The Hermetic Λόγος: Reading the *Corpus Hermeticum* as a Reflection of Graeco-Egyptian Mentality

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                                                Prof. Dr. Claudia Opitz-Belakhal

To my wife Daniela.

Acknowledgements

Egyptology is not a subject traditionally taught at university in Brazil. Only few choose to study ancient Egypt and even fewer are actual Egyptologists. In most cases the enthusiasts for the land of the Nile are Historians, Anthropologists, journalists and alike. I have to admit that I was no better off when I arrived in Basle; I held a bachelor and a master's degree in History and had done research that focused on the Greeks' perception of and relations with Egypt in the Classical/Hellenistic period.

The project of writing my dissertation began to take shape in 2005. I had only recently received my M.A. and commenced correspondence with Prof. Dr. Antonio Loprieno from the University of Basle. He later kindly introduced me to my advisor, Prof. Dr. Susanne Bickel, who reviewed my project and interviewed me in August 2006. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Bickel for the guidance and advice she offered me at meetings and debates. I regard it as one of my greatest achievements of the past four years to have been able to win her favour for my project.

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O God, thy arm was here;

And not to us, but to thy arm alone,

Ascribe we all!

(William Shakespeare, Henry V, act 4, scene viii)

If you desire to read writings, come to me and I will have you taken to the

place where that book is that Thoth wrote with his own hand, when he

came down following the other gods.

"Setne Khamwas and Neferkaptah" (Setne I) – Pap. Cairo 30646 = *M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature* III. (Los Angeles: 2006), p.128.

Abstract:

This study analyses Hermetic literature and focuses on the seventeen treatises of the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum*. It takes as its starting point the assumption that what are nowadays known as the Philosophical Hermetica emerged as a product of a Graeco-Egyptian process of self-perception. As will be demonstrated, Hermetic literature helps our understanding of how reformulations of symbolic universes led to a specific Graeco-Egyptian mentality. The Hermetica will be treated as the result of cross-cultural exchange between Greek and Egyptian symbolic universes. Hermetic literature will therefore be analysed according to its historical context, i.e. as part of a Greek-Egyptian dialogue.

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AA - *Analecta Aegyptiaca* (Kopenhagen).

ad. Ascl. – *Ad Asclepius*. English version: B. P. Copenhaver (transl.), *Hermetica*. (Cambridge: 2002); Latin Version: A. D. Nock, A. –J. Festugière (ed. and transl.) *Corpus Hermeticum: Tome II - Traités XVIII- XVIII*, (Paris: 1945).

AH - *Agyptologica Helvetica* (Basel).

BAmSocP - *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* (Duhran – NC).

BdE – *Institut Français d'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale : Bibliothèque d'Étude* (Le Caire).

BGU – *Ägyptische Urkunden aus den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Griechische Urkunden* (Berlin).

BIFAO - *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* (Le Caire).

CdE – *Chronique d'Égypte* (Bruxelles).

CH. – *Corpus Hermeticum.* English version: B. P. Copenhaver (transl.), *Hermetica*. (Cambridge: 2002); Greek Version: A.D. Nock, A. –J. Festugière (ed. and transl.) *Corpus Hermeticum: Tomes I, II - Traités I-XVIII*, (Paris: 1945).

Contra Julianum - Freench and Greek versions: P. Burgière, P. Évieux (transl.) *Cyrille d'Alexandrie Contre Julien* - vol.1. (Paris: 1985).

De Anima – English version : P. Holmes (transl.) *Tertulian - A treatise on the Soul*. - A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. (Edinburgh, Whitefish - MT: 1870, 2004).

De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum – Greek and Freench versions : J. E. des Places (transl.), *Jamblique – Les Mystères d'Égypte*. (Paris: 1989).

Diod. – *Diodorus of Sicily*. English and Greek versions: C. H. Oldfather, (transl.) *Diodorus of Sicily*. – *Loeb Classical Library– vol.1*. (London: 1968).

Enneads - English and Greek versions: A. H. Armstrong (transl.) *Plotinus – Loeb Classical Library – vol.2*. (London: 1990).

Hdts. – Herodotus. English and Greek versions: A. D. Godley. (transl.) *Herodotus - The Persian Wars – Loeb Classical Library – vol.1*. (London: 2004).

JARCE – *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* (Cairo).

JEA - *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (London).

JEOL - *Jaarbericht ex Oriente Lux* (Leiden).

JNES – *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (Chicago).

LÄ – W. Helck, E. Otto, (ed.). *Lexikon der Ägyptologie.* (Wiesbaden: 1977).

NHH. – *Nag Hammadi Hermetica*: Codex VI-6 (The Discourse on the Eight and Ninth) ,VI-7 (The Prayer of Thanksgiving), VI-8 (Asclepius: Coptic version from chapters 21 to 28). Translated from Coptic by J. Brashler, P. A. Dirkse and D. M. Parrot. In: J. M. Robert (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. (New York: 1990). Coptic version (fragmentary): J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II*. (Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt: 1997).

OBO - *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* (Fribourg).

OLA - *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* (Leuven).

PGM - *Papyri Graecae Magicae* - English version: H. D. Betz (ed.) *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation.* (Chicago, London: 2004). Greek version: K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae* 2 vols. (Stuttgart: 1973-4).

RdE - *Revue d' égyptologie* (Paris).

SAK - *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* (Heidelberg).

TUAT - *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (Mainz).

ZPE – *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphie* (Köln).

Introduction

Around 1460 A.D, a Greek manuscript from a Macedonian monastery arrived at Florence. It was a compendium of seventeen texts, some of them in fragments only, concerning theology, philosophy, astrology, alchemy and magic. Cosimo de Medici was so fascinated by the writings that he immediately asked his expert translator of Plato, Marsilio Ficino, to examine the texts and render them into Latin right away. The Latin translation of these texts was called the *Corpus Hermeticum.* It had been named after their main protagonist, "Hermes Trismegistos", who was thought to be the author of an ancient philosophical and magical doctrine. The *Corpus Hermeticum*, especially its first treatise, "The Poimandres," was circulating across Western Europe in many copies before it was published in 1471. Due to Ficino's Latin translation and comments, Europeans started to engage with the Hermetic doctrine producing their own interpretations and originating Western esoteric movements. Among these were the alchemist movements of the 15th century as well as Rosicrucianism during the 16th and 17th centuries. Freemasonry followed in the 18th and 19th centuries ensued by Theosophy and the New Age movements during the 20th and 21st centuries.

According to Ficino, Plato had been influenced by Hermes via Pythagoras. Moreover, many held Hermes to be a contemporary of Moses[1] and thought that the *Corpus Hermeticum* might have served as a vehicle to spread Christian values. Indeed, Ficino believed these books to be of Divine origin. At the same time, however, another theory, the so-called "*prisca theologia*"*,* considered the *Corpus Hermeticum* to offer proof for a common pagan origin of later religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and

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[1] See: J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*. (London: 1997).

Islamism. However, Casaubon nullified this interpretation when he demonstrated in 1614 that the *Hermetica* were in fact a Graeco-Roman composition and probably a "Christian forgery"[2]. His theory that the texts were a Christian counterfeit was upheld until 1904 when Reitzenstein showed that they were in fact very complex in their nature and likely to have experienced some degrees of Egyptian cultural influence.[3] The debate promoted by Reitzenstein determined the course of the last century's approach to Hermetism, i.e. with regard to the cultural identity of the Hermetic discourse, which until recently was continued to be an object of dispute between Hellenists and Egyptologists.

The present study considers Hermetic literature to be the result of a major intercultural mixture. It links Hermetic literature to the formation of a Graeco-Egyptian mentality. This is why Hermetism will be viewed as part of a cross-cultural exchange and dialogue taking place between Greek and Egyptian referential symbolic universes. In a first step the historical roots of Hermetism will be analysed. Hence the historical context of the cultural interactions between Greeks and Egyptians will be examined.

Ever since the Greek Archaic age/ Egyptian Late period[4], Greek and Egyptian civilisations underwent different degrees of diplomatic, commercial and cultural interactions. Despite Egypt's political presence in the Greek world – or Hellade – Greek prototypical representations of Egypt always portrayed its inhabitants as wise priests or magicians. Its civilisation was assumed to live in an admirable ancient land where most of the known wisdom had originated. Indeed, Egyptian religiousness was one of the

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[2] See: G. Quispell, "Preface." In: C. Salaman *et alii* (transl.) *The Way of Hermes: The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios.* (London: 1999), p. 9.
[3] R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres - Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur.* (Leipzig: 1904).
[4] Archaic Greek age: from 750 to 480 B.C; Egyptian Late Period: from 712 to 332 B.C. See our Appendix 1 for a table of equivalences between the Greek and Egyptian chronologies approached in this study.

most common points of the Greeks' description of Egypt in this idealisation process. Furthermore, many wise Greeks had reputedly travelled to Egypt asking for education, and the general Greek consensus claimed a mythical Egyptian origin for most of their philosophical schools and mystery cults. Greek attempts made at grasping and describing Egyptian religion were also supported by a syncretistic tendency which aligned pantheons according to each god's virtues. This process, which the Greeks called *Interpretatio Graeca* – although it was common practice in all societies in Antiquity – allowed the identification between Egyptian and Olympic gods. Thus it equated the Egyptian god of wisdom, Thoth[5], with the Greek divine messenger, Hermes.

The Greeks, who started to settle in Egypt under the Saite Pharaoh Amasis (570 - 526 B.C.), associated Thoth with their own psychopompos and magician, Hermes. Hermes presided over medicine and the realm of the dead. He was renowned for his inventiveness and trickery and worked as a messenger between men and gods. Thoth-Hermes, on the other hand, owed his popularity among ordinary people to his role as a guide of souls. In addition to this, he was also the divine scribe present on the day of the soul's judgment. After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great and the ensuing establishment of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, the Egyptian Hermes gained such popularity that he developed an independent identity and mythology. Consequently, the god was described as a wise philosopher and magician from a remote Egyptian past, who, in accordance with his own philosophical teachings, later assumed the cosmic aspects of

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[5] The god Thoth is attested in the Egyptian pantheon since the Old Kingdom (ca. 2670 - 2205 B.C). He presided over the temple cults, in particular the sacred rituals, invented writing and was the lord of all human branches of wisdom. He was also the patron of magic and occultism and was identified with the moon due to its regenerative capacity. His occult powers, which focused on healing and protection, were considerable; even his speech had creative powers. See Appendix 2 for a list of equivalences of virtues for the *Interpretatio Graeca* between Toth and Hermes.

the native Egyptian god Thoth. During the times of the Roman administration, the Egyptian 'Hermes' was also called "Trismegistos" - literally "three times the greatest" – which had probably evolved from the translation of an Egyptian epithet for Thoth. The apotheosis of Hermes Trismegistos, on the other hand, was directly connected to doctrine. Thus Hermes Trismegistos ascertained that all human beings had a divine nature: If an individual managed to develop the right relationship with the spiritual dimension of his logos (here translated as "reason"), he could ascend a moral and spiritual path, which climaxed in the direct connection with God through an initiatory individual experience called Gnosis.

For centuries Greek mentality developed a close association between the word logos and political life. Social life and all dimensions of quotidian relations of a Classic *polis* were deeply connected to the political experience. Oratories and rhetoric were pursued as arts since eloquence and erudition were key elements to political success. It was the social-political interaction that was responsible for the shaping and development the methodology behind the Greek logos. This specific type of logos referred to the way human relations were perceived.[6] However, during the Hellenistic age, especially after the Roman conquest of the Hellade, this political sense of *logos* underwent a transformation and assumed a more mystical character. Influenced by the contact with oriental religions and traditions from newly-acquired eastern Hellenistic kingdoms, Hellenistic philosophical schools began to discuss metaphysics. Instead of promoting the welfare of a community, philosophers henceforth focused on the nature of the soul, individual happiness, etc. The Roman conquest in turn supported the proliferation of

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[6] See: J. –P. Vernant, *Les origines de la pensée grecque.* (Paris: 1962).

these Hellenistic thoughts throughout the Mediterranean basin. It was this intellectual and cultural phenomenon that produced Hermetic literature in Egypt.

Modern historiography distinguishes two classes of Hermetic writings. The first category are the so-called Technical Hermetica, which consist of magical papyri and similar texts concerning occultism. These stem from the time of the Ptolemies. The second category contains the so-called Theological or Philosophical Hermetica. They are made up of the seventeen treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the Latin treatise *ad Asclepius*, the Armenian *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios*, and the Hermetic texts written in Coptic, which were found at Nag Hammadi during the 1940s. The Philosophical Hermetica generally date from the 1st centuries A.D. However, a new source called *The Book of Thoth*, that was originally written in Hieratic and Demotic and is believed to have been restricted to Egyptian temples, has pushed the dating of the Philosophical Hermetica back to the 1st century B.C.

It is possible to see Hermetism as a type of Gnosticism. However, as there are many variants of Gnostic sects, systems, and beliefs, this study will classify the Hermetica as a separate class of literature. Following the argumentation of the Egyptian Neo-Platonist Plotinus, Gnosticism and Hermetism will be treated as two distinct phenomena. Overall, Technical and Philosophical Hermetica were equally received and reproduced by people of various backgrounds, including Gnostics, pagan philosophers and early Christian intellectuals. Indeed, as will be shown, Christians, Gnostics (including Christian and pagan Gnostics known to the Arabs as 'sabians') and pagan philosophers formed part of a large group that took an interest in Hermetic literature. Naturally, the Hermetica exchanged influences with these groups in different ways and with different intensity. Individual approaches to Hermetic literature will be analysed and compared. This will

help us understand how multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon gave rise to culturally different readings.

The present study employs the term *Corpus Hermeticum* as an expression to designate exclusively those mentioned seventeen treatises, that were originally written in Greek and subsequently translated into Latin in the Renaissance. In addition to this, all Hermetic texts - regardless of belonging to the so-called Philosophical or Technical Hermetica - shall be equally defined as "Hermetic literature".

The Greek language enabled the *Corpus Hermeticum* to become part of culturally adapted Egyptian knowledge. Egyptian concepts of moral and spiritual virtues, i.e. Maat, were transformed into a Greek Hermetic Logos (discourse). The use of philosophy as vehicle to transmit Egyptian ethics introduced Egyptian thought to metaphysics. Greek abstract concepts such as Logos, Nous and Gnosis entered a dialogue with Egyptian concepts. This caused an alteration of the original Egyptian cosmogony which consequently formed part of a new Hermetic worldview.

Hermetic mythology claimed to be a translation of traditional Egyptian teachings. What is more, despite the apparent presence of Judaism, Zoroastrism and other cultural elements, all non-Greek parts in the Hermetic doctrine were generically classified as "Egyptian". This happened because Thoth-Hermes was considered to be the allegorical author of every natural and supernatural science. Furthermore, the so-called Philosophical Hermetica and the god Hermes Trismegistos legitimated these new 'Egyptian' moral and ethical discourses which were connected to magic. The fact that the Hermetica were even translated into Coptic suggests that even non-Hellenised Egyptians were familiar with the Hermetica's symbolic Egyptian ancestry. Broadly

speaking we may say that the Hermetica and Hermetic doctrine were reproduced in linear continuity of Egyptian spirituality.

The present study only analyses the so-called Philosophical Hermetica. Its primary focus are the seventeen Hermetic treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In addition to these examples, several other Hermetic texts as well as Greek and Egyptian samples will be examined. The main premise will be that the Philosophical Hermetica were the result of a Graeco-Egyptian process of self-perception. Hermetic literature will prove a useful instrument in our understanding of how the reformulations of symbolic universes developed a new Graeco-Egyptian mentality.

The first chapter discusses the possibility of a specific cultural identity of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. It approaches the historical context of social and cultural interactions between Greeks and Egyptians before and after Alexander's conquest. In a next step, potential political and cultural identities will be analysed. In addition to this, intercultural influences on the production of Graeco-Egyptian literature will be examined.

In a next chapter, the differences between Gnosticism and Hermetism according to the Graeco-Roman perception will be surveyed. The classification of the Hermetica as lacking a particular ideology allows for a comparative analysis of the Hermetic cosmogony with its alleged Egyptian origins. Here the Hermetica will be analysed as a channel for the Greeks' reception of Egyptian abstract concepts. The second chapter suggests that translating abstract Egyptian concepts into Greek might have risked unintentional misinterpretations and/or multiple possible understandings.

The last chapter focuses on the dynamic process of "textual circularity" of the Hermetica throughout the Roman Empire. The audience of Hermetic discourse will be portrayed as coming from various ideological and antagonistic social layers. The objective of the analysis is to establish how discursive practices were able to assimilate a text that in turn could become part of a new social discourse. Moreover, it will be examined how each social group promoted partial and distinct interpretations of the same phenomenon.

The chapters have a similar structure offering partial conclusions in their last sections. Eventually, each chapter's last part will help support the final conclusion of the present paper.

1. The Hermetica and their Cultural Environment in Graeco-Roman Egypt

"Hellenistic" is a term created during the Modern age. It is based on the false presupposition that a 'pure culture' could exist impermeable to external influences. In the original definition, Hellenistic referred a Greek culture 'disturbed' by Oriental elements. Chronologically it was situated between Alexander's death and the fall of Carthage and Corinth, which marked the rise of Rome as a Mediterranean power. This interpretation reduced the Hellenistic age to a 'decadent' and 'intermediary' status. It appeared 'decadent' when compared to the so-called 'Classical Greek culture' of Pericles, Herodotus and Plato; and 'intermediary' since it was depicted as the period before the Roman rule over the Mediterranean world. However, we must bear in mind that the Hellenistic civilisation that was growing in the eastern Mediterranean was not aware of their 'Hellenisticity'. This is modern thinking. Hellenistic culture and people believed that they experienced the linear continuity of their Greek ancestors' culture and traditions. Differently put, Hellenistic Greeks identified their world/ culture/ society and civilisation as the Greek world/culture/society/civilisation.

The present paper uses the term 'Hellenistic' to refer a pro-Greek mentality, culture, self-perception, etc. The expression 'Graeco-Roman Egypt,' on the other hand will be treated as covering the time from the ascension to power by the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great to the death of the Roman emperor Theodosius.[7] In other words, seen from a chronological perspective, the present study distinguishes two periods of 'Graeco-Roman Egypt': the first covers the time of the Greek-Macedonian rule over

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[7] See Appendix 1.

Egypt, the second starts with the arrival of the Romans. Generally speaking we may say that the Greeks treated Egypt as they did all other cultures in the eastern Mediterranean basin, i.e. they kept up the image of the Greek culture as the non-barbarian culture.

Hermetic literature is a Graeco-Egyptian intellectual product, which flourished during the Graeco-Roman period. Its teachings, which are a combination of philosophy and mystic/magical principles, offered a new cosmogony and a characteristic way of understanding life, death, divinity, God, etc. In other words, Hermetic literature created a new world-conception and proposed a different way of interaction with the world.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Hermetic literature vanished from the Occident without a trace. However, in the Eastern Roman Empire – as well in the Islamic world – the Hermetica were preserved and even expanded. The production of Hermetic literature in Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Aramaic, Arab and Armenian illustrates that the Hermetica remained an intellectual subject and were continuously studied.[8] The western civilisation only 're-discovered' the Hermetic tradition in the Renaissance. In 1460 A.D, the monk Leonardo of Pistoia brought to Florence a Greek manuscript with Hermetic treatises concerning philosophy, astrology and alchemy. The city's ruler,

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[8] In the Byzantine Empire, a rich Hermetic literature was still preserved. Arab Hermetica also developed throughout the late antiquity and middle ages. In the Syrian city of Harran (present Turkey) prior to the Arab-Islamic conquest, Neo-Platonism had been syncretised with Hermetism. Hermetism persisted as a living tradition as late as the tenth century, when one of Haran's exponent philosopher, Thabit ibn Qurra (836-901) established a pagan Hermetic school in Bagdad. See: A. E. Affifi, "The Influence of Hermetic Literature on Moslem Thought." In: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13/4, (Cambridge: 1951), p.844. For Haran's syncretism see: T. M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*. (Leiden:1992), p.168; S. Brock, "A Syriac Collection of Prophecies of the Pagan Philosophers". In: *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, 14 (1983), pp. 203-46. Concerning the Byzantine world, see: H. J. W. Drijvers , "Bardaisan of Edessa and the Hermetica: The Aramaic Philosopher and the Philosophy of his Time". In: JEOL, 21, 1970, pp.190-210. About the Armenian Hermetica, see: M-G Durand, "Un traité Hermétique conserve en Arménien." In: *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 190 (1976), pp.55-72 and J. –P. Mahé, "The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios" in: C. Salaman *et alii* (transl.) *The Way of Hermes: The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios*. (London: 1999), pp. 99-124.

Cosimo de Medici ordered the scholar Marcilio Ficino[9] to translate it to Latin. According to Quispel, initial euphoria arose because scholars thought the literature would be older than the Old Testament. However,

> [i]n 1614 the Swiss Calvinist from Geneva, Casaubon, proved that the Corpus Hermeticum was not as old as it pretended to be but should be dated after the beginning of the Christian era. After this Hermetic writings lost their general fascination but lived on in secret societies such as the Freemasons and the Rosicrucians.[10]

The modern dating of the texts refutes the possibility that they are an ancient fount of divine wisdom that predates Plato. Nevertheless, it is possible that the Hermetica represent an authentic Egyptian religious tradition that came under the influence of Greek philosophy and was later written down in a highly Hellenised style. Iamblichus of Chalcis/Apamea[11] suggested as much in his *Abammonis ad Porphyrium Responsum*.[12]

Further research regarding the texts' origin was carried out by Richard Reitzenstein. He published his *Poimandres* in 1904 challenging Isaac Casaubon's claim that the Hermetica were mere Christian forgeries[13]. William C. Grese summarizes

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[9] Cf. M. Ficino, *Opera Marsilii Ficini florentini insignis philosophi platonici medici atque theology clarissima opera omnia et quae hactenus extitere.* (Basel: 1576, 1959).

[10] G. Quispell, "Preface." In: C. Salaman *et alii* (transl.) *The Way of Hermes: The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios.* (London: 1999), p. 9. For a complete analysis concerning the European reception of the Hermetic literature from the Renascence to the eighth century, see: J. Assmann*, Moses the Egyptian*. (London: 1997).

[11] Iamblichus was born in Chalcis but created a Neo-Platonic School at Apamea, in the vicinity of Antioch. He studied Neo-Platonism with Porphyry of Tyre, who was pupil of Plotinus.

[12] Presumably been written by Abammon, a high-ranking Egyptian priest, in reply to questions concerning theurgy that had been addressed to him by his former master, Porphyry of Tyre. See: K. Brown, "Hermes Trismegistus and Apollonius of Tyana in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh." In: J. McLean (ed.) *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá'í Theology* – vol 8 (Los Angeles: 1997), pp. 153-187.

[13] R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres - Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur.* (Leipzig: 1904).

Reitzenstein's position as follows: "Reitzenstein portrayed the Hermetica as a Hellenistic development of ancient Egyptian religion."[14]

Academic attention once again turned to the Hermetica when the *Nag-Hammadi Library* of Coptic Gnostic and Hermetic texts[15] was discovered during the 1940s and consequently published in the 1970s. Garth Fowden states that Hermetic scholarship entered in a new phase, one that emphasized an even closer connection between the Hermetica and traditional Egyptian thought.[16] It was maintained that the fact that Hermetic texts had been translated from Greek into Coptic clearly demonstrated that even non-Greek speakers had been involved in their reception, circulation and interpretation. This in turn motivated academics to probe into a definition of the Hermetica's cultural identity. Most modern discussions led by Hellenists and Egyptologists tend to label the texts in accordance with the cultural influences found therein. Naturally, the strong presence of both, Greek philosophy as well as Egyptian thought, led to debates centring on either an assumed Greek or Egyptian origin. The former drew heavily on the fact that – until recently – the oldest example of Hermetic writing came from a papyrus dating back to the 2nd century A.D.[17] This appeared to support the view that this type of literature had developed in Greek at the beginning of the Christian era.

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[14] W. C. Grese, "Magic in Hellenistic Hermeticism." In: I. Merkel, A. G. Debus (eds.), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, I. (London, Toronto: 1988), p. 45.

[15] The so-called Nag Hammadi Library, which mystic and religious contains such as non-canonical gospels and Gnostic texts, but also Hermetic texts. After the discovery of the Nag-Hammadi codices, the debate concerning the formation and cultural origins of Hermetic thought admitted the possibility of Jewish influence. See: J.M. Robinson (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library*. (New York: 1990).

[16] G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, (Princeton: 1993), p. xv. J. -P. Mahé sees a connection between the philosophical Hermetica and the earlier Egyptian Wisdom literature in *Hermès en Haute-Egypte* (Quebec: 1978-1982). See also E. Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine* (Copenhagen: 1984).

[17] Cf. "*Papyrus Vindobonensis Graeca* 29456".

Most traditional modern interpretations of the Hermetica acknowledged the theories of Festugière[18], who defined the texts as Greek with some Egyptian aesthetic elements. Moreover, to them the strong similarities between the *Corpus Hermeticum* and neo-Pythagoreanism as well as Neo-Platonism[19] pointed to a shared socio-cultural background, maybe even direct intellectual exchange. In line with this widespread position, Nock commented that the Hermetica contained very few Egyptian elements apart from the texts' protagonists. According to him, the Hermetica mirrored popular Greek philosophy in a very eclectic form, i.e. as a mixture of Platonism, Aristotelianism and the then widespread Stoicism. Furthermore, Nock argued for some traces of Judaism Iranian religious literature.[20]

The notion was soon established that the Hermetica's original authors probably stemmed from Alexandria's Hellenistic milieu. Judging from their degree of erudition in both Egyptian traditions and Greek philosophy, they were thought to have been members of the priest class. This view remained canonical until the second half of the 20th century and affected the entire host of modern studies. Among these was Momigliano[21], who analyzed the cultural encounter between Greeks and their neighbouring civilizations. He argued that the entire Hermetic phenomenon could be reduced to a branch of Hellenistic literature aiming to look Egyptian in order to obtain more prestige. Hermetic literature itself, however, seemed of little value to him; he

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[18] A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d`Hermès Trismégiste.* (Paris: 1944-54). See I, 85 for his attempt to disqualify the Egyptian influences. According to Festugière, the clear presence of Greek intellectual influences was enough to classify the Corpus Hermeticum as Greek literature with some degree of Egyptian background.

[19] It is important to note that the prefix "neo-" before the Hellenistic philosophies started during the Rennaissence. We should bear in mind, however, that Neo-Pythagoreans and Neo-Platonics preferred classifying themselves as Pythagoreans and Platonists respectively.

[20] A. D. Nock, A. -J Festugière, (*op. cit*), p.486.

[21] A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom : the limits of Hellenization.* (Cambridge: 1975).

pejoratively labelled it an "esoteric curiosity" made by Greeks for the "foolish" layer of the Hellenistic population that had no political aspirations. He concluded that:

> […] many of the politically-minded Greeks chose Rome; many of the religiously-minded went to an imaginary Persia and an imaginary Egypt. With the decline of the political fortunes of Hellenism the self-doubting questions increased and encouraged the weak-minded and the unscrupulous to offer easy ways out in text which could not be genuine.[22]

Momigliano classified the Hermetica as "not genuine" since its Greek sections purported to have evolved from more ancient Egyptian thought. He reasoned that the texts were in reality an attempt undertaken by Greek authors to cover up their ignorance of Egyptian "true knowledge". Consequently, "Pseudo-Hermes" had been an original 'mediator' who mixed neo-Pythagorean with Neo-Platonic philosophy and had sold this as very attractive and exotic Egyptian mysticism.

Still other specialists analysed elements of the corpora's composition and classified them as Greek due to the large presence of Greek philosophy.[23] The appearance of Egyptian lore, on the other hand, caused others to judge the texts to be Egyptian.[24] Moreover, some scholars have offered an alternative interpretation that allows for a multicultural origin.[25] This current emphasises the texts' elements that do not fit the Egyptian-Greek axis; e.g. the occurrence of Hellenised peoples such as Mesopotamians and Hebrews. Comparing the philosophical Hermetica with non-Greek Instruction texts, Fowden states:

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[22] *Ibidem*, p. 149, is guided by premises of the traditional Marxist History current, which opposed religious praxis and political commitment as a dichotomist paradigm.

[23] A. -J. Festugière, *La Révélation d`Hermès Trismégiste.* (Paris: 1944-54). Festugière defends the Hermetica as part of Greek philosophical tradition.

[24] See: J. -P. Mahé, *Hermès en Haute-Égypte*. I-II (Quebec: 1978-82). Mahé understands the Hermetica as an early Ptolemaic attempt to codify Egyptian religion.

[25] See: G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: a historical approach to the late pagan mind*. (Princeton: 1993). Fowden also offers a bibliographical review concerning this traditional debate about Greek and/or Egyptian origins to Hermetica.

The (relatively) unhellenized Egyptian expressed himself in the language and thought-patterns of the indigenous tradition, but what he wrote, […] might well draw on and be drawn on by what was being written at the same time in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. [26]

Put differently, Fowden's interpretation includes the possibility of multiple authorship developing over several generations and drawing from various origins and cultural influences.

However, the conception of Hermetism as an original and exclusive Greek-centred phenomenon is no longer upheld among scholars. The scales were tipped with the discovery of *The Book of Thoth*[27], a multi-layered discourse in the form of a dialogue between the god Thoth – whom the Greeks identified with Hermes in the *Interpretatio Graeca*[28] - and his disciple *Mr-rḫ* ("lover of wisdom").[29] The *Book* itself is composed of fragments, dating from the 1st century B.C. and the 2nd century A.D that stem from various sites in Egypt. The different examples were written in Demotic and Hieratic.[30] Their study proved, firstly, that Hermetic literature was written in Greek at the same time as similar texts were developed in Egyptian temples; and, secondly, that this cultural phenomenon preceded Christianity (rather than being its contemporary).

The present study is therefore based on the premise that the circumstances responsible for the development of Hermetic literature were not confined to the restricted axis of 'Hellenised population to Hellenised population'. Furthermore, it

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[26] *Ibidem*, p. 73.
[27] R. Jasnow, K-Th. Zauzich, *The ancient Book of Thoth.* (Wiesbaden: 2005).
[28] This identification between Thoth and Hermes is stated by Aristoxenus of Tarentum and Hecateus of Abdera. Cf: Stobaeus I *Proem*. 6, p.20 Wachsmuth = Aristoxenus fr.23 Wehrli; Diodorus I.16.
[29] The latter's name could indeed be translated as "philosopher″.
[30] There is a considerable number of fragments from Tebtynis, Dime and Elephantine (P. Louvre AF 13035 in Demotic, and P. Louvre E 10614 - the only copy in Hieratic), and Edfu (P. Berlin P 15531, the best preserved manuscript).

posits that a close examination of the relations between Greeks and Egyptians in Ptolemaic Egypt was not only relevant to the understanding of the formation of the Greek-Egyptian mentality, but also of crucial importance in the process of composing Hermetic literature. The following chapter thus aims at establishing the historical and cultural background of the relations between Greeks and Egyptians. Accordingly, a brief overlook of the times before the Lagide period will be offered. A discussion of the transformations occurring in Egypt as a consequence of the Roman conquest will conclude this section.

1.1 Background Information on Cultural Interactions between Greeks and Egyptians

Every civilisation influences and is influenced by its neighbours. This is true with regard to a spatial as well as a temporal dimension; i.e. a civilisation is influenced by the traditions of its ancestors and forefathers. In the case of Egyptians and Greeks, their first encounter predates the Macedonian conquest by centuries. The rule of Alexander the Great and his successors, i.e. Egypt's conquest by the Macedonians, easily accounts for the development of a Hellenistic civilisation in Egypt. However, since the Egyptians had already been in contact with Greeks prior to Alexander's arrival, it is likely that knowledge of Greek philosophy − and any Greek cultural influence for that matter − entered Egyptian writings at a much earlier point than usually assumed.

This paper takes as its premise that the Hellenistic civilisation in Egypt was the result of complex relations between two symbolic universes, which had for many centuries coexisted within the same physical space. We need to bear in mind, of course that it is

not cultures that 'meet' each other but people. As a result of such an encounter, a culture's perception of itself and the elements setting it apart from another culture become blurred and undergo constant, gradual and always unpredictable transformations. It goes without saying that these changes are shaped by the way individuals understand, classify and interact with the world surrounding them, i.e. at a political, religious, cultural and social level. The outcome of such a transformation of cultures is a new symbolic universe – in our case a Hellenistic universe – that contains a new world view replacing both traditional Egyptian and Hellenic discourses. Hence the birth of the Hermetic milieu in Egypt concurred with a newly founded perception of reality.

A discussion of the Graeco-Egyptian worldview necessarily includes concepts of cultural identity. In order to understand such a complex socio-cultural phenomenon as Hellenism in the Graeco-Egyptian society, a historical contextualization is a sine qua non. This will highlight the conditions that made the assimilation of key concepts possible. Thus the next section offers some background information on the relations between Egyptians and Greeks. Rather than just presenting a simplified summary of facts, the following contextualisation includes additional topics that are relevant to the further development of the argument presented in this paper. As will be seen, this framework demands a diachronical perspective at times. The following section will be split into two subsections, one dealing with pre-Hellenistic Egyptian-Greek relations and the other with interactions postdating the Macedonian conquest.

1. 1. 1 Greeks and Egyptians prior to the Hellenistic age

Contact between Greeks and Egyptians dates back to the Middle Kingdom. By the time of the beginning of the New Kingdom, i.e. the 18th Dynasty (ca. 1550-1350 B.C.), intercultural exchange between Greeks and Egyptians had become intense. The mutual influence left traces in art, as can be clearly seen in the Minoan motifs found in frescoes from Avaris, the former capital of the Hyksos located in the eastern Delta.[31] Thus we read in the topographic list from the funerary temple of pharaoh Amenophis III names like "People from Kaftu" or "Keftiu" (i.e. Crete), as well as references to Amnisos, Knossos, Phaistos and many other Greek places.[32] Assmann also mentions the foreign diplomatic documentation from the Amarna period (ca. 1365 - 1349 B.C.) which contains the name "*Akkijawa*". This might be the Hittite equivalent to the Egyptian *'Aqawas* (Achaeans), who, in the Ramesside period, were listed among "The Peoples of the Sea" due to their piracy and plunders in the eastern Mediterranean.[33]

The Dorian invasions coincided with several climatic changes and provoked the collapse of the civilisations in the eastern Mediterranean world between 1200 - 1100 B.C.. At roughly the same time, the Mycenaean[34] as well as the Hittite[35] civilisations perished and cities between Troy and Gaza were destroyed and/or abandoned. In Egypt, the New Kingdom ended together with the centralised pharaonic state at the end of the

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[31] J. Assmann, *Weisheit und Mysterium* (München: 2000), p.13.

[32] *Ibidem*, p.14.

[33] *Ibidem.* For the main reference about it, see: W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters*. (Baltimore: 1992).

[34] See appendix 1 for chronology. It started the so-called "Greek Dark Ages" - from the end of the Mycenaean civilization, until the formation of the first Greek cities during the IX century B.C. For a most recent documentation, see: J. Galard, (ed.) *L' acrobate au taureau – Les découvertes de Tell el-Dab`a et l' archéologie de la Méditerranée orientale*. (Paris, 1999).

[35] Peoples from south Russia, who included the Phrygians, destroyed the Hittite Empire.

2nd millennium B.C (i.e. the Third Intermediate or Libyan Period)[36]. By and large, these changes brought about the collapse of an entire network of commercial and diplomatic relations existing between Egypt and its Mediterranean neighbours. This is the reason why Egyptians already depicted the Keftiu as an Asiatic people in the 13th century B.C while the Greeks would be later known simply as *Ḥꜣw-nb.w*[37] (this also applies to the Hellenistic period). *Ḥꜣw-nb.w* was a mythological expression for the people from the northern limits of the world.

There is a tendency among modern scholars of ancient Greece to overestimate the importance of the Linear B script with regard to the Greeks' self-perception and their relations with their past. As Finley explains:

> The Greeks themselves had no knowledge of the existence of a Linear B script […] and what they could not help but see of the ruins – as Mycenae itself – they regularly misunderstood. […] . In brief, the later Greeks had no memory whatever of a Mycenaean civilization qualitatively different from their own and divided from it by the Dark Age break. They thought of the rulers of Mycenae and Pylos as their own immediate ancestors and forerunners, speaking socially and spiritually, not just biologically, […] .[38]

Indeed, when seen from a Greek perspective even the relations between Greeks and Egyptians can be traced back to the Mycenaean times. However, such contact would only begin to flourish again after this "Dark Age" and, as will become clearer later,

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[36] This refers to the time in Ancient Egypt which started after the death of Pharaoh Ramesses XI in 1070 B.C. The land also would be ruled by several local kings – in northern Egypt and by the priests of Amon in southern Egypt, allied with Libyan (twenty-first – twenty-forth) dynasties. In fact, Egypt would be reunited again under the rule of an Egyptian Pharaoh just in the Late Period, after the foundation of the twenty-sixth (Saite) by Psamtek I in 664 B.C., following the expulsion of the Nubian rulers of the twenty-fifth dynasty and the end of the vassal-ties with the Neo-Assyrian Empire – at the time in process of disintegration .

[37] *Haw-Nebw* - which literally means "The dwellers of the swampy abyss". Cf. also the Greek term "Hyperboreans".

[38] M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks*. (New York: 1991), pp. 23-24.

these relations gradually became more intense until the Hellenistic age. Depending on which chronology one follows, these changes began in the late archaic period in the Helade or during the Late Period in Egypt (i.e. at the start of the Saite 26th Dynasty).

1.1.1.1 Late Period Egypt and Archaic/ Classical Hellade

Today Homer's writings are the most important source to study when trying to establish a continuous relationship between Greeks and Egypt that originated near the beginning of the archaic period in the Hellade (750 - 480 B.C.). The Greeks of the 6th and late 5th century B.C however, used 'Homeric' as a general term for the entire heroic tradition recorded in hexameter. Moreover, the Homeric poems served as sole source of collective historic memory to the Greeks of that time.[39] In the Odyssey we find references to the high esteem Egypt enjoyed in the ancient world in places ranging as far as Asia, Africa and Europe. In a commentary on the Odyssey, Bresciani observes how Ulysses' innumerable attempts to land his ship resemble the actions of the "Peoples of the Sea," albeit in the 8th century B.C[40] We will now turn to the Greeks' Archaic Period, that begun in Greece during the time of the Egyptian 26th Dynasty (Saite, 664 – 525 B.C.), which deserves a special consideration here.

The 26th Dynasty saw great transformations of Egypt's administrative and judiciary systems whereby cultural traditions of older dynasties were revived. The so-called Saite

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[39] This situation would change only after the second Persian invasion, in 480 B.C., whose reaction created a feeling that – if not "pan-Hellenic" – the Homeric poetry w as the biggest reference to the Hellenic identity so far.

[40] Cf. E. Bresciani, "Lo Straniero". In: S. Donadoni (ed), *L'Uomo Egiziano*. (Roma: 1990), p.262. he says: "Le coste e i porti egiziani non erano ignoti ai Greci d'Ómero: si ricordino, narrati nell'Odissea, i tentativi di sbarco di Ulisse, un pirata simile ai 'Popoli del Mare', ma nell'VIII secolo". For a best understanding over chronological equivalences between the Greek world and Egypt, see Appendix 1.

Renaissance adhered to bygone artistic models and aimed at rescuing ancient texts of the past[41]. It is important to note that the Saite Dynasty even exercised influence over later Egyptian dynasties. Psamtek I, for instance, became a model of inspiration due to his ability to restore national unity, or, as Perdu puts it:

> […] il le doit surtout à cette réputation qui tend à faire de lui le modèle même de roi restituant au pays sa souveraineté après une domination étrangère. À cet égard, il est significatif qu'après avoir chassé les Perses et réunifié le pays sous l'autorité de Saïs, l'Armytée de la XXVIIIe dynastie se présente comme un nouveau Psammétique, attitude qui préfigure la volonté des derniers souverains indigènes de la XXXe Dynastie de se comporter en véritables émules des Saïtes dans leur tentative de sursaut national.[42]

Indeed, not only during the reign of Amirtaios (28th Dynasty) after the first Persian domination, but also under Nectanebo I (30th Dynasty), native pharaohs viewed the Saite 26th Dynasty as an ideal model of government. Thus seeking inspiration Nectanebo I similarly turned to the past, which can be seen, for example, by his choice of a throne name that is identical to the one Senusret I (Sesostris I) used to carry[43]. Overall, Egyptians developed really close ties with their past during the Late Period resulting in the generation of a new 'cultural memory'[44], which might even be labelled 'conservative'.

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[41] With regard to the Saite Rennaissances, Herman De Meulenaere complements it by saying: "Ce sentiment de nostalgie des époques anciennes a engendré, aussi bien dans la langue et dans l'écriture, un fervent désir de remettre en usage des conventions et des procédés utilisés autrefois et tombés en désuétude." Cf: H. de Meulenaere "Thèbes et la Renaissance Saïte". In : *Egypte, Afrique & Orient*, 28, 2003, p. 61. For a deeper analysis on this subject, see: Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past - Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty*, (London, 1994).

[42] O. Perdu, "Psammétique Ier". In : *Egypte, Afrique & Orient*, 28, 2003, p. 10.

[43] The second pharaoh of the 12th dynasty - conqueror of Nubia and the western oasis - he ruled Egypt between ca. 1956 – 1911 B.C.

[44] J. Assmann, *Weisheit und Mysterium* (München: 2000), p. 15. Cf. also: A. Loprieno, *La pensée et l'écriture: pour une analyse sémiotique de la culture égyptienne.* (Paris: 2001). The author debates the process carried on by a further generation into re-constructing its relationship with its own past, through reinterpreting its own memories. On the same subject, see also: J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian* (London: 1998), especially pp.1-22.

Contact between Egyptians and Greeks started under the first Saite king, Psamtek (Psammetichus) I (664 – 525 B.C.), who began trading with the Hellade. Increasingly closer relations between the two countries followed this. The most important reason for this development was a huge Greek and Carian migratory flux moving from western Anatolia to Egypt. Commerce between Greeks and Egyptians was so thriving that the former received permission to colonise a trade port in the vicinity of Sais which came to be known as Naucratis.[45] From 650 B.C. onwards, the Greeks came to live at Naucratis as well as at other military colonies in the Delta.[46] Although Herodotus writes at a later period, he is able to inform his readers of the gifts the Egyptians gave to the Greeks (*II*, 182). Among these was the foundation of Naucratis (*II*, 178)[47] – by which the Egyptians intended to boost commerce and diplomatic relations – as well as the donation of lands, which served as a means of holding the mercenaries in Egypt (II, 152 - 154).

A further factor that contributed to the establishment of Greek-Egyptian ties was a strong Greek 'cordiality' with Egypt. Höbl explains that the demise of the New Assyrian Empire:

> […] caused Egypt to turn its gaze more and more often to the Mediterranean and the Greeks. King Amasis (570 - 526) was perceived as a particularly good friend of the Greeks: he bestowed the legal status of a polis upon the Greek settlement in Naucratis (in the Delta). At that time, Cyprus belonged to the Egyptian Empire and an agreement of friendship existed with Cirene.[48]

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[45] G. Höbl, A History of the Ptolemaic Empire. (London: 2001), p.10.

[46] Cf. Herodotus' stratopeda (II, 154).

[47] Then, the author concluded that pharaoh "Amasis became a lover of the Greeks." (II, 178). "Φιλέλλην δὲ γενόμενος ὁ Ἄμμασις ἄλλα τε ἐς Ἑλλήνων μετεξετέρους ἀπεδέξατο."

[48] *Op.cit*, p. 3.

It is important to remember that the recruitment of foreign mercenaries was a common practice under the Saites. As the Greek contingent clearly outnumbered those of other 'nationalities,' the Egyptian title "Commander of Greeks" (*mr ḥꜣw-nbw*) became a synonym for "Commander of foreigners" (*mr ḫꜣstyw*) during the 26th Dynasty.[49] Furthermore, Assmann maintains that the Egyptian recruitment of mercenaries among Greeks was also promoted by Greek rulers themselves.[50] In the case of Pharaoh Amasis and Polycrates, the Samoan tyrant, we might even venture to speak of friendship (Diod. I, 95.3). Fraser sums up the general Egyptian consensus towards Hellenic mercenaries as follows:

> Egypt from Elephantine to the Delta was familiar to Greeks of the most varied callings, but especially the profession of arms in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. They have left their names and ethnics inscribed on a score of temples from the archaic period onwards, from Middle Egypt to Nubia and out to the Eastern Desert, […] .[51]

The Saite Dynasty was also of crucial importance as it set the background to the writings of Herodotus (5th century B.C.) as well as those of Diodorus Siculus (1st B.C.) It was these authors whose descriptions of Egypt, read by Greeks and Romans alike, helped crystallise a stereotyped image of the land of the Nile. The authors and their audience both influenced this image by their choice of how information was transmitted and interpreted. Naturally, their ability to judge, understand and criticise a foreign culture also affected their view. However, we should be careful not to dismiss these works as failing to portray a truthful picture of Egypt's civilisation – this had never been

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[49] S. Pernigotti, *I Greci nell'Egito della XXVI Dinastia* (Imola: 1999), p. 77.
[50] *Op.cit.* p. 15.
[51] P. M. Fraser, "The world of Theophrastus". In: S. Hornblower (ed). *Greek Historiography*. (Oxford: 1996), p. 180.

their authors' aim in the first place. We need to bear in mind that the criteria of a historically accurate narrative back then differed from our theoretical and methodological approaches nowadays.[52]

To sum up, Egypt became the epitome of a golden age civilisation due to Greek and Egyptian 'recollections' of the 26th Dynasty. Writing in the 5th century B.C, Herodotus adopted in his rhetoric the concept of θῶμα[53] which included general curiosities, wonders, miracles and all kind of prodigies according to which the peoples surveyed could be classified. Inevitably, this reinforced the vision of Egypt as a remarkable and admirable place, of which Herodotus tells his audience:

> […] and I visited Thebes too and Heliopolis for this very purpose, […] I visited Thebes too and Heliopolis […], because I desired to know if the people of those places would tell me the same tale as the priest at Memphis ; for the people of Heliopolis are said to be the most learned of the Egyptians […]. But as regarding human affairs, this was the account in which they all agreed : the Egyptians, they said were the first men who reckoned by years and made the year to consist of twelve divisions of the seasons […]. Further, the Egyptians (they said) first used the appellations of twelve gods[54] (which the Greeks afterwards borrowed from them)[55]; and it was they who first assigned to the several gods their altars

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[52] Polybius is an excellent example of author who deeply concerned with the accuracy of his comments and at the same time dealt without ceremonies with mythical references and mostly with the role-played by Fortune into one's life. For a more specific debate about historical truth and the plurality of truths among the ancient Historians, see: P. Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* (Paris: 1983).

[53] About this θῶμα (lit. astonishment), Herodotus announced in his first lines that he proposed: "μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἕλλησι τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα." (I, 1); which means: an exposition/description of what should be worth to be seen as the great deeds of Greeks and Barbarians.

[54] The author observes that the term "Twelve Gods" is obscure. He adds, "This only appears to be clear, that eight (or nine) gods form the first order of the Egyptian hierarchy, and there are twelve of second ranks". Cf. A.D. Godley (transl.) *Herodotus Books I-II* (London: 2004), pp. 278-279, note 01. See also the following footnote.

[55] C. Jacob gives an interesting complement to the matter of the "Twelve Gods" : "À l'exception d'Héra et Poséidon, qui ne viennent pas d'Égypte : II, 50. Hérodote a sans doute compris que les prêtres parlaient des douze dieux grecs, alors qu`ils pensaient plus probablement à l'ennéade d'Heliopolis." Cf. C. Jacob, "Introduction (et notes)". In : C. Jacob, P-E Legrand (transl.). *Hérodote – L'Égypte : Histoires, livre II* (Paris : 1997), p. 8, note 12.

and images and temples, and first carved figures on stone[56]. They showed me most of this by plain proof. (Hdts. II, 3-4).

An important part of Egypt's depiction by Herodotus was its alleged natural connection to religious wisdom. Thus he wrote of the Egyptians that "they are beyond measure religious, more than any other nation" (II- 37). In addition to this, he also called upon Egyptian priests to testify to and legitimise the truthfulness of his information: "This is the story which I heard from the priests of Hephaestus' temple at Memphis" (Hdts. II, 2).[57]

Herodotus' rhetoric strategy[58] was so successful that his model was still reproduced four centuries later by Diodorus. Diodorus's work thus reinforced the traditional and idealised Greek perception of Egypt as an ancient land and cradle of knowledge (i.e. the country of wise priests). As his predecessor, Diodorus emphasised the role of the priests' as guardians of this knowledge which induced many foreigners to visit Egypt:

> But now that we have examined these matters, we must enumerate what Greeks, who have won fame for their wisdom and learning, visited Egypt in ancient times, in order to become acquainted with its customs and learning […]. For the priests of Egypt recount from the records of their sacred books that they were visited in early times by Orpheus, Musaeus, Melampus, and Daedalus, also by the poet Homer and Lycurgus of Sparta, and Plato, and that there also came Pythagoras of Samos and the mathematician Eudoxus, as well as Democritus of Abdera and Oenopides of Chios. […] . (Diod. I, 96, 1-2).

The above survey shows how Greek historians created the image of Egypt as a land full of knowledge which in turn was linked to its priests. Once we accept that the

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[56] C. Jacob: "Les composantes matérielles essentielles du culte grec sont ainsi mises en place. Hérodote distingue les statues de cultes (*agalmata*) et les reliefs taillés dans la pierre. " (*ibidem*, note 13).

[57] Cf. also his comment: "[…] the priests told me that Min was the first king of Egypt" (Hdts. II-99).

[58] For a most complete research on Herodotus' method, see: F. Hartog, *Le mirroir d'Hérodote : essai sur la représentation de l'autre.* (Paris: 1980).

Greeks viewed Egypt through the eyes of their countrymen – in particular Herodotus', who claimed to have written his accounts based on oral reports, and his contemporaries' – it becomes apparent that subsequent generations contented themselves with merely copying what their predecessors had already outlined. By and large, this created a continuous process of quotations and reproductions of former stereotypes that were understood to be valid premises for studying Egypt.

1.1.1.2   The Persian Invasions of Egypt and the Classical Hellade

By defeating the last Saite pharaoh, i.e. Psamtek III and his army – which was mostly composed of Greek mercenaries – the Persian Great King Cambyses succeeded in conquering Egypt in 525 B.C. As a consequence of this, Egypt lost its political autonomy and became a Persian satrapy (*fratarak*). Other Persian policies followed a more moderate agenda; Dareios I, for example, went to great lengths to achieve legitimacy as an Egyptian ruler. He therefore built temples, made offerings to the gods and codified laws. Diodorus informs us that:

> [The] sixth man to concern himself with the laws of the Egyptians, it is said, was Darius the
> father of Xerxes; for he was incensed at the lawlessness which his predecessor, Cambyses,
> had shown in his treatment of the sanctuaries of Egypt, and aspired to live a life of virtue
> and of piety towards the gods. (Diod. I, 95, 3-6).

The profanation of Egyptian religious symbols carried out by Cambyses became a long-term instrument of propaganda against the Persians. Briant comments that the story told by Herodotus about Cambyses' profanation of the Apis bull soon became the epitome of

Persian impiety. Furthermore, this incident was repeatedly re-used to impress the image of Persians as destroyers of Egyptian religiousness[59].

