

# The Hermes Paradigm

Book I  
"First Principles"



Rubaphilos Salfuere

First Edition 2009  
Second Edition 2019

(Second edition in pdf format produced specifically  
for the subscribers to my Yahoo Group)

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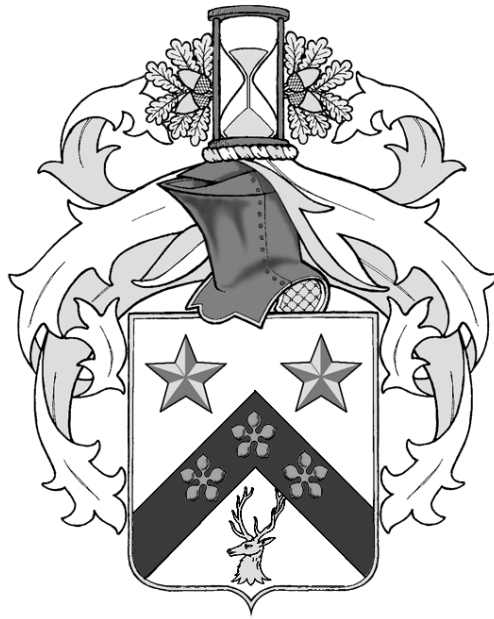
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For Ben, quae colloqui dux secretus



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*“Entia non sunt multiplicanda sine necessitate”*

(All things being equal, the simplest solution is often the best.)

Lex Parsimonæ (Ockham’s Razor)

(William of Ockham – 1288-1348)

“Simplicity is the seal of truth”

A New Chemical Light

(Sendivogius –1608)

# The Hermes Paradigm

Book One – First Principles

By Rubaphilos Salfluëre



## Preface to Second Edition

It is just about ten years since this first little book in the Hermes Paradigm series was first published. Anyone who knows anything about the history of this book knows that I had a great deal of trouble with the publisher, and in subsequent years many problems with individuals who had offered to help fulfil my promise to interested students of my writings to reproduce commercial versions of the two books in this series which had already been published. I won't go into the mind numbing details here, again, but will suffice to say that this book was my first foray in to the world of traditional publishing and I learned a great deal about the stinking backwaters of the publishing industry from my work on this book. Lessons which gladly can now be avoided with the new innovations in self publishing that have developed in recent years.

Having been unable to find the time (as of yet), or the necessary help to attempt to go ahead with a self-publishing of not only this volume, but also the second volume which had previously been published, and the intention thereafter of completing the entire five book series, I have decided to upload to the internet a digital version of one of my original drafts of this book. So this is what you see here in this volume in its original condition, which means that its technical formatting is still somewhat untraditional. This is one of my last drafts of the Hermes Paradigm – Book I, before the original publisher got his grubby fingers on the manuscript and insisted on making his uneducated changes to the text.

There is not a great deal of difference between this version and the publishers final version, except primarily that the importance I placed on the exact formatting of the text, in order to preserve ciphers which are embedded in the book, that the publisher altered before printing, are for the most part untouched here.

As I pointed out this was my first publishing project and looking back at it after ten years there are obviously a lot of things I

would have preferred to change and to include in this text if I were to publish it today. Nevertheless I believe, for what it is, the original text can still stand on its own two feet as an important statement concerning the beginning of my public journey to champion for the movement toward presenting a more authentic view of Western Hermetism than exists presently in the mainstream. At the same time one of the reasons why I have decided to release this book in to the wild of the internet is because (as I have declared elsewhere) it definitely is time for me not only to re-edit this volume and add to it the concepts which were here not included, but to complete my writing of and publication of the entire series. I cannot say how long it is going to take to complete that magnum opus, but I do want to say that I definitely have plans to complete my full discourse on my view of the authentic Western alchemio-Hermetic tradition, giving detailed explanation of not only the basic principles but also of the Great Work in the lab itself and the still largely secret details of the authentic inner work of Hermetic initiation.

Rubaphilos Salfluère  
Mataruahoe Island  
New Zealand  
February 2019



## Preface to 2007 Edition

The scientific age has built its successes, and practically its entire existence, upon the foundations laid by Renaissance Hermetists. It was from the work of the alchemists in particular that scientific methods as we know them today were adapted. Once their knowledge fell in to the possession of the uninitiated, most of the esoteric perspective and philosophy was dispensed with, leaving only raw methodology as its measuring stick. Since that time science has set out to dismember virtually everything laid before it in the hopes of acquiring knowledge that could be exploited for the interests of human industry, in the name of the cult of capitalism.

It is not often that a book like this is written. You hold in your hands a rare volume; a voice of clarity amid the ceaseless din of confusion and falsehood which passes for 21<sup>st</sup> century occultism. The ease with which esoteric publications are put before the reading public today has led to an increase in misinformation, and a dramatic decrease in qualified instruction. This is particularly noticeable as the classic texts of the ancients are gradually edited or replaced by new literature written by people of dubious authority or who have no practical experience whatsoever.

Salfluère is an alchemist the likes of which we must look to past history, if we are to find similar examples. Descending from an unbroken line of teaching which stems back to antiquity, he is in a unique position to present modern readers with an accurate view of Alchemy – by this I mean specifically, the Hermetic view of the Royal Art. While I have only contributed to this volume in an insignificant capacity, I have had the pleasure of the author's association for many years, and can attest to the hard reality of that which he presents herein.

The author has devoted a staggering amount of effort toward the process not only of studying and practicing Alchemy (and Western Hermetism in general), but also of teaching it. While this

requires a great deal of patience and expertise, it also yields valuable insights that would otherwise be unknown to individual practitioners who remain solely in the role of student. Having a qualification and experience in psychotherapy, as well as formal education in botany, chemistry, microbiology and physics, and the practical application of these latter sciences in the realm of oenology, with such a broad background of experience he is able to speak to a wide range of issues that concern people of both modern and traditional (ancient) scientific backgrounds.

Whether you approach Alchemy from an outer (laboratory) or inner (psycho-spiritual) perspective, are experienced or new to the tradition, I can say with the utmost confidence that you will not find a better presentation of the Hermetic philosophy in these times, nor will you find a more valuable resource in the volumes to follow.

The time has come to restore a proper understanding of the Western Mystery Tradition. You may find that Hermetism is not what you thought it was, and the point of occult study quite different than that which you might be familiar with. This is a good thing, because it has a great deal more to offer than its reputation today suggests.

There are very good reasons why I have recommended the works of this author so emphatically; I leave you to find out for yourself why this is. May your journey be as wondrous as mine.

Allerion  
Seattle, Washington, USA  
October 2007

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## Introduction

“... For [he] must die to the world, to the flesh and to all the senses and to the whole man animal, who would enter into the closest of secrets ...”

(Anon - *The Rosie Crucian Secrets*. 1713)

The body of knowledge Western occultists know as the *Hermetic Sciences* is composed of a number of separate disciplines, foremost amongst which today are Magic, alchemy, astrology, qabala, divination and ritual<sup>1</sup>. These individual systems, when viewed as a group, are found to share a common philosophy. That philosophy of itself focuses on defining and explaining the hidden *universal* laws of nature that are the basis of the more *specific* laws governing each of these separate subjects. The depth of understanding that lies behind these individual occult disciplines, encompassing them all, we call *Hermetic philosophy*.

To focus on the theory, rules and practices specific to any one of these separate disciplines in isolation is considered an acceptable approach to study in mainstream<sup>2</sup> esoteric circles. Rarely, though, does the student of any of these specific disciplines take time to understand the philosophy which is the root of them all. All too often the result is that many occultists have developed or adopted misunderstandings or complete ignorance concerning these fundamental philosophic principles. This conundrum becomes

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<sup>1</sup> See the appendix one for a definition of each of these disciplines.

<sup>2</sup> It is helpful to understand that where occult study is concerned there are two basic levels of activity. We have the *secret tradition*, which I refer to as the *underground stream*, where knowledge is accurate and teaching is effective, and is still a hidden system. Then there is mainstream or *popular* occultism where knowledge is tainted with superstition and inaccuracies and teaching is more often than not impotent, where effective results are concerned. It should also be noted that pop-occultists by default believe they are part of the secret tradition, which practice shows is self-evidently untrue, as everything they know and do is public knowledge.

understandable when we realise that the literature and instruction which deal specifically and accurately with the principles of Hermetic philosophy are rare. The world of Western Hermetic occultism and of its font – alchemy – in particular, are long overdue a work that concentrates specifically on the essential theory of *the Hermetic paradigm*.

Any system of knowledge that has survived a history of more than 5000 years will inevitably show signs of damage. Almost every creed - religion, politics and philosophy - which the body of Hermetic knowledge has rubbed up against over the centuries, has left its mark. In doing so few have added anything of value, largely only serving to increase confusion relating to the principles of that which has been referred to as the perennial philosophy.

Nevertheless, as any learned student of Hermetism is aware, tradition instructs us that since time immemorial there has existed an unbroken chain of pure Hermetic teaching preserved and handed down through the ages by its more advanced Adepti. Indeed, if such a method of transmission did not exist, as some claim, we would not have access to an accurate teaching today (as we surely do). For no publication has ever contained the true mystery of Hermetic initiation. This pure teaching has flowed secretly down through the ages like an underground stream, concealed beneath the surface of the popular (and often ineffective) face of Western occult study. At various times and places little wellsprings of that secret tradition have been allowed to seep to the surface, bringing with them new life to a waning mainstream teaching.

Today, at a point in the journey of human endeavour when the search for a unified theory of the nature of reality is becoming increasingly more important to conventional science, the ideas upon which Hermetic philosophy are based are slowly beginning to take on renewed importance. At the same time, when so many new and curious minds are attracted to the study of the Western view of occult knowledge, we also find an abundance of ideas that are foreign to Hermetic philosophy, even contradictory to its principles, being imported in to the tradition. Unfortunately in most cases this

situation has only helped to encourage the already virtually impotent condition of the popular face of the Western tradition in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There are many individuals in the Western occult community who will disagree with that statement, I am quite sure. They will staunchly insist that a good portion of their approach to the esoteric mysteries encompasses much that is of practical value to the aspiring Hermetist. It is likely, in fact, that many supporters of the present popular view of Western occultism would insist that the tradition has never been in such a healthy condition, based on the oft mistaken conclusion that quantity of interested persons is the same thing as quality of interest. The reality is far less encouraging. When it comes to obtaining serious results from that which usually amounts to many years of esoteric study we rarely if ever find demonstration of anything even closely approximating the kinds of results the ancients taught us to expect from such study. The truth of the situation, which modern occultists cringe to admit, is that today in the Western tradition esoteric study is virtually little more than a glorified intellectual pursuit. At the same time it is true that the Western tradition offers a variety of practical techniques for occult attainment, but ... in most cases the keys to understanding how to get such techniques to work with desired effect is out of the reach of the average teacher and student alike.

It is necessary to begin laying a foundation for any practical work in Hermetism by providing a reasonable supportive theory on the subject. As theory some of the material presented in this text you will agree with, and some you won't. That is only natural. It is not important, generally, what you disagree with or have reservations about, or what you accept in that which follows. The act of providing you with this theory is simply to give you the opportunity to see Hermetic philosophy, which underlies the Hermetic process, from my point of view. In doing this, you should be aware that essentially education, for the tutor, is a recapitulation of his own journey to the student and almost nothing more. While what you are about to read is not a direct retracing of my own steps

(on the particular subject covered in this volume), it is an attempt by myself to put that which I have learned into some kind of orderly and coherent package, with all that is superfluous removed, so that you can more easily make sense of it.

Likewise, our *practice* should be provided with a motive and a good technical justification. This is the reason behind presenting my *theories* concerning the work first. The theory describes the playing field, then the mechanics of the game, and finally from that a plan of attack can be outlined. By plan of attack I refer directly to the practical exercises formulated to gain the greatest chance of success from walking the path of an Hermetic initiate.

In ancient times, tradition asserts, before the dawn of Christianity, a number of important discourses existed that expounded specifically upon the details of Hermetic philosophy. Since the catastrophic destruction of the library at Alexandria, for the first time possibly as early as 48 BCE, hardly a single volume, let alone *set* of works, can be found to have survived to our own age, which attempt to define and explain the specific principles upon which Hermetic thought is based. Without any argument, many learned publications have found their way into the public arena that explain in detail more general views of Hermetic thought and practice. Books on Magic, astrology, divination, ritual, symbolism, architecture, esoteric history and so-forth, fill the bookshelves of institutions and individuals who concern themselves with the study of such knowledge. But virtually nowhere has any Adept, who knew enough to do so, attempted to publish a work expounding the laws and concepts that lie behind these separate fields of study. Perhaps the one known exception that barely comes close to doing so is the *Kybalion*. A work that, while a valiant attempt at filling a huge void in Hermetic teaching, is marred by brevity, incompleteness and some important technical errors that somewhat undermine an honest attempt at grasping a greater truth.

In considering writing on a subject such as this, an immediate concern arises that it is difficult to discuss Hermetism without



resorting to the use of somewhat obscure, and a little confused, in-house technical language. At the same time explanation of the essence of Hermetism requires resorting to descriptions of ideas that are quite foreign to 21<sup>st</sup> century thought. Therefore I feel it is necessary to begin my discussion by clarifying some general concepts that are bound to raise some questions, while I attempt to lay the foundation of my theory of the Hermetic paradigm. Then we should consider the history of the tradition, for a tree without roots bears no fruit. Finally we will then be in a position to contemplate the universal and unified theory upon which Hermetic science is founded.

In your reading of this little volume I should point out that many years of valuable study and experience have been compressed here in to few words. Each word has been selected with care in order to convey exact meaning. Therefore I strongly advise the serious student that simply reading this work will not suffice to extract from it all that has been placed herein. Indeed, the text needs to be studied, and in doing so read and re-read. In studying this work it should be understood that most of the ideas presented here are based on solid personal experience, part of which experience has involved close association with many other individuals who were also going through the paces of attempting to realise these realities themselves. Therefore, while some of the concepts you will read here are to be found in other respected works on the subject of Hermetism, many other ideas presented here are only discovered after having been involved in specialised Hermetic training.

## On Terminology and Definition

“... And being a new thing unto them, they feared that their great name might be lessened, if they should now again begin to learn and acknowledge their many years of errors ... who so loveth unquietness, let him be reformed.”

(Anon - *Fama Fraternitatis*. 1614)

Adepti who have experience with the difficulty of communicating Hermetic ideas, the definitions of which *they* were trained to accept, know they are likely to come in to conflict with other popular meanings circulating in mainstream circles. This happens to be the case because traditionally and historically esoteric education has prospered in a community that is anarchic<sup>3</sup> by nature – that is, it is a community that has no form of *physical* central authority that sets and maintains standards. Different schools of Hermetic thought at various places and times in history have developed their own terminology and definitions with which to describe Hermetic phenomena and concepts. This has often arisen out of a necessity born of isolation from the core teachings of other branches of the tradition. A good deal of confusion exists as the result of this state of affairs. This confusion of tongues is one of the main reasons why a deeper understanding of Hermetism has been greatly hampered at the popular level of study.

I should point out that I am not overly concerned with such disagreements in the use of Hermetic terminology. The labels we might personally choose with which to describe Hermetic phenomena do not alter the realities inherent in the phenomena themselves. Technical terminology is a tool, the purpose of which is to facilitate communication and understanding. For this reason when individuals enter in to discussion on any subject of a technical

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<sup>3</sup> Anarchy is often confused with the concept of disorder and violence. A state of anarchy is one where individual groups oversee their own government on their own terms rather than be subject to centralised control.

nature all that matters is that they agree on common usage where language is concerned, and common understanding where concepts must be agreed upon.

I should start by explaining one of the traditional conventions used in written language by authors who have paid careful attention to the nuances of communicating esoteric concepts. It sometimes happens that in describing conditions of a specifically occult nature no precise word exists for the idea under consideration. In such a situation it is a habit to make use of *everyday* terms, (often as analogies or metaphors), that are somehow related to the esoteric concept. In order not to have these terms confused with their common meaning and usage, the first letter of the word is often capitalised to indicate that the word should be taken in its esoteric context. For example, in alchemical language the word *sulphur* is used regularly. When spelled 'sulphur' it refers to the yellow mineral element known to chemists by that name. On the other hand, when spelled 'Sulphur', with a capitalised 'S', the word refers to the alchemical *Principal*<sup>4</sup>, not the common mineral. Likewise Magic refers to the occult art, while magic refers to the well-known art of stage illusion, the kind seen at children's birthday parties. Not all authors of esoteric literature make use of this convention, but many do, especially in the West. Being aware of this can open up deeper layers of understanding than would otherwise be available. This is especially true where the subject under discussion is alchemy, since alchemists of all ages have made use of this convention more than authors on any other Hermetic subject.

When considering definitions of Hermetic terminology few would argue that the most difficult territory to tread on is that of classic alchemical literature. Many individuals who are attracted to the study of alchemy derive much of their understanding of the nature of the art from such literature. It would not be an exaggeration to insist that most students of alchemy consider its literature to be one of its greatest treasures. At the same time it is

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<sup>4</sup> See the glossary for a detailed definition of the use of this term.

widely agreed that there are many problems that arise with any attempt at trying to understand alchemy primarily on the basis of information presented in books on the subject. Many of these difficulties are not even suspected by novice aspirants. With this fact in mind I feel it is important to lend some consideration to the subject of problems that arise from a heavy reliance on the aid of alchemical publications.

One of the first issues to address is the fact that traditionally the best, the most reliable and respected alchemical books, are published *by Adepts for Adepts*, with few exceptions. Because those who are skilled in the alchemical science tend to practice in isolation, and are rare individuals, one of the few ways such people could attract the attention of their secretive peers was to publish works that described their degree of understanding. Adeptship is a lonely condition, and human nature has formed us to be social creatures, so it is natural for experts in any discipline to seek communion with their equals. Therefore the first way that we must approach the greater part of alchemical literature is to accept that if we are not initiated into a traditional stream of accurate knowledge it is highly unlikely that we will reap any real and significant benefits from studying such works. No matter how much anyone likes to argue that point, it is a demonstratable fact.

The next problem we must consider, when studying alchemical publications, again, is that there is no broad agreed standard for technical terminology. While we can accept that certain terms are universally used in a way that is understood by all students of the art, the reality is that the greater portion of terminology used is specific in meaning to each individual publication. Therefore each book on alchemy has to be studied on the basis of its own merits (or difficulties).

Likewise, a very frustrating situation exists where over the ages certain unknown individuals have practiced the habit of publishing their personal ideas about the Work under the names of historically prominent and respected alchemists. So, for example, we might argue that a number of respected tracts have been

published under the name of the famous English alchemist George Ripley, but were not written by him. If we were to gather all of the works published under his name together and study them intensely, we would discover not only that they made use of different definitions for important terminologies, but also that they are not all describing the same path to the Philosopher's Stone. The real nature of the problems involved in studying such texts with an understanding of these issues can only ever be truly known by someone who is traditionally educated in the art, and has an accurate understanding of the Work, with a lot of experience under their belt. A poorly informed individual, or an outsider, is therefore in a position to have almost no understanding of the nature of the problems that arise from such a situation.

At the same time it is widely believed that there is only *one* true path to the Stone. Students who are in the habit of thinking this way spend a great deal of time frustrated at the confusion that arises from believing that only one path uses alchemical terminology accurately, and everything else is false. The reality is that there are a number of paths, and alchemists who publish their ideas about them apply commonly used terms in ways that might be used differently by someone following a different path. An even more frustrating reality is that individuals writing about the same path will at times use the same terms, but in different ways.

This kind of problem exists most widely in alchemical literature but also can be recognised in publications on other Hermetic subjects, and so it creates an enormous amount of confusion where definitions and meanings of terminology are concerned. Especially since most students approach the study of Hermetism from the point of view of using classic texts to try and figure out how to deal with practical concerns. The reality of the situation is that you need someone first to show you how to effectively realise the nature of esoteric phenomena, so that then you can read and recognise the truth or falsehood of certain ideas in classic Hermetic literature which are confused by inconsistent use of terminology.

This approach to authoring works on Hermetic subjects is perpetuated with one primary purpose in mind, to ensure that accurate understanding is only obtained from an initiated tuition. Of course nobody wants to believe this. Most people who approach the study of Hermetism want to believe that the truth is open to anyone who makes a good enough effort to learn from books ... despite the fact that the old Adepti repeatedly reminded us that the truth was found by only two paths - being trained by an expert, or by revelation from the divine.

Alongside these difficulties remains the fact that the world of Hermetic literature is polluted with fake texts. It is well known that in certain periods of history there existed a virtual industry of publishing false alchemical books. While many of these fakes were very obvious, many were also cunning works produced by skilful shysters. Upon accepting this fact we must acknowledge that a number of Hermetic texts that have enjoyed a respected reputation are in fact worthless. Since Hermetists who succeed in the work rarely list which books they gleaned accurate knowledge from, the task of weeding out the fakes from amongst truthful works has become increasingly difficult.

Finally, we must also recognise that the world of occult commentary, in all its vastness, is populated with a great number of people who in fact have little or no real understanding at all of the true nature of esoteric phenomena or concepts. Over the many years that such people have felt it their duty (or a profit to their other interests), to make claims about occultism in the name of some authority other than experience, many, many false ideas have crept in to the field of Hermetic study and have become accepted as fact, but which have no relation at all to the truth. Do yourself a favour and read that again, while stopping to think about what that statement really means if it is true.

## Hermetism

“I know this, that these arts are very old, were held in great esteem by the ancients, hidden and handed down as special secrets.”  
(Paracelsus – *On Hermetism*<sup>5</sup>. 1493-1541)

Of primary importance here, when considering terminology and definitions, is that of the concept of Hermetism itself. To understand this concept as I present it in this work, we need to consider that it might be possible to unite all science and art under the umbrella of one universal theory of the nature of reality. This idea is not a new one. Modern physics (for example) speaks of a *grand unified theory*, in which the formulae used to explain the nature of the four fundamental forces of physics might be presented as a single perfectly integrated system. The Hermetic concept of a universal theory of the nature of reality is somewhat broader than the idea of a grand unified theory of physics. The entire edifice of Hermetic philosophy is built upon the concept that everything in nature owes its existence to one simple, underlying, universal mechanism. On the basis of this fact everything we know can be measured and understood by considering its relationship to this mysterious apparatus<sup>5</sup>. This suggests that a single theory ... a single formula possibly ... can be used to describe the structure and dynamics of any system in nature ... animal, vegetable or mineral, matter or energy, physical, psychological or spiritual, on any level of its existence. When considering the form a unified theory in Hermetism might take, we need to turn our attention to the subject of this universal mechanism, which we shall do shortly.

Tradition asserts that in the very distant past a group of humans discovered, or were taught, the theory behind this underlying unified condition of nature. We might say then that the

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, when contemplating just what this mechanism might be, that laboratory alchemy, in its purest sense, is concerned almost entirely with the study of this one subject.

sciences that fall under the banner of Hermetism are the philosophic and practical application of that theory to different departments of human endeavour. For the sake of argument we could call the unified theory upon which Hermetism is based the *first principles* of Hermetic philosophy. These principles are enshrined in what Hermetists know as the Emerald tablet of Hermes, which we shall consider later in this text. Hermetic science itself, while it was once very likely to have been studied and practiced as a single discipline, has since been divided into a number of virtually separate branches of study. The two foremost of which, in the West, are *alchemy* and *Magic*. Astrology, qabala, ritual and divination are disciplines of a second order of importance, which are made use of as auxiliary sciences, by the two foremost.

It is curious to note that many so-called Western occultists, while knowing that Hermetism is referred to as a science, also insist that modern science can never understand esoteric concepts nor quantify esoteric realities. Proper experience demonstrates that such a mind-set is mostly born from ignorance and an adolescent desire to rebel against established authority. It has nothing at all to do with the pure reality of Hermetism. Pure Hermetism *is* a science in the truest sense of the word. Every idea it espouses and every reality it rests on can be demonstrated and proved according to the presently accepted boundaries of *scientific method*, no matter how unpopular that idea might be with poorly educated occultists, or conventional science<sup>6</sup>. This is the very foundation of alchemical philosophy and of the original Rosicrucian ideal, which I shall elaborate upon elsewhere.

So, in the following text, when reference to Hermetism, Hermetic science, or Hermetic philosophy (for example), is made, I refer to this body of esoteric knowledge ... either in its original

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<sup>6</sup> An immediate cry of disagreement will be heard to rail against this claim. But as any expert alchemist knows all spiritual (for lack of a less abused term) phenomena have a physical basis upon which they can be measured, as we will consider in later chapters.



condition as a pure unified science of universal truth<sup>7</sup>, or in the condition it has existed in later in history - corrupted and dissociated by age, religion, politics, modern science, general misconceptions and in places deliberate vandalism<sup>8</sup>. A body of knowledge that has come to us out of the mists of pre-history and has been passed ... mouth to ear, hand to hand and Brother to Brother ... for over 5000 years.

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<sup>7</sup> Which system I most often refer to as *the underground stream*, in reference to the untainted secret tradition, which still exists today.

<sup>8</sup> Which system I most often refer to as *mainstream* or *popular* occultism. Any school or teaching which exists in the public domain belongs to this corrupted and dysfunctional aspect of the Hermetic tradition. Nevertheless, it is unwise to think of such systems as having no value, where tuition in pure Hermetism is concerned. For this popular realm of occultism is the portico of the secret inner school.

## Three Core Concepts

“Art must faithfully follow Nature and cannot achieve anything useful without her, all practical investigation of Nature undertaken without a preliminary correct knowledge of the universal World Spirit and the created properties of those natural things in which work is done, must needs turn out as foolish and fruitless.”

(Kirchweger - *The Golden Chain of Homer*. 1723)

The subjects we must next consider are the three concepts that lie at the *core* of Hermetic Philosophy, upon which everything the Hermetist believes and does, rests. The first concept that is central to the Hermetic paradigm is that of:

### **1. The existence of a Supreme Being.**

From the beginning Hermetic science has insisted that our entire reality (both seen and unseen) is created and is maintained by a single universal and Supreme Being. In modern times an increasing number of atheists have found themselves attracted to Western occultism. In an attempt at finding a home for themselves in the community of esoteric study many have endeavoured to make their surroundings more comfortable by importing atheist concepts in to the traditional framework and pass them off as Hermetic. It is necessary that any student of Hermetism who desires to take their initiatory journey seriously, understand that the entire dynamic of Hermetic thought, study and practice is founded on the idea that a Supreme Being governs the universe. Philosophies and practices that espouse an atheist view of reality, whatever else they might be, are not Hermetic.

While it might be a relatively reasonable approach to argue the universe is a Godless creation brought about by random accidental events, when basing the evidence on materialism alone.

If we include a realistic view of psychology, the deeper we delve in to that realm the harder it is to sustain an atheist point-of-view.

When considering what an Hermetist might be thinking of when he contemplates the idea of a Supreme Being, we need to be very careful. Many people who are attracted to the study of occult knowledge arrive with a rejection of the Christianised (and anthropomorphic) concepts of Deity already inbuilt – and often cringe at every mention of a *God* that isn't overtly non-Christian, in esoteric teaching. In the purest and truest sense, the Hermetic view of the Supreme Being has virtually nothing to do with the common religious view. Religious concepts in general have little more than a superficial correspondence with serious esoteric philosophy, although the two are not altogether incompatible. The wise Hermetist refrains from considering the form and qualities of the Supreme Being, because he insists that unilluminated humanity – *homo vulgaris* – possesses nothing within its range of thought that can grasp the condition in which the Supreme Being has Its existence. Instead, the wise teach that the Supreme Being can only be known through Its creations, which are the manifestation of Its Will, and therefore tell us something of Its nature.

