's fifth chapter (pp. 321-405) is devoted to *Literarische Kabbalistik* and the 'hermetic style' of Hamann and Herder, and Simonis repeatedly refers to kabbalistic semantics, one wonders why she does not engage the role of Jewish and Christian Kabbalah in Herder's *hebräischer Poesie* and elsewhere. Taking seriously the linguistic dimensions of kabbalistic discourses—that indeed are much older than their, often polemic, adaptation in Hamann and Herder—would have changed several of her conclusions (cf., for instance, pp. 358, 404-405, 415).

These questions notwithstanding, *Die Kunst des Geheimen* is an important contribution to the place and function of esotericism in Enlightenment culture. It reveals the benefits of discursive approaches that transgress the limits of typological or sociological interpretations. It is highly recommended to all scholars interested in the seeming paradoxes of the eighteenth century, the intrinsic relationship between different cultural systems, and general methodological issues in the study of esotericism.

Kocku von Stuckrad

Allen G. Debus (ed.), *Alchemy and Early Modern Chemistry: Papers from Ambix*, s.l.: The Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry 2004. 543 pp. ISBN 0-9546484-1-2

Comme le rappelle l'éditeur dans son introduction, la revue *Ambix* apparut en 1937 dans le sillage des recherches pionnières en histoire des sciences, menées par Georges Sarton, fondateur de la revue *Isis*. Allen Debus note que Sarton a toujours classé l'alchimie parmi les pseudo-sciences; ce qui expliquerait en partie l'émergence de la revue *Ambix*. Celle-ci devint rapidement utile en offrant un nombre croissant de travaux dans ce domaine précis de l'histoire des sciences (p. ix).

L'éditeur précise aussi que l'horizon de la revue se modifia sensiblement quand, à partir de 1968, elle offrit de plus en plus d'articles consacrés à la chimie des 19^e et 20^e siècles. Cela aboutit rapidement à l'abandon de sa présentation par ordre chronologique, ainsi qu'à un changement d'appellation de la Société. De fait, l'histoire de la chimie naissante (*Early Chemistry*) fut remplacée par une histoire générale de la chimie incluant la période post-lavoisienne (*The Society for the Study of Alchemy and Chemistry*). Ces précisions fournies, Debus souligne que le Conseil de la Société a entendu orienter l'horizon de la publication commémorative. Celle-ci est exclusivement composée d'une réimpression d'études publiées tout au long de l'histoire d'*Ambix* et couvrant une période bien précise: 'that is, to reprint papers on alchemy and early chemistry rather than the papers on the nineteenth and twentieth century chemistry' (*ibidem*).

La trentaine d'articles regroupés offre un panorama exemplaire couvrant l'historiographie de l'alchimie occidentale, depuis la problématique de ses origines (H.J. Sheppard, "Alchemy: Origin or Origins?", 1970; F. Sherwood Taylor, "The Origins of Greek Alchemy", 1937) jusqu'au paradoxe de son apothéose avec Newton (Michael T. Walton, "Boyle and Newton on the Transmutation of Water and Air, from the Root of Helmont's Tree", 1980) simultanément à son abandon par plusieurs chimistes renommés de l'époque (John C. Powers, "Nicholas Lemery and the End of Alchemy in Eighteenth-Century France", 1998). On comprend mieux le renversement, quand John Powers souligne que l'alchimie fut dépouillée de sa substance avant d'être abandonnée: 'Since many of the most interesting problems for chemists derived from alchemical sources, the academicians manipulated the rhetorical boundary between chemistry and alchemy in order to redefine their alchemical studies as chemistry. To accomplish this manipulation, the

chemists presented their work as the search for chemical ‘facts’ and summarily expunged its alchemical origins’ (p. 525).

Ce paradoxe d’une apothéose de l’alchimie chez un Newton simultanément à son abandon par plusieurs chimistes n’est pas facile à expliquer. Les réponses classiques ne suffisent pas: ‘the history of alchemy and early chemistry did not fare well in a field that was dominated by mathematical sciences’ (“Introduction”, p. viii). En effet, plusieurs systèmes spéculatifs de la Renaissance véhiculaient ce qu’il fallait pour étudier l’aspect quantitatif des qualités premières des différentes substances métalliques ou végétales dans le but de parvenir à une transmutation de ces dernières (N.H. Clulee, “John Dee’s Mathematics and the Grading of Compounds Qualities”, 1971). Et l’étude d’Allen Debus (“Mathematics and Nature in Chemical Texts of the Renaissance”, 1968) montre à l’évidence que les aspects quantitatifs des proportions, mesures et magnitudes des substances sont présents aussi bien chez Paracelse que chez Robert Fludd. Cette analyse quantitative est d’autant plus solide qu’elle s’appuie sur les recherches scientifiques de la tradition médiévale, depuis al-Kindi, sur les intentions et rémissions, c’est-à-dire, les multiples variations de formes accidentelles des différentes substances et matières (N.H. Clulee, pp. 148-155).

A la lecture des théories scientifiques et philosophiques de chacun des auteurs importants, on aperçoit souvent un horizon théorique différent pour chacun. A titre d’exemple, Francis Bacon rejette l’idée que le sel paracelsien, ainsi que le soufre et le mercure, seraient des constituants métaphysiques (‘sophiques’) des corps matériels; il rejette aussi l’idée de sphères célestes de cristal, mais demeure farouchement partisan du géocentrisme (Graham Rees, “Francis Bacon’s Semi-paracelsian Cosmology”, 1975). De son côté, Newton rejettera les concepts scolastiques de formes substantielles et de qualités occultes (A. Debus, *loc. cit.*, p. 187), mais postulera une transmutation continue de l’air et de l’eau pour expliquer la croissance des végétaux, la respiration des animaux et la formation des minéraux, les queues de comètes lui semblant fournir des atomes neufs d’air et d’eau à mesure que la nature se déploie (M.T. Walton, *loc. cit.*, pp. 477 et 481). Autant que l’aspect quantitatif du savoir, déjà présent dans la philosophie naturelle du 14^e siècle, l’aspect qualitatif novateur qui semble caractériser l’avènement de la révolution scientifique moderne est difficile à définir.

Dès le tout premier numéro d’*Ambix*, paru en 1937, Julius Ruska (“Methods of Research in the History of Chemistry”, 1937) considérait que l’histoire de l’alchimie fondée sur des sources accrues avait commencé avec

les recueils de Zezner et autres compilations du début du 17^e siècle, mais aussi avec l'œuvre de Borrichius (1626-1690), auteur d'un *Conspectus Scriptorum Chemicorum Celebriorum*. Puis, exactement deux siècles plus tard, une nouvelle ère de cette histoire s'ouvrit avec Berthelot (p. 6). L'orientaliste termine son étude en montrant, à l'aide de l'exemple de Morienus, combien l'analyse philologique est précieuse pour déjouer les nombreuses falsifications qui ponctuent l'histoire de l'alchimie.

On peut dire que c'est à une telle expertise philologique, souhaitée par Ruska, que se vouèrent plusieurs des auteurs publiés dans les différents numéros d'*Ambix*. Ainsi, J.P. Hershbelle s'est penché sur le fantôme de Démocrite dans l'alchimie grecque ("Democritus and the Beginnings of Greek Alchemy", 1987). La conclusion de son analyse du pseudo-Démocrite, identifié souvent à Bolos de Mendes, pose pourtant que l'œuvre de Bolos, dont il ne reste que de rares fragments, ne traite ni d'alchimie, ni de métallurgie, et qu'au demeurant il n'est nullement certain que ce dernier puisse être identifié au pseudo-Démocrite. Hershbelle regrette notamment que la publication des travaux de Fraser sur Bolos n'ait pas mis un terme aux nombreuses conjectures portant sur le pseudo-Démocrite, et cela, même chez certains historiens récents de l'alchimie (pp. 63 et 74).

C'est Synesius, qui attribua à Démocrite d'Abdère un traité intitulé *Physica et Mystica*. Les recettes de ce traité s'accordent avec celles des papyri de Leyde et de Stockholm, précise Hershbelle. Cela signifie que l'alchimie, dès son origine grecque lointaine, se déploie sur les deux versants de la science et de la spiritualité. Cette dualité, F. Sherwood Taylor l'expose clairement lui aussi, dans son étude portant sur l'alchimie grecque: 'The hall-mark of Alchemy is the combination of a spiritual and practical aspect in the making of precious materials' (*loc. cit.*, p. 11). La lecture d'une bonne partie des études du présent ouvrage collectif donne à penser que c'est probablement la composante mystique, qui fut progressivement évacuée par les chimistes modernes. Cette composante est pourtant encore bien présente au 16^e siècle. L'étude que Walter Pagel consacre à Paracelse ("Paracelsus and the Neoplatonic and Gnostic Tradition", 1960) montre à quel point le ciel, dans sa configuration et son influx, joue un rôle dans la science de la santé du médecin suisse. Allen Debus rappelle qu'à la même période, personne ne mettait en doute l'existence du diable et l'efficacité de la magie; de même, les intellectuels étaient séduits par la mystique des nombres et la kabbale (*loc. cit.*, p. 194).

C'est au cours du 17^e siècle que semblent se séparer les versants mystique et pratique de l'alchimie. En médecine, le magnétisme recule; le mécaniste

Walter Charleton, en 1654, rejette la cure helmontienne des blessures par voies sympathiques (P.M. Rattansi, "Paracelsus and the Puritan Revolution", 1963). Il veut montrer aussi que la magie des naturalistes ne s'explique par l'action diabolique, mais par une philosophie toute mécaniste (p. 351). Au même moment, Robert Boyle (publication de son *Sceptical Chymist*, en 1661), pourtant partisan de plusieurs doctrines alchimiques, abandonne l'iatrochimie helmontienne et se convertit lui aussi à la philosophie mécanique corpusculaire.

Dans cette perspective, Jean-Baptiste van Helmont est peut-être le dernier "chimiste mystique" (B. Heinecke, "The Mysticism and Science of Johann Baptista van Helmont (1579-1644)", 1995). Le médecin philosophe de Bruxelles élabore en effet une doctrine du feu qui lui permet d'affirmer l'existence d'entités spirituelles et de semences invisibles qui interviennent dans la formation des êtres matériels. Ces forces cachées, connues de l'homme par l'art de la magie, permettent à ce dernier d'agir sur la Nature en conformité avec la volonté divine (p. 387). Cette tendance mystique de van Helmont était incompréhensible pour son ex-admirateur Boyle (p. 377). L'iatrochimiste flamand est pourtant l'auteur de multiples découvertes scientifiques positives. La postérité se détournera néanmoins de sa mystique, ainsi que de sa physique de sympathie—deux horizons réflexifs au demeurant trop souvent confondus, et qui n'en reflètent pas moins la profondeur de son génie.

L'étude de D.R. Oldroyd ("Some Neo-platonic and Stoic Influences on Mineralogy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", 1974) montre que l'alchimie est encore présente au milieu du 17^e siècle, par exemple chez Becher (1635-1682). Mais partout en Europe, l'horizon change: 'the intellectual situation in Germany at that period was scarcely comparable to that in England and France, where the impact of the "mechanical philosophy" was felt considerably earlier' (p. 236). La bataille des horizons se serait donc déroulée vers le milieu du 17^e siècle, période au cours de laquelle la philosophie mécaniste rencontre une grande résistance, clairement évoquée par N. Rattner Gelbart ("The Intellectual Development of Walter Charleton", 1971), qui fait état du 'strong hold that the hermetic ideas had upon natural philosophers in the mid-seventeenth century' (p. 391).

Claude Gagnon

Mark Sedgwick, *Against the modern world: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, New York: Oxford University Press 2004. 370 pp. ISBN 0-19-515297-2

L'auteur de ce livre a voulu expliquer l'apparition et le succès de ce qu'il appelle le "mouvement traditionaliste". À cette fin, il a choisi de s'attacher non à des "questions abstraites" mais aux personnes dont les espoirs et les erreurs ont fait l'histoire du "Traditionalisme" (p. 17). Il divise cette dernière en trois temps (p. 22): 1) le développement par Guénon de la 'Traditionalist philosophy' et la réunion autour de lui d'un groupe de 'followers', cela jusqu'aux années 1930; 2) les tentatives de mise en pratique de cette 'Traditionalist philosophy' dans deux contextes principaux: l'islam soufi et le fascisme européen; 3) après les années 1960, le passage des idées "traditionalistes" dans la culture générale occidentale, puis de l'Occident au monde islamique et à la Russie. L'ouvrage se divise toutefois en quatre parties: 1) le développement du "Traditionalisme", 2) le "Traditionalisme" mis en pratique, 3) le "Traditionalisme" en liberté (la Maryamiyya aux États-unis, le terrorisme en Italie, le "Traditionalisme" dans diverses entreprises éducatives), 4) le "Traditionalisme" après 1968 (en Europe, dans le néo-eurasisme russe et dans le monde islamique).

L'auteur conclut cette dernière partie par une réflexion sur la réception de la perspective "traditionnelle" selon les aires culturelles (p. 261). Il note que les rôles joués par le "Traditionalisme" en Occident d'une part, dans le monde islamique et la Russie d'autre part, diffèrent fondamentalement. En Occident, ce courant de pensée touche des minorités; dans l'autre zone, il joue un rôle au sein de courants dominants de la pensée. Dans le monde islamique, les pays les plus traditionnels (le monde arabe) ont, au contraire de l'Iran et de la Turquie, montré un intérêt moindre pour le "Traditionalisme". En Occident, ce n'est pas la modernité qui exclut le discours "traditionaliste" mais l'absence d'un intérêt pour les questions principales sous-tendant l'œuvre de Guénon; ces questions travaillent en revanche la Russie et la Turquie ("Orient ou Occident?") et l'Iran ("modernisation ou isolement pour la cause de la religion?").

L'auteur a beaucoup voyagé pendant le temps de son étude et réalisé de nombreux entretiens avec des témoins. Il apporte en cela quantité de données nouvelles et de précisions concernant essentiellement les mondes anglo-saxon, islamique et russe, ainsi que les mouvements néo-soufis se réclamant de l'œuvre de Guénon. Au sein de cet apport documentaire important, on découvre par exemple que Thomas Merton fut très intéressé par ce qu'il

apprit sur Schuon. L'auteur consacre également plusieurs développements au parcours si singulier d'Henri Hartung. Eric Vinson en avait souligné l'intérêt dans son mémoire de D.E.A. *Entre anti-modernisme spirituel et universalisme traditionnel: La pensée politique de René Guénon*, soutenu à l'I.E.P. de Paris en 1996. L'auteur restitue également un récit complet et détaillé du parcours de Schuon. Il nous fait de même découvrir la réception de Guénon en Russie, en Turquie (Thierry Zarcone s'était également penché sur la question) et en Iran. Son apport marque ainsi une étape dans la connaissance de la diffusion de la perspective "traditionnelle" à l'extérieur du contexte français.

L'étude soulève en même temps plusieurs problèmes. Tout d'abord son approche de l'œuvre de Guénon—laquelle, selon l'auteur, fonde le "Traditionalisme"—reste trop en surface pour permettre une compréhension approfondie de sa réception. Comme l'indique le titre de l'ouvrage, ce corpus est ici essentiellement envisagée sous son aspect critique. Et même lorsque l'auteur évoque la notion d'initiation, il n'en présente pas réellement la théorie guénonienne. Cette carence est manifeste lorsque l'auteur affirme (p. 22) que l'essentiel de la 'philosophie "traditionaliste"' fut exprimée dans les quatre premiers ouvrages de Guénon. Or, ce dernier écrivait au contraire en 1924 à Jean Grenier (jugant obscure la dernière partie d'*Orient et Occident*) que sa production livresque, jusque-là, 'n'avait jamais eu la prétention de représenter autre chose qu'un travail préliminaire, que l'état actuel de la mentalité occidentale rendait d'ailleurs tout à fait indispensable avant qu'il soit possible d'arriver à des considérations d'un caractère plus positif... mais la seconde partie de [s]on travail, [c'est-à-dire] l'exposition même des doctrines, [était] maintenant commencée [avec *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*]' (Lettre de Guénon à Jean Caves (alias Jean Grenier), le 22 juin 1925).

Ainsi, *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta* n'est pas un développement d'*Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* comme l'affirme l'auteur (pp. 27-28), mais le premier exposé de la métaphysique qui fonde la critique guénonienne du monde moderne. De même, l'affirmation selon laquelle *La Crise du monde moderne* est le chef-d'œuvre de Guénon (p. 28), est révélatrice de la perspective de l'auteur, mais nous semble difficilement soutenable; il n'y a qu'à comparer cet essai à un ouvrage comme *Le Règne de la Quantité et les signes des temps*. De même, nulle part dans *Against the Modern World* ne sont cités le titre ou seulement la notion d'*États multiples de l'être*, pourtant au cœur de la métaphysique guénonienne. D'autre part, lorsqu'il aborde l'époque de la parution de ce livre (p. 74),

l'auteur s'attarde sur la vie personnelle de Guénon mais n'évoque pas l'important épisode de la création de la collection L'Anneau d'or où furent précisément édités *Le Symbolisme de la croix* et *Les États multiples de l'être*. De là résulte un aplatissement de la perspective "traditionnelle", lequel rend difficile la compréhension de ce qui fonde sa critique du monde moderne, et surtout de ce qui la sépare radicalement de toutes les idéologies politiques des années 1930. La distinction entre "Universel" et "individuel"—qui n'apparaît pas non plus dans cette étude—, est à ce titre essentiel. Cette lacune ne permet pas à l'auteur de saisir l'un des facteurs principaux de la réception de Guénon de son vivant: sa théorie de la connaissance.

La réception intellectuelle de l'œuvre de Guénon en France entre les années 1920 et 1950 est également largement ignorée. Un court paragraphe fourre-tout aborde cette question (pp. 36-38). Les parcours de Gleizes, de Bonjean, de Daumal (qualifié à plusieurs reprises de "peintre surréaliste"), comme celui, plus loin, de Pauwels (p. 208), ne sont pas du tout mis en perspective. Pourtant, Daumal et Pauwels auraient chacun mérité un paragraphe dans la mesure où ils ont été profondément marqués par l'œuvre de Guénon, ont contribué à la faire connaître et, que le premier a donné des développements originaux aux questions qu'elle posait. Les noms de personnalités intellectuelles et littéraires aussi considérables que Simone Weil, Raymond Queneau, Jean Paulhan, Antonin Artaud ou Pierre Drieu La Rochelle n'apparaissent pas, non plus que ceux de Jacques Masui, d'Émile Dermenghem, des docteurs Grangier et Winter, et, plus proches encore de la pensée de Guénon, ceux d'André Préau et Luc Benoist. La création de la collection Tradition chez Gallimard n'est pourtant pas un détail dans l'histoire intellectuelle du "Traditionalisme".

Il y a également une absence importante pour un sujet auquel s'est plus particulièrement attaché l'auteur: le soufisme. En effet, il n'est jamais question des Européens islamisés au Maroc entre les années 1930 et 1950 sous l'influence de Guénon, lesquels constituaient un milieu tout à fait digne d'intérêt. Parmi eux, Pierre Georges (alias Si Abdallah)—à qui Guénon envoyait ses manuscrits avant publication et qui eut un rayonnement tout à fait notable—, n'est évoqué que par le biais du journal de Gide (n. 5, p. 303); l'éditeur de ce diaire le confondant avec Si Haddou (Guy Delon). Ces Européens constituent un chaînon manquant qui pourrait expliquer la réception de Guénon par les élites marocaines; Bernard Duval, un ami de Pierre Georges, fut en effet professeur au Lycée Moulay Idriss de Fez après

l'indépendance. Autant d'itinéraires importants car donnant l'exemple d'une intégration réussie dans une société traditionnelle.

L'étude du domaine français aurait en outre permis à l'auteur (qui indique que cela n'existe pas p. 270) de trouver des progressistes se ralliant à la perspective "traditionnelle" (Bonjean par exemple), de découvrir des tentatives de conciliation de la perspective "traditionnelle" avec une vision de l'évolution (chez Masui et d'une façon plus complexe chez Pauwels), ou encore des écrivains tentant une synthèse entre marxisme et pensée "traditionnelle", comme Daumal et Queneau par exemple (p. 227, l'auteur se demande à propos de l'eurasisme comment cela est possible). Si on ne peut guère reprocher à un auteur britannique vivant au Caire de méconnaître l'histoire intellectuelle française (bien qu'un Ph.D. écrit à Princeton ait abordé la question: Gabriel Asfar, *René Guénon: A Chapter of French Symbolist Thought in the 20th Century*, Princeton University, Department of Roman Languages and Literatures, 1972), on peut en tout cas regretter qu'il n'ait pas précisé plus nettement les contours de son étude; car une telle lacune risque de fausser la vision des lecteurs anglo-saxons d'un livre présenté comme la "première histoire du Traditionalisme". Le public intellectuel français des années 1920-1950 n'est en effet pas un public quelconque, mais le "public-milieu" sinon le "public-cible" de Guénon. Or, à mesure que l'on s'éloigne du contexte dans lequel a été produite l'œuvre fondatrice du "Traditionalisme", l'accroissement de la distance séparant le récepteur de l'émetteur favorise les distorsions de sens. Pour cette raison, l'étude de la réception de la pensée "traditionnelle" par ce "public-milieu" aurait, nous semble-t-il, donné des clefs de compréhension essentielles à une histoire du "Traditionalisme".

Le plus important problème est la validité de cet objet construit par l'auteur. Dans quelle mesure existe-t-il un "mouvement" "traditionaliste"? Selon l'auteur, ce mouvement est constitué d'un certain nombre de groupes et d'individus unis par leur dette commune envers l'œuvre de René Guénon (p. 22). Ce dernier a élaboré la 'Traditionalist philosophy' caractérisée par trois idées principales: 1) le Védanta-perennialisme, 2) les notions d'inversion et de contre-initiation, et 3) celle d'initiation. L'auteur dit avoir choisi le terme "Traditionaliste" (en ajoutant la majuscule) *dans la mesure où* les acteurs de ce supposé mouvement se qualifieraient eux-mêmes ainsi (p. 22). Mais dans quelle proportion les individus et les groupes qu'il étudie se qualifient-ils ainsi? On peut au moins affirmer que le plus éminent d'entre eux à ses yeux, à savoir R. Guénon lui-même, donne un sens péjoratif à ce terme dans un

article publié en octobre 1936 dans la revue *Etudes traditionnelles* (“Tradition et traditionalistes”). Les “traditionalistes” sont, pour Guénon, ceux qui réagissent contre le monde moderne sans direction doctrinale claire. Le but de cet article est ‘de prévenir toute tentative d’utilisation illégitime de l’idée même de “tradition” par ceux qui voudraient assimiler indûment ce qu’elle implique à leurs propres conceptions dans un domaine quelconque’; occasion significative pour son auteur de désavouer tous les régimes et idéologies politiques européens de l’époque. La référence à cet article nous aurait semblé intéressante dans la mesure où il aborde la question du rapport de l’œuvre guénonienne (fondatrice du Traditionalisme selon l’auteur) avec le domaine politique lequel tient une place très importante dans *Against the Modern World*. Ce n’est toutefois pas le terme lui-même qui pose problème, mais l’objet construit par l’auteur. On pourrait discuter de l’existence d’un “mouvement traditionaliste” entendu comme l’ensemble des individus et des groupes ayant remodelé des formes “religieuses” ou “initiatiques” existantes à partir du corpus guénonien (une partie de ce que l’auteur appelle ‘Traditionalism in practice’). Mais ce qui est ici présenté comme le “mouvement traditionaliste” va bien au-delà de cette acception.

L’auteur décline le terme “Traditionaliste” en lui accolant des qualificatifs variés. Ainsi évoque-t-il le “Traditionalisme dur”, “soft”, “the softest of soft” (p. 189), le “semi-Traditionalisme”, le “Traditionalisme” juif (mais celui-ci est rare nous dit l’auteur p. 196, en raison du ‘Judaism’s firm rejection of other religious traditions acts’; cette attitude n’est-elle pas commune aux “religions du Livre”?), le “Traditionalisme” guénonien (p. 267) et le “Traditionalisme” roumain (il ne fait pas la différence entre les perspectives d’Avramescu et de Lovinescu) ou italien. Pour l’auteur, il existe des conclusions “quasi-traditionalistes”, des objectifs “semi-traditionalistes”, des “Traditionalismes” qui abandonnent un des critères principaux (comme celui d’Askenazi sceptique quant à ‘l’unité transcendante des religions’), des “néo-traditionalismes” comme celui de Shmulevich, un ‘Russian Islamic Traditionalism [which] is primarily political—in fact Islamist rather than Islamic’ (p. 257; p. 259, l’auteur note l’incompatibilité entre le “Traditionalisme” et l’islamisme radical); un texte pouvant être ‘Traditionalist in tone’ (p. 258), ‘purely Traditionalist’ ou ‘post-Traditionalist’ (p. 260), et l’islam “traditionaliste” ou “non-traditionaliste” (p. 267).

En fait, bien des objets visés par l’auteur résultent d’amalgames entre certains éléments de la pensée dite “traditionnelle” et d’autres éléments. Ne faudrait-il pas étudier ces “syncrétismes” comme des objets spécifiques au lieu de les réunir en un étrange “mouvement traditionaliste” dont l’invention

nous semble projeter plus d'obscurité que de lumière? Deux exemples. Après avoir longuement présenté le "néo-eurasisme" de Dugin, l'auteur en vient à dire qu'il n'est pas spécialement "traditionaliste" mais que l'on peut y identifier certains éléments caractéristiques du "Traditionalisme" (p. 230). Plus encore, après avoir étudié le néo-eurasisme israélien sur quatre pages (pp. 237-240), il va jusqu'à écrire: '[It] represents a development of Dugin's activities that can not even be described as "soft" Traditionalism. To the extent that they make use of an ideology partly described as "soft" Traditionalism, however, they too are descended—albeit indirectly—from Guénon's work' (p. 240). À ce jeu-là, on pourrait étendre indéfiniment l'étude à des écrits ayant intégré, au troisième, quatrième, cinquième degré, des éléments empruntés à l'œuvre de Guénon ou à certains de ses "développements".

Or, alors que l'auteur inclut dans son "histoire du 'Traditionalisme'" des phénomènes de réception très indirects et fragmentaires, il se tait sur d'autres plus significatifs. On peut ainsi s'interroger sur la pertinence de ses choix mais surtout sur la représentation du "Traditionalisme" qui en résulte: un paragraphe de quatre pages est dédié à l'obscur Séligny alors que les parcours de Pauwels et Daumal ne bénéficient que de quelques phrases; l'auteur s'arrête longuement sur le terrorisme italien (lequel n'a qu'un rapport plus qu'indirect avec la pensée "traditionnelle") alors qu'il n'y a pas un mot sur Jean Paulhan ou l'itinéraire de Pierre Georges au Maroc; le parcours de Sebottendorf—personnage à l'évidence sans grand rapport avec le "Traditionalisme"—est évoqué (pp. 95-96 et 270) jusque dans la conclusion, alors qu'est ignoré le rôle de ferment joué par l'œuvre de Guénon dans la résistance spirituelle au nazisme (Daumal, Max-Pol Fouchet, Masui). La question est alors de comprendre comment l'auteur en est venu à traiter tel mouvement ou tel parcours individuel plutôt que tels autres plus pertinents dans le cadre d'une histoire du "Traditionalisme".

L'itinéraire de recherche retracé dans les premières pages de ce livre nous éclaire un peu: il y est question de Dugin, du "National Bolshevik Party" lequel 'combine les "meilleurs" éléments du stalinisme et du nazisme', des talibans, de *Chevaucher le tigre* d'Evola, puis des affaires de mœurs autour de Schuon, de Claudio Mutti qui expose dans son bureau des insignes du parti nazi, du procès de Ceaucescu . . . On comprend qu'un tel parcours de recherche ait quelque peu orienté les conclusions de l'auteur, d'autant que celui-ci accorde une importance prépondérante aux entretiens avec les acteurs étudiés, mettant "les questions abstraites", comme il les appelle (p. 17), au second plan. Si les "Traditionalistes" partagent comme il le dit la même faiblesse méthodologique en survalorisant l'étude des textes sur l'observation,

l'auteur semble parfois pâtre du travers inverse. Or, la mémoire de la réception intellectuelle du "Traditionalisme" des années 1920 et 1930 s'est perdue avec la disparition des derniers témoins; elle aurait certainement surpris l'auteur.

Le supposé 'mouvement "traditionaliste"' décrit par *Against the Modern World* risque en particulier de contribuer à répandre dans les pays anglo-saxons l'idée d'une pensée naturellement alliée aux "fascismes". Cette idée fut jadis entretenue en France par deux champions du confusionnisme: Louis Pauwels et Jacques Bergier, dans leur bestseller *Le Matin des magiciens*. Leur célèbre formule ('D'une certaine façon, l'hitlérisme, c'était le guénonisme plus les divisions blindées') a été reprise dernièrement dans *Le Dictionnaire des intellectuels français* et attribuée pour l'occasion aux disciples de Julius Evola (cf. Daniel Lindenberg, 'René Guénon', dans Jacques Julliard et Michel Winock [éds.], *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français*, Paris: Seuil 1996, 566-567). Cela nous semble regrettable pour l'exactitude historique mais également pour la recherche; ceux qui, pris en tenaille entre 'les hagiographes professionnels et les contempteurs intéressés autant que hâtifs' (pour reprendre les termes de Pierre-André Taguieff), essaient en France de faire avancer la recherche en ce domaine, savent combien ces idées reçues nuisent à 'la discussion critique approfondie des pensées se référant à la Tradition primordiale'). L'auteur ne met notamment pas assez en évidence le fait que les facteurs intellectuels qui amenèrent Evola à tenter d'œuvrer au sein du régime fasciste furent précisément ceux qui le séparaient profondément de la perspective dite "traditionnelle" (anti-christianisme, contestation de la supériorité de l'autorité spirituelle et de la nécessité d'une transmission spirituelle ininterrompue). Il est symptomatique en la matière que l'auteur affirme sans argumenter qu'Evola fut 'le collaborateur' le plus important de Guénon, plus important même que Coomaraswamy (p. 98). Cela est historiquement inexact: la correspondance de Guénon avec Guido De Giorgio montre qu'il fut toujours très réservé à l'égard d'Evola; il refusa même qu'un de ses livres soit intégré dans la collection Tradition en raison de l'hétérodoxie de son auteur. À l'inverse, Coomaraswamy a été considéré comme un pair par Guénon: il fut l'un des rares à lui faire réviser un jugement (en l'occurrence sur le bouddhisme) et à lui donner par ses écrits l'occasion de développer des aspects de son œuvre; Guénon souhaita vivement sa participation à la collection Tradition.

Against the Modern World constitue un apport documentaire de premier plan pour l'histoire de la réception contemporaine de la pensée dite "traditionnelle". Les conclusions de l'auteur sur les raisons de sa fortune selon les

aires culturelles sont également très stimulantes. Toutefois, il aurait gagné à délimiter plus précisément le champ et les catégories de son étude; cela lui aurait permis de donner une image plus juste de ce que fut l’“influence” de la pensée dite “traditionnelle”. Il aurait, nous semble-t-il, gagné en clarté en procédant à une étude de réception plutôt qu’en construisant un objet trop flou. Ce livre a toutefois le mérite de soulever une question digne d’intérêt: à quel objet scientifique valable pourrait répondre le nom de “mouvement traditionaliste”?

Xavier Accart

Kennet Granholm, *Embracing the Dark: The Magic Order of Dragon Rouge—Its Practice in Dark Magic and Meaning Making*, Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press 2005. 347 pp. ISBN 951-765-251-8.

In Sweden Dragon Rouge (*Ordo Draconis et Atri Adamantis*) stands out as one of the most well-known esoteric new religious movements. Founded in 1989 by a group of teenagers in Stockholm it quickly caught the attention of the media by which it was labelled a satanic group. By the mid-nineties the movement had established itself throughout Sweden and its membership exceeded 500 people, which is a comparatively high number for a Swedish alternative spiritual organisation. During the second half of the nineties Dragon Rouge became less visible in the mass media and its membership dwindled. However, this period was also characterised by increasing maturity of the organisation: stricter rules for local lodges were created, and a wealth of written material was produced for the members. Today, Dragon Rouge has established lodges in countries such as Germany, Poland and Italy and is thus the first Swedish esoteric new religious movement to become an international movement. In *Embracing the Dark*, a doctoral degree thesis delivered at Åbo Academy, Finland, Kennet Granholm sets out to describe and analyse Dragon Rouge, basing his research primarily on participant observation conducted during the period 2001-2002, with some additional field visits over the following two years.

It should be stated at the outset that *Embracing the Dark* is an important book. It is unique not only because it deals with a contemporary occultist new religious movement which has received almost no academic attention before, it is also a virtual treasure trove of modern occultist ideas and

practices, and the author has accomplished the difficult task of conducting participant observations while maintaining his objective stance. That said, *Embracing the Dark* is not a flawless work and it contains a few problematic aspects.

The book is divided into four main parts: the first one forms the introduction in which previous research and the materials are presented. As previous research on the Dragon Rouge is virtually non-existent, Granholm focuses on the etic terminology connected to the study of Western Esotericism, such as Occultism and Magic, and emic terms such as Left and Right Hand Path and various forms of Magic(k). This discussion tends to be problematic at times as Granholm tends to use both etic and emic terms, even though this can be excused by the fact that the author is faced with terms that sometimes have no set etic meanings. However, he makes it a bit too easy for himself when discussing the term magic: 'I use the term magic since this is the term used by Dragon Rouge to denote what the order does' (p. 25). Most scholars would be careful in labelling the activities of a group as magic just because the group itself chooses to do so. The primary sources used by the author consist primarily of in-depth interviews with various Dragon Rouge members, and questionnaires. The fieldwork and participant observations were carried out by attending various seminars, lectures and group-rituals, as well as actually becoming an initiated member and advancing to the second degree of the order. Granholm states that he informed the members of Dragon Rouge that he was a scholar conducting research on Dragon Rouge prior to becoming a member.

The second part consists of chapters 2 to 5 and deals with the formative background and context of Dragon Rouge (chapter 2), the philosophical tenets of the order (chapter 3), the history and organisational structure of the order (chapter 4), and finally the practice of the movement as illustrated by four ethnographic accounts of various Dragon Rouge activities. Chapter 2 gives a short presentation of the academic study of Western Esotericism, focusing on the work of Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff. In the present reviewer's opinion this part could have been more substantial, and the theories of Faivre and Hanegraaff should have been discussed much more critically in relation to the material that Granholm analyses. The history of Western Esotericism which follows deals primarily with The Theosophical Society, The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley. This part is, however, the weakest of the book. Based more than once on questionable sources, it repeats a number of errors and unsubstantiated claims made by previous authors: one such claim which Granholm repeats a number

of times is that Aleister Crowley introduced Tantra to the West, when in fact Crowley's knowledge of Tantra was very limited and his "sexual magic" owes more to Western sources, such as Paschal Beverly Randolph, than to Eastern Tantric practices. One is furthermore tempted at times to draw the conclusion that the author is not familiar with the subject as he misspells basic terms such as "grimoire" and the names of prominent occultists—and even mistakes William Butler Yeats for Keats, and Francis Barrett for Frances Bacon! The author shows greater familiarity, however, with the New Age Movement, Neopaganism and the so-called Alternative Spiritual Milieu of Sweden that he deals with separately in the final sections of chapter 2.

If chapter 2 was weak, then chapter 3 to 5 are much more interesting and well researched. In these three chapters the author deals explicitly with various aspects of Dragon Rouge, drawing from his participant observations, interviews, questionnaires and the surprisingly extensive amount of materials published exclusively for the members of Dragon Rouge. When discussing the philosophical tenets in chapter 3 Granholm puts special emphasis on the concept of "dark magic," which, the author states, should not be understood in a moral sense, but rather as pertaining to spiritual practices which explore the dark or hidden aspects of Man's psyche. This exploration is carried out chiefly by what can be termed religious antinomianism, through which the morals and religious concepts of Western society are challenged. The goal of dark magic, as carried out by Dragon Rouge, is self-deification. According to Granholm dark magic is part of a particular strand of Western Esotericism which he calls the Left Hand Path. The Left Hand Path differs from the Right Hand Path in the final goal of the magician, i.e. self-deification for followers of the Left Hand Path, and *unio mystica* or union with the Godhead for followers of the Right Hand Path. Here Granholm follows the emic usage of the terms found within the Dragon Rouge and other similar organisations, but this sharp distinction can, in the present reviewer's opinion, be questioned. The term Left Hand Path is taken from the *Vama Marga* found in Tantric traditions, and Western tantra forms an intrinsic part of the Dragon Rouge system: in fact, the Red Dragon, for which the name Dragon Rouge stands, is identified with the Kundalini Serpent. In his discussion of the relationship between Dragon Rouge and Tantra, Granholm emphasises the positive understanding of feminine symbolism found in Dragon Rouge, but it is regrettable that he does not discuss the fact that the Tantra by which Dragon Rouge is inspired is a Western understanding of Tantra that differs considerably from Hindu and Buddhist forms of Tantra. Here the author would have benefited from taking into account scholars such as Hugh B. Urban. Chapter

4 deals thoroughly with questions pertaining to membership, finances and gender, apart from examining the history and organisational structure of Dragon Rouge. It is worth noting that the initiatory system of Dragon Rouge (in accordance with their antinomian stance) is not based on the Tree of Life as for nearly all occultist initiatory societies since the Golden Dawn, but on the qliphoth which in occultist literature is identified as the antithesis or dark side of the Tree of Life, the so-called Tree of Death. Here Granholm is correct in identifying the influence of the writings of the English author Kenneth Grant. The ethnographic accounts in chapter 5 describe the Order's 2004 annual meeting held on the Swedish island of Gotland; a course in ceremonial magic held at the main temple in Stockholm; the ceremonial opening of a new lodge in Malmö, Sweden; and finally Granholm's own initiation into the second degree which he underwent at the main temple in Stockholm.

The third part, which consists of chapters 6 and 7, forms the theoretical analysis of the material presented in the second part. By adopting a social constructionist approach—and more specifically by carrying out a discourse analysis—Granholm sets out to investigate 'the way meaning is attributed to reality in the Dragon Rouge context' (p. 243). Granholm states that there are six major discourses that constitute 'key elements in the Dragon Rouge magic system and the order's practice of magic' (p. 257): (1) Magic-is-all-Encompassing, (2) Self-Evolvement, (3) Individuality, (4) Magic-is-Demanding, (5) Nature, and (6) Women's Rights. Although these discourses are undeniably important features within Dragon Rouge, it would perhaps have been a good idea if the author had discussed in greater detail how and why he selected these particular discourses. Furthermore, the six discourses identified by Granholm are too broad and general to capture what is unique with Dragon Rouge when compared to other occultist movements. It would have been more fruitful if the author had concentrated on the major discourses that differ from other similar organisations, for instance the religious antinomianism which appears to form the core of the symbolism and practices of Dragon Rouge, and the ad-hoc approach to rituals that is evident from the ethnographic accounts. This latter approach can even be found in the rituals of initiation that are described in the book: no two members go through the same identical, word-for-word ritual which is compulsory in essentially all esoteric initiatory societies that I have encountered.

Embracing the Dark has much to offer to students and researchers of contemporary Western Esotericism and new religious movements. The most interesting and unique aspects of the book are undoubtedly the ethnographic accounts and the fact that the book deals with a contemporary organisation

which was founded just sixteen years ago. Furthermore, the fact that Dragon Rouge is a Swedish order and thus reflects the particular context of Swedish alternative spirituality and occultism makes the book invaluable as an aid for making further comparative studies with movements from other countries of origin. There is a wealth of material contained within the covers of the book for anyone interested in contemporary occultism, and *Embracing the Dark* will undoubtedly be the standard reference on Dragon Rouge for years to come.

Henrik Bogdan

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*, New York / London: New York University Press 2003. 369 pp. ISBN 0-8147-3155-4.

Après un ouvrage novateur et remarqué sur l'aryosophie en Autriche et en Allemagne de 1890 à 1935—*The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1985)—suivi, dans la même ligne d'une étude consacrée à une figure majeure du néo-nazisme ésotérisant, Savitri Devi—*Hitler's Priestess* (1998)—Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke continue avec *Black Sun* ses recherches sur les recouvrements entre idéologies d'extrême-droite et ésotérisme. Ce dernier volume, d'abord conçu comme une sorte de suite aux deux précédents, ce qu'il est aussi, déborde largement son propos initial pour faire l'histoire des groupes et idéologies néo-völkisch de l'après-guerre, principalement en Grande-Bretagne et aux États-Unis.

"Black Sun", le soleil noir, figuré par la roue solaire du château de Wewelsburg cher à Himmler, y est le symbole alchimique et cosmologique d'une puissance sombre et occulte dont ses tenants firent le mythe, l'emblème, la source et le terme de leur combat en faveur du racisme blanc. Ce que N. Goodrick-Clarke décrit et analyse ainsi, à l'aide de ce fil rouge, ce sont les origines et les évolutions des différentes composantes de cette nébuleuse, qui, d'un nationalisme allemand, se transforma en dévotion à Hitler, sauveur de la race et du monde blancs, acquit ensuite de véritables dimensions cultuelles—où la figure de Hitler, quasi divinisée, éventuellement associée à des mythes soucoupistes, reste centrale—, avant de culminer en une religion néo-nazie de l'identité blanche qui, par bien des aspects, retrouve l'aryosophie du début du 20^e siècle.

La palette des courants abordés est donc large: partis simplement politiques ouvertement nazis, soit purement patriotiques, identitaires, nationalistes, soit encore prônant des alliances tactiques contre un sionisme diabolisé avec certains groupes musulmans ou noir-américains; mouvements à tendance syncrétiste conjuguant, sous l'égide du pan-aryanisme, mythologie nazie (notamment mise en vogue par *Le matin des magiciens* ou les ouvrages de Robert Charroux), hindouisme, paganisme nordique, mythes "scientifiques", soucoupisme, satanisme, néo-gnosticisme, théosophisme, templarisme, voire certains éléments du traditionalisme évolién (de ce point de vue on peut alors regretter que l'auteur n'ait pas davantage exploré les rapports d'Evola et de ses émules au nazisme); Églises de la *Christian Identity* prenant la relève d'un Ku Klux Klan en relative déshérence; ruralistes pénétrés d'écologie globale; etc.

Comme le suggère l'auteur à plusieurs reprises, le caractère composite de cette nébuleuse est lui-même éclairant, particulièrement dans sa variante américaine. En effet, on peut s'étonner de voir se côtoyer et parfois s'associer au sein du néo-nazisme des vitalistes hostiles au christianisme, des nordico-aryens, des tenants de la *Christian Identity* issue d'un anglo-israélisme devenu antisémite, des apologistes du néo-hindouisme, des soucoupistes . . . C'est que l'ensemble de ces courants américains, non seulement partage des options fondamentales—défense et promotion de la race blanche, antisémitisme—, mais aussi et surtout, qu'ils ont été tous formés dans la matrice du fondamentalisme chrétien américain, marqué de prophétisme, de millénarisme et d'apocalyptique, et que, de la sorte, tous participent d'une même vision à la fois dualiste et conspirationniste, où juifs et *illuminati* sont les figures interchangeables de la subversion radicale qui menacerait les peuples blancs et viserait à instaurer ce que certains ont désigné comme le Zog, *Zionist Occupation Government*.

Au terme de ce voyage au pays de ce qu'il faut certainement appeler des "nouveaux mouvements religieux" néo-nazis, force est de constater que ces derniers révèlent, ainsi que le souligne l'auteur, la face obscure de tendances à l'œuvre dans le Nouvel Âge et qui ne sont pas sans rappeler celles qui animaient la pensée *völkisch* de l'entre-deux-guerres: écologie, culte de la nature, thérapies alternatives, magie, paganisme, etc. De la sorte, le retard de la venue du Nouvel Âge a-t-il pu être compris comme le fait d'une véritable conspiration des pouvoirs en place, du type de celle exposée par les apocryphes *Protocoles des sages de Sion*, et reformulée en termes souvent apparentés à la critique néo-nazie de la mondialisation économique, politique, culturelle et "raciale". Peut-être est-ce aussi dans cette perspective, néo-nazisme en

moins, qu'il faut comprendre l'immense succès de fictions conspirationnistes comme les *X-Files* de Chris Carter ou le *Da Vinci Code* de Dan Brown.

Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire

Tom Cheetham, *The World Turned Inside Out: Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism*, Woodstock (Connecticut): Spring Journal Books 2003. ISBN 1-882670-24-8

La pensée d'Henry Corbin a déjà suscité plusieurs ouvrages en soulignant la portée générale pour la philosophie et / ou la pensée religieuse. On se souvient bien sûr de *La logique des Orientaux: Henry Corbin et la science des formes* (1983) de Christian Jambet, qui confrontait les positions "orientales" analysées par Corbin avec celles de plusieurs philosophes d'Occident comme Kant, Hegel ou Marx. Daryush Shayegan en avait relevé l'importance spécifique pour la connaissance de la pensée iranienne dans *Henry Corbin: La topographie spirituelle de l'Islam iranien* (1990). Plusieurs articles, mémoires universitaires voire essais (ainsi G. Giuliano, *Il Pellegrinaggio in Oriente di Henry Corbin*, 2003) ont été rédigés sur d'autres aspects de l'œuvre corbinienne, dont on peut trouver les références sur le site <amis-corbin.com>. L'ouvrage de Tom Cheetham part quant à lui d'un point de vue original. L'auteur précise d'entrée qu'il n'est pas orientaliste, mais s'intéresse au départ à la philosophie et à la psychologie des profondeurs. Il retrace brièvement le parcours académique de Henry Corbin, sans s'y attarder, renvoyant pour l'essentiel aux données publiées dans le volume des Cahiers de l'Herne *Henry Corbin* (1984), ou explicitées par Daryush Shayegan (*op. cit.*, 13-35) et Seyyed Hossein Nasr (dans *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 1987, chap. 17). L'exposé philosophique de T.C. part de la base heideggerienne de la question de l'Être: penser représente un acte de présence au monde, un acte d'être. Ce n'est pas le monde extérieur qui détermine la nature de la conscience humaine, mais le degré de l'engagement de cette dernière qui donne au monde son sens. C'est la nature de cet acte qui est premier, non les conditions extérieures, sociales ou autres. Mais la position corbinienne ne s'identifie pas du tout à celle de Heidegger. Ce dernier considérant l'être de l'homme comme limité de façon infranchissable par la mort (le *Zum-Tode-sein*). Pour Corbin, cette position de principe est elle-même déterminée historiquement. L'acte de conscience, chez les auteurs dont H. Corbin se fait

l'exégète, porte au-delà. Il rend compte d'une expérience de l'être ou une transcendance se manifeste. Il y a là bien sûr un clivage fondamental qui s'installe entre les auteurs "orientaux" étudiés par H. Corbin et la pensée dite moderne. C'est en ce sens—et en ce sens seulement—que Corbin conteste la prééminence accordée aux circonstances historiques. Le philosophe ou le théosophe "oriental" n'est plus entièrement déterminé par les aléas de l'histoire, puisque c'est une décision de la conscience qui trace les frontières de ce que qui est appelé passé ou présent, réalité et illusion, vie et mort.