This animosity against the Persian rule climaxed in two failed native rebellions. The first took place soon after Xerxes' defeat of the Persians in Marathon around 484 B.C; the second, which received massive support from the "Athenians and their allies" (i.e. the Delos League), was lead by two native princes, Amirtaios and Innarus. According to Thucydides, they acted on an instigation by Innarus (I, 104). However, after some years of war (460 – 455 B.C), Artaxerxes restored the Persian rule. Herodotus' also incorporated the occurrences on the battlefield where Egyptians, backed by the Delos League, clashed with Persians into his account (III, 12). The Athenian expedition, which had begun around 460/459 B.C ended in the Nile Delta through the hands of the Persians in 454 B.C.[60] Thucydides (I, 104 - 109) best describes the Athenians' disaster during the campaign in Egypt. Westlake, on the other hand, comments on the passage by Thucydides that he:

> […] merely states that the Athenians and their allies sailed up the Nile and were in control
> of the river when they captured most of Memphis and began the investment of the White
> Castle. […] It is true that he chooses to confine his narrative to the barest summary when
> dealing with the middle years of the Pentecontaetia and that the campaign in Egypt is not
> altogether relevant to the principal theme of his excursus, which is the growth of the

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[59] P. Briant, "L'Égypte des Grands Rois". In : *Egypte, Afrique & Orient*, 9 (1998), p. 3.

[60] Despite Thucydides estimate the Athenian losses in about two hundred and fifty ships in Egypt, modern scholars considers this number as overestimated. Indeed, there is a lot of conflict around Thucydides' numbers. J.M. Libourel explains the main argumentation of supporting this opinion against Thucydides' numbers. He says: "(…) a disaster of such magnitude would have had far greater repercussions in the Aegean world, have felt that this figure was too high and have suggested that the actual number of Athenian and allied ships engaged in the Egypt campaign numbered only about fifty or even forty - the figure given by Ctesias (63-4)". Cf.: J. M. Libourel "The Athenian Disaster in Egypt". In: *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. 92 (1971), p. 605.

> Athenian power. […] It is remarkable that Thucydides nowhere states the total of the losses sustained in Egypt by the Athenians and their allies.[61]

The next Persian to rule over Egypt was Artaxerxes II, the successor of Dareios II. He had to face a civil war against his brother, Cyrus, and briefly ruled over Egypt (405 − 404 B.C.)[62]. At roughly the same time, an Egyptian prince called Amirtaios, who came from Sais in the Delta, proclaimed his independence. He acted as pharaoh for some years in addition to the Persian domination. However, his power already extended as far as Elephantine around 398 B.C Egypt experienced a short period of political independence until order was restored in Persia. The Persians' constant attempts to reconquest Egypt brought at least another Persian rule around 343 - 341 B.C.

1.1.1.3 Herodotus attitude towards of the Persians

According to Cassin[63], classical Greece considered somebody to be a barbarian if he/she did not follow Greek laws, which were based on customs and traditions. This is the reason why Herodotus, for instance, ironically portrayed the Persians as men without culture since they adopted foreign customs with easiness (I, 135). Thus they began to wear Mede clothing and Egyptian breastplates and practiced Greek love. Generally speaking, barbarians were defined by their ability to adapt; they took originally foreign traditions, prescriptions and laws and made them their own.[64] It was the cultural

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[61] H. D. Westlake, "Thucydides and the Athenian Disaster in Egypt". In: *Classical Philology*, vol. 45 (1950), p. 209.

[62] A most detailed study about the Persian rule in Egypt as well as the Persian history itself can be obtained in: P. Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire Perse. De Cyrus à Alexandre*, (Paris, 1996).

[63] B. Cassin, "'Barbarizar' e 'cidadanizar' ou Não se escapa de Antifonte". In: B. Cassin *et alii Gregos, Bárbaros, Estrangeiros*. (Rio de Janeiro: 1993), p. 108.

[64] Later, from the Hellenistic age onwards, this conception of barbarians changed; a moral dimension was added to its older definition.

differences Herodotus observed that motivated him to investigate the "customs of barbarians". Inevitably, he carried his survey out against the background of a Greeks vs. "barbarians" dichotomy. The Persians were therefore 'constructed' as the complete antithesis of Greek-Athenian virtues and Egyptian religious virtues.

The fact that Herodotus frequently presented Persians performing not only bad but also good deeds might appear to contradict his above stated behaviour. This approach, however, also gave his analysis some 'apparent' bias. It was 'apparent' since some elements of his narrative were clearly pre-selected and the author thus responsible for mediated information that influenced public reception. It should also be noted that Herodotus employed this mode of depiction with all cultural groups/civilisations he described, Greeks and Barbarians alike[65].

Since Herodotus' accounts gained popularity throughout the Greek world, they were constantly imitated, even in Graeco-Roman times[66]. It became common practice to reiterate a stereotypical image of Persians who – at least in the eyes of the Greeks – embodied the complete opposite of Egyptian virtues. This negative view was still considered to be attractive and politically useful when Alexander the Great declared war against the Persians whom he allegedly fought in revenge for two events; namely their invasion of Greece, that took place 150 years before his time, and the Persian profanation of Greek temples and sanctuaries.[67] It is interesting to observe that the anti-

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[65] In Herodotus' work, "Barbarian" is a term to identify the peoples who were unable to understand the Greek language and therefore to follow the Greek traditions and laws (*nomoi*).

[66] From the end of the Classical Age through the times of the Imperial Rome, the concept of "barbarian" would be radically transformed into a moral issue. For that reason a revision of Herodotus' *logoi* carried out by Plutarch would accuse Herodotus as "*philobarbaros*" (Plutarch : *Moralia* 856E). This debate concerning the concept of barbarian among the ancient authors is best explored in chapter 1.1.3.

[67] Such negative stereotype of Persian rule would be reproduced even by the Hebrews in the Old Testament's Book of Daniel (8:21; 10:20-21; 11:1-3), where Alexander and his army are interpreted as a divine intervention to put an end into the Persians profanations against Israel. Herodotus himself uses in

Persian propaganda persisted throughout the Hellenistic age; the Macedonian kings of Egypt simply transferred the negative Persian stereotypes to the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire. The Hellenistic kingdom therefore clearly became the symbolic "heir" of the Persians.

1.1.2   The Ptolemies: Egyptian religion used as a Political Instrument

At the time of the rule of Dareios III ("Codoman"), an Egyptian revolt ended with the ascension of a new native pharaoh, Khababash[68], who was recognised as legitimate ruler throughout most parts of Egypt. When Alexander the Great entered Egypt with his army in 332 B.C the Egyptians had recently been defeated in their latest attempt under pharaoh Khababash to break the Persian rule. Egypt was once more controlled by the Persians soon before the arrival of its Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great, who found the land administrated by a Persian satrap. After a last and brief period of Egyptian contestation, the Persians, after restoring their rule, disbanded the Egyptian army and established a Persian garrison. Consequently, when the Macedonians took up the administration of Egypt, there were no longer a native army or military elite. Huss[69] surmises that the Persian king Dareios III absorbed the remainder of the Egyptian army after the revolt led by Khababash. The author also observes that the Macedonians made

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his History an entire dialogue among Persians against Democracy, which is classified as a good only "for Persian's enemies" (III, 80-83).

[68] Khababash led a revolt against the Persians in ca. 337 B.C. He is briefly mentioned in the Satrap Stele (Cairo CG 22182), dated to times of Ptolemaios son of Lagos – or Lagide – when he was still but a satrap ruling in the name of Alexander IV, the official successor of Alexander the Great. This stele was dedicated in commemoration of the restoration of the rights of a temple at Buto, after Ptolemaios Lagide victory over Demetrius Poliorcetes at Gaza in 312 B.C. This stele mentions (lines 32-44) an inspection around the Delta region prepared by this pharaoh so that any effort of another invasion by the Persian fleet could be blocked off. Cf. W. K. Simpson, (ed.), *The literature of ancient Egypt*. (London: 1972).

[69] W. Huss, *Der Makedonische König und die ägyptischen Priester*. (Stuttgart: 1994), p. 11.

large use of the bureaucratic and administrative Egyptian elite (the "land's administrators" or śšmj.w tꜣ). Apart from this, no military authority was bestowed on Egyptians. As Rostovtzeff explains,[70] the Macedonians are likely to have kept the native administration since they needed an efficient administrative body. This was crucial in their struggle against the newborn Hellenistic kingdoms of Syria and Macedonia.

The political relations between Macedonian and Egyptian elites had many strands.[71] On the one hand, the Macedonian army was initially welcomed as liberator from the Persian domination; on the other hand, the Macedonians needed some sort of justification for their rule over the Egyptians nonetheless. The well-established Egyptian priests required more well-founded arguments than the mere 'right of conquest'. This meant negotiation. The great social prestige the priests enjoyed as well as the influence they could exercise over society made them key factors in the process of recognition and legitimacy of the Macedonian dynasties[72]. After all, what the Macedonians tried to simulate was a natural and valid continuation of the ancient pharaonic lineage.

Throughout its Hellenistic rule, Egyptian priests functioned as major mediators establishing native acceptance of the Macedonian authority. The following generation of Macedonian kings, i.e. the *basilei*, pursued the strategy adopted by Alexander, which most foreign rulers of Egypt made use of as well. He took on the title of pharaoh and consequently assumed all prerogatives and duties such a position demanded within the

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[70] M. Rostovtzeff, *A large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century BC*. (Rome: 1967), p. 3.

[71] Cf.: W. Huss, *op. cit.*, offers a very consistent debate about the different ways and dimensions of the possible negotiation, cooperation and opposition between the Ptolemaic kings and the Egyptian priestly elites.

[72] In Egypt, there were two distinct Macedonian dynasties: the Argeade, who where the blood-lined successors of Alexander the Great, and the Lagide, who where the blood line successors of Ptolemy son of Lagos – or Lagide. Ptolomy (later Ptolemy I), was a former general of Alexander, then Satrap on behalf of the Argeade and at last the first Macedonian king of Egypt after the integrity of Alexander' Empire collapsed due to his generals' disputes. See Appendix 1 for further details about chronologic information.

Egyptian symbolic universe. In other words, in his role as pharaoh, the *basileus* had to meet the demands of an Egyptian king. Inevitably, this introduced a peculiar realpolitik at the Hellenistic court in Egypt, where native traditions and royal Egyptian ideology were considered to be important elements of the "affairs of the king" (basilica).

At the beginning of the Hellenistic administration of Egypt, Ptolemy I seized the opportunity to build on Egypt's religiousness as means of reaching its population. A good example of this scheme is the introduction of the Sarapis cult; i.e. the birth of a new Greek-Egyptian syncretistic deity created with the help of Egyptian and Greek sages. According to Kessler, the introduction of Sarapis enabled the Greek masses to take part in the Egyptian festivals at the Sarapeion of Alexandria.[73] The god's cult soon became popular among the Hellenised population of Egypt and spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean basin and towards all the places owned by the Lagides.[74] Religiousness thus worked as a driving force that brought cohesion to the new social structure of Hellenistic Egypt. It formed part of each Lagide ruler's agenda to build, expand, and restore Egyptian temples. The widespread popularity of the Egyptian gods, cults and religious practices among the Hellenised population also meant the maintenance of the social prestige enjoyed by the native priests.

Once Egypt's aristocracy was reduced to priests, 'spirituality' became an important political tool for the elites on both sides, i.e. Egyptians and Greeks/Macedonians. According to Sahlins,[75] "politics" serves as the essential mediator between man and society, nature and cosmos. By means of the political instrumentalisation of

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[73] The author understands it as a Hellenistic attempt to connect the Egyptian and Macedonian calendars and their cultural habits. See: D. Kessler, "Das hellenistische Sarapeum in Alexandria und Ägypten in ägyptologischer Sicht". In: M. Görg, G. Höbl (eds.), *Ägypten und der östliche Mittelmeerraum im I. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Wiesbaden: 2000), pp. 163-230.
[74] Furthemore, Sarapis was later worshipped throughout the entire Roman Empire as an aspect of Zeus.
[75] M. Sahlins, *Islands of History*. (Chicago: 1985).

religiousness, Hellenistic Egypt developed a new symbolic *campus*[76], which in turn created channels through which power could be negotiated. This was possible because both elites recognised the new political channels as a valid means of communication between the respective representatives of Hellenistic and Egyptian bodies or "symbolic jurisdictions". Since both sides needed each other to achieve symbolic and political legitimacy as well as to gain support among both their rivals and allies, it was necessary to establish a symbolic space in which both groups could interact as representatives of their respective symbolic universes.

What occurred in such a space can be seen in the so-called "Synodal decrees"[77], where priests and kings acted interconnectedly due to their their shared interest, namely the welfare of (priests and) Egypt.[78] All decrees start by reporting the individual benefactions made by the particular king to Egypt and its temples. By royal order, priests all over Egypt had to regularly meet for political deliberations in a synod.[79] The decrees were produced at the end of their session. They gave an account of all aspects concerning the king's domestic and foreign policies and dealt with several issues regarding Egypt's social organisation.

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[76] Cf.: P. Bourdieu, *Le Sens Pratique*. (Paris: 1980). The author defines as "*campus*" a cultural concept for a symbolic and delimitated field or sphere in a society, in which antagonism between different instances of power could both agree as valid for the legitimacy of the negotiations. A *campus* could be understood most simply as some sort of "jurisdiction of *habitus*". In this case in Hellenistic Egypt, the social importance of the priestly social group implied in a reconnaissance of their specific line of action on Egyptian society as the best way to achieve a channel for political negotiations.

[77] The idea of regular synods existed already since the Ramesside times. However, with the Ptolemaic rule, this practice was adopted with some innovations. For instance, the text of the decrees then followed some Hellenistic canons such as the invocation of Fortune, and the oath formula. There is a comparative study concerning the Ptolemaic synodal decrees and their antecessors in: D. Vallbelle, J. Leclant (ed.) *Le Décret de Memphis*. (Paris : 1999).

[78] Although the priests worked together with the king, the temples also enjoyed some economic autononmy.

[79] Ptolemy V Epiphanes determined the end of the obligatorily of those regular synods. See: D. J Crawford, J. Quaeguebeur, W. Clarysse, *Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis*. (Leuven: 1980).

To the modern reader, the decrees serve as valuable minutes of the discussions between the king and the priests. The list of topics varies and may include, among others, the creation of a new phyle of priests or a reform of the Egyptian calendar – as can be found in the Decree of Canopus. The Raphia Decree, on the other hand, offers details of a military campaign to Syria including the return of lost sacred statues to the Egyptian temples and fiscal privileges granted them (as reduced taxes, for instance.). The Memphis/Rosetta Decree makes reference to the organisation of a new fleet and army, an amnesty given to rebels, and the concession of fiscal privileges to the temples. All decisions taken were made public in every Egyptian temple by means of a stone stela that was inscribed in three languages: Greek, Demotic and hieroglyphs[80].

Seen from a broader perspective, the synods and their issued decrees formed part of a larger context of political relations between two spheres of power in activity in Egypt. The decrees worked as official and organised reaction of the Hellenistic government to home affairs – albeit clad in Ptolemaic religious practices. The priests returned the king's favour in form of material and symbolic support. This brief sketch helps to understand the role the priests played in the legitimacy of the Hellenistic ruler cult in Egypt. It is important, however, to note that this cult did not form a linear continuation of dynastic Egypt practices.

In the traditional Egyptian royal cult, pharaoh, due to his divine status (*ntr*), received a cult both during his life and after his death. He acquired and maintained his divinity with the help of specific kingship rituals. These began with his coronation, which was also the most important ritual. In this ceremony, the king was transformed into a god by

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[80] See: W. Huss, *Der Makedonische König und die ägyptischen Priester*. (Stuttgart: 1994), for a detailed analysis on the social and political context of the decree's production. See also G. Höbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London: 2001).

means of the god's union with the royal soul (*kꜣ*). As a god, pharaoh was identified with the sun god Re as well as with the manifestations of the gods Horus and Osiris.[81] The actual cult became popular at the beginning of the rule of Amenhotep III (ca. 1390-1352 B.C), i.e. during the New Kingdom. It followed the pattern of the daily temple rituals of other gods very closely and kings even erected (colossal) statues of themselves where offerings were deposited.[82] As this clearly shows, pharaoh was understood to be the mortal bearer of divine functions; at the core, he was essentially a mediator between the natural and the supernatural world.

The dynastic royal model stands in stark contrast to the Hellenistic basileus in Egypt, who totally depended on his own charisma and political skills for his transformation into a living god. The deification of the basileus based on his superior character (*arete*) stands in closer connection to the Greek custom of hero-worshipping than any Egyptian practices. However, the heroes' cult was in fact a cult centring on dead people and was maintained to preserve role models for future generations. Overall, the royal Hellenistic cult may therefore be labelled innovative.[83]

This idiosyncratic cult first emerged under Ptolemy I. It started out as another Greek hero cult in honour to Alexander, whose body had been transported from Babylon to Macedonia for his burial and subsequent placement in a shrine in Alexandria. Ptolemy, however, did not only give homage to the deceased; he seized the cult as an opportunity

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[81] Since the Middle Kingdom, the pharao was also identified with the god Amun-Re.

[82] There are depictions of the king making offerings to his deified self. These statues represented the royal ka of the living king, and when he or she worships their own statue, they are actually worshipping the concept of deified kingship as represented in the royal ka, which the king embodies. See: S. Morenz, *Ägyptische Religion* (Stuttgart: 1960).

[83] See : Cl. Préaux, *Le Monde Hellénistique 1.* (Paris: 1997), pp. 238-71; J.P.V.D. Balsdon, "The Divinity of Alexander", *Historia* 1 (Stuttgart: 1950), pp. 363-388. L.J. Sanders "Dionysius I of Syracuse and the Origins of Ruler Cult in the Greek World", *Historia* 40, (Stuttgart: 1991), pp. 275-87; F. W. Walbank, "Könige als Götter, Überlegungen zum Herrscherkult von Alexander bis Augustus", Chiron 17 (München: 1987), pp. 365-82.

to promote himself as a legitimate successor to Alexander. Nonetheless, Ptolemy never claimed divine worship for himself. It was his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphos, who arranged the formal deification of his parents around 280 B.C, which proclaimed them as "Savior Gods" (*Theoi Soteres*). Some years later, Ptolemy II Philadelphos and his wife, Arsinoe II, were also deified. In contrast to Ptolemy I, they were endowed with their new title of the "Sibling Gods" (*Theoi Adelphoi*) while still living. They were worshiped in the above-mentioned shrine of Alexander.

The development of the ruler cult as a Hellenistic 'state religion' had the support and collaboration of Egyptian priests. The decrees they wrote usually[84] employed the Egyptian artistic canon thereby depicting the royal Macedonian family as a traditional pharaonic family. The following is a typical example of a Hellenistic Egyptian synodal decree:

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84 Altough the Decree of Raphia proclaimed that the pharaoh should be represented on horseback with Macedonian armoury and Spear, the style remained Egyptian. See: W. Clarysse, "Ptoléméees et Temples." In: D. Vallbelle, J. Leclant (ed.) Le Décret de Memphis. (Paris : 1999), pp. 41-65 ; image of the stele in p.47.

Table 1: Canopus Decree (Cairo CG 22186)	
A) The top of the stela from Kom el-Hisn, in the Delta. (Greek Momenphis; Egyptian *Jmȝw*). Capital of the third nome of Lower Egypt[85].	B) A *Facsimile* with a drawing of the same stele by Gunther Roeder (the segmentation of the texts was omitted by the author of this paper)[86].
A. 1) Top of the stela with part of the text written in hieroglyphs.	This stela shows Ptolemy III Evergetes I and his wife, queen Berenike II, portrayed as gods at a gathering with their ancestors and Egyptian gods.[87]
A. 2) Middle section: The hieroglyphic text was chiselled atop its demotic version underneath which the Greek text can be found.	A. 3) At the bottom of the stela follows the Greek version of the document.
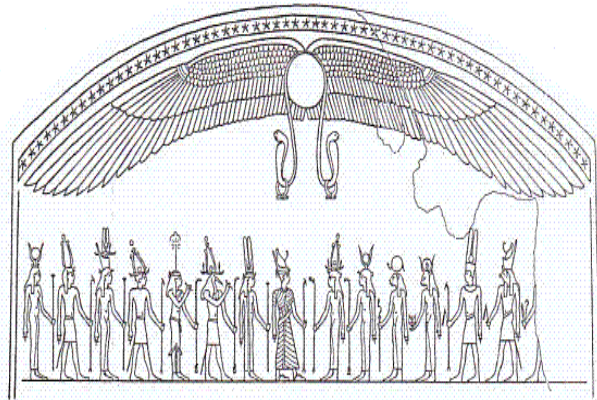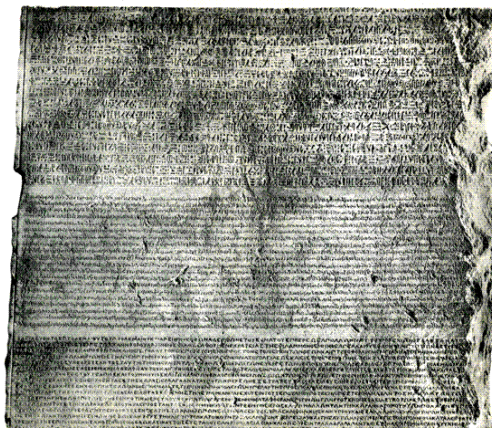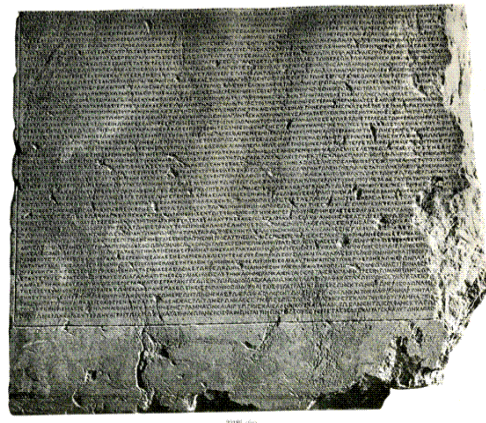
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[85] A. B. Kamal, *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes : 22001- 22208 Stèles Ptolémaiques et Romaines Tome II.* (Le Caire: 1904), Plate LIX (top = A.1); LX (middle = A.2) ; LXI (botton = A.3).

[86] G. Roeder, *Kulte und Orakel im alten Ägypten, Band II.* (Zürich: 1960), p. 151. G. Höbl (*op.cit.*) reproduces the same draw with comments at p.107

[87] Below the winged sun from the left side: Berenike I following Ptolemy I Soter (the first royal pair); Arsinoe II following Ptolemy II Philadelphos (the second royal pair); then the goddess Seshat, the god Thoth and the third royal pair: Berenike II and Ptolemy III Evergetes I. Ptolemy III is in front of the goddess of the third Egyptian nome, followed by the goddesses Hathor, Sekhmet, Sekhat-Hor, and the gods Amun-Re, Horus and a last god, unrecognizable due to damages to the stele.

Portraying the Ptolemies as Egyptian pharaohs, the visual discourse suggests the ideal of continuity between the former pharaohs and the current dynasty. In addition to this, the decrees proclaimed the legitimacy of the cult to the royal family.[88] They made the good deeds of the king public, reinforced the loyalty of the priests and recorded contracts concerning both the king and the priests. In fact the newly fashioned Hellenistic ruler cult received full support from Egyptian priests through the decisions taken during the synodal decrees:

Table 2: Synodal Decrees[89]				
Ruler	**Modern Name**	**Synod Location, Date**	**Reason for Synod**	**Royal Images Decreed**
Ptolemy III Evergetes I	*Canopus Decree*	Canopus, 238 B.C.	royal jubilee and deification of a princess	deified princess Berenice
Ptolemy IV Philopator	*Raphia Decree*	Memphis, 217 B.C.	victory at Raphia	king and queen
Ptolemy V Epiphanes	*Memphis Decree* (also known as *The Rosetta Stone; Rosettana*)	Memphis, 196 B.C.	Coronation of the king	King
Ptolemy V Epiphanes	*Philensis II*	Alexandria, 186 B.C.	suppression of rebellion	king and queen
Ptolemy V Epiphanes	*Philensis I*	Memphis, 185 B.C.	Enthroning of Apis bull	king and queen

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[88]   For the relations between the priestly synodal decrees and the ideology of the Hellenistic ruler cult, see: D. Thompson, *Ptolemaic Oinochoai and Portraits in Faience, Aspects of the Ruler Cult*. (Oxford: 1973); P.E. Stanwick, P. E. Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies – Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs*. (Austin: 2002), See also J.J Pollit, *Art in Hellenistic Age*. (Cambridge: 1986).
[89]   Table based on P. E. Stanwick, (*op.cit.*), p. 7.

The decrees prescribed the inclusion of royal statues fashioned in Egyptian style inside Egyptian temples. However, the decrees also promoted social modifications, such as the creation of new priestly ranks, a calendar reform[90] and several fiscal benefits and privileges granted to the temples in the decrees made under Ptolemy V Epiphanes. On the whole, the Egyptian priests helped consolidate a new cultural element in Egypt by accepting and organising the royal cult. On top of that, the decrees also featured passages on tax balances, fiscal privileges and several other political aspects relevant to the Greek/Macedonian government and the Egyptian priests. Politics played an important role in this process of social transformation altogether as both elites needed to establish platform on which their concerns could be debated. The decrees in turn functioned as intermediary medium to securing their respective ambitions. Generally speaking, they served as a balanced foundation for the discussions of power relations between political institutions, i.e. the throne and the temples.

As was already mentioned, the decrees were produced in three languages, namely two Egyptian scripts, hieroglyphs and demotic, as well as in Greek. The Greek name for the decrees, ψήφισμα, suggests some degree of symbolic submission on the part of the Egyptian priestly class.[91] On the other hand, the original Egyptian term for these decrees, *wḏ*, i.e. "(to) order or (to) command," implied a priori that giving the orders was a pharaonic and divine prerogative.[92] According to one example given by

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[90] Cf. The Canopus Decree.

[91] Psiphisma is essencially an oath taken by those part who compromise themselves into fulfill the promises firmed by the Hellenistic decree. Indeed, there was already an interesting debate concerning whenever the synodal decrees from the Ptolemaic age should be classified as Egyptian or Hellenistic documentation. See : W. Clarysse, "Ptoléméees et Temples." In: D. Vallbelle, J. Leclant (ed.) *Le Décret de Memphis*. (Paris : 1999), pp. 41-65.

92 Cf. *wḏ-nsw*: "royal decree". Moreover, this term had also a magical meaning, connected to the divine capacity of creation through the will. See: S. Bickel, "La Cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire." In : Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 134. (Fribourg: 1994), p.101, and: S. Morenz, Ägyptische Religion (Stuttgart: 1960), p.172.

Valbelle,[93] the royal decrees written under the Saites showed a tendency to reproduce Old Kingdom protocols. Gunn's analysis of the royal protocol on a Saite stela of pharaoh Apries highlights the use of the phrase "Le roi lui-même (dit): 'Sa majesté a ordonné […]'".[94] Overall we may say that Egyptian priests during the Hellenistic age made use of a traditional political means of communicating with the pharaoh. A new addition, however, was that it was no longer the pharaoh who issued the decrees and took responsibility for their contents but the priests; they now took over the authorship and responsibility for the production of the decrees. In this sense, we may say that Hellenistic pharaohs enjoyed less symbolic power than his dynastic counterparts.

The mentioned examples underline the priests' attempts at making the decrees appear to have been issued voluntarily or as a reward in recognition of the royal efforts to please the Egyptian temples and the country's people. Incorporating elements of Hellenistic protocols in these texts, the decrees achieved the status of acceptable by the Hellenistic Power. Thus the latter was satisfied with the alleged Egyptian symbolic submission implicit in a ψήφισμα, while the Egyptians were equally pleased with the usurpation of the traditional symbolic pharaonic prerogative of ordering the production of a decree.

There was no such thing as an Egyptian clergy in the Lagide Empire. As Huss observes, the Ptolemaic kings established a free spiritual space throughout the *hieratikoi* and *hieroì nómoi* respectively. This can also be perceived in the fact that priests were

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[93] D. Valbelle, "Décrets égyptiens antérieurs aux Lagides". In : D. Vallbelle, J. Leclant (ed.) *Le Décret de Memphis*. (Paris : 1999), pp. 67 – 90. This article establishes a comparative analysis between the Egyptian priestly decrees from the Pharaonic and Hellenistic ages. It deals with several examples from different Dynasties.
[94] B. Gunn, "The Stele of Apries at Mîtrahina". In: *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 27, 1927, pp. 211 – 237. APUD : D. Valbelle *op.cit.*, p.73.

self-governed.[95] Moreover, Egypt was dotted with several temples for various deities, and inside temple walls different political points of view were common. The native priestly elite in Hellenistic Egypt was a complex and heterogeneous group with very particular objectives and strategies.

Since the Macedonian kings adhered to Egyptian rituals and symbolic prerogatives, the local priests were willing to recognise them as pharaohs. Following their native sacred rituals and symbolic prerogatives, Egyptian priests recognised the Macedonian kings as pharaohs. The priests also took part in the promotion of regular synods, at which the exchange of honours, prestige and privileges bestowed on both parties and mutually recognised were written on stelae and consequently positioned throughout Egypt. Nonetheless, it was the same Egyptian priests who also supported the many and long regional rebellions that rose during the Ptolemaic rule – including some led by native self-proclaimed rebel pharaohs.[96] The Ptolemies, for their part, sought to control Egyptian temples by unifying them as one body. The organisation of regular synods proved a helpful tool in this undertaking. Eventually, a ψήφισμα-*wḏ* became a key factor in the establishment of regular dialogue between Egypt's ruler and its priests.

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[95] W. Huss, *op.cit*, p. 51.

[96] See: Polybius V, 107, 1-3; XIV, 12, 3-4; for the Egyptian military (the native veterans from the Battle of Raphia, against Antiochus III from Syria) revolt against Ptolemaios IV. This revolt happened from 207 B.C. to 186 B.C. across the southern (namely the region of Thebes, or "Thebaid") Egypt and was crashed only by Ptolemaios V. For many years Egypt had a rebel pharaoh ruling the rebelled lands in South: the first, since 206 B.C., was Hor-em-Akhet , and later, since 199 B.C., Ankh-Wennefer. There is another rebellion described in the Rosetta Stone, lines 19 -20 (Greek text) between 198 B.C. and 197 B.C.– at the Delta, by this time - crushed again by Ptolemaios V. Even Alexandria faced a revolt, against the brothers Ptolomaios VI Philometor and Ptolemaios VII Evergete II (at the time in dispute for the succession), leaded by the Greco-Egyptian Dionysus Petoserapis (see Diodorus XXI 15 a., for the rebellion at Alexandria). After his defeat at Alexandria, Petoserapis fled to the country and started a new revolt against the Lagides (see Diodorus XXX 17 b., for the second revolt leaded by Petoserapis). Finally, a second revolt at the Thebaid started in-between 91 - 88 B.C., again with full priestly support, against Ptolemaios X Alexander I. It was partially controlled by his successor Ptolemaios IX Soter II (by the time in his second reign). At this time, the rebel province would be 'pacified' only in 30 B.C., by Cornelius Gallus, after the Roman conquest of Egypt. See : A-E Veïsse, *Les "révoltes égyptiennes" : recherches sur les troubles intérieurs en Égypte du règne de Ptolémée III à la conquête romaine*. (Leuven: 2004).

Although some of the elites were willing to negotiate their support of the Hellenistic authority, the relationship between the Macedonian king and the Egyptian priests remained a complex issue overall.

1.2 Cultural Identity and Hellenistic Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt

Although many Hellenised settlements were founded in Egypt following the great influx of Hellenic and Hellenised immigrants, Hellenistic Egypt only featured three 'true' Greek *poleis*.[97] The first of these was Naucratis in the Delta, which had been created centuries before the arrival of the Macedonians. This was followed by Alexander's founding of Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast. Finally, Ptolemy I established Ptolemais[98] (or Ptolemais Hermiou[99]) in Upper Egypt. The Greek settlers – most of whom stemmed from the army – were sent to the countryside, so-called *chora,* where the majority of them received land in exchange for military services. Of this cleruchy[100] Höbel writes that:

> This system of allotting land to military settlers probably spread over all the grain-producing lands of the Ptolemaic empire, […]. Scattered over the entire country, the

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[97] The Greek 'colonisation policy' in Egypt differed from the one they used in other places, where they founded one Greek-fashioned city after another. Their aim in Egypt, on the other hand was not to recreate a Greek world within the new cities.

[98] For further explanations about the exception status of Ptolemais, and for a general analysis about the foundation of new Greek cities and settlements in Hellenistic age, see: Cl. Préaux, *Le Monde Hellénistique 2.* (Paris: 2002), pp. 401- 460. For Egypt's case, see: K. Mueller, *Settlements of the Ptolemies.* (Leuven: 2006).

[99] For the epithet ἑρμείου , see Ptolemy, *Geography* (4.5.66). R.S. Bagnall comment about Ptolemais as being "the metropolis of the Thinite nome". Cf.: R.S. Bagnal, "Cults and Names of Ptolemais in Upper Egypt". In: *OLA* 85 (1998), pp. 1093 – 1101; p.1093. Strabo describes this city (17.1.42,813) as the largest city of Upper Egypt and not smaller than Memphis (Egypt's second city): "μεγίστη τῶν ἐν Θηβαΐδι καὶ οὐκ ἐλάττων Μέμφεως" .

[100] The Greek idea of cleruchy originated during the Classical period, however there was also an Egyptian similar precedent dated back to the New Kingdom - *vide* Appendix 01 for chronological correspondences - See: R.S. Bagnall, "The Origins of Ptolemaic Cleruchs", in: *BAmSocP* 21, 1984, pp.7-20. For further analysis of land status in Hellenistic Egypt, and specially in the Fayum, see: D.J. Crawford, *Kerkeosiris : an Egyptian village in the Ptolemaic Period.* (Cambridge: 1971).

kleruchs introduced Greek ideas and technology into the agricultural environment in which they were living.[101]

Broadly speaking we may say that Hellenisation was a consequence of the attempt to construct a *homogeneia*, i.e. a community that was tied not only by blood, but also by common behaviour, values, customs, traditions, laws, etc. In other words, the aim was a community joined by a common consensus of customs and laws, or, differently put, a community united by a common *nomos*.[102] What is more, the Hellenistic *homogeneia* comes closest to our modern concept of a nation. This ties in well with Hall's argument that a nation is not only a political entity, but also a unit that produces meaning, i.e. system of cultural representations.[103] Hall conceives nation as a symbolic community that is marked by its power to generate a sense of identity and, consequently, solidarity and loyalty.

Another element which is crucial to the understanding of Hellenistic Egypt is *nomos*, which played an important role in the growth of the concept of 'Hellenic' in a new reality of cultural interactivity, i.e. in the process of creating what we now call 'Hellenistic'. The concept of *nomos* is apparent in numerous ways ranging from culture in general, laws, traditions and human artefacts (e.g. the polis, gymnasium, etc.) to the way people distributed of gifts. *Nomos* originally meant the common law found in a society that exclusively followed ancient customs and established social norms.[104] *Nomos* even included specific moral values, such as the notion of decency and comfort

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[101] G. Höbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*. (London: 2001), p.61.

[102] *Nomos* is a cultural convention that aims at promoting symbolic agreement and therefore the idea of social cohesion. By this terms, "to be honest" always was an individual choice, however the Greek definition of "honesty" was given by the group's *nomos*.

[103] S. Hall, "Who needs 'identity'". In: S. Hall, P. Du Gay. *Questions of Identity*. (London: 1996), pp.1-17.

[104] E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*. (Paris: 1969), p. 85.

found in social relationships. It therefore stood in contrast to any form of 'arbitrary' or 'chaotic' decisions.[105] In addition to these aspects, Benveniste notes that the term *nomos* was also used to refer to a pasture shared by virtue of customary law.[106]

As we have seen, *nomos* gained its legitimacy through a consensus based on social relationships and habits. It grew out of a group's interest to perpetuate the commonwealth of its individuals and eventually developed into an efficient system that promoted social cohesion. It provided and helped create a sense of social and cultural identity among its members, who recognised its validity and obeyed the order of the symbolic universe it entailed. Ultimately, *nomos* was a common denominator of values and judgements uniting different individuals, who adopted the *nomoi* as unquestionable truth, reality and norm. Apart from social cohesion, *nomos* also fostered the continuity of an ancestral past, be it historical or symbolical, and encouraged individuals to heed their cultural traditions. It was as a consensus creator par excellence and the ultimate mechanism for identifying and differentiating people who recognised Greek laws, i.e. Greeks/us, and individuals that did not obey them, i.e. barbarians/the others. By the same token, any disturbance of what was considered normal by a Greek community was felt to be an infringement of a taboo and consequently 'barbarian' – in other words, outside Greek *homogeneia*.

Everyday life in Hellenistic Egypt soon gave rise to intercultural marriages producing a succession of generations that were able to switch between two cultural identities.[107] It is safe to posit a closer co-existence of Greeks and Egyptians than has

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[105] "Arbitrary" in order to escape from any kind of social normative code. The term implies the absence of any sort of law, criterion, order, etc.

[106] G. Höbl, *op. cit*., p. 85.

[107] Recent studies how Hellenistic elites actually helped to intermediate the relations between Greek and Egyptian symbolic universes. Dioskourides is a case of biculturalism: Greek officer in an Egyptian sarcophagus covered with hieroglyphs and even using the Egyptian custom of matrilineal filiations. See:

previously been assumed. Furthermore, integration it is likely to have occurred among every social class, not only elites.

The Egyptian bicultural elite actively fostered cultural mediation between the different symbolic universes. This can be deduced from art produced at the time. A nice example thereof is the sarcophagus of Dioskourides, who worked as a high-ranking official under Ptolemy IV (Philometor). [108]

Table 3: Dioskourides and interculturality in Egypt
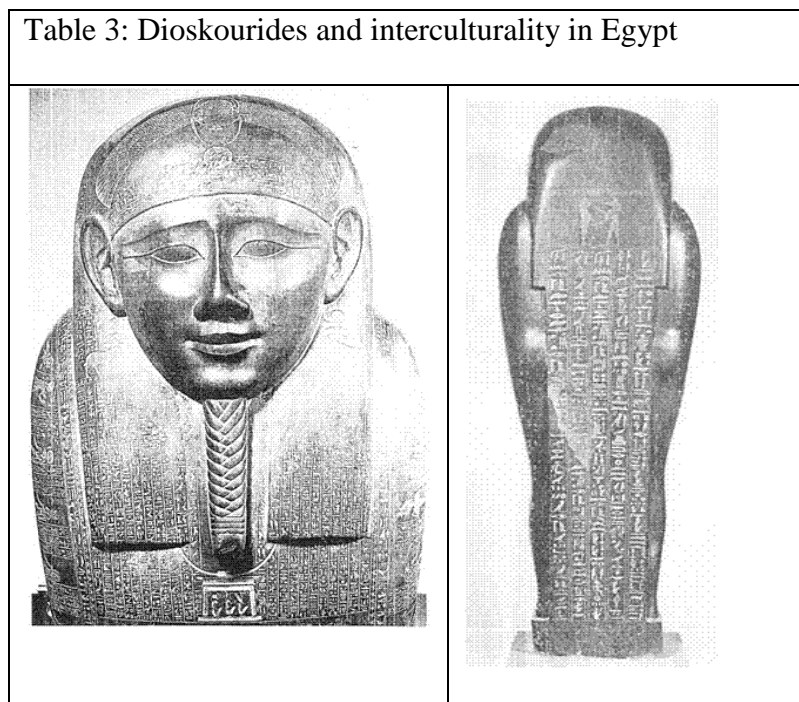
His autobiography mentions his Egyptian mother, one "Lady Imhotep," and lists his titles, which are given as Egyptian translations of his Greek offices. [109] In addition to

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Ph. Collombert, "Religion égyptienne et culture grecque: l'exemple de Dioskourídes". In : CdE 75 (Brussels : 2000) pp. 47 – 63.   For other emblematic cases, see also: L. Coulon, "Quand Amon parle à Platon (La statue Caire JE 38033) ". In : RdE52, (Paris: 2001), pp. 85-125 ; and I. Germeur, "Les syngènes Aristonikos et la ville de Tp-bener", RdE 51, (Paris : 2000), pp. 69-78.

[108] See: Ph. Collombert, *op.cit.* (Brussels: 2000), pp. 58 – 9 respectively. This sarcophagus is registred by the Musée du Louvre as AE 008633.

[109] For instance, the Greek title ἀρχισωματοφύλαξ was phonetically translated into *m ꜣrkysmṯpyrks*, while διοικητής was translated by the equivalent Egyptian title *snty*. See: Ph. Collombert, "Religion égyptienne et culture grecque: l'exemple de Dioskourídes". In : CdE 75 (Brussels : 2000) pp. 47 – 63.

this, Dioskourides adhered to traditional Egyptian funerary customs despite having led a public life as part of the Greek elite.

Religiosity as such seems to have served Egyptians as key identity marker. The Egyptian Negative Confession, i.e. spell 125 of the *Book of the Dead*, can be read as a definition of Egyptian identity and nicely sums up what was thought to be proper social behaviour:

> […] I know thee; […] I know the names of the 42 Gods who exist with thee in this broad hall of the two Truths, […]. I have brought thee truth; I have done away with sin for thee.
> I have not sinned against anyone. I have not mistreated people. I have not done evil instead of righteousness. I know not what is not (proper); […] I have not increased nor diminished the measure, I have not diminished the palm; I have not encroached upon fields. I have not added to the balance weights; […] I have not driven small cattle from their herbage. […] I have not built a dam against flowing water. […] I have not (failed to observe) the days of haunches of meat. […]. I am pure. […].
> […] I have not sinned.
> […] I have not robbed.
> […]
> […] I have not stolen the God's property.
> […] I have not profiteered.
> […]
> […] I have not quarrelled except in behalf of my property.
> […] I have not been deaf to words of truth.
> […] [110]

In addition to this, Egyptian religiousness also functioned as an effective mechanism of social organisation. It spiritually permeated every dimension of everyday life and was deeply connected with what Egyptians perceived as 'culture'. Egyptians essentially understood being Egyptian as a matter of following what they called "Maat," i.e. truth or righteousness. Maat belonged to the key concepts of Egyptian mentality and was

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[110]See: Th. G. Allen (transl.) *The Book of the Dead*. (Chicago: 1974) pp. 97-8.

present in all dimensions of its people's natural and spiritual life.[111] Furthemore, supernatural phenomena could be explained with reference to Maat. Ultimately, the native people living in Egypt did not only consider each other to be 'Egyptians' due to their public adherence to the principle of Maat, but also with regard to their private behaviour. To respect Maat was always also a private matter.

Greek-Hellenistic perception of culture, on the other hand, was essentially political and had jurisdiction over the public dimension of everyday life. In Egypt, this public domain was supplemented by Egyptian piety, which was present in various ways in Hellenistic quotidian life. Cultural hybridism, biculturalism and syncretism were all relevant and complementary elements of the formation of the new symbolic universe in Hellenistic Egypt. Thus, even those who had no extraordinary blood-ties with Egyptians adopted Egyptian religious practices as part of their culture. Simply put, it was considered 'Greek' to pursue Egyptian religiosity. This was possible because, as was the case with Egyptian funerary practices, Egyptian customs did not interfere with the principle that being Greek was the antonym of being a 'barbarian'. The Greek's feeling of supremacy rested upon the assumption of cultural superiority, which had been largely debated since the Classical Greek period.[112] The innovation of the Hellenistic discourse was the use of 'culture' as a political tool. Since the justification and legitimacy of an imperial attitude based on cultural superiority became increasingly problematic,

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[111] For the social dimension of Maat see:J. Assmann, *Maat – Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im altem Ägypten*. (München: 1990).

[112] Debates concerning the differences between Greeks and non-Greeks where an important issue since the Late Classical period in Greece and remained a relevant subject even during the Roman domination. For most relevant observations about it, see: Plato's Republic 436a; 469c; 471c. It is interesting to compare with Aristotle's Politics 1.2; 7.7. The idea of superiority over non-Greeks concerning the customs, traditions, laws, was summarized in the Greek concept of right social conduct contained by the idea of *nomos*.

Hellenistic civilisation employed the concept of Hellenisation as means towards achieving an effective and systematic domination.

The *nomos* also played a crucial role in the way Greeks dealt with Egyptian religion. At a certain moment in history, the Hellenised inhabitants of Hellenistic Egypt reached a consensus on what being Greek involved in an Egyptian reality. Thus it was agreed that a Greek in Egypt was still Greek even if he worshipped Isis and called her son "Isidoros," i.e. "the gift of Isis". These were interpreted as Greek behaviour and accepted since they were in line with the new *nomos* developed in Egypt: a Graeco-Egyptian *nomos.* In other words, a series of innovations taking place within the existing symbolic universe gave birth to a Hellenistic-Egyptian symbolic universe. On the other hand, some Greek things were adopted by the Egyptians, as for instance their language. In addition to this, Hellenised non-Greeks immigrants settled Egypt together with Greeks, and Greeks chose spouses among both the Hellenised and Egyptian native population. Their co-existence thus naturally gave birth to biculturalism. Moreover, the growing bicultural population laid the ground for practicing Egyptian religion in Egyptian manner and defined how Egyptian jobs were to be done in Greek fashion. Due to this mediation, Egyptian practices were more easily tolerated and became acceptable as Greek practices.

The question we need to ask ourselves now is: How could the original idea of *nomos* be 'updated' to fit in with this new reality? This is a relevant question since practising Egyptian religion and doing Egyptian jobs in a Greek manner were not mere consequences of cultural hybridism, syncretism, biculturalism, etc. Being Greek in Egypt allowed such apparently contradictory behaviour. What we have to find out, however, is how it came into existence. As we shall see, the mixture of symbolic

universes happened as a consequence of everyday interactions. Since these are dynamic and unplanned par excellence, day-to-day practice – or what is called "Altagspraxis" in German – is a category of social relations which is not immune to misunderstandings, adaptations innovations and reformulations.

To the Graeco-Egyptian population adopting Egyptian practices posed no problems for their Greek discourse of identity, i.e. the way they saw themselves. Outsiders, on the other hand, judged differently, as can be seen, for example in the Roman Republic's disdain of the Macedonian's Hellenism in Egypt.

Hellenistic Egypt, however, viewed 'being' Greek as publicly acting in line with what was expected by the group's *nomos*, i.e. the readiness to seek consensus for the sake of maintaining social 'normality'. It goes without saying that what the Greeks defined as 'normal' was undergoing a process of reconfiguration in Egypt. What was regarded to be '*nomic'* in Egypt did not feature a geographical dimension, as had been the case during Classical age. *Nomos* had been redefined as something which could be perceived in social public activities. This is the reason why a witness of one's behaviour served as the ultimate monitoring instrument in the maintenance of the *nomos*. Since private acts received less attention, i.e. were less witnessed by other people, they fell out of the jurisdiction of the *nomos*.

The concept of identity upheld by Hellenistic elites in Egypt fits well into what Hall defines as "master identity". A "master identity" describes the core aspects of somebody's cultural identity that cannot be consciously altered or abandoned. No matter how many Egyptian customs the Greeks incorporated into their lives in Egypt, in

their own eyes they always remained true to themselves, i.e. they remained Greeks.[113] They were also not willing to change their cultural identity since, at least in their own eyes, the Greek culture was far superior to any other civilisation. This ties in well with Hall's statement that a "master identity" may involve the "desire to dominate the nature of the other".[114] What the Greeks attempted to do was to find a way to remain Greek while adapting to their new Egyptian environment. They did this consciously as well as at an unconscious level; consciously, because they promoted a certain discourse; unconsciously because they naturally underwent a process of re-evaluating what they regarded as Greek and what as Egyptian.

We can now link this to the concept of *nomos*. It was *nomos* that helped the Greeks decide if they were still being Greeks or not. Nomos formed the cultural bond between them; it served as a means of defining their "master identity" and was actively promoted. In fact, in the eyes of the Greeks, *nomos* and "master identity" were synonyms. In the case of Egypt, the "master identity" was the search of a universal ideal of Greek culture, which enabled everyone to become Hellenised (albeit not unanimously and uniformally).

The Greek *nomos* in Egypt differs greatly from other *nomoi* found in Hellenistic societies. It clearly belongs to Hellenistic Egypt and was developed right there, not in Rome and not by another Hellenistic civilisation. Overall, it is not possible to subsume the different cultural identities found in the various Hellenistic societies by one "master identity," because such a "master identity" always gained its power within a specific political reality. Social interactions between natives and foreigners/immigrants naturally

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[113] It goes without saying that this may differ from what outsiders thought of their behaviour. We should not forget, however, that self-perception and perception by outsiders are always likely to differ.
[114] S. Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity". In: S. Hall, D. Held, T. McGrew (eds.) *Modernity and its Futures.* (Oxford: 1992), pp. 273-326.

led to the mutual incorporation of initially alien cultural elements. The nature and the outlook of this incorporation differed from Hellenistic society to Hellenistic society. Differently put, there was a Macedonian *nomos*, an Egyptian *nomos*, a Syrian *nomos*, etc. What nevertheless linked these different societies to each other was the desire to remain Greek while living in a new cultural environment.

This process of adopting foreign elements resulted in the diminishment of the original symbolic barrier between 'us' and 'them'. As Hall explains, this was driven by "erosion of identity" as well as the emergence of new identities.[115] Burke, on the other hand, holds that cultural adaptation can be seen as an attempt to establish double-contextualisation and re-contextualisation whereby an item is removed from its original location and modified in such a way that it fits a new environment. [116] If we apply this to Hellenistic Egypt, we may define "master identity" as the attempt to maintain Greek 'normality'. However, this does not necessarily imply an impermeable Greek identity but is likely to allow exceptions and readjustments in day-to-day practice. Sahlins[117] has demonstrated how unpredictable innovations resulting from daily interactions are. Thus, the interactions between foreign cultural practices and native ways of doing things eventually produced unexpected results, i.e. 'inventions' that were not directly absorbed by the discourse of *nomoi*. On the whole, we can say that the 'cultural encounter' [118]

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[115] S. Hall, *op.cit.*, 1992.

[116] P. Burke, *Hibridismo Cultural*. (São Leopoldo: 2003), p. 91.

[117] M. Sahlins, *Islands of History*. (Chicago: 1985). See also the excellent debate about crucial theoretical problems for Human Sciences such the comparative rationality: M. Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example*. (Chicago: 1995). This was his response to the academic attacks from G. Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, (Princeton 1992).

[118] It is important to remember that a culture is an abstraction; therefore, two cultures cannot "do" anything. An intercultural encounter happens when people meet each other and then their respective cultures serve as symbolic filters so that they might be able to classify the other throughout their own available symbolic systems.

between 'Greeks'[119] and Egyptians triggered a process of mutual negotiation of two distinct ways of perceiving the world. While Egyptian law and customs were connected to their ancestral heritage, religiousness and the subjection to a pharaoh as well as to the social and symbolic prestige of the priestly class – in fact, this whole complex was considered to mirror cosmic order – the Greeks viewed their *nomoi* as the barriers of symbolic universes.

Sahlins termed the possibility of altering symbolic meanings though day-to-day practice "empiric risk".[120] According to him it involved a "risk" since the production of new meanings could go unnoticed. One of the most emblematic Hellenistic additions to Egyptian traditions was the establishment of social acceptance of marriages between brothers and sisters. Taking a critical view towards this Hellenistic practice, Assmann claims that the marriage between brothers and sisters was, as many other examples, a case of mistaken interpretation of Egypt's past and consequently produced a entirely mistaken conception of Egyptian culture.[121] Roberts similarly remarks that: "[N]o concession by Hellenism to oriental manners is more striking than this; it is noteworthy that in the *Gnomon* of the *Ideos Logos* it was found necessary specifically to forbid such marriages to Romans."[122]

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[119] The single quotation marks are necessary since not all foreign participants of the prevailing condition in Egypt were ethnically of Hellenic origin. The nobility itself was Macedonian, and many Persians, Jews, Thracians, etc., participated in the migratory flux into Hellenistic Egypt. Yet still they were considered non-barbarian anymore once they were recognized as "Hellenized", and despite it must be understood as a prime condition to citizenship, to be Hellenized is not necessarily the same thing as to achieve the juridical status of "citizen".

