

HERMETIC TRADITIONS

The Archaic Underground Tradition
Alchemy and Hermetic Philosophy: An Overview
The Western Mystery Tradition
The Origins of Hermetic Magic
Kabbalah and the Hermetic Tradition
The Hermetic and Rosicrucian Mystery
The Hermetic Art Of Memory
Freemasonry and the Hermetic Tradition

THE ARCHAIC UNDERGROUND TRADITION

By Author Unknown

(1) Ancient Egyptian Tradition

"In the ancient city of Annu (later called On in the Bible and Heliopolis by the Greeks) there was a great sacred pillar, itself named Annu - possibly before the city. This, we believe, was the great pillar of Lower Egypt and its counterpart in Upper Egypt at the time of unification was in the city of Nekheb. Later the city of Thebes, known then as 'Waset', had the title 'Iwnu Shema', which meant 'the Southern Pillar'."

"The twin pillars of the Two Lands became the Pillars of Hermes and the attributes of the ancient Egyptian moon god Thoth became absorbed into Hermes...It was said that this god [Thoth] possessed all secret knowledge on 36,535 scrolls that were hidden under the heavenly vault (the sky) which could only be found by the worthy, who would use such knowledge for the benefit of mankind."

- Christopher Knight & Robert Lomas, *The Hiram Key: Pharaohs, Freemasons and the Discovery of the Secret Scrolls of Jesus*

The tradition of a secret doctrine of Thoth appears to be well established in Egypt:

1.) According to a papyrus dating to Dynasty 12 of the Old Kingdom:

"Then [His Majesty]

<http://www.mystae.com/restricted/streams/thera/joseph.html> King Khufu, the vindicated, said: Now as for the rumor that you know the shrines of the secret chambers of the enclosure of [Thoth]? Dedi said: By your favor, I do not know their shrines, Sovereign, my lord, but I do know the place where they are. His Majesty said: Where are they? And Dedi said: There is a passage of flint in a chamber called the Inventory in Heliopolis in that passage."

- "A Marvel in the Time of King Khufu Himself"

2.) A chapter in the Egyptian

<http://www.mystae.com/restricted/streams/scripts/duat.html> Book of the Dead, according to its rubric, is said to have been found at:

"Shmun [Hermopolis] under the feet of the majesty of this sublime god [Thoth] upon a slab of upper Egyptian granite in the script of the god himself in the tomb of...Mycerinus, by Prince Hor-dedef. He found the spell when he was engaged in inspecting the temples."

- *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*

"Divine authorship elevates religious literature from present day existence; similarly, the accounts about the discovery of such works ascribe them to a more or less distant past. This exemplifies the tendency to emphasize the antiquity of sacred writings, which is particularly evident in the retention of ancient linguistic forms or the deliberate choice of archaistic expressions. Egyptians could also adopt the customs of bygone ages in their mode of writing."

"There is a particle of truth in the statement of Clement of Alexandria that the Egyptians had forty-two sacred writings by Hermes (Thoth), in so far as these texts, which include geographical and medical works among others, constitute the entire range of material available for the education of priests. The reference to Thoth's authorship...is based on ancient tradition; the figure forty-two probably stems from the number of Egyptian nomes, and thus conveys the notion of completeness."

- Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*

Regarding the "Pillars of Hermes" of "Seth" and of "Solomon"

"In the 9th chapter of the [Egyptian] *Ritual of the Dead* they are referred to as the 'Pillars of Shu', the 'Pillars of the Gods of the Dawning Light', and also as 'the North and Southern Columns of the Gate of the Hall of Truth'. In the 125th chapter, they are represented

by the sacred gateway, the door to which the aspirant is brought when he has completed the negative confession. The archaic pictures on the one Pillar are painted in black upon a white ground, and those on the other in white upon a black ground, in order to express the interchange and reconciliation of opposing forces and the eternal balance of light and darkness which give force to visible nature....The archaic illustrations are taken from vignettes of the 17th and 125th chapter of the *Ritual of the Dead*, the Egyptian Book of the 'Per-em-Hru' or the 'Book of Coming Forth into the Day', the oldest book in the world as yet discovered."

"...The general design of the White Pillar is a pictorial synthesis of the gradual freeing of the soul from the body, left to be mummied and its union with [Osiris](#), Lord and Judge of the Dead and of the resurrection, the sun in his rising....The Black Pillar symbolizes the pathway of darkness, the Negative Confession, as the White Pillar represents the Hymn to the Rising Sun, the Pathway of Light, and the Positive Confession."

- G. H. Frater, "The Core of the Tradition"

The Complete

<http://www.mystae.com/restricted/streams/gnosis/golden.html>*Golden Dawn System of Magic*

(2) Greek Accounts

"Explaining the Egyptian pantheon of twelve gods to his countrymen, the Greek historian Herodotus also wrote of an 'Immortal whom the Egyptians venerated as "Hercules".' He traced the origins of the worship of this Immortal to Phoenicia, 'hearing that there was a temple of Hercules at that place, very highly venerated'. In the temple he saw two pillars. 'One was of pure gold; the other was as of emerald, shining with great brilliancy at night.'"

- Zecharia Sitchin, *The Stairway to Heaven*

"Plato's *Timaues* and *Critias* state that about 560 BC in the temple of Neith at Sais there were secret halls containing historical records which had been kept for more the 9,000 years. Proclus gives the name of the high priest with whom Plato spoke in Sais - Pateneit. It is probably from him that the Greek philosopher learned about the oldest archives of Egypt. Another interesting fact to notice is that the high priest of Egypt Psonchis, teacher of Pythagoras, also mentioned sacred registers which even speak of a collision of the Earth with a

giant asteroid in a remote past."

- Andrew Tomas, *On the Shores of Endless Worlds*

"Greek philosophy and Egyptian lore really came together at the time of the Lagides, who gradually made Alexandria the intellectual, scientific, philosophic and religious center of the Hellenistic world....**Manetho** [his hieroglyphic name meant 'Gift of Thoth'], the Egyptian priest of Heliopolis, was also famous for translating the mysteries into Greek. He lived during the final years of the fourth and first half of the third centuries B.C. in the reign of the last two Ptolemies."

- Murray Hope, *Practical Egyptian Magic*

"Manetho extracted his history from certain pillars which he discovered in Egypt, whereon inscriptions had been made by Thoth, or the first Mercury [or Hermes], in the sacred letters and dialect; but which were after the flood translated from that dialect into the Greek tongue, and laid up in the private recesses the Egyptian Temples. These pillars were found in subterranean caverns, near Thebes and beyond the Nile, not far from the sounding statue of Memnon, in a place called Syringes; which are described to be certain winding apartments underground; made, it is said, by those who were skilled in ancient rites; who, foreseeing the coming of the Deluge, and fearing lest the memory of their ceremonies be obliterated, built and contrived vaults, dug with vast labor, in several places."

Hermes Trismegistus "invented many things necessary for the uses of life, and gave them suitable names; he taught men how to write down their thoughts and arrange their speech; he instituted the ceremonies to be observed in the worship of each of the Gods; he observed the course of the stars; he invented music, the different bodily exercises, arithmetic, medicine, the art of working in metals, the lyre with three strings; he regulated the three tones of the voice, the sharp, taken from autumn, the grave from winter, and the middle from spring, there being then but three seasons. It was he who taught the Greeks the mode of interpreting terms and things, when they gave him the name of [Hermes], which signifies Interpreter.

"In Egypt he instituted hieroglyphics: he selected a certain number of persons whom he judged fitted to be the depositories of his secrets, of such only as were capable at attaining the throne and the first offices in the Mysteries, he united them in a body, created them Priests of the

Living God, instructed them in the sciences and arts, and explained to them the symbols by which they were veiled."

- General Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma*

"...The so-called Hermetic literature...is a series of papyri describing various induction procedures...In one of them, there is a dialogue called the *Asclepius* (after the Greek god of healing) that describes the art of imprisoning the souls of demons or of angel in statues with the help of herbs, gems and odors, such that the statue could speak and prophesy. In other papyri, there are still other recipes for constructing such images and animating them, such as when images are to be hollow so as to enclose a magic name inscribed on gold leaf."

- Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*

"*The Vision* is the most famous of all the Hermetic fragments, and contains an exposition of Hermetic cosmogony and the secret sciences of the Egyptians regarding the culture and unfoldment of the human soul. For some time it was erroneously called 'The Genesis of Enoch', but that mistake has now been rectified."

- Manly P. Hall, *Masonic, Hermetic, Quabbalistic & Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy*

"His importance in magic is due to the so-called 'Emerald Tablet' which succinctly sets out the 'as above, so below' principle on which most magical theory is based."

- David Conway, *Ritual Magic*

"The exact origins of the celebrated 'Emerald Tablet' are lost, but it is certainly not nearly as old as it is supposed to be. The content of the 'Emerald Tablet' can be traced back, with a fair degree of certainty, to Moslem alchemists in Syria in about the tenth or eleventh centuries."

- Daniel Cohen, *Masters of the Occult*

"While Hermes still walked the earth with men, he entrusted to his chosen successors the sacred *Book of Thoth*. This work contained the secret processes by which the regeneration of humanity was to be accomplished and also served as the key to his other writings. Nothing definite is known concerning the contents of the *Book of Thoth* other than that its pages were covered with strange hieroglyphic figures and symbols, which gave to those acquainted with their use unlimited power over the spirits of the air and the subterranean divinities. When

certain areas of the brain are stimulated by the secret processes of the Mysteries, the consciousness of man is extended and he is permitted to behold the Immortals and enter into the presence of the superior gods. The *Book of Thoth* described the method whereby this stimulation was accomplished. In truth, therefore, it was the 'Key to Immortality'.

According to legend, the *Book of Thoth* was kept in a golden box in the inner sanctuary of the temple. There was but one key and this was in the possession of the 'Master of the Mysteries', the highest initiate of the Hermetic Arcanum. He alone knew what was written in the secret book. The *Book of Thoth* was lost to the ancient world with the decay of the Mysteries, but its faithful initiates carried it sealed in the sacred casket into another land. The book is still in existence and continues to lead the disciples of this age into the presence of the Immortals. No other information can be given to the world concerning it now, but the apostolic succession from the first hierophant initiated by Hermes himself remains unbroken to this day, and those who are peculiarly fitted to serve the Immortals may discover this priceless document if they will search sincerely and tirelessly for it."

"It has been asserted that the *Book of Thoth* is, in reality, the mysterious Tarot of the Bohemians - a strange emblematic book of seventy-eight leaves which has been in possession of the gypsies since the time then they were driven from their ancient temple, the Serapeum."

- Manly P. Hall, *Masonic, Hermetic, Quabbalistic & Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy*

The Philosophy of Hermes

"According to the Neoplatonic view the material world is arranged as a 'golden chain', which reaches from the topmost being and from the one which is beyond even existence, down to the last shimmer of being in matter, joining plane with plane in their essence. Ascending the chain the beings climb back to the summit of all being."

- Holger Kersten & Elmar R. Gruber, *The Jesus Conspiracy - The Turin Shroud & The Truth About the Resurrection* (1992)

"Written by a Neoplatonist philosopher of about the fifth century, "the *Celestial Hierarchies* describes three worlds of which ours is the lowest. This is the elemental world of nature and is subject to

influences from above. Above this 'sublunary' world, is what is called the 'celestial' world wherein are found the stars and their 'spirits' or 'guardians' (analogous to the Gnostic archons). Even higher is the sphere of the 'supercelestial' world, the world of *nous*, the 'intellectual' or 'intelligible' world of angelic spirits, of superior knowledge of reality because closer to the One, the divine source of creation, who is beyond the three worlds. Hand in hand with this concept of worlds, of which ours is the lowest projection, goes its essential counterpart; the concept of microcosm.... Going deeper and deeper into the mind of Man, illuminated by *nous*, man could travel farther and farther into the universe - and back again."

- Tobias Churton, *The Gnostics*

"Hermes, while wandering in a rocky and desolate place, gave himself over to meditation and prayer. Following the secret instructions of the Temple, he gradually freed his higher consciousness from the bondage of his bodily senses; and, thus released, his divine nature revealed to him the mysteries of the transcendental spheres. He beheld a figure, terrible and awe-inspiring. It was the Great Dragon, with wings stretching across the sky and light streaming in all directions from its body. (The Mysteries taught that the Universal Life was personified as a dragon.) The Great Dragon called Hermes by name, and asked him why he thus meditated upon the World Mystery. Terrified by the spectacle, Hermes prostrated himself before the Dragon, beseeching it to reveal its identity. The great creature answered that it was *Poimandres*, the Mind of the Universe, the Creative Intelligence, and the Absolute Emperor of all. [Edouard Schure, *The Mysteries of Egypt*, identifies *Poimandres* as the god Osiris.] Hermes then besought *Poimandres* to disclose the nature of the universe and the constitution of the gods. The dragon acquiesced, bidding Trismegistus hold its image in his mind.

"Immediately the form of *Poimandres* changed. Where it had stood there was a glorious and pulsating Radiance. This Light was the spiritual nature of the Great Dragon itself. Hermes was 'raised' into the midst of this Divine Effulgence and the universe of material things faded from his consciousness. Presently a great darkness descended and, expanding, swallowed up the Light. Everything was troubled. About Hermes swirled a mysterious watery substance which gave forth a smokelike vapor. The air was filled with inarticulate moanings and

sighings which seemed to come from the Light swallowed up in the darkness. His mind told Hermes that the Light was the form of the spiritual universe and that the swirling darkness which had engulfed it represented material substance.

"Then out of the imprisoned Light a mysterious and Holy Word came forth and took its stand upon the smoking waters. This Word - the Voice of the Light - rose out of the darkness as a great pillar, and the fire and the air followed after it, but the earth and the water remained unmoved below. Thus the waters of Light were divided from the waters of darkness, and from the waters of Light were formed the worlds above and from the waters of darkness were formed the worlds below. The earth and the water next mingle, becoming inseparable, and the Spiritual Word which is called Reason moved upon their surface, causing endless turmoil."

"Then again was heard the voice of Poimandres, but His form was not revealed: 'I Thy God am the Light and the Mind which were before substance was divided from spirit and darkness from Light. And the Word which appeared as a pillar of flame out of the darkness is the Son of God, born of the mystery of the Mind. the name of that Word is Reason. Reason is the offspring of Thought [Thoth] and Reason shall divide the Light from the darkness and establish truth in the midst of the waters'."

- Manly P. Hall, *Masonic, Hermetic, Quabbalistic & Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy*

[Compare with the tradition behind the pillar of fire that the Isrealites followed in the wilderness.]

"Of the immortal man it should be said that He is hermaphrodite, or male and female, and eternally watchful. He neither slumbers nor sleeps, and is governed by a Father also both male and female, and ever watchful. Such is the mystery kept hidden to this day, for Nature, being mingled in marriage with the Sky Man, brought forth a wonder most wonderful - seven men, all bisexual, male and female, and upright of stature, each one exemplifying the natures of the Seven governors [spirits of the Planets]. These, O Hermes, are the seven races, species, and wheels."

"Then all living creatures, including man, which had been hermaphroditical, were separated, the males being set apart by themselves and the females likewise, according to the dictates of

Reason.'

"Then God spoke to the Holy Word within the soul of all things, saying: 'Increase in increasing and multiply in multitudes, all you, my creatures and workmanships. Let him that is endued with Mind know himself to be immortal and that the cause of death is the love of the body; and let him learn all things that are, for he who has recognized himself enters into the state of Good.'"

- *Poimadres (or The Vision of Hermes)*

"Man, according to Hermes, had taken on a mortal body merely to commune with nature, but at heart remained a spirit, a divine, creative, and immortal essence. Living beings did not die, but, being composite, dissolved the bond in order to reunite and re-form. Nothing dies; it only dissolves and transforms. The gnosis consisted in re-becoming a god."

- Peter Tompkins, *The Magic of Obelisks*

"We suffer a perpetual transmutation, whereby we receive a perpetual flow of fresh atoms, while those that we have received are leaving us."

- Giordano Bruno

"Indeed, for antiquity in general, the divination of man was not an extravagant dream. 'Know, then, that you are a God,' Cicero wrote. And in a Hermetic text we read: 'I know thee, Hermes, and thou knowest me: I am thou and thou art I.' Similar expressions are found in Christian writings. As Clement of Alexandria says, the true (Christian) Gnostic 'has already become God.' And for Lactantius, the chaste man will end by becoming *consimilis Deo*, 'identical in all respects with God.'"

- Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*

"...You saw the spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you became Christ. You saw the father, you shall become Father....you see yourself, and what you see you shall [become]."

"Whoever achieves gnosis becomes "no longer Christian but a Christ."

- *Gospel of Philip*

"...I was very disturbed, and I turned to myself...Having seen the light that surrounded me and the good that was within me, I became divine."

- *Allogenes*

The Neoplatonic Origins of the Writings

"...A Greek manuscript in seventeen books brought from Macedonia to Cosimo de' Medici...was said to contain the secret wisdom of Thoth, the Egyptian sage whom the Greeks called Hermes Trismegistus, or the Thrice Great Hermes."

- Peter Tompkins, *The Magic of Obelisks*

"A fusion of Greek philosophy and the ancient religion of Egypt, the beliefs of Hermeticism were contained in a body of texts known as the Corpus Hermeticum."

"The *Corpus Hermeticum* takes the form of dialogues between Trismegistus, Thoth, and several other Egyptian deities, including Isis. Scholars point out that little in the text is truly original. In fact, much of the Hermetic world view is grounded in the philosophy of Plato. Hermetics saw the universe in terms of light and dark, good and evil, spirit and matter. Like their Gnostic contemporaries, practitioners preached a mind-body dualism and salvation through the possession of true and divine knowledge."

- *Ancient Wisdom and the Secret Sects*

"...In 1614 the brilliant scholar of Greek, Isaac Casaubon had shown in his *de rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI* that the *Corpus Hermeticum* could not possibly have been written by an ancient Egyptian sage - be he Hermes Trismegistus or anyone else. The Greek style was of the period of Plotinus (second and third century) and, furthermore, it had clearly escaped the attention of former commentators that neither Plato nor Moses nor Aristotle nor indeed any pre-Christian writer had ever made reference to this Hermes Trismegistus."

- Tobias Churton, *The Gnostics*

"It is this very book [the *Book of Moses*/] which Hermes plagiarized when he named the seven perfumes of sacrifice in his sacred book entitled *The Wing*."

- Fr Festugiere, *Revelation of Hermes*

"According to the legend... which had come from Lactantius, a father of the Church, Hermes Trismegistus was supposed to have foretold the coming of Christ. Hermes Trismegistus, in the book titled *The Perfect Word*, made use of these words: 'The Lord and Creator of all things, whom we have thought right to call God, since He made the

second God visible and sensible.... Since, therefore, He made Him first, and alone, and one only, He appeared to Him beautiful, and most full of all good things; and He hallowed Him, and altogether loved Him as His own Son.' The fraud perpetrated by Neoplatonics of the second century was that Hermes was supposed to have been living at the time of Moses and his creation story and the quote which I read you was all about 1,500 years before Christ. In reality it was dated about the second century AD."

"The Neoplatonics believed in a world spirit, and that one could coax the spirit into matter through the use of the soul, which was located midway between spirit and matter. This use of the soul is what is known as magic. Augustine was revulsed by this practice and strongly admonished Hermes for practicing such magic."

- Gerry Rose , "The Venetian Takeover of England and Its Creation of Freemasonry"

"The *Trismegistus*, then, came under the influence of the early Christian Gnostics, many of whom adopted large chunks of it in defense of their 'heresies'. The most notable of these was Basilides, whom the great psychologist Carl Jung believed to be either a fragment of his own group soul guiding him in trance through the *Seven Sermons of the Dead*, or himself in a former life. The <http://www.mystae.com/restricted/streams/gnosis/valentinus.html> Valentinian Gnosis was also strongly Hermetical. The Gnostic flavor in the *Trismegistus* literature is therefore obviously very strong, so it will pay the student to strip away some of these Christo-Gnostic overleaves in order to get a little nearer to the Egyptian original."