T.C. consacre ensuite un développement à la pensée iranienne ancienne—le mazdéisme, pour l'essentiel—et au "combat pour le monde" qu'elle implique. Il donne également un bref aperçu sur les éléments de base de la pensée ésotérique en Islam, notamment le chiisme. Les chapitres suivants analysent principalement ce qu'on pourrait appeler la phénoménologie de Corbin. Les phénomènes ne sont jamais donnés en tant que tel, il s'agit de savoir comment ils apparaissent. Dans ses recherches sur la philosophie islamique, Henry Corbin prend acte d'une perception "gnostique" de l'univers. Le gnostique découvre un univers caché aux autres parce qu'il s'en rend présent. Cette découverte a lieu par le biais de la "remontée" (ar. *ta'wīl*) d'un langage lui-même multiple. Il s'agit du langage philosophique lui-même, mais aussi et surtout celui du texte de la Révélation, s'agissant de penseurs musulmans. La méditation sur le texte sacré laisse apparaître des profondeurs de significations en fonction de l'intensité de l'acte d'être du méditant, et en même temps, ces nouvelles lectures le transforment, le spiritualisent. La même remarque peut *mutatis mutandis* valoir pour la lecture du Livre de l'univers, objet de l'Art par excellence qu'était l'alchimie.

Cette référence à l'alchimie permet de mieux approcher les modalités de l'herméneutique mise en œuvre. Celle-ci n'est pas seulement conceptuelle, mais engage également l'imagination, cette faculté créatrice que Corbin a explicité en de nombreux passages de son œuvre. Les gnostiques musulmans parlent de mondes "cachés", ce qui ne signifie pas qu'ils soient tous invisibles. L'imagination créatrice permet d'y avoir accès, car elle s'ouvre précisément au lieu ontologiquement déterminé où les Idées prennent forme, où les esprits angéliques deviennent perceptibles par le biais des visions, rêves et intuitions imaginatives (pp. 66 s.). Les images visionnaires permettent de comprendre—par voie symbolique—les événements de la vie; par là, elles transforment la personne qui les éprouvent. Elles ne sont pas de simples expériences visuelles passagères. Elles sont de véritables "rencontres avec l'ange". Et ici nous entrons en contact avec un des thèmes que Corbin a souligné avec le plus de force. Le monothéisme propose à ses adeptes

la vision d'un Dieu créateur immense, cosmique, créant du même coup une distance immense entre le croyant et son Seigneur. Ce "paradoxe du monothéisme" induit la nécessité de concevoir des intermédiaires: et c'est précisément cette nécessité de l'angélologie que H. Corbin souligna dans plusieurs de ses ouvrages (p. 162). L'expérience du mystique, c'est d'abord la jonction avec la dimension la plus élevée, la plus spirituelle de son propre être, avec cet ange qui est en quelque sorte sa contrepartie céleste. Et c'est précisément cette rencontre avec son ange qui permet l'instauration d'une conscience vraiment personnelle (p. 86, 95). Au travers de cette expérience, la personne humaine est capable de connaître la Face personnelle du Dieu cosmique. Mais ceci ne peut avoir lieu qu'au terme d'un long pèlerinage, d'une longue transformation permettant la manifestation de la Face de Dieu, de son apparence extérieure manifestée sous la forme de l'ange, qui se trouve coïncider avec la dimension la plus intérieure de l'âme humaine. Ce retournement de la conscience humaine, exprimé par H. Corbin dans plusieurs textes essentiels (p. 59, 121), a donné précisément son titre à l'essai de T.C.

L'ouvrage de Tom Cheetham apparaît au total comme une œuvre fort utile et salutaire. Il permet au lecteur de se faire une idée précise des propositions philosophiques de Henry Corbin, et cela sans avoir à faire le détour par l'étude d'auteurs islamiques médiévaux analysés dans les quelques vingt volumes de l'œuvre. Bien sûr, il évite les innombrables nuances à apporter entre les positions respectives et souvent divergentes des penseurs 'orientaux' convoqués—Avicenne et Sohrevardi, Ibn 'Arabî et Molla Sadra—mais ce n'était pas le lieu ici d'en faire état. Son style clair et concis, faisant aux citations une place utile mais non envahissante, rend compte de la pensée de Corbin avec une sympathie évidente pour ses principes et ses conclusions, mais en gardant la distance d'un essayiste qui ne s'identifie pas non plus avec son objet.

Pierre Lory

RECENT AND UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Aries aspires to keep its readers informed about recent and upcoming conferences relevant to the study of Western esotericism; but for this, the editors are largely dependent on the information they receive. Readers are therefore invited to send Conference Programs as well as Calls for Papers and announcements of upcoming conferences to the editorial address, if possible in electronic form. In doing so, please take into account that *Aries* is published in the months of January and July, and that copy must have reached the editors four months in advance (i.e., *October 1* and *April 1* resp.).

Die Kabbala Denudata: Text und Kontext (org.: Christian Knorr von Rosenroth Gesellschaft e.V.), Sulzbach-Rosenberg, 1-3.7.2005.

Papers: Rosmarie Zeller, 'Der Kontext der Kabbala-Handschriften im Knorr-Nachlass der Herzog-August-Bibliothek'; Ittai Tamari, 'Das Christliche und das Jüdische: Zum Druck der Kabbala Denudata 1677/1684'; Boaz Huss, 'The Text and Context of the 1684 Sulzbach Zohar Edition'; Elke Morlok, 'Text als Textur bei Joseph Gikatilla und in der Kabbala Denudata'; Konstantin Burmistrov, 'Pardes Rimmonim and Kabbala Denudata: On the Place of Cordoverian Kabbalah in Knorr's Project'; Philipp Theisohn, 'Naphtali Bacharach's Emek Hamelekh und die Kabbala Denudata'; Jean-Pierre Brach, 'The Theme of the "Soul of the Messiah" in Christian Kabbalah, up and into the Kabbala Denudata'; Gerold Necker, 'Geister, Engel und Dämonen: Abraham Cohen de Herreras Seelenlehre in der Kabbala Denudata'; Yossef Schwartz, 'Immanenz, Transzendenz, Atheismus: Die Rolle der Kabbala Denudata in der religiösen Krise des 17. Jahrhunderts'; Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, 'Die Debatte zwischen Knorr und Henry More über den Inhalt der christlichen und jüdischen Kabbala'; Giuseppe Veltri, 'Von der "Philosophia judaica" zur "Jüdischen Philosophie": (Ver-) Wandlungen eines Begriffs im Kontext der Kabbala Denudata'; Guillaume van Gemert, 'Knorrs Kabbala Denudata und der niederländische Kontext'; Bernd Roling, 'Erlösung im angelischen Makrokosmos: Emanuel Swedenborg und die Kabbala Denudata'; Andreas Kilcher, 'Die Kabbala Denudata in der esoterischen Literatur'.
Information: <http://www.knorr-von-rosenroth.de>

Masonic and Esoteric Heritage: A New Perspective for Art and Conservation Policies (org.: OVN: Foundation for the Advancement of Academic Research

into the History of Freemasonry in the Netherlands, in collaboration with the subdepartment History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, the Chair for cultural Heritage, Conservation and Restoration, both at the University of Amsterdam, and the Netherlands Postgraduate School for Art History), National Library, The Hague (Netherlands), 20-21.10.2005.

Lectures: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Western Esotericism and the Status of the Image'; Henrik Bogdan, 'Illustrated Esoteric Manuscripts in the Swedish Collection of Gustav Adolph Reuterholm (1756-1813)'; Diane Clements, 'The English Grand Lodge as Patron of the Arts: Commissions for Freemasons hall (1776)'; Christopher McIntosh, 'Esoteric and Initiatic Symbolism in 18th and 19th Century European Gardens'; Melanie Öhlenbach, 'The Influence of Jacob Böhme's Theosophical Ideas on Philip Otto Runge's "Farbentheorie"'; Helmut Zander, 'The First Goetheanum in Dornach by Rudolf Steiner (1913-1922): Understanding Occult Space'; Marijo Ariëns, 'Alchemical, Kabbalist and Occult Symbolism in the Work of Pablo Picasso and his Contemporaries'; Giovanna Costantini, 'Wall & Pylon: Freemasonry in the Art of Giorgio de Chirico'; Verena Kuni, 'Tracing Masonic Heritage in the Work of Joseph Beuys and Matthew Barney'; Alan B. Solomon, 'The Reconstruction of the Ground Zero Area and the Preservation Campaign for 211 Pearl Street'; Erik Westengaard, 'Salvaging Masonic Symbolism in Public & Private Gardens (1750-1810)'; Eugène Warmenbol, '19th Century Masonic Temples in Egyptian Style: Shared Responsibilities for Masonic Heritage'; Malcolm Davies, 'Masonic Musical, Theatrical & Poetical Heritage: Unexplored Territories in Public and Private Archives'; Andréa Kroon, 'The Material Culture of Freemasonry in the Netherlands: History, Destruction and Conservation'; Marty Bax, 'The Conservation of Theosophical Architecture: The Building of the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij'; Andreas Önnersfors, 'The Digitalization of 18th Century Membership Records of Swedish Masonic Lodges'; Andrew Prescott, 'Freemasonry as a Part of National Heritage: The Conservation of Esoteric Heritage in Great Britain'; Frans Grijzenhout, 'Introduction to the Closing Debate on "The Future of Western Esoteric Heritage"'.
 Information: OVN, P.O. Box 92004, NL-1090 AA Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Email: info@stichtingovn.nl

Seeing with Different Eyes: A Conference on Cosmology and Divination (org.: Angela Voss, University of Kent), University of Kent, Canterbury, 28-30.4.2006.

Keynote speakers: Gregory Shaw, Peter Struck, Barbara Tedlock.

Information: a.voss@kent.ac.uk. Website: www.kent.ac.uk/secl/Div_conf

OF ELECTRUM AND THE ARMOUR OF ACHILLES:
MYTH AND MAGIC IN A MANUSCRIPT
OF HEINRICH KHUNRATH (1560-1605)

HEREWARD TILTON

The ancient dream of achieving magical invulnerability in battle is reflected in the content of a number of Indo-European myths. In Northern Europe the mythological incarnation of the warrior made invulnerable by magical means is Siegfried (Norse *Sigurd*), who in the *Nibelungenlied* bathes in the blood of the lindworm he has slain; thus immersed the hero becomes impervious to attack, save for a point between his shoulder-blades where a leaf of the lime tree happens to land. There the dragon's blood does not impart its powers, and it is this point of weakness which is exploited by Siegfried's assassin, Hagen¹. The better-known forebear of Siegfried in this respect is, of course, Achilles. According to the non-Homeric account of Statius, in order to procure his invulnerability the sea nymph Thetis dipped her son in the river Styx, whilst crucially neglecting to immerse his heel or ankle—whence the tale related by Hyginus of Achilles' death by way of Paris' well-aimed arrow².

Another element (or “mytheme” in the Levi-Straussian sense) demonstrating the affinity of these two myths is the fact that the waters of the river Styx, like dragon blood, were commonly held to be poisonous. It is not clear whether this affinity is historically or merely psychologically grounded, but

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¹ *Nibelungen-Handschrift C*, Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Donaueschingen 63, f. 34 verso (chapter 15, strophes 906, 909): ‘Si sprach min man ist chvene dar zv starch genvoh/ do er den lintrachen an dem berge slvoh/ do batte sich in dem blvotē der reche vil gemeit/ da von in sit in stvremen nie dehein wafen versneit/ . . . Do von des trachen wden vloz daz heize blvot/ vñ sich dar inne badete der chuene reche gvot/ do gehafte im zwischen herten ein lindenblat vil breit/ da mac man in verhowen des ist mir sorgen vil bereit’.

² Statius, *Achilleis*, I.133-34, I.268-70, I.480-81; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 107. As Statius apparently assumed his readers knew the Styx tradition, the references are vague, and were only elucidated by later mythographers; see Burgess, ‘Achilles’ Heel’, 222. In the *Argonautica*, IV. 865-884, Apollonius of Rhodes relates the alternative legend that Thetis scorched the baby Achilles over fire by night and anointed him with ambrosia by day. For other Indo-European variations on the motif of “imperfect invulnerability”, see Burgess, *ibid.*, 218-219, n. 5.

it is quite possible that the topos of invulnerability gained through immersion in a powerful fluid ultimately reflects a genuine magical practice of the primeval warrior, given that in remoter regions of Africa we still find the use of potent lotions believed to grant immunity to the ravages of modern weaponry (together with the dire consequences such practices entail)³. Nevertheless, the tale of the waters of the river Styx is a later accretion to the lore surrounding Achilles; in the *Iliad* we are told only that Thetis acquired for her son a wondrous suit of armour from Hephaestus (Roman *Vulcan*), god of fire and the smithy, which Achilles wore as he slew his arch-rival Hector. And, in what amounts to a later gloss on the passage by Virgil⁴, this armour of Hephaestus is said to have been fashioned in part from the metal electrum.

To the contemporary chemist, electrum is an artificial or naturally-occurring alloy of gold and silver, containing at least twenty percent of the latter metal⁵. Although a little harder and cheaper than gold, it is inferior to bronze or iron as a raw material for armour or weaponry—hence it was rarely used for this purpose in the ancient world, and objects such as the electrum spear-heads and adzes found at the royal tombs of Ur are today considered to be strictly ceremonial in character⁶. However, if such items were rare in the ancient world, they were entirely unknown to the West by the medieval period, when gold and silver were applied decoratively only to the most expensive steel armours. Thus it is surprising not only to find a belief in the magical efficacy of electrum armour in late sixteenth century Europe, but also to discover that a usurping monarch appears to have entertained the possibility of gaining advantage over his rivals through such a technology. This is the testimony of an intriguing manuscript tract composed by the theosopher and alchemist Heinrich Khunrath (c. 1560-1605). Entitled *Consilium de Vulcani magica fabrefactione armorum Achillis* (“Counsel concerning Vulcan’s Magical Fashioning of the Armour of Achilles”), the manuscript currently resides in the Swedish Royal Library in Stockholm, and deals with

³ For instance, Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Movement in Northern Uganda, the members of which smeared shear oil imbued with the “Holy Spirit” on their bodies as a magical protection against bullets, and attacked government forces in waves whilst chanting hymns. Similar beliefs are endemic in the Congo, where the Mai-Mai (“powerful water”) militia are anointed with magical water by their witch-doctors.

⁴ Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII.620-625 (624); cf. VIII.402.

⁵ This definition has remained constant since Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, XXXIII.xxiii.

⁶ *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie*, 2315; Zettler and Horne, *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur*, 162, 170; *Der Neue Pauly Enzyklopädie*, 978.

the production of an *electrum magicum* which not only lends its strange powers to armour, but which can also be used to manufacture magic mirrors and bells for use in *nigromantia*⁷.

The manuscript in question is handsomely bound in leather with a decorative gold inlay. On the title page the clear hand of the scribe tells us that the copy is issued at the special request of a “high potentate”, and that it is the work of ‘three excellent men, of whom the first is a highly learned Kabbalist and astronomer, the second a profound philosopher and experienced alchemist, and the third a subtle and gifted *magus* working in accordance with Nature’. Hitherto this ‘most excellent jewel’ has been kept in the utmost secrecy, ‘and justly remains so concealed’⁸. In a different hand at the bottom of the page lies the signature ‘Conradus Khunradt’—i.e., Conrad Khunrath, brother of Heinrich and a well-known chemist in his own right. That the *Consilium* indubitably stems from Heinrich is clear not only from the fact that he claims it as his own in his *De igne magorum* (“On the Fire of the

⁷ Khunrath, ‘Consilium de Vulcani magica fabrefactione armorum Achillis Græcorum omnium fortissimi et cedere nescii’, Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket MS Rål 4, 1597 (43). The use of “electrum” bells for summoning spirits is mentioned in both the *Consilium*, 17-19, and its source, *De compositione metallorum* of pseudo-Paracelsus (of which more below), and has a long history in the esoteric literature (cf. Heydon, *Hampaaneah Hammegulleh*, 36; the early eighteenth century ‘The Rosie Crucian Secrets’, London, British Library MS Harleian 6485, 298-299; Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 49). The use of magical electrum mirrors for observing distant events is mentioned in another source for the *Consilium*, *De speculi constellatione* of pseudo-Paracelsus (cf. the eighteenth century manuscript ‘Testamentum der Fraternitet Rosæ et Auræ Crucis . . . Anno 580’, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Cod. Sn. 2897, 258 ff.).

⁸ Khunrath, *Consilium*, title-page: ‘Auff sonderliches begehren/ und fleissigs Anhalten eines Manhafftten hohenn Potentaten/ Bestellet/ Durch drey Furtreffliche Menner. Unter denen der Erste/ ein Hochgelerter Cabalist und Astronomus. Der ander/ ein Tiefsinniger Philosophus und wolgeübter Alchimist. Der Letzte aber ein Subtiler und geschwinder Naturgemessener Magus gewesen. Und ist dis Löbliche furtreffliche Kleinod und werck bisanhero in höchster geheimb gehalten worden und noch billig also zuhalten: Conradus Khunradt’. Whilst Carlos Gilly surmises that these words constitute a claim of authorship by Conrad Khunrath, the significance of *durch* in this instance points to the “three” unnamed men as authors; Carlos Gilly, ‘The *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* of Heinrich Khunrath’, 349. The fact that Conrad belonged to the small circle of people who were granted a copy of Heinrich’s *Consilium* supports the old but hitherto unsubstantiated assumption that the two were brothers: see Khunrath, *Vom Hylealischen . . . CHAOS*, f.) (2 *recto*—*verso*). Oliver Humberg has recently unearthed a letter from Conrad Khunrath to Moritz of Hessen-Kassel (Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, 4a Nr. 50) in which the alchemist offers the landgrave a copy of the same manuscript, this time accompanied by a very polite request for remuneration. The text of the letter will be published by Humberg later in 2006 in the second volume of the series *Quellen und Forschungen zur Alchemie*, accompanied by other biographical and genealogical research on Conrad Khunrath and his relation to Heinrich.



Fig. 1. An eighteenth century rendition of the author's portrait from Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* (1609 edition). ULB Darmstadt, Ms. 3263 (with permission of the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt).

Magicians", 1608), but also that the author of the *Consilium* claims *De igne magorum* as his own⁹. Hence we might understand the "three men" mentioned as authors of the tract on the title-page as Conrad Khunrath's praise for the three aspects of his brother's learning, which are listed as precisely Kabbalah, alchemy and *magia* on the title-page of Heinrich's *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* ("Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom", 1595).

The dedication from Conrad Khunrath on the second page of our manuscript is to 'the most enlightened and high-born prince and lord, Lord Karl, hereditary prince of the empire of Swedes, Goths and Slavs, Duke of

⁹ Khunrath, *De igne magorum*, 37, 69-70; Khunrath, *Consilium*, 35.

Södermanland, Närke and Värmland', and carries the date 1597¹⁰. Duke Karl (1550-1611, later King Karl IX) was one of the four sons of the Lutheran king Gustav I Vasa of Sweden, and was bequeathed his duchies in his father's testament of 1560¹¹. He is noted for having promoted mining and metallurgy within his lands, which comprise the modern counties (*län*) of Södermanland, Örebro and Värmland in central Sweden. However, in 1597 he would have been too busy to indulge a purely theoretical interest in the properties of a magical electrum; for in the summer of that year Karl entered into a civil war with his nephew, the devout Catholic King Sigismund III, for the control of Sweden. Described by Michael Roberts as a Machiavellian tyrant whose weapons were 'the terrorization of opponents, the use of mob hysteria, the exploitation of class divisions, and a totalitarian rejection of the right to differ', Karl played upon popular fears of a papal conspiracy against Protestant Sweden to promote his own conflict with Sigismund and the powerful nobles of the *Råd* (Council of State)¹².

In this light, the allusions on our manuscript title page to a 'special request' delivered by this 'high potentate' appear less a rhetorical ornament of Conrad Khunrath's, and more a reflection of Karl's desire to keep abreast of developments which might lend him a technological edge in his struggle. To the contemporary reader this might seem an odd assumption. However, the testimony of the literature we are about to explore suggests not only that a belief in the efficacy of magical armour and weaponry was present amongst the European nobility and royalty in early modern times, but also that certain emperors of the *Deutsches Reich* held faith in such articles. Above and beyond this fact, the specific value of Khunrath's manuscript lies in the detailed insight it affords us into the reception and application of Ficinian and Paracelsian magical notions in early modern Germany.

¹⁰ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 2: 'Dem Durchleüchtigstenn Hochgebornen Fürsten und Herren/ Herren Carolo Reiche Schweden Gotten unnd Wenden Erbfürsten/ Hertzog zu Sudermanlandt, Nericöe unnd Wormelandt etc. Seinem gnedigsten fürsten und Herrenn/ Wüntzschet Conradus Khunrath Leipsensis Von Gott dem Almechtigen langes leben/ beständige gute gesundtheitt/ Glückliche friedsame Regierung/ unnd aller Fürstlichen prosperitet/ neben gantzlicher dedicationn und offerirung dieses Buechs/ gantz trewlichst unnd unthenigst: Anno 1597'. According to the dedication to the staunchly Lutheran Elector of Saxony, Sophie von Brandenburg (1568-1622), given in his *Vier Schöne Medicische Tractat* published in 1597, Conrad Khunrath was living in Danish Schleswig-Holstein in 1597. Heinrich Khunrath was resident in Magdeburg in June of 1597: see his *Vom Hylealischen . . . CHAOS*, f.)(8 verso).

¹¹ Roberts, *The Early Vasas*, 195.

¹² *Ibid.*, 367.

Khunrath's reception of the Iliad and the Aeneid

In his seminal article on the subject Joachim Telle brings Johannes Burggrav's *Achilles ΠΑΝΟΠΛΙΣ redivivus* (1613)—a text which was largely plagiarised from Khunrath's *Consilium*—into close proximity with “mythoalchemy”, a literary genre in which the myths of the ancient world are treated as a repository of alchemical and natural philosophical knowledge¹³. An important component of humanist discourse in early modern Germany, mythoalchemy was nourished above all by the reception of antique mythology amongst the Florentine Neoplatonists, and was also the logical extension of the ancient alchemical practice of concealing the secrets of the Art in allegories, vision accounts and enigmas¹⁴. The most famous example of the genre is Count Michael Maier's beautiful book of emblems, the *Atalanta fugiens* (1618). In an earlier work, the *Arcana arcanissima* (1614), Maier sets forth the first methodical formulation of the mythoalchemical approach, which was born in part of the humanist desire to accommodate the pagan authors to an immutable Christian referent. The close relation of emblematics to Maier's alchemical hermeneutic is also evident in his words:

... it is unlikely that the ancient poets attributed so much adultery, homicide, incest and crimes to their gods out of some innate wickedness or gratuitous mockery, or so that they might make sport with gods or men, or indeed that they might themselves use the example of the gods to propagate enormous crimes of that kind (for in that case they would have been the greatest rogues to walk on two legs)¹⁵. Rather, it was in order that they might show these gods to be fictitious and imaginary, and symbols and emblems—the one intended for the eye, the other for the mind—of an occult Art, hidden to the common people but known to themselves. Lest moreover they might appear publicly to produce empty names for worthless riddles, each fictitious god was given a quasi-divine

¹³ Telle, ‘Mythologie und Alchemie’, 139: ‘Für das deutsche Kulturgebiet muß vorerst gelten, daß hier die Auffassung, “die herrlichen schönen Gedichte der Poeten/ so sie von den himmlischen Göttern vorbringen”, seien nichts anderes als verhüllte Beschreibungen der “geheimsten Künste der Alchymey”, erst seit dem 16. Jahrhundert Macht über viele Alchemisten gewann. Fortan reißt ihr Bemühen, “in allen Poetischen Gedichten” der Alten “Chymicae operationes” zu enthüllen, nicht mehr ab und ergießt sich bis in das 18. Jahrhundert ein breiter Strom an Schriften, deren Urheber bereits in der Titelvahl: *Arcana Palladis*, *Balneum Dianae*, *Filum Ariadnes*, *Aureum vellus*, *Pandora*, *Proteus mercurialis*, *Hercules piochymicus*, *Oedipus chymicus*, *Achilles redivivus*, mehr oder minder enge Bindungen zwischen Alchemie und Mythologie zu erkennen geben’.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149, 154.

¹⁵ Cf. Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, I.5.14.

function and power of Nature. They ascribed diverse parents to these gods, but nevertheless professed one God in all of them¹⁶.

Although mythoalchemy flowered in the German late Renaissance, contemporary scholars have divergent opinions concerning its age and true nature. Antoine Faivre mentions the fifth century alchemist Olympiodorus as a proponent of the alchemical allegorization of myth¹⁷; Erik Leibenguth, on the other hand, follows Telle in identifying the *Margarita pretiosa novella* (1330) as the formative early work of the tradition¹⁸. There Petrus of Ferrara argues that Ovid, Virgil and Homer wove the secrets of the alchemical art into their stories and myths by way of an 'ornate language'. As a result, only the wise can see their true intention, whilst the world is kept safe from those unworthy souls who would sow chaos with such knowledge¹⁹.

As the primary antique authors alluding to Vulcan's activity as an armourer, Homer and Virgil occupy a central position in Khunrath's *Consilium*—which, like many alchemical works, begins with a theoretical discourse on the subject in question before moving to a practical description of the laboratory processes involved. Thus Khunrath opens his tract with a passage from the *Iliad*. The Greek Patroclus has entered battle with the Trojans wearing the armour of his companion, Achilles, and has been slain by Hector; even as his soul departs for Hades, Patroclus warns Hector that he will die at Achilles' avenging hand. Because her son's old armour is now in the possession of Hector, Thetis makes her plea to Hephaestus to create some fine new equipment:

Therefore I have now come to your knees, in the hope that you will be minded to give my son, who is doomed to a speedy death, shield and helmet and noble greaves fitted with ankle pieces and a corselet²⁰.

¹⁶ Maier, *Arcana arcanissima*, 59: '... non est verisimile, antiquos illos Poetas ex innata malitia, aut irrisionis gratia tot adulteria, homicidia, incaestus et scelera suis Diis attribuisse, ut vel Deos, vel homines luderent, aut vitia ejusmodi enormia Deorum exemplis propagarent, (tum enim omnium bipedum nequissimi fuissent) sed potius ut demonstrarent Deos illos non esse nisi ficticios, imaginarios et artis occultae vulgo, sed sibi notae, symbola et Emblemata aliud ad oculum, aliud ad mentem referentia: Ne autem inania nomina rebus cassa in medium producere viderentur, singulis illis Diis fictitiis singula officia quasi divinia et vires Naturae: genitricis diversas asscripserunt, ac nihilominus Unum Deum in omnibus istis professi sunt'.

¹⁷ Faivre, *The Golden Fleece and Alchemy*, 16.

¹⁸ Leibenguth, *Hermetische Poesie des Frühbarock*, 93 n. 88, 95-96; Telle, 'Mythologie und Alchemie', 138. Also mentioned by Telle is the thirteenth century encyclopaedist Vincent of Beauvais, who counted Virgil amongst the 'masters of alchemy'.

¹⁹ Leibenguth, *Hermetische Poesie des Frühbarock*, 92.

²⁰ Homer, *Iliad*, XVIII.457-460; Murray (ed.), *Iliad*, 321.

That Achilles' own fate has already been sealed by the schemes of the Olympian gods is well known to Hephaestus, who nonetheless replies:

Take heart, and do not let these things concern your mind. I wish that I might so surely be able to hide him far from dolorous death, when dread fate comes on him, as surely fair armour will be his, such that in future many a one among the multitude of men shall marvel, whoever looks on it²¹.

With this Hephaestus sets to work; and it is evident that Khunrath, when reading the following words for the first time, saw in them not only the activity of the primordial armourer and smith, but also an image of the alchemist in his guise as arcane metallurgist:

... the bellows, twenty in all, blew on the melting vats, sending out a ready blast of every force, now to further him as he laboured hard, and again in whatever way Hephaestus wished and his work went on. And on the fire he put stubborn bronze²² and tin and precious gold and silver; and then he set on the anvil block a great anvil, and took in one hand a massive hammer, and in the other he took the tongs. First he made a shield, great and sturdy, adorning it cunningly in every part, and round about it set a bright rim, threefold and glittering, and from it he fastened a silver baldric. Five were the layers of the shield itself; and on it he made many adornments with cunning skill²³.

In the *Iliad* there follows here an extensive description of the various scenes with which Hephaestus ornaments the shield of Achilles; this is omitted by Khunrath, who proceeds to the last lines of book eighteen:

... when he had fashioned the shield, great and sturdy, then he fashioned for him a corselet brighter than the blaze of fire, and he fashioned for him a heavy helmet, fitted to his temples, a fair helmet, elaborately worked, and set on it a crest of gold; and he fashioned him greaves of pliant tin. But when the glorious god of the two lame legs had fashioned all the armour, he took and laid it before the mother of Achilles. And like a falcon she sprang down from snowy Olympus, carrying the flashing armour from Hephaestus²⁴.

From the outset, Khunrath's approach to this passage in the Latin edition he used raises important questions concerning the exact scope of the genre which has come to be known as "mythoalchemy". Firstly, from Khunrath's perspective the text describes a replicable procedure of arcane metallurgy, and

²¹ *Ibid.*, 321 (XVIII.463-467).

²² The meaning of χαλκός is given as "copper" in other editions of the *Iliad*; although the word variously denotes "ore", "bronze" and "copper", the fact that bronze already contains tin points to "copper" as the better translation.

²³ Homer, *Iliad*, XVIII.470-482; Murray (ed.), *Iliad*, 322.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XVIII.609-617; Murray (ed.), *Iliad*, 333.

not of alchemy proper. Secondly and more significantly, Khunrath's interpretation of the myth is not allegorical in orientation, but euhemerist. The name Vulcan, for instance, is construed by Khunrath to be a corruption of Tubalcain, the name of the Jewish patriarch whom the book of Genesis describes as 'the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron'²⁵. There is no doubt, so Khunrath declares, that the pagans came to hear of Tubalcain through Japhet, the third son of Noah and ancestor of the Ionian Greeks—and because Tubalcain was the most ancient smith and armourer, they made of him an idol, and imagined his home as fiery Etna²⁶.

This historicizing mode of interpretation stands in direct contrast to the allegorizing approach of mythoalchemists such as Maier, who specifically refutes euhemerism when dealing with the myth of Isis and Osiris in his *Arcana arcanissima*²⁷. Nevertheless, such euhemerism has important precedents in the history of alchemical exegesis, as Faivre demonstrates in his *Toison d'Or et Alchimie*. Some commentators have excluded euhemerist strands from the scope of mythoalchemy, which they define strictly as an allegorization of myth (conceived as an intentionally employed veil for arcane processes of transformation)²⁸; Faivre, on the other hand, traces the often interwoven history of both allegorizing and euhemerist tendencies in the literature (cf. Pico's *De Auro*), and suggests we avoid too rigid a demarcation between the two²⁹. In any case, whilst mythoalchemy may well be more than a mere subset of an allegorizing hermeneutic³⁰, it seems we are obliged either

²⁵ Genesis 4.19-22: 'And Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Na'amah'. In his commentary on Genesis 4.22 the Baptist John Gill (1697-1771) suggested that this etymology derives from Eusebius; but Eusebius' account (*Praeparatio evangelica*, 1.35 B) contains fragments of the lost Phoenician mythology of Sanchuniathon, who only mentions two sons of Hypsuranus skilled in the working of iron, one of whom (Chrysor) is equated with Vulcan. Isidore of Seville makes no mention of Tubalcain in his commentary on Vulcan in the *Etymologies*. Indeed, Khunrath is the earliest purveyor of the tradition I am aware of, although it surely antedates him; the same etymology is given by Sir Walter Raleigh in his *History of the World* (1614), and is commonly to be found amongst bible commentaries from the seventeenth century onwards. It also holds a place in Freemasonic lore.

²⁶ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 5; the isle of Vulcano between Sicily and the Aeolian isles is indicated as the home of Vulcan by Virgil (*Aeneid*, XVIII.419), who merely likens Vulcano to Etna.

²⁷ Maier, *Arcana arcanissima*, 11.

²⁸ Leibenguth, *Hermetische Poesie des Frühbarock*, 93 n. 88, 94.

²⁹ Faivre, *The Golden Fleece and Alchemy*, 20, 35, 65 et passim.

³⁰ Leibenguth, *Hermetische Poesie des Frühbarock*, 93.

to radically extend the parameters of the mythoalchemical genre as determined by Telle, or to exclude Burggrav's (and hence Khunrath's) work from the list of texts falling within its ambit.

Although Khunrath does cast Homer's account as a *veiled* description of arcane metallurgical procedure, in his view it is veiled by an intentional omission of detail concerning the true material of the armour, and not by the myth's symbolism itself. In Homer's description of Vulcan's work there is, in fact, no allusion to electrum, be it magical or otherwise—only to copper and tin (the constituents of the alloy bronze) and 'precious silver and gold'. It is beside the point that the alloy of the latter metals is known today as electrum: where Homer does use the word ἤλεκτρον (*elektron*, the Greek cognate of Latin *electrum*), it is not always clear which substance he is referring to. Of the three places in the *Odyssey* where ἤλεκτρον is mentioned, two seem to refer to the golden-brown fossilised tree resin we call amber³¹. The meaning of the remaining reference has long been the source of scholarly debate; there Telemachus likens the halls of the Spartan palace of Menelaus, which are decorated with 'flashing gold and ἤλεκτρον, silver and ivory', to the court of Olympian Zeus³². Is Homer describing inlaid amber, the colour of which stands to gold as ivory's colour does to silver? Or is this indeed a reference to an alloy of gold and silver, as Pliny³³ surmised some eight centuries after Homer?

Whatever the case may be, Khunrath cites the less likely interpretation of Pliny when he himself describes the halls of Menelaus in his *Consilium*; these shone in the torch-lit night with the superior radiance of pale electrum³⁴. According to Khunrath, Homer deliberately avoids mentioning the

³¹ Homer, *Odyssey*, XV.459: 'There came a man, well versed in guile, to my father's house/ with a necklace of gold, and with amber beads was it strung between'; XVIII.295: 'And a chain did another straightway bring to Eurymachus,/ one cunningly wrought of gold, strung with amber beads, bright as the sun'. The fact that both references use the plural ἤλεκτροισιν bears out the meaning of "amber beads"; and the fact that in the former a Phoenician bears the ornament also lends support to this interpretation, as this seafaring folk is known to have traded extensively in amber. See the *Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines*, 532, nn. 13, 14, which has the best exposition of the controversy to be found in the lexicons.

³² Homer, *Odyssey*, IV.73: 'Son of Nestor dear to this heart of mine, mark the flashing of bronze throughout the echoing halls, and the flashing of gold, of electrum, of silver, and of ivory'. The radiance of the substance described demonstrates the close association of ἤλεκτρον with the word ἥλιος, "the beaming sun". See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexikon*, 768.

³³ Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXIII.xxiii.81.

³⁴ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 10-11: '*M. Joh. Mathesius in Sarepta concione de Electro* schreibt also, Es haben die alten *Poeten*, das guldige Silber, das ist, Gold mit Silber vermengt, auch

alloy when describing Vulcan's work in the *Iliad*—the implication being that the ancient poet, like any true initiate into the occult mysteries, had sought to protect the secrets of the arcane art he described³⁵. Nevertheless, what was hidden by Homer may be revealed to any diligent student of the wisdom of the ancients; for Virgil, in the eighth book of his *Aeneid*, once again describes the work of Vulcan, this time betraying the crucial *prima materia* of the armourer's craft—electrum. An epic poem that cleverly transforms the structure and themes of the *Iliad* into a work of Roman imperialist apologetics, the *Aeneid* tells the story of Aeneas, cousin of Trojan Hector, son of Venus, legendary founder of Roman power and supposed ancestor of Virgil's patron Augustus Caesar. Having escaped the smouldering ruins of Troy, the wandering warrior Aeneas arrives in the Campagna di Roma. To aid him in his battle with the Latin Rutuli tribe, Venus seduces Vulcan and gains thereby the following promise:

And now if you are preparing for war and this is what you wish, whatever care I can offer you in the exercise of my skill, whatever can be done by melting iron or electrum, anything that fire and bellows can achieve, you do not have to pray to me. You need not doubt your power³⁶.

From these words, Khunrath maintains triumphantly, the true material of this wondrous and regal armour is made clear to all³⁷. Although the Latin word *electrum*, like the ambiguous Greek *elektron*, could refer to either amber or an alloy of four parts gold to one silver³⁸, the fact that this material is molten leaves no doubt as to Virgil's meaning. Indeed, the bronze and electrum used by Virgil's Vulcan can be correlated with the metals employed by Homer's Hephaestus: copper and tin, gold and silver. Khunrath takes note, however, that a fifth metal appears in the account of the *Aeneid*: *chalybs vulnificus*, or 'death-dealing steel'. The mass production of weaponry made of wrought

Electrum genennet, welches bei der nacht wan man grosse fackelnn anzundett heller dan dichte oder fein Goldt leuchten soll wie *Plinius* meldet, Damit Koningk *Menelaj* Sahl oder Mueshaus soll beleget sein gewesen, drinnen es geschimmert wie die Sonne scheint und der Mond glentzet, wie man im *Homero* sehet'. Johannes Mathesius of Joachimstal was a contributor to the early mining literature; Khunrath's reference here is to his *Sarepta oder Bergpostill*, published in Nuremberg in 1564.

³⁵ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 9: 'Aus diesen worten wirt nun klar und offenbar was gewesenn seii das rechte und warhaftige *subjectum* dieser wunderbarlicher und koniglicher *armorum* nemblich *Electrum*, von φ. θ. Paracelso *Electrum magicum* genennet, das *SIEBEN EAN* oder *EAN SIEBEN METAL*. *Homerus* hatt den nahmen verschwiegen, *Virgilius* hatt ihn erfurbracht'.

³⁶ Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII.400-405; West (ed.), *Aeneid*, 176.

³⁷ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 9.

³⁸ Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXIII.xxiii and XXXVII.xi.

iron and steel, an alloy of iron with small amounts of carbon, was a mainstay of Roman power; although iron is mentioned by Homer, its absence from his description of Vulcan's craft may reflect the late Bronze Age roots of the *Iliad*. For Khunrath, however, Virgil's inclusion of the metal contradicts neither Homer nor the 'inviolable precepts of the magical arts'—for why should the metal of warlike Mars be absent from such a martial work³⁹? Virgil's beautiful description of Vulcan and his Cyclopean minions at work in the caverns of Vulcano refers to the process of quenching bronze in cold water, a process which is also required to harden good steel:

The gold ore and iron,⁴⁰ the dealer of death, were molten in a great furnace. They were shaping one great shield to be a match for all the weapons of the Latins, fastening the seven thicknesses of it circle to circle. Bellows were taking in air and breathing it out again. Bronze was being plunged into troughs of water and hissing. The cave boomed with the anvils standing on its floor while the Cyclopes raised their arms with all their strength in time with one another and turned the ore in tongs that did not slip⁴¹.

As in the *Iliad*, Virgil proceeds to give a lengthy description of the scenes engraved upon the mighty shield—although here they prophetically depict the glorious history of the Romans under the conquering descendants of Aeneas, rather than the sketches of daily Greek life and rustic idylls given by Homer. It is noteworthy that only the greaves, or shin armour, are specifically mentioned by Virgil as being fashioned from electrum—a fact which in no way deters Khunrath from his main thesis, which is the identification of the armour's material with that substance 'called by Paracelsus *electrum magicum*'⁴².

The production of electrum magicum

Leaving the smoking realms of Vulcan, the *Consilium* proceeds here with extensive citations from a work Khunrath speaks of as Paracelsus' *De electro*. There is a tract under this name in the *Zwen Tractatus des hocherfahrenen und bewärtisten Teutschen Philosophi* edited by Michael Toxites in

³⁹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 8.

⁴⁰ Most translations render the original *chalybs* as steel rather than iron (*ferrum*).

⁴¹ Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII.445-453; West (ed.), *Aeneid*, 177-178.

⁴² Khunrath, *Consilium*, 9: 'Aus diesen worten wirt nun klar und offenbar was gewesenn seii das rechte und warhaftige *subjectum* dieser wunderbarlicher und koniglicher *armorum* nemblich *Electrum*, von φ. [Philippus] θ. [Theophrastus] Paracelso *Electrum magicum* genennet'.

1572⁴³; it is better known as book six of the *Archidoxis magica*, which is entitled *De compositione metallorum*. The *Archidoxis magica* was first published in 1569, and originally consisted of four previously secret tracts written under the name of Paracelsus and thought to be the key to his art⁴⁴. *De compositione metallorum* and a tract by the name of *De speculi constellatione* first appeared in print in the 1572 version of the *Archidoxis magica*; their addition was justified by the editor, Johannes Huser, on the grounds that they were consonant with Paracelsus' thought, and that they were generally recognised as works of Paracelsus. Although Toxites raised no doubts in his edition concerning their authenticity, Huser certainly did, and similar doubts had also been jotted down on the manuscript copy which he used for his edition⁴⁵. Khunrath derives his instructions on the manufacture of *electrum magicum* from both *De speculi constellatione* and *De compositione metallorum*, which form a pair and appear to have been written by the same author. The fact that in the *Consilium* he also refers to the tracts *De tempore* and *De imaginibus* suggests he used the 1572 edition of the *Archidoxis magica* published by Petrus Perna in Basel, as these tracts were included in that version as further accretions to the whole dubious work. Whilst Schneider believes the original four books of the *Archidoxis magica* may in fact be heavily edited notes of Paracelsus, there is no evidence suggesting that the works concerning electrum are authentic, nor have we any clues as to who their true author might be⁴⁶.

In the true works of Paracelsus, electrum refers most commonly to a 'mineral' which is the 'primary essence of metals', and which although still imperfect is 'full of seminal power'⁴⁷. This significance is possibly related to the descriptions of electrum (Egyptian *asemu*) amongst the ancient alchemists. For example, a recipe under the name of *Chrysopoeia* ("gold-making") in the Leiden papyri describes an alloy of gold, silver and copper which can be used like a 'yeast' to produce further gold-like alloys, a process which gave rise in later alchemy to the idea of the Philosophers' Stone as a 'leavening' agent for metals⁴⁸. In any case, the *electrum magicum* of

⁴³ Paracelsus, *Zwen Tractatus*.

⁴⁴ Schneider, *Paracelsus: Autor des Archidoxis Magica?*, 6-7.

⁴⁵ The oldest manuscript copy of the *Archidoxis magica* resides at Nürnberg and dates to 1570: *ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁷ Paracelsus, *Werke*, V, 415: '... das erste Wesen der Metalle, das seine letzte Vollkommenheit noch nicht erreicht, und doch voll samenlicher Kraft ist und steckt'; hence also the usage of the term by the Paracelsian Johann Baptist van Helmont in his *Præcipolum*, 48.

⁴⁸ Gebelein, *Alchemie*, 122-123; Schütt, *Auf der Suche nach dem Stein der Weisen*, 37-38.

pseudo-Paracelsus is not a mineral essence, nor is it electrum in the ancient or contemporary sense of the term. It is instead an alloy of all the alchemist's seven metals, which possesses supernatural qualities stemming from the astrological influences brought to bear in the course of the work.

The exact proportions of the alloy are given by both Khunrath and pseudo-Paracelsus as ten parts gold, ten parts silver, five parts mercury, five parts copper, two parts tin, two parts lead and one part iron⁴⁹. Before the alloying process can begin, the metals should be purified in the following manner: the gold must be 'poured three times through antimony', and once again through lead, then beaten thin and laid in saltwater for twenty-four hours; the silver should be thinly beaten and laid for a quarter of an hour in a solution of salt and pulverised *Weinstein* (potassium hydrogen tartrate)⁵⁰; the copper needs six to eight hours' immersion in vinegar and 'vitriol water' (probably a dilute sulfuric acid distilled from ferrous sulfate heptahydrate)⁵¹; the iron should simply be filed, and the 'dust' washed away; the lead and 'fine English tin' must both be melted in an iron ladle, a 'bean-sized' piece of wax placed atop until it burns away, then poured into pure water; and the mercury should be pressed through leather into a wooden bowl⁵². These procedures for removing impurities are standard for their time, and are mentioned by other authors⁵³; however, Khunrath cites *De speculi constellatione* directly when he states that the purification of each metal should commence in the hour of the planet to which it corresponds, and that the good or bad aspect of the planets should also be taken into account⁵⁴. Likewise, the alloy-

This ancient significance of "electrum" is specifically refuted by Dorn, *Dictionarium Theophrasti Paracelsi*, 40, and by Ruland, *Lexikon alchemiæ*, 194, both of whom nevertheless refer only to the definition of electrum given by pseudo-Paracelsus in the *Archidoxis magica*.

⁴⁹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 24; pseudo-Paracelsus, *Archidoxis magica*, 480.

⁵⁰ An acidic salt, so named because it is manufactured from the residues of wine fermentation; see Agricola, *Zwölf Bücher*, 200, n. 21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 381, n. 4.

⁵² Khunrath, *Consilium*, 24-27; the tin in question probably came from the famous mines of Cornwall.

⁵³ The purification of gold with antimony is described in Glaser, *Traité de la chymie*, 84-87; Agricola, *Zwölf Bücher*, 208-209, describes the purification of gold with lead, and the removal of impurities by immersion in an 'acidic fluid' and vinegar for 24 hours; in the *Natural History*, XXXIII.xxxii, Pliny mentions the cleaning of mercury with leather in the context of refining gold, whilst potassium hydrogen tartrate ('cream of tartar') is still used to clean metals.

⁵⁴ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 27; the 'hour' of the planet is determined by assigning each planet a number and utilising the numerical sequence 1642753. For example, if one were to work on a Sunday (something the pious Khunrath would no doubt have avoided), the possible times for commencing the purification of gold would be within the first, eighth, fifteenth and twenty-second hours of the day; for silver, the fourth, eleventh and eighteenth hours; for iron, the

ing of mercury and lead should be carried out during a conjunction of Mercury with Saturn. The resulting amalgam should then be united with the tin during a conjunction of Jupiter with either Mercury or Saturn; and so forth, until all seven metals have been alloyed into a single substance incorporating the powers of all their corresponding planets.

Khunrath's magical praxis

The fashioning of armour from the electrum of pseudo-Paracelsus is described in the *Consilium* as an act of *gamodreos*, which according to Khunrath is the 'fourth species' of the magical arts⁵⁵. We are probably dealing here with an error of the scribe, as Paracelsus himself speaks of the fourth species of magic (which he distinguishes from *nigromantia* and *necromantia*) as *gamaheos* or 'the preparation of the *gamaheu* in order to give them their power'⁵⁶. Just as a key opens a lock, a sword inflicts wounds and armour deflects stabbing and shooting, so such activities may be carried out artificially rather than naturally, invisibly rather than visibly, through the use of *gamaheu*⁵⁷. In

seventh, fourteenth and twenty-first hours; for mercury, the third, tenth, seventeenth and twenty-fourth hours; for tin, the sixth, thirteenth and twentieth hours; for copper, the second, ninth, sixteenth and twenty-third hours; and for lead, the fifth, twelfth and nineteenth hours.

⁵⁵ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 30: 'Auß dieser *Massa Metallica* müssen die *de Electro Vulcanica et Regia arma* geschmiedet werdenn und gehörenn unter *quartam spetiem artis Magicæ specialiter sumptæ/Gamodreos* genandt, welche durch hülffe der kunnst, alles das ihenige unsichtbar und *spiritualiter* thuett, was sonst die *natur* ohne dergleichenn *adhibirte* kunnst, sichtbar und *Corporaliter* zuthuen vermagk'.

