

ANGELS AROUND THE CRYSTAL:
THE PRAYER BOOK OF KING WLADISLAS
AND THE TREASURE HUNTS OF HENRY THE BOHEMIAN¹

BENEDEK LÁNG

Introduction: Crystallomancy and Ritual Magic

Written evidence on the medieval practice of crystal magic is rather scattered and fragmentary; still, its basic rules can be reconstructed². In his survey of magic, William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris (ca. 1180-1249), presents the use of crystal balls (more precisely the inspection of shining bodies, *inspectio corporum lucidorum*) in order to see revelations as a method of natural magic, which nevertheless may turn out to be dangerous and demonic, partly because looking into the transparent body may damage the viewer's eyes, and partly because malign spirits may interfere even if the operator did not intend to invoke them. It is clear in this report, that the practice of crystal balls (*crystallomancy*), magical mirrors (*catoptromancy*), and other shining bodies (such as fingernails, swords, ivory objects and basins filled with water) with its detailed methodology and well-defined procedure of ritual invocations, was not a mere sub-branch of natural—i.e. non-demonic—magic³ and pure divination⁴. It transgressed irreversibly the borders of the realm of ritual (or ceremonial) magic which functions through the invocation of angels

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² The most comprehensive and reliable work on medieval crystallomancy and catoptromancy—in spite of its title and its date of publication—is still: Delatte, *La Catoptromancie grecque*. On this topic, see also Braekman, *Middeleeuwse witte en zwarte magie*, 437-440; and Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, 185-205.

³ Natural magic may be defined as an art operating through the secret correspondences of the world and the hidden but natural virtues of its objects.

⁴ The objective of divination is to foretell future events hidden but foreordained by God through the interpretation of signs.

and demons and which often involves young girl and boy mediums who get into contact with the spirits⁵.

In 1376, Nicolaus Eymeric, the famous Catalan inquisitor who had a close acquaintance with necromantic books, since he read, condemned and burned many of them, also reported about invocations, which might be performed ‘by tracing a circle in the earth, by placing a boy in the circle, by fixing a mirror, a sword, an amphora, or other small body before the boy, and with the necromancer himself holding a book, and reading, and invoking the demon’⁶. In his exhaustive catalogue of divinatory techniques, *Das pûch aller verpoten kunst*, the German Johannes Hartlieb (ca. 1400-1468) reports cases of scrying with steel mirrors: these should be consecrated, and then—according to the magicians—angels and not demons appear in them⁷.

An anonymous necromantic manual, now published by Richard Kieckhefer, also contains accounts of experiments with gazing into crystals, which aim at obtaining information about uncertain things, such as a theft⁸. This crystal is put to work, or rather “switched on” by names of God (Adonay, Sabaoth, Hel, Hely, Sother, Emanuel, Alpha et O, and so on), and if all the indispensable ingredients are at the disposal of the magician, he may start conjuring angels, who will tell him the truth⁹. One of these elements necessary for the crystallomantic and catoptromantic activities, as well as for a wide range of other divinatory experiments and invocations described by the necro-

⁵ William of Auvergne, *De universo* II 3 20 and 21, 1053bC, 1054aH, 1057bC in Auvergne, *Opera Omnia*. See also Marrone, ‘William of Auvergne on Magic’, especially 745-747, as well as Delatte, *La Catoptromancie grecque*, 28-40.

⁶ Eymeric, *Directorium inquisitorum*, 338, quoted and translated by Bailey, ‘From Sorcery to Witchcraft’, 973.

⁷ Hartlieb, *Das Buch aller verbotenen Künste*. The basic secondary literature on Hartlieb is Fürbeth, *Johannes Hartlieb*.

⁸ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 107 and 244-245. To these examples one can add five experiments with mirrors (called the Mirror of Floron, and that of Lilith) presented by the same source, because mirrors function in the same way for similar purposes, with the involvement of angels and virgin boys. *Ibid.*, 104-106.

⁹ The endurance of these traditions is well demonstrated by an interesting seventeenth-century book written in Hungarian on ritual magic, which contains instructions on how to find treasure, money, and precious stones hidden under the earth with the help of prayers and invocations. Summoning the appropriate angels and archangels (a different one for each day), the operator is to turn to the sun, to give a mirror or a crystal to a virgin boy or girl, and to iterate (*flexis genibus*, as usual) a long list of prayers and a set of divine names (*Agios + Otheos + yschiros + Athanatos + Eleyzon + Ymas + Szentczeges Isten*). His objectives extend beyond the simple wish to find treasure; he wants the angels to satisfy all his wishes and requests, provided—the text hastens to stress—that his goals are not of a malign nature, vain or indecent. See Herner and Szörényi, ‘A Tudás Könyve’ [The Book of Knowledge].

mantic handbook, is a virgin boy¹⁰. That young boy mediums are essential in many magical rituals is testified by other sources as well. John of Salisbury, William of Auvergne, Johannes Hartlieb and Nicolaus Jawor unanimously mention virgin boys used as mediators of the divine message¹¹, John of Salisbury having the most personal experience among them, since he himself was used in his youth by a priest as a recipient of divinatory information (*Policraticus*, II. 28)¹².

A fairly analogous picture of crystallo-mantic procedures operating with a similar magical apparatus emerges from the documentation of legal procedures led against real or alleged magicians. From Jean de Bar's famous confession of 1398, we learn that he consecrated a crystal stone in order to enclose in it a devil, whom he mistook for a benign angel, and during all these events a child was also present¹³. Jean describes the ritual components of his practices in great detail: how he (ab)used the elements of Christian liturgy, and how he applied figures, characters, images, the holy names of God and strange words (*estranges paroles*) during the invocations. The demons invoked through these rituals later enter a consecrated mirror, tell the operator all the secrets they know, and answer honestly whatever is asked from them¹⁴. All these methods and convictions were—as Jean confessed before his execution—taken from special necromantic manuals.

Another curious and rather unknown text on crystal scrying is again a confession, this time made by a certain William Byg alias Lech¹⁵. This magician arrived in South Yorkshire in 1465, and for the following two or three years lived by recovering stolen property with the help of a crystal. In his confession made in front of the Commissary Poteman in 1467, William Byg admits how he performed his practices with the help of a sixteen-year old

¹⁰ See Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 112-113, 140-142, 240-242, 244, 246-254 and 329-339.

¹¹ For these and many further examples for the use of virgin boys in magical rituals, see Veenstra, 'The Confession of Master Jehan de Bar', especially 352, n. 3; and Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 98 and 107.

¹² See also Delatte, *La Catoptromancie grecque*, 15-18.

¹³ From the vast literature, I just quote two important titles: Veenstra, 'The Confession of Master Jehan de Bar', and Boudet, 'Les condamnations de la magie'.

¹⁴ Note that Jean de Bar's case exceeds the importance of a simple source of crystallo-mancy. Bar's position in the complicated context of the French royal court, and the structural and thematic correspondence of his confession with the 1398 list of articles on condemned magical arts issued by the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris, and with Jean Gerson's *De erroribus circa artem magicam* is accurately examined in both Veenstra's and Boudet's articles (see the previous footnote), who discovered the textual parallel simultaneously.

¹⁵ For the background of this case, see Raine, 'Divination in the Fifteenth Century'.

boy, with a crystal stone, and through prayers to Christ and the angels. As a result of all the preparations, the boy could see one or two angels thus invoked appearing in the crystal, and these angels were willing to answer questions about the location of the stolen articles. The question to be asked of the conjured angel is spelled in English in the otherwise Latin confession: ‘Say me trewe, chylde, what man, what woman, or what childe hase stolne yis thyng, and shewe me thing in his hand’. Through these procedures—the confession goes on—William managed to reveal the location of numerous precious stolen properties belonging to various noblemen, among them a Fitzwilliam (whose involvement could be the main reason why William was not condemned to death as Jean de Bar was). Finally, this text also ends with a statement that all these methods were learned from magical handbooks, and that the angels appeared through the reading of these books.

As is apparent from the sources, by the end of the Middle Ages, a comprehensive procedure of crystallomancy is worked out with a well-defined list of participants, tools and convictions. Consciously summoned angels appear in the crystal to answer the questions of the operator (most often about the location of hidden treasure or stolen articles but occasionally also about the highest truths), virgin boys serve as mediums, magical handbooks provide the appropriate formulae to be read, and consecrated crystals are engraved with the secret and powerful names of God. These elements go far beyond the territory of natural magic (allowed by William of Auvergne as a legitimate science), and consequently they provoke certain worries and serious counterattacks from the side of official theology: inquisitors and university statutes condemn it, while its practitioners are called before the court, made to confess their errors, and are even executed occasionally. Aware of all this, the historian does not tend to expect a handbook of crystallomancy to be tolerated by official authorities and to occur—and more importantly: to be used—say, in a royal library. Yet, in the following, we will examine a Polish royal prayer book which combines crystal gazing with the basic texts of ritual magic, and which—as I will attempt to demonstrate—is related furthermore to a court case most similar to that of Jean de Bar and William Byg.

The Prayer Book of King Wladislas

The illuminated prayer book, now preserved in the Bodleian Library¹⁶, known as the *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka* (Wladislas Warnencyk’s prayer

¹⁶ MS Rawlinson liturg. d. 6. Its number in the Summary Catalogue is 15857; see Madan, *A*

book), was at the center of scholarly interest as early as 1928, not only because of its peculiar content, prayers, miniatures and instructions on pursuing crystallomancy, but also for the mysteries around its history and owners¹⁷. Originating in fifteenth-century Poland, this is one of the eight prayer books known to have belonged to the famous royal family, the Jagiellonian dynasty¹⁸. It is, however, the most complex, enigmatic, and atypical among them.

Eighty parchment folios supply the reader with a number of prayers of various provenance (mostly deriving from prayers in common use), addressed to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Spirit. However, in most of the prayers we find inserted a stereotypical crystallomantic formula with reference to a crystal ball, to various angels, and to the person for whom the book was meant. Wladislas, the unworthy sinner and servant of God¹⁹—so the text goes—prays for the angels to clarify and illuminate (sometimes to enter, open and amplify) the crystal in order that he may learn all the secrets of the world. These formulae introduced in the text of the prayers vary slightly in length and wording, but they are highly similar and have the same structure:

– Ad vos clamo, rogo humiliter et devote Ego Wladislaus, indignus peccator, nullis meis meritis confidens, sed peccatorum mole gravatus . . .²⁰

– Da et huic Cristallo et michi indigno famulo tuo Wladislao ad exercendum in eo cunctipotentie tue omnipotentieque virtutem . . .²¹

– . . . ad videndum in illo Cristallo omnia secreta, que sub quatuor elementis contenta sunt, et omnia que scire voluero . . .²²

– Quatenus super me respicere digneris, indignum famulum tuum Wladislaum, et michi in hoc Cristallo veram visionem per sanctos angelos ostendere digneris . . .²³

Summary Catalogue, 521. See also Pächt, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, 175, and Csapodi and Csapodi-Gárdonyi, *Bibliotheca Hungarica*, no. 2336. In Hungary, the manuscript may be read in a microfilm copy: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára, Mf. 5119/IV.

¹⁷ For a published edition of the Latin text and a detailed analysis in Polish, see Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyzka* [Wladislas Warnencyz's Prayer Book]. See especially the chapter by Ganszyniec, 'O Modlitewniku Władysława' [On Wladislas' Prayer Book], 25-93, and that by Korzeniowski, 'Modlitewnik Warnencyzka' [Warnencyz's Prayer Book], 13-25.

¹⁸ For a description of the content of this and the other Jagiellonian prayer books, see Borkowska, *Królewskie Modlitewniki* [Royal Prayer Books], especially 64-76.

¹⁹ The emphasis on the unworthiness of the operator is a usual motif in ritual magic. See Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 264: ' . . . ita quod me famulum tuum, N., licet indignum . . . '

²⁰ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyzka*, 68.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²² *Ibid.*, 17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

– Da michi, domine (. . .) hunc Cristallum (. . .) ut in eo videre possum Omnia, quecumque voluero, que sub quatuor elementis continentur secreta (. . .) et impartire michi hanc gratiam super hunc Cristallum, sicut Impartitus es regi Salomoni et posteris suis artibus . . .²⁴

– Mitte michi sanctos angelos tuos ad huius cristalli clarificationem et illuminationem ut omnia huius mundi secretissima secreta sub quatuor elementis contenta . . .²⁵

– Mittat sanctos angelos suos ut me instruant ad videndum in eo omnia que in mundo, in terra vel sub terra sunt, sub quatuor elementis contenta . . .²⁶

– Digneris hodie inspirare in cor meum huius Cristalli, per sanctos Angelos tuos, ad clarificandum et illuminandum, ut in eo videre valeam et considerare omnia que sub quatuor elementis contenta sunt, et secretissima mundi, sine nocimento et omni lesione mentis et corporis, per spiritus sancti gratiam . . .²⁷

And so the petitions continue, permuting the same expressions about Wladislas and his crystal, about God and his angels, and about the ways the secret knowledge may be revealed. The excerpts quoted above designate the three issues on which we will concentrate in the following: the text of the prayers, the crystal, and the operator—which latter issue may be divided into two sub-questions: the identity of Wladislas, the owner, and the identity of the anonymous author of the prayer book.

Text and Sources

In his detailed study introducing the edition of the text, Ryszard Ganszyniec identified the provenance of roughly two thirds of the prayers²⁸. Most of these were standard liturgical texts, common Mass prayers and private devotional prayers collected from the core of the medieval prayer books. Nevertheless, Ganszyniec identified one prayer (*Summe deus pater piissime*) as deriving from a magical source attributed to Solomon, the *Ars notoria*²⁹. This text is

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸ Ganszyniec, ‘O Modlitewniku Wladyslawa’, especially 52-67. I am very grateful to Jolanta Szpilewska, (Ph.D. in 2003, Medieval Studies Department, Budapest) for letting me consult her unpublished translation of Ganszyniec’s introduction.

²⁹ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Wladyslawa Warnencyka*, 13-16. From the growing literature on the *Ars notoria*, I only refer here to the following: Dupèbe, ‘L’“Ars Notoria”’; the articles in Fanger, (ed.), *Conjuring Spirits*; Boudet, ‘L’*Ars notoria* au Moyen Age’; and Julien Véronèse’s as yet unpublished “*Mémoire de DEA*”, entitled *L’Ars notoria: une tradition théurgico-magique au Moyen Age (XII^e-XVI^e siècle)*.

a most widespread example of medieval ritual magic and theurgy; it promises intellectual perfection, learning, the acquisition of memory, and understanding difficult books by means of a large variety of prayers, invocations of divine and angelic names and numerous rituals.

The *Ars notoria* prayer borrowed by Wladislas' book originally aimed at gaining intelligence and memory, but in its new context it was altered with the insertion of the standard petition to God to send his angels to illuminate the crystal. This text is not present in the earliest versions of the notory art; it belongs to a short version that was later attached to the main bulk of the *Ars notoria*, and appears as a closing prayer in the first printed version, which can be read in a sixteenth-century edition of Cornelius Agrippa's *Opera Omnia*³⁰. What is interesting here (and what leads us to certain speculations) is the fact that the following prayer in the prayer book of Wladislas also contains an *Ars notoria* excerpt (*O lux mundi*)³¹, again occurring in Agrippa's volume but fifty pages earlier than the other one, completely separated³². In contrast, it appears just next to the *Summe deus* prayer in another Polish codex, the MS Biblioteka Jagiellońska (henceforth: BJ) 551, in a short version of the notory art (f. 109v-111r). It is quite likely therefore, that a short *Ars notoria* version containing these two prayers next to each other traveled in the medieval manuscripts, and the compiler of the prayer book worked from a text similar to the one in BJ 551³³.

Ganszyniec left a number of prayers unidentified, but he claimed that the author worked in a continuous and uniform way, borrowing pieces of texts from his sources, and not composing a single prayer himself. The author, who is rather a compiler, seems to have been satisfied with introducing

³⁰ Agrippa, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, 603-660, especially 657-659.

³¹ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka*, 17. This short prayer, not identified by Ganszyniec, was found by Claire Fanger, who kindly drew my attention to it.

³² Agrippa, *Opera omnia*, 605.

³³ It may be added that Ganszyniec's impression on the text was the following: when including magical elements in the handbook, the compiler made magic the least explicit possible. He omitted the obviously forbidden elements, the methods of suffumigations and the most explicit rubrics of magic, since they were condemned by medieval penitential books as *vane superstitiones*. Thus, the compiler constructed the appearance of a regular prayer book, making use at the same time of the ritual character of this genre. As a result of this cautious balance, the magic contained in the book was invisible to everybody except the compiler. See Ganszyniec, 'O Modlitewniku Władysława', 78-82. Although this conclusion seems to be outdated, since scholarship has established the category of ritual magic and since it has been exploring the purifying methods of John of Morigny, Ganszyniec was certainly right in identifying a conscious program of reinterpreting magical texts in a Christian framework.

formulaic paragraphs quoted above into the imported texts. More recently Urszula Borkowska examined the prayers of Wladislas in the context of other prayer books of the Jagiellons, and she noted that ‘Marian devotion is particularly developed in it, and the angelological texts, rarely developed in prayer books, are extremely interesting’³⁴.

Ganszyniec and Borkowska are not to be blamed for leaving the most important source of the author of the royal prayer book unidentified; they were simply not in a position to find this source, since the *Liber visionum* of John of Morigny was not at the center of scholarly interest in the time they completed their books. John of Morigny was a French Benedictine monk, with some university training behind him. He once practiced the notory art himself, but for various reasons he found it demonically motivated, abandoned it, and inspired by the Virgin Mary he decided to prepare a purified version of the *Ars notoria*. Thus, he composed an exceptional collection of Marian visions, the *Liber visionum*. The Church authorities were not convinced by the monk’s confidence that his work was delivered by the Virgin Mary, and the *Liber visionum* was officially burned in Paris in 1323³⁵. Although John’s book has been discovered just recently, and was virtually unknown by earlier scholarship, a number of accurate studies published in the last ten years seem to make up for this previous disregard³⁶. Meanwhile, new manuscripts are continually turning up, and the edition of the text is also under preparation; so far, however, only its autobiographical prologue is accessible³⁷.

As Claire Fanger and myself pointed out³⁸, almost one third of the prayers in Wladislas’ prayer book go back to Brother John’s text. Among these, we find the prayer which Ganszyniec supposed to have been borrowed from erotic literature³⁹, as well as the closing angelological prayers that Borkowska

³⁴ Borkowska, *Królewskie Modlitewniki*, 346.

³⁵ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol. 9, 23-24.

³⁶ See, *inter alia*, Barnay, ‘La mariophonie au regard de Jean de Morigny’, and the published version of Barnay’s doctoral thesis: *Le ciel sur la terre*. See, furthermore, the following: Watson, ‘John the Monk’s *Book of Visions*’; Fanger, ‘Plundering the Egyptian Treasure’; Kieckhefer, ‘The Devil’s Contemplatives’.

³⁷ Fanger and Watson, ‘The Prologue to John of Morigny’s *Liber Visionum*’.

³⁸ So far only a short note has been published on this finding: Fanger and Láng, ‘John of Morigny’s *Liber visionum* and a Royal Prayer Book from Poland’. The discovery (that the author of the Polish prayer book borrowed a considerable number of prayers from the *Liber visionum*) was made by Claire Fanger, thanks also to my involvement: inspired by my description on the prayer book, she identified many of the prayers with excerpts in her as yet unpublished transcription of Brother John’s text.

³⁹ Ganszyniec, ‘O Modlitewniku Władysława’, 62.

found exceptional and without analogy⁴⁰. These prayers are addressed to God (such as *O Rex regum, qui es fortissimus . . .*)⁴¹, to the Virgin Mary (*Ave, salve gloriosa mea amica, virgo maria, and O Gloriosa regina angelorum*)⁴², to the four archangels (*Et rogo vos Archangelos Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, et Uriel, et invoco vos, ut illuminetis Crystallum illum . . .*)⁴³, and to the hierarchy of angels (*O vos omnes spritus sancti angelici, benigni, gloriosi, dulces et mites, qui in ordine angelorum, in inferiori Yerarchia loca et mansiones habetis*)⁴⁴. Although the borrowings are somewhat unsystematic and in most cases the author did not adapt complete prayers, rather mixing, interpolating and abbreviating excerpts from various parts of the *Liber visionum*, still the order of the extracts more or less follows the original sequence.

Interestingly, the author of the prayer book incorporated in his text those parts of the *Liber visionum* where John describes how he—blindly—used to practice the *Ars notoria*, before turning away from this wicked and demonic art:

Oro te, supplico tibi, rogo te toto corde meo, quia prius et antea, quodam suffocacione demoniaca tentatus deceptio, illo prevalente, cecatus, quasi hesitans, non credendo revelaciones sacras et moniciones michi ex bono spiritu, operacione et arte, quibus ignoranter vacaveram esse factam, et in detrimentum anime mee ad diversas peccatorum operaciones quasi scienter cucurri et, prochdolor, adhesi mei in contumeliam creatoris⁴⁵.

As a matter of fact, this is the first text in the prayer book borrowed from the *Liber visionum* (in the original it was not a prayer), and it follows the *Ars notoria* prayer. It is mainly this positioning that has led Claire Fanger and myself to the conclusion that the author of the prayer book must have known John's whole text, and consciously imitated the structure of the *Liber visionum*, as well as John's passage from the Solomonic art in his own angelic system⁴⁶. The impression that John and consequently our author are no longer offering diabolically motivated magic in their books, but are trying to do something non-demonic and divinely inspired, is reinforced by many later claims in the text: . . . *et omnes tentaciones dyabolicas omnesque fraudes et artes magicas valeam devitare et viriliter superare . . .*⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Borkowska, *Królewskie Modlitewniki*, 74-76.

⁴¹ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyzka*, 18.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28 and 30, see also 29, 32.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁴⁶ Fanger and Láng, 'Liber visionum and a Royal Prayer Book', 2.

⁴⁷ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyzka*, 59, see also *ibid.*, 62, 64, 66.

Another interesting motif borrowed from John is the emphasis on the care with which the book itself is prepared. Relying on the text of the *Liber visionum*, although somewhat altering it, our author also stresses that the book was written, made and composed with great diligence, devoting to it several days, hours and nights with vigilance, fasting, special orations, complete reverence and many ceremonies⁴⁸. This ritualistic attention to the preparation of the book is unknown in the tradition of the *Ars notoria*. For parallels we have to turn to other magical sources, either to the *Liber consecrationis*, in which the book is not only prepared with such care, but is also consecrated⁴⁹, or to the *Liber Juratus*, at the center of which we find again a consecrated book. The latter one narrates the event when a synod of 89 necromancers and magicians⁵⁰ gathered together from Naples, Athens and Toledo and they chose from among themselves a leader, Honorius, son of Euclid, who wrote a book on the magical arts which contained the hundred sacred names of God. This book is called the sacred or sworn book of Honorius, because—as the text stresses—it is consecrated by God and His angels⁵¹. The act of consecrating a magical book indicates expressively the difference between a text of magical content and the book as an object enclosing the text.

The Crystal

Still there remain a few prayers the sources of which are not identified by Ganszyniec as devotional texts of common use; nor do they come from brother John. One of these is a prayer addressed to Adonay (*Rex potentissime, omnium creaturarum visibilium morabilis dispositor*)⁵² which is copied in a significant place: after the *Ars notoria* prayer, and before the first borrowed passage from John, while it also incorporates the aforementioned short paragraph from the notary art. This prayer is rich in magical elements; among them we find the main motif of natural magic: the occult virtue of gems and

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34: ‘Liber iste cum summa diligencia recta disposicione, debitis diebus, horis et noctibus, vigiliis, ieiuniis, oracionibus specialibus, summa reverencia et omnibus cerimoniis (sic) scriptus, factus et compositus est’.

⁴⁹ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 257-259.

⁵⁰ The number 811 in the earlier publication of the text was based on a 16th-century English translation (British Library MS Royal 17-A-XVII), the Latin Versions give 89 (British Library MSS Sloane 3854 and 3885) and 8 (MS Sloane 313). See Hedegård, *Liber iuratus Honorii*, 26.

⁵¹ On this curious text, see Boudet, ‘Magie théurgique’; and Mathiesen, ‘A Thirteenth-Century Ritual’.

⁵² Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka*, 16-18.

herbs induced by God (*qui virtutem das cunctis gemmis et herbis, da et huic Cristallo . . . cunctipotentie tue virtutem*). These paragraphs are either composed by the compiler himself, or borrowed from an as yet unidentified magical source. An additional reason why they are of interest for us is that they contain some interesting details about “the crystal”, details that are not to be found in the other parts of the book. Interestingly, the crystal appears here as a quadrangular object (*qui quadrangularem hunc Cristallum illuminet*), and functions—as the text goes—through the “holy” (or, rather, magical) names of God: Agla, Sabaoth, Tetragrammaton, Emanuel and Messias⁵³ (the same names are often used in magical rituals, among other places in the necromantic manual from Munich)⁵⁴. It may be plausible to suppose—although it is far from being explicitly stated—that these divine names that offer their virtue to the crystal and function as powerful catalyzers of the process, are physically engraved either directly on the gem or rather on a metal frame surrounding it: *coram presenti figura, tuo nomini reverenter fabricata et conscripta*⁵⁵.

Although the crystal is at the center of the practices described by the prayer book, about its appearance we only have conjectures based on analogies (note that there is no crystal involved in the practices of the *Ars notoria*, nor in those of the *Liber visionum*). A recently found and exceptionally well-preserved object may help us in speculating. German archaeologists excavated an elaborate magical mirror from the sixteenth century in 1999 near Mecklenburg (Plate 1)⁵⁶. The small object (12 cm high) has a handle and a circular main part, in which in the middle of a drawn square we find a 3 cm rock crystal. Around the crystal, in the (quadrangular!) square, we read engraved the names of the four evangelists (on one side) and those of the four archangels (on the other). Outside the square are written those divine names which we know from the prayer book: Adonay, Messias, Tetragrammaton and Sabaoth, while along the perimeter of the outer circle, there are further

⁵³ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka*, 17: ‘Manifesta michi secreta quecunque voluero in hoc Cristallo, ut in illo videre valeam, per hec sancta nomina tua, quorum efficacia celum et terra et omnia que in eis sunt, contremiscunt Agla, Sabaoth, Tetragrammaton, Emanuel, Messias’. See also ‘ut in cristallus sit illuminatus per sacros angelos tuos et per vim et virtutem illorum verborum essenciam divinam attinencium’, *ibid.*, 21, and ‘ut tu cristallus sis illuminatus per sanctos angelos, per virtutem et vim illorum verborum’, *ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁴ See Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 139 and 261.

⁵⁵ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka*, 1.

⁵⁶ For a short note and three drawings on this object, see Braekman, ‘A Unique Magical Mirror’.

powerful names, such as Agla, Eli, Eloy, rex, alpha et o, and Sabaoth again. No doubt this practically shaped object once served practical purposes, but who can tell today what (or whom) the practitioner saw when looking at the crystal, and what his source was, from which he read the instructions and the prayers?

Reading the Polish prayer book, it is not an over-interpretation of the text to expect that the crystal—if it was an existing object indeed—looked very much like the German device. While we cannot take it for granted that it really existed, we have every right to suppose so. The reader of the prayer book does not get any instruction on how to prepare it, and what is more, at one point—where the operator invokes the angels for the composition of the crystal (whatever this means)—he speaks about a *present* crystal⁵⁷. The text leaves no doubt that these are the angels who prepare the crystal, but seemingly they have already done this in the past, and they are not being asked to do so in the present. In addition, *preparare* seems to mean in this context “making it ready for being used”, instead of “creating”⁵⁸.

Further crystallomantic instructions that we find scattered on the folios of the prayer book are not very helpful when we try to imagine how the object functioned. The picture put together from these small bits of information is rather obscure. The angels invoked through the prayers enter and amplify the crystal (*intretis illum Cristallum et dilatetis eum*)⁵⁹, then clarify, illuminate, and illustrate (*Mitte michi sanctos angelos tuos ad huius cristalli clarificacionem et illuminacionem*⁶⁰ and *ut ad illum Cristallum pro illustratione at illuminacione istius*)⁶¹, and at the end of the preparatory stage for the vision, they even open it (*quatenus dilatare et aperire digneris hunc Cristallum per sanctos angelos tuos*⁶² and *ut tu cristallus scindas te et clarificas*)⁶³. A last important detail is provided by the statement that the

⁵⁷ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka*, 60: ‘Vos ad presentis Cristalli compositionem et illustracionem invito et voco’.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31: ‘Ut in illo Cristallo per sanctos angelos tuos illuminatum et preparatum . . .’ See also *ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61. For *dilatare*, see also 21, 38, 40.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 42: ‘Mitte michi sanctos angelos tuos ad huius cristalli clarificacionem et illuminacionem’; ‘ut omnia huius mundi secretissima secreta sub quatuor elementis contenta (. . .) et precipue illam rem quam pronunc scire voluero, sine omni fallacia et lesione corporis et anime (. . .) per sanctos angelos tuos michi manifesta erunt’. See also 22, 23, 26, 27, 43.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 42, see also 20, 21.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 23.

angels are also supposed to consecrate the crystal⁶⁴. Now, the consecration of a magical object (a crystal, a sword or a book) can be easily accounted for, and the clarification and the illumination of a crystal by the angels at the moment when it becomes a means of communication between terrestrial and celestial agents would still be understandable⁶⁵, but what do amplification (*dilatare*) and opening (*aperire*) mean?

Taking a look at the fourteen miniatures inserted amongst the prayers does not shed much light on this obscure picture. On most of them, we see a young crowned person with a white eagle on his coat of arms (the symbol of the Jagiellonian family), kneeling and praying in front of the Madonna (the orientation of the *Liber visionum* is faithfully adapted), to the crucified or the resurrected Christ, or to various saints⁶⁶. One of these illuminations filling the space just between the *Ars notoria* prayer and the first *Liber visionum* text (which narrated how Wladislas turned away from his previous magical practices) depicts the young crowned man with a sword (an important part of the magician's inventory, not only, but particularly in catoptromantic and crystallomantic experiments) in his hand, standing next to a table with a strange object on it, which mostly resembles three intersecting circles (Plate 2). The last miniature but one shows the same man kneeling in his chamber in front of the same object on a table, and behind the table three winged angels appear, while a Godlike figure seems to supervise the whole procedure (Plate 3). These angels are supposedly just in the process of illuminating, clarifying and entering the strange object, which should be—according to this interpretation—identified with the crystal.

Needless to say, this depicted object does not bear any resemblance to the German mirror, and nor it is quadrangular as the text claimed. However, its shape is not very far from the “circles” described in a late medieval magical text, the *Clavicula Salomonis*⁶⁷ (four circles situated at the four angles of a square, see Plate 4)⁶⁸. As is detailed in its chapter on the construction of the circle, the practices of the *Clavicula* involve a consecrated magical sword

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22: ‘... in illo Cristallo per sanctos angelos tuos consecrato’.

⁶⁵ For analogies of entering and illuminating a crystal, taken from a famous magical manuscript (Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 252), see Delatte, *La Catoptromancie grecque*, 102-103.

⁶⁶ The miniatures are reproduced at the end of Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka*.

⁶⁷ For a not very reliable English translation of the text, see Mathers, *The Key of Solomon the King*. The same can be found on the following website: <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/ksol.htm>

⁶⁸ Circle from MS London British Library Kings 288, p. 21.



Plate 2: The prayer book of Wladislas: the king and the crystal. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawl. liturg. d. 6. f. 15r (reproduced from Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka*)



Plate 3: The prayer book of Wladislas: the king and the angels. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawl. liturg. d. 6. f. 72r (reproduced from Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyka*)

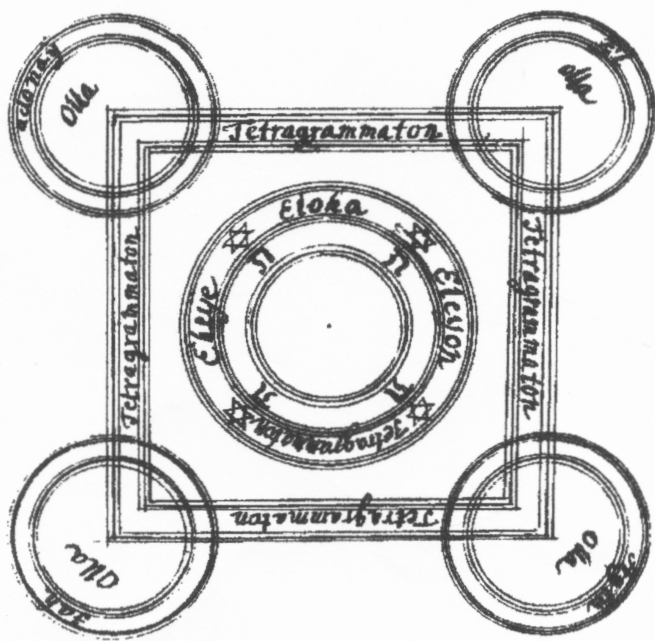


Plate 4: Clavicula Solomonis: magical circle. London, British Library, Kings 288 p. 21. (Reproduced from the web page <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/ksol.htm>)

with which the operator is to draw the circle⁶⁹, and some prayers to God (*Lord Adonai*), in which He is asked to *enter* and *consecrate* the circle which is marked out with the most powerful and holy names of His, and also to *magnify* and *extend* upon the operator⁷⁰. Although the first surviving manuscript of the *Clavicula* is from the mid-fifteenth century, it is likely that this text had earlier copies too⁷¹, and—more importantly—the practices described in it may definitely originate from the late Middle Ages⁷².

⁶⁹ British Library, add. Ms 10862, f. 12v.

⁷⁰ British Library, add Ms 10862, f. 14v.

⁷¹ Boudet, 'Magie théurgique', 869.

⁷² A text with the title *Clavicula Salomonis* is mentioned for example in the fifteenth-century book list of the Milan dukes (Pellegrin, *La Bibliothèque des Visconti et Sforza*, 322). This should be taken, however, with certain caution, since it is possible that similar titles refer to a different texts, or to different versions of the *Clavicula*.

I do not want to imply, of course, that the author of the prayer book had an early copy of the *Clavicula Salomonis* in front of him. The point I am trying to make is simply that while the prayers mix three traditions (the *Ars notoria*, *Liber visionum* and common prayers), the crystallomantic formulae inserted in the prayers integrate at least two different sets of terminology: on the one hand, that of the actual practice of divination by means of a crystal, as represented by the Mecklenburg mirror, and on the other, that of magical circles used for the invocation of angels—a practice similar to what is described in the *Clavicula*—where entering and magnifying by angels makes more sense than in the case of a crystal. Both in the procedures with the help of a crystal and in those involving magic circles, there are divine names written on the object, but while the metal frames of the crystal which survived in Germany may more easily rationalize why our one is “quadrangular”, the tradition of the Solomonic circles may better explain the circular form depicted on the pictures, as well as the strange terminology of the text.

The Owner

The fate of the codex is as mysterious as its contents. In 1630 we find it in Besançon in the possession of a certain Jacobus Prive⁷³. Twenty-four years later it is still in the same town, owned by a medical doctor called Guerinet, who asks for the Jesuit Johannes Ferrandus’ opinion on the manuscript. A copy of the Jesuit’s answer can be read after the text of the prayer book⁷⁴. These folios initiated a long scholarly debate that has not yet concluded. Ferrandus recognized clearly that the codex had been owned by a Polish king, Wladislas, and suspected that among the many Polish kings called Wladislas, it must have been the first one, Jagiello, the Grand Duke of Lithuania and creator of the Polish–Lithuanian commonwealth (Duke of Lithuania: 1377–1401, King of Poland: 1386–1434). He enumerated four arguments to support this suspicion, but admitted that this was no more than a conjecture. Just like the modern reader, the Jesuit was puzzled by the magical content of the seemingly devotional book. Furthermore, he did not see how the crystal might have been quadrangular⁷⁵, and he also found the crystallomantic practices to be in opposition with the Christian faith. His main

⁷³ His name appears on f. IIr.

⁷⁴ f. 78v–79v. Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyzka*, 73–76.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 74: ‘... Crystallum nescio quam quadrilateram . . .’

concern was similar to the worries of the Paris authorities who had ordered the burning of the *Liber visionum* in 1323, namely the curiosity and vanity of the operator who asks for total, divine and eternal knowledge.

Coming back to the history of the codex, after a half-century gap, the great book collector, Richard Rawlinson (1690-1755), purchased it at some point between 1719 and 1726, while traveling on the continent. At his death he left it to the Bodleian Library together with a huge collection of medieval manuscripts, medals and coins in 1755 (the sudden growth of the quantity of books in the Bodleian was for the librarians a real shock; for more than a century they were not even able to catalogue the Rawlinson manuscripts)⁷⁶.

But all this evidence is secondary to the question of who may first have commissioned the compiling of this text, that is, who Wladislas was. This name in the fifteenth century would not yet have crossed the borders of Poland, and the coat of arms present on all the miniatures clearly belongs to the Jagiello family; consequently all scholars agree that the owner of the book was one of the several Kings Wladislas known from Polish history. Traditionally, the codex is related to the Jagiellonian king of Poland and Hungary who died in 1444, in the Battle of Varna (hence it is called the Prayer Book of Wladislas Varnencyk)⁷⁷. Indeed, the handwriting of the codex dates from the 1430s, while the young crowned person depicted on the miniatures resembles the king, who died as a young man in the battle: he is short, almost a child's height, and he has thick hair. This is clearly not the portrait of Wladislas II (1456-1516), King of Bohemia and Hungary, a corpulent bald man who otherwise is also often identified as the owner of the prayer book. The miniatures, in contrast to the script, seem to date from the 1490s, the time of Wladislas II's reign⁷⁸. Some Hungarian philologists considered the codex to have belonged to King Matthias' Corvinian Library, which was inherited by his successor, Wladislas II. Unfortunately, these scholars have brought equally convincing arguments for both Wladislases⁷⁹.

The text of the prayer book, especially the ever and again repeated crystallomantic formula, is to some extent revealing about the possessor, but at the same time it adds even more confusion to the picture. Most of the prayers—

⁷⁶ Madan, *A Summary Catalogue*, 177-178.

⁷⁷ Madan, *A Summary Catalogue*, 521; Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warneńczyka*, 69-70.

⁷⁸ Podlacha, 'Minjatury modlitewnika Warneńczyka' [On the Miniatures of the Prayer Book].

⁷⁹ See Hoffmann, *Régi magyar bibliofilek* [Old Hungarian Bibliophiles], 49 and 164, and Csapodi, *The Corvinian Library*, 923. Csapodi attributes it to Wladislas I, Hoffmann to Wladislas II, both referring to the coat of arms and the crowned figure.

in the first person singular—let slip some information on Wladislas, but not very consistently. In the crystal Wladislas wants to see the intentions and acts (*consilia, acta vel facta*) of not only his subjects, that is, people of lower rank who like or hate him, but also of his equals and superiors, among them kings and princes (*acta vel facta superiorum dominorum meorum, regum et principum, eciam michi equalium et inferiorum subditorum meorum, qui me diligunt vel odiunt*)⁸⁰. This means that his is not the highest place in the political hierarchy, and he is not a ruling king. He has both spiritual (ecclesiastical) and secular superiors (*acta vel facta dominorum meorum superiorum spiritualium vel secularium*)⁸¹. Among his equals, he mainly lists dukes (*eciam michi equalium ducum*)⁸², but on one occasion—rather inconsistently—even kings (*acta vel facta omnium superiorum meorum, dominorum regum et principum, eciam michi equalium regum inferiorum et subditorum meum*)⁸³. Neglecting this latter example as a dictographic error, Ryszard Ganszyniec comes to the conclusion that the owner of the original text (which was, according to him, later copied in our codex) was a duke, more precisely a Silesian duke (as Ganszyniec identifies a number of Germanicisms in the text), probably Wladislas of Opole (1356-1401)⁸⁴.

With the intention of arriving at a compromise, I propose to agree with all the arguments quoted above: in all probability the text and the book can be related to more than one Wladislas, perhaps even to three of them. To explain how this is possible, let us proceed backwards in time. The prayer book was most likely decorated in the 1490s with the Jagiellonian coat of arms in the miniatures. As is known, several unfinished codices of the Corvinian library of King Matthias were completed in Buda by the royal workshop of his successor, Wladislas II, replacing the Corvinian black raven with the Jagiellonian white eagle in the decorations⁸⁵. Either this prayer book was one of the inherited codices which the new king completed, or he simply brought it from Krakow to Buda as an old codex of his family (and in this case it is obviously not a Corvina), Wladislas II was certainly not its first possessor.

⁸⁰ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Wladyslawa Warnenczyka*, 31, 35, 38, 40, and so on.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁴ Ganszyniec, 'O Modlitewniku Wladyslawa', 70.

⁸⁵ Csapodi, 'Quando cessò l'attività della bottega di miniatura di Mattia?'; Csapodi and Csapodi-Gárdonyi, *Bibliotheca Corviniana*, 29-30. For examples of the Polish white eagle inserted in the codices of the Corvinian library, see *ibid.*, plates XLI, LI, LVII.

The book was written or copied in the times of a previous king, Wladislas I (the “Varnenczyk”), adapted perhaps for his purposes. Now, either the identity of the copyist and the author coincide, and in this case we have arrived at the point of origin of the text, or the prayer book was copied from an earlier example, which may have been commissioned by a Jagiellonian duke, Opole, or the Grand Duke of Lithuania. This complicated series of owners might account for the confusing terminology of kings and dukes in the text (it should be added, however, that if the prayer book was copied from a previous text, it is possible that the name Wladislas was inserted only in the copy, and the original text was prepared for a person of a different name). It is certain, however, that this manuscript was prepared for and circulated in the court of two or three Wladislases.

The Author

Revealing the mystery of the ownership may shed some light on the issue of the authorship. More precisely, it is not an author we are looking for, in the sense that he composed the prayers, but rather a compiler, who had a number of magical and devotional texts in front of him, and interpolated them in one final collection, incorporating the short crystallomantic formula, and substituting the usual “N” which stands for the operator in the magical literature with the name Wladislas.

This shows first of all that the *Liber visionum*—of which primarily Central European copies (understood in the wide sense of the word, that is, copies of north Italian, German, and Austrian provenance) were found so far⁸⁶—had a certain Polish (or Silesian, or East-German) circulation in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Not only was it accessible to our compiler, but also fairly profoundly known by him, and its close relationship with the *Ars notoria* is apparently recognized. Either our author put the two texts next to each other on his table (he may have had only a shorter version of the *Ars notoria*), or he had one manuscript in front of him containing both texts⁸⁷. We may conclude, furthermore, that our man also had a profound acquaint-

⁸⁶ On the survived copies of the *Liber visionum*, see the lists of manuscripts in Fanger and Láng, ‘John of Morigny’s *Liber visionum* and a Royal Prayer Book from Poland’, and in Fanger and Watson, ‘Some Further Manuscripts’.

⁸⁷ Such as the Vienna, Schottenkloster, MS Scotensis-Vindobonensis 61, a codex copied in 1377 in which the *Liber visionum* (f. 1r-106v) is followed by various short *Ars notoria* versions (f. 107r-156r). Hübl, ed., *Catalogus codicum*, 74-75, and Véronèse, *L’Ars notoria*, 145-146.

tance with other magical experiments involving crystals, mirrors and circles. Finally, he managed to combine two components: prayers to angels borrowed from the *Ars notoria* and its derivatives on the one hand, and the practice of crystallomancy on the other. For this combination no earlier example has been known to us so far than the angelic conversations of John Dee⁸⁸.

This person, an attentive reader of the *Ars notoria* and the *Liber visionum*, followed their terminology (as far as his own terminology can be observed at all, since he constantly incorporated alien paragraphs in his texts): he used the rare expression *ars exceptiva* to designate the magical arts (more precisely, he copied these words from the *Liber visionum*)⁸⁹; he spoke about angels and (using a consciously ambivalent term) spirits, and avoided the word *demonēs*; he called the notory art *ars*⁹⁰; he emphasized the power of words and divine names (*vim et virtutem illorum verborum*)⁹¹ in harmony with the introductory passages of the *Ars notoria*. He was, furthermore, committed to the goals of his sources (for which one of them, the *Liber visionum* had been condemned): he sought perfect knowledge, and he wanted to know *omnia secreta, que sub quatuor elementis contenta sunt*.

Analyzing the transmission of manuscripts of ritual magic, Frank Klaassen points out that the scribes of these texts—in contrast to those of image magic—tended to rewrite their sources, thus creating new and new compendia⁹². Indeed, as the *Grandes Chroniques de France* puts it, Brother John simply renewed a condemned heresy, although he hoped to give it another name and title⁹³. The author of Wladislas' prayer book—although not giving a new title—also used recycled prayers and definitely renewed the *Liber visionum* (which had renewed, in turn, the *Ars notoria*). The difference lies in the reception of their intellectual enterprises: the Polish compiler had a more tolerant audience than John did, and there is no sign that his work was ever condemned.

The conclusions drawn regarding John of Morigny⁹⁴ are analogous to what we can say about the compiler of Wladislas' prayer book. None of these

⁸⁸ At least, if we accept the theory of Stephen Clucas, that one of John Dee's sources was the Solomonic art. Clucas, 'John Dee's Angelic Conversations'.

⁸⁹ Bernacki and Ganszyniec, (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warnencyzka*, 19 '... quod per illam artem et scienciam exceptivam errore seductus ...'

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16, 17, 19.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21, 23, 17.

⁹² Klaassen, 'English Manuscripts of Magic'.

⁹³ Camille, 'Visual Art', 110.

⁹⁴ See Fanger, 'Plundering the Egyptian Treasure'.

persons was an outsider, a fool, or a person suffering an unstable existence. Both were clerics with a profound education, well versed in Church dialect. Both seem to be practitioners, and although the fifteenth-century compiler is not as talkative about his own experience as the fourteenth-century Brother John (or, more precisely, says nothing in his own words), both offer insight into the world of the readers and operators of the techniques of the *Ars notoria*. Finally, neither of them intend to write a magical handbook satisfying dubious needs. Instead, they create a genre in which it is hard to decide whether magic or religion plays the more important role (beyond this, there are many differences between the two authors—one of them is a real author, while the other is a compiler, and so on—which I will not detail here.)

We see how the author of the prayer book worked, but we still do not know who he was, nor at whose court he resided. I do not think it is very likely that the conditions he needed were at his disposal at the court of a Polish or Lithuanian duke in the fourteenth century. I would rather tend to think that the author and the copyist were not two different persons, but identical, and that our codex is not a copy but the first example of this crystal-lomantic prayer book. In a word, I believe that the compiler is to be found at the court of Wladislas I. Beyond this, I can only speculate, but there is an explanation which offers itself. An exceptional example of the practice of crystallomancy from the Polish Middle Ages dates precisely from the time when this codex was written. A member of the household of King Wladislas I, called Henry the Bohemian (Henricus Bohemus), was accused of and condemned for pursuing crystallomancy and keeping necromantic books. His case reminds us in many respects of those of Jean de Bar and William Byg: it is again a legal case against crystallomancy and demonic invocations, one of the chief surviving sources is again a confession in which the accused admits that he had learned the practices from magical handbooks, and the whole story is again taking place in the circles of the aristocracy, which raises the possibility that some political intrigue can account for the accusations. Henry was an influential member of the royal court, he was present at the birth of Wladislas I, and he stayed close to the future king when he was a child. Last but not least, his Bohemian origin might account for the Germanicisms of the prayer book. He was jailed in 1429, but in the 1440s he lived freely in Krakow, and he had plenty of opportunity, the necessary sources (the necromantic books) at his disposal and the background knowledge in crystallomancy to compose a royal prayer book for Wladislas.

Treasure Hunting and Crystallomancy: The Case of Henry the Bohemian

From the acts of the legal action brought against Henry, the secrets of a group of friends and the practices of a circle of learned magicians can be disclosed⁹⁵. In 1429, Henry found himself accused of conjuration of demons, necromancy and the propagation of Hussite ideas. Since this was not the first occasion of such accusations against him by a court case, his life was seriously in danger, his execution a real possibility.

Henry was not an average personality of Polish history. *Magister Henricus genere Bohemus*—as Jan Długosz, the great Polish historian reports—was a talented astronomer residing at the royal court of Wladislas Jagiello from 1423 to the autumn of 1427. He was held in high respect, and he maintained a close relationship with Queen Sophie. This is shown, *inter alia*, by the fact that he was allowed to be present at the birth of the three sons of the king, and he even cast their horoscopes⁹⁶. In spite of this high esteem, Henry was accused on three different charges in 1429: inclination to the ideas of Hussitism, astrological and magical practices accomplished for finding treasure hidden in the earth (supposedly with the involvement of demons), and the keeping of forbidden necromantic books.

The court case was conducted by Stanislas of Skalbmierz (died in 1431), who—in agreement with the wishes of the court—tried to save Henry from the death waiting for him as irrecoverably heretical. Stanislas is a rather important figure of the Polish Middle Ages. He was the first rector of the renewed Krakow University, and a severe polemist in matters related to the Hussite movement, he also participated at the Council of Constance, and he was—at the time of Henry's trial—the vicar-general of the archbishop of Krakow⁹⁷. He was a most adequate person in this case not only because of his proficiency in theological issues related to Hussitism, but also due to his competence in magical issues, primarily concerning popular practices. In

⁹⁵ BJ 2513 and BJ 2014. For Henry and his legal process, see also the following: Zathey, 'Per la storia', especially 105-106; Birkenmajer, 'Sprawa Magistra Henryka Czecha' [The Case of Master Henry the Czech]; *idem*, 'Henryk le Bohemien'. For a reconstruction of the process and a critical edition of the *Consilia Stanislai de Scarbimiria contra astrologum Henricum Bohemum*, based on BJ 2014 f. 120r-129v (ca. 1432) and BJ 2513 f. 261r-269v (1435), see Wielgus, 'Consilia de Stanislas de Scarbimiria'.

⁹⁶ Długosz, 'Annales seu cronicae', 349-350.

⁹⁷ Chmielkowska, 'Stanislas de Skarbimierz'.

Henry's case, however, Stanislas was faced with a different set of problems: instead of folk charms and spells, instead of agricultural magic and divination from the candle, instead of midwives who did not sell milk after sunset, and superstitious women who walked around their fields with crosses, here he had to consider the methods of learned ritual magic which included necromantic books, magic circles, a crystal and a young boy.

The acts tell us that Henry attempted to search for treasures hidden in the earth with demonic help⁹⁸. He possessed heretical and magical books which contained heretical teachings, magical arts, divinatory procedures, invocations of demons, conjurations, interrogations and consultations in order to find treasure and other hidden things, and finally diverse errors of diviners, astrologers and sorcerers⁹⁹. One of these books was written by a certain Matthias, a necromancer¹⁰⁰. Both the magical books and this Matthias are still waiting to be identified in the secondary literature of medieval learned magic.

A further source, a confession made by Henry the Bohemian, complements our picture with some new details. Henry admits that he invoked demons and searched for treasure with his companions in the garden of Zwierzyniec (the zoological garden of the king). On the methods of how to conjure and bind demons, they found the instructions in necromantic books. In addition, they also practiced crystallo-mancy with the help of a young boy medium—again for finding treasure¹⁰¹. Interestingly, the confession is the only source

⁹⁸ 'Quidam astrologus, vehementer de haeresi suspectus, generaliter omnem haeresim abiuravit; qui tamen, post abiurationem in iudicio in debita forma factam, maleficis invocantibus daemona pro inveniendis thesauris in terra defossis per astra ad eosdem inveniendos indicavit, custodemque socii, sperans se fieri lucri participem, se fecit, bisque maleficiis illorum, qui daemona invocabant, ut occultos thesauros invenirent, interfuit'. BJ 2014 f. 120r, Wielgus, '*Consilia*', 153.

⁹⁹ 'Quartus articulus, quod post promulgacionem sentencie episcopi et inquisitoris libros hereticos et magicos non manifestasti nec restituisti'. BJ 2513 f. 272r-278r, and Birkenmajer, 'Sprawa Magistra Henryka Czecha', 221. '... librosque tam continentes haereses, quam artes magicas aut alias divinaciones vel invocaciones demonum'. BJ 2513 f. 261r, Birkenmajer, 'Sprawa Magistra Henryka Czecha', 210; BJ 2014 f. 120r, Wielgus, '*Consilia*', 154. '... nec non variae et multiplices daemonum invocationes, coniurationes, interrogationes et consultationes pro thesauris et aliis occultis inveniendis et diversi errores divinationum, astrologorum et sortilegorum'. BJ 2014 f. 125r, Wielgus, '*Consilia*', 163.

¹⁰⁰ '... nonnullos cartas et libellos cuiusdam Mathie nigromantici clam in quodam hospicio receptos'. BJ 2513 f. 261r, Birkenmajer, 'Sprawa Magistra Henryka Czecha', 210; BJ 2014 f. 120r, Wielgus, '*Consilia*', 154.

¹⁰¹ 'Nam ex confessione tua habetur, quod presens fuisti, cum in Kazimiria quidam negromanticus Stanislaus sedente quodam iuvene et inspiciente cristallum demones invocabat et coniurabat et responsa eorum inquirebat pro thesauris occultis in terra defossis inveniendis. Et postea

related to Henry where the child and the crystal appear: in Stanislas of Skalbimierz' text they were not mentioned, and it seems that crystallomancy was not a topic raised in the court case.

The sources give the names of some of Henry's companions: magister Nicolaus Hinczonis and magister Monaldus¹⁰². The latter name refers to Monaldus de Luca, an Italian professor who specialized in mining and minting¹⁰³. Monaldus was expelled twice from Krakow due to his adventuresome character¹⁰⁴. His medical recipes and his short treatise on plague have been preserved in two codices of the Jagiellonian Library¹⁰⁵. As for Nicolaus Hinczonis, he originated from Kazimierz (*Casimiria*—a quarter of present-day Krakow) and he was also a master of Krakow University: he earned his MA degree in 1403, he was elected as rector in the winter of 1412, and he died around 1434¹⁰⁶. Finally, a last person mentioned in the confession of

in nocte ultra Zwierzyniec presens fuisti dum nigromantici similiter per nigromanciam demones adiurabant, invocabant et coniurabant, pro eidem thesauris inveniendis, et vidisti bene iuvenem sedentem et in cristallum insipientem sed tunc invocaciones nigromanticorum non adiuvisisti, quia in alia parte stetisti custodiendo, ne aliqui de villa venientes impedirent fodientes thesauros in terra quorum tu partem habere voluisti, prout habetur ex tua confessione. Scivisti eciam in libellis dicti nigromantici contineri adiuraciones, per quas demon esset compellendus ad ostendendum thesauros absconditos, prout habetur ex tua recognicione'. BJ 2014 f 138, quoted in Zathey, 'Per la storia', 105.

¹⁰² 'Quis dicet'—writes Stanislaus—'hanc frequentationem non in uno, sed in pluribus, ad minus in duobus locis (quia coram teste certo et certis familiaribus magistri Nicolaus Hinczonis ac magistro Monaldo et quibusdam suis consociis) maxime iunctis aliis suspicionibus, esse modicam sive levem suspicionem, cum simplices ad credulitatem vel idiote seu minus eruditi scandalizari poterant vel infirmari in fide?' BJ 2513 f. 266v, Birkenmajer, 'Sprawa Magistra Henryka Czecha', 214; BJ 2014 f. 126v, Wielgus, 'Consilia', 166.

¹⁰³ His name occurs in the list of the Krakow professors, but his subject is not indicated: Pauly, Ulanowski and Chmiel, eds., *Album studiosorum*, vol. 1, 6. Monaldus appears also in the list of the medical doctors of the university: *Hii sunt doctores et magistri*: BJ 258 f. 130r-131v. For a published version of this text, see Markowski, 'Les manuscrits des listes de docteurs', for Magister Monaldus medicus, see *ibid.*, 137.

¹⁰⁴ He is also mentioned as a victim of a robbery: Fink, ed., *Repertorium Germanicum*, IV/2, col. 1876.

¹⁰⁵ BJ 792 f. 33r-42r: Monaldus de Luca, *Medicinalia praecepta*; BJ 849 f. 161r-162v: his tract on the plague.

¹⁰⁶ See Gąsiorowski, ed., *Liber promotionum*, 8. Kowalczyk, 'Mikołaj Hinczowicz z Kazimierza' [Nicolaus Hinczonis of Kazimierz]. Jerzy Zathey raised the idea that this Nicolaus Hinczonis may have been identical with one Nicolaus accused of necromancy, about whom Anne of Cilli, Queen of Poland and Wladislas Jagiello's wife, wrote a letter to Pope John XXIII in 1410 mentioning him together with *solis et lune figure, cristalli, cere impresse*. See Zathey, 'Per la storia', 104. Indeed, the fact that both persons are mentioned as participating in crystallomantic practices in Krakow in more or less the same period makes it probable that they are identical. However, as recent research has pointed out, the first Nicolaus was a *tortor*, a marginal figure of the society who participated in tortures and executions, while Nicolaus Hinczonis was a

Henry, a certain Stanislas, also participated in the treasure hunts; he can be identified as Stanislaus Johannis de Casimiria, who was a student in Krakow in 1408, and later a schoolmaster in Kazimierz¹⁰⁷.

In short, three university masters were involved in magical activities together with Henry the Bohemian. It is logical to ask now whether he himself was a university person. Henry appears both in the *Annales* of Długosz and in the official sentence of his legal case as *Magister Henricus de Brega, vocatus astrologus, laicus*, which title implies that he had a university background. However, Henry is not mentioned either in the *Album studiosorum* or in the *Liber promotionum* of Krakow University, and even Stanislaus implies that Henry just abused the title of *magister*¹⁰⁸. Whether he brought his title from Prague is dubious and depends greatly upon the solution of another enigma: with which one of the many astronomers of Bohemian history called Henricus we want to identify him¹⁰⁹. Since there is no consensus on this question, we can only claim that at least three, but possibly four persons in the company had a university education.

It remains to examine whether there is any basis to relate the case of Henry with Wladislas' prayer book. First, the crystal-gazing and treasure-hunting methods followed by Henry and the books possessed by him indicate an equally elaborated, and in many respects similar, knowledge in the field of magic to that which we find in the prayer book containing the *Ars notoria* and *Liber visionum* prayers together with the inserted formulae on the crystal. Second, these two examples of Polish crystallomancy are strikingly close to each other in time, and what is more, we should remember that King Wladislas Warnencyk, whom we have identified as a possible owner of the prayer book, was one of the three princes whose birth had been assisted by Henry. Finally, we see that at the end of his trial Henry avoided capital punishment, and even though he was finally jailed, somewhat later he managed to leave prison, and lived freely in Krakow¹¹⁰. In the *Acta Officialia Cracoviensis*

university master who was rather involved in scholarly interrogations, and this difference undermines Zathey's theory considerably. See Zaremska, *Niegodne rzemiosło* [Undignified Craft], 102-103.

¹⁰⁷ BJ 2014 f 138, quoted in Zathey, 'Per la storia', 105. See also Pauly, Ulanowski and Chmiel, eds., *Album studiosorum*, vol. 1, 27.

¹⁰⁸ Wielgus, 'Consilia', 149. For the text, see *ibid.*, 166: Stanislas mentions some theological statement 'quod est falsum, scivit enim, quia magister est, ut asserit, in artibus. . .'

¹⁰⁹ For the possibilities, see Birkenmajer, 'Sprawa Magistra Henryka Czecha', 222, and Wielgus, 'Consilia', 149.

¹¹⁰ Kowalczyk, 'Przyczynki do biografii Henryka Czecha' [Appendices to the Biography of Henry the Czech].

several notes report that *Henricus Bohemus astronomus* was active in 1440, getting involved in various official transactions with other citizens¹¹¹. It seems he did not completely give up his magical interest: Johannes de Dobra, a medical doctor, reports in his manuscript that Henricus Bohemus talked to him about an Armenian who lived for four hundred years thanks to a special medicine¹¹².

Being experienced in the field of crystallo-mancy, possessing books of magical content, a good friend of King Wladislas, and living free in the early 1440s, Henry the Bohemian could easily have been commissioned to edit a special prayer book on an omniscient crystal and on clarifying angels satisfying the “magico-devotional” purposes of the king. Taking into consideration the fact that the text of the prayer book was written precisely in the 1430s or 1440s, one could even reverse the question: who else (experienced in these fields) could have been commissioned for this task when Henry was at the court? Even though the author cannot be identified with complete certainty, at the moment Henry the Bohemian is the most plausible contender for this role. We see Henry as a most learned man in medieval magic: he might have possessed the texts of the *Ars notoria* and the *Liber visionum*, he had a close acquaintance with crystals, and what is more, his interest was apparently not limited to the field of theory: he and his friends also put their magical knowledge into practice.

Conclusion: Reading vs. Using

Finally, we may attempt to draw some conclusions from the extant crystallo-mantic sources regarding the reasons why they were copied at all. Were they meant to serve actual practice or mere reading? Did the scribes and owners intend to practice the divinatory procedures, magical formulae and ritual invocations? Or did they just want to learn about them, and did magic simply belong to a pure “academic interest” of the collectors? As we have seen, the answer is quite simple in the case of Henry the Bohemian: external

¹¹¹ Przybyszewski, ed., *Cracovia artificium*, vol. 1, 91-92; *idem*, ed., *Cracovia artificium: supplementa* 2, 119, 120 and 127.

¹¹² BJ 778 f. IIIv. The text is published in Kowalczyk, ‘Przyczynki’: ‘Dominus Henricus astronomus Bohemus dixit michi de quodam Armeno, qui morabatur in Bauoria, qui vixit 400 annorum. Et magister Johannes de Ragusio cum eodem Armeno loquebatur, quomodo sic diu vitam conservaret, qui respondit, quod utebatur medicina quadam, quam idem magister Johannes de Ragusio nondum intellexit. Et hoc michi dicit idem dominus Henricus Bohemus anno Domini MCCCCXL’.

evidence proves that he not only read in his handbooks how to rehearse crystallo-mancy and how to invoke demons, but also practiced it. In the case of the magical manuscripts, however, usually no definite answer can be given to the question as to whether the inclusion of magic in the codices indicates actual practices or simple curiosity. These texts contain no indication whether their scribes tried to test their instructions, and fabricated talismans or tried to create artificial monsters. Medieval folios usually do not talk to us and answer our questions concerning the intentions of their scribes.

Fortunately, the prayer book of Wladislas is not so silent, and contains internal evidence indicating actual application. While in the texts of ritual magic the operator is usually designated merely by the letter “N” (implying that the actual user has to substitute his name wherever he reads “N”), in the royal prayer book of Wladislas, “N” is always replaced with the name of the king. The source which the prayer book follows here is again the *Liber visionum* of John of Morigny. John gives precise instructions, according to which each person who wishes to operate with the prayers of John’s book is to copy his own volume by his own hand, substituting his name for that of John, and finally he is to consecrate the book (John is aware that his name is fairly frequent, and therefore he stresses that even those persons who are also called John must reproduce the book with their own hands if they really want to use it)¹¹³. Indeed, the major part of the extant copies of the *Liber visionum* are not mere copies of the original version, but handbooks copied and used by a certain Albertus (of Judenberg)¹¹⁴, a Petrus¹¹⁵, a Bernardus¹¹⁶ and other medieval readers. Now, the substitution of the name Wladislas in the prayer book implies that the text which has come to us was made for real use, it was consecrated, and its crystallo-mantic formulae and angelic prayers were probably indeed applied by a certain Wladislas¹¹⁷. It is not likely, of course, that a king copied the text with his own hands in order to render the prayers effective, but this is not a problem, because John allows that somebody else may copy the book as long as it is under the name of the prospective user¹¹⁸. In consequence, the prayer book of King Wladislas is

¹¹³ Graz, University Library, MS 680, f. 137v col. 1: ‘Quamvis liber iste sub hoc nomine iohannes conponatur et plures alij homines vocantur hoc nomine iohannes tamen nullus alius potest operari per eum nisi ille pro quo fuerit specialiter libri compositus’.

¹¹⁴ British Library MS 18057.

¹¹⁵ Graz, University Library, MS 680.

¹¹⁶ Hamilton, CA, McMaster University Library MS 107.

¹¹⁷ For all these pieces of information and considerations, including the quotation from the Graz manuscript, I owe thanks to Claire Fanger.

¹¹⁸ See the text of the vow which anyone has to take who wishes to recopy the book in

one of those few cases where a magical text itself betrays the fact that the book containing it was consecrated and used as a real manual.

Benedek Láng (Budapest, 1974), Philosophy and History of Science Department, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, is doing research on the medieval history of science and magic, and has recently completed his doctoral thesis entitled "Learned Magic and its Readers in Central Europe in the Fifteenth Century".

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Anges autour du crystal : Le livre de prière du Roi Vladislas et les chasses au trésor de Henri de Bohême

Après avoir brièvement passé en revue les sources médiévales de la magie du cristal (divination ou évocation des anges avec l'aide d'une bulle magique en crystal ou d'un miroir) l'article centre son intérêt sur un manuscrit singulier qui contient les évocations d'anges et de la cristallomancie, le mystérieux Livre de Prière du Roi Vladislas qui se trouve actuellement dans la collection de la Bodleian Library à Oxford (MS Rawlinson liturg. d. 6.). L'étude présente s'occupe de quatre problèmes principaux relatifs au manuscrit: le contenu et la source des prières, le but possible et le fonctionnement du cristal et l'identité de l'opérateur du cristal, ce dernier point pouvant être divisé en deux: l'identité du Roi Vladislas lui-même, propriétaire du livre et l'identité de l'auteur anonyme. L'apport important de l'article est d'avoir révélé que—à côté des sources liturgiques connues et des passages de *Ars notoria*—la source principale du livre de prière royal était un texte de magie rituelle, récemment identifié et étudié, le *Liber Visionum* de Jean de Morigny dont les copies retrouvées jusqu'à nos jours sont presque exclusivement originaires de l'Europe Centrale. L'article pose clairement en détail (et laisse ouverte finalement) la question si le propriétaire du livre peut être identifié à Vladislas Varnenczyk (Vladislas I^{er}, roi de Pologne et de Hongrie, mort en 1444) ou à Vladislas II (roi de Bohême et de Hongrie, 1456-1516), et en vient finalement à conclure que l'auteur ou compilateur du livre de prière qui appartenait probablement à la cour du roi Vladislas I^{er}, était Henricus Bohemus, accusé et condamné en 1429 pour cristallomancie et pour avoir possédé des ouvrages nécromantiques. Finalement, en ce qui concerne les raisons pour lesquelles le livre de prière fut copié, certaines indications accréditent que le texte que nous possédons fut rédigé pour un usage régulier, fut également consacré et ses formulae de cristallomancie et ses prières angéliques furent également appliquées par un certain Vladislas.

L'ERMETISMO DEL RINASCIMENTO DA MARSILIO FICINO A LUDOVICO LAZZARELLI

CLAUDIO MORESCHINI

Alcuni studi recenti (mi riferisco, in particolare, a quelli di Sebastiano Gentile¹ e di Brian Copenhaver²) hanno mostrato che l'interesse di Marsilio Ficino per l'ermetismo si manifestò già prima della sua traduzione dei primi quattordici trattati del *Corpus Hermeticum*, e precisamente nella composizione di alcune operette minori (quali il *De divino furore* e il *Di Dio et anima*), per le quali egli si rivolse, come era logico, alle fonti medievali latine. Di conseguenza, quegli studiosi hanno indagato la problematica della successione dei filosofi antichi, costituenti l'"aurea catena" che permise la formazione della "pia philosophia". Il nostro intento, invece, è quello di precisare la funzione ed il significato che la teosofia di Ermete ha conservato anche nella maturità del Ficino, dopo la sua traduzione giovanile, funzione e significato che sono stati contestati recentemente, come vedremo.

1. *Ermete e Platone*

In un'altra opera giovanile, anteriore, come quelle sopra ricordate, alla traduzione del *Corpus Hermeticum*, si trovano alcune considerazioni che confermano l'interesse del Ficino per quella antica teosofia. Ci riferiamo al *De voluptate*, un argomento di particolare significato nel secolo XV, e oggetto della famosa discussione del Valla, anteriore di circa venti anni a quella del Ficino.

Subito all'inizio dell'opera il filosofo distingue tra "voluptas", da una parte, "gaudium" e "laetitia", dall'altra (ed. *Basileensis* I, 987). Il "gaudium" è il piacere più alto, quello che deriva dalla contemplazione della realtà divina, come spiega anche il *Fedro* di Platone ('perfectum quoddam atque absolutum gaudium, quo in ea ipsa Dei cognitione animus perfruatur'). Per far conoscere il significato del "gaudium" prodotto dalla contemplazione di Dio

¹ Cfr. Gentile, *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, 15-17; 'In margine all'epistola', 33-77; 'Ficino ed Ermete', 19-26.

² Cfr. Copenhaver, 'Hermes Theologus'.

e delle realtà del mondo iperuranio, Platone ricorre alla nozione poetica dell'ambrosia, appunto nel *Fedro* (247e). Concorda con questo pensiero di Platone l'opinione di Mercurio Trismegisto, allorché, parlando del sommo Dio, così si esprime:

Condonas³ nos ratione, sensu, intellegentia. Ratione, ut te suspicionibus indagemus, sensu, ut te cognoverimus, cognitione, ut te cognoscentes gaudemus⁴, quod te ostenderis nobis totum.

È, questo, un riferimento alla preghiera finale dell'*Asclepius* (cap. 41), della quale il Ficino mette in evidenza la gioia che è procurata dalla gnosi di Dio, secondo il significato del "gaudium" di cui parla il *Fedro* platonico nel passo ora indicato.

Questa unione di Platone ed Ermete apre in modo simbolico il *De voluptate*. La medesima coppia ("gaudium"—gnosi) appare anche nel successivo cap. 2 (I, 991). Il Ficino, facendo riferimento alla trasformazione del genere umano nel genere degli animali, osserva, come si legge nell'*Asclepius* (cap. 6):

Cumque humanum genus inter Deum ad bestias medium teneat ob eamque causam utrorumque participes esse merito videatur, in alterum quoque migrare et quasi converti posse Trismegistus existimat. . . .

Anche Platone, prosegue il filosofo, nel *Fedone* (cfr. 83d) dice che il piacere, come fosse un chiodo, tiene l'anima confitta al corpo. Un'altra concordanza tra Platone e l'ermetismo è indicata dal Ficino poco più avanti:

Ex iis altera quaedam argumentatio a Trismegisto contextitur. In omnibus quippe rerum generibus unum aliquod maximum atque summum esse vult⁵, cuius participatione reliqua in eodem genere reponantur, ut omnia, quae calida sunt, ignis natura, cui summa caliditas adsit, calida fieri eodemque modo et bona quaecumque sunt, quod summum, primumque bonum sequantur, atque imitentur bona dici debere. (Cap. 3) Haec igitur est divina Platonis de voluptate sententia, in qua Mercurius Trismegistus, et Pythagorici omnes, ac Socratici quoque excellentiores absque ulla dubitatione consentiunt.

Fondamentale, dunque, fin dalla giovinezza, è, per il Ficino, la convinzione dell'accordo tra Ermete e Platone (esso è asserito già nel *Di Dio et anima*)⁶.

³ Così il testo ficiniano nell'edizione basileense; il testo dell'*Asclepius*, tuttavia, legge "condonans", con riferimento al dio che è invocato dal Trismegisto.

⁴ Probabilmente un errore di stampa: bisognerà leggere "gaudeamus", come nel testo dell'*Asclepius* e come vuole la sintassi.

⁵ Forse nei capp. 34-35 dell'*Asclepius*.

⁶ Secondo il Gentile ('In margine all'epistola', 43-49), questa concordia era basata verisi-

La somiglianza tra l'ermetismo e il platonismo, proposta dal Ficino, è, perciò, una novità di notevole valore speculativo, che ha il suo peso nella cultura del Rinascimento, e non scomparirà nemmeno quando si conosceranno meglio, e meglio si distingueranno, sia l'uno sia l'altro⁷.

2. Ermete, Platone, Orfeo e il cristianesimo

Parimenti significativa è la convinzione del Ficino che ermetismo e teologia trinitaria cristiana abbiano molto in comune. Ha ragione il Gentile a ritenere che, a tal proposito, il Ficino poteva essere stato influenzato sia dai testi ermetici latini e dalle notizie che gli forniva la letteratura tardo antica (l'*Asclepius*, Lattanzio e l'*Adversus quinque haereses*) sia da quanto poteva leggere in alcuni scrittori medievali, come Guglielmo di Conches e Abelardo, e soprattutto Thomas Bradwardine, il cui scritto *De causa Dei* circolò a Firenze alla fine del XIV secolo. In esso l'*Asclepius* viene ampiamente citato come autorevole testimonianza del fatto che già gli antichi avevano una cognizione delle Persone divine⁸.

Entrambi i motivi (accordo tra Ermete e Platone; precorrimiento del cristianesimo ad opera di Ermete) saranno fondamentali anche per il Ficino maturo e per tutto l'ermetismo del secolo XVI.

Nella sua introduzione alla traduzione del *Pimander* il Ficino ci dà qualche indicazione del suo interesse per questo aspetto della "prisca theologia". Ermete scrive di cose divine e nel suo libro appaiono misteri segreti ed oracoli mirabili. Egli non parla come filosofo, ma come profeta che preannuncia la futura rovina della religione egiziana, la nascita di una nuova fede,

milmente sulle analogie tra il *Timeo* platonico e l'*Asclepius* e sul reciproco chiarirsi delle proposizioni, spesso oscure, dei due filosofi. Di tutto questo non sono molto convinto: il *Timeo* e l'*Asclepius* hanno poco in comune tra di loro.

⁷ La successione Zoroastro, Mercurio, Orfeo, Aglaofemo, Pitagora, Platone si incontra ancora nella *Theologia Platonica* (VI 1 e XVII 1), ove si propone la successione dei sei maggiori filosofi: Zoroastro, Mercurio, 'princeps sacerdotum Aegyptiorum', Orfeo, Aglaofemo, Pitagora, Platone. Poiché questi antichissimi filosofi nascondevano sotto dei 'poetica umbracula' i misteri divini affinché non fossero noti ai profani, prosegue il Ficino storicizzando la tradizione platonica antica, sorsero poi i vari interpreti. Sei furono le accademie: tre attiche (antica, iniziata da Senocrate; media, iniziata da Arcesilao; nuova, iniziata da Carneade) e tre straniere (Egiziana, con Ammonio; Romana, con Plotino; Licia, con Proclo). I "prisci theologi", osserva ancora il Ficino, unirono sempre lo studio della filosofia alla "religiosa pietas". Lo testimoniano gli scritti di Zoroastro ed il fatto che i trattati di Mercurio comincino sempre con una preghiera e finiscano con un sacrificio (*Theol. Plat.* XII 1 = II, 157 Marcel).

⁸ Cfr. 'In margine all'epistola', 43-49.

l'avvento del Salvatore, il giudizio finale, la gloria dei beati e la punizione dei reprobì. Non sembra che il Ficino sappia già, nel 1463, che Agostino aveva accusato Ermete di avere raggiunto poteri profetici grazie all'astrologia o, peggio ancora, ai demoni (cfr. *De civitate Dei* VIII 23 sgg.): questo sarà un problema che egli affronterà nei decenni successivi⁹.

2.1. *Ermete e Platone*

L'Allen, tuttavia, considera poco verisimile che il Ficino nutrisse interesse per un tipo di filosofia religiosa nella quale l'ermetismo e il platonismo stessero congiunti¹⁰; secondo lo studioso il Ficino avrebbe potuto vedere nel *Pimander* delle dottrine che trovava già in Calcidio, se non in Platone (che però allora non aveva ancora letto): quella del demiurgo, quella della sua creazione del mondo animato e dell'uomo e quella dell'esistenza di un padre creatore e del suo figlio, che è il mondo. Il Ficino, secondo l'Allen, subordinava la sua cosmologia e la sua cosmogonia a quella del *Timeo*, ed osservava con molta cautela il fatto che talvolta i filosofi antichi impiegassero dei termini che potevano essere messi in relazione con la teologia trinitaria dei Cristiani. Per cui, in *De Christiana religione* 22, il Ficino dice che «tutta l'antica teologia è contenuta nei volumi di Platone ed ivi è perfezionata». Vale a dire, nell'interpretazione dell'Allen, Platone era per il Ficino il filosofo sublime ed Ermete solo un lontano precursore. L'opera principale di Ermete, il *Pimander*, era interessante solo perché era una testimonianza della presenza in Egitto dell'antica teologia, forse come un effetto della diffusione, tra i sacerdoti egiziani, dell'insegnamento di Mosè. Essa non poteva sostituire il *Timeo* e Proclo.

A nostro parere, questa distinzione così netta è antistorica, tanto è vero che tutti gli scrittori cristiani dell'antichità che furono interessati ad Ermete furono studiosi anche di Platone, da Lattanzio a Cirillo di Alessandria ad Abelardo. Per questo motivo il legame tra Mercurio e Platone continua ad essere presente anche nelle opere più tarde del Ficino. Così, nell'*In Parmenidem* 79 (II, 1181) leggiamo un apprezzamento dell'apofatismo a proposito di Dio che unisce Platone, Ermete ed i cristiani:

Quamobrem non iniuria Parmenides admonet, non tam negationibus quam silentio tranquillo, divino, amatorio confidendum. Quod quidem Platonici omnes una cum Mercurio et Apollonio Tyaneo procul dubio comprobant. Et propheta David inquit, laus tibi, o Deus, est silentium . . .

⁹ Cfr. Moreschini, *Storia dell'ermetismo*, 62-79.

¹⁰ Cfr. 'Marsilio Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus', 42-43.

e nella *In Alcibiadem secundum epitome* (II, 1135) si afferma che tale apofatismo esclude ogni culto esteriore (cfr. *Asclepius* 41):

Mercurius ac Plato, cum supremi numinis maiestatem venerabantur, externas omnes caerimonias auferebant, solam ac puram flagrantiam animi relinquebant.

Altre considerazioni sull'accordo dell'ermetismo con Platone si leggono nella *In Minoem, vel de Lege, Epitome* (II, 1135), ove si dice che il Trismegisto attribuisce a Mercurio l'invenzione delle leggi:

Quamobrem omnes illustres conditores legum inventionem legum in Deum, sed per diversa nomina atque media rettulerunt . . . Trismegistus Aegyptiis (Aegyptius?) in Mercurium.

e nell'*In Philebum* 31 (II, 1241) il Ficino ricorre a specifiche dottrine ermetiche, anche se non precisamente individuabili:

Mercurius quoque ait¹¹, Deum esse omnium actuum potentiam et omnium potentiarum actum, quia omnes primi actus ab eo creantur, potentia efficax omnium actuum Deus dicitur, quia omnes actus secundi ab eo excitantur et roborantur, potentiarum omnium dicitur actus, id est omnes potentias in actum reducens.

La stessa cosa si deve dire per questo passo del *De studiosorum sanitate tuenda* (I, 502):

Mercurius, Pythagoras, Plato iubent dissonantem animum vel moerentem cithara cantuque tam constanti quam concinno sermone componere simulatque erigere.

2.2. Ermete e l'orfismo

Non è necessario richiamare l'attenzione sulla grande diffusione che ebbero nel Quattrocento italiano le dottrine orfiche. Particolarmente significativa, per il Ficino, è quella dell'androginia divina, che egli poteva trovare anche nell'*Asclepius*. Così, nell'*In Plotinum* 27 (II, 1744) si legge:

Sic Orpheus naturam mundanumque Iovem marem appellat et foeminam, similiterque Mercurius . . .

Dio, pertanto, è maschio e femmina insieme, come si legge nell'*Asclepius* (cfr. cap. 20), e come il Ficino aveva visto già nei trattati più giovanili. Qui è interessante osservare che, secondo il Ficino, negli scritti orfici¹² come in

¹¹ A quale passo della dottrina ermetica si riferisca il Ficino non è molto chiaro: forse all'*Asclepius*, capp. 3-4.

¹² Cfr. fragm 168,3, p. 201 Kern, come osserva la Tarabochia Canavero, 232. Probabilmente questo ampio frammento poetico è stato ricavato non tanto dal *De mundo* pseudo-aristotelico, come ritiene la studiosa, ma dal *De mundo* apuleiano, che lo cita in greco (cfr. 37,372).

quelli ermetici l'androginia è attribuito non tanto di Dio quanto del mondo; comunque sia, il Ficino ritiene che esista un accordo tra le due antichissime teosofie. Altrettanto egli afferma nel *De vita* III 26:

Quo quidem attractu secum ipso devinciri mundum testantur sapientes Indi, dicentes mundum esse animal passim masculum, simulatque foeminam, mutuoque membrorum suorum amore ubique coire secum, atque ita constare, vinculum vero membrorum inesse per insitam sibi mentem, quae totam infusa per artus agit molem et magno se corpore miscet¹³. Hinc Orpheus naturam ipsam mundi Iovemque mundanum marem appellat et foeminam.

2.3. *Ermete e il cristianesimo*

Negli anni della maturità, il Ficino aggiunge ad Ermete e a Platone (il Platone del *Parmenide*) anche lo scrittore cristiano che è l'emblema dell'apofatismo, Dionigi l'Areopagita. Così, infatti, egli dice nell'*Argumentum ad epistolam secundam quae est Platonis ad Dionysium Siciliae tyrannum* (II 1532):

Hinc in Parmenide *probat nos neque nomen neque definitionem neque scientiam habere de Deo, utpote qui sit super intelligentiae limites*. Idem ante ipsum (*scl.* Platonem) Mercurius asserit, idem post ipsum Dionysius Areopagita . . . Sat ergo fuerit post convenientem inquisitionem purificasse mentem, atque direxisse. Reliquum Mercurius *sacro mentis silentio* tribuit. Deum enim a mente suo quodam silentio potius quam sermone suo censet pronunciari (cfr. *Asclepius* 41).

L'accordo tra ermetismo e cristianesimo è confermato anche da altri passi di opere più tarde, come l'*In Dionysii Areopagitae librum de Divinis nominibus Commentatio* (II, 1034):

Mysteria Dionysii sententia illa Mercurii ter maximi confirmantur. Deus, inquit, nihil est omnium. Deus est omnia. Deus nomen nullum habet, Deus habet omne nomen.

Vale a dire, la dottrina ermetica che Dio è privo di nomi e, insieme, possiede tutti i nomi (cfr. *Asclepius* 20), perché è l'uno—tutto, preannuncia, grazie all'intermediazione di Platone, quella dei 'nomi divini' del platonico Dionigi l'Areopagita.

Dionigi, infatti, in quanto cristiano (e non si deve dimenticare la grande fama di cui godette questo Padre nel corso del Medioevo), è il legittimo erede di Platone, più ancora dei platonici pagani¹⁴: 'Platonicae disciplinae culmen

¹³ Queste parole costituiscono una citazione virgiliana (*Aen.* VI, 726-727) camuffata all'interno del discorso ficiniano.

¹⁴ Sulla storia della *prisca theologia*, che culmina nella rivelazione cristiana, si leggano, oltre

et Christianae Theologiae columnen' (cfr. *In Dionysii Areopagitae librum de Divinis nominibus Commentatio* II, 1013)¹⁵; e ancora:

... ipsum (scil. Dionysium) ... non solum caeteris Platonice propter doctrinae Platonicae culmen, verum etiam ipsi Platoni propter novum veritatis Christianae lumen, anteponendum esse censemus (*ibid.* II, 1024).

Per spiegare questo accordo tra i grandi filosofi del passato e Dionigi l'Areopagita il Ficino sostiene (seguendo in questo Lattanzio e i teologi medievali, come Abelardo¹⁶) che Ermete aveva intravisto, anche se confusamente, il mistero della Trinità, anche se per forza non era stato in grado di formularlo in modo corretto. Nella sua *In epistulas D. Pauli commentatio* 2 (I, 430) il Ficino scrive che

Zoroaster quoque una cum Mercurio intellectualem Deo prolem attribuit. Dixerint isti quidem quod potuerunt, et id quidem adiuvante Deo, Deus autem hoc solus intelligit, et cui Deus revelare voluerit.

Ed anche in *De Christiana religione* 13 (I, 18):

Mercurius Trismegistus de Verbo et Filio Dei, ac etiam de Spiritu saepe mentionem facit.

In conclusione, come nelle opere giovanili del 1457, anteriori alla sua conoscenza del *Corpus Hermeticum*, anche più tardi il Ficino è interessato alla figura di Ermete quale profeta del trionfo del cristianesimo sull'antica religione e quale annunciatore del più profondo mistero cristiano. Era, questa, l'interpretazione medievale dell'*Asclepius*. Dovette essere questa convinzione a spingere il Ficino ad ignorare le critiche di Agostino ad Ermete, nonostante l'ammirazione che egli nutriva per Agostino stesso, e a scegliere l'interpretazione di Lattanzio.

Ma d'altra parte, per chi, come il Ficino, era interessato a stabilire una lunga discendenza delle filosofie antiche dalla tradizione giudaica e cristiana, l'Egitto si prestava perfettamente a questa ricostruzione. Poteva servire a tal riguardo una attestazione scritturistica, e precisamente quella di *Atti* 7,22, ove si dice che Mosè era stato esperto in tutta la sapienza degli Egiziani. Se ne poteva dedurre, quindi, quello che era già implicito nell'ermetismo cristiano della tarda antichità, e cioè che Mosè avrebbe insegnato ai sacerdoti

a quanto si è osservato sopra, anche le osservazioni di Euler, "*Pia philosophia*" et "*docta religio*", 220-224. Su Dionigi l'Areopagita nell'Umanesimo, cfr. Moerschini, 'L'autenticità'.

¹⁵ Sul Ficino e Dionigi l'Areopagita, cfr. ora (oltre alla bibliografia indicata dall'Euler), S. Toussaint, 'L'influence de Ficin à Paris'; e C. Vasoli, 'L'"Un-Bien"'.
¹⁶ Cfr. C. Moerschini, *Storia dell'ermetismo*, 159 sgg.

dell'Egitto le verità del monoteismo¹⁷, che erano state successivamente adulterate¹⁸. L'adulterazione dell'antico insegnamento ermetico si coglieva, ad esempio, nell'impiego della magia e nei rapporti degli Egiziani con i demoni, come aveva deplorato a suo tempo Agostino¹⁹. Ma su questo torneremo tra poco.

3. *Ermetismo e magia*

A proposito di questo problema, molto dibattuto, ancorché non centrale (a nostro parere) nell'ermetismo di Ficino, già la Yates aveva sostenuto²⁰ che il Ficino si trovava di fronte, per quanto riguarda l'ermetismo, a due atteggiamenti opposti dei Padri antichi: da un lato vi era stata la posizione conciliante e favorevole di Lattanzio, dall'altro quella ostile e negativa di Agostino, che investiva esattamente l'impiego della magia e della ispirazione demoniaca da parte di Ermete. Il Ficino sostanzialmente prese atto della condanna di Agostino (*De civitate Dei* VIII 23–26), salvo poi non aderire ad essa. E in effetti era impossibile, sia per il Ficino sia per i suoi lettori, ignorare il passo così pericoloso dell'*Asclepius* (cap. 26) in cui si parlava della 'creazione' degli dèi mediante la costruzione di statue nelle quali si poteva inserire uno spirito magico²¹. Inoltre, Ermete aveva predetto, sempre nell'*Asclepius* (cap. 24 sgg.), la fine dell'antica religione egiziana perché era stato ispirato, secondo Agostino, da un demone. Ermete era stato, dunque, in contatto con i demoni e impiegava la magia.

Il Copenhaver, invece, tende a liberare il Ficino da ogni implicazione con la magia, perché, a suo parere, il filosofo, per quanto interesse potesse avere avuto per essa, non ne andava a ricercare le testimonianze nei testi ermetici,

¹⁷ Questa convinzione era stata sostenuta nel cristianesimo antico soprattutto da Cirillo di Alessandria, nella sua replica al *Contra Galilaeos* di Giuliano l'apostata; uno studio sulla presenza di Cirillo nella cultura cristiana del Quattrocento sarebbe estremamente utile.