[120] Cf. M. Sahlins, *Islands of History*. (Chicago: 1985).

[121] J. Assmann, *Weisheit und Mysterium* (München: 2000). p. 20. Assmann stress that in an failed attempt to produce some degree of archaism, the Hellenistic Egypt became victim of "Egyptomania".

[122] C.H. Roberts, "The Greek Papyri". In: J.R. Harris, (ed). *The Legacy of Egypt*. (Oxford: 1971), p. 386. The collection of civil regulations created by Augustus, the *Gnomon* of the *Ideos Logos,* aimed to control the social behaviour of Egypt's Hellenised citizens. Cf. E. Seckel, W. Schulbart, *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos*, BGU V, I, 1210 (Berlin:1919); W.G. Uxkull-Gylleband, *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos*, BGU V, II (Berlin 1934). The passage mentioned says: "23. It is not allowed to Romans get married to their sisters, neither their Aunts; (...)" cf. BGU V, I, 1210, 70.

1.2.1 The Roman Conquest and the Reconstruction of Identities

Diplomatic relations between Hellenistic Egypt and Rome date back to the times of Ptolemaios II Philadelphus (ca. 273 B.C.). Lewis calls their first exchange "an assurance of friendship."[123] Indeed, while Rome spread its rule over the Mediterranean world, Egypt always remained an 'ally'[124] – even when the Romans began to come into conflict with other Hellenistic kingdoms beginning in the 2nd century B.C In exchange for the protection by the Romans, Egypt offered huge supplies of grain.[125] It was through this alliance that Egypt managed to escape the Syrian conquest at least two times; the Roman threat kept the Seleucid army out of Egypt at the time of the young king Ptolemaios V (Epiphanes), and a generation later, during the early days of the young Ptolemaios VI (Philometor).[126] Rome's interventions also included moments of Egyptian domestic turbulences, such as the frequent succession disputes among parties of the Lagide Dynasty. At that time Egypt came under permanent control by Rome.[127]

During the rule of Cleopatra VII, Egypt became involved in two Roman civil wars – the first was won by Julius Caesar, who made an alliance with Cleopatra and became her consort, and the second, one generation later, was left victoriously by Octavian Augustus, who conquered Egypt in 30 B.C He thereby put an end to the Roman Republic as well as the Lagide Dynasty. Lewis explains:

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[123] N. Lewis, Life in Egypt under Roman rule (Oxford: 1985), p.10.

[124] *Ibidem*: Lewis observes that "Protection evolved almost imperceptibly into protectorate. Long before Cleopatra ascend the throne of her ancestors, Egypt, though nominally still independent, had become in reality a client-state of all-powerful Rome".

[125] The Roman commercial and political interest in Egypt was in constant growing. As Lewis remarks: "the commercial opportunities afforded by Alexandria had led numbers of Roman merchants and shippers to settle there. Inspection tours and visits to Egypt by Roman officials became more frequent." *Ibidem*, p. 12.

[126] About the first Roman intervention, against Antiochus III, see: Justin, *Roman History*, Book 34, sect. 2. Polybius describes (XXIX, 27) the second Roman ultimatum, this time against Antiochus IV.

[127] In 59 B.C., Rome annexed the Egyptian province of Cyprus in retaliatory action against a supposedly Egyptian support to the pirates defeated by Pompey. Egypt faced his economic collapse.

In 30 BC Egypt was left with a Roman conqueror and no dynastic claimant to the throne of the Ptolemies. Octavian made what must have seemed the obvious decision: to install a Roman governor and administrative staff, together with a Roman army of occupation to assure public tranquillity.[128]

Under Augustus, it was in fact a *praefectus Aegypti* who worked as the emperor's representative. Among other duties, he had to make sure that no Roman of aristocratic class and political prestige could enter Egypt without formal authorisation.

Life in Egypt broadly remained the same after the Roman conquest. The Egyptians took the view that the Roman emperors were merely a new dynasty of foreign pharaohs, as had been the case with the Macedonians and Persians. Lewis points out that:

Temples continued to be built and decorated in the native Egyptian style all through the three centuries of the Principate. On their walls the Roman emperors appear in the traditional settings, attitudes, and trappings of Egyptian royalty – the pharaonic garb and crown, the hieroglyphic cartouche enclosing the ruler's name, […] the standard titles and honorifics of the pharaohs, such as 'son of Ra', 'beloved of Ptah and Isis', and so on.[129]

Apart from a few adjustments, the Romans maintained the Ptolemaic administrative structure of Egypt. Thus the administrative districts remained in the same shape as they had been during the Lagide rule. However, the strategos was now a mere a civil official who did not wield any military power. The only armed force allowed in Egypt were the Roman legions, who were permanently present in fortified camps and distributed in strategically important areas of the country. Nevertheless, despite the new Roman administration and legislation, there was no clear-cut cultural separation between Hellenistic Egypt, i.e. from Alexander the Great until Cleopatra VII, and Graeco-Roman

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[128] *Op.cit.* (1985), p.14.
[129] *Ibidem*, p.15.

Egypt, i.e. from Octavian Augustus Caesar until Theodosius.[130] That is because with regard to its <u>culture</u>, Egypt followed the tendency of the whole east Mediterranean which remained positively Greek in its self-perception. Thus the entire eastern Mediterranean basin continued being 'Hellenised' during the Roman rule. Among other things that meant that lingua Franca remained Greek, to be more precise, the so-called *koine* (lit. "common"). Furthermore, the Greek Gymnasiums were built and Greek education unquestionably remained the social model pursued by Hellenised elites.

However, during the Republican period, Romans had a generally negative opinion about Egypt's Hellenistic elite despising them as 'degenerated' – i.e. a people who had become barbarians.[131] They consequently established a new juridical classification that made a clear distinction between Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. This will be further explained in the following.

a) Roman citizens:

In contrast to the terms 'Greek' and 'Egyptian,' 'Roman' originally marked a legal status, namely citizenship, which entitled its bearer to specific rights – such as voting and special tax status – as well as obligations (e.g. military service). Under Augustus most of the Roman citizens in Egypt were part of the country's two legions. Non-citizens, on the other hand, were able to join the army as auxiliary units. After a period of twenty-six years of duty, they received the title of Roman citizens. By time the number of Romans increased. This was due to the growing number of veterans as well

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[130] *Ibidem*: "In local administration some Ptolemaic titles were retained, but where that was done the responsibilities of the office, (…) were usually altered. For the rest, new offices and new titles were created as needed, and new regulations are in evidence governing important aspects of economy, society, and religion.", p.17.
[131] See: Polybius V, 34 ; Strabo XVII, I, II ; Justin XXIX and Titus Livy XXXVIII, 37 – who blames the weather.

as new members who came from the Alexandrian aristocracy. Overall, Roman citizens profited from a privileged economic, social and political status.

b) Greek citizens: When Egypt became a Roman province, the empire adapted Egypt's legal system and kept the class structure as it had been in place under the Ptolemies. To be defined as a Greek by Romans meant that one belonged to the "citizens" (*astoi*) living at Naucratis, Alexandria and Ptolemais Hermiou enjoyed local autonomy and various other privileges. When in 130 A.D emperor Hadrian built the fourth Greek city in Egypt, Antinoopolis, it was granted the same privileges its three predecessors had been given. Thus it featured the traditional organs of a Greek polis as well as some of the advantages of a Roman municipality. The Jews, who were also residents in these cities, had some privileges as well. However, they had lost many of their prerogatives as consequence of the Jewish revolts during the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D which occurred under the rules of Trajan and Hadrian respectively.

c) Egyptians: All other inhabitants of Egypt who were not Roman citizens or a citizen of one of the above-mentioned *poleis*, or a Jew for that matter, automatically fell into this category. These people no longer possessed hereditary privileges issued to descendants of military colonists by the Ptolemaic government. Broadly speaking, 'Egyptians' formed a very heterogeneous political category including native Egyptian peasants and Hellenised descendents of Greek settlers. The only possible means of differentiation was their degree of Hellenisation.

d) Urban Greeks: Among the Egyptians, a sub-class variously termed *Metropolites* or "urban Greeks" formed a privileged group which was made up of residents from major towns. How the boundaries of this category were drawn and the extent to which they were enforced is difficult to ascertain; nevertheless, the categories suggest that the Roman administration recognised some measure of difference, which it was naturally expected to be able to police.

Transgression of class boundaries was penalised according to the so-called *Gnomon of the Idios Logos*. In it we read:

38. Those born of an urban Greek mother and an Egyptian remain Egyptians but inherit from both parents.

39. If a Roman man or woman is joined in a marriage with an urban Greek or an Egyptian, their children follow the inferior status.

43. If Egyptians after a father's death record their father as a Roman, a fourth is confiscated.

44. If an Egyptian registers a son as an *ephebe* (of a polis), a sixth is confiscated.

49. Freedmen of Alexandrians may not marry Egyptian women.

53. Egyptians who, when married to discharged soldiers, style themselves Romans are subject to the provision on violation of status.

54. Soldiers who style themselves Romans without having received a legal discharge are fined a fourth of their property.[132]

Since the Graeco-Egyptian *nomos* differed from the one the Romans used, the Romans despised Hellenistic Egypt as a "barbarised" or "decayed" civilisation. Roman disdain for the ways of Ptolemaic Egypt – particularly its royal cult – had emerged long before Octavian Augustus.[133] With the beginning of his rule, however, the Romans' attitude

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[132] BGU V, I, 1210. Commented by N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman rule* (Oxford: 1985), p.33.
[133] The political differences between the Roman Republic and Ptolemaic Egypt are actually far more complex, and date back to the time before Augustus. What is to be said here is that the Roman civilization

further exacerbated and developed into political and ideological hostility.[134] Their claim that "the Greeks in Egypt became barbarians or degenerate themselves" has to be taken with a grain of salt though. After all, is it not a 'barbarian civilisation' that is making this accusation? The Romans themselves certainly fell into this category as they did not speak Greek and had no blood-ties with Greeks. In fact, Cicero himself admitted that the Romans had their own definition of 'barbarian,' which differed from the one the Greeks used.

> [Scipio] – Now tell me: was Romulus a king of barbarians? [Laelius] – If as the Greeks say, all men are either Greeks or barbarians, I am afraid he was; but if that name ought to be applied on the basis of men's manners rather than their language, I do not consider the Greeks less barbarous than the Romans.[135]

So what was really happening when Rome, or pro-Roman writers,[136] disqualified Hellenism in Egypt? On the whole, it was a matter of definition – and the Romans won the argument due to one crucial detail: their legions. Even after the Roman conquest and the subsequent re-classification of most Greeks as barbarians like the Egyptians, many subcategories between "citizen" and "barbarian" developed in the countryside due to the prominence of the Graeco-Egyptian *nomos* as the only mediator between Greeks and world around them. Overall, Roman Egypt featured a very heterogeneous society that

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developed a different way to consider itself more "Hellenic" than "Barbaric" from the one developed in Egypt. Romans had a different way to think the idea of "degree of civilization / Greekness" than in Egypt, it is thus understandable that the pro-Roman intellectuals produced a picture of Egypt as a place where decayed and barbarized Greeks and Macedonians dwelt.

[134] N. Lewis, "Brief Communications: The demise of the Demotic document: when and why". In: *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* . JEA 79 (London: 1993), p. 281.

[135] See: Cicero XVI: De Republica, De Legibus, translated by C. W. Keyes – Loeb. (Cambridge: 1970). In Cicero's *de Republica* I, XXXVII, 58. "(*Scipio) cedo, num' Scipio 'barbarorum Romulus rex fuit?'* . *(Laelius): si ut Graeci dicunt omnis aut Graios esse aut barbaros, vereor ne barbarorum rex fuerit; sin id nomen moribus dandum est, non linguis, non Graecos minus barbaros quam Romanos puto.*"

[136] Plutarch's ironies about the Egyptian religiosity and gods can be seen in "*De Iside et Osiride*". The social reality of the reader will be extremely relevant to establish the possible line of dialogue between author and receptor. During Herodotus' Classical age, for instance, culture and politics had a different connection one to the other than in Plutarch's Graeco-Roman world. Plutarch's criticism may also symbolizes the mentality's changing concerning how culture itself was thought during the Graeco-Roman period.

included native Egyptian peasants and the Hellenised descendents of Greek settlers. The individual degree of Hellenisation formed the only means of distinction.

Ultimately, Roman administrative politics aimed at restraining social mobility. For a better understanding of this policy, the following offers excerpts of norms taken from a code of administrative and social regulations established in Egypt. The *Gnomon of the Idios Logos* also had regulations which directly affected Egyptian priests. With their establishment began a stricter foreign control over the priests' activities. Thus we are told that:

> 71. For the priests it is not allowed to have another occupation than the cult of the gods, neither to go forth in woollen clothing and neither to have long hair, even not when they are away from the divine procession.[137]
>
> 76. A priest who wore woollen clothing and had long hair (was fined) 1000 drachmas.[138]

Dieleman's analysis combines these rules with the fact that a shaven head and the wearing of white linen clothing originally marked people as pure in ancient Egypt. He posits a very pragmatic origin stating that behind the orders stood

> [t]he idea that bodily hair attracts lice and that clothes made of living beings would pollute the wearer. […]. However in the mind of the Roman administrators, the possibility to mark out native priests as a distinctive group within society might have taken precedence.[139]

It is important to remember that with the arrival of the Romans in Egypt native priests began to live as a closed community disconnected from the people around them.

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[137] BGU V, I, 1210, 181 – 187.
[138] BGU V, I, 1210, 188.
[139] J. Dieleman. *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*. (Leiden/Boston: 2005), p. 209; n.60. The author makes also a more complete analysis concerning the *Gnomon of Idios Logos* and its impact on the Egyptian priestly class.

Following the orders of Augustus, the Roman policy of subordination also foresaw the embedding of all Egyptian priests and temples under the command of a Roman official in Alexandria.[140] Furthermore, Augustus abolished temple-owned estates, which used to make up the main income of Egyptian temples back in pharaonic and Ptolemaic times. Inevitably the priests lost part of their social prestige, economic autonomy and general cosmic importance during the Roman period. They were no longer a relevant power within Egyptian society. The Roman administration turned the Egyptian priests into an extension of the Roman bureaucracy transforming them into a formal clergy subordinated to a "high-priest," i.e. a Roman administrator appointed by the Roman *praefectus* from Alexandria.

In 212 A.D, the Roman emperor Caracalla issued an edict granting Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire.[141] However, in the case of Egypt, "the class relationships, the restrictions, show no essential modifications"[142]. In other words, the Graeco-Egyptian society maintained its complex strategies of negotiating differences during the Roman administration. This ties in well with Derrida's observation that the reproduction of the dichotomy "Us" vs. "Them" is a way of perpetuating pre-existing power relations. It is crucial to notice, however, rather than being fixed, this relation is produced by a dynamic and unpredictable process he called "*différance*"[143]. Indeed, classifying themselves as the positive opposite of their foreign counterpart lay at the root of Greek and Egyptian conception of identity.

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[140] See: W. Otto. *Priester und Tempel im Hellenistischen Ägypten* (Leipzig: 1905 /Berlin: 1908/ Rome: 1975).

[141] The so-called "Antonine Constitution" (*P.Giss.* 40). Lewis, *op.cit.* (1985), p. 34 explains; "only the 'capitulated', whose identification remains matter of scholarly dispute, were excluded".

[142] N. Lewis, *op.cit.* (1985), p. 35.

[143] J. Derrida, *On Grammatology*, (Baltimore, London: 1976).

1.3 Hellenistic Mentality and Religious Thought in Graeco-Roman Egypt

The Hellenistic age ended the Classical independent city-state model. From then onwards all Greeks were subjects or had to pay tribute to a Hellenistic *basileus*. Even the few cities who managed to maintain some autonomy had to endeavour to establish a good footing with their new and stronger neighbours. Moreover, Hellenistic kingdoms usually pursued an aggressive policy of getting involved in their neighbours' political life. After all, it has to be said that the original definition of the term politics included all activities concerning the welfare of one's polis. Thus during the Classical period, all public events like sports, theatre, funerals, banquets and religious activities had a political dimension in Greek societies; they were not only instances of social integration and solidarity but also opportunities to celebrate and demonstrate citizenship. Pollit, who analysed this specific aspect of Hellenistic mentality, even perceived it a "[n]ew temperament of the Hellenistic age"[144]. He writes:

> Five attitudes, or states of mind, are particularly characteristic of the Hellenistic age: an obsession with fortune, a theatrical mentality, a scholarly mentality, individualism, and a cosmopolitan outlook. [...] They are all interdependent and together constitute something like a Hellenistic *Zeitgeist.*[145]

The loss of their political autonomy led to a series of transformations of Greek institutions and its people's mentality. Classic philosophy, which debated a range of topics related to physics and politics seeking to find the best administration for the Greeks' community and life in general, began to lose its raison d'être. Once it was

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[144] J.J. Pollit, *Art in Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge: 1999), p.1. The author connects these attitudes to the development of new values, a new literature, new art and philosophy.
[145] *Ibidem.*

disconnected from its main objective, i.e. political excellence, Hellenistic Greek philosophy turned its attention to metaphysics. Moreover, it became deeply influenced by eastern mysticism and religious thought. Thus new schools developed that endeavoured to understand life and the cosmos. Among these were the Neo-Platonists, Neo-Pythagoreans, Cynics, Stoics and Epicureans.

In addition to these changes, the traditional civic religion of the poleis lost its original meaning. One of the main objectives of Classical civic religion used to be the reinforcement of the links between citizens and their polis. These were strengthened through public religious events. Whereas priests in a polis used to hold a temporary office that could (theoretically) be given to anyone applying for it, the loss of the polis' political autonomy almost completely decreased the citizens' political importance and rendered civic religion nearly meaningless. This in turn helped to give more credibility to eastern cults, in which followers were able to gain the favour of a deity through the initiation into the god's mysteries. Oriental gods such as Cybele, Mithras, Sarapis and Isis achieved great popularity throughout the Hellenistic world. Furthermore, astrology, charms and the array of occult art was considered to be valid and acceptable as long as it promised protection from fate or offered social upward mobility. What is more, the magi, i.e. the priests of Zoroaster, were so respected that their name became synonymous with supernatural prodigies.[146] Most important to the present discussion, however, is the fact that the teachings of Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistos achieved great popularity. In addition to this, the old stereotype describing Egypt and its population as coming from the "land of ancient wisdom" continued to be accepted and reproduced. The following Hellenistic Isis hymn found in Kyme and composed by one

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[146] See: H.G. Liddell and R. Scott Greek-English Lexicon. (Oxford:1996), p.1071. ἡ μαγεία = theology of the Magians, (Pl. Alc.i. 122a), magic , Thphr. HP 9.15 (pl.), Act.Ap.8.11 (pl.), P.Mag Berol.I.127, etc.

Demetrios Thraseas, son of Artemidoros, well illustrates this.[147] It evolves around Isis' claim that she has brought humanity civilisation.[148] She says:

(3) I am Isis, the Mistress of every land. I was taught by Hermes [Thoth], and by his help I found out both the sacred [Hieroglyphs] and the popular [demotic] writings [... .][149]

(28) I turned the Law [τὸ δίκαιον] stronger as gold and silver.

(31) I assigned the languages of Greeks and barbarians.

(40) Nobody achieves prestige/fame/ honours [δοξάζεται], without my acknowledgment.

(55) I conquer Fate [τον ἑιμαρμένον].

(56) Fate harkens to me. [150]

Isis is portrayed in this hymn as being able to protect humankind from all its contemporary dreads which can be summarised as fear of a chaotic world. Her promises of individual salvation, which formed part of the characteristic concept of Egyptian religiousness,[151] helped to transform the Graeco-Roman Isis into an archetypical universal mother goddess. All in all, no other Egyptian deity managed to achieve greater

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[147] Cf. J. Bergman, *Ich bin Isis.* (Upsala: 1968). The author describes this hymn as an "Isisaretalogie von Kyme - Memphis", p.301. However this perception is contradicted by, R. Merkelbach, *Isis regina – Zeus Sarapis.* (Stuttgart, Leipzig: 1995). The author estates that the power of Isis is not entirely presented in this hymn, and that disqualifies the typical demonstration of arête-power-*miracula* so characteristic of any "Aretalogy". (See: p. 113, n.4).

[148] R. Merkelbach, *Isis regina – Zeus Sarapis.* (Stuttgart, Leipzig: 1995), p.113, n.1 informs about copies of this hymn also found at Thessalonica, Ios and Andros. It is probably a text from III century B.C, but Diodorus I, 27, also quote this hymn in middle I B.C.

[149] Hermes' virtue as psychopompos promoted his assimilation to Anubis, raising the so-called "Hermanubis", from Isis cult. His priests use to be portrayed as wearing the Anubis' head and carrying the Caduceus. Apuleius, in *Metamorphoses* XI, 11 says: "There was no delay when the gods then came forward, deigning to tread with human feet. First came that dread messenger of both celestial and infernal beings, Anubis, of lofty stature and with a face now black, now golden, holding high his dog's neck; in his left hand he bore a herald's staff and his right hand he shook a green palm-branch.(...)" in: J.G. Griffiths Apuleius of Madauros – The Isis Book-Metamorphoses Book XI. (Leiden: 1975). See also: H. Bonnet, "Hermanubis." In: H.Bonnet. *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*. (Berlin: 1952), p.289. For further information concerning the relations between Hermes Trsimegistos and Isis See: G. Fowden. *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton:1993).

[150] See: R. Merkelbach, *op.cit.*, §212: pp.115-118.

[151] See: OLA 107, especially B.U. Schipper. "'Apokalyptik', 'Messianismus', 'Prophetie' – eine Begriffsbestimmung". In: A. Blasius, B.U. Schipper, (eds.). *Apokalyptik und Ägypten* OLA 107 (Leuven, Paris, Sterling: 2002), pp. 21-40.

popularity than Isis. With her epithet of "Isis of the Thousand Names" she assumed the attributes of most Egyptian[152] and Oriental popular goddesses. According to Assmann, the organisation of the "Mysteries" of Isis imitated the mysteries at Elusis and were a Hellenistic innovation.[153] In fact, Isis became so strongly Hellenised during the Hellenistic age that instead of having been assimilated to Demeter and Aphrodite, she was *de facto* directly worshipped as an Egyptian goddess. Generally speaking, however, Egyptian gods always enjoyed great popularity between the Egyptian and non-Egyptian population when they lived under Greek or Roman rule. After the Roman conquest of the Hellenistic kingdoms and the eastern Mediterranean, oriental cults spread all over the empire – and Isis in particular, whose temples can be found from Petra to York.[154]

As has been demonstrated in the last section, the idea of a cultural 'apartheid' between Hellenised and non-Hellenised inhabitants does not apply to Egypt. Egyptian priests, who made up the last surviving native social elite, interacted with the Hellenistic power in several ways. The case of Manetho, a priest from Heliopolis who lived in the 3rd century B.C illustrates how early the priests were able not only to express themselves in Greek, but also to correct Greek misunderstandings of the Egyptian civilisation.[155] Indeed, he openly contradicted Herodotus in Fr. 43, §73 as well as in Fr. 88: "Manetho has written in Greek the history of his homeland, translating, as he

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[152] For a most detailed study about the diffusion of Isis cult over the Hellenistic world, and as well the transformations of her aspects throughout the ages See: F. le Corsu, *Isis – Mythe et Mystères* (Paris:1977); For a list of Isis' epithets, see: C.Leitz (ed)., *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*. (OLA 129, Band VIII: Register), (Leuven: 2002), pp.1-47.

[153] J. Assmann, *Weisheit und Mysterium* (München: 2000), p. 39.

[154] For a detailed study on the diffusion of Isis cult in Roman Empire, see: E.A. Arslan (ed.), Iside – il mito, il mister, la magia. (Milano: 1997).

[155] See: W.G. Waddell (transl.)., *Manetho*. Loeb (Cambridge: 1973). Despite the loss of the original work, the importance of Manetho to the Hellenistic scholars can be attested by the quotations of his text by Plutarch, Theophilus, Aelian, Porphyrius, Diogenes Laertius, and among others, the Christian chronographers Josephus and Eusebius.

himself says, from the priestly writings, and he refutes Herodotus, who through ignorance made many mistakes about Egypt."[156]

On the other hand, Egyptians were also influenced by Hellenistic thought, even during the Roman administration. An example of this is the work of the *hierogrammateus* and Isis priest Chaeremon (first century A.D), whose work explained the hieroglyphs and was deeply influenced by Stoicism.[157]

Graeco-Roman Egypt was first and foremost a political reality. This could be perceived in the empire's roads and trading networks. Furthermore, the Roman administration considerably reduced the prestige and socioeconomic autonomy of the Egyptian priests. Most important, however, is the fact that Egyptian intellectuals not only had access to Hellenistic thought but also took an active part in shaping it. Nevertheless, both, native Egyptian as well as Hellenistic literature, continued to depict Egyptian priests as great sorcerers who were capable of producing all kinds of supernatural effects. Thus the demotic cycle of Setne's tales (Setne I) contains a book of magic written by the god Thoth himself and a contest of skills between magicians. Lichtheim similarly comments on the writings of Setne II, who is likely to have lived during the Roman administration: "[T]he presence of Greek motifs in Setne II is one of many testimonies to the intermingling of Egyptian and Greek cultures in Graeco-Roman Egypt."[158] In both tales Setne is portrayed as a prince from a remote past. A different

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[156] Cf. *Josephus contra Apionem* 1.73. See: G. P. Verbrugghe, J. M. Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho – Native Traditions in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.* (Michgan: 1999), p. 129.

[157] See: P.W. Van der Horst (transl.), *Chaeremon: Egyptian priest and Stoic philosopher.* (Leiden:1984).Van der Horst explains the relations between Chaeremon's work and the Stoicism, and says: "And in *Fragm.* 12 (...) he explains hieroglyphs as the symbols by which the ancient scribes concealed their (...) "physical theory about the gods". In Stoic philosophy, theology was part of physics!" p.X. Like Manetho's, the work of Chaeremon is lost except by the quotations of his contemporaries and posterior writers. (Josephus, Michael Psellus, Origen, Porphiry, Iamblichus, Jerome, …)

[158] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature III – The Late period.* (Berkeley: 2006), p.126. See also: J. F. Quack, *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte III – Die gräko-ägyptische Literatur.*

description of an Egyptian priest can be found in Heliodorus' Hellenistic novel *Aethiopika*, which focuses on the Memphite Isis priest Calasiris, who was supposedly living at the time of Heliodorus. The novel tells of Calasiris's ability to fight evil spirits and to communicate with people through their dreams.[159]

Literary portrayal and idealisation of Egyptian priests as magicians does not mirror actual misconception of reality.[160] Instead the reproduction of these stereotypes proved a useful tool to keep up the popularity of Egyptian cults and regain some of the prestige the priests had lost. As Dieleman writes: "[M]agic is perceived as a category that bestows prestige on the person who is acknowledgeable about it."[161]

Furthermore, we need to bear in mind that Egyptian priests represented a social model of behaviour. Frankfurter explains:

> Priestly charisma is typically a charisma of "office", meaning that leadership authority from the social position or rank one occupies rather than from one's unique presence or ideology. Priests' abilities to influence people, to convey ideology, thus tend to be constrained by their dramatic cultic roles.[162]

In other words, the priests' prestige stemmed not only from their alleged possession of supernatural capacities. Neither did it merely originate from their role as mediators between gods and man. The primary task of priests in ancient Egypt was to ensure the thriving of maat (mȝꜥ.t). This was achieved through the priests' compliance with particular rules, which in turn made them virtuous. Dieleman comments that: "[T]hese

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(Münster: 2005), and F. Hoffmann, J. F. Quack, *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*. (Munster: 2007), pp.118-152.

[159] See: M.P.F. Pinheiro, "Fonctions du surnaturel dans les Éthiopiques d'Héliodore". Bulletin de l'Association Guilhaume Budé, 4, 1992, pp.358-81.

[160] This tendency assumes a greater intensity particularly during the early Christian centuries. The Egyptian priest-magician is commonly connected to an extraordinary knowledge of natural elements (mineral and vegetal magical properties), he is depicted as being the lost link with a remote golden-age past. See: Y. Koenig, *Magie et magiciens dans l'Égypte ancienne*. (Paris: 1994).

[161] J. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*. (Leiden, Boston : 2005), p.238.

[162] D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt : Assimilation and Resistance*. (Princeton: 1998), p. 204.

priestly virtues are a combination of formal requirements[163] and additional moral achievements like voluntary presence in the temple and providing teaching for posterity". [164]

We should bear in mind that this "posterity" included the literate elite consisting of priests and nobility.[165] In other words, the above-mentioned teachings were meant for people inside the temples and those who had access to them. The demotic (and hieratic) texts from the *Book of Thoth* fall into this category. It is possible to describe their contents as texts with ethic-normative elements that directly linked the Egyptian notion of good sociocultural behaviour to the cosmic order. The normative discourse contained in the *Book* essentially aimed at promoting Egyptian moral values as the ultimate goal of every priest.

The literary category the *Book of Thoth* belongs to, which is also known as Instruction/Teaching/or Wisdom literature", formed part of a literary genre that had been around ever since dynastic Egypt.[166] The new aspect the *Book of Thoth* featured and which in turn linked it to Greek Hermetica[167] and Egyptian Instructions was its syncretism of style and content. The texts' form as a dialogue between teacher and student, on the other hand, was common to Egyptian Wisdom texts and Greek philosophical works.

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[163] *Ibidem*: "Purify, Rectitude in performing priestly duties, denial of theft from offerings, righteousness (social solidarity) and proper speech. Accordingly, these five points can be considered the main constituents of priestly self-presentation in the Late and Geco-Roman period. Each of the five topics was already common in earlier periods, albeit less pronounced, but the underlying morality of Late Period biographies stresses human responsibility and accountability as never before." That indicates as well how individualism flourished in Egypt's mentality centuries before in the Hellenistic civilization.

[164] J. Dieleman, (op.cit.) p.218.

[165] Or only the priestly elite if one considers the Egyptian society in the Hellenistic age.

[166] Some examples are The Maxims of Ptahhoptep (Middle kingdom), The Teaching for Merikare (New Kingdom (?)), The Teachings of Anchsheshonky (Late Period), among others.

[167] Thoth is even called "Trismegistos" (wr, wr, wr). See: R. Jasnow and K..-Th. Zauzich, *The Book of Thoth – vol. I*. (Wiesbaden: 2005), p.65.

That brings me on to potential Greek and Egyptian influence on the composition of the Hermetica. In brief, they form part of an ongoing debate which is unlikely to end any time soon. To state just one opinion at this point: Fowden remarks that "general Egyptian ideas are prominent in this text."[168] We should be cautious about tracking Greek and Egyptian elements in the Hermetica. As we have seen, cultural and intellectual exchange between Greeks and Egyptians is much older than the one taking place during the Hellenistic period. Any attempts to trace specific cultural influence will thus inevitably prove biased and ultimately futile.

Although the *Book of Thoth* will not be treated as an Egyptian Hermetic treatise as such, it will be considered to be the outcome of intercultural contact similar to the one occurring in the Hellenistic intellectual milieu, which produced Hermetic literature. By the same token it should be understood that the Egyptian temple did not enjoy intellectual immunity. For one thing Egyptian scholarly[169] texts were translated into Greek and circulated throughout the Roman Empire. Moreover, the Greek Hermetic texts themselves claimed to be translations works written in the Egyptian language.[170] In addition to this, the Coptic Hermetica from Nag-Hammadi show that Egyptians who did not know any Greek, i.e. people who are likely to have lived outside the class of priests, were also involved in assimilating and circulating these particular texts.[171] This basically means that the Egyptians living during the Graeco-Roman period viewed and reproduced the Hermetica's discourse as part of their ancient traditions. The Hellenistic

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[168] G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*. (Princeton: 1993), p.29.
[169] For some examples, like "The Book of the Temple". See: J. Quack "Ein ägyptisches Handbuch des Tempels und seine griechische Übersetzung." In: ZPE 119 (1997),pp. 297-300. And "The Myth of the Sun's-Eye", see: S. West, "The Greek Version of the Legend of Tefnut". JEA 55 (1969), pp.161-83.
[170] CH. XVI, 1-2. This passage claims rather an Egyptian origin to the Hermetic thought than a literal claim of having been copied from any Egyptian text. This passage will be further analyzed on the next chapter.
[171] The Hermetic texts are part of *Codex VI*. See: J. M. Robinson (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library*. (San Francisco: 1977).

and Egyptian audience in general believed in the Hermetica's Egyptian pedigree. The same holds true for later Byzantine and Islamic readers.

1.4 Hermetism and Hellenism

Although Hellenistic Greeks and Egyptians had been living together for centuries and thus shared a common past, their relationship was completely redefined from the Late / Archaic-Classical Period[172] onwards. As became clear in the centuries to come, the Greek idealisation of Egypt as the land of an 'amazing civilisation' did not keep the Greeks from perceiving its political reality as well. Thus Greeks traded and battled with pharaonic Egypt. Most of the Greek merchants and mercenaries settled in Naucratis or in one of the cleruchies in the Delta. In addition to these developments, a Greek mercenary army fought the Persians to defend Egypt's independence and, after the Persian conquest, another Greek expeditionary force – which was led by "Athenians and their allies," i.e. the Delos League − supported a long campaign to free Egypt from Persians.

Even the Macedonian conquest did not put an end to the Greeks' veneration of Egypt's 'golden age'. Greeks, Macedonians and several other Hellenised cultural groups continued to interact with Egyptians on a daily basis. Egyptian religiousness was popular among all social classes and people from different cultural backgrounds. Syncretistic gods such as Sarapis and the Hellenised version of Isis achieved great popularity across the eastern Mediterranean basin. At the same time, Egyptian priests were deeply involved in the political affairs of their country. Egyptian temples thus

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[172] Cf. appendix I.

became a crucial and active political force in the Ptolemaic power balance. Ultimately, the overall popularity of Egyptian religion, the Egyptian priests' high social prestige and their political influence all helped to make Egyptian piety, rituals and other religious practices part of the 'Greek way of life' in Egypt.

The ensuing reduction of the distance between Egyptians and Greeks/Hellenised people did not harm the idealised depiction of Egypt as the home of an amazing civilisation. Egypt continued to be regarded as the cradle of ancient wisdom and knowledge even after the Roman conquest. In fact, the idealisation of Egypt steadily grew during the Hellenistic age along with its integration into the Hellenistic world, first as a Greek new kingdom, then as Roman province. Notwithstanding, the idealised literary image of priests who possessed supernatural powers did not hinder anyone from recognising their class as a political and social reality. While the Greek-Macedonian elite ruled Egypt with the priests' support, the Roman administration destroyed their economic autonomy and political relevance as soon as possible.

It should not be forgotten that to accept the idea of a 'degenerated' Graeco-Macedonian elite is more conform to Roman propaganda than actual conditions found in Hellenistic society in Egypt. After all, Egyptian self-perception in Graeco-Egyptian culture and Greek self-perception were not mutually exclusive. This is the reason why a Greek could pursue a Greek profession and worship an Egyptian god without feeling that he is doing something contradictory or paradox.

After the Roman conquest, the Roman commercial network was extended until it covered the cosmopolitan eastern Mediterranean area. Due to the Roman roads, the overall integration of Roman culture in the Mediterranean and, most importantly, the Pax Romana, Egypt's religion disseminated in the empire. The Egyptian priests

remained the epitome of religious piety and archetypical magicians. We have to bear in mind, however, that the Egyptian connection between moral/spiritual virtues and magical power was associated with the logics of the entire Hermetic thought as well as with the Hellenistic concept of theurgy. As has been demonstrated, Hellenistic mentality, the popular oriental cults, deities, doctrines and philosophies spread throughout the empire's provinces and beyond.

Another point of interest of this chapter was to present Hellenisation in Egypt as a dynamic process rather than a mere power relation between monolithical institutions – i.e. Hellenised elite versus Egyptian temples. Even though early 20th century scholars purported the general notion of Egyptian priests as living isolated in their temples and reproducing 'pure Egyptian culture,' this image is now outdated. Hellenistic Egypt was a place where new social relationships caused two communities to revisit elements of their original symbolic universe. The results of this process were newly defined identities and cultural ideologies that were compatible with the new circumstances of their lives. It therefore goes without saying that if one seeks to study Hellenistic Egypt only through the analysis of official discourses, the outcome will always be partial and incomplete. As the Hellenistic settlers entered a dynamic process of interaction, integration and intermarriage, it became increasingly difficult for the Hellenistic government to maintain the now artificial distinction between Hellenised and non-Hellenized groups. Although Egyptian funerary-magic-religious practices continued to be the most easily recognisable emblems of Egyptian influence over the Greek population shaping Hellenistic mentality and culture in Egypt, texts like the so-called *Book of Thoth* demonstrate how the priests' beliefs were integrated into Ptolemaic

political and social life. We can therefore presume that Egyptian priests were promoting 'philosophical blending' in the temples as well.

With regard to Hermetic literature, its importance does not rely on its alleged 'Egyptianity' or 'Hellenicity'. As has been shown, Egypt had already entertained diplomatic and trading contacts with its neighbours several centuries previous to Alexander's arrival. In other words, the Greeks were just another people with which Egypt interacted. Since Egypt's intellectuals were thus already living in a cosmopolitan society, they had access to all kinds of foreign ideologies, doctrines, languages and cultures with whom they would further mix later during the Hellenistic age. Again, this makes the task of identifying 'Hellenistic' or 'Egyptian' elements in the Hermetica very subjective. Moreover, it is based on the assumption that the only explanation for the multicultural elements found in an Egyptian discourse form the result of some sort of 'triumph' on the part of Hellenisation. However, 'Hellenisation' was rather a new political reality than a demonstration of cultural submission. Greeks and Hellenised people adopted 'Egyptian religion' at the same time as Egyptians and non-Greeks adopted the Greeks' way of life, art, philosophy, etc. It is thus not feasible to posit a distinction between 'Egyptian religion' and 'Greek philosophy' as both discourses were widely accepted as part of their respective symbolic universes. Furthermore, Hellenistic civilisation was also characterised by its plasticity; every culture was borrowing from each other and assimilated foreign elements. The existence of non-Egyptian aspects therefore does not necessarily mirror non-Egyptian intervention. It rather demonstrates how cultural integration was reflected in the new mentality found in Hellenistic Egypt.

It should also be remembered that the cultural identity of the Hermetica was never an issue for their ancient audience; in their eyes the Hermetica were translations of ancient

Egyptian texts. Moreover, most Greek philosophers willingly admitted – or claimed – an Egyptian origin for their schools and masters. Hence, they easily spotted philosophical concepts and premises in their literature. In addition to this, the existence of Coptic Hermetic texts proves that at least some Egyptians who were not literate in Greek also accepted an Egyptian origin of the Hermetica.

To sum up, we can say that Hermetism was a cultural phenomenon originating in Hellenistic Egypt. It was the product of a culture that was in a constant process of symbolic (re-)negotiation. In the same way that Hermetic texts should be understood as part of this civilisation, this civilization's self-perception should be understood as part of the process of the Hermetica's creation. Hermetic literature was not only written in Greek, but also it reproduced in Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Aramaic and Arabian. Both the textual translations and their new additions made possible to incorporate new cultural elements into its corpora. Furthermore, the fact that Hermetic literature had multiple authors for many generations demonstrates the absence of any formal aim at canonisation. This again supports the view that Hermetism was the result of a wider process of cultural interaction and formed part of a mentality transformation.

As has also been demonstrated, the process of intellectual exchange between Greeks and Egyptians already took place in the Greek Archaic age / Egyptian Late Period. Examples of this can be found in the *Interpretatio Graeca*, Pythagorean philosophy and in several cultural elements present in Greek culture whose alleged Egyptian roots according to Herodotus were generally accepted. The Hellenistic age maintained this interpretation. Hermetism should therefore be regarded as being part of a characteristic intellectual tendency to mix philosophy with oriental spirituality and mysticism. The present paper will therefore work with the axis 'Hermetic thought - Hellenistic

civilisation'. Its premises include the assumption that Hermetic thought is a particular case of intellectual syncretism of Greek philosophy, Egyptian and oriental thought. Furthermore, it tentatively suggests that the birth of the so-called philosophical Hermetica occurred between the 1st century B.C and the 3rd century A.D.

The following chapters will offer a definition of Hermetic literature, survey the selected documents and the chosen approach and, finally, explore the discussed sources.

2. Thoth-Hermes Trismegistos and the Hermetica

This chapter will explore the definition of Hermetic literature as well as discuss the selected documents, present the approach chosen and, eventually, examine the materials. The case of Hermes-Thoth, who was the patron of the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum*, and his relation to Hermetic literature, will thereby serve as main focus.

The image of Egypt as a land of wisdom and lost knowledge was preserved during the Hellenistic period. Diodorus commented the *Interpretatio Graeca* in his work on Egyptian traditions by stating that:

> It was by Hermes, for instance, according to them [i.e. the Egyptians], that the common language of mankind was first further articulated, and that many objects which were still nameless received an appellation, that the alphabet was invented, and that ordinances regarding the honours and offerings due to the gods were duly established. [... .] The Greeks also were taught by him how to expound [*hermeneia*] their thoughts, and it was for this reason that he was given the name Hermes. In a word, Osiris, taking him for his priestly scribe, communicated with him on every matter and used his counsel above that of all others. (Diod. I, 16)[173]

The Graeco-Romans believed that Thoth-Hermes was worshiped in Egypt as a god of not only basic but also specialised and extraordinary education. With the beginning of the Late / Archaic-Classical Period[174], Thoth's popularity increased due to his mastery of magic. Any magic formula attributed to Thoth was believed to produce a particular

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[173] The general relations between Hermes and Thoth are exposed in a table with bibliography on the Appendix 2. The table is rather a "quick list", all specific attributes, and virtues of both gods will be explored individually in this work whenever it might be necessary. For a complete analysis of Thoth's epithets, see: C. Leitz (ed.), *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen* –Band VIII: Register– in: OLA 129. (Leuven:2003), pp.715-730 and for further studies about Thoth, see: P. Boylan, Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt. (Oxford:1922). For the process of this Hellenistic Hermes' ascension from the dynastic Thoth, see: B. Couroyer, "Le 'Dieu des sages' en Egypte." In: R.Bi. 94 (1987), pp. 574-603.

[174] See the table of Greek and Egyptian chronologic equivalences in Appendix 1.

result. Cicero claimed that this happened because of the power the pronunciation of the god's name emanated.[175] Broadly speaking, Thoth underwent a transformation from an Egyptian into a universal god during the Hellenistic period. At the end of this process stood his Hellenised counterpart: Hermes Trismegistos, whose epithet means "three times the greatest". Although the expression "three times the greatest" is often associated with the Greeks, it was already in use in Egypt before Alexander's arrival and is thus of Egyptian origin.

Hornung postulates an Egyptian background of 'Thoth's' new epithet. He refers to a stela which dates back to the 20th year of the reign of pharaoh Apries (26th Dynasty, ca. 570 B.C., i.e. the so-called Saite Period). On it Thoth is described as "the two times great" and lord of Hermopolis-Baqliya.[176] It is interesting to note that there is a Greek equivalent to this expression which can be found in the Ptolemaic sacerdotal decrees of Raphia (217 B.C.). There we read "μέγιστος καὶ μέγιστος," i.e. "greatest and greatest" (ꜥꜣ ꜥꜣ "great, great" in Egyptian).[177] The Rosettana, i.e. the Memphis decree written in 197 B.C similarly features "μέγας καὶ μέγας," i.e. "great and great" (pꜣ ꜥꜣ pꜣ ꜥꜣ "the great, the great" in Egyptian).[178] Furthermore, an oracle from Hermes Trismegistos that was discovered at Saqqara and dates around 168-164 B.C bears the epithets "μέγιστος

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[175] Cf. *De natura deorum* III 56.

[176] E. Hornung, *L'Égypte Ésoterique*. (Monaco: 2007), p. 19. The author refers to Wladimir Golenischeff, *Die Metternichstelle in der Originalgrösse* (Leipzig: 1877, Wiesbaden: 1982). Figure in pl.3. See also: C.E. Sander-Hausen "Die Texte der Metternichstele" – *Analecta Aegyptiaca, VII.* (Kopenhagen: 1956). This type of stele of protection and healing was originally from the nineteenth dynasty, but it gained popularity during the Saite period and kept reproduced until the end of the Ptolemaic period. The rituals are further analysed by Helke Stern-el-Hotabi "Die Metternichstele." In: C. Butterweck *et alii, Texte aus der Umwelt desAlten Testaments –Band II.3: Rituale und Beschwörungen II.* (Gütesloh: 1988), pp. 358-380.

[177] See: R.S. Simpson "Appendix B: The Raphia Decree". In: R.S. Simpson, *Demotic Grammar in the Ptolemaic Sacerdotal Decrees*. (Oxford: 1996), pp. 242-57. This specific passage is in pp.242 (Demotic version) and 243 (English version).

[178] *Ibidem*, pp.258-71. This specific passage is in pp.262 (Demotic version) and 263 (English version).

καὶ μέγιστος μέγας" and "μεγσίτου καὶ μεγσίτου θεοῦ μεγάλου".[179] As Hornung

explains, the lack of a superlative form in the Egyptian language was later circumvented

by adding the adverb *wr*, i.e. "very," to the expression ꜥꜣ ꜥꜣ (twice great).[180] During the

3rd century B.C the term commonly used was "three times (very) great," and the

expression "eight times great" can be found in Setne's tale, which was composed in the

2nd century B.C.[181]

Thus "Trismegistos," which first appeared as early as the 3rd century A.D[182] is

commonly interpreted as an attempt to translate an older Egyptian epithet. In other

words, the Egyptian expression ꜥꜣ ꜥꜣ *wr* is traditionally accepted as the Egyptian role

model out of which the Greeks developed Τρισμέγιστος ("Thrice the Greatest").

However, the *Book of Thoth* (1st century B.C. – 2nd century A.D) attests to the fact that

Thoth had already been venerated as *wr wr wr* (lit. "Great, great, great") in Egypt

before the Roman conquest.[183]

Throughout the process of assimilation of Thoth and Hermes, the Hellenistic

Hermes-Thoth combined all functions and virtues of his component deities.[184] However,

the Egyptian Hermes surpassed the powers of his predecessors and ultimately became

the epitome of an entire branch of philosophical and sacred syncretism that resulted in

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[179] T.C. Skeat, E.G Turner, "An Oracle of Hermes Trismegistos at Saqqâra." In: JEA 53 (London: 1967), pp.199-208.
[180] See: Hornung, *op.cit*, p.19.
[181] (Setne II; 5,1): "He went to the temple of Khmun, [made his] libations before Thoth. The eight-times great, the lord of Khmun, the great god."See: M. Lichtheim. Ancient Egyptian Litterature- the late Period. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: 2006), p.146.
[182] Thissen quotes the Pap. B.M 121, 551 for "τρισμέγας"(third century A.D). See: H.-J. Thissen "Hermes Trismegistos". In: W. Helck, E. Otto (ed.) LÄ. (Wiesbaden: 1977), pp.1133-5, p.1134, n.6.
[183] See: R. Jasnow, K-Th. Zauzich, *The ancient Book of Thoth*. (Wiesbaden: 2005). Note that in Fayum, the god Suchos was still being called "great, great god" during the Graeco-Roman period. Cf. *W. Chrest.* 141,142 "grosser grosser Gott". See: H. I. Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt*. (Chicago: 1975), p.62.
[184] See Appendix 2. Hermes-Thoth is a pre-Hellenistic equivalence. However, the Hellenistic Hermes Trismegistos assumed all complementary virtues from both Egyptian and Greek sides, producing a new and stronger vision of an Egyptian Hermes.

the creation of Hermetic texts. Following Festugière,[185] this corpus can be divided into two major classes, namely, the technical/practical Hermetica and the philosophical/theoretical/theological Hermetica.

2.1 Technical Hermetica and Philosophical Hermetica

In 1614 Isaac Causabon situated the composition of the philosophical texts between the late 1st and the late 3rd century A.D.[186] Modern scholars agree with his dating. Galen of Pergamon was the first ancient author to make reference to Hermetic texts when he mentioned a treatise on medical botany, which had allegedly been written by Hermes Trismegistos and was well known in the 1st century A.D[187] However, the discovery of the *Book of Thoth* caused scholars to locate the age of the philosophical Hermetica in the 1st century B.C In the abscence of more evidence, however, it is difficult to refute even an earlier composition of the technical texts which might have taken place up to two centuries prior to the 1st century B.C.

The technical / practical Hermetica are believed to include all writings that feature Hermes as a patron of magic. Their contents cover various areas of magical aspirations (e.g. alchemy, divination, charms, etc.) so that it is hard to subsume the texts under a more specific title. The bulk of them include magical papyri in which someone asks the god for protection/assistance in his magical operations. The technical / practical Hermetica's origins are also difficult to pin down. However, in the case of an astronomical work entitled the *Art of Eudoxos*, which was written in the 2nd century

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[185] A. -J. Festugière, *La Révélation d`Hermès Trismégiste* - Tome I. (Paris: 1944).
[186] These calculations are based on external testimonia and analysis of the linguistic style and the doctrinal content of the texts. See: W. Scott, *Hermetica* - vol. I (Oxford: 1924), p. 9-10.
[187] See: J. Scarborough, "Hermetic and Related Texts in Classical Antiquity." In: I. Merkel, A. G. Debus (eds.) *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*. (London, Toronto: 1988), p. 22.