⁵⁶ Paracelsus, *Astronomia magna*, 78: 'bereitung der *gamaheu*, inen ire kreft zu geben'. The other categories of magic listed by Paracelsus (*ibid.*, 78, 83-85) are: (1) *Magica insignis*, or 'the interpretation of supernatural stars'—the example given is the star from the East that accompanied Christ's birth, which appeared to be a "natural" body just as Christ appeared to others as an ordinary human; both were in fact supernatural entities, and the *magi* interpret such heavenly signs just as the apostles were able to recognise Christ. (2) *Magica transfigurativa*, or the transformation of one living body into another, 'just as Christ was transfigured and illuminated like the sun'. (3) *Magia characteralis*, or 'the preparation of characters and similar blessings'—this is the art of constructing words which impart the same heavenly power when spoken as herbs do when administered by the physician. (4) *Altera in alteram*, or the preparation of images with the power to lame, blind or bring impotence; just as Nature does these things naturally, so the *magus* can bring them about by artifice. (5) *Ars cabalistica*, which is idiosyncratically interpreted as an art allowing the magus to hear a voice from across the oceans, or allowing someone in the West to hold a conversation with someone in the East (the ostensible theme of the 3rd book of Trithemius' *Steganographia* is called to mind here); it is also the art of accelerating the speed of living beings such as horses and messengers.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 84: 'Also weiter merkent, das die viert species lernet *gamaheu* machen, welche alles das tun, das die natürlichen instrumenta vermögen. Als ein schlüssel tut ein schloß auf, ein

his *Dictionarium Theophrasti Paracelsi* (1584) Gerhard Dorn speaks of *gamohææ* as ‘images which have been received from supercelestial influences and which have been imprinted’⁵⁸; Peuckert understands *gamaheu* as German *gemmen* or engraved stones⁵⁹. The word seems in any case to be related to Latin *gemma* in the senses of either “gem” or “signet” and the cognate Greek γέμω, ‘to be filled with’. We are concerned here with a form of talismanic magic, which is described by Paracelsus in the following way:

That which Nature is able to accomplish in a discrete body can also be accomplished by man; namely, that he can bring to pass the same operations as Conception tends to do by itself. Hence an image, which has neither flesh nor blood, is and becomes akin to a comet; hence also words and characters are as effective as medicine; hence herbs and *gamaheu* can be employed; and hence such subjects are akin to the planets and their occupants, and also to all the stars of the firmament. And you should not be astonished that a man is able to achieve such a thing, because [if] Scripture states ‘you are Gods’, [then] so much more are we stars; [if] ‘we are the sons of the most High’, [then] so much greater is our power over the stars⁶⁰. For it is borne out that the stars are subject to human artifice, and man can bring the stars down into another body [so that] it is then akin to the stars⁶¹.

schwert huet wunden, ein harnisch beschirmt vor stechen und schießen. Also vermag die vierte species magicæ artis solchs zu tun durch kunst unsichtbar, das die natur sichtbar vermag. Und diese species heißt mit irem rechten namen gamaheos’.

⁵⁸ Dorn, *Dictionarium Theophrasti Paracelsi*, 45-46: ‘Gamohææ sunt imagines, ex influentia supercelesti conceptæ, et impressæ’. “Supercelestial” refers to the realm of Ideas beyond the circles of the celestial stars and planets, i.e. the empyrean heaven.

⁵⁹ Paracelsus, *Werke*, III, 111.

⁶⁰ Cf. John 10.34: ‘Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods?’”; and Psalms 82.6-7: ‘I say, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like men, and fall like any prince”’. That humans have power over the stars Paracelsus explains in another place with reference to Psalms 8.6-8, ‘you have put all things under his feet . . . the birds of the heavens, the fish of the waters’; Paracelsus, *Astronomia magna*, 135; compare also p. 120, ‘. . . darumb wir bilich götter geheißen werden und söne des allerhöchsten. Dan in uns ist das liecht der natur und das liecht ist got’.

⁶¹ Paracelsus, *Astronomia magna*, 128-129: ‘. . . was die natur vermag in einem frembden corpus zu volbringen, das vermag auch der mensch, das er die selbigen operationes dahin mag bringen, da die conception hingebracht mag werden. Also das ein bilt, das weder fleisch noch blut hat, einem kometen gleich ist und wird, das auch die wörter und characteres kraft haben, so wol als arzney, das die kreuter und gamaheu dahin gebracht mögen werden, das solche subiecta gleich seind den planeten und iren inwonern, auch dem ganzen gestirn des firmaments. Und das solt ir euch nicht verwundern, das ein mensch solches mag zu wegen bringen, dan wie die geschrift sagt, ir seit götter, vil mer seint wir das gestirn, seind wir söne des höchsten alle, vil mer seind wir dester gewaltiger uber das gestirn. Dan also beweret es sich, das das gestirn in des menschen kunst stehet und mag sie herab bringen in ein ander corpus und dasselbig ist wie das gestirn’.

Paracelsus alludes here to the manner in which the virtues of the planets and fixed stars—or the virtues of their ruling angels or intelligences—are imbued at astrologically propitious times in images, words and objects, whence an action of sympathy or antipathy proceeds from them. His words concerning humans *as* stars appear to be a reference to the sidereal body by which celestial influence is received and magic effected in the Paracelsian system⁶²; they might also be compared with Ficino's belief that images of the macrocosm, including the heavenly bodies, reside in the human soul and sympathetically provide our ability to grasp the structure of things in the world⁶³. In his *Consilium* Khunrath has recourse to a similar conception when he speaks of the influence of 'inner microcosmic stars' or 'mental impressions', without which 'no result can be achieved in the art of the magicians'⁶⁴.

Strictly speaking, the use of *gamaheos* in the *Consilium* is limited to the imprinting of certain characters on the electrum armour once it has been forged. In his *De occulta philosophia* Agrippa von Nettesheim sets out the magic squares and characters which express 'the divine order of celestial numbers impressed upon the heavenly entities by the ideas of the divine mind through the order/structure of the world soul'⁶⁵; concerning the character given for Mars, we are told that if it is engraved upon an iron plate or a sword when Mars is in a favourable aspect it will make a man seem 'terrible to his enemies' and grant him victory over them⁶⁶. In his *Consilium*

⁶² Paracelsus, *Astronomia magna*, 17 ff., 122.

⁶³ Ficino, *De amore*, V.4; Marcel (ed.), *Commentaire*, 185: '... Quamobrem hec mundi pictura quam cernimus universa in angelis et animis lucet expressior. In illis enim sphere cuiusque figura, solis luna et siderum reliquorum, elementorum quoque lapidum, arborum, animalium singulorum. Picture huiusmodi in angelis, exemplaria et idee, in animis, rationes et notiones, in orbis materia, forme atque imagines a Platonis nominantur. Clare quidem in orbe, clariores in animo, in angeli mente clarissime'.

⁶⁴ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 36: 'Sonderlich aber soltu keinesweges vergessenn *Cooperation* oder mitwirkung *Microcosmischen* innerlichen gestirnes, *astrorum coeli Microcosmi* darneben anzuwenden, ohne welche in *arte Magicorum* man zu keinem vollenkommen ende gereichen noch kommen kann'; cf. Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae*, 22: 'HOC, CELUM SECUNDUM, sublime; Regio purè ætherea. HOC, Solem, Lunam et Stellas habet; revera etiam PRIMUM et Inferius (suo modo) astra sua: id quod sciunt atque testantur Sapientes'.

⁶⁵ Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, II.22: 'Traduntur insuper a magis quaedam numerorum mensulae, planetis septem distributae, quas planetarum sacras tabulas vocant, multis admodum magnisque coelestium virtutibus insignitas, quatenus repraesentant divinam illam coelestium numerorum rationem divinae mentis ideis per rationem animae mundi coelestibus impressam...'; (Lyon edition, 215-216).

⁶⁶ Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, II.22: 'Haec fortunato Marte in lamina ferrea aut ense sculpta, potentem facit in bello, et iudiciis, et petitionibus, et terribilem adversariis suis, et victoriam praestat adversus hostes'; *ibid.*, 217.

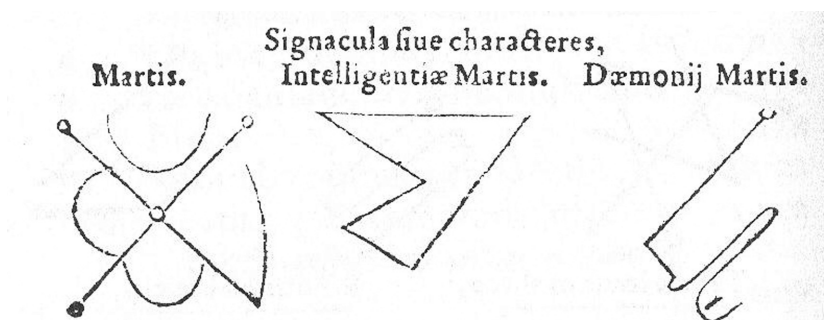


Fig. 2. The characters of Mars given in Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*, II.22 (with permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München).

Khunrath accordingly instructs those who are so inclined to imprint on the front of the armour with a steel stamp the characters of Mars, of its intelligence (Graphiel)⁶⁷ and of its daemon (Barzabel)⁶⁸ given by Agrippa. This should be done when Mars is ascendant in the second house of Aries, and again when Mars is ascendant in the first house of Scorpio⁶⁹.

With regard to the actual forging of the electrum armour, we are not dealing with *gamaheos* in the narrower sense of talismanic magic, but rather with the power of words to convey celestial virtue—which might still be understood in terms of the ‘imprinting of supercelestial images’ in the sense of Dorn’s definition. Khunrath supplies his readers with a Latin incantation or enchantment which is to be recited during the process of fashioning armour from the *electrum magicum*, and here it is the thought of Agrippa—and hence

⁶⁷ That is, the divinely instituted ruler of the planet. The Aristotelian term “intelligence” is equivalent to the planetary angel of Christian Neoplatonism.

⁶⁸ For Agrippa, as for Ficino before him, daemons formed a bridge between the human being and the stars, or the intelligences (in the Aristotelian sense) ruling the stars: see Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, II.21; Ficino, *De vita*, III.1. Agrippa also follows Ficino in distinguishing between daemons of nativity and daemons of profession: *De occulta philosophia*, II.22; *De vita* III.23. In both authors’ works, as in the work of Khunrath, the Neoplatonic individual daemon or genius is equivalent to the “guardian angel” of orthodox Christianity.

⁶⁹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 41–42: ‘Wehr lust darzu hette, wan Mars in Ascendente in Secunda Arietis facie ist, Tabulam (characteristicam, unnd dan auch wan Mars wiederumb in Ascendente in I. Scorpionis facie ist, Characteres Martis, So lib: 2 occultæ Philosoph: H. C. Agrippæ Cap: 22: gemahlet stehenn, cum pistillo chalybeo, den armis Vorne herab imprimire’.

the thought of his main source, Ficino—which comes to the fore. In his discourse on incantations Agrippa describes the manner in which the magician draws down the virtues of the stars and their intelligences by reciting verses expressing the star's specific qualities. He writes:

Therefore, in composing verses and orations for attracting the virtue of any particular star or its deity, you must diligently consider what virtues, effects and operations the star contains in itself, and instil them in the verses by praising, extolling, amplifying, and supplying those things which a star of this kind normally conveys and infuses⁷⁰.

The work of an incantation is achieved through 'the greatest impetuous force of the imagination', and through the magician's use of 'a most pure, harmonious, warm, breathing living spirit', which bears 'motion, influence and significance'⁷¹. Agrippa goes on to say that magicians are wont to impart the said celestial virtues into those objects which they wish to enchant by breathing (*afflare, inspirare, inhalare*) the words of the verses into or onto them⁷². Thus Khunrath instructs the worker to repeatedly breathe (*inspirare, anhauchen*) his incantation into or onto the armour during its production. That the use of the magical imagination involves the production of an altered state of consciousness is well illustrated by Khunrath's direction to utter the verses repetitively 'with an angry, cruel, warlike voice' and a 'savage, fierce, furious expression'⁷³. Just how the armour is infused with the qualities of warlike Mars is evident in the words of the incantation:

⁷⁰ Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, I.71: 'In componendis itaque carminibus et orationibus pro attrahenda stellae aut numinis alicuius virtute, oportet diligenter considerare quas in se quaelibet stella continet virtutes, effectus et operationes, atque haec carminibus inserere laudando, extollendo, ampliando, exornando, quae solet stella huiusmodi afferre et influere'; (Lyon edition, 142).

⁷¹ Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, I.71: 'Eiusmodi itaque carmina aptè atque ritè ad stellarum normam composita intellectu sensuque plenissima, vehementi affectu opportunè pronuntiata, tum secundum eorum articulorum numerum et proportionem, atque secundum formam ex articulis resultantem unà, atque per imaginationis impetum vim maximam conspirant in incantante, atque subinde traiciunt in rem incantatam ad illam ligandam, aut dirigendam, quorsum affectus sermonesque incantantis intenduntur. Instrumentum vero ipsum incantantium est spiritus quidam purissimus, harmonicus, calens, spirans, vivens, motum, affectum, significatum secum ferens, suis articulis compositus, praeditus sensu, ratione denique conceptus . . .'; (Lyon edition, 143).

⁷² Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, I.71: 'Atque ideo solent Magi incantantes res simul afflare, et verba carminis inhalare, ceu virtutem ipso spiritu inspirare, ut sic tota animae virtus dirigatur in rem incantatam ad suscipiendam dictam virtutem dispositam' (Lyon edition, 143).

⁷³ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 38.

By breathing⁷⁴ often into the Electrum,
 and by a martial irradiation⁷⁵ [of the Electrum] with basilisk eyes⁷⁶,
 I, rich Chaerus⁷⁷, fashion the armour for noble Mars which no force can harm,
 neither fire ([as] of the bombard)⁷⁸,
 nor blade, nor waters; but let there be dread and fear,
 if ever men who wish to do me injury behold this armour, so it will lend me a
 terrible power.

Breathe the following [words] quite powerfully into or onto the work three times.

As the fierce wolf frightens the placid lamb,
 As the timid deer is terrified by the savage Molossian hound⁷⁹,
 So, too, let this armour strike fear in men.

Breathe onto the work again three times, as before.

Whichever bold mortal seeks to confront this armour,
 He will not be able to stand against me when my mind is resolute;
 Whosoever threatens us, you will give them useless missiles.

Now breathe into the work once again during the forming [of the armour], as before.

Even as this Electrum is softened by the fierce fire,
 Even as this Electrum is beaten with repeated blows,
 So when this armour is seen, the heart is melted by it,
 [And] so this completed work shall frustrate all arms⁸⁰.

⁷⁴ The ablative gerund *inspirando*, from *inspiro*, has the meaning not only of breathing onto something, but also of infusing it with force.

⁷⁵ Like *inspirando*, *irradiando* again has the connotation of infusing or imbuing.

⁷⁶ In other words, the smith imbues the armour with the power of the basilisk. In the sixteenth century the term basilisk also referred to a powerful type of cannon.

⁷⁷ The reference here seems to be to Charon, the ferryman at the river crossing to Hades, who has grown rich with the many *oboli* (coins) he has received from the dead thanks to the electrum armour. On the other hand, *Chaerus* might be another error of the scribe—for it was Croesus who was proverbially rich, and who also offered up a golden shield to Athena (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, X.8.7). Khunrath alludes to the famed king and his wealth in another manuscript ('Signatura Magnesiae Henr. Kunr.', Kassel, Murhardsche Bibliothek und Landesbibliothek, MS 8° chem. 25, f. 136 verso). Whilst an identification with Croesus within this incantation is a little odd, perhaps Khunrath felt an affinity for a man with treasures heaped with gold. On this matter, see the amusing story in Herodotus, *The Histories*, VI.125, 1-5.

⁷⁸ A type of cannon.

⁷⁹ A breed of hunting dog originally from the Greek province of Molossus.

⁸⁰ *Artus* here appears to have the general meaning of "weapons", but perhaps also of "limbs" in the magical sense of hindering the opponent's movement. The original text (Khunrath, *Consilium*, 38-40) runs as follows: '*Electrum saepius inspirando, oculisque/ Basilisceis Martialiter irradiando./ Chærus ego divis, generoso fabrico Marti./ Arma quibus possit vis nulla nocere, nec ignis (Bombardæ)/ Nec ferrum, nec aquæ sed sint terror timorque/ Si quando hæc videant, homines mihi damnum parcentes/ Uti hæc horribili mihi fiant arma vigore./ Volgens inspirare oder anhauche das werck zimblich starck dreimahl, dicendo./ Ut Lupus imbelles*

The fact that this armour is imbued with 'basilisk eyes' gives us a clue as to the manner of its operation; for the mythical basilisk, a serpent born 'contrary to nature' from the egg of a cockerel, has the power to immobilise or kill its prey with its very gaze⁸¹. Thus through the *sighting* of the armour alone the enemy is divested of his power—a notion reminiscent of the gorgon's head which commonly adorned the shields and breastplates of Greek and Roman warriors, and which was still to be seen upon ceremonial armour in Khunrath's time⁸². Khunrath describes this magical property with the word *fascinatio*, or bewitchment, and cites as evidence Homer's description of Achilles' warriors, the Myrmidons, who 'shook with fear' at the sight of their leader's armour, and 'could not endure to look at it'⁸³. That such sighting constitutes a form of contact with the magical object is evident from Khunrath's mention of a certain 'spirit' or 'soul' which 'proceeds forth in splendour' from the armour and 'aggressively enters the adversaries, hindering their operation'⁸⁴.

The exact nature of this "spirit" is clarified by Agrippa in his account of the art of bewitchment (*fascinatio*). He follows Ficino's *De amore* (and ultimately Aristotle) when he describes a pure, clear, subtle 'spiritual vapour' generated by the warmth of the heart from the blood, which proceeds in rays from the eyes of the bewitcher through the eyes of their victim, and thence to their heart⁸⁵. This vapour is stirred up by a 'strong imagination', and possesses the power of contagion, whereby a victim may be infected with the 'corrupted blood' of the bewitcher⁸⁶. That such a power of enchantment may

violentus territat agnos,/ Ut timidus saevos exhorret dama molossos,/ Sic haec incutiant mortalibus arma timorem./ Anhauche das werck wiederumb dreimahl Wie Vor, dicendo./ Non mihi praesenti poterit consistere mente,/ Quicunque his armis, audax vult obvius ire/ Irrita tela dabis, quicunque minabere nobis./ Itzt inspirire das wergk noch einmahl unter dem schneiden, wie zuvor, dicendo./ Hoc veluti rapido Electrum mollescit ab igne,/ Hoc veluti crebro, Electrum contundit ictu./ Sic his conspectis liquantur pectora ab armis,/ Sic opus hoc Cunctos foelix frustrabitur artus'.

⁸¹ Agricola, *Zwölf Bücher*, 536. Ficino, *De vita* III.16, mentions this power of the basilisk in relation to *fascinatio*; Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.4.40 also speaks of serpents fascinating humans as an analogy for magical influence.

⁸² See, for example, the Milanese armour made for Emperor Charles V held at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

⁸³ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 20-21; Homer, *Iliad*, XIX.15.

⁸⁴ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 30-31: 'Entis huius spiritus seu anima/ magnefice [sic] egreditur et ingreditur homines hostiliter adversantes/ et fascinat ipsos naturaliter, impeditque illorum operationes mirabiliter'.

⁸⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *De insomniis*, II.459.

⁸⁶ Ficino, *De amore* VII.4; Marcel (ed.), *Commentaire*, 246ff.; Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia* I.50: 'Fascinatio est ligatio, quae ex spiritu fascinantis per oculos fascinati ad cor ipsius ingressa pervenit. Fascinationis autem instrumentum spiritus est, scilicet vapor quidam purus, lucidus,

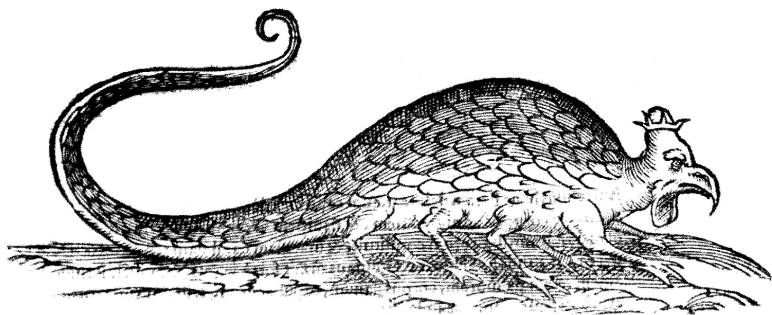


Fig. 3. A basilisk from Ulysses Aldovrandi's *Serpentum et draconum historiae libri duo*, Bologna 1640, p. 363. With permission of the Universitätsbibliothek München.

be instilled in objects is made clear by Agrippa, who goes on to speak of the use by witches of an eye ointment which strikes fear in the victim, and which is made from the eyes of the wolf⁸⁷. Khunrath also mentions the power of the wolf's gaze to bewitch by means of 'spiritual rays of vision', leaving its prey unable to cry out for help. This power has been observed by many a hunter and wanderer, Khunrath declares, and is akin to the action of his electrum armour. Accordingly, the straps of the armour should be made of wolf's skin, or the skin of the hyena, which possesses a similar magical property. Anyone who doubts that the parts of a dead animal might still be active in this regard is directed to Agrippa's testimony on the matter⁸⁸.

subtilis, a cordis calore ex puriori sanguine generatus: hic similes sibi radios per oculos semper emittit: radii isti emissi vaporem spiritualem secum ferunt: vapor ille sanguinem, sicut apparet in lippis ac rubentibus oculis, cuius radius usque ad obvios spectantis oculos emissus, vaporem una secum corrupti sanguinis trahit, cuius contagione cogit spectantis oculos morbo simili laborare. Sic patefactus, et in aliquem intentus oculus cum forti imaginatione pro suorum radiorum aculeis, qui spiritus vehicula sunt, ipsos in adversos oculos iaculatur: qui quidem lentus spiritus fascinati diverberans oculos, cum a percutientis corde incitatur, percussi praecordia, tanquam regionem propriam sortitus, cor vulnerat, et spiritum inficit peregrinus hic spiritus' (Lyon edition, 90-91).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, I.50.

⁸⁸ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 41-42: 'Die Riemen, domit man die Rustung oder Harnisch zusammenheftet, sollenn sein *de pelle Hiænae*, die dan *per Mercatores ex illis Regionibus* überkommen werdenn konnenn. Im mangell aber dieser, *sufficit tibi corium Lupi, q. animal est Martiale*: Dann es habenn Jägers unnd wandersleute offtmals erfahrenn, das etzliche Wolfe mit den *radiis spirituum Visivorum* [sic] (gleich dem thiere *Hiæna*) dieselbigenn dermassenn *fascinirt* habenn, das sie auch gahr heischen wordenn, unnd nicht laut schreijenn, noch umb hulfte habenn rueffenn konnenn, sonderlich, wann die Wolfe dem Menschenn ehr seint ansichtigk wordenn, als die Menschen die Wolfe, *Maro, Ecloga 9* erwehnet hievon auch etwas. *Vox quoque Moerim/ lam fugit, Lupi Merim videre priores*. Daß aber solche crafft, *operation*, oder Werck ungenn

Long passages of the *Consilium* are devoted to enumerating various objects which operate in a similar manner to the electrum armour of Achilles. In these passages we can discern the many ways in which magical virtue can be transmitted—not only by vision, but also through sound, through similitude or likeness of form, and through consumption. Amongst the herbs mentioned in this regard are the *Siegwurtz* or Sword Lily, which by virtue of its form magically deprives weapons of their sharpness⁸⁹; the *Eberwurtz* or Carline Thistle, which ‘magnetically’ divests animals and humans alike of their vital power⁹⁰; and the *Pardalianches* or Leopard’s Bane, which being formed in the shape of a scorpion drains that very creature of its power⁹¹. The latter belief is ultimately drawn from the first-century Greek botanist Dioscorides, who describes the Leopard Bane’s antipathy with the scorpion in his *De materia medica*, a work which remained one of the most important sources of herbal lore throughout the medieval and early modern periods⁹².

A good idea of the sources of both Khunrath’s botanical knowledge and his doctrine of signatures can be garnered from his doctoral theses, *De signatura rerum naturalium theses* (1588), in which he mentions standard ancient authorities such as Galen, Pliny and Dioscorides, as well as popular

bleibenn konnenn in den *partibus* der thieren, nach ihrem Todt unnd absterbenn, findet man beweiß genuessamb, *Cap: 18 Lib: I. occulta Philo: H. C. Agrippæ*. The citation is from Virgil’s *Eclogues*, 9.53–54.

⁸⁹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 32: ‘*Alcæa*, Sieg- oder Pantzerwurtz, benimbt *Magicē* den waffenn ihre scharffe, das sie das menschliche fleisch nicht durchschneidenn noch beschedigen können’. The plant referred to is probably *Gladiolus Palustris*; one might imagine that the Sword Lily or *Gladiolus* would be useful in this regard due to its sword-shaped leaves. Nevertheless, its tubercule possesses a net-like involucre, which seems to have been compared by the common folk to a coat of mail: *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, s.v. ‘Siegwurz’.

⁹⁰ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 31–32: ‘Man betrachte nur *Chamaelem nigrum* oder Eberwurtz, nach ihrer *exaltation* und Balsamischer zeit gesamblet: Dieselbige nimbt einem anderen Menschen unnd Vihe, *Magnetice*, seine gesundheitstercke unnd guete Natur, und gibts *Nymphidischer*weiße deme, den ihr glantz begreift wie den ihenigen, so mit Roß lauffenn und Rennen sich über nicht unwissent. Entzeucht auch solcher gestaltd den fruchtbaren Leuten ihre krafft, kinder zu zeugen, unnd pflantzet darkegen einem anderen unfruchtbarenn frembden ein’.

⁹¹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 31: ‘So liegen auch die *Scorpionen* mit der wurtzell des warnn *Aconiti Pardalianchis*, so gestaltd ist wie ein *Scorpion*, beruhert, krafftlos und fur todt darnieder’. The plant’s name is from the Greek *παρδαλιάχης*, a poisonous plant so called for its power to asphyxiate the panther. This is the species *Doronicum Pardalianches*, known commonly as Leopard’s Bane, as the relation of the plant’s leaves to its flowers could imaginatively be construed as taking the form of a scorpion. It is only mildly poisonous, though the fact that it is known to the Indians as a useful aid in the event of scorpion stings confirms its identity, as well as pointing to the prevalence of the lore relating to it. See the *Glossary of Indian Medicinal Plants*, 101.

⁹² Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, IV.77.

sixteenth-century authors on natural history such as Lemnius, Mattioli and Fuchs⁹³. Moreover, from Khunrath's mention in his 18th thesis of a certain herb named *Scorpioides* with a seedpod resembling a scorpion's tail—recommended as a remedy against a scorpion's sting—we can deduce another, unnamed, contemporary influence on the author⁹⁴. Although Khunrath cites Galen as his source for this passage, in his *De simplicium medicamentorum facultatibus* Galen only mentions the drying and warming humoral effects of *Scorpioides*⁹⁵. The true source of Khunrath's words on the plant is given belated recognition in the *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae*. There Khunrath declares that he publicly defended the doctrine of signatures for the doctoral degree he received on the 24th of August 1588 in Basel, and boasts that he was the first to do so after Paracelsus, as Giambattista della Porta's *Phytognomonica* (1588) was not known in Germany at that time⁹⁶. The first German edition of della Porta's work on the sympathetic and antipathetic virtues of plants was published in Frankfurt in 1591; judging by the manifest similarity of his words on *Scorpioides* with those of della Porta⁹⁷, it seems likely that Khunrath read the Latin version of the *Phytognomonica* in the year he defended his doctorate, and that it was an important influence on his thought at this early stage of his development.

As in the case of the Carline Thistle, magnetism is mentioned by Khunrath as an explanatory principle for sympathetic and antipathetic action in relation to a ring made of *electrum magicum*. The said ring has the ability to alleviate epileptic fits, and reveals hidden sicknesses by 'sweating' and becoming disfigured when worn—this, according to Khunrath, occurs through

⁹³ The Dutch physician Levinus Lemnius (1505-1568) was the author of a popular cornucopia of extraordinary natural phenomena, *De miraculis occultis naturae libri IIII*; the German physician and botanist Leonhart Fuchs (1501-1566) attempted to accurately identify the plants mentioned by Dioscorides and Galen in his well-illustrated *De historia stirpium commentarii* (1542); and the Italian Pierandrea Mattioli (1500-1577) wrote a commentary on Dioscorides, *Commentarii in sex libros Pedacii Dioscorides Anazarbei De medica materia* (1544), which was a standard botanical text of its time.

⁹⁴ Khunrath, *De signatura rerum*, 7.

⁹⁵ Galen, *De simplicibus*, VIII: 'Scorpioides excalfacit ordine tertio, desiccat secundo' (Paris 1543 edition, 164).

⁹⁶ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum*, 17.

⁹⁷ Khunrath, *De signatura rerum*, 7: 'Scorpioides herbula est foliis paucis, semine caudae scorpionis effigie: illita scorpionum ictibus, teste Gal. lib. 8. simpl. med. praesentaneo est auxilio'; della Porta, *Phytognomonica*, 314: 'Scorpioides herbula est, caudae scorpionis effigie; profert siquidem quaedam siliquosa cornicula, scorpionis caudae instar inflexa, et sic apud omnes scorpioides nomen obtinuit: illita scorpionum ictibus praesentaneo est auxilio, ex Dioscoridae'. See Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, IV.192.



Fig. 4. Three types of *Scorpoides* from della Porta's *Phytognomonica*, Rouen 1650, p. 315. On the right *Heliotropium Europaeum*, or the European Turnsole, is portrayed; on the left is *Coronilla Scorpoides* or the Annual Scorpion Vetch. With permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München.

the operation of a 'magnetic virtue' or 'incomprehensible soul', which is also to be found in hippo tusks, fossilised sea urchins and elderberries grown in putrefied sparrow carcasses⁹⁸. The quality of magnets was often held up as

⁹⁸ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 14-15: 'Daher so man einen solchen ringk einen *Epileptischen* an den großen finger gesteckt, in dem allerheftigsten *Paroxismo*, ist der *Paroxismus* als baldt aus gewesen, und der fallende aufgetaucht. So haben wir auch gesehen und selbst erfahren, dass ein solcher ringe, so ehr am Hertzfinger getragen wirt, und sich im menschen eine verborgene kranckheit eröffnen will, hat der ringk auch angefangen zu schwitzenn, Unnd wirt von seinem grossen mitleiden *maculirt* unnd ungestaltet. So ist auch weiter zuwissen, das unser *Electrum* allen bösen Geistern widerwertigk ist. Den in unserm *Electro* ligt verborgen himlische wirckung und die *Influentzen* aller *Planetenn*. Solches geschieht auch am Krötenstein, *qui gestat etiam Principibus* . . . Der im *Maio* ausgegrabene *Acorus aquaticus* oder rothe schwertelwurtz, und dens *Equimarini* so von Lißbona aus Portugal in *Germanien* gebracht wirt, ist in *dysenteria et spasmo in Epilepsia* vielmahl sehr krefftigk befunden. Die in ihrer Balsamischen zeit colligirte *paeonien* würtzell, *Item* die Hollunder so *ex passeris Epileptici cadavere putrefacto* auf der weiden gewachsen, und solches alles *Virtute magnetis vegetabilis aut Anima incomprehensibili* sind eben derselbigenn Krafft'. Cf. pseudo-Paracelsus, *Archidoxis magica*, 487.

an edifying example of occult virtue by the Renaissance *magi*. *Fascinatio*, for example, is likened by Ficino to the operation of a magnet, whereby a quality is lent from one object to another and attraction or repulsion follows sympathetically⁹⁹. Amongst the more amusing examples given by Khunrath in this regard is his description of rat-catching; by playing a pipe made of the vertebrae of the ‘rat king’, or by beating on a little drum spanned with his skin, a man is able to draw mice and rats helplessly towards him (hence the folktale of the pied piper of Hamelin or Hameln)¹⁰⁰. An antipathetic action of the same order is given by Khunrath in his words concerning Count Žižca, leader of the fifteenth-century Hussite rebellion in Bohemia, who allegedly ordered that a drum be made of his skin upon his death¹⁰¹. When marching into battle against the imperial armies arrayed against them, the rebels beat on this drum and sent their foes fleeing—and Khunrath’s glowing depiction of this legendary feat leaves us in no doubt as to his strongly Protestant leanings. That sound can transmit the subtle magical virtue in question is also made evident by Khunrath’s mention of *olifant*, the famed horn of the hero Roland from the medieval *Chanson de Roland*¹⁰².

⁹⁹ Ficino, *De amore* VII.4; Marcel (ed.), *Commentaire*, 249; see also Agrippa’s explanatory use of magnetism in *De occulta philosophia*, 1.16 (Lyon edition, 32). The extraordinary experimental scientist William Gilbert stated that Agrippa only repeated ‘the figments of ravings of others’ with regard to the lodestone (magnetite). Ficino was likewise ‘led astray by certain erroneous physical systems, and having made no magnetical experiments . . . old-womanishly dreamt the things that were not’. One of these “dreams” of Ficino was his ascription of the lodestone’s magnetic power to the constellation Ursa, the potency of which is transferred by the lodestone to iron; likewise, Lucas Gauricus held that the attraction of the compass could be explained by the existence of a lodestone beneath the tail of Ursa Major. Agrippa’s opinion that the lodestone does not attract iron when in the presence of a diamond, which originally stems from Pliny, *Natural History* XXXVII.15, is also debunked by Gilbert. See Gilbert, *De magnete*, 2-6, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 32-33: ‘Sollenn doch alle Meusen und Ratten, so das gethöne oder schall des Pfeifleins vom beinlein aus des Ratten Königs rucken gemacht, und auch des drumbleins Oder Peuckleins, mit des Ratten Könings fehl uberspannet, hören, dermassen gehorsamen, das sie demselbigen klang oder schall nachlauffenn, unnd darbei sich versammeln mussenn’.

¹⁰¹ The legend is mentioned by Montaigne, *Essais*, 13-14. Žižca was the first commander to employ firearms decisively on the battlefield; on this matter see Williams, *The Knight and the Blast Furnace*, 857-859.

¹⁰² Khunrath, *Consilium*, 20: ‘Diß ist geschehenn aus geheimber Natural auch Magischen Krafft unnd *fascination*, gleich wie auch das Hussittenn Hauptmans undt Krieges Obersten des *SISCHREN* haudt in Behmen uber die Trummell gespannt, denn feinden eine furcht einjagte unnd also sie fluchtigk unnd Siegloß machte. Das auch ebendergleichen *effectus* gefolget sei auch daß gethöne oder schall *Rolandi* horn *olivant* genandt, liset man in glaubwürdigen *Historien*’.

Natural magic, Ficino and Khunrath's cosmology

The *Consilium* is unique amongst Heinrich Khunrath's various printed works and manuscripts for the insight it grants us into his magical practice. The bulk of his corpus is concerned with various problems of alchemy, although the famous *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* (1595, reprinted in an expanded edition in 1609) counts amongst the most powerful of early theological works. An extended commentary on the Book of Proverbs and the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, the *Amphitheatrum* presents us with a synthesis of the Neoplatonic and ancient Hebrew cosmologies which is strongly coloured by alchemical conceptions and integrates a number of Kabbalistic notions. In order to complete this sketch of Khunrath's magical practice, a brief consideration of its relation to the cosmic hierarchy portrayed in the *Amphitheatrum* is in order here.

A central element of Khunrath's cosmology is his concept of an all-pervading 'heaven' (Hebrew שָׁמַיִם, *shamayim*), which is threefold in its structure, and which can be manifested to the human senses through the work of a talented alchemist¹⁰³. *Elohim* resides with his angels in the uppermost, third or empyrean heaven¹⁰⁴, an eternal 'fiery water' composed from the upper waters, variously described as an 'impenetrable light', the quintessence, an 'aethereal fertility' and a divine water known to the alchemists. Beneath the empyrean heaven lies the firmament (רָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם, *râqîya shamayim*) or second heaven, composed of the same 'fiery water' which has been congealed into a 'solid arch' more durable than diamond, in order that it supports the upper waters and is not annihilated by the heat of its own light and fire (i.e., that of the sun, moon and stars God has placed there)¹⁰⁵. Beneath the

¹⁰³ See below, n. 106.

¹⁰⁴ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum*, 22: 'HOC, CELUM Empyreum, lucidissimum; imó, LUX, quam (tanquam rem Divinitati consentaneam) DEUS inhabitat inaccessibilis, 1. Timoth. 6.16. QUEM idcirco in ignea esse Essentia Divinus Plato ab Indorum Brachmanibus didicit, Quintamque Essentiam Divinitatis statuit mansionem'.

¹⁰⁵ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum*, 21: 'Secundò, SUPERIUS, non mixtum Elementis eorundemque superfluitatibus, sed per et in se (animatum tamen NATURA) congelavit, solidavit, corpus durum ac solidum constituit atque effecit, hoc est, firmavit . . . Unde Latini FIRMAMENTUM, Germani eine Veste rectè dixerunt: nam quovis ære et adamante est durior et durabilior; Celi solidissimi, quasi ære, fusi sunt, Iob. 37.18 quare nec Lucis aut Ignis sui calore, nec motus pernecitate imminutionem patitur, nedum, antè diem novissimum DOMINI, consumatur . . . Et fecit DEUS Firmamentum, (ut sit tanquam firmissima fornix, quam DEUS subjecit aquis, et per quam retineret eas in sublimi) divisitque aquas, quæ erant sub Firmamento, ab his quæ erant super Firmamentum'.

firmament lies a 'great empty space' filled with 'watery humours' and the vapours which daily rise from the lower regions—the site of a condensation and rarefaction akin to that which takes place in the alchemical vessel. The first or inferior heaven is also composed of the same 'fiery water' as those above it, but it interpenetrates and is mixed with the material sublunary world which God has created from the *prima materia* (Chaos, Abyss)¹⁰⁶. Here too there are stars, Khunrath tells us, which sympathetically follow the motion of the upper stars—a reference to the *scintilla* which were scattered throughout 'the great mass of the *prima materia*' by the breath of God (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, *rûwach ʔlôhîm*)¹⁰⁷. All earthly things have been lent their forms or *signatura* by God through *rûwach ʔlôhîm*, a 'spirit' or 'vapour' which is 'an emanation of primeval archetypes or patterns' conceived in the mind of God¹⁰⁸. This *rûwach ʔlôhîm* is also described as 'Nature itself' and the *anima mundi*; as pure form it can only be united with its opposite (matter) through the medium of heaven, *shâmayim*, which union is described in sexual terms as the pouring forth of semen and warmth by God into virginal matter¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hamburg 1595 edition), Emblem 3, Question 5; in the extended 1609 edition the text surrounding the third emblem has been removed and placed as an appendix to the main body of the work. Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hanau 1609 edition), Section 2, 196: 'Quid est Cælum? CÆLUM est SPIRITUS ÆTHEREUS corporalis, vel, corpus æthereum spirituale, corruptioni non obnoxium, totius Mundi machinam permeans: superius, VERBO DOMINI, firmatum, hinc FIRMAMENTUM; inferius, massæ sublunari, toti incorporatum: Unius eiusdemque et essentiae et substantiae Cælum unum, id quod inferius, et id, quod superius. Illud, tamen, labore Physicochemiæ sagaci, in usum hominum, ad sensum potest manifestari atque tractari'.

¹⁰⁷ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hamburg 1595 edition), 22: 'HOC, CELUM SECUNDUM, sublime; Regio purè ætherea. HOC, Solem, Lunam et Stellas habet; revera etiam PRIMUM et Inferius (suo modo) astra sua: id quod sciunt atque testantur Sapientes. Motu harmoniaco sive sympathico (erga se invicem) movetur utrumque: id quod inferius, sicut id quod est superius, et contra'; Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hamburg 1595 edition), Emblem 3, Question 4; Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hanau 1609 edition), Section 2, 195: 'UNUS (essentia et numero) hic DEI Spiritus est; una, Universitatis perspicuæ et corporeæ huius unius, Anima catholica, πολυποίκιλος tamen, h.e. multiformis (Sap. 7,22. Ephes. 3,10) et variæ eius radii atque SCINTILLÆ, per totius ingentem, materiei primæ massæ, molem, hinc inde dispersæ ac dissipatæ . . . '.

¹⁰⁸ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hamburg 1595 edition), Emblem 3, Question 4; Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hanau 1609 edition), Section 2, 195: 'RUACH ELOHIM, est SPIRITUS, spiraculum, anhelitus רִיחַ sancti, sanctus; Vapor virtutis DEI omnipotentis atque omni tenentis, et EMANATIO quædam, emmissio, fecunditatis vitalis, primi summique motoris, vivifica atque virtuosa, è profundissimo, Divinitatis suæ recessu; IDEARUM, videlicet, sive Exemplarium, Specierum, Rationum seminariarum, primordialium et radicalium, voluntatum opificum et causarum effectricum, in ARCHETYPY, opificis summi, mente (רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ) Hhohmah in SAPIENTIA, Bonitate eius, causante eas) conceptarum atque præexistentium, rerum omnium, in Mundo, postea futuro, producendarum et fiendarum'.

¹⁰⁹ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hamburg 1595 edition), Emblem 3, Question 6; Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hanau 1609 edition), Section 2, 197: 'RUACH ELOHIM (descendendo demit-

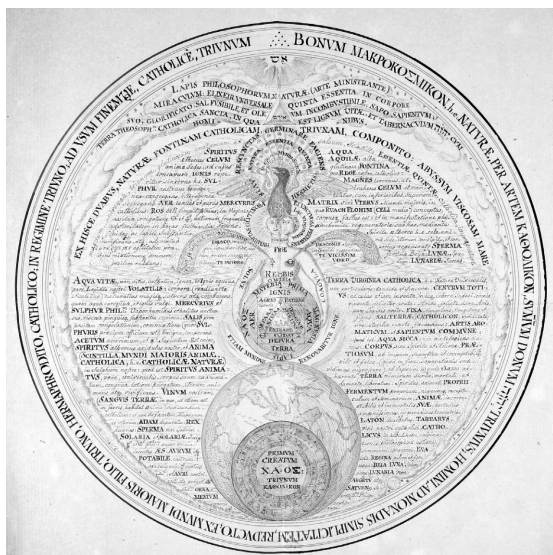


Figure 5: The relation of things earthly to heavenly, from Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* (copied from the 1609 edition). ULB Darmstadt, Ms. 3263 (with permission of the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt).

Khunrath compares the influence of the celestial bodies on objects in the inferior world with the cosmogonic operation of *rûwach ʔlôhîm* and its medium, *shâmayim*. We are told that this comparison is not to be understood in the vulgar sense, i.e. that the relation should be understood as one of correspondence rather than identity. The animating light and heat of the celestial bodies is therefore ‘heaven animated by Nature’, or archetypal form and its medium, which is the drive of all earthly things, lending them movement and impelling their various effects in the macro- and microcosm¹¹⁰. The correspondence can be illustrated in the following way:

tendoque se per circumferentias partesque abditissimas omnes, et dispergendo in imum vel medietullum, Scintillas radiosve fœcunditatis suæ) ad CENTRUM usque penetrabat, in ENS illud CREATUM, totum: massamque illam sive molem ingentem, rudem, (ΧΑΟΣ) confusam atque informem, Mundi futuri seminarium, ὕλην sive materiam lutosam, VIRGINEAM, (nondum enim neque conceperat, neque produxerat antea) FORMA (semetipso) sic informavit, et ANIMA animabat, imprægnabatque purissima . . .; cf. the following footnote.

¹¹⁰ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hamburg 1595 edition), 22: ‘SCHAMAIM, hoc est, CELUM, Doctrina hac nostra genuinè expositum, saluberrimè te docebit, unde et quid sit LUX, (Hebraicè, AOR) . . . ob cuius LUCIS absentiam vel carentiam ignotum et obscurum nobis futurum erat Universum DEI opus hoc immensum: Quomodo quotidie naturaliter fiat et arte manifestetur UR sive IGNIS; Qui, cum absque calore esse nequeat, Effectum suum semper exhibet atque demonstrat CALOREM: hic, certè, in Omnibus (extat enim in Omnibus Schamaim animatum NATURA) totius Formæ ac Speciei est custos, Naturaliumque in Rebus actionum et Rerum

God → Archetypes → *rûwach ʿlôhîm* → *shâmayim* → Chaos

Celestial bodies → Light → Earthly objects

Hence Khunrath's basic cosmological conceptions are more or less identical with those of Ficino, notwithstanding his employment of the nomenclature of the Genesis creation account. *Shâmayim* is the Ficinian *spiritus mundi*, which is described in *De vita* as precisely 'heaven' and the quintessence, and which acts as the all-pervasive medium allowing the generative power of the *anima mundi* (Khunrath's *rûwach ʿlôhîm*) to act upon the lower, grosser world¹¹¹. In contrast to Agrippa, Khunrath does not emphasise the role of planetary intelligences. Thus in the *Consilium* the use of Agrippa's planetary characters is only recommended for 'those who are so inclined'; no doubt Khunrath felt the same reticence about condoning intercourse with spirits as Ficino, who (as a priest) was in fact exceedingly cautious concerning the use of talismanic images, preferring to ascribe their power to the 'hammering and heating' of their production, which under a sympathetic constellation merely fortifies the virtues already inhering in the material employed¹¹². With regard to Khunrath's dealings with spirits, a *Hyperphysicomageia* or 'pious and useful contact' with the good angels or 'fiery servants of God' is mentioned in the taxonomy of sciences given in the *Amphitheatrum*¹¹³. According

gignendarum ac producendarum stimulus) [sic] ὄργανικόν (tam externè quàm internè) Naturale et Artificiale Principium, et impulsivum seu κινητικόν aut ἐνέργητικόν à DEO consitutum, ac ANIMAE, quæ sic (mediante Schamaim) dotes suas (ut insint) multiformiter largitur Rebus, instar obstetricis cuiusdam fidelissimæ Micro et MacroCosmicè attributum. Cur, vel quo respectu CALOR sit atque dicatur Divinus; Celestis, Elementaris; Naturalis, insitus sive innatus, proportionem quadam Soli siderumque calori respondens; Unde actiones horum (IPSIUS) tam diversæ; Quo sensu (minimè vulgari, attribuendo unicuique suum) interpretandæ phrases Philosophorum hæ: CELUM est animatum; Influentiâ, Lumine et Motu agit in Inferiora; Celum est potissima caussa, cur Elementa, quamvis suapte Natura contraria, permisceantur atque invicem conjungantur; Ad primam Materiam eandem, quam vir ad sibi delectam conjugem, obtinet rationem; Res adamat inferiores; In Terram non secus ac Mas in fæminam semen transfundit suum . . .

¹¹¹ Ficino, *De vita*, III.3.

¹¹² Ficino, *De vita*, III.18; Kaske and Clarke (eds.), *Three Books on Life*, 343: 'Probabile enim est, si quam vim imagines habent, hanc non tam per figuram nuper acquirere, quam per materiam possidere naturaliter sic affectam. Ac si quid denuo acquiritur dum insculpitur, non tam per figuram comparari quam per calefactionem contusione quadam proveniente. Quæ quidem contusio calefactioque facta sub harmonia coelesti simili harmoniæ, quæ quondam materiæ virtutem infuderat, excitat virtutem ipsam atque corroborat, sicut flatus flammam; et manifestam efficit ante latentem . . .