¹⁸ Per quello che riguarda la data di Ermete, secondo Agostino (*De civitate Dei* XVIII 39), egli sarebbe stato posteriore a Mosè di almeno due generazioni; altri, invece, pensavano che Ermete fosse stato contemporaneo di Mosè, stando a quello che si legge nella famosa raffigurazione sul pavimento del duomo di Siena, ove il Trismegisto è detto 'contemporaneus Moysi'.

¹⁹ A questo punto ci si potrebbe porre, con il Salaman ('Echoes of Egypt'), il problema se, come è vero che nel *Corpus Hermeticum* si trovano reali presenze della religione egiziana (come la critica più recente ha oramai definitivamente accertato), tali elementi sono stati ripresi dal Ficino. Il tentativo del Salaman, a tal riguardo, non è giunto, a mio parere, a risultati convincenti.

²⁰ In un suo saggio giustamente famoso (Yates, *Giordano Bruno e la tradizione ermetica*, 73 sgg.).

²¹ Questa duplicità emerge nella nostra *Storia dell'ermetismo*, 82-91.

i quali, sul pieno teorico, dicevano poco a tal riguardo, ma, se mai, si rivolgeva a Plotino e Proclo (che però, a nostro parere, non dicono molto di più)²². Tanto è vero che il Ficino nel terzo libro del *De vita* non fece nessuno sforzo per giustificare la sua teoria della magia sulla base dei quattordici trattati del *Corpus Hermeticum* che aveva tradotto, perché essi non gli sarebbero stati utili a questo scopo²³. Il Ficino, infatti, cita la magia di Ermete in soli tre passi, di cui solo in due per nome (*Opera*, p. 548 = *De vita* III 13; p. 561 e pp. 571-572 = *De vita* III 26): essi non contengono tanto un riferimento ad argomenti filosofici in sostegno della magia, quanto dei riferimenti alla venerabile autorità di Ermete. Il Ficino intende dimostrare che la magia che “costruisce” gli dèi, di cui si parla nell’*Asclepius*, è efficace, vale a dire, che la struttura artificiale, materiale di un talismano o di una statua può far sì che essi siano abitati o animati da un essere spirituale, cioè da un demone, e comunque intende anche affermare in modo velato che siffatta magia può essere illecita, cioè un atto di idolatria. Anche in un altro punto del suo studio²⁴ il Copenhaver tende a rendere “neutri” (cioè a vedere in essi una pura e semplice notizia di carattere “storico”) i riferimenti del Ficino alla magia ermetica. Questo studioso afferma²⁵, tra l’altro, che gli *Hermetica* fornivano al Ficino una giustificazione per la credenza nella magia che era più di tipo genealogico o storico che teoretico. Il fatto che la magia fosse associata con l’antica teologia di Ermete poteva averla resa più mirabile, ma gli “antichi” teologi (Ermete, Zoroastro, Orfeo) erano poco utili, per il Ficino, per analizzare la magia da un punto di vista fisico o filosofico. Allusioni ermetiche a concetti magici erano abbastanza frequenti per associare la magia alla “prisca teologia”, ma non possedevano argomenti fisici e filosofici capaci di fornire gli elementi di una teoria della magia convincente e valida. Gli *Hermetica* popolari trasmessi durante il Medioevo erano più importanti del *Corpus Hermeticum* come fonte di dati magici, ma siccome essi erano soprattutto delle raccolte di ricette o di curiosità non collegate a nessuna filosofia coerente, il loro valore teorico non era grande, e, comunque, il Ficino non era interessato ad essi.

²² Cfr. Copenhaver, ‘Iamblichus, Synesius’, 441-442.

²³ Cfr. Copenhaver, ‘Iamblichus, Synesius’, 443.

²⁴ Cfr. B. Copenhaver, ‘Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus’, 80 e 95; ‘Iamblichus, Synesius’, 448. L’interpretazione del Copenhaver, che vuole escludere, nel Ficino (ed anche nel *Corpus Hermeticum*, a cui il Ficino si ispirava), ogni più profondo interesse per la magia, è stata vivacemente respinta da P. Zambelli (*L’ambigua natura della magia*, 282-283; 301; 317-319), la quale, seguendo le concezioni del Garin, nega la validità scientifica e storica di una netta separazione tra magia e filosofia.

²⁵ Cfr. ‘Hermes Trismegistus’, 93.

Eppure non possiamo credere che si debba giungere ad un ridimensionamento così forte (tanto da apparire quasi una negazione) degli interessi del Ficino per la magia. È un fatto, del resto, che non mancano testimonianze dei secoli XVI e XVII che considerarono il Ficino compromesso con quelle pratiche²⁶.

Ugualmente restrittiva è l'interpretazione dell'Allen. Egli asserisce²⁷ che la soluzione di questa difficoltà, cioè dei difficili rapporti con la magia, i quali avrebbero potuto implicare anche una accusa di tradimento della fede cristiana, è presentata dal Ficino in *De vita* III 26 (I, p. 571):

His ferme exemplis ipse Plotinus utitur, ubi Mercurium imitatus ait veteres sacerdotes sive Magos in statu sacrificiisque insensibilibus divinum aliquid et mirandum suscipere solitos. Vult autem una cum Trismegisto per materialia haec non proprie suscipi numina penitus a materia segregata, sed mundana tantum, ut ab initio dixi, et Synesius approbat . . . Mercurius ipse, quem Plotinus sequitur, inquit, daemones aërios non coelestes, nedum sublimiores, statuasque Mercurius ipse componit ex herbis, arboribus, lapidibus, aromatis, naturalem vim divinitatis (ut ipse ait) in se habentibus. Adiungit cantus caelestibus similes, quibus ait eos delectari, statuisque sic adesse diutius, et prodesse hominibus vel obesse. Addit sapientes quondam Aegyptios, qui et sacerdotes erant, quum non possent rationibus persuadere populo esse Deos, id est spiritus aliquos super hominibus, excogitasse Magicum hoc illicium, quo daemones allicientes in statuas esse numina declararent . . . Sed ad Mercurium immo ad Plotinum iam revertamur. Mercurius sacerdotes ait accepisse virtutem à mundi natura convenientem, eamque miscuisse. Sequutus hunc Plotinus, putat totum in anima mundi conciliante facile confici posse etc.

Qui, secondo l'Allen, il Ficino sostiene che anche Plotino seguì Ermete, supponendo che le statue contengano al proprio interno non tanto le divinità, che sono totalmente separate dalla materia, quanto i demoni. Ermete aveva costruito delle statue usando piante, legni, pietre preziose e aromi, tutte cose che possedevano una potenza demoniaca entro di sé; aveva fatto cantare dei canti adatti a particolari demoni, in quanto essi si dilettevano di quei canti ed in tal modo erano spinti ad abitare nelle statue. I sapienti egiziani non erano stati in grado di convincere il loro popolo che a presiedere agli uomini fossero degli dèi o degli spiriti, e così, abbandonando l'insegnamento di Ermete, gli Egiziani avevano inventato la magia delle statue, che è illecita, e avevano affermato che i demoni che erano stati attirati entro di esse erano in realtà degli dèi. Giamblico, che il Ficino 'scopre' in un momento della

²⁶ Cfr. recentemente a tal proposito Buccolini, 'Explicatio Ficini', 53-55.

²⁷ Cfr. 'Marsilio Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus', 43-46.

sua più piena maturità, aveva condannato gli Egiziani proprio perché avevano adorato i demoni in quanto tali, invece di ricordare che essi dovevano servire solamente come intermediari per noi nella ricerca dei misteri divini (cfr. *Myst.* VIII 2).

Alla fine della sua vita il Ficino introduce un nuovo elemento, sostenendo che i sacerdoti egiziani, quando ebbero consacrato i loro templi agli dèi, vi avevano anche posto le statue degli uomini che essi supponevano essere particolarmente sottomessi all'influsso di quelle divinità. Essi avevano incorporato in queste statue figure di animali, legni, metalli, pietre ed anche speciali caratteri e immagini associati con gli dèi. Ermete era, insomma, solo il *testimone*, non il difensore di questa pratica degli Egiziani.

Mercurius ter maximus *testis est* religionis Aegyptiae patres statuas in templis arte magica fabricatas collocare consuevisse, et in eas daemones defunctorumque animas excitare (*In epistulas D. Pauli commentatio*, cap. 8, I, p. 440).

Più rivelatore ancora dell'atteggiamento del Ficino è, infine, secondo l'Allen un altro passo. Ivi il Ficino pensa che Ermete abbia condannato la maggior parte degli Egiziani perché essi non credevano o che esistessero degli dèi al di sopra del cielo o che le preghiere degli uomini che abitavano la terra potessero raggiungerli. Questa era stata la ragione per fabbricare le statue come abitazioni dei demoni, che essi adoravano come dèi famigliari.

Infatti,

Si Trismegistum consulueris, disces ex propriis mundi materiis certo cuidam daemone congruentibus compositam rite statuam confestim per daemonem congruum animari . . . Audies quoque Mercurium hunc veteres plerosque damnantem, quod diffidentes vel esse numina super coelum, vel terrenorum vota ad caelestia superioraque pervenire, fabricare statuas habitacula daemonum, quos quasi familiares colerent deos. Putabat sane, quamvis interdum in delubra daemones salutare advocarentur, saepe tamen descendere noxios (*In Apologiam Socratis epitome* (II, p. 1389).

In conclusione, in queste varie citazioni Ermete appare un riformatore di credenze idolatriche più che un fondatore di teorie magiche²⁸. Per il Ficino, infatti, il problema della magia non era già l'esistenza o l'efficacia delle statue magiche, che da lui non era contestata, quanto la loro liceità da un punto di vista religioso (e quindi anche civile). Il Ficino sapeva che l'ermetismo era collegato con la magia, ed aveva cercato di purificarlo. Sul suo atteggiamento non poteva non avere influito, quindi (contrariamente a quanto aveva

²⁸ Cfr. 'Marsilio Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus', 45.

pensato la Yates, come avevamo detto sopra), la condanna dell'ermetismo, formulata da Agostino.

Una soluzione definitiva è difficile a trovarsi. È verisimile che per motivi pratici il Ficino andasse estremamente cauto quando doveva parlare di magia, quand'anche essa si trovasse nei testi che più amava, come quelli di Ermete o di Giamblico²⁹. Del resto, lo stesso Platone, nelle *Leggi*, l'aveva apertamente e duramente condannata. Ma che nei testi sopra riportati il filosofo si dimostrasse così 'asettico', non mi pare³⁰. È vero che in altri testi il Ficino appare più 'neutro' e 'dossografico'. Così in alcuni passi che qui citiamo di seguito:

Quales (scl. images) et Trismegistus ait, Aegyptios ex certis mundi materiis facere consuevisse, et in eas opportune animas daemonum inserere solitos, atque animam avi sui Mercurii (*De vita caelitus comparanda* III 13 [I, 548]).

Et quemadmodum ab initio docuit Mercurius Trismegistus ac diu postea Plotinus et Iamblichus, statuis quibusdam ordine certo compositis daemones quodammodo includentur (*In Cratylum . . . epitome* II, 1309).

E anche nella *Theologia Platonica* (XIII 3 [II, p. 233 Marcel]) il Ficino riferisce, come esempio dell'efficacia delle varie arti, che gli Egiziani, come insegna Mercurio, costruivano delle statue di dèi che parlavano e camminavano. Nello stesso contesto (XIII 5 [II, p. 241]) si descrivono gli effetti dei vari "miracula" della magia. Ne parla anche Mercurio Trismegisto, 'ubi de regeneratione cum filio suo Tatío disputat' (*C.H.* XII 16; XIII 14). Oppure, nella *Theologia Platonica* XVIII 10 (III, p. 233), afferma che alcuni dicono che le anime non formano specificamente il "corpus elementare" o "terrenum" e che non hanno le sensazioni attraverso di esso, ma che,

sicut arte magica per certam statuarum dispositionem daemonibus certis accomodatam daemones statuis quasi devinciuntur, quod Mercurius confitetur atque Plotinus³¹, sic lege divina animas, quae se corporibus dederunt, aquae mancipari vel igni, atque id quidem adeo serviliter ut ob hoc vehementer indignantur atque doleant.

²⁹ Su questa problematica cfr. P. Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura*, 29 sgg. e altrove.

³⁰ Giustamente Weill-Parot, tracciando in breve lo *status quaestionis* della polemica tra la Zambelli e il Copenhaver, osservava che 'pur senza una prudenza ipocrita . . . i due punti di vista non gli sembravano inconciliabili' (cfr. 'Penombre ficinienne', 74). Lo studioso è tornato sull'argomento anche in un saggio molto informato (*Les "images astrologiques"*). Il Weill-Parot assume una posizione intermedia tra i negatori della magia ficiniana e coloro che vedono nel Ficino una grande apertura ad ogni forma di magia, e conclude che 'in realtà, Ficino gioca su una serie di ambiguità. Mostra di conoscere, e si nasconde dietro il "non tam probo quam narro"'. In ogni caso, il Ficino arreca un importante contributo alla storia della magia dotta in generale.

³¹ Cfr. *Ascl.* 7; *Plot.* III, 5,6.

Ma è necessario considerare questi passi apparentemente oggettivi e distaccati nel loro contesto più generale. Ora, la critica più recente ha sempre più insistito nel sottolineare l'interesse del Ficino, negli ultimi anni della sua vita, per le varie forme di magia e per le forme di misteriosofia ad essa affini. Ne è una testimonianza il sempre più frequente ricorrere dello scrittore alla cabala ebraica e alla filosofia degli arabi, che sembra essere stata da lui conosciuta direttamente³². È in questo contesto, quindi, che anche i riferimenti alla magia ermetica debbono essere inquadrati, anche se, apparentemente, poco impegnati e asettici.

Infine, con ragione W. Hanegraaff respinge come poco funzionale, per quello che attiene a certe correnti di pensiero del Rinascimento, la distinzione di cui si serve il Walker, tra "magia" e "religione"³³. È verisimile che le incertezze di cui fa mostra il Ficino, e il contrasto tra il suo interesse per la magia e l'esplicita sottomissione all'autorità della Chiesa, dichiarata nella prefazione del *De vita caelitus comparanda*, non sia dovuto soltanto alla paura della censura ecclesiastica, ma ad una incertezza personale circa la valutazione di queste teosofie³⁴.

4. Altri elementi dell'ermetismo ficiniano

La tendenza critica è, anche a questo riguardo, sostanzialmente riduttiva. Così, il Copenhaver³⁵ sostiene che, nel complesso dei suoi scritti, il Ficino cita Mercurio presentandolo semplicemente all'interno di una dossografia in cui Ermete è una delle più antiche autorità. Il Ficino ricorrerebbe ad Ermete talvolta per affermare una propria dottrina, che appare sostenuta anche da un testo ermetico, o, più spesso, per presentare proprio una dottrina ermetica, alla quale, comunque, non attribuisce particolare significato.

Anche l'Allen ritiene che, tutto considerato, il Ficino rimanga tiepido nei confronti di Ermete; egli non ha per lui l'ammirazione sconfinata di un Lazzarelli³⁶ e non pone il *Corpus Hermeticum* sullo stesso piano di Platone o di Plotino. Conferma questa posizione secondaria del Trismegisto il fatto che il Ficino non scrisse commenti alle opere ermetiche. L'iniziale interesse

³² Cfr. recentemente S. Toussaint, 'L'individuo estatico'.

³³ Cfr. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 51; 75-84.

³⁴ Cfr. Hanegraaff, 'Sympathy or the Devil'.

³⁵ Cfr. Copenhaver, 'Hermes theologus', 78.

³⁶ Cfr. 'Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus', 46; si veda a tal riguardo anche la nostra *Storia dell'ermetismo*, 216-239.

per Ermete come profeta e teologo venne meno gradualmente e fu sostituito dall'ammirazione per i neoplatonici, Plotino e Proclo in particolare. Insomma, il Ficino non fu mai un ermetista, e l'impatto del *Corpus Hermeticum* su di lui fu iniziale e limitato, sebbene non privo di interesse, soprattutto nell'ambito delle teorie sulla magia. L'autorità di Ermete agli occhi del Ficino fu quella di essere stato un sapiente-teologo ed un profeta, ed in particolare il riformatore che aveva ammonito gli Egiziani a non adorare le statue e a non praticare riti in onore dei demoni.

Esaminiamo, pertanto, alcune attestazioni dell'interesse del Ficino per l'ermetismo quali si colgono nella sua opera maggiore, la *Theologia Platonica*, e più precisamente a proposito dei temi essenziali di quella teosofia: il mondo, l'anima, l'uomo, per vedere se questa interpretazione limitativa è valida.

Certo, di carattere dossografico è quello che si legge in *Theologia Platonica* XVII 4 (III, p. 169). Platone descrive la creazione del mondo più o meno allo stesso modo di Mosè, che fu il primo a parlarne, e di Mercurio, poi³⁷. Vennero quindi Severo, Attico, Plutarco e molti altri platonici, per cui il pitagorico Numenio esclamò che Platone era un Mosè che parlava in attico (cfr. framm. 8 des Places). Questa affermazione di Numenio, ricavata da Eusebio di Cesarea, ebbe amplissima fortuna nel corso della rinascita del platonismo rinascimentale.

Parimenti, in I 3 (I, p. 50), il Ficino riferisce che la materia, come sostengono Mercurio Trismegisto e Timeo, è 'informe, non nihil, nihil proximum, quod primo infiniteque sit patiens' (C.H. VI 2; *Ascl.* 4)³⁸.

Ma nel passo di XVIII 2 (III, p. 183) penetriamo ulteriormente nel problema della cosmologia. Con la sua infinita potenza Dio creò il mondo *ex nihilo*, poiché lo fece per sua libera volontà, non per necessità di natura. Tale origine del mondo è stata spiegata chiaramente da Ermete il Trismegisto. Non deve sembrare strano che egli abbia conosciuto queste cose, 'si homo idem Mercurius fuit atque Moyses, quod Artapanus historicus coniecturis ostendit'. Il riferimento è alla notizia fornitaci da Eusebio, *Praeparatio Evangelica* XI 37,6.

³⁷ Il riferimento è al mito che si legge nell'undicesimo trattato del *Corpus Hermeticum*, uno dei più vicini alla cosmogonia cristiana. Si osservi la cronologia di Mercurio, che qui è collocato dopo Mosè.

³⁸ Accanto a questo riferimento, più ovvio, alla dottrina platonica della materia, si è pensato (cfr. Kodera, 'Narcissus') che il rapporto tra intelletto e materia, adombrato dal mito di Narciso, si troverebbe nel Ficino, ripreso da un passo del *Corpus Hermeticum* (I, 14) e sviluppato nella *Theologia Platonica* (XVII, 2): '... utpote qui humanae pulchritudinis speciem in aqua specularetur, eiusdem admirationem quandam in terra conspiceret, illic praeterea consecutus similem sibi formam in seipso existentem, velut in aqua amavit eam, secumque congregi concupivit'.

Impegnativa anche la considerazione di XI 4 (II, p. 120). Le forme sono più “perspicuae” nell’operante che nella sua opera o nei suoi strumenti, e così le forme dell’universo sono più “perspicuae” in Dio che nell’universo. Per questo motivo Mercurio ritiene che il mondo sia ‘omniformis Dei imaginem omniformem’ (riferimento a *C.H.* V 10; X 16, secondo il Marcel, ma potrebbe essere anche ad *Ascl.* 19, sebbene in un contesto totalmente differente).

In IV 2 (I, p. 169) si afferma che la fine del mondo è chiamata da Mercurio ‘mundi senium’ (*Ascl.* 26), da Platone *In libro de Regno* (*Polit.* 270a) ‘mundi restitutio’. In realtà, dopo l’invecchiamento del mondo avverrà la “palingenesia”, cioè il ritorno del mondo all’ordine primitivo, come insegnano non solo Mosè, ma anche Zoroastro, Mercurio (*Ascl.* 26) e Platone. Così è detto in *Theol. Plat.* II 3 (II, p. 65).

A questo proposito vale la pena osservare che due testimonianze collegano la cosmogonia del Trismegisto a quella orfica. La prima è quella di *In Convivium Platonis de amore, Commentarium* 2 (II, p. 1321):

Orpheus in Argonautica, cum de rerum principiis coram Chirone heroibusque cantaret, Mercurii Trismegisti theologiam sequutus, Chaos ante mundum posuit

Orfeo, dunque, sarebbe venuto per secondo, ed il Trismegisto sarebbe stato il maestro.

L’altra testimonianza si legge in *Theologia Platonica* XVIII 1 (III, 178). Ivi si dice che anche Mercurio avrebbe insegnato che il mondo sussiste grazie alla volontà di Dio, ‘quem cuncti comitentur affectus’ (*C.H.* X 2-3; *Ascl.* 6; 20). E così pure Orfeo, come già Platone nel *Timeo*, asserisce che la volontà benefica di Dio è stata l’origine certissima delle cose. Anche in questo caso si deve pensare che Orfeo avrebbe desunto il suo insegnamento da quello di Mercurio.

Per quanto riguarda l’anima, stando a quello che dicono Zoroastro ed Ermete (il riferimento è a *C.H.* I 8), l’anima discende dall’ampio cerchio dell’universo e l’intelligenza più bassa si unisce innanzitutto al corpo più alto, e non soltanto gli si unisce, ma si infonde entro di lui (*Theol. Plat.* XVIII 4 [III, 192]).

Anche il Ficino crede che esista un veicolo dell’anima: esso è da lui chiamato “idolum” (XVIII 4 = III, 194), e da Platone ‘species animae mortalis’, cioè ἄλλο τε εἶδος . . . τὸ θνητόν (*Tim.* 69c). L’anima, quando è nel corpo celeste, ‘emittit idolum quasi crinitam comam’. In quanto “idolum”, è presente in lei una ‘phantasia . . . irrationalis atque confusa’, e ogni volta che,

lasciato il suo corpo terreno, si raccoglie nel suo corpo celeste, l'uomo ode delle musiche mirabili e delle voci provenienti dai cieli. Lo conferma anche l'esclamazione di Tat, dopo che si fu purificato grazie alle cerimonie e alle espiazioni del padre (*C.H.* XIII 11-22), e lo stesso Mercurio narra di avere avuto questa esperienza nell'estasi della sua anima (*C.H.* I 1; XIII 3) (p. 195).

Le nostre anime, che assomigliano agli spiriti celesti, si rivestono di corpi di diverse forme, e al termine di certi intervalli di tempo riprendono i medesimi corpi che avevano all'inizio. Questo processo è chiamato "palingenesia" da Zoroastro, e di essa parla a lungo Mercurio con suo figlio Tat (*Theol. Plat.* XVII 3 [III, 161]; secondo il Marcel, questo è un riferimento a *C.H.* XIV—ma potrebbe essere anche ad *Ascl.* 24 sgg.).

La palingenesia implica per il Ficino, come già per i neoplatonici, il problema di quale sia il corpo in cui avverrà la trasmigrazione. Il filosofo lo affronta in *Theol. Plat.* XVII 4 (III, p. 172). Nemmeno i sacerdoti egiziani sono concordi a pensare che le trasmigrazioni delle anime avvengano da una specie all'altra; al contrario, essi vogliono che si intendano 'de ferino vel heroico animae habitu', poiché pensano che l'uomo diventi una bestia o un eroe, in quanto, secondo loro, l'uomo è rappresentato dall'anima soltanto. Questo è spiegato da Mercurio, 'Aegyptiorum pontifex maximus', il quale, avendo descritto in maniera poetica siffatta migrazione, aggiunse che la legge divina non permette che la migrazione avvenga nei corpi delle bestie. Inoltre, egli attribuisce alle anime empie delle pene eterne negli elementi più bassi di questo mondo, e asserisce apertamente che quelle anime sono sottomesse ad un supplizio eterno da una sentenza immortale. Mercurio dice anche che la mente si congiungerà a Dio così strettamente da non essere più implicata nell'errore (*C.H.* X 19-22).

Lo stesso problema è discusso anche in XVIII 10 (III, p. 228). Platone e Mercurio dicono che le anime malvagie, dopo questa vita, 'mutato genio incidere in mali daemonis potestatem' (secondo il Marcel, riferimento a *C.H.* I 22-23³⁹), e cioè dopo che saranno state condotte dal loro genio al giudice che non può essere ingannato. E poco più oltre (p. 234): i malvagi sono tormentati, in punto di morte e dopo la morte, dalla loro 'furens phantasia' e dal 'malus daemon, ut Mercurius ait et Plato' (*Gorg.* 525 sgg.). Parimenti, nel commento a Plotino (VIII 5 = II, 1755) si afferma:

Peccantes (scil. animae) vero gravius vexantur etiam a daemonibus, quod Mercurius (cfr. *Ascl.* 28) et Orpheus Iamblicusque confirmant.

³⁹ O forse ad *Asclepius* 28.

In un contesto che, come abbiamo visto sopra, congiunge rivelazione cristiana a dottrina ermetica, il Ficino (XII 3 [II, p. 159]), dopo aver citato Giovanni l'Evangelista, il quale dice che l'anima che vede la verità opera la verità (1 Gv 1,6), e Paolo, che dice (2 Cor 4,16) che l'anima che contempla si rinnova di giorno in giorno, osserva che il Trismegisto, allo stesso modo, dice che dall'unione della mente pura con Dio risulta, per così dire, un solo spirito (cfr. *Ascl.* 3; *C.H.* I, 26; anche XII, 4; *Ascl.* 10).

A proposito dell'uomo, cogliamo anche nella *Theologia Platonica* (XIV 3 [II, 257]) la dottrina ermetica, così diffusa nell'umanesimo italiano, che l'uomo è un 'magnum miraculum' (*Ascl.* 6). Il genere umano cerca di diventare ogni cosa, perché conduce tutti i generi di vita. Come esempio di quanto viene detto si cita quel passo famoso dell'*Asclepius*: 'non illi coelum videntur altissimum, non centrum terrae profundum'⁴⁰.

Più banale è quanto si legge in *Theologia Platonica* II 13 (I, p. 125): la provvidenza di Dio protegge il genere umano, come dice Mercurio (*C.H.* X 3,22; *Ascl.* 34-41).

Osservazioni sparse sono quelle di *Theol. Plat.* XVIII 9 (III, pp. 225-226): poiché si sono allontanati dal loro equilibrio primitivo, gli uomini raggiungono la loro felicità con grande fatica. La otterranno facilmente, invece, quando saranno stati restituiti alla loro condizione originaria. Questa opinione sembra accordarsi meglio delle altre ai misteri di Zoroastro, di Mercurio, di Platone e di tutti i poeti che hanno raccontato l'età dell'oro.

In XVIII 9 (III, p. 236) si sottolinea l'importanza di un "oraculum" di Virgilio (*Aen.* VI 730-731). In esso il poeta latino, seguendo in parte Mercurio ed in parte Platone, descrive le quattro perturbazioni dell'animo, che sono la conseguenza di quattro umori: dalla bile ardente proviene il desiderio, dal sangue, che è aria, il piacere, dalla bile nera, che è la terra, il timore, dalla pituita acquosa il dolore e la fiacchezza (*C.H.* I 23-24).

5. Conclusioni

Tenuto conto delle attestazioni che abbiamo presentato, le opinioni del Copenhaver e dell'Allen ci sembrano troppo radicali. L'interesse del Ficino

⁴⁰ Questa concezione è sviluppata anche nel *De Christiana religione*, inc. lat. H 7069; BMC VI 625; IGI II 3857, c. 36r, ove si insiste 'sulla necessità che l'infinita bontà divina ['quae se communicare vult omnibus'] si congiunga con la natura umana, che è il centro, il medio tra tutte le cose e tutte le comprende in sé'. Traggio questa informazione da C. Vasoli, *Filosofia e religione*, 53.

per l'ermetismo non si spegne con il passare degli anni. Ancora alla fine della sua vita, quando scriveva il *Commento a Plotino*, il filosofo in un passo famoso attribuiva alle dottrine ermetiche un ruolo non secondario per la propria formazione di un tempo, ed esse lo accompagnarono fino alla fine della sua speculazione, anche se essa è stata essenzialmente quella di un filosofo platonico. Né il crescere dell'interesse per Platone e il neoplatonismo doveva significare il porre in secondo piano l'ermetismo. Abbiamo già osservato che questa netta separazione tra ermetismo e neoplatonismo è poco funzionale per comprendere il pensiero del XV e del XVI secolo.

Forse l'influsso dell'ermetismo sul Ficino fu più fertile di risultati in un altro senso, e cioè in quanto il Ficino fu il tramite, accresciuto dall'autorevolezza che egli si era acquistato nel corso di una vita di studi e di insegnamenti, per la diffusione della dottrina di Mercurio nel Rinascimento europeo⁴¹; ma in ogni caso, anche per il Ficino, pur più platonico che ermetico, l'insegnamento del Trismegisto fu essenziale, in quanto fu quello fornito dal primo maestro (o da uno dei primi maestri) della "pia philosophia"⁴².

6. Esempi di traduzione ficiniana

Proponiamo ora un saggio di esame della traduzione ficiniana del *Corpus Hermeticum*: l'abbiamo eseguito, a mo' di prova, solo per il *Poimandres*. Emerge da esso l'insufficienza dell'edizione, tuttora canonica, del Nock—Festugière, non foss'altro perché tale edizione trascura di far luce sui contributi sia del Ficino sia del Patrizi, il quale, più di un secolo dopo l'*editio princeps*, intervenne sul testo per correggerlo, ma basandosi anche sulla traduzione del Ficino stesso. Lo scrivere una storia del *Corpus Hermeticum* nel XVI secolo è una urgente necessità.

Un confronto preciso tra il testo greco e la traduzione del Ficino permette di cogliere anche le divergenze più minute. Rivolgiamo la nostra attenzione in primo luogo alle modifiche dovute a interpretazione ficiniana del pensiero ermetico secondo la dottrina cristiana, in secondo luogo ad alcune correzioni del testo.

⁴¹ Qualche notizia al riguardo (ma solo qualche notizia) in Mahé, 'La Renaissance et le mirage égyptien', ma la parte più importante della ricerca rimane ancora da fare.

⁴² Il Gentile, tuttavia, trova che la presenza dell'ermetismo continuò ad essere essenziale fino alla fine della vita del Ficino, il quale riprese la dottrina del Trismegisto fino a farne elemento portante della propria speculazione ('Ficino ed Ermete', 29-30).

§. 2. ‘*Sum, inquit ille, Pimander, mens divinae potentiae*’⁴³ (c. 5r). “*Mens divinae potentiae*” traduce l’espressione ὁ τῆς αὐθεντίας νοῦς; così, più oltre (c. 11v), “*divinae potentiae verbo*” corrisponde ad αὐθεντίας λόγου (§. 30). Il termine αὐθεντία significa il potere assoluto di qualsivoglia divinità, ad esempio, quello del dio gnostico di cui parla Ippolito, come osserva il Festugière, *ad locum*. Per il Ficino non può essere di altri che di Dio.

§. 5. Poimandres rivela ad Ermete la realtà del cosmo. In esso si trova l’aria, che, essendo leggera, venne dietro al soffio del fuoco: ἀήρ . . . ἐκολούθησε τῷ πνεύματι. Il Ficino traduce con ‘*aer spiritu parens*’, modificando il significato di ἀκολουθέω: cioè l’aria “obbediva” allo *spiritus*, e questo spirito non poteva essere altro che quello di Dio, che disponeva le varie cose. Il Ficino traduce, dunque, secondo la dottrina biblica dello spirito che ‘si muoveva sopra le acque’ (cfr. Gen 1,2).

§. 12. Il Nus, che è padre di tutto, è vita e luce: ἀπεκύησεν ἄνθρωπον αὐτῷ ἴσον, cioè ‘produsse uguale a sé’ l’umanità originaria, ma il Ficino smorza il concetto e rende con ‘*hominem sibi similem procreavit*’ (7r), secondo la dottrina cristiana che Dio creò l’uomo non uguale a sé, ma *a sua immagine e somiglianza* (cfr. Gen 2,7).

Ibid. Il testo prosegue: ‘Atque ei tamquam filio suo congratulatus est’ (7r). Il più debole ‘congratulatus est’ rende il greco ἡράσθη, cioè l’amore con cui il dio intelletto amò il primo uomo, che aveva creato uguale a sé, come ora si è detto. Cfr. quanto dice l’*Asclepius*, cap. 8: ‘amavit eum’. Lo stesso procedimento anche poco oltre (§. 13), ove ἡράσθησαν αὐτοῦ è reso con: ‘*humanae mentis meditatione gaudentes*’.

§. 13. Viene ‘alleggerito’ il significato pagano del testo greco συνεχωρήθη ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς γενόμενος, reso con ‘*a contemplatione patris delapsus*’, ‘allontanatosi dalla contemplazione del padre’.

Il §. 18 è reso senza particolare modifiche, probabilmente perché lo stesso testo ermetico appariva fortemente cristianizzante. Il dio parla alle sue creature con una parola santa: ‘Pululate, adolescite, propagate universa germina atque opera mea’ (8v). L’affermazione: ciascuno riconosca τὸν αἴτιον τοῦ θανάτου ἔρωτα è esplicitato con ‘*amorem corporis mortis causam esse scite*’.

§. 19. Il testo greco (ἀγαπήσας τὸ ἐκ πλάνης ἔρωτος σῶμα), che vuole dire che l’uomo ha amato il corpo, prodotto dall’errore dell’amore, è reso con uno strumentale o causale: ‘*Qui vero corpus amoris errore complectebatur*’

⁴³ Citiamo dalla *editio princeps*: *Mercurii Trismegisti . . . Pimander*, ed. G. van der Leye, Treviso 1471, ristampa a cura di S. Gentile, Firenze 1989.

(9r). Pertanto costui, dice il testo greco, errava ἐν τῷ σκότει, che il Ficino spiega meglio con: 'is oberrabat in tenebris mortis', che è un'eco biblica.

§. 21. 'Qui se ipsum cognoscit transit in deum' (9r) è una modifica del testo greco: ὁ νοήσας ἑαυτὸν εἰς αὐτὸν χωρεῖ, ove εἰς αὐτὸν è inteso come 'verso se stesso', non come 'verso dio' ('celui qui s'est connu soi-même va vers soi', traduce il Festugière).

§. 26. Il concetto tipicamente gnostico ed ermetico dell'"ogdoade", cioè della perfezione, non poteva essere noto al Ficino, che rende, quindi, per congettura con 'ad optatam naturam revertitur' (10v) il greco γίνεται ἐπὶ τὴν ὀγδοατικὴν φύσιν.

Ibid. La traduzione 'deo fruuntur' (10v) è più vicina alla spiritualità cristiana del greco ἐν θεῷ γίνονται.

Per quello che riguarda gli aspetti letterari della traduzione, osserviamo il §. 5. 'Ut terrae facies pateret': 'terrae facies' è ampliamento del Ficino al testo greco; essa precorre l'integrazione τὴν γῆν del Reitzenstein e del Festugière.

§. 9. 'Mens autem deus, utriusque sexus fecunditate plenissimus' rende il greco ἀρρηνόηλος ὢν, ma non mediante una traduzione propria, bensì facendo ricorso ad una frase famosa dell'*Asclepius* (cap. 20), che il Ficino già conosceva prima del 1463. Analogamente, più oltre (c.822) ἀρρηνοθήλεα è reso con 'utriusque generis munitus'.

§. 11. 'Aer volatilia protulit, aqua vero natantia' (6v). 'Natantia' è correzione del Ficino, se è vero che il manoscritto greco da lui adoperato per la sua traduzione (il Laur. 71, 33) ha νοητά invece di νηκτά (che è la lezione giusta) degli altri manoscritti (questo, almeno, si ricava dall'apparato critico dell'edizione di Nock e Festugière).

Ibid. Dall'apparato critico della medesima edizione si legge che ἡ γῆ sarebbe stata un'aggiunta del Patrizi, ma già il Ficino inserisce 'terra': 'terra postmodum animantia . . .' (6v-7r).

§. 13. Il Ficino rende in modo congetturale il difficile testo greco κατένόησε τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τὰ δημιουργήματα con 'opificia septem gubernatorum animadvertit', intendendo i reggitori delle sette sfere celesti (ma il Festugière: 'il perçut les oeuvres de son frère'). Successivamente il Flussas avrebbe corretto, seguendo probabilmente l'interpretazione del Ficino, τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ in τῶν ἀδελφῶν, ove il termine 'fratelli' indicherebbe i reggitori delle sfere celesti.

§. 15. Il testo greco è estremamente difficile: l'uomo ὑπεράνω οὖν ὢν τῆς ἀρμονίας ἐναρμόνιος γέγονε δοῦλος. A prescindere dal significato, per il quale lo stesso Festugière non riesce a trovare una soluzione conveniente, il Ficino lo rende in modo inesatto e modificato: 'Non [il Ficino legge dunque οὐ per

οὖν] igitur harmonia superior obstitit [invece di 'extitit', come sarebbe stato giusto per ὧν], in harmoniam vero lapsus periclitatus servus effectus est'. Analoghi ampliamenti si incontrano poco dopo: viene aggiunta ad ἀρρηνόθηλυσ δὲ ὧν una specificazione che non si trova nel greco: 'ab eo qui arborum et rivorum fons est', forse semplicemente per dare un senso compiuto al passo.

§. 19. Il greco περιούσιον ἀγαθόν è reso con 'bonum quod est super essentiam', con una correzione che anticipa così una congettura dello Scott (ὑπερούσιον), che però il Festugière non accoglie nel testo, probabilmente a torto.

§. 21. La lezione εὖ φῆς è una correzione del Reitzenstein, accolta dal Festugière, per εὖ φημι dei manoscritti, ma già il Ficino aveva tradotto 'recte loqueris'.

§. 22. Il Ficino anticipa la correzione μυσάττονται, attribuita al Turnebus, leggendo 'fastidiunt' (9v), invece di μυσάττοντες dei manoscritti.

§. 23. Nel *locus desperatus* θρώσκει αὐτὸν il Reitzenstein aveva congetturato θρώσκει ἐπ' αὐτόν, ed il Festugière τιτρώσκει: ma già il Ficino aveva tradotto con 'sensus affligit' (10r).

§. 25. Il manoscritto impiegato dal Ficino ha, come la maggior parte degli altri, la lezione τὰς ἀφορμὰς . . . ἀνεέργητον, ma il Ficino, d'accordo con la correzione del Parisinus gr. 1220 (da lui però non conosciuto), legge (10v): 'occasiones . . . itemque ociosas', cioè ἀνεργήτους. E così il Festugière.

§. 26. La traduzione del Ficino 'cum iis qui illic sunt' (10v) anticipa la congettura dello Scott, σὺν τοῖς <ἐκεῖ> οὖσιν.

§. 31. Il Ficino corregge l'errore del manoscritto Laurenziano εἰκὼν ἔφη traducendo giustamente con 'imago est', cioè ἔφν.

Nella preghiera finale (§. 31) troviamo un'omissione, non so se voluta: santo è Dio, che vuole essere conosciuto ed (γνωσθῆναι βούλεται καὶ) è conosciuto da coloro che gli appartengono ('sanctus deus qui suis familiaribus innotescit') (11v).

Errori del Ficino dovuti alla cattiva condizione del testo del Laur. 73, 11 sono (§. 28) 'vos qui laboratis inopia' (τῇ πλάνῃ gli altri manoscritti, ma σπάνῃ il Laurenziano) e (§. 29) 'quo factum est ut illi ex imbrium procellis emerserint'⁴⁴ (καὶ ἐτράφησαν τοῦ ἀμβροσίου ὕδατος, ma ἀβροσίου il manoscritto Laurenziano, lezione che il Ficino intese come un derivato da ἀβρός, 'umido').

Per quanto riguarda l'aspetto esteriore della traduzione, essa appare notevolmente libera, anche là dove non intervengono motivi di carattere stilistico

⁴⁴ Il Ficino pensa, quindi, che ἐτράφησαν sia derivato da τρέπω, non da τρέφω.

che giustificino tale modo di *vertere*. Ad esempio, le battute del dialogo tra Pimandro ed Ermete spesso non corrispondono, nella traduzione del Ficino, a quelle delle edizioni moderne, nonostante entrambe siano basate sullo stesso manoscritto Laurenziano; oppure alcune frasi sono poste dal Ficino con significato interrogativo, mentre non lo sono nel testo greco; ancora, certe altre sono parafrasate più che tradotte, o, a causa anche della mancanza di una chiara punteggiatura nel manoscritto adoperato, l'*ordo verborum* inteso dal Ficino è diverso da quello delle edizioni moderne. Insomma, il Ficino fece un'opera da pioniere su di un testo estremamente difficile, e se spesso non riuscì nell'impresa e ricorse a degli espedienti, come quello della parafrasi e della congettura, e talora, anche, commise degli errori, altre volte, però, corresse felicemente il testo greco che non dava senso. Interessanti sono certe correzioni di carattere dogmatico, che gli erano suggerite dalla sua fede cristiana e dalla sua convinzione che il testo che aveva davanti preannunciava per tanti aspetti il cristianesimo: era logico, quindi, per lui, intendere quel preannuncio alla luce di quello che sarebbe stato insegnato pienamente in seguito, con la venuta di Cristo in terra⁴⁵.

7. Marsilio Ficino e Ludovico Lazzarelli

Può essere utile tornare a considerare le fonti del *Crater Hermetis* di Ludovico Lazzarelli. Tra di esse, come è logico, il *Corpus Hermeticum* possiede una posizione centrale. Bisogna, tuttavia, osservare, che il Lazzarelli (come il Ficino, in fondo), si limita all'impiego dei trattati ermetici, e non conosce ancora i frammenti (in primo luogo quelli che si possono leggere nell'*Anthologium* di Stobeo), che invece diverranno sempre più noti nel secolo a lui successivo, ad esempio in Agostino Steuco.

⁴⁵ Sulla concezione rinascimentale della traduzione cfr., tra la numerosa bibliografia, recentemente E. Berti, 'Traduzioni oratorie fedeli'; 'Osservazioni filologiche', 112: nella seconda redazione della traduzione del *Filebo* 'l'interpretazione del dialogo è rimasta inalterata... il giovane Marsilio dopo non molti anni di studio del greco, aveva già raggiunto un altissimo livello di penetrazione del pensiero platonico ed una straordinaria capacità di orientarsi in un'espressione linguistica di rara difficoltà... in molti passi della prima redazione, in effetti, traspare ancora visibilmente la trama della traduzione letterale. Sappiamo, del resto, che per il proprio uso personale Marsilio Ficino era abituato a tradurre "verbatim". La tecnica della traduzione letterale era la prassi corrente nella scuola e una tradizione millenaria di alta cultura l'aveva accreditata in particolare per opere di filosofia e di religione...'. Questo giudizio così positivo non è ancora calzante per la traduzione ficiniana del *Corpus Hermeticum*.

Più strano è il fatto che le citazioni dai trattati ermetici provengano solo dai quattordici tradotti dal Ficino, e non anche da quelli tradotti dal Lazzarelli medesimo e che si trovano nel famoso codice di Viterbo, posseduto proprio da lui. Secondo Hanegraaff (cito, qui e in seguito, dal suo libro su Ludovico Lazzarelli, in corso di stampa), invece, lo scrittore si è chiaramente ispirato anche agli ultimi due trattati del *Corpus*, cioè alle cosiddette *Diffinitiones Asclepii*, che egli stesso aveva tradotto per Mercurio da Correggio. Tuttavia l'impiego di questi trattati consiste, secondo lo studioso, nel fatto che nei primi due del gruppo XV-XVII l'allievo è un re, che è iniziato rispettivamente da Asclepio e da Tat, mentre l'ultimo trattato si conclude con un panegirico del re medesimo. Stando a quanto pensa Hanegraaff, dunque, l'influsso dei trattati ermetici tradotti dal Lazzarelli si limita a fornire allo scrittore la cornice del *Crater*. Lo studioso, pertanto, sottolinea la novità dell'impostazione del dialogo, in cui l'autore si presenta come maestro ispirato, dotato di una natura semidivina, e iniziatore nei misteri ermetici, nonostante che gli allievi siano personaggi di rango sociale molto più elevato di lui, quali il re di Napoli Ferdinando di Aragona e il Pontano, suo segretario. Tuttavia, motivi di contenuto dottrinale dei trattati XV-XVII non sembrano essere stati utilizzati nel *Crater*.

Per i trattati I-XIV, il Lazzarelli impiega, come è logico, la stessa traduzione del Ficino, anche se il testo non sembra essere stato ripreso alla lettera. Bisognerebbe domandarsi quale edizione del *Corpus Hermeticum* tradotto dal Ficino abbia impiegato il Lazzarelli, dopo l'*editio princeps* del 1471. Potrebbe bastare questo a spiegare le divergenze? Forse sì e forse no: niente esclude, infatti, che le citazioni siano diverse anche perché il Lazzarelli contava di "abbellirle" e di renderle consone al "tono" della sua opera, nonostante che la cosa sembri insolita e inopportuna, se giudicata con criteri moderni.

Qualche esempio: in *Crater* 5,1 il Lazzarelli cita C.H. I 3 con la seguente modifica: 'quae cupis' invece di 'quae optas'.

Crater 6,2 = C.H. I 18 'ac opera': 'atque opera' la traduzione del Ficino, e quindi la modifica è scarsamente significativa. La citazione ermetica è interpretata come un riferimento alla necessità di conoscere se stessi, che era stato il punto di partenza della discussione in *Crater* 2,3. Il Lazzarelli, infatti, amplia il significato del testo ermetico e del testo di Gen 2,9, ove si parla dell'albero della conoscenza del bene e del male, con le parole seguenti: 'In his Hermetis enim verbis et lignum vitae in quo vivimus et lignum scientiae boni et mali, quod nobis affert interitum, continetur. Cuius caput praecepti, ut videtis, est ut nosmet ipsos dignoscamus'.

Crater 9,4 = C.H. V 3 nessuna discrepanza nella citazione.

Crater 10,5 = *C.H.* I 18 ‘fore causam’: ‘causam esse scite’ il Ficino.

Crater 14,5 = *C.H.* I 13 ‘in patre suo’: ‘in tempore suo’ il Ficino. Qui la modifica sembra essere più significativa. Il testo greco è completamente diverso: ἐν τῷ πατρὶ. Il Lazzarelli sottolinea come l’uomo voglia “fabricare” anche lui, per aver visto come il Padre aveva creato ogni cosa. Probabilmente il Lazzarelli vuole portare il suo ascoltatore ad ascoltare la sua dottrina della “creazione” umana, che nel Ficino, invece, rimane abbastanza nell’oscurità e non espressamente dichiarata. Nella medesima citazione il Lazzarelli legge: ‘omnium’, invece di ‘rerum omnium’ del Ficino, forse volendo intendere, appunto, la generazione di tutti gli uomini, invece che la creazione di tutte le cose.

Ma a questo proposito bisogna tenere presente una osservazione fatta da Hanegraaff. L’ultima parte della citazione contiene un ampliamento, operato dal Ficino, sull’originale greco, nel quale non si trovano le parole ‘unde a contemplatione patris ad sphaeram generationis delapsus est’, vale a dire, l’uomo, volendo anch’egli creare, a imitazione di Dio, abbandonò lo stato originario di contemplazione per dedicarsi alle cose terrene e materiali. Hanegraaff ha osservato che questa aggiunta ficiniana apparve bene accetta anche al Lazzarelli, che la riprese. Tuttavia, bisogna fare attenzione al fatto che questa ‘ripresa’ forse non è stata ‘cosciente’, come se il Lazzarelli avesse davanti a sé il testo greco, e, pur notando l’aggiunta del Ficino, la considerasse congrua e opportuna.

Poco dopo, citando *C.H.* I 15, la discrepanza, anche se non pesante dal punto di vista dottrinale, è notevole: il Lazzarelli legge: ‘homo harmonia superior extitit’, mentre la traduzione del Ficino è: ‘non igitur harmonia superior obstitit’, come abbiamo visto sopra. La traduzione del Ficino (almeno nella *editio princeps*) è, evidentemente, difettosa; il Lazzarelli l’ha probabilmente corretta personalmente. La citazione del Lazzarelli prosegue: ‘in harmoniam [‘in harmoniam autem’ la redazione di Lefèvre d’Estaples, ‘in harmoniam vero’ il Ficino] delapsus [‘lapsus’ il Ficino] servus effectus est’.

Le successive citazioni di *Crater* 18,5 (= *C.H.* I 12) e di *Crater* 21,3 (= *C.H.* I 6) non presentano divergenze, mentre *Crater* 21,5 (= *C.H.* I 21) è sottoposta a una notevole rielaborazione stilistica. Il Lazzarelli aggiunge, con tono fortemente patetico e predicatorio, alla traduzione del Ficino (c. 9r) le parole ‘reminiscere, homo, reminiscere’, e modifica la traduzione stessa (‘quoniam ex vita et luce constat omnium pater, ex quo natus est homo’) riscrivendo: ‘quia lux et vita Deus est et pater, ex quo natus est homo’.

Il cap. 25,3 non contiene una citazione, ma una allusione a *C.H.* XII 12: ‘Considera . . . quod duo haec soli ex omnibus animalibus homini deus ipse

largitus est, sermonem scilicet atque mentem. Quae quidem eiusdem ac immortalitas praemii esse censentur. Iis quisquis ad id quod decet utitur, nihil ab immortalibus discrepat, quinetiam corporis solutus compedibus, ab utrisque ducetur in chorum beatorum simul atque deorum'. L'allusione condensa sostanzialmente quello che al Lazzarelli preme enunciare: l'intelletto e la parola sono tanto preziosi quanto l'immortalità, e chiunque si serve in modo acconcio di queste due potenzialità naturali non è assolutamente diverso dagli esseri immortali, anzi, viene collocato nei cori dei beati. Il discorso ermetico serve al Lazzarelli ad enunciare una concezione che gli preme in modo particolare, ed è quella, che tanto "scandalo" ha suscitato, dell'anima che "genera" altre anime: la mente umana, infatti, non soltanto è immagine della mente divina, ma ha avuto in dono da Dio la fecondità e la immortalità: tale "generazione", che è ben diversa dal generare, da parte dell'intelletto, le scienze e le arti (cfr. 25,4), è esposta nel successivo capitolo 26.

L'ultima citazione si trova in *Crater* 29,3, ed è tratta da *C.H.* IX 4. Anch'essa è particolarmente interessante, perché il Lazzarelli applica il passo ermetico, ove si parla della sapienza ermetica, alla sua concezione personale, che è quella dell'"arcanum mysterii" della "creazione delle anime", di cui si è detto, e che lo scrittore ha cercato di dimostrare con il ricorso alla cabala. 'Qui se huic sapientiae dedicant', dice il testo ermetico citato dal Lazzarelli, vivono come estranei al mondo: non piacciono al volgo e sono derisi da tutti, come aveva detto già Platone, osserva giustamente lo scrittore (cfr. *Fedro* 249d). La traduzione del Ficino così suona: 'Qua de causa si qui huic se cognitioni dedicant, nec ipsi vulgo placent', etc., e il resto della citazione del Lazzarelli concorda con la traduzione del Ficino. Ma non è questo che ci interessa. Quello che è più importante è che il Lazzarelli ha sostituito 'sapientiae' a 'cognitioni', cioè 'gnosi', del testo ermetico: la sapienza è qualcosa di divino, perché corrisponde all'insegnamento segreto di Mosè e degli Ebrei *Mecubales*, e quindi è superiore alla gnosi ermetica, che è l'aspetto esterno e non religioso della dottrina ermetica stessa.

In conclusione, ci sembra di poter dire che il Lazzarelli cita liberamente la traduzione ficiniana, di cui si è servito, ma, soprattutto, l'ha impiegata per elaborare la sua dottrina personale della generazione delle anime e della sapienza segreta, dottrina che non era implicita nel testo greco, e che il Ficino stesso ha ripreso solo in parte.

Interessante, infine, il passo di 29,1, ove si legge: '... in dialogo ad Asclepium, qui τέλειος λόγος inscribitur'. Questo titolo dell'*Asclepius* non si trova nell'opera, ma in Lattanzio (*Div. Instit.* IV 6,1 e altrove), che probabilmente il Lazzarelli ha letto in quegli anni, nella sua ricerca dei testi

dell'ermetismo. È da notare, inoltre, che la redazione curata da Lefèvre d'Etaples sostituisce al titolo greco il titolo *De divina voluntate*: è quello dato dal Ficino all'*Asclepius*: il Lefèvre è più vicino al Ficino che non al Lazzarelli?

Anche in 30,4 il Lazzarelli presenta il Pimandro ('Pimander . . . ab Hermete et mens et verbum divinae potentiae interpretatur'), secondo la definizione che il Ficino stesso aveva dato di quel testo ermetico, e cioè 'de potestate et sapientia Dei' (c. 2r).

Claudio Moreschini (nato nel 1938), è professore ordinario di Letteratura Latina presso l'Università di Pisa. Insieme a Fabio Troncarelli dirige l'edizione nazionale italiana delle opere di Ludovico Lazzarelli.

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Renaissance Hermetism from Marsilio Ficino to Ludovico Lazzarelli

As is well known, Marsilio Ficino translated the *Corpus Hermeticum* into Latin in 1463, having temporarily interrupted his work on the Platonic dialogues, which he had begun shortly before. How important were the hermetic writings to him? Is Ficino to be considered only a Platonist, or also an Hermetist? First-class scholars have argued that Hermetism was only a passing interest in Ficino's philosophical career, whose most important constituent remains Platonism. It is argued here that such a distinction or opposition between Plato and Mercurius Trismegistus is erroneous, since Ficino himself, like other Renaissance Platonists, saw the two philosophical systems as two faces of the same *pia philosophia*.

This article investigates and evaluates the traces of Hermetism that can be found through the whole of Ficino's literary production. As it turns out, already before his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Ficino was interested specifically in Hermetism, and he investigated Medieval

Hermetic texts, as has been demonstrated by Sebastiano Gentile and Brian Copenhaver. Already in one of his earlier works, the *De voluptate* Ficino attempted to link Hermetism and Platonism, and this attempt is continued in other works and in his *Theologia Platonica*. Moreover, in his commentary on Dionysius Areopagita Ficino explores another important affinity, i.e. the one between Hermetism and Christian doctrine. Hermetism, Platonism and Christianity are therefore considered by him as a homogeneous complex.

This paper also discusses Ficino's "ars vertendi", citing examples from the translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Whereas Ficino made numerous mistakes, due to his still imperfect knowledge of Greek, he also suggested some good corrections of this difficult text. A final appendix deals with Ludovico Lazzarelli, and with how he employed Ficino's translation: Lazzarelli used it, but occasionally made changes congenial to his somewhat different interpretation of Hermetism.

THE ANGELICAL STONE OF ELIAS ASHMOLE

MATTHEW D. ROGERS

1. Introduction: Ashmole's Angelic Alchemy

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed an unusual confluence of the two disparate occult sciences of alchemy and magical evocation. In the work of various alchemists and magicians, angels and other spirits were regarded as sources of alchemical information, and more surprisingly, alchemical techniques and substances were held to provoke the appearance and submission of spirits. Laurence Principe has aptly noted the circumscribed province of this occult hybridization as evidence for a 'diversity of schools within alchemy', a diversity which supports his observations regarding the variable aims and theories of different alchemists, as well as the division and debate between various parties of alchemical practitioners. He proposes to denote this school as "supernatural alchemy", and places it 'on the fringe of classical chrysopoetic thought'¹.

While limited in extent, this school does not appear to have been entirely peripheral to seventeenth century British alchemy. Principe notes the existence of a 1660 manuscript regarding supernatural stones, including a *Lapis Angelicus* 'for the seeing, opening, and discovery of spirits in generall & of such invisible Powers & Substances as the Eye can noe way see'. By date and handwriting evidence, he ties this manuscript to the circle of experimenters and reformers associated with Samuel Hartlib². Principe also notes that the anonymous *De Manna benedicto*, published in 1680, was 'widely circulated' in manuscript and cited by Ashmole as the words of 'an incomparable author', and that this tract indicates the use of the Philosophers' Stone in evoking spirits³. While it would be impossible to fully explore this topic in a modest paper, the following pages will provide a preliminary attempt to trace a pattern of dissemination for the doctrine of the Angelical Stone, and

¹ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 196, 201.

² *Op. cit.*, 198. Principe cites British Library MS Sloane 648:99-100.

³ *Op. cit.*, 199. The Ashmole citation is in the "Prolegomena" of *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (henceforth noted as *TCB*), A4v.

its relationship to the religious and scientific context of seventeenth century England.

While naming various alchemists as possible participants in or contributors to the “supernatural school”, Principe particularly points to Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) as a ‘noteworthy exponent’ of it⁴. In fact, Ashmole appears to be the sole party to *publish* the central claim of this school, and he will serve as the principal point of reference in the present view of transmission of the doctrines of supernatural alchemy. Ashmole was an antiquarian, an alchemist, and a founding member of the Royal Society⁵. He was also a physician, eventually working under a license issued to him by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1670⁶. One of his most important alchemical accomplishments was the compilation and publication of the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, a landmark compendium of English alchemical verse. It is in the “Prolegomena” of Ashmole’s *Theatrum* that Principe finds the clearest exposition on the Angelical Stone, which deserves a full quotation:

Lastly, as touching the *Angelical Stone*, it is so *subtill*, saith the aforesaid *Author*, that it can neither be *seene*, *felt*, or *weighed*; but *Tasted* only. The *voyce* of *Man* (which bears some proportion to these *subtill* properties,) comes short in comparison; Nay the *Air* it selfe is not so penetrable, and yet (Oh mysterious wonder!) *A Stone*, that will lodge in the *Fire* to *Eternity* without being prejudiced. It hath a *Divine Power*, *Celestiall*, and *Invisible*, above the rest; and endowes the possessor with *Divine Gifts*. It affords the *Apparition* of *Angells*, and gives a power of conversing with them, by *Dreames* and *Revelations*: nor dare any *Evill Spirit* approach the *Place* where it lodgeth. Because it is a *Quintessence* wherein there is no corruptible Thing: and where the *Elements* are not corrupt, no *Devill* can stay or abide.

St. Dunston calls it the *Food of Angels*, and by others it is tearmed *The Heavenly Viaticum*; *The Tree of Life*; and is undoubtedly (next under *GOD*) the true *Alchochodon*, or *Giver of Years*; for by it *Mans Body* is preserved from *Corruption*, being thereby inabled to *live* a long time without *Foode*: nay, ‘tis made a question whether any *Man* can *Dye* that uses it. Which I doe not so much admire, as to think why the *Possessors* of it should desire to *live*, that have those *Manifestations* of *Glory* and *Eternity*, presented unto their *Fleshy Eyes*; but rather desire to be *Dissolved*, and to enjoy the full *Fruition*, then live where they must be content with the bare *Speculation*.

After *Hermes* had once obtained the *Knowledge* of this *Stone*, he gave over the use of all other *Stones*, and therein only delighted: *Moses*, and *Solomon*,

⁴ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 197-198.

⁵ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 135. Josten’s five-volume treatment of Ashmole emphasizes primary sources, and collects a dizzyingly comprehensive set of biographical documentation.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, vol. I, 173.

(together with *Hermes* were the only three, that) excelled in the *Knowledge* thereof, and who there with wrought *Wonders*.

That there is a *Gift of Prophetie* hid in the *Red-stone*, *Racis* will tell you; for thereby (*saieth he*) *Philosophers* have foretold *things to come*: And *Petrus Bonus* avers, that they did *Prophetie*, not only *Generally* but *Specially*; having a *Foreknowledge* of the *Resurrection*, *Incarnation* of *Christ*, day of *Judgement*, and that the *World* should be consumed with *Fire*: and this not otherwise, then from the *Insight* of their *Operations*⁷.

The ‘aforesaid *Author*’ mentioned at the outset is one E.A., referenced earlier as E.G.A.I., who ‘made much use of’ the book ‘*S. Dunstons Worke De Occulta Philosophia*’⁸, an earlier authority again mentioned in the quoted passage as ‘*St. Dunston*’. These mysterious sources will bear revisiting.

Principe finds it odd that Ashmole should tout such supernatural prodigies in the “*Prolegomena*” while the other texts collected in the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* ‘show no hint of supernatural involvement’⁹. But there may be other continuities with the body of the work. For one thing, the Angelical Stone is the fourth and final in an ascending series of Philosopher’s Stones, in which the earlier entries are the Mineral, Vegetable, and Magical (or Prospective) Stones. A somewhat parallel claim is made in William Bloomfield’s “*Campe of Philosophy*”, which Ashmole includes in his *Theatrum* under the title “*Bloomefields Blossoms*”. Bloomfield writes, ‘*Our Magistery is Three, Two, and One: / The Animall, Vegitable and Minerall Stone*’¹⁰. These three grades of the stone are also treated in the John Gower text published in the *Theatrum*, as Ashmole points out in his notes¹¹. In Ashmole’s remarks on Thomas Norton’s *Ordinall of Alchimy* (the text of which is the first article of the *Theatrum*), he provides a long discussion of the nature and characteristics of “*Naturall Magick*.” Citing Pico della Mirandola, Cornelius Agrippa, and other authorities on the topic, Ashmole equates magic—which Norton terms ‘the chief Mistris among Sciences all’—with hidden knowledge of the secrets of nature; and he denies that the workings of such magic are either miraculous or diabolical in origin. However, towards the end of this passage, Ashmole volunteers that ‘the *Production* of things is *Naturall*, but the bringing forth of the *vertue* is not *Naturall*: because the things are *Create*, but the *Vertues* increate’. And he concludes the discussion by declaring:

⁷ Ashmole, *TCB*, B1v-B1r.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, A4v.

⁹ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 197.

¹⁰ Bloomfield, in Ashmole, *TCB*, 323.

¹¹ Ashmole, *TCB*, 370-1 and 484.

In fine, if any man be so blest as to discover and unvaile our *Diana*, he shall finde and confesse that he was beholding to *Naturall Magick* for directions at the *Beginning, Middle, and End*; and when it is wrought up to his *highest degree of Perfection*, he shall see things not fit to be written; for (may I aver it with awfull Reverence) *Angelicall wisdome* is to be obteyned by it¹².

In later notes on the *Ordinall*, Ashmole addresses Norton's claim that 'The Red Stone is preservative, / Most precious thing to length my life', which the "Prolegomena" asserts as a particular property of the Angelical Stone or 'Red-stone'. As in the "Prolegomena", Ashmole's notes here equate the prolongation of life with abstinence from ordinary food, which is now said to leave its impurities in the human body as the causes of aging and death. And in this connection, he references 'the Doctrine which the *Angell* taught *Esdras*' in 2 Esdras 7:11-13¹³. None of these points establish Norton as a supernatural alchemist in his own right, but they do clearly indicate Ashmole's supernaturalist reading of the *Ordinall*. Ashmole also understood Norton to have been the apprentice or personal student of George Ripley (the influential author of no fewer than six of the texts in Ashmole's *Theatrum*), who had been persuaded 'to communicate the *Red Medicine* to him [Norton]'¹⁴.

Furthermore, if omissions from *Theatrum Chemicum Brittanicum* are at issue, it is worth observing that the title page and "Prolegomena" of the *Theatrum* declare it to be 'The First Part'. Ashmole had intended to issue a second volume of the collection, but he was distracted from that work by legal difficulties and other engagements¹⁵. Although the "Prolegomena" solicits the submission of any texts that Ashmole might yet be missing for inclusion in the Second Part¹⁶, it is apparent that he already had in his possession enough material to merit another volume which would 'follow and complete *this* a full *Theatrum*'¹⁷. Given the sequence in which Ashmole presents the various grades of the Philosophers' Stone, it makes sense that he would have

¹² Ashmole, *TCB*, 443-7 (Ashmole's emphasis).

¹³ *Op. cit.*, 448. In the cited passage of 2 Esdras, the angel declares the transformation of the world following Adam's sin, from its old state of ease and 'immortal fruit' to its current difficult condition.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, 438. A red color is certainly assigned to the Philosopher's Stone outside of supernatural alchemy, but it is noteworthy that Ashmole attributes it to the Angelical Stone.

¹⁵ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 90-92 and vol. II, 735.

¹⁶ Ashmole, *TCB*, B4r.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, A4v. See also Josten's citation in his preface to *TCB*, of the bookseller William Cooper's remark to the effect that the second volume had been 'almost finished' since the late 1650's.

held documents addressing the more advanced topic of the Angelical Stone until the second volume. Finally, as will become apparent, Ashmole's *Theatrum* does in fact include texts from alchemists whom we have good reason to suspect as his precursors, if not predecessors, in the pursuit of the Angelical Stone.

2. *Antecedents: Edward Kelly, Arthur Dee, William Backhouse*

In seeking a possible basis for the postulated "supernatural school", Principe points to the angelic communications of John Dee and Edward Kelly, as popularized for seventeenth century readers by Meric Casaubon in his *True and Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Years between Dr. John Dee and Some Spirits*¹⁸. Casaubon's book was published a mere seven years after Ashmole's *Theatrum*, and it may have been as much against Ashmole as against Dee and Kelly that Casaubon aimed his castigation of 'spiritual Chymists' as a class¹⁹. He charged that 'that which we call ordinarily, and most understand by it, *The Philosophers Stone*, is certainly a meer cheat, the first author and inventor whereof was no other than the Divel', and furthermore that hopeful and piously ignorant people might be defrauded by 'precious Powder brought unto them by Spirits'²⁰. Casaubon's treatment is at pains to distinguish honorable '*Chymistrie* as it is meerly natural, and keeps itself within the compass of society' from the culpable 'spiritual Chymists'²¹. Keeping in mind that the words "alchemy" and "chemistry" (and their various alternate spellings) did not have their modern, separate denotations until the 18th century, this position of Casaubon's certainly supports Principe's contentions regarding a distinct school harboring doctrines that were by no means universal to the alchemy of the day²². Given this background, Casaubon's

¹⁸ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 195-6.

¹⁹ As a conservative intellectual of the Restoration period, Casaubon was a public opponent of the Royal Society and its partisans, and one of his charges against them was the employment of 'the common language of all extravagant Chymists'. Ironically, Casaubon's own antiquarian and humanist approach had more in common with Ashmole, Dee (to whose derision he dedicated an entire book), and even Robert Fludd (whom he heavily criticized), than with the more "mainstream" Baconian elements of the Royal Society. For more detail see Spiller, '*Concerning Natural Experimental Philosophies*', 105-121.

²⁰ Casaubon, *A True and Faithful Relation*, E4v.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, E4r.

²² In his later treatise *On Learning*, Casaubon was more uniformly condemnatory of alchemy as a whole, equating 'an Vniuersitie, consisting of *Chimists*, *Behemists* and *Enthusiasts*' to 'Bedlam', and castigating them as '*natural fooles* [. . .] *Phreneticks*, and *crackbraine*'. Casaubon, *On Learning*, 35.

label “spiritual chymistry” will also serve as a convenient synonym for Principe’s coinage “supernatural alchemy”.

Casaubon’s *True and Faithful Relation* was an important book for Ashmole, being for many years his principal source of data on the operations of Dee and Kelly, in whose work he was abidingly interested. After Casaubon’s death, Ashmole managed to borrow the author’s bound copy of *A True and Faithful Relation* from Nicholas Bernard, and transcribed Casaubon’s marginalia into his own copy²³. In that same year (1672), Ashmole acquired a set of original John Dee manuscripts from Thomas Wale through the agency of Ashmole’s servant Samuel Story²⁴. These papers turned out to be magical diaries that antedated the materials published by Casaubon. Ashmole never published these, but he did write a preface to them, which survived with them²⁵.

The alchemist Edward Kelly (1555-1595?²⁶) is one of the most lauded and notorious visionary mediums or “skryers” in the history of angelic evocation. In his work with the Elizabethan magus John Dee, Kelly was the direct recipient of the various angelic communications, while Dee managed the sessions and recorded the results. There has certainly been dispute over the genuineness of Kelly’s visions and the sincerity of his reports to Dee²⁷. But the actual materials generated through Kelly’s mediumship surpass his likely abilities to fake them. These materials include a set of “keys” that are elaborate invocations in an angelic language, for which Kelly provided both the angelic texts and their English translations. They also include a large assortment of “tables”: letters arranged in tabular grids, from which the names of

²³ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. III, 1282 & n. 4.

²⁴ Ashmole, ‘Preface’ to *Mysteriorum Libri Quinti*, xv-xvi.

²⁵ Ashmole’s preface was published in Peterson’s twentieth century edition of *Mysteriorum Libri Quinti*.

²⁶ The dates are as given by Ashmole, *TCB*, 479 and 484, from Dee’s own data, although the actual date of Kelly’s death has been questioned by modern scholars. For a summary, see Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversations*, 23. Kelly’s name is variously spelled in contemporary accounts (Kelley and Kelly are about equally common), and he first encountered Dee while using the name Talbot, as documented in Dee, *Diaries*, 47, 49.

²⁷ Accusations against Kelly go back at least to the first published account of his sessions with Dee in Casaubon, *True and Faithful Relation*, D3r (1659), where Kelly is accused of being a conjurer of evil spirits, who misrepresented the true nature of his spiritual contacts to Dee. Casaubon’s defamation of Dee delayed a sympathetic book-length biography of the latter until Charlotte Fell Smith, *John Dee*, 91 (1909), pointed out that ‘Dee was by no means the easy dupe of Kelley that he has been called’. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 149 casts Kelly as a ‘fraud who deluded his pious master’, and Clulee, *John Dee’s Natural Philosophy*, 197, 205-6 perpetuates the judgment.

various angels are to be extracted according to complex rules²⁸. Kelly beheld most of the angelic visions in a stone, which Dee recorded as originally having been deposited on his windowsill by the angel Camara (a.k.a. Baglion) in November 1582²⁹. Ashmole's own summary of Kelly's character (derived in part from the latter's horoscope) was that Kelly was 'very *Ingenious*, and a continuall *Searcher*, in the abstruse and difficult *Secrets* of *Philosophy* and *Chemistry*. Yet for all this, he could not escape the hard *Censures* and *Scandals* of those that understood not what he did'. And Ashmole exonerates Kelly from charges of malevolent sorcery, on the basis of 'good and sound *Reasons* (too tedious to be touched here)'³⁰.

Ashmole's investigations disclosed that Kelly 'was first an Apothecary in Worcester'³¹. Kelly's alchemical involvement was extensive, taking place before, during, and after the years of his angelic sessions with Dee. Two alchemical pieces written in English verse by Kelly were published by Ashmole in the latter's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*³². Other known (or alleged) writings of Kelly include a collection of alchemical texts that were published originally in a German edition in 1676³³. Although Dee's social and intellectual status was superior to Kelly's, it is Kelly who merits attention as a spiritual chymist. According to Dee's diaries, it was Kelly who performed a successful 'public demonstration of the philosopher's stone' in Trebona in December 1586³⁴, while Dee confided that he had later learned the alchemical secret from Kelly³⁵. Also, Dee never directly conversed with any of the

²⁸ For a further discussion of the difficulty of dissimulating these angelic visionary materials, see James, *Enochian Evocation*, xv-xviii and xxi. James also points out the significant stylistic differences between Kelly's writings and his visionary accounts, as well as issues of motivation regarding Kelly's attempts to break off his working relationship with Dee.

²⁹ Dee, *Mysteriorum Libri Quinti*, 121. '24th Action, 21. Nov. 1582'. A preserved MS note from Ashmole says that the stone was 'of a lenticular form'. The story is also referenced in Casaubon, *True and Faithful Relation*, D2v.

³⁰ Ashmole, *TCB*, 478-480.

³¹ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. IV, 1436, citing MS Ashm 1790:58. Ashmole had this information from William Lilly, who took it from John Evans, who was supposed to have talked with Kelly's sister.

³² *TCB* includes 'Sir Edward Kelle's Worke' (324-331) and 'Sir Ed: Kelley Concerning the Philosophers Stone' (332-333).

³³ These documents were later collected into the *Deutsches Theatrum Chemicum* of Roth-Scholtz (1732). An English translation of the 1676 text was issued in the late 18th century, with publication attributed to John Lilly and Meric Casaubon, and this translation was republished in 1893 as Waite (ed.), *Alchemical Writings of Edward Kelly*.

³⁴ Dee, *Diaries*, 204.

³⁵ 'May 10, 1589. E.K. did open the great secret to me, God be thanked'. Dee, *Diaries*, 235.

spirits himself, but was dependent on Kelly and other skryers in that respect³⁶. According to Ashmole's notes on Dee's diaries, the angels of the tables governed such topics of alchemical interest as 'Phisick, Mettals, Transformation, the living Creatures of the 4 Elements, comixtion of Naturall things, Locall Mutation [moving from place to place], Mechanical Arts, [and] knowing of Secretts'³⁷.

Kelly's alchemical writings work with the two (pre-Paracelsian) alchemical principles, emphasizing the relationship of mercury and sulphur largely through personification and gender symbolism, and they are dense with citations of earlier alchemical authorities³⁸. The most important and mysterious authority for the alchemy of Kelly and Dee was Saint Dunstan. This saint was the original Abbot of Glastonbury, who later came to be regarded as the patron saint of goldsmiths, and thence assimilated into the myths surrounding the alchemical work. During the early interactions between the two, Kelly sought Dee's assistance in decrypting a mysterious 'book and scroll found in Northwick Hill' by the former³⁹. Some scholars have chosen to identify this book as the enigmatic "Book of Saint Dunstan", but there does not seem to be any positive evidence for doing so⁴⁰. Years later, Dee's diaries mention an incident in which a fire started by an overturned lamp destroyed many manuscripts, including forty leaves of "Extractiones Dunstani" inscribed by Kelly, observing also that the original text was present in the same room but unharmed⁴¹. In one of Dee's very last angelic dialogues, working with the scryer Bartholomew Hickman rather than Kelly, the angel Raphael alluded to an earlier promise of knowledge of the Philosopher's Stone and the Book of Saint Dunstan⁴².

This entry follows various exchanges between Dee and Kelly, with Kelly giving Dee instruction and an alchemical powder.

³⁶ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, 204-205.

³⁷ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. III, 1273-4, citing MS Ashm 1136, 30v.

³⁸ Of all Kelly's writings, only 'The Humid Path' exhibits the Paracelsian *Tria Prima*, but on that basis, among others, I am tempted to exclude it as a pseudepigraphon. It has a program of Platonic and Hermetic philosophy that is absent from the other writings attributed to Kelly, it contains no significant autobiographical references, and it lacks the quasi-scholastic style of other Kelly texts.

³⁹ Dee, *Diaries*, 53-4. Ashmole originally credited reports that the book and accompanying elixir had been found 'in some part of the *Ruines of Glastenbury-Abbey*' (TCB, 481), but decades later he learned the more accurate information from Dee's diaries. (Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 184-185; see also Abraham, 'Introduction', lxi-lxii.)

⁴⁰ Waite's 'Biographical Preface' to Kelly's *Alchemical Writings*, xli, makes this inference explicitly. Editor Edward Fenton indicates it as an assumption in his notes to Dee, *Diaries*, 61.

⁴¹ Dee, *Diaries*, 231-2: '12 December, 1587'.

⁴² *Op. cit.*, 269: '10 July, 1607'.

Ashmole refers to Dunstan as the author of *De occulta philosophia*, the contents of which Ashmole cites through the works of E.G.A.I., also noted as E.A.⁴³. Principe has identified Ashmole's remarks with text from a manuscript called "The Epitome of the Treasure of Health", by Edwardus Generosus⁴⁴. It seems reasonable to assume that E.G.A.I. is "Edwardus Generosus A.I." (*Adeptus Illuminatus*?⁴⁵), and that E.A. is the same "Edwardus Adeptus". There is a further temptation to identify this illuminated adept Edward with Kelly, who is also known as "Edoardus Gelleus"⁴⁶, among the many variants of his name. But Principe points out that the "Epitome" is dated 1562, which if accurate would disqualify Kelly, who was certainly not an alchemical adept at the age of seven!

Kelly began scrying for Dee in 1582, but by 1587 the former's interests were fully concentrated on alchemy, and various tensions had developed between the two men. At this time, the angels informed Kelly that he would be dismissed from service as a spirit medium, and that his skrying gift would be transferred to Dee's juvenile son Arthur. While Arthur's first attempt at mediumship seemed promising, it soon became apparent that he was not up to the task, and the angels and Dee reenlisted Kelly⁴⁷. A year earlier, the young Arthur had been a witness to Kelly's demonstration of the Philosophers' Stone, a memory that he retained throughout his life⁴⁸. In later years, Arthur Dee would take up the alchemical art himself.

Arthur Dee (1579-1652)⁴⁹ wrote *Fasciculus Chemicus* while serving as a court physician in Russia in 1627. Alchemy was at that time relatively unknown in Russia, and Dee was working largely from texts that he had brought with him from England. He sent the Latin text to France for publication⁵⁰. Dee's *Fasciculus Chemicus* has much in common with the earlier writings of Kelly.

⁴³ See above, note 7.

⁴⁴ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 198.

⁴⁵ Waite, *Alchemical Writings of Edward Kelley*, xxxvii indicates that Kelly claimed these same titles for himself.

⁴⁶ Editor Fenton's note regarding Kelly's alchemical tracts, in Dee, *Diaries*, 241.

⁴⁷ Abraham, 'Introduction' to *Arthur Dee: Fasciculus Chemicus*, xvi. John Dee's account of Arthur's seership is in his *Diaries*, 209-213, & 227. For Ashmole's knowledge of this sequence of events, see Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. IV, 1757-8, where Ashmole provides an account of the matter in a letter to Anthony Wood.

⁴⁸ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. IV, 1756-1759 provides Ashmole's secondhand account of Arthur's childhood experiences. Arthur Dee's testimony is criticized by Waite, *Secret Tradition in Alchemy*, 233-235.

⁴⁹ For birth date, see Dee, *Diaries*, 5. For death, Appleby, 'Arthur Dee and Johannes Bánfi Hunyades', 100.

⁵⁰ Figurovski, 'The Alchemist and Physician Arthur Dee', 46.

It maintains the quasi-scholastic style of referencing authorities throughout. And although the element of salt has crept into the discourse, the mercury-sulphur dyad is still preeminent, and Paracelsus is not cited by name. One source of interest that is repeatedly cited is “Dunstan”, to wit, passages from “Tractatus Maximi Domini Dunstani Eposcopi Cantuariensis, veri philosophi, de Lapide philosophorum”. This manuscript, which is preserved in Arthur Dee’s own hand, is bound with his own unpublished *Arca Arcanorum* (1631)⁵¹. The obvious inference is that the “Tractatus” is a copy of the Book of Saint Dunstan, which Dee had received through his father from Kelly⁵².

Another, more sensational inheritance of Arthur’s is alleged in a document inscribed on the back of a 1591 parchment deed that accompanied a crystal purported to be the stone delivered to John Dee by the angels in 1582. The first part of the document is written by the physician and astrologer Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654) and dated 1651⁵³. Culpeper claimed to have been given the stone by Arthur Dee in 1640, and to have subsequently used it for medical purposes, but he was ‘afflicted by a demoniacal apparition which exercised itself to lewdness’ as a side effect. So he gave it up, according to the accompanying document. A further note on the same sheet was written in 1658 by the astrologer William Lilly (1602-1681)⁵⁴, who claimed to have bought the stone from Culpeper’s widow, and collaborated with Elias Ashmole to conjure ‘a female devil lewd and monstrous’ by its aid⁵⁵! Despite its supernatural incredibility, this story is circumstantially feasible. Culpeper, Lilly, and Ashmole were among a half-dozen contemporary English champions of astrology listed by John Webster in his *Academiarum Examen* (1654)⁵⁶, and were certainly known to one another. Ashmole in fact enjoyed a friendship of several decades with Lilly, and lodged at Lilly’s house repeatedly in the period 1655-1657⁵⁷.

Elias Ashmole’s English translation of *Fasciculus Chemicus* was the first alchemical text that Ashmole saw into print; it appeared in 1650, two years prior to *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*. During the process of publishing

⁵¹ Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus*, 28-29. Abraham, ‘Introduction’, lxi-lxii. *Arca Arcanorum* and the Dunstan ‘Tractatus’ constitute British Library MS Sloane 1876.

⁵² Waite, *The Secret Tradition in Alchemy*, 232-3 n. 4 provides some further details and doubts about the nature and provenance of the “Tractatus” MS.

⁵³ For a brief biographical note on Culpeper, see Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. II, 659.

⁵⁴ Lilly’s birth and death dates per Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. III, 1114 and nn. 1-4.

⁵⁵ The account of the stone and its documentation is from Appleby, ‘Arthur Dee and Johannes Báñfi Hunyades’, 96.

⁵⁶ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. II, 659.

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, vol. I, 115-119.

it, Ashmole established a correspondence with Arthur Dee; the latter died before the two could ever meet in person⁵⁸. But Ashmole was later able to develop a correspondence with Dee's friend Thomas Browne, who provided him with biographical information on Arthur and John Dee⁵⁹. A list of the presentation copies of Ashmole's edition of *Fasciculus Chemicus* includes Arthur Dee himself, as well as William Backhouse⁶⁰.

William Backhouse (1593-1662) was Ashmole's personal alchemical mentor⁶¹. Backhouse was interested in esoteric subjects from his youth. C.H. Josten suggests that Backhouse's alchemical interests, like Arthur Dee's, may have originated with his father, the gentleman Samuel Backhouse (1532-1626)⁶²; and he speculates that in his late teens, Backhouse may have met Robert Fludd, the English advocate for Rosicrucianism, and also suggests that in his early twenties he may have traveled in France, and obtained French alchemical literature there⁶³. Backhouse wrote little himself, however, and the brief alchemical poem "The Magistery" (1633) which appears in Ashmole's *Theatrum* is the earliest work credited to him⁶⁴. He did translate some alchemical poetry from French, including *La Fontaine des Amoureux de Science* by Jean de la Fontaine, *Les Remonstrances de Nature à l'Alchimiste errant* by Jean de Meun, *Le Vray Livre De La Pierre Philosophale* of 'Synesius the Greek Abbot', and *The Golden Fleece or The Flowre of Treasures* (for which the French title and author are unknown)⁶⁵.

There is no firm date for Ashmole's initial meeting with Backhouse. The first appearance of Backhouse in Ashmole's diaries is in 1651, and suggests at least a prior acquaintance⁶⁶. At that time, the two men had been living within ten miles of each other for the previous four years⁶⁷. The occasion of the 1651 diary entry was that Backhouse 'caused [Ashmole] to call him Father thence forward', indicating the alchemical adoption of Ashmole by the older man. Ashmole later drew up an astrological chart for the event, and

⁵⁸ Ashmole's letter and Dee's reply are reproduced in Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. II, 502-5.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, vol. IV, 1371.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, vol. II, 521-2.

⁶¹ For dates of birth and death, see Josten, 'William Backhouse of Swallowfield', 2 & 26.

⁶² *Op. cit.*, 1, 3 and 33 n. 101.

⁶³ *Op. cit.*, 4.

⁶⁴ Backhouse, in *TCB*, 342-3. The poem is credited to W.B., but Ashmole noted 'Backhouse' in full in his own copy (Josten, 'William Backhouse of Swallowfield', 5, referencing Ashm. MSS 971, 972).

⁶⁵ Josten, 'William Backhouse of Swallowfield', 27-31, citing Ashm. MSS 58, 1395.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. II, 567-9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 'William Backhouse of Swallowfield', 16.

composed a poem commemorating it⁶⁸. In his notes to Norton's *Ordinall*, Ashmole explains the idea of a catena of alchemists created through adoptive filiation. Ashmole writes in explication of Norton's 'Myne heire unto this Art I will you make'.

There has ever beene a continued *Succession* of *Philosophers* in all *Ages*, although the *heedlesse world* hath seldome taken notice of them; For the *Auncients* usually (before they dyed) *Adopted* one or other for their *Sonns*, whom they knew well fitted with such like *qualities* [. . .]

He then discusses the weighty oaths of confidentiality imposed on such 'whom they conceived in all respects worthy of their *Adoption*', and contrasts such pupils with the '*Legitimate Children*', which were the alchemists' own writings, 'being the *issue* of their *Braine*'⁶⁹.

In February of 1652, Backhouse related a tale of Edward Kelly to Ashmole. Crediting the information to an anonymous 'Pursevant', Backhouse told of Dee and Kelly's meeting with an Italian monk in Prague, who had a black powder that could whither vegetation and kill pigs on contact. With Dee threatening to inform authorities of the poisoner, Kelly and the monk traveled to Poland, where the monk taught Kelly secrets and gave him a powder that served to transform flint into diamond⁷⁰. This communication from Backhouse demonstrates that he shared Ashmole's interest in Kelly as an alchemist. Much later, Ashmole was able to discount this entire story about Kelly and the monk, on the basis of the Dee manuscripts that he had acquired⁷¹.

It was nearly eight months from Ashmole's adoption before he first visited Backhouse at the latter's Swallowfield House⁷². Another three months later, Ashmole wrote that 'my father Backhouse opened himselfe very freely, touch^s the great secret'⁷³. Finally, regarding an occasion that Ashmole again considered worthy of astrological analysis, Ashmole's diary observes:

1653, May. 13. My father Backhouse lying sick in Fleetestreete over ag^t: S^t Dunstons Church, & not knowing whether he should live or dye, about eleven o'clock, told me in Silables the true Matter of the Philosophers Stone: w^{ch} he bequeathed to me as a Legacy⁷⁴.

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*, 17-18.

⁶⁹ Ashmole, *TCB*, 440-441.

⁷⁰ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. II, 603-5, citing Ashm. MS 1790, 60-61.

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, vol. II, 605.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 'William Backhouse of Swallowfield', 20 n. 75a, citing Ashm. MS 374, 133v.

⁷³ *Op. cit.*, 20, citing Ashm. MS 1136, 24v and 27.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, 21, citing Ashm. MS 1136, 29. The reference to St. Dunstan's is eye-catching!

By this time, Ashmole's *Theatrum* had already gone to press, complete with its "Prolegomena", which was influenced by Backhouse in at least one respect, according to Ashmole: 'Concerning the Oake in New Forrest mentioned in my Prolegomena, I had first notice of it from W^m Backhouse of Swallowfield'⁷⁵. The "Oake" in question was in Ashmole's description of the Vegetable Stone⁷⁶. Ashmole probably began writing the "Prolegomena" in the month immediately following his adoption by Backhouse⁷⁷, and within the following weeks, Ashmole observed in his diary that the adoption was cemented because Backhouse 'had communicated so many secrets to [him]'⁷⁸. It is credible to infer that the expressions of supernatural alchemy in the "Prolegomena" were influenced by Backhouse. Although fearing death in 1653, Backhouse recovered and survived another nine years, during which he and Ashmole continued to be in contact. But true to Backhouse's motto *Sache cache* ('know how to conceal'), there is little positive evidence for his own alchemical opinions. He was a retiring man who never held public office, and he published nothing under his own name, with respect to chymistry or any other topic⁷⁹.

3. *A Contemporary: Robert Boyle*

There does not appear to be evidence for any private dialogue or correspondence between Ashmole and Robert Boyle (1627-1691), although both were active in the intellectual networks of scientific recruitment during the Interregnum and Restoration periods. In particular, both were correspondents of Samuel Hartlib. As a Puritan and a partisan of Parliament, Hartlib was a key figure in promulgating Baconianism, and in organizing many of the individuals who would form the emerging British scientific establishment. Boyle was introduced to Hartlib in 1647, and the two quickly recognized their common philosophy of utilitarian utopianism, promoting scientific investigation for the general improvement of the human condition⁸⁰. In the following years, Boyle became a trustee of Hartlib's Agency for the Advancement of Universal Learning, a society inspired by the "Solomon's House" of Bacon's *New*

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, 21, citing Ashm. MS 971, 3v.

⁷⁶ Ashmole, *TCB*, B1r.

⁷⁷ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 77, and vol. II, 572.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 'William Backhouse of Swallowfield', 20, citing Ashm. MS 1136, 24v.

⁷⁹ *Op. cit.*, 25.

⁸⁰ Webster, *The Great Instauration*, 61.