Hermetists tell us that it is the nature of the Supreme Being to have three primary attributes. First, that Its energy<sup>9</sup> animates every thing and every condition (*omnipotence*). Second, that every thing and every condition is composed of Its substance<sup>10</sup> (*omnipresence*). Third, that every intelligence is Its intelligence<sup>11</sup> (*omniscience*). It is important to recognise and understand that the qualification 'every', describing the above three conditions, means *absolute*. It does not refer to the idea of *most* or any concept less than *completely*. This set of attributes constitutes the most fundamental concept of the nature of the Supreme Being as far as Hermetic Philosophy is concerned. A position of Being, in relation to which, no other thing, process, condition or situation, is greater in any way. There cannot

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<sup>9</sup> The Sulphur Principal.

<sup>10</sup> The Salt Principal.

<sup>11</sup> The Mercury Principal.

exist any thing, process, condition or situation that can act without the Supreme Being having animated it, being the intelligence within it and forming it. There are no exceptions to this rule in the Hermetic view.

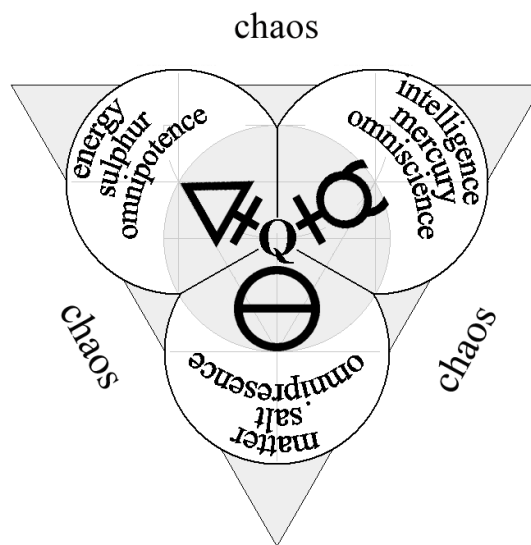


Figure 1: The Triune nature of living systems.

The next, or second important feature of the core concepts of Hermetism concerns the focus of the Supreme Being. Here I speak primarily of the purpose of existence, the existence of the whole of the created universe:

**2. The primary force in the universe is a force we call Will power, or more accurately *Intent*.**

The entire motive for the creation of the universe arises out of the nature of this Intent – the Intent of the Supreme Being. This divine Intention amounts to the Supreme Being’s desire for *Self-realisation through Self-expression*. This Intent-in-action is the

force of evolution itself. It is the evolution of every thing, every condition, every process and every species. In this way we might describe the real nature of evolution as being a growth towards greater self-awareness. This brings us to the Hermetist's third core concept – the third feature of the essential foundation of Hermetism:

**3. The condition we call individual life and awareness is a process of attaining to personal self-realisation ... through self-expression.**

This is the evolution of the Intent of the Supreme Being - its expression through the myriad of *individual* living systems.

When this feature is actually realised by the individual, and then that individual chooses to deliberately align itself with this universal purpose (Intent), Hermetists call the resultant direction of the life of the individual ... *The Great Work*. The student of Hermetic Science who is committed to the discipline of attaining self-realisation, and who is fortunate enough to find himself under the guidance of a capable guide and teacher, is traditionally referred to as an *initiate*. So here we have it, the actual technical reason for becoming an initiate (a student of Hermetism) – a desire to align oneself with the Intention behind the creation of the universe, by deliberately seeking full self-realisation ... *a conscious awareness of the totality of ones being* (spiritual Illumination).

## Initiation and The Great Work

“The entire object of art is the uncovering of the inner faculty of insight and wisdom. The ‘essence of mind which is intrinsically pure’, and the removal of the veils intervening between the mind and dividing it from its hidden divine root.”

(Israel Regardie – *The Philosopher’s Stone*. 1970)

Note: chapter 5,  
paragraph 1, word  
1, ‘heredom’

Covenant conditions between these three Principal concepts being necessary, to justify the corner stone of our philosophy, from the harmonious integration of these principles arises a fourth concept. The fourth essential concept of Hermetic Philosophy is that of the nature of the *Great Work*.

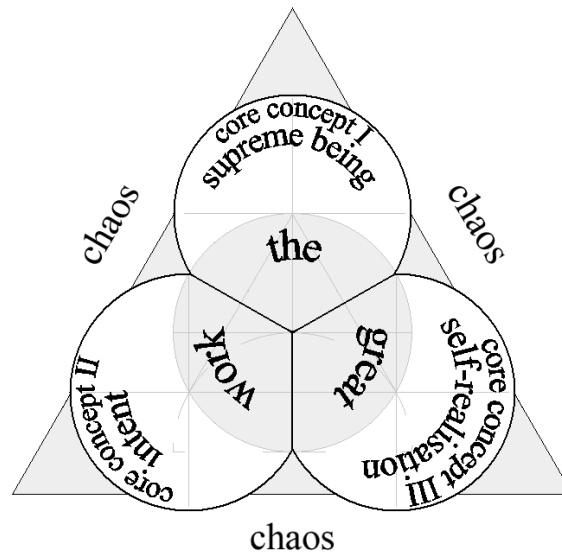


Figure 2: The core concepts

The idea that the one must choose, *of one’s own free will and accord*, to undertake the Great Work, and that it requires a

deliberate effort on the part of the individual, is central to the Philosophy of Hermetic initiation. This fourth concept might be defined as:

**4. The individual's taking personal *responsibility* for re-orientating his life and focusing it upon the goal of spiritual Illumination.**

The heart and soul of Hermetic education is the process of that which is commonly called *initiation into the mysteries*<sup>12</sup>. A more accurate use of the terminology would have us refer to it as *initiation in to the Great Work*. All other material that falls under the banner of the science of Hermes of necessity takes second place in consideration to that of the subject of esoteric initiation. Without the leverage this essential activity provides, the arts of alchemy and Magic, which are the machinery of Hermetism, remain impotent and produce nothing of real, lasting, spiritual or *practical* value.

Although the word initiation is defined as *a new beginning* in any good dictionary, within the mystery tradition it has a somewhat more extensive meaning. It refers to one's beginning a new lifestyle, a lifestyle devoted to walking the path of the full and proper training of a student of the Hermetism. This word is also often used to refer to the procedure that follows a start to that journey. More correctly, though, that procedure itself is that which is technically called the Great Work. This term is likely to have first been used by alchemists to refer to the labour involved in confecting the physical Philosopher's Stone. In a broader sense the term was later used to define the Great Work as the orderly process, from beginning to end, that must be endured on the path of the

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<sup>12</sup> This concept is one that has been greatly abused in mainstream esoteric study. Commonly it is believed that anyone who studies occultism is an initiate of the sacred mysteries, even if at the very least all he has managed to do is read on the subject. It should therefore be understood that the *true* ancient mysteries are not things which can be read, or successfully explained, but must be experienced in order to be understood. That experience *is* the act of initiation, in its purest sense.

deliberate struggle towards attaining spiritual Illumination. The arch-chemist *knows* that the physical Philosopher's Stone is an accurate analogue of the attainment of full spiritual awareness – *homo illuminatus*.

It should be pointed out that the Great Work only refers to such initiatory processes that actually do lead to spiritual Illumination ... as opposed to systems that are based on ideas that purport to, but in reality do not lead to such a state, through some fault or misunderstanding inherent in them, or their professors. Care needs to be taken to reiterate this point, since there are many systems overflowing with students who believe that they are on that path, when in fact experience demonstrates they never were.

Spiritual Illumination itself we might define as:

“The degree of understanding that arises when full conscious awareness *of the totality of ones own being* is attained.”

The main point here being that our crude day-to-day mental condition is defined by a gross lack of understanding of the true nature of reality. This condition stems directly from the fact that we experience life from a point of view that is very much incomplete. The average person (or conventionally learned person) does not have anywhere near all the facts, all the tools, or a full conscious awareness necessary for a complete view, at their immediate disposal. When we attain to a condition that allows us to see and know ourselves completely, then, because we exist as a simulacrum of the Supreme Being, we eventually come to a (*relatively*) complete understanding of the nature of our reality – i.e., spiritual Illumination: *to bring the Light of conscious awareness into that part of ourselves which is obscured by the darkness of unconsciousness*. The special Hermetic techniques designed to effect initiation were created to facilitate this process.

One of the greatest obstacles to progress in the Great Work is a lack of understanding of what the path itself actually requires



from an individual initiate<sup>13</sup>. Further, many desire to take up the task without much more than the most superficial idea of the nature of the goal itself, only to discover once *real* progress is beginning to be made, that at least for the time being they do not now want what they originally set out to obtain.

Once we take the step to commit to the life of a Hermetic initiate any further success in our journey relies on our acceptance, our understanding, and an effective application – of these first four fundamental concepts.

The motives for our approach to dealing with the process of the Great Work are based on these core ideas about the Existence and Nature of the Supreme Being. Sometimes right from the outset, but certainly eventually, every novice struggles with the question of whether or not he can accept these premises as motive for changing his life to the extremes that the Great Work demands. During the early stages of the primary struggle with the initiatory effect this may not be at all obvious to the novice, but every Adept who has overcome the first major hurdle on the path knows the necessary importance of these core concepts. To be objective, though, in respect of the sceptic's view, we can say that at the very least-measure the Hermetic approach to initiation behaves (from the outset), as if our initial premises about the core concepts were true. While this claim does not provide the novice with proof, it does present a reasonable argument for beginning the journey in the first instance.

When any individual reaches that point where he finds himself taking the question of his spiritual emancipation seriously, that question often first takes on two facets ... *is there a God?*, and if there is ... *is there a plan?* For thousands of years non-initiates have struggled with this question, and have almost always come up

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<sup>13</sup> Few Western occultists understand that the mechanism of initiation is inherent in nature, just as the mechanism of germination is inherent in a seed. Most occultists therefore believe (in their arrogance and ignorance), that initiation is something they themselves do to themselves, when in fact it is something that nature does to us once conditions are ideal.

short. In the face of the difficult situation the non-initiate finds himself in, having no tools at his disposal with which to find an answer, the solution to the enigma is actually very easy. If there is no God and therefore no plan, behaving like they both exist will cause no harm. But if God and a plan do exist, behaving like they don't may have dire consequences. Therefore in both cases it is a safer bet to behave like both the Supreme Being **and a plan are** a reality.

Then, what does matter at the end of the day is that the practical techniques used to attain spiritual Illumination, which stem from the *core concept* theory, do assure the kind of progress claimed by the Adepti who have designed, taught and followed these practices for thousands of years. Those who have travelled even a small way along the true path towards spiritual Illumination will often insist that while a rational explanation of the theory and motives for the techniques used, and the desired direction the initiate travels are important, one soon realises that the experience itself reveals a species of knowledge that is in itself ... self-validating. I understand that this type of justification for accepting and putting in to action a major life-changing paradigm is often not at all acceptable to the mind trained in and bias towards common, rationalist, or positivist thinking. I make it quite clear, though, that this work is not begun and continued with the intention of trying to encourage anyone to accept the Hermetic approach to life by providing an argument that might be acceptable to the common rational faculty. The very idea of spiritual Illumination itself is not rational, in the common sense. This is because it belongs to the supra-rational; a process of the higher functions of the mind. Any student of Hermetism who, through the guidance of a competent Adept, has become *intimately* familiar with the structure and dynamic of his own mind, knows how pointless any attempt to appease common reason would be if one were to attempt to justify an Hermetic approach to life. On the contrary, this work is written for the individual who either already accepts the Hermetic point of view, or who, for whatever reason, accepts its basic argument and

therefore desires to come to a greater understanding of what that view might be.

Here we arrive at the crux of my definition of Hermeticism: that it is not simply a body of knowledge, it is a lifestyle. If it were simply a body of knowledge to be learned by rote, then it would be little more than a plaything for scholars, academics and capitalists. As a lifestyle it is something one must immerse oneself in, completely, in order to understand and Master it. In this way real Hermetic education is something of a catch-22 endeavour. One cannot be in a position to prove or disprove the validity of the Hermetic lifestyle without first walking the path of proper Hermetic education ... and in having done so it is then too late ... one becomes the subject of the investigation, and then there is no going back. For once the truth is experienced it cannot be ignored without causing oneself grief. Indeed, a point eventually arrives when the truth cannot be ignored, full stop. “*Aye, there’s the rub*” ... as the bard wrote, and any protestation to the contrary falls on deaf ears. Experience shows that the true path itself defines the true method, and no argument on anyone’s part can change that.

In the field of Hermetic study a person who has decided to commit himself to evolving his awareness in order to be able to grasp a greater truth concerning the nature of reality, learns that this path cannot be travelled without expert guidance (contrary to popular opinion). This factor we might call the fifth core concept:

**5. Effective initiation requires transmission of higher awareness from an initiated Adept to a recipient.**

To be under the tutelage of such a guide is traditionally referred to as having been *initiated in to the sacred mysteries*. Such an initiate is then involved in a special regime of training, designed specifically to ease him towards a state of mind that the Western Hermetic school has traditionally called spiritual Illumination. This is the same condition that is more commonly referred to by the Eastern esoteric school as ... enlightenment.

We should, here, also consider the subject of self-initiation, which concept has arisen and become popular in modern times. Many individuals who declare the validity of this approach to spiritual development insist that a teacher is never (or rarely) necessary. This belief is neither a traditional Hermetic concept, nor is it actually feasible in practical terms. The very mechanics of real esoteric initiation require that the student have someone not only to offer expert instruction and guidance, but also to oversee safety<sup>14</sup> and ensure that direction and momentum are not lost. For, as anyone who has made the journey well knows, there comes a point where every esoteric pilgrim's ability to be objective about his progress is lost, and productive choices cannot be recognised or made. At the same time, in the laboratory tradition, the ability to grasp the necessary solutions to the enigma of the Great Work requires a state of mind that the student does not possess at the outset of the journey. Therefore it should be noted that Hermetic initiation, of necessity, is a teacher-pupil relationship – of the deepest and most meaningful kind.

In Hermetic terms a new student initiate is often referred to as a novice, apprentice or zelator (for example). A person who is in an actual position to facilitate the guidance of a student through the initiatory process (as opposed to someone who simply assumes they are in such a position) is nearly always referred to as an Adept. A true Adept being someone who is an *expert* in all things Hermetic, but who is himself still seeking the ultimate goal of the science. Over and above the Adept is the Master. He is that class of individual who has attained Illumination, and, in the field of alchemy specifically, he is someone who has attained the Philosopher's Stone by his own labour. While a Master too may

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<sup>14</sup> It is a common belief that the process of initiation is entirely a joyful experience. Anyone who has actually walked the path of the real initiatory journey will quickly verify that a large portion of the opening stage of the process is a difficult struggle, by nature very emotionally painful and intellectually confusing.

take on students, his real purpose is to attend to the details of his own part in the divine Intention.

In this way training in an Hermetic system is generally arranged in to three basic Grades, Degrees or Orders of initiation, advancement and attainment. Some more complex systems divide these three main Grades into a larger number of sub-Degrees, but the three-tier system is the most widely recognised.

Today, the subjects that might be taught to a student in any Hermetic system vary from school to school, and amongst Adepts who work as solo practitioners. This really depends largely on where the particular source of instruction places its emphasis. Some schools or teachers are more mystically<sup>15</sup> inclined, some more concerned with Magic, or alchemy, or qabala or maybe simply ritual, for example. What ever format any Hermetic education might take, there is no argument that an important focus of any classic system of training must be the initiatory process, which is specifically designed to guide the student through an acceleration of his mental evolution and result in a vastly expanded awareness. While many sources of Hermetic education claim to offer such a system, in *most* cases their claims are based on misconceptions and their skill in effecting Hermetic initiation in their students is non-existent. What in fact happens in most mainstream schools is simply a formal passing on of information that today can be gleaned, without anyone's help, from any number of very good publications available at any good esoteric bookseller. Without the inclusion of the essential initiatory journey in the serious study of Hermetic science, all we have left is ceremonial drama for the drama's sake, an intellectual curiosity, and often a fascination with *attempting* to work Magic for personal gain, or a hobbyist approach to laboratory

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<sup>15</sup> In Western occultism a distinction is made between mysticism and occultism as two disciplines at opposite ends of the scale. Mysticism is defined as a search for union with God and an end to the cycle of incarnation. Occultism is defined as a concern for using esoteric means for dealing with the issues of physical existence. The Western tradition is considered primarily occult, and the Eastern, mystical.

alchemy. All four of which activities soon prove impotent because they lack the active principle that breathes life into the enterprise – an Illuminated point-of-view – a view that can only be arrived at by successful initiation.

## Hermetic Initiation (Deeper Still)

*“Hierous: You cannot pass by me [...] until you have learned my name.*

*Hegemon: You are darkness in the place of darkness, questioning the seekers of light.”*

*(A.E. Waite – 0°=0° Holy Order of the G.:.D.: 1900)*

Possess a good grasp of the foregoing concepts and you will have little difficulty in recognising the importance of that which follows. Having briefly considered the problems that the modern Western tradition experiences where the subject of practical results in esoteric work are concerned, we would be remiss to not take a closer look at the issue of initiation, the inaccuracies and difficulties inherent in its execution. I feel it important to state firstly, that as with many facets of esoteric training the real nature of initiation is grossly misunderstood by the bulk of individuals who consider themselves to be on the initiatory journey (or to have completed it). As with many other aspects of Western occult study and training the events that are most often *claimed* to act as signposts on the road of initiatory progress are nothing more than superficial or unimportant occurrences of little or no significance. If this were not the case persons who claim advanced stages of initiatory achievement would display a vastly greater degree of evolved character and spiritual or Magical attainment and skill than they almost always do. I have rarely come across a student of the Western mysteries today who does not look at those claiming (or intimating) advanced initiation and question just what it is about their behaviour and condition that might reflect such an achievement. But because it is customary to consider it rude or improper to question such claims, even behind closed doors, no matter how politely, it is possible for virtually anybody to allege high initiation without the embarrassment of being challenged.

I believe one of the problems that enables this situation to exist and to continue is found in the fact that in the Western tradition explanations of just what advanced initiation really is, and what character traits an advanced Adept or a Master of Hermetism should possess, are routinely and unnecessarily vague. Therefore, while we may look at an individual who claims such an achievement, but who does not in fact possess it, and feel that something is obviously out of place, we rarely have enough knowledge to put those feelings into order so that we might formulate a reasonable argument on the issue. So let us attempt to repair that situation right here.

First we must remember that in the Western tradition there are basically two initiatory streams - alchemy and Magic. So we can say that any person who claims to be an initiate (in the *classic* sense), is being trained in and is studying either laboratory alchemy (and/or internal alchemy), or is involved in one of the recognised forms in which Western Magic expresses itself. The initiatory process is a natural mechanism, similar (analogically) to the process that is triggered when the seed of a plant germinates. As soon as the seed or the initiate are exposed to the right conditions, in the right *season*, latent natural laws and mechanisms that govern the germination or initiatory process suddenly spring to life. Therefore, whether we follow a Magical path or an alchemical one, essentially the initiatory mechanism that is coaxed into life by the initiator is the same in both streams. The only thing that differs is the environment under which the process is awakened<sup>16</sup>, and the means used to cause the awakening and to facilitate the advancement of the process.

In both situations, the Magical and the alchemic, ideally the process begins with a study of the theory of Western esoterica. That should cover the subject of the Hermetic world-view and of Hermetic philosophy, first. This should involve an explanation of

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<sup>16</sup> The environments in which Magic or alchemy are taught and learned are in practical terms quite different. The alchemist invariably learns his craft in a laboratory, and the mage in a temple or ritual setting.



the mechanics of initiation, and its relationship to the practice of Magic and/or alchemy. This entire introduction process is almost always absent from modern popular training. Then come the theoretic principles of the *practice* of either Magic or alchemy (or both). The theoretical study is often undertaken alone today, as books on the subject are plentiful and openly available. Most students of the esoteric sciences will start their initiatory journey by reading everything they can gain access to on the subject of occultism in general, then increasingly on that stream that they feel most drawn to specifically. Unfortunately unguided study of such theory means that in most cases by the time an aspirant finds a teacher, that teacher must first attend to correcting the many errors the student has picked up from his inevitable reading of worthless publications, tinkering with various questionable practices and the adoption of erroneous concepts from other novice aspirants.

It is also often the case that a decision to adhere more closely to one of the two streams in particular is not made until the student finds a teacher, and is therefore influenced by the teacher's personal orientation. Finding a teacher, or a living source of instruction, being the next step in the process. Any student who takes study seriously will quickly realise that doing so on one's own will only serve to aid in the achievement of a limited understanding and experience, and the assumption of much confusion. Since a great deal of distrust exists in esoteric circles where the question of teachers' qualifications are concerned, most modern students opt for joining an esoteric school such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, or the Philosophers of Nature for example. By this means they manage to keep their tuition on an impersonal level, while feeling that they are part of something bigger and hopefully meaningful. In so doing it will then often take the aspirant a number of years, and with some individuals most of the rest of their esoteric career, to realise that such schools are in fact more often than not of little more help than reading alone had been. The difficulty of finding a good teacher is probably one of the most frustrating tasks for the novice student. So

frustrating that I think it likely that the wishful institution of self initiation was born as a response to those who simply gave up trying. It is a curious factor in the teacher hunting game that the student rarely considers as part of the formula of success something that a good teacher always recognises, the question of his own suitability for the task. The reality is that good teachers are just as rare as good students. Any failure to complete the Great Work is equally likely to be a product of an inability to learn as it might be an inability to teach. Most students, on the contrary, prefer to believe that simply because they desire esoteric training that this means they are suited for it. Any real Adept will tell you that experience proves that this is only true in about 1% of cases.

The main attraction of institutional study eventually proves to be either the ability to partake in group ritual (for students of Magic), or the attendance of group laboratory workshops, for students of alchemy. The discipline of adhering to an organised and orderly (and hopefully 'proven') path of study, and the benefits of social contact with other like-minded individuals being equally attractive to some students.

By far the most widely used method in schools of Magic, for effecting the process of initiation, is the system of "ritual degrees" (as they are often called). The theory as to how these rituals can effect initiation is somewhat complex, a proper understanding of which requires a careful study of esoteric psychology (a discussion of which is not the purpose of this book). Nevertheless the basics are not too difficult to grasp. First the student is taught to memorise a complex system of symbols and their meanings, the body of which make up that which is often referred to as the Magical language. Adept occultists learned millennia ago that the unconscious mind, which contains our Magical potential, communicates with the conscious mind by means of symbolism. The establishment and maintenance of an effective two-way communication between the conscious and unconscious minds being the essential foundation of Magical practice. The unconscious adopts a system of symbols naturally, during the course of an

individual's life, and we experience our own personal symbol language in our dreams. Mages also discovered that a person could be taught a synthetic esoteric symbol-language, and the unconscious would slowly adopt it to use as a basis of a communication of esoteric concepts to the waking mind. Ritual Magic is essentially a process of taking an empty work space and saturating it with symbols directly associated with the goal of the Magical act itself. In personal ritual that one might perform at home alone, this dynamic is often quite a simple affair. In group ritual designed to either start or help progress the initiatory experience (as part of training), the symbol systems used and the way in which they are used are often very complex. Essentially the initiation ritual is an esoteric drama played out in a series of acts, each act being a 'degree' in the initiatory journey, performed in a series over a period of a number of years. The student undergoing such an initiation process plays the role of the central character in the drama. The story that he finds himself the focus of is most often the story of some mythological esoteric hero who is depicted, allegorically, as travelling the path of initiation. At the core of this drama the symbolism of the initiatory temple, in which the event is being enacted, is describing to the unconscious mind by means of the Magical language, a set of instructions that will catalyse the internal changes required to ease the initiate down the road of the initiatory process<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, as the initiate takes each degree and the story unfolds in serial fashion, he should experience in his life, during the intervening periods between the degrees, *significant* psycho-spiritual changes. Each successive degree working only being entered-in upon once the tutor is satisfied that the psycho-spiritual effects of the previous degree have been activated in the psyche of the initiate, and successfully worked through.

The picture I have just painted is of course an ideal situation. In reality either the ritual system claiming to catalyse an initiatory effect is all too often designed wrongly and does not actually work.

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<sup>17</sup> This methodology is essentially an advanced form of hypnotic suggestion.

Or the people who 'work' the rituals do not have the necessary knowledge or skill to make what would otherwise be an effective system, effective (i.e. they were not properly initiated themselves). Today in the Western tradition usually both situations are the problem. I believe this accurately describes the greater part of systems that are thought to represent the cutting edge of Hermetic education today ... in the main stream.

Unfortunately the psychology of initiation is such a technically complicated subject, and so little is known about it in the main stream, that both new students and the governing authorities over popular initiatory systems do not have the qualifications that would allow them to discern between a working system and an impotent one. Under these conditions the only way most students discover the degree of effectiveness of any particular system, or its lack thereof, is by actually working through it. To everyone's great disappointment it can take many years before a student comes to realise that the system has not done what it advertises. Because this state of affairs demonstrates the rule rather than the exception in esoteric training, a strange attitude has developed over the last 200 years in the mainstream esoteric community that has seen everyone lowering their standards concerning what they expect of initiation, and what they claim to be the acceptable indicators of forward progress along the way.

There is another more effective less frequently used approach in Magical and internal-chemical initiatory circles though. This approach is the one-on-one method of teaching, requiring a specific teacher to train an individual (or a small number of individuals at the same time), personally. The technique used leans more heavily on practical exercises that are basically meditations designed to have the same effect as the group ritual approach. The main difference between the group approach, as opposed to the one-on-one style of training, is that with the former method a number of people and a larger system impose an effect upon the student, *ideally* making progress easier. With the latter system the student must also master ancillary techniques that will re-enforce his will

power so that he will have the strength to call up and control those forces inside himself that will allow initiation to have a positive affect on him. This approach is by far the more difficult as it requires greater courage, soul maturity and often a more intelligent and enthusiastic student.

One of the curious developments of the one-on-one approach to initiation is that attempts have been made to adapt its methods to create a self-initiation system. This largely involves a student *reading* the instructions that used to form part of the teacher-pupil oral tradition and apply them to himself using his personal judgement as to how best to manage his development. This of course is nothing more than the blind leading the blind, and proves to rarely (if ever) work, for reasons we will consider in a moment.

So much for the basics of the Magician's approach to initiation. The proper *alchemical* method of approach is very different. Firstly, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the *mainstream* alchemical tradition has not really owned its own technique for initiation (in historic memory). This of course would be hotly disputed by esoteric alchemists, who would then rattle off a description of any number of approaches to spiritual emancipation that have been used down through the ages by alchemists and pseudo-alchemists. Nevertheless any learned student of Hermetism would immediately recognise that these various systems are largely either adopted from Magical training methods, 'are' Magical methods, or are methods taken from Eastern approaches that have no direct connection with Western laboratory alchemy (or often with alchemy in general). Making this point is of course not meant to denigrate these various methods. They are in their own right either worthy approaches to initiation, or not, despite any assumed or actual relationship they may have with the alchemical tradition. The question must arise though: why practice lab alchemy at all if you are going to use an initiatory process from another system? *Pure* Alchemy itself possesses a system of initiation native to its own stream, but which is so misunderstood, unknown or out of reach of the average student, that it is rarely given proper

consideration. That native process is founded on the ingestion of initiatory (alchemical) medications, particularly the so-called Elixir of Life<sup>18</sup>.