B.C., the source of the text is known. What we have is a complex Hellenistic treatise on Egyptian astronomy, which is likely to have been compiled in a Sarapeum. Among other things, the text contains calculations for equinoxes and solstices as well as information about lunar and solar calendars. Thompson not only mentions that the text features the references "oracles of Sarapis" and "oracles of Hermes," but also states that:

> The oracular roles of both Apis and Thoth, found here in Greek form, enjoyed a popular vogue; they were further connected with the interpretation of dreams. This combination of oracle and astronomy verging on astronomy, which later became so popular in the Roman world, with the rise of Hermes Trismegistos and works like *Tetrabiblos*, finds its roots here firmly fixed in Egypt of the second century B.C.[188]

It appears that scholars living in Hellenistic Egypt did not notice (or care about) the previous absence of astrology in pharaonic Egypt. Its sudden birth seems not to have puzzled them. Being aware of its civilisation's ancient past, the Greeks naturally credited Egypt for all branches of wisdom. We have already seen the degree of respect Egypt enjoyed among Herodotus' contemporaries. The Greeks' emphasis on 'Egyptian origin' was even more pronounced when it came to spirituality, magic and thinking. Egypt was still held to be the prestigious cradle of extraordinary knowledge during the Hellenistic age. According to Dieleman:

> Many Greek authors of the Hellenistic period who wrote about the principles of astrology based their arguments on books revealed by the supreme god Hermes Trismegistos or written by the famous Egyptian astrologers Nechepso and Petosiris, who were both supposed to have lived in the early Hellenistic period. The names of these authors are

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[188] D. J. Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies*. (Princeton: 1988), p.254.

certainly to be interpreted as pseudoepigraphy, a common and widespread phenomenon in Antiquity and even earlier periods.[189]

During the Roman rule, astrology was already well established in Egypt. Demotic horoscopes and astrological texts demonstrate that the Egyptian priests used signs of the zodiac, which might have been introduced to Egypt under the Ptolemies. According to Bohleke, Egypt turned horoscopes into an art that had a significant impact on Roman society.[190]

Oracles and divination were also quite common subjects of the technical Hermetica. The following Greek magical papyri illustrate how Egypt's Graeco-Roman population made use of Hermes-Thoth's magical powers. The presented extract stems from a spell that asked Hermes for inspiration. It begins with a description of the spell, i.e. with a list of the required ingredients and procedures. This is followed by the prayer/hymn to Hermes whose last section asks the god for his assistance:

> (400) Hermes, lord of the world, who're in the heart,/ O circle of Selene, spherical/And square, the founder of the words of speech,/ Pleader of justice's cause, garbed in a mantle,/ With winged sandals turning airy course / (405) Beneath earth's depths, who hold the spirit's reins,/ O eye of Helios, O mighty one,/ Founder of full-voiced speech, who with your lamps/ Give joy to those beneath earth's depths, to mortals/ (410) Who've finished life. / The prophet of events/And Dream divine you're said to be, who send/ Forth oracles by day and night; you cure/All pains of mortals with your healing cares./ Hither, O blessed one, O mighty son/ (415) Of Memory, who brings full mental powers,/ In your own form both graciously appear/ And graciously render the task for me,/ A pious man, and render

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[189] J. Dieleman, "Claiming the Stars – Egyptian Priests Facing the Sky." In: S. Bickel, A. Loprieno (Eds.) *Aegyptiaca Helvetica* 17 (Basel: 2003), p.279. The name "Petosiris" – "The one whon Osiris has given", is usually attested from the Late Period onwards. See also O. Neugebauer, R.A. Parker. *Egyptian astronomical Texts 3vols*. (London: 1969). The authors refute the possibility of Petosiris the astrologer would be the same priest Petosiris, the owner of the tomb in Hermopolis. For a study on Astronomy itself, see: B.L. van der Waerden, *Anfänge der Astronomie* (Groningen: 1956).
[190] B. Bohleke, "In terms of fate - A survey of the indigenous Egyptian contribuition to ancient astrology in light of Papyrus CtYBR inv. 1132 (B)." In: Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur 23, (Hamburg: 1996), pp. 11-46. This article shows how the Egyptian priesthood was involved with astrology.

your form gracious/ To me, NN/ That I may comprehend you by your skills/ Of prophecy, by your own wondrous deeds. /(420) I ask you, lord, be gracious to me and/ Without deceit appear and prophesy to me.[191]

Note how the magician believed that "being a pious man" would increase his personal merit and be crucial in winning the god's favour. However it is not clear from the spell's phrasing what this piety exactly entailed – apart from the fact that it must have been in line with Hermes' doctrine.

It is possible to detect a connection between the prayer mentioned above and the philosophical Hermetica. It can be argued that the philosophical Hermetists believed and used parts of the technical Hermetica and vice versa. The two textual genres appear to complement each other and share a common focus: purification. The philosophical Hermetica suggested philosophical reflection as a path leading disciples to 'purification' – or what we might call virtue – and the ability to visualise the divine sphere[192]. Furthermore, there existed a complementary relation between human spiritual virtue and magical merit. This was characteristic of 'theurgy', which can be roughly defined as a branch of magic in which a 'theurgist' was assisted in his work by a being from the divine/angelical/spiritual sphere. Rituals in turn were just a way of manifesting the inner force of a theurgist. This 'inner force' was directly responsible for the production of 'magic,' i.e. the manifestation of the theurgist's will, faith and spiritual merits, and was achieved through the development of mental skills and spiritual virtues.[193] In the same

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[191] PGM V. 370-446 lines 400-420. This hymn is repeated with different degrees of alterations in PGM VII.664-85; VII.668-80 and XVIIb. 1-23. For a complete and actual study concerning the PGM see: J. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites* (Leiden, Boston: 2005).

[192] This process is called "Religio Mentis" by the Hermetic treatise Asclepius (*ad Ascl*. 25).

[193] See: G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neo-Platonism of Iamblichus*. (Pennsylvania: 1995). G.R.S Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes: Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis*. Vol I-III (London:1906). For further information about theurgy before and contemporary to Iamblichus and as well its relations with Hermetics, see: G. Fowden (*op. cit.*).

vein we read in the Hermetic treatise called *Kore Kosmou* (K.K.), which portrayed Hermes as theurgist, that: "Having prayed with great intensity and having said certain words [Hermes] departed to heaven." (K.K, VII)[194] In the *Book of Dead*, on the other hand, Thoth declares his theurgic role by presenting himself as a virtuous god and powerful ally to fair people against evil.

41. [...] I am Thoth, wise scribe, clean of hands, Lord of Purity, Who has rejected the evil, scribe of Truth, whose abomination is / Falsehood, whose red [pen] has protected the Lord of all, Lord of laws, who makes writing speak, Whose words have brought order to the Two Banks. [*Jnk Ḏḥwty sš jqr wᶜb ᶜ.wy Nb wᶜb(w) dr(w) bw-ḏw.t sš Mꜣᶜ.t bw.t=f Jsf.t mk nᶜr=f Nb ḥp.w rd(w) {t} mdw drf grg(w) md.wt=f Jdb.wy*]

43. I am / Thoth, Lord of the Truth, who vindicates the loser, savior of the wretched needy one and his possessions. [...] [195] [*Jnk Ḏḥwty Nb Mꜣᶜ.t smꜣᶜ (w)-ḫrw ḥb(w) ḫrw nḏ(w)-ḥr mꜣr (s)d(=w) ḥr jš.t=f*]

Generally speaking, Thoth served Maat with his power. This is perfectly consistent with the god's aretology as described in his various dynastic epithets[196] such as the ones describing his knowledge of earthly and supernatural physics. Among the common

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[194] This tractate is a dialog of Isis (instructor) and Horus (disciple). In this passage – the conclusion of the tractate - Hermes prays and speaks words concerning τὰ ἱερὰ τῶν κοσμικῶν στοιχείων σύμβολα. Kore Kosmou = Excerpts XXIII-XXIV from the Library of Stobaeus. See: A.D. Nock, A.-J Festugière (ed. and transl.) *Corpus Hermeticum: Tome IV- Fragments extraits de Stobée: XXIII-XXIX* (Paris: 1954). The *Kore Kosmou* is not part of the *Corpus Hermeticum* collection; however it was published as a compendium of supplementary Hermetic texts.

[195] See: *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day- Ideas of ancient Egyptians concerning the hereafter as expressed in their own terms*. Translated by Th. G. Allen - The Oriental Institute of Chicago. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization. No 37 (Chicago: 1974). Egyptian Transliteration cf., *Le livre des Morts de l'Égypte Anciene*. Translated by Cl. Carrier (Paris: 2009). (The spell 183, from Papyrus Hounefer, BM EA 9901). Lines 41-43, pp. 830-1.

[196] See: C. Leitz (ed.), *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen* –Band VIII: Register– in: Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 129. (Leuven: 2003), pp.715-730; Y. Volokhine, "Le dieu Thot au Qasr el-Agoûz - Ḏd-ḥr-pꜣ-hb, Ḏḥwty-stm". In : Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 102, (Le Caire: 2002), pp. 405-423. See also, P. Boylan, *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt*. (Oxford: 1922), pp.180-200.

epithets referring to Thoth are *Rḫ-sw*, i.e. "The wise," *Nb mdw*, i.e. "Lord of the words," *ꜥ-ꜥ-wr-n-pr-mḏ3t*, i.e. "The two times very great of the Library," as well as *Nb mdw-nṯr*, i.e. "Lord of the sacred words" and *Wr-ḥk3*, i.e. "The one with great Spell craft". Furthermore, Thoth was also characterized as the ultimate keeper of virtue. Thus we may read that he is the one *Jꜥb-M3ꜥt*, i.e. the one "Who is united to the Truth/Justice;" or *Wp-M3ꜥt-r-jsft*, i.e. the one "Who protects the Truth/Justice/Fairness from untruth/injustice/unfairness". Moreover, he was able to actively intervene in the mortal world. Thus he was called *Ḏḥwty-stm* [sic.], i.e. "Thoth who listens," as well as *Sm3ꜥ-ḫrw-s-r-ḫfty*, i.e. "The one who allows a man to triumph over his enemy". Other texts identify Thoth as "the heart of Re" (*jb n Rꜥ*). This epithet was so commonly used during the Graeco-Roman period that "Heart of Re" was "simply an equivalent of "Thoth," which might explain why Thoth was occasionally even just called "Heart".[197]

Thoth created the world by thought and utterance. He was both the tongue and the heart of the creator god Re and thus possessed creative powers.[198] This naturally made him subordinated to Re and might even suggest that he was a manifestation of the sun god, i.e. that both gods were different aspects of the same deity.

Inspiration, magical skills and moral virtues combined with spiritual piety all form part of a theurgist's universe, which lends Thoth-Hermes Trismegistos a theurgic character.[199] The Hermetists were certainly aware of both the technical and philosophical Hermetica as a means of communication with the divine sphere. However, it is neither clear how popular ritualistic Hermetic magic was nor if it was

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[197] P. Boylan, *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt* (Oxford: 1922), p. 114.

[198] Tongue and heart are the two key elements in the utterance of life-giving and powerful words.

[199] Iamblichus explained that it was necessary for the theurgists to achieve a high level of spiritualization in order to keep their works free from demonic intromissions. See: *De Mysteriis* III, 31, 177-9; V. 15, 219; VIII. 4, 267; X.6, 292. He explains also that the higher the level of the magic, the more spiritualized was its technique.

more popular than the philosophical Hermetic texts. Whatever the case was, it is important to bear in mind that the dichotomy between technical and philosophical Hermetica is a modern classification.[200]

The so-called philosophical texts also cover topics like astrology, which could just as well be classified as 'technical'. Astrology is also the subject matter of the *Stobaeus Frag*. VI and *Nag Hammadi* VI-6, 2. Alchemy, on the other hand, appears in the *Corpus Hermeticum* V, 9; XII, 8; XIV, 10, and magic is mentioned in *Nag Hammadi* VI-6, 56.

In *Corpus Hermeticum*, Tat teaches the principles of *sympatheia*[201] to a king (probably Ammon):

> […] O king, incorporeal also exist among the corporeals. […] Doesn't it seem to you, for example, that there are forms that appear in body even though they are incorporeal, in the bodies not only of ensouled beings but of the soulless also? […] Thus, there are reflections of the incorporeal – from the sensible to intelligible cosmos, that is, and from the intelligible to the sensible. Therefore, my king, adore the statues, because they, too, possess forms from the intelligible cosmos. (CH. XVII).

Another Hermetic treatise called *ad Asclepius* similarly reads:

> Are you talking about statues Trismegistus? Statues, Asclepius, yes. […] I mean statues ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds; statues that foreknow the future and predict it by lots, by prophecy, by dreams and many other means; statues that make people ill and cure them, bringing them pain and pleasure as each deserves. […] (*ad Ascl*. 24).

The Greek term *enpneumatosis*, i.e. "inspiration," means literally 'filling with *pneuma* or spirit'. As Copenhaver observes, the divine *enpneumatosis* and protection was a recurrent theme of the PGMs:

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[200] In fact, the relation between technical and philosophical Hermetica will be further analysed in the third chapter through the perspective of their receptors.
[201] The usage of an object in magic as a means to access the divine.

> [S]alvation in the large sense – the resolution of man's fate wherever it finds him – was a common concern of theoretical and technical Hermetica alike, though the latter texts generally advertised a quotidian deliverance from banal misfortunes of disease, poverty and social strife, while the former offered a grander view of salvation through knowledge of God, the other and the self.[202]

Thoth's link to *enpneumatosis* found in the Hermetica is not a Hellenistic innovation. Two other Egyptian epithets describe Thoth's power to give breath. Thus he is called *D-tꜥw-r-fnd-n-s-nb*, i.e. "The one who gives air into the nose of every man," and *Rdi-ṯꜣw-n-wrd-ib*, i.e. the one "Who gives air to tired hearts". The combination of *enpneumatosis* and Thoth already appear in the *Book of the Dead*, where it stands for salvation. Spell 128 makes reference to Thoth's magic role:

> P1. <Book> for causing Osiris to endure, giving breath to the Weary-hearted One through the activity of Thoth, warding Osiris's enemies […] *mdꜣ.t n(y.t) ddy.t Wsjr rd.t ṯꜣw n Wrd-jb m rꜣ-ꜥ Dḥwty ḫsf ḫft(y) {w} Wsjr*[203]

It is impossible to tell if those who used to read what is now known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* always had access to the same number and/or variety of texts. We can only presume how codified the Philosophical Hermetica were. It is remarkable that texts from the Philosophical Hermetica were already being grouped together during the Graeco-Roman age. Such groups are abundantly attested both within the texts themselves, e.g. in cross-references, and outside of them, i.e. in quotes of the Hermetica by other writers. To the latter also belong references to a collection of Discourses (logoi) in which Hermes, Tat, Asclepius, Ammon, Isis, Horus and other characters

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[202] B.P. Copenhaver (transl.). *Hermetica*. (Cambridge: 2002), p.xxxvii.

[203] English text; cf. *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day- Ideas of ancient Egyptians concerning the hereafter as expressed in their own terms*. Translated by Th. G. Allen - The Oriental Institute of Chicago. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization. No 37 (Chicago: 1974). Egyptian Transliteration cf., *Le livre des Morts de l'Égypte Anciene*. Translated by Cl. Carrier (Paris: 2009). (The spell 182, from Papyrus Mouthétepti, BM EA 10010). Line 1, p.819.

appear as teachers and/or pupils. Plutarch even alludes to a collection of Egyptian knowledge known as the "Books of Hermes". This allegedly formed part of his contemporaries' knowledge:

> In the so-called Books of Hermes they (the Egyptians) relate that it is written concerning the names that the power placed in charge of the sun's course is Horus, and that the Greeks call it Apollo; that the power in charge of the wind is called by some Osiris, by others Sarapis; [...]. (*De Iside et Osiride*, 61).[204]

Sometimes Hermetic treatises contradict one another in the way they approach certain subjects. This begs the question of multiple authorship. This study agrees with K.W. Tröger that there are multiple philosophic and religious currents represented in the Hermetica which not only originated in different historical periods but also in various cultural surroundings.[205] In the following, the philosophical Hermetica will be split into seven general groups.[206]

a) *The Book of Thoth*

The Book of Thoth forms the most recent subject of academic speculation on the Hermetica.[207] The first text edition of this ancient book appeared in 2005. It contains a dialogue between the Egyptian god Thoth, "great great great," and a disciple called *Mr-rḫ* ("the lover of wisdom," which is in fact an Egyptian translation of the Greek word

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[204] J.G. Griffiths (transl.), *Plutarch: de Iside et Osiride*. (Cambridge: 1970). That is also the most remote mention of Hermetic literature by a Classical author. Another ancient author, Clement of Alexandria lists 42 Hermetic books (*Strom*. VI, 4, 35; 3-37; 3). For the consensus on the Egyptian origin of Hermes Trismegistos see: Iamblichus, *de Mysteriis* VIII, 4.

[205] K.W. Tröger. *Mysterienglaube und Gnosis im Corpus Hermeticum XIII – Bd. 110* (Berlin: 1971), pp. 5-6.

[206] This list is also an upgrade to the works of H.-J. Thissen "Hermetische Schriften (*Corpus Hermeticum*)". In: W. Helck, E. Otto (ed.) LÄ. (Wiesbaden: 1977), pp. 1135-7, and Th. M. Scott, *Egyptian Elements in Hermetic Literature*. (Cambridge: 1987), pp. 4-8.

[207] R. Jasnow, K-Th. Zauzich, *The ancient Book of Thoth.* (Wiesbaden: 2005).

for philosopher). Its original is preserved in Demotic and Hieratic, and there is no evidence that might suggest that the text was ever translated into Greek or another non-Egyptian language. The text's author is unknown, and its fragments, which date from between the 1st century B.C and the 2nd century A.D, were collected from different temples across Egypt.

The Book of Thoth has been subject to several debates focusing on its dating as well as on how closely Egyptian religion in general should be linked to the development of philosophical Hermetic literature. The oldest fragment of *The Book of Thoth*, which is in fact a corpus of several texts, dates back to the 1st century B.C This date is used here as a 'symbolic mark' of the birth of Hermetic literature. The dating of Hermetic texts in general is not uniformally accepted; in fact, they are traditionally located at a later point in time, i.e. somewhere between the 2nd and the 3rd century A.D.

b) The Hermetic fragments from the *Nag Hammadi Codices*[208]

A library consisting of twelve books was discovered in the vicinity of the town Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in December 1945. In addition to the books, eight pages from a thirteenth book dating from Late Antiquity were found placed inside the front cover of the sixth book. The sixth book was discovered in a jar at the foot of a desert cliff known as the Gebel et-Tarif (i.e. below Luxor, near the village of Es-Sayyâd, the ancient Chenoboskion). Out of the 52 tractates (i.e. 13 codices), only six were already known, either in the original Greek, or in Greek or Latin translations. Furthermore, out of the thirteen codices (or manuscripts), eleven were complete while a few scattered leaves

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[208] See: J.M. Robinson (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library*. (New York: 1990); The Nag Hammadi codices are also available in J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II*. (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt: 1997), pp. 505-562. In this study these texts are generally called "Nag Hammadi Hermetica" (NHH).

were all that remained of two different manuscripts. In total, these codices contained 52 texts. Apart from of several Gnostic revelations, the texts featured three Hermetic fragments (Codex VI.6, VI.7 and VI.8). Two of these fragments, VI.7 and VI.8, stem from a Coptic version of *ad Asclepius*. Codex VI.6. is text which was then called *The discourse on Eighth and Ninth*[209] (or *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*) and only exists in Coptic. The resemblance of the texts to the 'Middle Platonism' of Albinus suggests a dating in the 2nd century A.D[210]

c) Fragments and Excerpts Preserved by Different Ancient/Medieval Writers

According to Scott, the Neo-Platonic philosopher and Cristian apologist Athenagoras of Athens, who lived around 180 A.D, was the first to refer to Hermetic literature. Other writers who discussed Hermetic literature and thereby helped shape its reception include Tertullian, Arnobius, Lactantius, Augustine and Cyril of Alexandria.[211] Even the Arabs added lines to the Hermetic tradition. Thus we find references to Hermetic texts in the works of Al-Kindi (the earlier, ca. 850 A.D), Abu Sulaiman Al-Maqdisi, Al-Nadin, Ibn Zulaq, Ibrahim Ben Wassif Shah and Al-Katibi. Thabit ibn Qurra, who lived from 836 until 901 A.D even founded a pagan Hermetic school in Bagdad.[212]

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[209] See: M. Krause, P. Lahib, "Gnostische und Hermetische Schriften aus Codex II und Codex VI." *In: Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, Koptische Reihe, Band 2* (Glückstadt: 1971);

[210] D. M. Parrot, "Introduction to the Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth (VI, 6)." In: J. M. Robinson, (ed). *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, (New York: 1990), p. 322.

[211] See: A.D. Nock, A.-J Festugière (ed. and transl.) *Corpus Hermeticum: Tomes III-IV - Fragments extraits de Stobée: I-XXIX* (Paris: 1954). J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II*. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: 1997.

[212] For further authors and fragments, see: See: G.R.S Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes: Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis. Vol I-III (London:1906). A.D. Nock, A.-J Festugière (ed. and transl.) *Corpus Hermeticum: Tomes III-IV - Fragments extraits de Stobée: I-XXIX* (Paris: 1954). G.R.S Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes: Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis*. Vols. I-III (London: 1906). H .J. W Drijvers , "Bardaisan of Edessa and the Hermetica: The Aramaic Philosopher and the Philosophy of his time". In: JEOL, 21, 1970, pp.190-210. K. Brown, "Hermes Trismegistus and Apollonius of Tyana in

d) The Armenian *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepius*

This text is an Armenian translation of a lost Greek original and dates to the 6th century A.D Some of its aphorisms also appear in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, namely in the first book, i.e. CH.I (also known as "Poimandres"). In addition to his, parts of the *Definitions* have parallels in the Byzantine Stobaeus' Excerpts.[213]

e) The Hermetic Excerpts from the Library of *Stobaeus*

The Byzantine Stobaeus, also known as Johannes Stobaios who lived in the 5th century A.D compiled roughly forty[214] Hermetic Excerpts in his library. They feature various dates. Eleven of his collected fragments can be also found in an anthology which has been labelled as *The Corpus Hermeticum.* The most famous Excerpt, XXIII, is a treatise called *Kore Kosmou* , i.e. "The Pupil of the World".

f) The *ad Asclepius* tractate

This text is also known as *Logos Teleios*, i.e. "The Perfect Discourse". Along with the *Kore Kosmou*, it belongs to the longest Hermetic tractates. It is a Latin translation of a

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the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh." In: J. McLean (ed.) *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá'í Theology* – vol 8 (Los Angeles: 1997), pp.153-187. See also: A.E. Affifi, "The Influence of Hermetic Literature on Moslem Thought." In: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13/4, (Cambridge: 1951), pp.840-855, and T. M. Green,   *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*. (Leiden: 1992).

[213] See: J.-P. Mahé, (transl.), "The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepius". In: C. Salaman *et alii* (transl.) *The Way of Hermes: The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios*. (London: 1999), p.101-8. M-G Durand, "Un traité Hermétique conserve en Arménien." In: *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 190 (1976), pp.55-72.

[214] For a matter of how those fragments should have been counted, A.D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière (*Corpus Hermeticum* III, p.1) understands that there are forty Excerpts - while Walter Scott had estimated forty-two (*Corpus Hermeticum* III, p.3). See also J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II.* (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt: 1997).

lost Greek original. Thissen observes that St. Augustin was familiar with this text.[215]

Scott believes that the extant Latin version of *ad Asclepius* is more complete than its

alleged lost Greek origin.[216] Nock-Festugière, on the other hand, believe that *ad*

Asclepius has no predecessor.[217] Unfortunately, no consensus has been reached with

regard to the structure and interpretation of the text.

g) The *Corpus Hermeticum*

The expression *Corpus Hermeticum* is used as a generic term to describe Hermetic

literature disregarding its contents, date or place of origin. It was probably composed in

the 1st to 2nd century A.D. The term was first given to a Greek anthology of about

seventeen[218] distinct manuscripts, which were published as a collection in Western

Europe in the 14th century A.D. The treatises can be divided into several groups:

CH. I - "The Poimandres of Hermes Trismegistos," the official first book, describes the

teachings of Poimandres to his pupil, Hermes Trismegistos. It centres on the so-called

appearance of the "Nous of God" to Hermes, which started the process of his instruction

and consequent Gnosis.

The following nine documents are short dialogues or lectures which cover different

Hermetic topics, in particular cosmogony. They are:

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[215] H.-J. Thissen "Hermes Trismegistos". In: W. Helck, E. Otto (ed.) LÄ. (Wiesbaden: 1977), pp. 1135. See also our chapter 3.

[216] Th. M. Scott, *Egyptian Elements in Hermetic Literature*. (Cambridge: 1987), p. 5.

[217] A.D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière (*Corpus Hermeticum* II) p.290. There is also a short bibliographical debate on this subject.

[218] Apparently one of those treatises is now lost. Nonetheless the collection is still numbered as being eighteen documents. A.D. Nock, A.-J. Festugière (*Corpus Hermeticum* I), p.xiii.

CH. II – "Universal Discourse"

CH. III – "Sacred Discourse"

CH. IV – "The Monad"

CH. V – "God is invisible and entirely visible"

CH. VI – "There is no good anywhere but in God"

CH. VII – "The worst evil in men is the ignorance of God"

CH. VIII – "No being perish and it is a mistake naming transformations as destruction or death"

CH. IX – "On understanding and sensation"

CH. X – "The Key" (debating important points from CH. II - Universal Discourse).

Furthermore, there are four tractates which discuss mystical aspects of Hermetism. To these belong:

CH. XI – "Nous to Hermes"

CH. XII – "About the common mind to Tat"

CH. XIII – "A Secret dialogue on the mountain to his son Tat: On being born again and the promise to be silent"

CH. XIV – "From Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepius: health of mind"

There used to be a Book XV in the *Corpus Hermeticum.* A 16th-century editor named Flussas originally composed it from parts of different origins. Although this fifteenth text no longer forms part of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the latter always counted eighteen

volumes with the fifteenth missing.[219] The other texts that belong to the *Corpus Hermeticum* are:

CH. XVI – "The Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon". This is a letter from Asclepius to an Egyptian king featuring a lesson on the constitution of the cosmos.

CH. XVII – (fragment without title). Tat instructs an Egyptian king (presumably king Ammon).[220]

The text to conclude this list is:

CH XVIII – "On the Soul hindered by the body's affections". However, Nock and Festugière prefer to exclude Book XVIII from the *Corpus Hermeticum.*[221] Due to the text's inferior style and contents it is believed to be Roman forgery. Nevertheless, while Salaman's edition follows this interpretation and omits it, Copenhaver included it in his.

The Book neither features individual characters nor dialogues. It is written in the form of an essay portraying the king as a musician and comparing his rule with playing a lyre. CH XVII will not be further discussed here.

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[219] C. Salaman *et alii* (transl.) *The Way of Hermes: The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios.* (London: 1999), p. 85.
[220] See chapter 2.1.1 of this study.
[221] A.D. Nock, A.-J. Festugière (ed. and transl.), *Corpus Hermeticum*: Tome II, Traités XIII-XVIII, (Paris: 1945), p.244. The authors define CH. XVIII as "Cet insipide morceau de rhétorique en prose rythmée combine plusieurs fragments incohérents d`un discours épidictique à la louange des « rois » (apparemment Dioclétien et ses collègues), composé aux alentours de l`an 300. Rien ne prouve que ce discours ait jamais été prononcé."

2.1.1 Hermetic mythology in the *Corpus Hermeticum*

As has already been pointed out, Egypt featured many Graeco-Egyptian syncretistic cults in the Graeco-Roman period. Egyptian religion and gods were also very popular with different cultures. The syncretism of Graeco-Egyptian deities allowed for the combination of Greek and Egyptian elements. Similar phenomena were reproduced in Hermetic literature; while the Hellenistic Hermes was assimilated to Anubis and Thoth,[222] the popular healer god Asclepius became identified with the Egyptian nobleman Imhotep/Imouthis. Moreover, Horus was likened to Agathos Daimon, and Ammon, i.e. the Egyptian god Amun, was depicted as a deified early king (Ammon). Graeco-Romans read ancient myths and gods as fragmentary and remote memories of real men and events.[223] Clement of Alexandria described pagan gods as:

> [a] countless host, all mortal and perishable men, who have been called by similar names to the deities we have just mentioned.[224]And what if I were to tell you of the many gods named Asclepius or of every Hermes that is enumerated, […] . (*Exhortation to the Greeks*, II, 25p).[225]

The popular Hellenistic cults also fathered individuals whose attributes and definitions as pupils and masters eventually set up a complex Hermetic mythology. This mythology took as its starting point that gods used to live as ordinary men on earth. It related how these 'men' had contact with supernatural beings who passed their divine knowledge, i.e. *gnosis*, onto them. Hermetic doctrine in turn aimed at transmitting this lore to later generations. This was undertaken by several deities, such as Asclepius, Tat, Agathos

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[222] See the table of Appendix 2 for a resume on the associations between Thoth, Hermes and Anubis.

[223] See: P. Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leur mythes?* (Paris: 1983).

[224] Cf. *Exhortation to the Greeks* II – 24p – 32p: He stresses that many different gods bear the same name, and that those gods were really men, who lived and worked on earth. Clement lists and coments the mortal origin of Ares, Asclepius, Poseidon, Zeus, etc.

[225] Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*. Translated by G. W. Butterworth – the Loeb Classical Library. (London: 1968).

Daimon, Nous and Ammon, who took on a new syncretistic Hermetic aspects and became the famous interlocutors/authorities appearing in the *Corpus Hermeticum.*

The following offers an overview of the most important characters of the *Corpus Hermeticum.*

a) Poimandres: The etymological origin of the name Poimandres is dubious. It may be connected to the Greek ποιμὴν ἀνδρῶν, i.e. "shepherd of men". Ποίμανδρος appears in Plutarch as a mythological person.[226] He is a spiritual being identified in the first book of the *Corpus Hermeticum* as ὁ τῆς αὐθεντίας νοῦς. Marcus surmises that "*nous of authentia*" reflects the author's "attempt[…] to convey to Greek readers the meaning of a non-Greek name".[227] On the other hand, Ποιμάνδρες might also stem from Π-ⲈⲒⲘⲈ-Ⲛ-ⲢⲈ, i.e. "the knowledge of the sun". Here ⲈⲒⲘⲈ would be the Coptic equivalent for νοῦς.[228]

As Marcus explains, Poimandres is a treatise full of gnosticised Greek ideas, whose themes derived mostly from Stoicism. This study agrees with Marcus theory that proposes a Coptic ethmology. The most suitable Coptic equivalent for *nous of authentia* is ⲠⲈⲒⲘⲈ ⲚⲦⲘⲚⲦⲈⲢⲞ, "which in this context would mean 'the reason of sovereignty'".[229] Thus the name Poimandres is connected to the Stoic notion of

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[226] Cf. *Moralia* 299 C, D.

[227] See: R. Marcus, "The Name Poimandres". In: JNES, 8 (Chicago: 1949), p. 40.

[228] W. Scott, *Hermetica* vol. II (Oxford: 1925), pp.14-18. The author observes that if Poimandres mean "the νοῦς of the Sun-god" it would make sense since in Egypt and the Roman Empire, the Sun was regarded as the supreme god. Hence, ὁ τῆς αὐθεντίας νοῦς would rather denote the mind of the Soverign Power.

[229] R. Marcus, *op.cit.*, p.43. "If we remember that in Late Egyptian, including Coptic, there were few true adjectives and that a phrase like "the holy man" was expressed by the construction "man of holiness" or "the man who was-holy" (the latter compound being intend to represent Egyptian use of relative auxiliary and qualitative form of the verb), we see that the assumed meaning of Poimandres, "the reason of sovereignty" is equivalent to the Greek of English phrase "the sovereign reason".

"sovereign reason," which was variously identified as *logismos*, *dianoia* and also as *nous* by Philo and Plotinus (among others).

Poimandres meets and teaches Hermes Trismegistos.[230] Ultimately, he helps Hermes Trismegistos reach his *gnosis*. As Poimandres' teachings concern the divine discourse/logos, he is not only the divine Nous but also acts as the divine Logos.[231] The revelations of Poimandres also deal with higher-level Hermetic doctrine, such as the secrets of the cosmos, man and his soul's destiny.

There are other references to Poimandres in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. He is first mentioned in book XI, in which Hermes is instructed by a supernatural being called "Nous". As Fowden explains, "it is clear that Poimandres is intended".[232] Overall, the name Poimandres occurs twelve times in CH. I, but only twice in the other treatises. He appears in CH. XIII, 15 – where Hermes acknowledges his higher authority concerning Hermetism – and again in CH. XIII, 19, where he functions as a 'soul-shepherd' in the strictest sense.

b) Hermes Trismegistos: Hermetism interprets Hermes not as a god but a man or prophet guided by a god. Centuries before the Graeco-Roman age, Plato had already questioned whether Thoth was a god or just a divine man.[233] The writings ascribed to Hermes usually describe Thoth as a mortal agent offering guidance that leads to sacred revelation; he frees souls from the bondage of matter and promises to disclose the

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[230] Hermes is not named in this treactate. Poimandres teaches a human, whose experience is described on the text. The identity of Hermes is only assumed.

[231] See: K. –W. Tröger, *Mysterienglaube und Gnosis in Corpus Hermeticum XIII*. (Berlin: 1971), pp. 121, 133-4.

[232] G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*. (Princeton: 1993), p. 33.

[233] Plato, *Phaedrus* 274d. It was a current thought in the Graeco-Roman world to believe that gods and myths were actually vaguely based on real ancient kings and events. Their rationality tried to explain the mythical language without excluding it from their symbolic universe. See: P. Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* (Paris: 1983).

secrets surrounding creation. In addition to this, Ammianus Marcellinus refers to Hermes Trismegistos, Apollonius of Tyana, and Plotinus as individuals who were assisted by guardian spirits.[234]

The epithet 'Trismegistos', i.e. "Thrice the greatest," was standardised in the Roman period. Initially, the Greek god Hermes was considered to be the equivalent to the Egyptian god Thoth. However, at some stage Hermetists began to talk of the existence of three 'Hermeses', namely a 'grandfather', a 'father' and a 'grandson'. What is more, in *ad Asclepius*, Hermes refers to the tomb of his grandfather, i.e. Hermes of Hermoupolis (*ad. Ascl.* 37). The 'first' Hermes, i.e. the Hermes who wrote hieroglyphs on stelae, was believed to have been the Egyptian god Thoth. The 'third' Hermes was the one who translated the texts into Greek[235] and was supposedly the son of Agathos Daimon[236] and father of Tat. In order to maintain the prestige of the Greek texts, Hermes the younger became the translator of the original texts of Thoth.[237]

To both Christians and pagans of the Roman Empire, Hermes Trismegistos was a real person of great antiquity. Some thought of him as a contemporary of Moses. He was held to be an archetypical master of *gnosis*, from whose teachings later philosophers derived the fundamentals of their philosophy. The Neo-Platonic Iamblichus wrote that Plato and Pythagoras had visited Egypt. Where they had studied the stelae of Hermes with the assistance of native priests.[238] Hence, we may say that the

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[234] W. Hamilton (ed. and transl.), *Ammianus Marcellinus, The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378).* (New York: 1986), p. 228.

[235] Altough Iamblichus recorded that an Egyptian priest called Bitys was the translator of at least part of the Egyptian Hermetic texts into Greek. Cf. *De Mysteriis* VIII.5; X, 7.

[236] Indeed, the Emperor Julian in *Against Galilaeans,* 176 A-B said that Egypt was visited by the third Hermes. See also B. Copenhaver, *Hermetica.* (Cambridge: 1992), p.164.

[237] See: G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*. (Princeton: 1993), p.30.

[238] See: J. Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt.* (New York: 1970), p. 107.

name "Hermes Trismegistos" invoked a relatively 'human' Hermes who differed from the gods' messenger – an association mainly made by Greeks.

Hermes is the teacher in all the discourses in which he appears – except for CH.I and CH. XI, where Hermes himself is taught by Poimandres/ divine Nous. Note that in CH. XII, 1 and 13, Hermes praises Agathos Daimon as if the god were an authority on Hermetism and perhaps an *alias* to Nous/Poimandres.

c) Asclepios: Asclepios was another popular deity in Graeco-Roman Egypt. According to Hornung, during the rule of Cleopatra VII (46 B.C.) Asclepios-Imhotep was even more popular than Ptah, Memphis' patron god.[239] Asclepios-Imhotep was the deified sage Imhotep, who was known as Imouthes among the Greeks and believed to be a powerful magician and healer.[240] Ptolemy IX Evergetes II erected a shrine to Thoth-Hermes in Medinet Habu in which three deified individuals, namely Imhotep-Asclepios, Amenophis and Teos[241] (Ḏḥr), are represented as *paredroi* of Thoth.[242]

Asclepios and Hermes often resemble each other in their insignia; both Asclepios and Hermes are accompanied by a combination of serpents and a staff. Both attributes already appear in magical texts in the book of Exodus VII, 9-12.[243] In the Graeco-Roman world, Alclepios was represented by a serpent-entwined wooden staff; Hermes, on the other hand, by the traditional Greek caduceus, i.e. a metallic short herald's staff

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[239] E. Hornung, *L'Égypte Ésoterique.* (Monaco : 2007), p.64.
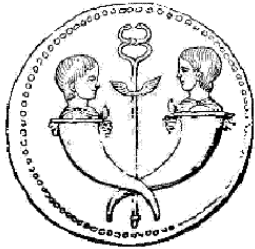
[240] See: J. B. Hurry, *Imhotep, the Vizier and Physician of King Zoser.* (Oxford: 1928), and J. B. Hurry, *Imhotep, the Egyptian god of medicine.* (Chicago: 1987).

[241] P. Boylan, *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt*, (Oxford: 1922), pp. 166-8. On this Teos-Ḏḥr, there are some dispute if he might be just a memphitic Sm-priest of Ptah, or the "Teban Hermes" mentioned by Clement of Alexandria along with the memphitic Asclepios – cf. *Clement, Strom*. I, 21, 134.

[242] *Ibidem*

[243] This consensus continued throughout Late Antiquity. See also Tertullian: *De Anima* LVII: The serpents which emerged from the magicians' rods, certainly appeared to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians as bodily substances".

entwined by two serpents in the form of a double helix which was sometimes surmounted by wings.

Table 4: The insignia of Asclepios and Hermes	
Representation of Asclepios with his Rod	**Representation of Hermes' Caduceus**
"Denarius of Caracalla, bearing for its legend of reverse PMTRP XVIII COS IIII PP (Sovereign Pontiff, invested with the tribunitian dignity for the 18th time, consul for the 4th time)."[244]	"Bronze coin of Tiberius for his son Drusus (ca. 22 CE). Two crossed cornucopiae display the heads of Drusus' sons Tiberius Gemellus and Germanicus, with a winged caduceus between them *Two Cornucopiae.*"[245]

In astronomical texts Asclepios and Hermes Trismegistos appear interchangeably. Hornung also mentions a Greek horoscope from 138 A.D in which Asclepios and

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[244] S. W. Stevenson, *et alii, A Dictionary of Roman Coins* (London: 1889, 1964), pp. 20-21. Aesculapius-Asclepios "is designated by his inseperable attribute, and by his side, or rather at his feet, we see his dwarfish companion Telesphorus. The fratricide son and successor of the merciless Severus, who caused this silver coin to be struck, is said by Herodianus to have visited Pergamos, about A.D. 215, "in order to place himself under the tutelary care and healing influence of Aesculapius (...). On silver and second brass of Albinus (the latter with COS II for legend of reverse), Aesculapius appears, upright, resting his right arm on his serpent *twisted* staff. He also is found, with his usual attributes, on silver and third brass of Gallienus, sharing, as CONSERVATOR AVG*usti* (the Emperor's preserver), those sacrificial honours which that rash and reckless prince, amidst a world of calamities, physical, social, and political, was at the same time in the habit of paying to Apollo, to Hercules, to Jupiter, to a whole Olympus (…), whom he vainly invoked to save him and his distracted empire from impending destruction".

[245] *Ibidem*, pp. 288-289. "The Caduceus *between two cornucopiae* indicates Concord, and is found on medals of Augustus, M. Antony, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, Antonius Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Clodius Albinus."

Hermes are treated as equals.[246] In the *Corpus Hermeticum*, however, Asclepios is the pupil of Hermes Trismegistos, (CH. XIV, 1). Only in one instance does Asclepios assume the role of teacher himself, namely in CH. XVI at the court of king Ammon.

d) Agathos Daimon: The origins of the Greek Agathos Daimon are disputed. Dunand argues that he might have originally been a psychopompos, who guided the souls of the deceased, or a home-guarding god, or a patron of agriculture.[247] In addition to this, Agathos Daimon was also worshipped as the guardian god of Alexandria, whose cult was probably established by Alexander himself.[248] His function as a protective deity also caused Agathos Daimon to be identified with Sarapis. Moreover, he was known as a god of fortune associated with Τυχὴ Ἀγαθή ("Good Fortune")[249], which in turn was also identified as Isis and Sarapis.[250] The Egyptian version of ἀγαθὸς δαίμων and ἀγαθὴ τύχη, Shaï and Shepset, also formed a pair.[251] According to Quagebeur, Greek astrology located ἀγαθὴ τύχη and κακὴ τύχη as the 5th and 6th zodiac signs, which corresponded to the demotic horoscopes *tꜣ-špšy(.t)* and *tꜣ-wry(.t)*[252]. The author adds that the zodiac signs of the 11th and 12th demotic horoscopes, i.e. *pꜣ-šy* and *sšr,* in turn tallied with ἀγαθὸς δαίμων and κακὸς δαίμων.

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[246] E. Hornung, *op.cit.*, p. 65. For the association between Hermes and Asclepios on Astronomy, see: K. Sethe, Imhotep, der Asklepios der Aegypter - Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und altertumskunde Ägyptens. (Leipzig: 1902), p.22.

[247] F. Dunand, "Les representations de l'Agathodémon." In: BIFAO 67, (Le Caire: 1969), pp. 44-5.

[248] Cf. Pseudo-Calisthenes I, 32. Agathos Daimon is also deemed as the guardian of Alexandria in "The Oracle of the Potter" (ca. 130 B.C), P3, 49-62.
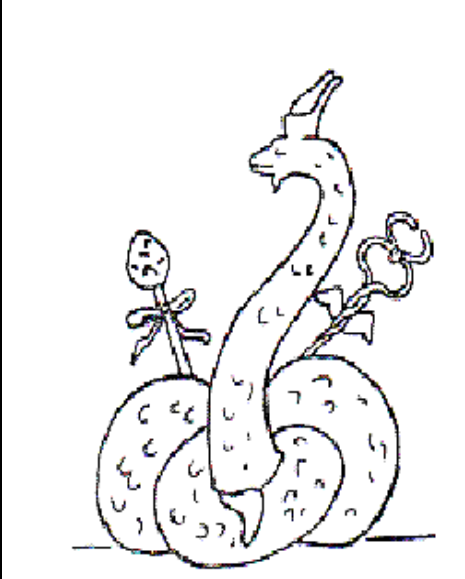
[249] PGM IV. 3125-71.

[250] For the correlations between Agathos Daimon, Good Fortune and Isis, Sarapis Sobek among others, see: F. Dunand "Les representations de l'Agathodémon." In: BIFAO 67, (Le Caire: 1969), pp. 9-48

[251] J. Quagebeur, "Le dieu égyptien Shaï." In: OLA 2, (Leuven: 1975), p.171.

[252] *Ibidem.*

Agathos Daimon was portrayed as a serpent and also identified with the Egyptian serpent-goddesses Isis-Thermouthis[253], and Shaï[254], the Egyptian goddess of destiny. Furthermore, Agathos Daimon was associated with the sacred serpent Osiris-Dionysos - Thoth-Hermes.[255]

Table 5: Agathos Daimon-Dyonisos-Hermes	
The image from the so-called Expedition E. von Sieglin, by Th. Schreiber: [256]	A *Facsimile* with a draft of the same image, by F. Dunand:[257]

The same serpent is portrayed in a bas-relief 'holding' the Hermetic caduceus, the Dionysian Thyrse and double crown. Dunand interprets this as a representation of

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[253] See F. Dunand, *op.cit.*

[254] J. Quagebeur, *op.cit.*

[255] Th. Schreiber, *Expedition E. von Sieglin - Ausgrabungen in Alexandria, I: Die Nekropole vom Kom esch Schukâfa* (Leipzig: 1924), pl. XXII (*in situ*).

[256] *Ibidem*. Tafel XXII : "Das Hauptgrab. Vorhalle der Hauptkammer. Rechte Seite der Hauptwand."

[257] F. Dunand, *op.cit*, p.36: "Fig. 10 – Agathodémon avec thyrse at caducée. Antichambre de la grande chamber sépulcrale de Kom esch Schugafa."

Sarapis-Hermes-Agathos Daimon.[258] This association of Agathos Daimon with two psychopompos (here Hermes and Dyonisos) can also be found in the god's description given by the Graeco-Egyptian alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis. Apparently, Zosimos met the god in a dream and learned that Agathos Daimon was "a spirit and a guardian of spirits".[259] In the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Agathos Daimon rather appears as a reference than as an active interlocutor (this only occurs in CH. XII). Although he is named as and authority twice in CH. XII, 1 and 13, the maxims Agathos Daimon allegedly offers are mere plagiarism of the teachings of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus.[260] Nevertheless, in the entire Hermetica, the only master of Hermes Trismegistos is "The Poimandres" / " The Nous". Thus it is possible that the depiction of Agathos Daimon as an authority of Hermetics (Book CH. XII) is actually an attempt to give a 'face' to "The Poimandres" / " The Nous".[261] This would mean that Hermes and "The Poimandres" / " The Nous" were one and the same deity.

e) Tat: 'Tat' might be a Greek misspelling of Thoth.[262] Be that as it may, Tat assumed an identity of his own as the son of Hermes Trismegistos (CH. XIV, 1). In CH XIII, 9 we learn that Hermes is unable teach the most complex aspects of his doctrine to Tat since Tat is too young for this. Tat might have learned them later, however. This would

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[258] *Ibidem.*

[259] B. Karle, *Der Alchemistentraum des Zosimus* (Freiburg: 1925). Fragments: pp. 26-32, commentary: pp.33-61.

[260] See: A.D. Nock, A.-J Festugière (ed. and transl.), *Corpus Hermeticum*: Tome I, Traités I - XI, (Paris: 1945), p.135, n. 78, and P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* vol I. (Oxford: 1972), p. 209-11.

[261] In fact, in *Contra Iulianum*, 533 A, Cyrill of Alexandria mentioned a Hermetic dialogue in which Hermes is instructed by Agathos Daimon.

[262] Hermes Trismegistos is also called "Thath" (Θαθ). PGM VII. 551-7.

tie in with his later role as a master (CH. XVII[263]). Tat may symbolise the pupil's early stages of the Hermetic path, since in CH.XIII, 7-10 his mortal weaknesses are purified by God's power.

In CH. XIII, 2 Tat says that the teachings between father and son have no riddles. The language used in Tat's teachings is therefore always simple and clear.

f) King Ammon: Thoth-Hermes was regarded as the originator of sacred texts, formulae and of the arts and science. Platon mentions the tradition tale that Thoth-Hermes revealed the arts of writing, geometry, and astronomy to King Ammon at Thebes.[264] In line with the Hellenistic explanation of myths and gods as events and people from a remote past, this king Ammon was thought to be an ancient king of Egypt, which might have served as role model for the creation of the god Amun.[265]

2.2 (Neo-) Platonism *vs*. Gnostic systems

There is some tendency by modern scholars of labelling Hermetism as a Hellenized form of Gnosticism.[266] The existence of Hermetic texts among the discoveries at Nag Hammadi proved that Hermetic texts circulated also among Gnostics. The Greek Hellenistic Platonic Philosophy – also called "Neo-Platonic" accordingly to a posterior convention in modern times' Renascence - miss regard Gnosticism as a valid thought

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[263] CH. XVII is just a small fragment and the unique discourse in *Corpus Hermeticum* where Tat is the teacher. There his pupil, a king - who most certainly is king Ammon, calls Tat "prophete" (προφήτης). Hermes asks Tat to start teaching his doctrine in NHH. VI-6, 52-53.

[264] Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 274d

[265] See: Manetho 105. 31; Plato, *Phaedrus* 274d; G. Fowden *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton: 1993), p.32.

[266] See : U. Bianchi, "Le Problème des Origines du Gnosticisme". In : U. Bianchi (ed.), *Le Originni dello Gnosticismo – Colloqui di Messina, 13-18 Aprile 1966,* (Leiden: 1967).pp. 1-27, p.18 and 19 – in comparison with a more 'judaeising' Gnosticism.

system. Indeed, in the third century A.D the (Neo-) Platonist philosopher Plotinus wrote a treatise against the Gnostic movements[267], in which he accused Gnostics of being maliciously obscure in their terminology, and deliberately modifying original Platonic concepts. In his tractate, Plotinus defined as "Gnostic" all those who considered:

2.2.1 The universe and the material world as evil

Plotinus defended the Platonic Ontology, for maintaining that the Universe was not just good but also eternal and divine, and then he attacked the Gnostic doctrine:

> But they do not honor this creation of this earth, but say that a new earth has come into existence for them, to which, say they, they will go away from this one: and that this is the rational form of the universe.[268] (Enneads IX (33), V).

> [...] for Plato says: 'The maker of this universe thought that it should contain all the forms that intelligence discerns, contained in the Living Being that truly is'[269]. But they did not understand and took it to mean that there is one mind which contains in it in repose all realities, and another mind different from it which contemplates them, and another which plans, but often have soul as the maker instead of the planning mind. (Enneads IX (33), VI).

According to Armstrong[270], this criticism seems to be addressed particularly to "Gnosticising" Platonists, who used to be influenced by Numenius' ideas. Following the Gnostic principles, a serious revisionism of Platonic concepts is the transformation of the Maker of the Universe, or Demiurge an evil entity who paradoxically created the world just to be adored.

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[267] Cf. Plotinus, "Against the Gnostics". In: Enneads IX – or 33 according to Porphyry (The Life of Plotinus).

[268] See : Plotinus II (7 vol.) Translation of A.H. Armstrong – Loeb (London: 1990).

[269] Cf. Timaeus 39 E, 7-9

[270] See: Plotinus II (7 vols.) Translated by A.H. Armstrong – Loeb (London : 1990), p. 244, n.2. The Gnostic system of Numenius bears resemblance to the one Plotinus attacked, especially with regard to the hierarchy of gods, the Supreme God, or Mind vs. the Second Mind, and the conception of the universe as an ensouled divine being.

But if this is what it is, how will their statements still apply that it (the Demiurge) created for the sake of being honoured, and how does it create out of arrogance and rash self assertion?[271] (Enneads IX (33), XI).

In fact, Plotinus also attacks the Gnostic evil Demiurge:

[...] one point must be mentioned which surpasses all the rest of their doctrine in absurdity [...]. The maker [...] revolt from his mother and drag the universe which proceeds from him down to the ultimate limit of images.[272]

2.2.2 The creation of new obscure concepts

Plotinus also attacked the Gnostic creation of new concepts without references and the absence of further explanations regarding this new Gnostic language**:**

And what ought one to say of the other beings they introduce, their "Exiles" (παροίκησις) and "Impressions" (μετάνοια) and "Repentings" (ἀντιτυποι)? [...] these are the terms of people inventing a new jargon (καινολογούντων) to recommend their own school. (Enneads IX (33), VI).

[...] they use now one name and now another, and say many other names just to make their meaning obscure. (Enneads IX (33), X).

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[271] St. Irenaeus has a similar point of dispute with non-Valentinian Gnostics in *Adversus Haereses* I, 29. See also Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* IV, 13-19 (against Valentinian Gnostics).

[272] *Ibdem*, p. 264. Armstrong explains that Plotinus is attacking a Gnostic myth in the particular version of the Valentinian Gnostic system. Armstrong explains the myth: "The Mother, Sophia-Achamoth produced as a result of the complicated sequence of events which followed the fall of the higher Sophia, and the offspring of the Demiurge, the inferior and ignorant maker of the material universe, are Valentinian figures." P.264, n.1. See also: Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* I, 4-5. Since Valentinus had been in Rome, Plotinus might have met some of their followers. However, Porphyry (Life of Plotinus 16) understands that the Gnostic friends of Plotinus belonged to the older Gnostic group called Sethians/Archontics, related to the Ophites/Barbelognostics. Armstrong (p.264, n.1) understands that Gnostics rather called themselves "Gnostics": "since they borrowed freely from each other, and it is likely that Valentinus took some of his ideas about Sophia from older Gnostic sources, and that his ideas in turn influenced other Gnostics. For observations on Valentinian Gnostics and its treatises on Nag Hammadi, see: M. Puech, *Les sources de Plotin* (Genève: 1960), pp. 162-3 and 174-80. For Porphyry see: Plotinus I (7 vols): Porphyry *On the Life of Plotinus and the order of his Books* – transl. A.H. Armstrong. Loeb (London: 1978).