- Murray Hope, *Practical Egyptian Magic*

ALCHEMY and HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY: AN OVERVIEW

By Lance Storm ©

(From: Investigator 65, 1999 March)

Prologue

The alchemical tradition, incorporating hermetic philosophy and gnosticism, extends chronologically, from pre-Christian times right up to the modern era,

and geographically, throughout Europe, Arabic countries (Egypt, Iran, etc.), and even as far as India and China. The practitioners of the *spagyric* art/science (from Greek *spaein* = to rend, tear apart, and *ageirein* = to bring together) claimed matter as both the source of their wisdom (though many had a spiritual orientation), and the salvation of their soul's desire. In its simplest form, the transmutation of base metals (lead, mercury, etc.) into gold was the primary goal, and the attempt to bring this about was taken literally, and quite seriously. Running parallel with this effort was the search for the philosopher's stone (the *lapis*, Latin = stone) and the elixir of life ("drinkable gold").

Alchemy, as proto-chemistry, later developed into the science of Chemistry at the time of the Age of Enlightenment, while the more metaphysical statements of the hermetic philosophers became the subject of philosophy and psychology. Transmutation became an ultimate reality in the twentieth century at two levels: psychologically, in the recognition of the alchemist's visions as representations of developmental and structural transformations in the psyche as given in the Jungian tradition, and physically, with the manufacture of new elements through transmutation of already existing elements (for example, hundreds of tonnes of plutonium are manufactured each year in the United States alone) as a result of a more detailed knowledge of the structure of the building blocks of matter (the atom), and an associated understanding of both the immense forces which bind subatomic particles and the awesome energies which may be released through nuclear fission and fusion. Thereby, late twentieth-century humanity was launched into the nuclear age—a world very different from that imagined by the alchemists.

The Politico-religious World of the Alchemist

In an age-old human world of values, aspirations, goal-seeking and the like, it is not surprising that a kind of 'meritocratic' attitude should have emerged as a fundamental aspect of human nature (this may be a human construction based on an a priori instinctual pattern of survival). Existing side by side with other political systems of increasing complexity as civilisations grew, this type of meritocracy emerged in accordance with the notion that the measure of an individual's merit (intelligence, strength, personality and character, talent and skill, etc.) can only be proven in competition, or measured against personal wealth.

Hand in hand with the individual's "heroic quest" is the distortion of this necessary striving for egohood and identity into an over-valuation in materialistic societies of the 'object' as a symbol of personal power and spiritual strength in highly prized (because rare) elements and other products of matter (gold, silver, precious jewels, and so on). It is therefore not surprising that a socially constructed type - the alchemist - should also have emerged: an individual whose sole aim was to acquire wealth - whether this be measured as *aurum vulgi* (common gold = material riches) or *aurum philosophorum* (philosophical gold = emotional balance and wholeness).

Another split was also reflected in the character of the alchemists. Human credulity and avarice prompted many power-seeking and opportunistic rulers to seek out successful alchemists who, having mastered the art of gold-making, were later shown to be tricksters and charlatans leading both themselves and their gullible sponsors either to financial ruin or narrow escape from vengeful creditors (Holmyard 1957: 14; De Rola 1973: 12-14). Other less ambitious, more honest practitioners of the art maintained a life-long and steady - if not fruitful - attempt at transmutation through cautious efforts in the laboratory, and avoidance of a public life, lest they be found out (Holmyard 1957: 14; De Rola 1973: 12-14; Aylesworth 1973: 39-41).

Secrecy was especially important since all alchemists were regarded as heretics by the Church for adopting the gnostic belief that spiritual salvation could be achieved through knowledge of nature and matter, and *speculative* interpretation of Scripture. Believing that human nature could be perfected in a laboratory through chemical magic was an insult to Christian doctrine and Church authority, where faith and *spiritual* interpretation of Scripture was the only accepted path to God. Not that the alchemists in Christian Europe were unchristian or antichristian - certainly they were not Godless. They believed that the darkness of nature could only be illuminated by the light of the Holy Spirit, *Deo concedente* (with God's Will), with the art itself being an arcanum of the *Sapientia Dei* (God's Wisdom) (Jung 1973: 26, 52).

The Hermetic Tradition

It is from a religious position that the idea of correspondences was most highly honoured amongst the more insightful of alchemists. Those that were well versed in the hermetic teachings of the mythical Hermes Trismegistos - who supposedly lived contemporaneously with Moses of Exodus fame, and produced many works on alchemy, magic, philosophy and astrology - held the belief that a practical, experimental approach to matter and an

understanding of its nature, mirrored or corresponded with the workings of the human soul and its nature, culminating in a liberation from the earthly realm, "after knowledge and experience of this world have been gained" (Bernoulli 1970: 319).

Fowden (1986: 22) notes that hermetic thought extends as far back as ancient Egypt to the Egyptian Thoth (god of science, intellect, and knowledge) who was later equated with both the Greek god Hermes (god of travel, communication, and language) and the Roman god Mercury (god of commerce, eloquence and skill). Fowden writes that since God was taken by the hermetic philosophers to be a part of everything, it naturally followed that "sympathetic correspondences, or 'chains'" existed between all things, held together by "divine powers" or "energies":

affinities [exist] between the most disparate areas of the natural realm, so that each animal, plant, mineral or even part of the human or animal body corresponds to a particular planet or god whom (or which) they can be used to influence, providing the right procedures and formulae are known (Fowden 1986: 77-78).

Consequently, the equation of metals, animal natures and heavenly bodies with human characteristics was inevitable. The colours of precious metals became the 'soul' - the animating principle as merged with the metal's 'body' (the mere physical quality of the metal); so too the human soul - character, personality, mind - was a higher, more sublime component imprisoned in the flesh and blood of the human body. The aim of the 'true' alchemist was "dissolution of the body and the separation of the soul from the body" (Fowden 1986: 90). This secret was the 'absolute truth' about the soul and it corresponded directly with the Philosopher's Stone - it was eternal, and to have it meant not only knowledge of the mystery of life, but mastery over matter and an ability to make gold.

Such a 'truth' had to be guarded from the greedy and foolish masses. Therefore, as a means of protecting themselves, and their knowledge, Holmyard (1957: 14) claims that "alchemists used to describe their theories, materials, and operations in enigmatic language, efflorescent with allegory, metaphor, allusion and analogy" which often led interpreters to assume that the alchemists' statements were sometimes of a "purely esoteric significance." However, their 'formulations' were made just as often unconsciously as they were made deliberately. For the most part, the

practices and materials were, as Holmyard states, described esoterically, but the images, and the theories constructed from these images, were spontaneous (unconscious) psychic products and were represented by the alchemist as well as hand and eye would permit in ambiguous and incomprehensible paintings and drawings.

Jung recognised the value of these seemingly paradoxical and nonsensical images when he discovered the connection between the unconscious psychic processes of the alchemist and his experiments with matter (Jung 1970: 228, 242ff; 1989: 488ff). Although the tenth-century Persian physician Avicenna scoffed at the literal-mindedness of the 'puffers' (so named from their constant use of the bellows), and many disillusioned but enlightened alchemists closed their laboratory doors for good to pursue the finer, more spiritual points of the art, most alchemists were never aware of the psychic component in their alchemical transmutations (Holmyard 1957: 90; Jung 1970: 217).

Understandably so, since the unconscious content of the alchemist's psyche was not recognised as personal (related to the ego) and was therefore seen in the laboratory flask or vessel. Jung writes:

All projections are unconscious identifications with the object. Every projection is simply there as an uncriticized datum of experience, and is recognized for what it is only very much later, if ever. Everything that we today would call "mind" and "insight" was, in earlier centuries, projected into things, and even today individual idiosyncrasies are presupposed by many people to be generally valid (Jung 1989: 488).

The veritable panoply and diversity of imagery which constitute the iconography of alchemy reflects the complex nature of the psyche - particularly the unconscious - which communicates to the ego in images, since they convey more meaning than the spoken word (not that language is not used by the unconscious, but the image is universal and accessible to all people, while language is limiting and particular to a people). As de Rola observes:

in their images alchemists have spoken in ingenious and often very beautiful ways of things about which they have never written. This pictorial language, in which not a single detail is ever meaningless, exerts a deep fascination on the sensitive beholder (de Rola 1973: 9).

Even today, images, mythical or otherwise, such as dragons, kings and queens, ravens, lions, unicorns, royal marriages, peacocks, trees, and so on, can be experienced to almost numinous heights in the human imagination (dreams, visions, fantasies), and even in the visual arts, such as painting, sculpture, and film.

The Magnum Opus (The Great Work)

The first principle of the opus was the Stone of the Philosophers. This Stone must be "transformed and perfected by the art," becoming paradoxically, the *lapis philosophorum* (Philosopher's Stone) (de Rola 1973: 10).

Psychologically, the *lapis* refers to the psyche—its closest equivalent for the alchemist being the human soul. In fact, the stone was called the "stone that is not a stone," coming as it did "from God but not from God" (Aylesworth 1973: 36). Although the terms, before and after transmutation, (first, Stone of the Philosophers, then, Philosopher's stone) vary in word order, the *lapis* is essentially the same, just as transformation in a person's personality is detectable only through relationship, but not physically - effectively the person is the same, but different, somehow.

The *lapis* occupies an extremely high position in the arcanum of the alchemist, and as such, tended to be referred to in the texts more often than the gold, which was the transmuted base metal made possible by the *lapis* in the first place. Specifically, the "transformed and perfected" Stone was attained by a union of opposites symbolised by the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) between *Sol* (Sun) and *Luna* (Moon) principles. These principles were embodied in the anthropomorphic couple of King and Queen, which Jung equates with consciousness and the unconscious, respectively. They are antagonistic and polar opposites and may involve friction and violent reaction when brought 'face to face'—the process of self-discovery is equally demanding. This reaction was observable in the alchemist's vessel upon heating a mixture of the standard ingredients Sulphur (Sun) and Mercury (Moon), and was a highly volatile procedure symbolised by two dragons at war.

Should success be attained, the royal couple would merge and become the hermaphrodite or androgyne. Unfortunately, there were always difficulties, even disaster, during the opus, and many stages, involving putrefaction, sublimation (evaporation) and distillation (purification), were necessary to bring the process to completion. Jung (1970: 228-232) observes that the

"death of the product of the union" might follow, which took the alchemist into the *nigredo* (blackness) stage. A 'baptism' or washing may lead the alchemist to the *albedo* (whiteness) stage, or the soul may return to the "dead" body, or perhaps the *cauda pavonis* (peacock's tail) symbolism of many colours might appear. This symbolism too, marks the advent of the albedo, which is indicated by the 'presence' of silver - the moon condition.

The final stage, the *rubedo* (reddening) or sunrise stage is reached when the highest temperatures purge the product of its impurities. Once again the "red and the white are King and Queen, who may also celebrate their "chymical wedding" at this stage, symbolising a personality of even and balanced temperament and exhibiting the best qualities of both natures—a 'golden' disposition (Jung 1970: 228-232).

The entire opus is steeped in confusing symbolism, a conflation of real chemical reactions with the alchemist's projections (it is known that the fumes from heated mercury can induce hallucinations) - an undifferentiated merging of natural events in the physical world with mental events in the psyche - which generally produced an incoherent philosophy that could not, or should not, be seen as referencing the same reality. The psychically real and the physically real were one and the same to the alchemist, hence the difficulty the modern mind has in deciphering these images. With the advent of modern depth psychology a separation of these two factors became possible.

Epilogue

It cannot be stated conclusively whether the ideals of the hermetic philosophers - the 'true' alchemists - were ever realised in practice. Throughout the many centuries during which the alchemists have plied their craft only a few are claimed to have discovered the *lapis* and actually transmuted base metals into gold. One notable alchemist, a French scrivener of the 1400s, Nicolas Flamel, and his wife Pernelle, are held to have amassed a vast fortune in gold upon their discovery of the lapis, and there is documented evidence recording the great many charitable acts performed on their part as a result of such wealth (Sadoul 1972: 72-84).

As mentioned in *Investigator #54*, a relatively new theory of 'low energy transmutation' by Kervran (1980), as distinct from the 'high energy' transmutation described previously, challenges modern physics' conceptions of matter. His theory sits alongside chemical theory and does not challenge its precepts, but the physicist's theory of the atomic nucleus is challenged in

so far as it does not necessarily take extremely high levels of energy to create one element from another. Numerous examples are given in Kervran's book.

The legacy of the alchemists remains: from their hard work and personal sacrifice, extending over thousands of years, arose the disciplines of modern medicine, pharmacology, organic and inorganic chemistry, mineralogy and nuclear physics. That which started in the imagination of the hermetic philosophers - the psychophysical parallelism of the human being with nature, the dream of transmutation, the discovery of many new elements, the nature of crystalline structures, and genuine scientific work (including improvements in laboratory techniques) - led to the empirical foundations of the world as we know it today.

The testament of the alchemists: advances in medicine (cures for venereal disease and other ailments, smelling salts, sleeping potions and pain killers), waterproofing for leather and cloth, rust inhibitors, luminous inks and explosives, and so on, have all arisen from the imagination and the endeavouring human spirit. As Jung has said: "the debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable. It must not be forgotten that it is just in the imagination that a [person's] highest value may lie" (Jung 1971: 63). This value, the alchemist's dream, may well be the philosophical gold.

[Borrowed Article Copyright Permission Pending © Lance Storm](#)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aylsworth, Thomas. G. *The Alchemist: Magic Into Science*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Westey, 1973.

Bernoulli, Jacob. "Spiritual Development in Alchemy." In *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers From The Eranos Yearbook*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1970.

De Rola, Stanislas K. *The Secret Art of Alchemy*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.

Fowden, Garth. *The Egyptian Hermes*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Gilchrist, C. *The Elements of Alchemy*. Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1991.

Holmyard, E. I. *Alchemy*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957.

Jung, C. G. *Psychology and Alchemy*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970.

_____ *Psychological Types*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1971.

_____ *The Psychology of the Transference*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1973.

_____ *Mysterium Conjunctionis*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Kervran, C. L. *Biological Transmutation*. New York: Beekman, 1990.

Sadoul, Jacques. *Alchemists and Gold*. London: Neville Spearman, 1972.

THE WESTERN MYSTERY TRADITION

By Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki ©

In the late eighteen-hundreds Helena Petrovna Blavatsky introduced the West to the Mysteries of the East. In doing so she re-vitalised the way in which we in the west think about religion: she changed us for good. Theosophy became all the rage and groups and societies sprang up all over Europe and England. A great deal of good came out of this because it made it obvious to those who thought deeply that the East held a lot of magical knowledge we had never heard about. It made the West hungry for more.

But it was not enough. There were those who, while they admitted the importance of what Blavatsky had done, felt that the West should seek out its own ancient ways of the higher Mind. They turned to Greece, to Rome, to Sumeria and of course to Egypt seeking to understand what the ancient believed in and how they worshipped. The East, they argued, has much to offer, but it most benefits those of Eastern descent. The romance of it all caught the imagination of many, but, as always, for some it was the research, the study, the serious side of it all that beckoned.

Slowly, gradually they began to unravel the long forgotten rites and beliefs of the Western Tradition. This was very different to that of the East. Thousands of years lived in a cold, harsh, and dangerous climate had made life a hazardous business. It made Westerners evolve in a very different way. They are people of action and intent, motivated to search and build and so their belief system needs a more positive approach and a philosophy to match. A more active discipline that emphasise the Westerners' need to overcome obstacles. Then the Golden Dawn burst upon the scene and within a few short years our

world had changed beyond belief and would never be the same again. This lecture, however, is not about history, rather it is about the way of the Western Tradition itself, its many off-shoots, its ways of training, its beliefs and sources. However before one even begins to think about training it is important to know something of the subject itself.

With the possible exception of sex, the occult and all things pertaining to it must be the most misunderstood, misinterpreted and misjudged subject of our time. Bring up the word magic in casual conversation and 90% of the time your listeners will equate it with **BLACK MAGIC**, blood sacrifices, spiritual and moral degradation, ritual abuse of children and wholesale perversion. They will listen politely if they are British, with blatant disbelief if they are European and then mark you down as mad, bad, and dangerous to know.

Now while it is true that there will always be those who delight in the pain and humiliation of others, who seek not knowledge and wisdom but simply power over others, they form a very small part of the occult. What is more to the point, you will find an even higher percentage of such people in the orthodox religions and/or the ordinary walks of life. Those who rage hysterically against the occult are often to be found among those who support vivisection, commit incest, beat up their wife and families and run amok with guns. They forget the nine million men women and children who were hung, burnt, and tortured to death during the Burning times.

Most of these objectors see occultists as people who run around naked luring young and innocent youths and girls into lives of perversion. If only one tenth of this were true, virgins would be an endangered species and the rest of us would be dying like flies of exhaustion and double pneumonia. In Britain very few people go sky-clad or star clad for two very good reasons: 1) the climate, you would have chilblains and frost bite in very tender parts of your anatomy, and 2) there are very few places in Britain private enough to do such things. More often than not a group of Scouts or Guides will tramp past, or a posse of leather shorted tourists will decide to have their picnic in the middle of your circle, or , worst of all, a delegation of Japanese businessmen will appear and take photographs.

Remember that here we are speaking of The Old Religion, which is just one aspect of the Western Way. There are a few of them that still work in the old ways but most of them have long warm woolen wood cloaks in which to hold their rites, while the ceremonial magician often wears vestments that may have been handed down over a hundred years or more. The majority of occultists work actively with the Forces of Light and those great Beings responsible for the Cosmic Laws of the universe.

Those who today study the ancient mysteries practice the teachings of wise men and women who lived and taught when the world was younger and more stable. For the most part they are deep-thinking people who search for ways to bring the best of the old ways into alignment with the best of the new, in order to serve the needs of the future. But persecution is by no means dead. The modern occultist is still denied the right in many places to believe and to worship as they wish. This despite the UN charter giving all the basic right to worship as they please. The pyre and the rack may have gone, but the threat of publicity, the tabloid press, loss of jobs and social ostracism still pose a threat.

Despite this people still search for entry into schools such as the Servants of the Light because they hold an inner vision. They feel, and rightly so, that by entering one of the sacred contacted schools they will become part of the living tradition that has never ceased to practice the ancient mysteries.

Of those ancient mysteries most used today the best known are the Eleusinian or Greek, the Egyptian, Celtic, and Qabalistic, as well as those pertaining to the mysteries of the great School of Alexandria and its wonderful library, deliberately set on fire - though more was saved than is generally known. These are the Traditions that have had - and still have - the greatest influence upon the Western world.

The Western mind inquires, dissects, experiments, probes and puzzles out the secrets of the world about it. It is not enough to know, they must also know Why and How, When and Where. Then comes a need to improve, change and adapt what they have discovered. In the East there is acceptance of the higher will, a way evolved over many centuries, a willingness to allow Fate to have the last word, something that is not acceptable to the West. Both ways are valid for those born

to them, but when a choice of teaching is offered it is better to choose one's own racial type.

Sumeria, Chaldea, Egypt and Greece were the cradles of the Western Way. Greece was the birthplace of abstract thought, and philosophers like Thales of Miletus, Anaxamander and Anaxagoras taught a thought process that was excitingly new to Western minds. It opened a cosmic-sized pathway along which the curiosity-ridden mind of the West could travel. These new ways of thinking enabled the human mind to really see and understand the true nature of the world around and within him. From this sprang the first new mode of thought since the decline of the great Egyptian temples of learning. Once its value was recognised, its use was expanded and incorporated into the training of the neophytes and used to its full potential. In many ways our present position as we come to the end of both a century and an Age is analogous to what happened in ancient Greece. Our mental and physical capabilities have expanded so fast and so far that we do not always take enough time to consolidate them and are in danger of out-running ourselves. We are in the middle of learning how to think in new and sometimes very strange ways.