Where the student mage programs his mind with the symbols of the Magic language through ritual, to trigger off and advance initiation, the alchemist triggers that process by ingesting a special medicinal preparation which has profound psycho-somatic consequences.

The central problem with this alchemical approach, as with the reality of the Magical method, is that because the mainstream alchemical tradition does not possess or provide an effective education in esoteric psychology, any attempt at this medicinal approach to initiation is just as likely to breed failure - the reason for which we shall look at now.

What actually happens to someone who is exposed to a proper effective initiatory training in the Western Hermetic tradition? Such an explanation is best given with reference to the one-on-one approach, since its technique and the reactions it elicits are far more obvious than in the vastly more subtle and complex ritual-group approach. Providing the student has had a good education in the basic theory and philosophy of initiation, the teacher can proceed to instructing him in the practical exercises peculiar to the system he teaches. As I have mentioned elsewhere, in the Western tradition this process is more likely than not going to involve a system of visualisation exercises as the core of the key method. The foundation concept here is that the human psycho-spiritual condition (*homo vulgaris*) exists as a binary system. That is, the unenlightened individual is composed of a conscious waking state of awareness and an unconscious sleep-type state. The student is also male or female externally and the opposite gender exists internally. These two binaries (to over simplify the matter) are often called the King and Queen by alchemists<sup>19</sup> and by qabalists. The path of initiation is described (often using metaphor or analogy) as

<sup>18</sup> Although there are a number of preparations which fall under this category.

<sup>19</sup> See figure 6 on page 'x'

being one where the conscious-unconscious and the male-female binaries are being harmonized and made homogeneous – the alchemist's *chymical wedding* and the mage's *mystic marriage*. The result is a new state of awareness that is referred to as the *rebis* by alchemists<sup>20</sup>, or the *Higher Genius* by Magicians. The condition is the same in both systems – spiritual Illumination.

The binary faculty's *conscious-unconscious* and *male-female*, exist in antipathy to each other in every day human life. That is, they desire to maintain their individuality and avoid integration in order to keep the individual's consciousness immersed in physical life. It is entirely the task of the initiator to expose the initiate to forces that will turn the attitude of the poles of these binaries 180 degrees in the opposite direction to that which they exist in, in the average human. There are all kinds of techniques for carrying this out, but the effects these techniques have are always the same – if the techniques work, and are taught and practiced properly.

At the start of the journey the conscious awareness (the part of the mind that deals with external life) is turned inward, towards the unconscious. Instead of focusing on the dynamics and structure of the outer world, it is taught to look at the inner world and to realise how that inner world functions. Esoteric alchemists refer to this process as *our* crude matter (*physical* awareness), being immersed in *our* sea (the ocean of the unconscious). At first this is a fun exercise and most students jump into it head-first with a good deal of enthusiasm. Little do they suspect, though, what this activity is doing to their mind behind the scenes. If they had already carried out the manual labour (laboratory process), and their teacher had drawn their attention to the analogous effect in the lab, they would have already had some idea of what to expect. Immersion of the waking attention in to the sleeping mind causes the sleeping or unconscious mind (the 'waters'), to begin to exert a decomposing effect on the waking mind.

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<sup>20</sup> See figure 11 on page 'x'

The student is guided through a process of deep self introspection, which is essentially causing him to recognise that the *he*, which he believed to be a singular individual in his every day life, is in fact revealed under the surface to be composed of a number of distinct intelligences, functions and structures. These are the *fishes* which the alchemist knows swim in his *philosophic* sea. Again, discovering the nature of the various pieces of mental software that are responsible for governing his every day functions is exciting at first. A time then arrives, sooner or later, where the awareness of self, the ego or individual personality, begins to feel the increasing effect of the control of the inner hidden self (the unconscious) over the outer self. As this feeling increases the ego begins to feel uncomfortable. Soon discomfort develops in to a mild fear. Fear then develops in to anxiety, and if the process is allowed to continue along its natural path, a mild paranoia begins to surface.

The condition within the unconscious which is responsible for precipitating this fear and paranoia is that which alchemists call the 'blackening' or the 'putrefaction' of their matter. It is the softening and digestion of the philosophic seed that we allegorically know as the germination of the Tree of Life. It is the beginning of the death of the crude matter (*homo vulgaris*) of the Philosopher's Stone (*homo illuminatus*), the start of that which Magicians and mystics refer to as the *dark night of the soul*.

"Our work begins in darkness and death," the old alchemists rightfully insisted.

This is the killing-off of the old *human* personality, and the start of laying a fertile foundation for the germination of the new supra-human personality.

This condition is defined by two main characteristics in the initiate's life (1) an increasing fear, of unknown origin, and (2) irrational thinking and behaviour<sup>21</sup>. This stage of the process is the

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<sup>21</sup> This is the advanced neurosis of the initiate, similar in many ways to the clinical neurosis of conventional abnormal psychology, but differing in key essential characteristics. It is deliberately catalysed (rather than being a result of trauma), and then guided beyond the reaches of the exoteric understanding of the



first obstacle that the initiate must overcome. It is an obstacle that nature puts in his way to test his courage and his commitment ... in short, his preparedness for what is about to follow.

Any student of the occult who attempts to reach this stage alone (by so-called self-initiation) will eventually discover that without an experienced guide this fear and irrational behaviour will act as an impenetrable barrier to any further progress. Without the calm, rational and experienced help of an **expert** teacher the student at this point is incapable of recognising what is required to continue forward, or to be able to think clearly about the experiences he is now exposed to. In the ocean of discomfort and uncertainty that the initiate in *the black stage* becomes immersed in, the teacher must act as the anchor of reason and the navigator over the dark Hermetic sea, a much needed source of encouragement and direction. It is because of this stage of the journey, *which is absolutely impossible to avoid*, that all true initiates know that the requirement of an experienced and skilled teacher is an absolute necessity. This special relationship is that which is **alluded** to when reference to Hermetic Apostolic Succession – or *the ancient chain of initiation*, is mentioned.

As this state unfolds and advances the student is finally led to a point where the very core and nature of his fear and his irrational behaviour is exposed before his very eyes. As this accomplishment nears, even under the guidance of a skilled Adept, without the requisite courage or commitment 90 percent of students abandon the process out of concern for their sanity, or their very lives<sup>ii</sup>. Contrary to that which popular opinion often insists, this is the cold hard fact of the beginning of the true process of initiation. No matter what the novice initiate believes about his attitude towards a desire to undergo initiation, when he reaches the point where his worst fears stare him in the face, the last thing he wants to do is continue. The literal and very real personification of this fear is that which Hermetic Adepts, who are intimately familiar with the human condition in to a state that at present is solely the domain of Adept initiates (in the legendary sense of the concept).

*realities* of initiation, call '*the dweller upon the threshold*'. This spectre of fear is the Jungian shadow, that which we personally refuse to acknowledge about life, the unresolved contradictions within us, and outright raw fear of the unknown that lurks in our unconscious. No mere intellectual grasp of the nature of the *dweller* can ever prepare us for our meeting with it at the Gate to the Mysteries. As it approaches us out of the darkness of the ages, if we manage to overcome our desire to flee, our first experience of this intelligence is one that combines a mixture of awe, incapacity and panic. It is a condition of mind that the ancient alchemists described as ... *black, blacker than the blackest pitch*.

After having managed through the skill and knowledge of the initiator to confront the *dweller upon the threshold*, and having survived any desire to give up the struggle for Illumination, because of its powerful effect on our lives, we must then summon the courage to face that spectre again and again until we have uncovered its true nature and received from it the keys that open the Gate at the Threshold to the true path to full spiritual emancipation. Any person who believes that such a task is possible without an experienced and skilled teacher has no understanding of the literal truth and unavoidability of the process I have above described<sup>22</sup>. They will never drive fear and ignorance from their heart and never truly deserve the title of Hermetic initiate. For successfully traversing this dark territory of the soul is, as any learned alchemist knows, the first and necessary step in the true Great Work.

At the same time it is a process that requires such a degree of skill to deal with that those individuals in the Hermetic tradition who at any time actually possess the ability to be initiators would almost not outnumber the fingers on your hands. This skill is so rare

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<sup>22</sup> Any aspirant to Hermetic initiation who reads this passage and decides that it is probably only a description of one approach, and that there must be other easier methods, is wholly mistaken. '*The path is singular, and the entrance way narrow, that would lead into the temple of the ancient mysteries*' is the oft repeated axiom. In other words, at this point of the journey there is only one way, and it is uncompromising.

that I have only once come across an accurate indepth explanation of a personal experience of this first obstacle in the Western esoteric literature of the last 350 years<sup>iii</sup>. One of the reasons for this is that those who have managed to successfully pass this waypoint find themselves, by virtue of the knowledge and experience they now possess, to have travelled beyond the pale of popular occultism in to the outer reaches of the underground stream – where silence is observed because its value is understood, not because it is solicited.

Having defined the essential nature of Hermetism, and the proper approach to it, we should now look at definitions of its two main branches – that is of alchemy and Magic (theurgy or thaumaturgy).

## Alchemy

“Our stone is one, one medicine, to which we add nothing, from which we take nothing away, only removing that which is superfluous.”

(Jabir ibn Hayyan. 721-815)

The depths of the nature of initiation considered, we should now turn our attention to the discipline that was responsible for discovering and categorising the mechanics and laws of the process. In considering the origin of Hermetic philosophy, tradition tells us that the principles upon which Hermetism is based stem from an understanding of nature's mechanisms. Therefore the ancients taught that alchemy (which studies these natural processes), is the mother of all arts and sciences. For this reason alchemy takes precedence over Magic when considering the two main branches of Hermetic study. Magic itself being founded upon alchemical principles. For the same reason, when seeking to discover and understand the basic principles of Hermetism our primary reference must be alchemical lore.

Alchemy itself covers two fields of activity. First we have laboratory alchemy (also known as *the manual labour*), which focuses on the study and manipulation of physical materials. If we were to describe laboratory alchemy in modern terms we might say it roughly combines the disciplines of physics, chemistry, botany and biology, viewed and practiced as a single discipline. Then we have inner or *spiritual* alchemy, as it is often called. It deals with the evolutionary forces that arise from our internal reality. Again, the closest concept in modern terms that we could relate to inner alchemy would be the discipline of psychology. But, *esoteric* (alchemio-magical) psychology takes in to consideration conditions and functions at a higher level of the mind than are presently recognised by conventional psychology.

Note: chapter 7,  
paragraph 1, word 36  
'of'

Laboratory alchemy teaches the student to apply the rules of esoteric chemistry (which are based on the chemical processes of nature), to vegetable and mineral substances (and less frequently today with animal substances). This provides an understanding of how super-natural forces and laws operate in and through matter and physical conditions. In this way laboratory alchemy serves as a *model* of how hidden aspects of natural law operate both in our environment and in ourselves.

The long-term motive for practicing laboratory alchemy is to obtain the Philosopher's Stone – a physical mineral substance that the alchemist confects in his laboratory (with great difficulty). This Stone has three uses, which are the three (potential) goals of alchemy. Firstly, the Stone can transmute base metals in to noble metals, and convert base minerals in to precious gems. The physical act of transmutation proves something of a spiritual nature that only the experienced alchemist can appreciate<sup>23</sup>. Then, with such wealth at his disposal the alchemist can live independently, finance his further research and perform generous charitable acts<sup>24</sup>. Secondly, the Stone is the source of the Elixir Vitæ, or Elixir of Life. This medicine preserves one's health, cures all disease and extends the alchemist's longevity to very extreme limits. The Elixir Vitæ is also the source of the third goal, attainment of spiritual Illumination. But this third goal is not as easily obtained as most believe, or would hope. If one were to ingest the great Elixir without proper training in the theory of spiritual emancipation, and without special psychological preparation, insanity or fatal consequences may ensue, not Illumination, as a result ... to which a number of historic accounts attest.

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<sup>23</sup> That which can be done outwardly, can also be done inwardly, since both realities are governed by the same laws.

<sup>24</sup> The morality of this very mundane financial aspect of the alchemists work is found in the teaching that the Great Work is so important in the scheme of human endeavour that the creator of the universe provided a built-in support system for any Adept who would be fortunate enough to complete the first stage of the work (obtaining the Stone).

It is this aspect of the alchemical journey that requires the internal work, esoteric psychology, become an essential study for the student of the manual labour who nears success. This is the rarest, most secretive and by far the least understood aspect of alchemical training. It remains secretive partly because knowledge of this aspect of the art has been almost completely lost to the outer esoteric community, partly because of the great problems associated with teaching this facet of the work. Things have become so confused concerning the inner work of alchemy that most students of the art are no longer aware that the Elixir is the actual initiator and source of the true Master laboratory Alchemist's Illumination. Instead, following the lead of the Magical current of Hermetic teaching, most students of alchemy turn to occult exercises that are taught alongside the alchemical path, or even outside of its sphere, as a means to the inner goal. Similarly, while this is not strictly the alchemist's proper approach to awakening his higher awareness (although it is quite traditional), it is most important for the aspiring alchemical initiate to receive the kind of esoteric training that will prepare him for the shock that ingesting the Elixir will surely have ... if he is fortunate enough to be counted amongst the few who have found themselves in that position.

## Magic

“With his ordinary understanding, man cannot understand the revelation of mysteries. All that I am about to reveal to you can be revealed only to the Masters, who know how to keep the balance because they have been initiated.”

(Anon - *The Zohar, or Book of Splendour*. Pre-1300)

Keys have for centuries been used as symbols for the secret techniques used by skilled initiators to effect the methods of the Great Work. There is little doubt that these symbols and the techniques they represent have been the most artfully made use of within the *Magical* current of the Western tradition.

It can be said that Magic is that science which deals with the psycho-spiritual side of our reality. In modern layman’s terms we could say that Magic is a kind of esoteric (occult) psychology, and therefore has much in common with internal alchemy<sup>25</sup>. I have heard this hotly argued against, on the basis that the Magician desires to manipulate physical conditions. But there are two fundamental errors in that view. Firstly, in order to be able to use Magic one must first discipline the mind, and that requires years of special psychological training. Secondly, any experienced Adept knows by experience that *all is mind*<sup>26</sup>.

While some of the mysterious functions of the mind that make Magic possible can be exploited by any uninitiated person, the main rule here is that before the mind can reliably and substantially produce a Magical effect, the student must first be initiated. At the same time it is known that in order to make safe and accurate use of

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<sup>25</sup> This relationship can be confusing. When Magicians apply initiatory techniques to attain Magic power, they are practicing internal alchemy. But in its specific use as the means of affecting our reality in miraculous ways, Magic is then applying an aspect of psychology that is strictly in its own category – *Magic*.

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed explanation of this concept refer to the *Kybalion*. It should be noted that according to this concept even the laws of laboratory alchemy are a sub-set of the laws of (divine) psychology.

such mental powers a certain amount of accurate and indepth theory concerning the machinery of Magic, and of the true nature of reality, must be learned and understood. To affect one's circumstances (or someone else's) via Magic is one thing, but to know enough about the nature of reality so as *to ensure such effects do not bring about problematic consequences* is something else altogether. Such knowledge is very difficult to discover, and is only found in possession of the most advanced Adepti. The bad reputation that occultism in general enjoys today as much as it did in past times is due almost entirely to the abuse of this idea ... which I labour so much, here, to make clear.

Where the vast majority of occultists in the West are concerned, using Magic in order to manipulate things and situations is all they are interested in. Understanding the *how* and the *why* rarely enters in to the equation. For the more mature student their primary or only interest is found in the Great Work, the search for spiritual Illumination. Such individuals are not as much interested in turning their Magic skill on to objects in their environment, or to gain control over external conditions, as they are of turning Magic in on themselves, in order to gain control over their own nature. This is the highest and best goal of Hermetism.

There are a number of approaches to the study and practice of Hermetic Magic, some traditional, some not so, others more creative and eclectic. Magic, as a discipline, requires the broadest range of study of esoteric subjects amongst all of the Hermetic sciences. The average Western magus is expected to become an expert in astrology, divination, talismanic Magic, healing, clairvoyance, qabala, angel and demonology, ritual evocation and invocation. Traditionally, formalized ritual has always been the central theme of Hermetic Magic, upon which all the other subjects of study are brought to bear. The most extreme of examples of ritual Magic is used in some of the more advanced mainstream Hermetic schools as a medium to transmit key information while at the same time directing Magical forces to ease the aspirant further along the initiatory path – as I have said previously.



At the end of the day, once the art of Magic has been mastered, the purpose in its practice is not to satisfy the control issues or greed of the magus, but to provide a channel through which the divine will can accomplish its intention, outside of conventional means.

These simple, essential concepts about the nature of Hermetism, how it is taught and studied, its motives and goals, have followed the above format with little variation for thousands of years. How this long standing tradition came about, and how it has developed down through the centuries, we shall now consider.

## The Origins and Development Of Hermetic Thought

“The powers belonging to form are called *occult* powers, because their causes are hidden; that is to say, even the sharpest intellect cannot thoroughly conceive of their nature, and what the philosophers know about them they have learned rather by observation and experience, than by intellectual reasoning.”

(Cornelius Agrippa<sup>iv</sup>. 1486-1535)

It is probably most productive to think of the body of knowledge that we refer to as Hermetic philosophy as a collection of ideas about the true nature of reality. It is generally agreed that these ideas focus primarily on explaining the enigmas of:

1. The nature of the Supreme Being and Its created universe,
2. The (esoteric) nature of humanity, and
3. The relationship between the Supreme Being and humanity.

For the sake of argument we should start by considering the possibility that at some point in a vastly distant period of pre-history some human, or group of humans, discovered or were taught a very accurate knowledge of the answers to these riddles. The question of how they might have discovered this knowledge is an interesting one, but not really important here. What we desire to know is, are the claims that these questions were answered really justified? At the end of the day, alongside that messy struggle every initiate undertakes on his path to Illumination, this is the ever-burning question that remains at the forefront of his or her motivation.

That this claim and its body of knowledge have come to us out of the mists of prehistory is without question. There are significant signs of its theory and practice scattered through the

artefacts of several ancient cultures, reaching back to the earliest historic records. At that point in time, which academia dates at around six and a half thousand years ago, it is agreed that all the basic requirements for civilization already existed in a relatively well-developed form. Written language, organised religion, military expertise, political organization, urban culture, industry and so-forth were well established. This means that at some point before extent records of history there existed some kind of educating and civilizing movement with a degree of skill that modern learned opinion agrees is surprising. A system of education and civilizing influence that is as yet of unproven origin to the conventional academic community.

The Priesthoods of ancient Egypt and Sumer, who were in their day the guardians of scientific knowledge and education, insist that they had preserved accurate scientific and historic records stretching far back into pre-history. These records, we are encouraged to believe from surviving accounts, teach that the condition of civilisation at the dawn of the first Egyptian dynasty (circa: 3500 BCE) was the decrepit remains of a once much more advanced culture. In the language of that period the foremost authoritative Priesthood of ancient Egypt maintained records of their Regents which claim a lineage stretching back more than 30,000 years. These records state that there had once ruled over Egypt a god whom they called (amongst other titles) Tehuti. In later history this god was called Thoth. Later still the Greeks produced their own form of him that they referred to as Hermes. This god-king, the Egyptians insisted, was the source of humanities knowledge of language, civilisation and science ... especially the science of Magic.

Exactly what we should understand by the term *god* (that is, *Neter* in Egyptian), is an important concept to grasp if we are to avoid confusion and possess any accurate idea at all about who this *Thoth* character might have been. It is a relatively well-established concept today, by those who make it their business to study psychology, mythology and comparative religion that the term

*Neter* refers to that which Jungian psychologists recognise as an *archetype of the collective unconscious*<sup>27</sup>. In other words, the common gods of ancient religion were symbols representing powerful patterns that exist in the collective mind of the human race. Modern psychology recognises that we all express some degree of the power of these archetypes, but that at certain times and places individual humans are born and live in whom these archetypal patterns are very pronounced. In other words, on occasion we find persons who express the powers of these *Neters* so extremely that they seem to become the very embodiment of extraordinary abilities in human nature – such as in music, art, mathematics, language, technology, or in the case we are examining here *Magic* (a knowledge of and skill in the area of little known powers of the mind).

In this way we can hypothesize that Thoth, for example, was some individual who somewhere around 12,000 BCE (as esoteric history would have it) embodied the incarnation of the psycho-spiritual archetype of science, Magic and a civilizing influence.

Again, how accurate this view might be is really not important. In presenting this idea my intention is only to aid the reader in forming a picture in their mind of the way that the initiated members of the Priesthoods of the two key cultures we are concerned with here viewed the concept of a god. In this way we set the scene, and start our journey in to the world of the history of the secret tradition, from its alleged beginnings.

So, when the Priests of ancient Sumer and Egypt taught that a god instructed humanity in language and science (for example), it is highly likely that they meant by that idea that someone had access to a part of the collective unconscious where information about the true character of the hidden laws and machinery of nature could be gleaned. The Egyptians called initiates who could do this *god-men*.

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<sup>27</sup> The subject of unconscious archetypes is far too immense to cover in this work. It is suggested the reader seek out a more complete understanding of this concept in authoritative works on the subject that are very readily available elsewhere.

This particular god-man was known as *Thoth* – a person in whom the archetype of Magic was incarnate.

In attempting to trace the origins of Hermetic Science, this really is the earliest hint of a place in time where we can begin our story ... no matter how fantastic that story might seem. Unusual esoteric opinions aside, we feel it is completely reasonable to accept that the first ideas that are basic to Hermetic thought came to us out of some unknown pre-historic teaching. Therefore, that the accumulation of the essential ideas that formed the basis of the body of later Hermetic knowledge are much older than 6500 years. At the same time I feel it is safe to say that whoever was responsible for discovering these ideas and tying them together into a single body of knowledge made a huge impact on early human civilisation – an impact that modern academia still cannot grasp. Whoever and whatever Thoth was, it is therefore understandable that his status was exalted to such extremes in legend.

It should by now be obvious that the term Hermetic was applied as an appellation to this body of knowledge on the basis that Hermes was the Greek title for the archetype that the Egyptians called Thoth. But the story of Thoth-Hermes, as father of this science, is not that simple. While the mythology of the god-king is the oldest story concerning the origins of Hermetic thought, it is by far not the only, nor possibly the most significant story. From much later in history come legends of various persons who were either referred to as Hermes, or who were said to possess the same or very similar attributes, in various other cultures, and were thereafter allied in legend with the original Thoth-Hermes in some way. Among the most important of these later characters was *Hermes Trismegistus* – or, the thrice-great Hermes (as the title suggests). Said to be thrice great because he possessed knowledge of the triple-faceted wisdom of the universal science. Much speculation has been entered in to concerning just who this later individual might have been, and when he might have lived. Legends and tradition have left us no certain ideas about this matter. Some say he was a King, others that he was the Old Testament Moses, still others

that he lived before the great flood, etc, etc. What we do know is that no reliable sources identify him directly with the original Greco-Egyptian Thoth-Hermes. Indeed most historic commentaries on *Hermes Trismegistus* suggest he lived much later, possibly in the early millennia of recorded history (around 2500 BCE) and anywhere up to about 500 BCE. Why this later individual is referred as Hermes is also not really known. It is assumed that along with a small number of other legendary individuals of varying degrees of importance in the same category, he espoused a philosophy and practices that were classic ancient Hermetism in its purest sense. In such a case the collection of individuals who carry the title Hermes (or a related appellation), or who are placed in that same genre with equal status, are often spoken of simply as being highly significant accomplished initiates in the Hermetic stream, at various times and places in history. Technically, envoys of the underground stream of Hermetic thought and practice.

There is one very important factor above all else that is attributed to the specific legendary character Hermes Trismegistus, though. He is credited with having used his advanced knowledge of laboratory alchemy to make a tablet from the precious gem, Emerald. On this tablet he inscribed in a form of verse the fundamental principles ... the basic formula ... of the universal science. This tablet is known as the Emerald tablet of Hermes (funnily enough) and is, without argument, considered the single most important (conceptual) artefact and authority concerning the nature of Hermetic thought in existence. We shall come back to this subject in detail, later.

So, we have suggested that the origin of the teaching of Hermetic thought is hidden in prehistoric legend, and thus it is unlikely that we will learn anything reliable at all about that period of the tradition in the foreseeable future. Our next point of interest must surely be ... how did Hermetic knowledge appear when it drifted in to historic record (around 3000 BCE)? By this time what must have once been a single stream of teaching from a single source, had now been absorbed by, and evolved in to, the politico-

religious mechanics of a number of prominent historic cultures ... interestingly enough, on more than one continent. Of most importance to our story, ancient Sumer and Ancient Egypt both possessed this knowledge, but superficially (at least) expressed it in different ways, even though they put it to the same fundamental uses. There is no argument that under the surface of each of these two culture's expressions of this knowledge, they both had access originally to the same source of influence.

Whatever condition this stream of knowledge was in by the time of the first common Egyptian dynasty rolled around (approx' 3100 BCE), Hermetic science as it was at that time was almost exclusively in the possession of the extremely powerful Priest caste. The religions for which they were overseers were quite different from the concept of religion as we understand it today. I think the easiest way to imagine how the average person saw those powerful institutions in their heyday was that they were a combination of the structures of education, politics, industry and organised spirituality (both common-religious and esoteric). The average person's attitude towards the Priest craft would not have been unlike modern humanities attitude towards scientists. The best amongst them were seen as the source of inspiration for the knowledge that supported the industrial and socio-political mechanics of our respective cultures.

Over and above all of the largely mundane concerns the Priest craft governed, the secret core belief system that lay behind their function in society catered for inclusion of a special role that the royal families<sup>28</sup> of their respective countries played. The upshot of this relationship between the Priesthood and the royal family was that some of the earliest records we have of Hermetic thought and practice in Egypt (for example) are records of special initiatory rites that were inscribed on the walls of religious buildings and royal, so-called, tombs. (One of the most marked examples of these types of rites is found in the inscriptions on the walls of the inner chamber of

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<sup>28</sup> And their aristocratic 'hangers-on'.

the Temple of Unas in Egypt). The purpose of some of these buildings has confused and eluded conventional academia, due to the fact that they have no understanding of the nature of Hermetic tradition, and specifically of initiation. Most experienced modern Hermetists, though, would immediately recognise in many of the inscriptions, (and papyri) of the initiatory genre that have survived, early examples of what we today would call pathworking, descriptions of very advanced esoteric visualisation journeys.

These rites reveal to the educated eye that the High Priests of the early Egyptian dynastic periods were involved in some kind of highly developed esoteric psychology, which they believed assured the immortality and deification of their Regents and nobles. As the centuries unfolded this genre of rites became less exclusive (and probably less well understood and maybe even less effective). By the dawn of the Christian era similar types of rites, and the belief systems that accompanied them, were open to virtually any esoterically minded individual, of all levels of society, in different cultures, who cared to study and practice them.

In recognising the nature of these initiation rites, and the fact that they existed in a very developed state at the dawn of recorded history, we are faced with a glimpse of two of the more important central concepts of Hermetism in practice – esoteric initiation (sic: the Great Work) and the concept of its relationship to the idea of an immortality that can be won by humanity.

That these core concepts are not exclusive to ancient Egyptian esoteric thought is evident in the fact that one of the oldest stories in existence, the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh, dated at around 2500 BCE (at the least), also deals in part with the theme of a human search for immortality, its relationship with an initiatory process, and its exclusive relationship with royalty (or an equivalent rank in the social hierarchy).