The lack of commitment by Gnostics with regards to explaining their own concepts was a common characteristic of Gnostic doctrines. Their systems were normally cohesive in that they defended their arbitrary superiority in the face of all humankind and Gods, however, as Plotinus observed, they failed to explain their own concept of virtue since there was no Gnostic tractate on virtue. This makes the entire Gnostic concept of salvation unfair, obscure and suspicious.

> Yet, those who already have the Gnosis should start going after it, and it their pursuit should first of all set right their conduct here below, as they come from divine nature; for that nature is aware of nobility and despises the pleasure of the body. But who has no share of virtue would not be moved at all towards the higher world. This too is indifference to virtue, that they had never made any treatise about virtue, but have altogether left out the treatment of these subjects; they do not tell us what kind of thing virtue is, nor how many parts it has [...]. (Enneads IX (33), XV).

Plotinus believed that the absence of virtue left Gnosticism as an empty system.

> [...] In reality it is Virtue (Ἀρετὴ) which goes before us to the goal and, when it comes to exist in the soul along with wisdom, shows God; but God, if you talk about him without true virtue (ἀρετῆς ἀληθινῆς), is only a name. (Enneads IX (33), XV).

2.2.3 A magical gnosis as a 'short-cut' to salvation

In their defense, the Gnostics claimed that they had a secret and magical knowledge (*gnosis*) which enabled them to assure their own salvation. This *gnosis* was necessary in order to cross the "gates" of each cosmic sphere which was guarded by a gatekeeper

potency called Archon.[273] Such passwords would give the Gnostic a safe passage to his spiritual kingdom. Plotinus classified this as naive and unrealistic and with irony said:

"The spheres make all things sweet and lovely for them." (Enneads IX (33), XIII).

…And disdains of the aspirations of superiority by Gnostics:

> Then, the man of real dignity (ἄριστος) must ascend in due measure, with an absence of boorish arrogance (οὐκ ἀγροικίας), going so far as our nature is able to go and consider that there is room for others at God's side, and not himself after God; […].[274] (Enneads IX (33), IX).

Plotinus's argument against the Gnostics in his work can also function as a useful guide to help understand the ancient definition of Gnostics. Using Plotinus' argument as a basis, this section aims to offer an antithesis by dealing with the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In order to make the differences between Gnosticism and the Hermetic worldview (accordingly to Plotinus' perspective) clear, the Hermetical cosmogony shall be described and explained as follows.

2.3 The *Corpus Hermeticum* and its Cosmogony

It is clear that Plotinus considered Gnosticism as an opportunistic alteration and misunderstanding of Plato's theories. Thus, according to Plotinus' criticism, Gnostics

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[273] The cosmic spheres and its Archons were supposedly the only barriers which the soul had to pass on its journey upwards to its true home. Each sphere was protected by an Archon and the right magic formula was necessary to obtain free transit among them. Origen "Against Celsus" VI, 31, mentions some Ophite spells. This principle is in harmony also with the popular Mystery religions, like the Hellenistic Isis cult. The ascension into each hierarchic level granted more esoteric informations to the worshiper - and as well a stronger protection from the worshiped divinity.

[274] *Ibidem*. The Gnostic claim of being superior to the Creator and his creation is also criticized by Irenaeus in *Adv. Haer*. II, 30.

can be generally defined by three characteristics. Namely: misunderstanding or deliberated manipulation of Plato's concepts (producing an evil cosmos where mankind lives as prisoners); Creation of new jargon using poorly explained concepts (in order to avoid debates); determinism of mankind to remain under the rule of evil divinities (for only the chosen could be saved); absence of explanations concerning merit for salvation (virtues). So, by presenting topics of the Hermetic cosmogony, this section aims to depict Hermetism as a singular movement, rather than simply a branch of another.

2.3.1 The Hermetic Trinity and their emanations

There were three major, active participants in the Hermetic creation. God, the father and only true creator and His first son the Cosmos, who helped Him organize and form life. God`s second son Man, who helped God rule the material world. This section aims to explore their definitions and relationships with one another and also the creation.

I) On God's attributes

God is defined as incorporeal:

> What is the incorporeal, then? (τὸ οὖν ἀσώματον τί ἐστι ;)"
>
> Mind as a whole wholly enclosing itself (Νοῦς ὅλος ἐξ ὅλου ἑαυτὸν ἐμπριέχων), free of all body (ἐλεύθερος σώματος παντός), unerring (ἀπλανής), unaffected (ἀπαθής), untouched (ἀναφής), at rest in itself (αὐτος ἐν ἑαυτῷς), capable of containing all things and preserving all that exists (χωρητκὸς τῶν πάντων καὶ σωτήριος τῶν ὄντων), and its rays (as it were) are the good (οὖ ὥσπερ ακτῖνές εἰσι τὸ ἀγαθόν), the truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια), the archetype of spirit (τὸ ἀρχέτυπον πνεύματος), the archetype of soul (τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ψυχῆς). (CH. II, 12).

The divine creation was moved by His supreme goodness, which is inherent to God. Thus, the creation is nothing less than the manifestation of God's goodness:

[...]The good is what gives everything and receives nothing (ὁ γὰρ ἀγαθὸς ἅπαντά ἐστι διδοὺς καὶ μηδὲν λαμβάνων); god gives everything and receives nothing (ὁ οὖν θεὸς πάντα δίδωσι καὶ οὐδὲν λαμβάνει·), god is < the > good, and good is god. (ὁ οὖν θεὸς <τὸ> ἀγαθόν, καὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν ὁ θεός). (CH. II, 16).

Therefore, God is also the father of all creation:

God's other name is 'father' because he is capable of making all things (ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα προσηγρία ἐστίν ἡ τοῦ πατρός πάλιν διὰ τὸ ποιτικὸν πάντων·). Making is characteristic of a father. (πατρός γὰρ τὸ ποιεῖν). (CH. II, 17).

Existence was the result of the combination of God, Nous and matter. God is the beginning of all and is ultimately responsible for life's continuity.

God is the glory of all things, as also are the divine and the divine nature (Δόξα πάντων ὁ θεός καὶ θεῖον καὶ φύσις θεῖα). God, as well as mind and nature and matter is the beginning of all things that are since he is wisdom meant to show them forth (ἀρχὴ τῶν ὅτων ὁ θεός, καὶ νοῦς καὶ φύσις καὶ ὕλη, σοφία εἰς δεῖξιν ἀπάντων ὤν·). The divine is also a beginning, and it is nature and energy and necessity and completion and renewal. (ἀρχὴ τὸ θεῖον καὶ φύσις καὶ ἐνέρεια καὶ ἀνάγκη καὶ τέλος καὶ ἀνανέωσις). (CH. III, 1).

God is also present in all dimensions of existence. His emanations can be found in every single aspect of being:

And god surrounds everything and permeates everything (καὶ ὁ μὲν θεὸς περὶ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντων,), while mind surrounds soul (ὁ δὲ νοῦς περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν), soul surrounds air and air surrounds matter. (ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ περὶ τὸν ἀέρα, ὁ δὲ ἀὴρ περὶ τὴν ὕλην). (CH. XII, 14).

According to this Hermetic perspective, it is possible to draw the following graphic:

Table 6: God's emanations to Matter

GOD

NOUS

SOULS

AIR

MATTER
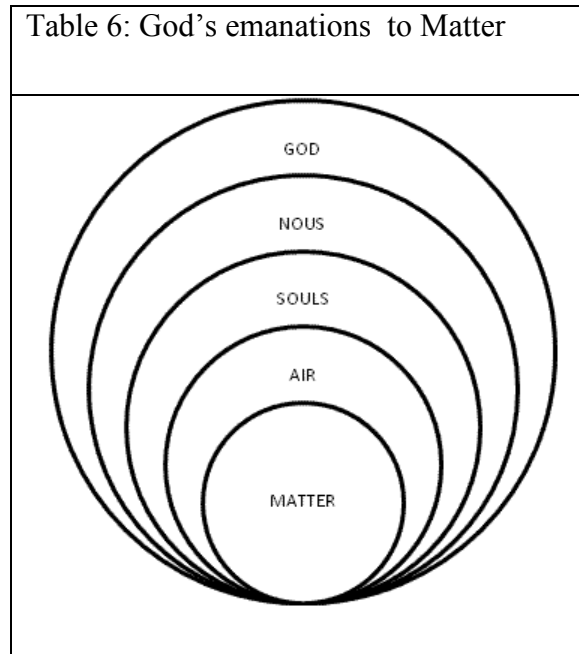
God and also His Nous are present in all spheres of His creation. He created souls, which emanated from His Mind/Will/Nous - the most subtle dimension of existence - and sent these souls to a denser sphere so that they could interact with Nature. Air is the most subtle portion of Matter, but it remains a factor as it serves as a border stage between material and transcendental existences. Matter is the less subtle sphere of existence. In the material world, the creation is able to manifest itself and interact with Natural and Sensitive reality. Nous and Air are similar as intermediary spheres.

II) On God's creation and relations with His sons

a) The creation of the First Son, or Cosmos

The Cosmos is the first creation of God. God enlightened this chaotic, dark and humid primordial element. The result of this process is the separation and grouping of transformed elements according to each one's nature.

> In the deep were was boundless darkness and water and fine intelligent spirit (ἦν γὰρ σκότος ἄπειρον ἐν ἀβύσσῳ καὶ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ πνεῦμα λεπτὸν νοερόν), all existing by divine power in chaos (δυνάμει θείᾳ ὄντα ἐν χάει). Then a holy light was sent forth, and elements solidified [...] out of liquid essence (ἀνείθη δὴ φῶς ἅγιον καὶ ἐπάγη + ὑφ᾽ ἄμμῳ + ἐξ ὑγρᾶς οὐσίας στοχεῖα). And all the gods {divide the parts} of germinal nature (καὶ θεοὶ πάντες + καταδιερῶσι + φύσεως ἐνσπόρου). [...] The heavens appeared in seven circles (καὶ ὤφθη ὁ οὐρανὸς ἐν κύκλοις ἑπτά), the gods became visible in the shapes of the stars and all their constellations (καὶ θεοὶ [ταῖς] ἐν ἄστρων ἰδέαις ὀπτανόμενοι,), and the arrangement of < this lighter substance > corresponded to the gods contained in it. (σὺν τοῖς αὐτων σημείοις ἅπασι καὶ διηρθρώθη ... σὺν τοῖς ἐν αὐτῇ θεοῖς). (CH. III, 1-2).

It is worth comparing the motives associated with the creation of cosmos: darkness and humidity in close relation with chaos also re-occur in the Egyptian creation of the world. The Egyptian creative myth describes God existing alone before creation in the primordial Ocean (Nun). God's self-manifestation or creation as Atum-Re, emerged out from Nun - eg. by hatching out of his egg – and gave a principle to all gods and creation. So there is a similarity between the Hermetic God and the Egyptian Atum share a similary as both beings were considered the fathers of all.[275]

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[275] See: S. Bickel, "La Cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire." In : *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 134. (Fribourg: 1994).

Out of the primordial chaos the first son of God, Cosmos, created seven circles of gods, who were directly connected to stars and constellations. So, the Cosmos is also depicted as the god of "fire and spirit" (the stars were representations of divine powers) since he created seven potencies to assure the cosmic order in the material / sensible world.

> The mind who is god (ὁ δὲ Νοῦς ὁ θεός), [...], by speaking gave birth to a second mind, a craftsman (ἀπεκύησε λογῳ ἕτερον Νοῦν δημιουργόν), who as god of fire and spirit, crafted seven governors (ὃς θεὸς τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ πνεύματος ὢν ἐ δημιούργησε διοικητάς τίνας ἑπτά); they encompass the sensible world in circles, and their government is called fate. (ἐν κύκλοις περιέχοντας τὸν αἰσθητὸν κόσμον, καὶ ἡ διοίκησς αὐτῶν εἱμαρμένη καλεῖται). (CH. I, 9).

Note that the process of creation is advanced by the power of speech/logos. As the manifestation of will, speech places sounds into the air which represent ideas. These are carried with the power by will, and the result of this action was creation. However, creation through speech was possible only due to the use of God's speech. God's logos guided Cosmos' Nous (the craftsman's mind) during his participation in the creation. Cosmos' main attributes were concerned with the handling of all forms of matter.

> [...] the word of god leapt straight up to the pure craftwork of nature and united with the craftsman-mind (for the word was of the same substance). (ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ Λόγος εἰς τὸ καθαρὸν τῆς φύσεως δημιούργημα, καὶ ἡνώθη τῷ δημιουργῷ Νῷ (ὁμοούσιος γὰρ ἦν)).The weighty elements of nature were left behind, bereft of reason, so as to be mere matter. (καὶ κατελείφθη [τὰ] ἄλογα τὰ κατωφερῆ τῆς φύσεως στοιχεῖα, ὡς εἶναι ὕλην μόνην). (CH. I, 10).

The Cosmos, know as the craftsman, or as the first son of God, was also his assistant and helped Him create the physical world. However, the creation of the elements of

nature was not the craftsman's concern. He just manipulated the elements that God previously produced:

> [...] 'the elements of nature - whence have they arisen?' (στοιχῖα τῆς φύσως πόθεν ὑπεστη ;) [...] 'From the counsel of god (ἐκ βουλῆς θεοῦ) which, having taken in the word and having seen the beautiful cosmos, imitate it, (ἥτις λαβοῦσα τὸν Λόγον καὶ ἰδοῦσα τὸν καλὸν κόσμον ἐμιμήσατο) having become the cosmos through its own elements and its progeny of souls (κοσμοποιηθεῖα διὰ τῶν ἑαυτῆς στοιχείων καὶ γεννημάτων ψυχῶν). (CH. I, 8).

The instruments of creation were the combination of Logos and Nous:

> Since the craftsman made the whole cosmos, by reasoned speech, not by hand, (Ἐπειδὴ τὸν πάντα κόσμον ἐποίησεν ὁ δημιουργός, οὐ χερσὶν ἀλλὰ λόγῳ), [...] and as having crafted by his own will the things that are.(τῇ δὲ αυτοῦ θελήσει δημιοργήσαντος τὰ ὄντα· τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ σῶμα ἐκείνου). (CH. IV, 1).

The Cosmos shared the divine Logos with God. He was also able to emulate God's role by creating souls from elements created by God, but also present in his own nature. Since the cosmos was also able to create life (from elements given by God) he was also known as "the Craftsman" (ὁ Δημιουργός). Instead of being some autonomous co-creator, the Hermetic craftsman is rather dependent on God as the son of his father (hence his epithet "First Son"). God is the one who sustains the immortality of the cosmos. This is done through God's presence, which encompasses all dimensions of existence:

> The source of all things is god (πηγὴ μὲν οὖν πάντων ὁ θεός); eternity is their essence (οὐσία δὲ ὁ αἰών); the cosmos is their matter (ὕλη δὲ ὁ κόσμος). Eternity is the power of god (δύναμις δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἰών), and the cosmos is eternity's work (ἔργον δὲ τοῦ αἰῶνος ὁ κόσμος), [...]. Therefore, nothing in the cosmos will ever be corrupted (for eternity is incorruptible) (διὸ οὐδὲ φθαρήσεταί ποτε (αἰὼν γὰρ ἄφθαρτος)), nor will

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pass away since eternity encloses the cosmos. (οὐδὲ ἀπολεῖταί τι τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, τοῦ κόσμου ὑπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐμπεριεχομένου). (CH. XI, 3).

The Hermetic worldview partially seconds Plato's stance by defining the cosmos as divine and immortal. In addition, man is not exiled or held as a prisoner of the cosmos as the Gnostics believed. Instead, he was a positive part of it:

Mortality is a kind of destruction (ὁ γὰρ θάνατος ἀπωλείας ἐστίν·), but nothing in the universe is destroyed (οὐδὲν δὲ τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἀπόλλυται). If the second God is the cosmos, an immortal being (εἰ γὰρ δεύτερος θεὸς ὁ κόσμος καὶ ζῷον ἀθάνατον), it is impossible for any part of an immortal being to die (ἀδύνατόν ἐστι τοῦ ἀθανάτου ζῷου μέρος τι ἀποθανεῖ·). Everything in the cosmos is a part of the cosmos (πάντα δὲ τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ μέρη ἐστι τοῦ κόσμου), but specially man, the living being with speech. (μάλιστα δὲ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, τὸ λογικὸν ζῷον). (CH. VIII, 1).

The relationship between God and his first Son can be best visualized in the following scheme:

Table 7: God's emanations to Cosmos

GOD

NOUS OF GOD

DIVINE LOGOS

7 SPHERES

MATTER AND SPEECHELESS CREATURES

125
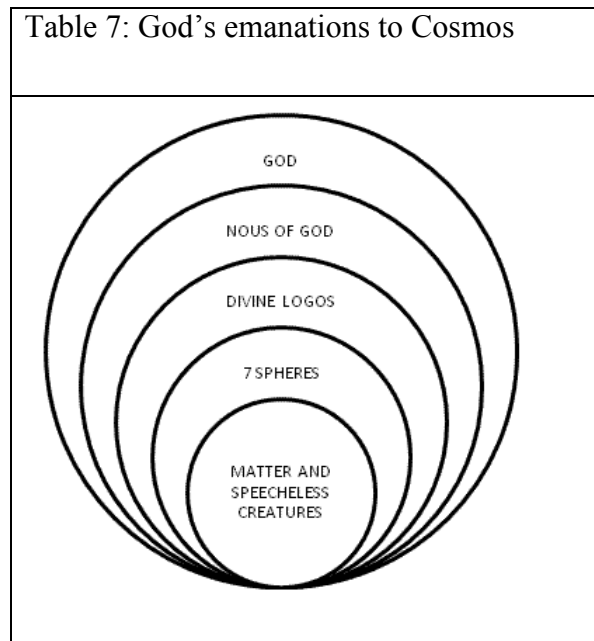
God's Nous represents an attempt to identify an origin for His will, love; intelligence and maybe an essence. Nous is a field or a sphere from where life originally came. God's Logos is also a description of the ability to bring something that existed in God's mind/will/heart/Nous into manifested existence. The combination of God's Nous and God's Logos produced Life. The creation of Life must be understood as the creation of Souls. In this sense, God is the unique creator. The role of God`s first son, Cosmos, was to offer material support for Life to develop. Then, by sharing God's Logos and Nous, Cosmos shaped and ordered seven celestial material spheres, aiming to coordinate the interactions between Nature and living creatures. These seven spheres restrain physical life/existence/reality, and rule over mortals through the mandate of gods/potencies (manifested as stars, and constellations) under the law called "Fate". Beyond these seven spheres or material reality, there are three transcendental and spiritual ones: Logos, Nous and God. These three spheres are not in the jurisdiction of Cosmos. To Mankind, Logos is God's divine aspect as he maintains the ability to transcend material reality towards immortality.

b) On Fate / Ἑιμαρμένη / *Šꜣy*

The Egyptian expression for destiny /fate/ luck was *šꜣw/ šꜣy,* derived from the verb šꜣj (to determine/ decide). *Šꜣy* was also represented as a goddess, whose attributes were correlated with gods, the king and men[276]. Therefore, there are examples of divine šꜣy –

e.g. *Nw.t wr.t ms nṯr.w nb šꜣw rr.t m s.t-wrt.* "Nout, la grande qui fait naître les dieux,

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[276] See: J. Quaeguebeur, "Le dieu égyptien Shaï dans la réligion et l'onomastique." In : Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 2 (Leuven : 1975)

maîtresse de Shaï-Reret à Edfou"[277];   royal *šꜣy* - e.g. *ntk šꜣw nfr. Tu* (i.e Emperor

Domitian) es le bon Shaï" [278];   and human *šꜣy – stn wsjr tkr pꜣy-k šy jrm-k ḥtp pꜣy-k rn-nfr*

n šy m ḥtp. "Écoute, Osiris (le défunt) ! Ton Shaï court avec toi. Que ton beau nom de

Shaï repose en paix."[279]

It is important to understand that there was a negative and positive *šꜣy*. In a passive

sense, it corresponded to predetermined destiny, in an active sense it was the

consequence of human actions. As negative effect, *šꜣy* is connected to all negative

aspects of life, including death. The positive *šꜣy* is related to the gods' favour, the end of

a misfortune, and the favourable result of dubious situations.

All the blessings that one can receive that serve to assure one's happiness including

prosperity, health are perceived as a divine reward attributable to good behaviour. It was

possible to obtain a good *šꜣy* by achieving the protection of deities. This was achieved

though the respect and observation of Maat's principles. Through one's actions his *šꜣy*,

or *factum* or ἑιμαρμένη, or destiny, could be positive or negative.

The Hermetic world-view accepted the existence of divine secondary powers. The

seven spheres[280] of stars and constellations had hegemony over the material world. The

Craftsman's work produced the so-called seven spheres of existence:

> The craftsman-mind, together with the word (ὁ δὲ Νοῦς σὺν τῷ Λόγῳ), encompassing the
>
> circles and whirling with a rush (ὁ περιίσχων τοὺς κύκλους καὶ δινῶν ῥοίζῳ), turned his

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[277] *Ibidem*, p.97. Cf. Edfou IV, 110, 14.

[278] *Ibidem*, p.113. Cf. Esna II, n 115, 8.

[279] *Ibidem*, p. 120. Quaguebeur observes that this demotic papyrus with the Book of the Dead (from 63 A.D) implies some degree of substitution of the notion of ka by Shaï. Cf. F. Lexa, Das demotische Totenbuch der Pariser Nationalbibliothek (Papyrus des Pamonthes), (Demotische Studien 4), (Leipzig: 1910), p.26: III 4-5.

[280] By accepting the premises of Nag Hammadi Hermetica in "The Discourse of the Eighth and the Ninth". The seven spheres are in charge of material / physical creation/creatures. A eighth sphere of existence was the divine Logos (bordering with the natural world), the ninth one was the Nous and the last one - the tenth, was God's sphere of existence. See: J.M Robinson (ed), The Nag Hammadi Library, (New York: 1990).

craftworks about (ἔστρεψε τὰ ἑαυτοῦ δημιουργήματα), letting them turn from an endless beginning to a limitless end (καὶ εἴασε στρέφεσθαι ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς ἀορίστου εἰς ἀπέραντον τέλος·), for it starts where it stops. (ἄρχεται γάρ, οὖ λήγει·) Revolting as mind wished them to, the circles brought forth from the weighty elements living things without reason (for they no longer kept the word with them).(ἡ δὲ τούτων περιφορά, καθὼς ἠθέλησεν ὁ Νοῦς, ἐκ τῶν κατωφερῶν στοιχείον ζῷα ἤνεγκεν ἄλογα (οὐ γὰρ ἐπεῖχε τὸν Λόγον)). (CH. I,11).

The government of such spheres was the responsibility of Fate /Destiny (ἡ Εἱμαρμένης). As a result, Fate's jurisdiction was limited to all physical beings.

Everything is an act of fate, my child, and outside of it nothing exists among bodily entities. (Εἱμαρμένης γὰρ πάντα τὰ ἔργα, ὦ τέκνον, καὶ χωρὶς ἐκείνης οὐδέν ἐστι τῶν σωματικῶν·) Neither good or evil comes to be by chance. (οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακὸν γενέσθαι συμβαίνει) Even one who has done something fine is fated to be affected by it (εἵμαρται δὲ καὶ τὸ καλὸν ποιήσαντα παθεῖν), and this is why he does it: in order to be affected by what affects him because he has done it.(καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δρᾷ ἵνα πάθῃ ὃ πάσχει ὅτι ἔδρασε). (CH. XII,5).

Fate is an amoral power. It can be understood as a general rule or principle of cause-effect, whose function is to assure the balance and the order of the universe.

Necessity, providence and nature are instruments of the cosmos and of the order of matter (ἀνάγκη δὲ καὶ ἡ πρόνοια καὶ ἡ φύσις ὄργανά ἐστι τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τῆς τάξεως τῆς ὕλης). (CH. XII, 14).

c) The creation of the Second Son, or Man

Man was created to observe and interact with the works of God, and to discover all divine arts in the world. Hence, the necessity of multiplying across the earth so that he will be present in the whole world.

{[...] The gods} sowed the generations of humans to know the works of god (+ ἐαυτοις εσπερμολόγουν + τάς τε γενέσεις τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰς ἔργων θείων γνῶσιν); to be a working witness to nature (καὶ φύσεως ἐνεργοῦσαν μαρτυρίαν); to increase the number of mankind (καὶ πλῆθος ἀνθρώπν); to master all things under the heaven (καὶ πάντων τῶν ὑπὸ οὐρανὸν δεσποτίαν); to discern the things that are good (καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἐπίγνωσιν); to increase by increasing and multiply by multiplying. (εἰς τὸ αὐξάνεσθαι ἐν αὐξήσει). (CH. III, 3).

Throughout the contemplation of God's works, Man should be able to know his Father.

[...]The man became a spectator of god's work (θεατὴς γὰρ ἐγένετο τοῦ ἔργου τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος). He looked at it in astonishment and recognized its maker. (καὶ ἐθάνμασε καὶ ἐγνώρισε τὸν ποιήσαντα). (CH. IV, 2).

By knowing God, Man was able to distinguish himself as the manifestation of his Father's love. Man's origin was in God.

- I do not know what sort of womb mankind was born from, o Trismegistos, nor from what kind of seed. (ἀγνοῶ, ὦ Τρισμέγιστε, ἐξ οἵας μήτρας ἄνθρωπος ἐγεννήθη, σπορᾶς δὲ ποίας).

- My child, <the womb> is the wisdom and understanding in silence, and the seed is the true good. (Ὦ τέκνον, σοφία νοερὰ ἐν σιγῇ καὶ ἡ σπορὰ τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἀγαθόν)

- Who sows the seed, father? [...] (Τίνος σπείραντος, ὦ πάτερ ;)

- The will of god, my child. (Τοῦ θελήματος τοῦ θεοῦ, ὦ τέκνον). (CH. XIII, 1-2).

Indeed, by saying that Man's seed came straight from God, Man's creation is depicted as being an extraordinary moment of creation, since he came from God and not from the Craftsman (like the other living beings).

Nous, the Father of all (ὁ δὲ πάντων πατὴρ ὁ Νοῦς), who is life and light (ὢν ζωὴ καὶ φῶς), brought forth Man, the same as himself (ἀπεκύησεν Ἄνθρωπον αὐτῷ ἴσον), [...] bearing the image of his Father (τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς εἰκονα ἔχων·). It was really his own

form that God loved (ὄντως γὰρ καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἠράσθη τῆς ἰδίας μορφῆς), and he handed over to him all his creation.(παρέδωκε τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πάντα δημιουργήματα). (CH. I, 12).

In fact, God has created Man directly from his will and allowed Man to assume a condition of equality with the first son, the Cosmos. Being beloved by his Father and Brother, Man received the permission to take an active part on the creation.

> And after the man had observed what the craftsman had created with the father's help, he also wished to make some craftwork, and the father agreed to this (καὶ κατανοήτας δὲ τὴν τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ κτίσιν ἐν τῷ πυρί, ἠβουλήθη καὶ αὐτὸς δημιουργεῖν, καὶ συνεχωρήθη ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρός·). Entering the craftsman's sphere (γενόμενος ἐν τῇ δημιουργικῇ σφαίρᾳ), where he was to have all authority (ἔξων τὴν πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν), the man observed his brother's craftworks (κατενόησε τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τὰ δημιουργήματα); the governors loved the man (οἱ δὲ ἠράσθησαν αὐτοῦ), and each gave a share of his own order. (ἕκαστος δὲ μετεδίδου τῆς ἰδίας τάξεως·). (CH. I, 13).

Then, there are three major creative powers in the Hermetica: God, the Second God/ Demiurge=Cosmos and Man. They are correlated as follows:

> [...] the third living being, man, has been begotten in the image of the cosmos (τὸ δὲ τρίτον ζῷον, ὁ ἄνθρωπος, κατ᾽ εἰκόνα τοῦ κόσμου γενόμενος), [...]. Not only does he have affinity with the second God (οὐ μόνον πρὸς τὸν δεύτερον θεὸν συμπάθειαν ἔχω), but also a conception of the first. (ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔννοιαν τοῦ πρώτου·). (CH.VIII, 5).

Man is the only living being with speech/logos. This logos is reminiscent of the divine, creative Logos and is therefore useful in helping Man exercise his authority over earth. It helped Man assure his dominion over the material world and helped him to connect himself with God.

> [...] after the cosmos the second living thing is the human (ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος δεύτερον ζῷον μετὰ τόν κόσμον), who is first of mortal things and like other living things has ensoulment (πρῶτον δὲ τῶν θνητῶν, τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ζῴων τὸ ἔμψυχον ἔχει·). [...] A human soul

is carried in this way (ψυχὴ δὲ ἄνθρωπου ὀχεῖται τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον·): the mind is in the reason (ὁ νοῦς ἐν τῷ λόγῳ); the reason is in the soul (ὁ λόγος ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ), the soul is in the spirit (ἡ ψυχὴ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι·); the spirit passing through veins and arteries and blood, [...] (τὸ πνεῦμα διῆκον διὰ φλεβῶν καὶ ἀρτηριῶν καὶ αἵματος). (CH. X, 12-13).

d) On Man's double-nature

As explained previously, Man rules over the material world thanks to his Logos. This Logos had a double-purpose. Regarding Man's double-nature it is said that:

> [...] unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold (καὶ διὰ τοῦτο παρὰ πάντα τὰ ἐπὶ γῆς ζῷα διπλοῦς ἐστι ὁ ἄνθρωπος) – in the body mortal but immortal in the essential man (θνητὸς μὲν διὰ τὸ σῶμα ἀθάνατος δὲ διὰ τὸν οὐσιώδη ἄνθρωπον·). Even though he is immortal and has authority over all things, mankind is affected by mortality because he is subject to fate (ἀθάνατος γὰρ ὢν καὶ πάντων τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἔχων, τὰ θνητὰ πάσχει ὑποκείμενος τῇ εἱμαρμένῃ); thus, although man is above the cosmic framework, he became a slave within it.(ὑπεράνω ὢν τῆς ἁρμονίας ἐναρμόνιος γέγονε δοῦλος ἀρρενόθηλυς δὲ ὤν). (CH. I, 15).

Logos was a mediator between God and Man. It is placed in the intermediary zone between spiritual and material spheres. The relationship between God and his Second Son can be best illustrated by the following illustration:

Table 8: God's emanations to Man

GOD

NOUS

LOGOS

SOUL
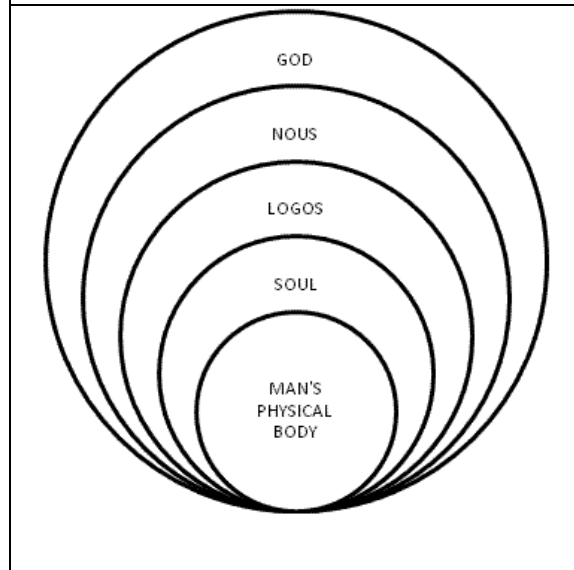
MAN'S
PHYSICAL
BODY

God created Man's soul and Cosmos prepared his body. The presence of Man in the material world is a consequence of Man's desires to help the effort of creation. Therefore, mankind flourished on earth with God's permission and blessings. Since Man was destined to rule over all other living creatures, God gave him the gift of Logos/intelligence/moral-intellectual discernment.

The gift of Logos aimed to assist Man in his double task: to master the material world and to learn how to connect to God. In this sense, his divine gift of Logos can be used in order to exercise humanity's power over creation and to pursue the development of Man's spirituality.

e) On Logos and Nous

Human reasoned speech, discernment, reason, articulated word, or logos were divine gifts to mankind and constituted a part of God's virtue.

Reasoned speech, then, is the image and mind of god, (ὁ οὖν λόγος ἐστὶν εἰκων καὶ νοῦς τοῦ θεοῦ,) as the body is the image of the idea and the idea is the image of the soul. (καὶ τὸ σῶμα δὲ τῆς ἰδέας, ἡ δὲ ἰδέα τῆς ψυχῆς). (CH. XII, 14).

Man's logos gave him authority over the material world and speechless creatures while at the same time allowing him to gather the means to leave this world and return to God's side. This is achieved through the process of developing his Nous. Logos and Nous are interconnected with God. They are the mediators between material and spiritual spheres of existence:

Reasoned speech, then, is the image and mind of god (ὁ οὖν λόγος ἐστὶν εἰκων καὶ νοῦς τοῦ θεοῦ), as the body is the image of the idea and the idea is the image of the soul (καὶ τὸ σῶμα δὲ τῆς ἰδέας, ἡ δὲ ἰδέα τῆς ψυχῆς). Thus, the finest part of matter is air, the finest air is soul, the finest soul is mind, and the finest mind is god. (Ἔστιν οὖν τῆς μὲν ὕλης τὸ λεπτομερέστατον ἀήρ, ἀέρος δὲ ψυχή, ψυχῆς δὲ νοῦς, νοῦ δὲ θεός·). And god surrounds everything and permeates everything, while mind surrounds soul, soul surrounds air, and air surrounds matter (καὶ ὁ μὲν θεὸς περὶ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντων, ὁ δὲ νοῦς περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ περὶ τὸν ἀέρα, ὁ δὲ ἀὴρ περὶ τὴν ὕλην). (CH. XII, 14).

Nous is an emanation of God. To have Nous should rather be understood as being in contact with God's will. Having Nous grants an individual the ability to be "one" with God, since they are sharing the same sphere:

Mind, O Tat, comes from the very essence of god (Ὁ νοῦς, ὦ Τάτ, ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ οὐσίας) [...]. Mind then, has not been cut off from god's essentiality (ὁ νοῦς οὖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀποτετμημένος τῆς οὐσιότητος τοῦ θεοῦ); it has expanded, as it were, like the light of the sun (ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἡπλωμένος καθάπερ τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου φῶς). In humans this mind is god (οὗτος δὲ ὁ νοῦς ἐν μὲν ἀνθρώποις θεός ἐστι·). (CH. XII,1).

The following table resumes these relationships:

Table 9: The Hermetic "triade" and its emanations
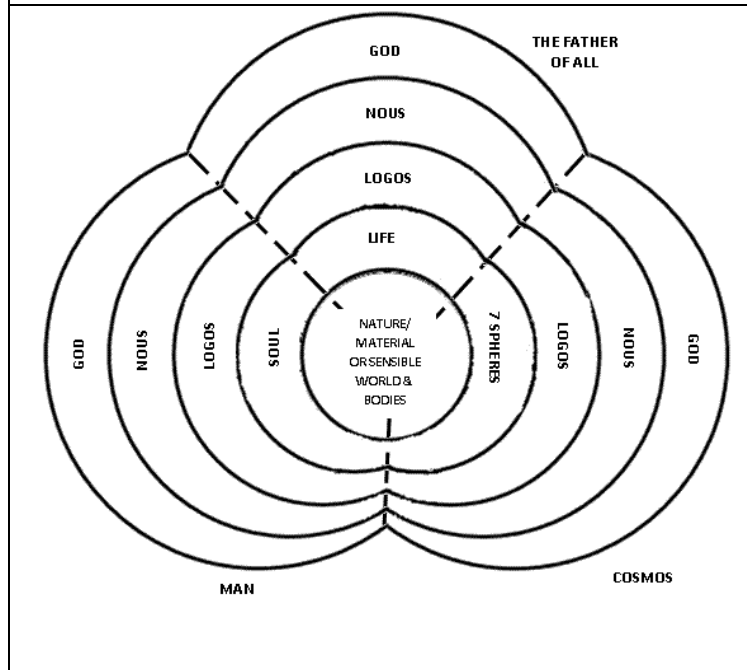
In the Armenian "Definitions" from Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepius, the same association is explained as follows:

> God: an intelligible world; world a sensible God; God: an immovable world; heaven: a movable world; man: a reasonable world. Then there are three worlds. Now the immovable world (is) God, and the reasonable world is man: for both of (these) units (are) one: God and man after the species. Consequently (there are) three worlds on the whole: two units (make up) the sensible and one (is) the intelligible; one (is) after the species, and the third one (is) after (its) fullness. All of the multiple (belongs to) the three worlds; two of them (are) visible: (namelly) the sensible and man, (that) destructible world; and the intelligible is the God: he is not visible, but evident within the visible (things). (Definitions, I, 1-2).[281]

God created all souls (real life), while the physical bodies of the creatures were in charge of the Cosmos. While God shares his Logos and Nous with the Cosmos He also sustains cosmic immortality and provides continuity for physical existence (i.e.

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[281] J. –P- Mahé, "The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepius". In: C. *Salaman, et alii. The Way of Hermes.* (London: 1999), pp. 99-124.

everything in subordination to the so-called seven spheres and Fate). Humankind functions in a similar way which resulted from God have created everyone as souls. As a result, man's body is a tool that allows him to interact with sensitive or material reality.

Conversely, only Man has a share of the divine Logos which grants him the potential to rule over the material world. This Logos also helps Man to recognise and remember his divine nature and may guide Man towards his share of the divine Nous. The Hermetical Logos is the capacity of Man to distinguish himself from other creatures and to have the conscience of God. As a result, a human Logos is the mediator between God's Nous and his soul. Man is only able to have Nous (or to "achieve" Nous, since it is an emanation from God's sphere) because he was directly created by God. The Hermetical Nous is the connection of God with humankind and is the spiritual dimension of Man himself.

A formal analysis of the elements exposed thus far shall reveal meaningful topics of interest for this research[282]. The following exercise aims to isolate specific characteristics of the relevant agents of the texts (God, Cosmos, and Man).

Table 10a: God, Cosmos and Man

Agents	Attributes	Actions	Relations
God	*The definitive goodness, truth, spirit and soul ; * Life and Light; * The cause of existence; * The glory of all	* Creator by Logos, Will, and Nous; * Created the Cosmos; * Created the elements of Nature; * Created Life/souls; * Created Man;	* He does not subsist to any of his sons; * Shared his Logos with his sons; * Offered the Nous to a few Men; * He encompasses

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[282] According to the model proposed by: J. Molino "Interpréter". In: C. Reichler (ed.) *L'interprétation des Textes*. (Paris: 1989), p. 9-52.

	things; * The divine nature; * The Father; * The original Nous and Logos giver; * Unbegotten/Unique; * Eternal;		and preserves all that exists and is always present;
Cosmos	* The First Son; * The Craftsman; * The image of the first God; * Has Nous and Logos * Begotten by God; * Immortal (sustained by God);	* Assisted in the creation using the divine Logos, and was guided by God's Nous; * Manipulation of raw material; * Control over speechless creatures; * God of Fire and Spirit (i.e. Stars); * Architect of Fate (who governs the seven spheres he ordered for giving shape to the sensible world);	* He is begotten by God and is sustained and made immortal by God; * His Logos and Nous have the same substances as God's; * Manipulator of all elements of Nature; * Ruler of the sensible World;
Man	* The Second Son; * The image of Cosmos and a conception of God; * Beloved by God and Cosmos; *Beloved by the Gods of the seven spheres; * Has Logos and Nous; * (Man's soul) was begotten by God in his own sphere; * Double nature (mortal / immortal);	* Has dominion over the world of mortals and living creatures without speech; * Suffers mortal things (for being mortal);	* Although belonging to enhance the harmony of the cosmos, Man has become a slave within it; * Subject to Destiny/ Fate (for being mortal); * May join God in His sphere due to his Nous;

God has no competition, no rivals and no threat from an Evil demiurge. The Cosmos is unable to create life or matter by himself. Therefore, his task is to manipulate and

organise what God has created and in doing so uses the divine Logos and is guided by God's Nous. Man's double condition is by no means a punishment. He is beloved by God, Cosmos and even the seven potencies (celestial spheres) who rule the sensible world. He is on earth helping his brother and father to master the creation. Indeed, humankind has a share of the divine, creative word, and, in addition, is connected to God by the action of Nous.

Thus, it is possible to synthesise the Hermetic creation with the following outline:

Table 10b: (synthesis) - God, Cosmos and Man			
Agents	God	Cosmos	Man
Attributes	Eternal and unique; The Nous and Logos, the only true creator.	The auxiliary god. In charge of giving shape and order to God's creation.	The double-natured being; part of God (as immortal), part of the Cosmos (as mortal). The only living being with Logos and Nous.
Actions	To create, love and sustain life - eternally.	To give form, plan and assist. Ordered the cosmic spheres and the rule of Fate.	With Logos: To discern between good and evil, to witness God's works, to know God, to rule over the material world. With Nous: to achieve his gnosis and rejoin God in His sphere.
Relations	He is always present. Loves His sons and the material world.	Is sustained by God. Shares Nous and Logos with God. Rules over Mortals and the sensible world. Loves God, Man and the creation.	Received Logos from God. Without Nous he is a slave of Fate and is attached to the sensible world. However, he Can be free of the sensible world by receiving Nous and rejoining God. Loves God, Cosmos and the creation.

The Cosmos acts like a Demiurge in Hermetic literature. However, Cosmos is not permitted to create more than speechless creatures (i.e. his "creation" consists in giving

form/shape/order to nature elements – which are God's creation – then together with them forming the complex physical bodies each God's soul must inhabit), and to manipulate inanimate matter. He is inferior to the first God, who is still co-responsible for the creation of life. Nonetheless, Cosmos is an auxiliary participant (as man would also be when created) in the creation process. It is interesting to compare the use of this intermediary between God and his creation with the role-played by Ptah, described by the "Memphite Theology" or "The Shabaka Stone"[283] – a text from the 25th Dynasty. Ptah was associated with the Creator's (Atum) intellect. His condition of "craftsman" – which gave him the ability to give form to raw materials and made him responsible for Atum's primordial matter, have assumed form in a manifestation of existence.

According to Memphite Theology, Ptah himself is not the creative god, but the intermediary between the act of creative thought and speech. He was worshipped as the creator of the physical world. The creation of life itself was a consequence of the divine Word. As written in the "Shabaka Stone": "Evolution into the image of Atum occurred through the heart and occurred through the tongue". The text implies the theory of creation by command. All gods that took part in the creative process were organs or parts of Atum. They represented faculties commanded by Atum in a similar form, which is described by the Hermetic texts. In the Shabaka Stone, as the heart of Atum and the tongue of the Sun-god, Thoth commanded thoughts into being and then the creative power of Thoth was created by utterance into the physical world. Therefore, the Second god or hermetic Demiurge would be more compatible with this Egyptian demiurge than the Stoic or Platonic ones.

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[283] Created or copied under the rule of pharaoh Shabaka, 25th Dynasty (ca. 710 – 698 B.C). This text is known as "the Shabaka Stone". See: M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature – I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms. (Berkeley: 2006). Remarks on the "Memphite Theology": p.51. Lichtheim believes that the language is archaic and resembles that of the Pyramid Texts. Therefore, the original might be a work of the Old Kingdom (c.a 2650- 2135 B.C).

Another point of interest is the presence of love as the ultimate motivating force for creation. Love guided God towards the manifestation of existence. Love made Cosmos an assistant for the creative process, and love motivated humanity to join nature and help God and Cosmos govern the world. Even the so-called spheres were ruled by friendly potencies who loved Man since the beginning. These potencies or gods must be understood as being the Egyptian Pantheon instead of any Gnostic interpretations such as both Valentinian and non-Valentinian systems. Gnostic systems depict the creative god as being malicious and evil, and the spheres as being a hostile field. In the Hermetica, those divine spheres are subject to Fate, which is a universal law of cause-effect rather than any evil doer intent upon harming humanity. The Hermetica defended the cosmos by claiming that everything on the cosmos was good. Evil was limited to mortality and therefore, to Earth, as Hermes taught to Asclepius.

> As I have said, vice must dwell here below since this is its native land, not the cosmos, as some will blasphemously claim. (τὴν γὰρ κακίαν ἐνθάδε δεῖν οἰκεῖν εἶπον ἐν τῷ ἑαυτῆς χωρίον οὖσαν· χωρίον γὰρ αὐτῆς ἡ γῆ, οὐχ ὁ κόσμος, ὡς ἔινιοί ποτε ἐροῦσι βλασφημοῦντες). (CH. IX, 4).

This message seems to be a direct condemnation of those Gnostic beliefs about an evil Cosmos, gods, archons and demiurge. Therefore, despite being a doctrine with a gnosis, The Hermetica should not be easily reduced to a Gnostic doctrine. The general antagonism between Gnosticism and Hermetism was noted also by early Christian fathers like Tertullian of Carthage, who quoted clearly from the philosophical

Hermetica in his tractate against Gnostics, called *Adversus Valentinianos,* and in another work, called the *De anima*, both composed around 206 – 207 A.D.[284]

The *Corpus Hermeticum* is an anthology of dialogues[285], promoting an association among gods who sometimes act as masters and other times as pupils. These dialogues display a combination of different degrees of mythic narratives and hymns. Alternatively, the sayings are mostly derived from Greek philosophy, connecting the "self-knowledge" or *gnosis* with questions of cosmology and anthropology. According to Betz – in the analysis of the first Book of CH.:

> This question (i.e the Hermetic *gnosis*), in turn, raises the issue of theodicy, an issue that is deeply embedded in both Egyptian and Greek tought. Proceeding from the basis, the older Egyptian creation is then examined. This examination takes two steps: (A) the recalling of the myth by the way of an ecstatic vision. That re-visioning of the myth then constitutes the narrative of the cosmogony, anthropology and eschatology; (B) the dialog critically reinterpretes the myth in accordance with Gnostic concerns.[286]

The old Egyptian creation myth was re-created by the Hermetic narrative. This update aims to establish a correspondence between Greek philosophy (and its maxims, such as "know yourself") and the Hermetic (and Gnostic) re-formulated use of Greek philosophy. Since Gnostics and Hermetists were engaged in a similar hermeneutical procedure, this can be used explain the motivation which led Gnostics to develop interest in the Hermetica, and included some of them in the so-called Nag Hammadi Library. The Hermetic God was like the God of Stoicism, omnipresent and omniscient

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[284] See: G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*. (Princeton: 1993), p. 198. Both treatises will be debated in our third chapter.

[285] The Dialogue is a recurrent style for the Egyptian literature of wisdom/instruction, as well as to Plato's discourses. Note that CH. III and CH. VII remained only as fragments. CH XIV is a letter from Hermes to Asclepios, and CH XVIII is a political essay, but it is rather deemed to be fake/non-Hermetic.

[286] H. D. Betz, "The Question of "Poimandres." In: S. Giversen, *et alii* (eds.) *The Nag Hammadi texts in the History of Religions – Proceedings of the International Conference at the Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen, September 19-24, 1995 – On occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Nag Hammadi Discovery*, p.91.

through the material cosmos. In Gnosticism, by contrast, God was transcendent, and the physical universe was an evil place created by an evil Demiurge.[287]

Hermetic ethics celebrated the divine within the world; Gnostic ethics were abstemious, ascetic efforts to escape from the world.[288] Therefore, Hermetism is not reduced to a variant of Gnosticism; nor is it intended to be a philosophical system. Hermetism is a movement or doctrine with a well-explained "gnosis" and maintains an emphasis on eliminating the obscurity of their teachings.

2.4 Hermetic Logos, Nous and Gnosis

Hermetists adopted a vast amount of Greek philosophic concepts and terminology. Occasionally, these newfound Greek concepts and terminology assumed entirely new meanings, due to their application in such a specific context. However, the acceptance of these new meanings is, at times, unintentional. Those that receive the Hermetic discourse are not necessarily aware that they are dealing with new interpretations or even that they are actually proposing new interpretations in their discourse. They actually believed that they were reproducing the Greek interpretation of a "pure Egyptian ancient wisdom". However, any interpretation implies a certain degree of adaptation and innovation. The symbolic misunderstandings dwell in the difference between "what they do" and "what they believe they are doing". Due to these "misunderstandings", new meanings are incorporated without being recognised as

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[287] See: R. van den Broek, "Gnosticism and Hermetism in Antiquity: Two Roads to Salvation." In: R. van den Broek, W. J. Hanegraaff, (eds.) *Gnosis and Hermeticism: from Antiquity to Modern Times*. (New York: 1998), pp. 1-20.
[288] See: J.-P. Mahé, "Gnostic and Hermetic Ethics." In: R. van den Broek, W. J. Hanegraaff, (eds.) *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times*. (New York: 1998), pp. 21-36.

"new". Thus, if it is true that Hermetism tries to explain non-Greek concepts in Greek, such "misunderstandings" become impossible to avoid. This is a byproduct of the ambiguity of many Greek concepts. Moreover, many Egyptian concepts had no equivalent in Greek, and therefore, it was necessary to use different Greek terms in order to improve upon the visualization of those terms.

Following the logic of Plotinus's criticism of the Gnostic misuse of Greek concepts, this section aims to debate some Hermetic uses of Greek concepts. The *Corpus Hermeticum*, a Greek composition, used a rational argument in the Greek language in order to show Greek-speakers that anyone could follow the path towards individual *gnosis* – or knowledge of God. This *gnosis* promised immortality to all those who committed themselves to the teachings. Plotinus' Gnostic generalisation accuses Gnosticism of misinterpreting original Platonic concepts. Festugière already exposed the relationship between Hermetica and Greek philosophical concepts.[289] Therefore, this work will only focus on the Hermetic concepts of Nous, Logos and Gnosis and their new meanings. As pointed out in the last section, God was one with Nous and Logos. Nous and Logos were also present in Man. Therefore, the Hermetic *gnosis* was related to these two faculties. These concepts must be further explored in order to fully comprehend and demystify the Hermetic argument.

a) On the Hermetic Nous and Logos

As previously discussed, hermetical creation is a process, which articulates God, His Nous: an emanation from His essence – if He has any - which produces will (the passive

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[289] See: A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d`Hermès Trismégiste I.* (Paris, 1944).

form of command) + His Logos, which in turn grants God the command of His Nous. Therefore, Logos acts as the mediator between that which is inside God (the will of God comes from Nous) and this material world. This Hermetic perspective is particularly close to the Egyptian world-view.

In Heliopolis, as in Memphis[290], a primitive god has created all other divinities and living beings in the universe. The first two divinities that were created were Thoth and Horus, "The heart and Tongue of Ptah."[291] Next, Ptah created Atum and the Ennead of Egyptian gods by the will of his heart, and the utterance of his word. The next creation of the heart and utterance from Ptah was the *mdw-nṯr* "the divine/sacred words" – which was a product from Thoth and Horus. According to the Egyptian Heliopolitan tradition[292], the world was created by the combined action of thought (*sjꜣ*) – *sjꜣ* is the perception of what needs to be done - and Utterance (*ḥw*) – as the power to make what needs to be done happening through speech. Such command was supported by Maat – connected to the sense of establishing order where it was not before) and magic power (*ḥkꜣ* – in the sense of assuring the effectiveness of the speech, so that the desired result may be achieved). In Egypt, *Ḥkꜣ* was also the goddess personifying extraordinary, supernatural powers or magic. She appears as a child of Re, sometimes as his personification. *Ḥkꜣ* was associated with the powers mastered by Gods and Pharaohs.

Although magic could be expressed in many different ways and different kinds of magicians existed, Egyptian magic was closely related to the expression of an idea (*sjꜣ*) through creative speech (*ḥw*). In this process of creation through the Great Word, Heka

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[290] The Memphite tradition is a little different than the Heliopolitan trandition. The Memphite theology replaced/interpreted *sjꜣ* by the thought produced by the heart and *Ḥw* the physical expression of will. See: S. Bickel, *La Cosmogonie égyptienne avant le Nouvel Empire*. In: OBO 134. (Fribourg: 1994).