While the Greeks were learning to think around corners, the school of Alexandria concerned itself with the collection and preservation of what was ancient knowledge even then. Within its walls a cross-section of the finest minds of the time might be found. Herbalists from Cathay exchanged ideas with Therapeutoi from the Desert Peninsula and astrologers from Sumeria, white robed Druids walked with the dark-skinned priests of Nubia. The Rune Masters of the cold, far North taught their art to the shaven headed Egyptian priests from Heliopolis, and the scribes copied it all down. It was a place where the known and often unknown world sent its finest minds to both learn and teach. Such harmony between nations has never been surpassed, rarely has it even been equalled.

In the mist-wrapped islands of the far North there were other, older colleges of learning whose founding priests had come as survivors from the drowned lands of the West. Theirs was perhaps the most ancient of all schools; the primal source of the Mysteries as we know it - the fabled Atlantis. On the shores of Britain and the surrounding islands, once perhaps the furthest outposts of their empire, the Atlanteans raised places of learning to train those who proved

themselves worthy of the teaching. It is from this time that so many of the legends and myths of the Celts have come down to us. There are still faint echoes of this ancient world, and it surfaces in our old customs and festivals. It was from this source that the Celts received their love of poetry and music.

All Western schools lay emphasis on personal effort, both mental and physical, as a means of obtaining self-knowledge. Time has not changed this aspect of the Western Mysteries. You will find no real school of the Mysteries that offers knowledge without effort - none, that is, that has anything of value to teach. In the East, humanity lived at a slower pace, in a warmer and more productive climate foodwise. A more introspective approach was taken which suited the lifestyle, but for the West a more active way was needed.

In our time the mind of humanity is stirring once more and preparing to make another leap of understanding of the cosmos in which we live and of ourselves, both mentally and physically. As a species we are changing, becoming taller, stronger and developing new areas of the brain. Once more men and women are beginning to approach the Pylon Gate of the Mysteries because those ancient priests had experienced the same kind of leap and left records and clues that can and will help us to make our own transit in the coming Age. Some look and pass on, others hesitate, enter, then retreat back to the safe, warm known world. But there are always a few who will enter and stay and find what they have been seeking within its walls. It is not always the same thing; each man and woman is different and find what it is meant for them to find, which is not always what they want or would like.

As we move towards the end of this century, material, teachings, knowledge that was prepared for us hundreds if not thousands of years ago, and hidden against the time when it would be needed, will come to light. Old manuscripts, reprints of books not fully understood when they were first written, a fuller understanding of facts, fables, myths long forgotten as well as new scientific discoveries that will underline them will come into the open. We are already finding material with which we may build a bridge across the gulf of time that separates one era from another .

Reluctantly and screaming every step of the way, science is being forced to look at what they call The Paranormal, and admit its existence. They have discovered, as did the Egyptians 3,500 years **BC**, that the mind is an incredible tool that has in no way reached its full potential, The ancient search to *Know Thyself* has been resumed in earnest. When you come to the Pylon Gate you are answering the same call as did those young hopefuls who assembled outside the temples of On, Eleusis, and Alexandria, waiting and hoping to be chosen for training by the priests. Only the years stand between you; the urge to know is still the same, but we have no need to travel far from home and family: communications, e-mail, fax machines and so on mean we can search the libraries of the world for information. But - the need for dedication, time and study is still there, more so in fact. We also have the Qabalah with which to compare and file what we find.

The symbol of the Tree of Life is so wonderfully flexible that it can and does incorporate all tradition within itself. Though pertaining in its highest form to the purest mystical traditions of the Jewish faith, it lends itself without difficulty to the ways of all Western thought. To do justice to it requires a lifetime of dedicated work. The Western tradition does not use it or even fully understand it as do the learned Rabbis of the the ancient city of Sefat in Israel, but we do treat it with the respect it merits. In those Western schools where it forms the basis of the curriculum, great effort is made to see that it is not debased.

One of the first rules you learned in Alexandria was never to decry the faiths and belief systems of others. Share the teaching of your own path, and listen to the wisdom of a different way, but do not seek to turn anyone away from the path of their race. If they wish to change they must seek it for themselves.

The Western Mystery Tradition uses the Tree of Life for its capacity to hold, explain, unite, and expand the multi-patterned universe in which we live. Its study gives a firm foundation to Jew, Gentile, Christian, Craft, Orphic or Egyptian tradition.

The call that rings you to the Pylon Gate of the Western Way will also take you into dangerous, un-mapped and even lawless regions of the Inner Kingdom of the mind. Your first need is to reclaim that kingdom for your own and learn to rule it wisely and well. This is

known as The Quest and it is the subject of many a myth and fairy tale all over the world. The Prize at the end of the Quest changes from from race to race, but it is always there for the seeking. The Western aim is the integration of the whole person, not a casting away of the physical, but a recognition of its vitality, its powers and potential.

This kind of knowledge and the wisdom that comes from the study, use, and practice of it is not something you can learn in a weekend seminar. It requires a solid basis of data, theory, and years of practice and constant updating. It must be pursued with the same dedication and determination and *respect* you would give to years of studying for a Ph.D. Only *you* can do the work; the teacher simply shows you how to use what you are learning. Asking questions is good, for a question is intended to obtain a clearer view of the subject; any school that does not encourage questions on the subjects it teaches should be viewed with suspicion. A student comes to a school like an onion with many layers built up over the years. Those layers have to be peeled off, and this is neither easy nor painless. It should be regarded in the same way as a Rite of Passage undergone in order to gain a greater sense of Self. Such a time marks the passing from one kind of existence to another and much wider one.

The Western Way is not meant to be exclusive, but rather it is for as many as will come seeking it. The values, ideals, and principles of the Western Mysteries may appear strange to some, for they are used to a world where everything must be seen to have a high monetary value in order to have worth. The Mysteries follow the law that stipulates that those who come to the Gate of the Mysteries are judged on their abilities and their capacity for hard work, not what they may or may not have in worldly wealth. In the old days on acceptance into the temple a neophyte stripped naked before the door and ceremoniously knocked for entrance. He/she was then bathed and given a coarse robe, sandals and a cloak, and fed bread, salt and wine and anointed with oil; thus the body and the soul were cared for and welcomed into the Temple. When you come to the Door in the modern world, this should be held in the mind as an example.

At this time, close the end of what is possibly the most momentous and most crucial century in the recorded history of humankind, we are reaching back into the past for clues to help us through the next decade, to unite the simplicity of the old with the impetus and

knowledge of the new. If we succeed we might possibly make it to the next century. But such gifts of the mind as trained by the methods of the Mysteries are not to be had just for the asking, nor will all who come to the gate pass through to attain the high levels they hope for. We have become too used to the idea that what we want, we are entitled to have. Unfortunately this is not the way it happens.

Some minds are peculiarly adapted to working in such ways, but it is a talent like music, singing, being able to paint or write or sew. It requires certain gifts, an ability to imagine things visually so well that the everyday world seems strangely unreal when you return to it. A lucid and adaptable memory that can supply information rapidly, concisely and cross index items with ease and correctness. A mind that is encyclopaedic in its ability to store information of all kinds, with insatiable curiosity. Total dedication to the study, sometimes to the exclusion of all else. A certain dramatic flair for ritual, a love of silence and loneliness for what it can offer to the still mind.

But unless you try, you will never know if you could have succeeded. If you do try, the least of your rewards will take you far beyond what you would have been. Your concentration and ability to cope with Life's storms will be increased, you will be able to cope with situations others find impossible. You will have more ability to control your environment and your life and will enjoy it more.

Some of those who do pass through may go a certain way and decide to go no further: this is enough for them in this lifetime. They may return to it in another time and go on from where they have left off. We say in the Mysteries that it takes three lifetimes to make an initiate. The first when you come to it new and uncertain, touching the edges so to speak; the second where you enter the Mysteries and go as far as you can or wish to go; the third life you progress rapidly to where you stopped last time and go on from there.

What does such a training offer a candidate? A priceless gift, that of knowing yourself. To many who seek immediate power over others this seems like a big let down. But the wise ones of ancient times knew very well that the love of power can corrupt even the finest and most dedicated. They always trained their pupils to look first of all at themselves, to know and be able to assess their best and worst traits and talents. This is a long and tedious job, it takes years and often the

impatient ones leave because there is no excitement, no battle on the astral, no moments when they are **THE MIGHTY MAGICIAN THAT CONQUERS ALL**. If that is your aim, forget the Mysteries, train as an actor, become a writer of fantasy books, become a dreamer, you will do better that way.

Some people dream of doing great things; wise people stay awake and do them.

If you cannot control yourself, you cannot control others well and wisely, or your environment.

The Magi of the West aim to lift physical matter to the higher levels of spirituality, not to abandon it. To study and practice the Western Mysteries does not mean you have to abandon the orthodox faiths of your upbringing. All faiths truly based on the Light are part of the greater whole. But you will always reach a deeper level of understanding with regard to that faith, because your perception of its underlying principles will have been brought into a much sharper focus.

Those new to the Mysteries are at first filled with enthusiasm about all of this. They want to tell everyone about it. This is understandable; you are like those that were called to serve the Saviour of the Piscean age, you become evangelistic, the spreader of good news. But you will meet with doubt, hostility and even at times violence. The age of persecution is not yet past. We have been fortunate for many years in being tolerated but our beliefs are not yet fully accepted. But the pendulum is always swinging and it may yet fall back to outright condemnation of our ways and when that comes it will be a great testing time. You may well find yourself nailed to an emotional cross.

As you go deeper into the Mysteries, the world in which you once lived will be turned upside down. This is made clear to everyone who enters a contacted school. The Inner Plane Teachers accept nothing without testing it, sometimes almost to destruction. You will be called upon to accept any changes in your life, if not right away then certainly within the year. This does not mean you have done anything wrong; you are simply being cleared of all that has become unnecessary in your life and in your way of thinking. It is the first part of the cleansing of the Channel of Light you were intended to be. For those who are destined to become channellers of the Teacher

themselves this is even more traumatic and far reaching. In actual practice there are no absolutely clear channels, we all have areas of blockage in our mental and spiritual make-up.

Many students who enter our school give up by the fifth lessons of the main course. It is not exciting enough for them, they are frightened by the amount of change occurring in their lives, or they find the work too difficult. Of all these, about one third return, often years later, having adjusted their lives, or arranged it so that the dues of the Hearth Fire have been met, or simply because they have grown up enough to cope with it.

This kind of training is long, hard, arduous, demanding, time-consuming and at times dull and boring to boot. Endless repetitions are required, not so much for memory as for the purpose of getting you to react to the same experience on different levels of understanding. But the personality sees this as the same thing and hates it. But there are good times as well as bad, the elation of finally understanding something you have been working with for months. Realisation when you pick up a book and are able to grasp every nuance of what the author is saying. Long conversations with friends of like mind and training. Or simply understanding the universe around you and knowing that you are part of it and it is a part of you.

Every day brings unseen advances more control over one's mind and emotions. A stronger, better character emerging out of the old one. Better, deeper relationships, the ability to do one's every day work with better control and enthusiasm. The days when someone comes to you because they feel you will understand their pain or trouble, or that they can trust you. The one will become the many and your time of service will have begun. Time and again people come to the gate of the Mysteries asking what it can offer; when you pass through, it changes to "How May I Serve?"

Many come seeking magic in the Disney sense. That is a beautiful fantasy: save it for pathworkings. *Real* magic causes changes inside the mind, body, and soul. It is caused by your own desire to change and grow. It has nothing to do with your teacher; he or she is merely a rung on a ladder which you are climbing to get a better view of yourself. The change you undergo is all to do with your desire to know in order to serve. The same instinct causes the legendary

phoenix to cast itself into the fire of its desires and rise renewed from the flames. Every phoenix starts out as an unhatched egg. You can either let life boil you and bash your head in with a spoon, or roll along until you find a warm place in which to grow and hatch out. When you do, you will be like the ugly duckling: clumsy and unsightly and untrained. You will go through many moultings and many changes of plumage before you obey the summons to the mountain-top and begin to build your fiery bed on which you will endure the final change.

Does all this sound as if I am trying to put you off joining a Mystery School? Well, in a way I am.

Unless you come to us knowing what you are in for, you will get discouraged and dejected and will finally leave, unable to believe in what is before you. You will lose and we will lose. Don't just look at one school, look at many. You are an individual, schools are different. What suits one will not suit another. We know we cannot be the school for everyone - not everyone is the right pupil for us. Choose carefully, and ask questions if you wish. Wait for the feeling that says, "this is the one".

When you find it, sit down and think over its' material and what it will be asking of you. Family must be considered. The changes you will go through will also affect them. Sometimes - often in fact - partners will be violently opposed to your studies. Sometimes the changes involved will mean a change of job, house, country, beliefs and even... partners. Ask yourself if you can accept the discipline involved. Can you spare the time for reading and study? It is no good if you will have to give up in six months' time. Many never even start because the first lessons are not magical enough for them. Others because they do not begin doing rituals right away. Well, you don't put nitroglycerine into a baby's cup and then hand it to him to throw on the floor. Ritual work for the unprepared is just as dangerous and not just for the student. If you prove to be a good student, your supervisors will work you even harder and be even tougher on you. Only the best is good enough for the Masters.

Don't think you can make it to the top in a year... Take a look at a few of the things you will need to have in your mental data bank. Biology, psychology, and chemistry, physics, archaeology, geology,

philosophy and literature - your own and other countries' - history, art, mathematics, music, languages, voice training, things like sewing and cutting out robes, woodwork for making your own wands and altar. Anthropology, comparative religions, dancing, singing, astrology, tarot, geomancy, memory training, palmistry, crystals, healing, colours and vibrations... there are some more but I do not want to frighten you too much. You won't have time to get bored if you are serious about this.

The aim of a school is not to grab as many students as it can, but to turn those they have into fully trained, responsible occultists. So many begin with enthusiasm and then tail off when studies interfere with a full social life, dancing, clubs, cinema, television etc. It is heart-breaking and annoying to spend time and effort on a promising pupil and then see them drop out often without even the courtesy of a letter. Your time is precious; so is ours. If you mean it, be welcome: we will train you hard and well. Every tutor has been through what you are experiencing, they can help you recognise the stumbling blocks and help you over them, if you really want to do that. There are no doors in the Pylon gates - but only the most determined get through.

THE ORIGINS OF HERMETIC MAGIC

By Eric Pommer © 1997

Very little attention has been given to the origins of Hermetic Magic in most Ars Magica supplements. Houses of Hermes makes mention of Hermes Trismegistos, but doesn't go into detail. After doing some research, I discovered a wealth of historical and legendary information that can be incorporated into an Ars Magica saga.

The information is provided below as it might be written in Hermetic texts. Obviously, the information is highly mythified. This is currently the accepted history of Hermetic magic in the Thorendon saga, though it is hotly contested by some magi.

Hermes the Thrice-Great

All ye of our Order, bear witness to the secrets I have discovered, for they tell a tale of our place in the world that is good and worthy to the ear. Trust not that our Order began with Bonisagus and his magic, nor even the cults of Rome; our Order is eternal, though like Almighty God it manifests on earth in varied and mysterious ways.

Nowhere is it written from whence Hermes Trismegistos did come. The Egyptians did call him a god, and wrote that he came from the sky; but no true god was he, for it is known that he did die in the days before Rome. Strong was Hermes in the magical arts, and from him all knowledge of magic did flow.

In the days before Noah, Hermes did found an Order of learned men, trained in the ancient rites of our Art. Skilled in prophesy, these men of the first Order of Hermes, our eldest forefathers, foresaw the coming of the Great Deluge, which God did send to punish man for his wickedness. Fearing for the loss of their knowledge and their ceremonies, they used their magic to build certain winding apartments beneath the ground at a place called Syringes. On great stone pillars hidden in these secret vaults, they transcribed the mysteries of their Order in the sacred tongue of Hermes. Plato himself speaks of these secret halls in his *Timaeus* and *Critias*.

After the Flood

While his followers perished in these vaults during the flood, Hermes himself was able to hide aboard the Ark in the shape of a raven. Thus was Hermetic Magic able to survive the Flood. It was Hermes who helped the sons and grandsons of Noah to rebuild and repopulate the earth. He scribed a great work called the Corpus Hermeticum, which consisted of forty-two texts in all. Fifteen of these books detailed the Magical Arts, while the rest were devoted to music, to medicine, to mathematics, and other worthy knowledges. The most important of these was the Ma'ar, the book of Truth, for Hermes was wise in the rule of law.

The sons of Noah divided the nations of the earth after the flood, and with the help of Hermes did they build cities, for all the earth was of one speech, and all men open to the ways of magic. Soon did the sons of Noah and their sons build a great tower in the city of Babel, which they would by magic raise unto Heaven, that they might see the throne of God. But God came down to see the tower they did build, and was displeased. He confounded their tongues, and scattered them across the earth. Even did he close the minds of men to magic, that they would not work as one any longer.

Until this time, it is thought, all men had the Gift, and all could learn the magic of Hermes. After the scattering of tongues, many could no longer understand the mysteries, or were confused by them. It is likely the birth of the exotic traditions began here, at Babel, called Babylon in the Greek.

Soon after this time, and before the time of Abraham, Hermes did look for those who could understand the mysteries, for even now did many men fear them. And so did he find Menes, Pharoah of Egypt, a wise and goodly man. The Pharoah called Hermes by name of Thoth, and proclaimed him a god, for he had much knowledge and power. And Hermes taught the Pharoah many things, even the Magical Arts, which the Pharoah was eager to learn. With the wisdom of Hermes did the Pharoah do many great things; he united the Kingdom of Egypt, he built the great City of White Walls. even did he hunt many great beasts and turn them to stone.

The Egyptians

Hermes gave to the priests of Egypt the writings of the Corpus Hermeticum, and even to them did he teach how to read and understand his work. And it came to pass that all the scribes of Egypt did learn the sacred tongue of Hermes, that they could communicate to each other without words, which men had not done since Noah's time. And those who could grasp the mysteries did Hermes take for himself, and so did he teach them, and they became the second Order of Hermes, which men called the Priests of Thoth.

And Menes, Pharoah of Egypt, ruled well and honoured justice and law. And so did the Priests of Thoth follow the laws which Hermes had made. And there was peace and good harvests upon the land for all the days of Menes the Pharoah. And when he died, his people worshipped him as a god, and so Hermes built a great pyramid of stone, and made it to be a tomb, and used great magics that the body of Menes should not age, or turn to dust. And so even did the people of Egypt raise such pyramids for their favoured Pharoahs for the rest of their days, and they did also study the Arts of Necromancy, that they might keep their bodies as Hermes had done. And ever still does the tomb of Menes shame even the largest fortress of Europe, and

even so the tombs of the other pharaohs, of which none approach the size of that built by Hermes.

And it came to pass that Hermes was greatly saddened by the death of Menes, for they had been as father and son. And so did Hermes think to depart from Egypt. To his High Priest did he give a great gift, the Book of Thoth, which was a work of the most powerful magics. Even did Hermes say to his High Priest, Make thee a casket of shittim wood, and overlay it with pure gold inside and out, and onto it place guards and wards of great strength. And make thee a magical key of pure gold, that this key be the only means to open the casket. Keep this key always, and let no other take it from thee. And Hermes said, Place thou the book within the casket, and let no one but thyself and thy successors read its pages, for it contains great knowledge. And even did the High Priest obey the commands of Hermes, and so the casket was hidden in the innermost sanctum of the temple, and none but the High Priest himself was permitted its secrets.

And the secrets of the Book of Thoth were these; how to attain everlasting youth and vigour on the earth; also did it teach men to capture the spirits of demons and angels, that they might be placed inside statues with help of herb and gem, even so they might speak and make prophesy. And the secrets of transformation, that a man might forever control the substance of the four elements, even was it written therein. And all these secrets were known to the High Priest of Thoth, of the second Order of Hermes.

And so it came to pass that Hermes departed Egypt and travelled into the wilderness, and was not seen for many years. And the Priests of Thoth taught the Corpus Hermeticum to the people of Egypt, and practiced the Magical Arts, and built great cities and temples. Yet the Priests of Thoth loved the mysteries more than the law, and so did they stop teaching the Ma'ar, and even so did justice and truth fade from their hearts. And the priests began to fight amongst themselves, even did they argue with their elders, and neglect their duties. And without the strength of law which binds men together, the Priests could accomplish nothing, for as at Babel they had no common tongue.