Here we have what I consider the three central foci of Hermetic *practice*:

1. A teaching concerning the nature and mechanics of deity,



2. A system of esoteric initiation founded on the idea that human nature can be deliberately accelerated (or evolved), and
3. The idea that the goal of that process is Illumination, the child of immortality.

But I digress, and we shall come back to these ideas in detail later. When Sumer and Egypt took on this body of knowledge, and the practices that attended it, they were eventually organised into civil institutions. This institutionalisation is that which conventional science today refers to as the religion of those cultures. But those religions, as I have said, were very different from the concept 21<sup>st</sup> century man has concerning religion. To understand how that is, we need to be aware that those institutions had two aspects to them. There was an outer aspect – which concerned itself with the every day running of life's necessary and desired activities – political, industrial, educational, health and (somewhat superficially) psycho-spiritual. Largely the lay-Priesthood and those Priests who were fully employed with religious duties, but were not fully initiated, administered to these outer aspects of religion.

On the other hand the religious system had its secretive inner side. This facet was more akin to what we today might imagine as being an intimate combination of secret society and shadow government – without the evil context commonly associated with those ideas today by conspiracy theorists. This hidden arm of the state (or district) religion was populated and administered by a few very select individuals. These few elect men and woman had been initiated in to a real knowledge of that which the outer religion was only allowed superficial understanding. Under ideal conditions the structure and direction of the outer concerns was designed and guided by the Illuminated inner faction. But conditions were not always ideal, and history has left traces of examples of periods when the link between the inner and outer was severed, and the dark consequences that always followed.

Exactly how this dynamic really worked in practice for those ancient cultures, we know little of. But essentially the picture I have just painted is the basic understanding of the role Hermetism played in the old religions of Egypt and Sumer, which tradition teaches each successive generation of Hermetic students.

We understand that this situation remained fundamentally unchanged for roughly 2500 years after the dawn of the first Egyptian dynasty. Fundamentally unchanged, that is, on the inner where the underground stream flowed relatively pure, undisturbed by prying minds and hands that had little idea of its existence or whereabouts. On the surface, though, things were not the same, altering relatively regularly and sometimes with quite disturbing consequences. But the first major change didn't really occur to the structure of the religious and, more importantly, the secret tradition until the dawn of the Christian era. Even the Greek invasion of Egypt in 332 BCE did not alter the situation drastically. History tells us that these new masters of Egypt absorbed much that Egypt had to offer, without seriously damaging its secret heritage at all. Tradition adds to this the exclamation that the Priests who held the keys to the deepest secrets were highly reluctant to reveal them to their new Greek masters. The result being that while mainstream Western esoteric history has always included Greece amongst the cultures that influenced Hermetic tradition most significantly, the wise recognise that the Greeks rarely, if ever, had access to the true depth of the underground stream. This view is emphasised by the fact that the limited understanding of science the Greeks inherited led to a view bias towards an over objectivity of reality – a void of the spirit of life that so much characterizes the culture of modern science and society, to which Greek philosophy gave birth.

The esoteric culture of Sumer eventually collapsed around 2500 BCE, although it is agreed that key aspects of its tradition survived in Harran, in Turkey. Hermetism was nursed and passed on by the Egyptians as *the* major branch of the Western tradition until possibly around 1500 BCE when it is said that Moses led the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt. Tradition also asserts that, being

an adopted member of the royal family, Moses himself was an initiate of the secret tradition of ancient Egypt. In this way the significant religious and esoteric effect Moses had on the Israelites of the Exodus was greatly influenced by Egyptian Hermetic thought and practice. The esoteric philosophy that Moses based the religious system of the Israelites upon was nurtured by a special caste of Hebrew Priests, amongst whom at their core, were an elect group of individuals who we refer to today as qabalists. This term refers specifically to the preservation of an oral tradition of secret knowledge, a stream of Hermetism deeply coloured by Judaic religion and politics, which was nurtured within the hidden recesses of Jewish religious culture. In this manner the Hebrew qabala became the second major stream of the preservation of Hermetic knowledge that would eventually be inherited by the Western European mystery tradition.

The Greek government of later Egypt, and the cultural conditions that Hellenism brought about, set the scene for serious change in the preservation and passing on of Hermetic knowledge in the last few centuries leading to the birth of Christianity. Tradition tells us that the earliest Christian communities fostered at their heart a secret initiatory tradition, the real nature of which we can only guess at. It is assumed that it stemmed probably from a combination of both the remains of the Hebrew secret tradition, (the qabala), and the Egyptio-Hermetic initiatory system embodied mainly in the death and resurrection cult of Osiris<sup>29</sup>. If the descriptions of the primary protagonist of the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth, detailed the life of a real person, there is little argument amongst Hermetists who care to consider the subject, that he was himself an advanced initiate from such a secret society. Hints of the

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<sup>29</sup> It has to be admitted, though, that a number of prominent ancient death and resurrection cults were in existence at the time when the legend of Jesus was being formulated. So it is by no means confirmed that the Osiris cult was the main influence on the early Christian mystery tradition. It is just as likely that the Christian legends were influenced by the Sumerian cult of Tammuz that had survived in Harran (for example).

nature of that situation abound in the New Testament, plainly recognisable by anyone familiar with the behaviour and philosophy of an Adept initiate of the Western mystery tradition. What this tells us is that the underground stream flowed in to some obscure (Middle Eastern) group and produced an advanced Adept who we know today largely by the Greek name *Jesus*<sup>30</sup>. Whatever Jesus' intentions were it is likely that he never really intended to found a religion. Any knowledgeable initiate would never entertain such an idea. But history proves that it happened anyway, spurred on largely it seems by the behaviour of the apostle Paul. With that, one of the most significant events in the purely Western branch of the Hermetic tradition was born and unfolded. Christianity eventually became entrenched as the guardian of education, spiritual belief and of scientific knowledge in the Western world, not to mention the influence its sticky fingers had over European politics.

While the inner teachings of the original esoterically focused society that gave birth to Christianity were becoming increasingly twisted in the hands of the guardians of the outer, secular facet of the rapidly growing religion, the inner school, our underground stream, was becoming increasingly more secretive.

The next major event in the history of the Hermetic tradition had started to manifest by 480 AD, with the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. This plunged Europe into the so-called dark ages, as much of the knowledge, skill and educational structure that had existed under Roman rule crumbled away. From this point on virtually all officially recognised education in Europe existed only inside the Christian church. Then, roughly 160 years after the fall of the Roman Empire the first Islamic invasion of Egypt by Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab took place, in 639 AD. This gave Arab professors and occultists access to a vast store of Greek literature on the subject of science and the occult arts of both Greece and Egypt.

A slow and cautious stream of this knowledge trickled in to Christian Europe over the next four centuries. But it wasn't until

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<sup>30</sup> The Hellenisation of the Hebrew name Joshua.

around 900 AD that the deliberate systematic acquiring of Arab scientific and occult texts (the primary source of knowledge for Medieval Europe), was made by Europeans. This is the era in which history and tradition agree the Western Hermetic occult tradition *proper* had its beginning.

During this period, almost exclusively within the bounds of the Christian church, and primarily within the monastic tradition, clerics were travelling in to the Islamic dominated East in search of knowledge that had been lost due to the fall of the Roman Empire. Many of these innovators came home from the East with Greek and Arab texts that they rapidly had translated in to Latin (the scholarly and academic language of the time), for the consumption of a European audience. Tradition also informs us that some of these adventurers were initiated into Islamic secret societies, through which they gained access to secret and ancient Hermetic texts and oral teachings.

At the heart of the dark ages (which extended in their entirety from roughly 480 AD – 900 AD), the Christian church increasingly gained more and more power over every aspect of European daily life. Under such conditions the early fathers of the Western mystery tradition were increasingly faced with a need to conceal their fascination with what had become known as forbidden knowledge. While the church would increasingly embrace science, the truth is that at that time a clear distinction had not been drawn between what was considered acceptable science and unacceptable occultism, by religious authorities. Such things were not so clear in those times. Subjects, which modern man would consider superstitious occultism had existed at the completely acceptable end of the scientific spectrum for centuries. Therefore, as more Arab and Greek literature filtered in to Europe from the East the church became increasingly uncomfortable with what was now being considered heretical knowledge and practices.

Tradition informs us that the occultists who lived during this period networked and became more and more organised in their efforts to protect their knowledge, and each other, from abuse by

religious and secular convention. Necessity being the mother of invention, secret Brotherhoods were eventually founded with the express purpose of preserving and distributing such knowledge safely and in secret. As these clandestine brotherhoods grew bigger over time we are told that they organised themselves somewhat loosely along monastic lines, in respect of their origins. The idea that these secret societies were being covertly established within the church is the very basis in the Western tradition of the concept of esoteric Fraternities or Orders. In this way many of the customs we are presented with in modern Western esoteric societies have their roots in this early secret monastic tradition.

Exactly how all of this organisational activity might have happened, if indeed it did happen in this manner, we really don't know. Much of what is taught within the modern Western tradition about this era is based on assumption and a romantic view of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, historic record accords itself with many of these ideas as fact, and academia to some degree supports the general tenure of this view. We do know, for example, that a good number of Christian clerics studied occult knowledge. That many of them were not entirely secretive about it and got away without attracting any disastrous consequences. At the same time we know that there was a risk in involving oneself with occult study, (fatal risk in some cases), and that undoubtedly secret societies were formed specifically for protection of the knowledge and of individuals interested in it, from persecution and death. Just what real form these covert brotherhoods took at that period of history, and how widely spread and organised they really were, we can only take an educated guess at.

Because we know from historical records that the main influx of occult knowledge from the Near and Middle East occurred increasingly in the centuries leading up to 1000 AD, many stories exist about the role that the Knights Templar may have played in this process. The first crusade took place in 1095 AD.

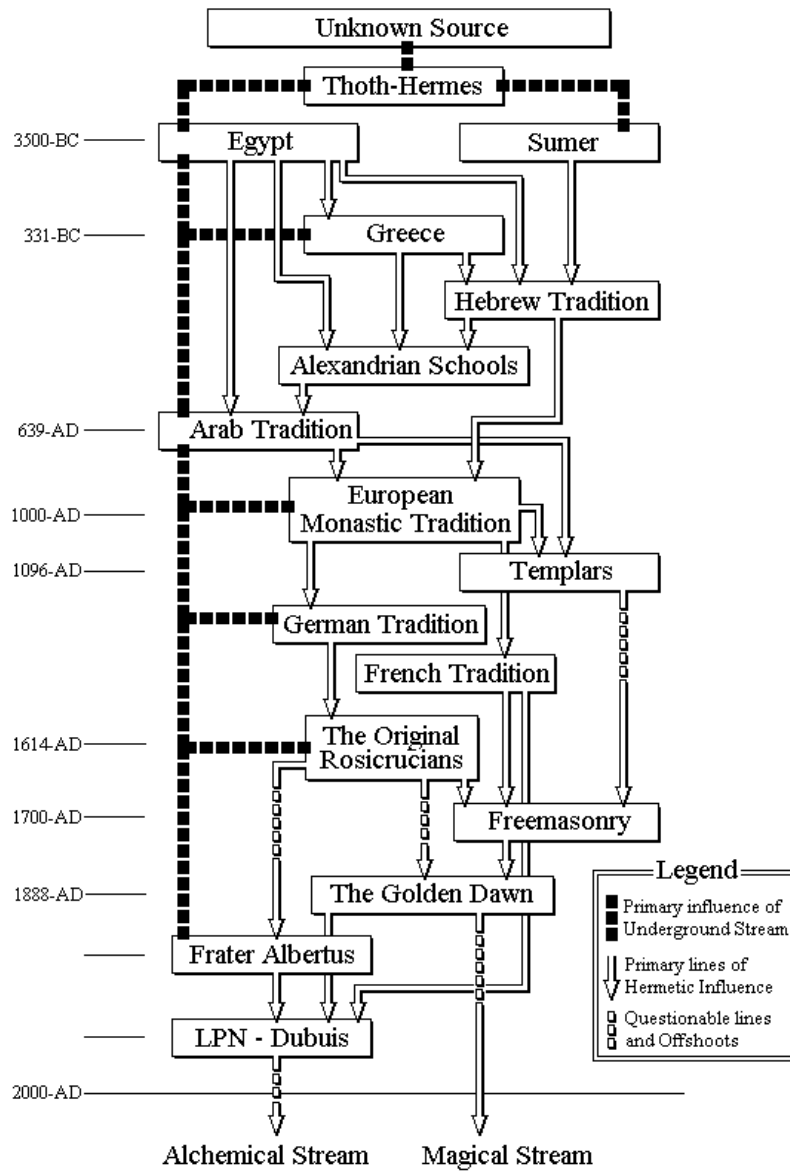


Figure 3: A brief history of Hermetic Tradition.

By 1096 the Order of the Temple (as the Templar were also known), was allegedly created to protect pilgrims heading to and from Christian occupied Jerusalem. The success of the first crusade meant that the small degree of contact that Europeans had had with Islamic intellectual culture previously, now suddenly turned in to a relative flood. One of the big concerns the church had at this time was that, with pilgrimages to Jerusalem being encouraged so vigorously, contact by Westerners with the 'unsavoury' elements of the Islamic world of occult knowledge was greatly increased, amidst the turmoil of post war Jerusalem.

While there is little reliable evidence in existence that the Knights Templar were in any way *seriously* interested in acquiring occult knowledge, a number of legends exist expounding theories that in fact they were. As a religious Order, if factions within the knights Templar were interested in occultism that would not at all have been unusual. Since we already know that both the secret and the open study of occultism was going on within the church all over Europe at that period of time. Claims about the Templar, though, are so extreme that many people insist that the Order was indeed *founded* with some kind of occult purpose in mind. Whatever the truth might be about the subject, the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon eventually entered in to legend as infamous Hermetic occultists, and in so doing a major new stream of influence over the later Western tradition was born. In this way we know that a number of overtly *alleged* Templar-descended secret societies exist within the Western esoteric tradition today. Likewise, riding on the back of the Templar legends, the general concept of Orders of knighthood and other chivalric notions abound in modern Western occult systems.

It is important, before moving on, to mention another curious and significant aspect of the Western Hermetic tradition that arose around the Templar period and had been greatly neglected until very recently. This significant side stream is that of the Arthurian legends and the Grail cycle. Tradition informs us that these mystery



teachings were imported from The Middle and Near East during the crusade period, and grafted on to pre-existing Celtic mystery teachings, by qabalists and Troubadours who were acting in concert<sup>v</sup>. In this way much of the wisdom that was also secreted in stories such as the famous *1001 nights*, was made acceptable to the European palate and enshrined as a prominent vein of initiatory teaching through the Troubadour influence. This genre of esoteric knowledge became very popular in British occultism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Over the next 600 years (up until the early 17th century), many events in the history of Western occultism made their mark on the Hermetic landscape. The most lasting of these events involved the large number of very important esoteric publications which are now considered major source works of Western occult theory. Individuals who would later become legendary for their contributions to the modern Western mystery tradition produced a number of these works.

## The Rosicrucian Brotherhood

“For what we do presage is not in grosse, For we be brethren of  
the Rosie Crosse; We have the Mason word and second sight,  
Things for to come we can foretell aright.”

(Henry Adamson - *The Muses Threnodie*. 1638)

Then, suddenly, in 1614 a pamphlet was published in Germany titled *The Fama Fraternitatis, or a Discovery of the Fraternity of the most laudable Order of the Rosy Cross*. This publication was allegedly a description of the history and principles of a once highly secretive esoteric brotherhood, referred to today generally as *the Rosicrucians*. The important thing about this pamphlet of 1614 is that it was allegedly the first ‘coming out of the closet’ in history of a classic monastic-style Western Hermetic brotherhood. Since this publication a great deal of debate has raged over the question of whether or not the Rosicrucians of the *Fama* were a real group, or whether the publication was a fabrication, with good cause I might add. In one way the questionability of the claims of the *Fama* do not matter, because the important thing about these claims does not concern their past history, but rather the effect they would then have on the future of the Western tradition.

Almost immediately after the description of the structure and purpose of this group was made known through this pamphlet, it was accepted as the ideal model of that which a classic and deeply serious Western tradition Hermetic brotherhood should be. Immediately imitations sprung up like weeds all over Europe, then America, and have unceasingly done so over the 400 years that have passed between the original publication and our time. Because of the huge impact this pamphlet had, and that of its successor – the *Confessio*<sup>31</sup> (published shortly afterwards), no study of modern Western Hermetic occultism can be said to have been effectively

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<sup>31</sup> The *Confessio Fraternitatis*, or, The Confession of the laudable Fraternity of the most honourable Order of the Rosie Cross, written to the Learned of Europe.

carried out without a comprehensive investigation of the history and philosophies of the Rosicrucian movement. Hardly a single organised attempt at maintaining a system of Western occult teaching exists today that has not been affected in some way by basic Rosicrucian concepts.

This event, the appearance of Rosicrucianism on the horizon of reformation Europe, first looked as if it was the beginning of a new age for European occultism. Curiously enough, though, it might be said that exactly the opposite was true. The publication of the *Fama* and the *Confessio* spurred a new interest in the establishment of secret societies all over Europe and the Americas. This in turn greatly encouraged an increase in publications of an esoteric nature, and with this the purely intellectual and superficial hobbyist pursuit of occult study grew in leaps and bounds. At the same time, as a result, interest and skill in the practical application of the theory of Magic and alchemy rapidly declined. By the time Robert Boyle (1627-1691) arrived on the scene to launch the new age of science, as he and his accomplices started down the road of converting alchemy into modern chemistry and physics, the tradition of classic alchemy had all but disappeared, the remains of which had moved almost totally underground.

## Freemasonry

“It would account at once not alone for Hermeticism itself but for alleged Rosicrucian influence as part thereof, for the obvious presence of Kabbalistic elements in Speculative Masonry.”

(A.E. Waite – *On Hermetic Freemasonry*<sup>vi</sup>)

One of the curious things about the birth of modern science is that it was orchestrated by a group of individuals who were themselves involved in another secret society that played a major role in the preservation of the fading remains of the Western Hermetic tradition ... that is, in *Freemasonry*. Nobody, including modern Freemasons themselves, knows where or how this once very secret society began. Some of the content of the various high degree Masonic rituals supports a legend that Freemasonry began in Scotland somewhere before 1646 AD, one of the earliest records of a Freemasonic meeting in England.

Two persistent theories are fostered about how Freemasonry might have been created. The first is that as the habit of building stone structures declined, therefore so did the need for stonemasons. As the number of stonemason companies (guilds) reduced, it was said that they started accepting as members men who were not operative stonemasons, but in some way or other were patrons of the craft. Eventually a time arose when some mason's lodges existed that no longer had any operative stonemasons as members. Thus were born the first entirely *speculative*<sup>32</sup> Masonic lodges. One of the earliest speculative lodges was said to have been started by the London Stonemasons Company, who established a *Lodge of Acception* in 1619, for the admittance of non-stonemasons. Some

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<sup>32</sup> Within Freemasonry we hear of the terms *operative* and *speculative* Masons. The former refers to stonemasons who built stone buildings. The latter refers to Freemasons who did not themselves work in stone, but who work a philosophic system which espouses morals using stonemason's tools and practices as its symbols.

claim has therefore been made that *the acception* was the first speculative Masonic rite.

The second, and probably most popular (and it seems, more romantic), theory centres on the Knights Templar. Being disgruntled with their significant influence over socio-political events in Europe, and allegedly being interested in procuring their great wealth for himself, King Philip IV of France had attempted to arrest all of the Knights Templar in France on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 1307 AD<sup>33</sup>. It is suggested that some of those Knights managed to escape arrest, fleeing with their navy and their treasure, to the safe territory of Scotland. It is said that once there they managed to live in exile under the protection of the Scottish nobility until the last of them died out. Once they were firmly entrenched in Scottish society they allegedly became involved with Scottish stonemasonry. They then hatched some plan for integrating their own secret (occult) tradition within the semi-religious system of graded promotion used in Scottish stonemason's guilds. In this way, it is suggested, the first secret and speculative lodges of Freemasons were born, a long period of time before the first speculative lodges appeared in historic record in England. In other words, it is believed that Freemasonry as it was and is, is a clandestine continuation of the alleged occult mysteries preserved and taught in the original Templar tradition. Whether or not there is any degree of truth to this view, it is certain (as I mentioned earlier) that this is the legend the higher degrees in Freemasonry themselves teach.

Nevertheless, the point of note about Freemasonry where our story is concerned, is not how it began but what it soon developed in to. It didn't take long for this secretive brotherhood to spread across Europe. In the early decades of its public existence, its activities largely revolved around its lodges 'working' a small set of rituals, the subject of which mostly involved a simple metaphorical story about the building of Solomon's Temple (not at all the stuff of legendary secret Templar occultism). At first most Masonic lodges

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<sup>33</sup> This is the origin of the popular concept of *black Friday*.

worked two of these rituals, called the *entered apprentice* and *fellowcraft* degrees. But from somewhere a small number of other rituals sprung up that elaborated on the basic theme presented in the first two degrees. These other rituals were considered (relatively speaking) *higher* degrees, mainly because they were not simply allegory based on Biblical themes as the first two degrees obviously were. The wishful-thinking side of tradition likes to insist these more esoterically inclined degrees had been part of the system from the beginning, but this is less likely than the suggestion that they were created and added later in order to provide some depth to the original speculative system. The most popular of these other rituals was called *The Holy Royal Arch*. It was originally (it seems) used as a third degree; one that only the Masters of lodges were advanced in to. Here we can see, for the first time most significantly, the traditional Hermetic scheme of dividing progression in teaching and status in esoteric brotherhoods into three degrees or grades – called Apprentice, Fellowcraft (or Journeyman) and Master, in the Masonic system.

Although previous attempts had been made, eventually the first stable governing body for English Freemasonry was established in 1813<sup>34</sup> – The United Grand Lodge of England. One of its main tasks was to standardise the ‘workings’ of lodges under its control. This led to the acceptance of the three official degrees of what was now called the *Antient and Accepted* tradition ... Apprentice, Fellowcraft, Master Mason (a ritual that had crept in to supplant the Royal Arch as the Master’s degree circa 1730), plus The Holy Royal Arch (which was thereafter worked as a separate higher system under its own governing body). The first three degrees became known as blue lodge Masonry, and the last degree, as red Masonry, the only degrees *officially* recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England.

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<sup>34</sup> There was an attempt before this date of forming a *Grand Lodge of England* in 1717. But a dispute between two factions (known as the moderns and the antients) within Freemasonry at that time was not concluded until 1813, when both parties *united* under one banner.

Even by the time the United Grand Lodge of England had established the official degree system, the disquietening trend continued to emerge within Masonry of adding new degrees. All across Europe certain Freemasons, who often happened to be occultists, started to create new sets of more esoterically inclined degrees. That is, they created new pseudo-Masonic Orders. They hoped to quietly and often covertly attach their new degree systems on to the mainstream Masonic degrees. Thereby they could recruit enthusiastic and esoterically inclined Masons in to their concealed ranks. This degree-mill (as it is often referred to) likely began in the early 1700s (or even sooner) and continued on in to the late 1800s. Many of these new degrees, being somewhat esoteric, associated themselves with ideas stemming from the ancient mystery traditions of Sumer, Egypt and Greece ... and a number had Templar, and esoteric Templar themes. Of interest, amongst these various new degree systems, we find a small collection which could be loosely grouped under the title of *degrees of Heredom*<sup>35</sup>, which were distinctly Rosicrucian in flavour, hinting at an association between the Brethren of the Rosy Cross and early speculative Masonry.

Thuswise, a culture of more mainstream and loosely banded<sup>36</sup>, occultists was rising almost completely independent of the underground stream (and the flagging original mainstream) in Europe, primarily in France and Germany. They were seeking to use Freemasonry as a means of adopting a more orderly structure, for the purposes of gaining more respect for their newly cohering systems. In this way Freemasonry became the primary channel of

Note: chapter 11,  
paragraph 6, word  
171, 'heredom'

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<sup>35</sup> Heredom: has appeared in various guises over the centuries of Masonic tradition. Also spelled: Harodim (Hebrew for Rulers, overseers or Masters), and Highrodiam. The subject of the origin of the Harodim Chapters in Freemasonry, and the subsequent development of degrees of Heredom is a study worth pursuing for anyone interested on the early preservation of occultism in English and Scottish secret societies of the Renaissance era.

<sup>36</sup> As opposed to the more rare and secretive organised occultists who were closely connected to the underground stream.

expression, and general meeting ground for popular occultism in Western Europe of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.



## The Modern Popular Tradition

“When, then, the pupil is thus initiated and prepared, let him open the casement, light the lamps, and bathe his temples in the elixir. He must beware how he presume yet to quaff the volatile and fiery spirit. To taste, till repeated inhalations have accustomed the frame gradually to the extactic liquid, is to know not life, but death.”

(Bulwer-Lytton – *Zanoni*. 1842)

We know this was all going on, and we know a lot about the kinds of knowledge these 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century occultists had, and didn't have (by reference to their often complex and detailed rituals). This leads us to the conclusion that this activity represented an attempt at building a system of Western tradition secret societies virtually *from scratch*, using Freemasonry as the main vehicle. A system that was essentially outside, while also developing alongside, the already existing more esoteric and older Rosicrucian based stream. It is assumed that it was considered necessary to create these new pseudo-Masonic Orders because the mainstream presence of the old established tradition was now so-far underground that as this new tide of interest in the Western mysteries was being born, it had no readily available vehicle through which to express itself. This prompted the creation of new ones.

This is a very important turning point in the history of Western Hermetic occultism. It is important because many of the schools and individuals who claim to be part of this tradition, in the last 200 years, teach that there is an unbroken chain of communication of pure and accurate teaching extending all the way back through history to ancient Egypt, Sumer and Greece. While such a secretive chain did (and does, in a manner) exist I also assert that there are two primary and distinct streams of Western occultism that existed during the latter decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century ... ostensibly independent of that unbroken chain of transmission, and

therefore somewhat apart from its pure influence. The first of these two separate streams was made up of the many Rosicrucian and pseudo-Rosicrucian societies that sprung up after the publication of the *Fama and Confessio*. This stream was by far the more secretive, more accurate and practical (generally). The second stream expressed itself initially through Freemasonry.

Another significant facet of progress happened in the new popular movement during this period of the proliferation of Masonic degrees - the search for effective, traditional, practical techniques of occult development that had been conspicuous by their absence. Then a gentleman by the name of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) began to influence the European occult scene in a way I believe was unintentional and, today, almost completely overlooked by historians. Mesmer re-discovered a phenomenon that he referred to as animal magnetism<sup>37</sup>. Some of the effects of his experiments were claimed to have had occult properties. As rumours spread concerning the esoteric potential of what had now become known as mesmerism, they attracted the attention of French Savants and the fashionable salon scene. Experimenting with mesmerism became the subject of fashionable parlour games in many polite as well as bohemian circles. It is now well known that one of the side effects of some of the mesmeric techniques was that they induced a hypnotic trance state in patients. (This effect was mistakenly called mesmerism by some commentators. Mesmerism was something entirely different – it was not hypnosis.) This side effect led a gentleman by the name of James Braid (1795-1860) to categorise the basic principles of hypnosis in 1842. In this way, by the mid 1800s, a number of the more serious of the new esoteric Masonic degrees, and other emerging non-Masonic secret societies, incorporated mesmeric (animal-magnetic) and hypnotic techniques as ‘practical occult secrets’ in to their workings.

