

# Hermetic concepts

Hermetism is becoming more and more popular. But how many people will be able to say much about what are the ideas that can be found within the Hermetic texts? I decided to take a few subjects and work them out with quotes from different texts. These are not by one author or one group of authors, so the texts may contradict each other. This does not matter, because the underlying philosophy is always the same. For this comparison of concepts I used the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Asclepius*, the Hermetic texts from the Nag Hammadi library, the Stobaeus and Tertulianus fragments and *De Castigatione Animae*. Of most the texts I have Dutch translations, and of almost all I also have English translations. For the quotes I mostly used the very literal translation of Walter Scott (1855-1925), sometimes I preferred my Dutch translations by Gilles Quispel and Roelof van den Broek (Q/VdB in the text).

## GOD

The first subject that I want to speak about is God, in Greek *and* Latin usually "Deus". This is a very prominent subject and every single text refers to it. In different ways as we will see.

"God" is not a word with one meaning in the Hermetic scriptures. In fact, a whole range of meanings are given to it, even within the same text. One such meaning is *God as the absolute*. The seventh libellum of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, verse 2 (CH VII.2) says: "For He cannot be known by hearing, nor made known by speech; nor can He be seen with bodily eyes, but with mind ('nous') and heart alone." and CH V.8 says that God is "too mighty to be named God" (verse 1) and "too big for a name" (verse 8; Scott has a missing piece here). Another very nice quote comes from *De Castigatione Animae* chapter 1: "He [...] is the universal, not the sum of all." The first Hermetic fragments of Tertulianus are in the vein of "There is one God; he is beyond comprehension and appraisalment." (fragm. II) and also in Stobaeus we can find similar quotes, such as: "To conceive God ('Deus') is difficult; to describe him is impossible." (Stob. I.1) But we have other views on God.

Slightly more common is *God as being (the sum of) Good*. Sayings such as "God the Good" or "God is the sum of good" can be found in CH II.15; CH VI (this whole libellum, it is entitled: "That the Good is in God alone, and nowhere else"); CH X.1; and Stobaeus fragment II B.3.

A more often used attribute is *God as cause or beginning of all* or as it says in CH III.1: "God is the the source of all that is". This already comes close to another subject that I will speak about later (creation), but I just want to point you to CH I.6; CH II.12+13 ("God is He that is neither Mind nor Thruth, but is the cause to which Mind and Thruth, and all things, [...] owe their existence"); CH VIII.2, CH XI.3 and chapter 1 of the *Castigatione* which says: "origin, creator and founder of the universe". Stobaeus XXI.1 speaks about the pre-existent ('pro-on').

Then we come to *God as the Maker* (or I could say "builder" or "great Architect. Everard uses "Workman", Scott "Maker"). "The Great Architect [...] [is] ever present and ever existing, has created everything and is eternal and one" (CH IV.1 - my English version of Quispel/Van den Broek. Scott does give the Greek of "CH IV I A", but leaves it untranslated). Also see CH IX.5; *Asclepius* verses 2+8 ("the Master, the Maker (conformator) of all things, whom by usage we name God") and Stobaeus II B.3. Everard uses the word a lot, like in CH X and CH XIII. In Greek the word for "Maker" is quite consequentially "demiurgos", but Stob.XXIII.4 uses "techutos" of which Scott made "craftsman" and one time "poeita" ("Maker" verse 37) but later just "demiurgos".

Or isn't He the Great Architect? As we saw God is the creator, but CH XVI.5 says that the Great Architect is the sun! The same goes for CH XVI.18 which says: "God (Deus) then is the Father of all; the Sun is the Demiurgus; and the Kosmos (see below) is the instrument by means of which the Demiurgus works." The Stobaeus fragment *Of Thruth* (II A.14) says: "[the Sun] do I worship, and I adore his reality, acknowledging him, next after the one supreme God, as the Maker." Another Stobaeus fragment says that the Sun ('helios') is an image of the Maker ('demiurgos') who is above the heavens. The supreme Maker created the universe and the Sun the animals and plants (Stob. XXI.2).

## Kosmos

The next subject that I want to talk about is the "Kosmos" which is "a god" according to CH XII.15. Everard translates the word to "world", Quispel/Van den Broek and Scott leave the word untranslated.

"God brings forth Eternity; Eternity the Kosmos; the Kosmos time; time birth and changeableness" (CH XI.2, missing in Scott), but: "The Lord and creator of this universe, who we call God, brought forth from himself a second god which is visible and senseable", this second god is called the "Kosmos" (Ascl.8). This Kosmos is the son of God (CH IX.8 and CH X.14). The fact that the Kosmos came forth from God himself, makes it an image of God, which indeed is confirmed in CH XII.15 and CH VIII.2, however in the last verse the Kosmos is not name specifically. The 'trinity' God-Kosmos-man is sometimes mentioned, like in CH X.14, Stob. XI.2 and *Castigatione* ch.21. More about this in the chapter about creation. In CH X.10 Tat asks: "who therefore is this material God?" in the translation of Everard. In my Dutch translation the question is: "then who is the God of the outer world?" and Scott has "What then, are we to think of the material God, the Kosmos?" The Kosmos sometimes seems to be the outer world, sometimes its God: the second god.

Surprisingly enough we have other candidates for being the second god. CH XII.8 has a Good Mind/Spirit or Agathodaimon as second god. Asclepius 32 (missing in Scott) speaks about the Mind of Aion which can both be explained by being God himself or the second god.

According to Ascl.3, also heaven is a god who stands at the same level as the world-soul (about which later) and above these two is God himself.

Something that actually is more aligned with the subject of creation but which I want to shortly note here anyway, is the fact that CH I.8 (quoted below) speaks about a high and a low Kosmos. I will come back to this soon.

## Logos

"God does not build with His hands, but with his Logos (Word)" (CH IV.1; Scott does give the Greek, but leaves this line untranslated). Here we come a bit closer to the next subject. This Logos is "the image and Mind of God" (CH XII.14 with Quispel/Van den Broek), which same line is Scotts CH XII.13A "Speech (Logos) then, is an image of mind (nous) and mind is an image of God". So where did this Logos come from? "Poimandres" (CH I) says that the Word comes from the creative light (God) (CH I.4+5) and moves earth and water (CH I.5). Is the Logos the Eternity that we ran into in CH XI.2? Probably not, but a fact is that in certain Gnostic worldviews (and for example Genesis) the Logos plays a prominent part in ...

## CREATION

This subject is also interesting. Some texts speak about it in detail -and these details differ-, other texts do not come further than the earlier quoted: "God makes the Aeon (eternity), the Aeon makes the Kosmos, the Kosmos makes Time, Times makes Coming-to-be ('genesis')." (CH XI.2).

Paging through the *Corpus Hermeticum* we find a detailed account of creation in the third libellum. This account reminds a bit of Genesis:

"There was darkness in the deep ('abyssos'), and water without form; and there was a subtle breath ('pneuma'), intelligent, which permeated the things in the Chaos with divine power." (CH III.1). Then a divine light raises up and the elements came forth from the moist substance (verse 1). The gods used the best of these elements to create the world (v. 3). Also we can read how light elements raise up to the heavens, heavy elements sink into the earth and how the sun, the moon and the stars are formed (v.2). Also quite interesting is the fact that the gods create animals and men without the need of the Logos (v.3 - note by Quispel en Van den Broek).

Other details can be found in CH VIII in which we can read that God is the absolute first of everything who creates a second god after His own image (verse 2). "The Father ('pater') took all that part of matter ('hylè') which was subject to his will, and made it into a body, a made it bulk, and fashioned it into a sphere. [...] the Father implanted within this sphere the qualities of all kinds of living creatures, and shut them up in it" (verse 3).

Another variant of this we can find in Asclepius 2 where "the One [who is] all things, seeing that all things are in the Creator" forms the world. "Soul ('anima') and corporal substance ('mundus') together are embraced by nature and by natures working kept in movement." (verse 2) Verse three continues to speak about creation. Then in verse 14 we learn more about the raw material that I mentioned before. In Greek it is called "hylè" and the Latin text of the *Asclepius* gives it in Greek! The word may some of you may be familiar with. "Hylè" is the primeval matter, the "mulaprakriti" of the East, or rather "hyloteta" (CH VIII.3) is the first matter, and "hyle" (sometimes) 'normal matter'. Verse 14 of *Asclepius* (which reminds a bit of the

*Stanzas of Dzyan* from Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*) says that in the beginning there was God and matter. "The elements of which the universe is composed were not then in existence, because they had not yet come into being; but they were already in that form which they were to be generated." "The spirit-of-life moves and leads everything and everything moves within hylè", says verse 17, according to Quispel and Van den Broek. Scott has that matter is the receiver of forms, laid upon it by spirit according to the will of God.

"The unmovable spiritual world sets the world of matter [...] in motion" (CH X.11 in Q/VdB, also see Ascl.30). This is usually done by the Mind, of which is said: "the workings of God are mind ('nous') and soul ('psyche')" (CH XI.2). Of the 'world-soul' (in Q/VdB) I will speak more about below.

Then in the Nag Hammadi text about the 8th and 9th celestial spheres (NHC VI.6) we also have a nice piece about creation. Gods nature gives form and substance, created all and holds everything in himself. Therefor the All has gotten soul.

In Stobaeus we find a very long fragment called "Kore Kosmou" (Stob. XXIII) which means 'eye-apple (or pupil) of the world', but also 'maiden of the world'. It is a long account of created that Isis gives to her son Horus. Isis tells that the sole ruler commands lesser gods who split the homogenous mass in to (verse 8), the God makes the stars (verse 9). When the lesser gods told God that the world below was very empty and boring so God formed a beautiful woman out of his voice, this woman he named Nature (verse 10). Hierna volgt een gedetailleerde beschrijving van de 'vulling' van de aarde en de lucht.

The first libellum of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is a long one and speaks at length about creation.

The primal form precedes an infinite beginning (verse 8). God as creator brings forth another spirit as the god of fire and the breath of life, while seven governors create the perceptible kosmos with its spheres (v.9). Then the Logos that we spoke about before, connects himself with the modelling spirit (nous) which causes the spheres to spin and thus creates animals (v.10). The Father/Mind -though- creates the (heavenly) Man (or Antropos) who resembles Himself (v.12). Man sees his image in the waters of the world, falls in love with matter (v.14) and caused mankind to be twofold: mortal after the body, immortal after the true Man (v.15). Also we can read how the human race gets separated in two sexes.

## THE MIND IN MAN

However the Stobaeus fragments speak quite a bit about the soul ('pneuma'), the larger texts deal more with the mind in man. Its relation with the divine Mind for example. Translating the words I come to the problem that in Greek and Dutch one word can be used with or without a capital, but in English I say it would have be the Mind of God, which is the spirit in man. Scott chose to use "mind" for every time the Greek text says "nous". The usual Hermetic division of a human being is the well-known body-soul-mind/spirit, but this is not a natural combination. "Do not all men have mind?" is a question that is asked in both CH I.22 ('nous') (Hermes to Mind) and Ascl.7 ('sensus') (Asclepius to Hermes). The answers are fairly clear ("pay attention"), but I want to quote CH IV.3 in which Hermes says to Tat: "Npw speech ('logos') [...] God departed on all men; but mind ('nous') he did not impart to all." This is much different from what we read in CH XVI.15 where Asclepius writes to Ammon: "For at the time when each one of us is born and made alive, the daemons who at that time are on duty as ministers of birth take charge of us." This may sound much different from the mind we have from God. Another example then: "And the third being is man [who] differs from all other living creatures upon in that he possesses mind, for so the Father has willed".

At other times mind is a price for people who lead a good and devout life. "I, even Mind, come to those man who are holy and good and pure and mercifull.", as the Mind says to Hermes in CH I.22. There is a whole libellum in the *Corpus Hermeticum* dedicated to the subject. In a discourse of Hermes to Tat called "Crater" ("the basin") (CH IV) Hermes says that man have both sense and mind and is therefor higher than the Kosmos, but not all men have spirit. Spirit is "a prize that human souls may win" (CH IV.3). People worthy can immerse in a crater or mixing-barrel of spirit that God has sent and thereby receive Gnosis in the translation of Gilles Quispel and Roelof van den Broek.

A wonderfull piece in *Asclepius* says that besides *pneuma* which is in everthing, man was also granted a soul in order to be able to watch intuitively; this is the *quintessence*, the fifth element (verse 6, based on translation by Q/VdB).

Another libellum in the *Corpus Hermeticum* that speaks about the subject at length is X "the key". Here we get some more information about the mind of man. You can read what 'clothing' ("wrap" in Scott) it gets when incarnating (CH X.17), that it gets a fiery body ('pneuma' or "vital spirit") after the physical body

died and that this fiery body is the mind's actual vehicle (verse 18) and even that souls can become spirits and spirits angels ('daimons') (verse 21). But also here not every human has a spirit, because you have to pray ('daimon') (verse 22) for such a protective spirit, a good spirit (verse 22). Also the spirit can leave the soul (verse 24) when people no longer deserve it (verse 24).

Some interesting remarks we can find in CH XII, where we can read again that Mind comes from Gods being, that in men Mind ('nous') is a god and that where is a soul, there is Mind, but in animals there are souls without Mind/spirit. Man have Mind and Logos/language, but animals do not, but in these beings it works as instinct.

Asclepius 11 also says that not only the lower part of man has four parts (elements), but also the higher part of man, since it consists of soul, spirit, memory and intuition, however you may think that the last two are part of either of the first two.

*Asclepius* also says that with the spirit can amalgamate with the soul when a human gives himself up to God (Ascl.18, not in Scott). Something similar we can find in the *Castigatione Animae* where chapter 1 says that above the soul is the spirit and the spirit is above the soul *and encloses it*.

And when in Ascl.6 Asclepius asks Hermes if not all men have spirit/Mind Hermes says that not all men have received the true Gnosis. Some have carried away by illusions and thus bringing evil in a man and here we come to the next subject that I want to write about.

## EVIL

As you may know some of the Gnostic milieu (Gnosticism is one of the sources of Hermeticism), evil is everything 'here below'. Hermetics are mostly a little less pessimistic. Still you can still read in the *Castigatione* that the soul has cloths of evil that have to be laid off (chapter 4) or in CH X that the world is the most impure of the impure and CH VIII.4 says that the world here below is evil's domain. Stob. XXIII.41 even states that life on earth should be regarded as punishment. Less strong is one Stobaeus fragment II A (*Of Truth*) that says: "everything on earth is illusion" (verse 3). Another chapter of the *Castigatione* is a bit clearer on the latter: "The world is not only bad, not only good." (chapter 2). Still man is evil because he is mortal and changeable (CH X.12). In the same verse it is said that the world/Kosmos is not evil, because it may be changeable, but it is eternal. So what then is 'Hermetic evil'? Well, there are different forms of it.

The biggest evil of a human being is Godlessness. This we can read in most of the Hermetic texts, but this is of course not the evil that we talk about. The bad things in the world are not made by a cruel God, because: "But neither did the Copper-smith make the Rust, nor the Maker the Filth, nor God the Evilness. But the vicissitude of Generation doth make them" (CH XIV.7 in translation of Everard). God did not make evil, it evolved as time passed. And this "evil is visible, while goodness is invisible" (CH IV.9). Evil is a part of the Kosmos because it is needed to bring understanding and Gnosis to men (Ascl.16).