Atlantis, as well as the utopian writings of Comenius and Andreae⁸¹. Boyle's first published paper on chemistry appeared in Hartlib's *Chymical, Medicinal and Chyrurgical Addresses* (1655), a diverse anthology of essays that was published for a market primed by Ashmole's *Theatrum*⁸². Ashmole was far less engaged with Hartlib, but he did correspond with him during the 1650's⁸³.

In addition to their shared association with Hartlib, both Ashmole and Boyle were involved with the beginnings of the Royal Society, which in large part grew out of the work of the Hartlib circle⁸⁴. Again, Boyle was more central to this venue, where he was named as a member of the Society's governing Council under both its First and Second Charters⁸⁵, and became one of the original dozen actively attending core members of the Society's early years⁸⁶. Whereas Boyle is often characterized as a "dominant" member in the organization of the Royal Society, Ashmole was merely a founding member by invitation, and his real participation in the Royal Society appears to have been fairly limited⁸⁷. To sum the known relationship of the men, it seems unlikely that they knew each other, and nearly certain that they knew of each other.

Boyle's writings demonstrate an adherence to the premise of supernatural alchemy that is at least as well defined as Ashmole's own. One document that exhibits the issue strongly is "Mr. Boyle's papers dictated by him, copied by Dr. Burnet, relating to his Life"⁸⁸. In these memoranda, confided to Burnet after decades of close friendship, Boyle provided wide-ranging autobiographical information at the same time that he showed a considerable preoccupation with the phenomena of spirit evocation. Half of the total five pages of "Mr. Boyle's papers" are dedicated to recounting a handful of anecdotes about the magical conjuration of spirits. One tale concerned the encounter of a chymist with a Catholic clergyman in France. The latter summoned spirits in the forms of wolves and women, to answer questions about the

⁸¹ *Op. cit.*, 97-98.

⁸² *Op. cit.*, 281, 303-305, and Maddison, *Life of Boyle*, p. 86.

⁸³ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 78 & 111, vol. II, 597 & n. 3, 684 & n. 13.

⁸⁴ Webster, *The Great Instauration*, 501-503.

⁸⁵ Maddison, *Life of Boyle*, 100.

⁸⁶ Webster, *The Great Instauration*, 90 and table on 92.

⁸⁷ For Boyle's role, see Webster, *The Great Instauration*, 496, and Maddison, *Life of Boyle*, 98-100, 112-114, 129, 132, 134, 140. For Ashmole, see Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 135-7, 182.

⁸⁸ These memoranda constitute British Library Add. MS 4229, 60-63, and are summarized and quoted by Hunter in 'Alchemy, magic and moralism'. The relevant portions are also mentioned in Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 190-191.

Philosopher's Stone. The same chymist, after relating the story to Boyle, had offered Boyle the opportunity to scry spirits in a glass of water, which Boyle declined. In the second anecdote, attested by another Fellow of the Royal Society, a priest in Italy had a magic glass in which a nine-year-old medium saw and conversed with spirits who resisted being interrogated about the Philosopher's Stone. Yet another gentleman informer of Boyle's presented a magic glass of his own and invited Boyle to 'satisfy himself' in obtaining visions, and Boyle again declined, although sorely tempted. In a fourth anecdote, Boyle told some hearsay of a pregnant woman who had clairvoyantly beheld a naval battle in a glass or basin of water⁸⁹. Although these stories connect alchemical knowledge with evoked spirits in the manner demonstrated by Kelly's work, they do not quite reach the doctrine of the Angelical Stone.

The alchemical substance as a means or instrument to communicate with angels is the central issue of Boyle's "Dialogue on the Converse with Angels aided by the Philosophers' Stone", in which he discusses the proposition that 'a red powder should draw and procure such a familiarity' with angels⁹⁰. While the dialogue form of this essay obscures Boyle's personal conclusions, there is no doubt that he wrote it to address the central suppositions of spiritual chymistry. He puts it in very specific terms, spoken by the dialogue character of Eleutherius:

I confess to you Arnobius that it seems somewhat unaccountable and therefore incredible that a little powder that is as truly corporeall as powder of post^e or of brick should be able to attract or invite incorporeall and intelligent beings that have neither need nor use of gold[,] to converse familiarly with those that perhaps by chance or fraud have made themselves possessors of a few drams or ounces of Transmuting powder[;] for what affinity or congruity can there be betwixt the stupid and inanimate Elixir and a rationall and immortal spirit that these happy beings should delight to hover about it, and for its sake should be quite contrary to the custome if not also to the politie of those blessed spirits [to] discover themselves in a sensible way to the chymist that carries it about him and converse familiarly with a sinfull and perhaps too, an ignorant mortall from whose conversation what advantage can we suppose they can expect to reap⁹¹?

As in the Burnet memoranda, Boyle provides anecdotal support for supernatural alchemy, having one character claim to 'know severall persons divers

⁸⁹ Hunter, 'Alchemy, magic and moralism', 388-391.

⁹⁰ Boyle, 'Dialogue on the Converse with Angels', 310.

⁹¹ *Op. cit.*, 313.

of them Physitians and men of parts and not superstitious but rather the contrary who have had converse with spirits even in visible shapes⁹². Another character answers him with a more specific story concerning a gentleman mathematician who was ‘rescued from Athesim [*sic*]’ by demonstrations of converse with spirits⁹³. Writing as the speaker Sophronius in his ‘Discourse of Things above Reason’, Boyle also speculates that ‘some of the angels (at least the good ones)’ may be ‘by nature of a higher order than human souls’, and classes such beings with God as ‘*supra-intellectual*’⁹⁴.

Just as Ashmole accepted the doctrine of Hermetic “adoption” as the means by which the alchemists propagated a secret tradition, Boyle was convinced of the existence of mysterious adepts who maintained the true chemical lore. In his *Sceptical Chymist*, Boyle advertised his willingness to submit to instruction from such a source⁹⁵. His quest eventually led to his involvement with a series of purported adepts, some of whom were certainly spurious, but others of whom were evidently considered quite genuine by Boyle⁹⁶. He directly associated a catena of adepts with the work of supernatural alchemy, writing in his “Dialogue on the Converse with Angels” among the “Arguments for the affirmative”:

That tis not difficult for the Adepti to discriminate good spirits from evill ones. That such persons as the Adepti may well be supposed to be under a peculiar conduct and to have particular priviledges⁹⁷.

Boyle’s alchemy shows some other incidental similarities to chymical writings of Ashmole and the predecessors discussed above. Like Edward Kelly and Arthur Dee, Boyle’s writings evince a resistance to Paracelsianism, preferring a system of two principles to the then-usual addition of salt to the principles of mercury and sulfur. Despite his interest in pharmacy, Boyle opposed the “iatrochemical” trajectory of Paracelsianism, and kept within the chrysopoetic tradition of alchemy⁹⁸. The popular notion of Boyle’s attitude towards secrecy is founded on his work in sharing scientific knowledge through the Royal Society, and his denunciations in the *Sceptical Chymist*

⁹² *Op. cit.*, 315.

⁹³ *Op. cit.*, 315-6.

⁹⁴ Boyle, ‘Discourse of Things above Reason’, 211.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, *Sceptical Chymist*, [xiii].

⁹⁶ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 91-137 provides a great amount of detail on these encounters. See also Maddison, *Life of Boyle*, 166-176 for the engagement with Georges Pierre.

⁹⁷ Boyle, ‘Dialogue on the Converse with Angels’, 310-311.

⁹⁸ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 36-46.

against ‘affected Equivocations’, where he seems to set himself against the sort of obscure allegories that Ashmole had published in the *Theatrum*. But Principe has amply shown that this attitude of Boyle’s never really excluded the specifically chrysopoetic traditions of confidentiality and obscurity, and that these are acknowledged and demonstrated in his works, including the *Sceptical Chymist* itself⁹⁹.

4. Seeking Successors: Robert Plot, John Pordage

Given the shared emphasis by Ashmole and Boyle on the confidential reception of the alchemical secrets, it is only natural to inquire, to whom might Ashmole personally have transmitted a recipe for the Angelical Stone, or the basis for seeking one? Did Ashmole adopt a son in the Art as Backhouse had adopted him? The most conspicuous suggestion in answer to this question has been to name Dr. Robert Plot (1640-1697)¹⁰⁰.

Plot was the first professor of chemistry at Oxford, holding that position from 1683 to 1689¹⁰¹. During approximately the same period, lasting only a couple of years longer, he served as the original keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, answerable to Ashmole himself in this capacity¹⁰². During this period, Plot dedicated a presentation copy of his book *De Origine Fontium* to Ashmole, with a letter expressing Plot’s debt to Ashmole’s favor and encouragement¹⁰³. There is some evidence that Ashmole was not particularly pleased with Plot’s performance as keeper, however¹⁰⁴. Plot also spent two years as secretary of the Royal Society from 1682 to 1684. There was also communication between Plot and Boyle, the latter providing Plot with suggestions for chemical furnaces that were installed by Plot in the basement of the Ashmolean Museum¹⁰⁵.

Plot was himself an alchemist, although he did not advertise his interest in the manner that Ashmole had, and it remained a fact largely unknown even to his biographers¹⁰⁶. Nevertheless, many of Plot’s alchemical papers

⁹⁹ *Op. cit.*, 57-8, 148-9. See also Hunter, ‘Alchemy, magic, moralism’, 406.

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, ‘Alchemical Papers of Dr. Robert Plot’, 67.

¹⁰¹ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 255, 293.

¹⁰² *Op. cit.*, vol. I, 250-5, 292-7.

¹⁰³ *Op. cit.*, vol. I, 261; vol. IV, 1751.

¹⁰⁴ *Op. cit.*, vol. I, 292; vol. IV, 1865.

¹⁰⁵ *Op. cit.*, vol. I, 255.

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, ‘Alchemical Papers of Dr. Robert Plot’, 67, 71.

were preserved as British Museum MS Sloane 3646¹⁰⁷. Particularly noteworthy are the “Draft agreements by which an Author knowing the alchemical Secrets is to entrust them to a person who shall put them into practice”, in which Plot appears to be offering to place his own secret chymical knowledge at the disposal of suitable investor in exchange for ‘a deposition of three hundred and fiftie pounds’¹⁰⁸. Plot had apparently acquired the secret knowledge in question sometime around 1677, and the “Draft agreements” appear to date from roughly the beginning of his work as museum keeper and chemistry professor circa 1683¹⁰⁹.

In his treatment of Plot’s alchemical papers, F. Sherwood Taylor proposes that Plot’s secret had come from Backhouse via Ashmole. Taylor interprets Plot’s reference to ‘our English Anonymous’ as Backhouse, and points out that Plot, like Backhouse and Ashmole both, used the specific (though hardly unique) phrase ‘true matter’ to indicate the alchemical arcanum¹¹⁰. Ashmole’s biographer Josten emphatically disagrees with Taylor, observing that ‘there was at no time a close personal relationship’ between Ashmole and Plot that could have facilitated the younger man’s Hermetic adoption¹¹¹. In any case, even if the secret prized by Plot came from Ashmole, it does not appear to have been a secret of the Angelical Stone. Plot’s secret is alleged to be efficacious for ‘Medicine and riches’¹¹², but he never mentions angels or spirits as entities or phenomena associated with the Elixir. Instead, his alchemical preoccupation appears to have been with “menstrua”, fluids that could infuse substances with properties originally extrinsic to the substance in question¹¹³. In marked contrast to Ashmole and Boyle, Plot seems to have had no interest in any metaphysical dimension of the alchemical work.

Another figure who presents an intriguing prospect as a possible recipient of Ashmole’s secret is John Pordage (1608-1681)¹¹⁴. Although Ashmole was a few years Pordage’s junior, the younger man was a patron to the older, appointing Pordage as the Rector of Bradfield around 1650¹¹⁵. Ashmole was favorably impressed by Pordage’s interest and knowledge in astrology. Although

¹⁰⁷ *Op. cit.*, 67-69.

¹⁰⁸ *Op. cit.*, 69-74.

¹⁰⁹ *Op. cit.*, 75.

¹¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, 73, 75-76.

¹¹¹ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 103.

¹¹² Taylor, ‘Alchemical Papers of Dr. Robert Plot’, 71.

¹¹³ *Op. cit.*, 68-69.

¹¹⁴ Dates from Versluis, *Wisdom’s Children*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 109.

trained for medicine, Pordage sought a career in the church, becoming a vicar at St. Lawrence's, Reading, before his association with Ashmole¹¹⁶. Pordage's abiding significance was as an important English popularizer of the spiritualist ideas of Jacob Boehme, and some of these ideas (or antagonistic distortions of them) contributed to his removal from his Bradfield post in 1654 after being condemned on 65 charges of heresy, blasphemy and intercourse with spirits, news which reached his patron while Ashmole was residing with Backhouse and tutoring the children at Swallowfield¹¹⁷. Pordage spent the remainder of his life ministering to his fellow theosophers and writing about his own experiences and doctrines outside the sanctions of official religion, while supporting himself in part through work as a medical doctor and herbalist¹¹⁸.

In his treatise *Innocencie Appearing*, Pordage related that one of his co-religionists, a Mrs. Flavel, had a vision of 'the Philosopher's Stone, that so many learned men had sought after'¹¹⁹. Other writings compounded this association, such as the letter-essay "A Philosophical Epistle on the True Stone of Wisdom to One Who Is Earnestly Digging", in which Pordage counsels that 'it is not an easy thing to make the holy stone of power, even if we have attained the true *materia*'¹²⁰. Pordage was even more of a visionary than an alchemist. He claimed to have seen angels and other spirits, and to have experienced their routine presence in his household. Unlike the scrying in stones and glasses described by Dee and Boyle, Pordage and his friends were able to directly encounter these entities by means of "the inward eye". He recounted that

There appeared then to our inward sight multitudes almost innumerable, of pure Angelical spirits, in figurative bodies, which were clear as the morning-star, and transparent as Christal, these were *Mahanaim*, or the Lords host, appearing all in manly forms, full of Beauty and Majesty, sparkling like Diamonds, and sending forth a tincture like the swift rays, and hot beams of the Sun, which we powerfully felt to be refreshing of our souls, and enlivening of our bodies¹²¹.

As tempting as it might be to correlate these features of Pordage's writings and experiences to the mystical alchemy of his patron Ashmole, it is highly

¹¹⁶ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 106.

¹¹⁷ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. II, 667-8. For Pordage's trial and removal, see Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, 55-57; and Versluis, *Wisdom's Children*, 45-47.

¹¹⁸ Versluis, *Wisdom's Book*, 66.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Wisdom's Children*, 45.

¹²⁰ *Op. cit.*, 67.

¹²¹ Quoted in Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, 163.

unlikely that there was a transfer of the Angelic Stone in this case. To the extent that Pordage did use alchemical language, it was largely received from Paracelsus (who was *not* an alchemical authority for the Ashmolean supernaturalists) via Boehme, and even then it was a matter of borrowing images and expressions, rather than laboratory recipes¹²². Where a text like “Kelle’s Worke” uses “Man and Wife” as a metaphor for sulfur and mercury in chrysopoeia¹²³, Pordage’s ‘magical union of the fire with the water’ is understood as a reference to Adam’s androgyny, and the ‘seed and matter of your Stone’ are human masculinity and femininity¹²⁴. Although Pordage demonstrated an interest in natural philosophy, in keeping with the ideas of Boehme and Paracelsus, he does not seem to have placed any emphasis on alchemy as a form of empirical knowledge after the manner of Ashmole or Boyle. Instead, his work belongs to a theosophical tradition that is concerned only to illustrate the spiritual condition of the individual through alchemical tropes¹²⁵.

Moreover, circumstances that are at first suggestive do not seem to bear out the idea of Ashmole instructing Pordage, or *vice versa* for that matter. Pordage’s first angelic visions came in 1649, at a time when he had already been introduced to Ashmole, but before Ashmole had begun to learn secrets from Backhouse¹²⁶. B.J. Gibbons writes that ‘there is no evidence of a close relationship’ between Pordage and Ashmole, and the notion is borne out by the observation that in 1686 Ashmole admitted to not having learned of Pordage’s death until years after the fact¹²⁷.

5. *Some Tentative Conclusions*

The earliest recognizable figures involved with spiritual chymistry in England are characterized by the overlap between scrying for angelic communications on one hand and alchemical chrysopoeia on the other. The term “stone” in such a context acquires a special ambivalence, alternately referring to the shew-stone used by the visionary medium and to the philosopher’s stone

¹²² *Op. cit.*, 44 & n. 8.

¹²³ Kelly, ‘Sir Edward Kelle’s Worke’, 325 ff.

¹²⁴ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 109, explicating Pordage’s *Innocencie Appearing* and ‘A Philosophical Epistle on the True Stone of Wisdom’.

¹²⁵ Versluis, *Wisdom’s Children*, 53-55.

¹²⁶ *Op. cit.*, 37, 41.

¹²⁷ Letter to Anthony Wood, in Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. IV, 1821.

applied in the transmutation of metals. Saint Dunstan is a recurring figure in these stories, whose person mythically conflates alchemy with the pious and heavenly. All of the historical individuals who present themselves as immediate sources for Ashmole's doctrines of supernatural alchemy are Englishmen, and all seem to have taken significant, yet differing, sojourns on the Continent: Edward Kelly in Bohemia, Arthur Dee in Russia, William Backhouse in France. One narrative effect of their travels was to associate them with the "magical" auras of Christian traditions outside of England¹²⁸. Whether or not any of these men would have subscribed to the idea of the Angelical Stone as Ashmole expressed it, all seem to have made important contributions to its credibility.

But it is not until the work of Ashmole and Boyle that we can firmly associate the spirit evocation of supernatural alchemy with known historical authors. These two men held to similar doctrines regarding spiritual chymistry, but they were evidently not correspondents or collaborators. Both were intellectual luminaries of the period, although Ashmole appealed to the antiquarian and romantic sensibilities of his peers, and Boyle to the investigative and utopian ones. Between the publication of Ashmole's "Prolegomenon" and Boyle's aggressive networking in pursuit of alchemical knowledge, it seems likely that each of them would have shared the ideas of mystical chymistry with many other alchemists of their day, and it may have been a thesis widely but quietly considered¹²⁹. In the end, however, it did not endure. Boyle seems to have resisted any firsthand engagement, and remained deeply ambivalent about whether it would corrupt him to practice, let alone to teach such operations¹³⁰. Ashmole must have felt a sense of obligation to continue the chain of instruction he believed himself to have received, but if either Pordage or Plot received any intimations from Ashmole, it does not seem to be reflected in their work. To the extent that alchemy and spirit evocation continued into the 18th century, they seem to have done so as distinct "occult sciences", without the hybridization of the Angelical Stone.

It may be that the period of revolution and restoration in England was particularly suited to the formulation of mystical alchemy as a pursuit. Charles

¹²⁸ Cf. Hunter, 'Alchemy, magic, moralism', 391-392 & nn. 8-9, regarding Boyle's association of spirit evocation with Roman Catholicism. The notion of cultural nostalgia that Hunter takes from Keith Thomas on this score is particularly applicable to the antiquarian Ashmole.

¹²⁹ In this connection, consider again the 1660 MS regarding the *Lapis Angelicus*, as well as the 1680 publication of *De Manna benedicto*.

¹³⁰ Hunter, 'Alchemy, magic, moralism', 392-395; Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 204-205.

Webster's *Great Instauration* discusses the dynamic effects of English Puritanism on the changing intellectual climate of those times. He points out the manner in which the religious and political conflicts energized apocalyptic and millennial ideas. Webster emphasizes the eschatological dimension of apocalypticism, with an emphasis on the exegetical work done with the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation¹³¹. Samuel Hartlib, associated with Boyle and Ashmole alike, was a disseminator of millennialist treatments, from Mede's *Clavis Apocalyptica* to Potter's "On the Number 666"¹³². Spiritual alchemy can be seen as a product of the complementary phenomenological aspect of apocalypticism, in which angelic visions are considered to be the preeminent medium of religious revelation. Indeed, Revelation 2:17 could be read as alchemical intimation: 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth [it]'¹³³. Certainly, this visionary apocalypticism was central to the work of Pordage and his fellow Behmenists in their work during the period of mystical chymistry¹³⁴.

For Puritans, Anglicans and Catholics alike, the repeated disruption of existing religious institutions in 17th century England created an atmosphere in which there was a widespread worry that "atheism" (broadly understood as the rejection of accustomed religious doctrines, rather than a specific thorough denial of God) would threaten the foundations of society. The objective demonstration of spiritual entities was a popular gambit for the refutation of atheism, and one that provided a convincing motivation for Boyle's interest in spiritual chymistry as a contribution to the welfare of society¹³⁵. The emerging Baconian scientific institutions of the period were dedicated to useful knowledge and technology with the aim of general social betterment. Thus they partook of a paradox: such "scientific" pioneers as Boyle and Newton worried about a mechanistic rift between matter and spirit, possibly seeing alchemy as a "middle-term" to reconcile natural philosophy and theology¹³⁶.

¹³¹ Webster, *The Great Instauration*, 4-31, 178 f., 505.

¹³² *Op. cit.*, 32-33.

¹³³ Note the relationship here to the title of the tract *De Manna benedicto*.

¹³⁴ Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 208-209.

¹³⁵ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 201-205.

¹³⁶ *Op. cit.*, 205-208 for the "middle-term" proposal applied to Boyle. The central thesis of Dobbs' *Janus Faces of Genius* is that alchemy served to coordinate the physical and metaphysical interests of Newton. Westfall, *Never at Rest*, 281-309 demonstrates that Newton never rejected alchemical experimentation in favor of "rational chemistry". See also Westfall, 'Newton and alchemy', 322, in which he discusses Newton's alchemy as resistance to the atheistic implications of mechanical philosophy.

But the traditional secrecy of alchemy kept its influence limited, and the growing public and collegial aspects of the natural sciences aggravated the institutional and intellectual polarization between knowledge of God and knowledge of nature.

Thus by the end of the century this polarization was well underway in England, so that although one might easily find secretive laboratory chemistry (“alchemy”) on the one hand, or mystically symbolized theology (equally “alchemy”) on the other, there was no longer any hopeful prospect for their synthesis in mystical chymistry. These two divergent paths might be conveniently characterized by the alchemies of Drs. Plot and Pordage respectively. Modern histories of alchemy, popular and scholarly, have often been handicapped by a tendency to characterize either of these types as a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the other, on the assumption that there was a “true” alchemy which was essentially proto-scientific or quasi-religious. This cleavage is even more fundamental than the division into various “schools” mentioned by Principe, a schismatic effect predictable of any sort of secrecy-privileging discourse. Only in the most recent generation of scholarship on alchemy, exemplified by Dodd’s study of Newton, Principe’s work on Boyle, and Newman’s treatment of Starkey, have the signals of the alchemists started to emerge from the noise of the two major interpretive frameworks, so that individual schools can be distinguished and considered in their own contexts. In the case of the “supernatural school”, its own idiosyncrasies and the dynamism of its social context make it an enigma worthy of continued investigation.

Coda: A Hypothesis of the Stone

The paper to which this section is appended has been a consideration of the Angelical Stone as an *idea*, rather than an actual technology. The idea could exist independently of any actual Stone, and deserves consideration whether or not there was one. But it is not fitting to dismissively rule that the Angelical Stone was only a chimera, simply because the idea seems to us—as it did to Boyle—‘somewhat unaccountable and therefore incredible’. Even if Boyle and Ashmole as its clearest expositors lacked the secret of the Stone, it is not impossible that either of them should have become convinced of its existence by someone who was able to provide them with testimony that happened to be genuine. Combining certain features of the accounts given by Ashmole and Boyle can provide a provocative picture of the Angelical Stone.

Ashmole in the “Prolegomena” seems to indicate that the Angelical Stone was used by being eaten: he says that it can be discerned by being ‘*Tasted only*’, and that ‘*St. Dunston* calls it the *Food of Angels*’¹³⁷. Alongside this implication we can set a miscellaneous dialogue fragment from the Royal Society Boyle Papers, in which Boyle remarks, ‘how utterly Improbable it is, that druggs, which are but materiall things . . . should have the power to engage either evil or good Angells, which are granted to be immateriall beings’¹³⁸. This description of the angel-engaging potential of ‘druggs’ uses remarkably similar language to that in the ‘Dialogue on Spirits’ describing the ‘unaccountable and therefore incredible’ effects of ‘a little powder’. With these references alone, one can hardly be faulted for wondering if the pharmacopoeia might have offered to such alchemists a drug that could induce visions of angelic beings or other spirits.

Turning to more contemporary documentation, the existence of visionary drugs seems to be a well-established fact, with evidence beginning in Aldous Huxley’s accounts of his mescaline use in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, and culminating (though hardly terminating) in the massive outpouring of the psychedelic counterculture in the 1960’s and 70’s. From a sample of 206 “psychedelic sessions” that they conducted, administering LSD-25 and mescaline to a variety of subjects, researchers Masters and Houston reported that fully 96% reported ‘religious imagery of some kind’, while the majority (58%) encountered animate religious figures, including gods, saints, angels, and devils. Although these figures may seem somewhat high, and could easily reflect a bias involved in the “trip guiding” techniques of the experimenters or their interpretive categories, it is hard to imagine that their bias could exceed that of a pious alchemist anticipating angelic visions¹³⁹.

Mescaline, derived from an American cactus, was unknown in Europe before the 20th century. LSD was a new laboratory invention circa 1940, and it may be a strain to suppose its derivation from the ergot fungus under the more primitive conditions of 17th century chemistry. A third popular modern visionary drug is the psychoactive mushroom. Colorful self-reporting on animate, personified mushroom visions is available in the testimony of Dennis and Terrance McKenna, discussing their experiences smoking tryptamine-bearing mushrooms.

¹³⁷ Ashmole, *TCB*, B1v. Again, the title of *De Manna benedicto* appears to involve a consistent allusion.

¹³⁸ Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 207 and n. 104.

¹³⁹ R.E.L. Masters and Jean Houston, *Varieties of the Psychedelic Experience*, 265.

We especially refer to the apparently autonomous and intelligent, chaotically mercurial and mischievous machine elves encountered in the trance state, strange teachers whose marvelous singing makes intricate toys out of the air and out of their own continually transforming body geometries. This spectacle of more than Oriental splendor is the characteristic, even unvarying manner in which this experience presents itself¹⁴⁰.

And they also allege other phenomena which could be interpreted as angelic visitation, in different descriptions of their ‘essential schizophrenia or classic shamanic trance’ under the influence of *stropharia cubensis* (psilocybin):

We could feel the presence of some invisible hyperspatial entity, an ally, which seemed to be observing and sometimes exerting influence on the situation to keep us moving gently toward an experimental resolution of the ideas we were generating . . . we were led to speculate that the role of the presence was somehow like that of an anthropologist, come to give humanity the keys to galactarian citizenship¹⁴¹.

Just as their drug experiences led the anthropologist McKenna to see themselves in an extraterrestrial mirror, one can imagine how a similar characterization of benevolence might prevail among alchemists who could see angels working on the alchemical matter of human souls. Still, there is cause for caution regarding the “objective” reliability of these testimonies. The McKenna explicitly equate ‘deeper states of tryptamine ecstasy’ with ‘the poetic-literary idea complex that was, in fact, one motivation for our program of investigation of natural tryptamines’¹⁴².

Studies and anecdotes like these have naturally led to investigations regarding the possible psychopharmacological origins of religion. In one of the earliest such studies, R. Gordon Wasson searched for but found no evidence of mushrooms among the drugs implicated in Medieval and Renaissance witch trials¹⁴³. Nor were mushrooms addressed in Michael J. Harner’s later “Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft”. That conclusion would actually be consonant with alchemical mushroom use, since alchemists hardly saw themselves as receiving their lore from witches and heretics¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴⁰ Dennis and Terrence McKenna, *The Invisible Landscape*, 104.

¹⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, 100.

¹⁴² *Op. cit.*, 104, emphasis added.

¹⁴³ Wasson, *Soma*, 176.

¹⁴⁴ Twentieth century neo-pagan witches, on the other hand, have certainly been influenced by various early modern esoteric traditions, including alchemy. For an allegation of fly agaric use in modern neo-pagan witchcraft, see Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 316.

I have been able to locate no scholarly literature suggesting that early modern alchemy involved experimental psychoactive drug use. There is, however, a fairly recent book called *Strange Fruit* by Clark Heinrich, who only claims to be an enthusiast, not a scholar. *Strange Fruit* verges on the mycomaniacal, going so far as to attribute solar and phallic images in general to mushroom symbolism centered on the fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), and suggesting that a mushroom sacrament was the basis for ancient Hebrew religion, Christianity, and the medieval Grail myths¹⁴⁵. At the same time, the author raises some interesting points in his chapter “Elixir: The Secret Stone of Alchemy”¹⁴⁶. If nothing else, Heinrich demonstrates the manner in which alchemical symbolism would have been a natural fit for anyone seeking to discuss “psychedelic” experiences prior to modern secularized psychology, as well as pointing to a number of possible alchemical illustrations of the processing of the mushroom-as-Elixir.

Ashmole’s claim that the Angelical Stone can make its user survive without other food is consistent with anorexic properties of the fly agaric mushroom and other hallucinogenic drugs, which eliminate sensations of hunger while conferring a feeling of energy on the user¹⁴⁷. The description of the Stone by Ashmole and Boyle alike as a red powder fits the red fly agaric caps, as well as the fact that mushrooms retain their potency when dried and ground.

The idea that mushroom hunting might be central to the secret of the Angelical Stone is in keeping with Backhouse’s transmission of herbal lore to Ashmole in the context of the Vegetable Stone. Fly agaric mushrooms grow only near conifers, and Backhouse was discussing unusual evergreen trees. Backhouse’s poem “The Magistery” might even be taken to *pun* on “mushroom”: after writing of grounding an Eagle (the ‘winged’ cap) and giving wings to a Snake (the stalk), he writes, ‘Then in *one Roome* sure *binde* them both’¹⁴⁸. The snake and eagle, along with the toad—the fly agaric being the classic “toadstool”—are the principal components of the illustration on the title page of Ashmole’s *Theatrum*, with the legend, ‘*Serpens et Bufo gradiens sup terram, Aquila volans, est nostrum Magisterium*’¹⁴⁹.

Mushroom cultivation also tallies surprisingly with a much later note of Ashmole’s, which Josten characterizes as the ‘only [note] in Ashmole’s papers

¹⁴⁵ Heinrich follows Wasson regarding ancient Indian religion, and Allegro’s *Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* for Christian origins.

¹⁴⁶ Heinrich, *Strange Fruit*, 160-188.

¹⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, 116.

¹⁴⁸ Backhouse, ‘The Magistery’, 343-344, emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁹ Ashmole’s title page illustration is appended to the present paper.

suggesting that he performed alchemical or chemical experiments'¹⁵⁰. The note is from February 1683, and in it Ashmole claims to have 'acquainted Mr. Woolrich (in part) with the Secret of raising flowers from a Virgin earth'¹⁵¹. There doesn't seem to be any need for practical experiment in Ashmole's transmission of a secret 'in part', but the idea of germinating mysterious flora in a sealed glass, as explicated by Josten, certainly tallies with an attempt at artificial mushroom cultivation in laboratory circumstances¹⁵².

It would be putting a strain on the available evidence to conclude that Ashmole or Boyle had ever *used* a mycological Stone, although one might be tempted consider the possibility for seers like Kelly and Pordage. While these conjectures are necessarily speculative, they are for their own "super-natural" topic as apt as the modern chemical analyses provided by Newman and Principe for alchemical codes in Starkey and Boyle's laboratory work¹⁵³. It is plainly the case that early modern alchemy was not monolithic (pun intended), and Heinrich's mycophagia would never suffice to account for the full range of alchemical discourse. But it might have a special application within the field of mystical chymistry, where the spirits are said to converse with the user of the Angelical Stone.

Matthew D. Rogers (1968) is an independent scholar in Austin, Texas and a recent graduate of the Masters program at the subdepartment of History of Hermetic Philosophy and related currents at the University of Amsterdam.

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¹⁵⁰ Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, vol. I, 258.

¹⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, vol. IV, 1712-13.

¹⁵² *Op. cit.*, vol. I, 258, and vol. IV, 1713 n. 2.

¹⁵³ Newman, *Gehennical Fire*, 179-188; Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, 82-86, 143-148.

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Der Engelstein des Elias Ashmole

Dieses Referat bietet einen Überblick über eine Tendenz innerhalb der Alchemie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts, welche dem so genannten Stein der Weisen Gewalt über Engel und andere Geister zuschrieb. In seiner Studie über die Alchemie Robert Boyles hat Laurence Principe den Ausdruck 'supernatural alchemy' geprägt, um eben diese Richtung der Alchemie zu benennen. Meric Casaubon war ein zeitgenössischer Gegner solcher Vorstellungen, welche Casaubon 'mystical chymistry' nennt.

Elias Ashmole hat eine Darstellung über der 'Angelical Stone' im 'Prolegomena' seines *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* erscheint. Der Beitrag möchte die These substantiieren, dass frühere Alchemisten, vor allem Edward Kelly, Arthur Dee und William Backhouse, als Quellen der alchemistischen Lehren Ashmoles zu betrachten sind. Ferner werden vergleichbare Ideen in den Schriften Boyles herangezogen sowie die Werke Robert Plots und John Pordages dahingehend geprüft, ob sie möglicherweise auf Ashmoles Aussagen zum Geheimnis des Engelsteins zurückgehen.

Abschließend sollen die sozialpolitischen und religiösen Verhältnisse jener Zeit im Hinblick auf die Entwicklung jener alchemistischen Schule betrachtet werden. Überlegungen zu einer möglichen psychopharmakologischen Basis der *supernatural alchemy* und ihrer Rezeption runden den Beitrag ab.

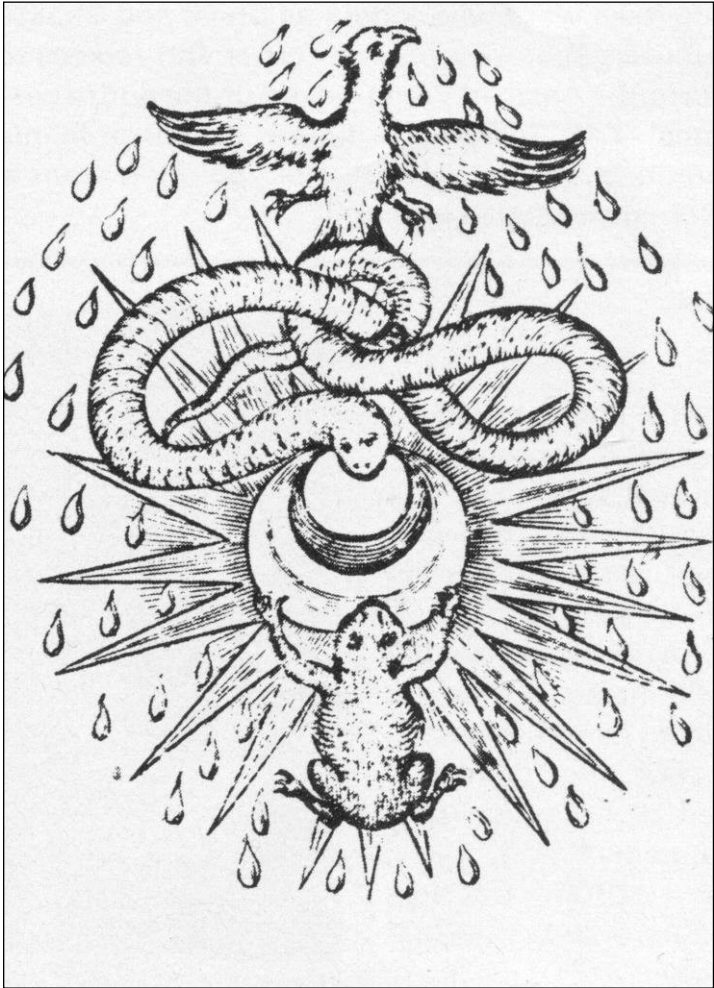


Figure 1: Title page illustration from Ashmole's *Theatrum*

ISAAC NEWTON AND THE KABBALISTIC NOAH: NATURAL LAW BETWEEN *MEDIAEVALIA* AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

GARRY W. TROMPF

Crystallized in Durban, and herewith dedicated to South African Jewry: let righteousness prevail!

Insofar as [Sir] Isaac Newton (1642-1727) self-consciously hid much of his research findings, we can talk of him as an esoteric soul at least in some sense of the word¹. In any case he believed he was in a position to unravel divine mysteries, and this was a life-quest too sensitive for even his closest friends to share. Nowhere is this esoter[ic]ism more evident than in his covert historical investigations, with draft after redraft put down on paper to sort out problems of Biblical chronology and about the religio-political influences between ancient nations. As I have previously argued in a detailed piece on “Newtonian History”, Newton laboured between *ca.* 1672 until his death to construct a large secret history running from the time of the Great Flood to the fall of the Western Roman Empire².

The first component of this work carries the title “Theologiae Gentilis Origines Philosophicae” and remains unpublished (the most mature version, largely in Latin, lying within Yahuda MS collection as signature Nos. 16.1-2, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem). It basically concerned the origins and early development of religions outside Israel. The second component was smaller, and was apparently intended to sit within the “Origines”, being titled in English “The Original of Monarchies” and now conveniently published from a Keynes MS (No. 146, University of Cambridge), by Frank Manuel³. Tidied up and made readier for possible publication than its parent manuscript, “The Original” was meant to prove that councils always preceded

¹ Readers should be aware that I hold a distinctly open-ended understanding of “the esoteric”, being affected by the complexities of anthropological and cross-cultural religious materials. Although not so obviously in the case of this article, I tends to give more space in my work to the secretive and secretly initiatic than is conceded by eminent scholars now seeking to recast the image of Western esotericism. Cf. Hanegraaff, ‘Esotericism’.

² Trompf, ‘On Newtonian History’, 219-234.

³ That this was an intended chapter of the “Origines” is confirmed by Yahuda MS 16.2, fol. 24 with heading on “The Original of Kingdoms”. For its publication, Manuel, *Isaac Newton Historian*, 198-221.

monarchs or kings in the establishment of governments among the nations. The impression left is that these two studies end where Newton's more formal chronological efforts begin, *ca.* 1125 BC, when the Shepherd Kings flee from Egypt at the time of Joshua's incursion into Canaan.

Newton's *Chronicle of Ancient Kingdoms Amended* (worked on from the 1690s and published posthumously) covers events from Moses to 331 BC, or Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia, and it should be read in conjunction with his *Short Chronicle*, a pirated copy of which was translated into French by 1725, and which appeared prefixed to the large chronicle as early as 1728⁴. The *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (started as early as the 1670s yet published as late as 1733, by Benjamin Smith) actually read these two Biblical works as history, or the "exact prophecy" of events running from Persian times to the fall of the Western Roman empire, and making up for the fact that Holy Writ lacked straightforward narrative materials about the nations for this period⁵. To these we might add his secret and more truly apocalyptic projections of the future, including God's judgments for the errors of the whole past and his hopes for a divinely governed transformation of all things (in 1867)⁶.

On my assessments Newton's hopes to reconstruct a macro-history (basically of Antiquity as determinative for subsequent centuries) was held together above all by a defensive reference to *Jewish* traditions. For him Israel preserved the truth about the origins of religion, knowledge and cultural achievement; Israel produced the first truly great efflorescence of civilization (for Solomon's temple *preceded* the building of the pyramids!); and Israel cradled the Messiah, who was in fact too easily misrepresented by the Gentiles who

⁴ Newton, *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended, etc.*, cf. *Abrégé de la chronologie de M. le chevalier Isaac Newton, etc.* For manuscriptal indications of constant preoccupations with chronological questions, e.g., Landsdowne MS 788 and Sloane MS 3208, fols. 69-71 (both British Library, London), etc.

⁵ In two parts; with this approach affected by the fact that Puritan-influenced Newton did not accept the Apocryphal 1-2 Maccabees as an authoritative guide (on the Greek period and the Jews' "Second Commonwealth"), indeed thought them corrupted under Antiochus Epiphanes; see Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar", 106.

⁶ See esp. Manuel, *Religion of Isaac Newton*, including the publication of Yahuda MS 1 as "Fragments of a Treatise on Revelation" (pp. 107-125), and of MS 6 as "Of the [World to Come,] Day of Judgement and World to Come" (pp. 126-136). The above-mentioned date, which Yahuda MS 1.1-2 allow us to calculate 1260 days of the Seven Seals of Revelation from the Fall (and extreme religious apostasy) of Rome by 607. Thus *contra* Jakubowski-Tiessen et al., *Jahrhundertwenden: Endzeit- und Zukunftsvorstellungen vom 15. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* [Einführ.], 9, wrongly specifying 2000. The year 1867 has meaning in relation to the fervour surrounding 1666 in Newton's day.

accepted him⁷. Newton hardly thought that his appeal to Jewish materials was in any sense non-Christian: the Old Testament was sacred Scripture, and the New Testament also reflected truths of Israel that had been neglected⁸. But the presence of “Judaica” in his very private explorations naturally raises questions about Kabbalistic issues and influences.

Of special importance is Newton’s claim that the seven commandments given by God to Noah and his family after the Deluge were foundational for all existing social life. These Noachian or Noachide Precepts, as they are better named, still remain within Judaism as the first requirements of righteous behaviour from any Gentile or *goy* wishing to become a Jew: not to worship idols; not to blaspheme the divine; not to fornicate; murder; or steal; and to treat animals kindly; and set up councils for the fulfilment of these laws⁹. Only two of these injunctions—through the prohibition to partake the blood of animals, and to requite murder—are alluded to in the Bible (Gen. 9:4-6), yet Newton is so bold as to assert that the ‘religion of Noah’, for him the ‘oldest religion in the world’, provided the ‘fundamental and immutable’ constituents from which all ethics, religions, and Antiquity’s social forms would arise¹⁰. This is a distinctly Jewish conceit, and if Newton’s most obvious source might seem to lie in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sandhedrin* 56)¹¹, one might enquire whether Jewish mystical insights are also involved.

Intriguingly, not only morals and spiritual beliefs derive from Noah, but on Newton’s reckoning all philosophy and science and thus cosmology also. The connexions between Noah and science are no longer obvious to us, but they were palpable to a man who found in the covenantal rainbow (of Gen. 9:12-4) the inspiration for disclosing the hidden spectrum of colours by shining white light through a prism¹². His researches into *Opticks* certainly moved Newton to a sense of invisible providence behind visibility, and he apparently intended a later edition of this book to finish with a reference to the Noachian precepts as the source behind Greek and therefore European philosophy.

⁷ See Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought*, ch. 1, sect. 8.

⁸ On the utmost seriousness with which Newton undertook the study of the Bible, esp. Mandelbrote, “‘A Duty of the Greatest Moment’”.

⁹ For introductory assistance, Clorfene and Rogalsky, *The Path of the Righteous Gentile*.

¹⁰ Thus Newton, ‘A Short Scheme of the True Religion’, reprod. in: *Theological Manuscripts* (ed. McLachlan), 48, cf. also 52-55; Keynes MS 3, p. 35; ‘Irenicum’ (posit. 2) (MacLachlan, 28); cf. *Chronology*, 140-141.

¹¹ More precisely 56a-b, cf also Yoma 28b.

¹² See *Opticks* ([1704, published late] 1720 edn.), in S. Horsley (ed.), *Opera quae exstant omnia*, vol. 4.

Noah's sacrifice already betokened a scientific insight, fire epitomizing the primordially of light (Gen. 8:20-1, cf. 1:3)¹³. The first mention of measurement in the Holy Word, moreover, comes with the divinely prescribed dimensions of the Ark (8:14-6), the unit entailed being the cubit, which Newton took as initiating the science of numbers so insightfully developed by Pythagoras¹⁴, with this 'first religion' having to be 'the most rational of all others'¹⁵. What is more, the Flood itself was very much on the agenda of cosmological speculation toward the end of the seventeenth century. If Leonardo da Vinci had earlier questioned the possibility of a world-wide inundation, by asking where all the waters would have gone in the aftermath, Newton lived in the shadow of Halley's comet, which returned to the solar system in 1682. At the time of the Flood, surely, this agency of God (as Newton conceived it) would have been an undepleted giant, and he had no trouble with his contemporaries' views that its closeness would have first drawn up all the subterranean waters of the earth and its passing then caused their recession, according to the principles of gravity he himself so brilliantly established¹⁶. Noah and his family, it follows, were witnesses to such wonders.

Were these relationships of thought being forged simply because Newton dabbled with 'the Talmudists' of his time, who were also picking up suggestions of Noah as a wise and inventive soul¹⁷? or are we approaching near the very stuff of Kabbalah? Had not the fascinating Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), attuned to kabbalistic lore, also probed the planet's subterranean depths, albeit more obviously as an analogue to the mining of the soul and its demons¹⁸? Did not Newton, probably following his Cambridge predecessor Henry More (1614-1687) take space and duration to be the *sensorium Dei*, as if dealing with a cosmic body like a Kabbalist, with the sun symbolizing

¹³ For the arguments, Gascoigne, "The Wisdom of the Egyptians", 188-189.

¹⁴ Newton's handwritten scholium to *Opticks*, 1717 edn., Babson Institute Library, Wellesley, Massachusetts. Cf. also his "Dissertation upon the Sacred Cubit of the Jews and the Cubits of the Several Nations, etc.", 405-428 (where Newton finishes up arguing that the ancient cubit came to be used for building Solomon's temple before any Egyptian pyramid [cf. *infra*]).

¹⁵ Yahuda MS 41, fol. 7^r.

¹⁶ Newton to Richard Bentley, 10 Dec., 1692, in Turnbull, *The Correspondence of Isaac Newton*, vol. 2, 234-235. Cf. Leonardo, using *Selections from the Notebooks* 31-32), yet esp. Burnet, *Telluris theoria sacra*, vol. 2, esp. frontes.; Whiston, *A New Theory of the Earth*, esp. 305ff., 341ff. Cf. also Bligny, 'Il mito del diluvio universale', 47-63.

¹⁷ Allen, *The Legend of Noah*, esp. ch. 5; Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton*, ch. 2.

¹⁸ E.g., Kircher, *Mundus subterraneus*, esp. Bk. 8.

its head¹⁹? Did he not describe God, in the General Scholium of his 1713 *Principia mathematica*, as ‘all ear, all eye, all brain, all arm, all power to perceive, to understand and to act’, as if he knew of the famed *Adam Kadmon*, the sephirotic cosmic Man by which kabbalists conveyed the divine unfolding²⁰? And are there not suggestions of a plurality of worlds in Newton’s cosmologic imaging that chime with Kabbalistic notions of different “cosmic cycles” through time²¹? In answer, one can only appeal to caution.

For a start, the classical kabbalistic Noah bears quite a distinctive air. The Noah of the *Zohar* is plummeted via the Deluge into an entrapment of materiality and the demonic; by opening up the hatch of the Ark to send out birds (Gen. 6-13) Noah was opening the window of the soul. The rainbow, furthermore, symbolically represents the colours of the patriarchs, not secrets of the physical universe²². The Zoharic Noah, we note, seems thoroughly marginalized between speculations about the cosmic Adam and references to the commandments of Moses, and efforts to prove that the mystico-symbolic *Gehinnom* informed Newton’s cosmology have thus far failed²³. Apart from being an emotionally restrained Englishman who lacked a mystical bent, the opportunity for Newton to get hold of a Latin translation, let alone Hebrew text of the *Zohar* apparently comes relatively late to his studies (after *ca.* 1685)²⁴. Not only is the facility in Hebrew for Zoharic studies we see in the Jesuits Guillaume Postel and Kircher not there, but we find as well that the associated “traditional[ist] mentality” is much weaker with him than them. Perhaps it is a matter of relativity, yet older expressions of universal correspondences do not seem to come naturally to Newton. It might have been easy for Kircher to invoke the “Cabbalistic axiom”, for example, that no plant on earth lacks its correspondence in heaven²⁵, but such *mystae* are very

¹⁹ For the evidence, Zafiropulo and Monod, *Sensorium Dei dans l’Hermetisme*, 128-139, cf. Newton, *Opticks*, 1717 edn., quer. 28, 31.

²⁰ Thus Zollschan, ‘God’s Sensorium: Newton’s Kabbalistic Slip’ (unpublished paper, Conference of the Australasian Association for the History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Science, Melbourne, July 1993); cf. Copenhaver, ‘Jewish Theologies of Space’, 489-548.

²¹ For background Kubrin, ‘Newton and the Cyclical Cosmos’, 340-345; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 77-80.

²² *Zoh.* III, 215a-b; 222a-b (using Lachower-Tishby paraphrasing).

²³ Cf. *Zoh.* e.g., II, 144a-b. The arguments of Copenhaver and Zollschan (*supra*, n. 18) have been convincingly dismantled by Goldish, *Judaism*, 156-158.

²⁴ For confirmation of eventual access to translations, through von Rosenroth’s [edited] *Kabbala*, see Harrison, *The Library of Isaac Newton*, 171-173 (and on my assessment of the copies both volumes were received at the same time, all pts. 1, 2 and 3 being dog-eared).

²⁵ Kircher, *Mundus subterraneus*, vol. 2, 401b-402a. Cf. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, esp.

mented in the great Englishman's work, for all his newly uncovered interests in alchemy²⁶. He knows no Jewish alchemy, in any case, and information about the kabbalistic theory of the cosmic ages, within or quoted from the *Sefer haTemunah* (apparently published for the open market by 1546)²⁷, evidently does not reach his desk. We therefore need to consider the limits of Newton's dealings with Jewish mysticism.

It is not unimportant to affirm that Newton was in a generic sense esoteric in habits and interests. It would surely be facile methodologically to list all the components belonging to "the esoteric tradition", or characterize its *air de famille*²⁸, if that means glossing over the straightforward, classical meaning of questing or relaying "truth(s)" in secret, or engaging in *studia recon-dita*²⁹. There can in any case be many and varied initiatic rites, and certain probings for Faustian, magical or forbidden powers that are concealed (*occulti*) yet fall outside the ambience covered by "formally-minded" esoter[ic]ists. *Pace* the problem of construing a post-antique history of gnosticism, moreover, there is still some room for placing Newton as a harbinger of "gnoseology" in the modern sense, and of supplanting faith with the unveiled hidden laws of nature or a covertly established "exact knowledge"³⁰. Newton, however, has been of late noticeably appropriated into the "deep stratum" of the investigation of esotericism, when a simpler representation might be his due. I mentioned his alchemical concerns. Not so much by people reading her complex findings about his approach to it, but more by the effects of simply *associating* Newton with alchemy in her researches, especially with the *Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus, American scholar Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs' has landed Newton (more than ever before) among the worthy subjects

42-43; Fletcher, *The Life and Work of Athanasius Kircher*. Yet cf. Newton on vegetation, e.g., Bundy MS 16, fols. 1; 5^v-6^v.

²⁶ Cf. e.g., Dobbs, *Foundations of Newton's Alchemy*; and *Janus Face of Genius*.

²⁷ Cf. Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*. Although copies of *Sefer haTemunah* have been lost (see E. Gottlieb in *Enycl. Judaic.*, vol. 15, 999), extensive quotations from it were found in such works as Meir ibn Gabbay, 'Abodath haQodesh, and haLevi Berukhim [?]. *Gallei Razayya*.

²⁸ Cf. Faivre and Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, chs. 1-2.

²⁹ Start with Anon. Pythagoreans, *apud* Hippolytus, *Adv. Haer.*, I, 2; VI, 315ff.; [School of] Basileides, *apud* Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, I, xxiv, 7. For further discussion Trompf, 'From the Esoteric to the Exoteric and Back Again', 27-32. Ponder also the most dog-eared of Newton's books: Anonymous (= Starkey), *Secrets Reveal'd*, in Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

³⁰ For the heart of the debate in this instance, Hanegraaff, 'On the Construction of "Esoteric Tradition"', 29-36 (section on Voegelin); cf. Voegelin, *Order and History*, III; Camporesi, e.g., *Credenza e non credenza nel processo educativo*, etc.

of the contemporary study of esotericism³¹. But with sufficient warrant? And in any case where does Jewish mysticism—and Kabbalah in particular—fit in?

Let our springboard for assessment be the Noachian precepts, since they were “truths” closest to Newton’s heart. If the impetus to read the Talmud and related Judaica, and to learn Hebrew (in the 1670s), came first with the pressure to know the sources of ancient history³², information about the Noachian commands in the *Sandhedrin* tractate was most famously laid out by the Puritan jurist John Selden (1584-1654). It was Selden who propagated the theory that all human law derived from (the six juridically substantive) precepts Noah received after the Flood³³. Interestingly Selden wrote positively of ‘Cabala’ as being transmitted by the Jews on sacred and hereditary grounds through the generations, and especially from Moses on, to keep the stars and orbs as symbols of God rather than falling into the error of worshipping them as deities³⁴. Here we note a recognition that Kabbalah could have been given side-by-side with the Mosaic external law, in the tradition that runs from the high Renaissance figure of Pico della Mirandola, via Johannes Reuchlin and Cornelius Agrippa, on into Protestant theological circles³⁵. Selden, admittedly, is not willing to deny that such *arcana* might

³¹ Cf. Dobbs, ‘Newton’s *Commentary* on the *Emerald Tablet*’, 188, cf. also Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton’s Alchemy*, Cazenave, ‘Gravitation et l’alchimie de Newton’, 89-109.

³² Newton’s earliest manifest history guide, Jan van Sleidan, has the Talmud first in his list of extra-Biblical sources: cf. *De Quatuor Summis Imperiis*, 1 (cf. Westfall, *Never At Rest*, 82, n. 46 on van Sleidan’s importance as a ‘key to historie’), and consider some preliminary-looking Talmudic interests in Yahuda MS 2.4, fol. 46; Babson MS 434, fol. 1. See also Newton’s [1660s to 90s] “Common Place Book” [2], reprod. in: McLachlan, 127, where a list of ‘noted authors’ include bishop Lightfoot’s *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae* (earlier), and other books on ‘Kabbala’, ‘Sohar’, among them von Rosenroth’s *Kabbala denudata*, and rabbinical commentaries (most later, I estimate at ca. 1685-1690), has been constructed over the years. Judaica was best available in Cambridge’s Trinity and Emmanuel College libraries, cf. Gaskett, *Trinity College Library*, 187; Bush and Ramussen, *Library of Emmanuel College*, 56-61.

³³ Cf. *De synedriis et praefecturis veterum Ebraeorum*, 6. For Biblical legitimation, Selden took the “precepts” of Ps. 119:4 (he reads 118) as referring to the Noachian ones; and looked to Ambrose’s *Liber de Noe et Arca* for Patristic inspiration (though this work is more on the priority of the Hebrew tongue): thus Selden, *De jure naturali*, 16-17; cf. also 18—on Pythagoras as inheritor of Hebrew truth, using Origen, *Contr. Cels.* I, 15 (as a foil to Celsus’ pagan listing of wise sages). Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) is well known for criticizing Selden’s approach as a false reading of legal history, see e.g., *Principi di una scienza nuova*, I,v.

³⁴ *De Dis Syris syntagmata II*, 29-30: ‘Cabala . . . jus sacrum et haereditarium ad posteris continua generationum serie transmittetur a patribus acceperant Solem, Lunam et Stellas Dominos . . . esse positissimum divinitatis symbolum merito habeatur’.

³⁵ I.e., possibly even given as a book it seems: ‘. . . nam qicquid arcano volumine condidit postea Moses, id Cabala antea erat, . . .’ *Dis Syris* 29 (if we take *volumine* to refer to a material text). For background, Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*.

have had a previous history³⁶, yet he nowhere argues that they derived from Noah, as a conclusion that could have reinforced Newtonian interests. Still, we find Newton himself held to the view that Moses (especially in the Ten Commandments) reaffirmed the seven Noachian decrees, and felt that God's many further laws were presented at Sinai in their apparent externality to suit the 'sense & capacity of y^e vulgar'—thus implying something deeper philosophically lay beneath them³⁷.

One related line of influence alleged to have affected Newton's position was from a specifically Jewish source, that of Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon or Ramban) (1135-1204), and his mammoth *Mishneh Torah* ("Second Law", or, "The Torah Reviewed"). Maimonides is renowned for considering divine pre-Mosaic directives; but his stress is more on *Adam's* prior reception of six of these, Noah being given an additional seventh, the prohibition 'against [eating] flesh from a living animal'³⁸. In any case, Newton did not have in his library that portion of Maimonides great work—*Hilchot Melachim u'Milchamoteihem* (the Laws of Kings and their Wars)—that deals with these matters³⁹. Maimonides himself was not exactly known for his mystical propensities⁴⁰, and if he did argue in one renowned place that star worship began with an error of Enoch, who wrongly honoured the heavenly bodies created by God, Newton was as predictably uninterested in this piece of *pre*-Noachian lore as he was in noting the notorious sin of Noah's drunkenness (which was highlighted in the Kabbalah as a repetition of Adam's sin⁴¹).

Admittedly concern for the Noachian precepts persists in Jewish reflection beyond Maimonides, in the writings of Joseph Albo (*ca.* 1380-1444), for one, and more significantly of two others steeped in Kabbalah. I refer first to the Iberian Hasdai Crescas (d. 1412), who *inter alia* is famous for criticizing

³⁶ See esp. Idel's recent reassessments, 'Kabbalah and Hermeticism in Dame Frances A. Yates's Renaissance', 65-84.

³⁷ Newton, esp. *Correspondence*, vol. 2, 331 (to Thomas Burnet).

³⁸ Maimonides, *Hilchot Melachim*, 9.1.

³⁹ Inferring from Harrison, *Library*, 186 (while Selden was used to editions of it under the one cover, cf. e.g., Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, fols. *tshn.* ff.).

⁴⁰ Though note Maimonides' virtually unobtainable *Sefer ha-Madda* (recently made accessible by Chajim Sack in 1994).

⁴¹ Maimonides, *De Idolatria Liber*, 1.1-2 (a passage thought important for Newton's case by Goldish, *Judaism*, 50-51); J. Angelino, *Livnat ha-Sapir*, following Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 163-164. On esotericism and the Enochian trajectory, for contrast, see the paper by Y. Stoyanov, 'Enochian Apocalypticism and Mysticism in some Currents of Modern Western Esotericism'. It was one of Newton's more emphatic points that star worship (strictly speaking) began in Egypt, see Trompf, 'Newtonian History', 221.

Aristotle and postulating the infinite extension of space, and who utilized the kabbalic *Sefer Yetzira* (third to sixth centuries) and *Sefer ha-Bahir* (twelfth century). And in second place we must of course consider Isaac Luria (1534-1572), that Safed-based mystic dedicated to disclosing each mystery (*raza*) of the *Zohar*, whose new system came to inspire the most influential of all non-Jewish Kabbalists in the seventeenth century, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth⁴². We note here that the *Zohar*, now ascribed to Moses de Leon (of the later thirteenth century), succeeded Maimonides in time as a book⁴³, but among Hebrew Kabbalists, traditionally speaking, its truths were supposedly revealed to Adam, as were those of the other greater Kabbalic *seferim* before it⁴⁴. The simple datum remains, all the same, that Adam, so central to Zoharic speculation, hardly figures in Newton's scheme of things⁴⁵, and he does not have access, materially or linguistically, to either traditional Jewish Kabbalah or the passing down of insights about the Noachide precepts in the Jewish trajectory we have just ever so briefly surveyed.

It is not as if there are no affinities to explore. If Newton was a man extolling divine directives, we should not read Kabbalah as subverting the external Torah for some mystical freedom, when in fact, as Moshe Idel has carefully shown, its creators and most of practitioners thought they were reinforcing the Commandments⁴⁶. The author[s] of the *Zohar* also speculated about reducing the ten commandments, but theirs was a distillation into five, and then a contemplation of five related pairs⁴⁷. Newton's straightforward two—of loving God and one's fellow—is more distinctly Christian, and he is in pursuit of a basic religion as morality, not Torah. This particular ploy, a distilling of the Gospel into a conveniently age-old true and moral religion, will become a fountainhead of Enlightenment thinking. Newton's attitudes,

⁴² Albo, *Sepher ha'Ikarim*; Crescas; *Or Adonai* (for preliminary guidance, W. Harvey, *Encycl. Judaic*, V, 1082-5); and I. Luria, 'Etz Hayyim, following Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, lect. 7. On von Rosenroth, see *supra*, ns. 24, 32 (Latin translations of Luria's *Kabbala recentior* being published in later parts his work, but—we note—with little sign of dog-earing by Newton in the relevant parts).

⁴³ Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrine, Development and Literature*.

⁴⁴ I.e., communicated to the fallen Man as a key to the recovery of the paradisaical state. If it was by tradition also received also by Noah (before Abraham and Moses), Newton's lack of interest (or knowledge) of this claim is highly significant and indicative. For background, Scholem, *Kabbalah*.

⁴⁵ A rare reference to the basic religion of doing duty towards God and man in Adam and Enoch is found in "Short Scheme", (McLachlan, 48). Goldish errs in reading Adam into Newton's thought as reflecting Maimonidean influences, *Judaism*, e.g., 11-12, 50-52, 66.

⁴⁶ Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, esp. xii-xx.

⁴⁷ E.g., *Zoh.* II, 90a-90b.

mediated by his associates, were to become associated with the critique of priestcraft and religious accretion, not with the pursuit of mystical correspondences⁴⁸. Mind you, that fact that Newton evidently stresses the transcendence of the Almighty, *prima facie* conceiving Him to have limited involvement in human affairs, has convinced the fine Jewish scholar Richard Popkin that his theological outlook is Maimonidean⁴⁹. This may indeed be another kind of affinity; but this view does not fully persuade, any more than does the claim that Newton heralds the secularization process by seeming to reduce history to chronology and “exact prophecy” as expressions of natural law *tout simple*⁵⁰. It simply will not work for someone who still marvels at eruptions of prophetism and apocalyptists to reveal the truth in its times, accepts the miracles of Jesus, acknowledges the fall of the Western Roman empire as divine retribution, let alone believes the movements of comets to be ‘imprest by an Intelligent Agent’⁵¹. Perhaps Newton’s sympathy for astrology and Maimonides’ antipathies against it also count for something in this particular argument⁵². On the other hand, one must surely own that both Maimonides and Newton treated Nature as something that held divine moral commands and the ordinances that govern the behaviour of the Creation in the one concept, even if the two did so in distinctive ways⁵³.

If I were to pick an extra-Biblical traditional Jewish text that shows some interest in Noah and his receipt of commands, and has a mystical enough touch to connect with Kabbalistic interests, I would think first of the second century text called *Seder Olam* (the Book of the [Order of the] Ages). Newton

⁴⁸ More work requires being done on the influence such “Newtonians” as Samuel Clarke, David Gregory, John Conduitt, William Stukeley, let alone William Whiston, and not in portraying Newton in a more deistic light, but as the apostle of basic morality. See Trompf, ‘The Distillation of the Gospel: Basic Morality, Natural Law, and Liberal Principles in a History of Ideas from Isaac Newton to John Stuart Mill’ (forthcoming).

⁴⁹ Popkin, ‘Newton and Maimonides’, 216-229; and esp. ‘Some Further Comments on Newton and Maimonides’, 1-7.

⁵⁰ Westfall, ‘Isaac Newton’s *Theologiae Gentiles Origines Philosophicae*’, 30-31.

⁵¹ E.g., Yahuda MS 15.3, fol. 57; ‘The Language of the Prophets’ (McLachlan, 119-126); ‘Fragments of a Treatise on Revelation’, in: Manuel, *Religion*, esp. 107-111; *Observations upon the Prophecies*, 14 (prophets and Biblical apocalypses), Yahuda MS 5.1, fol. 7^r; 25, fols. 20^r, 21^r, etc. (Christ); To John Locke, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, 195, 214 (on miracles); Yahuda MS 1.4, fols. 127ff.; Keynes MS 1 (fall of Rome); To Bentley, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, 235 (quotation on comets).

⁵² Cowling, *Isaac Newton and Astrology*, yet cf. Maimonides *Ad Jud. Marsell.*, 1194, as discussed by Stitskin, ‘Maimonides Unbending Opposition to Astrology’, 134-146.

⁵³ E.g., Maimonides, *Dalalat alHar’irin* [= ‘Guide to the Perplexed’] e.g., sect. lxvi; Newton’s *New System*, within *Sir Isaac Newton’s Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and System of the World*.

was dominated by a secret desire to uncover the structure of time, and outside of Natural Philosophy proper, this meant sacro-historical time. The *Seder Olam Rabbah* presents chronicle dimensions more or less paralleling his own, from [Adam/]Noah running to the Bar Kokhba revolt (AD 135) or the Jewish equivalent to Patristic times. Attributed to the second century Jose ben Halaftha, it dates the age of the world from that time more or less as conservatively as Newton did (3828 years old); it shows chronographic propensities; stresses the divine commands from Noah to Moses (in part I); uses Daniel as factual for the Persian period of Israel; apparently avoids the “suspect” Maccabean books for the time of the Greeks and Second Commonwealth (see *supra*, n. 5) through deploying Demetrius’ “Hellenistic” history of the Jewish kings instead; and labours the details in the whole account’s last phases⁵⁴. We note that Newton possessed two copies of this work in English translation, one sponsored by a person of the greatest importance in the non-Jewish history of kabbalistic speculation, none other than Francis Mercurius van Helmont⁵⁵.

But you will detect that the evidence thus far places Newton only on the margins of *die Weltanschauung der hebräischen Kabbala*⁵⁶. Idel apparently convinced himself that Newton ‘paid attention to this body of thought’, thinking especially of Lurianic versions of it; and on the basis of an apparent comment on Newton’s cosmology by John Locke, French scholar Serge Hutin thought it ‘indéniable’ that Newton concurs with the Lurianic doctrine of *tsimtsum*, of a place in the divine immensity in which God can retire and work on His Creation⁵⁷. Mention of van Helmont, though, demands deciding

⁵⁴ *Seder Olam Rabbah*, esp. I; III.28-30. Demetrius (frag. *Reg. Iud.* [second century BC], incidentally, shows a keen interest in correct chronology [from 722 BC on]). Newton was accused of dating the Creation far too recently, e.g., Stukeley, *Memoirs of Sir Isaac Newton’s Life*, 62; for the dimensions of Newton’s macrohistory, *supra*, yet not forgetting the detail he put into church politics at the end of his schema, on events surrounding Nicaea and Athanasius’ allegedly meretricious pro-Trinitarian activism: e.g., “Paradoxical Questions Concerning the Morals and Actions of Athanasius and his Followers” (McLachlan, 61-118). That the *Seder Olam* did not derive from ben Halaftha, however, had already been proved in Renaissance Jewish circles, cf. Weinberg, ‘Azariah de’Rossi and the Forgeries of Annius of Viterbo’, 262. But Newton did not know this.

⁵⁵ Harrison, *Library*, items 751, 1479. Cf. Coudert, *The Impact of Kabbalah in the 17th Century*.

⁵⁶ To adapt to the quest for different kabbalistic ethos in Western thought as skilfully undertaken by Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma*, esp. ch. 2.

⁵⁷ Idel, *Kabbalah*, 264; Hutin, ‘Note sur la Création chez trois kabbalistes chrétiens anglais: Robert Fludd, Henry More et Isaac Newton’, 155. For deductions from Locke (*Essay on Human Understanding*, Bk. 4, 10, sect. 18 [not naming Newton]), see Gorny, *La Kabbale*, 267-268; E. Bréhier, *La philosophie et son passé*, 86.

whether Newton sits well with “non-Hebraic” Kabbalism as it developed along certain lines in early modern European thought. After all, did not those paragons of later Renaissance German speculation van Helmont and Knorr von Rosenroth harbour a decidedly Christian agenda, when they sought to plumb the Kabbalah’s depths? That is to say, were they not looking to the (eschatological) conversion of the Jews, and the restoration of harmony between Catholics and Protestants to heal a divided Christendom⁵⁸? And was not one of Newton Cantabrian mentors, Henry More, a famed “Christian Kabbalist”?

Let us, having taken this route, now sharpen our perspectives. Contemplate the most pertinent manuscriptal evidence, Yahuda MS signed No. 15 (intriguingly and not necessarily fortuitously “next” to the “Origines” in MS 16 that I have spent so much time studying to decipher the Newtonian macro-historical outlook). With Yahuda 15, we find that during the 1680s Newton did actually try to acquaint himself with “Cabbala” via Henry More’s writings (the latter’s *Conjectural Essay* on the subject having been published in 1662) and those of von Rosenroth (whose *Kabbala denudata* [1677] quoted extracts from both More and van Helmont, as well as from Zoharic and Lurianic texts). But Newton evidently did not like what he found. The paradigm of the *sefirot* smacked of the emanationism he connected to Simon Magus, the Gnostic heresiarch, and the roots of this lay further back in the genealogy of the Egyptian gods⁵⁹. On Newtonian assessments, the religion of Noah was most highly distorted in Antiquity with Egypt’s polytheism and consequent star worship (cf. n. 41)⁶⁰. Threatening the purity of Jesus’ teaching, the same disturbing tendency re-erupted in the second century, especially at the hands of the Gnostic Valentinus, traditionally an Egyptian⁶¹. Newton sensed similarities between Kabbalah and early Christian Gnosticism, a deduction that could be explained by the widespread Jewish “pretence” that Moses de Leon’s *Zohar* was really the rediscovered work of Simeon (“Justus”) bar Yochai, who received traditions passed down from Moses via

⁵⁸ For orientation, Coudert, *Impact*, 116-117 (Please note that the 1887 part-translation of von Rosenroth’s *Kabbalah denudata* is a somewhat untrustworthy rendering by a Blavatskyite Theosophist, S.L. MacGregor Mathers).

⁵⁹ Yahuda MS 15.7, fol. 108 (where ‘Platonists’ join ‘Gnosticks . . . and Cabbalists’ in the same error), cf. 127^r (marg.); 15.5, fol. 88^v; 97^r; and see Trompf, ‘Newtonian History’, 234.

⁶⁰ Trompf, *Recurrence*, vol. 2 [forthcoming].

⁶¹ Newton, ‘On the Theology of Valentinus’ (Royal Mint MS 5, fol. 38). Cf. the newly uncovered University of Uppsala Newton MS [letter] (with thanks to Dr. Susanna Åkerman for drawing my attention to it).

Ezra to the times of the Second Jewish Commonwealth. Newton took Simeon, as son of the Jewish high priest Onias [II] (*flor.* 280s BC?), to have founded a Temple in Egypt and disseminated false Egyptian teachings into Israel from there⁶².

As Matt Goldish has carefully shown (especially through commentary on quotations from Yahuda MS 15), Newton arrived at the conclusion that if Simeon Justus marked a meeting point during the Hebrews' Second Commonwealth, the Kabbalah must be taken as younger than Plato and Aristotle, in fact influenced *by* them, because their ideas came to Egypt (indeed Socrates and/or Plato, the *Timaeus* implied, had visited there)⁶³. This means that, whatever theoretical testing Newton does with the "Sephiras" or "Sephirots" in relation to Greek planetary cosmology (and at one point to the alchemy of metals), he will put his failure to match up the schema with other ancient ones as a result of doctrinal corruptions⁶⁴. In the end, Kabbalah will have traces of truth that have been marred by Egyptian priests, and in the course of time will cause the ancient Christian heresies, which 'consisted chiefly in certain cabbalistical and heathen opinions' about divine emanations⁶⁵.

Now the reactions and interpretations here, we will have to admit, also have to do with scientific argument. For, as Allison Coudert has ably shown,

⁶² Cf. Bodmer MS ch. iv, p. 1^r (two drafts), following Goldish, *Judaism*, 146. The key sources are interestingly Hebrew ones (rather than Josephus): *Pirqûê Aboth*, i, 2, and Babyl. Talmud *Bab. Menackoth* 109b; *Jer. Yoma* 6, 3 (53cd), but the Talmud makes Simeon's son Onias (= III) the founder of the temple in Egypt. Newton interestingly (and upon Talmudic evidence?) breaks away from the impression created in the *Seder Olam* that Simeon is a contemporary of Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. The scholar most important for sorting all these (largely inter-Testamental) matters at the time was Humphrey Prideaux, in his *The Old and New Testament Connected in the History of the Jews and Neighbouring Nations, from the Declension of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah to the Time of Christ*, yet he would have had an effect only after Newton had worked out his own position. Also note here that Manuel, in *Religion*, 68-69, to establish his own arguments (whence the quotation), mistakenly puts Simeon down to the time that early Christian Gnosticism flourished (second century AD).

⁶³ Yahuda MS 15.7, fol. 120^r; 137^v-138^r; Bodmer MS, ch. 4A, fol. 4^r; cf. Plato, *Timaeus* esp. 25E, 26E. Consult Goldish, *Judaism*, 147-149.

⁶⁴ Yahuda MS 15.7, fols. 120^r, 127^r. Consult Goldish, *Judaism*, 152-155, and esp. n. 56.

⁶⁵ Yahuda MS 15.7, fol. 137^{r-v} (where, using [the poorly edited] Manetho, *Aegypt.*, the ten Sephiroth reflect Egyptian memories of ten antediluvian patriarchs); Bodmer MS, ch. 4, p. 1^r (quotation). Consult Goldish, 146-147, who rightly, if only by implication, puts these conclusion in the 1710s, since (as on p. 144) he believes Newton's connexion of Kabbalah and ancient Christian Gnosticism derives from reading Jacques Basnage de Beauval. Newton seems to have hardly touched Basnage in the English (1708), but the Frenchman's *Antiquitez judaïques, ou remarques critiques sur la République des Hébreux*, shows definite signs of usage (considering Harrison, *Library*, 95-96).

the renowned monadological theory of Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) apparently had its foundations in Kabbalistic emanationism⁶⁶. If ethereality and gross matter subsisted within the same sefirothic and universal “body” *à la* Kabbalah, Leibniz expounded the differing arrangements of monads in the cosmos, taking them to be rarified in the human mind, significantly, and densest of all in such inert material objects as rocks. But Newton, whether out of a spiteful competitiveness or through genuine abhorrence of a preconceived style of thinking, places Leibniz in the emanationist camp, as a kind of Simon Magus *redivivus*⁶⁷. This looks paradoxical, since the thought of Henry More, who had a deal of influence on Newton, may be said to have Leibnizian affinities, and arguably because of their common interest in Kabbalist principles⁶⁸. More, in fact, could be claimed to have first envisaged the Internet, taking the world to be enveloped by a great spatially-broad Band that was distinctively the arena of ‘the Spirit’, full of energies, good and bad, interacting with each other⁶⁹ (and yes, the Internet belongs within the Newtonian rather than Einsteinian paradigm!). But Newton had his own (though not really unrelated) physical theory to deploy. *Pari passu* with Boyle in chemistry, Newton was busily “baptizing” atomism, redeeming it for the Christian faith by playing down its associations with ‘atheistical’ Democritus, Epicureanism and outcomes of mere chance, and envisaging atoms in their various arrangements as part of a harmonious, providentially governed order⁷⁰. These myriad atoms followed the logic of number and measurable relationships as creations separate from God, not as His extensions. They operated by ordained laws of nature rather than as divine filaments. It was not Kabbalizing Leibniz who was needed to appreciate them, but rather the *imago* of Pythagoras.

In re-making atomism’s ancestry, in fact, with Pythagoras as its recognizable father (and with Noah as overall “seminal sage” in the background)⁷¹, Newton clearly shows himself interested in a tradition of esoteric wisdom, or a *prisca sapientia* manifesting itself recurrently (or off and on) through

⁶⁶ Coudert, *Impact*, ch. 13; idem, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, 142. On the Leibniz-Newton conflict, see her ‘Leibniz, Locke, Newton and the Kabbalah’, cf. esp. Alexander (ed.), *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*.

⁶⁷ Manuel, *Religion*, 68-77 for the details.

⁶⁸ Brown, ‘Leibniz and More’s Cabbalistic Circle’, 77-96.

⁶⁹ Substituting for and avoiding the Platonizing “World Soul”. Cf. esp. More’s *Enchiridion metaphysicum*, cf. Gabbey, ‘Henry More and the Limits of Mechanism’, 19-36.

⁷⁰ Start with McGuire and Rattansi, ‘Newton and the “Pipes of Pan”’, esp. 110-130.

⁷¹ For further argument, Trompf, ‘Newtonian History’, 235-236, 246 n. 137, 249 n. 175.

time. As Neapolitan part-contemporary Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) was right in noting—and he was himself disinclined to follow this line of interpreting the history of thought—proponents of a such a *sapienza riposta* typically listed Zoroaster of the Orient, Hermes Trismegistus of Egypt, Orpheus of Greece, Pythagoras of Italy, and sometimes Confucius of China, as its fundamental purveyors⁷². Newton puts in a good word for each of these, intriguingly, albeit in scattered references⁷³, because he held that the Noachian truths were largely preserved by them outside Israel. Even Hermes or Thoth is positively credited with inventing hieroglyphic writing, at a time before the Egyptians succumbed to the worst of their errors⁷⁴. Like Postel, moreover, Newton also concedes a rôle for India's brahmins as custodians of truths that somehow endured after the post-diluvian dispersement of peoples⁷⁵. But if we expect Kabbalah to be located within such a sapiental gallery, or welcomed side-by-side with the Mosaic Torah in Israel's special story, we will be disappointed.

What, however, of *Christian* kabbalists, especially those close to him? There were surely kabbalistic components in the enthusiastic sharing of projects and hopes between Puritans and Jews on both sides of the Channel (esp. 1655-80)⁷⁶, and in the airing of eschatologies both Sabbataean and Protestant⁷⁷. And "Cabbala" was evoked more and more as suggesting the wisdom of the ages—in early masonic discourse and in philosophic representations of a "cosmic" Christianity (or certainly a Christianity broader than in its historico-institutional form)⁷⁸. Henry More, we reiterate, was certainly deploying the

⁷² Vico, *Scienza nuova*, II,[iii],10 (Berger and Fisch, sect. 427). Unlike Newton, Vico knew the critical work of Scheffer (e.g., *Natura et constitutione philosophicae Italicae*, which was early in posing problems for exponents of the *prisca theologia*, and of connections between Pythagoras and atomism).

⁷³ Newton, New College (University of Oxford) MS II, fol. 54; "Origines" (fol. 15) (Zoroaster, Prometheus and Hermes, the list deriving surely from Riccioli's *Almagestum novum*, e.g., I,xxvi); Newton, *apud* P. Casini, 'Newton: The Classical Scholia', 37 (Orpheus and Pythagoras); Keynes MS 7 (with minor errors = McLachlan, 52) (Confucius). See also Manuel, *Historian*, 83, 270-271, 277, etc.

⁷⁴ New College MS II, fols. 108, 162, III, fol. 6; cf. also *Correspondence*, vol. 3, 338 (*apud* Gregory).

⁷⁵ "The Original of Religions", Yahuda MS 41, fol. 8^r (Newton showing no sign of Postel's inference that Abraham was cognate with brahmin).

⁷⁶ See van den Berg and van der Wall (eds.), *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century: Studies and Documents*, e.g., 171-186 (for Menasseh ben Israel's "Compendium Kabbalae").

⁷⁷ Cf. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, chs. 4, 6.

⁷⁸ From, e.g., Marcelline, *The Triumph of King James the First*, 55-58 (behind Scottish masonry) to John Toland (e.g., *Pantheisticon*).

Kabbalah in this latter way⁷⁹. Though perhaps neglecting Noah, had he not traced Pythagorean and Platonic philosophies back to Moses (and thus the Kabbalah), and already asserted that it was Pythagoras not Democritus who founded “Atomical” philosophy?⁸⁰ But here is the rub. One review of the opening chapter of More’s *Defence of the The Philosophick Cabbala* reveals that Moses taught the Tetractys, that God was contained in the Trinity of Light, ‘Eternal Wisdome’ (the Son), and Spirit (‘the Holy Ghost’), out of which the fourth component, the corporeal world, took form⁸¹. Newton was consequently selective about what he would take from his part-mentor, because, if ever there was a doctrine against which he resiled, it was that of the Trinity!

Newton was a Socinian-influenced neo-Arian⁸². This meant that he worked as much out of temper with the older run of Christian kabbalists—Reuchlin, Paracelsus, and their like, who sought to deduce both the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ from Jewish theosophy—as he did with the newer breed—John Wallis, Theophilus Gale, Ralph Cudworth etc.—who were even more enthusiastic about finding the Trinity in Kabbalah than More⁸³. This unpopular theological position made Newton’s labours on historical and religious issues even more secretive than they might have been, and, in appearing suspect, Newton was allowed only through royal dispensation to continue in the Lucasian chair of Mathematics, having succeeded in it to a most defensive pro-Trinitarian soul, Isaac Barrow⁸⁴.

The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, moreover, was for Newton both reflective of emanationism and the horrendous errors of idolatry and polytheism that derived from Egypt. Newton worshipped Jesus, but as God’s

⁷⁹ Note his exchanges with Lady Anne Conway, cf. M. Nicolson (ed.), *Conway Letters, etc.*; and see [Conway] *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*.

⁸⁰ More, *Conjectura Cabbalistica, etc.*, esp. pref. [iv], 103 (using Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. Philos.*, as his source); cf. idem, *Visionis Ezechielis sive Mercavae expositio ex principiis philosophiae Pythagorae, etc.*, linking Pythagoreanism and Jewish (Merkabah) mysticism. More’s *Conjectura*, significantly, is absent among the collection of More’s works in his Newton’s library, Harrison, *Library*, 195-196.

⁸¹ Within *Conjectura*, esp. 71.

⁸² Start with “Common Place Book” (McLachlan, 130-131); cf. Westfall, *Never at Rest*, 314-315 and MSS cited there. For background, Williams, *The Radical Reformation*; Colligan, *The Arian Movement in England*. For books by Faustus Socinus in Newton’s personal collection, Harrison, *Library*, 241.

⁸³ On the older views, e.g., Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*. Cf., for the newer, Wallis, *Three Sermons concerning the Sacred Trinity*; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles*, I-II; Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*.

⁸⁴ See D. Brewster, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton*, II, 98-101; cf. Barrow, *A Defence of the Blessed Trinity*.

viceroys, not as consubstantial with the Father. *Pace* Arius the traditional here-siarch hailing from Alexandria and therefore Egypt, it was more to the point for Newton that Athanasius, the most persistent theological protagonist of the *homoousian* cause against the Arians, and thus the chief architect of Trinitarianism, was an Egyptian⁸⁵. If the church father's namesake Athanasius Kircher might have waxed enthusiastic that signs of the Trinity were decipherable in Egyptian hieroglyphics, this is precisely the kind of polytheistic perversion Newton expected to arise from the land of the Nile⁸⁶. As the seventeenth century wore on, furthermore, Egypt offered its new-born seductions to scholars. Suspicions increased that Egypt's civilization had been greater than Israel's and therefore might have influenced it. Thus argued Thomas Burnet (1635-1715), another of Newton's philosophic "competitors", who deduced that 'the Egyptian Wisdom was more ancient than Moses', and that 'he was the Disciple rather than the Teacher of that learned Nation'⁸⁷. And John Spencer (1630-1693), sometimes reckoned the early modern founder of Comparative Religion, considered it absurd that Egyptian law, practices and reasoning did not influence the Mosaic polity, albeit as some kind of indulgence to satisfy the Hebrews' 'taste and capacity'⁸⁸. But Newton was bent on dismantling this potential disparagement of the holy Book and its people. Hence his contentiousness that the Solomonic temple preceded the great pyramids; and his accusative stress on Egypt as the worst source of errors. The Egyptian priests capped off a complex process, as Newton euhemeristically interpreted it, which turned the eight members of Noah's family into eight primary deities (the Ogdoad), that would in turn be developed into the twelve Olympians⁸⁹. On top of this, Egypto-Athanasian Trinitarianism put Christianity on the wrong track for over a millennium, the Roman papacy abetting it and breaching the Noachian precepts with its idolatries, so that Christians became 'y^e most wicked wretched sort of people . . . the worst sort of men that ever reigned upon the face of the earth'⁹⁰.

⁸⁵ Newton, *Prophecies* 468, 472 (and for exegesis, Trompf, 'Newtonian History', 232-233, 247 n. 153).

⁸⁶ Cf. Kircher, *Obeliscus Pamphilius*.

⁸⁷ Burnet, [*Archæologiæ Philosophicæ sive*] *Doctrina Antiqua de Rerum Originibus*, etc., 45, cf. 56, 241-246.

⁸⁸ Spencer, *De Legibus Hebræorum ritualibus et earum rationibus, libri quatuor*, II, 649, cf. 709-1212.

⁸⁹ Start with 'Origines' (Yahuda MS 16.1, fols. 13-20; 16.2, fols. 3-17), cf. the later Yahuda MS 15.7, fol. 120^r. On background to Newton's euhemeristic method via such scholars as Gerardus Vossius, I defer to Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Discovers the Gods*, esp. ch. 3.

⁹⁰ Yahuda MS 1.4, fols. 67-68.

One wonders why Newton needed to have implicated Kabbalah in all such negativity. After all, Selden wrote of its symbolism with acceptance (*supra*, n. 35), and actually intimated that it had a proto-history deriving from Chaldaea. Preceding Egyptian civilization, this primal *Cabala sacra* influenced views about Thoth and thus the Hermetic tradition, though a purer strand of it branched into Syro-Phoenicia⁹¹. Still, Newton cannot be said to have followed this up, even when, as we shall see, he had good reasons for doing so. Goldish, though he apparently does not know of Selden's references to Kabbalah, was right in his instincts that it was the writings of this great Puritan jurist rather than those of Cantabrian academician Spencer that first enticed Newton into Judaica and Noachiana⁹². Yet Newton possessed a highly selective mentality. He apparently read Spencer (*ca.* 1689) as carefully as he had Selden; and this not just to refute him. Significantly, Spencer's *magnum opus* on the laws of the Hebrews contained in its very middle a crucial *Dissertatio* on the commands traditionally received by Noah and the apparent evocation of them in the New Testament⁹³. It was a crucial Spencerian inference that, upon making its decisions about the conditions of the Gentiles' entry into the Christian fold, the early church appealed to four of the Noachide laws most appropriate to the current situation—and thus moved to proscribe idolatry, fornication, murder, and the eating of strangled meat among its new members (Acts 15:19-20, 29). From this Newton could satisfy himself that the earliest church, following Jesus, practised the ancient religion of Noah after him. This was the kind of Jewish-originated material central to his concern, not *qabbalah*.

Newton was in pursuit of *prisca theologia* with a pure lineage within the Biblical record, a preoccupation hardly unrelated to the concerns of Jewish mysticism. At his hands, however, it remained a *studium reconditum* peculiar to himself, and was never presented in a mystical, let alone kabbalistic vein, except perhaps when expatiating upon apocalyptic symbology in Daniel and Revelation. The honoured lineage internal to the Bible ran from Noah, through Abraham, Job, Moses, the prophets and Jesus, to the early church⁹⁴.

⁹¹ *Diis Syris*, 30-32 (on Thoth having sanctuaries in Syro-Phoenicia).

⁹² Goldish, *Judaism*, 21-29.

⁹³ *De Legibus*, 1686 edn., I, 594-597 (knowledge of the Talmudic *Sanhedrin* tractate shown). For indications of the year of reading Spencer, Yahuda MS 41, fol. 5, cf. Westfall, *Never at Rest*, 352, n. 55. Newton's copies of Selden's *Dis Syris* and Spencer's *Legibus* reflect more or less the same amount of usage and "dog-earing", see Harrison, *Library*, 235-236, 242.

⁹⁴ Thus esp. "Irenicum", posits. 2-5 (McLachlan, 28-29), posit. 5 intriguingly clarifying, however, that the Gentiles, in responding to primitive Christian preaching, returned not to 'the

The human population spread out from ‘Chaldaea’, where ‘mankind lived together . . . under the governance of Noah’⁹⁵, and thus there were in the course of the Gentiles’ histories figures who reflected his primordial wisdom—this being where proverbial linkages and figures of esoteric wisdom come in. Of wise teachers, we find Zoroaster, Thoth, Orpheus (indirectly), Pythagoras, Confucius and the Brahmins all receiving appreciation, if in an unsystematic treatment⁹⁶.