And it came to pass that the Shepherd Kings from the East invaded Egypt, and brought with them powerful sorcerers. And the Priests of

Thoth were not united, and so did they fight as children against the sorcerers of the Hyksos. And the High Priests feared for the Book of Thoth, and they took it from the inner sanctum and fled with it to a land where the ancient mysteries are not coveted by men. Even do they await the return of Hermes, that the book be again given to his chosen people.

And it was two hundred years upon the earth when Hermes returned to Egypt. And he saw the rule of the Shepherd Kings, and how the sorcerers of the Hyksos did raid his temples, and great was his anger. And he spake unto the winds of the sky and the stones of the earth, and they did raise for him an army against the invaders. And his army made war with the Shepherd Kings, and did defeat them, and Hermes did humble the sorcerers of the Hyksos with his power, and even did he cast them from his temples. Yet his anger dwelt still with his priests, who had foresaken his laws, and he said unto them, No more shall I teach thee, nor call thee my people.

The Prophecy

And Hermes did prophecy: Unto the people of Egypt shalt many hardships be delivered, and thy knowledge will be forgotten. And I shalt inscribe upon an Emerald Tablet the heart of the mysteries, and it shalt be forever hidden from thee. And it shall come to pass that a learned man shall lead great armies unto Egypt, and its people shall fall before him. And unto him shall I grant the knowledge of the mysteries, and even will he build with them a great empire.

Unto the desert did Hermes return, and never again was he seen in Egypt. And his priests had not his wisdom nor the Book of Thoth to guide them, and even did they move about like a beast without a head. And so were many of the Arts forgotten, and even did the magicians of Egypt practise false arts, that they might please their Pharoah. And it came to pass that Moses came unto Egypt, and brought with him the wrath of God, and there was much hardship in the land of Egypt. And the magicians tried to stop the plagues and could not, for they were no longer true to the mysteries.

And it came to pass, as was fortold by Hermes, a learned man did lead great armies into Egypt. And this man was Alexander the Greek, pupil of Aristotle, and wise in many things. And his armies did fall upon the

armies of Egypt, and devoured them like lions. And Alexandar did conquer Egypt, and did built a city to bear his name.

And unto Alexander was brought Manetho, whose name means Gift of Thoth, and he was a gifted scribe. Even did he scribe the long history of Egypt, and even the forgotten mysteries did he translate into Greek. And Alexander was much amazed at the wisdom of Hermes, and commanded a great library be built to house the work of Manetho, for Alexandar loved wisdom. And even did they build the library in Alexandria.

And Alexandar studied the mysteries and was desirous to learn more, and so he did travel to the Oracle at the Oasis of Ammon, that he might learn where Hermes had hidden the Emerald Tablet. And the Oracle was strong in prophesy, and knew that unto Alexander would the tablet be given. And so he did tell Alexandar of the crypt of Hermes, and even did he tell him where to find it, and Alexandar made haste to journey there. And he went into cave, and even did he look upon the body of Hermes. And the body did look as if in sleep, yet no life did dwell therein. And at the feet of the body was the tablet, and Alexandar did take it and depart. Thus was the prophesy of Hermes fulfilled.

The history of Hermetic Magic between the destruction of Alexandria and Bonisagus' interpretation of the Emerald Tablet is still being debated.

KABBALAH AND THE HERMETIC TRADITION

By Mark Stavish, M.A. ©

The history of Kabbalah is filled with many personalities and events that have shaped not only the development of Kabbalah over the centuries, but Hermeticism as well. While often lost to antiquity, or only remembered by the disciples of their particular schools, it is important to look at some of these illustrious and influential individuals and their contributions to esoteric thought if we are to have a broader and more complete picture of Europe's spiritual development.

Kabbalah, as most readers know, comes from Hebrew and is generally translated as "tradition" or "received oral tradition". It is the unwritten

mystical and magical aspects of Judaism that run parallel to the written rules, laws, and rituals of exoteric Jewish thought and philosophy.

What is not generally known however, is that although it existed prior, the word "kabbalah" didn't come into use until the 12th or 13th century to designate the esoteric and mystical thoughts and practices of Jewish philosophy. It was about this time, that Kabbalah, as we understand it, with the Tree of Life and all the sepheroth, also came into being. Like the word that denotes these studies, the Tree of Life also has roots in older traditions and practices. While many schools of kabbalah were, and some still are, exclusively Jewish in orientation, as time went on many were adapted to the Christian world as well as influenced by other schools of mystical and esoteric activity.

Isaac the Blind, a pivotal figure in the study of early 13th century kabbalistic philosophy and ritual studied not only Jewish, but also early Greek, and Christian Gnostic writings, as well as the writing of a Sufi sect at Basra, the Brethren of Sincerity. Isaac the Blind was the leader of the influential Provençal schools of his day. Another key figure in early kabbalistic development was the 14th century Spanish scholar Abraham Abulafia of Saragossa. Said to have been of messianic proportions, Abulafia traveled the Middle East and North Africa and returned with certain yogic techniques of posture, breathing, and rhythmic prayer, and introduced them to his disciples in a new kabbalistic structure.

It is important to note that some of the most profound leaps in human consciousness took place during this period when Europe was in the last death throes of the Dark Ages. Yet despite the ignorance and intolerance that existed in Europe north of the Pyrenees Mountains, in Spain a mystical revival was taking place in a period of Arab ecumenical tolerance. While Christians and Muslims were fighting wars for the political and spiritual control of the Middle East and Spain, Jewish intellectuals rose to positions of power and influence in the Arab empire.

This "Golden Age" of Medieval Judaism peaked in Arab occupied Spain and contributed some of the most profound Jewish mystical philosophers since the period of the Prophets in the Old Testament. Moses ben Maimon, the preeminent commentator on classical Jewish

writings, Solomon ben-Gabirol, and Moses of Cordoba, the author, or more likely editor of the *Sepher Zohar* come from this period. The *Zohar*, or *Book of Illumination*, along with the *Sepher Yetzirah* (*Book of Formation*), forms the basis for all kabbalistic speculation, meditation, and ritual. Its commentaries on Biblical lore are a never ending storehouse of wisdom for students of Western mysticism. It is because of these activities in Spain, in the region of Catalonia in particular, and Provençal in Southern France, that Kabbalah grew into one of the most powerful and influential mystical philosophies in Western history.

This is also important to mystical students because it is from Arab Spain that the West gets much of its knowledge of Alchemy, and Ritual Magic, the sisters of Kabbalah. Together, these three schools formed the basis for Hermetic philosophy and practices as mentioned in the early Rosicrucian manifestoes: the *Fama Fraternitatis*, the *Confessio Fraternitatis*, and *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz*. For many students of mysticism, the pilgrimage to these schools was as great and as dangerous as their forbearers had made to the temples of Egypt and Persia. Raymond Lull, Arnold of Villanova, and the famed French mystic, alchemist, and Rosicrucian Nicolas Flamel, bookseller turned patron of cathedrals, all received their initiations into the Hermetic sciences, of which Kabbalah is a part, in Spain and brought it to the rest of Europe.

Thus, the idea of a pure unchanging stream of kabbalistic thought and technique having been handed down to Adam and existing to this day, as perpetuated by some Jewish and Hermetic schools, is mythology or foolishness. It is even suggested by some scholars that while Kabbalah has its roots in earlier Jewish mystical practices, particularly Mercavah, or Chariot mysticism, its ideas were entirely novel to the period of the 12th and 13th centuries. All things in nature change and adapt, kabbalah is one of these changing and evolving creations.

A perfect example of this change is the Christianization of kabbalistic ideas by mystics who sought to preserve the early Jewish writings when they were in danger of being destroyed by the Inquisition, as well as find practical uses for what was contained within them. For this reason a kind of Christian Kabbalah (often spelled cabala) developed in the 15th century. It had as its goal the harmonization of Kabbalah with Christian doctrines, and found ripe justification for the

Christian Doctrine of the Trinity in the Kabbalah's first three sepheroth, or "Holy Upper Trinity".

The two primary sources for "Christianized Cabala" were the writings of 'conversio' Jews in Spain (sometimes called "crypto-jews"), or Jews who converted to Catholicism, and the Platonic Academy, supported by the Medicis, in Florence.

Those writing from Jewish converts in Spain that most effected Kabbalah's development began at the end of the 13th century and lasted until the Jewish "Diasphora" from Spain in 1492. Writers such as Abner of Burgos and, Paul de Heredia secretly wrote several Christian Cabalistic works in the name of Judah ha-Nasi and other famous mystical authors. Two of their most famous texts are, *Iggeret ha-Sodot* and *Galei Rezaya*. Other works were put out in Spain until the end of the 15th century by Jewish converts, often imitating the styles of other well known and respected works, such as the *Zohar*. However, such imitation was common and accepted in that period, and in itself is not enough to doubt the integrity of the author involved.

The Florentine schools had a greater impact than the writings of Jewish writers in Spain. While the Spanish texts were often translated and to a greater or lesser degree available, they won few if any converts from Judaism to Christianity, or from Christianity to the effectiveness of the Kabbalah. The Florentine school developed the belief that an indisputable source for the validation of Christianity, and neo-Platonic, Pythagorean, and Orphic thought was discovered in Kabbalah. Also, they believed that in Kabbalah, the long, lost secrets of the Catholic, and possibly original Christian faith, had been rediscovered. The principle founder of this Christian Cabalistic school was Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94). This young genius began his kabbalistic studies in 1486 at the age of 23, and had a large selection of kabbalistic material translated into Latin by Samuel ben Nissim who was himself a convert to Catholicism. Pico later had Raymond Moncada, known as Flavius Mithridates, translate for him as well. Among his 900 theses that he publicly displayed for debate in Rome included the statement, "no science can better convince us of the divinity of Jesus Christ than magic and the Kabbalah," thus bringing the Kabbalah to many in the Christian world for the first time.

The Church's reaction was one of fierce opposition and rejection to this and other propositions made by Pico. The public debate Pico wanted was guaranteed. Kabbalah now became the principle discussion in the Christian intellectual world, as it was seen as an otherwise unknown Jewish esoteric doctrine that had been overlooked or lost completely. Christian Platonists in Germany, Italy, and France quickly attached themselves to Pico's school of thought. Pico's works also caused Johannes Reuchlin, the famed Christian Hebrew scholar, to undertake kabbalistic studies, publishing two books on it as a result - *De Verbo Mirifico* (On the Miracle-Working Name, 1494) and *De Arte Cabalistica* (on the Science of the Kabbalah, 1517).

Between the publishing of Reuchlin's *Verbo* and *Arte*, a number of works appeared from the pen of Paul Ricius. Ricius was himself a convert to Catholicism, as well as the physician to Emperor Maximilian, and had a reputation for being erudite. Ricius took the ideas of Pico and Reuchlin and added to them his own conclusions based upon kabbalistic and Christian sources, forming a doctrine of the "Divine Name" and its relationship to world history.

According to Ricius, all of world history could be divided into three stages based upon the names of God found in the Bible. The first period was the natural period where God reveals himself through the three lettered Divine Name Shaddai (The Strong). The second phase is the Torah period, where God reveals to Moses the Divine Name of four letters, the Tetragrammaton, or YHVH. The final period, or period of grace and redemption, God reveals the Tetragrammaton plus the fifth letter shin, or the letter of the Logos (Christ), spelling Yehoshua or the Cabalistic rendition of Jesus, name. Thus, the name of Jesus, or the Miraculous Name, become the pronounceable name of the previously unpronounceable YHVH. To support his argument, Ricius used medieval manuscripts in which Jesus' name was abbreviated JHS, the Jewish-kabbalistic doctrine of three world ages (Chaos, Torah, Messiah), and the similar doctrine of Joachiam of Fiore, who proposed a reign, or age, of the Father, Son, and finally, the Holy Spirit. Many of these concepts, particularly the significance of shin in the Divine Name, and the Reign of the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) would play a significant part in the development of 19th and early 20th century French (Levi and his successors) occult schools and their philosophies.

What makes the writings of Pico and Reuchlin significant, is that they placed for the first time the kabbalah in the broader cultural and theological context of Christian (principally Catholic) Europe and its intelligentsia. Their focus on "Divine Names," practical or magical kabbalah, and the synthesis of Christian doctrine with kabalistic philosophy and speculation, became the zeitgeist of the era.

During this period, the most influential of all magical-mystical kabbalistic texts that came from the newly formed Christo-centric cabalistic tradition that was forming, was Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim's *De Occulta Philosophia* (1531) in four volumes. This series of works on practical kabbalah was an encyclopedia of all the known occult and magical lore of the day. It is from these works, that much of the Christian world received its information regarding magical and numerological associations with kabbalah.

Other Christian thinkers sought to reconcile this lack of mastery of principle kabbalistic source materials during the 16th century by returning to the Hebrew and Latin originals. While the primary goal was to further prove the connection between Christianity and mystical Judaism, the end result was a broader intellectual understanding of Hebraic studies. Two of the most prominent figures in this movement were Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (1465-1532) who was heavily influenced by the *Zohar* and *Sefer ha-Temunah* in his writings *Scechina* and "On the Hebrew Letters", and Francesco Giogio of Venice, (1460-1541) a Franciscan, the author of two large volumes on kabbalah that were read extensively at their time, *De Harmonia Mundi* (1525) and *Problemata* (1536). In both works the kabbalah was central to the themes developed, and the *Zohar*, for the first time, was used en masse in a work of Christian origin. Giogio's writings also elaborated extensively on Pico's theses.

Among all of these scholars, the most influential, remembered, and closest to the original Hebrew sources was Guillaume Postel (1510-1581). Postel, a French mystic, translated into Latin the *Zohar* and *Sefer Yetzirah* before they were publicly printed in Hebrew. His translations included mystical annotations of his own theosophic philosophy as applied to kabbalah. His publications also include a Latin commentary (1548) on the mystical symbolism of the menorah, and eventually a Hebrew edition.

Throughout the 16th century Christian cabala focused its own internal theosophical development, and not upon evangelizing among the Jewish populations of Europe. However, such a cause could be justification enough for studies that might otherwise get one arrested or killed. With the development of these increasingly Christ-centric theosophical speculations, less and less time was spent with original Hebrew sources or their Latin translations. One of the few exceptions to this was Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter (1560-1557) who amassed a large collection of kabbalistic source materials for his studies.

With the writings of Jacob Boehme and Knorr von Rosenroth in 17th century Germany, Christian Cabala took a definite turn away from Hebrew source material, a turn that would last for some time to come. While Rosenroth's *Kabbalah Denudata* (1677-84) made much of the *Zohar* available to Christian readers for the first time, his essay on the Adam Kadom and its relationship to the 'primordial man Jesus' in Christian theology seemed to upstage the *Zohar* in many respects. The essay appearing at the end of *Denudata* by the Dutch theosophical speculator, Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, is particularly strong on this point. The essay is entitled "Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae" and is anonymously authored.

In England the 'Cambridge Platonists,' led by Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, to made use of kabbalah for their own speculations, and found a link in van Helmont for further Christianization of cabalistic philosophy. In Germany, and later elsewhere, kabbalah had taken on a strongly 'Boehmian' character as it found a strong similarity between Jacob Boehme's writings and those of the various schools of kabbalah. While there is no historical connection between the writings (and visions) of Boehme, this definite link would only further remove Christian Cabala from its earlier tenuous connections with Jewish kabbalah. Boehme's impact would extend into the writings of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, just prior to the French Revolution, thus helping to change the face of Continental mysticism and the later "French Occult Revival".

Christian Cabala almost from the start developed into what we now call the Hermetic, or Alchemical Kabbalah, for lack of better terms, which sprang out of the Hermetic schools in the Renaissance period. The goals of Hermetic philosophy were to synthesize all of humanity's previous learning, particularly the wisdom or sophia of the ancients,

and present it in a single universal philosophy (pansophia). This philosophy was the synthesis of four major stands of thought and practice under the general heading of a form of mystical Christianity. These four schools were Jewish Kabbalah, Hermetic literature, neo-Platonic (Pythagorean) philosophy, and Gnosticism. In fact, the addition of alchemical symbols and motifs to Christian Cabala began as early as the 16th century. Among the chief exponents of this movement in Elizabethan England were Sir Francis Bacon, Elias Ashmole, Thomas Vaughan (1622-1666) and the Rosicrucian apologist Robert Fludd (1574-1637). On the continent, Blaise de Vigenere, *Traite du Feu* (1617), Heinrich Khunrath, *Ampitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1609) typified this kind of permanent departure from traditional Jewish literature and the formation of a completely separate system of theosophy. By the mid-18th century, this departure would be complete with the writings of F.C. Oetinger (1702-1782), the *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum* (1735) by Georg von Welling, and the virtual explosion of Masonic, and pseudo-masonic, grades, degrees, rites, and orders.

The creation of Masonic and masonic-style systems was nowhere more virulent than in 18th century France. Here, like in Germany, the nobility had an almost insatiable appetite and gullibility for things mysterious and magico-mystical. While many of the rites created were for the purpose of perpetuating the true and authentic mysteries of hermeticism, either on their own or as an addition to Freemasonry through the 'High Grades' system, many were also created to simply fill the pockets of their self-appointed Hierophant or Grand Master. The majority of these systems had little known lasting influence outside of the period, or even the rooms where their 'initiations' and 'conventicles' were held. However, one of these systems, that of Don Martinez Pasquales, was different, and its impact on Western mysticism would be felt for centuries to come.

The appearance of Martinez Pasquales upon the scene of French "Initiation" was like that of many of his contemporaries: mysterious, of unknown origin, filled with claims of supernatural contacts, and filled with Cabalistic signs and symbols. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, Pasquales' influence would be a lasting one, and his system of magic, restoration, and angelic communications was unique. Nothing of its kind had been revealed to the world since the writings of Dr. Dee and Edward Kelly, and while definitively

Christian-Cabalistic in nature, nothing equal to it has been delivered since. This is not to say that all other systems are inferior to Pasquales (or even Dee), only that such uniqueness in thought and form comes around only rarely.

Born in Grenoble, of Spanish descent, Martines Pasquales received his authority to transmit the ancient teachings from his father, who was granted a Masonic charter from Charles Stuart, "King of Scotland, Ireland, and England," dated May, 20, 1738. The power and authority of this charter was transmissible upon death of the holder. As a result, Martines created a movement of distinct masonic character, open only to Master Masons, and named it: Order of Knight Mason, Elect Priests of the Universe, or Elus Cohen (Elect Priests).

While Pasquales' spiritual mission' officially began around 1758, he did create a masonic chapter in Montpellier four years earlier. It was a year later, in 1755, that the Elect Priests were officially founded in Bordeaux. Paris was the site of the ventual Sovereign Tribunal in 1766, which had among its members several prominent masons of the period. Avignon, Montpellier, Metz, La Rochelle, Versailles, and Lyon were all sites of future Lodges of the Order of Elus Cohen.

What made the Elus Cohen distinct from the masonic organizations it drew its membership from, was it emphasis on ceremonial magic, or theurgy, for the 'Reintegration' of humanity. The Martinist doctrine of Pasquales focused around the 'Fall of Man' and its rectification. It's fundamental tenants were:

1. Archetypal Man, or Adam Kadom, was emanated from God, and originally dwelt on a high spiritual plane.
2. Through abuse of his 'free will' Adam Kadom 'fell'.
3. This originally unified being shattered into the many individual souls that now exist.
4. The goal of humanity is to reintegrate itself with the original archetype, thus achieving unity.

The Order of Elect Priests was divided into three principle parts, completed by the secret grade of "Reau+Croix". The first group was composed of those who went through the first three degrees of Craft Masonry, with a complementary degree following; the second group

contained the 'Porch Degrees' of Cohen-Apprentice, Fellow-Cohen, and Master Cohen; the third group was the Temple Degrees of: Grand Master Elect Cohen, Grand Architect of Chevalier (Knight) d'Orient, and Grand Elu de Zorobabel.