[291] See: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature – I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*. (Berkeley: 2006).

[292] See : S. Bickel, *op.cit.*

does not represent the power of conception (taking place in the mind-heart), nor its utterance (taking place on the tongue). Rather, it represented the capacity to break any possible resistance to the expressed (*ḥw*) will (*sjз*).

The view of Thoth as a wise, creator god using his demiurgic reason or logos is very similar to the Greek concept of a demiurgic Nous. However, the Egyptian sense of Sia-Thoth as reasoning god did not correlate to the Stoic world-ruling Nous concept. Here the Heart (Thoth) and the Tongue (Horus) were not thought of as independent divinities. One mythological explanations offered by Boylan is that: "Ptah is the primitive deity: all the other gods are, therefore, his members and organs. Thoth is the thinking heart, just as Horus is the commanding tongue of Ptah".[293]

It was a characteristic of Egyptian Theology that held that there were different degrees of fusion between two or more divinities. Being the God of all knowledge, Thoth is naturally the most easily connectable to the god Sia[294]. According to Boylan:

> Though Sia is at different times, identified with very various gods, he is identified far more frequently with Thoth than with any other. Throughout the huge body of texts of the Greco-Roman period, the identification of Thoth with Sia is so frequent that Sia is simply a second name of Thoth.[295]

Horapollo Niliacus, a reputed Egyptian mage from the fourth century A.D commented on the relationship between Thoth-Hermes and the heart in his tractate *Hieroglyphica*:

> The Heart

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[293] P. Boylan, *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt* (Oxford:1922), p. 113. See also: H. Spiess, *Der Aufstieg eines Gottes – Untersuchungen zum Gott Thot bis zum Beginn des Neuen Reiches.* (Hamburg: 1991).

[294] The deification of Sia means the personification of understanding and perception. It is not the sense of a self-revelation of a god – what could identify Sia to Logos. As Boylan explains: "The reason or perception of any god might be thus personified – and not merely the understanding of a primitive deity." (*Op.cit.*, p. 105).

[295] *Ibidem*, p. 106.

> When they wish to denote the heart, they draw an ibis. For this animal is sacred to Hermes, lord of every heart and reason, since the ibis is likes the heart itself. Concerning this the talk is great among the Egyptians. (Hieroglyphica I, 36). [296]

Graeco-Roman lore also recognised Thoth's mastery over words. In *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus called Thoth-Hermes "the god in charge of the word/logos" (Θεὸς ὁ τῶν λόγων ἡγεμών). Iamblichus also named Nous and Logos as primordial elements to creation.

> Mettant au-dessus intellect et raison comme étant à part soi, ils leur font oeuvrer les êtres du devenir. Νοῦν τε καὶ λόγον προστησάμενοι καθ᾽ ἑαυτοὺς ὄντας, οὕτω δημιουργεῖσθαί φασι τὰ γιγνόμενα· (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* VIII, 4).

According to Broze and van Liefferinge, Hermetism assimilated the Egyptian metaphor that regarded the heart as the symbol of the creative intelligence/ will of the demiurge as the logos reports to the demiurge's creative word.[297] The hermetical creation determined that God's sphere is not apart from the others. All the others are actually different emanations from Him. That is why He is always present, and how Nous works as His channel. There are, by no means, pluralities of Nous but that of God, according to the Hermetica. By receiving *logos*, Man attained the ability to observe the Father's works and use this experience to learn about God or to recognise Him. Logos allows man to know God if he chooses to live in accordance to His Will/ Nous. For those who choose this virtuous way of life, God rewards with the capacity of connection

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[296] G. Boas (transl.), *The Hieroglyphs of Horapollo*. (Princeton: 1993).

[297] M. Broze, C. van Liefferinge, "L'Hermès commun du prophète Abamon." In : Religions Mediterranéennes et Orientales de l'Antiquité BdE 135, (Le Caire : 2002), pp.43. The authors say : "Le cœur est dans l'anthropologie sémitique en général, le siège de l'activité de l'intellect. Dans les écrits gnostiques et hermétiques, cœur et intellect sont fréquemment associés". See also: E. Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*. (Copenhagen: 1984).

with his Will / Nous. Thus, the human logos and soul were both divine gifts, and are a part of man. However, before accessing Nous, Man must earn it:

> God shared reason among all people, O Tat, but not mind (τὸν μὲν οὖν λόγον, ὦ Τάτ, ἐν, πᾶσι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐμέρισε τὸν δὲ νοῦν οὐκέτι), [...]. 'For what reason, then, did god not share mind with all of them, my father?'(- Διὰ τί οὖν, ὦ πάτερ, οὐ πᾶσιν ἐμέριδε τὸν νοῦν ὁ θέος;) 'He wanted it put between souls, my child, as a prize for them to contest. (- Ἠθέλησεν, ὦ τέκνον, τοῦτον ἐν μέσῳ ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὥσπερ ἄθλου ἱδρῦσθαι). (CH. IV, 3).

The Hermetica defined Nous as a divine prize to special Men. The *corpora* of the so-called philosophical Hermetica were actually conceived as a literary source for moral instruction. However, the use of Greek nomenclature dragged the contents of these texts into philosophical speculation. Therefore, the Hermetic use of Logos and Nous lent new meanings to the text. The Greek receptor was able to recognise the former Greek definition for Logos, Nous and nonetheless included the Hermetic sense as another valid perspective. The Hermetica teach that there is a correct or moral way to use Logos and Nous:

> Notice this also, my child, that to mankind – but to no other mortal animal – god has granted these two things, mind and reasoned speech, which are worth as much as immortality. (- Κἀκεῖνο δὲ ὅρα, ὦ τέκνον, ὅτι δύο ταῦτα τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ὁ θεὸς παρὰ πάντα τὰ θνητὰ ζῷα ἐχαρίσατο τόν τε νοῦν καὶ τὸν λόγον, ἰσότιμα τῇ ἀθανασίᾳ). [Mankind also has the speech that he utters.]([τὸν δὲ προφορικὸν λόγον ἔχει]) If he uses theses gifts as he should, nothing will distinguish him from the immortals. (τούτοις δὲ εἴ τις χρήσαιτο εἰς ἃ δεῖ, οὐδὲν τῶν ἀθανάτων διοίσει·); instead, when he has left the body, both these gifts will guide him to the troop of the gods and the blessed. (μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος ὁδηγηθήσεται ὑπὸ ἀμφοτέρων εἰς τὸν τῶν θεῶν καὶ μακάρων χορόν). (CH. XII, 12).

The correct use of these divine gifts is the path to proving oneself worthy of immortality. Creating a sense of moral duty caused the necessity of re-evaluating the

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meanings of Logos and Nous in the Hermetica. As a result, these concepts were updated due to the process of re-interpretation, which was co-dependent upon the context.

b) The Hermetica as a channel to Graeco-Egyptian concepts

The Hermetic association of Nous and Logos is similar to the Egyptian creation by *sjꜣ* (Thought/ will of the heart) and *ḥw* (Utterance) and *ḥkꜣ* (magic, or the efficacy of the creative power).

When the Hermetica describe in Greek that *sjꜣ*-thought = Nous, and *ḥw*-utterance = Logos are the powers in charge of creation, how does this not speak to the Greek concepts of νοῦς-mind and λόγος-speech? Moreover, by presenting this Hermetic perspective of Thought/Nous and Utterance/Logos, how can one assure the correct presentation of the Egyptian complexity regarding such concepts? Since Greeks had a long debate concerning Nous[298] and Logos[299], how can one conciliate the Egyptian and Greek differences by using the same words? Such troubles of communication were solved in a most simplistic fashion: it was merely admitted as part of the texts' nature and then incorporated in between the lines of the work.

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[298] For instance, Homer classified as Nous all kind of human intellectual process. To the pre-Socratics it became more canonized as the reason in opposition to sense perception. Anaxagoras defined Nous as some mechanical force responsible for giving order to the original chaos, provoking the beginning to the cosmos. Plato said that it was rational, immortal and part of human soul. Aristotle added that there was a passive and an active Nous, being both parts interdependent and complementary one to another for they were in charge of two different ways of knowledge. The Stoics believed that it was the same as logos; end encompassed the human reason, as part of a cosmic mind. Plotinus claimed that Nous was an emanation of a divine being. See: F. Buddensiek *"Nous"*. In: Ch. Horn, Ch. Rapp: *Wörterbuch der antiken Philosophie.* (München: 2002), pp. 297- 301.

[299] Heraclitus established logos as the source for the fundamental order of the cosmos. The sophists used the term as a general synonym of discourse, while Aristotle defined logos as the rational discourse. The Stoics identified logos as being the divine principle of life, present all over the cosmos. After the Hellenization, Philo of Alexandria adopted the term to interpret Judaism. The early Christians did the same and still, identified Jesus as the manifestation of the divine logos. See: M. Frede, G. Striker (eds.), *Rationality in Greek Thought.* (Oxford: 1996).

My teacher, Hermes - often speaking to me in private, sometimes in the presence of Tat (Ἑρμῆς μὲν γὰρ ὁ διδάσκαλός μου, πολλάκις μοι διαλεγόμενος καὶ ἰδίᾳ τοῦ Τάτ ἐνίοτε παρόντος,) – used to say that those reading my books would find their organization very simple and clear when, on the contrary, it is unclear and keeps the meaning of its words concealed (ἔλεγεν ὅτι δόξει τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσί μου τοῖς βιβλίοις ἁπλουστάτη εἶναι ἡ σύνταξις καὶ σαφής, ἐκ δὲ τῶν ἐναντίων ἀσαφὴς οὖσα καὶ κεκρυμμένον τὸν νοῦν τῶν λόγων ἔχουσα); furthermore, it will be entirely unclear (he said) when the Greeks eventually desire to translate our language to their own and thus produce in writing the greatest distortion and unclarity. (καὶ ἔτι ἀσαφεστάτη, τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὕστερον βουληθέντων τὴν ἡμετέραν διάλεκτον εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν μεθερμηῦσαι, ὅπερ ἔσται τῶν γεγραμμένων μεγίστη διστροφή τε καὶ ἀσάφεια). (CH. XVI, 1).

The Egyptian perception of the superiority of their language is a premise of their magical thought. Secrecy was a constant principle of Egyptian priestly life. Translation of original texts was taboo. It was a way to corrupt their true meaning, and by replacing the original Egyptian sound, the effect of the magic would be lost. Translating a sacred text could also mean giving the enemy the efficacy of the ritual word, since the word was not a mere expression but also an act.[300]

But this discourse, expressed in our paternal language, keeps clear the meaning of its words. (ὁ δὲ λόγος τῇ πατρῴᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἑρμηνευόμενος ἔχει σαφῆ τὸν τῶν λόγων νοῦν). The very quality of the speech and the < sound > of Egyptian words have themselves the energy of the objects they speak of. (καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς φωνῆς ποιὸν καὶ ἡ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ... ὀνομάτων ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἔχει τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῶν λεγομένων). (CH. XVI, 2).

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[300] M. Detienne, *Les Maîtres de Verité dans la Grèce Archaïque*. (Paris: 1967), pp. 51- 80. Greeks were aware of the issue regarding the "barbarian's" mistrust of translations of their native knowledge into Greek. See: Plato, Cratile, 385 C - 390E; Iamblichus de Mysteriis VI, 7. See also: J. Dielemann, *Priests, Tongues and Rites*. (Leiden, Boston: 2005), p.81: "Secrecy constitutes a complexe social arena in which the members of the concealing party are characterised by a tension between the social obligation to conceal the information and the desire to reveal it in order to gain social prestige for oneself. (...) Given the desire of the dominand Greco-Roman culture to share in the secret of the knowledge and divine revelations of the Egyptian priesthood, such a sociological model of concealment might be a useful heuristic tool for situating the encrypted scripts in their textual and social context."

This passage portrays the Egyptian idiom as being capable of giving an unusual power to the objects it describes. Indeed, Iamblichus defines the general Graeco-Roman perception of the power of Egyptian language in his definition of theurgy, the magical virtues of the Egyptian language, and in general, the inherent virtue of each original language in opposition to translations.[301] However, note that the subject of this Hermetic discourse is the process of teaching itself, and in this context, there is a discussion on the verbal articulation of Egyptian language in comparison to Greek. In Egyptian, *mdw* refers to the spoken word rather than the written symbol (*drf*). Asclepius himself must be referring to the capacity of *mdw* to change into *mdw nṯr* or sacred/divine words. The *mdw nṯr* assumed a magical and creative effect when used as in, for instance, the ritual *formulae* and was connected to the divine power present in the hieroglyphs. During the Graeco-Roman era, *mdw nṯr* was already the accepted word for hieroglyphs. Note, however that Egyptians had a clear distinction between written and spoken words. According to Boylan,

> There is no lack of other words to express 'hieroglyphs' in Egyptian. The most familiar of these terms is *drf*, or better, "*drf* of Thoth". An expert in hieroglyphs is 'he who knows the *drf* of Thoth' (Berlin 7316: XVIII th. Dyn.). 'Hieroglyphics' meaning an inscription written in hieroglyphs, would be rendered "*sš Ḏḥwti*" (Leiden I, 350, *recto* 4, 23) or "*sš n Ḏḥwti*" (Cairo, 20539, etc.).[302]

With regard to the Hermetica, how would the Greek translation produce distortions and unclarity? It seems possible to assume that this possibility was related to the necessity of translating important Egyptian concepts into Greek. The translation of abstract Egyptian concepts would demand the use of abstract Greek concepts. This gap

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[301] C.f. *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* VII, 5

[302] P. Boylan, *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt.* (Oxford: 1922), p. 94.

between how Egyptians and Greeks dealt with their equivalent concepts could create obstacles to the understanding. However the Hermetic doctrine generally disdained the use of words. The Hermetica generally classify human words as empty of truth, since they give false virtues to matter. In CH. II, 16, it is said how everyone irresponsibly uses terms as "good" to classify what is perceived, when the true good is in God. In CH. VII, 6 Hermes says that only the ignorant refer to men as "beautiful" or "good", for he is not capable of understanding that the truly beauty and goodness are in God. In CH. VIII, 1 Hermes explains that "mortality" is also a meaningless word, since death was an illusion. It was impossible to destroy any part of Cosmos – an immortal being. Then, how could anyone manage to learn the truth, if the words were full of misunderstandings capable of leading one to mistakes? The teaching of CH.X, 5 stated that only the silence of God – the nullification of one's material perceptions (i.e. sensory faculties and social conventions), which are considered by Man`s language to mean "reality", would one be allowed to understand the 'truth'.

Thus, the Hermetic doctrine was not concerned with the Greek idiom – since any human verbal communication system was misplaced in relation to God's truth - but also with the Greek philosophy as language – i.e. the strategy used to debate/transmit abstract concepts. Greek philosophy was defined in the Hermetica as being unable to reach the full understanding of Egyptian thought. Asclepios disdains the lack of energy resulting from the limited scope of Greek words:

> [...] for the Greeks have empty speeches, O king, that are energetic only in what they demonstrate, and this is the philosophy of the Greeks, an inane foolosophy [SIC] of speeches. (Ἕλληνες γάρ, ὦ βασιλεῦ, λόγους ἔχουσι κενοὺς ἀποδείξεων ἐνεργητικούς, καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν Ἑλλήνων φιλοσοφία, λόγων ψόφος). We by contrast, use not speeches but sounds that are full of action. (ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐ λόγοις χρώμεθα, ἀλλὰ φωναῖς μεσταῖς τῶν ἔργων). (CH. XVI, 2).

The expression "sounds full of action" may not be literally understood. It simply refers to the "efficacy" of the Egyptian way of transmitting knowledge. Asclepios is not debating Egyptian magic or rituals[303]; rather he critiques Philosophy as a vehicle of moral instruction. The Egyptian instruction/teaching literature – or *sbꜣy.t*, "written teaching" had a different strategy on how to transmit the knowledge. It followed usually a narrative structure of a monologue spoken by a father to his son - a characteristic also present in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

This aims to the importance of the actual words spoken by the father. Not only is this a "good" discourse because it concerns itself with what people ought to do to live a balanced life (namely Maat), but the dialogue is presented in accomplished, excellent way. The spoken words have *intrinsic value* because truth and justice (Maat) are present in them. The goals of the spoken words are reached and results in them, at the very least, lingering in the memory of those who heard them. Egyptian sapient education was based on hearing the discourse of Maat. To hear it was to let the real meaning of the words enter one's heart. This allowed one to make (if hearing was accomplished) a perfect copy of what was heard and the capability of reproduction. Note that the Egyptian verb *šdj.t* "to read" also meant "to recite". Indeed, as a discourse is written down, the process of "reading" also implies the combination of "reciting" and "hearing".

In the Old Kingdom, *sbꜣy.t* was primarily addressed to aristocratic circles. In the New Kingdom, when a new "ideal man" was presented as being entirely modest with no material interests, the effect was felt as the literature became popular. The instructions

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[303] In CH. VII, 7 Hermes mock religious processions and rituals as futile. Indeed Hermes reprehended Asclepios in *ad Ascl*. 41 for asking for burning incence while praying to God.

embody the pragmatic wisdom of the upper-class Egyptian, and promote the code of the Old Kingdom nobleman. This nobleman belonged to the wealthy class, initiated the temple service, was able to read and write, and was part of the administration of Pharaoh and often were local governors, high priests, and members of court or Pharaoh's family. The goal here is to transmit vital information concerning Maat by means of a good example. This example is also a discourse by those who "know Maat". The Hermetica have a similar objective as they use Hellenistic/Hellenized popular gods as moral models to inspire their audience. They are written in Greek so that the entire known world (*oikoumene*) may have access to them. The Hermetica also used philosophy since it was a unique way of systematizing moral teachings in a recognizable way to the Greek/Hellenized mentality. Finally, they tried to transmit Egyptian moral or the Maat-code in order to achieve the same social, spiritual and individual order that the *sbꜣy.t* promoted. As Hermes explained to Tat,

> The hearer must be one mind with the speaker, my son, and one spirit as well (Συννοεῖν δεῖ οὗ τέκνον τὸν ἀκούοντα τῷ λέγοντι, καὶ συμπνέειν); he must have hearing quicker than the speech of the speaker.(καὶ ὀξυτέρα ἔχειν τὴν ἀκοὴν τῆς τοῦ λέγοντος φωνῆς·). (CH. X, 17).

However, there are some differences between the Egyptian instructions and philosophical Hermetica. Egyptian wisdom is ethical, social and engaged with current life here and now. The Hermetica are individualistic, theological, reflective and invoke the inner, mystical initiation during life on Earth. They also show an influence from Dionysian and Orphic traditions. Moreover, Hermetism is ascetical and rejects matter and the world. According to Fowden:

> [...] the Hellenized Egyptian wrote in the Greek language, to whose expressiveness he was sensitive, and thought in Greek categories, whose subtlety he exploited. But once he had been moulded by that culture, he became first its bearer, then its arbiter.[304]

Asclepios explained that translating the Hermetic doctrine to a different system of teaching created unnecessary complications and misinterpretations. This is because the use of philosophy takes the attention away from the moral subjects and into a debate about the use of words as concepts. The translation of abstract Egyptian concepts, such as "Maat", into Greek language caused abstract Greek concepts to be updated. Since these Greek and Egyptian concepts were represented as homonyms in Greek language, they became mixed with Greek abstract concepts.

They also became new aspects of Greek concepts instead of being understood as original and independent Egyptian concepts. Thus, this passage defines philosophy as being incapable of producing the correct interpretation of the Egyptian way of thinking. Egyptian thought had no formal separation between mental and magical operations.[305] Therefore, by talking about the power of the sounds made by Egyptian words, the subject of this criticism is not the Greek language as a symbol of Greek/foreign culture. What is in debate here is the magic and creative power of what one expresses by words *versus* philosophy. Philosophy was not able to produce any kind of transcendental effect as it was restricted to the use of words for the intellectual interpretation of the meanings and context of what has been written. According to Lévy-Strauss[306], when an image is transformed into a sign, it assumes an abstract dimension, which can be used to produce

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[304] G. Fowden. *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton: 1993), p. 73.

[305] For further studies on non-philosophic thoughts and the analysis of the category of causality, see: L. Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive.* (Paris: 1960). For further analysis of the category of supernatural, see: L. Lévy-Bruhl, *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive.* (Paris: 1963).

[306] C. Lévy-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage.* (Paris: 1962).

a general thought. A mythical thought, though still connected to images, is capable of establishing abstract relations, analogies and comparisons. Philosophy creates its own instruments (hypotheses, theories). Indeed, as a system the Hermetica determined that without believing – an emotional faculty - it was not possible to know God.

> If you are mindful, Asclepius, these things should seem true to you, but they will be beyond belief if you have no knowledge. (ταῦτα σοι, Ἀσκληπιέ, ἐνοοῦντι, ἀληθῆ δόξειεν, ἀγνοοῦντι δὲ ἄπιστα.) To understand is to believe, and not to believe is not to understand. (τὸ γὰρ νοῆσαί ἐστι τὸ πιστεῦσαι, ἀπιστῆσαι δὲ τὸ μὴ νοῆσαι.) Reasoned discourse does < not > get to the truth, but mind is powerful, and, when it has been guided by reason up to a point, it has the means to get < as far as > the truth. (ὁ γὰρ λόγος οὐ φθάνει μέχρι τῆς ἀληθείας, ὁ δὲ νοῦς μέγας ἐστὶ καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου μέχρι τινὸς ὁδηγηθεὶς φθάνειν ἔχει < ἕως > τῆς ἀληθείας). (CH. IX, 10).

This passage subordinates Logos to Nous. As the reason-Logos reflects the intellectual capacity of Man. Reason produces a discourse that can lead one to the ultimate understanding of almost everything. However, reason alone cannot be enough to reach the truth of God. This transcendental truth must be reached by Nous, which means, by spiritual/moral achievements. This perception of a greater truth beyond the sensorial capacities also influenced the Neo-Platonism of Iamblichus:

> [...] Écoute donc, toi aussi, selon líntelligence des Égytiens (Αἰγυπτίων νοῦν), línterprétation intellectuelle des symbols, en abandonnand l'image des elements symboliques qui vient de l'imagination et de l'ouïe, pour t'élever à la verité intellectuelle (νοερὰν ἀλήθειαν). (de Mysteriis VII, 2).[307]

S. J. Édouard des Places (transl.), *Jamblique – Les Mystères d'Égypte*. (Paris: 1989), p.189.

In a different sense to what happens in philosophy, there is no opposition between rational and emotional logics.[308] The major problem in translating Egyptian thought into Greek words is the Greek separation of reason and emotion as two distinct and even antagonist categories. To the passage above, this was a flaw of Greek idiom and thought. Thus, Egyptian thought can find some compatibility with Greek philosophy since it aims to arrange events looking for a sense of order or meaning. It is correct that the Hermetica presented the antagonism between Egyptian and Greek idioms. However, the Hermetic discourses in *Corpus Hermeticum* use the term Logos for two kinds of speeches: the divine gift of Logos, and the ordinary speech that all humanity utters. The Hermetic Logos was related to a universal spiritual faculty. It affected all humankind equally without distinction which was in contrast to animal sounds. The gift of God may grant one's immortality if used correctly. Consequently, regardless of the original "nation" (ἔθνος) of men, they all had the same divine Logos transcending the sensorial differences of the languages of different civilizations. Hermes and Tat below debate this point:

> The other living things, my father, do they not use speech? (-Τὰ γὰρ ἄλλα ζῷα λόγῳ οὐ χρᾶται, ὦ πάτερ;)

> No, child, they use only voice, and speech differs greatly from voice. (- Οὔ, τέκνον, ἀλλὰ φωνῇ· πάμπολυ δὲ διαφέρει λόγος φωνῆς). Speech is common to all people (ὁ μὲν γὰρ λόγος κοινὸς πάντων ἀνθρώπος), but each kind of living thing has its own voice. (ἰδίᾳ δὲ ἑκάστου φωνή ἐστι γένους ζῴου).

> Even among humans, my father, does speech not differ for each nation? (- Ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὦ πάτερ, ἑκάστον κατὰ ἔθνος διάφορος ὁ λόγος;)

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[308] On the separation of Logos and Mythos and its impact in the Greek thought, see: Plato, *Gorgias* 523A; the role of Logos as interpreter of Myths, see: Plutarch, *Life of Theseus*, I,5; see also: J. –P. Vernant, *Les origines de la pensée grecque.* (Paris: 1962), and P. Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* (Paris: 1983).

It is different, my child, but humanity is one (- Διάφορος μὲν, ὦ τέκνον, εἴς δὲ ὁ ἀνθρώπος·); therefore, speech is also one, when translated it is found to be the same in Egypt and Persia and Greece.(οὕτω καὶ ὁ λόγος εἰς ἐστι καὶ μεθερμηνεύεται καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς εὑρίσκεται καὶ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ Περσίδι καὶ ἐν Ἑλλάδι). My child you seem to me to be ignorant of the excellence and importance of speech. (δοκεῖς δέ μοι, ὦ τέκνον, ἀγνοεῖν ἀρετὴν καὶ μέγεθος λόγου). (CH. XII,13).

Hence, the Hermetic Logos has abstract characteristics, which transcend human idioms, and all ordinary use of words. It was a spiritual counterpart of humankind, capable of uttering his thoughts into being. It is indeed an aspect of the Father, presented as a gift to His son. As a Greek concept, it was the mediator per excellence, but not only between Man and nature/ cosmos/ society... Man uses logos to rule the world, but also as an intermediary between himself and the Hermetic Nous. Nous is the channel to God. When an individual decides to search for God, he is able to develop a special special condition named in the Hermetic context as Nous.

Therefore, in the Hermetic literature, Nous denotes a spiritual faculty or sensibility rather than intellectual proficiency. It is also used to learn about God, and as a "tool" used to understand the differences between good and evil. It is also responsible for embedding humankind in two basic categories: those with Nous and those without Nous.

c) Hermetic gnosis: Man with Nous *versus* Man without Nous

The Hermetic *gnosis* was a combination of intellectual (Logos) and sensitive (Nous) faculties. Those who managed to coordinate intellectual and emotional reasons were able to reach God's truth, or gnosis. The sense of such *gnosis* is radically different from that defended by Gnostics and attacked by Plotinus. In Hermetic doctrine, *gnosis*

describes the path of individual salvation. *Gnosis*[309] can be translated as knowledge, but it also can be understood as "seeking to know" or "means of knowing". Hence, "*gnosis*" defines not only intellectual or technical achievements but also moral, thus, transcendental virtue.

> For all learning is incorporeal (πᾶσα γὰρ ἐπιστήμης ἀσώματος), using as instrument the mind itself, as the mind uses the body. (ὀργάνῳ χρωμένη αὐτῷ τῷ νοΐ, ὁ δὲ νοῦς τῷ σώματι). (CH. X, 10).

The Hermetic definition of *gnosis* is comparable to the Egyptian definition of wisdom and of a wise man, which was not limited to techinal knowledge. A truly wise person was the one who managed to live according to Maat and transmited its laws to the subsequent generations.

> [...] the wise is a [school] to the nobles. Those who know that he knows will not attack him, / No [crime][310] occurs when he is near; / Justice[311] comes to him distilled, / Shaped in the sayings of the ancestors. / Copy your fathers, your ancestors, / [...] / See, their words endure in books, / Open, read them, copy their knowledge, / He who is taught becomes skilled. (The Instruction to Merikare, Linies 33-36).[312]

The Hermetica explain that there are two kinds of man. One kind is concerned with his spiritual condition and another concerned with the sensible world. The first is closer to his spiritual half, the other to his material one. Those which are connected with their spiritual dimension are instinctively moved to use their Logos to search for God and at

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[309] See: H.G Liddel, R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*. (Oxford: 1966), p. 355.
[310] "Iyt". See: J. Rizzo, "*Iyt:* Une conception égyptienne de la fatalité." In : *Egypte, Afrique & Orient* n.24 (2001), p.38.
[311] Maat. *Ibidem.*
312 See: A. Gardiner. "New Literary Works from Ancient Egypt." In: The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 1 (London:1914), p.27. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature – I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*. (Berkeley: 2006), p. 99.

this moment, received the individual's Nous. Nous guided virtuous people toward God. Following Egyptian thought, the Hermetica also assimilate the Nous - here an equivalent of Sia as the perception of what needs to be done - as the truth of one's heart. Instead, the sensorial faculties, which were heart and mind, could work together to help man perceive God:

> All are sober and gaze with the heart toward one who wishes to be seen, who is neither heard nor spoken of, and who is seen not with the eyes but with mind and heart. (οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἀκουτός, οὐδὲ λεκτός, οὐδὲ ὁρατός ὀφθαλμοῖς, ἀλλὰ νῷ καὶ καρδίᾳ). (CH.VII, 2).

Those who use their Logos strictly to improve the material life - i.e. social prestige, material prosperity, physical pleasures etc. - are men without Nous. As a result, these men, regardless of how intelligent or successful they may be, remain ignorant about the truth of God, since Nous is a spiritual sensibility/ wisdom. Hermes explained that those men without Nous are potentially susceptible to the actions of demons. The nature of those demons is not clear in this source. However, in *Nag Hammadi Hermetica* [313] Asclepios asks Trismegistos about these demons:

> Trismegistus, who are these (daimons)?
>
> Asclepius, they are the ones who are called stranglers, and those who roll souls down on the dirt, and those who scourge them, and those who cast into the water, and those who cast into the fire, and those who bring about the pains and calamities of men. For these are not from a divine soul, nor from a rational soul of man. Rather, they are from terrible evil. (NHH. VI-8, 78, 30-43).

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313 Codex VI-8, 78, 30-43. That is the Coptic (fragmentary) version of ad Asclepios. See: J. M. Robinson (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library*. (New York: 1990), p.338; and J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II*. (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt: 1997), p. 562.

Hermes explained that a demon (δαίμων) was a soul (ψυχή), and when a soul is full of evil (κακία), it becomes impossible to reach the air (ἀήρ).[314] A soul in such condition was also addicted to blood and death, and suffering and despair are like <u>aliments</u> to her. A demon no longer exists as a "divine soul" (θεῖος ψυχή), and it doesn't exist as a reasoned (λογικός) human soul (ψυχή) anymore, but just for an evil existence.[315] In the Latin *ad Asclepius* Hermes explains that Man may join God or the demons according to his deeds:

> Hence, one who has joined himself to the gods in divine reverence, using the mind that joins him to the gods, almost attains divinity. And one who has been joined to the demons attains their condition. [...]Because of this, Asclepius, a human being is a great wonder, [...] for he changes his nature into god's, as if he were a god; he knows the demonic kind inasmuch as he recognizes that he originated among them; [...] (*ad Ascl.* 5-6).

It is important here to aknowledge that men without Nous are vulnerable to evil influences due to their own lack of spiritual concern:

> [...] adulteries, murders, assaults on one's father, acts of sacrilege and irreverence, suicides by hanging or falling from a cliff, and all other such works of demons. (μοιχείας, φόνους, πατροτυπίας, ἱεροσυλίας, ἀσεβείας, ἀγχόνας, κατὰ κρημνῶν καταφοράς, καὶ ἄλλα πάντα ὅσα δαιμόνων ἔργα). (CH. IX, 3).

Men without Nous are disconnected from God, so instead of receiving inspiration from the divine sphere, they are subject to other sources of influence. This passage aims to explain that evil occurs due to a "lack of God" – actually the absence of Maat/*Nous*, and therefore, the incapacity of men to connect with God. It is partially comparable with the

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[314] See our table 6: Air was the next sphere after Matter in the journey towards God. That means that demons were confined to the material world as in a "cage". In NHH. VI-8: 76, 28-29 Hermes defined "Air" as the intermediary sphere between Earth and Heaven. Demons can reach Air, but are always repelled back to Earth by a "great demon" (ⲚⲞ6 ⲚⲆⲀⲒⲘⲰⲚ) in charge of judging souls. In the Latin *ad Asclepius* 28-29, Hermes explains how this judgment occur.
[315] J. Holzhausen, *op.cit.,* p. 562.

Egyptian concept of "*iyt*" (lit. "what shall happen" - in a negative sense). It can be also translated as "fate", but always with an evil connotation. Rizzo[316] defines it as a "channel" that propagates the forces of evil in all possible forms. It is manifested in different forms including everything from bad luck and physical accidents to psychological disturbances and death. This force was attracted by various kinds of behaviour all in opposition to the principles of Maat. This was explained in "The teachings of Ptahhotep":

> The fool who does not hear, / He can do nothing at all ; / He sees knowledge in ignorance, Usefulness in harmfulness. / He does all that one detests / and is blamed for it each day; / He lives on that by one dies, / His food is distortion of speech. / His sort is known to the officials, / Who say: "A living death each day. / One passes over his doings, / Because of his many daily troubles.[317]

This disobedience to Maat, called "mental deafness" by Assmann[318] causes the corrupted person to lose Maat's protection. As a result of this process, iyt naturally assumes the gap left by Maat. That makes *iyt* a conditional fate – or castigation -, which only appears as a possibility when Maat is absent. The *Corpus Hermeticum* understands that the only way to praise God was through the virtuous behaviour:

> There is but one religion of god, and that is not to be evil. (θρησκεία δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ μία ἐστί, μὴ εἶναι κακόν). (CH. XII, 23).

In comparison to *šȝy*, a neutral relation of cause-effect with the possibility of positive and negative results, *iyt* had always maintained a bad connotation. *Iyt* was a punishment to human moral corruption. It might affect those who neglected Maat – or in the

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[316] J. Rizzo, "*Iyt*: Une conception égyptienne de la fatalité." In: *Egypte, Afrique & Orient* n.24 (2001).

[317] *"Iyt". Ibidem*, p.36. The Teachings of Ptahhotep, 17, 4-17, 9. See: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature – I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*. (Berkeley: 2006), pp.74-75

[318] J. Assmann, *Ma'at- Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Altem Ägypten.* (München: 1990). See also. J. Assmann, *Maât, l'Égypte pharaonique et l'idée de justice sociale.* (Paris: 1989).

Hermetic terminology, impious people or "men without Nous". As a result, it is suited to be the Hermetic description of the action of demons, which had *a priori* power over all those who were disconnected from God/Maat. Egyptian virtue was the observation and obedience to *mꜣꜥt* (maat). This single word was able to cover social, spiritual, cultural and magical dimensions. *Mꜣꜥt* defines justice, piety, mercy, charity, honesty, goodness, and it is the ultimate synonym of everything related to the cosmic order, like friendship, conjugal fidelity, the servant's loyalty, the king's capacity to defend his people and territory, the repetition of religious rituals and ceremonies, etc. *Mꜣꜥt* connects all things in an indestructible unity including the cosmos and the material world and society and people were seen as aspects or spheres of the order generated by *mꜣꜥt*.

On the other hand, the closest concept the Greeks had for translating *mꜣꜥt*, was δίκη. These concepts are emblematic for understanding Egyptian and Greek mentality, respectively. According to Tobin: "To maintain, [...], that δίκη in the Greek system is the equivalent of the Egyptian *mꜣꜥt* is a mistaken oversimplification."[319] Both concepts express the belief of a universal order within the cosmos. Nevertheless, *mꜣꜥt* was moral force from the beginning of creation, while δίκη was "originally amoral, receiving its moral connotations only as result of later development."[320] In order to fairly express in Greek all aspects of *mꜣꜥt*, it was necessary to use several different concepts, such as θέμις (law, order), μοῖρα (destine, fate), σοφροσύνη (moderation, self-control), ἀρετή (virtue, excellence).

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[319] V. A. Tobin, "Maꜥat and ΔIKH: Some Comparative Considerations of Egyptian and Greek Thought." In: JARCE, 24, 1987, pp. 113-121, p. 113.

[320] *Ibidem*, p. 121. For δίκη as regulatory force in the cosmos, see Parmenides, Frag. 8:13. For its "amorality" see: Iliad XVI 433ff and specially XXIV 527-33. In a comparative analysis of this concept in Aeschylus, plays, ans Plato's Republic as well, Tobin says: "it must be also admitted that (…) moral implications belong to a later period of Greek thought and are in no way inherent to the original concept of δίκη." *Ibidem*, p.115.

In the Hermetica Nous – i.e. the key to immortality - is given by God as a prize for virtuous men. In a similar way, the Ramesside (New kingdom's 19th-20th dyn.) "Instruction of Amenemope" praises Maat:

"Maat is a great gift of god, He gives it to whom he wishes."[321]

Maat promotes the reproduction of a moral code for cultural behaviour for Egyptian society. It consolidated the perception of right and wrong, good and evil, moral and immoral in the Egyptian mentality. Therefore, the Egyptian self-perception as "Egyptian" was connected to Maat, since Maat was the idea of order of the Egyptian cultural system, or "Common Sense" according to Geertz[322]. In this sense, one possible opposition to *m³ꜥ* - "righteousness" (lit. having the quality of *m³ꜥt*); was *isft* [323] - "falsehood" – antisocial behaviour: egoism, agressivity, greed, compulsive behaviour, and fight for power... In short: everything, which menaced a harmonious social relationship inside a community, granted by Maat's prescriptive solidarity between the stronger and the weaker, the rich and the poor, the wise and the simple minded, etc. *Isft* represented an evil force, which manifested itself through human behaviour which affected human relations. Hermetism has no equivalent to the universal chaos/evil represented by the Egyptian god Seth. The only mention of evil in the Hermetica belongs to the individual dimension. In fact, the *Corpus Hermeticum* defined *isft* as a product of the actions of men without Nous. Thus, evil was always a matter of individual choices:

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[321] The Instruction to Amenemope XXI, 1; 5, 6. See: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, - II: The New Kingdom*. (Berkeley: 2006), p.158.
[322] C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge*. (New York: 1983).
[323] See: J. Assmann, Ma'at – Gerechtigkeit und Unterblichkeit im Alten ägypten, (München: 1990), p.269. In some other instances, the opposition to *m³ꜥt* is also achieved with *grg* (falsehood, lie). Both *isft* and *grg* use as determinative the same small bird – *passer domesticus aegyptiacus* - (G37, in Gardner's list) meaning "evil", "injustice", "failure", "sin"...

Grudging envy comes not from on high; it forms below in the souls of people who do not possess mind. (ὁ γὰρ φθόνος οὐκ ἔνθεν ἔρχεται, κάτω δὲ συνίσταται ταῖς τὸν νοῦν μὴ ἐχόντων ἀνθρώπων ψυχαῖς). (CH. IV, 3).

Therefore, all individualistic wrongdoing is deemed by Egyptian thought as related to isft. Individualistic and materialistic behaviours are characteristics of men without Nous. These are individuals concerned only with their physical/emotional/intellectual pleasures and ambitions and are living a life without concerns regarding their own spiritual dimension. The consequences of the absence of Maat are comparable to the absence of Nous-God in the Hermetica. Both are the cause of suffering, since the Egyptians had *iyt*, and the Hermetica the so-called demons. Maat-Nous-God as piety is a soul's attribute. Thus, men without Nous were actually considered spiritually diseased creatures:

"A great disease of soul is godlessness [...] (νόσος δὲ μεγάλη ψυχῆς ἀθεότης)." (CH. XII, 3).

The Hermetic *gnosis* is the process of recognising one's spiritual dimension. It is about following the path which gives one the necessary moral virtues which one must follow to become worthy of a connection with God's mind. Therefore, all intellectual achievements would be useless in helping the the Hermetic disciple, if it was not accompanied by deep moral values. It is the moral transformation which makes an individual deserve to awaken one's own personal Nous. The only way Man can access this divine sphere is by remembering his true spiritual condition. That happens through one's Nous. To achieve the capacity of coming back to God's side, he must realize/remember his original spiritual condition and set himself free of the material world. This process of realization/remembering *is* gnosis in the Hermetic literature.

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The truth is: light and life *is* God and Father, whence Man is begotten (Εὖ φὴς λαλῶν · φῶς καὶ ζωή ἐστι ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ ἐγένετο ὁ Ἄνθρωπος). If, therefore, you realise yourself as being life and light and that you have been made out of them, you will return to life. (ἐὰν οὖν μάθῃς αὐτὸν ἐκ ζωῆς καὶ φωτὸς ὄντα καὶ ὅτι ἐκ τούτων τυγχάνεις, εἰς ζωὴν πάλιν χωρήσεις) [...] 'Let the man endowed with Nous remember himself'. ('ὁ ἔννους ἄνθρωπος ἀναγνωρισάτω ἑαυτόν'). (CH. I, 21).

The Hermetic gnosis allows the ascension of the soul, and its return to God's sphere. This transcendent virtue of the gnosis can be compared to the Egyptian *ḥkꜣ*:

I will ascend and rise up to the sky. The magic, which appertains to me is that which is in my belly. (...) It is not I who says this to you, you gods, it is magic (*ḥkꜣ*) who says this to you, you gods. I am bound for the Lower Point of Magic. (Pyramid Texts, Utterance 539 - §1318-1324).[324]

Following the Hermetic gnosis definition as a moral achievement, *ḥkꜣ* and *mꜣꜥt* were also interconnected:

My tongue is the pilot in charge of the Bark of Righteousness (Maat). [...] The soles of my feet are the two Barks of Righteousness. (Pyramid Texts Utterance 539 - § 1306 = 1315).**[325]**

Men are engaged to an endless cycle or living and death, remaining everlastingly connected to the material world/cosmos.

Do you see how many bodies we mest pass through, my child, [...] in order to hasten toward the one and only? (ὁρᾷς, ὦ τέκνον, πόσα ἡμᾶας δεῖ σώματα διεξελθεῖν, [...] ἀστέρων ἵνα πρὸς τὸν ἕνα καὶ μόνον σπεύσωμεν ;) For the good is untraversable, infinite and unending; it is also without beginning, but to us it seems to have a beginning – our

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[324] R. O. Faulkner (transl.), *The Ancient Pyramid Texts*. (Oxford: 1969).
[325] *Ibidem.*

knowledge of it. (ἀδιάβατον γὰρ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἀπέραντον καὶ ἀτελές, αὐτῷ δὲ καὶ ἄναρχον, ἡμῖν δὲ δοκοῦν ἀρχὴν ἔχειν τὴν γνῶσιν). (CH. IV, 8).

The only way to become free of this cycle is to awake their Nous, a spiritual faculty capable of connecting one's soul to God's sphere through Nous. A comparison between Man with Nous and Man without Nous can be seen in the following comparative scheme:

Table 11: Man with Nous vs. Man without Nous	
Man with Nous	Man without Nous
NOUS (CONNECTION WITH GOD) / LOGOS / SOUL / MAN'S PHYSICAL BODY	FATE (CONNECTION WITH COSMOS) / LOGOS / SOUL / MAN'S PHYSICAL BODY
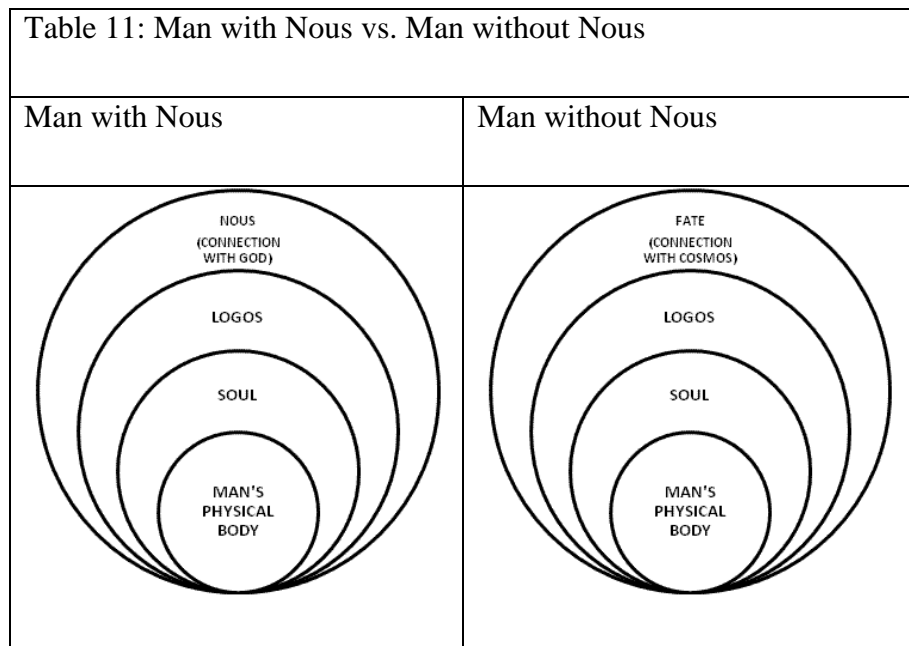
The Egyptian concept of *mꜣꜥt* is one of the sources of the Hermetic monotheistic content. This ethics/monotheism embraces all dimensions of the Hermetic worldview and is present in the sense of gnosis. The Hermetic sense of gnosis is an ethic code rather than a mysterious anthology of spells and formulas. Hermetism preached that intellectual development must be always combined with spiritual achievement.

Hence, Logos alone cannot grant immortality to mankind. The ordinary use of Logos makes Man the ruler of the material world. Its "other" use brings man to Nous and therefore into contact with God. All those who chose a non-spiritual existence have no

Nous. They are directly or indirectly responsible for evil actions and behaviours throughout the material world. Those who have no Nous are disconnected from the higher transcendent spheres of existence and therefore, must remain attached to the Cosmos in the realm of ordinary creation. Conversely, Nous grants immortality to the truly wise ones, who, after leaving their bodies, may join the Father in His sphere.

2.5 Hermetic receptivity to Egyptian concepts

To the Graeco-Roman civilization, Egypt remained idealised as a land of wisdom. The so-called *Interpretatio Graeca* was continuously applied in order to maintain the syncretistic equivalences between Greek and non-Greek deities. In this environment, the Egyptian god Thoth – who by this time was particularly popular due to his role as master of magic – was already identified as the Greek god Hermes. The Egyptian Hermes received the epithet "Trismegistos", which may have an Egyptian origin. The figure of Thoth-Hermes Trismegistos also became the allegorical author of a huge volume of magical and theological treatises. Some of these texts came in the form of spells and oracles while others were philosophical speeches which were called Hermetic books, or more simply, the Hermetica.

Nowadays, Hermetic literature is generally divided into two great thematic groups. They are listed as the so-called theoretical or philosophical Hermetica and the practical or technical Hermetica. The technical texts explored the relationship of Thoth-Hermes Trismegistos with magic and included alchemical texts, astrological works, magical *formulae*, etc. Nonetheless, they also listed hymns and prayers to the god. On the other hand, the theoretical or philosophical Hermetica – the subject of this study – are priori

theological/philosophical texts aimed at moral teaching, yet also mix their contents with magical knowledge. Thereby is it correct to assume that there was no formal separation between technical and philosophical hermetica.

Thus, it is also possible that Hermetists would have, to some extent, used both forms of text in their studies. Both literary categories established the relationship between moral merits and magical efficacy. They assumed a theurgy-like aspect, by connecting moral virtue as a primordial element in the process of communication with the god/divine sphere as well as for assuring the efficiency of a magician during his operations. Indeed, it is possible that such a theurgic aspect present in the Hermetica is connected to Thoth's aretalogy. For Thoth was not only the master of all natural and supernatural knowledge. He was also the defender of Maat – i.e. truth, justice, good, ..., and was always eager to assist "virtuous men". Thus, a man who receives God's inspiration is able to connect himself with the divine sphere. However, such inspiration is the result or reward for maintaining a high moral level. In this same sense, Thoth was not only the master of magic, but also the champion of Maat. Therefore, only those who are in harmony with Maat deserve Thoth's favour.

The composition of the Hermetic philosophical discourses joined a new mythological universe of gods, cults, and deities that were particularly popular in Graeco-Roman Egypt. The popularity of Hermes Trismegistos and his allegorical interlocutors helped the Hermetica assimilate social prestige and relevance, so that Hermetic mythology could legitimatize a new Hermetic cosmogony. It is a similar strategy to that adopted by the Gnostic movements. In fact, there are many similarities between Hermetism and Gnosticism. Both offered a new cosmogony, mythical characters and defended the gnosis as the unique way to salvage one's soul from the

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material world. They also incorporated Greek philosophical concepts and terminologies into their doctrines, sometimes actually building new meanings for them.

However, as Plotinus established, Gnosticism was not able to develop a consistent system of beliefs. It lacked reasonable arguments when their obscure terminology contradicted the philosophers who developed the concepts they adapted to their own use. Gnosticism's solution for the lacunas and vague explanations was to claim that the ultimate understanding of their doctrine was a set of progressive and secret magical *formulae*, which they called the *gnosis*. Contrary to the Gnostic principles, Hermetism developed a cosmogony in accordance with Plato's ontology: God, the Cosmos and Man lived in perfect harmony and the only evil in the universe was created by Man's actions on earth. This Hermetic cosmogony was not reduced to a rip-off of Plato's teachings.

According to Plotinus, the universe is good because it is moved by love. God is the unique creator, because He is the one who produces souls. The Cosmos was the first creation and helps Gods by giving material form to life. Hence, he is also described as Demiurge (i.e. artisan/craftsman). Man was the second creation of God, and received permission to help creation from the inside. As a result, he interacts directly with nature. According to the Hermetic doctrine, Man is free, and lives on earth with God's blessings. It is Man's purpose on earth to rule over the creation, and to learn about God's love. In doing so, Man uses his divine gift, the Logos. This Logos grants mankind intellectual supremacy and the ability to recognize God's participation in all abstract and concrete things in the universe. If Man chooses a virtuous life and looks forward to understanding his own spirituality, then he receives another gift from God: the Hermetic Nous. This Nous is actually a spiritual sensibility. Only truly virtuous and

moral people reach it. As God's emanation, Nous is what connects Man with his Creator. Those persons who nuture their Nous are able to achieve the Hermetic gnosis: the realisation of one's spiritual condition. To those "men with Nous", death is the gate to returning to their spiritual home, by God's sphere. The hermetic doctrine escapes from the Gnostic stereotypes and avoids such things as mysteries and secrets. Nobody is predestined for salvation, according to the Hermetic view. Salvation, meaning gnosis, is reachable for anyone at anytime, despite cultural identities or social status, since he is truly committed to the Hermetic path.

It is possible to identify Egyptian equivalents for some of the philosophical concepts in the analysed Hermetica. Hence, there is the possibility of such cosmogony being somehow connected to the original – yet twice adapted - Egyptian teachings. First, it was adapted to another idiom, Greek, then adapted a second time to a different language, philosophy. This study devoted itself to the description and explanation of Hermetic concepts of Logos, Nous and gnosis. By giving entirely different contexts to such concepts, their original meanings became susceptible to transformation. Hermetic cosmogony explains that God created the universe from His Nous. This Nous must be understood not only as an intellect, but also as His will in a passive sense. The responsibility for turning this passive will into active condition was the divine Logos – here understood as the manifestation of God's will/ Nous.

This description evokes an Egyptian myth of creation where the heart and utterance of Re created the world. The Egyptian myth identified Thoth as both the heart and the tongue of the god Re. He created through his creative speech (or *mdw-ntr,*): a combination of tongue – the manifestation of God's will - and heart – God's power of command. When an idea or thought is verbalized, it is materialized through the words.

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Since this thought becomes part of matter (it was materialized as sound), it assumes a more intense action. The articulation of a word turns the described object, which formerly existed only as an idea of the thought, into part of the material reality. The Egyptian relationship between heart and utterance is essential to understanding the Hermetic relation between Logos and Nous. Heart and utterance formed the so-called *mdw-nṯr*, the divine/creative word, whose efficacy was granted by Maat. According to this interpretation, the Egyptian concept of *sjꜣ* (the perception of what must be done) fits with the Hermetic explanation of the Creative/God's Nous.