Geographical linkages and concern for the mystical associations come into the equation. The first line of influence from Noachian-influenced Chaldaea is Arabia, or more precisely Sabaea, fabled in classical and Muslim sources as a fount of wisdom⁹⁷. John Spencer attended to ‘the Zabaeans’ as a people of great interest, and knew Maimonides had learnt about their absentions from idolatry, fornication, blood and the suffocation of animals⁹⁸. From Arabia there were two branches of influence that impinged on the course of Gentile affairs outside the mainstream Biblical story, one of these being to Egypt and the other to Syro-Phoenicia. It is tempting to put down Newton’s favouritism towards the latter trajectory to his reading of Selden; but that remains an uncertain deduction nonetheless. He also pored over Johannes van Sleiden’s distillation of world history early in the 1660s, it being an obvious idiosyncrasy of that popular west German annalist’s Four Monarchy theory that each of the great Kingdoms of Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome successively ran into very serious troubles after they conquered Egypt. This was apparently Sleiden’s means of explaining why the Egyptians did not figure in the Danielic schema, and demanded a somewhat forced interpretation of events considering that Babylon as such never really took over Egypt in any

religion of Moses but to that of their ancestors’, to a religion obliging ‘men to be merciful even to brute beasts’, and thus by extension back to ‘the religion of Noah . . . from which they had [originally] revolted’. Moses and his polity, in contrast to Newton’s stance, was the critical “departure point” of spiritual history for Christian Kabbalists.

⁹⁵ “Irenicum”, posit. 2 (McLachlan, 28).

⁹⁶ Cf. *Supra*, and n. 73 for background. Orpheus enters this cluster for being among the Argonauts under Jason, another crew member possessing a ‘primitive sphere’ (his source being Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonaut.*); see [Newton] *apud* ‘Remarks on the Observations made on a Chronological Index of Sir Isaac Newton, etc.’, 91; cf. Manuel, *Historian*, ch. 5, and see 83, 94, 107-109, 270-271, etc. for the others.

⁹⁷ Sabaea was conceived to include Nabataea (cf. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliot.*, II,ii,48), let alone the renowned Biblical area of Harran (cf., eg., Gen. 24). Thus start with Newton’s “Origines” (Yahuda MS 16.1, fols. 3, 5-7), cf. MS 15.3 (fol. 57). For background on the sources, D. Chwolsohn, *Ssabier und Ssabismus*, I, 689-714 (on Maimonides), vol. 2, 366-636.

⁹⁸ *Legibus*, I, Bk. 2, appealing to Maimonides, *Mor. Nebhoc.* [I].

case⁹⁹. Over and above Selden and Sleidan, though, there was enough in both the Bible and his apparently ancient Jewish survey history *Seder Olam* to enculpate Egypt as the chief source of religious distortions.

In the context of the Solomonic achievements, to elaborate Newton's position, the Phoenician king of Tyre, Hiram, assisted in the construction of the temple, at a time, we reiterate, deliberately made prior to the erection of the pyramids. The Hiram-Solomonic cooperation amounts to a crucial intersection of Hebrew and Gentile wisdom. Newton's interest in the temple, we can anticipate, already entails a mixture of elements. For him the temple expresses the primary efflorescence of civilization, and no other civilization becomes truly great until after Israel, a chronologically paradoxical position to be explained by his defensive Biblicism. The mystical measure of the cubit returns in the Hebrews' story with the accounts of the the Temple's dimensions (1 Kgs. 6; 2 Chron. 3). Newton's fascinations with the Temple's plan and proportions partly reflects his views about the lines of knowledge in Antiquity; he accepts the Patristic opinion that the fabled Cadmus brought "letters" to the Greeks, in journeying from Phoenicia where the writing of alphabetic letters (as against hieroglyphs) first started¹⁰⁰. He takes the first philosopher placed in the Greek tradition to be 'a Phoenician by ex[traction]'¹⁰¹. But Natural Philosophy was not the only issue involved: speculations about the mystical messages of the Temple's shape and size lay in the very middle of Jewish-Christian relations at the time, and in shared eschatological hopes among Puritan and Hebrew minds (especially of those Britain and Holland) that the Jews would return to Israel, with the last Temple of all (cf. Ezek. 40-41) then being erected¹⁰². Jews and Christians, it is evident, could put a common focus on the Temple through early Masonry (the very

⁹⁹ Sleidan, *Quatuor Summis Imperiis*, 1-2; and for the details, Trompf, *Recurrence*, II. Sleidan apparently bases the alleged Babylonian conquest of Egypt on 2 Kgs. 24:7 and Jer. 46. The problem he has here could have been avoided by accentuating Assyro-Babylonia as a complex, and noting how Assyria held down Egypt between 670-626 BC, the last dating marking Assyria's virtual collapse.

¹⁰⁰ For the main source, Clement, *Misc.*, I, 16 (with a list of sages), cf. Newton, esp. "Original of Monarchies", 206-207. And also where Atomism, began with a certain Moschus the Phoenician, cf. University of Cambridge Library MS 3965.6, fol. 270^r. Newton did not identify this Moschus with Moses (see Casini, 'Newton: The Classical Scholia', 36, as the Cambridge Platonists had done, see Sailor, 'Moses and Atomism', 14-16).

¹⁰¹ 'Out of Cudworth', reproduced as Append. in: Popkin and Force (eds.), *Context, Nature, and Influence*, 208.

¹⁰² Cf. esp. Manasseh ben Israel, *Hoc est, Spes Israelis*; cf. Offenberg, 'Jacob Jehuda Leon (1602-1675) and his Model of the Temple', 95-117.

name of which evokes divine architecture, and which is known for its curious “Hiram” ritual). Whether a pre-Andersonian Mason or not, Newton shows enough affinities in his thought to convince us that he was responding to its developing ethos¹⁰³, even though his interests were more apocalyptic¹⁰⁴.

In relating lines of wisdom to ancient geography, Newton was forever anxious about “the Egyptian implication”. If Egypt did eventually come to influence Greek high culture, this was largely to derail better beginnings through emanationist, pantheist and “Platonist” influences¹⁰⁵. By 1614, we note, Isaac Casaubon had punctured the supposed very ancient date of the Egyptian *Corpus Hermeticum*, allowing it to be placed in the problem area of the Gnosticism and kabbalism, their pagan-influenced speculations mar- rying primitive Christianity¹⁰⁶. The long-term history of such distortions had ended up with the misguided Egyptophilic Hermeticism of Giordano Bruno and the deviating Jewish pantheism of Baruch Spinoza¹⁰⁷. And of course the biggest problem in world religion was the Trinitarian and papist idolatry, with its Alexandrian origins.

We now approach the conclusion of Newton’s opinions and thus our own assessments of it. Extraordinarily the great scientist, renowned across many lands in his own time, thought of himself, in his inner sanctum, as cosmically significant. Not only was he recovering a true picture of the universe, which

¹⁰³ For preliminary research, Trompf, ‘Newtonian History’, 235-236, 248-249. The Talmudist James Anderson established and systematized the Scottish rite in England by 1723, adding Rosicrucian elements that were probably not to Newton’s liking, and in all probability replaced the Noachian precepts by the seven Masonic virtues, which the same as the classical pagan ones (though in the end the Biblical precepts to love God and one’s fellow were also stably present, but with a third one given, to ‘honour the state’). Pre-Anderson English Masonry is often connected with the lodge of the Jewish benefactor Elias Ashmole; see Josten (ed.), *Elias Ashmole, 1617-1692*, I, 33-35, who puts us in touch with a world in which Noachian-based masonry helped preserved economic relations between Jews and Christians (especially after the Iberian anti-Jewish expulsion orders), and also Muslim traders (relevant Noachianism occupying a whole *sura* of the *Qur’an* [71]). With its possibilities for irenicism, this world of collusion suits Newton, while by contrast he is very anti-Rosicrucian; see his notes on “The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity of R.C., etc.”, reprod. in: Macphail, *Alchemy and the Occult: A Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts from the Collection of Paul and Mary Mellon given to Yale University Library*, II, 347-348.

¹⁰⁴ See Newton’s “The Second Book concerning the Method and Synchronisms of the Apocalyps & the Allusions therein the Laws and History of the Jews”, reprod. as Append. F. in: Goldish, *Judaism*, 21-29.

¹⁰⁵ Note Bernal, *Black Athena*, vol. 1, 26-27.

¹⁰⁶ Casaubon, *De Rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes*, etc., esp. 73-87.

¹⁰⁷ That Newton knew of Spinoza’s world-view through access to Isaac Barrow’s collection is argued by Manuel, in *Religion*, 84-85. That he had never heard of Bruno’s *mal famé* is hard to believe.

he was after all humble enough to believe derived from a mysterious post-diluvian *fons et origo*, but he conceived himself as the apostle of a restored true religion of Noah and a true pre-pervverted Christianity. He was the last crucial figure in the custodial line of a *prisca theologia*, as the eschatological days of a new order approached¹⁰⁸. He was not alone in his neo-Arianism, of course, and in the turbulence of the Puritan revolution and the glorious act in 1688 of removing the Papists' chances of ever controlling Britain again, a small band of fellow believers could announce the return of a "Golden Age" of "primitive Christianity"¹⁰⁹. When William Whiston, Newton's successor to the Lucasian chair at Cambridge was foolish enough to air the shared dream and his own neo-Arianism in public, however, this special exercise of the radical reformation soon dissipated¹¹⁰. That is, of course, unless we can be persuaded that it transformed itself into the unitarianisms and deisms of the Enlightenment. Isaac Newton, lonely in his study, had his own special version of religious renewal, and although *qabbalah* had little place in it, various lines of Jewish thought, sometimes integral to if more often detached from Jewish mysticism broadly conceived, have their place in his very special esoteric quest. In our final analysis his deepest desire seems to have been to bring his "ethico-historical" and "scientific" work together. Matching his disclosure of the universal laws of nature ordained by God for the cosmos, he teetered on the deduction that the basic religion of Noah and Jesus, and their "most rational" morality in loving God and fellow humans, was also natural law. An open pronouncement of this latter position, however, was to be left to such well known Enlightenment philosophers as Montesquieu and Paine¹¹¹, although they were in much less of a position to integrate this view with experimental science. In them Newton's esoteric quest somehow becomes exoteric, and any connections with either mysticism or Jewishness have been lost.

Garry W. Trompf is Professor in the History of Ideas, Department of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney.

¹⁰⁸ Here Joseph Mede (1586-1638) was even more important than More. For a brief introduction, Olson, *Millennialism, Utopianism, and Progress*, 200-203, cf. also Newton's "Fragments of a Treatise on Revelation", 114, 121.

¹⁰⁹ E. Duffy, 'Primitive Christianity Revived: Religious Renewal in Augustan England', 287-300.

¹¹⁰ Duffy, 'Whiston's Affair: The Trials of a Primitive Christian 1709-1714', esp. 131-2.

¹¹¹ Ponder: Montesquieu, *L'esprit des Lois*, I, 2, cf. pref.; Payne, *The Rights of Man*, 305.

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Isaac Newton et le Noah cabalistique: La loi naturelle entre Mediaevalia et Lumières

Quelle est la relation entre Isaac Newton et la cabale? S'agit-il pour lui de se placer dans la néo-tradition du cabalisme chrétien (suivant Jean Selden, Henri More, etc.), ou adopte-t-il plus directement, en revanche, des éléments de la pensée judaïque (Maïmonide, les idées noachides, etc.)? L'auteur accorde plus de crédit à la seconde possibilité, en proposant toutefois une ligne distincte d'interprétation.

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

Roy Willis & Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon*, Berg: Oxford & New York 2004. 170 pp. ISBN 1-85973-682-3 (cloth) and 1-85973-687-4 (paper).

Astrology occupies a liminal space in contemporary Western society. Polls suggest a wide-spread popular sympathy for stellar divination, with a quarter of the population typically professing belief. At the same time, astrology is in a sense thoroughly marginalized, having been ousted from areas such as politics, higher education and medicine where it once reigned supreme. Indeed, whereas many other religious (or religiously tinged) practices are generally granted at least a minimum of respect by the cultural elite, astrology provokes outright hostility among many non-believers and is routinely branded as an irrational pseudo-science. The present slender volume, comprised of five chapters authored by anthropologist Roy Willis and six by historian of astrology Patrick Curry, revolves around this peculiar state of affairs.

Their very sensible point of departure is that the nature of astrology has been thoroughly misunderstood by its critics. The post-Enlightenment culture in which we live has fostered the illusion that astrology must be either a failed science or a valid one, *tertium non datur*. The anthropological perspective, that astrology has nothing to do with science but is a form of ritual divination, makes more sense of the activities in which astrologers and their clients are involved. It is easy to sympathize with the general premise of the authors. Skeptics who probe the truth value of astrological propositions bark up the wrong tree, their investigations are as inherently odd as if they had decided to subject the shells, bones and sticks of the African diviner to scientific scrutiny.

There are many conceivable ways in which this crucial insight could be developed further. A rough but convenient distinction could be made between empirical and theological approaches. Empirical studies concentrate on historical or social-scientific data. Such studies would typically investigate how contemporary astrologers, their clients, readers of astrology columns and a skeptical environment interact to form the particular socio-historical constellations that determine the ambiguous status of divination in contemporary society. There are interesting parallel developments that could be explored in research of this kind, e.g. the ways in which skeptical organizations such

as CSICOP have come to resemble anti-cult movements, adopting similar functions as moral entrepreneurs. Theological tracts are structured differently and have a quite different agenda. They characteristically focus much more heavily on normative issues, and are generally written in order to defend a particular set of opinions—in this case astrology—against its cultured despisers.

Both Willis and Curry have excellent track records in the empirical genre, but have here largely chosen the other path. They declare their own approach and their style of argumentation early on, when, on page 4 of their joint introduction, they write that their aim is to ‘assert the right to existence of other forms of life than those approved by a Committee of Scientific Experts, and the current Witchfinder General’. In their defense of divination, the Enlightenment anti-astrological world is depicted as dead and disenchanted, whereas the astrological form of life is said to retain a pre-modern vision of the world as seen through the spiritual hermeneutics of the mythic consciousness. Although Max Weber, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl figure prominently in the authors’ discussion of mythic versus disenchanted thought, this nostalgic line of reasoning resonates as much, if not more, with the spirit of Mircea Eliade and his distinction between an archaic *homo religiosus* in tune with the cosmic rhythms and the rootless denizen of modern secular culture.

The defense of a ‘spiritual universe’ against the ‘agents of disenchantment’ (p. 40) goes via a wide-ranging panorama of the history and practice of stellar mythology and celestial divination. Their survey of various trends in pre-modern as well as contemporary astrology (chapter 6) is perhaps the most thoroughly empirical part of their book, and reveals a solid familiarity with the subject. The use that Curry and Willis make of the material is, however, distinctly theologized, as becomes particularly clear in the sections that attempt to define divination and astrology.

My earlier characterization of the theological genre obviously alludes to the title of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s most famous work, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Schleiermacher attempted to rescue Christianity by defining it as something other than what most contemporary readers would have taken it to be, namely either sets of beliefs or moral injunctions. Patrick Curry performs an analogous move when he states that divination is not a predictive art but a negotiation with the divine and a quest for wisdom. Where the empirical evidence resists being subsumed under this redefinition, it is because divination has moved away from the pure ideal type and has become decadent (pp. 57-59), or because astrologers themselves fail to understand what their art is really about (p. 89). The various varieties of contemporary

astrology are therefore normatively ranked according to their ability to conform to the ideal picture of what astrology should be (pp. 72-75). Equally pervasive is the implication that those who reject astrology do so because they have succumbed to indoctrination by a male-dominated, secularist ideology (pp. 66, 69 et passim), echoing the believers' standard defense that if we truly understood them, we would agree with them.

Different genres adopt vastly different literary styles and are read in divergent ways. The stylistic traits of theological writing permeate much of the present work. Whereas academic arguments tend to be formulated in a fairly subdued vocabulary, it is part of the polemical game to describe one's friends as 'warm-blooded, egalitarian, anarchistic and erotic' (p. 11) and to vilify one's ideological foes as 'pathological, if not psychotic' (p. 16). The rhetorical requirements of the apology also go a long way to explain the motley list of authorities invoked in support of the authors' position. Willis and Curry are by no means unique in finding inspiration in postmodern thinkers from Lyotard to Latour, whose contested opinions are also in much scholarly prose rhetorically invoked as if they were generally accepted insights. More unusual is the attempt to draw support and inspiration from an array of controversial writers, with little reflection on the massive source critical problems involved in their work. The list includes Carl Jung, archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, anthropologist Marcel Griaule (author of several heavily criticized works on Dogon cosmology), author Frank Waters (known for his largely pseudo-ethnographic work *Book of the Hopi*), proponents of New Age science such as Fritjof Capra, as well as neo-shamanic writers Michael Harner and (admittedly with some caveats) Carlos Castaneda.

Boosting the respectability of astrology is, of course, a perfectly legitimate pursuit. Willis and Curry accomplish their task with considerable erudition and argumentative skill, and have a number of important points to make along the way. Their fundamental observation, that the barrage of rude and offensive counter-rhetoric with which astrology is sometimes met calls for some form of explanation, remains valid. It is also easy to concur with their suggestion that there are vastly more interesting questions to ask of a divinatory practice than those typically voiced by organized skeptics. Nevertheless, constructing a theology of astrology rather than crafting a historical or anthropological study does come with a price. It is an authorial strategy that risks transforming one's overarching argument into little more than a matter of personal taste. Either one is constitutionally predisposed to agree with the authors' sentiment that the practice of astrology is an act of spiritual defiance against a virulently malevolent System, or one is not.

It would, however, be a category error to chide a piece such as this for not conforming to the rather bloodless language and cautious norms of middle-of-the-road scholarly writing. As with astrology itself, it is not very fruitful to dissect this text in order to categorize it as an example of failed or valid science. Willis and Curry's book can be read differently, as part of an ongoing cultural movement in which "alternative" practices and beliefs, that for the last several generations functioned as forms of "folk" religiosity, have once again begun to attract intellectually sophisticated defenders, structural counterparts of the more familiar philosophically astute apologists of the great traditions, viz. Christian, Islamic or Jewish theologians. When the definitive history of astrology in the late modern age finally is written, *Astrology, Science and Culture* will no doubt be quoted as an important source text.

Olav Hammer

Hermann E. Stockinger, *Die hermetisch-esoterische Tradition unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Einflüsse auf das Denken Johann Christian Edelmanns (1698-1767)*, Hildesheim, Zürich und New York: Georg Olms Verlag 2004. 968 S. ISBN: 3-487-12601-X.

Es ist der Plan des Verfassers der hier anzuzeigenden Arbeit, ein mehrbändiges Grundlagenwerk zur "Religionskritik der Aufklärung" zu erarbeiten. Den ersten Teil: "Theologieinterne Kritik", gibt es bereits, allerdings bisher nur als Manuskript einer Diplomarbeit (Wien 1997). Für seine Dissertation konzipierte Stockinger dann den zweiten Teil, in dem er die "Radikalen" behandeln will: Johann Christian Edelmann, Karl Friedrich Bahrdt und andere. Während der einschlägigen Vorarbeiten zum Abschnitt über Edelmann entdeckte er, dass dessen Religionskritik nur verständlich werden konnte, wenn man die Leser zuvor in den spezifischen geistesgeschichtlichen Hintergrund seines Denkens einführt: die hermetisch-esoterische Tradition nämlich, deren Kenntnis, so die völlig zutreffende Einschätzung Stockingers, nicht allgemein vorausgesetzt werden durfte. Er machte sich also daran, zunächst einmal diese "Tradition" zu erarbeiten. Das Resultat ist das vorliegende Buch.

Es ist wichtig, sich diese Entstehungsgeschichte des Werkes vor Augen zu führen, um zu verstehen, wieso das Thema—laut Titel—in besonderer Beziehung zu Edelmann abgehandelt wird. Gleichzeitig hat sich die

Vorgeschichte, um die es hier eigentlich nur gehen sollte, jedoch verselbstständigt und ein Eigenleben entwickelt: Die Geschichte des europäischen Hermetismus von den Anfängen bis zum 18. Jahrhundert konnte nicht in einem kleinen Überblick dargestellt werden. Sie wuchs sich zu einem Werk von annähernd tausend Seiten aus. Und dabei gewann sie für den Autor nun auch einen neuen Anspruch, der weit über die Servicefunktion für das Verständnis eines Aufklärers hinausging. Es wurde der Anspruch, der europäischen Philosophiegeschichte, die Stockinger in ihrer—wie er sagt—Fokussierung auf rationale Systeme und Fragestellungen als ‘erfundene Philosophiegeschichte’ begreift, den ‘fehlenden hermetischen Teil . . . zurückzugeben, um ein ganzheitliches Bild dieser Geschichte in den Blick zu bekommen’ (S. VI). Diese neue, ungleich anspruchsvollere Zielsetzung veranlasste ihn dann offenbar zu der Vorabpublikation eines Textes, bei dem es sich eigentlich nur um einen Unterabschnitt eines Kapitels des II. Teils im Rahmen eines ganz anderen Gesamtprojekts handelt (vgl. das Inhaltsverzeichnis der “Religionskritik der Aufklärung”, S. 909-925).

Wir haben nicht so viele Überblickswerke zur Geschichte des europäischen Hermetismus, als dass der Entschluss Hermann Stockingers, dieses so ganz unorthodox entstandene Manuskript der Öffentlichkeit vorzulegen, nicht voll und ganz zu begrüßen wäre. Auch die Entscheidung des Verlages, diese Arbeit über ein immer noch nicht selbstverständliches Thema in seine Reihe “Philosophische Texte und Studien” aufzunehmen, verdient alle Anerkennung. Fragen wir uns also zunächst, was die Arbeit leistet.

Der erste Eindruck, den der Leser schon bei der Durchsicht des Inhaltsverzeichnisses gewinnt, ist die geradezu enzyklopädische Anlage dieses Werkes. Der Band ist eine Fundgrube für jeden, der sich über Aspekte der “hermetisch-esoterischen Tradition” informieren möchte. Unterstützt wird diese Funktion noch durch ein sehr brauchbares Personen- und Sachregister. Es ist beeindruckend, welche Fülle von Wissen der ja noch junge Verfasser akkumuliert hat und nun vor uns ausbreitet. Dabei ist er (außer zum 18. Jahrhundert—hier gibt es abschließend interessante Überlegungen und Korrekturen zum Modell einer “vernünftigen Hermetik”) nirgendwo Spezialist. Seine—wie er selbst sagt—‘Tour de force’ (Vorwort) ist aber wohl nur auf diese Weise möglich. Man muss die Unbekümmertheit des Generalisten besitzen, um überhaupt den Mut zu fassen, derart viele verschiedene Themen und Forschungsrichtungen, zu denen es jeweils ganze Bibliotheken von Quellen und Literatur gibt, in einem Gesamtansatz integriert darzustellen. Aber das ist eine der Herausforderungen, vor der die Esoterikforschung ganz allgemein steht: Niemand kann alle Aspekte und zeitlichen Entwicklungen

abendländischer Esoterik wissenschaftlich völlig adäquat beherrschen, und doch muss das Gesamtbild erarbeitet werden. Sonst bleibt die Bedeutung dieses Themenfeldes in seiner übergeordneten Relevanz auch weiter unsichtbar. Die Rezensentin kennt dieses Problem aus eigener Erfahrung, und so ist sie auch nicht in der Lage, die Darstellung in den einzelnen Abschnitten des "Historischen Teils" zu beurteilen. Hier müssen die jeweiligen Fachleute sprechen. Jede Kritik sollte sich jedoch dieser speziellen Problematik esoterikgeschichtlicher Forschung bewusst sein.

Aber was bedeutet das eigentlich, "Esoterik"-Forschung? Was versteht der Autor unter der 'hermetisch-esoterischen Tradition', die er darstellen will? Stockinger setzt sich sehr eingehend mit dieser Frage auseinander. Vor seinem "Historischen Teil" (S. 178-908) steht ein "Systematischer Teil" (S. 10-177). Hier erfährt der Leser, dass der Autor "Hermetik" und "Esoterik" als Synonyma verwendet: 'Um das Denken Edelmanns . . . verstehen zu können, ist es unumgänglich, vorweg eine Tradition ins Auge zu fassen, die als "hermetische" oder (in neuerer Zeit) als "esoterische" (Faivre) bekannt ist' (S. 11). Das heißt: "Hermetik" ist hier nicht primär ein Quellenbegriff, bezogen auf die Hermetica der Antike und ihre Wirkungsgeschichte, sondern "Hermetik" wird ebenso wie der Terminus "Esoterik" (der ja vor dem 19. Jahrhundert überhaupt kein Quellenbegriff ist) als ein wissenschaftlicher Synthesebegriff verwendet, der in heuristischer Funktion der Modellbildung dient. Dementsprechend geht Stockinger von der Definition der "Komponenten der Esoterik als Denkform" aus, wie sie Antoine Faivre vorgelegt hat (*L'ésotérisme*, Paris 1992). S. 19 erläutert Stockinger die vier grundlegenden Komponenten, die bestens bekannt sind und hier nicht wiederholt werden müssen. Dann passiert etwas Merkwürdiges. Es folgt nämlich der Satz: 'Faivre kennt noch ein weiteres Kennzeichen: 5): Initiation durch einen Meister oder Transmission'. Das ist eine verkürzte Darstellung, denn Faivre kennt noch *zwei* weitere Kennzeichen. Stockinger übergeht—aus Gründen, die sich dem Leser nicht erschließen—die Komponente der "Konkordanz", die darauf abzielt, das esoterische Traditionsdenken zu fassen (ich zitiere aus der von Stockinger benutzten deutschen Ausgabe von 1996, S. 30): 'Es handelt sich um eine Tendenz, gemeinsame Nenner zwischen zwei, drei, sogar allen verschiedenen Traditionen aufzeigen zu wollen in der Hoffnung, dabei auf eine Gnosis oder Erkenntnisquelle von höherer Qualität zu stoßen'. Statt dies also darzustellen, macht Stockinger den "Traditionalismus" zu seinem eigenen sechsten Kennzeichen, das er den 'fünf Kennzeichen von Faivre' hinzufügt. Danach folgen noch drei weitere Ergänzungskomponenten, die nun tatsächlich über das Grundmodell Faivres hinausgehen: der "Kosmotheismus" (7),

der "Utopismus" (8) und das Selbstverständnis des Esoterischen als "Fundamentalwissenschaft" als 9. und letzter Punkt. "Kosmotheismus" und "Traditionalismus" werden in eigenen Abschnitten eingehend behandelt. Dabei scheint der Rezensentin der Hinweis auf den "Kosmotheismus" der Esoterik am interessantesten zu sein. Die Ausführungen, die der Autor S. 33-38 dazu macht, sind anschlussfähig an neuere Tendenzen in der Religionswissenschaft, die von einem Pluralismus der europäischen Religionsgeschichte ausgehen. Stockinger beruft sich allerdings weniger auf diese Autoren als auf Erich Hornung und Jan Assmann.

Dass diesen Abschnitten ein ausführlichst gegliederter Textteil zu den Stichworten "Geheimnis", "Geheimhaltung" und "Geheimlehre" folgt, ist dagegen wenig nachvollziehbar. Faivre hatte das Arkanum mit guten Gründen aus seiner Esoterikdefinition herausgehalten. Dem kann man selbstverständlich widersprechen. Das Problem ist nur: Der Autor tut das ja gar nicht. Er führt das Arkanum gerade nicht in seinen Neun-Punkte-Katalog ein, behandelt es dann aber trotzdem unter "Kennzeichen der Esoterik" (S. 48-61). Damit entsteht die Frage, welchen Status dieses Element innerhalb des "Systematischen Teils" hat? Die fehlende Antwort führt auf eine grundlegende Schwäche dieser Arbeit. Sie hat keine klar durchdachte Struktur. Der Autor will alles, und damit will er zuviel. Es gibt so gut wie nichts, das in der einschlägigen Forschungsdiskussion begegnet, das nicht in der überbordend ausführlichen Gliederung auftaucht, und wenn nicht dort, dann wird es in einzelnen Absätzen oder Anmerkungen angesprochen. Stringenz, ein eigenes Profil, kann so kaum entstehen; die durchaus erkennbaren Ansätze dazu werden ständig wieder durch weitere Überlegungen aufgelöst und untergraben.

Damit kommen wir zur entscheidenden Frage: Wie schreibt der Autor Esoterikgeschichte, und zwar nun in der notwendigen Verklammerung des "Systematischen Teils" mit dem "Historischen Teil"? 'Schreibt man eine Geschichte der Esoterik', so Stockinger S. 44, so ist 'nicht die realgeschichtliche Vergangenheit . . . wichtig, sondern die Aufnahme jener durch die Hermetiker. Die Erforschung der Geschichte der Esoterik muss daher vorrangig die Gleichförmigkeit und den Wandel der Rezeption der hermetischen, alchemistischen, magischen etc. Traditionen ins Zentrum rücken. Die von der Esoterik vorgebrachte Tradition ist also eine imaginierte und konstruierte, was nicht heißen soll, daß sie nicht auch auf historische Fakten und Personen zurückgreift—nur, der Aspekt der rezeptiven Adaption und rekonstruktiven Projektion ist in dieser Tradition besonders stark greifbar'. So ist es; dem ist nichts hinzuzufügen. Verstärkt wird diese erkenntnisleitende Grundthese noch durch die Tatsache, dass der Autor den "Traditionalismus" als wichtige Komponente

esoterischen Denkens so eindrücklich herausgestellt hat. Esoterik ist hier also Rezeption und Konstruktion, nicht Tradition—um es auf eine knappe Formel zu bringen. Warum trägt die Arbeit dann den Titel: “Die hermetisch-esoterische Tradition”?

Um dies nachvollziehen zu können, ist eine zweite programmatische Textstelle hilfreich, die der Leser auf S. 15 findet, und in der der Autor erläutert, wie er seinen Überblick über die esoterisch-hermetische Tradition strukturieren wird: ‘Es ist dabei notwendig, bis in die Zeiten des alten Ägypten, bis zur Zeit Mose, ja bis zur mythischen Zeit des archaischen Weisheitslehrers Hermes Trismegistos zurückzugehen, das Problem der Beziehung resp. Beeinflussung von ägyptischer, jüdischer, heidnischer und christlicher Religion zu beleuchten, kurz die (christliche und häretische) Gnosis zu streifen, die Tradierung (neu-) platonischen Gedankengutes nachzuzeichnen, die Rezeption und Kritik der hermetischen Schriften zu verfolgen, den “linken Flügel” der Reformation zu betrachten, die spekulative Naturphilosophie der Renaissance miteinzubeziehen, auf Paracelsismus, Böhmissmus und Rosenkreuzertum hinzuweisen, um dann letztendlich die unmittelbare Vergangenheit Edelmanns . . . sprich: die mystisch-spiritualistischen und damit unmittelbar zusammenhängend, radikalpietistischen Gedankenwelten etwas ausführlicher zur Darstellung zu bringen . . .’. Das ist die esoterische Traditionskette des Johann Christian Edelmann, und genau nach dieser esoterischen Logik baut Stockinger dann seine Arbeit tatsächlich auf.

Um keine Missverständnisse hervorzurufen: Selbstverständlich kann man eine wissenschaftliche Geschichte der Astrologie schreiben und kann, ja muss sogar mit den Babyloniern oder den prähistorischen Vorläufen beginnen. Wenn man eine Geschichte der Hermetik (im engeren Sinne) schreibt, beginnt man mit dem Corpus hermeticum. Schreibt man eine Geschichte der Alchemie, beginnt man im altägyptischen Kulturkreis usw. Aber eine wissenschaftliche Geschichte europäischer Esoterik beginnt nicht bei Hermes Trismegistos. Auch nicht bei Echnaton (Stockinger S. 246 ff.). Die Realgeschichte des Alten Ägypten hat mit Esoterik nichts zu tun—esoterisch ist eine spezifische Rezeption Ägyptens durch die europäische Neuzeit. Diese Rezeption beginnt mit der Renaissance.

Stockinger weiß das auch. An zahlreichen Stellen weist er selbst darauf hin. Trotzdem kann er sich mit dieser Sichtweise nicht wirklich anfreunden, wie man an der Ausführung der Arbeit sieht. Damit steht er nicht alleine, und deshalb ist es auch so interessant, in der Rezension dieses Werkes auf diese Grundproblematik von Esoterikforschung hinzuweisen. Wann und wo setzt man damit an, eine bestimmte Denk- und Glaubensform als “Esoterik”

zu bezeichnen? Es wird in dieser ja noch immer jungen Disziplin noch über diese und viele andere grundlegende Fragen zu diskutieren sein. Dieses Buch bietet Anlass dazu. Das ist nicht das Schlechteste, was man über eine Arbeit sagen kann—auch wenn ihr eine eigene, klare Konzeption in eklatanter Weise fehlt, eine Tatsache, die sicher nicht nur darauf zurückzuführen ist, dass es nicht funktionieren *kann*, eine Geschichte abendländischer Esoterik als Vorgeschichte Johann Christian Edelmanns zu schreiben.

Monika Neugebauer-Wölk

Michael J.B. Allen and Valery Rees (with Martin Davies), eds., *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, his Philosophy, his Legacy* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 108), Leiden etc.: Brill 2002. xxii, 493 pp., 9 illustrations. ISBN 90-04-11855-1.

As is well known, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) is one of the most important figures in fifteenth-century esotericism, exerting a strong influence on his contemporaries and on later generations through his theological and philosophical writings as well as through his translations of Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Hermetic texts. On occasion of the Quincentenary of Ficino's death in June 1999, a conference was held at the National Gallery in London under the auspices of the Society for Renaissance Studies. That this academic conference on Ficino's life, work, and legacy drew more than 350 participants is evidence of the enormous public interest in this complex representative of Renaissance esotericism. Two thirds of the volume presently under review go back to papers presented at that occasion. Taken together, the 21 essays reflect the state of the art in Ficino studies and illustrate the vitality and fascination of this particular field of research. The editors did an excellent job in selecting and structuring the contributions, and Michael J.B. Allen—himself the leading expert on Ficino worldwide—provides the reader with a brief yet informative introduction to the volume.

As is usually the case in collective volumes, not all individual contributions share the same approach and academic quality; some can be read as mere introductions to issues of Ficino studies that were already discussed elsewhere, while others break new ground for future academic research. The advantage of such a mixture is, of course, that this volume can be recommended not only to the "initiated" expert but also to a general audience

interested in Ficino and his Renaissance contexts. When reading the book from cover to cover, however, one often misses internal references between the articles and is at times bored by redundant passages (why, for instance, must the story of Ficino's life and works be told repeatedly in different chapters? A biographical introduction would have served better).

The contributions are—albeit not always convincingly—arranged in three major parts that take up the volume's title: Part I focuses on theological issues, part II addresses the philosophical elements of Ficino's writings, and part III discusses the context and legacy of this remarkable Renaissance figure. It is not possible here to discuss all arguments that the various authors present. Instead, I will describe the major issues of the three parts, highlighting a few crucial contributions and pointing out problems I see in others.

Given that Marsilio Ficino was both a priest and a canon, it comes with no surprise that Christianity plays a significant role in his work. In Ficino's lifetime—in part thanks to him—philosophical and religious systems entered the stage that went beyond the Christian revelation and the scholastic doctrines. This was a sincere challenge for Christian theologians of the period; Ficino wrestled with the various implications of these conflicting lines of tradition, trying to incorporate Neoplatonic and Hermetic models into his understanding of Christianity. The papers in part I (pp. 1-178) tackle a cornucopia of themes related to Ficino's theology. Peter Serracino-Inglott focuses on 'Ficino the Priest' in general and on Ficino's notion in particular that the provision of medical care was an integral part of the ministry, to be supplied by a Christian priest. Indeed, the theme of the priest-doctor is crucial for a proper understanding of the links between Ficino's theology and his medical and esoteric interests. There are several more articles that address the Platonic Christianity of Ficino: Jörg Lauster describes the 'Theological Aspects of his Platonism' and Michael J.B. Allen ('Life as a Dead Platonist') the astrological connotations of his concept of birth and rebirth. At this point, it becomes obvious that we will not arrive at a deeper understanding of Ficino's ideas without taking ancient philosophical discourses into account. This is made explicit in the papers of Christopher S. Celenza on 'Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism', Anthony Levi ('Ficino, Augustine and the Pagans'), and Clement Salaman ('Echoes of Egypt in Hermes and Ficino'). Some of these chapters would have fitted the volume's second part just as well as the first, and there are several interrelations that could have been made more explicit.

Two contributions attempt to contextualize Ficino in the theological and religious scene of his time. Dennis F. Lackner sheds new light on the early

period of Ficino's public appearance, namely the Camaldolese academy and its hitherto underrated influence. Already in the 1420s the Florentine monastery of S. Maria degli Angeli was an important center of Christian Platonic spirituality, and it is fascinating to follow Lackner tracing the links between the Camaldolese order and Renaissance Platonism over four generations. Moshe Idel, for his part, compares Ficino's notion of *prisca theologia* with Jewish uses of this construction of "tradition". Interestingly enough, the model of what Idel calls a 'multilinear theory' of historiography—the inclusion of alternative sources of absolute knowledge earlier than and beside the monotheistic revelation—was strongly rejected by most Kabbalist thinkers who stuck to a 'unilinear theory' of revelation, subsuming all revelation under the Jewish heritage. Although his conclusion that, thanks to the Christian multilinear model that freed itself from orthodox Christian control, '[w]ithin a few generations, this in turn facilitated the beginnings of modern science, while Jewish thinkers were still adhering to a unilinear theory of knowledge' (p. 158), may be a bit exaggerated, the controversy about non-Christian ways of revelation is indeed a crucial aspect of intra- and interreligious discourses of identity in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe.

Part II (pp. 179-326) collects essays on the philosophical aspects of Ficino's writings. It opens with a highly readable description of the 'Plato-Aristotle-Controversy' of the Renaissance; John Monfasani shows that the bipolar philosophical world that set up Plato and Aristotle as strong opponents was a product of a fourteenth and fifteenth century polemic which constructed Christian identities against "paganism" (such as Plethon's). Tamara Albertini addresses 'Two Correlatives of a Renaissance Concept of the Mind', namely 'Intellect and Will in Ficino', with reference to Ficino's aesthetics that trace the artist's creation to a process originating in the mind. Angela Voss (*Orpheus Redivivus: The Musical Magic of Marsilio Ficino*) moves from aesthetics to music and gives an overview of the Orpheus myth in Ficino's work and reception. This contribution could have been less descriptive and more analytical (I missed a bunch of important studies on Orpheus in medieval and Renaissance times). Furthermore, one should be careful with definitive assumptions about the initiation rituals in the Presocratic era such as the following: 'At the shrines of Apollo, a healing took place. In a state of trance it is said that the initiate heard the music of the spheres and was made whole' (p. 235). This fits the controversial ideas of Peter Kingsley (whom Voss cites as only reference) and lends itself quite nicely to Ficino's own understanding, but uses contestable terminology and should not be used as an indication of historical dependency.

Donald Beecher gives a fascinating account of Ficino's medical treatment of Theriaca, an ancient pharmaceutical preparation, that shows Ficino as a medical philosopher and astrologer interested in the occult nature of drugs. Hiroshi Hirai tackles Ficino's 'Concept of Seeds and Nature', while Stéphane Toussaint addresses the humanists' interest in the self-motion (*automato*) of man-made astrological apparatuses (*astrarium*) and speculation about a hidden cause (*ignara causa*) and the manifestation of an occult force (*occulta vis*) mysteriously transferred from natural to artificial objects (see p. 310). Ficino was likewise fascinated by this theory but linked it to the Hermetic animation of statues and moved on 'to a totally new kind of talismanic project' (p. 321). Special mention must also be made of Sergius Koderá's contribution 'Narcissus, Divine Gazes and Bloody Mirrors: the Concept of Matter in Ficino' because it is one of the rare examinations of Renaissance esotericism from the perspective of gender studies. His well argued thesis is that in Ficino's 'Neoplatonic philosophy, the mirror becomes . . . the most important and highly ambiguous metaphor for the embodied world, and hence for the female and passive aspect of creation'. It 'eventually becomes the crucial image of a particularly male fantasy of women' (p. 285).

Part III (pp. 327-442) contextualizes Ficino's works and—albeit only rudimentarily—looks at the impact of his thought on later generations. Francis Ames-Lewis gives a report on 'Neoplatonism and the Visual Arts at the Time of Marsilio Ficino' and the modern scholarly debate about it at the Warburg school, Dilwyn Knox looks at the relation between Ficino and Copernicus, and Stephen Clucas scrutinizes the influence of Ficino on the poetry of George Chapman. Arthur Field discusses the thesis of James Hankins that the "Platonic Academy" of Florence is simply a myth, arguing for a more moderated version of the thesis that allows for a Platonic Academy 'insofar as it consisted of his university students' but very different 'from what historians have traditionally associated with Ficino' (p. 367). The reader wonders if this variation is one at all, and why this article does not refer to Lackner's analysis of the Camaldolese academy. Much more informative are Valery Rees' analysis of Ficino's political influence, demonstrated with reference to 'Ficino's Advice to Princes' and Jill Kraye's splendid discussion of 'Ficino in the Firing Line: A Renaissance Neoplatonist and His Critics'. Kraye not only sheds new light on the difficult and much debated relation between Ficino and Pico della Mirandola but also describes the critical reception among Ficino's contemporaries (mainly Angelo Poliziano, friend of Pico's) and some sixteenth-century thinkers, among them Agostino Nifo, Sebastián Fox-Morcillo, Johann Haynpl, Johannes Serranus, Étienne Tremblay, Paolo Beni, and

Giovan Battista Crispo, some of them figures who hitherto have not received much scholarly attention. Indeed, it is a much needed corrective to a common heroism in Ficino studies to ‘pay attention not only to his manifest strengths but also to his areas of weakness and vulnerability, as perceived by the generations which followed him’ (p. 382).

In sum, the editors must be congratulated for this highly informative and rich volume. Some inherent difficulties notwithstanding, the volume breaks new ground on a variety of fields and is a crucial contribution to Ficino studies. It is a must for specialists and a readable introduction to present-day Ficino studies for students interested in this important Renaissance figure.

Kocku von Stuckrad

Jacques Fabry, *Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817): Esotérisme chrétien et prophétisme apocalyptique* (Etudes et Documents 62), Berne: Peter Lang 2003, X et 216 pages et illustrations.

Né dans la région de Nassau-Siegen en Allemagne, élevé dans une famille piétiste, Jung-Stilling fut étudiant en médecine à Strasbourg où il se lia avec Goethe et Herder. Nommé Professeur d’Economie Politique à Kaiserslautern en 1778, puis à l’Université de Marburg en 1786, auteur de trois romans éducatifs (dont un célèbre, *Das Heimweh*, 1794/96), éditeur de plusieurs revues, et en rapports aussi étroits que complexes avec les milieux maçonniques, il a connu la gloire littéraire d’abord grâce à ses écrits autobiographiques (*Jung-Stillings Lebensgeschichte*, 1777-1804). Il a tenté de scruter les secrets de l’au-delà, dans *Scenen aus dem Geisterreiche* (1795-1801) et dans *Theorie der Geisterkunde* (1808/09). Enfin, dans plusieurs de ses oeuvres, notamment *Blicke in die Geheimnisse der Naturweisheit* (1787), il a développé un système néo-kabbalistique et théosophique reposant principalement sur des spéculations à caractère eschatologique. Dans un français clair et élégant, parfois émaillé de pointes d’humour, Fabry retrace les étapes d’une vie aux multiples expériences, traite des œuvres majeures et du rayonnement du personnage, et termine par un “Portrait de Jung-Stilling”, brossé à la Sainte-Beuve.

Bien qu’il existât déjà un grand nombre d’études sérieuses consacrées à Jung-Stilling, celle-ci mérite une attention particulière. Elle est sans doute la première à présenter de manière aussi heureusement synthétique, dans leurs

contextes, la vie, l'œuvre et l'influence de cet auteur. En outre, il s'agit du seul travail en français sur le sujet, tous les autres ayant été, à notre connaissance, écrits en allemand. Si nous avons bien affaire à une synthèse, laquelle ne prétend pas apporter des éléments nouveaux, celle de Fabry ne saurait pourtant être considérée comme un simple ouvrage de vulgarisation, même académique. En effet, d'une part, sa maîtrise du sujet (du moins, pour ce qui concerne Jung-Stilling proprement dit) témoigne d'une longue familiarité tant avec les documents de première main qu'avec la littérature secondaire consacrée spécifiquement à cet auteur (par exemple, les travaux de Max Geiger, 1963; Adolf Benrath, 1976-1992; Rainer Vinke, 1983; Gerhart Schwinge, 1987-1994; Otto W. Hahn, 1990); d'autre part, comme il arrive parfois avec de bons ouvrages généraux, l'objet apparaît, en quelque sorte, comme neuf à nos yeux, ou du moins rénové, et devient alors incitation à s'y plonger ou à s'y replonger. En l'occurrence, peut-être n'existe-t-il pas de meilleure introduction à Jung-Stilling, qui après avoir été quelque peu négligé jusqu'aux années 1950 inclusivement a suscité au cours des décennies suivantes et jusqu'à aujourd'hui un vif intérêt—une "réhabilitation", comme Fabry se plaît à le souligner—, dans la mouvance duquel cet ouvrage se situe. On notera qu'il se situe également dans la mouvance des deux précédents du même auteur, à savoir deux thèses publiées (*Le Bernois Friedrich Herbart et l'ésotérisme chrétien en Suisse à l'époque romantique*, Peter Lang: Berne 1983; et *Le théosophe Johann Friedrich von Meyer et l'ésotérisme en Allemagne au XIX^{ème} siècle*, même éditeur, 1989), lesquelles constituent une source inappréciable d'informations sur la période dans des pays de langue allemande et au-delà. Il serait souhaitable que ce dernier ouvrage en date, de Fabry, fasse l'objet de traductions, après avoir été revu et corrigé.

Sur certains points en effet, *Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817): Esotérisme chrétien et prophétisme apocalyptique*, tel qu'il se présente actuellement, prête le flanc à la critique. On pardonnera volontiers quelques négligences dans les notes: les ouvrages cités dans la première moitié du livre le sont parfois sans indication de la page, ou des pages, auxquelles ces notes sont censées renvoyer (cf. pp. 5-6, n. 4; p. 13, n. 5; p. 15, n. 9; p. 18, n. 12; p. 37, n. 18; p. 46, n. 4; p. 52, n. 11; p. 124, n. 19); des titres d'écrits de Jung-Stilling sont référés en français, avec indication de pagination, alors qu'ils n'existent qu'en allemand (p. 11, n. 2; p. 26, n. 10). Le titre d'un roman de Laurence Sterne est cité en français (p. 36, n. 17). Il est davantage regrettable qu'à propos de questions ne portant pas directement sur Jung-Stilling, Fabry ne donne généralement que des références dépassées (*not least*, à de vieux travaux de l'auteur du présent compte rendu). Par exemple, on lit

(p. 70, n. 10) que Johann Valentin Andreae est “l’auteur des Manifestes rosi-cruciens”, alors qu’il en fut seulement un des auteurs.

A cet égard, un passage (pp. 160-161) consacré aux rapports de Jung-Stilling avec la Russie est significatif. Il mériterait d’être complété, voire refondu, ne fût-ce qu’en raison de l’intérêt que cette question présente. L’auteur, qui ne fournit pas de références, y traite notamment de Ivan Vladimir Lopouchine. Visiblement, il n’a pas eu connaissance de l’ouvrage fondamental d’Andrei G. Danilov (*Ivan Lopuchin: Erneuerer der russischen Freimaurerei. Seine Lehre von der Inneren Kirche als eigenständiger Beitrag zum Lehrgebäude der freimaurerischen Mystik*, J.R. Dettelbach: Röhl 2000), dans lequel Jung-Stilling fait l’objet de quelques développements. Par exemple, Danilov a bien montré que l’idée d’“Eglise intérieure” (que Fabry assimile un peu facilement à “Eglise invisible”) selon Lopouchine diffère assez de ce que Jung-Stilling et Eckartshausen avaient cru, ou préféré, entendre par là. En fait, l’accord apparent reposait sur un malentendu, car pour Lopouchine il s’agissait d’un programme d’ordre institutionnel visant à créer une sorte de symbiose entre la franc-maçonnerie né-rosi-crucienne russe et l’Eglise Orthodoxe—ce qui n’entraînait nullement dans les conceptions des deux Allemands. Ajoutons qu’on peut se montrer surpris de lire sous la plume de Fabry (p. 160) que ce Russe ‘n’était guère fait . . . pour la Franc-maçonnerie active’. En réalité, à partir de 1784 il fit preuve d’une extraordinaire activité en ce domaine (*cf.* le titre même du livre de Danilov!). On aurait aimé aussi trouver chez Fabry quelques précisions sur le récit, réel ou fictif (la question n’est peut-être pas encore résolue) selon lequel Jung-Stilling aurait entrepris d’effectuer des traductions d’œuvres de Lopouchine. Au moins une allusion eût été la bienvenue, au fait que Lopouchine avait conçu, puis construit, un jardin sur une île—baptisée par lui “Île Jung [Stilling]”—sise sur un lac près de Moscou. Les visiteurs pouvaient y admirer des symboles maçonniques et, surtout, un monument dédié à Jung-Stilling, un autre à Eckartshausen, un autre enfin à Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Les observations les plus sérieuses que ce travail appelle sont d’ordre méthodologique. De fait, si la seconde partie du sous-titre (“prophétisme apocalyptique”) ne saurait faire l’objet d’une critique, il n’en va pas de même de “Esotérisme chrétien”, en raison du substantif. Etant donné que celui-ci figure dans le sous-titre, et pas seulement dans des passages du texte, on est d’autant plus en droit de s’interroger sur ce que ce mot signifie dans l’esprit de l’auteur. Mais on échoue à trouver dans le texte quelque définition opératoire que ce soit. Parmi les passages y relatifs, relevons celui de la page 3, où il est question de ‘l’alchimie, la Kabbale et même l’astrologie [. . . , qui]

constituent un corpus doctrinal auquel on a donné le nom d'ésotérisme ou d'hermétisme'. Or, s'il est un corpus peu doctrinal, c'est bien celui de l'ensemble des courants qu'on appelle "ésotériques", dont l'unité relative repose sur tout autre chose que sur une ou des doctrines. Dans un passage (p. 4) bien obscur, l'auteur écrit que la 'théosophie chrétienne est souvent considérée [mais par qui ?] comme une sorte de voie médiane entre la théologie et la philosophie', et il pose l'existence d'une 'véritable théosophie' (on notera au passage le caractère essentialiste/prescriptif de l'expression), laquelle correspondrait à une 'méthode non rationnelle où se mêlent intimement ésotérisme et théosophie'. Ainsi, selon l'auteur, ces deux derniers substantifs renvoient à deux arbres distincts l'un de l'autre. En réalité, la théosophie est seulement l'une des branches de l'arbre ésotérique—elle est l'un des courants qui constituent ce qu'on appelle l'ésotérisme en Occident, du moins selon la terminologie maintenant en usage dans les travaux académiques. Même flou en maints passages (*cf.* notamment pp. 48-50) où la "théosophie" est définie par l'existence, dans les discours qu'elle produit, de thèmes tels que chutes de Lucifer et d'Adam, réintégration, etc. Or, si ces thèmes font, certes, bien partie du registre thématique de la théosophie, ils ne sauraient définir celle-ci du même coup, dès lors qu'ils ne lui appartiennent nullement en propre.

Certes, l'auteur a le droit de se tenir à l'écart de l'important travail de réflexion méthodologique fourni, depuis de nombreuses années déjà, par les chercheurs dans la spécialité qui porte sur les courants ésotériques occidentaux modernes; mais cela ne devrait pas le dispenser pour autant de construire, avec un minimum de rigueur, ses propres définitions.

Antoine Faivre

Reinhard Breymayer, *Eine unbekannte Koranerklärung in der Bibliothek von Goethes Vater: "Elias mit dem Alcoran Mahomeds". Über das wiedergefundene Werk des Radikalpietisten Johann Daniel Müller aus Wissenbach (Nassau). Ein Fundbericht*, Tübingen: Noûs-Verlag Thomas Leon Heck 2004. 32 pp. ISBN 3 924249 43 1.

Le célèbre chercheur Reinhard Breymayer (Université de Tübingen) rend compte dans cet opuscule de sa collaboration avec le savant russe Eugene Benyaminovich Beshenkovsky, Professeur Emérite à la Columbia University

de New-York, qui travaille à la reconstitution de la bibliothèque de l'éditeur moscovite Nikolaj Ivanovich Novikov (1744-1818). A la fois rosicrucien et piétiste, Novikov avait publié entre autres une traduction russe du *Biblisches und emblematisches Wörterbuch* (1776) de Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. C'est grâce à E.B. Beshenkovsky que purent être retrouvés à la Bibliothèque Nationale d'Aarhus, au Danemark, ainsi qu'à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Moscou (ex-bibliothèque Lénine), des exemplaires du livre *Elias mit dem Alcoran Mahomeds*, dont Reinhard Breymayer commente la découverte dans la présente étude.

Derrière le nom d'emprunt Elias, qui fait évidemment allusion au mythe d'*Elias Artista* (Elie Artiste), maître suprême de l'*Ars Magna*, se cache le piétiste radical Johann Daniel Müller (1716-±1785), musicien et parent lointain par alliance de Goethe, dont le père possédait dans son importante bibliothèque l'ouvrage intitulé *Elias mit dem Alcoran Mahomeds*. En 1794, la bibliothèque du père de Goethe fut vendue aux enchères, et le catalogue mentionne ce livre, dont Reinhard Breymayer a, de son côté, retrouvé en mars 2004 la mention de deux autres exemplaires dans le fichier de la Staatsbibliothek de Berlin.

J.D. Müller ne connaissait pas l'arabe; il a lu le Coran dans la traduction allemande que Salomo Schweigger avait faite d'après une traduction italienne du texte original. Le surnom d'Elie indique le sens que le piétiste entendait donner à son interprétation du Coran. Il se présente comme le vrai prophète, Elie dont le retour était attendu (Matth. 17:11; Marc 9:12), et il prétend être le seul à avoir découvert les sens profonds de la Bible et du Coran.

L'ouvrage de J.D. Müller parut en 1772. Or il est intéressant de noter que Goethe, en cette même année 1772, avait lu le Coran dans la traduction allemande du Francfortois Megerlin et qu'il connaissait la traduction latine du Coran publiée par le jésuite Maracci en 1698. Goethe avait également lu l'*Histoire de la vie de Mahomet, législateur de l'Arabie*, publiée en 1773 par le Français François Henri Turpin. Inspiré par ces lectures, il avait recopié un certain nombre de sourates du Coran, et il écrivit le *Chant de Mahomet*, paru en cette même année 1773 dans le *Musenalmanach* de Göttingen.

Outre la constatation que la bibliothèque du père de Goethe possédait le curieux commentaire du Coran signé "Elias", on sait gré à R. Breymayer d'avoir découvert, avec le concours d'un chercheur russe, des exemplaires de cette œuvre due au musicien piétiste J.D. Müller, auquel il a déjà consacré pas moins de dix études différentes, et dont il a notamment souligné l'influence sur Oetinger et Philipp Matthäus Hahn en 1984 dans la revue *Pietismus und Neuzeit*. Antoine Faivre a également montré l'importance de

ce mystérieux auteur dans son article publié par la revue *Aries* (2:2 [2002] et vol. 3:1 [2003]).

R. Breymayer a volontairement restreint son étude à la découverte des exemplaires du livre *Elias mit dem Alcoran Mahomeds*. Mais le sous-titre de ce livre: “In der Offenbarung Jesu Christi. Zur Versammlung aller Völker in einen einigen Glauben an den einigen Gott. Der da ist der Vater aller Menschen Kinder” ne peut qu’éveiller chez les lecteurs le désir d’avoir accès à une réédition des 396 pages de cet ouvrage.

Roland Edighoffer

Jane Williams-Hogan, *Swedenborg e le Chiese swedenborgiane* (traduzione dall’inglese di Marco Pasi), Torino, ELLEDICI 2004.

Il volume *Swedenborg e le Chiese swedenborgiane* di Jane Williams-Hogan, pubblicato nel 2004, nella traduzione di Marco Pasi, si inserisce bene nella collana, diretta da Massimo Introvigne, “Religioni e movimenti” della casa editrice ELLEDICI che propone prospettive d’insieme su personaggi, movimenti e problemi della cultura religiosa. L’autrice del libro, docente di sociologia e di storia delle religioni presso l’università di Bryn Athyn, in Pennsylvania, si dedica, da molti anni, allo studio di Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), della sua vicenda umana e culturale, del suo pensiero, del suo straordinario successo legato, più che ai suoi contributi scientifici, all’eccezionalità di un’esperienza religiosa destinata a concretizzarsi storicamente nella nascita di una Chiesa oggi presente in diversi paesi.

La Williams-Hogan ripercorre rapidamente le vicende biografiche, le attività di ricerca, i contributi scientifici e filosofici dello studioso svedese, soffermandosi in modo particolare sul pensiero religioso e sulle esperienze mistiche dell’ultima parte della sua vita. Anche le vicende della Chiesa Swedenborghiana, dal momento della nascita alla sua diffusione, che fu accompagnata, come per ogni nuova fondazione religiosa, da discussioni, contrasti e differenziazioni, sono accuratamente registrate. Il linguaggio chiaro e la brevità stessa dell’opera ne fanno un ottimo strumento di introduzione al problema Swedenborg che da sempre ha appassionato letterati, artisti, filosofi, teologi, ma anche cultori del paranormale e amanti dell’esoterico. Una essenziale bibliografia completa il testo consentendo uno sguardo almeno su parte degli studi e delle ricerche dedicate a Swedenborg.

Figlio di un pastore protestante e cresciuto in un ambiente permeato di letture bibliche e di forti esperienze spirituali, Swedenborg dedicò i suoi interessi giovanili alla ricerca scientifica e alla sperimentazione tecnica, inserendosi in quel clima di studi e di scoperte che fu comune ai maggiori paesi europei fra '600 e '700. Negli anni della maturità, Swedenborg si orientò verso una riflessione filosofica a carattere sistematico che si rivolse al mondo della natura, ma anche e soprattutto alla ricerca dei principi metafisici della realtà, nel tentativo di ricondurre ogni elemento, ogni grado dell'essere, ogni aspetto dell'universo sotto il denominatore comune di un'unica causa spirituale. Le opere fondamentali di questo periodo, i *Principia* e il *Prodromus de infinito*, delineano una metafisica che riconosce nell'infinito il principio di ogni cosa e pone come immediata derivazione da questo il punto metafisico, elemento di mediazione tra infinito e materia. Tale metafisica fonda una concezione filosofica e religiosa in cui l'uomo rappresenta il punto culminante della creazione e il mezzo di ricongiunzione tra natura e Dio. L'*Oeconomia* e il *Regnum animale* approfondiscono questo tema attraverso nuovi e originali studi sul rapporto anima e corpo. Proprio a partire da queste ricerche cominciarono a farsi evidenti i motivi religiosi che divennero predominanti dopo il viaggio che Swedenborg compì a Londra nel 1745. Un diario in cui annotava i sogni, *Journal of Dreams*, e uno *Spiritual Diary* testimoniano la crisi religiosa e morale che porterà il filosofo svedese a dare una svolta alla sua vita, a riconoscersi come portatore di una verità, di una rivelazione. Questo processo di trasformazione negli interessi e negli affetti si riverserà nello studio delle Sacre Scritture e nella loro interpretazione secondo la dottrina delle corrispondenze. Gli *Arcana Coelestia* costituiscono il risultato del lavoro di ermeneutica applicato alle Scritture di cui rivelano l'autentico significato spirituale nascosto dietro il senso letterale, in funzione di un rinnovamento del cristianesimo. La Williams-Hogan mette bene in evidenza come le opere che registrano l'esperienza spirituale di Swedenborg e il suo lavoro di interpretazione delle Scritture delineino una dottrina filosofica e religiosa di respiro universale. Fondamentale è la legge delle corrispondenze che lega il mondo spirituale, quello naturale e quello umano. In particolare, tra il regno dell'eternità e quello temporale esiste corrispondenza, dipendenza causale, comunicazione e rispecchiamento. Le Scritture sono state scritte nella lingua delle corrispondenze e gli *Arcana* ne rivelano il senso interno o spirituale, in modo da renderlo accessibile a tutta l'umanità; l'amore di sé e delle cose esteriori ha oscurato nell'uomo la conoscenza di questa lingua che gli antichi conoscevano e che oggi rivive solo nelle esperienze eccezionali di santi e mistici. E' in questa situazione che Swedenborg si sente chiamato a ristabilire e a

dare forma scritta al linguaggio delle corrispondenze, in modo che la comunicazione tra cielo e terra sia recuperata a favore dell'umanità intera. Grazie alla legge di corrispondenza, Cielo e Inferno presentano un quadro della vita eterna molto simile a quello umano, e gli angeli vi conducono una vita attiva al servizio di Dio, respirano, mangiano, lavorano, studiano, amano, si sposano. Queste teorie sono esposte nel *De Coelo et Inferno* (1758) uno dei libri più letti di Swedenborg, che offre una rappresentazione vivida e concreta della vita dopo la morte. Se il Paradiso rappresenta il momento di congiunzione con Dio, l'Inferno, al contrario, ne segna l'allontanamento, il trionfo dell'amore di sé e delle cose del mondo. Per l'uomo la morte segna solo l'inizio della vera vita: quando si stacca dal corpo, l'anima non viene meno, ma potenzia la consapevolezza di sé e sulla base del suo essere autentico, di ciò che è e che vuole, si dirige spontaneamente verso la dimora spirituale che gli è propria, sia essa Cielo o Inferno, essendogli ogni alternativa insopportabile. Dio in quanto è Amore non decide la sorte ultraterrena dell'uomo, ma lascia che sia lui stesso a scegliere se amarlo o meno. Metafora di questa dottrina teologica è l'amore coniugale, uno dei temi più tipici della riflessione swedenborghiana, che unisce eternamente l'uomo e la donna e realizza scopi soprattutto spirituali. La salvezza è accessibile a tutti gli uomini, perché a tutti si dirige l'amore divino: dottrine e pratiche religiose non sono indispensabili. Una vita buona, basata sulla verità, ne è la sola condizione. Sotto questo aspetto la teologia swedenborghiana assume carattere davvero universale e le religioni storiche, nella loro varietà, costituiscono elemento essenziale alla perfezione dei cieli.

Nel terzo capitolo del suo libro, la Williams-Hogan dà conto delle vicende legate alla formazione della Nuova Chiesa. Swedenborg non fondò una propria Chiesa e un movimento ispirato alle sue dottrine riuscì a imporsi in Svezia solo nel 1874, quando fu ufficialmente riconosciuta dallo Stato. La Nuova Chiesa fu fondata nel 1787 a Londra, la British Conference of the New Church, che nell'Ottocento si organizzò in una struttura di tipo congregazionale e oggi amministra le trenta congregazioni del Regno Unito. Tra fine Settecento e inizio dell'Ottocento si sviluppò in America la General Convention of the Church of the New Jerusalem che riunisce circa quaranta congregazioni. Nel 1897, per contrasti nell'interpretazione degli scritti di Swedenborg e su principi organizzativi, dalla General Convention si staccò la General Church of the New Jerusalem che adottò forma episcopale e presto assunse respiro internazionale, diffondendosi in diversi continenti. L'autrice sottolinea come gli affiliati alla Chiesa swedenborghiana risultino legati più al "carisma del libro" (pp. 67-70) che a quello della persona, nonostante

abbia pesato sulla diffusione della nuova teologia il fatto che i testi fossero scritti in latino.

Il pensiero di Swedenborg ha dato luogo, nel corso del tempo, alle più diverse interpretazioni e ha prodotto, a seconda dei casi, entusiastiche adesioni o decisi rifiuti: alcuni lo hanno riconosciuto come ispirato da Dio, altri come il frutto della follia. Immanuel Kant è certo il più famoso rappresentante della tesi del carattere visionario dell'esperienza di Swedenborg, una tesi che ancora oggi viene ribadita da quanti sostengono un rapporto di causa-effetto tra esperienza religiosa e psicosi. La Williams-Hogan, rispetto alle contrastanti interpretazioni ricorda, con molto equilibrio, come lo stesso Swedenborg fosse cosciente del problema e lo giudicasse insolubile, proprio mentre ribadiva che i suoi scritti riportavano ciò che aveva "visto e udito". Del resto, proprio la necessità di preservare il "libero arbitrio" giustifica indecidibilità e il valore dell'esperienza religiosa. Anche in ciò consiste la modernità di una teologia che punta a dare spiegazioni razionali su questioni fondamentali della vita, nel rispetto della libertà di scelta dell'uomo e delle diverse forme di religiosità.

Francesca Maria Crasta

Martin P. Starr, *The Unknown God: W.T. Smith and the Thelemites*, Bolingbrook, Illinois: The Teitan Press 2003. 416 pp. ISBN 0933429-07-X.

In this book, Martin P. Starr, a leading expert on Crowley and the thelemic movement in North America, deals not only with Crowley but also with the experiences, documented through unpublished letters and diaries, of the de-facto leader of the thelemic movement in North America. Starr quotes extensively from a wide range of unpublished sources, most of which have been inaccessible to scholars previously. Apart from the standard archives and collections, the Gerald J. Yorke Collection (Warburg Institute, the University of London), and the Ordo Templi Orientis Archives, the author has had free access to the Wilfred T. Smith Papers and the Helen Parsons Smith Papers (both part of his own collection), the Charles Stansfeld Jones Papers (private collection, England), and the C.F. Russell Papers (private collection, USA), plus some additional collections. As a result, the book contains materials which force us to re-evaluate the history of the thelemic movement in North America.

Wilfred Talbot Smith has so far been almost unknown, certainly if compared to Crowley. From when he was about thirty years old until his death in 1957, he devoted himself to the work of Crowley and his religion of Thelema. Born on June 9, 1885, in Tonbridge (Kent, England), Smith emigrated to Canada in 1907, probably in an attempt to escape the stigma of having been raised as an illegitimate child in a Victorian household. His arrival in Canada marked a new phase in Smith's life. He soon came to reject the morals and religion of his upbringing, and instead began to study 'yoga, Eastern philosophy and the occult generally'. Through a discussion on occult subjects with one of his co-workers in the British Columbia Electric Railway Limited, Charles Stansfeld Jones (1886-1950), Smith discovered the writings of Aleister Crowley in 1912, and this sealed his destiny. From that year onwards, his life would be tightly connected to Crowley and the Law of Thelema.

Smith eventually joined both of Crowley's initiatory societies: he became a member of the O.T.O. in 1915 (British Columbia Lodge No. 1, the first O.T.O. Lodge to be opened in North America) and of the A.:A.: in the following year. Although Smith briefly met Crowley in 1915, Jones was in fact Smith's spiritual teacher well into the 1920s. Jones (known as Crowley's so-called Magical Child) was the Viceroy of the O.T.O. in North America, until a chain of events led to a fallout between him and Crowley, followed by Jones' departure from the thelemic movement. While Jones searched for spiritual truth in other obscure organisations, such as the Universal Brotherhood and the Psychomagian Society, it fell on Smith to act as Crowley's representative in the U.S.A. and rekindle the activities of the O.T.O., which were in decline. In 1935 Crowley authorised Smith to start O.T.O. work, and a few months later the first initiations were performed in Agape Lodge No. 1, in Hollywood, California. Smith had by now been elevated to the Xth degree of the O.T.O., and assumed Ramaka as his new fraternal name. Agape Lodge would later move to Pasadena, and in the period 1938-1943 no less than 57 members joined the lodge.

As Smith was in direct and regular correspondence with Crowley, it became increasingly apparent to him that Crowley was not the perfect leader he had imagined him to be. On the contrary: Smith's diaries, and the letters exchanged between him and Crowley, bear witness to increasing frustration on Smith's part over the fact that Crowley used the O.T.O. as a means of personal financial support, and they show that Crowley's paradoxical behaviour frequently undermined Smith's authority over the members of the Agape Lodge. The now ageing Crowley tried to maintain his authority over the latter—the only

functioning O.T.O. lodge in the world at that time—by means of letters and telegrams, apparently trying to rule by means of creating conflict. The clashes between Crowley and Smith became ever more frequent, and came to a head in 1943, when Crowley finally decided to get rid of his rival through what can only be described as one of the most absurd schemes he ever devised. Crowley produced a short text, *Liber CXXXII* (now published for the first time by Starr), which claimed that astrological evidence showed that Smith ‘is not a man at all; he is some Incarnation of some God’. Smith was ordered to retire from the world at large, in order to find out of what god he was the incarnation. This magical retirement was to be performed in total isolation, and the members of the Agape Lodge were forbidden to have any contact with their former Lodge Master. To Smith it was clear that Crowley had no further use for him and that *Liber CXXXII* was merely his way of removing Smith from the thelemic community in Pasadena.

Smith had in effect been excommunicated. His few efforts to resume contact with the person to whom he had devoted over thirty years of his life were met with contempt or silence. When Smith learned of Crowley’s death, he noted in his diary: ‘The Sun went out’. Smith now re-entered the thelemic movement in California, but was treated with suspicion by Crowley’s successor as head of the O.T.O and the A.:A.:, Karl J. Germer. One day after Smith’s death on April 27, 1957, a thelemic ceremony was nevertheless performed to mark the event.

Apart from the fascinating history of Wilfred Talbot Smith and the American thelemites in Crowley’s days, *The Unknown God* treats various topics which are, from a broader perspective, relevant to the study of Western esotericism and new religious movements (NRMs). A first one concerns the organisational structures of the esoteric new religious movements of the first half of the 20th century. Modeled after 18th-century masonic initiatory societies, esoteric NRMs such as the O.T.O and the A.:A.: were divided into different degrees which the candidates took by undergoing rites of initiation (as in the case of the O.T.O.), or by completing practical and theoretical exams (as in the A.:A.:). At the core of this structure lies the idea that the degrees in some sense corresponds with the spiritual advancement of the members, and that the highest degrees contain the “supreme secrets” of these organisations (consisting of sexual magic in the case of the O.T.O.). Most of the organisations encountered in *The Unknown God* (such as Choronzon Club, the Psychomagian Society, the Universal Brotherhood, AMORC, and the Societas Rosicruciana In America) are organised as masonic initiatory societies. For a number of reasons Crowley seems to have seen this as the ideal type of

organisation for spreading Thelema. Starr points out that Crowley in fact saw his organisations more or less as a vehicle for his personal will, and repeatedly attempted to “highjack” existing organisations: the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1904), the Antient & Primitive Rite (1913), Freemasonry as a whole (1919), the O.T.O. (1921), the Esoteric Section of the parent Adyar Theosophical Society (1925), and AMORC (1936). *The Unknown God* shows how strongly the esoteric NRMs in America in the first half of the 20th century were interconnected, and in that respect the book is bound to become a standard source for scholars working in this particular field.

A second topic is the focus on sexual liberty, which is evident in the history of the O.T.O. in North America right from the start in 1915. To the members of the early thelemic movement, individual freedom was often synonymous with sexual liberty. The morals and ethics of Western society and Christianity were regarded as restrictions imposed upon the individual, from which one had to break free in order to make spiritual progress. A new sexual morality, based on *The Book of the Law*, encouraged people to freely practice sexual promiscuity, as long as one’s partner approved. It is evident from the letters and diaries quoted in *The Unknown God* that the members of the thelemic groups spent much of their time and energy in sexual pursuits within the movement, and this often led to internal tensions and conflict. But far from being unique to the thelemic movement, the identification of individual freedom with sexual liberty turns out to have been an important feature in many NRMs in the first half of the 20th century. The intolerance of the press and society at large caused many NRMs to keep silent about their sexual morals or veil them in symbolical language. *The Unknown God* is extremely valuable for studying this aspect, since it quotes letters and diaries which were not intended for the larger public. They contain detailed accounts of how individual freedom and sexual liberty were interpreted, and provide often quite graphic accounts of members’ sexual exploits.

A third topic which struck this reviewer is the image of Crowley as a “behind-the-scenes” charismatic leader. That he was manipulative and highly self-centred comes with no surprise, but one gets a new insight into how the immediate circle around Crowley reacted to, and sought to cope with, the negative traits of their religious leader. Smith himself evolved from seeing all Crowley’s actions as more or less divine, to separating “Crowley the man” from “Crowley the prophet”, but at times one wonders why Smith kept believing in the latter. The paradoxical nature of Crowley’s charismatic religious leadership is shown in great detail: through his published writings he encourages each individual to be his/her own sole and ultimate authority with respect

to questions relating to personal spiritual progress, but through letters and telegrams he constantly tries to regulate and dictate the lives of his followers. The wealth of information contained in *The Unknown God* about this paradoxical side of Crowley's leadership invites comparison with other esoteric leaders.

In sum, this very well-researched and well-written book contains a remarkably interesting account of a small first-generation esoteric movement. It is not only invaluable to researchers specialising in Crowley and Thelema, but has much to offer for anyone interested in esoteric new religious movements and masonic initiatory societies of the 20th century. Its scholarly aspects aside, the author should be commended for his literary style—the book is a real page-turner!

Henrik Bogdan

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.).

Magical Practice and Belief, 1800-Present (org.: Department of Historical Studies, Bristol University), Bristol (United Kingdom), 25.04.2004.

Papers included: Ronald Hutton, 'A General Framework for the History of European Magic'; Owen Davies, 'Witchcraft Accusations in France 1850-1990'; Ann Heilmann, 'That Blavatsky Woman Started It: Theosophical Desire and the Female Artist in Sarah Grand's New Woman Fiction'; Dionysios Psilopoulos, 'The Book of the Law, A Vision, and the Equinox of the Gods'; Joanne Pearson, 'Rebel Angels: Magic and the Academy'; Hannah E. Sanders, 'Playing with Power-Teenage Witchcraft in Contemporary Britain from the Screen to the Scene'; Julia Mannherz, 'Popular Occultism in late Imperial Russia'; Julian Vayne, 'Two Worlds and In-between: Concepts and Use of Space in Moderne Magick'; Melvyn Willin, 'The Magic of Music in 21st Century Paganism & Witchcraft'.

Information: URL: <http://www.sasm.co.uk/conf.html>

Northwest Astrological Conference NORWAC, Seattle, WA (U.S.A.), 28-31.05.2004.

With Bernadette Brady, Maurice Fernandez, Steven Forrest, Demetra George, Laura Gerking, Eileen Grimes, Robert Hand, Jeff Jawer, Dan Keusal, Lee Lehman, Rick Levine, A.T. Mann, Chris McRae, Roxana Muise, Diane Oggoian, Alan Oken, David Pond, Kim Rogers-Gallagher, Philip Sedgwick, Gloria Star, Diana Stone and Joanne Wickenburg.

Information: Tel: (+1) 1 206 545 2912; Email: laurag@astrologyetal.com

1st Sri Jagannath (SJC) Singapore Conference: "An in-depth look at the classical principles of Jyotish", Singapore, 29.05-04.06.04.

For all interested Jyotishas in the SE Asia & Asia Pacific regions (Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand).

With Sanjay Rath, Sarajit Poddar, S. Purushottaman, Sarbani Sarkar.

Information: S. Purushottaman, Email: purush@singnet.com.sg or Sarajit Poddar, E-mail: sarajit@srijagannath.org or Hari, M., Email: onlyhari@yahoo.com; URL: http://srath.com/conf/sjc_sing.htm. For general information about SJC: URL: <http://www.srijagannath.org>

North American Conference on Esotericism (org.: The Association for the Study of Esotericism), Michigan State University (U.S.A.), 03-06.06.2004. Papers included: Lisa Carnell, 'From Esoteric to Exoteric: The Translation of Arabic Magical and Scientific Works in the 12th and 13th Centuries'; Chaim Hames, 'Exotericism and Esotericism in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah'; Nicholas Watson, 'Open Secrets: The Ars Notoria and the Liber Visionum'; Allison P. Coudert, 'The Kabbalah, Science, and the Enlightenment'; Gordon M. Weiner, 'The Kabbalah as a Source of Christian Anti-Semitism'; Marsha Keith Schuchard, 'William Blade and the Jewish-Moravian-Swedenborgian Underground in Eighteenth-Century London'; M.E. Warlick, 'Cosmic Conjunctions: Sexuality of the Planets in Alchemical Images'; Susanna Kerman, 'The Esoteric Queen Christina: Alchemy, Prophecy, and Rosicrucianism'; Gustav-Adolf Schoener, 'The Coming of a "Little Prophet": Astrological Pamphlets and the Reformation'; Dagmar Wernitznig, 'Esoteric Indianness: From North America to Europe'; Patrick LeBeau, 'A Secret Society at the University of Michigan: Michigamua as Pseudo-esoteric'; Craig D. Atwood, 'Masculine and Feminine in Zinzendorfian Piety'; Cathy Gutierrez, 'Discorders of the Soul: American Spiritualism and the Kabbalah'; Christopher Lehigh, 'Rewriting Ritual Magic'; Matthew Klemm, 'Incantations in the Medical Philosophy of Petrus de Abano (c. 1250-1316)'; Claire Fanger, 'The Technology of Virginity in Medieval Catoptromantic texts'; Thomas George Lolis, 'Strike Flat the Thick Rotundity o' the World: Demonic Possession, Gnostic Influence, and Protestant Anxiety in King Lear'; Kimberly D. Guy, 'Agrippan and Christian Cabbalistic Influences in the Poetics of George Chapman'; Christopher Webster, 'Drawn from Nature: Hermetic references in the early photographs of W.H.F. Talbot (1800-77)'; Geoffrey McVey, 'Thebes, Luxor, and the Landscapes of the 19th-century Esotericism'; Eric Wilson, 'Emerson and Esoteric Electromagnetism'; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, 'Wheels of Fire: Physiology of the Soul from the Renaissance to the Present'; Clare Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Transmission of Homeopathy to America'; Mark Laus, 'Walking Like an Egyptian: the American Destinies of a Revolutionary French Secret Society'; Siobhan Houson, 'The Martinist Legacy and Its Influence on Contemporary Esoteric Churches'; Martin Starr, 'The Esoteric Rosicrucians: The Beginnings of the Ordo Templi Orientis in North America'; Douglas

McGetchin'; 'German Popular Interest in Buddhism, 1890-1914'; Lee Irwin, 'Daoist Alchemy in the West: The Esoteric Paradigms'; Olga Louchakova, 'Towards a Comparative History of Esotericism: Kundalini Awakening in the West'; Carol S. Matthews, 'Gnosis of the Flesh: DNA, Spiritual Bloodlines and Power in New Age "Ascension" Literature'; Joscelyn Godwin, 'Gnosticism for Young Adults: Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*'; Sheng-mei Ma, 'The Apocalyptic from the Thighs of East/West'; Philip Davis, 'The Neo-Pagan Paradigm'; Stephanie Stean, 'Inside Thunder Mountain: A Shaman's Vision of Knowledge as Sustenance'; Massimo Introvigne, 'The Church of Universal Soul, Italian Communal Esotericism'; J. Gordon Melton, 'Recent developments in Channeling Ramtha American West Coast Esotericism'; James A. Beverley, 'Mediumship and Channeling in the Unification Church the Westernization of Korean Shamanism'; Jeffrey Kupperman, 'Towards a Definition of Initiation: Emic and Etic Views of Initiation in the Western Mystery Tradition[s]'; Alfred Vitale, 'The Method of Science; The Aim of Religion: Understanding the Modern Western Occult Systematization of Esoteric Technologies'; Melinda Weinstein, 'The Science of Transformation: Esoteric Approaches in the Work of Norman O. Brown'; John Richards, 'Folk Magic and Protestant Christianity in Appalachia'; Gerald Milnes, 'Documentary on Appalachian folk magic'; György E. Szönyi, 'The Image of Renaissance Hermetism in 20th-Century (Post)Modern Metafiction'; Barbara E. Ladner, 'Esotericism in the American Mystery Novel'; Victoria Nelson, 'Who Likes Lovecraft? The Worshipful World of Fantasy Fandom'.

Information: URL: <http://www.aseweb.org>.

Joint inter-disciplinary Conference: "Exploring Consciousness" (org.: The Sophia Centre for the Study of Cultural Astronomy and Astrology), Bath Spa University College and Psychonaut (United Kingdom), 24-26.06.2004.

With Freya Aswynn, Francoise Barbira-Freedman, Brian Bates, Philippa Berry, Susan Blackmore, William Bloom, Bernadette Brady, Chas Clifton, Jude Currivan, Erik Davis, Rick Doblin, Stephen Fitzpatrick, Piers Gibbon, Liz Greene, Susan Greenwood, Rob Hand, Charles Jencks, Andy Letcher, Dave Luke, Robin Mathews, Kelly Morris, Serena Roney-Dougal, Hilary Rose, Anja Saunders, Alexander Shulgin, Ann Shulgin, Julian Wayne, Max Velmans, Hattie Wells, and others.

Information: Email: a.ekrek@bathspa.ac.uk; URL: <http://www.bathspa.ac.uk/schools/historical-and-cultural-studies/sophia/conferences>.

8th Astrologers Meeting "Gente de Astrologia-GeA2004", Buenos Aires, Argentina, 26.06.2004.

Information: Email: info@gente-de-astrologia.com.ar; URL: <http://www.gente-de-astrologia.com.ar>

NYC NCGR's Annual Spring Conference: "Bringing Astrology Down to Earth: The Magic of Connections", Hunter College, New York, NY, (U.S.A.), 26-27.06.2004.

With Shelley Ackerman, Joe Addeo, Wendy Ashley, Stephanie Azaria, Diana Brownstone, John Cook, Ronnie Dreyer, Adrian Ross Duncan, Meira Epstein, Dorian Greenbaum, Jean Lall, Ken Kimball, Michael Lutin, John Marchesella, Bob Marks, Deb McBride, Eileen McCabe, Margaret McMahon, Noreen Moglia, Lloraine Neithardt, Arlene Nimark, Anne Ortelee, Joan Pancoe, Christine Rakela, Heather Roan-Robbins, Courtney Roberts, Maria Simms, Shirley Soffer, Judi Vitale, Liane Wade, Mark Wolz, Darcy Woodall.

Information: Email: debtune@nyc.rr.com; URL: <http://www.astrologynyc.org/>

Spiritismus und ästhetische Moderne, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, Tübingen (Germany), 29.07-01.08.2004.

Papers included: Heinz Schott, "Geister" in der Medizin der Neuzeit: Zum historischen Hintergrund des (modernen) Spiritismus'; Tomas Kaiser, 'Spiritismus in München: Personen, Kreise und Gesellschaften um Carl du Prel'; Karl Clausberg, 'Kampf ums Dasein am Himmel—du Prel bis Flournoy'; Timon Kuff, "Ideoplastische Vorstellungsbilder" bei Schrenck-Notzing: von Magdeleine G. bis Eva C.'; Eberhard Bauer, 'Der Forscher und Sein Medium—Albert von Schrenck-Notzing und Willy Schneider'; Ulrich Linse, 'Albert von Keller, der Maler des 'kataleptischen Affekts': Die experimentelle Erforschung der 'Psychologie des Weibes' mittels Trancemedien'; Priska Pytlik, 'Berliner Autoren im Grenzbereich von Spiritismus und Mediumismus um 1900'; Andreas Kilcher, 'Spiritismus und Literatur in Prag um 1900'; Georg Braungart, 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen spiritistischer Ästhetik—Rilke und die 'Verdichtung' der Geister'; Monika Fick, 'Die andere Wahrnehmung. Sinnesphysiologie, Spiritismus und Moderne—am Beispiel von Przybyszewski, Rilke und Benn'; Monika Schmitz-Emans, 'Gesplante Geister. Spiritismus in der literarischen Moderne (Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Marcel Schwob, Luigi Pirandello, Thomas Mann)'; Manfred Hilke, 'Der Einfluss von Spiritismus und Parapsychologie auf den französischen Surrealismus zwischen 1919 und 1924'; Sandra Kluwe, 'Okkultismus und Psychoanalyse'; Veit Loers, "Wer kann noch an die Undurchsichtigkeit von Körpern glauben . . ."—Futurismus und Spiritismus'; Horst Thomé, 'Spiritismus und Weltanschauungsliteratur: Zu Wilhelm Bölsches 'Die Mittagsgöttin'; Wolfgang Riedel, 'Zur Theorie

des Phantoplasmas bei Robert Müller'; Moritz Baßler, '“Wollen Sie den Geist Ihrer Mutter sehen?” Spiritismus und Avantgarde in Carl Einsteins Prosa'; Helmuth Kiesel, 'Wenn die Welt transparent wird: Unheimliche Erfahrungen als Deutungsproblem für die Moderne am Beispiel Alfred Döblins'.

Information: URL: www.spiritismus-und-moderne.de

2nd Sri Jagannath Centre (SJC) Annual European Conference on Hindu Astrology, Sri Murugan Temple, Highgate, London (United Kingdom), 03-08.08.2004.

With Sanjay Rath, Umesh Kulasingham, Visti Larsen, Zoran Radosavljevic, Sarbani Sarkar.

Information: Umesh Kulasingham (a.k.a Jaan) Phones: (+44)-208-686-4076; Mobile: (+44)-7763-722-733 Email: umesh@srijagannath.net; URL: <http://srath.com/conf/uk2004.htm>. For general info about SJC-URL: <http://www.srija-gannath.org/>

Vedic Astrology International Summer Conference, Boulder, CO (U.S.A.) ACVA accredited conference hosted by Christina Collins Hill, 04-08.08.2004. With Dr Terry Briggs, Dennis Flaherty, Dr David Frawley, Dennis M. Harness, Ph.D., Christina Collins Hill, William R. Levacy, Kuntal Rawal, Komilla Sutton and Chakrapani Ullal.

Information: Tel: (+1) 1-303-774-1999 or leave a message at (+1)1-888-596-8474 (1-888-JYOTISH); Email: [jyotish@indra.com](mailto: jyotish@indra.com); URL: <http://www.ved-icastrologer.cc/>

Faculty of Astrological Studies Summer School, Brasenose College, Oxford, England, 13-20.08 2004.

With Nicholas Campion, Geoffrey Cornelius, Darby Costello, Bernard Eccles, Kim Farley, Liz Greene, Rob Hand, Mike Harding, Robin Heath, Joyce Hoen, Peta High, Diane Marcus-Page, Clare Martin, Melanie Reinhart, Carole Taylor, Darcy Woodall.

Information: Tel: (+44)-20-85169473; Email: summerschool@astrology.org.uk; URL: <http://www.astrology.org.uk/>

3rd West Coast USA Sri Jagannath Centre (SJC) Vedic Astrology Conference: “The Art of Prediction in Jyotish”, Best Western Inn and Suites, Sunnyvale, CA (U.S.A.), 21-29.08.2004.

With Sanjay Rath, Brendan Feeley, Robert Koch, Sat Siri Khalsa, Sarbani Sarkar, Visti Larsen, Raghunadha Rao Nemani, Barbara Corkrean, Freedom Cole.

Information: Lakshmi Kary, Tel: (+1) 1-707-485-7637; Email: lakshmikary@netzero.com URL: <http://srath.com/conf/wcc.htm>. For general info about SJC-URL: <http://www.srijagannath.org/>

1st Argo Astrology Conference: "Going Back to our Roots", Cape Town (South Africa), hosted by Bipin Prag & Nicky Allsop, 23-28.08.2004.

With Geoffrey Cornelius, Monica Cromhout, Gary Cousins, Albertus van Dijk, Maggie Hyde, Megan Kruger, Dean Liprini, Bernadette Medder, Karen Moss, Anita Noyes-Smith, Petra du Preez, Fiona Scott-Hayward, Tracey Shaw, Rod Suskin, Komilla Sutton.

Information: Bipin Prag Phone (+27) 82-8818786, Nicky Allsop (+27) 82-5533791; Fax: (+27) 21-6834360; Email: info@argoconference.com; URL: <http://www.argoconference.com>

36th Annual Conference: "Founts of Wisdom" (org.: The Astrological Association of Great Britain), Bath (United Kingdom), 03-06.09.2004.