How does all this work? CH XVI 13-15 says that under command of the seven planets there are spirits, good and bad. These spirits (or 'daemons') cause what happens on earth and even work in human bodies. "Do I have evil spirits, father, in myself who torture me?" Tat asks Hermes in CH XIII.7. "Not a few, my son, they are as terrible as they are many" Hermes answers. Not very promising! And for people who give into the evil spirits that haunt him, awaits more punishment in the afterlife. *Asclepius* 28 speaks about some kind of purgatory where astral bodies are tormented after death. There are special demons for this task who see to it that you lay off your evil deeds after death.

And to close off I want to tell you how to avoid all this and what is the way to ...

## SALVATION

*De Castigatione Animae* is a relatively long text that gives you a whole spiritual path on an Hermetic basis. The whole text is about salvation. The 3rd chapter has a very nice story about the soul which is like a boat on the sea. The boat keeps being pushed back and forth by the waters of life and can only be brought to rest by pulling it ashore to the source and root of its being.

This 'turning to good/God' is the advice that you will hear most. "But first you must tear up the garment which you wear, --this cloak of darkness, this web of ignorance, this prop of evil, this bond of corruption, - this living death, this conscious corpse, this tomb you carry about with you, -this robber in the house, this enemy who hates the things you seek after, and grudges you the things which you desire." (CH VII.2)

"And men can end the cycle of transmigrations of the soul and be immortal when they transform

themselves into good spirits." (CH X.7), Scotts translation is much different, but says the same: "And human souls, when they have attained to a beginning of immortal life, change into daemons, and thereafter pass on into the choral dance of the gods".

"We are glad that You made us divine in our bodies by your gnosis" (*Prayer Of Thanksgiving Nag Hammadi Codex VI.7*). Lets act to it!

## some information about Hermetic scriptures

This article comes forth from a lack of (easily findable) information that I have been looking for and is the result of a series of adaptations and investigations during november 2003. There may still be changes still, but I think the information is fairly complete now. I had two 'problems' with Hermetic scriptures: Problem 1. Nowhere could I find a list with **books ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus**, this means, writings that we nowadays believe to be genuinely 'Hermetic' (this does not mean: written by Hermes). Because I could't find this list either in my personal library or on the internet, I started to make one myself. Later I ran into such a list on the [internet](#) AND on 15/11/03 the new book of the Dutch scholar Jacob Slavenburg was released ([see review](#)). It deals with Hermetic history and... has a list with Hermetic scriptures within his 'sources list'. Here is the Slavenburg list:

- **Book of Thoth**, recently discovered/compiled pre-Hermetic text;
- **Aphorisms of Hermes**, from the *Alchemista Graeca* 115.10;
- **Asclepius**, an older and long Hermetic text that is much more Egyptian than the *Corpus Hermeticum* and of which Latin translations were known in the Middle Ages. in 1945 a gnostic library was found near the Egyptian village Nag Hammadi. this library included three Hermetic texts of which one was unknown until then, including a Coptic translation of the *Logos Teleios* ('perfect doctrine') which is the source-text of the *Asclepius*. the Coptic translation is much less free than the Latin translation that we already had;
- **Brontologion**, also *doctrine of thunder*, a Greek-Egyptian astrological treatise;
- **Corpus Hermeticum** in 17 "libelli" (plural of "libellus" a word that Slavenburg and Walter Scott (see second part of this article) use for "treatise"). there are versions of the *Corpus Hermeticum* that have other treatises than the normal ones (see below);
- **Prayer of Thanksgiving** (NHC VI-7);
- **The religious experience of doctor Thessalos**, a medical Hermetic work;
- **Secret method of Hermes Trismegistos for every initiative**, an astrological writing;
- **Greek magical papyri** (Papyri Graecae Magicae), being:
  - ritual (pgm I);
  - isis' complaint (pgm IV);
  - to the waxing moon (pgm IV)'
  - magical spell for doing business (pgm IV);
  - the ring of Hermes (pgm V);
  - conjuration for shy men (pgm V);
  - hymn to Hermes (pgm V);
  - lamb fortune telling (pgm VII);
  - love-spell of Astrapsoukos (pgm VIII);
  - dreamwish (pgm XII);
  - hymn to Hermes (pgm XVIIb);
- **The holy book of Hermes to Asclepius**, an astrological/medical text;
- **Hermetic definitions**, or *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos for Asclepius*, originally an Armenian text and which is fairly long;
- **latromathematica of Hermes Trismegistus to the Egyptian Ammon**, subtitled *foreknowledge concerning diseases that force people to bed* ("bedlegerige ziekten" in Dutch) *according to mathematical science*;
- the **Kyraniden** 1) *Kyranis* and 2) *Koiranides*, medical texts;
- **Liber Hermetis Trismegisti**, a fairly long astrological text;
- **Of the plant called Pioen**;
- **Of the influence of planets on plants**;
- **Peri Seismon**, astrological text;
- **Salmeschoiniaka**, either translated as *book of images* as *book of great birthgiving*, an astrological text;
- **fragments from Stobaeus' Anthologium** (*Stobaei Hermetica*) a compilation of Greek quotes for his son

of which some proved to be Hermetic and some even unknown:

- 1 : fragment of conversation between Hermes and Tat;
- 3 : of the same (Hermes);
- 4 : fragments of conversations between Hermes and Tat;
- 5 : fragments of conversations between Hermes and Tat and between Tat and Ammon;
- 6 : fragment of conversation between Hermes and Tat;
- 9 : fragments of conversations between Hermes and Tat;
- 10: fragment of conversation between Hermes and Tat;
- 16: fragments of conversations between Hermes and Ammon;
- 23: *korè kosmou* ('eye of the world', but also 'little maid of the world', much longer than the rest and available in the Scott book "Hermetica" and in the 'Secret Doctrine Reference Series' in a translation by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, two Theosophists);
- 24: (Isis to Horus);
- 28: aphorisms;
- 29: from Hermes (about planets)

(three Stobaeus fragments can be found in the editions of the *Corpus Hermeticum* of Patrizi and Van Rijckenborgh (see below):

- *Hermes to Tat: of Thruth* (Stobaeus IIA in the Scott counting);
- *Oration of Hermes to Tat / first book*;
- *Of Operation and Sense*.

Walter Scott has all 23 fragments, also those that can be found in other texts and those which are only one line. Also Scott has 37 fragments found in texts of Tertulian, all of which are only one or two lines.)

- [Tabula Smaragdina](#);
- **Therapeutic manual of Harpokration**;
- **Received from the angels as gift of the unforgettable God, the God Hermes Trismegistus, to tell to people who are endowed with understanding**;
- **From Hermes about the plants of the twelve signs**;
- [Discourse on the eight and ninth \(celestial spheres\)](#) (Nag Hammadi Codex VI-6);
- **(Hermetic) discourse about the soul**;
- **Abridged medical manual of Hermes Trismegistos in accordance with astrological science in the natural influences of animals, addressed to his student Asclepius**;
- **True book of Sophé**, anonymous alchemical text;
- **Fragments of Vienna**, *Vindobonenses Graecae* 29456r and 29828r;
- **Book of the secret of creation**;
- **The large letter of the spheres of Hermes of Dendera**;
- **Light upon the life of Hermes of Hermesses for who wishes this**, Arabic text;
- **Liber XXIV Philosophorum**, or *book of the 24 wise*, an alchemical writing of which some versions say it is by Hermes, some don't say that.
- **Liber Alcidi**, book with aphorisms of Hermes;
- **Silverwater and starearth**, Arabic alchemical text.

To this already impressive text I would like to add the following titles:

- **De Castigatione Animae**, an Arabic with text the title *Kitab Mu'adilat an-Nafs* that was translated to Latin twice (1736 J.J. Reiske and 1873 O. Bardenhewer) and can be found in a few German books of 1840 and 1870. it is now also translated to Dutch. see my [review](#) of this little book;
- **Tractatus aureus de Lapide Philosophico**, I am in doubt about this one. an esoteric encyclopedia of mine lists this as an Hermetic text and [Frank van Lamoen](#) also has it as authentic Hermetic text, but it was written by a certain Joannes de Lasnioro, according to [this page](#). the text is part of the alchemical book *Musaeum Hermeticum* (1625, 1678, 1749) and also *Ars Chemica* (1556);
- **Papyrus Mimaut**;
- **Fragmenta Hermetica**, "1-36 (Nock and Festugiere, 1945-1954, vol. 4): various fragments quoted in Greek, Latin or Syriac by several authors from Tertullian (second-third century CE) to Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286). to these fragments should be added the papyri *Vindobonenses Graecae* 29456r and 29828r, as well as an Armenian fragment and several Syriac fragments." <info from [this page](#)>;
- **Minerva Mundi**, Eliphas Levi mentions this "Hermetic text" on page 176 of my Dutch translation of his *Dogme et Rituel de la haute Magie* and [this page](#) has it as alchemical Hermetic text and says the

following: "The treatise *"Minerva Mundi,"* attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, contains, under the most poetical and profound allegories, the dogma of the self-creation 'of beings, or of the law of creation that results from the accord of two forces, these which the Alchemists called the Fixed and the Volatile, and which are, in the Absolute, Necessity and Liberty.'" (the text is from Albert Pike);  
 - **Centiloquium**, published in the *Liber Nativitatem* (1501) and is an astrological text that is also sometimes ascribed to Ptolemaeus (2nd cent.).

Many texts have been lost, also keytexts such as the *General Discourses* that are referred to in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and which Slavenburg believes to be the beginners lessons of the Hermetic initiation education.

Should anyway have more information, I would like to [hear](#) from you.

## Another problem that I ran into is the **order of the treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum***.

I thought that this order had long been fixed and agreed upon, but even fairly recent editions of the text, have different orders and different treatises even! I may have to let you down admitting that I own only two version of the text, which are the Dutch translation by Roelof van den Broek and Gilles Quispel (1990) who use the 'official counting' of I-XIV and XVI-XVIII, which I will explain lateron and the four books of Jan van Rijckenborgh (see below). Further, the internet, information of the [Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica](#) by email (thank you Cis), the small library of the local temple of the [Lectorium Rosicrucianum](#) and later a book by Frank van Lamoen ([see review](#)), have made me able to compare four other versions: Van Beyerland (1643), Everard (1650), Mead (1906), Van Rijckenborgh (1960-1965) and Copenhaver (1992, including *Asclepius*).

To start, I want to give you a short account of the history of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

<b>11th cent.</b>	Michael Psellus knows the <i>Corpus Hermeticum</i> as bundled treatises;
<b>1463</b>	Ficino finishes the translations of 14 treatises that he got from Cosimo de Medici;
<b>1471</b>	after having circulated for several years, the first publication follows;
<b>- - - &gt;</b>	more and more manuscripts turn up, some of which have more treatises than Ficanos;
<b>1507</b>	Ludovico Lazzarelli translates the current treatise XVI to Latin;
<b>1554</b>	the Greek text is published by Adrianus Turnebus. this version contains 16 treatises and 3 fragments from a compilation of Greek quotes that John Stobaeus made for his son;
<b>1574</b>	François de Foix republishes the Greek text with some corrections. also he leaves out the current treatises XVII and XVIII and puts in the Stobaeus quotes as treatise XV;
<b>1494</b>	Jacques le Fèvres d'Étaples meets Ficino and released the sixth (!! ) printing with his own commentary;
<b>1565</b>	le Fèvres released the <i>Corpus</i> and the <i>Asclepius</i> in one book.

Many later versions used the De Foix Greek printing to translate the text, but left out the spurious Stobaeus texts without altering the numbering. Even the first scientific publishing of Nock and Festugière (1945-1952) uses the numbering I-XIV + XVI-XVIII.

This is also the reason that I expected all versions after 1574 to have the same order, but this is not true. Let me give you the order of my "scientifically just" version of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which is based on the Greek text in the publishing of Nock and Festugière. Of course I only have Dutch titles of the treatises so the English versions are my own.

I	Poimandres
	Poimandres
II	Een algemeen gesprek van Hermes met Asclepius
	A general conversation of Hermes and Asclepius
III	Een gewijde verhandeling van Hermes
	A consecrated discourse of Hermes
IV	Het Mengvat of De Eenheid

	The Crater or Unity <"Mengvat" actually means "mixing-barrel">
V	God: onzichtbaar en toch goed zichtbaar God: invisible and yet very visible
VI	Het Goede is alleen in God en nergens anders Goodness is in God alone and nowhere else
VII	Onwetendheid aangaande God: het grootste kwaad onder de mensen Ignorance concerning God: the biggest evil of mankind
VIII	Van wat bestaat, vergaat niets Nothing that exists shall perish
IX	Inzicht en Waarneming Insight and Perception
X	Openbaring van de driewerf grote Hermes: Sleutel Disclosure of the thrice greatest Hermes: Key
XI	De Geest spreekt tot Hermes The Mind speaks to Hermes
XII	De Geest die het Al doordringt The Mind that penetrates All
XIII	De driewerf grote Hermes spreekt tot zijn zoon Tat The thrice greatest Hermes speaks to his son Tat
XIV	Het Wezen van het Al The Being of All
XVI	Aforismen. Een brief van Asclepius aan koning Ammon Aformisms. A letter of Asclepius to king Ammon
XVII	Beelden Images (or Statues)
XVIII	Lofrede op het Koningschap Eulogy to Kingship

Please note that there is no treatise XV.

This order will be the basis of the comparisons of the other *Corpus Hermeticum*s.

So now we turn to the oldest version that I named in my introduction, being that of the Dutchman Abraham Willemsz **van Beyerland** (1586-1648). I haven't seen anything of the book, but according to [Van Lamoen](#), Van Beyerland used the Greek-Latin version of Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597, book released in 1591) who had a different order. More about this below

The version of John **Everard** (1575-1650) can be found [online](#) at the site of Adam MacLean and as PDF from [Hermetics.org](#) (look for "Corpus Hermetica"). It has 17 treatises, even though it is claimed to be a translation of Ficinos Latin version, which has only 14 treatises. According to [Frank van Lamoen](#), Everard used the Patrizi translation, but skips a few of his books.

Everard opens with a Stobaeus fragment. Then follow a few *CH* treatises in the alternative order. After this Everard skips Patrizi's book XIII which is the *Korè Kosmou* fragment of Stobaeus and also skips Patrizi's book XIV which is a compilation of eight Stobaeus fragments. Then follows an authentic treatise, Stobaeus fragments as books XIV and XV and two more authentic treatises. A.E. Waite used this translation in his "Collectaeano Hermetica".

Here is the index of Everards translation, the right column is the numbering based on the 'official' numbering:

The First Book.	?
The Second Book - Poemander.	I
The Third Book - The Holy Sermon.	III
The Fourth Book - The Key.	X
The Fifth Book - That God is not Manifest and yet most Manifest.	V

The Sixth Book - That in God alone is Good.	VI
The Seventh Book - His Secret Sermon in the Mount or Regeneration, and the Profession of Silence.	XIII
The Eighth Book - That the greatest Evil in Man, is the not knowing God.	VII
The Ninth Book - A Universal Sermon to Asclepius.	II
The Tenth Book - The Mind to Hermes.	XI
The Eleventh Book - Of the Common Mind to Tat.	XII
The Twelfth Book - His Crater or Monas.	IV
The Thirteenth Book - Of Sense and Understanding.	IX
The Fourteenth Book - Of Operation and Sense.	?
The Fifteenth Book - Of Truth to His Son Tat.	?
The Sixteenth Book - That None of the Things that are, can Perish.	VIII
The Seventeenth Book - To Asclepius, to be Truly Wise.	XIV

Interesting point: "the first book" is Van Rijckenborghs (see later) fifth book and "the fifteenth book" is the same as seventeen of Van Rijckenborgh. Both books are Stobaeus fragments as we saw earlier. Everards 15th book is Stobaeus IIA.

Then we go to G.R.S. **Mead**, whose translation can be found online on several pages, [like this one](#) or as PDF [here](#). Mead has only 13 treatises which are part of a collection of "Hermetic texts".

I. Poemandres, the Shepherd of Men	I
II. To Asclepius	II
III. The Sacred Sermon	III
IV. The Cup or Monad	IV
V. Though Unmanifest God Is Most Manifest	V
VI. In God Alone Is Good And Elsewhere Nowhere	VI
VII. The Greatest Ill Among Men is Ignorance of God	VII
VIII. That No One of Existing Things doth Perish, but Men in Error Speak of Their Changes as Destructions and as Deaths	VIII
IX. On Thought and Sense	IX
X. The Key	X
XI. Mind Unto Hermes	XI
XII. About the Common Mind	XII
XIII. The Secret Sermon on the Mountain	XIII

**Jan van Rijckenborgh** wrote a series of four books with different Hermetic texts and his extensive commentaries. He has the *Tabula Smaragdina* and 17 treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. According to [Van Lamoen](#), Van Rijckenborgh used the 1706 German translation of a certain Alethophilus who on his turn used the Patrizi and Van Beyerland translations. Van Rijckenborgh stuck to the alternative order, but still comes out differently from Everard.

There is an English translation of the books, but I haven't seen them, so the translations of the titles are again my own.

Het eerste Boek: Pymander	I
The first Book: Pymander	
Het tweede Boek: Pymander tot Hermes	XI
The second Book: Pymander to Hermes	
Het derde Boek: Dat het grootste kwaad in de mensen is, dat zij God niet kennen	VII
The third Book: That the biggest evil in mankind is, that they do not know God	
Het vierde Boek: Hermes' rede ter ere Gods	III
The fourth Book: Hermes' oration to God's honour	
Het vijfde Boek: Uit een rede van Hermes tot Tat	? (1)

The fifth Book: From an oration of Hermes to Tat	
Het zesde Boek: Algemene dialoog tussen Hermes en Asklepios	II
The sixth Book: General dialogue between Hermes and Asklepios	
Het zevende Boek: Hermes tot Tat over de Crater en de Eenheid	IV
The seventh Book: Hermes to Tat of the Crater or Unity	
Het achtste Boek: Hermes tot zijn zoon Tat: Dat de onzienlijke God het meest openbaar is	V
The eight Book: Hermes to his son Tat: That the invisible God is most public	
Het negende Boek: Dat niets van hetgeen werkelijke bestaat verloren gaat, maar dat men in dwaling de veranderingen vernietiging en dood noemt	VIII
The ninth Book: That nothing that exists shall parish, but that by mistake people call changes destruction and death	
Het tiende Boek: Dat het Goede alleen in God en nergens anders te vinden is	VI
The tenth Book: That Goodness is in God alone and nowhere else	
Het elfde Boek: Over het verstand en de zintuigen	IX
The eleventh Book: Of intellect and senses	
Het twaalfde Boek: De sleutel van Hermes Trismegistos	X
The thirteenth Book: The key of Hermes Trismegistos	
Het dertiende Boek: Hermes Trismegistos tot Tat: Over het algemene Gemoed of de Heiligende Geest	XII
The thirteenth Book: Hermes Trismegistos to Tat: About the general Mind or the Holy-making Spirit	
Het veertiende Boek: De geheime Rede op den Berg, betreffende de wedergeboorte en de belofte van stilzijgendheid	XIII
The fourteenth Book: The secret Oration on the Mountain, about rebirth and the promise of silence	
Het vijftiende Boek: Hermes Trismegistos tot Asklepios: Over het juiste denken	XIV
The fifteenth Book: Hermes Trismegistos to Asklepios: about the right thinking	
Het zestiende Boek: Hermes tot Ammon: Over de Ziel	XVI
The sixteenth Book: Hermes to Ammon: About the Soul	
Het zeventiende Boek: Hermes tot Tat: Over de Waarheid	? (2)
The seventeenth Book: Hermes to Tat: About Thruth	

(1) Van Rijckenborghs fifth book is the same as the first book (even before Poimandres) of Everard.

(2) Van Rijckenborghs seventeenth book is the same as the fifteenth of Everard.

The last version of the *Corpus Hermeticum* that I want to mention is that of Copenhaver. I got his index from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), but it is rather boring as you can see:

Corpus Hermeticum I	I
Corpus Hermeticum II	II
Corpus Hermeticum III	III
Corpus Hermeticum IV	IV
Corpus Hermeticum V	V
Corpus Hermeticum VI	VI
Corpus Hermeticum VII	VII
Corpus Hermeticum VIII	VIII
Corpus Hermeticum IX	IX
Corpus Hermeticum X	X
Corpus Hermeticum XI	XI
Corpus Hermeticum XII	XII
Corpus Hermeticum XIII	XIII

Corpus Hermeticum XIV	XIV
Corpus Hermeticum XVI	XVI
Corpus Hermeticum XVII	XVII
Corpus Hermeticum XVIII	XVIII

To close off I want to give you a comparative table:

official order	Van Beyerland	Everard	Mead	Van Rijckent
I	I	? (1)	I	I
II	XI	I	II	XI
III	VII + III	III	III	VII
IV	II	X	IV	III
V	IV	V	V	? (1)
VI	V	VI	VI	II
VII	VIII	XIII	VII	IV
VIII	VI	VII	VIII	V
IX	IX	II	IX	VIII
X	X	XI	X	VI
XI	XII	XII	XI	IX
XII	XIII	IV	XII	X
XIII	XIV	IX	XIII	XII
XIV		?		XIII
XVI		? (2)		XIV
XVII		VIII		XVI
XVIII		XIV		? (2)

(1) and (2) these books are the same, but can't be found in most other versions of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, they are Stobaeus fragments, see text about the Everard translation above.

So now you can check if Everard or Van Rijckenborgh write: "the fourth book of Hermes says...".

<12/11/03 first update: I found one more Van Rijckenborgh treatise and I got a few of his titles correct now>

<13/11/03 second update: three Hermetic scriptures added>

<17/11/03 the Hermetic texts section is enormously enlarged after the release of the book *De Hermetische Schakel* (the Hermetic link) of Jacob Slavenburg>

<19/11/03 now all Van Rijckenborg titles are correct>

<26/11/03 minor changes after an email of mr Slavenburg>

<03/12/03 "Minerva Mundi" added>

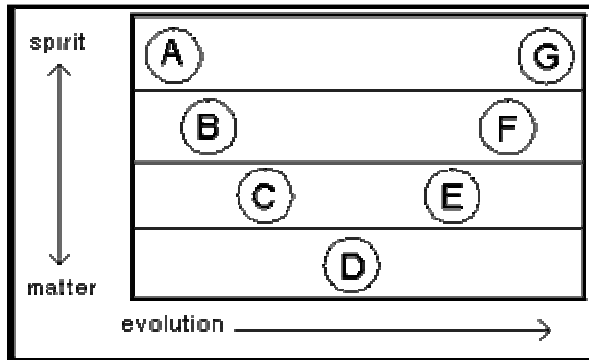
<10/12/03 I got myself the textual history of the *CH* of Frank van Lamoen and made the final (?) changes to the second part>

<11/12/03 final changes?>

## the esoteric tradition(s) of the west part I

### Early times

To make a start with these series about the esoteric tradition(s) from the west I will go back a long way in time, even before 'our periode', the times of Atlantis and farther back. The best basis to build on is the quite well-known (and controversial) theory of the globes and races of [Helena Petrovna Blavatsky](#) (often abbreviated to HPB) (1831-1891) which she wrote down in her monumental work "The Secret Doctrine" from 1888<sup>1</sup>.



In short the theory says that evolution goes in steps of seven. The earth passes through seven stages which HPB depicted by seven globes. They are not really interesting for this article though. It *does* become interesting when is mentioned that on each globe humanity also passes through seven stages, which are called the "root-races". These root-races are again divided in seven races, those in subraces, families, etc. Both the globes and the races that be shown in a diagram as you see on the right. The first globe or root-race may be very spiritual, but is on the very beginning of its evolution. Slowly but surely she descends into matter, striding along the path of evolution. Phase D is the most material phase halfway the evolutionary path. From then on it is forward and upward. In part II of her "The Secret Doctrine" (p6) HPB gives names to the root-races of our current globe D to make talking about them a bit easier. The first root-race becomes the "self-born", living on the "imperishable, holy land". The names for the later root-races already sound more familiar: "Hyperboreans", "Lemurians", "Atlantians" and "(Indo-)Aryans".

### **Homo cogito, the thinking man**

I am not going to write about every single root-race. First of all this doesn't add much to the purpose of this story, secondly it is very hard to find any descent information about the earlier civilisations. Fortunately the information and the level of interest for this article come together at the Lemurian race. This is because in the third race "thinking descended over humankind". HPB describes this as the inhabiting of human bodies by "Manasaputras" (SDII 260), which word means as much as that 'beings of thinking' (Manas=thinking, putra=being). The beginning of thinking is a nice stage in evolution to continue this article.

HPB writes that the Lemurians fell in bad habits while a small number of others walked the evolutionary path faster than average<sup>2</sup> (GLII 317). These were to be the future guides of mankind. Because of the misuse of the largest part of the population, Lemuria is destroyed by disasters of fire and water (earthquakes and volcano eruptions verses heavy and long rain and floods). How I would want to, I can't tell you much about Lemuria or it's inhabitants. It is the time of Atlantis from where the information is a bit easier to find.

### **Atlantis**

According to [G. de Purucker](#) (1874-1942) about every 4.320.000 a new root-race comes into being<sup>3</sup>. When the transition from Atlantis to our fifth root-race took place about 10.000 years ago, the destruction of Lemuria already happened quite a while back. Something that should be mentioned though, is that different root-races overlap for massive amounts of time. In fact, they just very slowly go over into eachother, the older one slowly extinguishing. Also the destruction of Lemuria didn't take place over a night. But it must be quite save to say that the first clear sign of the Atlantic race could be detected about four million years ago. The knowledge that was gained in Lemuria was taken to Atlantis.

However Atlantis already was a lot more physical/material than Lemuria, it is still hard to imagine what the land and its inhabitants looked like. [Rudolf Steiner](#) (1861-1925) describes in his "Geheimwissenschaft In Umriss"<sup>4</sup> with a dizzying amount of details the history of humankind, information he gathered through "mental spectating" (Steiner was born clairvoyant). He describes the bodies of the Atlantians as delicate and week, flexible and plastic and they were very expressive and an expression of the mental/spiritual development of its owner. The less developed, the bigger the body and the larger the limbs. Most Atlantians were enormous and grotesq (p 194/5), which means that the spiritual development of the largest part of the Atlantic population left much to be desired. In the mentioned book Steiner describes how the farthest developed Lemurians were allotted with thinking with help of "Luciferian beings" (the Manasaputras of Blavatsky) and how the difference between sleep and the waking state came forth. Also

Steiner wrote that the 'body of life' wasn't yet totally attached to the physical body which gave the Atlantians a certain 'spiritual freedom', especially in their sleep. Some of them managed to bind themselves with spiritual beings which speeded up their evolution quite drastically. These Atlantians can be called the first initiated and soon became the leaders of the Atlantic nations.

The Luciferian influence caused an individualisation under the human beings and the physical bodies of the Atlantians slowly started to become more physical/material. Less developed who were students of the initiated started their own experiments and power-loving initiated started to use their forces for selfish purposes. This was only halfway the Atlantic periode, but surely the beginning of the end.

### **After Atlantis**

Steiner describes how many disasters tortured the earth and because large parts of land came under water, people moved to higher places, especially to what we now call Europe, Asia and Afrika. The contact with the spiritual world was cut-off more and more and the giants extinguished while the Atlantic race was replaced by the Aryan. Steiner wrote that already in Atlantis there were seven oracles (or mystery-schools) of which the "Christus-oracle" was the most important. Just after the Atlantic periode the leader of this "Christus-oracle" found it necessary to lead his followers away from the rapidly degenerating rest of the human kind. He migrated to central Asia with them where he taught his seven best followers the secrets of the "Christus- oracle" and the other oracles and sent them out in the world as the first spiritual leaders. Most of them went to India because the people who lived there were still most susceptible for their teachings. This may be the reason why many people place the cradle of humanity in the area.

The second post-Atlantic periode, Steiner describes as the periode of Zoroaster/Zarathustra. This was a long long time before the religious reformer who took the same name around 700BC. Still the 'well-known' Zarathustra belonged to the Zarathurstrian tradition that started with the 'original Zarathustra'. This tradition had as aim to teach human kind the difference between good and evil, spirit and matter, etc. The almost extinct Zoroastrianism (founded by the 'pseudo-Zarathustra) is still known to us as an extremely dualistic religion. The Persians had an interesting mythology in which the so called "Devs" played a big role. Also there were "Peris" who were giants, just as the Devs, but not as gigantic. Unfortunately not too many Zoroastrian texts have made it to our time, but I want to point to one "Yasna" from the fairly well-known "Gathas of Zarathustra"<sup>5</sup>: "May the Depraved with his evil doctrine not destroy the world for the second time." (45.1). As we will see furtheron many post-Atlantic mythologies refer to Atlantis and the great flood.

Back to Steiner and his history of humanity. The third post-Atlantic periode is the one that took place in little Asia and northern Afrika. Of course this refers to a few civilisations that get quite a lot of attention nowadays: the Chaldean, Babylonean, Assyrian and Egyptian civilisations.

Human kind lost more and more senses and the contact with the spiritual world faded even more.

Development became more focused on the senses that we still have today and the physical world. The great leader of this periode -by the way- is Thoth/Hermes, but also this time the Thoth and Hermes that we think off today is merely a faint remnant of the original leader, but again still a great leader and in the same tradition. This second Thoth/Hermes will be dealt with in great length in these series.

As you may know, the Sumerian mythology is full of references to Atlantis and the flood. The best-known Mesopotamian (to use a few terms through eachother) myth is the epos of Gilgamesh which speaks about the man of the same name. Most likely the half-godly Gilgamesh was an Atlantian himself. One of the stones that are left of the Gilgamesh-epos is called the "flood-stone" (depicted on the bottom of this article). This photo will also make it quite clear to you why there are so many holes in our Gilgamesh-epos... But, let me give you a few Mesopotamian quotes to make my point: "after the flood, the whole of humanity was turned to clay" (turned more physical?) (Gilgamesh-epos, stone XI). The myth of Atrachis describes how the gods created men to do their dirty work, but they start to get annoyed by the noise that these humans make. First they sent a few plagues down, but eventually they take care of their creating by whipping them away in a great flood. Also there is an 'epos of creation' which speaks of creating, destruction and recreation<sup>6</sup>. The Babylonians also had a theory involving races. The first race was a "zalmat gagnadi" ("dark race") and called "Adami". The second race was a light race, called the "Sarku". Unfortunately I haven't been able to find any Egyptian myths refering to the flood or Atlantis. It seems there there is a myth about the four sons of Horus (and I am not talking about the four sons to who the organs are offered before embalseming), but in general there aren't really that many Egyptian myths available. What may be interesting to mention -by the way- is that most likely the Egyptians were *not* Atlantic people, which may explain the absence of Atlantic mythology. For a long time scientists have

broken their brains over the question how such a flourishing civilisation came falling out of the sky. After reading the above you may say: "simple, they were Atlantians fleeing from the water", but recently quite definite proof has been gathered that it is quite contrary to that. Some Sumerian tribes have probably wandered around for a while, ended up in northern Afrika and found the Nile-delta a nice place to establish. The Sumerians already had some time to build up their civilisation and when you have a good comparison, you can see quite clear resemblances between the Sumerian and early-Egyptian civilisations<sup>7</sup>. Anyway, it is not for this article to dive into that too deeply.

Let me shortly finish the Steiner story by mentioning that the fourth post-Atlantic civilisation was the Greek-Latin and the fifth our current one. This goes nicely parallel to Blavatsky's subraces of the fifth root-race.

### **Other referrals to the flood**

It remains a tough job to find information about Atlantis to write something what we would call "history". The only name -for example- that I have found is that of Thevelat who was "born wise" but let his people to a demise. This is shortly mentioned in the end of the first part of HP Blavatsky's first grand-opus "Isis Unveiled"<sup>8</sup>. Plato (428-347BC) writes a few things about Atlantis<sup>9</sup> in his "Timaeus" and "Critias", but also here nothing that we would give the name "history". In "Phaedrus" he is said to mention a winged human race.

In better known texts we also find referrals to the flood. The Bible refers to it for example (see Genesis 6:5) and the (Atlantic) giants are mentioned in Genesis 6:4. With some effort we can even filter Blavatsky's race-theory out of Genesis. In Genesis 1:26 we read that man was created "after our likeness", when Eve is created in Genesis 3:20/21 mankind is lifted in "skirts of skin" (I don't know the official English translation) and after that we are suddenly "one ours".

An apocryphical (not unrecognised) but still quite known book is the Ethiopian "Book of Enoch" which is a strange blend of different writers from the times of the Old Testament to the New Testament. It tells the story of Enoch who must have been an Atlantian, because he was the grandfather of Noah (see LVX 1) who we of course know from the Bible. The book describes how angels in the form of animals form other animals (LXXXVI, the fall), how the giants were created because of actions of the fallen angels (VII 1-), speaks extensively of the flood and the destruction of the giants (for example XVI, 1), tells how Noah is warned by the angel Uriel (X 1,2) and gives a clear explanation for the reason the earth was destroyed:

"And a command has gone forth from the presence of the Lord concerning those who dwell on the earth that their ruin is accomplished because they have learnt all the secrets of the angels, and the violence of the Satans, and all their powers -the most secret ones- and all the power of those who practise sorcery, and the power of witchcraft, and the power of those who make molten images for the whole earth" (LXV 6)<sup>10</sup>. The quoted book seems to have a Gnostic<sup>11</sup> tendency, but also often seems very 'evangelic'.

Then again another better-known book, the Islamitic 'bible' "Qor'an". I couldn't find any unambiguous references to Atlantis or the flood, but verse 15 of chapter 29 (the Al-Ankabut) is definitely worth citing: "Truly, we sent Noah to his people, and he remained among them a thousand years minus fifty years. And the flood overtook them when they were sinful."<sup>12</sup>

Of course I could also quote some Eastern texts, but we are talking about the West here, so I don't. What may be worth mentioning is that the oldest scriptures that we know, the Veda's and the books of Manu from the far East, don't refer to the flood *once*. The book of Manu (I 35) mentioned ten "Prajapatis" or great saints, but stops after Visavat, the father of Vaisvata or the Noah of the Hindus<sup>13</sup>. This gives the idea that these text were actually written *before* the flood, which would make them the only Atlantic texts that we have.

### **For the rest of the series**

In the 'third part' of "The Secret Doctrine" HP Blavatsky writes: "The mysteries were given to the chosen when most Atlantians were on their way falling in sin too deeply" (p 288). There are much more referrals to the fact that the mystery-school were first founded in Atlantis. As mentioned before Rudold Steiner said that seven oracles came from Atlantis to our world. Mystery schools were founded in the East and in Egypt and it is the western branch that will be dealt with later in these series.

notes:

1 I used my Dutch 1988 printing by the "Theosophical University Press Agency". For a short explanation see page 434-436 of the original English paging;

2 A small but very nice book is that of another Theosophe (Grace F. Knoche) called "The Mystery Schools Through The Centuries";

- 3 Another Theosophy, see "Foundation Source Of Occultism" p184 (of my Dutch version at least);
- 4 My Dutch book is called "De Wetenschap Van De Geheime Der Ziel" (1998 uitgeverij vrij geestesleven p 189-220). However some people say that this is *the* Steiner standard work, I have no idea what is the English version of it...;
- 5 The Gathas are of the few scriptures that made it to our time. I used a very nice Dutch translation with some additional info (1995 mirananda, by j. de vries);
- 6 A nice little book (but not when you want to read the whole stories!) is "Mesopotamian mythology" of H Mc Call from the series "Legendes uit een ver verleden" (1997 tirion) <indeed a dutch work...>;
- 7 See for example "The Ancient Egyptians, Religious Beliefs And Practises" van AR David, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1982;
- 8 First released in 1875, my Dutch translation is from 1995 (ankh-hermes) see page 758;
- 9 It is said that Plato was the first to use the name "Atlantis", but this isn't a Greek word, not does it have a Greek root!! So where did he get it from? I don't have any works of Plato myself, so I can't give you any page numbers. Information mostly from HPB;
- 10 After the reprint of the English translation by RH Charles from 1912 (Oxford at the Clarendon Press);
- 11 Gnosticism will be dealt with in depth lateron;
- 12 From my Dutch translation 1994 (The Oriental & Religious Publishing Organisation) by the Ahmadiyya Society;
- 13 Information from "Isis Unveiled (see note 8) part II p 512;
- 14 A third part for "The Secret Doctrine was planned but HPB did not live to make it. The mentioned book is a collection of writings and speeches collected by Annie Besant and in 1980 published again in Dutch by the Dutch Theosophical Society with help of Mirananda publishing.

## the esoteric tradition(s) of the west part II

### Alchemy

The first branch of Western esotericism that I want to write about is alchemy. Of course there are different explanations to give to the word in the sense of tradition, but I will use the word "Alchemy" to refer to the ages-old tradition. When I write "alchemy" without a capital, I refer to what most people think off when hearing the word "alchemy" being 'early science', but more about that later.

The ancient tradition has received different names in different times by different writers. Some people use the word "Hermeticism" to refer to it, but in the article about hermeticism that will follow some time, I will say how I use that word myself. Maybe "Ars Regia" (royal art) would a good term, but I prefer to say "Alchemy".

One of the most interesting facts about alchemy, is that three traditions started roughly at the same time in three very different places on the earth. There is an Alchemical tradition from China, one from India and one from the West. In China it is mostly a tradition based on Taoism and in India on Hinduism. All three Alchemical traditions tell about two forms of alchemy. One materialistic, one spiritual. It is only quite recently that writers seriously look at the spiritual forms of alchemy which makes it a lot more than just 'early science'. As these series are called "the esoteric tradition(s) of the west", I will speak mostly of the Western alchemical tradition.

#### **The origins of Western Alchemy**

It is hard to trace when and where the Alchemical tradition of the West began. As mentioned in the previous article, the esoteric tradition in general is as old as humanity and it is quite easy to form a fairly general view of alchemy making it a synonym for the esoteric tradition as a whole. When Alchemy is understood as the esoteric tradition with both a materialistic and spiritual side and in both cases trying to take the 'rough material' to a higher level, I think we have to look for the origins of Alchemy in Egypt, just like with other Western esoteric traditions as we will see later.

Where the oldest-known Chinese practise of alchemy is of 350 BC and metallurgy would already have been practised in India as early as the 5th century BC, there was a (legendary) Egyptian called Imhotep who lived 5500 years ago who is regarded as the father of medical science and an alchemist. The ancient Greeks called him "Asclepius", which is of course the legendary Hermes' student and also the title one of the great Hermetic scriptures (about which in a later article) and -also remarkable- the Indian (alchemical) 'elixir' "soma" is most likely extracted from the climbing-plant "asclepius acids"! If not already legendary, Asclepius was taken as the patron-saint by many Western esoteric groups, under who the alchemists.

However not really alchemical writings, the Egyptian Book Of The Dead (or better said: The Book Of Appearing By Day) are also from this time. The earliest versions are found in a 5000 year old piramide of the pharao Unas.

Anyway, since scientists say that the Egyptian civilisation started around 3000BC, the first Egyptian would already have been a master is various sciences, which may seem a little implausible. It *is* true however that even today scientists still can't explain how a high civilisation as that of the Egyptians could just appear out of nothing.

But let us stick to the facts. The Egyptians have worked with metals a pretty long time ago. A museum in Cairo has a mummie that is dated 3000BC on which the makers already had the deceaseds face made in copper! Even back then the Egyptians knew how to melt metal from ores. By the time of the XVIIIth dynasty (1538 - 1296BC) they were able to make copper as pure as 99,9% as nowadays metallurgers have discovered.

I suppose it is safe to say that 5000 years ago the Egyptian civilisation did not just started without origin. They sure have been working with both metallurgical and spiritual matters for a long long time. No wonder that we can trace elements of our society to the Egyptian civilisation.

The ancient Greeks wrote about the Egyptians that they used mercury to split ore from gold and silver which is in a way an alchemical practise. The result of this process was a black powder to which miraculous qualities were suscribed. The black powder is also referred to in early Egyptian mythology.

The 'mysteries of Tehuti' (Thoth the god of writing and knowledge and often the patron-saint for alchemists and the like) speak of Ra (sungod) giving birth to a 'stone of light' and a gum that was used to make the mummie of the deceased imperishable. This seems to be the earliest reference to the 'philosophers stone'. Also there are references to 'amulets of the City of Gold' changing Heru (Horus) into a falcon of gold.

An ironic fact is that the Egyptians were not only skilled in metallurgy, but also in the imitation of gold, silver and the colour purple. The oldest-known practical alchemical text proudly tells how the writer was able to to make forged gold silver and purple paint (purple was so hard to make that it was actually valuable). The so-called "Leiden-papyrus" (after the place where it is now kept) gives recipes and instructions how to make metals shine like gold or silver. The papyrus is dated 300BC and was found in the tomb of a magician from Thebe, but I asume the techniques are of a (much) older date.

The dating of the Leiden-papyrus, I will use to make a leap in time to the period of decay of the Egyptian civilisation In 700 and 525BC parts of Egypt were conquered and in 332BC Alexander the Greek finished the process by his occupation of the country and the taking over control. Immediately the well-known Greek city in Egypt was build and named after the conquerer. Of course I am talking about Alexandria. Here the Egyptian and Greek civilisations met and later people from different parts of the world and backgrounds came to live in the tollerant city. A flourishing civilisation of mixing the cultures of Egypt, Assyrian, Greek, Roman, Hebrews and later the early Christians. Much was started in this period and Alexandria will be dealt with in other articles in these series as well.

### **Transition to modern times**

The Greek already had quite a history in philosophical thinking. Empedocles (494-434BC) had come up with the idea of the four elements. Plato (427-347BC) made furore with his theory of 'idea-forms', but also said that Empedocles elements were not four completely seperate things, but could 'go-over' into eachother. Water freezes to ice, being stone or earth or it evaporates to steam or air. Later Aristotle (384-222BC) came along, not only adding the fifth element ether (bringing western alchemy in line with the Chinese and Indian versions at this point), but also bringing things back to the materialistic plane. He *did* follow Plato in the idea that the elements could be changed into eachother, but he added qualities to the elements, which made fire hot and dry, air hot and moist, water cold and moist and earth cold and dry.

This is roughly the basis on which modern western alchemists based their theories, practices and complex calculations. The loveliest description of the link between materialistic and spiritual alchemy is the Aristotelian saying that as humans strive to achieve their highest forms, also do metals. The ultimate goal for a metal is to become gold and alchemists help them to achieve that as fast as possible.

Many great alchemists have come from Alexandria like Cleopatra (the alchemist of course), Mary the Jew, Zosimus, Theosebia, Stephanus and many more. Some of them left scriptures like the famous papyrus of Cleopatra with the Ouroboros in the down left corner.

It was halfway the Alexandrian period that a peculiar man lived and taught in Judea. Especially two of his followers formed churches and later Christianity became an institution that grew rapidly. Early Christians also lived in Alexandria and initially in peace with the other inhabitants of the city. 300 Years after the

'founder' of Christianity died, the Church had a lot of power in the mediteranian area and eventually they had enough power to decry and eventually try to destroy all non-Christian convictions. This resulted in the burning of 'heretic' writings and even the 300.000 scrolls library of Alexandria in 392AD. Alexandria mostly died with it and many people fled. After this almost the entire esoteric tradition from the west was stopped, forbidden and eventually even forgotten as the grip of the Catholic church on Europe and the near east got tighter.

### **Our saviour Mohammed**

Of course this is quite an ironic opener because it were Mohammeds early followers that would turn out to be the keeper of 'our' knowledge, but let me continue with the story.

As Alexandria fell to pieces, the few scrolls that were saved and the few people not Christianised by force, fled to Bagdad. This is a bit too shortly told though.

There had been quite a lot of Arabs in Alexandria who studied and followed the Alexandrian alchemists. They nearly worshipped Democrites, Mary the Jew, Zosimus and Stephanus and added legendary alchemists to their list of great people. Moses of the Jews, Zarathustra, Ostanos of the Perses, Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle of the Greek and more. Alexandrian alchemists first sought refuge in the near east. The Sabeans of Harran were widely known for their enormous astronomical knowledge and capabilities and they were more than interested in the alchemical knowledge of the newcomers. They were forced to move to Mesopotamia in 489 and eventually to Persia. The Sabeans translated many books from Greek to old-Syrian under which Alexandrian alchemical texts.

In 571 Mohammed was born in Mecca as the sprout of the Quraysh-tribe. However there was not really a national or regional religion, Mecca was already a holy place and Allah the name for the highest Divinity. Mohammed reached enlightenment from solitary meditations around the age of 40. His teachings got a rapidly increasing number of followers and soon Islam became the religion for the middle East. Muslims were a friendly kind of people. Having lived between Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians for such a long time, they recognised and respected all the 'people from the book', meaning, all believes based on holy scriptures. Coming across alchemical/Hermetic people who showed them their ancient texts, they were allowed to keep their convictions and live in Muslim states. In this friendly climate the new Western centre of knowlegde was formed in the Muslim state Iraq, Bagdad to be more precise. This was around the year 750.

The Muslims knew the Hermes of the Greek, being the Enoch of the Jews and called him Idris. Many Muslims were interested in the tradition of Idris and alchemy and studied and translated all the books that they could find. There was famous group of Hermetic Muslims called Ikhwan al-Sufa or brothers of purity. This group produced a philosophical and scientific encyclopedia called Rasai'l (epistles) between 909 and 965. Later Muslims started their own investigations and brought forth their own influential alchemists. The earliest of them was called Khalid ibn Yazid who lived from 660 to 704 and who had as many alchemists come to his castle with all their writings and had them translated and he wrote a few books himself. The greatest Muslim alchemist was Jabir ibn Hayyan who became known in the West as Geber. Jabir wrote a massive amount of books and had translations of many more. We owe it to him that we have gotten back many Western alchemical writings. For example the oldest known version of the famous Tabula Smaragdina (emerald tablet) comes from Jabirs writings. Jabir also wrote corrections on Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, etc. and he had a very complex numerological system of alchemy that inspired many of the medieval alchemists.

Another Muslim alchemist was Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya, better knows as Al-Razi or Rhazes in the West. Rhazes wrote many classics on alchemy, medicines and theology.

Inspite of quarrels within the Muslim community the area of Muslim reign enlarged and eventually the biggest part of southern Europe came to fall under Muslim government. However rapidly fought out of France by Christian troops, Spain has fallen under Muslim authority for a quite long time and actually in relative peace. Cordoba became the new centre of knowledge and Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together in this gigantic city. The crossbreed of ideas resulted in some new Jewish sacred texts like the Zohar (book of splendour) and the Sepher Jetzirah (book of form(ation)) which gave birth to Kabbalism. Also alchemy came back in the West and many books were translated (back) from Arab to Latin to make them available to the Europeans again. Also great alchemists appeared in this environment like Abu'l Qasim Maslamah ibn Ahmed, Muhammad ibn Umail, rabbi Moses ben Maimon or Robert of Chester.

### **Medieval and renaissance alchemy**

Even when the Muslims were driven out of Europe in the 13th century, the new philosophy that has originated by their presence spread rapidly. This resulted in new forms of mysticism that can be found in

the Grail- mythology, Gothic architecture, the stories of the Knight Templars and a new wave of magicians like Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, Cosimo de' Medici, Thomas of Aquino, etc.

Later people like Ramon Lull, Michael Maier and Italians like Pico della Mirandola took over the torch. So much happened and so much is written in these centuries that this would take an article (or two) on its own. There was a clear division between materialistic and spiritual alchemy (with much stress on the first in the beginning) and enormous and many works were written about both. Laboratories could be found all over Europe and every possible experiments to make the 'philosophers stone' or the 'elixir of life' was tested, but of only a handful it is said that they succeeded.

Alchemists could carry out their experiments freely until the 16th century. The 'enlightenment' of the Renaissance spread over Europe and materialism and rigid Catholicism became the official worldviews. The inquisition was installed to get rid off heretics and great minds like Giordano Bruno (burned at the stake in 1600) or Tomasso Campanella were persecuted while Athanasius Kircher was ordered to help pope Innocentius X.

Inspite of the problems with the Catholic church, the alchemical tradition continued to flourish. The rise of the 'Rosicrucians' was -so to say- the first alchemical organisation with maybe not many members, but a few great names in their ranks. Also the court of emperor Rudolph II in Prague was a safe place for many alchemists and magicians.

Around the end of the 17th century Isaac Newton started his investigations of nature. It is an ironic fact that Newton was heavily interested in alchemy and did many experiments himself, but that he was the start of the fall from grace of it. The scientific revolution set in and alchemy became a retarded philosophy or at its best the forrunner of science. This is the idea that many people in our time still have of it. However nowadays there are still a handful of alchemists scattered over the globe, in most people's minds alchemy is a mystery from the past.

And what about the philosopher's stone? Well, it is of course often written about, given different names, said to be a stone, a diamond, a powder, a liquid or the essence of the soul. It depends on if you are reading about a materialistic or spiritual alchemist what answer you will get.

Writing this article I came to the conclusion that there is so much to write that this article would be ten times as long. It was difficult to give information without having to use too long explanations, but the lack is of course that now I haven't been able to work anything out more. Maybe I should pick something and work it out more in a separate article. As a *very* rough introductory article I hope it was helpful. There are some good books to be bought nowadays and also the internet has some descent pages. I suggest you continue your investigation if I sparked your interest.

## the esoteric tradition(s) of the west part III

### Hermetism

In the Renaissance there was an occult revival and many people were interested in different cultures and philosophies. In 1439 Cosimo de Medici (1389 - 1464) founded his "Platonic Academy" in Florence (Italy) for these studies.

Then in 1460 the monk Leonardo of Pistoia (?? - ??) came back from his journey through Macedonia bringing a Greek handwriting which he handed over to De Medici. The scripture contained 14 tracts/treaties and De Medici was thrilled. He told his brilliant pupil Marsilio Ficino (1433 - 1499) to stop his translations of Plato to start translating the new found texts. De Medici and others believed the texts to be written by the most ancient teacher of mankind, the Egyptian wiseman Hermes Trismegistos. In the times of De Medici they were not completely sure when Hermes would have lived, either in times a long, long time ago, around the time of Moses or a few generations after Moses. This also sets the idea behind this article. Sometimes Hermeticism is regarded as the oldest esoteric tradition descending from the earliest dynasties of Egypt, at other times originated in Alexandria, the Greek city in northern Egypt somewhere around the beginning of our counting of years.

Already in the fifth century BC Herodotus identified the Egyptian god Tehuti/Thoth with his own Greek Hermes. Thoth was the bringer of writing, science and culture and in Egyptian writings (such as the Rosetta Stone) called the "big and big" Thoth and in a Greek translation from 165 BC found in Saqqara "the great and the great and the great god Hermes" (Egyptian doesn't have superlatives). This became the 'thrice greatest' and eventually in Greek 'Trismegistos' which means the same.

In 1462 Ficino was asked to start to translate the first found Hermetic scriptures and in a few months time (summer 1463) he was finished. Parts of it went around in interested circles and in 1471 the translation became available in printing for the first time and being reprinted countless times in the next centuries. The first treaty was called "Poimandres" and Ficino thought that the other treaties were chapters of a book that he named "Pimander", a book with 14 chapters. Later more scriptures were found that could belong to the "Corpus Hermeticum" ('Hermetic body of writings' so to say). In 1507 for example a scripture was published in Ludovico Lazzarelli's (1450 - 1500) Latin translation which we now know as treaty XVI "Aphorisms". The first time the original Greek texts were published was in 1554 by Adrianus Turnebus (or Adrièn Turnebe 1512 - 1565) which has 17 treaties and three fragments that he found in a compilation of Greek quotes by Johannes Stobaeus (1580 - 1646). The Frenchman François de Foix de Candale (1502 - 1594) republished the Greek texts of Turnebus with some corrections and a new translation in Latin. He left out the tracts XVII "Images" and XVIII "Oration For Kingdom" and mistakenly made the Stobaeus quotes chapter XV. Later people recognised the mistakes, left out tract XV again and re-added XVII and XVIII, which is the reason that current editions of the Corpus Hermeticum count from I to XIV and from XVI to XVIII.

During the Renaissance nobody had doubts about the authenticity of the Corpus Hermeticum. Moses, Plato, Pythagoras, every big philosopher or religious reformer in the past or current time had been influenced by Hermes and his teachings. The oldest scriptures ascribed to Hermes Trismegistos were the ancient magical papyruses from the time of Augustus (63 BC - 14 AD). These magical writings are one kind of scriptures ascribed to Hermes. Another group are astrological writings which resulted in medicine, botany and other writings about subjects that could be influenced by moving stars. Much later in the Roman periode also alchemical writings were 'added' to the Hermetic scriptures and the last writings of Hermes were of a more philosophical nature.

Sometime somehow people started to compile writings ascribed to Hermes. An early work called "The Hermetic Definitions" is one, the neo-Platonist Porphyrius (322 - 305) wrote his wife a letter somewhere around the year 300 in which he compiled a lot of (Hermetic) sayings and also the "Teachings Of Sylvanus" (that was found with other old writings near Nag Hammadi in 1947) is one of these. The earlier mentioned Stobaeus made his compilations in the 5th century.

The oldest handwritings of what we now know as the "Corpus Hermeticum" are from the 14th century. Different versions were found with different numbers of treaties. It is known though that the 11th century Byzantine scholar Michael Psellus (1018 - 1078) already knew the scriptures in collected form and Stobaeus again knew a lot of Hermetic scriptures, but there is no proof that he owned them in one binding. In Vienna/Wien in Austria -though- there are fragments of papyruses of around the start of the 3rd century with Hermetic texts naming them "tract 9" and "tract 10" so they definately should have been part of a larger compilation.

The name of Hermes ("Trismegistos") and the Hermetic scriptures themselves suggest that the wisdom originated in Egypt, but in 1614 the Swiss protestant scholar Isaac Casaubon (often called Casaubonus) (1559 - 1614) published his "Exercitationes ad Cardinalis Baronii prolegomena ad Annales" ('investigation of the "Annales Ecclesiastici" of cardinal Cesare Baronio (or Baronius) the cardinals history of the Christian church). Casaubon especially opens his attack on pre-Christian heretics and he totally devastated the idea that the Hermetic scriptures are ancient-old and have Egyptian origins using very good arguments and proof. After this there has always been some reservedness to ascribe ancient texts to Hermes. Also looking at the writings himself the Egyptian origins is dubious. There are Greek and Jewish influences in many texts suggesting the strong 'hellenised' Jewish influences of Alexandria. Of course this was a city in Egypt and a lot of Egyptians lived there as well, so Egyptian influences are not unlikely, but translations from ancient Egyptian texts?

However none of the tracts can be precisely dated, it is almost certain that many of them were written in the eclectic community of Alexandria. The influences are Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, Gnostic and even slightly Christian at times. It seems that around the year 300 there were already so many Hermetic scriptures that nowadays scholars think that most of them were written in the three centuries before. So, rediscovered in the Renaissance, this fact suggests that when the young and rapidly upcomming religion of Christianity gained power and destroyed the Alexandrian libraries in 392 AD, Hermeticism went underground for a thousand years. Like I said in the article about Alchemy it were the Muslims that has kept the Hermetic tradition alive absorbing it in their own esoterica. The Muslims kept both Hermetic and alchemical writings and in the periode of peace during their reign over southern Europe a lot of writings were translated back and came back in the hands of Europeans. The now so famous "Tabula

Smaragdina" was discovered in the writings of Jabir ibn Hayyan (721 - 803 in the west known as Geber) in the 16th century. And as the opener of this article said a compilation of Hermetic texts fell in the hands of the Italian occultist Cosimo de Medici.

Actually the Alchemical and Hermetic stories have been perpetually mixed up. Alexandrian Hermeticists were probably often also alchemists or maybe you can say that Hermeticism was spiritual alchemy in contradiction to the more practical forms of alchemy. The students of both traditions in the times after De Medici are often the same: Ramon Lull (1235 - 1315) Christian alchemist and active writer, probably also forerunner of the Christian Cabala; Johannes Reuchlin (1455 - 1522) a German Hermeticist and Kabbalist; Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486 - 1535) an allround occultist/magician and writer; John Dee (1527 - 1608) actively writing UK occultist; Giordano Bruno (1548 - 1600) philosophical alchemist (Hermeticist) who was burnt at the stake; Francis Bacon (1561 - 1626) Franciscan friar involved in the early Rosicrucian movement; Michael Maier (1569 - 1622) alchemist and early Rosicrucian or Robert Fludd (1574 - 1637) another English Rosicrucian.

As you can see the Renaissance revival led to new Hermetic movements such as the Rosicrucians and the Freemasons. After that Hermeticism has been slumberingly existant until the current time. Here and there slowing a tip of the iceberg such as in the 1960'ies occult revival. After the time of Newton (1642 - 1727 who was an active alchemist himself by the way) alchemy has fallen from grace and become 'science in child's years', so more spiritual western traditions found it easier to survive and nowadays there are some Crowlegian Hermetic groups, but also more 'traditional' Hermeticists or people interested in the tradition. The few texts that are left are often very well available and this article is largely based on the introduction to the Dutch translation of the "Corpus Hermeticum" that the two scholars Roel van den Broek en Gilles Quispel made for the Dutch "Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica" founded by Joost Ritman in 1957 in Amsterdam and having an impressive collection of Hermetic (and other) writings to keep the tradition alive and available in our times. Click on their logo below to visit their page.

### some information about Hermetic scriptures<>

This article comes forth from a lack of (easily findable) information that I have been looking for and is the result of a series of adaptations and investigations during november 2003. There may still be changes still, but I think the information is fairly complete now. I had two 'problems' with Hermetic scriptures:

Problem 1. Nowhere could I find a list with **books ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus**, this means, writings that we nowadays believe to be genuinely 'Hermetic' (this does not mean: written by Hermes). Because I couldn't find this list either in my personal library or on the internet, I started to make one myself. Later I ran into such a list on the [internet](#) AND on 15/11/03 the new book of the Dutch scholar Jacob Slavenburg was released ([see review](#)). It deals with Hermetic history and... has a list with Hermetic scriptures within his 'sources list'. Here is the Slavenburg list:

- **Book of Thoth**, recently discovered/compiled pre-Hermetic text;
- **Aphorisms of Hermes**, from the *Alchemista Graeca* 115.10;
- **Asclepius**, an older and long Hermetic text that is much more Egyptian than the *Corpus Hermeticum* and of which Latin translations were known in the Middle Ages. in 1945 a gnostic library was found near the Egyptian village Nag Hammadi. this library included three Hermetic texts of which one was unknown until then, including a Coptic translation of the *Logos Teleios* ('perfect doctrine') which is the source-text of the *Asclepius*. the Coptic translation is much less free than the Latin translation that we already had;
- **Brontologion**, also *doctrine of thunder*, a Greek-Egyptian astrological treatise;
- **Corpus Hermeticum** in 17 "libelli" (plural of "libellus" a word that Slavenburg and Walter Scott (see second part of this article) use for "treatise"). there are versions of the *Corpus Hermeticum* that have other treatises than the normal ones (see below);
- [Prayer of Thanksgiving](#) (NHC VI-7);
- **The religious experience of doctor Thessalos**, a medical Hermetic work;
- **Secret method of Hermes Trismegistos for every initiative**, an astrological writing;
- **Greek magical papyri** (Papyri Graecae Magicae), being:
  - ritual (pgm I);
  - isis' complaint (pgm IV);
  - to the waxing moon (pgm IV)
  - magical spell for doing business (pgm IV);
  - the ring of Hermes (pgm V);

- conjuration for shy men (pgm V);
- hymn to Hermes (pgm V);
- lamb fortune telling (pgm VII);
- love-spell of Astrapsoukos (pgm VIII);
- dreamwish (pgm XII);
- hymn to Hermes (pgm XVIIb);
- **The holy book of Hermes to Asclepius**, an astrological/medical text;
- **Hermetic definitions**, or *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos for Asclepius*, originally an Armenian text and which is fairly long;
- **latromathematica of Hermes Trismegistus to the Egyptian Ammon**, subtitled *foreknowledge concerning diseases that force people to bed* ("bedlegerige ziekten" in Dutch) *according to mathematical science*;
- the **Kyraniden** 1) *Kyranis* and 2) *Koiranides*, medical texts;
- **Liber Hermetis Trismegisti**, a fairly long astrological text;
- **Of the plant called Pioen**;
- **Of the influence of planets on plants**;
- **Peri Seismon**, astrological text;
- **Salmeschoiniaka**, either translated as *book of images* as *book of great birthgiving*, an astrological text;
- **fragments from Stobaeus' Anthologium (Stobaei Hermetica)** a compilation of Greek quotes for his son of which some proved to be Hermetic and some even unknown:
  - 1 : fragment of conversation between Hermes and Tat;
  - 3 : of the same (Hermes);
  - 4 : fragments of conversations between Hermes and Tat;
  - 5 : fragments of conversations between Hermes and Tat and between Tat and Ammon;
  - 6 : fragment of conversation between Hermes and Tat;
  - 9 : fragments of conversations between Hermes and Tat;
  - 10: fragment of conversation between Hermes and Tat;
  - 16: fragments of conversations between Hermes and Ammon;
  - 23: *korè kosmou* ('eye of the world', but also 'little maid of the world', much longer than the rest and available in the Scott book "Hermetica" and in the 'Secret Doctrine Reference Series' in a translation by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, two Theosophists);
  - 24: (Isis to Horus);
  - 28: aphorisms;
  - 29: from Hermes (about planets)
 (three Stobaeus fragments can be found in the editions of the *Corpus Hermeticum* of Patrizi and Van Rijckenborgh (see below):
  - *Hermes to Tat: of Thruth* (Stobaeus IIA in the Scott counting);
  - *Oration of Hermes to Tat / first book*;
  - *Of Operation and Sense*.
 Walter Scott has all 23 fragments, also those that can be found in other texts and those which are only one line. Also Scott has 37 fragments found in texts of Tertulian, all of which are only one or two lines.)
- **[Tabula Smaragdina](#)**;
- **Therapeutic manual of Harpokration**;
- **Received from the angels as gift of the unforgettable God, the God Hermes Trismegistus, to tell to people who are endowed with understanding**;
- **From Hermes about the plants of the twelve signs**;
- **[Discourse on the eight and ninth \(celestial spheres\)](#)** (Nag Hammadi Codex VI-6);
- **(Hermetic) discourse about the soul**;
- **Abridged medical manual of Hermes Trismegistos in accordance with astrological science on the natural influences of animals, addressed to his student Asclepius**;
- **True book of Sophé**, anonymous alchemical text;
- **Fragments of Vienna**, *Vindobonenses Graecae* 29456r and 29828r;
- **Book of the secret of creation**;
- **The large letter of the spheres of Hermes of Dendera**;
- **Light upon the life of Hermes of Hermesses for who wishes this**, Arabic text;
- **Liber XXIV Philosophorum**, or *book of the 24 wise*, an alchemical writing of which some versions say it

is by Hermes, some don't say that.

- **Liber Alcidi**, book with aphorisms of Hermes;
- **Silverwater and starearth**, Arabic alchemical text.

To this already impressive text I would like to add the following titles:

- **De Castigatione Animae**, an Arabic with text the title *Kitab Mu'adilat an-Nafs* that was translated to Latin twice (1736 J.J. Reiske and 1873 O. Bardenhewer) and can be found in a few German books of 1840 and 1870. it is now also translated to Dutch. see my [review](#) of this this little book;
- **Tractatus aureus de Lapide Philosophico**, I am in doubt about this one. an esoteric encyclopedia of mine lists this as an Hermetic text and [Frank van Lamoen](#) also has it as authentic Hermetic text, but it was written by a certain Joannes de Lasniore, according to [this page](#). the text is part of the alchemical book *Musaeum Hermeticum* (1625, 1678, 1749) and also *Ars Chemica* (1556);
- **Papyrus Mimaut**;
- **Fragmenta Hermetica**, "1-36 (Nock and Festugiere, 1945-1954, vol. 4): various fragments quoted in Greek, Latin or Syriac by several authors from Tertullian (second-third century CE) to Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286). to these fragments should be added the papyri *Vindobonenses Graecae* 29456r and 29828r, as well as an Armenian fragment and several Syriac fragments." <info from [this page](#)>;
- **Minerva Mundi**, Eliphas Levi mentions this "Hermetic text" on page 176 of my Dutch translation of his *Dogme et Rituel de la haute Magie* and [this page](#) has it as alchemical Hermetic text and says the following: "The treatise "*Minerva Mundi*," attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, contains, under the most poetical and profound allegories, the dogma of the self-creation 'of beings, or of the law of creation that results from the accord of two forces, these which the Alchemists called the Fixed and the Volatile, and which are, in the Absolute, Necessity and Liberty.'" (the text is from Albert Pike);
- **Centiloquium**, published in the *Liber Nativitatem* (1501) and is an astrological text that is also sometimes ascribed to Ptolemaeus (2nd cent.).

Many texts have been lost, also keytexts such as the *General Discourses* that are referred to in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and which Slavenburg believes to be the beginners lessons of the Hermetic initiation education.

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Should anyway have more information, I would like to [hear](#) from you.

## Another problem that I ran into is the **order of the treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum***.

I thought that this order had long been fixed and agreed upon, but even fairly recent editions of the text, have different orders and different treatises even! I may have to let you down admitting that I own only two version of the text, which are the Dutch translation by Roelof van den Broek and Gilles Quispel (1990) who use the 'official counting' of I-XIV and XVI-XVIII, which I will explain lateron and the four books of Jan van Rijckenborgh (see below). Further, the internet, information of the [Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica](#) by email (thank you Cis), the small library of the local temple of the [Lectorium Rosicrucianum](#) and later a book by Frank van Lamoen ([see review](#)), have made me able to compare four other versions: Van Beyerland (1643), Everard (1650), Mead (1906), Van Rijckenborgh (1960-1965) and Copenhaver (1992, including *Asclepius*).

To start, I want to give you a short account of the history of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

<b>11th cent.</b>	Michael Psellus knows the <i>Corpus Hermeticum</i> as bundled treatises;
<b>1463</b>	Ficino finishes the translations of 14 treatises that he got from Cosimo de Medici;
<b>1471</b>	after having circulated for several years, the first publication follows;
<b>- - -</b>	more and more manuscripts turn up, some of which have more treatises than Ficinos;
<b>1507</b>	Ludovico Lazzarelli translates the current treatise XVI to Latin;
<b>1554</b>	the Greek text is published by Adrianus Turnebus. this version contains 16 treatises and 3 fragments from a compilation of Greek quotes that John Stobaeus made for his son;
<b>1574</b>	François de Foix republishes the Greek text with some corrections. also he leaves out the current

	treatises XVII and XVIII and puts in the Stobaeus quotes as treatise XV;
<b>1494</b>	Jacques le Fèvre d'Étaples meets Ficino and released the sixth (!! ) printing with his own commentary;
<b>1565</b>	le Fèvre released the <i>Corpus</i> and the <i>Asclepius</i> in one book.

Many later versions used the De Foix Greek printing to translate the text, but left out the spurious Stobaeus texts without altering the numbering. Even the first scientific publishing of Nock and Festugière (1945-1952) uses the numbering I-XIV + XVI-XVIII.

This is also the reason that I expected all versions after 1574 to have the same order, but this is not true. Let me give you the order of my "scientifically just" version of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which is based on the Greek text in the publishing of Nock and Festugière. Of course I only have Dutch titles of the treatises so the English versions are my own.

I	Poimandres
	Poimandres
II	Een algemeen gesprek van Hermes met Asclepius
	A general conversation of Hermes and Asclepius
III	Een gewijde verhandeling van Hermes
	A consecrated discourse of Hermes
IV	Het Mengvat of De Eenheid
	The Crater or Unity <"Mengvat" actually means "mixing-barrel">
V	God: onzichtbaar en toch goed zichtbaar
	God: invisible and yet very visible
VI	Het Goede is alleen in God en nergens anders
	Goodness is in God alone and nowhere else
VII	Onwetendheid aangaande God: het grootste kwaad onder de mensen
	Ignorance concerning God: the biggest evil of mankind
VIII	Van wat bestaat, vergaat niets
	Nothing that exists shall perish
IX	Inzicht en Waarneming
	Insight and Perception
X	Openbaring van de driewerf grote Hermes: Sleutel
	Disclosure of the thrice greatest Hermes: Key
XI	De Geest spreekt tot Hermes
	The Mind speaks to Hermes
XII	De Geest die het Al doordringt
	The Mind that penetrates All
XIII	De driewerf grote Hermes spreekt tot zijn zoon Tat
	The thrice greatest Hermes speaks to his son Tat
XIV	Het Wezen van het Al
	The Being of All
XVI	Aforismen. Een brief van Asclepius aan koning Ammon
	Aformisms. A letter of Asclepius to king Ammon
XVII	Beelden
	Images (or Statues)
XVIII	Lofrede op het Koningschap
	Eulogy to Kingship

Please note that there is no treatise XV.

This order will be the basis of the comparisons of the other *Corpus Hermeticum*s.

So now we turn to the oldest version that I named in my introduction, being that of the Dutchman Abraham Willemsz **van Beyerland** (1586-1648). I haven't seen anything of the book, but according to [Van Lamoen](#), Van Beyerland used the Greek-Latin version of Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597, book released in 1591) who had a different order. More about this below

The version of John **Everard** (1575-1650) can be found [online](#) at the site of Adam MacLean and as PDF from [Hermetics.org](#) (look for "Corpus Hermetica"). It has 17 treatises, even though it is claimed to be a translation of Ficinos Latin version, which has only 14 treatises. According to [Frank van Lamoen](#), Everard used the Patrizi translation, but skips a few of his books.

Everard opens with a Stobaeus fragment. Then follow a few *CH* treatises in the alternative order. After this Everard skips Patrizi's book XIII which is the *Korè Kosmou* fragment of Stobaeus and also skips Patrizi's book XIV which is a compilation of eight Stobaeus fragments. Then follows an authentic treatise, Stobaeus fragments as books XIV and XV and two more authentic treatises. A.E. Waite used this translation in his "Collecteano Hermetica".

Here is the index of Everards translation, the right column is the numbering based on the 'official' numbering:

The First Book.	?
The Second Book - Poemander.	I
The Third Book - The Holy Sermon.	III
The Fourth Book - The Key.	X
The Fifth Book - That God is not Manifest and yet most Manifest.	V
The Sixth Book - That in God alone is Good.	VI
The Seventh Book - His Secret Sermon in the Mount or Regeneration, and the Profession of Silence.	XIII
The Eighth Book - That the greatest Evil in Man, is the not knowing God.	VII
The Ninth Book - A Universal Sermon to Asclepius.	II
The Tenth Book - The Mind to Hermes.	XI
The Eleventh Book - Of the Common Mind to Tat.	XII
The Twelfth Book - His Crater or Monas.	IV
The Thirteenth Book - Of Sense and Understanding.	IX
The Fourteenth Book - Of Operation and Sense.	?
The Fifteenth Book - Of Truth to His Son Tat.	?
The Sixteenth Book - That None of the Things that are, can Perish.	VIII
The Seventeenth Book - To Asclepius, to be Truly Wise.	XIV

Interesting point: "the first book" is Van Rijckenborghs (see later) fifth book and "the fifteenth book" is the same as seventeen of Van Rijckenborgh. Both books are Stobaeus fragments as we saw earlier.

Everards 15th book is Stobaeus IIA.

Then we go to G.R.S. **Mead**, whose translation can be found online on several pages, [like this one](#) or as PDF [here](#). Mead has only 13 treatises which are part of a collection of "Hermetic texts".

I. Poemandres, the Shepherd of Men	I
II. To Asclepius	II
III. The Sacred Sermon	III
IV. The Cup or Monad	IV
V. Though Unmanifest God Is Most Manifest	V
VI. In God Alone Is Good And Elsewhere Nowhere	VI
VII. The Greatest Ill Among Men is Ignorance of God	VII
VIII. That No One of Existing Things doth Perish, but Men in Error Speak of Their Changes as Destructions and as Deaths	VIII
IX. On Thought and Sense	IX
X. The Key	X
XI. Mind Unto Hermes	XI

XII. About the Common Mind	XII
XIII. The Secret Sermon on the Mountain	XIII

**Jan van Rijckenborgh** wrote a series of four books with different Hermetic texts and his extensive commentaries. He has the *Tabula Smaragdina* and 17 treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. According to [Van Lamoen](#), Van Rijckenborgh used the 1706 German translation of a certain Alethophilus who on his turn used the Patrizi and Van Beyerland translations. Van Rijckenborgh stucked to the alternative order, but still comes out differently from Everard.

There is an English translation of the books, but I haven't seen them, so the translations of the titles are again my own.

Het eerste Boek: Pymander	I
The first Book: Pymander	
Het tweede Boek: Pymander tot Hermes	XI
The second Book: Pymander to Hermes	
Het derde Boek: Dat het grootste kwaad in de mensen is, dat zij God niet kennen	VII
The third Book: That the biggest evil in mankind is, that they do not know God	
Het vierde Boek: Hermes' rede ter ere Gods	III
The fourth Book: Hermes' oration to God's honour	
Het vijfde Boek: Uit een rede van Hermes tot Tat	? (1)
The fifth Book: From an oration of Hermes to Tat	
Het zesde Boek: Algemene dialoog tussen Hermes en Asklepios	II
The sixth Book: General dialogue between Hermes and Asklepios	
Het zevende Boek: Hermes tot Tat over de Crater en de Eenheid	IV
The seventh Book: Hermes to Tat of the Crater or Unity	
Het achtste Boek: Hermes tot zijn zoon Tat: Dat de onzienlijke God het meest openbaar is	V
The eight Book: Hermes to his son Tat: That the invisible God is most public	
Het negende Boek: Dat niets van hetgeen werkelijke bestaat verloren gaat, maar dat men in dwaling de veranderingen vernietiging en dood noemt	VIII
The ninth Book: That nothing that exists shall parish, but that by mistake people call changes destruction and death	
Het tiende Boek: Dat het Goede alleen in God en nergens anders te vinden is	VI
The tenth Book: That Goodness is in God alone and nowhere else	
Het elfde Boek: Over het verstand en de zintuigen	IX
The eleventh Book: Of intellect and senses	
Het twaalfde Boek: De sleutel van Hermes Trismegistos	X
The thirteenth Book: The key of Hermes Trismegistos	
Het dertiende Boek: Hermes Trismegistos tot Tat: Over het algemene Gemoed of de Heiligende Geest	XII
The thirteenth Book: Hermes Trismegistos to Tat: About the general Mind or the Holy-making Spirit	
Het veertiende Boek: De geheime Rede op den Berg, betreffende de wedergeboorte en de belofte van stilzwijgendheid	XIII
The fourteenth Book: The secret Oration on the Mountain, about rebirth and the promise of silence	
Het vijftiende Boek: Hermes Trismegistos tot Asklepios: Over het juiste denken	XIV
The fifteenth Book: Hermes Trismegistos to Asklepios: about the right thinking	
Het zestiende Boek: Hermes tot Ammon: Over de Ziel	XVI
The sixteenth Book: Hermes to Ammon: About the Soul	
Het zeventiende Boek: Hermes tot Tat: Over de Waarheid	? (2)

The seventeenth Book: Hermes to Tat: About Thruth	
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(1) Van Rijckenborghs fifth book is the same as the first book (even before Poimandres) of Everard.

(2) Van Rijckenborghs seventeenth book is the same as the fifteenth of Everard.

The last version of the *Corpus Hermeticum* that I want to mention is that of Copenhaver. I got his index from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), but it is rather boring as you can see:

Corpus Hermeticum I	I
Corpus Hermeticum II	II
Corpus Hermeticum III	III
Corpus Hermeticum IV	IV
Corpus Hermeticum V	V
Corpus Hermeticum VI	VI
Corpus Hermeticum VII	VII
Corpus Hermeticum VIII	VIII
Corpus Hermeticum IX	IX
Corpus Hermeticum X	X
Corpus Hermeticum XI	XI
Corpus Hermeticum XII	XII
Corpus Hermeticum XIII	XIII
Corpus Hermeticum XIV	XIV
Corpus Hermeticum XVI	XVI
Corpus Hermeticum XVII	XVII
Corpus Hermeticum XVIII	XVIII

To close off I want to give you a comparative table:

official order	Van Beyerland	Everard	Mead	Van Rijckent
I	I	? (1)	I	I
II	XI	II	II	XI
III	VII + III	III	III	VII
IV	II	X	IV	III
V	IV	V	V	? (1)
VI	V	VI	VI	II
VII	VIII	XIII	VII	IV
VIII	VI	VII	VIII	V
IX	IX	II	IX	VIII
X	X	XI	X	VI
XI	XII	XII	XI	IX
XII	XIII	IV	XII	X
XIII	XIV	IX	XIII	XII
XIV		?		XIII
XVI		? (2)		XIV
XVII		VIII		XVI
XVIII		XIV		? (2)

(1) and (2) these books are the same, but can't be found in most other versions of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, they are Stobaeus fragments, see text about the Everard translation above.

So now you can check if Everard or Van Rijckenborgh write: "the fourth book of Hermes says...".

<12/11/03 first update: I found one more Van Rijckenborgh treatise and I got a few of his titles correct now>

<13/11/03 second update: three Hermetic scriptures added>

<17/11/03 the Hermetic texts section is enormously enlarged after the release of the book *De Hermetische Schakel* (the Hermetic link) of Jacob Slavenburg>

<19/11/03 now all Van Rijckenborg titles are correct>

<26/11/03 minor changes after an email of mr Slavenburg>  
<03/12/03 "Minerva Mundi" added>  
<10/12/03 I got myself the textual history of the CH of Frank van Lamoen and made the final (?) changes to the second part>  
<11/12/03 final changes?>

## Hermetic concepts

Hermetism is becoming more and more popular. But how many people will be able to say much about what are the ideas that can be found within the Hermetic texts? I decided to take a few subjects and work them out with quotes from different texts. These are not by one author or one group of authors, so the texts may contradict each other. This does not matter, because the underlying philosophy is always the same. For this comparison of concepts I used the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Asclepius*, the Hermetic texts from the Nag Hammadi library, the Stobaeus and Tertulianus fragments and *De Castigatione Animae*. For more information about Hermetic texts see [my article on this subject](#). Of most of the texts I have Dutch translations, and of almost all I also have English translations. For the quotes I mostly used the very literal translation of Walter Scott (1855-1925), sometimes I preferred my Dutch translations by Gilles Quispel and Roelof van den Broek (Q/VdB in the text).

### GOD

The first subject that I want to speak about is God, in Greek and Latin usually "Deus". This is a very prominent subject and every single text refers to it. In different ways as we will see.

"God" is not a word with one meaning in the Hermetic scriptures. In fact, a whole range of meanings are given to it, even within the same text. One such meaning is God as the absolute. The seventh libellum of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, verse 2 (CH VII.2) says: "For He cannot be known by hearing, nor made known by speech; nor can He be seen with bodily eyes, but with mind ('nous') and heart alone." and CH V.8 says that God is "too mighty to be named God" (verse 1) and "too big for a name" (verse 8; Scott has a missing piece here). Another very nice quote comes from *De Castigatione Animae* chapter 1: "He [...] is the universal, not the sum of all." The first Hermetic fragments of Tertulianus are in the vein of "There is one God; he is beyond comprehension and appraisal." (fragm. II) and also in Stobaeus we can find similar quotes, such as: "To conceive God ('Deus') is difficult; to describe him is impossible." (Stob. I.1) But we have other views on God.

Slightly more common is God as being (the sum of) Good. Sayings such as "God the Good" or "God is the sum of good" can be found in CH II.15; CH VI (this whole libellum, it is entitled: "That the Good is in God alone, and nowhere else"); CH X.1; and Stobaeus fragment II B.3.

A more often used attribute is God as cause or beginning of all or as it says in CH III.1: "God is the the source of all that is". This already comes close to another subject that I will speak about later (creation), but I just want to point you to CH I.6; CH II.12+13 ("God is He that is neither Mind nor Truth, but is the cause to which Mind and Truth, and all things, [...] owe their existence"); CH VIII.2, CH XI.3 and chapter 1 of the *Castigatione* which says: "origin, creator and founder of the universe". Stobaeus XXI.1 speaks about the pre-existent ('pro-on').

Then we come to God as the Maker (or I could say "builder" or "great Architect. Everard uses "Workman", Scott "Maker"). "The Great Architect [...] [is] ever present and ever existing, has created everything and is eternal and one" (CH IV.1 - my English version of Quispel/Van den Broek. Scott does give the Greek of "CH IV I A", but leaves it untranslated). Also see CH IX.5; *Asclepius* verses 2+8 ("the Master, the Maker (conformator) of all things, whom by usage we name God") and Stobaeus II B.3. Everard uses the word a lot, like in CH X and CH XIII. In Greek the word for "Maker" is quite consequentially "demiurgos", but Stob. XXIII.4 uses "techutos" of which Scott made "craftsman" and one time "poeita" ("Maker" verse 37) but later just "demiurgos".

Or isn't He the Great Architect? As we saw God is the creator, but CH XVI.5 says that the Great Architect is the sun! The same goes for CH XVI.18 which says: "God (Deus) then is the Father of all; the Sun is the Demiurgus; and the Kosmos (see below) is the instrument by means of which the Demiurgus works." The Stobaeus fragment *Of Truth* (II A.14) says: "[the Sun] do I worship, and I adore his reality, acknowledging him, next after the one supreme God, as the Maker." Another Stobaeus fragment says that the Sun ('helios') is an image of the Maker ('demiurgos') who is above the heavens. The supreme Maker created the universe and the Sun the animals and plants (Stob. XXI.2).

### Kosmos

The next subject that I want to talk about is the "Kosmos" which is "a god" according to CH XII.15. Everard translates the word to "world", Quispel/Van den Broek and Scott leave the word untranslated. "God brings forth Eternity; Eternity the Kosmos; the Kosmos time; time birth and changeableness" (CH XI.2, missing in Scott), but: "The Lord and creator of this universe, who we call God, brought forth from himself a second god which is visible and senseable", this second god is called the "Kosmos" (Ascl.8). This Kosmos is the son of God (CH IX.8 and CH X.14). The fact that the Kosmos came forth from God himself, makes it an image of God, which indeed is confirmed in CH XII.15 and CH VIII.2, however in the last verse the Kosmos is not name specifically. The 'trinity' God-Kosmos-man is sometimes mentioned, like in CH X.14, Stob. XI.2 and *Castigatione* ch.21. More about this in the chapter about creation. In CH X.10 Tat asks: "who therefore is this material God?" in the translation of Everard. In my Dutch translation the question is: "then who is the God of the outer world?" and Scott has "What then, are we to think of the material God, the Kosmos?" The Kosmos sometimes seems to be the outer world, sometimes its God: the second god.

Surprisingly enough we have other candidates for being the second god. CH XII.8 has a Good Mind/Spirit or Agathodaimon as second god. Asclepius 32 (missing in Scott) speaks about the Mind of Aion which can both be explained by being God himself or the second god.

According to Ascl.3, also heaven is a god who stands at the same level as the world-soul (about which later) and above these two is God himself.

Something that actually is more aligned with the subject of creation but which I want to shortly note here anyway, is the fact that CH I.8 (quoted below) speaks about a high and a low Kosmos. I will come back to this soon.

### **Logos**

"God does not build with His hands, but with his Logos (Word)" (CH IV.1; Scott does give the Greek, but leaves this line untranslated). Here we come a bit closer to the next subject. This Logos is "the image and Mind of God" (CH XII.14 with Quispel/Van den Broek), which same line is Scotts CH XII.13A "Speech (Logos) then, is an image of mind (nous) and mind is an image of God". So where did this Logos come from? "Poimandres" (CH I) says that the Word comes from the creative light (God) (CH I.4+5) and moves earth and water (CH I.5). Is the Logos the Eternity that we ran into in CH XI.2? Probably not, but a fact is that in certain Gnostic worldviews (and for example Genesis) the Logos plays a prominent part in ...

### **CREATION**

This subject is also interesting. Some texts speak about it in detail -and these details differ-, other texts do not come further than the earlier quoted: "God makes the Aeon (eternity), the Aeon makes the Kosmos, the Kosmos makes Time, Times makes Coming-to-be ('genesis')." (CH XI.2).

Paging through the *Corpus Hermeticum* we find a detailed account of creation in the third libellum. This account reminds a bit of Genesis:

"There was darkness in the deep ('abyssos'), and water without form; and there was a subtle breath ('pneuma'), intelligent, which permeated the things in the Chaos with divine power." (CH III.1). Then a divine light raises up and the elements came forth from the moist substance (verse 1). The gods used the best of these elements to create the world (v. 3). Also we can read how light elements raise up to the heavens, heavy elements sink into the earth and how the sun, the moon and the stars are formed (v.2). Also quite interesting is the fact that the gods create animals and men without the need of the Logos (v.3 - note by Quispel en Van den Broek).

Other details can be found in CH VIII in which we can read that God is the absolute first of everything who creates a second god after His own image (verse 2). "The Father ('pater') took all that part of matter ('hylè') which was subject to his will, and made it into a body, a made it bulk, and fashioned it into a sphere. [...] the Father implanted within this sphere the qualities of all kinds of living creatures, and shut them up in it" (verse 3).

Another variant of this we can find in Asclepius 2 where "the One [who is] all things, seeing that all things are in the Creator" forms the world. "Soul ('anima') and corporal substance ('mundus') together are embraced by nature adn by natures working kept in movement." (verse 2) Verse three continues to speak about creation. Then in verse 14 we learn more about the raw material that I mentioned before. In Greek it is called "hylè" and the Latin text of the *Asclepius* gives it in Greek! The word may some of you may be familiar with. "Hylè" is the primeval matter, the "mulaprakriti" of the East, or rather "hyloteta" (CH VIII.3) is the first matter, and "hyle" (sometimes) 'normal matter'. Verse 14 of *Asclepius* (which reminds a bit of the *Stanzas of Dzyan* from Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*) says that in the beginning there was God and matter. "The elements of which the universe is composed were not then in existence, because they had not yet

come into being; but they were already in that form which they were to be generated." "The spirit-of-life moves and leads everything and everything moves within hylè", says verse 17, according to Quispel and Van den Broek. Scott has that matter is the receiver of forms, laid upon it by spirit according to the will of God.

"The unmovable spiritual world sets the world of matter [...] in motion" (CH X.11 in Q/VdB, also see Ascl.30). This is usually done by the Mind, of which is said: "the workings of God are mind ('nous') and soul ('psyche')" (CH XI.2). Of the 'world-soul' (in Q/VdB) I will speak more about below.

Then in the Nag Hammadi text about the 8th and 9th celestial spheres (NHC VI.6) we also have a nice piece about creation. Gods nature gives form and substance, created all and holds everything in himself. Therefor the All has gotten soul.

In Stobaeus we find a very long fragment called "Kore Kosmou" (Stob. XXIII) which means 'eye-apple (or pupil) of the world', but also 'maiden of the world'. It is a long account of created that Isis gives to her son Horus. Isis tells that the sole ruler commands lesser gods who split the homogenous mass in to (verse 8), the God makes the stars (verse 9). When the lesser gods told God that the world below was very empty and boring so God formed a beautiful woman out of his voice, this woman he named Nature (verse 10). Hierna volgt een gedetailleerde beschrijving van de 'vulling' van de aarde en de lucht.

The first libellum of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is a long one and speaks at length about creation.

The primal form precedes an infinite beginning (verse 8). God as creator brings forth another spirit as the god of fire and the breath of life, while seven governors create the perceptible kosmos with its spheres (v.9). Then the Logos that we spoke about before, connects himself with the modelling spirit (nous) which causes the spheres to spin and thus creates animals (v.10). The Father/Mind -though- creates the (heavenly) Man (or Antropos) who resembles Himself (v.12). Man sees his image in the waters of the world, falls in love with matter (v.14) and caused mankind to be twofold: mortal after the body, immortal after the true Man (v.15). Also we can read how the human race gets separated in two sexes.

### **THE MIND IN MAN**

However the Stobaeus fragments speak quite a bit about the soul ('pneuma'), the larger texts deal more with the mind in man. Its relation with the divine Mind for example. Translating the words I come to the problem that in Greek and Dutch one word can be used with or without a capital, but in English I say it would have be the Mind of God, which is the spirit in man. Scott chose to use "mind" for every time the Greek text says "nous". The usual Hermetic division of a human being is the well-known body-soul-mind/spirit, but this is not a natural combination. "Do not all men have mind?" is a question that is asked in both CH I.22 ('nous') (Hermes to Mind) and Ascl.7 ('sensus') (Asclepius to Hermes). The answers are fairly clear ("pay attention"), but I want to quote CH IV.3 in which Hermes says to Tat: "Npw speech ('logos') [...] God departed on all men; but mind ('nous') he did not impart to all." This is much different from what we read in CH XVI.15 where Asclepius writes to Ammon: "For at the time when each one of us is born and made alive, the daemons who at that time are on duty as ministers of birth take charge of us." This may sound much different from the mind we have from God. Another example then: "And the third being is man [who] differs from all other living creatures upon in that he possesses mind, for so the Father has willed".

At other times mind is a prize for people who lead a good and devout life. "I, even Mind, come to those man who are holy and good and pure and mercifull.", as the Mind says to Hermes in CH I.22. There is a whole libellum in the *Corpus Hermeticum* dedicated to the subject. In a discourse of Hermes to Tat called "Crater" ("the basin") (CH IV) Hermes says that man have both sense and mind and is therefor higher than the Kosmos, but not all men have spirit. Spirit is "a prize that human souls may win" (CH IV.3).

People worthy can immerse in a crater or mixing-barrel of spirit that God has sent and thereby receive Gnosis in the translation of Gilles Quispel and Roelof van den Broek.

A wonderfull piece in *Asclepius* says that besides *pneuma* which is in everthing, man was also granted a soul in order to be able to watch intuitively; this is the *quintessence*, the fifth element (verse 6, based on translation by Q/VdB).

Another libellum in the *Corpus Hermeticum* that speaks about the subject at length is X "the key". Here we get some more information about the mind of man. You can read what 'clothing' ("wrap" in Scott) it gets when incarnating (CH X.17), that it gets a fiery body ('pneuma' or "vital spirit") after the physical body died and that this fiery body is the minds actual vehicle (verse 18) and even that souls can become spirits and spirits angels ('daimons') (verse 21). But also here not every human has a spirit, because you have to pray ('daimon') (verse 22) for such a protective spirit, a good spirit (verse 22). Also the spirit can leave the soul (verse 24) when people no longer deserve it (verse 24).

Some interesting remarks we can find in CH XII, where we can read again that Mind comes from Gods being, that in men Mind ('nous') is a god and that where is a soul, there is Mind, but in animals there are souls without Mind/spirit. Man have Mind and Logos/language, but animals do not, but in these beings it works as instinct.

Asclepius 11 also says that not only the lower part of man has four parts (elements), but also the higher part of man, since it consists of soul, spirit, memory and intuition, however you may think that the last two are part of either of the first two.

*Asclepius* also says that with the spirit can amalgamate with the soul when a human gives himself up to God (Ascl.18, not in Scott). Something similar we can find in the *Castigatione Animae* where chapter 1 says that above the soul is the spirit and the spirit is above the soul *and encloses it*.

And when in Ascl.6 *Asclepius* asks *Hermes* if not all men have spirit/Mind *Hermes* says that not all men have received the true Gnosis. Some have carried away by illusions and thus bringing evil in a man and here we come to the next subject that I want to write about.

## EVIL

As you may know some of the Gnostic milieu (Gnosticism is one of the sources of Hermeticism), evil is everything 'here below'. Hermetics are mostly a little less pessimistic. Still you can still read in the *Castigatione* that the soul has cloths of evil that have to be laid off (chapter 4) or in CH X that the world is the most impure of the impure and CH VIII.4 says that the world here below is evil's domain. *Stob.* XXIII.41 even states that life on earth should be regarded as punishment. Less strong is one *Stobaeus* fragment II A (*Of Truth*) that says: "everything on earth is illusion" (verse 3). Another chapter of the *Castigatione* is a bit clearer on the latter: "The world is not only bad, not only good." (chapter 2). Still man is evil because he is mortal and changeable (CH X.12). In the same verse it is said that the world/Kosmos is not evil, because it may be changeable, but it is eternal. So what then is 'Hermetic evil'? Well, there are different forms of it.

The biggest evil of a human being is Godlessness. This we can read in most of the Hermetic texts, but this is of course not the evil that we talk about. The bad things in the world are not made by a cruel God, because: "But neither did the Copper-smith make the Rust, nor the Maker the Filth, nor God the Evilness. But the vicissitude of Generation doth make them" (CH XIV.7 in translation of Everard). God did not make evil, it evolved as time passed. And this "evil is visible, while goodness is invisible" (CH IV.9). Evil is a part of the Kosmos because it is needed to bring understanding and Gnosis to men (Ascl.16).

How does all this work? CH XVI 13-15 says that under command of the seven planets there are spirits, good and bad. These spirits (or 'daemons') cause what happens on earth and even work in human bodies. "Do I have evil spirits, father, in myself who torture me?" *Tat* asks *Hermes* in CH XIII.7. "Not a few, my son, they are as terrible as they are many" *Hermes* answers. Not very promising! And for people who give into the evil spirits that haunt him, awaits more punishment in the afterlife. *Asclepius* 28 speaks about some kind of purgatory where astral bodies are tormented after death. There are special demons for this task who see to it that you lay off your evil deeds after death.

And to close off I want to tell you how to avoid all this and what is the way to ...

## SALVATION

*De Castigatione Animae* is a relatively long text that gives you a whole spiritual path on an Hermetic basis. The whole text is about salvation. The 3rd chapter has a very nice story about the soul which is like a boat on the sea. The boat keeps being pushed back and forth by the waters of life and can only be brought to rest by pulling it ashore to the source and root of its being.

This 'turning to good/God' is the advice that you will hear most. "But first you must tear up the garment which you wear, --this cloak of darkness, this web of ignorance, this prop of evil, this bond of corruption, - this living death, this conscious corpse, this tomb you carry about with you, -this robber in the house, this enemy who hates the things you seek after, and grudges you the things which you desire." (CH VII.2)

"And men can end the cycle of transmigrations of the soul and be immortal when they transform themselves into good spirits." (CH X.7), *Scott's* translation is much different, but says the same: "And human souls, when they have attained to a beginning of immortal life, change into daemons, and thereafter pass on into the choral dance of the gods".

"We are glad that You made us divine in our bodies by your gnosis" (*Prayer Of Thanksgiving Nag Hammadi Codex VI.7*). Lets act to it!

## the esoteric tradition(s) of the west part IV

### Gnosticism

As most articles about the subject, I will start to say that "Gnosis" (say, "no sis" as if your little sister is not allowed to do something) is a Greek word meaning "opinion", "view", "knowledge". Most of the time the word is used for deep, 'direct' knowledge as in a revelation. However the word "Gnosis" can therefore be used in all times and for every tradition, it is mostly known for a pre-Christian movement that has also existed after the start of our counting of years. It is this movement or tradition that I will speak about in this article.

Nowadays it is mostly recognised that the gnostic movement came forth from the Jewish mystery-tradition a few hundred years BC. This does not fully explain the many different kinds of Gnosticism though. Some seem more aligned with the Egyptian tradition, which of course may give you the idea that I am talking about Hermeticism (see previous article) which may very well be true. Other gnostic traditions seem to be based on 'hellenised' Egyptian knowledge; when the Greek conquered Egypt the philosophies crossbred and influenced each other. Also some kind of Gnosticism came forth from the near east, which kind we can call 'Syrian Gnosticism'. Little was known about the Gnosis until fairly recently.

For about 1600 years the only information came from the enemy, mostly Christian priests and bishops. Most of the time they did their utmost to discredit the heretics, sometimes by quoting their scriptures at length and writing about habits and rituals. Of course most of this information is very coloured. The most ironic part of the story is that it seems that Jesus of Nazareth seems to have been *the* impuls for the rise of a great many gnostic schools. In the years 100 to 150 there were several dozens of them. Some modern Bible investigators claim that the words of Jesus have inspired such schools. In his book "Jesus, a hundred years before Christ", Alvar Ellegård even defends and tries to prove his thesis that Jesus was actually the "master of justice" of the the apostate Jewish sect of the Essenes and that early Christianity actually came forth from this movement. This isn't the first time that primal Christianity is called a gnostic movement and also later (as we will see) Gnosticism and Christianity are closely aligned.

Around 1945 two major discoveries were done near the Dead Sea. One of these became known as the "Dead Sea Scrolls", the other as the "Nag Hammadi Library". The Dead Sea Scrolls mostly contain pre-Christian Jewish scriptures that are either or not also to be found in the Old Testament. The Nag Hammadi scriptures date from just before to a few hundred years after the birth of Christianity, giving a totally different picture from our usual view of the early days of the world's greatest religion. The Nag Hammadi scriptures turned out to be Essene writings and they contain old versions of canonical scriptures (scriptures that were taken into the Bible), apocryphal writings (scriptures that did not make it to the Bible), typical gnostic writings, some Hermetic texts and other scriptures. They give a fairly good picture of the life and ideas of the Essene sect and Gnosticism in general.

When Christianity became organised and dogmatized they found that it was time to decide which books are really inspired by God and which are not, so when in 367 AD the first version of 'the list' was produced. The possession of other texts became penal. Several investigators think that the monks of a monastery in Nag Hammadi in Egypt wanted to secure their beloved (now apocryphal) texts and hid them in a cave where they were found almost 1600 years later by a shepherd that was chasing two of his goats. Christians actively started to oppress the gnostics (and other 'heretics') and Gnosticism went underground and was not really heard of for several hundred years. In the west, that is. A bit more to the east, the prophet Mani had given birth to 'Manicheism', the only 'gnostic religion' that has been rather big in the middle east for many decades.

The west had to wait until the 11th century for the first gnostic revival. It was mostly Manicheism that inspired different groups of people in their strange convictions, but also further eastern influences came to the west. Italy and southern France were the first regions that were 'infected' at large by the new faith. Of course we all know about the Cathars or "good Christians" that were particularly large in number in southern France until pope Innocentius III in 1209 started his crusade against them.

The biggest objection of the Church against the gnostic movement were the fact that they had no permanent priests, everybody could be priest and give his/her own explanation of sacred texts. Women had the same rights as men in most gnostic movements and the gnostics didn't obey the Church's authority. Their heretic doctrines were blasphemous and dualistic. It was not God or Jesus that brought enlightenment, but the gnostics themselves and knowledge through learning was more important than dogmatic explanations by the Church. Worst of all was that the gnostics said that the God of the church

was a minor, or even evil God who created the earth. So again in the early 13th century, Christianity effectively wiped out the second gnostic boom and other occultist movements, such as those aligned to the Knight Templars.

It took another 400 years before the esoteric tradition from the west reappeared in the form of anonymous scriptures of the shady German 'brotherhood of the Rosy Cross'. Very active in the beginning and quickly gaining many members in different countries throughout Europe, there was a new rise of interest in the occult. Besides the Rosicrucian movement, birth was given to the Freemason movement, which is less gnostic.

Rosicrucianity and Freemasonry have more or less actively existed ever since, but the current interest in Gnosticism got the biggest injection after the discovery of the Dead Sea and Nag Hammadi scrolls. Perfectly timed in a time where critical Bible studies became allowed and respected. However it took quite a long while before the texts really became obtainable to the public, Gnosticism is nowadays something that most people have heard of. Serious writers and spokesmen and an enormous flood of publications fill the hunger for "Gnosis" of the people of today, coming to new and healthy insights in Christianity, Gnosticism can impossibly be thought out of our nowadays society.

As you can see, especially the early history of Gnosticism is quite like that of Alchemy and Hermeticism. It seems that Gnosticism was a larger movement though and existing and growing in different parts of the near east. Also it seems that Gnosticism was there before Alexandria and that Hermeticism became the bridge between Alchemy and Gnosticism. The 'teachings of Hermes' are often called "the Hermetic Gnosis" which probably says enough. Somehow Hermeticism remained obscure, maybe because Gnosticism managed to remain connected to Christianity in spite of all the problems between the two, and Hermeticism didn't. As mentioned in the end of the Hermeticism article the renaissance occult revival was a mishmash of traditions and the early Rosicrucians definitely built on Alchemy, Hermeticism *and* Gnosticism as other occultists of the 16th and 17th century did. With Gnosticism it is harder to name particular names. This would mostly concern Christians in times of less oppression, but since Gnosticism seems to be more of a tradition or even doctrine, there are no real gnostic *thinkers* to be mentioned, just reproducers of the traditio

## the esoteric tradition(s) of the west part V

### Kabbalah

In the article about Alchemy I wrote that the upcoming religion of the Islam brought a safeguard for many western occultists that had to flee the rage of Christianity. After the destruction of Alexandria and in particular its libraries, many alchemists, hermeticists, gnostics, Jews, etc. fled to the regions where soon the prophet Mohammed would start his quest. The 'pre-Muslims' and later the Muslims treated the immigrants with respect and both parties learned a lot from each other.

When the Muslims reigned southern Europe a fruitful environment for mysticism and occultism existed in Spain. Muslims brought alchemical and hermetic texts that had come to them by the fleeing occultists of 1000 years earlier and translated them (back) in western languages.

There were also many Jews in Spain and the Jewish alchemist Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204 better known as Maimonides) compiled the text that we now know as the Mishnah. This word means 'repetitions' and the text contains explanations of the Torah. It seems that Maimon was a re-compiler or maybe only a translator, because the second century Rabbi Judah ha-Nassi is (also) regarded as the compiler of the Mishnah. The Torah are the first five books of the Jewish bible (the Old Testament of the Christians) and the word means 'doctrine'.

Moses of Léon (1250-1305) wrote (or compiled) a large book about the Torah that we came to know as the Sepher Zohar or the 'book of splendour'. This book claims to be the writings of a second century wiseman and is mostly regarded the most important Kabbalistic text that contains every aspect of the tradition

(which is the translation of the word Kabbalah by the way). There are even people who claim that Kabbalism came into being in this time and with the Zohar, but not everybody agrees with this.

Another major Kabbalistic text that originated in the Muslim environment in Spain are the Sepher Yetzirah or 'book of creation' which describes the ten emanations of god, or the "sephiroth" and however it does not give the drawing, describes the well-known 'tree of life' (see left and particularly the article "Etz

Chayyim").

However there are people who say that Kabbalism originates in this 12th century climate, this is not entirely true.

The Hebrew characters for the word are , qof-beth-lamed-heh, or , kaf-beth-lamed-heh from right to left. Since ancient Hebrew doesn't have any vowels *and* the consonants can be transcribed to our letters in different way, there are many ways of writing the word. I usually use "Kabbalah", but it may just as well be "Kabala", "Cabala", "Qabala", "Quabalah" or even "Quobele" if you like (we also don't know how ancient Hebrew was pronounced). It is generally accepted that there are two kinds of Kabbalah, the speculative Kabbalah or 'Jehunieth' and the practical Kabbalah or 'Maassieth'. The first is of course of a more philosophical nature, the second is involved with magic and Jewish word-games ("Gematria" and "Notaricon", maybe enough to say about them for a separate article). Kabbalah is mostly based on the ancient Jewish texts, such as the Torah, the Talmud ('instructions'), Mishnah, Gemarah (supplement to the Mishnah), etc., but mostly on the Torah.

Written in Hebrew the Torah contains text and numbers, since every Hebrew character is also a number. When you count the value for a certain word or piece of the text, other words with the same value are closely aligned (this is actually "gematria"). This is an example of practical Kabbalah on the Torah. When speaking of God, there is a striking similarity with the gnostic worldview. Kabbalists say that the God from the Bible isn't the highest God, but a creator-God. The highest Divinity is endless, eternal, unlimited and incomprehensible and named "En-Soph". The Sephirothic tree is a schematic reproduction of creation. En-Soph is above and all around and the 10 sephiroth are as said 10 emanations of It. The tree can be splitted in three parts of which the top three sephiroth form the highest of the three worlds, the next three sephiroth the second highest, the next three the third and the last sephiroth "Kliphoth" ("hell" so to say) or the material plane.

Of course there is a lot to say about this, but that is not really the purpose of this article.

Jewish mysticism is mostly based on the vision of Ezechiel from the Old Testament. The tradition is called "Merkavah mysticism" that developed for a long long time until a new impulse came in the 12th century Spain and 'real Kabbalism' came forth. Kabbalism quickly spread through the Jewish world, but also the west got infected. Western occultists and in particular Ramon Lull (1235 - 1315) and the Italian school of Cosimo de Medici (1389 - 1464) gave birth to the "Christian Cabala" that is mostly written like this to divide it from the orthodox Jewish Kabbalah (and later the ceremonial magical (Crowlegian) Qabalah), which is of course based on the Jewish Kabbalah, but with more astrological and western esoteric influences. These two developed quite separately from each other, especially after the time that the Christians reconquered southern Europe from the Muslims and both the Muslims and the Jews were killed or driven out. What we here in the west mostly get is (fairly) Christian Kabbalah and the serious Jewish literature is mostly unavailable in western languages. Still it is an extremely interesting field for investigation, probably enough to fill a life-time.

## the esoteric tradition(s) of the west

### Conclusion

These are the pillars of western esotericism that I want to write about. Other traditions, doctrines, teachers, etc. are based on those mentioned: Alchemy, Hermeticism, Gnosticism and Kabbalah. As we have seen, the histories of the different traditions are often either the same or closely aligned, which is the reason that I wrote the 's' between brackets in the titles. When looking at the history after Alexandria, we see that in this Greek city in Egypt several traditions came together and mostly developed further together, but sometimes by itself. Some traditions were there before Alexandria, or maybe all of them, or maybe none. A fact is that the 600 years that Alexandria has existed it sure formed the primal-soup for our western occult tradition and probably of our culture in general.

So in general, shall we now say that Hermeticism is a part of the Gnostic tradition? Or is it a part of the Alchemical tradition? Or is alchemy a form of Hermeticism? It all just depends on what tag you put on it. Sometimes (especially in the beginning) it is quite clear to tell them from each other, but since the 16/17th century it all became one tradition of the west (again), maybe except the real Jewish kabbalah.

I hope that those of you who were not known with these traditions at all or too well, will have gotten interested enough to start your own studies. Check out the book-reviews for good and interesting books and the philosophy links for good websites.