This entire dynamic, the creation of new secret societies, growing investigation of the esoteric potential for mesmerism and

<sup>37</sup> Mesmer’s experiments in animal magnetism were essentially what we would call today a form of alternative therapy.

hypnosis, came to a head in 1855. A French gentleman by the name of Alphonse Louis Constant (1810-1875), who eventually went by the alias Eliphas Levi, published a book under the title - *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (The Dogma and Ritual of High Magic<sup>38</sup>). This publication, and the ones which followed it, had a similar if not equal impact on European occultism as the Fama and Confessio had had over 200 years earlier.

Whereas the Rosicrucian pamphlets had provided the first widely accepted, albeit vague and somewhat cryptic, description of what a Western secret society might be, Levi, using the evolution of that vague outline as a springboard, provided the first widely accepted detailed analysis of history, theory and practice of Western occultism. In this way Levi earned himself the title of *father of the modern Western occult tradition*, (that which I have referred to as the new pop-occult tradition), by the individuals who were about to become the next most significant players in the evolution of that branch of Western occultism.

During the years following Levi's publications many attempts were made to create secret societies that could be what the Fama, Confessio and Levi said the ideal Western occult school should be. But, even though the teachings of Mesmer and Braid had now augmented these overtly intellectual systems with simple techniques for practical occult exercises, occult societies of the beginning of the second half of the 19th century still lacked aesthetically convincing, traditional and effective practical methods of training.

The ideal Hermetic Order had still not been born. But all of this was about to change. Hot on the heels of Levi's publications a small cabal of English Freemasons were plotting to provide what they believed was lacking. By the late 1800s nearly all of the serious organised interest in occultism inside English Freemasonry was found in a relatively small side Order called *The Societas Rosicruciana In Anglia* (The Rosicrucian Society of England). In 1888 four of the members of this society wanted to found an occult

<sup>38</sup> More often published under the simple title *Transcendental Magic* today. (English translation, publication).

school that operated outside of the restrictive male-dominated Masonic system. Their new creation was known as ... *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*. While the basic structure of the new system was obviously modelled on the *Societas Rosicruciana* (contrary to popular opinion), it surpassed its mother in every way. Its founders had managed to gather together bits-and-bobs from all manner of esoteric sources and integrate them relatively harmoniously into what became the most impressive and complex modern Western Hermetic school of the age. In the Order of the Golden Dawn the pop-occult aspects of the once separate streams of Freemasonry and latter-day Rosicrucianism came together to form one system. It thereby became the primary conductor of the popular expression of the Western tradition *Magical* current.

Eventually one of the members of this Order took it upon himself to breach his strict obligation of fraternal secrecy, and published all of the teachings and rituals he had in his possession<sup>39</sup>. This event single-handedly changed the face of present-day Western occultism. So much so in fact that we will find little argument against the suggestion that a new period in Western occult history arose, with those exposures, that we might call the *post Golden Dawn era*. The now ready availability of that Order's teachings turned it into the number one preferred source of information for any serious student of Hermetica (and other systems), and any person working on creating their own Western-flavoured secret society after 1900.

The complexity of the Golden Dawn system was particularly attractive to many people who were partial to an intellectual approach to occult study. The more astute members of the Order, though, realised that while the Golden Dawn had one of the more advanced approaches to practical occultism in the popular stream,

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<sup>39</sup> I refer here to Israel Regardie. Even though Crowley, before him, had made exposures of aspects of the G.D. system, they went largely unrecognised, and so had nowhere near the effect that Regardie's exposures would have.

its system of initiation was so complex that it was too difficult for most people to muster the resources necessary to operate it.

The Fama and Confessio had provided the spiritual purpose and blue print for this new Western stream. Levi had provided the necessary background theory. The Golden Dawn gave popular occultism structure, intellectual diversity and complexity and a highly experimental approach to practical occultism. Its system being based on simple visualization techniques mixed with an advanced understanding of the fundamental laws of hypnosis that had been established by James Braid, mixed with a dash of an esoteric understanding of emerging theoretical psychoanalysis<sup>40</sup>. Unfortunately, while occult exercises based on an early understanding of visualization and hypnosis, dressed in traditional garb for effect, could work to a small degree over time, little was understood about the effective delivery of what amounted to this modern experimental approach to practical occultism. As far as tradition was concerned these modern techniques were just not convincingly authentic, and occult societies often experienced fallout in membership before any credible headway was gained by their students.

Out of a desperation born from a break in the chain of transmission between the underground stream and the new popular stream, the architects of post Golden dawn era esoteric schools looked to a new situation that was developing on the boundaries of the Hermetic tradition. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Western explorers managed to find their way in to remote areas of India, Nepal and more particularly Tibet, which had previously kept its borders closed to Westerners. Amongst these explorers were individuals in search of powerful occult contacts, which legend had

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<sup>40</sup> Few modern occultists realise that at the time the G.D. was reaching the peak of its first cycle, Freud, Jung and the other early fathers of psychology were beginning to lay down the first serious theories of human psychology. Key players in the development of Western occultism such as Dion Fortune and Israel Regardie were greatly affected by these teachings and in their turn had a huge influence on the depth of understanding of occult dynamics.

insisted hid themselves in these remote locations and possessed accurate knowledge of techniques for developing superhuman spiritual faculties. The understanding of Eastern mystical practices that these Western adventurers obtained, and imported back in to Europe, was often poor and inadequate, but possessed a veneer of ancient mystic authenticity to less informed European occultists. A subsequent invention of collaborating theories that insisted the Western tradition was originally imported from the far East (contrary to pure Hermetic teaching), helped to grease the wheels of industry.

Just how important this influx of Eastern knowledge, which was foreign to the Western psyche, has been to the most significant modern Western esoteric schools, becomes obvious when we take a close look at the so-called secret inner teachings in many influential post Golden Dawn occult Fraternities (and a good number that existed before the creation of the Golden Dawn). It is usual for such institutions to claim, in some form or another, that they have inherited by direct succession pure Hermetic theory and practice – and therefore consider themselves guardians of the *Western* tradition. If we find ourselves in the privileged position of being able to read the entire course of these teachings, in most cases we find both of two serious faults in such claims. Firstly, the inner or core initiatory teachings and practical techniques are often badly designed versions of Eastern Pranayama (breathing), and/or Kundalini yoga exercises mixed up with visualization techniques that developed out of an esoteric understanding of James Braid's basic laws of hypnosis. The second telling factor that betrays the real nature and origin of these post Golden Dawn schools is that (in almost all cases) they contain either no teaching at all, or extremely superficial and often inaccurate teaching, on the subject of laboratory alchemy. Laboratory alchemy being, we should remember, one of the two main branches of knowledge in the original pure Western tradition – and the mother liquor of Hermetic theory. It makes me cringe to realise that in a significant number of cases the teachings of some of the more prominent schools even

denied that there was any validity to the laboratory tradition, claiming in their ignorance that alchemy was an entirely psychological philosophy and discipline. A concept that was virtually unheard of before Carl Jung's influence on modern psychology. Even if that view were realistic it still does not explain why virtually no modern Western occult school has any significant alchemical teaching, when we know today that until roughly 150 years ago books on alchemy comprised by far the greatest portion of traditional, classic, Western esoteric literature. Where is the influence of that great body of knowledge and experience today in mainstream Western occultism?

The conclusion that we cannot hope but draw from these conditions is that most of present day Western tradition occultism is the result of an attempt at reinventing the Western school of thought and practice roughly between the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and late-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of the causes of this development (I believe) is that it coincided with the rise of the so-called age of reason, and the subsequent development of modern science and modern psychology. The result has been that many of the schools in the mainstream (popular level) of 'serious' Western occultism, unintentionally focus mainly on an intellectual approach to esoteric study, and experience a huge lack of knowledge, skill and accomplishment in the area of practical application of theory. That is, in the attainment of *significant*<sup>41</sup> results from their practical work.

There are two main reasons why I have felt it necessary to make this point, here. The first is that I feel that it is important, if students of Hermetism really desire to make headway in their study, to realise that the chances are they are searching for that success in a dysfunctional level of the tradition. Most people involved in (so-called) serious schools of occult study are quite convinced that they are working in, or are very close to, a wellspring of the pure,

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<sup>41</sup> In discussing the subject of *results* obtained from the practical application of occult theory, we need to keep in mind the degree of effect the old Masters instructed us we should expect, not the watered down minimal and misunderstood results that masquerade today as serious achievement.

accurate and effective teaching. The reality is that this is more likely to not be the case. The second reason I want to make this point is in order to provide some basis for the idea that because the popular interpretation of Hermetic philosophy is both ready at hand and dysfunctional, outsiders (such as academics) who attempt to research occult knowledge with the intention of making judgements about its theories and practices, are more often than not looking in the wrong place and in the wrong way. Accurate understanding of alchemy (and Magic) has been almost completely missing from mainstream Western esoteric teaching for over 250 years. This means that a highly significant area of knowledge, which was designed specifically to demonstrate and *prove* fundamental Hermetic principles, is almost entirely absent from popular Hermetic thought. A good number of important modern schools display faults in their philosophies that are a direct result of not having the depth of understanding that comes only with a proper education in traditional Western Hermetic alchemy. The most effective view of the proper structure of the hierarchy in a Western school, after the Rosicrucian model, was to ensure there was always an advanced and influential Adept who not only was intimate with the practical alchemical tradition, but who possessed the Stone. In this way a reliable check and balance would exist against which all questions on essential theory could be measured.

Nevertheless, an unexpected incident occurred in the Western occult community about 45 years ago that initiated a change in the value of popular occultism. It involved a gentleman by the name of Albert Riedel, who assumed the esoteric alias - Frater Albertus Spagyricus. Albertus had been a student of a well-known Rosicrucian Fraternity in the USA, one of the few Western esoteric schools that had knowledge of and taught traditional laboratory alchemy, when most other schools still had no idea what it was. After a falling out with the head of that school Albertus went off and founded his own school, which he originally called the *Paracelsus Research Society* and then later *The Paracelsus College*. In doing this Albertus became the first man in modern history to



teach accurate, classical, alchemical theory and practice to anyone who desired to learn. A trickle from a wellspring of the underground stream had finally reached the surface after some two centuries of drought. Albertus eventually died in 1984 but his legacy lives on in the few students he influenced who carried on his work. His achievements also inspired the French alchemist Jean Dubuis to carry on where Albertus left off, by founding his own school *Les Philosophes de la Nature*.

Today, the two primary streams of the Western tradition, Magic and alchemy, exist as almost completely separate entities – although some cross-fertilization has begun to occur from both sides.

Having looked at the history of the descent of the Hermetic tradition down through the centuries to our own time, let us now turn our attention to Hermetic philosophy itself. Exactly what is it that constitutes the essence of Hermetic teaching? Without doubt the opinion of most experts on the subject agrees that the Emerald tablet of Hermes is the most significant source of essential Hermetic doctrine. So let us now take a detailed look at the tablet, and that which it tells us about alchemy, as the font of Hermetic science.

## The Emerald Tablet and Its History

“I will stress this point, although I am sure that few will thank me for it: we are truly concerned with a nocturnal star, whose light shines without great brightness at the pole of the *hermetic sky*.”

(Eugene Canseliet – *Le Mystere des Cathedrales*. 1929)

The word *Emerald* has been used at various times in history to refer to any number of different green minerals, stones or gems. It has been suggested that the original Emerald tablet of Hermes could have been made from any of these, or simply that *Emerald* meant it was painted or stained a green colour. Such suggestions would never have been taken seriously by anyone who had a depth of understanding of the alchemical laboratory tradition.

In his epic work *Parzival*, the famous 13<sup>th</sup> century Bavarian poet Wolfram von Eschenbach demonstrated just such an intimate knowledge of the alchemical tradition. He described the Holy Grail as having been made from an Emerald gemstone. Von Eschenbach must have been aware that the description of the Grail’s powers, and the powers attributed to the Philosopher’s Stone, were identical, and that there was some kind of analogous relationship between the two items that he wanted to draw attention to. Curiously, he might even have known that in some approaches to the Great Work the matter from which the Philosopher’s Stone is made appears at different stages as both an emerald coloured oil (the green lion), an emerald coloured gum (the gum of sericon) and an emerald green vitrified mass (depending on how one approaches the work).

Of equal interest to this subject is the less well-known alchemical art of dissolving precious gems so that they might be cast in a mould to any shape one desired<sup>42</sup>. The post Egyptian (Arabic) era theme of the tablet text is overtly alchemical in nature. This theme is supported by the idea that its maker might have been

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<sup>42</sup> Probably the most famous example of this is found in the claim that the alchemist Saint Germaine performed this same process in order to repair a flawed diamond for the King of France.

skilled enough in the practical art of alchemy to be able to liquefy enough precious Emeralds to allow him to cast from them the famous tablet. As any craftsman knowledgeable in the basics of casting knows, the possibility that this was the means by which the tablet was manufactured is suggested in the historic claim that the Syriac or Phoenician characters the tablet's message was originally presented in were said to be in *bas-relief* (standing out of the base, not carved in to it).



(a)

The Stone appears an Emerald green colour at various stages of the work: (a) in the liquid chaos phase at the outset, (b) during the solid chaos phase (prima materia) at the middle of the Work, and (b) during the final stages of the Work, were it vitrifies if allowed to cool.



(b)



(c)

Figure 4: The Philosophic Emerald

So, when examining the concept of the Emerald tablet the first thing we are struck by is the possibility that the object itself was created by a very skilled alchemist. This possibility is

compelling in its influence on setting the scene for consideration of the nature of the tablet as a source of information, itself.

If the original tablet of legend did really exist we have no firm idea at all of its origin. At least one of the early translations of the tablet text closes with the statement that claims the creator and author of the tablet to be Hermes Trismegistus. But since we really do not know who that character was, or in what exact age he lived, claims about the antiquity of the object can only be vague guesses. The concept of the tablet first enters history when it was claimed by Arab authors, roughly as early as 650 AD, to have been discovered in the East, possibly Egypt, at some point during the three centuries leading up to, or the first century of, the Christian era.

There are a number of very old stories in existence about the possible details of that discovery. Probably the two most popular versions involve an individual called Apollonius of Tyana (in Arabic - *Balínús*), who it is said lived somewhere around the years 3-97 AD (roughly). The second story revolves around Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE). According to the legend of Balínús, he found the tablet in a cave clutched in the hands of the corpse of Hermes Trismegistus himself, along with a book called *The Book of Causes*<sup>43</sup>.

The second-most popular legend insists that Alexander the Great had access to the tablet, roughly 250 years before Balínús. One version of that story claims that Alexander, some time after having conquered Egypt, was informed of the whereabouts of Hermes' tomb, where the tablet was secreted. It is said that Alexander removed the artefact and took it to Heliopolis, where it was placed more-or-less on public display.

Exactly who might have actually discovered the tablet and who its creator might have been are not as important as the possibility that such an artefact existed. If it did, we might also assume that the original was available to study some time after the period of Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt.

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<sup>43</sup> Arabic: Kitáb al-‘Ilal

Eventually the city of Alexandria in Egypt became renowned as the hub of esoteric activity in that part of the world. This was partly due to the collection of ancient MSS that the famous *library of Alexandria* gave access to, which was said to have been the largest collection of ancient wisdom in the world. Occultists, alchemists, philosophers, qabalists and Hermetists from all over the Middle and Near East, from Africa, Greece and Rome congregated in Alexandria in order to be part of the greatest esoteric and scientific cultural exchanges of the age. In this way, at some point during a period of around 600 years, roughly 360 BCE to 400 AD, every branch of hidden knowledge that would eventually come together to form the basis of the Western mystery tradition was represented in Alexandria. Esoteric and philosophic ideas that had formerly developed in relative isolation from each other now freely interacted, exchanged and debated their views. One of the main subjects of interest that many of these different esoteric and philosophic schools in the city had in common was a study of the Emerald tablet. We know this because esoteric tradition, and conventional history to an extent, assert that a number of transcriptions and translations of the tablet were produced in this area, during this period, that indicate that they were products of such a meeting of ideas.

While some of these versions of the tablet did vary in superficial details, they were almost all in agreement on the important and overall content of the text. Again, legend, and to a certain degree academic thought, suggest that this is because the original tablet (or an agreeably reliable facsimile) existed in Alexandria during this period.

It should be noted, though, that whatever the source of the document might have been at the time of Alexander (and/or Balínús), the original document, said to have been written in either in ancient Syriac or Phoenician, might then have been produced at least 2500 years before the tablet's rediscovery.

The next significant event in the Western tradition's story of the tablet was its later discovery as part of Arab esoteric and

scientific culture. The Roman Emperor Diocletian's burning of all the Egyptian and Greek alchemical literature that he could find, in 296 AD, and the fourth and final destruction of the library of Alexandria by Emperor Theodosius I in 391 AD, left post Roman Empire Europe all but completely cut off from the accumulated written wisdom of the ancient world for the next 500 years. The primary record of the earliest traces of the tablet we therefore had access to were those that were preserved by the Arab intellectual community.

Scholarly and academic opinions on the history of these Arab versions of the tablet are somewhat confused, and so it takes something of an effort to unravel a relatively coherent version of their story, from the flotsam of introduced or reproduced error. By comparing academic opinion with Hermetic tradition I believe we come up with a *somewhat* plausible picture of the later history of the document. That story goes something like this ...

Somewhere between 332 BCE (when Alexander the great conquered Egypt) and 100 AD (near the end of Apollonius' life), possibly either Alexander the Great and/or Apollonius of Tyana (Balínús) found both the Emerald tablet and a book that in Arabic was called the *Kitáb al-'Ilal* (The book of Causes). The following account of one of the Balínús versions of that discovery was recorded in the introduction to the *Sirr al-Khaliqa* (The Secret of the Creation of Nature<sup>44</sup>) circa 800 AD. It relates how Balínús allegedly discovered both the tablet and the 'Book of Causes' while exploring a crypt beneath a statue of Hermes:

“Thus, I found myself across from an old man seated upon a golden throne who was holding in his hand an Emerald Tablet on which was written: “Here is the craft of nature.” And in front of him was a book on which was written: “Here is the secret of creation and the science of the causes of all things.” With complete trust I took the book [and the Tablet] and went out from the crypt. Thereafter, with the help of

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<sup>44</sup> A translation of *The Book of Causes*, by the Christian Monk Sájiyús.

the book, I was able to learn the secrets of creation, and through the Tablet, I succeeded in understanding the craft of nature.<sup>27vii</sup>

Balínús is said to have transcribed and translated the original ‘book of causes’, to which he appended a translation of the Emerald tablet, in to his native language – Syriac. The title of his book in Arabic reads *Kitab Sirr al-Khalíqa* (The Secret of Creation). If such a book existed it would probably have been produced some time between 3-97 AD (during Apollonius’ life time).

It would then be roughly 500 years before the next translation of this book, and its version of the tablet, were produced. A Christian monk from Neapolis in Palestine named Sájíyús tells us that he had himself made a translation of the *Kitab Sirr al-Khalíqa*, we assume from Syriac in to Arabic. Modern scholarship suggests this probably happened some time after 650 AD. That work reached the condition we know it in today (it was added to over time), somewhere close to or before 833 AD. Scholarly opinion claims there is no doubt that the original from which this 9<sup>th</sup> century Arabic version of the work was copied, was written in Syriac. Some scholars had thought that this version of the text was written by Jábír ibn Hayyán (Gerber), but he himself insisted it was not, and that it had been copied from an original by Balínús.

Around the same period that the Arab version of the book by Sájíyús was produced, Jábír wrote a work called the *Kitáb Ustuqus al-Uss* (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of the Elements of Foundation), in which he included his own version of the Emerald tablet:

### **The Jábír version**

Balínús mentions the engraving on the table in the hand of Hermes, which says:

Truth! Certainty! That in which there is no doubt!

That which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above, working the miracles of one.

As all things were from one.

Its father is the Sun and its mother the Moon.

The Earth carried it in her belly, and the Wind nourished it in her belly,

As Earth which shall become Fire.  
Feed the Earth from that which is subtle, with the greatest power.  
It ascends from the earth to the heaven and becomes ruler over that which  
is above and that which is below.  
And I have already explained the meaning of the whole of this in two of  
these books of mine.<sup>viii</sup>

In 1923 a **German** academic by the name of Julius Ruska discovered Jābir's book, and his version of the tablet. Ruska then later discovered the Arabic translation of the *Kitab Sirr al-Khalīqa* which we are to believe was based on the monk Sājīyūs' translation. Ruska's version of the tablet that we have today is therefore based on this earlier Sājīyūs version:

#### **The Ruska-Sājīyūs version**

Here (is) a true explanation, concerning which there can be no doubt.  
It attests: The above from the below, and the below from the above - the  
work of the miracle of the One.  
And things have been from this primal substance through a single act.  
How wonderful is this work! It is the main (principle) of the world and is  
its maintainer.  
Its father is the sun and its mother the moon; the wind has borne it in its  
body, and the earth has nourished it.  
The father of talismen and the protector of miracles whose powers are  
perfect, and whose lights are confirmed,  
A fire that becomes earth.  
Separate the earth from the fire, so you will attain the subtle as more  
inherent than the gross, with care and sagacity.  
It rises from earth to heaven, so as to draw the lights of the heights to  
itself, and descends to the earth; thus within it are the forces of the  
above and the below;  
Because the light of lights is within it, thus does the darkness flee before  
it.  
The force of forces, which overcomes every subtle thing and penetrates  
into everything gross.  
The structure of the microcosm is in accordance with the structure of the  
macrocosm.  
And accordingly proceed the knowledgeable.  
And to this aspired Hermes, who was threefold graced with wisdom.  
And this is his last book, which he concealed in the chamber.<sup>ix</sup>



Ruska's Sájiyús translation of the tablet has been considered one of the oldest authoritative sources for the text for a long time, by many scholars. But we now know of a translation that claims to be an older source. In 1140 AD an individual by the name of Hugo de Santalla got his hands on a copy of one of the original *Kitab Sirr al-Khaliqa* by Apollonius. Hugo called his translation in to Latin *De Secretis Naturae*<sup>45</sup>. This is considered the most accurate oldest surviving translation.

So far, Ruska's much later discoveries aside, we have looked at the history of one of the four major versions of the tablet that affected the early Western esoteric tradition. The other three versions came from the same source, a text called *Kitab Sirr al-Asrar* (The Book of Advice to Kings), possibly translated from Syriac by one Yahya ibn al-Bitriq, circa 800 AD.

The first of these three versions was a Latin translation by John of Seville, circa 1120 AD. John called his translation *The Secretum Secretorium*, and he decided to leave out the text of the tablet, that the original had included, from his translation. Nevertheless the famous Roger Bacon (13<sup>th</sup> century) produced a copy of the *Secretum Secretorium* and added his own version of the tablet to it. It has been suggested that Bacon's Emerald tablet was a version much preferred by medieval alchemists, and so played an important role (to a degree) in influencing the Western view of the text.

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<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately I have not been able to find a copy of his version of the tablet, but J.R.Guerreo (McLean's alchemy academy archives, online) sights a source in U. WEISSER, (1979), *Buchber das Geheimnis der Schpfung und die Darstellung der Natur (Buch der Ursachen) von Pseudo-Apollonios von Tyana*, edited by Ursula Weisser, Institute for the History of Arabic Science, University of Aleppo.

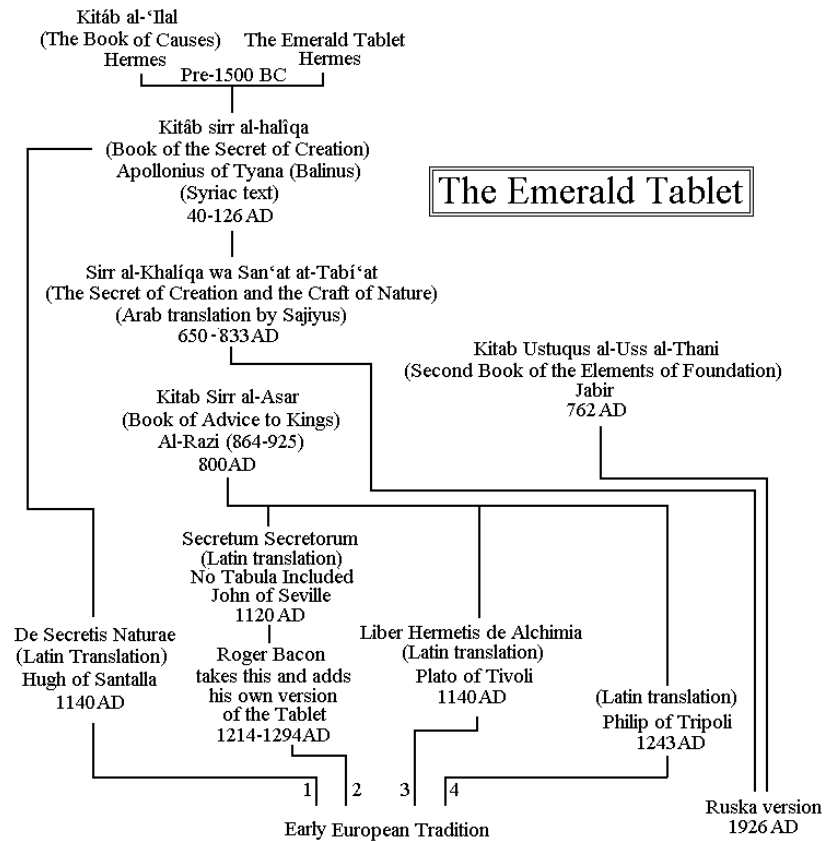


Figure 5: The history of the tablet

The second of these three latter versions was a Latin translation by Plato of Tivoli, circa 1140 AD. He titled his version of the book *Liber Hermetis de Alchimia*. This is considered to have been the most popular version with medieval alchemists. Finally, in 1243 AD Philip of Tripoli produced another Latin translation of the *Kitab Sirr al-Asrar* that we recognise as the fourth recension of the Emerald tablet to influence early Western occultism.

Today we have easy access to roughly ten well-known versions of the tablet. The *Ruska* translation, the *Jabir ibn Hayyan* version (Arabic), A twelfth century *Latin* version, the *Georgio Beato* translation (from the Aurelium Occultae Philosophorum). Later interpretations are almost certainly all based on these earlier translations – *Issac Newton's* version (1680), *Kriegsmann* translation (*allegedly* from Phoenician), *Sigismond Bacstrom* translation (*allegedly* from Chaldean), the *Helena Blavatsky* version, the *Fulcanelli* version (two translations in to English from French), and the *Idres Shah* version (possibly Sufi in origin)<sup>x</sup>.

Bacstrom, while a respected Rosicrucian, provides an interpretation that smells too distinctly of the environment of 18<sup>th</sup> century occultism he frequented. Blavatsky suffers from the handicap of having no real alchemical knowledge or experience and a bias towards a far Eastern (non-Hermetic) point of view. Fulcanelli's entire history is suspect, and Idres Shah, while being a modern writer on the subject of the Sufi tradition, hails from a very popular view of Sufism.

For the purposes of more closely analysing the Hermetic and alchemical meaning of the tablet here, I have produced my own adaptation, which I present below. I have based my interpretation on a consideration of all the well-known versions (including part of the Santalla version), tempered by my general knowledge of Hermetic philosophy and my experience in laboratory alchemy.

### **The Salfluëre version**

- (1) This is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth:
- (2) That which is above is like unto that which is below, and that which is below is like unto that which is above, in order to perform the miracles of the One.
- (3) As all things were from the One, by mediation of the One, thus all things are born from the One, by adaptation.
- (4) Its Father is the Sun, its Mother, the Moon, the Wind carries it in its belly, its Nurse is the Earth.
- (5) It is the Father of all the creative systems of the whole world.
- (6) Its power is perfected if it dwells in the Earth.