Through rituals, often lasting up to six or more hours in length, in individual and group work, each member of the Order was given the opportunity to communicate with angelic beings, overcome demonic forces in the universe, manifest the power of God, and "Reintegrate himself with the original Primordial Adam. The Ladder of Spiritual Entities that each member had to contact and become initiated into began with the Minor in Privation (worldly man), Reconciled Minor (one who has begun the spiritual path), the Regenerated Minor, a transition phase exists with the Elect Minor, and followed by the Superior and Major Spirits of the Celestial Hierarchy, ending with God.

While the rites and rituals of the Elus Cohen are still practiced much as they were two-hundred years ago (a lodge is still active in Paris) it was through two of his disciples, who would take radically different paths, that the legacy of Pasquales would be perpetuated. Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin and Jean-Baptiste Willermoz.

Saint-Martin received his initiation into the Elus Cohen in 1786 while serving as an officer in the French garrison at Bordeaux. He was 25 at the time, and would later write, "It is to Martines Pasquales that I owe my introduction to higher truths." His appreciation of his earlier Master would serve him well, for unlike many who break from the tradition that gave them spiritual birth, Saint-Martin was entirely grateful to Pasquales despite his later philosophical disagreements.

After leaving the army in 1770 to devote himself to his esoteric research, Saint-Martin became Pasquales' personal secretary. By 1777, however, three years after the death of his Master, Saint-Martin moved away from the theurgic practices of the Elus Cohen, claiming personal lack of 'talent' for the operations, and entered into the realm of pure, abstract mysticism.

Soon afterwards, he became connected with the 'Order of Unknown Philosophers' and quickly became a teaching force within its ranks, traveling often to establish contacts, study groups, and convey initiations throughout Europe. Claiming connection with an ancient

Order, dating back to 1643 of a 'Rosicrucian character' and having Heinrich Khunrath, Alexander Sethon, Sendivogius, and Boehme among its ranks, the Society of Unknown Philosophers also linked itself to "Les Freres d Orient" created in Constantinople in 1090. The teachings of this society were conveyed from teacher to disciple and their principle unifying form was the distinction of receiving "The Initiation" which gave them the right to be known as "Unknown Superiors" or "Superieurs Inconnus" or S.I. as it is written. Saint-Martin's writings, under the pseudonym "The Unknown Philosopher," made him quite in demand among European aristocracy. Being of aristocratic blood himself, it is often considered a miracle that he not only kept his head during the 'Reign of Terror' but also managed to continue his work relatively unimpeded.

Jean-Baptiste Willermoz however continued the teachings of the Elus Cohen, and even took them into the masonic Order of Strict Observance, an order claiming direct Knights Templar descendancy. It was through these two principle forces, the teachings of Willermoz through the Strict Observance, and Saint-Martin through his 'free Initiation' that French esotericism in particular, and European esotericism in general, continued until the period known as the "European Occult Revival".

While the "European Occult Revival" has its origins in France with the writings of Eliphas Levi, it is not until the 1880's that it becomes a full fledged social force, similar to today's "New Age Movement" complete with celebrities, art galleries, mystical compositions of all sorts, the usual ego's, personality failings, and just plain old gossip.

The principle character in all of this was a young medical student by the name of Gerard Encausse, better known by his pseudonym, "Papus" after the Egyptian genii of the healing arts. With Augustine Chaboseau, Stanislas de Guaita, Sedir (Yvon Leloup), Charles Bartlet, Josepin Peladan, and virtually all of the moving forces in French occultism the Martinist Order was founded, by Papus, to perpetuate the ideas and teachings of Saint-Martin, Martinez Pasquales, in a new kabbalistic framework, complete with seven degrees, which were later reduced to three. Soon afterwards the "Kabbalistic Order of the Rosy+Cross" was created, and after several years, and a few 'spitting matches', schisms among the founding members created about a dozen off-shoots, most of which continue to this day in some form.

Yet, by 1914, what petty rivalry, egotism, and oneupsmanship had failed to do to European mysticism and magical movements, world war would accomplish. The world wide networks of initiates and lodges that were created out of this period, along with similar movements in England (the Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn, and the Societas Rosicruciana in particular), Russia, and Germany (as well as the United States) were virtually eliminated by two world wars and the totalitarian governments that controlled most of Europe by the 1920s and 1930's.

Unfortunately, not all of the 'hermetic' 'kabbalistic or 'occult' movements that were born at the turn of the century gave fruit to humanitarian offspring. In Germany and Austria the Ariosophist movements gave not only 'spiritual' inspiration, but also men and material support to what became the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP), or the Nazi movement. The Germanen Ordnung (Order), the Thule Society, and other less well known groups, gave ideological justification for the racist, militant, and nationalistic beliefs of the German Right Wing. In 1934 Hitler declared, "We shall form an Order, the Brotherhood of the Templars around the Holy Grail of pure blood." The Grand Master of this Order was Heinrich Himmler, its knights the Officer Corps of the SS, and the Castle at Wewelsburg, with its Round Table, its spiritual center.

While promoting its own form of occult madness, the Nazis systematically shut down all forms of occult and esoteric activity. Psychics, astrologers, faith healers, writers, publishers, and simply well known individuals in the field, were rounded up under Berlin's "Witchcraft Laws" of 1934, all in a single night. Publishing houses were shut down, books burned or carted off to Ahnenerbe (Racial Ancestry Department) research libraries, people imprisoned or forced into 'domestic exile', and that was just the beginning. Several waves of round ups would continue throughout the war, particularly as the tide turned against German victory.

Viewed as part of the "Jewish Conspiracy" Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Martinism, and other kabalistic-hermetic or esoteric organizations were the special target of these crackdowns, led by "Einsatzgruppen Rosenberg" and the Ahnenerbe. Not since the Inquisition had Western esoteric, initiatic, and cabalistic-hermetic groups especially, been so violently suppressed with such singleness

of purpose. The role call of martyrs included many of the leaders of the most prominent magical and mystical movements of the period. The egotistical rivalries that separated them and kept the Light from unifying, was skillfully and brutally used against them by Darkness. The faggots burned again in Europe, this time with smoke stacks.

Despite its opponents, and in spite of some of its most ardent supporters. kabbalah and hermeticism, the life blood of Western esotericism, continues to survive and thrive. Never before has so much material, books, publications, organizations, and students existed so openly and freely. As we head toward the millennium, and pray for the "Reign of the Paraclete," let's look back on history and learn its lessons. With Europe and Asia looking more like 1914 than 1994, let our hearts unite in active prayer and meditation to turn the world toward the Source of Light we all so earnestly seek when we pray "Thy Kingdom come ... after all, that is what kabbalah is all about.

Bibliography

Anonymous. *Five Christian Principles*. Public Publications, 1984. Forward by Sarah Ibitson.

Epstein, Perle. *Kabbalah - The Way of the Jewish Mystic*. Boston, 1988.

Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. *The Occult Roots of Nazism*. The Aquarian Press, Wellingsborough, Northamptonshire, 1985.

Howe, Ellic. *Astrology and the Third Reich*. The Aquarian Press, Wellingsborough, Northamptonshire, 1984.

King, Christine Elizabeth. "The Nazi State and the New Religions". *Studies in Religions and Society*. vol. 4. The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 1982.

Knight, Gareth. *Magic and the Western Mind*. Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN., 1991.

McIntosh, Christopher. *Eliphas Levi and the French Occult Revival*. Weiser, NY., 1974.

The Rosicrucians - The History and Mythology of an Occult Order. Crucible, Wellingsborough, Northamptonshire, 1987.

Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah*, Meridian, New York, 1978.

Stavish, Mark. "A Rosicrucian Approach to the Kabbalah". Lecture delivered to Johannes Kelpius Lodge, AMORC Allston/Boston, Mass., 'Reunion Day' June, 1992.

Periodicals

"The F.U.D.O.S.I. - An International Journal of the Ancient and Honorable Esoteric Orders" Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1946. Brussels, Belgium.

"Now It Can Be Told" part 1 through 8, Ralph M. Lewis, F.R.C., "Rosicrucian Digest", San Jose, Calif., Oct. 1946 though May 1947.

THE HERMETIC AND ROSICRUCIAN MYSTERY

By Arthur Edward Waite

We are only beginning, and that by very slow stages, to enter into our inheritance from the past; and still perhaps in respect of its larger part we are seeking far and wide for the treasures of the mystic Basra. But these treasures are of more than one species and more than a single order; for that measure to which we are approximating and for that part which we hold, we shall be well advised to realize that there are some things which belong to the essences while some are of the accidents only. I do not think that among all the wise of the ages, in whatsoever regions of the world, there has been ever any difference of opinion about the true object of research; the modes and form of the quest have varied, and that widely, but to one point have all the roads con-verged.

Therein is no change or shadow of vicissitude. We may hear of shorter roads, and one would say at first sight that such a suggestion may be true indubitably, but in one sense it is rather a convention of language and in another it is a commonplace which tends to confuse the issues. It is a convention of lan-guage because the great quests are not pursued in time or place, and it would be just as true to say that in a journey from the cir-cumference to the centre all roads are the same length, supposing that they are straight roads. It is a commonplace

because if any one should enter the byways or return on his path and restart, it is obvious that he must look to be delayed. Further-more, it may be true that all paths lead ultimately to the centre, and that if we descend into hell there may be still a way back to the light, as if one ascended to heaven; but in any house of right reason the issues are too clear to consider such extrinsic possibilities. Before I utilize these random and, I think, too obvious considerations to present the root-thesis of this paper, I must recur for one moment to the question of the essence and the accident, because on the assumption from which the con-siderations originate- namely, that there is a secret tradition in Christian times, the place of which is in the West- or rather that there are several traditions- it seems desirable to realize what part matters vitally among them. I will take my illustra-tion from alchemy, and it should be known that on the surface it claims to put forward the mystery of a material operation, behind which we discern- though not, it should be understood, invariably-another subject and another intention. Now, sup-posing that we were incorrect in our discernment, the secret tradition would remain, this notwithstanding, and it would remain also if the material operation were a dream not realized. But I think that a tradition of the physical kind would have no part in us, who are concerned with another conversion than that of metals, and who know that there is a mystic stone which is unseen by mortal eyes? The evidences of the secret tradition are very strong in alchemy, but it must be accepted that, either therein or elsewhere, I am not offering the proofs that the tradition exists. There are several schools of occult literature from which it follows that something was per-petuated belonging to their own order, as, for example, the schools of magic; concerning these latter I must say what to some persons may seem a rule of excessive severity- that they embody nothing which is essential to our purpose It is time that we should set apart in our minds the domain of phenomenal occultism as something which, almost auto-matically, has been transferred to the proper care of science. In so doing it is our simple hope that it may continue to extend a particular class of researches into the nature of man and his environment which the unaccredited investigations of the past have demonstrated already as productive to those who can be called open to conviction. The grounds of this conviction were manifested generations or centuries ago, and along both lines the research exhibits to us from time to time that we -or some of us- who know after another manner, have been justified very surely when, as if from

a more remote region, we have returned to testify that the great mysteries are within.

I have no need to affirm that the secret tradition, either in the East or the West, has been always an open secret in respect of the root-principles concerning the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is easy, therefore, to show what it is not, and to make the distinction which I have attempted between the classes of the concealed knowledge. It is not so easy to define the most precious treasures of the King- in respect of that knowledge- according to the estimate concerning them which I have assumed tacitly to be common between persons confessing to mystic predispositions at this day. The issues are confused throughout, all our high predilections notwithstanding, by the traditional or historical notion concerning the adept, which is that of a man whose power is raised to the transcendent degree by the communication or attainment, after some manner, of a particular and even terrible knowledge of the hidden forces of nature. I have heard technical and imputed adepts of occult associations state that those who possess, in the actual and plenary sense, the gifts which are ascribed to themselves by the simplicity of an artificial title, are able so to disintegrate the constituted man that they can separate not only the body from its psychic part but the spirit also from the soul, when they have a sufficient cause in their illumination against a particular victim. If things of this kind were possible, they would belong to the science of the abyss- when the abyss has been exalted above all that is termed God; but there is no need to attribute an over-great seriousness to chatter and traffic of this kind, which has been all too prevalent in a few current schools of inexactitude. The tendency contributes, as I have said, to confuse the issues and, though it may seem a perilous suggestion, one is tempted to say that, in all its higher aspects, the name itself of adept might be abandoned definitely in favour of that of the mystic- though on account of the great loose thinking it is only too likely- and there are signs sufficient already- that it would share a similar fate of misconstruction.

There was a time perhaps when we could have listened, and did even, to descriptions of this kind, because we had only just begun to hear of adepts and sages, so that things were magnified in the half-light. The scales have fallen now, and though the light into which we have entered is very far from the high light of all, it is serviceable sufficiently to dispel many shadows and to dissipate many

distractions. The difficulty which is here specified is increased by the fact that there are certainly powers of the height, and that the spirit of man does not in its upward path take all the heavens of aspiration without, after some manner, being set over the kingdoms which are below it. For ourselves, at least, we can lay down one irrevocable law- that he who has resolved, setting all things else aside, to enter the path of adeptship must look for his progress in proportion as he pursues holiness for its own sake and not for the miracles of sanctity. It will be seen that I am disposed to call things by their old names, which have many consecrations, and I hope to command sympathy- but something more even- when I say further that he who dreams of adeptship and does not say sanctity in his heart till his lips are cleansed and then does not say it with his lips, is not so much far from the goal as without having conceived regarding it. One of the lesser masters, who has now scarcely a pupil amongst us, said once, quoting from somewhere *Vel sanctum invenit, vel sanctvm f/acit*; but I know that it must be long resident in our desires before it can be declared in our lives.

I have searched the whole West and only in two directions have I found anything which will compare with pure monastic mysticism; one of these is the mystic side of alchemy, while the other is that body of tradition which answers most fully to the name of Rosicrucianism. There are other places in which we find the same thing, or the substance of the same thing, and I believe that I have given faithful testimony already on this point; even in the lesser schools I am sure that it was always at the roots, but except in so far as a personal sympathy may direct us, or the accidents of an historical study, I do not know that there is a direct gain- or that there is not rather a hindrance- by going any distance afield for what is so close to our hands, and into side issues for what is in the straight road- whether this be broad or narrow. There is no doubt that from one point of view Christian mysticism has been on the external side bewrayed rather seriously by its environment, because of the inhibitions of the official churches in saying this, I hope that the time has come to all of us when the cheap conventions of hostility towards these churches, and especially towards the Latin Rite, have ceased to obtain in our minds and that we can appreciate, in however detached a manner, the high annals of their sanctity. If so, we shall be able to appreciate also, at the proper value, an external and historical side on which the Latin Church approached too often that picture in the story of the Holy

Graal of a certain King of Castle Mortal, who sold God for money. The difficulty which the Rite has created and the inhibitions into which it has passed arise more especially not alone on the external side but from the fact that it has taken the great things of symbolism too generally for material facts. In this way, with all the sincerity which can be attached to its formal documents, produced for the most part by the process of growth, the Church Catholic of Latin Christianity has told the wrong story, though the elements which were placed in its hands are the right and true elements. I believe that the growth of sanctity within the Latin Church has been- under its deepest consideration-substantially hindered by the over-encrustation of the spirit with the literal aspect, though this at the same time is indispensable to expression. I believe that in the minds of the mystics this hindrance has operated; of all men on earth they have recognized assuredly the working of the spirit; but they sought to attain it through the veils of doctrine and they did not utterly and wholly part the curtains thereof. The result was that these trailed after them and were an impediment as they entered the sanctuary. The process itself was, in one sense, the wrong process, though on account of their environment it was almost impossible that they should adopt another. We have agreed long ago that to work up from Nature to Grace is not really the method of the wise, because that which is below is the branches and that which is above is the roots, and the tree of life is really in this sense, and because of our distance from the centre, as it were, upside down. So also the true way of experience in the mystic life is to work outward from within. It is natural, of course, and this is of necessity also, that we should receive our first intimations through the letter, but when it has exhibited to us some reflections of the light which is behind we must not suffer our course to be hindered by the office of the letter, but should set it aside rather, to abide in the root-meaning which is behind the symbols. There is a later stage in which we shall revert to the external and to the meaning that is without, bringing back with us the inward light to interpenetrate and transform it. Perhaps an illustration will explain better the order of procedure than a formal statement merely, though I do not think that there is even a surface difficulty concerning it. We have been taught in the infancy of the mind the great story which is the root and heart of external Christianity. That is not the letter which kills but the cortex of a vessel behind which are the eternal fountains of life. I need not say that many of us do not get beyond this cortex and, fortunately, it is

not a dead husk, but a living body through which Grace flows to us after the measure of our capacity. But it may come to pass that the inward sensorium is opened- by the mediation, as it may well be, of the great books of the Church, or in what manner soever- and we then see that the great story, the old story, the story which is of all things true, is that of our own soul. I mean this not in the sense of the soul's geniture, but in the sense of its progress, as it is here and now environed. We are then looking towards the real road of our redemption, and it is at this stage that the letter should be set aside for a period because everything has to be enacted anew. The virgin must conceive and bear her son; in the grand rough outline of Saint Martin the son must be born in the Bethlehem of our human life; he must be presented in the temple which stands in the Jerusalem within; he must confound the doctors of the intellect; he must lead the hidden life of Nazareth; he must be manifested and must teach us within, in which way we shall return to the world of doctrine and shall find that all things are made new. It is not that there are new doctrines, but there is another quality of life; thereby the old symbolism has been so interpenetrated that the things which are without have become the things which are within, till each seems either in the power of the grace and in the torrent of the life. It is then that we cease to go out through the door by which we went in, because other doors are open, and the call of many voices, bidding us no longer depart hence, says rather: Let us enter the sanctuary, even the inmost shrine.

I desire, therefore, to make it plain that the Secret Church Mystic which exists and has always existed within the Church Militant of Christendom does not differ in anything from the essential teaching of doctrine- I mean *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*; that it can say with its heart what it says also with its lips; that again there is no change or shadow of vicissitude; but in some very high sense the ground of the essentials has been removed. The *symbolum* remains ; it has not taken on another meaning; but it has unfolded itself like the flower from within. Christian Theosophy in the West can recite its *Credo in unum Deum* by clause and by clause, including in *unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam*, and if there is an *arriere pensee* it is not of heresy or Jesuitry. Above all, and I say this the more expressly because there are still among us- that is to say, in those circles generally- certain grave misconceptions, and it is

necessary to affirm that the path of the mystic does not pass through the heresies.

And now with respect to the secret schools which have handed down to us at this day some part or aspects of the secret tradition belonging to Christian times, I must leave out of consideration, because there are limits to papers of this kind, the great witness of Kabalism which although it is a product of the Christian period is scarcely of it, and although therein the quest and its term do not assuredly differ from that of the truth which is in Christ, there are perhaps other reasons than those of brevity for setting it apart here. Alchemy may not have originated much further East than Alexandria, or, alternatively, it may have travelled from China when the port of Byzantium was opened to the commerce of the world. In either case, its first development, in the forms with which we are acquainted, is connected with the name of Byzantium, and the earliest alchemists of whom we have any remains in literature constitute a class by themselves under the name of Byzantine alchemists. The records of their processes went into Syria and Arabia, where they assumed a new mode, which bore, however, all necessary evidence of its origin. In this form it does not appear to have had a specific influence upon the *corpus doctrinale*. The records were also taken West, like many other mysteries of varying importance, and when they began to assume a place in western history this was chiefly in France, Germany and England. In other words, there arose the cycle of Latin alchemy, passing at a later date, by the way of translation, into the vernaculars of the respective countries, until finally, but much later, we have original documents in English, French and German. It follows, but has not so far been noticed, that the entire literature is a pro-duct of Christian times and has Christianity as its motive, whether subconsciously or otherwise. This statement applies to the Latin Geber and the tracts which are ascribed to Morien and Rhasis. The exception which proves the rule is the Kabalistic *Aesh Mezareph*, which we know only by fragments included in the great collection of Rosenroth. I suppose that there is no labyrinth which it is quite so difficult to thread as that of the *Theatrum Chemicum*. It is beset on every side with pitfalls, and its clues, though not destroyed actually, have been buried beneath the ground. Expositors of the subject have gone astray over the general purpose of the art, because some have believed it to be: (*a*) the transmutation of metals, and that only, while others have interpreted it

as (*b*) a veiled method of delineating the secrets of the soul on its way through the world within, and besides this nothing. Many text-books of physical alchemy would seem to have been re-edited in this exotic interest. The true philosophers of each school are believed to have taught the same thing, with due allowance for the generic difference of their term, and seeing that they use the same language it would seem that, given a criterion of distinction in respect of the term, this should make the body of cryptogram comparatively easy to disentangle. But as one of the chief difficulties is said also to reside in the fact that many of them do not begin at the same point of the process, the advantage of uniformity is cancelled largely.