¹¹³ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hamburg 1595 edition), 16: 'HYPERPHYSICOMAGEIA (respectu Naturalis, et Doctrinæ causa, sic dicta) est cum Angelis bonis, flammeis DEI ministris, sub modo delegate à JEHOVAH administrationis, tam vigilando quam dormiendo, mediâtè et immediâtè, pia et utilis conversatio'.

to this taxonomy, however, the procedure described in the *Consilium* is only a work of natural magic—like the much-debated ‘weapon-salve’ it involves an ‘invisible and spiritual natural-magical or magnetic contact’ between objects rather than a visible, physical contact¹¹⁴. When it comes to communion with spiritual entities, Khunrath merely follows Ficino in speaking of his own inspiring *genius*, *spiritus familiaris* or guardian angel, which imparts the wisdom of God and grants knowledge of Nature¹¹⁵. Thus in his *Vom Chaos* Khunrath inveighs against certain knaves who are wont to brand him an ‘enthusiast’:

Listen, you blasphemer, you say mockingly that I am an enthusiast because I speak here of visions and apparitions, and certain revelations which nevertheless issue from a benevolent spirit: the truth to be told, you are a knavish fantast, who still doesn’t know what the little word “enthusiast” actually means, or out of sheer foolishness has never thought it over, and doesn’t wish to mention what it actually is. If enthusiasm, i.e. *afflatio numinis* or divine inspiration (without which, as Cicero testifies, no-one can ever be a great man)¹¹⁶, is the same as *Schwärmerei*¹¹⁷, then Bezalel and Oholiab¹¹⁸ and other wise men who received wisdom in their heart from God . . . must also have been *Schwärmer*¹¹⁹.

It is noteworthy that the instilling of virtue via the breath of the magician mirrors God’s work of creation and inspiration through His divine breath.

¹¹⁴ Khunrath, *De igne magorum*, 67–70. In his letter to Moritz of Hessen-Kassel (Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, 4a Nr. 50), Conrad Khunrath describes the *Consilium* as a work of ‘astronomy’ (see n. 8 above).

¹¹⁵ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (Hamburg 1595 edition), 14–15, 22; cf. Ficino, *De vita*, III.23.

¹¹⁶ Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II.66.

¹¹⁷ *Schwärmerei* is the derogatory German term for “enthusiasm”, such as that found amongst certain inspirationist Anabaptist groups in the Reformation period.

¹¹⁸ Exodus 31.1–6: ‘The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have called by name Bez’alel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oho’liab, the son of Ahis’amach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you”’.

¹¹⁹ Khunrath, *Vom Hylealischen . . . CHAOS*, ff.)(5 verso—)(6 recto: ‘Höre/ du Lästermaul/ sprichstu spöttlich/ ich sey ein Enthusiast/ dieweil ich in gegenwärtigen meinem Buch von *Visionibus* oder Gesichten/ und sonderlichen (jedoch Gut-Geistlichen) Offenbahrungen sage; so spreche Ich nur Wahrheit/ du seyest ein Närrischer Phantast; der noch nicht wisse/ oder aus Unbesonnenheit je nicht bedencke/ was das Wörtlein Enthusiast eygentlich heisse; will geschweigen was Enthusiast recht sey. Ist *Enthusiasmus*, h.e. *Afflatio Numinis*, das Göttliche Anhauchen (*sine quo afflatu, teste etiam Cicerone, nemo unquam vir magnus*, ohne welches niehmahls eine fürtreffliche hochbegabte geschickte Person sey worden) Schwermerey/ so müssen auch Bezaleel/ Achaliab/ und allerley Weisen/ denen GOtt [sic] die Weißheit ins Herz gegeben . . . auch . . . Schwermer gewesen seyn’.

The benevolence of Khunrath's magic might seem a little doubtful to the pious reader contemplating the purpose of his "electrum" armour. Nevertheless, benevolent spirits also have their wrathful aspect, as Khunrath makes clear in his *De igne magorum*, where he compares the operation of his armour somewhat cryptically to the 'wrathful fire of God', which has been known to lay waste to whole villages and towns¹²⁰.

Magical warfare in early modern Europe

Was Duke Karl aided by this awe-inspiring "fire" in his ignoble war against King Sigismund? As it happens, the course of events probably did not require the employment of Khunrath's magical armour—for in a piece of trickery more reminiscent of sly Odysseus than brave Achilles, Karl and his band of poorly armed peasants sued for peace when faced with Sigismund's well-trained knights at Stångebro in 1598, then advanced under the cover of thick fog, took a strategic bridgehead and forced the enemy's capitulation¹²¹. This was the beginning of the end for Sigismund, who was compelled to abdicate the following year; Karl went on to claim the throne of Sweden for himself in 1604.

Though we may never know if Karl made use of the *Consilium* he had ordered, Khunrath's thoughts on the production of "electrum" armour came to be quite influential in the early modern literature on magical warfare, in part by happenstance. In 1614 or thereabouts Dr. Jacob Alstein, Count Palatine and one time physician to Henry IV of France and Emperor Rudolf II, accidentally left his manuscript copy of the *Consilium* at the house of a colleague by the name of Johannes Staricius¹²². Having noticed that Alstein had kept these 'highly secret' papers strictly to himself, Staricius took the opportunity to read them through—and having been duly impressed, he decided to publish them for the greater glory of his beloved German fatherland¹²³. The result was the *Heldenschatz* (1615), the first chapter of which

¹²⁰ Khunrath, *De igne magorum*, 36-37.

¹²¹ Roberts, *The Early Vasas*, 382.

¹²² Given that Khunrath also spent some time in Prague, it is possible that Alstein obtained his manuscript copy of the *Consilium* there whilst working for Emperor Rudolf II.

¹²³ Staricius, *Heldenschatz*, ff. A5 verso—A6 verso: 'Es ist ohnlängsthin ein berühmter/ erfahner unnd vortrefflicher Medicus bey mir zu Losament ein Zeitlang gelegen/ der zu seinem Abraisen/ durch oversehen/ under vielen hohen gehaimen Secretis (damit er sehr zehe/ fest still gewesen/ unnd gewaltig an sich gehalten) jetzgedachten Tractat zwar Titulotenus angefangen/ aber sonsten noch gantz ohnaußgeführt in rudi saltem et indigesta forma, hinder sich beligen

consists largely of a verbatim copy of Khunrath's work, interspersed with Staricius' equally eccentric commentary. The *Heldenschatz* was quite a success for Staricius, and underwent many reprints in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries¹²⁴.

Understandably, Alstein was not happy with his learned colleague's behaviour, and publicly denounced Staricius as a plagiarist. In the foreword to the second book of the second edition of the *Heldenschatz* (1618), Staricius rebuts the charge, defiantly declaring that his detractor has no right to complain, as the original manuscript was not Alstein's work but that of Heinrich Khunrath¹²⁵. Whatever we may think of Staricius' behaviour, he at least belatedly acknowledged the source from which his work was copied. The same cannot be said for Johannes Burggrav, whose aforementioned *Achilles ΠΑΝΟΠΙΑΣ redivivus* also consisted largely of a Latin translation of Khunrath's *Consilium*; Burggrav recommended the work as a supplement to the military studies of his Calvinist patron Count Simon VII of Lippe (1587-1637) without any mention of its origin¹²⁶.

lassen . . . Als hab ich bey mir erwogen (ohnerachtet vom Autore selbst/ wie mir sein Gemüth unnd Natural bekennt/ solches dem gemeinen Truck nimmermehr zu Liecht geben worden were) quod omne bonum sit in se divisum, ideoque communicativum sui: Derowegen mich nit lang besonne/ sondern dahin getrachtet/ wie dem gemeinen Wesen/ unserm geliebten Vatterlandt teutscher Nation zum besten/ einer Edlen/ werthen und thewren Ritterschafft aber zu besonderlichen Ehren/ Lieb und Wolgefallen/ ich es in seine ordenliche Form richten/ und zu offentlichem Truck fertigen möchte/ gestalt in solchem trewgemeinten Vorsatz ich hiemit daselbige bester massen im Werck præstirt/ gelaistet/ und underdienstlichen præsentirt haben will'. This citation is from the second edition of the work, which is dedicated to Staricius' ill-fated Protestant patron, Friedrich Ulrich, Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1591-1634).

¹²⁴ The catalogues show editions from the years 1615, 1616, 1624, 1647, 1655, 1658, 1676, 1682, 1685, 1694, 1702, 1720, 1730, 1734, 1743, 1750, 1840, 1855 and 1978 (the final three editions being reprints of the Cologne edition of 1750). Given the origins of Khunrath's *Consilium* in a very distant Europe, rife with magical beliefs and riven by religious strife, it is curious to find the text standing in almost its entirety on the internet, in a French translation ascribed to a certain "Eusèbe Barrida" (see, amongst other pages, <http://www.morgane.org/electrum.htm>). Nevertheless, Staricius' partially plagiarised work was translated into French in 1897 by the pseudonymous Barrida, who seems to have belonged to the circle of the occultist Gérard Encausse ("Papus"). "Barrida" gives the title of the work as *L'Électre magique: de la fabrication et préparation vulcanique et magique des armes d'Achille, d'après le Grimoire ou Magie Naturelle de Benoit XIV*—the latter fantasy perhaps having been suggested to the French translator by the *Grimoir des Pabsts Honorius*, a seventeenth century sorcerer's text accompanying the 1750 and 1855 editions of Staricius' *Heldenschatz*. Contemporary French aficionados of Crowleyite magic are responsible for the web editions of Barrida's translation.

¹²⁵ Staricius, *Heldenschatz*, 120-123. See the intriguing account of this episode given by Möller, *Staricius und sein Heldenschatz*, 49 ff.

¹²⁶ Burggrav, *Achilles ΠΑΝΟΠΙΑΣ redivivus*, 3-7.

Despite its dubious origins, the *Heldenschatz* of Staricius lends us an interesting insight into beliefs concerning magical warfare in early modern Europe. Whilst some of Staricius' instructions do not involve magic—for example, he deals with the manufacture of rockets and the use of various types of shot—the most striking of his descriptions concern the magical attainment of power in battle through powerful fluids, which as we have seen constitutes an important mytho-magical topos. Holy water and horse sperm are mentioned by Staricius as being useful in this regard, although the foremost amongst these fluids is a virgin's first menstrual blood—hence the *Hel-denschatz* recommends a small linen cloth be soaked in such blood, and sewn by a virgin under the right arm of the warrior's gambeson or vest prior to battle¹²⁷. Whilst he does not go into details, Khunrath was also acquainted with the power of virginal *menstruum*, as he tells us in his *Consilium* that he knows well its use in martial matters¹²⁸. Contact with bare skin is paramount in the use of such charms; of similar application and efficacy is *Johannisblut* (*Johanniskraut* or St. John's Wort), a renowned medicinal herb related in legend to St. John the Baptist, and so named for the red juice of its flower¹²⁹.

The imbibing of certain fluids to gain magical power is also detailed at various places in the literature. In his book on *The Art of Distillation* (1651) the Englishman John French makes mention of 'Khunrath's famous water called *aqua magnanimitatis*'—a distilled ant liquor which 'is of excellent use to stir up the animal spirit'¹³⁰. Just why ants should be useful in this regard is hinted at by Staricius, who states that an 'honourable knight and warrior' should consider the fact that ants have been imbued with a certain 'divine signature'—that is to say, their proclivity to march about and mass upon their enemies is akin to the behaviour of an army¹³¹. The antiquity of

¹²⁷ Staricius, *Heldenschatz*, 83-84; the author goes on to tell of a soldier who rode out against sixty knights with such a charm; what is more, when he returned victorious in the evening, he could not be beaten whilst gaming with dice, and won a silver dagger for his efforts.

¹²⁸ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 33: 'Was unnd wieviel *Menstruum Virginis primum*, in ein tuchlein aufzufangen, in *Martialischen* Sachen Vermagk, wissenn wir mit warheit auch woll'. The fact that Staricius supplies the details of this charm leads us to suspect that Alstein's manuscript copy of the *Consilium* was more extensive than the copy given to Karl IX, which may well have been abbreviated by Conrad Khunrath.

¹²⁹ Staricius, *Heldenschatz*, 82-83.

¹³⁰ French, *The Art of Distillation*, 93. There is no *aqua magnanimitatis* to be found in Conrad Khunrath's *Medulla destillatoria et medica*, published in Leipzig circa 1594, which fact suggests French was referring to Heinrich Khunrath here. French (*The Art of Distillation*, 188-189) also describes the production of a medicine from the 'immature mineral electrum'.

¹³¹ Staricius, *Heldenschatz*, 92.

this perception of kinship is well illustrated by Achilles' warriors, the Myrmidons ('people who move to and fro like ants', from μύρμηξ and δονέω), who were transformed from ants into humans by Zeus¹³². According to Staricius, such *aqua magnanimitatis* may either be imbibed or mixed with Carline Thistle oil and smeared on the hands and rapier¹³³.

How widespread was the actual use of such magical articles and charms in the late medieval and early modern period? A firm answer to this question awaits further research; however, with regard to *aqua magnanimitatis* French relates that 'John Casimire, Palsgrave of the Rhene and Seyfrie of Collen, General against the Turks, did always drink of it when they went to fight, to increase magnanimity and courage'¹³⁴. This is a reference to the Calvinist Johann Kasimir (1543-1592), Pfalzgraf bei Rhein and great uncle of the Winter King, and Siegfried von Kollonitsch, a general of Emperor Maximilian I. Staricius alleges that Maximilian I himself held this 'ant spirit' to be the 'highest *arcanum*' and a great aid in his forging of the Habsburg empire—an allegation which gains plausibility from the fact that the emperor knighted Agrippa von Nettesheim for military services rendered in Italy¹³⁵. Staricius also claims his colleague Alstein once confided to him that Emperor Rudolf II possessed a magical rapier which caused an opponent's weapon to shatter on contact. The blade had been forged on a Tuesday (the day of Mars), and its hilt was fashioned in the hour of Mars from the wood of a tree struck by lightning¹³⁶. In order to attain the desired effect a snakeskin and a tanned eel-skin should also be bound to the right arm as the rapier is being used, and on the little finger of the right hand a ring should be worn bearing a martial inscription.

Alstein also purportedly disclosed to Staricius that just such a rapier was known to Margrave Johann Georg von Brandenburg-Jägerndorf (1577-1624), an ally of the Winter King¹³⁷.

These rapiers belong to another important class of object employed in magical warfare, the magical sword. References in legend to magical swords are legion, and Khunrath in his *Consilium* makes mention of Balmung (Norse *Gram*), the sword of Siegfried which according to the Norse *Völsunga Saga*

¹³² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII.634.

¹³³ Staricius, *Heldenschatz*, 92-93. On Khunrath's mention of the Carline Thistle see above, n. 90.

¹³⁴ French, *The Art of Distillation*, 93.

¹³⁵ Staricius, *Heldenschatz*, 91.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

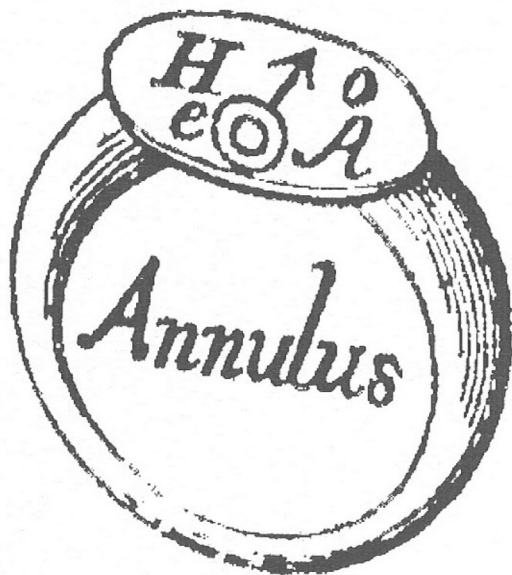


Fig. 6. The magic ring from Staricius' *Heldenschatz* (with permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München).

was fashioned by the smith-god *Volundr* (cognate with Anglo-Saxon *Weyland* and Latin *Vulcan*)¹³⁸. Balmung is likened by Khunrath to the sword mentioned by Paracelsus in the *Astronomia magna*, which can cut an anvil in two—it is fashioned in accordance with the principles of *philosophia adepta*, which harnesses the ‘power of the firmament’ present in earthly objects¹³⁹. Also mentioned by Khunrath is the emblematic work of Claude Paradin, *Symbola heroica* (1562), which gives the following illustration of a ‘knife of Thomas Aquinas’ cutting through an anvil (a device which Khunrath seems to have understood quite literally)¹⁴⁰.

The testimony of Khunrath, Staricius and French is hardly conclusive vis-à-vis the use of magical objects on the early modern battlefield. Notwith-

¹³⁸ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 38; although the scribe has given ‘Menungi’, this seems to be another error, and Khunrath was probably referring to Balmung’s alternative name of *Mimung*. The *Völsunga Saga* relates that Odinn thrust Gram to its hilt into the tree Branstock, from which it could only be drawn by Sigmund (the father of Sigurd/Siegfried)—a sign of the sword’s mythic relation to the Arthurian “sword in the stone”, Excalibur.

¹³⁹ Paracelsus, *Astronomia magna*, 97-99.

¹⁴⁰ Khunrath, *Consilium*, 37-38; Paradin, *The Heroicall Devises*, 68.

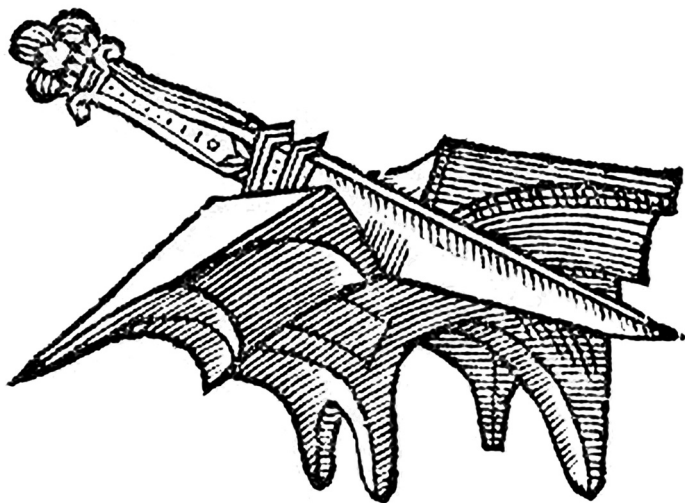


Fig. 7. The “philosophical knife” of Thomas Aquinas, from the *Symbola heroica* of Claude Paradin (with permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München).

standing the pervasiveness of occult thought amongst the embattled Protestant nobility, or the penchant Emperor Rudolf had for all things magical, Staricius’ second-hand reports in particular are surely open to question. Nevertheless, the fact that an eminent nobleman such as Alstein should jealously guard the secrecy of a manuscript like the *Consilium* (some seventeen years after its composition at that) is at least an indication of the currency of the ideas it expressed.

Furthermore, there is a specific fact which explains why Khunrath’s conception of magical armour found a ready place in some quarters of the early modern imagination. It is telling that the increasing deployment of firearms in the sixteenth-century theatre of war coincided with the rise of highly decorative parade armours procured from specialist goldsmiths; from 1560 onwards there was a concomitant decline in the appearance of plate armour on the battlefield, although its use persisted until the middle of the seventeenth century¹⁴¹. The heightened vulnerability of soldier and commander alike before the destructive power of guns (a fact specifically emphasised in the words of Khunrath’s incantation) surely gave rise amongst the warrior

¹⁴¹ Williams, *The Knight and the Blast Furnace*, 362-363; Pfaffenbichler, *Armourers*, 9, 38, 68.

nobility to the vain hope of a superior defence—a hope reflected in Duke Karl's apparent interest for Khunrath's *Consilium*. Above and beyond this fact, a world as uncertain and dangerous as early modern Europe, in which the wealthier citizenry were inclined to carry and use weaponry, would generally provide fertile imaginary ground for the notion of magical power and invulnerability purveyed by Khunrath and his ilk. From this perspective, his proffering of invincibility may simply be catalogued next to those other more traditional promises of the alchemists—wisdom, eternal life, unlimited wealth—which play upon the primordial desires of humanity.

It seems incontestable that psychological factors inspired Khunrath's attempt to manifest a mythic object in the physical world, which resembles in part his efforts to manifest certain alchemically conceived *materiae* from the Genesis creation myth in his laboratory (even if he would never subject the Bible to a euhemerist reading, or to the allegorizing of *alchemie libertine*)¹⁴². As I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere, Khunrath's renditions of these “primeval” substances are identifiable and well-known to today's science¹⁴³. Nevertheless, just as Khunrath's laboratory practice cannot be reduced to the categories of contemporary chemistry, so it would also be amiss to reduce the entirety of Khunrath's treatment of myth (or the essence of related mythoalchemy) to a matter of psychology. Indeed, myth appears to be intimately bound up with the very fabric of our being and discourse, a fact which makes it both irreducible and highly prone to attempts at reduction. Whether it is seen through allegorizing or euhemerist eyes, myth serves as a mirror of the beholder's intention, so Vulcan and even Yahweh can be formed in the alchemist's image.

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¹⁴² On the subject of “*alchemie libertine*”, in which certain alchemists subjected Biblical myths to the same reductive allegorizing as they did those of Greece and Egypt, see Matton, ‘Le Phénix dans l'Oeuvre de Michel Maier’.

¹⁴³ See my article *Of Ether and Colloidal Gold: The Making of a Philosophers' Stone*, forthcoming in the online journal *Esoterica* (www.esoteric.msu.edu).

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Zusammenfassung

Das Manuskript des Alchemisten und Theosophen Heinrich Khunrath (1560-1605), gerichtet an den Verteidiger der Interessen schwedischer Protestanten, Herzog Karl, beschreibt eine Methode zur Herstellung einer magischen Rüstung und bietet einen Einblick in die praktische Anwendung magischer Konzepte in der Tradition Ficinos, Agrippas, Paracelsus' und Della Portas. Die vorliegende Studie beschreibt detailliert Khunraths Anwendung einer pseudo-paracelsischen magischen Legierung, ebenso wie seine Rezeption der Beschreibungen der magischen Waffen Achills bei Homer und Vergil. Es wird gezeigt, daß Khunraths magische Rüstung gemäß der Ficinischen Prinzipien der "fascinatio" (Behexung) und der Einführung himmlischer Kräfte in Dinge durch die imaginative Kraft des Magus wirkt. Diese Prinzipien werden auf dem Hintergrund der neuplatonischen Kosmologie Khunraths erörtert. Die Frage der Beziehung der euhemeristischen Interpretation des antiken Mythos in diesem Manuskript zum vorherrschend allegorischen Genre der Mythoalchemie wird ebenso behandelt, wie andere Versuche, magische Überlegenheit und Unverletzbarkeit in der Kriegsführung des frühneuzeitlichen Europa zu gewinnen, angesprochen werden.

THE CHALDEAN ORACLES OF ZOROASTER, HEKATE'S COUCH,
AND PLATONIC ORIENTALISM IN PSELLOS AND PLETHON¹

DYLAN BURNS

Frances Yates does not begin her introduction to Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Hermetic discourse with lofty praise for the wisdom of her subjects. Instead, she introduces them to us as dupes who are deeply devoted to a colossal failure: Lactantius' error of dating the wisdom of the thrice-great Hermes to the era of Moses. She refers to it again and again², a grand historical mishap which dramatically altered the West's intellectual discourse even to the present day³. However, little is said about another important error of sourcing, one which is tightly entwined with the fate of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in Renaissance and Modern Europe. I speak of George Gemistos Pléthon's claim that the fragments of text hidden in the libraries of Byzantium under the heading *Chaldean Oracles* were in fact written by Zoroaster. Indeed, Pléthon was the first individual to actually take the "Chaldean" aspect of the corpus—which is clearly limited to the title—seriously enough to identify the *Oracles* as Zoroastrian teachings. Pléthon's claim that the *Oracles* were Zoroastrian profoundly affected the development of Modern European discourse about the Hellenic themes of the *Oracles* and, more generally, "the Orient"⁴. As Michael Stausberg has written in his exhaustive study of the figure of Zoroaster in European culture,

¹ This paper has benefited from the attention of Profs. Kocku von Stuckrad (Universiteit van Amsterdam) and John Duffy (Harvard University). I am very grateful to them both for their valuable advice and suggestions.

² Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 13, 18-19.

³ Ibid. 1-2: 'The returning movement of the Renaissance with which this book will be concerned, the return to a pure golden age of magic, was based on a radical error in dating. The works which inspired the Renaissance Magus, and which he believed to be of profound antiquity, were really written in the second to third centuries A.D.'.

⁴ I refer to the "Orient" fully in Said's sense of the term; Said, *Orientalism*, 1-9, 12, 15. Moore-Gilbert (*Postcolonial Theory*, 34-73, esp. 41-53) offers a very useful introduction to Said replete with criticisms, as does Kennedy (*Said*, esp. 21-48); Macfie (*Orientalism*) and Kurz (*Vom Umgang mit dem Anderen*) provide important discussions of the scholarly debate about and appropriations of Said's work. With Said one must read the counter of Baruma & Margalit (*Occidentalism*, 10): 'Occidentalism is at least as reductive (as Orientalism); its bigotry simply turns the Orientalist view upside down. To diminish an entire society or civilization to a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unfeeling parasites is a form of intel-

schon das Beispiel Plêthons macht daher deutlich, daß die Geschichte der Rezeption des Namens Zoroaster in Europa bzw. die Geschichte der mit der Rezeption dieses Namens verbundenen Motive und Interessen qualitativ etwas anderes ist als eine Geschichte von iranischen oder zoroastrischen "Einflüssen" auf Europa⁵.

Plêthon and his *Chaldean Oracles* clearly outdid Lactantius with his *Hermetica*; the *Oracles* were not only mistakenly assigned to an impossibly remote Antiquity, but an Eastern world of ancient wisdom. To be more precise: the European discourse fetishizing the East as a source of ancient wisdom came upon a dramatic and enduring *locus fascini* in the figure of Zoroaster when Plêthon titled his collection of the oracles the *Chaldean Oracles of Zoroaster*.

This article is not an analysis of how that story unfurled and what happened in the end⁶, but of a hitherto unexplored subplot which transpired at the very beginning—in fact, the prologue. I begin there, with the 11th-century Byzantine theologian Michael Psellos. Psellos was one of Plêthon's chief sources not just for the *Oracles* but for general information about Greek philosophy—especially Late Neoplatonism.

'The Platonic and Orphic and, most of all, the Chaldean Writings'

Psellos was almost certainly inspired a great deal by the *Oracles* and treated them with respect, even going so far as to assert that Plato and Aristotle largely subscribed to their doctrines, and that all the great Neoplatonic thinkers agreed with them entirely⁷. In fact, he found many of the *Oracles* to be aligned with Christian doctrine⁸.

However, he also expresses some ambivalence about the content of the *Oracles*. The question of whether his reservations may have been feigned in

lectual destruction'. Despite the charge of Occidentalism (not to mention Said's failure to provide thorough investigation of gender and Orientalism [for which see Kennedy, *Said*, 37-46, and Kurz, *Vom Umgang mit dem Anderen*, 185-194]), I do find Said's general intuition worthy of application in numerous contexts besides (post)-Colonial literature and philology, such as the present topic, the interface of magic, religious identity, and idealized fonts of wisdom in the Late Antique and Medieval worlds.

⁵ Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 971.

⁶ Readers intrigued by this subject will find all they desire in Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*.

⁷ Psellos, *Philosophica Minora II*, 148. See also idem, *Theologica I*, 16, 88-89. The translations of Psellos given here are my own except where noted otherwise.

⁸ Ibid. p. 129.

the better interest of self-preservation is probably unanswerable (at least until new evidence is brought forward) but need not concern us here⁹. Regardless of cause or motive, his comments about them are utterly contradictory. On the one hand, he hints that they are capable of imparting an undemonstrable knowledge, a perennial philosophy, and that the same divine revelation can be found not only in the Bible but the teachings of the Neoplatonists and their own inspired text¹⁰.

This revelation is a claim to absolute knowledge:

I heard it said by the more adept philosophers that there is a wisdom which is beyond all demonstration, apprehensible only by the intellect of a wise man, when prudently inspired. Even here my resolution did not falter. I read some of the occult books and grasped their meaning, as far as my human abilities allowed, of course, for I myself could never claim that I had an accurate understanding of these things nor would I believe anyone else who said he had¹¹.

Given Psellos' fierce admiration for Proklos, and Proklos' own zeal for the *Oracles*, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that the *Chaldean Oracles* were one of Psellos' "occult books" transmitting 'a wisdom which is beyond all demonstration'. Hoping to salvage Plato and Aristotle in a letter to one of his critics, he distinguishes the philosophers from the occult wisdom of the supposedly ancient books:

And so on account of these things (I've said about Plato) I have come immediately to the text, speaking in defense of its insolence and demonstrating, as much as I can, that all Hellenic wisdom as old as 'the most ancient age'—including with this the text of the Chaldeans and the Egyptians or some other occult knowledge (*gnōsis aporrētos*)—is, I have concluded, as a whole less old¹².

He further decries the Neoplatonic champions of the *Chaldean Oracles*: 'I feel ashamed of Iamblichos and Proklos, and all of those couriers of *philosophia*, those bearers passing on the Chaldean nonsenses . . . But of this I've said enough'¹³.

⁹ See, however, the view of Kaldellis, who argues quite forcefully that Psellos in no uncertain way favored Plato and Hellenic religion over the Christianity of his age. Athanassiadi, on the other hand, assigns Psellos a 'gloomy' Christianity torn between his genuine delight in Hellenic texts and the prevailing orthodoxy of his day (Athanassiadi, 'Byzantine Commentators', 245-247). For some middle ground with sympathy to Kaldellis, see the useful introduction to Psellos' philosophical character in Duffy, 'Psellos'.

¹⁰ My argument agrees with the brief but useful survey of Psellos' various comments about the *Oracles* offered by Duffy, 'Reactions', 85-90, esp. 86.

¹¹ Duffy's translation of Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, in *ibid.*, 87.

¹² Psellos, *Ep. Giovanni*, 1. 234-239. See also *ibid.*, 1. 15-20.

¹³ *Idem*, *Theologica I*, 37.6-8. However, as Duffy suggests, Psellos' commonplace denunci-

Yet Psellos also freely admits to having drawn magical practices from the *Oracles*. I refer of course to his famous reference to the iynx wheel made by attaching a leather strap to a golden ball, embedded with a single sapphire. Gripping the other end of the strap, the theurgist would swing the ball around like a bull-roarer¹⁴. Sometimes Psellos trumpets his own great knowledge of astrology, the manufacturing of apotropaic objects, and ancient Pagan cosmologies. Moreover, he writes very enthusiastically about theurgic practice and its consonance with Christian teaching because of its Platonic asceticism:

... We are also made like God according to the theurgic virtues. This is at any rate the most perfect similitude (we have to him). For purifying souls and theorizing about existents are not at all like the divine, for it is something greater than purity and theory. That which can divinely force man to depart from matter and delivers him from the passions, so that he can practice theurgy (*dunasthai thourgein*) on someone else, now this is the most perfect similitude (of the divine). 'And if you bring forth', as God says in the Gospel, 'the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth' (Jer. 15:19)¹⁵.

But Psellos also insists that he has never employed any of the magical techniques forbidden by the Church, rejecting the rituals associated with the *Oracles*. In response to a criticism of one Oualentinus, he says,

And concerning this great charge of Oualentinus', that I have fallen in with many books, Platonic and Orphic and especially Chaldean texts: in no way have I turned to a passage (in one of these books) for any practical purpose (*spoudasmati*). Rather I only do it with the very intention that I understand the records about the heresies¹⁶.

ations of Neoplatonic and esoteric texts could simply have been his way of ensuring that he would be able to read them at all without being put to the stake (Duffy, 'Psellos', 147-150, 154). Athanassiadi chides Psellos for his 'hypocrisy' (Athanassiadi, 'Byzantine Commentators', 246).

¹⁴ Psellos, *Ep.* 187, V.474.

¹⁵ Idem, *De Omnifaria Doctrina*, 45, 52.5-46, 12. See also Duffy's analysis ('Psellos', 147) of Psellos' exegesis (idem, *Theologica* 18.33-40) of Mark 10:17-18. Psellos also admires the *Chaldean Oracles* for their anticipation of Christian ascetic teaching (idem, *Philosophica Minora II*, 127, 13-14, 127, 25-128); as will become clear in the below, Pléthon's departure from Psellos in this matter is very significant.

¹⁶ Idem, *Theologica I*, 4.44-48, p. 16. The term I have translated as 'practical purpose' (*spoudasmati*) generally refers to a zeal for practice, an action. Psellos carefully chooses his words to try to show that in no way is he practicing anything he researches in the 'many books of the Platonists and Orphics and Chaldeans', but that he is simply engaging in the usual heresiology.

Psellos' strategy here is to paint himself as a heresy-hunter who does not practice any of the occult techniques he reads about¹⁷. This of course would include the various ritual practices and meditations described in the *Oracles*.

Michael Psellos, then, engages the *Chaldean Oracles* in two separate, but (for him) totally interwoven discourses. The first is that of the *philosophia perennis*: the existence of an absolute, undemonstratable wisdom which can be found in other canonical great thinkers—in fact, *every* thinker worth reading. Psellos then provides an example of a Byzantine version of the theme of the *prisci theologi*; it is notable that he always mentions the Hermetic (literally, “Egyptian”) texts on the level of the Neoplatonists and the *Oracles*, in contrast to two very prolific Neoplatonic writers: Proklos, who says nothing at all about Hermes Trismegistos, and Iamblichos, who describes the ‘Hermetic books’ with great reverence but in passing.¹⁸

But paradoxically, Psellos is also wary of assigning the Neoplatonists and the *Chaldean Oracles* the same status as Plato, Aristotle, or canonical Christian figures. He will not assign “occult knowledge” the authority of Antiquity or the mantle of philosophy. We should remember, however, that Psellos' remarks on the *Oracles*, perennial wisdom, and magic are not made freely. Openly admitting to the teaching and use of practices considered to be magical would be tantamount to death or expulsion from the empire. He seems to be especially sensitive to these issues when he discusses magical practices, with which he identified the rituals of the *Oracles*. There is an overwhelming heresiological discourse in Psellos' wavering stance the *Oracles*. He has to dance around not only the Hellenic wisdom of the *Oracles* but the practices described in them, which are bound by this overarching heresiological discourse to the discourse about magic¹⁹.

At this point in the *Chaldean Oracles*' history, the controversy over them departs from the Late Antique discourse of disputation over the efficacy of theurgic practice versus intellectual, philosophical contemplation²⁰ to one in which magic and supra-philosophical learning are bound together as hereti-

¹⁷ Ibid. 4.44-50, p. 16; Duffy, ‘Psellos’, 149-150; idem, ‘Psellos and Italikos’, 88.

¹⁸ Garth Fowden (*Hermes*, 134-141) surveys Iamblichos' evidence about the Hermetica (Iamblichos, *Mysteries*, Book VIII).

¹⁹ This statement follows from and agrees with Duffy, ‘Psellos and Italikos’, 84.

²⁰ See Iamblichos, *Mysteries*, II.11.96, 9-II.11.98, 11, Proklos, *Platonic Theology*, I.25, and Damaskios' famous statement that ‘while some, such as Porphyrios and Plotinos and many others, esteem philosophy more highly, Iamblichos, Syrianos, Proklos and the all the priests honor the hieratic art more instead’. (Damascius, *Phaedo*, 105) For general introductions to Neoplatonic theurgy see Shaw, ‘Rituals’, and Dodds, ‘Theurgy’.

cal, Pagan teachings. They become markers of alterity, of affinity with the “Other” in Byzantine theological discourse²¹. To understand Psellos’ periodic reticence about the *Oracles* as an act of identity formation through distancing himself from his “other”, it is helpful to glance at how other Byzantines thought about magic.

In the Byzantium of Late Antiquity, the use of magical objects, amulets, and spells was commonplace and could be explained away to the authorities relatively easily. By Psellos’ own time, however, only obsequiously Christian magical practices were tolerated, and “magic” became synonymous with anti-Christian heresy²². Alexander Kazhdan has demonstrated this by observing

²¹ Levinas (*Alterity and Transcendence*, 103), working with reference to Buber, coined the term “alterity” to describe the ethical relationship of the subject with its “other” (‘In that relation to the other, there is no fusion; the relation to the other is envisioned as alterity. The other is alterity . . .’), but the term has been reinterpreted in a Lacanian sense in cultural studies with the aim of discussing the process of identity formation through conceiving the “other”: ‘All human cultures articulate, situate themselves by categorizing the world. Such a predicative act necessarily involves a distinction between that which is allowed into a sphere of culture, and that which is excluded; the circumscription of cultural identity proceeds by silhouetting it against a contrastive background of Otherness’ (Corbey and Leerssen, ‘Studying Alterity’, vi). See also Kippenberg & von Stuckrad (*Einführung*, 155): ‘Erst mit der kulturwissenschaftlichen Neuorientierung der Disziplin setzte sich zunehmend die Erkenntnis durch, dass man Gruppenbildungsprozesse nicht ohne einen Rückgriff auf geschichtliche Narration, geteilte Erinnerungen oder auch das Ausgrenzen und Konstruieren des “Anderen”, also jener Menschen und Gruppen, die nicht dazu gehören sollen, erklären kann . . .’.

²² Duffy, ‘Psellos and Italikos’, 95. Late Antique Byzantium also saw the copious use of textiles and floor mosaics decorated with Christian incantations and geometric symbols to invoke apotropaic power (Maguire, *Rhetoric, Nature, and Magic*, 265-274). During the debate of iconoclasm in the early Medieval period, however, the sort of “Christian magic” of these textiles was removed from a magical discourse. Maguire (‘Magic and the Christian Image’, 70) describes how Christian tapestry art of Late Antiquity and the early Medieval period illustrates ‘how the church after iconoclasm was successful in redefining and recontextualizing Christian imagery, so that it no longer was able to play a role in unofficial practices and belief systems that the church could not reconcile with the theology of the icon, and had previously associated with “magic”’. The crucial change was that ‘Christian images lost the status of powerful signs, becoming instead the representations of powerful individuals’ (ibid. 71). In other words, images that would have been conceived as magical became simply Christian, leaving “magic” as a category of alterity to Christian identity.

Marie Theres Fögen has provided valuable evidence to support this conclusion in her comparison of fourth-century Roman law about magic and the 12th-century testimony of Balsamon: ‘(1) Whereas the character and works of the culprits (magicians) remain vague and undifferentiated in the fourth century, they later receive a more and more detailed description. (2) *Whereas fourth-century legislation was not concerned with a neat distinction of pagan and Christian practices and rites, this separation was later provided by a social and mental discrimination of the pagan forms.* (3) Whereas for the emperors of the fourth century (and still for Basil), magicians, diviners, and their clients were nothing other than murderers, canon law categorized

the difference in Medieval Byzantine discourse about miracles and magic. By and large, this discourse had ‘no palpable boundary between evil magic and the beneficial miracle’, but the ‘difference between the holy and unholy miracle becomes evident in the stories about contests between the saint and magicians’²³. In these stories, Christians triumph over Pagans, Muslims, and Jews through martyrdom, the resurrection of animals, or ‘a miraculous locking up of the mouth of the saint’s opponent—the saint just makes him mute and unable to continue his slander of the Christian faith’²⁴.

The evidence of the famous Byzantine historian Nikētas Choniates is also revealing in this respect. He admits that some events clearly unexplainable by natural causes were clearly the works of ‘sorcerers’. The descriptions of these warlocks, Kazhdan tells us, ‘contain the paraphernalia typical of the ambiance of hagiographical demons: lust and rape, the bathhouse, the serpent’²⁵. One of their villains, the astrologer Skleros Seth, uses a ‘Persian apple’ to seduce a virgin, conjuring the familiar Orientalist portrait of anti-Christian, Asiatic decadence²⁶. The hazy image of the Persian, his magical tricks and tools, and Pagan idolatry conjoin in the common Medieval Byzantine imagination as a powerful image of the “other” by which Christians could identify themselves²⁷.

Psellos’ wrestle with his own stance on the *Oracles* takes place in this workshop of Christian identities constructed through differentiation from an anti-Christian ideal²⁸. His writings on the *Oracles* reveal that despite his admiration for them and interest in the practices described in them, he does not, for whatever reason, identify himself (publicly) with a discourse of Pagan

and treated them according to their conscience and guilt in respect not to murder but to heresy and apostasy’ (Fögen, ‘Balsamon on Magic’, 110; emphasis mine).

²³ Kazhdan, ‘Miracle Workers’, 81, 78.

²⁴ Ibid., 78.

²⁵ Ibid., 81.

²⁶ Ibid. It is entirely probable that the individuals he describes were in fact charlatans; the point is how he describes them.

²⁷ The world of the Persian empire is, in the Byzantine mind, that of ‘the Sphinx, Cleopatra, Eden, Troy, Sodom and Gomorroah, Astarte, Isis and Osiris, Sheba, Babylon, the Genii, the Magi, Nineveh, Prester John, Mahomet, and dozens more; settings, in some cases names only, half-imagined, half-known; monsters, devils, heroes; terrors, pleasures, desires’ (Said, *Orientalism*, 63).

²⁸ Valerie Flint (‘The Demonisation of Magic’; *The Rise of Magic*, esp. 397) has argued that it was precisely through the sort of ambivalent hand-wringing about magic we see in Psellos that magic survived Antiquity at all; while Christian authorities condemned practices deemed magical, they ultimately compromised it and failed to wipe it out.

philosophia perennis and magical practice. Rather, he uses this hybrid discourse of Pagan beliefs and magical practices as the foil of alterity in formulating his own identity as a Greek Orthodox theologian, Neoplatonic learning notwithstanding.

The Newest Oldest Sage

George Gemistos Plēthon's treatment of the *Chaldean Oracles*, on the other hand, displays no such equivocation, vacillation, or confusion. Whilst 14th-century Byzantium was slowly devoured from the bottom up by the Turks, Plēthon happily whiled away his days in the Peloponnessus, exiled for a clearly articulated, vigorous self-identification as a Pagan heretic. I will attempt to demonstrate in this section how Plēthon not only accepted and defined himself by Psellos' treatment of the *Oracles* as a marker of an heretical, Pagan, magical identity, but in fact intensified his anti-Christian identity through his unprecedented attribution of the authorship of the *Oracles* to the Persian sage Zoroaster.

Plēthon believes that Zoroaster was the most wise and ancient (having apparently lived 5000 years before the Trojan War) of all sages²⁹. Indeed, he includes Zoroaster as the very first perennial philosopher usually (for his lists vary, but not very significantly) alongside Orpheus, Musaeus, Pythagoras, the Presocratics, Plato, some Stoic thinkers, and the Neoplatonists³⁰.

²⁹ Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathustra*, 60.

³⁰ Plēthon's paradigmatic treatment of the idea of "perennial wisdom" discovered by a variety of thinkers is aptly described by Woodhouse: 'if there were a common substratum to all religions, it would be natural to identify it with the oldest known form of religion. Gemistos, who had no idea of the comparative antiquity of religions, looked to Zoroaster, Moses, and various legendary Greeks as the nominal sources of his system. But he formulated its content in terms of what he believed to be the oldest surviving religion, and also the best known to him, which was the Olympian religion of this ancestors, including its pre-Olympian core. This reversion to paganism on his part was deliberately provocative, but it was not mere foolishness' (Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 168-169). See also Woodhouse's paraphrase of the beginning of Plēthon's *Book of Laws* (ibid. 326-328) and Masai, *Plēthon*, 130-141. It is significant that Plēthon does not seem to associate a very specific sort of truth claim, besides a rejection of Islamic and Christian thought, with his ur-Platonism. He did take seriously Plato's argument in the *Phaedrus* that true wisdom can only be disclosed in a personal pedagogical encounter rather than through book-learning (Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 67), but there is no evidence to align him with Psellos' consideration that this wisdom is an unfalsifiable, revelatory truth-claim, even if it is probable that he would have been amenable to this concept, especially considering his use of Plato's *Seventh Letter* and Proklos' works.

The “Zoroaster” of Plēthon keeps appropriate company, for all of his ideas were not simply Greek but Platonic. Plēthon, reading Plutarch’s *De Iside et Osiride* 369d-e, thinks that Zoroaster was the first to assert that a triple deity ruled over the cosmos, a doctrine consonant with Platonic theology (he was most likely thinking of Plato’s *Seventh Letter* 312e)³¹.

Is it possible, then, that Plēthon actually knew anything about the historical Zoroaster or the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism? There is no evidence to suggest that he did. The only ideas he cites as Zoroastrian are Platonic and were available to him in Platonic sources (indeed, he says as much whenever he asserts, as he does in the title of one of his treatises, on the agreement of the ideas of Plato and Zoroaster). The only clear evidence regarding the question of his knowledge of Persian language shows that Plēthon knew nothing of Persian. He offers an etymology of the name of the ancient Persian king Cyrus, concluding, wrongly, that it meant “sun”, that most hallowed of Platonic metaphors³². Plēthon is a “Platonic Orientalist”, deriving from Neoplatonic sources a fascination with the exotic, decadent East as the source of arcane mystical wisdom³³.

Plēthon actually does not say very much about what particular aspects of the *Oracles* he thinks are particularly Zoroastrian; the text, to him, speaks for itself. Plēthon does, however, mention that the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, described in the first two lines of his edition of the *Oracles*,

³¹ Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 60.

³² Ibid. While Woodhouse acknowledges that the references to Zoroaster in Gemistos’ work can all be traced to Greek sources, he is unwise to hint that Gemistos had any instruction at all in Persian religion when his every mention of Zoroaster points to the Platonism of the *Oracles* and not to Persia. (Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 63-64) Similarly Athanassiadi overreaches when she argues that ‘the oral tradition of an Oriental mysticism—not necessarily Islamic—which had flourished since the ninth century in the greater Middle East and which had been abundantly fertilized by Neoplatonism, was a primary influence on him’. This argument rests entirely on speculation about Plēthon’s activities during his Ottoman period and is bereft of any textual evidence.

³³ John Walbridge coined the term in his study of the great Sufi mystical philosopher Suhrawardī. As he argues, ‘there certainly is no warrant whatever for considering Suhrawardī as an exponent of any sort of genuine pre-Islamic Iranian wisdom. He shows no evidence of knowledge of ancient Iran beyond what might be expected of an educated Muslim of his time and place . . .’. ‘He certainly was a mystic, but the mysticism, as befits a Platonist, is firmly placed in a rational setting and put in the service of epistemology. The romantic Orientalism is likewise authentic, but it is secondhand, like that of the Greeks. He is a champion of the ancient Persians, not because he is an Iranian himself, or even knows much about them, but because this kind of Orientalism is an integral feature of Pythagoreanizing Neoplatonism’ (Walbridge, *Wisdom*, 13, 83). See also the discussion, without recourse to Orientalism, of Athanassiadi, ‘Byzantine Commentators’, 249-250.

is Zoroaster's³⁴. He also says that Zoroaster is in agreement with 'Platonic and Pythagorean wisdom' on the relationship between the body and the soul³⁵.

In that context Plēthon deals with the quite literally "psychological" discussions in Greek thought typified by Aristotle's *De Anima* or Plato's *Timaeus*, a conversation which need not delay us here. For us, the crucial aspect of the relationship between the body and the soul in Plēthon's thought is his rejection of the phenomenon of dualist asceticism in so many strands of Platonic philosophy. Unlike Plotinos, Plēthon was not ashamed to be in a body, something he did not regard as a prison at all³⁶. He despises the Greek Church's consecration of asceticism; and, as we will see below, he simply can not accept the clear distaste for the body manifest in his own copy of Zoroaster's "Chaldean" *Oracles*³⁷.