- (7) Separate the Earth from the Fire, the volatile from the fixed, with care, patience and skill.
- (8) It ascends from the Earth into Heaven and again it descends into the Earth, thus combining in itself the power of both that which is above and that which is below.
- (9) In this way you obtain the glory of the whole World.
- (10) Thus wise, it may, for you, Illuminate the Darkness.
- (11) It is the abode of the force of forces, because it overcomes all volatile things, and penetrates all fixed things.
- (12) In this way are Worlds created.
- (13) Hence the Great Work is effected, by this means.
- (14) Therefore I am Hermes the Thrice Great, having the three parts of the philosophy of the World.
- (15) What I have said concerning the operation of the Sun is complete.

Let us now consider the fundamental concepts upon which the tablet's message is based. Then, with these principles in mind we can consider the motive for my adaptation and my analysis of each verse, more closely.

## The Spagyric Formula

“Books on true occultism are on the whole very useless things; because those who are in possession of occult knowledge will not require them; while those who have no such knowledge will not understand them ...”

(Franz Hartmann<sup>xi</sup>. 1945)

The format of the earliest version<sup>46</sup> of the Emerald tablet of Hermes was decidedly more *philosophic* than alchemical. Alternatively, all of the later Arabic versions and their direct Latin translations are quite obviously bias towards a more alchemical rendering. Most European occultists, from the earliest period, are largely unaware of the philosophic character of the earliest source(s). The question must arise, then, as to how valid the alchemically bias rendering of the original text is.

Firstly, I have already discussed the idea that the original physical tablet was itself produced by an alchemist, using advanced alchemical knowledge. Then it seems that, at the earliest recorded period, individuals with serious alchemical interests gained most from the tablet’s preservation, and a more alchemically bias view of its message. I believe one of the supporting reasons for this claim is that alchemists, because of their specialised knowledge, amongst the wider body of occultists, were the ones who most readily understood the tablet. Therefore, when making translations of the text they were bias towards taking what had possibly been a more generalised description of essential Hermetic principles, and expressed them in a more alchemically orientated manner.

It is rarely argued that the tablet is considered one of the (if not *the*) most important documents in the Hermetic canon<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup>De Secretis Naturae – Hugo de Santalla.

<sup>47</sup> I have made this statement more than once here, realising that many Hermetists would rush to insist that the *Corpus Hermeticum* could also take that place. While I certainly agree that the *Corpus Hermeticum* is claimed to be a major source of

Experienced alchemists have likewise insisted that alchemy itself is the most important body of knowledge in Hermetism, since the natural lore it describes is the basis of Hermetic philosophy. It should therefore be acceptable to suggest that if we are going to grasp the essence of Hermetic philosophy then we would be required to first understand alchemy.

Before we can competently consider the underlying and essential function of the tablet it is necessary to consider the concept of that which alchemists refer to as *spagyrics*. It is believed that the word spagyric was first coined by the famous 12<sup>th</sup> century alchemist Paracelsus.

“Therefore, learn Alchimiam, otherwise called Spagyria, which teaches you to separate the false from the true.<sup>xii</sup>”

(Paracelsus)

I think there should be little doubt that what Paracelsus meant by this quote, by the term *spagyria*, is that it has the same definition as *alchimiam* (alchemy). It is worth making note of this point here because a definition of spagyrics has arisen very recently, and been accepted widely, which claims that a spagyric approach to alchemy, while somewhat valid in its own sphere, refers to a less esoteric or *Philosophic*<sup>48</sup> method of work. By this it is suggested that through a spagyric approach to alchemy, true alchemical results cannot be obtained. Such an idea is both non-traditional, as well as being contrary to the actual meaning and usage of the word, as we shall see. This kind of flawed cliché that regularly arises in alchemical teaching, and becomes fashionable, is a good example of how the

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authority on Hermetic philosophy, it is also argued that it is of highly questionable origin and content.

<sup>48</sup> It is the practice of alchemical authors to often refer to the special techniques that they use on their laboratories, as opposed to the pure chemical methods used by modern science, as *philosophic* methods. For example, if we are shown a philosophic Salt, we are to understand by this description that the Salt possesses some property that allows to it effect, or aid in the effect, of reactions not recognised by chemistry, and is therefore referred to as *alchemical*.

search for accurate knowledge, for truth, is increasingly made more difficult as time progresses.

The term spagyric is compounded of two Greek words: *spaō*, meaning – to draw out, or to divide; and *ageirō*, to bind, or join. “These two concepts form the foundation of every genuine alchemical work ...” as Manfred Junius has assured us<sup>xiii</sup>. It is likely that Paracelsus created this word as a means of presenting the famous alchemical axiom *solvé et coagula* (to dissolve and to bind), in a more user friendly form. In fact the formula is not quite that simple. In its fullest form it reminds us to ... separate, *purify* and recombine, thus more accurately conforming with the triune nature of alchemical philosophy and practice.

Alchemy is described as being *the* spagyric art. That is, it employs the spagyric formula wherever it intends to manipulate something in an alchemical way – be it in visual art, literature, politics, music or chemistry, for example. In this way the spagyric formula is the key formula of alchemy.

The first or *separation* stage of the formula tells the alchemist that his subject (the thing he is manipulating alchemically), must be carefully separated in to its three Principal conditions – that which alchemists call Mercury, Sulphur and Salt, the physical vehicles of the Spirit, Soul and Body of the subject, respectfully. The second stage of the work directs the alchemist to *purify* these Principal conditions. By this he understands that he should employ special techniques to remove all that is superfluous in them, leaving only their pristine essence. The third stage of the work is to then *recombine* the pure Principals in such a way that they form a homogeneous whole – a new expression of itself, on a higher level.

Alchemical philosophy teaches that this process is continually active in every department of nature. As a natural mechanism it is said to be the *primary* expression of the *Intent* or *Will* of the Supreme Being – since it is the physical expression of Evolution. Every student alchemist is taught how to apply this mechanism in the realm of (al)chemistry, first with plant materials then later with

minerals and metals<sup>49</sup>. As his study and his practice develop he becomes so deeply acquainted with the intricacies of this mechanism that he can recognise its operation in all things ... the life of the planet, in social interaction, human history, the birth, life and death of every thing around him ... and if he is particularly observant ... he even sees it operating in his own mind.

As the devoted student of alchemy progresses beyond the basic training he eventually decides it is time to commit himself to the Great Work ... the labour to find the Philosopher's Stone. One of the first things he learns is that there are a number of so-called paths to the Stone. This means that there are different methods that are designed to make use of different starting materials<sup>50</sup>. Therefore we hear of such paths as the wet way, the dry way, the way of the red dragon, etc, etc. Whichever approach any particular student is trained in by the Adept he studies under, or chooses to take of his own volition, *every correct path is based on the same essential formula*, and this formula is itself based on the spagyric law. This understanding is an important place to start from, unrecognised by many students, while others grasp the idea but know nothing of the practical reality of this concept.

So, in order to even begin to understand what the Emerald tablet means to an alchemist, we need to recognise that it is in fact a commentary or elaboration upon the spagyric formula. If we don't realise this much then we will never do more than grasp at straws in any attempt at trying to understand the message and purpose of this ancient document.

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<sup>49</sup> Traditionally animal substances were also manipulated alchemically. Due to moral objections in modern times this aspect of alchemical training is now almost completely neglected.

<sup>50</sup> This concept is of essential importance. It is widely believed that there is only one crude matter and one path (or method) to obtain the Philosopher's Stone. This belief arises from a misunderstanding concerning an old axiom about the unitary nature of the matter and work. Such an attitude encourages a view that is highly restrictive to the degree of understanding required to succeed in the Great Work.



## The Tablet Proper

“Now then, Gilgamesh, who will assemble the gods for your sake?  
Who will convince them to grant you the eternal life you seek?  
How will they know you deserve it?”

(Utnapishtim – *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. 2500BCE)

The various versions of the tablet are composed of anywhere between around 10 and 15 verses. These verses elaborate a description of the structure and function of the spagyric mechanism. In its most abstract form this mechanism operates in the same way in every system in nature. In each different type of system the mechanism takes on a *form* that suits its working conditions. Since it would take a large volume to describe the intricacies of how this mechanism operates and appears in each type of system in nature, the ancients devised a method of describing universal concepts in a way that could then relatively easily be applied to any specific system. Their method was to make use of the universal language of symbolism, analogy and metaphor.

The symbolic language that the tablet uses is strictly Hermetic. We can also say that while the basic ideas used in that language are universal, they are also alchemical and are therefore most easily applied to descriptions of the laboratory tradition, and it's Great Work. In this way the laboratory process, and specifically the Great Work, become models or allegories that we can use to then transpose our understanding on to other non-chemical views.

It is the habit of proficient Hermetic Adepts to teach the first principles (foundation concepts), of any esoteric subject to their pupils in this symbolic language before anything else. Then as the student progresses he is taught how to superimpose these abstract principles on to any subject he might be studying. In this way he is expected to learn how universal natural laws play their role in the function of different arts, sciences and natural (living) systems.

Abstract (symbolic) descriptions of first principles are designed to be viewed from, and understood mainly on, three separate levels (for the purposes of initiatory instruction):

1. The Human.
2. The Universe (sic: the Supreme Being), and
3. The relationship between humanity and the Universe (i.e. the Great Work).

A fourth level of meaning ties the previous three together in to a single relationship.

4. The Alchemical view.

In this way when we read the Emerald tablet it is possible to consider that it is explaining to us how a human works, how the world outside us works, and how the relationship between our environment and ourselves operates, and finally, how alchemy operates in and through these systems.

Let us now look at the tablet itself, and consider its message verse by verse. In doing this it is my intention to focus primarily on the main message in its text ... the tablet as a description of the laboratory Great Work, something that has never, in my opinion, been successfully attempted before. Where prudence allows I shall also provide examples of how the first three levels of understanding also relate to these verses.

**Verse 1:**

*This is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth:*

On a superficial level the author wants the reader to know that the information that follows is accurate and can be relied upon. On a more significant level the author alludes to the idea that the entire concept that the tablet explains is the truth ... the ultimate, essential truth about the nature of reality. Here again we are faced with

considering the idea of a unified theory of nature, and its relationship to the alchemist's spagyric formula.

**Verse 2:**

*That which is above is like unto that which is below, and that which is below is like unto that which is above, in order to perform the miracles of the One.*

The main theme upon which this verse is based revolves around the symbolic use of the terms ... *above* and *below*. The phrase from which this allegory is taken is probably the most famous of all Hermetic axioms. One of the first things we can know about the universal science, in reference to the concepts ... *above* and *below*, is that each of the three levels we may view the information on the tablet from is a view of a *binary* system. By this we might understand that the subject of each view has what the tablet calls an *above* facet and a *below* facet. For example, when considering humanity, its primary binary is *male* and *female*. Then within each pole of the binary (male and female) we find the binary *body* and *mind*. In man's environment, the second level or view, we have the primary binary of *matter* and *energy*. Then matter is both *organic* and *inorganic*, and energy is hot or cold (positive or negative). This binary manifestation of all things is that which Hermetists refer to as the *law of polarity* and the *law of gender*<sup>51</sup>. By this we understand that all things are binary in nature. All things have two poles and this polarized condition is gender-defined. For example, there is no such thing as a mind without a body, light without a shadow, matter without energy. One can only exist because of its relative relationship to the other.

So again, for example, humanity is expressed through the binary male-female and these poles are of course gender specific. Then if we take one of these poles, say – the female, we find she

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<sup>51</sup> The laws of polarity and gender are, by some authors, spoken of as separate laws. In fact they are the same. Wherever we have a binary relationship the law of gender automatically exists.

has both a mind and a body, and these two states are in turn feminine and masculine (in the esoteric and analogical sense). Again, if we look at the second level of the tablet's message, our environment is composed of the polarity matter-energy. Esoterically we refer to matter as feminine and energy as masculine. If we consider matter more closely we have organic matter (masculine) and inorganic matter (feminine).

For the law of polarity, or the *binary law* as I prefer to call it, to be perfectly universal we cannot have one pair. We must have two pairs. So each pole in a binary relationship must itself be a binary system. The poles of any binary always have one side that is more dominant over the other, under any specific conditions. Just which side is dominant can change with those conditions. In this way, in the binary pair, one pole is always *above* (i.e. dominant), and the other is always *below* (i.e. subordinate). In other words, they are almost never equal. Or to be more accurate, any momentary equality that might exist between the poles of a binary (in this reality) is always temporary.

In the realm of the Great Work, the binary law appears most significantly in the fact that the Philosopher's Stone is composed of two principal chemical complexes. In classic alchemical literature this binary pair is referred to by all manner of names, foremost amongst which are – the Sun and Moon, the King and Queen, the Lion and the Eagle. Each pole of the binary pair that is known by these various titles can also be pure and impure, fixed and volatile. Therefore, in the same manner as our previous examples, one aspect is dominant (above), and one is subordinate (below).

If we can understand this much, we can grasp the nature of the metaphor ... *above* and *below*, the central concept presented in the second verse. Verse two also informs us that the poles of any binary pair are *like unto each other*. While it is true that the wider Hermetic community understands the nature of the law of polarity, the definition of the phrase *like unto* (the key to understanding the essential nature of the binary), is either overlooked, misunderstood or disputed. Fortunately experience in laboratory alchemy provides

us with an excellent demonstration of the definition of this relationship.

In *general* alchemical laboratory practice two substances represent this primary binary condition. Alchemists call them *Mercury* and *Salt*. These substances are not what we commonly understand by these terms. The qualities alchemists recognise in this binary relationship are listed below:



	
Mercury	Salt
Liquid	Solid
Volatile	Fixed
Flammable	Inflammable
Male	Female
Deconstructive	Constructive
Transparent	Opaque

Figure 6: The primary binary.

Experienced alchemists know that these two Principal substances by and of themselves cannot be naturally homogenised. They possess an antipathy toward each other. In the alchemical process these substances originate from the same source (are native to each other), but have opposing properties. Essentially (radically), they are the same substance, and because of this a special technique can convert them one into the other – and therefore by *art* we may obtain homogeneity.

The insightful alchemist recognises immediately in this chemical relationship a reflection of the relationship that exists also in our first level of understanding – that is, in the primary binary of humanity. Likewise, this dynamic exists in the third level relationship, between humanity and the Supreme Being.

So how does this model help us understand the definition of the phrase ... *like unto*? It tells us that a sympathy exists behind the superficial antagonism that exists between the two facets of any natural binary. But again, at the same time there is an inherent quality in each facet that does not allow them to combine naturally. In other words they are held apart by nature, but maintain a relationship based on mutual exclusivity, and radical likeness.

Another condition of great significance is known about these two substance-conditions. Every thing in the universe contains them. What this tells us is that everything in the universe has a fixed and a volatile facet, a body and a mind, a male and a female facet and a deconstructive and constructive aspect, etc, etc,.

The second clause of the second verse of the tablet tells us that this binary condition exists ... *in order to perform the miracles of the One*. The meaning of this phrase shouldn't be too hard to understand.

We have looked quickly at the idea that the tablet presents the idea of a tripartite [3] philosophy, and what that means. We have looked in more detail at the binary [2] law in Hermetism as the tablet presents it. Now we see at the end of the second verse the concept of the unitary nature [1].

Firstly, we are to understand that the reason why the binary law exists in all things is so that existence (all things) can serve the purpose (Intent) of the *One*. We can infer from this that in its native state the *One* cannot achieve this purpose, so It had to create the binary dynamic. This binary situation is governed by four conditions (again, two pairs):

1. Two poles
2. Two Genders (qualities)
3. Two degrees of control (dominant and subordinate)
4. Two degrees of energy (hot and cold/negative and positive)

These conditions assure that any system is always under tension, always in motion and always either growing or decomposing. In short, the binary condition is the basic unit of *evolution*. We can deduce from this that one of the reasons why the binary condition was created was because in the unitary state the *One* (the unified field) cannot evolve. Such an assumption raises all kinds of questions. (We shall return to this idea shortly).

The concept of the *One*, philosophically, could have any number of connotations to a Hermetist depending on the view he was considering. To a laboratory alchemist the *One* has special meaning, it refers to the Philosopher's Stone as an analogue of his own Higher Genius, as well as of the Supreme Being.

In the second level of understanding of the tablet, the *One* represents the outer world, the universe, as a single entity – the vehicle of the Supreme Being.

In the third level of understanding the *One* represents the essential unity of the macrocosm and microcosm, one being a representation of the other.

**Verse 3:**

*As all things were from the One, by mediation of the One,  
thus all things are born from the One, by adaptation.*

The third verse explains the nature of the *One's* influence on our reality, more clearly. When considering the second level or view of the tablet's message, the *One* represents the source of the complex world (the universe). Likewise, when contemplating the model view (that of laboratory alchemy), the *One* represents a substance, or chemical condition, that exists in nature, which is the basis of the Philosopher's Stone. It is the Oroborus, the beginning and the end of the Great Work. Just as the Supreme Being (in the second view) is the universal source, the *One* substance in nature that is the source of the Stone is also universally present at the heart of all things – and thus is called the *central salt*.

The tablet then explains that the One is the origin of all things because it is the mediator. A mediator's job is to reconcile opposites. By this alchemists understand that natural and native opposites (binary pairs), cannot join in agreement without a special condition of matter that is designed to serve that purpose. Just as these opposites were created by the One, the One also reconciles them – alpha and omega. As we have seen alchemists call these opposites Mercury (intelligence<sup>52</sup>) and Salt (form). To complete the tripartite nature of this dynamic they refer to the mediator as Sulphur (energy). Alchemical Sulphur is part fixed (Salt-like) and part volatile (Mercury-like), and so it is able to mix with Salt and Mercury, thus being the perfect medium between them.

For Alchemists our Sulphur is the Principal substance in the universe that is most like the Supreme Being, because its nature is fiery, and it is the vehicle of the soul. As mediator it is also the essence of that force we call love in the universe, and it is through love that all things have their being. This is what we understand by the first two clauses of the third verse ... "*As all things were from the One, by mediation of the One ...*" We are informed that the condition of matter that is found in the One is the state that exists in nature from which all things have their birth. It is the field-state, the particle and wave, of constant becoming. It is pregnant with the potential of every possibility in nature. It is this aspect of the One state that gives the Philosopher's Stone (which is an abstraction of this field-state out of common matter), its ability to be an agent for transmutation – that is, a pure conduit for the evolutionary force.

The fourth clause of the third verse reads ... "*thus all things are born from the One, by adaptation.*" This clause describes how the alchemist understands what it is that defines one thing from another, or we might say, one species from another. The word adaptation is the main clue to the meaning of this clause. Any novice student of alchemy with reasonable experience knows first that all things are composed of Mercury, Sulphur and Salt

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<sup>52</sup> Or information.



(intelligence, energy and form). He also knows that the differences between species are defined by the fact that they are adapted to have different proportions of Mercury, Sulphur and Salt compared to the ratios that other species contain.

So, verse three tells us that not only do all things have their origin from the action of the Sulphur Principal, but also that their natures are adapted by the Sulphur Principal. Sulphur consists of both fixed and volatile, Salt and Mercury – and thus is in the peculiar position of being able to impart and/or adjust the ratios of these components in any subject. It manages this because it is the agent of contraction and expansion, fixation and distillation, the centripetal and centrifugal forces.

**Verse 4:**

*Its Father is the Sun, its Mother, the Moon, the Wind carries it  
in its belly, its Nurse is the Earth.*

It could probably be said that of all the metaphors used in the tablet that which is presented in verse four is the most cryptic and least understood. While the terminology is common enough to any well-read alchemist, most are nevertheless frustrated by a limited understanding of the meaning of this metaphor as a whole.

I have already made the point that the meaning of the verses on the tablet can be understood on various levels. The language used in verse four leans more heavily toward the fourth level, a description of the making of the Philosopher's Stone. Therefore in opening verse four the term *Its ...* refers more obviously to the Philosopher's Stone. Although it should not be forgotten that the metaphor presented is still valid for all natural systems.

Verse four tells us (again) that the Stone is produced from two Principal conditions. The Sun is the active, fiery and masculine Principal, and the Moon is the passive, watery and feminine Principal. At various stages of the Great Work, and for other reasons, these two conditions are given different names – Sulphur

and Mercury, King and Queen, *our* silver and *our* gold, the Eagle and the Lion, and the red and white tinctures, etc., - for example.

This binary, the primary binary of the Stone, manifests in different ways during the three main stages of the Great Work. It is at the end of the second major stage that this binary comes into its own. In that moment more than any other these conditions that the tablet refers to as the *Sun* and *Moon*, are more clearly manifest than at any other. Every process previous to their full appearance in the Great Work has led to the drawing out and concentration of all of the powers of the creative binary. Previous to this point the powers of the binary were distributed throughout the system, and at different levels of its metabolism. Now at the end of the second stage they are gathered together and centred in their proper vehicles. These two conditions are literally as well as analogically the Father and Mother of the Stone. They are the final *pure and compatible* binary from which the homogenous Stone of the Philosopher's can now be confected. They are the male and female Principals of the Stone no longer at odds with each other. They are royal substances in the ancient sense ... that is, of divine nature.



Figure 7: The Father and Mother of the Stone.

The third clause of the fourth verse describes a very important part of the overall process ... *the Wind carries it in its belly*. This concept is presented in a most cryptic manner. This clause is a complete mystery to most students of the art, and therefore beyond the grasp of virtually anyone devoid of practical experience in the

laboratory process. This is a good example of how misleading alchemical symbology can be though, because paradoxically the technique this piece of the passage describes is relatively well known (if not experientially at the least on a theoretical level) by most experienced alchemists. But the author of the tablet is not completely uncharitable in his description of this procedure, because he revisits the subject again in verses seven and eight in more detail.

For now let us be content with saying that clause three refers to the fact that the binary condition, from which the finished Stone directly arises, must first be volatised in order to be fit for integration. From a practical laboratory point of view this simply means that these substances must *pass over the still-head*, that is ... be able to be distilled and/or sublimated<sup>53</sup>. In other words, they must be turned in to gas (*wind*) and then recondensed into liquids and/or solids. The practical import of this statement only becomes clear after the student has gained experience with the distillation of solids, and then becomes aware that *our* Sun and *our* Moon are partly liquid and partly solid at the start of this specific operation. All of this is simple to theorize about, but in fact a portion of this process is known by experienced Adepts to be the most difficult thing to achieve in the Great Work. Therefore techniques to improve the ease of volatising solids (minerals) were kept very secret. Only the most difficult and laborious methods were shown to apprentices and published in books.

This concept is a cipher symbolically represented in diagram 6 by two prominent alchemical symbols. First, the fact that *our* King and Queen are unclothed, that is – they have had “*all that is superfluous*” (impure) removed from them. This is one of the important effects that volatisation has on a substance. Secondly, the dove which descends exactly half way between the two figures

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<sup>53</sup> Distillation is a term generally reserved for reference to liquids, and sublimation refers to the distillation of solids (usually mineral salts). Technically, though, the two normally quite separate operations can overlap and/or be carried out together.

represents the *vehicle* of the afore mentioned *mediatory* force. We are being told two things here. First, that this volatisation has the effect of harmonizing these two substances, and secondly, that Sulphur plays a role in wedding the binary ... but more on this in a moment.

Clause four completes the verse with ... "*its nurse is the Earth.*" The term nurse here agrees with the dictionary definition ... any fostering (or nurturing) agency or influence. The previous clause hinted at the volatile requirement of the nature of the two primary components of the Stone. In fact these volatile components of the Stone, described as being *in the belly of the wind*, refer to an adolescent state of the matter. In the final clause of verse four a further hint is provided about this volatisation process. The volatile components of the Stone, which are being repeatedly distilled, (through a technique that alchemists call *circulation* or *reiteration*), are being feed or nurtured by the alchemical Element of Earth (which we have previously referred to as the alchemical *Principal of Salt*<sup>54</sup>), because this Earth gives of itself to the volatile aspect in order to increase its quantity and quality.

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<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that some confusion revolves around the fact that the Elements and the Principals are in fact (relatively speaking) the same 'things', but are correctly differentiated by the places at which they appear in the Great Work.

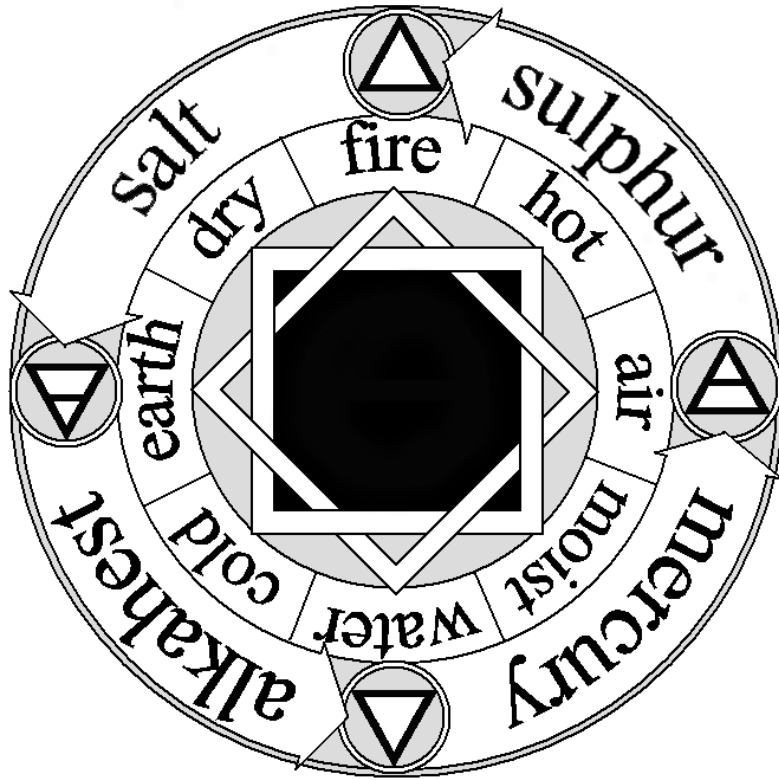


Figure 8: The Elements and the Principals

**Verse 5:**

*It is the Father of all the creative systems of the whole World.*

This verse is short and to the point, but again, while seemingly simple – an often-unfathomed depth lies here. In reference to the term ... *It*, here we are encouraged to see this passage as an allusion to our second level of understanding, to the universe or Supreme Being. But the concepts encapsulated in this verse also relate to the completed Philosopher's Stone, itself an

analogue of the Supreme Being, as well as to the occult creative process in humanity.

This verse explains to us that in any world (that is, any living system in nature), there is a sub-system within the overall dynamic mechanism of the *world* that manages the creative process for that system. Where the Stone is concerned this idea is very closely linked to the concept of evolution, in its esoteric sense<sup>55</sup>, and therefore to transmutation. Transmutation being an accelerated ripening or accelerated *evolution* of the subject.

*It*, the Stone, is seen as an artificially concentrated source of this accelerated ripening force. Verse five, then, quietly alludes to the nature of the force of transmutation.

With the presentation of that idea the perfect opportunity has arisen for us to discuss one of the most important areas of concern for the serious Hermetist, the dynamic of the creative faculty in man – an example of the first level of understanding we might extract from this verse.