With Bernadette Brady, Claire Chandler, Frank Clifford, Dr Patrick Curry, Kay Doyle, Bernard Eccles, Kim Farnell, Andy Gray, Dr Liz Greene, Darrelyn Gunzburg, Judy Hall, Mike Harding, Dr Dennis Harness, Robin Heath, Lee Lehman, Bob Mulligan, Gerasime Patilas, Dione Smith, Neil Spencer, Dr Richard Tarnas, Tchenka Jane Sunderland, Sue Ward.

Information: Tel: (+44) 20-88804848; Fax: (+44) 20-88804849; Email: office@astrologicalassociation.com; URL: <http://www.astrologicalassociation.com/>

The imaginal Cosmos: Astrology, Divination and the Sacred (org.: University of Kent), Canterbury (United Kingdom), 02-03.10.2004.

Papers included: Charles Burnett, 'Astrology in the Cosmos of Two Twelfth-Century Visionaries: Hermann of Carinthia and Hugo of Santalla'; Patrick Curry, 'Divination, Nature & the Divine'; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Weave of Fate: sixteenth-century prognostications and twentieth-century prediction in the context of Western esotericism'; Dorian Greenbaum, 'Rising to the Occasion: Appearance, Emergence, Light and divination in Hellenistic Astrology'; Pat Harris and Frank McGillion, 'A thing ceases to be magical when we understand it'; Jean Lall, 'Watering the roots of Astrological Theory and Practice: Gaston Bachelard's Contribution to a Philosophy of Divination'; Joseph Milne, 'The Cosmic Sence'; Jeremy Naydler, 'Being Ancient in a Modern Way: Divination in the Context of the History of Consciousness'; Gregory Shaw, 'The Talisman'.

Information: Dr. Angela Voss, Email: a.voss@kent.ac.uk; Tel: (+44) 01227-

824411. Aisling Halligan, Religious Studies Office; Email: Phil-rel@kent.ac.uk.
URL: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/secl/thrs/divconference/>

2nd Edition of the International Conference of Astrology (org.: the Holistic Center “Il Sentiero della Luna”), Pisa (Italy), 09-10.10.2004.

With Francis Astore, Emanuela Badiali, Boris Cristoff, Carolyn Egan, Lidia Fassio, Jack Fertig, Frank Mazzei and Laura Poggiani.

Information: Tel: 39-50-822217; Email: ilsentierodellaluna@tiscali.it or info@astralis.it; URL: <http://www.astralis.it/corsi.htm>

Conferences: “De l’usage aujourd’hui des classiques du comparatisme en Science des Religions” (org.: Institut Européen en Sciences des Religions), Paris (France), 20.10.2004-18.05.2005.

Papers included: Antoine Faivre, ‘Mircea Eliade et l’école phénoménologique dans le contexte des autres formes de comparatisme’; Yves Lambert, ‘Types de religion depuis les chasseurs-cueilleurs jusqu’à aujourd’hui’; Mondher Kilani, ‘La religion comme catégorie de traduction des cultures. Universalisme, comparaison, hiérarchie’; Claude Calame, ‘Les approches comparatives des religions entre christianisme et régimes polythéistes’; Nicola Gasbarro, ‘Comparatisme et compatibilité des différences: La perspective historico-religieuse (Pettazzoni) et la globalisation des civilisations’; Jean Lambert, ‘Comparer avec Georges Dumézil les monothéismes méditerranéens’; Jean-Marie Husser, ‘Le comparatisme de James G. Frazer à l’épreuve du dossier des dieux qui meurent’; Régis Debray, ‘Religion, un terme à définir’.

Information: Email: Celine.Beraud@ephe.sorbonne.fr; URL: www.ephe.sorbonne.fr

Sixth Annual Vedic Astrology Certification Conference, hosted by the Galactic Center of Dallas, Renaissance Dallas North Hotel, Dallas, TX (U.S.A.), 21-25.10.2004.

With Howard Beckman, Michiel Boender, Ronnie Gale Dreyer, Dennis Flaherty, David Goldstein, Ph.D., Gary Gomes, Dennis M. Harness, Ph.D., Edith Hathaway, Sat Siri Khalsa, R.G. Krishnan, William R. Levacy, Maire Masco, Nalini (Tom Hopke) Cynthia Novak, Joni Patry, Susie Patterson, Patricia Sanders, M.Ed. and Ernst Wilhelm.

Information: Conference Sponsor Joni Patry: Tel: (+1)1-214-352-2488; Email: joni@galacticcenter.org; URL: <http://www.galacticcenter.org/> or ACVA: Tel: (+1) 1-928-282-6595 Fax (+1) 1-928-282-6097; Email: ACVA108@aol.com; URL: <http://www.vedicastrology.org/>

State of the Art Conference 2004 (SOTA), Quality Hotel Parkway Convention Centre in St. Catharines, Ont. (near Niagara Falls) (Canada), 27.10-01.11.2004. With Shelley Ackerman, Merilynn Artman-Zaitoon, Stephanie Clement, Monica Hable Dimino, Dorothy Figg, Louise Fimlaid, Dennis Flaherty, Antoinette Imhoff, Shelagh Kendal, Dorothy Oja, Walt Masters, Marion McMillan, Chris McRae, Ray Merriman, Arlene Nimark, Glenn Perry, Kim Rogers-Gallagher, Bryan Trussler, Donna Van Toen and more.

Information: Tel: +(1) 416-466-2258; Email: cvantoe@attglobal.net; URL: <http://www.donnnavantoe.com/>

Southern Oregon NCGR's 1st Regional Astrology Intensive, Ashland, Oregon (U.S.A.), 04-07.11.2004.

With Robert Blaschke, Bernadette Brady, Kim Marie, Maria Mateus, Mary Plumb, Maria Kay Simms, Christopher Warnock.

Information: Email: astrosarah@hotmail.com; URL: <http://www.astrologyin-nashland.org/> <http://www.geocosmic.org/>

3rd International Congress of FAES (Federation of Mediterranean Associations) (org.: CIDA), Hotel Michelangelo, Milan (Italy), 06-07.11.2004.

With speakers from France, Italy and Spain, plus invited speakers like Dieter Koch (Switzerland) and Erich van Slooten (Germany).

Information: Tel: (+39) 02-69005576; Email: davalente@fastwebnet.it; URL: <http://www.cida.net/>

Colloque l'Astrologie et le monde, (org.: Mouvement Astrologique Unifié et l'Encyclopaedia Hermetica), Paris (France), 12-14.11.2004.

With main themes: Le prophétisme nostradamique, les rapports Astrologie/Temps, Astrologie et Société, 1974, et le début de l'ère des congrès français, le Tarot et le Zodiaque, les relations Astronomie/Astrologie, le millénarisme astrologique.

Information: MAU, 8, rue de la Providence, F-75013 Paris, France; Email: mouvementastro@yahoo.fr

New Age, Witchcraft and Marian Devotion: Contemporary Spiritualities and Capitalism, (org.: University of Western Sydney), Sydney (Australia) 15.11.2004.

Papers included: Kathleen McPhillips, 'A political economy of contemporary Marian devotion'; Karen Lisa. G. Salamon, 'Inspired leadership—an anthropological discussion of neo-spiritual discourse amongst management

consultants'; Douglas Ezzy, 'Ethics and consumerism in New Age witchcraft'; Adam Possamai, 'Alternative spiritualities in the phase of late capitalism: cultural logic, colonisation of the life world and communicative action'.

Information: Adam Possamai, Tel: (+61) 2-9772-6623; Email: A.Possamai@uws.edu.au

"The Unconventional Convention", Sands Expo Convention Center, Las Vegas, Nevada (U.S.A.), 18-22.11.2004.

This Metaphysical Convention is free to the public to exhibitors' areas: Alternative Health, Angels, Spiritual Healing, Astrology, Psychics, UFOs, Conspiracy, Paranormal, Weird and Strange Things, New Age, Reincarnation, Astrology Gambling, etc. and with more than 100 seminars, workshops and speakers.

Information: Tel: (+1) 702-444-1034; Email: lor@ewnconvention.com or ewnconvention@earthlink.net; URL: <http://www.theunconventionalconvention.com/>

8th International Symposium of astrology (org.: Beatrice Ganz), Zuerich (Switzerland), 27-28.11.2004.

With Verena Bachmann, Dr med. Kurt Bettler, Detlef Hover (Germany), Manfred Maag (Germany), Dr Peter Niehenke (Germany), Inge Pfad (Germany), Sibylle Sulser, Dr Harald Thurnher (Austria), Heidi Treier (Germany), etc.

Information: Tel: (+41) 1-4224682; Fax (+41) 1-4224620; Email: beatrice-ganz@bluewin.ch; URL: <http://www.alocality.ch/symposium/>

Between Mysticism and Power Politics—Swedish Freemasonry on the Scene of the European Enlightenment (org.: Andreas Önnersfors, Lund University, Henrik Bogdan, Göteborg University), Lund (Sweden), 17-18.12.2004.

Papers included: Martin Ernst Urmann, 'Casus Foederis: Protestants and Prophets. Aspects on the Hermetic Concordance in Freemasonry and the Construction of Anciennity in Sweden'; Thomas Karlsson, 'Initiation and revelation in the Gothic kaballah: Johannes Bureus as the father of Gothic esotericism'; Andreas Önnersfors and Patrik Sonestad, 'Presentation of the on-line database "Swedish 18th-century Freemasons"'; José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli, 'Las motivaciones políticas de las primeras condenas de la masonería en la Europa del siglo XVII' (The political motives of the first condemnations of Freemasonry during the 18th century); Andrew Prescott, 'Contacts

between the Swedish and English Grand Lodges up to (and including) the union in 1813'; Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, 'The Masonic connections between France and Sweden in the 18th Century: a strong and aristocratic relationship'; Oliver Benjamin Hemmerle, 'Nazi Perception of Swedish Freemasonry during the Enlightenment and the Napoleonic Era'; Ulf Lindgren, 'The French rituals of Fredrik Horn (1740-ies)'; Alain Bernheim, 'Friedrich, Baron von Vegesack and Johann August Starck—The rise of knightly degrees in France, Sweden and Germany'; Pierre Noel, 'The influence of the Swedish system on the Scottish Rectified Rite'; Henrik Bogdan, 'Alchemical illustrations in a Swedish manuscript of the Strict Observance'; Tom C. Bergroth, 'Masonic activities in Finland in the 18th century'; Henrik Stenius, 'Freemasonry in Finland 1756-1826'; Anders Simonsen, 'Honourable People. Organized social life and the making of the bourgeoisie in Gothenburg during the late 18th century'.

Information: Dr. Andreas Önnersfors, Lund university, Dept. of Cultural Studies, Biskopsgatan 7, SW 22362 Lund, Sweden; Email: andreas.onnerfors@kult.lu.se

Dr. Henrik Bogdan, Göteborg University, Dept. of Religious Studies, Box 200, SE 40530 Göteborg, Sweden; Email: henrik.bogdan@religion.gu.se

All and Everything 2005, International Humanities Conference, Best Western Hotel Marijke, Bergen (The Netherlands), 09-13.03.2005.

Information: Email: aec.info@ntlworld.com

"An Exaltation of Astrology" sponsored by Canopus, Academy of Astrology in Hobart, Tasmania (Australia), 13-17.03.2005.

Speaker submissions invited now.

Information: Linda Reid, Tel: (+61) 3-6442-3601; Email: canopus@south-com.com.au; URL: <http://www.panplanet.com/>

6th biannual International Society of Business Astrologers (ISBA) Congress, Amsterdam (The Netherlands), 05-07.05.2005.

With Karen Boesen, Faye Cossar, Mary Downing, Madeline Gerwick-Brodeauer, Robert Gover, Barbara Hamilton, MA, CAP, Bill Meridian, BS, MBA, Harald Seeberger, Han van Straaten.

Information: Tel: (+45) 38287376; Email: info@businessastrologers.com; URL: <http://www.businessastrologers.com/>

9th International Symposium of Astrology (org.: Beatrice Ganz), Zuerich, (Switzerland) 26-27.11.2005.

With Dr Harald Thurnher etc.

Information: Tel: (+41) 1-4224682; Fax 41-1-4224620; Email: beatrice-ganz@bluewin.ch; URL: <http://www.alocality.ch/symposium/>

Die Enzyklopädie der Esoterik: Allwissenheitsmythen und universalwissenschaftliche Modelle in der Esoterik der Neuzeit, (org.: Andreas Kilcher), Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, (Germany), 26-30.09.2006.

Information: Prof. Dr. Andreas Kilcher, Neuphilologische Fakultät, Deutsches Seminar, Wilhelmstrasse 50, D-72074 Tübingen, Germany; Email: andreas.kilcher@uni-tuebingen.de; Tel: (secr.: Ingeborg Kunze-Teufel) (+49) 7071-2978439 / 2972481; Fax: (+49) 7071-295085.

LILIE, LICHT UND GOTTES WEISHEIT:
PHILIPP OTTO RUNGE UND JACOB BÖHME

MELANIE ÖHLENBACH

Gott kannst du hinter diesen goldnen Bergen nur ahnen, aber deiner selbst bist du gewiß, und was du in deiner ewigen Seele empfunden, das ist auch ewig—was du aus ihr geschöpft, das ist unvergänglich; hier muß die Kunst entspringen, wenn sie ewig sein soll¹.

... [D]as Schönste, das Höchste will ich erreichen, darum werde ich kämpfen, solange ich lebe, und dieses würde ich auch erstreben, wenn sich mir auch alles widersetzte².

Die Einflüsse der deutschen Mystik auf die Frühromantik sind in der Vergangenheit unzureichend untersucht und gewürdigt worden, obwohl die mystische Ansicht der Welt einen der zentralen Punkte der romantischen Philosophie darstellt. Besonders bei Philipp Otto Runge erscheint es notwendig, die Lehre des barocken Mystikers Jacob Böhme bei der Interpretation des Lebenswerkes mit einzubeziehen. Runges Theorie der “Neuen Kunst”, seine Farbentheorie sowie seine artistischen Werke zeugen von einer umfassenden Kenntnis der Werke des “Philosophicus teutonicus”. Zwar blieb Runges Lebenswerk unvollendet und geriet nach dem Ausklang der Romantik bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts fast in Vergessenheit, doch vor allem seine farben-theoretischen Ansätze und die praktischen Ausführungen besitzen noch heute Gültigkeit.

In dieser Arbeit soll dem *Morgen* besondere Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt werden, weil dieser als einziger der Kupferstiche der *Vier Zeiten* 1808 in Farbe umgesetzt wurde. Wichtig im Zusammenhang mit der farbigen Umsetzung erweist sich auch die Erläuterung der Farbenlehre beziehungsweise der *Farbenkugel*, da hier die Bezüge zu Böhme mit am deutlichsten erscheinen. Auch soll Runges Theorie der “Neuen Kunst” kurz dargestellt werden, da sie den Hintergrund für seine künstlerische Entwicklung bildet. Als problematisch erweist sich allerdings, dass nur wenige konkrete Belege dafür

¹ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 72.

² Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 64.

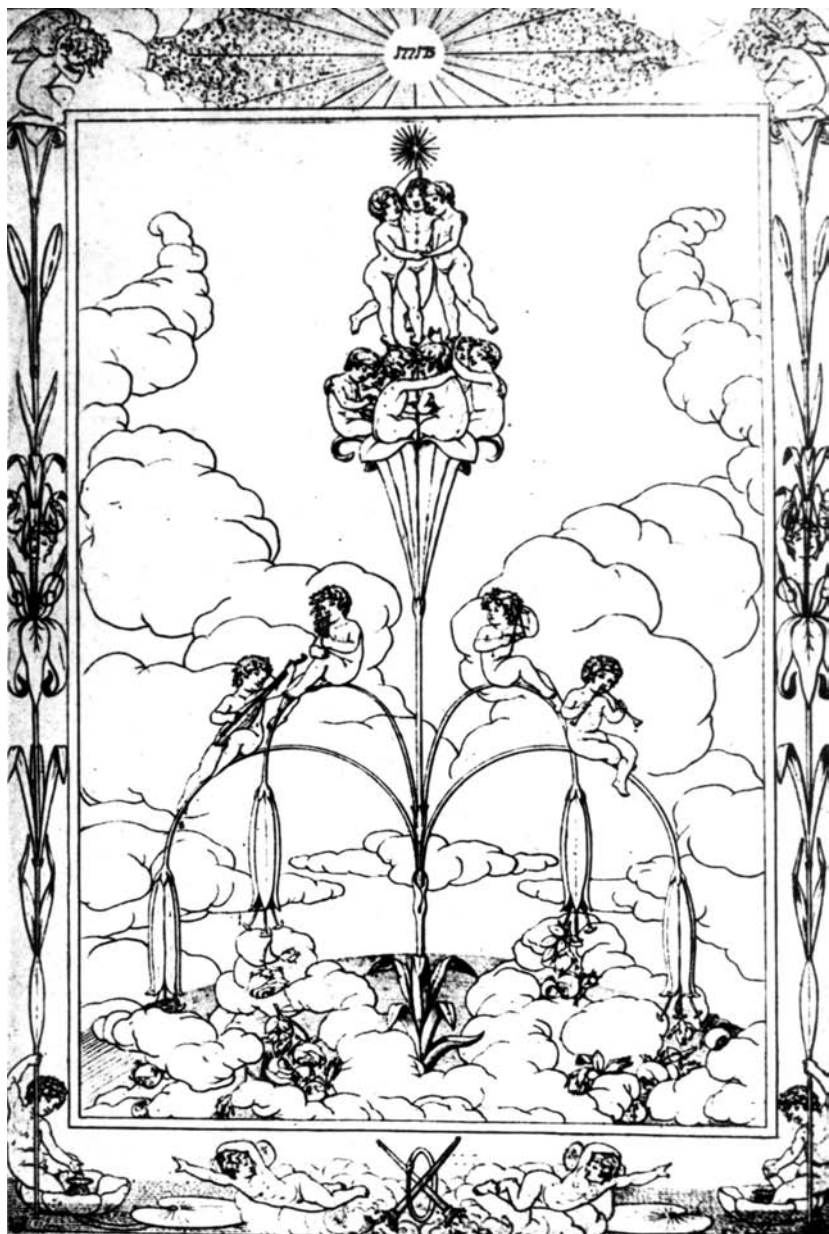


Abb. 1. "Der Morgen".

vorhanden sind, welche Schriften Böhmes Runge selbst gelesen und welche er von seinen Bekannten in einer Neuinterpretation übernommen hat.

1. *Historisches und Biographisches*

1.1. *Historischer Hintergrund*

Um einen tieferen Einblick in Runges Lebenswerk zu erhalten, ist es zunächst notwendig, die historischen, sozialen und philosophischen Umstände seiner Lebens- und Schaffenszeit kurz zu erläutern.

Deutschland um 1800 ist geprägt von den politischen, sozialen und philosophischen Umwälzungen der Französischen Revolution von 1789. Die Kritik am absolutistischen Staat und der Machtstellung der Kirche als Institution, die Aufwertung der menschlichen Vernunft und Rousseaus Forderung "Zurück zur Natur!" hinterlassen zum einen zwar neue Denkansätze, wenn auch als Weiterentwicklung der englischen Philosophie, zum anderen aber auch Fragen, die, wie zur Zeit Jacob Böhmes, erneut zur Diskussion stehen. So leugnen Voltaire und die sogenannten Deisten zwar nicht unbedingt die Existenz (eines) Gottes, definieren ihn aber als Schöpfer und unbewegten Beweger außerhalb der Welt, so dass die menschliche Vernunft als einziges Prinzip des menschlichen Handelns agiert: Aberglauben und kirchliche Doktrinen werden abgelehnt.

Auch die deutsche Aufklärung mit der Lehre Kants lässt die Fragen um eine Existenz Gottes und seines Wirkens unbeantwortet. Seine Lehre des Dinges "an sich" lässt Zweifel am subjektiven Empfinden aufkommen; der Bruch zwischen neuer vernunftbetonter Lehre und Pietismus, Glaube und Wissen wird evidenter.

Auch die gescheiterte soziale Proklamation von "Freiheit, Gleichheit, Brüderlichkeit" und die Restauration der alten Machtordnung nach Napoléon hat für Deutschland bedeutende Folgen. Nach dem Zerfall des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation, ist Deutschland definiert nach sozialer und kultureller Herkunft, nicht aber nach einer Einheit des Staatsgebietes. Die Suche nach nationalem Bewusstsein, Identität, Zusammengehörigkeit, Geschichte und Herkunft ist gekoppelt mit universellen und existenziellen Fragen, die auch 200 Jahre zuvor aktuell waren und in der Philosophie der Frühromantik eine Neuinterpretation alter mystischer Begriffe beinhalten. So sieht sich die geistige Elite in der Nachfolge der Französischen Revolution, wenn auch auf einer anderen Ebene: der geistigpoetischen.

Ansätze der neuen Philosophie finden sich bereits in der Zeit des Sturm und Drangs und in Goethes *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* ihren ersten Höhepunkt. Ausgehend von dieser Epoche entwickeln sich die Bewegungen der Weimarer Klassik um Goethe und Schiller und die deutsche Romantik, die mit Novalis wohl ihren bekanntesten Vertreter der Frühzeit hervorbringt. Trotz der gegensätzlichen Meinungen, die beide Richtungen vertreten, ist es jedoch evident, dass sie durch Kontakt und Austausch einige ähnliche Ideen entwickeln, wie das Kapitel über Runges Farbenlehre, die weitgehend mit der Goethes übereinstimmt, zeigen wird.

1.2. *Biographisches*

In allem, was ich getrieben habe, das nicht zur Kunst gehörte, habe ich keine Fortschritte gemacht, nur in der Kunst bin ich fortgegangen, ohne es selbst zu wissen. Ich meine, wenn man das ergreift, wozu einen die Natur treibt, so tut man seine Pflicht, und es heißt das mit dem Pfunde wuchern, das uns Gott gegeben hat³.

Philipp Otto Runge ist zwölf Jahre alt, als die Französische Revolution mit der Bestürmung der Bastille am 14. Juli 1789 ihren Anfang nimmt. Als neuntes von elf Kindern wächst er in einem streng protestantischen Elternhaus in Wolgast (Vorpommern) auf, zu dem er sein Leben lang eine enge Verbindung aufrecht hält.

Nach einer abgebrochenen Kaufmannsausbildung bei seinem Bruder Daniel in Hamburg wendet sich Runge im Jahr 1798 vermehrt der Malerei zu, aus der er auf ewig 'neuen Mut zur Arbeit und zum Leben holen kann . . .'⁴. Er begeistert sich zunächst sehr für die Kunst des Klassizismus, Goethes *Propyläen*, und die klassischen Werke von Homer, kommt aber dennoch sehr früh mit der Gedankenwelt der Frühromantiker in Berührung⁵. Der unbewusste Bruch mit dem Klassizismus erfolgt während der Ausbildung an der Akademie in Kopenhagen: Runge begegnet nachts im Traum Rembrandt als Hohepriester, der Kritik an der Malerei eines Kollegen Runges übt:

Mit gräßlicher Kälte ergreift ihr Buben das Werkzeug, welches euch die Muse darreicht, und so kalt, wie euer Herz ist, streicht ihr den Kalk dahin und wollt

³ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 32.

⁴ Runge, *Begier*, 35.

⁵ Runge berichtet 1798 in einem Brief begeistert von Tiecks *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen*, 1799 zitiert er den *Gestiefelten Kater*. Vgl. Brief an J.H. Besser am 3.6.1798. In: Runge, *Begier*, 37.

mit eurem armseligen Verstand ergründen, was die Empfindung der ganzen Welt noch nicht erschöpft hat.⁶

Runge versteht die Worte zwar nicht, doch ahnt er ihre Bedeutung. Er vertraut sich Rembrandt an und wird mit 'seligem Gefühl' von ihm angenommen. Nach dieser Vision vollzieht sich der Wandel in Runges Einstellung langsam, aber stetig. Zwar wechselt er 1801 an die Kunstakademie nach Dresden, bemängelt aber auch dort die künstlerische Ausbildung und den Umgang mit der Kunst. Seine Forderungen nach einer neuen 'wahren Kunst'⁷, die nicht auf äußere Komposition, sondern inneren, geistigen und gefühlbetonten Zusammenhang Wert legt, werden immer lauter. Treibende Kräfte für diese Entwicklung sind nicht zuletzt die Lektüre der Bibel, die Liebe zu Pauline Bassenge und letztendlich die Bekanntschaft mit Tieck, dem er Ende 1801 begegnet und der ihn mit den Schriften Jacob Böhmes vertraut macht. Auch die Ablehnung eines seiner Werke beim Wettbewerb der "Weimarer Kunstfreunde" 1802 und die Faszination für die Musik der katholischen Kirche treiben diese Entwicklung voran. Runge beginnt seine Vorliebe für Landschaftsmalerei, die Bewunderung der alten Meister wie Dürer, Rubens, Raffael und Rembrandt mit den Ideen der romantischen Kunstreligion zu verbinden und schafft so die Grundlage für sein Lebenswerk, das durch seinen Tod 1810 unvollendet bleiben wird. 1802/03 fertigt Runge die ersten Federzeichnungen der *Vier Zeiten* an, die 1805 und 1807 als Kupferstiche herausgegeben werden, und beschäftigt sich ausgiebig mit seiner Farbentheorie. Alle seine weiteren Werke, die in dieser Zeit entstehen, können als "Vorübung" für seine Ölfassung des *Kleinen Morgens* von 1808 gesehen werden.

Runge erhebt mit seinen Bildern den Anspruch, eine "Neue Kunst" zu begründen, deren mystischer Hintergrund und Theorie im Folgenden kurz dargestellt werden sollen, da zum Einen in ihr bereits der Einfluss Jacob Böhmes sichtbar wird, und sie zum Anderen als Basis für Runges Lebenswerk fungiert.

2. Runges Theorie der "wahren Kunst"

... [H]inter jedem Blatt und jeder Blüte, dünkt mich, stecke ein Engel, der mir meinen Mut erhielt, und ich begreife es nicht, wie mir zu anderen Zeiten denn sein kann, als wenn alles nur da wäre, um meiner zu spotten, ein Wort

⁶ Runge, *Begier*, 49.

⁷ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 64.



Abb. 2. Probedrucke der Bildbeigabe zur "Farbenkugel"; Kupferstich, Aquatinta, Aquarell von Philipp Otto Runge, O.J., 22,5 × 18.9 cm original: Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle/34291; Foto Elke Walford.

mich dann aus den süßesten Träumen und von den schönsten Bildern zum Nichts herabreißen kann⁸.

Runges endgültige Abwendung von der klassizistischen Kunst im März 1802 und die Entwicklung der "Neuen Kunst" hängt—wie bereits angedeutet wurde—nicht von ungefähr mit der Bekanntschaft Tiecks zusammen⁹, welcher bereits 1799 zusammen mit Wackenroder die *Phantasien über die Kunst* herausgegeben hatte. Auch die Kenntnis der Schriften Jacob Böhmes verdankt er diesem. Allerdings ist es schwer nachzuweisen, um welche Werke es sich dabei handelt, da Runge in seinen hinterlassenen Schriften nur selten den Namen des Mystikers erwähnt; die Aussagen und Wortwahl in seinen Briefen jedoch deuten auf eine große Akzeptanz des Böhmeschen Gedankenguts hin, sei es nun über primäre oder sekundäre, das heißt, von anderen Romantikern aufgegriffene und verarbeitete, Quellen¹⁰. Besonders die Offenbarung des Lichts in der Schöpfungsgeschichte ("fiat lux") und des Geistes Gottes in der Natur beeindruckt Runge zutiefst, führt aber auch zu seinem persönlichen Zwiespalt zwischen der Erziehung des protestantischen Elternhauses und der neu entwickelten religiösen Theorie. Dennoch scheint es, als habe diese Kenntnis Runge nun endlich einen Weg aufgezeigt, seine Ideen und Ahnungen, die bereits in seiner Zeit in Kopenhagen ersichtlich werden, zu formulieren. Mitausschlaggebend mag neben der beklagten 'mangelhaften Betreuung' wohl auch der bereits erwähnte Traum von Rembrandt gewesen zu sein. Ebenso scheint er mit seiner Auffassung nicht alleine zu sein, wenn er schreibt:

[E]s sind jetzt viel unter den neuen Künstlern, die das Bessere suchen, die es finden würden, müßten sie durch den Schein sich nicht beim Leben erhalten¹¹.

Es kommt in dieser Zeit mehr wie seit Jahrhunderten zur Sprache, daß die *wahre Kunst* das einzige ist, was gesucht werden sollte, und das, was am wenigsten gesucht wird. Ich habe zu ergründen gesucht, was die *wahre Kunst* sei—was das erste sei, das ein Künstler zu erlangen suchen muß, welches der *erste Anfang* eines *Kunstwerks* sei¹².

Runges Fundament für die "Neue Kunst"—wie im Übrigen auch für die Wissenschaft, was sich in der Farbenlehre noch zeigen wird,—ist die Religion.

⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 38.

⁹ Vgl. Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 10 f.

¹⁰ Vgl. Brief von Kosegarten an Runge: '(. .) [D]er Jacob Böhme, dessen Sie gedenken, ist mir, soviel ich weiß, verehrt worden. (. .) [I]ch schicke Ihnen die beiden Bände [A.d.V. Runge hat bereits einen Band erworben] und tue es umso bereitwilliger, weil ich es ohnehin aufgeben werde, diesen Schriftsteller lesen'. In: Runge, *Begier*, 154 f.

¹¹ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 58.

¹² Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 61.

Er verwendet hierbei den Begriff nicht im dogmatisch-institutionellen Sinne; für ihn ist Religion der Glaube an die Offenbarung Gottes in der Welt. Auch Böhmes Schriften entspringen, zumindest nach Eigenaussage, nicht der menschlichen Vernunft:

Dan ich habe meine wissenschaft nicht vom studio, . . .¹³.

[W]eil ich aber die Porten GÖttes in meinem geist sehe / und habe auch den trieb darzu / so will ich nach meinem anschawen recht schreiben / und keines Menschen autorität ansehen¹⁴.

Wichtig in diesem Zusammenhang ist die Ahnung und das innere Gefühl, die neue Subjektivität, sowie das Bestreben alles in der Welt in einem großen Zusammenhang zu sehen. Dieser Zusammenhang ist Gott, der "omnes in omnibus" ist, also alles aus sich geschaffen hat und somit in allem gegenwärtig ist.

Auf die Weise könnte einst, was wir jetzt noch nicht einsehen können, aus dieser Kunst die Landschaft hervorgehen und eine bleibendere herrliche Kunst werden. . . . Aber wenn die Kunst auf diesem bescheiden Sinne bleibt, wenn sie sucht unsre allerhöchste Ahnung unsers Zusammenhanges darzustellen, so ist sie an ihrer Stelle und gar etwas Achtungswürdiges.

Ich meine, Lieber, daß ich auf den Grund alles unseres Glaubens, auf unsre geoffenbarte Religion, eine Kunst zu bauen suchen wollte¹⁵.

Bei Böhme finden wir:

Du wirst kein Buch finden, da du die Göttliche Weisheit könntest mehr inne finden zu forschen, als wenn du auf eine grüne und blühende Wiesen gehst, da wirst du die wunderliche Kraft GÖttes sehen, riechen und schmecken, wiewol es nur ein Gleichniß ist; und ist die Göttliche Kraft im dritten Principio materialisch worden, und hat sich GÖtt im Gleichniß offenbaret: aber dem Suchenden ists ein lieber Lehr-Meister, er findet sehr viel alda¹⁶.

Die unendliche Tiefe Gottes und die durch die Materie (angeblich) begrenzte Welt werden in der Farbenlehre noch deutlicher thematisiert werden.

Auf diesen Grundlagen stellt Runge die Bedingung auf, dass es höchste Kunst ist,

. . . [I]n jedem Ding den Zusammenhang des menschlichen Lebens [zu] studieren; jedes würde Dich wieder in Dich selbst zurückführen, und eben daß Du ganz

¹³ Böhme, *Aurora*, 462,20.

¹⁴ Böhme, *Aurora*, 463,23 ff.

¹⁵ Runge, *Begier*, 115.

¹⁶ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, VIII,12.

alles auf Dich selbst kannst, würde Dich im Begriff eines vollkommenen Kunstwerks näher bringen¹⁷.

Die Rückführung des "Makrokosmos" Welt zum "Mikrokosmos" Mensch baut auf der folgenden Aussage Böhmes auf: 'Dann der Mensch ist eine kleine Welt aus der grossen, und hat der gantzen grossen Welt Eigenschaft in sich'¹⁸. Daher trägt der Mensch wie auch alle anderen Geschöpfe einen Funken der göttlichen Liebe in sich, der durch den Fall in die Materie verborgen wird¹⁹. Dieser Funke ist es, der den Weg zur "wahren Kunst" aufzeigt; er ist kein

anderer als die Tugend selbst, denn nur durch ein reines Gemüt kann die Reinheit der Kunst gefühlt und ausgeübt werden, . . .²⁰.

Ich weiß es, daß ein Künstler ohne die Liebe nichts ist, daß er ohne sie nichts leisten kann; . . .²¹.

Die Erkenntnis des göttlichen Erbes in sich befähigt den Künstler, aus sich heraus zu wirken und nicht äußere Erscheinungen zu imitieren, denn '[e]s ist nichts und führt nur geraden Weges zum Verfall der Kunst, von außen nach innen wirken zu wollen'²². Auch bei Böhme findet sich die besondere Betonung der Imagination:

Sollen dir die Augen des Geistes offen stehen / so mustu also gebären / sonst ist deine Begreifigkeit eine Närrin / und geschicht dir eben als wann dir ein Mahler die Gottheit auff ein *Epitaphium* mahlet / und sagte / er habe es recht gemacht / sie sey also. So geschicht dem Gläuber und dem Mahler einem wie dem andern / und sehen doch alle beyde nichts / als Holtz und Farben / und führet ein Blinder den andern / wahrlich du must allhie nicht mit Thieren / sondern mit Göttern kämpfen²³.

Durch das Bewusstsein des Inneren ist dem Künstler auch das Recht gegeben, wie Gott schöpferisch tätig zu sein.

. . . [D]as ist nämlich das Edelste und Höchste, was je der Mensch gewesen ist: das Gleichnis Gottes. Das in uns zu suchen und zu *bilden*, das ist das, das wir das Ideal dieser Kunst nennen müssen, diese Blüte der Menschheit, dies Land,

¹⁷ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 59.

¹⁸ Böhme, *Theosophische Sendbriefe*, XXII,7.

¹⁹ Dieser Aspekt, den Runge von Böhme übernommen hat, wird im Verlauf der Arbeit noch ausführlicher behandelt werden.

²⁰ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 35.

²¹ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 65.

²² Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 60.

²³ Böhme, *Aurora*, 398, 3 ff.



Abb. 3. "Der kleine Morgen"; Gemälde/Öl auf Leinwand von Philipp Otto Runge, 1808, 109 × 85,5 cm Original: Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle/1016; Foto Elke Walford.

das wir das Paradies nennen, das inwendig in uns liegt und das wir finden und worüber wir uns einzig und allein freuen sollten, wenn wir darauf stoßen²⁴.

Runge trifft aus diesen Aussagen die deutliche Differenzierung zwischen Künstler und Maler:

Die Kunst ist eine so reine himmlische Region, zu der sich Wenige ganz erhoben haben, und die nur im Glauben daran dafür erkannt und völlig begriffen werden kann; daher auch keiner, der bloß eine Ahnung davon hat, was sie ist, sich unterstehen wird, ein Künstler sich zu nennen; Hingegen ein Mahler seyn, . . . das können Viele . . .²⁵.

In Anbetracht der Verherrlichung der Kunst und des Künstlers erscheint es noch einmal notwendig zu betonen, dass die Kunst bei Runge nicht zur Religion erhoben wird:

Die Religion ist nicht die Kunst; die Religion ist die höchste Gabe Gottes; sie kann nur von der Kunst herrlicher und verständlicher ausgesprochen werden²⁶.

Die Göttliche Weisheit . . . weiset aber der Kunst den Weg, was sie thun und wie sie sich suchen soll: Ist doch die Kunst GOTTes Werckzeug, damit die Göttliche Weisheit arbeitet: was soll ich sie denn verachten?²⁷

Basierend auf dieser mystischen Einsicht formuliert Runge seine Kunsttheorie. Er stellt hierbei eine Reihenfolge auf, welche den Künstler befähigen soll, "wahre Kunst" zu schaffen.

Ich will hier also die Erfordernisse eines Kunstwerkes, wie sie, nicht allein in Hinsicht der Wichtigkeit, sondern auch in Hinsicht, wie sie ausgebildet werden sollen, auf einander folgen, noch einmal hersetzen:

1. unsre Ahnung von Gott
2. die Empfindung unsrer selbst im Zusammenhange mit dem Ganzen, und aus diesen beiden:
3. die Religion und die Kunst; das ist, unsre höchsten Empfindungen durch Wort, Töne oder Bilder auszudrücken; und da sucht denn die bildende Kunst zuerst:
4. den Gegenstand; dann
5. die Komposition,
6. die Zeichnung,
7. die Farbengebung,
8. die Haltung, (d.h. Perspektive, a.d.V.)

²⁴ Runge, *Begier*, 116. Kursive Hervorhebung durch den Verfasser.

²⁵ Runge, *Hinterlassenen Schriften I*, 103.

²⁶ Runge, *Begier*, 102.

²⁷ Böhme, *Antistiefelius*, 461.

- 9. das Kolorit,
- 10. den Ton²⁸.

Dass dies keine reine Theorie ist, beweist Runge in seinem Lebenswerk, dessen Abschluss der unvollendete *Große Morgen* bildet, bei dem er die geforderten Handlungsschritte einhält²⁹. Sie ist die Basis für seine Bestimmung, die mit dem ersten Entwurf der *Vier Zeiten* 1802 beginnt.

3. Die *Vier Zeiten*

Wie ich in Ziebingen Tieck meine Zeichnungen zeigte, war er ganz bestürzt; er schwieg stille wohl eine Stunde, dann meinte er, es könne nie anders, nie deutlicher ausgesprochen werden, was er immer mit der neuen Kunst gemeint habe; . . . wie nicht eine Idee ausgesprochen, sondern der Zusammenhang der Mathematik, Musik und Farben hier sichtbar in großen Blumen, Figuren und Linien hingeschrieben stehe³⁰.

Schon vor Beginn der Arbeit an den *Vier Zeiten* schwebt Runge ein Werk vor, in dem er die "Neue Kunst" begründen wollte. So finden sich in seinen Briefen bereits Mitte 1802 Hinweise auf die Blumen- und Kindsymbolik, die er im *Zeiten-Zyklus* verwendet³¹. Es handelt sich hierbei bei um die Umsetzung seiner lang gehegten Gedanken über die Kunst in Bildform; die intensiven Gespräche mit Tieck verhelfen Runge dazu, seine Ahnungen zu formulieren. Folgt man der Argumentationsweise seiner Gesprächsbeschreibungen, so erkennt man Ähnlichkeiten zwischen seiner Kunstterminologie und den mystischen Begriffen Jacob Böhmes³².

Die *Vier Zeiten*, ursprünglich angelegt als eine Idee dekorativer Zimmergestaltung in fünfzig Bildern³³, werden von Runge zu Beginn noch als die *Vier Tageszeiten* bezeichnet; später verwendet er aber nur noch den reduzierten Titel, da der Inhalt vielseitig interpretiert werden kann³⁴. In dieser Vielseitigkeit

²⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 96. Hierbei handelt es sich lediglich um eine tabellarische Zusammenfassung. Vorhergehend werden die einzelnen Punkte von Runge detaillierter beschrieben.

²⁹ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 260 f.

³⁰ Runge, *Begier*, 134.

³¹ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 104 und 114 f.

³² Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 93 ff.

³³ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 349, Anmerkung 36.

³⁴ Ihre Bedeutungsfelder erstrecken sich, laut Runges Bruder Daniel, nicht nur auf den

zeigt sich das Totalitätsdenken Runge: Menschliches Sein wird in Bezug zum Kosmos gesehen. In seiner Entstehungsphase teilt sich der *Zeiten*-Zyklus in die zwei Gegensatzpaare *Morgen-Abend* und *Nacht-Tag* auf. Es würde den Umfang dieser Arbeit sprengen, alle vier Bilder zu erläutern; daher wird an dieser Stelle nur auf das erste Blatt, der *Morgen*, eingegangen werden, da nur von diesem eine farbige Umsetzung erfolgt.

Der *Morgen* [Abb. 1] ist aufgeteilt in ein Innen- und eine Art rahmenartiges Außenbild, das nachträglich hinzugefügt wurde³⁵; beide stehen zueinander in enger Beziehung. Um die Gesamtbedeutung und die Zusammenhänge mit Böhme aufzuzeigen, erscheint es sinnvoll, zunächst die Bilder einzeln zu beschreiben, um sie dann in ihrem Gesamtkomplex zu erfassen.

3.1. *Bildbeschreibung*

Das Innenbild, das vom Außenbild durch einen hellen, leistenartigen Rahmen abgetrennt ist, wird von einer Lilie eingenommen, die sich von der Oberfläche einer Kugel erhebt und eine Wolkendecke durchbricht. Von ihrem Stiel gehen im unteren Bereich vier Knospen ab, die sich der Kugel zuneigen und aus denen Rosen auf sie herabfallen. Auf den vier Seitenstängeln sitzt jeweils ein musizierendes Kind. Nach oben hin öffnet sich eine einzelne Lilienblüte, auf deren Blättern wiederum sechs Kinder sitzen, die auf Grund ihrer Umarmung zu drei Paaren zusammengefasst werden. Das linke Paar blickt in die Blüte, das in der Mitte schaut sich an, während das Paar zur Rechten nach oben sieht; einer der beiden macht auf die über den Blütenkindern stehende Dreiergruppe aufmerksam. Das mittlere Kind hält einen Stern über seinen Kopf; die beiden anderen umschließen es in ihrer Umarmung. Die Wolken sind auf Höhe der Lilienblüte bereits sehr dezimiert und weit zum Rand des Bildes gedrängt, auf Höhe des Sternes sind sie gänzlich verschwunden.

Im unteren Teil des Außenbildes sind in der Mitte zwei umgekehrte Fackeln zu sehen, die an ihrem Kreuzungspunkt von einer sich in den eigenen Schwanz beißenden Schlange umrahmt werden. Von ihren wolkenartig dargestellten Rauchschwaden fliehen jeweils eine männliche und eine weiblich Kindfigur

Tageskreis, sondern stehen ebenso synonym für das Jahr, das Leben des einzelnen Menschen, die romantisch-mystische Auffassung der Menschheitsgeschichte sowie Zeit und Ewigkeit. Demzufolge stellt der *Morgen* den symbolischen Ur-Beginn und zugleich (im Innenbild) den idealen Endzustand, im Terminus der Romantik das "Goldene Zeitalter", dar. Vgl. Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 12 f.

³⁵ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 133.

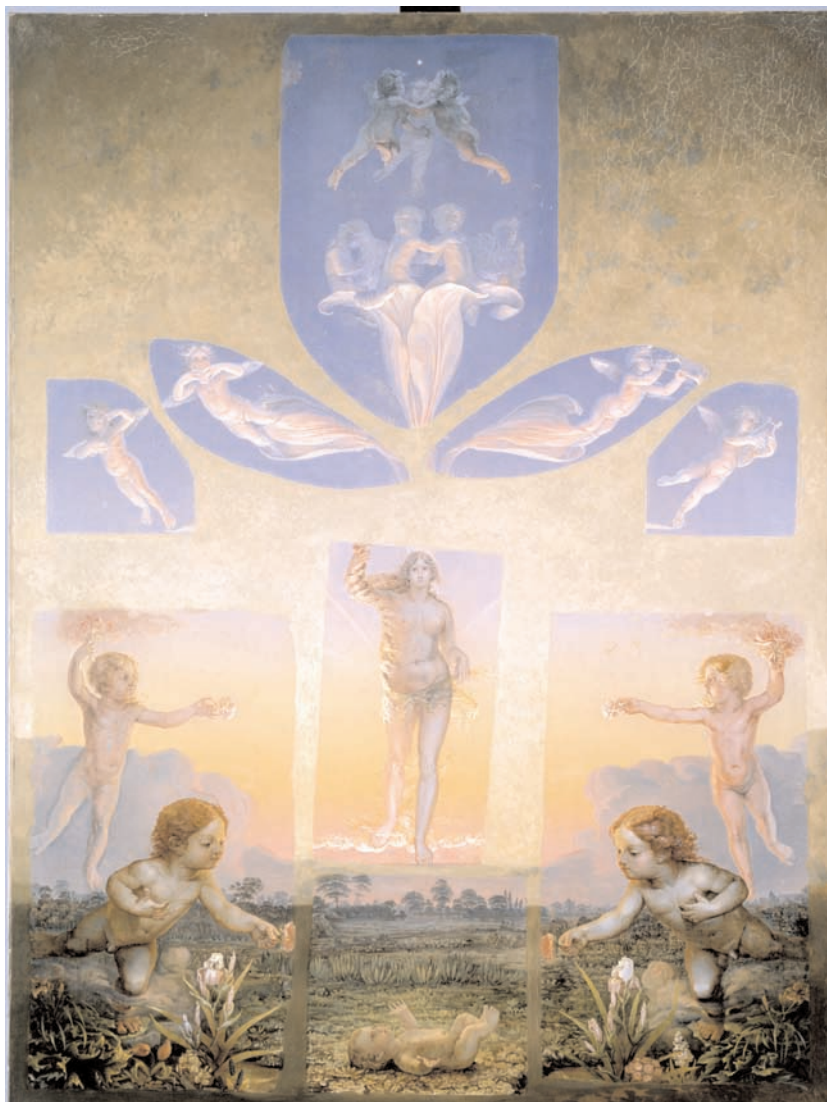


Abb. 4. "Der Morgen"; Gemälde/Öl auf Leinwand, doubliert von Philipp Otto Runge, 1809, 131,5 × 143,5 cm Original: Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle/1022; Foto Elke Walford.

in die linke beziehungsweise rechte Ecke. Sie haben einen ihrer Arme über den Kopf, der noch den Fackeln zugewandt ist, gelegt; den anderen strecken sie dem in den Ecken sitzenden Kind entgegen, das sie anblicken und ihnen ebenfalls eine Hand darreicht.

Die Kinder in den Ecken befinden sich in einer Seerosenblüte und halten in der anderen Hand den Stängel einer Amaryllis, die im Mittelteil des "Rahmenbildes" zur Blüte kommt. Aus dieser Blüte, die sich auf gleicher Ebene mit dem Blütenansatz der Lilie im Innenbild befindet, ragt der Oberkörper eines Kindes, dessen Blick nach oben gerichtet ist. Die beiden Hände fassen die Blütenfäden, die zugleich die ersten Blätter einer Lilie sind, welche ebenfalls wurzellos aus der Blüte wächst.

Schließlich sitzt auf der Blüte der Lilie mit gebeugtem Knie eine Kindfigur mit Engelsflügeln in jeder Ecke; mit demütig vor der Brust gekreuzten Armen neigen sie den Kopf vor der Sonne, die sich in der Mitte befindet. In der Sonne ist in hebräischen Buchstaben der Name Gottes—Jehova—dargestellt. Die Strahlen der Sonne durchbrechen die Wolkendecke, die sie von den beiden Engeln in den Ecken trennt. Des Weiteren kommen dahinter kleinere Gesichter zum Vorschein, die sich mit ihr zugewandten Antlitz um die Sonne gruppieren.

3.2. *Interpretation*

Die Komplexität des dargestellten Sujets erschwert eine umfassende Interpretation. Runge selbst beschreibt in einem Brief an seinen Bruder Daniel sein Erstaunen über die Vieldeutigkeit des Werkes. Sein Plan, zusammen mit Tieck einen Aufsatz über den 'Total-Eindruck' zu verfassen, um durch die Interpretation einzelner Elemente die 'lebendige Kraft des Bildes' nicht zu zerstören, wird allerdings nie ausgeführt werden³⁶. Dennoch sind einige Interpretationshinweise in Runges Briefen enthalten. Außerdem hat er schon von Beginn an eine farbliche Umsetzung der Bilder angestrebt; die an Daniel gerichtete Bildbeschreibung³⁷ enthält die wesentliche Farbgebung, die Runge zu dieser Zeit vorschwebt. Auch sie werden, soweit vorhanden, in die Interpretation mit einfließen³⁸.

³⁶ Runge, *Begier*, 145 f.

³⁷ Runge, *Begier*, 130.

³⁸ Runge deutet bereits seit 1802 in verschiedenen Briefen seine Farbenlehre an. Daher werden nur die zur Zeit der Herstellung der *Zeiten* bekannten Erkenntnisse berücksichtigt. Eine ausführliche Beschreibung der Farbenlehre findet sich im nächsten Kapitel.

Auffallend ist zunächst die symmetrische Anordnung der Gesamtkomposition von Innen- und Außenbild. Als Mittelachse dient die ‘aufgeblühte Lilie, hell wie ein Licht schnurgerade in die Höhe’³⁹, die innerhalb des Innenbildes durch die Dreiergruppe mit dem Stern, im Außenbild durch die umgekehrten Fackeln und die “Jehova-Sonne” verlängert wird. Die Helligkeit, also Durchlichtetheit der Lilie deutet auf Gott hin, da für Runge die Sonne als Symbol der Heiligkeit Gottes und des Guten fungiert. Auch schreibt Runge von einer Linie, die

dasselbe, was der Punkt ist, nur länger angesehen; . . . Der *ausgesprochene* Punkt ist das, was von Gott ausgegangen ist, das *Wort*, alle Dinge sind durch dasselbige gemacht, und ohne dasselbige ist nichts gemacht, was gemacht ist⁴⁰.

Hier greift Runge den Gedanken Böhmes, dass Gott der Urgrund aller Dinge und alles aus ihm entstanden sei, auf. Böhme bezeichnet dies als die “Dreieinigkeit aller Dinge” oder die Zusammensetzung aller Wesen durch die sieben Quellgeister⁴¹. Gott ist der Ausgangspunkt und gleichzeitig auch der Endpunkt, dem alles zustrebt. Daher kann man von ihm ausgehend zwei Entwicklungen innerhalb des Gesamtbildes feststellen—eine im Innenbild und eine im Außenbild—, die in Wechselwirkung zueinander stehen.

Im Außenbild finden sich am unteren Ende der Symmetrie erzeugenden Mittelachse die beiden umgekehrten Fackeln mit der Schlange. Dieses Todessymbol ist hierbei nicht auf die physische Existenz des Menschen bezogen, sondern auf seine geistige. Verlängert man den im Innenbild angedeuteten Kreis in das Außenbild, so umschließt er die untere Vierergruppe. Die Zahl Vier symbolisiert die Basis und die Erde. Da Runge die Fläche dem Teufel zuordnet⁴², trägt sie für ihn die gleiche Bedeutung wie für Jacob Böhme⁴³. Der Mensch ist von dieser physischen Welt eingeschlossen, und sein göttliches Erbe, das Licht des göttlichen Funkens verlöscht. ‘Die Melancholische Natur ist finster und dürre, giebet wenig Wesenheit, sie frisset sich in sich selber, und bleibet immer im Trauer-Hause; . . .’⁴⁴. Die Schlange erinnert an

³⁹ Runge, *Begier*, 130.

⁴⁰ Runge, *Begier*, 137 f.

⁴¹ Vgl. Böhme, *Aurora*, 124, 14 ff.

⁴² Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 137.

⁴³ Jakob Böhme berichtet in der *Aurora* vom Fall des Engels Luzifer, dem Gott zu Anbeginn ein Reich gegeben hat. Durch die Erhebung des Engels gegen seinen Schöpfer wird auch dessen Reich verdammt. Fortan kämpfen in diesem die göttlichen und luziferischen Kräfte miteinander. Erlösung erfährt dieses Reich nur durch einen neuen Herrscher, den Sohn Gottes.

⁴⁴ Böhme, *Trost-Schrift*, 8.

die Versuchung im Paradies; sie bringt den ersten Menschen die Erkenntnis, die sich daraufhin ihrer Nacktheit bewusst und aus dem Paradies vertrieben werden. Die beiden Kinder halten sich wie entsetzt die Arme über das Gesicht, sie eilen von den Fackeln weg, ihre Geschlechter sind erkennbar:

... [D]er Mensch verliert sich in dem ungeheueren Raum, die Unschuld des Gemüts wovon er ausgegangen, verliert sich wie ein Sandkorn, und er meint, die Größe der Schöpfung zu verstehen, indem er sich vernichtet ... [D]ie Natur ist von ihrer Bahn gewichen durch die Sünde; das Ich und Du wird nur im Tode verbunden; ...⁴⁵.

Im Innenbild steigt aus der wolkenverhüllten Erde, welche Runge aus der Titelillustration der Amsterdamer Böhme-Ausgabe von 1682 übernommen hat, die Lilie hervor.

Verbunden mit dem Stern sowie mit den um sie gruppierten Kindfiguren symbolisieren beide dasselbe, nämlich die Trinität Gottes. Runge schreibt:

Das Licht ist die Lilie, und die drei Gruppen haben, wie sie gestellt sind, wieder Beziehung auf die Dreieinigkeit. Die Venus (der Stern) ist das Pistill oder der Mittelpunkt vom Licht, und dieser habe ich mit Fleiß keine andre Gestalt als den Stern gegeben⁴⁶.

Das Licht der ewigen Sonne Gottes, die allem zuoberst steht und durch ihre Position im Außenbild zugleich den Eindruck erweckt, hinter dem Innenbild und somit in allen Dingen zu wirken, wird also durch den Stern, den Runge als den Morgenstern Venus definiert und in Gold darzustellen gedenkt⁴⁷, im Innenbild aufgenommen. Die Trinität setzt sich wie folgt zusammen: Die Knospen, aus denen die 'Rosen und bunte Blumen heraus auf den Nebel [fallen], der sich von ihnen färbt'⁴⁸, symbolisieren den Heiligen Geist. Als "Tröster"⁴⁹ verstreut er die farbigen Blumen als Symbol der irdisch gewordenen Liebe Gottes über die Welt, um die Gegenwart Gottes darzustellen. Der gefärbte Nebel zeigt die erwachende Erkenntnis Gottes; der Heilige Geist beginnt, die Verschleierung der Seele mit dem Bewusstsein Gottes zu durchdringen, der Nebel beziehungsweise die Wolken lichten sich mit dem Wachstum der Lilie zunehmend. Die musizierenden Kinder übernehmen die gleiche Funktion. Wie im Außenbild sind es vier an der Zahl, was ihre Zugehörigkeit

⁴⁵ Runge, *Begier*, 137.

⁴⁶ Runge, *Begier*, 130 f.

⁴⁷ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 130.

⁴⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 130.

⁴⁹ Siehe Farbenlehre.

zur Erde bestärkt. Außerdem empfindet Runge Musik als ‘Harmonie und Ruhe’⁵⁰; das Erwachen der Erkenntnis Gottes im Menschen vergleicht er mit einer neuen Geburt:

Diese Geburt ist die neue Musik, die neue Liebe der Welt, in der Materie ausgeführter und inniger damit verbunden. Die Welt sondert sich so durch die seelenvolle Materie immer mehr von dem Geist, und sie wird einst ebenso erlöst. Diese durch die Liebe mit dem Geist verbundene Materie ist der Körper, der aufstehen wird am Jüngsten Tag⁵¹.

Auf die besondere Symbolik der Kinder und Blumen wird im Verlauf der Arbeit noch eingegangen werden.

Die Geburt der Erkenntnis ist es, die im Außenbild durch das Wachstum einer Amaryllis dargestellt wird. Sie symbolisiert das beginnende Ahnen der Erkenntnis Gottes im Menschen. Der zweite Aspekt der Trinität, der Sohn Gottes, wird im Innenbild durch die Lilienblüte und die sechs Kindern auf den Blütenblättern angedeutet. Runge bezeichnet in seiner Farbenlehre diesen Aspekt als den “Mittler” zwischen dem irdischen und himmlischen Reich⁵². Die Lilie, Symbol für die Jungfrau Maria, birgt in ihrem Inneren den Christus; die Zahl Sechs stellt die Dreieinigkeit dar, die aus der Verbindung der Dualitäten in Paare entsteht. Die beiden Kinder auf der linken Seite blicken in das Innere des Kelches, sie erschauen dort den inneren Funken Gottes. Das Paar in der Mitte blickt sich an: daraus resultierend erkennen sie die Göttlichkeit in ihrem Nächsten. Das dritte Paar erkennt Gott selbst, der in Form des Morgensterns über allem steht—der Blick wendet sich ihm zu. Böhme schreibt hierzu:

Ich suchte allein das Hertze JESu Christi, In solchem meinem gar ernstlichen Suchen und Begehren . . . ist mir die Pforte eröffnet worden, daß ich in einer Viertheil Stunden mehr gesehen und gewußt habe, als wann ich wäre viel Jahr auf hohen Schulen gewesen, dessen ich mich hoch verwunderte, wußte nicht, wie mir geschahe, und darüber mein Hertz ins Lob GOTTes wendete. Dann ich sahe und erkante das Wesen aller Wesen, den Grund und Urgrund: Item, die Geburt der H. Dreyfaltigkeit, das Herkommen und den Urstand dieser Welt, . . .⁵³.

Der Geist aber ist das ewige Leben / welcher mit GOTT *inqualiret* / und die innerliche Gottheit in der Natur begreift⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Runge, *Begier*, 140.

⁵¹ Runge, *Begier*, 142.

⁵² Siehe Farbenlehre.

⁵³ Böhme, *Theosophische Sendbriefe*, XII,6 ff.

⁵⁴ Böhme, *Aurora*, 310,2 ff.

Somit ist die beschränkende Deutungsweise aufgehoben: Nicht nur Maria wird durch die Lilienblüte symbolisiert, sondern jeder Mensch und auch die Natur, da alles den göttlichen Funken in sich trägt.

Auch im Außenbild tritt der Christusaspekt hervor. Die Blüte der Amaryllis, die als Symbol für den Aufgang des Lichts steht, befindet sich auf der gleichen Höhe mit dem Blütenansatz der Lilie im Innenbild. Das Kind in der Blüte mag das Christuskind darstellen oder zumindest ein Kind, dessen Bewusstsein für das Höhere deutlich erwacht ist: Es blickt nach oben. Des Weiteren entsteigt der Blüte eine neue Lilie mit frischen Knospen und einer geöffneten Blüte.

Schließlich findet sich zuoberst in Form des Morgensterns und der Dreiergruppe der Aspekt des Vaters. Die Kindergruppe stellt erneut die Trinität dar; der "Vater", der den Stern hält, wird von den beiden anderen Aspekten in einer Umarmung umschlossen. Die Wolken haben sich nun vollständig aufgelöst und geben einen dunkelblauen⁵⁵ Himmel frei. Hier zeigt sich die Herrlichkeit Gottes, die durch keine Wolke verdunkelt wird.

Der Morgenstern als Sinnbild für den Anbruch des Morgens und der Rückkehr des Lichts hat in diesem Zusammenhang die Bedeutung der Wiederauferstehung und der Erlösung durch Umkehr und Ablassen von den niederen Instinkten. Böhme beschreibt den Anbruch der Morgenröte folgendermaßen:

[S]o wird der plitz im gantzen circkel dieser Welt auffgehen / zu welchem dieser Geist ein Bothe oder Verkündiger des Tages ist⁵⁶.

... [D]an die zeit der wiederbringung / was der mensch verlohren hat / die ist nunmehr vorhanden / die Morgen-Röthe bricht an / es ist zeit vom schlafe auffzuwachen⁵⁷.

Die Vollendung im Außenbild vollzieht sich auf etwas andere Weise: Auf den Kelchen der Lilien sitzen in den jeweiligen Ecken zwei Kinder mit Engelsflügeln; die physische Existenz scheint überwunden. Aber die Kinder sind noch durch die Körperlichkeit, die durch die Wolken dargestellt wird, von Gottes Reich getrennt. Daher ist der Mensch zu Gott zurückgekehrt, so weit es ihm in der materialischen Existenz möglich ist, und verehrt ihn zusammen mit einer Vielzahl anderer, die sich um die "Jehova-Sonne" versammeln. Auch hier durchbricht die Sonne die Wolkendecke, die sie von den Engeln trennt, und offenbart sich dem,

⁵⁵ Siehe Farbenlehre.

⁵⁶ Böhme, *Aurora*, 215,19 ff.

⁵⁷ Böhme, *Aurora*, 218,11 ff.

... wer die höchste Stufe erreicht hat, die der Körper mit dem Geist zusammen zu erreichen fähig ist, wenn dann in dem Menschen der Geist noch kräftig weiter fortwirken will, so wird der Körper aufgelöst und der Eros ist lebendig gen Himmel gefahren⁵⁸.

Während der Morgenstern im Innenbild den Anbruch des Tages verkündet, steht im Außenbild bereits die strahlende "Jehova-Sonne". Sie bildet den Übergang zum zweiten Bild des *Zeiten*-Zyklus, dem *Tag*⁵⁹.

4. Exkurs: *Blumensymbolik*

Runges besondere Vorliebe für Blumen lässt sich schon seit seiner Kindheit belegen, als er sehr viele Scherenschnitte anfertigt. Bereits zu dieser Zeit zeigt sich seine besondere Affinität für die Lilie, einem der zentralen bildlichen Elemente bei Böhme, wie Runge im Verlauf seines Lebens erfahren wird. Die Lilie steht in der christlich-mystischen Interpretation als Symbol für Unschuld, Aufstieg, Licht und die Anwesenheit Gottes.

Für Runge sind Blumen Sinnbilder für die Schönheit der Natur und für das Leben, das aus dem Samen und der Erde erwächst, zur vollen Blüte kommt und wieder vergeht, um im darauf folgenden Jahr wieder neu zu entstehen. Im Außenbild strebt die Seele zu Gott, sie sucht wie eine Pflanze das ewige Licht, um auf ewig in ihm aufzugehen. 'Und so wie die Blume nur einen Moment in ihrer Pracht da steht, daß man das Woher? oder Wodurch? vergißt, so vergessen auch eben die Menschen eines über dem andern, ...'⁶⁰.

Die Kinder besitzen eine dreifache Bedeutung, die sich in Gott gründet. Im Außenbild stellen sie zum Ersten die kindliche Seele des Menschen dar, zum Zweiten die Seelen der Blumen; im Innenbild verdeutlichen sie die Trinität. Gemeinsam versinnbildlichen sie, dass 'Gottes Liebe wirkt und ist allerwege sichtbar in der Welt; ...'⁶¹. Somit vertreten sie innerhalb des Außenrahmens nicht nur die menschliche Seele, sondern auch die kreatürliche beziehungsweise die Weltseele. Mit der Kinddarstellung kommt Runge der biblischen Forderung "Werdet wie die Kinder!" nach. An Pauline schreibt er:

⁵⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 135.

⁵⁹ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 174.

⁶⁰ Runge, *Begier*, 171.

⁶¹ Runge, *Begier*, 151.

Bauen wir aber im kindlichen Glauben auf Gott, so ist unsre Stärke größer denn aller Menschen Kraft. Das ist der Grund, daß wir, daß er allein wahrer Gott ist und den er gesandt hat, Jesum Christum, erkennen; . . .⁶².

Der Mensch, dessen Seele im Licht Gottes steht und somit ein Kind des Geheimnisses ist, begreift sein göttliches Erbe⁶³, so Böhme.

Im Außenbild erblickt man ebenso zwei Kinder mit Engelsflügeln. Die Kinder ähneln den Engeln mehr als die Erwachsenen, da sie in der Materie weniger verhaftet sind; sie stehen also der Urquelle Gott näher, da sie den göttlichen Lebensfunken in der Natur begreifen. Bei Böhme findet sich Folgendes:

Wem soll ich nun die Engel vergleichen?

Den kleinen Kindern wil ich sie recht vergleichen, . . . [Die Engel] nehmen einander bey den händen / und spatzieren in dem schönen Himmels-mayen / und reden von den lieblichen und schönen gewächsen in der himmlischen *pomp*, und essen der holdsehligen fruchte Gottes / und brauchen der schönen Himmels-blühmelein zu ihrem spiel / und machen ihnen schöne Cräntzelein / und freuen sich in dem schönen Mayen Gottes.

Da ist nichts dan ein hertzlich lieben / eine sanfte liebe / ein freundlich gesprech / ein holdseelig beywohnen / da einer immer seine lust an dem andern siehet / und den andern ehret. Sie wissen von keiner bosheit oder list oder betrug / sondern die Göttliche fruchte und lieblichkeit seind ihnen alles gemeine / einer mag sich der gebrauchen wie der ander / da ist keine mißgunst / kein neid / kein widerwille / sondern ihre hertzen seind in liebe verbunden⁶⁴.

5. Farbenlehre

Wenn wir die Natur auf irgendeine Weise nachahmen oder ähnliche Erscheinungen wie sie hervorbringen wollen, so müssen wir uns bemühen, in der unendlichen Mannigfaltigkeit und Beweglichkeit, welche in der Natur ist, die einfachen Teile zu entdecken und abzusondern, Es kann auf solche Weise z. B. ein Gemälde gleichsam wie eine eigne, zweite Schöpfung in der Natur dastehen, deren Vollkommenheit desto größer sein wird, je tiefer der Maler in die Elemente der Naturerscheinung eingedrungen; . . .⁶⁵.

⁶² Runge, *Begier*, 151.

⁶³ Vgl. Böhme, *Aurora*, 316,4 ff.

⁶⁴ Böhme, *Aurora*, 197,21 ff. Vgl. ebenso Böhme, *Aurora*, 199,6 ff.

⁶⁵ Runge, *Begier*, 197.

Runges Ambitionen, die Kupferstiche in Farbe zu fassen, um ihre Schönheit und ihren Symbolwert zu unterstreichen, beginnt er allerdings erst 1807 umzusetzen. Dazwischen beschäftigt er sich unter anderem eingehend mit seiner Farbentheorie, deren wichtigste Gesichtspunkte, welche bei der Interpretation des *Morgens* relevant sind, nun in diesem Kapitel beschrieben werden. Auch hier werden sich Einflüsse Jacob Böhmes nachweisen lassen.

Runges Farbenlehre wird erst 1810 in der *Farbenkugel* [Abb. 2] veröffentlicht. Sie beinhaltet zwölf Farbtöne: die drei Grundfarben Rot, Gelb und Blau, die aus deren Kombination entstehenden Mischfarben Orange, Grün und Violett sowie sechs weitere sogenannte Zwischenfarben, die gleichmäßig die Abstufungen der Farben zueinander regulieren. An den Polen findet sich oben Weiß und unten Schwarz. Die Kugel ist an den in den *Zeiten* dargestellten zyklischen Gedanken angelehnt und hat erneut die Titelillustration der Amsterdamer Böhme-Ausgabe zum Vorbild⁶⁶. Daher symbolisiert die Kugel zum einen die Welt, zum anderen die holistische Geschlossenheit—Gott, der alles umfängt und zusammenhält. Dies ist eine Ansicht, die bereits in der Kunstauffassung erwähnt wurde und nun in der Farbenlehre verdeutlicht wird.

Die *Farbenkugel* von 1810 stellt das Produkt langwieriger Arbeit dar⁶⁷. Bereits 1802 erwähnt Runge in einem Brief an seinen Bruder Daniel die symbolhafte Auslegung der drei Grundfarben, auf die später noch genau eingegangen werden soll. Auch die Absicht, Farbe gezielt in den *Vier Zeiten* einzusetzen, um deren tiefliegende Bedeutung offensichtlich zu machen, rührt aus diesen Anfängen. In einem Brief an Goethe beschreibt er dieses Verlangen folgendermaßen:

Es ist ein sehr natürlicher Gedanke für einen Maler, wenn er zu wissen begehrt, indem er eine schöne Gegend sieht oder auf irgendeine Art von einem Effekt in der Natur angesprochen wird, aus welchen Stoffen gemischt dieser Effekt wiederzugeben wäre. Dies hat mich wenigstens angetrieben, die Eigenheiten der Farben zu studieren und ob es möglich wäre, so tief einzudringen in ihren Kräften, damit es mir deutlich würde, was sie leisten oder was durch sie gewirkt wird oder was auf sie wirkt⁶⁸.

Seit 1806 scheint sein Interesse an der Farbentheorie mehr wissenschaftlicher Natur zu sein; seine Briefe, die er an Goethe richtet, verdeutlichen eher die rationalere als die mystische Ansicht⁶⁹. Bedenkt man jedoch, dass sein Interesse

⁶⁶ Vgl. Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 17.

⁶⁷ Runge erwähnt seine Farbenlehre bereits vorher in Briefen und verfasst diverse undatierte Fragmente. Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 352, Fußnote 68.

⁶⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 180.

⁶⁹ Hierbei gibt es in der Forschung allerdings zwei kontroverse Meinungen. Bisanz stellt die

auf die Lektüre Böhmes begründet und es Runges Absicht ist, eine "Neue Kunst" zu begründen, in der auch der Einsatz von Farbe einen wesentlichen Teil einnimmt, so finden sich immer noch Spuren einer mystischen Weltsicht hinter aller Wissenschaftlichkeit. Hier findet sich auch ein Vergleich mit den Blumen:

Die Blumen, Bäume und Gestalten werden uns dann aufgehen, und wir haben einen Schritt näher zur *Farbe* getan! Die Farbe ist die letzte Kunst und die uns noch immer mystisch ist und bleiben muß, die wir auf eine wunderlich ahnende Weise wieder nur in den Blumen verstehen⁷⁰.

Dass Böhme Mitinitiator seiner Lehre ist, stellt Runge in einem Brief 1810 dar:

Die tiefsinnigen Beziehungen in der tabellarischen Ordnung haben ihren Ursprung aus Jacob Böhme, Swedenborg usw. Den "Stammbaum aller Farben" und Mischungen findest Du . . . just in meiner Kugel⁷¹.

Des Weiteren sei erneut darauf hingewiesen, dass in der Auffassung Runges die Wissenschaft in der Religion verankert sein sollte und nicht in rationaler Auffassung. Dennoch greift auch Runge auf die Methoden wissenschaftlichen Arbeitens zurück; er bemüht sich also, seine in der Religion fundierten Annahmen empirisch nachzuweisen. Er lässt sich eigenen einen Farbapparat herstellen, um die angenommen Mischverhältnisse zu beweisen⁷². Auch bedauert er es sehr, die Schriften Newtons zur Farbe nicht zu kennen, ihm stehe dabei 'sehr wohl im Wege, daß ich keine Sprachen verstehe, . . .'⁷³. Ebenso beklagt er den Mangel an mathematischen und chemischen Kenntnissen⁷⁴.

Viel bedeutender als die Kenntnis von Fremdsprachen und den Naturwissenschaften erweist sich für Runge die Bibel und die Schriften Jacob Böhmes.

oben genannte Feststellung dar: 'The importance which Runge attaches to mystogogy diminishes perceptively as he grows older. (. . .) we can (. . .) separate, in our own minds, fact from mystery (. . .) when we hear Runge the sober art theorist and when Runge the religious fanatic'. Bisanz, *German Romanticism*, 82.

Hohl schreibt hingegen, dass Runge auf Grund seines Briefkontaktes mit Goethe, der die klassizistische Kunstrichtung vertritt, von seinen mystischen Beschreibungen absieht. Vgl. Hohl, *Philipp Otto Runge*, 28.

⁷⁰ Runge, *Begier*, 110.

⁷¹ Runge, *Begier*, 333. Die Auflistung, von der Runge möglicherweise spricht, findet sich bei Möseneder, *Runge und Böhme*, 30.

⁷² Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 239 f.

⁷³ Runge, *Begier*, 195.

⁷⁴ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 185.

Immer bedeutender für sein Leben und Werk wird ab 1802 die alttestamentarische Schöpfungsgeschichte, mit besonderer Betonung der Worte “fiat lux”. So schreibt er am 9. März 1803 an Pauline:

Das Licht, wenn es angezündet wird, giebt erst einen gar kleinen Schein und die Finsterniß drängt es immer nur in sich zusammen; es ist darum aber nicht weniger wahr, dass es Feuer und ein wirkliches Licht ist. Die Finsterniß kann das Licht nicht zerstören, wohl aber kann das Licht alle Unwahrheit und Falschheit und Thorheit des Bösen auseinander sprengen in alle vier Winde des Himmels. Der ein Funke, der uns gegeben ist vom Himmel, der kann wachsen und gedeihen zu einem großen Feuer, das alle Raubthiere verscheucht, und den Feind verderben in den Wohnungen seiner eigenen Dummheit⁷⁵.

Laut Böhme besteht Gott aus den sieben Quellgeistern, die sein Licht ausmachen und ewig sind:

Vnd die 7. Geister sind des Liechtes Vater / und das liecht ist ihr Sohn / den sie von ewigkeit zu ewigkeit immer also gebähren / und das liecht erleuchtet und macht immer und ewig die sieben Geister lebendig und freudenreich / dan sie nehmen alle ihr auffsteigen und leben in krafft des liechtes. Hingegen gebähren sie alle das liecht / und seind alle zugleich des liechtes Vater . . .⁷⁶.

Da Gott die Schöpfung aus sich geschaffen hat, trägt alles dieses Licht in sich, das unbezwingbar der Finsternis gegenübersteht. Dieses Licht ist nach Böhme notwendig, um sich aus den Klauen der durch Luzifers Fall entstandenen materiellen Welt zu befreien⁷⁷. Diese Welt bezeichnet Böhme als die “dritte Geburt”, die Begreiflichkeit der Natur, also die Manifestation, die nun erneut das göttliche Licht braucht. Da diese Welt durch den Zorn des Erzengels Luzifer entstanden ist, ringen bei Böhme das Licht der Liebe und das Feuer des Zorns miteinander. Die Finsternis ist die Ignoranz des Menschen, der nicht erkennen will, welch göttlichen Ursprungs er selbst und alles in der Welt ist.

Diese Gedanken bilden die Grundlage für Runge's Farbenlehre. Das Licht als Sinnbild des Guten und die Dunkelheit als das des Bösen offenbaren sich als konträre Pole in Weiß und Schwarz, die er als “Nichtfarben” bezeichnet:

Licht, oder Weiß, und Finsternis, oder Schwarz, sind keine Farben, das Licht ist das Gute, und die Finsternis ist das Böse (ich beziehe mich wieder auf die Schöpfung); das Licht können wir nicht begreifen, und die Finsternis sollen wir nicht begreifen da ist den Menschen die Offenbarung gegeben, und die Farben sind in die Welt gekommen, das ist: Blau und Rot und Gelb⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ Runge, *Begier*, 133.

⁷⁶ Böhme, *Aurora*, 174,19 ff.

⁷⁷ Vgl. Böhme, *Aurora*, 318,9 ff und 319,21 ff.

⁷⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 111.

Weiß suggeriert die vollständige Anwesenheit von Licht, während Schwarz seine vollständige Abwesenheit zeigt⁷⁹. Zwischen den beiden extremen Polen sind nun die Farben angelegt, die als "Offenbarung" das Licht der Sonne zeigen, in das nicht direkt geblickt werden kann⁸⁰.

Licht und die dadurch erzeugten Farben sollen also als Vermittler zu Gott, dem Inbegriff des Guten, gesehen werden. So schreibt Runge am 27. November 1802 an seinen Bruder Daniel:

Sieh, so freut sich die Welt des Lichts, das Gott ausgehen ließ, sie zu trösten. Recht in dem Mittelpunkt der Erde, da sitzt die arme Seele und sehnet sich zum Licht, wie wir uns hinein sehnen. . . . Und, wie Jacob Böhme meint, der Teufel hat die Erde verbrannt und nun die Seele da eingeschlossen, aber die Barmherzigkeit Gottes währet ewiglich, und Gott sprach: es werde Licht! Denn Gott war vor dem Licht und ist größer als das Licht, und das Licht war vor der Sonne, denn das Licht ist die Nahrung der Sonne; und das Licht scheint in der Finsternis und die Finsternis begriffen es nicht; da gab Gott den Menschen die Farbe, . . . innerlich sehnen wir uns zum Licht, und unsre liebe Mutter in der Erde hält uns fest, . . . und wie die geoffenbarte Religion uns die Dreieinigkeit erschließt, so erschließt sie [die Erde] uns die Dreieinigkeit der Farbe . . .⁸¹.

Der Mensch, oder zumindest der göttliche Funke in ihm, sehnt sich zurück nach seinem Ursprung und Schöpfer, doch die materielle Existenz und die Verbundenheit mit der Welt halten ihn zurück. Die Welt ist wie bei Böhme ein Ort, in der der Mensch in seiner "dritten Geburt" gefangen ist. Für Runge erweisen Farben und Licht sich als die Spuren Gottes, als "signature rerum", die der Mensch allein durch seine geistige Natur begreifen kann. Erst wenn der Mensch in sich die Bedeutung der Worte "fiat lux!" durch den Glauben erkennt, wird er verstehen, dass Gott und seine Schöpfung eins sind, denn Gottes Wort

. . . ist der Anfang aller Dinge; aus diesem sind die Farben hervorgegangen, das ist die Eins und die Drei, das ist die Sehnsucht, die Liebe und der Wille, das ist Gelb, Rot und Weiß [Blau?], . . .⁸².

Äußerst mystisch und erneut sehr in der Tradition von Böhme ist daher Runges Forderung nach dem Streben zum Licht. Für ihn bringt das Licht Leben, Wirken und Schaffen hervor; Gott als der Schöpfer der Welt, der Mensch, dessen wahres Licht aus dem Inneren kommt, als sein Abbild und

⁷⁹ Runge schreibt in einer späteren Schrift, dass Weiß nur die Vorstellung von Licht, nicht aber das Licht selbst darstellt. Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 214.

⁸⁰ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 111.

⁸¹ Runge, *Begier*, 114.

⁸² Runge, *Begier*, 136. Eckige Klammer vom Verfasser.

Erbe, ‘... denn aus dem inneren Lichtstrahl ist alles hervorgegangen, er ist der lebendige Odem, das Bild Gottes in uns, ...’⁸³. Daher ist auch für Runge keine Trennung von Wissenschaft und Religion möglich, da für ihn alles nur einen Ursprung kennt. ‘Das Licht und den Geist außer der Schöpfung und ohne die Schöpfung kennen und wissen zu wollen, ist die Trennung von Gott’. Folglich muss er Newtons wissenschaftliche Arbeit ablehnen, denn ‘[i]ch glaube nicht, daß die Farbe gebrochne Lichtstrahlen sind; ... Ich will dem Licht die Ehre nicht nehmen, Farbe zu sein, bewahre Gott; es wäre soviel, als Gott die Ehre zu nehmen, Mensch zu sein; ...’⁸⁴.

Die Dreieinigkeit Gottes zeigt sich der Welt—laut Runge—in Form der drei sogenannten Grundfarben, die nicht weiter in ihren Farbbestandteilen reduzierbar sind, und deren Kombination—gegebenenfalls unter Einbezug der beiden Nichtfarben—alle weiteren Farben hervorbringen. Dabei ordnet er Blau dem Vater, Rot dem Christus und Gelb dem Heiligen Geist zu:

Blau hält uns in einer gewissen Ehrfurcht, das ist der Vater, und Rot ist ordentlich der Mittler zwischen Erde und Himmel; wenn beide verschwinden, so kommt in der Nacht das Feuer, das ist das Gelbe und der Tröster, der uns gesandt wird—auch der Mond ist nur gelb⁸⁵.

Den Farben verschiedene Personen oder Eigenschaften zuzuschreiben, steht ganz in der Tradition Jacob Böhmes. Er beschreibt Gott als ein Gemisch aus verschiedenen “Farben”—Quellgeister genannt—, die die unterschiedlichen Qualitäten Gottes betonen. Je nach Zusammensetzung der Qualitäten enthält jedes Wesen seinen Charakter. Böhme unterscheidet hierbei nach sieben Quellgeistern, denen eigene Farben zugeordnet sind und durch deren Kombination die Farbgebung variiert: die bittere Qualität zum Beispiel ist ‘die bildung allerley rothen farben in ihrer eigen *qualität* / in der süssen bildet sie allerley weiße und blawe / in der herben und sauren allerley grüne und dunckele und vermengte farben mit mancherley gestalt und geruche’⁸⁶.

Auch greift Runge Böhmes Analogie von Farbe und Musik auf, welche auch schon bei dem Kupferstich in Form der musizierenden Kinder eine Rolle spielt.

Die Farbe ruht aber in der Luft wie der Ton im Metall. Und daß das stärkere Anspannen einer Saite die Töne verändert, ist ebenso ein Wunder, als daß der stumpfere Winkel die Farben verändert. ... Allein mit der Luft in einem Bilde

⁸³ Runge, *Begier*, 136.

⁸⁴ Runge, *Begier*, 243.

⁸⁵ Runge, *Begier*, 111.

⁸⁶ Böhme, *Aurora*, 123, 14 ff.

rein und richtig zu musizieren, das ist der Grundbaß, wodurch alles ineinander tönt und klingt . . .⁸⁷.

Böhme ordnet den Schall einem der Quellgeister zu, womit er ein Teil Gottes ist. Damit Gott in diesem Sinne also vollständig erfahren werden kann, strebt Runge eine Vereinigung der Künste an. 'Die Analogie des Sehens . . . mit der Grunderscheinung des Gehörs, führt auf sehr schöne Resultate für eine zukünftige Vereinigung der Musik und Malerei, oder der Töne und Farben, . . .'⁸⁸.

Mit den fünf ursprünglichen 'Elementen'⁸⁹ besitzt der Künstler die Möglichkeit, seine Schöpfung zu beginnen. Die Gestaltung der "künstlichen Welt", ihre Form, reguliert er durch den Farbauftrag. Runge differenziert hier zwischen "durchsichtigen" und "undurchsichtigen" Farben. Während 'die undurchsichtige Farbe nur auf der Oberfläche erscheinen kann, so offenbart sie uns die Form derselben . . . und es offenbart sich uns die Materie'⁹⁰, sind '[d]ie durchsichtigen Farben . . . in ihrer Erleuchtung wie in ihrer Dunkelheit grenzenlos, wie Feuer und Wasser als ihre Höhe und ihre Tiefe angesehen werden kann'⁹¹. Ein undurchsichtiger Farbauftrag gibt demnach die äußere sichtbare Gestalt wieder, während die Lasur das innere Wesen des Gegenstandes freilegt. Daher erscheint er auch beweglicher, da das lebendige Feuer Gottes sich offenbart⁹². Das göttliche Wesen ist bei undurchsichtigen Farben in der Materie gefangen, in einer Welt der dualen Gegensätze von Weiß und Schwarz, also Gut und Böse. Die beiden Nichtfarben 'sind beide *undurchsichtig* oder *körperlich*'⁹³. Durch die "Geburt" der göttlichen Wesen in der Welt verbinden sich mit der Materie die durchsichtigen Farben, die von Gottes durchscheinender Herrlichkeit ausgehen, und werden körperlich:

Alle Farben sind doch eigentlich durchsichtig, sie werden aber körperlich durch Weiß oder Schwarz. Die Wirkung einer klaren Lasurfarbe ist sehr verschieden von einer körperlich aufgetragenen Mischung⁹⁴.

Da sie aber noch immer göttlichen Ursprungs sind, sind sie fähig, ihr Inneres zu offenbaren:

⁸⁷ Runge, *Begier*, 243. Vgl. ebenso Runge, *Begier*, 242.

⁸⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 280. Vgl. ebenso Runge, *Begier*, 303.

⁸⁹ Runge bezeichnet die drei Grundfarben und die beiden Nichtfarben als 'Elemente'. Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 198.

⁹⁰ Runge, *Begier*, 215 f. Vgl. ebenso Runge, *Begier*, 215 und 217.

⁹¹ Runge, *Begier*, 182. Vgl. ebenso Runge, *Begier*, 215.

⁹² Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 213 und 218.

⁹³ Runge, *Begier*, 182.

⁹⁴ Runge, *Begier*, 164.

[V]nd ist kein ding in der Natur das geschaffen oder gebohren ist / es offenbahret seine innerliche gestalt auch eusserlich / dann das innere arbeit stets zur Offenbahrung / als wir solches an der krafft vnd gestaltñiß dieser Welt erkennen . . .⁹⁵.

Daher können sie nicht dem Bösen zufallen, auch wenn sie durch ihre Körperlichkeit nicht zu Gott zurückkehren können: ‘Die undurchsichtigen Farben stehen zwischen den Weißen und den Schwarzen, sie können nie so hell wie Weiß und nie so dunkel wie Schwarz sein’⁹⁶. Laut Möseneder sind auch bei Böhme die Begriffe “Alphabet” und “Farbe” in ihrem Ursprung synonym zu verstehen⁹⁷. Böhme schreibt in seinem Werk *De signature rerum*:

[D]ann an der eusserlichen gestaltñiß aller Creaturen / an jhrem trib vnd begierde / item an jhrem außgehenden hall / stim und spraache / kennet man den verborgnen Geist / dann die natur hat jedem dinge seine spraache (nach seiner Essentz vnd gestaltñiß) gegeben / dann auß der Essentz vhrstündet die spraache oder der hall / von derselben Essentz *fiat* kompt der Essentz qualitet / in dem außgehenden hall oder krafft / den lebhaftten im hall / vnd den essentialischen im Ruch / Krafft vnd gestaltñiß: ein jedes ding hat seinen Mund zur offenbarung / vnd das ist die Naturspraache / darauß jedes ding auß seiner eigenschafft redet / vnd sich immer selber offenbahret / vnd darstellet worzu es gut vnd nutz sey / dann ein jedes ding offenbaret seine Mutter / die die Essentz vnd den willen zur gestaltñuß also gibt⁹⁸.

. . . [D]arumb ist in der *Signatur* der gröste verstand / darinnen sich der Mensch (alß das Bild der grösten tugend) nicht allein lernet selber kennen / sondern er mag auch darinnen / das Wesen aller Wesen lernen erkennen . . .⁹⁹.

Für die undurchsichtigen Farben ist Runges Deutung für die nachfolgende These interessant: ‘Wenn wir drei *undurchsichtige* Farben Rot, Blau und Gelb zusammenmischen, so entsteht ein Grau, welches *genauso* aus Weiß und Schwarz gemischt werden kann’¹⁰⁰. ‘Ein völlig gleichgültiges Grau’, wie Runge es nennt, ergibt sich, ‘wo die . . . Kräfte in gleicher Stärke gegeneinander wirken’. Es ergibt sich ‘eine vollkommene *Indifferenz*, in welcher alle individuelle *Qualitäten* sich aufgelöset haben, und also nur die bloßen *Quantitäten* ihrer materiellen Substanz in einer Summe übrigbleiben können’¹⁰¹. Daher ist diese Einheit die Mittlerfarbe, die die Disharmonie, welche

⁹⁵ Böhme, *De signatura rerum*, 518,18 ff.

⁹⁶ Runge, *Begier*, 182.

⁹⁷ Vgl. Möseneder, *Runge und Böhme*, 38.

⁹⁸ Böhme, *De signature rerum*, 518,30 ff.

⁹⁹ Böhme, *De signature rerum*, 518,26 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Runge, *Begier*, 182. Vgl. ebenso Runge, *Begier*, 199 und 181.

¹⁰¹ Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften I*, 121.

bei der Kombination der körperlichen Farben entsteht, ausgleichen kann. Ein Detail bedeutet dies:

Die Kombination zweier Grundfarben ist zunächst disharmonisch. 'Wir wissen ferner, daß Rot mit Blau, Blau mit Gelb und Gelb mit Rot einen Mißton gibt; . . .'¹⁰². Um die Harmonie wieder herstellen zu können, ist es notwendig, Grau als Mittler zwischen den Farben einzusetzen, damit die Farbkontraste sich wieder "beruhigen". Dies sei aber nur bei einer Kombination von zwei Farben möglich; kombiniert man alle drei Grundfarben miteinander, so ist die disharmonische Wirkung überhaupt nicht aufzuheben. Des Weiteren wirkt die Verbindung zweier benachbarter Farben auf der Farbkugel monoton.

Wenn wir aber Gelb und Rot durch Orange verbinden wollten, so würde, da Orange der Übergang von Gelb in Rot ist, das Charakteristische beider Farben dadurch ineinandergezogen und die Individualität derselben geschwächt werden, welches die Monotonie ist¹⁰³.