Why does Plēthon attribute the authorship of the *Oracles* to Zoroaster? For the same reason that Psellos does not (publicly, at least) accept the *Oracles* as truly consonant with orthodox Christian teaching: they aren't Christian. In Psellos' time and before, their title was clearly a play on the fascination with Persian magic and wisdom fathered in mainstream Greek literature by Aeschylus in *The Persians*. Any educated Greek, in Athens or Constantinople, knew that *magos* was originally a Persian word³⁸. Plēthon raises his own heretical ante by retaining the Hellenic theme of *philosophia perennis*, probably using Proklos and Psellos, and introducing Zoroaster, a classical Greek Orientalism, into it³⁹.

³⁴ Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathusthra*, 59; Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 54.

³⁵ Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathusthra*, 60.

³⁶ Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 1.

³⁷ Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 64; contra Bidez/Cumont (*Mages hellénisés*, 161): 'De même que les Mages, ses disciples, les Λόγια Χαλδαϊκά ne prêchaient-ils pas, avec une sorte de dualisme, le culte du Feu divin?'

³⁸ Aeschylus, *Persians*, 684-688: 'As I behold my wife by my tomb I am overcome by dread, but graciously accept her libations. And while you, milling about my tomb, lament, shrieking piteously, you call me with the magicians (*goois*) who conduct the dead (*psukhagōgois*)'. For more on the Greeks' ancient and persistent association of illicit magic with the East, see Bidez/Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 144-145; Graf, 'Magic', 35-36. And see, more generally, Said, *Orientalism*, 56-58.

³⁹ The question of the status of the ancient Byzantine foe, the Persian, in the eyes of the Medieval Byzantine must at least be considered tangentially. In Psellos' time, the Byzantines dominated the Muslim caliphates to the South. By the 12th-century, however, Turkish Muslims had become a force to be reckoned with in the South. The identification of this southern threat with anti-Christian Persian barbarism is manifest in Theodore Prodromos' panegyric to John II after a battle in which he compares the Emperor to the infant Christ in a painting of the adoration of the Magi: '... And the Emperor has entered out of Teman bearing victory. The star of God announces His Advent to the Magi, but the very stars of his trophies declare the Emperor.

Plêthon perpetrates Psellos' heresiological discourse but magnifies it by intensely amplifying the Orientalist discourse of his Antique sources⁴⁰. The move worked; Scholarios, who viciously attacked Plêthon's reputation, was acutely aware of and disgusted by this enthusiasm for non-Christian, (supposedly) Eastern teaching⁴¹. It is significant that Plêthon asserted the consonance of the doctrines of Plato and Zoroaster while giving lectures to Italians on the disagreement between Plato and Aristotle, sparking the controversy in Europe over the philosophers' disparity⁴².

There is no need to imagine Plêthon as some demented antichrist maliciously slapping Zoroaster's name on the *Chaldean Oracles* to attack Christendom and confound modern historians. Neoplatonic to the core, he betrays no sense of cunning, cynicism or sarcasm in his writings, despite his occasional ferocity or harshness. Moreover, he speaks of Zoroaster so reverently that one cannot imagine that his mistaken attribution of the *Oracles* to the Persian sage was intentional; and to leave the matter as a case of philological naïveté is uncurious and boring (a great Zoroastrian sin!). Rather, it

One of them has three Persians doing obeisance to Him as He lies in His crib; the other has all of Persia bending its neck under his feet . . . Both of them regenerate the whole of Creation, both ascend on high, both . . . defeat all the barbarians, destroy cities, increase the boundaries of New Rome, and become saviors of the Christian clergy' (Maguire, *Style and Ideology*, 229). For the impact of the Latin world's reception of Islam on Orientalism, see Said, *Orientalism*, 59-62.

⁴⁰ Stausberg puts it quite well when he says that 'das Zoroaster-Pseudepigraph ist demnach das Relikt, das Monument einer ursprünglichen, zunächst in Asien beheimateten philosophischen Weisheit der Menschheit, die sich über Ägypten bis nach Griechenland ausgebreitet habe' (Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 66). See also Masai, *Plethon*, 57: 'Pour Plêthon, Zoroastre est l'ancêtre du platonisme, l'inspirateur des *Oracles Chaldaïques*, c'est à ce titre seulement et en dehors de tout opportunisme qu'il en reconnaît l'autorité'.

What about Plêthon's contemporary Orientalist discourses about Judaism and Islam in his birthplace and long home, the Byzantine empire? Plêthon expressed admiration for the capability and discipline of Islamic governments, and Scholarios attests that, as a youth, Plêthon had been instructed by a Jew named Elisha. (Bidez/Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 160; Woodhouse, *Plêthon*, 23-28, 71-72; see also Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 40-41) But one does not get the sense from Plêthon that he thought Islam was nearly as profound as the perennial wisdom of the Greek and Persian sages; Muhammad lived a thousand years after Plato, much less Zoroaster! Similarly, Plêthon never discusses Judaism, and no trace has been found of his mysterious Jewish tutor, who could as easily have existed as been invented.

⁴¹ Bidez/Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, 160; Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 41.

⁴² Stausberg discusses in some detail Plêthon's conflict with Greek Orthodox Aristotelianism and his substitution of Zoroaster and his *Oracles* for Aristotle as the great equal to Plato, a conflict which is at the root of the dispute between Plêthon and Scholarios. (ibid. 66-69; 165-170; 240-266; 283-307). For Plêthon's hand in instigating the Plato-Aristotle controversy, see Monfasani, 'Marsilio Ficino', 183-186.

is helpful to think of Plēthon as participating in the process of forming his own identity through defining himself consciously and strongly against “others”.

As Plēthon negotiated the complex theological boundaries of his period, infinitely complicated by his rejection of Christianity in favor of his own Pagan ideas and practices, it must have been much easier for him to define himself as anti-Christian once he considered himself a proponent not only of ancient Pagan but Eastern wisdom. The *Oracles*, as observed already in the above, signaled an identity of otherness in the theological discourse of medieval Byzantium. Psellos admired the *Oracles*, but refused to identify himself with them as the “other” in the Byzantine theological community.

Plēthon, on the other hand, enthusiastically painted himself as a figure of theological alterity. Not only did he accept the form of the polemical “other” described by Psellos—an entwinement of “Pagan” identity and mystical wisdom—he also transformed it, stoked it, by introducing an identification with the “East”.

Plēthon also graciously accepted Psellos’ association of magical practices with these “occult books”. As observed in the above, it is precisely on the subject of magical practices that Psellos equivocates the most. Plēthon, on the other hand, consciously translates the *Oracles* to the end of creating a discourse about magic. Instead of interpreting the famous inuxes of the *Oracles* cosmologically as entities, hypostasized “connectors” on the analogic highway, he interprets them to be spells, as ritual practices⁴³. Psellos, too, says the inuxes are theurgic tools—which he would never use.

Why Plēthon? Why did not Proklos or Psellos attribute these oracles to Zoroaster before him? His two predecessors were equally conscious of the

⁴³ Majercik and Lewy describe the inuxes as mediating entities—abstract, Platonic demigods (Majercik, *Oracles*; esp. Lewy, *Oracles and Theurgy*, 250: ‘we have already seen that the function assigned to the “Iynges” by the Oracles is that of a magical mediation between the Supreme God and the invoking theurgist. They are designated in these texts as the “powers” or “thoughts” of the “Father” who, when their “ineffable magical names” are invoked, “hasten forth” out of Him, “leap” into the spheres and then “return” to Him . . . This practice of theurgy is accordingly, judged by the action, a magic of the celestial sphere’). Plēthon on the other hand called them ‘spells’, and equated them with the ‘act’ and ‘act of piety’ mentioned in the *Oracles* (Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 53, 53 n. 41). Plēthon believed that ritual was an absolutely necessary part of everyday life. Introducing his hymns to the various Greek deities at the end of his *Book of Laws*, he remarks that they are intended for use by the government of his Pagan *politēia*. This social appreciation of ritual should be set alongside Athanassiadi’s portrait of Plēthon as a mystic, not a magician, who is entirely uninterested in the ritual discourse of the *Oracles* (Athanassiadi, 241-242, 249).

political and theological dominance of their Christian authorities, and their two copies of the *Oracles* were always Chaldean, after all.

Another Mistake: Plēthon's Edition of the Oracles and their de-Hellenization

To answer this question I return to the first observation of this paper: how one historical accident, Lactantius' dating of the writings of Hermes Trismegistos to the time of Moses, is echoed by the much less frequently mentioned but entirely analogous dating of the *Chaldean Oracles* to a period of impossibly remote Antiquity, an error perpetrated, as we have seen, by Michael Psellos. As we've seen, Plēthon added a second historical accident: the dating of the *Oracles* not only to the ancient East but specifically to the Persian sage Zoroaster, a move which is best described as a major-turning point at a meeting of Hellenic and heresiological (which is to say "Pagan" with fully orthodox distaste) discourses in the transmission of a central document in the history of Western esotericism⁴⁴.

To explain why Plēthon in particular made this attribution despite the availability of almost identical sources to Neoplatonists a thousand years dead⁴⁵, I will offer a brief glance at yet a third historical accident in this tale of philological error committed in the name of the pursuit of supraphilosophical wisdom: Plēthon's own edition of the *Oracles*. In his text, two Platonic, Pagan, dualist ideas were missing; their absence made it easier for Plēthon to formulate as strongly as possible an anti-Christian identity beyond his love of Pagan Neoplatonism.

His version of the *Oracles* consisted of sixty Greek hexameters—considerably smaller than Psellos', and surely also than the versions possessed by the Neoplatonists. Today we have the blessing of two scholarly reconstructions of the *Oracles* (des Places' and Majercik's—I use the latter here) which

⁴⁴ Ficino, Pico, the Romantics, and even Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society all used versions of Plēthon's manuscript of the *Oracles* and continued to ascribe the document to Zoroaster (Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 83-91). It was not until Hans Lewy's revolutionary study of the *Oracles* in the 1940s that the question of a possible Mesopotamian origin for them was finally dropped—although not entirely, as Peter Kingsley's comment that they exhibit 'genuine elements of both Iranian and Mesopotamian traditions' shows (Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, 304; Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 54-55).

⁴⁵ It is fair to assume with Bidez/Cumont (*Mages hellénisés*, 161), however, that the theurgic Neoplatonists probably considered the *Oracles* to have something to do with Zoroaster, following Plutarch of Chaeronea's fascination with the figure.

contain 226 fragments, drawn mostly from Damascius, Psellos and Proklos—far more than Plēthon could leave for us⁴⁶.

How does his version fare with the modern reconstructed text? At first glance, the main features of the *Oracles* as we know them today—a second or third-century document poetically mixing Middle Platonic cosmological claims, references to Greek deities, enigmatic aphorisms, and descriptions of arcane rites—are also present in Plēthon's edition.

There is a clear emphasis on the differentiation between a supreme, transcendent deity and a second god who creates various intermediary entities⁴⁷. The Stoic conception of the divine as a fiery being is as strong in Plēthon's text as it is in modern editions. Plēthon's text also mentions another Stoic idea, 'dread *heimarmenē*'⁴⁸. Fate governs the soteriological ascent narrative which is also present in Plēthon's text: employing a number of practices which include the use of symbols and ritual breathing, the soul withdraws from the body and ascends through the cosmos on the famous "vehicle of the soul", a kind of body of light which guides the soul from the body to heaven⁴⁹.

But two features of Plēthon's text differ significantly from modern reconstructions of the *Oracles*. First, Plēthon's *Oracles* do not mention Hekate, who Psellos refers to so often⁵⁰, and reportedly purified Proklos prior to his initiation into the Chaldean mysteries⁵¹. Plēthon does have a corrupt, rather puzzling version of one of Psellos' fragments about Hekate which omits the goddess' name and replaces it with the somewhat similar *koitēs*, "couch": 'in the left flanks of the couch is the source of virtue which remains wholly within and does not give away its virginity'⁵². Psellos quotes an uncorrupt

⁴⁶ Athanassiadi criticizes the editions of both Des Places and Majercik for their uncritical use of Kroll (Athanassiadi, 'Byzantine Commentators', 238-239). She also offers a useful summary of the debate over Psellos' own sources for the *Oracles*, especially regarding the commentary of Proklos (ibid., 238 n. 3).

⁴⁷ I use the able translation provided by Woodhouse of Opsopoeus' text in Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 51-53. The supreme deity is described in lines 9, 46, 52-55, and 58-60; the second god and lesser gods in l. 10-12, 32-34, and 54.

⁴⁸ Ibid., l. 4-6, 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., l. 13-16, 19-20, 25, 30-31, 38, 39-40, 46-48, and 55-56. For the vehicle of the soul in the *Oracles* see Lewy, *Oracles and Theurgy*, esp. 182-185; Majercik, *Oracles*, 31-45; and, from the view of Late Neoplatonism in general, Finamore, *Vehicle*.

⁵⁰ See, for example, his description of Hekate in a discussion of the *Oracles*' general cosmology (Michael Psellos, *Theologica*, 88.38-41) or of divine circular motion. (idem, *Philosophica Minora II*, 133, 16-21).

⁵¹ Marinos, *Vita Procli*, c. 28.

⁵² Opsopoeus' text in Woodhouse, l. 17-18.

copy of the same fragment in his commentary on the *Oracles*⁵³, so the oracle must have been corrupted in the centuries between Psellos and Plēthon. The absence of this Pagan, feminine hypostasization of mediation between the soul of the theurgist and the pure Intellect of the second, creator divinity is a major turning point in the history of the *Oracles*⁵⁴. The vacuum left by Hekate is filled by a further emphasis on the abstract first principles of a transcendent deity and a creator-deity; moreover, the absence of the Pagan identity-marker becomes the presence of the Zoroastrian one.

Second, Plēthon's *Oracles* are much more ambivalent about the nature of matter and the body. The *Chaldean Oracles* of Late Antiquity had a strongly dualist, ascetic flavor which considered matter as an evil principle and the body as evil's instrument in the human experience⁵⁵. Plēthon's *Oracles*, on the other hand, do refer to matter as "evil", but only in an offhand remark⁵⁶.

Moreover, the concept of matter as an evil principle seems to be more abstract than the sort of matter of the everyday world: Nature (*phusin*). 'Do not call', Plēthon's *Oracle* warns, 'upon the self-revealed image of Nature'⁵⁷. To be sure, this is not a statement of nature's divinity either. Plēthon's oracle bids the theurgist to interact with the intelligible deity instead of the material world, but does not say that the body is evil and must be rejected in order to do so.

Similarly, to describe how the world appears to the theurgist who sees the 'word' (*lepton*), or deity, Plēthon's text uses naturalistic similes as a nega-

⁵³ Michael Psellos, *Philosophica Minora II*, 135, 9-18, and Majercik, *Oracles*, fr. 52.

⁵⁴ The "Chaldean Hekate", so to speak, was a generative deity: 'for from the salty hole on her right side a full, plentiful stream of primordially generated soul gushes forth, utterly ensouling light, fire, aither, worlds' (Majercik, *Oracles*, fr. 51; see also *ibid.* fr. 32, 35, 50). But Hekate is not the first cause of the universe; rather, through her status as a producer of lower particulars she also has the power to elevate them to the level of her own producer. As one oracle states, division into plurality begins from perfect, transcendent unity along a 'girdling, intellectual skin' (*ibid.* fr. 6). Sarah Iles Johnston has persuasively argued that 'Hekate, by means of her womb, plays the same role as does the Cosmic Soul in other Middle Platonic doctrines. She receives the noetic Forms or Ideas and brings them forth anew for use in structuring—indeed creating—the physical world' (Johnston, *Hekate*, 51; see also *ibid.*, 18-20, 54-70).

⁵⁵ 'The soul delivered from the body is immortalized by theurgical ascension—Iamblichus' spiritualistic formulas fail to disguise this cardinal Chaldean dogma' (Lewy, *Oracles and Theurgy*, 188). Majercik compares the *Oracles*' 'extreme derogation of material existence' to that of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and various Nag Hammadi texts (Majercik, *Oracles*, p. 4).

⁵⁶ Opsopoeus' text in Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, I. 28, 35. My argument here agrees with that of Athanassiadi, 'Byzantine Commentators', 242-245.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 44.

tive definition: ‘... then the curved mass of heaven is not visible, the stars do not shine, the light of the moon is veiled, the earth stands not firm. All things appear as lightning’⁵⁸. Again, while the oracle uses nature as a prop, a simile, a mild negative theology even, it does not damn matter and the body either.⁵⁹

Do these characteristics of Plēthon’s text significantly influence his interpretation of the *Oracles* and hence the doctrine of “Zoroaster”?

Yes. For one, as already mentioned, Hekate is altogether absent in the text. This absence is filled by the greater presence of the first and second deities. In other *Oracle* fragments, fire is associated with anagogy in general, all the gods encountered on the road to heaven, and, as one would expect, Hekate in particular⁶⁰. Plēthon, however, opens his *Brief Explanation* by stating that ‘these Oracles mean by fire the deity’ which is ‘flashing with quivering flames through the recesses of the whole world’⁶¹. He exhorts his reader to engage the ‘reins of the fire’ manifest in religious rituals and practices. Fire, then, loses its status as a metaphor for the various steps of the ascent to heaven, and instead begins to express the individual’s encounter with the transcendent divinity in ritual.

It should also be noticed that Hekate had, without doubt, a more personal presence than any other deity in the original *Oracles*. She is the only Pagan deity mentioned in them at all besides Rhea, who seems to have fulfilled the same generative/mediating dual function⁶². Her high profile in the text necessarily labeled it as a Pagan discourse. Even if he had wanted to declare

⁵⁸ Ibid., I. 41-43.

⁵⁹ For passages from other fragments which display Middle Platonic geological and meteorological theories, see Majercik *Oracles*, fr. 54, 57, 61-62, 64-70. There can be no doubt that the *Chaldean Oracles* as reconstructed today display a strongly ascetic hylopathy: ‘do not hasten to the light-hating cosmos, violent and corporeal, for thither there is murder, discord, the foul vapors of nature, desiccated plagues, corruptions, and fluctuating actions. He who wishes to desire the Intellect of the Father must flee these things’ (ibid. fr. 134). Matter is the source of *lubēn*, the turbulence of the world of Becoming (ibid. 180. See also ibid, fr. 88, 94, 98, 100, 114, 129, 181).

⁶⁰ Lewy describes the invocation of Hekate as follows: ‘Hecate herself appears in this “most sacred fire”’; out of it she answers the questions of the conjuring theurgist. From these verses we learn that the goddess did not manifest itself in a corporeal shape but in fire’ (Lewy, *Oracles and Theurgy*, 245).

⁶¹ Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 53; and Opsopoeus’ text in ibid. 53, I. 46-7.

⁶² Majercik, *Oracles*, 35, 37. Proklos mentions Aphrodite in the same breath as the *Oracles* in ibid. 173; Hephaestus in ibid. 114. In some doubtful fragments left by Lydus, Synesius, and Proklos, Zeus, the gods Dionysius, Osiris, and Helios appear (ibid. 215, 218, and 226).

the exact consonance of the *Oracles* with Christianity, Psellos would have been at great pains to explain the strong presence of Hekate, mistress of Pagan khthonia. Her transformation into a couch 'which does not give away its virtue' allowed Plēthon, on the other hand, to historically locate the *Oracles* by their name alone: thus they become the *Chaldean Oracles of Zoroaster*.

The ambivalence towards matter in Plēthon's edition is also deeply entwined with the relationship between his theory of asceticism and of Zoroastrianism. As stated above, a strong ascetic streak flowed through the *Oracles* of Antiquity. Plēthon, as mentioned above, eschewed ascetic practice, prized by the Greek Church. The tempered, more ambiguous ascetic discourse in his own copy of the *Oracles* gave him much more freedom to interpret them as he might like on matters of ascetic living.

Plēthon cosmologically interprets the *Oracles'* slightly negative hylology in his *Brief Explanation* as follows: 'when they call matter evil, they do not mean purely evil, for they would not say that things "worthy and good" spring from it, but they mean it is evil in comparison with the whole of formal being, by reason of its being last in the whole of essential nature'⁶³. Thereupon, even though he attributes the doctrine of metempsychosis to Zoroaster, he refuses to attribute to the Persian sage the ascetic anthropology which usually accompanies the Orphic/Platonic doctrine: 'by the "dung of matter" they mean this mortal body. They bid us not to neglect it, though perishable, but to preserve it so far as possible'⁶⁴. And in his *Commentary*, 'it follows that one must not "make away with the soul from the body" for this would mean the soul making away with itself, contrary to the laws of nature'⁶⁵.

Plēthon was the first transmitter of these *Oracles* of Chaldea who was capable of actually attributing them to a Chaldean because he had a slightly different copy of them than did his predecessors. This copy differed in two important ways. First, they no longer held the irascibly Pagan element of Hekate. A Greek deity in a supposed centerpiece of ancient Persian religion would have been difficult for Plēthon to explain. Because of his copy, he didn't have to. Second, none of his *Oracles* display the strident ascetic ethic common to Middle/Neoplatonic texts. Plēthon's particular edition of the text, then, greased the wheels of his identification with the Byzantine "other" by

⁶³ Woodhouse, *Plēthon*, 54.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

facilitating his self-alignment of his own identity with an arch-“other” Eastern figure and his rejection of asceticism, a way of life on which Psellos found the *Oracles* to be in agreement with the Gospel.

Why did Plēthon have these particular sixty lines of the *Oracles*, and not others? Nobody knows Plēthon’s exact sources for the *Oracles*, but he almost certainly relied on Psellos’ text and supplanted it with the fragments transmitted from Proklos⁶⁶. In an important article on Plēthon’s reading of the text, Athanassiadi argues that he consciously excised six fragments from Psellos’ copy in view of his own Pagan and anti-ascetic theology—that the different copy was no accident but a case of intentional philological malpractice⁶⁷. However, the case of Hekate’s couch presents the possibility of corruption of Psellos’ text. If we follow Athanassiadi’s reasoning on this matter, Plēthon could have simply done away with the fragment like the six others instead of rendering it incomprehensible and having to admit confusion as to its meaning in his own commentary. Slips of the dictating tongue or trembling pens were not unheard of, and the wear of the centuries between the commentators could certainly have done some of Plēthon’s editing for him. Of course, it was also commonplace for an editor to, per Athanassiadi’s argument, simply ignore inconvenient or disagreeable aspects of a text and fail to transmit them.

Regardless, the historical accident(s) by which these specific verses of Antiquity found themselves in Plēthon’s tomes gave him enough freedom of interpretation to assert their consonance with the “doctrines of Zoroaster” he drew from other Hellenic sources. Thus do the *Chaldean Oracles* and the Hellenic, magical *philosophia perennis* of Michael Psellos find themselves transformed into a more deeply liminal space in the Western imagining of Persia than ever before. At the same time, they continued to instill, nourish, and shield the intense conviction held by Proklos, Psellos, Plēthon, and eventually so many esotericists of the Renaissance and early Modern Europe, that the wisdom of the ancients and the wisdom of the East are absolute, incommunicable, identical—and, moreover, manifest in magical practices.

Plēthon’s Paganism was not that of the public cults of Graeco-Roman religion. He theorized a totalitarian Pagan regime devoted to Zeus⁶⁸, and in the

⁶⁶ Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathusthra*, 57: ‘textgeschichtlich ist Plēthon von Michael Psellos’ *Kommentar zu den Chaldäischen Orakeln* (also der *Exegēsis*) abhängig’.

⁶⁷ These are fragments 107, 149, 150, 159, 206, 212; Athanassiadi, ‘Byzantine Commentators’, 239–245.

⁶⁸ Plēthon describes with elaborate detail his radical political programme in his *Laws*; for an excellent discussion see Wokart, “Hellenische Theologie”.

process adopted the esoteric Platonism of the Late Antique intellectual milieu, although eschewing its generally ascetic ethos. Ficino and esotericists who lived after him did not read the *Oracles* of Psellos. They read the *Oracles* of Plēthon; they even read his commentary⁶⁹. While Psellos left a greater number of fragments of texts from this Antique esoteric milieu for modern philologists, Plēthon had a far wider impact on Western culture through the assimilation of his text of the *Oracles*, his ideas about the *philosophia perennis* and the Persian East as the most ancient font of wisdom⁷⁰.

Plēthon's philological mistake—the assignment of the *Oracles* to Zoroaster's remote Antiquity—was made possible, at least in part, by the historical accident of his edition. Plēthon was no naïve fool, and to weave the story of his reception of Psellos' *Oracles* with thread of error's hue might be exact but not entirely true. Plēthon believed that they bestowed an incredibly ancient, profound wisdom, surpassing all that Christendom had to offer. This conviction proved to be contagious.

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⁶⁹ Stausberg (*Faszination Zarathusthra*, 83-92) relates the pervasiveness of the idea that Zoroaster authored the *Oracles* in some detail.

⁷⁰ 'Dennoch hat Plēthon der europäischen Zoroaster-Rezeptiongeschichte die entscheidenden Impulse gegeben: Ohne Plēthons Zuschreibung der *Chaldäischen Orakel* an "Zoroasters Mager" hätte das Interesse an Zoroaster wohl nie jene Intensität erlangt, die vorliegende Untersuchung überhaupt erst legitimiert' (ibid. 44).

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Die Chaldäischen Orakel des Zoroaster, die Couch der Hekate und platonischer Orientalismus in Psellos und Plēthon

Die vorliegende Untersuchung geht der Frage nach, auf welche Weise Michael Psellos und Georgios Gemistos Plēthon die *Chaldäischen Orakel* als eine Quelle uralter orientalischer Weisheit interpretierten. Psellos geht als ein Häresiologe an die *Orakel* heran, wenn auch mit ambivalenten Aussagen hinsichtlich der Rolle von Magie sowohl in der Lehre der *Orakel* als in seiner eigenen Philosophie. Der Artikel untersucht, inwieweit in der mittelalterlichen byzantinischen Vorstellung Magie mit Konstruktionen orientalischer "Dekadenz" verbunden war, die ihrerseits Einfluss hatten auf Psellos' eigene Auffassung, bei den *Orakeln* handele es sich um illegitime östliche Zauberkunst, ungeachtet des Wertes ihrer metaphysischen Lehre.

Plēthon hingegen greift die *Orakel* im Kontext eines Diskurses neopaganer Alterität auf, in welchem er sie mit einer antiken östlichen Weisheit identifiziert, die gegen das orthodoxe Christentum in Stellung gebracht wurde. Obwohl er keinerlei Kenntnisse über persische Religion besaß, schrieb er dem Zoroaster die Autorschaft der *Orakel* zu, und zwar nicht aus schlichter Naivität, sondern im Zuge eines gängigen Deutungsmusters, das James Walbridge "Platonischen Orientalismus" nennt: die Neigung neoplatonischer Denker, uraltes Wissen nicht nur Platon zuzuschreiben, sondern auch anderen Weisen aus dem Osten. Plēthon, selbsternannter Neuheide in einem christlich orthodoxen Reich, fühlte sich angesprochen von der orientalischen *Otherness* der *Orakel* und identifizierte sich mit ihnen.

Sein Manuskript der *Orakel*, welches ursprünglich Psellos gehörte, half ihm bei diesem Unternehmen. Seit Psellos waren wichtige Fragmente, die Askese, Dualismus und pagane Gottheiten betrafen, verloren oder doch unvollständig. Ohne diese fehlenden Fragmente war es ein Leichtes für Plēthon, die *Orakel* als eine holistische persische Theologie zu lesen, und nicht

als eine hellenistische, mittelplatonisch-dualistische. Die Unterschiede zwischen Plēthons Exemplar der *Orakel* und jenen der frühen Neuplatonisten mögen ein Grund dafür sein, dass Plēthon der erste Platonist war, der Zoroaster als den Autor der *Orakel* identifizierte, eine Zuschreibung, die entscheidend werden sollte für die Rezeption und Interpretation der *Orakel* in Renaissance und moderner Esoterik.

I PARGOLI DI AGATODEMONE: FRAMMENTI DI MITOLOGIE ALCHEMICHE

EZIO ALBRILE

1. *Alla ricerca di una “tradizione”*

Tramite l'arabo *al-kīmiyā*¹, il nome “alchimia” è riuscito ad arrivare sino a noi forse dal greco χύμα, “massa metallica, lingotto”, ma anche da χυμός, “succo, umore” (e in senso traslato “ambrosia”), o forse dall'antico egiziano *kemi*, “nero”, normalmente impiegato nei geroglifici per indicare l'Egitto stesso (a causa della sua terra nera). Questo sempre attraverso il greco χημία, che secondo Plutarco designerebbe la “terra nera” d'Egitto¹; una metonimia che gli alchimisti greci sembra abbiano conservato nelle loro speculazioni sul nome “Egitto” e sulla definizione di “nero perfetto” per indicare la *prima materia*, le cui trasformazioni produrrebbero l'oro o l'argento. Plausibile anche l'interferenza con il greco χυμεία, “fusione”, in riferimento all'opera metallurgica².

Nel quadro della letteratura ermetica sono gli scritti alchemici, unitamente a quelli astrologici, ad aver avuto la diffusione più ampia, passando dal greco al siriano, all'arabo e al latino. Ma, a differenza di quanto avviene per l'astrologia, nell'alchimia ermetica è praticamente impossibile individuare una discendenza diretta da fonti egiziane antiche.

Un *Corpus* alchemico si formò in epoca bizantina³: la conquista islamica dell'Egitto nel VII sec. d.C. esiliò l'alchimia greca a Costantinopoli, ove essa andò incontro ad una fase di stasi. L'“arte sacra” mutò in erudizione, trasformandosi in un'attività di compilazione e di riordino di materiali letterari antecedenti⁴. Una sorte condivisa con lapidari, bestiari, erbari, manoscritti di magia e di astrologia⁵, tutti riccamente illustrati; ma a differenza di questi

¹ Plut. *De Isid. et Osir.* 33 (364 C); cfr. Gundel, ‘Alchemie’, coll. 240-241; coinciso ma importante anche Vereno, ‘Alchemie’, coll. 347-349.

² Cfr. Forbes, ‘Chemie’, col. 1062.

³ Cfr. Doresse, ‘L'ermetismo di derivazione egiziana’, 78-79.

⁴ Vd. anche Festugière, ‘Alchymica’.

⁵ Cfr. Mazal, *Handbuch der Byzantinistik*, 138.

l'iconografia alchemica è limitata nel tempo e nei tipi. I manoscritti greci di alchimia contengono infatti soltanto illustrazioni più o meno schematiche di apparecchi⁶. Fa eccezione la figura dell'Οὐροβόρος, il Serpente o δράκων avvolto su se stesso⁷, eternato nell'atto di inghiottire e divorare la propria coda⁸, il simbolo più significativo che introduce alla prassi alchemica⁹.

Le citazioni di antiche opere attribuite ad Ermete si trovano nel corso di trattati o di compilazioni sotto i nomi di Stefano, di Olimpiodoro, del "Cristiano", etc. Gli scritti più preziosi sono costituiti dalle opere attribuite a Zosimo di Panopoli (oggi Akhmim, nell'Alto Egitto), che visse nel III secolo d.C. Dei ventotto libri che egli avrebbe dedicati alla "sorella" Teosebeia¹⁰, ricordiamo il trattato "Sulla Lettera Omega", colmo di preziose citazioni di apocrifi vari, e il "Libro del Computo finale", in cui, parlando delle "tinture opportune", cita il *Poimandres* e il *Cratere* ermetici; mentre il trattato "Sulla forza" è conservato solo più nel commento di Olimpiodoro¹¹.

Nel "Libro dell'Imouth" (forse contrazione di Ἰμούθης, forma grecizzata di Imhotep, il famoso cortigiano e architetto della III dinastia egiziana)¹² Zosimo si riferisce ai Φυσικά di Ermete: egli ha forse tratto di qui l'introduzione a una rivelazione alchemica da lui riprodotta con il titolo di "Lettera di Iside a Horus". Ricordiamo inoltre il "Libro di Sophé", probabile corrutela del nome del faraone Cheope (che gli antichi egizi chiamano Ὡψω, Erodoto Χέοψ e Manetone Σοῦφις)¹³. Più di Stefano od Olimpiodoro, Zosimo attesta con le sue citazioni l'esistenza di un'alchimia ermetica che non è pervenuta fino a noi. Sarebbero attribuiti ad Ermete dei Φυσικά e un Ἐπταβίβλος, una

⁶ Cfr. Halleux, 'Alchimia. Occidente', 327a.

⁷ Vd. *infra* l'ampia disamina su questa enigmatica figura.

⁸ Alla tematica dette spazio il grande Preisendanz, 'Aus der Geschichte des Uroboros'; vd. anche Sheppard, 'The Ouroboros and the Unity of Matter in Alchemy'; Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 258-259, 372; Käppel, 'Uroboros', col. 1053.

⁹ Per una introduzione generale al problema si vd. Riess, 'Alchimie'; e Weyer, 'Alchimie', coll. 445-448; cfr. inoltre Halleux, 'Alchimia: Occidente', 326a-329b; e Bausani, 'Alchimia. Islam', 330a-335b; da ultimo il più recente Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 247-279; con commento alle pp. 372-380.

¹⁰ Figura descritta da Zosimo ora nelle vesti di "sorella" e discepola mistica, ora nei panni di una alchimista sedotta dagli insegnanti di scuole rivali, da riconquistare al proprio magistero (cfr. Tonelli, *Zosimo di Panopoli*, 4); il nome letteralmente significa "culto divino".

¹¹ L'edizione da noi utilizzata è quella classica di Berthelot & Ruelle, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, II, 69-104 (d'ora in poi abbreviato in Berthelot-Ruelle); annunciata nella Collezione "Les Alchimistes Grecs" (per i tipi di "Les Belles Lettres") una nuova e definitiva edizione a cura di Cristina Viano; vd. per ora della stessa 'Les alchimistes gréco-alexandrins'.

¹² Cfr. Mertens, *Zosime de Panopolis*, XCV.

¹³ *Ibid.*, LXVII.

raccolta arricchita da oscuri commentari attribuiti a un certo Anubis. Altri cinque titoli indicano più probabilmente singoli trattati: “La Piramide”, la “Piccola Chiave”, il “Trattato a Paosiris”, “Sullo sbiancare del piombo” e “Sui vagli”. Quanto al “Sulle nature” e al “Sull’immaterialità” citati da Zosimo a proposito del dogma della Fatalità, nulla dice che essi parlassero d’alchimia¹⁴. A questi trattati, direttamente attribuiti ad Ermete, vanno aggiunti i “Commentari di Pebechio”, che sarebbe stato un discepolo di Ostanes, ma che viene ricordato solo da Psello nel IX sec. d.C.; nonché un’anonima “Lettera a Osiride” e una ricetta attribuita al dio Heron, divinità solare egizia nota alle fonti ellenistiche¹⁵, forse da collegare a Horon, figura di spicco del pantheon sincretico siro-egizio¹⁶.

Quest’elenco sarebbe assai deludente se non fosse da ascrivere all’ermetismo un’altra tradizione alchemica, anch’essa conservata nelle sillogi bizantine e le cui origini sono più facilmente controllabili. Questa specifica dottrina pare si proponesse di “tingere” metalli e pietre con oro, argento o gemme, quasi si trattasse di semplici tessuti. Essa è documentata tra l’altro da due grandi papiri del III o IV sec. d.C., ritrovati insieme ad altri scritti “segreti” in una tomba della necropoli tebana, dove forse qualche iniziato aveva fissato la propria dimora. A tali formulari va accostato quanto i manoscritti bizantini ci hanno conservato dei *Φυσικὰ καὶ μυστικά* attribuiti allo pseudo-Democrito, due opere che i moderni critici sono riusciti a ricollegare a un tal Bolo di Mendes il “democriteo”¹⁷, autore di un trattato sulle tinture o *Βαφικά* che sarebbe vissuto verso il 200 a.C. e avrebbe conosciuto alcune pratiche di doratura con le quali si abbellivano gli oggetti sacri dei templi egizi.

Filosofia religiosa, astrologia e medicina, alchimia e scienze naturali, ma non è tutto: l’ermetismo si sarebbe interessato anche alla storia. Così gli *Αἰγυπτιακά* di Manetone ricevettero, molto dopo la loro composizione, una dedica apocrifia a Tolemeo Filadelfo, un preambolo secondo il quale Manetone non avrebbe fatto altro che trascrivere i libri storici di Agatodemone, chimerico figlio del secondo Ermete, il quale li avrebbe tradotti personalmente dalle iscrizioni lasciate dal primo Ermete nei tempi anteriori al Diluvio.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, LXII ss.

¹⁵ Cfr. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 295b-296a.

¹⁶ Cfr. Morenz, *Gli Egizi*, 308-309.

¹⁷ Cfr. Wellmann, ‘Bolos. 2’, 676-677.

Manetone godeva di una così vasta fama presso i discepoli di Ermete che essi composero sotto il suo nome un poema astrologico¹⁸.

2. *Palingenesi*

Figura chiave di tutte queste dottrine è Olimpiodoro con il suo commentario “Sull’arte sacra”, dove vengono citati e glossati gran parte di questi testi¹⁹. Anche se in un linguaggio forse volutamente farraginoso, il commentario di Olimpiodoro delinea una visione unitaria della prassi alchemica, incentrata sulla produzione e sulla trasformazione di un elemento peculiare, il cosiddetto “magnete” o “magnesia”²⁰. Esso è il corpo sostanziale, il σῶμα ὑποστατικόν, il “corpo dotato di esistenza individuale” o “che dà l’esistenza”²¹, quello che secondo Olimpiodoro gli Egizi chiamano “piombo nero”, μόλυβδος μέλας, cioè la *prima materia* dell’opera. Tale mistero

ὃν ἐπεθύμησαν εἰδέναι οἱ Αἰγυπτίων προφηταί, καὶ οἱ τῶν δαιμόνων χρησμοὶ ἐξέδωκαν, σκωρίδια καὶ τέφραι Μαρίας.

che i profeti egiziani anelavano conoscere e gli oracoli dei demoni hanno rivelato, sono le scorie e le ceneri di Maria²².

Qui per “Maria”, la leggendaria alchimista ebrea²³, è da intendersi il “corpo lunare”, l’involucro psichico che deve dissolversi affinché possa nascere e manifestarsi, come da una crisalide, l’originaria identità celeste²⁴. L’embrione racchiuso nell’Uovo e le scorie o “ceneri di Maria” esprimono un identico referente simbolico: possiedono ambedue una struttura lunare, in quanto immagini che definiscono un divenire non ancora manifestato, ossia la realtà virtuale e preformale celata nelle Tenebre, nella Notte e nel Chaos primigenio. È possibile inoltre un gioco di parole tra χρυσαλλίς, “crisalide”²⁵, e

¹⁸ Cfr. Syncell. *Chron.* 72-74 (Mosshammer [Leipzig 1984], 40, 26-41, 28).

¹⁹ Vd. *supra* n. 11.

²⁰ Di questo ho parlato in maniera dettagliata nel mio precedente lavoro ‘Olimpiodoro e l’Iran’.

²¹ Cfr. *Hiera Tech.* 37 (Berthelot-Ruelle II, 91, 11-12).

²² *Ibid.* (91, 12-14); una significativa variante testuale recita: . . . τέφρας· καὶ ἡ Μαρία δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς αὐτὸν οἶδε τὸν μόλυβδον (Redazione L in Berthelot-Ruelle II, 91 n. 14).

²³ Cfr. Hammer Jensen, *Die älteste Alchymie*, 55 ss.; la figura e l’opera di Maria l’Ebreia sono dettagliatamente ricostruite in Patai, *Alchimisti Ebrei*, 85 ss.

²⁴ Cfr. anche Evola, *La tradizione ermetica*, 69 (che riporta le dottrine ermetiche di Giuliano Kremmerz).

²⁵ Sull’idea di crisalide nel mondo antico, cfr. Arist. *Hist. anim.* 551a 19.

χρυσοκόλλα, l'amalgama aureo dai poteri taumaturgici, prodotto alchemicamente²⁶. L'intera dottrina è compendiata in un passo successivo:

Καὶ μὴν ἄνθρωπον ἔχομεν λειῶσαι καὶ ἐπιβαλεῖν; φησὶν ὁ φιλόσοφος πρὸς τὸν Ζώσιμον. Ὁ δέ φησιν· “Ἐτεκμηράμην ὡς ἐκ τοῦ κοσμικοῦ, τοῦτο ὧν εἶναι”. Πάλιν ἐν τῇ πυραμίδι ὁ Ἑρμῆς τὸ ὧν αἰνιττόμενος, κυρίως οὐσίαν καὶ χρυσοκόλλης καὶ σελήνης ἔλεγεν τὸ ὧν. Καὶ γὰρ τὸ ὧν προκαλεῖται τὸν χρυσόκομον κόσμον· ἄνθρωπον γὰρ εἶναι φησὶν τὸν ἄλεκτρυόνα ὁ Ἑρμῆς καταραθέντα ὑπὸ τοῦ ἡλίου.

‘E non riusciamo a polverizzare e gettare l'uomo?’—Dice il filosofo rivolto a Zosimo. Quindi afferma: ‘Abbiamo dimostrato che l'Uovo è figura del cosmo’. E ancora, ne “La Piramide” Ermete adombra per enigmi l'Uovo; dice che l'Uovo è, propriamente parlando, la sostanza della crisocolle e della Luna. L'Uovo è chiamato mondo dalla chioma aurea ed Ermete designa la gallina quale uomo maledetto dal Sole²⁷.

Il lessico dell'enigmatica domanda iniziale sembra presupporre un culto funerario in cui le ceneri del defunto sono ritualmente disperse, ma il tutto appare rielaborato in chiave misterica. L'idea dell'alchimista è di ridurre l'uomo, il suo cadavere, ad un principio indistruttibile, un’“essenza” atemporale. Tramite segrete manipolazioni, a partire dalle ceneri si sarebbe ricostruito l'individuo originario, si sarebbe compiuta la *παλιγγενεσία*²⁸.

È il fascino di un'arte arcana che si trasmette al mondo latino: la prima opera alchemica a stampa, accompagnata da incisioni di carattere simbolico, è un'aldina del 1546. Si tratta di una silloge di testi curata dal monaco calabrese Janus Lavinius. Nelle tavole che commentano uno dei testi, la *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* di Pietro Bono, è descritta una prassi palingenetica affine alla nostra. Le incisioni si rifanno probabilmente ad un manoscritto miniato dell'epoca di Pietro Bono²⁹, risalente a circa duecento anni prima, al 1330. Esse mostrano le vicende di un sovrano ucciso dal proprio figlio, le cui spoglie mortali (= ossa), manipolate in modo appropriato, ne rendono possibile la resurrezione³⁰. Più recentemente la vicenda di uomini e animali

²⁶ Cfr. Stephanus, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*, VIII, coll. 1736-1737.

²⁷ *Hiera Tech.* 52 (Berthelot-Ruelle II, 101, 11-16).

²⁸ Cfr. De Dánann, *Mémoire du sang*, 95.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 122-124.

polverizzati e rigenerati a piacere ha avuto una appendice romanzesca ne *Il caso di Charles Dexter Ward* di H.P. Lovecraft³¹.

Il passo in questione è stranamente sfuggito a L. Brisson, strenuo e unico sostenitore dell'origine neoplatonica e alchemica della "dionisofagia"³², cioè dello *σπαραγμός*, lo "smembramento" di Dioniso. Quale contromisura per la morte del dio, Zeus abbatte i Titani fulminandoli; dalle loro ceneri nasce una nuova generazione di uomini, i quali recano in se stessi sia l'elemento titanico, che quello dionisiaco, tanto la maculazione della trasgressione originaria, quanto il principio della perfezione divina.

Al contrario, il passo di Olimpiodoro che il Brisson adduce per documentare la sua singolare teoria, è un lungo e oscuro asserto, in cui Ermete parla del "magnesio" sublimato e della sua capacità di "rendere bianchi" tutti i corpi: si tratterebbe quindi di un processo di calcinazione. In definitiva, secondo Brisson, incenerendo i Titani Zeus compirebbe una operazione alchemica il cui risultato è la nascita, o meglio la "produzione", dell'essere umano³³. Nei *Meteorologica* di Aristotele τίτανος designerebbe infatti il prodotto della calcinazione del calcare³⁴.

Ma la parte saliente della citazione può essere tradotta in modo differente. È sempre Ermete che parla:

Ἄφες αὐτὴν, φησὶν, ἀπέναντι τῆς καμίνου καίεσθαι λεπύροις φοινίκων κωβαθίων.

Lascio cuocere sul fornello, sottoponendolo all'azione delle scaglie di rosso cobalto³⁵.

L'espressione "rosso cobalto", φοινίκων κωβαθίων, cela forse un secondo significato nei termini φοῖνιξ, "rosso porpora", ma anche "Fenice", il mitico pennuto che ciclicamente rinasce dalle proprie ceneri, e κωβαθίων, un *hapax* alchemico³⁶ usualmente interpretato con "cobalto", ma riconducibile alla glossa κωβάριον, "globo, sfera"³⁷.

³¹ Cfr. Lovecraft, *Opere complete*, 731-822.

³² Cfr. Brisson, 'Le corps "dionysiaque"', 492 ss. (l'articolo mi è stato segnalato da G. Casadio, che ringrazio).

³³ *Ibid.*, 493.

³⁴ Cfr. *Meteor.* IV, 11, 389a 28.

³⁵ *Hiera Tech.* 27 (Berthelot-Ruelle II, 84, 21-85, 1).

³⁶ Cfr. Liddell-R.Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, I, 1015b.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Sovente la Fenice è rappresentata assisa su di un globo che ricorda il mondo³⁸. Da altre fonti³⁹ apprendiamo come l'involucro che raccoglie le spoglie mortali della Fenice sia una bara di mirra a forma sferica, σφαῖρα σμύρνῃς, testimonianza che ha un possibile parallelo in Claudiano, ai versi 73-74: 'auctoremque globum phariae telluris ad oras'; ed un ricordo lessicale in Lattanzio: '... in formam conglobat ore pio'⁴⁰. Ma la fonte di quest'idea è in Erodoto⁴¹, dove si afferma esplicitamente che la bara della Fenice è un ᾠόν, un Uovo contenente le spoglie del genitore morto, che essa reca ad Heliopolis in Egitto, come sostiene anche Horapollo⁴²:

Vi è anche un altro uccello sacro, chiamato Fenice. Io non lo vidi se non dipinto, giacché esso si reca da loro [= gli Egizi], come dicono quelli di Heliopolis, ogni cinquecento anni e si racconta che vi si rechi dopo che gli è morto il padre. Se risponde alla immagine dipinta, ecco com'è per grandezza e forma: ha le penne in parte color oro e in parte rosse e assomiglia all'aquila nelle linee del corpo e nella grandezza. Dicono—ma per me non è credibile—che partendo dall'Arabia rechi il padre nel tempio del Sole (= Helios) e lì lo seppellisca dopo averlo unto di mirra. E lo trasporta in questa forma: innanzi tutto costruisce un Uovo di mirra tanto grande quanto essa può trasportarlo; quindi prova a reggerlo e, dopo un primo tentativo, lo vuota, così da collocarvi dentro il padre, e poi, con altra mirra, chiude l'apertura per la quale ve lo ha collocato. Con il padre dentro il peso dell'Uovo resta lo stesso; dopo averlo così avvolto essa lo trasporta in Egitto nel tempio del Sole (= Helios). Tali cose dicono che faccia questo uccello⁴³.