The Egyptian concept of *ḥw* (utterance/articulation) fits with the Hermetic sense of God's Logos, the power of manifesting things through the word. Maat is not an independent element, although it is also present in Hermetic cosmogony in a similar way to the Egyptian tradition. It the responsibility of Man to assure that he had the right to receive his Nous from God, as this Nous was a gift given by God only to some humans with who acted with true moral behavior and pious attitude. A similar process also occurs with *ḥkꜣ* (the efficacy of the word). It is not explicitly an element of the Hermetic cosmogony, however, the purer the heart of the Hermetist (i.e. his association with Maat), the more efficient would be his magical ability, or more intense his contact with the divine sphere. Therefore, if *mꜣꜥt* and *ḥkꜣ* were once active principles in the Egyptian tradition, they became passive principles – since they act as consequences – in the Hermetic tradition.

The following scheme makes these analogies between Egyptian-Hermetic concepts most clear:

Table 12: Egyptian and Hermetic Terminologies		
Egyptian Terminology	**Hermetic Terminology**	**Comparative Points**
Sjȝ : Thought/ will of the heart/ the perception of what must be done.	**Nous:** God's Mind; the will of God; the creative desire, moved by love. In humans, Nous is a reward for moral and spiritual achievements and it is what makes contact with God possible.	Both are divine creative elements. They are the willpower, albeit passive, since they are not able to manifest themselves alone. They are also connected to one's heart.
Ḥw : Utterance.	**God's Logos.**	The complementary power and active principle of creation is in charge of manifesting the will created in the heart/Nouse into the material world.
Mdw nṯr : The divine word.	**Logos as the Divine Verb.**	It is the capacity of creating thought through words. Willpower is condensed by the action of sounds and produces a physical effect.
Mdw : spoken word.	**Logos.**	Different people on earth use different and idioms, using particular combinations of sounds. Egyptians believed in the superiority of their language's sounds. Hermetists believed that the power of sounds were irrelevant in comparison with the Divine power they represent (the gift of Logos). In the Hermetica, humans' idioms are equals and exist in opposition and in common superiority to all animal sounds, because these are "beings without Logos".

Ḥk3 : magic, or the efficacy of the creative power.	**Nous as the degree of spiritual purity/ heart's purity.** **Gnosis, in its transcendent aspects**	The more virtuous the being, the more pure his heart and the more effective will be his contact with the Divine, or the magic he intends to use.
M3ᶜt or Maat	**God, Man's spiritual/moral commitment, Nous.** **Logos, as social order**	A power responsible for the order of the universe. It is a combination of physical and spiritual harmony between Man and society, cosmos and nature. The power which represents "The Good", and in this sense, "The Evil" is its absence.
Š3y	**Fate**	It is the neutral and amoral combination of cause-effect, producing good and bad results according to one's actions.
Isft	**Men without Nous** (as the cause for the same effect).	It is the antisocial behaviour, which disturbs the harmony produced by Maat/God/God's love. It causes society to suffer due to individualism, greed, wars, and all other social chaotic/evil deeds.
Iyt	**Demons** (as its agents)	The possibility of bad things happening as punishment to those persons disconnected from Maat/ God/ Nous/... *Iyt* and demons represents the same power that is "attracted" by "bad behaviour". However, in the Hermetica this power is individualised in the form of demons. The Hermetica are more particular about this case, since the

		possibility of humans joining those decayed humans or demons exists.
Sbꜣy.t	**Philosophical Hermetica**	Both literatures were responsible for reproducing and transmitting teachings concerning moral/Maat and its transcendental implications, in order to assure individual/ social/ emotional/ spiritual order. Despite using different languages and having different receptors and historical background, they may be classified as similar – although not in the sense of a lineal relation of continuity as proposed by Mahé. [326]

Another point of interest is the fact that the Egyptian language distinguished between written and spoken words. That was not the same in Greek. If the *mdw-nṯr*, could be roughly translated as "hieroglyphs" in Greek, it was not possible to explain the complexity behind those words without using the Greek terms Nous and Logos. The process of re-contextualizing such terms allowed for a new way of understanding Nous as the Hermetic Nous and Logos as the Hermetic Logos. The Hermetica recognise philosophy as a valid method of conveying knowledge/ information. However, it was clear that the study of philosophy alone would not bring the true Hermetic gnosis. Since philosophy – and in this instance the philosophical Hermetica - deals with the intellect, it's "jurisdiction" was limited to the Hermetic Logos' sphere. To Hermetists, the Hermetic Logos was a mediator to the Hermetic Nous. This subordination of Logos *en face* Nous is necessary to give sense to the Hermetic *gnosis* as a spiritual experience,

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[326] J. P. Mahé, *Hermès en Haute-Egypte* (Quebec: 1978-1982).

instead of an intellectual acknowledgement. In order to receive the Hermetic Nous from God, it was necessary to believe with the heart, rather than to understand with reason. In this sense, Hermetism may be understood as an intellectual movement, not because it was aiming at an erudite audience, but because it was an attempt to combine rational and emotional logic.

The Hermetic Nous was also in charge of deciding on the destiny of Men's souls. Those who had Nous returned to God's side. Those without Nous remained chained in a cycle of birth and death in the material world. A third possibility covered all those who lived apart from God/Maat, which stated that their souls were consumed by evil. Those evil souls remained on earth as demons. All of these paths were available to everyone. It was the intentions and the actions connected to one's free will that decided his fate.

The Hermetica defined the demons as a consequence of "the lack of God" and that they act as punitive tools to those who disregarded their spiritual side. It was possible to connect the Hermetic vulnerability to the actions of demons with the Egyptian vulnerability to *iyt*. However, the idea of someone joining the demons had no Egyptian precedent. The explanation follows a Greek concept of affinities and is in harmony with the rest of the corpora as a principle. Since the universe is mental/spiritual (there is no difference), Man is free to join those who are mentally/spiritually harmonic with him. When he is truly virtuous and spiritualized, he joins his brothers in the divine sphere. If he is still too emotionally involved with material existence, he remains caught in the cycle of life and death. In addition, when he does follow the good principles, which give order to the universe, he decays as a demon and becomes a prisoner of the material world. This innovation might be the result of different of influences from Gnostics beliefs, Judaism-Christianism, and/or other Eastern doctrines. Therefore, it is possible to

understand the so-called philosophical Hermetica as a doctrine aiming to teach moral codes of values. This morality is culturally compatible with the Egyptian definition of moral covered by the concept of Maat. Still, it is not possible to assume in this study that such was the pragmatic objective of the Hermetic doctrine. Instead, it is possible to establish that such was one of the achieved effects of the doctrine's composition. Most of the receptors of the Hermetic discourses were not able to recognize and explain the concepts of *Mꜣꜥt, mdw-nṯr, sjꜣ, iyt,* etc. Nevertheless, the truehearted Hermetists were, throughout their lives, deeply committed to the meaning of these concepts without necessarily being aware of it.

3. The Hermetica in Discursive Practices

This chapter aims to understand the phenomenon of Hermetism though the perspective of its process of reception and reproduction in society. It will explore the phenomenon that was the transformation of the Hermetica into a social discourse. The so-called technical and philosophical Hermetica are texts. A text is the result of a production: it is composed by men, and addressed to men. It is important to consider the intentions and values present in a text's production, and to understand that its process of reception and reproduction in society are, in fact, complex and dynamic. A text must be viewed as not being simply a reflection of the society into which it is inserted, but rather as an active form of social mobilization. After a text's production, it is presented to a society where different groups can participate in its process of reception and reproduction, or "textual circularity". Then, different interpretations concerning the texts' intentions can be proposed to society throughout the process of debate.

These different groups taking part in the process of the text's interpretation represented different possibilities for the text's assimilation (as knowledge to be understood), and definition (as a phenomenon to be explained). Following this, one or more groups in society can use its/their symbolic power in order to propose/impose what Bourdieu[327] defined as *consensus*, or social order concerning social integration. This process establishes what the general knowledge calls "sense of order/normality" in the social dimension.

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[327] P. Bourdieu, *Le Sens Pratique*. (Paris: 1980). See also: P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. (Harvard: 1991).

Symbolic systems are also utilized as instruments for the legitimacy of ideologies, aiming to assure the domination of one social group over another. By approaching the engagement of social groups in the process of significance with regards to the Hermetic phenomenon, this chapter establishes a debate on how the Hermetica as literary source could become part of the social discourse regarding antagonist worldviews. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the relationship between the so-called technical and philosophical[328] Hermetica, and their interpretations by respective groups of receptors in society.

3.1 Groups of Reception and Interpretation

It has already been explained that there was no known attempt to organise this literature into a canon - as a codification for the Hermetic doctrine. However, private libraries/collections could compose different anthologies of Hermetic treatises, and consequently promote a thematic/partial selection of those texts. For the audience/readers/receptors of such literature was/were free to select them according to individual preferences for specific topics. To call the producer and receptor as Hermetists could be useful didactically; however, it must be clear that Hermeticism was by no means a way of self-perception.

It is not possible nowadays to achieve any accord about how the so-called technical and philosophical Hermetic literatures were used. Distinct groups with specific interests could produce new interpretations for Hermetic treatises and proposals for its own use as well. Questions concerning inconsistencies and/ or lacunas were most simply solved

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[328] Definitions proposed by Festugière in order to separate Hermetic texts with more enfasis on astrology, magic, alchemy , and other esoteric affairs, from those he classified as more connected to theologic and philosophic digressions. See: A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d`Hermès Trismégiste.* (Paris: 1944-54).

by admitting that the text was an imperfect translation of a lost Egyptian original. Moreover, the debate on Hermetic treatises never ceased, so those lacunas could be "explained" by interpretations promoted by the debate between Hermetica and other sources, such as Philosophy in some Hermetist circles. It is clear that different uses of Hermetica could produce different interpretations for this literature.

As a result, it is necessary to compare some distinct processes of appropriation of the Hermetic literature and its respective interpretation as social proposals aiming at respective social groups. Each group promotes a specific relationship with the texts, since they offer different social contexts and perspectives of how to interact with the Hermetica. Therefore, in this study, the term "Hermetist" is a generic term used to define all those who took part in the process of production, reception and circulation of Hermetic texts. So, *a priori,* in Graeco-Roman Egypt, a Hermetist could belong to any social category, with any cultural identity and hold any number of possible political/ ideological/ religious inclinations.

3.1.1 Hermetic Mysticism and Gnostics

"Gnostics" were defined by the words of Plotinus as esoteric/magic multifaceted groups with several variant doctrines. They labeled the world as an evil place and claimed that learning a secret knowledge (or *gnosis*) was the unique form of escaping from it. There were pagan and Christian Gnostic groups as well, and due to the lack of formal codification, both currents were able to use each other's concepts and literature. It is not impossible that Hermetism had different degrees of influence over different Gnostic sects. Indeed, there is a sixth-century reference regarding Valentinian Gnostic

cult called the "Hermaoi".[329] The contact of Gnostics with Hermetic authors is not discarded, nor is the possibility of some degree of mutual influences between Christian/Pagan Gnosticism and Hermetism.[330]

3.1.1.1 On Gnostic/Hermetic communities

The Gnostic community at Nag Hammadi used Hermetic treatises as part of their sources. Gnostic adepts and doctrines used to exchange knowledge with one another and also took information from external beliefs, traditions, etc. The Hermetic treatises were no exception for the Gnostic usages of external sources in their systems. The Gnostic library of a community at Nag Hammadi is a good example of it.[331] Among the Hermetic texts found at Nag Hammadi, there was a previously unknown discourse, which depicts the protagonists of the Hermetica living in a Gnostic-like environment. The Nag Hammadi Hermetica portrayed a specific social reality. In these texts, it is possible to confirm the existence of another way of reception of the Hermetic texts: the communal study of a group/fraternity/confrary.[332] That style of Hermetic dialogue was totally new, since, in comparison, the anthology called the *Corpus Hermeticum* had two protagonists: the master and the disciple, and in *ad Aslcepius*, Hermes teaches Asclepius along with Tat and Ammon.

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[329] See: G. Fowden, The Egyptian Hermes. (Princeton: 1993), p. 173, n.72: "Tim. Const., Haer., 17b; and Marc. Anc., Eccl. 6, mentioning "the followers of Hermes and Seleucus" in a list of Gnostics and other heretics […]."

[330] For a specific case study on Poimandres, See: J. Büchli, Der Poimandres, ein paganisiertes Evangelium. (Tübingen: 1987).

[331] The collection of books contains religious and Hermetic texts, works of moral maxims, Apocryphal texts, and a rewriting of Plato's Republic.

[332] Reizenstein held that Hermetists could have lived in Gnostic-like "Hermetic communities", while Festugière was against such theory See: R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres - Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur*, (Leipzig: 1904), p. 248. Festugière`s argument against that theory: A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d`Hermès Trismégiste I.* (Paris: 1944), pp.81-4.

In the Hermetica from the *Nag Hammadi Library*, Hermes encourages Tat to teach others, and the discourse reveals the existence of many others spiritual sons who were also educated by Hermes.

> After I had received the spirit through the power, I set forth the action for you. Indeed the understanding dwells in you; in me (it is) as though the power were pregnant. For I when conceived from the fountain that flowed to me, I gave birth)
> My father, you have spoken every word well to me. But I am amazed at this statement that you have just made. For you said "The power is in me"
> He said, "I gave birth to it (the power), as children are born.
> Then my father, I have many brothers, if I am to be numbered among the offspring.
> Right, my son! [...]. (NHH. VI-6 52, 6-7).

After the instruction, follows a ceremonial kiss/embrace:[333]

"Let us embrace each other affectionately, my son." (NHH. VI-6 57,26).

Furthermore, it follows a prayer with Hermes, Tat, and Tat's spiritual brothers.

> My father, begin the discourse on the eighth and the ninth, and include me also with my brothers.
> Let us pray, my son, to the father of the universe, with your brothers who are my sons, that he may give the spirit of eloquence. (NHH. VI-6 53, 25-31).

There is a passage on holy aliments that were "without blood" and that concerned a ceremonial banquet:

> When they said these things in the prayer, they embraced each other and they went to eat their holy food, which no blood in it. (NHH. VI-7, 5-7).[334]

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[333] See: M. Krause, "Der Stand der Veröffentlichung der Nag Hammadi-Texte". In: U. Bianchi (ed.), *Le Originni dello Gnosticismo* – Colloquio di Messina, 13-18 Aprile 1966. (Leiden: 1967), pp.87. "Lasst uns einander küssen (ἀσπάζεσθαι)." This ceremonial kiss and prayer are repeated in Codex VI-7, 65 3f. See also: J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II*. (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt:: 1997), pp.518; and J. M. Robinson (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library*. (New York: 1990). This ceremonial kiss is repeated in VI-7, 65, 5 and note that both in Robinson's and Holzhausen's text, the translation for ἀσπάζεσθαι is to embrace / umarmen, instead of to kiss.

[334] M. Krause *op.cit.,* p. 80, excerpt from Codex VI-7, 65 5-7: "Als sie das gesagt hatten, indem sie beteten, küssten sie einander und gingen, um ihre heilige Nahrung zu essen, in der kein Blut ist." Note that vegetarianism was also a norm of Pythagorean communities, and that blood in aliments was also part

The possibility of the existence of several other religious/esoteric communities using or even producing Hermetic texts is not discarded. According to Quispel, such Hermetic communities or associations may have existed under a structure similar to that of the former Classical mystery religions:

> [...] it has become certain that the Hermetic Gnosis was routed in a secret society in Alexandria, a sort of Masonic lodge, with certain rites like a kiss of peace, a baptism of rebirth in the spirit and a sacred meal of the brethren. It started with the astrologic lore contained in works like the Hermetic *Panaretos*, of the second century before the beginning of the Common Era. [...] Greeks, Egyptians, and Jews were members of the Hermetic lodge and unanimously contributed their specific traditions to the common views. Christian influences, however, are completely absent.[335]

It is certain that Hermetism projected no organised cult, with priests, sacrifices, processions and the like. Nevertheless, the Hermetic texts of Nag Hammadi suggest the existence of small Hermetic communities, or groups, in which individual experiences and insights were collectively celebrated with rituals, hymns and prayers. Despite the dispute concerning whether or not Hermetists were socially organised or how that organisation was structured, it is important to note that there were no formal recommendations found in any part of the Hermetic doctrine concerning social organisation.

Nevertheless, the existence of more formally organised Hermetic communities/associations will also "produce" its own Hermetic discourses in order to promote symbolic legitimacy and regulation of the group's social *consensus*. This

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of a social-religious taboo in Judaism. See also: J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II.* (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt: 1997), p. 537; and: K. −W. Tröger, *Mysterienglaube und Gnosis in Corpus Hermeticum XIII.* (Berlin: 1971), pp. 121, 133-4.

[335] G. Quispel: "The Asclepius". In : R. Van den Broek, W.J.Hanegraaff, W.J, *Gnosis and Hermeticism*, (New York: 1998), p. 74.

means that the Hermetic texts influenced the development of specific social organizations, and/or helped support them symbolically. Another dimension of that influence can be found in the indirect presence of Hermetic elements in non-Hermetic literary sources.

3.1.1.2   Christian Mysticism and Hermetism

In Egypt, early Christians were part of the Jewish community of Alexandria before Emperor Trajan's extirpation of the Jews of Alexandria after the war with the Jews in 115-117 A.D.[336] Their development was distinct from Christianity's development in Rome, Syria and elsewhere. Coptic was developed as a language used in translating the Christian and Old Testament books from Greek into a language for Egyptian use, and Christianity and Gnosticism - growing out of Jewish origins separately from Christianity - came closely together for a period. According to Parson[337], it was during this period that some Christian leaders adopted some elements of Gnostic mysticism in their development of Christianity before separating permanently.

In the Gospel of St. John, composed in ca. 100 A.D, it is written:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God./ He was in the beginning with God./ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made./ In Him was the light of men./ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John, 1, 1-5).

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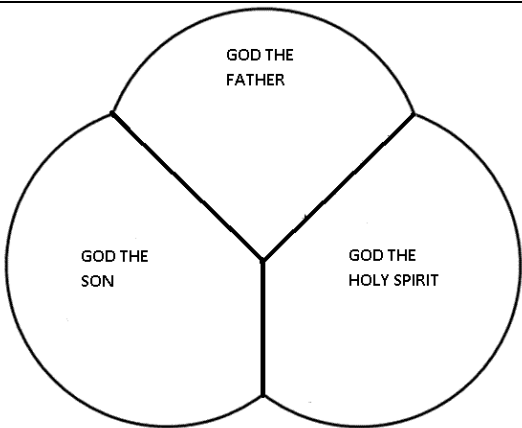
[336] See: G. Alon, *The Jews in their land in the Talmudic age.* (Harvard: 1980), M. Pucci, *La rivolta Ebraica al tempo di Traiano.* (Pisa: 1981).

[337] B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt - Studies in Antiquity and Christianity.* (New York: 2004),

Here, Christ is depicted as the Word of God, having been united with him since the moment of the Creation. The "second God" or "Logos" was the glory of God sent to enlighten men. To Christians, the "Logos" <u>is</u> Christ. It is the unique Son of God the Father, who was incarnated as Jesus and is revealed though the Holy Spirit of the Father. Jesus Christ ascends to the Father so that this Holy Spirit may descend upon the faithful. In the Gospel of John, the Hermetic notion of 'Man-with-Nous' is present as the gift of God by virtue of the Son, who is called "the Word-Logos". This gift is presented as the grace of the Holy Spirit enabling the soul to participate in the Divine life of the energies that radiate from the Divine Trinity.

Then, Christians formed a triad whose representation is as follows:

Table 13: The Christian Trinity	
	a) God the Father is the divine principle of existence. He is the good, heavenly and unique principle of absoluteness and transcendence. **b) God the Son** is the divine Word, Logos and Mind, represented by Christ. The unique divine and human son of the heavenly Father (i.e. - The Christ), who, as "logos", creates the universe and, as Saviour, mediates between humanity and the Father. **c) God the Holy Spirit** is the Divine gift and comforter. The love between Father and the Son sets an example, is a comforter and a spiritual guide for Christians to return to the "house of the Father".

In its Neo-Platonic form, this structure was used by the theologians of Constantine, to form the Nicene Trinitarian concept of the "One God", which is still the cornerstone of the contemporary Catholic concept of God.[338]

As pointed out in the last chapter, the relationship of God's creative Logos/Word and the divine pre-existence of three spiritual spheres of existence are part of the Hermetic Cosmogony, and therefore is present in the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

> Because the demiurge has created the whole world not with his hand but with the Word, conceive Him then as present and always existing, who made it all being one-alone [...]. (CH. IV, 1).
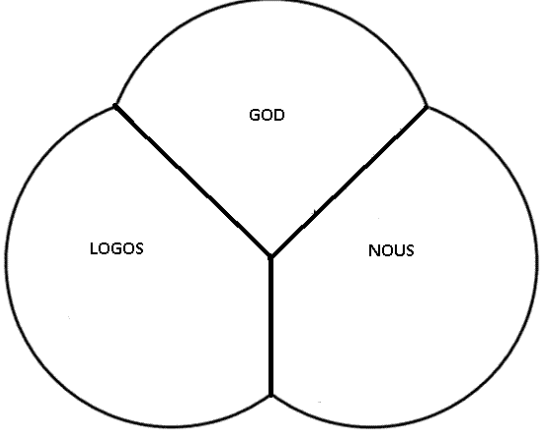
In Hermetism, God is unbegotten while God's Mind/Nous and Logos are self-begotten. The combination of these three elements created the universe with a "holy word". It was explained in the last chapter that the Hermetic Demiurge was responsible for giving forms to the creation, and that he was a brother and equal to the Hermetic Man. The Hermetic Man is the son of God, as Poimandres explained, for he came directly from God's Intellect/Will/Nous.

In order to offer a comparison to the Christian Trinity, a Hermetic triad can be reads as follows:

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[338] See: J. Danielou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture: A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicea*, Vol. 2. (London: 1973), B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt - Studies in Antiquity and Christianity*. (New York: 2004), and : B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*. (Minneapolis: 2006).

Table 14: The Hermetic 'Trinity'	
	a) God, the Unbegoten/ the Father, is the essence and source of Life, Soul, Good, Joy... He is also the tenth sphere of existence. **b) Nous, God's Will/Mind,** is self-begotten and represents the ninth sphere of existence. **c) Logos, the Holy Word,** is begotten for it is an emanation from Nous. It is the eighth sphere of existence and through its action, all other spheres came into being. Therefore, it remains above all other seven Governors of the Seven spheres ruling the material/sensitive world.

3.1.1.2.1 St. Paul as Hermes

St. Paul offers a Christian version of Hermetic/Neo-Platonic principles by defining the duality of human nature: material/natural and spiritual:

> And so it is written, "the first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit./ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural and afterward spiritual./ The first man was of earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord of heaven./ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavingly Man, so also are those who are heavenly./ and we are borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man. (I Corinthians, 15, 45-49).

Such duality is also allegorically present in both Hermes and Christ`s "part-man-part-god" status. Following this analogy, while a Hermetist received the divine gift of Nous and the gnosis, as described by the ecstatic experience of Hermes in Poimandres,

Paul received "the spirit from Christ" in a vision portraying a Gnostic-like experience of enlightening (Acts 9, 1-9).

"As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. [...]" (Acts 9, 3).

In this case, Paul who was travelling heard the voice of Jesus Christ, but his companions could not hear or see anyone. Paul was in such ecstasy with his experience that he became blind, and did not eat or drink anything for the next three days (Acts 9, 9).

The splendour of this vision of God is also described and commented on by Hermes to Tat:

> You have filled us with a vision, father, which is good and very beautiful, and my mind's eye is almost {blinded} in such vision.
>
> Yes, but the vision of the good is not as the ray of the sun which, because it is fiery, dazzles the eyes with light and makes them shut. On the contrary, it illuminates to the extent that one capable of receiving the influence of intellectual splendour can receive it. It probes more sharply, but it does no harm, and it is full of immortality./ Those able to drink somewhat more deeply of the vision often fall asleep, moving out of the body toward a sight most fair, […]. (CH. X, 4-5).

It is possible to approach a comparison of Christian and Hermetic elements in this narrative by using the isotopic method. According to Greimas[339], this method is the search for a "unique reading". It makes possible the identification of redundant semantic categories, which allows a uniform reading of the narrative and solves its ambiguities.

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[339] A. J. Greimas, *Du sens. Essais sémiotiques*. (Paris : 1970), p. 188.

In the following scheme, the similarities between Hermetic and Christian narratives will be explored thematically:

Table 15: The visions of God by Paul and Hermes[340]	
Thematic field A:	**Figurative elements that justify the thematic elements:**
Thematic elements: God is manifested through a magnificent bright light.	"Suddenly a <u>light shone around him from heaven</u>." (Acts 9, 3). "<u>It illuminates</u> to the extent that one capable of <u>receiving the influence</u> of <u>intellectual splendour</u> can receive it. (CH. X, 4-5).
Thematic field B:	**Figurative elements that justify the thematic elements:**
Thematic elements: The vision of this wonderful light is an experience which leads a common person to Ecstasy.	"You have filled us with <u>a vision</u>, father, <u>which is good and very beautiful, and my mind's eye is almost {blinded} in such vision.</u>" (CH. X, 4-5). "<u>He became blind, and neither ate nor drank nothing for the next three days</u>" (Acts 9, 9). "<u>Those able to drink somewhat more deeply of the vision often fall asleep, moving out of the body toward a sight most fair</u>, (...)" (CH. X, 4-5).

Further understanding of the initiatory character of the visionary experience of apprehension of divine Nous is provided in the Hermetica by the Nag Hammadi tractate *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. This text enriches understanding of the rebirth

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[340] *Ibidem.*

which was widely discussed in the dialogue of Nous and Hermes in *Corpus Hermeticum*

XI.

> Consider this for yourself: command your soul to travel to India, and it will be there faster
> than your command. Command it to cross over to the ocean, and again it will quickly be
> there, [...]. Command it even to fly up to heaven, and it will not lack wings. [...] But if you
> shut your soul up into the body and abase it and say, "I understand nothing, I can do
> nothing; I fear the sea, I cannot go up to heaven [...]", then what have you to do with God?
> (CH. XI, 19-21).

In the Nag Hammadi text, Hermes Trismegistos is described as successfully utilizing

the technique taught by Nous before he guides his son in the same practice in detail.

Having interpreted the image in a spiritual manner, Hermes concluded that a divine

Mind had fashioned the image within his soul and he achieved an experience of

communion with the Mind that he postulated:[341]

> I [am Mind and] I see another Mind, the one that [moves] the soul! I see the one that moves
> me from pure forgetfulness. You give me power! I see myself! I want to speak! Fear
> restrains me. I have found the beginning of the power that is above all powers, the one that
> has no beginning. I see a fountain bubbling with life. I have said, my son, that I am Mind. I
> have seen! Language is not able to reveal this. For the entire eighth, my son, and the souls
> that are in it, and the angels, sing a hymn in silence. And I, Mind, understand. (NHH. VI-6,
> 58-59).

It is important to observe that the Christian narrative – i.e. the case of Paul - the ecstatic

experience of contemplation of God did not turn him into another Logos - i.e. another

Jesus. On the other hand, the Hermetic interpretation of Gnosis would have depicted

him as being one with Logos and Nous, since he would have transcended the seven

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[341] E. H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. (New York: 1979), 136-7.

material spheres - i.e. he would have become another Hermes. In fact, note also that in Acts, there is a mention of Paul being mistaken as Hermes - due to his divine Logos - by the Lycaonians, after performing a healing miracle:

> [a]nd in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who has never walked./This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,/ Said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked./ Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"/ and Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.(Acts 14, 8-12).

A semiotic analysis of this passage allows an inter-textual comparison between this Christian narrative and possible Egyptian and Hermetic references. The following analysis will not reproduce the entire model proposed by Todorov[342], restraining the work to the five verbal categories or sequence of events. Thus, following the formal sequence of Todorov's analysis, it is possible to resume the narrative on Paul as follows:

a) **Initial situation**: Paul is speaking to some Lycaonians (preaching the Gospel).

b) **Perturbation of the initial situation**: Paul notes a specific man in the mob as being a cripple.

c) **Crisis**: Then he decides to perform a miracle before the people of Lystra by healing that man.

d) **Intervention in the crisis**: Paul realises that the crippled Lycaonian have enough faith for the miracle to occur.

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[342] T. Todorov, *Littérature et signification*. (Paris: 1967).

e) **New balance of the situation**: Paul orders the miracle with his Logos and the Lycaonian is healed. This leads to an adapted version of the initial situation, since the Lycaonians mistake Paul as Hermes.

The elements present in this process of achieving a miracle are analogous to the Egyptian/Hermetic ones analysed in the former chapter.

- In "**b-c**" *sj3* - Nous tells Paul/Thoth-Hermes that he must help the cripple in the mob.

- In "**d**" *ḥk3* it is manifested through the observation of the "faith" of the crippled. This *ḥek3* is also the moral virtue characteristic in the Hermetic sense of "Man with Nous" and as *ḥk3* does, it is directly responsible for the effectiveness behind Paul's Logos.

- Then, in "**e**" Paul utters his will using *ḥw* - God's creative Logos. As the miracle happened, he was acclaimed by the mob as Hermes in "**e**". Logos and Nous are here combined in the same way as the Egyptian/Hermetic theurgic principles correlating moral merit and magical efficiency.

3.1.2 Philosophical Hermetica and Christian Thought

Christianism started in a poor and remote Roman province and was a small branch of Judaism. When it split from Judaism as an independent religion, it first grew in popularity among slaves and poor segments of the population and faced many periods of political persecution. However, in just few centuries it was already consolidated as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and also of its neighbours Ethiopia and

Armenia.[343] Such rapid growth produced diversity in the interpretations of this religion. Therefore, it was necessary to develop some epistemology to codify the beliefs and also to promote a unified position against rivals such the pagan religions and Christian divergent sects – or heretics.[344] This process of codification was deeply based in the debate between Christian ideology and philosophic systems, whose authors were not necessarily exclusive Christians, but could be interpreted in a favourable sense.

Origen (2nd/3rd centuries A.D) and Augustine of Hippo (4th/5th centuries A.D) are good examples of this "Christian intellectual war" on paganism and heresies.[345] On the other hand, Porphyry of Tyre in *Contra Christianos* criticizes Origen's appropriation of Greek allegorical methods of interpretation to explain the Jewish scriptures.[346] Indeed, in the late 4th century A.D Emperor Julian - called "the Apostate" by Christians - attempted to remove some of the power of the Christian schools, which, during this time and following time periods, used ancient Greek literature in their teachings, in an effort to present the Christian religion as superior to paganism.[347] We know that Tertullian, Cyrill and Augustin were reading Hermetic texts, collections and/or anthologies. They rejected its Paganism, but noted that similarities could be found within their theology. The early Christian Fathers went as far as to quote the Hermetic texts in their campaign against heresies.

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[343] See: J. L. González, *The Story of Christianity: Vol. 1: The Early Church to the Reformation*. (San Francisco: 1984).

[344] In fact, the heresies were deemed as the greatest threat to Christianism, since different Christian sects promoted independent efforts of evangelization (especially among the belligerent Germanic tribes), spreading their heresies and the ideological conflict.

[345] Against the popular cults of Isis, Mithra and Cybele, see Augustin's *City of God* VII, 23-26.

[346] Cf. Porphyry, *Contra Christianos, Frag. 39.*

[347] See: G.W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*. (London: 1978), and W. Hamilton (ed. and transl.), *Ammianus Marcellinus, The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378).* (New York: 1986).

During the late 2nd century A.D, Clement of Alexandria differentiated between Greeks and Christians, accusing the Greeks of atheism[348] in his "Exhortation to the Greeks" (II, 20p). He claimed that the pagan gods were nothing but divinised ancient men – thus, fake gods. With regards to Hermes and Asclepius specifically, he says:

> A countless host, all mortal and perishable men, who have been called by similar names to the deities we have just mentioned. And what if I were to tell you of the many gods named Asclepius, or every Hermes that is enumerated […]. (Exhortation to the Greeks, II, 25p).[349]

In early 3rd century A.D, Clement wrote in the *Stromata* that the Theban priests were reputed astronomers and philosophers[350], but that Egyptians had a different and particular philosophy, deeply based in their religion[351]. This association between Thoth-Hermes and the so-called technical Hermetica is also reproduced in Clement's description of an Egyptian procession in which priests of different ranks hold different sorts of Hermetic Books:

"**a) Hymns to the gods** (1Book).

b) Account of the king's life (1 Book).

c) The astrological books (4 Books)

- on the ordering of the fixed stars;
- on the position of the sun, the moon and the five planets;
- on the conjunctions and phases of the sun and the moon;
- on the times when the stars rise.

d) The hieroglyphic books (10 Books), on cosmography and geography, Egypt and the Nile, the construction of temples, the lands dedicated to the temples, and provisions and utensils for the temples.

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[348] Note that Clement established "Greek"as opposition to "Christian". On atheism, see: A.B. Drachmann, *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity.* (London: 1922). According to the author, the concept of atheism in late Antiquity was not the denying of the existence of gods. It was rather an attempt to approach this subject with philosophical argumentation, in opposition to most of the popular ideas concerning them.

[349] G.W. Butterworth (transl.) *Clement of Alexandria – Exhortation to the Greeks - Loeb Classical Library* (London: 1968). II 24P-32P. His arguments included Ares, Asclepius, Poseidon, Apollo, Zeus, the Muses, the mysteries, and other Heathen practises.

[350] Cf. *Stromata* XVII. 1, 46.

[351] *Ibidem,* VI. 4, 35, 2-3.

e) Books on education and the art of sacrifice (10 Books), dealing in particular with sacrifices, (...), hymns, prayers, processions and feasts.

f) The hieratic books (10 Books), on laws, the gods and the whole of priestly training.

g) The medical books (6 Books)

- on the construction of the body;
- on diseases;
- on organs;
- on drugs;
- on diseases of the eyes;
- on the diseases of woman. (*Stromata*, VI, 4, 35, 2-3)"[352]

According to Frankfurter, Clement's view of Egyptian priests was stylized and condensed to some essential facts. The author says:

> The overall function of the priesthood was indeed the ordered preservation of the cosmos – earth, society, sky, gods – through the performance of rituals. These rituals were distributed throughout the calendar and set down in texts (...). Thus the books with their sacred writing quite literally constituted the preservation of the cosmos: as the books set it down, so the priests performed or uttered, and so the cosmos continued according to Maʿat, order.[353]

Clement seem to be more concerned with the association between Thoth-Hermes and magical, medicinal and astrological knowledge – i.e. the so-called Technical Hermetica. His representation of Egyptian Liturgy was actually a demonstration of Egyptian knowledge such as anatomy, geography, healing, etc. Clement recognised that a different philosophy emerged from this combination of literatures. This "different philosophy" of the Egyptians was also present as a whole in the early Christian effort of debating the canon of beliefs for their religious doctrine.

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[352] This resume regarding Clement's description of the so-called 42 Books of Egyptian wisdom is adapted from: G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*. (Princeton: 1993), pp. 58-9.

[353] D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*. (Princeton: 1998), p. 240.

3.1.2.1   Tertullian of Carthage as a Hermetist

The Hermetic doctrine was a useful source for the so-called *Patristica Latina*. Some principles in Tertullian's thought are deeply based or influenced by his debate with the Hermetic doctrine – among other philosophic schools and traditions.

a) The true Gnosis came from God alone and cannot be taught

In his tractate against Gnostics (early 3rd century A.D), Tertullian called "*Mercurius Trismegistus*", the father of all natural sciences/ occultism[354]. In his work *de Anima* he declared that true knowledge cannot be taught, but can only be given by God:

> Of course we shall not deny that philosophers have sometimes thought the same things as ourselves. The testimony of truth is the issue thereof. […] In nature, however, most conclusions are suggested, as it were, by that common intelligence wherewith God has been pleased to endow the soul of man. This intelligence has been caught up by philosophy, and, with the view of glorifying her own art, has been inflated (it is not to be wondered at that I use this language) with straining after that facility of language which is practised in the building up and pulling down of everything, and which has greater aptitude for persuading men by speaking than by teaching. […]She thought, no doubt, that she was deriving her mysteries from sacred sources, as men deem them, because in ancient times most authors were supposed to be (I will not say godlike, but) actually gods: as, for instance, the Egyptian Mercury, to whom Plato[355] paid very great deference; […]. (*De Anima* II, 1-3).

Such position was indeed in agreement with the Hermetic doctrine:

> The virtue of soul, […], is knowledge; for one who knows is goodand reverent and already divine. […] There are senses in all things that are because they cannot exist without them – yet knowledge differs greatly from sensation; for sensation comes when the object prevails, while knowledge is the goal of learning, and learning is a gift from God." (CH. X, 9).

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[354] *Adversus Valentinianos* XV, 1. On the matter of "*magister omnium physicorum*", see comments in : J. –C. Fredouille (transl.) *Tertullien: Contra les Valentiniens*. Tome II (Paris: 1980), pp. 280-1. It is not very clear if physicorum is used here as an allusion to the wisdom of nature of the world hence *physicus* would be used in the ancient sense of φυσικός - , or if it was connected to the Hellenistic sense of expertise in occultism. In fact, both interpretations fit with the general knowledge concerning Hermes Trismegistos.

[355] Cf. *Phaedrus* C. LIX; Augustin *City of God* VIII,11; Euseb. *Praep. Evang*. IX, 3.

b) The connection between heart and soul

Tertullian also agreed with the Hermetic doctrine by identifying the heart as the core of the soul's energy:

> Whether there be in the soul some supreme principle of vitality and intelligence [...] as the
> Egyptians have always taught, especially such of them as were accounted the expounders of
> sacred truths in accordance, too, with that verse of Orpheus or Empedocles: "Man has his
> (supreme) sensation in the blood around his heart. (*De Anima*, XV, 1-5).

For Hermes also said that the heart is responsible for discerning God.[356]

> Look up with the eyes of the heart [...]. Then seek a guide to take you by the hand and lead
> you to the portals of knowledge. [...] All are sober and gaze with the heart toward one who
> wishes to be seen, who is neither heard nor spoken of, who is seen not with the eyes but
> with mind and heart. (CH. VII, 1-3).

c) On the human soul's nature

In his understanding of the human soul, he denied the Pythagorean and Hermetic principles of reincarnation[357] and the pre-existence of a human soul:[358]

> What, then, by this time means that ancient saying, mentioned by Plato, concerning the
> reciprocal migration of souls; how they remove hence and go thither, and then return hither
> and pass through life, and then again depart from this life, and afterwards become alive
> from the dead? Some will have it that this is a saying of Pythagoras; Albinus supposes it to
> be a divine announcement, perhaps of the Egyptian Mercury. (*De Anima* XXVIII, 1).

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[356] The spiritual role played by the heart was already shown in the Egyptian history. However, it must be clear that to Graeco-Roman general knowledge, the Hermetic doctrine was indeed the translation of pure Egyptian traditions.

[357] In *Corpus Hermeticum* IV, 8, reincarnation is mentioned as being necessary to the process of allowing Man to achieve the perfection of his soul.

[358] On the other hand, the Neo-Platonist and Christian apologist Origen believed in the pre-existence of Soul. Cf.: *De Principiis* I. 2,10; I. 7,4; II. 9, 1.

Tertullian's account of the destiny of the human soul after death is quoted directly from the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

> I must here also remark, that if souls undergo a transformation, they will actually not be able to accomplish and experience the destinies which they shall deserve; and the aim and purpose of judicial recompense will be brought to nought, as there will be wanting the sense and consciousness of merit and retribution. And there must be this want of consciousness, if souls lose their condition; and there must ensue this loss, if they do not continue in one stay. But even if they should have permanency enough to remain unchanged until the judgment,—a point which Mercurius Aegyptius recognised, when he said that the soul, after its separation from the body, was not dissipated back into the soul of the universe, but retained permanently its distinct individuality, "in order that it might render," to use his own words, "an account to the Father of those things which it has done in the body;"—(even supposing all this, I say,) I still want to examine the justice, the solemnity, the majesty, and the dignity of this reputed judgment of God, and see whether human judgment has not too elevated a throne in it—exaggerated in both directions, in its office both of punishments and rewards, too severe in dealing out its vengeance, and too lavish in bestowing its favour. (*De Anima* XXXIII, 2).

He quotes the following passage:

> [...]The gods sowed the generation of humans to know the works of God; to be a working witness to nature; to increase the number of mankind; to master all things under heaven; to discern the things that are good; [...] and through the wonder-working of the cycling gods they created every soul incarnate to contemplate heaven, the course of the heavenly gods, the works of God and the working of nature; [...]." (CH. III, 3).

In fact, through his knowledge of the philosophic aspects of the Hermetic doctrine, Tertullian demonstrated that Christian Hermetists were also debating this doctrine to the point of producing direct quotations in their texts, as well as agreements and disagreements on subjects presented by Hermetic literature. Accepting and refusing aspects of the Hermetic (and other) doctrine is enough to establish that such literature took part in Christian intellectual digressions during the construction of a "Christian system of belief".

3.1.2.2   Cyrill of Alexandria as a Hermetist

Hermetic texts were also inspiration for the *Patristica Graeca*. Hermetic discourses were also present in the arguments of Cyrill of Alexandria, who wrote a postumous response to Emperor Julian's tractate against Christians in the 5th century A.D. In his antithesis: "*Contra Iulianum*", Cyrill considers the Hermetic texts – here called the "Hermaic Books" (Ἑρμαϊκὰ) - a legacy of a wise human being who was deified by Egyptians in posterior generations.

> Pour en venir aux comparisons, n'entends-tu pas dire que notre compatriot Hermès a divisé l'ensemble de l'Égypte en parts et en lots, mesurant au cordeau les terresarables ? Qu'il a tracé des fossés en vue de l'inrrigation, a institué les districts territoriaux et donné des noms d'après ces districts ? Qu'il a mis en forme les stipulations contractuelles ? (…) Qu'enfin il a imaginé les nombres, le calcul, la géométrie, l'astronomie, l'astrologie, les arts, la gramaire, et les a transmis ? (*Contra Julianum*, I, 548 B-C).[359]

Following the same observations as that of Clement and Tertullian, Cyril links Hermes to natural (numbers, astronomy) and supernatural (astrology) brands of knowledge.

a) God as the divine creative Logos

On the subject of the creative divine Verb, he also quoted Hermes three times by saying, firstly:

> Hermès Trismégiste parle ainsi de Dieu: "Son Verbe (Logos), procédant de lui, parfait, fécond et créateur, tomba avec sa nature féconde sur l'eau déconde et rendit l'eau prégnante […] Et du même, dans une autre passage: "C'est donc la pyramide qui sert de

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[359] P. Burgière, P. Évieux (transl.) *Cyrille d'Alexandrie Contre Julien - vol.1.* (Paris: 1985). The authors comment in p. 188, that this text is not part of the known Corpus Hermeticum. It is possible according to Burgière-Évieux that Cyrill was using some lost apologetic Hermetic text.

fondement à la Nature et au monde spirituel, car elle a au-dessus d'elle, qui la domine, le Verbe créateur du Maître de toutes choses, […]. (*Contra Julianum*, I, 552 D).

The Logos of God creating the world is debated in CH. IV. It is interesting to note that Hermes adopted a bowl full of Nous as a metaphor and shared it only with those special souls of men who had faith.

> He (God) filled a great mixing bowl (Κρατῆρα μέγαν) with it (Nous), appointing a herald whom he commanded to make the following proclamation to human hearts: "Immerse yourself in the mixing bowl (Βάπτισον σεαυτὴ ἡ δυναμέν εἰς τοῦτον τὸν κρατῆρα) if your heart has the strength, if it believes you will rise up again to the one who sent the mixing bowl bellow, if it recognizes the purpose of your coming to be." […]. (CH. IV, 4).

The connection to the Christian sacrament of baptism is undeniable. It could be explained by the Hermetic view as a representation of God's sharing of Nous with selected souls. On the other hand, it could also reflect how at some point a Christian view of Hermetism become integrated into the Hermetic doctrine. In that sense, the herald may be understood as a reference to Jesus, inviting humanity, on God's behalf, to a share of immortality through his calling/Logos.

The second reference to the Hermetic doctrine concerning the divine Logos/Verb comes from an unknown fragment of a dialogue between Hermes and Agathos Daimon:

> Le même Hermès, à la question d'un desservant de sanctuaire égyptien qui lui demande: Pourquoi, Très grand Bon Génie (ὦ μέγιστε ἀγαθὸς δαίμων), le Verbe a-t-il été appelé de ce nom par le Seigneur de l'univers ? ", répond ainsi : "Je te l'ai dejà dit à une précédente occasion, mais tu n'as pas compris. La nature du Verbe spirituel de Dieu est une nature générative et créatrice. (*Contra Julianum*, I, 553 B).

Then, Cyrill mentioned another Hermetic tractate aiming to explain the Christian description of God as the Father:

> Hermès encore, au livre I de son Commentaire détaillé à Tat, parle ainsi de Dieu : "Le Verbe du Créateur, mon enfant, est éternel, se meut lui-même, est insensible à la croissance, à la diminution, au changement, à la corruption; unique, il est tourjours semblable à lui-même, égal, uniforme, stable, ordonné, seul à exister après le Dieu conçu comme primordial. " Et par cette expression, il désigne, je crois, le Père. (*Contra Julianum*, I, 553 A).

Thus, the philosophical/theological aspects of the Hermetic doctrine were openly accepted as being compatible with most Christian perceptions of God.

b) On the human incapacity concerning to understand God, the Father

Cyrill followed Hermes' arguments in order to explain how impossible it was for a human being to describe or even to understand God:

> Hermès Trismégiste s'exprime à peu près comme suit: "Concevoir Dieu est difficile, l'exprimer est impossible, même pour qui peut le concevoir : c'est en effect la tradutction de l'incorporel par du corporel qui est impossible, comme l'est aussi la compréhension du parfait par l'imparfait [...] Et Hermès ajoute ailleurs : "Ne prétends plus jamais, en songeant à cet être unique, à ce seul Bien, que rien lui soit impossible : la totalité de la puissance, c'est lui. [...]." (*Contra Julianum*, I, 549 B-C ; 552 D).

In *Corpus Hermeticum* Hermes explains to Tat that prayer is the only possible way to feel the presence of God:

> You, then, Tat, my child, pray first to the Lord, the Father, the Father, the only, who is not but from whom the one comes; ask him the grace to enable you to understand so great a god, to permit even one rai of his to illuminate your thinking. Only understanding, because

it, too, is invisible, sees the invisible, and if you have the strength, Tat, your mind's eye will see it. (CH. V, 2).

He goes on to explain that God can be noted only by one's Nous:

> This is the god who is greater than any name; this is the god invisible and entirely visible. This god who is evident to the eyes may be seen in the mind. He is bodiless and many-bodied; or, rather, He is all-bodied. There is nothing that he is not, for he also is all that is, and this is why he has all names, because they are of one father, and this is why He has no name, because he is the father of all. (CH.V, 10).

Indeed, Cyrill quoted the description of God as eternal Logos, the Supreme Good and Father of all, as given also by *Corpus Hermeticum*, I, 18-19; II, 14-17. Concerning the perception of God by humans, Cyrill observed that it was not possible to directly perceive God using sensorial faculties and used Hermetic texts to reinforce his beliefs once more:

> J'ajouterai à cette citation ce qu'a jadis écrit Hermés Trismégiste *A son esprit* ('Πρὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Νοῦν') (c'est là titre du livre) : "Ainsi donc, dis-tu, Dieu est invisible? Trêve de blasphèmes! Qui plus que lui est visible? S'il a créé, c'est pour qu'on le voie à travers toute chose. L'excellence de Dieu, sa vertu, c'est de se manifester à travers toute chose !" (*Contra Julianum*, II, 580 B).

Cyrill quotes the teaching of Nous to Hermes:

> And you say, "God is unseen"? – Hold your tongue! Who is more visible than God? This is why he made all things: so that through them all you might look on him. This is the goodness of God; this is his excellence: that he is visible through all things. [...]. (CH. XI, 22).

He again returns to this subject and call Hermes as a witness to his argument that the act of creating was, in fact, part of God's nature:

> Voici en effect ce qu'écrit *A Asklèpius* celui qu'on appelle Hermès Trismégiste, parlant de la nature du Tout : S'il est vrai qu'on admet deux êtres, celui qui naît et celui qui crée, l'unité fond en un seul celui qui précède et celui qui suit ; or celui qui précède, c'est le Dieu créateur, et celui qui suit c'est l'être qui naît, quel qu'il soit. [...] La gloire indivisible de Dieu est de créer toute chose, et le pouvoir créateur est comme le corps de Dieu. [...]" Plus loin, Hermès parle en termes plus chaleureux, en apportant un example manifeste: "Ainsi donc, il est permis à un même peintre de représenter le ciel, la terre, la mer, des dieux, des hommes toute sorte d'êtres privés de raison et d'âme, et Dieu est incapable de créer tout ce qui existe ? Ô comble de stupidité, profonde ignorance de ce qui touche Dieu! [...]." (*Contra Julianum*, II, 600 A-B).

Such debate regarding the definition of God is present in the following texts: Corpus Hermeticum: CH. I, 21; II 5-12, God as the Supreme good in II, 14-16 and VI; on the possibility of a man learning on God, CH. III, 3; V, 2-6; The impossibility of describing God is present as subject in: CH I, 30, IX, 1-6. In *ad Asclepius* God is a widely debated as subject in 8-22.

3.1.2.3   Christians and their separation of Hermetica

As explained in the second chapter of this study, the separation of Technical/Practical/Occult and Philosophical/Theological/Theoretical Hermetica is rather a didactic measure than a *de facto* perception of the phenomenon as a whole by its contemporaries. Festugière argued that "philosophic Hermetism" and "occult Hermetism" had little to do with each other.[360] However, Fowden has argued that the

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[360] A. -J. Festugière, *La Révélation d`Hermès Trismégiste.* (Paris: 1944-54).

two bodies of literature were not mutually exclusive. Instead, they should be understood as components of a single Hermetic worldview.[361] Nonetheless, this debate returned to this point of study in order to expose the idea that the Christian perception of the Hermetic phenomenon was indeed dual in its nature. It has been demonstrated through examples how the Christian doctrine was compatible with the hermetic cosmogony. In addition, it has been made clear just how prepared the early Christian Fathers were for debating and comparing Christianity and Hermetism. However, such disposition in dialogue with the theological and philosophical dimensions of the Hermetic literature vanishes when subjects concerning magic and the other occult wisdoms are added to the discourse.

Tertullian generally defined all magic, oracles, spirit evocations, and magicians as essentially evil:

> What after this shall we say about magic? […]it is an imposture. But it is not we Christians only whose notice this system of imposture does not escape. We, it is true, have discovered these spirits of evil, not, to be sure, by a complicity with them, but by a certain knowledge which is hostile to them; nor is it by any procedure which is attractive to them, but by a power which subjugates them that we handle (their wretched system) - that manifold pest of the mind of man, that artificer of all error, that destroyer of our salvation and our soul at one swoop. In this way, even by magic, which is indeed only a second idolatry, wherein they pretend that after death they become demons, just as they were supposed in the first and literal idolatry to become gods (and why not? since the gods are but dead things), […]. So also in that other kind of magic, which is supposed to bring up from Hades the souls now resting there, and to exhibit them to public view, there is no other expedient of imposture ever resorted to which operates more powerfully. Of course, why a phantom becomes visible, is because a body is also attached to it; and it is no difficult matter to delude the external vision of a man whose mental eye it is so easy to blind. The serpents which emerged from the magicians' rods, certainly appeared to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians as bodily substances. (*De Anima*, LVII).