Allerdings kann durch das Hinzufügen von Grau die Individualität der einzelnen Farben gesteigert werden, denn 'so kann der individuelle Charakter in seiner vollen Kraft erscheinen'¹⁰⁴.

Darüber hinaus stellt Runge fest, dass die Kombination zweier Komplementärfarben, also Farben, die sich auf der Farbkugel gegenüberliegen, wie Rot und Grün, Gelb und Violett oder Blau und Orange, einen harmonischen Effekt erzeugen. 'Weil wir nämlich zwei Augen haben, schwimmen, wenn Rot mit Grün zusammengestellt ist, die Grenzen ineinander und bringen den *grauen* Mittelton hervor'¹⁰⁵. Er zieht daraus eine philosophische Forderung:

Wie in der Welt jede lebhaft interessierende Erscheinung darauf beruht, daß entgegengesetzte Charaktere in ihrer eigentümlichen Kraft und Eigenschaft nebeneinanderstehen, jeder in sich lebendig, anstatt daß aus der Vermischung solcher Gemüter und Gesinnungen bei Aufhebung ihrer Eigentümlichkeit und Selbständigkeit völlige Charakterlosigkeit oder der Tod erfolgt¹⁰⁶.

Das Phänomen der Disharmonie sei, so Runge, allerdings nur bei den von der Materie gefangenen Farben vorzufinden. Durch das Übereinanderlegen

¹⁰² Runge, *Begier*, 208.

¹⁰³ Runge, *Begier*, 208.

¹⁰⁴ Runge, *Begier*, 208.

¹⁰⁵ Runge, *Begier*, 208.

¹⁰⁶ Runge, *Begier*, 206.

von durchsichtigen Farbplättchen findet er heraus, dass die daraus resultierende Mischung Weiß ergibt¹⁰⁷. Die Farben, die aus Gottes durchlichteter Herrlichkeit entstehen und ungebunden sind, bleiben also rein. Er folgert,

daß in der durchsichtigen Farbe alle Elemente: Rot, Blau, Gelb, Grün, Orange, Violett, sei es hell oder dunkel, immer in Harmonie stehen und daß in dieser Region kein Widerspruch ist. Die Elemente der undurchsichtigen Farbe stehen ohne Dazwischenkunft von grauen Tönen immer, wie wir wissen, in Disharmonie¹⁰⁸.

Runge bewegt sich mit dieser Behauptung auf dem psychologischen Gebiet Kommunikation der Farben, die nicht nur bei Goethe, sondern auch bei verschiedenen Kunstrichtungen des 20. Jahrhunderts auf großes Interesse stößt.

Auch in seinem einzig vollendeten Gemälde der *Vier Zeiten*, dem *Kleinen Morgen* von 1808, spielen der Kontrast von Durchlässigkeit und Undurchlässigkeit der Farbe und ihre Bedeutung eine entscheidende, symbolträchtige Rolle. Mit diesem Werk veranschaulicht er nicht nur vollständiger als mit den Kupferstichen die Vorstellungen der romantischen Kunst und Philosophie, sondern versinnbildlicht die in Jacob Böhmes *Aurora* beschriebene anbrechende Morgenröte auf hoffnungsvollste und treffendste Weise.

6. Der Kleine Morgen

Der Morgen ist die grenzenlose Erleuchtung des Universums. . . . Diese sind die vier Dimensionen des geschaffenen Geistes. Gott aber wirkt alles in allem; wer will gestalten, wie er den Geschaffenen berührt¹⁰⁹.

[W]ache auff / die Stunde deiner Wiedergebuhrt ist vorhanden / der Tag bricht an / die Morgen-Röhte zeigt sich¹¹⁰.

Runges Farbfassung des *Kleinen Morgens* [Abb. 3] kann man durchaus als ein Fazit seines Lebenswerkes betrachten. Sein letztes großes Werk—die Fassung des *Großen Morgens* [Abb. 4] sollte unvollendet bleiben—kombiniert die Fassung der *Vier Zeiten*, die romantische und mystische Theorie sowie die Farbenlehre eindeutig, selbst wenn Runge erst bei der Arbeit am *Großen Morgen* behauptet, dass all seine vorher geschaffenen Gemälde nur

¹⁰⁷ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 213.

¹⁰⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 210.

¹⁰⁹ Runge, *Begier*, 234.

¹¹⁰ Böhme, *Aurora*, 201,25 ff.

Vorübungen für diese Arbeit gewesen seien, um seine malerischen Fähigkeiten und den richtigen Einsatz von Farbe zu üben¹¹¹.

Auch wenn einige Bildelemente und die Konstruktion beziehungsweise der Bildaufbau an den Kupferstich von 1802 erinnern, beinhaltet der *Kleine Morgen* neue, wichtige Darstellungen, die durch die in seiner Farbentheorie angelegte symbolische Farbgebung eine gewichtige Rolle spielen.

Vielleicht würden Sie dann, indem zu diesen Endzweck die Komposition umgearbeitet werden müßte (im ganzen aber so bliebe), durch eine größere Einheit des Ganzen wie durch den Gegensatz der Töne dieser Blätter sich mehr angesprochen fühlen¹¹².

Runges Ziel ist es also, die in den Kupferstichen angelegten Ideen vollständig auszuführen, um den Totaleindruck seiner Kunsttheorie in Licht, Form und Farbe darzustellen.

6.1. *Bildbeschreibung*

Im Vordergrund des Innenbildes ist—im Gegensatz zum Kupferstich—nicht eine Erdkugel, sondern ein grüner Wiesengrund zu erkennen, auf dem ein Kind mit nach oben gerichtetem Blick liegt. Rechts und links von ihm blüht jeweils eine Lilie, daneben sind Kinder zu erkennen, die das auf der Wiese liegende betrachten und aus deren Händen rote Rosen auf den Boden fallen. Über der Wiese, die im Hintergrund durch Bäume und Büsche abgeschlossen wird, liegt eine leichte Wolkendecke, welche von der anbrechenden Sonne in ein rosa-violettes Licht getaucht ist. Diese Wolken werden wiederum von einer nackten Frauenfigur geteilt, die auf nun hellgelbem Grund genau über dem Kind zu schweben scheint. Ihr Körper und ihre orangegelben, bodenlangen Haare werden von dem hellen Gelb völlig erfasst. Zu beiden Seiten der Frau stehen Kinder an den Rändern des Bildes, die der Frau in der Mitte fast durchsichtige Blumen streuen.

Noch viel blasser erscheint hinter der Frau eine Lilie zu erwachsen, deren Stängel die Frau mit der über den Kopf erhobenen Hand zu halten scheint. Die fast nicht erkennbaren Blätter der Lilie umrahmen jene, und die Blüte zusammen mit zwei Knospen tritt direkt über ihrem Kopf deutlicher in Erscheinung, worauf die Frau auch ihren Blick richtet.

Um die erleuchtete Lilie herum schweben zu beiden Seiten je zwei Engel mit Musikinstrumenten, von denen je einer aus den Knospen zu entsteigen

¹¹¹ Vgl. Runge, *Begier*, 261.

¹¹² Runge, *Begier*, 202.

scheint. Auch sie sind vom Licht erfasst, welches nun aber in ein helleres Blau übergeht und den Hintergrund für die weiß-violette Blüte bildet, auf deren Blütenblättern drei sich umarmende Kinderpaare sitzen. Das Paar zur Linken schaut in den Blütenkelch, das Paar in der vorderen Mitte blickt sich an und das rechte wendet sich nach links beziehungsweise rechts. Über der Lilie erstrahlt ein Stern, der von drei ihn anblickenden Engelsköpfen umrahmt ist. Hier ist das Blau zwar noch durchscheinend, aber wesentlich dunkler geworden. In den beiden oberen Ecken befinden sich des Weiteren zwei arabeskenartige Engelsköpfe, die das gleiche Dunkelbraun wie der Rahmen aufweisen, mit denen das gesamte Innenbild umschlossen ist.

Auch das Außenbild ist von einem dunkelbraunen Rahmen umschlossen. In der Mitte des unteren Bildrandes ist eine verfinsterte, aber dennoch orange-gelbe strahlende Sonnenscheibe zu erkennen, von der nach rechts und links eine männliche und eine weibliche Kindfigur sich entfernen. Die Füße der beiden Figuren berühren den äußeren Rand der Sonne und haben ihren Blick ihr zugewandt; ihre Hände jedoch fassen bereits die zweier Kinder, die in den Ecken auf fast nicht erkennbaren Seerosen sitzen. Die Körper der beiden wegstrebenden Gestalten befinden sich noch im Licht der Sonne; ihre Hände haben jedoch die Wolkendecke, die keine der intensiven gelben Strahlen hindurchlassen, durchbrochen; die beiden Ecken besitzen eine dunkle schwarzbraune Grundierung.

Die beiden dort sitzenden Kinder sind eindeutig von größerer Gestalt. Von unten werden sie durch die Seerosenblüte, von oben durch die hellbraunen Wurzeln einer Amaryllis umschlossen. Die dunkelgrünen Blätter der Blume erstrecken sich zur Mitte des Seitenrandes, wo in der rotfarbigen Blüte zwischen den gelben Staubfäden wiederum jeweils ein größeres Kind sitzt. Die Hände und der Blick sind in Richtung der oberen Bildmitte gerichtet. Man bemerkt hier bereits, dass die Helligkeit der Farben im Vergleich zu den Ecken zugenommen hat. Der dunkle Hintergrund ist heller, das Rot der Blüte kräftiger, und auch die Farbgebung der Kinder weist mehr Rosa- und Gelbtöne auf.

Über den Kindern erwächst, allerdings ohne erkennbare Wurzeln, jeweils eine Lilie mit einer geöffneten weißen Blüte und zwei Knospen an den Seiten. In den Blütenkelchen befindet sich je eine Engelfigur, die sich in demütiger Haltung der Bildmitte des oberen Bildteils, mit dem sie sich nun auf gleicher Höhe befindet, zuwendet. Mit vor der Brust verschränkten Armen und gesenktem Kopf knien sie in den oberen Ecken. Hier hat sich das Braun nun völlig in ein leicht mit Gelb und Rot gemischtes Weiß aufgelöst, das eine deutliche Wolkenstruktur aufweist. Diese Wolkendecke wird in der Mitte

durch helle Lichtstrahlen geteilt, deren Lichtquelle nicht erkennbar und die von einer Vielzahl sehr kleiner Kindergesichter in bogenförmiger Anordnung umgeben ist. Dieser Teil des Bildes ist in durchlichtetem Blau gehalten, das von den ausgehenden Strahlen erhellt wird.

6.2. Interpretation

Bereits durch die Beschreibung des Bildaufbaus ist ersichtlich, dass Runge sich in den Elementen an die Kupferstichfassung hält und diese ergänzt. Dies mag zum einen zu einer Verdeutlichung des Sujets führen, zum anderen tragen die zusätzlichen Elemente aber auch zu einem völlig neuen Interpretationsansatz bei. Auch den in der Farbentheorie angelegten mystischen Elementen muss besondere Aufmerksamkeit entgegengebracht werden. Darüber hinaus ist es auch hier ratsam, die Ausführungen von Runge zu Rate zu ziehen.

Wie auch schon bei dem Kupferstich stehen Innen- und Außenbild in enger Beziehung zueinander, wobei dem Innenbild eine deutlich zentralere Funktion zukommt. Es zeigt zum einen die Erschaffung der Welt und des ersten Menschen, zum anderen verdeutlicht es den im Außenbild dargestellten Weg zu Gott.

Das Innenbild stellt somit das ursprüngliche Paradies und das Paradies im Innern des Menschen dar, das, wie Runge bereits in seiner Kunstauffassung fordert, nach außen getragen werden soll. Das Zentrum des Innenbildes bilden die Figuren der Frau und des Kindes. Ihre Deutungsvarianten sind vielfältig und voneinander abhängig. Bei Traeger und Möseneder finden sich ausführliche Darstellungen der Sinnschichten "Aurora-Manifestation des Göttlichen", "Venus-Eros" und "Maria-Jesus Christus"¹¹³. Hier soll das Hauptaugenmerk auf der Interpretation nach Böhme liegen, die darüber hinaus auch alle erwähnten Ansätze zu einem gewissen Grad mit beinhaltet. Auch der Totalitätsanspruch¹¹⁴, den das Gemälde stellt und welcher schon in der Kupferstichfassung erklärt wurde, soll hier weitgehend außen vor gelassen werden, um Wiederholungen zu vermeiden.

Das Innenbild stellt zunächst den Schöpfungsakt dar, über den sich bei Böhme Folgendes findet:

Nun siehe, der Himmel ist die ganzte Tieffe, soweit sich die äther haben zur Geburt dieser Welt eingegeben: und der ist die *Matrix*, aus welcher die Erde,

¹¹³ Vgl. Möseneder, *Runge und Böhme*, 68 und Traeger, *Runge*, 159.

¹¹⁴ Siehe Fußnote 32.

Steine und materialisch Wasser sind erboren. Nun hat GOTT das materialische Wasser alda entschieden von der *Matrice*; und siehet man gar eigend alhier, wie das materialische Wasser gleich wie ertödtet, oder darinnen der Tod ist; denn es hat nicht können in der schwebenden Mutter bleiben, sondern ist auf die Erd-Kugel geschaffen worden, und GOTT hat es Meer geheißten . . .¹¹⁵.

Die Wolken im Innenbild, über denen die Frauenfigur schwebt, symbolisieren also das irdische Wasser, das vom eigentlichen Himmel getrennt ist. Hier zeigt sich auch der Übergang von den durchsichtigen zu den körperlichen Farben. Die Wolken sind plastischer dargestellt als alles über ihnen. Selbst die Frauengestalt und die Engel scheinen durchlichteter. Der Hintergrund für sie und die Lilie geht darüber hinaus ganz in der Farbaufteilung der Dreieinigkeit auf, die im *Morgen* der *Vier Zeiten* symbolhaft dargestellt wird. Ganz zuoberst findet sich Gott Vater (Blau), dann der Heilige Geist (Gelb) und zuletzt der Sohn (rötliche Farben), der durch seine Menschwerdung der materiellen und durch seine Göttlichkeit der himmlischen Welt angehört.

Die Frauenfigur, die aus dem Hintergrund des Heiligen Geistes ausgeht, ist somit Teil der Trinität: 'Und die Bildniß der Drey-Zahl, als die ewige Jungfrau, welche stund im *Ternario Sancto*, in der ewigen Weisheit, in der Wesenheit als eine Figur, . . . darein die gantze Heilige Dreyzahl war beschlossen'¹¹⁶. Die göttliche Weisheit kommt als "Mutter" oder '*Matrix*, die mehr feuernd ist'¹¹⁷ in die Welt, sie 'tritt hier aus dem goldnen Glanz der Haare heraus und leuchtet mit einem Büschel wie mit einer Flamme vor sich her'¹¹⁸, dem Symbol des "fiat lux". Sophia ist 'die Offenbarung GOTTes, eine Jungfrau, und eine Ursache der Göttlichen Wesenheit, denn in ihr ist die Licht-flammende Göttliche Tinctur zum Hertzen GOTTes gestanden . . .'¹¹⁹. Als 'GOTTes Gespielin, zur Ehre und Freude GOTTes'¹²⁰, gilt Sophia als 'ein Spiegel der Gottheit, darinn sich der Geist Gottes sich selber siehet'¹²¹ sie 'waltet vor GOTT, und ist die Blume des Gewächses'¹²². Bei der Blume, die hier angesprochen wird, handelt es sich um die Lilie, die hinter Sophia zu sehen ist.

Hier ist die ganze *Lilie* wie das Aufblühen des Tages zu betrachten, und wie diese verfliegt, sowie die Sonne kömmt, so verlischt auch nach oben der *Stern*

¹¹⁵ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, VI,16.

¹¹⁶ Böhme, *Vom dreifachen Leben*, VII,23.

¹¹⁷ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, VI,18.

¹¹⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 246.

¹¹⁹ Böhme, *Von der Menschwerdung*, 1.Th., I,12.

¹²⁰ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, XIV,87.

¹²¹ Böhme, *Von der Menschwerdung*, 1.Th., I,12.

¹²² Böhme, *Drey Principien*, XIV,87.

um die Figuren. Die ganze Lilie ist wie lichte, helle Wölkchen zu behandeln, die Haare wie leuchtende Wolken etc.; . . .¹²³.

schreibt Runge an Goethe. Sophia löst sich also aus der göttlichen Blume, von der ohnehin nur noch die Blüte und Knospen deutlich zu erkennen sind, heraus und geht in den materiellen Schöpfungsvorgang hinein. 'Die Kinder auf der Seite streuen die Blumen in leichte, jagende Wolken'¹²⁴ als Zeichen der Ehrerbietung. Den gleichen Zweck erfüllen auch die musizierenden Engel, die sich an beiden Seiten der Lilie befinden, wo der blaue Hintergrund in den gelben übergeht. Runge bezeichnet 'den Bogen der Knospen zusammen mit den musicierenden Kindern' als 'Musica'¹²⁵ und bleibt somit ganz in der Tradition Böhmes:

Wan nun aufgehet die Himmlische *Musica* der Engel / so gehet in der Himmlischen *pomp*, in dem Göttlichen Salitter auff allerley gewächse / allerley figuren / allerley farben / dan die Gottheit erzeiget sich in unendlich / und in unerforschlicherley arth / farben / formen und freuden¹²⁶.

Dennoch sollte noch einmal auf den Unterschied zwischen Sophia und Gott hingewiesen werden: '[D]ie Blume des Lichtes aus dem Herten Gottes grünet in ihr, und sie ist doch nicht GOTT, sondern die züchtige Jungfrau der ewigen Weisheit und Verständniß . . .'¹²⁷. Gott ist das schöpferische Element, während Sophia die Gebärende darstellt. Dies ist schon aus der Konstruktionszeichnung zu erkennen: Sophias Schoß ist das Konstruktionszentrum der kreisförmig angeordneten Engel und des auf der Wiese liegenden Kindes. Böhme schreibt: 'Die Weisheit oder ewige Jungfrau Gottes eröffnet alle die grossen Wunder im H. Element: denn alda sind die Essentien, in welchen aufgehen die Gewächse des Paradeses'¹²⁸. Die Schöpfung erweist sich als Offenbarung Gottes, alles trägt den göttlichen Funken seines Schöpfers in sich:

. . . aus dem ewigen Element gehen aus Farben, Kunst und Tugend, und die Gewächse der Lilien GOTTes, welches sich die Gottheit immer erfreuet in der Jungfrauen der Weisheit; und dieselbige Freude gehet aus den ewigen Essentien, und heist Paradeis, . . .¹²⁹.

¹²³ Runge, *Begier*, 246.

¹²⁴ Runge, *Begier*, 246.

¹²⁵ Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften I*, 235.

¹²⁶ Böhme, *Aurora*, 196,11 ff.

¹²⁷ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, XIV,86.

¹²⁸ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, XXII,26.

¹²⁹ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, XIV,89.

Im weiteren Text werden darüber hinaus die Lilien als Gleichnis besonders hervorgehoben¹³⁰. Auch Runge verwendet beim *Kleinen Morgen* das Element der Lilien:

Die Erde tut sich in den Blumen auf, und aus denselben sieht das Kind so grade nur in den Aufgang hinein, ohne etwas zu erwarten, selbst als das Bild des Aufgangs. Der ganze Effekt der Naturerscheinung liegt also in der einfachen, aber gründlichen Gegeneinanderstellung der Luft, der großen Wolke und des Erdbodens¹³¹.

Die Lilien symbolisieren die Materialisierung Gottes; durch den Fall in die Körperlichkeit verändern sich die Farben; die göttlichen durchsichtigen Farben werden körperlich und vermischen sich stärker (zum Beispiel im Grün der Wiese). Daher können sie auch nicht aus sich selbst strahlen, sondern reflektieren das Licht des Himmels. So besitzen sie einen

... Effekt der Beleuchtung des Vordergrundes, da alles nur in einen kalten Reflexlicht liegen kann und die ganze warme und helle Beleuchtung nur von hinten hinüberspielt.

Wie nun in diesen ganzen Bilde alle Farbe und Gestalt nach oben in den Raum verfliegt, so faßt sie gleichsam auf der Erde in dem Kinde und den Blumen Wurzel.¹³²

Das Kind, das auf der Wiese liegt, wird aus dem Schoße Sophias “geboren”, mit der er durch einen kaum sichtbaren Lichtstrahl noch verbunden ist. Auch weist sein Körper dieselbe Helligkeit auf, ergo ist er aus demselben Stoff gemacht. Hier wird der Gedanke des göttlichen Funkens in allem wieder aufgenommen. Gott ist ein “omnes in omnibus”, ein Alles in Allem. Das Kind spiegelt so beispielhaft als “Mikrokosmos” den “Makrokosmos”, also Gott, wieder. Runges geschickte Darstellung lässt nicht erkennen, welches Geschlecht es hat. Es verkörpert den ersten Menschen, Adam, der nach Böhme androgyn ist.

Adam war ein Mann und auch ein Weib, und doch hatte er keines, sondern eine Jungfrau, volle Keuschheit, Zucht, und Reinigkeit, als das Bilde Gottes: Er hatte beide Tinkturen vom Feuer und Lichte in sich, in welchen *Conjunction* die eigene Liebe als das Jungfräuliche *Centrum* stand . . .¹³³.

... [S]ein Kleid war die Klarheit in der Kraft Gottes . . . [I]n seinen Augen war die Göttliche Kraft, und er war ganz und vollkommen, er hatte den *Limbum*

¹³⁰ Vgl. Böhme, *Drey Principien*, XIV,89.

¹³¹ Runge, *Begier*, 245.

¹³² Runge, *Begier*, 245.

¹³³ Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum*, XVIII,2.

und auch die *Matricem* in sich: er war kein Mann und auch kein Weib, gleichwie wir in der Auferstehung seyn werden . . .¹³⁴.

Zu beiden Seiten des Kindes kniet jeweils eine Kindfigur auf Wolken aus Tau und 'bilden aus den Tau der Wiesen die Rosen'¹³⁵, das Symbol der irdischen Liebe, welches schon im Kupferstich verwendet wird. Auch sind sie ein Zeichen der Ehrerbietung, denn '[d]a sahen die Engel den Glantz der Majestät in einer lebendigen Bildniß, darein die gantze Heilige Dreyzahl war beschlossen'¹³⁶.

Der göttliche Funke, den die beiden Kinder erkannt haben, ist nach Böhme immer und in allem vorhanden: 'Das ist nun die Göttliche Krafft / der alle Creaturen unterworffen seind / dan alles was da lebet und schwebet / das ist in Gott / und Gott selber ist alles / und alles was gebildet ist / das ist auß JHM gebildet / es sey gleich auß Liebe oder Zorn'¹³⁷. Dies lässt sich auch aus der Konstruktion der Mittelachse sehen, die im Innenbild aus dem Stern, der Lilie, Sophia und dem Kind besteht. Durch Einbezugnahme des Außenbildes erweitert sich auch hier die Achse: Nach oben wird sie durch das hinter dem Rahmen hervorstrahlende Licht, nach unten durch die verdunkelte Sonne verlängert. Wie auch schon im Kupferstich ergeben sich zwei symmetrische Zyklen entlang der (Licht-)Mittelachse, die den scheinbar starren Rahmen des Innenbildes durchdringen. Sie zeigen die Zerstörung der Illusion, nämlich dass die Seele in der Materie gefangen ist, durch Gottes allmächtiges Licht. 'Mit demselben Willen verstehen wir den Grund der Gottheit, welcher keines Ursprungs ist, denn er fasset sich selber in sich, daran wir billig stumm sind; denn er ist ausser der Natur'¹³⁸. Dies ist nun für die weitere Interpretation von großer Bedeutung.

Die verfinsterte Sonnenscheibe am unteren Ende der Lichtachse kann als Verdunkelung der Erkenntnis Gottes gesehen werden. Der Mensch entfernt sich von seiner Quelle, er vergisst seine göttliche Herkunft. Dies mag mit dem uranfänglichen Sündenfall, der Geburt in der materialistischen Welt zusammenhängen. Der Mensch hat die Sonne in seinem Inneren, die eigentlich das Licht des "Morgens" aufnimmt, verdunkelt und wendet sich ab. 'Die Melancholische Natur . . . bleibt immer im Trauer-Hause; wenn gleich die Sonne in ihr scheint, ist sie doch in sich traurig, . . . aber in der Finsterniß

¹³⁴ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, X,18.

¹³⁵ Runge, *Begier*, 245.

¹³⁶ Böhme, *Vom dreifachen Leben des Menschen*, XII,23.

¹³⁷ Böhme, *Aurora*, 240,11 ff.

¹³⁸ Böhme, *Von der Menschwerdung*, 2.Th., I,8.

ist sie immer in Furcht und Schrecken vor Gottes Gericht'¹³⁹. [D]ie Sonne [tritt] hinter der Erde, die Geister erwachen und dringen durch die Vegetation in eine neue Welt'¹⁴⁰, schreibt Runge. Der Mensch verlässt die himmlischen Sphären und betritt durch die Wolkendecke die Welt der "äußeren Geburt", die ihr den Blick auf das wahre Wesen verschließt¹⁴¹. Wie beim paradiesischen Sündenfall werden nun die Geschlechter offensichtlich. Adam ist nun nicht länger eine androgyne Einheit, sondern eine Dualität.

Die beiden Kinder in der Ecke, die die Fliehenden aufnehmen, sind bereits unter den Wurzeln gefangen. Sie sind älter geworden, der Mensch hat also mit dem Fall auch seine Unsterblichkeit verloren. Die Dunkelheit umschließt sie fast vollständig, nur die Körper haben noch nicht ganz das Licht, das aus dem Inneren scheint, verloren.

Bei diesen beginnt nun aber auch der Aufstieg der Seele zu Gott; die Wurzeln deuten nämlich nicht nur das Gefängnis, sondern auch das Entstehen der Amaryllis an, die nach oben wächst. Parallel zur Zwiebel findet sich im Innenbild das Streuen der Rosen durch die beiden Kinder. Die irdisch gewordene Liebe weckt die Sehnsucht nach der urgründlichen Quelle. Sie erreichen, dass die 'Porten der GOTTHEIT . . . wieder aufgeschlossen worden'¹⁴² sind und der in der Materie gefangene Funke wieder zu "treiben" beginnt.

Wie der Teufel zuerst die Erde verbrannt hat und die arme Seele so tief und finster eingesperrt, da hat Gott das Licht ausgehen lassen, und nun sehnt sie sich zum Licht, und . . . es gehen auf allerlei Blumen . . . und viel hunderttausend Menschenstimmen sprechen für sie und sehnen sich zum Licht . . .¹⁴³.

Dieses Sehnen nach dem Licht (Gottes) beschreibt Runge an einer anderen Stelle sehr treffend:

Ewige Sonne! . . . Dieser goldene Saum, dieses feurige Meer erregen in mir die unaufhaltsame Begierde nach dem ewigen Lande der Liebe. Warum hält mich die Schwere des Körpers zurück? Warum erhielt nur der Adler Flügel, sich in diese Seligkeit zu stürzen?—

Ungeduldige Seele, harre noch ein wenig. Siehe, der sternerdurchwebte Schleier der Nacht ruht über dir; selige Ahnung stillt die tobende Brust. Diese ruhige Stille löset jeden Wunsch, ich fühle die lebendige Gegenwart, sie schreitet still und duftend mir vorüber.—

¹³⁹ Böhme, *Trostschrift*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Runge, *Begier*, 246.

¹⁴¹ Vgl. Böhme, *Aurora*, 323,4 ff.

¹⁴² Böhme, *Aurora*, 323,9 f.

¹⁴³ Runge, *Begier*, 119 f.

Süße Kindheit! Nur ruhige Sterne blinken dich an, über dir ruht noch die dunkle unsichtbare Zukunft, . . .¹⁴⁴.

Der Aufbau der Amaryllis ist darüber hinaus auch farbensymbolisch interessant: Die Zwiebeln der unteren Pflanze sind in Braun gehalten, die Wurzeln weisen eine deutliche Weißfärbung auf. Die Assoziation mit dem Bibelwort "Wer auf Gott gebaut"¹⁴⁵ liegt nahe.

Die Blätter sind von einem kräftigen Grün, das in den Blattspitzen das sich im Innenbild auftretende Gelb widerspiegelt. Die rotfarbenen Blüten mit den gelben Blütenstempeln nehmen ebenso wie die in ihnen sitzenden Kinder immer mehr das einstrahlende Licht auf. Runge verwendet hier ein Nebeneinander der Komplementärfarben Grün und Rot, das die erneute Harmonisierung des Menschen und seines Schöpfers zeigt. Die Amaryllis steht darüber hinaus noch als Attribut für die (Muttergöttin) Sophia und weist auf die aufgehende Sonne im Innenbild und somit—im Bezug auf das Außenbild—auf die wachsende Erkenntnis hin.

. . . [U]nd wie gewaltige Wogen aus dem leuchtenden Jubel der größten Helligkeit in die klingende Tiefe einer unergründlichen Finsternis, die in großen Odemzügen immer tiefer entschläft, bis einst das Licht den glühenden Morgen mit unendlicher Pracht in ihr entzündet¹⁴⁶.

Im Innenbild bricht der strahlende Körper der Sophia durch die Wolkendecke. Sie verkörpert die klare Sicht der Erkenntnis, da sie die Schleier der materiellen Erscheinung verdrängt und das wahre Wesen der Dinge offenbart.

So sie aber sieget / so bringet sie ihr Liecht und erkäntnus mit ihrem durchdringen biß in die eusserste geburth des Menschen: Dan sie dringet mit gewalt zu rücke durch die 7. Geister der Natur / welche ich alhie die *Siderischen* Geister heisse / und herrschet mit im rathe der vernunft¹⁴⁷.

Aber die edle Sophia nahet sich in der Seelen Essentz, und küsset sie freudlich, und tingiret mit ihren Liebe-Strahlen das finstere Feuer der Seelen, und durchscheinet die Seele mit ihrem Liebes-Kusse: So springet die Seele in ihrem Leibe vor grossen Freuden, in Kraft der Jungfräulichen Liebe auf, triumphiret, und lobet den grossen Gott, kraft der edlen Sophiae¹⁴⁸.

Der Weg zur Einheit mit Gott ist im Außenbild noch nicht abgeschlossen, er steht vielmehr am Beginn. Der Körper der Kinder, die in den Amaryllisblüten

¹⁴⁴ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 69 f.

¹⁴⁵ Vgl. Matthäus, 7:24 f.

¹⁴⁶ Runge, *Begier*, 216.

¹⁴⁷ Böhme, *Aurora*, 303,4 ff.

¹⁴⁸ Böhme, *Von wahrer Buße*, I,45.

sitzen, erstrahlt zwar in der gleichen Helligkeit wie der Körper der Sophia, die Haltung der erhobenen Arme deutet allerdings ein weiteres Aufstreben und die Forderung nach dem Begreifen Gottes an; '... daß wir unsern begehrenden Willen wieder in die himmlische Jungfrau setzen und unsere Lust darein führen'¹⁴⁹. Von hier an wird der dunkle Hintergrund immer heller, das Licht der Erkenntnis bricht immer mehr durch.

... [W]ie sich in der ganzen Natur dasselbe Phänomen bestätigt, daß die Finsternis durch Vermittlung der Farbe zum Licht erhoben wird; ... Und da sich Gott in der Natur geoffenbart hat, wie in der Religion, so liegt auch in dieser Ansicht ein Beispiel davon, daß der Gang von der Finsternis zum Licht eine Stufenfolge (die Zeit) bedeuten mag; ...¹⁵⁰.

Der Mensch beginnt also wieder das zu tun, was er seit Anbeginn getan und durch seinen Fall vergessen hat.

... [D]enn der Geist, so in uns ist, den ein Mensch vom anderen erbet, der ist aus der Ewigkeit in Adam geblasen, der hat es alles gesehen, und siehet es noch im Lichte Gottes, und ist gar nichts fernes, oder unerforschliches: denn die ewige Geburt, so im menschlichen *Centro* verborgen stehet, thut nichts Neues, sie erkennt, wircket und thut eben das, was sie von Ewigkeit gethan hat, wircket zum Licht und Finsterniß, und arbeitet in grossen Aengsten. Wenn aber das Licht in ihr scheint, so ist in ihrem Gewircke eitel Freude und Erkenntniß¹⁵¹.

Diese Erkenntnis wird nun wiederum im Innenbild durch die Lilienblüte und die auf ihren Blütenblättern sitzenden drei Kinderpaare dargestellt. '... [E]ine Lilie blühet vber Berg vnd Thal / in allen Enden der Erden: Wer da suchet der findet / AMEN'¹⁵². Dieses Motiv ist ebenfalls schon aus dem Kupferstich bekannt, daher soll seine Bedeutung nur noch einmal kurz erwähnt werden, da es auch hier eine zentrale Position einnimmt. Die Kinderpaare symbolisieren verschiedene Stufen der Erkenntnis: Erstens die des eigenen inneren Wesens, zweitens die der Wahrnehmung des Göttlichen im Anderen und drittens die der wahren Schau Gottes. Hier blickt das Paar allerdings nicht nach oben auf den Stern, sondern nach links und rechts—denn Gott ist überall anwesend. Sie begreifen, '... im welchem ausgeflossenen Worte der innere Himmel und die sichtbare Welt stehet, samt allem Creatürlichem Wesen, daß Gott habe alle Dinge durch sein Wort gemacht, ...'¹⁵³.

¹⁴⁹ Böhme, *Von der Menschwerdung*, 1.Th. I, 12,2. Vgl. ebenso Böhme, *Aurora*, 336,11 ff.

¹⁵⁰ Runge, *Farbenkugel*, 87.

¹⁵¹ Böhme, *Drey Principien*, VII,6.

¹⁵² Böhme, *De signatura rerum*, 788,19 ff.

¹⁵³ Böhme, *Schutz = Rede wieder Gregor Richtern*, 16.

Bei Runge findet sich in einem anderen Zusammenhang eine sehr schöne Beschreibung dieses Vorganges:

Ich erkenne neben mir mich selbst im andern. Bin ich nicht allein? ist außer mir noch eine Welt?—Mit unnennbarer Wehmut faßt es meine ganze Seele. Nicht verschlossen ist mir der Blick in dein Auge, in deine Seele, auch du stürzest mir freudig entgegen.—Liebe! dich suchte ich, du warst der flammende Strahl, der meine ersten Stunden erhellte. Finde ich so dich wieder?¹⁵⁴

So auch, wenn im Menschen der Geist der Liebe erweckt ist, und durch ihn und in ihm Gottes Wunder erscheinen in der unsichtbaren Welt, tritt die äußere Welt wie ein Spiegel dieser innern Herrlichkeit vor ihm auf, und er kann und will nur dies einige herrliche Bild lieben und in allen Werken erkennen; so löset sich zuletzt in ihm die Creatur auf zum Wesen, und die Gestalten seiner Gedanken, die er als vergängliches Ding einschlingt in den Abgrund seines liebenden Wesens, und sich selbst aufgibt in Gott, sind so ihm Würken der Bescheidenheit, daß er auch alle natürlichen Erkenntnisse versenket in die ewige, und die Wahrheit nur in Gott findet¹⁵⁵.

. . . [A]ber im Geiste Gottes siehet mein ingebohner geist durch Alles / aber nicht immerdar beharrlich; sondern wan der Geist der Liebe Gottes durch meinen geist durchbricht / alsdan ist die *animalische* geburth und die Gottheit ein Wesen / eine Begreiffigkeit und ein Liecht¹⁵⁶.

Die Frucht dieser Erkenntnis Gottes zeigt sich wiederum im Außenbild. Das Grün der Lilienblätter, die über dem Kind in der Amaryllisblüte erwachsen, befindet sich auf einem sehr stark mit Weiß durchsetzten Grund, die Lilienblüte und die Knospen sind weiß. Auf der Blüte sitzt nun eine Kindgestalt, deren Körper wieder im hellen Licht, das von ihm ausgeht, beziehungsweise das sie von der Gottesdarstellung in der Bildmitte aufnehmen, erstrahlt. Die Helligkeit hat nun in der körperlichen Welt ihren Höhepunkt erreicht. Die Demuthaltung, die die Figuren Gott entgegenbringen, ist auch für die gesamte Natur bestimmt. Böhme schreibt über den rechten Weg zu Gott: 'Es darf nicht lange Worte, sondern nur einer gläubige, bußfertige Seele, die sich mit gantzem Ernste in die Barmhertzigkeit GOTTes, in GOTTes Erbarmen einergiebet; . . .'¹⁵⁷.

Daher ist die Kindgestalt keine menschliche, sondern eine englische: Der Mensch hat innerhalb seines einschränkenden Rahmens das Himmelreich erkannt; er ist innerhalb seiner Körperlichkeit engelsgleich geworden. Erst durch den Tod, der ihn von seiner materialischen Hülle befreien wird, kann

¹⁵⁴ Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 70.

¹⁵⁵ Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften I*, 265.

¹⁵⁶ Böhme, *Aurora*, 410,2 ff.

¹⁵⁷ Böhme, *Vom Heiligen Gebet*, 36.

er in Gottes Herrlichkeit vollständig eingehen. Dieser Zustand ist in der oberen Bildmitte dargestellt. Die Wolken der materialischen Welt, die im unteren Teil die Verschleierung der Erkenntnis der himmlischen Welt darstellen, werden geteilt und geben den Blick auf die "Cherubsglorie", durch die der blaue Hintergrund hindurchscheint, und die Strahlen des göttlichen Lichtes frei. Hier hat Runge die lasierende Technik angewendet. Zusammen mit den kleinen Gesichtern erzeugt er einen perspektivischen Effekt, der Gottes Unendlichkeit im Gegensatz zu der körperlich endlichen Welt darstellt. Gottes Anwesenheit wird nur durch die Strahlen gezeigt, '[d]enn weiter soll sich doch wohl der Mensch kein Bild von Gott machen, er kann es auch nicht'¹⁵⁸. Seine Allgegenwart belegen im Innenbild der Morgenstern mit den drei Engelsköpfen als Symbol der Dreieinigkeit, die Farben als Zeichen seiner Offenbarung und die Helligkeit, sei es nun in der ätherischen Welt des Innenbildes oder in der körperlichen des Außenbildes.

... [E]s wird mir bei allen Blumen und Bäumen vorzüglich deutlich und immer gewisser, wie in jedem ein gewisser ... Geist ... steckt, und wird es mir so klar, daß das noch vom Paradiese her sein muß; es ist grade so das Reinste, was noch in der Welt ist und worin wir Gott und sein Abbild ... erkennen können¹⁵⁹.

Die ganze Schöpfung ist ein Beweis der Existenz Gottes, daher ist die Erkenntnis Gottes jederzeit möglich.

Es gaffe niemand mehr nach der Zeit, sie ist schon geboren: Wens trifft, den trifft; wer da wachet der siehets, und der da schläffet, der siehets nicht. Sie ist erschienen die Zeit, und wird bald erscheinen; wer da wachet, der siehet sie¹⁶⁰.
... [W]isset: Daß euch mitternächtigen Ländern eine Lilie blühet¹⁶¹.

7. Schlussbetrachtung

So ist denn die Kunst das schönste Bestreben, wenn sie von dem ausgeht, was allen angehört, und eins ist mit dem¹⁶².

¹⁵⁸ Runge, *Begier*, 119.

¹⁵⁹ Runge, *Begier*, 119.

¹⁶⁰ Böhme, *Theosophische Sendbriefe*, 55,17.

¹⁶¹ Böhme, *Theosophische Sendbriefe*, 55,13.

¹⁶² Runge, *Begier*, 96.

Wie aus der Analyse hervorgeht, ist Runge's Rückgriff auf Böhme evident. Die Kenntnisse aus Böhmes Werken ermöglichen Runge, seine Gedanken in Worte und schließlich in Bilder zu fassen. Die Offenbarung Gottes in der Welt zeigt sich sowohl in seinen theoretischen als auch artistischen Werken.

Der Totalitätsgedanke in Runge's Bildern beschreibt Gott als den Urgrund aller Dinge, als "omnes in omnibus". Dies zeigt sich in der Konstruktion sowohl des Kupferstiches als auch des Gemäldes, bei denen die Mittelachse, von der alle Dinge zyklisch in Harmonie ausgehen und in Beziehung zueinander stehen, über die symbolische Darstellung der Dreieinigkeit zur göttlichen Einheit im Zentrum des oberen Bildrandes führt.

Die Dreieinigkeit Gottes, aus dem die sieben Quellgeister hervorgehen, offenbart sich darüber hinaus auch in der Farbe; die durchsichtigen zeigen seine durchscheinende Allgegenwart, Unendlichkeit und—im Bezug auf die Natur—den göttlichen Funken; die körperlichen bezeichnen die begrenzte physische Existenz der Schöpfung. Die Farben sind die Sprache Gottes, die "signature rerum", die dem in der Natur innewohnenden Funken nach dem Fall in die Finsternis der Materie die Rückkehr zum ewigen Licht ermöglicht, den Schöpfungsvorgang im Sinne des "fiat lux" quasi wiederholt. Diese Rückkehr zur "unio mystica" ist bei Böhme und Runge nur durch die subjektive Wahrnehmung des Inneren und die Imagination möglich.

Das Wiederaufsteigen des göttlichen Funkens aus der Materie in die geistigen Sphären wird durch die Kinder (Engel) und Blumen im Außenrahmen dargestellt. Im Innenbild des Kupferstiches übernehmen sie zusammen mit der Lichtlilie die Funktion der Darstellung der Dreieinigkeit, die im Gemälde noch durch die Gestalt der Sophia ergänzt und betont wird.

Dass Runge die malerische Gestaltung seines *Zeiten-Zykluses* mit dem Morgen in einer doppelten Ausführung begann, ist wohl nicht nur allein der politisch-gesellschaftlichen Umbruchsituation zuzuschreiben, die der Böhmes ähnelt, als er seine Werke verfasste. Runge sah sich am Beginn des romantischen "Goldenen Zeitalters" als Vermittler der "wahren Kunst" im Zeichen Gottes, einer künstlerisch-geistigen Reformation, während Böhme als Bote des spirituellen Umbruchs die Weiterentwicklung der theologisch-geistigen Reformation forderte. Daher fand Runge in Böhme das ihm adäquate Pendant, das ihm half, seine intuitiven Erkenntnisse in theoretische Betrachtungen zur Kunst umzusetzen. Insofern kann der Runge'sche *Morgen* sowohl als Symbol des Aufbruchs, des Neubeginns im künstlerisch-politisch-spirituellen Sinne aufgefasst werden als auch als Hommage an Böhmes Werk, insbesondere der *Aurora*.

Daß dieses Streben es ist, was ich mit meinem Künstlerleben meine, versteht sich von selbst und jeder gemeinere Begriff muß mir fern von der Seele bleiben.¹⁶³

Melanie Öhlenbach (geb. 1979) studiert Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft und Deutsche Sprache und Literatur an der Philipps-Universität Marburg.

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¹⁶³ Runge, *Begier*, 118.

Lily, Light and God's Wisdom. Philipp Otto Runge and Jacob Böhme

The influence of Jacob Böhme on early Romantic art and its philosophy has been largely neglected by modern scholars, even though tracing the impact of Böhme's writing opens a wide range of new interpretations and leads to a deeper understanding. Phillip Otto Runge's life, his theory and works bear testimony to Böhme's importance.

The article is divided into five sections: The historical and biographical background (1) forms the basis of describing Runge's demand for a new form of art ("*Neue Kunst*") (2): Art is considered as the revelation of God and the artist as its tool, while the artist's imagination creates the insight of God. It is the artists' duty to re-create the diverging harmony of man and cosmos in the sense of an artistic-spiritual revolution. Due to his early death, Runge managed only partly to put his ambitions into practice, notably in the *Morning* of his *Four Times of a Day* (*Die Vier [Tages-] Zeiten*) which was the only one of the four copperplate prints that was finally painted in colours. In its copperplate version (3), Runge uses rich symbolic features that show both his theoretical ambitions and Böhme's influence. The author argues that Runge's work reflects Böhme's ideas of God and the Holy Trinity, angels, the creation of the world, and "Christosophie". In order to understand the full impact of Runge's works, it is also necessary to explain his theory of colours (*Farbentheorie*) (4). Colours are perceived to be "signature rerum" which indicate the possibility to return to God. Runge's theories of light, the trinity of the primary colours and the harmony of colours as well as their application (transparent or non-transparent) are based on Böhme's spiritual ideas. The final chapter of Runge's life as well as of this article is dedicated to the coloured version of the *Morning* (*Der Kleine Morgen*) (5). The author shows how the element of the female figure, which strongly suggests Böhme's idea of "Sophia", is central to the painting. In recognition of all the features previously explained, the author provides a holistic interpretation of Runge's life work that includes and goes beyond previous interpretations.

VIRGIN TERRITORY: PURITY AND DIVINE KNOWLEDGE IN LATE MEDIEVAL CATOPTROMANTIC TEXTS¹

CLAIRE FANGER

Terminological Preliminaries

Catoptromancy is the art of divination by polished or reflective surfaces. Sometimes it is understood to refer to divination by mirrors only, as distinguished from divination by other shiny surfaces, such as crystallomancy (crystal scrying), or onychomancy (divination by a polished fingernail). Often, however, the term is broadly used to refer to divination by reflective surfaces generally. Catoptromancy would thus be seen as the broad category in which crystallomancy, onychomancy, and divination by other types of reflective surfaces might occur as subtypes². There is justification for this broad categorization of “divination by reflective surfaces” since the texts I will be discussing here are not always specific about the kind of surface to be used, some suggesting a mirror, an oiled fingernail, or some other shiny surface all might work in the same operation equally well.

In the later middle ages, catoptromantic practices tended to be embedded in rituals for binding and summoning demons or invoking angels or other sorts of spirits to give the practitioner knowledge or information about the world. The information was usually delivered via images seen in the polished surface. Thus medieval catoptromancy may be seen more broadly still as a subtype of spirit conjuring with a reflective surface being used to facilitate and enhance the operator’s or medium’s visions or visualizations of the spirits present. For often—though not always—a medium was used to see

¹ I would like to thank Stephen Clucas for help with this paper and his kind offer to read it on very short notice, and the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, for permission to quote from manuscripts in their keeping. Errors remaining are, of course, my own.

² In the only known manuscript of the original Old Compilation of John of Morigny’s *Liber florum celestis doctrine* (*Liber visionum*), divination by the invocation of spirits in polished surfaces is classed under aeromancy (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS Liturg. 160, fol. 61v). By contrast, Johan Hartlieb classified shiny surface divination techniques under pyromancy (Hartlieb’s views are discussed in Delatte, *La catoptromancie grecque*, 50 ff). It is hard to tell how widespread either of these usages may have been; probably neither is a hapax legomenon.

the spirits and convey information from them. Typically the medium was required to be a virgin girl or boy (usually the latter), sometimes further required to have been conceived in a legitimate bed.

Catoptromancy as Virgin Territory: The state of the Question

In this paper I will be comparing the idea of virginity as used in the rhetoric that frames certain medieval catoptromantic prayers and invocations with the more theoretical discussion of virginity as an operative principle in catoptromantic visions in the writings of the thirteenth-century philosopher William of Auvergne. I intend to show first, in a general way, that there is more similarity between the medieval theurgic or angel summoning texts and those involving demon binding than might normally be assumed; though techniques are not identical, both types of ritual exist in a continuum of practices which involve similar assumptions about the operators' place in the cosmos and the appropriateness of seeking spiritually infused knowledge. Second, I will show that the cosmological understanding evident in the catoptromantic rituals is less different from the understanding evident in the natural philosophical writing than is normally allowed in modern discussions, which rarely treat the two forms of discourse as being connected. In this discussion, virginity serves as a useful bridge between liturgy and natural philosophy, since ideas and purity and virginity recur frequently both in the catoptromantic rituals and in the philosophical writings about them.

Although catoptromantic practices crop up frequently in a variety of times and cultures from antiquity on, there are few studies which undertake serious examination of catoptromantic practices from a historical perspective³. As with most other areas relevant to the history of Western esotericism, academic studies have been on the rise in recent years, though have yet to catch up with the quantity of primary source material remaining unexamined in archives. An important article by Benedek Láng⁴ appearing in the last issue of *Aries* discusses a substantial Polish catoptromantic text of the fifteenth

³ The most useful scholarly work on this topic is still Delatte, *La catoptromancie grecque* (1932), which despite its title is concerned almost entirely with medieval and early modern texts. There are no other scholarly book length monographs on the topic. A scattering of briefer studies is chronicled in the bibliography to Láng, 'Angels around the Crystal'; and some additional treatments of earlier catoptromantic practices are also to be found in scholarly studies of John Dee, especially the Whitby dissertation.

⁴ Láng, 'Angels around the Crystal'.

century which is of interest not only because of its impressive execution and court provenance, but also because of the way it shows a diverse body of ritual materials, including those of the *ars notoria* and its avatars, being reorganized and adapted for use with a crystal. This ritual text is evidently designed to induce crystal visions in a solitary adult practitioner without the use of a child medium—by no means the only instance of late medieval ritual of this kind assuming unmediated adult contact with spirits, but a particularly well elaborated variant.

One of the most frequently studied practitioners of the art of scrying was the sixteenth-century philosopher and mathematician John Dee, who, throughout the 1580s, was engaged in an extended set of crystal gazing experiments in which he conjured angels with the help of various mediums including the infamous Edward Kelly. Dee's angel conjurings, of course, have been the subject of numerous articles and more than one book length study, including most importantly a book called *John Dee's Conversations with Angels* published by Deborah Harkness in 1999. For a long time, scholarly studies of Dee's crystallomancy tended to share an assumption that Dee's use of the crystal for making angelic contact is an idiosyncratic form of catoptromancy, necessarily different from medieval uses of crystals for the same purpose. However it is in fact difficult to say exactly in what ways the differences operate, because there has been so little study of the medieval ritual practices which antedate Dee's use of crystal gazing.

In an important 1981 PhD thesis⁵ on John Dee, Christopher Whitby, working from reported accounts of observers as well as English trials, demonstrates that a substantial part of Dee's practices really do appear more similar to the "popular tradition" of crystal gazing than to the hermetic, kabalistic and neo-platonic precedents suggested by Frances Yates. However despite the work of Whitby, which already provided an important corrective to the theses of Yates, Shumaker⁶ and other earlier Dee scholars, the task of performing any substantial comparison of Dee's prayers to the aims and goals of actual *ritual* texts of catoptromancy still waits in the wings. Indeed even the most exhaustive studies of Dee's metaphysical and cosmological sources (like that of Harkness) ignore what may in hindsight turn out to be the most obvious of these—that is, the metaphysics of the cosmos in which the ritual

⁵ Whitby, *John Dee's Actions with Spirits*.

⁶ See chapters on Dee in Schumaker *Renaissance Curiosa* and Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*.

drama is enacted in medieval theurgic and catoptromantic texts⁷. As will be seen, examination of the ritual texts yields a slightly different kind of information from that of court cases or other reports of such practices, even those reflecting firsthand involvement.

Neglect of these texts is at least in part due to the fact they are, with a few exceptions, still unpublished, yet to be extricated from the manuscripts in which they reside. They do not tend to travel solo in manuscript, which makes the individual texts difficult to isolate and to compare with one another; they do however occur with considerable frequency in the handbooks of experiments labeled, *faute de mieux*, “necromantic”. Most of these rituals remain unpublished, with the important exception of the manuscript from the Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 849, which was edited by Richard Kieckhefer and published in 1997 under the title *Forbidden Rites*. This text contains a number of catoptromantic experiments, some of which I will be drawing on in this paper.

Neglect of these texts by early modern scholars has certainly been aggravated by the fact that the early modern practitioners of these forms of magic had a strong reason to disavow connections to medieval rituals which had long been labelled theologically suspect. Despite this disavowal, the continued popularity of such texts *sub rosa* is attested both by a measurable increase in manuscript copies throughout the early modern period⁸, and by instances of covert dependence. Dee’s library was known to have included many medieval ritual texts, including the copy of the *Sworn Book of Honorius* (an avatar of the *ars notoria*) now owned by the British Library as Sloane 313. Dee’s Sigillum Dei Æmæth, a diagram which was to be inscribed in beeswax and used as a support for Dee’s crystal⁹, shows a startling similarity to the sigil diagrammed in Sloane 313, though this book is not acknowledged as a source by Dee himself. More such instances will likely be discovered as the medieval texts become better known.

This situation is in the process of rapid change as more medieval texts are being brought out into the light and more attention being drawn to an array of medieval precedents for early modern magical practices and theories. An

⁷ See Fanger, review of *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels*.

⁸ As noted by Frank Klaassen, ‘Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance’.

⁹ The pattern is shown in another manuscript of Dee’s owned by the British Library, Sloane MS 3188, f. 30r. This image is reproduced by Harkness (who does not note the resemblance to Sloane 313), in *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels*, 36. It is also reproduced by Joseph Peterson (who does note the resemblance); see his edition of the *Sworn Book* at the Esoteric Archives website.

important study by the early modern scholar, Stephen Clucas, 'John Dee's Angelic Conversations and the *ars notoria*: Renaissance Magic and Medieval Theurgy'¹⁰, discusses the probable influence of medieval Solomonic angel magic (of which the *ars notoria* and the *Sworn book of Honorius* may be the most important types) on Dee's angel conjuring. Clucas chronicles some of the problems of categorization that have bedevilled even the best of the earlier Dee scholarship due to general lack of familiarity with the topography of medieval theurgy; he describes the common rhetoric of the *ars notoria* and the prayers Dee uses, noting that both have earlier liturgical precedents. The extent to which Clucas is on the right track in looking at medieval angel magic for the immediate precedents of Dee's practice is attested not only by Dee's use of the diagram from the *Sworn Book of Honorius* in Sloane 313 as a model for his Sigil Æmæth¹¹, but also by the extent to which catoptromantic and angel magic rituals are permeable to each other anyway. More editions and studies of the *ars notoria* and its variants have also become available in the last few years¹². This article will be a further contribution to the corrective picture of medieval precedents for early modern magical practices which these writings have already begun to provide.

The Principle of Virginity in Late Medieval Catoptromancy

It is a key point of this essay that, in premodern periods, any theoretical or philosophical understanding of the effects of a practice like catoptromancy had to take account of the way the rituals for summoning spirits understood their own activities. Both institutional liturgies (the prayers and *lectiones* heard daily or weekly in churches and public spaces) and the private forms of ritual which are closely related to these (whether determined in any given instance to be magical or not), inhabit the same conceptual domain as, and continue to be closely related to the understandings of physical science. In

¹⁰ The text of this article has been privately circulated among scholars in the area for some years and appears in a number of bibliographies, though it is only now in press.

¹¹ As Clucas points out, 'Non est legendum', 122-123.

¹² Of these, the most substantial as well as the most recent is the still unpublished dissertation by Julien Véronèse, *L'Ars notoria au Moyen Âge et à l'époque Moderne*, which includes definitive editions of the most important texts of the notory art as well as in depth treatment of origins and context of the text. There is also a recent critical edition of the *Sworn Book of Honorius* by Gösta Hedegård, though it lacks the in-depth contextual and historical information provided by Véronèse for the *Ars notoria*.

the middle ages the activities of ritual magic, just like the activities of standard institutional liturgies, assume certain things about the cosmos: they presuppose certain types of cosmological cause and effect, even if they lie strictly speaking outside the realm of physical theory.

Thus I intend to argue that a full understanding of the theories of natural philosophers about such practices must locate them in relation to the cosmos in which the ritual drama is enacted. My illustrative case here is the medieval philosopher William of Auvergne, the thirteenth-century author of the encyclopaedic and philosophical texts *De universo* and *De legibus* (two works which have often been mined for information about magical texts and practices, though seldom read in their entirety). William's opinions are of interest not only because of his patent influence on later writers but also because his thought has a characteristic precise logic which makes more startling his affinities with (not to mention evident first hand knowledge of) the writers and operators of the necromantic and other spirit conjuring manuals. In addition to the writings of William of Auvergne, I will be focussing specifically on the cosmological language found in a number of catoptromantic experiments involving virgin mediums drawn from two late medieval sources particularly rich in such operations: one the necromantic handbook already mentioned, edited by Richard Kieckhefer from a manuscript in the Bavarian State Library (clm 849) and published as *Forbidden Rites*, the other a spirit conjuring manual in a manuscript made in England, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS Rawl. D. 252.

Of the two texts, the Rawlinson book is the more heavily invested in experiments for gaining knowledge. Indeed few of its experiments have other ends; unlike the Munich text, which has experiments designed to gain a variety of ends from the obtaining of sexual favours to the creation of magical illusions, the Rawlinson manuscript it is almost exclusively concerned with obtaining information by seeing or communicating with spirits, largely in reflective surfaces, but also through simple conjurations, or sometimes through visions in candles or other aids to attaining dream or visionary states. While the Munich handbook compiles a variety of materials from obviously varied sources, and includes astrological instructions and experiments, the Rawlinson handbook is almost exclusively composed of conjurations drawing on liturgically based material which is not astrological in orientation. Both of these manuscripts date from the fifteenth century, but collect their materials from earlier sources. It is difficult to date the texts exactly, in part because of the way such materials tend to be freely adapted; however despite the difference in provenance of the two manuscripts, there are certain thematic threads

which recur and show a kind of broad consistency of assumption and interpretation within the rituals. Between the various experiments in the two manuscripts we get a good spread of different types of examples of late medieval practices involving virgin mediums, spirit summoning and reflective surfaces.

Within the rhetoric of all ritual, it is a commonplace that the operator must see to the purity of his instruments. In the catoptromancy experiments, it is not unusual to begin with an exorcism and blessing of the child medium, and in some cases the polished surface or crystal is exorcised as well. In one experiment in the Rawlinson manuscript for drawing angels into a crystal, the operator is instructed to begin the experiment in clean clothes, and to have a virgin boy or girl and a crystal of good size. You must wash hands and face, and in a private place, when the air is calm, write the names *on agla* on the stone in olive oil; let the boy be seated with his back to the sun and lay the stone in his hands.

Following these instructions comes a short prayer for God's blessing on the enterprise; then the operator makes the sign of the cross over the boy and the stone and over himself and says another longer blessing over the stone:

God, by whose gift the natural powers are inserted into stones, we beseech you, look in this hour into this stone of crystal and bless it with the blessing of your mercy and cause to descend upon it the abundant grace of your blessing, and multiply in it the effect of your power, so that by the dominion of your majesty it takes on the grace of the holy spirit¹³.

The stone is further blessed and purified:

May this creature of crystal be clean and free from every enemy incursion and purged from the descent of all evil to the point where your holy angels arriving may themselves discover no resistance therein to the obedience of their will; may this crystal purified of stain of any uncleanness be made an acceptable place for the manifestation of their apparition; whence I bless you, creature of crystal, by the living God, by the true God, by the holy God¹⁴.

¹³ Deus, cuius munere naturales lapidibus inseruntur virtutes, respice, quesumus, in hac hora in hunc lapidem cristalli et benedic eum benediccione misericordie tue, et copi[os]am . . . super eum fac descendere gratiam tue benediccionis, et multiplica in eo tue virtutis effectum, ut tue magestatis imperio gratiam spiritus sancti assumat. [MS Rawl. D. 252, fol. 115v. In all cases of manuscript citation, punctuation and corrections are my own. All translations from Latin are my own.]

¹⁴ Sit eciam atque hec creatura cristalli munda et libera ab omnium inpugnatorum incursu et tocius nequicie purgata descensu, quatinus sancti angeli tui aduenientes in eo nullam inueniant obediencie sue voluntatis resistenciam ipsemet; que cristallus a cuiuslibet inmundicie macula depuratus sit eius locus acceptabilis ad eorum apparenciam manifestandam vnde te benedico

This pattern of invocation and blessing involves a kind of recuperation of the stone's lost state of virtue, a reinvention of the power original to it, which the angels might be seen as indwelling in the purified stone in a natural way.

It is worth noting that although this is definitely a form of spirit conjuring, and hence by any medieval definition is *not* natural magic, there is an idea of nature deeply embedded in the ritual language. The rhetoric of the prayer is primarily concerned with the *restoration* of nature, the return to an ideal shape of things which was supposed to have existed before the fall and which has the power to exist now through sacramental grace. That idea of nature is in fact very nearly contiguous to what is already emerging in other types of medieval texts as governing "natural magic", understood as a way of enhancing or releasing the natural (i.e. divine) powers already existing in the elements of the world. However the reader may feel about the uses to which these spiritual powers are being put (catching thieves and locating stolen property are the most common ends of such divinatory operations in the Rawlinson manual), from the perspective of the operator, the work is conceived as humanly desirable because divinely desired.

It is worth noting also that it does not matter whether the ritual is intended to conjure angels or demons as far as the utility of purity and virginity goes, because the natural state of the cosmos cooperating with God gives purity a power over demons too. In general, in these experiments, the sought-for knowledge is depicted as a property of the divinity, whether the entities conveying the knowledge are angelic or demonic. For the same reason, the virginity of the child medium is not less important when the experiment employs demonic agencies to attain knowledge.

The same ritual for conjuring angels in a crystal from the Rawlinson book ends with a prayer which also occurs, in almost exactly the same wording, as part of a demon conjuring experiment in the Munich handbook (in the Munich experiment, the demons are conjured to appear in the right shoulder blade of a ram, which is smeared with oil to create reflective properties unlikely to be present in the unvarnished bone). Both experiments use virgin boy mediums, and in both, the prayer invokes God with the purpose of purifying the mind of the boy in the same way the crystal was purified. I quote from the version in the Rawlinson manuscript:

In the beginning, this prayer is said over the head of the boy before the invocation of spirits: God, you who sent your Holy Spirit over your apostles, send

your Holy Spirit over the [understanding] of this virgin boy¹⁵ and illuminate and clarify his understanding and soul, so that in the spirit of truth he may be able to see your /good/¹⁶ creatures, and through them may you deign to reveal to us the truth about this thing concerning which we seek or desire to know. You who live and reign, God for all ages of Ages, Amen¹⁷.

Whether the spirits summoned are angels or demons, they remain in both cases “your” (i.e. God’s) creatures, parts of the creation. The only change made in the language of the angel magic experiment is that “your creatures” become “your good creatures”. Since the word “good” is not part of the body text, but is inserted from the margin, it can be deduced that this prayer was most likely copied from a version similar that in the Munich manuscript. In other words, its use in demon conjuring experiments most likely predates its use in the angel conjuring one for which it has been adapted in the Rawlinson text.

Conjurations of the virgin boy himself also occur. Conjurations of the child are found more than once in the Munich manuscript, always for the purpose of making him speak; they make the most of the cosmological associations between purity and truth-telling, emphasizing an order of things in which the pure and baptised infant has no choice but to tell the truth, is literally unable to lie. An experiment in the Munich handbook for summoning demons into a fingernail (the second of two using a similar formula), conjures the virgin youth repeatedly to tell the truth and not to conceal any information:

I conjure you, virgin youth,

- by God, On, Orion, Sabaoth, Adonay,
that you have no power of lying or concealing concerning what I am questioning you about; again, I conjure you, virgin youth,
- by your God, Alpha and O, who is first and last,
that you tell the truth to me concerning the thing about which I require; again I conjure you, virgin,
- by the baptism which you received in the name of the holy and undivided Trinity

¹⁵ Munich reads *istum puerum*, both words in accusative; Rawlinson has accusative *istum* followed by *pueri* in genitive, suggesting a probable missing word between the two; I supply *intellectum*, as suggested by the following sentence.

¹⁶ The word “good” occurs only in the Rawlinson text, where it is inserted from the margin.

¹⁷ *Primo dicatur ista oratio super caput pueri ante inuocationem spirituum: Deus qui misisti Spiritum Sanctum tuum super apostolos tuos, mitte Spiritum Sanctum tuum super istum [intellectum] pueri virginis. Et illumina et clarifica intellectum illius et animam, vt in spiritu veritatis videre possit creaturas tuas /bonas/, et per eas nobis reuelare digneris veritatem de hac re de qua querimus vel intendimus. Qui viuus et regnas deus per omnia secula seculorum, Amen.* [Quoted from MS Rawl. D. 252, fol. 118v; parallel passage in Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, experiment 28, 252.]

- by the chastity and power which it regenerated in you from water and the Holy Spirit that you have no power nor permission to conceal or lie about anything you see¹⁸.

These conjurations of the youth continue; within them, conjurations by baptism and chastity get repeated several times with slight variations in wording, interwoven with a variety of names of God. If these conjurations result in the boy seeing a person in his fingernail, then the boy is to repeat after the master the following conjuration of the figure which he sees in his fingernail in his native tongue:

You who are before me, I conjure you

- by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 - and by saint Mary and her virginity,
 - and by saint John and his virginity,
 - and by saint Katherine and her virginity,
 - and by all the male and female holy virgins,
 - and by my own virginity,
- that you swiftly go to your king and make him come to me¹⁹.

Here the virginity of the youth is seen not only as a guarantee of true speech, but also importantly as itself a power of constraining demons, not differently from that of the virgin saints who are also mentioned. We might say that the power of the saints' virginity seems to be working independently of their holiness or saintly status; it is parallel to, and interchangeable with, the virginity of the boy medium. Indeed, virginity here is operating as a holy power

¹⁸ Coniuro te, virgo iuuenis,

- per deum On, Orion, Sabaoth, Adonay,
vt non habeas potestatem menciendi uel celandi de quocumque interrogauero; item coniuro te, virgo iuuenis,
- per deum tuum, Alpha et O, qui est primus et nouissimus,
vt michi veritatem dicas de hac re de qua te requiro; item coniuro te, virgo,
- per baptismum quem recepisti in nomine sancte et indiuidue trinitatis,
- per castitatem et potenciam qua te regenerauit ex aqua et Spiritu Sancto,
vt non habeas potenciam neque licenciam celandi uel menciendi quodcumque videris.

[Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, experiment 27c, 248.]

¹⁹ Tu qui es coram me, coniuro te

- per Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum,
- et per sanctam Mariam et eius virginitatem,
- per sanctum Iohannem et eius virginitatem,
- per sanctam Katheriname et eius virginitatem,
- per omnes sanctos et sanctas virgines,
- et per virginitatem meam,
vt cito vadas pro rege tuo et facias eum venire coram me, ita vt ipsum possim expresse videre et intelligere.

[Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, experiment 27c, 249.]

to such an extent that it does not matter to whom it belongs. It is the concatenation of these multiple virginities in the invocation which is expected to bring about the required effect.

It may be remarked that if virginity is alluded to in these rituals in general as if it were a kind of natural power, given, like all such powers by God, so too the power of demons and indeed the power of the conjuror over them may be seen in a similar way as natural and providential. In the experiment cited earlier involving scrying in the oiled shoulder blade of a ram, the operator addresses the demons and conjures them:

- by the head and crown of your Prince,
- by your own powers, given to you by the most high God,
- by the ring of Solomon, and by the signs and holy names inscribed on them,
- and by the seven heavens and all angels disposed in them²⁰.

This conjuration describes in brief the order of nature by which the demons are bound to obey the power of the operator. Moving upwards from the demonic domain, it alludes first to the demonic chain of command (through the head and crown of the demon prince), to the God given powers of the demons (emphasising that they, too, are creatures of God), to the power which God gave to Solomon through certain signs and holy names (which this operator claims the use of much as if he were the heir of Solomon—something which might be seen as true in a variety of senses), and to the whole divine order extending upwards through the seven heavens, all of which conspire to will the outcome of the experiment.

Another onychomancy experiment in the Munich handbook uses an even more explicit sequence of references to the divine Providence and Wisdom which ordained human power over demons, conjuring the demons:

- by that selfsame Providence which God had in mind when he made the world that you should obey my dominion, not through my power but that of the omnipotent majesty of God; I conjure and call to witness you demons,
- by that Wisdom of the eternity of God which caused heaven to be established above and founded and perfected the earth below, of elements which it linked up in the work of the world,
- and by the Prudence by which God separated light from darkness and created both, so that by art and mastery, by your master Astaroth given to you, you

²⁰ per caput et coronam principis vestri,

- et per vestram potestatem, vobis a summo deo datam,
- per anulum Salomonis, et per signa et sancta nomina in ipsis descripta
- et per vii celos et per omnes angelos in ipsis dispositos . . .

[Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, experiment 28, 250.]

cause the nail of this boy, N, anointed with oil, to grow and illuminate and increase in width, so that there may appear plainly and he can see in it the thief and the thing stolen and the place it was taken from and the place it has been taken to and where it was set and whatever was done in this theft²¹.

Here again, it is not the operator alone, but the whole of the cosmos that wills the experiment to have an effect; the ends are brought about by Providence and divine Wisdom which planned the world before its creation, put in order its elements, and placed the demons in it, subjugated to their masters and the divine will operating through the priest, exorcist or necromancer. All the basic premises of angel magic are equally present here in this demon conjuring experiment; there is no significant difference in the attitude of the operator to the divine realms or to the sought for knowledge.

There do exist experiments of this type for visualising spirits in a glass which do not use a virgin medium, but are designed to induce the visions of angels or demons in the adult operator. The ritual language shares many of the same characteristics; the insistence on the purity of the operator is consistent, and conjurations by the virginity of the saints remain plentiful. A Rawlinson experiment, which can be done with either a crystal or mirror, allows a solitary adult operator to conjure any of an array of fallen angels (Byleth, Andromalcus, Egypcia, Oberion or Sibilla) to become visible in the shiny surface. The operator conjures by an extensive array of virginities:

by these names of God and by holy Mary, mother of our lord Jesus Christ, and by her virginity, and by her five joys, and by all the holy virgins, and by the virginity of the blessed Apostle John . . . that wheresoever you are now you [come] into this crystal or this mirror, by the virginity of the most blessed Mary, mother of God and of our lord Jesus Christ, who was a virgin before birth, during birth, and after she had given birth²².

²¹ • Per ipsam prouidenciam quam deus in mente habuit prius quam mundus fieret, [vt] obediatis imperio meo, non per virtutem meam sed per virtutem magestatis omnipotentis dei. Coniuro et contestor vos demones

- per sapienciam eternitatis dei, qua celum supra stare fecit, terram autem deorsum fundauit et perfecit, elementorum que in opus mundi connexit,
- et per prudenciam qua deus lucem a tenebris separauit et vtrumque creauit, vt arte et magisterio, a magistro vestro Astaroth vobis concessa unguem huius pueri, N., oleo linitum, crescere et clarescere faciatis et procreare latitudinem, vt apparere possit euidenter et videre in eo furem et furtum nobis ablatum, et locum de quo ablatum est, et in quem locum translatus est, et vbi adhuc positum est, et quidquid ex ipso furto actum est. [Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, experiment 39, 335.]

²² per hec nomina Dei, et per sanctam Mariam, matrem domini nostri Ihesu Christi, et per virginitatem eius, et per quinque gaudia eiusdem, et per omnes sanctas virgines, et per virginitatem

In this ritual, conjurations by the operator's own virginity are absent, and perhaps tellingly the ritual seems to anticipate frustration; it is considerably longer and more repetitive than any of the experiments described using virgin boys and girls, which seem to anticipate a successful vision, or visualization, in two or three attempts. Here, repeatedly the operator is directed to look in the glass and if the spirit does not appear, to address another conjuration to the hapless demon, each one more fierce and threatening than the last. The coercive maledictions become harsher and more abusive (one gets quite sorry for the demon before it is all done) until ultimately, after perhaps ten or fifteen attempts, the ritual does anticipate a successful visualization and a delivery of sought for information in the final sequence of prayers. Needless to say, such coercive language is not a characteristic of angel conjuring rituals, though these also may be done by a solitary adult practitioner, but the rituals may still be longer and more complex than those involving child mediums; the crystallomancy in the Krakow prayer book is a prime example of such a ritual which involves angel magic.

Before I turn to the writings of William of Auvergne, I will try to outline a few conclusions that might be drawn about the way the ritual actions tend to contextualize virginity in these texts. First, virginity would appear to be a useful and helpful quality in a medium, but not a necessary one, since, even in those experiments involving virgin children, the child's virginity is only one among many types of cosmic powers that get called upon and concatenated in the conjurations. The rituals for inducing visions in the adult operator are not significantly different in form or shape from those involving child mediums: all things are assumed to be cooperating for good for those loving God.

Second, the issues surrounding virginity in the medium are by and large issues of power. They are not issues having to do with discernment of spirits, or what kind of spirits the ritual may attract. The language of the conjurations connects the child's virginity—and baptism similarly—to the power and ability of the child to contact God's invisible creatures, and to experience illumination from God, whether the immediate agency of that illumination is angelic or demonic, and to speak the truth about these visions. It is connected like all virginities to the power of binding and constraining demons.

beati Iohannis apostoli . . . Quatinus vbicumque fueris nunc in isto cristallo siue in speculo isto, per virginitatem beatissime Marie, matris Dei et domini nostri Ihesu Christi, que erat virgo ante partum in partum et post partum. [MS. Rawl. D. 252, fols. 146v-147r.]

The principle of virginity in William of Auvergne

In the *De universo*, in a discussion of the use of virgin mediums in catopromancy, William advances a possible theory for the visionary operation and its connection to virginity:

Moreover it was already clear from many *experimenta* that when seven or ten boys who are virgins are set to visions of this sort, scarcely one among them is discovered who can see the thing about which the revelation is sought (namely a theft, a robber or something else hidden). On account of this some of the wise from ancient times were induced to say that all instruments of this kind [i.e. reflective objects] worked only to cause one thing to produce the sort of apparition or vision which I am about to describe—that is, the re-flection (lit. “turning backwards”) of the force²³ of the mind into itself, the mind of the person who looks into this sort of instrument; for the luminosity of the instrument prohibits the viewer from turning or directing the force of his mind on exterior things, and repels and re-flects (or “turns”) it inwardly, so that he is forced to gaze within himself; wherein according to the opinion of Plato, if the mind is clean, and washed free from the filth which comes from the corporeal part and clings to the human soul, as in a mirror bright and clean he sees either all things clearly and plainly, or some part thereof, or the hidden thing which is sought for. And this according to whether he is more or less perfect or imperfect, which is say to as much he is purer and farther from uncleanness²⁴.

As it turns out, William brings this theory up only to dismiss it as illogical, but he does not dismiss it without giving it a fair hearing; indeed he elaborates the idea somewhat further:

that which is called “reading” among us is called “recovered knowledge” among the Greeks: what is in our souls through teaching or discipline or experience is not new knowledge, but old and innate in us, which, having been, as it were,

²³ Or “gaze” (*acies*).

²⁴ Claruit autem jam multis experimentis quia cum septem, vel decem pueri, ac virgines, ad huiusmodi visiones applicantur, vix unus ex eis invenitur, qui videat rem, cuius revelatio queritur: videlicet furtum, aut latronem, aut aliquod de occultis. Propter hoc igitur inducti sunt sapientes nonnulli ex antiquis, & dixerunt omnia instrumenta huiusmodi illud solum operari ad huiusmodi apparitionem, seu visionem, quod dicam. Hoc igitur est illud, videlicet, reflexio aciei mentis in se ipsam, mentis inquam ejus, qui aspicit in huiusmodi instrumento; prohibet enim luminositas instrumenti ipsum aspicientem faciem mentis in exteriora intendere, seu dirigere, & repellit eam, atque reflectit in se propter quod cogitur intueri in semetipsa: in qua, juxta sententiam Platonis, si purgata sit, & tersa a sordibus, que a parte corporis adveniunt, & adhaerent animae humanae, velut in speculo claro, & terso, videt vel omnia occulta, & manifesta, vel partem eorum, vel occultum, quod quaeritur; et hoc secundum magis & minus, secundum perfectius, & imperfectius quod est dicere prout purior, & ab inquinamentis remotior fuerit. [In *Opera*, Vol I, *De universo* II, III c 18, 1049 B c-d. All further references to *De universo* are to this edition.]

buried or covered up, is uncovered by the exercise or experience of learning; and there appears in us that which we formerly saw not in ourselves²⁵.

After thus explaining the theory of recovered knowledge, William goes on to refute it as inconsistent with experiential knowledge and common sense—on the face of it, either information is there or not. When we look at a blank parchment with no writing on it, we don't say there is really writing on it but it is covered up and hidden. If writing appears on it we assume someone put it there, not that it has had writing on it all along but appeared not to. So also we say "teach me something I don't know" not "teach me something I really deeply know but appear to myself not to know"²⁶.

William does not tell us exactly what texts he is relying on for the opinions of the 'ancient philosophers' that he refutes here. Delatte suggests he might have in mind a passage from the *Timaeus* (71b) which suggests a similar process underlies divination by dreams²⁷; however William's reading need not have been Plato, or even an ancient source. The Platonic theory of recovered knowledge was espoused by a number of prominent twelfth-century writers, including Hugh of St Victor, whose influential *Didascalicon* includes a disquisition on the idea that the human soul is a mirror of the divine which learning or education "polishes", uncovering rather than implanting knowledge²⁸. Hugh relies most heavily on Boethius in the construction of his argument, but also refers to Plato and the Chalcidian commentary on the *Timaeus*, Eriugena, Macrobius and the hermetic *Asclepius*, all of which would have been available to William of Auvergne as well. Since William does not need to seek among *récherché* sources to find the idea of pure soul as mirror of the divine idea, it should not be assumed that he is taking a dogmatic theological line against the theory itself, which in any case never suffered any taint of heterodoxy. It is most likely that William's elaborate dismissal of the theory of recovered knowledge has nothing to do with a possible theological or philosophical objection to it, but rather with the fact that he has himself experimented with techniques of divine infusion as a route to knowledge, but experienced effects that seemed to disprove the principle.

²⁵ Unde & quod apud nos vacatur lectio, apud Graecos vocatur reperita cognitio. Non igitur fiunt in animabus nostris novae scientiae per doctri[n]am, aut disciplinam, aut experientiam, sed veteres, ac innatae nobis, quae quasi sepultae fuerunt, & obtectae, deteguntur per exercitationes doctrinales, aut experientias; & apparet etiam nobis ipsis, quod prius apud nos esse non videbamus. [*De universo* II, III, ch. 18, 1050, A f.]

²⁶ *De universo*, II, III, 19, 1052, A g.

²⁷ Delatte, *Catoptromancie*, 37.

²⁸ *Didascalicon*, Book I, chapters 1-4.

The possibility that this forms a component of his reasoning is much strengthened by what he goes on to say; for if he does not believe in recovered memory as such, it is clear that he has no problem with the idea that genuine divine illuminations may come from angels; indeed he grants all the fundamental premises of angel magic, including the ways that purity is important to the process. He states that such divine illuminations do depend on the subject's freedom from corporeal impediments; that people of certain complexions are more prone to them; melancholics are more inclined to such visions for example, due to their tendency to be abstracted from worldly pleasures and tumults²⁹. Likewise blind people are more likely to be visionaries than sighted people³⁰ due to their being cut off from bodily vision. It is clear that if William does not grant Plato's created perfection of the soul as a possible explanation for the feats of the virgin medium in catoptromancy, he does not dismiss out of hand the rest of the platonic cosmos nor the role of purity or virginity within it for contacting the divine.

Armand Delatte, in his discussion of William's attitude to catoptromancy, complains that William does not give a clear guideline for distinguishing between divine and demonic visions, admitting the possibilities of both kinds occurring to the catoptromantic medium³¹. However it is possible that William might not have thought of giving a guide to discernment of spirits here simply because catoptromantic rituals themselves do not have a great concern with it. Some rituals are designed for visualising demons and others are for angels; others still are not overly specific about the domain or type of spirits summoned. Lack of concern with discernment of spirits arises in part from the specific assumptions of individual invocations that the operator will be summoning spirits that are *either* angelic or demonic, in part from the more generalized assumption pervading all the ritual language that the sought for knowledge is itself always a divine gift, whether the agency of its delivery is angelic or demonic.

William's attitude to the visions that could in principle be induced by angel magic was that such visions were best not courted and that one should wait upon the good will of God for one's illumination. On the face of it this may appear to be good theology; but there may be more to this than meets the eye. Poignantly, William alludes to what may have been unsuccessful angel

²⁹ *De Universo*, II, III, 20,1054, *passim*, e-g.

³⁰ *De Universo*, II, III, 20,1055 A d.

³¹ Delatte, *Catoptromancie*, 40.

magic experiments of his youth which have formed his current ideas and ultimately discouraged him from accepting the practical viability of such pursuits, if not from accepting the world view in which they were theoretically possible:

It must continually be remembered about the human soul that it is on the horizon of two worlds and in the confines of two regions, and free naturally to lean into the lower and to lift or elevate itself to the higher, if corruption, which is the corporeal part, does not impede it. But it is not free to elevate itself to the superior world or region in a state of misery and corruption; for it is amazingly weighed down and burdened by the body. . . . Hence it is that during the time of my adolescence it seemed to me that the acquisition of prophetic splendor and of great irradiation was easy, because our souls are as it were touching both of those worlds, or regions. It seemed to me thus that purgation of our souls from the filth of vice was easy, and easy the breaking of the snares or chains by which our souls were held weighed down and as it were seized by the neck, as Mercurius says in the book *On the God of Gods*³². I thought that little by little, by abstinence and removing my soul from cares and pleasures which catch and submerge it in the lower world, which is the world of sensible things . . . my free soul might escape and break free powerfully by itself into the superior region which is light. But now and over much time I have learned that human souls are not able to be purified by exercitations of divine things from the stains of vices and sins except by the power and grace of the Creator; and *that liberty, although it may be natural, namely of breaking free and raising one's self into the region of light, is not to be repaired or restored to them otherwise* (i.e. except by the Creator)³³.

³² The *Asclepius*, a text which informs this passage thoroughly; William here is probably thinking specifically of section I.11.a.

³³ Oporteret autem te jugiter reminisci de anima humana, quod ista est in horizonte duorum mundorum, & in confinio duarum regionum, & etiam ei naturaliter liberum inclinare se in inferiorem, atque erigere se sive elevare ad superiorem, nisi corruptio, quae est a parte corporis, impediret. Nunc autem non est ei liberum elevare se ad mundum superiorem, sive regionem illam, in statu miseriae, & corruptionis istius; est enim mirabiliter depressa, & incurvata per corpus. . . . Hinc est, quod tempore adolescentiae meae visum fuerit mihi, quod facilis erat acquisitio prophetici splendoris, & irradiationis magnae, propter hoc, quoniam animae nostrae sunt quasi tangentes utrumque mundorum istorum, sive utramque regionum istarum. Videbatur itaque mihi, quia facilis erat purgatio animarum nostrarum a sordibus vitiorum, facilisque diruptio laqueorum, seu vinculorum, quibus animae nostrae tenebantur incurvatae, & quasi in obtorto collo, sicut dixit mercurius in libro suo De deo deorum. Opinabar enim, quia paulatim abstinentia, & abstrahendo animam meam a sollicitudinibus, & delectationibus, quae eam captivant, & demergunt in mundum inferiorem quae est mundi sensibilibus. . . . & sic evaderet anima mea libera, & potens per semetipsam in regionem superiorem, quae lucis est, erumpere. Nunc autem, & a tempore multo jam didici per exercitationem rerum divinalium animas humanas non posse purificari ab inquinamentis vitiorum, & peccatorum, nisi virtute, & gratia creatoris; & *istam libertatem, quamquam naturalis sit, videlicet, erumpendi, & elevandi se in regionem lucis, non*

This passage, with its touching suggestion of the failure of William's early attempts to attain a state of prophetic splendour through 'exercitations of divine things', seems a credible testimony to the strength of his belief in the possibility of human divinization attested by the *Asclepius*. Two things may be deduced from this passage that are of interest to us here. First, it may be noted that the way the category of the "natural" is understood in this passage is fundamentally similar to that of the catoptronic prayers: that is, "nature" includes the entire cosmos, not just what lies below the sphere of the moon. William's statement, 'that liberty, although it may be natural, namely of breaking free and raising one's self into the region of light, is not to be repaired or restored [except by the Creator]', manages to preserve the absolute independence of the divine will without denying the idea that it is "natural" to the human soul to have visionary experiences of ascent and angelic contact. This idea of what is natural to the human soul is linked in a larger way with the idea of what is "natural" to the baptised child, the consecrated crystal, even the divinely granted and providential powers of the demons; all derive ultimately from the deity whose power emanates through the cosmos. Clearly William's premises about what things are natural to the soul in a purified condition (as well as to the cosmos itself, and the elements which make it up) are shared with the catoptronic experiments already examined, where all things in their natural, or pure (or purified, exorcised or baptised) state are naturally disposed to co-operate with God.

My second point concerns another type of contiguity between these two genres of text: because this passage follows close on the heels of William's reflection on the possible means by which catoptronic practices might work, it shows on the most basic level that there is a link in William's mind between the hermetic-theurgic cosmos described in the *Asclepius* and the catoptronic practices in the ritual texts under discussion. This is a point that requires the more emphasis because of the way standard medieval theological opinions ranged themselves around these types of texts: the *Asclepius* was treated as a theologically acceptable work of pagan learning, while the ritual texts themselves, for all their tendentiously Christian liturgical formulae and insistence on the divinity of knowledge, tended to be suspected of bad demonic involvement in their outcomes. In general, of course, magical theologies will always be less problematic than magical practices; the point

esse eis aliter reparabilem, aut restaurabilem. [*De Universo*, II, III, 20,1056, A h, B e (my emphasis).]

I would emphasize here is simply that theological suspicion of the latter and acceptance of the former is evidently no bar to thinking of these two types of texts as being in the same category. It is more likely than not that the ‘exercitations of divine things’ William experimented with were those of the standard medieval theurgic texts, the *ars notoria* and its variants, or indeed crystallogantic texts of the kinds we have seen in the Munich and Rawlinson handbooks; the medieval practitioner interested in pursuing the Asclepian work would have had little else by way of practical guide into the angelic realm.

Conclusion: John Dee and John of Morigny

In his essay on John Dee’s Angelic conversations, Stephen Clucas takes note of the way modernity is inclined to debar instrumental practices from the category of “religion”; a broader apprehension of such practices, as Clucas notes, would need to have been available to Dee himself:

As a specific intellectual and practical formation, then, Dee’s angelic conversations are characterised by an inextricable co-involvement of what we think of as the separate spheres of “orthodox” religious practices and a set of instrumental desires. The inseparability of these apparently separate spheres or domains in Dee’s art suggest that we should try to conceptualise it as a form of operative practice which has its constitutive roots in religious forms, as a development or expansion of “allowable means”³⁴.

Clucas goes on to suggest that the forms and techniques of medieval ritual magic similarly blend operative desire and devotional practice.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate the reasons why a generalized theoretical difficulty with instrumental practices may not be a merely modern problem³⁵, but it is certainly true to say that the farther one reads one’s self into the operator’s perspective in all these practices (whether those of Dee or of the theurgic ritual of the medieval period), the more difficult it becomes to disentangle the language of orthodox and “pure” devotion from

³⁴ Clucas, ‘John Dee’s Angelic Conversations,’ end part 1. (Page numbers of printed book not yet available.)

³⁵ Though modernity may exacerbate them, it did not invent them; it is well known that even in his own time Dee did not succeed in clearing his name from suspicion of sorcery. Beyond that, William of Auvergne is clearly struggling with similar issues (debarred, perhaps, from accepting the effects of theurgic experiments as legitimate at least in part because they did not work so well for him as they did for Dee).

that of earthly desire and instrumental action³⁶. The rituals of catoptromancy are scarcely different in this regard from those of the *ars notoria* and variants. To be sure, the care with which Dee chronicles all his actions with spirits offers the reader a very full access to the operator's perspective in all its fascinating idiosyncrasy; but his theological justifications for his practices in their insistence on the divine will, the soteriological necessity of God's grace, and the divine origin of all knowledge, are all to be found already in the rhetoric of the medieval ritual texts.