There are affirmed to be experimental schools still existing in Europe which have carried the physical work much further than it is ever likely to be taken by any isolated student; but this must be accepted under several reserves, or I can say, at least, that, having better occasions than most people of knowing the schools and their development, I have so far found no evidence. But there are testified otherwise to be- and I speak here with the certainty of first-hand knowledge-other schools, also experimental, also existing in Europe, which claim to possess the master-key of the mystical work. How far they have been successful at present in using that key I am not in a position to say, nor can I indicate its nature for reasons that, I think, must be obvious. It so happens, however, that the mystery of the processes is one thing and that which lies on the surface, or more immediately beneath the externals of the concealed language, is, fortunately, another thing. And, as often happens also, the enlightening correspondences are offering their marks and seals- if not at our very doors- at least in the official churches. Among all those places that are holy there is no holy place in which they do not abide *a mane usque ad vespertinum*, and the name of the correspondence-in-chief is the Holy Eucharist.

I propose now to tabulate certain palmary points of terminology which are common to all the adepts, including both schools indifferently, though we are dealing here- and this is understood- with the process of one school only. By the significance of these points or terms we shall see to what extent the symbolism of the higher alchemy is in conformity with mystic symbolism and with the repose of the life of the Church in God. It should be realized, however, that there is nothing so hard and so thankless as to elucidate one

symbolism by the terms of another- and this notwithstanding an occasional identity which may manifest in the terms of each.

It must be understood further and accepted that all alchemists, outside the distinctions of their schools, were actuated by an express determination to veil their mystery and that they had recourse for this purpose to every kind of subterfuge. At the same time they tell us that the whole art is contained, manifested and set forth by means of a single vessel, which, amidst all manner of minor variations, is described with essential uniformity throughout the great multitude of texts. This statement constitutes a certain lesser key to the art; but as on the one hand the alchemists veil their hallow-in-chief by reference, in spite of their assurance, as above noted, to many pretended vessels, so has the key itself a certain aspect of subterfuge, since the alleged unity is in respect only of the term final of the process in the unity of the recipient. This unity is the last reduction of a triad, because, according to these aspects of Hermetic philosophy, man in the course of his attainment is at first three- that is, when he sets out upon the great quest; he is two at a certain stage; but he is, in fine, one, which is the end of his evolution. The black state of the matter on which the process of the art is engaged is the body of this death, from which the adepts have asked to be detached. It is more especially our natural life. The white state of the stone, the confection of which is desired, is the vesture of immortality with which the epopts are clothed upon. The salt of the philosophers is that savour of life without which the material earth can neither be salted nor cleansed. The sulphur of the philosophers is the inward substance by which some souls are saved, yet so as by fire. The mercury of the sages is that which must be fixed and volatilized- naturally it is fluidic and wandering- but except under this name, or by some analogous substitute, it must not be described literally outside the particular circles of secret knowledge. It is nearer than hands and feet.

Now the perfect correspondence of these things in the symbolism of official Christianity, and the great mystery of perfect sanctification, is set forth in the great churches under the sacramentalism of the Holy Eucharist. This is my point, and I desire to make it clear: the same exalted mystery which lies behind the symbols of bread and wine, behind the undeclared priesthood which is according to the order of Melchisedeck, was expressed by the alchemists under the guise of transmutation; but I refer here to the secret school of adeptship which

had taken over in another and transcendent interest the terminology and processes of occult metallurgy.

The vessel is therefore one, but the matter thereto adapted is not designated especially, or at least after an uniform manner it is said to be clay by those who speak at times more openly in order that they may be understood the less, as if they also were singing in their strange chorus:-

Let us be open as the day,

That we may deeper hide ourselves.

It is most commonly described as metallic, because on the surface of the literature there is the declared mystery of all metals, and the concealed purpose is to show that in the roots and essence of these things there is a certain similarity or analogy. The reason is that the adept, who has been translated, again finds his body after many days, but under a great transmutation, as if in another sense the *panis quotidianis* had been changed into the *panis virus et vita/is*, but without mutation of the accidents. The reason is also that in normal states the body is here and now not without the soul, nor can we separate readily, by any intellectual process, the soul from the spirit which broods thereover, to fertilize it in a due season. It is, however, one vessel, and this makes for simplicity; but it is not by such simplicity that the art is testified to be a *lusus puerorum*. The contradistinction hereto is that it is hard to be a Christian, which is the comment of the man born blind upon the light that he cannot see. There is also the triumphant affirmation of the mystical counter-position, that to sin is hard indeed for the man who knows truly. The formula of this is that man is born for the heights rather than the deeps, and its verbal paradox is *facilis ascensus superno*. The process of the art is without haste or violence by the mediation of a graduated fire, and the seat of this fire is in the soul. It is a mystery of the soul's love, and for this reason she is called "undaunted daughter of desire." The sense of the gradation is that love is set free from the impetuosity and violence of passion and has become a constant and incorruptible flame. The formula of this is that the place of unity is a centre wherein there is no exaggeration. That which the fire consumes is certain materials or elements, which are called *recrementa*, the grosser parts, the superfluities; and it should be observed that there are two

purgations, of which the first is the gross and the second the subtle. The first is the com-mon process of conversion, by which there is such a separation of seemingly external components that what remains is as a new creature, and may be said to be reborn. The second is the exalted conversion, by which that which has been purified is so raised that it enters into a new region, or a certain heaven comes down and abides therein. It is not my design in the present place to exhaust all the sources of interpretation, because such a scheme would be impossible in a single paper, and I can allude, therefore, but scantily to the many forms of the parables which are concerned with the process up to this point. The ostensible object, which was materialized in the alternative school, is the confection of a certain stone or powder, which is that of projection, and the symbolical theorem is that this powder, when added to a base metal, performs the wonder of transmutation into pure silver or gold, better than those of the mines. Otherwise, it prolongs life and renews youth in the adept-philosopher and lover of learning. In the second case, it is spoken of usually as an elixir, but the transmuting powder and the renewing draught are really one thing with the spiritual alchemists. It must be also affirmed that in virtue of a very high mysticism there is an unity in the trinity of the powder, the metal and the vase. The vase is also the alchemist on his outer side, for none of the instruments, the materials, the fires, the producer, and the thing produced are external to the one subject. At the same time the inward man is distinguished from the out-ward man; we may say that the one is the alchemist and the other the vessel. It is in this sense that the art is both physical and spiritual. But the symbolism is many times enfolded, and the gross metal which is placed within the vessel is the untrans-muted life of reason, motive, concupiscence, self-interest and all that which constitutes the intelligent creature on the normal plane of manifestation. Hereof is the natural man enclosed in an animal body, as the metal is placed in the vessel, and from this point of view the alchemist is he who is sometimes termed arro-gantly the super-man. But because there is only one vessel it must be understood that herein the stone is confectioned and the base metal is converted. The alchemist is himself finally the stone, and because many zealous aspirants to the art have not understood this they have failed in the great work on the spiritual side. The schedule which now follows may elucidate this hard subject somewhat more fully and plainly.

There are (a) the natural, external man, whose equivalent is the one vessel; (b) the body of desire, which answers to the gross matter; (c) the aspiration, the consciousness, the will of the supernatural life; (d) the process of the will working on the body of desire within the outward vessel; (e) the psychic and transcendental conversion thus effected; (f) the reaction of the purified body of desire on the essential will, so that the one supports the other, while the latter is borne upward, and from such raising there follows this further change, that the spirit of a man puts on itself a new quality of life, becoming an instrument which is at once feeding and is itself fed; (g) herein is the symbol of the stone and the great elixir; (h) the spirit is nourished from above by the analogies of Eucharistic ministry; (i) the spirit nourishes the soul, as by bread and wine; (j) the soul effects the higher conversion in the body of desire; (k) it thus comes about that the essence which dissolves everything and changes everything is still contained in a vessel, or- alternatively- that God abides in man.

This process, thus exhaustively delineated in the parables of alchemy, is put with almost naked simplicity by Eucharistic doctrine, which says that material lips receive the supersubstantial bread and wine, that the soul is nourished and that Christ enters the soul. It seems, therefore, within all reason and all truth to testify that the *panis vivus et vitalis* is even as the trans-muting stone and that the chalice of the new and eternal testament is as the renewing elixir; but I say this under certain reasonable reserves because, in accordance with my formal indication, the closer the analogies between distinct systems of symbolism the more urgent is that prudence which counsels us not to confuse them by an interchangeable use.

All Christian mysticism came forth out of the Mass Book, and it returns therein. But the Mass Book in the first instance came out of the heart mystic which had unfolded in Christendom. The nucleus of truth in the missal is *Dominus prope est*. The Mass shows that the great work is in the first sense a work of the hands of man, because it is he officiating as a priest in his own temple who offers the sacrifice which he has purified. But the elements of that sacrifice are taken over by an intervention from another order, and that which follows is transfusion.

Re-expressing all this now in a closer summary, the apparatus of mystical alchemy is indeed, comparatively speaking, simple.

The first matter is myrionimous and is yet one, corresponding to the unity of the natural will and the unlimited complexity of its motives, dispositions, desires, passions and distractions, on all of which the work of wisdom must operate. The vessel is also one, for this is the normal man complete in his own degree. The process has the seal of Nature's directness; it is the graduation and increasing maintenance of a particular fire. The initial work is a change in the substance of will, aspiration and desire, which is the first conversion or transmutation in the elementary sense.

But it is identical even to the end with the term proposed by the Eucharist, which is the modification of the noumenal man by the communication of Divine Substance. Here is the *lapis qui non lapis, lapis tingens, lapis angularis, lapis qui multiplicetur, lapis per quem justus aedificabit domum Domini, et jam valde aedificatur et terram possidebit, per omnia, etc.* When it is said that the stone is multiplied, even to a thousandfold, we know that this is true of all seed which is sown upon good soil.

So, therefore, the stone transmutes and the Eucharist trans-mutes also; the philosophical elements on the physical side go to the making of the stone which is also physical; and the sacramental elements to the generation of a new life in the soul. He who says *Lapis Philosophorum*, says also: My beloved to me and I to him: Christ is therefore the stone, and the stone in adept humanity is the union realized, while the great secret is that Christ must be manifested within.

Now it seems to me that it has not served less than a useful purpose to establish after a new manner the intimate resemblance between the higher understanding of one part of the secret tradition and the better interpretation of one sacrament of the church. It must be observed that we are not dealing in either case with the question of attainment. The analogy would remain if spiritual alchemy and Christian sacramentalism abode in the intellectual order as theorems only, or as part of the psychic dream which had never been carried into experience. It would be more easy (if there were here any opportunity) to offer the results of the experience as recorded in the lives of the saints than to discuss the traditional attainments which are held to have passed into actuality among the secret schools; but the veiled literatures must be left to speak for themselves, which- for those who

can read- they do, like the annals of sanctity as to these- those who will take the pains may seek verification for themselves. My task in respect of spiritual alchemy ends by exhibiting that this also was a mystery of sanctity concerned *ex hypothesi* with the communication of Divine Substance, and that this is the term of the Eucharist. It is this which the doctrine of sanctity offered, to those who entered the pathway of sanctity, as the foretaste in this life of the union which is consummated in eternity, or of that end beyond which there is nothing whatever which is conceivable. We know from the old books that it has not entered into the heart of man, but the heart which has put away the things of sense conceives it by representations and types. This is the great tradition of that which the early alchemists term truth in the art; the end is representation after its own kind rather than felicity, but the representation is of that order which begins in ecstasy and ends in absorption. Let no man say, therefore, that he loses himself in experience of this order, for, perchance, it is then only that he finds himself, even in that way which suggests that after many paths of activity he is at length coming into his own.

It might seem that I have reached here a desirable point for my conclusion, but I am pledged, alike by my title and one antecedent reference, to say something concerning Rosicrucianism, which is another witness in the world on the part of the secret tradition. There is one respect in which it is simpler in its apparatus than the literature of the purely Hermetic tradition, for it lies within a smaller compass and has assumed a different mode. It is complicated by the fact that very few of the texts which are available among the things of the outside world have a title to rank in its tradition. This, I suppose, is equivalent to an intimation that the witness is still in the world after another and more active manner, which is true in more than a single way. I am not the ambassador, and much less the plenipotentiary, of the secret societies in the West, and independently of this statement I feel sure that I shall not be accused of endeavouring to assume the role or to create the impression. I know only that the societies exist, and that they are at the present time one means of perpetuating that tradition. I do not suggest that there are no other means, because I have indicated even from the beginning that the door looking towards heaven and the sanctuary which is its ante-chamber was opened long centuries ago by the official churches. But the tradition itself has been rather behind the churches and some part of the things for which we

are all seek-ing is to be found therein- all which is without detriment to the light of the East, because this is also the light of the West under another veil. Even in the esoteric assemblies which are now and here among us, the tradition is, in a sense, veiled, and, of course, in speaking publicly one has always to cloud the sanctuaries rather than to say: Lift up your eyes, for it is in this or that corner of London, Paris or Prague.

If there is one thing more regrettable than the confusion in forms of symbolism, it is the identification of separate entities under a general term which has only a particular meaning so far as history is concerned. The name Rosicrucian, has suffered from abuse of this kind, being used almost interchangeably with that of Alchemist by popular writers. I must ask to be dis-associated from this error when I say that the external history of the Rosy Cross, in so far as it can be said to exist, has only one point of correspondence with Rosicrucian traditions perpetuated by secret societies in a few centres of Europe. The point of correspondence is the legend-in-chief of the Order, detached from the pseudo-historical aspect which it bore in the early documents, and associated with a highly advanced form of symbolism. It is in this form only that it enters into the sequence of the mysteries, and exhibits how the priest-king does issue from Salem, carrying bread and wine. We have, therefore, the Eucharistic side in the higher Rosicrucian tradition, but if I may describe that which is greater in the terms of that which is lesser- because of the essential difficulty with which I am confronted- it has undergone a great change, not by a diminution of the sacraments but because they are found everywhere. The alchemical maxim which might be inscribed over the gate of any Rosicrucian temple is-

Est in Mercurio quicquid quaerunt sapientes.

The Eucharistic maxim which might be written over the laboratory of the alchemist, in addition to *Laborare esse orare*, would be-

Et antiquum documentum

Novo cedat ritui:

Praestet fides supplementum

Sensuum defectui.

The maxim which might be written over the temples of the official churches is *Corporis Mysteriorum*, that the mystery of the body might lead them more fully into the higher mystery of the soul. And, in fine, that maxim which might, and will be, inscribed over the one temple of the truly catholic religion when the faiths of this western world have come into their own- that which is simplest of all, and of all most pregnant, would be *mysterium fidei*, the mystery which endures for ever and for ever passes into experience.

In conclusion as to this part, Rosicrucianism is the mystery of that which dies in manifestation that the life of the manifest may be ensured. I have found nothing in symbolism which accounts like Rose-Cross symbolism for that formula which on one side is the summary expression of mysticism: "And I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

And now in conclusion generally:-

I have spoken of three things only, and of one of them with great brevity, because the published literatures have to be set aside, and of that which remains it does not appear in the open face of day. The initiations are many and so are the schools of thought, but those which are true schools and those which are high orders issue from one root. *Est una sola res*, and those whose heart of contemplation is fixed upon this one thing may differ widely but can never be far apart. Personally, I do not believe- and this has the ring of a commonplace- that if they came to understand one another they would be found to differ widely. I know not what systems of the eons may intervene between that which is imperishable within us and the union wherein the universe will, in fine, repose at the centre. But I know that the great systems ay, even the great processes- of the times that are gone, as of those which now encompass us- do not pass away, because that which was from the beginning, is now and ever shall be- is one motive, one aspiration, one term of thought remaining, as if in the stillness of an everlasting present. We really understand one another, and our collective aspirations are united, world without end.

ARS MEMORATIVA

An Introduction To The Hermetic Art Of Memory

By John Michael Greer ©

Part One: The Uses of Memory

In the current occult revival, the Art of Memory is perhaps the most thoroughly neglected of all the technical methods of Renaissance esotericism. While the researches of the late Dame Frances Yates¹ and, more recently, a revival of interest in the master mnemonist Giordano Bruno² have made the Art something of a known quantity in academic circles, the same is not true in the wider community; to mention the Art of Memory in most occult circles nowadays, to say nothing of the general public, is to invite blank looks.

In its day, though, the mnemonic methods of the Art held a special place among the contents of the practicing magician's mental toolkit. The Neoplatonic philosophy which underlay the whole structure of Renaissance magic gave memory, and thus techniques of mnemonics, a crucial place in the work of inner transformation. In turn, this interpretation of memory gave rise to a new understanding of the Art, turning what had once been a purely practical way of storing useful information into a meditative discipline calling on all the powers of the will and the imagination.

This article seeks to reintroduce the Art of Memory to the modern Western esoteric tradition as a practicable technique. This first part, "The Uses of Memory," will give an overview of the nature and development of the Art's methods, and explore some of the reasons why the Art has value for the modern esotericist. The second part, "The Garden of Memory," will present a basic Hermetic memory system, designed along traditional lines and making use of Renaissance magical symbolism, as a basis for experimentation and practical use.

The Method And Its Development

It was once almost mandatory to begin a treatise on the Art of Memory with the classical legend of its invention. This habit has

something to recommend it, for the story of Simonides is more than a colorful anecdote; it also offers a good introduction to the basics of the technique.

The poet Simonides of Ceos, as the tale has it, was hired to recite an ode at a nobleman's banquet. In the fashion of the time, the poet began with a few lines in praise of divinities -- in this case, Castor and Pollux -- before going on to the serious business of talking about his host. The host, however, objected to this diversion of the flattery, deducted half of Simonides' fee, and told the poet he could seek the rest from the gods he had praised. Shortly thereafter, a message was brought to the poet that two young men had come to the door of the house and wished to speak to him. When Simonides went to see them, there was no one there -- but in his absence the banquet hall collapsed behind him, killing the impious nobleman and all the dinner guests as well. Castor and Pollux, traditionally imaged as two young men, had indeed paid their half of the fee.

Tales of this sort were a commonplace in Greek literature, but this one has an unexpected moral. When the rubble was cleared away, the victims were found to be so mangled that their own families could not identify them. Simonides, however, called to memory an image of the banqueting hall as he had last seen it, and from this was able to recall the order of the guests at the table. Pondering this, according to the legend, he proceeded to invent the first classical Art of Memory. The story is certainly apocryphal, but the key elements of the technique it describes -- the use of mental images placed in ordered, often architectural settings -- remained central to the whole tradition of the Art of Memory throughout its history, and provided the framework on which the Hermetic adaptation of the Art was built.

In Roman schools of rhetoric, this approach to memory was refined into a precise and practical system. Students were taught to memorize the insides of large buildings according to certain rules, dividing the space into specific loci or "places" and marking every fifth and tenth locus with special signs. Facts to be remembered were converted into striking visual images and placed, one after another, in these loci; when needed, the rhetorician needed only to stroll in his imagination through the same building, noticing the images in order and recalling their meanings. At a more advanced level, images could be created for individual words or sentences, so that large passages of text could be

stored in the memory in the same way. Roman rhetoricians using these methods reached dizzying levels of mnemonic skill; one famous practitioner of the Art was recorded to have sat through a day-long auction and, at its end, repeated from memory the item, purchaser and price for every sale of the day.