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[361] G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*. (Princeton: 1993).

Note that Tertullian is not denouncing magic as a lie. He condemned its adoption as a fake system, by accusing it of being product of demoniac activity. This negative impression of magic led Lactantius to call Hermes Trismegistos "Lord of Demons" (δαιμονιάρχης).[362] In fact, Christian literature reproduced the stereotype representing magicians as compulsory deceivers and natural antagonists of the Christian faith, represented by saints and apostles.[363] However, Tertullian delimited the existence of good magic as Christian miracle, for when Christians managed to summon spirits of the dead it is God and not demons who are operating the miracle:

> The power of God has, no doubt, sometimes recalled men's souls to their bodies, as a proof of His own transcendent rights; but there must never be, because of this fact, any agreement supposed to be possible between the divine faith and the arrogant pretensions of sorcerers, and the imposture of dreams, and the licence of poets. But yet in all cases of a true resurrection, when the power of God recalls souls to their bodies, either by the agency of prophets, or of Christ, or of apostles, a complete presumption is afforded us, by the solid, palpable, and ascertained reality (of the revived body), that its true form must be such as to compel one's belief of the fraudulence of every incorporeal apparition of dead persons. (*De Anima*, LVII).

There was an apparent contradiction in the Tertullian double definition of magic in the axis: Us-divine-allowed vs. Then-demoniac-forbidden. Conversely, the early Christian texts railing against pagan and heretic practises were more concerned with expelling the other gods/beliefs than establishing their own. In this sense, Tertullian is claiming the monopoly over magic for Christians rather than condemning the practice

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[362] *Lact. Div. Inst*. II 14,6. In: J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II*. (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt: 1997), p.575.
[363] There are too many examples. For cases described in the New Testament: Simon, the nemesis of Peter, in: Acts VIII, 9-25; And for Elymas, the rival of Paul, in: Acts XIII, 8-12.

itself.[364] Such an attempt to exclude rivals instead of convincing adversaries was recurrent in this branch of Christian literature. Pagan gods and religious practices were tolerant and non-excluding about themselves, but belief in the Christian god could not tolerate other gods or religious behaviours. In this sense, it would have been a huge contradiction if Christians integrally accepted a doctrine which dismissed the necessity of a Church or any formal clergy as precondition to achieving Heaven/God. Indeed, Hermetism accepted the existence of other gods and, at the same time, claimed that the salvation of one's soul was an individual and solitary enterprise. Rituals and Processions were deemed as futile and even such seemlingy innocuous activities such as burning incense while praising God were not only considered unnecessary but also offensive to God.

In this sense, Christian usage of the Hermetica should be limited to certain specific subjects. This selective perception of Hermetism is present in the commentary of Augustin, bishop of Hippo, to whom some aspects of the Hermetic doctrine were not the work of the Holy Spirit, but of a spirit of lies. Nonetheless, on its philosophical/theological aspect he had to admit that:

> [...] regarding the one, true God, the creator of the world, he (i.e. Hermes) indeed says much that corresponds with the truth. (City of God, VIII, 23).[365]

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[364] See: P. Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* (Paris: 1983). The author explains how the Christians claimed that it was possible to convince people of their views by convincing people to trust them. Furthermore, there was indeed a war for knowledge between Christians and Pagans, hence the interest in assuring in the discourse that only Christians were able to produce true knowledge. Cicero debated the idea of religion to be nothing more than political fiction, aiming to promote social order and respect for a specific institutional autorithy in *De Natura Deorum*.

[365] D. S. Wiesen (transl.) *Augustin : City of God* - Loeb Classical Library - Book III (London: 1968).

Therefore, during the process of codification of the Christian doctrine, a functional division of the Hermetic literature was promoted based on its content. Early Christian thinkers assimilated the parts of the Hermetica that were in harmony with the Christian doctrine. When some content was more connected to the pagan mentality or to heresies such as the Gnostic sects, it was corrected as a misunderstanding, or repelled as demonic.

3.1.3 Technical Hermetica and Pagan Thought

Taking a different route than the Christian Hermetists, the pagan milieu endorsed the technical and philosophical aspects of the Hermetic doctrine with the same deference. Magic was very popular in the pagan milieu, especially regarding love charms, divine protection, avenging human enemies and necromancy. According to Pinch:

> Most surviving Egyptian magic is concerned with protection or healing. In the Graeco-Egyptian papyri, magic is often motivated by the desire for sexual pleasure, financial gain and social success.[366]

Magicians were not necessarily as evil as portrayed in Christian literature, but indeed celebrated as extraordinary individuals, even to the point of holiness.[367] The general belief in Egypt was that Hermes Trismegistos was the link between contemporary times and the lost idealised Egyptian past. Emperor Julian commented in the 4th century A.D that:

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[366] G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*. (London: 1994), p. 163.
[367] As in the case of Apollonius of Tyana, who was deemed a holy man and produced miracles with the same greatness of those the Christians claimed that Christ did. See: K. Seligmann, *The History of Magic*. (Ner York: 1948), pp.87-8.

> [...] the Egyptians, as they reckon up the names of not a few wise men among themselves, can boast that they possess many successors of Hermes, I mean of Hermes who in his third manifestation visited Egypt. (*Contra Galelaeans* 176 AB).[368]

The reproduction of such "ancestry" as a social discourse deliberately ignored all external[369] cultural influences, such as Babylonian, or Hebrew, for instance. According to Fowden:

> [...] the evidence for substantial continuities between the Egyptian priestly literature and the technical Hermetica is patchy, not surprisingly in view of Egypt's successive exposure to Babylonian influences [...] But Graeco-Egyptian magic, which was to a large extent conceived of a Hermetic, can certainly be seen in terms of translation and interpretation of native materials; and the same can not be said of Hermetic alchemy and astrology [...]."[370]

Technical Hermetica were a demonstration of the divine dimension of men. It has already been explained that God created Man and sent him to Earth in order to rule over the creation with his share of the divine Logos. Man's older brother, the Cosmos, creator of the seven spheres and their gods (i.e. stars, constellations) gave him a share of each god's virtue, in order to assist him during his experiences in the material world. This principle establishes Man as superior to the gods, since he belongs to a superior sphere of existence. In this sense, philosophical and technical Hermetica are essentially interconnected. So, despite Hermetism's borrowing from Aristotelian, Stoic, Platonic and Jewish thought[371], the Hermetic doctrine articulated its occultism and philosophy in

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[368] W. C. Wright (transl.) *The Works of Emperor Julian, v.I.* (London: 1961).
[369] "External" in the sense of not belonging to the axis Greek's – Egyptian's symbolic referential symbolic universes.
[370] G. Fowden *The Egyptian Hermes.* (Princeton: 1993), p. 68.
[371] See: G. Fowden, *op. cit*, pp. 36-7; and B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity.* (Minneapolis: 1990).

such consistent form that it managed to insert its influence into the development of new systems of thought.

3.1.3.1 Iamblichus of Chalcis as a Hermetist

In his work *De Mysteriis Aegyptorum*[372], written between late third century and early 4th century A.D, the Syrian Neo-Platonist/Neo-Pythagorean Iamblichus established a particular conception of magic by which the human soul could achieve salvation through rituals aimed at contact with gods. Iamblichus based his explanation on the divine aspect of his so-called theurgy (lit. the work of gods, normally translated as a synonym for magical practices) in the hermetical principle of Man's dual nature.

As a result, his perception of the occult arts connected them as a complementary mechanism which aimed for the perfection of souls. Using Egypt as a reference for his system, Iamblichus followed the idea that Hermetism did parallel many aspects of Egyptian tradition, reproducing some degree of "Egyptomania" that existed in the Graeco-Roman mentality.

a) On Theurgy

In his work, Iamblichus reproduced the old *formula* of claiming an Egyptian priest (Abammon) for the authorship of his work.[373] In fact, this tendency to relate Egypt to occult and fantastic wisdom remained a part of late Graeco-Roman imagery. In this sense, Hermetic occultism and philosophical principles were commonly portrayed as

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[372] This title is an invention of Marcilio Ficino.
[373] Cf. the headlines of *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum.*

having had Egyptian origins. Iamblichus nonetheless made it clear that theurgy was a distinct and sacred process.

> Si donc l'ascension obtenue par les invocations procure aux prêtres purification des passions, affranchissement du monde créé, union au principe divin, comment dire qu'elle implique une passibillité? Car il n'est pas vrai que cette sorte d'invocation attire de force les dieux impassibles et purs vers le passible et l'impur ; au contraire, elle fait de nous, qui en raison de la génération sommes nés passibles, des êtres purs et immuables. (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* I, 12).

Indeed, theurgy was magic. The difference pointed out by Iamblichus was based on the premise that magic was essentially egotistically motivated, for it served human passions: desires, fears, ambitions, etc. On the other hand, the major objective of Theurgy was the spiritual improvement.[374] In that sense, Theurgy was the proposal of a "moral code" with regards to handling magic rather than an entirely new branch of magic.

> Le bien en soi, ils (les Égyptiens) croient que c'est, s'il divin, le dieu qui transcende la pensée ; s'il est humain, l'union à ce dieu, comme Bitys[375] l'a traduit des livres hermétiques. Cette partie n'a donc pas été, comme tu le supposes, "négligée par les Égyptien", mais divinement transmise ; et ce n'est pas d'"objects futiles que les théurges accablent l'intellect divin", mais de ce qui se rapporte à la purification de l'âme [...]. (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* X, 7).

Deeply influenced by Hermetic texts, Iamblichus, - writing through his pseudonym Abammonis - tried to establish a correlation between Hermetica and Egyptian tradition.

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[374] See: G. Luch "Theurgy and Forms of Worship." In: J. Neusner *et alii*, *Religion, Science and Magic*. (Oxford: 1989), pp. 185-228. See also G. Shaw, Theurgy and the Soul: The Neo-Platonism of Iamblichus. (Pennsylvania: 1995).
[375] The Egyptian priest and Hermetist Bitys is presented by Iamblichus as being responsible for presenting King Ammon with the Hermetic texts (*De Myst*. VIII, 5). Fowden, *op.cit*, p. 150, n.34, believes that the frequent references to a certain Pitys in PGM IV might be a reference to him.

According to Iamblichus's explanation, the choice of Philosophy as the way to produce Hermetic literature would have been a consequence of the translation's process from Egyptian to Greek.

> Ceux (écrits) qui circulent sous le nom d'Hermès contiennent des opinions hermétiques, bien que souvent ils s'expriment dans la langue des philosophes; car ils on été traduits de l'égyptien par des hommes qui n'étaient pas sans connaître la philosophie. (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* VIII, 4).

In this sense, he defended the importance of the original Egyptian names in a magical perspective:

> Chaque peuple a des caractéristiques impossibles à transposer dans la langue d'un autre ; ensuite, même si on peut traduire ces noms, en tous cas ils ne gardent plus la même puissance ; de plus, les noms barbares ont à la fois beaucoup de solennité et beaucoup de concision, ils ont moins d'ambiguïté, de variété, et les mots qui les expriment sont moins nombreux ; pour toutes ces raisons ils s'accordent aux êtres supérieurs." (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* VII, 5).

His opinion on this subject seems to be supported by Asclepios' teachings to King Ammon in *Corpus Hermeticum*:

> The very quality of the speech and the <sound> of Egyptian words have in themselves the energy of objects they speak of. (CH. XVI, 1).

This passage is also subject of debate in the second chapter of this study, but in a different context of argumentation. However, Iamblichus had a different interpretation of this same passage and used it to support the idea that Egyptian sounds should be preserved in order to preserve their magical virtues. His interpretations may be a consequence of two different dimensions of ideologic appropriation:

First, an unpredictable and expontaneous cultural dialogue with the source. For Iamblichus it would be culturally unfathomable to consider any kind of criticism of the efficiency of philosophy as a system of intellectual digression/instruction. It was part of all Hellenized symbolic systems that the 'truth' was that philosophy was the only civilized way of intellectual expression. Therefore Iamblichus and his other Hellenistic contemporaries would be 'symbolically blind' to any such possibility.

Another possibility is a subordination of the text to its receptor's social-political expectations: Iamblichus could not accept the possibility of Hermetic criticism of philosophy since he was proposing a philosophic system. Since he consistently based a part of his system on "translated Egyptian tradition", it would be illogical to promote an interpretation in which his main source of symbolic legitimacy disagreed with his ideas regarding the efficacy of philosophy.

What is exposed in Iamblichus' "The Mysteriis" is that Egyptian sounds were believed to have had magical virtues, and therefore, they should be "symbolically preserved" at least as *voces magicae*. Indeed, the so-called Greek Magical Papyri have plenty of examples of how Greek spells recurred to the expedient of *voces magicae*[376] in order to transcribe Egyptian Demotic sacred names, and fulfil evocations.

> Charm that produces a direct vision: Prayer for divine alliance, which you are to say first toward the sunrise, then the same first prayer is to be spoken to a lamp. [...] Hymn: Hail, serpent, and stout lion, natural sorces of fire./ And hail, clear water and lofty-leafed tree,/ and you who gather up clover from golden fields of beans, and who cause gentle foam to gush forth from pure mouths. [...] I pray because your mystic symbols I declare, ηω αι ου αμερρ οουωθ · τυϊωη · Μαρμαραυώθ · Λαϊλαμ · σουμαρτα · Be gracious unto me, first-father, and may you yourself sent strength as my companion. [...]. (PGM. IV, 930-949).[377]

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[376] It is the transcription and glossing alphabetically secret magic names. For a study on Greek and Demotic Magical Papyri, see: J. Dieleman. *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*. (Leiden/Boston: 2005).

[377] H.D. Betz (ed.). *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation.* (Chicago, London: 2004), pp.56-7. Betz (p. 56, n.126) identifies this spell as a Greek equivalent to the Demotic spell called: *pḥ-nṯr* (god's arrival).

Note that in the Hermetic tractate *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth, voces magicae* are also evoked twice by Tat in his calling for the angels of the eighth and ninth spheres:

> He is perfect, the invisible God to whom one speaks in silence – his image is moved when it is directed, and it governs – the one mighty power, who is exalted above majesty, who is better than honoured (ones), Ζοχαθαζο Α ωω ΕΕ ωωω ΗΗΗ ωωωω ΗΗ ωωωωωω ΟΟΟΟΟ ωωωωωω ΥΥΥΥΥ ωωωωωωωωωωωω ωωω Ζοζαζοθ. (NHH. VI-6, 56,10-20).[378]

And in his calling for God's hidden name:

> I praise you . I call your name that is hidden within me: Α ω ΕΕ ωω ΗΗΗ ωωω ΙΙΙΙ ωωωω ΟΟΟΟΟ ωωωωω ΥΥΥΥΥ ωωωωωω ωωωωωωω ωωωωωωωωω. (NHH. VI-6, 61, 4-10).

In fact, the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri reveals many similarities with theurgy as well as with technical contents of Hermetic discourses. They can be understood as the products of the same intercultural phenomenon. In a general analysis of Magic in Graeco-Roman Egypt, Pinch declares:

> […] most of the techniques featured in the spells find precedents in earlier Egyptian Magic. These include identification with and threats against deities, the use of the dead as intermediaries, the making of magical figurines and protective amulets, and the drawning of divine figures and the invocation of deities by their sacred names.[379]

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[378] The names Ζοχαθαζο and Ζοζαζοθ can also be found in PGM XIII 138, 213. Zoxathaz can be a combination of Life (ζωή) and Death (θάνατος). See: J. Holzhausen, *Das Corpus Hermeticum-Deutsch II.* (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt: 1997), p. 521, n.57. Holzhausen observes connection of the seven Greek vocals with the seven known planets. See: J. –P. Mahé, *Hermès en Haute-Égypte, I.* (Québec: 1978), p.73.

[379] G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt.* (London: 1994), p. 163.

Iamblichus also attacked Christian's view on magic, acusing Christians of impiety for denying the divine principles supporting theurgy:[380]

> Et ceux par lesquels certains ridiculisent comme vagabonds et charlatans les fidèles des dieux, [...] ceux-là non plus n'atteignent pas la vraie théologie et la vraie théurgie. (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* X, 3).

His theurgy proposed a way to form a relationship with magic. From this perspective, the use of magic was acceptable and necessary in the process of learning about God.

b) On Astrology

Astrology in Graeco-Roman age was a mixing of Greek, Egyptian and Mesopotamian lores.[381] Some stars and constellations were preeminent in Egypt religious tradition, but the twelve signs of zodiac are a Greek invention. It was based on the theory that the energy of stars and planets were connected to certain precious stones and metals, and parts of the human body as well. Astrology was a popular phenomenon in Graeco-Roman world. Emperors had "Egyptian astrologers" at their service.[382] Astrologers had

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[380] As in the attacks of Augustin in *City of God* X, 9-11. Augustin condemned all kinds of magic and classified incantantions, charms, necromancy (*goetia*) and theurgy as demonolatry. He addressed these chapters against Platonists like Porphyry who insisted in the divine aspects of theurgy.

[381] For a complete analysis of the development of Astronomy in a comparative approach on Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians including Indian and Hellenistic sources, see: B. L. van der Waerden, *Anfänge der Astronomie* (Groningen: 1956). For a study on Egyptian astrology and the Graeco-Roman milieu, see: J. Dieleman, "Claiming the Stars – Egyptian Priests Facing the Sky." In: S. Bickel, A. Loprieno (eds.) AH 17 (Basel: 2003), pp. 277-289. See also: O. Neugebauer, R. A. Parker, *Egyptian astronomical Texts 3vols.* (London: 1969).

[382] See: G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt.* (London: 1994), p. 169, and J. Dieleman, "Claiming the Stars – Egyptian Priests Facing the Sky." In: S. Bickel, A. Loprieno (Eds.) *Aegyptiaca Helvetica* 17 (Basel: 2003), p. 277-89.

such social prestige that even the New Testament[383] included a scene of young Jesus receiving a visit of three eastern wise men/mages[384] guided by a mighty star.

> When they heard the king. They departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood where the young Child was. (Mt. II, 9).

Iamblichus` definition and justification of astrology is deeply connected to the Hermetic principle of Man's duality.[385] A spiritual being who descended to Earth with God's blessings in order to learn about Him and to help rule the creation. In that sense, Man was restricted by the cosmic forces ruling the material world. The seven spheres or astral gods who governed the Material world in obedience to Fate had *de facto* influences over men as long as they remained in their jurisdiction. Thus, while Theurgy helped Man in his transcendence to the gods, Astrology helped him to understand and control[386] his relations with Fate.[387] He explained that Astrology was just one of the many topics of the Hermetic doctrine:

> Les ephemerides astrologiques ne contiennent qu'une petite partie du système d'Hermès (τῶν ἑρμαϊκῶν διατάξεων). (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* VIII, 4).

By analysing the Egyptian thought he established that it was a characteristic of Egyptians to differentiate between the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of life:

> Ils (les Égyptiens) distinguent de la nature la vie psychique et la vie intellectuelle, non seulement à propos de l'univers mais dans notre cas: mettant au-dessus intelect et raison

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[383] Matthew II, 1-13.
[384] That depends of the translation. "Wise men" in English, like "Weisen" in German. "Mages" in French, "magos" in Spanish and Portuguese, "μάγοι" in Greek.
[385] As exposed in CH. I, 15, and already explained in the second chapter of this study.
[386] "Control" in the sense of not being reduced to a passive beholder of Fate's actions. For a well trained astrologer it was possible to change one's fate through foreknowledge.
[387] The Hermetic relation with Fate is explained in chapter 2.2.1, II-b of this study.

comme étant à part soi, ils leur font oevrer les êtres du devenir; [...]. (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* VIII, 4).

As in the Hermetic doctrine, Man also has a dual Logos[388], which could be used as intellectual virtue, in order to prosper over the material world and as spiritual virtue, in order to assure him of the possibility of transcending back to God's side. Concerning the Hermetic Astrology, Iamblichus observed that the dual nature of Man leaves him under the rule of Fate as long as he lived in his material form.

> La plupart des Égyptiens font dépendre notre libre arbiter du movement des asters."Ce qu'il en est, il faut te l'expliquer plus longuement, en recourant aux conceptions hermétiques. D'après ces écrits, l'homme a deux âmes : l'une issue du Premier Intelligible, qui participe aussi à la puissance du démiurge ; l'autre introduite en nous à partir de la révolution des corps célestes; c'est en celle-ci que se glisse l'âme qui voit Dieu. (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* VIII, 6).

In that sense, Iamblichus proposed that in order to free oneself of Fate, it was necessary to become divine, by seeking God and avoiding all evildoings. That process demanded a dual effort. One side was the moral/spiritual purification...

> Je pronounce donc que l'homme conçu comme divinise, uni auparavant à la contemplation des dieux, s'est glissé dans une âme combinée à la forme spéecifiquement humaine et par là trouvé pris aux liens de la nécessité et de la fatalité. Il faut donc examiner comment il se délie et sáffranchit de ces liens. Or, il n'est pas d'autre moyen que la connaissance des dieux : l'essence du bonheur, en effect, c'est d'avoir la science du bien, comme l'essence du mal consiste dans l'oubli du bien et l'illusion au sujet du mal ; [...]." (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* X, 5).

... and the other side was intellectual, through the magical development of channels to the gods. Iamblichus explained that the union with the gods, or theurgy produced the spiritual purification and allowed man to triumph over Fate:

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[388] The Hermetic Logos and its duality are explained in CH. XII, 14. With regards to the transcendence of Man due to his Nous, it is the subject of CH. XII,1. See also tables 10 a/b of this study.

La connaissance des dieux s'accompagne du retour à nous-mêmes et de la connaissance de notre âme. [...] Chez les dieux, la vérité ne subsiste-t-elle pas ennson essence et non sellon un accord, fondée qu'elle est sur les intelligibles ? (*De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* X, 1-2).

Thus, astrology was a method of combining the intellectual and spiritual aptitudes (the double-essential Hermetic Logos), which composed human nature. Iamblichus claimed that – in agreement with his contemporaries' general knowledge on this subject – that it was a part of Egypt's tradition. His perception was that astrology aimed to predict or influence human affairs by understanding how the divine will operated through Fate. This understanding was a demonstration of how one's intellect could help one's soul in the task of self-purification.

3.1.3.2   Sabians and their fusion of Hermetica

Sabians are normally identified as Persians, Zoroastrians and Eastern Chaldeans, while their religion is portrayed as a star-worshiping cult. According to Assmann, some Gnostic sects from the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D could also fit in the definition of Sabian. At the end of the 4th century A.D, the Syrian city of Harran[389] was still pagan and its population remained following the Mesopotamian Moon god "Sin".[390]

According to Drijvers[391], soteriology, cosmology, anthropology and theology of Bar Daysan of Edessa[392] (154 - 222 A.D) are consistent with the Hermetic worldview as expressed in the Poimandres. Despite this, Harranian beliefs were not exclusively

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[389] In the vicinities of Edessa, in modern Turkey.

[390] J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*. (London: 1997), p.57.

[391] H. J. W. "Bardaisan of Edessa and the Hermetica: The Aramaic Philosopher and the Philosophy of his time", in: JEOL, 21, 1970, pp.190-210.

[392] *Ibidem.* Bar Daysan of Edessa was one of the most important links in the chain of transmission of Hermetism to the Near East.

derived from Hermetic sources as other influences were also present. In Haran, Hermetism had been syncronized with late Neo-Platonism which was prior to the rise of Islam.[393] In the 7th century A.D, this late Hellenistic Hermetism submitted to the invading Muslim forces. According to Holmyard,

> Syrian pagans from Harran were [...] star-worshippers and diligent astrologers. These Sabians, as the Arabs called them, possessed exceptional skills as linguists, and the ease with which they acquired Arabic recommended them to the courts at Baghdad [...].[394]

By the time of the Muslim conquest, Babylonian, Assyrian, Jewish, Greek, Graeco-Egyptian and Roman religion as well as Syriac Christianity had interpreted Harranian religion which was rooted in the worship of the stars and raised astrology to the level of a religion. According to Green,

> Sabian, then, is a synonym for gnostic. Given this definition, the stories found in certain Muslim authors connecting Sabian beliefs with those of the Egyptians, the references to Hermes, Enos, Seth and the Agathodaimon, the supposed pilgrimages of Sabians to the pyramids and the secret rituals and prayers would all make sense in the context of this definition of Sabian.[395]

However, from 830 A.D on, the term was used specifically to refer to Harran. According to Scott, they claimed to be Sabians in order to escape persecution[396], and declared that the Hermetic books were their sacred writings.[397] Hermetism persisted as a living tradition in the city of Haran in Syria as late as the tenth century, when its

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[393] See: T. M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran.* (Leiden: 1992), p.168.
[394] E. J. Holmyard, *Alchemy,* (Dover, New York: 1990), p.68.
[395] *Ibidem,* p.110.
[396] For the Koran (2: 59; 5:73; 22:17) proclaimed that Jews, Christians and Sabians were believers and therefore are protected by the Law. However, regardless of this, they were obligated to convert in 1050 A.D.
[397] W. Scott (ed., Transl.) *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus.* (Oxford: 1929), pp. 97-108.

leading exponent, Thabit ibn Qurra (835-901A.D), established a pagan Hermetic school in Baghdad.[398] Prominent Muslim philosophers as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and others were influenced by Hellenistic Hermetic writings.[399] Therefore, cases like the pagan-Gnostic tradition of Harran and the so-called Technical Hermetica were, in fact, Philosophical. Furthermore, such perceptions were assimilated and reproduced by the Islamic thought, following a radically opposite view of the Hermetic phenomenon that was developed by Christians.

3.2 The Hermetica as a Social Discourse

When the social reproduction of a text begins, it gains the potential to be also used as a social discourse. After the presentation of a text before society, authors no longer have control over the significance and meanings of their texts. The Hermetic literature was received in different ways, since different social groups used it. In the case of anonymous or pseudepigraphic texts, like the Hermetica, the allegorical authorship aims to achieve symbolic credibility and social prestige in order to promote a certain text in society. In a commentary on the Hermetica Foucault observes that,

> [...] the fact that several texts have been placed under the same name indicates that there
> has been established among them a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentification
> of some texts by the use of others, reciprocal explanation, or concomitant utilization. The
> author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse. [...] it is a

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[398] See: A. E. Affifi, "The Influence of Hermetic Literature on Moslem Thought." In: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13/4, (Cambridge: 1951), p. 844, and D. Merkur, *Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions*. (New York: 1991), p. 20-1. W. Scott, *op.cit*, pp. 103-5 mentions a book from ibn Qurra called *De Religionen Sabianorum*.
[399] See: A. E. Affifi, *op.cit*., and Ch. Genequand, "Platonism and Hermetism in al-Kindi's *Fi al-Nafs*." In: *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 4 (Frankfurt: 1987-8), pp.1-18.

speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status".[400]

Indeed, a text, when in circulation throughout society, is liable to be interpreted, re-interpreted, and adapted according to the multiple understandings and interests present in different social groups such as Christians, Pagans and Gnostics. According to Foucault[401], a social discourse is related to power as it operates by rules of exclusion. Each group had a particular perspective of the Hermetic literature according to its contents and background. These perspectives were different for each social group since they represented different symbolic universes. By aiming for a reproduction of a sense of order, Christians, Pagans and Gnostics offered particular interpretations in order to satisfy each group's "ideologies".[402] Here, an "ideology" is understood as a system of ideas and beliefs, which characterizes a specific social group and the process of the production of significant themes and ideas in society by this given group. Each social group has its own "truth". Here, "truth" should be understood as the correspondence between social discourse and empirical reality[403], and this empirical reality is the perception of normality according to the common sense of a social group. This common sense is formed expontaneously through plural and not-centralized experiences, and therefore is arbitrary, for it is part of a group's process of formation of a symbolic system.[404]

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[400] M. Foucault, "What is an author?" In: J. V. Harari (ed), *Textual strategies: perspectives in post-structuralist criticism.* (London: 1980), p. 147.

[401] See: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish.* (New York: 1977).

[402] See: J. McCarney, *Social theory and crisis of Marxism.* (London: 1990), and: D. Navarro (ed.), *Cultura, ideología y sociedad.* (Havana: 1983).

[403] Cf. Aristotles *Metaphisics* 101, 1b-25.

[404] Note that common sense is a vulgar knowledge, and is therefore different than empirism, since common sense has no method of control over the process of knowledge's construction.

According to Geertz[405], the process of creating significance is cultural and lends itself to common sense, since most symbols are given by individuals. Indeed, the symbols of an individual's community are already in use when he is born and they will remain in circulation after his death. Common sense constructs identification based on the recognition of a rise in common or shared characteristics with other groups of people, or the recognition of the presence of the same ideal. According to Augé[406], culture can be understood here as a net of symbolic systems. The process of symbolisation of a society is promoted by its social groups. They aim to understand and control the cultural perception of what is real, truth, fake, good, bad, etc. Sahlins[407] understands that a symbolic system is necessarily arbitrary, since it aims to offer a particular perception of normality to a given cultural group – and in this sense, "culture" is how people, without thinking or consciousness, live.

Then, the respective social discourses promote and reproduce each "truth" to the respective social group. By the process of reception, assimilation and diffusion of texts in the perspective of each group's social discourse, they become what Said called "*idées reçues*"[408], which starts to echo repeatedly throughout society, but without any criticism. The reason behind this is that typically the notion of knowledge is deeply connected to the idea of truth: it is impossible to mention one without the other. When a group's common sense agrees with the value of the truth of a sentence, or text, the individuals participating in that group are actually promoting a subjective judgment on the value of that sentence or text. This agreement, or *consensus*, leads to any discourse

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[405] C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. (New York : 1973).
[406] M. Augé, *Le sens des autres.* (Paris: 1994).
[407] M. Sahlins, *Islands of History*. (Chicago: 1985).
[408] E. W. Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: 1978).

quoting that sentence or text acquiring the status of truth for being in agreement with the social discourse.[409] According to Fowden:

> [...] the tendency for certain passages from the Hermetica to be quoted and quoted again and again in the non-Hermetic literature points to the existence of anthologies as well, organised in more readily digestible form than the collections.[410]

Once the Hermetic texts achieved greater prestige throughout the Graeco-Roman world, it became possible to reproduce them as sources for intellectual debates. In this case, Hermetic discourses could be partially reproduced among intellectual circles as well. Early Christians, for instance, mentioned and quoted some of the "Hermaic Books" and were able to find common points in Hermetism in order to add legitimacy to their own doctrine. However, according to their own doctrines they also established that all kinds of magic operations were evil, demoniac, impostures, etc. Therefore, the Christian social discourse declared that no Hermetic texts concerning occultism were worthy to be read. On the other hand, Pagan intellectuals contested the negative status of magic and consequently the Hermetic texts on this subject. The Hermetica were indeed an important source for Syrian Neo-Platonism of Iamblichus of Chalcis, as well as for his master Porphyry of Tyre, and Bardaisan of Edessa. Theurgy and Astrology were deeply connected with the Hermetic doctrine. Thus, Pagan's perception of the Hermetica was that the whole *corpus* was interconnected, and therefore there was no logic behind the Christian way of separating good/philosophical Hermetica from evil/technical Hermetica.

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[409] K. Barwise, J. Etchemendy, *The Liar: An Essay on Truth and Circularity.* (Oxford: 1989), see also: K. Barwise, J. Etchemendy, *Language, Proof and Logic*. (Stanford: 2002).
[410] G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*. (Princeton: 1993), p.4.

Furthermore, Gnostic contents of the Hermetic discourses influenced both Christian and pagan Gnosticism as well. Lastly, via Harran, Hermetism was assimilated by the Islamic world as a fusion of Platonism, Alchemy and Astrology.[411]

The *Corpus Hermeticum* was a textual production that proposed a code of moral, ethic, and spiritual values to society. However, as a social discourse it was also able to establish different proposals of social *consensus*. The *consensus* is actually the feeling of "normality" and "continuity" of a community's life, defined by Bourdieu as "*habitus*".[412] Due to society's acceptance of the Hermetica`s symbolic value or authority as a source of information, the general knowledge reproduced in them were used throughout social relations. That means that once the Hermetica achieve a certain status in society, they become reliable enough to be quoted as a superior reference in debates, or in supporting or condemning some specific point of view. According to Green,

> The mystical powers of Hermes exerted themselves far beyond the pagan world of late antiquity, transmuting medieval Christian and Islamic understanding of the relationship between rational knowledge and revelation.[413]

Hermetism was incorporated into Christian theologies and the gospels of Paul and John. Those Christian writers who included Hemetism as part of Christian doctrines through quotations and debates, (i.e.Tertullian, Lactantius, Augustin, etc.) were used as sources by Giordano Bruno, Marsilio Ficino, Campanella and Giovanni Pico della Mirandolla in order to classify Hermes Trismegistos as a wise pagan prophet who

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[411] See: A. E. Affifi, "The Influence of Hermetic Literature on Moslem Thought." In: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13/4, (Cambridge: 1951), and: T. M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*. (Leiden:1992).
[412] P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*. (Paris: 1980), p. 88.
[413] T. M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*. (Leiden: 1992), p.85.

foresaw the coming of Christianity.[414] The Hermetic doctrine dealt with the intellectual and spiritual faculties of man as balanced equivalents. It proposed a dialogue between Egypt's idealistic past and contemporary reality by combining Greek philosophic principles and Egypt's theological principles. On the other hand, once incorporated by social discourses it became part of a different branch of power as it was used to legitimatise different political alignments. The further utilization of the Hermetica in debates and/or in the formation of opinions results from man`s ambitions for symbolic authority and social credibility.

3.3 Textual Circularity and Social Interpretations of the Hermetic Logos

In late antiquity, different social groups representing different thoughts and ideologies were in constant dispute while they imposed and defended their respective ways of life. Christians struggled to conquer new adepts by destroying the credibility of Paganism – including pagan Gnostics - and heretic Christian factions – including Christian Gnostics. The others struggled to maintain the strength of their symbolic universes, and attacked Christian's aspirations of hegemony over the Roman Empire. In this context, the intellectual debate promoting the codification of the Christian doctrine was also a method of critiquing all rival doctrines. In this sense, the meaning of a text is not merely found inside it, but is also built through an active social process, since it is ideological. The texts can be used in an "ideological" sense, since social discourses promote identities, exclusions, orientations and behaviours. What determines the ideological or

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[414] The renascentists believed in a *Prisca Theologia*, the doctrine that a unique, true theology existed, which threaded through all religions, and which was given by god to mankind in antiquity. See: F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. (London: 1990).

political usage of a social discourse is the external context of the social process in which it is inserted.

As social groups, Christians, Pagans and Gnostics used a vast supply of literature in order to offer justification and legitimacy to their beliefs and behaviours, the Hermetic literature was part of this process. There was not a canonical interpretation, nor a "right way" of using the Hermetic texts, since the uses are culturally established by different social groups. They could be used equally as part of a theological discourse, philosophical debate, and erudite curiosity. In fact, the "usage" of Hermetic texts was by no means restrained to "Hermetic esoteric-like circles" – if one existed. Christian Gnostics used them in Nag Hammadi, Christian apologists assimilated them in their discourses and Pagan Philosophers debated them and used them in their own systems. Therefore, each social group had different interests, strategies, and interpretations of the Hermetica. Furthermore, at one time these interpretations could be contradictory among the groups. Consequently, the difference of interpretations produced different "truths" concerning the Hermetica. Each "truth" was reproduced as part of the respective social group's symbolic universe. Then, there was a Christian, a Pagan, and a Gnostic general view of the same phenomenon, and each one's interpretation could be used as part of the argument to support one's group, or as a tool to use against the other groups.

In that sense, it is possible to understand how the Christian view of Hermetism focused more on its theological/philosophical aspects. Christian theology claimed that only Christians could perform true magic – called miracles – for they were instruments of the only true God. Following this logic, all pagan magicians were dealing with demons. Then, the process of assimilating the Hermetica to the Christian symbolic universe also created a distinction between good Hermetica (philosophical/theological

contents) *and* bad Hermetica (all contents encouraging occult/magic/esoteric individual practices). Therefore, when Christians performed the separation of Hermetica, they were actually reproducing their judgement on Egyptian tradition – for the general agreement depicted the Hermetica as Egyptian – and in another perspective, reproducing the Christian judgement of the entire non-Christian social reality. On the other hand, magic was part of the quotidian life not only in Egypt but in all pagan societies as well; its practice was also an important part of all cults to the gods across pagan societies. It would make no sense at all if the pagans' approach on the Hermetica had promoted any distinction between magical *and* theological contents in the Hermetica. As they understood it, Hermetism, theurgy, astrology (and alchemy), were the connections between magical and theological contents of the doctrine. Such perception was indeed assimilated by Islamic thought.

Hermetism is not a collection of heterogeneous doctrines, nor a single synthesis, but an autonomous mode of discourse, concerned with theological, philosophical and magical subjects. The "gnosis" of Hermetism – i.e. the secret knowledge, which granted salvation of one's soul – was shared through a symbolic initiation: the experience of Nous/God. It was ecstasy born out of cognitive activities. The concept of this experience influenced Christian mysticism as well.

The Hermetic texts were reproduced as social discourse throughout the quotidian social relations, becoming part of the society's common sense. Here, common sense is the knowledge shared by the subjects of a social relationship. Once its communicability is forged through dynamic processes of interpretation, negotiation, imagination, reformulation, and reinterpretation it creates habits and thoughts. When the Hermetica are approached as an element of a social discourse, it becomes possible to understand

how society debated and applied their contents as ideological proposals. Therefore, a discourse is not just a linguistic phenomenon. It is understood in this study as something necessarily biased. The Hermetica became part of the Graeco-Roman society, and helped to shape its mentality. They were also useful instruments of mediation in the process of forming opinions under different social-political ideologies. The Hermetica are a social discourse as long as they help to legitimate lores, produce *consensus* - thus, a common sense - and support ideologies.

Conclusion

The Greek and Egyptian civilizations were already well integrated centuries before the arrival of Alexander the Great. In fact, Egypt was a part of the political dimension of Greek life. On the other hand, Archaic and Classical Greek authors reproduced a discourse that idealized Egypt as well. As a result, Egypt was stereotyped in Greek literature as the foremost ancient civilization and cradle of all knowledge, including that of Greek civilization. After the conquest of Egypt by the Macedonians, the political relationship between Greeks and Egyptians underwent a revolution. It started a contrast between the dominant and dominated. The Hellenistic period could be classified as another moment of foreign domination, like many others in Egyptian History. As in other cases of foreign rule in Egypt, the Macedonian kings reproduced the traditional political relationship with the priestly elite. They assumed the symbolic category of pharaoh, and promoted a political relationship of power with the mediation of the native religious elite. However, the Hellenistic relationship of power was also reproduced by a discourse of Greek cultural supremacy, which dragged culture into a political category. Since culture assumed a political value in the Hellenistic age, the reproduction of all traditional tensions between dominant and dominated factions carried a different societal impact.

Due to these transformations on the handling of culture, the Hellenistic domination also created new perceptions and definitions of cultural identity. Although Greeks and Egyptians could identify themselves as the positive antithesis of the other, as generations passed such a dichotomy would become even thinner as Greeks and Egyptians adopted nearly the same behaviours and customs in Egypt. Following the

path of the entire Hellenistic kingdom, Hellenistic Egypt developed a Graeco-Egyptian mentality. This mentality could be roughly described as the combination of Greek and Egyptian cultural values. This process echoed in a new thought, combining Greek philosophical principles with the Egyptian concept of "salvation". In this sense, Hellenistic approaches to philosophy took on more esoterical and metaphysical content. Egyptian religiosity and cults became popular among Greek settlers of Egypt and Ptolemaic dominions of the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Philosophy also became a subject of Egyptian appreciation. Examples of philosophers-priests like Chaeremon and those who produced and debated the so-called Book of Thoth across Egyptian temples in the country demonstrated the native interest in philosophic digressions concerning life, death, cosmos, soul, etc.

Note that the Hellenistic age witnessed the transformation of the relationship in the political dimension between Greeks and Egyptians. Conversely, the idealisation of Egypt as a land of natural and supernatural science remained unchanged in the Greek mentality. Throughout the Ptolemaic and Roman administrations, Graeco-Roman authors reproduced the traditional Greek representation of Egypt as a land of non-vulgar traditions, especially concerning religiosity and occultism. Indeed, Egyptian religiosity was popular among all social and cultural segments of Egypt's Hellenistic/Graeco-Roman population. Greek and Egyptian pantheons were connected through the syncretistic discourse called *interpretatio graeca,* and, in that context, the Greek-Egyptian syncretism identified the Egyptian god of wisdom Thoth as the Greek divine messenger Hermes. From late Ptolemaic times through the Roman domination, all texts concerning medicine, astrology, magic, etc, were generally claimed as products of Thoth-Hermes authorship. The huge popularity of this deity managed to give an

independent identity to the Egyptian Hermes, who was depicted as wise/magician from a remote past and whose doctrine - translated into Greek idioms and through Greek philosophic terminology - combined intellectual and emotional reasons. His doctrine was not formally codified, or even officially named. The Graeco-Roman age contemporaries followed their Egyptian predecessors and simply called them the texts/books of Thoth-Hermes.

In this historical context, what we now classify as Hermetic doctrine was an irregular production of anonymous/pseudepigraphical texts which combined principles of magic, alchemy, astrology with theological and philosophical digressions. Although Greek and Egyptian cultures were present in its composition, there were also elements of different cultural origins. Nonetheless, the Graeco-Egyptian perception of the Hermetic literature insisted on the discourse as being "translations of a pure and remote idealised Egyptian past". Indeed, the Hermetic philosophical and theological principles had many common points with Greek philosophic schools like the Neo-Platonism, Egyptian cosmogony, and with the monotheistic religions of the time, teaching that all beings derive from one supreme God, who is the object of each soul's worship.

Despite its multiple cultural influences, it was a consensus in the Graeco-Roman world to depict the Hermetica as synonym of Egyptian knowledge. Hellenistic civilizations in general - and especially the Roman Empire in the first few centuries A.D - were known for the syncretistic drive of their component cultures. Greeks and Romans were borrowing from the Egyptians, the Jews, and the Persians, while these cultures in turn borrowed from the Greeks and the Romans, and from each other. The intermingling of Egyptian and Hellenistic populations, as well as their rational and sacred ideas made such borrowing a necessity, and contributed to a widespread feeling of tolerance and

cosmopolitanism. All cultures involved in this process underwent some degree of cultural innovation without losing their self-perception which resulted from the continuity of their ancestral heritages.

In fact, the Hermetica transmitted "Egyptian knowledge", but such knowledge was not disconnected from other cultural influences - such as the Babylonian astrology, for example. Nevertheless, the development of Egyptian interpretations of these external influences - as an efficient "Egyptian astrology"- offered legitimacy to the myth that everything present in the literature dedicated to Thoth-Hermes Trismegistos remained linearly connected to a lost idealised Egyptian past. In a similar way, the Hermetica reinvented the Egyptian cosmogony in order to combine its own system with Greek and Egyptian cosmogonies. Their receptors realized that they were not dealing with one "pure" Egyptian tradition, but with a tradition that was "pure enough" to be recognised as Egyptian tradition, according to what their Graeco-Roman receptors expected Egyptian traditions to look like.

However, this is not the same as classifying Hermetism as a Hellenistic fantasy mocking Egyptian culture. The production and reproduction of such literature must be understood as part of a major intercultural phenomenon, in which a Graeco-Egyptian mentality "dialogued" continuously with its dual cultural reference in order to promote order in its symbolic universe. The philosophical principles behind the Hermetic discourses presented their moral teachings partly as a mythic description and partly as a philosophic digression. The Hermetic cosmogony was not a mere attempt to reproduce Egyptian knowledge. Hermetic literature integrated new cultural elements and engaged in debates regarding new ideas and the proposal of new interpretations on these subjects.

With regard to the Hermetica's claim of being nothing more than a compilation of Egyptian traditions, it is possible to determine that, indeed, this doctrine promoted a similar notion of morality to that of the traditional Egyptian thought. The receptor of the Hermetica was generally a Greek speaker and probably familiar to some extent with philosophy. So, it was possible or necessary to present the Hermetic teachings using different idioms and didactical language. In this sense, the Hermetica produced the same results as the Egyptian instruction texts as they transmitted to their receptors the magic-moral-religious perspective on the relationships of Maat and Man in Society and afterlife, "translated" into Greek terminology as the relations of God, Nous, Cosmos, Logos, Man, and the Gnosis.

This may have had led to – intentionally or not - a new Graeco-Egyptian cultural perception of values, justice, moral, history, cultural identity, and an entire reformulation of the socio-cultural concept of "truth". In this sense, "truth" is a specific world-vision or world-conception. However, to understand how a text could promote such values in society it would be first necessary to understand its process of reception, interpretation, and reproduction by its receptors in society. Concerning the reception of the Hermetic texts and the formulation of social discourses based on Hermetism this subject assumes a subjective sense.

Christians usually praised their common points with Hermetic theology and banned its occult content. In their discourse, Pagans claimed that the entire Hermetica were complementary texts portraying the respectful Egyptian tradition. The dispute between such different perspectives represented a major dispute between two radically opposite world-views (*logoi*). The respective discourses also aimed at the hegemony of each particular social group and their attempt to impose their world-view as the official

'reality' or 'truth'. It is a structure that has been defined, legitimatized, and sustained by a specific society's symbolic universe. A "symbolic universe" in this context, is an offspring of all that is culturally specified as being natural for a culture – in this case, the Graeco-Egyptian one. Thus, this "symbolic universe" is historically reproduced which promoted the perception of continuity for the common sense of society. Consequently, the eventual triumph of Christianism over paganism managed to reproduce the Christian view on the Hermetic phenomenon along with their accepted Hermetic values. Furthermore, it allowed the canonical interpretation of the Hermetic principles to be read simply as the confirmation of the truth behind the Christian doctrine, obscuring the original importance of Hermetism from occidental History until around 1460 A.D, when a Greek manuscript containing Hermetic discourses arrived at Florence from a Macedonian monastery ...

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APPENDIX 1: Chronological equivalences: Greek and Egyptian periods[415]

Greek World (Hellade)	Egypt
c. 1200 – 1100 B.C: Dorian invasion and the end of the Mycenaean civilization. (At the same period, it happened the collapse of the Hittite Empire in Anatolia).	New Kingdom: (c. 1550-1070 B.C) 18th - 20th Dynasties
The so-called Greek "Dark Ages": c. 1100 – 750 B.C	Third Intermediate Period or "Libyan period": (c. 1070 -712 B.C) 21st - 25th Dynasties
Archaic Greece: 750 – 480 B.C	Late Period (including the two Persian rules): (712 - 332 B.C) 26th – 31th Dynasties
Classical Greece: 480 - 323 B.C	
Hellenistic Greece: 323 – 146 B.C	Greco-Roman Period: (332 B.C - 395** A.D) Macedonian Dynasties (Argeades and Lagides): 332 - 30 B.C
Greco-Roman Greece: 146 B.C – 330* A.D	Roman Emperors (including Augustus): 30 B.C - 395** A.D
Byzantine Empire: 395** A.D – 1453 A.D Until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.	Byzantine/Coptic Period: (395**A.D – 642 A.D) Until the Arab conquest.
Notes: * : 330 A.D: Administrative partition between Western and Eastern Roman Empire. ** : 395 A.D: After Theodosius' death this separation became permanent.	

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[415] Accordingly to: Boardman: 1991, Finley: 1991, Wilkinson: 1994, Baines and Malek: 1984.

APPENDIX 2: On the *Interpretatio Graeca*: Thoth and Hermes[416]

THOTH	HERMES
Civil officers, autocrats.	Merchants.
Oratory, speech, letters; Philosophy (from the third century B.C).	Oratory, grammar, translators, dialectic, rhetoric.
Bedouins	Wandering herds/ Shepherds; Travellers.
	Home.
Protection.	Protection
	Fertility.
	Music
Moon, calendar, time counting. Created the five-epagnol days.	Planet Mercury. Astrology.
Medics, medicine.	Medics, healing.
Inventions.	Inventions.
Numbers, calculus.	Mathematic.
Land Surveiler – "Agrimensor", measurements.	Measures and weight.
Board and dice games.	
Wisdom, spells, magic.	Spiritual/mental occupations.
Destin.	Luck.
Judge of Osiris' tribunal.	Peacemaker.
(Local) creator god: Created the world using the power of his speech/words.	
Oracles.	Divination.
Laws.	
Temple rituals / all sacred rites.	
Emissary from the gods (divine Vizier).	Emissary/Herald from the gods, mediator between mankind and gods.
As Psychopompos: executor of the ritual for opening of the mouth; Helped Isis to resurrect Osiris.	As Psychopompos: freed the deceased's soul from its body; Could resurrect a dead person with his caduceus. (Also assimilated to Anubis, as "Hermanubis").

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[416] Accordingly to: P. Boylan (Oxford: 1922). H. Bonnet "Thot". (Berlin: 1952), pp.805-12; B. Hederich., "Thot". (Leipzig: 1770, Darmstadt: 1996), pp.2368-9; B. Hederich "Mercurius" (Leipzig: 1770, Darmstadt: 1996), pp.1591-1604; W. Fauth "Hermes". (München: 1979), pp.1069-76; H.-J. Thissen "Hermes Trismegistos." (Wiesbaden: 1977), pp.1133-5.

Lebenslauf

Mein Name ist Ronaldo Guilherme Gurgel Pereira. Ich wurde am 21. Januar 1977 in Rio de Janeiro - RJ, Brasilien, geboren. In Rio besuchte ich von 1993 bis 1997 das Colégio Pedro II, welches einem Gymnasium entspricht.

1998 begann ich mein B.A. Studium in Allgemeiner und Brasilianischer Geschichte. Als Nebenfach wählte ich Pädagogik („Licenciatura") an der „Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – UFRJ". In meiner Abschlussarbeit schrieb ich über die Darstellung Ägyptens bei Herodot. Meine Universität druckte die Arbeit. Während meiner Jahre als B.A. Student ging ich an viele regionale und nationale Konferenzen, um meine Forschunggegenstände zu diskutieren. 2002 beendete ich mein Bachelorstudium, ein Jahr später beendet ich die „Licenciatura".

Von 2003 bis 2005 blieb an der UFRJ, um meinen M.A. erwerben. Ich besuchte das „Programa de Pós-Graduação em História Comparada" (PPGHC - UFRJ). In diesem fanden Diskussionen zur Vergleichenden Geschichte statt. Es war also eine interdisziplinäre Veranstaltung, in welcher sich Studenten der Ethnologie, Anthropologie und Geschichte traffen. Mein damaliger Fokus war die Interkulturalität im hellenistischen Ägypten. Erneut hielt ich Referate an verschiedenen Konferenzen. Auch meine Masterarbeit wurde wiederum von meiner Universität gedruckt.

Von 2007 bis 2010 arbeitete ich am ägyptologischen Seminar in Basel an meiner Dissertation. Meine Arbeit behandelt das sogenannte *Corpus Hermeticum* und die

Bildung einer griechisch-ägyptischen Mentalität. Betreut wurde meine Arbeit von Frau Dr. Susanne Bickel Zignani.

An meiner mündlichen Prüfung habe ich zu den Themen „Altes Reich" und „Griechisch-Römisches Ägypten" befragt worden. Als zu prüfende Sprachen wählte ich klassisches Ägyptisch mit dem Text des Schiffbrüchigen, sowie Koptisch, zu welchem ich Auszüge aus dem Judasevangelium übersetzten werde. Meine Doktorprüfung wurde am 26.10.2010 stattfinden.