Of course John Dee is not the first writer to chronicle personal interactions with angels using instrumental prayers. The Benedictine monk, John of Morigny, wrote an account of his experiments with the *ars notoria* which preceded his composition of a book thirty prayers³⁷. Like the *ars notoria*, John's prayers were designed to induce divine knowledge from the Holy Spirit with the assistance of the nine orders of angels. Drawn from, and partly modelled on, the prayers of the *ars notoria* (which had always been theologically problematic), John's own prayers are presented as intended to destroy the *ars notoria* by replacing it with a purified, and more effective, text. According to John, these prayers were delivered to him verbatim by the virgin Mary from the mouth of God, and recuperate all the good and spiritual work of the *ars notoria* while being free of its demonic corruption. He explicitly bills his text as a type of sacrament³⁸ (something which the *ars notoria* also claims, though with less supporting contextual information).

John of Morigny's *Book of the Flowers of Heavenly Teaching*³⁹ is an important reference point in the history of practices preceding Dee's actions with spirits for a number of reasons. First, it is akin to Dee's work in its interweaving of operative prayers to gain access to divine knowledge with personal, visionary and theological justifications of its own design. It thus provides further insights into the operator's perspective, offering information about how such practices could be conceptualised in terms that were simultaneously

³⁶ On magic and devotional practice generally see Kieckhefer, 'The Devil's Contemplatives', 250-253.

³⁷ Edited by Fanger and Watson as the 'Prologue to the *Book of Visions*'.

³⁸ 'Prologue', translation, 169.

³⁹ Previous studies of this work, including my own, have referred to this text as the *Liber visionum* or *Book of Visions* based on the text's incipit: 'here begins the *Book of Visions* of the blessed and undefiled virgin Mary'. But a fuller study of the text makes it clear that John himself use the title 'Book of Visions' to refer to the 'Prologue' only; he wanted the whole text to be titled the *Liber florum celestis doctrine* (*Book of the Flowers of Heavenly Teaching*). Our forthcoming edition of the full text will give it the title John wished it to have.

instrumental, devotional, and theological. Beyond this, John of Morigny's chronicle of his experiences with the *ars notoria* shows that the mode of experience brought on by these prayers is one of information brought through aural and visual means. This is an important point, because the means of delivery of information (or knowledge) are not really very clear from the *ars notoria* text itself, nor has any operator's experience of the *ars notoria* been available for scholarly investigation prior the discovery of John of Morigny's account. For our present purposes, it must be noted that the style of dream visions recounted by John appear to be less different from the angelic apparitions recounted in Dee's *Book of Mysteries* than might have been supposed without them.

In his visionary autobiography, John describes not only his own experiences with the *ars notoria*, but also those of his sister and his friend, the Cistercian monk John of Fontainejean. For all of them, when the *ars notoria* was working as it ought to, the acquisition of information tended to take place in dream visions. The operator, alone or assisted, would say a prayer with a certain problem or question in mind (other ritual preparations often having been made beforehand, including fasting and the taking of communion). The petitioner would then lie down, as if to sleep, and a visionary state would ensue, in which the operator could expect to see angels or other entities who would answer the formulated question. The answer could be expected to be enigmatic, and sometimes to require interpretation by the operator (if not indeed another visionary action to explain it).

For the most part when John speaks of an individual experience induced through the *ars notoria* he refers to it as a "dream" (*somnium*), though he also tends to refer to such experiences collectively as "visions" and makes no particular effort to distinguish between these two things. At one point John refers to the 'visions it is customary to have from the *ars notoria*'⁴⁰ and throughout his own *Book of Prayers* he writes of seeking and awaiting "visions" rather than "dreams". Indeed, in the *Book of Figures* of the Old Compilation, he explains that prophecy is judged simply by the real presence of the spirit of prophecy, not by the mode in which the experience occurs:

⁴⁰ Speaking of his friend John of Fontainejean, who was a less successful visionary, it is noted that when he had worked with the *ars notoria* for a long time, 'after much labor he did not see visions so frequently as is customary to see them in the *ars notoria*' (post multum laborem non ita vidit visiones sepius sicut mos est in arte notoria videre; Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS Liturg. 160, fol. 10r). This passage is edited out of the parallel section of the New Compilation.

For every vision, dream, revelation, and prophecy are different in manner, but consonant in effect, inasmuch as they are made by one and the same spirit, and not by diverse ones. Whence “vision” is a term that can cover both a “prophet seeing” and a “prophecy”. Moreover it is prophecy, inspiration or divine revelation that announces outcomes of things in the fixed truth. This may happen in five ways: through deeds, through words, through visions, through dreams, and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit alone⁴¹.

Though the rubric to this passage announces that its content will relate to the ‘difference between visions, dreams and prophecies’, the passage itself evidently makes no distinctions between these things, saying rather that the spirit of prophecy may work in a diverse ways; “prophecy” is simply known as the product of the prophetic spirit, rather than something produced by a certain modality of operation. There is no reference here to the influential distinction made by Augustine between corporeal, spiritual and intellectual vision⁴², nor does John apparently harbor any particular suspicion of corporeal vision or visions occurring in dreams.

If, for both John of Morigny and John Dee, instrumental prayer is an extension of “allowable means”, as Clucas suggests, so too for both of them, dreams and corporeal visions seems to be equally allowable means for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Pragmatic similarities are evident in their mode of reception of knowledge too. All of their actions involve interpretation of visual and auditory stimuli. Although John of Morigny’s visions occurred in dreams, and Dee’s were reported by a medium through the instrumentality of a crystal ball, in both cases we see the operators considering the words and actions of their spiritual interlocutors, the visualisations of which might include details of cut and color of clothing, facial expression, positioning in space, and reported speech. Both of them too (and this is something both share with William of Auvergne as well) operate within a cosmological context that is certainly no less informed by liturgy than by natural philosophy. This is in part because of the way the cosmological underpinnings of liturgy

⁴¹ Omnis enim visio, sompnium, reuelacio, et prophetia in modo differunt, sed idem sonant in effectu, quippe quia vno eodemque spiritu fiunt et non diverso. Vnde ‘propheta videns’ et ‘prophetia’ ‘visio’ interpretantur. Est autem propheta, inspiracio, uel reuelacio diuina rerum euenti immobili veritate denunciatis. Que sit quinque modis, per facta, per dicta, per visiones, per sompnia, et per solam spiriti sanctus inspiracionem. [MS Liturg. 160, fol. 65 r-v.]

⁴² Key passages for this tripartite distinction (widely disseminated through Isidore) are found in the last chapter of *Contra Adimantum* as well as book 12 of his *De genesi ad litteram*. For examination of some of the tensions between these categories and the actual experience of other late medieval visionaries, see McGinn, ‘Visions and Critiques of Visions’.

were friendly to the kind of neo-platonic thinking that characterised all of their enterprises when in philosophical mode.

Given the extent of the theoretical, practical, and visionary similarities between Dee's actions with the crystal and John of Morigny's actions with the *ars notoria*, it becomes far less surprising to find instances in manuscript where texts of prayer drawn from Solomonic magic are interwoven with other types of divinatory operations, including those involving catoptromantic techniques. Manuscripts in which John of Morigny's *Liber Florum Celestis Doctrine* are combined with whole or partial texts of the *ars notoria* occur rather more commonly than John himself would probably have wished⁴³; and additionally we find John's prayers combined with prayers from the *ars notoria* in conjunction with a crystal ball in the crystallomantic Prayer Book of Wladislas of Varna mentioned earlier in this article⁴⁴. Clearly these methodologies were very permeable to each other: whether the visionary experiences involved dreams or waking visions in polished surfaces, and whether they involved a solitary adult practitioner or visions reported by a medium, they occurred within a common set of liturgical and philosophical premises.

It is hardly possible to end a paper on virgin mediums and angel conjuring without commenting on John Dee's long term use of the adult Edward Kelly (no virgin and by reputation no angel either) as a medium in his own crystallomantic experiments. This may seem to have been an eccentric move on Dee's part; yet, as I have already noted, the issues surrounding the use of virgin mediums were issues of power and ability, and not discernment of spirits. Once Kelly had shown he had the power to visualize spirits, it seems unlikely that Dee would have felt concerned over Kelly's lost maidenhead. Indeed if anything, for Dee, the very possession of the ability would probably have argued in its own way for the inner purity of Kelly; this, at least, is the understanding which acquaintance with the ritual literature would likely sustain.

Claire Fanger (1956), is an independent scholar with a doctorate in medieval studies from the University of Toronto (1994). She has written on a variety of topics in the history of magic and on esoteric aspects of medieval texts, and, with Nicholas Watson, is currently completing an edition of John of Morigny's *Liber florum celestis doctrine*.

⁴³ In Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 276 John's work is preceded by an *ars notoria* text, and Vienna, Schottenkloster 140 (61) it is followed by one. Hamilton, Canada, McMaster University Library MS 107 is also followed by ten prayers billed simply as 'orationes pro sciencia adipiscenda' which are in fact prayers from the Solomonic *ars notoria*.

⁴⁴ Described in Láng, 'Angels around the Crystal'.

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Le territoire vierge: Pureté et savoir divin dans les textes catoptromantiques du Moyen Âge tardif

La catoptromancie (divination par l'observation d'objets brillants) est une pratique abondamment attestée dans l'histoire, depuis l'Antiquité. Toutefois, les travaux académiques consacrés aux rituels de catoptromancie médiévaux sont encore assez rares. Cet article traite d'abord des prières et des rituels catoptromantiques pratiqués à l'aide d'un médium—toujours un enfant vierge—, lesquels se trouvent, notamment, dans deux manuels de nécromancie médiévale (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Rawl. D. 252, et le manuel publié par Richard Kieckhefer sous le titre *Forbidden Rites*). Après une analyse de l'idée de virginité, qui apparaît dans les mots des prières, l'article se concentre sur l'explication qu'un philosophe du XIII^e siècle, Guillaume d'Auvergne, fournit en matière d'utilisation d'enfants vierges au cours d'expériences catoptromantiques. Guillaume s'emploie longuement à réfuter la doctrine platonicienne selon laquelle la science n'est qu'une sorte de réminiscence; mais malgré son opposition à l'idée de "science-réminiscence", il se montre naturellement favorable à la notion, également platonicienne, selon laquelle la pureté virginale peut, en principe, donner plus facilement accès aux régions de lumière appartenant à l'ordre du Créateur. Selon Guillaume, la lumière divine habite tout naturellement l'âme qui n'est pas encombrée et accablée de vices corporels; toutefois, il est pratiquement impossible à l'âme seule, sans l'assistance de Dieu, de franchir les frontières de ces régions. Ici, Guillaume fait allusion aux expériences d'ascèse infructueuses, auxquelles il s'est lui-même livré dans son adolescence. Bien évidemment, malgré l'opposition théologique à l'encontre de l'expérience théurgique, il existe une intéressante continuité entre la pratique et la théorie de la catoptromancie médiévale. En conclusion, l'article fait brièvement état de quelques autres continuités entre, d'une part, les formes de théurgie médiévale (notamment, dans les prières de l'*ars notoria* et dans celles de Jean de Morigny); et d'autre part, les conversations de John Dee avec les anges. Enfin, l'auteur présente une suggestion peut-être susceptible de résoudre "l'énigme Edward Kelly".

FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE: ANTI-ESOTERIC POLEMICS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF

Discourse is a way of speaking about something
which constructs what that something is.

Linda Williams¹

Having been involved over the last eight years in editing the two-volume *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, recently published by Brill², it was impossible for me not to be confronted almost daily with basic questions of definition and demarcation. What is it that justifies gathering such an enormous amount of often spectacularly different currents and personalities, from late antiquity to the present, under one and the same terminological rubric? The question has occupied me ever since I first began to be interested in the field³, but by the time I had to write the Introduction to the Brill Dictionary, I was surprised at how easy I found it to answer. Having briefly discussed the most important terms and categories that have traditionally been used by scholars to speak about the field, I concluded that

... seemingly innocuous terminological conventions are often the reflection of hidden or implicit ideological agendas. Perhaps no other domain in the study of religion has suffered from such biases as seriously as the one to which this Dictionary is devoted, for it covers more or less all currents and phenomena that have, at one time or another⁴, come to be perceived as problematic (mis-

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¹ Williams, *Hard Core*, 276.

² Hanegraaff et al., *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism (DGWE)*.

³ The development of my ideas in this regard can be traced through Hanegraaff, 'A Dynamic Typological Approach', 'Empirical Method', 'On the Construction', and 'The Study of Western Esotericism'.

⁴ Note the importance of this qualifier. It would be far from me to claim that all currents and phenomena that are nowadays gathered under the umbrella of "Western esotericism" were always perceived as problematic; in fact, the opposite is true, and an important task for the study of Western esotericism is to point out that many of its basic ideas and currents used to be part of normal acceptable discourse and of general Western culture, and came to be regarded as

guided, heretical, irrational, dangerous, evil, or simply ridiculous) from the perspectives of established religion, philosophy, science, and academic research⁵.

This simple conclusion—reminiscent, in a way, of James Webb’s concept of “rejected knowledge”⁶—provides the starting-point for the present article. In brief, I will argue that the field of study referred to as “Western esotericism” is the historical product of a polemical discourse, the dynamics of which can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of monotheism. Moreover, it is in the terms of this very same discourse that mainstream Western culture has been construing its own identity, up to the present day. This process of the construction of identity takes place by means of telling stories—to ourselves and to others—of who, what and how we want to be⁷. The challenge of the modern study of Western esotericism to academic research ultimately consists in the fact that it questions and undermines those stories, and forces us to see who, what and how we really *are*. Instinctive resistance against the breaking down of certainties implicit in such (self)knowledge is at the very root of traditional academic resistance against the study of Western esotericism.

1. *Polemics and Procedures of Exclusion*

Any polemical discourse, I suggest, is subject to a number of basic conditions:

1. It requires a sense of unrest or threat (in situations of total contentment and security—real or imaginary—there is no motivation for engaging in polemical discourse).
2. It requires that the source of threat be not entirely clear and readily accessible (if the enemy is standing on your doorstep threatening to kill you, you do not polemicize against him but seek to attack or defend yourself).
3. It requires a target (if, in contrast to the previous point, there is no enemy—real or imagined—that can be attacked, polemical discourse dies stillborn, from pure frustration).

“other” only in later periods and as a result of specific historical developments (see e.g. the Enlightenment).

⁵ Hanegraaff, ‘Introduction’, xiii.

⁶ Webb, *The Occult Underground*, 191. An important pioneer in the academic study of Western esotericism, Webb was also a child of his time, and his discussion of the occult as representing “the flight from reason” (o.c., ch. 1) still strongly reflects the polemical discourse which I criticize in this paper.

⁷ It is basic to my argument that the generic “we” includes ourselves as contemporary scholars of Western esotericism: assuming that it is only “them” who tell those stories means missing the point altogether.

4. It requires an audience (if nobody is interested in your polemics, the discourse never develops beyond the stage of mere monologue).
5. It requires simplicity, i.e. the discourse must be based on simple oppositions (complex arguments, with plenty of room for nuance and qualifications, are polemically ineffective).

Politicians know these things instinctively, and my points can easily be demonstrated at the example of the Bush administration's rhetoric about international terrorism. The climate that made it possible was created by the acute sense of threat (1) caused by the 9-11 attack. Although the source of the threat was quickly identified as Al Qaida and Islamic terrorism generally, these faceless networks of groups and individuals were not readily available for retaliation (2). In order for a polemical discourse to develop against this background, an attackable target was needed (3): hence the political rhetoric came to focus first on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, then on Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. Since the sense of threat was widely shared, the discourse found a receptive audience (4). And finally, its effectiveness relied on simple dualisms of unambiguous good versus unambiguous evil (5): "you are either with us or with the terrorists", the "axis of evil" stands against "the land of the free", the choice is between tyranny or democracy, and one may even have to choose between French fries or Freedom fries⁸.

To prevent misunderstanding: the fact that any polemical discourse needs to "create" a target enemy does not, of course, imply that this enemy is wholly imaginary and constitutes no real threat. It does mean, however, that—whether there is a real enemy or not—a polemical discourse needs to make it look real *at least* in the imagination. And in order for this to happen, even the most concrete enemy needs to be simplified: the reified "other" in any polemical discourse is therefore always an artificial creature, juxtaposed against a no less artificial "self". By simplifying the "other" as unambiguously bad, polemicists simultaneously create a simplified identity for themselves as unambiguously good. In order for a polemical discourse to be effective, these two artificial entities and the clearcut opposition between them must take the place, on the screen of the human imagination, of the

⁸ For Bush's rhetoric, see the excellent (and very disturbing) article by Urban, 'Religion and Secrecy in the Bush Administration'; on page 6 Urban quotes a speech before the FBI on September 25, 2001: 'I see things this way: The people who did this act on America . . . are evil people. They don't represent an ideology, they don't represent a legitimate political group of people. They're flat evil. That's all they can think about, is evil. And as a nation of good folks, we're going to hunt them down, and we're going to find them, and we will bring them to justice' (Urban o.c., quoting from Bush, "*We Will Prevail*", 22).

much more complex and messy realities “out there”. The effectiveness of the discourse is proportional to the extent in which it succeeds in *confusing* its participants, so that they mistake the categories of their imagination for descriptions of reality⁹.

Now, precisely such a reification of imaginary constructs by means of polemical discourse over many centuries, or so I will argue, is at the bottom of the modern and contemporary perception of “Western esotericism” as a separate tradition or field of research rather than as merely a dimension of Western culture generally. This is not an argument for discarding any such concepts; but it is an argument for not confusing our constructs with historical reality¹⁰.

To understand the emergence of “Western esotericism” as a field of research, we need to look not only at the dynamics of polemical discourse, but also at the various procedures of exclusion that function within such a discourse. Michel Foucault has famously distinguished between three such procedures: prohibitions, the opposition of reason against madness, and the opposition of true against false¹¹. I intend to slightly complicate this list by distinguishing between *two* kinds of prohibition; and it seems to me that Foucault ignored the difference between *reasons for* exclusion and *strategies of* exclusion. Thus I end up with four kinds of objection against the “others” in polemical discourses, and two kinds of strategy:

⁹ I realize that the implications are farreaching. If I claim that polemical discourse creates confusion between imagination and reality, and argue (as I will do in the rest of the article) that it is the task of scholarship to criticize such confusion and call attention to the complexity of historical reality, some critics will object that this may be academically correct but politically naïve and even dangerous, because it blurs the distinction between good and evil and ends up defending moral relativism. I maintain that the commitment of academic scholarship in the Enlightenment tradition is to the truth, by means of critical research and reflection (even though any such “truth” is always limited, conditional and provisory); obscuring the truth in the interest of “morality” is far more immoral than facing up to the fact that any moral commitment is indeed a *commitment*, not a logical inference from unquestionable metaphysical truths (cf. on this point my discussion of relativism in ‘Prospects for the Globalization’).

¹⁰ As argued at length in my ‘On the Construction’. Confusion of this kind is demonstrated particularly clearly by the multiple cases of authors who have used Antoine Faivre’s famous definition of Western esotericism (in terms of four intrinsic and two non-intrinsic variables) as a litmus test for deciding whether person x or movement y “is” esoteric or not. See my discussion of this problem in ‘The Study of Western Esotericism’, 508.

¹¹ Foucault, *L’ordre du discours*, 11-23 (“l’interdit”, “l’opposition raison et folie”, “l’opposition du vrai et du faux” [i.e. “la volonté de vérité”]).

reason for exclusion:	positive alternative:	preferred strategy:
danger	– safety	prohibition
immorality	– morality	prohibition
irrationality	– reason	ridicule
error	– truth	ridicule

Let me take some examples. Harddrugs are prohibited because they are considered dangerous, but not because they induce immoral behaviour; and polemical discourse concerned with “the war on drugs” addresses a sense of threat to public safety by reducing a complex compound with fuzzy boundaries to a simple generic concept¹². Attempts to restrict or prohibit pornography, in contrast, are typically defended with moral arguments (its “dangers” being presented as dangers to morality); and here, again, the category is highly artificial¹³. Such attempts at prohibition make no reference to reason or truth. Western esotericism or its associated components (e.g. “magic”, “astrology”, “the occult”, etcetera), in contrast, tend to be a frequent focus of mild ridicule by contemporary academics; they are not considered immoral

¹² “Drugs” is a nice example of an “artificial enemy” created in the collective imagination by means of simplification. For example, in the Netherlands the “party drug” XTC is considered an illegal hard drug, whereas alcohol use is accepted. The facts are that alcohol is physically addictive and its misuse frequently causes serious violent behaviour, whereas XTC is not physically addictive and makes its users feel soft and loving instead of aggressive. While too much XTC can be dangerous to one’s health, the same goes for too much alcohol. Including under illegal “hard drugs” a substance like XTC but not alcohol is therefore highly artificial, and difficult to defend rationally. The simplified entity “drugs” as it functions in popular discourse in fact refers to a multifarious collection of psychoactive substances that differ greatly in their effects, their health hazards, and in being addictive or not; as a result, addictive and dangerous substances such as e.g. heroin are incorrectly lumped together with e.g. various non-addictive herbal brews containing dimethyltryptamine (Ayahuasca, Jurema etc.), which present no danger to health and whose psychoactive properties can even have demonstrable healing effects.

¹³ This is demonstrated with particular clarity in the classic study of pornography by Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum*. Likewise, Bette Talvacchia in her splendid study of Renaissance eroticism formulates very precisely how and why pornography is an artificial polemical construct: ‘the creation of pornography . . . comes from targeting particular objects, images, and texts as offensive to morality and therefore unacceptable, so that a pornographic object cannot exist without the discourse that identifies it. In this view, there is never any inherently pornographic nature in any cultural production; rather, certain kinds of sexual representations are singled out and argued to be pornographic’ (*Taking Positions*, 103; *mutatis mutandis*—i.e. by replacing the term “pornography/pornographic” by “esotericism/esoteric” and “sexual” by “religious”—exactly the same argumentation can easily be applied to the category of Western esotericism). As is well-known, pornography was singled out as a target of polemics by feminist activists, with Andrea Dworkin as perhaps the most notorious example; their militant pro-censorship arguments have been countered by anti-censorship feminists such as notably Linda Williams (for this distinction, see her *Hard Core*, 16-30).

or dangerous to society, but are simply dismissed as irrational and false. One does not take such things seriously; for if one does, one risks finding oneself excluded from acceptable discourse¹⁴. At first sight an attitude of ridicule may hardly seem to qualify as a “polemical” strategy, but I will argue that, on the contrary, its historical roots as far as Western esotericism is concerned are polemical in the extreme. It is only because the “other” in question is no longer believed to pose a serious threat today, that prohibition and persecution have been replaced by the milder—but not necessarily less effective—strategy of ridicule.

2. *The Grand Polemical Narrative*

I hardly need to emphasize that an analysis within the space of a few pages of a polemical discourse that (as I announced above) ‘can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of monotheism’ can only be sketchy in the extreme. Therefore the following overview is in no way intended as an empirically adequate description of historical reality, but merely intends to sketch the outlines of a possible heuristic approach to it, in view of specific questions that the study of Western esotericism cannot afford to ignore.

The Construction of Paganism: Monotheism versus Idolatry

It is natural to assume that the polemical target of monotheistic discourse consists in “polytheism”, but in fact that opposition is a relatively recent phenomenon. The term “polytheism” was introduced by Philo of Alexandria¹⁵, but came to be used by other authors only since Jean Bodin in 1580¹⁶, and the term “monotheism” was coined by Henry More in 1660 as a counter-term against polytheism. After Philo and up to the end of the 16th century, the basic opposition was another one: that of worship of the one true God versus idolatry. The discourse that pits “monotheism” against “idolatry” goes back, of course, to the Hebrew Bible, which codifies it in the Second Commandment, and is of absolutely basic importance to how Jews, Christians

¹⁴ A perfect example at which one can study this dynamics is Immanuel Kant’s polemics against Emanuel Swedenborg, in his *Träume eines Geistersehers* of 1766. For an analysis, see the section on Kant in Hanegraaff, ‘Swedenborg’s *Magnum Opus*’ (forthcoming).

¹⁵ Schmidt, ‘Polytheisms’, 10 and 52 nt 1 (with reference to Philo of Alexandria, *Mutatione* 205; *Opificio* 171; *Ebrietate* 110; *Confusione* 42, 144; *Migratione* 69).

¹⁶ Schmidt, ‘Polytheisms’, 10 and 52 nt 2 (Bodin, *La demonomanie des sorciers* [1580], bk I ch V).

and Muslims have construed their identities. As formulated by Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, ‘The prohibition against idolatry is the thick wall that separates the non-pagans from pagans’¹⁷.

As brilliantly argued by Jan Assmann, underneath this distinction is an even more basic one. Western monotheism he describes as the space severed or cloven by the distinction between true and false in religion¹⁸. This distinction, although first drawn by Akhenaten in the 14th century B.C., he refers to as the “Mosaic Distinction” because it has come to be linked to the name of Moses in the actual mnemohistory of Western civilization. It created the new phenomenon of what Assmann refers to as “counter-religion”: a type of religion that does not function as a means of intercultural translation (the gods of one pantheon being considered translatable into those of another) but as a means of intercultural estrangement, and which defines itself by rejecting and repudiating the gods of other and earlier peoples—in other words, by a polemical discourse:

Narratively, the distinction is represented by the story of Israel’s Exodus out of Egypt. Egypt thereby came to symbolize the rejected, the religiously wrong, the “pagan”. As a consequence, Egypt’s most conspicuous practice, the worship of images, came to be regarded as the greatest sin. Normatively, the distinction is expressed in a law code which conforms with the narrative in giving the prohibition of “idolatry” first priority. In the space that is constructed by the Mosaic distinction, the worship of images came to be regarded as the absolute horror, falsehood, and apostasy. Polytheism and idolatry were seen as the same form of religious error. The second commandment is a commentary on the first . . . Images are automatically “other gods”, because the true god is invisible and cannot be iconically represented¹⁹.

The mosaic distinction, then, takes concrete shape in the form of the *true* religion of the one invisible God, defined by its rejection of the *false* religion of idols.

Idolatry as the rhetorical “other” of monotheism often came to be associated with danger and immorality, but clearly the more basic procedure of exclusion relied on the opposition between truth and error. There is no obvious danger in worshiping idols—quite the contrary, pagans would consider it dangerous to neglect such worship—and it must have been very puzzling to pagans that Jews and Christians often described it in moral terms as

¹⁷ Halbertal & Margalit, *Idolatry*, 236.

¹⁸ Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 1-2. Cf. Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung*.

¹⁹ Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 4.

“whoredom”²⁰; such associations naturally followed, however, in the wake of the prior perception, basic to monotheism, of pagan idolatry as false belief²¹. And this category of error, which in contemporary Western society is sanctioned by no more than ridicule, became the object of grave prohibitions in the original Jewish context and later throughout the history of Christianity. Simply to be wrong constituted a capital offense²².

The construction of a “pagan other” is the first crucial move in the Grand Polemical Narrative by which mainstream Western culture has been constructing its own identity. It is easy to demonstrate that, as a matter of historical fact, ideas and traditions integral to paganism have nevertheless been essential components of Christianity from very early on²³, and have continued to exert an enormous influence throughout the history of Western culture: obvious examples are Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, but also Hermetism and even Zoroastrianism in elite culture, or the enormous variety of pagan practices that have always continued to thrive in popular culture²⁴. But in the imagination of Christians this factual omnipresence of

²⁰ The connotations of idolatry with sexual transgression and immorality (e.g. infidelity, prostitution, nymphomania) are pervasive in the Hebrew Bible, and are discussed in detail in the first chapter (“Idolatry and Betrayal”) of Halbertal & Margalit, *Idolatry*.

²¹ Which became considerably worse if it happened not out of ignorance, but was seen as a conscious choice and commitment; hence the strong association in the Hebrew Bible of idolatry with sexual infidelity. As explained by Halbertal and Margalit, ‘[t]hrough the root metaphor of marriage, God’s relationship to Israel is construed by the prophets as exclusive. Within the marriage metaphor God is the jealous and betrayed husband, Israel is the unfaithful wife, and the third parties in the triangle—the lovers—are the other gods. Idolatry, then, is the wife’s betrayal of the husband with strangers, with lovers who had no shared biography with Israel, the other gods whom Israel never knew’ (*Idolatry*, 237; cf. detailed discussion on 9-36).

²² I cannot here go into the juridical aspects of this development. For an excellent discussion focused on the case of astrology, see von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie*, 782-797. What was perceived as the irrationality or insanity of heretical and “pagan” belief (see e.g. the Edict of Emperor Theodosius, quoted in Von Stuckrad, o.c., 797: ‘dementes vesanosque . . . haeretici dogmatis’) could be sanctioned by prohibition and persecution.

²³ The only way in which anyone can possibly deny this, is by reverting to the concept that “Christianity” consists only of “true Christianity”. Such an approach is obviously unacceptable from any historical and academic perspective; nevertheless it has been basic to traditional Church history, and occasionally this is even openly admitted by Church historians themselves (see the representative case of Bakhuizen van den Brink discussed in my ‘The Dreams of Theology’).

²⁴ The cases of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism are too well known to require bibliographical support. As for Hermetism, see e.g. Moreschini, *Storia dell’ermetismo cristiano* and Roelof van den Broek, Paolo Lucentini, Vittoria Perrone Compagni, and Antoine Faivre, ‘Hermetic Literature I, II, IV’, in: Hanegraaff et al., *DGWE*. For Zoroastrianism the standard reference is Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*. For popular culture, among a flood of studies see e.g. Harmening, *Superstitio*, Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, or Keith Thomas’s classic *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. With the possible exception of Aristotelianism, the “idolatrous”

paganism in Christianity has been obscured with remarkable success by the power of polemical discourse²⁵. This discourse rested upon an imaginal construct: the ideal concept of the Church as the “pure”, “uncontaminated”, “healthy” body of Christ which continuously needs to be defended against the danger of “attack”, “contamination”, “infection” and so on, by its enemies. Few Christians would deny that such contamination often did take place—after all, any claim that the historical (rather than the ideal) Church was entirely pure and healthy would amount to denying the presence of sin and the need for redemption. But the ambiguities, complexities and general messiness of historical reality made it all the more necessary to uphold the clarity of the ideal.

Accordingly, our concern here is not with the unavoidable gap between spiritual ideal and earthly realities, but with the common confusion between those two in the practice of *historiography*, which has consistently sought to exorcize the paganism integral to historical Christianity by presenting it as “other”. Theologically such a rhetorical procedure was not only understandable but necessary: as a “counter-religion” born from the monotheistic rejection of idolatry, Christianity would not have been able to define its own identity otherwise. Nevertheless, from a consistent historical perspective—which defines its very identity (!) by opposing demonstrable facts against pious rhetoric, contingency against providence, diversity against unicity, complexity against simplicity, and indeed relativity against dogmatic truth-claims²⁶—such procedures do confuse myth with reality, and are simply incorrect.

dimension of the traditions was quite obvious: one thinks of the practice of *telestikè* (animation of statues) in Neoplatonic theurgy, the criticism (since Augustine, and greatly emphasized by William of Auvergne) of Hermetic idolatry as evident from *Asclepius* 23-24/37-38, the traditional status of Zoroaster as the inventor of magic (inseparable, as will be seen, from idolatry), and the generally “idolatrous” nature or implications of many “folklore” traditions in Christianity (e.g. use of talismans, veneration of statues of saints).

²⁵ For a longer development of this point, see my ‘The Dreams of Theology’.

²⁶ Hence historians should beware of creating their own polemical simplifications. One could argue that the present paper, and my ‘Dreams of Theology’ article, are themselves examples of a polemical discourse. Although I do not wish to construe “theologians” as an artificial enemy, it is true that they are indeed a target insofar as they confuse myth and reality; and although the simplification necessary in any polemical discourse is explicitly incompatible with the very position I am defending, I cannot avoid it altogether if I want to make myself understood. If this proves anything, it is that me and my opponents find ourselves in the same predicament, insofar as none of us can claim the virtue of an “uncontaminated purity” as opposed to the “error” of our opponents. Which is, in fact, exactly my point.

In sum: I suggest that the construction of a “pagan other” has been the first step—and arguably the most crucial one—in the development of a “grand narrative” of Western religion, culture and civilization. This narrative of “who, what and how we want to be” relies upon a concept of who, what and how we do *not* want to be: pagan, or associated with anything pagan. But regardless of such wishes, as a matter of historical fact paganism is and always has been part of what we *are*: it is an integral part of Western religion, culture and civilization, and cannot be separated from what lived Christianity has been from the very beginning. This fact, however, could not be openly acknowledged, or even be allowed to surface into conscious awareness; and as a result, a “space” was created in the collective imagination that was occupied by the pagan “other”. In the course of a long development, this space eventually developed into what we now refer to as Western esotericism.

The Construction of Heresy: Christianity versus Gnosticism

All the later stages in the development of the Grand Polemical Narrative are to some extent variations on the basic opposition of pagan versus nonpagan, which is in its bare essence an opposition of error versus truth. But they added new rhetorical twists to it, which variously emphasized the variants of “danger”, “immorality” and “irrationality” (or “madness”); and they added a wealth of new contents, in the form of various ideas and beliefs that had not been present in the original imaginary of “paganism” or had remained implicit rather than overt.

“Gnosticism” is a particularly clear example of an artificial construct that came to be reified by means of polemical discourse—so successfully, in fact, that almost all academic specialists throughout the 19th and 20th centuries have assumed that it referred to a historically identifiable current or movement. It is sobering to realize that the very term “gnosticism” was invented as late as 1669 by (again) Henry More, as a pejorative umbrella concept for what polemicists like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Hippolytus of Rome and Ipihanus of Salamis had rejected as heresy in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Significantly, in view of the previous section, More’s primary focus of attack was Catholicism, described as ‘a spice of the old abhorred Gnosticism’ and a false prophecy that seduces true Christians into (guess what . . .) idolatry!²⁷

²⁷ See Henry More, *An Exposition of the Seven Epistles*, 99 (‘. . . to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to Idols, which is a chief point of that which was called Gnosticisme’), and for the formulation quoted in the text, see idem, *Antidote against Idolatry* [unpaginated],

In one of the most important recent studies in the field, Michael Allen Williams has explained in detail why “gnosticism” is in fact a ‘dubious category’ that creates a distorted picture of historical reality and therefore should be ‘dismantled’ as soon as possible²⁸. And Karen L. King has provided useful discussions not only of how “gnosticism” was construed as the fundamental heresy, but also of how the heresiological polemics of the 2nd and 3rd centuries have provided modern scholarship with its basic terminological conventions and theoretical assumptions²⁹. Her discussion provides detailed confirmation of my basic point that “gnosticism” is an artificial polemical construct that has always consisted in the imagination rather than in historical reality, and could be created and kept alive only by means of simplification. King’s conclusion says it all:

... the polemicists have reigned supreme for most of the twentieth century; scholars have tended to evaluate Gnosticism negatively, and on nearly the same grounds as the polemicists did heresy. Gnosticism has been described as theologically inferior and ethically flawed; as an artificial and syncretic parasite; as an individualistic, nihilistic, and escapist religion incapable of forming any kind of true moral community. Scholars have included an increasingly wide range of diverse materials under the category of Gnosticism, and yet they have chafed at the problem of defining its essential characteristics. But above all, we have been mistakenly preoccupied with determining its origin and tracing its genealogical relation to orthodox Christianity because we have unwittingly reified a rhetorical category into a historical entity³⁰.

As in the case of paganism, “gnosticism” was rhetorically excluded primarily as being based upon theological “error”; hence its usefulness for defining the polemicists’ identity as representatives of “orthodoxy”—upholders of the right doctrine. Other negative features followed as a matter of course: “gnosticism” is “dangerous” because it stimulates individualism and hence division, that is to say, it undermines legitimate authority; those who lack a solid grounding in the truth are bound to lapse into “immoral” behaviour, and of course examples (such as the well-known accusations of sexual libertinism) are readily found; and their rejection of philosophy as a sufficient way towards divine knowledge could be used to present the gnostic emphasis

included as an appendix to the *Exposition*. For the complete original quotations, see Layton, ‘Prolegomena’, 348-349 (= ‘Appendix: Henry More’s Coinage of the Word “Gnosticism”’).

²⁸ Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*; and see discussion in Van den Broek, ‘Coptic Gnostic and Manichaean Literature’, 673-676.

²⁹ King, *What is Gnosticism?*

³⁰ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 52.

on “gnosis” as demonstrating their lack of rationality. Furthermore, as with “paganism”, it is striking how frequently one encounters the language of purity and contamination.

As I emphasized earlier, the imaginary nature of “gnosticism” does not mean that it did not correspond with anything real. But instead of any well-defined “current”, “movement”, or even “religion” of gnosticism³¹, what we do find in the Roman empire during the later hellenistic period is a diffuse and complex type of religiosity, based upon the pursuit of gnosis or salvific esoteric knowledge³². It included not only what Williams would like us to call “biblical demiurgical” traditions, but also Christians such as Clement of Alexandria and the currents that inspired the hermetic literature; and as those examples readily demonstrate, it ignored religious boundaries and could manifest itself in pagan and Christian, as well as in Jewish contexts. This fluidity and flexibility may have been one reason why the polemicists felt threatened by it. The construction of heresy, as explained by King, ‘was only one part of the larger rhetorical enterprise of establishing the boundaries of normative Christianity, which also had to distinguish itself from other forms of belief and practice, notably Judaism and paganism’³³. The basic polemical strategies were similar in all these cases, but the targets were recognizably different. Hence it made sense for polemicists to reduce the problem of gnosis to its manifestations that called themselves Christian. By and large, this is what became the heresy later called “gnosticism”. Other manifestations of gnosis could be subsumed under the umbrellas of Judaism and Paganism, and refuted as part of relatively separate polemics.

The Construction of Magic: Christianity versus Demon-Worship

The term *magiké* (the art of the *mágoi*, or Persian priests) originated with the Greeks, who used it to indicate ‘a ritual practitioner occupied with private rites whose legitimacy was contested and often, at least in later times, marginalised and forbidden’³⁴. From the beginning, *mageia* was an imprecise but generally negative term, referring to what was seen as the opposite of legitimate and overt religious practice³⁵. There were many equivalents to

³¹ Cf. the famous title by Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*.

³² Hanegraaff, ‘Introduction’, vii–viii, with reference to Van den Broek, ‘Gnosticism I’.

³³ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 21.

³⁴ As formulated by Fritz Graf, ‘Magic II’, 719.

³⁵ For Greek and Latin understandings of the term “magic” and its cognates, see also De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 387ff.

magiké or aspects of it, such as the Greek *gōes* (someone who communicates with the dead, hence *goeteía*), *pharmakeútria* (a woman using herbs and drugs) or *analutēs* (a specialist in undoing binding-spells), and the Latin *saga* (witch), *veneficus* (poisoner) or *maleficus* (evildoer)³⁶. Early Christian authors in the Roman empire inherited the concept of *magia* and its equivalents as a category of exclusion, but naturally understood it within their own framework of true versus false religion, that is to say, the opposition of Christian belief against pagan idolatry. Up through the 12th century, which saw the emergence of new concepts of *magia naturalis*, magic in Christian discourse became therefore equivalent to trafficking with demons³⁷, who, as was well understood, were the very same entities that had manifested themselves as “gods” to the pagans.

Hence it is quite clear that the Christian discourse of magic came to occupy a major part of the “space” in the collective imagination that had been created by the original monotheism-paganism distinction. In that process, however, the imaginary “other” acquired a new aura. From the perspective of anti-pagan counter-religion, the Greek and Roman concept of magic as illegitimate or forbidden practice became something much more dramatic, by being “demonized” as the domain of the Enemy of Mankind. As explained by Valerie Flint,

The characterization of “magic” as the work solely of wicked demons, and of “sorcerers” and “magicians” as their servants, stemmed from two convergent developments. In the first place, the concept of the “daimon” changed . . . In the second, “*magia*”, or “*magic*”, became the *chief* term whereby the most powerful of the emerging religious systems described, and condemned, the supernatural exercises of their enemies. In brief, as organized and institutionalized religious practice was asked to play an ever more prominent place in the daily life of humans, as an exclusive form of monotheism commanded much of this practice, and as Christianity, in particular, assumed . . . a quasi-imperial role, the older, looser, views of the dealings of human beings with the “*daimones*” could no longer be tolerated. The “*daimon*” was translated, then, into the evil demon of Judaic and Christian literature . . . Thus, those humans who looked to obtain supernatural help in the older ways and through an older or different “*daimon*”, came to be viewed by many as terminally deluded, and their exercises seen as magic as its worst. Sorcerers and magicians were then “demonized” by being declared subject only to the demonic forces of evil, and were described as offering reinforcement to the most wicked of these forces’ designs. The process of

³⁶ Graf, ‘Magic II’, 719.

³⁷ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 10-11.

demonisation was greatly assisted by the extraordinary range of activities which had meanwhile been captured under the name of magic³⁸.

In the course of such redefinitions of pagan religion as (demonic) magic, the original emphasis on religious error clearly shifted towards an emphasis on *danger*. While one may seek to refute the errors of pagans, gnostics, or heretics generally, in an effort to win them over to the truth, such an approach is useless in the case of demons: the important thing is, rather, to protect individuals and society against the enemy. And because—as rightly pointed out by Flint—an enormous variety of activities had now come to be covered by the same term “magic”, they could all be perceived as manifestations of one and the same threat. Again, we see how simplification is essential to a polemical agenda. The assumption of demonic agency became in fact the only universally agreed-upon characteristic of “magic”, which now functioned as a polemical waste-basket category lumping together such widely different things as divination (itself a category including various techniques, e.g. geomancy, hydromancy, aeromancy, pyromancy, astrology, observation of flight and sounds of birds, or of the entrails of animals, and so on)³⁹, evocation of angels, demons or the dead, curse tablets and image magic, amulets and talismans, the activities of witches, enchantment by magical use of words, ligatures, and so on.

Nowadays, all these “exceptive arts” or varieties of “superstition”⁴⁰ are routinely associated—by specialized academics no less than by the general audience—with “magic” (or with the more recent term “the occult”); and throughout the history of Christianity, theologians have sought to convince their fellow Christians that these activities were unlawful, dangerous, immoral, deluded, and wrong. Of course, the mere fact that they needed to do so proves that many Christians *did* practice them. There is no particular reason to assume that, in doing so, they intended to choose the devil’s part; more likely they simply expected to gain something useful from these arts and techniques, and did not see why they should be so incompatible with Christian faith. Again, I would emphasize that from a historical point of view, all such practices, no matter how far removed they may be from standard concepts of normative Christianity, must be recognized as integral parts of the tapestry of Christianity as a living culture⁴¹. Within that culture, “magic”

³⁸ Flint, ‘The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity’, 279.

³⁹ See Charmasson, ‘Divinatory Arts’.

⁴⁰ See the catalogues of practices associated with this term in Harmening, *Superstitio*.

⁴¹ The only alternative is the arrogant position, implicit in traditional approaches, according to which only an elite of professional theologians ever really understood what Christianity meant:

has always been a hotly contested space, but the efforts of leading theologians and church leaders to exclude it as the “other” of Christianity should be seen as part of a polemical discourse internal to Christianity itself, rather than being taken at face value as though they were a historically reliable description of factual realities. In the practice of church history and largely of history in general, however, the standard phenomenon of a confusion between polemical concepts and historical realities has reigned supreme. Just as in the case of “gnosticism”, the terms and categories of the polemicists have (consciously or unconsciously) been taken over by academics and have been allowed to strongly influence the way we have perceived and construed the history of Christianity and of Western culture as a whole.

The Re-Construction of Paganism: Protestantism versus Roman Catholicism

That “paganism” and “magic” had actually become integral parts of Christianity was keenly perceived by the leaders of the Reformation, who accordingly sought to exclude Roman Catholicism from the domain of legitimate religion. Hence history repeated itself in the 16th century: the Reformation—and Calvinism most in particular—defined its very identity by polemically excluding Roman Catholicism as the “other” of true Christianity, in a way that is structurally similar to the cases we have just explored. In this process, the emphasis shifts back again from “danger” towards “error”⁴².

The relation between “paganism” and “magic” in this Protestant discourse is extremely complex, with the concept of “idolatry” as arguably a major point of connection; but this is hardly the place to go into that problematics in any detail. Suffice it to say that the truth-error distinction basic to traditional anti-pagan polemics is given a vehement new sting in the new Protestant variety, by means of being framed in terms of a distinction between *belief and practice*. This was something new. In a Roman Catholic context the true doctrine was not only embodied in the Church, but also ritually enacted in its central ceremonies; therefore by religious practice, the faithful

a position that (arrogance apart) can logically be maintained only if one holds to an essentialist instead of historical understanding of Christianity. See again my ‘Dreams of Theology’.

⁴² And note that the strategy of ridicule was a major one already in this context. One good example of this is the Calvinist polemicist Philips van Marnix, Lord of St. Aldegonde (1540–1598), whose biting satire *De Biëncorff der H. Roomsche Kercke* (The Beehive of the Roman Catholic Church; 1569) went through many editions. See also the “invectives” discussed in Claude Postel, *Traité des invectives*.

participated in the truth. Not so from a Protestant perspective. Salvation comes from faith alone, that is to say, not from ritual participation, good works, or any other kind of practice. Together with Roman Catholicism, this principle has the effect of very cleanly and effectively excluding both “paganism” and “magic” from the domain of legitimate Christianity.

The same simple Protestant principle has exerted an enormous influence over how the nature of “religion” has come to be perceived since the 16th century, in academic contexts and generally—with far-reaching but usually overlooked implications for the study of Western esotericism. The modern study of religion has only slowly managed to break free from the crypto-Protestant idea that religion is based upon—and hence defined by—“belief” (i.e. upon the adherence to certain propositions held to be true), and many scholars continue to think in these terms even today. Applied to the history of Christianity, this has the effect of calling attention away from its symbolic, mythical and ritual aspects⁴³, in favour of an artificial concentration on Christian doctrine as supposedly representing the core of what Christianity is all about for the believer. In terms of the Grand Polemical Narrative such a reduction makes perfect sense, but historically it is extremely misleading, for in many respects an approach based upon the Protestant principle is simply incapable of describing who Christians have actually been, what they have believed, and how they have behaved. Any dimension of lived Christianity that does not fit the pattern is simply not registered. Once again, confusion between polemical concepts and historical realities caused the latter to be perceived from a simplifying ideological angle, and the resulting picture was taken for granted by later generations as factual description.

With respect to Western esotericism, the contribution of Protestantism to the Grand Polemical Narrative has had a double effect. First, it strongly amplified the already existing practice of excluding “paganism”, “gnosticism” and “magic”—domains which, however, as every student of Western esotericism knows, had just been witnessing an important revival engineered by Catholics in the half century preceding the Reformation⁴⁴—from the

⁴³ While highlighting the triad “symbol, myth and ritual” in what follows, I will assume that they include the role of the visual as such. The religious use of images may be included under ritual practice, regardless of whether images are seen as mere “symbols” or, more concretely, as direct representations or embodiments of what they represent.

⁴⁴ I am not aware of any major studies that explore systematically and in detail to what extent the explicit defense of “paganism” and “magic” in the wake of the rediscovery of hermetism—by Catholics such as Ficino, Lazzarelli, Pico della Mirandola and so on, and often combined with defenses of that other traditional enemy, Judaism—played a role in Protestant polemics against Roman Catholicism. On the face of it, one would expect that the phenomenon of a

domain of Christianity. And second, it promoted an approach to religion in general that emphasizes only doctrine and verbal/scriptural expression. As a result, if the excluded “other” came in view at all, not only was it automatically put in a negative light, but even more seriously, its symbolic, mythical and ritual aspects were bound to be systematically ignored, played down or “translated” into something that could be verbalized and understood in doctrinal terms. Apart from the fact that symbolic, mythical and ritual dimensions are integral parts of *any* kind of religion (including even the most extreme manifestations of Protestantism itself⁴⁵), for our present concerns it is essential to see that the types of religiosity which had been excluded as “other” in Western culture had always been characterized precisely by a strong emphasis on those very dimensions: paganism is largely practice supported by myth (and flourishing in the veneration of images), gnosticism is nothing without its rich mythology⁴⁶, magic is eminently something done and not just something believed in, and the role of images and symbols is pervasive in all these domains.

In his study of eros and magic in the Renaissance, Ioan P. Couliano has analyzed the “censorship of the imaginary” as a historical process with profound effects, that developed in the wake of the Reformation⁴⁷; and one merely needs to think of the iconoclasm of Protestantism and its pervasive rhetoric against Roman Catholic “idolatry”, to realize that the attack on images cannot be separated (except conceptually and analytically) from the censorship of religious “practice” and ritual⁴⁸. By seeking to exclude Roman Catholicism from legitimate Christianity and include it in the pagan/magical domain of the “other”, the Protestant discourse cemented its own identity as the anti-imaginal, anti-mythical and anti-ritualistic counterreligion *par excellence*; and this, in turn, could not but amplify long-standing associations of “truth” with the clarity of words, and “error” with the ambiguity of images⁴⁹.

hermetic/neoplatonic Christianity defended by Catholics would make it an ideal target for Protestants, as demonstrating how deeply the Roman Catholic church had sunk.

⁴⁵ See e.g. the example of Calvinism briefly discussed in my ‘Dreams of Theology’.

⁴⁶ See the discussions of “mythological gnosis” in van den Broek, ‘Gnosticism I’.

⁴⁷ Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, 193.

⁴⁸ See in this regard Bräunlein, ‘Bildakte’. On iconoclasm, see e.g. Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*; Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm*; Deyon & Lottin, *Les casseurs de l’été 1566*; Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*.

⁴⁹ See Claire Fanger’s unpublished Ph.D. dissertation *Signs of Power and the Power of Signs* (chapter “Inventing the Grand Dichotomy: St Augustine, Signs and Superstition”) for a brilliant discussion of Augustine’s ideas about miraculous versus demonic signs, with reference to his *De doctrina Christiana*. Augustine’s discussion is based upon the conventional nature of signs, whose only meaningful use is ‘the transfer of a *motus animi*, a concept, from one mind to

But the ascetic ideal of a religion based only on words was hard, perhaps impossible, to maintain in practice. It is significant that some of the most important innovative currents in the history of “Western esotericism” since the 16th century emerged precisely from Protestant foundations: notably the Rosicrucian Manifestoes and the Christian Theosophical current linked to the work of Jacob Boehme both sprouted from Lutheran foundations and demonstrate that myth, symbolism and the religious imagination could flourish in a Protestant context. But it is no less true that precisely these currents, together with their Hermetic/Neoplatonic and Paracelsian origins, came to be branded as *Schwärmerei* (“enthusiasm”) and heresy by mostly Protestant polemicists, and finally ended up enriching the space of the pagan-gnostic-magical “other” with new concepts, myths and images.

Ehregott Daniel Colberg’s polemic against *Das Platonisch-Hermetisches* [sic] *Christenthum* (1690-1691) plays an important role here, as arguably the first book to present what we now refer to as Western esotericism as a specific domain in its own right. Colberg saw the connections that historians of Western esotericism still emphasize today: a specific type of “Platonic-Hermetic Christianity” had come into existence since the 15th century, and had further developed into currents such as Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism and Bohemian theosophy. Colberg sought to warn his readers against this danger, but only a few years later Gottfried Arnold’s famous *Impartial History of Churches and Heresies* took the side of the heretics in what amounted to

another’. Demons, however, are not interested in clarity but in entrapment of human beings; and therefore demonic signs are necessarily ambiguous and violate the rational transfer of conceptual meanings: ‘the transfer of meaning . . . must somehow be *incomplete* in demonic language: the intended meaning never reaches the human recipient whole, for if it did, it would not “lead” anywhere. The communication is always broken off before it is fully understood, and hence the hearer is made curious, tempted to further communication (aiming to “complete” the transfer of thought), thus proceeding farther and farther into the trap’. The demons play on human curiosity: ‘The kind of appetite that leads to entrapment by demonic signifiers is *curiositas*, the perverse and insatiable . . . desire to know things for their own sake. One might even say that the “appetite” designated by the term *curiositas* is an appetite for signs themselves, rather than for meaning as it is embodied in signs used appropriately’. Such misuse of signs is a perversion of divine worship itself, and hence directly related to idolatry: ‘the diviner, the curious or superstitious person, looks to the sign as thing rather than to the thing the sign stands for, just as idolaters look to the statue of a god, to creature rather than Creator’. Augustine points out that the rejection of idols should be extended to ‘all imaginary signs, which lead to worship of idols, or worship of creation and its parts in place of God’ (*De doctrina* II,23.36). Idolatry, then, becomes a subcategory of all practices involving “imaginary signs”, i.e. ‘signs of imaginary things, conducive to (or the product of) fantastic imaginings, rather than reason or good sense’.

a counter-polemics against orthodoxy⁵⁰. And in 1703 he published Abraham von Franckenberg's *Theophrastia Valentiniana* (orig. 1629, but not printed before): the first known apology of gnosticism⁵¹. Although the terminology used to refer to the "other" has always remained quite fluid and hence confusing, "hermetic" eventually emerged as a particularly convenient term since it could be connected to so many aspects of the field: the hermetic writings themselves, the traditional "hermetic art" of alchemy, and hence all types of *Naturphilosophie* somehow associated with Paracelsianism. In sum, as I concluded elsewhere,

In a manner very similar to what happened in Late Antiquity, with the reification of "Gnosticism" as a distinct heretical system opposed to Christianity, the concept of a distinct system or tradition of "Hermeticism" (comprising . . . the entire mixture of hermetic literature, neoplatonic speculation, kabbalah, alchemy, astrology, and magic outlined above) seems to have emerged in the 17th century and to have been taken up especially in Protestant contexts. It is mainly against this background that the proponents of the Enlightenment came to present it as the epitome of unreason and superstition⁵².

This new concept of "hermeticism"—in fact an umbrella term that comprises the entire "referential corpus" central to what modern scholars understand by modern "Western esotericism"—therefore emerged as a Protestant polemical concept. It is essentially a late 17th/18th-century development of the Grand Polemical Narrative whose earlier stages I have been tracing. The space originally occupied by "paganism" in the monotheistic imagination, and which later came to include "gnosticism" and "magic" in the Christian imagination, had now been further embellished by the revived and Christianized paganisms of Neoplatonism and Hermetism, various forms of Christian kabbalah, Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism, and Christian Theosophy. The arts or disciplines of astrology, alchemy and *magia naturalis* had been

⁵⁰ Colberg's and Arnold's importance in this regard seems to have been first noted by Faivre & Voss, 'Western Esotericism', 54, and cf. the longer discussion in Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 11-12. More recently it was discussed at length in Neugebauer-Wölk, 'Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800', and see also Hanegraaff, 'The Study of Western Esotericism', 490. Neugebauer-Wölk's very interesting discussion and criticism of the approach outlined in my 'Dreams of Theology', and its implications for how we look at the relation between Western esotericism and Christianity, require a much more detailed response than would be possible here. As for Protestant anti-esoteric (or more specifically, anti-theosophical) discourse more generally, see in particular Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 16-19. Faivre seems to have been the first to call attention to the importance of Protestant polemics in the history of Christian theosophy and of Western esotericism more generally.

⁵¹ See Gilly, 'Das Bekenntnis zur Gnosis', 416-422.

⁵² Hanegraaff, 'Introduction', in: *DGWE*, x.

integral parts of this compound at least since the neoplatonic revival of the later 15th century (although the sources, of course, went back through the Islamic and Christian middle ages to the Hellenistic culture of Late Antiquity); but due to their status as traditional sciences they would be highlighted for special emphasis in the final stage of the Grand Polemical Narrative, that occurred in the 18th century.

The Construction of the Occult: The Enlightenment against the Irrational

The so-called Scientific Revolution developed in a culture rife with religious, social and political conflict, and hence dominated by a complex variety of polemical discourses. It is usually impossible in this context to make any sharp separation between strictly scientific or philosophical polemics and purely religious ones, and hence we encounter the basic oppositions discussed above in the debates of science and natural philosophy no less than in those pertaining to theology. For the very same reason, however, the 16th and 17th centuries are *not* characterized by anything resembling the clearcut opposition of “science against superstition” or “reason against unreason” so familiar from traditional historiography in the wake of the Enlightenment. It was simply not typical for scientists to oppose “science” against “religion” and reject the latter; instead, scientists usually saw themselves as taking the side of truth, which naturally included true religion, against whatever they saw as error. One clear illustration is the case of the witchcraft debate. In his groundbreaking monograph of 1997, Stuart Clark explains why and how the ‘reassuring story of the victory of science over magic, of reason over ignorance, and, in the sphere of demonology itself, of scepticism over belief’⁵³ has been thoroughly undermined by what we now know about the “scientific revolution”:

... men who were undoubtedly leading exponents of the new styles of natural philosophy, who championed the Royal Society, and were, some of them, fellows of it, went out of their way to insist on the reality of witchcraft and the importance of demonic activity in the natural world. On the other hand, neither of the leading critics of witchcraft beliefs who went into print in this period—John Webster and John Wagstaffe—were “new scientists” ... Arguably the most powerful of all sceptical treatments of witchcraft was still Reginald Scot’s—reissued in 1651, 1654, and 1665 but originally published in 1584, and steeped in theological, rather than natural scientific orthodoxies⁵⁴.

⁵³ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 296.

⁵⁴ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 296.

In other words, the traditional type of religious polemics that saw magic as based upon demonic activity remained in full force; and progressive scientists tended to continue believing in demons rather than rejecting them as figments of the superstitious imagination (as they were supposed to have done according to later historians). Likewise, in lieu of many other examples, it may suffice here to mention the famous cases (which can easily be expanded) of the practicing astrologer Kepler, or the alchemical activities of Newton and Boyle—all of them devout Christians—to make the by now uncontroversial point that the so-called “occult sciences” were integral parts of the history of the scientific revolution. Obviously this does not mean that subjects like magic, alchemy or astrology were never targets of attack from scientific perspectives that we now recognize as “progressive” (see e.g. the well-known case of Robert Fludd, attacked by Mersenne, Gassendi and Kepler). The point is, rather, that defenders and opponents could be found on both sides of the divide (or rather, the grey area or no man’s land) that divided the new science from traditional approaches in natural philosophy. Even leaving aside other considerations⁵⁵, this in itself is sufficient to demonstrate that a rejection of the “occult sciences” cannot reasonably be construed as representative of the scientific revolution as a whole.

Of course that revolution eventually led to the emergence of what we now recognize as “genuine science”, and against that background 18th-century Enlightenment discourse—or rather, the simplified versions of that discourse which eventually, during the 19th century, came to be perceived as such⁵⁶—did polemically oppose reason against irrationality and science against superstition or “the occult”. In doing so, it could fall back on the entire existing reservoir of excluded “others” and their associated stereotypes, inherited by Enlightenment ideologues and their intellectual heirs from monotheistic and Christian polemical discourse, but now rejected for new and different reasons. From a perspective that emphasized the progress of reason over the superstitions of the past, the original “pagan” other was seen as representing a “primitive”⁵⁷ stage of human consciousness dominated by idolatrous

⁵⁵ I am thinking here of the role played by the concept of “*qualitates occultae*”, on which see Hutchison, ‘What Happened to Occult Qualities’, Millen, ‘The Manifestation of Occult Qualities’, and Hanegraaff, ‘Occult / Occultism’.

⁵⁶ It has become very clear in recent decades that the idealized picture of “Enlightenment discourse” as codified in historiography since the 19th century does not match—once again, for the same story repeats itself over and over again—its actual complexity. See in this regard e.g. McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, Neugebauer-Wölk, *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, and various contributions in Trepp & Lehmann, *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis*.

⁵⁷ The negative connotations of that word were not yet obvious in the 18th century; see e.g. Court de Gébelin’s 9-volume *Le monde primitif* (1773-1782).

image-worship. Referred to as “fetishism” since Charles de Brosse (1760), idolatry was routinely associated with “magic”, and both were seen as based upon “wrong thinking”. “Fetishism” was intellectually inferior because it relied on a failure to distinguish between a material image and the concept symbolized by it; and “magic” (frequently used as a synonym for “occult philosophy” or “occult science”) relied on the equally confused belief that occult “correspondences” merely imagined in the human mind reflected real connections in the material world⁵⁸. The former type of approach clearly reflects traditional Christian perceptions of paganism and magic as “wrong religion”, whereas the latter reflects perceptions of *magia naturalis* and all other “occult” disciplines as “wrong science”; and in both cases, the implicit “intellectualist” bias which takes it for granted that religious behaviour is rooted in intellectual processes is clearly a legacy of the Protestant principle discussed earlier. It goes without saying, furthermore, that the traditional association of all these domains with demonic activity strongly amplified their perception as primitive and backward, based upon the fears and delusions that had dominated human consciousness for so long and that were now finally being driven away—or so it was hoped—by the light of reason.

In sum: the space in the collective imagination occupied by the “other” of monotheism and official Christianity, which had grown and developed through the various stages outlined above, had now finally been transformed into the space containing *Das Andere der Vernunft*⁵⁹. As such, it has exerted an incalculable influence over the academic study of religion and of culture in general during the 19th and through most of the 20th century. The Enlightenment defined its own identity by means of a polemical discourse that presented itself as entirely rational, while excluding all forms of “superstition” as wholly irrational and hence misguided⁶⁰. And this superstition included much more than the dogmas of the church: the entire “hermetic” compound that had come to be perceived as a quasi-autonomous “current” or “movement” by Protestant polemicists around the end of the 17th century was readily available for assuming the role of the “other” of reason. An attitude of ridicule was usually most effective as a polemical strategy, but as

⁵⁸ For these approaches, see discussion in Hanegraaff, ‘The Emergence of the Academic Science of Magic’.

⁵⁹ See Böhme & Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft*.

⁶⁰ A question that cannot be developed in more detail here is in how far Enlightenment perceptions of “religion” as such were in fact determined by it being associated primarily with Roman Catholicism rather than Protestantism, and of the former with paganism and magic (viz. worship of images, emphasis on ritual practice rather than doctrine).

the Enlightenment discourse developed through the 19th and especially the 20th centuries, it has often emphasized the aspects of immorality and especially of “danger” as well. This is particularly clear in the case of the various kinds of modernist discourse that perceive phenomena such as fascism and National Socialism as a return of the “gnostic” enemy and as the fatal result of a *Zerstörung der Vernunft*⁶¹ vaguely but persistently associated with “the occult” in general⁶².

As an epilogue to the above, it should be noted that the reification mainly by Protestant and Enlightenment authors of “Hermeticism” as a coherent counterculture of superstition and unreason, followed by its exclusion from acceptable discourse, forced its sympathizers to adopt similar strategies. From the 18th century on and throughout the 19th, as a by-product of secularization and the disenchantment of the world, one sees them engaged in attempts at construing their own identity by means of the “invention of tradition”: essentially adopting the Protestant and Enlightenment category of the rejected other, they sought to defend it as based upon a superior worldview with ancient roots, and opposed to religious dogmatism and narrow-minded rationalism. This process is part of a new kind of polemical discourse, in which self-styled “esotericists”, “occultists”, “magicians”, and eventually “pagans” as well, self-consciously define themselves in opposition to religious and scientific orthodoxies. The rhetorics and strategies of exclusion at work here would merit a separate analysis, but fall beyond the limits I have set myself in the present article⁶³.

3. *Implications*

I have argued that the perception of “Western Esotericism” as a domain of research in its own right is the historical outcome of a polemical discourse that ultimately goes all the way back to the origins of monotheism, and in

⁶¹ Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*.

⁶² With respect to gnosticism, a very clear example is the political philosopher Eric Voegelin (see section on him in Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction’, 29-36). For occultism in general, see in particular Pauwels & Bergier’s very influential bestseller *Le Matin des Magiciens*; and cf. the very useful appendix “The Modern Mythology of Nazi Occultism” to Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots*.

⁶³ For short discussions at the example of “magic”, see Hanegraaff, ‘Magic V’ and ‘How Magic Survived’. Very interesting in this regard is the tension between “Abwehr” (rejection) and “Verlangen” (desire) analyzed by von Stuckrad at the example of (neo)shamanism; see esp. von Stuckrad, *Schamanismus und Esoterik*, 273-279.

fact consists of long series of successive simplifications. It is by the end of the 17th century in a Protestant context that this field was first conceptualized in a manner roughly equivalent to modern scholarly understandings, and its perception as a domain different not only from mainstream religion but also from normative science and philosophy is rooted in Enlightenment discourse. This account clearly confirms the nature of “Western Esotericism” as a theoretical construct instead of a natural term, and is incompatible with common religionist ideas according to which there exists something “essentially” esoteric. Nothing “is” esoteric unless it is construed as such by somebody for some reason.

I believe it would be too simple to attribute the traditional resistance of academics against the study of Western esotericism merely to the fact that they reject its perspectives from their own “Enlightenment” worldview, or even to the feeling that by taking such a field seriously one gives it some legitimacy. Both certainly play a role, but I would suggest that on a deeper level, the fact that—until recently—the study of Western esotericism was almost completely excluded from academic research finds its explanation in the very nature of polemics as such. The process of simplification that is basic to any polemical discourse requires that access to detailed factual information be restricted as much as possible. We know this from the role played by secrecy, dissimulation and propaganda in actual warfare⁶⁴ (whence the truism that “the first casualty in any war is truth”), and likewise, with respect to Western esotericism detailed factual information is simply not in the interest of the dominant party. I hasten to add that I do not mean this in any conspirational sense⁶⁵; what I have in mind is the simple fact that in order for any polemical rhetoric to be effective, things should be kept simple and too much information about the “other” will only create confusion. In that regard, the academic study of Western esotericism is clearly the natural enemy of the Grand Polemical Narrative—not because it chooses the “enemy’s side”, but because as an academic discipline it is committed to the expansion of knowledge from a perspective of ideological neutrality. Both of these

⁶⁴ For instructive examples, see again Urban, ‘Religion and Secrecy in the Bush Administration’.

⁶⁵ See the flourishing genre of occult fiction and quasi-fiction based upon the concept that the establishment is “hiding the truth” in order to preserve its power; the most famous recent example is, of course, Dan Brown’s mega-bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*, based upon the mystifications of Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln’s *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (1982) and related literature.

principles—the pursuit of knowledge and a neutral approach—work against rhetorical simplicity and in favour of complexity. The deep irony is that precisely the eminently academic enterprise of expanding our knowledge of Western religion and culture by means of critical and unbiased research, if applied consistently, is bound to eventually expose reigning polemical narratives as mere simplifying constructs, and hence threaten the safety and stability of conventional academic identities that are built on them. Resistance against such deconstruction is psychologically understandable, but is nevertheless in direct conflict with *the* methodological principle basic to the academic enterprise as it developed in the wake of the Enlightenment (and which, in my opinion, must be preserved at all costs): the “practice of criticism”, whose only commitment is to truth and which therefore cannot afford to impose restrictions on itself out of respect for any tradition or authority⁶⁶.

From the above it should be clear that, in my opinion, the importance of the study of Western esotericism goes far beyond a mere “academic interest” in some historical currents and ideas that happen to have been neglected by earlier generations. On the contrary, this domain of research should be recognized as centrally important to historians of religion and culture because it is only by virtue of excluding its basic components—as imagined in the polemical imagination—from the realm of the acceptable that Western culture as such has been able to define its very identity. If I am correct in arguing that the most essential components of that identity are at bottom polemical concepts, it follows that we cannot understand them in isolation, as if they exist in and for themselves. Instead, we need to understand the dynamics of the underlying discourse that created them; and this, in turn, requires us to try and step *outside* the latter and analyze it from a neutral point of view.

What does this entail? The very attempt (or even just the idea) of making such a step is bound to have disturbing and disorienting effects, because it commits us to a radical empiricism with profoundly relativistic implications. If we perform the “though experiment” of trying to imagine what Western history might look like if perceived from outside its own foundational discourse, we find that we have lost all traditional criteria by means of which we routinely privilege certain aspects of Western culture or religion as relatively “important”, “central”, “serious”, or “profound”, while marginalizing others as less important, eccentric, unserious, superficial and so on. My contention is that we instinctively tend to adhere to the Grand Polemical

⁶⁶ In this respect I adopt the approach of Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment* I, ch. 3 (“The Climate of Criticism”).

Narrative not only because we are so used to it (so that we seldom even perceive its presence) but also because we feel we would be lost without it: the narrative protects us from perceiving the full complexity of our own culture. Simplicity is psychologically reassuring, while complexity is hard to deal with; and the disappearance of traditional lines of demarcations will leave us in a state of disorientation. All this is entirely correct: if we can manage to step outside the Grand Polemical Narrative, nothing will look the same, the ground will seem to vanish under our feet, and the general impression will be that of utter chaos. The only solution in any such situation is not to panic but to simply start looking carefully at what is there, and see what patterns emerge⁶⁷.

It would of course be stupid to even suggest that, in pursuing such an approach, we should forget all the accomplishments of past research and start “from scratch”. To take the most obvious example: the Grand Polemical Narrative is itself a major pattern, whose very presence is bound to emerge as extremely relevant to understanding the dynamics of Western culture. The difference is that it is now reduced to its proper status as an object for scholarly investigation, rather than being allowed to function as the latter’s foundation and starting point. This in itself makes it possible for other patterns, different from and unrelated to those that follow from the Grand Polemical Narrative, to come into view as well. In the context of a radical new historiography as suggested here, “Western esotericism” will figure quite simply as what it is: an imaginary entity produced and reified by the foundational polemical discourse of Western culture. The gradual emergence and

⁶⁷ I am aware that the approach advocated here cannot fail to evoke associations with the basic process of psychotherapy. Since it seems to me that such parallels indeed make sense, I might as well make them explicit. As human individuals [cf. as a culture] we define our adult identity by rejecting parts of ourselves and repressing them into the realm of the subconscious [cf. the realm of the excluded “other”]. This “shadow” becomes the reservoir of who, what and how we do not want to be; but it is in fact a significant part of who, what and how we actually are. Rather than facing and confronting the parts of ourselves [cf. of our culture] that we do not want to own, we tend to project them outside ourselves [cf. “pagans”, “heretics”, “witches” and so on]. Any successful therapeutic process, in contrast, involves a confrontation with the contents of our subconscious and an effort to integrate them as parts of our own identity. Since such a process requires a breaking down of the barriers we have created to protect our identity and keep it stable, we naturally tend to resist it (out of a fear of chaos, disorientation, and madness). But if we manage to overcome such resistance, we can gain a more complex and multi-leveled understanding of ourselves and are able to redefine our identity accordingly [cf. the radical new and far more complex picture of “Western culture” that must result if its contents are no longer subdivided along the lines of the Grand Polemical Narrative]. I freely admit that, in my opinion, such a “psychotherapy” of academic research would be healthy and desirable.

development of that entity in the collective imagination, and the various historical manifestations that have been subsumed under it, can then be studied in detail, ideally without distortion by quasi-essentialist assumptions and hence without artificial boundaries separating “the esoteric” from the “non-esoteric”. It is true that, given the existing political, social and psychological realities, such an approach may well remain a utopian ideal, at least in its fully developed form; but the study of “Western esotericism” and of Western religion and culture generally will greatly profit if we at least start traveling in its general direction.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1961) is professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam.

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La connaissance interdite: Polémiques anti-ésotériques et recherche académique.

L'objet de cet article est de montrer que l'"Esotérisme occidental", entendu comme champ de recherche spécifique, est le résultat d'un discours polémique qui s'est développé dans la culture occidentale au cours de nombreux siècles. La culture occidentale définit sa propre identité par le moyen d'un Grand Récit Polémique qui exclut certains types de religion, de vision du monde, ou de pratique, lesquels ressortiraient au domaine de "l'Autre". C'est ainsi que le monothéisme définit son identité en rejetant le "paganisme" et l'"idolâtrie"; les premiers théologiens chrétiens, en rejetant l'hérésie du "gnosticisme"; le christianisme ancien et médiéval en rejetant la magie comme inspirée par des démons; le Protestantisme, en rejetant le Catholicisme Romain comme idolâtrie crypto-païenne; et les Lumières, en rejetant toute une série de croyances et de pratiques comme liées à l'hermétisme et à "l'occulte".

Par suite de ce processus cumulatif, l'"espace" occupé dans l'imaginaire collectif par l'"Autre" païen s'est peu à peu empli de contenus toujours nouveaux au fur et à mesure que le temps passait, et a continué à se développer, à s'étendre, jusqu'à finir, dans la recherche et le discours académiques dominants, par devenir une sorte de corbeille à papier de "savoir rejeté". Récemment, des chercheurs ont commencé à se rendre compte que ce terrain, maintenant désigné généralement sous l'appellation de "Esotérisme occidental", nécessite une étude sérieuse et impartiale. D'un point de vue historique, la Grand Récit Polémique, qui est à la base de notre identité culturelle commune, consiste en une longue série de simplifications successives fondées sur des programmes idéologiques et normatifs. Or, une tâche importante dévolue à la recherche historique et critique consiste à apporter un correctif aux faits historiques ainsi dénaturés, et à développer une compréhension plus complexe, plus nuancée, et plus neutre, de la culture occidentale. Voir les choses selon cette perspective nouvelle ne saurait perpétuer le programme polémique de base qui voit dans les idées et les développements de l'"ésotérique" quelque chose qui ferait partie d'une contre-culture des "autres", dirigée contre le discours dominant. Il s'agit, en revanche, de les analyser en tant que dimension négligée de la culture et de la société en général. Une telle approche n'est pas seulement susceptible de nous aider à mieux saisir le sens de la réalité historique; elle est également, et nécessairement, appelée à connaître des implications radicales quant à la manière dont "nous" percevons notre propre identité.

NOTE A MARGINE DELL'INFLUSSO
DI G.I. GURDJIEFF SU SAMAEL AUN WEOR

PIERLUIGI ZOCCATELLI

La storia delle religioni non è storia di opinioni, ma di
avventure¹

Nicolás Gómez Dávila (1913-1994)

Sulle tracce di una posterità dei “filosofi della foresta”

Oggetto del presente studio vuole essere un *primo* approfondimento dell'influsso—mai sin qui rilevato—del pensiero dell'esoterista caucasico George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1866-1949)—all'origine di quella che già in anni remoti è stata definita la “scuola della foresta”²—sul fondatore di un peculiare “movimento gnostico” contemporaneo, Samael Aun Weor (1917-1977). Ci siamo attribuiti questo compito per tre ragioni sostanziali.

(1) In primo luogo, entrambi gli esoteristi presi in considerazione sono all'origine di un'assai complessa genealogia di gruppi, realtà e movimenti—non di rado in conflitto, tenue o vivace, fra loro—diffusi a livello internazionale e con migliaia (quando non decine di migliaia) di appartenenti, a tal punto che ci pare giustificato applicare anche a tali genealogie la categoria di “ipertrofia della filiazione”, elaborata dal sociologo Massimo Introvigne a proposito della posterità di un altro protagonista del *milieu* esoterico-occultista contemporaneo, Giuliano Kremmerz (Ciro Formisano, 1861-1930)³: in quest'ambito, se gli studi sulla posterità e le filiazioni che derivano dall'insegnamento di Gurdjieff non mancano⁴, quanto a Samael Aun Weor si può tranquillamente affermare che non solo non esistano studi su tale segmento, ma che in generale su di lui non esista alcuno studio di alcun genere, eccettuati due saggi che abbiamo prodotto noi stessi in anni recenti⁵.

¹ Gómez Dávila, *In margine a un testo implicito*, 132.

² Sharp, ‘The “Forest Philosophers”’.

³ Introvigne, ‘De l’hypertrophie de la filiation: le milieu kremmerzien en Italie’.

⁴ Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters*, 282-313; Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 223-254.

⁵ Zocatelli, ‘Il paradigma esoterico e un modello di applicazione: Note sul movimento gnos-

Il che, vale la pena sottolinearlo, rende a sufficienza l'idea di quanto vasto sia il campo ancora da esplorare riguardo le correnti dell'esoterismo contemporaneo: per rimanere al solo campo della sociografia, citiamo a esempio il fatto che, nell'estate 2000, quando stavamo compiendo un'indagine sul campo relativa alla "galassia weorita" in Italia, abbiamo partecipato a uno *stage* di alcuni giorni di una delle decine di "movimenti weoriti" (nella fattispecie, particolarmente invisibile agli altri movimenti), assieme a circa mille persone convenute da tutta Italia . . .

(2) Secondariamente, a entrambe le personalità prese in considerazione—come pure a molti altri autori "classici" dell'esoterismo moderno e contemporaneo—pare potersi applicare efficacemente la *cifra*, nel contempo ermeneutica e sociologica, che la studiosa statunitense Jane Williams-Hogan ha definito il "*carisma del libro*"⁶, ovvero quel fenomeno del tutto particolare, al tempo stesso universale—poiché attira l'attenzione su un livello di realtà più profondo, che svolge una funzione unificatrice, e perché parla alle persone al di là delle loro culture di appartenenza—e personale—in quanto invita ogni individuo a confrontarsi con la propria vita e i propri bisogni—nel quale l'individuo trova in un libro una risposta che si rivolge specificamente a lui. Per quanto riguarda Gurdjieff, è noto che egli è all'origine di un insegnamento, anche attraverso gli scritti (ma non solo, e non soprattutto), di non indifferente entità, e che il "*carisma del libro*" che genera dal suo pensiero è particolarmente contenuto in un'imponente produzione bibliografica adottata dai suoi allievi⁷. Quanto a Samael Aun Weor, anche nel suo caso l'insegnamento proposto ai suoi discepoli deriva da una considerevole mole bibliografica (è argomento controverso se i libri da lui scritti siano 49 o si avvicinino ai 70), che si accompagna—come nel caso di Gurdjieff—a una trasmissione orale degli insegnamenti teorico-pratici più "interni".

(3) Infine, ed è la terza ragione che ci ha mosso a questo studio, considerata l'enorme importanza che Gurdjieff riveste nel panorama dell'esoterismo contemporaneo, l'analisi dell'influsso di Gurdjieff su Samael Aun Weor pone in rilievo un aspetto dell'insegnamento di Gurdjieff che solitamente non pare punto essere posto al centro—o alla periferia—delle pratiche realizzative dei discepoli della "scuola della foresta", o delle preoccupazioni

tico di Samael Aun Weor'; Idem, 'La "psicologia rivoluzionaria" e i "Tre Fattori della Rivoluzione della Coscienza" nel movimento gnostico di Samael Aun Weor'.

⁶ Williams-Hogan, 'Moving Beyond Weber's Concept of Charisma: The Role of Written Text in the Founding of the Swedenborgian Church'.

⁷ Driscoll, *Gurdjieff: An Annotated Bibliography*; Idem *Gurdjieff: A Reading Guide*.

teoretiche dei medesimi, ma che nel travaso nell'insegnamento del "movimento gnostico" di Samael Aun Weor assume un ruolo assolutamente centrale, pure non essendo mai—e tematicamente—denunciata la fonte. Ci riferiamo, lo anticipiamo subito, all'insegnamento e alla pratica della magia sessuale, che nella scuola weorita è la chiave dell'intero sistema, e che proviene da un adattamento pressoché *letterale* derivante da Gurdjieff.

Corre l'obbligo, giunti a questo punto, di effettuare qualche precisazione, poiché siamo perfettamente consapevoli che nell'insegnamento dell'esoterista greco-armeno nato nel 1866 ad Alexandropol (oggi Gyumri, nell'attuale Armenia), il tema della "magia sessuale"—o "alchimia interna", o come altro si preferisca nominarla—non riveste una funzione prioritaria. Eppure, così ci verrebbe da dire, le cose stanno in tal modo almeno apparentemente. Perché, appunto, lo studio approfondito dell'*opus* weorita e il tentativo di paragone sinottico con il pensiero gurdjieffiano, c'impone d'ipotizzare che tale portato non sia del tutto estraneo al "cuore" della Quarta Via, o che lo possa essere in maniera più sostanziale di quanto sul punto sia stato sin qui esaminato solo in maniera periferica e accidentale. Ove le cose stessero davvero così, o *anche* così, s'imporrebbe a nostro avviso un ulteriore approfondimento dell'insegnamento di George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff.

Come vedremo meglio nel seguito di questo studio, il rapporto tra i due insegnamenti trova la sua fonte nella dottrina comune della "sessualità quale forma eminente di relazione con il trascendente", e il contatto che le due "scuole" hanno fra di loro—in ragione dell'influsso che Gurdjieff svolge su Weor—è un tema che costituisce, per così dire, una prima "scoperta" della presente ricerca. Ciò che costituisce però una seconda, e forse più importante, "scoperta" di queste pagine—ci sia consentita una timida enfasi—è la constatazione, dunque, che sia possibile affrontare l'insegnamento di Gurdjieff *anche* nella prospettiva di dottrine che dicono relazione alla trasmutazione dell'essere attraverso l'utilizzo dell'energia sessuale, cioè secondo coordinate concettuali che non sono mai state poste in risalto adeguatamente nella pur sterminata "bibliografia gurdjieffiana", se non in maniera frammentaria e quasi di sfuggita (a tal punto da non essere recepite negli studi interpretativi), e di cui daremo notizia nel prosieguo, ovvero come se non rivestissero alcuna importanza nel pensiero di Gurdjieff.

Da queste considerazioni nascono ulteriori riflessioni e quesiti, che i limiti che ci siamo imposti in questa indagine—relativa all'influsso di Gurdjieff su Weor—non ci consentono di sviscerare adeguatamente, ma che possiamo sin d'ora impostare. Anzitutto, e abbiamo già accennato al punto, il reperimento di tracce d'insegnamenti di "alchimia interna" in Gurdjieff significa

che l'utilizzo da parte di Weor di tali nozioni fa meno violenza al pensiero di Gurdjieff di quanto si potrebbe a prima vista supporre. Ne consegue almeno un quesito, che presentiamo in forma retorica: dobbiamo concludere che Weor è stato il solo a cogliere questo aspetto dell'insegnamento di Gurdjieff, mentre la maggior parte dei discepoli più accreditati non ha voluto dare a questo aspetto l'importanza che meritava? Oppure questi insegnamenti di "alchimia interna" emananti direttamente da Gurdjieff continuano a scorrere nei rivoli delle filiazioni gurdjieffiane senza che se ne faccia pubblico cenno (diversamente da altri movimenti, dove tale aspetto non è—forse—più importante, ma solo più esplicito)? E dunque, come si pone il tema della "sessualità quale forma eminente di relazione con il trascendente" in Gurdjieff e nel *milieu* gurdjieffiano?

Una prima risposta a questo insieme di domande è reperibile in un brano tratto da un noto volume del famoso discepolo britannico di Gurdjieff, John G. Bennett (1897-1974), il quale in *Gurdjieff: Un Nuovo Mondo* (*Gurdjieff: Making a New World*) scrive:

Dal capitolo "Purgatorio" in *Beelzebub's Tales* appare chiaro, naturalmente, che Gurdjieff reputa l'energia sessuale, lì denominata *exiohary*, la fonte principale di nutrimento per i corpi superiori dell'uomo. Il suo insegnamento in merito alla trasformazione dell'energia sessuale è molto personale ed egli affermò energicamente che non esistono norme generali⁸.

Ritorniamo sulla possibile ricezione dell'argomento nell'ambiente gurdjieffiano, senza mancare di anticipare sin d'ora che, in effetti, nell'assai complesso quadro dottrinale e cosmologico del capitolo "Il Santo Pianeta Purgatorio" de *I racconti di Belzebù al suo piccolo nipote* (*Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*)—nel quale certo il lettore non abituato al linguaggio dell'autore si potrebbe smarrire in nozioni quali "l'epoca ciut-bog-litanica", il "mdnel-inn a coincidenza meccanica", il "quinto stopinder modificato della legge Heptaparaparshinokh chiamato harnel-haut"—, Gurdjieff abbozza il tema delle "sostanze cosmiche sacre", fra cui l'"exioekhari esserico" (cioè lo 'sperma' e le 'sostanze ultime che si costituiscono negli esseri di sesso femminile'⁹), e della loro manipolazione, nel quadro di un più ampio riferimento alle 'cristallizzazioni autonome che si formano nei tetartocosmi'¹⁰, nell'ambito delle quali "exioekhari" figura fra altre sei "cristallizzazioni autonome".

⁸ Bennett, *Gurdjieff*, 239.

⁹ Gurdjieff, *I racconti di Belzebù al suo piccolo nipote*, II, 226.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 201.

Cenni sul “Lavoro”

Non ci pare questa la sede per ripercorrere le coordinate biografiche di Gurdjieff: troppo imponente la produzione letteraria che riguarda tale aspetto—del tutto recentemente, anche in un prezioso saggio uscito appositamente per il mercato editoriale italiano¹¹—, e che comprende volumi che possono adeguatamente fornire un complessivo “stato dell’arte”¹². Per il compito che ci siamo attribuiti, invece, non sarà inutile tratteggiare alcuni elementi salienti dell’insegnamento che mette insieme spiritualità, filosofia, cosmologia e un modello complesso della persona umana, legandoli in un sistema unificato a sfondo esoterico. Lo faremo svolgendo una sintesi di un apposito capitolo dedicato al pensiero di Gurdjieff nell’ambito di un progetto enciclopedico che abbiamo co-diretto¹³.

Il “Lavoro” di Gurdjieff è rivolto all’evoluzione personale, alla trasformazione sociale, e ultimamente a una trasformazione su scala cosmica. L’espressione “Lavoro” si riferisce allo sforzo che è necessario perché l’allievo si “risvegli” al significato dell’esistenza umana. I frutti del “Lavoro”, che inizia come opera interiore su sé stessi, devono ultimamente trasformare la vita quotidiana. Il “Lavoro” è una forma di tradizione orale; richiede una “scuola” e la disponibilità degli “allievi” o “studenti” a porsi sotto la tutela di un maestro, senza il quale la trasformazione interiore è giudicata impossibile. La condizione umana così come si presenta oggi è lontana dalla sua verità originaria e dal suo potenziale. Nel mondo moderno in ogni persona coesistono molti “io” contraddittori, in competizione fra loro; questo conflitto rende ultimamente impossibili il pensiero e l’azione in forma unitaria. Inoltre, in ogni persona coesistono due nature che non sono capaci di riconoscersi a vicenda: l’essenza e la personalità. La libertà, l’azione consapevole e un’autentica volontà non possono esistere in questo stato di frammentazione. Quella che chiamiamo “azione” è soltanto un fenomeno meccanico e inconscio. Questo stato comune e quotidiano è chiamato da Gurdjieff “sonno”. L’evoluzione personale è quindi il risveglio dallo stato di sonno, e il passaggio dalla frammentazione all’unità. Lo stato di “sonno” non priva soltanto la persona della libertà e della responsabilità; turba anche la sua relazione con il cosmo. Gurdjieff chiede—talora brutalmente—di prendere atto dello

¹¹ Jones, *G.I. Gurdjieff e la sua eredità*.

¹² Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*; Moore, *George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff*.

¹³ Introvigne—Zoccatelli—Ippolito Macrina—Roldán, *Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia*, 481-488.

squilibrio e delle illusioni che impediscono di vedere la realtà della presente condizione umana.

Il “Lavoro” lentamente rivela come l’entità che la persona considerava unitaria, coerente e libera è in realtà un insieme contraddittorio di pensieri, reazioni emotive e meccanismi ripetitivi di auto-protezione. La consapevolezza di questo stato di confusione è il primo passo in direzione del risveglio. Come secondo passo, è necessario accettare quanto si è visto. Le prime fasi del “Lavoro” propongono l’osservazione, la verifica e l’accettazione della verità della condizione umana attraverso lo studio, la partecipazione a un lavoro di gruppo ed esercizi di attenzione (“ricordo di sé”). L’insegnamento di Gurdjieff non è organizzato intorno a un sistema dottrinale, ma piuttosto intorno a un metodo. Insiste che tutto deve essere messo in discussione. Vivendo in questo modo—perpetuamente critico—le capacità di osservazione e di attenzione si affinano, e le idee sono verificate nella vita. Gurdjieff insegna che le sue dottrine non possono essere trasmesse in modo univoco perché ogni persona ha un itinerario di crescita indipendente e unico, di cui si deve tenere conto. Tuttavia, è anche vero che—di fronte al rischio dell’auto-illusione—un lavoro di gruppo, con altri, è indispensabile per la trasformazione. Lavorando in gruppo l’osservazione di sé stessi può essere più obiettiva; alcuni esercizi sono inoltre possibili soltanto in gruppo.