With the disintegration of the Roman world, these same techniques became part of the classical heritage of Christianity. The Art of Memory took on a moral cast as memory itself was defined as a part of the virtue of prudence, and in this guise the Art came to be cultivated by the Dominican Order. It was from this source that the ex-Dominican Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), probably the Art's greatest exponent, drew the basis of his own techniques.⁴

Medieval methods of the Art differed very little from those of the classical world, but certain changes in the late Middle Ages helped lay the foundations for the Hermetic Art of Memory of the Renaissance. One of the most important of these was a change in the frameworks used for memory loci. Along with the architectural settings most often used in the classical tradition, medieval mnemonists also came to make use of the whole Ptolemaic cosmos of nested spheres as a setting for memory images. Each sphere from God at the periphery through the angelic, celestial and elemental levels down to Hell at the center thus held one or more loci for memory images.

Between this system and that of the Renaissance Hermeticists there is only one significant difference, and that is a matter of interpretation, not of technique. Steeped in Neoplatonic thought, the Hermetic magicians of the Renaissance saw the universe as an image of the divine Ideas, and the individual human being as an image of the universe; they also knew Plato's claim that all "learning" is simply the recollection of things known before birth into the realm of matter. Taken together, these ideas raised the Art of Memory to a new dignity. If the human memory could be reorganized in the image of the universe, in this view, it became a reflection of the entire realm of Ideas in their fullness -- and thus the key to universal knowledge. This concept was the driving force behind the complex systems of memory created by several Renaissance Hermeticists, and above all those of Giordano Bruno.

Bruno's mnemonic systems form, to a great extent, the high-water mark of the Hermetic Art of Memory. His methods were dizzyingly complex, and involve a combination of images, ideas and alphabets which require a great deal of mnemonic skill to learn in the first place! Hermetic philosophy and the traditional images of astrological magic appear constantly in his work, linking the framework of his Art to the wider framework of the magical cosmos. The difficulty of Bruno's technique, though, has been magnified unnecessarily by authors whose lack of personal experience with the Art has led them to mistake fairly straightforward mnemonic methods for philosophical obscurities.

A central example of this is the confusion caused by Bruno's practice of linking images to combinations of two letters. Yates' interpretation of Brunonian memory rested largely on an identification of this with the letter-combinations of Lullism, the half-Cabalistic philosophical system of Ramon Lull (1235-1316).⁵ While Lullist influences certainly played a part in Bruno's system, interpreting that system solely in Lullist terms misses the practical use of the combinations: they enable the same set of images to be used to remember ideas, words, or both at the same time.

An example might help clarify this point. In the system of Bruno's *De Umbris Idearum* (1582), the traditional image of the first decan of Gemini, a servant holding a staff, could stand for the letter combination be; that of Suah, the legendary inventor of chiromancy or palmistry, for ne. The decan-symbols are part of a set of images prior to the inventors, establishing the order of the syllables. Put in one locus, the whole would spell the word bene.⁶

The method has a great deal more subtlety than this one example shows. Bruno's alphabet included thirty letters, the Latin alphabet plus those Greek and Hebrew letters which have no Latin equivalents; his system thus allowed texts written in any of these alphabets to be memorized. He combined these with five vowels, and provided additional images for single letters to allow for more complex combinations. Besides the astrological images and inventors, there are also lists of objects and adjectives corresponding to this set of letter-combinations, and all these can be combined in a single memory-image to represent words of several syllables. At the same time, many of the images stand for ideas as well as sounds; thus the figure of Suah

mentioned above can also represent the art of palmistry if that subject needed to be remembered.

Bruno's influence can be traced in nearly every subsequent Hermetic memory treatise, but his own methods seem to have proved too demanding for most magi. Masonic records suggest that his mnemonics, passed on by his student Alexander Dicson, may have been taught in Scots Masonic lodges in the sixteenth century;⁷ more common, though, were methods like the one diagrammed by the Hermetic encyclopedist Robert Fludd in his *History of the Macrocosm and Microcosm*. This was a fairly straightforward adaptation of the late Medieval method, using the spheres of the heavens as loci, although Fludd nonetheless classified it along with prophecy, geomancy and astrology as a "microcosmic art" of human self-knowledge.⁸ Both this approach to the Art and this classification of it remained standard in esoteric circles until the triumph of Cartesian mechanism in the late seventeenth century sent the Hermetic tradition underground and the Art of Memory into oblivion.

The Method And Its Value

This profusion of techniques begs two questions, which have to be answered if the Art of Memory is to be restored to a place in the Western esoteric tradition. First of all, are the methods of the Art actually superior to rote memorization as a way of storing information in the human memory? Put more plainly, does the Art of Memory work?

It's fair to point out that this has been a subject of dispute since ancient times. Still, then as now, those who dispute the Art's effectiveness are generally those who have never tried it. In point of fact, the Art does work; it allows information to be memorized and recalled more reliably, and in far greater quantity, than rote-methods do. There are good reasons, founded in the nature of memory, why this should be so. The human mind recalls images more easily than ideas, and images charged with emotion more easily still; one's most intense memories, for example, are rarely abstract ideas. It uses chains of association, rather than logical order, to connect one memory with another; simple mnemonic tricks like the loop of string tied around a finger rely on this. It habitually follows rhythms and repetitive formulae; it's for this reason that poetry is often far easier to remember

than prose. The Art of Memory uses all three of these factors systematically. It constructs vivid, arresting images as anchors for chains of association, and places these in the ordered and repetitive context of an imagined building or symbolic structure in which each image and each locus leads on automatically to the next. The result, given training and practice, is a memory which works in harmony with its own innate strengths to make the most of its potential.

The fact that something can be done, however, does not by itself prove that it should be done. In a time when digital data storage bids fair to render print media obsolete, in particular, questions of how best to memorize information might well seem as relevant as the choice between different ways of making clay tablets for writing. Certainly some methods of doing this once-vital chore are better than others; so what? This way of thinking leads to the second question a revival of the Art of Memory must face: what is the value of this sort of technique?

This question is particularly forceful in our present culture because that culture, and its technology, have consistently tended to neglect innate human capacities and replace them where possible with mechanical equivalents. It would not be going too far to see the whole body of modern Western technology as a system of prosthetics. In this system, print and digital media serve as a prosthetic memory, doing much of the work once done in older societies by the trained minds of mnemonists. It needs to be recognized, too, that these media can handle volumes of information which dwarf the capacity of the human mind; no conceivable Art of Memory can hold as much information as a medium-sized public library.

The practical value of these ways of storing knowledge, like that of much of our prosthetic technology, is real. At the same time, there is another side to the matter, a side specially relevant to the Hermetic tradition. Any technique has effects on those who use it, and those effects need not be positive ones. Reliance on prosthetics tends to weaken natural abilities; one who uses a car to travel anywhere more than two blocks away will come to find even modest walks difficult. The same is equally true of the capacities of the mind. In Islamic countries, for example, it's not at all uncommon to find people who have memorized the entire Quran for devotional purposes. Leave

aside, for the moment, questions of value; how many people in the modern West would be capable of doing the equivalent?

One goal of the Hermetic tradition, by contrast, is to maximize human capacities, as tools for the inner transformations sought by the Hermeticist. Many of the elementary practices of that tradition -- and the same is true of esoteric systems worldwide -- might best be seen as a kind of mental calisthenics, intended to stretch minds grown stiff from disuse. This quest to expand the powers of the self stands in opposition to the prosthetic culture of the modern West, which has consistently tended to transfer power from the self to the exterior world. The difference between these two viewpoints has a wide range of implications -- philosophical, religious, and (not the least) political -- but the place of the Art of Memory can be found among them.

From what might be called the prosthetic standpoint, the Art is obsolete because it is less efficient than external data-storage methods such as books, and distasteful because it requires the slow development of inner abilities rather than the purchase of a piece of machinery. From a Hermetic standpoint, on the other hand, the Art is valuable in the first place as a means of developing one of the capacities of the self, the memory, and in the second place because it uses other capacities -- attention, imagination, mental imagery -- which have a large role in other aspects of Hermetic practice.

Like other methods of self-development, the Art of Memory also brings about changes in the nature of the capacity it shapes, not merely in that capacity's efficiency or volume; its effects are qualitative as well as quantitative -- another issue not well addressed by the prosthetic approach. Ordinarily, memory tends to be more or less opaque to consciousness. A misplaced memory vanishes from sight, and any amount of random fishing around may be needed before an associative chain leading to it can be brought up from the depths. In a memory trained by the methods of the Art, by contrast, the chains of association are always in place, and anything memorized by the Art can thus be found as soon as needed. Equally, it's much easier for the mnemonist to determine what exactly he or she does and does not know, to make connections between different points of knowledge, or to generalize from a set of specific memories; what is stored through the Art of Memory can be reviewed at will.

Despite our culture's distaste for memorization, and for the development of the mind generally, the Art of Memory thus has some claim to practical value, even beyond its uses as a method of esoteric training. In the second part of this article, "The Garden of Memory," some of these potentials will be explored through the exposition of an introductory memory system based on the traditional principles of the Art.

Notes for Part 1

1. Yates, Frances A., *The Art Of Memory* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1966) remains the standard English-language work on the tradition.
2. Bruno, Giordano, *On the Composition of Images, Signs and Ideas* (NY: Willis, Locker & Owens, 1991), and Culianu, Ioan, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1987) are examples.
3. The brief history of the Art given here is drawn from Yates, *op. cit.*
4. For Bruno, see Yates, *op. cit.*, ch. 9, 11, 13-14, as well as her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1964).
5. See Yates, *Art of Memory*, Ch. 8.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 208-222.
7. Stevenson, David, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988), p. 95.
8. See Yates, *Art of Memory*, Ch. 15.

Part Two: The Garden of Memory

During the Renaissance, the age in which it reached its highest pitch of development, the Hermetic Art of Memory took on a wide array of different forms. The core principles of the Art, developed in ancient times through practical experience of the way human memory works best, are common to the whole range of Renaissance memory treatises; the structures built on this foundation, though, differ enormously. As we'll see, even some basic points of theory and practice were subjects of constant dispute, and it would be impossible

as well as unprofitable to present a single memory system, however generic, as somehow "representative" of the entire field of Hermetic mnemonics.

That is not my purpose here. As the first part of this essay pointed out, the Art of Memory has potential value as a practical technique even in today's world of information overload and digital data storage. The memory system which will be presented here is designed to be used, not merely studied; the techniques contained in it, while almost entirely derived from Renaissance sources, are included for no other reason than the simple fact that they work.

Traditional writings on mnemonics generally divide the principles of the Art into two categories. The first consists of rules for places -- that is, the design or selection of the visualized settings in which mnemonic images are located; the second consists of rules for images -- that is, the building up of the imagined forms used to encode and store specific memories. This division is sensible enough, and will be followed in this essay, with the addition of a third category: rules for practice, the principles which enable the Art to be effectively learned and put to use.

Rules for Places

One debate which went on through much of the history of the Art of Memory was a quarrel over whether the mnemonist should visualize real places or imaginary ones as the setting for the mnemonic images of the Art. If the half-legendary classical accounts of the Art's early phases can be trusted, the first places used in this way were real ones; certainly the rhetors of ancient Rome, who developed the Art to a high pitch of efficacy, used the physical architecture around them as the framework for their mnemonic systems. Among the Hermetic writers on the Art, Robert Fludd insisted that real buildings should always be used for memory work, claiming that the use of wholly imaginary structures leads to vagueness and thus a less effective system.¹ On the other hand, many ancient and Renaissance writers on memory, Giordano Bruno among them, gave the opposite advice. The whole question may, in the end, be a matter of personal needs and temperament.

Be that as it may, the system given here uses a resolutely imaginary set of places, based on the numerical symbolism of Renaissance

occultism. Borrowing an image much used by the Hermeticists of the Renaissance, I present the key to a garden: Hortus Memoriae, the Garden of Memory.

The Garden of Memory is laid out in a series of concentric circular paths separated by hedges; the first four of these circles are mapped in Diagram 1. Each circle corresponds to a number, and has the same number of small gazebos set in it. These gazebos -- an example, the one in the innermost circle, is shown in Diagram 2 -- bear symbols which are derived from the Pythagorean number-lore of the Renaissance and later magical traditions, and serve as the places in this memory garden.² Like all memory places, these should be imagined as brightly lit and conveniently large; in particular, each gazebo is visualized as large enough to hold an ordinary human being, although it need not be much larger.

The first four circles of the garden are built up in the imagination as follows:

The First Circle

This circle corresponds to the Monad, the number One; its color is white, and its geometrical figure is the circle. A row of white flowers grows at the border of the surrounding hedge. The gazebo is white, with gold trim, and is topped with a golden circle bearing the number 1. Painted on the dome is the image of a single open Eye, while the sides bear the image of the Phoenix in flames.

The Second Circle

The next circle corresponds to the Dyad, the number Two and to the concept of polarity; its color is gray, its primary symbols are the Sun and Moon, and its geometrical figure is the vesica piscis, formed from the common area of two overlapping circles. The flowers bordering the hedges in this circle are silver-gray; in keeping with the rule of puns, which we'll cover a little later, these might be tulips. Both of the two gazebos in this circle are gray. One, topped with the number 2 in a white vesica, has white and gold trim, and bears the image of the Sun on the dome and that of Adam, his hand on his heart, on the side. The other, topped with the number 3 in a black vesica, has black and silver trim, and bears the image of the Moon on the dome and that of Eve, her hand touching her head, on the side.

The Third Circle

This circle corresponds to the Triad, the number Three; its color is black, its primary symbols are the three alchemical principles of Sulphur, Mercury and Salt, and its geometrical figure is the triangle. The flowers bordering the hedges are black, as are the three gazebos. The first of the gazebos has red trim, and is topped with the number 4 in a red triangle; it bears, on the dome, the image of a red man touching his head with both hands, and on the sides the images of various animals. The second gazebo has white trim, and is topped by the number 5 in a white triangle; it bears, on the dome, the image of a white hermaphrodite touching its breasts with both hands, and on the sides the images of various plants. The third gazebo is unrelieved black, and is topped with the number 6 in a black triangle; it bears, on the dome, the image of a black woman touching her belly with both hands, and on the sides the images of various minerals.

The Fourth Circle

This circle corresponds to the Tetrad, the number Four. Its color is blue, its primary symbols are the Four Elements, and its geometrical figure is the square. The flowers bordering the hedges are blue and four-petaled, and the four gazebos are blue. The first of these has red trim and is topped with the number 7 in a red square; it bears the image of flames on the dome, and that of a roaring lion on the sides. The second has yellow trim and is topped with the number 8 in a yellow square; it bears the images of the four winds blowing on the dome, and that of a man pouring water from a vase on the sides. The third is unrelieved blue and is topped with the number 9 in a blue square; it bears the image of waves on the dome and those of a scorpion, a serpent and an eagle on the sides. The fourth has green trim and is topped with the number 10 in a green square; it bears, on the dome, the image of the Earth, and that of an ox drawing a plow on the sides.

To begin with, these four circles and ten memory places will be enough, providing enough room to be useful in practice, while still small enough that the system can be learned and put to work in a fairly short time. Additional circles can be added as familiarity makes work with the system go more easily. It's possible, within the limits of the traditional number symbolism used here, to go out to a total of

eleven circles containing 67 memory places.³ It's equally possible to go on to develop different kinds of memory structures in which images may be placed. So long as the places are distinct and organized in some easily memorable sequence, almost anything will serve.

The Garden of Memory as described here will itself need to be committed to memory if it's to be used in practice. The best way to do this is simply to visualize oneself walking through the garden, stopping at the gazebos to examine them and then passing on. Imagine the scent of the flowers, the warmth of the sun; as with all forms of visualization work, the key to success is to be found in concrete imagery of all five senses. It's a good idea to begin always in the same place -- the first circle is best, for practical as well as philosophical reasons -- and, during the learning process, the student should go through the entire garden each time, passing each of the gazebos in numerical order. Both of these habits will help the imagery of the garden take root in the soil of memory.

Rules for Images

The garden imagery described above makes up half the structure of this memory system -- the stable half, one might say, remaining unchanged so long as the system itself is kept in use. The other, changing half consists of the images which are used to store memories within the garden. These depend much more on the personal equation than the framing imagery of the garden; what remains in one memory can evaporate quickly from another, and a certain amount of experimentation may be needed to find an approach to memory images which works best for any given student.

In the classical Art of Memory, the one constant rule for these images was that they be striking -- hilarious, attractive, hideous, tragic, or simply bizarre, it made (and makes) no difference, so long as each image caught at the mind and stirred up some response beyond simple recognition. This is one useful approach. For the beginning practitioner, however, thinking of a suitably striking image for each piece of information which is to be recorded can be a difficult matter.

It's often more useful, therefore, to use familiarity and order rather than sheer strangeness in an introductory memory system, and the method given here will do precisely this.

It's necessary for this method, first of all, to come up with a list of people whose names begin with each letter of the alphabet except K and X (which very rarely begin words in English). These may be people known to the student, media figures, characters from a favorite book -- my own system draws extensively from J.R.R. Tolkien's Ring trilogy, so that Aragorn, Boromir, Cirdan the Shipwright and so on tend to populate my memory palaces. It can be useful to have more than one figure for letters which often come at the beginning of words (for instance, Saruman as well as Sam Gamgee for S), or figures for certain common two-letter combinations (for example, Theoden for Th, where T is Treebeard), but these are developments which can be added later on. The important point is that the list needs to be learned well enough that any letter calls its proper image to mind at once, without hesitation, and that the images are clear and instantly recognizable.

Once this is managed, the student will need to come up with a second set of images for the numbers from 0 to 9. There is a long and ornate tradition of such images, mostly based on simple physical similarity between number and image -- a javelin or pole for 1, a pair of eyeglasses or of buttocks for 8, and so on. Any set of images can be used, though, so long as they are simple and distinct. These should also be learned by heart, so that they can be called to mind without effort or hesitation. One useful test is to visualize a line of marching men, carrying the images which correspond to one's telephone number; when this can be done quickly, without mental fumbling, the images are ready for use.

That use involves two different ways of putting the same imagery to work. One of the hoariest of commonplaces in the whole tradition of the Art of Memory divides mnemonics into "memory for things" and "memory for words." In the system given here, however, the line is drawn in a slightly different place; memory for concrete things -- for example, items in a grocery list -- requires a slightly different approach than memory for abstract things, whether these be concepts or pieces of text. Concrete things are, on the whole, easier, but both can be done using the same set of images already selected.

We'll examine memory for concrete things first. If a grocery list needs to be committed to memory -- this, as we'll see, is an excellent way to practice the Art -- the items on the list can be put in any convenient

order. Supposing that two sacks of flour are at the head of the list, the figure corresponding to the letter F is placed in the first gazebo, holding the symbol for 2 in one hand and a sack of flour in the other, and carrying or wearing at least one other thing which suggests flour: for example, a chaplet of plaited wheat on the figure's head. The garments and accessories of the figure can also be used to record details: for instance, if the flour wanted is whole-grain, the figure might wear brown clothing. This same process is done for each item on the list, and the resulting images are visualized, one after another, in the gazebos of the Garden of Memory. When the Garden is next visited in the imagination -- in the store, in this case -- the same images will be in place, ready to communicate their meaning.

This may seem like an extraordinarily complicated way to go about remembering one's groceries, but the complexity of the description is deceptive. Once the Art has been practiced, even for a fairly short time, the creation and placement of the images literally takes less time than writing down a shopping list, and their recall is an even faster process. It quickly becomes possible, too, to go to the places in the Garden out of their numerical order and still recall the images in full detail. The result is a fast and flexible way of storing information -- and one which is unlikely to be accidentally left out in the car!

Memory for abstract things, as mentioned earlier, uses these same elements of practice in a slightly different way. A word or a concept often can't be pictured in the imagination the way a sack of flour can, and the range of abstractions which might need to be remembered, and discriminated, accurately is vastly greater than the possible range of items on a grocery list (how many things are there in a grocery store that are pale brown and start with the letter F?). For this reason, it's often necessary to compress more detail into the memory image of an abstraction.