Il greco κοβαθίων è forse alla base del latino *coobatio*, termine che nell'alchimia latina designa il processo iterato di ridistillazione⁴⁴, un procedimento che può dirsi "uroborico", o meglio "circolare, sferico", di purificazione e redenzione ciclica della *prima materia*. Nel nostro testo ciò che si vuole esprimere è che attraverso la coobazione tutti i corpi sono resi bianchi. La chimerica palingenesi vegetale e la leggenda della Fenice descrivono entrambe una rigenerazione che si attua a partire dalle ceneri; il "magnesio", sublimato e sottoposto a successive calcinazioni, diviene il sale bianco che può trasmutarsi in ogni cosa.

³⁸ Cfr. *LIMC*, VIII/2, 656 n. 10; 657 n. 18.

³⁹ Vd. anche il mio 'L'Uovo della Fenice: Aspetti di un sincretismo orfico-gnostico'.

⁴⁰ Cfr. *De ave phoen.* 120 (Ricci [Bari 1981], 85-86).

⁴¹ Herod. II, 73, 4-5.

⁴² *Hierogl.* II, 57.

⁴³ Herod. II, 73, 1-5.

⁴⁴ Cfr. Testi, *Dizionario di Alchimia e di Chimica Antiquaria*, 67a.

Olimpiodoro cita un testo ermetico purtroppo smarrito, “La Piramide”. Da sottolineare come tale figura geometrica sia cruciale nelle speculazioni ermetiche e neoplatoniche⁴⁵: essa è il simbolo della gerarchia ontologica, del progressivo depotenziarsi dell’Uno nei molti; ma non solo, la piramide è anche immagine della montagna cosmica, la prima zolla di terra affiorata nell’Oceano iniziale. Montagna che nel testo di Olimpiodoro custodisce il segreto delle miniere d’oro⁴⁶. A quanto ci è dato capire in questo testo sarebbe raccontato per enigmi il mistero dell’Uovo, *imago mundi* ma anche essenza della χρυσοκόλλα e della Luna, dove σελήνη è forse metafora per “Argento”⁴⁷, fermo restando il simbolismo germinale di cui è foriera.

E ancora, nel perduto scritto si aggiunge un misterioso asserto in cui l’Uovo è chiamato mondo dalla “chioma d’oro”, χρυσόκομος. Tale strana definizione risente forse di un influsso orfico⁴⁸, ma è anche probabile uno scambio semantico con χρυσοκόμη, nome che designa una varietà botanica sulla cui identificazione non v’è accordo⁴⁹. Fonti autorevoli ritengono si tratti del *Chrysocoma linosyris* L. o *Aster linosyris* (= “Spillo d’oro”), pianta perenne dai fiori gialli della famiglia delle Asteraceae (o Compositae). Altrove ho insistito sui legami tra piante magiche ed origini della sapienza⁵⁰ nel quadro di una iniziazione estatica⁵¹ secondo cui sarebbe la stessa pianta ad “iniziare” il miste, conferendogli la visione delle realtà ultime. Forse anche in questo caso siamo in presenza di una concezione analoga, ma la difficoltà nell’individuare l’esatta specie botanica rende problematico capire quale sia il principio psicoattivo alla base di tali esperienze. Ciò che preme rilevare è il carattere criptico di questi testi, colmi di rimandi e allusioni, unito ad una finalità che è sostanzialmente prammatica.

⁴⁵ Cfr. Festugière, ‘La piramide ermetica’, 135-140.

⁴⁶ *Hiera Tech.* 30 (Berthelot-Ruelle II, p. 88, 3-5).

⁴⁷ Sono ravvisabili analogie, anche se in chiave angelologica, con l’esegesi gnostica del valentiniano Eracleone, così come refutato da Origene (*In Joh. Com.* 13, 17, 104 [Preuschen, 241, 19-22]).

⁴⁸ Cfr. *Orph. Hymn.* 34, 9 (Ricciardelli [Milano 2000], 94).

⁴⁹ Cfr. Stephanus, VIII, col. 1738.

⁵⁰ Cfr. Albrile, ‘Le magie di Ostanès’, 1076-1077.

⁵¹ Vd. anche Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreism*, 120 ss.; Culianu, ‘Iatroi kai manteis’, 290 ss.

3. *Ouroboros*

Tale è forse la natura della trasgressione evocata nel testo, sì da giustificare una metamorfosi animale: la trasformazione in “gallina” (ἡ ἀλεκτρυών), ma anche in “gallo” (ὁ ἀλεκτρυών)⁵², è logica, dal momento che si parla dell’Uovo e dei suoi misteri ed ha inoltre una sua profonda ragion d’essere simbolica: il Signore del mondo intermedio, Abraxas, o l’Abrasax di Basilide gnostico⁵³, è il dio dagli arti di serpente e dalla testa di gallo, qualche volta raffigurato con il capo leonino⁵⁴, elementi che rinviano ad una iconografia dalle radici molto antiche e ben assestate nel tempo⁵⁵. Il significato teologico-solare, e quindi “aureo”, di Abraxas/Abrasax, era stato già rilevato da San Girolamo⁵⁶ e dall’autore degli *Acta Archelai*, che lo avevano accostato a quello del dio iranico-ellenistico Mithra (Μεῖθρας), il cui valore numerologico (isopsefico) corrisponde a 365, e che nel mondo greco-romano ha anch’esso funzioni di Demiurgo. In alcuni testi gnostici di Nag-Hammadi Abraxas/Abrasax è descritto nelle vesti di messaggero celeste⁵⁷, in perfetta sintonia con le funzioni svolte nelle gemme e nei papiri magici. Nelle prime, sostanzialmente usate con valore talismanico, Abraxas/Abrasax appare sovente in figura umana con testa di gallo⁵⁸, iconografia che ritroviamo ancora nella cosiddetta “Sfera magica di Atene”⁵⁹.

Ibrido magico che ricorda un altro personaggio spurio più volte evocato da Olimpiodoro, Agatodemone, il mitico ierofante iniziatore della disciplina ermetica, il “buon demone”⁶⁰ dell’Egitto. Agatodemone descrive plastica-

⁵² Cfr. anche Marcovich, ‘Pythagoras as Cock’, 174-177.

⁵³ Cfr. Hipp. Ref. VII, 26, 6.

⁵⁴ Cfr. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, 123 ss.; Nilsson, ‘The Anguipede of the Magical Amulets’, 61-64; Delatte & Derchain, *Les Intailles magiques gréco-egyptiennes*, 23 ss.

⁵⁵ Sia per Abraxas che per Yaldabaoth, il Quispel postula ad esempio una origine orfica (con innesti egizio-fenici); cfr. Quispel, ‘The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John’, 10 ss.

⁵⁶ In Am. 3 (PL 25, 1018 ss.).

⁵⁷ Cfr. Ev. Aegyp. III, 52, 26; Zostr. VIII, 47, 13; Apoc. Adam. V, 75, 22.

⁵⁸ Cfr. in partic. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, pl. VIII, 162-176; IX, 177-178; e l’illustrazione che accompagna N. Turchi, ‘Abraxas’, col. 128, che però confonde Abraxas con il Dio supremo dello gnostico Basilide; abbondante materiale iconografico anche in H. Leclercq, ‘Abraxas’, coll. 128 ss., con una interessante rassegna delle parole magiche tratte da gemme gnostiche (coll. 137-155).

⁵⁹ Da me studiata in ‘La posterità di Iao’.

⁶⁰ Sulla fisionomia di questo curioso e mai esistito personaggio, cfr. Ganschinietz, ‘Agathodaimon’.

mente l'eterna coniugazione di principio e fine nelle fattezze del Serpente Ouroboros (δράκων γὰρ οὐροβόρος)⁶¹. Il Serpente avvolto su se stesso, eternato nell'atto di inghiottire e divorare la propria coda, è il simbolo più significativo che introduce alla prassi alchemica; è tradizione che le sue tortuosità nascondano, come un utero, una sequela misteriosa di esistenze, di "mondi", dal più oscuro al più perfetto.

Questa figura—secondo Agatodemone—nasconderebbe un significato recondito:

βούλεται εἶναι, οὐ φθονῶν ὡς δοκοῦσί τινες ἀμύητοι· ἀλλὰ φανερόν τοῦτο ἐστίν, ὃ μύστα, πληθυντικῇ τῇ φωνῇ, ψά.

Parlando così egli non intende celare gelosamente la verità, come credono i profani; al contrario, o mio miste, ciò è reso manifesto da una parola al plurale: Uova⁶².

In greco il plurale di Uovo (ὄν) è ψά cioè la sequenza di Α (inizio) e Ω (fine) rovesciata, espressione linguistica del compimento unito al principio, quale coda in bocca all'Ouroboros. Il significato più noto legato all'Ouroboros è quello che lo accosta al Tempo. Il tempo che non ha inizio né fine, poiché non è altro che il filo con cui è tessuta l'eternità. Gli Egizi lo collegavano al cammino celeste degli astri che regolano le nostre stagioni e i nostri anni⁶³. Tuttavia sembra che il significato iniziale dell'Ouroboros oscillasse tra il ciclico, inesorabile fluire dell'eternità e il limite spazio-temporale tra ciò che gli Egizi chiamavano *Nun* (= il Chaos) e l'esistente⁶⁴. Con una peculiare sincresi, Gnostici e Neoplatonici riprendono questa cosmologia, facendo dell'Ouroboros l'immagine del divenire ritmato in una duplice ciclicità: lo sviluppo, il manifestarsi dell'Uno nel Tutto e il ritorno del Tutto all'Uno⁶⁵. Nel mondo latino l'Ouroboros è attribuito di Saturnus, figlio di Coelus; Saturno è il Tempo nelle fattezze di un vecchio che nella mano destra reca una falce e nella sinistra l'Ouroboros, poiché nello scorrere del tempo l'ultimo mese di ogni anno raggiunge il primo dell'anno successivo, così come si congiungono la testa e la coda del Serpente ciclico⁶⁶. Filiazione che

⁶¹ *Hiera Tech.* 18 (Berthelot-Ruelle II, 80, 1-2).

⁶² *Ibid.* 18 (80, 2-3).

⁶³ Importante a riguardo il lavoro di Stricker, *De Grote Zeeslang*, 12 ss.

⁶⁴ Cfr. Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen*, 172-173; Stricker, *De Grote Zeeslang*, 18 ss.; Mertens, *Zosime de Panopolis*, 178.

⁶⁵ Cfr. Leisegang, *La gnose*, 81; Mertens, *Zosime de Panopolis*, 179.

⁶⁶ Vd. Deonna, 'La descendance du Saturne', 170-189.

ritroviamo in Olimpiodoro, in cui la figura di Agatodemone si confonde con l'Ouroboros:

Καὶ ὅρα, πανίστορ, καὶ νόει ὅτι ὁ Ἀγαθοδαίμων ἄρα τίς ἐστιν· ὥς μὲν
τινες μυθεύουσιν ὅτι τις ἀρχαῖός ἐστι τῶν πάντων παλαιῶν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ
φιλοσοφήσας· ἄλλοι δὲ φασιν εἶναι αὐτὸν μυστικώτερον ἄγγελόν τινα . . .
πάλιν τινὲς Οὐρανὸν αὐτὸν ἐκάλεσαν· καὶ τάχα ὧδε ἔχει λόγον διὰ τὸ
κοσμικὸν μίμημα.

E attendi con solerzia, tu che conosci ogni cosa e comprendi chi è Agatodemone: qualcuno narra che sia un antenato illustre, uno dei più vecchi filosofi d'Egitto. Altri ritengono sia un angelo mistico . . . Altri ancora lo hanno chiamato "Cielo". Forse si usa questa espressione perché il Serpente è la rappresentazione del mondo⁶⁷.

Da tenere presente anche l'ipotesi di un vagheggiamento orfico: nella teogonia di Ieronimo ed Ellanico Cielo è figlio della Notte, ma la Notte è sia sposa che madre e figlia di Phanes, un personaggio meraviglioso, androgino, teriomorfo e con le ali d'oro, nato da un Uovo splendente⁶⁸, probabile modello ispirativo dell'Agatodemone ermetico. Nel mito orfico Phanes è scaturigine del cosmo e "seme degli dèi". Ma il dato palese è l'identità soterica fra Agatodemone e l'Ouroboros applicabile al Redentore per eccellenza, Gesù Cristo: una pietra incisa, attribuita ai seguaci di Basilide gnostico, reca un Ouroboros con i segni del crisma cristico, cioè il monogramma formato dall'intersezione delle lettere greche I (iota) e X (chi)⁶⁹.

E ancora, prosegue il testo:

Ιερογραμματεῖς γάρ τινες τῶν Αἰγυπτίων βουλόμενοι κόσμον ἐγχαράξαι
ἐν τοῖς ὀβελίσκοις ἢ ἐν τοῖς ἱερατικοῖς γράμμασιν, δράκοντα ἐγκολά-
πτουσιν οὐροβόρον· τὸ δὲ σῶμα αὐτοῦ κατὰστικτον ὑπάρχει πρὸς τὴν
διάθεσιν τῶν ἀστέρων. Ταῦτα δὲ μοι εἴρηται ὥς διὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν· ὃς καὶ
βίβλον ἐκτίθησιν χημευτικὴν . . .

Alcuni scultori egizi di geroglifici hanno scolpito sugli obelischi il Serpente Ouroboros per rappresentare il mondo o per manifestarlo in caratteri sacri, poiché il suo corpo è cosperso di astri. Tali cose egli [= Agatodemone] ha detto riguardo al principio nel "Libro sull'alchimia" . . .

È il senso dell'Ouroboros quale perpetuità della forza che agisce in lui, non solo in quanto, ricurvo in cerchio, può rotolare come una ruota, ma soprattutto perché si muove con rapidità, grazie ad una combinazione di movimenti

⁶⁷ *Hiera Tech.* 18 (Berthelot-Ruelle II, 80, 3-9).

⁶⁸ Cfr. *Orph. frag.* 70 e 85 (Kern).

⁶⁹ Cfr. Leclercq, 'Basilidiens', coll. 517 ss.

dei fianchi e delle placche ventrali che si traduce in una sequenza di ondulazioni laterali e propulsive. Una forza interiore, automotrice, che spinse gli Egizi a ritenere l'Ouroboros un'immagine del moto circolare degli astri attorno al polo celeste e, di conseguenza, del fluire ciclico del tempo, inteso quale successione ininterrotta di istanti. Ed è sicuramente in questa forma circolare che, secondo Plutarco, gli Egizi paragonavano il Serpente agli astri⁷⁰.

L'identità astrale dell'Ouroboros è ribadita da un importante documento gnostico già noto prima delle sensazionali scoperte di Nag-Hammadi, la *Pistis Sophia*: questo testo menziona il "Drago delle Tenebre esteriori" quale forma epifanica del male, effigiata astrologicamente dalla linea dei nodi lunari⁷¹, ovvero dalla linea che congiunge i punti in cui l'orbita della Luna interseca il piano dell'eclittica⁷². Il Drago delle Tenebre esteriori è nominato diverse volte nella *Pistis Sophia*⁷³, ma è solo dal Cap. 126 del terzo libro che Gesù, rivolto alla Maddalena, ne dà una descrizione dettagliata: 'Le Tenebre esteriori sono un grande Drago con la coda in bocca, sono fuori dal mondo e circondano tutto il mondo'⁷⁴, egli dice, utilizzando la classica immagine dell'Ouroboros gnostico. È un chiaro riferimento zodiacale: il Drago ha 'dodici camere' in cui abitano dodici Archonti, e 'ognuno ha un nome e cambia d'aspetto a seconda delle ore'⁷⁵; si tratta dell'allusione al *dôdekâôros* elaborato da Teucro di Babilonia, scandito in un periodo di dodici ore in cui si susseguono dodici immagini di animali, corrispondenti ai segni zodiacali, ognuna delle quali comprende due ore.

Le anime condotte dal Drago sono quelle di peccatori, omicidi, adulteri, etc.: egli le inghiotte e poi le espelle dalla coda, in un ciclo che si ripete sino alla purificazione definitiva⁷⁶. Il "soffio" delle Tenebre, cioè la foschia notturna, è il nutrimento del Drago che si stende, come un velo, sul Sole⁷⁷; lì risiede il suo segreto, poiché 'quando il Sole ritrae i suoi raggi, il mondo non è in grado di sopportare il vero aspetto delle Tenebre del Drago, perché ne sarebbe distrutto e andrebbe in rovina'⁷⁸. Il "fumo" e la foschia notturne

⁷⁰ Cfr. Stricker, *De Grote Zeeslang*, 7-10.

⁷¹ Cfr. Furlani, 'Tre trattati astrologici siriaci', 569 ss.

⁷² Cfr. *PS* III, 131 (Schmidt-MacDermot, 332, 3-10).

⁷³ *Ibid.* III, 102; 105; 106; 108; 119.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* III, 126 (Schmidt-MacDermot, 317, 16-21).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* (319, 10-18).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* III, 127 (320, 13-21).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* III, 131 (332, 3-7).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* (332, 7-10).

alimentano l'essenza lunare del Drago, sono il nutrimento oscuro per mezzo del quale egli si ciba delle anime impure: è il mistero di 'mammona di iniquità'⁷⁹, che la *Pistis Sophia* spiega con il potere arcano del Logos. Liberarsi dai vincoli del Drago significa—non a caso—conoscerne il *nomen secretum*:

... colui che conosce uno dei nomi del Drago delle Tenebre esteriori, qualora rimanga superstita nelle Tenebre esteriori o qualora abbia terminato i cicli delle trasformazioni, se pronuncia il nome del Drago sarà salvato, uscirà dalle Tenebre e sarà accolto nel Tesoro della Luce⁸⁰.

Nel primo trattato del *Corpus hermeticum*, comunemente noto come *Poimandres*, la Tenebra che si stende sul mondo inferiore, 'terribile e oscuro', ha sembianze uroboriche. Tenendo conto dell'integrazione al testo fatta dal Reitzenstein⁸¹, essa appare in 'sinuose spirali simili ad un drago'⁸²: σκολιῶς ἐσπειραμένον ὡς εἰκάσαι με <δράκοντι>. L'ispirazione egizia del *Corpus hermeticum* richiama sia il valore positivo che l'Ouroboros ha nella cultura faraonica, sia la raffigurazione soteriologica che ne dà—in una prospettiva sincretistica—la *Storia Fenicia* di Filone di Biblo⁸³. Rifacendosi al fenicio Sanchuniathon, Filone riferisce che nell'ambiente siro-egizio, in cui si coltiva la sapienza di Ταντός (l'egizio Thot e futuro Trismegisto), si riconosce una natura divina, ignea e "pneumatica" al Serpente, poiché questi è 'infinito nel tempo', πολυχρονιώτατος, eterno, rinascente e rigenerantesi a nuova vita, e 'quando ha raggiunto una età prestabilita si autodivora'. Il Serpente, prosegue Filone, è immortale e 'si risolve in se stesso'⁸⁴, εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀναλύεται.

Una forma che nasconde il più sublime dei contenuti, ecco—secondo Zosimo glossato da Olimpiodoro—il mistero ultimo dell'Uovo:

καὶ οἶκον αἰνίττεται φιλοσόφων ψυχῶν, καὶ φησιν· “Οἶκος ἦν σφαιροειδῆς ἢ ὠοειδῆς ταῖς δυσμαῖς βλέπων εἰς ἃς εἶχεν τὴν εἴσοδον, κοχλιοειδῆς ὑπάρχων”. εὐρήσεις δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν διαγραφὴν ἐν τῷ μνημονευθέντι σοι λόγῳ.

Egli [= Zosimo] allude inoltre alla dimora delle anime dei filosofi e dice: “Esisteva una dimora sferica, ovoidale, volta a Occidente e lì si apriva la

⁷⁹ Cfr. *Lc.* 16, 9.

⁸⁰ *PS* III, 130 (Schmidt-MacDermot, 331, 12-19).

⁸¹ Cfr. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, 329.

⁸² *Corp. herm.* I, 4 (Festugière-Nock I, 7-8, che invece integrano con ὡς <ῥφει> εἰκάσαι με).

⁸³ Vd. anche Stricker, *De Grote Zeeslang*, 21.

⁸⁴ Cfr. Euseb. *Praep. ev.* I, 10, 46-48 (= Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of* 20-21 [testo]; 245-246 [trad.]).

sua soglia a forma di spirale”. Ne troverai la descrizione in quanto detto precedentemente⁸⁵.

Sappiamo da un passo precedente che in Olimpiodoro l'asse Est-Ovest è relato alla seconda fase dell'opera alchemica⁸⁶, l'*albedo* o λεύκωσις, che si perfeziona nella *citrinitas* o ξάνθωσις. Ogni autore ermetico utilizza infatti i quattro stadi di colore (*nigredo*, *albedo*, *rubedo*, *citrinitas*) all'interno di una visione cosmologica sì individuale, ma volta a mostrare come nel cuore oscuro della materia si celi l'eterno principio dell'illuminazione.

4. Iranismi

Secondo il *Timeo* platonico l'Anima cosmica⁸⁷ e l'Anima individuale⁸⁸ sono sferiche. A ciò si aggiunga la spirale quale immagine della perenne mutazione, figura di una rivoluzione ciclica a cui sono legate le vicende transmigrative dell'anima, e si avranno i presupposti ontologici di una prassi ermetica che assicura proprio la liberazione dall'umiliante κύκλος cosmico, da quella 'ruota delle nascite'⁸⁹ che opprime i molti ma, per paradosso, rende fattibile la salvezza ai pochi. Altri antecedenti simbolici e dottrinali sono ancora rintracciabili nel mondo iranico, ossia nella tradizione del mazdeismo zoroastriano, fondata sull'idea di un dio sommo e trascendente (Ahura Mazdā/Ohrmazd), autore di una creazione che si sviluppa su due livelli ontoc cosmologici, il *mēnōg* e il *gētīg*, tradizione in cui troviamo l'immagine dell'Uovo primordiale per esprimere la sfericità del mondo e la sua genesi⁹⁰.

Così nel pahlavi *Zādspram* Ohrmazd afferma di aver collocato la Terra al centro del Cielo 'come il tuorlo nel centro di un Uovo'⁹¹. Una metafora analoga si ripropone nel *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad*, dove l'insieme degli elementi cosmici, 'il Cielo, la Terra, le acque e tutto ciò che vi è in essi', è

⁸⁵ *Hiera Tech.* 48 (Berthelot-Ruelle II, 98, 22-99, 3).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 30 (87, 11-12); ho trattato dettagliatamente di questo nel mio lavoro di prossima pubblicazione 'Olimpiodoro e l'Iran'.

⁸⁷ Cfr. *Tim.* 37c.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 42c-d.

⁸⁹ Cfr. Robinson, 'The Wheel of Fortune', 208a; ripreso nel mio 'La porta del tempo'.

⁹⁰ Per quanto segue cfr. Gnoli, 'Un particolare aspetto del simbolismo della luce', 113 ss.; e id., 'Note sullo 'X'arənah-', 207-218.

⁹¹ *Zādspram* 34, 20.

rappresentato in forma di Uovo: ‘proprio come l’uovo di un uccello’⁹². Il significato cosmogonico di questa immagine risulta egualmente dalla testimonianza di Plutarco relativa alle dottrine dualistiche iraniche⁹³: Ohrmazd (*Horomazes*), dopo aver creato ventiquattro dèi, li pose in un Uovo, ma Ahriman (*Areimanios*), creati altrettanti esseri malefici, li fece penetrare al suo interno, provocando così la mescolanza dei beni e dei mali⁹⁴, mescolanza che corrisponde esattamente al *gumēzišn*, al “miscuglio” mazdeo tra *mēnōg* e *gētīg*, tra “invisibilità” e “materialità”⁹⁵. L’immagine mitica dell’Uovo in Plutarco esprime la totalità e l’unità del suo contenuto, che si manifesta prima a livello ontologico, in quanto l’Uovo è una unità che racchiude in sé la molteplicità degli dèi generati da Ohrmazd, poi a livello cosmogonico ed antropogonico, in quanto, a seguito dell’introdursi in esso degli dèi ahri-manici, si dispiega la vicenda cosmica ed umana, posta sotto l’egida della mescolanza tra bene e male.

È stato riconosciuto da più parti lo stretto legame esistente tra la fonte plutarchea ed i testi iranici. Infatti, come nel *De Iside et Osiride*, anche nei testi pahlavi il simbolismo dell’Uovo è utilizzato in contesti palesemente cosmogonici: nella *Rivāyat* pahlavi che accompagna il *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* si dice che con uno ‘strumento’ (*abzār*) ‘simile ad una fiamma’ di pura Luce, forgiato nella ‘Luce Infinita’ (*asar rōšnīh*), fu fatta tutta la creazione, che venne poi inserita in un corpo, dove restò e crebbe per tremila anni. Dalla sua testa fu formato il Cielo senza supporto “materiale” (*gētīg*), ed in esso si stabilì Ohrmazd con tutta la sua creazione⁹⁶. Dai piedi di questa sorta di macroantropo fu fatta la Terra, che è retta dalle montagne, ove è racchiusa la ‘sostanza’ (*gōhr*) dello *xwarrah* (< avestico *xʷarənah*), lo “splendore” sostanziale alla gloria divina. Questo *gōhr ī xwarrah*, questa sostanza luminosa, riveste una funzione essenzialmente germinale. Difatti fa crescere le montagne: per millesettecento anni le montagne crebbero di sopra e di sotto e poi soltanto di sopra per altri ottocento anni. Sopra e sotto, in alto ed in basso, circola lo *xwarrah*, lo “splendore”, ed il tutto, cioè la creazione della terra senza supporto “materiale” (*gētīg*), è immaginato simile ad un Uovo

⁹² *Mēnōg ī Xrad* 44, 7.

⁹³ Per una introduzione al problema vd. Hani, ‘Plutarque en face du dualisme iranien’, 489-525.

⁹⁴ Plut. *De Isid. et Osir.* 47 (370 B).

⁹⁵ Cfr. Gnoli, ‘Osservazioni sulla dottrina mazdaica della creazione’, 180 ss.; Shaked, ‘The notions *mēnōg* and *gētīg*’, 59 ss.

⁹⁶ Cfr. Gnoli, ‘Un particolare aspetto del simbolismo della luce’, 107, 114; Zaehner, *Zurvān*, 364.

con dentro un uccello in embrione⁹⁷. L'embrione racchiuso nel suo Uovo e le acque latrici del germe igneo, dello *xwarrah*, esprimono un identico referente simbolico: infatti possiedono ambedue una struttura lunare, in quanto immagini del divenire non ancora manifestato, ossia della realtà virtuale e preformale celata nelle Tenebre, nella Notte e nel Chaos primigenio⁹⁸.

Concezioni che presuppongono una figura cruciale della cultura iranica, il *Simurγ*, termine neopersiano con cui si designa un arcaico e fantastico pennuto, il *Saēna mərəγa-*, l'uccello *Saēna* dei testi avestici, il *Sēnmurw* di quelli pahlavi⁹⁹. Si tratta della cosiddetta "Fenice iranica", il cui legame con la Fenice classica, risorgente dalle proprie ceneri, è rappresentato proprio dalla suaccennata metafora seminale. Vediamo come.

Secondo un testo avestico—lo *Yašt* 12, 17—, l'Albero taumaturgico che racchiude i semi di ogni pianta e che si erge al centro del mare onirico *Vouru.kaša*, ospita tra i suoi rami l'uccello *Saēna*. Come la Fenice, *Saēna* è un pennuto solare: col calore sprigionato provoca l'essiccamento dei semi, disperdendoli in seguito sulla terra¹⁰⁰. L'avvicinamento non è portato a caso, dal momento che lo *Yašt* 14, 41 sovrappone l'Albero dai molti semi all'Albero dell'*haoma*, il fluido miracoloso, l'ambrosia che farà risorgere i morti e renderà immortali i viventi¹⁰¹. Una *Rivāyat* pahlavi che glossa il *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* afferma che il *Sēnmurw* costruirà il proprio nido nella foresta al tempo della resurrezione finale, quando la terra diverrà piatta e le acque immobili¹⁰². Tutte circostanze che fanno dell'uccello *Saēna* un possessore del fatidico *x'arənah-*, la "forza luminosa"¹⁰³ dai poteri straordinari: un qualcosa di intangibile e di atemporale che agisce ed opera efficacemente. Nello *Yašt* 19 questa "forza luminosa" è esaltata come il mezzo con cui Ahura Mazdā ha operato la sua creazione; essa consente anche agli eroi *kayanidi*, Zarathuštra ed il *Saošyant-* (il Redentore del cosmo e dell'uomo) di abbattere i *daēva* e tutti gli esseri *ahrimanici*¹⁰⁴ in circolazione. Esiste quindi un legame abbastanza palese tra ceneri e semi: entrambi, nella mentalità alchemica, sono alla base di una nuova "vita", palingenetica per le prime, somatica per i secondi.

⁹⁷ Cfr. Gnoli, 'Un particolare aspetto del simbolismo della luce', 115.

⁹⁸ Cfr. Eliade, *Trattato di Storia delle Religioni*, 427 ss.; in partic. pp. 429-430.

⁹⁹ Cfr. Schmidt, 'Simorǵ'; importante anche Büchner, 'Simurgh', 458a-460a.

¹⁰⁰ Cfr. Schmidt, s.v. «Simorǵ», 1.

¹⁰¹ Cfr. Gnoli, 'Lichtsymbolik in Alt-Iran', 528-549; per l'identificazione botanica vd. anche Flattery & Schwartz, *Haoma and Harmaline* (da integrare con la recensione di Gherardo Gnoli apparsa in *East and West*).

¹⁰² Cfr. Schmidt, 'Simorǵ', 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Cfr. ora nella versione di Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt*.

5. *Origini*

Tutto questo a dimostrare come l'alchimia sia solo fugacemente legata all'Egitto¹⁰⁵.

Un apparente paradosso, che è forse frutto della leggenda sulla distruzione, voluta da Nerone o da Diocleziano, dei ricettari grazie ai quali gli Egizi avrebbero potuto fabbricare oro a profusione per ribellarsi a Roma?

L'alchimia, infatti, avrebbe più tardi rivendicato origini egiziane. Un vescovo di Gaza fece bruciare nella sua città parecchi libri sull'alchimia dell'oro o dell'argento che si dicevano 'scritti dagli antichi Egizi'. Un trattato enumera, di passaggio, molte città egiziane in cui un tempo sarebbe stata preparata la pietra filosofale: Eracleopoli, Licopoli (Asyut), Afroditopoli, Apollinopoli (Edfu) ed Elefantina¹⁰⁶.

In realtà non sembra che l'Egitto faraonico abbia conosciuto una qualsiasi forma di alchimia. Pare, invece, che l'alchimia ermetica si sia sviluppata come sottoprodotto dell'astrologia, basandosi sulla credenza nelle simpatie che legano ogni pianta ad uno dei sette metalli planetari.

La letteratura ermetica in fatto di alchimia comprende scritti molto diversi: ricette per "tingere" le pietre e i metalli, opuscoli che basano le trasmutazioni sull'effetto delle simpatie¹⁰⁷ e, infine, trattati nei quali l'alchimia è una dottrina mistica occultata dietro alla scienza della natura. Quest'ultima categoria di testi sembra di elaborazione tardiva, mentre le altre due vantano origini menfite, riassunte in una leggenda che, sebbene non attestata prima del IV sec. a.C., presuppone una conoscenza precisa di quella che era la vita religiosa dei templi egizi al tempo dell'invasione persiana.

Secondo questa leggenda le dottrine diffuse da Bolo di Mendes risalivano a un tale Democrito, che le avrebbe apprese a Menfi. È quanto afferma un racconto conservato nei perduti *Φυσικὰ καὶ μυστικά*, in cui Democrito appare quale adepto del Mago persiano Ostanes, che nel tempio di Menfi lo inizia al mistero degli antichi scritti¹⁰⁸. In questa memoria si coniugano le due tradizioni che vogliono Democrito discepolo dei Magi mazdei e di Bolo "democriteo", originario di Mendes, in Egitto. Secondo la narrazione di Giorgio Sincello, il Mago Ostanes si trovava nel tempio di Menfi perché inviato dai Re persiani a presiederne il culto; tra i numerosi sacerdoti e filosofi

¹⁰⁵ Cfr. Doresse, 'L'ermetismo di derivazione egiziana', 91 ss.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹⁰⁷ Cfr. Röhr, *Der Okkulte Kraftbegriff im Altertum*, 75-76 e *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ Cfr. Preisendanz, 'Ostanes', col. 1629.

presenti a questi τελεταί la stessa fonte menziona una certa Maria l'ebrea, figura carismatica in gran parte dell'alchimia ellenistica¹⁰⁹.

All'ombra del grande santuario di Ptah, Democrito e Maria l'Ebreia avrebbero entrambi ricevuto l'insegnamento degli egiziani Pammene e Apollobeches, nonché e soprattutto del persiano Ostanes. Quest'ultimo morì prima di aver rivelato ai discepoli i fondamenti della sua arte, ma un miracolo pose rimedio alla malasorte: un giorno una colonna del tempio¹¹⁰, squarciandosi da sola, scoprì una stele in cui si leggevano le massime ermetiche sulla natura del mondo superiore ed inferiore. Si tratta di aforismi che una tradizione molto più tarda—quella della *Tabula Smaragdina*—farà ugualmente scoprire a Menfi, dove sarebbero stati però ritrovati su un rotolo di pietra tra le mani della statua nascosta di Imhotep/Asclepio.

Questa leggenda era già parte dei Φυσικά καὶ μυστικά quando questo apocrifo democriteo comparve, nel II sec. a. C., quale parte dell'insegnamento di Bolo di Mendes? E ancora, per quale motivo si è privilegiata la figura di un Mago mazdeo quale "iniziatore", addirittura all'interno di un tempio egizio?

Nei *Florida*, Apuleio assicura che alcuni Magi, in particolare Zoroastro, sarebbero stati incaricati di rivivificare in Egitto le vecchie tradizioni del clero faraonico¹¹¹. Testimonianze più antiche narrano che Pitagora avrebbe raccolto alcune delle sue dottrine presso questi Magi¹¹². Di fatto si sa oggi che i Magi—una classe di sacerdoti mazdei diffusi dalla Mesopotamia al Mediterraneo orientale¹¹³—penetrarono in gran numero in Egitto e vi si stabilirono, integrandosi con il clero locale, sino ai primi secoli della nostra era.

Un monumento egiziano illustra anche come potesse realizzarsi una tale coabitazione: si tratta della statua votiva del sacerdote di Sais Udja-Hor-Resne, che Adriano fece portare dall'Egitto per ornare la sua villa di Tivoli e che ora si trova in Vaticano. I geroglifici che riassumono la biografia di Udja-Hor-Resne raccontano come, nominato archiatra dallo stesso Cambise, egli fosse stato incaricato dal sovrano di riorganizzare il tempio della dea Neith a Sais. Inviato poi nell'Elam, ne venne richiamato da Dario I, il quale gli affidò la riorganizzazione delle scuole sacerdotali egizie e lo incaricò di

¹⁰⁹ Cfr. Syncell. *Chron.* 471 (Mosshammer, 297, 26-27).

¹¹⁰ Cfr. Berthelot-Ruelle I, 41.

¹¹¹ Apul. *Flor.* 15 (Augello [Torino 1984], 490).

¹¹² Vd. inoltre Bidez & Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, 63 ss.; gli apocrifi alchemici ascritti alla sapienza mazdea sono alle pp. 309-356.

¹¹³ Cfr. Gershevitch, 'Zoroaster's own Contribution', 12, 25, 32; seguito da Gnoli, 'Magi', 80-81.

codificare alcuni testi che altrimenti sarebbero andati perduti¹¹⁴. La leggenda di un insegnamento impartito in un tempio di Menfi da un Mago mazdeo quindi, lungi dall'essere inverosimile, concorda con alcuni fatti storici.

Una volta messo in luce quest'incontro del clero iranico con quello egizio nella valle del Nilo, sembra legittimo non separare dall'astrologia e dall'alchimia esplicitamente ermetiche quegli scritti che, pur attribuiti a Zoroastro, Ostanes o altri Magi, accampano anch'essi origini menfite o saitiche.

Importanti per la nostra ricerca sono anche gli opuscoli alchemici basati sulla dottrina delle simpatie, pervenuti attraverso tarde compilazioni redatte a partire dal IV sec. d.C., ma che presuppongono una tradizione testuale molto più antica. È infatti problematico discernere ciò che nei testi deriva dagli scritti ermetici più arcaici. Possiamo tuttavia ricostruire, attraverso le citazioni e i commenti di Zosimo nel suo "Libro del Computo Finale"¹¹⁵, quel che affiorava da un "Libro delle tinture naturali"¹¹⁶, attribuito ad Ermete.

In un lontano passato, prima del Diluvio, sarebbero esistiti procedimenti di "tintura naturale" attraverso i quali gli uomini avrebbero avuto accesso ai segreti delle trasmutazioni. In seguito ad un complotto dei "demoni vigilianti", già sconfitti dalle Potenze celesti, tali arcani caddero nell'oblio: accuratamente nascoste, queste ricette vennero raccolte e crittografate in alcuni trattati attribuiti all'antico Ermete. In luogo di queste "tinture naturali" i demoni avrebbero introdotto con l'inganno procedimenti ricalcati sulla tintura delle stoffe. Stando al riassunto di Zosimo, queste tinture, cosiddette "occasional", avrebbero la peculiarità di agire solo durante certe congiunzioni astrali e di rimanere inattive in qualsiasi altro momento, secondo la volontà degli angeli malvagi¹¹⁷. La dottrina così riassunta da Zosimo rinvia a una tradizione alchemica giudeo-egiziana che Maria, condiscipola dello pseudo-Democrito, avrebbe appreso a Menfi.

6. *Amplessi astrali*

Nella nona parte del "Libro dell'Imouth" Zosimo conferma che Ermete menzionava nei Φυσικά la tradizione secondo cui una razza di demoni discesa

¹¹⁴ Cfr. Bresciani, 'Egypt, relations with Persia and Afghanistan I, 247a-249a.

¹¹⁵ Vd. l'edizione di Tonelli, *Zosimo di Panopoli*, 113-123.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

dal cielo si sarebbe unita alle figlie degli uomini e avrebbe insegnato loro queste manipolazioni¹¹⁸. L'opuscolo alchemico "Lettera di Iside a Horus", anch'esso conservato tra le opere di Zosimo¹¹⁹, colloca addirittura una di queste rivelazioni nel tempio di Hormanuthi/Edfu, dove Iside avrebbe ceduto al desiderio dell'angelo decaduto Amnaele per ottenerne in cambio la rivelazione di alcune prassi alchemiche¹²⁰. È probabile che alla base vi sia una tradizione giudaica compendiata nel *Libro di Enoch* (sopravvissuto fino a noi come "Enoch Etiopico"), anch'esso citato a più riprese da Zosimo¹²¹, e rivisitata in vesti "egizie": una tradizione secondo la quale i Vigilanti, gli angeli decaduti, si innamorarono delle figlie degli uomini e le sedussero insegnando loro le principali arti.

La tradizione prosegue in un altro pseudepigrapho tardogiudaico¹²², i "Testamenti dei Dodici Patriarchi", un testo che rivela influssi gnostici e cristiani. Nello stigmatizzare la fornicazione (ἡ πορνεία) uno dei "Testamenti", quello di Ruben¹²³, si diffonde, ampliandola, sulla scarna notizia trascritta dal testo di *Genesi*¹²⁴ circa i *Nəfilim* enochici, gli "Egregoni" o Vigilanti che si uniscono alle figlie degli uomini, cioè alla stirpe dei cainiti¹²⁵. La bellezza delle donne—dice il nostro testo—ammaliò e sedusse i Vigilanti, che esistevano sin da prima del Diluvio¹²⁶. Essi ne contemplavano e desideravano i corpi: così facendo si trasformarono (μετεσχηματίζοντο < μετασχηματίζω) ed apparvero alle donne mentre copulavano con i mariti; le donne desiderarono nella loro mente le immagini degli Angeli decaduti (ἐπιθυμοῦσαι τῇ διανοίᾳ τὰς φαντασίας αὐτῶν) e generarono i Giganti¹²⁷. Per attuare il coito i Vigilanti hanno mutato natura, subito una metamorfosi, trasferendosi nell'intermondo onirico ed erotico delle donne, le quali, accoppiandosi con i rispettivi

¹¹⁸ Cfr. Mertens, *Zosime de Panopolis*, XCIV = Syncell. *Chron.* 23-24 (Mosshammer, 13, 22-14, 14).

¹¹⁹ In realtà si tratta di un'opera a sé stante raccolta in Berthelot-Ruelle II, 28-33 (testo); 31-36 (trad.); importante la messa a punto di Mertens, 'Une scène d'initiation alchimique', 3-24.

¹²⁰ Per la recezione di Iside nella cultura ellenistica, vd. Brenk, "Isis is a Greek Word", 227-238.

¹²¹ Vd. anche Fraser, 'Zosimos of Panopolis and the Book of Enoch' (ringrazio Giancarlo Mantovani per la segnalazione).

¹²² Cfr. Sacchi (cur.), *Apocrifi dell'Antico Testamento*, II, 348.

¹²³ *Test. Rub.* 5, 6-7 (Sacchi, 367).

¹²⁴ Cfr. *Gen.* 6, 4.

¹²⁵ Cfr. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 17 ss.

¹²⁶ Cfr. anche ed in partic. Delcor, 'La caduta degli angeli', 122-123.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

consorti, interiormente e mentalmente si sono congiunte con le immagini angeliche; tale pratica, ben conosciuta nella mentalità magica arcaica ed attuata anche negli ambienti gnostici¹²⁸, è rintracciabile, quasi inalterata, nel mondo dell'ermetismo e dell'alchimia rinascimentali.

I papiri di Leida e di Stoccolma non sono però così didascalici e si limitano ad offrirci esempi di questa o quella “tintura”¹²⁹, cui le fonti riportate da Zosimo ridurrebbero l'alchimia. Tinture la cui essenza illusoria si spiega sia con la gelosia degli angeli malvagi nei confronti delle “tinture naturali” o “divine”, sia con la difficoltà di operare nel momento preciso in cui esse avrebbero potuto sortire un effetto, in quanto le tinture “occasionalì” sono attive unicamente attraverso un preciso sincronismo tra mondo astrale ed eventi terrestri. Tali “creazioni”, infatti, racchiuderebbero una forza “demonica” limitata, proporzionale ad un meccanismo astrologico oscillatorio la cui intera chiave non è mai stata rivelata.

In siffatto apparente chimerico bailamme, una specificità alchemica va sottolineata: mentre i sistemi gnostici, in particolar modo quelli “iranici”¹³⁰, predicano una “conoscenza” e una salvezza derivanti dalla separazione tra Luce e Tenebra, tra Corpo e Πνεῦμα, nonché un “ordine” che si staglia sul Chaos, in molti testi il fine dell'alchimia non è la separazione, bensì l'unione¹³¹. A questo riguardo così si esprime Olimpiodoro:

Δύο γάρ εἰσιν ἄκρα χρώματα, λευκὸν καὶ μέλαν · καὶ τὸ μὲν λευκὸν διακριτικὸν ἐστίν, τὸ δὲ μέλαν συνεκτικόν.

Esistono due colori finali: il bianco e il nero; il bianco divide, il nero unisce¹³².

La distruzione della forma e la scomparsa di qualunque nome “costante”, cioè di qualunque specificazione, fornisce la sola e autentica *prima materia*, che allora è davvero “prima” nel senso più preciso e metafisico del termine. Solo così si entra nel mondo della potenzialità pura e illimitata, dove Luce e Tenebra si mescolano in modo indistinguibile, rendendo possibile l'es-

¹²⁸ Cfr. Michelini Tocci, ‘Simboli di trasformazione cabalistici ed alchemici’, 67-68; la pratica nello gnosticismo ofitico-sethiano è intesa però in un senso inverso, finalizzato alla redenzione.

¹²⁹ Ora editi da Halleux, *Les alchimistes grecs*, Tome I.

¹³⁰ Per questa arcaica distinzione, cfr. Jonas, *Lo gnosticismo*, 223 ss.; Widengren, *Il manicheismo*, 58-59; Rudolph, *La gnosi*, 429.

¹³¹ Per quanto segue faccio riferimento alle magistrali intuizioni di Paolo Lucarelli, profondo conoscitore dell'alchimia, espresse in una sua lettera del 2 aprile 2003; alla sua memoria è anche dedicato questo mio modesto lavoro.

¹³² *Hiera Tech.* 38 (Berthelot-Ruelle II, 92, 4-6).

trazione della ὑγρὰ οὐσία, la “sostanza liquida”, l’essenza indifferenziata che può tramutarsi in ogni cosa¹³³. È l’albore del miscuglio alchemico che le streghe del *Machbeth* di Shakespeare distillano dalle loro pozioni magiche a partire da un intruglio di sostanze immonde¹³⁴. L’Opera alchemica è quindi un *Chaos ab ordine*, distruzione delle creazioni e ritorno a prima del *fiat lux*.

Nonostante l’apparente disordine, l’alchimista riesce a ricostruire un corpo perfettamente equilibrato, capace di trasmettere questa sua perfezione a tutti i corpi con i quali entra in contatto: si tratta del “segreto dei segreti”, l’*elixir*, l’agente che opera sì la trasformazione dei metalli vili in oro, ma anche—e soprattutto—dona perfetta salute e longevità al corpo umano. Da un piano speculativo “esteriore”, metallico, puramente simbolico, l’alchimista trasferisce i contenuti e i conseguimenti della propria ricerca spirituale in un mondo interiore e separato, segnato da estasi e visioni. Questo perché il Chaos alchemico è in certo qual modo simile all’esperienza schizofrenica¹³⁵: si tratta infatti di una vera e propria “liquefazione” dello spazio vissuto, rappresentata dal dissolversi dei limiti tra il proprio e l’altrui pensiero; un sentire che, debitamente indirizzato alla cancellazione e alla “incinerazione” della distanza fra le coscienze individuali, contribuisce al formarsi di quel fertile amalgama mentale e corporeo che gli alchimisti chiamano *prima materia*.

Ezio Albrile (1962) è saggista e storico delle religioni.

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¹³³ *Ibid.*, (92, 11).

¹³⁴ *Machbeth* 4, 1, 126-131.

¹³⁵ Cfr. M. Bracco, *Sulla distanza*, 50; e prima, ovviamente, C.G. Jung, *Psicologia e alchimia*, *passim*.

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Agathodaemon's Children: Fragments of Alchemical Mythologies

An important source for the study of Hellenistic Alchemy is the Neoplatonic Olympiodorus and his treatise on "Sacred Art". In this text Olympiodorus gives an unitary view of alchemical praxis, based on the production and transformation of a peculiar element, the so-called "magnet" or "magnesia". This element is the "substantial body", *sōma hypostatikon*, the body which is "giving existence", the alchemical black lead, the *prima materia*. The alchemist succeeds, by his creative action, in obtaining a perfect body which is able to transmit perfection to every body with which it is in contact. This is the *elixir* which gives health and salvation. The processes described put emphasis on color change as a guide to progress from black to white to yellow to violet: the sequence was clearly associated with the change from a chaotic and undefined primal stage to metallic perfection. And although the final phase or *iōsis* was eventually to be changed from violet to red, the emphasis on color was to remain a basic theme in descriptions of the *magnum opus*.