I gruppi—nel “Lavoro”—dovrebbero anche sviluppare sincerità, forza interiore e nuove capacità. In concreto il “Lavoro” si concentra su metodi di auto-osservazione che hanno, tra l’altro, lo scopo di imparare a “ricordare sé stessi”. Osservare come si pensa, si agisce, si provano emozioni rivela come i tre centri della persona umana—mentale, emozionale e motorio—operano a diverse velocità, e sono spesso in contraddizione tra loro. Gli esercizi del “Lavoro” rendono consapevoli delle relazioni fra i tre centri, e permettono l’emergere di momenti in cui la natura meccanica dell’uomo non è più dominante. Questi momenti in cui si emerge dallo stato di “sonno” sono effimeri, ma gradualmente si legano gli uni agli altri e offrono nuove possibilità di integrazione.

Al servizio del “Lavoro” si pongono anche la musica e i movimenti del corpo. Gurdjieff e Thomas de Hartmann (1885-1956) hanno lasciato un ampio *corpus* musicale, il cui scopo è trasmettere un insegnamento pratico sulle relazioni fra la vibrazione, l’esperienza del suono, e la consapevolezza. Jeanne de Salzmann (1889-1990) ha trasmesso a sua volta un gran numero di “danze sacre” o “movimenti” creati da Gurdjieff sulla base di diverse tradizioni osservate nei suoi viaggi. La musica e i movimenti offrono la possibilità di studiare e “ricordare” sé stessi, creando condizioni in cui è più facile osservare

la relazione fra il corpo e la qualità della nostra attenzione. Attraverso il corpo si sperimentano anche diversi livelli e qualità di energia.

Gurdjieff descrive gli stati superiori dell'evoluzione personale come difficili, ma non impossibili. A differenza di altri sistemi esoterici, l'insegnamento di Gurdjieff insegna a integrare quelle che definisce le due nature dell'esistenza umana, la evolutiva e la involutiva, in modo da accedere a un luogo ideale collocato in una posizione intermedia fra queste due nature. Solo a questo punto è possibile riscoprire e alimentare l'essenza, quella parte della persona che rivela lo scopo della vita. Continuando nello sviluppo, cresce anche la consapevolezza delle responsabilità: la persona può mettersi al servizio di altri e del grande processo cosmico dell'evoluzione. Gurdjieff inserisce il "Lavoro" in una complessa cosmologia. Lo scopo della vita è consapevolmente trasformare energia e partecipare responsabilmente a un processo e a un dramma cosmico, in cui l'umanità ha il suo posto nella grande catena dell'essere. Le persone che non raggiungono la consapevolezza contribuiscono anche loro—ma involontariamente e passivamente—a liberare energia e a nutrire i processi cosmici, diventando 'un *nutrimento* per la luna'¹⁴.

In termini più "religiosi", alcuni interpreti del pensiero di Gurdjieff hanno affermato che si ritrova qui l'idea—comune ad altri sistemi esoterici—secondo cui non tutti hanno un'anima immortale, ma soltanto coloro che sono in grado di costruirselo consapevolmente attraverso un faticoso processo, che appunto consiste nello "sviluppo armonioso dell'uomo":

Questo è il punto cruciale dell'antropologia di Gurdjieff: l'Uomo non è per natura un'anima immortale¹⁵.

Poiché il punto ha una certa rilevanza per il prosieguo della nostra analisi, vale la pena riportare il ricordo di Thomas de Hartmann a proposito di tale insegnamento:

Il succo . . . è questo: al suo livello attuale l'uomo non possiede un'anima immortale, indistruttibile, ma se compie su di sé un certo lavoro egli *può formare* un'anima immortale. Allora, questo corpo-anima di nuova formazione non sarà più soggetto alle leggi fisiche e dopo la morte del corpo fisico seguità ad esistere¹⁶.

A tal proposito, naturalmente, si è posto a più riprese—e ci pare trattarsi di un problema attualmente irrisolvibile, o quantomeno facente parte

¹⁴ Ouspensky, *Frammenti di un insegnamento sconosciuto*, 67.

¹⁵ Bennett, *Gurdjieff*, 250.

¹⁶ De Hartmann, *La nostra vita con il Signor Gurdjieff*, 14.

dell'“enigma Gurdjieff”¹⁷—il quesito sulle fonti del pensiero di Gurdjieff, posto che l'“autobiografia” del medesimo sembra essere costruita con un linguaggio profondamente allegorico che ne caratterizza la narrazione e la fattualità degli episodi¹⁸. D'altro canto, e non senza elementi a supporto, nel suo studio su Gurdjieff, James Webb (1946-1980)¹⁹ sembra non nutrire dubbi sul fatto che il punto di partenza della sintesi gurdjieffiana sia da reperire nell'opera classica della fondatrice della Società Teosofica, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), *La Dottrina Segreta* (*The Secret Doctrine*)²⁰. E altrettanto è puntualizzato da Sophia Wellbeloved²¹, la quale inserisce l'influsso della Teosofia su Gurdjieff nel clima dell'epoca e del luogo:

Quando Gurdjieff inizia a insegnare in Russia, nel 1912 circa, il suo insegnamento cosmologico era presentato in termini occultistici, gli incontri del gruppo si svolgevano nel segreto, e gli allievi non potevano rivelare all'esterno quanto apprendevano. Ciò avveniva in maniera conforme agli interessi dell'epoca, poiché in Russia era forte il revival occultista, e la Teosofia e altri insegnamenti occultisti occidentali riscuotevano un grande interesse presso l'intelligentsia in generale e negli allievi di Gurdjieff in particolare²².

Viaggio in Colombia

Diversamente dal caso di Gurdjieff, e per le ragioni cui abbiamo precedentemente accennato, per quanto riguarda Samael Aun Weor non sarà inutile descrivere per sommi capi l'itinerario personale, che in qualche modo “illumina” il suo pensiero.

Víctor Manuel Gómez Rodríguez nasce a Santa Fe de Bogotá, in Colombia, nel 1917. Dopo avere iniziato gli studi in un collegio gesuita, lo abbandona a dodici anni, disilluso dalla religione. Quattordicenne, si appassiona allo spiritismo—particolarmente ad Allan Kardec (1804-1869) e al suo successore Léon Denis (1846-1927)—, per aderire in seguito, nel 1933, alla Società Teosofica, dalla quale si ritira dopo qualche anno per diventare membro della Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antiqua di Arnoldo Krumm-Heller (1876-1949)²³—

¹⁷ Bennett, *L'enigma Gurdjieff*, passim.

¹⁸ Gurdjieff, *Incontri con uomini straordinari*.

¹⁹ Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*, 533.

²⁰ Blavatsky, *La Dottrina Segreta*.

²¹ Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 204-206.

²² Eadem, ‘Changes in G.I. Gurdjieff's Teaching “The Work”’.

²³ Weor, *Le Tre Montagne*, 26.

iniziata a stabilire in Sudamerica nel 1927—, dal quale avrebbe personalmente ricevuto una consacrazione episcopale nella Chiesa Gnostica Catholica di derivazione Theodor Reuss (1855-1923), circostanza peraltro non esente da contestazioni e dubbi²⁴. Deluso dalle precedenti esperienze, e dopo avere approfondito lo studio di Eliphas Lévi (Alphonse-Louis Constant, 1810-1875), Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) e Max Heindel (Carl Louis von Grasshoff, 1865-1919), si ritira a meditare e scopre di essere stato nelle vite precedenti uno ierofante egizio, Giulio Cesare, un membro di un ordine tibetano composto da 201 monaci che reggono l'umanità, e l'equivalente sulla Luna di Gesù, dove sarebbe stato crocifisso per salvare l'umanità ivi residente e preparare l'avvento della “quinta razza radice” (secondo il classico schema teosofico elaborato da Helena Petrovna Blavatsky). In ogni caso, morto Krumm-Heller, nel 1949, Gómez—dopo avere assunto il nome iniziatico di Samael Aun Weor (l'origine di tale nome è in parte oscura, ma pare potersi dire che almeno il primo termine, “Samael”, sia riconducibile alla dottrina esposta in *Iside svelata* [*Isis Unveiled*] della Blavatsky, dove ‘Samael è Satana’²⁵), e dopo la pubblicazione del suo primo libro *Il matrimonio perfetto* (*El Matrimonio Perfecto de Kinder*), nel 1950—decide di intraprendere ogni sforzo per aprire le porte della Gnosi all'umanità e fonda a Città del Messico la Chiesa Gnostica Cristiana Universale, realtà che nel corso dei decenni assumerà altre denominazioni, anche in ragione delle varie derivazioni e scissioni del suo “movimento gnostico”.

Alla morte di Samael Aun Weor (avvenuta a Città del Messico, il 24 dicembre 1977), il movimento patisce una dura lotta per la successione, e oggi ne sono presenti decine di branche separate. Benché queste branche divergano—oltre che su questioni di successione—anche su problemi dottrinali, comune è la venerazione degli scritti di Samael Aun Weor e della stessa persona del maestro, venerato come “Kalki Avatar dell'Età dell'Acquario” (la Nuova Era, che per Samael Aun Weor ha avuto inizio il 4 febbraio 1962, fra le due e le tre del pomeriggio²⁶), “Buddha Maitreya” e “Logos del pianeta Marte”, particolarmente in seguito a un evento occorso il 27 ottobre 1954, quando si realizza l’“avvento spirituale dell'arcangelo Samael”, una “natività gnostica” e “fatto cosmico” (ovvero la fase finale del processo iniziatico di Víctor Manuel Gómez Rodríguez, che da questo momento incarna il suo “essere

²⁴ Introvigne, *Il ritorno dello gnosticismo*, 198.

²⁵ Blavatsky, *Iside svelata*, II, 440.

²⁶ Weor, *Il Messaggio di Acquario*, *passim*.

interno” Samael Aun Weor) alla quale sono presenti i primi discepoli di Samael Aun Weor²⁷.

Da un punto di vista strettamente fenomenologico, il pensiero gnostico di Samael Aun Weor—che ha ottenuto un rapido e notevole successo in America Latina e nel Québec, negli Stati Uniti e in Europa—combina temi che derivano, fra l’altro e come si è visto, dalla tradizione delle Chiese (neo-) gnostiche, da Arnoldo Krumm-Heller (e dal responsabile della Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antiqua in Ecuador, Jorge Adoum, noto come Mago Jefa, ?-1958), dal tantrismo, dalla Società Teosofica, senza dimenticare i non secondari influssi thelemiti (ovvero risalenti ad Aleister Crowley, 1875-1947), e soprattutto la netta ripresa del pensiero dell’esoterista caucasico George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. Tutto questo detto, senza dimenticare che, in effetti, Samael Aun Weor si definisce “Maestro della Sintesi” per avere concepito un corpo di dottrina che sintetizza in maniera didattica la conoscenza iniziatica contenuta nelle culture primitive ed esoteriche del pianeta Terra, associato a un lavoro di verifica interna attraverso le pratiche dello sdoppiamento astrale, stati di *jina* (viaggio del corpo fisico nell’iperdimensione), e così via.

Hic Rhodus, hic salta!

La sintesi degli insegnamenti gnostici di Samael Aun Weor e delle scuole che a lui si rifanno è contenuta nei “Tre Fattori della Rivoluzione della Coscienza”, le cui dinamiche sono sintetizzate particolarmente in tre volumi²⁸. Questi “tre fattori” sono: (a) la *morte* dell’universo interiore negativo di ciascuno (“ego”, o aggregati artificiali della psiche che impediscono la manifestazione dell’essere) tramite l’autoscoperta, la comprensione e la disintegrazione di tutti gli aggregati psicologici—blocchi, condizionamenti, identificazioni, paure, ecc.—che impediscono la libera circolazione delle energie e il risveglio della “coscienza oggettiva”; (b) la *nascita* dei corpi interni o corpi esistenziali superiori dell’essere (corpo astrale, corpo mentale, corpo causale), indispensabili veicoli per le dimensioni superiori a quella fisica, grazie alla trasmutazione delle energie creatrici (mediante la pratica dell’“Arcano AZF”, ovvero la pratica di eccitazione dell’apparato sessuale maschile senza emissione del seme, con conseguente “cerebralizzazione” del

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ Idem, *Trattato di psicologia rivoluzionaria*; Idem, *La gran ribellione*; Idem, *La Rivoluzione della Dialettica*.

seme e “seminizzazione” del cervello) e l’eliminazione degli aggregati psicologici, onde raggiungere uno sviluppo e rigenerazione totale, risvegliando facoltà quali la chiaroveggenza, la chiaroudienza, l’intuizione e la telepatia; (c) il *sacrificio per l’umanità* nella divulgazione, in qualsiasi modo opportuno, della saggezza eterna appresa, ovvero il lavoro per restituire le chiavi della conoscenza universale ricevute nel percorso gnostico.

L’obiettivo della gnosi di Samael Aun Weor, come si è accennato, è il risveglio della coscienza, che parte da un’auto-osservazione attraverso la quale l’uomo si rivolge al suo interno e si accorge che “qualcosa” gli manca. Questo processo di risveglio non è però facile perché la coscienza è racchiusa e impedita (“addormentata”) da una serie di strutture psicologiche negative (chiamate “io”). Il primo lavoro che l’adepto è dunque chiamato a compiere è quello di identificare queste strutture. L’uomo scopre così che il suo mondo interiore è costituito da tre diversi elementi: l’essenza, gli “io”—che si trovano nei 49 livelli del subcosciente²⁹—e la personalità. L’essenza è la scintilla divina gnostica che vive all’interno di ogni uomo. Nonostante la presenza di questo elemento divino, l’uomo contemporaneo degenera nella violenza e nella crudeltà. Questo avviene a causa dei “demoni rossi di Seth”, cioè gli “io”: strutture psicologiche, difetti, vizi che si manifestano sia come pensieri, sia come comportamenti. La personalità, a sua volta, non è innata come l’essenza, ma comprende tutti i valori appresi tramite la cultura e l’educazione. Il primo lavoro interiore da fare—senza trascurare l’educazione, che sin dall’infanzia mira allo sviluppo armonioso dell’essenza e della personalità—è il lavoro sugli “io”, che mira a rimuovere le incrostazioni che impediscono all’essenza di emergere e dominare la personalità. Nella personalità dove domina l’essenza la volontà umana si converte nella “volontà-Cristo” (il termine “Cristo” ha qui un significato esoterico indipendente dal personaggio storico di Gesù). Dissolvendo gli “io”, attraverso la salita di tre montagne, si arriva all’unione con l’Assoluto dove non esiste più alcuna dualità. Salendo le prime due montagne, l’iniziato realizza i “corpi solari” (che tuttavia possono ancora essere utilizzati dai cattivi “io”) e quindi, dissolti i primi, i “corpi d’oro”. Saliti sulla terza montagna non ci sono più corpi, e il serpente *kundalini* viene ingoiato dall’aquila, a simboleggiare che ogni forma particolare deve morire per entrare nell’assoluta unità.

Per raggiungere questi scopi Samael Aun Weor offre una conoscenza, un accostamento alchemico alla sessualità, invocazioni, catene di protezione e

²⁹ Idem, *La Rivoluzione della Dialettica*, 17.

cura nonché—dopo un'apposita unzione che abilita al sacerdozio gnostico, al termine di un corso speciale—rituali suddivisi in sette gradi e compendati nello scritto riservato *Liturgia Gnostica*³⁰, fra cui una messa gnostica. Quanto alla pratica, raggiunto un certo livello di approfondimento dell'insegnamento gnostico, particolare importanza viene attribuita ai “viaggi incorpori” e alla creazione del corpo astrale. Per ottenere questo risultato è necessario trasmutare l'“idrogeno sessuale SI-12”.

In tutti gli elementi della natura, in ogni sostanza chimica, in ogni frutto, esiste il suo corrispondente tipo d'Idrogeno; e l'Idrogeno del sesso è il SI-12³¹.

Chi abbia un minimo di dimestichezza con l'insegnamento di Gurdjieff, non mancherà di notare la perfetta consonanza di questo riferimento con il concetto degli Idrogeni, che per esempio nella testimonianza—da tutti gli studiosi riconosciuta come autorevolissima—fornita da Pjotr Demianovich Ouspensky (1878-1947), sintetizza gli aspetti teorici e pratici dell'insegnamento di Gurdjieff. Un solo esempio, fra i moltissimi:

L'idrogeno *si 12* è l'idrogeno che rappresenta il prodotto finale della trasformazione degli elementi nell'organismo umano. Esso è la materia a partire dalla quale il sesso lavora e produce³².

Quanto alle modalità per trasmutare l'idrogeno sessuale SI-12, Weor scrive:

L'idrogeno sessuale si sviluppa dentro l'organismo umano secondo la scala musicale DO-RE-MI-FA-SOL-LA-SI. L'idrogeno sessuale SI-12 abbonda nel seme; cristallizza nuovi corpi umani e saggiamente trasmutato prende forma di corpo astrale. Frenando l'impulso sessuale per evitare l'eiaculazione del seme, l'idrogeno sessuale SI-12 riceve uno shock speciale che lo fa passare ad una seconda ottava superiore, che agisce in accordo alle sette note della scala DO-RE-MI-FA-SOL-LA-SI. Nessun occultista deve ignorare che la trasformazione delle sostanze dentro l'organismo, agisce in accordo alla legge delle Ottave³³.

Assolutamente identici insegnamenti sono quelli impartiti sul punto da Gurdjieff³⁴, orientati anche nella sua esposizione alla ‘formazione del corpo astrale . . . , ciò che l'alchimia definisce trasformazione o trasmutazione’³⁵. Erano questi gli ‘esercizi interiori’³⁶ impartiti da Gurdjieff cui Thomas de

³⁰ *Gnosis*, 4, 48-59.

³¹ Weor, *Trattato esoterico di Astrologia Ermetica*, 88.

³² Ouspensky, *Frammenti di un insegnamento sconosciuto*, 283 (cfr. pure 103, 189-197, 200-208, 211-216, 352-359).

³³ Weor, *Corpi Solari*, 127.

³⁴ Ouspensky, *Frammenti di un insegnamento sconosciuto*, 282-288.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 284.

³⁶ De Hartmann, *La nostra vita con il Signor Gurdjieff*, 48.

Hartmann fa cenno, aggiungendo di non sentirsi ‘autorizzato a parlarne’, cioè quelli relativi all’‘energia sessuale [che] ci disse di non ripetere mai ad altri’³⁷? La risposta a tale quesito non ci è nota. Tuttavia, in quest’ottica è più facile comprendere a cosa si riferisca Gurdjieff quando—in un brano tratto da una conversazione con i suoi allievi a New York, del 20 febbraio 1924, pubblicato solo dopo la sua morte—, pur senza menzionare l’energia sessuale (peraltro oggetto di commenti orali da parte di Gurdjieff ai suoi allievi, almeno sul finire degli anni 1940³⁸) e le pratiche “interne”, afferma:

L’uomo, da solo, non può diventare un uomo nuovo: ci vogliono delle speciali combinazioni interiori. Quando la sostanza richiesta s’accumula in quantità sufficiente, può cristallizzare, proprio come il sale cristallizza nell’acqua se supera una certa concentrazione. Quando nell’uomo si accumula una grande quantità di sostanza sottile, a un certo punto si può formare e cristallizzare un nuovo corpo . . . , di un’ottava superiore. Questo corpo, spesso definito “astrale”, può formarsi solo a partire da quella sostanza speciale, e può costituirsi solo in modo cosciente. Tale sostanza può anche essere prodotta in condizioni ordinarie, ma poi viene consumata e dispersa all’esterno³⁹.

Certamente, Samael Aun Weor—che ha fatto dell’“Arcano AZF”, ossia della magia sessuale, l’intero perno del suo insegnamento e delle pratiche conseguenti—è consapevole di “superare” Gurdjieff, che peraltro è citato assai raramente nei suoi numerosi scritti e mai quale fonte del suo pensiero: ‘Noi siamo più rivoluzionari negli insegnamenti psicologici di Gurdjieff e di Ouspensky’⁴⁰. Sembra potersi dire, semplificando, che nel “sistema weorita”, Gurdjieff svolga la funzione teorica e Krumm-Heller quella pratica:

Il grande saggio tedesco Krumm-Heller dice . . . quanto segue: “Invece del coito che porta all’orgasmo, si devono prodigare riflessivamente dolci carezze, frasi amorose e delicati palpeggiamenti mantenendo lontana la mente della sessualità animale, sostenendo la più pura spiritualità, come se l’atto fosse una vera cerimonia religiosa. Però, l’uomo può e deve introdurre il pene e mantenerlo nel sesso femminile . . . , affinché sopravvenga in entrambi una sensazione divina che può durare ore intere; ritirandolo nel momento in cui si avvicina lo spasimo, per evitare l’iaculazione del seme⁴¹.

Comunque, che Weor abbia “superato” Gurdjieff o meno, che egli abbia tratto da Gurdjieff la teoria e da Krumm-Heller (dunque nel contesto di certo

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 115.

³⁸ Bennett & Bennett, *Idioti a Parigi*, 30.

³⁹ Gurdjieff, *Vedute sul mondo reale*, 196.

⁴⁰ Weor, *La Rivoluzione della Dialettica*, 99.

⁴¹ Idem, *Il Messaggio di Acquario*, 137.

“rosicrucianesimo occultista”) la pratica, ciò non toglie che—per tornare a monte del nostro discorso—sia in Gurdjieff sia in Weor (e in Weor, *secundum* Gurdjieff) la premessa maggiore del proprio *discorso* e *percorso* vada rintracciata nella considerazione che l’uomo non possiede un’anima immortale, e che per “fabbricarla” sia necessario “cristallizzare” un fluido sottile dell’organismo umano mediante una pratica di trasmutazione. Peraltro, e questo—ancora—sia secondo Gurdjieff sia secondo Weor, affinché quest’anima diventi veramente immortale, la creazione di un “corpo astrale” non è condizione sufficiente, poiché dopo il raggiungimento di tale stato, l’allievo deve concentrarsi nella fabbricazione di un terzo corpo, il “corpo mentale”:

Ma il terzo corpo non è ancora l’anima nel vero senso della parola. [...] Solo il quarto corpo segna il raggiungimento del massimo sviluppo che all’uomo è possibile nelle condizioni terrestri di esistenza. Esso è immortale nei limiti del sistema solare⁴².

Dopo Gurdjieff, la magia sessuale in Weor

Nelle pagine precedenti, ci siamo posti di sfuggita il quesito sulle fonti del pensiero di Gurdjieff, menzionando l’opinione di James Webb circa il debito che egli avrebbe contratto con le dottrine di Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, o comunque delle analogie fra l’insegnamento dell’esoterista caucasico e la Società Teosofica, come suggerito da Sophia Wellbeloved. Se l’oggetto del presente studio è determinare l’influsso *certo* e dettagliato dell’insegnamento di Gurdjieff sul sistema di magia sessuale di Samael Aun Weor—constatazione, vale la pena ripeterlo per l’ennesima volta, che non implica necessariamente un’analoga preminenza della tematica all’interno della “scuola della foresta”—, rigore metodologico vorrebbe che ci si ponga anche il quesito sulle fonti del pensiero relativo all’“alchimia interna” in Gurdjieff. Tuttavia, più ancora che nel caso precedentemente osservato, né gli studi sin qui prodotti, né le fonti primarie, sembrano aiutare nel reperire una risposta plausibile. Lo stesso James Webb sembra avvalorare l’influsso di Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875) nell’insegnamento di Gurdjieff sull’energia sessuale⁴³, ma il riferimento, per quanto stimolante—anche in relazione a studi recenti sulle relazioni (pure conflittuali) fra Società Teosofica e ambi-

⁴² Gurdjieff, *Vedute sul mondo reale*, 209. In parallelo, cfr. Weor, *Corpi Solari*, 129-135.

⁴³ Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*, 532.

enti occultisti nei quali la magia sessuale sembra certo avere svolto un ruolo⁴⁴, nonché sullo stesso Randolph⁴⁵—, non appare adeguatamente acclarato.

Dunque, non ci rimane che proseguire oltre nel rimarcare il “filo rosso” che unisce l’insegnamento di Gurdjieff a quello di Samael Aun Weor. Un “filo rosso” che, e ci pare questo un punto ulteriormente qualificante, non riguarda solo le premesse teoriche inerenti la magia sessuale, ma più in generale vasti segmenti del pensiero di Gurdjieff (basti pensare ai “Tre Fattori della Rivoluzione della Coscienza” precedentemente esposti, nei quali l’influsso gurdjieffiano è alquanto evidente). Così, il tema degli “io”—così importante nel “sistema weorita”, come abbiamo visto—deriva da un preciso insegnamento della Quarta Via⁴⁶; o ancora, il “Raggio di creazione”, concetto chiave nel pensiero di Gurdjieff⁴⁷, trova un preciso riverbero in Samael Aun Weor⁴⁸; e ancora—ma la lista non è di per sé esaustiva—i concetti di “Santa Affermazione, Santa Negazione, Santa Conciliazione” de *I racconti di Belzebù al suo piccolo nipote*⁴⁹ riappaiono in Weor⁵⁰, assieme alla “Legge del Tre (Triamazikamno)”⁵¹ e alla “Legge cosmica fondamentale di Heptaparaparshinokh (Legge del Sette)”⁵².

D’altro canto, non solo il *discorso* di Gurdjieff è ampiamente ripreso da Weor, ma anche il *percorso*. Infatti, se nel piano originario dell’Istituto per lo Sviluppo Armonico dell’Uomo le persone che ne sarebbero entrate a far parte sarebbero state divise in tre categorie (‘gruppo essoterico, gruppo mesoterico, gruppo esoterico’⁵³), identico profilo gerarchico è adottato nella galassia del “movimento weorita”, come scrive il più importante discepolo di Weor, Joaquin Enrique Amortegui Valbuena (1926-2000), più noto come V. M. Rabolú⁵⁴. In effetti, l’itinerario di approccio agli insegnamenti gnostici nel movimento weorita si suddivide in tre cicli, per un totale di circa cinquanta incontri a cadenza settimanale, corrispondenti a un programma di

⁴⁴ Godwin—Chanel—Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, *passim*.

⁴⁵ Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, *passim*.

⁴⁶ Walker, *Viaggio nella Quarta Via*, 15.

⁴⁷ Ouspensky, *Frammenti di un insegnamento sconosciuto*, 92-98, 107-108, 148, 153-156, 186-189, 229, 339-340.

⁴⁸ Weor, *Corpi Solari*, 38.

⁴⁹ Gurdjieff, *I racconti di Belzebù al suo piccolo nipote*, I, 117.

⁵⁰ Weor, *Trattato esoterico di Astrologia Ermetica*, 14.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 15; Gurdjieff, *I racconti di Belzebù al suo piccolo nipote*, I, 114-125.

⁵² Gurdjieff, *I racconti di Belzebù al suo piccolo nipote*, II, 242-289; Weor, *Trattato esoterico di Astrologia Ermetica*, 15.

⁵³ Gurdjieff, *Il nunzio del bene venturo*, 46.

⁵⁴ Rabolù, *Scienza Gnostica*, 23-38.

studi graduale: la “prima camera” (*circolo exoterico*) è composta di tre fasi (A, B e C), corrispondenti ad altrettante tappe di apprendimento delle nozioni fondamentali (meditazione, rilassamento, vocalizzazioni e mantra, viaggio astrale, risveglio dei chakra, conoscenza del sé, trasmutazione delle energie, ecc.); la “seconda camera” (*circolo mesoterico*) è rivolta a quanti, avendo compreso e messo in pratica l’insegnamento gnostico, desiderano vivere più a fondo i “Tre Fattori della Rivoluzione della Coscienza”; la “terza camera” (*circolo esoterico*), infine, è aperta agli allievi di fase avanzata. La pratica centrale è chiamata (utilizzando un termine tantrico) ‘*Sahaja Maithuna*’⁵⁵ e consiste in un atto sessuale completo fra un uomo e una donna che comporta la sublimazione dell’energia sessuale senza passare attraverso l’orgasmo (*‘inmisio [sic] membri virili in vagina feminae sine ejaculatum seminis’*⁵⁶), così da realizzare una “trasmutazione” dell’energia sessuale che contribuisce ad aprire i 49 livelli del subconscio (facendone uscire tutti gli “io” che sono nascosti) e permette l’ascesa gnostica. Si tratta di una pratica concepita come diversa rispetto al coito interrotto (nella misura in cui il seme, anziché essere eiaculato, dovrebbe percorrere un itinerario “interno”), ma che dovrebbe consentire la trasmutazione sia dell’energia maschile—seme—, sia delle secrezioni femminili, altrettanto importanti per il risveglio della *kundalini*.

Non va dimenticato, peraltro—ed ecco un’ulteriore elemento a supporto dell’influsso di Gurdjieff su Weor, nonché della presenza in Gurdjieff di dottrine collegate all’“alchimia interna”—che anche ne *I racconti di Belzebù al suo piccolo nipote* trova una fugace trattazione il tema della ritenzione del seme nelle pratiche trasmutative basate sull’energia sessuale, sulla base d’insegnamenti relativi al significato degli “hexioekhari esserici”, la cui conoscenza avrebbe attraversato indenne la scomparsa di Atlantide:

Quelle informazioni autentiche ma frammentarie sostenevano in modo assai convincente la possibilità di perfezionarsi utilizzando le sostanze degli hexioekhari, o “sperma”, presenti in essi, ma per loro sfortuna i frammenti rimasti non indicavano né cosa bisognasse fare a tal fine, né come. Allora alcuni hanno cominciato a riflettere ed a tentare con sforzi perseveranti di comprendere come bisognasse lavorare al perfezionamento di sé, per mezzo delle sostanze che inevitabilmente si costituiscono nella loro presenza. Riflettendo seriamente, alcuni s’erano convinti che il perfezionamento di sé poteva realizzarsi da solo, semplicemente astenendosi dall’emettere nel modo abituale la sostanza detta “sperma” costituitasi nella loro presenza, e avevano deciso di vivere insieme per verificare praticamente se l’astinenza potesse dare l’atteso risultato. . . . Da

⁵⁵ Weor, *Le Tre Montagne*, 101.

⁵⁶ Idem, *Il Messaggio di Acquario*, 78.

allora ad oggi, simili “adepti” han continuato ad organizzarsi automaticamente in gruppi⁵⁷.

Diversamente da altri ambienti esoterici, Samael Aun Weor considera questa via all'alchimia sessuale come l'unica lecita; le altre sono rifiutate e perfino attaccate come diaboliche (presiedute, finalmente, da una ‘Loggia nera’⁵⁸). Samael Aun Weor insegna che, nel *Sahaja Maithuna*, dall'unione delle forze maschile e femminile nasce una terza forza, il Cherubino: una parte della Grande Madre Divina, una creatura di fuoco che agisce per un tempo limitato ma sufficiente a “bruciare” gli “io” contro cui la sua forza viene diretta. Riprendendo una tradizione tantrica dotata di una lunga storia nella spiritualità orientale e nell'esoterismo occidentale, Samael Aun Weor ritiene che, evitando l'emissione del seme, l'energia sessuale, anziché disperdersi verso l'esterno, viaggi verso le fibre più profonde dell'essere e della coscienza, che viene così risvegliata. Anche se non in tutte le derivazioni del “movimento gnostico”, ai discepoli non coniugati viene invece insegnato un esercizio di trasmutazione chiamato (ancora utilizzando un termine tantrico; anche se nel tantrismo si tratta—come nel caso di *Sahaja Maithuna*—di parole che coprono significati diversi⁵⁹) *Vajroli Mudra*, che consiste in particolari posture seguite da un deciso massaggio sugli organi genitali⁶⁰.

Confermando un approccio non libertino alla sessualità—che deve essere infatti vissuta in assoluta castità di pensiero—, Samael Aun Weor sottolinea che l'antitesi fatale del *Vajroli Mudra* è ‘il vizio ripugnante e abietto della masturbazione’, cui segue fatalmente ‘l'abisso e la seconda morte’⁶¹ di cui parla l'*Apocalisse*. Vi è qui una chiave particolare dell'intero sistema gnostico weorita, il quale considera la sessualità quale forma eminente di relazione con il trascendente: ‘il sesso è la funzione creatrice per mezzo della quale l'essere umano è un vero Dio’⁶² e ‘l'alchimia sessuale è di fatto la scienza della nuova Era d'Acquario’⁶³, insegna Weor. A tal punto che la dispersione dell'energia sessuale fuori da queste pratiche—‘un vizio che ci hanno insegnato i luciferi’⁶⁴, ultimamente intesi come rivali esoterici che hanno deragliato dalla strada maestra della magia sessuale—viene letta come *causa causarum*

⁵⁷ Gurdjieff, *I racconti di Belzebù al suo piccolo nipote*, II, 237-238.

⁵⁸ Weor, *I Misteri Maggiori*, 69.

⁵⁹ White, *Il corpo alchemico, passim*.

⁶⁰ Weor, *La transformation radicale*, 136-145.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

⁶² Idem, *Il matrimonio perfetto*, 34.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 37.

⁶⁴ Idem, *I Misteri Maggiori*, 68.

della perdita di tutte le facoltà interne nonché di malattie, vecchiaia, degenerescenza delle funzioni vitali, perdita della memoria e, infine, della morte stessa, giacché ‘i tenebrosi consigliano l’ejaculazione seminale’⁶⁵.

Stop!

Abbiamo dichiarato in esordio gli obiettivi e i limiti che tale nostro saggio si prefiggeva, ovvero un *primo* approfondimento dell’influsso del pensiero di George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff su Samael Aun Weor, tenuto conto della straordinaria importanza dell’impatto dell’insegnamento del primo personaggio non solo sul panorama dell’esoterismo contemporaneo in generale—per tacere dell’influenza, tanto estesa quanto poco conosciuta, che Gurdjieff ha esercitato sulla letteratura, l’arte, l’architettura e la musica contemporanea—, ma in particolare del suo decisivo apporto sull’intero sistema teorico-pratico che il secondo personaggio preso in esame ha posto in essere a partire dagli anni 1950. Il parallelismo da noi adottato, che speriamo di avere dimostrato è fondato su premesse filologiche e interpretative, non è peraltro finalizzato ad attribuire a Gurdjieff quel che è proprio a Weor; e nondimeno, svolte tutte le debite distinzioni opportune, non ci vogliamo esimere dal considerare che un’attenta lettura di Weor induce a “rileggere” Gurdjieff da una prospettiva solitamente non rilevata dai molteplici—e non di rado assai approfonditi—studi che lo riguardano. Tuttavia, vi è dell’altro, a dare per così dire significato a questa piccola impresa, che sarebbe anche a nostro avviso lacunosa ove non fosse capace di spingersi oltre una pura comparazione testuale. Un “altro” che rileva dall’ennesima constatazione di come gli insegnamenti, le dottrine, le pratiche, gli schemi conoscitivi, le sofisticazioni concettuali, basati sull’idea della “sessualità quale forma eminente di relazione con il trascendente”—la trasformazione, o trasmutazione, dell’essere a uno stato superiore, attraverso l’uso, la manipolazione o l’intelligenza dell’energia sessuale, intesa nei suoi rapporti micro- e macro-cosmici—, siano una specie di “firma” di un numero ben più ampio di realtà dell’orizzonte esoterico-occultista moderno e contemporaneo di quanto generalmente si sia indotti a ritenere. Un “altro” che ci invita a ricordare e ad approfondire ulteriormente questo particolare fiume carsico—le cui premesse, coordinate, geografie, storie andrebbero sistematicamente organizzate, se si fosse capaci di svolgere un volo d’intelletto—, il quale a modo suo sembra disvelarsi come forma peculiare

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 62.

di permanenza della gnosi, di ritorno della gnosi, o di neo-gnosticismo, pur nella perfetta consapevolezza che lo studioso deve mantenere nel distinguere fra gnosticismo, neo-gnosticismo e nuovo gnosticismo, fra *risveglio* della gnosi e *ritorno* della gnosi, rifuggendo cioè da ogni impropria assimilazione ad alcuni miti culturali talora correnti.

PierLuigi Zoccatelli (1965), is deputy director of CESNUR, the Center for Studies on New Religions and member of SIPR (the Italian Society for the Psychology of Religion).

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Remarks on the influence of G.I. Gurdjieff on Samael Aun Weor

George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1866-1949) plays a special role among the key figures of contemporary esotericism. While he always refused to be identified as "a master", and did not particularly like the word "esotericism" either, Gurdjieff was uniquely influential not only on subsequent Western esotericism, but on literature, architecture, music and the arts in general as well. It is true, on the other hand, that followers, schools and independent disciples each interpreted Gurdjieff's teachings in very different ways. The article discusses Gurdjieff's influence on a lesser known, but quite important esoteric author, the Colombian master Samael Aun Weor (1917-1997), who established a "Gnostic Movement" which today is present in a number of different countries and has several thousands of followers. Neither Gurdjieff nor Weor left behind a single group or movement. Instead, their followers split up into a dozen different organizations, as also happened with the followers of other masters within the framework of Western esotericism, where a characteristic "genealogical hypertrophy" often leads to endless claims of legitimacy and schisms. Both Gurdjieff and Weor may also be studied in terms of the "charisma of the book", a category Jane Williams-Hogan introduced with reference to Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), i.e. their books generated a plethora of organized movements even beyond the presumed intentions of their authors. What is perhaps new in this article is that it discusses Gurdjieff's profound influence on Weor. This influence is rarely acknowledged, and in fact the crucial element of Weor's system, i.e. sexual magic, is not a central feature in most of the movements claiming Gurdjieff's heritage. Yet, a doctrine of sexuality as a pre-eminent kind of relation with the sacred, and as a means of achieving higher states of consciousness, is far from absent in Gurdjieff's writings. In fact, several of Weor's ideas about the use and manipulation of sexual energies appear to be taken literally from Gurdjieff. A study of Weor thus may be especially significant in order to address an aspect of Gurdjieff which was never adequately discussed in the large international corpus of publications about his teachings.

William R. Newman & Anthony Grafton, *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, The M.I.T. Press: Cambridge (Ma.) & London 2001. 443 pp. ISBN 0-262-14075-6

Dirigé par deux spécialistes confirmés de l'histoire des sciences et, plus largement, de l'histoire culturelle de l'Europe moderne (une "spécialité" qui a désormais acquis ses lettres de noblesse académiques), le présent volume se concentre, comme l'indique son sous-titre, sur l'évolution de l'astrologie et de l'alchimie au cours de la Renaissance.

L'*introduction*, signée des deux responsables, entend faire justice de deux principaux lieux communs, obstacles à l'historiographie réellement critique des disciplines sus-nommées qu'entend promouvoir le recueil: d'une part, l'idée selon laquelle l'astrologie n'aurait représenté qu'un souci marginal et déjà culturellement presque obsolète dans la société européenne de l'époque concernée, idée reposant sur une relecture anachronique conditionnée par notre vision actuelle des choses; d'autre part, l'extension abusive, à toute la Renaissance, du thème de l'interdépendance de la magie, de l'alchimie, de la philosophie naturelle et de l'astrologie conduisant, plus ou moins sous la houlette de cette dernière, à l'élaboration de la figure synthétique du *magus universalis*. La perspective corrigée défendue par *Secrets of Nature* établirait le caractère essentiellement indépendant des parcours respectifs de l'astrologie et de l'alchimie, déjà ancré dans les principaux discours médiévaux (ps.-Geber, par exemple) qui leur sont consacrés.

Les deux premiers articles du recueil concernent J. Cardan (1501-1576) et sont respectivement dûs à G. Ernst d'une part, A. Grafton et N. Siraisi d'autre part; ces trois auteurs ont par ailleurs déjà abondamment traité de ce célèbre mathématicien et astrologue, en participant par de nombreux articles ou des monographies à la vague de publications et de colloques qui l'ont pris pour cible dans la dernière décennie. G. Ernst insiste sur le désir bien connu chez Cardan, confronté comme tant d'autres aux critiques de l'astrologie, de rendre à celle-ci sa place, définie par Ptolémée, au sein de la philosophie de la nature. Dans cette perspective, la composition d'horoscopes individuels vise à établir la "science des astres", conçue comme un genre de "théologie naturelle", sur une base empirique fiable.

En ce sens, la pratique médicale, centrale chez notre homme, et qui fait l'objet de la monographie de N. Siraisi (*The Clock and the Mirror: Girolamo Cardano and Renaissance Medicine*, Princeton University Press 1997) comme du second article ici présenté, bénéficie d'un lien théorique très anciennement attesté avec l'astrologie. On sait qu'au Moyen Âge, l'enseignement de la seconde était parfois rattaché à la chaire de médecine, comme par exemple à Bologne au XIV^e siècle. Les deux auteurs montrent que Cardan, loin de profiter de cette tradition doctrinale et thérapeutique bien établie, développe plutôt une tendance à considérer séparément les fondements théoriques des deux disciplines. Dans la pratique, essentiellement à l'occasion de l'interprétation récurrente de son propre horoscope et du diagnostic de son état de santé personnel, il prend certes en compte les influences astrologiques mais en relativise l'importance en les associant à l'hérédité et aux facteurs épidémiques, déterminant ainsi par rapport à l'astrologie médicale une attitude évolutive, assez complexe et ambiguë. On regrettera seulement, dans ces deux articles denses et informés, l'absence de toute référence aux travaux d'O. Pompeo Faracovi (*Scritto negli astri. L'astrologia nella cultura dell'Occidente*, Venise: Marsilio 1994, 240-46 et *passim*; *Gli oroscopi di Cristo*, ibid. 1999, 183ss. et—mais paru en 2002—*Girolamo Cardano: La natività del Salvatore e l'astrologia mondiale*, Milan: Mimesis; on peut maintenant ajouter K. von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, München: C.H. Beck 2003, 238-242 et *passim*).

L'étude, par D. Rutkin, du recours à l'astrologie généthliaque dans la dédicace, par J. Kepler, de son *Astronomia nova* (1609) à l'empereur Rodolphe II, et de sa possible influence sur celle du *Sidereus Nuncius* de Galilée (1610) à Cosimo II, semble attester la prégnance des considérations horoscopiques dans la culture européenne de la Renaissance. Si l'emprunt direct éventuel ne peut, en l'état actuel des choses, être démontré, une similarité des arguments dans les deux cas ne fait pas de doute, pas plus que l'emploi du biais astrologique dans la "présentation" d'une œuvre scientifique à un protecteur. Toutefois, il reste selon nous qu'il s'agit là surtout d'une rhétorique assez banale à l'époque, et qu'éluder comme le fait l'auteur les différences entre les deux textes en les traitant de simples variations, confine—du point de vue de la méthode historique—au paralogisme.

N.H. Clulee, spécialiste de l'œuvre de J. Dee, s'attache à réfuter l'hypothèse déjà ancienne de F.A. Yates, qui voyait dans le savant anglais un important propagandiste religieux, précurseur sur le Continent du mouvement rosicrucien. À dire vrai, il n'est plus guère utile de s'attaquer à de telles vues, qui n'ont jamais vraiment emporté l'adhésion générale, mais on saura gré en

revanche à l'auteur d'avoir montré, par une analyse approfondie, le rôle de Dee dans l'illustration du concept d'"astronomie inférieure" appliqué à l'alchimie, dans la ligne de Ficin, Trithème et Agrippa. N.H. Clulee établit encore la fragilité de certains intermédiaires supposés par F.A. Yates entre Dee et les milieux rosicruciens, comme le texte attribué à "Philippus a Gabella", dans la mesure où celui-ci semble tout ignorer des problématiques propres aux Manifestes, tout en exhibant une relative connaissance de l'œuvre de Dee, qu'il relit à sa façon.

Dans un article abondant, extrêmement minutieux et admirablement documenté, D. Kahn ramène la fameuse affaire parisienne des "placards" rosicruciens de 1623 à la dimension—pourtant historique!—d'une blague d'étudiant. L'auteur de la plaisanterie, un certain Etienne Chaume, visait autant à confondre les amateurs de connaissances mystérieuses qu'à rallier l'opposition aux libertins. D. Kahn montre que l'épisode s'inscrit dans le très vif débat parisien sur la théologie et le paracelsisme, réutilisés par les jésuites pour s'opposer à la Réforme; mettant en évidence l'important volet proprement médical de la controverse, il étudie en détail la position centrale de G. Naudé, fait justice au passage de la légende de l'implication de Descartes dans la *curiositas rosicruciana* et élucide les derniers prolongements, désormais surtout littéraires, de l'affaire.

L. Kassel s'attaque ensuite avec brio au personnage haut en couleurs de Simon Forman (1552-1611), auquel elle a consacré une thèse inédite (Oxford 1997), à quoi est venue maintenant s'ajouter la monographie de Barbara H. Troister, *Notorious Astrological Physician of London: Works and Days of Simon Forman* (Cambridge University Press 2001). Installé à Londres en 1591, S. Forman s'érigea en médecin et praticien autodidacte de l'occulte, réalisant—tant en fonction de son intérêt personnel en ces matières que dans celui d'une pratique bientôt lucrative—une synthèse originale de la médecine, de la magie, de la kabbale, de l'astrologie et de l'alchimie, dans la ligne de Dee et Agrippa. L'auteur examine avec soin et précision les interactions entre ces disciplines dans la pensée et la pratique de Forman, à la lumière d'une étude attentive de ses précieuses notes, de ses manuscrits et de ses procédés de lecture (annotations, etc.).

Dans la dernière contribution du volume, W. Newman et L. Principe, tous deux historiens réputés de l'alchimie médiévale et Renaissance, font justice de plusieurs stéréotypes dont l'étude critique de cette discipline est encore fréquemment grevée: parmi eux, l'opposition entre alchimie "occulte" et chimie "scientifique", systématisée au cours du XVIII^e siècle, qui sacrifie la prise en compte des continuités thématiques et structurelles reliant l'alchimie

médiévale et le panvitalisme iatrochimique de la Renaissance, dissimulant à la fois leur fécondation mutuelle jusqu'aux Lumières et leur rôle dans l'établissement des fondations théoriques et expérimentales de la "révolution chimique" de la fin du XVIII^e siècle (J.-B. van Helmont).

En deuxième lieu, les interprétations spiritualistes (Atwood, Hitchcock), jungienne et éliadienne de l'alchimie qui prétendent, chacune à sa façon, éliminer pour l'essentiel la dimension historique, matérielle et expérimentale de l'Art, pour le travestir en exercice mystique intemporel. Pour les deux auteurs, le symbolisme et les allégories alchimiques ont pour fonction d'encoder de réelles et reproductibles procédures chimiques, sans nier pour autant les nombreuses et indiscutables interactions entre Ecriture, religion et alchimie (que déplorait déjà Mersenne).

Dans l'ensemble, il s'agit donc ici d'un volume dense, solide, utile, même s'il revient parfois sur des causes qu'on aurait pu croire jugées (marginalité de l'astrologie, thèse de Yates sur Dee, caractère non-scientifique de la position jungienne, quoiqu'elle ait malencontreusement influencé certains historiens des sciences comme—à des titres divers—H. Metzger ou B.J.T. Dobbs). Louable en soi, le parti-pris de considérer séparément les avatars historiques de l'astrologie et de l'alchimie a mené à un relatif éparpillement des articles, dont le rapport entre eux et, aussi bien, à la thématique dominante du recueil est parfois lâche (c'est, il est vrai, l'écueil de presque tout recueil de ce genre). De fait, constater que tel auteur (par exemple Kepler) ne s'intéresse guère à l'alchimie [!] ou que tel mouvement (rosicrucien) paraît négliger l'astrologie judiciaire, est chose différente de démontrer—s'il en était réellement besoin!—que tout adepte Renaissance des arts occultes n'adopte pas nécessairement la conception synthétique post-ficinienne de l'alchimie comme "astronomie terrestre". Une appréciation plus nuancée semble ici requise des liens entre "vision(s) du monde", cosmologie et arguments "techniques" ressortissant à telle ou telle discipline (théorie de la matière, nature et mode d'action des influences astrales, etc.), comme le montrent les textes du mouvement paracelsien, le grand absent du présent volume mis à part les efforts de D. Kahn.

Jean-Pierre Brach

Wilhelm Kühlmann & Joachim Telle (Hg.), *Corpus Paracelsisticum. Band 1. Dokumente frühneuzeitlicher Naturphilosophie in Deutschland: Der Frühparacelsismus. Erster Teil*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 2001. 732 S. ISBN 3-484-36559-5.

Wilhelm Kühlmann & Joachim Telle (Hg.), *Corpus Paracelsisticum. Band 2. Dokumente frühneuzeitlicher Naturphilosophie in Deutschland: Der Frühparacelsismus. Zweiter Teil*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 2004. 1090 S. ISBN 3-484-36589-7.

Mit den ersten beiden Bänden des auf vier Bände angelegten *Corpus Paracelsisticum* haben Wilhelm Kühlmann und Joachim Telle Pionierarbeit geleistet. Bereits die ebenfalls von Kühlmann und Telle besorgte Edition von Oswald Crollius' *De signaturis internis rerum* und von dessen *Alchemo-medizinische Briefe 1585 bis 1597* macht den Anspruch der beiden Editoren auf transparente philologische Arbeit und Quellenerschließung durch biographische, bibliographische und inhaltliche Annotationen deutlich, den sie mit der kritischen Edition des *Corpus Paracelsisticum* vorbildlich weiterverfolgt haben.

Die zwei bislang erschienenen umfangreichen Bände sind jeweils mit einer ausführlichen instruktiven Einleitung versehen, die das komplexe Thema und das noch weitgehend unerforschte Terrain des Frühparacelsismus in Deutschland in seinen weitverzweigten kulturhistorischen Implikationen darstellt. Den edierten Quellentexten gehen biographische und bibliographische Daten zu Verfasser und Adressaten voraus. Schlagregesten fassen den Inhalt der Quellentexte kurz zusammen, Regesten liefern eine umfassendere Inhaltsangabe. Alle lateinischen Textzeugen werden ediert und übersetzt. Sämtliche Texte sind kenntnisreich und ausführlich mit Bezugnahme auf die relevante Forschungsliteratur kommentiert. Den Abschluß größerer Sinneinheiten, wie u. a. die Briefe und Dedikationen von Adam von Bodenstein, bilden zusammenfassende Gesamtwürdigungen. Die Quellen selbst bestehen meist aus Briefen und Dedikationsepisteln, aber auch aus Vorreden an Paracelsicaleser, wie sie vor allem im ersten Band zu finden sind. Band 1 versammelt Briefe, Dedikationen und Prologe der Paracelsisten Adam von Bodenstein, Alexander von Suchten, Valentius de Retiis, Valentius Antrapassus, Christophorus Pithopoeius und Heinrich Wolff; darüber hinaus finden sich frühe Zeugnisse zur Paracelsus-Rezeption von Cyriacus Jacobus und Georg Joachim Rheticus. Dabei nehmen die Zeugnisse Bodensteins den größten Raum ein. Im zweiten Band sind Quellentexte von Michael Toxites, Balthasar Flöter, Pietro Perna

(ediert in der Bearbeitung Carlos Gillys), Gerhard Dorn und anderer Paracelsisten ediert. Hier kommt Toxites der größte Raum zu.

Mit der Ausgabe des *Corpus Paracelsisticum* ist nun in der Tat ein großer Schritt in der historiographischen Erschließung des Paracelsismus getan. Wie aus dem *Corpus Paracelsisticum* ersichtlich wird, dreht sich der paracelsistische Diskurs, der Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland einsetzt und schon bald zu einem europäischen Phänomen wird, im Wesentlichen um einen Paradigmenwechsel in Naturphilosophie und Medizin, der von Paracelsus intendiert und in Gang gesetzt wurde, nun aber in der Bewegung des Paracelsismus ideologisiert und sowohl sozialpolitisch als auch frömmigkeitspragmatisch aufgeladen wird. Fortgesetzt wird dabei der Versuch einer Wende in der *Scientia naturalis* von den frühen Paracelsisten wie Adam von Bodenstein, Alexander von Suchten, Michael Toxites und Gerhard Dorn. In bewußter Anlehnung nicht nur an Hohenheims naturkundlich-medizinische, sondern auch an seine sozialetisch-theologischen Lehren, entwickeln sie Strategien der Verbreitung und Etablierung des als "neu" apostrophierten paracelsischen Wissens. Einige der wichtigsten Strategeme, wie sie sich aus den Texten des *Corpus Paracelsisticum*, insbesondere den Textzeugen von Adam von Bodenstein und Michael Toxites, deutlich aufzeigen lassen, zeigen die außerordentliche thematische Bandbreite, die Kühlmann/Telle mit ihrer Edition des *Corpus Paracelsisticum* ausfüllen. Die einzelnen Strategeme sind dabei eng miteinander verflochten:

1. Die Polarisierung von "altem" und "neuem" Wissen, in die weitere Gegensätze eingefügt werden, darunter der wichtige Gegensatz von heidnischer und christlicher Wissenschaft, von Dogmatismus und betont christlichem Fortschritt, von unfrommer Autoritätsgläubigkeit (Aristoteles, Galen) und frommer Offenheit für die offenbarende Dynamik der göttlichen Ansprache in Natur und Geschichte, die neue Erkenntnisse und Wahrheiten allererst möglich macht. Dabei stellt für die Paracelsisten die neue Medizin des Paracelsus den Prototypus einer explizit und genuin christlichen Kunst und Wissenschaft dar, in der Experiment und frommes Gebet zusammenfließen. Intendiert ist der dem Nächsten im Namen der Nächstenliebe zugute kommende Nutzen. Hierzu gehört auch die Entgegensetzung von "res" und "verba" mit der Priorität der Dinge vor den Worten. Die Praxis in Wissenschaft und Theologie hat demnach Vorrang vor Spekulation und Theorie. Darin sehen Paracelsisten wie Bodenstein und Toxites den einzigartigen Vorzug der paracelsischen "alchemia medica", ihre Glaubwürdigkeit.

2. Die Theologisierung der Sprache, mit der das neue Wissen charakterisiert wird. Bewußt wird von einer "reformatio", "renovatio" und "regeneratio" der Medizin und Naturphilosophie gesprochen, wird eine enge Parallele zwischen Luther und Paracelsus gezogen.
3. Das Erschaffen eines Paracelsus-Bildes, das einerseits als Gegenlegende zu den negativen Gerüchten um die Gestalt des Hohenheimers fungieren soll, andererseits als positive Legende eine Art Verkaufstrategie darstellt, um mit dem Image des Paracelsus auch das neue paracelsische Wissen zu verbreiten. Zu diesem Strategem gehört auch die von Bodenstein initiierte Verbreitung von Gerüchten, wie dem Gerücht von Giftmordanschlägen auf Paracelsus seitens galenistischer Ärzte, um einerseits Paracelsus' ungehobelte zornige Angriffe auf die herrschende medizinische Zunft zu erklären, andererseits letztere zu diffamieren. Aus dem ungehobelten und ungebildeten Paracelsus wird so ein zorniger Heiliger und Prophet der neuen wahren Medizin. Die von Kühlmann und Telle ausgewählten Briefzeugnisse bieten so u. a. die einzigartige Möglichkeit, die Legendenbildung in der frühen Neuzeit bzw. die Verdichtung unterschiedlicher historischer Gestalten wie Luther, Faust, Trithemius und Agrippa von Nettesheim zu einem Typus zu studieren.
4. Neben die Verklärung der Gestalt des Hohenheimers tritt die Heiligsprechung der paracelsischen Schriften, deren volles Verständnis nur unter Beihilfe göttlicher Inspiration einzutreten vermag: 'Dann sein lehr steht nit in falschem wohn/ oder mainung/ sonder ist gantz vnnd gar auff die natur/ die wahrhafftige Philosophie/ höchste erfahrung/ ja auff Gott selbs gegründet. Wer solches nit will glauben/ der besehe seine bücher recht/ greiffs an mit der hand/ wirdt er gewißlich/ so jm Gott der Herr (der hierinn der beste Preceptor ist) die augen auffthut/ mehr finden/ dann buchstab außweiset. Wer hie allein verachten/ vnd schelten will/ der erwege mit vleiß die fünff Bücher von dem langen leben/ vnd sein grosse Chyrurgy/ will von andern nicht reden/ so würt er finden/ wie ein hoher theurer schatz der weißheyt darinn verborgen ligt' (Brief von Michael Toxites an Graf Philipp, *Corpus Paracelsisticum* 2, S. 70).
5. Übersetzung von Paracelsica ins Lateinische bzw. Verbreitung von lateinischen Paracelsica, um eine internationale Rezeption zu sichern.
6. Aufbau eines tragfähigen sozialen Netzes, in dem Paracelsicalieferanten, Stadtärzte, Wundärzte, Leibärzte, Apotheker, aber auch Juristen, Amtsmänner, Adelige und Geistliche, ja sogar der Kaiser selbst einbezogen sind oder werden sollen (siehe hier vor allem die Adressaten der im

Corpus Paracelsisticum abgedruckten Briefzeugnisse), um zur Etablierung der nicht nur medizinisch orientierten, sondern auch sozialpolitisch ambitionierten paracelsistischen Bewegung beizutragen. Eine Analyse der Dynamik eines solchen Netzwerks muß mit der Erforschung der Biographien, Briefwechsel, sozialen Funktion der eher unbekannten Beteiligten ansetzen, wie dies beispielhaft im *Corpus Paracelsisticum* geschieht, dessen Hinweise es sich im Einzelnen nachzugehen und detailliert auszuarbeiten lohnt. Dies impliziert mitunter aufwendige und gründliche Archivarbeit.

7. Eine gewiefted Editionspolitik mit gekonnter Dedikationspraxis.
8. Die Systematisierung der paracelsischen Lehren im Sinne eines methodisch intakten auf Experiment und Erfahrung basierenden Lehrgebäudes, um dem Vorwurf der mangelnden Systematik und der Unverständlichkeit des paracelsischen Werks entgegenzuwirken.

Die Edition des *Corpus Paracelsisticum 1 und 2*, dessen Textzeugen zwischen 1550 und 1584 verfasst wurden, bleibt allerdings bei den hier kurz erläuterten Aspekten nicht stehen. Der Paracelsismus läßt sich auch keineswegs auf seine strategischen Verfahren verkürzen. An die beiden vorliegenden Bände darf vielmehr darüber hinaus die Frage gestellt werden, warum und wie der Paracelsismus Verbindungen beispielsweise mit den Rosenkreuzern, den Böhmiſten und bestimmten Ausläufern des Pietismus eingegangen ist und diese geprägt hat. Die vorliegende Edition hat den außerordentlichen Vorzug, dass sie dem aufmerksam forschenden Leser Antworten auf diese Fragen bereit stellt. Es bleibt also nur zu hoffen, dass der Materialreichtum des *Corpus Paracelsisticum* Anlaß zu ebenso reichhaltigen fachwissenschaftlichen und interdisziplinären Detailstudien gibt. Das Programm dafür haben Kühlmann und Telle vorgezeichnet: Interdisziplinäre wissenschafts- und kulturhistorische Forschung und philologisch kritische Editionsarbeit in Allianz.

Hanns-Peter Neumann

Elisabetta Barone, Matthias Riedl, Alexandra Tischel (Hrsg.), *Pioniere, Poeten, Professoren: Eranos und der Monte Verità in der Zivilisationsgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Eranos, Neue Folge, Band 11), Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2004. 257 S.

Die Bedeutung der Eranostagungen für die Religionsgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts wird immer deutlicher. Das nicht nur wegen der Prominenz der Teilnehmer, sondern auch wegen des Einflusses, den die Tagungen auf das Verständnis dessen ausgeübt haben, was Religion denn nun "wirklich" sei und wie man wissenschaftlich mit ihr umzugehen habe. Ebenso kann nur schwer die Vorreiterrolle bestritten werden, die Eranos für die akademische Aufarbeitung esoterischen Gedankengutes gespielt hat. Deshalb muß eigentlich jedes Buch, das sich dieser nunmehr seit 70 Jahren stattfindenden Zusammenkünfte annimmt, höchst willkommen sein. Das vorliegende Werk enttäuscht jedoch leider. Und das, obwohl der Untertitel des Buches Großes hat erwarten lassen. Aber nach neuen Erkenntnissen und einem Vorantreiben des Wissensstandes um Eranos oder den Monte Verità sucht man so gut wie vergebens. Umso enttäuschender ist das, weil ja die Herausgeber den "Amici di Eranos" angehören, die unter der Führerschaft von Prof. Tilo Schabert um die Wichtigkeit dieser Konferenzen bestens Bescheid wissen. Ebensowenig kann ihre Liebe und Begeisterung für dieses Thema bezweifelt werden.

Dazu eine kurze Erklärung: Nachdem die ursprünglichen von Frau Olga Froebe-Kapteyn 1933 ins Leben gerufenen Tagungen im Jahre 1988 unvermittelt von ihrem Nachfolger Rudolf Ritsema eingestellt und nur noch auf das Studium des *I Ging* beschränkt wurden, formte sich um die Professoren Erik Hornung und Tilo Schabert die sogenannte Associazione Amici di Eranos. Sie führte schon ab 1990 diese Tagungen mit hochkarätigen Vortragenden und in modernisierter Form weiter. Dabei gelang es, den alten Geist einer Vereinigung von akademischem Fachwissen und innerem Erleben weitgehend zu erhalten. Leider kam es dann im Jahre 1999 zu einem Zerwürfnis zwischen Erik Hornung und Tilo Schabert, die jeder für sich allein weitermachten. Damit zeigen sich heute drei unterschiedliche Eranosstränge: der ursprüngliche in Ascona/Moscia, wo Rudolf Ritsema bzw. von ihm Berufene Tagungen abhalten, derjenige der Amici di Eranos, wo Tilo Schabert führend tätig ist und schließlich derjenige unter der Leitung von Erik Hornung, dem sich Andreas Schweizer beigesellt hat. Tilo Schabert hat sich dabei besonders um die Anwerbung von Studenten sowie jungen Nachwuchsleuten verdient gemacht und speziell für sie Kolloquien organisiert, wo sie Gelegenheit bekamen, eigene Forschungsergebnisse vorzutragen. Der

vorliegende Band enthält nun die Akten des Kolloquiums vom Jahre 2000, das das erste dieser Art war.

Den Anfang im Buch macht Tilo Schabert höchstpersönlich, der versucht, *The Eranos Experience* in Worte zu fassen. Trotz seines Engagements bleibt das Ergebnis vage. Wie will man aber auch siebzig Jahre unterschiedlichster Tagungen auf wenigen Seiten unter einen Hut bringen? Der darauffolgende Beitrag von Elisabeth Ries gibt zwar einen konzisen historischen Überblick über die Geschichte des Monte Verità, aber eben auch nicht mehr.

Ähnlich geht es weiter: Die im Umfeld von Stefan George angesiedelte Dichterin Franziska zu Reventlow, die sich die Mitherausgeberin Alexandra Tischel zum Thema erwählt hat, mag zwar interessant sein, doch die Berührungspunkte mit dem Monte Verità sind rar gesät. Enttäuschend auch der Beitrag von Claudio Belloni über *Thomas Mann und die Anfänge von Eranos*, da der Titel doch die Entdeckung neuer Zusammenhänge suggeriert. Statt dessen geht es hauptsächlich um eine Analyse des Briefwechsels zwischen Thomas Mann und Karl Kerényi und um Manns Roman *Joseph und seine Brüder*. Eranos spielt allerhöchstens im Hintergrund mit. Wo die Anfänge von Eranos behandelt werden, bleibt unklar.

Der Philosoph Adriano Fabris versucht, sich der Eranos zu Grunde liegenden Philosophie anzunehmen und spricht unter anderem von Offenheit, lebendiger Ganzheit, Individualität und Erfahrung. Nicht daß man widersprechen wollte, aber man hätte sich mehr erwartet. Widersprechen muß man allerdings einigen (wenn auch nicht besonders wichtigen) faktischen Fehlern in der Geschichte von Eranos, wie sie Fabris vorträgt. So hat 1940 Frau Olga Froebe-Kapteyn unter allen Umständen die Tagungen durchführen wollen und das mit Andreas Speiser (nicht Speisen) auch so abgesprochen, wie ihre damals gehaltene Einführungsrede beweist. Sie wollte also eben keine Unterbrechung von Eranos, wie das Fabris annimmt (Vgl. Hans Thomas Hakl, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos*, Bretten 2001, S. 197f.). Diesem Beitrag folgt eine Reihe von Aufsätzen, die zwar für mancherlei Kulturwissenschaftler von Interesse sein mögen, dem Eranosforscher jedoch nur wenig bringen.

Da bei einem Sammelband wie dem vorliegenden nie alle Arbeiten besprochen werden können, sollen nur noch einige Beiträge erwähnt werden, die wenigstens einige Teilfragen um Eranos neu betrachten. Hier wäre Ron Margolin anzuführen, der die unterschiedlichen Herangehensweisen analysiert, die Martin Buber, Carl G. Jung und Mircea Eliade bei ihren religionswissenschaftlichen Studien anwandten. Margolin erhellt dabei die geistige Verwandtschaft von Buber und Eliade, die sich beide von Jung und

dessen Methodik absetzten. Ebenfalls herausgehoben zu werden verdient Matthias Riedls Abhandlung über den Biologen Adolf Portmann, der nach dem Tode der Eranos-Gründerin gemeinsam mit Rudolf Ritsema die Tagungen weiterführte. Neben der Stilsicherheit besticht hier auch die Klarheit der Stellungnahme. Ebenso spürt man die (durchaus begründete) Sympathie für die Gestalt Portmanns. Warum Riedl allerdings das "Esoterische" bei Eranos bestreitet, müßte genauer analysiert werden, wobei zuvor jedoch eine Klärung der Begriffe nötig wäre. Falsch ist sicherlich eine pauschale Qualifizierung von Eranos als "esoterisch". Gerade Adolf Portmann ist ein hervorragendes Beispiel für die Unrichtigkeit einer solchen generellen Qualifizierung. Andererseits dürfte es aber sehr schwierig sein, die esoterische Grundhaltung von Frau Froebe-Kapteyn zu übergehen.

Georg Dörr behandelt die Beziehung zwischen Olga Froebe-Kapteyn und dem deutschen Dichter Ludwig Derleth, die in der Vorgeschichte von Eranos tatsächlich eine bedeutsame, wenn auch schon länger bekannte Rolle spielt. Eigenartig wirkt dabei, daß der Autor behauptet, den Briefverkehr der beiden "gefunden" zu haben. Finden kann man aber nur, was "verloren" war und dieser Briefverkehr war nie verloren. Er liegt ja im Deutschen Literaturarchiv von Marbach, wo Tausende von Nachlässen aufbewahrt werden und darunter eben auch derjenige von Ludwig Derleth. Abgesehen davon, dass die Dame, die gemeinsam mit seiner Witwe die gesamte Korrespondenz des Dichters in Marbach deponiert hat, noch immer lebt und ebenso abgesehen davon, dass dieser Briefverkehr ja in der Fachliteratur mehrfach aufscheint.

Zumindest kurz erwähnt werden soll noch der Beitrag von Francesco Gaiffi über die christlichen Theologen bei Eranos, deren Mitarbeit vielfach in den Hintergrund gedrängt wird. Besonders interessant der Hinweis Gaiffis auf die anfangs äußerst fruchtbare und später immer problematischer werdende Diskussion zwischen dem katholischen Geistlichen Victor White und C.G. Jung. Jung hatte nämlich die Hoffnung, gemeinsam mit White, der dem Dominikanerorden angehörte, das "magnum opus" einer Vereinigung der psychologischen und religiösen Dimension des Menschen zu realisieren. Einige zentrale katholische Dogmen standen dem jedoch schlußendlich entgegen.

Im Anhang an die eigentlichen Beiträge finden sich Stimmen von Vortragenden über ihre Erfahrungen bei Eranos, darunter diejenigen von Anthony Aveni, Walter Haug, Moshe Idel und David Miller. Zwei Register und eine Bibliographie beschließen den Band. Zu erwähnen ist noch, daß das Werk mehrsprachig ist, wobei das Italienische im Vordergrund steht.

Mag im Übrigen diese Besprechung auch sehr kritisch wirken, so soll doch die darin enthaltene Aufmunterung, auf jeden Fall mit solchen Projekten

weiterzumachen—nur bitte etwas zielgerichteter—nicht übersehen werden. Schließlich wollen wir ja (fast) alle, dass die Bedeutung von Eranos erfasst wird und Eranos weiter lebt.

Hans Thomas Hakl

Chrysopoeia, Tome VII (2000-2003), Archè Edidit: Paris & Milan 2003. 542 p.

De 1996 à 1998, Christina Viano et Sylvain Matton ont tenu à Paris un séminaire sur “Les théories alchimiques de la matière” en choisissant la tradition platonicienne comme point de départ. La revue *Chrysopoeia* offre dans son récent tome VII une part des communications de ce séminaire présentées respectivement par D.D. Saffrey, M. Papathanassiou, U. Rudolph, Y. Marquet, P. Carusi, P. Thillet, R. Crouvizier, A. Perifano, A. Clericuzio et J.-P. Brach. L’éditeur a ajouté à cet ensemble d’autres études presque toutes rattachées à l’histoire de l’idée de matière dans la tradition alchimique, y compris à des textes de certains adversaires de cette idée.

La lecture des différentes théoriques physiques énoncées pas les philosophes antiques et que défendirent des médecins et des chimistes permet de constater que l’élémentarisme s’impose comme horizon d’événements. En outre, malgré l’orientation platonicienne fort suivie, il semblerait que c’est l’élémentarisme aristotélicien qui fut le recours constant des alchimistes et de ceux qui s’opposèrent à eux. De fait, dans l’Index du volume on trouve deux fois plus de références au Stagirite qu’à son ancien Maître.

Ces études sont rassemblées autour de ce qui constitue le point de départ théorique de l’alchimie: la matière, et son concept ultime, à savoir la matière première, qui est au demeurant l’un des pôles de la métaphysique antique et médiévale. Partant de Stéfanos d’Alexandrie et s’arrêtant au cartésien Waldschmidt, l’ensemble des textes ne constitue évidemment pas une histoire organique de l’idée de matière chez les expérimentateurs; toutefois, on peut effectivement constater l’omniprésence des élémentarismes platonicien et aristotélicien, et surtout la rémanence de ce dernier malgré son rejet répété par plusieurs générations de spagyrites.

Maria K. Papathanassiou consacre une étude à l’alchimie de Stéphanos d’Alexandrie pour conclure à l’influence évidente du néoplatonisme sur ses idées à plus d’un égard. Mais cette influence est déjà mêlée ‘aux systèmes

philosophiques syncrétistes d'Alexandrie et aux œuvres des Pères de l'Église' (p. 31).

Ulrich Rudolph se penche sur trois textes islamiques: le *Livre d'Ammonius sur les opinions des philosophes* (IX^e s.), et deux autres ouvrages rédigés à la même époque mais beaucoup plus connus, à savoir la *Turba philosophorum* et *Le Livre du secret de la création* du ps.-Apollonius de Tyane. Le premier ouvrage 'se compose d'éléments en majorité néoplatoniciens et monothéistes' (p. 39). Les hypostases platoniciennes de l'intellect, de l'âme universelle et de "la matière d'en haut" sont présents dans cet ouvrage qui s'insère dans le 'célèbre processus de transmission de l'héritage grec au monde arabe qui s'est déroulé au IX^e siècle' (p. 35). Cette matière intelligible ne cessera de hanter les métaphysiciens médiévaux. Également, la *Turba philosophorum* reprend 'la fameuse théorie des quatre éléments' (p. 44). Or, l'élémentarisme semble être pour l'auteur inconnu de la *Turba* 'l'une des doctrines les plus importantes' (*ibid.*). On voit donc combien une certaine alchimie arabe du IX^e siècle pouvait s'accommoder de l'élémentarisme grec.

Alfredo Perifano présente trois néoplatoniciens italiens de la Renaissance: Basilio Lapi, Alessandro Farra, Antonio Allegretti. Il démontre que même si 'un certain nombre d'éléments platoniciens ou plutôt néoplatoniciens sont bien présents' chez Lapi, cette présence 'est diluée dans un mélange syncrétique d'aristotélisme hybride filtré par la pensée médiévale'. Les éléments aristotéliens présents aussi chez les deux autres auteurs s'expliquent, selon Perifano, par 'cette exigence assez répandue chez les néoplatoniciens de la Renaissance de faire appel à Aristote dans le domaine de la physique, ce que n'avait pas dédaigné de faire Ficin lui-même' (p. 237).

Ce jugement est corroboré par Jean-Pierre Brach, qui traite de la *Physique résolutive* du médecin Annibal Barlet. La théorie de la matière du médecin spagyrite est un 'mélange superficiel de termes et de notions d'origine indifféremment platonisante ou aristotélienne, mis en oeuvre de façon très floue' (p. 333).

Antonio Clericuzio résume le révisionnisme de Van Helmont qui, 'en s'opposant à la philosophie de la nature aristotélienne', modifie la conception paracelsienne de la matière en postulant une matière première et en considérant que les trois principes du soufre, du mercure et du sel, 'ne sont pas des substances simples ou homogènes, mais des corps composés' (p. 317). En corollaire, l'alchimiste belge cherchait comment 'produire un solvant universel . . . capable de ramener tous les corps composés à leur matière première' (p. 317). Clericuzio rappelle ensuite la critique du spagyrisme hel-

montien par Robert Boyle qui rompt aussi avec la théorie paracelsienne de l'analogie microcosme-macrocosme (p. 309).

À la fin du XVII^e siècle, on peut lire dans la *Physique* de Gaetano Felice Verani, texte traduit ici par Sylvain Matton, l'état de confusion qui existe sur la conception de la matière: 'Non seulement Paracelse a établi ces trois principes avant les éléments, mais encore il a ineptement composé d'eux le ciel lui-même. Les chimistes plus récents n'osent cependant pas défendre cela, mais posent que les éléments existent avant ces trois principes. D'autres disent que ces trois principes n'existent pas avant les éléments et ne sont pas des corps simples . . .' (p. 409).

En ce qui concerne la fortune récurrente du concept de matière première, Renan Crouvizier, à l'occasion de son étude sur Zecaire, situe justement son origine dans le traité pseudo-avicennien *Liber de anima in arte alchimiae* qui eut tant de fortune chez les savants médiévaux. Il y a aussi, ajoute de son côté Perifano, ce lieu commun de l'alchimie médiévale dont l'origine se trouve dans le *De congelatione et conglutinatione lapidum* du véritable Avicenne, et à propos duquel Albert Le Grand écrivit: 'les espèces ne se transmutent pas, si on ne les ramène à la matière première et à la matière des métaux, et ainsi, avec l'aide de l'art, elles sont amenées dans l'espèce de métal que l'on veut' (p. 229).

Le panorama des théories alchimiques de la matière se termine sur une note du médecin allemand cartésien Johann Jakob Waldschmidt concernant l'alchimie. Sylvain Matton présente ce personnage comme un témoin de la confrontation entre 'l'école médicale cartésienne et l'école chimico-paracelsienne' (p. 511). On voit encore qu'à cette date tardive les adeptes de la spagyrie s'efforcent encore de nier l'élémentarisme aristotélicien tout en faisant souvent du neuf avec du vieux: ainsi l'antique *spiritus mundi* est-il 'ramené à la matière subtile de Descartes' (p. 513).

Ce numéro de *Chrysopoeia* contient en outre des contributions sur divers problèmes philologiques ou historiques rattachés à l'histoire de l'alchimie. Henri Dominique Saffrey suggère une correction dans une phrase des *Mémoires* de l'alchimiste Zozime de Panopolis. Jean-Marc Mandosio rectifie l'identité du maître d'œuvre de la *Bibliothèque des philosophes chymiques*, Nicolas Salomon, et montre comment ce médecin bibliophile fut l'un des artisans du mythe de Nicolas Flamel.

Mirjam de Baar, *'Ik moet spreken': Het spiritueel leiderschap van Antoinette Bourignon (1616-1680)*, Zutphen: Walburg Pers 2004. 832 pp. + Cd-rom. ISBN 9057302748.

In the 17th century many reformers emerged in the Low Countries, criticizing the established churches and society in general. Jean de Labadie and Pieter Plockhoy are only two examples of people who not only took a critical attitude concerning the establishment but also claimed to have prophetic qualities. They each created their own network of friends and followers and sometimes ended up leading spiritual societies, like e.g. Jacob Boehme, Jan van Leiden and David Joris had done before them. Had she been a man, Antoinette Bourignon might not have stood out in the seemingly apocalyptic clash of opinions that were characteristic of her lifetime. As if this notion were not ironic enough in itself, the fact of Bourignon being a woman in a world of spiritual leadership that was ruled by men must have influenced the reception of her thought; and accordingly, a comprehensive study of her life and work cannot restrict itself to a strictly historical-theological point of view but has to include psychology, thereby obliging the researcher to work, as her subject did, from an unusual perspective and risk criticism herself. The reason why Mirjam de Baar started her research on Antoinette Bourignon had nothing to do with the interesting dynamics of gender studies, though. Initially, she planned to do a research project on 17th century prophets and prophetesses like de Labadie and Plockhoy in the Republic of the Netherlands, but following the discovery of a vast collection of previously unknown sources concerning Antoinette Bourignon, de Baar decided to write her thesis on this spiritual leader, and make this new material accessible to the world. Of course, the extraordinary position of Bourignon as (at least according to de Baar) the only female leader of a religious organisation during the period could not be ignored; Antoinette Bourignon had been very controversial during her lifetime and afterwards, because of her gender as well as her ideas. She believed God had sent her to gather the true Christians around her and lead them towards salvation. She looked beyond the borders of specific church communities, and this made her very popular in some quarters: many of her writings have been printed during her lifetime (164 to be exact, including the translated works).

During the 19th and 20th centuries several studies on Antoinette Bourignon have been written, as for example the 1895 monograph by Antonius van der Linde, who concluded that Bourignons autobiography was a 'biographical legend' and that she was in fact a dominant, selfish and deceitful person.

Later scholars adopted van der Linde's opinion that Bourignon suffered from hysterics and "pseudologia fantastica". From 1910 onwards, starting with Alexander MacEwan's study, which emphasized quietist elements in Bourignons teachings, the followers of van der Linde were opposed by those who thought more positively of Bourignon. Notwithstanding this shift to a more nuanced perspective, an emphasis on Bourignon's supposed psychological deficiencies and sexual frustration kept showing up in studies about her.

Claiming to mostly ignore the psychological perspective, de Baar emphasizes the contextuality of her own method, as opposed to previous studies that treated Bourignon as an isolated phenomenon. It is for this reason that she chose the format of a biography. De Baar and several of her predecessors find ambiguity to be strikingly characteristic of Antoinette Bourignon. For example she presented herself as an instrument of God, used by Him to announce the end of times; but when asked if she were a prophetess, she claimed to be nothing but a small earthworm. Bourignon also claimed not to have read any books, but nevertheless she often quoted not only the Bible, but also authors such as Jacob Boehme, Theresa of Avila and Franciscus of Sales. The inner ambiguity of Bourignons works as well as the resistance she encountered made her an appealing subject of research. Interestingly, this ambivalence also applies to de Baar herself. Whereas in her Introduction she takes her distance from the psychological perspective, one only has to look at the table of contents to understand that psychology is the thread by means of which de Baar's otherwise eclectically chosen concepts of interpretation are held together, with the theme of gender playing a central role. Motifs like defensiveness, means of contact, the building of a spiritual network, personal crises that made people follow Bourignon, charisma, spiritual motherhood, power and dependence embellish the otherwise dry historical details of Bourignons life with a psychoanalytical lacquer that makes de Baars dissertation easy to read. The perspectives from which she interprets Bourignons biography—gender, the book as a means of communication, the appropriation of Bourignons teachings by others, and Bourignons sense of identity—while not in themselves interrelated, nicely capture the ambivalence of her subject by focusing on aspects that are central to the interpretation of Bourignon's life and work. One could question de Baar's choices: a profound discussion of the contents of Bourignons work, and a comparison to e.g. the teachings of Jacob Boehme or spiritual leaders from the low countries like de Labadie would have been interesting, but de Baar only superficially refers to these people's ideas. One could argue, however, that a biography does not need to go into detail about such theological and philosophical questions.

Rather than extensively discussing Bourignon's thought in relation to the works of others, the author chooses to stay close to her subject. At least in one case this lack of distance proves somewhat problematic: de Baar indicates that she studied (mostly contemporary) *copies* of letters written by Bourignon, but hardly seems to give attention to the fact that the copiers might have made mistakes, left things out, or added ideas of their own without Bourignon's consent. Since the materials studied by de Baar contain some internal inconsistencies, this might have been an interesting problematics to explore.

Whereas de Baar in some regards stays very close to her subject, her eclectic choice of interpretational angles bears witness, on the contrary, to a perspective of critical distance. Her method of selecting some perspectives, in the full realization that the resulting constellation is a mere construct that might have looked entirely different had other aspects been emphasized, runs the risk of ending up in a post-modern approach of "anything goes". That being as it may, she does succeed in presenting her subject from different angles, thereby giving preference to physical depth over a flat historical timeline. In short, she portrays Antoinette Bourignon from a close yet distant angle, correlating opinions with facts, letters with books and attaching people to names, thereby showing that a historical-theological biography can be filled with dynamics.

Finally, de Baar's biography of Antoinette Bourignon is very valuable for having collected a wealth of historical data that partly had not been published before. The comprehensive indexes, as well as the included CD-rom that contains a list of known followers of Bourignon and bibliographies of Bourignon's books and letters, will be very useful to researchers of related subjects. Furthermore, this substantial volume is another pillar to support a history of religion that gives appropriate attention to both male and female leading characters. The book would deserve to be made accessible to the English-speaking world.

Ingeborg Mensinga

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.).

Symposium Freemasonry & Nationalism (org.: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid van de Universiteit Leiden en de Orde van Vrijmetselaren onder het Groot-Oosten der Nederlanden), Leiden (The Netherlands), 26-27.11.2004.

Papers included: José Ferrer Benimeli, 'La Franc-maçonnerie européenne: expansion en Amérique de sud'; Andrew Prescott, 'Freemasonry and the British Parliament, 1870-1885'; Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein, 'Die Verschwörerthese: Stand der Erforschung'; Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, 'Freemasonry: a Cosmopolitan Project for Enlightenment Europe'; John Acaster, 'Freemasonry in the City of Free Trade'; Giuseppe Vatri, 'From the Idea of a Nation to the Nationalistic Enemy: Experiences and Behaviors of Italian Freemasonry in the 19th Century'; Jeffrey Tyssens, 'Patriots of a Counterfeit Nation: Belgian Freemasonry and Nationalism in the 19th Century'; Anton van de Sance, 'Prince Frederick and the Nationalistic Challenge'.

Astrology & Social Sciences/Astrologie & Sciences Sociales (org.: Bibliotheca Astrologica), Paris (France), 26.02.2005.

Information: Email: Astrobibl@yahoo.fr; URL: www.grande-conjonction.org

Masons, Templars and the Holy Grail: Historical Conspiracies and Popular Culture, (org.: Conspiracy Theories and Claims for the Paranormal Area Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association), National Conference San Diego (USA), 23-26.03.2005.

Information: Todd B. Stevens, Email: toddbstevens@earthlink.net

Possibly topics: Freemasons, Rosicrucians, Alchemy and other alternate forms of science/philosophy, Gnosticism, Templar Knights, Illuminati, the

Holy Grail/Merovingian Dynasties, Hollow earth and other alternate cosmologies, Cagliostro, St. Germain, The Wandering Jew, and other legends of immortality.

Unveiling the hidden: An Interdisciplinary Conference on Divination (org.: University of Copenhagen), Copenhagen (Denmark), 01-03.08.2005.

Keynote speakers: Philip M. Peek, Susan Reynolds, Scott Atran.

Deadline for registration is 1 June 2005.

Information: Anders Lisdorf, Email: andersl@hum.ku.dk; Kirstine Munk, Email: kmunk@filos.sdu.dk; URL: www.unveiling-the-hidden.dk

Masonic and Esoteric Heritage: A New Perspective for Art and Conservation Policies (org.: OVN, Foundation for the Academic Study of the History of Freemasonry in the Netherlands; Subdepartment History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, University of Amsterdam; Chair for Cultural Heritage, Conservation and Restoration, University of Amsterdam).

Call for papers & all other information: OVN, P.O. Box 92004, NL 1090 AA Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Email: info@stichtingovn.nl

Western Esotericism and Polemics. Series of sessions at the 19th World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Tokyo, 24-30 March 2005.

Panel I: Leonard Lewisohn, 'Esoteric Platonism in Seventeenth-Century Persia and Fifteenth-Century Florence and the Influence of Muslim Thought on Italian Renaissance Humanism'; Hans-Peter Neumann, 'Between Heresy and Orthodoxy: Alchemy and Piety in Late 16th Century Germany'; Helmut Zander, 'The Genesis of the Idea of Self-Redemption'; Peter Hans Reill, 'Between Theosophy and Orthodox Christianity: Johann Salomo Semler's Hermetic Religion'.

Panel II: Kocku von Stuckrad, 'Christian Kabbalah and Anti-Jewish Polemics: Pico's Theses Revisited'; Ana Maria Binet, 'Between Apology and Criticism: The Treaty of Kabbalistic Science (1652) by D. Francisco Manuel de Melo (1608-1666)'; Konstantin Burmistrov, 'Kabbalah and Orthodoxy: An Obscure Facet of the Russian Freemasons' Identity (the Late 18th Century)'.

Panel III: Josefina Rodríguez Arribas, 'Astronomical Spheres and the Ten Commandments of the Jewish Faith'; Renko Geffarth, 'The Masonic Necromancer: Shifting Identities in the Lives of Johann Georg Schrepfer'; Roelie van Kreijl, 'Western Esotericism Versus Science: a Riot in Early 19th-century Medicine'; Anat Harel, "'The Day Rome Will Not Curse Us, Is the

Day Freemasonry Dies”: Orthodox Catholicism and Dutch Masonic Identity, 1880-1910’.

Panel IV: Anja Hallacker, ‘Secrecy and Knowledge—How to Construct an “Esoteric” Identity’; Joscelyn Godwin, ‘Esotericism and Cultural Identity in the Neo-Pagan Movement’; Anita Stasulane, ‘The Search for Universal Peace: N. Roerich’s Case’; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research’.

Information: Dr. K. von Stuckrad, c.k.m.vonstuckrad@uva.nl

Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in Western Esotericism (org. Wouter J. Hanegraaff & Jeffrey J. Kripal), Esalen Institute, California.

Papers: Roelof van den Broek: ‘Some Aspects of Sexuality and Sexual Symbolism in Hermetic and Gnostic Thought and Practice’; Allison P. Coudert, ‘Hidden Intercourse: Early Modern Demonology and Women’; April de Coninck, ‘The Passion of Psyche: Marriage and Gnostic Spirituality in Early Valentinian Traditions’; Antoine Faivre, ‘Love and Marriage under the Sign of Sophia in Christian Theosophy (17th to 19th Centuries)’; Claire Fanger, ‘A Dirty Magic and Divine Knowledge: Representing Desire in Medieval Christian Rituals’; Cathy Gutierrez, ‘Deadly Dates: Bodies and Sex in Spiritualist Heavens’; Hans Thomas Hakl, ‘The Practice of Sexual Magic in the O.T.O. of Theodor Reuss and Aleister Crowley, in the German Fraternitas Saturni, the Italian Ordine Osirideo Egiziano and in Julius Evola’s Group of Ur’; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Under the Mantle of Love: Sexuality and Eroticism in Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno’; Jeffrey J. Kripal, ‘Sex with the Angels: Nonlocal Mind and *An End to Ordinary History* (1983)’; Pierre Lory, ‘Sexual Intercourse between Humans and Demons in the Islamic Tradition’; Marco Pasi, ‘The Knight of Spermatophagy: Unveiling the Mysteries of Georges Le Clément de Saint-Marcq (1865-1956)’; Lawrence M. Principe, ‘The Role of Sexuality and Gender in Latin Alchemy’; Hugh Urban, ‘The “Yoga of Sex”: Tantra and its Impact on Modern Western Esotericism’; Arthur Versluis, ‘Nineteenth-Century American Sexual Mysticism’; Elliott Wolfson, ‘Rose of Eros and the Duplicity of the Feminine in Jewish Esotericism’.

Information: W.J. Hanegraaff, w.j.hanegraaff@uva.nl