In this context, one of the most traditional tools, as well as one of the most effective ones, is a principle we'll call the rule of puns. Much of the memory literature throughout the history of the Art can be seen as an extended exercise in visual and verbal punning, as when a pair of buttocks appears in place of the number 8, or when a man named Domitian is used as an image for the Latin words domum itionem. An abstraction can usually be memorized most easily and effectively by making a concrete pun on it and remembering the pun, and it seems to

be regrettably true that the worse the pun, the better the results in mnemonic terms.

For instance, if -- to choose an example wholly at random -- one needed to memorize the fact that streptococcus bacteria cause scarlet fever, rheumatic fever, and streptococcal sore throat, the first task would be the invention of an image for the word "streptococcus." One approach might be to turn this word into "strapped to carcass," and visualize the figure who represents the letter S with a carcass strapped to his or her back by large, highly visible straps. For scarlet fever -- perhaps "Scarlett fever" -- a videotape labeled "Gone With The Wind" with a large thermometer sticking out of it and an ice pack on top would serve, while rheumatic fever -- perhaps "room attic fever" -- could be symbolized by a small model of a house, similarly burdened, with the thermometer sticking out of the window of an attic room; both of these would be held by the original figure, whose throat might be red and inflamed to indicate the sore throat. Again, this takes much longer to explain, or even to describe, than it does to carry out in practice.

The same approach can be used to memorize a linked series of words, phrases or ideas, placing a figure for each in one of the gazebos of the Garden of Memory (or the places of some more extensive system). Different linked series can be kept separate in the memory by marking each figure in a given sequence with the same symbol -- for example, if the streptococcus image described above is one of a set of medical items, it and all the other figures in the set might wear stethoscopes. Still, these are more advanced techniques, and can be explored once the basic method is mastered.

Rules for Practice

Like any other method of Hermetic work, the Art of Memory requires exactly that -- work -- if its potentials are to be opened up. Although fairly easy to learn and use, it's not an effort-free method, and its rewards are exactly measured by the amount of time and practice put into it. Each student will need to make his or her own judgement here; still, the old manuals of the Art concur that daily practice, if only a few minutes each day, is essential if any real skill is to be developed.

The work that needs to be done falls into two parts. The first part is preparatory, and consists of learning the places and images necessary

to put the system to use; this can be done as outlined in the sections above. Learning one's way around the Garden of Memory and memorizing the basic alphabetical and numerical images can usually be done in a few hours of actual work, or perhaps a week of spare moments.

The second part is practical, and consists of actually using the system to record and remember information. This has to be done relentlessly, on a daily basis, if the method is to become effective enough to be worth doing at all. It's best by far to work with useful, everyday matters like shopping lists, meeting agendas, daily schedules, and so on. Unlike the irrelevant material sometimes chosen for memory work, these can't simply be ignored, and every time one memorizes or retrieves such a list the habits of thought vital to the Art are reinforced.

One of these habits -- the habit of success -- is particularly important to cultivate here. In a society which tends to denigrate human abilities in favor of technological ones, one often has to convince oneself that a mere human being, unaided by machines, can do anything worthwhile! As with any new skill, therefore, simple tasks should be tried and mastered before complex ones, and the more advanced levels of the Art mastered one stage at a time.

Notes for Part 2

1. See Yates, Frances, *Theatre of the World* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1969), pp. 147-9 and 207-9.
2. The symbolism used here is taken from a number of sources, particularly McLean, Adam, ed., *The Magical Calendar* (Edinburgh: Magnum Opus, 1979) and Agrippa, H.C., *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, Donald Tyson rev. & ed. (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1993), pp. 241-298. I have however, borrowed from the standard Golden Dawn color scales for the colors of the circles.
3. The numbers of the additional circles are 5-10 and 12; the appropriate symbolism may be found in McLean and Agrippa, and the colors in any book on the Golden Dawn's version of the Cabala. The Pythagorean numerology of the Renaissance defined the number 11 as "the number of sin and punishment, having no merit" (see McLean, p. 69) and so gave it no significant imagery. Those who wish to include

an eleventh circle might, however, borrow the eleven curses of Mount Ebal and the associated Qliphoth or daemonic primal powers from Cabalistic sources.

FREEMASONRY AND THE HERMETIC TRADITION

By R.A. Gilbert ©

GNOSIS #6

If, as is stated categorically by the United Grand Lodge of England[1][1], Freemasonry "is not a Secret Society" and is "not a religion or a substitute for religion," then what is it? And why should students of the occult be concerned with the history, symbolism and rituals of this "peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols," which is defined officially as, "one of the world's oldest secular fraternal societies . . . a society of men concerned with spiritual values. Its members are taught its precepts by a series of ritual dramas, which follow ancient forms and use stonemasons' customs and tools as allegorical guides. The essential qualification for admission and continuing membership is a belief in a Supreme Being. Membership is open to men of any race or religion who can fulfill this essential qualification and are of good repute"?[2][2] Perhaps the occultist, who sees in freemasonry the survival of ancient, pagan mystery religions, sees something that, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, for what he sees is clearly invisible both to the governing body of the Craft and to the bulk of its members.

Freemasonry does have a traditional history (around which its rituals are constructed) that places its origin at the time of the building of King Solomon's Temple, but in the material world we can trace its history from 1717 A.D. when the first Grand Lodge in the world - the Grand Lodge of England - was founded at London. From that time on Freemasonry has expanded, undergoing many vicissitudes along the way - schisms, reconciliations, quarrels over jurisdiction and quarrels over essential beliefs -until today it is firmly established in most

countries of the world (the exceptions being countries of the Communist bloc, and those countries that suffer under Islamic fundamentalism).

Regular Freemasonry - which, among other things demands from its members a belief in God, forbids the discussion of religion and politics in its lodges, and forbids also the admission of women to membership - is strongest in the English-speaking world, and it is a curious paradox that England, where the Craft is most conservative, should have produced not only the foremost masonic historians, but also the most adventurous (and most widely read) speculative interpreters of masonic symbolism and philosophy.

These latter have been invariably influenced by the masonic traditions of continental Europe, where "higher" degrees and exotic Rites have proliferated since the middle of the eighteenth century. (At this point it would be well to emphasise that all "higher" or "additional" degrees and grades are later inventions than the three Craft degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason, including "the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch" - declared in 1813 by the United Grand Lodge of England to be the only degrees of "pure Antient Masonry"; and further, that the governing bodies of the "higher" degrees have no control whatsoever over the Craft degrees.)

The complex phenomenon of European Freemasonry was significantly different from its counterpart in eighteenth century England. The essential masonic tenets of tolerance and benevolence were overlain from an early date with layers of metaphysical speculation, while the simple Craft rituals were extended into elaborate ceremonies for a multiplicity of degrees, grades and Orders, all of which involved extravagant traditional histories and hierarchical ruling bodies that became increasingly divorced from reality. To some extent such Rites represented a way of escape from the political oppression of illiberal regimes and the spiritual oppression of the Roman Catholic Church, which had been implacably hostile to

Freemasonry from the beginning[3][3], but they inevitably drifted away from "pure Antient Masonry" to become either politicised or steered into overtly esoteric channels.

Given their nature, it is scarcely surprising that it has been from these esoteric Rites within and around Masonry - The Elus Cohens, the Strict Observance, the Illuminati, Cagliostro's Egyptian Masonry, and the thousand-and-one self-styled Templar Orders and Chivalric degrees - rather than from Craft Masonry, that occultists and esoterically inclined freemasons alike have drawn, and continue to draw, their inspiration for Orders of their own, and their plethora of false notions about the Craft and its origins.

It is unfortunate that there can be no authoritative, official refutation of these false notions, but there can be no definitive pronouncement about the origins of Freemasonry for the simple reason that there is no certainty as to what those origins are. It is undeniable that masonic ritual, in its essentials, is based upon the presumed customs and the working tools of medieval stonemasons, but there is little a no evidence to support the popular theory of a regular progression from operative masonry to the speculative Craft via a hypothetical "transitional" period during the seventeenth century, in which non-working members were gradually accepted into masonic lodges until they constituted a majority.

A more probable theory of origin - but still, it must be stressed, only a theory - is that which suggests that Freemasonry arose during the seventeenth century from the efforts of a group of enthusiasts who sought to establish tolerance in religion and the general improvement of society in an era in which intolerance prevailed. They protected themselves by adopting the myth of the building of King Solomon's Temple as an allegory of their aims and by utilising the wholly appropriate structure of extant building guilds. An eminently sensible theory, but for occultists wholly inadequate.

There must be, for their purposes, both a strictly esoteric content in masonry and an ultimately Gnostic source: tolerance is too prosaic, and the medieval building guilds unsatisfactory by virtue of their uncomfortably orthodox profession of Christian faith. Either the Knights Templar or the Rosicrucians, or both, offer a more satisfying explanation of the emergence of Freemasonry in its speculative form. That there is no shred of historical evidence linking the Templars with Masonry, nor any certainty that the Rosicrucians as an organised body ever existed, does not matter, since for occultists - and for esoteric freemasons - Freemasonry exists primarily to perpetuate the teachings of the ancient Mystery Schools, and there is thus necessarily a definite, if hidden, connection between Freemasonry and its supposed forerunners.

To the conclusive demonstration of such links masonic writers of esoteric inclination have devoted their literary careers, only to have their work rejected as unsound by more prosaic masonic scholars. "Esoteric" masons, however, have been, and still are, mightily impressed by the apparent scholarship of authors such as the Rev. F. de P. Castells, who considered that he had proved beyond doubt the link with the Rosicrucians, and maintained that "Freemasonry originated with certain Hebrew mystics associated with the Temple of Jerusalem, and that they are represented by the Kabbalists of historic times." (*Our Ancient Brethren the Originators of Freemasonry*, 1932, p. 24)

Castells wrote during the 1920s and '30s, and although he was far from being the first masonic "historian" on whom occultists had drawn, he was among the most impressive, for he united his historical studies with a critical analysis of masonic rituals and their symbolism. And it is masonic symbolism that has proven always more irresistible to the occultist even than masonic history.

The rituals of the Craft degrees represent the progress of the apprentice towards the mastery of the Craft, illustrated by the building of the Temple, and accompanied by the inculcation of

moral precepts, culminating in the symbolic reenactment of the death of the architect Hiram Abiff, who preferred to die rather than betray the secrets of his Order.

In the First Degree the three "Great Lights" (the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and Compasses) and the three "Lesser Lights" (the Sun, the Moon and the Master of the Lodge) of Masonry are explained to the candidate in symbolic form, while in each of the three degrees the appropriate "Working Tools" are similarly explained (the gavel, plumb-rule, level, etc.). There is also an elaborate emblematic diagram, or Tracing Board, for each degree, the symbolism of which - variously architectural, biblical and numerical, - is explained in detail.

While such a wealth of symbolism has a very specific meaning within Freemasonry, its very richness has left it vulnerable to the most wild and extravagant interpretations on the part of occultists and of "esoteric" masons who ought to know better. Nor is the unreason of such interpretations lessened by the invariable insistence of the interpreters on seeing the Third Degree as a rite of death and resurrection - which it is not. It may suit the purposes of the occultist to see it in this light, but it is simply and solely a representation of the death of Hiram and his subsequent exhumation for decent reburial.

Speculation on the meaning of masonic symbols began in the eighteenth century, but serious attempts to relate those symbols to ancient resurrection myths and to the mainstream of the Western Hermetic Tradition did not begin until the Occult Revival of the late nineteenth century. At the same time, amateur historians of occultism began to seek esoteric origins for Freemasonry itself. When these two paths of research merged, the results were curious indeed.

H. P. Blavatsky, who was effectively the principal architect of the Occult Revival, had little interest in Freemasonry, but she utilised - and believed - much of the information amassed by Kenneth Mackenzie in his *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia* (1877),

and thus through her own writing acted as a channel for its dissemination throughout the Theosophical world and far beyond the confines of Masonry itself. To what extent Mackenzie (who, surprisingly, did not accept that Freemasonry had its roots in Rosicrucianism) believed his own statements is unclear, but he and his colleagues (F.G. Irwin, John Yarker, Dr. Woodman et al) consciously attempted to emulate the eighteenth century proliferation of grandiose masonic degrees and esoteric Orders -with considerable success, for it was from this background of exotic Rites that William Wynn Westcott gained the inspiration for his immortal brain-child, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. That amazing creation, which came into being in 1888, owed its success in part to the increasing familiarity with masonic symbolism (via the works of Madame Blavatsky) on the part of both male and female occultists. It is surprising enough that English Freemasonry should have given rise, however indirectly, to an androgynous Order; that it should have provided the administrative structure, the framework of its rituals and no small part of its eclectic symbolism is even more surprising, given that the proportion of English Freemasons interested in and informed about occultism was (and is) minute.

Of those Freemasons who were inclined towards occultism at the close of the last century, the majority were deeply involved in the Theosophical Society, or at least in the teachings that it propagated; they absorbed from it the notion of the great antiquity of Eastern religions and the superiority of Eastern philosophy over Western thought. From their subsequent mental confusion arose most of the books that have propagated original and bizarre ideas about the history and meaning of freemasonry But however reliable their "histories" may be, and however unsound their conclusions, their influence among fellow occultists has been so widespread and so pervasive that the student of the Hermetic Tradition and its history cannot ignore them if he wishes to separate fact from fantasy and to

understand how the present syncretistic structure of occultism has come about.

During his lifetime the most influential of these "alternative" masonic historians was John Yarker, whose monumental work on the *Arcane Schools* (1909) is really a prehistory of Freemasonry, which he saw progressing from the Egyptian and Greek Mysteries via Mithraism, Gnosticism and Alchemy, with a brief conclusion on its history in modern times. Yarker controlled or influenced numerous quasimasonic Rites and through these he effectively directed the thinking of many of his esoteric contemporaries -not least those who were members of the Co-Masonic Order, whose activities he supported while wisely refraining from joining.

Univeral Co-Freemasonry (which admits both men and women) was founded in France in 1893 and spread to England in 1902 by way of the Theosophical Society, collecting Annie Besant and her coterie en route. Once Mrs. Besant was established, in 1907, as President of the T. S., her support, coupled with that of C. W. Leadbeater, led to a rapid expansion of Co-Masonry among theosophists, taking in even those who had previously been bitter opponents of Freemasonry[4][4]. The Order was, however, susceptible to the wider teachings of Theosophy, as Leadbeater made clear in his utterly uncritical *Glimpses of Masonic History* (1926): "With the advent of Dr. Annie Besant to the leadership of the Order in the British Empire, the direct link between Masonry and the Great White Lodge which has ever stood behind it (though all unknown to the majority of the Brethren) was once again reopened" (p.328).

Other occultists saw Freemasonry as deriving from sources not quite so far East. For Max Heindel (who was not a freemason) it was "rooted in hoary antiquity", its very name was Egyptian (Phree messen = Children of Light), and the progress of "Mystic Masonry" would ultimately hasten "the Second Advent of Christ" (*Freemasonry and Catholicism*, 1931, pp. 86 & 98). This was admittedly an extreme interpretation: esoteric masons

were generally more cautious in their imaginings - although Manly Palmer Hall could claim that "Masonry came to Northern Africa and Asia Minor from the lost continent of Atlantis, not under its present name but rather under the general designation Sun and Fire Worship" (*The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, 1936, p. 176)[5][5]. He further maintained that "within the Freemasonic Mysteries lie hidden the long-lost arcana sought by all peoples since the genesis of human reason" (ibid p. 176), and while this is strictly a personal opinion, Hall's arguments are presented as authoritative, and the influence of his books (which have remained continuously in print) has been so widespread among American occultists over the last sixty years that those who read nothing else on Masonry have tended to treat his opinions as facts.

In England other speculative masons have been equally influential. J.S.M. Ward saw masonic symbolism in the initiation rites of virtually every human culture, past and present, and Freemasonry was for him "the survivor of the ancient mysteries - nay, we may go further, and call it the guardian of the mysteries" (*Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods*, 1926, 2nd ed., p. 341). Ward's symbolist approach to masonic history ought to have appealed to occultists, but they are often unaware of him, for his work has been confined almost exclusively to masonic circles - unlike that of Dr. Westcott for whom the reverse was true. As befitted the Supreme Magus, or head, of the masonic Rosicrucian Society, Westcott believed firmly in the development of Freemasonry out of Rosicrucianism, and he argued forcefully that masonic ritual was deeply tinged with Kabbalistic ideas. And yet for all the flaws in his scholarship Westcott appreciated the value of historical research, and he thus rejected as unfounded the claims of Yarker, Ward and others for a descent of Freemasonry from Mithraism or from the Essenes (see *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vols. 1, 28, 29).

But while Westcott's purely occult works have remained popular, his masonic writings are virtually unknown, and in

attempting to bring Freemasonry to the notice of the occult world he was less successful than his younger and more mystical contemporaries, W. L. Wilmshurst and A. E. Waite, both of whom wrote for a wider audience than a purely masonic one. They presented their respective visions of Freemasonry as a part only of a more comprehensive and continuing spiritual tradition: and more importantly, the works of both men are still available - reaching and influencing an infinitely greater number of readers than either the works of Westcott or those of their little-known critics who wrote to protest against their errors of fact (Waite especially was prone to treating historical data in a very cavalier manner).

And this is the paradox of the hermetic misunderstanding of Freemasonry. The ideas of its motley crew of apologists are propagated in books that survive when the lives of their authors (and their opponents) are long forgotten, for there is a common thread that binds them all together. Credulous oddities such as Heindel and Leadbeater; earnest, if unsound, scholars like Ward and Westcott; and such luminous mystics as Wilmshurst and Waite, all shared a passionate conviction that Freemasonry holds a key -indeed, the key - which will unlock the ancient mysteries, the Secret Tradition, or whatever one chooses to call that subtle alternative to mundane history and orthodox thought.

In the last analysis, that is what matters. It is of little consequence whether or not Freemasonry is descended from the mystery religions of antiquity: the important thing is that influential figures in the recent history of the Hermetic Tradition believed that it did; and this belief colored their perception of Hermeticism as a whole and determined the manner in which they gave those perceptions practical expression. Without an appreciation of their idea of Freemasonry, however distorted and inaccurate it may have been, we cannot fully understand their role in the development of the Hermetic Tradition in the modern era.

Nor is this all. We must also be aware of the true nature of Freemasonry itself, of its relationship with esoteric systems of thought during the period of its creation, and of the more esoteric theories of its origin. It may be that none of these theories is correct, that the occultists were right, after all, in assuming a vast antiquity for the Craft; but even if it proves to have been nothing more than a curious social club, its presence, however passive, lay behind almost all of the esoteric Orders of the last two centuries - Orders whose creators believed in Freemasonry as the supreme vehicle for the transmission of a superior traditional wisdom. Unless we acknowledge the influence of the idea of Freemasonry and attempt to understand its nature, both as it is and as it was believed to be, our understanding of Hermeticism will be impoverished. We shall be like the candidate for Masonic initiation: in a State of Darkness.

Borrowed Article Copyright Permission Pending © R.A.Gilbert

R.A. Gilbert is an antiquarian bookseller in Bristol, UK. He is the author of *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians*, and *A.E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts* and is currently working with John Hamill, the librarian of the United Grand Lodge of England, on *A World History of Freemasonry*.

[6][1] 1. The U.G.L.E. is the governing body of English Freemasonry; the quotations are taken from a leaflet issued by their Board of General Purposes, entitled What is Freemasonry ? Although I refer throughout the text to English Freemasonry, the arguments hold for the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite in the U. S. A. and for Regular Freemasonry throughout the world.

[7][2] Quoted from What is Freemasonry?, as reproduced in John Hamill, *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry*, Crucible Books (1986) p. 12.

[8][3] The first papal pronouncement against Freemasonry was the Encyclical, *In eminente*, issued in 1738.

[9][4] e.g. F. D. Harrison of Bardford who became Grand Secretary of Universal Co-Freemasonry in England, although he had left the Horus Temple of the Golden Dawn because he disliked its masonic ethos.

[10][5] This is the title by which it is commonly known. The correct title is An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermertc, Qabalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy