



“The Elixir and the Stone – Unlocking the Ancient Mysteries of the Occult”

By Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh
Penguin Books Paperback
1998

Other references:

- The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary 1989 Paperback
- The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th Edition 1989 Volumes 5 and 11

This book provides a detailed history of the occult and this line of thought called Hermeticism. It is loaded with references, names, places and an extensive bibliography. Since it was written by two academics with extensive degrees, the vocabulary at times was so challenging that this reader had to keep a dictionary close by at all times!



The authors take us on a very long, detailed journey through time and geographical space, meeting many individuals who carried on this Hermetic line of thought whether knowingly or not. We are shown frequent examples of this concept of “interconnectedness” in nature, the magical power of words, sounds and music.

I unearthed this gem in early 2002 while browsing one of those clearance tables, heaped with piles of books whose prices were slashed incredibly low. I had found a paperback copy of “[Sex in the Snow](#)” and tripped upon this while slowly travelling around the tables. On the cover, the symbol of the Order of Freemasonry intrigued me as well as the figure of Thoth, looking ancient Egyptian there with his birdlike head and writing instrument in his hands. Part of me found the subject of magic and the occult very intriguing. Part of me was curious to learn more about this mysterious figure called *Hermes Trismegistos* and the early beginnings of his teachings in Alexandria, Egypt.

My decision to purchase it was sealed when I saw the price of 99 cents down from \$11.99 Canadian! It was worth the risk of a dollar if it turned out to be a load of crap. Since it has turned out to be very informative and enlightening, I feel as if I owe something to the authors and their publisher. The best way I could repay them is to write a review of this book and spread the interest in the subject while helping alleviate suspicions and fears of the subject of alchemy and the occult - *the original meaning not of anything dark and evil but of something secret and beyond human understanding.*

This book is full of so many interesting historical facts and interesting connections between the beginnings in Egypt and the evolution of our humanity – especially the Western world. I will attempt to provide a brief summary then

share [some interesting passages](#). I have also planted [some text with links related](#) to the topics being discussed.

The experience of reading this book, discovering more about world history as well as my own history and talents, has been magical in itself!

The origins: Alexandria, a great seaport and melting pot of the Mediterranean. We are introduced to a divine being whose Greek name was *Thoth*. The original Egyptian name was *Djhuty* or *Djhowtey*. The Greeks blended his name with that of their god Hermes to become Thoth-Hermes. Then it became Hermes Trismegistos. We learn about the great influences of his writings there in Alexandria then as various powers moved, conquered and moved on again throughout the Mediterranean and Europe.

Because the followers did not fall into the category of the “people of the book”, their lives were at risk more times than once when various dogmatic regimes invaded and conquered these evolving civilizations.

Alchemists and magicians used the Hermetic writings for centuries to come. They presented many ideas, among which were was the interdependency of everything plus the power of the spoken word and that of sound, later to become poetry, song and music in general.

Since these writings and teachings did not align with those of the ruling religions at various times, they were forbidden and their proponents labelled as charlatans. Some started their own “secret societies” to protect themselves from the powers of the day and superstitious mobs.

The influence of these writings and teachings spread through the medieval times, the Renaissance and are touching upon our modern age.

The authors launch our journey in Alexandria:

Alexandria was a great seaport on the Mediterranean, located near the Nile delta of Egypt. Alexander the Great found Alexandria in 332 BC, one of the many cities he established during his wide-spreading conquest of the Mediterranean.

[“When Alexander the Great died, Egypt was given to Ptolemy, who was one of his generals. He chose Alexandria as his capital and started there the first great public library of the world, with 700,000 books written on papyrus.”](#)

Alexandria became a city rich with many different cultures, creeds and philosophies. There they built a university where the great mathematician Euclid taught and where astronomy, geography and poetry flourished. [“It was there too, that the Old Testament was first revealed to the Christian World...translated from Hebrew into Greek.”](#)

Amongst the blend of different cults, creeds, beliefs and philosophical systems, there were also cults deriving from the religion of ancient Egypt. The cult of Serapis was believed to be a deliberately fabricated divinity, [“calculated and](#)

synthesized to appeal to Greeks and Egyptians alike.” “The cult of Serapis was particularly encouraged by the Ptolemaic dynasty because it transcended religious differences and could be used to maintain civic order.”

