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EDITORIAL

With the previous issue of the Journal I sent out a letter acquainting subscribers and colleagues with the difficulties I had experienced through moving to Wales. The response was overwhelming and very heartening. Many people wrote or telephoned to show their concern, offering me good advice as to how best to resolve things. This certainly demonstrated to me that people want to support the Hermetic Journal and the publishing activities and wish this work to continue and develop further. The last few months have been rather hectic, but I can announce

that the work of the Journal and publishing ventures has now been entirely secured for the future. As you all know, this work is only marginally profitable, indeed it is entirely unrealistic to expect such specialist esoteric publishing ever to survive well in the commercial sphere. So I have decided, as suggested in my earlier letter to found a non-profit making educational Charity dedicated to researching and preserving the Hermetic tradition. (The proposed aims and objects of this Trust are on page 3 of this issue).

This provisionally titled 'Hermetic Research Trust' will continue the work that has been

initiated through the Journal and the publications, I will be the Director of the Trust, and will donate all the equipment, bookstock, etc. Whenever people subscribe to the Journal, buy books, make a donation, or give some of their time to help the Trust, they will be directly supporting the aims and objects of promoting interest in the Hermetic tradition we all love and wish to see unfold further in our present age.

The process of transforming the existing business to a 'Hermetic Research Trust', could not be made without new resources becoming available, particularly some property to act as a new base for the work. The Marquess of Northampton has been kind enough to help out by providing accomodation for myself and the Hermetic Journal activities at Tysoe near Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. This has resolved my immediate difficulties over the situation in Wales and I will move to Warwickshire in mid February. The Marquess of Northampton, who supports many charitable activities, is also helping greatly over the legal procedures involved in setting up the Charitable Trust.

Many exciting possibilities for the future of the work are now beginning to unfold, and in particular I expect to be based in central London in about two years time, when there will be a further expansion of the Hermetic work. Details of these future developments will be announced later in the Journal.

So in a few months, once the legal technicalities have been finalised, the work of the Journal will be established as a Charity. There will be little outward sign of this change, the Journal continuing as usual as will the publications, but I hope that a new closer relationship might

develop between the Journal activities and its subscribers. I hope to be able to involve more people directly in the work of the proposed 'Hermetic Research Trust', so if anyone has any suggestions of ways in which they would like to help please contact me.

This is an extremely important and exciting time for me. I believe the work I initiated over seven years ago out of my belief in the spiritual impulse still living in the Hermetic tradition, though constricted and thrown into crisis by the move to Wales, is now going through a new spurt of growth, and is being transmuted into a new form that will ensure its survival well into the next century.

I thank all of you who have helped me over the past years, and especially those regular subscribers to the Journal, whose unwavering support has stimulated and encouraged me to undertake all the laborious and time-consuming tasks that are necessary if these materials are to be published.

In the next decade or so we are going to witness exciting new developments in the Hermetic work, and I hope the Journal, Magnum Opus and the new 'Hermetic Research Trust' will be able to play a part in this. I hope that many of the subscribers to the Journal, my fellow researchers and colleagues, will feel able to join with me in contributing to these developments.

Adam McLean

The proposed initial 'working draft' for the aims and object of 'Hermetic Research Trust'. Please note that this have to be amended or expressed in other words in order to satisfy the Charity Commissioners. A final version should be available in a few months time.

'The Hermetic Research Trust'

An educational Charitable Trust established to promote and encourage interest in the heritage of the hermetic tradition and show its continuing relevance as a source of inspiration both to cultural life and to the personal spiritual growth of the individual.

To further these aims the Hermetic Research Trust will work :-

- * To sponsor and encourage serious research into the original manuscripts and source documents of the hermetic tradition and make this available to the public through books, exhibitions and conferences.
- * To sponsor and encourage the editing, translation and publication of the important source works of the hermetic tradition that have been neglected.
- * To promote and encourage greater understanding of the continuing relevance of the philosophical, symbolic, aesthetic, spiritual and cultural ideas underlying the hermetic tradition in all its facets.

WEEKEND WORKSHOP 24 - 25th MAY

I am undertaking an intensive weekend workshop to be held in London in May, organised by the Wrekin Trust. There are only a limited number of places, so if you wish to attend, please book early - direct to the Wrekin Trust, Marbury House, St. Owen St, Hereford HR1 2PR (tel 0432 266551) - I enclose their leaflet with the mailing of this issue. Please note I cannot personally handle any bookings.

NEW ADDRESS

Please note my new address as from mid-February will be,
1 Banbury Road
Tysoe,
Warwickshire, CV35 0SS
Tel: 029 588 746

This is in a small village between Stratford-upon-Avon and Banbury, and halfway between Birmingham and Oxford. It is easily accessible by many major roads. The Hermetic Journal and myself should be based here for about two years. I would be delighted if some of my subscribers took the opportunity of visiting me, and especially would welcome any regular help (such as binding the Journal or typing) from anyone living relatively nearby.

Mail will be redirected by the Post Office from my previous addresses, you need not worry if you temporarily lose this new address. It should take until mid March to get my new workspace fully organised, but I don't foresee any insurmountable problems over this, and things should quickly get back to normal.

THE SEVEN PALACES IN EARLY JEWISH MYSTICISM

Dr Deirdre Green ◉

The early Jewish Hekhalot mystical tradition is not well known outside Judaic circles; little scholarly research has been done on it, and modern esoteric groups, although drawing widely on later Jewish mystical and occult thought, have given it no substantial attention. Even within Judaic circles, it was a closely guarded, unorthodox, esoteric system. It appears to have initially developed from prophetic visions such as those described in the books of Ezekiel and Isaiah [1] where (to abstract a typical example) the visionary sees God sitting on a throne in a crystal firmament, surrounded by fire, with the Cherubim and the Four Holy Living Creatures nearby. From these types of visions developed speculations forming the basis for Merkavah or "Chariot" mysticism: the "Chariot" refers to the culmination of the mystic's vision, where a celestial chariot carrying the Divine Throne, such as was seen by Ezekiel, is perceived [2]; although here and there we receive hints that the chariot is also a kind of spiritual "vehicle" or "body" which the initiate would use to ascend to higher states of awareness and vision.

The first full scale literary presentation of Merkavah mysticism is in the Hekhalot ("Palaces") literature; the texts that survive are mostly from the period 300 or 400 C.E. to the early Middle Ages. The Merkavah and Hekhalot traditions can hardly be separated. For purposes of clarity, I refer throughout to "Hekhalot" mysticism when indicating experiences connected with the Seven Palaces (Hekhalot), and to "Merkavah" mysticism when referring to the broader stream of the movement and to experiences of its members which do not in themselves necessarily involve reference to the Palaces. (The word hekhal in fact may mean a temple as well as a palace.) Later, the tradition was continued -- with some modifications and alterations -- in medieval Kabbalah and Hasidism, and its symbolism even seems to have crept into the writings of the Spanish Carmelite mystic St. Teresa of Avila. (See my article 'St Teresa of Avila and Hekhalot Mysticism', Studies in Religion, Vol 13, No 3, Summer 1984). Traces of the Merkavah tradition can also be found in Apocalyptic literature (the Revelation of St. John, discussed later, being an interesting and relatively well known example), and in Qumran texts.

Merkavah and Hekhalot mysticism was an occult-orientated mystical system: that is, it made elaborate use of magical names, invocations, guided visualisation and related techniques, and it was an esoteric system revealed only to initiates. It was a controversial issue in Judaism and was kept largely secret, warnings being circulated about the

dangers of misuse of its techniques and about the importance of not speaking of them other than to a worthy pupil who had attained the required degree of understanding. The reality of magic was almost universally taken for granted at the time of the Hekhalot mystics, although there were many attempts to expunge it by the orthodox. In fact, magic was acceptable in some branches of Judaism, because it was seen as mirroring God's own activity. Creation, which was often depicted as the manipulation and combination by God of numbers, letters, and elements forming, as it were, the building bricks of the universe, was seen as a kind of act of high magic, and God as an artist creating all things. Thus Blumenthal, speaking here of certain branches of Rabbinic tradition, says "creative magic 'worked' for the rabbis because Creation itself was, after the formation of the Sefirot and the letters, a mechanical - a magical - process. By this I mean that God, too, in Creation acted as an artisan who uses his tools and material and who, therewith, 'creates' new objects. God used his animated letters and spiritual elements, and once man had the knowledge and the spirituality, he too could use the same tools and the same elements to create. Rabbinic magic was not a coercing of God into doing the will of man. It was a parallel, though lesser, use of the same Power. And for that reason, magic was 'permitted' within Rabbinic Judaism only when practised by a rabbi, that is, only when the creative act was done with the same spiritual craftsmanship as the original Creative Power. That was the 'image' of God in which man had been created". [3].

The Hekhalot literature elaborated on the basic elements of prophetic vision found in the Old Testament, using the vision of Ezekiel as a kind of blueprint on which the mystic might base his * mystical strivings (whilst allowing for innovations). To this basic model, however, the Hekhalot literature added the notion of a series of seven Palaces, or (as they are called in the earlier texts) Chambers, through which the mystic was to ascend:

"Many sages maintain that one who possesses all the necessary qualifications has methods through which he can gaze at the Merkava and peek into the chambers on high. One first fasts for a certain number of days. He then places his head between his knees, and whispers into the ground many songs and praises known from tradition.

From his innermost being and its chambers he will then perceive the Seven Chambers. In his vision, it will be as if he is entering one chamber after another, gazing at what is in each one." [4]

The Hekhalot initiate does not see the Seven Palaces as something exterior to the self, but rather with the power of inner vision called by some Jewish commentators "the eye that sees with Ruach HaKodesh" [the Holy Spirit] and by Christian mystics "the eye of the soul". As later commentaries on the Hekhalot visions put it, the mystics "did not physically ascend, but it appeared to them as if they had ascended on high" [5], or they "gazed and saw it in the profound depths of the heart" [6]. The Zohar, a later Jewish document, drawing on the Hekhalot tradition, says that the celestial Palaces cannot be apprehended by

* Contrary to my usual practice, I have not referred to "his or her mystical strivings" because no female Merkavah mystics are known. Jewish mysticism has unfortunately been as exclusivist where women are concerned as Jewish orthodoxy, in spite of its wide use of feminine symbols of the Divine.

means of the senses, graphically describing the Palaces as "Thoughts seen through curtains" [7]. Kaplan comments: "The ascent through the Chambers seems to be a sort of spiritual projection. One creates for himself a spiritual 'body' ... the initiate is ascending mentally rather than physically..." [8] We could, then, say that the descriptions of Hekhalot mysticism are symbolic of an inner spiritual journey, although it is important to point out that, for the initiate who has mastered the power of inner vision, the ascent through the Palaces and the things seen therein are not merely the result of imagination in the sense that this term is usually understood. Mystical visions, when genuine and fully developed, have a vital power and reality of their own, and appear to the seer to be just as real -- on their own level -- as is the physical world apprehended by means of sense-experience.

The surviving Hekhalot texts (some of which are only fragments of what must originally have been much longer treatises) are fairly heterogeneous, but a number of common elements can be isolated which seem to point to the existence of a loosely-knit mystical movement without rigid dogmas but with a broad consensus of accepted teaching. Doors or gates, guarded by angels, are encountered at the entrance to each Palace on the mystic's inner journey, and the initiate needs to know the special means to be applied to pass through them: this usually entails showing magical seals to the angels, who then guide the mystic on to the next Palace. The seals seem to have had magic names, either of angels or of aspects of the godhead, inscribed on them. Detailed use is made of prayers, hymns, invocations, fasts, special diets, ritual cleansing, and magical names. The repetition of these secret magical names of the Deity and of the angels was one of the most important techniques. It would have been similar to the recitation of mantras in Indian religion. The names had to be repeated an exact number of times. All these magical and religious procedures were for the purpose of protection and self-strengthening on the ascent to the Palaces and on the descent back to everyday reality; deviation from the prescribed means (such as, for example, from the precisely ordained number of times a magical name was to be repeated) could induce failure at best, or at worst, extreme psychic and physical danger.

The Hekhalot initiates would have experienced a number of distinct yet inter-connected levels of heightened awareness, corresponding to the seven distinct levels of being symbolised by the Palaces. From these inner Journeys, they hoped to gain visions of the Deity or of the Divine Throne, revelations of mystical and magical lore, insights into cosmological secrets, and understanding of the key giving knowledge of the inner or esoteric interpretation of the Torah. For the Hekhalot mystics, revelations of the Divine realm entailed simultaneous revelation of the secrets of nature: of cosmological doctrines, astronomical laws, the cycles of the seasons, and so on. In some Merkavah writings (which cannot strictly speaking be called "Hekhalot" writings, since they do not employ the notion of the Palaces) these and other secrets are revealed by angels who are invoked to descend to earth, rather than by the mystic undertaking the ascent to the Palaces. We shall concentrate here, however, on writings actually dealing with the Seven Palaces. The gate of the Sixth Palace seems to have been seen as a particularly difficult threshold to cross and as an arduous test for the mystic: the literature contains warnings about the peril involved in trying to undertake this passage if one is not fully prepared for and worthy of the intense experience generated.

We shall concentrate here on what is possibly the most important Hekhalot text: the Hekhalot Rabbati (Great Book of the Palaces). I shall offer some comments on some other Hekhalot texts in passing, but the Hekhalot Rabbati will serve as a convenient introduction to the nature of the ascent through the Seven Palaces. Its literary form is that of an account of an esoteric group gathering for teaching, under the leadership of Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, pupil of Rabbi Nehuniah ben Hakaneh and a well known Merkavah teacher. The text begins by describing certain accomplishments and powers which the mystic gains when he has entered the Heavenly Chambers; he has the ability to foresee the future and to see into the true nature of people's characters, and merits a high degree of Divine protection, so that whoever speaks disrespectfully of him suffers supernatural retribution. There follows a description of the method of attaining the Merkavah vision:

"When anyone should want to 'go down to the Chariot' * he would call upon Surya, the Angel of the Presence, and make him swear [to protect him] one hundred and twelve times in the name of Tootruseah - YHVH ... [there follows a number of permutations of this name, and the text then continues] ... He may not do it more than one hundred and twelve times, or less, for he who adds or subtracts has his blood on his own head. Rather one's mouth brings forth the name and one's fingers count one hundred and twelve times. He then immediately goes down and [successfully] masters the Merkabah." [9] (* On going down rather than "ascending" to the Merkavah see below.)

This is merely the initial mantra-invocation which allows the initiate to set out at the beginning of his inner journey, of which there is a good deal more to be travelled. "TUTRUSYAY, the Lord, God of Israel sits in seven chambers, one within the other. At the door of each chamber are eight gatekeepers, four to the right of the lintel, and four to the left." [10] The names of all the angelic gatekeepers at each door are given, and the gatekeepers of the Seventh Palace are described as being particularly terrifying and powerful. Rabbi Ishmael continues his instruction:

"When you come and stand at the door of the First Chamber, take two seals in your hand, one of TUTROSYAY, the Lord, and one of Surayah, Prince of the Face. That of TUTROSYAY show to those standing to the right, and that of Surayah, show to those standing to the left.

Dehaviel, the angel who is the chief guardian of the door of the First Chamber, and overseer of the First Chamber, who stands at the right of the lintel, and Tofhiel, the angel who stands at the left of the lintel with him, will immediately grasp you. They will give you over to Tagriel, the angel who is chief guardian of the door of the Second Chamber, who stands to the right of the lintel, and to Mathpiel, the angel who stands with him to the left of the lintel...." [11]

The treatise continues to follow this pattern from one gate to the next, seals being shown and the initiate being led by the angels to the next gate in each case, until the arrival at the threshold of the Sixth Palace. Other Hekhalot texts give more detailed descriptions of the symbolic terrain between the Palaces. The Ma'aseh Merkavah [12] describes bridges linking the Seven Palaces, on which angels stand. There are rivers of fire, rivers of hailstone, fiery wheels, and so on, all of which encircle the angels who stand on the bridges. Another

fragment describes the dangers encountered by the mystic in his passage from one Palace to another: he is said to resemble a man who loses his way in a wood and arrives at a place full of beasts which attack him and threaten to tear him to pieces.

Returning to the Hekhalot Rabbati and to the threshold of the Sixth Palace, here, we are told, the guardians of the Sixth Chamber will strike, burn and even kill "those who 'go and do not go down to the Merkabah without permission' " [13]. The puzzling phrase "those who go and do not go down to the Merkabah" is later explained to refer to individuals accompanying the actual mystics on their inner journeys, apparently acting as amanuenses, writing down all that the mystic says while in a state of trance. It is warned that these amanuenses may not be worthy of approaching the Sixth Chamber and may be attacked by its guardians, and that one should therefore be careful to choose for this purpose "men who are fit and tested haverim [i.e. members of the esoteric group]" [14]. The statement that the amanuensis follows the mystic on an inner journey, in sufficient proximity (so to speak) as to himself suffer from the consequences of "going down but not going down", suggests an unrivalled degree of psychic attunement between the mystic and his companion; perhaps this was deliberately cultivated in the Merkabah/Hekhalot tradition, or perhaps the effects felt by the amanuensis on the descent to the Merkabah were simply a case of undesirable psychic contagion. In any case, the basic message (which is reinforced elsewhere in Hekhalot writings) is clear: one should not attempt to pass through the Sixth Gate unless one is fully prepared, and possessed of the requisite degree of spiritual understanding. The Sixth Palace is described in some depth in Hekhalot texts, and in later Zoharic descriptions of the Palaces. It seems to be seen as being of special importance: we are told that it contains the quintessence of all that is to be found in the other six Palaces [15]. At the door of the Sixth Palace, the visionary has to show one seal to the angel Dumiel ("Divine Silence"), and two to Kaptziel ("Wrath of God"), forbiddingly described as "the angel whose sword is unsheathed in his hand. Lightning flashes from him, exploding and blinding all who are not worthy of gazing at the King and the Throne. Nothing can hold him back. His outstretched sword screams out. 'Destruction and Annihilation!' " [16].

I have commented elsewhere (see my 'Mysticism and the Sevenfold Castle', Shadow, Vol 2, No 2, December 1985, also my 'Light on the Castle Path', Hermetic Journal No 17, Autumn 1982) that one of the symbolic attributes of the Castle or Palace is that of a well-defended area into which it is difficult to penetrate; the tests and ordeals which the mystic must undergo exclude those who are unprepared to cope with the astonishing experiences engendered by following mystical techniques. The centre of the Castle, or the central room of the Palace, are not accessible without a great deal of struggle, and hence are analogous to the goal of the mystical aspirant. The descriptions of the terrifying visions and trials undergone by the Hekhalot mystic are a reflection of this fact.

When the initiate has shown his seals to the angels at the Sixth Gate Kaptziel fires his bow, which brings a stormy wind, and the visionary is placed in a chariot of glowing light. The stormy wind Sa'arah, and the chariot (here not Merkava but Karon) of glowing light Nogah are widespread elements in accounts of Merkabah and apocalyptic mystical ascension. Ezekiel, in his vision, sees a stormy wind and a glow round about a flashing fire, out of the midst of which come the four Holy

Creatures [17]; Elijah is carried up by a stormy wind and a chariot of fire or glowing light to heaven [18]. Enoch, another celebrated Merkavah mystic who is traditionally said to have been transformed into the angel Metatron, is also "translated" to heaven in a chariot of fire [19] and of course the importance of the chariot in this context is shown by the fact that the very word Merkavah means "Chariot". The statement in the Hekhalot Rabbati that the mystic is placed in a chariot can be seen as denoting the use of a spiritual "vehicle" as a part of mystical technique, a type of non-physical "body" enabling the mystic to ascend yet higher.

Still at the Sixth Gate, the angel Dumiel, if he judges the visionary to have the required qualifications to continue with his journey, entrusts him to Gabriel, who writes a note in red ink and hangs it on the mystic's chariot of light. The note outlines the mystic's degree of spiritual attainment, and states that he wishes to come before the Throne of Glory. The guardians of the Seventh Chamber then receive the initiate. (Rabbi Ishmael at this point interrupts his account of the Hekhalot journey to tell the story of how he persuaded his teacher, Rabbi Nehuniah ben Hakaneh, to tell him the highly secret names of the guardians of the Seventh Palace. The names used on the mystical ascent are not the same as those used when one wishes to undertake the return journey to everyday reality. Both sets of names are listed, with eight angels for the ascent and eight for the descent.)

In the Seventh Palace, the mystic sees "wonders and power, majesty and greatness, holiness, purity, terror, humility, and uprightness." [20] He sees the Cherubim and Ophanim and finally the Holy Living Creatures, terrifying in their naked and awesome spiritual power:

"Each of the holy Chayot [Living Creatures - D.G.] that stand opposite the door of the Seventh Chamber has 256 faces. These great [angels] therefore each have 512 eyes.

There are four Chayot opposite the door of the Seventh Chamber. Each of these [four] Chayot has the face of a man, [the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle] . Each [of these four] faces in turn has sixteen faces.

When an individual wishes to descend to the Merkava the angel Anpiel opens the door of the Chamber. The individual then stands on the threshold of the door of the Seventh Chamber. The holy Chayot then lift up their 512 eyes to gaze at him, and each eye of the Chayot is like a huge bushel. The gaze of their eyes is like a lightning flash. All this is besides the eyes of the mighty Cherubs and Ophanim of the Divine Presence, which are like scintillating flames and the fire of glowing coals.

The individual then trembles, shakes and shudders, is stricken and faint, and he falls backwards. He is then supported by the angel Anpiel and the 63 other guardians of the seven doors of the Chambers. All of them support him and say, 'Fear not, O son of the beloved seed. Enter and see the King in his glory. You will not be destroyed. You will not be burned.' " [21]

Having been supported and encouraged by the angels, the mystic may now stand before the Throne of Glory (if he is judged worthy: there is still a possibility of being cast out even at this stage). The Throne is borne by the Holy Living Creatures; God (called in Hekhalot Rabbati Zoharariel, "God of the Shining Light") descends to the Throne at regular intervals (three times a day, corresponding to the times of prayer of the Jewish people) and at other times is seen as residing in

the Eighth Heaven, of which little is said since it is above even the greatest heights of mystical vision and cannot be understood or penetrated. In various Hekhalot texts recurrent elements occur in descriptions of the Divine Throne; streams or tongues of fire may flow from it, it may have wheels shining like the sun, it may emanate dazzling light, it may be of crystal. Sometimes certain of the Palaces are themselves said to be of crystal, surrounded by flames [22]; we see a reflection of this in St. Teresa of Avila's book The Interior Castle, where Teresa uses the image of a crystal or diamond sevenfold Castle. The height of the Hekhalot spiritual experience is this vision of the Divine Throne, and not, as in most other mystical traditions, union with God or absorption into a nondifferentiated spiritual Absolute. The mystic and the Deity remain separate; the mystical aspirant is not called to a loving communion with God or to merging into his being (although these elements became more pronounced in the later Jewish Kabbalistic tradition). Throughout Hekhalot writings, the Deity is represented as transcendently majestic, glorious, and awful:

"His throne radiates before him and His palace is full of splendor.

His Majesty is becoming and His Glory is an adornment for Him.

His servants sing before Him and proclaim the might of His wonders,

as King of all kings and Master of all masters,

encircled by rows of crowns, surrounded by the ranks of the princes of splendor.

With a gleam of his ray he encompasses the sky

and his splendor radiates from the heights.

Abysms flame from his mouth and firmaments sparkle from his body." [23]

Strictly speaking, it would be more correct to call the culminating vision of the Hekhalot initiate a "numinous" rather than a "mystical" experience, following established scholarly usage of these terms, where a mystical experience entails union or oneness with the immanent Divine Being or Principle, and a numinous experience entails a vision of the Deity as transcendent and "Wholly Other" than the self. Indeed, in most Hekhalot texts it is held that the initiate, far from seeking union with God, cannot even perceive God as a Being separate from himself directly, but must see God's glory filtered or reflected through some kind of "mirror", such as an angel who speaks on God's behalf. This is vitally connected with the belief that "No man can see Me and live" [24]: in Jewish doctrine God was utterly transcendent and unknowable, and the vision of God face to face was believed by many mystics to be of such shattering intensity that it could not be borne in this life. In fact some Merkavah and Hekhalot writings, far from giving instructions for obtaining a direct vision of God such as we find in the manuals of either mystical traditions, tell the visionary how to avoid this terrifying experience! Nevertheless, other Hekhalot groups seem to have reinterpreted these doctrines to mean that whereas the human intellect cannot understand the Deity, in mystical vision the initiate can rise above his human limitations to a higher level of revelation; and in advancing this interpretation they set themselves outside orthodoxy. In Jewish mystical and magical writings there are many references to "mirrors" or "glasses" used to obtain spiritual vision: the technical term for such a "mirror" is Ispaklaria.

Distinctions are usually drawn between the dull, dark or non luminous

mirror of mediated vision and the luminous mirror of direct vision or higher mystical insight. It is said, for example, that Moses saw through a luminous mirror, while all the other prophets and patriarchs saw through a dull mirror. The Zohar speaks of the righteous seeing God "face to face" in the Luminous Mirror after death [25] and holds that the mystic can perceive things either in the luminous or non luminous glass, depending on the technique used. (In the later Kabbalistic tradition, the dull and luminous mirrors were identified with the Sefirot Malkhut and Tiferet respectively.) The tale is also told of one Merkavah mystic, Ben Azzai, who on entering Paradise continued to utter Divine Names because he wished to see in a clear mirror (to gain direct vision of God): as a result of this he died. Of his three companions, only one ascended and descended safely. [26] St. Paul's saying that in this life we "see through a glass darkly" [27] refers back to this use of mirror symbolism, and the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart speaks of seeing God by all natural means "in a mirror and in mystery" but by mystical insight "in a mirror and in light". [28]

The predominance of this mirror symbolism in the Jewish mystical tradition may shed some light on the techniques for obtaining mystical vision used by the Merkavah and Hekhalot initiates. In many accounts of both Biblical and Merkavah visions, the visionary stands by water (usually on a river bank) and looks down at it, the water seemingly serving as a mirror of things in the spiritual realms. What this would actually amount to is that the Merkavah initiate uses the still, reflective surface of the mirror or of water as a means of calming and concentrating the mind and as a receptive medium in which visions might be seen; this might have been an established method of contemplative or visionary experience for the initiates. (We need to remember in this context that mirrors, at this time in history would not have produced a near perfect image such as do the mirrors we have today; they would probably have been simple polished metal plates, and would give a hazy or distorted reflection, much as the surface of water would.) Thus, in the Merkavah text Re'uyot Yehezkel (the Visions of Ezekiel), which is a mystical commentary on Ezekiel I, Ezekiel is described as standing by a river looking down at the water when the seven heavens are opened to him; in each of the seven heavens is a chariot. The river, as the text makes explicit, acts as a 'mirror'. Gruenwald suggests that "this procedure could be a means of avoiding the immediate sight of the Godhead and the heavenly beings" [29] -- that is, the mirror, or the surface of the water, allows the seer to see an image of the Divine Realm without having to look upon it "face to face".

This point may have a bearing on the rather confusing terminology found in Merkavah writings, whereby the process of gaining Merkavah visions is sometimes described as a "descent" and sometimes as an "ascent". Scholem notes that in the early literature, the writers always speak of an "ascent to the Merkavah", whereas in the later writings -- including the important Hekhalot Rabbati, discussed here -- the visionary Journey is always referred to as a "descent to the Merkavah". Paradoxically, however, in the later texts the actual description in detail of the mystical process nonetheless consistently employs metaphors of ascent and not of descent. [30] In Re'uyot Yehezkel, Ezekiel looks downward to see what is above: not only does he look down at the water, but also, we are told, "God opened to Ezekiel seven divisions of the lower world and as Ezekiel was looking at them, he saw everything that was in the heaven." [31] What are described in this text

are seven subterrestrial regions corresponding to the seven Heavens, and seemingly, they reflect each other, as it were, so that to gain insight into the lower worlds is also to have a vision of the spiritual realm. A similar motif is found again in the Zohar, which speaks of seven "Palaces of Hell" corresponding to the Heavenly Palaces. In connection with these paradoxical symbols of descent and ascent, it might be pointed out that many ancient mystical and magical traditions placed great importance on the notion of descent to underworld regions, and this emphasis has tended to be continued in less orthodox forms of mystical and esoteric thought to the present day. Some mystics from a later period of history (Meister Eckhart again being a good example) conflated the metaphors of descent into the inward depths of the self, and ascent to higher realms of consciousness, so that, as Eckhart himself puts it, ".....depth and height are the same thing." [32] These points may go some way towards resolving the confusing terminology of Merkavah texts.

An alternative explanation of the terminology is, however, proposed by Scholem, who suggests that the use of the phrase "descent to the Merkavah" represents a transference to Merkavah speculation of the liturgical expression "going down before the ark" in prayer; this transference probably came about (Scholem holds) as a result of comparison of the Merkavah with the synagogal ark containing the scrolls of the Pentateuch. [33].

I have said that in Hekhalot Mysticism, the gate of the Sixth Palace is a particularly difficult point of testing for the visionary, and interestingly enough, the symbolism of water recurs here. A separate portion of the Hekhalot Rabbati tells us that the guardians of the door of the Sixth Chamber cause a mirage of millions of waves of water to appear before the initiate, but in fact there is not a single drop of water there. What the mystic really sees is the ethereal glitter of the marble with which the Palace is adorned. If the mystic takes the marble for water, and asks about the meaning of the water, he is cast out of the Palace as one who is unworthy and is assailed with thousands of iron bars. [34] The idea seems to be that the "unworthy" mystic is hindered by lack of perceptual clarity, and imagines that the marble is water. This strange episode can be seen as describing a kind of "safety valve" whereby the unworthy are protected from danger, for as the text says, ".....this shall be a sign for all times that no one shall err at the gate of the sixth palace and see the ethereal glitter of the [marble] Plates and ask about them and take them for water, that he may not endanger himself." [35] Rabbinical writings regularly refer to this episode, connecting it with the story of the four sages who entered Paradise, among whom was Ben Azzai, mentioned in passing above. One of the four, Rabbi Akiba -- the prototype of the ideal mystic and the only one of the company to return safely -- warns the others, "When you come to the place of the shining marble plates, then do not say: Water, water! For it is written: He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." [36] The Zoharic writings on the Seven Palaces also sometimes use water symbolism - of seas, rivers, ships - in connection with the Sixth Palace.

The ladder as a symbol of mystical ascent from one realm of consciousness to another is a recurrent image in Hekhalot Rabbati. The text says that the mystic is like "a person who has a ladder in his house. He goes up and down on it and no one can prevent him." [37] Also mentioned are a heavenly ladder which reaches up from earth to the right

leg of the Divine Throne and a ladder climbed by the souls of the righteous in the celestial Garden of Eden. Sometimes the ladder has seven rungs, corresponding to the Seven Palaces. [38]

A further important point relates to the symbolism of centrality, to the penetration to the very core of the self portrayed by the central room of the Castle or Palace. In Hekhalot Rabbati the Seven Palaces are said to be inside each other, so to penetrate to the Seventh Palace would be to reach the centre. We can picture this graphically as a diagram of seven concentric circles; the journey to the Seventh Palace is then an inward journey which entails passing through and beyond successive veils or thresholds as the mystic uncovers deeper and deeper layers of revelatory truth. The image of the rooms of the Castle being inside each other in this same way is used by St. Teresa of Avila in her book The Interior Castle. The Sefer Yezirah (Book of Formation), an important Jewish cosmological treatise, augments this image of the sevenfold Palace, seeing the Palace as a kind of hub at the centre of the universe. The precise date of compilation of the Sefer Yezirah is not known, but some scholars have suggested that it may be connected with Merkavah mysticism. The text speaks of the Holy Palace which is at the centre of the six directions (height, depth, East, West, North, South) and which sustains them all. Correspondences are drawn between the seven "double letters" of the Hebrew alphabet (each of which has a particular symbolic significance in the cosmological theory outlined), the seven directions (that is, the six above plus the centre), and the seven planets, the seven heavens, seven seas, days of the week, and so on. The importance of the number seven is continually stressed: the double letters are said to be "seven and not six, seven and not eight" and we are told that God loves best of all the seventh of any sequence of seven. [39] The seven double letters are said to represent categories of opposites such as life and death, wisdom and folly, beauty and ugliness, strong and weak, etc. All of these aspects of sevenfoldness (the planets, heavens, days of the week, letters of the alphabet, etc.) form an involved system of metaphysical and magical correspondences, and the central point at the junction of the six directions -- the Palace -- is, as it were, the still centre from which the directions radiate. In a word, the Palace represents the unmoving centre at the hub of all movement, and also the centre of creation (the Axis Mundi): two images which are recurrent symbolic designations of the still, quiet centre of the self into which the mystic must withdraw. (The Sefer Yezirah, in contrast to the Hekhalot Rabbati, speaks only of one Palace, not seven; but the motif of a Sevenfold system of cosmological and mystical truths culminating at a central point which is the innermost Palace is common to both.)

Sevenfold systems of symbolism are, of course, extremely widespread in mystical and esoteric writings, and this point may merit a short digression, since many, although not all, of the examples of the Castle or Palace as a mystical symbol, see this Castle or Palace as seven-roomed or as connected in some other way with septenary symbolic systems. Mystical writings very often speak of "stages" along the way, phases of self-transformation, sequences of attainment of more and more exalted levels of consciousness, passages from one level of being or awareness to another. There are not always seven stages (some mystics work with threefold, ninefold, or other systems) and it is important to note that, however many "stages" are used in a description of the path to mystical realisation, the sequence represents only a means of

conceptually expressing complex inner experiences which do not, in practice, fall into a neat, tidy scheme. The dividing lines between the different stages are not rigid, and mystics recognise that the experience of each individual differs from that of any other: it is possible, for example, to skip a stage entirely, or for two stages to alternate or coexist with each other. The sequence of stages, then, is simply a means of representing in some coherent, structured form, experiences which have many nuances and implications, which are felt as being to some degree ineffable, and which cannot be neatly defined or summed up once and for all.

These sevenfold systems of "stages" represent seven distinct yet interconnected levels of consciousness encountered by the mystic. We find some examples of this in The Interior Castle, in the writings of the Hindu mystic Ramakrishna, in 'Attar's The Conference of the Birds (which describes a journey through seven valleys to the Palace of the King) and in the 17th century Rosicrucian document The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz. More general connections between the Castle and septenary symbolism, which do not appear to involve the notion of a set of "stages" of experience, are also found, for example, in the early Welsh poem 'The Spoils of Annwn'. A general introduction to sevenfold symbolism that is not necessarily connected with the image of the Castle or Palace may, however, illuminate our theme further. A limited number of examples, which are not intended to be exhaustive, will suffice to illustrate the widespread nature of this imagery.

The image of the seven-runged ladder, already mentioned in connection with the Hekhalot Rabbati, is a widespread symbol found in many traditions. In Mithraism, the initiate mounts a seven-runged ladder to the heavens; the same motif recurs in shamanism, and in the writings of the Christian mystic Ruysbroeck (1293-1381). An analogous theme in mystical symbolism is the ascent through the seven planetary spheres or heavens, shown for example in Dante's Paradiso; or the passage through seven gates to the Nether World, as portrayed in the Sumerian myth of the Goddess Inanna. [40] In alchemical writings, the Magnum Opus is accomplished in seven stages (as in The Chymical Wedding), and the system of seven planes of consciousness, corresponding to the seven main chakras (centres of subtle energy in the human body) is central to Hindu yogic and Tantric systems.

Septenary symbolism is also found in Buddhist legend, where it is related that the Buddha, at his birth, immediately took seven strides, and then proclaimed that this was to be his last incarnation (that is, that he would attain enlightenment and liberation from samsara, the round of births and deaths, in this life). Eliade assimilates this legend to the passage through seven stages of ascent to the spiritual world: the seven steps, he holds, portray the idea that the Buddha has reached the summit of the world by passing through the seven cosmic stages which correspond to the seven planetary heavens.

".....the 'seven steps of the Buddha' are analogous to the Siberian shaman's ascent to Heaven by means of the steps cut in the ceremonial birch-tree (seven, nine or sixteen Notches corresponding to the same numbers of Heavens), or to the ladder with seven rungs which is mounted by the initiate in the mysteries of Mithra. All these rites and myths are of a common structure: the universe is conceived as having seven stages, one above another -- that is, the seven planetary heavens.....Elevation into the supreme Heaven, that is, the act of transcending the world,

takes place near to a 'Centre' (a temple, or a royal city, or it may be a sacred tree, homologised with the Cosmic Tree, the stake of sacrifice assimilated to the Axis Mundi, etc.) because it is in a 'Centre' that the 'break' occurs from one plane to another, and, therefore, the passage from Earth to Heaven." [41]

In other words, the basic symbolic theme, common to many cultures, is that of an ascent through seven levels of existence or consciousness, beginning at the Axis Mundi, and culminating at the "summit of the Cosmos" which in terms of spatial symbolism is (so to speak) at the top of the World Axis-pole which joins Earth to Heaven. (As I have said, the Castle or Palace is very often portrayed as an Axis Mundi.) There are, of course, certain divergences between the different cultural representations of this symbolism: differences of evaluative tone, of religious doctrine, of the methods or techniques used to induce the ascent, and so on; but the basic symbolic theme remains as a fascinating reminder of an important mode of human spiritual experience. It is important to note, though, that in the Hekhalot literature the seven Palaces do not usually correspond to the seven Heavens, but rather are located in the seventh Heaven (*Aravot*). The Hekhalot texts are not at all consistent on this point, but the usual pattern is one of seven Heavens followed by seven Palaces.

In Judaic tradition, with which we are more specifically concerned here, the number seven often has symbolic connotations of consummation (for example, God creates the world in six days and rests on the seventh); when the eighth level is reached, a new cycle is begun.

A more specific parallel to the writings of the Hekhalot mystics is found in Gnosticism, and many scholars have shown that the Hekhalot/Merkavah tradition does in fact owe much influence to Gnosticism. We may give a brief summary of the main points of resemblance here, although it should be noted that Gnosticism had many sects and schools, and what is given here is only a brief outline of some relevant points common to most of these.

Gnosticism was a dualistic religious system, seeing God and the material world as fundamentally opposed to each other. God neither created the world, nor is he its governor; rather, the world obstructs from the Gnostic true knowledge of the Deity. The malevolent Archons (often under the leadership of the Demiurge) are creators of the world, and try to prevent the Gnostic from gaining a vision of the true God. The universe over which the Archons rule is "like a vast prison whose innermost dungeon is the earth, the scene of man's life. Around and above [the earth] the cosmic spheres are ranged like concentric enclosing shells. Most frequently there are the seven spheres of the planets surrounded by the eighth, that of the fixed stars." [42] The significance of this, as Jonas points out, is that everything which intervenes between here and the "Beyond" (the Gnostics' term for their spiritual goal) separates humanity from God, "not merely by spatial distance but through active demonic force. Thus the vastness and multiplicity of the cosmic system express the degree to which man is removed from God." [43] Each of the spheres or planetary heavens is guarded by an Archon, who tries to bar passage to those who seek to ascend from the material world to spiritual realisation. Through a system of microcosmic and macrocosmic correspondences, each aspect of the human being is held to correspond to one of the seven spheres. The *pneuma* (spirit or divine spark) in the human being is enclosed by seven "bodies" corresponding to the seven spheres, making up the astral soul

(psyche), physical body, appetites and passions: these imprison the spirit and prevent it from attaining its transcendent goal of leaving behind the world of matter and ascending to the spiritual realms. The goal of the Gnostic is to release the spirit from the bonds of the physical world and to return to the realm of Light -- to exchange for ignorance, knowledge (gnosis) of one's true homeland (the "Beyond"). This is brought about by a redemptive act: a transcendent saviour or messenger descends from the world of Light, penetrates the barriers of the seven spheres, outwits the Archons, and awakens the individual spirit. Amongst other spiritual truths and esoteric secrets, this messenger reveals the magical formulae and secret names to be used to force one's passage up through the seven spheres. The use of magical seals is also prominent in later Coptic Gnostic works. And so the Gnostic who is able to accomplish his goal ascends through the seven spheres, leaving behind at each one the particular "body" which corresponds to and is a part of it.

Scholem [44] argues that Hekhalot mysticism is in fact a kind of Jewish Gnosticism, and it is certain that the correspondences between the two systems are in many respects very close; there seems also to have been a period of mutual influence between the two traditions, which resulted in the use of some of the same Divine Names and so on by both; but there are also some important differences, as Gruenwald notes. [45] Gnosticism means a final escape from the bonds of the corrupting world of matter, whereas Hekhalot mysticism presupposes that the mystic can and should return from his journeys through the Seven Heavens and finally the Palaces to his earthly body and to everyday life. Furthermore, the angels who guard the Palaces in Hekhalot literature do not actually try to hinder the mystic's ascent or to make him remain bound to the world of matter, and nor are they opposed to the "true God". They simply try to prevent the unworthy or unready aspirant from passing through the Palaces, acting as a kind of spiritual safety-valve.

What is perhaps of more direct relevance (particularly in the light of our discussion of the Spanish mystic St Teresa of Avila) is the influence that the Jewish Merkavah/Hekhalot stream of mysticism was to have upon Christian thought. The Revelation of St. John (the Apocalypse) is an interesting example of how prophetic and Merkavah visions came to be recast in a Christian setting, whilst still retaining a strongly Jewish tone. The author (who may not actually have been St. John the Divine) sees a door opening in heaven, and has a vision of the Divine Throne, in front of which is "a sea of glass, like crystal" [46]. These are recurrent references to glass and crystal in descriptions of symbolic Castles and Cities and this motif also regularly recurs in descriptions of the planetary heavens, which were seen as crystal spheres. One wonders also whether this sea of crystal or glass might bear some relation to the marble that appears like water in the experiences of the Merkavah mystics. The Four Holy Living Creatures -- in the forms of a lion, an ox, a man and an eagle -- surround the Throne, and, just as they are described in the Hekhalot Rabbati as being covered with eyes, so here, too, they are "full of eyes in front and behind" [47]. (The wheels of the Divine Chariot in Ezekiel's vision are also covered with eyes.) Other elements recur which also have parallels in Merkavah visionary experience, such as the anthropomorphic divine figure with hair white as snow and "eyes like a flame of fire" [48]. Throughout the book, there are many examples of the dense occult

symbolism which we have seen to be an element of the visionary and magical system of Merkavah mysticism, and the closing verses show a belief in the magical efficacy of words, which reminds us of the magical efficacy of names in Merkavah mysticism and the injunction that the initiate must not add to or subtract from the number of times a Divine Name is to be repeated: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and the holy city, which are described in this book." [49] The expression "I was in the Spirit" [50], used by the author to describe the nature of his perception, is apparently a technical term used to designate experiences which the visionary sees in a state of trance. The experiences described in the Book of Revelation culminate in the vision of the Holy City of Jerusalem. However, the Revelation of John does not speak of a septenary system of Castles or Palaces. Some esotericists have attempted to correlate the Seven Churches, Seven Seals or Seven Spirits of the Book of Revelation with the Seven Palaces of Hekhalot mysticism, the seven Planetary heavens, and even with the seven chakras of Indian thought, but there is not really any conclusive evidence for this (although the symbolism of Revelation certainly gives much food for thought, and is capable of being interpreted in a variety of ways). Judaic tradition has always had a passion for septenary symbolism under many different guises and in many different contexts, and by no means all examples of this have any direct relation to the Seven Palaces. So there is no definite argument to justify identification of the sevenfold symbolism of Revelation with that of the Seven Palaces of Hekhalot mysticism, although certainly there are many close connections between Revelation and the broader (non-Palatial) stream of prophetic and Merkavah visionary experience. However, there is some justification in the argument that the Seven Palaces of Hekhalot mysticism might represent a means of expressing the same experience, on a phenomenological level, as the experience undergone by the yogic or Tantric adept who expresses his or her experience in terms of the seven chakras. That is, what may well be the same basic human spiritual experience is symbolically represented by different means in different cultures, and is assimilated to different theological, metaphysical, and doctrinal systems of thought.

References

I would like to express my debt in preparing this article to Ithamar Gruenwald's very thorough and interesting study, Apocalypse and Merkavah Mysticism (Brill, Leiden, 1980). I am also greatly indebted to Dr A. P. Hayman of the University of Edinburgh for his comments on the ms. and his help and advice.

[1] See Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1, 8 and 10.

[2] See Gershom G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken, 1978), p.143.

[3] David Blumenthal, Understanding Jewish Mysticism, pub Ktav, New York, 1978, pp.45-46.

[4] Hai Gaon (938-1038) as quoted in Aryeh Kaplan, Meditation and Kabbalah (Maine: Weiser, 1982), p.26. Although this text is later in date than the bulk of Merkavah writings, it is a description or explanation of the earlier tradition.

- [5] Tosafot (12th century) in Kaplan, op. cit., p.24.
- [6] Rabbi Chananel ben Chushiel (990-1055) in Kaplan, op. cit., p.25.
- [7] Ariel Bension, The Zohar in Moslem and Christian Spain, Routledge, 1932, p.210 .
- [8] Kaplan, op.cit., p.41. [9] Blumenthal, op.cit., pp.60-61.
- [10] Hekhalot Rabbati, Chap.17, in Kaplan, op.cit., p.45.
- [11] Hekhalot Rabbati, Chap.19, in Kaplan, op.cit., p.46.
- [12] See Gruenwald, op.cit. [13] Blumenthal, op.cit., p.67.
- [14] Hekhalot Rabbati, Chap.20, in Kaplan, op.cit., p.48.
- [15] Bension, op.cit., p.208.
- [16] Hekhalot Rabbati, Chap.20, in Kaplan, op.cit., p.48.
- [17] Ezekiel 1:4 ff. [18] II Kings 2:11.
- [19] In Sefer Hekhalot (3 Enoch); see Gruenwald, op.cit.
- [20] Hekhalot Rabbati, Chap.22, in Kaplan, op.cit., p.50.
- [21] Hekhalot Rabbati, Chap.24, in Kaplan, op.cit., Pp. 52-53.
- [22] For example, in Enoch's ascension, he sees two crystal houses one within the other, surrounded by a wall of crystal and the whole surrounded by flames. See Gruenwald, op.cit.
- [23] Hymn to "Zoharariel [God of the shining Light], Adonai [the Lord], God of Israel", in Scholem, op.cit., p.59.
- [24] Exodus 33:20. [25] Bension, op.cit., p.146.
- [26] Rabbi Chananel ben Chusiel's commentary on the passage from the Talmud about the four sages who entered Paradise. In Kaplan, op.cit., p.25.
- [27] I Corinthians 13:12.
- [28] Eckhart, in James M. Clark, Meister Eckhart (London: Nelson, 1957), p.26.
- [29] See Gruenwald, op.cit., p.135 [30] Scholem, op. cit., Pp.46-47.
- [31] Re'uyot Yehezkel, quoted in Gruenwald, op. cit., p.135.
- [32] Meister Eckhart, in Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation, trans. Raymond Bernard Blakney (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), p.37.
- [33] Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1965) p.20, note 1.
- [34] Hekhalot Rabbati, Chap.26, in Kaplan, op.cit., p.54. See also Scholem, Major Trends, Pp. 52-53.
- [35] Hekhalot Rabbati, in Scholem, Major Trends, p.53.
- [36] Talmudic commentary on the four sages who entered Paradise. In Scholem, Major Trends, p.52.
- [37] Hekhalot Rabbati, Chap.22, in Kaplan, op.cit., p.50.
- [38] Gruenwald, op.cit.
- [39] Sepher Yetzirah, in Manly P. Hall, An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Gabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy (Los Angeles:Philosophical Research Society Press, 1936) p. CXV.
- [40] See 'Inanna's Journey to Hell', in Poems of Heaven and Hell from Ancient Mesopotamia, trans. N.K. Sanders (Penguin Classics, 1971).
- [41] Mircea Eliade, Myths Dreams and Mysteries (London: Collins, 1968), p.113.
- [42] Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Boston:Beacon Press, 1963), p.43
- [43] Jonas, op.cit., p.43.
- [44] Scholem, Major Trends. See also his Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition.
- [45] Gruenwald, op.cit. [46] Revelation 4:6.
- [47] Revelation 4:6. [48] Revelation 1:14.
- [49] Revelation 22: 18-19. [50] Revelation 1:10, 4:2, 21:10.

A METHOD OF PHOTOGRAPHING ETHERIC ENERGY
WITHOUT THE NEED OF SPECIAL OPERATOR PROPERTIES

Michael Watson ©

At various times attempts have been made to photograph etheric forces. The first person to have produced something more or less systematically seems to have been Ruth Drown some fifty years ago. This was later followed by the work of Delawarr. However, it appears that the methods of these researchers relied on a certain property of the operator to act on a photographic plate in total darkness simply by touching it or merely by proximity. [1]

Other operators without this property could produce little or nothing using either the Drown or the Delawarr method. The requirement for the operator to have the property of effecting a photographic plate without the intervention of light puts any results in the same category as psychic photography.

Psychic photography depends on the person having 'mediumistic abilities', which seem to stem from the human body having the property of emanating a peculiar substance called ectoplasm. This remarkable substance has the property of acting on a photographic plate on the one hand and of being capable of receiving impressions from the unconscious mind of the person on the other.

My own experiments suggest that probably all human beings produce this substance in small quantities and that mediumistic people represent an extreme case. It seems that the modern way of life dissipates it. Intellectual activity reduces it enormously as does any activity that taxes the nervous system such as noise, anxiety, etc.

The writer, long ago, tried to produce direct effects on a photographic plate with absolutely no result. Trials with the Drown camera [2] and a simplified version of the Delawarr camera [3] also yielded nothing. It became clear that the answer did not lie in the instruments, but at the time there was little published information on the Delawarr method and little was (and still is) known about how Drown produced her results. The operator reliance of the Delawarr camera had not then been published and there was always the possibility that he had made some fundamental discovery that rendered direct photography possible.

While performing these experiments the writer was using bromide lantern plates (still available then) and a photographic safelight in the form of a large beehive neon lamp. It turned out that the neon lamp

was not quite safe, that is, it was producing sufficient ultraviolet and blue light to fog a plate held close to it.

During one of the experiments the photographic plate was held close to the neon to see if there was anything on it. There was nothing to start with, but rapidly, a curious pattern started to appear on the plate. After fixing, the pattern bore a remarkable resemblance to some of the Drown pictures. Further experiments showed that the effect was due to the plate becoming fogged by the residual blue light coming from the neon. The plate, having been in the developer, was still wet, and consequently, the plate started to turn black in the usual way. The plate did not turn black uniformly and this seemed to be due to the uneven action of the developer. The places where the developer film was thickest developed the most rapidly.

Despite the clear physical explanation, the similarity to Drown's pictures triggered the idea that perhaps the etheric forces were at play in addition to the developer patterning. This is not to suggest that Drown used such a method, as far as is known she used the ordinary photographic process. The idea was that the etheric force from man is normally too feeble to effect a photographic plate directly but it may be able to modify the rate of development of the plate. The writer eventually convinced himself that this indeed happens, at least sometimes and that some of the failures were due to the difficulties in interpreting the result.

The physical energy needed by the weak ectoplasm or etheric force would be a great deal less if all it had to do was to guide the already operating energy of the developer chemistry. Further experiments suggested that not only did the etheric force modify the development rate but it acted so as to inhibit or accelerate the diffusion of the developer out of the photographic emulsion. To exploit this effect the process was modified. The following process is performed in total darkness or under a proper photographic safelight. The photographic plate is exposed to the source of etheric energy for a few seconds. As will be discussed later, this is not strictly necessary but it serves to concentrate the attention of the operator. The plate is then soaked in developer for a few minutes. After this it is drained and transferred to a water bath in which there is a little acetic acid. The plate must be plunged as rapidly as possible, emulsion side up, into the water bath. After a precise period which usually less than ten seconds, a bright white light is switched on above the water bath. A few seconds later the image will gradually appear on the plate. During the image development and subsequently, the light remains on. When the image has fully appeared, or earlier if it is becoming too dense, the plate is transferred to the conventional rapid fixer bath. That is an outline of the process.

Details of the method:

The developer is 2 parts water / 1 part developer, such as Johnsons 'Universol' or any bromide paper developer.

The stop bath is 5ml glacial acetic acid in 1 litre tap water.

The fixer bath is a standard rapid fixer made up according to the manufacturers instructions.

All solutions should be used at a temperature of 18 +/- 3 degrees Celsius. This is to standardise results, other temperatures can be used,

but if so should be noted.

The time in the stop bath before the light is put on is the controlling factor. The light should be no more than 2 feet away and directly above the stop bath. A standard 100 watt bulb is satisfactory. The time between plunging the plate into the stop bath and turning on the light is best done automatically, but good, if somewhat variable results can be obtained by counting for example; "one A,B" - "two A,B" - etc. The time is usually about 4 seconds, but if there is excessive random patterning due to developer turbulence, (there will always be some), the time may be extended a few seconds. Do not use the stop bath for more than 6 plates before replacing it. Always use a litre at a time and ensure it is at least 3 cms deep.

Photographic materials:

Glass photographic plates are the best but are virtually unobtainable now. Kodak produce a plate called the 'High resolution plate 1a'. For a quarter plate size they cost £55 for 30 ! The cheapest solution is to use resin backed papers such as Ilfospeed. They must be held as flat as possible with double sided scotch tape onto a sheet of glass or rigid plastic. Cut film can also be used and it produces good results but since it is panchromatic it must be handled in total darkness during the developer saturation phase of the process.

For some not too clear reason, heating the papers or plates to about 80 deg celsius for 1 hour before use, greatly improves the result. Both the plates and papers appear to stand this treatment. Papers will curl unless held flat at the edges. A simple metal frame can be constructed for this purpose. The heat treatment appears to harden the gelatine reducing its absorbency. This for some reason also seems to allow the etheric energy to have a greater effect on the developer diffusion mentioned above. Drying in a vacuum or over a dessicant may produce a similar effect but I have not tried this yet.

Before describing the results, one small word of caution. Resist the temptation to see faces in the results. The human brain is very adept at this. The process is far too crude to show a face with any certainty, even if that were the object of the photograph.

Results :

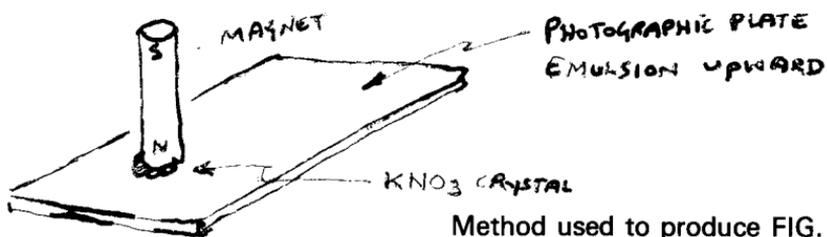
All the following results were produced without a 'camera' or any additional apparatus unless otherwise stated. In general, the photographic plate was held in the hand over the presumed source of the energy, or the energy source was placed on the plate.

Fig. 1. The aim of this photograph was to replicate the Delawarr fundamental ray photographs. Delawarr's pictures were produced by placing a vertical magnet on a photographic plate previously sensitised by allowing his assistant to handle it in the dark. A small quantity of chemical whose fundamental rays were to be photographed was placed on or next to the magnet. The magnet was rotated until a dowsing reflex detector gave a response. This was simply Drown's rubber diaphragm detector which was stroked with the fingers until a 'stickiness' was felt under the finger. Exactly the same method was followed here with regard to the placing of the chemical (Potassium nitrate KNO_3) and the tuning process. The chemical was next to the base of the magnet. The



FIG. 1

FIG. 2



Method used to produce FIG. 1 and FIG. 2



FIG. 3a



FIG. 3b



FIG. 4

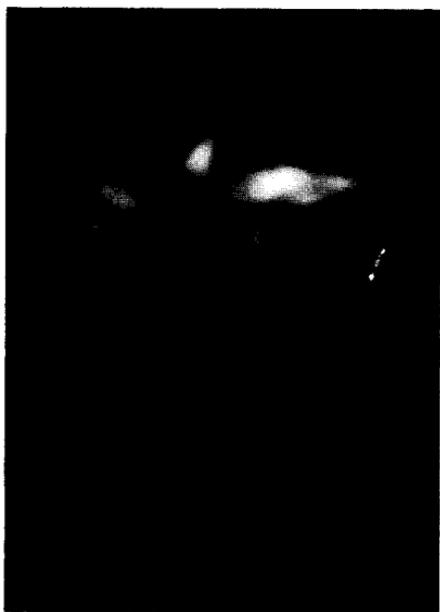


FIG. 5



FIG. 6

FIGURES 4, 5 and 6 are Finger Tip Auras. The white line has been scorred on to the photographs to show the finger position.



FIG. 7

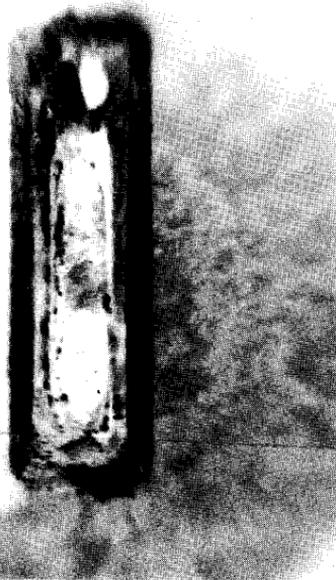
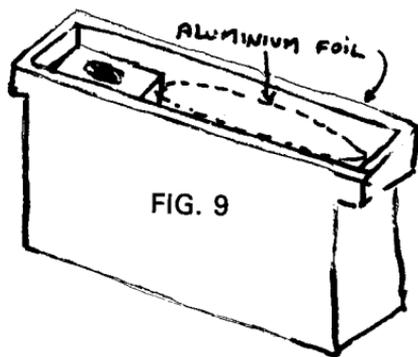


FIG. 8



Sketch of Patterson Quarter Plate Developing Tank, subject of FIG. 7 and FIG. 8

magnet was 5 cm long and 1 cm in diameter. It was an alnico magnet. Its location was approximately central in the patch of energy. The fundamental ray (only one) can be seen out towards the bottom left at about 7 o'clock. The magnet is N Pole down.

Fig. 2. This is a repeat of fig. 1 immediately afterwards. Note the energy is already much weaker. The fundamental ray can still be seen. A third repeat produced nothing. The magnet had evidently accumulated some sort of energy. Producing this accumulation at will has proved difficult. More about this important and central problem later.

Fig. 3a, 3b. These results were taken using photographic paper not plates. They are of a kidney stone showing two stages of its progress down the tube from the kidney to the bladder. the person concerned was of course under medical supervision and had been x-rayed so that the presence of the stone was known. The stone took three months to pass from the kidney to the bladder so there was ample time to attempt to photograph it using this process. These results show the enormous difficulty in interpretation and illustrate the danger of using such methods in medicine.

The stone seems to be the constriction marked B. Its position is referenced by the curious mark shown as A and present in both pictures. This seems to be some mark on the bladder, but what, is unknown. The identification of the area surrounding A as the bladder was simply based on the fact that the patient knew roughly the location of the stone. The photographs 3a and 3b were taken about a month apart. The stone passed into the bladder about three weeks after photo 3b was taken. It is interesting to note that in photo 3b, to the left and right there seems to be a black shadow of the intestines. Both photos were taken by holding the photographic paper in the hand and against the person's abdomen. I held the intention to picture the kidney stone clearly in my mind for a few seconds and that was all. The paper was then processed using the above method.

Fig. 4 and 5. These are pictures on the finger aura. The finger position can be seen by the black dots in fig. 5 and the white score mark in fig. 4.

Fig. 6. This is also a finger aura but after doing breathing exercises.

Fig. 7 and 8. These figures are particularly interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, they point to the self imaging property of the etheric force. Secondly, they give evidence that the process works. Thirdly, they point to the fact that the electric and magnetic fields have a deep connection with the etheric force.

The central part of the figure is actually the top of a narrow plastic box loosely lined with aluminium foil. The box is a quarterplate developing tank. Looking from the top, the end of the plate tank has a recess which engages with a projection on the lid. (The purpose of this is to enable the tank to be filled with developer in daylight without having to open it.- See fig. 9 for sketch of tank.) Fig. 7 was taken by holding the photoplate in the hand in total darkness over the developer tank. Compare the shape of the central lizard-like object with the ordinary photograph Fig. 8 (produced by conventional means) and it can be seen that the elongated oval is actually the shape of the top of the aluminium foil loosely lining the box. The recess visible at the upper end of fig. 8 as a round object appears as a black blob at the head of the lizard-like figure.

The active zone around the central object seems to be a field of

etheric energy. The whole box, foil and all, was standing on a metal plate charged to 8000v with static electricity. At the bottom of the box were two short bar magnets which had been charged by rubbing with the hand.

Although this seems rather arbitrary, in fact, there was and is a theory behind it. It has been known since the days of Mesmer that iron in particular has the property of attracting and holding the human vital or etheric force. Reichenbach [4] showed that the aligned molecular state caused by physical magnetism also caused the stored etheric force to split into two forms. This happens also with non-magnetic crystals so it is not directly connected with magnetism but molecular alignment. The electric field also has a considerable attraction for the human vital force, provided the lines of electric force end up on the human body. So, if we electrify an iron globe, for example, to a high potential, the iron globe will attract and accumulate the etheric force to a certain degree. If the iron is also conventionally magnetised then the etheric force will split into its two components.

As I understand it this property of iron (unelectrified, of course) is the key to physical alchemy. The etheric energy attracted by the iron has to be transferred to the chemical substances and condensed on them. As a result of this the ordinary chemicals commence to transform in a completely new way. The human etheric force is the only agent capable of directing these operations. These chemical actions are totally inaccessible to conventional chemistry simply because its agents such as heat, chemical affinity, etc., do not have this capability. It is for this reason that alchemy is of the utmost importance. If this is true, application of the etheric force to the transformation of matter opens up a vast field, amounting to a new science.

A few words about radionic cameras. Although no such devices have been employed here, it is not true that all these devices are worthless. Despite the self imaging nature of these forces some equipment not only acts as an aid to concentration but does interact with the etheric forces. In recent years there seems to have been a move away from the pioneer researches of Abrams, Drown and Delawarr without much attempt to clarify the physical basis of the subject. Boyd's work on a modification of Abram's device is, as far as I am aware, the only occasion that research has been done with scientific rigour in this area. Boyd's method was, in fact, examined by a scientific committee, the Horder Committee which was set up to examine his claims. He and his apparatus passed the tests set for it with 'flying colours' [5]. The work of Boyd has, to my knowledge, never been repeated, and it seems logical to clarify the basis first before rejecting anything.

Returning to the photographic process : the mechanism by which it works is still obscure. At one level it seems to be just turbulence in the stop bath that causes the image. Yet in that case the water itself, in reality, has the image forming properties. One thing seems certain, that two etheric energies are involved. One part is image forming and comes from the operator, and the second energy from the object under examination. The two parts are the form and force components of the etheric energy. It seems that it is easy to produce the force by physical means, but the formative part always comes from man.

Anyone attempting to repeat this process should not be disappointed if he or she does not get immediate results. A little perseverance may be required to get ones nervous system to produce the required formative

energy. There is a learning process involved here. Do not try to produce more than four photographs per session. The exhaustion it produces is quite noticeable. Do not attempt more than one session per day, or less if results tail off.

It is desirable to control any experiment by running a dummy experiment in parallel with the proper one, differing only in the factor being tested. With this process it is not so easy, since it seems to work by registering the aura of the operator. In other words, handling the photographic materials, or mere proximity, is sufficient to transfer something. The intention to perform an experiment is enough to activate the unconscious mind that controls the aura. The only way to control the experiment would be to gain control over the auric field or etheric emanation.

References

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- [2] The Delawarr George : Brevet D' Invention No. 1-084318. Perfectionment alla recherches du Radiation Fondamental.
- [3] Drown, Ruth : A method and means of obtaining Photographic Images of Living and other Objects. British Patent 515866.
- [4] Horder Committee on the Boyd Emanometer. Scottish Homeopathic Society 1923.

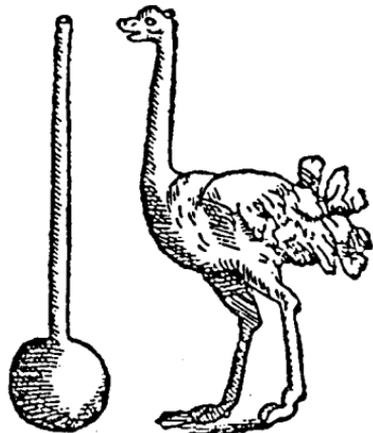
THE ALCHEMICAL VESSEL AS SYMBOL OF THE SOUL

Adam McLean ©



As students of the hermetic tradition we all recognise that the alchemical work takes place on many different levels - the physical work with substances, the experience and manipulation of etheric forces, the interior work on the soul, as well as the spiritual and planetary/cosmic aspects of alchemy. These different facets of the work interpenetrate and overlap each other. Indeed, in a sense, if we are to make any progress in alchemy, we must pursue the different facets concurrently, paralleling interior development with experience of the outer work. One symbol that belongs to all these different realms of this work is that of the alchemical vessel. In this article I would like to outline some ways in which we can use this symbol in our inner exercises.

The tradition of interior development in alchemy, is pursued by mirroring the transformations and processes of alchemy within our soul. As with any esoteric practice, this internalising of alchemical operations can produce disturbing patterns in the powerful psychic energies that we evoke through inner work, unless we find some means of containing these energies. In the tradition of ritual ceremonial magic the operators normally use an opening and closing ritual that acts as a structure to contain and safely dissipate the



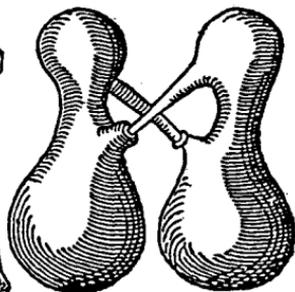
energies raised through their work. Similarly, in many traditions of meditation, an opening and closing exercise (sometimes based on breathing rhythms) helps to anchor and reconnect the meditators with their normal state of consciousness, so as not to leave them rather dissociated and dangling somewhere in between the outer and interior worlds.



In our inner work with alchemical processes we will find the symbol of the alchemical vessel an invaluable means for containing the interior energies and allowing them to unfold within us in a controlled and positive manner. So in a sense, the alchemical vessel can be a protective interior symbol, just like the circle of the ceremonial magician, or the astral temple of a working esoteric lodge, or the breathing exercises of a meditation tradition. The energies evoked by working with alchemical processes, as I have said, can be powerful and disruptive forces in the psyche, and a direct inner encounter with these transformative energies is not to be had instantaneously. Only through long and repeated interior work do we come to directly experience these energies in their primal and most fundamental form. The initial encounters are usually ephemeral and overlain with emotional currents. Only if we have the patience of alchemists tirelessly repeating interior experiments, brooding over our inner flask, will we attain even a glimpse of the goal of alchemical transmutation. It is therefore important that we understand the nature of the alchemical vessel so that we have some indication of how to use this in our inner work.

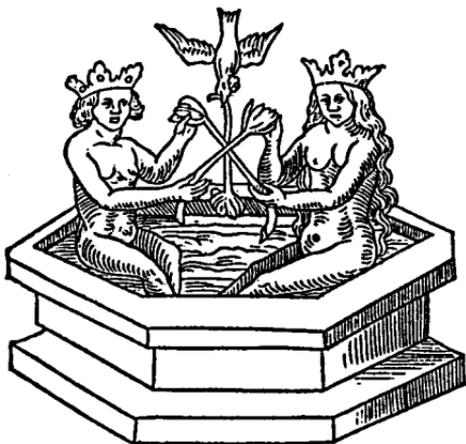


We should come to see that symbols are actually patterns of energy. In an exoteric sense this is so, for obviously any symbol held in our consciousness is manifested as an electro-chemical plexus in the neuron net in our brain. However, esoterically on the deepest level, a symbol is the pattern of etheric energy underlying its various

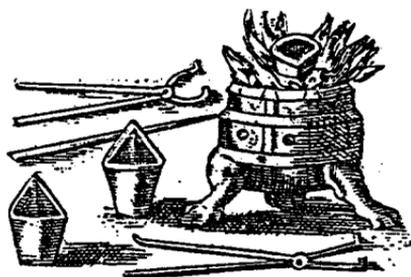


different forms. When we meditate on a symbol we will find it shape-shifting and manifesting its different appearances, and through this can come to grasp that the true nature of the symbol is its energy pattern.

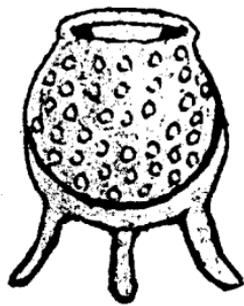
There are many different forms of vessel described and depicted in the alchemical literature and emblematic engravings. There are a seeming multiplicity of forms of retort, pelicans, water baths, alembics, cucurbites, stills, etc. However, in the interior work we will find that all these different outer manifestations of the apparatus reduce to three archetypal forms - which we can call the CRUCIBLE, the RETORT and the STILL.



The Crucible is essentially an open vessel, a dish, a mortar, or a cauldron, open to the outside world yet capable of containing material. Substances and energy patterns can be put into the crucible and be acted upon by some agent, and some part of this substance can also be drawn off or removed so enacting a kind of purification. This is often pictured as taking place through the application of heat. In outer terms, an ore is placed in the crucible, which is then heated, the metal forms itself out of the ore and various impurities are given off into the air, or a slag is skimmed off the surface of the metal. Thus the primal substance, the ore, is transformed into new pure metal. The essence, however, of this type of vessel and the inner operations undertaken in it, is that it is open. A transformation can be undertaken because certain energies (or impurities) are allowed to escape or dissipate. Heating is not essential to this archetypal alchemical process. Acting on a salt with an acid to produce an effervescence or release of gases, is another outer example of this process, or the slow precipitation or crystallisation of a solid out of a mother liquor. When we internalise the crucible in our souls we picture a vessel within our being



which is open, allowing impurities or unwanted facets of the work to pass out or to dissipate away, as well as substances and forces to enter in from the universal spiritual. In this sense the crucible in our souls is a chalice, the lower part of which contains and holds a substance or constellation of forces while its upper part is open to universal spiritual influences. Unwanted energies can be allowed to safely flow out of our crucible and dissolve in the universal flow, and in the other direction energies can be gathered from the spiritual and allowed to descend to the bottom of our interior vessel. This process can be a gentle and slow flowing one, or alternatively one can heat up our inner crucible through generating powerful currents of emotional energy, forcing and pressing for some transformation to occur. Indeed, once we become experienced in using these techniques, we can readily consciously evoke both of these phases, the active fiery phase and the gentle cooling, precipitation or crystallisation, and in a particular working these can be applied alternatively to create a polarity within the interior experience, that greatly helps the work to come to some conclusion. Thus we normally undertake such exercises by placing some pattern of symbolic energy into our inner crucible, then opening ourselves to the particular transformations that can be evolved by this exercise - calcinations, purifications, crystallisations, dissolving, etc. I hope to write further on the inner nature of these alchemical processes in a later issue of the Journal.

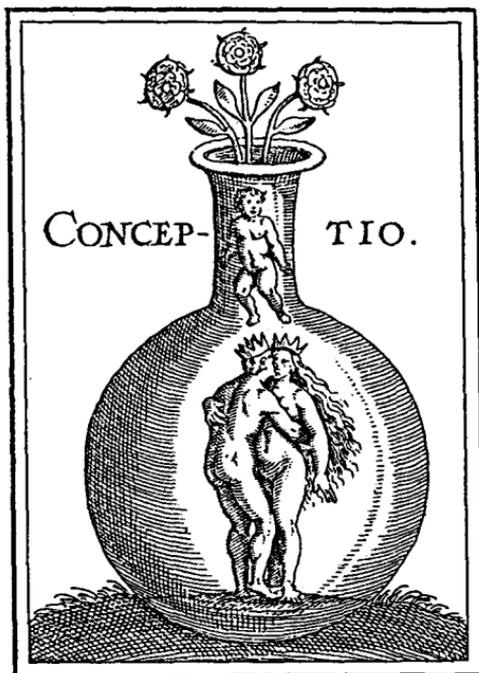


The Retort in this archetypal case is a sealed flask. In this interior work we picture our soul as entirely sealed off from both the outer world and the universal spiritual realm. When we undertake this exercise we must have everything we need within the sphere of our inner retort, and for the duration of this work we are

entirely self-contained and rely on inner change to take place within the components or forces we have within our being at that time. We have to work to bring about a transformation in these inner patterns, without relying on external forces. It is thus very important if we are to undertake such interior exercises in a positive way with any hope of any satisfactory results, to prepare ourselves and place in our inner retort all the energies and symbols that are necessary for the process. Thus working this particular exercise requires some degree of preparation. The retort exercise is especially valuable for working towards the interior synthesis of polarities. We place the polarised patterns of energy bound up, say, in some particular set of symbols, into our interior flask, seal it up, and allow them to fully unfold, interpenetrate, and come to a new synthesis.

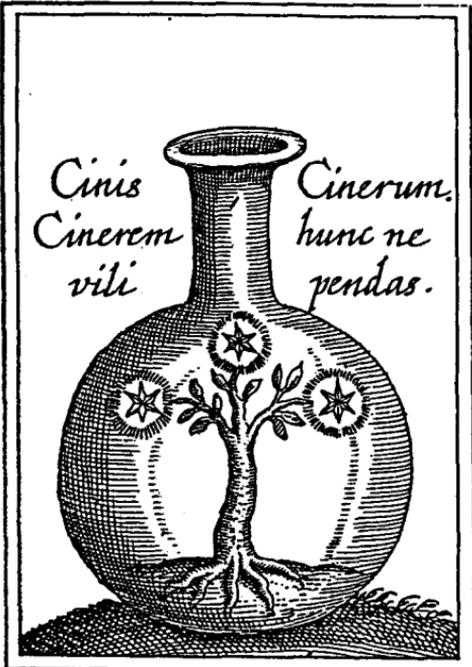
The most common symbol of this in alchemical writings is the man and woman in a flask, uniting and giving birth to a child. So the obvious forces to work with through this exercise are our masculine and feminine components. Through putting these patterns of symbolic energies into our inner retort and calling up the manner in which they manifest and resonate within our beings we can bring about an encounter with these psychic components and make them meet in a positive way. Other polarities we might try to work with are our logical thinking and emotional intuitive facets, or body and spirit, even our awe of the spiritual light and our fear of the deep darkness of matter, or the processes of life and death, and growth and decay.

We should try to experience the retort as a womb or matrix in which the process of gestation or new birth arising out of primal components, can safely take place in us. If we work with this retort exercise over a period of time, we will begin to feel the importance of this space in our souls, and value it as a creative



interior workplace.

The alchemical processes that go on in this retort usually involve the meeting of polarities, such as Separation and Conjunction, or of Dissolving and Coagulation. Sometimes we find our inner retort will go black, and nothing seems to happen for an extended period, but if we persevere some change will eventually be seen - perhaps at first merely a glimmer - which over a number of repetitions of the exercise might give rise to some new inner experience. At other times the retort will be full of movement and iridescent play of colours and ever changing forms, and here we must wait for some solid and substantial ground to arise in the shifting patterns, upon which our inner experience can grow. A symbol or pattern of energy often experienced at this stage is the tree or flowering plant within the space of the interior retort. Another symbol structure is that of the bird rising and falling in our inner world.



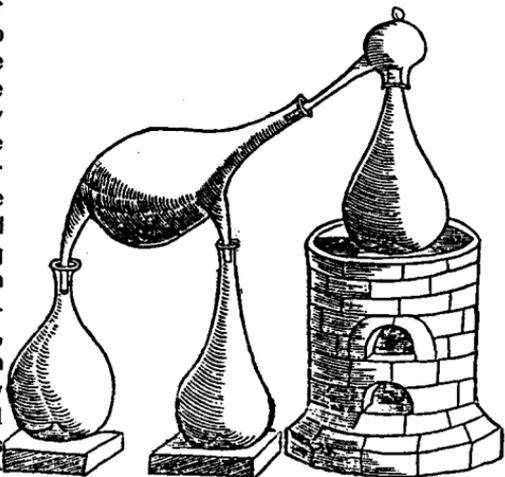
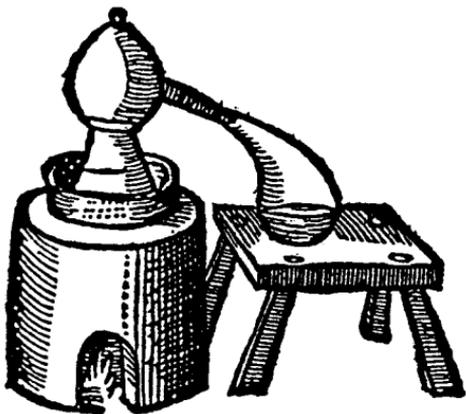
The final interior vessel I would like us to consider is that of the Still. When we try to experience our inner world through this symbol, we should have a sense of extracting an essence out of one of the interior processes, purifying and gathering it within our being so that it becomes an inner source we can touch upon at will. This alchemical operation to some extent corresponds in our everyday outer consciousness to the way in which an experience of coming to an understanding of some aspect of our world can entirely transform our way of interacting with it. For example, our initial reaction to a new piece of technology or an unfamiliar task, is tentative and fraught with difficulties we project upon this device or task. If we can eventually understand just how the device works or gain a picture of the movements needed to accomplish the task, then our way of using the device or of undertaking the task becomes entirely transformed. Similar processes take



place in respect to our interior life through the exercises of inner distillation, though this works on a more subtle plane.

Here we take some particular positive quality of our being, such as our creativity, or our sensitivity to others, or our ability to think deeply and clearly, and we find some symbols that capture (or at least envelope) the essence of this quality. We then place these into our interior Still and in our meditation begin to allow these symbol patterns to flow together. At some point in the inner work, we should sense some essence of this process begin to rise out of and separate itself from the specific symbols and feelings connected with this quality. If we encourage this process we can have the inner experience of elevating this essence and allowing it to collect in the upper part of our soul. It then becomes a Tincture.

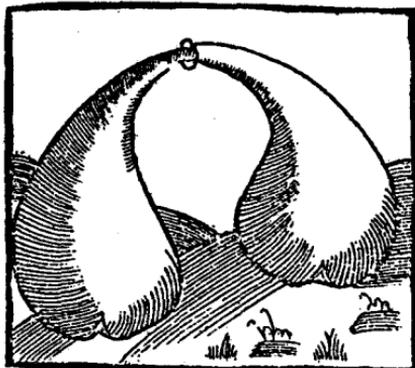
If, say, we choose to work upon our creativity through this exercise, we place into our interior Still, our understandings of the source of our creativity, picturings of our previous creations or our work in progress, memories of the emotional currents associated with our creative experiences, more universal symbols of creativity, and so on. In a meditative work on this facet, which will take many sessions to bring to fruition, we evoke all this material in our interior Still and attend closely to the processes and changes taking place there. For example, at one point we will experience the 'polarity flipping' of various symbols. We might, say, initially believe our creative impulse lies entirely in the quest for some ideal form, and experience this ideal image flipping (instantaneously interchanging) with its antithesis, some ugly shapelessness, or cycle of metamorphoses, producing disturbing patterns within our being. This stage will eventually resolve and we will find some symbol or feeling-perception that captures the essence of our creativity (or



whatever we have chosen to work with) emerging out of the meditative material. If we nurture and sustain this essence, then we can allow it to rise up within our soul and we will feel it remaining as a kind of tincture in our inner world. If this tincture becomes fixed within our being then we can later draw upon it at will. What we find then is that a part of our inner forces retains an echo of all the meditative work we undertook at that time, and we can reconnect with this reservoir whenever we wish. So in the case of creativity, once we possess this inner tincture, then if we have some difficulties (or a block) over some particular piece of creative work, we will find that evoking the inner tincture of this experience, will put us deeply in touch with the ground of our creativity and may enable us to resolve our present problem.

Of course, such exercises are never entirely completed, as we ourselves are changing all the time in response to ongoing experiences, but working with our interior Still will be found invaluable in putting us in touch with the sources of our positive qualities. In alchemical terms the processes associated with the Still include those of Distillation, Exaltation, Fixation, Projection, Multiplication, Quintessence, etc.

I hope these few indications might help us to see how the philosophy and symbolism of the ancient alchemists can still be effectively used today, as a vital living force for the inner spiritual transformation of our souls. The 'open secret' of alchemy is that we must, like the alchemists of old, experience our inner world as these alchemical vessels. Then our inner life will be tinged and transformed with a new richness of spiritual experience.





I have redrawn this mandala from an early 14th century manuscript the 'Opera Medicinalia of Al-Razi' in the Jagiellowska library in Cracow. It shows a flask standing upon flames and sealed at the top with a bishop's mitre - thus emphasising that the process in the flask is a spiritual one. Below the flask is a four-fold symbol. Young man - Old man - round (moon?) disc with face - and beast's claw. From this four-fold symbol proceed the flames which fire the flask, initiating and driving the process. From other illustrations in this document it seems most likely that we have here the Christian Trinity : Christ the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit as the disc, while the taloned foot adds the further dynamic of the beast. So we have a cross of polarities: the Son - the Father ; the Holy Spirit - the Beast.

Within the flask a winged dragon lies in an inverted position, its wings towards the earth, forming an ouroboros by siezing its own tail in its mouth, its four talons grasping five-fold rose flowers. This is a symbol we have met before in our study of alchemical mandalas. The dragon is the raw primal energies of our souls. When it is shown winged, this indicates that these psychic energies have begun to develop the ability to rise out of their own level, to transcend their limitations. However, they cannot rise unchanged into the heights of our soul. To do this they must sacrifice themselves, by turning in upon themselves in the ouroboros experience. This is what is shown symbolically in the lower part of this flask. The dragon feet do not rest upon any solid ground but grasp roses. Here we have an indication that this comes about through the life forces of the etheric world. These four roses are the essence of the four elements and reflect the four-fold symbol of Son - Father - Holy Spirit - Beast below the flask. We might tentatively suggest that Beast - earth, Holy Spirit - fire, Son and Father - water and air.

Above the ouroboros Dragon is an Eagle, representing the next stage of the process. The Dragon below becomes the Eagle in the soul through this transformation. The Eagle has a crescent moon across its outstretched wings. The Dragon in fact forms though the ouroboros, the symbol of the Sun ☉. Like a sun, the Dragon forces radiate energies through this transformation which are caught and reflected by the Moon Eagle. Although I have not inspected the original manuscript (only seeing a black and white illustration), I expect that the Eagle's wings may be differently coloured, so that it symbolically incorporates an element of polarity. At the stage of the Eagle in the soul, the alchemist still has not finally resolved the polarities. The Eagle can rise to the heights and plummet to the depths, but still bears unintegrated polarities. The final stage is again a bird form, the dove which rests upon the Eagle's head. This represents the final spiritualisation of the alchemist's soul. When alchemists develop the dove in their beings, they have an inner spiritual vehicle, a part of themselves that can rise within to experience the spiritual dimension of reality unencumbered by the limitations of the dragon forces.

DICTIONARY OF ASTROLOGY by Fred Gettings
RKP 1985, 365pp, Cloth £20.00, Paper £12.95

This Dictionary is a reliable and comprehensive guide to astrological terminology. It forms a reference and source-book for anyone involved in general astrological studies, and includes terms derived from the major post-medieval sources of astrology, up to and including the most modern forms of astrology now practised. Under more than 3000 headings the Dictionary gives definitions which will be clear to the non-specialist investigator, but still detailed enough for the general requirements of the practical astrologer. It re-examines the ancient terminologies to clear up some general misconceptions, and gives firm definitions to many ancient and modern terms, providing a new and secure foundation for the New Astrology. Recent developments in the study of literature and history have emphasized the importance of astrology to such authors as Dante, Chaucer and Shakespeare. The Dictionary of Astrology gives the general reader a working knowledge of an important tradition which was once the backbone of all philosophy and all art. It is also a sound starting-point for anyone wishing to make a serious entry into this startling, provocative, infuriating yet philosophically satisfying realm, which has been called the most intellectually demanding of popular magical beliefs.

- From Publishers publicity notes.

PORPHYRY'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE MARCELLA

Trans by Alice Zimmern, Intro by David Fideler, Phanes Press, PO Box 6114, Grand Rapids, Mi 49506, USA. PB 69pp,
\$4.95, £5.00 by Air Mail post.

Porphyry (c. 233-305 CE) is one of the most fascinating figures in the history of Western philosophy. A disciple of Plotinus, he was responsible for editing and transmitting the writings of his great master, and was a brilliant philosopher in his own right. Porphyry wrote a great number and variety of philosophical works, many of which have been either lost or destroyed. At an elderly age Porphyry married Marcella, a widow of a close friend who had seven children, but shortly after he was called away, urged on by the gods, to attend to the affairs of the Greeks. Out of print for nearly a hundred years, Porphyry's Letter to Marcella is a personal and moving document. In addition to explaining why he chose Marcella as his partner in marriage, Porphyry consoles his wife and reminds Marcella not to neglect the life of philosophy, conceived of here as the care of the soul in its re-ascent to the One. Porphyry writes of how God is best honoured and of the divine principles which must be upheld by the philosopher in daily life, and describes the preparatory stages of that ascent, and how the ascent is accomplished. A new introduction by David Fideler illuminates the life, work and writings of Porphyry, various aspects of Neoplatonic thought, and the nature of the philosophical ascent.

- From Publishers publicity notes.

THE SECRET ROSE GARDEN of Sa'd ud din Mahmud Shabistari
Rendered from the Persian with an introduction by Florence
Lederer, Phanes Press, Grand Rapids, Mi 49506, USA, PB, 92pp,
\$5.95,

The mystic verse of Shabistari written during a period of fierce conflict between Christianity and Islam (1311 A.D.) must be reckoned among the greatest poetry of any time or land. Treating such themes as the Self and the One, The Spiritual Journey, Time and this Dream-World, and the ecstasy of Divine Inebriation, Shabistari's work is a perennial witness to the capabilities and destiny of mankind. While Shabistari was deeply rooted in the Sufi mystical tradition, there are no cultural gaps which need to be bridged, for he was keenly aware of that one Unique Truth which all religions strive to approximate. Thus he writes :

Know the world from end to end is a mirror;
In each atom a hundred suns are concealed.
If you pierce the heart of a single drop of water,
From it will flow a hundred clear oceans;
If you look intently at each speck of dust,
In it you will see a thousand beings,
A gnat in its limbs is like an elephant;
In name a drop of water resembles the Nile,
In the heart of a barley-corn is stored an hundred harvests,
With a millet-seed a world exists,
In an insect's wing is an ocean of life,
A heaven concealed in the pupil of an eye,
The core in the centre of the heart is small,
Yet the Lord of both worlds will enter there.

- From Publisher's publicity notes

SPECIAL REVIEW FEATURE

Although the Hermetic Journal often seems to focus on Renaissance Hermeticism, we should not lose sight of the fact that the earlier Greek, Neoplatonic, Gnostic and Jewish traditions contributed to this later flowering of hermeticism. For this issue I have chosen to review some recent works which enable us to appreciate these earlier esoteric currents which help mould that stream of mystery knowledge we know today as hermeticism.

SEPHER HA-RAZIM translated by Michael A Morgan Scholars Press,
1983, PB, distributed in UK by Chthonios Books. £8.50

The Sepher Ha-Razim has been edited from a number of manuscripts and now presented as a coherent text in English translation. It is thought to date from the 3rd or 4th centuries C.E. It is divided into seven sections which correspond to the seven firmaments. The work is a strange mixture of elevated mysticism, drawing on the Merkavah traditions of that time, and rather debased and self-seeking magical rituals, however, overall the document has a high spiritual tone. When examining this work

I had the distinct impression that it was the source for many of the medieval grimoires of corrupted and distorted Jewish magic. One can imagine such mystical material becoming more and more debased, as it passed through the hand of copyists, and when by being translated into Latin such a manuscript became independent of the Jewish world then it could easily metamorphose into the corrupt grimoires that emerged in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. Such grimoires obviously have their exemplar in early Jewish mystical documents like the Sepher Ha-Razim. In a number of the rituals in the Sepher Ha-Razim the operator is instructed to place certain substances in flasks and look for certain changes, so there is also an alchemical aspect underlying this work. The Sepher Ha-Razim is accepted as the oldest extant work of Jewish literature specifically devoted to magic. Part of it was included in some of the medieval manuscripts entitled Sefer Raziel (also published in Amsterdam in 1701).

THE "SI'UR QOMAH" : A Critical Edition of the Text with Introduction, Translation and Commentary by Martin Samuel Cohen, Ph.D. thesis, University Microfilms, distributed in UK by Chthonios Books, 679pp, Hardbound £44.50, softbound £39.50.

This is the first scholarly edition and English translation of an important early Jewish mystical text most probably composed in Babylonia in the 6th or 7th century C.E., though some scholars, including Gersholm Sholem, hold that it dates from the second century C.E. The text draws from the early traditions of Hekhalot and Merkavah mysticism, and one section in particular pictures the Divine as a Macrocosmic Man and includes a detailed measure of the different parts of his body. This kind of material was much later to be found worked into the Zoharatic writings. M. Cohen who studied the text in depth says "it seems that the Si'ur Qomah was composed as a mystic meditation on the Deity, the recitation of which was meant to yield practical physical and metaphysical boons. In a sense, the author of the Si'ur Qomah was a precursor both of the speculative and practical kabbalists of the medieval period". This detailed survey of the background and translation of the Si'ur Qomah is obviously not an easy work to study, but serious student of mysticism or the kabbalistic stream will find much here to interest them.

THE BOOKS OF JEU and the UNTITLED TEXT in the BRUCE CODEX edited by Carl Schmidt, trans by Violet MacDermot, E.J. Brill, Leiden, HB, 345 pp, distributed in UK by Chthonios Books. £34.29.

The Books of Jeu are early Gnostic documents with parallels to the better known Pistis Sophia. It takes the form of the instruction by Jesus of his disciples into an arcane knowledge of deep and strange mysteries. In this text Jesus describes how his Father has set up a true God called Jeu who will bring forth other manifestations. A large part of the work is devoted to descriptions of various names of Jeu together with a series of 28 diagrams and ritual names. After this account of the different facets of Jeu, Jesus describes the Treasuries of Light and this book shows a sequence of seals, names and ciphers. The initiate wishing to enter these Treasuries of Light must take a seal in their

hands and intone the names. The Watchers, or Guardians of the Treasuries then withdraw and allow the veils that hide the gates to be crossed. Thus we have here an important record of one of the Gnostic methods of inner mystical journeying, entering strange interior realms. Such mystical material resonates with facets of Jewish mysticism and with the Hermetica. This whole area of Gnostic spiritual material has largely been ignored by esotericists, and I think much could be gained by esoteric research in this field.

GNOSIS : CHARACTER AND TESTIMONY by Robert Haardt, E.J. Brill, Leiden, HB, 424 pp, distributed in UK by Chthonios Books. £22.63.

This useful anthology of Gnostic writings includes in its first part devoted to Gnosticism, pieces on Simon Magus, Basilides, Marcion, the Barbelo-Gnostics, the Ophites, and also extracts from the Song of the Pearl, the Apocryphon of John and Poemandres. The second and third parts have extracts on Manichaeism and Mandaeanism. This book is useful in that the editor and translator, Robert Haardt, provides an Introduction to the subject of Gnosticism and adds various historical notes to each of the pieces he chooses for this anthology. I believe this book helps give us a picture of the diversity of the Gnostic Mystery schools. It will prove useful to anyone wishing to make an introductory survey of Gnostic material.

ZOSIMOS OF PANOPOLIS ON THE LETTER OMEGA edited and translated by Howard M. Jackson, Scholars Press, PB, 64pp, distributed in UK by Chthonios Books. £9.00.

This little tractate by the Egyptian alchemist Zosimos is of absorbing interest as a miniature showcase of the religious and philosophical trends of the first centuries of the Christian era. The work begins with a polemic against a rival school of alchemists who have no conception of anything beyond the material. He then discusses the motif of escape from corporeality under the guidance of the Hermetic saviour-revealer Mind, and turns to speculate on the primal Man. He mentions the opinions of the Gnostic seer Nikotheos as to the name of the primal, spiritual Man within the fleshly Adam, his temptation and fall into embodiment, and his consequent enslavement to Fate at the hands of her archonic planetary agents. Zosimos then recounts the rescue of the primal Man and those who are part of him, by Jesus Christ, who descends into this world to effect the separation from embodiment.

- extracted from the Introduction.

HERMETIC AND ALCHEMICAL TRADITIONS OF THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, with an essay on their relationship to alchemical poetry, as illustrated by an edition of "Blomfield's Blossoms", 1577 by Robert Michael Schuler, Ph.D. thesis, University Microfilms, HB, 526 pp, distributed in UK by Chthonios Books. Hardbound £44.50, softbound 39.50.

Historians of science tend to view alchemical treatises as documents of a "primitive chemistry"; adherents of occultism and mysticism

interpret them as records of transcendental experience; Jungian psychologists see them as transcripts of the process of integrating the personality; and students of literature view them largely as troublesome but necessary sources for an understanding of Chaucer's Canon's Yeoman's tale or Donne's "Love's Alchymie" or Ben Johnson's The Alchemist. This Ph.D. thesis considers a problem crucial for distinguishing between different kinds of alchemy and thereby perceiving more clearly what alchemy was at a given time and place. This problem is the historical relationship between two separate bodies of thought: the first is material alchemy, well established in early hellenic times, with the god Hermes as the reputed of this art which transmuted base metals to gold. The second is the Corpus Hermeticum, religious and philosophical writings composed around the second century A.D., purporting to record the sayings of Hermes Trismegistus, sage, king and prophet; these Learned Hermetic writings are Neoplatonic in character and derive largely from Judaising Gnostics. Some thinkers saw in the process of material alchemy an allegory of the Gnostic purification and ascent of the soul, and they combined the two traditions under the authority of "thrice-great Hermes". Thus one finds at least two distinct traditions of early alchemy, one with and one without the dimension of Learned Hermetism. Although Learned Hermetism was combined with material alchemy in the late Hellenistic period and in medieval Islam, the introduction of the Corpus Hermeticum into western Europe by Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) is our primary concern. Recent scholarship, especially that of Frances Yates and D.P. Walker, has shown the great bearing that the "baptising" of Hermes Trismegistus by Christian humanists had on the religion, science, and magic of the Renaissance. This study, however, is the first to consider fully the effect of Renaissance Hermetism on material medieval alchemy. The discussion focusses on the tradition of English alchemical poetry, and then on the text of a particular poem, "Blomfild's Blossoms" written in 1557, and composed in the medieval tradition of material alchemy. The text, edited from the manuscripts, is accompanied by a commentary whose purpose is to elucidate the religious, philosophical and scientific aspects of late medieval alchemy, as well as to indicate how Ashmole and other Renaissance Hermetists could interpret the poem (and others like it) as a mystical treatise in the tradition of the Corpus Hermeticum.

- From the author's abstract to his thesis.