

## Hermeticism Notes

Hermeticism is a western, philosophical, and esoteric religion based on the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, which emphasized that humanity can evolve into godhood through esoteric knowledge found in the material realm.

### Hellenistic Hermeticism

In order to understand Freemasonry, which began in the 1700s AD, and the modern western occult, which began in the 1800s AD, one must understand the development of the mystery religions and Hermetics in Europe through the Medieval period. Though many different people have practiced Hermeticism throughout time and in different ways, this paper will look at how Hermeticism developed throughout the history of Medieval Europe.

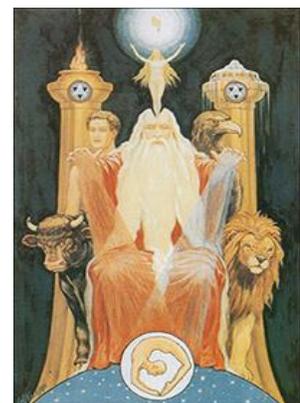
Out of the Greco-Roman mystery religions came the religion of Hermeticism in the 200s and 100s BC. Hermeticism is based on the writings of Hermes Trismegistus (“the thrice great Hermes”). In the Hellenistic Greek world, the Egyptian god Thoth and Greek god Hermes were worshiped as a unified god of esoteric knowledge and magic. Hermes Trismegistus was supposedly a pagan philosopher who foresaw the coming of Christianity.

The writings of Hermes Trismegistus were known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* (100s and 200s AD) and emphasized the belief that esoteric knowledge brings oneness with God and the idea of *Prisca theologia*, a doctrine stating that a single, true theology is in all religions (all religions are equal). He emphasized human free choice and responsibility for one’s actions.

The image to the right is an esoteric image of Hermes Trismegistus dressed like an Egyptian with the solar disk of Horus and wings of Isis across his chest. In his left hand is the caduceus of Hermes, which is a symbol of the serpent of wisdom spiraling around the scepter of authority. At the top are the wings of Isis, which represent enlightenment. In his right hand are the emerald tablets of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. He has one foot on the dragon (reason), signifying his mastery over the material realm and attainment of enlightenment. The top left circle is an ibis, which is the head of Thoth, and the bottom right circle is a dog, which is represents Horus as the dog star Sirius.



The second image is an esoteric image of Yahweh sitting on his heavenly throne, which sits on the earth. He sits between the two pillars of Solomon’s temple, which have the hexagram of duality on them. Surrounding him are the four heads of the cherubim from Ezekiel’s vision of Yahweh (Ezek. 1). Out of his head is the birth of Athena, the daughter of Zeus and the Greek goddess of wisdom. Above that is the yod, which is the first letter of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. The point is that Yahweh and Zeus are the same god. The pillars contain fire and water, out of his hands is wind, and below him is earth. These come together to form the fifth element, which is the human in a circle, representing his eternity as god.



The new emphasis that Hermeticism brought to the philosophies of the mystery religions was the combination of magic and science as a way to master the material realm and achieve enlightenment and the immortality of the soul. This was a religion of the intelligentsia.

Their main maxim from the *Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus* is: “That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracle of the One Thing.” That which is above is the macrocosm of the universe, and that which is below is the microcosm of oneself.

The image to the right is an esoteric image of the above maxim. The right-side-up man is the true man of the spiritual realm, who is a king. He is reflected as a distorted, upside-down man of the material realm. The triangle pointing up (spiritual realm) and the triangle pointing down (material realm) form the hexagram, which is the chemical marriage that brings the two realms together as one. The cross with equal branches represents the duality as well. The white triangle in the upper left represents the female, while the white perpendicular lines in the upper right represent the male.



The second image is an esoteric image of the cosmic man. At the top of the image are the angels of heaven, and at the bottom are the demons of hell; these represent the duality of the spiritual realm. The dragon (reason) is at the base of the tree, which represents nature and ancient wisdom. The enlightened philosopher sits within the tree meditating. The trunk of the tree is like his spinal cord. Wrapped around the tree is the serpent of wisdom. Above that is a man firing an arrow into the heavens, and the arrow has flowered into the lotus flower of Hindu meditation. Above that is the wheel of samsara of Hinduism and the duality symbol of Taoism in the center. Above that are the phoenix of self-reincarnation and the dove of the Holy Spirit of Christianity. Above that is the triangle and eye of Horus wearing the crown of godhood. Above that is the yod, which is the first letter of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. All of this is inside the hexagram, which looks like a human body and represents the four elements coming together to form the fifth element of man's enlightenment. This is also portrayed as the shekinah glory of Yahweh that led Israel out of Egypt and is parting the veil of the sky and entering to heaven. The point is that man is God.



Hermeticism taught that there were three parts to wisdom:

- **Alchemy** (the operation of the sun): the study of nature and the mastering of nature in order to understand life, death, and resurrection (transmigration).
- **Astrology** (the operation of the stars): the study of the planets and stars in order to understand the mind of the All (God).
- **Theurgy** (the operation of the gods): the practice of magic in order to unite with higher beings to obtain divine consciousness; the practice of black magic (demons) of malicious magic and the practice of white magic (angels) of healing magic.

In 380 AD, Theodosius I, Gratian, and Valentinian II established Nicene Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. This led to the Catholic Church's rule over Europe during the Medieval period and their suppression of the mystery religions and Hermeticism. Granted, this did not affect the overwhelming majority of Europeans, who were illiterate and were merely trying to survive.

During this time, the development of Hermetic alchemy moved to the Islamic world. They also preserved the Greek writings in the Arabic language. The Iranian Jābir ibn Hayyān (721–815 AD) introduced scientific methodology and controlled experimentation, in contrast to the ancient Greek and alchemists, whose works were often non-quantitative and allegorical. Jabir introduced the idea of the philosopher's stone (alkahest), which was a formula that would allow one to change the elements of nature and would allow for the transmutation of the soul and thus eternal life.

## Medieval Europe

As a result of the Crusades connecting the Islamic and European worlds, alchemy was brought to Europe in 1144 AD, with Robert of Chester's translation of the *Arabic Book of the Composition of Alchemy*.

During the 1200s AD, Christian thinkers began to introduce the Greek Philosophers (though they did not have access to their writings) to Europe, as men like Saint Anselm (1033–1109 AD) began to argue that faith and rationalism were compatible.

Roger Bacon (1219–1292 AD), a Franciscan friar, connected alchemy and the Greek philosophers with Christianity. He also progressed scientific methodology further along, and many consider him the father of modern chemistry. The words "alchemy" and "chemistry" were synonymous during the 1600s AD.

In the 1300s AD, alchemy became more accessible to Europeans outside Latin-speaking, educated men and became more social visible in the public eye. In 1317 Pope John XXII's and 1403 Henry IV of England forbade the alchemic practice of changing the form of metal and the promise of the transmutation of the soul.

The birth of the Renaissance (1300s–1600s AD) would cause alchemy to flourish in Europe, and many scholars began to mix the ideas of Christianity, the occult, and alchemy.

Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) was the leader of the Florentine Academy and sought to revive Plato's school of thought. He was one of the most influential humanist philosophers of the early Italian Renaissance and the first translator of Plato's works into Latin.

Esoteric societies developed outside of Italy and blended alchemy into a broader occult Hermeticism, fusing it with magic, astrology, and Christian Kabbalah.

## **Kabbalah**

Kabbalah was brought to Europe when Moses de Leon (1250–1305) “discovered” the *Zohar*, a work he ascribed to Simeon bar Yochai, a rabbinic Jew who lived in Israel during the 100s AD.

It taught that Yahweh was the AIN SOPH (“the One”), an unknowable, eternal, and unlimited force and that the AIN SOPH manifested itself as triune: Kether (male), Chokhmah (female), and Binah (androgynous son).

The AIN SOPH revealed itself to Moses, who was given the Law (teachings), the Mishna (interpretation), and the Kabbalah (esoteric understanding). These revelations were the AIN SOPH, and the events in these writings told of what was happening in the AIN SOPH.

## **Luciferianism**

The Hermetics revered Lucifer as the origin of divine thought and enlightenment. Luciferianism, birthed out of the religion of Gnosticism, does not revere Satan nor believe in Satan. Lucifer is a good and divine liberator or guiding spirit who brings esoteric knowledge to those who seek enlightenment.

The name Lucifer is associated with the morning star, which is connected to the planet Venus. The people of the ancient Near East thought the planet Venus was two different stars since it appeared in the sky in the morning and again in the evening.

The Greeks gave these two appearances of the planet Venus two different names. In the Greek language, the morning star was called *Phosphoros* (“bringer of light”), while the evening star was called *Hesperos* (“star of evening”). The Romans translated these names into their Latin language, providing the names *Lucifer* and *Vesper*.

The planet Venus was associated with the goddess of love, Aphrodite, Venus, Isis, Astarte, Ishtar, and Queen of Heaven, who have shown wisdom to people.

Emperors and deities throughout the ancient world referred to themselves as the “morning star” to refer to themselves as the bringer of light in the darkness or the ultimate victor in battle (Isa. 14; Ezek. 28).

The Greeks also associated the morning star with Prometheus, the god of forethought who stole fire from the gods and brought it and knowledge to the humans. He was called Lucifer in the Latin because he was the “bringer of light.” He was punished by being cast down to the earth and being nailed to a mountain to have an eagle eat his immortal liver every day because he rebelled against the demiurge. Some Hermetics worship a specific being who is seen as the origin of light, esoteric knowledge, and enlightenment, while others see Lucifer as any divine being who has achieved enlightenment beyond the material realm and who acts a guide to those seekers of truth in the material realm. Lucifer is most accurately manifested as Horus. The Baphomet is an esoteric image of Lucifer.

The figure of the Baphomet to the right, has the body of a man and the head of a goat. The Goat is a symbol of rebellion and of man doing his own thing. The horns represent authority. Out of its head is a torch of fire, which represents enlightenment. The figure is androgynous, with the breasts of a woman and the caduceus of Hermes coming out of its lap to represent the male genitalia. It has wings, which represents divinity. The right hand is pointing up toward a white moon and the spiritual realm. The left hand is pointing down toward a black moon and the material realm. These represent the duality of the hexagram.



In Medieval Christianity, some Christians, based on a misunderstanding of Isa. 14 and the false beliefs of Hermeticism, connected the fall of Satan with Prometheus, which is when Satan started becoming known as Lucifer (“the bringer of light”).

In reality, Yahweh and Jesus are the only source of truth and light. In Isa. 14 and Ezek. 28, Yahweh is condemning the Babylonian king for falsely declaring himself as the morning star, and Yahweh killed him and put him in the grave for his arrogance.

By the Second Testament, the Bible associated the title “morning star” (Lucifer) with Jesus as the true bringer of light (Lucifer) (Num. 24:17; 2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16).

## Rosicrucianism

By the 1700s, European alchemy began to decline with the rise of modern science. Science emphasized rigorous quantitative experimentation and disdained “ancient wisdom” and magic associated with alchemy. So Hermetics went underground into secret societies.

During the 1600s AD, an extremely secretive and political group called Rosicrucian became extremely influential in the politics of Europe.

They emphasized absolute free will (freedom) and believed that spirituality was attained through wisdom, Kabbalah, and magic. They viewed the Egyptian triad as the source of wisdom and the ultimate manifestation of Lucifer.

They sought to connect with the natural world and the universe in order to move all humanity forward. They did this mostly through education and politics. They were the driving force behind the French and American Revolutions.

Their symbol was the rose (symbolic of the female) and cross (symbolic of the male), which typifies the generative process.

The major objectives of Rosicrucianism:

- the abolition of monarchical forms of government and the substitution therefore of the rulership of the philosophical elite
- the reformation of science, philosophy, and ethics
- the discovery of the Universal Medicine for all diseases (Philosopher’s Stone, Elixir of Life)



Out of the secretiveness of the Rosicrucians arose a more public fraternity with the same objectives, known as the Freemasons.

## **Bibliography**

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