KOCKU VON STUCKRAD ET LA NOTION D'ESOTERISME

ANTOINE FAIVRE

Kocku von Stuckrad, *Was ist Esoterik? Kleine Geschichte des geheimen Wissens*, München: C.H. Beck 2004. 280 pp. ISBN 3406 52173 8

Dans cet ouvrage déjà traduit en anglais¹, Kocku von Stuckrad propose une nouvelle approche méthodologique de l'“ésotérisme” et présente un panorama historique du champ que ce terme devrait désigner selon lui. Il écrit dans une langue claire, avec un évident souci pédagogique. Un appareil scientifique (des notes abondantes, une copieuse bibliographie, un index des noms propres) complète utilement son texte.

La partie historique – de loin, la plus importante quantitativement – dénote un souci méritoire de broser un tableau des courants et des auteurs. En dépit, semble-t-il, des propos méthodologique exposés *infra*, l'A. traite surtout de ce qu'il appelle 'l'ésotérisme euro-américain' (l'expression est heureuse). Il aborde avec pertinence diverses questions qui font l'objet de débats très actuels. Par exemple, il explique (pp. 106-107, 240) pourquoi il se range du côté des historiens qui – à la différence de Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, par exemple – ne considèrent pas 'l'ésotérisme chrétien' comme un domaine par nature incompatible avec le christianisme. Cette partie comporte néanmoins certaines lacunes qu'une réédition viendra, souhaitons-le, combler.

Ainsi, après avoir insisté, dans son introduction méthodologique (sur celle-ci, *cf. infra*), sur l'importance de l'islam dans son champ de recherche, il lui a réservé un traitement bien mince (trois pages au plus, pp. 74-77) – alors qu'un chapitre entier, de bonne tenue au demeurant, traite de l'ésotérisme juif (pp. 53-71). De plus, ce courant occidental moderne (au sens français de l'adjectif) qu'est la théosophie (au sens classique; en l'occurrence, boehméen et néo-bohméen) occupe deux pages seulement (Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin et Franz von Baader sont à peine mentionnés; pp. 156, 167), alors que le théosophisme (de type blavatskien) en occupe une vingtaine (pp. 197-216). A ce propos, la partie consacrée à l'ésotérisme maçonnique gagnerait à être revue et complétée (l'ésotérisme d'un Rite à hauts grades théosophisant comme le Rite Ecossais Rectifié, par exemple, ne

¹ Von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*.

fait pas l'objet d'une présentation), et la partie bibliographique critique y relative attend une mise à jour.

Ce domaine français souffre d'étranges absences. En l'occurrence, nulle part les noms d'Eliphas Lévi et de René Guénon ne sont cités. Aussi bien le lecteur les chercherait-il en vain dans l'index. Or, on sait la considérable influence que ces deux auteurs ont exercée sur l'ésotérisme contemporain – pas seulement français, loin de là. Eliphas Lévi fait figure de “pionnier” par excellence d'un courant ésotérique à part entière, dit occultiste, qui lui aussi se trouve par trop négligé dans le panorama (seulement quelques organisations et auteurs sont mentionnés). Or, sans savoir qui est Lévi, comment comprendre Mme Blavatsky, comment comprendre Aleister Crowley (pourtant bien présent dans le livre), comment les situer correctement dans leur contexte historique? Nous observons ici une inconséquence en matière de plan – au sens de “synopsis”. En effet, le parti pris par l'A. de traiter des organisations initiatiques en général dans un chapitre (Ch. VII) qui précède celui qu'il consacre au théosophisme blavatskien (Ch. VIII) introduit un malheureux bouleversement chronologique, puisque par voie de conséquence la Golden Dawn et Aleister Crowley sont présentés avant la Société Théosophique. Quant à René Guénon, en même temps que son absence nous constatons du même coup celle de tout le courant dit pérennialiste ou traditionniste, qui pourtant n'est pas une mince affaire dans le paysage de “l'ésotérisme occidental”, quelque sens que l'on donne à cette expression.

À l'instar de maintes bonnes pages consacrées à l'ésotérisme occidental jusqu'au XVII^e siècle inclusivement, le dernier chapitre (“Esoterik und Moderne”, pp. 216-236) contient des remarques et des aperçus intéressants, notamment sur le New Age. Selon l'A., le channeling, l'écologie profonde et les discours portant sur les “états modifiés de conscience” (*cf.* par exemple Ken Wilbur) ‘représentent au fond une continuation du programme ésotérique par d'autres moyens’ – ces trois ‘champs de discours’ constituant comme la dernière phase en date de l'histoire de l'ésotérisme dans la culture euro-américaine (pp. 234-236). Cela dit, le nombre de personnages cités à propos du XX^e siècle reste insuffisant. La place faite à Hermann Hesse, par exemple, à propos du New Age, aurait pu être restreinte au profit d'autres noms qui n'apparaissent pas. Plus généralement, enfin, on regrette que la période couvrant la fin du XIX^e siècle à nos jours occupe près de cinquante pages, alors que toute celle qui précède (de l'Antiquité tardive jusqu'au XIX^e siècle) en occupe seulement trois fois plus.

La partie méthodologique, originale, mérite une attention toute particulière. En bon historien, l'A. ne part pas d'une idée a priori de ce que l'ésotérisme

serait “en soi”. Il va aussi jusqu’à poser (p. 20), après plusieurs chercheurs, que cette notion n’est jamais qu’une construction existant dans la tête des savants pour analyser des processus d’histoire culturelle européenne (p. 20) – proposition sans doute discutable. Il note également, d’entrée de jeu, qu’en matière d’ésotérisme il n’existe pas d’unanimité entre les chercheurs, tout en reconnaissant que cette spécialité est maintenant reconnue comme telle dans le monde académique – et il laisse ainsi entendre que sa propre approche pourrait contribuer à l’établissement d’un certain consensus. Dans le même mouvement, il situe celle-ci par rapport à celle d’Antoine Faivre*, dont il donne un résumé et qu’il se met en devoir de soumettre à un examen critique. Un article tout récent², du même auteur et sur lequel nous préparons un commentaire, reprend les mêmes arguments, du moins pour l’essentiel. Dans l’ouvrage qui fait l’objet du présent compte rendu il rappelle que Faivre, ayant pris acte de l’existence, dans l’Europe “moderne” (en français: fin XV^e-XX^e siècles), de certains “courants” historiques présentant certaines similitudes, avait dégagé de cette observation une “forme de pensée” (historiquement et géographiquement circonscrite) qu’il avait appelée “ésotérique” et à partir de laquelle il avait élaboré un modèle opératoire fait d’un certain nombre d’éléments constitutifs. L’A., lui, a préféré

recourir à un modèle de l’Histoire européenne des Religions, lequel repose sur l’idée de pluralisme religieux. Il s’agit de considérer que non seulement le christianisme, mais aussi le judaïsme, l’islam, ainsi que les divers polythéismes et néo-polythéismes européens, font partie intégrante de la culture européenne, voire occidentale. Dans notre présentation historique il s’agira donc de décrire les continuités et les ruptures, les interférences et les changements, du “discours ésotérique” dans son contexte historique concret³.

Le “modèle” en question est emprunté à l’historien des religions Burkhard Gladigow, cité à plusieurs reprises (pp. 240, 242 et ss.). Nous avons affaire à une idée centrale dans l’esprit de l’A., qui lui a consacré une partie de son livre *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, co-signé avec H.G. Kippenberg⁴. Le propos consiste, pour l’essentiel, à mettre l’accent sur l’existence d’un pluralisme religieux au sein de la société occidentale; il s’agit

² Von Stuckrad, ‘Western Esotericism’.

³ ‘[Ich greife] dabei auf ein Modell der Europäischen Religionsgeschichte zurück, das von der Idee des religiösen Pluralismus ausgeht, einer Idee also, die Christentum, Judentum und Islam, aber auch die vielfältigen europäischen Polytheismen, als feste Bestandteile europäischer Kultur versteht. In der historischen Darstellung wird es dann darum gehen, die Kontinuitäten und Brüche, Überlagerungen und Veränderungen des “esoterischen Diskurses” im konkreten historischen Kontext zu beschreiben’ (p. 15).

⁴ Cf. notamment pp. 126-134.

de relativiser une approche de la dite société et de son histoire, approche souvent adoptée et jugée trop *Christian centered* par ces historiens. Mais pourquoi opposer ce propos à celui de Faivre, alors que l'un et l'autre ne sont pas de même nature? En fait, Faivre avait seulement entendu, par choix de méthode, traiter d'un 'Occident *visité par* le judaïsme et l'Islam', donc majoritairement pénétré (jusqu'au XX^e siècle) de christianisme, ce qui ne revenait pas pour autant à minimiser l'importance d'un pluralisme religieux dont personne, au demeurant, ne saurait nier la réalité. Il entendait ainsi laisser aux judaïsants, islamologues, voire orientalistes, le soin de préciser ce que, dans leurs spécialités respectives, ils voudraient ou pourraient bien entendre eux-mêmes par "ésotérisme", quitte à ce qu'ils appellassent cela autrement. Il s'agissait de restreindre le champ, dans un souci d'éviter toute forme d'universalisme – fût-il limité aux monothéismes –, et de contribuer ainsi à fonder au sein du monde académique (principalement en Histoire des Religions) une spécialité qui n'eût jamais pu prétendre à cette reconnaissance si elle avait par trop empiété sur d'autres.

L'A. estime, d'autre part, que la construction proposée par Faivre

aboutit à un cercle vicieux, en ce sens qu'elle fait entrer dans l'ésotérisme cela seulement qui a servi préalablement de base pour déterminer la notion. Concrètement: comme Faivre, pour élaborer sa taxinomie, a eu recours principalement à l'hermétisme de la Renaissance, à la *Naturphilosophie*, à la Kabbale christianisée et à la théosophie protestante, dès lors des secteurs se trouvent rejetés hors des frontières de l'ésotérisme (et de la recherche y relative), lesquels seraient pourtant proprement déterminants pour donner une image d'ensemble: cela concerne, chronologiquement, l'Antiquité, le moyen âge et surtout l'époque depuis les Lumières, et, quant au contenu, l'ésotérisme juif et musulman, pour l'époque depuis les Lumières le bouddhisme également, lequel a influencé fortement l'ésotérisme européen du vingtième siècle⁵.

Certes, le modèle présenté par Faivre a pu prêter le flanc à la critique – à l'instar, au demeurant, de tout modèle opératoire, dont une des raisons d'être est justement de se trouver amendé, corrigé, voire remplacé au fur et à mesure que progressent la recherche et la réflexion. En l'occurrence, Wouter

⁵ 'Das Ergebnis ist ein Zirkelschluss, der nur das zur Esoterik rechnet, was zuvor Grundlage der Bestimmung gewesen ist. Konkret: Da Faivre zur Generierung der Taxonomie hauptsächlich auf den Hermetismus der Renaissance, auf Naturphilosophie, die christlich transformierte Kabbalah und die protestantische Theosophie zurückgegriffen hat, werden Bereiche aus der Esoterikforschung ausgegrenzt, die für ein Gesamtbild eigentlich entscheidend waren. Zeitlich betrifft das die Antike, das Mittelalter und vor allem die Moderne, inhaltlich die jüdische und muslimische Esoterik, für die Moderne auch den Buddhismus, der die europäische Esoterik des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts stark beeinflusste' (p. 14).

J. Hanegraaff et d'autres auteurs ont fait remarquer que son modèle pouvait présenter certaines difficultés quand il s'agit de l'appliquer à la période qui s'étend des Lumières jusqu'à notre époque. Or, il paraît regrettable qu'à ce propos les dits auteurs ne soient pas cités dans le livre, car le lecteur peut avoir ainsi l'impression que depuis ces travaux de Faivre le débat méthodologique n'a pas connu d'histoire, ce qui est loin d'être le cas.

Il convient de noter aussi que l'expression "cercle vicieux" (*Zirkelschluss*) ne saurait s'appliquer ici. En effet, si à partir de l'observation de données empiriques (nécessairement circonscrites dans le temps et dans l'espace) un chercheur entreprend de construire l'objet d'une recherche (voire d'une spécialité, ou même d'une discipline), alors il n'y a pas lieu de s'étonner qu'ensuite il ne fasse pas entrer dans le champ de l'objet ainsi construit ce qui ne ressortit pas à celui-ci. En fait, cette expression ne devrait s'appliquer qu'à tout autre chose. Par exemple, à une procédure qui, partant d'une idée a priori (idéologique, politique, religieuse), viserait ensuite à interpréter selon celle-ci la réalité observée. Si telle n'est pas, certes, la procédure suivie par l'A., on pourrait tout de même lui appliquer l'expression "cercle vicieux", puisque sa construction, bien qu'elle porte sur un plus vaste ensemble, 'aboutit' elle aussi 'à considérer comme "ésotérique" cela seulement qui a servi de base préalable pour déterminer la notion'. Comment pourrait-il d'ailleurs en être autrement?

D'autre part, même si on admettait avec l'A., ne serait-ce qu'à titre d'hypothèse, que Faivre, 'pour élaborer sa taxinomie, a eu recours principalement à l'hermétisme de la Renaissance, à la *Naturphilosophie*, à la Kabbale christianisée et à la théosophie protestante'⁶, cela n'impliquerait nullement, a priori, que cette taxinomie se révélerait inapplicable à d'autres contextes – à un "ésotérisme" juif ou musulman, par exemple. Aussi bien ne saurait-on se prononcer sur la pertinence d'un modèle opératoire avant de l'avoir mis à l'épreuve. Au demeurant, si l'A. avait donné à son objet un autre nom que "ésotérisme" – "gnose", par exemple –, peut-être ne se serait-il pas mis ensuite en devoir de mesurer sa construction à l'aune d'une autre qui porte sur un autre objet. Aussi bien ne pourrait-il s'agir ici que d'une question de vocabulaire.

⁶ On ne peut pas dire qu'en ce qui concerne le courant théosophique, Faivre avait eu recours «principalement» à son versant protestant. En fait, pour élaborer sa taxinomie il avait eu tout autant recours à son autre versant, non protestant (représenté, notamment, par des théosophes tels que Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin et le catholique Franz von Baader), auquel il avait d'ailleurs consacré davantage de travaux qu'au premier et qui, surtout, se situe bien après la Renaissance, à savoir aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles.

Mais en quoi consiste la construction que l'auteur nous propose et qui, on l'a vu, s'appuie sur l'idée de pluralisme? Il la présente ainsi. Ce qu'il a choisi d'appeler "l'ésotérique" (*das Esoterische*), plutôt que "l'ésotérisme", c'est un 'élément de discours (*Diskurselement*) de l'histoire des religions en Europe' (pp. 7, 21; dans la suite, nous dirons, avec l'A., "l'ésotérique"). 'On peut', nous dit-il, 'identifier cet élément de discours de la manière suivante' (p. 21):

I) "Le recours à la connaissance" (*Erkenntnisanssuche*) – 'la' connaissance, 'absolue', et les moyens à mettre en œuvre (*Modi*) en vue d'en disposer.

II) "La dialectique du caché et du manifesté" (*Dialektik vom Verborgenen und Offenbaren*), qui joue sur ces *Modi* évoqués *supra*. 'Ce qui rend ésotérique un discours, c'est la rhétorique d'une vérité cachée, laquelle peut être dévoilée en suivant une voie précise, et que l'on confronte à d'autres interprétations (*die gegen andere Deutungen in Stellung gebracht wird*) portant sur le cosmos et l'histoire' (p. 21). La connaissance de cette vérité cachée, ou cette prétention à un savoir, s'accompagnent souvent d'une insistance à mettre l'accent sur les "expériences individuelles" (*individuelle Erfahrungen*) pourvoyeuses d'états de conscience extra-ordinaires et, partant, de "vérités supérieures".

III) "L'altérité" (*Alterität*), ou "déviance" (*Devianz*). Cette notion porte sur les instruments d'interprétation qui visent à construire la différence (l'altérité). Nombre de manifestations de l'ésotérique entrent dans la catégorie des options religieuses "déviantes" (comme hérésies, polythéisme ou panthéisme, qui s'éloignent de l'interprétation monothéiste) (p. 22).

IV) "Les cristallisations" (*Auskristallisierungen*). Les discours ésotériques se cristallisent en constellations toujours nouvelles pour constituer un "champ" (*Feld* ; ou plutôt, *cf. infra*, un "champ de discours"). l'A. entend les "décrire" comme des "motifs" (*Motive*) ou "*topoi*". La plupart sont de type holistique ou moniste. La pensée en termes de correspondances en fait partie. De même, la *philosophia perennis* (p. 22 et ss.). L'A. déclare que, contrairement à la typologie proposée par Faivre, il ne conçoit pas ces motifs et *topoi* comme des "éléments constitutifs" (*Bestimmungselemente*) de l'ésotérisme, mais en quelque sorte comme des "matériaux" (*Material*) du discours (p. 242 et ss.). Ces "champs" (*Felder*), il les appelle souvent "champs de discours" (*Diskursfelder*). Ils passent de l'un à l'autre, d'où l'expression, qui lui est chère, de "transferts discursifs" (*diskursive Transfers*), qui sont essentiellement des "transferts de savoirs". Par exemple, des éléments d'ordre scientifique se trouvent "transférés" dans des pratiques spirituelles (*Transfers*

naturwissenschaftlicher Ansätze in spirituelle Praxis, p. 230 et ss.). L'on observe ainsi des transferts entre religion, science, philosophie, littérature, art; entre science et religion (sur ce dernier point, *cf.* notamment le chapitre VI), ou encore politique (pp. 20, 218 et ss.). A ce propos, il lui arrive d'employer aussi l'heureux terme *Verflechtung* (entrelacs, rapports d'interdépendance; *cf.* par exemple p. 218).

Pour éviter un malentendu, précisons que la numérotation de ces quatre notions ne figure pas dans le texte de l'A. Nous l'adoptons par souci de commodité seulement. Certes, l'A. nous dit bien (*cf. supra*) qu'elles servent à "identifier" le *Diskurselement*. Toutefois, il n'est pas certain que nous ayons affaire ici, pour autant, à un modèle opératoire dont la spécificité reposerait sur la présence simultanée de quatre éléments constitutifs, au point que ce qui n'entrerait pas dans le modèle ne serait pas spécifique de l'ésotérique. Cela posé, quelles questions son modèle est-il susceptible de soulever?

La première notion ne nous paraît pas susciter de difficulté particulière. Pour ce qui concerne la deuxième, on peut s'interroger sur sa pertinence opératoire. En effet, souvent il s'agit bien moins de "dévoiler" une vérité cachée, que d'"approfondir" une vérité déjà connue et admise (ainsi, quand on pense accéder à une révélation à l'intérieur d'une révélation préexistante). Là, nous n'avons pas nécessairement affaire à une "confrontation" avec une interprétation déjà connue et admise, mais plutôt à une extension de celle-ci – ce dont témoignent maints discours relevant de la théosophique classique, par exemple.

Pour ce qui concerne la troisième notion, elle revient à dire ou bien que l'ésotérique se pose en s'opposant, ou bien qu'il se définit à partir des discours qui s'opposent à lui – ou bien encore qu'on admet ces deux propositions à la fois. Cela nous paraît appeler trois remarques. A) Parler de "déviance", comme parler d'hérésie, c'est se situer sur un plan doctrinal – par exemple, quand une proposition de type dogmatique vient contredire une autre proposition du même type. Or, l'une et l'autre relèvent du concept, alors que le discours ésotérique, lui, nous paraît relever bien moins du conceptuel que de l'image – et cela, parce qu'il ressortit essentiellement à la pensée mythique. B) Parler d'altérité revient à faire retour à la notion de marginalité. Or, cette notion, de commodité factice, fait maintenant l'objet de sérieuses remises en question de la part des historiens et des sociologues des religions en raison de son caractère ambigu. De fait, et ce point nous paraît essentiel, les courants dits ésotériques, considérés dans leur ensemble, sont bien plutôt transversaux que marginaux. C) Force est de constater que

cette approche “marginalisante” est de nature à restreindre considérablement le champ de l’ésotérique; et cela, de façon quelque peu paradoxale puisque l’A. entend justement élargir ce champ.

Quant à la quatrième notion, elle nous semble présenter quelque dissonance par rapport aux trois précédentes, parce qu’elle ressortit à un ordre différent. En effet, si celles-ci peuvent s’appliquer à une même œuvre, celle-là, en revanche, porte sur un ensemble d’œuvres, ou sur des questions de réception, d’influences. Elle renverrait plutôt à un autre type d’enquête – comparatiste, en l’occurrence (sur cette idée de comparatisme, cf. aussi *infra*).

Que sont, d’autre part, ces motifs et/ou *topoi* liées à la notion de “cristallisations”? L’A. écrit qu’à la différence de Faivre il ne les considère pas comme des “éléments constitutifs” (*Bestimmungselemente*) de l’ésotérique, mais en quelque sorte comme des “matériaux” (*Material*) de discours. Or, si l’expression “matériaux de discours” est plutôt heureuse dans ce contexte, il faut dire en échange que la phrase précisant ce dont l’A. entend se démarquer repose sur une erreur de lecture. Certes, Faivre a considéré “la pensée en termes de correspondances” comme l’un des éléments constitutifs (au sens de “généralisations effectuées à partir de nombreux cas concrets”) de sa construction, parce qu’il y a vu un des aspects d’une forme de pensée (et surtout pas un thème, bien que cette aspect-là puisse éventuellement servir de “matériau” au sens où l’A. l’entend). Mais il n’en va pas de même des deux autres exemples de motifs/*topoi* énumérés (pensée holistique ou moniste, d’une part; *philosophia perennis*, d’autre part), car contrairement à ce qu’écrit l’A., Faivre n’en a pas fait des éléments constitutifs de sa typologie. D’une part, il a justement pris le soin d’éviter de faire entrer dans celle-ci ce qui relève de positions philosophiques particulières, a fortiori du doctrinal, ce à quoi ressortit par définition le “type holistique ou moniste”. Et d’autre part, écrire (cf. encore dans l’exposé de la notion 4) qu’il a considéré la *philosophia perennis* comme un de ses éléments constitutifs revient à confondre ceux-ci (en l’occurrence “l’idée de transmission”) avec un des nombreux exemples (en l’occurrence, la *philosophia perennis*) qui ne font jamais qu’illustrer le dit élément.

En fait, le modèle de Faivre se situe sur un tout autre plan, puisqu’il s’applique non pas à des “discours” faits de contenus, mais à une “forme de pensée” qui ne se définit pas par ceux-ci. Et puisque nous avons ainsi affaire à deux “images d’ensemble” (pour reprendre l’expression que l’A. utilise dans la première des deux citations *supra*), celle de l’A. et celle de Faivre, par nature différentes l’une de l’autre bien qu’elles se recoupent en partie, la nécessité ne paraît pas s’imposer de mesurer l’une à l’aune de l’autre. En

l'occurrence, d'opposer "l'ésotérique" au sens où le premier l'entend, à "l'ésotérisme occidental moderne" au sens où le second l'entend. Dans le premier cas il suffirait peut-être, répétons-le, de remplacer le terme "l'ésotérique" par celui de "gnose", par exemple (ou par tout autre terme commode), pour voir disparaître la pertinence d'une confrontation des deux approches.

Cela dit, pour ce qui concerne le modèle proprement dit que l'A. nous propose il peut être effectivement fructueux de dresser des listes de thèmes et de motifs apparaissant dans les discours de l'ésotérique, à condition de comprendre ce mot selon l'esprit de l'A.; à savoir, pensons-nous, comme une "forme de discours parmi d'autres discours", laquelle est susceptible d'intégrer des contenus. Et dès lors nous devons bien admettre, par souci de logique, qu'un certain nombre des critiques d'ordre méthodologique adressées ci-dessus à l'A. se trouvent relativisées par le fait même que, dans son ensemble, son approche porte sur des contenus plus que sur des concepts opératoires proprement dits.

Reste néanmoins à s'interroger sur l'utilité pratique du modèle. Nous rappelions la nécessité, pour une spécialité académique – même transversale par nature – soucieuse de reconnaissance, de ne pas trop étendre son champ. C'est dans cet esprit qu'a été conçu le *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*⁷. Le champ qu'il couvre est déjà passablement vaste, puisqu'il englobe non seulement les Temps Modernes (au sens français du terme), mais aussi l'Antiquité tardive et le moyen âge. Or, que serait un Dictionnaire embrassant tout "l'ésotérique" au sens où l'A. l'entend? A supposer que ses collaborateurs se mettent effectivement d'accord sur une approche définitoire conforme à ce sens, une telle œuvre ne risquerait-elle pas de faire plus ou moins double emploi avec d'autres, de portée fort générale, consacrées aux philosophies religieuses ou aux "spiritualités"?

Aussi bien la méthode proposée par l'A. nous paraît-elle moins contribuer à affirmer la spécificité de l'ésotérisme au sein de l'Histoire des Religions, qu'à se présenter comme une sorte de programme de comparatisme en matière de Sciences Religieuses ou de Philosophie. En outre, son article paru dans *Religion* (cf. *supra*) nous semble assez significatif de l'orientation de pensée dans laquelle il se trouve engagé. En effet, il ne reprend que très partiellement les quatre notions décrites plus haut, et met principalement l'accent sur la première d'entre elles, qui semble donc, au stade le plus avancé de sa réflexion, représenter à ses yeux ce qui permettrait d'approcher au mieux

⁷ W.J. Hanegraaff et al. (éds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*.

“l’ésotérique” : à savoir, la connaissance absolue et les modes pour y accéder. Aboutirions-nous donc à appeler “l’ésotérique” une notion tellement générale ? De fait, le programme comparatiste sur lequel nous paraît déboucher l’orientation suivie par l’A. nous semble présenter quelque ressemblance avec ce que Henry Corbin appelait de ses vœux et nommait ‘un ésotérisme comparé des religions du Livre’ – à ceci près qu’ici il s’agirait de l’étendre au-delà des dites religions (et surtout, bien sûr, que la démarche de l’A., à la différence de celle de Corbin, est exempte de tout religionisme)⁸.

Comme nous le disions au début, dans le monde de la recherche académique consacrée à l’ésotérisme l’A. constate un défaut d’unanimité quant à la nature de l’objet. En fait, réaliser cette unanimité au sens absolu du terme ne nous semble pas l’essentiel. Ce qu’il s’agit de maintenir surtout, au sein d’une communauté scientifique, c’est le consensus qui porte sur la nécessité d’échanges permanents, fructueux dès lors que chaque chercheur confronte sa propre démarche à celle des autres, lesquels confrontent la leur à la sienne. Or, l’ouvrage de Kocku von Stuckrad, à l’instar de ses précédents précédents, s’inscrit dans cette perspective. Il est de nature à relancer la réflexion, dans le sillage des travaux les plus intéressants parus à ce jour.

* L’auteur du présent compte rendu a choisi de parler de lui-même à la troisième personne.

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⁸ Sur les risques épistémologiques qu’une telle entreprise nous paraît présenter cf. A. Faivre, ‘La question d’un ésotérisme comparé des religions du livre’.

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

Edward F. Crangle (ed.), *Esotericism and the Control of Knowledge* (Sydney Studies in Religion 5), Sydney: Department of Studies in Religion / The University of Sydney 2004. 360 pp. ISBN 1-86487-642-5; ISSN 1444-5158

The words “esoteric” and “esotericism” have at least two distinct meanings. Esotericism in a typological sense denotes religions from any place and any time characterized by postulating that certain kinds of ritual or doctrinal knowledge are reserved for an elite. Esotericism in a historical sense is a label applied to a host of currents in Western culture that display a family resemblance. The two senses have not always been kept clearly separate. Antoine Faivre’s 1987 entry on esotericism in Eliade’s *Encyclopedia of Religions* still refers to esotericism as characterized by a “special knowledge or gnosis” accessed via a hierarchically structured path. Faivre’s seminal redefinition in 1992 of a historically conceived Western esotericism removed every mention of elite knowledge or secrecy from the definition. As is well known, esotericism has since then by near-consensus been understood as a common term for currents with four essential characteristics (correspondences, living nature, mediating symbols and transmutation) and two less essential ones (concordance and special transmission). Although there has been some cogent critique of Faivre’s definition, there has in recent literature been little stress on any links between Western esotericism and secrecy.

The pre-1992 approach to esotericism may have blurred some distinctions, but it did have the virtue of pointing at an important characteristic of quite a few currents of Western esotericism. Like many mystics, a considerable number of esoteric writers and movements claim to have arrived at a privileged kind of knowledge that others cannot access directly. Others suggest that true knowledge is a scarce resource, passed on from time immemorial through a chain of sages, but unknown to *hoi polloi*. Yet others suggest that the deepest insights are secrets over which they and the movement that they represent exert control. What relation is there between esotericism in the post-1992, Faivrean sense, and esotericism as a claim to special insight and restricted knowledge? The bulk of the present edited volume, comprising articles by fourteen scholars connected with the Australian academic milieu, revolves around this issue.

The material covered by the authors reveals a very inclusive understanding of “esotericism”. Besides classic candidates for the label such as Rosicrucianism, Traditionalism and the work of Gurdjieff, there are papers on Christian spirituality, Church fathers, Mandaean Gnosticism and even Vietnamese religion. The volume is divided into three sections, dealing with methodological approaches, esoteric knowledge and esoteric practices. All fourteen contributions cannot possibly be covered in a brief review, which will therefore concentrate on a few examples, culled from each of the three sections.

In the section on methodologies, the most theoretically oriented paper is that by Victoria Barker. Both postmodernists and esotericists reflect critically, each in their own ways, on the ability of traditional discursive logic to arrive at “truth”. Both reject Aristotelian logic, both tend to employ language in unusual ways in the conviction that linear narratives are imbued with a logocentric straightjacket. Postmodernism, like research on esotericism, is concerned with the retrieval of marginalized voices. Although her article is more of a programmatic statement than a specific suggestion for future methodologies, Barker seems to suggest that we as researchers should position ourselves as caretakers for the marginalized Others, a stance that can either be read as a plea for solidarity with our sources, or more controversially as an apologetic appeal for an esoteric religionism.

With characteristic erudition, Garry Trompf in his contribution pursues the interaction between (esoteric) claims of privileged insight and (exoteric) public proclamations of a way to universal salvation, from antiquity to the present. For the former, the prototypes are Plato’s *locus classicus*, the parable of the cave, as well as the Mystery cults and Gnostic religions of late Antiquity. For the latter, mainstream Christianities are typical. The divide between exoteric and esoteric proved crucial for the formation of a Christian orthodoxy, because it precipitated the need to draw borders against those who proclaimed an esoteric gnosis and to formulate a publicly available canon of “correct faith”. A broad sweep over the subsequent history of religions in Europe amply attests to the fact that the tension between these two ways of envisaging religious truth never subsided. Trompf covers a lot of ground in few pages, providing both a road map to an understudied area and a host of ideas to be pursued further by other researchers.

The second section, on esoteric knowledge, is the one that would appear to be most closely connected with the theme of the volume as a whole. Gary Itter’s paper on Clement of Alexandria illustrates in some detail the tensions between public knowledge and controlled insight discussed more generally

in Trompf's paper. Clement argued against the Gnostics and attempted to persuade his readers that true gnosis was in fact characteristic of the most knowledgeable Christians. He did this by suggesting that Christian doctrines were understood differently by those who possessed higher insight and by the mass of ordinary believers. Indeed, in his *Stromateis* Clement insisted that those who truly understand must speak obliquely, lest the 'ineffable word of real philosophy' be profaned.

Not all knowledge is discursive. An important point made in the third section, is that the scholarly study of esotericism has emphasized the doctrinal dimensions and devoted far too little attention on the ritual and social aspects of esotericism. Al Gabay presents a thick description of the fin-de-siecle milieus where battles raged over the status of spiritualist phenomena: were they genuine contacts with the dead, hoaxes to be debunked or a potential subject of academic inquiry? Gabay's paper focuses on the role of the Society for Psychical Research in the struggle over who could claim to possess valid knowledge of the paranormal.

For readers of *Aries*, one can suspect that the contributions by Christopher Hartney and Nasoraia Hathem Said in the third section will present the most unfamiliar material. As the study of Western esotericism has progressed, similarities with and loans from Jewish kabbalah and Islamic (especially Ismaili Shiite) gnosis have been the focus of considerable interest. Comparative studies with "esoteric" religions outside the Abrahamic fold are by contrast exceedingly rare. Said's contribution on priesthood and knowledge in Mandaeen religion presents a religion which, by its Gnostic roots, has a distant historical relationship with the esoteric currents in the West. Hartney takes us one comparative step further, by examining esoteric knowledge in a Vietnamese movement, Cao Dai. Interestingly, Caodaists, of whom many live in a diaspora in the West, have recently come to adopt the term *esoteric* when they wish to characterize their own world view.

The papers in the present volume approach the nexus between esotericism as privileged knowledge and esotericism in a more historical sense from very different angles. A problematic issue with some contributions is the blatantly apologetic agenda. Esotericist writers are presented in a hagiographic mode (Harry Oldmeadow on Schuon). The "true" meaning of core concepts is elucidated (Matthew del Nevo on Christian spirituality). Various currents are normatively ranked, with the ones least palatable to the author being dismissed as part of a 'vast spiritual wasteland' (Oldmeadow). Readers are informed that 'In our mind, the hierarchy of Being is self-evident . . . Esotericism refers to things as they are; not as they appear in the world of

flux' (Timothy Scott, again on Schuon). Less obviously religionist are the attempts to "rescue" esotericism by appealing to a post-modern embracement of alterities. To be more than a protective strategy, however, such attempts will need to grapple seriously with the trenchant critiques of post-modern religionism by Russell McCutcheon and others.

Other papers have problems with issues of definition. In a collection concerned with the distinct uses of the term *esoteric*, one would expect authors to exhibit particular care in making their understanding of the term explicit. However, even Itter's otherwise well-argued contribution uses the label without clearly defining it. Others employ crucial terms in idiosyncratic fashion. It is puzzling to read Oldmeadow define esotericism so broadly as to encompass tantra and shamanism (the latter presented as a concept in the singular), and characterize religion so narrowly that it excludes groups with a belief in psychic and paranormal phenomena.

The editorial policy of including a very diverse group of scholars from one specific geographical region, rather than to commission contributions representing the best available scholarship, comes with a price. As a collection, *Esotericism and the Control of Knowledge* gives an uneven impression. The best papers, however, will be important points of departure for any scholar wishing to further pursue the relationship between the two ways of envisaging esotericism.

Olav Hammer

Jan N. Bremmer & Jan R. Veenstra (eds.), *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern period*, Leuven: Peeters 2002. xiv + 317 pp. ISBN 9042912278

As noted in the Preface, this volume is the outcome of a workshop of the same title held in June of 2000, which was part of an incentive program entitled *Cultural Change: Dynamics and Diagnosis* with the collective goal of promoting multi-disciplinary approaches towards phenomena 'typical in transformation processes in the fields of art and politics, literature and history, philosophy and theology'—a vast objective which clearly needs narrowing down if it is to mean anything on the level of actual research projects. This book, restricting itself to the topic of the "metamorphosis of magic", aims

to meet the challenge of the *Cultural Change* program by reflecting a specific refinement of its broad goal: the essays collectively and individually aim to illuminate ideas of change and transformation in the understanding and practice of magic from late antiquity to the early modern period.

It was a good idea, and there are some good essays in the book; yet, as might be expected given the broad range of things the word “magic” can include and the long time span the book attempts to cover, there remain problems of focus and consistency. Although the first essay by Bremmer involves a methodological positioning around the vexed term “magic”, this positioning can only provide a notional kind of unity when the actual terms of what will be taken to constitute “magic” in *this book* are left vague (his final appendix also attempts a return to the discussion of terminology, but the book would have been better off without this historically oversimplified and misleading representation of the developing semantic fields of magic and religion). In any case, the essays in the volume cover such a broad range of topics (from incantations to law, from the dead sea scrolls to Reuchlin, with lycanthropy and miracle stories thrown in), it is no wonder that the book sometimes seems to have uncertain collective goals. There simply cannot be an overarching narrative of transformation for a time period this extended in a field of study this broad.

And yet the book means very well, and despite these problems many of the essays are good ones in their area. Jan Bremmer’s opening article on the birth of the term “magic” is a useful exposition of changes in the semantic field of term “magia” which re-examines the data on antique and late antique uses of the term, and sheds light on how the Greeks came to consider the “magi” as magicians. In the next article, Florentino Garcia Martinez looks at divination and exorcism in the Dead Sea Scrolls, arguing that one reason for the presence of these practices had to do with the dualistic world view of the Qumran community in which they originated, where ‘one of the basic tenets was the division of the angelic world and the individual person into two opposing camps of light and darkness’ [33]. The fascinating texts which the author puts under scrutiny here thus appear convincingly as emergency procedures necessary to sustain the balance of dark and light in the cosmos. The author’s interest in reading these texts as ‘witnesses of a process of change in the approach to magic within the Jewish world’ [13] seems more questionable, since practices of this kind are not less ubiquitous throughout history than are condemnations of magic—it is thus not really possible to read their mere presence as evidence of any change in attitude toward magic.

Despite the weakness of the author's attempt to thematize the essay along the axis of transformation, the piece is a very interesting analysis on its own terms.

Sarah Iles Johnston's essay 'The *Testament of Solomon* from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance' is one of the more disappointing ones in the book, as it neither provides any significant analysis nor offers any historical context for the better understanding of the *Testament of Solomon* or its reception. While there is certainly room for new work on this text, Johnston, a competent scholar who has done important work elsewhere, seems unable to get her mind around the project here. She begins with a disclaimer: noting that any real scholarship on the Testament would take quite a lot of work, she chooses to opt out of it: '... Lacking both a magical ring and infinite time, I have chosen to provide a brief survey of our knowledge about the Testament ... and, following that, to discuss the relevance of two of its most distinctive features ...: the use of demons for the benefit of humanity and the imprisonment of demons in sealed containers' [34]. Unfortunately the tracking of these two distinctive features is not really a smaller job than any close analysis of the *Testament* itself might have been, and what follows the necessarily brief synopsis of available scholarship on the *Testament* is a rambling essay which picks up literary references to Solomon, most from early modern and modern works, with some final attention to contemporary film. Johnston's attempt to weave a poetic whole from this ahistorical substance is not wholly unsuccessful; it might serve as a useful preliminary guide to the Solomonic literature available in print for a student new to the topic, though it seems like false advertising to bill it as an essay on the *Testament of Solomon* (as though the *Testament* were exclusively responsible for all Solomonic references in all literature thereafter). The piece disappoints chiefly, perhaps, because one feels Johnston might have done a creditable job on the *Testament of Solomon* if she could have mustered any real interest in it.

In Jan Bremmer's second essay, 'Magic in the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*', a synthesis of his recent work published elsewhere on these texts, he suggests that this corpus of Apocrypha has been 'wrongly neglected by students of ancient magic, whereas, in fact, it provides valuable information on the changes and tensions occurring in the Roman Empire through the gradual rise of Christianity' [52]. Referring as background to the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, the Greek magical papyri, and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Bremmer traces stories about magic and exorcism in these apocrypha. Like Stolte and Flint (below), he is interested in the competition between

Christian and non-Christian practices; his focus is therefore on confrontations between magicians on the one hand and the saints and apostles on the other, and he succeeds in revealing a number of interesting contact points between them.

In the next essay, 'Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri: The Figure of the *Parhedros*', Anna Scibilia aims at contrasting the inner-worldly and other-worldly aims of magical *actio* in the Greek magical papyri, opening with the question, 'is it possible to speak of a soteriology in Greek magical papyri, and, if so, how do we qualify this soteriology?' [72] Scibilia comments on the use of the hymnic genre, noting that 'in the structure and nature of the hymns . . . that the dialectical relationship between magic and religion, or between coercion and prayer, most often surfaces' [73]. While the author is tackling large and interesting questions here, her reasons for identifying the 'relationship between magic and religion' as an equivalent to the 'relationship between coercion and prayer' are not made explicit; the terminology which identifies magic with "coercion" as contrasted to religion as "supplication" seems methodologically questionable, though at the same time her footnotes show ample acquaintance with current approaches to this area of theory. This is not the only instance where the author's work leaves its relationship to previous writing less explicit than one might have liked it to be; however her analysis of the function of the *parhedros* (personal daemon or divine assistant) within the texts is fascinating, showing an overlap of interest at almost every point between this-worldly and other-worldly actions in the papyri.

Fritz Graf next offers a very readable piece on Augustine and magic which briefly places Augustine in the context of classical and late antique pagan thinkers (especially Apuleius but also the neo-Platonists), to whom Augustine was responding, or whose ideas he was absorbing or modifying. It is useful to be reminded both how new to Augustine his Christianity was (hence of all the ways in which his thinking counted as radical), and at the same time how philosophically absorbent his thought is at its point of origin. While this essay belongs more to the text/reference genre, it is a very good piece of its kind, positioning Augustine at the intersection of classical and Christian worlds and usefully furthering the volume's theme of "transformation".

In the following essay, 'Magic and Byzantine Law in the Seventh Century', Bernard H. Stolte also tackles an intersection of pagan and Christian issues around magic. Stolte looks at how cases involving magicians and those who consulted them were dealt with in seventh-century Byzantium, referring especially to the newly popular Christian genre of *erotapokriseis* or "questions

and answers”, and focussing on stories and anecdotes in these texts in which magic plays a role. The sources investigated by Stolte are of intrinsic interest for the light they cast on the life of the people who wrote them, though the essay winds up feeling oddly inconclusive, because the rather vague definition of “magic” promulgated at the opening of the essay (Stolte says: ‘I use [the term magic] in a rather loose way to indicate any studies and especially practices which refer to the “supernatural,” but are not part of established Christian religion’ [105]) made it difficult to formulate any strong argument about magic in seventh century Byzantium.

The next essay, by Valerie Flint, ‘Magic in English Thirteenth-Century Miracle Collections’ deals with similar themes (and shares similar problems), but jumps a few centuries forward. Flint also seeks to illuminate the theme of competition between licit and illicit holy power in miracle stories of the late medieval English bishop saints Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford, Richard Wich of Chichester, and William Fitzherbert of York. Though the stories she finds to tell about the bishop saints are rife with fascinating details of popular practices, it remains quite unclear how much if any of the ritual activity within them is thought of as magic, or related to magic either by the people in the stories, or the audience of the text. The notion that the bishop magi (or counter magi, as she sometimes refers to them) were rescuing or protecting magical practices by their miracles thus seems to be assumed more than demonstrated. While the article draws on very interesting sources, the conclusions drawn regarding the use of miracles to legitimate magical practices remain open to question.

An abrupt change, both of subject and time period, follows, with Veenstra’s piece ‘The Ever-Changing Nature of the Beast: Cultural Change, Lycanthropy and the question of Substantial Transformation (From Petronius to Del Rio)’. This is an engaging essay, taking readers on a romp through important werewolf literature down through the ages. Veenstra covers in short compass the whole history of the idea of transformation in lycanthropy, in the end tying it to a magical idea of transformation in a way that nods cleverly at the theme of the volume as a whole.

The final three essays in the book feel somewhat more connected with each other, inasmuch as all deal with theurgic issues in late medieval and early modern magic. Nicolas Weill-Parot’s essay ‘Astral Magic and Intellectual Changes (Twelfth-Fifteenth Centuries): “Astrological Images” and the Concept of “Addressative” Magic’ usefully covers concepts treated at more length in the author’s longer work, *Les images astrologiques* (2002). He here

advances some new English terminology, suggesting “addressative” magic as a functional label for the type of magic that tended to get classified as “demonic” in the middle ages (whether its actual addressees were angelic, demonic or neutral). While this is an interesting piece, the essay suffers somewhat from being too brief to do real justice to the breadth of its topic (after all treated elsewhere by Weill-Parot).

This sense of being overloaded with their material is a problem shared in some degree by both the following essays as well. Jan Veenstra’s essay on the late medieval angel magic text *Almandal* remains a very useful essay, stopping a number of gaps in research while we wait for Veenstra’s edition of the German language version of the *Almandel*. I would have liked to see more information on the Latin *Almandal* here, and one wonders why Veenstra includes as an appendix a transcription of a late English version of the text (when a closely related version has been available to readers through the edition of the *Lemegeton* by Joseph Peterson since 1999 at the Esoteric Archives website). However, when work on this text is so much needed, it seems churlish to complain of these small shortcomings. The final essay by Bernd Roling, ‘The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin’ is a competent summary of the (many) non-Christian sources influencing Reuchlin’s theurgy, as well as some analogues in other early modern works. Despite its length, this piece has a feeling of being enormously compressed, as though it were wearing a corset too tight for it (my impression, later confirmed in a conversation with the author, was that it had been edited down with difficulty from something much longer). It is a pity, too, that the essay seems to have been very hastily copy edited, as it probably contains nearly as many typos as the rest of the book together (including an unfortunate mistranscription of Robert Mathiesen’s first name as “Roland”).

It is difficult not to regret that some of the important texts and topics in the book were not given more space in which to expand; a book covering no more than the territory briefly glanced at by Weill-Parot, Veenstra and Roling, but covering it in more depth, might have made a more substantial contribution to the study of medieval and early modern theurgy. Similarly there are other sections and themes in the book that would likely have held together more coherently, and delivered more of substance, if they were allowed to occupy a volume of their own. Despite the limitations of its format, however, this is a book which contains much of interest for those interested in the history of magic; if nothing else, it holds promise for much

worthwhile future work likely to be done by the scholars who contributed to it.

Claire Fanger

Nicolas Weill-Parot, *Les "images astrologiques" au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance: Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XII^e-XV^e siècle)*, Paris/Genève: Honoré Champion 2002. 988 pp. ISBN 2745304496

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries new categories of learned magic were translated from Arabic, Greek and Hebrew into Latin, primarily in Spain, and disseminated in manuscripts across Europe. Many of these texts described rituals in which an object (the image or talisman) was artificially created by a magical practitioner and infused with power from celestial bodies and/or spirits. After a relatively favourable reception, which was partly due to the scientific and philosophical texts with which they were often translated, magic texts describing the construction of images came under scrutiny from the Church. Nicolas Weill-Parot highlights the two main approaches to images in the history of their reception in the Medieval West: that of natural philosophy, which explored the question "how do celestial influences empower the talisman?" and that of the Church which asked "is there anything potentially superstitious in their construction?" The existence of a natural explanation was the guarantee of the licit nature of the image, turning it into an "astrological image" empowered only by natural celestial forces. In its absence the efficacy of such images would be attributed to demons.

This book is a history of the notion of the astrological image, that is of the kind of talisman which was said to derive its power from purely natural causes. According to Weill-Parot's argument astrological images did not exist in reality, rather they were an intellectual solution to a contemporary need to reconcile the curiosity of science with the necessity of appropriateness to the Christian faith. Once invented, however, the astrological image became important in the history of medieval magic as a rare category that many philosophers and theologians argued was legitimate, and that consequently both limited and enhanced the possibilities of occult interests and practices.

Nicolas Weill-Parot situates his study within the field of intellectual history rather than the history of magic as a practice. Although his book deals

with both practical and reflective sources the latter is given priority: the focus is on the problems that astrological images pose in the different fields of thought they traverse. The questions that Nicolas Weill-Parot places at the centre of his book are consequently: Why and in what circumstances was the notion of an astrological image created? What led it to become so significant in the fifteenth century? What is its intellectual significance and influence in the fields of activity in medieval thought where it is found? His methodology is to proceed by a lengthy analysis of the writings of theologians, philosophers, physicians, and astrologers who concerned themselves with astrological images. The survey sometimes covers familiar ground, but its clear organisation means that it can usefully be dipped into for a particular thinker's approach to astrological images and there are helpful concluding sections throughout the text. As a whole it presents a very useful perspective on the ways in which medieval scholars engaged with the philosophical implications of a magical practice.