We have already looked at the idea that when we apply the alchemical spagyric process to physical matter ... in order to perfect a (complex) substance ... that process involves (in its simplest view), the manipulation of the primary binary nature of that substance. Just as all matter is composed of the binary we call *our* Sun and Moon, etc, so does the inner man. While many hints about the dynamic of this inner (or spiritual) relationship can be gleaned from respected historic alchemical literature and art, (as Jung re-discovered to our great benefit), we are indebted to the Hebrew qabala for one of the best sources of information on this subject.

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<sup>55</sup> The concept of evolution as explained in Hermetism is only superficially related to Darwinian evolution, and associated conventional theories. Alchemy demonstrates that every situation in nature where a system grows, is brought to maturity (ripened), dies and is reborn is displaying one expression of evolution. We know this because the same force and mechanism governs all such progress. Alchemists refer to the action of this force in the conversion of base metals in to silver and gold as *transmutation* (accelerated evolution), and as a response to the ingestion of the Elixir Vitæ it is called *rejuvenation*.

We have also brushed over the concept of how the Hebrew qabala, the secret esoteric tradition behind Judaism, was built up from exposure of the early Semites to both the Babylonian mystery tradition and the mystery tradition of the ancient Egyptians. The proto-qabala that was the foundation of the Babylonian and Egyptian secret traditions has been all but lost to the popular esoteric tradition (the only reliable practice now existing almost exclusively in the underground stream). The only dependable remains in the mainstream lie on the Hebrew qabala, rotting under centuries of religious and political garbage. For this reason the Hebrew qabala has taken pride of place in the Western Magical tradition as the source of the most reliable information about Magical lore.

There is one very important area of qabalistic knowledge that is both greatly overlooked and underestimated. That is the subject of the partzufim, or (as Jungian psychology would have it), the archetypes of the (collective) unconscious. Qabala has preserved a number of stories that describe the esoteric functions and relationships of and between the six primary (i.e. initiatory) archetypes. With proper inside understanding these stories reveal the natures of some very interesting dynamics. Two of these archetypes are sometimes referred to as the *King* (Heb: Melekh) and *Queen* (Heb: Malkah), by qabalists. A little study of the facts reveals that this qabalistic King and Queen are the self-same symbols used by alchemists to define the primary binary relationship of the chemio-spagyric process. The alchemical use of anthropomorphic symbols to represent this binary relationship hints at a doctrine that underlies the (al)chemical model, which points to the fact that these alchemical conditions are also part of a *psycho-spagyric* dynamic. One of the most significant functions of this relationship is the process by which humans literally self-create their reality, both individually and collectively. The existence of this process is well known even on the most superficial levels of esoteric practice. But knowledge of how the mechanics of the



process actually work is almost entirely absent from popular teaching.

The King, (more commonly referred to as the Ruach (spirit) by qabalists), is the psychological faculty that judges the environment of the individual *objectively*. Through the course of his existence the King has developed a philosophy concerning the rules of the game of life, as the basis for governing the survival of his host in the everyday world<sup>56</sup>. During the waking hours of the individual's life the King is constantly, moment-by-moment, making judgements about everything his host is experiencing, as he goes through his day. Each of these judgements (roughly some 60,000 per day) is 'heard' by the Queen (that which qabalists refer to as the Nephesh, or animal soul. The subjective faculty of mind). **As she absorbs each of the Ruach's judgements and rapidly sorts them in to their various complexes<sup>57</sup>**. Once a new judgement is absorbed by its native complex that judgement is weighed in relation to the sum of all previous judgements made about the same subject. As soon as this comparison is completed a mean-average sum is calculated from the total set of judgements, so as an overall *attitude* concerning the subject (complex) can be reached. The Queen, who's job it is to literally order (and produce) an individual

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<sup>56</sup> The Ruach, or objective faculty of mind, is only embryonic in the newborn infant. It comes into its own at roughly seven years of age, but by this time the individual (host) has already been deeply programmed in how to use his Ruach by his immediate family (that is, primarily his caregivers during his formative years).

<sup>57</sup> It is easiest to think of a psychological complex as being a node of ideas in the mind. These nodes are born at a person's first experience of each single idea, and grow in the mind as the individual's life experiences develop their understanding of these ideas. Complexes are, then, similar to Elemental life forms, in esoteric parlays.

persons reality, makes any necessary adjustments to that order (moment-by-moment) based on the mean-average conclusion deduced from the condition of the sum of complexes contained in her host's psyche<sup>58</sup>.

In this way the King (Ruach) and Queen (Nephesch) are involved in a feedback-loop creative process ... one that is in the process of constantly and literally building and sustaining the individual's world. An essential part of the advanced Hermetic student's training revolves around knowledge of the details of the working of this process, and the exploitation of its laws for the purpose of initiatory development.

The collective mean-average conclusions concerning the nature of reality, of all of the individual human beings on our planet, go together to feed the collective (unconscious) effect on the nature of reality. Thus the collective effect over-rides the messy details of individual broad judgement in order to establish a collective (racial) vision of life that serves as the reality we all share about the nature of our environment. In this way we can begin to understand how the creative process works on the second and third levels that the Emerald tablet can be understood – those of the nature of the universe and the relationship that exists between it and humanity.

But I digress, because our verse, verse six, does not elaborate on the nature of this creative process, but simply wants us to know that the *One* fathers this function. In other words, the unitary nature in each level of understanding ... the Higher Genius in man, the Supreme Being in the universe, and the Stone in the Great Work, are all the source of the creative force, its laws and mechanism, in their respective kingdoms.

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<sup>58</sup> This is not an easy dynamic to grasp if one is not well versed in the partzufim theory of the qabala, and the basic theory of human psychology (particularly Jungian psychology). In all my years of involvement in esoteric study I have only ever come across one open description of how this creative mechanism works. Unfortunately a detailed understanding and practical grasp of the facts is still only available through close instruction with an Adept.

Enough has been said about this aspect of the creative process, here. I will cover the subject again in its appropriate place, where it can be dealt with in more detail and greater consideration.

**Verse 6:**

*Its power is perfected if it dwells in the Earth.*

This brief statement harkens back to the fifth clause in verse four, where we are told that the Stone is nursed, or nurtured, by the Earth. The additional qualification of *its power being perfected* is emphasized in this verse, though. Here the term *power* can only refer to one thing ... the ability for the Stone to perform a transmutation. Therefore we are talking about the evolutionary force again ... the *Intent* of the Supreme Being. A number of concepts can be extrapolated from this verse on the basis of this understanding, and depending on what *level* we are considering the Work. The most important of these ideas concerns the concept that the nurturing process that is spoken of in verse four is the dynamic that is responsible for the manifestation or, more accurately, amplification<sup>59</sup> of the transmutory force in the Stone. We eventually reach the conclusion, after hard labour in the laboratory and the cloister of contemplation and meditation, that since we know that the Masters adjured us to ... *only remove that which is superfluous* ... from the unripe matter of the Stone, that part of the reason for the amplification of the transmutive effect is found in the fact that under natural conditions its full force is *muffled* by a special kind of *superfluous* matter.

But verse six specifically states that *Its power*, the power of the Stone, is perfected if that power is forced to reside in the Element of Earth. In order to begin to understand what this means, we need to know exactly what Hermetists understand by *the Element of Earth*.

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<sup>59</sup> Transmutation is simply an amplification of the evolutionary force that already exists in all things.

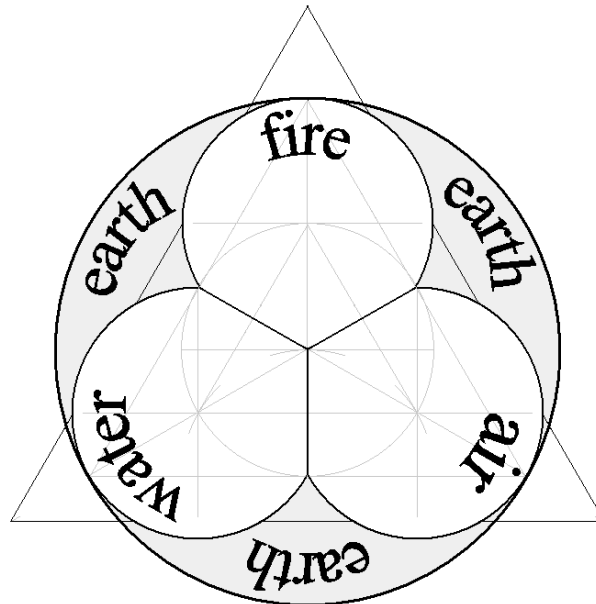


Figure 9: The Trinity in Unity.

Again, this is a concept basic to Hermetic philosophy, but one which we find a wide range of students of alchemy haven't managed to grasp. The three *Principal Elements* ... Fire (Sulphur), Air (Mercury) and **Water (Salt)** are a triad of conditions that are required for any system to sustain a life (awareness and evolutionary process). When these three come together to form a living system they form a cohesive unit, which alchemists call **Earth**. A detailed understanding of this natural law can be found in the mystery of the Hebrew *Tetragrammation*, more commonly known as Jehovah – spelled in Latinised Hebrew as YHVH<sup>60</sup>. In Hebrew each letter of the alphabet represents a number as well as several ideas. In this way the Y in YHVH represents alchemical Fire. The first H represents Water and the V represents Air. The

<sup>60</sup> Hebrew does not contain vowels, but a form of diacritic (accent) marks was eventually developed to aid in pronunciation.

final H represents the first three working together as an integrated living system, the Element of Earth. The reason why, in Judaism, the name YHVH is not allowed to be spoken aloud, and is marked with reverence by Jews, is simply because the qabalists had great respect for the fact that the Name represented the laws of the Elements. We could say that a body of knowledge describing the secrets of the Elements was the highest (secret) doctrine that the Hebrew religion possessed.

One of the things we learn when we examine this body of knowledge, and/or the experiences we gain from applying this knowledge in the alchemical laboratory, is the nature of the mystery of incarnation. That is, the nature of the motive for the formation of Earth and its effect. Of primary importance to this subject is an understanding of the role the binary law plays in the evolution of being. The crux of this concept is found in the fact that the binary law was created in order to allow the Intent of the Supreme Being to grow and develop. In this way that Intent is *perfected ... in the Earth*.

**Verse 7:**

*Separate the Earth from the Fire, the volatile from the fixed,  
with care, patience and skill.*

There can be no mistaking that this verse presents us with a description that is alchemical in the most obvious way. The concept advanced here is one that has been repeated by many alchemical authors over the centuries, and therefore attests to the importance of its message. Verses seven and eight speak of two aspects of the same process, focusing tightly on the essentials of the spagyric mechanism in the Great Work.

When discussing the fourth or (al)chemical level of understanding defined in verse seven, there are primarily three parts of the Great Work under consideration. The single process described in verse seven (and later, verse eight) is composed of any or all of a number of classic operations - digestion, extraction,

distillation, sublimation and condensation and are collectively seen as a process of *volatisation* on the one hand, and *fixation* on the other. Basically we are talking here, in the simplest view, of distillation.

A solid and a liquid (usually native to each other), or a substance that is mucilaginous (a congealed solution of solids), is placed in a boiling flask. It is then distilled until all the liquid and any volatile solids are *pulled over* in to the receiving flask, and only the dry fixed solids remain behind. In the absolute simplest way this explains the meaning of verse seven.

But it so happens that if we desire to take the operations described in verse seven to their extreme (which is the real intention of the work described in the passage), we must take the distillate and return it to the dry residue. We then repeat these distillations and returns until the liquid portion, which will become increasingly impregnated with dissolved solids, eventually takes the entire mass in to solution. This very simple distillation and return repetition is sometimes referred to as *reiteration*. In the kind of classic alchemical literature that describes practical operations of the Great Work, Adepts usually teach this technique as the standard method of operation used to carry out the typically difficult process of volatising solids. We could say it is a wet form of sublimation<sup>61</sup>. It uses a level of heat required for distillation and the (at first, sometimes) weak solvent properties of the hot liquid in the system to dissolve the solid. The end result is that the liquid becomes relatively homogenised with the solid, and any impurities that were in the solid at the beginning precipitate out of the homogenised solution as terra damnata (fixed and unpurifiable Earth). The apprentice soon discovers that the process is extremely laborious and can take many months or even years to complete.

By use of this method everything that is actually or potentially volatile (pure), within the flask at the start is separated from

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<sup>61</sup> Generally the sublimation of solids is carried out *dry*. In other words the solid is heated, from dry, in a heatproof flask, until it vaporises. This often requires extreme temperatures.

everything that is fixed (impure). The volatile material becomes progressively more Fiery in nature, as it increasingly takes on the properties of a Philosophic solvent. At the same time the fixed portion becomes more cold and inert. Thus in this way the cold Earth is separated from the volatile Fire.

One application of this operation involves separation of the alchemical Elements from their chaos in the second stage of the Great Work. In the apprentice's method the separation of the alchemical Elements from the philosopher's chaos is achieved through distillation. In this procedure (as with any distillation), the volatile Elements rise and come over the still-head first. After the Water (phlegma) is separated our Air (Mercury) and Fire (Sulphur) distil, leaving the fixed Earth (Salt) in the bottom of the boiling flask. While it is true that the Air and Fire of the Stone come over separately, to a greater degree, the two unavoidably mix and are usually collected together.

Different authors have over the ages given various names to this volatile (but as yet impure) distillate. Probably the most useful descriptive term has been *Mercurius Duplicatus*, or double Mercury. This double Mercury has a Fiery nature, which it receives from the yellow-red Sulphur now dissolved in its clear liquid body. Its distillation and separation from the Salt-Earth it leaves behind fulfils the requirements of one of the two primary (al)chemical definitions of the first clause of this verse.

**Verse 8:**

*It ascends from the Earth into Heaven and again it descends into the Earth, thus combining in itself the power of both that which is above and that which is below.*

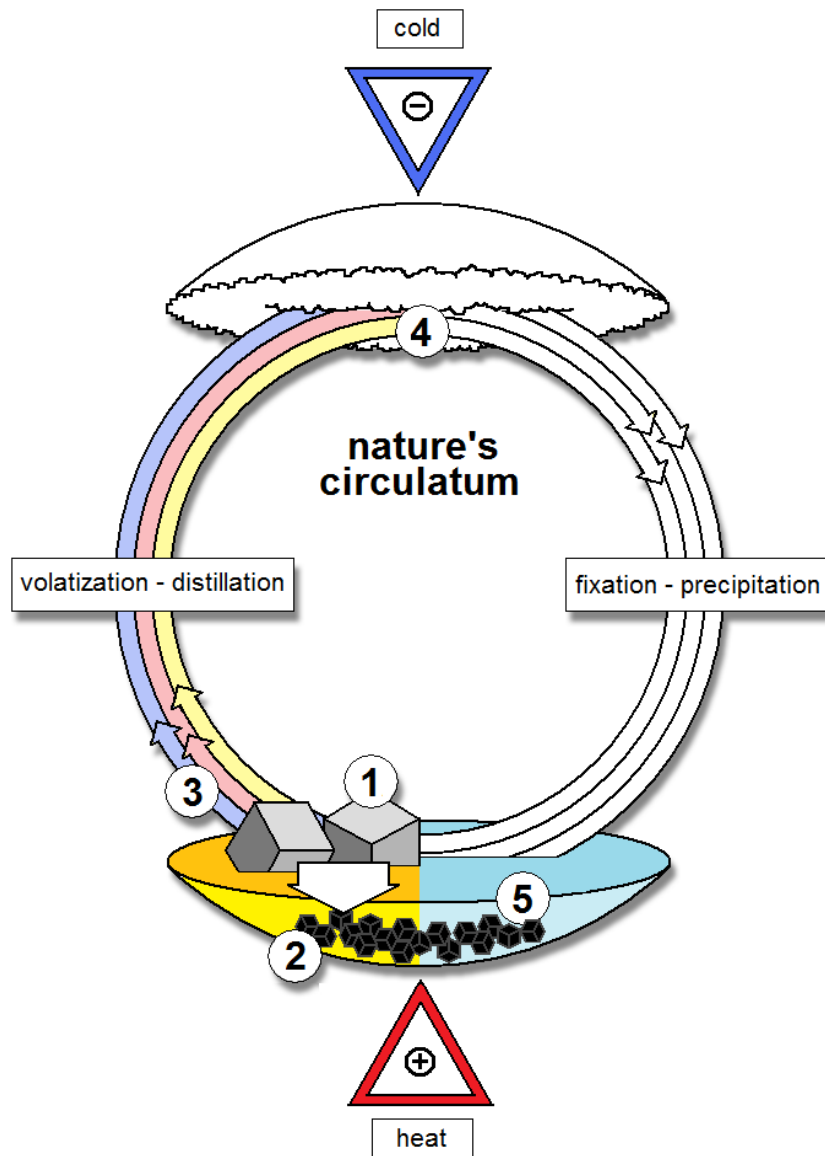


Figure 10: An abstract of the mechanism behind Pelicanisation.



(1) A solid (mineral) is immersed in a solvent. (2) As **is** dissolves, its impurities precipitate out. (3) Under the influence of heat the solvent evaporates (distils), carrying with it the three Principals dissolved (volatile). (4) At the summit of its ascent the solvent gas recondenses, under the influence of cooler temperature. (5) The recondensed solvent re-unites with the original solvent, its dissolved minerals adding to the solvents ability to dissolve the original solid (mineral) body.

In verse eight we see a development of the process I have called reiteration in verse seven. *It ascends from the earth into heaven and again it descends into the earth ...* describes the process that in its simplest form we call pelicanisation or a circulatory.

Skilful Adepti over the centuries developed techniques to ease and speed up the basic circulatory operation (primarily the volatisation of solids), which I have explained in verse seven. These Adepti have largely kept these secrets to themselves, almost exclusively resorting to cryptic allegory when they feel obliged to hint at the existence of easier approaches. It has been said, and experience will demonstrate, that the necessary volatisation of solids (Salts) is the most difficult and labour intensive aspect of the Great Work for a student who has not been initiated in to the deeper secrets of the Adept volatisation of the Salt of the Stone.

Another classic approach to this process takes the above-mentioned method of reiteration (repeated distillation and return), and applies a more user-friendly approach to obtaining the same ends. Instead of completely separating the liquid from the solid in each circulation cycle, a vessel with a neck that is long enough to allow it to be cooler at the top (or artificially cooled, in the manner of a condenser) allowing the condensation and precipitation of the distillate. In this way we create a continual distillation-condensation cycle inside the sealed flask, which flask the ancients called a pelican and today we call a circulatory.

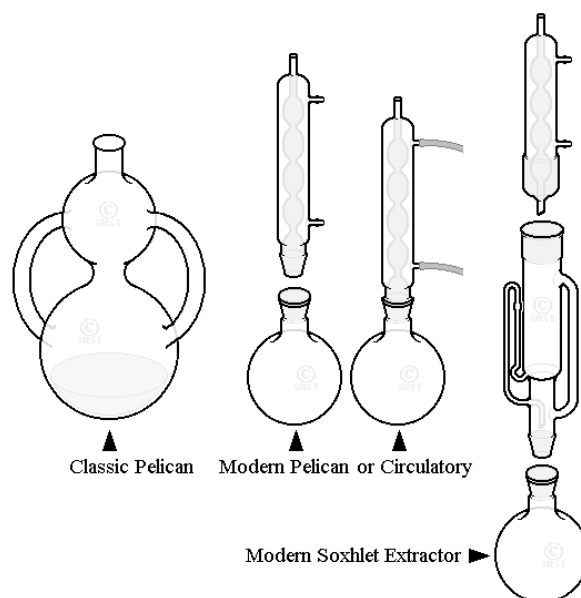


Figure 11: Circulatory glassware

This basic concept eventually evolved into a very useful piece of laboratory equipment called a soxhlet extractor. The main benefit of the pelicanisation approach is that the alchemist does not have to constantly attend to the operation, but instead can leave it in a warm place sealed, for as long as it takes for the liquid to dissolve and cleanse the solid.

The second area of the Great Work that this operation is applied to is that of making the alkahest. The term is very probably Arabic in origin, and is used to refer to a solvent that possesses special properties. This solvent arises from a homogenous combination of the pure Mercury with its pure native Salt. It is therefore a solvent that is a direct result of the alchemical work responsible for producing the Philosopher's Stone. Detailed knowledge of the nature of this solvent and the method of producing it has always been kept a close secret. In fact, in the

entire canon of alchemical literature we rarely met with any description of just what the Alkahest is, let alone how it is made ... with only brief and often vague descriptions of its effects in alchemy. Without this solvent the infant material of the Stone cannot be brought to its true and radical putrefaction. Without this Philosophic putrefaction it cannot be reborn in to a new state of matter ... that which I have been in the habit of referring to as the *Q-state* ... the quintessence or Fifth Element, of the Philosophers.

There are a number of ways of producing the Alkahest; some are complex operations and seem to have more in common with chemistry than alchemy. Some are simple but laborious alchemical techniques, while still other methods are so simple that the alchemist expends no specific effort to produce it, because it forms an integrated part of an overall operation that is based on natural process.

Except for a few very rare examples, where an alchemist has chosen to publish information on a technique for producing the Alkahest, tradition compels him to only reveal the simplest and hardest path. That path is the apprentice's path, the afore-mentioned technique of reiteration or pelicanisation. Nevertheless, as I have already mentioned, Adept practitioners conceal a small number of special techniques for volatising solids very quickly and with relatively little effort.

The third use of the technique described in verse eight speaks of a process that takes the major part in the final of the three stages of the laboratory Great Work. In this last stage the King and Queen are united in a flask, designed specially for the purpose, called the Philosophic egg or womb. A prolonged process that is usually referred to simply as a digestion, but is really a subtle and powerful pelicanisation, slowly integrates the two subjects of the Philosophic binary. The immature Stone putrefies, manifests a number of colour and state changes, further volatises and finally vitrifies in to an homogenous state commonly referred to as the Philosopher's Stone.

The second clause in this verse ... *thus combining in itself the power of both that which is above and that which is below* ... tells

us something important about this circulatory process. It makes clear that the forces and the forms that are present in the Earth and the Fire, as separate Elements, are being integrated. That is, what was once a binary condition is now slowly becoming homogenous, not just physically but also energetically. Alchemists refer to this homogenous state as either *our* rebis or *our* androgyne. Both of these terms mean the same thing; rebis translates literally as *two-thing* (a binary expressed as a unit), and androgyne means *both genders in one*. This rebis condition is the Philosopher's Stone itself.



Figure 12: The Rebis of the Philosophers.

**Verse 9**

In this way you obtain the glory of the whole world.

The androgyne state described at the end of verse eight is more carefully explained here, in verse nine. Verse nine simply and clearly tells us that the rebis is the most important state of matter-energy-intelligence in a world (any living system). In other words, it is the most evolved expression of intelligence, matter and force, on this planet (for example). The statement in verse nine is further qualified by insisting that the Stone is not only the highest expression of the triad of living forces, but that it is the highest expression of the entire world ... meaning, of everything that dwells in and on a world. It is, as alchemists would say ... the purest homogenous extract of the four Elements of the world. In other words it is a new or fifth Element – from where we obtain the term *quintessence*.

**Verse 10:**

*Thus wise, it may, for you, Illuminate the Darkness.*

The deepest significance of verse ten is almost completely overlooked by anyone who cares to consider its meaning. In most cases, where any understanding of the meaning of this verse is had at all, it is thought to refer to the enlightening (albeit intellectually grasped) knowledge that can be reaped from participating in the Great Work. Some individuals consider that verse ten might refer specifically to the Emerald tablet itself, and the enlightenment an understanding of its verse offers. In both cases the connotation is the same, a superficial understanding of passage.

The true import of the message in this verse is only discovered through knowing just what the Philosopher's Stone actually is, and how it is most effectively used. Most students of alchemy who might happen to discuss the subject of the Stone, talk almost exclusively about its ability to guarantee wealth and good health, and maybe less frequently of its power to extend longevity. But the real point in obtaining the Stone was rarely grasped, let alone mentioned. And where it is grasped, rarely understood. Stranger still, a good many who had the Stone never learned this

secret ... a lesson of huge import is hidden in this infrequently related fact.

Most individuals who care to expend any amount of serious effort to study the subject of alchemy, and specifically the Great Work, are aware that the old Adepts insist that such study, when coupled with effective practice, is supposed to provide the successful alchemist with spiritual Illumination. Exactly how this is supposed to happen is almost a complete mystery to students of the art. Of even more curiosity is the fact that such a path of attainment is regularly and hotly denied by occultists and non-occultists who have no experience and little learning in the matter.

Non-alchemists argue that an activity that seems to be focused almost entirely upon the manipulation of chemicals possesses no means of affecting the inner, spiritual, nature of humankind. Such an attitude can only be fostered by individuals who are all but completely ignorant of even the most simple and fundamental concepts of Hermetic philosophy.

Unfortunately the situation amongst students of alchemy, who should know better, is not much improved. For lack of any properly educated insight in to Hermetism all kinds of misconceived personal theories about the spiritual side of alchemy are whispered in tones coloured by embarrassment in the dimly lit backrooms of the popular occult community. The most superficial and widely spread theory relates (as I have previously mentioned), that the physical operations in the laboratory are somehow supposed to have a sympathetic effect on the student's spiritual emancipation. How such a belief could persist in the face of a complete lack of evidence in support of its claim totally confounds me. Another popular theory has it that the beautiful woodcuts and engravings that adorn classic alchemical literature are designed to trigger spiritual development, when meditated upon in conjunction with realisations reaped from the student's laboratory practice. Again there is no traditional nor practical evidence to support this romantic theory. There is little doubt that to a superficial degree some of these artworks help to elucidate pieces of practical technique and other physical and

theoretical considerations. But as far as seriously aiding in the spiritual development of the alchemist ... I have yet to hear of a single instance where such a claim could be taken seriously ... to the degree the old Masters insisted we should expect of real spiritual emancipation. For most students of alchemy, in the face of a lack of any other foreseeable choice, necessity forces them to turn to other traditions for their spiritual progress ... an act that paradoxically invalidates their involvement in alchemy in the first place (it being designed specifically to aid an initiatory reaction, not to supplant a common man's pharmaceuticals nor to make gold).

It so happens, though, that every now and then some student who is advancing in to the more complex arena of mineral and metallic laboratory alchemy, stumbles upon success with one of the more potent mineral preparations. In so doing, after ingesting the preparation he discovers (amongst other things) that it has a surprising effect on his mind and on his body. Anyone who has experience with the more potent effects of some long-term meditation practices will immediately recognise that a certain class of alchemical preparation causes the same results as, for example, those expected from the Kundalini yoga of the Eastern tradition. In this lies a glimpse of the true nature and purpose of the Philosopher's Stone, and the Elixir of Life that is prepared from it.

A student of practical occult techniques for spiritual development, who has reached a point where he has had serious success with internal transformation, will recognise in a few instances in classic alchemical literature, a number of descriptions of the psycho-spiritual effect that ingesting the Elixir has on the alchemist. One of the things that immediately occurs to someone who is in a position to recognise where validity exists in such descriptions is the rare truth found in the best of these tales. Unless someone had personal experience with such psycho-spiritual practices it is highly unlikely that he would recognise the nature and value of reliable descriptions, or be able to relate such a story convincingly to someone who himself had had such a personal experience.



We learn a number of interesting things from this class of experiences, as they appear in European alchemical literature. Firstly, that any kind of description of the psycho-spiritual effects of ingestion of the Elixir is rare. Secondly, that any kind of detail in the descriptions we do have is almost completely lacking. Thirdly, that from what we *can* read on the subject it becomes obvious that in most cases the alchemist was often unprepared for the potency of the effect. Further, that even when the symptoms of ingestion didn't result in fear of repeating the experience, or eventual insanity or death from an over-dose, the alchemist rarely understood how to deal with the development of the internal state the Elixir was producing.