In Egyptian mythology, there was the ibis-headed figure known as Djehuti – pronounced Joe-Tee. “Plato had speculated about whether ‘Thoth was a god or just a divine man’. He is credited with the invention of writing ... And because writing was perceived as a magical operation – as the “words of the god” or “divine words” – Thoth was also regarded as the god of magic, the supreme master magician who confided the secrets of his art to his initiates among mankind”.

“As an Egyptian deity, Thoth performed a number of functions. He was a moon god, symbolized by the cusped or horned moon, and silver was sacred to him. He acted as initiator into the most arcane mysteries. He served as sentinel or guardian of the gates to the underworld and in this capacity he weighed the souls of the newly dead in order to determine their posthumous destinies.



How his name involved into Thoth remains unclear. “Perhaps that was how it sounded to Greek ears, or on Greek lips. Neither is it clear why precisely Thoth was ‘thrice great’. Some Hermetic texts seem to suggest his triple greatness was a consequence of three incarnations.”

“The works attributed to Thoth-Hermes are numerous, often opaque, often diffuse. Many of them overlap or coincide with certain of the other religions, cults, philosophical traditions and schools of thought that characterized Alexandrian syncretism...” “There are numerous practical works pertain to astrology, such as the *Liber Hermetis*, and to alchemy. Finally, there are two somewhat later works of particular importance. One is the magical and astrological *Picatrix*. The other and perhaps the most famous, is the so-called *Tabula smaragdina* or “Emerald Tablet”. This last has generally been regarded as the most succinct and, at the same time, definitive summation of Hermetic thought.”

The Magic of Sounds

“In Hermeticism, as in Hebrew and in the later Judaic Kabbala, sounds, words, even individual letters can be equivalent of storage cells, repositories charged with a form of divine or magical power as a battery is charged with electrical energy.”

“The texts of the Hermetic corpus were quite explicit in stressing the necessity of tuning the human microcosm to resonate with the macrocosm of the cosmos. The Hermetic practitioner, for example, **‘should tune the inward lyre and adjust it**

to the divine musician'. Music, in the Hermetic corpus, is the key to the numinous; 'And to be instructed in music is precisely to know how all this system of things is ordered, and what divine plan has distributed it. For this order, having brought all individual things into unity by creative reason, will produce as it were a most sweet and true harmony, and a divine melody.' "

[Read about and hear universal rhythms.](#)

Hermetic magi of the Renaissance: "At the same time, they also stressed the importance of harmonious marriage between the musical note or chord and the word. Poems were composed with the explicit intention of setting them to music as songs; and the words or text of such poems comprised as crucial a component of the music as the music itself. At times, indeed, the 'rhythm of the music is completely subjected to the metre of the verse'. Verses and melody were thus fused into a single inseparable whole. From this practice, as extolled, for example, by the Hermetic poets of the *Pléiade* in sixteenth-century France, arose the genre of musical sacred drama – from which, in turn, opera was to evolve."

Definition of Hermeticism – from E&S

"In general, Hermeticism is a mystical tradition, a mystical body of teachings, a mystical mode of thought. Like other such traditions, bodies of teaching and modes of thought, it repudiates simplistic belief and blind faith. It repudiates codified dogma and the interpretive necessity and authority of priests. It also refuses to accept the rational intellect as the supreme means arbiter of reality. Instead, it emphasizes and extols the mystical or numinous *experience* – direct and first-hand apprehension of the sacred, direct knowledge of the absolute."

On nature and science

"In the analogous structures of the atom and the solar system, nuclear physics also found a species of confirmation for the old Hermetic doctrine of macrocosm and microcosm. There can be few serious-minded science students who did not at some time wonder, even if only idly, whether each atom might not in itself constitute an entire solar system – and whether the solar system we inhabit might not perhaps be a single atom in some immensely vaster creation. Such thinking is, in itself characteristically Hermetic.

Quite apart from such vertiginous speculation, modern science – without, of course, calling it by its name or acknowledging its source – has, in effect, accepted the Hermetic principle of interconnectedness."

"...Environmental studies confront us daily with the need to recognize our planet as a living and ultimately threatened organism, the brutalization of which, however distant, will have repercussions on our own existence."

".. As the Hermeticist of ancient Alexandria insisted, we are interdependent with the natural world and an inseparable part of it."

[Read another book review regarding nature and our beautiful planet](#)

Beautiful coincidences and connections:

I like coincidences. I find them intriguing and enjoyable, especially the kind that help connect ideas and trains of thought. Here are some I encountered while reading this book:

1. Robinson surname – magical forests - Robin Greenwood
2. Mesmer – Robinhood
3. Shakespeare – “A Mid-summer’s Night Dream” and Robin Goodfellow

1. Robinson surname – forests - Robin Greenwood

My siblings and I grew up beside a river, near the shores of a bay and at the foot of a forest. Our elementary school path led and wound through a forest. It was part of our growing up. I felt drawn to this green domain many times as it was a place of solitude and mystery. The following is an interesting excerpt about the assumed origin of the Robinson family surname. My dear late Father may have found it very humorous although he at one time had hopes we descended from the Scots.

First, the Green Knight AKA Robinhood

"The same hero serves as protagonist in another work drawing on material contemporary with that of the 'pagan Grail' narratives, "Gawain and the Green Knight". This work, emerging from the heart of supposedly Christian Europe, is an unabashed portrayal of pre-Christian pagan magic. The Green Knight is a depiction, in medieval chivalric terms, of the ancient Celtic vegetation deity - the northern equivalent of Pan, who presides over the cycle of the seasons, the sowing and reaping of the harvest, the birth, death and rebirth of the year. "

"...Perhaps the most flagrant and popular manifestation of the Green Man is the medieval figure of Robin of the Greenwood - the Robin Goodfellow, or Puck, of "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

"...By extension, he is associated - like the bird of the same name - with the advent of spring and the world's renewal into fertility"

Next, about the spring rituals of May Day:

"... For the peasantry of the time, therefore, May Day was a day of sexual licence, of unbridled orgy. The traditional maypole was endowed with explicit phallic implications. The chosen 'Queen of the May' was a thinly disguised avatar of the pagan mother goddesses who had figured saliently in Wicca and other pre-Christian creeds. She and other village virgins would troop off to the adjacent forest, where they would be received by 'Robin of the Greenwood' and his 'merry men' - or, to be more accurate, by an individual, a local youth or perhaps a seigneur, clad in apparel designed to evoke spring's harbinger. In the frolics that followed, 'Robin' would confer on the girls their sexual initiation. Or he might, in some cases, confer his blessing on the mating of already plighted couples. And nine months later, the village would spawn a winter crop of bastards, who would be known as 'sons of Robin'. It was often from these rituals that such surnames as 'Robinson' derived."

2. Mesmer – Robinhood

While I was still reading the book mid-June, 2002, I found in the TV movies listing a movie called “Mesmer” about a Parisian doctor in the 1700’s who believed in

the powers of magnetism. I have some family members who are strong believers in the healing powers of magnets so I thought it would be interesting.

It turned out that the actor, Allan Rickman had also played the delightfully wicked Sheriff of Nottingham in the Kevin Costner movie version of "Robinhood, Prince of Thieves". The Mesmer movie had some powerful scenes but kind of lost me near the ending.

Right after I watched the movie, I continued to read the E&S. The next chapter was "The Return to Unity" and one of the main subjects was – you guessed it - Mesmer. *Hmmmm. Verry innnteresting!*

3. Shakespeare – "A Mid-summer's Night Dream" and Robin Goodfellow

After I had finished reading the book and started toiling on a suitable format for a review, I noticed in the TV listings that "A Mid-summer's Night Dream" was to be playing on Sunday evening on Bravo. It was the modern version with Kevin Kline (delightful!), Calista Flockhart and other big names. It was a beautiful rendition, sticking with the original text while enhanced with excellent special effects.

One of the secondary, magical creatures dwelling with the fairies and forest folk was Puck or Robin Goodfellow.

The movie was colourful, magical and very, very enjoyable. Bravo!

Related Links:

- "Sex in the Snow " – Book review: www.jobateh.ca/web/reviews/review-sits.html
- More moon myths – www.jobateh.ca/bunny/myths.html
- The power of music – www.jobateh.ca/drum/about/
- Nature – Book review: www.jobateh.ca/web/reviews/review-gnfac.html

If you like find-a-word puzzles, I have created one with names and words conjured up from the references I used during this experiment. Enjoy!
www.jobateh.ca/web/reviews/pdf/review-elixirstone-words.pdf

T. Jobateh, June 2002