According to Weill-Parot (chapters 1-2) the notion of the astrological image originated in the *Speculum astronomiae*, an anonymous mid-thirteenth-century work which identified licit astronomical images as those which depended solely upon astronomical calculations, and illicit necromantic images as those which incorporated ritual suffumigations and invocations ("abominable" Hermetic magic) or the inscription of characters and the exorcism by certain names ("detestable" Solomonic magic). Weill-Parot describes the characteristics of the latter genres as "destinative" elements, that is rituals which were (or appeared to be) aimed at communicating with spirits. He argues, moreover, that the licit texts cited by the *Speculum astronomiae* were not originally conceived as purely astrological. This is likely to be correct although it would be interesting to know more about whether there was a comparable sensitivity in the original Arabic and Jewish context concerning the difference between utilising natural celestial powers and addressing spirits.

How influential were the licit/illicit distinctions made by the *Speculum astronomiae* on later medieval texts and practice? According to Weill-Parot, image-magic texts were usually concerned with the construction of talismans according to astrological theories rather than their defence on the grounds that they were purely astrological. This is not surprising since a characteristic of medieval magic texts was the bringing together of harmonious but also eclectic sources of power, so to exclude any elements on the grounds of potential "destinativity" would be to greatly weaken the networks of power in the operation. On the other hand, manuscript witnesses suggest that the polemic of the *Speculum astronomiae* was influential on collectors with

primarily astrological rather than magical interests but attracted to the possibilities of “safe” images. Surviving copies of the licit image-magic texts—seven of which follow the lead of the *Speculum astronomiae* and entitle their talismans ‘ymaginibus astronomicis’—greatly outnumber those of the illicit ones.

It was possible, as Weill-Parot shows, for an author who supported the use of all talismans on philosophical grounds—al-Kindi—, and for one who condemned them all on theological grounds—William of Auvergne—, to ignore the notion of a licit “astrological image” (chapter 3). This was similarly the case with the acts, manuals and process of the inquisition, in which the demonological perspective focussed not on potential astrological licitness but rather on the person of the practitioner, inappropriate rituals like the baptism of images and harmful and destructive goals. In this context an interesting avenue for scholars to explore further is the relationship between the role of images in learned texts and popular traditions. Literary anecdotes often associated the construction of images with illiterate old women and the English natural philosopher Adelard of Bath, a translator of many Arabic image-magic texts, even claimed to have learnt his craft from one. Some historians, uneasy at the ambiguity of the term image in this popular context prefer astral magic as a way of placing the emphasis on the construction of objects according to astrological rules and calculations.

In chapters 4-6 Nicolas Weill-Parot explores the intellectual arguments for and against the notion of the astrological image. These depended upon a tension between curiosity for the newly translated natural sciences and intellectual concerns to classify with a clear vision of causes, particularly in relation to natural or demonic causality. This section, dealing with such important thinkers as Aquinas and Albertus Magnus and the crucial medieval debate over the relationship between art and nature, supports Weill-Parot’s claim for the significance of his topic. He uses the narrow notion of the astrological image to argue that the scholastic middle ages were not a time of irrationality but of profound rationality, if anything expressed excessively in the belief that everything could be explained. Astrological talismans, which were of relative insignificance in the fields of astrology and medicine, and only one of many types of magical practice in circulation, nonetheless incited a thinker of the stature of Albertus Magnus to defend their licitness through the idea of a causal chain which relayed the astrological cause to the talisman *via* the artisan-creator.

Nicolas Weill-Parot downplays the significance of astrological images in the arts of astrology (chapter 7) and medicine (chapter 8). He demonstrates

that images had a marginal place in the former on the basis of their absence in mainstream texts, the fact that astrologers would not usually possess metal-working skills and the understandable avoidance of the illicit implications of talismans by the authors and practitioners of this relatively respectable art. It is important to note, however, that since astrology often had a significant technical role in magical practice, the connection between the two arts is nonetheless very important for historians of magic. Medicine is situated at the intersection of manifest and occult science by Weill-Parot, with occult solutions tending to concentrate around particular medical problems: epilepsy, impotence, melancholy, poisoning, plague. The frequent associations of the Black Death with poisonous air led to a new interest in astrological images—the scorpion and the serpent carrier—which were used in anti-poison treatments (chapter 9). Nevertheless Nicolas Weill-Parot demonstrates that learned medical texts citing astrological images were a tiny minority and he diverges from current historiography to argue that the place of astrology itself in scholastic medicine has been overestimated. This is an interesting point for historians of medicine to take up, especially since it is likely that the overestimation was contemporary as well. Whilst physicians did not necessarily use astrological calculations particularly often, the connection of their study with the Heavens was a rhetorically prestigious one.

The fifteenth century saw the arrival of a new intellectual climate in Italy influenced by neo-platonic, hermetic and humanist currents of thought, all of which gave man a new place in the cosmos, and a new capacity to manipulate the forces of the universe with which magic texts were particularly congruent. In this context Nicolas Weill-Parot argues image magic experienced a renaissance of theory and practice, especially in the period 1450-1500 (chapters 10-13). At the end of the fourteenth century the figure of the magician had achieved new prominence in two rather different contexts: in the persona of learned author-magicians and under the scrutiny of Church trials. When Jean de Bar was accused of necromancy in 1398, he admitted making images of wax and copper baptised and consecrated by devils and their names. The popular end of the image-making practice was thus exposed to the condemnation of the Church, but what is interesting, by contrast, is how successfully learned practitioners adapted the making of images to the licit terminology of “natural magic”. Weill-Parot shows how author-magicians and (anecdotally) practising image-makers such as the court astrologer Thomas de Pizan reinvented image magic as a form of natural magic that incorporated destinative ritual elements. Natural magic was still the signal of good practice, but the vocabulary of licitness was beginning to be used

by authors such as Antonio da Montolmo and Giorgio Anselmi da Parma to mask an amalgam of a little of everything (natural, theurgical, necromantic and astrological techniques and vocabulary). The manuscript tradition also reflects this eclectic approach as surviving fifteenth-century manuscripts are much more likely than earlier ones to include compilations of image and natural magic and texts with more explicit instructions for communicating with spirits (see Frank Klaassen, 'Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance', *Aries* 3:2 [2003], 166-199).

Ficino was the most significant defender of the new conception of natural magic through the argument that art could be superior to nature and by presenting a "universal explanation", as al-Kindi had, which justified the destinative ritual elements of image-making. Nicolas Weill-Parot argues that the fifteenth-century reinvention of natural magic was both a defence mechanism for incorporating previously illicit practices and an advertisement of philosophical authority by making the links between magic and philosophy more explicit. The culmination of his book is a discussion of the only long work dedicated specifically to astrological images, Jérôme Torella's *Opus praeclarum* of 1496, which explores all the logical possibilities of astral virtues in a talisman.

The last chapters are particularly useful for assessing significant changes between medieval and renaissance concepts of natural magic which previous historians had not clearly addressed. Nicolas Weill-Parot's extensive range of references to magic texts and other sources concerning magical practices make this book a very helpful reference tool, although it should be noted that the *Speculum astronomiae* provides a relatively unrepresentative selection of magic texts, excluding all those (such as the important and influential *Ars notoria*) which were not relevant to the author's defence of astrology. In this context—that is the social and cultural history of magic—"destinativity" is perhaps an unhelpful term, and one which unfortunately sounds rather awkward in English with its connotation of destiny in the astrological sense. Although Weill-Parot is right to point out that the medieval Church raised concerns over "destinativity"—rituals that were or seemed to be used for communicating with spirits—the fact that so many collectors and practitioners of magic texts were clerics means that they could also identify themselves as appropriate practitioners of such skills. Pre-fifteenth-century manuscripts suggest that the choice for collectors was often between "natural" and/or "angelic" magic on the one hand and "demonic" magic (necromancy) on the other, rather than "destinative" versus "non-destinative", and fifteenth-century manuscripts suggest that both kinds of distinction were often

ignored. Nonetheless, these are very minor criticisms for what is an important, erudite and wide ranging book which will be of great interest and use to future scholars studying the intersections of magic, astrology, medicine, science and theology from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries.

Sophie Page

Gerolamo Vitali, *Lexicon Mathematicum Astronomicum Geometricum*, ristampa anastatica dell'edizione parigina del 1668, a cura di Giuseppe Bezza, con una prefazione di Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, La Spezia: Agorà Edizioni 2003. ISBN 88-87218-60-9

Ad un anno dalla scomparsa di Eugenio Garin, un buon modo per ricordarlo è constatare con soddisfazione che l'impulso che egli ha dato agli studi sul Rinascimento è ormai un *modus* acquisito della ricerca storica e storiografica. Ciò si manifesta, soprattutto, nella crescita da parte di molti studiosi della consapevolezza che anche tutti gli aspetti "minori" del sapere rinascimentale vanno considerati come parte integrante e specifica dell'umanesimo, il cui studio è quindi necessario e imprescindibile per comprendere a fondo un fenomeno tanto complesso quale la cultura che caratterizzò la civiltà europea tra i secoli XIV e XVII. Consolidate realtà di ricerca, quali l'Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento di Firenze diretto da Michele Ciliberto, sono ormai vere e proprie "scuole" dove gli interessi per le più svariate tecniche e discipline del sapere rinascimentale vengono ad integrare e completare con nuove suggestioni quei più ampi quadri teorici che costituiscono le interpretazioni del Rinascimento. Che l'attenzione poi per questo genere di studi non sia da attribuirsi ad occasionali vezzi eruditi, ma quanto piuttosto al carattere metodico e scrupoloso di un nuovo modo di fare ricerca, è ancor più testimoniato da esperienze analoghe a quella che ha portato alla pubblicazione del *Lexicon astronomicum* di Girolamo Vitali, la cui edizione anastatica è stata curata da Giuseppe Bezza, profondo conoscitore delle tecniche e della storia dell'astrologia, e promossa da Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, studiosa che non a caso ha avuto Garin tra i propri maestri, e alla quale dobbiamo riconoscere il merito di aver introdotto negli studi sull'astrologia rinascimentale un rigore tecnico e metodologico che ha contribuito non poco a liberare questo settore da numerosi pregiudizi ed errori interpretativi. È soprattutto in questa ottica che possiamo comprendere e apprezzare come

questa raccolta di ben 1345 lemmi della scienza astronomica e astrologica, della matematica e della geometria, pubblicato a Parigi nel 1668, costituisca uno strumento assai prezioso per tutti gli studiosi della storia, della cultura e dell'arte del Rinascimento, trovando qui raccolta e compendiata—e non è poco—tutta la lunga esperienza umanistica e rinascimentale in campo astronomico, comprese quelle scoperte e teorie cosmologiche che hanno contribuito a segnare la nascita della scienza moderna.

Il punto di vista di Gerolamo Vitali, ci spiega Giuseppe Bezza nella sua approfondita ed ampia introduzione, è proprio quello di trovarsi a cavallo tra due epoche, tra due diverse concezioni del sapere e della scienza, e in questo senso è significativamente prezioso e privilegiato: in pieno secolo XVII le tecniche astrologiche erano entrate in una profonda crisi teorica, messe in discussione dalle nuove teorie astronomiche e incrinata dalla crisi dell'aristotelismo, eppure la risposta degli studiosi e dei cultori dell'astrologia fu rigorosamente e altrettanto teorica e metodologica. Il *Lexicon* del Vitali—allievo e discepolo di Placido Titi che fu il più grande riformatore e rinnovatore dell'astrologia rinascimentale—costituisce dunque il punto più alto di questa discussione, raccogliendo tutte le diverse suggestioni interpretative del proprio tempo e inserendosi in una tradizione, quella della *astrologia italica* che mescola istanze naturalistiche con temi filosofici e teologici. La posizione dell'autore del *Lexicon*, analoga a quella del proprio maestro, è di intendere l'astrologia come una tecnica ed uno strumento per comprendere gli effetti e le cause degli agenti naturali, quali anche gli astri, ad un grado più universale, sono. Le previsioni astrologiche, quindi, non sono nulla di occulto o malefico—sebbene nel 1630 con la bolla *Inscrutabilis* Urbano VIII avesse definitivamente messo all'indice ogni forma di premozione del futuro—ma un modo per cercare di conoscere anticipatamente gli effetti e le disposizioni naturali a partire proprio dalle loro cause più ampie ed universali e cioè, gli astri. I corpi celesti, in questo senso sono segni e cause, al tempo stesso, delle cose terrene per mezzo del loro *influxus* cioè di una azione continua ed attiva sulle qualità “umorali” dei corpi naturali e della parte più “sensibile” della mente umana (la percezione e la fantasia), azione che, sostanzialmente, è prodotta e protratta per mezzo della luce stessa delle stelle e dei pianeti e dunque è un tipo di attività altrettanto naturale, sebbene in una sua forma più “raffinata” e superiore; tale prospettiva veniva ad essere perfettamente in linea con la tradizione astrologica, ma anche con le riflessioni, più scientifiche, di Keplero, che considerava la luce degli astri come la forma principale e più caratteristica della *virtus instrumentalis siderum*. Viene meno dunque ogni attribuzione delle forze ed energie astrali

a fattori agenti occulti o “antropomorfi”, ma anche alle disposizioni relative al moto degli astri, che, in un’ottica più strumentale, altro non è che il disporsi variabile dei corpi celesti e quindi il loro mutare e diversificare gli influssi, sulla base delle diverse prospettive da cui appunto la luce degli astri raggiunge la Terra e i corpi presenti su di essa. Il tentativo di Vitali è pertanto quello di ribadire l’abbandono da parte della nuova astrologia di ogni tentazione deterministica, legata ad una visione dell’*influentia* astrale che presupponga i corpi celesti essere—in una prospettiva schiettamente platonico-rinascimentale—sedi e “contenitori” di cause formali per i corpi e gli enti di natura e quindi di qualità non fisiche ma spirituali o “ideali”. L’azione “universale” delle stelle e dei pianeti è da intendere, dunque, non come il privilegio di uno *status* ontologico superiore, ma come il risultato di cause naturali e “meccaniche” che coinvolgono gli esseri presenti sulla Terra perché essa stessa coinvolta e compresa in un “sistema” di relazioni fisiche e naturali più ampio: l’astrologo cristiano e non eterodosso, quale il religioso Vitali aspira ad essere, legge il cosmo come la disposizione sensata e intelligente di rapporti fisici, una sorta di strumento generale e suggestivamente efficace per mezzo del quale la *potentia ordinata* di Dio discende gradatamente fino alle singole cose, si attua in esse, nei fenomeni della natura. Ne esce salva, in questo modo, l’affermazione della superiorità e dell’autonomia dell’esperienza umana, influenzata e coinvolta—nei suoi aspetti sensibili—nel sistema naturale, ma anche indipendente e svincolata da esso nel trarre le proprie conclusioni, porre i suoi giudizi di merito, nel formulare le proprie idee e pensieri fondandosi su una matrice logico-cognitiva che, in ultima analisi, affonda le proprie radici nella divinità stessa. Tuttavia, sebbene sia costante in Vitali il desiderio di non uscire dalla più rigorosa ortodossia dell’aristotelismo tomista, l’autore del *Lexicon* non può fare a meno di introdurre in numerosi lemmi prospettive ed elementi teorici che aprono il discorso alle più diverse ed eterodosse concezioni dell’universo, lasciando trapelare, di volta in volta, simpatie per le ipotesi sull’animazione universale, sulle relazioni “simpatetiche” tra corpi celesti ed enti naturali o per le più curiose e innovative considerazioni sugli effetti delle forze magnetiche sviluppatasi nel XVII secolo in continuità con la tradizione “sperimentale” e pragmatica dell’alchimia cinquecentesca.

Quello che Gerolamo Vitali ci consegna, in ultima analisi, è uno squarcio su un mondo che sta profondamente cambiando, che sta rinnovando le proprie basi teoriche, confrontando e mettendo in discussione vecchie teorie filosofiche e nuovi sistemi e metodi di indagine, sperimentando innovativi strumenti che estendono la portata dell’esperienza dell’uomo e su questa

fondano nuova conoscenza e, soprattutto, verità più efficaci per giustificare il mondo. La posizione dell'astrologo Vitali risente, come è ovvio, di questa intensa crisi culturale; pur tuttavia sono significative e sorprendenti la vitalità e l'energia tramite cui l'autore del *Lexicon* tenta di rinnovare e rileggere un'arte radicata nelle tradizioni più antiche proprio per mezzo di quei metodi e quelle concezioni che caratterizzano la scientificità moderna (tra le voci del lessico vi è, ad esempio, il lemma "*telescopium*" o il confronto tra i vari sistemi cosmologici), sfatando in parte il falso mito di un meccanicismo razionalista e naturalistico acerrimo nemico delle superstizioni ideologiche tra le quali—immeritatamente—anche l'astrologia fu annoverata. Anche solo il fatto che grandi "scienziati" come Cardano, Galileo e Newton conobbero e praticarono l'astrologia, può aiutarci a comprendere quanto invece fu vitale e feconda, ancora nel '600, la scienza astrologica, quanto contribuì, anch'essa, a sviluppare "nuova" conoscenza. In questa ottica cogliere l'idea e il senso della continuità nell'evoluzione del sapere e della cultura, per mezzo di una costante revisione e rilettura dei temi teorici più importanti, non solo rende giustizia al meticoloso lavoro di studio e ricerca di generazioni di studiosi, ma spiega anche al lettore moderno quella linea di trasmissione e elaborazione della conoscenza che lega—con un filo coraggiosamente "laico"—l'occidente antico e l'Europa moderna.

Marco Matteoli

Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre, *Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, le philosophe inconnu (1743-1803)*, Paris: Éditions Dervy 2003. 296 pp. ISBN 2-84454-226-3

Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin's theosophy is an epic of fall and rehabilitation. The history of humanity begins with the loss of the perfection of its primordial state in which it participated in the divine pleroma. Humanity subsists in a state of forgetfulness of its true nature owing to the fall, but, because it retains the germ of the image of Divinity within itself, it remains susceptible to receive light emanating from the divine intelligence that permeates the universe, and therefore may draw out its divine life from under the bondage of its fallen status by reorienting its will, still free despite the fall, with the divine will. Through active, dynamic contemplation we can reassemble the shattered, dispersed world into unity and thereby awaken to consciousness of our true nature and to the circulation of spiritual forces

through the universe. Saint-Martin links the rehabilitation of humanity to the recovery of the original, universal, divinely natural language of humanity, a recovery that is possible because something of the ability of original language to express the universal faculties of the Supreme Principle remains in our degenerate languages, albeit indirectly. This indirect speech of correspondences, symbols, figures, and allegories, or poetry, participates in the divine powers, thereby linking humanity to God and allowing us to grasp the unity of creation. Saint-Martin calls souls who, moved by desire for God, acquire knowledge of the interior truths of the hidden spiritual reality behind sensible objects, *hommes de désir*. These “men of aspiration” imitate Christ both in incarnating consciousness of the Word (divine truths) and in expiating the fallen world through sacrificial suffering. Their self-immolation having separated them from the material kingdom, they exercise a spiritual ministry by regenerating others through their sacrifice. Once a critical mass of “men of aspiration” has been achieved, the *homme-esprit*, or corporate regenerated humanity, is created whose “ministry” is to complete the regeneration of humanity through the radical development of its intimate essence. Saint-Martin considered the French Revolution to be an important moment in the historical process by which humanity raises itself to a dynamic consciousness of eternal truths. The identity he posits between the regenerated human will and the divine will makes it possible for humanity to reattain its true end and become once again the flawless mirror of God. The attainment of this glorious future is the “Great Work” of reintegration.

Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre (formerly Jacques-Chaquin) is well-known to students of esotericism. In addition to her studies on the history of sorcery and demonology, and on the relations among literature, philosophy, and religion in the eighteenth century, she is the author of over two dozen articles on Saint-Martin. The present book, as the distillation of over thirty years of research on Saint-Martin and his intellectual milieu, undertakes two principal tasks: to provide an account of Saint-Martin’s thought, and to situate it in relation to the Enlightenment. It will come as no surprise to those familiar with Jacques-Lefèvre’s work that in the former task she succeeds brilliantly; from the introductory material on Saint-Martin’s intellectual itinerary from Martinès de Pasqually to Boehme through chapters on ontology, epistemology, imagination, philosophy of history, and poetics, to the concluding ‘sketch of a Saint-Martinian anthropology’, this book stands as the best account we have of Saint-Martin’s thought. Things are more complex, however, in the matter of the latter task, and it is with it that the balance of this review will be concerned.

Arguing that Saint-Martin at once broke with and was in dialogue with Enlightenment philosophy, Jacques-Lefèvre locates him in 'a very complex relation to the Enlightenment' (10). Building on the scholarship of Jean Fabre and Léon Cellier, her literary approach examines Saint-Martin's authorial strategies in relation to the signifying and imaginary networks of his theosophy, and pays particular interest to their negative moments. Her work is intended to displace the two partisan perspectives that she identifies as having dominated the interpretation of the Unknown Philosopher since the nineteenth century: a reading of Saint-Martin as simply another traditionalist spokesman for an absolute, ahistorical theosophy; and a reading of him as a conservative political theorist and enemy of Enlightenment thought, the reactionary master of Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald.

Jacques-Lefèvre details in chapter after chapter both Saint-Martin's 'enlightened tendencies' and his 'Illuminist specificities' (33), thereby substantiating the truism that the century of the Lumières was also the century of Illuminés. Her dossier of Saint-Martin's enlightened tendencies is both detailed and persuasive. At a minimum, there is his interest in signs and the origin and nature of language, his anti-clericalism, his defence of human action and desire, his insistence on human agency in the working out of our destiny, the integration of systematic rationalism and science into his thought, the epistemological weight he gives to logical demonstration and empiricism, his embrace of progress, and his recognition of the pedagogic value of narrative writing. And yet, if Saint-Martin's problematizing of his epistemological framework, his motivations for writing, and his engagement with language, poetics, anthropology, history, and philosophy are all deeply marked by the Enlightenment, it is equally true that Saint-Martin conceived and executed his theosophic oeuvre in opposition to the Enlightenment. Jacques-Lefèvre's observation that Saint-Martin did not understand reason, judgment, and experience in exactly the same way as Enlightenment thinkers (86) may be generalized to apply to all of his enlightened tendencies. Saint-Martin, that is, remained "other" to the Enlightenment even as his intellectual project was shaped by its contours. And he remained other because his ultimate authority was a theosophic interpretation of the Bible.

It is true, as Jacques-Lefèvre argues, that for Saint-Martin the Bible was only one reference among others, and that he read the Bible for its present use rather than for its historical or doctrinal content. Nevertheless, the biblical framework of creation, the fall, and redemption, theosophically understood, was foundational to his thought, including those aspects of it that most

display enlightened tendencies. Enlightenment thinkers developed a naturalistic—rationalist or empiricist—framework for their thought in specific repudiation of the biblical framework of creation, the fall, and redemption. Saint-Martin's theosophy attempted to reinsert the topoi of Enlightenment thought back into the framework of creation (interpreted as meaning that humanity participates in the divine life and that entities at all levels of the cosmos are linked to each others and to the spiritual forces circulating throughout the cosmos by correspondences), the fall (interpreted as separating humanity from the divine life and substituting indirect communication for direct communication between humanity and God), and redemption (interpreted as the re-attainment of participation in the divine life by means of a progressive reorientation of the human will). Consequently, while Saint-Martin shared the Enlightenment interest in epistemological reflection, for example, his theory of knowledge dispensed with Enlightenment epistemological modesty in favour of a supreme confidence that our knowledge is certain because it is grounded on the self-revealing God. Similarly, Saint-Martin considered an understanding of the physical laws governing a mechanical universe as merely preliminary to grasping the dynamic spiritual forces that unite and vivify the cosmos. His interpretation of the effects of the fall governed his analyses of natural language and the various historical languages, as well as his poetics. His philosophy of history, finally, was the story of redemption from the effects of the fall.

Jacques-Lefèvre does not deny that a theosophical interpretation of the biblical framework was foundational to Saint-Martin's thought; indeed she repeatedly demonstrates instance after instance of it. Yet, I wonder whether it is given sufficient weight in her account. Specifically, her book is concerned to demonstrate the continuities between Saint-Martin and Enlightenment thought rather than the discontinuities. While this emphasis is justifiable, given the earlier readings of Saint-Martin as a thorough-going and absolute enemy of the Enlightenment, nevertheless what is lost is the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the historical question of *how* Saint-Martin differs from the Enlightenment. The payoff for such reflection would be a better integration of Jacques-Lefèvre's numerous references to Romanticism into the argument of the book. As is well-known, Saint-Martin was an important influence on the Romantics, but questions remain: does Saint-Martin differ from the Enlightenment in the same way that Romanticism differs from the Enlightenment? Is Saint-Martin continuous with the Romantics on this point, or fundamentally different somehow? We can't answer these

important questions concerning Saint-Martin's status in the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism until we better understand how Saint-Martin differs from the Enlightenment.

Readers, however, should recognize that the above paragraphs represent a minor criticism of a superb book. Anyone interested in the Unknown Philosopher or related matters will discover in it a wealth of judicious scholarship and illuminating insight.

Arthur McCalla

The Letters of H.P. Blavatsky, vol. 1, edited by John Algeo (H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings), Wheaton (Il) and Chennai (India): The Theosophical Publishing House / Quest Books 2003. x + 634 pp. ISBN 0-8356-0836-0

Scholars interested in the development of the Theosophical Society and the life and thought of its extraordinary co-founder, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, have always found the monumental fifteen-volume series of *H.P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings*, compiled and edited by Boris de Zirkoff (1902-1981), and latterly by Dara Eklund, an essential source of first-hand information. Quest Books, the imprint of the Theosophical Society in America, has now extended that project with the first volume of H.P. Blavatsky's collected letters in a planned three-volume set of her complete correspondence. The letters have been edited by Professor John Algeo, Vice-President of the Theosophical Society, with the assistance of a distinguished editorial committee of long-established scholars working on Theosophy.

The letters are arranged chronologically, each with a short introduction providing the context of Blavatsky's contemporary circumstances and interests, and most letters are also supplemented with notes on sources, dating, and other helpful references. Professor Algeo's own speciality in English language and literature is also very much in evidence with painstaking efforts to establish the most authentic texts. Wherever possible, autograph letters were sought out and transcribed without changes to grammar, wording, spelling, or punctuation. When autograph letters were no longer available, the earliest or best-known copy was used.

The history of this editorial project is itself a matter of interest and was begun by Boris de Zirkoff, the second cousin, once removed of Blavatsky. Unable to complete this work in his lifetime, de Zirkoff left his library, man-

uscripts and notes to the Theosophical Society in America, which later decided to pass the task to John Cooper, a well-known historian of Theosophy resident in Australia. Besides his extensive knowledge of the context of the letters, Cooper also gathered many additional letters and thus expanded the project. As Cooper died before the work was complete, the Theosophical Society in America resumed the task. Some dissension arose over the posthumous use of Cooper's research, and the present editors claim that his work could not be used directly following the discovery that many of the texts, both those originally collected by de Zirkoff and those added by Cooper, were not accurate. This objection, surprising in view of Cooper's reputation for careful scholarship, implies that no efforts have been spared to establish a corpus of genuine letters with reliable texts.

The collection is also greatly enriched by the inclusion of fourteen 'Background Essays' which provide an intermittent biographical study, not so much a continuous account but supplementary material to assist an understanding of each ensuing series of letters. The first two background essays, respectively on 'HPB's Early Life' and 'The Lost Years' offer an fascinating context for the earliest surviving letters of Blavatsky yet discovered dating from the 1860s. These letters, written in the course of Blavatsky's barely documented later wanderings after her return to Caucasian Georgia in 1863. Here she claimed to have studied with native magicians called *kudyani* and further developed her healing and parapsychological powers. The very first letter, one version of which is drawn from HPB's English-language manuscript 'Mystical History', is probably based on an article by her younger sister Vera Petrovna Zhelihovsky published in the Russian periodical *Rebus* in 1883. Much of the contents of the 'Mystical History' surface in a variant account published by her biographer Alfred Percy Sinnett.

Revealingly, Blavatsky describes in fascinating detail her growing sense of a "double life". Whenever alone, she relapsed into her usual, half dreamy state and became *somebody else*. The variant account by Sinnett describes a mild fever, complete loss of appetite, drastic reduction of weight over several months, and a complete sense of separate identity. 'When someone else—I had no idea of who was H.P. Blavatsky. I was in another far off country, quite another individuality, and had no connection at all with my actual life'. These experiences in the Caucasus led to a turning-point in Blavatsky's life. In 1865 she found herself, for the first time, able to control the parapsychological powers and psychic phenomena which had attended her since early childhood. The second preserved letter, tentatively dated to this year and from the same source, records her enormous elation at being 'cleansed and

purified of that dreadful attraction to myself of stray spooks and ethereal affinities’.

More controversial than these early insights into Blavatsky’s psychic powers is the notorious letter of 26 December 1872 from Blavatsky offering her services as a spy to the Russian intelligence service. Writing from Odessa, Blavatsky boasts of her knowledge of political affairs in Europe and the Middle East to the Director of the Third Department, the secret police force for political intelligence and security formed by Tsar Nicholas I in 1826 but closed down in 1880. The letter is an astonishing document, at once ingratiating and incriminating, and the editors are right to note that a number of researchers have questioned its genuineness. Here Blavatsky implies that the majority of her mediumistic messages from the spirits were given ‘out of consideration for the success of [her] own plans’. She relates her intimate knowledge of Turkish-Russian intrigues in Egypt, her close dealings with the Russian consulate and Mustafa Pasha, military governor of Egypt under the Khedive Ismail. She also claims that a member of the Papal Mission in Cairo solicited her contribution as a spiritualist to Catholic propaganda and urged her to turn her back on “heretical Russia”. Admitting her inborn hatred of Catholic clergy, she took five thousand francs from the envoy and took no further action on their behalf. Later in the text, she asserts her aim is not profit but moral protection of her motherland, adding that she has already turned down several lucrative offers from foreign powers.

The Canadian Theosophical periodical *Fohat* has already (Vol. VIII, No. 3, Fall 2004) published an article and a number of letters from individuals challenging the authenticity of this Letter No. 7 on the grounds that this and some eighteen others cannot be verified against any original manuscript letter and were simply translated by Boris de Zirkoff from a hostile book by her enemy Vsevolod Solovyov (1849-1903), a Russian novelist and poet whom Blavatsky met in Paris in 1884. They became friends but after Blavatsky’s death, Solovyov published a series of exposé articles including these suspect letters in the 1892 issues of the journal *Russkiy Vestnik*, and later as a book entitled *Sovremennaya zhritsa Isidi (A Modern Priestess of Isis)* in 1893. In 1895 an abridged English translation was published with some additional material on behalf of the Society for Psychical Research. The implication is that Letters 7, 11, 12, 17 and quite a few others cannot safely be attributed to Blavatsky, but that most of them were probably forged or distorted by Solovyov as part of his campaign to discredit her and Theosophy. In her book, *Blavatsky and Her Teachers* (1988), Jean Overton Fuller devoted a whole chapter to Solovyov in which she suggests that

Solovyov turned against Blavatsky after compromising himself as a recruiter for the Russian intelligence service. Sylvia Cranston, in her biography *HPB: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky* (1993), minutely dissects Solovyov's dubious conduct and the alleged Blavatsky letters. Given Solovyov's overriding interest in defaming Blavatsky, it is conspicuous that it is in those letters taken from his polemic book where Blavatsky specifically speaks about her lack of morals, her sins, her opportunism, and her materialistic outlook. Be that as it may, the very contradictions, heart-searching, confessional outbursts and improprieties of the letters reveal a personality that is seeking illumination and redemption through dedication to the cause of esoteric philosophy. The editorial decision to include them was obviously a difficult one, and it should be noted that besides Professor Algeo and his team, both Boris de Zirkoff and John Cooper had wanted the Solovyov letters included, albeit with a health warning.

Scholars will find much of interest concerning Helena Blavatsky's early thought and interests. Her visit to observe the spirit manifestations at the Eddy farmhouse in Vermont represented her introduction to American spiritualism and occasioned her first published article in October 1874. There immediately followed her first letter (No. 8) without previous acquaintance to Alexander Aksakoff (1832-1903), the Russian author and psychical researcher, who had written on Swedenborg, and in 1874 founded at Leipzig a monthly periodical, *Psychische Studien*. Interestingly enough, this is also a Solovyov letter and the style and content seem quite consistent with her venturesome and outspoken personality.

The greater part of the edited letters comes from three well-known sources: her letters to Alexander Aksakoff (via Solovyov's book *A Modern Priestess of Isis*), her letters to her family (previously published in *The Path* and other journals), and her letters to Professor Hiram Corson (1828-1911), an English professor at Cornell University, at whose house in Ithaca, New York, Blavatsky spent some time writing *Isis Unveiled*. Of great interest is her letter (No. 21) of 16 February 1875 to Professor Corson in which she writes candidly of her scant regard for American spiritualism, which had occupied much of her previous correspondence with Aksakoff and others relating to Katie King and the Holmes affair. Dismissing 'the ever lying cheating mediums, miserable instruments of the undeveloped Spirits of the lower Sphere', she states that her belief is based on something older than the Rochester knockings. Here she clearly refers to Western esoteric traditions, as springing from the same source used by Raymond Lull, Pico della Mirandola, Henry Cornelius Agrippa, Robert Fludd, and Henry More. Like them, she

asserts that she has long been searching for a system that can disclose the profundities of the divine nature, and the real tie that binds all things together: ‘I found at last—and many years ago—the cravings of my mind satisfied by this theosophy taught by the Angels and communicated by them, that the protoplast might know it for the aid of human destiny. The practical—however small knowledge of the Principle the *Ain Soph* or the Endless and Boundless, with its ten *Sephiroths* [sic] or Emanations goes more towards opening your eyes than all the hypothetic teachings of the leaders of Spiritualism . . .’ (p. 86). This reference is highly interesting. Not only does she use the term “theosophy” for the first time, implying also that this was a discovery made some years in the past, but through her terminology she specifically identifies the Kabbalah with this theosophy. In my own work, *Helena Blavatsky* (2004), I have also argued for a more proximate source of her inspiration in Western esotericism and also adduced Kabbalah, possibly through the works of Eliphas Lévi (1810-1875), as an important element in her early thought and even as the basis of her seven principles of man. Such a reference in a letter, prior to commencing the writing of *Isis Unveiled* in the summer of 1875, is indicative of her older sources of inspiration. Indeed, these very authors may recall the titles on alchemy, magic and Kabbalah she pored over as a teenager in the library of her maternal great-grandfather Prince Pavel Vasilyevitch Dolgorukov, who had been initiated into Rosicrucian Freemasonry during the 1770s.

Another key episode in the early history of the Theosophical Society is highlighted by Blavatsky’s correspondence with Hurrychund Chintamon in 1878 in preparation for the Founders’ voyage to India against the background of the short-lived alliance of the Theosophical Society with the Arya Samaj, an Indian society for the reform of Hinduism based on the *Vedas*. Partial copies of these letters were made by the SPR, most probably in support of their earlier negative Hodgson Report, and tend to omit parts of the original letters not relevant to the purposes of the SPR case. The copies were probably made by Eleanor Sidgwick and paraphrase and abbreviate the original text, while including personal opinions as interjections. The style is therefore variable, but again the editorial decision to include these six letters can be justified on the grounds that some passages at least record the tone and spirit of Blavatsky, especially relating to her hopes of marvellous Indian phenomena. She even includes a request for ‘a good photograph of either a Fakir, or Sannyasi, sitting self-supported, in the air’ with a view to having it published in the mass-circulation *Harper’s Weekly* magazine, so that science would have to explain this phenomenon.

The sheer scope of these 136 letters, whose composition extends from early items in the 1860s up to her transit through London en route for India in January 1879, resists convenient summarisation. Alongside the published articles and memorabilia already available in the first volume of *H.P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings*, these letters, supported by the background essays, offer a vital impression of the extraordinary personality of Helena Blavatsky. Such correspondence, including the possible *spuria*, supply an indispensable record of her interests, hopes and fears during her earlier years and the crucial period in which she first wrote on esoteric philosophy. It is also a personal testimony to her view of the Theosophical Society at the time it was conceived and held its meetings in New York during the 1870s.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke

RECENT AND UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Aries aspires to keep its readers informed about recent and upcoming conferences relevant to the study of Western esotericism, but for this, the editors are largely dependent on the information they receive. Readers are therefore invited to send Conference Programs as well as Calls for Papers and announcements of upcoming conferences to the editorial address, if possible in electronic form. In doing so, please take into account that *Aries* is published in the months of January and July, and that copy must have reached the editors five months in advance (i.e., August 1 and February 1 resp.).

Esoterismo y misterio (org.: Centro de Investigaciones en Filosofía e Historia de las Religiones—CONICET—UAJFK; Departamento de Filosofía—UAJFK; Escuela de Graduados—UAJFK), Universidad Argentina John F. Kennedy, 6-7 October 2005.

Papers: Francisco García Bazán, 'Esoterismo, misterio y rituales gnósticos de liberación'; Liliana García Darís, 'Lo esotérico de los exotérico: Repensando el amidismo'; Andrea De Vita, 'La Enciclopedia de los hermanos de la Pureza'; Paula Savon, 'Misterio y simbolismo constructivo: El Amalaka'; Leandro Pinkler, 'Esoterismo e iniciación en el orfismo'; Claudio Rubino, 'Los misterios de Mitra según Porfirio'; Patricia Ciner, 'Misterio, esoterismo e iniciación en la teología de Orígenes'; Lydia Quintana, 'Herukas, dakinis y yidams en el sendero insuperable (anuttara)'; Bernardo Nante, 'Jung y las tradiciones esotéricas'; Hanna Chelmicki, 'Sobre la noción de hombre y su polisemia en el Rg Veda'; 'Cristina Simeone, 'Noticias e interpretación agustiniana del esoterismo académico'; Graciela Ritacco, 'La palabra mística en el neoplatonismo ateniense'; Olivia Cattedra, 'La doctrina de los Acharas en el Hinduismo Medieval'; Juan Schobinger, 'La arqueología como reveladora de sitios místicos o iniciáticos'; Magdalena Díaz Araujo, 'Estudio preliminar sobre el carácter esotérico de *La Vida Griega de Adán y Eva*'; Mariano Troiano, 'La figura de Lilith como punto de contacto entre los dos momentos místicos esotéricos medievales: El Catarismo y la Cábala'.
Info: egrad@kennedy.edu.ar; tel. +54 11 43001166.

Comprendre l'Écossisme (colloquium organized by the Société Française d'études et de recherches sur l'écossisme [S.F.E.R.E.]), Paris, 8 October 2005.

Papers: Jean-Pierre Brach, 'Approche méthodologique de la tradition sym-

bolique'; Roger Dachez, 'Les sources symboliques des Hauts Grades'; Irène Mainguy, 'Les grades de Perfection, un itinéraire buissonnier?'; Pierre Mollier, 'Bilan des recherches récentes sur l'origine des Hauts Grades'.

Info: <http://www.sfereco.org/index.htm>; and contact@sfereco.org

Address: SFERE, Boite Postale N° 15, 78172 La Celle Saint-Cloud Cedex, France.

La franc-maçonnerie entre réformes et révolutions à l'époque des Lumières: Europe, Amériques (org.: Université de Bordeaux III), Bordeaux, 17-19 november 2005.

Andrew Prescott, 'Freemasonry and radicalism in Yorkshire, 1780-1830'; Trevor Stewart, 'William Hutchinson (1732-1814): A Hitherto Unknown 18th Century English Radical Masonic Dramatist'; Petri Mirala, 'Freemasonry as a Model for Radical and Conservative Movements in Ireland in the 1790s'; Andreas Onnerfors, 'Swedish Freemasonry and its Transnational Connections during the Age of Enlightenment'; Jeffrey Tyssens, 'Aspects de la sensibilité libérale dans les loges belges pendant les premières décennies du XIX^e siècle'; Sandro Landi, 'La franc-maçonnerie et la légitimation des réformes en Italie au XVIII^e siècle'; Yuri Stoyanov, 'Endorsement and Condemnation of Political Radicalism and Reform in 18th Century Russian Freemasonry: The State of Debate and its Implications'; Christian Lerat, 'Benjamin Franklin, pionnier de la franc-maçonnerie transatlantique'; Susan Somers, 'Like Moths to a Flame: British Radicals and the American Revolution'; Cécile Revauger, 'Franc-maçonnerie, Lumières et Révolutions: De la Révolution d'Amérique à la Révolution française'; Georges Lamoine, 'Jacobites et francs-maçons à Toulouse: Autour de la famille de Barnewall'; Eric Saunier, 'Le parcours initiatique d'Armand Gaborria au temps de la Révolution ou la réciprocité des influences'; Alain Ruiz, 'Fauteurs de la Révolution Française: Les Illuminés d'Allemagne vus par l'Abbé Augustin Barruel dans ses *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme*'; Jean Mondot, 'Les Illuminés de Bavière: Suite et fin?'; Elisabeth Liris, 'Franc-maçonnerie entre idéaux et régénération sociale et culturelle'; Jacques Lemaire, 'A propos du "complot judéo-maçonnique", "Le Nouveau Judaïsme"'; Jacques de Cauna, 'Autour de la thèse du complot: franc-maçonnerie, révolution et contre-révolution à St Domingue, 1789-1791'; José Ferrer Benimeli, 'Le binôme franc-maçonnerie-révolution à l'époque des Lumières entre l'histoire et la mythification'; Charles Porset, 'Franc-maçonnerie et Révolution: un dossier revisité'.

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L'ésotérisme au féminin (Politica Hermetica, 21e colloque), Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne), 3-4 december 2005.

Papers: Serge Caillet: 'Des élues Coën à l'Agent inconnu: l'initiation féminine au siècle des Lumières'; Allison Coudert, 'Ange du foyer ou idéal de perversité: Les femmes dans l'ésotérisme du XIX^e siècle'; Andrée Buisine, 'Les magiciennes de la Golden Dawn'; Patrizia d'Andrea, 'Féminisme et spiritisme'; Nicole Edelman, 'Lucie Grange, une nouvelle Messie'; Marc Le Gouard, 'Clémentine-Hélène Dufau et l'utopie du "Pôle féminin primordial"'; Marco Pasi, 'Exégèse et sexualité: l'occultisme oublié de Lady Caithness'; Brigitte Beauzamy, 'L'action directe des sorcières Wicca dans les mouvements antiglobalisation: un paradigme féministe'.

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The Lure of the Dark Side: Satan and Western Demonology in Popular Culture (org.: The Research Centre for Religion, Film and Contemporary Culture), St. Deiniols Library, Hawarden, 1-12 March 2006.

Info: <http://trpc.org.uk/dark.html> or c.partridge@chester.ac.uk

Esoterik in der Aufklärung: Rezeption—Integration—Konfrontation (org.: Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für die Erforschung der Europäischen Aufklärung [IZEA]), University of Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, 15-18 March 2006.

Papers: Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, 'Aufklärung—Esoterik—Wissen: Transformationen des Religiösen im Säkularisierungsprozess'; Allison Coudert, 'The Kabbalah, Science, and the Enlightenment'; Hans-Peter Neumann, 'Atome, Sonnenstäubchen, Monaden: Zum Pythagoreismus im 17. Jahrhundert'; Markus Meumann, 'Diskursive Formationen zwischen Esoterik, Pietismus und Aufklärung: Halle um 1700'; Kristine Hannak, 'Johann Conrad Dippel: Grenzgänger zwischen Hermetik, Pietismus und Frühaufklärung'; Hans-Georg Kemper, "'Eins in All! Und All in Eins!" "Christliche Hermetik" als Trojanisches Pferd der Aufklärung'; Manfred Beetz, 'Palingenesie im Spinozastreit'; Friedemann Stengel, 'Swedenborg als Rationalist'; Hans Adler, 'Die Legitimität des Obskuren'; Karin Hartbecke, "'Ein Evangelischer Theologus und Platonischer Philosoph: Sigmund Ferdinand Weissmüller und die pythagoreische Tetraktys"'; Martin Mulsow, 'Aufklärung versus Esoterik? Vermessung des intellektuellen Feldes anhand einer Kabale zwischen Weissmüller, Ludovici und den Gottscheds'; Hermann Stockinger, "'Vernünftige Hermetik" bei Johann Christian Edelmann' (1698-1767); Andre Rudolph, 'Ästhetische Aspekte zum Verhältnis von Aufklärung und Esoterik: Hamann, Herder, Goethe'; Renko Geffarth, 'Von Geister und Begeisterten:

Semler und die “Dämonen”’; Berit Ruge, ‘Esoterische Symbollandschaften in deutschen Gärten der Spätaufklärung: Orte zum Erproben neuer Sinn-systeme?’; Peter Hanns Reill, ‘The Hermetic Imagination in the Late and High Enlightenment’; Detlef Kremer, ‘Die Romantische Theorie der Unverständlichkeit als ästhetisches Residuum der Esoterik’; Michael Bergunder, ‘Esoterik nach der Aufklärung’; Jürgen Stolzenberg, ‘Von der Weltseele: Über die Möglichkeit einer Philosophie der Natur nach Kant’.

Info: gruppe@izea.uni-halle.de or <http://www.izea.uni-halle.de/forscher-gruppe/index.htm>

The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain (Neale Lecture and Colloquium), 31 March-1 April 2006.

Speakers include: Jean-Claude Schmitt, Robert Bartlett, Miri Rubin, David d’Avray, Sophie Page, John Arnold, Carl Watkins, Frank Klaassen, Lea Olsan, Aleks Pluskowski, Brigitte Resl, Alixe Bovey, Susan Reynolds.

Further info: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/conferences/neale2006/index.htm>

Pour une sociologie de l’ésotérisme (org.: Groupe de Sociologie des Religions et de la Laïcité, CNRS), Iresco, 59-61 Rue Pouchet, Paris, 13 april 2006.

Papers: Emmanuel Kreis, ‘Désillusion du New Age et conspiration ufologique’; Yves Hivert-Messeca: ‘Esotérismes: de la méfiance à l’adhésion, une grande variété de regards maçonniques’; Stéphane François: ‘Les nouvelles manifestations de l’ésotérisme occidental, musique, bande dessinée et parallittérature’; Bernard Renaud de La Faverie, ‘Esotérisme: le regard de l’éditeur’; Pierre-André Taguieff: ‘L’imaginaire “ésotéro-complotiste” dans la nouvelle culture populaire mondialisée’.

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Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism (inaugural conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism [ESSWE]), Tübingen, Germany, 20-22 July 2007.

Conference chairman: Prof. Dr. Andreas B. Kilcher, andreas.kilcher@uni-tuebingen.de

Invited speakers (provisory): Jean-Pierre Brach, Allison Coudert, Antoine Faivre, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Bernhard Greiner, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Aaron W. Hughes, Moshe Idel, Andreas B. Kilcher, Marco Pasi, Mark Sedgwick, Michael Stausberg, Kocku von Stuckrad, Bernhard Tschöfen, Steven M. Wasserstrom.

Info: www.esswe.org

The 6th conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions, to be held in Bucharest, 20-23 September 2006, will include a session on esotericism.

Info: www.rahr.ro/