All of these issues combined lead us to begin to understand why so few students of Hermetic alchemy know anything at all of the effect of ingesting the Elixir. Nor the real consequences of doing so. This still most secret aspect of the art has remained so shrouded in mystery, largely out of concern on the part of those who knew for the danger of such a rapid and deep development of the spiritual faculties through the path of ingestion of the Elixir. This subject has been in the past, and remains today, one of such profound ignorance and confusion in alchemical circles. It is no wonder that after more than 25 years of alchemical study, practice, and discussion of the same with literally 100s of serious students, that I have rarely found anyone who knew anything accurate or of practical use about the subject.

My point concerning verse ten should now be quite clear. That the concept described by the word ... *Illuminate* ... used in this verse refers, on the deepest level of understanding, to the spiritual emancipation that ingesting the Elixir can effect in the successful student of the art. Ingestion cleanses the body and mind. It cleanses the internal organs of the body, especially the brain, endocrine glands and nervous system. Thus it causes them to become receptive to a range of frequencies of consciousness that make the unfolding of the most extreme levels of higher function of the mind possible.

**Verse 11:**

*It is the abode of the force of forces, because it overcomes all volatile things, and penetrates all fixed things.*

With verse eleven we enter more into the realm of esoteric physics, another less well-known aspect of laboratory alchemy. Any experienced alchemist knows with certainty that while most people see in the laboratory work a simple tinkering with (hopefully) esoteric pharmaceuticals, his true occupation is focused in the manipulation of little known and less understood forces behind the veils of common nature. In fact it would be more accurate to say that his real concern is with one force in particular, which he seeks to discover and draw out in all his various operations. This force he calls by various names, but which I have referred to as *evolution*. His journey is one of hunting down the physical vehicle in nature in which this force resides most concentrated. Then by manipulating that substance he knows he also manipulates that force – in order to produce the kind of effects about which alchemical legend has most hotly been argued.

This single force I have also called the Intent or Will of the Supreme Being. It arises from the unified field that resides behind physical matter, forces and intelligence, from which all the phenomena with which modern physics concerns itself with have their source.

Verse eleven tells us (most obviously) that the Philosopher's Stone (and therefore analogically, also the Supreme Being and Higher Genius) are the vehicle in their respective realms of this *force of forces*. As Hermetic philosophy divides all conditions in nature in to two primary classes, volatile and the fixed, dominant and subordinate, male and female, the author of the Emerald tablet claims proof of the ultimate superiority of this proto-force on the basis that it has power over all conditions in existence.

At this point it is wise for us to remember the claims I have made in my explanation of the previous verse. While the more

commonly recognised ability for the Stone to act as an agent for transmutation of base metals on a physical level, thus demonstrating its superiority in the realm of physics, its ingestion likewise demonstrates its equal superiority on the inner or psycho-spiritual level. Therefore the analogical concept of volatile and fixed in verse eleven refers not only to the power of this force in the outer world, but also on the inner.

**Verse 12:**

*In this way are worlds created.*

Verse twelve brings us to a prelude conclusionary statement concerning everything that has been said to this point. Alchemists consider the Great Work in the alchemical laboratory to be an analogue of the work of creating a world. It is common to think that by the term *world* it is meant our planet, or planets in general. In fact, although this is true to a lesser extent, the concept *world* as it is meant here and in much Hermetic allegorical writing, refers to any complete living system – whether it be an atom, an ant, a bird, a planet, the universe, a human or a social entity (for example). By informing us that the process described to this point in the tablet is the method by which worlds are created, we are to understand that all living systems are essentially created, governed, maintained, decomposed, recreated and evolved by the self-same mechanism, of which spagyrics is the main-spring.

The Stone is, in this way, seen as a little world or microcosm because in its creation in the laboratory are seen, in an abstract manner, the same essential forces and mechanisms at work as are found at work in other living systems. In this way are worlds created; and therefore by studying and practicing alchemy can the student discover and learn the essential laws and processes that are responsible for the environment in which he exists, the wider universe, and indeed himself ... as the microcosm or little world in his own right. This concept is the basis of the oft-repeated phrase ...

*if ye do not find the first matter in yourself, you will never make the Stone, and similar axioms.*

**Verse 13:**

*Hence the Great Work is effected, by this means.*

This verse requires little explanation, and should be easily understood by anyone who has taken the time to *study* all that I have said to this point. The reference made here in this verse is to the fact that making the Stone and thereafter ingesting it ... *is* the Great Work ... the greatest labour any human can undertake.

But ... again there is a deeper secret hidden in this seemingly innocent statement. With the passage opening on the proviso ... *hence* ... verse thirteen qualifies its claim on the basis of that which has already been said in verse twelve. In other words the author of the tablet is saying that ... *the Great Work is effected by the same process which is used to create worlds*. It is important to stop and consider the consequences of that statement if we are to ever begin to grasp what the real import of the process of the Hermetic initiation is. An immensely deep mystery concerning the real nature of the first level of understanding is secreted in these two verses. What is man? Whither does he journey?

**Verse 14:**

*Therefore I am Hermes the Thrice Great, having the three parts of the philosophy of the whole world.*

I have elaborated on the meaning of this passage earlier. Two concepts are of most importance here, the identity of the author of the tablet, and the meaning of his moniker. By placing his own name on the document (or, lets face it, someone else assuming that title, or by adding it to later translations of the tablet), the nature of the philosophy expounded in the text is placed fairly and squarely in the Hermetic and Western camp.

The closing clause of this verse reminds us that the philosophy presented here is that of the whole world ... or maybe in more modern terms it should read ... *of a complete living system*. We are also told that this philosophy is triune in nature. That is, it is a theoretical construct that describes the mechanics of a system whose structure is defined by groups of three integrated laws and/or functions.

**Verse 15:**

*What I have said concerning the operation of the Sun is complete.*

I have made an important amendment to the structure of this final verse, in order to (as I see it) change its meaning to more accurately fit the overall ambience of the information presented in the tablet. Most authors see this final statement as being an exclamation of the obvious fact that the text is finished. Why make such a statement which would seem to serve no other purpose than to insult the intelligence of even the least learned reader? The author of the tablet has thus far been careful to explain all of the essential concepts of his Philosophy in the briefest manner. He has excluded all that is unnecessary in his explanation, providing us with the most concise and accurate description. Why would he now add a final verse that has not only no philosophic purpose, but serves simply to state the obvious?

It is therefore my contention that the final statement was not designed, in its earliest appearance and tongue, to point out that the document was now finished, but rather to make absolutely clear that the description the author has provided of the method by which worlds are created is a complete description. In other words, that we can rest assured that no point or part of the spagyric and alchemical philosophy has been left out.

## In Conclusion

“They did not write with the object of disclosing their secret to the world, but in an obscurely elusive style, in order that they might be able to recognise those who understood their meaning as brothers and fellow adepts.”

(Thomas Norton – *The Ordinall of Alchemy*. 1477)

At the end of the day, when looking at the tablet from the point of view of the student of alchemy who is trying to extract cohesive meaning from its message, what does the foregoing philosophy really tell us? The tablet is simply explaining to us the archetypal technique for preparing the Philosopher’s Stone in any living system. In man, in the universe or in the laboratory, specifically. So let us now strip away the complexity from my previous explanation and extract the essence of the tablet’s message.

Firstly, the process of making the Stone involves (fundamentally) a manipulation of two conditions of existence. This way of looking at the process predates Paracelsus, after which the binary view gave way to the concept of the three Principals. For argument’s sake we will defer to the tablet’s symbolic names for these two conditions and call them the *Sun* and the *Moon*. These two conditions are manipulated by the alchemist in his Great Work in order to produce the Philosophic Stone. (Verse two).

Secondly, because everything has its source from one substance-condition, this means that the Philosopher’s Stone can be (ideally) produced from anything in the world, contrary to popular opinion. This One substance (the alchemist’s *Gur*), is *in* everything, and the Great Work is simply a process of drawing out and concentrating that thing. (Verse three). Most often this substance is referred to as *niter* or our *central salt*. The source of this Salt is to be found in the physical sun, from which it radiates as energy. When that energy enters the atmosphere of our planet forces here convert it into a chemical body. This is the proto-chemical from

which all other chemical elements have their origin, their purpose and their life.

Again, the Stone is produced by concentrating the primary binary within the crude matter (starting material), in to its two poles. This *Sun* and *Moon* must then be volatised (distilled and sublimated) in order to remove all *superfluous matter* and thereby to make the binary pair volatile and fusible. (Verse four).

This post sublimation condition of the Solar and Lunar binary pair is then mixed together and placed in a special Hermetically sealed flask. This mucilaginous composite is the Father of the Stone. (Verse Five).

A long digestion now *fixes* the matter. That is, it becomes *Earth*, a raw homogenous blending of the primary binary pair. This is the (second) Philosophic putrefaction of the Stone. (Verse six).

This long digestion and putrefaction involves a second separation of the fixed from the volatile, where any unhomogene aspects of the form, force and intelligence of the primary binary are completely equilibrated and wedded. (Verses seven and eight).

The end of this long digestion produces a new form of matter, a transmutation agent. It is not one of the four Elements, it is a new *fifth* Element – the Q-state of matter. (Verse nine).

The final verses are simply explaining subtle details of the completion of the work.

The Great Work is really that simple. Didn't the most respected Masters insist that the truth was found in the most simple ideas and practices? All of the various paths to the Stone are simply adaptations of this archetypal formula ... a formula that at its heart is nothing more than a *pelicanisation* of the crude matter. This is the 'wheel' of the alchemists, and 'wheel of fortune' of the mages and the 'rota' of the Rosicrucians. The wheel is rotated by placing heat at one end and cold at the other. During the rotation of the wheel, on the upward phase the now volatile matter is *separated* from its base. On the downward phase the volatile *is recombined* with its base. In the middle of this separation and recombination the matter is

*purified*, as the impure is precipitated out of the cycle. In this manner our rota displays the function of the spagyric mechanism inherent in its process. But if we were simply to take this crude matter and subject it to a circulatory evolution it would take longer than our normal human lifespan to complete the work. Therefore cunning alchemists have found ways of removing the Principal components of the Stone from the wheel and processing them in isolation, before returning them to the circulatory. By this means they ease the process in order to shorten the work and amplify the effectiveness of the end product.

Did not the old Masters entreat us to look for the solution of their enigma in nature? And what do we find in nature? We find a large spherical earth from which all things have **the** birth, their life and which they return to in their dissolution, in a never-ending rotation of life and death. This earth sits in the centre **if** a sealed sphere, like *our* matter in the sphere of our Philosophic egg. The world of that flask is heated by the sun and cooled by moon and the menstruum of the great seas rotate within its boundaries volatilising, fixing and purifying the crude matter. While this alchemical wheel rotates the Principal living systems which inhabit the earth are removed from the system periodically, by the Great Alchemist of the Universe, processed in isolation outside of the system, and then returned to it so that the *life* of the Stone is not lost. At the end of the Great Work this matter will be digested in fire until all that remains solid will fuse and be made perfect ... world without end.

Any student of the Great Work who doubts the validity and effectiveness of this simple scheme will only ever succeed by accident, if fate decides she will allow him to succeed at all. As any scientist knows accuracy and truth stem from sound *first principles* – the paradigm of truth – and extend in to the complexities of practical necessity.

Lapis Coronat Opus.  
Salfluëre <sup>AHS</sup>



## Appendix I Glossary of Terms

Note: The following list of terms refers largely to words used in this text, or indirectly to concepts discussed in this text.

**Adept:** An Hermetic term commonly used to define someone who is an expert in any particular area of Western occult study and practice. More accurately an expert in the study and practice of all major branches of Hermetism (astrology, divination, Magic and alchemy.) An Adept has undergone traditional training, no longer requires a teacher, can obtain reasonable results from his application of Hermetic knowledge, and is (ideally) working towards Mastery (sic: spiritual Illumination).

**Alchemy:** Broadly - the science and art of the study and application of the spagyric formula in any field of human endeavour. Traditionally: a person who attempts to study and apply spagyric law to the realm of (al)chemistry and physics. Spiritually: the application of spagyric law to human psychology (psycho-spagyrics), with the intent of attaining spiritual Illumination. An Alchemist: a person who studies and applies spagyrics to specific fields of endeavour, especially, and traditionally, to the field of chemistry and physics and higher psychology.

**Alkahest:** A special class of solvents. It is commonly thought that there is only one alkahest, but this is untrue. Alkahests are solvents that arise from the homogenous combination of a solvent (such as water or alcohol) with what alchemists refer to as its native Salt. The resulting solvent is something akin to liquid crystal (at saturation point), and has properties not recognised by modern chemistry. One alkahest is considered pre-eminent above all others and that is the alkahest produced during and used in the Great Work. This alkahest is more frequently referred to as the universal solvent, universal Mercury or Philosophic Mercury. It is the only substance capable of forcing

the matter of the Philosopher's Stone to putrefy, a necessary prerequisite to the final homogeneity of the stone.

**Astrology:** Commonly, that Hermetic Science that alleges to calculate an effect that celestial bodies have on the development of living systems. This effect is said to be predictable and therefore to some degree fated. Paracelsus (the famous alchemist) saw fit to correct this common few with the statement that astrology had more to do with calculating the effects that psychological archetypes (to use Carl Jung's language) had on living systems, such as humans. Traditionally some Magicians and alchemists used astrology to attempt to calculate the most effective times in which to perform esoteric activities.

**Chaos:** (or Hyle) A term usually used in laboratory alchemy, but can also be applied to inner alchemical work. Refers to a condition of matter when the alchemical Elements have not as yet separated into distinct conditions. Sic: The Chaos of the Elements. Is a state of proto-matter. More specifically, in its universal sense, a state of proto-existence. In the Great Work it is said that the substance from which the Philosopher's Stone is made must first be reduced to its chaos. That is, it must be reverse engineered. The chaos of the Philosophers is also frequently referred to as the prima materia, or first substance. This is often erroneously confused with the concept of the crude matter of the Stone.

**Circulatory:** (Also circulatum and pelican(isation)) A circulatory is a specific arrangement of laboratory glassware. In a modern laboratory this would comprise (in its simplest form) a boiling flask with a condenser attached, vertically, directly into its neck. This allows distilled or evaporated fluids (and/or sometimes solids) to recondense and precipitate back into the flask, thus avoiding loss of any gases, liquids or volatile solids during the heating process. This allows the contents of the flask to circulate, to purify and to homogenize to some degree.

**Elements (alchemical):** A term usually used in lab work, but is also be applied to inner work and to Magic. When spelt with an upper

case 'E' refers specifically to the alchemical concept of: Fire, Air, Water and Earth (aka: Energy (or plasma), Gas, Liquid, Solids). Does not refer to that which a chemist defines as a chemical element, nor does it have the same connotation. Is related to the concept in chemistry and physics defined as *phase states*, and to that which physicists call the four fundamental atomic forces (the strong force, the weak force, gravity and electromagnetic forces). The conditions in nature we recognise commonly as Energy, Gases, Liquids and Solids are considered by alchemists to be the primary outward vehicles of the fundamental atomic forces, of modern physics, expressed at the macrocosmic level.

**Divination:** The practice of using any one of a number of different practices for attempting to foretell future events. In the modern Western tradition divination is almost exclusively restricted to Tarot reading, horary astrology and talismanic divination. In medieval Europe divination took many different forms, many of which have been neglected or completely lost. The basic premise upon which the concept of divination is founded is that at an unconscious level of mentation events are not seen as random or chaotic, as they often are at the conscious physical level. Therefore a skilled mage can encourage his unconscious mind to communicate to him, through some symbolic medium, the order inherent in outward events that he not otherwise grasp with his rational mind.

**Elements (chem):** When spelled with a lower case 'e' refers specifically to the chemical concept of an element that is listed on the periodic table of elements. While individual chemical elements are recognised by alchemy, most physical substances are referred to as mixts by alchemists, and the nature of their properties and interrelations is broader than that recognised presently by modern chemistry and physics.

**Elixir of Life:** Also, in Latin - *Elixir Vitae*. Some say the medicine made from the white (or second-to-last) stage of the Great Work. Generally to be considered as a homeopathic preparation (highly

dilute solution) of a piece of the Philosopher's Stone itself. The effect of its ingestion is to maintain perfect health, rejuvenate the alchemist, extend his longevity and to greatly accelerate his psychic development.

**Esoteric:** Uncommon, of uncommon usage (dictionary definition).

A term used frequently today by occultists to refer to things occult. The word has become a preferred term to replace the word occult, due to the negative overtones that word often carries with it in the popular mind. Strictly, an esoteric subject, state, process or object is one which is recognised to exist outside of the experience of modern science.

**Evolution:** (esoteric) A force and a condition that exists in all departments in nature, not just in the organic world (as suggested by Darwinian evolution). The force of evolution is the foundation of the Q-state (the fifth Element or quintessence). It is the manifestation of the Divine Will, giving both motion and direction to everything in creation. In alchemy the term transmutation refers to the effect of *pure* evolutionary force on chemical elements. This same effect in the organic world is referred to by alchemists as rejuvenation and/or regeneration. Unlike the view of modern science, Hermetism recognises that the force of evolution itself operates in nature not only as an energy, but through a specific substance. In other words, evolution also has chemical properties that operate in animals, vegetables and minerals. This chemical is called the *central salt* by alchemists.

**Great Work (the):** Refers to the process of deliberately advancing a things evolution beyond the point that nature, unaided, can develop it. The origin of the word is likely to be specific to laboratory alchemy where it refers to the manual work of confecting the Philosopher's Stone. Used also in inner alchemy to refer to the process of attaining 'spiritual Illumination' (enlightenment).

**Hermetism:** Also spelled Hermeticism. A philosophy and science based on an understanding of the spagyric law of nature. Said to

have first be taught to humanity by the Egyptian God-king known as Tehuti or Thoth, called by the Greeks Hermes. The basic tenet of Hermetism is that it is a body of knowledge, and a science, that can only properly be understood and mastered if the practitioner has been effectively initiated. The process of initiation itself is the application of the spagyric art to the mind and life of the student of Hermetism. therefore, by becoming the subject of the art the student enters in to the fullest understanding of its nature.

**Higher Genius:** The loftiest level of human energy, form and intelligence – combined in a single living unit. A common term for this state is the *higher self*. In Christian terms it is the Spark of God that dwells in individual humans – which the Greeks called the *Christos*. Qabalists refer to it as the Yechidah (unified and complete self).

**Homo Vulgaris:** Vulgar or common humanity. Refers to the unilluminated (uninitiated) herd of the masses. Specifically refers to individuals who have not been exposed to the effect of the (real) esoteric initiation process. Such persons are understood to be motivated by fear, expressed through base passions, which lead to eventual deterioration of the individual, to death and a need for rebirth.

**Homo Illuminatus:** A person who has succeeded in completing the journey of an initiate. See *Illumination*.

**Initiation:** A term usually associated with the inner work, but can also be applied to the laboratory work of alchemists. The term refers to the act of entering upon the path of Hermetic initiation. The act of initiating is in its strictest sense a moral contract between the aspirant and the Adept to walk, teach and *complete* the path to spiritual Illumination.

**Illumination (spiritual):** The completion of the journey of esoteric initiation. This condition arises when the Adept has managed to expose and understand the contents of his unconscious mind. Humans have two sides to their being – the side they are conscious of (composing roughly 10% of the total nature), and

the side that they don't know because it exists hidden in their unconscious. The process of initiation is simply the careful uncovering of the content of the unconscious. Once this side of the self, which was concealed in darkness, is brought to the light of conscious awareness, the Adept is said to have claimed a full awareness of who and what he is. Experience of *the totality of his being*. This condition is known as *Illumination*. Once the Adept then understands what he can do with this new state he is considered a Master, an *Arch Alchemist* or Mage. This is the highest level of esoteric attainment.

**Magic:** The field of Hermetic study and practice that deals exclusively with the exploitation of little known or understood laws of the mind. These laws, when applied effectively, allow the Magician or mage to produce effects in the physical world that cannot be accounted for by present scientific understanding, or common knowledge. At the extreme a full expertise in Magic allows the practitioner to control every aspect of physics and psychology with his will.

**Mastery:** To be technically correct, in the Hermetic tradition the title Master is only conferred upon an alchemist who has obtained the Philosopher's Stone by his own labour, or on a Magician who has achieved full understanding of the spiritual Illumination he has attained.

**Occult(ism):** A Latin term meaning *hidden* or *secret*. When used to speak about the subjects of Magic, alchemy, astrology, etc, the term refers to the fact that the natural laws which these disciplines study and make use of are laws and processes that are *hidden* (and therefore not easily discovered) in nature. It is often believed that occult means that this information is *kept secret* by those who study and preserve knowledge of it. While it is true that oaths of secrecy are demanded by those who teach such knowledge, the reality is that most of the theory has been in the public domain for many centuries. Since the word *occult* has a certain stigma attached to it in the public mind, many students of

these arts today prefer to use the word *esoteric* to describe this subject matter.

**Philosopher's Stone:** A term that in its most traditional sense refers to the physical substance that is made by an alchemist with which he transmutes base metals into gold, and from which he prepares the Elixir of Life. The term has also been justifiably used in later history as a metaphor for that which the ancient Greeks referred to as the Christos, the Higher Genius, and more commonly today, the Higher Self. Each of these conditions is defined as being *the Stone* on the basis that they transmit the force of Evolution in its purest expression.

**Pop-occultism:** That portion of the pure Hermetic tradition (the underground stream), which has violated the rule of silence and slipped in to the public arena. Popular occultism exists in a state somewhere between religion, new-age superstition and pure Hermetism. While it contains many fragments of the pure tradition, they are almost irreversibly confused with superstition, falsehoods, politics and capitalism – rendering its efforts almost completely impotent.

**Principals (alchemical):** (Commonly spelled principles, a practice that is a left-over from medieval unconventionalised spelling practices). A term usually used in laboratory alchemy, but is also applicable to inner work and to aspects of Magic. Refers to the three alchemical Principals, usually called Mercury, Sulphur and Salt, which directly relate to Water/Air, Fire and Earth respectfully. They are the three Principal Elements. In modern terminology these are respectively: Intelligence (information), Energy and Form. Every thing in existence, no matter what state or kingdom it exists in, is a combination of these three Principal functions.

**Qabala:** A Hebrew term which translates literally as 'to receive', and refers to an oral *esoteric* tradition that was inherited by the early Hebrews from ancient Babylon and Egypt. Most Western occultists associate this term with the Hebrew mystery tradition, but in fact this system of knowledge greatly predates the Semitic

qabala. Gems of the original proto-qabala can still be recognised within the core of the Hebrew system, which has been greatly polluted by the religion and politics of Hebrew culture, and by the damage which accompanies the passage of history.

**Q-state:** Usually used in lab work. Refers to the 5th Element or quintessence. It is a state of energy and a physical (al-chemical) state not as yet recognised by modern science. It appears only as a homogenous combination of the three purified alchemical Principals (P-States). This wedding of the 3 P-States creates a new form of matter-energy called a quintessence, or Q-state. The Q-state of matter is the primary vehicle for the evolutionary force in nature and is responsible for the transmutation effect.

**Quintessence:** See Q-state.

**Rejuvenation:** The term used for the effect that a Q-state pharmaceutical preparation has on organic beings (plants and animals). Accelerated evolution. Most often effected in alchemy by ingestion of the Elixir of Life. It is little known that one of the side effects of alchemical rejuvenation is the activation (or maturing) of latent higher psychic functions. Typically alchemical rejuvenation is accompanied by a loss of hair, toe and fingernails and teeth, which all re-grow. The alchemist also loses the function of unconsciousness during sleep, in which he remains fully aware. Proper alchemical rejuvenation returns and holds the alchemist at the physical stage of his 40's (years of age), in perfect health, indefinitely. the 40's being that point in human life where the life force reaches its peak. (It does not replace early youth as is often historically claimed.)

**Ritual:** Forms part of *Magic* theory and practice, but is also sometimes made use of by alchemists. Ritual most often involves the technical use of occult symbolism within a ritual format designed to effect the unconscious mind and produce Magic effects. While other schools of occultism (such as the Eastern tradition) make use of ritual, the consummate art of ritual Magic has been developed far more extensively in the Western tradition than any other.



**Rosicrucian(ism):** The original Rosicrucians were a legendary Western occult secret society that made their presence publicly known in the early 17th century. The pamphlets that were allegedly published by this society provided simple descriptions of its history, work and purpose. These concepts soon became accepted as the blueprints for everything that was considered ideal about a classic Western secret society. Rosicrucianism is a combination of mystical Christianity with a strong emphasis on laboratory alchemy and the study and practice of Magic. One of its key approaches to esoteric study and practice was an insistence on a scientific approach to esoteric subjects.

**Spagyric(s):** A term more often used in lab alchemy, but also applicable to the inner work. Refers specifically to the formula of the alchemical process - to separate, purify and recombine. The art and science of applying the spagyric formula to particular situations, such as chemistry, art and politics. The term was invented by Paracelsus. In recent times the word has been erroneously used to define non-esoteric (philosophic) alchemical practices. The proper term for such practices is *alchemy*.

**Transmutation:** Accelerated evolution, or ripening, of a subject. Usually used to refer to the effect that the transmutation agent called the Philosopher's Stone has on base metals, where the base metal is converted into a noble metal. There are also lesser transmutation agents (called 'particulars'), which usually transmute base metals in to other base metals. Transmutation is the effect we normally attribute to evolution in its full force in the metallic kingdom. Transmutation, the Intent of the Supreme Being in full effect.

**Underground stream (the):** A modern term that was made popular by the infamous book *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. The term refers to the concept of a highly secretive unbroken chain of pure esoteric teaching, reaching 1000s of years back in history, and still existing today. Individuals who are party to this teaching rarely make the fact known, and kept their knowledge strictly secret - except on the rare occasion that exposing something of

their truth is required in order to correct an over abundance of error in the popular esoteric community.

## Appendix II

A Latin version of the Emerald Tablet

**TABVLA SMA-**  
**RAGDINA HERMETIS TRIS-**  
 megifti . Incerto interprete.  
 Verba Secretorũ Hermetis

Verũ, sine mendacio, certũ et verissimũ. Quod est Inferius est sicut qđ est Superius, et qđ est Superius est sicut qđ est Inferius, ad perpetranda Miracula Rei Unius. Et sicut res omnes fuerunt ab Uno, meditatione unius, sic Omnes Res natae ab hac una Re, adaptatione. Pater eius est Sol. Mater eius est Luna. Portavit illud Ventus in Vẽtre suo. Nutrix eius Terra est. Pater omnis Telesmi totius Mundi est hic. Virtus eius integra est si versa fuerit in Terrã. Separabis Terrã ab Igne, subtile ab spisso, suaviter, cũ magno ingenio. Ascendit a Terra in Coelũ, iterumque descendit in Terrã, et recipit Vim superiorũ et inferiorũ. Sic habebis Gloriã totius Mundi. Ideo fugiet a te omnis Obscuritas. Haec est totius Fortitudinis Fortitudo fortis, quia vincet Omnem rem subtilem, Omnemque Solidam penetrabit. Sic Mundus creatus est. Hinc erunt Adaptationes Mirabiles, quarũ Modus est hic. Itaque vocatus sum Hermes Trismegiftus, habens tres partes Philofophiae totius Mundi. Completũ est qđ dixi de Operatione Solis.

⚡

15-37-5

Figure 13: The Latin tablet

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